

On the Concept of “Fiction” as an Impetus of Postmodern Architecture as presented by Heinrich Klotz

Abstract

To clarify postmodern architecture and thus simultaneously differentiate it from the architecture of classical modernity and that of the postwar period, Heinrich Klotz (1935–1999), as an advocate and commentator of this new direction, used the term “fiction” in the early 1980s. Thus, looking at the works of Charles Moore, Robert Venturi, Aldo Rossi and O.M. Ungers, he expressed his realization that these architects, who for him represent the protagonists of postmodernism “despite all of their differences, (have) the common goal to use symbolic and typological forms not only superficially on the level of mere information, i.e. to communicate content, but rather to use them as fictitious *material*, from which structure becomes possible again as a work of art, as a work of ‘beautiful appearance’. They have”, he continued, “an essential part in the creation – not of *functional building*, but of invented *fiction*”. (H. Klotz: *Die Revision der Moderne*, 1984 / *The Revision of Modernity*). Despite its radical renewal, he did not see postmodern architecture as the end of modernity, but rather as a “break in continuity”, a “turnaround” (H. Klotz: *Moderne und Postmoderne*, 1984 / *Modernity and Postmodernism*), and understood postmodernism as a revision of modernity in the sense of a new kind of outcome vis-à-vis a modernism which had become obsolete due to its focus on pure functional fulfillment, technical construction, economy, and geometric form.

He saw as a guiding principle of postmodern architecture, that now “the design of a building is consciously connected with the reclamation of content which can become the ‘narrative material’ of building form and individual form”, and that it was a matter of “freeing architecture from the muteness of ‘pure forms’ and from the noise of ostentatious constructions so that a building can once again become a design occasion which not only takes facts and utilization programs into account, but also takes up poetic imagination and shapes poetic materials”. He summed this up in the formula: “Not function, but fiction!” (H. Klotz: *Moderne und Postmoderne*, 1984 / *Modernity and Postmodernism*).

This, however, raises the question of the general validity of the concept of “fiction”, which Heinrich Klotz narrowly defines as “narrative”, and which refers only to postmodern architecture. Was it not rather a different kind of fiction, i.e. the newly occurring mental conception in association with earlier historical building forms which led to a differentiated image and thus to a multifaceted architecture, which can be claimed as the cause of this so-called “turnaround” from the architecture of classic modernity to the architecture of postmodernism? The clarification of this question regarding the transformation of fiction and its realizability as well as the questions: Was not the architecture before or directly after the war also guided by fiction? What is the fictional aspect of postmodern architecture as compared with antecedent architecture? And: Are fiction and function mutually exclusive? shall be explored in this paper.

Keywords

Heinrich Klotz, Architecture of Postmodernism, Fiction, Narrative Material, Imagination, Play, Semiosis, Reevaluation, Function, Construction, Robert Venturi, Frank Gehry, Lucien Kroll, Oswald Mathias Ungers