A reading of: “Architecture is (as) a gesture”

Author: Bart Verschaffel
Text review by Arsenii Kuznetsov

This book raises a number of questions including: how we can treat ‘modern’ architecture and where it actually began, what is its ‘real’ sense and ‘purpose’, how we can find and reveal its ‘authenticity’ and ‘sincerity’.

In the first part, the author argues how architecture could be ‘real’ or ‘unreal’, ‘true’ or ‘untrue’ and if we have already lost its original meaning. He puts Adolf Loos’s comparison of work of farmer or craftsman with work of architect (Adolf Loos, Architectur, 1988, pp. 90-104) and then he makes a statement that farmer’s houses or those of the craftsmen serve for its function and have no extra/ambiguous meaning. They are ‘true’ because they say nothing. On the contrary, Loos uses architect’s villa as an example of artificial object which only “defaces the landscape” and, hence, is not “authentic” (Adolf Loos, Architectur, 1988, pp. 90-91).

According to Ludwig Wittgenstein “Architecture always has to mean, has to ‘glorify’ or ‘immortalize’ something”. And in this case “architecture is a gesture” (Ludwig Wittgenstein. Architectur is eine Geste, 1942, p. 86). “As not every purposive movement of the human body is a gesture as not every functional building is architecture. Architects who have the urge to do more that purely functional buildings distinguished themselves from the ‘real’ architecture (Ludwig Wittgenstein. Architectur is eine Geste, 1942, p. 86). He gives several reasoning why in attempt of these ‘to do more’, to find extra sense or extra beauty architects very often forget about very original purpose of the building.

As a conclusion author uses next words: “good architecture does not resemble us but only slightly, it is not a contribution to modern age, but a way to accept and endure modernity. Good architecture has ‘life piety’, like the servant, not like a slave of exchange, money or success. Architecture as a gesture then, a variation on the already given score of the house’s ‘form’, as the proud and confident confirmation of the commonplace house like a child would draw it. ‘Ordinary, but with reference to its original power” (Bart Verschaffel, Architecture as a gesture, p. 32).
Markers:

**Public passage** through the private building could be an example of an architect’s intention to make the relationship between the residents and the city stronger.

![Bornhuetter Hall, LTL Architects](image)

Bornhuetter Hall, LTL Architects
Wooster, USA

**Cutoff** at the corner of the building demonstrates openness, pedestrian friendliness and invitation to the building itself. Small gesture makes our perception different.

![Youth Hostel 'Pulcinella', Van Duysen Vincent Architects](image)

Youth Hostel 'Pulcinella', Van Duysen Vincent Architects
Antwerpen, Belgium
Open glazed plinth with building on top serves as a “roof” makes clear gesture towards public access and reveal its purpose as place where people can be protected by the city authorities.

Stadskantoorg, OMA
Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Shifting to the back of the site shows the respect to the historical buildings at the background and creates feeling of the continuity and suitability to the context.

Waalse Krook, Coussee & Goris
Ghent, Belgium
Common playground. The surrounding region is relatively dense and there is not much space available for homes with private yards. The single family home features a playground in place of a front yard, and chalkboard paint turns the entire house into a children's art project. The home explores the balance between public and private space.

Single family house, BLAF Architecten
Asse, Belgium