# ARHITEKTONSKI TRI-K: *KOMUNIKACIJA, KONTINUITET, KONTEKST*

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*„Svjetska civilizacija ne bi mogla biti drugo do koalicija kultura koje zadržavaju svoju originalnost."*
ClaudeLevi - Strauss

**Sažetak:** Definirati arhitekturu čini se teškim, a često i uzaludnim poslom. Unatoč tome, ne smijemo odustati od njezinog ustrajnog objašnjavanja i novog razumijevanja. Danas, kad je arhitektura silovito zakoračila u medijski prostor, a onda se i sama promovirala u autentični komunikacijski medij, govoriti o arhitekturi jednako je važno kao i govoriti arhitekturom.
U ovoj prigodi, otvaramo razgovor o arhitekturi kroz diskurs hrvatske nacionalne kulture, njezine povijesti, sadašnjosti i budućnosti. Pitamo se, može li ta mala ali osebujna kultura, čiju ključnu sastavnicu čine upravo baštinjene urbanističke i arhitektonske vrijednosti, a nadasve zadivljujuća kultura krajolika, najprije uspješno premostiti provaliju diskontinuiteta, a potom i odoljeti osmotskom tlaku globalizma i kulturnog imperijalizma. Kako se boriti za kulturni, pa tako i za arhitektonski identitet u vremenu komunikacijske revolucije koja je proizvela planetarnu prostorno-vremensku konvergenciju, ili, kako se to kaže, "sažimanje Svijeta„, i privid o njegovom svakodnevnom "smanjenju".
Ovim razmatranjem želi se pronaći odgovor na pitanje ima li ikakvog smisla opirati se neumitnom civilizacijskom zbliženju i poistovjećenju? Možemo li, i smijemo li, unatoč svemu, tvrdokorno ustrajati na vlastitom kulturnom identitetu, pogotovo onom koji bi mogla, ili morala, nositi i promicati arhitektura?

**Ključne riječi:** arhitektura, arhitektonski jezik, komunikacija, kontinuitet, kontekst, kulturni identitet

# ARCHITECTURAL 3C: COMMUNICATION, CONTINUITY, CONTEXT

*"World civilization can only be a coalition of cultures, each preserving its originality."*

*Claude Lévi-Strauss*

**Summary**
Defining architecture seems to be a tough and often futile business. Nevertheless, we must not give up on its persistent explanation and new understanding. Today, when architecture has moved heavily into media space, and then also promoted itself to an authentic communication medium, talking about architecture is just as important as talking through architecture.
On this occasion, we open a conversation about architecture through the discourse of Croatian national culture, its history, its present, and its future. We wonder whether this small but distinctive culture, whose key components are precisely the inherited urban and architectural values, and, above all, the fascinating landscape culture, can, first, successfully overcome the abyss of discontinuity, and then also resist the osmotic pressure of globalism and cultural imperialism. How to struggle for cultural as well as for architectural identity in the time of a communication revolution that has produced planetary space-time convergence, or, as it is said, the "compression of the World," and the illusion of its daily "shrinkage."
This reflection seeks to find an answer to the question whether there is any sense in resisting the inevitable civilizational convergence and identification? Can we, and may we, despite everything, unyieldingly persist on our own cultural identity, especially the one that architecture could, or should, carry and promote?

**Keywords:** architecture, architectural language, communication, continuity, context, cultural identity

## INTRODUCTION

In his brilliant essay entitled *Usefulness of "philosophizing" about architecture*, Architect Dominko Blažević says that architects think about architecture as St. Augustine does about time: "If you do not ask me (what time is), I know; if you ask me, I do not know."
Indeed, history abounds in numerous definitions of architecture, and even the present time has not run out of attempts to reclarify and redefine architecture, its purpose, its character, and its role in dynamized social and civilizational transformations.
Defining architecture is also difficult due to its immanent ambivalence. The being of architecture is divided. By its property of utilitarian, it represents an expression of the rational, and by its property of spiritual/aesthetic, it represents an expression of the intuitive. This discursive-intuitive character of architecture is a representative oxymoron, unknown to any other science or art.
It is from that oxymoron that different descriptions of the being of architecture result, swinging between opposite character and meaning poles.
However, no matter how much we disagree about possible interpretations of architecture, we are all united about one: architecture is an imprint of a social moment, its sensor, its witness, the time capsule for transmitting that testimony to the future. In this accelerated world, where everything madly speeds up and then (consequently) heats up, architecture could become the civilization's *black box*.

However, one must also face an exceptionally important realization: architecture, as a distinctive communication medium, has not only captured the image of the civilization moment. It has also participated in shaping the reality it describes.
Because, architecture is the most plastic and the most comprehensive image of the state of a society. However, architecture will never give up the ambition also to shape the society itself.

"Architecture is being built, anywhere, anytime, nobody can stop it. Architecture is always present. However, from time to time the profession to which we belong simply needs to be reset. That is also done with present-day instruments that surround us, when they become overwhelmed in an inefficient infinite loop due to so much programming: the *reset* (restart) key needs to pressed.
Why press the reset key now? Because architecture has such a trend as never before in public media and political life. Architecture has never before been as popular as it is today. And yet, we have never before been so unable to understand each other about what architecture involves as it is the case today." (Dietmar Steiner)

The problem-oriented questioning of architecture urges us to try to clarify another dilemma:
Do national architectures exist?
Does Croatian national architecture exist?
When you ask this question, it is as if you asked: does God exist?
Certainly, answers can be both negative and affirmative. Let us refer to those who think that there is national architecture as believers and those who are convinced that it does not exist as atheists.
However, even atheists, however convinced that God does not exist they are, do not give up the need to express a certain type of spirituality. Atheistic spirituality today is a common topic of socio-philosophical discussion, and it is particularly interesting how this intriguing issue is viewed by the contemporary French philosopher Andre Comte-Sponville, who, in his book *The Spirit of Atheism, Introduction to Spirituality without God*, says:

"I define myself as a faithful atheist: an atheist because I do not believe in any God and in any supernatural force; but faithful, because I recognize myself in a certain history, certain tradition, certain community, and especially in the Judeo-Christian (or Greek-Judeo-Christian) values that are ours."
Translated into architecture: We do not have to believe in national architecture, but we have to remain faithful to the values by which architecture has marked our community and its culture.

Comte says, "I am a *faithful* atheist, meaning that he remains true to the values that arise from religion, even when he is convinced that God does not exist. The same is true for architecture.

Nobody can make us prisoners of architectural tradition, even when it has the mark of national culture, but we should remain *true* to the recognizable values we have inherited.

One episode of the cult series "Malo misto" ("Small town") shows the troubles of Roko Prć (Boris Dvornik), a peculiar protagonist of a new revolutionary man who, in spite of his unquestionable ideological firmness, faced with the challenge of Christmas Eve, however not because of the annunciation of God's birth but because of the smell of cod that pervaded Malo misto. Ingenious Miljenko Smoje, the old leftist bard, spoke through the character of Roko Prć about the troubles and temptations he was subjected to, being stretched between the ideological consistency and fragrant call of cod, which is admittedly a dried fish of a sharp smell but which, to the regret of atheistic *gourmands*, marks the culture of fasting to await the day of great religious hope in believer's purity.

Shall we give up what undoubtedly reveals our identity, what confirms our belonging to a social community, what we inherit in it, only because the legacy results from a religion that we do not want to follow or practice any longer.

Indeed, the answer to the question whether architecture with a national sign exists is not really an easy or unambiguous one. This question reminds me of a question of my youth when we were trying to figure out what is the kind of architecture that could be representative of a self-managing socialist society? Siding with those who will flatly reject any attempt to define architecture by a national or ideological matrix, we will inevitably face another question: how to call an architecture that persistently promotes the well-established values of a community and specificities of a region? Frampton's definition of *critical regionalism* does not fully answer this question. Namely, here we are not talking about returning to a specific object of architecture, but we are talking about recognizing its particular spirituality.

My first encounter with the question of how to answer the question of national and cultural identity through architecture took place during the Homeland War, at a time when we were endangered both as a nation and as a distinct culture. At that time, it was terribly important to point out the particularities of our national culture so that we could explain to the whole world who we are and why we deserve that our right to independence is recognized. It was incredible that, back then, in 1992, in the middle of the war, we had the power to announce an architectural competition for reconstruction of a church destroyed in the war. Churches were being demolished by the psychological pattern of rape, which means - to hurt and humiliate the victim by desecrating the symbols, sacred things, representatives of its national and cultural identity. The church I speak of is the votive chapel consecrated to the miraculous Lady of Carmel, on the Okit hill, near Vodice, which was at that moment situated on the demarcation line between defensive and aggressive forces. Construction of that church was a gesture of resistance by which a message was sent to the enemy side, but also to the entire world, that we were prepared for everything, and especially that we were prepared to preserve our holy objects, symbols of our heritage, signs of our identity.

This bidding project was my first design encounter with the topic of sacral architecture. I do not know if I was more excited about it or about the circumstances in which the project was launched. The excitement was so great that for an inexplicable reason I developed a high fever last evening before submitting the bidding work, which I had reserved for writing the textual explanation. I believed that it was a foretelling sign. And indeed, my design won the first prize. After completion of the bidding, on various occasions, I had to explain the architectural concept of this church, emphasizing the resistance of our culture and resistance to its destruction. I tried to explain that this church sublimates our national culture, but this contention of mine was acceptable and also understandable only to a small number of people. On the contrary, most of them suspiciously shook their heads and wondered: where is our church here, what does that "water reservoir" have to do with the shape of our church which the enemy destroyed? The problem was that the new church did not imitate the former one by shape, but it converted the sacral heritage into a contemporary architectural expression by the transposition procedure.

That is when a realized that I had to explain that intention better both to others and to myself. I wanted to explain that, in that crucial historical time, we could defend ourselves by architecture.

They want to destroy us by demolishing our holy objects, petrified symbols of our national, religious, and cultural being, and we will answer them by building, as a gesture of existence and firmness in preserving what we are. However, we do not want, by replica reconstruction, to return to the state before destruction. We want to step into modernity, proving that we are contemporary, that we do not want to be petrified in the past, that we do not want to be slaves of traditional patterns, that we can create new values on the foundations of our heritage.
Then I dared to set up a theoretical model for such an endeavor.
It is a triadic definition of the conditions that will guarantee the authenticity of that architecture by which we wish to give evidence to our own identity and our own culture. In this way, the 3C model was developed as the principle by which authentic architecture must comprise the three imperative properties - Communication, Continuity and Context.

I know that my persistent efforts to establish criteria for cultural and architectural authenticity will seem to many people anachronistic. I completely understand that. It really sounds retrograde to insist in today's convergent world, where communication technologies, every day breaking the limits of communication speed, have produced the effect of "world shrinkage". Why oppose the planetary integration of contents and forms, stubbornly insisting on the specifics of individual cultures. Because the world is really becoming increasingly uniform and similar among itself. And just as we have come to think that we are on the threshold of a universal *sameness*, here comes the devil!: the world is beginning to fiercely oppose this global identification. The richness of diversity is becoming a new paradigm of the global world.
Today we want to look at the world as at a big multicolored mosaic. Following this metaphor, I think: all right, if the world is a big mosaic, let's try to make our grain in that mosaic glimmer with its own shine. I am convinced, going back to architecture, that the 3C formula will help us preserve that shine.

## COMMUNICATION

A series of (persistent and futile) attempts to define architecture also includes this one: useful building becomes architecture when the building is aimed at saying something, when the building is intended to give a message. This directs us to the property of architecture on which we want to focus in this chapter: how to communicate with architecture, how to send messages through building, how architecture can, like other arts, promote the particularities of a culture which, in its specificity, wants to be different from any other culture - in short, going back to the metaphor of the expressive grain in the mosaic of global culture, how architecture can make this grain bright and recognizable?
I believe we all agree that architecture is a communication medium. The proof that this is so is the frequent use of linguistic terminology in describing architectural methods and procedures: architecture speech, architectural language, architectural vocabulary, architectural rhetoric, architectural semiotics and semantics, syntax of architecture and other similar expressions in the field of linguistic systemology. Consequently, in a communicological sense, architecture functions as a linguistic system that describes the architectural narrative, the content of architecture and its complex semanticemissions. We could say that an individual structure is as much more architecture as its messages are more powerful and complex.
Thus, the architectural language is made of a dictionary of signs which, through a complex syntactic correlation, shape the architectural idea, materialized as a house, a building, a bridge, a church, a school.
If we are aware that through architecture we communicate, speak, write, or maybe also sing, because architecture is, as we know, petrified song, we must know what we talk about, what kind of architectural literature we write and what songs we sing?
This discussion gradually leads us to the crucial question: what distinguishes building from architecture? When a functional building becomes an architectural work? An artwork.

The answer to this question is very simple. Architecture can be considered as the building that gives a message, that speaks. An architectural work - is a symbolic building.

Communication is the process of information exchange through a conventional system of signs, usually through a language. Communication has three properties: content, form and aim.
The science that studies communication is called communicology. It would be appropriate if someone would more seriously deal with architectural communicology.
Who? Says what? By what means? With what effect? (Harold Lasswell)******

"If we come across a mound in the forest six feet long and three feet wide, shaped with a spade in the form of a pyramid, then we become serious and something inside us says: someone is buried here!
That is architecture." (Adolf Loos)

Loos leads us to realize that architecture begins with a small, almost insignificant building activity, but one that must involve a readable gesture. It is a gesture that shapes a sign in which a clear message is contained. Such an architectural sign is just one word in the architectural language, whose richness and interrelation create architectural language syntax.
And exactly the syntax is the art of ordering words/signs that creates poetry from ordinary speech and architecture from ordinary construction.

So, architecture is undoubtedly a special communication medium. Linguistic systemological patterns can almost literally be applied to the sign, semiotic and semantic system of architecture, as well as to its lexicon and syntax. And even architectural structuralism, as a significant legacy of contemporary architecture, has emerged from linguistic structuralism.

Architectural language, its semiotic and semantic properties go beyond the level of this consideration. Indeed, we are interested in that language only to the extent that it serves the efforts on which we want to focus on this occasion: how to interpret culture through architecture?

Architecture is literature. It can cover different information fields and different communication levels. What interests us in the communication through architecture is contained in the following question: How can architecture as a communication means effectively present and promote our national culture, our national and social specifics, our identity?

The language of architecture in terms of sign canons is defined by the previous architecture. So, it could be said that architecture can (culturally) communicate only through tradition. One can ask what is the beginning of this tradition, what is the origin of architectural sings, and finally, how architectural etymology is formed. What is the first architectural sign - cave or wooden hut as a paradigm of ancient temple.
It is therefore understandable that architecture is best interpreted by eminent references. Architectural references can be various. Sometimes these can be really bizarre examples. When I was a young architect, references were intimate, and were mentioned shyly but only as part of the analytical procedure in approaching the project. Openly emphasizing a reference was considered impolite because it could cause doubts about the originality of the design and the author's integrity as an architect. In short, revealing a reference was like admitting the theft of the initial idea, partial plagiarism or copying.
Today, references have become common practice in presenting architectural ideas and their starting points. If these references are aimed to better communicate and to easier bring the project philosophy closer to one's client, that is acceptable and there is nothing wrong about that.
However, architectural references with blatant images of what has already been made somewhere, and so something like that is promised to be built here too, that is really too much.
Frampton would sigh "Marketing images!"

Problems in interpreting architecture arise when one wants to send out architectural messages that cannot be explained by references, or through architectural tradition, or through culture or nature.
For example, how to describe a property of architecture that is not preceded by a recognized sign, and it is, say, transcendence of a sacred space. How to express sublimity? How to denote power? How to preserve remembrance? How to mark the unmarked?

Either way, the necessity of communicating with architecture takes new properties every day.

Communication through architecture also give us evidence of its inevitable commodification. Consumerist ideology commodifies architecture by simultaneously encouraging consumption through architecture.
Commodification of culture and then also of architecture is normally followed by aggressive and cacophonic communication noise. Therefore, it should not be forgotten that sometimes it is best to speak (or defend oneself) with silence.

## CONTINUITY

Why talking about continuity is important for Croatian architecture?
Achieving continuity is one of the crucial, imperative tasks for the survival of Croatian culture, and then also the survival of Croatia as a free, organized and stable society.
The Croatian country is laid across a shaky geopolitical space, and this is a constant that we cannot influence. Every nation that has to face seismic forces that shake its space must know how to protect itself against this trouble if it is to survive. We knew how to do so! This space was ruled by powerful empires, Venice, Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Yugoslavia.... We are still here and where are they?

When talking about our history from the time of settling down in these geographic areas, in the perception of most people is Iveković's cult painting *Arrival of the Croats to the Sea*! The mythical view from Velebit of the previously not experienced wide panorama of the coast and floating islands in the blue sea. Everything desolate, everything virginally pure, the promised land stretched before the seven of them, five brothers and two sisters, five falcons and two doves.
The real picture is far from this romantic image.
First we had to defeat the Avars and then seize the populated area and meet with the old, native cultures that we managed to assimilate and make part of our own identity.
This small historical digression tells us that the Croatian people have a historical experience of sustainability and survival.
And continuity is a transhistorical dialogue, it means continuance and incessancy.
The answer to the question why it is necessary to talk about continuity in our time results from the realization that we have entered the space and time of dramatic discontinuity.
This is clearly observed in today's architecture, which ignores the necessity of cultural memory.
And architectural continuity is actually a cultural continuity and that is what we are in this treatise most interested in.

Today's architects are reluctant to talk about continuity, because it is by definition a conservativecategory that many think will inhibit them in their creative freedom, in pursuit for the new and the progressive. Architecture is governed by the imperative of progress, which is often close to ideological extremism. Like, architects must be modern, they must persevere on the path of progress, they must be avant-garde. In this enthusiasm, many forget that, in spite of all the possible architectural transformative phenomenology and new insights that shake its foundations, the nature of architecture is constant, and architectural truths permanent. (I paraphrased the theorist of conservatism, Russell Kirk). That is why, following Taylor Coleridge's conservative thought, I would accept the fact that in society, as well as in architecture, "permanence and progression must remain two balanced forces"...

## CONTEXT

My conviction is that architecture belongs to a place.
The interrelation with place, and the place is always different, makes architecture unique and architectural work exciting.
To explain the relationship between architecture and place, we often talk about context.

However, many do not understand the concept of context or give it completely wrong meanings.

The most common misconception is the one relating to the context as the physical environment of the architectural work, so it is then assessed whether the building successfully "fits" into the environment or is in contrast with it.
In doing so, it is little known that there is a context of sameness and a context of contrariety.
But the physical architectural contextuality, it is only one of many forms of context.
The physical/material context is explicit and therefore least interesting. We are interested in a wider discourse of contextuality, especially the one relating to the immaterial, cultural context. It is usually not visible, it does not reveal itself.
Speaking about the context in the sense of immaterial, we get back to the field of language and theory of literature. According to this theory, within context there must be an understanding that does not have to be stated. Precisely this is the most exciting property of context. So, when we speak about architectural contextuality, then the contextual thought which we understand, but which is not expressed by building, is the most interesting.
One of the most exciting examples of such contextuality comes to us from the depth of national history.
It is a sacrosanct example of our early sacral architecture - the Church of the Holy Cross in Nin.
It is a small early Christian pre-Romanesque church from the 9th century with characteristic plan view distortions that archeologists and art historians believed to be the result of construction by Christianized clumsy persons, the newcomers of a technical and artistic level inferior to the previous, antique culture. It was revealed what kind of false belief it was when in 1978 Mladen Pejaković* published the book *Number from Light*, in which he presented his research of the smallest cathedral in the world.
In that book, Pejaković surveys and through complex tests proves why the architectural plan of this church differs from the ideal architectural form, where the angle of deformation of the plan view is a constant value.
Pejaković concludes that these irregularities are systematic and that they are identical to the angle that marks the equinoctial delay of the first ray of sun, which appears in Nin only after the sun gets higher than the edge of Velebit. So, it is a corrective angle that, on the day of the equinox, correlates the east on the earth horizon with the local east, as viewed by the observer at the position of the church. And the equinox had a great importance in the secular and religious life of the Middle Ages. It was the day when it was possible to unmistakably establish the east-west direction so that the longitudinal axis of the church could be set on it according to established canon.

Thinking about Pejaković's interpretations of the volume deformities of the Church of Holy Cross in Nin, which functions as a cosmic device designed to project the universe and its inexorabilities to a single topographic point at which the mystery of the relationship between man and God is resolved. In a time when spirituality and search for God followed the trail of unquestionable truth, to which any individuality had to be submitted, including the one of the builder-author, whose name forever remained concealed, we reach the final understanding that architecture beyond space and time does not have any meaning.

## INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

In a time of globalist asepsis that wants to sterilize everything and reduce everything to a single measure, preserving a healthy diversity is a civilization temptation. And this diversity is guaranteed by continuity in the development of the variety of the world and its achieved freedom. Namely, any uniformity leads us to a certain form of totalitarianism. That is why we emphasize: we are aware of belonging to the world, we must be parallel with it in our social, economic and cultural development. We will not close, we will remain open both as a culture and as an architecture. But if we have accepted a single picture of the world, let this picture be a mosaic one, or in the present-day style - pixelized. Let's make sure that our grain or our *pixel* in this picture of the World glows with a special shine.

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