

## Historical Meaning in Architecture of the XXth century

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### Summary

*The historical meanings communicated through architecture strongly and durably mark important events in communities' life. This is achieved by using the symbolism of shapes, the expressivity and the monumentality of volumes. Historical architectural styles connect the people with their past and their heroes and give them feelings of continuity and stability, of identity and national pride.*

*Architecture has expressed different attitudes towards history, such as:*

*- Negation- refusing to accept events that had harmed the national pride. Typical are the huge efforts of reconstruction of culturally important buildings crashed in the war.*

*- Acceptance and transformation – the symbolic alteration of iconic buildings of a painful past in a manner that illustrates the political and social changes. Thus the past is not rejected or ignored, but it is forgiven and accepted as part of the history*

*- Glorification of historical victories and fulfillments through magnificent edifices in order to enhance national pride*

*- Commemoration and remembrance – mourning the heroes and helping people learn from unfortunate events, architecture takes on a redeeming role, it becomes homage and symbol of reconciliation. Thus architecture makes possible a new, peaceful way of living.*



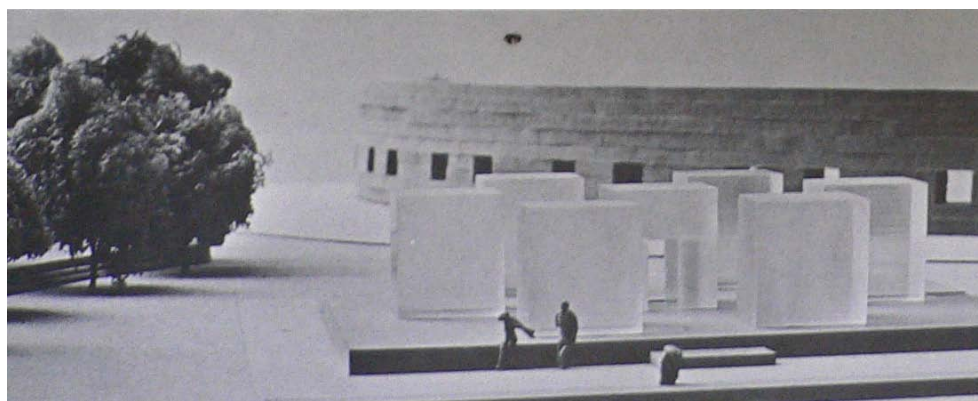
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### MONUMENTALITY AND SYMBOLISM

People are writing their history and are celebrating their heroes through the most magnificent and beautiful edifices. The historical meanings inserted in the built environment give communities the feeling of continuity and stability, of national or

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community pride and of identity. They also have a didactic role, that of facilitating learning from the mistakes or successes of the past. Most of the commemorative architecture appeals to the symbolism of basic geometric shapes and to monumentality in programs such as triumph arches, museums and monuments.



Louis Kahn, Jewish Martyrs' Memorial, New York

## ARCHITECTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS HISTORY

Architecture has shown the following attitudes to historical facts:

- Negation It is the refusal to accept the negative events and historical errors that had harmed the national pride. Typical examples are the huge efforts made for the reconstruction of Frauen Kirche from Dresden, Germany and of the cities Hiroshima or Warsaw, which were almost completely destroyed during the Second World War bombings.



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- Acceptance and transformation. The history shouldn't be rejected or forgotten, says architect Daniel Libeskind, when explaining his view in designing in dramatic lines the Jewish extension of the Berlin Museum. Every exhibition space is linked to the central void that must be permanently felt by the public: it signifies the void left in Berlin's culture and history by its Jewish citizens' extermination. The architect's intention was to create a museum of forgiveness. He wants this void to be visible and accessible, to be the symbol that expresses the presence of the absence<sup>2</sup>.



Reichstag, a symbolic place for German history, in its revival and change has become the sign of the destruction of the former imperialism. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the mixture of contrasting architectural languages - eclectic 19th century and high tech, -transformed the building into a national democratic edifice. Symbolically, the shell rotating around the circular ramp following the sun and the mirrors as homage to the sky announces the triumph of democracy.



<sup>1</sup>Frauen Kirche in 2003 and in 1991, <http://en.wikipedia.org>

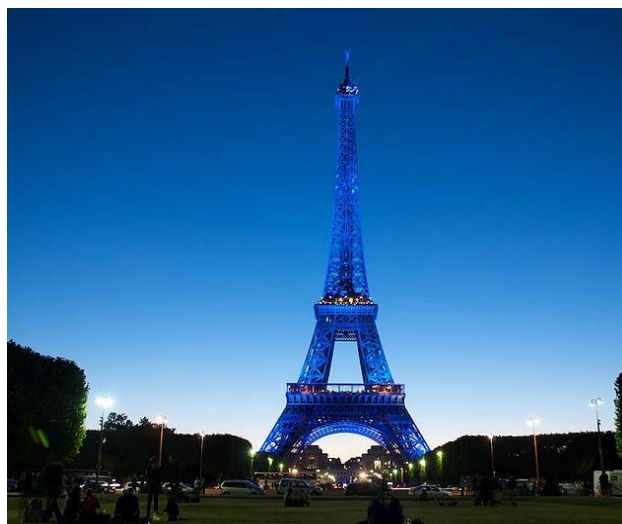
<sup>2</sup>Arhitectura 9/00

<sup>3</sup>Extension of the Berlin Museum, arch. Daniel Libeskind, [www.german-architecture.info](http://www.german-architecture.info)

<sup>4</sup>Reichstag today, architect Norman Foster, <http://en.wikipedia.org>

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- Glorification It is embodied in architecture that symbolizes the cultural and political affirmation. The independence of Catalonia was celebrated in the art-nouveau architecture of Antoni Gaudi by using traditional elements and signs of cultural identity.



Eiffel Tower was built to commemorate the centennial of the French Revolution. It also marks the revolution of the building technology and it is a symbol of modernity. Its blue lighting in honor of Europe marked in May 2006 the 20th anniversary of Europe Day and in June 2008 celebrated the France's presidency of the European Union.

- Commemoration and remembrance Architecture recalls, mourns and reinterprets the past. The purpose of commemorative architecture is to imprint historical events, facts and important personalities from the community in people's minds. The commemorative monuments function as redeeming gestures, they bring homage or are symbols of reconciliation.

The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, built on the place of the former city center from before the nuclear attack from 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1945, has as main concept the idea „never another Hiroshima”. The park contains statues and monuments and is dominated by the monumental modern architecture of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial museum, designed by Kenzo Tange. The museum exposes a touching collection of evidences about the Japanese tragedy and it is a symbol of hope for world peace and elimination of nuclear weapons.

<sup>5</sup> Eiffel Tower, Paris, G. Eiffel and Casa Batlló, Barcelona, A.Gaudi, [www.greatbuildings.com](http://www.greatbuildings.com)





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The Memorial Cenotaph, designed by the same architect, recalls the ancient house shapes to shelter the souls of the victims whose names are written inside the monument. Under the arch there is a perspective view to the carbonized skeleton of the former Industrial Promotion Hall, which remained standing after the bombing, right in the center of the crashes<sup>7</sup>. The historical significances are communicated through symbolic elements: the ruin, the water, the fire, the names and the nature.



The sculpture-architecture of Frank O'Gehry, the „dancing house” from Prague, was interpreted in a comic deconstructive manner - it was compared with a crashed Coca-Cola can. It makes in fact reference to the destruction of the European culture during the Second World War. Although this building might seem to some to be a superficial postmodern work, it is intended to have a semantic deepness, referencing the saddest episode of our contemporary history<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup>The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and The Memorial Cenotaph, architect Kenzo Tange  
<http://en.wikipedia.org>

<sup>7</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org>

<sup>8</sup> Arhitext design 4/02

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## CONCLUSIONS

The historical meanings used in architectural works have the purpose of healing the wounds that history has left and of creating the feeling of unity and solidarity between people.

The monuments of forgiveness and redemption make possible a new peaceful life and the monuments of glory connect people with their bright past and their heroes. History is written through architectural language in a durable and strong way, enhancing the sense of continuity, of belonging and of national identity.

## References

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