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Survival and Symbiosis: Among the Pathways of Inhabited Time

Dimitris A. Fatouros is one of Greece's most important architects of the Modern era. He taught for many years in the architecture program at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where he also became Rector of the University. He also served in the national government as Minister of Education. His architectural works, and his theoretical and pedagogical essays, have been published internationally. In 1991, and informally since, he has collaborated with Professor Hancock in an extensive study of the Greek landscapes and settlements.

In the pathways of inhabited time, the conditions of living, survival and symbiosis of human communities remain the critical field of investigation, a field, however, easily disorientated and limited.

John E. Hancock's explorations within the specificities of the Greek case, which may exist in the long duration of the Mediterranean, fall in this field (Hancock, 1998).¹ It is the search for multiplicity in the man-made environment, among natural-built conditions and relations. It is a creative reading of history that seeks supports in the critical core of the conditions of settlements, and in the dialogue of human relationships. This search may be trapped by the everyday reality, such as the "linguistically framed discourse" and the "premade theoretical constructs" that dominate architectural thinking, as Professor Hancock points out.

The observations, comments, and questions that he discusses reveal crucial parameters, not only for the Greek case, but for the associations of the human community with its environment in general. He writes of its “distinctive location: geographically amidst very different cultures on all sides, historically exercising an extreme cultural energy but under political subjugation, physically occupying a highly-differentiated and gently-scaled landscape and culturally occupying the mythical position as the fount of Western Civilization.”

The distinctive location is formulated in the long duration within the mild Mediterranean conditions and geographic specificities, such as – in many regions of Greece – the intense luminosity, the clarity of the atmosphere and the persistent presence of the *opposite* (Hadjimichalis, 2011) through many centuries of exchanges, transactions, and associations of the Greek land with the worlds of the East and the West, and the flows of the North and the South.

The Aegean Archipelago is such an example (Constantopoulos, Filoxenidou, Kotzia, Papadopoulos, 2006): the hundreds of larger and smaller inhabited and uninhabited islands and isles between the Greek coasts of Europe and the coasts of Asia Minor is a dense network, a bridge of movement and exchange. The specific characteristic of the *opposite* acquires a special emphasis: for all the continental and insular coasts of the Archipelago, and always within the same geographical and environmental conditions, there is a more-or-less obvious opposite, another land within the sea which invites, allows and develops ventures, possibilities, cases of survival and symbiosis – the projection of an unknown human person. The Aegean Archipelago could be considered a *mega Venetian laguna*.

In the long duration of movement, exchange, transaction, and interaction, in the Archipelago and elsewhere in the Greek land, certain identity traits seems to have been formulated.

The built world is the work of people’s hands: the mountain slopes, the sheltering habitat, the everyday interactions with nature. Inhabitation, the conditions of rural life, the constant dialogue with

the sea, become a cohesive entity: the inhabited and the natural world share elements of the same entity. These phenomena are all known in some way, but more and more it seems necessary that they are understood, dissociated from stereotypes and classified, so that they can be compared to contemporary possibilities and relations.

This conception of ways and conditions formulates the identity of conviviality which Professor Hancock calls “the tight weave between the built world and the lived world”:

“What binds together this place, these life-ways, these landscapes, and these buildings, attentive to the sun, the sea, the intensity of human relations... A sensual whole filled with the immediacy of sun and shade, street and stair, rock and wind... A specificity of the transparency of Greek light, things behind things, meanings within meanings, and multiple analogies of the physical and the metaphysical... The macro-dimension of the surrounding mountains and sea, and the micro-dimension of the random breaks, joints, and juxtapositions of form.”

In this description, all of the contributors to the creation of the relation of the “built world as a whole” are present, and they are coordinated through the symbolic functions of the human face, the micro-collective relations, with wishes, attitudes, and fantasies that exist, and will exist in the human realities as well.

Some elements of this entity are directly related to the tectonic origin that is developed with the flat or the barrel vaulted roofs of the gentle coasts of the European Mediterranean, distinctly different from the precipitous mountainous coverage of Central and Northern Europe (Frampton, 2001). Even the actual contemporary trend of tectonic fluidity may be discussed under the general tectonic hypothesis (Constantopoulos, Fatouros, under publication).

Diversity is also developed in the residential (inhabited) web, in the compositions of symbiosis, or rather survival and symbiosis, in the planning, the sizes, the scales, and the positioning: open enclosures, porches, routes of accession with mediation.

The existence of the pair “mildness/aggressiveness” in the built world seems to have some uniqueness in the Greek case. Being a trait of human behavior and human relations, it may constitute – even if not under the same conditions – crucial factor of spatial organisation as well. In fact, when the organisation of space is associated with human relations, then the pair cannot but constitute a crucial factor. Precisely for this reason, because the basis of the mildness/aggressiveness pair concerns the relationship with the other, the relevant classifications are neither easy nor desirable, and related discussions and references are rather limited, or are avoided altogether.

The multifaceted or the multireferential entity of mildness, as it emerges in ancient Greek thought (de Romilly, 1979), appears to seek not simply the conditions but also the search for conditions and associations; in other words, it is a constant process that can offer creative prerequisites that refer to the relationship with the other, the possibilities of resources which may exist in oppositions, and of course, in the relation with the self.

On the Acropolis in Athens, the Parthenon does not predominate as the main, unique worshipping theme in a “monolithic,” aggressive, or, in other words, authoritarian way. The perennial sequence of access, eccentric routes, pathways, and open-air enclosures and porches, emphasize the persistent use of intermission, of mediations that coexist among buildings of diverse scale; worshipping themes composed around different axes formulate different conditions re-composing the entity of the larger building (Fatouros, 1992).

In this respect, the Acropolis is a complex, densely built web similar to the small settlements, the villages at the coasts of the Mediterranean in the Aegean and elsewhere. This built inhabited web, coexisting with nature’s participation has a genetic intensity: the rock of the Acropolis itself, its slopes, the trees and rural areas, as well as the rain, the humidity, the sun, the shadows, and the night – they are all present, active nature. The sculpted figures of the birds, the vultures

on the Parthenon, are reminiscent of and accentuate nature in the worshipping city of the Acropolis.

Art, creative art tormented over the human community seeks and attempts to shape these very entities. A comprehensive example of wholeness with symbolic dynamics, co-reference of diverse routes of the inhabited time, and projection into the future, is Iannis Xenakis' *Polytopo* in Mycenae at the end of the 1970s. In the prevailing silence of a summer night in the meadow, Xenakis' music cohabits with the mobile luminous spots, and the sound of bells, all posted on the herd of goats moving slowly, linearly in the dark, with the minimal, low sounds of daily routine participating in an experimental entirety in direct contact with reality.

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, a new reality with persistence and coherence seems to be developing, a reality that is detached from the genetic, historical duration. Continuities of lower or higher intensity are removed from the historical "precedent" of the long duration, and a dynamic and universal spread of discontinuity is formulated.

Architecture and the city are often trapped as the backdrop of long, historical, duration shifts – a reasonable consequence, of course, since crucial anthropological elements such as language, or personal contact and encounters, are for instance removed by the persistent immaterial interference on human relations. But an understanding of the diversity and contradictions of history is also under pressure, as different associations with the built world emerge.

A different "tight weave between the built world and the lived world" is the crucial quest – a tight weave certainly not subdued or limited to univocal but to multiple, creative priorities.

The persistent search for actions, elements, and associations that may contribute to the formulation of the conditions of the daily routine is not a return to a romantic attitude but it is the search, as Professor John Hancock emphasizes, for creative relations of the human community with the built world. This is the *raison d'être* of the existence of architecture.



Kimolos Island, Greece

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Note

- 1 All the quotations from J. E. Hancock in quotation-marks.

John E. Hancock: A Scholar, a Teacher, a Mentor

Ana Elisabeta Botez is an architect and Assistant Professor at the University of Architecture and Urbanism “Ion Mincu” in Bucharest. She holds the B. Arch. from “Ion Mincu” (2000), two MS in Arch’s (one in the anthropology of sacred space from “Ion Mincu” in 2003, one from the University of Cincinnati in 2011), and the doctorate from “Ion Mincu” in 2012. Her research work involves various aspects of Orthodox Christian church architecture; her professional projects include designs, additions, and restorations of various churches and monasteries in Romania.

My first encounter with John was through a book,¹ which was a selection of his most important papers, previously published in English, but now collected together and translated into my native Romanian. The book was among the first in the series “Spații imaginate” (“Imagined spaces”), coordinated by Augustin Ioan for the Romanian publishing house Paideia, a series of books most valued by students and architects interested in studying the theory of architecture. The author of this book, who was completely unknown to me at the time, had a certain freedom and freshness in his discourse, which at the same time was based on an intimidating level of erudition and on an intimate and unmediated familiarity with some of the greatest works of architecture of all times. His manner of writing, distinctly academic and yet reader-friendly, was captivating.