

The Presence of Dalibor Vesely

Shortly after the appearance of the first edition of *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, published by Thames & Hudson in 1980, I was approached by Andrea Papadakis, then the editor and owner of the magazine *Architectural Design*, with the invitation to edit a special issue of the magazine, to which I would ultimately give the title of "Modern Architecture and the Critical Present". Together we planned and conjured up an issue which comprised of two essays by myself, one of which was a reworked gloss on Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1954), and the other a somewhat subjective survey of recent architecture with a typological bent, ranging from Kleihues to Utzon, via Pelli and Gwathmey, along with an excerpt from the book itself. In addition, we invited a number of figures to review the book, among them Alan Colquhoun, Demetri Porphyrios, Rafael Moneo, and the illustrious Manfredo Tafuri, this last acknowledging the 'thin red line', as he put it, running through my account. I asked Dalibor to write something on the book, but he politely and firmly declined to do so, saying the cultural crisis that I had attempted to identify at the end of the first edition had been succinctly and more profoundly characterized by Paul Ricœur in his 1961 essay, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures", an English translation of which was included in a collection of his essays published under the title *History and Truth*, published by Northwestern University Press in 1965.

Although I was already aware, I suppose via Coleridge, of the potentially significant distinction between the apparent synonyms of *culture* and *civilization*, Ricœur's characterization of 'universal civilization' (singular) as universal technology, and of 'cultures' (plural) as the ethical and mythical nucleus of mankind, which constituted for me an exceptionally revelatory paradigm, along with Alex Tzonis and Liane Lefebvre's coinage of the term 'critical regionalism' in their 1981 essay "The Grid and the Pathway". However, without Dalibor bringing Ricœur to my attention, it is extremely unlikely that my "six points of resistance" would have ever been attempted. This was perhaps the common point of reference that cemented my relationship with Dalibor throughout the rest of my career, and it was his informal tutelage, which came into being casually and without pretension every time we met, which kept the discourse alive. We encountered each other regularly, once a year, due to his brief presence as a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania. On one of these visits Dalibor gave me his own well-worn copy of the 1960 English translation of Hans Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, which is still one of my prized possessions.

Apart from his own *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, there was at least one other 'assignment' that Dalibor bestowed upon me; namely, the all-encompassing work of the daunting Eric Voegelin. Thus the three of them – Ricœur, Gadamer, and Voegelin – remain fixtures on my bookshelf to this day, figures whom I hope to address again, more assiduously, in the near future. Notwithstanding my limitations, Dalibor was a loyal colleague and friend, who, at one time, advanced my name as a candidate for the professorship at the Cambridge University School of Architecture. Regrettably my candidacy did not survive the shortlist interviews, where I was in the elect company of Colin Stansfield Smith and Manuel de Solà-Morales, both of whom also didn't make the grade. There was a moment sometime after, in which, at Dalibor's invitation, I contributed a synthetic response to an extraordinary collection of his former student's writings, which regrettably has yet to be published. Needless to say, one lives in the hope that this anthology will also one day see the light of day, particularly since I have now lost any trace of my own contribution to this erstwhile Festschrift.

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