

The Amber-Chamber (The Manifesto)

The Manifesto has references in the master thesis „The Interaction of Old and New Structures in the Nucleus of Klaipėda“ (VGTU; advisor Algis Vyšniunas. Vilnius, 1999)

Amber Chamber is a form of reality which surrounds or separates us. In each point of the earth's surface this form unifies what is begun and completed by that point. It is a part and a unity. But where does the former begin and the latter end? Why is "the modern city" – our inevitable residence – strikingly different from its ancestor, the polis? I know the uniqueness and restlessness of Angkor, the Capadocian cave, Manhattan or Venice. But I do not know the answer to the question: what is the difference between a megalopolis and an agglomeration and, most important, why does not all this remind one of a city?

Take Klaipėda: a port, the hope of Lithuania. The city that has its history and perspectives, but no identity. Here is the vision of a harbor: the seashore, haunted by city dwellers twice per year, the red brick wall, local jazz and liberal attitudes. The dilemma of the harbor versus the city had emerged in pre-war times and troubled the city dwellers in soviet times. Now the municipality and the state are made to balance near some Unknown Wealth. "Look deeper", the mass media suggests, and we do. But so attentively and so deeply that we do not recognize the obvious: we live in a wasteland, our houses are bunkers, and we are modern barbarians. What makes me think so? History?

The city-castle was founded in 1252 for military purposes by the Livonia order at the fall of the rivers Nemunas and Dangė. This was the establishment of the city. Later the area was attacked and several times plundered by Samogitians (Žemaičiai). The city is surrounded by star-shaped ramparts, the castle is separated from the island by channels, and hatred separates city-dwellers from castle-holders. A continuous defence of the city is going on. At the end of the 18th century another important change reshapes the structure of Klaipėda's city-image: the suburb town of Frydrič or Odu (the Hide) is separated from Island city (formed by Castrum-Romanum principle) by the size of its quarters and the tempo of living. More dispersed suburbs and estates' meadows stretch beyond the desolate embankments. The development of the urban structure remains almost unchanged until the end of World War II. The year 1947 brings soviet inventorization and re-evaluation. The city hopes to get rid of its slow burdensome history and to develop. However, it was in vain. Just because all parts of this system were built according to the principle that a man or a building is only a part. There is no certain unity: at best it is substituted by the communist party, a five year plan, or Mr. Gagarin. So far this is the last phase in the city development or, in other words, the decline.

What is the basis of my thinking? The perspectives, oppressed by the disadvantageous current situation? A massive buffer, the port, separates the city from water. One can hardly see through it to the Curonian spit and a few spires of churches or the postoffice. And there is no place for us.

The core of Klaipėda city, like many other cities of the world, does not have a clear form or distinct contents (unlike the Old Town of Vilnius – the unique Lithuanian urban monad). The fragments of urban and architectural heritage make up just a very small part of this sphere. Too small to be identified as a unity. The influence of the heritage to the developing city image makes up just a buffer against mercantilism and professional incompetence.

What is the basis of my thinking? On the basis of identity, which for Plato was a state, for Leibnitz – a monad, and for Kevin Lynch – a city image. On the basis of the Amber-Chamber, whose search has been too painful for Klaipėda (although any structural limits of the unity and the part should be recreated immediately). On the basis of the Creator's eye that once fixed upon a spider stuck in the solidifying magma of pine gum. Because the magma has preserved the genuine form of the include, the results of its socio-economical existence, the clutches of its setting, the freedom of its authentic form. On the basis of the name which legally belongs to its single owner.

The identity of Klaipėda is in geometry and composition.

The identity of Klaipėda is in gravitation and dominants.

The identity of Klaipėda is a monad.

The unity is a part. And the part is a unity.

Translated by Edgaras Platelis and Kerry Shawn Keys