Romvári Péter / Water Museum / opposition by Kas Oosterhuis

Why Water, why Museum? The choice of water is a relevant choice in the global macro-economical context. Water is by most trend watchers regarded as the oil of this century. Wars will be organized on water rather then on oil. If this is the case, what could be the importance to focus on water as subject for an thesis project? Is there any relation between the global interest in water and the personal interest of an architects student? I could also put it this way: could a design project on a Water Museum contribute to the world wide discussion on this precious source material? It could certainly contribute to the awareness of the public of the importance of the subject. It that sense the very choice to design a Water Museum could serve as a public relations component in the political struggle for a better treatment of the natural resources. The choice for a Water Museum is politically correct. But the subject I would like to discuss here is how the choice and the design for a Water Museum could relate to the architectural discourse in Budapest?

Romvári Péter has chosen to apply the shape of a wave as the leading theme for his design. Is that a logical choice? Many materials come in waves. Many immaterial information also comes in waves. In this sense his design could just as well have been a Radio Museum or a Milk Museum. Or a Geological Museum since the crust of the earth moves slowly and indeed deforms in wave like patterns. When I think of water I think of an extremely volatile material in all its physical aspects, water can be liquid, ice or vapor. The architectural language that is chosen for the Water Museum however is heavy, and it is traditional in its materialization techniques: concrete for the inside, concrete at the exterior. As far as I can judge from a distance the only way to make this is to build complicated molds on site, and to poor the concrete in situ. In many ways this design relies on traditional craftsmanship. There is no way this design could be realized using computer numerical controlled manufacturing processes. He would have needed to invent the programmable molds for prefabricating concrete first. The main impression that the drawings and renderings give me is that of an old species, like a dinosaur with large and heavy feet, a species which is almost extinct but still alive.

During the past twenty years I have noticed that in Hungary, as in the rest of the world, there is a strong tendency towards traditional values, a deep interest in folk tradition, a desire to know more about ones roots. There seems to be big interest, especially among a younger generation, in the concept of mystery, even a desire to create mystery when there is only intriguing reality. Exactly this aspect of our society is completely alien to me. I have always felt that daily reality and the hyper form of reality which is known as virtual reality, forms the most intriguing possible experience in life. I have the pleasure to realize that we are living inside evolution and that there is no better way to understand life then to look around and be amazed of how things are and how they develop. And then I am not talking about nature, about water, animals or plants, but I am referring to products, everything that is evolving inside our brains and physically around us. There is absolutely no need for mystery. Another way to put this that the desire for mystery actually cuts us off from the potential thrill of daily life and product evolution.

And yet Péter Romvári's exercise is important in the educational context. At least he tries to find new ways, but he finds himself very much tied to old traditions. He wants to brake away from the rectangularity of the now popular recycling of Modernism. He wants a more fluid architectural language, but he is prohibited by the technical aspects of how to achieve that. Unfortunately the real knowledge of how things are made using modern computer numerical controlled techniques is not taught at universities, not in Hungary and neither in The Netherlands. One has to go out of the university and go to the kitchens, the workshops and the factories, to the places where the actual production tales place. It is my wish that one day all levels of education will merge with the practices of invention and production. There the daily evolution takes place. There the genetic information on future species is modified, and there is nothing more exciting in life then to feel to be part of evolution.