All is architecture!

This is a sentence that still sends cold shivers down the backs of our poodle-toting petit bourgeois:

All is architecture.

About three weeks ago, John Sailer called me up and asked, “I’m setting up a small exhibition for Hans Hollein for his 80th birthday. Can you speak there?” Fine, I figured, that’s easy.

Since I am neither an art historian nor a critic, I’ll just speak about him personally, without any notes.

For instance, I’ll tell you about how I first saw him as a student at the TU, how I perceived him as a young architect, and how I later, as his two-generation (in architecture generations, that is) junior, collaborated with him on a project. We didn’t win the project for the world exhibition competition in Vienna, but we jointly presented the project at the AEDES Berlin Gallery. The theme was quality solidarity. And I’ll tell you about how I experienced him as a fellow professor at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, a position for which he had brought me in.

Today, it turns out that this is not so easy. It’s not just about respect (the issue of respect – which, by the way, is a characteristic that is rarely found in Vienna, because mediocrity does not know respect), but also pertaining to the many obituaries at home and abroad.

So I won’t talk about how we, as students at the TU, listened with rapture to a young,
lanky man in a striped shirt and orange socks who compellingly spoke about his city models.

Or the way we experienced him as an architect back then – we were already Himmelb(l)au – as someone who was never pleased with the outcome of a project and who changed, or rather improved, a project from day to day. And I will not tell you about how he, as Institute Director, turned down one appointment after another, despite a visibly empty schedule.

He also played the game of power and said, if one has power, one must also exercise it. This was not important to him personally per se. But for him, it was important to make use of the power whenever he saw an opportunity to expand the boundaries of architecture.

I don’t know where he had learned this – perhaps from Holzmeister. But I’m sure that Hans Hollein was one of the few architects, both in this country and internationally, who could think strategically.

As I said, I am no art historian. But one thing is clear: Hans Hollein was an inventor, and therefore one of the most influential and important architects in the world.

The obituaries in the Austrian press partly cover, inanely, all that he would have been happy to hear during his lifetime, and, as usual, would have never been told – otherwise, he would have built more than he had in this city of mediocrity and won the Kiesler Prize for sure, a prize that he had invented actually and never received for reasons I can’t understand.

Everybody in Austria writes about how he was the most important and influential architect, but nobody writes about why. For that, you have to read the international newspapers, such as the NZZ, for example.

I am no art historian, but Hollein was the most important and influential architect. Why was he important? Because he was an inventor. Why was he influential? Because he
was important.

As an inventor, he initiated and influenced architectural trends as both a theoretician and as a building architect.

He was a pioneering inventor, not an epigone or follower, unlike so many of those hyped-up shooting stars of the scene who are hailed one day and promptly forgotten the next.

Hollein was a co-founder of the postmodern movement, and the Bilbao effect should actually be called the Mönchengladbach effect, as it was he who designed a new typology of the museum through his museum. And although it, as well as the Haas-Haus, was rejected, outrageously enough, he has proven, with his daredevil space collages, that architecture itself can be art and that the concept of function needs to be radically expanded.

He has indeed referred to himself as a functionalist, only so that this term could be more broadly defined.

His example of a spacesuit which made the protective function of architecture obsolete through the technique of controlling bodily heat, and thereby opening up architecture to new areas that responded to our emotions and obsessions – that was a sign of a radical departure into a new world for us young architects.

How's that for impact?

Eisenman claimed that the future of an architect and his thoughts could be read on the drawing board and in the projects of the students. When one compares the photomontage of his aircraft carrier city to our museum in Lyon, the influence of Hans Hollein can still be felt.

The fascination that these models and drawings, as well as his writings, produced is apparent in many projects of architects who were young back then, and architects who
were his students at the time.

Now that's what I call influence.

Although Hans Hollein was always considered to be global, he was both a profoundly Austrian and, above all, Viennese architect, just as our city of Freud, and, if you like, the city of psychoanalysis, is also both of these things. Both the city and the psychoanalysis can be read in his drawn and built space sequences.

One, however, needs to have the ability to do this, of course.

Lars Lerup divides the thinking and the works of architects into three categories and compares it to a building. There are architects who are primarily occupied with the basement. Here, from an Austrian standpoint, Raimund Abraham is mentioned. There are architects who are primarily occupied with the central structure of the building. Rem Koolhaas comes to my mind. And there are architects who deal with the roof as utopia. This is Zaha – and perhaps us as well. Hans Hollein claimed all three categories for himself.

I would like to count him as one of the international resistance fighters of architecture who have neither betrayed nor revoked their ideals, and who constantly exceeded the limits of comprehension in order to prove that architecture is more than just the fulfillment of a functional economic constraint.

Wagner, Loos, Hollein – "All are architects, all is architecture."