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AESTHETICS OF ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPT: FROM METAPHORICAL VISION TO CREATIVE CONCRETIZATION

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ABSTRACT: The paper would explore an issue which seems to be fundamental in our understanding of particular elements of creative thinking. It concerns with architectural concept as an aesthetic phenomenon. For being the bearer of cultural and social meanings this form of creative thinking, develops as almost independent visual and philosophical expression of architectural values. Architectural concept as a form of aesthetic value reflects on social and cultural issues of the time it appears in. That is also the reason why we can demonstrate its metaphorical, narrative completeness on one side, and its potential for the possible materialization in the next step of architectural concretization. Possible, because architectural concept can live its own meaningful and aesthetic life, provoking appearance of new ideas and building up concerns and solution for complex issues in architectural thinking.

Discussion on this topic will focus particularly on the transformation of the architectural concept in the last ten or fifteen years, as a driving force for contemporary understanding of aesthetic forms of architectural expression.

KEYWORDS: Architectural concept; metaphor; creativity;

Intention of a designer to communicate social and cultural issues through creative process and design concepts appears to be the core of contemporary aesthetics. That way, aesthetic intention equalizes with any creative intention which transforms design object into a statement which regards particularly important social and cultural issues of the time. Therefore, we can think on creativity as a production of means by which one communicates ideas and issues. [1] These issues are usually expressed in a metaphorical way, concerning the very essence of the creative process and design concepts as its final idealistic principle. This approach to the design concept as a metaphorical cultural reflection is not a new one, and we can follow its development from the Renaissance time. However, the difference between contemporary conceptual expression and those formed in the previous centuries can be thought as essentially structural.

While design, particularly architectural concepts, of previous periods were reflecting idealistic visions of regarded issues exclusively by literal and pictorial means, today's metaphorical expressions of social and cultural issues are concerned with a kind of hyperreal materialized models, which can introduce observer into the world of particularly guided sensorial values, building a new concept of aesthetic experience. This possibility develops through contemporary approach to the Design Research methodology, which emphasizes concept as a final outcome of the part of the creative process in which designer regards the formation of aesthetic communication of social and cultural issues through design means. [2] It underlines a general understanding by which architecture can be thought as one of *culture's primary representational systems*. [3]

To explain better this particular position, we can use Baudrillard's thought on hyperreal which guides us towards a model of a concept coming out from reality and transforming into a meaning as metaphorical reflection on that reality. That way, contemporary architectural concepts can exist as independent aesthetic and sensorial expressions, provoking our emotional respond as a unique experience. As we will see, the possibility of architectural concept to be materialized, and that way to become an individual idealistic interpretation, builds up a pure simulacrum in Baudrillard's term. It presents itself as *reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality*, and so on. [4]

It seems that in this context architectural concept becomes a construct, resulting from adopted *philosophical, literary and psychoanalytical methods of expression*. [5] That enables a creative designer to express metaphorically, actually in a narrative way, issues of the social reality which would not be explicitly suggestive when incorporated in the finalized architectural object. It means that architect through a concept, can extract particular aspects and notions important in forming a creative process, and represent them as bearers of aesthetic communication. This approach applies

contemporary understanding of social and cultural reality as a text, which is based on Derrida's notion of *textuality*, but also on Tschumi's notion that architecture, when considered as a type of visual language, *can be only read as a series of fragments which make up an architectural reality. Fragments of architecture are all one actually sees*. [6] In this context, we can consider contemporary design and architectural concepts as deliberately extracted and materialized fragments, which become a virtual value, but always as a possibility for actualization. This underlines the thought that *design research cannot only be about objective descriptions of the world 'out there'; instead it reflects the social system within which research is conducted*. [7]

All what has been discussed emphasizes that through design process considered as aesthetic communication, we can build a system which reflects the social system it develops within. By that, design process influences development of the social system, but through the process of communication of issues, which stands separated from particular personal influence. [8] However, development of such a system should not be considered as a result of solely rational and intellectual argumentation, but as an intuitive and imaginative reflection on concerned issues. It seems that the nature of this process is aimed by the fact that designers are thinking in images, which reflects on cultural complexity of issues that should be expressed. [9] Images are translating reality into capacity for generating innovation.

Four examples will be discussed here to illustrate the ideas previously exposed. The intention is not to evaluate their artistic quality, but to use them as architectural concepts which are successfully reflecting on contemporary ideas on aesthetic communication of cultural and social issues. Examples are deliberately chosen as works exhibited on the Architectural Biennale, Venetia 2008, 20016, and they (among other examples) reflect ideas and statements of the profession on the issue we are discussing in this paper. In this context, it is important that in the last ten years the Biennale invitations suggested approach which reflects social and cultural issues that architectural profession could address in a conceptual way. In that context we can use legitimately the works which are deliberately contextualizing aspects we are interested in.

The first work, exhibited in 2016, named *Transsolar and their contribution to sustainability – cutting edge engineering at the service of common sense*, constitutes on the vision of light as an metaphor of environmental and architectural importance. Light is presented as a number of pencils of rays constructing the sense of spatiality without an architectural frame, and at the same time provoking the observers respond to environmental qualities. The conflict between sharp light and darkness triggers the perceiver's subconscious recognition of archetypal opposites, well explained in psychology. People are emotionally charged in a direct way, by a dilemma: to pass or not through the space of light, and that way they become participants in the exposed

idea. However, this work emphasizes one issue more important for our discussion. It demonstrates the possibility of conceptualization of an important environmental issue, using just one aspect, light, and manipulating with it in a way which activates observer's intuitive emotional reflection based on its subconscious capacity to engage primordial feelings. This concept constitutes a real feeling of environmental and architectural quality we can engage with, and emotionally respond to, and at the same time reveals the essential value of that what contemporary architectural concept can be.

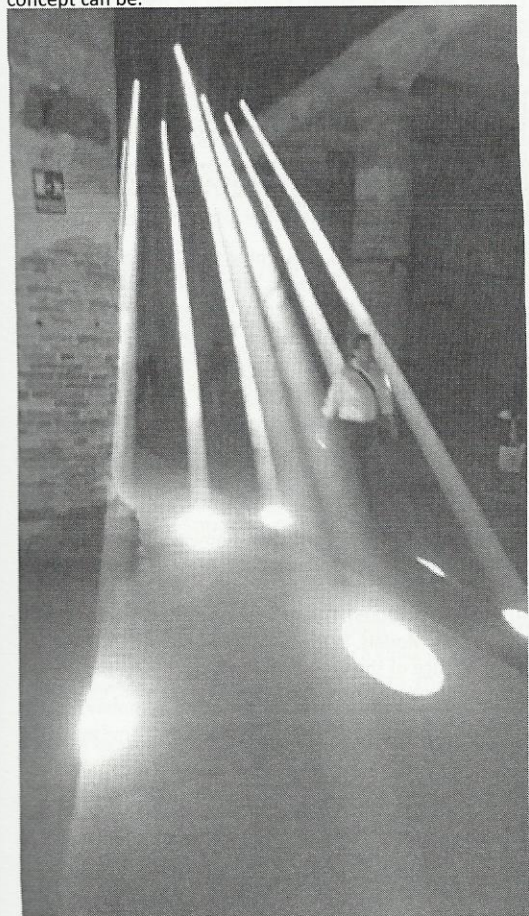


Fig. 1. Transsolar. Biennale. Venetia. 2016. (photo by author)

The second example is more complex, while it engages a number of ideas that transforms our usual understanding of what constitutes the everyday quality of objects as materialized design ideas. Named as *Hiperhabitat Reprogramming the World*, and designed by Guallart Architects/IAAC/MIT, The center for Bits and Atoms/Bestiario, the work is challenging the consumers usual understanding what the link between form and materiality should be. Actually, as in the first example, the architects are using light as a communication material between the idea and the observer, but supported by translucent and transparent building fabric. It emphasizes the connection of recognizable form of objects and the notion of dematerialized digital world. Light can be thought as a transmitter of perceptual values defined as contra standards in an aesthetic communication of new sensorial quality. We can engage form that reflect our real world, but shaped by the means of virtual value. The architects are programming a memorable map of reality, presenting actually recognizable everyday objects dispatched from that very reality. Actually the concept exposes the memorable map of reality, a sum of recognizable everyday objects dispatched from that very reality.

It is important that the attitude expressed in this work can be supported by a few important theoretical positions. It seems that the analyzed issue captures the notion that architecture expresses, signifies, translates a kind of full, constructed form, the context of a society already experiencing hyperrealism as the sum of all effects, as Baudrillard would define it. [10] It really proves that architectural concept can embody and present an anticipatory illusion, that it becomes a *concept of illusion, and that presents a space*

that works as the mental extension of sight. [4, 6] As Nouvel defined it, it becomes a mental space, an expression of dematerialized memorabilia.



Fig. 2. Hiperhabitat, Guallart Architects. Biennale Venetia. 2008. (photo by author)

At the same Biennale 2008, where the previous concept was exhibited, a group of authors from the Faculty of Architecture at Belgrade University, developed and materialized the idea of *Wohnlich*, a notion of 'being habitable'. This concept was structuralized in an attempt to provoke emotional response of observers, more than asking for rational understanding of spatial qualities. It was an experiment carried out in a research process regarding human poetical relation to space. The main idea of the concept emphasized the human feeling of being comfortable in space as an essential aspect for the aesthetic appreciation of architecture. [11] However, the concept was going beyond the formal body of a building and its gestalt values. As authors emphasized *the experimental nature of the work is based on the perception of boundaries as the membrane between outer and inner, public and private, social and intimate, allowed and prohibited.* The idea developed a feeling of space that *connects while separating and vice-versa; people, things, cultures, identities, spaces that are different, where margins are observed.* [12] This statement illustrates the complexity of the idea, and the approach to the aspects of its aesthetic communication to observers.



Fig. 3. Wohnlich. Group of authors. Faculty of Architecture Belgrade. Biennale. Venetia. 2008. (photo by author)

The last concept we will discuss, *Heroic Free Shipping*, exhibited in 2016, designed by group of authors from Belgrade, refers to the issue of position of young architects in contemporary society and culture, and their desire to make a change using profession as a tool. The main idea, the imprint of a ship into a blue fabric, actually a dream of materialization, works through the spatial capacity of the pavilion, and incorporates into self the present crowd of visitors as socially and culturally active force of transformation. This concept by its complexity communicates various issues, mainly through the aesthetic value which engages observers in an open participation. That approach to observer/participant invokes different metaphorical reflections on the essential meanings of the concept and its ideas. *From reminiscence on an urban legend and architecture as the most important vessel for conveying ideas*, [13] through the *metaphorical exuberance of Big Data brought on by the monstrosity of Capital* [14] to the *quest through the bright blue as a well known metaphor both personal and collective level of psychological and spiritual strength, almost heroic persistence in reaching new horizons* [14], number of observers personal statements are expound regarding the essential issues of the concept. It shows that architecture as stated in the work can be accepted as a social action, a communication of a collective expression of transformed social, and by that aesthetic value.

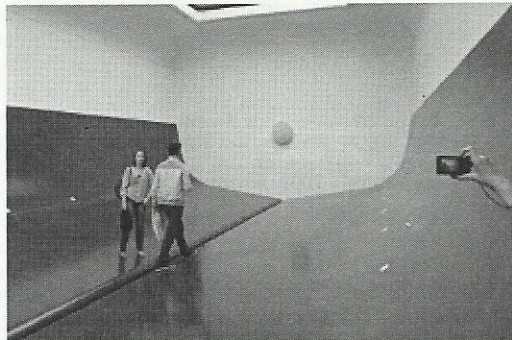


Fig. 4. Heroic. Group of authors. Belgrade. Biennale. Venetia. 2016. (photo by author)

Presented concepts are based on understanding that aesthetic communicates issues on a cultural and social level, using the result of design research on the stage where it operates on the primal level of creative activity. The contemporary practice of developing architectural concept as a materialized idea activates it as a carrier of essential spatiality. One can engage the materialized concept as a metaphor of trans-cultural memory, or as a metaphor of in-between existence connecting the reality we are living in and reality in which we will live, or as a culturally active social actuality. That way concept reflects the logic of invention, and became an experiment for reaching the capacity for generating innovation. Actually, contemporary understanding of architectural concept presents ideas through intuitively developed and creatively and intentionally constructed matrix of feelings and new perceptual values.

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