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INSIDE ARCHITECTURE. BETWEEN MYTH AND FIGURE

WEWNĄTRZ ARCHITEKTURY. MIĘDZY MITEM A FIGURĄ

Abstract

The myths of architecture operate on the deep structure of the text-object to search new meanings, by subjecting the transformation of the typological archive of the actual and future figures of the places to memory as an archive and to the key-words as compositional operators. The free association and the imaginative suggestion are the most important requirements for architecture, which should decode its purpose especially in relationship to the existing, trying to generate new multiple forms, simultaneous and fibrillating outcomes, in order to gain a visionary transformation and a new idea of beauty.

Keywords: architecture, myth, figure, space, void

Streszczenie

Mity architektury poszukują nowych znaczeń w głębokiej strukturze tekstu-obiektu. Transformację typologicznego zbioru istniejących i przyszłych kształtów miejsc podporządkowują one pamięci jako archiwum i słowom-kluczom jako operatorom kompozycyjnym. Swobodne skojarzenia i pomysłowe propozycje są najważniejszymi wymaganiami stawianymi architekturze, która powinna zdekodować swoje przeznaczenie, zwłaszcza względem zastanej rzeczywistości, starając się wygenerować nowe, wielorakie formy, symultaniczne i przenikające się rezultaty, aby osiągnąć wizjonerską transformację i nową ideę piękna.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, mit, figura, przestrzeń, pustka

1. INTRODUCTION

Facing the complexity of a measurable and definable structure, reflecting about the myth of architecture as form of thinking, is an opportunity to enrich its narration, from the ‘elements-parts’ to the ‘architecture of architecture’, to the urban and landscape systems.

Today as never before, ontological approach of thought reveals the theory of chaos. Punctual and infinitesimal phenomena, in complex systems, triggers a radical change of the systems themselves, a sudden ‘butterfly effect’. This thought shows the crisis of the linear cause-effect relationship which no longer finds a real ability to transform phenomena such as building the world by using artifacts. Nonetheless, complex thought overturns all reductionist criteria, opening new perspectives on the global reality of man and his worldview. Russian theory of constructivism and deconstructivism philosophy have thoroughly questioned rationalist thought. Lyotard conceives modernity as something for which there are no

alternatives, if not illogical randomness, while Derrida see just one possibility for building: deconstructing, making tabula rasa of paradigms of vertical and deterministic control.

Dislocation and typological distortion as well as the dialectic between construction and deconstruction enshrine a new theory of architecture, expressed by Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman projects for the Villette park in Paris (1983). Epiphany of the crisis of cause-and-effect legitimacy, whose architectural manifesto at Vitra campus (1993) are proposed as generative short circuits, has been the use of deconstruction in order to build self-referential structures. From Ghery's fragmented *non finito* to Hadid's dynamic suprematism, the alphabet of architecture is no longer included into a geometry, nor in a shared grammar, a system of rules, a code, a language.

Order and chaos without any apparent contradiction share the new 'liquid' architecture as structural devices of an inverse, chaotic and dynamic order. Fragmentations, conflicts, disjunctions, separations, physical, meaningful and functional decompositions, are the 'advanced architecture' narrative and methodological operators, described as instruments of subversion of traditional hierarchies in the Manhattan skyscraper by Rem Koolhaas. Starting from these mechanisms of fragmented structuring and hypertextual connection, today's architecture is looking for new statutes of thought to renew the discipline, for an 'in continuum' change of the transformation processes, both in environments and ecosystems.

2. DECODING

In order to redesign new forms for reality new dimensions, we are moving towards a deepening of operational and cognitive territories, which are free of programming modification in data systems, in which the minimum micro factor actually acts as an element capable of containing the future, as can be observed in global internet networking, where a single element can converge a multitude of connections, starting multiple and unpredictable links.

The sea of sand of deposited elements will find its significant existence in the decay of empty words and objects. Today, language, objects, vision accumulation determine the impossibility of a proven plan of legitimacy, and what is possible to do and what is not. It's the crisis or indeed it's the destruction of the Marcuse's assumption 'history is the realm of possibilities in the realm of necessity.'¹ So, if what is useful coincides with what is poetic, realm and conceptual together form a whole.

Within a linear system of cause and effect, the importance of rules, written in manuals of theory of architectural language – not least Le Corbusier's *Modulor* – implied that they were supported as structured by unwritten rules, underlying the attribution of a value that has always represented the construction of artifacts and places. These codes, defining what should be used, excluded and condemned to oblivion a whole world of improper and illegitimate elements.

Today also the identity of the competent authority, which is the fundamental actor in the transformation of places, went into a crisis. Since space is the place of control and governance, when the authority is absent, even the conversion of places becomes conflictual.

¹ H. Marcuse, L'uomo a una dimensione, Introduzione, after: *Marcuse, la paralisi della critica*, https://www.filosofico.net/Antologia_file/AntologiaM/marcusefel.htm (access: 22.10.2021).

The paradigm of complexity has infinitely multiplied the egalitarian actors, generating an enormous deposit of marginality, dysfunctionality and spatial discontinuities. Above all, complexity contains sufficient vagueness and ambiguity for a free and fertile associative approach, a methodology in which different and antithetical forms can inhabit.

The myths of architecture, understood as explanations of the meanings of its practice, can be expressed through different concepts.

In the deep archaeology of the resilient *fragment*, in the *junkspace* with the annulment of the distinct characters and the compromise of the resolution, we find illuminations to decode disciplinary thinking, which means knowing how to look at things of the project, recognizing the apparently random interaction between various elements, with different consequences at each scale, and generating a new sense to existing materials, even with distant effects.

In critique of rationalist thinking we recognize the power of stepping up, from the analysis of the object to the global contexts that affect figuration. Just like Manfredo Tafuri suggested, quite a long ago (1968), the structure of this context will arise as a particular phenomenon of a more general structure and, at a later stage, of comparison with the singularity. This idea does not refer to a single measure and dimension, but to an ambivalent relationship in the art of shaping space, as it happens in certain natural, open and chaotic configurations, recognizable only through new geometries. This is a cognitive step, a fluctuation between object and sense, between the replacement of the known reference system with other, unknown.

It can be worth talking about this step through an example: if we modify the dimension of a circular pillar, associating floating measures between the common size that generates its sense and the dimensions that exceed this limit, by free association the pillar-sign can become a living space, that is not only a structural element, but also a new element for connections. These actions on the sign, subjected to fluctuation between myth, understood as narrative reduction, and figure, understood as model and external image, are present in many emblematic architectures, such as the Sendai Media library by Toyo Ito or the Agadir convention center by Rem Koolhaas.

2.1. POSITIVE HETEROTOPIA

The fluctuation of meaning between myth, which contains multiple possibilities, and figure, which is one of the infinite possibilities, introduces a new typology into contemporary design. In collective memory and in personal imagination, the type is a great operational and disciplinary archive of the project dimension that goes beyond the treatises historical and classificatory logic, following the scale of the place.

According to deconstruction's principle, formal research of invariance is both a critique to the traditional unifying structures of the project and its textual structure. In fact, invariance is the first design operation for the necessary classification, naming and form, of the type.

Type underlies a primitive, founding and interpretative act between the three-dimensional components of the built space, which have in common some vague, ambiguous and similar characteristics. That is, they are built on the one hand with familiarity of form, function and description, on the other, by dimensioning their analogue scale, in order to proceed with the search for *persistence*.

This new geometry is a toll for the type, solving both dimension and figure, that is the relationship between the elements and the parts, the spatial meaning but also the textual structure of the object.

In modernity numbers, axes, figures constitute a positional grid of reduced elements, necessary to the beauty of composition: from Mies' cartesian grid to Le Corbusier's proportion grid, numbers measure distances between things, while defining the scale ratio and axes constitute the architectural system references. The new architectural knowledge *keywords* are primitive and topological figures, that define the association of the part with a specific name, or architectural configuration.

Undoubtedly, representation is the first form of architectural knowledge, informing places' geography. The reduced forms associated with the elementary figures, complicated by overlapping, addition, permeation, describe the contemporary space and its characteristics. Above all, they enable, at all scales, to distinguish and to measure the distance of all perceptible elements enclosed in their space. Stratification of topological geometry figures and countless names-signifiers, represent an imaginative archive of ontological objects, which are useful for the definition of new typological schemes.

Positional properties of the objects themselves become recognizable through a special vocabulary of new grammars. This keywords archive builds a new textual structure of usable architectural words, with minimal and reduced rules referred to the structure of the word itself.

The re-entry of objects-form as architecture materials is therefore a design operation that doesn't exclude anything, while determining the possibility of multiple choices.

The sign is obviously central. The unveiled sign carries in itself its own rules, keeping a distance from the traditional order. As Kandinsky theorized, type becomes 'sign for sign', 'text for text', 'art for art', silent symbols to the signifier, capable of becoming an artwork. The structure of a work of art and, even more so, its formal value, become meaningful. A typical example of such possible vagueness or ambiguity is the Great Glass by Marcel Duchamp, which for the author assumes a meaning in apparently meaningless words, a complete composition that, with its enigma, make sense out of the relationship between sign and context.

Context and not scale of measurement determines the reference system to design an architectural structure.

The traditional architectural codes, derived from proportional rules, admit a field of application that accepts the limit measure within a minimum and a maximum of dimensional coherences: under these dimensional consistencies the sign loses the ability as perceptible or usable space, while above it loses legitimacy. In the contemporary – on the other hand – architecture discovers a new knowledge, the operational typology, by using out of scale.

Invariable criteria of legitimacy are put in crisis to force the sense of narrative and textual capacity of architecture, excluded not by norm but by choice. Architecture search strategies, tactics, references, oscillating codes, that fluctuate between the deductions of the past and the forcing necessary to enter the future, in order to understand the reality of the world with cognitive research, useful for places' transformation. As it happens in some photographic techniques, a 'textual contrast' is obtained by inserting into the structure of the image a montage of critically deformed elements i.e. according to prescriptive codes.

This free association suddenly turns the stable, perennial and meaningful structure of the image, into an unstable one and determines the arbitrariness of this reading.

Oscillating is a descriptive facet of contemporary project complexity, an operation that clearly expresses the dissemination of meaning: the bigger and arbitrary is the free association of two elements, the bigger it opens up to multiple meanings.

2.2. PARADOXICAL ASSOCIATIONS

‘Occupy the space without having dimension: isn’t this the space?’² wonder the artist Eduardo Chillida. The imaginative categories and seemingly paradoxical associations modify the textual structure of the project, producing a conceptual and configurative shift.

Dimensions are the first parameters that can be brought to deformation, activating fluctuation in meaning of the architectural structure.

Modernity had defined void, as habitable space, through an arithmetic linear progression on an anthropocentric scale, with a measurable function, as Le Corbusier’s ‘five points’ suggest.

Today in the world, the space between things, object-names, is subject to paradoxical associations that admit arbitrariness, vagueness and even mistake.

Once the traditional codes of linear legitimacy disappeared, the imaginative suggestion of new architectural keywords – i.e. operational types – hold enough interchangeability, vagueness and ambiguity to allow a free, associative fertile approach, a generative methodology in which different and antithetical forms, artificial and natural, can coexist.

These keywords are a specific vocabulary for a significant ‘invisible’ structure, capable of generating plural outcomes that must be unstable in order to remain active.

If every phenomenon becomes visible in the form, then every word is a form. This apparition that becomes figure and the figure that becomes description is the myth, visual and textual structure of new and original structures of sense.

Architecture creative process uses operators such as texts and words, belonging to the same linguistic logical structure, containing alienating descriptions or imaginative outcomes, like in Theatre of the Absurd.

Therefore, oscillation between paradoxical elements, such as disorientation, explosion, deformation, overturning, cancellation, exclusion, is an architectural action with a ‘design hope’, which uses the past as a contestation and the future as a prophecy.

Conceptual oppositions are researched and expected in order to create relational architectural forms. In fact, the dichotomies, from the Greek word *δίχα* and *τέμνω*, define the need of indivisible union between the parties, whose conceptual outcome is the opposition, or the properties of the opposites, parts that are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but that can be complementary.

Thinking, for example, on the words limit and unlimited, it is clear that without the concept of limit there is no unlimited, affirming its union and continuity. This means that complexity couldn’t exist without the concept of redundancy.

If we look at a vast landscape, how will we define the unlimited? If the reference system is the ordered and limited composition, unlimited will correspond to the absence of elements related to their ontological essence, and it appears disordered: everything that contains, and is contained – the limit as an ontological element – must then be defined by a figure, a line, an edge. If we use another reference system, the unlimited corresponds to everything that cannot be contained in anything that welcomes its infinitesimal dimensional points.

Context of things should then be defined to contain and measure its finiteness, that is, its scale value.

² E. Chillida *Escritos*, La Fabrica, Madrid 2005, p. 64.

The void is the quality of the space-limit and the field of architectural design that defines the following actions: everything that is external, everything that is contained, the limiting or the line, the border, its density, the fullness, and finally the invisible, the immaterial infinite, i.e., the category of unlimited.

Only the choice of distance, the scaling, allows to overcome the threshold between limit and non-limited. The argument that emerges from this representation is amazing: all logical assumptions to create new architectural forms emerge from the voids, identified as interstices, margins, notes, quotations, indexes and spacings, that is, all the places of distances and separations.

Distance is part of an arbitrary and ambiguous form that investigates the unstructured objectives of the *mise-en-scène* of differences, as shown by the emblematic most recent treatises i.e. *S*, *L*, *M*, *XL* or *Metapolis*. These approaches have revealed the rhapsodic structure of things-words, texts-materials, recognized through the meaning of indifference, or a value of equality. Word-object itself is no longer investigated with descriptions, philological or etymological research, but as a phenomenon, internal in the very structure of the context.

2.3. VOIDS AS A PROJECT

Empty and the scaling therefore are the most powerful conceptual tools to contrast the meaning dependence from function. Spaces between things, absences, voids of meaning, have the sense of objects, if we define them in liminality, as a place. Their real scale is conceptual, the name becomes meaning without a necessary measure, such is the complexity of possible results and hierarchical indifference.

The palimpsest is a design methodology, where the enlargement and the overlap identify a possible layout among the possible, significant among significant, as it is evident in the Cannaregio town square for the Biennale of Venice by Peter Eisenmann (1978). Architecture as a knowledge form becomes measure of itself, selects real and metaphorical traces that highlight invisible and amazing analogies, from the crossroads of the grid of the imaginary project for the hospital in Venice by Le Corbusier, to the voids characterized by absence of meanings and functions. The conceptual displacement of measure is evident, the smaller void would not allow an interior, the intermediate one would allow it, but it is occupied internally, and finally the largest has unusable dimension for a man.

The project can use a new operator to work on the *vacuum* that is the *distance* which is understood by introducing the concept of absurdity. As in the Myth of Sisyphus, the possibility of action towards an object increases as you distance yourself from the object and any prejudicial definition. This is even more valid if it is not an immediate operation, since prejudice defines and excludes other differences.

It is therefore necessary unveiling, remeasuring and replacing the prejudicial definitions that arise between subjects and objects, as suggested by the existentialistic approach, which had the great merit to expelling the reassuring essence of things and the adherence between their meaning.

By introducing separation and unveiling operations, architecture produce a critical knowledge to interpret the problems posed by contemporary cities, such as fragmentation, order of chaos, separation of programs and can reuse the existing, freeing itself from the prejudice of original and archetypal forms.

What exists can become other than itself with new associations. Innovation springs from using topological figures, a-scalar geometries, variable configuration, voids, overlaps and glues, also generated by the places themselves, allowing maybe all the figures and epiphanies of the possible outcomes, and not only a single one.

The countless possible outcomes of this approach are part to ongoing research at Trento University under my responsibility (external tutor prof. Paolo Fossati) aimed to reinterpret vacant spaces and the dysfunctional, that incorporate fragments of buildings, infrastructural waste, urban residual, open spaces, telling different rules, actions, projects.

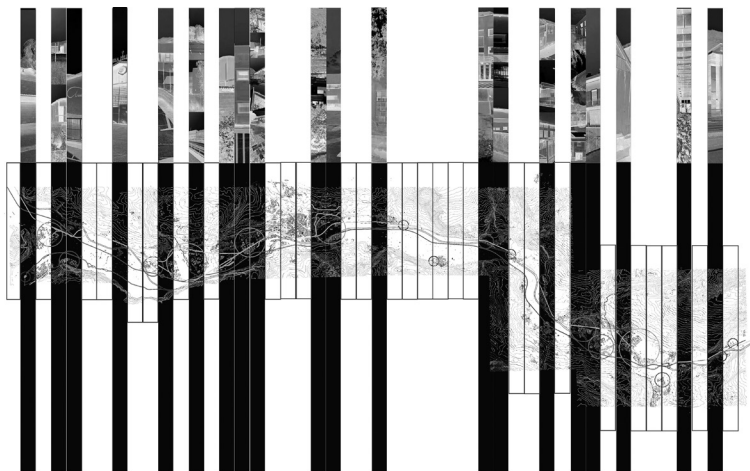
Design reflection recognizes an open network within a paratactic perceptual and descriptive structure, without perspectives, privileged points of view, or centrality, expansion of rarefied and marginal open spatiality, of physical and spatial enclosures, in the silence of the relationships between things and in the intersection of figures.

In the measure and distance of this crowding, the city empty space is not only an intersecting design of networks but it becomes a project of places and overlapping figures, whose geometric shape is given by the limits, internal boundaries that spring from the separate and separating space, arranged in vertical layers. These limits can have a new recognizability in the city and in the landscape, as enclosures in and around, decoding the existing as an imaginative multitude.

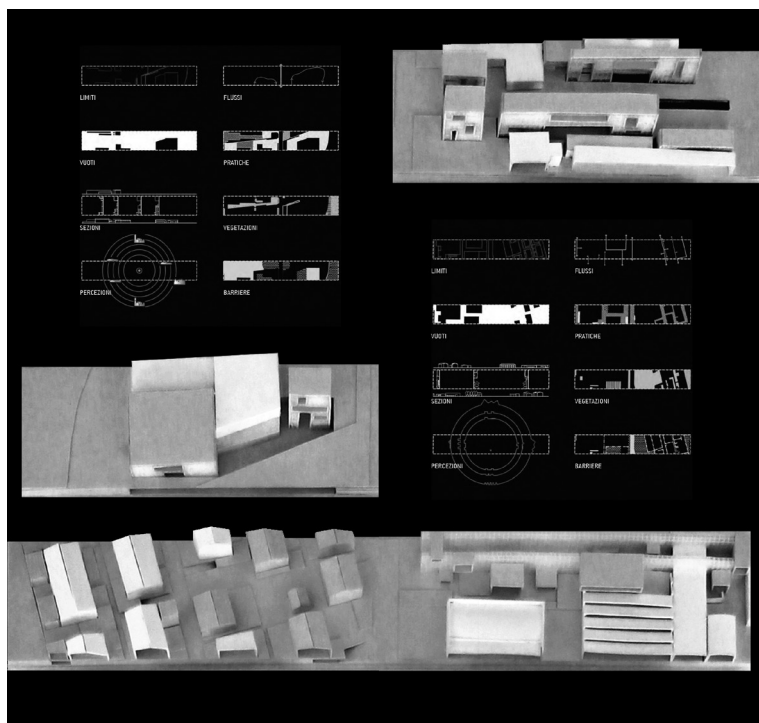
3. CONCLUSIONS

Myths are registers of time, iconic epiphanies of our personal and collective memory, that are rewrite in continuity in this time. Codified registers of architecture always involve a choice, that is not found in a mechanistic determinism of a single possibility, but is only one of many possible.

The method for a project open to complexity of contemporary cities, territories, landscapes can be traced starting from the concept of text-context and from an operational distance that activates a fluctuation in the signification structure. The description of possible operators of architecture, observed as pieces of a new embryo of the metaphysical core of it becoming, represents a typological archive of current and future figures, for the interpretation of contemporary vacant spaces in contemporary cities, in a continuous oscillation of strategies measuring their quality, in search of a new sense of places.



III. 1. *Scale of voids. Conceptual assumptions, elementary figures and measurement of complexity. The valley of the river Adige. Source: C. Battaino, Vacant spaces and the dysfunctional. Research project, University of Trento 2020.*



III. 2. *Figures incorporates found objects. Strategies and oscillating codes inside the separation fence. Source: C. Battaino, Vacant spaces and the dysfunctional. Research project, University of Trento 2020.*

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