

Liminal Field of Architecture

In - Betweenness

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Abstract — Simplified, a building façade could be defined as a membrane that disparts interior and exterior. Collected together, these membranes constitute physical structure of built environment, and again in simplified form, define a system of spatial boundaries, called architecture. Observing the differential conception of the façade as a static, unchangeable phenomenon, indicates a substantial review of the built environment in its traditional form. Contemporary living habits are based on constant overlapping, and in that sence they represent a negation of clear boundaries and definitions. Architecture, as an occupying spatial structure, doesn't subject to change together with its contemporary content.

This conflict indicates research of liminal fields of architecture and their possibilities in architectural praxis. One of the liminal states of architecture is *in-between space*, in this paper defined as an expanded façade.

Therefore, in-between space results from the dematerialization process of traditional façade into two transitional membranes, together with the space formed between them. In other words, wall is being replaced with a space, static boundary turns into dynamical cathogory.

Newly defined in-between space represents a spatial platform for functional expanding of private/inner space and semantic and aesthetic changes of public/outer space, as a feedback from previous. Space is being occupied and defined by its users, with the system of spatial organization based on the principles of Web 2.0. technology.

This paper represent a theoretical discussion on built environment and tends to underline the notion of ephemeral in architectural engineering.

Keywords - liminality, in-between, facade, ephemeral, web 2.0.

I INTRODUCTION

Traditional built environment represents a problem for the future - architecture that "continues relying on models based on rigid, pre - established, implicitly unchangeable and permanent structures; pure, strict and indisputable", while "our cities, our behaviour, even our time, respond largely to

dynamic, non - linear processes." [1] The fact that "the average lifespan for a dwelling lies somewhere around 100 years"[2], indicates an orientation of the traditional architecture towards historicism, and a tendency of an architectural object towards the adoption of a monumental role.

Change is the keyword of urban existence: "a building that today is located on the periphery may tomorrow be at the centre of a rapid new development - and vice versa." Therefore, traditional architecture puts its own essence into the conflicted position. "The speed of modernization and the unpredictability inherent in the process makes it very difficult to establish reality for such a slow - moving medium as buildings." [3] According to the problem of unchangeability, traditional architecture needs to be reconsidered, both in the sence of functional and programmatic on one side, and socio-semantic on the other. The introduction of liminality into an architectural praxis, points to the possibility of *ephemeral*, and principles that can be abstracted from it.

Further, ethical construction of introducing an ephemeral relations in architecture, reviews the role of architects. Does the architectural design represents the imposition or enabling? Jonathan Hill's definition of "occupying arhitecture" is being extended to changing and living architecture and its context.

BASIC SPATIAL LEVELS

The definition of physical city structure could be simplified and thus explained through three basic spatial levels: *exterior*, *interior* and *a border that separates them*. The sum of these borders (facades) is the basis of our visual perception of the city. In other words, the city that we see and perceive is the system of spatial boundaries, called architecture.

Both the inner (private) space, and outer (public space) represent dynamical cathogories, subject to change. In this complex system of variability, the traditional façade represents the static element of separation - the rigid structure not adapted for interaction between two spatial levels.

The question is: *What would happen if one replaces a wall with a space, that can be used, changed, and exposed? What would happen if liminal field between interior and exterior*

becomes dynamic? One of the possible answers is In-Between space. In other words, the abolition of the wall and the introduction of the space, forms a spatial *typology*, which position defines it as an *in-between* space and that represents liminal state of architecture, architecture simplified to the level of membrane of external and internal differentiation. The in-between space represents a platform for process: a functional extension of the interior under the influence of the character of exterior, as well as reversible reaction, semantic and aesthetic changes of the external environment formed by the action of internal transformation. The newly created space is a limit that is exceeded by the decision, after which the theoretical assumption of replacement of the wall with a space, becomes active.

TPOLOGY OF LIMINAL

A. Liminality

The concept of **liminality** in architecture is defined as “ephemeral relationship between people and spatial environments.” Liminality or the liminal refers to transitional space – “neither one place nor another, but a third space in-between.” If we observe space as “an interrelationship between physical attributes and different temporal, philosophical, political, social or historical dimensions”, [4] than architecture could be defined as a process of articulating relations between space and these non-spatial elements. According to that, liminal state of architecture could represent the changing of media or the level of this articulation, directed to ephemeral conditions instead of traditional, fixed. Liminal field of architecture is a feature set of these changes.

B. In-Between Space:

P. Crisman defines in-between space as “a space that intervenes between one thing and another, often generates seemingly uninhabitable zones and problematic discontinuities in the physical and social fabric.” [5] Crisman points to “reconceptualization and inhabitation of these *compromised* sites” addressing desert zones of highways, suburban areas etc. But reconceptualisation and inhabitation are the keywords when referring to the spatiality of the façade, and that is what constitutes in-betweenness in this work.

In-between space is one of the liminal states of architecture. This is the area of *high intensity*; undefined space: waiting for the prevailing effect of one of the reactions that surrounds it, and as a result of the prevailing endurance of any of these reactions, it becomes the space of tension. This tension defines a state of space which might be considered as the *instability of space*. In-between spaces are spaces that tend crossing from one state to another. The main element of instability of in-between space, formed from the structure of façade, would be conflict between public and private, and constant prevalence of one of these conditions.

C. Heterotopia:

In-between space is a position of *otherness*, or a *third place*. “First there are the utopias. Utopias are sites with no real place. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.” [6] In-between space introduced in the position of wall, and conducted as a design principle is a heterotopian element, and also, multiplied it blurs the line between architecture and these “other places”. The whole built environment becomes a platform that could be located now and here, but that is a consequence of “other”.

In-between space acts like a semi – transparent mirror: “I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.” [7]

D. The Expanded Space:

Cyberspace could be seen as a field of spatial extension, that simultaneously takes place and upgrades itself. Virtual space is an ephemeral structure that represents the sum of reactions of its users. It could be defined as a “consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts.” Also, it could be explained as “a graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Thus The Internet is a preeminent virtual space, and its nature is constantly being re-created by every person who taps into it to impart or search for information. It is fundamentally pluralistic and embraces differing and often conflicting positions. Even though many people accessing cyberspace have the same name, no two people can have the same individual email address, just as no two persons can have the same set of fingerprints. In cyberspace the more identity and character you lose, the more individuality you gain.” [8]

Cyberspace is defined and organized by using different software technologies, including the model of Web 2.0. that represents a platform for the development of any form of the collective community on the Internet. The term **Web 2.0** is

“associated with web applications that facilitate participatory *information sharing, interoperability, user - centered design, and collaboration* on the World Wide Web.” [9] A Web 2.0 site allows users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators (prosumers) of user-generated content in a virtual community, in contrast to websites where users (consumers) are limited to the passive viewing of content that was created for them.

Web 2.0. application can be seen as a **method of organization** of real physical space, where the overall aesthetical and architectural expression of the object, now becomes the sum of democratic responses of users. Web 2.0. put into physical built environment, would define a zone of privacy sharing, interoperability, user-centered architectural design and collaboration between interior and exterior of the city.

THE AESTHETICS OF LIMINAL: BLUR

Blur as a graphic design effect is explained as a technique of reducing image noise and detail. In general terms, blur could be interpreted as the method for undefining strict boundaries between two. In the field of architecture, where the facade is observed as a limit, blurring the boundaries between internal and external space, could be defined as an architectural design method.

What is in-between for architectural space, that is blur for architectural aesthetics. If we look at the in-between space as a platform for independent choice (both functional and aesthetical) of interior user, than the in-betweenness, as a design strategy becomes the sum of spontaneous actions made without control and articulation in their spatial gestures.

Behind the Clifford Gertz’s anthropological model of blurred genres, blur could be also defined as the aesthetics of liminal: a compromise between architect and user, at the same time allowing and limiting.

Therefore, if the existence of in-between space generates the future look of the façade, use of blur effect (in the selection of materialisation of membranes obtained by wall deconstruction) the esthetics of in-between space becomes articulated.

OCCUPYING IN-BETWEEN: CONCEPTS

„There are two occupations of architecture: the activities of the architect and the actions of the user.“ [10] The conclusion of the thesis is based on three concepts, which aim to highlight three elements of occupying the in-between space: actions of interior user, actions of architect and reversible *action public – private – public*.

A. The Concept of Time-based Spatial Transformation - Examines the functional use of in-between space. It deals with the user of the interior.

The concept of time-transformation appears as a conclusion: Architecture is a category based on both matters

of space and time. Durability is a “romantical” and artificial structure. Therefore, the adopted principles of spatial transformation applicable to the functional development of in-between space are:

- **Adaptability** - the ability of general changes. The spatial feature that allows scaling, intrinsic internal organization of structure and purpose of the object.
- **Flexibility** – the openness of the system for short – term adjustments. Changes in the functional organization of details, which do not include intensive changes of the building character.
- **Hibridity** – the possibility of synthesis of these changes as a positive condition of the object.

The concept of time-transformation negates the idea of fixed architecture, in terms of its spatial paralysis, questioning the possibility of flexible spatial structure, and methods for its use.

B. The Concept of Suggestion of Spatial Transformation - Examines the use of architectural and spatial elements in the role of suggesting the use of given space. It deals with the role of architects in the process of defining spatial functional framework.

The term of *spatial suggestion* includes the possibility of creating a complete experience of articulated space, based on incomplete elements of spatial composition, which in its incompleteness only suggest space. In other words, the reduction of architectural elements that make the architectural space is a basis for exploration of spatial experience of in-between space. According to the level of physical definition of space, we could distinguish empty space, suggested space and built space.

Thus, suggestive or reduced space is a liminal state: a platform of further semantical and functional upgrade. Suggestion of space with the architectural elements represents a skeletal construction of real, physical space, which extends into the platform for the infinite possibilities of variations of spatial experiences.

One example of spatial suggestion is a scenography design in Trier’s Film - *Dogville* (2003): suggested space of the village projected on the floor plan with few spatial elements. Performance of the actors together with this incomplete non realistic environment, define this image into the semantically logical whole – an existing village of Dogville.

C. The Concept of Content Visibility – Spontaneous City Voyeurism - Examines the relationship of changes of internal and external space, through the in-between zone.

Transparency is a state of allowance the passage of light and view on the content “behind”, as a state of being visible. Therefore, transparency represents the material condition, as well as the state of secrecy absence.

Spontaneous voyeurism of the city represents analysis of the relation: external space (public content) and internal space (private content), through the points in space, that enable the transparency of these two fields. The moment of anticipation is the foundation of the concept of content visibility, which is informally called “spontaneous city voyeurism” which indicates an indirect, but constant approach to the zone of privacy. Hence, multiplication of the reflected private content and its perception allows the indirect social existence of the city.

Regulation Line of Privacy - Regulatory policy of privacy is the boundary line beyond which the privacy resigns consciously. In-between space seeks to move the building regulatory line and the line of privacy and to separate them into two planar structures in order to create space between them, that would become the space of privacy resign.

CONCLUSION

This paper is a theoretical discussion that questions the possibilities of liminality in architectural design. One of the levels of liminality is an *in-between space*, presented here, and the future of this work would be to define other principles of liminal practice, and ways of their implementation into the architectural practice.

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