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Architecture and Representation

Peter Eisenman

First, I want to thank the Brera Academy. It is a great honor.

As part of that honor I would like to share a few personal thoughts with you.

Many scholars have noted the impossibility of a stable language after the Holocaust, that a poetic language, like German, could never be the same. This is also true of architecture in particular, whose language always had problems in terms of the representation and expression of deep emotions or feelings. This is especially true in the case of a memorial, and more specifically one to the Murdered Jews of Europe. More generally, the problem of an architectural language has to do with the representation of anything in architecture, especially in attempting something which clearly has as its primary goal an emotional narrative.

To understand this problem, it is necessary to paraphrase a debate in the 18th century between two German philosophers, Gottfried Lessing and Johann Winckelmann, about the famous second-century Greek sculpture, Laocoön. The Laocoön is a sculpture of three men – a father and his two sons – being strangled by huge sea serpents twisted around them like giant pythons.

Winckelmann argued that the Greeks could express a confrontation with agony and death in their tragic poetry and dramas, but because they were a heroic people possessing a certain sublime nature, they could not face the horror of portraying such a tragedy in physical form in a sculpture. Hence, the face of Laocoön is not contorted in the throes of the moment before death. Rather, the stoic tranquility of the face represents for Winckelmann a kind of transcendent horror that is abstracted from the real agony of the figure. Thus, for Winckelmann, this sculpture, while it expresses the death throes of Laocoön, cannot express any noble simplicity in accordance with Greek ideals of soul. This, he argued, is beyond the scope of a sculptural form.

Lessing replied to Winckelmann in a famous essay, "The Laocoön" of 1766. Lessing agreed that the Laocoön sculpture shows a man in extremis, under conditions of the most violent suffering, but that the pain is expressed without any sign of rage in either his face or his posture. Lessing proposed that while Laocoön suffers, and this suffering pierces our very soul, Winckelmann attributes this, he said, to the endurance of suffering as a great man, that is, as a Greek would endure. Lessing was critical of Winckelmann and suggested that according to the ancient Greeks, crying aloud when in physical pain is compatible with a nobility of soul. Thus the desire to express such nobility could not have prevented the artist from representing the scream in the sculpture. Lessing's point is crucial. He said that what can be represented in literature, poetry, and even in music is different from what can be represented in figural form – that is, in an object, in the form and space of painting, sculpture, and more importantly architecture. Lessing suggested that the reason Laocoön and his sons do not express agony in its full formation is that the physical form of the human mouth open in a violent scream becomes a caricature, a mawkish representation that lacks any formal quality. Thus any expression of violent agony would overcome the formal quality of the sculpture. And for Lessing, it is the formal quality that also gives both meaning and an internal integrity to the figure.

Lessing argued that the supreme law of difference between sculpture and poetry is that emotion can be expressed in a literal writing – that is, in literature or poetry – because the reader does not directly confront these emotions in that context. This difference articulates what can be called the autonomy of sculpture, an autonomy that is important to this argument when it comes to architecture and the Holocaust. When something is in writing, the reader has to use his or her imagination. When physical or emotional pain, or the reaction to such pain, i.e. to the Holocaust in a memorial, when it needs to be expressed in physical form, it requires a different form of imagination; hence the problem of such a representation for architecture. This problem certainly pertains to the possibility of expressing emotion and its affect when it comes to the specific case of such an expression in the architecture of a Holocaust memorial. There is no doubt that the Holocaust and its culture of representation has been considered a singular problem in the discourse of Western thought, at least through the end of the last century. But a monument is a very specific case of such a representation for architecture. Can a monument ever be architecture; and in the very specific case of the Holocaust, can it ever be both a representation of an external political, social narrative, as well as an example of the internal necessities of architecture, its disciplinary being? I am here this evening to argue that such a condition is possible. In order to express what I consider necessary to any architecture, it is necessary to lessen the importance of a representation as stated above in favor of something I will call a "presentation in the present."

Thus, the aspects of the memorial in Berlin that may make it architecture are twofold. One is the recognition of the paradigm shift that has moved toward the affective experience of objects and away from their critical, linguistic, and textual nature. Whether by accident or by design, our memorial was less about its possibility of its representation of a symbolic text, but rather about the individual subject having a prima facie experience in the present. This is not about the prima facie of the space of the concentration camps themselves. The camps can be seen and then psychologically assimilated into everyday experience. This is not the case with our memorial site, which allows for the experience of the affect of being alone, of being constricted, of possibly feeling lost in space, if ever such a condition were possible. This is an experience which cannot be easily assimilated in and of itself into everyday experience. It is an out of the ordinary physical experience unlike any other in everyday life. That is what makes it architecture: a physical experience that does not rely on a representation of the Holocaust as its major narrative but rather seeks to present what architecture is and can be. At the time of the Memorial's opening some seven years ago, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, writing in the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, suggested that there were two types of memory: one was the immemorable, or that which could not be or was beyond being memorialized; and the other was an archival memory, that which could be recorded and preserved. Agamben suggested that the Memorial in Berlin did both, the field of pillars being the immemorable and the underground chambers being the archival.

Ultimately, as a great painting is always about painting and less about its content, and great literature is ultimately about writing and only secondarily about its narrative, so too is architecture which aspires to be of disciplinary importance always about architecture. It is that aspect of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin which remains long after any memory has faded ●

Lectio Magistralis at the Accademia di Brera, Milan, on the 27th of January 2012. Courtesy of Peter Eisenman.

Shanghai

from



Skyscrapers in Asia

Neil Leach

On the last day of August 2003 the number of skyscrapers in Asia surpassed that in the United States. A crisis in the Western psyche. The Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur had already stolen the coveted title of world's tallest building from the Sears Building in Chicago. Now the ultimate insult: not only did Asia have taller skyscrapers than the United States, it also had more of them.

The United States has been trapped in a form of collective paranoia since 9/11. But nowhere is this paranoia expressed more clearly than in a form of real estate altophobia – vertigo of the urban imagination. No one is prepared to occupy office space beyond a certain height for fear of being trapped by a terrorist attack. No more clients, no more tall skyscrapers. Little chance, then, of the United States ever regaining the lead.

Rem Koolhaas riles against the repetitive banality of the skyscraper, which 'has become less and less interesting in inverse proportion to its success'. For Koolhaas the world has forgotten the lessons of Manhattanism, 'the organization of excessive difference, the installation of surprise'. Instead real estate development is dominated by middle men, with moustaches, receding hairlines and suspect waistlines', who peddle their 'soulless wares with shameless calculation'. What we need today, Koolhaas argues through his own designs, is an architecture that once more accepts diversity and surprise. Of course, Koolhaas is right. But the world is not interested in architectural theory. It is only interested in pure symbolism. The symbolic potential of architecture. This is where — in an increasingly

disembodied world — architecture still maintains a certain cultural authority. The revenge of the physical. The capacity for buildings to 'symbolise' regimes. Think how cities operate. It is only when cities contain recognisable buildings that they can be 'envisioned'. So it is that the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur or Taipei 101 in Taipei have inscribed those cities on the mental map of the world. Such buildings become icons which serve to 'promote' and 'brand' their city. Shanghai – the latest site of skyscraper-mania. The Pudong, once a shameful run down area on the wrong side of town, teeming with the flotsam of Chinese society, is now being transformed into a shameless expression of Chinese expansionism. An orgy of construction. Forests of shining new skyscrapers. The Pudong has become the new Manhattan.

At first sight it might seem odd that Shanghai is being developed in this way. Why does Shanghai need so many tall buildings? And are they even appropriate? Aside from the fact that smog and mist seem to envelop Shanghai for much of the year, so that from the ground you can seldom see the top of these buildings, but equally from the top you can seldom see the ground, Shanghai is situated on a river delta, where the soil is alluvial. Unlike Manhattan, which has a rock substratum, the Pudong hardly offers the perfect foundations for tall buildings. As a result, the Pudong is reportedly sinking at an alarming rate. The greater the number of tall buildings, the more it is sinking. And unlike in Manhattan, here there is no pressure from the real estate market to drive these buildings forever upwards.

So why build taller?

The answer perhaps lies in the lobby to the Jin Mao Tower building. At 421 m and 88 storeys the Jin Mao Tower is China's tallest building and the fourth

tallest in the world, although reportedly it is soon to be eclipsed by the World Financial Centre building, also in Shanghai, which is planned to be the tallest skyscraper not only in China, but also in the world.

Around the lobby of the Jin Mao Tower are laid out images of the World's Top Ten tallest buildings. These images clearly set out the challenge. The tallest building in the world is now in Taipei, and the second tallest is in Kuala Lumpur. Asia and the United States battle it out for the rest. New world versus old world.

The battle is on.

Taller, smarter, better. Each city is vying to become the showcase of the world, the city with the tallest building. There is little to justify such extravagance except pure prestige. The actual use of a building is not important. What counts is its ranking in the world list ●

1) Source: www.worldskyscrapers.com, as quoted in Rem Koolhaas et al. (eds.), *Content*, Cologne: Taschen, 2004, pp. 470-1.
2) *Content*, p. 473.



Today and Archeology

Ernesto d'Alfonso

Time. It seems the only one issue of today's architecture. It is its only measure. "Zeitgeist", the present time. As space did not have value anymore. As its standing in the time became a wall against the life flowing of societies. As that value could leave just garbage behind itself. Once it is consumed the divorcing act between present and past time, and the hour itself has a lack of soul, bored and imploded, could not presence at the opening event of the Focillon's "extended present time".

Is it really this what the global age is asking around?

I do not think so.

I believe instead the time's issue, "Zeitgeist", is the one about the style, not pleasing mode but not forgetting taste. Because of that the usefulness, through a pleasure's modality, sharing each other and redeeming what we need – the pure consuming just leave garbage – asks for something remaining as a being which through the time flow has experience of that and has consciousness of that; not as the hour devouring hours or Cronos devouring his sons; but beyond the present time, in the lack of what has been, we use to keep in our mind its having been through signs of "symbolic presence", as a hours' monument which could not be now. The invariance of time in time. The inner space of time. Even philosophy discovered what cannot be renounced, this determination it use to call "spacing" where there are signs of sense and significance, owing to the "immanent and signifying logos" which is the reality show of the world, according to the forebears. What we use to share each other through our somatic existence, before the inter-subjective one. We did not born in a nowhere space or by ourselves, but in "houses" and surrounded by others introducing us towards that somatic logos, in a not-said-yet and aphasic way of co-inhabiting.

I go back to the first question: could the modernity make a real "tabula rasa"?

I will not try to answer in a simplified way. If it is allowed the consuming, and the divorcing between the contemporaneity and the ancient's value (according to Riegl) could not be done a different way, that must have been done, in the cosmopolitan century, in order to put in suspension the local tradition, too much bounded actually to ancestral habits, not sharable and cause of fighting. This does not want to suppress the relationship between the ancient generation and the just passed ones.

History. A new kind of history, generated after the archeological annihilation's processes, has become the universal place of this relationship, needing symbolic presences and amplifying more and more its functions of presentification and symbolization. Creating at the same time the same number of troubles and fighting. It is born a kind of history keeping in the architectural signs – not only monumental – the carefulness about what gives sense to the time's flowing, where "creative events", originals, can find there the tools to become monuments of the immanent logos, of the somatic spacing, sign of their own workshop and picks of men passing time: history of the relationship with archeology. This archeology could not have a lack of intentional teleology – perhaps no more nameable, as it was in the Medieval Dante's period or in the Shakespeare's Renaissance, but always present also in some temporary shapes, at least today. Take a look at the diachrony of MM taking place in two acts and in two different places, with the topic of the changeover among the continent's populations. It is searching for a contemporaneity (otherness from the past), based on the technique and the production in a first moment and on the society and its economy – as part of a political uniting plan, which today is no more sustainable. During this political crisis, or during this condition of political redeeming, it is up again the radical issue of the hospitality, in the double sense of hosting and being host.

In the last leading article we focused on four key words about the issue of the hosting through a city growing by two main point, of which one is more indispensable than desired. It is hidden or excluded.

We are taking back that issue with a question: for whom, what? It concerns the today's heat for the democracy ●

Pujiang

We are inaugurating our magazine's Arcdue-world international section, which focuses on the globalisation of the Italian and Western culture, by reprinting Vittorio Gregotti's comments at the end of his book on China *L'ultimo hutong* (Skira 2009) on the point reached by today's architecture, also with reference to China. The book is based on longstanding personal experience, as demonstrated by the projects listed in the appendix and executed for China over a 20-year period and, in particular, the one currently underway for the new town of Pujiang on the Hungpu river just outside Shanghai.

We are highlighting a strong passage that criticises the renewed interest in the "aura" in architecture as a self-referential exaltation of creative freedom within an allegedly omnipotent communication that lacks content and exists in the global void. This interest, the reverse of that of the 1930s, is seen not only in the conduct of Western societies but Chinese society too, or at least a part of it. (Editorial Team) Gregotti says:

In a departure from that predicted by Ben-

jamin, some write today that, over the last 50 years, the issue of the communicating "aura" has become the renewed focus of artistic research. This is no return to the metaphysically complete "aura" advanced in the 1920s and '30s and, architecturally speaking, by the work of Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier's espace indicibile and the projects of Louis Kahn. Over the last 30 years, the shift (not really from the "what" to the "how", which has always been one of the foundations of all art) seems to have been a sacralisation of the concept that, in the global void (packed with market interests), the whole content of an artwork's "aura" lies in communication and creative freedom. "Reproducibility" is no longer the political act of equally distributing assets and services and the aura triumphs once more as a process of derealisation.

This is a shift of meaning towards a reflection (sublimated by a foolish morphology) on the state of things and as a consensus on the standardised values and conducts promoted by the "powers of expediency" that underpin the post-society of our times, and also a part of Chinese society, albeit a minority, for the moment.

Believing, as people today seem to do, that architectural forms have begun to quiver and crack or get bigger and bigger to convey or aesthetically cope with the instability of our times is an insult to the intelligence of the construction processes of the artistic practice of architecture (and, indeed, all the artistic practices), processes that have never been based on deductive reflection ●



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Design and digital technologies

Anna Maria Loiacono

The project of furniture offers us new proposals based on the use of new forms taken by digital technologies, elaborated through CAD technologies (Computer aided design), bidimensional and tridimensional. The multiple propulsive thrusts provided by innovation in digital in different phases of furniture design, from the beginning to the formal definition and graphic elaboration, direct us to an unusual and volatile made up by forms, colours, textures, material composition world which are characterized by innovation.

That it is the textures of Karim Rashid, in the tissues of the chairs and Blobola Blobina, in the fluid forms of the seats and furnishings designed by Zaha Hadid, with her studies on digital frames parametric two-and three-dimensional, chairs of Philippe Starck, or Ron Arad that bend and deforms variable surfaces, or other chairs made by Brodie Neill and Yves Behar, changing volumes that cross the one with the other, to the twisted ribbons in a furniture like the And chair made by Fabio Novembre for Cappellini, 2D CAD and 3D used like a source of new formal elaboration of study and knowledge of a poetics based on a topological geometry, which eschews traditional figures of Euclidean geometry, square, circle, rectangle, straight line, right angle, to experience three-dimensional images of great expressive value, from the parabolic hyperboloid, forms more sinuous and enveloping. This tendency, already present in the previous figures of the International design as Alvar Aalto and Arne Jacobsen, wavy and organic in their achievements and, more recently, Eero Aarnio in its curved forms, finds in digital the most suitable forms of expression and formal elaboration. Particularly interesting is the series of furniture designed by Zaha Hadid's Z-Scape furniture in 2000. Furnishings Zaha Hadid's complex forms draws fluid dynamics to create cavities and protrusions and tracking at the same time ergonomic elements. In modular Niche centerpiece designed for Alessi in 2009 in particular, emerges the complexity of the combination of the various pieces, fragmented along which, deforming, becomes liquid element of contemporary life. Similarly, when sitting in Oxford in 1962 and in the 1958 Egg chair by Arne Jacobsen are realized, curved and sinuous shapes appeared. Deformed and rounded they refer to a world of natural and organic forms, and in the chair by Eero Aarnio in 1967 and Pastil most recently in 1994 Table Parabel, are expressed in brighter colors and softer forms of new technologies; the chaise longue Ron Harad After Springl before summer of 1992 led an innovative unusual and complex. Digital technology is therefore a source of new forms, deformation, plastic modeling, reinterpretation, reinvention complex and changing world of the iconic contemporary ●

*For double the vision my Eyes do see, / And a double vision is always with me
With my inward Eye, 'tis an old Man grey, / With my outward, a Thistle across my way.
W. Blake, from Letter to Thomas Butts*

Fallin' in love

Davide Raponi

Odd and funny circumstances can be found amongst the folds of the city. With no interest for the news and generally devoid of attentions, they emerge by chance: they are sometimes unattended superimpositions, every now and then they are fortuitous interferences, or simple unforeseen occurrences. Some open backgrounds can be more occasionally be observed on these nearly jeopardized outlines, virgins in their way, seemingly proud as if touched by

that aristocratic taste for not being liked. The observer disapproves, that is true, but then he uses, simplifies and out-focuses until everything gets into the daily mixture of background, routine and steady images. HOV like to intervene in these unfortunate but very sweet areas, independently – and how could it otherwise be? – from clients engaged in somewhere else. Timeless objects suspended in my double vision ●

*from "Duplice Visione" by Michele Gabbanelli



Design Ron Arad, seat Oh Void2, 2004
Design Ron Arad, chaise longue Loop Loom, 1992
Design Zaha Hadid, Zaha Hadid Bowl- Metacrylic, 2007.

