Abstract

In the contemporary city, the purposeful definition of a specific space has undergone a gradual liquefaction. This process, which dilutes the recognition of the main parts of the city, has made its run side by side with the affirmation of the Maison Dominò and the modern movement. If at the beginning city centers presented a uniform and distinctive building curtain - from which the identity and distinctive regionalism of a typical city stood out clear - nowadays contemporary cities are full of buildings with common features, with façades that do not reveal anything about the peculiarity of the place. The “structure” of this no-place contributed to the progressive dissolution of the clear picture that defined its original identity.

The evolution of the concept of Parallax, introduced by Steven Holl in his homonymous book, produced a concept of urban analysis borrowed from astronomical physics and implemented in historical Italian cities. Parallax, developed in Holl’s research during late 1990s and early 2000s, can nowadays be applied with even greater force and made more effective when integrated into screens and loaded with conceptual ideas offered by the “digital city” painted by Matzuda. Therefore, the new city can find new life in the synthesis of the parallaxes and the New York screens. Hyper-media and hyper-technological urban systems can thus become the external extension of the koolhaasian Junk Space; a new city of wadding and contaminated air, getting ready to reflect on its surfaces avatars of desires, projected by those who are passing through.

Keywords: Parallax, City, Screen, Images

1. Introduction

In the contemporary city, the purposeful definition of a specific space has undergone a gradual liquefaction. This process, which dilutes the recognition of the main parts of the city, has made its run side by side with the affirmation of the Maison Dominò and the modern movement. If at the beginning city centers presented a uniform and distinctive building curtain - from which the identity and distinctive regionalism of a typical city stood out clear - nowadays contemporary cities are full of buildings with common features, with façades that...
really does not reveal anything about the peculiarity of the place. The “structure” of this no-place contributed to the progressive dissolution of the clear image that defined its original identity. The empire established by the Maison Dominò has imbued most of the historical centers of the world’s main cities with the same characteristic flavors.

Immersed and cuddled between the high façades of these pathways, visitors are completely deprived of the vision of the natural characteristics of the city and are dropped into a neutral space. The “half-center” in Milan resembles that of Valencia, Paris, Helsinki, or Rio de Janeiro, the building system and its infill walls matches the entire new construction (created between the 1950s and 1990s), projecting its inhabitants in a perennially familiar space that they will never be able to call “home”, that can’t ever be a space where they can figure their identity.

A clear example of urban mutation that these architectures are undergoing is located on the island of Manhattan, where the first signs of a mutation that will open the city surfaces in new and unexpected developments can be observed. On the facades of buildings in Times Square (which over the years have gradually started to be covered with LED screens) a new type of building can be observed: a brand-new urban type, a continuous screening schedule. The interest in the building itself is lost, what fills the rooms does not matter anymore: the only substantial element is the façade. Covered (and converted) to be used for advertising and communicative purposes, the building skin becomes an instrument for parasitic planning, a screen surface that transmits messages to the outside, completely unrelated to the building and its function. Completely disconnecting the building façade from its essential function establishes the transition from a building without an identity to a building with a digital identity: thus, the non-building becomes a changing landmark, a sort of Hejduk’s ephemeral masked tower. The presence of (ephemeral) screens on its façade configures the Koolhaassian “Roman gardens” on an urban scale, made by mirror of (false) shining reality.

Fiction becomes reality, the uncertainty and the continuous change become the foundations of the building project; screens become Foucault “carpets” that lead to new worlds. The Foucault’s cinema has become a city scale building, the Time Square Towers are cinemas theirself.

The evolution of the concept of “Parallax”, introduced by Steven Holl in his homonymous book, produced a concept of urban analysis borrowed from astronomical physics and implemented in historical Italian cities. Parallax, developed in Hollein’s research during late 1990s and early 2000s, can nowadays be applied with even greater force and made more effective when integrated into screens (that auto-introduce themselves in Time Square) and loaded with conceptual ideas offered by the “digital city” painted by Matzuda. Therefore, the new city can find new life in the synthesis of the parallaxes and the New York screens. Hyper-media and hyper-technological urban systems can thus become the external extension of the koolhaasian junk space; a new city of wadding and contaminated air, getting ready to reflect on its surfaces avatars of desires, projected by those who are passing through.

This research develops analysing the evolution of different models, all based on the Maison Dominò; this theoretical speculation on the facades can be made only thanks to the freedom that the dominò model gave to the function of the vertical surface of the buildings. The media (and hyper-media) surface found in the epidermis of the buildings the space to gain the freedom, to claim its authoritarian power to communicate and change the city image and identity. This new topos, as we will see further in the text, is taking more and more importance on the contemporary city design process, technics and method.

2. The structure and the gap

The progressive liquefaction of specific space identity has expanded until the complete erosion of intimate characteristics of the contemporary cities. The following paragraph will analyze this process in which the recognizability of the main parts of the city are now diluted, and the ways in which the presence of the
non-existent affirms its existence by running its race alongside the affirmation of the structural model of the 
*Maison Domînò*, as we shall see below.

The LeCorbuserian *manifesto* succeeded, from the moment when it was published, to constantly affirm its 
presence in the design process of contemporary urban structures. Despite the "revolutionary motions" that 
 began during the experience of CIAM and culminated in the *Athens Charter*, following the 4th International 
Congress of Modern Architecture held in 1933 on Patris II, traveling from Marseilles to Athens, who 
attempted to overthrow and suffocate the monster born from the mind of the Swiss architect in 1914 (La 
*Maison Domînò*) and the modern movement.

Le Corbusier’s theoretical construction system continued to proliferate by releasing the façades from their 
structural task, but it also allowed inexperienced hands to implement the dangerous de-functionalization of 
the skin of the building, making in fact all the flat faces and soulless. In the beginning, city centers were 
constituted by a uniform and “characteristic” construction curtain, from which the identity and the peculiar 
regionalism were an expression of precious characteristics, and the symbols that those represented stood 
clear outside the urban conglomerates. Nowadays, the cities are filled with buildings with common features 
brought by the corrupted use of the principles of the *domînò*, the façades no longer reveal anything about the 
peculiarity of the place where they are located: it is separated for his identity. This non-site structure has 
defined and contributed to a progressive clouding of an urban image that used to define the identity of the 
centers.

This constructive system has led to the true release of the façades only in a few cases, allowing a research 
for structural essentiality that can be contained even if it is no longer characterized by classical decorations 
or sophistication of style and giving true freedom to the building. As Rem Koolhaas observes in *Delirious in 
New York*, the expressive “lobotomization” of the facades partially frees the buildings from the 
communication of the internal function (eg heights and standards) does not work for any kind of building, only 
tall ones will do. This process, which leads to the gradual dissolution of the non-urban identity principle, is not 
dictated solely by the proliferation of a "post and beam" sequence and with the façades “dressed” in the 
same way. A visionary intuition might be conceived if one recounts the strong criticisms of Adolf Loos in his 
“Words of Emptiness”, referring to the Viennese customs and customs of the late eighteenth century.

The resilience of the Austro-Hungarian imperial capital to “change their underwear” by adapting their external 
image could be borrowed in an attempt to describe the formal permanence of newly constructed buildings, 
expressing his “belief” in the design, commenting the style and the customs of his times, often criticizing the 
artifice of the present and longing for the genuineness of the past.

Describing how the changing in the “Viennese underwear” did not change completely the clothes and new 
"exteriors" are not enough, the buildings’ façades no longer express their living and outer shape, they are 
modernized without changing their interior, without making a deep mutation. The success of the system 
theorized by the Swiss architect is mainly dictated by the constructive economy that characterizes intimately 
all the work of Le Corbusier, the secret dream of the *master* was obviously to succeed in codifying a 
constructive methodology that would be applied in the whole world. It is logical to deduce that the process 
and intention were not wrong, as this concept came very close to the completion of the intent of the architect. 
The research that led to the theorization of the 5 rules was dictated by the will to return an extremely simple, 
economical and easily reproducible building process, to establish a *method*. It is necessary to note, however, 
that the *domînò* system had not been conceived to give shape to constructions that proved to be in a historic 
paradigm. Le Corbusier in his *Plan Voisin* openly contradicts his attitude (and that of his model) with the 
historic city in open contradiction with the Athens paper, its attitude (and that of his model) to the historic city.

UIA 2017 Seoul World Architects Congress
Paris, in the surrealist, Le Corbusier vision (*voisin*), is transformed into an immense park, where historical monuments are erected as statues on an urban scale, and considered guests in the private garden of the "Mega-skyscrapers" designed to host a city inside them.

The conceptual constructive model, which was later refined in the *Ville Radieuse*, shows how history completely disappears from LC's mind and designs; the cruciform buildings show their naked structure and their koolhassian "anguish". In the greatest dream, this orderly curtain is built on parks that bind the streets to heaven, history is made in the machine, everything is ordered to the perfection mechanics of the plane, the buildings sprawl and orient according to the temple hosting them: history becomes an airport. These principles obviously disagree with being included in a historical paradigm, the model Le Corbusier *dominò* does not hold the tough confrontation with a flickering hand like the one with which he drew history.

The empire that *dominò* has established created historic centers of the main cities all deeply similar, they are immersed and pampered among the high facades of the same streets, completely deprived of the vision of natural features and projected into a neutral space. The semi-center of Milan resembles that of Valencia, Paris, Helsinki or Rio de Janeiro, the building system and its infill walls matches the entire new construction (created between the 1950s and 1990s), projecting its inhabitants in a perennially familiar space that they will never be able to call "home", that hasn't any characteristic identity.

The only "ivory towers" that stand out as characteristic in these vacant spaces are the pre-existing monuments, which stoically resisted the modernization of space; these landmarks are now the true points of the cities.

3. The Mutation

In New York we can observe the first signs of a mutation that will open up the city's surfaces to new and unprecedented evolutions. On the façades of Time Square buildings, which over the years have been gradually covered with screens and led lights, begins to see the light a new type of building, a new urban type: a continuous and innovative palette of the early twentieth century.

In this specific environmental condition, the decisive displacement of some architectural speculation on the surface composition can be observed. This ever-growing *epidermal* development ensues a concentration of the current project on the "skin" of the building, exemplified by a number of projects ranging from Frank O. Gehry's *Barcelona Olimpic Fish*, to *The Broad* by Diller & Scolfdio + Renfro. Taking the concept to extremes, we might even find the first tectonic detachment and the subsequent shift of interest on the skin with Peter Bherens's *Turbinen Fabrik*. The attitude that this tendency demonstrates is a progressive dissolution of the architectural centrality of the interior of the building, which is increasingly commonly transferred to interior designers.

The interest in the building itself is lost, what fills the rooms does not matter anymore: the only substantial element is the façade. Covered to be used for advertising and communicative purposes, the building skin becomes an instrument for "parasitic" planning, a screen surface that transmits messages to the outside, completely unrelated to the building and its function.

The complete disconnection of the façade from what lies behind sanctions the transition between a building without identity and its digital identity, the non-building becomes a changing landmark.

The presence of ephemeral displays on each building's façade re-creates Koolhaassian "Roman gardens" on a urban scale. Fiction becomes reality, uncertainty and continuous variability become the founding program of the building (coating) project; the screens become Foucault's "rugs" that transport observers into new
Koolhassian *lobotomization*, in this case, is re-read in an active manner: the Dutch master defines the functional disconnection of the façade from the “internal purpose” of the innumerable floors that constitute the vertical buildings scattered seamlessly on the surface of Manhattan island.

The description of the *Athetic Club* in *Delirius in New York* focuses mainly on the messianic and ritual capacity of the interior of the building, considering it primarily as a place for performing functions aimed at the spiritual elevation of man; the façade that liberated by the floor that accomplishes all the functions, lifts attention to what happens on their skin. This attention may perhaps voluntarily distract from the consequent birth of an epidermis exploitation. What goes unnoticed (perhaps voluntarily, assuming that the times for such a statement were not entirely mature) is the release of the façade from any other function of bright-thermal filter with the interior.

It may be noted that, according to Rem Koolhaas, the condensed and technological apparatus hanging on the façades state that the rapid obsolescence of the technological system can be identified as a new ornament of buildings, no longer *maiolik haus* but *conditionation haus*.

As shown by the works of Diller & Scofidio, this detachment express a criticism of the interior of the building. Disengaging from the criticism of New York’s study of voyeurism and the contemporary limit of private property, it clearly shows how today the relationship with the buildings' superficial surface technology is now an essentiality beyond which we can no longer conceive an idea of design, without contemplating the idea of the technology within the project itself, the project *topos* passed on the building skin.

4. The Parallax

Steven Holl introduces a concept of urban analysis by borrowing it from astronomy physics and applying it from the historical Italian city: the *parallax*. This concept that finds space in Holl’s research in the late 90s and early 2000s today finds even greater strength, implemented and made more effective if integrated into the conceptual ideas offered by the city painted by Matzuda: the new city lives in conjunction with parallax generated by New York screens. Hyper-media and hyper-technological urban systems can thus become the external extension of the koolhaasian *Junkspace*; a new city of wadding and contaminated air, getting ready to reflect on its surfaces avatars of desires, projected by those who are passing through.

The surface of the buildings covered by “intelligent” screens and evolved projective systems does not change the state of the urban system itself, but it can become meaningful by applying the *parallax* concept. “Complexity in the contemporary city” can reach greater significance by pursuing the modulation of the surface elements of buildings. The historic city reaches a higher degree of complexity through the modulation of façade styling, distributed on different floors.

The uniqueness of the urban curtain has been created by the great number of prospective peaks. Parallax is the phenomenon whereby an object seems to move from the background if the observation point changes. From a quantitative point of view, the term parallax indicate the value of the displacement angle, this system can cooperate with the heterotopic capacity of the screens that are merged in this new type of building.

The term derives from the Greek παράλλαξις (parálaxis), which originally meant “crossing” and also assumed the actual scientific significance. The angle of the *parallax* and the distance between the two observation points, it is possible to calculate the distance of the object by trigonometry, but if the object has an undefined surface (like the screen) the perception of the space can be multiplied endlessly.

In humans and other animals both eyes observe the same scene from slightly different points of view, this difference is called interpupillary distance. If you look at a close object, covering the eyes alternately, you will notice that the blurry image of the object seems to move, but if you cover the surface of this object of screens the perception of the space completely change, becoming and endless reflection of more images in continuous changing. This particular vision condition allows, through brain processing, to perceive the new depth of the media *building facades*; recording the element that compose this new space create the new...
identity characteristic of a new model of city. Liquid crystal shutter and a film in which cover the frames of the facades transpose on the outside (city) space the heterotopic power, that Foucault introduce by describing the cinemas: the city becomes a big “babilonese carpet”.

Moving the point of view on the indentity-less city center by creating new perspective model, based on the parallax system described, create a new sense of identity on the inhabitants of the contemporary cities. The effect of the parallax causes a image, a media image of an unseen hyper-media reality that stands behind the surface of the buildings, the structure of the contemporary cities (the hyper-media connection) is reflected on the multitude of screens that are “growing” the buildings façades. The net is taking his proper form in the city, the invisible connection are “growing” in a new parallaxes that is stratifying a new (contemporary) history of the cities.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be seen how the declination of the screen parallax based on the dominò structure (previously analyzed) can lead to a new urban design model. The structural skeleton theorized by Le Corbusier should not be abandoned, but has to be rethinked, as Sou Fujimoto suggests in his book Primitive Future. Fujimoto directly refers to an archetype to modify the Corbusarian skeleton concept, he defines the as Nest, and its actualization as Cave. The archetype he is referring to can be identify on Plato’s Cave Myth, the first model “reality projection”, this primitive cinematic device reconnect the screen and a deep sense of identity that lives on the common (occidental) culture. As Wahrol staits all the contemporary people are fascinated by the sparkling (ancient) “magic” that stand in the screens.

The Metacity Datatown shown by MVRDV: the green mountains loaded with data that were living in the invisible space (ethereal) of the contemporary cities is taking shape on the surface of the buildings. The hyper-intellectualized city that Matsuda imagines in his videos could be realizing not in microscopes/perceptual lenses that filter the world, but on the surfaces of buildings themselves; Design epidermis is mature today to be technologically engineered, thus becoming the most predominant design topos in the contemporary architectural compositional landscape.

The “prospective” subordination of the façades of the buildings allows to conceive in a possible creation of a design system that unites the positioning of the screens on the facades in function of the creation of an urban image that recreates “complexity”, the kind of historic complexity that revenue into identity. Weighted juxtaposition free projection surfaces declined to a prospective city project could recreate a new identity characteristic of a new model of city.

Bibliography