

Addressing Changing Cultural Context through Architecture

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Abstract:

Architecture being a tool to address culture devours on creativity and ideas. This produces a flavour to the building which can be recognized and felt. Abstracting a built form brings us closer to understanding it and also reproducing in a new domain. The paper thus explores architecture in a sense of abstraction and levels which could be critically analysed with the changing culture. The thing of the past could never be that of the future, keeping this in mind what could possibly be kept is learning of the core values of architecture. The paper is an exploration of these values which can empower vernacular architecture as well as gives a vision for future sustainability. It is an attempt to establish vernacular architecture as a concept that acts as a super-categorical noun for all subordinate concepts, and connects any related concepts as a group, field or category.

Abstracting vernacular architecture through significant built forms will rectify its diminishing nature, thus enabling us to better induce it into newer built forms. This method not only preserves the past but also looks towards the future with hope of sustainability with technology. Globalization is a chance to have an open-minded learning experience with a significant exchange of ideas. The polished form of ideas when presented at this platform truly denotes the vastness of art, which is an intrinsic part of architecture. The to and fro process of abstraction and application can liven up the experiments that happen in architecture giving it a new form and a step towards sustainability and the future of globalization. The paper thus abstracts vernacular architecture in the light of ever changing global scenario and sustainability giving out built components or forms which are not bound down by the shackles of past but an ideology for the future of architecture.

Keywords: Culture, vernacular architecture, sustainability, built form, abstraction

1. DESCRIPTION

Abstraction describes the phenomenon of obscure information architecture (IA) in the ambience of exhibition spaces – best found in forgotten archaeology museums or similar venues. Obscure in terms of recognizing the initial ideas and strategies of the responsible designer, turning into a cabinet of curiosities through an act of (unintentional) abstraction. People tend to call something “abstract” when a certain viewpoint confuses them. In fact they express that they feel uncomfortable with a viewpoint presented when it does not match with

their perceptions of reality that they are used to. When talking about functionality and quality, there are no different levels of abstraction, only different levels of detail. For example, “driving” remains “driving,” no matter if you narrow down the specification of the kind of driving by pointing towards the use of a car or a bicycle. When talking about construction, “abstraction” is a term that is very well applicable. To refer back to the example of the bike: The concept of a bicycle is two wheels and a frame. This concept is so abstract that it applies to almost all actual bikes, including the one stored in my own shed. On the other end of the spectrum, the latter, a physical instance of a bike, is so concrete that I can take it at will to drive it. Actually the design and creation process itself is a process of moving from a very abstract level to a very concrete one, including all intermediate steps. Architects should be as specific about functionality as is necessary to express stakeholder’s requirements. Very often this exercise runs from coarse to fine in an iterative process, where the level of detail differs per function, depending on what the architect and his stakeholders want to express. When it comes down to the construction, architects should limit themselves to the first top levels of abstraction: a) relations between functions and b) guidelines that are used by the technical designer in the transformation of a generic technical design into a specific technical design. However, the way these guidelines are expressed should match with the “comfort zone” of the designer, so there are occasions where guidelines are verbalized on a lower level of abstraction than actually desired. For example, instead of specifying the permissions, an architect might want to specify NTFS as the file system that should be used, avoiding a theoretical discussion on file system permissions. Architecture is a consistent collection of views that deconstructs a system by means of abstraction—realisation, composition—decomposition and separation of concern. Abstraction from architecture brings together the work of four artists whose work unpicks and translates architectural structures, forms and processes while at the same time does the same with its own making. The processes these artists employ to produce their work can act as blueprints for their own production, providing us with another level of understanding. What is perhaps even more interesting, in the case of these four artists, is an emphasis on the failings of structures, surfaces and forms, as much as their success.

2. VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

Vernacular architecture is a genuine tool for abstraction in architecture as it is intrinsic. It encapsulates the basic principles of architecture, recreating in many perspectives. The very construction techniques and the usage of natural materials add to the value of architecture and construction. The ideas thus used in the construction of these structures

could be abstracted through visuals, local knowledge and in-situ research. Design forms that are represented in these built structures have stood through the test of times.

The built spaces such as courtyard represent a singular structure with an introverted nature of spaces, signifying privacy and interaction in its essence thus displaying an example of spaces of similar nature. In order to create architecture that addresses changing culture and also acts as a tool for sustainability, the buildings must have vernacular qualities without acting as a hindrance to the new. The method by which it can be achieved is by abstracting the fundamental principles of vernacular architecture and reconfiguring the elements in a way that promotes changing culture instead of in-situ building.

3. STRATEGIES AND THEORIES

The strategy of abstraction in Modern architecture can be compared to the tendencies towards abstraction in twentieth century art. In early 1900s, art movements began to emphasize the volumetric quality of the objects that were represented, and an abstraction of surface and volume was often articulated with changes in tone and a traditional organization of elements. In architecture, these strategies begin to accentuate the significance of one element relationship to another, rather than value of an element alone. The functionalist aesthetic of modernist architecture is in direct contrast of the formal emphasis on volume and object that is derived from an analysis of art movements and their relationship to architecture. The reduction of elements to their components parts and abstract relationship among these elements are modern architectural ideas that were derived from investigations in art and sculpture, and that applied directly to the reinterpretation of the traditional definition of vernacular architecture.

Cubism began as a representational technique that allowed three dimensional objects to read on a two dimensional surface. The juxtaposition of colours with objects rendered in chiaroscuro, and the use of light to define spaces and objects were just some methods of representation utilized by cubist artists. Early Cubist experiments can be regarded as a technique of distortion, rather than abstraction, synthetic elements (Hitchcock 1948). The construction of lines and planes began to resemble three-dimensional objects which conveyed depth and projection without the use of conventional perspectival techniques.

Cubism accentuates the difference between representation and comprehension (Kahnweiler 2000), as it decomposes objects into series of forms which are then reconciled by the eye of the observer to the reading of the “whole.” Rather than imitating the specific form of objects, Cubist art abstracts according to its position in space and its geometric

components. These distorted forms are thus perceived in mind, using memory and association to understand the object despite its abstract representation.

The adaptation of Cubism to a machine age aesthetic resulted in purist work of artists such as Le Corbusier and Ozenfant. Purism arose as a reaction against Cubism's lack of public interest. These artists experimented with tone and colouring, and attempted to convey a finished look that was consistent with the "machine age" architecture of the time (Hitchcock 1948).

From the application of Mondrian's paintings in the work of Kandinsky and Klee with the methodology of the Bauhaus School, to abstract surrealism to Arp and Miro, a parallel relationship between art and architecture developed throughout the 1900s. The dialogue relies on the principles of abstraction and the meaningful translation and reinterpretation of elements and forms.

Abstraction in architecture operates similarly to abstraction in art, but accentuates the three-dimensional understanding of the elements. People recognize and understand vernacular and vernacular expression based on organizational principles as well as specific architectural language. If the forms and spaces of vernacular architecture are abstractly broken down and reconfigured, the human mind will understand these forms and could reciprocate with dynamic nature of culture.

The danger in abstraction, however, is that it leaves open the possibility for individual reconstruction of the image that the architect is attempting to convey. This concept could work in favour of individual expression within the collective environment or it could work against the ideas of breaking from history. The challenge for the designer is then to carefully consider the various readings of volumes and spaces in terms of their abstract connotations, and to decide which elements to leave open to interpretation, and which elements require more specific definition.

The images represent an exercise in the application of abstraction at this scale of the site. The first image uses a series of colours and forms to represent certain important elements in the city of Brussels, Belgium, including the historic city centre, the major transportation routes into the city, the canal and the European Union District. In the second iteration, the forms have been decomposed according to certain organizational principles that are set up by the city's infrastructure. The third version reconfigures these elements to others. While the form and orientation of each original piece show changes, the colours and distinguishing features of each piece allow the observer to reconstitute each element in the mind, or interpret the new composition based on the new properties of the pieces.



CONCLUSION

The techniques of abstraction involve a careful analysis of the components' parts and elements of a building or an object and their relationship with one another. If the principles and strategies of organization are defined and maintained, the components of an object may be rearranged and reconfigured in a different way. Some of the techniques for study are figure/ground relationships, layering techniques and readings of transparency. When an object or a building type is distilled down to basic component part, the reconfiguration of elements must happen on a very abstract level in order to avoid the development of figuration. Figuration and abstraction differ from each other in that figuration implies direct translation of objects or volumes into spatial context where they read

independently. Abstraction implies these objects or volumes in a less literal manner, and relies on a perceptual reconfiguration of the overall composition.

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