



SKIN

Authors: 1.Polyxeni Mantzou, Assistant Professor, School of Architecture, DUTH, Greece
2. Elisavet Mandoulidou, PhD Candidate, School of Architecture, DUTH, Greece
3.Dimitra Riza, PhD Candidate, School of Architecture, DUTH, Greece

At first there is only skin. The skin is not only the deepest but furthermore, the oldest. We are originated from ectoderm and endoderm that, in a later moment, peel away, in order to give way to a third surface the mesoderm. And it is from these three dermal layers that everything else is formed, internal organs, blood, muscles, connective tissue and the skeleton. (TAYLOR, 1998)

The apparent analogy between building and body makes the human body the archetype for Vitruvius' theory. Buildings should display the harmonious relation of parts and whole that is found in the human body; and beauty, according to Vitruvius, is directly connected to the commensurability of parts and whole. The body has been design's primary point of reference across history, not only because people like to fashion things in their own image but also because functional objects come in close contact with our flesh, skin and bones. Humans invented technologies to supplement the inadequacies of the body's natural envelope. As Marshall McLuhan proclaimed, every technology is an extension and an amputation of the human body. Apart from the body, which becomes our first habitat, once the Cartesian tradition leads to its detachment from the self, architecture is the primary mediator between the subject and its environment. The body derives from the skin and architecture derives from the shell, a second skin that allows us to protect the body and enhance its ability to survive. But as culture is established, beautifying aspects progressively become more and more important for the body and the building as well, leading *venustas* to become a separate condition independent from *firmitas* and *utilitas*.

Understanding *venustas* as a separate condition from *utilitas* and *firmitas* can be perceived as an evolving process that has led to the point where architecture can be dichotomized in two different projects: one concerning the interior, where *firmitas* and *utilitas* have a prevalent role, and the other concerning the exterior, the skin, where *venustas* seems to be the primary aspect.

As the body is paralleled to the building, the skin is paralleled to the façade. Skin and façade have followed the same route of progressive emancipation from the body and the building. Skins are now acted upon, through all sorts of procedures, as if they were autonomous, objectified, fragmented entities. The boundary, between interior and exterior, becomes a place of its own, a non-place, a neutral and non-belonging interface that is separated from the body's unity. Façades also are gradually detached. (MANTZOU, 2000)

In classical times the façade was an integral, inseparable part of the building. In modern times, as technology liberates the façade from its baring role, it becomes obvious that the façade is no longer automatically reliant on the building and thus, ethical proclamations for sincerity are necessary in order to maintain the bond between them. (SCHITTICH, 2006) In postmodern times, the façade is freed from the ethical obligation to express the structure of the building, but is all the more compelled to express the function and even become a powerful broadcaster of the building's use. Nowadays, façades are liberated from function and meaning as well, since buildings are expected to be able to host several, disperse programmes during their lifetime. Façades as skins proclaim their independence and assume their mediating role without desire to belong to neither of the poles that they mediate for, as is the case with most of the contemporary mediators and interfaces that demand a privileged and unattached placement. (MANTZOU, 2000) But also façades as skins are understood as communicators, as living, changing and detached surfaces that can be treated and acted upon separately in order to pursue its utmost results. (LUPTON, 2002)

Contemporary architecture seems rather obsessed with façade matters. At the same time skin care has received an unprecedented attention over the last years. Three approximations appear as dominant managements of the architectural skin. The use of "*maquillage*" in order to decorate with a superimposed system which creates multiple changing faces in the urban environment by carrying images; the use of "*tattoo*" on the building skin which imprints a

recognizable and identity bearing symbol; and finally the excessive utilization of materials in a "plastic" way which draws attention to the three-dimensionality of the building's skin and is related to plastic surgery procedures that act upon the skin as a separate, autonomous entity. The dissociation between interior and exterior, through the mediation of an apparently neutral and autonomous agent is present in the treatment of both, façades and skins. Skins however maintain their ability to interact and react to stimulus in a far more elaborate and sophisticated level, which façades are trying only partially to imitate. It seems that the façade will still strive in the future to reach the skin's complexity and ambiguity, its duplicity and convolution, its aliveness and capacity to interact, change and relate.

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