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1. Thematic Session

T2

2. Title

The independence of the façade: Skin-care architecture

3. Keywords

Façade, body, skin

4. Introduction

The proposal questions the relation of architecture and the human body and the way that social conceptions upon both have endured significant changes in the last two centuries. Understanding *venustas* as a separate condition from *utilitas* and *firmitas* can be perceived as a sequential 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* is the unique aspect that matters. The paper examines this tendency in architectural paradigms, where the skin has evolved in an independent element, categorizing the design operations by its communicative, functional, constructive, and, of course, beautifying aspects.

5.I. Body-Building

Beauty, according to Vitruvius, is directly connected to the commensurability of parts and whole. The archetype for Vitruvius' theory is the human body, buildings should display the harmonious relation of parts and whole that is found in the human body. 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 is 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; at first, as Mark C. Taylor points out we are only endoderm and ectoderm, which gradually leave space in the in between for the mesoderm. Equally, architecture is at first a 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 than *firmitas* and *utilitas*.

5.II. Skin-Façade

The analogy between body and building leads to the obvious analogy between skin and façade. The progressive emancipation of the skin in its relationship to the body is also observed in the relationship building-façade. 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. In modern times, as technology allows the liberation of 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. 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 functions 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.

5.III. Contemporary Architectural Skins: Maquillage-Tattoo-Plastic

Revisioning contemporary architecture, three approximations appear as dominant managements of the architectural skin. The use of "maquillage" in order to decorate with a superimposed system which creates a new changing face 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 in the three dimensionality of the building's skin. These three categories of contemporary façades emphasize the dissociation between interior and exterior, through the mediation of a neutral and autonomous agent that disrupts the equilibrium among *venustas*, *firmitas* and *utilitas*, leading to the isolation of *venustas*, now inhabiting solely the skin.

First, the treatment of the façade as a *carrier of multiple images and meanings* with screens or lightning techniques, where moving images are being transmitted and a new aesthetic dimension is given to the building's skin, transforms the façade into a projection screen. Venturi theorized about this transformation of the building façades into screens, on which facts and events are being projected, comparing the electronic image to the Byzantine mosaics. Three moments of the past can be recalled that have determined the way in which architecture has treated screen-façades.

The case of ZKM by OMA (Karlsruhe, 1989, not constructed) is an example showing different preoccupations about media, technology, interior spatial organization and exterior expressiveness. The east façade is a big screen where moving images are being projected. It is a visionary attempt to realize an electronic media façade with moving images, based on liquid-crystal technology or light diodes, resulting in a powerful image that has influenced the way in which architects have confronted façades and designed screen-façades, as images with a more poetic way, without taboo.

Tower of Winds and Egg of Wind are two projects of Toyo Ito in which his preoccupation about the

image and the relation of electronic media to architecture is evident, each of these projects investigating possible bonds between the natural and the electronic environment. Tower of Winds (Yokohama, 1986) is a structure that functions as a transducer, being an input, where environmental information enters, and an output, that transforms that information into light. The constant change of environmental data results in a constantly changing object. The result is the interpretation of the city through a building without utility, a building that is only a screen.

Jump Cuts is a project by Diller and Scofidio that uses both curtain walls and video surveillance, in order to claim the transparency in the contemporary showcase. On the one hand, the continuity of the moving bodies in escalators that appear through the transparent glass of the "showcase" until they are lost from the view and appear on the translucent glass, which is converted into a window that projects videographic images, and on the other hand, the constructed images, those of the real spectacle, that calls from the showcase the passersby on the street. Thus, the communication between the interior and the exterior is not direct, but intermediated through media, that result in a time and space shift.

In contemporary architecture, the term "media façade" or "mediatecture" describes the evolution of this type of façade that can become an independent project that is at times done separately, at a different moment and even by a different architect than the one responsible for the original project, as in the case of the Kunsthaus in Graz (2003, Peter Cook and Colin Fournier-architects, realities:united-BIX façade).

Second, the treatment of the façade as a *tattoo,* which through a process similar to the "decoration" of the human body or the identification and branding of animals with tattoos converts naked architecture to a permanently symbolized canvas. In this case, the appearance of the architectural body is enhanced or altered. The surface marks, like the tattoo of the body have the social and urban function of conferring, a recognizable identity on their barrier. At the same time it can "camouflage" the buildings identity, or give an unexpected way to experience the in between places that the façade is creating around it. The following examples demonstrate those three attitudes of architectural-skin tattoo.

The revolutionary idea of the "tattooing" the façade was introduced by Herzog and de Meuron already in 1993 in the Ricola Production and Storage Building in Muhlhause in France and in the in the Library of Eberwalde in Germany in 1997. The façade pre-fabricated panels in both cases were imprinted with motifs and photographs declaring an urban identity independent from their initial function. In the same way as the tattoo acts in the human body, by giving a unique character to it, the imprints give a unique appearance to the simple architectural boxes. In the case of Eberswalde Library the imprint unifies the two different materials into one texture that could be perceived from a distance. Jacques Herzog commented that this approach has an effect of "illusion" not only concerning the materiality of each panel but also the form of the building. *"The photographs Thomas Ruff selected to be applied onto the façades of the Eberswalde library flatten the building, making it look like a rectangular cut-out, distorting the form of the building."*

"Camouflaging" as attitude dealing with the façade is also very popular in the treatment of the architectural skin. The AH housing project by Abalos y Herreros, for instance, demonstrate an attitude to adapt the façade panels accordingly to the environmental characteristics of the site. The AH houses react to the conventional dwelling, changing their images according to the environment

in which they are placed exactly like the chameleon changes his skin color in different natural sceneries.

Another quality of "natural scenery" especially from the interior of the building, gives Weil Arets in the University Library in Ultecht. The bamboo imprinted façade filters the incoming light and completes the overall atmosphere. The antithesis between light and dark, inside and outside is being stressed and dramatizes the whole experience of the building.

"Tattooing" the skin of the building can simultaneously mark its identity and declare its uniqueness. The *firmitas - utilitas* (library, Housing, Storage building) are not any more the decisive factors that identify its character. The Building skin overtakes their role and stresses the architecture's exceptionality, as the façade is charged with meaning, using iconographic appliqué or decorative patterns.

Third, the *excessive utilization of materials*, where the material itself is the concept, results in a beautifying agent, liberated from the material's structural and functional properties. New provocative methods suggest how to "build" with materials that are used as scenery and image rather than as structural elements. With the increasing focus on the material, the issue is no longer the material truthfulness which Modernism dictated but the desired appearance of a product which is consumed as image. This treatment of the building skin results in the detachment of the façade from interior and exterior influences and in its establishment as an independent beautifying element, similar to the results of plastic surgery and bottox in the human skin.

The envelope is, in the work of Herzog and de Meuron, the surface of articulation between interior and exterior. The materials are displayed independently, become visible in their quality of being, however always involve in some level the ambiguity in the treatment of their own materiality. The envelope is like the skin, with its many layers and its pores through which the interior and the exterior communicate and exchange fluids in a continuous flow in search of balance, of continuity, of an approach which always stays suspended by the mediation of the skin. In the case of Dominus Winery (California, 1998) they use the natural stone found in the local environment as a way of integrating the natural landscape, leaving room between them, an intermediate, ambiguous and undefined space, so as to permit the penetration of air. The stone, behind which there is sometimes a layer of glass, is used more like a skin than as a traditional wall.

The use of glass in buildings like Peter Zumthor's Kunsthaus (Bregenz,1997), Gigon and Guyer's Kirchner Museum (Davos, 1992) and Rafael Moneo's Kursaal (San Sebastian, 1999) is suggesting an architecture of glass, that has something surprising, not because of the treatment of the material, but because of the existence of a second, inside layer, a layer of intermediated air. The treatment of the exterior surface is based on the attribution of an unprecedented, blurred and ambivalent materiality to the glass, on its transformation to texture and on the analysis of the surface on repeated elements that create a rhythm that are the only ones that give a sense of scale. The superficiality, thus, acquires a third dimension, essential in order to liberate the façade from the tensions and frictions of the interior-exterior, private-public, closed-open dipoles, and thus obtaining the role of the ball in a bearing (ruleman) that confers independence but at the same time isolates the parts for which it mediates.

6. Conclusions

Body and building share a common evolution which is also reflected in the changing conceptions of beauty in the history of both. As a result, skin and façade are also permanently linked and it is therefore possible to recognize certain analogies in beautifying procedures for the skin and the façade. Maquillage, tattooing and plastic are three cases of interventions upon the skin and the façade, with more or less permanent characteristics, but in every case destined to free the surface from the restraints and the complications of the interior and the pressures and expectations of the exterior, converting it to an independent, mediating interface, liberated and detached. Beauty is a new type of *venustas*, permanently disconnected from *firmitas* and *utilitas*. Skins and façades are becoming autonomous, self-regulating and self-sufficient entities, whose care is progressively taking up excessive bodily attention.

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