



'L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU'

THEORETICAL PREMISE

“We have never been “Modern”

A conceptual premise is developed from theoretical discourse. The premise draws from a discourse that proposes the integration of dualistic conceptions between a “cultural realm” and a “natural realm”, architecture and environment, self and other, and between difference and monotony.



“WE HAVE NEVER BEEN MODERN”

THE DUALITIES

Ever since the Enlightenment, humanity has acquired an endless fascination with the quantification of things. Modernity proclaimed these ideals to state a nature-culture dichotomy through which the world is conceived of through two separate realms - a natural realm and a cultural realm (Latour, 1993: 11).

Things find a way to “elude a dialectic of meaning” (Baudrillard and Poster, 2001: 188). It does so by outmatching its essence or by evading a dialectical stance with its counterpart (Ibid: 188). The universe, Baudrillard notes, is not dialectical in its current state (Ibid: 188): “It moves towards extremes, and not towards equilibrium.” By the conception of society, emotion and behavioural stimuli in its own realm and nature and science in another, we elude a dialectical stance with our essentials and counterparts. This dualistic conception between natural phenomena, such as a sunrise or tidal flow, and social phenomena such as emotive or behavioural responses, notes Latour (1993), have never existed in contemporary matters of public concern, like global warming, politics, science, and popular and specialist discourse.

We have endlessly failed to be Modern, since the Modern ideal of the segregation of nature and culture has never existed (Latour, 1993: 11). We choose to stand a little longer in the sun on a cold day or to feel our skin respond to winds that blow over it. The two realms operate within one another and become inseparably one and the same thing.

The rational being is as much a sensorial being that, as an individual and within a collective, we share essential relations with meaningful encounters, because the human being is an emotion machine (Sharr, 2007: 32) (Minsky, 2006). “We are political all the way down to the unconscious bodily responses that we could not call ‘thoughts’, and to the things (which might be outside our bodies) that prompt those responses.”

THE *EVERYDAY* AND *EVERYDAY*-NESS

“The *everyday* implies, on the one hand, cycles - nights and days, seasons and harvests, activity and rest, hunger and satisfaction, desire and its fulfilment, life and death - while, on the other hand, it implies the repetitive gestures of work and consumption (Lefebvre and Levich, 1987: 36).

Lefebvre (Ibid: 35) argues a dualism between natural cycles and modernity’s *everyday* that tends to mask and crush the cycles and subsequently impose its monotony. “It is the invariable constant of the variations it envelops.” The *everyday* cycles rationalise the wondrous complexities and poetics of life, leaving it breathless. The concept of *everyday*-ness becomes determinant of existing systems and standardises it to where mystery is rendered obsolete. “Are not the surreal, the extraordinary, the surprising, even the magical, also part of the real? Why wouldn’t the concept of *everyday*-ness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary?” (Ibid: 35).

Figure 4. 1

Ferns receive their nutrients from glass vases designed by (R&Sic(n), 2010)

PRESENCE OF DIFFERENCE

THE 'OTHER'

The ancient Greeks would see and interpret the “fullness of life” represented in their environment and the interconnections between them (Sennett, 1990: xi). “The spaces full of people in the modern city are either spaces that are carefully orchestrating consumption, like the shopping mall, or spaces limited to and carefully orchestrating the experience of tourism,” thus the choreography to a neutralised city (Ibid: xii). Beyond the economic and demographic reasons for this condition, the ‘modern’ fear of exposure to the ‘other’ or ‘otherness’ perpetuates the condition (Ibid: xii). The urban environment ultimately portrays a series of segregations that assumes that differences pose mutually threatening, rather than mutually stimulating, situations (Ibid: xii).

Modern culture suffers from a divide between outside and inside, between subjective experience and worldly experience, between city and self (Ibid: xii). Through this dualistic conception, the being is turned ‘inwards’ towards a subjectivity where counterparts are disallowed as integral to daily life. Our towns and cities encompass the milieu of the *everyday* to the human. Sennett (1990:127) argues for the shift of conception, from the city (or town) as a *place* that permits differences, towards a *place* that encourages a concentration of difference. “Its ‘moral order’, the lack of moral order that exercises hegemony over the city as a whole.”

The modern city (and town) enables people to turn ‘outward’, instead of ‘inward’ - “rather than wholeness, the city can give them experiences of otherness. The ability of the city to reorient people in this way lies in its diversity; in the presence of difference people have at least the possibility to step outside themselves” (Sennett, 1990: 123).

Essential to developing as a human being, is developing the capacity for evermore-complex experience (Ibid: 131). If the experience of complexity is losing its value in the environment, it threatens our spirituality (Sennett, 1990: 131) as we endlessly endeavour to orientate ourselves. Socio-spatial barriers inflicted upon environments serve as deterrence to complexity and difference within societies. By re-scripting these barriers, people are enabled to create meaningful engagement, and sustainably vivid and enabling environments.

ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

“Man knows himself only to the extent that he knows the world; he becomes aware of himself only within the world, and aware of the world only within himself” (Goethe and Miller, 1988: 39).

The cultural problem of the modern city, notes Sennett (1990: xiii), is to find a way to make this impersonal milieu speak - how to relieve its current blandness and neutrality that originates from the belief that the world outside of things, is in itself unreal. Our urban problem, he notes, is how to revive the reality of the outside as a dimension of human experience and integral to the self (Ibid: xiii).

To be able to dwell between heaven and earth, Norberg-Schulz (1980: 23) proclaims that man has to “understand” these two elements, as well as their interactions. He continues that the word “understand” here does not mean scientific knowledge, but rather an existential concept that denotes the experience of *meanings* or meaningful encounters. The conception of architecture as a thing in itself rationalises all its relations and capacity to convey meaning when, in fact, it operates and unfolds in the social, political and natural realms. The houses and buildings we dwell in and visit, are really “emotion machines” that are animated by us being implicated therein (Sharr, 2007: 37). In as much as the being animates the milieu, the milieu animates the being through its senses and ability to perceive.

Architecture and planning envelop “geographical metaphors” (Arbona, 2010: 53) that encompass not only the sustainability issues of an object in itself, but also its relation to its environment and context. Architecture, existence, and the natural and metaphorical landscapes are inextricably linked., and when we alienate ourselves from the living processes that we are part of, we end up, though unequally, in a stratified world alienating ourselves (Arbona, 2010: 48) (Williams, 2005).

‘I’m Lost in Paris’ (2008), an installation by Studio R&Sie(n) headed by French architect François Roche, exhibits the alienation and personalisation of nature, capitulating between attempts at overcoming alienation and heightening it (Arbona, 2010: 47). This is the premise of an interchanging animation; where conditions are allowed to animate one another.

INTERCHANGING ANIMATION

SENSORY ARCHITECTURE

The insertion of a new condition into a context allows new relations to arise and others to be remediated. It becomes an integral part of the narrative of *place*. Narrative denotes that an object contains some “other” existence, parallel to its function, that allow our surroundings to become fictional through an accentuation of its explicit ‘reality’ (Coates, 2012: 25). In *The Endless House* by Frederick Kiesler (1959), the inhabitant would be free to wander from room to room as the mind would shift from thought to thought, a trail of the spaces lingering as one transverse thresholds (Ibid: 27-28). In Parc Güell, mythical time and real time coexist and overlap, so that “in these ultra-imaginative surroundings, relationships are free to coalesce” (Coates, 2012: 25). One is allowed to meander along various paths and landscaping with events and scenes unfolding where nature and structure mimic one another and morphs with the context - the one becomes an extension of the other.

“Current science is based on the principle of induction: most people see a certain phenomenon and conclude therefrom that this will always be the case... but instead of formulating the law of the fall of the body towards a centre, why not give preference to that which ascend to the periphery, the vacuum being considered a unit of non-density, a hypothesis far less arbitrary than the choice of a concrete unit of positive density” (Jarry et al, 1996: 22) (Baudrillard & Poster, 2006: 257).

Architecture belongs to poetry (Norberg-Schulz, 1980: 23); and by having substance and void, content and relation; space becomes a medium (Coates, 2012: 25) that communicates a dialect of meaning and poetics. Sensory architecture responds to metaphysical socio-spatial geographies as well as natural geographies and climatic conditions of the environment; it invites its inherent poetics into its structure to animate our lives’ theatrical unfolding from within it. An interchanging animation is the reciprocal complementing of two components or conditions within a synergy or symbiosis. Where water flows through a furrow to feed vegetation, the flowers animate the furrow in as much as the furrow animates and articulates the flower. Such is architecture and the environment - it communicates with the environment and animates it through its presence and that which it allows through. Where the properties of the environment are made to animate and compliment the architecture in as much as the architecture animates and compliments networks and systems within its environment,

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE NEAR FUTURE

In his manifesto for architecture (boiteaoutils.blogspot.com, 2009), Nic Clear delivers a 21-point philosophy outlining a theoretical premise with which to produce and engage with architecture. The author adopts four of these in his theoretical premise:

The Architecture Of The Near Future will not be a thing. It will be many wondrous and complex things - it will be inclusive and non-hierarchical, it will be about creating narratives that celebrate diversity and difference.

The Architecture Of The Near Future will redefine aesthetics and good taste; the hegemony of morality, hygiene and functionality will be re-imagined as a playful intersection of the impossible, the improbable and the dirty.

The Architecture Of The Near Future needs to re-capture the speculative and the imaginative aspirations of earlier utopian movements without becoming mired in the internecine squabbling and neurotic formalism that plagued such tendencies.

The Architecture Of The Near Future will be fun - play should be at the heart of the creative processes that inspire all architecture. We have reached a point where we understand the typological and programmatic issues that underpin the banalities of production. However, we have lost a sense of purpose and joy that should be at the heart of every project.

