

EPHEMERAL SPATIAL STRUCTURES IN PARKS AND GARDENS – PERCEPTION AND MEANING

STRUCTURI SPAȚIALE EFEMERE ÎN AMENAJAREA PARCURILOR ȘI GRĂDINILOR – PERCEPȚIE ȘI SEMNIFICAȚIE

NICA R.M.¹, PETROVICI Liliana-Mihaela¹
e-mail:rmnica@gmail.com

Abstract: *Ephemeral spatial structures located in public spaces such as squares, gardens and urban parks may constitute complementary compositional elements in the contemporary landscaping. These temporary and reversible interventions on the landscape are counting on the psychological and perceptive impact and on an amplification of social contact, without creating, from the viewer, an instinctual denial of the novelty. Ephemeral spatial structures, which are simultaneously architectural and artistic, are not perceived as aggressions or alterations of the familiar space, but rather as urban furnishings that mark a certain event in the daily city life. In the case of the outdoor spaces design, these objects with a temporary existence are conceived as an integral part of the landscaping creation. Being detached from constraints of the perennial, these objects offer the opportunity of a new sensorial experience of the space.*

Key words: temporary landscape design, ephemeral urban furnishing, artistic and architectural installation, reversible interventions on natural environment, psychological and perceptive

Rezumat: *Structurile spațiale efemere amplasate în spații publice precum piețe, grădini sau parcuri urbane pot constitui elemente compoziționale complementare în amenajările peisagistice contemporane. Aceste intervenții temporare și reversibile asupra peisajului mizează pe impactul psihologic și perceptiv, pe o potențare a contactului social, fără a atrage din partea individului o reacție instinctivă de respingere a noului. Instalațiile spațiale efemere, ce pot fi atât arhitecturale cât și artistice, nu sunt percepute ca agresiuni sau alterari ale unui spațiu deja familiar, ci mai degrabă ca obiecte de mobilier urban care marchează un anumit eveniment în viața cotidiană. În cazul amenajării spațiilor exterioare, aceste obiecte cu o prezență temporară sunt concepute ca parte integrantă a creației peisagistice. Fiind desprinse de constrangerile permanentului, acestea oferă prilejul unei experiențe senzoriale inedite a spațiului.*

Cuvinte cheie: amenajări peisagere temporare, obiecte de mobilier urban efemere, instalație artistică și arhitecturală, intervenții reversibile asupra mediului natural, impact psihologic și perceptiv.

¹ “Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iași, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Through ephemeral spatial structures we understand that eventful and conceptual component of landscape design, with the single purpose of marking of a moment and the transmission of a message or a concept. As in the case of conceptual art, the ephemeral landscape design does not create a transient object, but an event.

In the city's general context of the built and natural environment, the transient term is synonymous with impermanent, reversible and temporary. The ephemeral, in this case, includes an understated comparison with the human existence time and not with the historical time. And so it is realised a reference to the conventional life expectation of a contemporary spatial structure and less to timeless existence assimilated to the ancient temples and gothic cathedrals.

Much like the ephemerae, insects that live as adults just one day, the ephemeral is an action, a phenomenon, a creation or an event with the duration limited to a single day. It is a short, fugitive, impermanent or unstable presence, an unstable and temporary phenomenon, that perpetually modifies and transforms.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Through human action (interaction, movement, event) a spatial structure overcomes the stage of aesthetic object and becomes an urban object with a temporary presence. Every object has a temporal stance, a temporary existence, but the transient implies a different standing towards the time, related to the everyday life. A fraction of the built environment life expectancy (determined by the materials sustainability and the moral usage of the functional structure) in the case of ephemeral designs is replaced by a precise predetermined life cycle.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The ephemeral intervention on the environment does not represent an authoritarian or intrusive gesture. These objects are not perceived as aggressions or alteration of an already familiar space, but rather as urban furniture objects that mark a certain event in the city life. Similar to art, the ephemeral structures placed in parks and gardens can, thus, count on the psychological and perceptive impact and on a revival of social contact, without generating an instinctive gesture of denial from the viewer.

Transient constructions, detached from the permanent constraints, are the occasion for a complete sensorial experience of space. Gaston Bachelard mentions that the space perception is not just empirical, but is possible even thought means of emotional memory. The space is perceived through the memory filters and thus, personalized.

In defining the way these objects are perceived and interpreted an essential factor is the *objects scale*, in this case the *smallness*. Usually these interventions are at a human scale, they interact in the same time with a relative small number of individuals. The reduced dimensions caused, mainly by economical and technical factors, lead to a more intimate relation between

landscape, architecture and individual. "The constructed mass and the reduction of the intervention scale generate physical and psychological safeness, social contact and communication, closeness (...)" according to Jane Jacobs. (Jacob, 1961)

The ephemeral landscaping intervention does not have just a function (rest, reunion, signal), but it transfers to the individual through a visual representation, an emotional state and intellectual stimulates him towards an introspection (fig. 1) One can speak about the object physical and mental representation, of the physic and mental projected image:"To perceive means to make an ephemeral adjustment, interesting and local (...) of two images, one supported by the substance, the other one crossed by the conscience that lasts and that is reported to I."(Wunenburger, 2004)



Fig. 1 - Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, Londra, UK, 2009, Architects: SANAA
Photo credits: © Iwan Baan, www.archdaily.com

Placed in a garden or a park, an ephemeral pavilion does not belong to a place, but is effectively perceived in relation to a certain place, a public space. It is a nomad object of whose presence does not leave visible traces, but only on an ideational level. We refer to the "some species of places set outside any place, even if they are in an effective way, located." (Foucault, 1994).

The transient spatial structures used in landscaping design live only through the direct relationship with the individual, meantime other attributes such as durability, stability, comfort and integration in context pass in a secondary plan. The intervention in public space of ephemeral constructions is not a leaning towards the superficial, consumerism or a denial of historical values, but an occasion for a complete sensorial challenge – sight, hearing, smell, and tactile sense.

Set in public gardens and parks, these *architectural* and *artistic installations* become a dynamic factor of the designed space. They become a rest point, a landmark in a much wider landscape path. The space defined is permeable, the line between the inside and the outside is very thin and in most



Fig. 2 - The installation called *A path in the forest* is a suspended bridge, sustained exclusively from the trees trunks. An event is created, a surprise in the landscape path. The intervention is reversible and does not aggressively intervene in the natural habitat of the forest. Tallinn, Estonia, 2011, autor: Tetsuo Kondo, Photo credits: © thecoolhunter.net

cases there is no obvious demarcation between the exterior and the interior of the spatial structure. The natural environment keeps its continuity and coherence, the interpenetration with the protected space cancels the distinction between nature and human ephemeral intervention (fig. 2).

Another surprising aspect arises from an analysis of these objects, the one of the public-private dichotomy. Although by definition these installations are public spaces, the experience offered to the viewer is usually intimate. The transmitted sensation can be unusual for a public space – physical and mental safeness, social contact and closeness. The outcome is a semi-public space (or semi-private), a *heterotopia* that brings together two different worlds. The focus is on the annulment of the traditional perceptive conventions: inside-outside, private-public, present-past antinomies.

The transient existence is present even on the level of the used materials. The focus on the sudden experience and on the impression of the moment leads to the usage of uncommon materials in landscaping design. Having in consideration that durability, tightness and hydro-thermal insulation are not relevant criteria; the materiality concept can be reconsidered. The ephemeral character of these interventions is highlighted even through the limited durability of the used materials – cardboard, canvas or – in an unusual way for a construction – vegetation. The Romanian pavilion for the International Expo from Hanover in 2000, whose envelope was entirely realized from a live *green reticule* fits perfect in this trend.

Limited time expectancy in exploitation implies a judicious usage of construction materials – the usage in small amounts and of few types of materials in the same project, the obtaining of a maximum spatial result with a minimum of resources, the use of local recycled materials. The transient existence of an architectural installation contrasts with its extensive design process (fig. 3).

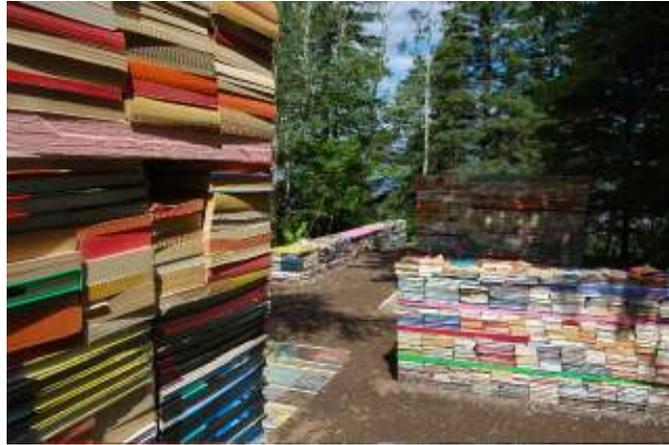


Fig. 3 - *The garden of knowledge* is a temporary artistic installation realised in Quebec - Canada from 40 000 books. The unusual material defines walls, benches and floors. Authors: 100 Landschaftsarchitektur; Photo credits: © Thilo Folkerts, www.archdaily.com

The Serpentine Art Gallery from Kensington Gardens –London gives every year, to well known architects, the opportunity to design and build a three months lasting pavilion on the lawn in front of the building.

In 2011 Peter Zumthor created on this occasion, from the concept of *hortus conclusus* (lat. closed garden), a garden in the medieval convents, a contemplative room, a garden within a garden. The outcome is an outside space, although deeply private, detached from the London verve (fig. 4).

The garden effect it is obtained through this enclosing (the fence, the enclosure wall, the closing from the neighborhoods) and through the privateness and the psychological safeness thus obtained. The spatial structure is the background for the interior lighted garden. The access from the garden is realized through a transitory labyrinth-like space, a narrow and oppressive lobby. The entrances from both directions are detached which implies a spatial transition before entering the interior. The garden is a self-centered space that invites the passersby to a moment of contemplation and offers an inedited perception of the space. A black, austere, prism-like volume, without scale and a functional implied form - this is the exterior of the construction. This image, intentionally retained, is in the same time intriguing.

The inside tilted roof, the proportions and the relating to the near gardens spaces created by Peter Zumthor, suggest a subtle allusion towards the two characteristic elements of Ancient Rome – the *atrium* and the *impluvium*. These

two elements were defined in the ancient architecture as the center of the house to which the other parietal displaced room related. They represent the architectural elements that mark the vertical axis in the relation with the divinity.

Zumthor creates the modern *atrium* of whose exterior offers a visual stimulus to the viewer, a mental challenge, for once entered in the interior space to discover a visual and a spiritual balance. The color contrast created by the black painted walls and the large shadow of the roof eaves cuts of a piece of the



Fig. 4 - Exterior and interior image of the pavilion created by Peter Zumthor for *Serpentine Gallery Pavilion*. London, UK, 2011
Photo credits: © Walter Herfst, www.archdaily.com

sky lightness. This is a project set exclusively on the revaluating and the stimulation of the public space defined by the urban garden and the actual art gallery.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The transient spatial structures potential, used in the urban gardens and parks landscaping, is represented by the playful and innovative spatial experiments, but also by the possibility of testing of unused before in the case of built environment materials and constructive techniques. Ecological constructive systems, economically unprofitable, set in an early stage of development and yet impossible to use in common practice, can be the occasion for experimental constructions.

2. Ephemeral spatial structures are considered a complementary step in the permanent architecture and the traditional landscaping design, of whose value they enhance. In the contemporary landscaping design the vanguard theories and concepts can take shape, without restrains of the permanent.

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