

ABSTRACT AND VIRTUAL CREATIONS IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

CREAȚIILE ABSTRACTE ȘI VIRTUALE ÎN PEISAGISTICĂ

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Abstract. *It is well-known the fact that nowadays refuge of human being into the abstract world or in virtual reality is an alarming signal of alienation, of psychic tensions which press us to retire into an univers apparently without stress. Some of the futuristic ideas from the abstract or virtual domain, those not publicly accepted, are not in harmony with Mother Nature, but some seems to be assimilated because of some particular qualities. Many nowadays experiments of creating an artificial landscape was taken from the repertory of the minimalist, hiper-realistic or pop-art of the years '70, but without public succes. The virtual reality try to conquer terrain projecting natural landscapes on huge screens, rivalling with the real natural landscape. Virtual refuge satisfactions are not sufficient because this retirement don't heal our energy, but spoil it. The refuge in the middle of real nature is the most tranquilizing and refreshing. Nowadays, the humanity need of aesthetically arranged green spaces became stringent.*

Keywords: abstract and virtual creations, artificial landscape, nature.

Rezumat. *Este binecunoscut faptul că refugiul actual al umanității în lumea abstractului sau a realității virtuale este un semnal de alarmă al alienării, al tensiunilor psihice care ne presează să ne retragem într-un univers aparent mai puțin stresant. Nu toate ideile futuriste manifestate abstract sau virtual sunt în armonie cu Mama Natură - unele au fost respinse de public, dar altele au fost acceptate pentru calitățile lor. Multe experimente actuale, de confecționare a unui peisaj artificial, au fost preluate din repertoriul artei minimaliste, hiper-realiste sau pop-artei anilor 70, dar nu s-au bucurat de succes. Realitatea virtuală încearcă să câștige teren propunând ample proiecții de peisaje naturale pe ecrane, făcând concurență cadrului natural. Satisfacțiile acestui refugiu virtual nu sunt mulțumitoare, deoarece această retragere nu ne reface energiile, ci ni le consumă. Refugiul în natura reală rămâne cel mai liniștitor și mai reconfortant, de aceea, în prezent, nevoia umanității de spații verzi amenajate estetic a devenit extrem de stringentă.*

Cuvinte cheie: creații abstracte și virtuale, peisaj artificial, natură.

INTRODUCTION

In 1990, the American magazine "Landscape Architecture" initiated an international contest "Visionary Landscape", expecting valuable landscaping proposals. In 2000, a deadlock was reached at this contest: no one of the 122 works was awarded. Most of the works were experimental or imaginary projects, in the field of artificial and virtuality abstract, away of reality and, mostly, away of stringent daily needs of an urban space more and more suffocated by concrete, plastic and NOx gases. The jury members formulated some opinions among

which the idea that **“the future of landscaping is not in artifices”** was obvious. The language of the presented compositions determined the jury to respond, outlining the ecological and sustainable role of landscape architecture at the level of entire city: “landscaping architecture should introduce a new language in metropolis planning”. The jury tried to remind the urbanists and landscape architects a long forgotten truth in the context of an urbanizing rage: “landscape architecture could be a way by which the city would become a homogenous whole, by unifying its fragments”.

What all these jury opinions are referring to? The acceleration of the urbanizing process, from the second half of the 20th century, with its excessively pollutant effects on multiple levels, already became a commonly know fact. As an obvious consequence, a huge process was intensified, a conscious annihilations of the nature presence within the urban frame.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Some of „futuristic” ideas from the abstract domain, are not publicly accepted because are not in harmony with Mother Nature. However, some of them seems to be assimilated because of particular qualities. The virtual reality try to conquer terrain projecting natural landscapes on huge screens, rivalling with the real natural landscape. Selecting and analyzing some examples, we linked all these creations to an essential problem of the contemporary age: the mankind need of real nature became very stringent and the landscape creations should face and solve this situation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

At the end of the 20th century, the city inhabitants need to escape in a “patch” of nature largely increased. The possibilities to cover this stringent human need were and still are extremely limited, in the conditions in which the constructions are rapidly erected on any surface, destroying with a furious greed the existing nature. It is well known the fact that the present refuge of humanity in the world of abstract or virtual reality is an alarm signal of alienation, of psychic strain pressing us to retreat in an apparent less stressing universe.

Related to this refuge in an artificial universe and its causes, the art critic Rene Huyghe visionary stated since 1965: “Our contemporaries have to cope with a new, terrifying reality, yet outcoming from their brain and minds. It seems to gain an increasing authority, imposing to the society restrictions and unexpected perils. It goes even further: *by its laws and operation becomes a sort of bare parody of life*”. The rapid way of degradation, degeneration and wasting of the urban land imposed the necessity to find new solutions for its rehabilitation and regeneration, as well as new way of its usage and endowment. Unfortunately, not all the ideas of the creators are in harmony with nature. Here, also, we face the temptation of artificiality, to which the above mentioned contest jury referred. Of course, these settlements are influenced by the personality of the urbanists, landscape architects or fine art creators, involved in these projects. On the other hand, the various manners and trends in art and architecture influence many of these creations. The

creations tried to change the dull and tired aspect of these spaces, the result being obviously positive from this point of view, the spaces regained their personality and dignity lost in time. But, at a second glance, the landscape critic reproaches the aridity of many of these too dry, too abstract creations, full of concrete and stone.

Let us take the example of public squares, of streets and passages, historical or modern that long ago lost their magnetism because of agglomeration, traffic, and mainly because of advertising kitsch that visually and psychologically pollutes the urban spaces. A present tendency in urbanism, for which there are many for and against pleadings, aims at their rehabilitation by landscape arrangements, by introducing the natural elements – earth, water and green spaces, their value being sometimes powered, other times annihilated by the presence of urban furniture. However, there are positive examples in which the arid abstract seems to be diminished by natural elements.

In the Sankt Hans Torv Square of Copenhagen, the sculptor Sven Ingvar Andersson created a monumental composition called “Rain House” by spectacularly using the water. Andersson did not create a certain edging for the areas where the water falls, but he slightly curved the slabbed land, letting the bypassers to approach as close as possible to the water (fig. 1). The massiveness of the central sculpture is slackened by water gushes that flush out of the slab work, so that everything seems to be very spontaneous and close to the residents soul (fig. 1). The composition is set free, defying the enclosures.



Fig. 1. “Rain House” in Sankt Hans Torv Square of Copenhagen

The Marugame Station Plaza created in Japan by Peter Walker is another example of square where the abstract seems to be assimilated and appreciated by the inhabitants (fig. 2 and 3).

Among the attempts of urban rehabilitation using abstract language, we may mention also *the creation of symbolic axes of the cities*, conferring their personality by ample and spectacular landscape development. An eloquent exemplification could be the project of Dani Karavan “Major Axis” of Cergy-Pontoise neighboring Paris. Karavan set a large axis, of three kilometers, having alongside 12 points and areas of concern. Karavan stated that he tried to work alongside the axis with archetypal forms, by their symbolism and subtle significances, to create a peculiar spiritual atmosphere (fig. 4 and 5). His axis visually unifies Paris, but not

pedestrian: from the platform of the 12 columns, at the horizon, at a very long distance, we can see the perspective head The Arch of the Defense, the long urbanistic axis going further till the Louvre Palace, ending in the Bastille Square.



Fig. 2. Marugame Station Plaza

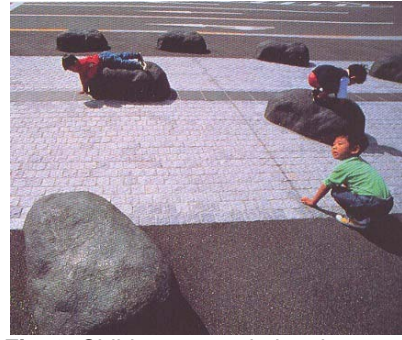


Fig. 3. Children appreciating the rocks



Fig. 4 and 5. Dani Karavan "Major Axis" of Cergy-Pontoise

The ambiantal arrangements of this kind try to resuscitate the lost magnetism of some public spaces, offering to the inhabitants a necessary daily refuge. *The way in which the proposals were compositionally solved has raised and still raising divergent opinions.* Many of these creations can not be billeted in a certain creative category: they belong both to landscaping and architecture, art in nature, as well as to the urban composition. It would be a natural approach, considering the unifying role of the nature. "La Villette" Parisian contest was trying in the 1980's to find out how the creators foreshadow "the future garden". On the site of an ex-cattle market of about 55 ha, it was suggested the development of a park dedicated generally to the Sciences and Technique, Music and Arts (fig. 6). Bernard Tschumi would win the contest with his visionary proposals, under the mark Urbanism-Leisure-Experiment, pleading for an opened program offering the escape in to a multi-functional paradise-city. Some critics consider that he failed to offer "unity in diversity" to his ample compositions. For them, La Villette constitutes a row of spaces without connection between them, a kind of urban exhibition.



Fig.6 and 7. La Villette is or is not “The Park of the 21st century”?

The opinions are divided whether La Villette is or is not “The Park of the 21st century”. Using a very modern language, appealing especially to materials, shapes and colors reminding of abstract constructivism, Tschumi considers that he carried out an integrating cultural act. By functional pluralism, by the multitude of the pass ways scattered with expressive objects, by surfaces charged with significances, he states that he succeeded to accomplish the vision of “park-cultural object”, suitable for a “refined cultural city” like Paris (fig. 6 and 7). By this example, we come back to the old dispute on city-nature-culture relationships.

Some “futuristic” ideas, of making up an artificial landscape, are taking over from the portfolio of minimalist art, hyper-realist art or pop art of the 1970’s, without having success.



Fig.7. Plastic volumes



Fig.8. Plastic flowers design



Fig.9. Artificially colored plants

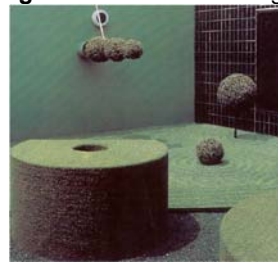


Fig.10. Artificial landscape

In these creations, the synthetic materials try to impose their own language by totally inadequate compositions or urban furniture, by an ostentative kitsch visibly placed in public spaces. We can find in parks alarming signs: natural plants are poisoned with acrylic colors (fig. 9), replaced with plastic flowers or plastic landscape (fig. 8 and 10), the trees are suffocated under plastic only to create “images” (fig. 7), Mother Earth skin is covered with large lengths of colored plastic foils. Despite the

fact that industrial aesthetics (plastics, Astroturf) were explored in landscaping creations along with high-tech ideas (artificial fog and fiber-optics), the designers still see in these artificial gardens their potential wildness. There are some abstract proposals trying ecological landscapes with natural materials (metal, shells or stones) some of them placed in damaged areas trying to save them, others inadequately placed in valuable natural landscapes competing with them, visually polluting and destroying their charm. On the other hand, *the virtual reality* is also trying to catch up suggesting ample screen projections, imitating the natural frame. In this respect, a famous example is the Miyazaki Ocean Dome-Japan where, just near the ocean, it was erected a huge dome, accommodating a large beach and an ocean, artificially created, with a sky and a horizon virtually realized, using projections on a gigantic background screen. However, when the climatic conditions allow it, the dome covering is mechanically slid letting the natural sun and sky to penetrate inside.

CONCLUSIONS

At concluding these surveys, some words uttered long time ago should be mentioned. In 1948, the urbanist Ch. Tunnard mentioned, in his book “Gardens in the modern landscape”, a strange human attitude toward landscape: “For centuries, the western man imagined himself in antithesis with nature. But the truth is that his identity is not separated from nature, but together with it.” A few years later, in 1965, the art critic R. Huyghe stated in “The Image Power”: “The 20th century man is placed in front of a terrific universe through the new perspectives that scientific explorations offer. There are signs of a profound disorder in front of a remodeled world by the discoveries of the human industry.” Nowadays, in the context of proliferation of artificial landscapes, we were tempted to find out its psychological causes: an alarm signal of alienation, of daily stressing tensions. The accelerated degradation of human health made the mankind need of nature to become very stringent nowadays. Artificiality does not renew our energies but consumes them in a vortex of illusions. The harmonious blending of natural elements in the landscaping compositions will always create a really calming, comforting and healing refuge.

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