

AESTHETIC MEANING IN LANDSCAPE DESIGN

SEMNIIFICAȚII ESTETICE ÎN ARHITECTURA PEISAGERĂ

PETROVICI Liliana-Mihaela

„Gh. Asachi” Technical University of Iasi, Romania

Abstract. *The psychological, visual and emotional comfort given by the environment design, such as parks and gardens, is actually created by harmony and expressivity. Landscape architecture, the art of designing outdoor spaces, cannot be imagined without its aesthetic and artistic side. Landscape design operates with elements of vocabulary in the realm of other visual arts – geometry, color, texture, light - and finds its specific way of expression in the molding of the natural elements and outdoor spaces. Both, basic geometrical shapes – circle, square, triangle, pyramid, spiral – and the natural elements – water, vegetation, light, materials – have their own intrinsic meanings, out of which some bear a universal character, and others are specific to some communities or individuals. Once the symbolism of these elements is transferred to the designed environment, it helps shaping some aesthetic meanings that bear cultural and psychological connotations.*

Key words: meanings of the landscape composition elements, aesthetic symbolism, cultural and psychological connotations

Rezumat. *Confortul vizual, psihologic și afectiv față de mediul exterior amenajat, al parcurilor și grădinilor, este creat de frumos, de armonie și de expresivitate. Arhitectura peisageră, arta amenajării spațiilor exterioare, nu poate fi concepută fără dimensiunea estetică și artistică. Creația peisageră operează cu elemente de vocabular plastic comune cu cele ale altor arte vizuale – geometrie, culoare, textură, lumină -, și își găsește în modelarea elementelor naturale și amenajarea spațiului exterior forma specifică de exprimare. Atât figurile geometrice primare – cercul, pătratul, triunghiul, piramida, spirala -, cât și elementele naturale – apa, vegetația, lumina, materialele -, au semnificații intrinseci, din care unele au caracter universal, altele sunt specifice unor comunități sau indivizi. Transferată asupra mediului amenajat, simbolistica acestor elemente contribuie la conturarea unor semnificații estetice ce au conotații culturale și psihologice.*

Cuvinte cheie: semnificații ale elementelor de compoziție peisageră, simbolism estetic, conotații culturale și psihologice

INTRODUCTION

Landscape architecture, the art of outdoor spaces, cannot be conceived without its aesthetic and artistic side. The psychological, visual, and emotional comfort towards the designed environment of the parks and gardens is actually derived from beauty, harmony, and expressivity. The aesthetic information as part of the landscape art is often transmitted by symbolical, superior meanings. The receiving of the aesthetic messages depends on their value, but is also marked out by subjectivity, fashion, and tastes, by the preferences for different styles or by the psychological predisposition to certain shapes, colors, materials, or textures.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Landscape design operates with elements of vocabulary in the realm of other visual arts – geometry, color, texture, light - and finds its specific way of expression in the molding of nature and outdoor spaces. These elements have their own inner meanings, out of which some bear a universal character, “symbolic images of the man in the world” (Mircea Eliade), others are specific to some communities or individuals, during certain historical periods.

The geometric composition leads to order and harmony in the spaces of gardens and parks. It confers them grandeur and magnificence, or creates them an intimate, warm climate. Concurrently, the language of geometric shapes contributes to the outlining of the meanings and concepts in landscape creations, due to their intrinsic symbolism, which is being transferred to the designed environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The archetypal shapes - *circle*, *square*, and *triangle* – are powerful figures, the first, original sample of the objects [fig.1]. They are symbols of perfection and simplicity, ancestral universal modules of the intuition and intellect, which appear in dreams and myths. The human mind tends to simplify the environment, to reduce it to these basic shapes. The more simple and regular the figures that embody the landscape compositions are, the easier they are perceived and understood, and become a better communication vehicle.



Fig.1. Salk Institute by Louis Kahn

The circle or sphere means homogeneity, represents the sky and the planets cycles, and symbolizes the Universe, the sun, the fire. It is the sign of the spiritual, invisible and transcendental world (fig.3,5). Its circular movement is perfect, without an end or a beginning, with no variations. That is the reason the circle is used to immerse and to measure time.

The square and the cube represent the Earth and the Created Universe. Equal, balanced, and standing, it is a no dynamic figure suggesting stability and solidification (fig.2,4). Being a neutral and static shape with no preferential directions, the square was associated with rationalism and purity in the modern art and architecture. According to Jung, the circle is the archetypal image of the entire psychic, while the square is the symbol of the earth matter, of the body and reality.

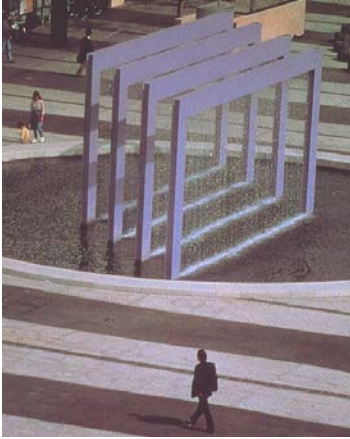


Fig. 2. Marugame Station Plaza by P.Walker



Fig. 3. Water Temple by Tadao Ando

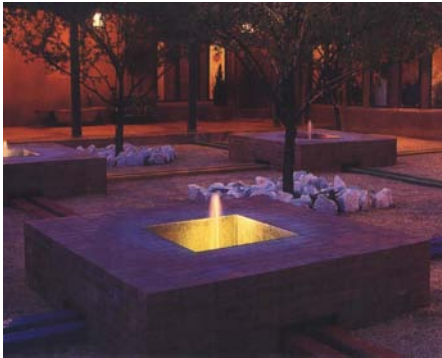


Fig. 4. Dickenson Garden by M. Schwartz

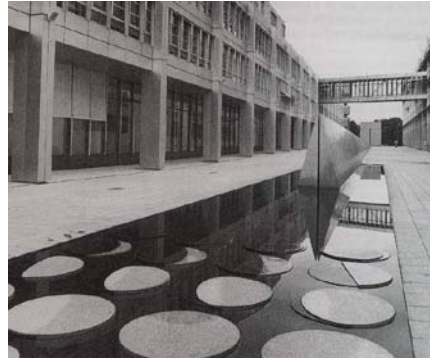


Fig.5. Court of Moon by W.Hannsjorg

The cross is the symbol of the Christian religion, of the divine sacrifice and of the human beings' salvation. Alike the square, the intersection of the arms of the cross symbolizes the earth, but in a dynamic way. The cross is the sign of orientation with functions of synthesis and measure. Indicating the four points of the compass, the cross is the base of all the orientation symbols. The cross is whereon the sky meets the earth (fig.5). It has the power of synthesis, it recapitulates the Creation and has a cosmic meaning. The intersection of its arms coincides with the Center and fixes an axis mundi.

The triangle is the symbol of the spiritual elevation and divinity. The triangle shape has stability from the interior and imparts dynamic movement directions from the exterior (fig.5). *The pyramid*, formally and semantically associated with the triangle, stands as a symbol of eternity and enlightenment, of purity and intelligence (fig.6). With a steady base and a peak towards the sky, the pyramid transposes geometrically the dialectic between horizontality and verticality.

The spatial or plane spiral evokes the cyclical progressive development, the evolution, extension, emanation. The symbol of the eternal return and of the connection between sky and earth, the spiral used in landscape architecture has

dynamism, spatiality and bears a great suggestive power (fig.7).



Fig. 6. The court of Louvre Museum by I.M.Pei



Fig. 7. Japanese garden

The labyrinth, a crossing of roads wherefrom most have no exit way, is associated with the dangerous world hunting after a center, after a savior escape from disorder and obscurity. Characterized by a complicated plan and by the difficulty of its getting over, the labyrinth represents the endlessness and the complexity of the Universe.

The labyrinth is a mysterious place, made on purpose to be unknown, conceived for keeping safely some precious things. It may also be perceived as a try-out whose overtaking would uplift our spirit. It is a place of self-revelation, an exterior complicated reality that once defeated, would enlighten us inside.

Andrei Plesu thinks of labyrinth as a symbol of errancy, as an experience of failure. It depends on us to transform it from itinerancy and misleading into a way of redemption. The fallen labyrinth, the broken fetter, and the deciphered problem, always know how to gratify our efforts. In the center of every labyrinth, there is the bower of a precious thing. This reward worths the risk of getting ourselves lost in its thicket.

The numbers do not express just quantities, but also ideas, qualities and forces. They are “the best way of reaching the divine truths” (Nicolas Cusanus). This refers not only to simple numbers, but also to eternal fundamentals that equal Truth. Platon used to consider the interpretation of numbers as the highest step of the knowledge and the essence of the cosmic and interior harmony. The landscape creation uses the symbolism and rules of numbers in order to recreate the harmony of the Universe and the cosmic rationality on Earth.

The golden section, the symbol of life and harmony, the key of the living creatures’ proportions, constitutes for the landscape architecture a controlling instrument used to create perfect rapports. The relations between simple numbers correspondent to the harmonic codes are used as abstract proportion canons in the compositions of parks and gardens.



Fig. 8. San Cristobal Stables and Folk Egerstrom House by Luis Barragan

The colors (fig.8) are one of the means of knowledge and symbolic representation of the world. According to Jung, the colors express the main functions of the human psychic: ideas, feelings, intuition, and sensation. The colors' meanings vary in different cultural areas and historical periods; they have a cosmic, ethical, biological, social, and even political symbolism, and the parks and gardens' environment may function as a vehicle for their transmitting.

In landscape architecture, the color is three-dimensional; it gives character and deepness to the entertainment exterior spaces. The color sets emotional contacts with the viewers and creates specific ambiances. The clear light colors have positive effects on human psychic; the warm and cold colors have different stimulating effects and influence processes of adaptation and communication.

The water is the symbol of purity, of wisdom, grace, and virtue. It is a source of bodily and spiritual regeneration. Water is one of the four primordial elements of the Creation, the origin of life and the primary substance from which the forms come into life and then return in regression.

An ambivalent symbol, the water means richness and protection, but it may also be an imminent danger. It is a blessing making life possible, and a purifying force, a source of creation and regeneration, yet a cause of death and destruction. The innate power of water represents the Yin and Yang essence, wherein good cannot exist without mischief. As a compositional design element, it lends energy, space, and vitality by its reflexion property and its audio-visual effects. The artesian wells and water basins bring psychological benefits and they represent attraction sights, places of communion, sources of power and regeneration. (fig.8,9,10).

The light is the symbol of divinity, of love and good. It is the life, the redemption, the sign of holiness and eternity. Light is an essential morphologic element for the molding of spaces and shapes. It generates dynamism and a feeling of depth; it amplifies the perspective and enlivens expressivity through the dialogue with the shadow.

Water, light, and vegetation used as esthetic elements in parks and gardens bring vitality and beauty; they harmonize the relation between the natural environment and the human set environment. They are a homage brought to

Creation and Nature, “the only body of God we could ever know” (Frank Lloyd Wright).



Fig.10. Water garden by Kathryn Gustavson



Fig. 9. Salk Institute by Louis Kahn

CONCLUSIONS

Once the symbolism of the geometrical shapes, of numbers, colors, water, and light is transferred to the designed environment of parks and gardens, it contributes to the shaping of some aesthetic meanings with cultural and psychological connotations. The purpose of landscape compositions is not only to create full of vitality, harmonious ambiances, but also to mold the environment in a suggestive and symbolic way in order to give it a human identity.

REFERENCES

1. **Chevalier Jean G. Alain, 2007** - *Dicționar de simboluri*. Editura Artemis, București.
2. **Ching Francis D.K., 1979** - *ARCHITECTURE, Form, Space, & Order, (second edition)*. Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, Florence.
3. **Dascălu Doina Mira, 2006** - *Peisagistica. O posibilă terapie pentru mileniul al III-lea*. Editura Societății Academice Matei-Teiu Botez, Iași.
4. **Evseev I., 2001** - *Dictionar de simboluri si arhetipuri culturale*. Editura Amarcord, Timișoara.
5. **Iliescu O. A., 2002** - *Simbol în arhitectură*. Editura Universitară Ion Mincu, București.
6. *****, 1997** - *Architectural Design*, 3-4/1997, “*Light in architecture*”, vol. 67.
7. *****, 1997** - *Architectural Design*, 5/1997, “*Architecture and water*”, vol. 66.