

STEEL AND CHLOROPHYLL

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Abstract: *The modernism of contemporary American architecture - the combination of cold steel and glass - is considered to be opposite to nature - most buildings in down town sites seems free of life with an unfavourable impact on the environment. City of Seattle was the one who gave the tone for an eco-revolution, by two approaches: 1. The favourable visual impact which had this combination - sometimes surprising - between austerity and the rigor of the urban landscape and the „heat” of the natural „alive” elements - represented by ornamental plants; 2. Applying a plan that involves among others the adoption of other “green” technologies, for the electricity energy production.*

Key words: American architecture, steel, glass, urban landscape

Rezumat: *Modernismul arhitecturii contemporane americane – asocierea rece dintre oțel și sticlă - e considerat antitetic naturii - majoritatea clădirilor din down town-uri părănd lipsite de viață și cu un impact nefavorabil asupra mediului. Orașul Seattle a fost cel care a dat tonul pentru o revoluție ecologică, prin două abordări: 1. impactul vizual favorabil pe care îl are asocierea - uneori surprinzătoare – dintre austeritatea și rigoarea peisajului urban și “căldura” elementelor naturale - “vii”, reprezentate de plantele ornamentale; 2. aplicarea unui plan ce presupune printre altele adoptarea unor tehnologii “verzi” pentru producerea energiei electrice.*

Cuvinte cheie: arhitectură americană, oțel, sticlă, peisaj urban

INTRODUCTION

The paradox of the modern times regarding the attitude towards inclusion of the *green element* into the urban space is that of theoretical orientation towards nature as a perfect model. We evolve more and more into a setting which supposes an alternation between *cold* and *warm*, but everything is put under the sign of refinement.

The dimensions and values of the public space have completely different connotations on the American continent. They are used ‘wisely’ as we say. That is why perhaps one cannot feel the crowdedness of the urban zones. A characteristic of the architectural landscape is the big enough difference between levels. All the constructions develop vertically while the private buildings and primary schools develop in length (Althen Gary, 1988). The functionalistic modernist style had made urban constructions as well as human habitat an even surface, making them obey to a strict logic. After the Second World War, in the United States, besides the innovation of some saving solutions; the need of architectural evenness has expanded rapidly. At the same time, the American architecture has been the host to so called ‘renaissances’ which meant the reproduction of some style from different times of worldwide architecture, among which the

multiculturalism of the American society had an important point to make (Stevenson Deborah, 2003). The glass, the nickel, the clear atmosphere, light, cleanliness, represent the privilege of the contemporary American architecture.



Fig. 1. Down Town, Seattle



Fig. 2. Nordstrom Commercial Centre, Seattle

The transparency of the building, the possibility to look inside it and the light symbolize its open power and structure. The metal and glass signify suppleness, clarity of structure, transparency and are usually used as a sign. Architecture has become a space of life. It is the justification through rendering things aesthetic in conquering the world, because a beautiful construction is not a simple element anymore, through which the man contributes to the disappearance of a piece from the natural environment, but a cultural component.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The American townplanner who propose the green colour, take into consideration the building of a new landscape and its 'real' possibility to bring nature into town. At the same time it is desired to prevent the town from becoming ill, by making vegetation interventions. The *green* element are not an architectural prolongation, not even a space in which this floats but an enclosing, an additional space, an urban function (<http://www.urbanecology.washington.edu/>). The urban landscape is not reduced to the simple presence of the glass and steel anymore. It appears to be combined in the *pith* of life, a possible compensation to the urban pollution. However, in order to obtain results that are as *real* as possible, the authorities have intervned choosing other ways as well. Two years ago, the mayor of Seattle town Greg Nickels has started an ecological revolution. Following his proposal, hundreds of mayors have started a campaign to reduce carbon emissions by replacing the vehicles used by authorities with hybrid vehicles. The results were immediate and carbon emissions have been reduced to 60% comparing to year 1990. Moreover, he proposed to the vehicles owners to use the public means of transport and he took the responsibility of creating bicycle lanes. He also enlarged the pavements to facilitate the pedestrian flux (<http://www.green-report.ro/revista->

presei/adevarul-revolutie-ecologica-primarilor-american). These project proposals are found more or less in all geographical spaces. But putting them into practice sees difficult as they remain at the project stage, in our country as well.

Some people are happy with a cleaner atmosphere, being aware at the same time that a 'saved' fir tree in the construction area in the middle of the town is not seen as a separate nature element, but as a concept of each place's becoming. The care for nature is not that big in other parts of the world as this fact would at least lead to discontent.



Fig. 3. Down Town, Seattle



Fig. 4. Public Library, Seattle

But more than that, the wish to feel *the green* everywhere, has led to innovative solutions. One of the public library halls in Seattle is 'warmed' by a huge carpet which gives you the sensation that the bookshelves are in the garden of a house (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Seattle, The public library, study hall

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The West Coast of the United States is more different from the East Coast. The population is smaller and the urban zones do not make themselves known by sky scrapers. Seattle, the capital of state Washington has a single higher building,

Columbia Tower, which is also the highest building on the West Coast side. (fig. 3, fig. 4). Seattle has such a spectacular natural positioning, so that a radical architectural concept appears to be too much in rapport with the natural ambient. The geometrical skyscrapers are perfectly combined with nature. You could even say that they have been built in order to complete the richness of the landscape and not the other way. But vegetation is part of the ambient, as much as an art object. Where there is no place for the nature's elements, the mirroring help to multiply them (fig. 6, fig. 7).



Fig. 6. Public Library, Seattle



Fig. 7. Macy's Commercial Centre, Seattle

A remarkable element is offered by the footbridges built between the buildings and on different floors and which also connect the streets (fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Footbridge, Seattle

On the other hand, American architecture has nothing cold or impersonal, even if the materials used could deny this thing. Glass and steel, alternations between brown, grey and blue colours, natural light which exploited to the maximum, everything is combined with the warm green colour of the ornamental plants. These are strategically placed and emphasize the value of spaces. The mirroring is searched even if the appearances can be hazardous (fig. 9). What can be seen in a mirror is not accidental, it has first of all the role of leading the sight, of informing and last but not least of creating aesthetic pleasure (fig. 10, fig. 11).



Fig. 9. Mirroring, Public library, Seattle



Fig. 10. Cafe, Bellevue



Fig. 11. Business centre, Seattle

We find innovative solutions for capturing the light in the public space as well as in the private one. The light spots replace the artificial light where it is possible, being welcome from an economic point of view too. The climate also allows this artificial zone, the roofs having to stand large quantities of snow.

The building from downtown of an American town develop- as we said before- more lengthwise, while the inhabiting spaces, whether they are private houses, or buildings centres, having at least a few storeys. You could say that after eight or ten hours of work without touching the ground, even more than that, being quite far from it, you could only wish for the lawn in your garden or even your balcony (fig. 12). Reading a book or relaxing in the middle of nature start being preferred by people, matching the technology available anytime and almost anywhere.

There are a lot of inhabiting spaces in the United States where the owners have given up on TV or computer just because they want a space which is truly private. But only 5 % of the population is part of this phenomenon. The media culture consumerism is on the top place, being favoured by the advanced technology and being mistaken for the cultural activities, for the reason that it offers information. More than that, the impression left is that the choice of information depends on the will of the consumer (Spellman Catherine, 2003).



Fig. 12. Private house, Seattle

CONCLUSIONS

The America culture is too little obsessed with the imagination's transcendental, metaphysic or anthropological basics and is more interested in the practical results of it. All projects that have been done in the United States, which have as a main target the protection of man and nature are not a novelty.

It is quite a long time since these preoccupations with practical results have existed. An example can be the big programme of interdisciplinary education in the field of urban ecology, initiated by the University of Washington, in year 2002. Its mission is clear: *Improving the Earth's situation by putting into action political factors of decision, researchers, students and citizens from the present generation, learning and using their knowledge about interactions between people and ecological processes in urbanizing the environment.*

The strictness this issue is dealt with proves that the space in which we work and interact with our peers can have a tremendous importance on our evolution in time.

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