

Architecture and Human Identity

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Abstract: Creativity¹ is a capability of humans. The relationship between creativity and architecture is present right from the early stages of the design process, regardless of the scale. It is important to remember that as human beings, we have a need for artistic sustainability in architecture. We take some examples of the architecture images planned and built in the Chinese context. The condition of architecture in China is not a special case to be studied as a phenomenon only part of a national framework, but is an example of a global crisis that fortunately in recent years is changing towards a sensitive redevelopment of architecture. The transformation of the Human thought² is the main driver of new social change which is then reflected through Architecture.

Keywords: Creativity, China, Irrational Thought, Human Birth Theory, Artistic Sustainability

I. INTRODUCTION

ARCHITECTURE AND CREATIVITY

“The story of the human being as a biological organism that is part of the natural world belonging to all plants and animals that, however, can have and has a different dimension that you have called vitality. Vitality that has the ability to emerge and even defeat the natural aggressions (...) of conflict between species. For realisation of a mind that achieves the verbal language, achieves the ability to write in silence that no other being, outside of human, has. That possibility to make a line and, therefore, create drawings, create architecture and create writings that should have the ability to succeed at recounting this invisible and supposedly unknowable world. here is the word ‘unknowable’ in front of which I have always rebelled.....”³ Architecture is a movement because it is the return in terms of artistic experiences of life, the images of the colors and lines of human existence. Speaking of movement I am not referring to the physical movement in space, but the psychic movement of the human being and the specifically human capacity to create artistic images and exercise the irrational thought. Architecture is art where the concept of movement can be transform in space.

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¹ These arguments about human identity are related to the scientific discoveries and theories presented by Italian psychiatrist Massimo Fagioli. This publication is a summary of a research Performed for Urban Affairs Association Conference, March 2014, San Antonio, Texas. U.S.A. Written for MPTF Conference October 2012 Suzhou China

² Human Birth Theory”, M. Fagioli; www.lasinodoroedizioni.it, “

³ www.Mawivideo.it Fagioli, M.: Academic years from 2002 to 2012, University of Chieti. Psychology.; Fagioli, M., “Left 2010” Book Signing, Bookshop Ibs, 17/01/2014, Florence.

Fagioli, M. (ed.): 1996, *The Courage of Images*, N.E.R., Rome. 2010.; *Death instinct and knowledge - excerpts*, L'Asino d'oro Edizioni, Rome.

There aren't many words to describe the surprise that you have to realize an architectural work perhaps only the completeness of a walk in a final architectural can explain this realization of the architect who is called creativity applied to space. But the creative process in architecture is a step really important for the result quality. Architecture, as art and a place where humanity discovers and conducts life experiences and as a discipline of construction, must meet human requirements and cannot be a self-referential exercise for the artist. Architecture cannot be a self-referential exercise because it is an art form that transforms the physical environment using irrational thought as psychic movement that is specifically human and instead differs from the instinct of animals.



Figure 2. Buonarroti, M., Prisoners, 1525-30; Rodin, A., Cupis and Psyche, 1905; Braque, G - La Roche Guyon, 1909.

"Non-finito" concept in art is an intuition of the artist to represent a fourth dimension of human feeling that is useful to introduce the concept of artistic sustainability also in Architecture. From Michelangelo to Rodin as the unfinished modern theme anticipates the work of many artists of the Avant-gardes of the twentieth century. The historical Avant-garde of the early twenty century gave to architecture the shape's movement by changing the architectural box in the images that was no longer defined by the illuministic geometry and decorative stratification but by a movement frozen in the form of buildings.

Michelangelo's Prisoners are the door to a modernity that speaks of irrational thoughts leaving to the intuition the solitary passion of these men captured in stone. I've referred to the sculpture of Michelangelo Buonarroti in order to explain the concept of artistic sustainability in Architecture. Prisoners Seeming in their nature to be foreshadowing, the stone men are more liberated by their own timeless existence than by whatever contemporary masterpiece they were meant to depict. That feeling that is felt standing before a masterpiece that, although classic and known, appears incredibly modern, touching our emotions intensely. Those faces and those powerful curves of the body have in themselves a universal quality that exists outside of time but is a human universality of emotion.

Following the history of architecture the representation of psychic movement⁴ in the art of Post-Modern architecture is displayed as an aggregation of decomposed elements, which represent the categories of thought. The philosophical Post-Modernism has destabilized the relationship between human beings and the reality, relating it to our conscious cultural structures and the conceptual metamorphosis of the art movement of the twentieth century. The concept of national identity does not describe the complexity of human identity which is evident in the Avant-garde experimentations before the beginning of the modern architectural movement. The process of separating of the modern movement from its relationship with the genius loci is leading architectural practice toward international contextualization in relation to the ⁵Zeitgeist. The architectural space in the achievements of Deconstructivism is displaced from the perception and the result is the representation of chaos, the architecture of a representation in internal chaos. In the Deconstructivist philosophy a human identity can not be read or represented except as inconsistency between reason and sensibility. The concept of doubt as attitude in relation to reality reinforces the mistaken belief as philosophical trend of thought that as humans we are not able to grasp reality in its entirety because the meaning changes according to our culturally acquired superstructures. Consequently, the fragmentation and dislocation movement is a key architectural representation of the loss of touch with reality. Clearly confusing Man's ability to create images from irrational thought as the capacity to imagine, typical of the human species. In architecture in the last twenty years, this has meant the transition from Deconstructivism, influenced by the theories of Jacques Derrida, to the Parametric Architecture, using as a content the tool of the computer language. In relation to this the condition of architecture in China is not a special case to be studied as a phenomenon only part of a national framework, but is an example of a global crisis of thought that follows the changes mentioned here. While in the European territory two trends prevail: the New Rationalism and Parametric Architecture, those trends in China are combining with tradition in a process finding a new identity, typical of Post-Modernism. The Topic of nature is emphasize as a meaning of architecture and razionalism is renewed dialogue and filtered with nature as environment and green soustainability.

II. ARTISTIC SUSTAINABILITY

To search, in Architecture, for artistic sustainability is to search in a designed space for a sense of beauty that is endless and reflective, forcing you to see your own beauty and become more yourself. An architectural work, and sometimes a large scale urban masterplan as well, when they have in themselves a universal quality that sheds time it is because they were thought of and conceptualized as creative images and not simply as consequent pragmatic solutions to the problem of housing or the urban organization of the city.

⁴ MPTF Conference- October 2012 Suzhou – XI an Liverpool University, China. Ahui Research: *The irrational in Architecture from the Modern Movement to the Contemporary Scenario*, Speaker Francesca Serri M. Architect.

⁵ Eisenman, Peter, *Architecture and Deconstruction. Lecture. Peter Eisenman in conversation with Peter Engelmann. Febraury 2012*

Architecture is not a need because it is art. If we block it from the beach of necessity and from the boat of functionality, those same emotions that are required from a work of art in order to capture us, to impact us and give us some thing that is not essential to our survival per se, but without which we could not realize our full capacity as human beings. To apply the need of art also in architecture could be a solution for several problems in contemporary cities and for good results in architecture. In order for architecture to arrive in open water, it has to respond to the necessity, embody our human need for artistic sustainability that has been undervalued and overlooked by economic and political logical rationale.

III. CONTEMPORARY CHINA

Architecture cannot be removed from the relationship with the environment and with the human reality of the users of a designed space and the realization of this requirement is essential today in the context of Chinese metropolitan spaces where the architectural landscape has been accelerated as never before. The current architectural landscapes of China, in fact, presents a challenge to the migrant images of architects of all nationalities who, upon arriving in a new architectural culture, face the unfortunate reality of the decreasing awareness pertaining to the importance of the human psyche within the realm of urban creation. The East is in a state of architectural transition parallel to the search for a renewed collective identity, albeit in comparison with the identity of the modern West.

The urban territory of China presents itself as an environment for observation and experimentation in architecture where cultural transformation takes place and the different cultures of the East and the West find new ways to combine. The current period of experimentation and development contributes something new to the already existing architecture in China and this phase of modernity is a new scenario.

The accelerated urban Chinese mutation has changed the face of the ancient China. Most of the historical buildings have disappeared and the recent projects remain conceptually captured in an undefined place between the traditionally inspired and the current architecture trends. Based on the direction in which the cultural transformation seems to be carrying China, future concepts will be a result of a fusing together of world cultures.

This, obviously, also requires taking into account the social and cultural possibility of creative freedom within the architect himself. In order to explain this topic emphasis is placed on the existing relationship between the human psychic dimension in relation with the time and space involved during the birth moment of an architectural concept. These concepts are not only meant to produce functional living spaces or recreational points but also spaces that reinforce all aspects necessary for a fulfilled human existence.

We take an example of New Rationalism in the work of David Chipperfield in Liangzhu Cultural Museum near the city of Hangzhou, but also in the work of Steven Holl in Nanjing Sifang Art Museum. The first building is sculpted

in the form of boxes states the priority of function in a return to a form of architecture influenced by rationality rather than by artistic image. In the second case of the Museum is inserted into a natural environment where the works of many famous of architects are presented. One of Steven Holl's first masterpieces in China challenged Eastern culture by incorporating it into his own signature style of art. He recreates the ancient visions of Chinese art, encapsulating tradition in a modern geometrical design.

As an example of Parametric Architecture combined with Rationalism, there is China Comic and Animation Museum in Hangzhou designed by Mvrdv that combines rationalism with blobbization of the whole, similar to the Galaxy Soho Building in Beijing, designed by Zaha Hadid Architects that is built in a Hutong's area.

In Parametric architecture the architectural theme of the surfaces takes precedence over space and apparently we are faced with a captivating view of the research in the formal freedom that new technologies allow. Instead, I believe, be it of a lack, namely a strong annulment of research on the irrational, the human is being defined as an organic controllable entity. While the human being is distinguishable by its ability to imagine and by the original capacity of each to have an identity characterized by the complementary nature between its rational thought and irrational thought, Man can not be reduced to an organic matrix. In the architecture of topologization there has been a return to the image of nature in order to regain the organic line and again to borrow the shape in the icon referring to the flowing lines of marine organisms and cell aggregation in re-establishing a correlation between organic and architectural box as complementary structures.

In summary, the introduction of computer technology to the parametric iconography would result in a lull in the architectural landscape, which is disuse of the unconscious non-oneiric image in architecture. This reappropriation of natural forms in Parametric Architecture is implemented as if there were a loss of psychic movement transferred from the artist to the artistic object. Differently, for example, in the Art Nouveau of Guimard and Horta and the mesmerizing lines of Mackintosh, or the formal synthesis of J.M. Olbrich, where the nature had been represented in architecture by recreating its image without imitation or exact reproduction. Within their work the iconic elements representing figure within the plant and animal world were recognizable, but in some ways the author's imagination have made it through the creative play of form, birthing an architectural image in the new sense and content. Another example of the potential uses of nature can be seen in the style of Xieyi Eccentrics Painters of Yangzhou in the 1600's who exceeded using figure reproduction and the signs of nature in their artistic depictions, against all academic tradition, were vague and unfinished though uniquely representative of their creators. I appreciate this image because it truly explains the concept of immense nature in China and its influence in society. Also, works by Xieyi Eccentrics Painters are the inspiration behind several famous works by Mad Architects.



Figure 3 Beijing Architecture, Olympic Games, 2008, China

The 2008 Olympic Games were an invitation to a new relationship with the West. The Bird's Nest Stadium by Herzog and De Meuron, the National Grand Theater of China by Paul Andreu and the Headquarter of CCTV were the crystallizations of an architecture made by collaboration between Western architects and Chinese teams of workers. The Dalian Museum by Coop Himmelblau's and the Guangzhou Opera House by Zaha Hadid Architects are examples of works that aim to re-invent the image of cities that have suffered from urban sprawl in previous years.



Figure 4 China Pavillion, Shanghai Expo: Better City better Life, 2010, Shanghai; Xi An Cun, Xiamen district, Old Houses, 2011, Fujian; Ningbo Museum designed by Wang Shu, 2008, Ningbo.

The works under construction or design in our contemporary China, and in the Asian context in general, are being carried out for the most part by Chinese architectural firms. Many of these architects have had a university education in the West, as in the firm of Mad Architects. In the context of China, as in internationally, architecture has now been converted into Morpho-Tectonic Architecture or Parametric Architecture but still finds moments of poetry such as in the projects of Mad Architects for the conversion of residential Hutong in Beijing. In the Hutong Bubble is still the 'utopia of the horizontal city on a human scale of nature conceived not topologically, but physically and poetically with links between human activities and architectural experimentation. The poetry of the bubbles is also transferred into the idea of the sustainable and green vertical city in the project for the Urban Forest Tower by the same Mad Architects. Recently at the 2013 Shanghai Biennale works from 2001 were

exhibited from many Chinese studios that in the last 10 years or more have advanced. The research combines the Western influence with local tradition.

However, to explain the context in Chinese architecture we refer principally to the works of 2012 Pritzker Prize-winning architect Wang Shu whom, I think more than any other, represents the state of architecture in China through his research on the tradition and the cultural relationship with the West. Such as in his work on the Museum of Ningbo, the poetic use of materials and construction techniques are part of an important conservative awareness of a valuable cultural heritage.

His is a passionate vision that reminds me of the important work of Liang Si Cheng and his wife Lin Huiyin. Architects and researchers, the two studied in America less than a century ago and were pioneers of cultural exchange in architecture between China and the West. They devoted their lives to the inventory and cataloguing of the immense architectural works scattered throughout China. During the Cultural Revolution they, though unsuccessfully, opposed the destruction of the ancient city of Beijing. In Wang Shu's Museum of Ningbo the form itself has a dividing line in the visible surface of the towers of the museum. One that is defined by the usage of reinforced concrete and contrasting recycled brick, of which there are 40 types. Symbolically, it is an oblique line between modernity and the past that reveals the complexity of the moment. I think his work is very important because it saves the language of tradition within the contemporary.

The traditions of ancient Chinese architecture and art are infused with the new European technology and are applied and thus incorporated into the creation of his new architecture. The search for original identity manifests in an attempt to recover a historical tradition in architecture. His work includes the acquisition of techniques and languages that, even in belonging to the past, he has reviewed with a postmodern approach.

Wang Shu architecture declares contamination with tradition and is accomplished in parallel with the recovery of the tradition itself which Chinese institutions now promote. However, I think it is possible to create original architecture that proposes new images separate from tradition and not subject to topological "blobization". Namely, an architecture that, parallel to the Chinese modern economic model, links to the idea of collectivity and that is separate from religious thought control. One that can, in some way, recover the relationship with irrational thought and, in forming part of the collective identity, can understand and respond to the depth of human requirements once the contingency of basic needs has been overcome.

Architecture in the Chinese territorial context can find its own new language through the phases of hybridization of concepts from the West and East that have already succeeded in bringing mutual cultural wealth to both. Essentially, I think there will be images that speak of a new identity in architecture separate from the mother tradition and the topologization of the image when the collective common ground allows for individual growth.

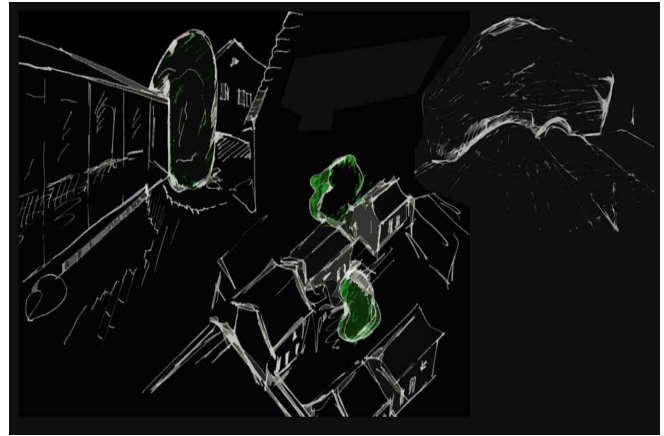


Figure 5 Serri.F, Drawings, Beijing Hutong Bubble, Mad Architects, 2009

The works of some Chinese architects, selected from of Shanghai in the exhibition held at the 2013 Shanghai Biennial, confirm current research and tell of recovering architecture that respects the most poetic tradition allowing us to go beyond the need, however, of a national architecture. Most of works presented refer to a conceptual art widely speaking of a merger between Western and Eastern art, revisiting the original idea of the individual identity that exists beyond national affiliation. The transition from the first to the second urbanization of this century in China involved urban centers of territorial dimensions smaller than the main metropolises. The result was also the change in the scale of intervention. It did the transition from a high-impact iconographic architecture, intended to represent the economic power of China, to urban interventions that cover large areas still under design and definition.

The masterplans are placed in a well-defined government program that will engage the architects for the next thirty years. In which time the Chinese government will respond to the needs of its population and thus more and more of the population will be diverted from the countryside's and into the cities in order to accommodate the migrants and urbanize newly developed areas. Both the Ghost City of Ordos in inner Mongolia and the city of Xiamen are emblematic of this. For example, in 1842 the City of Xiamen, as Shanghai, was one of the five ports of the Nanking Treaty, and is now subject to a violent urbanization around the heart of the island city. Around Xiamen Island, in the various districts, have emerged immense housing blocks and office spaces reminiscent of the interventions after the war in Europe, where the planning legislation often allowed abuse and wild urbanization without architectural identity. It is still a large amount of land that lies between Shanghai and Nanjing. For example, a new wave of housing buildings conceived of in series are grouped along the train tracks and suddenly we have the physical impression of a change. A planned immigration from the countryside to the small cities. There are no green spaces designed for humans and the shadow of architecture does not exist. Houses that resemble boxes are raised similar to postwar Europe. Frozen geometry that instead to my eye is revealed as a shapeless monster with know acknowledgement of human identity. An exponential expansion of these clone quarters sprouting from the same plans from which appeared ghost cities of

North China. To understand the roots of this huge operation, the urbanization of the metropolis and the works done by European architects in China must both be understood. This third urbanization differs from its predecessors because it involves, more than ever before, the middle class population of China instead of solely the poor, suggesting the possibility of a new lifestyle.

Figure 6 Xiamen Island Architecture, 2011, Fujian.



Figure 7 Serri.F, Collective Identity, Shanghai, Nanjing, 2009-2014, China

This use of planning tools is totally separated from the relationship with the human identity of irrational thought in architecture. The alibi is that this is the answer to the need for a population of migrants from the countryside and from other cities who move to seek a new quality of life in eastern China where there are more job opportunities. In one of the districts of Xiamen, called Xi An Cui, which until a few years ago was a rural area, old houses, bearing the uncanny mark of tradition, are surrounded by newer buildings that lack architectural identity. In my own experience, one example of the contradiction between rural life and new modern life conditions presented itself as I walked the streets of Xiamen and was able to encounter a dentist who's practice was located right there on the road. This and a series of other incongruent activities displays the modifications of architecture and the contradictions of China. The coexistence of tradition and modernity, as in any society, require a deeper reflection, but makes me appreciate the same true collective dimension that I found on the streets of Beijing in one of the districts where Hutongs still stand. While in Europe the issue of common ground in the design of architecture is an achievement of the Modern Movement and bearing in mind the research of the Deutscher Werkbund in Stuttgart of 1927. However, in China, the common ground is the collective identity upon which the very identity of the country and the ancient civil architecture unequivocally speak of this cultural baggage. From Siheyuan Houses in Beijing to the Tulou collective houses in Fujian we can see the idea of common sharing spaces centuries ahead of the trends of European cohousing. In the case of architecture for housing Steven Holl's Linked Hybrid in Beijing is noticeable.

The Linked Hybrid has of the movement of the painting The Dance of Matisse of 1909: the housing boxes of the entire complex are seduced by less rigid lines and less rational and more human are those lines in the air passages and internal joints between container and tape. The ribbon which passes through all in all the static nature of architectural boxes, is a successful intervention in the context in which it is inserted. Despite the scale of the

intervention it is possible to read its dynamic complexity. Also the technological sustainability of the project, including the environmental suite, gives it an added value.



Figure 8 Nanjing Fujian Tulou; "Xin an Cun", Xiamen distric, Houses; Hadid. Z, Guangzhou Opera House, Guangzhou; China

IV. Conclusions

I hadn't yet been able to see the modification of the urban context so quickly expressed and I supposed that the hybridization that is now ongoing between the East and the West in its third phase will find a new way to express images in architecture that finally will permeate the global context. As a result of these considerations, to understand the contemporary context, I tried to represent the Chinese Architecture of the third Westernization, the architecture of the Cultural Transformation, as an experimental synthesis of a long process of cultural exchange. The new perhaps is another step in the slow process of transformation of society. This synthesis, and the resulting human transformation, always potentially present in the multicultural society, emerges as unique and original in the architectural realm. But at the same time I am fully convinced that this architecture has been planned and built in the Chinese context. Perhaps, generally all societies in rapid transformation have not, in all instances, met the needs and demands of functionality and normal economic dictates, but must simultaneously provided a response to the specific human need of the not-useful. I hope that architects achieve results that not only amplify the rational aspects of architecture, but equally useful aspects that enhance the artistic and perhaps future upcoming projects, even by many Chinese architects. Training will bring us back to the European concept of creativity in architecture resulting in millennial dynamics of the encounter between civilizations. Travelling along the roads of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and other minor cities affected by the second urbanization, I experienced the sense of change and contrast is strong in the recovery of history, giving a new look to the erased culture. Excitement, curiosity and tension concerning change sensed in those streets and among the people lead us to hope that the cultural transformation in place in their society will lead to originality in architecture. We can only hope that the great works that have given a hybrid face to architecture in China between the East and the West, as the simultaneous synthesis of a process that has branched over time, can unite their iconographic power representative of new architecture that proposes original images created for human beings.

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