Poetical Intrinsic Consciousness in Contemporary Cultural Architecture

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Abstract. The intangible is one of the most thought about fundamental architectural themes, but unlike visible, palpable topics relying on function, structure or materials, the ineffable presence only sometimes generated by architectural space will always be a collective informational void that can only be holistically explored through theories and visions of poetics, psychology, literature, history, etc. The justification of architecture itself, its spatial consciousness, its temporality, its integrity and its presence can become - only in profoundly authentic and sincere spaces - the native language of architecture itself, beyond the aesthetic, structural, functional, material, environmental or light vocabulary, eventually generating together with them, the very life of a building. This, experimented by the human factor, as a product of the interaction of the aforementioned dynamics, can create an architectural experience, beyond a building. From Antiquity until today, sight has been considered the noblest of senses - from expressing certainty to the correlation with primary elements (fire, light, etc.), to symbolic form, approximating the intellect, the metaphorical, the immaterial. Given that man has therefore transcended the visual through a synesthetic collaboration between all senses and emotion or imagination, we are interested in experimenting spaces that use and exploit numerous senses, as well as their actual inner void and intrinsic spatial consciousness. We aim to use the analysis and a personal research project in order to generate a theoretical equation or an expression of dialogue between theoretical spatial poetry and the actual practice in contemporary spaces. In the current evolutionary context that has an explosive crescendo on excessive information, the ever-increasing technology and the pressure of constant innovation, only some of the contemporary functions manage to create spaces that go beyond the visual, through the cumulus of senses, in a dimension in which architecture speaks without words, transforming itself into lyricism and nurturing an inner space of feeling and poetry. Therefore, mostly spaces of meditation and cultural reflexion, remembrance and historical representation, which shelter individual and collective emotions, artistic expressions, creations and beliefs can breed intrinsic spatial and temporal identity. The personal knowledge, acquired by previously designing an interactive experience museum, has generated a strong background in analysing the features and accordingly creating immaterial, poetical space of experimentation and dialogue between the users / visitors and the desired cultural references. Thus, it will be essential in finding the optimal means to obtain an architectural equation or expression in which theory, lyricism, ambient poetry, practice and technology compliment themselves in a harmonious and efficient manner.
1. Introduction

"Architecture has its own realm. It has a special physical relationship with life. I do not think of it primarily as either a message or a symbol, but as an envelope and background for life which goes on in and around it, a sensitive container for the rhythm of footsteps on the floor, for the concentration of work, for the silence of sleep." [1]

The curiosity and occasionally hopeless questioning of what exactly generates quality architectural lieux have characterised most of our first academic years in the architecture faculty. While studying theories of form, space, function, programmatic and volumetric conception, we were also simultaneously introduced to spatial sentient experience, poetics and architectural lyricism. As "architecture cannot become an instrument of mere functionality, bodily comfort and sensory pleasure without losing its existentially meditating task [and] a distinct sense of distance, resistance and tension has to be maintained in relation to programme, function and comfort" [2], an initiatory journey of (self-) discovery may have tangentially characterised our architectural academic study path. Therefore, the realm of the intangible in architecture had become one of our main focuses while becoming aware of Gaston Bachelard, Juhani Pallasmaa, Peter Zumthor, Christopher Alexander (amongst others) characteristic threads of thought. Thus, a third year objective study on own academic architectural projects had raised a question that would become the vertebral column of our experiments regarding intangible features of architectural experience. Based on the idea that "the use of place - which is to say, the way in which the place shares in the world of life - is a complex process, and as such, cannot be reduced to motor behaviour, sensory impression, emotional experience, or logical understanding; rather, it embraces all of these various dimensions" [3], the personal study (conducted during the Poetics course coordinated by V. Gaivoronschi) had raised the question regarding the necessary means of architectural conception for a project, as materialized idea, eventually not only to exist, not only to correctly exist amongst built entities, but to create a dimension of vivid sensory experience and profound spatial consciousness." In conclusion, we consider that only the materialization of a project might suggest possible answers, because the way people feel cannot be anticipated, their sensibility cannot be acknowledged in advance, and most importantly, the irreversible passage of time over the users and a built entity might reveal unimaginable, unanticipated and unknown aspects of their coexistence and relationship." [4]

Although a fundamental architectural topic, the intangible aspect of space is a diaphanous theme, based on a multitude of physical, psychological and sentient factors, that also communicate with the background of the user's preference, state, memory, nature of perception, etc. Therefore, as numerous Julio Bermudez investigations and empirical studies also show, the architectural exceptional is born only once it interacts with people. Thus, although it can be present in the actual language of the built lieu, it only begins to exist while being perceived by the human factor. "The extraordinary in architecture has a double-arrow directionality pointing outwardly and inwardly. The importance of the inward direction may also explain why these phenomenologies are often reported to move beyond architecture into an experience of consciousness (Bermudez 2010a)." [5] Furthermore, while asking about the "phenomenological quality of the [architectural] experience", Bermudez identified "non-intellectual or not-knowledge seeking phenomenology", as results showed rather ethereal characterizations of space, through the following key-words "emotional (70.5%, 76.5%), sensual/perceptual/physical (71%, 50%), timeless (50%, 37%) and pleasurable (41%, 38.5%)." [6] Thereby, beyond theories of form, access apparatus, orientation, light, function, structure or materiality that can generate quantifiable qualitative architectural spaces, the layer of architectural poetics, with an intrinsic vocabulary that speaks towards the human consciousness, can most likely become identifiable or measurable only through direct interaction and present experience.

A contemporary area of program, in which architecture sings without any sound, while rather being the space between the notes than the sounds themselves, and generating an inner space of feeling
refers to mostly spaces of cultural reflexion, remembrance, artistic representation, meditation, etc., which shelter emotions, expressions, memories, creations and beliefs; these kinds of architectural programs can nurture consciousness out- and inwardly.

Therefore, only experimenting with such spaces would generate more insight regarding intrinsic spatial and temporal identities and their impact on their users.

2. Practical architectural study visits

2.1. Guinness Storehouse - Beer Museum
Housed in an old fermentation plant in the heart of Dublin, it is a seven storey sensory mostly visual experience, that culminates with taste. The visitor’s senses are aroused while experiencing the museum, culminating with a taste of the iconic beer. Everything is well thought to gradually excite and prepare.

As you approach the entrance, you feel the tectonic weight of the exterior, that gives no clue of the inside space.

The experience begins at the ground floor, with the welcome space, at the bottom of a large steel and glass structure, that rises through the building - an exciting and dramatic story that oversees hundreds of years of history – from the beginnings, 250 years ago, at the bottom, to nowadays, at the bar at the top.

From here, you enter a space that excites the senses by emphasizing the main ingredients of the beer: water, barley, hops, yeast, presented at an exaggerated scale, a simple tool for great meaning (figures 1, 2). As you walk around these large scale installations with the ingredients: a waterfall curtain, green walls made of hops, projection areas with barley on the floor, your senses elaborate a complex experience. More importantly, you can touch and feel the ingredients, which makes you feel as part of the process – personal.

Figure 1. Visual and tactile installation depicting barley
The visiting route is organized on different levels according to the logic of the cultural experience. Therefore, the 1st floor accommodates production processes, transportation and production of wooden barrels; here, everything is digitalized, but you can enter the barrels and feel the smell. On the 2nd floor, there are the tasting rooms that challenge all senses (aroma room, where you feel vapours of key tastes found in a Guinness). While there is creative advertising on the 3rd floor, the 4th one offers an educational experience through learning how to craft and pour your perfect pint; the experience thus, transforms itself from an experimental, sensory dialogue with the product and its vast history (see temporal spatial identity) into a metric, engaging, participative process based on play. Thus, the emotional ease creates space for commercial purposes on the upper floor, as the 5th one offers diverse food experiences, while keeping the beer as a key ingredient, and the top floor opening itself towards a 360° modern bar. The panoramic view (figure 3) enables a cyclic theme to be introduced, as the climax of the visiting route frames the actual production process and all related annexes, in a revelatory architectural story of passion and wonder towards this cultural local phenomenon.
In conclusion, in an extremely rigid industrial background, metal and brick structure, these simple symbolic, natural elements generate a sensorial experience. Minimal interventions (glass background for text information), large keywords, projections, green barley wall are being used for maximum impact. The museum offers an elegant proposal for how to relate to an existing structure, while not only keeping, but also enhancing its spatial and temporal significance. Here, everything has its own meaning – the airy approach that utilizes minimal, lightweight, independent interventions, enables you to still feel the visual load of the existing structure and the weight of its "age".

„Each ingredient is special in its own right, but when mixed together, the result is simply extraordinary” – the quote exhibited in the museum applies to the museum on different scales; while describing the small scale of the beer's ingredients, it can refer to the spatial sensory experience as well.

2.2. Kolumba Art Museum
Emerging from the existing site and building, a late-Gothic church, the art museum that accommodates the Roman Catholic Archdiocese's art collection, is a remarkable example of site integration and dialogue between the old and the new structures. They sensitively communicate although their languages differ, while also complementing each other (figure 4).

![Figure 4. Exterior dialogue between the existing and the proposed facades](image)

The access apparatus, the interior design and the proposed visiting path are based on objective elegance, as they do not intervene in the exhibition; furthermore, the visitor only creates a visual dialogue with the exhibits. The minimalistic rooms with large light accents only house few pieces of art; however, the fact that the entire construction is thoroughly designed with all details (see door handles, door frames, lamps, etc.) in an elegant, yet restrained manner, generates the sensation that the building itself is a piece of art. The distance it emits through minimalism, rough materials and large rooms and windows that are thrown out of the human scale, towards its visitors and towards its own exhibits, generate a contemplative, yet objective, unininvolved feeling. It transmits respect.

Therefore, as opposed to the first visit, Peter Zumthor's designed project, is based on the ability of the building to share a temperate interior atmosphere in order to sensitively "frame" the valuable
pieces of art, rather than relying on directions, dynamic movement through space that comes with an experimental, interactive, playful museum experience.

The serious feel becomes pure wonder as you enter the excavations hall (figure 5), which is the most intimate space for the two structures and textures to come together under the guidance of textured light. In an architectural braiding of Gothic and contemporary languages, this museum's key point represents its own transformation into a true work of art.

Figure 5. Interior dialogue between the existing and the proposed materials

3. A practical proposed implementation of an experience museum
As the selected study visits were based on the idea of experimenting with special architectural atmospheres that inspire and, although through intangible vocabulary, emit a vivid sense of space that can be felt, the study themes included the access apparatus, an emphasis on the existing structure while having a peaceful dialogue with the proposed one, light versus dark spaces, tall versus short ones, textures, route types and directions, materials and their sounds, types of connection to the exhibit, sensations, atmosphere. The characteristics of the visited spaces had, therefore, become a research background for a practical proposal of our own, which wished to take all these factors into consideration, in an attempt to create qualitative meaningful spaces that would honour the history of the exhibited product and its story.

Imagining thus, a tour through the oldest beer factory in Romania.

As a participating team in this contest proposed by the "Timisoreana" Beer Company, we imagined a rather initiatory journey, in which one would begin with the indoor museum area, then continue outside with the production and assembly areas, only to finish the tour in the restaurant area – an interior / exterior play, that entices and inspires (figure 6). While the more personal historical area was thoroughly imagined and designed within an existing building, the more pragmatic production area was marked by scattered interventions: identical structures placed in key points, in order for the viewer to take a sneak peak at significant production points.
Therefore, the proposed museum area consisted of two adjacent buildings, one vertical, the other horizontal, with multiple connexion possibilities – one underground, at the entrance level, the other at the top floors, in the exhibition area (figure 7). Some of them were physical, some were only visual. Also, the vibration of these two spaces was different: whereas one was dark and mysterious, the other one was open and airy.

While starting the initiatory tour within the courtyard of the existing historical ensemble of factories and production annexes, the only visible intervention from the outside in this well-crafted story was the access area, an elegant metallic fold on the floor, which described a descending direction - both theoretical and practical -, that welcomed and incited, while honouring the meaningful existing built. Thus, the proposed access was a focal point in itself, an instrument designed to immerse the visitors into a poetical realm of experimental, metaphorically heavy space and intrinsic historical consciousness. As the visitors entered, they would find a welcoming space, defined by light, shadow and texture: a brick wall and a metallic cantilever sheet would guide or invite to pause and touch, while a textured strip in the pavement would playfully indicate towards the continuity of the experimental path (figure 8).
Figure 8. Proposed types of access: subtle over-ground metallic fold and sensory underground welcoming area

Another defining area of the project was the monumental metallic elevator. If the access area was minimalistic, the adjacent elevator space would become an intriguing awe-inspiring factor of the project, the link that gave coherence and a unique dimension to the project and the visiting route. Visible only after a short stay in the welcoming area, it took the visitor in a historical journey – with a twist. Therefore, from the horizontal access space, the visitor was taken to a vertical one, the old existing furnace, in which we proposed a dynamic platform that would guide visitors through key events while openly and slowly gliding towards the upper level, and while introducing the visitors to the museum space as we knew it, at the same time. This element metaphorically represented a bridge between know-nothing first-time guest and connoisseur. As the visitors acceded on the platform, it slowly moved upwards, from darkness to light, bearing them through key projections about the company's rich history and their key moments in time. As they would reach the top, they would continue the tour in a wash of light, an opposite image than in the underground spaces, where light had been only used to give and underline information (figure 9).

Figure 9. Interior open elevator with successive historical projections and the metaphorical ascent towards the lighted cupola
Forwards, the more horizontal wing of the existing building offered a totally different perception of information, as the way in which the visitors’ movement was slowed down through a walk on a complex ramp that slid through the generous space. This gave them controlled views of the displayed items, a direct relationship present only in those spaces.

Thus, an important feature in the design process was to give the guest plenty of different interactions with the displayed items: hands on in the exhibition rooms, vertical and visual 360° in the elevator area, organic and directional visual in the horizontal wing.

Regarding the structural interventions, in order to underline the beauty of the existing historical building, we proposed a tangent self-bearing structure in the elevator area and minimal key interventions for information and tour purposes.

The predefined structures that penetrated the working halls - the last part of the tour, that emphasized the production processes, thus slowly reintroducing the visitors to physical and intellectual phenomena rather than emotional -, had the ability to give a subtle glimpse into the actual production process. While experiencing the used means of production throughout all historical key points, the guests would exit the existing exhibition buildings, come into the natural light(ness) again, while having gained significantly more knowledge about the history of the "Timisoreana" Beer.

They would then visit the present factory and operations, this time, while not being involved in the actual process, but only subtly witnessing the professional process from above, on elegant metallic, airy structures that we proposed to "parasite" the industrial buildings.

As the tour would reach its end, the circular initiatory journey would find its finale while getting a last glimpse of the historical building the visitors had first been introduced to. The finish would bring the theme of play in place, in order for the tour to reach its ease, by offering beer tastings and ludic gastronomic experiences.

4. Conclusions

Architectural poetics and interior consciousness is a profound subject matter to study as it involves environmental, behavioural, physical, spiritual, temporal, etc. phenomena, in an architectural world rather focused on practical features.

While experimenting with existing contemporary cultural spaces and identifying their lyrical characteristics and bonds towards the past, we are interested in taking the study of the cultural intangible in architecture further, in an attempt to blur the existing lines between practice and poetry. While implementing some of the expressions we identified through the research into the design of the "Timisoreana" experience museum, a small step has been made into our personal study. However, as this subject matter needs thorough holistic investigation, the bond between lyrical and practical architecture still remains a fascinating open question.

Acknowledgements

We are particularly grateful for the assistance given by our coordinators, who initiated the project and directed us throughout the designing process of the "Timisoreana" experience museum - Bogdan Demetrescu, Adina Szitar and Cornel Farcas.

As members of a larger team, we would also like to thank our colleagues for their collaboration, constant inspiration and friendship - Ioana Hariga, Adrian Mihai, Ovidiu Mihutescu, Radu Dorgo.
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