A Study on the Expressional Characteristics of a Spectacle
on a Contemporary Architectural Surface

-Focus on Commodification of Architecture and Urban Landscape-

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Abstract

The concept of a spectacle as an element of urban landscape is demonstrated by the relationship between the idea of sensible urban experiences and the surface of architecture. The face of architecture can go beyond visual experiences and create surfaces that communicate images by expressing a spectacle. In other words, the installations and surface finishes of architecture make it possible for us to use architecture as a tool for experiential marketing. This study was conducted in order to understand the spectacle phenomenologically as a means of expression in urban consumer space that constantly changes according to the development of the media in urban consumer spaces, and according to the changes of visual perception. In addition, the spectacle is seen as a surface element of architecture that creates urban landscapes. The purpose of this study is to examine how rhetorical expressions of spectacles are used as strategic tools to merchandize architecture as a component of urban landscapes. In conclusion, the authors discuss what roles spectacles play in consumer spaces in order to determine the representative characteristics of surfaces in an attempt to understand architectural surfaces of contemporary urban landscapes as a phenomenon of perceptive communication.

Keywords: spectacle; surface; perception; urban landscape; commodification

1. Introduction

The emergence of new visual technologies, the development of cities, and the creation of consumer spaces since the 19th Century has greatly changed human visual and perceptive experiences. Express transportations, such as trains and personal vehicles, have considerably changed our sense of speed, space and time. The visual information experienced while traveling at high speeds has encouraged humans, who have a limited capacity for accepting new images, to concentrate on superficial images of expanded visual ranges. In particular, consumer spaces are manipulated according to intention and purpose, and the importance of visuality is emphasized to capture the constant movements of consumers.

With the acceleration of industrialization, consumer spaces have developed beyond their original economic purpose of selling and exchanging goods, into entertainment spaces that offer indirect experiences of product images. Today, they are sensible environments that provide the public with the desires of visual consumption.

The relationship between objects, goods, and images forms circulatory links in the capitalistic consumer culture, manipulating and encouraging that culture while creating the images of the urban landscape.¹

The images within a city are expressed in various forms and methods through the media. These images accelerate the accumulation of excess information and the production of stimulating images for entertainment needs. The development of the media has changed the way images are created and perceived, and therefore has created for humanity a new relationship between senses and experiences.

The expression of these phenomena can be re-defined as spectacles, which are landscapes and elements that can be viewed and observed. As the elements of landscapes for experiential stimulation, spectacles provide objects to be seen and from which the sense of vision can be expanded into other senses to induce a mutual reaction between the perception of humanity and the environment.

The expressive elements of spectacles represent the characteristics of buildings in a city and are recognized as characterized images. When the surface of architecture is perceived as the most basic element of an urban landscape, we understand the importance

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of the surfaces of urban architecture and expand our interest in superficial images into the technique of packaging. An urban landscape is thereby designed using the surfaces of objects.

The composition of architectural surfaces has represented the functional and commercial needs of technology and structure, as well as the socio-cultural needs of the community. The face of architecture can go beyond visual experiences, and surfaces can be created that communicate images by expressing spectacles in consumer spaces.

In other words, the installations, compositions and surface finishes of architecture make it possible for us to mediate architecture as a tool of experiential marketing in urban consumer spaces.

The purpose of this study is to examine how rhetorical expressions of spectacles are used as strategic tools to merchandize architecture and as components of urban landscapes, and to examine what roles spectacles play in consumer spaces in order to determine the expressive characteristics of surfaces. The objective is to thereby understand the urban landscape of contemporary consumer spaces as a phenomenon of perceptive communication which mediates the existential relationship between human and urban consumer spaces.

To understand spectacles in urban consumer spaces, the following steps were taken in this study: first, an attempt is made to understand the effects of the transition to consumer society on the characteristics of urban spaces; second, a study is carried out on the expansion of human senses resulting from the development and influence of the media and changes in experiences in the physical environment of urban landscapes; third, an attempt is made to understand the concepts and characteristics of spectacles from 19th century to contemporary urban consumer spaces and to describe the changes that have occurred in the surface expressions of architecture in relationship to perceptive experiences. Through these steps, an attempt is made to understand how architectural surfaces work as commodities that create the urban landscape. It can then be demonstrated that the surface of architecture stimulates the sensible experience of human perception.

Through the above steps, this study defined the expanded concept of spectacles as an element of urban landscape by discussing the relationship between the popular theme of sensible urban experiences and the surface of architecture that delivers these experiences in contemporary urban consumer space.

2. Extent of Perception in Urban Consumer Space

2.1 Urban landscape in consuming culture

Urban consumer spaces emerged in the early 19th Century. Benjamin referred to the Arcade Project in Paris, representing the origin of modern capitalist society, as the beginning of the development of consumer spaces (See Fig.1). The Arcade can be used to commercialize urban landscape through exhibit products, glass windows and Flâneur. More importantly, stunned at the resonance between the surprising diversity of products, attention is given to the multisensory atmosphere and its 'tactile perception'.

Later, the growth of department stores, large shopping malls, and urban commercial spaces, and the division of time into working time and leisure time encouraged the growth of the city as a consumer space. The acceleration of capitalist development over the world and the urban transition into consumer spaces has since created evolving images of Contemporary urban landscapes. The common contemporary statement, "I consume; thus, I exist," expresses the sociological representation of modern humanity as the consumer or as the subject of consumerism. The increased accessibility to globalization along with industrialization, mechanization, and the development of capitalism, driven by the rapid growth of the metropolis, have all changed the style and environment of consumption.

Consumer spaces exist by the convergence of the two somewhat contradictory yet supplementary principles of selection and exclusion since 'possession' implies physical occupation; it is considered an 'exclusive' use of space. This phenomenon is engendered by the privatization of consumer spaces and the characteristics
of consumer spaces then become an element of the landscape.

In contemporary cities which are deeply and pervasively affected by the idea of the High-rise city (as implemented by Ludwig Hilberseimer, (1924) (See Fig.2.), and in the Ville Contemporaine (1922) by Le Corbusier) which was based on industrialization, standardization and mass production, show human interaction isolated from human perception through the planning of functional spaces whereby the big picture can no longer be observed and the center of the subject's experience and perception is thereby lost. In contrast, urban consumer spaces have encouraged such experiences by stimulating human vision and perception. Baudrillard named this characteristic the 'consumption of ambience'. Here, 'ambience' refers to the symbol of contemporary consumer space, whereby an individual consumes the symbol of a certain consumer space, such as Times Square, New York (See Fig.3.).

Additionally, architectural images that form the surfaces of urban landscapes respond to the changes occurring in technical, social, and cultural contexts and attract the viewer's visual attention by providing vibrant scenes for superficial visual experiences. As consumer spaces do not occur naturally, but are organized with specific intentions and purposes, they are strongly related to the tendency and strategy to expose and advertise themselves.

Because the surfaces in urban consumer landscapes must capture our visual attention in a very short space of time, images are concentrated in the forefront of the space. Similarly to the aim of the appearance of marketed products, building surfaces are designed to make distinguished impressions on people, to be communicated by people, to attract people's visual sense, to make a long-lasting memorable impression, and to stimulate the desire to consume.

2.2 Change of Perception

The paradigm of perspective, which had been the leading visual style of the West since the 15th Century, has been modified since the 19th Century by the multiplicity of perspectives, the emergence of the new media, changes in the relationship between subject and object, the invention of new optical equipment, and the development of visual technologies (See Fig.4.). The emergence of optical tools such as the panorama, the diorama, and the magic ball, and the technology of the continuous shooting of images and motion pictures have enabled a completely different perception of visual experiences.

This character is particularly demonstrated in the 'liquefied stare' phenomenon of 19th century urban consumer spaces, where arcades and department stores enable panoramic visual expressions to emanate from consumer spaces. Spaces filled with visually stimulating images such as the front surfaces of buildings and stores, displayed products, street advertisements, and store signs, provide fleeting, coincidental, and fragmented elements that create distracting and dispersed experiences. The experience of compressed time and space in a city or the panoramic views of a city often result in viewers losing their central, privileged positions.

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The development of new media and technologies accelerated the experience of 19th Century consumer spaces, while the aesthetics of today's consumer culture reinforce immediate sensible/physical stimulations such as a jolt, a shock, surprise, instant immersion, etc.

In the contemporary urban landscape, the new visual media, (such as TV, CF, Internet, and video games), the liquefied stare, and the acceleration of speed have exceedingly increased the amount of information and the number of spectacles, causing an overload of perception and senses. Images regenerated by media allow us to perceive the objects we are currently viewing according to our past experiences. Regenerated images are perceived through other senses besides visual perception, and viewing these images can reinforce the experience of past events. This process generates a certain intensity of sensual and compulsive stimulation, concentrates on form and style rather than content, and focuses on isolated, arbitrated, or fantastic images rather than on direct experiences.

Rituality and visual spaces are closely integrated in the experience of the contemporary city in which
we live. Changes that have occurred in the time and space of contemporary urban spaces have altered the nature of our visual experiences. Types of express transportation, such as trains and personal vehicles, have changed our sense of speed and we receive visual information in shortened moments of time, where information that is projected on superficial surfaces of landscapes is perceived as flat images that lack a sense of depth and change instantly. (See Fig.5.)

3. Spectacle in Urban Landscape
3.1 The Concept of Spectacle

The literary definition of spectacle is landscape, something valuable to see, sight, extravagant views, and shows, or simply something visually extravagant. Originating from the Latin *Spectaculum*, the word 'spectacle' originally referred to recreation within the French theater. As the word spectacle implies, it declares the domination of visual appearance and claims that all human or social lives are transiently superficial.

The concept of spectacle as something to see in consumer space was developed in the 19th Century arcade in Paris. The application of perspective in painting recreated the world based on the perspective of the 'viewer', resulting in vision holding a privileged position over any other human senses. Spectacles are vision-centered, straightforward, and sensibly pleasant. They are directly related to fantasy, magic, and special effects as well as vibrant, extroverted rhetorical images of the arcade.

Fig.5. Fremont Street, Las Vegas

The concept of a spectacle integrates and explains a wide variety of external phenomena of consumer society where a cult of commodities has begun to create a commodity fetish.

While in a contemporary urban landscape, the spectacle primarily expresses a colorful image, it inherently maximizes the strategy of using advertising effects to sell, masked by the entertainment provided by the spectacle and the dynamic expressions that attract and entice the viewer. The creation of depthless, superficial images, or the phenomenon of spectacles as aesthetics, is architecturally comprehended and expressed in urban landscapes of consumption. These images sensibly interact with the public and penetrate into the environment in which we live.

Spectacles of contemporary cities are deeply influenced by the idea proposed by Debord in *Society of the Spectacle* (2006). A spectacle is not merely a scene or an object to be viewed, but is controlled by the logic of economy and society. Debord regards a spectacle as an accumulated capital as much as it becomes an image and a social relationship mediated by that image.

In a society governed by spectacles, everything people see becomes a commodity. Splendid creations produced by media technology and unprocessed sceneries of nature transform into unfamiliar and mysterious objects up to the moment they become commodities.

In this respect, Debord insists that a spectacle reflects the production styles and social relationships of its time. A spectacle society reorganizes the society by transforming being into having and appearance into image. However, a spectacle is not merely a group of images, but a social relationship of people mediated by these images (Debord, 2006). Thus, the spectacle should not be thought of as a derivative generated by the technological abuse of excessive visual worlds or images. Rather, it is a worldview that is translated into something substantial and physical.

In contemporary urban spaces, the spectacle is actively engaged with commercialism, and is hidden in an environment that reconfigures urban landscape, where commodity, image and space are integrated.

The spectacle stimulates the desire to consume and also cooperates with urban consumer spaces, which are endlessly regenerated by images of commodities, implying that urban space can be commodified by the spectacle.

3.2 Commodification of the Architectural Surface

The ideology of the consumer society creates diverse expressions targeted at the advanced technology of contemporary society by converging with the
extreme consumption of technological minds. While the movement of modern architecture in the past was developed as part of an elite high class culture including fine art, sculpture, literature, classical music, and other pure art, contemporary architecture more significantly influences fashion, interior design, movies, graphics, advertising, etc. and expresses a consumer culture geared towards the public. Architecture acts as a signboard or a stage in a consumer space and focuses on its own visual effect.

As discussed above, the perceptive creation of architectural surface is used as a medium to promote the components of urban landscape as spectacles (see Fig.6.). Eventually, through the composition of its surface in a consumer space, architecture's role as a product is used as a means of producing images for brand and corporate identities. The abstract composition of surfaces extends the role to that of a sensational advertisement.

An exterior architectural surface not only promotes consumption but is also an object that is consumed. The decorations applied in contemporary architecture are clones that lack motivation, and are a type of sign that lacks inner necessity. This illusion stimulates the desire to consume and maximizes profit for the producers of the consumed objects. The role of architectural surface is not focused on expressing an internal programmatic desire, but is rather focused more on the relation to image formation, product branding, product and company images, and other marketing tools. Tod's Omotesando by Ito Toyo shows surface design as an autonomous element that stimulates people's attention of the brand's image (See Fig.7.). This is not merely the role of communication through the symbolic surface, but goes beyond the visual experience and promotes an understanding of the importance of a sensual experience.

The process of commercialization of architectural surface occurs in consumer spaces that involve consumer action such as selling or buying. This goes beyond promoting the consumption of a product and starts consuming the space itself. The consumer space has a significant difference in quality and stresses aesthetic distinction. Concealing the contradiction of this disparate space, money takes over our desires. As the urban space itself is consumed, it expands the reproduction of production profit. The process of consuming space is not based on the principle needs of a product's functionality, but is controlled by the principle desires of a refined beauty found in department stores and shopping malls in contemporary society. The strategic organization of a city's surface is a view of a spectacle that contains consumable materials, political ideology through social relationship, and the idea of capitalism in the consumer space.

A spectacle is not simple scenery or sight-seeing, but expresses the logic of an entire economic society. In order to assist in the exclusive possession of a spectacle, it successfully possesses the visual while being a symbolic and hypocritical technology that conceals the fact that it simultaneously possesses the visual. It is an image that is mass produced and mass consumed in a conscious space created for a specific purpose. Consumers that use spectacles experience the aesthetic revolution that is unavoidable yet attractive. Inside an aesthetic revolution, it shows its' sensual image and promotes the materialistic character of a product. A sensual marketing strategy is an embodiment of the visual, tactile, and sensual.
and concave glass which create reflective surface effect through time and view of spectators. (see Fig.8.).

A spectacle in contemporary society functions as a major magnification of the commodification or commercialization of design and it satisfies the contemporary needs of depthless images, simulations, and signifiers that focus on capturing new circumstances and expressing the separate appearances of public culture. Because information in a consumer city must capture our attention in a fleeting instant, the delivery of information is concentrated in the forefront of the space. Architectural surfaces in consumer spaces use images to symbolize companies, brands, or products (see Fig.9.).

Images attract the attention of consumers and stimulate image association. Images also create surfaces that are visual stimulations that can appeal to the senses of the general public. The ability of surfaces to convey meaning is maximized and diversified by the technological development of the separation of the surface from the structure, the weakening of functional expressions on programs, the use of building surfaces as means of advertising, liberal expression, and the production of surfaces using digital technologies. Architectural surfaces themselves are created as spectacle canvases or serve as an interface. Therefore, we can see that architectural surfaces are more symbolic visual media that deliver messages than they are parts of a building. We can understand a surface as something that covers or surrounds the building and its design methodology can be altered. By increasing the intensity of visually perceived stimulation on the surface of buildings, we can express strategies and methodologies for visual possession. In particular, form, texture, and color are effectively used to create sensible surfaces that go beyond visual perception.

In today's urban consumer space, surfaces create visual information using language, characters, images, and/or colors and surface compositions using digital media to create active perceptive environments by responding to users' reactions. Galleria Hall West by UN Studio used and programmed an LED disc which creates variable media surfaces (see Fig.10.).

4. Conclusion

The concept of spectacle was examined in this study through the premise that it can be understood as a phenomenological framework for urban consumer space that stimulates a person's consciousness and emotions. From this study, the following conclusions are offered.

First, contemporary urban spaces stress new forms of perceptive experiences through the development of the media and the intervention of time as well as through spectacles operating as forms of sensible and entertaining experiences. Urban surfaces are expressed by a liberal composition of architecture and become tools with which the urban aesthetics of spectacles can be recreated. The surface of a consumer city conveys the image of a city that sells and buys products. As a result, consumer space goes beyond the limitation of a commercial transaction and takes the role of a marketing tool. In other words, we can see the commercialization of architectural surface through the formation of images.

Second, contemporary urban landscape space as a spectacle is a by-product of the social and cultural phenomenon. By re-defining the role of architecture, it contributes to the forming of a relationship with ontology by building an emotional surface that reacts to a person's senses and assists in the integration of humanity and architecture. There is therefore a need to understand the view of the city by experiencing landscape, particularly the phenomenon of the surface, and to carry out research on the new consciousness of spectacles. As the elements of landscapes for experiential stimulation, spectacles provide objects to see and from which the sense of vision can be expanded into other senses to induce a mutual reaction between the perception of humanity and the environment.

Third, the surface of contemporary architecture can be made up of images and diverse characters by changing the different mediums and by the advancement of new technologies. It appeals to the senses through the surface by forming diverse techniques that stimulate the senses through repetitive and positive production to capture consumers' interests.

Furthermore, contemporary consumer space is accelerating the trend of commercialization and creating a sensible architectural surface through image communications.

Notes

Viewing a city as a landscape is a completely different concept than that discussed in other fields of study. Until today, urban planning has been defined by segmented plans, whereas landscape planning has been defined as a comprehensive plan. The urban landscape is the overall view or feel of a city. Regardless of whether there is a building, road, tree, or sign in the background, it
includes everything that constitutes a scene. Gyu-mok Lee, (2002) Korei's Urban Landscape, Yeolhwadang, pp.171-172.

2 Baudelaire, Benjamin and Simmel all take into account the new experiences of modernity in the big cities of the mid to late nineteenth century. Baudelaire focused on Paris of the 1840s and 1950s, which subsequently fascinated Benjamin. Baudelaire's world with its growth of mass culture became the subject of Benjamin's unfinished Passagen-Werk. Simmel's Philosophy of Money, written in the 1890s and published in 1900, also focuses on the experience of strollers and consumers in the new crowded urban spaces of Berlin. Mike Featherstone, (1990) Consumer Culture and Postmodernism Sage Publications Ltd. p.72.

3 Flâneur French term, means a certain type of person who emerged in Paris' arcades in nineteenth century. Flâneur anonymously strolls through the arcades and old-style shopping malls through a corridor between building blocks with triangular glass-roof and distinguished entrances, where various commodities are displayed in display window. Benjamin, Walter. The Flâneur, Charles Baudelaire: A lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, Translated by Harry Zohn, Verso, 1976, p.37.

4 See Benjamin's Essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Illuminations: Essays and Reflections, Edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

5 Baudrillard, J. (1998) The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications. pp.25-27.

6 The human eye is closely related to perception and stares selectively. In other words, not all images captured by our retina are perceived. Selective stare occurs as a result of internal factors such as desire, interest, perspective, personality, memory, and the unconscious and environmental factors that create stimulation. Thus, each of us perceives the same object differently. Soo Yun Lim, (2002) Corporate Image Architecture through Visual Experience and Image Creation, Ehwa Women's University Master's Dissertation. p.7.

7 Walter Benjamin, The Arcade Project, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughin trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London England : The Berkley Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p.32.

8 Paul Virilio explains the concept of Picnolepsie which is defined as a disorder marked by disturbed electrical rhythms of the central nervous system and typically manifested by convulsive attacks usually with clouding of consciousness. He used this term as an analogy for the high speed symptoms of contemporary society. Virilio, P. (1991), The Aesthetics of Disappearance Semiotext.

9 Barnhart, R. (1999) Dictionary of Etymology, Chambers, New York.

10 The arcades owed their existence to the rise of retail trade, particularly the trade in luxury articles, and also to new construction technologies: above all that of iron and glass architecture. This combination of developments gave rise to a new typically nineteenth-century, urban form. Heynen, H. (2000) Architecture and Modernity: A Critique, Cambridge: The MIT Press.

11 De bord, G. (2006) Society of the Spectacle, Oakland: AK Press p.11.

12 John Berger describes an image as a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and is preserved – either for a few moments or a few centuries.

13 Jean Baudrillard mentions that the most interesting aspect of advertising is its disappearance, its dilution as a specific form, or even as a medium. Advertising is no longer a means of communication or of information. Otherwise, it is overtaken by the specific in overdeveloped systems, that of voting for itself at each moment, and thus of parodying itself. If at a given moment, the commodity was its own publicity, today publicity has become its own commodity. And he pointed out that human beings are experiencing the absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising. All original cultural forms, all determined languages are absorbed in advertising because it has no depth, it is instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten. Baudrillard, J. (1998) The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures, Thousand Oaks, Calif.:Sage Publications.

14 In the article, Architecture for Sale(s), Kevin Ervin Kelley discusses his studies conducted over a decade on consumers in retail. In the environments of the past decade, people do not respond to the world as it is or how we, as designers, want it to be, but by their perceptions of it. Calling what his practice creates as "architecture" was quite confusing for all involved, so he redefined the service provided by his practice as "perception design" which serves promote consumerism by using environmental "signaling" that influences human perceptions. Sanders, W. Editor (2005) Commodification and Spectacle in Architecture, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

15 Currently, a number of conditions require us to re-evaluate these previous tools for constructing building expressions. These include a growing number of building types that are "blank". Department stores, shopping malls, cineplexes, libraries, and museums have an undefined relationship between inside and outside. Moussavi, F. (2006) The Function of Ornament, Barcelona : Actar.

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