



The Architecture of Excess

Image Fabrication between Spectacle and Anaesthesia

A Master's Thesis for the Degree *Master of Arts* (Two Years) in
Visual Culture

Andrei Deacu

Spring semester 2012

Supervisor: Anders Michelsen

Title and subtitle:

The Architecture of Excess: Image Fabrication between Spectacle and Anaesthesia

Author: Andrei Deacu

Supervisor: Anders Michelsen

Division of Art History and Visual Studies

Abstract

This thesis explores the interplay between the architectural image and its collective meaning in the contemporary society. It starts from a wonder around the capacity of architectural project The Cloud towers, created by the widely known architectural company MVRDV, to ignite fervent reactions caused by its resemblance to the image of the World Trade Centre Towers exploding.

While questioning the detachment of architectural image from content, the first part of this thesis discusses the changes brought into the image-meaning relation in the spectacle society in postmodernism, using concepts as *simulacra* and *anaesthesia* as key vectors.

In the second part of the thesis, the architectural simulacrum is explored through the cases of Dubai as urbanscape and The Jewish Museum Berlin as monument.

The final part of the thesis concludes while using the case study of The Cloud project, and hints towards the ambivalence of image-content detachment and the possibility of architectural images to become social commentaries.

Table of contents

1. Introduction	
1a. <i>The problem</i>	4
1b. <i>Relevance of the subject</i>	4
1c. <i>Theoretical foundation and structure</i>	5
2. From Spectacle to Anaesthesia	
2a. <i>The Architectural Image as the Expression of Society</i>	7
2b. <i>The Simulacrum</i>	10
2c. <i>Anaesthesia</i>	14
i. <i>Architectural debates</i>	15
ii. <i>New markers of the real</i>	17
3. The Architectural Simulacra	
3a. <i>An excess of architectural signifiers: simulacrum and the environment, Dubai</i>	20
3b. <i>Anaesthetized remembrance : simulacrum and the monument, Berlin, The Jewish Museum</i>	26
4. Conclusion and Case Study	
4a. <i>Transplanting the sing: simulacrum and the building, Seoul, MVRDV's The Cloud</i>	32
4b. <i>Ambivalence in image</i>	37
Bibliography	40
Image Appendix	42

Introduction

a. The problem

This thesis work was inspired by the recent proposal, of the internationally famed Dutch architecture company MVRDV in 2011, of twin towers in Seoul, Korea (see fig.7 in Appendix), which ignited reactions and critique for its similarities to the image of 9/11 attacks on New York's Twin Towers. The fervent responses to this project entitled *The Cloud Tower*, found only as a virtual material through images and data until so far, made me wonder why such a shocking proposal did appear in the first place, and what is the position of architecture now between image and meaning.

I became even more curious as MVRDV is an architectural and urban design company that I consider having an impact on today's practice and trend settings. We may also consider statements as one of popular thinkers such as Žižek concerning the 9/11 incident, as it "released the real into the largely fictive nature of everyday life."¹ Žižek's argument revolves around the idea that the terrorist act was committed for the spectacular effect of it, but it produced a "real" material and emotional damage. Thus the question can be extended into if MVRDV's proposal, by stirring in an intended or unintended manner associations and reactions, are indicative of a new and even more heated era of the society of the spectacle, or point to a crisis of representation of architecture in it.

b. Relevance of the subject

Last decades faced radical changes of society with the emergence of the new informational and communication technologies, giving the visual an outstanding importance over the oral and textual media and changing the way we represent and structure the architectural space. Part of today's cultural construction is largely born out of a collective consensus on images and the meaning they create in the social imaginary. We became so visual, that we no longer see only what's in front of our eyes, but as well through the media that fuels an overload of images. Moreover, the city is not only what we see but also related to cartography, photography, film, virtuality. This places the discussion in a visual culture defined by a never-before

¹ Slavoj Žižek cited in Terry Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2006, p.141

known abundance of images, grounding a reconsideration of Jean Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum through the lens of architecture.

The collective reactions around MVRDV's The Cloud towers are indicative that images have the power to become a social catalyst, steering a collective reaction around their message. Images are freeze frames of what we consider present reality, and they influence our sense of reality². Architecture and the city's image constitute a large amount of these representational forms that guide our daily connection to the real in the urban environment. As the visual gained new complexities in the past decades, it is relevant to investigate how the images influence the collective understanding of meaning embedded in the built environment, directly informing social reactions. Referring to the architectural space, we can consider image and social conditions as a continuous cycle of meaning production and re-production. These permanent exchanges lead to a cultural accumulation of polysemous images, becoming instituted as societal norms. Addressing architecture in this sense, the architectural theorist Peter Eisenman states that architecture is a cultural accumulation that in the public consciousness represents "a structure of reality"³.

c. *Theoretical foundation and structure*

The thesis explores the interplay between image and meaning in contemporary architecture by referring to two driving concepts: Jean Baudrillard's *simulacrum* and Neil Leach's *anaesthesia*. However my argument will start from Guy Debord's standpoint on the social life in relation with representation in the *Society of the Spectacle*⁴. Baudrillard brings to this a new dimension with the discussion of hyper-reality and the four orders of the simulacra. I found further relevant to bring in the discussion Neil Leach's book *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*⁵, where he questions the architectural practice in our age dominated by image and aesthetization. To enlarge the view on architectural image I make use of Hal Foster's provocative book *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)*⁶ that adds a

² M.Christine Boyer cited in Joan Ramon Resina "The Concept of After-Image and the Scopic Apprehension of the City", in Joan Ramon Resina (ed.), Dieter Ingenschay (ed.), *After-Images of the City*, Cornell University Press, 2003, p.9

³ Peter Eisenman "Blue Line Text" in Jan Brand, Han Janselijn (ed), *Architectuur en verbeelding : Architecture and Imagination*, Zwolle : Waanders, 1989, p.47

⁴ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb, Treason Press, Canberra, 2002

⁵ Neil Leach, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture* (translated as: Anestetica. Arhitectura ca anestezic), trans. Catuneanu, Cornelia Mirela, Paideia, Bucharest, 1999

⁶ Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (And Other Diatribes)*, Verso Books, 2002

critical perspective to the development of spectacle-architecture, as well as Terry Smith's *Architecture of the Aftermath*⁷. Joan Ramon Resina and Dieter Ingenschay's book *After-Images of the City*⁸ have also provided me with an insight on architectural representation through its discussions around the instable nature of the urban image.

As I have considered that an exploration of the connection between the architectural image and the reactions it provokes is related to the imaginary in a collective form, I have used Cornelius Castoriadis' notions from the *Radical Imagination and Social Instituting Imaginary*⁹. I have also found important to introduce another dimension of the spectacle, one through the eyes of Georges Bataille, as a possible antidote to anesthesia as, going back to Žižek's statement, we could associate Bataille's view on the vicarious contemplation of violence as the release of the real.

These constitute the theoretical foundation of this thesis, as they are to be found in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 presents two study cases that test the theoretical argument, as I have found them to be relevant examples in stirring collective reactions around their image.

In the first study case I have looked at the city of Dubai as an example of a spectacular image accumulation urbanscape, giving a proper analysis ground for understanding the Baudrillardian simulacrum.

Following Dubai, I considered Libeskind's Berlin Jewish Museum as an explicit example of the way architecture can be used to push imagination into recreating horror sensations referencing the Holocaust, while exploring its position towards simulacrum and anaesthesia.

Finally, in chapter 4, I discuss MVRDV's Seoul towers proposal as a third study case that I use to build up a general conclusion while hinting to possible implications of their provocative gesture.

⁷ Terry Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2006

⁸ Resina, Joan Ramon (ed), Ingenschay, Dieter (ed), *After-Images of the City*, Cornell University Press, 2003

⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary" in David Curtis , *The Castoriadis Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997

2. *From Spectacle to Anaesthesia*

2a. *The Architectural Image as the Expression of Society*

In order to unfold the theoretical foundation of this thesis, I consider necessary to start with a view on collective imagination as the creating instance of images and meaning.

Imagination creates society...

If the traditional philosophical view on imagination was largely resting on seeing it as an imitative or combinatory process, Cornelius Castoriadis conceptualizes the “radical imagination of the singular human being”¹⁰ as the “creation of and not image or copy of”¹¹. Castoriadis’ radical imagination is “a breaking-off of the animal imagination, the generic, stable and repetitive imagination”¹², enabling reality to exist for us. Moreover, it enables culture and society creation.

If in this form the absolute imagination is the creative instance of the singular psyche, the social imaginary is the collective dimension of it, the creative instance with a collective consciousness that enables humans to imagine the values and norms instituting the social group. It produces the institution of society, as Castoriadis defines it: the collective imaginary is the “social instituting imaginary of society”¹³. The values and norms are meaningful products of individual imagination that have a shared value in the group. Society is thus announced as self-creation: “Society fabricates the individuals who, thanks to the radical imagination, are nothing different than society”¹⁴.

... through images

Images “report on reality”¹⁵, as Susan Sontag refers to them, and form a field where the reality of the object and the subject’s perception of the reality morph. Images are born in the physical field of “the real”. They become interiorized by individuals through the process of perception and reconstituted over time out of what

¹⁰ Castoriadis in Curtis, p.319

¹¹ Marcela Tovar, “The imaginary term in readings about modernity: Taylor and Castoriadis’ conceptions”, in *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, No 09, 2001, p.33

¹² Tovar, p.33

¹³ Castoriadis in Curtis, p.319

¹⁴ Tovar, p.34

¹⁵ Susan Sontag, “The Image-World” in Jessica Evans (ed.) and Stuart Hall (ed.), *Visual Culture: The Reader*, Sage Publications Ltd; 1 edition (July 6, 1999), p.80

memory sensibly retains. In this discussion, the architectural image can be understood as the imaginary constructed form revealing the arrested momentary record of what society considers real¹⁶.

Those images encoded with a collective significance are permanently passed forward and recreated by the collective remembrance of their meaning, being instituted as symbols through the process of cultural accumulation. Seeing contributes to the creation of a common field of understanding and representing the physical environment: meaningful images get internalized by the social imaginary as meaningful representations of the real shared by a community¹⁷. This longstanding process of building collective experiences happens in the imaginary, being one of the strategies we use to define ourselves as part of a larger group. The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Wunenburger explains how the imaginary representation of elements perceived in the environment has the capacity to be shared by the members of a community through “accumulation or contagious contact”¹⁸. Once settled in the social imaginary, the representations become “forms” that are, according to Castoriadis meanings and values embodying social institutions¹⁹.

In this process of meaning accumulation, architecture plays an important role. Looking through the perspective of Wunenburger on imagination, we can speculate that architecture is the physical arrest of the social order at a certain moment in time. Or, as the architectural theorist Peter Eisenman states: “architecture in the public consciousness is the structure of reality”²⁰.

To the debate whether the architectural image represents anything at all, if meaning is immanent in the architectural structures, an answer was formulated by Deleuze and Guattari. Their “face-system” model explains architecture as “faces in the landscape they transform”²¹. The faces are physical forms crystallizing the resultant of forces interacting in the societal system, and their image is the expression of place-identity. Thus, architecture becomes symbol through the meaning given by

¹⁶ Joan Ramon Resina, “The Concept of After-Image and the Scopic Apprehension of the City” in Joan Ramon, Resina (ed.), Dieter Ingenschay (ed.), *After-Images of the City*, Cornell University Press, 2003, p.5

¹⁷ Castoriadis in Curtis, p.322

¹⁸ Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *L'Imaginaire*, PUF, Que sais-je ?, 1991, 2e éd. 1993, p.114

¹⁹ Castoriadis in Curtis, p. 322

²⁰ Eisenman in Brand and Janselijn, p.47

²¹ Mark Seltzer, “Berlin 2000: The Image of an Empty Space” in Joan Ramon, Resina (ed.), Dieter Ingenschay (ed.), *After-Images of the City*, Cornell University Press, 2003, p.66

society. In return, the “faces” make visible their symbolic power through their visual expression.

To illustrate this, let’s consider the example of the architecture of the cathedral as being symbolic for the Christian values of the Western medieval society. The cathedral was, and it still is, although its power largely diminished in the past decades, an imaginary institution brought into the “real” world of objects through its architecture. Its meaning, collectively imagined, had the power to condition social behaviours, with the “authority to command and prohibit”²². The cathedral’s symbolic power is visually externalized by its “face”: the object dominates the surroundings in mass and impresses the senses as if an extraordinary entity, the divinity, dominates the bodies of its loyals.

As society changes, the architectural space constantly registers the alterations and mutations. Hal Foster argues that the museum became the cathedral of post-modernity²³. Museums have attracted a big part of the architectural efforts in the past decades, becoming symbols for the economical prosperity of the cities, where this prosperity is accountable for the attractiveness it bears on the highly praised “creative class”. They replaced cathedrals as the new pilgrimage attraction, symbolizing the western society’s release from religion and re-spiritualization through culture. Their spectacular appearance symbolizes the capitalist market values as, how Debord puts it, “the material reconstruction for the religious illusion”²⁴.

²² Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, Routledge, 1997, p. 20

²³ Foster, 2002, p.37

²⁴ Debord, p.8

2b. The Simulacrum

Society of the Spectacle

Our culture seems lately to be dominated by media and communication, completely changing the way we relate to others and to our environment. While considering today's architecture drive towards a spectacle society that favours the image, I consider necessary looking back for its understanding through Guy Debord. The advancement of a society gravitating around visuality was announced by Debord: images became the main material that is mass-communicated by media to distances and speeds never-before imagined. Media replicates and distributes images, fragmented views of reality that, as Debord puts it "regroup themselves into a new unity as a separate pseudo-world that can only be looked at"²⁵. According to the notions discussed earlier, this would imply a regrouping into imagination and a multiplication of images in the creative social imaginary.

Our relation with "the real" became mediated by images to the extent where "meaning give rise to the manipulation of the visual order"²⁶ to produce new images not from the real, but from other images. This sets the ground on which Debord's society of spectacle rests: "the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images"²⁷.

Moreover, for Debord, the image is accumulated until it becomes capital. The new visual order sets in place a social structure, where the fulfilment is reached through possession, not through being. The visual communication led to fetishizing images that soon became commodities in a capitalist logic. Similar to Debord's idea of accumulation of capital through images, Terry Smith develops the concept of "iconomy" to argue that the visuality characterizing the contemporary society is deeply anchored in architecture. He points out to the importance gained by the architectural objects that foster cultural programmes in the past decades, as a direct consequence of the exchange value the imagery acquired in the society of spectacle²⁸. Their state of the art architecture creates selling images inscribed in a

²⁵ Debord, p.6

²⁶ Resina in Resina and Ingenschay (ed.), p.17

²⁷ Debord, p.6

²⁸ Smith, p.7

culture-led economical strategy of the cities that compete for a share of the global flux of capital, goods and people. The image of the new museum or opera became the business card logo of the city and an indicator of economic prosperity.

The increased interest that the architectural image gained lately, as a product, led to a separation of form from content in the name of design as architecture theorists such as Neil Leach argue.²⁹ This separation is not new, as it was imagined by Art Nouveau and re-used throughout Bauhaus, but as Hal Foster states, “it only seems to be achieved in our pan-capitalism present”³⁰. In architecture, a relevant example of how the “container becomes contained”³¹, where not as much the program but the building itself became the main attraction, is the “multibillion dollar museum building boom”³² with examples like the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, The Getty Museum Los Angeles, The Jewish Museum Berlin, or the former World Trade Center New York. The difference between the container and the contained translates into a difference between experience and promotion, where the architectural image becomes more and more aestheticised to appear in a magazine, as a photograph, implying framing and detachment. The ideological content tends to be reduced to an ideological style³³.

Smith claims that the postmodern mutation in visual culture took place through the dissemination of the products that needed a visual identity, a style and a logo³⁴. The city and its architecture became one of the commodities profitable for urban marketers, where its mediation by a variety of communications media pushed to the point where the architectural image started to emerge out of the label. The postmodern condition of architecture today pays due to communication, which in the last decades of architectural speed transformed it from container to contained, from shelter to capital, thus architecture as branding opens the way of the simulacrum.

The separation of the architectural image into a distinct strategy of project soon developed into an industry on its own that follows the rules of marketing. Thus, the architectural image is prone to create new signs related to this new image logic and often disconnected from content. The success of the cultural industry before the

²⁹ Leach, 1999, p.13

³⁰ Foster, p.19

³¹ Smith, p.25

³² Smith, p.19

³³ Smith, p.12

³⁴ Smith, p.5

start of the financial crisis in 2008 was fuelled by the spectacular architectural images and brought a mutation of the status art has in the society. Critiques of the model appeared both before and after the economic meltdown, pointing out that “art has become a too elastic category”³⁵ generalized in a commodity addressing the masses. The appearance of art has been shaped by the image of the architecture hosting it, and has been introduced in the capitalist order, changing art’s previous meaning. It is in this way that Baudrillard sees the Beaubourg-Centre Pompidou in Paris when naming it “a hypermarket of art”³⁶.

Simulacra and the four orders

Baudrillard set the ground for understanding how the advancement of media in the contemporary spectacle society influenced the relation between object, its representation and its social meaning. He denounces the mutation in the stages of simulacra, from simulation in pre-modernity— where the image was the counterfeit of the real, through simulacra in the industrial age – where the distinction between image and its representation started to dissolve with the mass production and dissemination of imitations of reality³⁷ to the contemporary state of simulacrum.

It is possible to distinguish four degrees in the mutation of image-reality relation.

Initially, the image was the “reflection of a basic reality”³⁸, where the visual sign mirrors reality to formulate the meaning. Significance is established in advance, settled by the image referent. I would say that in terms of architecture, this first stage is clearly expressed by traditional architecture, where the image was the honest expression of using available local construction materials, and of the social hierarchy.

In the second order, the image is looking to project an ideal stance of reality, one that “masks and perverts a profound reality”³⁹. As we understand from Baudrillard’s allegory of Borges’ empire map, what in representation is a frozen flourishing

³⁵ Foster, p.10

³⁶ Leach, 1997, p.209

³⁷ Mark Poster, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Stanford Univ. Pr; Later Printing edition (September 1988), p.5

³⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Beitchman, Phil, and Foss, Paul and Patto, Semiotext(e), 1983, p.11

³⁹ Baudrillard, 1983, p.11

moment, in reality it is a ruin⁴⁰. We can relate this to the architectural abstractization and aesthetization that appear to pervert the basic spatial reality.

Along with the mass production and reproduction of prototypes, the image starts to mask “the absence of a basic reality”⁴¹, entering the third order of the simulacrum. Although the image “plays at being an appearance”⁴², there is still a sense of understanding the difference between the copy and the prototype. I consider this related to the modernist period where the idea of home/shelter was mechanically reproduced as a standardized cell. Replication multiplies images that become independent from their context; the image pretends to copy a reality, but the representative process is lacking, being replaced with duplication. This enables meaning to be generalized to fit the worldwide public.

A final stage of the image, that we find ourselves in today according to Baudrillard, is one where “it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum.”⁴³ Baudrillard announces the simulacrum as the postmodern condition achieved through the astonishing proliferation of signs to the point where they substitute the real: “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself”⁴⁴. The society has been saturated with simulacra to the point where it can no longer tell reality from its representation. The representation precedes and determines the real, birthing the hyperreal not through imitating reality, but from imitating an imitation mistaken for reality. In the hyperreal there is no longer equivalence between the sign and the real. But simulation starts from denying the sign as indicator of reality, as “a liquidation of all referentials”⁴⁵. Representation appears from simulation and becomes a sign of simulacrum.

In architecture, one of the main vectors of the simulacrum, according to Leach, is the mass aesthetization⁴⁶ that intoxicate the senses with visual information and leave little to the formation of meaning. The development of communication technologies in postmodernism made possible the stunning circulation of an ever increasing amount of images, informing our senses about remote things, places or ideas. Image becomes information and this information replaces the production line

⁴⁰ Baudrillard, 1983, p.1

⁴¹ Baudrillard, 1983, p.11

⁴² Baudrillard, 1983, p.12

⁴³ Baudrillard, 1983, p.11

⁴⁴ Baudrillard, 1983, p.4

⁴⁵ Baudrillard, 1983, p.4

⁴⁶ Leach, 1999, p.61

to efficiently generate imagery. Meaning loses ground in front of the speed of dissemination of information-images. Inebriated by the amount of visual information impressing the sight, a fictive re-composition of randomly selected appearances occurs. Baudrillard announces that our reality has been shaded by the mass cloning of images, that it is no longer possible to directly live it. But more than being overwhelming through numbers, spectacular appearances accumulate in hyperreality, generalizing fascination. The visual fascination becomes an image strategy detached from meaning and ending up with no reference at all but only with sublime imagery.

2c. Anaesthesia

Even though Baudrillard's concepts of simulacra and hyperreality reference space production, there are not many architects taking on his argument. Neil Leach is one of the few practitioners from a young generation that discusses architecture from inside the profession while trying to bring cultural theory insights. In *The Anaesthetics of Architecture* he explores the contemporary drift towards aesthetization, making use, among others, of Baudrillard's concepts. If until now I have tried to argue that postmodernism brought a focus on visibility to the detriment of meaning, now I will try to bring an overview of Leach's anaesthesia concept in order to explore possible implications that architecture has in the hyperreal society.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines anaesthesia as "loss of sensation with or without loss of consciousness"⁴⁷. Following a similar logic, Leach builds his arguments around the hypothesis that the contemporary architectural imagery overload is causing a numbness of the sensible.

Although Leach only generally references Baudrillard's notion of simulacra and doesn't construct his anaesthesia concept following the orders, I think his argument can be read as a gradual progression of the image simulacra. This kind of reading could be justified to help understanding the vectors that lead to the separation of image from meaning as reflected by the architectural production today.

Leach starts his argumentation on anaesthesia by referring to the alienation brought by aesthetization. He considers that aesthetization creates a cocoon that protects from a harsh reality⁴⁸. For Leach, aesthetization operates a simplification in the complexity of reality transforming the architectural image into clean magazine

⁴⁷ 'Anesthesia', in *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary, viewed 10 May 2012, <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anesthesia>>

⁴⁸ Leach, 1999, p.15

visualization that isolates the architectural object from the possibility of its association with the trivial of daily life⁴⁹. I could add to this that it represents a sort of sterilization of the city in order to achieve an image that sells outside its context, similar to representing an ideal reality as in the second order of the simulacra.

Further, we can identify another measure of anesthesia as the result of overwhelming production of aesthetized images that reproduce and make generally available spectacular images, leading to boredom and being desensitized⁵⁰. The image seduction works against the incitement to discovery and reveals passivity as this new measure of the anesthesia⁵¹. This could reference the third order simulacra if we relate it to an analogy of mass production with the global dissemination of spectacular image as information.

Finally, Leach's building up on the concept of architectural anesthesia culminates with the loss of any sense of context as a loss of social reference⁵². Aesthetization is in his view a vehicle for transforming space into a fetishized abstract that annihilates the possibility of a common visual conscience around local meaning⁵³. In my view, this corresponds to the fourth order of the simulacra, where the image is an appearance born out of surrogates of reality and lost its capacity to stimulate to gather a collective consciousness around meaning.

2c.i. Architectural debates

As seen in the previous section, architecture found a central point in the global dissemination of images during the last decades. Leach attributes the increased interest towards the architectural image to aesthetics⁵⁴. The advancement of architectural and construction technologies allowed for an astonishing progress to be made in the sphere of architectural expression, qualifying architecture as a fashionable product. Ghery's deconstructivism, Koolhaas' sleek design or Libeskind's sculptural aesthetics are just few of the architectural styles that got globally communicated and launched trends in and outside the world of architectural practice. Inscribed in this logic, a cultural tourism flourished, fed by the pursuit of fashionable

⁴⁹ Leach, 1999, p.15

⁵⁰ Leach, 1999, p.40

⁵¹ Leach, 1999, p.13

⁵² Leach, 1999, p.72

⁵³ Leach, 1999, p.41

⁵⁴ Leach, 1999, p.5

architectural objects by an impressive number of tourists looking to get their picture taken in the fascinating realm.

Authors like Leach, Resina or Foster consider important drawing attention that the architecture of spectacle is having a social effect and question the architect's position in it.

The architectural aesthetics play a decisive role in the proliferation of appearances and generate a distortion of reality. Leach talks about the tendency in the contemporary practice of architecture to aesthetize the objects in order to distance them from the abject of the ordinary, pursuing the creation of fantasy images of spectacle and advertising⁵⁵. Architecture becomes part of a larger process of semiotization of the advertisement. The favouring of the appearance morphs space into a fetishized abstraction that is indifferent to the lived experience. General utopian images with the feeling of elsewhere are introduced to give the illusion of a healthy reality. Leach is discussing Lebbeus Woods' proposal for Sarajevo while drawing attention to the occurrence of a rupture between the sci-fi atmosphere of his drawings and the harsh reality found on the streets of the city⁵⁶. Moreover he questions the capacity of architecture to bring social improvements only through design and brings along an older issue concerning the myth of the architect as an entity capable of solving problems through design. As an argument, he goes back to Foucault to imply that the architectural form alone cannot act as a control device but the way its qualities are used determine it⁵⁷.

In the meantime Hal Foster is shedding light on what seems to be the superstar architects and designers like Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau position towards the architecture of spectacle, which he sees as surfers of the spectacle⁵⁸. Koolhaas has been a long term advocate of embracing the haziness and hyper-stimulation in the metropolis with spectacular and aesthetized architecture with his manifesto book *Delirious New York*⁵⁹. Nowadays his interest is still lying, as he declares, into "erasing the boundaries between architecture and information, the real and the

⁵⁵ Leach, 1999, p.15

⁵⁶ Leach, 1999, p.26

⁵⁷ Leach, 1999p.27

⁵⁸ Foster, 2002, p.24

⁵⁹ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, The Monacelli Press, 1997

virtual”⁶⁰, while explaining his proposal for the Seattle Public Library. At the same time, designers like Mau explicitly dream of a “retail environment [...] in which the brand identity, signage systems, interiors and architecture would be totally integrated”⁶¹. If we look back at the orders of simulacra we can trace here a full embracing of the hyperreal.

2c.ii. New Markers of the Real

As anesthesia goes from the senses’ intoxication with images devoid of meaning to the numbness of the sensible and passive consumption of architecture, a rediscovery of body sensations, as an unmediated proof of the real, gains new insight. Terry Smith turns to finding “markers of the real” in the “rehearsals of violence and violation”⁶² as the new source for the production of collective meaning in the synthetic metropolis.

As Smith reminds us, Foucault explains modernity as “defined by certain kinds of violence inherent in social spaces”⁶³. He describes the modern surveillance states as using spatial organization to “both impose and internalize” power. A revolt against power could thus be justified to breakthrough space and architecture, as these last ones are visual representations of the authority and “frames for our bodies.”⁶⁴

Similarly, Bataille understands architecture as the physical development of the human nature order⁶⁵. To this, there is a human side that wants to break this order by going against architecture. The individual “caught in the trap of life”⁶⁶ gets fascinated by the violent destruction of the space, a violent act touching upon the rules composing the societal schemata. As we saw before, spectacular images aim for an efficient reading defined by the purging of the ordinary. Bataille praises “ugliness” as “effectively an answer to an unhealthy need for cleanliness, for a bilious small-mindedness and for boredom.”⁶⁷ He’s seeing *violence* as an immanent experience of the human being trapped in the fictive nature of the social norms. He includes architecture to this discourse, dismissing it as the physical encoding of the social structuring. Further, Bataille argues that the distanced contemplation of an

⁶⁰ Koolhaas cited in Foster, 2002, p.24

⁶¹ Mau cited in Foster, 2002, p.23

⁶² Seltzer in Resina and Ingenschay (ed.), p. 72

⁶³ Smith, p.124

⁶⁴ Smith, p.128

⁶⁵ Leach, 1997, p. 21

⁶⁶ Georges Bataille, *The Cruel Practice of Art*, trans. Superverb 32 C Inc, translation from the BLAM! 1 CD-ROM, 1993, p.2

⁶⁷ Leach, 1997, p. 22

excessive act of violence arouses immanent gratification. For him, the voyeuristic consume of images of horror represents one of the ways for the modern individual to transgresses the constraints of the social structure.

Terry Smith, in his exploration of post traumatic architecture, concludes that violence is a way of getting back to the authentic through the body and its unmediated feeling of the real. Now, when the accumulation of appearances loosened meaning and diluted the group's cohesive strength, trauma offers an opening towards others as a bridge linking "bodies" than can collectively share the remembrance of pain. The collective sharing of pain, in this case, serves as a proxy for the absence of a collective gratitude from aesthetized images. Mark Seltzer identifies a similar type of situation when discussing Germany's memorial trauma in *After-Images*, pointing out that pain "has emerged as something like an infomercial for the psychic order for the modern soul"⁶⁸. "The wound culture"⁶⁹ as seen through Seltzer's essay on post-traumatic Berlin, regains the power to emotionally re-invest the architectural space.

The desire to wake up from anaesthesia becomes plausible by having everything grounded in the body and within experience, as recent reactions to traumatic episodes like 9/11 seem to prove.

I have tried here to capture, from a theoretical perspective, a process of image movement through several stages that I have considered relevant for my initial questions of where does architecture stand between image and meaning and how this relationship changed lately.

I have started with understanding images as one of the ways collective imagination creates society and the architectural image as the physical expression of a societal order. Then, I have used Debord to discuss the changes in the relationship that images have with meaning, when framed under a basic logic of production of spectacle in the postmodern society. Further I saw that, once the speed of dissemination of images increased, that architecture began to lose its referent to content and meaning, entering the realm of Baudrillard's simulacrum.

⁶⁸ Seltzer in Resina and Ingenschay (ed.), p.70

⁶⁹ Seltzer in Resina and Ingenschay (ed.), p.62

Today we seem closer to experience desensitization towards the architectural image interiorization with an impact on the social and its collective imaginary, as anaesthetized state, in the sense discussed by Leach. As reactions to these conditions, trauma and violence seem to be ways through which the contemporary subject searches to wake up from the anaesthesia.

Further, I will test these assumptions against several study cases while trying to illustrate the architectural image passage through these processes.

3. *The architectural Simulacra*

3a. *An Excess of Architectural Signifiers: simulacrum and the environment, Dubai*



Fig.1
1990, Dubai
Image Source: marketplace.org



Fig.2
2012, Dubai
Image Source: theholidayplace.co.uk

Building iconic Dubai

This study case discusses the city of Dubai as an example of a Baudrillardian Disneyland-like city image, giving a proper analysis ground for the understanding of architectural simulacrum. It is widely known as a global city, built in a desert area, a product of a flourishing oil economy. Dubai as a city has now a reputation for iconic architecture, and its economy is related to an urban landscape spectacle relying mainly on real-estate, tourism and financial services. This case represents a collage-like juxtaposition of different signifiers, as an “accumulation of the merely different”⁷⁰. The visual formula that Dubai gained in the last decade, as a cityscape and environment, is one that pursues to attract tourists and investors through high visibility. Here, architecture seems to give physical manifestation to fantasy while carrying the expression suitable for a magazine cover.

Dubai is a city built in the desert, almost detached from a context, with little historical or geographical specificity to refer to today as well as twenty years ago . The globalised image, achieved through a transplant of alien signifiers shapes local reality to a predefined model that settles sense before the actual social construction of it. The collage of elements taken out of context does only but to allow the process of appearance fetishization. The image of Dubai seems close to Debord’s view on the society of the spectacle, where images “regroup themselves into a new unity as a

⁷⁰ Jesse Reiser, *Atlas of Novel Tectonics*, Princeton Architectural Press, 2006, p.24

separate pseudo-world that can only be looked at”⁷¹. In this sense, Dubai is one of the most eloquent examples where whole city – space, structure and society - is being subsumed in an overall iconic form that is detached from the content. Iconic images of examples as Burj Al Arab (Fig. 8 in Appendix) or the Palm Island (Fig. 9 in Appendix) function as logos for Dubai as a financial or touristic destination.

The 3D Spectacle

This type of simplified architecture that seems to be created to be easily read in a glimpse can be considered as being part of an architectural class close to what Foster calls architecture reduced to a “3D billboard”⁷². The detachment of the shell, that bears a message to be sold, from the program serving local use in Dubai’s architecture enables the commodification of the city that becomes both product and advertisement. Reducing the object’s image to a logo, a practice at different scales, implies a constant pursue to stir desire by establishing fast connections with what the logo advertises for. Illustrating this, the Palm Islands have been conceived to be seen from above, through media and tourism magazines while ignoring it as inhabitable space, similar to how Foster perceives Gehry’s spectacle architecture, “as for you have to be well above both to read them as images at all, or you have to see them in media reproduction – which, again, is a primary ‘site’ of such architecture”⁷³. The already present discussion of architecture as design made for appearing in a magazine is exacerbated here. Architecture becomes part of a marketing strategy meant to pinpoint the place in a way that gives global visibility to possible investors and attracts tourists through the dissemination of dreamlike images. I would argue that, in Dubai, the accumulation of representative objects skips the phase of being produced through cultural accumulation. Instead of being the generators for a space to be produced, the iconic architecture resembles more a collection of predefined datum that shapes the value of the site.

Dubai seems to brand and rebrand itself in a continuous cycle, and this accumulation of signifiers comes out of a necessity of not being forgotten, as its whole reason of being is to remain present in the trend of the most desired destinations and enters a cycle of consumption in which remaining *fresh* is essential.

⁷¹ Debord, p.6

⁷² Foster, 2002, p.32

⁷³ Foster, 2002, p.38

While trying to overcome itself all the time, it keeps adding fantasy microcosms of architecture, while becoming a sum of fantasies. Dubai's visual symbols carry surface meaning of globalised consumerism and fashion.

The Realm of Simulacrum

At the beginning of 2012 images from a new project entitled Crescent Moon Tower (insert figure Appendix) surfaced in the virtual media to announce yet another architectural icon for Dubai. This proposal can be considered an explicit example of technology use that makes "everything designed" possible. Although it is only a project at the moment, its image is already meeting its purpose of advertising.

As we saw, in the cultural accumulated meaning throughout history, architecture means before everything *shelter*⁷⁴. But in this case, the miming of a half moon shape destabilizes this basic understanding. In the society of the spectacle the cultural accumulation of the idea of architecture as shelter falls short, as architecture becomes decoration. The whole city becomes now the receiver of this embellishment. This implies a hallucinatory scale shift towards gigantic dimensions in the landscape, from the decorated shed to the decorated urban realm. If in the second order of simulacra the object of architecture was the one being aesthetized to reflect an idealized image, in Dubai the whole landscape becomes a composition of architecture only to be looked at.

I would like to refer here to Baudrillard's idea of Disneyland saw as "imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas [...] are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation"⁷⁵ and make a parallel with Dubai. The pursue of visibility in Dubai makes room for a collage of fantasies impressive through image but devoid of content, that seems to reproduce a full scale example of Baudrillard's Disneyland. Now architectural fantasies are finding a common ground in Dubai, set free by the lack of economic restraints and historical context. The new created context that sets the ground for upcoming developments was from the beginning set up as a hyperreality, thus making fantasy the valid reference point. In this full scale environment, Baudrillard's fear that reality becomes impossible to distinguish from simulacrum seems justified. But more than being a

⁷⁴ Eisenman in Brand and Janselijn, p. 47

⁷⁵ Baudrillard, 1983, p.25

phantasm that gains reality status, Dubai's image conflicts with imagining other probabilities of reality or progress. Glossy images not only turn into abject the ordinary of the daily life but also present a fixed finality. Their images suggest a maximum each time and don't seem to allow a natural process of becoming. They are in themselves finalities, as their simplified symbolism leaves no place for negotiation.

This suggested image finality can be seen as a reminder that of the principles set by modernism as regularization and channelling of human activities, where architecture acts as a constraining element that pursues an efficiency of labour and movement. Dubai's masterplan, while referencing Corbusier's open plans, takes a surreal dimension through loss of understanding their scale. While modernity's *modulor* still kept somehow the scale under control, here it has been distorted as allowed by technical possibilities of producing as Dubai does, world's tallest hotel (JW Marriott Marquis Dubai Hotel) or world's largest shopping mall (The Dubai Mall). Images as these show an unstable relationship between basic architectural elements, like *edges* following a *rhythm* and defining *surfaces* and human proportions. Abstractization reached a new level, where the spatial relationship to the human body is lost into a projection of the imaginary with a lack of reference to one's own body and its physical reality.

Foster, when discussing star architect Zaha Hadid's futurist influences in design, is describing her project for the Car Park and Terminus in Strasbourg as "an architectural abstraction laid over an infrastructural abstraction"⁷⁶. This reference seems suitable for an analogy with Dubai where a generalized state of futurism fantasy is brought to life. Dubai's mechanized environment, now possessing "world's longest driverless metro network"⁷⁷, pursues efficiency through minimising human interaction, while the visual architectural expression plays an important role in this process. The new city is made for seeing while being trapped in a permanent movement through it.

⁷⁶ Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex*, Verso Books, 2011, p.82

⁷⁷ Online article at Rediff.com, viewed at 13 May 2012, <<http://www.rediff.com/business/slide-show/slide-show-1-worlds-longest-driverless-metro-network/20120224.htm>>

Seduction as an anaesthetic

At the same time, Leach is pointing to the cacophony of shocking images numbing the pleasure of seeing through an overload with spectacular. In the past ten years, Dubai launched and re-launched its image through more than ten shocking pieces of architecture. The excess of aesthetization becomes, as Leach is stating, an anaesthetic to the mind and body. Similarly, for the sake of getting magazine images, Dubai's cityscape is minimizing the body's interaction with the environment, reducing it to a vehicle with a predefined linear trajectory.

Seduction is now at a point where everything is made possible through digital simulation, as it was never easier to seduce through architectural image than now⁷⁸, when the act of seduction fails to be recognized and blends with the ordinary. If we turn to a dictionary definition of 'simulation' instead of Baudrillard's concept, we see it as: "examination of a problem often not subject to direct experimentation by means of a simulating device"⁷⁹. Simulation in architecture as a technical, now almost completely digitalized, procedure refers to producing visualizations of simulations of inhabiting and using space. This kind of simulation results in freeze frames that usually depict an exceptional moment rather than the banal of daily life, giving the impression that architecture is in a constant state of celebration. What before gained a shared value within the group through the poetic qualities of the singular, now tends to gain value through repetition and shared consumerism leading to boredom.

While this is embedded in the traditional representation in architecture, the advances in digital visualization bring the possibility of creating photorealistic simulations that tend to shed finality over the imagined spatial outcome, allowing little place for alternative imaginative interpretations. Anaesthesia comes here as acceptance of a predefined path, the acceptance of a predetermined image.

Diluting meaning

Commodifying and de-contextualizing the physical container of social interaction corrodes the power of social aggregation. The sense of belonging – both to space and to the group – is suppressed in a public arena destined to be consumed by the whole

⁷⁸ Leach citing David Greene, p.79

⁷⁹ 'Simulation', in *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary, viewed 10 May 2012, < <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/simulation>>

world: “the spectator does not feel at home anywhere, because the spectacle is everywhere.”⁸⁰ Moreover, a collective imaginary numb at the sight of spectacular images is less likely, I believe, to produce social meaning by collectively sharing emotions in presence of remarkable aesthetics. In my opinion, the accumulation of alien signifiers for the sake of creating selling images is not only leaving the social drifting but it creates an erosion of its coagulation forces. To illustrate this, I will go back to the example of the Crescent Moon Tower. Embodying the crescent moon, a symbol for the Arab world, the tower makes globally accessible to the eye the intangible of the imaginary that creates significance around it and the direct representation brings a dilution of the symbolism. It takes an element from the radical instituting imaginary and places it in the world of the objects through mimetism. The objectification of the symbol brings a loss of connotation once introduced into a system of image recycling and of commodification.

Architecture, reduced to a visual sign in the logic of simulacrum, is used and re-used until it becomes a copy without referent. And it is the infinite repetition and dissemination of the sign that imposes it, and not anymore the cultural accumulation of meaning. The architectural icon still carries a meaning, but one that is de-contextualized and doesn't serve a local purpose; it is a phantasm. The accumulation of appearances in culture gives birth to “hyperculture”, “a critical mass that is no longer tied to specific exchanges or to determinate needs but to a kind of total universe of signals”⁸¹. In hyperculture, the content is destroyed by the commodified container, the local is sacrificed in order to accommodate the global and the spontaneous is purged to establish the trend. Resemblance is being replaced by resemblance.

The iconic architecture gained a worldwide success, its driving motor slowing down only after the outburst of the economic crisis in 2008. Cities all-over the globe adopted and multiplied the iconic architecture as reference point. Its unlimited reproduction spread a global style with the characteristics of a commodifiable generality. The result is similar to a mass production of architectural icons that instigate to general consumption of the ideology architecture serves. The urbanite of the megalopolis is stimulated to educate his or her stimuli according to the trend, finally accepting the consumption of the trend as an urban norm.

⁸⁰ Debord, p.10

⁸¹ Leach, 1997, p.214

***3b. Anaesthetized remembrance: simulacrum and the monument, Berlin,
The Jewish Museum***



**Fig.4 Holocaust Tower,
Jewish Museum Berlin, 2001**

Image source:
<thequestforagoodlife.wordpress.com>



**Fig.3
Auschwitz gas chamber**

Image source: <home.earthlink.net>

By shifting from Dubai's case to Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, I wish to move the discussion further into how contemporary architecture relates to a violent past that is largely contained in the present, and how the architectural expression shapes remembrance. In contrast with the designing of a phantasmagoria in Dubai, the Jewish Museum makes an example of irrefutable attempt to define and contain history, with the intention of keeping its memory alive. If the discussion about Dubai brought to light the idea of simulacrum as fabricated historic legacy for the present and future, in the Jewish Museum's case the discussion will revolve around how history burdens and informs present and future.

Architecture after the Holocaust

Before discussing Libeskind's proposal for the extension of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, I will briefly introduce Auschwitz's architecture, as a death-camp icon that inspired the museum's solution. This becomes necessary for understanding how the museum's architectural mise-en-scène explicitly sets out to offer a visceral simulation of what the death camps meant. The general way to describe the Auschwitz camp is as industrial architecture for the maximum exploitation of the inmates' workforce and for mass execution. The image of the architecture of the death at Auschwitz was one so efficient in expressing genocide, that after the war

ended, it became a symbol of what the Holocaust meant. During its operation between June 1940 and January 1945, the German Nazis murdered 1.1 million people in Auschwitz-Birkenau's gas chambers and crematoria designed by professional architects and engineers. From dormitories to latrines and gas chambers, the conditions were so inhumane that the question of why the architects of the death camp were not trialled for war crimes became legitimate. Even if it worked as an inanimate object towards the prisoners, this product of the imagination brought to life a monstrous killing site, one where severe overcrowding and staggering sanitary conditions led alone to the death of many prisoners before their ordered murder.

And now, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, architecture becomes once more responsible for transmitting bodily sensations, this time with the purpose of remembrance. In this sense, Libeskind's intentions were expressed clearly, as to "integrate physically and spiritually the meaning of the Holocaust into the consciousness and memory of the city of Berlin."⁸²

In "The Architecture of the Aftermath", Terry Smith asserts that the ethical challenge that Libeskind took when designing the Museum was largely influenced by the desire to overcome Theodor Adorno's statement: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."⁸³ Adorno took a pessimist stance towards the possibility of art addressing the genocide. To him, trying to express through artistic discourse the horrors of Auschwitz is predestined to stir pleasure through the artistic qualities of the art piece, however distant it might be from the intentions of the author. Thus, this association between mass murder and art would be in his view unacceptable, as it would dilute, even humanize, what "was, above all, unthinkable, inconceivable."⁸⁴

Libeskind's aim with the Jewish Museum was not to follow the destiny predicted by Adorno for post Holocaust art. For this, he grounded his design in the ethical ambition of avoiding any clearly defined physical representation of horror, one that can vulgarize the trauma and turn it into a commodity. As a counter measure, the architect explains that the only way to create architecture after the Holocaust would be through avoiding the aesthetics of spectacle and build the sensation of a "permanent incompleteness, of always becoming"⁸⁵. The way Smith directs the discussion around Libeskind's proposal suggest that it comes as an answer

⁸² Libeskind cited in Smith, p.76

⁸³ Adorno cited in Smith, p. 68

⁸⁴ Adorno cited in Smith, p. 69

⁸⁵ Smith, p.74

to Adorno's concerns in a sense that is not drawing a closing line over the Holocaust as a consumed fact, but is trying to embed in the present the conscience of humanity capable of committing such an atrocity. I keep a sceptical position towards the assumption that the Jewish Museum is able to make us aware of this only through its architecture, as I try to discuss further.

Attempting to Avoid the Spectacle

With the architecture of the Jewish Museum, Libeskind tried to escape the spectacle, in order to create a space that re-enacts haptic sensation. For this, he applied a strategy of disguising the aesthetics of the architectural object, in order to "resist every attempt to read it as iconic".⁸⁶ The strategy was, first of all, to create a building that should not impress through volume or aesthetics, but rather is "is anything but 'overweight, overdone and overwhelming'"⁸⁷, as Kurt Foster observes while comparing the Jewish Museum to Gehry's Guggenheim. Moreover, the imprecise outer zigzag shape aimed to create an ambiguous image, one challenging its possible representation while becoming hard to stereotype. All the effort that went into escaping the spectacle eventually made it become "an attractor for its quality as art"⁸⁸. The Jewish museum became inscribed into the *iconomy*, even if not as a monumental memorial. Its zigzag, no matter how vague, became a logo and a stamp for Libeskind's signature style. And once a style is framed, it becomes a trading reference point.

Aesthetized simulacrum

Adorno feared a capitalist materialization of the tragedy, as "even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter."⁸⁹ We can discuss further Adorno's fear for the Holocaust to be minimized and misunderstood, while looking back at the detachment of the image from its content. This fear can be translated in the terms of Baudrillard's fourth order of the simulacra, while imagining how the infinite cloning of the representation of genocide can operate a disembodiment of representation from the historical reality. Baudrillard himself finds relevant to discuss the Holocaust theme in terms of the simulacrum, under the threat

⁸⁶ Smith, p. 77

⁸⁷ Kurt Foster in Smith, p. 77

⁸⁸ Smith, p. 89

⁸⁹ Adorno in Smith, p. 69

of forgetting⁹⁰. Baudrillard's vision is as well pessimistic, blaming, and similar to Adorno's, seeing aesthetization and transportation of the violent experiences into mass media as creators of forgetfulness and idleness: "forgetting, annihilation, finally achieves its aesthetic dimension in this way—it is achieved in retro, finally elevated here to a mass level."⁹¹ Baudrillard fears that a transposition of the Holocaust into the TV could transform the genocide into a mass spectacle of torn bodies, "which will make them spill into forgetting with a kind of good aesthetic conscience of the catastrophe."⁹² Further, remembering Holocaust will no longer be based on real facts, but on clones of the event's representation. The mediation of tragic history through representation and mass-media creates a parallel history, as a screen over reality, "something that still retains something of the double, of the phantasm, of the mirror, of the dream."⁹³

Anesthetized Remembrance

While acknowledging the value of its intention to set the ground for cultural continuity through remembrance and the attempt to escape spectacle, I think the Jewish Museum cannot be completely detached from Adorno's fear.

The whole logic of the museum is to allow remembrance in an un-finalized way; to allow display while questioning display. The answers the museum gives are emotional without a finalized, explicit physical shape. My view here is that this ambition reduces architecture to an abstract theory while the spatial reality works in favour of the opposite. While avoiding a graphic exposure of the atrocity in order to avoid the spectacular, the space becomes intellectualized, tamed and civilized, becoming an icon for the architects, and presenting a diluted meaning for the large public. So, in a certain way, by obscuring the brutality it achieves a sort of mystification. This mystification of history creates anaesthesia, a reduction of the genocide to a list of victim names inscribed on the walls of a museum. The mythization of the Holocaust's history is to Adorno a barbaric act, and "any effort to create a high-cultural artefact would, in these circumstances, be an act of the utmost complicity in murderous vandalism."⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Glaser, Sheila Faria, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994, p.49

⁹¹ *ibid*

⁹² *ibid*

⁹³ *ibid*

⁹⁴ Adorno cited in Smith, p.69

While trying to meet the challenge to “take on presenting the unrepresentability, the presenting of nonbeing, as the building’s only possible program”⁹⁵ Libeskind turned to the body, using architecture as a mean to stir sensations, to turn the unconceivable into experientable. Synthetic meaning is achieved by stirring raw panic sensations, unelaborated and instinctive. To achieve this, Libeskind uses basic and contrasting spatial effects with maximum efficiency: light/dark, empty/full, straight/bent. Stairs that lead nowhere, the sensation of being in a deep pit with a collapsing ceiling and a tension that makes you search for the exit, all bring up the sense of being a victim. Body and mind are both exposed to the impossibility of understanding the number of victims as a result of human cruelty, sending the visitor into a “bodily and mental crisis.”⁹⁶ Remembrance goes through body experience, not static image. The obsession with the haptic of the interior dynamics was brought to such an extent that “a feeling of quiet chaos and desperation was induced,”⁹⁷ one that extends over the curators as well, not only the spectators.

However, we must remember that the Jewish Museum is still by purpose a simulation and cannot transmit a direct effect of the mass extermination with its real effect: disappearance of the body. What the museum achieves goes through the intellect while converting to psychological pain, not corporeal. Thus, although Libeskind himself declares that “reality of architecture is visceral, not intellectual”⁹⁸, I believe that the Jewish Museum shows the complexity of the relationship between images, historical meaning, and architecture as corporeal experience, with a distinction line not so easily definable as the architect implies.

Seltzer speaks about our contemporary society finding certitude in wound as physicality while discussing post traumatic Berlin⁹⁹. For Seltzer, corporeal sensations of pain, trauma, damage, have gained status of “self-authorizing indexes of the real, both historical and physic.”¹⁰⁰ The Jewish Museum is a place of mediation between the perpetrator and visitor as victim, instigating to a vicarious contemplation on the idea of self-destruction, a release from the societal structures that allowed genocide.

⁹⁵ Smith, p.74

⁹⁶ Anthony Vidler cited in Smith, p.84

⁹⁷ Smith, p.87

⁹⁸ Daniel Libeskind, *Daniel Libeskind's 17 words of architectural inspiration* presentation on TED online platform, Filmed Feb 2009, at min.9.27,

<http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_libeskind_s_17_words_of_architectural_inspiration.html>

⁹⁹ Seltzer in Resina and Ingenschay (ed.), p. 72

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

It is the arousing of a terrifying sublime, horrifying and stimulating pleasure at the same time. The contemplation of death, Bataille believes, brings with it a “necessity for spectacle or of representation in general, without the practice of which it would be possible for us to remain alienated ignorant in respect to death.”¹⁰¹ What escapes anaesthesia enters the realm of vicarious pleasure. Contemplating destruction is inscribed Bataille’s idea of sacrifice. Carnal violence is a sign of the real, where “man has, in a sense, revealed and founded human truth by sacrificing”¹⁰² and it constitutes a symbolic sacrifice of the present’s perfection aura.

Testing the premises set in Chapter 2, I have discovered two dimensions of the simulacrum in architecture. In Dubai, spectacle architecture shapes the urban environment, where the image of architectural objects is detached from content and follows the logic of seduction and advertising. Technology allows here building a collage like image city. The excess of aesthetization leads to numbing the sensible through an abundance of spectacular images.

In the case of the Jewish Museum, the discussion was around the effect that the architectural image, found into an age dominated by spectacle, has upon the capacity to produce trauma remembrance. This study case discussed the possibility of escaping the spectacle through focusing on body sensations. Anaesthesia here seems to be produced through taming the visual.

If in Dubai the overload of visual stimuli brings anaesthesia, in the case of the Jewish Museum it is produced by avoiding creating images that can be consumed through the logic of the spectacle. In a sense Dubai might be considered the result of an embrace of the simulacrum and spectacle, while the Jewish Museum can be seen as the result of an attempt of image constraining.

¹⁰¹ Georges Bataille, in Fred Botting (ed.), Scott Wilson (ed.), *The Bataille Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1997, p. 287

¹⁰² Bataille in Botting (ed.) and Wilson (ed.), p. 286

4. Conclusion

4.a. Transplanting the sing: simulacrum and the building, Seoul, MVRDV towers



Fig.5
2011, MVRDV proposal, Seoul, South Korea
expected to be completed in 2024
Source: <dezeen.com>
Copyright: Luxigon



Fig.6
2001, 9/11 attacks
Source: <kypost.com>
Photographer: Spencer Platt/Getty Images
Copyright Getty Images

In 2011, a new project signed by the famous architecture practice MVRDV gained attention on the internet followed by a rapid dissemination through various media. While presenting similarities with photographs of the exploding towers of World Trade Centre, MVRDV's proposal entitled *The Cloud* ignited reactions throughout the media, in the US and around the world. There have been multiple enraged discussions around the proposal, culminating with the architects getting ranked by a popular television commenter as the “worst persons of 2011”¹⁰³. When looking at this study case, I consider the 9/11 incident as a consumed fact that forever left its footprint on the collective imaginary.

The symbolic power spectacular images of architecture accumulated in the past decades fatally surfaced on September 11 2001. Žižek credits the terrorist act directed at America's icons to “the spectacular effect of it”¹⁰⁴. After their construction in '46, the Twin Towers successfully achieved the goal of turning “downtown Manhattan into the most valuable square mile of real estate on the

¹⁰³ Keith Olbermann on December 9, 2011 on a televised show for Fox News, <<http://current.com/shows/countdown/videos/worst-persons-bill-oreilly-sean-hannity-and-architectural-firm-mvrdv>>

¹⁰⁴ Smith, p. 141

planet”¹⁰⁵. In the collective imagination, their image was invested with capitalist values that enabled the architectural to embody the societal symbol of capitalism, inscribing New York in the global network. It did this through an architectural expression that, at the moment, visually “shimmered in the imagination of all the nations”¹⁰⁶, becoming easy to become a generally shared representation of the ambitious capitalist values. The image of the WTC towers became, in this case, the carrier of an ideology, the symbol of a society. The worldwide dissemination of the image meant the globalization of the values it symbolized.

The WTC became “pins demanding attention and the globe is what promises receptivity”¹⁰⁷. Their worldwide visibility was what justified them as targets for the terrorist attack, bringing to question the future of the society of spectacle: “will the architecture of power and the imagery of spectacle survive 9.11.01?”¹⁰⁸. After the attacks, a new icon impregnated the collective imaginary. The burning towers’ image became a powerful symbol for the western world’s fight against terrorism. As well a spectacular image largely consumed, although an image of horror in this case, the “burning towers” are today an appearance for a worldwide disseminated message.

Consensus on reading the sign

Referring to the violent connotations of associating MVRDV’s proposal to 9/11, we could say that these are in themselves the expression of collective imagination, considering that the image itself is only by connotation violent, as it bears no apparent explicit aggression. 9/11, through its scale and monstrosity, became a latent common symbol, as Bird puts it, one that is “now programmed into our lives like a renegade gene that lies dormant, carrying its secret message until triggered into action; a memory that casts its shadow across all our worlds.”¹⁰⁹

The common understanding of 9/11 brings with it a flesh reaction in the way Sontag discusses violent images. Through simulating an image reminding of the

¹⁰⁵ Jon Bird, “The mote in God’s eye: 9/11, then and now”, in *Journal of Visual Culture*, ISSN 1470-4129, 04/2003, Volume 2, Issue 1 .p.89

¹⁰⁶ Bird, p.89

¹⁰⁷ Foster, p.44

¹⁰⁸ Smith, p. 7

¹⁰⁹ Bird, p.84

burning towers, “the suffering is globalized”¹¹⁰, the violent situation is exposed for everyone

If in the case of the Jewish Museum Libeskind introduced a certain obscurity in presenting images of horror and an abstract dimension to it that implied an intellectual reading of the space, here the framed image creates a direct relation to the viewer’s body, as it reveals direct facts. At the same time, The Cloud is coming after only ten years since the 9/11 incident while the burning towers memory is still fresh.

More than touching upon compassion for the victims, the image of the WTC destruction symbolizes the attack targeting the capitalist society as a whole. Thus, the violence of the image reminding of 9/11 is as much about making the viewers imagine the violence that the victims endured, as it is about acknowledging the precarious state of our contemporary image constructed society. By associating a project that has no expressed connections with 9/11 to the image of the burning towers that became a stabilized symbol for horror and terror in the global society, we can look at its values of becoming a social commentary. It’s almost that we can exclude the architect’s intentions to make an association; the multiple reactions that spread and raised the whole discussions around, are the ones that make this case as a standing point in understanding symbolic architectural images and social imaginary.

At the same time, the public’s intuition of the objectification of the tragedy ignites a strong reaction in a wide viewer’s group, especially the American. The image resembling 9/11 has the power to stir mass feelings of opposing the turning of trauma into spectacle. Moreover, the power of an image to stir this collective reaction is what I think touches the collective imaginary. I would consider the group’s cohesion around a shared standpoint of what ethic allows for a visual representation of 9/11 an indicative of the shared production of meaning around the MVRDV’s image.

Transplanting the sign trough simulacrum

I consider the images proposed by MVRDV as bearing two distinct violent undertones. The first, more direct, is through connotation referring to a violence act, turning the viewer to remembering and re-living the experience. The other undertone

¹¹⁰ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, London: Picador, 2004, p. 70

refers the simulacrum – as an image detached from the context fails to accurately portray real actions. Inserting an image with symbolic meaning, as the Cloud Towers refer the 9/11 trauma, into a remote culture that lacks an understanding of an already unclear situation suggests, in my view, creates a clear detachment of appearance from content in the architectural gesture. Violence here is suggested by making the trauma ordinary, by its brutal detachment from meaning. It seems that the project takes the terrorist incident only as an image, frames it and uses it as decoration in a completely different context. We can remember now once again Adorno's fear of aestheticizing trauma after the Holocaust and wonder if there is a collective unconscious intuition in this way related to The Cloud.

Looking at the images I have chosen (fig.5 and fig.6) as visual frames, their resemblance is compelling but their stories are different. In a society where images shape the understanding of reality, detaching the image of the trauma from its narrative might lead to the danger of losing its real meaning. Susan Sontag discusses these similar ideas around photographs of violence. She brings up framing and exclusion: "remembering through recalling pictures makes us forget the story"¹¹¹. Sontag argues this by adding that the photographs don't have the power of expressing the whole narrative behind the image, thus viewers don't remember through images, but only the images¹¹².

I consider that this project, as a simulated image for a living environment, brings a new challenge to the viewer in his/hers attempt to interiorize the simulation. The image brings an intriguing contrast between the glossy magazine image that we are used to see depicting an ideal environment and discovering the visual association with 9/11. As well, this could represent just another peak reached by the architecture of spectacle in pursue of attention.

Cropping the image of the burning towers as an appearance and reusing it with an aesthetic purpose into a new proposal removed from its initial context can be understood as a removal of initial connotations associated with terrorism. Bringing an icon with a transplanted message from a foreign culture references the simulacrum in a fashion not distant from Dubai's earlier discussed case. The simulacrum, the replication of image until it loses the reference to the real, is embodied here in this transplant of image, similar to how Dubai transplants

¹¹¹ Sontag, 2004, p.80

¹¹² *ibid*

architectural images from magazines into reality. If Adorno feared an aesthetization of the Holocaust and the possible pleasure that it might bring, in this case the society of the spectacle created the premises in which the use of the burning towers image into a spectacular representation can introduce it into the ordinary resulting in the anaesthesia of collective reaction to seeing it.

Waking up from anaesthesia

For critics like Debord, along with the Situationists, a way to fight the image society was to use its own means and logic to detour the spectacle from the inside¹¹³. We could ask ourselves if MVRDV's proposal can present signs of this undermining capacity. Using an image symbolizing the destruction of the capitalist values as an aesthetic artifice that gets inscribed in the logic of spectacle and gets ordinarily consumed would bring subversion from the inside of the society of appearances, questioning the act of representation that generates spectacular images. In a more radical fashion than Debord, Baudrillard holds a pessimistic view on the capacity to break the simulacrum cycle, considering that death is the only possible escape¹¹⁴. Looking from this perspective, can this be read as an image that reminds of death as a waking up from anaesthesia? If in the case of logo buildings devoid of meaning and designed to sell, as we saw in Dubai, the effect is to anaesthetize collective reaction, to alienate, here I believe that The Cloud proposal can point to the strong relationship that architectural image and social meaning have, and their power to coagulate a reaction around. Here imagination takes a concrete shape in an image that oscillates between fiction and reality, between simulating and living an experience, and materializes into a sign that is collectively shared, as bearing resemblance to 9/11. The icon and its meaning became stabilized in the collective memory and imagination, helping remembrance through its visual dimension, while cases like the London underground bombings, that lack visual iconicity, tend to get forgotten.

Images inform and open to their meaning to debate. So an abundance of images might be diluting the meaning, but they can also dilute symbolism that can, in some cases, coagulate humanity into committing atrocities. It allows taking of different positions and expressing multiple points of view.

¹¹³ Leach, 1999, p.49

¹¹⁴ Mark Poster, Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, Stanford Univ. Pr; Later Printing edition, 1988, p.6

4.b. Ambivalence in image

This paper started from a personal wonder on why an architectural image has the power of stirring collective reaction, and which are the mechanisms that create a relationship between image and its collective meaning.

In the beginning of Chapter 2, I have investigated how the images contribute to the creation of a common field of representing and understanding the physical environment, and saw that the architectural images are an expression of the social order in a certain moment of time. Further, I looked into recent changes in the production and dissemination of images that brought a mutation in the relation that they hold with their meaning and that can bring effects to the societal structures. Through Debord's views, I have discovered that the spectacle society brings a separation between images and their content that operates a dilution of meaning and a commodification of the image. This idea has been taken forward by discussing around the simulacrum concept, while concluding that the image starts to lose its referent to the real and makes difficult the distinction between a real and a simulated experience. Transposed into architectural terms, I have seen through reading Leach a possible turning of the simulacra into an anesthetization of the sensible through aesthetization. When looking at authors like Foster, I realized the relevance of the discussion in architectural practice terms, where numerous influential architects seem to embrace the condition of the hyperreal. Finally, I have seen how a possible release from the state of anaesthesia is tried by shifting the focus on stirring body sensations.

After testing these ideas on the study cases, I have discovered that the production of contemporary architecture can bring a generalized state of simulacrum, as in the case of Dubai, where the anaesthesia appears from a hyper-stimulation of the senses with iconic images. It constitutes a system where the production and reproduction of architecture into fantasy images can create an alienating abstractization.

While looking at the example of the Jewish Museum, I have seen an architectural attempt to escape the logic of the simulacrum in order to portray trauma. But by trying to express a barbaric act through a civilized architectural environment, it might not have fully escaped the spectacle and can bring anaesthesia to the act of remembrance. The case brought attention towards the combinatory complexity between space as a physical reality and meaning.

As a final study case that integrates the preceding discussions, the discussion around The Cloud Tower project revealed that the architectural image has the power to ignite collective reactions. In this case I have seen that the visual icons can embed a collective meaning. At the same time, this case raised questions about the validity of meaning created around spectacular images with a commodified dimension. It presents a direct example of simulacrum where the image is removed from original meaning and transplanted into another context. If considering this case as a trauma aesthetization, it might indicate that it comes too soon after the initial events and it is present in the collective memory so it escapes anaesthesia, but provokes a social commentary that can hint towards a crisis of representation in architecture.

Going back to the idea that architecture is the physical expression of a momentary reality, we can look at The Cloud project as an expression of current society. It raises the question of architectural simulacra being already instituted as a social state resulted from a visual overstimulation, where anaesthesia is present, but nevertheless, certain events are still able to stir reactions around them. We can look then at simulacra not as a finality that needs to be escaped, as Baudrillard sees it, but as another stage in the image-meaning relation. Susan Sontag was considering that “cameras are the antidote and the disease, means of appropriating reality and a means of making it obsolete”¹¹⁵ and I think this can be here applied to the architectural image production as well. If the simulacrum is the disease, an antidote could rest in the fact that a collectively shared understanding of images turns back in the collective imaginary and informs society. Thus, images can produce reality.

¹¹⁵ Susan Sontag, “The Image-World”, p.93

Therefore, maybe it is not a question of escaping the simulacrum, or that the image should negate it, but of how can the image provide continuity in its relation to meaning and in the formation and information of society.

Image now, while ubiquitous, informs and allows multiple stand points and debates around its meaning. The architectural image, as we've seen throughout this paper, tends to get separated from its content, and sometimes alienate. At the same time, the image of architecture is released from being just the physical expression of a social momentary reality, and empowers it to become a social commentary.

Bibliography

Books

- Bataille, Georges, Fred Botting (ed.), Scott Wilson (ed.) *The Bataille Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1997
- Baudrillard, Jean *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Glaser, Sheila Faria, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994
- Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulations*, trans. Beitchman, Phil, and Foss, Paul and Patto, Semiotext(e), 1983
- Brand, Jan, Janselijn, Han, *Architectuur en verbeelding : Architecture and Imagination*, Zwolle : Waanders, 1989
- Curtis, David, *The Castoriadis Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 1997
- Debord, Guy, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb, Treason Press, Canberra, 2002
- Evans, Jessica (ed.), Hall, Stuart (ed.), *Visual Culture: The Reader*, Sage Publications Ltd; 1 edition (July 6, 1999)
- Foster, Hal, *Design and Crime (And Other Diatribes)*, Verso Books, 2002
- Foster, Hal, *The Art-Architecture Complex*, Verso Books, 2011
- Koolhaas, Rem, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, The Monacelli Press, 1997
- Leach, Neil, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*, (Romanian translation, titled: *Anestetica. Arhitectura ca anestezic*), trans. Catuneanu, Cornelia Mirela, Paideia, Bucharest, 1999
- Leach, Neil, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, Routledge, 1997
- Poster, Mark, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Stanford Univ. Pr; Later Printing edition, 1988
- Reiser, Jesse, *Atlas of Novel Tectonics*, Princeton Architectural Press, 2006
- Resina, Joan Ramon (ed), Ingenschay, Dieter (ed), *After-Images of the City*, Cornell University Press, 2003
- Smith, Terry, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2006
- Sontag, Susan, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Picador, 2004
- Wunenburger, Jean-Jacques, *L'Imaginaire*, PUF, Que sais-je ?, 1991, 2e éd. 1993

Articles

- Bataille, Georges, *The Cruel Practice of Art*, trans. Supervert 32 C Inc, from the *BLAM! 1 CD-ROM*, 1993, p.2
- Bird, Jon, “The mote in God's eye: 9/11, then and now”, in *Journal of Visual Culture*, ISSN 1470-4129, 04/2003, Volume 2, Issue 1, pp. 83 – 97
- Tovar, Marcela, “The imaginary term in readings about modernity: Taylor and Castoriadis' conceptions”, in *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, No 09, 2001, pp. 32-39

Internet Resources

- Daniel Libeskind, Daniel Libeskind's 17 words of architectural inspiration presentation on TED online platform, Filmed Feb 2009, at min.9.27, <
http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_libeskind_s_17_words_of_architectural_inspiration.html>
- Longest Driverless Metro: Online article at Rediff.com, viewed at 13 May 2012, <
<http://www.rediff.com/business/slide-show/slide-show-1-worlds-longest-driverless-metro-network/20120224.htm>>
- Keith Olbermann on December 9,2011 on a televised show for Fox News, <
<http://current.com/shows/countdown/videos/worst-persons-bill-oreilly-sean-hannity-and-architectural-firm-mvrdv>>
- ‘Anesthesia’, in Merriam-Webster online dictionary, viewed 10 May 2012, <
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anesthesia>>
- ‘Simulation’, in Merriam-Webster online dictionary, viewed 10 May 2012, <
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/simulation>>

Appendix



Fig.7
2011, MVRDV proposal, Seoul, South Korea, expected to be completed in 2024
Source: Dezeen Magazine , online article: <<http://www.dezeen.com/2012/05/18/slideshow-feature-yongsan-international-business-district/>>, copyright: Luxigon



Fig.8
Burj Al Arab hotel
Source: <<http://www.dubai-architecture.info/DUB-003.htm>>



Fig.9
Palm Island Dubai
Source: Metro.uk < <http://www.metro.co.uk/news/53617-palm-island-fare-well-for-qe2>>