New Aesthetic Directions In The 21st Century: Is Modern Technology Directing Current Aesthetic Thinking

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Abstract: Aesthetics has been primarily concerned about beauty. But this aspect changed as it became related first to the philosophical understanding of art and then due to forces of commerce into a spectacle. The current era is dominated by a manipulative digital technology, its varied artifacts and its autonomy. It has led to changing relations between man and technology, where technology provides whatever mankind desires. It has led to two distinct aesthetic trends attitudinal and the technological. Both are related and caused by each other. Alter Modern and New Aesthetic are terms that have been used to describe the aesthetic attitudes and art works of this time, where both are the same and different at the same time. This paper investigates the developments in aesthetics and suggests that our 21st century architecture too is a manifestation of these aesthetic trends.

Keywords : **Aesthetics, digital technology, Alter modern, New Aesthetic, Trans-architecture**

Introduction:-

The Archeology of Aesthetics

When talking about aesthetics in architecture most of us associate it with the beauty of the built form and the visual or ornamental elements that have been deliberately created to articulate the building in order to add to its beauty and make it more attractive to the viewer/users. (Stevanović 2013)

Trained architects understand aesthetics as about defining mass, scale, space, order, harmony, spatial elements, relation between light and shade, texture, material, colour and elements of articulation. (ibid 2013) To this we may add; functionalism, aptness of form and architectural detailing. (Scruton 1979)

The aesthetic component of building has been constantly and naturally evolving with the evolution of new technologies, new materials, new human needs, and new ideas as shaped by the ingenuity of the architect/builder. These aesthetic components, features and elements in turn became sanctified as the cultural identity of the geographical place it is located in.

But there a link between technological development and aesthetics both directly and indirectly as they not only create new options but these options induce a change in the people' aesthetic attitude and hence create a shift in the spirit of artistic creation. (ibid 1979)

Scruton quotes Alberti saying that it was the business of the architect to know what is appropriate and what to build with that knowledge during the renaissance period.

It is the business of design to appoint to the edifice and all its parts as appropriate place exact proportion suitable disposition and harmonious order. (Scruton 1979:24)

In the modern period, however, the direction of architecture completely changed. It now became the solution to a number of problems where aesthetic considerations simply became one of the problems to be solved. And aesthetics became not the aim of architecture but a necessary byproduct. (ibid)

What is our understanding of aesthetics in architecture today?

Are new technologies creating new aesthetic elements and new aesthetic understanding?

Are the traditional factors for judging and creating aesthetical architecture still relevant?

Aesthetics Developments in Art

The term AESTHETIC comes from the Greek aisthesis and was first used by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten in his work entitled 'Aesthetica' (1739) where he uses it to describe the SENSITIVENESS AND PERCEPTIVENESS OF ART AND BEAUTY. The book explains taste as the experience of beauty and as an essential ingredient of the spiritual progress of man, (Stevanović 2013) where aesthetics was developed as the theory of sensuous knowledge in order to counter scientific logic and intellectual knowledge. (Kristeller 1952)

From there on WESTERN AESTHETICS developed in different directions, as a way to enlighten a society, to appreciate art, culture, ethics and other social etiquettes, as a philosophical way of seeing and judging art, as a ground for reason and morality and also as a way of classifying artistic developments. (Gaunt 1945)

The 17th to the 19th centuries brought several changes to life in Europe; political, economic, scientific, geographical and sociological that gave rise to notions of freedom, led to a spurt in industrialization and the discovery of new worlds. Henri de Saint-Simon coined a term avant-garde that he gave to artists who saw themselves as advance soldiers in the culture war, battling the deeply entrenched and established neo classical art world of Europe. They sought to change ideas and move art in new directions that were more compatible with the fast-paced life of the industrial society. This new art was independent of any standards and free of any external expectations. It insisted on creating its own values and evaluating its own merits and created the philosophy of 'art for art's sake'. (Kristeller 1952)

It led to a proliferation of artistic ideas and techniques all over Europe as artists created new styles of representation, abstraction and products that embodied the new spirit of the

age. Artists consciously rejected traditions, depiction of known experiences and old artistic knowledge and at the same time sought to distance themselves from formal painting techniques and methods.

Ordinary people also began to see art and use art in different ways as well and finally the invention of the camera and photography transformed the entire foundation of art and aesthetics.

The camera isolated momentary appearances and in so doing destroyed the idea that images were timeless. What you saw depended upon where you were when. What you saw was relative to your position in time and space. (Berger 1972:18)

Walter Benjamin argued that photography created images that detached from its original and tradition meaning and purpose. Further the possibility of a number of reproductions removed the uniqueness of an original work of art and at the same time permitted a number of beholders, each interpreting it in his context thus allowing for a number of different interpretations. (Oneto 2002) Further as the process became mechanical and the multiplication and manipulation became cheaper it allowed the consumer to use it in whatever manner he felt like.

By the end of the Second World War the center of power shifted from Europe to the United States. A new worldview emerged where the allure of consumerism and a world of obscure ideas entered into the artists fancy. People's desire was channeled into immediate gratification through consumption. Art became a commodity and the marriage of art and money made artists' entertainers and entertainers' artists and the purpose of art changed. (Saisselin 1984) This in turn changed people's attitude and judgment of aesthetic ideals.

Onto An Aesthetics of the Spectacle

While things were rapidly changing in the art world, architects too were demanding change. Architects on either side of the Atlantic, all demanded an end to ornament and surface decoration and promoted in its place, abstract machine based architectural space and forms. They advocated that forms should follow function. (Sullivan 1896) (Loos 1905)

The notion of Beauty in this period of architecture was equated with truth, functionality and the purity of mathematical calculations. Architect's did not reject beauty from their work, but were redefining it in accordance to modern conditions. (Eco 2004)

Architecture became the 'will of the age' reflected in spatial terms. Le Corbusier explained the relationship between architecture and beauty;

The Architect, by his arrangement of forms, realizes an order which is a pure creation of his spirit; by forms and shapes he affects our senses to an acute degree and provokes plastic emotions; by the relationships which he creates he wakes profound echoes in us, he gives us the measure of an order which we feel to be in accordance with that of our world, he determines the various movements of our heart and of our understanding; it is then that we experience the sense of beauty. (Corbusier 1924)

But by the 1960's a number of architects began to question this ideology and some like Robert Venturi suggested that architects should use more decoration, symbolism, color and references to historic structures in their work. Old buildings he felt, were not just worth preserving for their historical value but rather as an inspiration for new architecture. Architecture, that was not just black or just white, but made of various shades of grey. It led to a shift in aesthetics towards the popular and an art that included wit, whimsy and promoted by advertising. (Venturi 1966)

The aesthetic accepted fragmentation of society, local narratives, historic continuity and a number of other pluralities. But it also had its critics like Jean Baudrillard who claimed that this aesthetic was only about creating simulations without originality. Guy Debord termed the entire social group as the society of the spectacle, who only craved entertainment through the media. The new aesthetic trend had made art and architecture just decorative artifacts for quick consumption. (Debord 1967)

The AESTHETIC OF THE SPECTACLE grew into a celebration of modern technology. In many respects, the object of spectacle was to dovetail neatly with commodification and the power of the circulation of capital over daily life. The stimulus to the economy was therefore considerable. (Harvey 2000)

21st Century New Technology New Aesthetics

The current condition that we live in has been described in different ways by different people. What all agree on is that there is now a postindustrial, networked and highly informed society for whom the possession of information is the way to produce wealth and also is the driving force of intellectual activity. The society itself is made up of self-programmable, value rooted and flexible workers. (Castells 1995)

This current condition had its origins in man's inquisitive nature to scientifically study, document and record every aspect of the natural phenomenon. This led to the production of huge amounts of data that needed devices to record and process. Today's computers are simply highly evolved manifestations of this process. This has created a world dominated by technological thinking, where decisions in any field are required to respond to criteria of speed, efficiency, economy and one-dimensional utility.

Where, artists and architects need to deal with constantly evolving technology, changing relations between man and technology, new aesthetic trends, the autonomy of the apparatus and the need to still have an intellectual engagement with a number of ambiguous and paradoxical situations.

This paper believes that TWO DISTINCT AESTHETIC TRENDS emerged; the first ATTITUDINAL and the other TECHNOLOGICAL. Both are interrelated.

The first of ATTITUDINAL AESTHETICS was suggested by Nicolas Bourriaud. In 'Postproduction Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World' (2011), he explains that throughout history artists and architect have always been borrowing ideas and images that in turn implies the ideology of ownership and originality. He claims that there is little originality or ownership in art works now as the emphasis is

with objects already in circulation in the cultural market. Today's attitude is all about SHARING. (Bourriaud 2011)

Bourriaud coins the term ALTERMODERN to explain the multitude of possible and alternative aesthetic routes that follow the common goal of sharing. He suggests that the aesthetics of this era is a reaction to the struggle for diversity in the face of standardization; it is the acceptance of our multiple temporalities and it is a portrayal of chaos and complexity. The resulting art and architecture shows disorientation, collective authorship and decentralization of culture. (Bourriaud 2015)

The artist's task has become one of packaging, reframing and distributing. The personal connects are heterogeneous (belonging to different cultural traditions) and heterochronic (borrowed from different periods) (ibid)

The second trend is TECHNOLOGICAL AESTHETIC, more precisely aesthetic based on digital technologies where the fusion of a number of technologies in different spheres are blurring the lines between physical, digital and biological domains. Technology that is able to harnesses the possibilities and desires of billions of individuals all connected by mobile devices, each with massive processing power, storage capacity, and unlimited access to raw data. (Schwab 2015)

This technological spread has led to an increased digitalization of people's lives and by new digital cutting edge artifacts that provide new information work using new information and are therefore constantly transforming the way people live. Technology has developed to a state where there are independent computational systems that store, manipulate and redefine people's choices and re-present back in a manner that seem natural and tailored to personal tastes but which in reality are artificially created. (Contreras-Koterbay & Lukasz 2016)

The aesthetics of the time has been called different things. One such was coined by James Bridle is the NEW AESTHETIC. He describes the New Aesthetic as an attitude, a feeling and a sensibility made for the state of hyper-contemporaneity.

For a while now, I've been collecting images and things that seem to approach a New Aesthetic of the future, which sounds more portentous than I mean. What I mean is that we've got frustrated with the NASA extropiaism space-future, the failure of jet packs, and we need to see the technologies we actually have with a new wonder. Consider this a mood board for unknown products. (Bridle 2011)

The New Aesthetic as a movement sparked the interest of artists, curators and designers globally and has become a subject of theoretical inquiry for current day cultural theorists. This has been led by the increasing use of digital technology both as a means of producing artworks and as an art in itself. The new manifestations of the New Aesthetic are based in computational language, algorithms and self-replicating systems of code that question the traditional notions of beauty and pleasure, the role of ideas and the modes of expression.

How should the new aesthetic be described or judged?

Or do we simply treat is just as an experience to be felt and forgotten?

Or as just another software construct that may even fail to move us?

Or do we treat it as a part and parcel of our contemporary existence.

The New Aesthetic is primarily, though not entirely, digital and an internet-based approach cultural phenomenon that affects the lives of the entire human race.

Sterling describes it as a real-time enquiry that question novelty, historicity, ontological basis, gender bias and political biases where the central concern was the 'NEW' in the new aesthetic.

What is new is their integration into our lives to the point where we are bringing them to bed. (Sterling 2012)

Conclusions

How Is Modern Technology Directing Current Aesthetic Thinking?

Both ALTERMODERN and the NEW AESTHETIC are synthetic in nature and are products of the modern digital world.

They both are and will continue to transform people's perception of the world while simultaneously creating a new one. All aesthetic thinking will be the residue of the constant generation and shifting of ideas within a limited processing time leading to sharing, blending and repackaging of ideas and images.

Perhaps the architecture of this era can be called TRANS-ARCHITECTURE (transmutation + architecture). (Novak 1994) Architecture is redefining and reevaluating space between the real physical and the digital virtual.

Physical space, electronic space, scientific space, narrative, semantic and stochastic space, social, economic and political space, smooth and striated space, discrete and continuous space, cellular space, …… all are jostling together and creating the infinity of permutations that we live with but about which we are not sufficiently conscious or articulate.(ibid)

Trans-architecture is the physical and theoretical blend where multiple desires meet multiple technological possibilities to create a new conceptual space that we are unfamiliar with juxtaposition.

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