



Contemporary Definitions of the Architectural Sublime

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT Research is to study different expressions in architecture & architectural language. Even if these expressions are contradictory they are inseparable. Paper describes postmodern theorist Peter Eisenman & Anthony Vidler's view about architectural sublime. Peter Eisenman has compared sublime with 'grotesques' & Anthony Vidler has compared it with 'uncanny'. Both of them are trying to say that grotesques & uncanny are necessary to sense Sublime. Vidler describes an understanding of the uncanny may be crucial to an understanding of contemporary deconstructionist architecture. He analyzed different post modernists architect's projects in order to reveal how contemporary architecture makes use of the uncanny, on the one hand, to criticize traditional architectural narratives, and on the other hand, to express the core of our postmodern condition.

En Terror Farma: In trails of Grotexes

Peter Eisenman

The grotesque is a concept and not a design product or prescription.....

Peter Eisenman develops interest in understanding the limits of the discipline of architecture & its relationship with nature & beauty. He suggests displacement or deconstruction of architectural discourse might be accomplished using the aesthetic category of the grotesque considered a component of the sublime. He defines the architectural sublime as airy qualities which resist physical occupation while grotesque deals with real substance. The grotesque is characterized by the uncertain & unspeakable, arid & unphysical.

He accepts in manual Kant's modes of containing within: thus present within the beautiful grotesque which encompasses the idea of ugly, the deformed and supposedly unnatural.

Eisenman is concerned that appositional categories are inadequate to account for the complicity and irrationality of occupation of space. The grotesque is a concept and not a design product or prescription.

The edge of between...

One of his clients wanted something far more significant, something that challenges man's very occupation of space, not just surface of that space.

Architects have to deal with the real conditions of gravity, physical presence. They have to build the here and now. In fact architects must overcome nature. The overcoming nature remains the problem.

Architectural discourse changes its nature to knowledge this is because knowledge (as oppose to nature) has no physical being.

At the root of present conceptual structure of architecture is Vitruvian triad of commodity firmness and delight (use, structure and beauty). The beautiful has been about goodness, about the natural, the rational and the truthful. It is that to which architects are taught to aspire in their architecture. Thus they search for manifest conditions of the

beautiful as a form of delight in Vitruvius sense.

Finding something else in beautiful..... Kant

Eisenman has given reference of Immanuel Kant's concept of beauty. Kant suggests that there could be something else other than goodness & natural in beautiful which he called sublime. He came to suggestion that the sublime was within beautiful & beautiful within sublime.

The sublime has a condition within it which conventionally beautiful represses. It is condition of the uncertain, the unspeakable, the unnatural, the un-present, and the unphysical all together constitute the condition which approaches terrifying. This terrifying condition lies within sublime.

Sublime Verses Grotesque

The terms grotesque is generally used as a negative of sublime. But in case of architecture it is not always same that sublime deals with qualities of the airy, resisting physical occupation & grotesque deals with manifestation of uncertain in physical. Grotesque in some sense present in architecture & architecture is thought of physical presence. This condition of grotesque was acceptable as a decoration in form of gargoyles & frescoes. The grotesque introduces idea of ugly, the deformed & unnatural as an always present in the beautiful. And this something already within attempts to repress beautiful in architecture.



Grotesque in architecture

Rethinking relationship....

Sublime & the grotesque deals with movement between self & natural & the representation of unease in literature & painting. If the naturalness of nature is to be displaced in the uneasy movement between nature & self then idea of sublime & grotesque must be reconceptualised. The fear of overcoming nature must be preserved in any displaced categories.

Aspects of displacement or other architecture

Since the condition of sublime & grotesque evolved from the expression of man overcoming nature, the other term containing double uncertainty will have to be found. This means to architecture is internal displacement. Any form of occupation of space requires more form of beautiful at the same time it contains ugly, sometimes rationality with irrational etc.

Four Aspects of displacement

- **Otherness**
- **Twoness**
- **Betweenness**
- **Interiority**

Otherness

The displacement concerns with architect/designer & design process. Something designed can be called displaced in form of expression, a manneristic distortion of an essentially stable language. But other than this there is needed is intuition. Intuition with inherent architectural knowledge can never produce a state of uncertainty. The notion of grotesque & uncanny can conceptualize & imaged but cannot be designed. If something can be designed is no longer uncertain.

Form, function, structure, site& meaning.. all are said to be texts of architectural design but they are not textual. They are primary or original sources. Textual or textuality is that aspect of text which is a condition of otherness. Example,if architecture is primarily presence, materiality bricks & mortars would be otherness or trace that is secondarity.

Twoness

In any text there are traces of otherness, aspects or structures which have been repressed by presence. As long as presence remains dominant, i.e. singular there can be no textuality. And such condition of trace requires at least two texts.

There are many different twoness like twoness of form & function, twoness of structure & ornament. Traditionally one is always dominant or original & other as a secondary (Form follows function & ornament is added to structure).

Betweenness

But here twoness suggests structure of equivalences where there is uncertainty instead of hierarchy. When there is one text dominant there is no displacement. Thus second text will be always within the first text & thus between traditional presence & absence between being & nonbeing.

This third condition of other architecture suggests a condition of the object as a weak image. The new condition of the object must be between in an imageable sense. It is something almost this or almost that but not quite either. That is experience of uncertainty of partial knowing. This between is not between logically but a between within.

Interiority

With denial of traditional place or enclosure other condition of displaced architecture suggests interiority. This interiority has nothing to do with the inside or inhabitable space of building. It is related to the condition of being within. In case with grotesque interiority deals with two factors, the unseen & the hollowed out. It also deals with the condition proposed by textuality which refers inward symbolism.

Uncertainty within above Four

All above described four conditions provoke an uncertainty in the object with removal of both architect & user from necessary control of object. The architect no longer is the hand & mind, the mythic originary figure in design process. And the object no longer needs to look ugly or terrifying to provoke an uncertainty,

It is now the distance between object & subject- The possibility of possession which provokes this anxiety.

Theorizing the Unhomely**Anthony Vidler****Uncanny- The darker side of sublime**

Anthony Vidler has written about sublime & its darker side Uncanny. He looks into sources meaning & impact of fragmentation of uncanny. He has taken consideration Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical model to describe uncanny. The uncanny is the rediscovery of something previously controlled.

According to him architecture has capacity to raise, un-selling the problems of identity around the self, the other, the body & its absence. The uncanny provokes haunting sensations, the idea of the double, the fear of dismemberment & the other terrors. He sees the idea of human body in fragments as a theme of uncanny. This uncanny is the terrifying side of sublime. Uncanny cannot be instrumentalized in design.

Anthony Vidler has argued the architectural uncanny, Some of the architects have been inspired by un canny in their efforts to incite discomfort & unease. The uncanny manifested itself in phenomena like agoraphobia & claustrophobia. He says place of Himmelbleu feels place under threat.

**Sublime: View of other theorists****Sublime within conceptual reach & spiritual dimension****Kate Nesbit**

The significance of sublime as an aesthetic subject of art & architecture seems to lie in its conceptual reach or in case of religious sublime it will lie in spiritual dimension. The sublime refers to immense ideas like space time death & divine.

Sublime which produces terror**Edmund Burke**

Edmund Burke defined the sublime as that which somehow produces terror. Whatever is terrible with regard to sight is sublime too. For building to be sublime the one

& the only condition is greatness of dimension. When we have pain & danger then only we can feel the idea of delight & whatever excites this delight he call it as sublime.

Conclusion

Vidlers uncanny is similar to Eisenman's grotesque. Both are components of postmodern redefinition of classical aesthetic conception of sublime which begun by post structuralist, theorist in other disciplines. The contemporary sublime is the single artistic sensibility to characterize the modern.

Grotesque & uncanny are within sublime, both are inseparable.

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