CONCEPTUAL REPORT OF THE BEIRUT OMANI CENTER- HOUSE OF ART AND CULTURE

DAN GRAHAM: I'm interested in inter-subjectivity, exploring how a person, in a precise and given moment, perceives him/herself while at the same time watching other people who in turn are watching him/her.

The **proposal** presented for the "Beirut Omani Center - House of Art and Culture" is based on the way people perceive reality. It addresses the implications and representation of every human being's differing response and reaction to their surrounding environment, their unique and individual perceptions. Perception is the process of attaining awareness and understanding of sensory information and is dependent on multiple combinations of factors which include the physical, emotional and psychological state of an individual. As a result of multiple possibilities of interpreting information, reality is therefore and to a certain degree, a grey zone, a dream, that permanently fluctuates in time and space. We could even say that there is no one reality; that there is no one world.

 We would like to understand a performing act, or **performance**, as a sum of tools that when shared with other people, brings to life a part of "this" reality – emotions, thoughts, or any other mental form or process. The message involved in this action, connects the viewer and creator through an open, shared experience.

 In the same way, cultures work in an open format, and never constitute a finished totality. The medium for this type of interaction is what we are trying to identify.

 The importance of the concept of **place** (topographic idea of the bounded domain) as opposed to the **space** (endlessness of the megalopolis) comes from the necessity of analyzing the cultural impact of technology in the work of Art. The theoretician Kenneth Frampton tries to arrive at a genuine understanding of the world in relation with the human condition (tradition, nature…), claiming for the recovering of the roots and values of architecture. For him architecture should be the instrument to achieve the reconciliation between industrialization and more traditional forms of land settlement and use, and should reveal the different instances and modes by which the world comes into being/existence.

 On the contrary we take a position closer to philosopher Frederic Jameson's. His solution for this problem is a new postmodern art that has to hold the world space of multinational capital and simultaneously to achieve a breakthrough to some yet unimaginable new mode of representing the space where it exists and reveals.

 In the postmodern space the immediate experience of individuals is unable to address the true economic and social form (real) that rules the experience. Therefore the subjective individual experience is limited within the total social space. That's why Jameson claims that the architectural form from Frampton's Critical Regionalism would also lack all political and allegorical efficiency unless it were coordinated with a variety of other local, social, and cultural movements.

Hence, Jameson considers Critical Regionalism deliberately regressive and traditionally oriented in the way that it embraces the role of technology in aesthetic. This aesthetic equally and explicitly acknowledges the existence and the necessity of modern technology in ways whose originality must now be shown.

Proposal

In this context, we propose an art center with a revolutionary concept. Through the creation of a technological space that is detached from the traditional form of conceptual thinking, we strive to stimulate the birth of a new culture. This space will be a creation of what Marc Auge calls a "non-place" which results in a profound alteration of awareness: something we perceive, but only in a partial and incoherent manner.'

Anthropological places are contrasted to spaces; places in turn are contrasted to non-places: `If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place'. Modernity is contrasted to supermodernity: it is supermodernity which creates non-places, `spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places...' For example, `in the modernity of the Baudelairean landscape ... everything is combined', the old and new are interwoven; on the other hand, supermodernity `makes the old (history) into a specific spectacle, as it does with all exoticism and all local particularity ... in the non-places of supermodernity, there is always a specific position ... for "curiosities" presented as such'.

 An individual's unique and alienating experiences resulting from encountering these 'non-places' are the essence and foundation of the birth of a new culture, and a result a new society. As Auge points out, in order to remember it is necessary at the same time to forget. If one were to apply this philosophy in the context of the Lebanese experience, the historic and very romantic perception of Lebanon being the 'Switzerland of the Middle East', as well as its devastating recent past should be put behind. It is only after doing so that Lebanon will be ready to embrace a new present, and thus pave the way for a new beginning. The process of remembrance – the 'flowering' of the past in the present – is thus as much a process of negation as it is that of retrieval or selection. What is lost in oblivion is not the past (which is already absent) but the traces of its remembrance (its rendering as present), leaving other traces – other remembrances – to flourish and take root in their wake.

The New House of Art and Culture is a space where the consumption of text and images foster and embrace the retrieval of past experiences, which are codified into a new fiction. Remembrance (through literature, films, writing…) becomes the inspirational font of the creative process. 'These fictional scenes dive into our real life, slip in like remembrances in the same capacity as those we have lived'. These imbrications of 'fictive' return are materially and symbolically embedded in the live modalities of everyday practice, in which different fictions (individual, collective, mythic) are dialectically interwoven. Hence, an individual that enters the New House of Art and Culture will undergo a

process of birth or rebirth, casting off ('putting to death') his or her former identity and past remembrances. He will become a new person that will lead to the creation of a new society.

In this sense, the visitor is then forced to take an active role in any performance activity and is no longer a passive viewer. He or she will be part of the act of performing. Any action will create a constant retro-feed system between the actor, audience and consequently, the space thus contributing to the constant transformation of the space. As Augé describes as 'supermodernity' our non-place will suffer the overabundance or excess of space, alongside with the acceleration of history and the individualisation of consciousness.

Façade

The same concept is extended to the materiality of the building. We propose a reflected textile façade in the same way of Anish Kappor's Sky Mirror or Robert Morris Mirrored Cubes, presenting viewers with a vivid inversion of the city. This optical object changes through the day and night, becoming a 'non-object'; a building that, despite its monumentality, suggests a window or void into new world and seems to vanish into its surroundings. The viewer is constantly engaged in this artwork from a distance, as a foreword of the activity that takes place in its interior.

The exterior façade is a combination of different high technology textiles. A solar textile with a LED lighting system integrated, wraps the building in all its perimeter and acts as a support for an interactive information display. The façade's 'uniqueness' lies in its ability to react to different stimuli based on the current cultural and social interest. Other stimuli include number of visitors and the time of day, ongoing performances, façade orientation, news... For example, we propose an ambient translator that scans each visitor and input a 3D signal in various façades. Additionally it could be utilized as an advertising sign board through which the center's sponsors could receive a steady income from.

Towards the interior, the different suspended volumes are also covered with interactive and 'smart' fabrics. Composition, color, texture will vary depending on the acoustic and thermal conditions of the spaces. These fabrics will fulfill the demands of sound and light absorption and draft avoidance, as well as climate and fire protection, and will create a neutral background for the most varied festivities, installations and projections. The materials include a PVC projection screen, cotton velvet, PVC ultra mesh, Trevira CS voile, stainless steel rings and digital print. In this case particular example, we could look at Lucas Samaras or Yayoi Kusama Mirror Rooms and Petra Blaisse curtains and installations as references.

The use of this type of materials gives a temporary appearance to the intervention, and confirms that architecture could have a different character from the traditional solid structures. As Hans Hollein pointed out, 'Everything is architecture'. We understand that these type of buildings should be an open system and in constant renovation applying new technologies, new forms and works of art. It will be then become a coherent and signified proposal.

In this same line of thinking, the skeleton of the building is controlled by electro-hydraulic devices that can actually move and change shape beneath the fabric skin to accommodate the different events that happens in the inside. The car BMW GINA Light Visionary Model is an example of how designers should be able to think outside of the box when it

comes to the materials that make up a building and also how it relates to the user. As Bruce Lee said...we should 'be water my friend'.

Program

Programmatically the building also takes a different approach from what has been traditionally applied. Instead of trying to design a series of flexible halls – minimizing their number - we propose a sequence of specialize spaces that relate to the acoustics requirements for each specific performance. depending on the purpose of utilizing the space (Halls, Operas, Theatres, Chamber Music, Conference Spaces, Lecture Rooms, Polyvalent Rooms, Conservatories or Music workshops, Exhibition Spaces, Sound-Recording Studios, Broadcasting Studios, etc ...), the reverberation time of the space differs and therefore their volume and shape

These spaces are connected to the main service tower, which houses a variety of structures which include: different vertical cores – public and freight elevators -, the portal and lighting bridge, the fly loft and facilities, and a complex system of turntable stages. The value proposition of the tower is not limited to its ability to service all performances through it, but more importantly its ability to intertwine all the performance areas in one single three dimensional space. This gives the users new possibilities of appropriating the building – in time and space – which will lead into new performance concepts. The new society will have a physical support that will allow it to create new forms of expressions (for example a RPDC performance - reading poetry dancing opera). The building will then provide the flexibility to have different events going at the same time or become one performance unit that will take over the whole building.