

CARTOGRAPHIC VISUAL EXPRESSION, A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION AND EXPLORATION IN ARCHITECTURE AND ART.

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ABSTRACT:

A component of cartography is seen as a means of communication, a visual expression using signs and symbols and cultural codes of interpreting the information and messages contained by cartographic images. From this point of view, parallels could be found with architects' and urbanists' projective drawings, seen as visual communication instrument inside and outside their trade. Cartographic visual expressions are resourceful and inspirational from the perspective of a visual artist involved in architectural educational process.

Key-words: *Cartographic visual expression, Communication, Architecture, Identity visual art, Exploration.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The cartographic visual expression is an image composed of signs, symbols and codes that provide their interpretation. In this respect, cartography can be considered a language, a means of communication. The architects are using a specific language as well, in order to communicate and also to create and develop their projects, to follow their ideas.

The spatial component of the visual language used by the architects gains a specific evolution to cartographic language. Using the same theme of understanding and representing space, the cartographic language follows the same cultural controversies of the age. The cartographic means is the reflected image of the thinking and cultural stream of each historical moment. The relationship between means of communication and technical evolution, the relationship with space and its meaning, the impact of the digital age, are problems in which cartographic language has strong connections to the architects' interests.

2. TOWN PLANNING AND CARTOGRAPHIC VISUAL EXPRESSION

If architecture claims a problem of adapting its language to the new means, town planning encounters the same issues, as Kevin Lynch says: "the study of cities has no powerful basic language of its own. It borrows the devices of geography and architecture but they are only partly useful" (Kevin Lynch, 1984). The town determines a way of life, gives a direction to human destiny, in a mutual shaping and conditioning. Denis Wood's didactical experiments explore the city using a cartographic language. Pointing the physical data on the map lead to an emotional approach. Denis Wood published in 2010 this research, done in a playful manner, but revealing a certain urban reality: *EVERYTHING SIGNS: Maps for a Narrative Atlas*. This work transcends genres. Ira Glass says in the foreword:

"When I encountered these maps of Boylan Heights years ago, what I first loved was how impractical they were. Most maps are entirely about doing a job. They are dull salary men who clock in early and spend their days telling you where stuff is with unrelenting precision. They never vary an inch from these appointed rounds. Not these maps.

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One of my favorites, Pools of Light, is a dreamy rendering in blurry white circles of the light cast by street lamps. Even if you were in Boylan Heights on a dark night and badly needed to find a street lamp, it's hard to imagine how this map would help you. For one thing, you'd need to get under a street lamp to read the damn map, and once you'd accomplished that, well, you'd have achieved your goal, wouldn't you?

[...] These maps are completely unnecessary. The world didn't ask for them. They aid no navigation or civic-minded purpose. They're just for pleasure. [...] They know it's a sad, workaholic salaryman. Their mission is more novelistic. Which I also love. What they chart isn't Boylan Heights exactly but Wood's feelings about Boylan Heights, his curiosity about it, and his sense of wonder at all the things about the place that are overlooked and unnamed. [...] They describe human lives without ever showing us any people. [...] Wood is writing a novel where we never meet the main characters, but their stuff is everywhere" (Denis Wood, 2010).

The "professional" languages, specialized on multiple objects of study, lead to extreme isolation and autonomic structures that make them function artificially and insensitively. This differentiation between the specific languages of arts, architecture or cartography is artificial. Postmodernism and virtual media revealed the frail structure of language agreements proving a lack of ability to circumscribe different cultural domains. On the other hand, space itself is modified through the virtual reality. Mitchell says that "the worldwide computer network - the electronic agora - subverts, displaces, and radically redefines our notions of gathering, place, community and urban life". In Meyrovitz's opinion "where we are physically no longer determines where and who we are socially" and the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas asserts that: "the only space that matters in our time is the one we connect to on the computer" (Rowan Wilken, 2011).

Virtual space changes perception upon physical space so we can talk about a dematerialization of the second one. This process started in the latest decades, as the distances become relative as people are more and more eager to surpass records of speed between certain points. Nowadays, the well-known expression *at a click distance* is used to define the virtual space tendency to surpass physical limitations in covering terrestrial distances. The new generation of architects claims that the reference to terrestrial space is out of date. In their vision this kind of understanding reality is an obsolete perspective reflecting the idea that architecture is reported to human scale. The human shape loses its role (as stated from Vitruvius to Corbusier) of fundamental keystone in architecture, as virtual reality replaces the physical one and architecture turns from "*bricks to bits* (Rowan Wilken, 2011). Subsequently, as the physical, formal issue loses its key role in architecture, the famous principle of Louis Sullivan: "form follows function" is also obsolete in this vision upon contemporary architecture.

3. REPRESENTING SPACE. FROM DRAWING TO VIRTUAL REALITY

The antagonist perspectives upon contemporary architecture are active on the "battlefield of the image". One of the topics in this argue is visual representation and its role in the relationship with space and architecture. Exceeding its representative role, the image is still unanimously looked upon as a means of creation and knowledge. The new challenge is adapting the visual language to the new phenomenological meanings. There are several questions to get an answer these days: *is the traditional visual language still useful to communicate or create?, when is it useful?, is it losing the evocative power?* At the same time, it is interesting to see if we can talk about a developing epoch that will lead to a

situation resembling to the one described by Marshal McLuhan regarding the moment when printing was invented. *Gutenberg Galaxy* (Marshall McLuhan, 1975), as the new epoch was named by the author, marked a change of human reality through printed text.

Marconi Galaxy was the next – the epoch of mass media communication. This is the moment of „the medium is the message”, meaning that „the psychological, cultural and social effects of a certain means of communication (audio, visual or audio-visual) are the result of the using of a certain means regardless of the content of the message. This surprising idea demonstrates that the instrument itself has a formative influence upon the receptor, changing the perceptive patterns and the spiritual structure *regardless of the communicated content*” (Victor Ernest Maşek, 1975). The next question is if this crisis of the language is not a symptom of the crisis of the message as the supporters of traditional drawing and sketch in architecture planning plead not against digital means of producing images but against the effects they can induce: standardizing, globalization, losing identity, ignoring local specific feature.

4. CASE STUDY

4.1 Representing space – a quest for identity

The research themes of the object *Form Studies at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism*, 1st and 2nd forms, propose the exploration of language conventions, a quest for the limits and interlinking of the subjective meanings. The means of the language, as stated before, contain connotative information about the culture they attend to.

Having no position in the debate between traditional means and the recent ones, the *Form Studies* class proposes a research upon the communication capacity and interdisciplinary understanding of the language forms.

One of the themes of study for the students is: *the quest for identity*. They have to solve two issues: the first one uses four photos of some anonymous buildings. Using the images, as a source of information, students developed an ensemble of messages to express their deductions. Using the alphabet and language, they expressed a series of key words and expressions to define their impression/opinion about the buildings and the environmental context. Then, they tried to localize the buildings through a sketchy representation on the map. The third step was to draw an imaginative, deducted plan to express the neighboring space of the building the specificity of the landforms, vegetation and the structure of the settlement. The students' works elude conventions defining different language genres. They express a subjective way of understanding space (Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

4.2. Cartography – a spiritual itinerary

The second task refers to ancient maps and their symbolic function as religious, magic visual expression of the world or as a chart of sacred places or itineraries. Considering these ancient examples, students reshaped the city, following subjective criteria, places and itineraries that they consider relevant in their everyday life in Cluj (Fig. 7, 8). References for these drawings are medieval maps, known as “mappamundi”, considered as spiritual representations of the world, more than geographical spatial marks. In medieval representations, „buildings and cities appear as complementary elements of historical or mythical motifs that are represented



Fig. 7 Ioana Andreea Patrut, graphic exercise, superimposing daily basis experience in Cluj over the shape and form of medieval representation known as “mappamundi”; pencils and watercolor on paper, time – 1 hour, 2014.

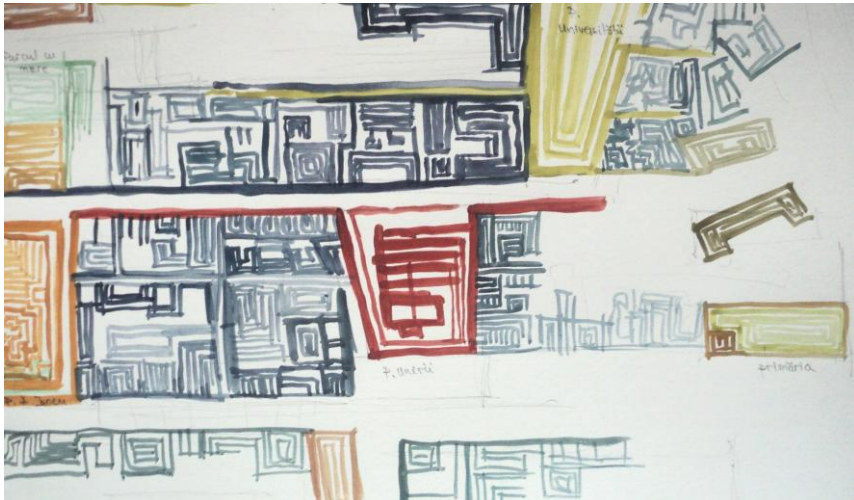


Fig. 8 Roxana Balas, graphic exercise, superimposing daily basis experience in Cluj over the pattern of spiritual spatial representation from Australian Aboriginal tradition; pencils and watercolor on paper, time – 1 hour, 2014.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Cartographic language can be related to different cultural and scientific domains and a specific application in an art-related object of study explore its potential in artistic visual representations. An artistic perspective on cartographic images, just like a collection in a worldwide museum, is a documenting and developing cultural process, a way of thinking, using artistic skills. From the very beginning of space representation in different cultures, there is a part of cartography that is not seen as an evolutionary process, but a side of continuous cultural shifting.

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