

Design Theory and Film
Assistant Professor Dr. Sercan Yıldıırım
Research Assistant Aslı Dođay
Gazi University, Faculty of Engineering and Architecture
Department of Architecture
Ankara, TURKEY

ABSTRACT

Design theories and film work with the same keywords since the designative concepts for both are time and space. At the beginning of the 20th century, the discovery of montage technique and a new esthetic language took place synchronically. This led to an interaction between them. Throughout the paper, this situation has been searched. However, the look is *operational*. For this reason, other discussions, concerning the topic have been excluded. The discussion is formed basically around four points defined in the 20th century. Four directors: Eisenstein, Tarkovski, Lynch and Greenaway are examined and discussed with their operational methods of filming. Various architects' works are also searched and discussed with the same operational keywords. The paper aims to disclose the interaction between the topics.

The beginning of the 20th century carries a disjunction point in itself. The New Aesthetic Revolution, as a revolution in arts, introduced man a new world: to catch the reality of the object. This power of perceiving the world through a new perspective is based on a new logic of production. This production required an instrumental look, because the grasping of the reality of the object no longer was achieved by a perspective perception belonging to Renaissance. A new dimension destructs this static image, time. The object is now perceived through different perspectives and distances and visualised then (Yildirim).

This dismantling of the object by time might be considered as a point of disjunction in arts. Definitely it has its own reasons. The disclosure of a new world by Industrialisation introduced new apparatus, which depend upon the concept of time, speed and acceleration. As Valery implied, material, space and time were no longer at the places where they used to be. Thus, the concept of art could no longer be achieved by traditional manners (Benjamin, 1993).

Cubism, purism, futurism, constructivism, dadaism were the revolutionary movements in arts at the beginning of the 20th century. Whether in Europe or in Russia, they aimed to construct a new aesthetics. A common point among all these movements was to grasp the reality of the object by tearing it apart and reforming it. The important point in this reformation was that the object's unity was never rejected. As Demir implies, cubism aimed a reformation where the object was torn apart by many perspectives (Demir, 1994). In futurism, the object was considered unstable. The unity of it was constructed by the overlapping of a continuous movement. In their futurist manifesto, Luigi Russolo claimed that the old fashioned perspective had to be left aside in favour of the moving objects which increase as vibrations that flow in space and change and destruct their own forms (Batur, YKY). In Russia meantime two

brothers, Gabo and Pevsner published a constructivist manifesto. A keyword for the journey of this new concept, movement was striking: “we are no longer content with the static elements of form in plastic art, we demand the inclusion of time as a new element and assert that real movement must be employed in plastic art, in order to make possible the use of kinetic rhythms” (Conrads, 1970).

Malevich states that this new path rejected a realistic design where things were offered as a section from the outer world (Batur, YKY). The film director Eisenstein shared this new path with others, his words and Malevich’s words were based on the same ideology: Hegel’s dialectics. Eisenstein summarised this idea briefly and in a very clear manner: “i take the images of reality, then I fictionalise them to produce emotions. I am not realist but materialist. By going to the reality, I move away from realism” (Eisenstein, 1984). This reality in modern arts was based on an understanding of disclosing the material (the object), not the one that is metaphysical. This understanding, though at first sight may have exhibited a complicated and indefinite image or not, constituted of a very pure and clear alphabet. El Lisssitky that worked together with other revolutionists all over Europe, in his manifesto ideological Superstructure, mentioned this point and notified that the aesthetics of the ideology asked for creations arising out of elemental forms (Conrads, 1970). As mentioned before, the reality of this primary form, the unity of the object could only be grasped by a new way of looking. The destruction of the Renaissance perceptive was inevitable. The dialectics required a new way of looking, and dealt with the perception of the in-betweens. Thus there was no more a naked truth (Berger, 1965).

To the question of why it occurred in such a way may be given to inventions that had deeply affected the beginning of the 20th century: photography and cinematography. The capturing of the movement, the images of the motion. As mentioned at the very beginning, the new art required an instrumental look. Cinema was the invention of the instrument itself and more. “then came the cinema and this world of prison was dynamited by the time pieces that were one over ten of a second; now we take adventurous trips among the ruins of this world that scattered around. Close-ups expand the space, and slow motion expands the motion in wide pieces. In a close-up it is no more than the already seen-before thing, new structural formations of the thing disclose” (Benjamin, 1993). As he mentioned in the Passages, believed that cinema brought a new dimension to the arts of the 20th century.

Sergei Eisenstein is one of the most important names of the cinema and the revolutionary arts at the beginning of the century. As Peter Wollen writes “ it was a young engineer who was bent on a finding a scientific approach to the secrets and mysteries of art” (Wollen, 1969). Eisenstein’s famous term “montage of attractions” – which has also influenced the end of the century- had close relations to dadaism and constructivism. A word created partly from art and partly from industry “aimed to combine units of impression into one whole” (Wollen, 1969). If we take a deeper look into this explanation it is possible to build a connection within the visual arts.

Eisenstein in *Towards a Theory of Montage* (1994) stated that the main attraction is the movement and the perception of any movement consisted in the continual break up of a certain static form and the reordering of the fragments of that static form into a new form. Borrowed from the dialectical language, he has named each part of the montage as a cell: because the cell, during its mitosis, forms a new thing. Both autonomous and internally related to the whole each cell more than being connected collides into one another. This “collision” leads to the arising of a new concept. *Collision* for Eisenstein is a concept of dialectics and any visual perception constitutes on it. Because, the being is a constant evolution of the actions of the two contraries. This requires a dynamic perception, and what is perceived is always something in-between, but never the binding, addition or juxtaposition of the two. This dynamic thing is a collision. According to him, this conflict (Eisenstein uses conflict as the same with collision) in a shot is a potential montage.

The architecture of the same period was also constructed on the same utopia: the constitution of a dialectical modern society. The French architect Le Corbusier has related himself with the dialectical term of cinema: montage. This fact may be disclosed through two different examples. The first one states his “interlayering of the typical, the ideal and the ironic” (Baird, 1995). In his penthouse for Beistegui, he employed the ironic techniques of *montage* both to create a complex cultural image encircling a wide range of domestic values, and to disclose the whole in a dialectical and modernist unity” (Baird, 1995). Montage was the only way of perceiving the space since the dialectical unity of it could only be grasped by a fragmental connection.

The second example is to discuss how Le Corbusier represented his works as the stills from a moving eye. It is exiting to state Le Corbusier has made a film with Pierre Chenal, *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui*, 1929. This constitutes the parallelisation between the way he perceives the object (his architecture) and the way he represents it. In this film, it may be seen that perception of space and time should occur in motion. Colomina in her article “The Split Wall: the domestic voyeurism” explains that even the stills from Villa Savoye introduce fragmented perceptions. “not only by the camera but by the house itself as well” (Colomina, 1992). This perception in motion always draws one to an exterior look, where perceiving of the object can only be achieved by a movement through the dimension of time. This motion creates fragments that are to be constructed in mind to a unifying of the object, the whole (cube). As mentioned above, the house always draws oneself to the exterior. One other reason to this fact is the fragmented representation of the landscape. The house does not have a face, it is in the air. Thus, it can be at any place, it is placeless. Le Corbusier comments: “the house is no more than a series of views choreographed by the visitor, like a filmmaker affects the montage of a film” (Colomina, 1992).

After the 2nd World War the most serious critic to Eisenstein’s theory of montage of attractions” belonged to Tarkovski. He described Eisenstein’s cinema as an

intellectual cinematography of concepts” because: this way of handling is contrary to the nature of cinema, it is oppressive over the spectator and, the director does not have such a mission. To constitute a third thought from two different concepts is contrary to the nature of the cinema and to play with the concepts can never be an aim of any kind of art work. Secondly, the screen does not let the viewer to create his own experience, he is faced with puzzles, he solves symbols, and he is expected to be fond of allegory. The screen addresses to the intellectual experience of the viewer. Thirdly, the constructing of the image (*montage*) becomes the target. By oppressing his thoughts over the viewer, the director becomes someone “who reproduces the reality”. However as an artist, the director should be forming his own world (Tarkovski, 1986,1994). According to Tarkovski, cinematography freezes the time that is recorded within the facts and images. That is, for an image to be cinematographic, time should live inside it. Time in a film flows not with the help of, but in spite of montage. Montage lives in any kind of art. It is a connecting of segments. Only when film addresses to life itself then time can be sensed. The film means more than a juxtaposition (Tarkovski, 1986, 1994).

Tarkovski developed the concept of “rhythm” instead of “montage of attractions”. Rhythm does not mean the following of segments in a metric order. What defines the rhythm is the tension created by the running through the montaged plans. He defines his concept of *rhythm* on a metaphysical reality and an existentialist base. The whole, which connects fragments, is the wholeness of life. A fragment in a film that is taken out of the whole does not have meaning on its own (Tarkovski, 1986, 1994). In the milieu of a post-war (2nd World War) the questions of existence and a longing for home have been brought to discussion by Tarkovski’s cinema. For this reason, it defines an important point for the passing from the theory of knowledge to existentialism, from knowledge to experience.

According to Kahn, as an architect of close years, planning is the introducing of the fragile *rhythm* of life; space is not a physical whole. Space is built upon the effects of life and the characteristics of the environment. Man communicates, so should architecture. Symbol, as a carrier of social codes, is important for communication. Plan is the formation of a method, and form is not a way of building. Design should not attempt itself to conditions. The structure of “place” implies what it wants to be. The structure first of all, is a sheltering object and privacy is its primary feature. Spatial interactions not only include the ones between the structure and its surrounding but also the ones between the interior and the acts it shelters (Kahn, 1991). The organisation of space within space is hierarchical due to the dominant one, and it defines a one and whole order (Rossi, 1984).

With the representational cinema that is built upon the thought of “everything can be read as a text” we are faced with the concept of fiction, just like “fictional” texts as Cixous names (Sarup, 1995). In fiction cinema: the characters are indefinite and subjectivity is not a fixed situation; the narrative’s view is unstable; the transparency

of the language is lost; the thinking of linear time is abandoned; ¹ the fake replaces the real. The understanding of time distorted by the disappearance of borders between the past and the present, is named as “time out of joint” by Jameson and “space-time compression” by Harvey. The fiction cinema more than constructing a memory for the future, builds its own present time, where projects for the future are abandoned and only segments of good/bad, beautiful/ugly, lightness/darkness and order/disorder *juxtapose*. David Lynch –*Blue Velvet*, *Wild at Heart*- transforms the past to visual images, stereotypes and avoids projects for the future. Instead of producing future utopias he juxtaposes the images. As Lynch states “weird things happen all the time” (Kaleta, 1993, Chion, 1995). But the meaning of the contemporary condition has changed; the speed of life has changed. In this sense the daily life is not a place where the one’s experiences from the past are transformed. Jameson defines Lynch’s films as nostalgia. This neo-historicism breaks the relationships between historic elements and their context and, juxtaposes them on a plane of present time. There is no uniting frame that defines a whole within this *juxtapositions*.² The fiction cinema defines an uncertainty: time, geography and space are uncertain. Orientation, identification and the questions of existentialist space are absent. The feeling of the truth is uncertain, and it is replaced by fantasy. The images are also uncertain because cinema believes that the communication via images is no more valid. ³ Pastiche, which is an imitation without a style is the only truth (Jameson, 1992). Because today, there is no more a reality that one could depend on.

Fiction cinema reveals space as a *fragmentation*. This is mostly achieved by an increase in deepness (the verticality of Wenders in *Himmel über Berlin*: between humans and angels, from the earthface to the sky). Deepness in science fiction films defines a new scale where it is perceived through fragmented view. But this is no more carries the feeling space. *Fragmentation* and the loss of a centre sign to a situation that is beyond the city. In design theories, traditional, cultural pieces are torn apart from their contexts and fictionalised in present time. Moore, Venturi in their architecture use elements that could be named as non-organising figurative pieces. They use word segments that stand alone such as roofs, windows, and series of columns and they *juxtapose* them on the edge of a ridiculous in meaning (parodic) and of a functional and picturesque in composition (Colquhoun, 1990). Both the historical and urban contexts are rejected. In Gehry’s house design (his own house) the exact rebuilding of a past does not happen. Because, it is a present time in this surrounded space: a present time that is turned into a resemblance by folding or quoting; that is not historic but historicist and; that is taken out from real history or that alludes to a past from real history (Jameson, 1992). Through a “dialogue” Gehry reorganises the categories of inside and outside. It is a dialogue between the old house and the folding. For him, the traditional and symbolic meaning of the feeling of centre loses its importance (Jameson, 1992). In design theories the mixing of the concepts of inside and outside, the designing of the in as an out, of in without out may be illustrated from the designs of Portman and Koolhaas: on one side gigantic structures, on the other *fragmentation*. Elements become autonomous and do not require the

existence of the other to justify its identification. The outer shell is not related to the life inside. The design theories today claim that the works for unifying the in and out at the beginning of the century, a realistic point of view are meaningless. In Portman's Bonaventura Hotel we face the disappearance of spatial hierarchy; spatial directing where things and persons can no longer discover where they stand. Jean Nouvel in his designs, states that city planning is improbable for today's changing face. He proposes a cinematographic look to time and space. Because for him, a city planning produced by a certain group is an impossibility for today's cities (Yýldýrým).

"We now have a different day. Instead of a solar or otherwise illuminated day, we have a subliminary and paraoptic day that has no relationship whatsoever to direct observation, and in which representations and configurations arise less from the separation of points, lines and planes of visual experience, or image resolution, than from the interruption of projection sequences" (Virilio, 1991).

Now, this is the contemporary condition, it is not the speed that we have been introduced at the beginning of the century because the concept of time has also changed. As Virilio maintains the new time is neither chronological nor historical, but purely computerised. This brings us to the fact that time has become "out of joint". It is now fragmented, multi-layered. The virtual and the real *superimpose*. This virtuality also dismantles the concept of space. The concept of distance, which is bound to time and space, is no more a subject. "The gap between world time and human time ends" (Virilio, 1991). The metropolis and its architecture do not ask for continuity in time and space. So the architect asks: "How should we think, plan and build in a world that is becoming daily more and more fragmented? Should we turn a blind eye to this fragmentation and take refuge in an 'ideal' world of architecture?" (Coop Himmelblau, 1991). The metropolis constitutes of fragmentations of heterogeneous movements. The architecture of it no longer requires static images. Today is a world of unstable images of video and computer and cinema. It is a world of "disjunctions" (Tschumi, 1994) where the ideal unity is questioned. Tschumi points out that this concept of disjunction is incompatible with a static view of architecture. It is a strategy that requires new operations: *superimpositions*, *juxtapositions*, *collisions* and so on. It is not difficult to build the interaction between film theory and this strategy. As mentioned above if one searches the answers to the contemporary condition, he will be faced with these terms of cinematography. In this sense Tschumi feels himself close to the ideas of poststructuralism and deconstruction.

Koolhaas also searches the emerging forms of architecture in the city of today. He mentions, just as Tschumi does, that the centre of gravity of the city has displaced itself from the centre to the periphery (Koolhaas, 1996). Virilio explains the same situation as the "deregulation of the city". The perception of the city has transformed itself since the real and virtual superimpose. This perception no longer is achieved by the idea of the unity. The whole is no longer visible. Thus, the perception is

fragmented, but different than the way it was with the New Aesthetics of the 20th century.

Jacques Derrida, at this point, may be considered one of the most influential men of the contemporary condition. He offers “a play with tools of the system” (Sarup, 1995). Where a new way of reading texts is done. Tschumi summarises the idea of deconstruction as “the challenge of the idea of a single unified set of images, the idea of certainty” and “the idea of an identifiable language” (Tschumi, 1994). The way Derrida plays with the binary oppositions reveals the meaning’s unstable conditions, since within this play the hierarchical situation is broken. This understanding brings about the fact that perception is no longer stable; the images of the contemporary condition are fragmented, superimposed that leads to a perceiving which can be achieved differently for each man. This leads to a self-experience and invention for each man (Dovey, 1985).

In Lynch’s films this fragmented world is visible, but the fragments only juxtapose. The viewer is not offered a world where self-experience is possible. To the question of how an invention may occur within such a world, can be given *The Pillow Book* as an example. Peter Greenaway, in his film has “played with the tools of the system” in a Derridian way (Sarup, 1995). This play where the viewer interacts synchronising images which juxtapose or superimpose in one frame leads to multi-layered perceptions. Greenaway explains his new language in three sentences the screen is multiplied; sequential time is avoided and thirdly; the scale is constantly changed (Dönmez-Colin, 1996). This language of Greenaway leads to a superimposition of images and/or acts where synchronisation takes place because via this superimposition everything is brought to a present time look.

This superimposition which breaks the meaning’s stability; which deconstructs the perception and which leads the viewer to an area of invention where he creates his own perception is taken as an operation in architecture. Bernard Tschumi in his well-known project Park de la Villette has realised an operation of this kind. As Vidler notes “Tschumi allies himself firmly with a present condition characterised by fragmentation and dissociation” (Vidler, 1992). He develops his strategy from the montage theory of Eisenstein, he uncovers Eisenstein’s operational terms such as frame-by-frame; collision of frames but he does not leave them untouched. He transforms their meanings in a Derridian notion of text. By the superimposition of layers, the fragments that constitute layers collide and this collision gives birth to a new condition where experiencing and invention becomes possible. Another interesting project belongs to Coop Himmelblau, the UFA Cinema Centre in Dresden. As Widman and Robnik states in their texts, “the whole building is conceived as a rhythmic element within a dynamic space sequence in relation to its urban environment (1994). This idea is achieved by a new designing of a foyer where hanging ramps define it. These ramps hang freely within the space and their presence is constructed on a movement. This constant motion both leads to certain

programmatic spaces and to nowhere. The ramps that act as the carriers of a motion allow possible perspectives towards the inner and outer space and multiply the possibilities of viewing. The viewer in the foyer is also introduced parts of moving images that are projected to the wall in the foyer. The differing scales of these images bring the viewer to a situation where he is no longer in front of the image but in it. This new perception of seeing is an overlapping of architectural and cinematographic layers where the tools of the systems are rediscovered within a play.

In an operational manner, as discussed till now, design theories and film worked with the same keywords. However today, the advantageous point gained by cinema's technology maintains cinema a privilege compared to design theories. For this reason, architects through their journey in time and space, are producing with these keywords, and probably will keep on this way. To be continued...

NOTES:

¹ The understanding of time as a historical area where all human activity takes place, thus connects past to present, present to future.

² As an opposition to the idea of understanding history as a one and united whole which constitutes the true knowledge, Lukacs states "we may no longer breathe in the old unity", Barthes states "history is not a one collective story but a pluralistic story that has different subjects", and Benjamin states "the past culture is a wreck more than a unity and only fragments can survive from a wreck"

³ An arrangement of truth, the plane of thinking and image is not valid. In such an arrangement the shared images constitute a language and it is used in arts. This fact has disappeared since 1980's.

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