

AN ANALOGY OF PALIMPSEST AS A STRATEGY TRANSFORMING URBAN STRUCTURE INTO ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE - FOCUSED ON DOMINIQUE PERRAULT'S ARCHITECTURE OF STRATA-

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ABSTRACT: The study departs from the fact that the site can be defined not only as a present form and shape but also as a grammatical text that should be read through socio-architectural memories of the past and the future. Under this premise, the study examines the new design strategy for the 21st century's global campus in cities of Korea, which promotes the traditional campus functions to be an 'entrance' that opens to the city and neighboring communities, which maintains the traditional academic identity to be a part of regional identity, and which progresses the city culture. The study, paying a particular attention to Dominique Perrault's design language, attempts to analogize the modern urban structure with the palimpsest condition, to rediscover the potential structure within the dialectical interrelationship between the past and the present, and to reevaluate the strategic value on the urban architectural design recovering the sense of place where time and space is persistently permuted. The main argument is focused on how to embody the architectural relative structure in the design strategy, through diverse interpretation of the notion of time in space and the absence in the presence.

KEYWORDS: Analogy, Palimpsest, Time and Space, Dominique Perrault, Stratification1.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and the Purpose

University campus design located in a city of Korea traditionally includes the package of city regional planning and urban design, ecological architecture and visual landscape design. Accordingly a campus becomes a micro suburban within a city, which creates place as well as landmark through buildings, landscape, and circulating systems. In case of Seoul, the capital city of Korea, the place-marking in a campus is a strategy applied for making place. Place-marking defines and conceptualizes the physical properties, and concentrates them in order to maintain visual uniqueness as well as cultural values to the community. University campus design in Korean cities tends to place main focus on the strategic contact points such as entrance and passages, where a city meets the campus, and where community integrates with campus.

This study introduces the new campus design strategy employed by Dominique Perrault, which develops the traditional functions of a campus 'entrance' that opens to the city and neighboring communities. In his new project, Ehwa Campus Center, Perrault maintains the basis of traditional campus identity to be developed to a part of regional identity and the city culture. In the project, he seems to recognize the fact that campus site can be defined not only as present physical shape but also as a grammatical text that is involved in socio-urban structure.

The study attempts to explore the ways to analogize today's ever-changing urban structure with palimpsest on which multiple layers are superimposed, and to rediscover the dialectic interrelationship between the past and the present, which is the latent structure hidden in the other side of the site, and to acquire the design strategy to restore the continuity of time and space within the realm of the place. The main argument is focused on how to represent diverse interpretations of the notion of time in space to the architectural relative structure.

The conclusion of the study arrives at the reconsideration on a campus in a city with regard to its integration of the suburbanity with urbanity, the interpretation of palimpsest mechanism to be a device managing place-making and place-marking strategy for local identity, and the possibility that historical

vestiges in urban structure can be represented in the layers of architecture.

1.2 Scope and Methodology

The study will analyze the expression and the property of the works in which the notion of palimpsest has been applied as a conceptual device for architectural representation. In the study, Dominique Perrault's works are investigated to disclose the nature of the architecture of the strata which recognizes the given site to represent the marks of time and space in the dialectic situation. The study of the palimpsest architecture provides with an opportunity to investigate the hypothesis that historical vestiges in urban structure can be represented in the layers of architecture.

For this subjective, the study pays a particular attention to Dominique Perrault's design language exhibited in his recent project of the Ewha Campus Center in Korea. Investigating Perrault's way of urban architectural representation in accordance with an analogy of palimpsest in the view point of deconstructionism, the study examines how the modern urban structure is to be analogized with the palimpsest condition, how the potential structure within the dialectical interrelationship between the past and the present is rediscover, and how the strategic value is reevaluated on the urban architectural design recovering the sense of place where time and space is persistently permuted.

2. ARCHITECTURE OF STRATA IN THE NOTION OF PALIMPSEST

2.1 Ehwa Campus Center

An inauguration of the Ewha Campus Center(ECC) was officially announced in April of 2008. In 2004, three world-signature architects including Zaha Hadid, FOA, and Dominique Perrault, were invited to propose an idea for the university's campus center. The Dominique Perrault, the prize winner, develops a grand subterranean space to create a new center of the whole campus and to connect the city with the campus. It is an ample open space digged into the ground to be seen as rather landscape than architecture. A so called 'Campus-Valley' states the opening of the college with its gentle slope down. The slope becomes stairs at the end of the valley to provide sitting area for open-air theater. Centering around the valley which acts as the main axis of the campus, diverse functions are combined together. Placing an emphasis on the urban scale and territories, this facadeless building transforms the urban geography and topographic environment into a new global landscape while at the same time integrating the building systems with the existing neighboring components.

The study inquires into theory and practice of Perrault's landscape architecture through his language of architecture, and investigates the nature of the Perrault's geo-architecture on the basis of the interpretation of urbanism with an analogy of palimpsest.

The study will also reconsider the interpretation of the site and city in the viewpoint of de-constructionism, compare the Ewha Campus Center with the Grand National Bibliotheque in Paris, and then investigate Perrault's way of architectural representation in accordance with human geography.

2.2 The idea of Palimpsest

Parchment is invented by King Eumenes of Pergamon in 190 B.C.. Even though the parchment is strong enough to be preserved for a long time, it was too expensive to be mass-produced. So that people repeated writing and erasing on the parchments to recycle them. Palimpsest means the parchment that had been numerous recycled.¹⁾ Writing on top of another writing produces numerous layers of documents, of which the previous texts superposed by later texts are often valued to be more important historical reference²⁾. In other words, palimpsest indicates a condition where the layers

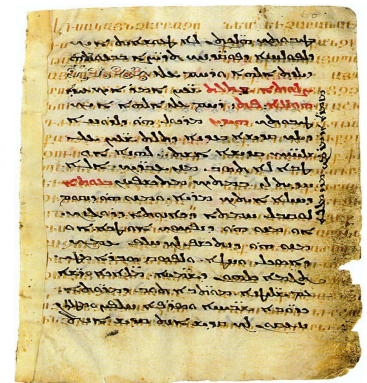


figure 1 codex Armenicus Rescriptus, Palimpsest Monastery of St. Cahterine, Mt. Sinai, 6th c. and 1st half of 10th c.

¹⁾ Lexical meaning of palimpsest(distinguished parchment) is parchment where texts have been already written and deleted.

²⁾ Kim Nam-hwan, "A study on architectural intervention in historical sites through an analogy of palimpsest", Inha Univ. 2004, p.6

of complex meaning are involved within an entity and where the layers keep rediscovered and reinterpreted. An entity does not signify a simple meaning but it continuously motivates new reading through inter-contamination with other texts while at the same time, maintaining the singularity of the original text. Based on analogy of the palimpsest's nature with the memory of a place, it can be said that place is not a fixed physical entity but an organic one that is endlessly evolved to be transformed.

2.3 Palimpsest as Chronotope³⁾ of difference and traces

A noun, 'difference', does not include meaning of 'to delay' or 'to postpone' but the verb, 'differ', does. Jacques Derrida has coined the term 'différance'⁴⁾ that is a noun possessing the meaning of both the verb and the noun. The '*différance*' signifies a movement that produces the difference; that connotes movement in both time and space. The '*différance*' as spatial movement creates a gap, distance, and separation while, the '*différance*' as timely movement signifies a movement to postpone and to delay, to detour and to return, to relieve and to withhold. Therefore, the '*différance*' indicates ceaseless, complicated, and ever-changing origin; that is, an origin that always becomes others.⁵⁾

On the other hand, a trace as past-oriented past is posited in the present moment while at the same time, joining hands with the past.⁶⁾ Likewise, extinction of the trace is simultaneously involved in both the present and the past. Extinction is a process of time that never belongs to the present moment. Derrida stated that the trace is neither present nor absent.⁷⁾ As the trace is generated where the presence and absence are crossed, it can be called to be non-spatial space.

2.4 A City as Palimpsest

A city is like a sedimentary layer accumulated for a long time. As Hegel indicated, place is time posed in space and human being experiences innate time through a long contact with place. Accordingly, considering a city as a timely layered palimpsest to rediscover the texture of innate time, we can find several alternatives to recover the lost identity of a city and to resist the rapid and stereotyped city development.

3. ARCHITECTURE OF DOMINIQUE PERRAULT: AN ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATION OF THE CHRONOTOPE THROUGH RECODING THE STRATUM

3.1 National Bibliotheque vs. Ewha Campus Center



figure 2 Bibliotheque nationale de France, Paris, France, 1989

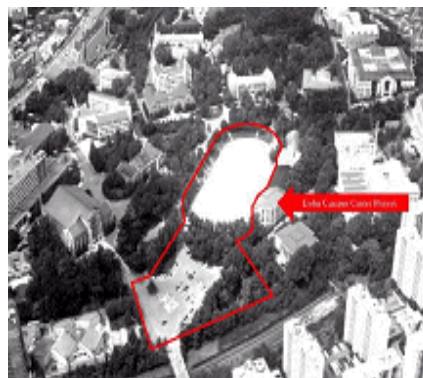


figure 3 Ewha University, Seoul,

³⁾ Chronotope (a word made of the space and the time in Greek) is setting the forth before hand to be forming a relationship of the indivisibility for the space with the time. M. Bakhtin used the Chronotope to distinguish to study the text according to the nature of a time-space criterion.

⁴⁾ Kimmmerle, Heinz, "Derrida", Seokwangsa, 1996. p.89

⁵⁾ ibid. p.378

⁶⁾ Lee Kwang-rae, "What is deconstruction?", Kyobo, 1989, pp69-71

⁷⁾ J. Derrida, "Limited Inc", Glyph, 1977, p.190

Dominique Perrault is a geo-architect who is adept at erasing architecture through underground buildings. For example, the space one needs to take note of in the Grand Bibliotheque, his major work, is not the 28-story-high four towers, but an obscure underground garden surrounded by the towers and a wooden deck. This garden is close to a statement disclosing the manipulated topology from Bercy blocks in Paris to Tolbiac, rather than a decorative landscape. The forest inside the garden is the intentionally cultivated nature to recreate layered time and convert cultural sediments into landscape. The reading room space leading to the basement area is the architect's commitment for it to be located on the original land located below the platform, which had been politically elevated from the river banks of the Seine at the eastern tip of Paris. Therefore, this architecture describes the city's characteristics where the new coexists with the traditional and declares the architect's intention to merge the land, buildings, and landscape conceptually and physically. It is a natural consequence to apply the conceptual analogy of "urban palimpsest" in such a city as Paris. With Ewha Women's University, Perrault shows the memory of the playground deleted due to violent insertion of void and artificial landscaping, through sampling. The traces of the past text are recreated through the ramp at the access area of the void, a sports strip, a changed surface, and a staircase. First of all, the layers of time are delicately interlocked from the spot where the sports strip and the starting point ECC void overlap. The sports strip reuses events that took place in the playground in the past and this is a screen displaying every facet of college life, commemorating the reunion with the long-parted local community. This plaza, which stretches across the east-west axis serves as the background for the existing International House and the Chapel to be reborn as "Locus solus"⁸⁾ and at the same time creates a dynamic sequence, codifying the Campus Complex that follows it. The scenario for the new access area becomes tenser due to the threshold elevated more than 2.5m higher than the original height of the Ewha Bridge by covering the Gyeongui railway. Here, "palimpsest" transforms the delicate difference of the superimposing floor surface at the Sports Strip into a ramp and then makes it return to the original ground. And this ground is transformed into a staircase that reminds one of stands in playgrounds in the past, delivering a message that the past and the present coexist. Therefore, this empty space is not merely a void, but "filled void(not-void)," and an object considered immediately as the "future" in the present.

3.2 An Architectural Representation of time and space in the Ewha Campus Center

Ambiguity in Figure/Ground, Solid/void: The emergence of the Ewha Campus Complex(here-after ECC) is accompanied by both a slight sense of shock and of disappointment. A large-scale void dissecting the ground and imposing mounds created as a roof garden evoke such feelings, yet the fact that the object that led the place-marking in campus design is absent, disturbs one's perceptions of space. Inevitably, we have to follow the footsteps of trying to understand the European architects' way of thinking on "architectualizing landscape." In Europe, at least in Paris, landscape necessarily accompanies architecture(action). For instance, the garden is defined as a "gentle interior space surrounded by hard walls."

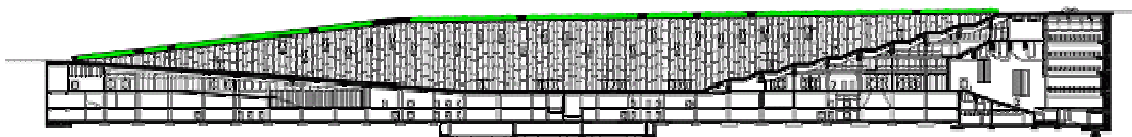


figure 2 section and elevation of the ECC

⁸⁾ "Locus solus" is a concept that only connotes unique or general relationships among specific sites and buildings. It is true that until now the Ewha Womans University campus has been a feast of a mono drama without a scenario(masterplan). Too many "locussolus" had been produced and hidden in the nature of the campus without any mutual connections. A building is regarded as a sign of an event that takes place(or could take place) on a specific site. The Ewha campus had weaknesses that these signs were not connected with the following signs. In other words, where the concept of time is excluded a designated place in which the tripartite relationships among land, event, and sign

Therefore, it could be considered that this "violently" inserted void is the "section of land" which has been created as a facade supporting the existing natural surroundings and the established landscaping (roof-garden) originating from the practice of making distinct boundaries between indoors and outdoors. However, this void maintains an interactive dynamic relationship or relative relationship in that it becomes both exterior space and interior space, depending on how it is viewed, rather than have definite border. In particular, this gigantic void demolishes the perceptual boundary between figure and ground, postponing the initial statement on the self-space concept toward the entire campus. In other words, this in-between space

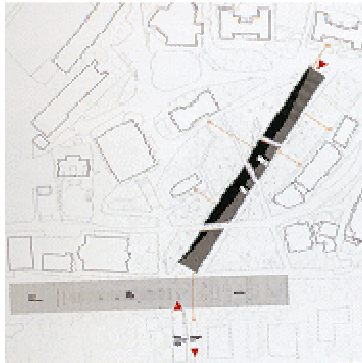


figure 4 Ewha University, Site plan, 2004

makes the building disappear and feature figure-ground ambiguities, highlighting the vertically flowing glass facade as the figure and at the same time becoming the figure on its own on the venue created by the glass surface and the ground. Moreover, this space had a pre-condition of underground space from the beginning, so the space itself owns both sides of figure/ground in an intersecting manner, thus blurring the relationship between space and mass. If this negative in-between space is considered as "solid", one can discover that the balance between space and mass is evolving in a very delicate and mysterious manner.⁹⁾ Therefore, on the campus map, this gigantic "void" will be perceived as a huge object that leads other university buildings that have existed as objects in their surroundings. In terms of both scale and form, the adjacent context thus inevitably forms the ground, as opposed to the huge density created by this void. Through the figure/ground, solid/void ambiguities, the empty valley is substituted by a conceptual wall. Through another in-between space of the

wall, a third realm started to be secured where multi layered border coexists. For instance, in the third realm, anew, hybrid and transitional identity is created and voluntary negotiations take place among differences that are impossible to homogenize.

A Paradox of indoor / outdoor : This "solid wall space" designed by Dominique Perrault, bisects the existing campus both visually and physically. One is imprisoned within the existing structure (campus) and the other stays in the outside of the structure (city). These two elements are separated in content, yet coexist in their entirety, building a structure of dialogue. However, at the same time, they offer placeness that is ready to depart from the existing situation at any time. This tension created by academy and the city establishes the passage between interiority and externality and between reality and imagination. This space is an in-between zone which is neither interior not exterior, and at the same time both inside and outside. Moreover, depending on how it is viewed, it could be either inside or outside. In other words, this space is a

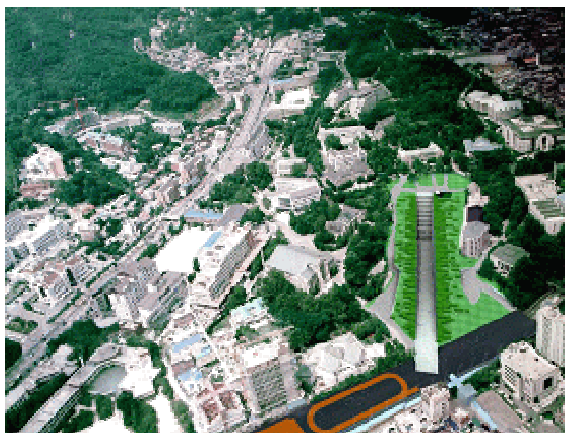


figure 3 Overview of the ECC with the context

partition through which heterogeneity and complexity are interconnected and infiltrated and is a realm where controlling and monogenetic signs are ceaselessly disintegrated. It is also an area characterized by a decentralized, de-hierarchical order, an anti-meaning system, as well as a carnival-like area of subversion, violation, liberation and revolution. In addition, it is an area where "desire" is universally innate.¹⁰⁾

The long band-shaped space of the ECC features various images, including "valley," "Champs Elysees" and "park." The valley is a metaphorical concept deriving from the Ewha Womans University's topology, while Champs Elysees highlights its social dimension that incorporates the urban realm into the campus by connecting to the shopping streets in front of the university. On the other hand, the park can be considered as a strategic move to

⁹⁾ It is characterized by solid-void ambiguities, as seen in Michelangelo's Laurentian Church and Le Corbusier's Ronchamp Chapel

¹⁰⁾ Kim Hyun-gi, "Dynamic Mechanism of Mask and Desire: Mask and Desire," *The Face of Culture*, 2005, pp.19-21.

create a new boundary(indicator) through the transformation of land, thereby making it "place." This architecture without form is revealed as a dramatic facade of multi-story space in which the surface of the city is ultimately connected to the roof of the campus. It is also re-sculptured as a dynamic space of gliding ceaselessly generated through the winding slope and staircase of the pedestrian route that passes through it.

3.3 Chora: Border Condition

The Chora proposed by Plato belongs to the third category, with a mediating nature, in order to complement the instability of the dualistic thinking system set by him. Plato explains Chora as the "receptacle of becoming" which accepts everything, yet is not altered by what it accepts or other influences, and is differentiated only through differences. In fact, Chora remains as an extremely ambiguous concept that shares characteristics of both image and physical existence to some degree, yet has no common denominators with either of them. However, when it is approached from an architectural perspective, Chora is the entrance space that exists above the internal passage. In other words, it can be considered as a chapter that connects the two realms and the threshold that exists in-between the more extensive and global state from the local.

Neo-Platonists interpret this word with such concepts that enfold the external world with concrete and specific physical body with the functions such as matrix and womb, in a broad context. Moreover, in Greek etymology, Chora is a conceptual approach to the city and is also referred to as the vicinity or a state of (a city's conscious) limitation. Here, vicinity (neighboring) space has the meaning of an entrance that moves into large and different spaces, exerting the function of communication possessed by borders. Let us reflect on the mentioning by Aristotle on space through this concept of Chora. The place is not only the border between containers, but also is seen as something that exists in-between, which is considered empty. If everything that exists has a place, the place itself would have a place and such relationship will be limitlessly repeated.¹¹⁾ Therefore, Chora is the border as the receptor that is continuously diversified in quality with the passage of time, going through "surcodage." In similar vein, this new entrance will become the "receptor of becoming" and "border of communication" that acts as the venue for space and events at a place where the time is cusped at the intersected point with the city, like Greek shrines, yet it appears to be almost non-existent, ephemeral yet spiraling in the rapidly changing urban landscape and reversely moves everything that moves it.



figure 5 ECC with the roof garden

4. CONCLUSION

As observed above, considering the site to be palimpsest premises the coexistence of textures of different times. Since palimpsest connotes the trace of time and space, it is constantly re-coded. What the study intended through the palimpsest is not to consider a city as an accumulation of temporary historical events on the basis of fragmentary knowledge but to view a city on the basis of interdependent or contradictory relationship between architecture and the site. The study reviewed the Ehwa Campus Center, designed by Dominique Perrault, in regard of an ambiguous conflict between figure and ground, void and solid, as well as an imaginary border condition between indoor and outdoor, in order to inquire into architectural representation of time and space.

As a consequence, architecture of strata, which is simultaneous recognition on the space created between architecture and the site, provides an opportunity to reconsider the interdependent or opposing relationship between city and architecture in perceiving the form and pattern of the city and the architecture. And at the same time, it is verified that an analogy of palimpsest to the site may make the alternative design strategy to overpass the limit of modern architecture that had misunderstood the city. Dominique Perrault's ECC taught us a lesson that a campus in a city is to be reconsidered in regard of its integration of the

¹¹⁾ Aristotle, *Physica*, Vo1.4, Chap.4, 212a 8-14

suburbanity with urbanity, that palimpsest mechanism must be constantly reinterpreted to manage place-making and place-marking strategy for maintaining local identity, and that historical vestiges inherited in urban structure are to be possibly represented in the form of architectural strata

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