Learning From Liminal Phenomena: the case of abandoned structures

Written paper / verbal presentation

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The abandonment of entire urban fragments can be seen in most major cities today. With long periods of desertion, these architectures do not belong to conventional cycles of regeneration. Rather, they remain unconsidered in urban projects, and act as parasites to urban planning endeavours. Instead of considering these structures as “pathological objects” (A. Rossi, 1996), we question their ability to mirror the contemporary urban condition, and to highlight today’s critical issues. Located in an in-between situation, urban abandoned structures fit the definition of liminal phenomenon (Van Gennep, 1909). These abandoned structures are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. As designers, what can we learn from this liminal condition?

The suggested presentation is an analysis of the production of three groups of architects and artists whose practice interrogates the notion of liminal condition: the Atelier Bow-Wow with the project Made-In-Tokyo (Japan, 2001), the collective Alterazioni Video with their project Incompiuto Siciliano (Italy, 2009), and the artist Eric
Tabuchi with his work Atlas of forms (France, 2015). These productions interrogate the conventional approach to classifying abandoned structures. Historically, architecture has used classification as a framework for analysis, as well as for action, mostly based upon formal, functional or stylistic criteria. The studied productions show the inadequacy of such frameworks. Additionally, they use the observed limits of such frameworks to renew the perspective on the city, and open a discussion regarding alternative design tools arising from a liminal reality.

Through the analyses of these productions, three strategies have been identified, which allows looking beyond the conventional classification of abandoned structures: 1) the enlargement, 2) the renewal of meaning (new semantic) and 3) the subversion. The presentation concludes by exploring the impact of these strategies on critical practice.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Tiphaine Abenia is a french architect and civil engineer. She is working, since September 2014, on a Ph.D within the Ph.D. Program in Architecture of the University of Montreal. Her PhD research project is under a cotutelle agreement between Canada (University of Montreal – Laboratory LEAP) and France (ENSA Toulouse - laboratory LRA), she is working under the joint direction of Jean-Pierre Chupin and Daniel Estevez.

Tiphaine graduated in civil engineering from the Institut National des Sciences Appliquées de Toulouse (INSA) in 2011. In 2013, she obtained her master degree in architecture from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Architecture of Toulouse. She dedicated her master degree project in architecture to an extensive feasibility study for the rehabilitation of an emblematic abandoned building of Buenos Aires: El Elefante Blanco. In 2014, Tiphaine was laureate of the European architecture competition “Talent de demain” with her graduation project (Architecture Biennale Bordeaux).

Beneficiary of a 3-year PhD contract granted by the french Ministry of Culture, she is pursuing her PhD research, focusing on the potential of abandoned large urban structures. Her work aims to develop a categorization system for large urban structures based on their potentials for the contemporary city. In 2017, she received the Palladio scholarship.