

THE INTERACTIVE AND IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES SHAPE THE NEW ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE

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This paper underlines how the hybrid relationships established among 3D and interactive installations offer sensorial explorations for a better understanding of architecture and the public space, by illustrating the works 'If building could talk...' by Wim Wenders and 'Sandbox' by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer.



*Rafael Lozano Hemmer, Sandbox, Relational architecture 17, 2010. Glow Festival, santa Monica, USA.
Photo by Antimodular Research.*

"Freedom is participation." _Giorgio Gaber

In recent years, many artists, filmmakers and designers have studied the alliance between art, society and audience by employing new media and technology as innovative tools to rethink the use of public space and to reinvent new opportunities for experiencing and for a better understanding. Reflections on the idea of space and its collective awareness, that we have of it, can come from the contribution within the architectural research by exploring it with artistic and cinematographic languages and how they shape their narrative and the overcoming experience that we can live by walking through the artworks or installations that requires our active immersion with it. [1] This paper based on an ongoing research, started with the workshop in Exhibit Design, held at the Università Iuav di Venezia, aims to articulate how the embodiment of the interactive projections and 3D technologies enable artists, such as Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, to broadcast the environment we are living in a participatory way and film makers, such as Wim Wenders, to set new vision for architectural and landscapes scenes in exhibition space.

Often we forget that the exhibition space, such the Biennale, is more a laboratory, rather than a simple display, where interdisciplinary experiments can take place. In 2010 Kazumo Sejima, the Japanese director of the 12th International Architecture Exhibition 'People meet in architecture' of the Biennale in

Venice, invited Wim Wenders to interpret her lyric building the Rolex Learning Center of the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale in Lausanne (Switzerland) for the exhibition space at the Arsenale. For the German director the primary issue was to convey the strong feeling of the building, which perfectly resonates with the surrounding landscape, and secondly capture the openness and the sense of 'infinite' of the center. So he found amusing the idea of experimenting 3D technology in an immersive installation, titled 'If building could talk...', in order to give the viewer the impression of being into the screen and to live the architectural experience of walking in it. [2] [3]

But in fact the building talks to us! Wenders guides us in a persuasive exploration of the space, into the architectural structures and the soul of the idea behind it. To use 3D technology appeared to be the most suitable way to translate the multiple curves of the building and the losing of orientation suggested by it, because curves generate (physical and intellectual) directions translated into a fluid shooting, where the fascinating survey on the relationship among space and time is narrated as a storytelling, whispered by Megan Gay's velvet voice: «Can you hear me? Places have voices. Buildings can talk, as you can hear. No, not all of them. But some need too. Some have chosen to remain silent. Some really want a constant dialogue with us ». In the silence, Thon Hanreich's music amplified the perception of the space, giving volume to it which can be only an interpretation of architecture within the exhibition space. Thus is the movement-image, where « objective and subjective images lose their distinction, but also their identification, in favour of a new circuit where they are wholly replaced or contaminate each other», as Deleuze stated, that extracted the essence of the place. [4] Without solution of continuity, the 12 minute film runs in a continuous loop the same sequence of images, but with slight changes in the text and music, thus offering multiple sensorial perceptions to the spectator. For this reason Wenders has chosen to use digital technology as a tool for emphasizing, in order to make more effective the communication of the architectural experience based on interdisciplinary approach. Moreover this also met Sejima's curatorial aims to stimulate and create new thinking processes and new ways of understanding the world we are living in.

One of the reasons why I have chosen Wim Wenders's installation at the Biennale was due to the fact that it was a 3D movie designed for an exhibition space, in other words a place of public cultural consumption, while on the other hand I would like to compare it with Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's installation-event 'Sandbox', in the Californian shore in Los Angeles, since in this case it takes place in an outdoor public sphere has a more political and social dimension.

'Sandbox' was a large-scale interactive installation created originally for Glow in 2010, which was an all night cultural experience that imagines the Santa Monica beach as a ludic agora for free access of a participatory and temporary artwork. The large-scale project consisted of two sandboxes: in one infrared surveillance cameras detected people walking on a certain 3,000-square foot stretch of so that it could be projected in the second sandbox and watch their actions magnified in large scale on the beach. « As participants reach out to touch these small ghosts, a camera detects their hands and relays them live to two of the world's brightest projectors, which hang from a boom lift and which project the hands over 8,000 square feet of beach. In this way people share three scales: the tiny sandbox images, the real human scale and the monstrous scale of special effects», describes the artist in his website. [5]

That is the reason why his work is as empowering as provocative.

A core element of the research by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's thought is on designing spaces and dynamics for and of participation 'where a plurality of positions may emerge', in any case both examples integrate the observers/visitors with the digital image.

Furthermore, Lozano-Hemmer's work implies an invasion of the physical space, where the real body of the spectator turns into the moving image (simulacra) of the co-author of the performative interactive installation, since his research has always leaned, as said, to pursue a certain number of social issues.

More broadly he states that «technology is inevitable the language of globalisation [...], it is inseparable from contemporary identity and it can be used as a way of criticizing from within some paradoxes of our culture.» [6]

For example it is interesting to put in practice that the technologies used for 'Relational architecture' installations mainly are the same ones used for the security system of control in order to identify and to punish, but by manipulating the use of them (such as the ominous infrared equipment or the video tracking system) with digital cinema projectors into amplified images, the sense of intimidation, fear and social disconnection is transformed instead into an intimate and a more playful relation with the public cultural arena, which in this case was the Santa Monica beach.

This leads to a final key question: does every one really want to participate in the cultural agora? Obviously no, but the interactivity experience in Lozano-Hemmer and the more contemplative immersion in viewing Wenders's movie are both examples of enriching opportunities to learn, generate new forms of attention and collaborative production of senses in our contemporary society.

In conclusion, what we can observe is that by participating in a collaborative manner with immersive experiences with the audience, both in an indoor exhibition space and outdoor public sphere, we can expand our own perceptions and widening our experiences; this ultimately leads to a broader understanding in life, a deeper awareness of freedom and hopefully to a re-design of our cultural landscape.

References and Notes:

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Millepiani no 28: Spazi Nomadi: Figure e Forme dell'Etica Contemporanea* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2004).
2. Teresita Scalco, "Se l'Architettura Potesse Parlare...", *Bollettino d'Ateneo's Web Site*, October 2010, http://www.bda.unict.it/Pagina/It/Notizie_1/0/2010/10/04/4088_.aspx (accessed July 27, 2011).
3. Wim Wenders's official Web Site, <http://www.wim-wenders.com/> (accessed July 27, 2011).
4. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 149.
5. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's official Web Site, <http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/> (accessed August 15, 2011).
6. Heimo Ranzenbacher, "Metaphors of Participation," in *Takeover – Who's Doing the Art of Tomorrow - ARS Electronica*, eds. Gerfried Stocker and Christine Schopf, 240-243 (Vienna: Springer-Verlag, 2001).