

Chiasmus and sceneries for all senses - the hidden possible at Faaborg Museum. A Visual Essay

Abstract

Based upon the bonds between architecture and phenomenology, this text aims to contribute to the debate about the space *museum* as a scenery to explore atmospheres to an embodied experience both of the specific space and of the works of art displayed. The concept of *chiasmus* (Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'Invisible*) appears as an order of reality that invites the experience of all senses instead the concept of *in-between* (*l'entre-deux*: Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception*) which still includes duality. *Chiasmus* emphasizes that the being is enmeshed in the space, recalling, according to our interpretation, what Deleuze refers to with the terms *milieu* [middle/amidst/surroundings/medium] and *devenir* [becoming].

The result of our analyses is a *critical visual essay*. The invitation and permission to explore the Faaborg Museum's phenomenological potential within the theoretical framework abovementioned — and to pass between its past and presence— is based on a series of photographs by the architectural photographer Hélène Binet, with the themes: *A Walk, the Furniture, Passages, Details and the Art*.

Our choice of the critical visual essay intends to let the visual elements of the essay form an integral part of our interpretations and readings about this specific interior design. The visual essay also allows to recollect and to debate the concept of chiasmus in the context of the space museum. The discussion about the museum's architectural elements that allow to explore atmospheres involves a process that in coalesce produce a compelling work where images, photographs, exhibited art and writings play an essential and important role in shaping an intellectual critical inquiry.

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Fatima Pombo

Department of Communication and Art, University of Aveiro, Portugal
Correo electrónico: fpombo@ua.pt
ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0003-1576-6992
Google Scholar

Anna Marie Fisker

Department of Civil Engineering Aalborg University, Denmark
Correo electrónico: amf@civil.aau.dk
ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0001-7039-7865
Google Scholar

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Quiasma e cenários para todos os sentidos: o possível escondido no Museu Faaborg. Um ensaio visual

Resumo

Fundado nos laços entre a arquitectura e a fenomenologia, este texto pretende contribuir para o debate sobre o espaço-museu como cenário para explorar atmosferas para uma experiência corpórea desse espaço específico e das obras de arte aí expostas. O conceito de *quiasma* (Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'Invisible*) aparece como uma ordem da realidade que convida à experiência de todos os sentidos em vez do conceito de *entre-deux* (*l'entre-deux*: Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception*) que ainda inclui dualidade. *Quiasma* enfatiza que o ente está imerso no espaço, lembrando, segundo a nossa interpretação, o que Deleuze refere com o termo *milieu e devenir*.

O resultado da nossa análise é um *ensaio visual crítico*. O convite e permissão para explorar o potencial fenomenológico do Museu Faaborg dentro do quadro teórico mencionado – e penetrar entre o seu passado e presente – baseia-se numa série de fotografias da fotógrafa de arquitectura Hélène Binet, através dos temas: *A Walk (Um Passeio) the Furniture (O Mobiliário), Passages (Passagens), Details and the Art (Detalhes e a Arte)*.

A escolha do ensaio visual crítico pretende que os elementos visuais formem parte integral das nossas interpretações e leituras deste específico interior e ambiente. O ensaio visual permite ainda recolher e debater o conceito de quiasma no contexto do espaço do museu. A discussão sobre os elementos arquitectónicos que possibilitam a exploração de atmosferas implica um processo que, em fusão, produz um trabalho irresistível em que imagens, fotografias, arte e textos têm um papel importante e essencial para delinear uma investigação intelectual crítica.

Palavras chave:

Atmosfera, quiasma, ensaio visual crítico, Museu Faaborg, fenomenologia do espaço.

Quiasmo y paisajes para todos los sentidos: lo oculto posible en el Museo Faaborg. Un ensayo visual

Resumen

Basado en los vínculos entre arquitectura y fenomenología, este texto tiene como objetivo contribuir al debate sobre el espacio del museo como escenario para explorar atmósferas para una experiencia corporal de este espacio específico y el trabajo de artístico exhibido allí. El concepto de quiasmo (Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'Invisible*) aparece como un orden de realidad que invita a la experiencia de todos los sentidos en lugar del concepto de intermedio (*l'entre-deux*: Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception*) que aún incluye la dualidad. El quiasmo enfatiza que el ser está enredado en el espacio, recordando, de acuerdo con nuestra interpretación, a lo que Deleuze se refiere con los términos medio [medio / en medio / entorno / medio] y que se acerca [convertirse].

El resultado del análisis es un ensayo visual crítico. La invitación y el permiso para explorar el potencial fenomenológico del Museo Faaborg dentro del marco teórico mencionado anteriormente, y para penetrar entre su pasado y su presente a partir de una serie de fotografías de la fotógrafa de arquitectura Hélène Binet, a través de los temas: A Walk, the Muebles, pasajes, detalles y el arte.

La elección del ensayo visual crítico tiene como objetivo permitir que los elementos visuales sean una parte integral de las interpretaciones y lecturas de este interior y atmósfera específicos. El ensayo visual también permite recordar y debatir el concepto de quiasmo en el contexto del espacio del museo. La discusión sobre los elementos arquitectónicos que permiten explorar atmósferas implica un proceso que se fusiona y produce un trabajo irresistible donde las imágenes, fotografías, arte exhibido y textos juegan un papel esencial e importante en la delineación de una investigación crítica e intelectual.

Palabras clave:
Atmósfera, quiasmo, ensayo visual crítico, Museo Faaborg, fenomenología del espacio.

The concept of Chiasmus

Based upon the bonds between architecture and phenomenology, this text aims to contribute to the debate about the space *museum* as a scenery to explore atmospheres to an embodied experience. Within this framework that brings together the concept of *chiasmus* and the architecture as an experience of all senses, this paper intends as well to stress the phenomenological potential of Faaborg Museum by architect Carl Petersen. Taking a phenomenological perspective, it also considers that photography can be used as tool to approach and communicate the experience of architectural space. In this text the invitation and permission to explore the Faaborg Museum's phenomenological potential is based on a series of photographs by the architectural photographer Hélène Binet with the themes: *A Walk, the Furniture, Passages, Details and the Art*.

The method followed in this article is qualitative and composed by three steps: 1. description of the concept of chiasmus within the phenomenological approach to architecture; 2. choice of the Faaborg's photographs of Hélène Binet as a precognition of the museum's space to explore the phenomenological understanding of it; 3. visit to the Museum Faaborg led by the photographs organized through the 5 themes mentioned and interpretation of how a visual approach, namely photographic, may contribute to the representation of the architectural space as a place for an embodied experience.

156

The concept of *chiasmus* (concept of Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* – in French *Le Visible et l'Invisible*) appears as an order of reality that invites the experience of all senses instead the concept of *in-between* (*l'entre-deux* as Merleau-Ponty coined it in *Phenomenology of Perception* – in French *Phénoménologie de la Perception*) which still includes *duality*: body versus mind; rational versus irrational; individual versus world; culture versus nature, and other forms of opposition. *Chiasmus* emphasizes that the being is enmeshed in the space. Chiasmus is *simultaneity*, not *duality*.

For Merleau-Ponty, as he wrote in *The Visible and the Invisible*, the body and the world are flesh from the same flesh, they are contemporary, they are *chiasmus* to state a pre-logical bond between the being and the world. In the work *The Eyes of the Skin*, Pallasmaa denounces in architecture the primacy of the sense of sight, denouncing the same suspicions about the sense of sight as Merleau-Ponty about the reflective thought. Pallasmaa invokes all senses in order to understand architecture and therefore supports that architecture requires the integration of the spiritual and the artistic when experiencing spaces. As he writes: "The ultimate meaning of any building is beyond architecture; it directs our consciousness back to the world and towards our own sense of self and being. Significant architecture makes us experience ourselves as complete embodied and spiritual beings. In fact, this is the great function of all meaningful art". (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 11). The metaphor of the whole senses is a call for an integrated perception of the individual's existential reality and the world in which architecture is built. Continuing with JuhanniPallasmaa: "An architectural work is not experienced as a series of isolated retinal pictures, but in its fully integrated material, embodied and spiritual essence. It offers pleasurable shapes and surfaces moulded for the touch of the eye and other senses, but it also incorporates and integrates physical and mental structures, giving our existential experience a strengthened coherence and significance". (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 12).

The subjective experience of space is a mediator of a personal legacy that cannot be fulfilled by a representation of a place based upon visual observation. We argue that Binet's photographic proposal reinforces the argument that images should not be consumed as substitutes for the buildings but, on contrary, should be a mediator of an experience that stimulates the physical visit with its sense of contingency and of materiality. The space it self discloses an atmosphere. The concept *atmosphere* has the particular possibility of translating a sensation, a mood's disposition related to a space, a kind of freedom/relief/hope/peace that

provokes the fruition of an architectonic space. Also the sensation that the things are coherent among them; that form and use interact in an harmonious way; that things coexist; that the architectonic space is a body that breathes with those who frequent it. Peter Zumthor in *Atmosphären*(2006) presents nine steps to achieve the possibility of creating an architectonic atmosphere. Among others: the consonance of the materials (how the materials react together), the sound of the space (the application of the materials makes the space functioning like a big instrument), the temperature of the space (in dialogue with the temperature of the body and of the external space), the grades of intimacy (the proximity and the distance, the size, the dimension, the proportion of the building in relation with the self), the light over the things (light and shadow and consequent effect in the surfaces and materials). Living and being involved in the atmosphere of a place asks for immersion, for a sense of physical presence and for a form of belonging that might liberate from visibility as the core of perceptions.

158

Photography documents places, people and things. The human encounter with photography unfolds within a continuum, fluidly moving back and forth between different modes of engagement but importantly also creating a possible pass amid the photographs' past and presence. However, do we see the truth? Photographic 'truth' has historically been linked to the indexicality of the medium, according to Messaris "the fact that [photographs] are, in certain respects, direct physical imprints of the reality recorded in them" (Messaris, 1997, p. x). The fact that "the photograph is seen as a re-presentation of nature itself, as an unmediated copy of the real world" (Sekula, 1982, p. 86), although, technically speaking, the camera records what is in front of it at the time that the shutter opens, photographic framing is a form of editing and manipulation. The photographer can thereby make things appear in certain ways.

Within the context of our text, we are not interested in developing a discussion about the complex theme 'the truth and photography', but to stress that the

Faaborg's photographs of H el ene Binet invite to explore the phenomenological understanding of the architectural space as an experience of atmospheres that express the 'spirit of the place' to quote Norberg-Schulz.

H el ene Binet photographs differ significantly from most pictures associated with the practice of architectural photography, writes Architect and Photographer Mark Pimlott in the epilogue to the work "Composing Space - photographs by H el ene Binet". (Binet, 2012, p. 204). Pimlott argues that Binet photographs with a different approach, a different kind of attention to detail and a different set of objectives, and so have different appearances to most architectural photographs. Neither instructed nor confined by the practice itself, Binet made images that one could perceive as meetings between camera and the architecture, each of which presented its own reality (Binet, 2012, p. 204).

Observing Faaborg Museum through the lens of Binet's camera in 5 thematic chosen topics, one must take note of the fact that depending on the skill level of the photographer and the technical demands of the camera, photography will frequently oscillate between *embodiment* and *alterity* relations from engaging the world through the camera.

However, we find that Binet's photography operates in some type of *hermeneutic* relation in terms of enabling us to 'read the world through it' in some way. Because the camera functions as a recording device directly interfacing with what is in front of it, we tend to look at photographs as factual, direct representations of reality. Analyzing Binet's version of Faaborg Museum guides us to recollect and debate the concept of chiasmus in the context of the space museum. In the frame of the chosen photographs representing *A Walk, the Furniture, Passages, Details, the Art* we find that, the observer is invited to experience some hidden possible at Faaborg Museum.

A Walk



Image 1.The Façade of Faaborg Museum against Grønnegade
by Héléne Binet

160

To start a walk you need to begin walking, and you need to enter a start point, i.e. enter the door to the Museum. This dark racing green door is inscribed in a classic portal with two Dorian columns that tend to hold the composition of the façade and at the same time execute the effect of “sucking in” the visitor from the small square in Grønnegade in Faaborg.

Daring to linger in front of the façade of the entrance, the breadth broader than the height, we see only clear expanse, the width further emphasized by the shadows of the forwarding part and the small vaults prelude. Detailing the

roofing with another curve do underline the horizontal even more, the façade articulates a continuously fluctuation.

Carl Petersen mentioned in his famous lecture in 1920, a manifest called "Contrasts", that it is important to gain monumentality in a building not to divide the mass and the surface in decomposing elements(Petersen, 1979). Uniquely this consciousness about scale and dimensions function optional, and one find the small house appropriate to the small town gaining the result that the building effectively seems larger than it is.

The Furniture



Image 2. The big exhibition hall with Carl Petersen's mosaic floor and the Carl Petersen and Kaare Klint.Faaborg chair by Hélène Binet

We perceive chairs of beauty accurately placing their slender and delicate legs on the omnipresent flooring of small burnt tiles that flow through the Museum. The mathematical patterns that Carl Petersen designed, beautiful coloured drawings that grip the furniture, a canvas of stone embroidery, a genius manifest of the outreach of the architect, place the legs of the chairs eminent strong and precise on the mosaic work.

Can we discuss if Kaare Klint and Carl Petersen welcome one to sit down in the chairs – the Faaborg Chair? Is it in the chiasmus optic not the opposite that happens —we are not invited to sit down— as in a display inverted parallelism the clauses by the architect articulate the balance of order within the room. Instead encouraging us to walk about gazing at the paintings exhibited.

The floors feel secure and comfortable to walk on, the sand in the joints between the small tiles honestly creaking faintly. The different tile patterns in each room emphasize the different rooms, their purpose and design, and accentuate the tense juxtaposition of rooms.

Passages

162

In our act or instance of passing from the imposing entrance of the Museum to the first exhibition room, the small hall for paintings, a significant Red chock surrounding and grip us starting enrolling the mystery of this enchanting building.

Architecture belongs to poetry, claims Norberg-Schulz, since its task is to allow us to dwell poetically by understanding the “*vocation*” of a place, concretizing the genius loci, and, as the final Biblical allusion of the text says, allowing us to “cross the threshold and regain the lost place” (Norberg Schulz, 1980, p. 23).



Image 3. The portico between the small hall for paintings and the domical vault hall by H el ene Binet

The whole territory of the Museum becomes poetry because the composition is a juxtaposition of very different rooms, and elementary the passages between them are articulated and emphasized as independent elements.

Details



Image 4. The domical vault seen towards the stairs to the big exhibition hall by Hélène Binet

164

Performing the unique details in the building Carl Petersen often referred to his lectures *“Contrasts”* from 1920 and *“Textural Effects”* from 1919.

We take one more step to understand the essence of the details. Making a reference to a thing's *essence* or *idea*, or when one details the constitution of an identical coherent thing by describing whatone “really” sees, the ultimate goal of these “reductions” is to understand how these different aspects, these surfaces, these steps, these colours work in the building. It does not mean that

the thing is only and exclusively what is described. Carl Petersen implemented details in many different levels; they are all important architectural agents with high impact on the artistic effects. Of course one cannot deal with details without mention the unified whole —Faaborg Museum is a building with a composition very precise and with sublime simplicity—every detail being serene and part of this essence.

The Art



Image 5. The domical vault room with Kai Nielsen's portrait sculpture of Mads Rasmussen and view into the small hall for paintings by Hélène Binet.

Entering from the small hall for paintings with its nearly madly red walls into the domical vault room we met darkness and a giant figure placed on a pedestal. The sculptural art piece by sculptor Kai Nielsen of a figurative mastodon, Mads Rasmussen, the founder of the collections and the Museum, or Mads Tomato as he was called referring to his business of canned food, has a world of its own. The domical vault room is octagonal, it seems to be built around the impressing sculpture its walls painted in cobalt blue – a colour that Carl Petersen subjective referred to as: *“the purest colour I know”* that provide a surface conveying profundity (Petersen, 1983).

The corpus of Mads Rasmussen add dimensions to the proportions of the room, never imitating the situation of being “man in the world”, but adding a kind of contrasting logic to the scale of the room, an architectural factor that Carl Petersen worked seriously with in the design of the rooms for these art collections.

Conclusion

The visit to the Faaborg Museum in a form of a critical visual essay based upon the bonds of phenomenology and architecture stresses the understanding of architecture as an organism composed of many elements (*organs*) depending on each other in interaction with other living organisms (human beings) who react and interact with the architectonic space.

If there is an increasing interest for immaterial experiences, this reflexion points out to the character of experiencing ‘hic et nunc’ which is possible by ‘going through’ the space.

Photography was the medium to acknowledge not just the past and the present but to stress the hidden possible of the museum as a scenery to explore atmospheres to an embodied being. The phenomenological understanding

of human existence underlines the encounter that ‘takes place’, that is not abstraction, that is not dichotomization, and therefore is intertwined with the space and resonates with it. That is the meaning of chiasmus and its legacy to architecture: the reversibility between the space and the subjective individual experience of space and time. In fact, space is defined according to the movements of the body. That is the body that awards significance to space transforming it into a lived meaning. Therefore, this approach to Faaborg Museum through photography should be replaced by an embodied visit. This visual essay, in effect, intends to invite to the recreation of this privileged space through the precognition of the fiveabove described themes, which are Binet’s alleged ability to unveil that space. It is intended that this precognition awakes other forms of interpretation and coexistence.

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