

Spatial Emotions

Sustainable Tropical Environmental Design Exhibition 2011

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The fourth semester students of the Bachelor Design (Architecture) were given a brief to design a built-up area of 1500 m² film gallery that consists of exhibition area, curator's office, workshop, staff lounges, reception area and car parks. 5 studio tutors were appointed as supervisors throughout this 7-week project. The proposed site is located on a hilly area with a 10-degree gradient that overlooks the Faculty of Modern Language and Communication, the main entrance of Universiti Putra Malaysia and the suburban view of Serdang town. This strategic location will make the design stand out in the landscape.

This process-based research method of contextualizing popular culture of film within the teaching model of architecture design is focused on the students' ability in interpreting their understanding of film into a spatial representation of architectural building. In that regard, they are introduced to the semiological analysis of identifying sign messages through the complexity of images, gestures, music, sounds and objects from their selected films. A4-phase designing process was introduced namely: contextual analyses, literature search, introduction to semiology and testing the ideas.

Phase 1: Critical contextual analyses

In the first phase, the students were asked to conduct specific site contextual analysis with respect to the physical environmental and socio-cultural issues such as site contour, micro-climate response, vehicular and human circulation patterns, and infrastructure services. It was later followed by the building's contextual analysis in which the students critiqued the contemporary practice of designing visouspatial gallery institution (to state a few, such as the blobby Kunsthau Graz by Peter Cook and Colin Fournier, Denmark Pavilion of BIG Group, Singapore Art Museum, Berlin Holocaust Museum of Daniel Libeskind, and Malaysian National Art Gallery) as their precedent. Special attention was given to investigate the conception, topology, and spatial configuration of the studied buildings in order to understand their design philosophy. The critical information from the analyses were discussed in a seminar class and accumulated as the 'design data bank' for the students' reference.

Phase 2: Literature search

In this second phase, the students were asked to choose their interested film genre such as horror, crime, musical, melodrama and action thriller. By conducting critical review from specific literatures such as film journals, magazines, pamphlets, online websites, and documented interviews, the students were divided into film genre groups in order to discuss their respective findings. At this stage, special attention was given to understand the visual sociologic phenomenon of popular culture; in which the students formulate their theoretical proposition in understanding how the popular culture of film is shaping public taste and its relationship with design thinking.

Phase 3: Introduction to the media semiotics

In this third phase, the discussion of media semiotics was introduced by the studio tutors. The complexity of how the meanings of visual cultural media, in this case the film, communicated through sign messages was discussed with special attention to address the issues of spatiality, functionality, and sensitivity in architectural design. Bringing further the findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2, intensive discourses were conducted in small focus groups in order to critique the students understanding on how the critical polemics of popular culture, film, and public taste are relevant with the architectural design of film gallery.

Phase 4: Testing the ideas

Based on their findings from the previous Phase 1, 2 and 3, the students produced series of representations: conceptual sketches and mock-up models in order to test their design ideas. Throughout the process, the studio tutors formulate the 'scenario-based problem' when trying to question the functionality and practicality of the proposed design. At this stage, the one-to-one reasoning dialogues between the students and tutors were conducted consistently during the individual critic sessions as a way to formulate justified arguments and consensual agreements towards the proposed design. The proposed Film Gallery Project is a visual sociological inquiry into the nature of film as a medium of design education and how it affects the individual, space construction of architecture and popular culture. The design brief acts as a catalyst for discussion on how architecture of architecture generates the portrayal of visuospatial communication with reference to the specific film genres. By approaching the fourth semester students of Bachelor Design (Architecture) using the design teaching methodology, the students were given opportunity to express their own design philosophy. Overall, the conducted project allows the students to enhance their design skills through the intensive intellectual discourses between the subject of popular culture of film and architecture. It is believed that this project will pave more possibilities in interlinking design research between the visual sociologic study of popular culture, film and architecture.