Revisiting the Word “Atmospheres” in the Urban Design Academic Field Based on the Artworks

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ABSTRACT

In this debate, we claim that few Egyptian scholars are considering issues of phenomenological critiques addressing adequately the atmosphere of cities and places, and that Egyptian urban design education does not address the possibility of teaching through commentary of this kind. This article examines the dilemma of using the term “atmospheres” in urban design education. It theorises the nature of this relationship, developing an analytical framework creating the architecture of the city as similar as the artworks through which to investigate them related through their aspects—ideas, themes, and dramatic text—and those overarching effects of the technical elements. The question is: how can one use the artworks in urban design teaching? This article discusses the atmospheres in many artworks of Western and Egyptian thought to explore the effect of the architecture of cities in creating the atmospheres of the cities. The conclusion aims to reach some of the lessons learned by analysing artworks that have achieved a different atmosphere in specific places.

KEYWORDS

Artworks, Education, Teaching and Learning, Urban Atmospheres

INTRODUCTION

Concerning for how the word atmospheres was included in the realm of architecture, especially in the discipline of urban design, particularly around education: teaching and learning, the problem of this research can be limited in three fundamental issues: 1) the absence of the course outlines (syllabi) in the departments of urban design in the universities use this word explicitly. 2) Many specialists reject the use this word as a scientific term because they believe that the urban design has many courses dealing with the visual, aesthetics, and perceptual dimensions, such as the courses of humanities. In another context, 3) there are many terms in the fields of urban design use this word based on phenomenological studies, such as natural, social, and architectural quality. These courses are atmospheric architecture, atmospheric perception, and aesthetics atmospheres—these technical terms used mainly in the courses of the department of “environmental design”, particularly in the areas of climate and sound-scape.

This disregard of the concept of the atmospheres occurs mostly during the process of urban design. But the word atmospheres often exist in architectural design on the level of an individual building, interior design, and exterior design (landscape architecture), mainly in uses of climatic effects, colours, shade, light, and sound. Many architects create the feeling of atmospheres by playing with the light and shadow. For instance, in ‘the Crystal Palace’ by Joseph Paxton (1869), ‘the church of Nôtre Dame...

Many scholars in the fields of architecture of the city create places based on the “time and not space” (Till, 2009, pp. 95-96), where architect see time as “crucial” in architecture (Gehl, 1987; Gehl & Svarre, 2013, p. 101). In this vein, many scholars innovated the ideas such as serial vision (Cullen, 1961), situate vital events in the form of a narrative event (Tschumi, 1981; Tschumi, 1994), reconsidering an urban experience as a series of events, and collection of experiences (Norberg-Schulz, 1988). Further, based on respecting the characteristics of the rhythms; time emerges through “rhythmic repetition”, “not repetition but change” (Lynch, 1972, p. 65), as well as “events recur without strict measure, repetition is not necessarily” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 6). Any aesthetics experiences have three characteristics: completeness, uniqueness, and providing quality (Dewey, 2005, p. 44). These characteristics are based on “rhythm” that identifies “with regularity of recurrence amid changing elements” (Dewey, 2005, p. 168). Also, Dewey sees “rhythm is rationality among qualities” (Dewey, 2005, p. 174).

Today, two matter shaped architecture “the progress of modern technology”, and the “developments in human needs” (Böhme, 1993, p. 29). Böhme is considered the daily experience a critical figure in the realms of ‘atmospheric architecture’ and ‘urban ambiances’. The drama of life and the daily experience, creating a different atmosphere that reflects on people’s mood. Architectural atmospheres as “singular density and mood, this feeling of presence, well-being, harmony, beauty” (Zumthor, 2006, p. 11). This way of thinking reveals the similarities between architecture and artworks.

Since an essential part of design education based on inspired from a range of experiences, the screening of the selected film scenes places the student in an experience that he may never experience throughout his or her life. Through the multitude lessons, students can draw inspiration from other experiences that are compatible with the nature of his or her projects, and more realistic solutions can be realized.

This article assumes that there is a lack of clarity in the use of the word atmosphere between academics regarding express people’s feeling in urban design education. The purpose of this article is to prove that the creation of the atmospheres of cities as plausible as it happens in artworks; both having similar aspects for making; which are ideas, themes, and dramatic text, as well as the technical elements.

This article focuses on revealing the contribution of art (music, novel, and cinema) to understanding the impact of societal transformations on everyday events according to different urban places. And then there is an attempt to teach students how to design urban spaces according to the creation of a series of events like what the author makes in the novel and director in the cinema. Thus, the objective is to reach some of the lessons learned by analysing some of the artworks that have achieved a different atmosphere in specific places. Some of the interesting questions in this context are: 1) Is there a lack of clarity or misunderstanding in the use of the word atmosphere at the level of practice among academics and professional urban designers? 2) How can use the concept of the atmosphere in the academic field?

This work responds to these questions through four sections following as some introductions and methodology. The first includes a detailed study on the influence of architectural thinking on improving the urban atmosphere in literature and artworks. The second dealing with the current events of the atmospheres in Egyptian cinematic work related to architectural history. The third section addresses the atmospheres in the academic fields. The fourth discusses the ambiguity of the atmospheres in the Egyptian thought. The concluded section offers the lessons learned from the application of artworks methods in reading history and using its tools in urban design education.
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