P4 REFLECTION

deniz uygur, 1553445, studio Explore Lab

key words: spiritual spatial experience, mobility, modern urban fabric, streetscape zones

My fascination has always been about the feelings, which are triggered by the environment, the nature and the man-made one. Instead of mere function of the built environment, “the quality without name”, as Christopher Alexander called, “the ineffable” as Le Corbusier called, “the immeasurable” as Lois Kahn called, has always more meaning for the user. It is a subjective quality, but since “space is existential and existence is spatial”, as French phenomenologist Ponty said, and nature is the thingness of space, the natural elements of space, light and shadow, vastness and immensity, silence and stillness can be used by architects to offer wide range of experience opportunities to users. As author of Poetics of the space, Bachelard defends; space is of significance to people and is infused with feelings and meanings, which include perceiving, doing, thinking and feeling in a certain way. Furthermore, space is permeated with visceral feelings. They are known not only through the eyes and mind but also through more direct modes of experience, which resist objectification. In my project and research paper I use the word of “spiritual” to define this quality which cannot be made, but only generated, indirectly by ordinary actions of the people, just “as a flower cannot be made, but only generated from the seed,” as Christopher Alexander states.

In my research paper, first I explained why human beings cannot be separated from spiritual needs. When it is about experiencing and perceiving, human cognition, as a realm of mind that covers the total capacity of holistic type of perception, takes the main role. Briefly, it encompasses the entire capacity for symbolic thought, which is the essential of any kind of language and spirituality. Here, spirituality can be considered as an inherent subjective language to perceive and formulate life in oneself. When the subject is about architecture or built environment, it has its own kind of language and formulation. But because of the fact that it forms the space where we live and exist, reflectively it is made up by another spiritual activity conveyed through creation of architectonic forms. When all of the human-made things are actually symbols and the reflections upon the existed symbols, buildings are not just forms but symbols. Thus, as oral languages constantly adapt and transform themselves with the change of tools and life styles of the time, the totality of architectonic forms has a lot to tell about the culture and reflect upon it.

Since the modern understanding of life based on productivity and since the attention is constantly kept on the community itself and its mechanism, the formal and functional patterns of urban fabric are lacking the qualities of spiritual space. Spirituality is inherently has been always found here and there, this is the reason that it is impossible to reach a spiritual spatial experience by the priority of function which is subjected to be changed in a large scope of time. When it is about a society, an organized way of living, the spirituality should be more about the plurality of individual experiences, instead of an imposed type of plurality which is mere for organizing the urban life. (ie. Constant daily migration in cities, from spot to spot) The change of spiritual public experience happens with the transformations of social and economic patterns. Thus, when human beings alters the tools, techniques, the ways of learning, perceiving, judging the goods of life are bound to be changed.

However after the transition from town to technopolitan, so-called spiritual spaces have been remained as religious places which addresses specific institutionalized group of people. Also under the effect of scientific and rational rules of modern society, spiritual public places could not find an acceptable functional reasons to exist there. Since rituals of modern rational life are based on productivity and swiftness, massive daily migrations in the functional patterns of urban fabric, form the biggest circulation movement and defines the main mobile act of citizens. As the main public space of city, even though streets have an impact on individuals with their position, which is connected to all parts of the city, and function, their significance on society is determinant for the general identity of city and disposition of society. Today the existence of streets only functions but do not have a quality to offer a space that can arise an extraordinary experience of individuals while physically gathering them. Considering all these, streetscape zones are chosen for evoking a pluraly existed and individually experienced spatial spirituality. Since street already has an important function in modern urban life, as the element of mobility, if it generates a spiritual experience, citizens can be the participators of the space and they can give meanings to it by their own imaginations. While a constantly used street is being the main stage of the mobile rituals of society, with its possible connection to nature it can generate different kinds of experience apart from the daily urban life. A very contrast spatial space can keep people away from their ordinary daily life and let them to have their own meanings on street. Since mobility is defined as the ease of movements, it also covers the physical and inherent movement of human beings. And the experiential connection to nature can be achieved even in the most hectic street of a city, with its very contrast quality of experience. With their natural existence, interplays of light and sound, and the illusions of perceivable scale of the space can be the main mediators of the spiritual quality of a streetscape.
Location choice

For the project location choice has been made after completing the main draft of the research. For the location, I wanted to go for a place that I know well and I chose Ankara, Turkey. Since it is a late and fast urbanized and modernized city, it does not really have an order, but it is more like overlapping and confusion of urban layers from different periods. Thus the project turned into solving the problem - redefining and redesigning the site to offer a more convenient space for pedestrians while accommodating spiritual spatial experience in a modern urban fabric.

I chose the most well-known central road/boulevard which is placed on an axes, connecting the citadel to main residential are by passing thorough the main governmental region. Atatürk boulevard was first designed as a part of the first urban plan of Ankara in early 20s. In that time, on the main avenue, there were several squares for more social reasons. However since it is a wide road, with the change of life style and with the invasion of cars, now it is impossible to realize those squares except some symbolic statues. Besides still this avenue connects the city centrum to everywhere and the regions serves for several different purposes so it is a well known and frequently used space. Unfortunately, even though there are lot of people, it is more like an highway splitting the city.

During the time, Ataturk Boulevard was extended through that main axes and ended up with the length of almost 3 km. However I chose the most used, and socially lively part which has 1,5 km length, and covers the main square of Ankara.
Design Process and Principles

Considering the main issue of the research – accommodating spiritual spatial experience in modern urban fabric- and the project site as the most hectic region of the city which is actually an undefined streetscape zone from a pedestrian perspective, there are two main purposes of the project.

- Giving a pedestrian friendly definition to the most hectic street of the city
- Finding a way/s to offer a spiritual experience for pedestrians in their random daily life

As a first step, the invasion of cars on boulevard is to be solved. Thusi since there are already some underpasses on boulevard, the auto circulation is placed under the ground.

As it is mentioned before, and elaborated in the research paper, to achieve that spiritual quality, there are elements of nature and their interplay are to be used

- Light and shadow
- Vastness and immensity
- Silence and Stillness

All these three main elements are simply found in nature. Light including shadow as its sub-form, is an optical and a natural phenomenon which is mostly considered as a phenomenon that tends to be experientially absent but actually is “the giver of all presence”, as Louis Kahn says. Even though vastness and immensity are quite similar concepts, both are mesmeric qualities of space that are related to scale. However vastness is a lot more observable than immensity since immensity of space is framed by vastness. Thus while vastness is a more stable quality, immensity is the experience triggered by vastness. As another natural determinative of space, sound and its particular interplays define the space in a holistic way. Even though the significance of hearing and its extensive being in spatial experience are mostly discounted, the entirety of sounds in space generates a temporal continuum in which visual impressions are embedded. Considering all these natural elements of space they also have a quality to affect each other mutually.

In order to design a spiritual place with all these natural elements and create a connection with nature through space and its determinative elements in a very hectic place, the concept of contrast became one of the main principles of the project. So the perceived size and scale, existence of light and shadow forms and stillness of space is to be encapsulated in a form which has a dual character. While shell and the outer skin is giving a stronger definition for used space, inner space is offering different experiences and letting users to put meanings themselves.
Form and Quality of Shell

Since the concept of contrast is one of the main principles of the project, this also reflects upon the form. Instead of the orthogonal forms of city texture, the form has a softness like a little hill popping out of the ground.

Since the site is actually a street with its linear shape, the richness of form on plan is mainly based upon the movements around that are mostly directed through the other smaller streets which are connecting to the site on sides. So smaller squares are formed on both sides outside, and inside urban courtyards are formed.
In order to offer more attraction in these small square some little stalls are embedded into the form.
Urban Courtyards and Design Principles

Vastness & Immensity (challenging the perceived size and scale of the site)

- Challenging the perceived size/scale of space
- Contrast spatial perception

- Horizontal linear vastness

- Sky / earth relationship
- Vertical linear vastness

- Cosy small scale areas in a vast form
Light & Shadow Interplays (sky - earth relationship, light diffusions, light reflections)

Context is out of the inner experience
Buildings are not visible from inside
Light Games and Reflections

Light is reflected from some shallow pools which are cladded with mirror on base.

Interior is partially cladded with mirror to distort the perceived space, scale and size by the infinite reflections of light.
Having a Shelter and Being in Nature
Materialization and Contrast between in and out

Experience is to be colored by memories, daydreams and imagination.