Filligree of Conglomerate: Some Theoretical Remarks On Kosovo Pavillion in XIII Architectural Biennial in Venice

Sezgin Boynik and Ajhan Bajmaku

Best possible way in dealing with the architectural event that is nothing but a compromise realized in the place that is all about the spectacle is to start with a radical critique of it. XIII Biennial of Architecture in Venice curated by David Chipperfield is brutally criticized by his colleague Wolf Pix in short press release statement titled simply as 'The Banal'. Prix is attacking whole concept of biennial, blatantly describing it as 'petty-burgeoisie', as 'danse macabre', or even getting more local and specific, describing it as 'sinking gondola'. This is fight between two architects. It is this situation that especially pleases us. Because what for us, seeing the biennial, seemed as a most obvious lack of the event, that is confrontation of ideas and positions, took place only outside of biennial: in this brutal criticism! But what pleased us mostly in reading this criticism is that it pointed to the most weak point of the whole concept of the biennial; to the inherent fantasy of unity of opposites, to the de-politicized antagonisms, and to the lack of the "theory" that is principal reason of all these compromises. 'Common Ground' that was a title of this last Architectural Biennial, couldn't offer any conceptual explanation why differences and diversities of various spatial organisations should co-exist. In poor reply to Prix, curator of exhibition Chipperfield explains the reason of these conceptual lacks as something incidental, something that was due to the certain strand of optimistic architecture, that is "build in the spirit of generosity." It is this optimism, in the last instance, that allows the curators of Russian Pavillion to cynically reproduce the Brzehnevist statist paranoia in the realm of Putinist corporate megalomania; or allows the USA for total co-optation and recuperation of all possible alternative political organisations of spatialities as some kind of Sunday afternoon garden parties of growing tomatoes; or it allows to depoliticization of Tropicalian movement as a slack-dream of capitalist success in Brazilian pavillion ("The same people who rests in hammocks can, whenever necessary, build a new capital in three years' time", Lucio Costa); or happy rainbow of urban differences dreamt by curator of Greek pavillion in the midst of the collective social rebellion. This is what in Biennials of Venezia is known as pavillions of various nations, mostly stationed in Giardini, a pure spectacle of representation, directly not selected by curator, but accommodated into his/her conceptualisation. Arsenale, as the heart of "commonality", was actually more directly involved in this "compromise" that Wolf Pix is pointing to. We can see in every step agnosticism either as amorphous emotional state of being or as impossibility of decision designating most of the works. Apart from Ines Weizman's 'Museum of Copying' dealing with the controversial copyright problems of Adolf Loos' plan for 'House of Josephine Baker' most fo the works in Arsenale was using historical references that has explicit political connotations only as a reflection of a sentimental spatial journey. Starting from Thomas Struth's 'Unconsicous Places' spread through the whole building, Zaha Hadid's "parametric semiology"; or presenting Herzog & de Meuron's controversial Elbphilharmonie project "without taking a stand", something as statement made clear, as "invisible forces that form of the context of every architectural project", that is, "battleground as common ground"; or Farshid Moussavi's concept of 'affectual architecture'. In this spontaneous conjuncture even slogans of seemingly political installations like Urban Think Tank's work on Torre David in Caracas, such as "intelligence starts with improvisation" sounds as banal petty-burgeois exploitation of precarious living conditions. It seems that there is a inherent contradiction in the very heart of the architectural intelligibility, or architectural politics: since architecture in the last instance is about buildings that lasts, or functional buildings, it is very difficult project to conceive critical architecture. Things has to function, even the ad hoc improvisational or spatial situations that happened as opposite to a capitalist system should be reorganized as functional constructions. What we want to say is that even the installations such as Urban Think Tank's 'Torre David' that deal with such a oppositional architectural situations is ellapsing the antagonism of precarious lumpen-proletariat to a certain architectural solution. As they wrote in their statement, Torre David is proof of the futuristic

architecture, it is the "[future] of urban development that lies in collaboration among architects, private enetrprise, and the global population of slum-dwellers". Here is main problem, and here we are dealing with most political manifestation of architecture, architecture is not a problem it is a solution. But problem of being funtional as "think tank" is not because they seek a solution per se; precisely problem is that architecture in its current conjuncture is solution only to the existing alternatives, especially as the solution to the capitalist relation to a spatial organizations. If we take closer examination of Urban Think Tank's 'solution' we will see that a link between the architects and the 'slum-dwellers' (or precariat) is private enterprise. To say this is to forget that 'slum-dwellers' are direct product of the private enterprise; and as such, the architecture with its 'solution' would only disguise/mask/hide the capitalist relations that grinds the billions of people on this earth (read for example book of Mike Davis 'Planet of Slum' if any of you are interested in knowing how this urban and spatial grinding mechanism is connected to capitalism).

It is not exaggeration to claim that 'non-theory', 'spontaneism', 'affections', etc of architecture as presented in Venice Biennial are symptoms of one great 'solution' to the field of spatial construction whose primary concern is 'business'.

The curator and at the same time 'artist' ('architect') of the Kosovo Pavillion in last Venice Biennial Perparim Rama is a businessman of buildings. But his business in Pavillion is not a sheer legitimation of his mercantilist profit, quite opposite, this business is visible in the same vein as the current architectural conjuncture of having defending business as the part of the 'solution' oriented spatial activity. To put it more blatantly, Rama's business of solution in Pavillion is not evident in practice, but in its 'theory'. In practice of curating and creating the Pavillion, Rama was, especially in private conversation, complaining how much he had to invest his own time and resources in building the installation. That is most probably true, clearly evident from the amateurish installation of the Pavillion; but one more time, the failure of Pavillion is not due to low-fi and D.I.Y. aesthetics of the pavillion, it is directly linked with the overall conceptualistion (or as early we described as 'theory') that conceives the architecture as a compromising solution to the most antagonistic social and political forces. What is the conceptualization utilized in the Kosovo Paviliion? There more than one, a many concepts. This is primary problem of the Pavillion, it seeks to answer to so many questions at the same time, that necessarily it succumbs to the impossibility of the theoretical answer, leaving problems as emotional reflections waiting to be picked up instinctively and intuitionally. We have detected at least some five levels of architectural conceptualisations in Pavillion:

1.   *emotions of buildings*: as earlier we claimed 'emotions', 'affects', or general 'amorphous' conceptions of architecture has become somehow ideal ground for flowering of 'non-theoretical' approaches in current architectural/spatial conjuncture. This is symptom of new business. But Rama is taking this business of 'emotions' into its extreme. The catalogue of the emotions which is six ("represented by different coloured lights for each: red for anger; blue for sadness; yellow for happiness; orange for excitement; green for freedom; and purple for entrapment") will allow certain orientation for the visitors within the urban landscape of the contemporary Kosovo. As curator is explaining there is "images from a preselected library or choosed photographs [of various buildings from Kosovo] that have been uploaded by other participants" that the semi-electronic device projects randomly. Depending on votes they got from visitors, these projected images are changing their colours. For example one building can make us angry (that is 'red'), and another could rise a feelings of entrapment (then it is joined with 'purple'). Accordingly we are invited to see the urban geography of Kosovo as manifestation of six different emotions, or six different colours, varying from the position of the beholder. Since there is no any other definition of the characteristic of these colours except as indicated above in paranthesis, we are invited to perform a perpetual improvisation on the colour-nature of emotions of buildings. For example 'Hamam' in Prizren as part of non-contemporary Ottoman architecture is in mnay cases is followed with a colour of 'yellow'; but for some of us, since there is not much precision on this, and we are left with our sole emotions, the 'Hamam' is nothing but 'blue'. Or for some 'Monument for Brotherhood and Unity' sculpture in Prishtina is 'blue' of sadness, but for some of us it is a 'yellow' of happiness and 'orange'

of excitement; even more it is 'red' of excitement, colour which do not correspond to the Rama's 'red' of anger. As Rama is clearly putting in his curatorial statement, the landscape of Kosovo architecture is a chaos and cacaphony, or " mash-up of styles", but with this ambiguous scope of 'emotions' and 'colours' of buildings this mess is even more exaggerated. If architecture is a spatial chaos, then intelligibility of this spatiality becomes even more chaotic with these colours: penetrating even to most intimate part of our brains. In order to not cause a stir among the readers we have to make this claim clearer: it is not the chaotic architecture of Kosovo that reproduces the chaotic emotions among its people. It is Perparim Rama's affectional conceptions that does this operation of deepening the chaos; at least in the Pavillion, during the Biennial.

2.   *interactive re-organisation*: second conception of the Pavillion is based on the assumption that visitors of the installation could re-shape the imagery of Kosovo contemporary landscape. Of course as many artistic imaginary-installations are, this active participation in interactive re-organisation is only symbolic, or fictional. But again this symbolic re-shape of architectural geography is not a problem in itself, what makes this interaction a problem is that the indexed symbolical codes corresponding to fixed spatial organisations (various buildings, from semi-private residences, to public and historical buildings) are to ambiguously defined. As we tried to show earlier, the colours are not efficinetly defined to be used for categorisation of the emotional effects of the buildings. Probably it is necessary to underline this once more: all the buildings have some kind of emotional effects; but these effects can not be dealt solely from the individualist, personal or psychological point of view. Colours, and their emotions, as related to buildings have political and social connotations. With one simple example it is possible to demonstrate this: following the earlier example we can ask of what colour is re-shaped building of 'Rilindja'? In the library of selected buildings this is dubbed as "refurbished high-rise", apart from year which was built (1970) and the location (Prishtina) there is not any other information on this building in the inter-active web-site of the Kosovo Pavillion (http://www.kosovoinvenice.org/). Even third information, the architect is left as "unknown". Same and even more is also for the most of the other contemporary buildings selected for vote: 'Grand Hotel Prishtina', 'Bridge in Mitrovica', 'Government Building' (?!), 'Residential Blocks', 'Office Building', 'Residence', 'KEK Building' and 'Residential Block Arberia' are presented without any inofrmation, just a photo and randomly selected name. Even if we assumes that there exist a subject who studied carefully the effect of colours on emotions, or even further studied the effect of colour to emotions aroused by buildings, he or she can not vote properly because there is not enough inoformation on the buildings. The buildings are presented as trans-historical, spontaneous, intuitive spaces that only to insiders, to be precise to Kosovars, have some meanings. If we scratch this self-initiated mess on architectural knowledge induced by Rama bit further we will face with very serious problem here: Kosovo's urban landscape is a mess, no building has a history, we do not know much about their formation, everything constructed is part of the political calculations, and in short, we don't have much inofrmation about this urban landscape. So in this case, colours and emotions are not an alternative method for evaluation of mess, but it is posed as only possible option for dealing with such a spatial agnosticism. One could call this a exotic view of urban landscape, but more than that this is also a amnesiac conception of landscape. One which puts politics in service of the ad hic spontaneity of psychological feelings. As we said earlier colours of buildings are political and social. Unfortunately this is field where Rama's installation is most silent about. Soon we will see the reasons of that, namely 'conceptual' reasons, but before that we have to say that, especially in Kosovo where current political conjuncture is looting, corrupting, destroying, even in extreme cases murdering for a architectural approporiation it is sheer naivety to postpone this urgent matters to the field of psychological mediation. But as it goes, for business of architecture, wheter right or wrong, building is what matters; that people's space is stolen every day is not a part of this deal.

3.   *architects of Kosovo*: Probably this third field is key concept in undersatnding the Pavillion in its most urgent political consequences. Psychoanalytically (not psychologically), following Jacques Lacan, we can call this "architects of Kosovo" as point du capitone, a caption point, point which unites everything. The installation apart from offering a colour theory of architectural

emotions is at the same time also proposing a new architectural policy. The central element of Pavillion, the six tableaux vivants, describing 'colour theory', are connected with wires to surrounding three large panels where most of the names of architects and their companies living or working in Kosovo are inscribed. This is strange solution for the installation that aims to problematize the 'mesh-up' of the architectural styles. It is impossible not to ask if reason for this connection of names of Kosovar architects to 'meshed-up' building is not some covert thesis that this architects are responsible for the spatial cacaphony. This is can be one of the reason, but what seems as obvious reason for this inclusion of domain called 'architects of Kosovo' to 'mess' is something else. The reason of this inscription of 'architects of Kosovo' we have to look somewhere else, namely in the prevailing ideological discourse of Kosovo's infantilism. Perparim Rama starts his statement on Pavillion with common words, repeated endless times: " [In] Kosovo – a new European country … currently, through a slowly growing economy and returning wealth from the diaspora, a proliferation of new buildings have appeared throughout the country". What is at stake here is that Kosovo that is refered to as baby-state of Europe, and neutral and fresh opportunity of "newness" is not seen as some possibility of emancipation from repetition of state-apparatuses; but contrary, as some possibility for 'renewal'. As 'baby-state' Kosovo in this sense is seen as exempt from criticism, and at the same time trans-historic and pure from corruption. As everyone in Kosovo knows, such Kosovo do not exist. That is Kosovo of fantasy, of ideological entitiy, more precisely, we can call it a Kosovo of national fantasy. What is this national fantasy consited of? For sure of unity. But the sum which makes the unity, in the case of nationalism, is not collection of heterogenous and antagonistic concrete elements. What makes the national unity so effective is the thing which in itself do not exist, but is pretended that there is. This is reason why we refer to it as fantasy. Kosovo as a being do not exist, it is constellation of various forces that we call 'Kosovo'; some forces and elements persisting for many decades, some less, some new, some which got weaker, and another that got stronger. Kosovo did not fell from the blue sky, but it is product of dialectical and materialistic relations and of historical and economical struggles. Rama in his statement is touching to this by stating that Kosovo "is often imagined as a struggling and damaged place, full of broken and deteriorating buildings", but immediately after this what he proposes is a renewal through emotions. But if in close examination of "interactivity" in previous chapter we showed that this 'emotional renewal' has to do with the business; now we are proposing that with a reference to Kosovar architects as a coherent entity, the Pavillion is somehow similar to national fantasy. We can demonstrate this very easily: the thing such as Kosovar architects do not exist, and under no circumstances this thing called Kosovar architects exist as coherent web of theoreticians and practitians. There is architects in Kosovo, they also have their Association, but their existence is part of separate and distinct tendencies, some do call themselves Kosovar architects, some only architects, some Kosovars, probably some like to be called as Albanian architects, some other-kind of architects, but what matters is that they do not differ among each other with these kind of descriptions. Their differences are likely to be based on descriptions as architects with less talent, 'made-to-measure' architects, charlatan architects, architects close to government, corrupted architects, naïve architects, postmodern architects, probably sometimes also a honest, clever, dedicated, politically active, social, intellectual or maybe dissent architects. Whatever their description to be, they are for sure in continuous struggle for job, for commissions, for bussiness in short. In de-politicized atmosphere of the current conjuncture in Kosovo, the responsibility of architects is for sure very important. It is only the architects that could bring the massacre of urban landscape to a more political sensitivity. But with conjoining the various architects in a coherent web of proffesionals, the Pavillion is not using the potenatial of architects as a political force against corruption. It is just hoping for renewal without touching to the essential problematic of the spatial re-structuring of contemporary Kosovo. Instead of making explicit the role of architects in this 'mesh-up', the Pavillion is proposing a fantasy of unity that is nothing but a national fantasy. To unite the proffesionals in one 'dream' of childhood, of baby-state, where everything is possible among the many brothers and some few sisters. This national fantasy of united 'architects of Kosovo' is nothing but a sheer delusion, that serves mostly to those brothers and sisters close to

state apparatuses, for whom Kosovo is unrestricted possibility of most profitable expoitation.

4. *global link*: this is intermezzo concept. Wires from six tableaux vivants are not only connecting all the architects of Kosovo, but they have extensions to the world map. This global connection is meant to show the quantity of people voted from various geographies of the world. But it has a role of connecting Kosovo to the world in the same way as it does connecting the Kosovo architects to the Kosovo building: the link is just arbitrary, without any historical connections. Since, as we showed earlier, the information on each buildings indexed in Pavillion is very limited, any people who is not from Kosovo, who do not have emotional connection to these building, can not vote for this buildings with other components than his or her exotic views of Kosovo. That map of world, the global link, is again only a self-reflection of emotional destiny of Kosovar current conjuncture.

5. *filigree*: or filigrani. This is how statement of Pavillion explains the 'filigree': "The exhibition's title, The Filigree Maker, comes from filigree, filigrani in Albanian, an ancient metal-making technique which starts by twisting threads of wire into ornamental pieces of jewellery and adornments worn by women and men alike. With a strong cultural presence, filigree was chosen as the strongest analogy for the pavilion. As a symbol of the past it can represent the reinvention of architecture connected to Kosovo's people and it's heritage." But filigree, as Rama expained many times in his private conversations, is also a continuous thread of wire, made not necessarily from gold or other expensive material. Filigree is, as metaphor of the Pavillion, the continuity, undisdurbed flow, a harmony, and naturalness. With filigree we came to the most crucial conception of the whole installation. There is not a filigree exponents in the installation, as it can be seen in some old jewellery shops in Prizren, but all the installation is presented as one filigree. So the tabelaux vivants, the interactivity with computers, wires connecting globe and architects of Kosovo, the colours, emotions...are interwoven as a *filigrani*. Whole installation is a filigree, a continuous and harmonic unity of distinct materials. With filigree we arrived at another Lacanian psychoanalytical concept, that is even more uniting than the previously mentioned point du capitone; that is a suture. An action of stitching all different things in one everlasting unity of harmony.

From all this discussed things it is obvious that what makes the Kosovo Pavillion in XIII Architectural Biennial so weak and problematic is the lack of theoretical and conceptual orientation. The Pavillion as we showed has more than one conceptual problematic, and that is the essential problem of whole installation. Even if these conceptualisations are strikingly distinct from each other, their unity is posed without contradictions. Since there was not a orinetation in the Pavillion, all what seemed as a "reality" of Kosovo has been gathered together in a random possibility that eventually hoped for a spontaneous and automatic solution. That is why so much emphasis were given to emotions. But it is not only a 'theory' that misses in the Pavillion, also 'politics' is completely absent in this installation. Otherwise we would not spend so much time to write this text. In current situation where Kosovo's architecture and urbanism is a pure example of conglomerate imposed by greedy capitalist interests; to visualise the spatial solution of this mess in the style of filigree is to play fool. We strongly think that architects of Kosovo should have much more responsibility, both theoretical and political in their practice. And we also strongly hope that for next Architectural Pavillion in Venice or for similar event, all these missgivings should be taken seriously and that emphasis would be given to a work that encourages critical thinking above emotionalism, spontaneism and business.