ICONIC EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURE AND THE VISITOR’S IMAGINARY IN RIO: THE “TOMORROW MUSEUM” CASE.

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Abstract  
This paper seeks to shed light on the perception of a world increasingly immersed in iconic images, where architecture is understood as an image production activity, subjecting people to the ephemeral consumption of visual spectacles. It also discusses architecture as an ideological practice that constructs landscapes and imaginaries potentially attractive to business and tourists. In the post-Fordist global world, urban and architectural processes and projects have been following the requirements of the competitive marketing among cities, which end up copying each other, creating simulacra of themselves. One of the main city marketing strategies is the implementation of iconic architecture (Bessa and Capanema-Alvares, 2014). By its imagery, it emerges self-sufficiently and establishes what Wunenberger (2013) calls the instituting-practical dimension of the imaginary. The imaginary, as such, leaves the limits of thought and sensibilities and reaches social actions, spaces and landscapes.

Considering that architecture should highlight the interrelationship between our image as individuals, our identities and our experience in the world, it is important to think about how architecture is visually perceived by the user to the detriment of other senses, what would result in a great loss in signification. This work proposes an analysis of the domination of vision in experiencing the new (Pallasmaa, 2011; Sontag, 2004; Urry, 2001) and especially the spectacular, taking from the Tomorrow Museum visitors’ experiences. The museum was designed by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava and was recently opened in Rio de Janeiro in the wake of urban renewal projects for the mega-event Olympics 2016. In order to project a new imaginary synthesis of Rio de Janeiro, as planned by local authorities, city administrators chose the iconic strength of the architect's work, known worldwide for his formal and material daringness. The new icon, as a physical and imaginary architectural practice, would have the function of re-signifying (NETTO, 2009) the consolidated image of the Rio, to mean a more technological and up-to-date metropolis.

In order to accomplish such purpose, this work draws on a brief literature review, a survey with 50 museum visitors, and two in-depth interviews. Among the main findings, the study concludes that architecture in this context is limited to ostensive formal conceptions, having the building appearance as its objective and its result, what promotes the "non-places” and reinforces a vicious cycle of global cultural homogenization. Technology enhances what we call visual hegemony, either by means of on-site consumption or through the almost unanimous use of social networks for sharing images with the consequent imaginary sense of belonging through imagistic consumption.

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CVs

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