ON SKINS AND OTHER PREOCCUPATIONS OF ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

The more the design of buildings becomes bioclimatically conscious, the more the behaviour of these buildings tends to become skin dominated. Double elements, much like the different layers of the skin of animals or human beings, can serve more than one purpose at the same time, such as shading, movement of air, evaporation, filtering of light or the support of other elements. Their use can help in a better integration of indoor and outdoor space, an extension of functions and a smoother transition from a more to a less controlled environment.

KEYWORDS

Architectural design, Skin of living organisms, Skin of buildings, Building envelope, Plants, Climatic Conditions, Threshold between exterior and interior.

When one comes to think of it, the history of architecture is virtually the history of the skin of buildings. This means the way we treat walls, roofs and openings. These utilitarian components, very often of a most mundane nature, when combined in an aesthetically pleasing manner, have led to realms of higher aesthetic appreciation and philosophical levels of abstraction and contemplation.

In the present-day way of thinking the approach to the design of the skin of a building in general comes about at two levels: On the first level, it is taken for granted in its simplest form, that it has to fulfil its most immediate functions of keeping cold and water out and letting air and light in. Very often little consideration is given to the multiple functions that an opening in a wall has to fulfil. It is taken for granted (in most cases) that it is only natural for it to exist without much further thought.

On a second and higher level, after the basic technical questions have been dealt with, the architect enters into the picture and starts combining the different components into a more holistic and aesthetically satisfactory overall product. This of course is not always the case, but it is the practice in most of the cases. The different components become abstract objects of an aesthetic value to be manipulated by the "craftsman-architect". The different materials, textures, shapes and many other properties of these components become issues of concern and starting-points for design development. Nowhere does it enter in this process, that these components exist also to fulfil a further role of creating a transitional space or threshold, the skin between the outside and inside. Nowhere does it become aware, that there are constraints to be dealt with and objectives to be fulfilled, and that with imaginative thinking these issues, further to being just constraints, could become starting-blocks for a much more holistic design. The richness of issues to be addressed is incredible and completely out of scale with the poverty and one-sided (depending on the designer's philosophy to design!) approach.