SEFERCİOĞLU, RÜYET
SPRING 18 / ARCH-465
21503026

SUMMARY OF *COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION IN ARCHITECTURE* BY ROBERT VENTURI:

PART 2: Complexity and Contradiction vs. Simplification or Picturesqueness

This paper is written in order to understand the main argument and pattern in the first book of Robert Venturi – *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, 1966*. The text is written in first person narrative that it has both formal & informal tones at the same time. In the first place, Venturi explains his philosophy: according to him, there should be complexity and contradiction in architecture which reflects the complex nature of life. Venturi believes, Orthodox Modern Architects failed to understand contemporary experience that they recognized complexity insufficiently and inconsistently. Their misconception of modern architecture resulted in oversimplified architecture. In other words, bland architecture. Venturi proposes a counter argument by supporting the messy vitality of the built environment in order to strenghten how relation between architecture and human life should be. To support his argument, Venturi investigates attitude of Orthodox Modern architects, blatant architecture, picturesqueness/subjective expressionism and program of architecture of late 1960s-1970s. Although the experience is personal and direct for Venturi, he reaches his conclusions in general only by implications.

In first chapter of the book, Venturi make his general stament by saying: "I like complexity and contradiction in architecture"(Venturi, 1996). Before he lead in the argument, he prefers to explain there is a need of complexity in architecture due to "increasing dimension and scale of architecture in urban and regional planning (…)" (Venturi, 1996). Basically, Venturi belives architecture should deal with complexities of the city to become more contextual. Therefore, architecture should be at its full scale with many levels of meanings. In the last part of Chapter-1, he foreshadows complexity and contradictions would suggest "difficult unity of inclusion" rather than oversimplification. Thus, space and its elements will coherent to real-life situations.

In the second chapter of Venturi's book, he divides his arguments into four parts to explain how complexity and contradiction differ from simplification or picturesqueness. In the first part, he explains why Orthodox modern architects failed and how life is more complex and paradoxical because of complex contemporary problems. He states Orthodox Modern architects' position leaded to seperation of elements rather than their juxtapositions. In this part, Venturi implies there is a need of change in architecture towards more complex whole since architecture should be a reflection of daily life. Then he implies this necessity by saying "At the same time that the problems increase in quantity, complexity and difficulty they also change faster than before." (Venturi, 1996).

In second part of this chapter, Venturi talks about blandness in architecture means of oversimplification and he is being critical about popular paradox of Mies Van der Rohe, *less is more*. He highlights the fact that less is not more but "less is a bore" (Venturi,1966). Venturi thinks that reality is much more complex that architecture should be harmonious with human reality. He explains that high level of selectiveness creates problems in the architecture since architects tended to only solve the problems they pick, not all the present problems. Moreover, He suggests this

attitude would result in manipulation of humans' life. However, Venturi does not reject the quality of selectiveness in Mies' designs but shows the paradox behind his works. He firmly believes that Mies' selectiveness is his strenght and weakness at the same time which added valuable things to architecture. As a strategy he prefers to criticize blatant architecture (over- simplified architecture) means of Mies' & Philip Hohnson's works. After analysing works of Mies & Johnson, he makes his final thesis by implying over-simplification leads bland architecture as "where simplicity cannot work, simpleness result" (Venturi, 1966). Before closing this argument, Venturi highlights he does not totaly reject simplification. He thinks valid simplification(not a goal but a tool for inner complexity) is a process to reach complex architecture.

In the next part of this chapter, Venturi speaks about false complexity and how picturesqueness differ from complexity. He implies intricate forms without complex programs give rise to symmetrical picturesqueness. To backup his argument, the narrator investigates the works of 20th century architects like Le Corbusier and A. Aalto. However, this time Venturi prefers to show the good parts in their work to propose how contradiction and complexity work in architecture. Furthermore, He highlights they "have usally rejected simplicity through reduction to promote complexity within whole" (Venturi, 1996). For instance, Venturi compliments A. Alto's work that Alto reached complex whole means of program. Alto's spaces really functions that it responds society's problem in terms of creation of space. Therefore, Venturi implies these features of Alto to show complex architecture is not a desire for expression. Lastly, he gives examples from history of Mannerist periods to remind readers there were always an attitude towards complexity and contradiction.

In the last part, the author links all the sub-arguments and concludes program and medium of architecture should grow out of complexities and contradictions because life is different. Lastly, he supports his main argument by expressing how do the programs differ from the past and then that we need more complex design to enrich architecture and experience, to define many layers of meanings. Venturi highlights not only new scopes of program are complex but even a scope of simple house is complex due to contemporary experience. Thus, in overall the second chapter, he suggests intensions must be more complex and ambiguous to become more contextual.

In conclusion, Venturi creates an original argument about necessity of complexity and contradiction in architecture. Although he uses first person narrative tone, he tends to be convincing with his strategy of explanation, argumentation and evaluation. Furthermore, the images and comparison&contrast modes of analysis give quality to his argument. As a main technique he prefers to explain before giving the the strengths and weaknesses of his theories. Lastly, he explains each argument layer by layer. Therefore, he becomes consistent about his position in this argument. For him, architecture needs complexity and contradiction over simplification and picturesqueness.

REFERENCES

Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture, 1996.