Hybrid - Inside The Walls

The *wall* as an architectural element that carries not only a structural load but also a meaning has been for some time treated as an autonomous designed object[1]. Whereas "Elements of Architecture" from the 2014 Biennale in Venice and Rem Koolhaas's formal methodology epitomized the definition of the *wall*[2], the hybridity of the *wall* has never been sufficiently investigated[3]. As Adolf Loos, Louis Kahn, Rem Koolhaas and others employ different strategies in this regard, in this article, I will explore the hybridity as it assumes different functions; *partitions, rooms* and *manifestos.* Beginning with volumetric operations, one sees that the subtractive approach takes the lead. However, in two-dimensional compositions the additive treatment becomes of much importance. The evolution that takes place *inside the walls* in either case has been characterized by the ambiguous function and appearance as well as the autonomy[4] of the given element. My examination of this trajectory will reveal different approaches and strategies, which are based on a series of heterogeneous examples.

Walls as Partitions

One of the fundamental functions of the *wall*, in its role as a divider of space, can connote so much more, rather than just being a spatial device. The true nature of the wall and its autonomous character is heightened where the wall separates two different values or kinds of people. Both aspects are amplified in many venetian churches like Basilica San Marco or Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari[5]. In these examples, the *wall* in the form of the *iconostasis, barco, septo* or *choir* embodies the division between *sacrum* and *profanum;* the prior and the congregation. Whereas the sanctuary symbolizes Heaven - the place, where the God is, the nave is meant for the contemplation. The *wall* conceals the divine, everything that should be hidden from human eyes.

A conceptual shift of this basic function has been made, when Rem Koolhaas, Madelon Vriesendorp, Elia and Zoe Zenghelis introduced *Exodus* as the entry for the competition The City as Meaningful Environment, organized by the Italian journal Casabella in 1972. The project alludes to the Berlin Wall and the enclosure of the city as a prison on a scale of metropolis[6]. The Walls of *Exodus* and the intermediate *Strip* (fig.1) become the central spine, dividing the city of London into The Good Half and The Bad Half, an apt illustration of an imprisonment and a utopian dream[7]. Such a metaphor of the "wall as means of separation and spatial difference becomes a tool that allows a liberty zone beyond planning"[8].

[1] Kenneth M. Moffett, The Wall in Recent Architectural Form: A Pattern of Evolution Toward Autonomy
[2] Koolhaas, Rem, Elements of Architecture, Central Pavilion catalog, p. 267 "The meaning of the wall is just as diverse as the uses of vertical surface can be, but there are at least two essential functions: providing structure, and dividing space"
[3] Evans, Robin, The Rights of Retreat and the Rites of Exclusion Notes Towards the Definition of Wall, 1971, p.50, "Yet the history of the wall as a means of moral, aesthetic and social exclusion (for three categories seem to converge at this point), is unwritten."
[4] Kenneth M. Moffett, The Wall in Recent Architectural Form: A Pattern of Evolution Toward Autonomy
[5] Foscari Widmann Rezzonico, Giulia, Elements of Venice, Zurich, Lars Muller, 2014
[6] Lucarelli, Fosco, Exodus, or the voluntary prisoners of architecture, Socks Studio, March 19, 2011
[7] Böck, Ingrid, Six Canonical Projects by Rem Koolhaas, p. 42

[8] Böck, Ingrid, Six Canonical Projects by Rem Koolhaas, p. 82

In some cases, another interpretation can be made. The *wall* as an autonomous barrierlike element evokes a symbolic Rite of Passage from one world to another; a threshold between production and consumption, sacrum and profanum or like in the venetian harbours between sea and land[9]. This constitutes a change in the perception of the *walls as partitions*. Rather than providing only division, the wall is a mediator of experience between two worlds, simultaneously giving them both autonomy and existing in this juxtaposition on a much more serious basis than just as a traditional element of separation and protection[10].
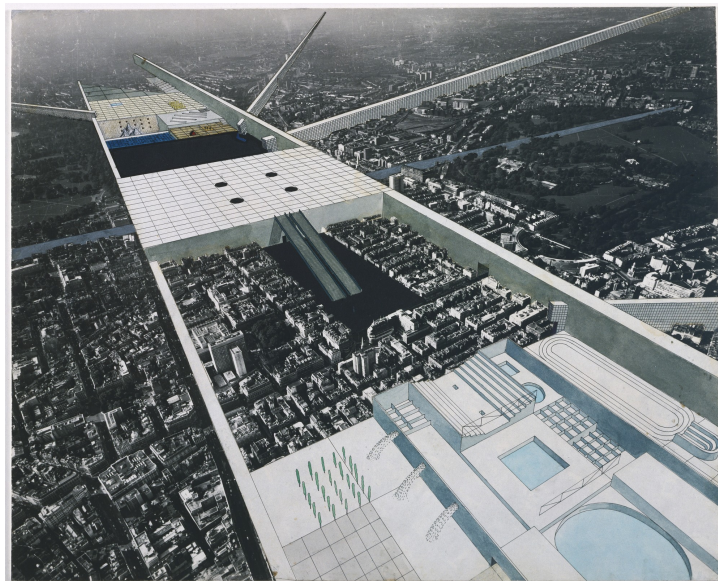
1., Rem Koolhaas, Madelon Vreisendorp, Elia Zenghelis, and Zoe Zenghelis, Exodus, or the voluntary prisoners of architecture,1972.
Source: MoMA https://www.moma.org/collection/works/104692 accessed March 9,2021

Walls as Rooms

Walls as rooms refer to the subtractive approach of the hybridity. The *poché* space filled "with great central living halls and auxiliary spaces nestled into thick outside walls"[11] tellingly manifests the importance of the void and the negative/positive perception of the form. Scottish Castles built between eleventh and thirteenth century likewise employ an inhabitable wall (fig.2). The subtracted volume allows for all the functional spaces like stairs and bathrooms to inhabit the walls. Another case of a "hollow wall"[12] is exemplified in renaissance italian churches - Il Redentore in Venice, Il Gesù in Rome and San Paolo e Barnaba in Milan[13]. In all those examples, which were built around the same time, in three different cities of Italy, the *wall* can be visualized as a passageway. The void, which unfolds behind the apse of Il Redentore, was used by the priests to gain access to the altar. This ambiguous nature of the wall prevents the clergy from passing in front of the highest ranking members of government, who were seated in the apse during the service.

[9] Foscari Widmann Rezzonico, Giulia, Elements of Venice, Zurich, Lars Muller, 2014
[10] Kenneth M. Moffett, The Wall in Recent Architectural Form: A Pattern of Evolution Toward Autonomy
[11] Kahn, Louis (as cited in Lucarell, Fosco, Sock studio, Walls as Rooms: British Castles and Louis Kahn, April 6, 2012)
[12] Kahn, Louis
[13] Foscari Widmann Rezzonico, Giulia, Elements of Venice, Zurich, Lars Muller, 2014

The same device of the wall as a "transition space that can be quickly walked through"[14] has become of much importance in many projects by Louis Kahn, which follow the distinction between *served* and *servant spaces.* The translation of historical forms found in medieval Scottish Castles is visible first and foremost in the National Assembly Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh - the main building of the whole complex (fig.3). The large transition spaces restrained in a double wall circle around the assembly chamber resulting however, in a space without any specific definition of use[15]. Nevertheless, to defuse the unsuitability of the *wall* one must know that it filters the light to the inside and underscores the importance of the central core.

Taken together, these examples constitute the second approach to the hybridity within the walls - *walls as rooms*. A heterogeneous mix of volumetric operations in the form of functional spaces or quite the opposite the transitional ones without any particular role leads to gaining an understanding of the *wall* as an inhabitable space.
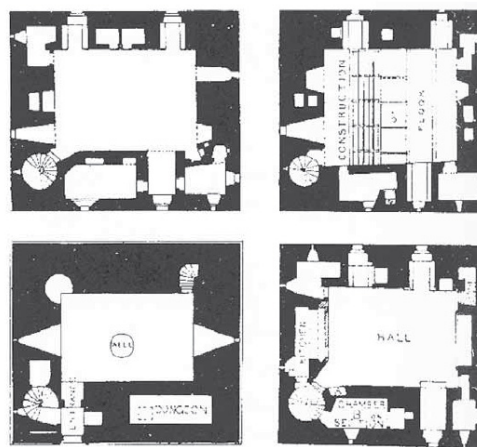
2. Louis Kahn, British castle floor plan sketches. Source: Brownlee, David B., and David G. De Long Louis Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture. Los Angeles: MUseum of Contemporary Art, Rizzoli, 1991, 68

3. Louis Kahn, National Assembly Building of Bangladesh, 1982. Source: http://archive.diarna.org/site/detail/public/181/ accessed on March 9,2021

[14] Kahn, Louis (as cited in Cacciatore, Francesco, The wall as living place)
[15] Cacciatore, Francesco, The wall as living place

Walls as Manifestos

The *wall* as a two-dimensional surface is characterised by the additive treatment, directing attention from what was happening inside to the outer layer of the wall. Whereas the unadorned wall was often a divider or a part of inhabitable space, a cladded or adorned wall becomes a distinctive symbol. There are three distinct cases within this category of *walls as manifestos:* the cladded wall, where the additions made entail different values; the exhibitor, where the art exhibited can change its meaning in contact with the wall, and murals, which are the synthesis of art and architecture.

There are well-known precedents for the applied cladded wall. One of them being adorned interiors of venetian palaces from the Renaissance[16]. Throughout the era; leather, damask, textiles, oil on canvas, stucco, fresco, boiserie, marmorino and plaster[17] were used as devices of self-promotion and self-glorification. *Wall* is not anymore "naked" but gains a depth, which assumes the presence of the audience. It becomes a *manifesto* of wealth and power. The cladding inside Villa Muller by Adolf Loos recalls a more subtle variant of this approach. Within the complicated volumes of the raumplan the materials used on the walls of this modernist villa are indicative of the importance or meaning of the given room[18]. "Every surface is coded to signal a specific use and is unsparing in its richness"[19] - cipolin marble marks the hearth of the house - the living room (fig.4); maple Ms. Muller's dressing room[20] and oak Mr. Muller's[21]. Whereas moving around this complicated network of rooms and levels may seem difficult, one can always orient her/himself easily thanks to the materiality of walls and the fact that "the point of transition is marked by a decorative feature"[22].

In a another variant of the *walls as manifestos* the *wall* becomes a "quiet"[23] exhibitor. To really appreciate the given artwork, the colour and the composition of the *wall* should be thought through in order to allow the spectator to properly admire it. The art should "be fit to challenge inspection, and to be worthy of being well displayed"[24].

Murals being the third case are unequivocally the art form deeply embedded in the architecture. Beginning with the example of Waterlilies by Monet the hybrid is anchored in the relationship between arts and nature. However, over time artists working during the period leading up to World War II shifted the focus to geometric, abstract approach, represented by Le Corbusier and painters in the Dutch De Stijl movement[25](fig.5). Thus these examples are rather a statement of the *wall,* limited by height and width, rather than a volumetric operation happening in its depth.

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[16] Foscari Widmann Rezzonico, Giulia, Elements of Venice, Zurich, Lars Muller, 2014
[17] Foscari Widmann Rezzonico, Giulia, Elements of Venice, Zurich, Lars Muller, 2014
[18] Fischer, Jan Otakar, White Walls in the Golden City, Harvard Design Magazine, No. 15 / Five Houses, plus American Scenes
[19] Fischer, Jan Otakar, White Walls in the Golden City, Harvard Design Magazine, No. 15 / Five Houses, plus American Scenes
[20] feminine
[21] masculine
[22] Berlage, Hendrik Petrus,Thoughts on Style, 1886–1909, p.35
[23] Berlage, Hendrik Petrus, Architecture and Impressionism, 1894, p.108 "These works (...) were not placed in the middle of a square, (...) nor were they placed right on the axis of a main portal, for that would create too busy a background for a piece of sculpture. Instead, they were placed next to or, preferably, against a quiet wall."
[24] Klonk, Charlotte, Spaces of Experience, p.29
[25] White, Anthony, Review of Golan, Romy, Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927–1957

4. Adolf Loos, Villa Muller. Source: http://en.muzeumprahy.cz/raumplan/ accessed on March 9,2021

5. Le Corbusier, Swiss Pavilion, Painting of silence, 1948. Source:
http://www.fondationsuisse.fr/en/architecture-space/a-living-sculpture/ accessed on March 9,2021

Conclusions

Suffice is to say that *wall* being one of the fundamental "Elements of Architecture"[26] has become an autonomous designed object. The nature of the wall as *partitions, rooms and manifestos* is expressed in volumetric operations, which happen in the thickness of the wall or in an additive approach, limited by the height and width of the element. The examples cited here were meant to evoke the new perspective on the topic of walls and point out how a wall with its ambiguous character and autonomy[27] can assume the role of a central object in the design process. Thus division into two worlds, where both of them don't possess either architectural qualities or spatial determinants; an inhabitable *poché* space with or without particular role; and symbolic expression or statement, conveyed by the *wall.* became a considerable voice in the discussion about the hybridity in architecture.

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[26] Koolhaas, Rem, Elements of Architecture
[27] Kenneth M. Moffett, The Wall in Recent Architectural Form: A Pattern of Evolution Toward Autonomy