PARAMETRIC DESIGN IN THE HISTORIC URBAN DOMAIN. THE CASE OF ELEFTHERIA SQUARE BY ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS

STELLA EVANGELIDOU

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary architectural practice increasingly makes use of technology for the design and creation of buildings and environments. While many architects see computer aided design as a drawing tool, others embrace parametric design ideologically, and propose it as a theory and method which can offer architectural solutions even in complex urban landscapes. Following a competition, the refurbishment of Eleftheria Square in Nicosia was awarded to the office of Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA), one of the major offices that takes parametric design ideologically. The choice of Hadid's proposal proved a major controversy among the local population from the announcement of the competition results in 2005 to the square's completion in 2020. The discussion focuses mainly on the aesthetic appropriateness of the proposal imposed on the historical context, (especially its proximity to the Venetian fortifications and the old town) despite the fact that such an urban intervention encompasses many more issues: memory and historicity, society, politics, culture, and aesthetics, as well as design methodology.

In this article, I attempt a hermeneutical approach for examining the ZHA proposal for the square, in order to see it from various perspectives and understand its significance in relation to its cultural context. I will start with examining the history of the site, offering an interpretation of the meaning it had for the local population, as a *topos* in the public realm. After investigating the main requirements of the competition, I will assess the reception of the project and the dominant arguments used in
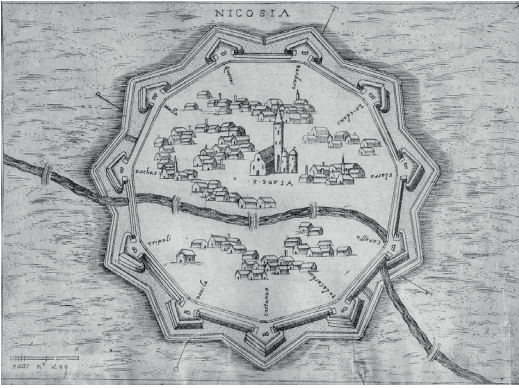
FIG.1: MAP OF NICOSIA BY
GIOVANNI FRANCESCO CAMOCIO,
(CA. 1570 AD)

FIG.2: GIULIO SAVORGNANO,
NICOSIA FORTIFICATIONS (1567).
COLONIAL OPENINGS
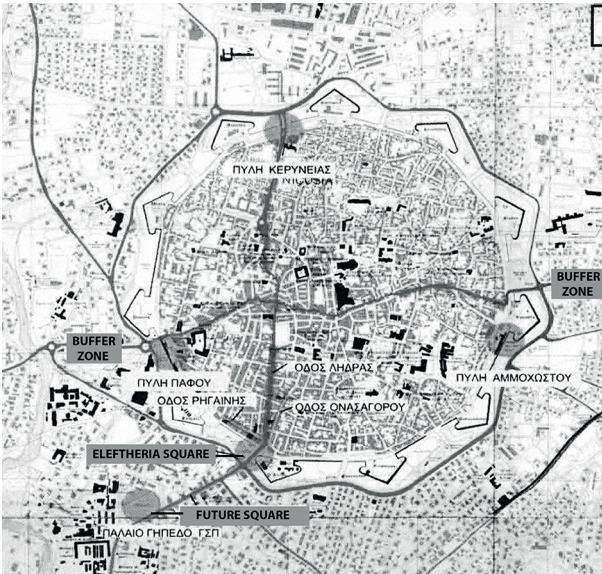

FIG.4: A CELEBRATION AT
ELEFTHERIA SQUARE (1952)

FIG.3: MAP OF NICOSIA.
ELEFHTERIA SQUARE,
COMPETITION BRIEF (2005)

the local discussions. In an attempt to understand the architects' methodological approach, I will explain their design approach, as evident in their theoretical engagement with parametric design. To contextualize their approach, I also will investigate the opposing views of others on such practices.

Through a hermeneutical approach, and by using a theoretical discourse ranging from philosophers Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault to architectural theorist Alberto Pérez-Gómez, I will relate the project to broader concerns on topics such as place and meaning, the contemporary public realm, the issue of attunement, parametric design, and the socio-political implications of a particular morphology in historical settings. I also will explore how the project, as it has been built, is used by residents of and tourists visiting Nicosia. It raises questions about architecture's ethical role and impact on society in the era of globalization. Through this examination, the Eleftheria Square project in Nicosia can be seen as a case study in the promise and pitfalls of employing parametric design in the historic urban domain.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND—THE SITE AS TOPOS

Even though Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, has never been designed as an Ideal City, [fig.1] its fortifications were a model of Renaissance engineering meant to be improved upon and replicated in ideal cities elsewhere within the Republic of Venice. Designed by the military engineer Giulio Savorgnano in 1567, the walls were still incomplete three years later when the town was besieged by the Ottomans. Yet they still remain largely intact to this day. When the old town started expanding beyond its limits in the late-nineteenth century, the British colonial government created openings [fig.2] through the Venetian walls in the form of bridges or roads, in order to connect it with the new suburbs. Two of these openings were wider than the others. Even though they were bridges over

a moat, they functioned as collective spaces. One acquired the function of a bus terminal, whereas the other functioned as a gathering space in the form of a square. This certainly occurred due to its location: it is an extension of the historical commercial main street, connected to a long avenue that leads out of the city. The square moreover is adjacent to the bastion where until recently the City Hall was located.

As a result of political hostilities between Turks and Greeks on the island, a buffer zone has been erected, first in 1963 and then in 1974, that divides Nicosia into northern and southern parts. Thus, while the historical city center, with its gothic cathedral and piazza, remained within the limits of the Turkish occupied territory in the north, the square was appropriated by the Greek citizens as the city's main square in the south. [fig.3] As such, it developed strong socio-political qualities, and became a place where spontaneous demonstrations and celebrations would take place. The bastion, being at a higher level, acted many times as a stage enabling direct contact between the organizers or politicians above and the people in the square below. [fig.4] Occasionally, the municipality would organize festivals, during which this urban setting would function as an open-air concert hall.

Associated with such communal events, the square was then renamed "Eleftheria", which is the Greek word for freedom.[1] It has been, therefore, a *topos* in both a phenomenological as well as in a political sense. It was a *topos* in the phenomenological sense of the *Genius Loci*, as defined by Christian Norberg-Schulz: a place which can be determined by its physical characteristics, and yet is more than that. A *topos* is defined as an existential space that carries intangible qualities which can only be experienced, rather than be determined by geometry and matter. In the case of man-made places, the qualities of a topos encompass the way a group of people draws on both its own virtues and the virtues of the space in which it is settled, thus acting and developing a degree of collective consciousness. Places where people have such a relationship with their built environment conjure up a sense of belonging. Consequently, such a place holds both the life of the people and the aura of the several historical layers, which reflect its special character and its own distinct spirit, its *Genius Loci*.[2] Since their construction, the Nicosia city walls have endured Venetian domination, Ottoman and British rule, the country's independence, and the Turkish invasion, but also the spirit of the people in social struggle and rejoicing.

In addition to its metaphysical qualities, the socio-political activities that took place on the square gave it qualities that defined it as a *topos politikos*. According to Hannah Arendt, the life of the polis is possible through such activities of common action (*praxis*) in the public realm,

which is the common world that gathers us together. Arendt relates public space to the space of appearances, that is, face-to-face human interactions. Appearance is a revelation of oneself, of one's position and essence, to others. However, as Seyla Benhabib explains, the public realm is a place where self-interest is transformed into a common public goal that transcends the boundaries of face-to-face society.[3] It is the presence of others, that see and hear from different positions), and demanding something in common with others to be more permanent than our earthly lives, which assures us of the reality of both the world and ourselves. Our perception of reality, Arendt argues, depends upon the phenomenality which takes place in the public realm. Consequently, our sense of our own existence depends on it.

The public realm is thus a political place where the life of praxis (*vita activa*) becomes a political life (*vios politikos*). Arendt considers *praxis* as the highest and most important level of active life. As a political action, *praxis* is the true realization of human freedom. *Topos politikos* transcends the lifespan of one generation, and thus transforms itself into a place of potential earthly immortality.[4] Eleftheria Square has been the public realm of the *polis* where its citizens, for generations, would gather in order to participate in a democratic expression of their collective concerns. It was, in this way, an intersubjective space which bonded, but also differentiated, the members of the society in the democratic manifestation in the *polis*. It was through actions marked by their essence of democracy and plurality that the *topos* gained, in turn, its existential quality.

THE COMPETITION FOR A NEW CITY SQUARE AND THE RECEPTION OF THE WINNING SCHEME

In 2005, the Nicosia municipality announced a competition for a new "bridge-square." The main challenges of the requirements, as given in the

> " THE PUBLIC REALM IS A PLACE WHERE SELF-INTEREST IS TRANSFORMED INTO A COMMON PUBLIC GOAL THAT TRANSCENDS THE BOUNDARIES OF FACE-TO-FACE SOCIETY "

FIG.5: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS, ELEFTHERIA SQUARE AND MOAT PARK, NICOSIA (2010-21)
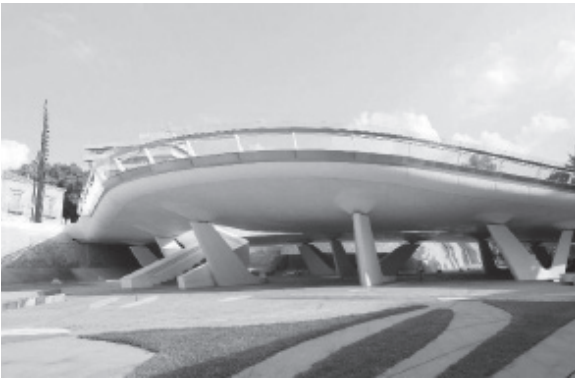

FIG.6: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS, ELEFTHERIA SQUARE AND MOAT PARK, NICOSIA (2010-21). THE "DISH." VIEW FROM THE MOAT

competition brief, were: i) to respect the monument of the Venetian walls, by following the international conventions and the local legislation on antiquities; ii) to design a permanent, two-lane bridge for vehicular traffic; iii) to provide a public space that would allow social interaction during all seasonal climatic conditions; iv) to pay attention to the materials and details, to propose street furniture as well as new programmatic uses; v) the proposed construction and materials had to allow reversibility, since only the bridge for vehicles would be permanent, whereas part of the square was to be demolished in the future after the construction of a new public square, in a new refurbished area outside the walls. [fig.3] As stated before, the competition was won by Zaha Hadid Architects, with a proposal which caused intense controversy between the citizens during and after the realization of the project. [fig.5.] According to the description of the office's website, the design of Eleftheria Square represents a "historically significant architectural intervention" which aspires to reconnect the old

fortified town with the modern city, by means of a "bold vision of coherence and continuity." The level of the square, which the architects call "the dish," has a slight upward inclination toward the moat, so as to act as an amphitheater addressing the bastion [fig.6], and in order to create a dialogue between the old and the new, as the office's representative explained in an interview.[5]

According to the same representative, the main structural novelty that was to be introduced was the unorthodox shape of the columns resting on the moat, with a thin tip and opening to a wide diameter at the top. This design was a solution to the problem of excavating into the moat and disturbing the historical layers beneath. He added that the innovative design and construction technique at such a scale was possible only due to parametric design, the method first applied in the Phaeno Science Centre, which ZHA had just completed in Germany. Apart from the information shared above, there is no other information recorded regarding the architects' concept and intentions for the form chosen for the specific project and its integration with the existing urban fabric. The Eleftheria Square project was nominated by a local jury for the Mies van der Rohe Awards which, as an institution, demands architecture to respond to vernacular, traditional, cultural, and natural elements. The views of the supporters of the project, engaged in the local debate, is well summarized in the jury's accompanying supportive essay from the local committee, which interprets the upward lifting of "the dish" as a symbolic gesture toward the future, and its circular geometry, which embraces the bastion, as a reference to the past. The essay regards the lower level of the moat as "a secret garden" with its own microclimate and distinct spatial qualities. The jury further praised the aesthetic quality of the details and the secret garden, which give to the overall project an artistic value which is accompanied with spatial experiences and promenades. In such a way,

FIG.7: MATERIALITY AND SCALE
IN THE OLD TOWN: NICOSIA
WITHIN THE VENETIAN WALLS..

FIG.8: MATERIALITY AND SCALE
IN THE OLD TOWN: NICOSIA
WITHIN THE VENETIAN WALLS..

it concludes, the project not only "re-establishes the area as a gateway to the old city, but also as a unique destination in itself."[6]

On the other side, the opponents of the project criticize the Hadid scheme firstly for the way it visually clashes with the monument of the Venetian walls "through its scale and materials." They claim that the Venetian walls function at the level of the intimate and the familiar, despite their monumentality, because of the earthy quality of the sandstone, which is also used extensively in the buildings of the old city with the narrow streets. [fig.7-8] The color and texture of the sandstone is in contrast to the coldness of the marble and the gray and white concrete of the new square. [fig.9] They perceive the new square as massive and monolithic, whereas the Venetian walls and the old town consist of small units and intimate spaces that relate to the human scale.[7] The materials used for Hadid's square, in conjunction with the hyper-aestheticized forms and sophisticated details, have been considered as alien to the locals' sense of aesthetics and habits.

The lack of consideration for the local climatic conditions is another issue. Cyprus is sunny most of the year, whereas Nicosia, being at the center of the island, is exposed to high temperatures that, in the summer, can sometimes exceed 40ºC. Indifference to the microclimate of Nicosia prohibits people from gathering in the square for at least half the year. The unsuitability of the public square to the weather conditions limits public encounters due to the reflective materials and lack of shade. In addition, this criticism focuses on the fact that the proposed scheme failed to respond to the basic programmatic requirements of the competition, since the construction materials didn't seem to be reversible, there was no

vehicular bridge, and no furnishings were proposed, while compliance with the Antiquities Law was disputed. It is also important to note that the design at the moat level was not part of the competition, but a later commission added to the project.

Although the square garnered praise for its formal qualities, the negative criticism weighs more on its human utility. The anthropocentric concern examines the metaphysical quality of the character and sense of the place, as well as the relation between its social and urban aspects, on the phenomenological dimension. From this short analysis of the scheme, one can conclude that issues such as materiality, historical layering, climate, local habits, and ways of socializing and using public space were given little consideration during the design of the new Eleftheria square by the winning office. The debate, which took place in the local press and across social media, was often accompanied with both caustic and ironic remarks directed toward the architect and the mayor, who were seen as indifferent elites, distant from the operation of the "real world." Such criticism was related to the extensive time required for the project to be completed, due to the many delays caused by conflicts between the architect, the municipality, and the contractors, which, in turn, caused an increase in cost and the disruption of the city center.

RELATED THEORETICAL DISCOURSES

In the absence of more information from ZHA regarding the concept behind Eleftheria Square, examination of the theoretical discourse which constitutes the background of their work is our only option for understanding the designers' thought process. Concurrently, an examination of other theoretical discourses concerning new architecture in historic and sensitive environments can inform a critical perspective on the subject.

The reference to, and influence of, the Russian avant-garde on Zaha Hadid's work since her

FIG.9: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS, ELEFTHERIA SQUARE, THE LEVEL OF THE SQUARE.

student years has been discussed and analyzed by many theorists and critics. Reflecting on her early paintings, Hadid confirmed her interest in the concept of fragmentation, abstraction, and explosion, as well as in deconstructing ideas of repetitiveness and mass production, which constitute the characteristics of modern architecture. According to ZHA's website, "for Hadid, painting was a design tool, and abstraction was an investigative structure for imagining architecture and its relationships to the world we live in." "Her paintings," it continues, "were conceived as a manifesto of a utopian world," and "prefigure the potential of digital processes," which explains why "technology and innovation have always been central to the work of the office".[8]

Her collaboration with Patrik Schumacher in 1988, whose work in parametric design complemented Hadid's approach, enabled the realization of their stylistic projects, and achieved both technological and structural breakthroughs. Schumacher's perspective, as explained in his massive theoretical books *Parametricism as Style—Parametricism Manifesto* 2008[9] and *The Autopoiesis of Architecture,*[10] offer insight into the ZHA approach to architecture. In both works, Schumacher claims that today's architecture has difficulty addressing the complexity of contemporary cities and societies, and therefore needs to reassert its methods. He sees an "inability in modernism and deconstructivism to form a new sustainable view." Therefore, he highlights the need to discover a new comprehensive theoretical system which can describe architecture from within its own internal constitution.[11]

Since architecture, according to Schumacher, cannot exist without theory, all buildings before Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), the first architect offering a theory of architecture, fall into the category of tradition. Schumacher asserts that each previous style in history constitutes a new research paradigm defeating its predecessor. Therefore, the "history of

architecture can be thought of in terms of cycles of innovation and shifts between revolutionary periods."[12] Parametricism is thus, according to him, the style of our times, because it is considered the architectural avant-garde of the technological era and, in addition, it can explain architecture itself as a distinct, autonomous network of communications. The "autopoiesis" of architecture is architecture's ability for self-production. This is based on a theory that focuses on architectural communication that observes and analyzes how individual communications depend upon, and reproduce structures such as concepts, values, styles and methods. Communications are the drawings, texts, and built works, whereas built works are the set of reference points within the network of architectural communications.

Conceived as a scientific theory about architecture from "within architecture," it is promoted as the "end of architectural theories." Reflecting architecture's evolving patterns of communication in relation to the societal domain, the autopoiesis of architecture and parametricism do not communicate with straight lines and platonic solids as they did in the past, nor with typologies, zones, or territories. Instead, the theory involves working with primitives such as "splines, blobs, nurds, and particles" organized by scripts, as well as by "gradient fields of activity and variable social scenarios calibrated with various event parameters." Since architectural elements have become so malleable through parametricism, one can ask for further softening, further differentiation, correlation, script, and so on.[13] In this method, there is a cross-connectedness which, unlike phenomenology, always depends on computer data.

Schumacher suggests that "parametricism" could introduce new ideas to the architectural scene. To him, it "can be summarized in the slogan" of importing an "architectural and urban repertoire that is geared up to create complex, polycentric

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urban and architectural fields which are densely layered and continuously differentiated." Style, buildings, and cities are described in terms of liquidity, flow, void, openness, and complexity, and their compliance to the tools of parametric design.[14] The images in the *Parametricism Manifesto* are related to Hadid's utopian painting, *London 2066* and many others.[15] The "active shake" of the city occurs by using similar parameters to large scale projects where open spaces, streets, railway lines, and water networks are redefined in new relationships and new possibilities in urban experiments.

The theoretical ground expressed in Hadid's paintings and Schumacher's manifesto share similar and intense formalistic elements and fluidity with ZHA's architectural projects built all over the world. Despite the location or country in which they are built, these projects look alike, having similar forms and even photorealistic renderings from the conceptual to the final construction stage. At the same time, the language and notions Schumacher uses to describe this methodology are hardly intelligible for people unfamiliar with the technological aspect of digital design. Nevertheless, these notions are expected to be understood, at least by the younger generations, since this method is well established in the educational program of architecture schools. Nonetheless, this language is far removed from any previous form of architectural production and representation, which remains haptic; it might instead sound more like a technical description of the inside functioning of a machine, rather than one regarding the "insides of architecture," as Schumacher claims.

At the opposite end of the argument about the place of science and technology in human life, many twentieth-century theorists have spoken of its negative course, beginning with the shift in consciousness that occurred after Descartes and Galileo. Amongst them, the architectural theorist Alberto Pérez-Gómez further explains the shift that occurred in the architectural field. In his latest work, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science*, he argues that *topos*, as a qualitative experiential site, was substituted by geometric space, since Galileo and Descartes saw the universe as a homogeneous geometric void in which all bodies were described by the same mathematical laws. It was under the influence of such epistemological thinking that Claude Perrault (1613-1688) came to understand architectural representation as a systematized set of sections, along with Cartesian planes.[16] A century later, according to Pérez-Gómez, Jean-Nicholas-Louis Durand (1760–1834) believed that architectural meaning was dependent only on the efficient, mechanical understanding of structure and cost-effective use of materials. For him, architecture was essentially a social need for a functional shelter. Durand implemented sophisticated tools of representation for producing

innovative work that was unresponsive to its cultural context. He preferred strictly instrumental design mechanisms, with the belief that architecture is the objective space of Cartesian geometry. Thus, a "building" meant its use, and any emotion was beyond its scope. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was a common assumption among architects that architectural space could be easily represented through descriptive geometry and axonometric projection based on visual attributes. This, Pérez-Gómez argues, neglected the emotional aspects and qualities experienced in a real, physical, and transcendental space.[17]

This translates, today, to the production of digital space and fashionable innovations through architectural software. Pérez-Gómez, therefore, is surprised by neither Schumacher's ideas presented in *Autopoiesis* nor the popular desire for "intelligent" buildings with "computerized minds" for adjusting to our comfort. He claims that as long as the use of technology enhances telecommunication devices and production techniques, our own sensory and perceptual abilities will be diminished. And since our urban environments emerge from this method of production, which reduces space to a set of coordinates, they remain devoid of qualities which involve all our senses. For Pérez-Gómez, the crisis of modern science and architecture consists of the fact that parametric strategies and tools generate forms and novel buildings that fail to propose meaningful, attuned environments for human culture. In this way they "exacerbate our sense of despair in view of the meaninglessness of existence."[18]

Further, such novel structures are in line with strategies for the commodification of architecture within the contemporary neoliberal political spectrum. The art critic Hal Foster offers an explanation of the process, which is aided by high-tech materials and electronic manipulations in order to become signs and symbols. He claims that the structure and the program are distorted in a way

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to achieve a sculptural monumental effect which, at times, has a scale that dominates the landscape. Formal expression is stressed, above all, in order to impress, while behind the rhetorical façades there are, many times, conventional interiors. Thus, the form of the building serves as "a sign that overwhelms the context." According to Foster, this is a winning populist formula with the signature of a star-architect, which serves the marketing policies of "museums, companies, cities, and other corporate entities that want to be perceived, through instant icons, as global players."[19]

Eleftheria Square fulfills Foster's description. Moreover, since the mayors and municipality officials have used the name of the architect and the design as a branding tool to promote the square as a tourist attraction, in order to raise the city's economy and status. The language of the project coincides with that of city branding policies which turn a location into a destination, while at the same time rejecting its own historicity and the meaning of the place. Topos, in this case, becomes spectacle. In such a way, architecture turns into an image that serves more the market economy than society.

Architecture as a language and art form is symbolic, and whether it has a meaningful presence for its users or not, it has its own meaning within the urban context. From the point of view of philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics, new architecture in a historic setting can generate multiple interpretations, which are constantly regulated by what a setting has been in the past, and what it wants to be, by means of the architecture of the new intervention. These interpretations might fall into the realm of prejudices. Prejudices for Gadamer are the pre-conditions of understanding. In the case of new architecture in old settings, we distinguish blind prejudices from productive prejudices only through a dialogical encounter with the past as a whole. Life, says Gadamer, is the dialogue between past and present. It is through this dialogue that we can define our living values and give meaning to our lives and surroundings.[20]

To understand the past is a necessary metaphysical basis for life. The context for the new architecture relates to people's understanding of their setting. Yet the relation to the architecture of the past goes beyond the historical period of which people have knowledge.[21] Gadamer talks about the harmony of all details, with the whole as a criterion for this understanding. Failure to achieve harmony means that the understanding has failed. How do we, then, understand the past? For Gadamer, it is a process of holistic experiences. Understanding tradition is an essential element to understanding existence. This understanding also takes place on visual and tangible grounds, such as materials, construction techniques, texture, colors, spatial disposition, and volumetric articulation.[22] In such

a way, Gadamer offers an analysis of the tangible qualities of the *Genius Loci*.

From a similar perspective, Pérez-Gómez discusses how, for centuries, the European city functioned as a theater of complex and diverse atmospheres. He explains "atmospheres" as the character, mood, and ambience of a place apprehended by all the senses. Atmospheres result from both natural and manmade spaces. Besides their materials and details, they include smells, sounds, and habits. These constitute an aesthetic experience which is multisensory and emotional, and cannot be reduced to distant "pictorial" forms. If architecture, he claims, does not aim to deal with local cultures, the lives of people, their habits, places, stories, and history, it will remain detached and contextually alien.[23]

With the term *attunement*, Pérez-Gómez calls for an architecture that is attuned to its location and its inhabitants, and can thus enhance our human values and capacities. Architecture remains in crisis, he states, as long as its social relevance is lost to formal innovation and algorithmic parameters that determine the physical environment, while ignoring the meaning of places. The meaning of places rests in the poetics of materials and cultural values. He argues that the understanding of its meaning is possible when architecture is engaged in a dialogical process between present and past, when it operates as a communicative setting for societies. By understanding its meaning, which is a constituent part of our consciousness, we are engaged with the spiritual dimension of life and a process of self-understanding. Pérez-Gómez delves into an existential reflection on the meaning of life, which is inextricably linked to the meaning of architecture. He thus poses a question for the ethical dimension of architecture and its service to society. To be fully self-aware, he claims, participation in an external environment replete with meanings and emotions is necessary. Such transformative atmospheres bring

"TO UNDERSTAND THE PAST IS A NECESSARY METAPHYSICAL BASIS FOR LIFE"

FIG.10: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS, ELEFTHERIA SQUARE. OCCASIONAL CONCERTS UNDER THE SQUARE

FIG.11: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS, ELEFTHERIA SQUARE. LATE AFTER-NOON (2022)

FIG.12: ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS, ELEFTHERIA SQUARE. MOAT LEVEL, WEEKENDS IN LATE AFTERNOON (2022)

productive change. Attuned architecture permits people to be attuned to their worldly actions and habits.[24]

THE "ACTUAL WORLD" - THE CURRENT USE OF THE SQUARE

If we consider Gadamer's and Pérez-Gómez's hermeneutical approach valid, it is obvious that the parametric methodology used for Eleftheria Square did not make sufficient consideration for either history, meaning or attunement. However, an integrated view of the Eleftheria Square project

is not possible without considering the way it is now being used, including its complementary part on the adjacent moat level. A few months after its completion, the first event organized on the square celebrated a political anniversary. This was the first and last collective event of any character to take place on the square, according to the municipality's records. After that, the municipality moved all events below the square, on the moat level. Since then, on the lower level underneath the square there have been many events of various, other than political, character. [fig.10] Some uses that were overlooked by ZHA in its design, but deemed by the city council appropriate for the moat park, were designed by the municipality, such as a small amphitheater and a playground, which appropriated some edges of the park.

The level of the square functions, mainly, as a pedestrian passage-way between the new and the old walled city. During the day, it is usually deserted, especially due to the intense sunshine, [fig.9] but also because it provides no other uses. On weekend nights and afternoons, however, the square attracts many people from the migrant (Asian and African) community working in Nicosia. [fig.11] The same occurs during weekends, at the level of the moat, which is overrun by migrants taking selfies. [fig.12] These are, perhaps, the most vibrant moments of the square and the moat park, since the locals, who don't hang out on the square, usually leave immediately after visiting for an event at the moat-park. Besides the locals who visited the site when it opened, and despite the attractive drone photos advertising the site taken by the municipality, [fig.5] it seems that it is not a destination for them. Likewise at the moat level, although there is an attractive park with fountains, lawns and tree clumps, located on floral-pattern concrete paving—all shapes ordered by parametric design.

These observations lead to the question of why the site cannot become a pluralistic collective

space of exchange and meaning for all. Would it be valid to suggest that this might be due to its strong character of a pleasure garden that caters only to visual pleasure, in conjunction with the diminishing importance of the Venetian walls as a mute backdrop to the irrelevant scenery in front of it? The deserted appearance of the square during the day turns it into a dystopia, whereas the project's site as a whole can be defined as a heterotopia. Michel Foucault, in his work *Of Other Spaces*, defines a utopia to be an ideal place of a perfect yet unreal society in bliss and describes heterotopias as the real places that have strayed from what is considered "normal" and are approaching the "other."[25] Both the square and the moat below fit Foucault's description of heterotopias of the transitory, as well as of the two extreme types of heterotopia, of illusion and compensation, respectively. A heterotopia of the transitory is a place absolutely temporal, disoriented from the eternal, and where time is fleeting, like in a festival. In a heterotopia of illusion we encounter informal, outside of "the normal" social activities in an illusory space which exposes the rationality of the adjacent space. A heterotopia of compensation, according to Foucault's terminology, fits his example of the "colonies:" a perfectly organized space that leaves its mark in the culture, which aims to be an ideal model of organization to which we all must adapt.[26]

CONCLUSION

Eleftheria Square, as an integral part of the Venetian walls, connecting the old city with the new, the city's history and its memory, carried a profound meaning for the inhabitants of Nicosia that can be understood and defined by the notion of *topos*. The discussion and controversy regarding the refurbished Eleftheria Square will, perhaps, continue for many years, given its importance to the city. This is so because of its central location as well as its historicity, its continuous cost of maintenance and surveillance, and its function as a public domain in flux in an emerging multicultural city. Besides its specificity, the project can be seen as a case study for new projects in historic urban environments designed via a similar parametric approach.

Reviewing the examination of the project, one could say that several considerations arise regarding the role of architecture in society. On the one hand, there are issues regarding the more technical aspect of the production of architecture and its management. On the other, there are issues related to its humanitarian and spiritual roles. In both cases, the core issue is ethical, and concerns those to whom architecture bears responsibility. Issues related to the responsibility of the competition jury to meet the programmatic requirements, the responsibility of municipal

authorities when the initial budget is exceeded, the management of the schedule, the management of taxpayers' money, the extension of the project's scale without a new tender, and the failure to comply with conventions on antiquities, are related to the technocratic aspect, but are not insignificant in the world of architectural practice. On the contrary, they are related to the ethical code of the discipline. Even though these issues are not usually heard beyond local societies, in our time of globalized architecture it is worth studying projects of star-architecture and how and/or why their execution might affect the wellbeing of a society.

Although the technical aspect is short-term and can, eventually, be handled, the actual built projects and their consequences are long-term. The result of a theoretical and methodological attempt based on "parametricism" for a utopian landscape that would be "self-produced" and can reproduce communication structures, such as concepts and values, seems to become, in the Eleftheria Square project, a place that segregates society. The public realm, according to Arendt's definition, does not emerge automatically because people gather. Instead, it occurs when their opinions are openly expressed, and their collective goal is manifested through actions that are possible due to human diversity and agency.[27] The hyper-aestheticized and non-functional forms have displaced political actions from the site. Eleftheria Square has lost its quality as a *topos politikos*. Despite the promise of the inclusion of human functions into parametric design, it seems that algorithms on a computer screen cannot, at least yet, engage peoples' histories, their sites with multiple meanings, their memories, or social habits. Instead, while aligned with the demands of a marketplace that commodifies architecture, "parametricism" results in an aesthetic homogenization on its top side, while it is only underneath and around its margins that the creation of heterotopias such as those at Eleftheria Square;

"THE PUBLIC REALM DOES NOT EMERGE AUTOMATICALLY BECAUSE PEOPLE GATHER. INSTEAD, IT OCCURS WHEN THEIR OPINIONS ARE OPENLY EXPRESSED AND THEIR COLLECTIVE GOAL IS MANIFESTED THROUGH ACTIONS THAT ARE POSSIBLE DUE TO HUMAN DIVERSITY AND AGENCY."

heterotopias of the transitory, of illusion, and of compensation.

If we consider that human consciousness needs external environments as vessels for meaning and emotion for its self-awareness, as well as dialogue and exchange in a pluralistic environment, these spaces of aesthetic homogenization cannot offer the space for a conscious life on the spiritual, social, and political level. Since the political is closely associated with aesthetic experience, and since at the core of the aesthetic experience is life itself, our harmony with our surroundings is an important factor in our psychosomatic health. As Pérez-Gómez says, an ethical architecture cannot but promote such attunement with our physical places, which are of utmost importance for our well-being. Cities with alienating environments cause alienation with culture and result in a sense of purposelessness. They are sources of malaise, contributing to despair. For when architecture functions as a "high-tech drug," says Pérez-Gómez, it simply provides comfort in order to avoid boredom and the reality of death.[28] If architecture will continue to eliminate spaces that promote human exchange and awareness by replacing them with "intelligent" and "spectacular" places that promote lethargy, narcissism, and illusion, we will probably need to reconsider its role in, and responsibility for, the survival of culture.

ENDNOTES

1. After the Second World War, and prior to the name "Eleftheria" (Freedom), the square was named after Ioannis Metaxas. He was the Greek prime minister who rejected an ultimatum to surrender imposed by Italy, committing Greece to the Allies and bringing the country into the war against the Nazis and Mussolini. Thus, the square was for many decades associated with the "No" of the Greek resistance and passion for freedom.

2. Christian Norberg-Schulz, Genius Loci: *Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 6–22.

3. Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. (Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996), 200–201.

4. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Second Edition) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 7, 15, 50–72.

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7. Στέλλα Ευαγγελίδου, 'Άρχιτεκτονικός διαγωνισμός για την ανάπλαση της πλατείας Ελευθερίας και του περιβάλλοντα χώρου.' Ο ΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ (Nicosia, June 4, 2005).

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10. Patrik Schumacher, *Parametricism and the Autopoiesis of Architecture*. SCI-Arc, Los Angeles, September 2010. https://www.patrikschumacher.com/Texts/Parametricism%20and%20the%20Autopoiesis%20of%20Architecture.html (accessed August 10, 2022).

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Patrik Schumacher, *CAA Annual Lecture 2018*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IuW7_f_8-Qsk&feature=youtu.befbclid=Iw-AR193znJFEJsaWbZwlvEBs32GdEdk5F2svfqPz8c0ft1BFUc WDda1HyGWWQ (accessed December 18, 2019).

14. Ibid.

15. Zaha Hadid Architects. *London 2066*, https://www.zaha-hadid.com/masterplans/london-2066/ (accessed December 15, 2019)

16. Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2016), 13, 23,119–20.

17. Ibid.*,* 108, 127.

18. Ibid., 119–30, 225.

19. Hal Foster, 'Image Building,' in: Anthony

Vidler (ed.), *Architecture between Spectacle and Use*. (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, 2008), 167, 175.

20. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1986, c1975), 245–53.

21. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Editred by David E. Linge). (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 95–96

22. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 259–78.

23. Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement*, *Architectural meaning after the crisis of modern science*, (University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Department of Architecture Lecture Series. Fall 2020) https://www.umass.edu/architecture/umass-department-architecture-lecture-series-fall-2020-alberto-p%C3%A9rez-g%C3%B3mez.

24. Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement*, 216–30.

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26. Ibid., 27.

27. Ibid., 198–199.

28. Ibid., 8.

EVANGELIDOU