THE CONCEPT OF FRAGMENTATION: BETWEEN FORM AND FORMLESS

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Abstract. Drawing on the idea that abstraction of architectural design is repeatedly demonstrated by new concepts, and that the idea of the design contains a fragment of its internal laws, the paper raises the question of alteration of forms towards new time-space categories. In contrast to Euclidean geometry based on the continuity of geometric forms, fragmented forms draw upon deformations and variability, operating in the limit zones, for the design, zones of the greatest creativity and potentiality. A new understanding of reality shaped by digitization of all systems has created the basis for forms of self-organization, openness, contingency, and emergence. What we have before us is basically a new aesthetics that goes beyond the horizon of visible in a way that allows the whole world and all its parts to be seen in a completely new, immaterial way. This means that architectural forms appear in the visibility zones, together with the forms of their systemic dislocation.

Key words: Post-digitization, Fragmentation, Formless, Spatial flexibility.

1. POTENTIALITY OF INCOMPLETENESS - THE CONCEPT OF FRAGMENTATION

Appreciation of fragments and fragmentation can be traced back to early German Romanticism, when the fragment was determined as the central philosophical notion, both as concept and idea of form, through the expression of a philosophical limit and its overcoming (Sandford, 2016, pp. 25-35). To the extent that the Romantic idea of the fragment has developed from a general fascination with ruins, it is also deeply linked to its origin via the cultural appreciation of archaeology, architecture, and ancient cultures. Thus, the cultural and intellectual context of the Romantic idea of the fragment has quickly spread from the concepts applied in literature and art to all other fields. The Romantic fragment can be seen as an artistic solution to a philosophical problem (Osborne, 2013, p. 58), and the problem of the presentation of the unpresentable (Manfred, 2004, p. 53).
The contemporary concept of fragments and fragmentation diverges from romantic ideas of fractions, cracks, separated and broken pieces, ruins, regret for the past, and it conceptualizes the idea of incompleteness as the essential potentiality of form, imagination, and contingency, where the fragment is determinate, projected, and conscious intention to leave things, concepts and forms open to new interpretations and readings.

This view sees and interprets the fragment, although essentially unfinished and incomplete, as a well-rounded form and not its part or residue – If a broken piece (part) did not qualify as a fragment, it nevertheless offered great potential if its accidental or involuntary character could be transfigured into a determinate and deliberate statement of fragmentation (Brain, 2007, p. 227). The fragment in its full sense is the idea of something complete in itself and yet essentially incomplete (Schlegel, 1991, p. 45). It is a self-sufficient form that requires infinite work on eliminating its incompleteness – which is precisely why the fragment is the idea of presenting the unpresentable, it is essentially ambivalent and paradoxical. Complete in its incompleteness, the fragment indicates the plurality of potentials - Each fragment stands for itself, as well as for the whole from which it is detached (Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, 1988, p. 44).

![Figure 1](image.png)

However, the question is whether this formulation of fragmentation and fragments requires isolated observation so that the totality we speak of is visible? For the French philosophers Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, the existential obligation of the fragment, if not its existence as a totality, is formed by the integrity and the wholeness of organic individual (Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, 1988, p. 63), that is, specificity. If the fragment is simultaneously in the whole and in each part, it can be interpreted as an elementary particle (specificity) of each whole. The fragment, in order to be a fragment, and not just a detached broken piece,
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fragments in itself all the information of the whole, that is – in its detachment or isolation, fragmentation corresponds to totality or the whole (Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, 1988, p. 63). In other words, the fragment is essentially defined in terms of its natural and inherent multiplicity – it is always becoming and never complete (perfect).

Fragmentation is in this sense the presentation of being and/or of existence, in which the searching for, is the essence of its integrity. As a result of this search, what arises is erasing, fraying, blurring and overlapping of the edges of the trace of fragments – making the aesthetics itself fragmented (Nancy, 2008, p. 126). The individuality and specificity of the fragment becomes, at the same time, the plural whole through the projection (presence) of all its potentialities and possible scenarios. The presence of each of these parts is therefore, paradoxically, co-presence (Heikkiä, 2010). The fragment, in its singularity, always has the structure that is more than one (plus d’un), as a trace of the other or the whole (Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, 1988, p. 64), simultaneously grounded in essential detachment.

Under the conditions of such multiplicities, where things are never formally unities or totalsities, but multiplicities that contain points of unification or centres of totalization (Deleuze, 2009), focus is not on the elements that make it, but on what there is between them in the void and on what separates them and distinguishes them. Thus, on what is sufficiently unknown to be contingent. Multiplicity is characterized by a specific type of complexity where it is not a matter of finding the unity of multiplicity but, on the contrary – of considering unity only as a temporary constellation or virtual dispersion. Therefore, the complexity does not consist in the one, but in the fact that each thing (each of its elements) can diverge and overlap with others, being in constant becoming and movement (Rajchman, 1998, pp. 12-36). In this context, unity is defined as a contingent operation that holds a potential divergence.

2. FRACTMENTARY EXPERIENCE OF TIME IN THE ERA OF POST-DIGITIZATION

The issue of contemporary can be addressed as a temporal and ontological problem of space, that is, to be contemporary – is to exist at the same time with something else, in relation to which we position ourselves, as a relation-reflection, a temporal determinant rather than a historical position (Rabinow, 2009, pp. 355 - 364). On the other hand, setting the concept of time as a central one in relation to the dynamic continuity of architecture, in which time as the context becomes a condition for the contingency of architecture (Till, 2009), corresponds with the contemporary need for dynamic spatial interaction, enabling the reaction to changes, or to changeability itself, coupled with incompleteness.

Stabilization of classical physics in the nineteenth century, brought about by mathematical postulates, led to conceptualization of the image of the world in which temporal determinism prevails and in which time does not have a creative role. Consequently, the idea of the future is set as fixed, unchangeable and defined in the past. Such a stable and static image of the world and of time, future and reality, has been shaken by science, especially thermodynamics, which introduced the idea of the arrow of time that conflicted with the symmetric concept of classical mechanics, where the past and the future were interchangeable (DeLanda, 2000). If thermodynamics, a science that deals with concepts and phenomena guided by ideas about the

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1 Divergence – denotes gradual moving away, or opposites. In mathematics, it is a property of a sequence or a series not to be inclined to a finite, limit value.
fluidity of things and matter, their variability that maintains differences in the state of emergence, is translated into the concept of fragments, we can see that only in these dynamic conditions that are far-from-equilibrium, in this unique intensity zone, the morphogenesis that is directed at the difference (which arises from it) becomes visible, that is, what it essentially is, while matter itself becomes an active substance, which is generated in itself, and whose form does not emerge, does not arise from the outside (externally) (Nicolis, Prigogine, 1989). Matter seen in this way is an inert\(^2\) material that does not come any more from Plato’s *Heaven or the mind of God*, but from the minds of people or cultural conventions: the World is amorphous and shaped by language.

Open future, which arises from the concept of openness of the world, as changeable and dynamic, is closely linked to the theory of actualization, in which nothing has already emerged, nor it exists now, but everything is in constant becoming. DeLanda sees the core of this approach in a neo-Kantian theory of perception in which individual experience is completely structured by intertwining of concepts and representations, while Kant’s transcendental concepts (of space and time) have been replaced by the conventional concepts of a given culture. This approach to reading and interpreting cultures in which they are independent and free can be observed in many contemporary theorists such as Margaret Mead, Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Worf, Thomas Khun. In fact, if every culture indeed develops in its own constructed reality, then we can speak of an open world, in which the future is never predefined in the past, but always unbound and open to multiple interpretations.

Measurable time, enabled by technological developments, in fact by the invention of the mechanical clock in the seventeenth century, is the basis of the modern concept of time, organizing its own cycle and separating from physical space (place as a reference to time) and virtual understanding of its flow. Expressed in hours, minutes and seconds, time has suddenly become representational in its own three-dimensional reality. This distinction is considered to have generated the process of modern time and the modern concept of space-time relations. The mechanical clock enabled to create the image of a numerically quantified universe. Time is measured not by its distinctiveness or personal experience, but by well-established abstract units that have gradually pervaded the sense of life (McLuhan, 1994, p.146). However, what we measure with abstract time are actually concrete and defined actions, events and intervals. Mass production of watches made time accessible to everyone, as an integral part of everyday life and a social category. The modern (social) construction of time and space not only transformed abstract understanding of cosmic time into measurable time, but also introduced speed as its new category.

The digitization of machines enabled access to the data anywhere and anytime, thus making information independent of space and time, accessible everywhere and at any time. Virilio calls this the “Third Revolution”, when speed becomes a key element for the perception of a new concept of space-time continuum. Abandoning the concept of here and now, as open possibilities for anywhere and anytime, as space and time instances, the concept of physical distance is replaced by psychological distance, while the screen becomes the space of interaction (Virilio, 2000). In this process of development of society and technology, space and time as we have known them lose their significance and seek redefinition and a new conceptualization in the conditions of digital and virtual.

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\(^2\) Inertia – a property of a body to resist any change in its state and position (rest or motion in a straight line), unless an external force acts to change that state.
The new social and spatial organizations that have been directly influenced by this concept of time and space led to the simultaneous presence of the past to the future in the present. The question of the nature of time is not and cannot be separated from our perception of time and its real transience.

Time conceived as a category of the modern age has become understandable, and therefore present in all its flows, changes, extensions and contractions. For Bergson, time is not an invisible whole and cannot be reduced to measurable units, it always remains internal and subjective in opposition to its technical representations, and whereas digital time is repeatable, reversible, and infinite, human time is irreversible, finite, and subjective (Deleuze, 2015).

What characterizes the new temporal digital paradigm is the fragmentation of the homogeneous linear (flow of) time, as we knew it, providing displacement and new mechanisms for (apparent) control and experience of time – that is, space and time become the contingencies that shape our experience (or are shaped by them). Digitization allows a shift from manipulation of static forms to geometry, flows and plans. On the other hand, operating in the field of virtual space (manipulation), the digital in architecture challenges the question of scale in the design, appearance and representation. The gap between modelling, reality, and representation, Frampton sees as a field of image seduction, emphasizing that this does not necessarily imply the dematerialization of architecture (Frampton, 1995).

Thus, for example, zooming can be viewed as a consequence of the crisis of the traditional notion of scale, caused by digitization and globalization, which generates a specific form of perceptive instability. This instability blurs the distinction between the abstract and the concrete, since nothing is at the same time more abstract and more concrete.
than the view (openness) of interpretation based on the ordinary categories of form and object (Berger, 1990). Generally speaking, in the age of the digital and digital manipulation, materiality becomes the intersection line (point/zone) of two opposed categories. On the one hand, pure abstractions, based on signs and codes, and on the other hand, full concreteness of perception of material phenomena and properties such as light and texture, are enabled through infinite zoom in. Hybridization of the abstract and the ultra-material represents a new world (a new paradigm) of sensations and movements (Picon, 1990).

Architecture as a discipline is in the phase of the post-digital era in which distinctions between the analogue and the digital are not so significant, and in which focus shifts to structural differences within each medium. While the transition from the production of form to the research of form (Kolarević, 2003) speaks of the transition to a continuous process, or a generic one, that does not imply finality of form even at the time of its materialization.

3. OPENNESS OF SYSTEM – FORMAL FORMLESS

Under the conditions of the universe viewed as a spider’s web, always becoming, self-structuring, avoiding final definition or any kind of closure, the concept of formless (informe) is the idea of a search for form and a call to formation of characteristic points, specific intersection points of form. The French philosopher Bataille speaks of the fragment as something (that is) formless (informe) (Bataille, 1985), or whose form is always becoming, in motion, and as such elusive. Thus, the specific form of the fragment can be referred to only as a constant state of variability, which is always between form and formless.

The constant search for formation conceived in this way does not produce meaning, but conceptualizes the purpose (Bataille, 1985). To think the formless, the unformed, is to think being as becoming and as such to think the being of becoming (Mellamphy, 1998). To become means to pass or surpass. To enable becoming is to come to terms with the idea of transience and incompleteness, as well as broken narratives. Thus fragmentation demands a distance, which allows it to break away from us, only to reappear, overcoming both the whole and its parts. Becoming (fragmentation) is, therefore, always defined both in the future and in the past in terms of the principles of the formless, unformed, and formlessness or shapelessness (Balmond, 2007).

The fragment can be compared with the present moment, that is, with the present - which is neither part of the past nor the future, but separated from them and always yet to come (Mellamphy, 1998). The present is unformed and as such always becoming – not becoming something, because the something that it is is becoming. The present is becoming, and it is not a part of anything, but something else beyond formulation – it breaks with the concept of part or parts, it is a hole in the whole or wholes (Mellamphy, 1998). The present is neither a part nor a whole, but separated from both (alienated), and for this reason fragmented (as a fragment of time). We can say that the fragment is always already abandoned, and as such and because of it, it calls for form, formation, definition, formulation, and conceptualization. But if the fragment is the call to form, is it at the same time the betrayal of the concept of formless (informe) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). To capture the fragment would mean to confine it, to frame it, which would be fatal for its variable nature - the fragment should not be inserted (formed) into a given (existing) system or structure (formulation), but it should neither be left out nor viewed as something separated from it, formless and undefined (Mellamphy, 1998). Thus, it could be said that
fragmentation and fragments demand the concept of a new field (discourse), new narratives, and a new concept of space, time and form, which do not attempt to define them in terms of the existing, but allow only some limit values to be defined, leaving the essential openness of the system and interpretation. To leave the fragment undefined (formless) would be as fatal as to form it. The fragment is somewhere between these two polarities, in the gap. The fragment never fills this gap, this void, it is this gap and its inevitable becoming. To fill the gap would mean to betray the fragment, to represent it and make it visible (Mellamphy, 1998). The fragment never represents a certain (necessary) system or a synthesis of totality (Nancy, 1993), but, as Heidegger said, it aims to capture the guiding representation of continuous (perpetual) becoming (Shahan and Mohanty, 1984).

If the virtual is understood, like Deleuze and Guattari do, as one of the states of reality characterized by openness to the emergence of (new) potentials, its reality becomes the reality of change (changeability) and event. If the virtual is change in itself, then it can figure only as a mode of abstraction (Massumi, 1998). It is not a representation of what it will be when it changes, but it is what is at a given moment, including all its potentials that evolve gradually. Massumi defines circumstances as self-abstraction to the extent to which they are realized through their potentiality. The virtual is not contained in any existing form of things or states, but it is in motion, in the transition from one state to another (formally and/or metaphorically).

Challenging abstraction and the virtual through the very process of form research that is in principle non-formal (for it is realized through the virtual), whose ultimate end is always form, Massumi offers the concept of topology and topological forms that have in themselves continuous transformation within their own variation. Topological forms operate in the zone in-between, between defined points (positions) of their beginning and their end, or within their limit values. Topological forms are variations that do not have the idea of separation and breaking in themselves, but they figure as an open but dependent system within the field in which deformations (changes) are possible. This is in fact the basis of their continuity. That is, the continuity of the zone in-between, as an environment for changes (and therefore the design process), is inseparable from the conceptualization (actualization) of form. Topological form is a sequence of still-standing and captured variation and a process of change at a given moment. In order to be topological, form must have a trace of the potential for otherness as evidence of its changeable nature and its variability. The variation captured by past and future in (broken) form is the virtuality of its form and appearance, as well as those that have not been realized (Massumi, 1998). The abstract field of variation, or a field of generative transformation (Massumi, 1998), becomes a condition for potentiality and the idea of form and its changeability (variability), while indeterminacy itself must be designed so that it emerges from the interaction of constraints.

Turning to topological forms leads to a shift in the focus of architectural design, from object to sequence, in which deformation and variability become the material to be used. Framed origin of form is translated into a movement that structures it. Finality of the idea of perfect form has been replaced by the process of emergence and invention of form that becomes the topic around which a topological paradigm is formed, because form is represented only as one in a sequence. Thus, imaginary digital space (in which the digital operates) is no longer a neutral screen for imagining (and/or representing) already imagined (conceptualized), but an active means of finding form that, as an environment, participates in structuring and conceptualizing. Such understanding of the digital is the idea of performativity of architecture that involves the design process itself through the digital
spatiality of the appearance of matter (its actualization), both the subject and the context in which it appears. Massumi sees digitization and the topological paradigm as a neo-modernism, characterized by Deleuze’s *fold to infinity*, as well as an extended field of fluidity of form, identity, even the entire discourse. Transition to the virtual structures the form, although it is non-formal conceptually (but also formally), it is more a state within transition, a moment of transition and the intersection of change. Even though the virtual cannot be seen or felt, it cannot not be seen or felt as other than what it is (Massumi, 1998).

The point of origin, of potentiality, changeability and anticipation can be understood as the primacy of forces upon the form, or a difference in potential, where the difference is the entropic arrow between tension and matter (Deleuze, 2004, pp. 86-89), and form is not a physical manifestation of matter, nor is it merely the result of a realized force, but a provisional state of equilibrium between forces, in a world shaped by the singularities and the differences (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, pp. 222-223/241). That is, the idea of matter in form is replaced by the idea of material and force (Deleuze, 2006, p. 160). The algorithmic nature and programming, as a process of the emergence of form, refer to processes of morphogenesis as the idea of the visibility of change, variability and potential.

4. **SYSTEMIC DISLOCATION OF FRAGMENTARY PARTICLE**

Drawing on the philosophical thought of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille, Blanchot, Barthes, Deleuze, and Nancy, the fragment can be seen as a constant state of becoming, separated from the whole and its parts, as something broken and as such without form, or whose form is elusive due to the fact that it is always becoming (it strives to become, but it never becomes), while this striving, this call to form, is what makes it a fragment, as
unfulfilled desire to attain the state of form (striving for finality and integrity) (Mellamphy, 1998).

Always in search of form, in a state of becoming, conceptualizing the transition from one state to another, the fragment surpasses the idea of the whole and its parts, not belonging to either. The idea of constant (recurrent) appearance implied in the idea of the fragment, opens up possibilities (is a condition) for creating (reading) differences (differance) as a constituent element of fragmentation towards a new world of appearance and representation: *In the eternal recurrence (return of the same), it is not the same that returns, re-presents itself, in whole or in part, but precisely the difference – or fragmentation.* If the idea of recurrence is taken from Derrida, who argues that recurrence occurs due to unrepeatability, unlike Deleuze who sees recurrence as a flow, the fragment can be interpreted as the idea of specificity and essential lack of definition. It is realized through the concept of difference, the ferment of change, and the idea of the continuity of life. The difference is, in Deleuzian terms too, always a kind of specificity, but it also appears within a whole, a whole that is always becoming, a whole that is insufficiently defined.

It could be said that fragmentation (fragment) is a specific kind of survival and that, conceptually, it stands in opposition to the ideas of fulfilment, hierarchical organization, progress and progression. The fragment does not develop in a linear and continuous way, it does not grow, but always remains within its frames that are expected to be variable, defined in terms of the limit values of its beginning, but not the end. The fragment is seen as something dislocated, as something that breaks away from the whole to which it belonged, which dissolves, dissipates, discontinues, and disappears, but viewed – not as a negation, but as what constitutes it. That is, *in this shattering, in this dislocation, we must recognize a value and not negation* (Blanchot, 1993, p. 308). If the concept of value is understood through the idea of formal qualities, as something that contributes to defining form, as its elementary particle that contains incompleteness, then we can speak of coding the incompleteness as the trigger for morphogenesis.

Although broken, the fragment persists and continues its life - *Fragments are unfinished separations, in a way destined to the gap (blank) that separates them, finding in this gap not what forms (ends) them, but what prolongs them or what makes them await their prolongation - what has already prolonged them, enabling them to persist in spite of their incompleteness* (Blanchot, 1986, pp. 58-59).

Conceptually speaking, the idea of fragmentation has no end because both the beginning and the end are about the whole. It never ends, its end is broken, interrupted, or simply disabled, and that is precisely where its potential lies. Precisely because it has no end but persists despite everything and never disappears, the fragment can be seen as a kind of break – *Neither beginning nor the end are ever interesting, the beginning and the end are just points. What is interesting is the middle... one begins again in the middle* (Deleuze, Parnet, 2009).

The force of potentiality is beyond abstract concepts. For Deleuze, it is virtual in the sense that opposes Bergson’s critique of abstraction, who argues that the possible cannot be betrayed, because it does not fulfil nor does it negate expectations, it always remains in the zone of potentiality (realizability), and thus there is more in the idea of the possible than in the idea of the real. It can be said that the virtual is – abstract in a different way than the possible. Unlike abstract mechanisms, abstract machines are real, though not concrete, actual although not effectuated, containing a specific reality of virtual in things. They have
the abstraction of immanent force, rather than transcendental form of abstract virtuality, of other possible worlds, beyond the world that we know (Rajchman, 1998, pp. 18-20).

The condition for the emergence of the formless (*informe*) is the intensification of space that breaks with the intervals of articulated elements of the limited space and the traditional place in which it occurs as free and exceeds the framing of place, plan and programme (Rajchman, 1998). It is a matter of shifting the centre of gravity with a constant movement, motion and disappearance, in folding and folds of forms that capture the void. Multiplicity is the idea of endless folding, or endless becoming and its elusive nature that is in constant motion.

**Fig. 4** Fragment 00038975 Neither Beginning nor the End, M. Mojsilovic & F. Prica, Digital model, 2018.19:11.21:36

In fact, it is a matter of searching for a place of specificity as a condition for the production of the new, which enables constant becoming through movement (motion) and (morpho)genesis, producing differences in the conditions of openness of the system, in its own incompleteness that allows changes and (fulfilment) of potentiality.

**5. CONCLUSION - SPATIAL FLEXIBILITY**

The civilization trend supported by new technologies and changed perception of space and time has accepted the predominant influence of digitization, resulting in continuous questioning of the methodology of the design process. In search of new ways of designing, in the conditions of the production of generic forms, topological and fragmented forms emerge that open up other fields of possibilities and diversity, towards new concepts of space and time category.
In contrast to Euclidean geometry based on the continuity of geometric forms, fragmented forms rest on the idea of deformation and variability, in the limit zones of the greatest creativity and potentiality. A new understanding of reality shaped by digitization (of a system) has created new concepts such as self-organization, openness, contingency, emergence, and thus a new aesthetics that goes beyond the horizon of visible (Mosco, 2004). Aesthetics of the digital allows the world and all its parts to be seen in a completely new, immaterial way.

Challenging the influence of digital technologies on architectural practice, despite the introduction of new concepts and terms such as trans-architecture, generic architecture, digital morphogenesis and fluidity, can be read at the moment of its actualization, or when it is translated from the virtual (space) into a real context. The question of the flexibility of understanding these concepts concerns replacing physical form by digital design (Jeska, 2008). This concept of architectural object as a variable structure opens up the possibility of stretching architecture (Maxwell, 1996), which is no longer expected to be static, but in its actualization after the virtual. Spatial flexibility, as a concept, allows objects to be variable and to adapt to the spatial and temporal changes in the context.

Abstraction of the universal is not what explains, but what must be explained, and the aim is not to rediscover the eternal or the universal, but to create the conditions for producing the new. The world is logical in accordance with the possibilities given by abstraction, even if not all the possibilities (potentials) have been realized (Rajchman, 1998), and in a sense precisely because of it.

REFERENCES
KONCEPT FRAGMENTARNOSTI - IZMEĐU FORME I NEFORME

Polazeći od ideje da se apstrakrnost arhitektonskog projektovanja svaki put iznova dokazuje novim konceptima, i da je u ideji o projektu sadržan fragment njegovih internih zakonitosti, rad otvara pitanje alternacije oblika na putu ka novim prostorno vremenskim kategorijama. Nasuprot Euklidovoj geometriji koja počiva na stalnosti geometrijskih oblika, fragmentisane forme počivaju na deformacijama i promenljivosti, operišući u graničnim zonama, za projekat, zonama najveće kreativnosti i potencijalnosti. Novo razumevanje realnosti oblikovano digitalizacijom svih sistema stvorilo je osnov za oblike samoorganizacije, otvorenosti, kontingentnosti, emergentnosti. U suštini pred nama je nova estetika koja prevazilazi horizont vidljivosti na način koji otvara omogućava da se čitav svet i svi njegovi delovi, sagledaju na potpuno nov nematerijalan način. To znači da se u zonama vidljivosti načini arhitektonski oblici zajedno sa oblicima svoje sistemske dislociranosti.

Ključne reči: postdigitalizacija, fragmentarnost, besformnost, prostorna fleksibilnost