

(UN) CLEAR WATERS

ARCHITECTURE AS A PERCEPTIVE TOOL

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– “ The basic act of architecture is therefore to understand the vocation of the place. In this way we protect the earth and become ourselves part of comprehensive totality.” - Norbert Shultz ¹

The interaction between the individual and its surroundings is instantaneously mediated by an initial awareness through the senses, this relationship evolves more complex, as memories, myths, accounts and constructed narratives shape the experience of the place, adding to that of the individual. What is perceivable then becomes our means for engagement towards that which we perceive, in this case the many natural environments that become part of our lives. Regarded as one of the most beautiful lakes in the world, Lake Atitlan is characterized by its clear waters, volcanic landscapes, and cultural importance to both ancient cultures as well as the modern economic livelihood of locals. Paradoxically it is however, imminent to become toxic if the current imperceptive attitude towards the lake does not change. Architecture is then presented as means to reposition perceptions and to establish this engagement as an asset not only in terms of environmental consciousness but as an inherent sense of care for place.

This thesis broadly inquires on the concept of perception in relation to our environment through the experience of architecture. Specifically encouraging different modes of engagement between the individual and place. The work focuses mainly on three different types of perception studies. These are: 1. Distant Perception, through the study of tourism and place. 2. Local Perception, through the study of myths and stories of the place. 3. Internal perception, through phenomenology, the human senses, and the experience of place. This critical inquiry culminates with an architectural proposition of a Material Recovery Lake Front in the shore of Lake Atitlan, Guatemala. The project is both a collector of recycling material from the basin as well as being activated by the involvement of the community in the process, articulated with the aim to reposition the relation between the inhabitants and the lake.

1. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius loci: towards a phenomenology of architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1996).pg. 19.