

8-3. Are all examples of paper architecture - idealistic manifestoes of forward looking architecture by vanguard architects - a form of publicity?

Paper Architecture-Publicity

James Smith

Examples of idealistic manifestos that demonstrate forward looking architecture are the result of an industry that is supplied by the individual and demanded by the masses. The ability to spread the word of thought among “an audience of practicing architects, students, and teachers of architecture” provides for an evolution of architectural theory and thought. (13) According to Kate Nesbitt, an editor for the Princeton Architectural Press, architectural theory is a “catalyst for change within a discipline, in both its academic and professional aspects,” allowing the architect to influence practitioners, theorists, critics and students.

Idealistic manifestoes or “Paper architecture,” in the context of the drawing, suggests the possibility of the product allowing the architectural representation, or drawing, to exist, bringing attention to the creators. Zaha Hadid and Daniel Libeskind are two examples of contemporary architects whose drawings have given them notoriety. The work of Eitenne-Lois Boulee and Piranesi are earlier examples of the “power of the drawn vision.”(19) The architectural image is a product of the creator; it therefore becomes a commodity, marketed to the architectural public, students, theorists and other practitioners. Within the past decade, the architectural image has become a commodity of the mass public; this is evident in the attention that has been given to the work of Frank Gehry and most recently the architectural debate surrounding the World Trade Center in New York.

Le Corbusier, the influential architect of the Modern Movement gained attention through his work as well as his fifty or so publications. He was has much architect as marketing agent. According to Beatriz Colomina, Le Corbusier borrowed modern advertising techniques manipulating “actual advertisements to incorporate his own vision.”(83) This is evident in his marketing strategies for the L’Esprit Nouveau, in which he would often inserts his own work into advertisements of everyday products. He sold his image and his product as a commodity along side of the everyday object. This is an example of Le Corbusier’s desire to appeal to the mass consumer society selling his work in relationship to the contemporary development of mass production.

In the nineteen sixties the attitudes of the modern movement began to dissolve, especially following the publication of Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* in 1966. According to Kate Nesbitt, “This single book, bearing the imprint of the Museum of Modern Art, opened a Pandora’s box of exploration of architectural history in America and abroad in search of formal principles to guide and enrich contemporary architectural design.”(12) Through the late sixties and the seventies theoretical attitudes presented by architectural treatise influenced architectural thought

and practice. The book, *Five Architects*, published in 1972 showcased the work of Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk, and Richard Meier, the “New York Five.” The five architects “gained instant credibility with patrons of architecture,” representing an abstraction of Venturi’s work. The Five architects, throughout the seventies continued on their own path in the academic and professional world resulting in large scale influential projects in the Eighties and continuing to be a major influence today. Theoretical works produced by the “New York Five” and other practitioners in the late sixties and seventies were largely the result of the inability of these architects to attract large scale commissions due to the economic instability of the nation, a result of the impact felt by the Vietnam War, oil embargo of the early seventies and the financial collapse of New York City. The architectural theory represented in architectural journals and books provide practitioners an income during this period. However, it was this theoretical work and the attention that was given to it, that resulted in the large scale commissions that many of these architects received in the 1980s’ and 90’s, when the economy was in the upswing.

Throughout the twentieth century a series of architectural exhibitions presented by the MOMA (Museum of Modern Art in New York City) supported the architectural theory that was showcased in “paper architecture.” The *International Style*, an exhibition at MOMA in 1932 was the “first Modern architecture trend in the United States.” The Culmination of the theoretical evolution of architecture was an exhibition at MOMA in 1988 titled “Deconstructivist Architecture.” According to Nesbitt, the “exhibition did not launch another major trend.” “Deconstructivism,” according to Nesbitt, “served as a stylistic label to exhibit some provocative work that may not have had much in common intellectually.”(27) Architectural theory, “paper architecture” represented in journals, books and showcased in exhibitions provide a wealth of architectural thought explaining the relationship of architectural thought in the context of architectural history, evolving architectural practice, and providing the architect with a method of showcasing theory and image; Publicity.

Nesbitt, Kate. “Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture, an Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995,” Princeton Architectural Press, 1996.

Colomina, Beatriz. “L’ Esprit Nouveau: Architecture and Publicitie,” in Colomina, Beatriz and Ockman, Joan (eds.): *Architecture production*.

The Architecture of the Public Architecture

Jimmy Shen

The notion of the avant-garde is inexplicably linked to publicity. The avant-garde is identified and brought forth by the dissemination of ideas to the public and always of ideas that challenge the status quo. And the method used by the avant-garde is the statement of extreme positions with blanket assumptions worded in simplistic ways. These manifestos are worded to demand attention and are often littered with exclamation points. In just looking at the implications from titles of architectural manifestos we get the sense that the purpose is to trigger a reaction and to convince people of a specific position with a bold announcement. There is Erich Mendelsohn's "The problem of a new architecture," CIAM's "La Sarraz Declaration," or Bruno Taut's "Daybreak." Like Luis Sullivan's statement "form follows function", advertisements use the same devices with proclamations such as Nike's slogan "Just Do It" or Playstation's "life is short, play hard."

The architectural manifesto came about within the new conditions of the industrial age with the maturation of mass communication and the development of consumer culture. This new age was characterized by impermanence and change that brought to attention certain problems associated to the aspect of the production of the multiple. Beatriz Colomina addresses one such problem by distinguishing the avant-garde and modernity. She uses Duchamp's Fountain by R. Mutt and Corbusier's image of a bidet as a starting point to examine the difference between their different positions towards art. She explains that "their difference... resides in the meaning of each gesture in the context in which it is placed."(p.76) Colomina uses Burger's definition of Duchamp's gesture as "an attack on art as an institution" in exposing the art market where "a signature means more than the quality of the work." Corbusier however holds onto a more romantic notion of art as he "distinguishes between art and life, between the art object and the everyday object."(p. 77) Corbusier "distinguishes works of art from works of technology and insists that only the latter are perishable."(p. 78) Whereas the avant-garde as represented by Duchamp sees the art-object as one that includes the mass produced products of the machine-age and recognizes its fleeting significance especially within the institution of art, Corbusier differentiates art from the everyday object by characterizing art with a permanent significance, he states that "certain things serve forever: they are Art."(p. 82)

But Corbusier's romanticism with the art-object contradicts his own adeptness with the tools of mass-media. Corbusier had an "intuitive understanding of media and a definite feel for news."(67) He understood the advertising industry's power to convince and the thirst of the masses for the impermanence that characterizes consumer culture. Corbusier saw "the everyday images of the press, industrial publicity, department store mail-order catalogues, and advertisements as 'ready-mades' to be incorporated into his editorial work." Colomina describes Corbusier as "perhaps the first architect fully to understand the nature of the media (to put it bluntly, he published some fifty books)."(p. 82) He was so adept with the tools and techniques of the advertising industry, he was able to attract professional clientele through the readership of L' Esprit Nouveau. Unless Corbusier saw his own work as that which could be typified as the everyday, his practice and

incorporation of the industrial product into his work came in complete contradiction with his own claims to the greater value of what he distinguishes as art. This outlook can perhaps be considered as a kind of optimism not shared by Duchamp and the Dadaists as they are separated with the datum of the World Wars. This contradiction places the Modern Movement as one represented by Corbusier as one which is distinctly different from the Avante-Garde. But perhaps this complication is a more accurate reflection of an age where the tension created by the subversion of the institution is precisely what creates a dialectic that allows us to understand the implication of the changes at the turn of the century. Colomina states that Corbusier's work is "precisely about the tension between a classical conception of the world and the shattering of this hierarchical order by the new processes of mass (re)production and the culture industry."(p. 99) It is one where the satirical and subversive tactics of the Dadaists which result in an endless cycle of negation are balanced by the optimism of the Modernists and their insufferable pursuit of an unattainable perfection, both of which are born from a social context where an inability to absorb the tools and techniques of the age would result in the impossibility of surviving in the modern world. Rem Koolhaas' book Content may serve as a recent and most excellent example of the architects use of media to promote an ideology directed at a manufactured market as a reflection on and producer of contemporary culture that perhaps can be considered as one that approaches closer to the conception of the avant-garde. In Content Brendan McGetrick states that "Content is a product of the moment. Inspired by the ceaseless fluctuations of the 21st century it bears the marks of globalism and the market, ideological siblings that, over the past twenty years, have undercut the stability of contemporary life. This book is born of that instability. It is not timeless; it's almost out of date already. It uses volatility as a license to be immediate, informal, blunt; it embraces instability as a new source of freedom."(p. 16)

- Colomina, Beatriz. "L' Esprit Nouveau: Architecture and Publicitie," in Colomina, Beatriz and Ockman, Joan (eds.): Architecture production.

- Koolhaas, Rem. "Content," Taschen, 2004

Paper Architecture as Publicity

Lilly Donohue

In her article, “L’Esprit Nouveau: Architecture and Publicite, Beatriz Colomina highlights the appropriation of advertising language employed by Le Corbusier in his publications of “L’Esprit Nouveau (1920-1925). In the magazine, Le Corbusier showcases images of a variety of consumer products, ranging from Hermes handbags to urinals. The motivation to explore “advertising” is not necessarily to explicitly endorse these specific objects, nor, as Colomina explains, to engage in a critique of art culture (as in Duchamp’s use of “ready-mades”), but rather to pursue an understanding of the contemporary consumer culture.

Le Corbusier speaks to the transition from permanence towards a popular culture centered on the disposable commodity in his writings on posters; “The fresco wrote history upon the walls of churches and palaces... There were no books, one read the frescoes... The poster is the modern fresco, and its place is the street. It lasts not five centuries but two weeks, and then it is replaced.”¹

Perhaps it is this cultural shift to disposability that renders the traditional architect; creator of cultural icons of permanence, disconnected from engaging with the mass population. Through the production of this paper- architecture, L’Esprit Nouveau, Le Corbusier is able to engage an audience outside of the insular architectural discourse by using the language of advertising and through the publication itself, generating a mass produced disposable product. He boasted that the primary subscribers to the magazine were industrialists and bankers, not architects, which indicates some level of success at developing a dialogue with the larger population.

It is often through this understanding and appropriation of media and the consumer commodity that architects have been most successful in engaging a larger social interaction. A later example, the publication of “Archigram” in the late sixties, also illustrates the use of popular imagery and notions of expendability as a method to address mass culture. Archigram not only specifically borrowed from popular marketing imagery, showcasing the young and beautiful and the “leisure” lifestyle, but they also extended this notion of the disposable commodity to suggest actual dwellings; “Living-Pod” and “Drive-In Housing”. Through situating themselves in the culture of the consumer, Archigram was able to engage with the youth market outside of the architectural discourse.²

The appropriation of publicity by certain architects to generate a “paper-architecture” has served as a critical method in sustaining an interaction with the general public. As Le Corbusier indicated, the masses no longer search the facades of buildings in order to read and perpetuate culture, but instead are submerged in consumption and expendability. It is through the positioning of architecture in this popular cultural context (paper-architecture) that architects have been successful in perpetuating a dialogue with the public.

1. as quoted in: Colomina, Beatriz. "L'Esprit Nouveau: Architecture and Publicité," in Colomina, Beatriz and Ockman, Joan (eds.): Architectureproduction.

2. Information from Cook, Peter. "Archigram", Princeton Architectural Press, 1999