AFTER THE MANIFESTO

EDITED BY CRAIG BUCKLEY
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WRITING, ARCHITECTURE, AND MEDIA IN A NEW CENTURY

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ARCHITECTURAL MANIFESTOS

BERNARD TSCHUMI

WHEN I STARTED to prepare for this event, the first thing I did was to go to Revolution Books, the legendary bookstore now located on 26th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues in New York (1). I wonder how many people in the audience have ever been to Revolution Books? Probably not many. Once upon a time, many of you would have gone there. Revolution Books has many great and important books on politics, cultural theory, avant-garde theatre, revolutionary film, and so on, but no books by Beatriz Colomina, Peter Eisenman, Bernard Tschumi, Anthony Vidler, or Mark Wigley—by virtually any of the people speaking here today. Perhaps this is because we architects do not "do" revolutions. Le Corbusier said, "It is a question of building which is at the root of the social unrest of today: architecture or revolution." Le Corbusier thought we could solve society’s ills through architecture.

Is a question of building at the root of today’s social unrest? Could Le Corbusier be talking about the subprime mortgage crisis in the United States, or the nearly 10,000 foreclosure actions taken every day? How many architects were downtown occupying Zuccotti Park with the 99 percent? Not many. And not because we are the 1 percent, either (2).

Could it perhaps be because we are too busy creating pretty shapes and forms? Has architecture lost its social agenda? Like everyone else on this panel, I went back to Ulrich Conrads’s famous book, Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture. I saw that almost every author in Conrads’s collection brought together the political and the social, suggesting—or rather, shouting—that there is no avant-garde without a...
social program. It's important to remember the word "program" in the title of Conrads's book. Many of these manifestos are also about a new society: Poelzig, Loos, Wright, Gropius, Mies, Le Corbusier. Some argued less about society, but still included a cultural discourse: Kiesler, Buckminster Fuller, Pichler, Hollein. And what about Louis Kahn? No social or cultural debate here. Kahn mostly talks about design, form, and order. Theo van Doesburg also, doesn't discuss much that is social in nature; his first point is form. He initially argues for the "elimination of all concepts of form." I got truly excited here, but then he qualiﬁes that as "form in the sense of ﬁxed types," and goes on with a lot about form. Architecture, according to van Doesburg, must be an anti-cubic, colorful synthesis of Neoplasticism.

So, here we are: we have those who speak about society but not much about architecture; those who speak about architecture but not much about society; and those—the most interesting ones—who speak about both.

When discussing manifestos, Conrads's book always comes up. Why is that? After all, it is constructed in exactly the same manner as most other anthologies of architectural texts. Just look at the recent publishing past of this school—Architecture Culture: 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology after Architecture Culture, edited by Joan Ockman; Architecture Theory since 1968, edited by K. Michael Hay; and The State of Architecture at the Beginning of the 21st Century, which I edited with Irene Cheng, in which we asked sixty architects and critics to state their own manifestos.

Even Charles Jencks did something similar to these anthologies with his Theories and Manifestos of Contemporary Architecture. By the way, why did he choose the color green for the cover? Shouldn't it be red when you're talking about manifestos? And why is the announcement for this symposium green, as well? A shift from revolutionary red to peaceful green? Even among our major critical little magazines, look at the color and the titles—from the red-orange Oppositions to the white, gray, or black Assemblage, Grey Room, or Log. From a polemic to a logbook.

Where do manifestos come from? I went to Revolution Books to replace my long-lost copy of Marx and Engels's The Communist Manifesto. (Even the current Penguin edition has a red-orange cover.) The opening words of The Communist Manifesto are amazing: "A specter haunts Europe, the specter of Communism." The text continues by suggesting, "There we are!" meaning that we are already there, "already acknowledged to be a Power!" Now, this is speech and strategy: we are already here. We are already "a power." Imagine hearing, "A specter haunts the world, the specter of Parametricism." Actually, Patrik Schumacher, who is well-schooled, says exactly that when he gives public lectures.

But what interests me here are the following questions: first, do manifestos precede the event they advocate, do they accompany it, or do they follow it? Do you write the "Little Red Book" before or after you have won the revolution? Second, is the manifesto the product of a group, or can it be created by an individual? Conrads points out that the artist Friedensreich Hundertwasser was the author of the first entirely subjective individual manifesto. Now, this concerns all of us: you are a young architect, you have a few friends you like to argue with, but you are really on your own.

Let me introduce a bit of self-historicizing. When I first arrived in New York over thirty-five years ago, doing one-term stints at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies or Princeton University but really spending most of my time with artist friends at the Mudd Club or at CBGB, my agenda was nothing less than to redefine what architecture is. I didn't believe that architecture should simply be white Le Corbusier-inspired buildings or so-called post-historicist towers. I was writing and creating a 32-foot-long drawing on the floor of an industrial loft that someone had lent me. By the time I was invited to show this work at Artists Space in 1978, I considered it as perhaps breaking new ground. I didn't call it a "manifesto," but instead titled the exhibition Manifestos in the plural, so as to remove the pretense of a unifying theory.
In the little catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, I prepared a series of statements:

Good architecture must be conceived, erected, and burned in vain. The greatest architecture of all is the fireworks; it perfectly shows the gratuitous consumption of pleasure.

Architectural space will be defined by ideas as much by real walls. Architecture will be the tension between the concept and experience of space.

The paper representation of architecture will have the sole purpose of triggering desire for architecture.

In architecture, fiction will replace function. ("Form follows fiction.")

Architecture will break out of its cultural isolation and expand the particular form of knowledge of its time. It will both import and export.

New books will give imaginary architecture an existence and a logic of its own. In return, architecture will give books new terms of reference.

Architecture will not be simply the expression of accepted functional and moral standards. Instead, actions, whether forbidden or not, will become an integral part of architecture. As a result, conventional plans will no longer suffice, and new types of architectural notation will be devised.

Architecture will define the places where reality meets fantasy, reason meets madness, life meets death. (Border crossing is erotic.)

Architecture will be defined as the convergence of objects, events, and places. Such convergence intensifies, reinforces, and accelerates.

Manifestos resemble contracts that the undersigned make with themselves and with society. As with all contracts, manifestos imply certain rules, laws, and restrictions. But they soon become independent from their authors. At this point, a masochistic relationship begins between the author and the text itself, for the manifesto-contract has been drafted by the very person who will suffer from the restrictions.
of its clauses. No doubt such carefully devised laws will be violated. This self-transgression of self-made laws adds a particularly perverse dimension to manifestos. In addition, like love letters, they provide an erotic distance between fantasy and actual realization. In many respects, this aspect of manifestos has much in common with the nature of my architectural work: each of the recent works plays on the tension between ideas and real spaces, between abstract concepts and the sensuality of an implied spatial experience.

I didn’t have to build—books were architecture, exhibitions were architecture, and advertisements were architecture (5–7). My work was about ideas and concepts; they certainly referred to architecture that could be built, but the work could also exist without building. It established a dialogue with other disciplines—with film, literature, and so on.

My concept-based work eventually led to the Parc de la Villette, Paris (1982–98), with its superposition of systems of points, lines, and surfaces; Le Fresnoy, Tourcoing (1997), with its facade-and-roof envelope; or the Glass Video Gallery in Groningen, the Netherlands (8–10). I considered each of these buildings to be a manifesto. Here, texts and words were okay, but the building was a manifesto on its own. Each building exists to represent an idea, to develop a concept, to be a manifesto of sorts.

What about today? Ideological manifestos are rarer and more infrequent, except perhaps for green, sustainable, or ecological endeavors, but there are still other architectural manifestos being developed—some as in-your-face as those by the Futurists, others more subtle and more perverse.

Examples include unbuilt work by Philippe Rahm, François Roche, Pier Vittorio Aureli, and my own Factory 798 project, as well as several

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projects by other people in this room. And what about built manifestos? After all, the Barcelona Pavilion (1929) and the Villa Savoye (1931) were manifestos. And one could think of many other examples from the last ten to twelve years, in no particular order: MVRDV’s Dutch Pavilion in Hanover (2000), Foreign Office Architects’ Yokohama Terminal (2002), the CCTV building by OMA (2012), SANAA’s Rolex Center (2010), Peter Eisenman’s City of Galicia (1999–ongoing), and even MAD (initiated 2006), as planned and designed by Norman Foster. The list goes on and on.

Indeed, I would claim that any work that has a fresh, provocative, and clear content is a manifesto of sorts. Invent a concept, and it will become a manifesto. (11)

We reject all doctrine, and all formalism.

AND PROCLAIM:

ARCHITECTURE IS NOT ABOUT THE CONDITIONS OF DESIGN BUT ABOUT THE DESIGN OF CONDITIONS.

ARCHITECTURE IS NOT SO MUCH A KNOWLEDGE OF FORM, BUT A FORM OF KNOWLEDGE.

ARCHITECTURE IS THE DISCOURSE OF EVENTS AS MUCH AS THE DISCOURSE OF SPACES.

ARCHITECTURE IS NOT ONLY WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE, BUT ALSO WHAT IT DOES.

ARCHITECTURE IS THE MATERIALIZATION OF CONCEPTS.

CONCEPT, NOT FORM, IS WHAT DISTINGUISHES ARCHITECTURE FROM MERE BUILDING.

ARCHITECTS DON’T CHOOSE CONTEXTS; THEY CHOOSE CONCEPTS.
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