

Fulcrum

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action architecture.

hesselbrand

Without form, communication stops... without form, you have everybody burling on to themselves, whenever and however, things that no one else can understand and - rightly - no one else is interested in.

Gerhard Richter

Out of all modern revolutions, there is one that has proven superior to all, one that has swept away the illusions that previously justified religious and political exploitation. It is the capitalist revolution and the reason for its success is due to that it is always a counter-revolution. This is why it always appears to be in a state of crisis, for in order to survive it requires instability, which moves it forward; if it stops, it collapses.

Unlike other forms of life, architecture has found it difficult to adapt to the unpredictable and metabolic nature of capitalism, simply because in its built form it is rooted and still. As much as this might sound like an old-fashioned stance in the current discussion, architectural form refers to something with a certain physical manifestation and material presence. What we see today however, is how the cyclical dynamics of capital continuously challenge its permanence and meaning. While the value of buildings is becoming increasingly abstract, flexibility replaces reflection and instigates consumption.

History bears witness to many architects' attempts to address these dynamic forces, through reduction and standardisation. These struggles stretch far back, but indisputably the most canonical project of modernism is that of the factory. Making use of scientific organisation through the compartmentalisation of functions, the factory became a frontal assault on the decentralisation that had been the norm of previous modes of production. Parallel to the rapid developments of machines, which exemplified the unpredictable nature of production, the only way to successfully accommodate such instability was by clearing out the interior. This was in order to adapt to the ever changing

needs of manufacturing. The form of specificity that was required could only be achieved by virtue of the generic frame. Along with the column grid and the reinforced concrete frame came the invention of the curtain wall; cheap and changeable, light and disposable.

Not only did the factory define the dogma of the industrial architecture that it was intended for, but it also became highly influential on the metropolitan architecture that was to follow. In principle, the architecture built to facilitate material production was the same as that built to accommodate the modes of immaterial production that has since prevailed.

When working in metropolitan concentrations, architects would directly adopt the structure of the factory, showing that the most efficient way to provide accommodation for the uncertainty of immaterial production was through the reduction of architecture to its bare minimum. The buildings of late modernist architects still maintained an emphasis on their perennial features, while the plans were left empty for an uncertain future. Although essentialist, the main concern was still architectural, in its spatial and structural order. Through its extreme straightforwardness it even gained a monumental character.

As a result of increasing productivity, where supply vastly exceeded existing

The expansion of the economic realm demanded a vigorous consumer society, in which architecture was unavoidably sucked into the accelerating cyclical rhythm of capital.

demand, mass-production gave rise to mass-consumption and a market that increasingly revolved around the construction of a new subject — and the production of demand.

Certain avant-garde architects of the time (especially of the 1960s) embraced the zeitgeist of consumerism and technology, in which architecture was ultimately (and ruthlessly) subsumed by the metabolic dynamics of capitalism. Moreover, they embraced unquestioningly the rise of technology and economics as integral to modern life.

Taking refuge from all previous ideals and choosing to ignore what

architectural history had to offer (even if subconsciously), they wholeheartedly embraced an objectification of architecture while simultaneously proclaiming it could easily be disposed. This manifest itself through the tail-end of consumption: the production of waste. In order to fit these dynamics, the lives of objects have come to acquire a form of planned obsolescence, where a product's life expectancy is deliberately cut short in order to speed up consumption. If we look to architectural history, we discover how its expression, which used to remain consistent over centuries, is becoming increasingly tied to the same rhythms and trends as those of products: the tendency to deterioration over time rather than improvement.

If the only way to justify a building is through economic validation, then its life is ultimately dictated by the same unpredictable forces as those of capital.

One of the great myths of neoliberalism is that of multiplicity. Its epic narrative of endless possibilities and unlim-

As cities become nothing but infrastructure for the circulation of capital, we find ourselves in a condition best represented by blurry images: a city where all is quantified by the indifferent force of money.

ited diversity has led us to believe that flexibility is the ultimate achievement of architecture. However, it is becoming increasingly evident that rather than creating a world of difference, the logic of expansion is rendering the world into a generic smoothness, where all aspects of life become increasingly standardised. When architecture is reduced to a bare minimum by predefined policies, the architect becomes a provider of appearance, as the plan has become subordinate to a standard. His last resort has become the elevation.

When architects attempt to construct flexibility, in the sense of the word which was pioneered by certain post-war architects, it implicitly entails an attempt to construct buildings of eternal youth. Unfortunately, this form of timelessness erases the very power of architecture in establishing a permanent platform for our lives, which in turn are essentially fluid. Change is inevitably the fate of

architecture. The life that unfolds within is ultimately supported by the permanence of its form, providing a restraint in an otherwise self-organised chaos.

Industrialisation and the modern history of architecture tell the story of an economic expansion increasingly organising life for the sake of productivity. By linking life to a rhythm of production and consumption, in a world preying on instability and fetishising expansion, the boundary between public and private space has become harder and harder to identify. In order for multiplicity to thrive, we believe it requires an architecture of constraints, and by its permanence and unwillingness to change, reclaim the boundary between private and public, life and work. As paradoxical as it may sound, permanence is what allows architecture to appreciate change and to inspire new life.

We believe that material form is fundamental to architecture. Nonetheless, it is difficult to say what this architecture *is*... although by rephrasing the question into what it *is not*, or what would happen *without it*, an image begins to surface. The way in which we understand the power, purpose and responsibility of architecture is similar to our understanding of language; as a mediator of life itself. Where language is the platform of thoughts, architecture becomes the platform of action. These are tools that give us the ability to express, exchange and disclose our human existence. If these tools are lost or censored it is likely we will eventually also lose the corresponding act itself.

Suggesting an approach of slowing down has suddenly become a radical attitude, but we believe that the physical constraint imposed by architectural form is what can allow us to go beyond the prescribed: like a distinct ridge to hold on to on an otherwise smooth surface. Unpredictable, by contrast, this architecture gives rise to the unexpected and reclaims the space in which we can give life back to life.

Hesselbrand is a London-based architectural firm directed by Jesper Victor Henriksson, Magnus Casselbrant and Martin Brandsdal.

Ricardo Palma is an architect. He co-founded UpLack. *Empire* reprises a quote from Deleuze: *A brick can be used to build a building or wage a war. That is action.*

