

WE CAN DO ANYTHING, BUT WE DO NOTHING: Revisiting Tschumi's "Advertisements for Architecture"

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The world is simultaneously massive as it is minuscule. We are as close to Africa as we are to Italy, but the former is far more foreign. So many places are off our radar, yet the same images reoccur of the cutting-edge techniques or radical new forms. The social agenda of the modern movement died an embarrassing death, and few have picked up the torch. While many academic journals and the minority of practices operate on the fringe, theorizing or building in the truly problematic environs, the majority of architecture is status quo, or simply a one liner in the form of the glossy image. Academia continues to skirt the edges of the war-torn territory of the ethical and problematic, but the bulk of student projects are formal and material exploits on pristine sites under the best circumstances. Real quandaries persist, but the valorization of the new is more often rewarded. Fashion and fad often determine interest while we often complain of the coming foreclosures that could spell the bankruptcy of the profession. We live in an age where we can do anything but instead squander millions on spectacles that with all things considered, are meaningless.

Bernard Tschumi's "Advertisements for Architecture" from 1975 sought to express latent desires as propaganda about our true values related to architecture. Be it passion or program, they were done in a time where form, meaning and the role of architecture was being questioned. Through a more current lens, what if we framed such advertisements as a provocation on the ethical responsibility for architecture to respond to the countless obstacles and dilemmas of our built world? An objective examination of our practices may awaken concern, or horror, as many of our exploits may be insignificant compared to pressing issues of the built environment.

Advertisements exist to sell by creating a potential reality; they are how the masses view entities. If we were to advertise our true motives and inclinations, as we are perceived by the culture we serve, would we simply be stating what they want to hear? As designers we are caught between our own megalomaniacal intent and the need to be wanted. We walk a dangerous line of knowing better, but better to not reveal this fact, as it would make things infinitely harder for us to operate. The critic in all of us must exact discerning investigations into our reasons for practice. Is it all an act, or can our works overcome the signal to noise ratio and communicate, contribute and foster an ethical way of operating while still maintaining the validity of our profession?

These are daunting tasks indeed, but they should start with a cynical self-appraisal. This project is the beginning of a propaganda campaign for the architects none of us want to be, and the buildings and situations we hate but use or abuse daily to our advantage. It is the foundation for a realist's manifesto; a vehicle for seemingly outrageous, but sadly obvious conditions of our practice.

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We make because we can. We can do everything, but we do nothing. The valorization of the new is the epitome of progress.



Instead of asking why, we shall resort to why not. Appropriateness is cliché, and in a world where innovation is rewarded and flawed architectural part's can be wrestled into existence with endless capital and expertise. We are visionaries: we can and will do the impossible. These days anything can be done anywhere, and design is only good if it innovates for innovation's sake.

Timelessness fails to fashion as newness demands rapid deterioration. Planned obsolescence of entire movements keep the avant-garde fresh.



Our profession is in survival mode struggling to maintain autonomy and value within culture. Like a wolf on the hunt, the higher profile the work the better. Production is progress, and progress = higher profit margins, celebrated design heroes, and the continued fashion and vanity of our profession.

The consistency and familiarity we demand is now mandatory.



The idiosyncrasy of region and place is no longer of value in the selective environs architecture chooses to operate in. Familiarity is prime, and the value of the signature and recognizable brand far outweighs any need to express the specifics of a given culture. Architecture must be commoditized to realize the maximum (profit / fame.)

Give us convenience or give us death.



The built environment is a rightful slave to our desire. Harnessed like a wild beast it does our bidding as we shape it into new and more intricate forms of fancy. The old frontier has been long conquered, now we seek to make extravagant use of the few remaining spots we have. As the party draws to a close, it might as well be the greatest one we have ever thrown. If we are to die, we might as well do so in the most accommodating way.

Culture can sit back, relax and watch. Design has all of our ecological woes covered.



Architecture is reactionary, and it exists to serve. The silver bullet of technology will save the day so our lifestyles need not change. In the wake of massive environmental crisis and countless natural disasters we are stalwart, rebuilding in the wake we seek every possible solution as long as it does not require us to change our daily lives. Be it via fear or fashion, the new "ism" is "green."