Radical games: architecture and revolution in the age of spectacle
Schrijver, L.S.

DOI: 10.6100/IR594617

Published: 01/01/2005

Document Version
Publisher’s PDF, also known as Version of Record (includes final page, issue and volume numbers)

Please check the document version of this publication:

• A submitted manuscript is the author’s version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher’s website.
• The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
• The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

• Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal?

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
Radical Games

Architecture and Revolution in the Age of Spectacle

Lara Schrijver
Radical Games
Architecture and Revolution in the Age of Spectacle

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de
Technische Universiteit Eindhoven, op gezag van
de Rector Magnificus, prof.dr. R.A. van Santen,
voor een commissie aangewezen door het College
voor Promoties in het openbaar te verdedigen op
dinsdag 25 januari 2005 om 16.00 uur

doors

Lara Suzanne Schrijver

geboren te Edmonton, Canada
Schrijver, Lara

Radical Games: Architecture and Revolution in the Age of Spectacle

dissertation, TU Eindhoven
ISBN 90-9018990-4
NUR: 648

© 2004, Lara Schrijver, Rotterdam.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements vi

Chapter 0. Introduction 1960s Architecture 1
0. Introduction 2
I. Structure of dissertation 8
II. General and Methodological Considerations 10

Chapter 1. From Utopia to Spectacle 13
Rearranging modernism by re-presenting the city
0. Introduction 14
I. Living with the legacy of the modernist city 18
A. France: Activist Urban Practice of The Situationist International 18
B. England: The Ordinary City of The Independent Group 37
C. United States: The Hidden City of Jane Jacobs 46
II. The (Universal) Modernist City Refracted 53
A. Global Aspects of the Debate 53
B. Global Traits of Resistance Localized 60
III. Basic Dualities – Incomplete Paradigm Shifts 61

Chapter 2. Purity of Vision, Potential of the Image 65
Modern architecture and the mass culture explosion
0. Introduction 66
I. From Modernist Abstraction to a Plethora of Pop Images 70
A. United States: Venturi, Scott Brown and The Promise of Pop 70
B. England: Pop Preludes of the Independent Group 81
C. Undermining the Spectacle – The Situationist International 95
II. The Contamination of Purist Modern Vision 102
A. Global Aspects of the Debate 102

B. Global Traits of Resistance Localized 105
III. Basic Dualities – Incomplete Paradigm Shifts 106
IV. What Lies Beneath: (Re)Constructions of Vision 107
A. Modern Vision – The Ocular Ontology 107
B. Postmodernist Imagery – Surface Games 113

Chapter 3. Mechanical Reproduction and CyberSimulation 116
(Re)visions through technology
0. Introduction 117
I. Transformations: Imagining a different kind of technology 121
A. UK: Technology revised and re-envisioned – Archigram 121
B. France: Liberation through technology – SI 144
C. US: Technology and consumerism – VSBA 147
II. Foundations: Modernism and Technology 150
A. The machinery of modernism 150
B. New technologies to transform the old 152
III. Technological Transformations: from high tech to sly tech 156
A. Paradigms of technology in architecture 156
B. From dialectic to plurality: technology and imagery 162

Chapter 4. Escaping the Modern Dialectic 165
Seeking beauty in the little things
0. Introduction 166
The 1960s: a time of transformation 166
I. Conclusions 169
II. Propositions: learning from then, producing for now 171
III. Theory and Critique in the Age of Spectacle 183

Sources 191
Dutch Summary 199
Curriculum Vitae 201
Acknowledgements

Over the course of this project I have had the benefit of a strong and generous advisory committee. Individual thanks are due to each of them. Jeroen Boomgaard has gone above and beyond the call of duty in terms of everyday guidance and general support in the face of this (sometimes overwhelming) research. Gerard van Zeyl regularly offered bird’s-eye view critiques, seeing beyond the details and reminding me of the bigger picture. Finally, Christine Boyer contributed more than can be said: not only her expertise in this field, but a generous intellect in the true spirit of a teacher, full of guidance and insight.

The Netherlands Institute for Scientific Research (NWO) provided funding for archival research and for an interview with Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi that proved crucial to the development of Chapter 2. At the archive itself, Bill Whitaker was more than generous with his knowledge and his time.

Many other people have been exceedingly helpful, be it through listening to my ideas and commenting on them, or in the tedious hours of production. A few that should not go without mention: Arie Graafland, for listening to my exposés on how his generation got it wrong and not complaining about it. Deborah Hauptmann for intellectual critique, coffee and friendship – the rare package of everything in one person. François Claessens, for being such a great sounding board on my early (and often naïve) ideas. Rinske van Ramshorst, for hours of scanning and putting up with my inevitable delays. Tia Blassingame, for critical readings and insightful commentary, always on short notice.

Finally, to Jasper de Haan: my words always fail me when it comes to you. This dissertation owes more to you than can be expressed. You’ve played the most important part in its completion, from your critique to your support, from the professional to the personal.
0. Introduction
The 1960s have an aura both of revolution and of playfulness. There was a general resistance against authoritarian schools of thought, peace and love and flowers became a motto, and freedom was sought for all – in the form of the sexual revolution, in the affirmation of an essential creativity of the individual, in the freedom to rebel against higher (and usually older) authority. From flower children and student protests to miniskirts and rock-and-roll bands, the everyday order of an earlier time was now disrupted socially and visually. This is by now an essential aspect of our collective perception of the sixties – an era of revolution and change and pleasure and above all ultimate freedom. These remarkable developments are also reflected in the architecture discourse of the time, in the introduction of colorful imagery drawn from science fiction and comic books rather than architecture history, of images referring to glittering Las Vegas and Hollywood, and in a reveling in the possibilities of consumer freedom. However, the question arises whether these revolutions were quite as radical as they set out to be. Has the received history of the 1960s superseded the results? And if so, what might a contemporary revival of some of the ideals of the 1960s be setting out to do – to replicate the decade, to relive a moment of radicality, or just to have another historical period to draw from?

This thesis is about the years between 1956 and 1972. The bulk of the work discussed came to fruition in the 1960s, but developments of this time are already apparent in the late 1950s, and extend a little beyond the numerical closing of the decade.

The boundaries of my ‘extended sixties’ are set by specific happenings in each year. In 1956 the exhibition ‘This is Tomorrow’ opened in London at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA). It proved a starting point of interest in the visual language of the mass media and expressions of mass culture, such as Hollywood science fiction films. In 1972, a by now infamous icon of late modernist architecture, the Pruitt-Igoe building in St. Louis, was demolished. Charles Jencks has noted this moment as signaling the end of the hegemony of modernism, or as the starting point for what he called postmodernism.

Historical Position
Many histories of architecture until the 1990s speak of modernism as opposed to postmodernism, with a transition set around the mid-1960s, early 1970s. Jencks’ reference to the demolishing of Pruitt-Igoe has become canonical, but regardless of when a specific date is set for the advent of postmodernism, it is treated as a radical break with the received tenets of modernism. In general, this text will try to hold to the received notions of modernism and postmodernism in architecture. In brief, this will encompass among others: a social ideology (CIAM), holding to functionalism, and a belief in the progressive nature of both history and technology (Le Corbusier) on the side of modernism; and a reintroduction of historical forms (Charles Moore) and a turn to the banal (Robert Venturi) on the side of postmodernism. More critical to this discussion however will be the terms ‘modernity’ and ‘postmodernity,’ as they define underlying societal conditions that can be readily identified, and do not so easily fall into the by now aesthetic categories or architecture movements associated with modernism and postmodernism. Modernity will hold to be roughly the first half of the twentieth century, although it has clear precursors in the 19th century. It is characterized by a belief in the new, in progress and technology; and by a dismissal or at the very least a questioning of the value of tradition. Postmodernity we will see as circumscribed by the reintroduction of historical motifs, by the introduction of other narratives than the dominant one (minority studies, feminism, etc) and a general relativism.

Typically, the 1960s have been seen as ‘belonging’ to postmodernity. Without a doubt, the resistance to certain aspects of modernism introduce various conditions that are essentially postmodern: an interest in historical form, a resistance to totalizing narratives in favor of local or differentiated traits, and a direct appropriation of the forms of mass culture. Yet rather than so simply placing this decade on one side or the other of a major shift, I would like to propose it as a transitional period (in the extended time frame 1956-1972), both incorporating elements that would traditionally be seen as modernist, and prefiguring ideas typically considered postmodernist. In this sense, the dissertation also hopes to


demythologize some of the writing about the 60s, and place it in its proper historical place.

Major transitional conditions are discernible in urban planning (the depiction and discussion of the city); in the struggle with an increasingly visual culture (which, under influence of the commodity leads to what I would call an ‘image culture’ – to be addressed later); and in the problematic relationship with technology (seen in utopian technological visions on the one hand and the fear of being overwhelmed by intelligent technology on the other). These areas of transformation will begin to define the structure of the thesis, as will be elaborated below.

Other considerations
A crucial question throughout this thesis will revolve around the distinction between images and words. The rhetoric of architects and the images or designs they produce are not always directly related. Also, there is the question of whether imagery is by definition uncritical or merely representational, whether an aesthetic practice may be discussed critically, and whether it can be considered to have productive qualities on a different level from the narrative of text-based critique.

The imagery of architecture itself becomes a field of observation for these questions, but the increasingly visual character of the world also defines the conditions that give rise to these issues. It is not only the proliferation of the forms of mass culture that sets the stage here, but also the appropriation of them by the aesthetic establishment. 7

This issue of mass culture in the latter half of the 20th century is an especially important consideration. Although it is not always explicitly addressed, the mutual influence of mass cultural imagery and the domain of fine art, and architecture that has proclaimed that domain for itself, is a critical relationship. This is not to conflate the two – yet the interrelationships may be considered more mutually productive than is currently often the case. We can no longer consider mass culture a domain in which the products of an avant-garde, fine, enlightened art simply descend and crystallize into culture industry products, especially not in an age where the products of this mass culture (Campbell soup cans, Las Vegas signage, Japanese pornography) are used as informative and formally innovative references for the domain of high art (Warhol, Venturi Scott Brown, Koolhaas).

Intent
This thesis also works from the position that ‘contamination,’ in the sense of an impure visual culture, is essentially a given, or has been since the mid-20th century.

This position could be argued from within a specific theory of contamination, but I have chosen to focus on the productive aspects of this ‘hybrid’ condition through ideas of pragmatism instead. 8 This notion of pragmatism is adjusted by incorporating some level of utopian/idealist drive that to my mind is necessary for architectural production. Although I will draw heavily on the work of Adorno in relation to mass culture, it is his idea of art as negation that I will contest. Although I sympathize with the radical elements of the 1960s manifestoes, it is their totalitarian traits that I will try to temper with pragmatism, thus hopefully demonstrating that one need not envision a brave new world to transform the contemporary one.

One of the goals of this dissertation is to synthesize some fields of work that are related to the condition of late capitalism but have not been examined as extensively in relation to one another – hence also the decision to take three exemplary areas of transition. Each one lays claim to a paradigm shift, proclaiming the radicality and novelty of its own position, but does not quite fulfill its own promise.

Basic Questions
The writing of architecture history and theory from the early 1970s was focused on this transition from modernism to postmodernism. Primary words and phrases here were: tradition, expression, symbolic form, beyond rationalism, and post-functionalism. 9 This was the fulfillment of a large transformation in architectural ideology, started in the mid-1950s. A full-scale revision of modernist architecture had begun in response to perceived problems of modernist beliefs, and in response to changing cultural conditions such as late capitalism and the mass consumption that went along with it. One blanket concept we can use for these changing conditions is Guy Debord’s ‘Society of the Spectacle,’ where the spectacle is “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image.” 10 Moreover, in Debord’s perception, this society of the spectacle is not only defined by capital but by mediation – the reality of everyday life is thus superseded by the imagery that delineates it. 11 The confrontation with this new everyday reality necessitated a response.

8 Pragmatism has become an important notion for many contemporary discussions of architecture, and will return in chapter 4. Here, suffice to say that choosing a pragmatic approach is informed by contemporary discourse in relation to its roots in the 1960s.
10 Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle, thesis 34. [orig: “Le spectacle est le capital à tel degré d’accumulation qu’il devient image.”]
From the perspective of today, one question that remains is – how revolutionary were the 1960s for architecture? Some things seem to have been revived recently, such as the idealism that had completely disappeared in the 1980s with its apocalyptic plans and visions. Many of the manifestoes examining early examples of what Fredric Jameson called late capitalism and the mass consumer society seem surprisingly relevant again. Yet there is also a suspicious similarity at times between the great manifestoes of the 1960s and those of the 1930s. Moreover, when confronted with the by now mythical proportions of the generation of 1968, the question of ‘how revolutionary was it?’ seems legitimate, especially if contemporary architecture is judged by its standards of revolutionary praxis.

In part to qualify these general revolutionary tendencies I have focused on the transatlantic debate between 1956 and 1972: this is where most of the manifestoes, interaction, mutual influence and history of various neo-avant-garde movements are to be found such as Learning from Las Vegas (Venturi and Scott Brown, USA), Society of the Spectacle (Guy Debord, France), The Death and Life of Great American Cities (Jane Jacobs, USA), and the work of the Independent Group and Archigram (UK). They are influenced by developments such as Pop Art in their own time, but also respond to the demanding principles of the Bauhaus, L’Esprit Nouveau, and CIAM. In this time-frame I will also examine the position of mass cultural imagery because of the role it played in both undermining modernist architecture principles and in cloaking some possibly more persistent beliefs underlying them (such as ‘surface’ and ‘substance’ being mutually exclusive). This role of imagery and the not-quite-paradigm-shift of the 1960s will be examined in three main areas of manifestoes: the demise of the functional city and the role of the individual; the image and the place of pop culture; positivist conceptions of technology and its redefinitions in the information age.

I believe it can be shown that the way the architecture debate (both in practice and in theory) has handled these three exemplary areas of architectural production (in both text and built form) is indicative of a far more continuous transition from modernity to postmodernity than is traditionally understood, and that today’s ‘society of the spectacle’ offers, as any cultural transformation does, both opportunities and a loss of earlier definitions. I also believe that the role of imagery in these three areas shows a remarkable consistency of attitude that transcends local cultural differences, and might thus be seen as something that resonates throughout the 1960s, forming a foundation for numerous questions in contemporary (Western) practice. Among the issues that will be addressed in this thesis are the continuing importance of the relationship between the individual and the public/collective; a tension between the image (or now simulacrum) and ‘reality’; the perception of technology as both liberation and constraint. These are the ideas I have tried to clarify and argue in this thesis.

Some of these issues reinforce earlier modernist positions: functionalism and form as an oppositional duality (as if form has no function, or function no form), surface and substance. Some of these dichotomies simply position postmodernism as a new phase of modernism, reviving an essentialist/transcendental belief in certain mutually exclusive dualities, without acknowledging the revolutionary importance (historically) of the contamination of these ‘pure’ ideas. In other words, a Platonic gesture is seen to underwrite history, rather than acknowledging the complexity of everyday life, which is never easily contained within a clearly defined category. This also explains my reference to pragmatism, which takes into account material reality, and an underlying interest in Aristotelian ethics, which sees merit as not only absolute, but also as relative to context.

The role of imagery in this whole constellation becomes critical because rather than setting it as a paragon of how one should live (Le Corbusier, Gropius, et al), in the 1960s it becomes a (political) tool to shatter the modernist conception of architecture as social engineering with the ability to transform its occupants. Imagery becomes a way of communicating rather than ‘teaching.’ Especially in an era where it seems that imagery has its own autonomy, has become an increasingly important part of everyday life, and has also found various production routes beyond only (bourgeois, accepted) art – this role has taken on manifestly other proportions than formerly. This visually oriented culture is complex and should be treated as such – the symbolic importance of imagery written out of modernist tracts was reintroduced in the 1960s, yet some of the simplified repositionings of this role reinforce a transcendental understanding of architecture as an ‘enlightening’ practice.

I. Structure of dissertation

These questions are addressed in this dissertation in two parts: the main section consists of three chapters, while the second section comprises a concluding chapter that has been separated from the body of the text. This is to mark a distinction between chapters 1 through 3, each handling historical and theoretical aspects of the 1960s architecture discourse, and chapter 4, which both draws conclusions from

12 The necessary intermingling of practice and theory will return in Chapter 4. The history of architecture, much more than the history of art, continually sits on the edge between practice and theory; 'disinterested reflection' is a rare condition. Furthermore, architecture in its very fabric is perhaps the most commodified of the arts due to the economic strain of building.

13 The notion of 'resonance' will return throughout the text as defining a coherent set of attitudes in a time. Although Zeitgeist is too loaded a definition for the conditions I am describing here, as Marwick notes there is a certain coherence to the 1960s that delineates a specific cultural and historical period. Marwick, The Sixties, p.17.
the previous chapters and suggests strategies that may be productive in relation to contemporary discourse.

Section I: Chapters 1-3
Chapters 1-3 each focus on a separate theme and work through its treatment in the discourse of the 1960s. The main text is structured by way of these themes and the most radical positions in relation to them. This leads to the following basic focus per chapter:

Chapter 1: the city, with the Situationist International (France) as primary critique
Chapter 2: the image, in the work of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown (USA)
Chapter 3: technology, through the critical projects of Archigram (UK)

Although these main issues and groups form the backbone of each chapter, the work of each is then reflected upon through the others. In other words, after examining the radical position of Archigram on technology, the position of the Situationist International and Venturi and Scott Brown is taken up to reflect upon distinctions and parallels.

This structure allows each chapter to begin with the most radical critique of modernism as its starting point, giving due emphasis to the revolutionary character of many of the 1960s manifestoes. At the same time, by reflecting on these more radical critiques through other positions, their shortcomings can be more easily discussed. The French, American and English contexts have been chosen for their combination of cultural distinction yet overall resonance in re-envisioning modernism in the 1960s. Furthermore, although many of the themes touched upon in these chapters recall work from other places (including Asia, in the heyday of Japanese metabolism), the center of these movements was still located in the transatlantic zone, where the most far-reaching positions of modernism and subsequent revisions were fashioned. The transatlantic debate is also the locus of Pop Art, which also influenced the architecture discourse.

As a final note, the structure of each chapter is straightforward, and largely repeated in each subsequent chapter. Yet the continuous interlacing of different positions in the various cultural contexts is also intended to do some justice to the prolific (and sometimes overwhelming) architecture production of the 1960s. The complexity expressed in the consequent shifting of the group order per chapter illustrates how complex the interrelationships and mutual influence between the different groups were.

As an example of how this is handled in the text, the first area of investigation, the city, revolves around ‘masses.’ This is signaled at the turn of the century by Georg Simmel and Robert Park, for example. Modernism deals with this explicitly, and in the 1960s this problematic is reintroduced. In the 1960s however, the problem is framed from the viewpoint of individual expression against the masses; while it is reminiscent of Baudelaire’s flâneur, the individual here has an active quality rather than being purely an observer. The face of the city had changed – in Europe through the functionalist expansions of the city with a socialist program, while in America this same functionalism seems to have served as an excuse for low-cost housing with maximum profit. The American suburb also bears some resemblance to the European banlieues, in its monofunctionality and extensive repetition of (semi-)standardized housing, but with a different formal expression – the single-family dwelling instead of the multi-family apartment building.

In the 1960s, Lefebvre notes the importance of difference in the city, as does Jane Jacobs (though her position is questionable since it comes from an all-white neighborhood in Greenwich Village); both note the crucial position of individuality against standardization yet embedded within a community. This position is exemplified by the Situationist practices of the dérive, and the psychogeography of the city. One of the framing mechanisms I use for this is the condition of order versus flux, where ‘order’ represents the modernist drive towards monofunctional city zoning, repetition and standardization and a general orderly grid against the chaos of everyday life (Le Corbusier), and ‘flux’ is held as the 1960s introduction of the differential qualities of the everyday and the unpredictable results of individual acts. This notion of flux is thus mainly situated within the context of the city, the first chapter. However it also returns in a different way in Chapter 2, on the image. Since pop imagery is also defined by its disposability and ephemeralism, the introduction of this rapid and continual change in the visual environment amplifies the sense of flux present in 1960s culture. This again is discussed in relation to architecture discourse. The same ephemeralism returns in Chapter 3 in the technological solutions for a newly desired flexibility. In other words, throughout the chapters certain ideas will return in different forms, reinforcing the sense of a cultural cohesion, even though each area also has its own (local) specificities.

Section II: Chapter 4
This chapter has been constructed as a separate, albeit small, section. It performs a dual function: it is both a concluding chapter and an extrapolation to the contemporary discourse. The concluding aspect of the chapter is about signaling the points in the 1960s discourse that were related to their failure today. The extrapolation aspect suggests some strategies that might be helpful in moving beyond the radical oppositions discussed in earlier chapters. This extrapolation seems necessary since the past ten years have seen a vast revival of 1960s material – the Situationists have become increasingly popular on the internet, and have been
revived in architecture debates as well; Venturi and Scott Brown are now perhaps finding the recognition they did not receive earlier, especially since Koolhaas interviewed them in the *Harvard Guide to Shopping*; and Archigram’s popularity has been strong for the past ten years, judging from exhibitions and references.

In general, there has certainly been a revival mode lately. Yet it remains important to not just reiterate forms of the 1960s (proposing a new New Babylon) or the ideals of that generation (in response to a cynical market mechanism), but to examine what went well and above all, what went wrong.

**II. General and Methodological Considerations**

**Theory in Architecture**

This thesis is above all a theory text: it discusses the discourse, interprets a historical period and also utilizes this in relation to the contemporary discourse. By claiming to offer a ‘theory’ however, the need also arises to briefly explicate the position of theory in the architecture discourse. The relationship between theory and practice in architecture has been in question for some time. Theory in the Vitruvian sense – a manifest instructing how to design – has been transformed into something completely different for some time now. The modernist manifestoes often still had some prescriptive relation with practice, but in the second half of the 20th century theory became increasingly independent from the world of architecture design and practice. Kate Nesbitt has offered a useful categorization of types of architecture theory, spanning four types: prescriptive, proscriptive, affirmative and critical.14 The first two have a directly operational relationship to practice, with prescriptive theory forming positive guidelines and proscriptive defined by negative guidelines (what not to do). Affirmative theory, though not defined specifically here, is presumably destined to offer an affirmation of a design’s premises and results, while critical theory is both speculative and polemical, in a strategy of uncovering underlying assumptions or inconsistencies.

Theory as it is utilized today is usually somehow strategic, not the neutral description that it has been presumed to be (Nesbitt p17). Although there are moments of ‘neutral’ description in this dissertation, it is intended as a re-examination of the 1960s towards a renewed (or maybe even revised) understanding of societal conditions and architectural responses in relation to contemporary architecture.15 The text is also positioned within a contemporary history of architecture theory 1965-1995. The text is also positioned within a contemporary theoretical context.

debate returning theory to some relation with practice, where the mutual influence of theory and practice is seen as a productive and beneficial relationship.16 The contemporary condition as a final question should be seen as the frame for this work – rather than a ‘pure’ architecture history, this series of questions and analyses is very much derived from a contemporary questioning that hopes to find a different strategy for architecture theory on an equal level to but not entirely independent from non-verbal products of architecture.17

**Method in Architecture**

The notion of method is problematic in this discourse only insofar as it holds to the methods of the natural sciences (experimentation leading to the induction of a theory) or the notion of an objective truth, to be revealed through study of historical sources. Contemporary architecture discourse has appropriated methods and ideas from various sources. It seems that in a discipline of such complexity (practice and theory, images and words, buildings and linguistic debates) it is worthwhile to take an explicit position that may be debated or refuted on the basis of its own premises.

In relation to this dissertation, this entails my presumption of ‘a’ truth, which is my interpretation of a period of time, and my analysis of the products of that discourse, both visual and linguistic. Since I am discussing revolutionary interventions in the architecture discourse, the selected sources remain primarily in the domain of ‘paper’ architecture: manifestoes and drawn (but not built) projects. I also suggest that this analysis based on interpretation is hermeneutical, but not in the original sense of searching for an actual, existing, autonomous truth behind the text. Rather, it is in a sense what one might refer to as a ‘critical hermeneutics’: it presents an analysis that both questions contemporary issues and hopes to reconfigure their position in practice.18 In this positioning it acknowledges its own historicity (the issues confronted are by definition filtered through the eyes of the contemporary) yet simultaneously accepts it for valuable in its own right (as opposed to seeing it as irrelevant due to its non-transcendental nature). Although this threatens to lead to an operationalized theory, by holding to a middle-ground position of ‘realism’ (which will return in chapter 4) combined with an understanding of the contingency

---


17 This is related also to Hays’ assertion that there is a new condition for theory, one that operates without resistance and negation as in traditional critical theory (following the Frankfurter Schule). K. Michael Hays, *Architecture Theory Since 1968*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998. p. xiv.

18 I use this term because in the work of Habermas for example, the idea of a ‘critical hermeneutics’ unites a critical theory with a notion of praxis or a call to action – again the ‘contaminated’ state of theory and practice that seems most appropriate to the field of architecture.
of historical theorizations, I hope to navigate the sticky waters of contemporary
discussions on method.

Selection of projects
The selection of the main themes derives from a two-fold perspective: on the one
hand, it responds to critical themes in modernism (1920s-30s). On the other hand, it
selects those themes that remained somehow problematic and sowed the seeds for
1960s manifestoes, all with similar revolutionary tendencies.

The specific groups chosen here share a few characteristics. Each produced a
significant body of work in written and visual form that both had a strong influence
on the discourse of the time and reflected some of the key elements. Furthermore,
each group represented some form of radical position, a fundamental revision of
earlier modernist tenets. Finally, each of the these groups have again gained
attention in recent years – there was a large exhibition on the Situationists in 1989,
the Internationale Situationniste was reprinted, as was Archigram, while Robert
Venturi and Denise Scott Brown were interviewed by Koolhaas just recently.19
Somehow, all have intimated something in their body of work from the 1960s that
has been revived recently as critical to our reflection on contemporary conditions. It
is the position held in this dissertation that a re-examination of the desires and
principles of the radical 1960s is necessary today, to not only understand the
immediately preceding history of our time but to learn from it.

The prolific production of the three chosen groups also shows their diversity, which
in the case of this study is necessarily simplified somewhat. The choices here
concern areas of great influence and highly specific responses to high modernism –
the dissertation examines the perceived revolution of the 1960s and to what degree
this perception still holds. Therefore, the main points of ‘revolutionary critique’ are
examined, rather than the (also endlessly fascinating) diverse margins of
production.

19 Exhibition on the Situationist International at the ICA Boston, Internationale
Situationniste reprinted by Fayard (Paris) in 1997. Retrospective of Archigram at the
Taschen, 2001. pp. 593-617
0. Introduction

This thesis revolves around the architectural discourse (and practice) of the 1960s and how its 'radical revolution' forms a transitional period, not quite completing the paradigm shifts it attempted to fulfill with respect to modernism.

The time frame is set from 1956 to 1972. These years serve as an 'extended sixties,' framed by significant moments in the architecture discourse. 1956 saw the collapse of the Congrès Internationale d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), the introduction of Pop art to architecture in the exhibit 'This is Tomorrow,' and the preliminary motions towards the founding of the Situationist International, only a year later. 1972 saw the collapse of the Situationist International and the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe building, exemplifying the failure of modernism and heralding the new era of post-modernism according to Charles Jencks. His choice of the word 'post-modernism' implied a critique of modernism, but also grew into a full-fledged architectural style by the mid-1970s. Although various critiques of high modernism were beginning to surface directly after the Second World War, in the 1960s they begin to produce more than just critique or minor transformations of an overall modernist tendency, coalescing into a larger body of (diverse) cultural criticism.

In a sense, the '60s occupy a unique position: a radical critique of modernism is posed, there is a forceful move towards democratization in the transatlantic world, and the cultural conditions are imbued with a sense of liberation, prosperity and the wonders of technological progress. But this sense of uniqueness should also not be exaggerated. By looking closely at the projects of the 1960s, we can also discern some important continuities and responses, often undervalued, that can inform the contemporary discourse and practice. In this thesis, three crucial areas are traced through the '60s in its resistance to and continuity with modernism: the city, the image and technology.

These main themes have been chosen for their continuing relevance to architecture today. In recent years there has been a revival of numerous 1960s themes and the architecture of the time. Exhibitions abounded on the architecture and culture of the 1960s.20 This revival hints at the importance of the period for contemporary architecture, but by simply framing it as 'radical' or 'pop', some of its significance is lost. This dissertation examines the manifestoes and work of the time to question how the 1960s may be considered radical, and why there was a subsequent failure of its transformative ideals. Understanding this period as underlying contemporary society in its assessment of cultural conditions, mass culture, revolution and democratization may help to better comprehend the position of the critical in architecture, and hopefully find a better balance between the ideals that led to radical critique and the possibility to create an architecture that is neither merely a replication of existing work, nor an embodiment of pure theory. The three main chapters should thus be read not only as a documentation of critiques in the 1960s, but also as an attempt to formulate a different kind of critical practice, which allows for individual agency in the face of mass society, and also for a critical practice within the conditions of capitalism.

The Importance of the Urban Condition

The city has played a prominent role in architectural discourse throughout the twentieth century. The works of Le Corbusier, Georg Simmel, CIAM, Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs and countless others attest to this. Modernity itself is framed by the city; grown out of the industrial era, the city becomes the environment for the modern. Although the approaches to the city from within architectural discourse have been diverse, there are a number of characteristic features shared among the transatlantic debates. This chapter will look at the position of the city in the architecture discourse and practice of the 1960s as a response to the crisis of the functional city. The internal conflicts that led to the collapse of CIAM in 1956 were centered on the shortcomings of rationality and mechanical functionality as defining features of the modernist city. The critique was internal, from a young group of architects who would eventually form Team 10, and focused on the absence of convention, tradition and the everyday.

The similarities between transatlantic discourses (here mainly French, English and American) indicate some overarching questions on the place of the city, the position of the metropolitan individual within it, and transformations in public and civic space. At the same time, their differences may help illuminate why the modernist notion of a single universal form to suit the human environment was in the end a failure. The Situationist International (1957-1972), a movement of artists and intellectuals centered around the self-proclaimed leader Guy Debord (1931-1994) will be the focal point of this chapter, as their critique of the urban condition was perhaps the most radical.

On the most basic level, resistance against the functionalist modern city was framed in terms of 'human relations.' About 40 years after Georg Simmel introduced us to the modern blase metropolitan individual, this indicated a move towards the tribal or rural understanding of human interaction.21 The functionalist city was seen as too mechanical and anonymous to incorporate such things as children playing in

20 An important recent exhibit was Les Années Pop, Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 2001). Recently, the Tate has followed suit with The Sixties: Still radical after all these years, (London, 2004).
fountains (Robert Venturi), ever-changing conditions of life (Alison and Peter Smithson), everyday informal social relations (Jane Jacobs), and the passion of human life (Guy Debord).

Guy Debord envisioned a totality of art and life, where each person was involved in a continual and passionate creation of his own life and its surroundings. This was something he claimed "can only materialize at the level of urbanism." Here, as in many manifestos of the high modern period, the importance of the urban was more than clear. The structure of the functionalist city as proposed by CIAM in the 1933 Charter of Athens was attacked directly by Guy Debord and his colleagues of the Situationist International (hereafter: SI). However, the importance of the city as a place for life was never challenged, indicating that not the city itself, but rather its form and structure were a problem. Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991), a sociologist briefly involved with the Situationist International, even wrote of people’s ‘right to the city’. Although his relationship with the SI was brief (1957-1962) and remained at some distance, Lefebvre was important to its early development. He was teaching at the Sorbonne at the time and although he did not himself become a member of the SI, he did spend many evenings discussing situationist principles with Debord. In this sense he was a mentor to Guy Debord in these early years of the SI, although Debord did not acknowledge him as such.

Mass Culture and the City

An aspect of the city that is central in modernity is the notion of the ‘masses.’ Since the advent of the industrial city, the question of housing large numbers of industrial laborers moving from the countryside has been present. The ‘masses’ and ‘mass culture’ are present in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, the sociology of Simmel and Ferdinand Tönnies, the essays of Walter Benjamin and the philosophy of Theodor Adorno. Works such as ‘Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben’ by Simmel show the relevance of finding a new mode of interaction in the face of anonymous masses of people, as opposed to the traditional rural model of Gemeinschaft, where interaction is formed by social relations. As we shall see later, this aspect of the ‘mass-ness’ of the twentieth-century city had its repercussions on not only the form of the city itself but on its representations and on the human interactions within it. The latter two especially begin to play a critical role in the 1960s, when a general reconsideration of the status of the city and the flaws of modernist representations is being made. These issues resonate throughout the transatlantic context, but the specific nature of the American, English and French contexts also illuminate the different forms the critiques take. Moreover, the ‘massiveness’ of the twentieth-century metropolis takes form both as a social and a cultural phenomenon. This results in for example a French discourse that attempts to engage the urban masses in social revolution (SI), and on the other an English discourse that takes up the symbolic language of mass culture as signifying liberation from architecture as an elite institution (Independent Group). The complexity of this two-sided nature of mass culture became increasingly apparent in the 1960s, when there was a further extension of the influence of mass culture through the mechanisms of what Debord calls the ‘spectacle.’ The imagery of consumer capitalism introduced a new level of mass imagery, and the mass media helped transmit it. This phenomenon, based on recognizable imagery (thus also transcending cultural boundaries) also contributed to the homogenization of public space.

Furthermore, we could argue that the overwhelming ‘mass-ness’ of the 1960s city (such as the Parisian banlieues) is not only about the actual number of people living in the city, but also about an increasingly global sensibility. In part this is related to the increase in travel and communications. Yet for the architecture discourse it is also seeded in the modernist notion of a universal form, by which cultural differences were to be transcended by the general applicability of an industrial form. This idea of universal form allowed the debates on appropriate architectural

---


24 Accounts of the relationship between Lefebvre and the SI vary. The SI accused Lefebvre of stealing situationist theses for his work on the Paris commune, while Lefebvre describes his own work as one of the inspirations for the SI. The accusations of plagiarism are to be found in L’historien Lefebvre’ in IS 10 (March 1966) pp. 485-487. For Lefebvre’s account of his relationship with the SI, see Kristin Ross, ‘Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview’ in: Tom McDonough, ed. Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002. pp. 267-283.

25 The most notable here is perhaps Friedrich Engels’ The Housing Question (1872-1873), but also early utopian projects such as those by Charles Fourier (phalanstère, 1829) and Robert Owen (New Lanark, 1814), and later Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City (1898-1902), followed later by the 1933 Charte d’Athènes (CIAM). All were addressing a new problematic that was endemic to the city of the industrial age.

---


27 Here, other obvious and important references for the architecture discourse are Baudelaire’s flaneur and Benjamin’s discussion of what we can now see as the beginning of mass consumption in the department stores of Paris. The term Gemeinschaft derives from Ferdinand Tönnies, and will form an important part of the discussion of city space in this chapter. Gemeinschaft implies an interaction between people based on social ties, as found in rural societies, and is opposed to Gesellschaft, where interaction is regulated through rules rather than social bonds, as in the anonymous condition of the metropolitan society.

28 The specific issue of mass culture and its imagery is discussed in chapter 2.

29 The global became more important with the increasing sophistication of media technologies, as will also return in chapter 3 on technology (see also note 1).
form to no longer be bound by local traditions and cultural differences, but rather by the ostensibly ‘neutral’ issues of program and industrial fabrication.

**Individual Resistance**

The radical critique of the functionalist city as posed by the Situationist International bears some similarity to other critiques such as that of Team 10 and Jane Jacobs in one particular aspect that we will discuss much more later: the notion of individual resistance against a perceived ‘machinery’ of domination. Although there are important distinctions between the various movements to be discussed, especially in what form this ‘machinery’ takes and how the ‘individual’ is framed, the idea that resistance is to be found from within individual freedom and creativity appears an integral part of most of the discussions. The position of the individual in relation to a collective body (anonymous in the case of the city) is also fundamental to the idea of the Gemeinschaft as opposed to Gesellschaft, and to the work of Simmel on the individual in the metropolis.

In their treatment of the ‘creative individual,’ the SI can also be seen as exemplary for the artistic movements of the time. Although they propagate a strong belief in the liberating power of the free and conscious will of each (romanticized) individual, they also claim the need at this moment in history to guide these imminently self-sufficient individuals towards their utopian destiny. Their theory of liberation is based on purely individual resistance, yet still claims the need for leadership by a vanguard (namely themselves) until the new society is realized. This ambiguity is critical to the treatment of the city in the latter half of the twentieth century, and will be discussed at length in this chapter.

**I. Living with the legacy of the modernist city**

A. France: Activist Urban Practice of The Situationist International

The most radical of the city critiques examined in this chapter comes from the Situationist International, founded in July 1957, which consisted of various (and ever-shifting) groupings of artists and intellectuals. Its membership and subgroupings extended throughout Europe, but the center of the movement was based in Paris, as was its self-proclaimed leader Guy Debord. The movement was rooted primarily in two movements from the early 1950s: the Lettrist International (LI) and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB), combining the conceptual tendency of the LI with the more expressionist artistic values of the IMIB. The main people involved with the inception of the Situationist International in 1957 were the artists Constant (CoBrA) and Asger Jorn (CoBrA and IMIB), and the political theorist Guy Debord (LI). The propositions of the SI were published in the twelve issues of their journal *Internationale Situationniste*, published intermittently from 1958 to 1969, on average once a year. The work of the SI is diverse and incorporates influences from many disciplines. Since the primary focus in this chapter is on work that has been influential to the architecture discourse, the work of Debord and Constant will remain central, as they contributed significantly to the SI critiques on the modern city. Additionally, the work of Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) will be addressed as essential to a number of situationist ideas.

During the years of the SI, 1957-1972, many different viewpoints were espoused under the large umbrella of situationism as a general condition of resistance, but the most consistent three points revolved around the city, the spectacle and everyday life. The city and conditions of everyday life featured prominently as central concerns in the early issues of *Internationale Situationniste*. To the SI, the environment of the contemporary city did not offer sufficient conditions for all aspects of life, especially since the functionalist tenets of the CIAM Charter of Athens (1933) had reduced life to three activities: work, dwelling and leisure, which were connected by a fourth: travel. This separation of zones negated the importance of unexpected encounters in the city (fig. 1.1). The critique of the spectacle became increasingly important in later years of the SI, coming to fruition in Debord’s *La Société du Spectacle* in 1967. The spectacle, as “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image,” added to the poverty of the physical environment by denying its importance and simply shifting attention to consumption and imagery as the primary activities in life, transforming everyone into a passive spectator (fig. 1.2). The spectacle was thus also a means of maintaining dominance in a capitalist society. The problems of everyday life were exacerbated by the poverty of the environment and the domination of the spectacle. The anemic version of everyday life in this city dominated by spectacle was precisely where the situationist transformation was to take place. The SI believed that only an active engagement with the everyday environment would finally lead to a transformation in all spheres of life.

Some general observations can be made about the work of the Situationists with respect to the city. In the early years, the city was a critical part of their discourse, both as an existing environment to be mined for as yet unrecognized significance in other things. Here again it becomes clear that the 1960s were not an anomaly with a full-fledged critique of modernity arising from nothing, but rather a critical mass growing from the postwar critiques. For a full genealogy of the Situationist International (SI), see Sadler, *The Situationist City*, pp. 2-12.

The official viewpoint of the SI was that ‘situationism’ as such did not exist or was conceived by ‘anti-situationists’, since the -ism implied a doctrine (SI 1, p.13). The word will be used here to indicate the general activities and theory of the SI despite this official position.


---

30 CoBrA was a group of artists from Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam (1948-1951); the Lettrist International was a group of artists and theorists based in Paris (1952-1957); IMIB was founded by Jorn in 1954 to address the place of artists in the machine age, among...
and as a conceptual problem due to the failure of the modernist city. At this time, their treatment of the city still had some relation to 'form,' in the sense that the sterile forms of the functionalist city were critiqued, and a major component of their work towards a 'unitary urbanism,' aimed at "l'emploi d'ensemble des arts et techniques concourant à la construction intégrale d'un milieu," took shape in the design of the future city New Babylon by Constant. Although the city remained an important part of situationist critique, the possibility of designing the future at all slowly became a problem for Debord, and the combination of critique and design made way for pure critique. These are also the years (1961-1967) when Debord's critique becomes increasingly oriented towards a Marxist interpretation of the power structures embodied in the city, explaining for example how "the history of cities ... is also a history of tyranny, of State administration controlling not only the country but also the city itself." He also discusses urbanism as "the mode of appropriation of the natural and human environment by capitalism." Although it is becoming increasingly clear to him that the city of the future cannot be envisioned until the revolution has happened, he still firmly believes that an active class struggle in the city will lead us beyond the congealed forms of domination now ever-present in the urban environment. This active struggle is aimed specifically at opposing the passivity inherent in the spectacle, which underlies the analysis he offers in his 1967 Society of the Spectacle, shortly before the student revolts in Paris. From then until the disbanding of the SI, their engagement with the city seems to become ever more dependent on active revolt (such as the events in Paris in May 1968) and on a radical break with the existing societal structure of the spectacle (fig. 1.3).

Although the actual influence of the situationists in the 1960s (and especially on the events of May '68) is still debated, their critique of the city shows a few traits that might be said to demonstrate a certain resonance with other critiques of the time. As will be shown below, parallels can be seen throughout the transatlantic discourse. Therefore, despite their status as a subculture, the SI will be used to examine a certain combination of features that might be said to define not only the

---

31 IS 1, p.13, "the combined use of arts and techniques as a means of contributing to the construction of a unified milieu." translation by Ken Knabb available online at: http://www.bopsecrerts.org/SI/index.htm. last accessed Nov. 16, 2004
32 On the level of theory, Raoul Vaneigem also plays an important role in the SI with his critiques on the banality of everyday life, especially in this later period. However, since his work has been less specifically referenced in the architecture discourse, it remains outside the scope of this study.
33 Debord, Society of the Spectacle, thesis 176, p.124
34 Debord, Society of the Spectacle, thesis 169, p.121
break with the modern city in the 1960s, but also the contemporary understanding of this time as a period of revolutionary resistance. 38

Undermining the Modernist City by Using it Against the Grain

One of the goals of the SI was to open up a space of resistance in the city, a resistance to the dominant progressivist thought of high modernism. The way they hoped to do so was simply by using the city – by walking through it, by reclaiming what was interesting, by remapping it and editing out what was in their view uninteresting (mostly the modernist developments). In this revaluing of the inhabitant of the city as a productive element in the creation of space, the Situationists are extremely connected to the work of Henri Lefebvre and the later work of Michel De Certeau. Lefebvre was deeply involved with the SI for some time (1957-1961/62), although the intellectual exchange (like so many others) fell apart after too many disagreements. 39

The work of Henri Lefebvre in particular was important to the Situationists because it incorporated notions of the everyday (the *vie quotidienne*) and a theory of moments, which to the SI was related to their theory of situations. 40 His later thoughts on the people’s ‘droit à la ville’ demonstrate many connections with situationist thought in its emphasis on the social needs of people as opposed to the pure functionality offered by architects and urbanists. The importance of sociology in the situationist formulation of a critique on the modernist city is visible throughout the early texts. 41 At the same time, they transformed these sociological analyses of the city and everyday life into a call to action. Thus on the one hand the SI introduced techniques of ‘drifting’ and other forms of ‘mapping’ as a conceptual tool, critical of existing ways to understand urban space. On the other hand, since their strategies were dependent on action, on the actual use of the city (and not on its image or their passive reception of it) these strategies also formed a praxis intended both to engage and perceive that space in a different way.

---

38 Arthur Marwick, for example, holds fast to the idea that the 1960s embodied a cultural revolution. *The Sixties.* pp. 16-20.
40 "Théorie des moments et construction des situations," *IS* 4, p.10-11. (ed. Fayard, p.118-119). In this piece, they also criticize Lefebvre's idea of moments for being too abstract and general, while their situations involve a creative praxis. The ‘everyday’ with its implication of habits accrued over time, is more present in the French discourse, while the English and American debates center more on the ‘ordinary,’ which tends more towards an aesthetic.
41 For example in *IS 1*, the definition of psychogeography (p.13) implicitly resorts to techniques of social geography, and an image by Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe (urban sociologist, 1913-1998) is used to demonstrate the narrow scope of urban experience of a city inhabitant. (*IS 1*, p.28)
Situationist definitions

The SI originally framed their break with the functionalist city in a number of definitions, each of which are significant in their relationship to the terminology of high modernism. In 1958, in the first issue of Internationale Situationniste, a brief definition is offered of all the important situationist terms, including the dérive, situation, psychogeography and unitary urbanism.

The dérive (drifting), as one of the first practices intentionally construed to investigate sides of the city repressed by functionalism, was a practice in which “one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.” In this process of dropping their usual motives for movement, the people involved in a dérive were moving against the intent of the functionalist city. Rather than moving from point A to point B in the most efficient manner, they were letting themselves drift along on the flow of ‘ambiances’ (not a word typically used in the rationalized modernist discourse) they encountered in the city. Rather than a strictly quantitative definition of their movement based on an efficient use of time, they were ‘wasting’ time by following intuitions that were not determinable within the framework of functionalism.

Despite the resistance to an over-rationalization of life as proposed by functionalism, these personal ‘intuitions’ about city spaces were by no means seen as an undefinable quality. The dérive was considered a scientific endeavor within the ranks of the SI. Their intention was to develop a ‘psychogeography’ of the city, which was to be developed out of the dérive. As noted above, psychogeography implicitly refers to techniques of social geography, insofar as it examines the relation between the social and physical environment and also lays claim to an aspect of scientific research. Psychogeography is defined as the study of “the exact laws and precise effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, acting directly on the affective deportment of individuals.” Although Debord admits in this text that there is not yet any way of ascertaining whether there is an objective truth to his psychogeographical data, he is confident that psychogeography will progress towards a scientific method. For him, the combination of its methods of observation and its mode of experimentation in the existing city leaves no doubt that objective results will eventually be attained. The modernist idea of functionalism is thus undermined in its restrictive reduction of the city into four zones, but the idea of objectivity and scientific definition, also a large part of modernist discourse, is still upheld.

The insertion of the phrase ‘consciously organized or not’ offers an oblique reference to the definition of ‘constructed situations,’ from which the movement derived its name. Situations are “the concrete constructions of temporary settings of life and their transformation into a higher, passionate nature.” This definition especially encapsulates the goal of a passionate, active participation in the creation of one’s own life and surroundings, which the SI sets against the passive reception of all the spectacle has to offer (thus asserting the power of the dominant class).

The spectacle is what Debord will eventually define as “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.” This relatively cryptic definition is often quoted as indicative of the permanent state of illusion we are all trapped in. Although ideas leading to the spectacle such as examinations of advertising and mass culture are present in the early discourse of the SI, it becomes of primary importance much later, when the SI has taken leave of the idea of being able to offer a formal definition for a future society. To Debord, the society of the spectacle is particularly problematic because it leaves everyone in a terminal state of passivity, unable to truly intervene in their own lives. Yet as with much of his writing, it remains somewhat unclear what his alternative is to this spectacle. Shattering the spectacle is the final goal of situationist strategies, yet what precisely constitutes these settings of a ‘higher, passionate nature’ is unclear. Perhaps the typical drunken revelry of the dérives unlocked a mystical understanding of the ‘totality’ of art and life, but the only visual definition of the principles of the dérive is to be found in the psychogeographical maps of Paris by Debord and Asger Jorn, and the design for New Babylon by Constant Nieuwenhuys (figs. 1.4, 1.5).

As Sadler indicates (Situationist City, p11, ff. 38) all these terms are already used in Potlatch. However, it is in Debord’s ‘Report on the Construction of Situations’ at the conference in Arroscio that they begin to circumscribe a coherent theoretical position, then to become the SI. The definitions are reiterated and compiled in the first issue of IS (p13).

42 As Sadler indicates (Situationist City, p11, ff. 38) all these terms are already used in Potlatch. However, it is in Debord’s ‘Report on the Construction of Situations’ at the conference in Arroscio that they begin to circumscribe a coherent theoretical position, then to become the SI. The definitions are reiterated and compiled in the first issue of IS (p13).


44 In IS 1 the dérive is defined as: “Mode de comportement expérimental lié aux conditions de la société urbaine: technique du passage hâtif à travers des ambiances variées. Se dit aussi, plus particulièrement, pour désigner la durée d’un exercice continu de cette expérience.” (p13)


46 Debord, ‘Report on the Construction of Situations’, in: McDonald, ed. p.44. The situation construite, defined as: “Moment de la vie, concrètement et délibérément construit par l’organisation collective d’une ambiance unitaire en d’un jeu d’événements.” (IS 1, p.13)


48 For a close examination of the full trajectory of the design for New Babylon from a contemporary perspective, see Wigley, Hyper-Architecture of Desire.
projects begin early in the course of the SI, with New Babylon first taking form in 1956, and the psychogeographies beginning in 1957.

At first, the project for New Babylon is also treated as the only example of ‘unitary urbanism,’ which forms a significant part of the urban discussions in early issues of *Internationale Situationniste*. The third and fourth issues of *IS* contain images of New Babylon to support the critique of the modernist city and demonstrate the possible environment of unitary urbanism (fig. 1.6). Until Debord finally denies any possibility of imagining a future form, New Babylon takes up a prominent place in the discussions of the SI. “Unitary urbanism … aims to form a unitary human milieu in which separations such as work/leisure or public/private will finally be dissolved.” Unitary urbanism will create the situationist city, where everyone can continually be engaged in transforming their own environment and creating situations, in other words, in living the totality of art and life. In New Babylon, there will be no spectacle, only lived experience. Separation is truly dissolved in New Babylon because its environment is not static – every conceivable boundary can be reconfigured depending on the needs and desires of its occupants. As we shall see in relation to other discussions of the city, this notion of ‘flux’ or continual change is one of the most commonly used elements in the 1960s in order to transform or critique the modernist city.

*Dérive as the other function: dreaming, feeling, sensing*

As noted above, the SI was not geared towards obliterating the idea of functions as important to city form, but rather the ‘absolute functionalism’ of CIAM. In their view, this absolute functionalism had destroyed much of the traditional fabric of the city. Their understanding of the *dérive* as a ‘drifting’ through the city in small groups to map out the ‘feeling’ or the ‘ambiance’ of neighborhoods was aimed explicitly at clarifying which zones of the city were critical to an urban experience without necessarily following the divisions of functionalism into work, dwelling, traffic and leisure. The position of the situationists revolved around finding ‘passion’ on the one hand to undermine the notion of ‘function’ as the only gauge of whether a city is well-constructed. On the other hand, they were also looking for

---

49 *Urbanisme unitaire*: “Théorie de l’emploi d’ensemble des arts et techniques concourant à la construction intégrale d’un milieu en liaison dynamique avec des expériences de comportement.” *(IS* 1, p.13)


51 Debord, ‘positions situationnistes sur la circulation’, *IS* #3 (dec 1959). This translation from Knabb, as quoted in Sadler, *Situationist City*, p.25

52 Constant had already written a piece in 1953 on the importance of the situation in relation to the city. (see Kristin Ross, *Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview*, in: McDonough, ed. pp. 267-283.)

53 These four are the basic categories of the Charter of Athens (1933). Traffic was seen as the connection between the three main groups of human activity.

chapter 1 – city

fig. 1.6. Constant, New Babylon model, as published in IS 3 (1959).

fig. 1.7. Ralph Rumney, Psychogeographic map of Venice. 1957. photocollage of a dérive.

chapter 1 – city
The 'psychological functions' that had not been addressed in the modernist discourse (figs. 1.7, 1.8).

The psychogeographical maps resulting from these dérives attempted to represent the 'sensibility' of a neighborhood rather than its traffic flow or its programmed activity. To frame the underlying issues in a transatlantic setting, we can compare this aspect of situationist activity to the work of Kevin Lynch in Image of the City (1960), who was trying to make the everyday understanding of our environment comprehensible by gathering data on how people mentally map their own environment. This resulted in a primarily symbolic interpretation of the environment, with paths, nodes and landmarks determining a city's appearance. In analogy to the intentions of the dérive, Lynch was looking for representations of the city and how they relate to our experience of them, rather than to the formal, utopian representations of Le Corbusier's Ville Radièsse. In both of these cases, the hope was also to find some kind of scientifically objective manner to represent or understand phenomena that had not yet been addressed by the modernist manifestoes on the city. These two different examples of responding to the functionalist city are indicative of the transatlantic level of the discourse. For both Lynch and the situationists (and numerous others), this objectivity was to be obtained primarily through the methods of sociology: by interviews and statistical data, by taking many different viewpoints into account and subsequently combining these into something approaching an objective perception.

There is a critical distinction between the two, however. The situationists were operating from the Marxist understanding of power and alienation. Their understanding of the city in which we could all become free was based on the idea that we must somehow liberate the creative individual inside. In other words, following the Marxist line of thought—each person was, in his core, a creative and self-motivated, self-sufficient individual; the only reason this was unable to express itself was through the modes of domination placed upon him by an unsatisfactory society. In the case of Marx this was still attributed to the domination of the bourgeoisie in a system of blossoming capitalism; by the time the Situationists had adapted Marxist ideas to the consumer-oriented society, the domination of imagery and spectacle was the main concern. In both early Marxism and its later form in the SI, however, we can argue that it involves a hopelessly romantic view of the individual, who, precisely because of his uncultivated nature, has an 'authentic' or unmediated relation to the world and to his own nature, and is therefore to be admired. The idea that some kind of pure, unmediated relationship with the world

---

54 Although Lynch's work is much more oriented towards a documentation of visual mapping, the idea of mapping is important throughout the 1960s discourse as a way to connect the perceptions of the environment to a more overall scientific understanding of the environment.
might actually exist is questionable to begin with, and if it does exist, how would we be able to recognize it as such? This romanticized understanding of the primitive, uncultured or rural man, always somehow related to an 'essence' of humanity that is invisible to most, is a recurring phenomenon throughout modernity, and the situationists have by no means escaped it. What they have however achieved is to invert the framework of this romanticism sufficiently to open up other avenues of understanding.

The dérive as practiced by the situationists was perhaps flawed in its dependence on individual creativity and sensibility, yet it did show a major gap in the modernist utopia: the absence of such human qualities as desire, intuition, feeling. Although these may not be quantifiable or directly applicable to a design, their absence in the modernist city could clarify why the perfectly designed open parks and playgrounds were not being efficiently utilized as expected. There was something missing in these designs, something that ran counter to rational understanding. This missing piece of the puzzle was to be found precisely in the traditional and conventional understanding of the city that had been dismissed by the modernists. Since in their view the modern era demanded of everyone that they live accordingly, they simply denied that societal convention was part of that modern era – that the ‘Gesellschaftliche’ metropolis so aptly described by Georg Simmel was not ‘just modern,’ but incorporated all the conflicting tendencies of the rural and the urban, the individual and the collective, the private and the public. Therefore, by positing that the order of the modern city must by necessity acknowledge the non-quantifiable, non-functional aspects of human behavior in a collective environment, the situationists brought something new and critical to the surface.

An important thing here is to also look at how these new developments were represented. In the case of the situationists, their dérive-based maps of Paris were not related to a symbol-based perception in the way Lynch had constructed but were truly and simply maps, reconfigured to direct us to the intense neighborhoods and with white spaces for the areas with no ambiance (fig. 1.9). This cartographic representation did not cede to public symbols, nor did it try to create an image of a better city. As we shall see throughout their work on the city, especially after Constant resigned in 1960, the situationists continually undermined the possibility of creating an image for the city. In this sense, their application of imagery was absolutely appropriate to the notion that we must break through the spectacle to find an unmediated form of living. What I will argue later, however, is that this reductivist position (either spectacle or life) misjudges the multivalent quality of imagery, and the associative meanings that leave room for more than a single perception. Only the strategy of détournement puts the strength of imagery to use, yet it too becomes subjugated to the role of societal critique.

Anti-functionalism as both liberation and return

An environment subject to continual transformation is radically anti-functionalist, at least in the sense of the rational functions founding modernity. Rather than the clear, stable surroundings where each space is devoted to a certain aspect of life (working, dwelling, leisure), unitary urbanism proposes a radical dissolution of all separations. This is a vision against efficiency, against a predetermined use of space and against the programmatic boundaries sketched out in the Charter of Athens.

The principles of an ever-changing environment and the dissolution of boundaries are simultaneously a liberation from the fetters of functionalism, a forward-looking utopian idea of a progressive society based on leisure and individual agency; and a return to the traditional European city, which more than anything is defined by the multiplicity of its spaces. The chaos of the traditional city that caused Le Corbusier to propose a separation of functions, is precisely what attracted the SI to the traditional city. The unexpected was to be enjoyed, especially if it was inefficient. As Henri Lefebvre would later write, the people had a 'right to the city,' because the city potentially has so much diversity and culture to offer. Yet this potential is currently unfulfilled because of the reductive nature of the modern city. According to Lefebvre, not only is the right to the city ‘manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit.’\(^55\)

More than anything it also requires a different understanding of the urban. Instead of the functional determination of the modernist city, urban needs would entail ‘those of qualified places, places of simultaneity and encounters.’\(^56\) Although Lefebvre and the SI claim that the traditional city itself is not the answer to this need for a richer environment, they both return to traditional spaces in the city as more meaningful. This ambiguity in the significance of the SI’s anti-functionalist strategies is illustrated in the psychogeographic maps of Paris generated by Debord and Jorn. As noted above, their maps show a vast amount of white space, indicating places that have no ‘ambiance;’ and otherwise consist of islands of ‘attractive’ city spaces, usually the more traditional neighborhoods. These maps end up showing both the traditional sides of the city (in its direct clippings of the map), yet also prefigure later ideas on the rhizome in their non-hierarchical relations, as well as resembling the notion of heterotopias, in their distinct yet simultaneously present clusters of this city space. The environments mapped out by Debord and Jorn exist alongside one another, yet are not necessarily connected.

The situationist ideas on the city will continue to straddle these two treatments of the urban environment. On the one hand it embodies the progressive idea of a liberating city, or a radical city that cannot yet be given form. On the other, it uses and examines the material of the traditional city, it allows for the possibility of finding elements in the existing spaces that critique the sterility of Le Corbusier’s utopian city (figs. 1.10, 1.11). Until the idea that a future city could by definition not yet be designed took hold, Constant’s design for New Babylon was an important part of the progressive theories on the city. It was radically new, and in this it still followed certain principles of the modern: it did not refer to traditional form and it was premised on technological progress (fig. 1.12). What it did not subscribe to was the clarity and order espoused by Le Corbusier, which was a common theme among critiques of the city. A general sense that the four purely delineated functions of working, dwelling, leisure and travel were simply insufficient to house the full breadth of human life was shared among contemporaries such as the members of the Independent Group in England and the journalist Jane Jacobs in the United States. The simultaneous turn to the existing conditions of the traditional city can therefore also be framed as a critique of the tenets of functionalism. Radical solutions such as New Babylon were proposed in opposition to the sterile city of Le Corbusier, yet a careful study of the traditional city fabric held the same kind of significance. The dérive was based on mapping out what functionalism could not address. Similarly, Jacobs was intent on describing the views of the city that Le Corbusier’s eyes could not see.

Despite the resistance against a functionalist perception of the city, the progressive beliefs of the situationist city still affirm the teleology of modernism. Even in the vastly different formal expression of New Babylon and psychogeography from the earlier machine aesthetic models, there is a belief that progression is still possible. The activism proclaimed by the SI has as its task to tempt the creative individual into transforming his environment. The belief that this would somehow create that ‘totality of art and life’ implies that, despite its movable forms, unitary urbanism then creates a finalized totality.

Sociology Engaged: Lefebvre and the Situationists
Both responses, radical liberation and the return to the traditional city, resist the rationalized and mechanical view of humanity underlying modernism as it was formulated by Le Corbusier. This is also where the 1960s interest in sociology comes in – a need for a scientific study of existing human patterns in full breadth.

The increasing importance of sociology to the architecture discourse, beginning with the work of Georg Simmel and his seminal text ‘Metropolis and Mental Life’ in 1903, finds a new focus in the 1960s with the turn to what is already present in the city as a form of resistance to the functional city. As Jane Jacobs points out, the...
fig. 1.10. Le Corbusier. View of the Contemporary City (1922).

fig. 1.11. Diagram illustrating rationalization of human movement. IS 6 (1961)

fig. 1.12. Constant, New Babylon. Model showing technical structure, with ground plane reserved for traffic.
modernists were so busy studying what there 'ought to be' in the city, that they neglect to acknowledge the cohesive structures that are already there. By turning to the discipline of sociology, the discourse of architecture not only begins to acknowledge the vitality of the traditional city, but now finds a discipline that can frame the social relations within the city in a historical and objective manner.

**Henri Lefebvre’s proclamation of the people’s ‘right to the city’**

As early as 1947, Henri Lefebvre proclaims the importance of the city in terms of amenities and more than anything, community life as a fundamental aspect of everyday experience. This notion of community life is where most of the answers seem to lie, as the understanding of community has gone through so many transformations over the past century. Two distinct definitions of community life can be seen in the early twentieth century. On the one hand there is the traditional village ideal we are familiar with from Heidegger’s *Building Dwelling Thinking*, where there is a naturalized relation between man and his environment, man and his soil, and thus the community extends out through a shared sense of the relation with the landscape (which is also defined in opposition to the city). On the other there is the modernist (or techno-progressivist) nearly mechanical sense of community, where community life is both organized (through leisure time, shared labor and universal standards) and rationalized – a more urban ideal.

Particularly in its early years, the SI was influenced heavily by the work of Lefebvre, who was offering various forms of understanding the city fabric that went directly against the beliefs of Le Corbusier. For example, Lefebvre’s *Production of Space* introduces ideas such as ‘lived space’ and ‘conceived space’ to analyze the distinction between the idealized models of space in architectural drawing and the occupant’s experience of that same space. His discussions of the everyday, important to the SI, introduce a sensitivity towards patterns of spatial appropriation that are not acknowledged in the utopian modernist city models. The field of sociology is also an opportunity to somehow measure or quantify people in a new way. Instead of the purely spatial qualification of the Modulor (how tall, what space needed to sit, to swing arms, to sleep), the idea of psychogeography incorporates other qualifications such as emotional response to certain streets. The images presented by the SI as a crystallization of their own ‘sociological’ experiments in the space of the city are still in the form of plans, albeit transformed, with parts eliminated, and images and texts added.

---

58 Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, vol. 1, 1947.
59 As noted, a major break occurred between the SI and Lefebvre. This was already fairly early, in 1962. (see the interview with Kristin Ross in McDonough, ed.). Again this demonstrates the importance of the city to the SI prior to 1962.
One key point made by Lefebvre is the distinction between urbanization and industrialization. Where these two are often equated in modernism, the distinction makes the SI’s turn to a different kind of (non-mechanistic) urbanity comprehensible. Also, Lefebvre’s Marxist underpinnings, visible in his understanding the sociology of the city as part of a class struggle, no doubt helped form Debord’s understanding of the city as a representation of dominant power structures. His definitions of the ‘society of the spectacle’ revolve around an urbanism that is intimately linked to high capitalism.

This remains one of the strongest distinctions between the debates of Europe and those of the US at the time. The space of the public and the private are different from the distinction Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft here, since the ‘public’ now revolves around the commodity, and the intrusion of the image in everyday life. Where the original notion of Gemeinschaft was clearly related to the public square, to the architectural space of the public, it has now shifted toward a more ethereal (disembodied and image-based) condition of public. Although something is lost in the disappearance of the public square, the space that this disembodiment has opened up has created an additional space of dialogue and negotiation.

**From Order to Flux**

Throughout the 1960s, terms such as ‘flux,’ ‘flexibility’ and ‘freedom’ are continually present in every discussion on the city. The fixation on this kind of terminology is related to the need to manifest individuality (as opposed to the mechanical collectivity of the modernist city), as well as the need to address the failure of universal form (thought possible by modernism) and the desire to replace a static and permanent design with space for changing conditions. The idea that an ever-changing life necessitated an ever-changing environment is most radically given form in the New Babylon project; other interpretations tended towards a static infrastructure with a flexible infill. The question remains whether this metonymic translation is any more appropriate than the modernist transposition of the creative individual as a resistance to mechanical (and orderly) collectivity and therefore possibly varying per culture but rather as an inevitable expression of some ‘essence’ of modernity. Both of these presumptions were re-examined in the 1960s. In some projects such as New Babylon, a certain level of this cultural neutrality is still evident: Constant does propose that his city will address a fundamental human condition. His designs are projected on different locations, and although the final form may vary according to the desires of its inhabitants, the basic structure is seen to be applicable everywhere. His version of flux is to become a new world order (fig. 1.13).

Flux or flexibility as a formal condition thus easily becomes the same universally applicable principle as the formal purity of the modernist city. Space for the expression of individuality as a resistance to mechanical (and orderly) collectivity is a more ephemeral condition, and more difficult to express in design. For the Smithsons, the solution was to be found in offering a stable infrastructure that would allow freedom within, such as in their Cluster City (1957-1959). For Constant, the creativity of the individual would manifest itself in the final and ever-changing form of New Babylon, simply because all the individuals would be engaged in a continual transformation of their environment.

**Asserting the Primacy of the Creative Individual**

Again, in terms of the position of the individual, the work of the SI proves itself more radical than their contemporaries struggling to address similar problems. The Smithsons, as mentioned above, leave room for change within a stable infrastructure, thereby positioning themselves as designers of an environment that simply leaves some details up to its inhabitants. The infrastructure itself is still treated as a concrete design problem, and the architect is still seen to have a certain relevance in shaping collective space.

Although the same could be said of New Babylon, in the sense that it is an actual design proposal and has a form given to it by Constant, there is a very different premise here. In New Babylon, the final form will always be determined by the sum total of individual actions. This is both a reiteration and an inversion of Le Corbusier’s city. It inverts the idea that a city’s form can determine the behavior of what the modernist city had wrought. Its static and clearly defined order was seen as restrictive; the individual occupant was forced into a straitjacket of expected behavior that had nothing to do with traditional patterns or convention. At the same time, the form of the modernist city was conceived of as the penultimate solution, not only negating the possible impact on design of changing conditions but also in direct opposition to its own premises of change and the ephemeral. One problem of this universal form posited by modernism is that it presumes a cultural neutrality of design, which is expressed in their idea of a universally applicable formal language. This language was not treated as ‘formal’ (in the sense of relating to conventions and therefore possibly varying per culture) but rather as an inevitable expression of some ‘essence’ of modernity. Both of these presumptions were re-examined in the 1960s. In some projects such as New Babylon, a certain level of this cultural neutrality is still evident: Constant does propose that his city will address a fundamental human condition. His designs are projected on different locations, and although the final form may vary according to the desires of its inhabitants, the basic structure is seen to be applicable everywhere. His version of flux is to become a new world order (fig. 1.13).

Flux or flexibility as a formal condition thus easily becomes the same universally applicable principle as the formal purity of the modernist city. Space for the expression of individuality as a resistance to mechanical (and orderly) collectivity is a more ephemeral condition, and more difficult to express in design. For the Smithsons, the solution was to be found in offering a stable infrastructure that would allow freedom within, such as in their Cluster City (1957-1959). For Constant, the creativity of the individual would manifest itself in the final and ever-changing form of New Babylon, simply because all the individuals would be engaged in a continual transformation of their environment.

** Asserting the Primacy of the Creative Individual**

Again, in terms of the position of the individual, the work of the SI proves itself more radical than their contemporaries struggling to address similar problems. The Smithsons, as mentioned above, leave room for change within a stable infrastructure, thereby positioning themselves as designers of an environment that simply leaves some details up to its inhabitants. The infrastructure itself is still treated as a concrete design problem, and the architect is still seen to have a certain relevance in shaping collective space.

Although the same could be said of New Babylon, in the sense that it is an actual design proposal and has a form given to it by Constant, there is a very different premise here. In New Babylon, the final form will always be determined by the sum total of individual actions. This is both a reiteration and an inversion of Le Corbusier’s city. It inverts the idea that a city’s form can determine the behavior of what the modernist city had wrought. Its static and clearly defined order was seen as restrictive; the individual occupant was forced into a straitjacket of expected behavior that had nothing to do with traditional patterns or convention. At the same time, the form of the modernist city was conceived of as the penultimate solution, not only negating the possible impact on design of changing conditions but also in direct opposition to its own premises of change and the ephemeral. One problem of this universal form posited by modernism is that it presumes a cultural neutrality of design, which is expressed in their idea of a universally applicable formal language. This language was not treated as ‘formal’ (in the sense of relating to conventions and therefore possibly varying per culture) but rather as an inevitable expression of some ‘essence’ of modernity. Both of these presumptions were re-examined in the 1960s. In some projects such as New Babylon, a certain level of this cultural neutrality is still evident: Constant does propose that his city will address a fundamental human condition. His designs are projected on different locations, and although the final form may vary according to the desires of its inhabitants, the basic structure is seen to be applicable everywhere. His version of flux is to become a new world order (fig. 1.13).

Flux or flexibility as a formal condition thus easily becomes the same universally applicable principle as the formal purity of the modernist city. Space for the expression of individuality as a resistance to mechanical (and orderly) collectivity is a more ephemeral condition, and more difficult to express in design. For the Smithsons, the solution was to be found in offering a stable infrastructure that would allow freedom within, such as in their Cluster City (1957-1959). For Constant, the creativity of the individual would manifest itself in the final and ever-changing form of New Babylon, simply because all the individuals would be engaged in a continual transformation of their environment.

** Asserting the Primacy of the Creative Individual**

Again, in terms of the position of the individual, the work of the SI proves itself more radical than their contemporaries struggling to address similar problems. The Smithsons, as mentioned above, leave room for change within a stable infrastructure, thereby positioning themselves as designers of an environment that simply leaves some details up to its inhabitants. The infrastructure itself is still treated as a concrete design problem, and the architect is still seen to have a certain relevance in shaping collective space.
its inhabitants (in other words, that a rational city form will cause people to occupy their environment and behave in a rational way). In New Babylon, it is the occupants that determine the final form, not the other way around. Yet the forms are presumed to 'trigger' a creative use of the environment, indicating some level of determination through architectural form. Thus New Babylon places a similar demand of self-realization on the individual that Le Corbusier does. Only now, rather than achieving the heights of rationality, people are required to continually express their inner creativity and manifest themselves as individuals. Instead of being the perfect expression of a collective (mechanical) humanity, they now become the inevitable collective of an individually expressive humanity.

The universal treatment of the form appropriate to this individual agency can be said to tend towards modernism, although Constant was always quick to point out that his was not to be considered a definitive form. This is an inevitable problem between proposing a design and leaving room for individual intervention. One end of the spectrum would consist of the methodical data collection of all individual expressions without design intervention, as done by the Venturi and Scott Brown in their work on Levittown,63 the other end of the spectrum is to design a possible world while acknowledging that this is one of many possible solutions, as Constant to some degree did.

The radically creative individual underlies all the situationist theories on the city. Although their critique of the city was also a Marxist one, involving the uprising of the working class, their conception of the working class was a romanticized one of a group of repressed individuals, all waiting for the opportunity to manifest their creativity. As Vidler has already pointed out, this implies a Nietzschean conception of the individual that is exhausting: the inhabitant is required to transform the environment continually to manifest his individual creativity.64 The notion that every moment, every action must be engaged towards a radical transformation of the environment is easily as totalitarian as the repressive mechanical nature of the Corbusian city. It is precisely this radicality of the critique coupled with the purity of the solution (instead of pure mechanical collectivity, there will be pure individual creativity) that seems to predict the failure of the situationist city. As they themselves critique the functionalist city not for being entirely wrong, but for neglecting some important aspects of life; so they too are not entirely off the mark, but forget that there are moments when their hyperactive individual might want to just be passive. The relationship between individuality and collective is one of compromise and negotiation. As the modernists (notably Le Corbusier) forget the importance of individualization, so the situationists seem to bypass the fact that collectivity will not always be the perfect expression of their romantic conception of the individual.

**Lived space against modern abstraction**

According to Debord, at the heart of modern conditions of construction, we find "an authoritarian decision-making process that abstractly develops any environment into an environment of abstraction."65 This is one of the most common resistances to modernist abstraction: the idea that alienation is inherent in being trapped in an abstract structure. But if this is truly so, how would it be possible to escape this alienation in, for example, Constant’s New Babylon? For although New Babylon is premised on the notion of the ‘great game to come’ and the ability for every occupant to transform the space – is the infrastructure itself not part of a new form of alienation, of the dominance of the artist? Yet there is a second tier of modernist alienation present in the presumption of Debord and his fellow situationists that they could see behind the curtain to what was ‘real,’ and that (similar to the rhetoric of Le Corbusier) they were necessary to enlighten the proletariat. This exact problem has already been formulated quite clearly by Pascal Dumontier: "Se différenciant des groupes de l’extrême-gauche, l’Internationale situationniste se distingue particulièrement par la critique radicale et totale du monde moderne qu’elle forme. A travers les ouvrages de Debord et Vaneigem, mais aussi a travers les articles parus dans la revue Internationale Situationniste, elle s’attache surtout à critiquer les nouvelles formes de l’aliénation, offrant ainsi une théorie révolutionnaire incontestablement moderne."66

Debord also had little use for those professions deeply involved in the structures of power and domination. To him, the commodity structure of the spectacle also precludes the possibility of lived space.67 We are left with two definitions of ‘lived’: visibly occupied (or not abstract) and on the other side, active (though not necessarily in formal expression). He continuously propagated the need for the people themselves to create their world – a clearly Marxist line of thought in its constant need for revolution. “The most revolutionary idea concerning city planning derives neither from urbanism, nor from technology, nor from aesthetics. I refer to the decision to reconstruct the entire environment in accordance with the needs of the power of established workers’ councils – the needs, in other words, of

the anti-State dictatorship of the proletariat, the needs of dialogue invested with executive power.\textsuperscript{68}

**The everyday and the place of the everyman**

Lefebvre proclaims the importance of the everyday as a site of resistance, as does the SI. The overarching vision that Debord subscribes to however is impossible to realize within the grand revolutionary framework of utopian schemes. To quote from a CoBrA statement (1948): "ce qui caractérisé un art populaire est une expression vitale, directe et collective." This is indeed what the 1960s artistic and intellectual revolutions hoped to achieve. Yet in the totalitarian schemes of Situationist engagement and urbanism in the form of New Babylon, the everyman had no choice but to be enlightened – and was thus placed in the same position as in the earlier schemes of modernist thought (fig. 1.14). In this sense, American pragmatism seems a more appropriate school of thought to the premises outlined in the work of the SI. The 'vital, direct, collective' expression referred to above is certainly premised on everyday life. But it is hard to see how, if this becomes the revolutionary endeavor so conceived, it can remain either 'direct' (and not instrumental to revolution) or 'collective' (if it is to follow Debord's vision). In the UK (see below), the everyday is similarly seen as a site of resistance, but it is employed in a less dramatic fashion.

**Imaging the Liberated City: Coherent Fragmentation**

The drawings and models of New Babylon show the fragmentation of a city based on individual intervention; yet the sum total of the structure is still a technology-based design that presumes the possibility of designing a 'kit of parts' to encourage the construction of situations. There is a level of formal expression inherent in the imagery, insofar as the notions 'unexpected', 'flux', 'individual agency' are all expressed in the design through its resistance to single defining images, the lack of a stable grid, the variations in viewpoints and depictions (figs. 1.15-1.17). A certain fragmentation is visible in the drawings of Constant, just as it is visible in the collages Debord and Jorn made of Paris. This metaphorical (legible) expression in the form of the visual was acceptable within the SI until about 1960, when Debord made a fairly strong about-face in positing that all these formal expressions were no more than the embodiment of the structures of domination that the SI was attempting to undermine.

In the early work, however, there are essentially two points that introduce something new to the perception of the city. On the one hand there is the condition of fragmentation represented in its imagery. And on the other there is the use of found imagery. On the title page of the *Mémoires*, it is stated explicitly that 'cet


*chapter I – city*
fig. 1.16. Constant, New Babylon. detail of model.

fig. 1.17. Constant, New Babylon. view of model showing a desolate ground plane.

One great distinction here within situationist thought remains that between art as a solidification of the dominant power structures, versus the power of art (or rather, the 'situation') to trigger the development of the creative (non-artistic, non-elite) individual. An aspect of this distinction lies in the understanding of representation and artistic endeavor. Where the Plan Voisin represents an ideal to be attained, Debord's Naked City only demonstrates the problem of the existing city, showing its shortcomings and absences. In this sense, the imagery of Le Corbusier is projective, where that of Debord is critical, or at least so he believes. This does seem to imply a conflict within his beliefs though: apparently he sees the visual designs made by Le Corbusier, and later Constant, as prescriptive—as if Debord's creative individual has no imagination that can interpret or go beyond what Constant has already sketched out. Apparently, the words describing a possible situationist city are less restrictive than a visual suggestion towards the same. This is perhaps where the shortcomings of the work of Debord are situated—although he is articulate in his critique of representation and the spectacular, it soon becomes impossible for him to see visual material as anything other than the representation or embodiment of a status quo. The potential of his notion of détournement, which utilizes prefabricated imagery, is fully dependent on active intervention by means of language and text, either to reveal new meanings or the uselessness of old meanings (fig. 1.18).

Furthermore, the situationist city remains ambiguous in its relation to technological imagery. Although one of the main problems with functionalism is seen as the...

---

70 Détournement: "S'emploie par abréviation de la formule: détournement d'éléments esthétiques préfabriqués. Intégration de productions actuelles ou passées des arts dans une construction supérieure du milieu. Dans ce sens il ne peut y avoir de peinture ou de musique situationniste, mais un usage situationniste de ces moyens. Dans un sens plus primitif, le détournement à l'intérieur des sphères culturelles anciennes est une méthode de propagande, qui témoigne de l'usure et de la perte d'importance de ces sphères. (IS 1, p.13). As it involves the use of prefabricated aesthetic elements in a non-conventional way, revolves around ensuring that they no longer affirm existing conditions but critique them and contribute to a 'superior' environment.
71 This leaves Debord quite close to Adorno's understanding of art as negation and mass culture as affirmation.
mechanization of the individual, the situationist city is still premised on a full-scale technological society. Constant bases the design of New Babylon on the absolute technologization of production, thus leaving the future occupants of his city free from labor, with nothing but leisure time on their hands. In his dependence on technology for both the realization and the representation of his future city, Constant is at odds with Jorn, for example, who still tends more towards the artistic imagination. Also, his engagement with the machine is to Constant anti-functionalist while Jacobs might argue that this is by definition impossible.

Debord’s ambivalence between a Marxist reliance on technology yet a sense of reactionary anti-aesthetics is already visible in the first few issues of IS, where the visual material on the city is restricted to plans and mappings of routes or borders (issues 1 and 2). In issue 3, photos are included of the models for New Babylon, as well as sketches by Constant accompanying his article ‘Une autre ville pour une autre vie.’ In IS 4, the world is still treated as a visual labyrinth in a discussion of the incomplete situationist intervention at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1959 (fig. 1.19).[72] The description of the yellow zone in New Babylon is also inserted in this issue (fig. 1.20). Issue 5 already announces the rupture between the SI and Constant, thus initiating the distanciation from a visual manifestation of the situationist city.

In the end, the activist urban practice advocated by the situationists is posed in direct opposition to the reception of the city as spectacle. This increasingly absolute contrast strengthens the problems with the visual, as it is demoted from a potentially critical endeavor, or the possibility of imagining something as yet unknown, to an affirmation of existing conditions, which according to Debord feed the machinery of capitalism and bourgeois power. He does not offer a place for an ‘autonomous’, or rather productive, form of visuality and use, the way Lefebvre seems to imply with his notion of ‘lived space’. In the use of the space it is transformed, but meaning is also accorded to it from within tradition. Of course, in neither is there a direct visual manifestation of these ideas; we must still look to the artistic production of the time for possibilities in the realm of the visual. Returning briefly to thesis 1 of Society of the Spectacle, we are reminded that the spectacle is in opposition to directly lived experience. The everyday (as the locus of directly lived experience) is the site of active resistance to this spectacle. Yet in England, we find an alternative to this everyday. Here, the everyday (or the ‘ordinary’) also occupies a position of resistance, but it reflects a vitality not so much to be conquered, but already present. This vitality resides not only in the domain of the creative individual, but is also present in the manifestations of spectacular culture, such as science fiction films and advertising.

B. England: The Ordinary City of The Independent Group

While the SI was presenting their radical critique of the modern city, developments in England on this front were centered on a few different collaborations. The primary ones of interest to this discourse are the Independent Group (hereafter: IG), Team 10 and Archigram. The IG, coalescing in 1952, was a loosely organized group of artists and architects that held occasional gatherings at the London Institute for Contemporary Architecture (ICA) to discuss contemporary developments and their ramifications for architecture. The IG was an extremely diverse group, including among others Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton and Alison and Peter Smithson, all of whom were struggling with issues of mass culture and advertising. Also, Reyner Banham and Lawrence Alloway, James Stirling and Colin St. John were involved. Team 10 was a specifically architecture-oriented group that originated from CIAM, finally breaking with it in 1956, and formulated precise critiques of the functionalist city. This group included the Smithsons, but also went beyond the borders of the UK to include (among many others) Aldo van Eyck and Jacob Bakema. Archigram, a group of recently graduated architecture students whose virtues were proclaimed by Banham included Peter Cook, Warren Chalk, Dennis Crompton, Michael Webb, Ron Herron and David Greene. They began working together a few years later than the IG and Team 10, in 1961, but address similar concerns such as the form of the future metropolis and the impact of mass advertising on architecture. Despite the contemporaneity of this interest in consumer culture, Team 10 in particular illustrates the specifically English turn towards the man in the street and the picturesque interpretation of the city.

One of the crucial distinctions between the IG and Team 10 is that the latter produces a critique of the city that is more specifically geared towards the CIAM discourse, while the IG incorporates various influences from everyday life and mass culture in a more diverse way. Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton contribute knowledge of and involvement in Pop Art. Lawrence Alloway writes equally on developments in contemporary film as he does on the contemporary city. Reyner Banham, who will be discussed more extensively in chapter 3, is interested in everything from the Brutalism of the Smithsons to the design of new cars in the U.S. Also, while Team 10 still produces various proposals for the future city, the IG is mainly concerned with finding visual forms that represent and give presence to the contemporary metropolis. Alloway often makes the explicit connection between mass imagery and the city, noting for example that “mass art is urban and democratic.”[73] Despite the distinctions between these three groups, there

---

[72] The intervention remained incomplete among others because their installation was deemed dangerous by the fire department, and the SI decided to call off the exhibit. ‘Die Welt als labyrinth’ IS 4, p.6-7.

is some overlap, and the three groups together can be said to form most of the Anglo-Saxon architectural discourse on mass culture and the city at the time.  

The images and rhetoric used by the Independent Group could not be more different from the statements of the SI. Yet the underlying agenda is much the same: how do we transform the modern city which is clearly in crisis, and how do we handle the increasing 'massification' of culture that is part of the development of the late modern (and capitalist) city? The problem of 'mass' in these years is both an architectural concern (housing the greatest number of people) and a visual and cultural concern (the influence of advertising and film). The Smithsons straddle the two interpretations, offering their architectural insights to the gatherings of the IG, while their city proposals are formulated more in their position within Team 10. Within the IG, the intersection between mass culture and everyday life is the more important factor in expressing their break with the modern city. Lawrence Alloway, writing as a critic, addresses concerns similar those of Debord (though with more pleasure in the phenomena of mass culture), while Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton approach the issues from within their art (as does Jorn within the SI). The position of the IG with respect to the commercial manifestations of capitalism is more closely allied to an American direction, which uses it more as a manner of communicating and less as a condition of the spectacle to be critiqued and destroyed. In the UK and US both, the imagery of ads and films, TV shows and comic books, serve to critique the 'high art' world, yet also signify a level of pleasure and serve to communicate with the occupants of architecture. A distinction to be explored later is the political/social awareness that underlies a European discourse, where the US discourse is more divorced from a political agenda. In a sense the work in the UK holds a middle ground between this pleasure in imagery and the political agenda. Hence, although many of the imaging strategies of the IG are certainly critical of their subject, they do utilize images that Debord would have most likely demolished for their intimacy with the conditions of spectacle. Where Alison Smithson was prepared to use the advertisements she found in women's magazines as a visual referent similar to Le Corbusier's grain silos, Debord would likely have argued that to use them at all without applying a strategy like détournement is to affirm the existing structures of domination.

Transcending Functionalism in the Network City

In the more strictly architectural scene, the Team 10 split from CIAM in 1956 is a critical moment in the crisis of the modernist city. With doubts similar to those of the situationists discussed above, Team 10 discusses issues such as creating space for change, the need to somehow incorporate social relations in the city and how to address aspects of life beyond the four CIAM functions. While the IG is examining the possibilities of mass culture in envisioning a more vital urban life and in understanding the contemporary city, Team 10 is more focused on finding an alternative form to the functionalist city.

In proposals less radical than those of the SI, yet still recognizably moving away from functionalism, the city plans by the Smithsons concentrate on creating clusters or networks where each cluster or network incorporates different functions and allows an interpretation of the separate CIAM spheres. This bears a resemblance to New Babylon in that the different spheres are allowed to mingle. New Babylon's structure is based on different psychological 'ambiances' however, allowing its environment to be almost fully determined by individual psychology, while the Smithsons' networks still follow a traditional understanding of the functions of the city, with the added function of human association. The new direction in these plans is intent on finding a way to encourage vitality in the spaces of the city and to leave room for change (fig. 1.21). Again, in the transformations taking place at the end of the 1950s and the reconsiderations of modernist principles, certain direct responses are visible. The importance given to non-linear networks, to diffusion and multiplicity, are elements that can be seen in the work of the situationists but also in the writing of Jacobs and Lefebvre. Non-linearity, multiplicity, plurality are all different strategies for encouraging a vitality seen in traditional cities and lacking in modern cities. These abstract notions are employed both in writing (as new forms of understanding) and as visual forms and strategies. The larger network of New Babylon incorporates change and allows for multiplicity (of ambiances for example) by allowing the environment itself to be modified at the whim of the inhabitants. The Smithsons on the other hand, see a stable infrastructure as a strategy to ensure room for change and diversity (fig. 1.22).

Infrastructure for Ever-Changing Life

In the work of the Smithsons, at the heart of their 'network city' that transforms the functional city, infrastructure becomes a primary focus, since everything in between the basic infrastructure can be left to the interventions of individual occupants. Although they too reserve an important place for the street, theirs is a far cry from the modernist lines of traffic structure, meant to allow efficient travel between separate zones. In contrast, their Golden Lane housing design shows street decks that have ample space for interaction. In this design, the 'informal social interaction' Jacobs sees as fundamental to the social cohesion of a community is given a place above ground level.

---

74 Banham was involved with the IG and close to Archigram; the Smithsons were involved with both the IG and Team 10.
The importance of the street itself in the 1960s should not be underestimated. At times it was the site of revolution (the situationists treated it primarily as such), at times it was the site of communication and interaction. The crisis of the modern city necessitated a reconsideration of the street, since its traffic arteries, conceived of as corridors of mobility, had become means of separation, a hard boundary between one city space and another. The street as it was treated by the Smithsons (and the rest of the IG), but also by the situationists and Jacobs was a space of diffusion and blurring. The street was about mixing the different functions of the city, and about the unexpected. In the by now classic illustrative grid of the Smithsons, the street holds a middle ground between house and city. It mediates between the private space of the home and the public space of the city. This space of mediation to the Smithsons was the site of the social, which we shall see later is precisely how Jacobs interprets the significance of the sidewalk. The street, as a critical space in the modern city, had become transformed not so much in its design as in its significance to the new analyses and designs in the city. While New Babylon echoes the modernist removal of traffic from the zones of activity by placing traffic below the space of occupation, for the Smithsons and Jane Jacobs, some of the traffic space becomes a space of occupation as well. It becomes a site of informal interaction, not purely of mobility.

Both Golden Lane and the various presentations of cluster cities are vaguely reminiscent of the constructions of New Babylon, in their emphasis on different levels and connections, in their proliferating networks of infrastructure (fig. 1.23). Some images demonstrate similarities, but much more important is the distinction between how the Smithsons and Constant handle their respective infrastructure and networks. To both, the notion of ‘change’ or ‘flux’ is an important premise towards constructing a city that is able to respond to its inhabitants. Where Constant has elevated the notion of flux to the very essence of his city order (where the formal expression of the city is dependent on the actions of its occupants), the Smithsons insert it between their stable infrastructure. On this level, they might be considered precursors to the work of Archigram (especially the Plug-in City). Archigram’s issue number 5 was devoted solely to the new metropolis: the growth-based crystalline city as proposed by the Japanese metabolists, cluster cities, network cities – everything becoming visual manifestations of the idea of growth and change. This kind of visual manifestation is not present in the abovementioned projects of the Smithsons, but their infrastructure embodies the same additive

---

76 As noted earlier, the dérive as described by Debord also notes the importance of unexpected meetings in the space of the street. Debord, ‘Theory of the Dérive.’
77 The social element is already present in the flaneur and blasé metropolitan individual: the social function of the street resurfaces in the 1960s in response to CIAM’s reduction of the street to a traffic artery. The main difference between the two types of social significance is that the flaneur’s sociability is based on observation, while the 1960s models follow the lines of active engagement.

fig. 1.21. Team 10 diagrams illustrating ideas on how to achieve human scale in the city.
chapter 1 – city

fig. 1.22. Alison and Peter Smithson. Diagrams of city development (1956)

fig. 1.23. Peter Smithson. Cluster city (1952)

fig. 1.24. Alison and Peter Smithson. Diagram of cluster development, with cluster houses submitted to CIAM 10 (1956)
nature of city-building (fig. 1.24). No longer a closed system, their cities can grow to whatever dimensions and in whatever direction necessary, unlike the more rigorous formal boundaries of the Corbusian city. Although the Corbusian grid is in principle endless, in his images he shows virtually no possibility of variation within the assigned scheme.

Sociology of the Everyday
The Smithsons too turned to sociology for help in defining the program for architecture in the city and in understanding the mass networks of social relations. They referred to Young and Wilmott, who had done studies of East-London that helped define some of the existing issues on social networks in the city population of the late 1950s. In an article exploring the relationship between ‘pop’ and architecture, Charles Jencks also indicates the importance of sociology in the ideas the Smithsons were putting forth at CIAM meetings. Again, the opposition of more individual and notably Gemeinschaft-oriented ideas such as identity and place against the universalist CIAM ideas is one of the key shifts.

By grounding it in sociology, a (pseudo-) scientific basis was laid for this new interpretation of city space.

At first glance this turn to sociology suggests that the architectural debate on the city shifts from a mechanical paradigm to a social paradigm. Or perhaps it is more accurate to posit that the idea of the city has shifted from the mechanical city to the living city. Notions of growth and change are explored both visually (through non-linear imagery, assemblages, specificity) and conceptually (in open-ended city plans, flexibility), replacing the static city image with a dynamic one. The living city is seen as an organism, whose systems are interdependent and cannot be treated as entirely separate entities. The vitality of this organism manifests itself throughout patterns of sociability. We can therefore argue that this is the first step towards Gemeinschaft in the city, as transforming the rationalized and regulated forms of Gesellschaft. Furthermore, by treating the city as a ‘living’ organism, historical continuity gains importance, thereby reinforcing the value of exploring the historical and social significance of the urban fabric (much as Lefebvre argues through his ‘lived space’).

This idea is borrowed from the 1963 Archigram exhibit The Living City, which again bears some resemblance to the fluid and clustered ‘ambiances’ present in New Babylon (albeit in a much more optimistic, less serious manner). The poster for the exhibit also explicitly uses the word ‘situation’ to describe the importance of inhabiting the city as opposed to its mere plan.

Although this idea may seem paradoxical since I retain the terms Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, I propose that the original connotations of Gemeinschaft, referring to the pastoral ideal of a community, may rightfully be applied in the late twentieth-century city with its islands of communal identities.
Another aspect of this is in the representation of the ideal occupant, which has shifted from being a mechanical metaphor (rational, functional, efficient) to being a social/psychological metaphor (desiring, creative, free). This is manifest in the permanent desire and creativity that the situationists hope to unleash, but also in the rhetoric of social interaction used by the IG. The turn to the social, to the level of 'human' rather than 'machine' manifests itself in various ways in the 1960s. We can distinguish two main tendencies: one oriented toward the individual human (psychology, individual expression) and one oriented toward the socialized human (community, tradition). Both are generally present to some degree. The IG is concerned with the psychology of the individual, but also in exploring the possibilities for community in the massiveness of a city.81

The imagery used to explore these sociological issues not only 'represents' some kind of 'truth' (in the way we would typically associate with modernism) but gives a presence to these underlying thematics, and in giving them presence, they also become part of the world around us. For example, the importance of the individual presents itself in the increasing focus on reception. Paolozzi and Hamilton use found imagery in their work. In doing so, they not only explore the visual pleasure of the imagery as artists expressing an internal truth, but also acknowledge that the audience brings to their work a network of personal connotations. Moreover, as Alloway points out, the conventions of mass culture are democratic and should be treated differently from those of high art. In appropriating mass imagery, these artists are on some level also appropriating the shift in conventions that accompanies these new images. This is a critical point in relation to Debord's idea that first the world must change, and then its visual and physical forms will follow. While he seems to retain a hierarchy placing conceptual thought above visual manifestation, the innovative use of imagery by Paolozzi and Hamilton leaves open the possibility that progress is not linear — that ordinary images may also subvert conceptual thought or demonstrate something as yet unthought.

The ordinary of the English debate is distinct from the French 'quotidienne' or everyday, but the two share some premises. As Paolozzi and Hamilton use ordinary images culled from magazines to undermine the hierarchy between high and low art (also undermining a particularly English class-based hierarchy), so Lefebvre suggests that everyday life is a subversion of the academic understanding of sociology. In both cases, we can see the typical democratization of the 1960s at work: an institution is undermined by introducing the subversive element of ordinary life.

Identity and city space

Although it is difficult to reintroduce the word 'identity' after the discourse of the 1980s which were so rife with excessive analyses of identity politics, it is important to note that identity is one of the main words used in city critiques in the 1960s such as the Team 10 Primer.82 By and large this comes out of the sociological discourse that is beginning to make clear how important a distinctive identity is in group formation and cohesion, which is then appropriated by an architectural discourse that is beginning to see the failings of mechanical metaphors. The work of Kevin Lynch, for example, is premised on the visual identity of the environment and how it was manifest in the mental maps of its inhabitants. The cluster cities of the Smithsons and the 'Gloops' of Archigram's 'Living City' exhibit (1963, Institute for Contemporary Arts, London) are both based on demonstrating groupings of distinct identities (fig. 1,25). The importance of a sense of identity is related both to individualization (this as a by now cliché 1960s phenomenon of 'finding yourself') and to convention (hence the return to a traditional city fabric as offering a sense of 'place' and 'stability'). Here again, the pendulum swings between a progressive sense of radical individual expression and a more traditional sense of being embedded in a community based on conventions, conveniently forgetting that they are also mutually dependent for their definition.

Identity is also tied to boundaries — identity can be defined by its distinction from something other. Thus New Babylon in a strange way undermines a sense of identity by dissolving all boundaries. The individual is subsumed in the collective, and although there is talk of extremely distinctive space with their own identities, these can be changed at a moment's notice by their occupants. In New Babylon, "unworthy" objects, be they in the form of advertising images or street festivals.

Again it is important here to note the dual attack on the modern city — not only is there a return to history and the coherence of the traditional city but there is also a call to the progressive individual to explore his environment and transform it to suit his needs. Radical demonstrations of the progressive and the reactionary are everywhere in the 1960s. The Plug-in City shows a radically progressive city premised on individual freedom and obsolescence, while Van Eyck's references to the degon return to a primitive society as a model for social relationships. In the intermingling of these oppositional critiques, the image of the modern city is undeniably undermined. Yet because of their oppositional structure, the fundamental dichotomies can remain standing. A choice must always be made between two oppositional poles: we must choose between a traditional city or a progressive one, just as we must choose between the expressive individual or the cohesive community.

81 These ideas are widespread at the time. Although the Italian debate is outside the scope of this study, in L'architettura della città (1966), Aldo Rossi avails himself of psychological metaphors such as memory, and does so primarily through the communal fabric of history and convention.

82 First published as a special issue of AD in Dec. 1962.
identity becomes a fluctuating, unstable phenomenon, no longer tied to a formal expression since the surroundings have lost every connection with a stable definition. To Debord even this was not radical enough, since New Babylon also designed the infrastructure that would make it all happen. It is easy to imagine him finding the Living City a laughable proposal towards identity and city space, since it defines its identities through existing imagery rather than goading the individual to express his authentic self (fig. 1.26).

The 1960s desire to offer city inhabitants a sense of identity was constantly contrasted with the sterile modern environment. By using the machine as a universal metaphor, the modernists paved the way for a general revolt against the overwhelming homogeneity of their utopian city. Moreover, by presuming the neutrality of their designs (on both an aesthetic and an ethical level), the invisible power structures critiqued by Debord were temporarily hidden from sight. The structures of domination is an aspect that touches upon all the areas of city critique discussed here, especially with the advent of late capitalism. The general tendency in the discourse of the 1960s is to react against the presumed universality and the resulting homogeneity of the modernist city. The French tendency towards activism and the critique of spectacle by Debord is precisely counter to the Anglo-Saxon references to images of the consumer society as representative of variety, freedom and consumer choice. Specifically, there is a distinction here between this situationist idea of ‘activism’ as an (urban) activity that is grounded in the self and the idea that an audience may not necessarily need to act from inner impulses, but rather performs an ‘active reception’ of the imagery it is confronted with. To Debord, this is simply impossible; the apparent freedom of consumer society images was little more than a screen to hide the dominance of capital (and therefore the alienation and the enforced passivity of the worker). Furthermore, the variety in imagery still all referred back to capitalism as a single, homogenous structure that kept its laborers passive. The IG on the other hand was discussing the same types of imagery with a pleasure in their lack of academic design pretensions. The lack of artistic pretense inserted a vitality that corresponded to the kind of vitality they were hoping to discover or unlock in the traditional city fabric. Alloway’s writing in particular is oriented towards discovering and understanding the vitality of the city through mass imagery.  

Identity has a further important resonance with the conditions of mass society: being able to distinguish oneself becomes important in relation to a proliferating mass culture. Yet the opportunities for distinction, especially in the realm of the visual, become increasingly rare as the age of reproduction produces an extended and global version of mass culture. The logos used by Debord and Jorn (Esso, Tuborg beer) in their *Fin de Copenhague* are perhaps not yet global, but certainly

---

83 Alloway, ‘City Notes’ (AD, Jan 59), ‘The Arts and the Mass Media,’ (AD, Feb 58)

well-known in the transatlantic world. Yet in the difficulty for individuation is again an opportunity for connection: an ability to identify with the other based on what global brands are favored. The radicality of the SI understanding of individuation (for example through détournement) is not present in the Anglo-Saxon discourse: here, some level of tradition and convention is seen as helpful in the critique of the CIAM city and the high-art culture of modernism.

**Everyday Imagery in the Service of the City**

The problem of the image of the future city is formulated as follows by William Whyte: "But what is the image of the city of the future? In the plans for the huge redevelopment projects to come, we are being shown a new image of the city - and it is sterile and lifeless. Gone are the dirt and the noise - and the variety and the excitement and the spirit. That it is an ideal makes it all the worse; these bleak new utopias are not bleak because they have to be; they are the concrete manifestation - and how literally - of a deep, and at times arrogant, misunderstanding of the function of the city." 84 This is the crisis of the modernist city, and this is the struggle facing all the protagonists sketched out here. The responses range from minimal to radical, but the questions are critical to all the different cases.

The IG and Archigram introduced their conception of 'variety, excitement and spirit' as formulated by Whyte through the profusion of mass imagery they experimented with. The SI on the other hand, hoped to find this spirit in the unexpected (and not yet visually determined) actions of the people in the city. There is a clear line demarcating these two, between the image of the city and the function of the city. Yet even from within these different premises, the visual techniques of both show similarities.

As we have seen above, the situationists combined a critique of the sterility of the modern city with a critique of the spectacle as a repressive structure of domination. This leads Debord to view the use of everyday imagery as purely affirmative, while the IG see it as simultaneously communicative and critical. Although the social relations within the city were important to the IG, they did not subscribe to the Marxist ideas of a false consciousness. Rather, their use and adaptation of everyday imagery to communicate a new image of a future city was informed more by the idea that pop imagery was able to communicate with the people in the street. Here, no détournement of these images was necessary to instigate a revolution - their presence itself was radical enough.

Freeing the City through Mass Culture

Explicit discussions arise throughout the 1960s that engage the imagery of mass culture as an instrument of liberating architecture from its ossified discourse. In an article in two parts for the AA quarterly in 1969, Jencks traces out a number of British postwar developments along the axis ‘Pop – Non pop’. In this two-part article, he defines ‘Pop’ as ‘accepting new ideas and forms from outside his profession’, and cites Archigram as an example. This is a polemic definition based on the English architectural discourse, since by this definition of new ideas from outside the profession, the situationist city with its reliance on art and sociology can also be defined as ‘pop’. However, it would be difficult to make this plausible to the situationists themselves since they would likely argue that pop is merely a way of making the unbearable conditions of spectacle more acceptable. Jencks in fact admits something similar. He notes that if one understands the contemporary vernacular as a cliché (which was common in the field of architecture at the time), “it was not surprising that the Pop-theorists inverted cliché: they decided to enjoy rather than suffer it.” It is important to note here that in contrast to what the situationists argued, the English situation to some degree equalled mass culture with ‘real’ conditions. A pop sensibility of accepting all influences and input as equal led to this easy conflation.

C. United States: The Hidden City of Jane Jacobs

Where the European city of the twentieth century is predominantly social, or has always been defined by some kind of societal discourse, the American city has less of an underlying social agenda. Or perhaps it is more appropriate to say that the American libertarian tradition limits the discussion of communities, since ‘community’ is generally placed below individual freedom. Conceivably then, invoking ‘tradition’ in the American city discourse is more about a nostalgic image than about a structural understanding of societal tradition. At the same time, there is a somewhat useful pragmatic result in just ‘accepting’ social context, as opposed to fashioning a brave new world. In the U.S. context, critiques of the modern city reflected concerns similar to their European counterparts, yet also illustrate the specific American condition of a society steeped in capitalism and individual freedom.

Jane Jacobs: in search of the messy vitality of everyday life

Jane Jacobs’ famous 1961 work The Death and Life of Great American Cities, illustrates the renegotiation of the place of the individual in the urban community in more ways than one. Yet it also shows the problem inherent in the discourse – she turns back to traditional models or notes the presence of what is, and does not necessarily have viable alternatives. The explicit suggestions and scathing analysis of high modernist repetition and economic design fit precisely the stereotypical model of the 1960s: in search of a more individualized understanding of space and a glimpse of the everyday, the banal, instead of only the regimented performativity of modern life. As Gans also continually notes, people do not live exactly as planners think they will in an ideal world. Furthermore, Jacobs’ writing suits the ‘grassroots’ style of 60s rhetoric in the sense that she extrapolates her ideas from the ‘mere’ observation of her direct environment in Greenwich Village: “In setting forth different principles, I shall mainly be writing about common, ordinary things.” This process of extrapolation from individual everyday experience is what leaves her wide open to critique; yet it is also what makes this work relevant today: the empathetic understanding of the direct environment as possibly indicative of larger questions, without presuming this is the final answer.

More than once she explicitly comments on the modernist tendency to posit a planning principle purely from ideas, and not from day-to-day observation. She discusses the tendency of urban planners to state “how cities ought to work and what ought to be good for people and businesses in them” and how they believe this so fiercely that “when contradictory reality intrudes … they must shrug reality aside.” Illustrative of this model-reality problem in her view is the traffic problem of Le Corbusier’s Ville Radieuse. Parking space was vastly underestimated, as was the sheer volume of car traffic: in this case the model came first, was locked down into a formal plan, and its reality remained of lesser importance (fig. 1.27). Comparable to the critiques of Team 10, Jacobs here addresses both the intention of the modernist city and the resulting reality. She opens up the abstract structure of the Corbusian panoramic city to the complexity of the local, particular and everyday. As such, her understanding of the qualities of the everyday bears some

85 In using the shorthand notation of ‘the 1960s’, I continue to refer to an ‘extended sixties’ from 1956-1972 as framed in my introduction.
86 Jencks, Charles. ‘Pop – Non pop (1)’, in: Architectural Association Quarterly, Vol. 1, no. 1, 1969. pp. 48-64. (quote from p49). The idea of ‘pop’ will be explored further in chapter 2; here, it serves merely to introduce the idea that influences external to the profession may be vital to its development.
87 Jencks, Charles. ‘Pop – Non pop (1)’ (quote from p52).
88 From Baudelaire’s flaneur in relation to the crowd, to Simmel’s metropolitan individual, to the Marxist city analysis of the SI and many more, all these discussions relate to the structure of society as manifest in the city.
90 Jacobs, p.3
91 Jacobs, p.8
92 Jacobs, pp.342-345.
resemblance to the work produced by Henri Lefebvre in France. In contrast to the French (and Marxist) tradition of the intellectual leading the masses however, it is sometimes noted as a qualification that Jane Jacobs has no degree in planning, but simply works from her own personal experience.

Cracks in the sidewalk: redefining the modern city inhabitant
Jacobs introduces the idea of formal versus informal interaction in her chapter on the uses of sidewalk space. One aspect of her careful analysis of the use of the sidewalk is the introduction of the living, breathing, everyday occupant of city space, and with this, the reintroduction of an ordinary image of the city (fig. 1.28). This is in stark contrast to Le Corbusier's idealized 'modulor'-style urban dweller. Also, it is comparable to Team 10's understanding of the street as a social space, not merely a space for traffic. This idea, alongside the sociocultural analyses of Levittown by Herbert Gans, will also pave the way for Venturi and Scott Brown's introduction of symbolism and communication in urban space.

The issue of rationalization versus 'organic' life is typical of the debate both within and against modernism. For example in the writings of Lewis Mumford we find many references to the importance of a techno-organic language for modernity, as opposed to the hyper-rational version of architecture proposed by Le Corbusier. Yet Mumford also believes fully in the capacity of rational man to find a design language that will suit his utopian visions of a rational and just society. Remarkable here is on the one hand Mumford's passionate diatribe against Jacobs, involving various critical comments on her naïveté and optimistic image of slums; yet at the same time his antipathy towards Le Corbusier, which he shares with both Jacobs and Guy Debord.

The difference here is in fact simple: although Mumford attempts to resist the purity of Le Corbusier by turning to the more 'organic' (or 'living') formal

---

96 Jacobs, chapters 2 through 4, pp29-88. The distinction between these two types of interaction is analogous to the Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft distinction mentioned earlier. At the time, these distinctions were rapidly becoming critical to defining urban society, and they have become again important today in the shift to an information society, where urban space and interactive space are no longer defined by the same boundaries.
98 It is worth noting as an aside here that in Enlightenment thought, the rational and the technological may overlap (where the technological is often a strategy to further attain a rational understanding of the world), but both are still treated as distinct entities. In modernism, the rational and the mechanistic are often conflated, where the machine aesthetic is seen to express an idea of rationality. This distinction is what allows Mumford to be critical of technology as a goal, yet incorporate it as a medium in his belief in human progress through rationality.
language of Frank Lloyd Wright, his belief in individual rationality as the primary faculty leaves him safely ensconced within the larger trajectory of modernism. Jacobs, on the other hand, questions precisely that rational project as something that has become dogma. Her commentaries on the state of urban planning and its denial of empirical evidence, in favor of idealized models of reality place her firmly opposed to Mumford, as she questions precisely the universal principles he supports. Even though her plea for empirical evidence is indicative of a greater belief in rationality than she admits (as it implies the ability to extrapolate objective facts about the human condition based on quantifiable evidence), her main arguments are based on a social collective and the cohesion of a group of individuals, rather than the rational faculties of each individual per se. In this sense, her critique offers a sense of Gemeinschaft based on an urban translation of traditional social values.

Yet what Jacobs neglects to discuss is the homogeneity of the neighborhood she extrapolates her ideas from. The worst social conditions are often to be found in extremely diverse neighborhoods, and it would be hard to argue that her Greenwich Village street of 1962 offered quite the range of people one might find these days. Moreover, her discussions nearly always center on either white blue-collar or white immigrant neighborhoods, thus conveniently sidestepping the pitfalls of a debate on the Latino neighborhoods in California, or African American neighborhoods in her beloved New York City.

Reconsidering Le Corbusier’s Urbanism

Jacobs refers to ‘orthodox’ city planning theory as fundamentally anti-city, aspiring to an earlier village ideal, to a harmonious relationship with nature. She first discusses Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City planning as an anti-urban yet highly planned and rationalized environment. In reaction to the squalor and overcrowding of the late 19th-century industrial city, this is perhaps easily defended. But, as Jacobs points out, Howard thus sets out a certain anti-urban paradigm that “wrote off the intricate, many-faceted, cultural life of the metropolis.” Especially important in the work of Howard was the small-town ideal of community life and dispersion of these small towns throughout the landscape. Density was to be avoided at all costs, as was later continued in the work of the American Decentrists and Frank Lloyd Wright in Broadacre City, albeit towards a different goal. Contrary to the more common urban interpretation of Le Corbusier’s city planning, Jacobs actually relates his work to that of Howard’s Garden City. She singles out Le Corbusier as the “man with the most dramatic idea of how to get all this anti-city planning right into the citadels of

---

99 Jacobs, p17-18
100 Jacobs, p19.
101 Jacobs, p18
iniquity themselves" (p21). His Radiant City plan may allow for a higher, more urban, density through its incorporation of skyscrapers, but in their park-like setting they still adhere to the ideal of a traditional rural village gently embedded in a natural environment.

Most of Jacobs’ critique revolves around the loss of vitality through planning and above all the loss of individual agency. This notion of agency is an important distinction from liberty. Typically, these two notions are conflated, when individual liberty is seen as the agency to do exactly as one pleases without regard for any context. According to Jacobs, it is this notion of liberty that is in fact destructive of the social fabric, and her ‘anti-planning’ argument is about introducing individual agency, in the sense that one has some influence on the greater whole. Moreover, of course, agency incorporates a certain degree of responsibility or accountability, which is not inherent to the notion of liberty: “Le Corbusier’s Utopia was a condition of what he called maximum individual liberty, by which he seems to have meant not liberty to do anything much, but liberty from ordinary responsibility. In his Radiant City nobody, presumably, was going to have to be his brother’s keeper any more. Nobody was going to have to struggle with plans of his own.” (p22; my italics)

Finally, one of the other main points of critique we find in Jacobs echoes many others of the time – a resistance to the mechanization of all aspects of life. Her plea was one for the vitality of everyday life, while the strict separation of functions and the design of everyday actions as cogs in a machine precluded this possibility of vitality – simply because it precluded the possibility of difference, of working against the grain. In Jacob’s words: “His city was like a wonderful mechanical toy. Furthermore, his conception, as an architectural work, has a dazzling clarity, simplicity and harmony. It was so orderly, so visible, so easy to understand. It said everything in a flash, like a good advertisement.” 102 The simplicity is here obviously proposed as simplistic, thereby disallowing any possibilities of complexity, or of the transformation of the whole through the agency of one of its parts. In contrast, the rapidly disappearing traditional city is seen as harboring vitality and complexity (fig. 1.29).

In this mechanization, in the clarity of its design, it responds immediately to the perception of the city as chaotic, dirty and incomprehensible. These were terms in which critics such as Lewis Mumford and Catherine Bauer were typically sketching the contours of the existing city. 103 Just as Frank Lloyd Wright spoke of the diseased city in his lectures, metropolis was seen here as nothing but a breeding ground for social ills, encouraged by its density and the presence of all sorts of unsavory elements of society. The city had beggars, hustlers, sinners, and their presence was unavoidable, just as the problem of disease was exacerbated by proximity. These ideas were of course set against an ideal of the organic and rustic environment that was man’s ‘natural habitat’ – as if disease and immorality do not exist in the rustic environment. 104

The idea of mechanization is intimately related to what Jacobs calls ‘decontamination’ a little further on: the idea that each element, each function is ‘pure’ and unadulterated, that each part of the city should be placed in full autonomy with nothing but a relationship of proximity. This again precludes the possibility of mutual influence, and thus of unprogrammed or unpredictable results. “[T]he principles of sorting out – and of bringing order by repression of all plans but the planners’ – have been easily extended to all manner of city functions, until today a land-use master plan for a big city is largely a matter of proposed placement, often in relation to transportation, of many series of decontaminated sortings.” 105

Here, the modernist incorporation of traffic becomes less an organic embodiment of the transformations of life through the automobile (which is what Benjamin would argue as productive), and more the use of mobility and speed as an image, or a metaphor, of progress. In this sense, Le Corbusier incorporated a static condition of mobility, one that could never exceed or transform its boundaries. This use of mobility as an image rather than a condition that may change over the course of time is again representative of the aspects of the functionalist city that laid claim to transformation yet at the same time proclaimed their own finality as a solution.

Density and vitality in the Radiant City reconsidered

Jacobs explicitly links vitality to density, arguing that there is a sort of ‘ideal’ density at which the city achieves its highest level of vitality. She sees this as directly related to diversity, although whether this is a diversity of form or of social constitution remains ambiguous, therefore lending her argument a certain vagueness useful to her purposes. “Obviously, if the object is vital city life, the dwelling densities should go as high as they need to go to stimulate the maximum potential diversity in a district.” 106 When dwelling densities get too high, or so her argument goes, a repression of diversity sets in: “The reason dwelling densities can beginpressing diversity if they get too high is this: At some point, to accommodate so many dwellings on the land, standardization of the buildings must

102 Jacobs, p23
103 Jacobs, p21
104 Jacobs, p25
105 Jacobs, p212

chapter 1 – city

50

chapter 1 – city

51
set in. This is fatal, because great diversity in age and types of buildings has a direct, explicit connection with diversity of population, diversity of enterprises and diversity of scenes." 107 Thus Jacobs argues against repetition and standardization, and in the end, it is our quest for maximum efficiency, related to the profit principle of capitalism, that to her causes this problem: "Maximum efficiency, or anything approaching it, means standardization." 108 Of course, underlying this commentary is the understanding that efficiency is not the only argument for building dwellings and cities. Precisely the vitality Jacobs is seeking has moments of high inefficiency. In the argument of Jacobs, inefficiency is thus used against a mechanistic and economic interpretation of the city, which negates the non-rational and non-quantifiable aspects of human life. Her argument tends towards a naturalistic interpretation, in her references to a 'natural' human interaction and its social qualities (which are to her quintessentially human). We can bear in mind here as an alternative the work of the Situationist International – whose idea of the dérive is precisely about this same inefficient but vital use of space, yet see it as a conscious act rather than a natural order. In other words, the SI tried to trigger vitality by means of the dérive as an inefficient use of the city, while Jacobs signaled the existence of inefficiency as an important part of the urban condition.

Vitality is the critical notion here, and it has everything to do with the ability to respond and to change. The very root of the word lies in the Latin vitalis, of life, and life is about responsiveness to changing conditions. On this level, Jacobs approaches an important understanding of vitality from all angles, but misses the point when she relates it directly to density. This type of 'rule' is what drowned modernism in dogma, and it does the same to Jacobs. Jacobs attacked the Garden City and the Ville Radieuse as essentially similar projects. This again goes back to a modernist belief in rationality, and then usually expressed through science and technology. To Jacobs, it is a problem of the type of modernist planning: the notion that statistics and scientific analysis can solve the perceived 'problem' of disorganized complexity. 109 On the one hand, Jacobs demonstrates her belief that rationality does not preclude complexity: "And so a growing number of people... think of cities as problems in organized complexity" (p438). This is indeed a historical line we can discern especially since the mid-20th century. Yet on the other, she also seems to be struggling with the idea that reality can be captured at all in a model: "we are all accustomed to believe that maps and reality are necessarily related, or that if they are not, we can make them so by altering reality" (p438).

The relationships between different things (such as maps and reality) are a continual source of conflict in the 1960s. This too goes back to an aspect of modernist belief in rationality: a kind of belief in an extremely linear version of relationships such as cause and effect. For example, in Gans' 'fallacy of physical determinism' referred to earlier (p5, above), Gans is not attacking the idea that the physical environment has an effect on people. He is only attacking the simplicity of the planners' understanding of cause and effect: changing one element (the physical environment) in a multitude of factors (income, education, family life, social network, etc.) will not transform an entire society. The typical 1960s resistance to this simplicity rests on the conflation of, for example, moral and aesthetic values in the rhetoric of modernism: the notion that 'ugly' equals 'ethically bad' or that 'good' architecture can create 'good' people. This type of behaviorist interpretation of architecture becomes problematic in the late 1950s when people realize that the banlieues in Paris, built to 'light and air' specifications, are not functioning at all the way they were planned. The ease with which very different things are conflated has everything to do with purism and abstraction (Le Corbusier and Wright) and the single universal goal; to attain the universal goal, we have to follow the abstracted argument, because details only get in the way. The 1960s on the other hand, have everything to do with plurality, or beginning to acknowledge it. There is a growing understanding that the relationships between different things may not be as linear or direct as presumed under modernism: more technology did not lead to more leisure time for the labor class, nor did it lead directly to an overall increase in wealth.

These investigations into plurality and diversity, the distinction between a model and its reality, and the understanding that some relationships are more complex than we can capture in a single gesture helped in the search for a vital urban environment, as well as in the definition of what was so lacking in modernist design and planning that a counterforce seemed necessary.

II. The (Universal) Modernist City Refracted

A. Global Aspects of the Debate

From the previous section it should be clear that some of the most prominent and radical ideas of the 1960s were formulated explicitly as a position of resistance against a dominant modernist ideology. Criticisms echo one another throughout the transatlantic debate, such as a lack of visible identity, too mechanized, sterile, abstract, no connection with reality, no traditional city fabric. Since this was so widespread, it is useful at this point to separate (as well as possible) some of the

107 Jacobs, p212
108 Jacobs, p213
109 Jacobs, pp 436-439. The notion of complexity is one of the critical terms of the 1960s, and still crucial to architectural thought today. For example, M. Christine Boyer's CyberCities deals with the birth of the computer age in relation to complexity. There is a relation between computers (as machines handling complexity) to the urban and 'the body,' as both city and body are highly complex systems. With the introduction of the internet, there is even the possibility to discuss self-organizing systems. As a basic term, 'complexity' will return in the second chapter through the work of Robert Venturi.
areas of resistance, and subsequently reevaluate what alternatives were given. Some of the main points of criticism can be categorized as: abstraction, mechanization, rationalization, massiveness. Each of these in their own way contributed to the sense of constraint – that the individual living in the city had been stripped of choices.

The alternatives, or strategies of resistance, discussed in section I might be broadly categorized as: social activism (SI), social criticism through symbols (IG, Archigram) and social cohesion through convention (Jacobs, Lynch). Each aims at regaining some kind of social cohesion and value (however loosely defined) through its strategies. Again, these are critiques produced over a period of time. While the SI shifts gradually from the aesthetic to the political, the trajectory opened up by Jacobs’ work moves towards the aesthetic in the work of Venturi and Scott Brown. They are all, however, seeking ways to transform the sterile city of abstracted form into something more human and vital, be it through collective action or collective symbolism. One issue that remains problematic however is the limited interaction between the social and the formal. Although it is true that neither can determine the other, denying any mutual influence is also counterproductive. Identification through signs and symbols is reasonably universal and to think that modern men would have no need of this is presumptuous, as is the hierarchy between ‘authentic’ symbols and those of the mass media.

Formal and conceptual distinctions

In the critiques, there was clearly a formal response to the rigidity of the modern city as presented by Le Corbusier. In response to an overly mechanized environment that was deemed inhuman, the designs of the time proposed organic forms. Since abstraction was considered not communicative enough, it was replaced with figuration. These formal reactions did liberate the general design tendencies from a rigorous dependence on clarity, rectilinear form, and visual purity. However, in their rigorous application, they began to form a new aesthetic that was no less demanding than its predecessor.

The conceptual innovations of the 1960s were principally engaged with replacing the idealist tendency of modern designs by a more realist version. Rather than offering only the perfected vision of their future city, these critics were also examining the fabric of the existing city to find its beauty. In theory, the 1960s were all about the intersection of the ideal and the real. Yet in practice, they often so reduced the reality they were examining that little was left of the multiplicity they were seeking.

Opposing modernism

It is necessary here to recapitulate the critiques of modernism, since those critiques point to perceived failures. I will argue that these perceived failures come in part from the tenets modernism, in part from transformations towards a late capitalist society and in part from the experience of modernity itself (and the inadequacy of modernism’s response to it). Subsequently, I will hold up the disparate counterreactions to examine whether they truly offered viable alternative solutions for the problems thus perceived.

In one sense modernism never did address the schism of modernity: the discombobulation of living in a time determined by conditions beyond our control. The hope inherent in modernism, its promise, was that Reason would inevitably resolve the problems of modernity. This promise had however been shattered by World War II, when rationality also proved to be a very efficient means towards destructive ends. The dependence on reason derives directly from Enlightenment thought, but in the modern era lost the spiritual stability of religion that Kant and Descartes were still able to lay claim to. Without an external universal determinant of value, the ephemerality of modernity becomes troubling, if not downright traumatic. Self-realization taken to the extreme also means that any twists of ‘fate’ are our own fault. This is the Nietzschean conception of the individual that also still plagues the 1960s.

The alienation created by an environment of modernist architecture became not only visible but also a tangible part of everyday reality once it had been built. A pointed example here is the Parisian banlieues, which served as the disturbing décor for Alphaville, a 1965 film-noir science fiction film by Jean-Luc Godard. He found precisely the dark, disorienting and unfamiliar setting he was looking for in the modernist building blocks on the edges of Paris. Once this built environment had left the domain of utopian plans and speculations and entered the world in built form, its shortcomings became more apparent. Rather than the promised land of efficiency and the perfectly rational city inhabitant, there was a disillusionment with the disorientation arising from uniformity. The contrast between the model and the reality is one of the problems here. This follows on Jacobs’ critique of ‘how things ought to be.’ Where Le Corbusier was designing how he felt the world ought to be, public housing projects such as those in Queens were clashing with reality, and showing that the world was not yet (and may never be) ready to become as idealized as he thought. Use tended towards the familiar (parks, sidewalks), not the new forms of the completely modern environment.
Furthermore, the basic societal parameters of the modern city had also changed, rapidly becoming more amassed than ever before. The massiveness already present at the dawn of the modern metropolis (Simmel) took another leap in scale in the 1960s. Here, the problems facing the 60s might be construed as an exacerbated form of the modern condition. Mass had now been further compounded with plurality. Alienation with the disappearance of traditional public space (in the CIAM city). Loss of ‘place’ with the uniformity of architecture. Additionally, Lawrence Alloway comments that mass culture is by its nature urban. The place and importance of the city in the society of spectacle is testimony to this.

In a way, the 1960s were not as directly opposed to modernism as the statements of the time imply. Many of the critical strategies proposed in the 60s are also already present in modernism—and even acknowledged as such. There is, for example, the situationists’ comment that Frank Lloyd Wright was heading in the right direction but not yet radical enough. Broadacre had a diffuse structure and was based on individual freedom of action, similar to New Babylon as a network of active engagement.

American and European (r)evolutions
Some important distinctions between the American and European treatment of the city are apparent in the writings of Jane Jacobs and Henri Lefebvre. In their underlying ideas and as a general critique of modernism, these two theorists writing on the city seem to be aiming at the same goal: a revaluation of the city as it stands, a renewed sense of place and importance for the individual living in that city, and a carefully weighed critique of what modernity has brought us and what modernism has perhaps also taken away. At the same time, a clear distinction can be made between the two that reflects the very different cultural backgrounds they operate within. Whereas Jacobs can be said to operate from within a pragmatist position, following American thinkers such as William James and John Dewey, Lefebvre is firmly rooted in a Marxist tradition.

The pragmatic position (in theory) does not presume an ideal, or a greater good, outside of everyday reality. What it does presume is not dissimilar to Aristotle’s notion of the median: the appropriate response within a given situation, taking into account the individual subject and his context. Marxism, on the other hand,


presumes a certain attainable ideal society based on a redistribution of capital and above all removing the alienation inherent in the labor process in capitalist society. The workers are responsible for this revolution themselves, but there is still an important place for the intellectual in Marxist thought. In the SI, the artist and the intellectual are seen as essential to instigating the revolution, but will no longer be necessary once life has become truly ‘authentic’ for everyone. Interestingly, the work of Jacobs is probably closer in spirit to Marx’s idea of the revolutionary laborer, since she does not presume the necessity of an intellectual leader. On the other hand, there is a unique place reserved for the artist in the Marxist-based neo-avant-garde, since the artist has the power to break through the ‘false consciousness’ of the spectacle and ‘see’ beyond it to a better world long before the creative individual can. This is reminiscent of Le Corbusier’s position for the architect-engineer, though it incorporates a shift from rational to personal expression.

The parallels between Jacobs and Lefebvre are indicative of some of the points of resonance in the transatlantic critique of modernism, such as this introduction of the everyday in its various forms. At the same time, their contrasts illustrate some of the cultural specificities within these responses. The American tendency toward liberal pragmatism results in an almost ‘naturalized’ acceptance of the world as it is, and the belief that, as such, one should explore the qualities of existing conditions. The European-bound versions of Marxist emancipation see this same condition of the ordinary and everyday as an instrument to overthrow an authoritarian government—demonstrating how saturated the Marxist critique is with a consciousness of a bourgeois ruling class.

Points of Resistance
What we have now seen of a ‘global’ resistance to high modernism (and by this I mean the widespread resistance in the transatlantic debate) shows the problems beginning to surface as many cities were reconstructed according to CIAM tenets. The modernist city was perhaps not all it had promised, and as already noted the reactions were extremely varied, although their points of critique were resoundingly similar. Lack of social space, lack of traditional city fabric, too sterile. One of the many texts of the period that illuminates the problems of the modernist city well is ‘Planning Today,’ a conversation published in Architectural Design between Peter Smithson, William Holford and Arthur Ling. Particularly the comments of Peter Smithson as quoted below define the issues well. Moreover,
many of the phrases used show a startling resonance among the transatlantic critiques of the modernist city.

Abstraction: The Model vs. Reality
Although abstraction was a useful tool around the turn of the century to reduce the clutter of the Victorian city to manageable proportions, this resulted in a form of Platonic thinking in (potentially) perfected models, which often negated the good qualities of the existing fabric.

This problem with a model abstracted from reality, then projected onto that same reality, is reiterated time and again, as is noted above in relation to the work of Jane Jacobs, in her distinction between ‘ought to’ and ‘does.’ In the ‘Planning Today’ article, Smithson comments: “And by ‘society’ I mean an actual group of people, rather than generalized ‘man’.”114 The process of abstraction (and deduction from a model) in itself is not the problem: Smithson too discusses the possible benefits of being able to “deduce from its existing structure a possible further structure” as long as we keep in mind “that any society is in constant change.” The problem with abstraction arises when it is held as a formal principle, rather than a strategy that understands its own contingency. In a society that is, as Smithson states, continually changing, taking an abstracted notion of that society to be ideal and permanent, is in direct contradiction with its very premises. The understanding of modern life as changing or developing is thwarted by the retreat into abstract models. This problem is very much one of form, and is often handled as such by (re)introducing everyday symbolism (Venturi and Scott Brown, Lynch), or everyday visual material (IG).

The word ‘actual’ and various synonyms are favorites in the writings of the 1960s—as in the work of Jacobs, Lynch and also Lefebvre, taking stock of a reality that is less ideal than the future that Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin projects, is the indication of a critical stance. Where the modernists rebelled against the ‘actual’ reality they faced in the nineteenth-century city, this same condition now became the instrument of resistance. ‘Reality’ was the place critics were turning to find the vitality they found lacking in modernist developments.

Again, the words and images of the 1960s projects point to specific shortcomings in the work of their predecessors. The continuous use of ‘actual’ and ‘real’ indicate that somehow the modernist city was not ‘real’ enough. Although the modernist city had attempted to project a future reality, by the time the Parisian banlieues were constructed and a large part of the European mainland was beginning to be filled with what Peter Smithson called ‘filing cabinets,’ there was a disjunction between everyday reality, which was filled with tangible and specific architectural

---

114 'Planning Today,' quote from p.186.
fig. 1.32. Victor Gruen, diagrams of cluster development (as more amenable to people)

fig. 1.33. Constant, New Babylon. models and sketches.
and visual form, and an environment determined by smoothly abstracted building blocks.

Machinic Orders
The rectilinearity of modernist cities is also perceived as problematic—though again the grid is a response to an extremely cluttered Victorian city, the conflation of a conceptual notion of rationalization with the Cartesian visual order of a rectilinear grid meets with resistance here (figs. 1.30, 1.31). Again, in the words of Smithson: “‘rational’ in this case meaning right-angled buildings parallel to one another” or, more critically: “more like filing cabinets that have been built by mediaeval techniques rather than places where people actually have to live.”\(^{115}\) Note in the latter comment the use of ‘actually’ again—constantly reconfirming that the modernists had more eye for the models they had conceived than for reality.

The rectilinearity first posited by Le Corbusier as the expression of the rationality and clarity of modernist man is now seen as “arbitrary and inhuman.”\(^{116}\) Yet as we will see in section III, Smithson himself is not entirely free of this type of conflation: he notes that a “discipline of growth” should be developed which is “pragmatic—not Cartesian” (p 186). The implication in this statement would seem to be that a structure will only allow growth if it is not Cartesian, and that pragmatism and a Cartesian grid are mutually exclusive.

Universality
In the end, modernism also negates its own premise of designing for a new era, which is half determined by ephemerality: by seeing its planning as a “permanently valid form of architecture” (p 186). In response to this sense of a form that is too restrictive and understood as universally valid, the notions of change and flexibility are incorporated in architectural form. There is a strange condition here, however: ‘change’ is often framed as a time-based condition, and linked to the idea of impermanence, yet often translated into a static form that remains little more than the representation of flexibility (figs. 1.32, 1.33). Archigram perhaps takes this idea to its most logical conclusion, almost allowing architecture to disappear entirely in favor of ‘space suits’ or mobile capsule-like environments.

Here we should perhaps recall Lefebvre’s critique of architects in general, that they somehow presume that their drawings represent the actual space, when they are necessarily abstractions, and can in no way seen to be universally valid for every culture.

\(^{115}\) ‘Planning Today’, quotes fr p185.


\(chapter 1 – city\)
Massiveness, complexity and mass culture

As indicated, there was a huge leap in scale of the metropolis in the 1960s. This resulted in further disorientation, since first the traditional symbols of architecture had disappeared with CIAM. Yet also, as Holford notes, the ‘efficient’ modern city became surprisingly “inefficient when the scale grew past the point where it was easily comprehensible” (186). The massiveness of the modern metropolis was complex, yet the CIAM tenets seemed not to acknowledge that. Nor did they acknowledge that the complexity of the modern metropolis might require a different formal approach – incorporating signs and symbols to navigate its complexity. This is addressed quite early in the work of Lawrence Alloway, and later more radically in Learning from Las Vegas.

Furthermore, the city was conducive to, or perhaps even caused, the rise of a mass culture. As Gans argues, it is the transition from a primarily rural peasantry to an urban one that initiates a mass culture to replace the earlier (rural) folk culture.\(^{17}\) The problem of mass continually returns throughout the 1960s, and is most succinctly phrased as “democracy face to face with hugeness.”\(^{18}\)

B. Global Traits of Resistance Localized

Individual Agency and Mass Culture as Instruments of Reform

What connects the overall critiques of the modernist city is a need for individuation in the face of an overwhelming ‘machinery’ of the functionalist city on the one hand, and the use of mass culture as a new tool in the general re-evaluation of the modernist city on the other hand. This indicates two general issues that follow opposing directions. Individual agency moves further into a sense of specificity and the uniqueness of each person within the larger environment of the city. In contrast, mass culture becomes a new level of communication that brings a sense of cohesion, of being a part of society and understanding its symbols.

Beyond the general responses to the modernist discourse, each of the groups discussed also have their own specific characteristics, which demonstrate the various interpretations of the transatlantic issues. In France, the SI posed the most radical critique of the modernist city. They place the creative individual at the center of their urban critique; the spaces of the modernist city are to be critiqued and transformed by means of interventions such as the dérive, organized around individual desire and interpretation. Their acknowledgement of mass culture is coupled with a theory of creative, subversive intervention by the individual in the notion of détournement. In the UK, the IG and Archigram wrote less on individual intervention as a creative tool, but saw freedom for the individual available in the new conditions of mass culture and consumerism. Their utilization of mass culture transcends the boundaries between modern architecture and the vernacular. Jane Jacobs similarly saw some freedom available in symbolic expression, although hers tended more towards a traditional view. Later, with the introduction of the vernacular American landscape by Venturi and Scott Brown, the qualities of mass culture as posed by the IG will find more foothold in the American discourse. Jacobs’ ideas on the city do offer a strong place for the idea of a collective, and her ideas are less radical than those of the SI, but incorporate more of an examination of the social.

III. Basic Dualities – Incomplete Paradigm Shifts

Despite the contradictions in the work of the 1960s indicated in section II, valuable questions are asked about the relationship between people and their environment, and which position architects might take. Therefore, this section reiterates some of the findings of this chapter and frames them in a few terms that may still be helpful today, which circumscribe the areas of ‘incomplete revolution’ I have noted earlier. In other words, the underlying presumption here is that the 1960s critiques were both insightful in their questions and simplistic in their answers. By seeing to what extent the ‘radical’ critiques of the 1960s recapitulated and confirmed some of the modernist distinctions they struggled against, we might put them to better use today. This is why I refer to the ‘incomplete’ paradigm shifts of the 1960s. Although there was a clear understanding of the insufficiencies of modernist thought with respect to the complexity and vitality of the city, the way this was handled resembled very closely the emancipatory project of the moderns. The impossibility of universal solutions and definitions was acknowledged in the projects (text and image) of the 1960s by raising questions against modernist utopias. Yet they consequently reiterated the modernist position by proving incapable of truly incorporating the uncertainty of a postmodern plurality while still retaining a belief in the need for judgement.

Therefore, my suggestion in this final section is to examine some of the dualities that were cast in place during the heyday of modernism and survived the radical critiques of the 1960s. By making the resemblance between strategies visible, we may find some possibilities rather than the impasse so often proclaimed these days (‘the death of public space’ for example).

Individual / Collective

The first and foremost duality in debates on the city is that between the desires of the individual and the needs of the collective. While Le Corbusier presumed that by defining the function of a mechanical collective, the perfect individual would arise, the situationists hoped that unleashing the creativity of a romanticized individual would shape the collective into something expressing an ideal passion of human

---


\(^{18}\) ‘Planning Today’, quote from p186.
life. Either way, the understanding of a necessary tension between the two seems to have given way to a hope that by perfecting one or the other, there will be a final state of harmony. This is what I mean when defining this as an 'emancipatory project of the modernist utopias' – the goal is still a transcendent state of perfection, rather than an understanding that there is a continuous state of development. Every moment of emancipation brings with it a transformation, therefore necessitating a renegotiation.

In that sense, understanding that the relationship between the individual and the collective will always be subject to negotiation is perhaps more productive than attempting to design a system that presumes the perfection of either. This leads to one of the most divisive problems in architecture: how much is to be designed? And to what extent can we presume an impact of architecture on behavior? To Constant, New Babylon would somehow instigate people to play with their environment and transform it. To Le Corbusier, the Plan Voisin would encourage people to become the rational and efficient beings a modern society needed. Neither of these basic premises allows the conceptual room for a counter-use of their spaces. Even when a counter-use is envisioned, it is immediately given form as space for 'subversion.' Each element was designed to a certain effect, and this effect was presumed to be attainable. For the situationists, unitary urbanism was not so much a utopia as a state yet to be achieved. To counterbalance this definitive understanding of the city environment, we might hope that presuming individual autonomy while projecting an ideal environment could bridge the gap. In other words, this means going back to the craft of design. Rather than creating a metaphorical future city (the mechanical city, the walking city, the living city), this would mean looking at the public spaces (the conjunction of individual and collective) and making them work on an architectural level rather than a metaphorical one. This entails functionality (the modern ideal), but also proportion (formal aspects of architecture) and visual information (aesthetics).

Aesthetics / Ethics
The duality of ethics and aesthetics has possibly been the most problematic one of the twentieth century, and will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation as well. Here, I would simply like to point out the problem of Le Corbusier's conflation of 'good design' with 'good morals,' and the problems it caused for 1960s critiques. This original conflation was perhaps not even so much a conflation, as the presumed universality of modernist morals and design.19

The underlying promise of modernist utopias was that society would function perfectly and properly. The underlying message of 'ornament and crime' was that bad design showed a lack of moral fiber (rather than an imperfect eye). The 1960s began to see the shortcomings of these principles in terms of repression of 'otherness' or 'diversity.' Yet in placing so much emphasis on the meaning of form (sterile=repressive; rectilinear=oppressive; organic form=freedom), the work of the 1960s produced the inverse problem: ethical architecture could only have one form, and aesthetic form must necessarily be unethical.

Image / Mass Culture
In the end, I am arguing here, in the abstract, for a recognition of the specificity of architecture. Not as a critical regionalism (Frampton) which romanticizes the genius loci, but as a profession that addresses a single program on a single site at a single point in time. Even if the program is more universal (such as a basic concept for a generic design – say McDonald's), this is tied to a need of this time (globalization), and the critique of a space should address the success or failure of a design in those terms. Also, the symbolic value of architecture is different from that of art and visual culture, as well as its time-frame. In architecture, both the use of a space and its reception (supported by its symbolic expression) need to be incorporated – the strength of the critiques written by Jacobs and Lefebvre is in their discussions of specific and successful spaces.

Summary / conclusion
The 1960s addressed a critical failing in the modernist city – in its purified design, it failed to make space for the extra-rational aspects of human life and association, while at the same time it left little room for the individual. The above excerpts and projects show a forthright concern with this, and broke open the rigid structure of the discourse. Yet in turn, the work of the 1960s too failed to fully comprehend or address the plurality it was propagating in its words. Through the radicalization of these theories and their operation on the basis of models (cf, for example, the creative worker suppressed by capitalism) they likewise failed to offer a 'real' space for the people they hoped to liberate, as their modernist fathers before them, only now from the mechanical city of the 1930s rather than the diseased city of the 1900s.

At the same time, with these critical notes in mind, it is clear that so many of these issues still resonate today, presumably because the rhetoric at the very least addressed questions now facing us, such as how to maintain individuality in an increasingly massive and technological world. Therefore, despite the failure of these radical critiques, the fundamental issues should remain under critical scrutiny. The best lesson we might learn from the above examples is to remember to accept...
the limitations of architecture; to understand that it is a field with so many variables that simply designing a space for an ideal occupant will not make that ideal human come to life. Furthermore, keeping both eyes open to the different facets of the discourse, from image to text and built form, is important. Architecture as a public image is not the same as architecture described towards a utopian society, nor is it the same as the building in the experience of the everyday user. All of these issues were raised in the manifestoes of the 1960s, yet seem to have been forgotten in the heat of revolution.

Chapter 2
Purity of Vision, Potential of the Image
Modern architecture and the mass culture explosion
0. Introduction
While the city comes to the forefront of the architecture discourse in the 1960s, there is above all a marked increase in attention for ‘the image.’ By this I mean a somewhat diverse collection of issues such as mass cultural imagery, the expression of the surface, the importance of symbolism and ornamentation, as well as an increasing interest in various manifestations of an increasingly visual culture. Although this may seem an extensive set of categories, there is a clear demarcation in the articles of the 1960s that opposes these questions to a perceived lack of visual vitality in modernism. This focuses on the importance of figuration (towards a symbolic and communicative value) and on an expressive surface (as opposed to the white walls of modernism). In the broadest sense, we might take Jencks’ definition of pop as a guideline here: incorporating new influences from outside the profession (and thereby opening the field of architecture to such ‘debased’ influences as mass culture). On the other hand, we could remain quite close to the question of imagery and ask which images allow architecture to ‘reconnect’ with the human factor so prominent in the 1960s. Both sides are valid and crucial to the debates in the 1960s.

The Importance of Pop Culture for Architecture
Mass cultural imagery had a wide-ranging influence in the 1960s critiques against modernism. This imagery was considered critical precisely due to its earlier negation in the sterile representations of the future modernist environment. In this aspect of the architecture debate, we again find transatlantic similarities that revolve around ‘pop imagery’ (for example Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi in the UK; Tom Wolfe in the US; Charles Jencks in both the US and the UK). In various writings and propositions of the time, again we find a general need to engage with the issue of imagery and mass culture – the SI is both interested in its revolutionary capacity in their definition of détournement, and at the same time wary of the capitalist power structure implicit behind the visual culture they see proliferating. Throughout this, there are also local distinctions that betray some of the differences in the relationship between culture and politics in the US and in Europe.

There is also a general background to these issues, which has to do on the one hand with a reaction against abstract expressionism in art, and at the same time has to do with changing conditions of everyday life. Especially in the US, the affluent

---


fig. 2.1. Venturi and Scott Brown, images of Las Vegas signage (1968)
West Coast Architecture extrapolated as a setting for leisure on the planet Altair 4 (Forbidden Planet, M.G.M.)

**fig. 2.2.** Science fiction in architecture magazines: Above, images accompanying article by John McHale (1959). Below, contemporary architecture as future environment (AD, 1958)

**fig. 2.3.** Eduardo Paolozzi 'Meet the People' (1948). Collage.
society of the postwar era was leading to increased purchasing power and beginning to fuel the economy of consumption we are familiar with today. Again we find resoundingly similar critiques, against the elitism of Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg (critiques by the Independent Group and by Susan Sontag, e.g.); and again, we find numerous connections between how these critiques are expressed and what they lead to – there is an overwhelming turn to everyday imagery and popular culture, as well as a consistent use of collage and assemblage techniques.

Designing for the Masses?
By themselves, these transformations in imagery and visuality need not have an impact upon the architecture production of the time – they could have remained within the discourse of art. However, in the general critiques of modernism and functionalism, there was a turn to popular culture here as well, in a hope that architecture could somehow reconnect with the inhabitants it was designing for.

As in the discourse on the city, where individual experience was used as a way to offset the increasing mechanization of the modern city, in terms of the visual field, symbolic and kitsch elements of popular culture were utilized to transform the abstraction and lack of symbolic communication in the modernist environment. In this way, the notion of a popular or a mass culture became important as a reference for architectural expression.

There was a hope that the images of mass culture could revitalize a discourse apparently stuck in modernist abstraction. Therefore, instead of rigorously mechanized buildings, architects produced frivolous and colorful imagery. They gathered their sources from science fiction and comic books, preferring the glittering worlds of Las Vegas and Hollywood to the urban utopias of Le Corbusier (figs. 2.1-2.4). In the most radical manifestations, anything was fine as long as it expressed personal freedom, the creativity of the individual (any individual, not only artists), the pleasure of living in an age of consumer freedom and increased wealth, and the necessary rebellion against standardization and the repressive authority of the older generation. As is most obvious in the works of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, the populist imagery of America became a new benchmark for a different kind of visuality, one that was less demanding perhaps than its modernist predecessor.

This is primarily about the communicative aspect of symbolism, which is central to the work of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. Although I will be using both the terms ‘popular’ and ‘mass’ culture, the preferred term for the 1960s will be mass culture with its connotations of urbanity and mass production.
Collective Symbolism

This different kind of visuality was both reflected in and formed through images. In
the architecture debate, the discussion of these representations were typically more
about the intent of the architect than the general aesthetic, cultural and visual
context. Yet it is also obvious that images are powerful in creating a collective
understanding of architecture and its agenda – one that is not entirely under the
control of architects. Where the modernist agenda was expressed through a purity
of line and form, through empty spaces that implied the liberated, rational, new and
unfettered society to come, its disturbingly inhuman aspects were exhibited in later
re-presentations of these same rational and orderly spaces, some of which did not
even belong to the domain of the architecture discourse. For example, we can think
of Tati’s Playtime, where M. Hulot looks out over an office space that is organized
on a perfectly square grid, by modernist standards a space of perfect clarity, calling
upon the most rational faculties of the occupant in its navigation (fig. 2.5). Yet our
protagonist Hulot shows only the distressing disorientation that results from a space
so thoroughly lacking in recognizable ‘landmarks’ or anomalies that can trigger a
sense of uniqueness. In fact, since it is a square grid, even the directional
orientation by length or width disappears, as shown further on in the scene. As
Hulot is running between the office cubicles, the camera makes a number of 90
degree rotations, completing the sense of being lost.  

Absolutely crucial to the developments in the 1960s is that this transformation
embodies a vast democratization of aesthetic values and their significance. The
discourse not only takes place within the hallowed halls of academia and
professional practice, but also in the public arena of mass culture. This implies a
two-way influence: presumably films such as those of Tati are popular because they
are somehow recognizable, or resonate with feelings or ideas already present in the
audience. Yet at the same time these popular films begin to create a collective
perception or consciousness of modernist architecture. Moreover, the relationship
between architecture and ordinary images is also represented through the familiar
symbols of traditional (vernacular) spaces versus the purified abstraction of
modernist space. This goes into the inherently troubled relationship with imagery.
For clarity’s sake, this final category should be split into two parts, one involving
mass cultural imagery, and the other involving the concept of ‘image’ as opposed to
‘reality’. In the case of mass cultural imagery, it has by and large been considered
unchallenging, derivative and unenlightened (following Adorno). In the 60s, it was
understood more along the lines of Benjamin: there is so much visual material out
there, so much new information, and it can be seen as productive in other ways, or
at least indicative of unexplored territories. It does not necessarily need to fit the
traditional categories of artistic quality or value, although it must certainly be

125 Although the films of Jacques Tati are beyond the scope of this study, they offer a strong
example of a general aesthetic and cultural critique of the modern city and its architecture.
I. From Modernist Abstraction to a Plethora of Pop Images

A. United States: Venturi, Scott Brown and The Promise of Pop

Robert Venturi (b. 1925) and Denise Scott Brown (b. 1932) began their separate careers in architecture in the US and the UK respectively, and both showed an interest in the ‘ordinary’ environment early on. Scott Brown began taking series of photographs she made of the everyday environment in Europe and Africa in the late 1950s. In Venturi’s work, the issue of ‘ordinary’ is already present in his book Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, but becomes ever stronger as he begins to collaborate with Scott Brown.

‘Pop’ becomes important in the 1960s as a specific type of ‘ordinary’: it is about the everyday environment of an urbanized consumer culture. As an influence in architecture, ‘pop’ is mainly a response to two conditions of postwar culture. On the one hand it overturned the sterile and abstract visualizations of modernism by introducing a profusion of imagery culled from everywhere – magazines, movies, comics. On the other hand, it was also simply an accommodation of a society in which visual information was increasingly present. Therefore it is not surprising to find that the influence of ‘pop’ found its most radical form in the US, where the general level of affluence increased quickly as of the mid-50s, while the country did not suffer the level of destruction in Europe following World War II. In terms of the architecture discourse, the importance of ‘pop’ as an imaging mechanism was an obvious response to the incapacity of the modernist discourse to handle any kind of (mass) imagery. The functionalist aspects of modernism had no place for the symbolic and often kitsch aspects of pop culture, while the abstracted metaphors of the machine age were visually not conducive to the candy-coated everyday imagery of ads, comics, films and magazines. Therefore it is perhaps unsurprising that, much as ‘everyday life’ became a label signifying ‘vitality’ in the city, ‘pop’ came to signify a vitality in the realm of the visual. Or, in the immortal words of Robert Venturi: ‘Less is a bore.’

The Need for the Ordinary

The seminal works of the 1960s by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown are respectively Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture (hereafter: C&C) by Robert Venturi (1966), and their 1972 co-authored book Learning from Las Vegas (hereafter: LFLV). C&C keeps its critique of modernism within the realm of architecture history, yet the commentary it delivers is familiar from the kinds of criticisms noted in the previous chapter – too ‘clean,’ too ‘pure,’ too ‘clear,’ too ‘simple,’ and Venturi adds ‘puritanically moral’ (these are all adjectives on the first page of C&C). In its adherence to the traditions of the discipline of architecture, the book cannot be considered ‘pop’ in the definition of Jenkins. Yet there is also a transition within the text and the images of the book; halfway through, the conclusions to the chapters increasingly refer to the everyday environment. In sequence, he notes the complexity of Times Square, the scale differences demonstrated by highways alongside buildings and he poses the question: “is not Main Street almost all right?” This transition in the book can be identified as the beginnings of Venturi’s examination of the ordinary, but still framed by the history of architecture. His comments are framed by a sense of historical continuity and a consciousness of his own position within the debate. The main point of criticism

129 The firm they run together now has gone through different phases and names, including Venturi and Rauch, Venturi Scott Brown and now Venturi Scott Brown and Associates. I will distinguish where appropriate by using the name used at the time, but when addressing the firm generally, will hold to the current name of Venturi Scott Brown and Associates (VSBA).
continually returns to a missing sense of reality in the work of architects with their “prim dreams of pure order” (p104). When he does address the condition of the contemporary vernacular, the environment either built without the intervention of architects, or discussed without the intervention of architecture historians, it is still to demonstrate a point about architectural form and what he perceives as lacking in the modernist discourse (figs. 2.6, 2.7).

**Vitality: Complexity and the Commonplace**

In *C&C*, many preludes are made to the later work in *LLV*, and at the same time many similar concerns are visible to the European critiques of modernism. Against the totalitarian condition of systematic order (where he specifically refers to Mies’ desire for order and clarity as a reaction to the confusion of modern times), Venturi poses the question: “Should we not resist bemoaning confusion? Should we not look for meaning in the complexities and contradictions of our times and acknowledge the limitations of systems?” From here, he uses the modernist tendency to maintain a rigid adherence to order and unity to argue the necessity of acknowledging and using elements of popular culture. This is on the one hand a slightly strange transition since the idea of complexity and contradiction need not be directly linked to popular culture, especially since he argues the existence of complexity throughout architecture history. However, in the context of his diatribe against modernism, and since the all-encompassing purist aesthetic of modernism is his main point of critique, the tendency to look towards mass culture as the locus of complexity is understandable. Modernism engaged with the increased massification of modern society, but did not visually acknowledge the mass culture that went along with that. Moreover, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, one of the most persistent critiques of modernist rhetoric is its tendency towards the revolutionary, the heroic and its concomitant denial of existing reality. Or, more accurately, the notion that existing reality must undergo a complete transformation into the utopian ideals of a truly modern society. In response to this aspect of the modernist discourse, Venturi offers: “The main justification for honky-tonk elements in architectural order is their very existence. They are what we have. Architects can bemoan or try to ignore them or even try to abolish them, but they will not go away.” (fig. 2.8) This shares the idea that there is something to be found in mass culture – but it is surprisingly tentative about the quality of it. Venturi here goes no further than to acknowledge that these ‘honky-tonk elements’ are simply a fact of life – here, he does not yet propose that there is also an important aesthetic vitality within popular culture as Alloway does. He only

---

136 Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, p42.
137 Lawrence Alloway, ‘City notes’, *Architectural Design*, January 1959, pp. 34-35, and ‘The arts and the mass media’, *Architectural Design*, February 1958, pp. 84-85. In the latter essay, Alloway even goes so far as to suggest that the fine arts may learn something from Hollywood.
concedes that "these commonplace elements accommodate existing needs for variety and communication" (p42). Two pages later, however, he does follow along the lines of Alloway’s argument in stating that: "Pop Art has demonstrated that these commonplace elements [by which he refers again to ‘honky-tonk’] are often the main source of the occasional variety and vitality of our cities, and that it is not their banality or vulgarity as elements which make for the banality or vulgarity of the whole scene, but rather their contextual relationships of space and scale" (p44).

Again we come to the idea that ‘vitality’, with an implied ‘real life’ (as opposed to ‘aestheticized’ life?) is to be found in those everyday elements (Venturi usually calls them commonplace) that architects have completely ignored in favor of their own constructions of total design. Even Vincent Scully in the introduction to C&C praises Venturi’s “instinct for the changes of scale in small buildings and for the unsuspected life to be found in the common artifacts of mass culture” (p10, my italics). In other words, in a complete inversion of the type of modernism espoused by Le Corbusier: ordinary = lively, and banal = vital.

Although the emphasis on the ordinary is still implicit in C&C, its criticisms finds resonance with other publications such as those of the Independent Group. In the American discourse, the word ‘honky-tonk’ appears alongside the more commonly used ‘ordinary’ or ‘commonplace,’ although it also fades away eventually. The emphasis will remain on the ordinary and the everyday. As we have seen, Venturi already comments on honky-tonk in C&C, as does Douglas Haskell in an early piece in Architectural Forum. To Haskell, this interest in honky-tonk is related to what Venturi will later call communication through symbols and signs. Learning from Las Vegas will ultimately exploit the kind of popular kitsch on the Strip that most modern architects eschew, all in the name of an interest in signs and (pop) symbols as a form of communication with ‘the masses’ (fig. 2.9).

From Buildings to Signs, or Learning from Las Vegas
With the publication of Learning from Las Vegas, Venturi and Scott Brown’s analysis of the everyday visual environment took on the radical form that not only shocked the architecture world at the time, but later earned them the labels ‘pop architects’ and postmodernists. In LLV, Venturi and Scott Brown make a plea for truly looking at the existing environment. They note that “orthodox Modern architecture is progressive, if not revolutionary, utopian, and puristic; it is dissatisfied with existing conditions… Architects have preferred to change the existing environment rather than enhance what is there.”

139 They often refer to their comment that ‘children have always played in monumental fountains.’
140 LLV, p.3.
Brown however, the purity of the drawing and the design – where the architect can still determine who will be presented as inhabiting it – will always meet reality, which will never be as neatly arranged as the diagram for it. They felt a need to incorporate the visible and sometimes messy reality that was absent from the modernist vision of cities that bred orderly inhabitants; this need arose by necessity from what had been repressed. In the case of VSBA, as well as the IG and the SI, it was expressed through a turn to ordinary people and ordinary images, an investigation of what insights those images might have to offer to existing aesthetic principles. Again, it is important to note how intertwined these reactions are with modernist work – the turn to an everyday imagery was to reintroduce precisely the messy aspects of an everyday that Le Corbusier had attempted to banish in his designs. This attitude recalls Jane Jacobs’ distinction between seeing the environment ‘as it is’ or ‘as it ought to be.’ This also explains why there is a perceived need to address the ordinary: it offers a strategy or a means to incorporate the vitality missing in the environments proposed by Le Corbusier (fig. 2.10). The problem, as we shall see later, is that simply incorporating a notion of ‘the ordinary’ as a design strategy eventually leads to an equally idealized perception of ‘honky-tonk’ as an environment, by which it eventually becomes stripped of the vitality it seemed to offer in the late 50s, early 60s.

‘Messy’ Reality
Chapter one discussed how ‘chaos’ was used as a liberating strategy in relation to the sterile modernist city. With the same intent, the idea of looking at ‘messy’ reality is introduced in architectural imagery, since it reacts against the radicality and purism of a modernist utopian agenda. Introducing the everyday implies an acceptance of imperfection or compromise. In the French discourse, along similar lines to the American discourse, there is a tendency to speak of the ‘image’ of space as opposed to the ‘experience’ of space. Here, the image of space is a purified representation, while the experience of space incorporates contradictory and undefinable aspects of reality. The two are not only distinct, but also seen as mutually exclusive. The SI is perhaps the most radical in its distinction of the two and subsequent rejection of space that is merely passively consumed, but Lefebvre too clearly distinguishes these two perceptions of space, which he identifies as

141 In this view, they are closely aligned to Lefebvre’s distinction between the space of architects and that of users (see also below, ‘messy reality’)
142 There is an important distinction between the SI and VSBA here, in that the SI was seeking to liberate a creativity they thought was inherent in every individual; yet they saw most of the ‘existing environment’ as little more than the embodiment of capitalist domination. VSBA tend more towards folk-art in their desire to examine the symbolism of everyday form.
143 Moreover, the importance of ‘being revolutionary’ is still emphasized throughout these interventions (the idea of revolution and originality of course in essence modern notions) – the first sentence of LLV is: “Learning from the existing landscape is a way of being revolutionary for an architect” (p3).
fig. 2.10. Venturi Scott Brown, analysis of the environment ‘as it is’: the richness of everyday symbolism.

fig. 2.11. Ruscha, buildings on Sunset Strip (1966). Meticulous recording of the everyday visual environment.

‘conceived space’ and ‘lived space.’ To him, conceived space is “a visual space, a space reduced to blueprints, to mere images,” while lived space is opposed to this image-bound space: “the space of the everyday activities of users is a concrete one, which is to say, subjective.” This distinction, useful as it is towards a critique of abstract modernist space, does not answer how the two may influence one another. It does not necessarily help in understanding what it is about Las Vegas that attracts so many people, since it is commercial, thereby falling under the capitalist mode of domination. In his view, conceived space is little more than an idealized perception of a space (little to do with everyday reality), and this has by now subjugated the real, lived experience of space. Since Lefebvre is arguing against the dangers of bourgeois (capitalist) domination, his notion of conceived space is also defined by its very submission to the dominance of capitalism.

In the U.S., similar ideas are proposed, and ‘messy’ is certainly seen as a revolutionary condition in architecture. But here the presence of this ‘messiness’ is typically used to normalize architecture (making it more like the everyday environment) rather than revolutionize the entire power structure (as the work of the SI in France might suggest). In this sense, the selfsame ‘messy reality’ in the U.S. becomes more of a formal category, as an introduction of a popular aesthetics. This resembles the collages of the IG, where the profusion of everyday imagery was in part put together out of pleasure. The problem of images and symbols are approached more pragmatically than in France, where the work of Gans, for example, when he argues that a ‘lower culture’ (dictated by the demands of the market and by the culture industry) does not produce or embody less meaning to those experiencing it. In other words, where Lefebvre might argue that Las Vegas could never become a ‘lived space,’ Gans might suggest that its significance is equal to a more romanticized Marxist version of ‘lived space’ that has nothing to do with mass culture.

The relationship with visualization remains a difficult one – where the philosophical arguments on what a space may mean and how to read it are a very important aspect of analyzing architecture, they often preclude a more multiple reading of visualizations that may be helpful. VSBA’s work in simply documenting various visual manifestations of what they were trying to analyze (signs, front lawns, porches) was very helpful in opening up an alternative formal language that may not have become as important if only presented in words (figs. 2.11-2.13). Their analyses of Las Vegas and Levittown offer a documentation of the signs and symbols of everyday consumer and suburban culture, for example. Eventually in their work too, however, design principles that began with appropriating the vitality

---

of honky-tonk became as rigorous a model as the earlier abstractions of modernism, or becomes an idealized image that functions as a sign of populism (like the gold-plated TV-antenna on the Guild housing). Might it be that it is simply impossible for designers to see the lived space without producing their own 'conceived space,' be it a spare utopian design for a city of the future, or rather a considered clutter that has been cleansed of any perceptible design interventions? 145

**Dévouement, American-style**

The idea of dévouement as defined by the SI (see Chapter 1, p.37) encompasses an unexpected use of existing elements (often mass culture artifacts, but high art or architecture elements are equally valid). This unexpected use is intended to shock the viewer into a state of revolutionary consciousness. Venturi proposes a similar strategy of the unexpected, but rather than combine it with a (politically) revolutionary agenda, he places it purely within the realm of aesthetic perception. Referring to Gestalt psychology and its understanding of perception, Venturi claims: “Through unconventional organization of conventional parts he is able to create new meanings within the whole. If he uses convention unconventionally, if he organizes familiar things in an unfamiliar way, he is changing their contexts, and he can use even the cliché to gain a fresh effect. Familiar things seen in an unfamiliar context become perceptually new as well as old” (p45). This is Guy Debord without the revolutionary sting: instead of a prelude to full revolution, Venturi’s perceptual transformation is intended to combine progress with tradition, fresh insights with a stable historical basis.

Throughout all this, a political sensibility even remotely comparable to the SI is hard to find. It does not even approach the English understanding of a need for social revolution (to be expressed through or happen alongside an aesthetic revolution). It is tempting to attribute this entirely to the cultural distinctions between the US and Europe – and in part this may be true. It is certainly clear that the social agenda of modernism barely survived the crossing of the Atlantic. 146 However, there may also be a distinction more on the basis of architecture and other arts, or the relationship between practice and theory. Guy Debord for example tends further towards the political once Constant has removed himself from the SI.

This is also in contrast to the modernist fixation on originality – Debord still holds to that in his creative expression of the individual. Venturi seems to imply that originality lies more in the unexpected organization of unoriginal things. Although this is similar to Debord’s notion of détournement, for Venturi his sense of defamiliarization is about opening up new perceptions, and perhaps seeing the environment with a fresh perspective. The question here is whether Venturi’s ordinary is in the end any less ‘original’ or revolutionary in its intent than its modernist counterpart. 147 Originality and revolution are fundamental to the modernist agenda and the work of the 60s appears no less dependent on these two ideas, whether it is political or not.

**Foundations: UK Pop and US Pop**

The work of Venturi Scott Brown proves to have a much stronger grounding in work produced in England in the 50s than is usually addressed. Moreover (sadly), the condition in architecture of the ‘silent partner’ (in this case Scott Brown) has left some very interesting aspects of the work produced in the early 60s undisclosed, or at least underanalyzed. 148 Scott Brown appears to have introduced some of the aspects of what one might call ‘social realism’ in architecture from the U.K. to the U.S. 149 Starting in 1956, she had taken many photographs of the vernacular environment with Robert Scott Brown, her first husband. Later, as she started studying, working and traveling in the US she moved more towards planning, systematically examining the everyday aspects of city and suburban life. She was familiar with the work of Herbert Gans, J.B. Jackson, the Independent Group and various sociologists. As a student at the AA in the late 1950s, she had been exposed to the New Brutalism (which also has some affinity with kitchen-sink realism). 150

There are distinctions between U.S. and U.K. Pop. The American version shows a stronger affinity with the commercial environment throughout different practices: Warhol used his background as a commercial illustrator within the art world, while

---

145 Although these categories (like lived space and conceived space) are helpful in delineating some of the issues in architecture, the total discourse of architecture is perhaps best served by the foundation of Aristotle’s Ethic, which is a continual movement and negotiation between an ideal and the reality. This idea will be discussed further in chapter 4, where the question of praxis and theory as both fundamental to the discipline of architecture is approached.

146 Denise Scott Brown, in unpublished interview with the author, June 2003. This distinction is also noted in relation to modernism in film by Donald Albrecht. *Designing Dreams: Modern architecture in the movies.* London: Harper & Row, 1986

147 “The reality slogan is a corollary of revolutionary defiance; it is a society-versus-elitist-academy attitude that acclaims design and architecture as essential for all men. But it is also a plea for the expansion of our social and aesthetic vision to include actual living patterns”. p. 6, *Supermannerism: New attitudes in postmodern architecture.* C. Ray Smith. NY: E.P. Dutton, 1977

148 For her own perspective on the problem of the ‘silent partner’ and how the ‘star system’ in architecture feeds this (there can, after all, be only one ‘star’), see Denise Scott Brown, ‘Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture’

149 Social realism is a term that has been used in diverse contexts – I use it here as it is used in reference to a group of English painters (then usually called kitchen-sink realism) who simply represent their everyday environment in an almost aggressively ordinary way (late 40s, early 50s). Since the mid-90s it has also been used in relation to English cinema with the same attention to gritty everyday detail. Scott Brown uses it as well in relation to New Brutalism in her article ‘Activities as Patterns: Lessons About Architecture from Planning.’

Tom Wolfe examined the neon signs of Las Vegas, and Doug Haskell discussed the interesting points of 'honky-tonk.' In the U.K. there was less of a fascination with the local environment than there was with U.S. magazines, films, and other visual production. Lawrence Alloway's only complaint about Piccadilly Circus was that its lights were inferior to the American versions he had seen on a recent visit to the US. Examples from the US were seen as exemplary for the vibrant, non-designed, new and spectacular environment. In contrast to what the SI stood for, the commercial character of the American environment was often seen as an asset rather than a problem; especially Hamilton of the IG wrote about the power of commercial imagery and heralded the affluence of his time.

Since Denise Scott Brown spent her studies in the U.K., it is conceivable that she took with her an eye for the everyday environment and some of the social interests in planning that can be seen in the IG and in Team 10. Venturi’s study of complexity and contradiction does indicate that he was trying to get at the same, but through a study of the symbolic dimension of architecture, rather than the everyday environment of the city. The New Brutalism was both imbued with sociological ideas and deeply interested in contemporary ads and the imagery of popular culture – echoes of this dual interest are to be found throughout the writings of Scott Brown, and later Venturi as well.

**From New Brutalism to Las Vegas: Charms of Brutal Glamour**

*Learning from Las Vegas* takes the idea of a contemporary vernacular, or an environment designed without architects, and runs with it. It was seen as a shocking work at the time, disturbing to the profession, and in fact even Scott Brown refers to Las Vegas as something they could not determine as either ugly or beautiful, but something that gave them ‘the shivers.’ Although this work is often attributed solely to Robert Venturi, various sources indicate that this work is truly a co-authorship. This is further confirmed by studio notes in the archive, and in a recent interview Venturi noted that his appreciation of Las Vegas and a better eye for the ordinary was largely attributable to her influence.

*Learning from Las Vegas* originated as a studio project given at Yale in the fall of the 1968 academic year. A few years earlier, in 1966, Scott Brown had traveled to California for a teaching position, but made various stops along the way in a general investigation of the American landscape. Her interest in the everyday is well-documented, and this trip was intended as a continuation of her interest in the context around her. One of her stops was Las Vegas, and this is what started the extended fascination with this landscape of the banal, the ugly, the ordinary – ultimately leading to the publication of *LLV* in 1972. Surprisingly, these beginnings of the Las Vegas project are well-documented but not often discussed. At the time of C&C, Venturi and Scott Brown had just met (1960), and had begun to discuss the importance of such issues as the everyday, and although Venturi’s interest in the ordinary was already quite marked in C&C, the introduction of the ‘actual’ ordinary, or the ‘commonplace’ in the sense of everyday architecture, vernacular imagery and popular culture must be attributed to Denise Scott Brown.

These beginnings are further confirmed in the extensive studio notes, largely written by Denise Scott Brown and composed of various studio assignments. *LLV* was broken up into themes, each of which had an introductory problem statement and a two-phase assignment. This structure is something Scott Brown attributes to her own pedagogical interests as well as her planning background. It does seem to have been an atypical studio structure at the time. By breaking the studio up into themes, a certain expertise was created within the studio, allowing an in-depth discussion of each aspect. The assignments demonstrate her broader background, incorporating research on sociological and economic conditions as well as architectural form. Didactic principles such as beginning with an analysis of existing conditions also show her foundations in more general social research.

The systematic structure of the Las Vegas studio elucidates the New Brutalist underpinnings of Scott Brown’s thinking as she herself discusses in ‘Learning from New Brutalism.’ Each particular aspect of the Las Vegas context – be it aspects of urban form or decoration, lighting or economics, is researched and documented. More importantly, each aspect is given equal weight: there is no hierarchy here between the elements of ‘architecture’ and the elements of ‘buildings,’ or between ‘aesthetic’ aspects of form or contextual determinants. Moreover, the studio syllabi are packed with readings such as the Independent Group, Archigram, Tom Wolfe, offering the students an extensive range of architecture, pop culture and the ordinary, in design as well as literature.

---

152 Denise Scott Brown, ‘Sexism and the star system in architecture’; various comments by Robert Venturi, including in unpublished interview with author, June 2003.
154 Denise Scott Brown, ‘Activities as Patterns’; ‘Learning from New Brutalism’
From Complexity in Architecture to the Ordinary of Las Vegas

In 1978, Colquhoun commented on this transformation in the work of Venturi between C&C and LLV.168 He signals what I mention here as well: that the implicit themes of the ordinary and populism become explicit and central to LLV.

Moreover, he implies that the influence of Denise Scott Brown is important here. Although this acknowledgement remains implicit here, he does note that the position taken by Denise Scott Brown is consistently that of the architect as interpreter of the client’s wishes. This alone connects it to the more central position of populism in LLV. At the same time, Colquhoun critiques her perception of the architect’s role for not being consistent with contemporary societal conditions.179 Although this is a valid point of criticism, I believe it is more interesting to examine the exclusivity of her position. In a reminder of the radicality of the SI, where art is destined only to instigate the revolution and then disappear as the totality of art and life becomes fact, here Scott Brown makes an equally radical suggestion that there is no personal subjectivity to architecture, but only the best possible interpretation of the client’s wishes. To oppose the heroic character of the modern architect with an exact opposite – the architect as mere instrument of client and society – seems once again to deny the complexity of a reality in favor of a conceptual model.

A more important point of criticism Colquhoun offers, which is surely fundamental to the work, is that all the ‘jokes,’ transformations and inconsistencies (or complexities) are aimed purely at an in-crowd of architects, regardless of the references made to the ‘commonplace’ or ‘popular culture.’ This is a central problem in the 1960s, despite the general desire to connect or communicate with ‘the masses’ (or ‘the people’) – criticism of the modernist forefathers is still so embedded within an architects-only discourse that it appropriates popular imagery to its own ends rather than utilizing it. “Unlike the music hall comedian, whose jokes are understood by his box-office audience (even if their typology is only appreciated by his fellow actors), Venturi’s wit seems to be aimed solely at his fellow architects. The semiological intention of these projects is clearly not to interpret its values. But such a situation simply does not exist today.” (Colquhoun, ‘Sign and Substance’, quote from p29)

Colquhoun also notes the latent presence of the decorated shed in C&C “since it had established the merely indirect connection between the appearance of a building and its substance and had drawn attention to the arbitrary nature of the architectural sign” (pp. 29-30). This eventually leads to the more dramatic position in LLV that the symbolic content of the sign should be given full attention in architecture, and that the ‘substance’ or spatial content behind it was in essence irrelevant, or at least less relevant. As Colquhoun points out, the very strength of Venturi’s attack on a form that expresses its content, led to the idea that a turn to surface, symbol and sign was the only viable alternative. And here we end up in a radicalization of the discourse that is reminiscent of the problems signaled in chapter 1: by its very radicalization, real solutions take a back seat to the polemic, and the general theory begins to overtake the everyday reality of specific applications. In a conceptual move analogous to Guy Debord’s denial of the possibility of designing a form prior to the revolution, Venturi here denies the possibility that substance and sign may interact, and that sometimes, the form might express a content. Moreover, by so doing, he simply reiterates the problematic modernist dichotomy: while in the early twentieth century ornament was crime, following Venturi’s argument here, ornament becomes central, and everything else is irrelevant. “The implications of the notion of the decorated shed are therefore far-reaching. They lead to the assertion that architectural meaning has become irretrievably separated from its substance. Architects are impotent in the face of a society whose values have made this split inevitable. It is not by the vision of an alternative architecture that these values can be criticized, but only by the manipulation of its surface appearance, and then only by means of an equivocal irony, in which these values are alternately condoned and ‘exposed’. This shows an amazing correlation with the position of the SI, who also signaled that sign and substance were separated. The SI however saw it as the task of the artistic avant-garde to reintegrate them, while Venturi and Scott Brown accept this as fact and see it as their task to accommodate an imperfect situation.

B. England: Pop Preludes of the Independent Group

Repressed Images Finally Surface

To return to earlier beginnings of ‘pop’ and architecture, we need to go back to the mid-50s, when an increasing correlation was perceived between the modernist rhetoric of emancipation and enlightenment, and urban blight, a sterile environment

---

179 “There might be an argument in favor of this point of view if modern society were constructed on medieval or even eighteenth century lines, and if there were a convergence of taste between society as a whole (or its dominant subculture) and the artist whose role it was to interpret its values. But such a situation simply does not exist today.” (Colquhoun, ‘Sign and Substance’, quote from p29)
169 Colquhoun, ‘Sign and Substance’, quote from p29
162 Colquhoun, ‘Sign and Substance’, quote from p36
and the depressing conditions of the factory worker. As discussed in the previous chapter, sociological studies of the mid-1950s begin to address these conditions on various levels, with an emphasis on city structure and the denied place of the individual. Well-known are the studies of East London by Young and Wilmott, later used by the Smithsons; and the studies of Herbert Gans in America, used by Venturi and Scott Brown. As in early modernism, sociology was the field in which a number of concerns in the disciplines of architecture and planning were being voiced; yet by now, a reasonably direct application of sociology seemed more fruitful to urbanists. 163 In architecture, the question was how to find a visual and spatial expression for the issues uncovered by sociologists. Moreover, there was a sense that the discipline could be transformed through these new visual expressions.

Liberation Through Commercial Imagery

On the most basic level, these visual and spatial expressions began with people—the ones never present in Le Corbusier’s drawings; the beginnings of Pop were all about popular culture, or the culture of the people that modernism forgot. Some of the earliest work showing these premises is that of the IG, especially of its members Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton and Alison and Peter Smithson, all of whom were struggling with issues of mass culture and advertising. Yet they were also thrilled with the vibrant energy they found in American imagery from magazines and movies. The beginnings of these influences of Pop in architecture can be seen in the exhibit ‘This is tomorrow’ in 1956, held at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, where visitors were confronted with a large cardboard constellation of American popular imagery such as Robbie the Robot (from the film Forbidden Planet) and Marilyn Monroe (figs. 2.14, 2.15). The desired effect was attained, because as Brian Wallis relates, this was not a typical art gallery exhibition only for the well-educated. This was interesting to all sorts of people—working class children were wandering in just “to hang out by the jukebox, critics loosened their aesthetic criteria and many viewers explored the exhibition no further than this whimsical installation by the door.” 164 This was a successful use of pop imagery to break through the alienation produced by much modernist work: “the funhouse installation challenged the exclusivity of the dominant ways of regarding art, and opened an avenue for a more democratic analysis of art and cultural criticism.” 165 We could speculate that its success lay precisely in the

163 Georg Simmel and Robert Park were important to the early modern period, but did not make practical urban planning suggestions. By the late 50s, Young and Wilmott as well as Gans were offering more problem-solving comments. Especially in the US, these urban renewal schemes were critical.


165 Wallis, p9
ambiguous position taken by the installation's creators: they were not only artists creating something with these images, they were also simply consumers. Again, democratization was an important premise in the 1960s, extending to aesthetic transformation as well.

The work of the IG was not a complete rejection of modernist principles, but rather a search for a more appropriate expression for their time, as Alison Smithson argues in 'But today we collect ads.' Here, they argue that Le Corbusier for example used popular art as well, but that the fundamental transformation in their time is to be found in advertising, since it begins to compete with fine art in terms of the quality of its images. The grand distinction between modernism and the 1960s thus becomes more a matter of the sources themselves: while the references Le Corbusier still required an intervention, to the Smithsons contemporary advertising consisted of imagery that equaled the fine arts in their fineness. The imagery shown at the 1956 exhibition was unlike anything shown before: it was cheerful, vibrant, colorful, and deeply embedded in the commercial sphere. It largely came from the US, where the postwar increase in wealth had extended the capitalist system of selling products, to selling commodities that were beginning to express a certain individuality, thus undermining the principle of standardization.

Around the middle of the '50s, the general level of affluence was causing the consumer economy to grow rapidly, and television was becoming a standard household item. In this general culture of affluence the rise of advertising became unavoidable in the everyday. The explosion of advertising, billboards and imagery heightened the contrast between the aesthetics of the everyday and of the mass-produced image on the one hand, and the demanding aesthetics of purity and 'Modern Man' on the other (as was later expressed most pointedly in the work of Andy Warhol). The images the IG was using suited this general development, since they were no longer part of the 'high art' tradition that required some level of education to recognize and/or understand, but were being culled from everywhere: magazines, films, photographs, comic books, in short, everything that had until now fallen outside of the categories of 'art' as such.

166 Wallis, p9
168 In 1950, only 9% of the households in the US owned a television, while in 1960 that was already 87%. Source: US Census Bureau, statistical abstract of the US, available online at: http://www.census.gov/statatab/hist/HS-42.pdf, last accessed 29 July, 2004.
169 The main precedent for this use of imagery is Dada, but the dadaists do not seem to have had much influence on the mainstream of architecture design and theory.
In this way, the IG, like American Pop Art, opened the way for an acceptance of commercial imagery in the realms of a more enclosed practice of architecture.\textsuperscript{170} Patricia Phillips for example argues that the most radical aspect of ‘pop’ architecture is its openness to sources from outside the discipline, thus liberating it from the constraints of historical referencing and continuity. It transformed the premises of architectural design by recalibrating what was considered acceptable inspiration.\textsuperscript{171} Originally, the type of imagery now used for commercial purposes (using collage techniques, seriality and mechanical reproduction) was the sole domain of the avant-garde. Although it often appropriated images from the realm of mass culture, it remained ‘high art’ to the extent that it was not involved with such ‘base’ sides of culture as commercial endeavor, but was geared towards experimentation with the new forms of technology available. By mid-century the techniques were co-opted by the culture industry and Hollywood, bringing these experimental images into the mass cultural domain and engendering Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the culture industry, as well as illustrating Walter Benjamin’s slightly more optimistic essays on technology and culture.

An interesting distinction within the IG is to be found between Richard Hamilton’s definition of Pop and the Smithsons’ position in ‘But today we collect ads’. Where Hamilton uses the type of wording and phrasing that resonates with the typical perception of Pop Art, naming things such as glamour, gimmicks and big business;\textsuperscript{172} the Smithsons in their article refer quite directly to Le Corbusier, thus affirming his value for their work, but they simply use different references:

\begin{quote}
Gropius wrote a book on grain silos, 
Le Corbusier one on aeroplanes, 
And Charlotte Perriand brought a new object to the office every morning; 
But today we collect ads.\textsuperscript{173}
\end{quote}

In that sense, it appears that Hamilton truly distanced himself from modernist tenets in shifting the focus towards gimmicks and glamour, and above all the commercial, while the Smithsons tried to modify the modernism they started from, to accommodate postwar transformations in society. Moreover, Hamilton’s references arise more from the American world of advertising and film, while the Smithsons refer solely to the European tradition of modernism in the piece above. Their sense of being revolutionary or responding to the specific conditions of their own time thus remains ensconced within architectural history, while Hamilton’s social conscience seems directed more outwards to mass culture.

In the end though, the basic strategy for this critique on modernism was the use of what had remained beneath the surface before – where Le Corbusier engaged his imagery to move towards a purified version of modernity, one free of the clutter he loathed in New York streets, the IG introduced an aesthetic of overwhelming numbers of everyday and commercial images, to reflect the everyday environment people were living in. Although the differences between the work of Hamilton and the Smithsons are clear, their choice of critical instruments is the same, and reflects a similar sensibility later to be found in LLV with its radical emphasis on billboards and signage as (the only) meaningful elements in the architecture of the time.

**Low Art-High Art: From Modernism to Pop**

The history of popular imagery is linked to modernism and the avant-garde, both through the technology necessary to create a ‘mass culture’ in the first place, and through the inherently troubled relationship between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art.\textsuperscript{174} The very terms ‘Pop Art’ and ‘pop culture’ derive from ‘popular’ – implying that this art and this culture are something belonging to the larger group of people out there, the masses. Its very popularity precludes it from becoming high art.\textsuperscript{175} The historical avant-garde has always retained a difficult relationship with pop culture, or imagery from mass culture; the premise of the avant-garde was to look ahead, to predict future developments and especially to lead the way for the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{176} The avant-garde could therefore not afford to be involved with mass culture: mass appeal would mean it was no longer radical. Yet at the same time some of the most radical work of the avant-garde was generated from objects of industrialization, ready-mades, and objects of mass consumption (Marcel Duchamp, Warhol, Max Ernst, dada, surrealism). This tension, the use of mass imagery to create radically avant-garde work, crystallized into a repression of the same imagery in the work of the modernists. In a definition similar to the avant-

\textsuperscript{170} In this sense, the IG also arguably introduces an important premise of postmodern architecture: the introduction of ‘otherness’ as a way to both undermine the rigorous purity of modernism and open it up to the presence of variety.


\textsuperscript{174} Andreas Huyssen. After the Great Divide; Herbert Gans. Popular Culture and High Culture. Gans notes that mass culture is an urbanized (and commercial) form of folk culture.

\textsuperscript{175} Avant-garde art here is seen as a vanguard, and the artist has a crucial role in preparing the way for progress. For an analysis of the relation between avant-garde and mass culture see also: Huyssen, After the Great Divide, especially ‘The Hidden Dialectic’, pp. 5-15.

garde, Le Corbusier positions art as a discipline for the prescient. But he diverges from them when he removes all references to visual mass culture, in favor of his own visualization of the perfect city.

The historical avant-garde used mass culture and politicized it; in other words, they utilized mass culture as a mirror to society: not just to acknowledge reality as it was, but rather to shock people into transformative action. This is the tradition the SI followed in its demand for revolution instigated by art. Modernism on the other hand, considered the imagery of mass culture as part of the problem: analogous to the bourgeois interior that produced too much clutter to be able to see the space. To the modernists, merely holding up a mirror was not going to work—it was necessary to offer the image of a perfect world, because only then would people realized what they 'actually' wanted.

Unlike earlier radical movements, the Pop sensibility was not about traditional iconoclasm; on the contrary, it was using these mass culture images to rip a hole in the abstraction of modernism. Much is to be said for this subversive use of imagery. Benjamin argued that shock value was an important aspect of art in the metropolis, since shock was the only way to actually still move an increasingly blase audience. For Debord, this idea of shock was inherent in the situationist principle of détournement: by juxtaposing inconsistent (or oppositional) images, the resulting image would shock the spectator into an active revolution. To even create this shock, it was necessary to combine the familiar images of mass culture into something absolutely new—the estrangement resulting from this familiar-but-new juxtaposition would be stronger than a predetermined and idealized image. Yet Venturi, following along similar lines of estrangement as a technique, does not attribute a politically revolutionary quality to it. In his view, the inventiveness of ordinary culture as exemplified in the American environment, has formal qualities that may be revolutionary on an individual level (reception) or in the discipline (design strategies), but not towards society as a whole.

The omnipresence of imagery, and the corresponding increase in visual awareness since the 1960s, has sometimes presented a problem for the discipline of architecture. The discipline of art operates under different conditions from architecture, and although the avant-garde strategies of high modernist architecture were clearly related to 1920s avant-garde strategies in art, their agendas were not the same. Le Corbusier noted that our understanding of housing had hardly changed in the 20th century, despite the fundamental changes throughout the world under the influence of increased industrialization. There is something still unresolved in our understanding of the role of architecture in the late industrial society. Much of this is due to a perceived incompatibility between the representation of space and its 'objective' spatial qualities. Thus it is in the translation from image to architecture, or in the precise relationship between the two, that the difficulties in handling a pop sensibility begin to appear. Generally speaking, there is a different time-frame between images and buildings. This results in a problem of the expendability of time-specific imagery in non-expendable buildings, or the transitory condition of ephemeral images that lose their value when they lose their context.

For example, in the trajectory of the IG, of the people working intensely with a Pop sensibility of imagery (Paolozzi, Banham, Hamilton, Henderson, the Smithsons) only Alison and Peter Smithson were architects. All the others were historians and artists. Even the work of the Smithsons shows a tension between the architecture and the ordinary life within it. In an interview, Scott Brown went so far as to suggest they gave up on trying to find a place for the banal. Smithson himself however, even as late as 2002, discussed their work as a container for everyday qualities. VSBA is perhaps the most consistent in seeking an architectural translation for these ideas, but the question is whether it is successful not as rhetoric or as image, but as architectural form. And if not, is that because of a problem with the imagery, the architecture or the connection between the two? The architecture discourse consists of buildings and their representations, in words and images, but often the intention or the images of the architects take precedence over other perceptions, such as those of the users. This is one of the main points of resistance in the 1960s, but often it remains more at the level of rhetoric than actual consideration.

Two crucial aspects of this development from modernism to pop derive from a reconsideration of the place and autonomy of individual people, both in presence in and reception of imagery. On the one hand there is the simple pleasure in a profusion of symbolic, frivolous, cheerful imagery to counter the weight and importance of modernist images intended to edify and enlighten. In the functionalist world of Le Corbusier, even leisure time was intended to improve the common man; Las Vegas as presented by Venturi and Scott Brown was an analysis of what kind of leisure time and symbolisms simply attracted people, rather than determining what they should be doing. On the other hand, there is an increasing presence of 'normal' people in images, of everyday references—the grand shift from the heroic to the ordinary, as is reiterated time and again in LLV, and as is

---


178 This argumentation is also present today, albeit transformed, in the work of Douglas Rushkoff and Naomi Klein. Both theorists argue that the imagery of mass culture is not only a spectator sport, but can become an active part of new developments in both high art and general culture. See also chapter 4.

179 Le Corbusier, 'Eyes which do not see.' Towards a New Architecture, pp. 90-148.
visible from the work of the IG on. Thus the demanding and austere world of the heroic common man of the 1920s and 30s is transformed into a celebration of the shiny happy world of new materials (plastic) and colorful surroundings, of increasing affluence that would allow everyone to realize their dreams to some level. Moreover, this democratization also allowed the everyday to become extraordinary, to the extent that consumption became a way of making dreams of leisure and affluence attainable for the masses (figs. 2.16, 2.17).

Themes and Strategies of Pop
A useful identification of some general cultural themes in Pop is offered by Dick Hebdige, who identifies four themes, each of which to some degree has to do with the shifting and blurring lines between ‘high art’ and ‘low art.’ These encompass: a critical function (creating an awareness of the complicity between structures of domination and aesthetic judgement), a strategy of definition (to structure the indeterminate line between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, ‘art’ and ‘non-art’), a power struggle (between the ‘high culture’ of Europe and the mass-oriented culture of America), and a discourse on new (and ephemeral) culture such as fashion and consumption.\textsuperscript{181} Note that he thus follows the common equation of the European aesthetic tradition with ‘high’ and the American tradition with ‘low’ art. This is critical in its relation to modernism, for it is on that cusp between art and popular culture, especially that area of popular culture ‘tainted’ by commerce, that pop found its radicality – and American culture is usually the generator of these distinctions in the European discourse, as is to be found in the work of Adorno and Benjamin. Throughout modern art and architecture, the idea that art was by definition incompatible with commerce has remained strong, even despite such efforts as those of Duchamp to introduce a different perspective within the realm of high art. In some critiques there have also been some notable exceptions, such as Walter Benjamin who remained fascinated by what popular culture and the aesthetics of commerce could offer to society in cultural terms.\textsuperscript{182}

This return to representation and a certain aesthetic pleasure, an indulgence even in imagery that is not edifying in a traditional manner, is critical to the struggle against the dominant visuality of modernism. Rather than see each image, surface or symbol as necessarily representing a loftier idea, something beyond what is directly perceived, there is a revaluation of appearances, the idea that perhaps there is a value to the surface as well. This remains a very tricky area of critique even today, because significance and meaning are seen as the domain of art, while the commercial is seen as a debased form of that. However, we could also argue that

\textsuperscript{182} Beyond his interest in mechanical reproduction, and the Paris warehouses, he also wrote on Mickey Mouse and the Karl May stories.

\textsuperscript{fig. 2.16. Advertisements for household goods.}

\textsuperscript{chapter 2 - image}
fig. 2.17. Paolozzi, It's a Psychological Fact Pleasure Helps your Disposition (1948) collage.

fig. 2.18. Alison and Peter Smithson, Golden Lane housing project (1952). collaged view of elevated 'street'
fig. 2.19. Le Corbusier, Ville Radieuse (1935). The power of the architect: the overview of an abstract model.

fig. 2.20. Le Corbusier, Ville Contemporaine (1922).

fig. 2.21. Smithsons, Golden Lane Housing (1952). collage
the tastes of the public are not necessarily ‘wrong.’ Or also, that whether or not a work is commercial is not in fact related to its artistic value. Moreover, in this debate there is always the question of who determines artistic value - the artists, the public, the critics? Moreover, as Venturi and Scott Brown argue in their work, the significance of symbolism is a complex construction, not something that can be ripped out of its cultural context. Lefebvre’s arguments run along similar lines, though the manifestations of blatant capitalism to him remain a troublesome area of power structures sugar-coated by diversions.

Pop Imagery and Pure Modern Vision
One of the most striking examples of the British use of pop imagery to transform at least the perception of their buildings is an eye-height perspective view of the 1952 Golden Lane Housing project by the Smithsons (fig. 2.18). The perspective is placed so that we are looking along the ‘elevated street’ of an apartment building, and its ‘streetness’ is expressed not through the lines themselves, but through the people collaged into it. Where Le Corbusier in his work on city proposals, from the Ville Contemporaine to the Ville Radieuse, made extensive use of the bird’s-eye view, and reduces human presence to the drawings of cars in his city (figs. 2.19, 2.20), the Smithsons have introduced photographs of actual people into their drawing.

In this classic image for the Golden Lane Housing project, we see not so much the facades, as the person on the walkway leaning down over a small child, as ordinary as a scene on any local street. At the same time, we notice a couple sneaking off into the left margins of the image, as if they’ve got much better plans that we’re not a part of. A second glance shows us that the couple is no ordinary couple – they are Marilyn Monroe and Joe Dimaggio, giving our perception of Golden Lane both a hint of glamour and an immediate connection to the everyday presence of Hollywood and the media. Although today this drawing may seem quaint, this kind of intervention in an otherwise traditional architecture was radical at the time – the very idea of introducing actual images of actual people into these pristine drawings was unheard of. Using actual people, or at least magazine photos, collaged into drawings is now so typical of architecture images that it seems almost banal. As with all formal innovations, it has become part of a common visual language.
What then is the actual intent and impact of this kind of imagery? First, the images made by the Smithsons clearly express their need to engage in a dialogue with Le Corbusier. This type of direct response to the paradigms of high modernism was common by the early 60s, but in their earliest manifestations also clarify what the problems with modernism were. First, there is the shift in the perspective of the drawing itself: moving from the bird’s-eye (or God’s-eye, as often argued) to eye-level concedes that perhaps the architect is not all-knowing. It allows the viewer now to engage with the space proposed, to see the presence of the windows and doors, rather than admire the formal perfection of a composition of volumes, all arranged by a trained architect. Furthermore, the eye-level perspective allows for the presence of ‘actual life’ in the presentation of a project. A bird’s-eye view can never hope to offer more than the abstracted composition of everyday elements. An eye-level view might confront us with the offending presence of a person standing in our way. Besides this perspective shift, there is the transformation in drawing techniques: the introduction of photo-collages. Addressing Le Corbusier in their own way, the Smithsons introduce the actual site, not the site as it will become. The Smithsons present another drawing for the Golden Lane project with a photograph of the existing site not only montaged into the drawing, but even interrupting the clarity of their own lines along one side of the drawing (fig. 2.21). This image of the existing site intrudes on the architectural ‘perfection’ of a project conceived in detail. Also, as mentioned before, the use of photographs allows a sense of everyday reality, or at least of unfiltered reality, in that the people now inserted are no longer delineated by the architect’s aesthetic decision. Moreover, these ‘extraordinary’ additions of images from magazines offer the profusion of the visual culture of everyday life (fig. 2.22), but also include various associations or the desire for identification (such as the dream of a glamorous Hollywood life). This too is an important function of symbolism. In relation to architecture it bears on Levittown and the transformation of standardized houses as documented by VSBA. 184 Scott Brown argues that their own documentation of suburban manifestations of these ideals is more directly aligned to the everyday, while the work of the IG still demonstrates an overly aesthetic education, in its desire to ‘educate’ or enlighten the masses. 185

**Pop and Styling in Architecture**

This dialogue with high modernism in general, and with Le Corbusier specifically, is also present in much of the work done by Archigram, but here is developed through a formal language referring explicitly to mass culture. Archigram started a little later than the work of the IG, with their first pamphlet appearing in 1961. This slight difference in time-frame may be historically significant; Denise Scott Brown

184 VSBA, On Houses and Housing. AD monograph no. ...  
Corbusier’s drawings. In their use of detail, color and the visual culture of advertisements, they related to the increased visuality of everyday culture. Moreover, by presenting their schemes as they did, they made a connection between the ordinary and the fantastic that is typical of an advertising culture – linking dreams and fantasies to products, or making the ordinary extraordinary.

Imaging the Ordinary
Just as individuality became an instrument of reform in the city, here the imagery of mass culture that became ever more present was also used to liberate architecture through its images. Through all these investigations of pop imagery, the discourse and practice of architecture was being shifted away from the monumental and heroic nature of its designs through the use of everyday images. In England, as noted earlier, this began as early as 1952 with lectures at the ICA in London by Reyner Banham, and revolved around the loosely organized Independent Group. The imagery appropriated by the IG was largely American in origin and revolved around advertising and glamour, while the principle of discovering the ordinary, looking at the everyday, was largely based on sociological studies such as that of Young and Wilmott on East London. The excitement in architecture about the everyday revolved around this duality: the grittiness on the one hand of social realism, of studies on what actually happened in the city areas architects only discussed in plan; and the energetic frivolity on the other hand of commercial and Hollywood imagery, which had become part of the everyday environment that was not designed by architects. The commonplace in the US (as epitomized by Las Vegas) was in a sense already more spectacular, already oriented towards a realm of fantasy.

As mentioned, Denise Scott Brown was still in England at the time, and by 1956 had begun to take series of photographs to document the everyday environment. Although she was not actively engaged with the IG, it is clear that their interests were similar, and she has also indicated that she was present at many of the lectures given at the ICA. When she later moved to the United States, she carried some of the principles of New Brutalism with her, which culminated in the collaborative study on Las Vegas, such as the sociological references of the New Brutalism as evidenced by its interest in the ordinary environment. This may be seen as one precedent for the extensive visual documentation and categorization of everyday architecture in the studies of Las Vegas and Levittown.

The importance of the work of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown lies in this meticulous documentation of the visual manifestations of the vernacular. Moreover, by collecting their results in a comprehensive study, they offered the possibility to utilize their work. Denise Scott Brown learned an important principle from her planning colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania: designers cannot afford to ignore the places so many people go to, no matter what they, as trained professionals may think of them. Places such as Las Vegas were worthy of study by their popularity alone – they were ignored by earlier architecture discourses, but even this suppression was not enough to make them disappear. If they were not going to disappear, the planners concluded, it was time the professionals at the very least learned from them where possible.

As noted, this notion is close in spirit to the social realism underlying the work of the New Brutalists. Yet we could argue that it is precisely because Scott Brown had been trained in both these ideas, that her influence extended further – she neither gave up the principles of social realism she learned in the UK, nor did she ignore the encouragement of her planning teachers to go look at what was popular and make them understand why. And perhaps it is because she studied under Herbert Gans, who was thoroughly convinced that visual understanding had no place in a sociological study, that she worked so hard to prove him wrong. Or maybe she simply saw the small gap in his thinking when he inverted the modernist idea of a society transformed through design into a denial of any possibility of influence through visual means.

The importance of the ordinary is signaled by Venturi and Scott Brown as early as the Middle Ages, but this is distinct from the everyday and the ordinary as it was construed in relation to industrialization and the subsequent modernization of architectural form. Modern architecture was concerned with housing the masses of the industrial city. The larger rural centers or cities with medieval origins were simply not equipped in terms of infrastructure to handle the population explosion that accompanied industrial growth. Most of the drive toward modernization of dwellings derived from this need to offer decent housing to unprecedented numbers of people. In other words, mass housing as an architectural problem became as relevant as earlier design problems of monumentality and the extraordinary. The culture of the everyday becomes important through a combination of the massiveness of the modern project and the denial of an everyday imagery. Machine imagery as a basis for mass housing contradicted the need for the personal yet collective manifestations of an already existent culture. The condition of mass architecture as it grew from the 1920s onward necessitated a close examination of

---

188 This introduction of empirical sociological research is an important shift, as opposed to the sociological philosophies of Simmel and Robert Park. By using empirical research, the basis of design became quantifiable existing conditions, rather than sociological and philosophical paradigms as a qualitative premise.


191 Again, the everyday (quotidienne) derives from the French discourse, while the ordinary is more the domain of the Anglo-Saxon discourse.
Every Man Is a Hero (Under the Guidance of Situationism)

In contrast to the pop sensibility of the IG and Archigram, the Situationist International, in accordance with the Marxist base of its thinking, turned to the revolutionary capacity of the everyman. The SI hoped that the ordinariness of the worker’s life meant that he was somehow less alienated from his own being as a human in the world, that he could somehow overthrow his own alienation, caused by the technocratic elite. There is an ambiguity in the relationship between everydayness and the everyday as posited by the SI, following the work of Lefebvre in his *Critique of Everyday Life*. The Situationist International was aiming for a critical transformation of everyday life. Moreover, there was the presumption that theirs was the only way to fulfill this transformation: ‘They [the situationists] claim that the creative activities initiated by them over the whole range of everyday life are the one and only basis for a new definition of the revolutionary ideal in our time.’ Close as this is to the modernist project by virtue of its totality, there is a difference insofar as Guy Debord saw the ‘common man’ as the agent of this transformation. The alienation in everyday life was to be overthrown by the worker; he must delve beyond the narcotic aspects of the spectacle and understand how his own alienation was caused by the mechanisms of capital, and sustained by the imagery of advertising. Or, as he takes the relation between capital and imagery even one step further, another well-known thesis of Debord’s manifesto notes: “The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image.” The only way to transform this problematic and incestuous relationship between the mode of production and the appearances it causes and that simultaneously sustain it was through the *creative* activities referred to above by Bernstein. In other words, everyday life had become tainted through commerce and the spectacle, through the mechanisms of capitalism which involved passive consumption over active creation. Yet at the same time, Debord did not shy away from employing these mechanisms to subvert the existing social order—even as late as 1967, he still proclaimed the virtues of *detournement*, where the very images of capitalism, albeit with an intervention (usually in the form of textual additions),

As noted earlier the relationship between Lefebvre and Debord was tenuous, with Debord denying (or not discussing) the influences of his former teacher. See esp. Kristin Ross, interview with Lefebvre, in McDonough. Peter Wollen also notes that Debord audited a class with Lefebvre (in: Sussman, p25). Wollen, ‘The Art and Politics of the Situationist International’ in: Sussmann, p22. An important source for this is Guy Debord’s ‘Report on the Construction of Situations’, for example his comment that it was now important to utilize “all the means of transforming everyday life” (translation in McDonough, p42). Michele Bernstein ‘The Situationist International,’ *The Times Literary Supplement*, special issue, September 1964. See for example Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* thesis 6: “Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production.”, and thesis 7: “The language of the spectacle is composed of *signs* of the dominant organization of production – signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that organization.” (p13)

chapter 2 - image

The introduction of the ordinary and everyday into the discourse and practice of architecture served as an escape from demanding technocratic designs such as the *Plan Voisin* or the *Existenzminimum* dwelling. It is important here to note the distinction in the uses of ‘the ordinary’: although modern architects were extremely conscious of the everyday in their approach to mass housing, they saw it as their task to make the ordinary better through their designs. Moreover, this was not merely a design project, but a social engineering project. In the 1960s, a strong resistance grew against the all-encompassing nature of this social engineering project. The importance of individual freedom was pitted against the notion that there was a single ideal way to live. To express this, the presence of the ordinary was used as a disruption of modernist perfection—it introduced the dust on the windowsill and the broken garage door, or in other words it introduced actual signs of life into machine-oriented designs. In demonstrating the flaws of technology, it did not at first offer an alternative, as much as it questioned exactly how much of our own autonomy we had given over to machines. In the 1958 film *Mon Oncle*, this is illustrated in the struggle Monsieur Hulot has with the mechanically perfected kitchen of his sister’s modern *Villa Arpel*—every cabinet he attempts to open either resists, or opens unexpectedly, or closes automatically just as he is trying to reach for something. His own slightly clumsy but recognizable hesitation in the face of all these gadgets shows us how strange it is to let a cabinet door decide of its own accord when you have had enough time to take something out. The finely tuned rhythm of Tati in his portrayal of this fight between ordinary man and technological appliances, going through this motion again and again, helps us sense the discrepancy between the disembodied and mechanical rhythm of the cabinets on the one hand, and the flexible and responsive rhythm of Hulot’s human reflexes on the other.

The strategies of employing the image and the concept of the ordinary to address what modernism left out shows both parallels and contrasts between different thinkers and designers in the 1960s. As shown, the common ground was constituted by a need to offer some alternative to the technocratic standardization of dwelling and living in the late 50s. The IG responded by utilizing pop imagery as a visually cheerful yet critically investigative alternative to modernist design. Archigram used pop imagery as a principle, stylizing their technological fantasies and trying to make them suit human flexibility and responses.

C. Undermining the Spectacle – The Situationist International

Moreover, with industrialization and urbanization came the shift from rural, folk culture to an urban mass culture (*Gans, Popular Culture*)

192 Moreover, with industrialization and urbanization came the shift from rural, folk culture to an urban mass culture (Gans, *Popular Culture*)

chapter 2 - image
were used to shock people into an awareness of their own alienation (figs. 2.23-2.25). The crucial elements of détourment are still relevant today, such as the recognizability of its elements and the form of ‘shock’ that results from an unconventional use. Yet above all a détourned image needs to open our eyes to the mangling jaws of the spectacle, by incorporating a message of general societal critique, as illustrated in the situationists’ Marxist slogans about the repression of the proletariat inserted in comics and advertising images (fig. 2.26). In this sense, Debord might have argued that today, even détourment is no longer possible, as all its results are immediately consumed by the spectacle, becoming an image of rebellion rather than an actual rebellion.

In a sense, maybe there is a radicality in the American situation that is based on the fundamental condition of democracy. Even though it has arguably become an oligarchy based on money, the implicit belief that each and every person is equal eliminates the Marxist need for enlightened intellectuals to lead the way. Perhaps there is less fear for the ‘blindness’ or ‘stupidity’ of the masses in the work of Gans and VSBA and Jacobs. Perhaps they are more pragmatic or maybe even utilitarian. In contrast, how different is Debord’s premise of revolution from Loos’ claim that he is speaking to truly modern men? True, Debord is addressing workers and students rather than an enlightened bourgeoisie or modern engineers; yet he still addresses them as ‘enlightened’ beings, instrumental to a total revolution.

The Spectacle Subverted: Is Resistance Futile?
Again we should examine the ambiguity in Debord’s work – his notion that we may use the images of capitalism, but only if we subvert them by inserting social critique. And here again the critique is text-based: it rests on a linguistic conceptual construction. Is this any less demanding than the encouragement to buy a product? Until 1962, art and theory were still relatively autonomous practices within the SI – it is post 1962 that we see the totality of art being incorporated into theory. Before that time, Debord made two films, and made the famous psychogeographic maps of Paris together with Asger Jorn as well as the Mémoires, which illustrate his interest in the visual aspects of his ideas at the time (fig. 2.27). In 1961 Asger Jorn left the SI, while Constant had left a year earlier to

---

198 Today, something similar can be seen in the products of ‘culture jammers,’ which utilize the power and the creativity of ‘everyman’ as well. Culture jamming is about subverting the intentions of well-known capitalist artifacts, and it can be done by anyone, following the classic grassroots principle of the 1960s. The most visible of these projects are t-shirts which transform well-known logos such as ‘Lego’ and ‘Ford,’ into ‘ego’ and ‘Fuct,’ within their own recognizable graphics.

199 Also, the dismissal of consumption in Debord’s work is somewhat problematic, since it reduces a general need for symbolic identification to only an individual creative expression, while ‘passive consumption’ also arguably fulfills this same need.


---

fig. 2.23. Øyvind Fahlström, ESSO LSD (1967). Logo transformation

parce que
j'aime ma caméra
parce que
j'aime vivre
j'enregistre les meilleurs moments de l'existence
je les ressuscite à ma volonté dans tout leur éclat

LA DOMINATION DU SPECTACLE SUR LA VIE

fig. 2.25. 'I love my camera because I love life.' Image from IS 11 (1967). The domination of the spectacle in everyday life.

fig. 2.26. Détaillé cartoon from IS 12 (1969)

fig. 2.27. Guy Debord, Asger Jorn. Image from Mémoires (1956). collage incorporating illustrations of architecture.
further explore his project New Babylon, which expressed the situationist idea of unitary urbanism. With the departure of these two members, two of the most prominent artists who had worked with and debated Debord disappeared from the SI, possibly encouraging his own move further away from any visual expressions of his theories. According to Debord, it was pointless to invent forms for a human being that did not yet exist.

The general tension between sociology/philosophy and the visual is apparent in the work of both Gans and Debord. Does this tension in fact confirm that the visual can only represent or reflect concepts, and never create them or investigate them autonomously? This is in the end a critical question, since it goes to the heart of the tension between the linguistic and the visual turn. Among others, it is related to the contemporary issue of whether we must teach our children how to watch TV, and we will return to this problem in a further investigation of the ‘visual turn’ in Section IV.

Yet even as Debord moved away from what he saw as the futile artistic endeavors of his former colleagues, he clung to his notion of détournement as one of the few visual strategies of subversion. So again we see an ambiguity here: although Debord believes that art and theory must somehow become one total praxis leading to the dissolution of ‘Art’ as a separate activity, there are a few visual strategies that appear to be attributed a power of autonomy. Maybe détournement remained potent because to him, it manipulated the language utilized by capitalism itself. This is even more plausible in light of later theorists who argue that these internal manipulations are far more dangerous than a full-frontal attack. In an earlier paper, I called this kind of critical maneuver ‘embedded’ to distinguish it from the Frankfurter Schule critique. The traditional Marxist critique is intended to rip a hole in the ‘false consciousness’ of our world, allowing us to become integrated into a totality of perfected praxis. ‘Embedded critique’ on the other hand, takes the strategy of détournement to its logical conclusion, blending seamlessly with the language and structure of the world it lives in. It hides in the manifestations of mass culture, in logos, in children’s cartoons. Its effectiveness is directly related to its ability to blur boundaries, to blend in, thus bypassing traditional censorship in television, for example.

201 Wollen ‘Art and Politics’ in: Sassman, p27.
202 Denise Scott Brown contests the idea that it requires a cultured adult intelligence to handle today’s visual culture, noting that “children are so much smarter than we think.” in unpublished interview with author, June 2003.
As to the so-called radicality of Debord’s total praxis: a manifesto from De Stijl in 1922 already mentions ‘[a]n end to the division between art and life.’\textsuperscript{202} This rhetoric is also to be found in a commentary by Van Doesburg, recapitulating the unity of art and life.\textsuperscript{203} Only in this case the form of unity is embodied in technology and the machine, whereas the unity Debord is proposing is based on desire, the unconscious and the refusal to work (or to become part of the productivity that underlies the capitalist system). The difference in expression is clear, but the question remains whether these two manifestations of revolutionary principles are as distinct as Debord might wish.

The Revolutionary Observations of the Everyday

Similar theoretical positions on the everyday can be found on both sides of the Atlantic, in America with Jane Jacobs and in France with Henri Lefebvre, both discussed in relation to their writings on the city in the previous chapter. Jacobs’ writing was already ‘ordinary’ in its directness and tone. She was trained as a journalist rather than educated as a planner or sociologist, which can be seen in the (re)surfacing of the everyday in response to its latent presence yet simultaneous repression in modernist architecture. Jacobs introduced the idea of ‘lived space,’ to indicate the distinction between the intentions of a designer and the result of the space once it became part of the everyday spatial experience of a community. He comes close to Gans’ problem with physical determinism: Lefebvre agrees that a design cannot have the immediate and simplified result that designers tend to think it will. Yet Lefebvre allows for the possibility that there is a mutual influence between space as it is designed and space as it is used or lived. Similarly, Venturi and Scott Brown proposed that the ordinary was the very locus of vitality and organic progress. They extended this notion of the everyday into an evolutionary force. Just as Lefebvre integrates time and development in his analysis of architecture, refusing the pure formal and unchanging interpretation of modernist form, Venturi and Scott Brown argue that one of the most influential aspects of the everyday is its openness to change, its adaptability to changing situations.

These manifestations of the ordinary are latent in early modernism, in its attention for the masses and the resulting need for an understanding of ‘everyday life,’ not only the life of the elite. Yet the understanding of the importance of the ordinary (and its sheer scale since the explosion of the urban population) was immediately translated into a certain monumentality. Not the monumentality of expressions of power, as can be seen in churches or the seats of political power, but rather the monumentality of mass combined with a rigorous and inflexible total design. The modernist understanding of the everyday went through a transformation from the need to address the massiveness of industrial society to a desire to edify the general populace, to shape it into the perfect expression of ‘modern man.’

The (re)surfacing of the everyday in response to its latent presence yet simultaneous repression in modernist architecture was through its ultimate expression: ‘lowbrow’ imagery. The 1960s shows exactly the expected proliferation of ordinary imagery: the visual language in architecture shifts from abstraction to representation again. Only rather than the representation of, for example, the sublime beauty of nature (18th century), this ‘new figural’ shift is all about the reproduction and representation of ordinary things such as tea kettles and frilly curtains, soap boxes and trailer homes. In the architecture of the time, this manifests itself mainly in the perspectives used to illustrate a project (see argument on Golden Lane Housing by Smithsons, above). It is also to be seen in the work of artists such as Rauschenberg (compiling bits and pieces of everyday reality in his work) and Paolozzi (whose work essentially shows pure assemblages or slight manipulations of ordinary images).

French Dialectics, English Humor and American Pragmatism

What can the comparison between the UK and the US bring us when examining the relationship between architecture and mass imagery? First, there is clearly a relationship between the two cultures in their use of pop imagery. The IG used a plethora of images culled from American magazines, television shows and films, and Alison Smithson has mentioned her pleasure in poring over advertisements in American women’s magazines while stuck in the depressing environment of post-war Europe. Moreover, luxury goods and their accompanying imagery, promising a better life thanks to various new commodities were attractive
representations of prosperity, something we might all aspire to now that we were gaining such freedom of consumer choice. 206

Furthermore, beyond the clearly legible connections between the images used, there is the underlying connection running from the IG through Denise Scott Brown to the US. We could perhaps ask whether the appropriation of the US everyday so apparent in the IG indicates that VSBA has in a sense a 'double-filtered' version of these US images. In other words, if Scott Brown learned to look at and use these images in England, reflecting on them through a background of social realism, could it be that she took that construct and then reapplied it in the US? It is also worth noting that few architects were studying phenomena such as Las Vegas – while in the UK people like Alloway, Banham and the Smithsons were deeply engaged with the manifestations of mass culture, few American architects beyond Venturi, Scott Brown and Charles Moore were discussing these phenomena. Perhaps the Beaux-Arts tradition was still too strong to allow this radical shift? An interesting argument in this context is that of Andreas Huyssen, who argues that in a sense, Pop Art was inevitably American, but did not gain a 'critical value' (in the sense of the Frankfurter Schule) until it had crossed the Atlantic again, back to Europe. It was only then that a more extensive intellectual reflection was possible on what the work of Andy Warhol really meant. 207

This is an interesting argument because it implies a number of things. First, that the work of Warhol was radical in a way that no European work could have been, and that this was in part due to its unreflective nature – in other words, that it lived on the surface of things, and took those surfaces for its subject. Second, that there is something to be discovered 'beneath' or 'beyond' this surface, and that the tools of a European brand of intellectualism are necessary to achieve this. In contrast, Venturi and Scott Brown noted about Las Vegas that they did not know whether it was good or bad – they simply suspended their judgement to examine it. Third, that the notion of critical (or rather 'critique' in the sense of the Frankfurt Schule) is necessarily connected to text, to analytic reflection through words on images (in other words, that Warhol had no critical value until it was analyzed), Where these first two presumptions may seem either trivial, or wrong, or reasonable, depending on the point of view taken, the third is worth investigating further because it has a direct bearing on what we see happening around us today.

The work of the Situationist International functions as a counterfoil here to the English 'pop architecture' movement. In the journal IS, American imagery was typically used to deconstruct the capitalist system and prove its flaws. Here too though, we see the use of imagery not only as a communicative device but very much as a form of critique – only the critique was often placed in the form of text around the image. 208 On this level, the SI approaches a critical use of the image itself in détournement but is still dependent on text and theory to achieve this. The communicative aspects of the image are similar to what VSBA suggest, but intended to communicate a call to action rather than a social convention. The parallels between the Brutalists, Team 10 and Robert Venturi and Charles Moore were elucidated by Denise Scott Brown as early as 1967. 209 These are reiterated in David Robbins’ study of the IG and related movements in Britain;210 in this later essay she discusses what she learned from New Brutalism and English social realism and how she was able to transform and apply this knowledge to the American context.

Here again, the distinctions between the American, English and French contexts become clear. The UK-US connection was experimenting with ‘community life as it is, and not as it should be’ (to paraphrase Jane Jacobs), as can be seen in the extensive use of objets trouvés and ‘images trouvées’ – like the Joe Dimaggio passed in the Golden Lane drawing, or the documentary panels produced in the Las Vegas and Levittown studios at Yale. 211 This experimentation with imagery (purely on the surface of things) flies in the face of the Marxist-based theories of the Frankfurter Schule and the later ones of the SI, on false consciousness and alienation. The SI forms an interesting ‘middle’ position in its belief that the ‘everyday’ is critical (and thus studies it extensively, just like VSBA and IG), yet it also presumes that this everyday is not the goal of its study, but rather an instrument to destroy the false consciousness produced by capitalism and modern means of production. In this sense, the SI treats the everyday much as the Enlightenment treated science and rationality: as the means by which people could transcend their (earlier) limitations. The critique the SI had for ‘Art’ was that it denied everyday life – and their hope was to create a society where art could be abolished entirely, since it would be subsumed under the creativity of everyday life. Yet their understanding of this creativity of everyday life paralleled the characteristics often attributed to art – as a ‘lifting of the veil’ between our misperception of a ‘true’ (transcendent) reality.

206 Again this goes into the notion of symbolic identification through objects: emulating wealth by purchasing objects with the connotations of a wealthy lifestyle (the luxury of kitchen appliances).


208 Conceptually, there is a separate discussion underlying all this in terms of the analytic value of text and synthetic value of imagery, as well as the troubled relationship between image and text, which will be examined more closely in section IV of this chapter.


210 Robbins, ed. Aesthetics of Plenty

II. The Contamination of Purist Modern Vision

A. Global Aspects of the Debate

Everyday Architecture from Abstraction to Profusion

In his ‘gentle manifesto’ Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, Robert Venturi discusses the importance of inclusion and the problem of modernism’s exclusion of ornament and elaborate forms. The attempts of Modernism to reduce architecture to its very essence had caused architects to ignore essential qualities. For Venturi, decoration and complex form are neither superfluous to how we experience a building. Not that Venturi was looking to reinstate a flagrant form of decoration for decoration’s sake – just that in the process of removing some of expressive aspects of architecture, there was also the loss of a certain quality of depth and multi-layered experiences, of jarring contradictions followed by soothing harmony. Venturi was pleading here for a resistance against oversimplification of form, arguing that our experience of the world is equally complex and inclusive of all sorts of contradictions.

The book itself is an explicit attack on modernist principles, although Venturi is quick to state that the architecture of some high modernists has important spatial qualities not to be denied. The attack is focused largely on the dogma of reduction and simplification, and seeks counterexamples throughout architecture history to construct an alternative view of design principles. The questions raised in the book, as well as the general resistance to oversimplification, reflect the period in which it was written. Reality appeared to be becoming more complex and less clear-cut. Where the 1950s, especially in America, were still largely framed by the perfect family structure and societal niceties, as well as a great respect for etiquette, privacy, etc., the early 60s were already rife with the resistance against stability, the dominant modes of living, and its social revolutions were already brewing. In referring to the tendency of architects in the first half of the twentieth century to solve only a select number of problems, Venturi formulated precisely this mid-century discomfort with tradition and clarity that led to such diverse forms of resistance to modernism in architecture (with postmodernism finally becoming the dominant one): “He [the architect] can exclude important considerations only at the risk of separating architecture from the experience of life and the needs of society.” It is this separation that is at the core of so many rebellious voices, only each has their own solution. Where Guy Debord similarly encouraged us to experience the ‘totality’ of life as the first steps towards revolution, Robert Venturi offers his ‘gentle manifesto’ to help architecture come closer to the experience of life. In Venturi’s formulation we again see the echoes of the ‘human qualities’ of life, of ‘real life,’ of ‘lived space.’ One of the most common critiques of modernism is thus manifested through the acceptance of the world as it is rather than designing the world as it should be.

He begins his journey by looking back into architectural history for an alternate route, one that does not inevitably lead to a modernist aesthetic. He finds some material in the Gothic, some in Art Deco. But his true discovery is not the symbolism of times past, but rather the transposition of symbolism on his own time, or the discovery of the iconography of the everyday (heavily influenced by Denise Scott Brown as noted above). In the late 50s to early 60s, this was a development beginning to surface in very different places: the New Brutalists had discovered the power of photographing real children playing in real streets, Andy Warhol offered Campbell soup cans and Brillo boxes to unsuspecting art gallery audiences, Alloway discussed the influence of Hollywood films and popular culture and Archizoom was presenting displays of everyday objects of consumption in an abstract gridded space (figs. 2.28, 2.29).

Although C&C is still focused on traditional architectural form, and analyzes it in the traditional terminology of tension and harmony, we begin to see hints of some later concerns with the visual drifting through the text at times. Addressing the difficulty in assessing architectural form, Venturi comments: “Instead, the variety inherent in the ambiguity of visual perception must once more be acknowledged and exploited.” Note here the sly insertion of ‘once more,’ implying ever so gently that there was a time, before the modernists recalibrated our vision to seek behind the surface, that the ambiguity of visual perception was understood. A further comment is to be found in his acknowledgement of the “complexity and contradiction that results from the juxtaposition of what an image is and what it seems.” In the modernist tracts appearance is always discussed as misleading, and structure or content always the goal to which we must all aspire. Venturi here is undermining one of the basic tenets of modern architecture: the denial of the surface if it is not a direct expression of the construction or structure behind it. Again, it is important to remember that there is a distinction between the manifestoes of modern architecture and its production – nobody would argue that Mies did not understand surface effect. However, the manifestoes are at the root of the need to reassess the principles by which architects were building; therefore, it is

212 Lefebvre also uses the word ‘reduction’ in his critique of architectural representations of space. See excerpts from The Production of Space. In: Leach, Rethinking Architecture, pp. 138-146.
213 Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction, p.17.
within the principles of the manifestoes that we are studying these problems of pure form and the introduction of complexity.

The introduction of complexity has everything to do with the need to find the synthetic condition of everyday experience in the built environment. Le Corbusier’s manifestoes were constructed on the clarity of the engineer and on the rhetoric of (pseudo-)scientific analysis. When constructing a perfect world like that of the Ville Radieuse, there is a need for the powerful language of reduction and simplification. However, the perfect world (as we know of all utopias) is not suitable to live in. The stability of perfection is an idea, not a reality (this problem of utopia will be re-engaged in a later chapter), and once the perfect world is constructed it must contend with the problems of everyday. This is to be seen in the utopia will be re-engaged in a later chapter), and once the perfect world is constructed it must contend with the problems of everyday. This is to be seen in the most obvious issues of our post-industrial society: despite the early 20th century hopes of industrialization and later globalization producing a world with no hunger, no poverty, extensive leisure time for all the working class, none of these conditions have been realized. Creating the perfect world has to do with not only a perfect environment or technological progress, but also with human factors. This problem is what Herbert Gans calls the ‘fallacy of physical determinism’: the idea planners have of being able to create a perfect community by creating a perfect environment. Perfection on this level, although it was attacked in terms of modernist conventions, was still present in the 1960s manifestoes: the SI hoped to find their perfect world through a combination of technology (to allow for leisure) and the unleashing of inner creativity; Archigram placed their hopes in a more ‘human’ form of technology; and Venturi and Scott Brown believed in a form of liberation through the acknowledgement (and sometimes emulation) of popular culture.

Nevertheless, Venturi, in line with his contemporaries, attacks this notion of the ideal: “When circumstances defy order, order should bend or break: anomalies and uncertainties give validity to architecture.” At the same time, he is quite aware of the need for some kind of order – without a system it becomes impossible to recognize anomalies: “Order must exist before it can be broken.” However, it is the rigidity and universality of this order he is questioning; there is a pendulum movement within every chapter of the book (and nearly every sentence) to place the anomaly against the system, the unexpected against the common. And it is from this resistance to the ideal that we finally run into what he is so well-known for: the use of banal objects and imagery. He finds their importance not so much in a perceived beauty (he even refers to some of these objects as vulgar) but rather in

the mere fact of their existence. “Architects can bemoan or try to ignore them or even try to abolish them, but they will not go away. Or they will not go away for a long time, because ... these commonplace elements accommodate existing needs for variety and communication.” Again, here we find a quietly embedded but extremely critical phrase: ‘existing needs.’ The major turns in the 60s revolved around looking at what was in the world, at acknowledging that the ideal was sometimes a little further away than expected. Architecture (and its theory) as well as urban planning found itself re-evaluating its expectations on the basis of what already existed, rather than what we hoped would come into being in the future.

Symbols, Substance and Surface

The extra introduction to the second edition of Learning from Las Vegas notes that C&C could be considered a treatise on ‘form’ and LLV a treatise on ‘symbolism.’ This is a significant distinction, and the communicative ability that is based on iconography and on collective imagery comes to the forefront more in LLV. Colquhoun in fact discusses this problem in terms of ‘form’ and ‘figure,’ where ‘figure’ is that type of expressive image that has fundamental culturally embedded connotations. It is this type of ‘figure’ that Venturi is trying to reinstate, to reconnect architecture to the people who use it every day.

While modernism operated under the idea that there were universally comprehensible forms, the retaliations in the 1960s revolved around a revaluation of visual convention. The idea that tradition offered embedded meanings that were worth examining rather than erasing was a way to help architectural form reconnect with its occupants.

While C&C discussed the tradition of form within architectural convention, the increasing presence of the mass media and a new visual language of consumption allowed the shift towards the more iconographic orientation of LLV. In other words, visual convention (as a language in itself) became an equally valid point of study towards the understanding of architectural meaning. The line of questioning from architectural complexity to the kitsch of Las Vegas challenged the modernist supposition that surfaces are by definition tainted or misleading. This discussion is based on a false dichotomy, presupposing that surfaces and substances can be separated and have no mutual influence. However, the work of VSBA also encouraged the preferring of surface over substance, reinforcing this opposition.

B. Global Traits of Resistance Localized

Images of Architecture: From Order to Ordinary

In the various manifestations of ‘ordinary,’ there is a slight but important distinction in vocabulary: while Venturi (and later Scott Brown) tend to use the
words ‘ordinary’ and ‘commonplace’ in their praises of popular culture, the SI and Lefebvre tend more towards the use of ‘everyday’ (quotidienne). The IG and the Smithsons again use ‘ordinary.’ The word quotidienne has within it a sense of repetitive action, of habits accrued over time (by repeating them every day). This sense does distinguish it from the commonplace or the ordinary which could be extraordinary to the ordinary should be considered one of the most important differences expressed between an activist sense of spatial appropriation and the formalist analysis of aesthetic elements.

In Western Europe, the Anglo-Saxon move toward social realism is not present in the same manner, but John Habraken for example does note a transformation in architecture due to postwar reconstruction. In his acceptance speech for a professorship at the TU Eindhoven he claims that the transition from the extraordinary to the ordinary should be considered one of the most important transformations in design culture.

III. Basic Dualities – Incomplete Paradigm Shifts

Both sides of the debate: the separation between surface and substance on the one hand and the impotence of architects in the face of society miss some essential points. First, no matter how separated sign and substance are, it is by appropriation of a space and by living in it that it acquires a conventional meaning – the lived space of Lefebvre constitutes new understandings of spaces because of the process of living. Moreover, attributing and appropriating meaning to and through images or appearances is a fundamental human process. Gans shows that the largest distinction between popular and high culture are not so much about the aesthetic or non-aesthetic, but about types of aesthetic experience (largely based on education). Sociologically, there is little distinction between aspiring to a great romance along the lines of a harlequin novel or rather following Wuthering Heights – the processes of identification with characters and ascribing meaning are similar. In this sense, one could argue that regardless of the interventions of the architect, some meaning will be ascribed, and not necessarily the intended meaning. Is this a societal flaw or a discrepancy between architects’ perceptions and the world they live in? Second, the architect can hardly be considered impotent if he gets his commission to design. True, the process is full of compromises (between architect, client, contractor, technology, budget), yet at the end of it there will still be a building, be it ugly or beautiful, and this building will be used, taken up into the fabric of daily existence. It may flout convention or annoy its occupants (and what proves power more than causing daily annoyance?), but it will have an impact.

IV. What Lies Beneath: (Re)Constructions of Vision

A. Modernist Vision – The Ocular Ontology

The (Re)Valuation of the Image

The critical re-assessment of vision and the associative qualities of what I would choose to call an ‘image culture’ is valuable now, in a time when audiences are becoming visually ever more sophisticated. This is not to say that we should concentrate solely on the visual aspect of architecture, but that we should at least discuss the visual as one importantly constitutive aspect of architecture. It is this importance of the visual, so strongly present in the work of Venturi and Scott Brown, that needs reconsideration.

As VSBA discovered quite early on, film and television productions are interesting media for this study, especially the commercial ones, because they are the ones that have the most wide-ranging influence. Especially some of the contemporary productions illustrate a certain avant-garde ‘technique’ introduced into a commercial product. This melding of avant-garde and commerce shows a certain shift currently discernible in terms of ‘blurring’ ideological lines; both pragmatism and aestheticism are present, and the question is to what extent they function as the (either historical or neo-) avant-garde would have them. In the 1960s we can only see the beginnings of these developments, but it is precisely the work done by VSBA and their various contemporaries in art and architecture that illustrate their grounding in a questioning of the Modernist ethic and aesthetic.

Where often movement and speed are seen as constitutive of the modern experience, and thus of modern vision, the 1960s and work such as Learning from Las Vegas pre-empt some other notions related less to vision and more to a total experience. In a conceptual sense, their work begins to touch on what the associative and networked, or communal qualities of the contemporary image are – how vision itself has become part of a larger whole incorporating advertising, projection, montage, thus forming a new Erlebnis, which would include not only an image but also an attitude and a form of communication that transcends mere representation.

Using ‘vision’ and ‘image’ as two critically related yet separate notions can be helpful in examining what the status of the project of modernity is today – can we see it as a critical stance, embodied in the visual? Or can we say that the cognitive

---


222 The representations of architectural traditions and clichés in television series and films are documented in the results of their ‘Learning from Levittown’ studio (source: office archives, VSBA). This is one of the earliest examinations of architectural language on television.

223 For example, discussions on tv-shows like ‘Buffy the Vampire Slayer’ run rampant in academic circles. Also, media theorist Douglas Rushkoff has offered highly critical insights into the sophistication of contemporary media culture and its use of the image in his books Media Virus and Children of Chaos.
transformations in cultural production (architecture as the case in point) have sufficiently reconditioned contemporary experience to necessitate a different method of analysis? If so, might the image itself become capable of a critical gesture in this different (post-industrial) mode of being?

'Vision': Modernity’s Construction of an Ocular Ontology

In the notion of vision as both natural and universal (following the ideas of Martin Jay, see below) there is clearly an implication of transcendence: that somehow, what the eyes can see goes beyond all boundaries of context, class, language and anything else that necessitates ‘translation’ of meaning. Although this too was questioned with the introduction of structuralism, the dominant understanding of the visual remained as a ‘true reflection’, unmediated, of reality. Since the 1960s, the condition of this image-based ‘spectacle’ has prompted a reconsideration of the autonomy of images, combined with their capability of communication. This idea of an ‘image culture’, or a ‘visual turn,’ presupposes that the visual is no longer either transcendent or the direct reflection of an objective reality, but rather accords to the visual an ambiguous status of both communication and mediation, as well as inherent and autonomous qualities that are unique to the visual. These qualities include fluidity and a network of associations, yet still retain a certain level of ‘legibility’ of imagery (related to its communicative nature). In this sense, the scopic regimes of modernism have been under attack since the 1960s: it is precisely the ‘easy legibility’ of pop imagery that allows this ‘image culture’ to arise, undermining the enlightened and intellectual understanding of vision that pierces the facile nature of the surface. Yet this image culture simultaneously hides much more within its surface than could ever be acknowledged under the regime of modernism.

Martin Jay discusses how there is certainly an element of the universal in vision – he mentions silent film as an example of how images transcend cultural boundaries. Yet what we find in the early 20th-century uses of ‘vision’ in texts like those of Le Corbusier is the implication that ‘to see’ is to see beyond the mere surface articulation. In the introduction to ‘Eyes which do not see’ he notes, in the true spirit of modernity, that we have entered a new era which requires a new

---

224 In structuralism, the visual was largely treated as analogous to language, consisting of signifiers and signifieds that were only related to one another through agreement. The idea of an unmediated reflection of reality is most prominent in photography. One of the best examples of this is to be found in a National Geographic cover with the Egyptian pyramids: they were moved somewhat closer together in the photograph, to fit on the cover, which prompted an intense public debate on ‘lying’ to the public in this photograph.


aesthetic—and that we are as yet unable to see it. To him, our vision is still constricted by what we are accustomed to, by the imagery of 19th-century eclecticism, and by earlier 'styles' in architecture. To Le Corbusier, 'vision' is more about seeing the 'true' or 'intended' order of things, or even perhaps the 'natural' order of things, as it is defined by Jay in his article.

Perhaps this is also what was so fundamentally shocking about a book such as Learning from Las Vegas: here were a pair of architects who were not encouraging us to look past the billboards and signs and clutter of commercial imagery, but rather to look directly at them, and to appreciate them for what they were: an expression of the vitality of the everyday environment (figs. 2.30-2.32).

We must also keep in mind here, though, that one of the driving forces behind Le Corbusier's manifesto has remained exactly the same for Robert Venturi: to apprehend and to clarify the aesthetics and the spirit of an age. Again in the introduction to 'Eyes which do not see,' he offers a definition of style which to some degree may still hold today, but certainly encompasses the true basis of modernity: "Style is a unity of principle animating all the work of an epoch, the result of a state of mind which has its own special character." Modernity itself is a flexible thing; it is precisely about transitions and being able to incorporate the new. This idea of style is no less applicable to Robert Venturi than it was to Le Corbusier—the state of mind had simply changed, thus requiring a re-evaluation of the basic principles under which architecture was being designed. The internal conflict in the writings of Le Corbusier was that he was aware of the ephemerality of the modern age, yet was convinced that his architectural principles were immutable and eternal.

The discursive and the figural—two sides of the same image

Jay refers to Norman Bryson's notion that images have both a discursive and a figural aspect. The figural is where notions such as composition, harmony and beauty are typically situated, the discursive, where meaning and symbolism are located. Furthermore, in the way these two aspects have developed, the figural is typically set in the realm of the absolute, and the discursive in the domain of the relative. Having gone a full trajectory from seeing the image as only figural, and

---

229 'Custom' vs. 'natural' reflects the distinction made by Colquhoun on 'form' and 'figure' in his 1977 essay on the two. 'Form and Figure' in: Alan Colquhoun, Essays in Architectural Criticism. pp. 190-202.
230 Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture. p87. This also contains an implication of the unfinished project of modernity as posited by Habermas.
231 Colquhoun, 'Form and Figure.' The essay offers an analysis of modernist architecture as 'form' (transcendent and universal), and postmodern architecture as introducing 'figure' (based on context and tradition). He borrows the notion of figure from rhetoric, and implies
needling to imbue it with meaning; seeing the image as only discursive, and having no grounds on which to judge its aesthetic merit; or we are currently in a struggle to begin to see both sides of it simultaneously. Jay is working towards this in his article, and it is also to be seen in art reviews, architecture conferences and various writing of recent years: the notion of beauty is becoming important again, yet it does not necessarily 'remove' meaning or preclude it simply by 'being beautiful.' Nor is there the idea that beauty is entirely universal in the way the Le Corbusier would have us believe – yet there is an agreement that it is a critical aspect, not to be entirely denied in the way we have seen it treated in the purely 'banal.' This problem, of contemporary reworkings of how to view, how to see and how to understand the visual, will be addressed in a later chapter.

Returning to the two aspects discursive and figural, there is a continual shifting between these poles: for already in our two key figures here, Robert Venturi and Le Corbusier, the two sides are used as a reductivist polemic, yet then reintroduced to quietly reconfigure their significance.

To begin with Le Corbusier: his suggestions (or demands) are continually on a plane of aesthetic intent. He uses the figural notions of harmony (of geometry and plan) to offer a perfected environment. This fits perfectly within the idea of a purely figural image, denying any contextual conditions (which would be an indication of the discursive) and guiding us toward the transcendental image of pure figuration. Moreover, it fits perfectly with the Enlightenment notion that the image is an unmediated representation of reality, is a 'natural' way of expressing something. Yet, despite all this clean, ostensibly amoral, projection, he conflates aesthetics with ethics. It is not merely beauty he is seeking, but the enlightenment and perfection of man, to be achieved through this universal notion of beauty. The conflation is where a slippery slope begins. He discusses architecture, engineering and the love of machines as having a moral aspect to it, because it is about clarity and order.232 Furthermore, the domain of art is to be left to those who are ahead of their time, who can see past the petty issues of everyday. Perhaps it is only through the conflation of modern beauty with morality; but these principles of enlightenment, taken together with his use of images of contemporary technology (the steamboat, the car, the airplane), show a discursive use of the imagery that is precisely about the cult of modern technology. Moreover, if we think back to his definition of style as the expression of an epoch and the result of a state of mind, he does have a certain discursive notion of the image.

Robert Venturi, on the other hand, pushed for a specifically discursive understanding of imagery: the idea that the experts' view of art (or in this specific case, the dominant ideology of a clean modernist aesthetic) was not the only appropriate one. He intentionally entered a realm that spoke of the relative values of one thing against another, and their embeddedness in a culture. Later, in collaboration with Denise Scott Brown, he would also begin to talk of signs, which brings the work extremely close to the semantic games played a little later in postmodernist architecture. His references to the historical value of certain styles and his understanding of continuity in the history of architecture and its images, all plant him firmly in the realm of the discursive – needing to understand the image in its very context. On the other hand, what Venturi does is to place for example ornament (in Complexity and Contradiction) on a figural level. He discusses notions of harmony and tension in the typical fashion of architecture history, which denies the possibility of other translations. Moreover, his analysis of these conditions of architecture are focused largely on a purely formal level; it is not until later in C&C (after Denise Scott Brown entered his life) that he begins to really engage with the condition of the everyday in a more analytic, sociological manner.

"One way that this issue was addressed prior to the visual turn was to distinguish between words as conventional signs and images as their natural counterparts... Whereas words were taken to be arbitrary signifiers without any necessary relation to what they signified, images were understood to be tied by natural forces to what they resembled, iconic analogues of their objects."233 Modernism both deconstructed and utilized the notion of the iconic analogue; its deconstruction is clearest in the work of cubism and abstract expressionism, with no clearly recognizable iconic analogues. Yet the notion of a universal and transcendent form is arguably related to the idea of not so much an iconic analogue, but perhaps a conceptual analogue. The implication in modernism was still that, given the appropriate form, the conceptual understanding would be absolutely independent of culture. Postmodernism on the other hand utilized the iconic analogue very literally in its employment of nearly direct renditions of traditional architectural figures (such as the pediment and the arch). Yet this form of iconic analogue was intended precisely to subvert the 'naturalness' of modernist vision, and reintroduce the discursive and communicative aspects of the visual. These distinction go to the heart of contemporary discourse. Although it would be hard to argue that there is a 'naturalness' to the imagery of our spectacle society, its signs and signifiers do still constitute a structure of communication, to some degree contextual but under the forces of globalization also incorporating a certain universal legibility.

---

232 Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, p127.

The position of vision and of image

There are subtle yet important distinctions to keep in mind here: the eye as innocent or objective; vision as piercing a surface, opposed to the image as pure surface; ocularcentrism and ocular ontologies in contrast to a more embodied vision; the perceived naturalness (and thus an implicit neutrality) of seeing.

The need for mass cultural references and an incorporation of everyday images was a response to the demanding abstraction and purity of Modernism. The imagery was sometimes used as an explicit attack, in other cases as sheer pleasure. But central to the idea was first a resistance to what had gone before, and a rearticulation through the artifacts of daily life. Eventually this democratization of art and architecture led to the use of ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ as a universal tenet – that it was not up to the architect or the artist to determine what was beautiful. And it is in this universality, in the complete dismissal of the autonomous qualities of images that danger also lies: “Visual culture, in other words, has come perilously close to being turned into a branch office of the cultural studies conglomerate, in which ocularcentrism is trumped by logocentrism and the autonomy of visual experience is denounced as an outdated ideology of high modernist art.”\(^{234}\)

From the Linguistic to the Visual

Many have thought, which is in a sense a modernist tradition, that the image is man’s downfall. This is expressed in different ways: in high modernism, such as that of Le Corbusier, Loos and Mies van der Rohe, the imagery associated with ‘the masses,’ with ‘popular arts,’ with ‘kitsch’ is seen as detracting from the possibility to truly see harmony and geometry, and rise to the perfection of a platonic aesthetic. These are the manif estoies that follow the lines of Plato’s cave theory, where we slowly be ing see nothing but the meager reflections of the real world and have no sense of what a true circle is because we are trapped in a cave and blindfolded to true vision. The philosopher is the one who can escape the cave and subsequently make others see. In many passages of Vers une Architecture as well as Urbanisme, Le Corbusier uses precisely this type of rhetoric to prove that the engineer-architect (instead of the philosopher) is ready to enlighten mankind.

The connection between this kind of rhetoric and that of Guy Debord for example is precisely this notion of enlightenment. Debord begins from within Marxist thought and uses the theory of capitalist production and alienation to prove that the images around us in the 60s, specifically the commodified images of advertising, TV, movies, are nothing but an opiate, serving to cloud our vision from the authentic world. Again, here we have the orator who is prepared to bring us out into

the real world, and images again are the source of our trouble: they cloud our vision through their pleasantries and simplistic reduction. It is on this level that the work of VSBA is interesting and can be seen as (on the cusp of) moving beyond modernism: it proposes that the image in itself is not the wrongdoer, and that it in fact holds the power to communicate, to subvert and to open other avenues of possibility. Thus the image becomes revalued as a tool of communication, not only obtuseness. From here, it is but a small step toward understanding the image as possibly being critical rather than only representational.

This work, as a prelude to postmodernism, incorporates both attitudes towards the visual: it offers a resistance to the ocular ontology of modernism, yet still has a traditional understanding of aesthetics embedded in it. Even in its resistance, it still expresses a utopian drive, allowing its very resistance to finally become dogmatic. The IG exhibit ‘This is Tomorrow’ also shows the ambiguity of the 1960s in its vitality and pleasure in imagery. Their reception of images as both consumers and artists shows a transition between high modernism and pop culture, using their imagery in part as ideology critique, yet also for sheer pleasure, for the enjoyment of something new and full of energy. In postmodernity, the issue of cultural relativism “challenged the pretension of any one language or code to serve as the metale gue or metacode for the species as a whole.”\(^{235}\) This is precisely the kind of response we are discussing as resistance to or rearticulation of modernism. Yet the 1960s also demonstrated that “much of the power of images, we might conjecture, comes precisely from their ability to resist being entirely subsumed under the protocol of specific cultures.” (p275, my italics). Here again we see the distinctions between Colquhoun’s figure and form, or Jay’s discursive and figural, or even Barthes’ idea of representation and figuration, becoming productive not despite the blurring of distinctions but because of it.\(^{236}\)

B. Postmodern Imagery – Surface Games

Media imagery – mass culture – pop art

The increasingly visual nature of the world has been blamed for problems such as superficiality and shallowness – this betrays the underlying notion that big ideas, proper relations with things, etc. can only be had through words. Yet it is worth briefly noting that each major shift in media has encouraged this kind of rhetoric: from Plato’s complaint (through the dialogues of Socrates) that people would no longer train their intellectual faculties once writing had become a common good (since memory would no longer be necessary if things were recorded), to the early complaints of shallowness in the lives of the children growing up immersed in an advertising culture; and such comments as Guy Debord complaining that authentic

\(^{234}\) Jay, ‘Cultural Relativism and the Visual Turn’ p271

\(^{235}\) Jay, ‘Cultural Relativism and the Visual Turn’ p271

\(^{236}\) Barthes as referred to through a quote of David Macdougall in Martin Jay, ‘Cultural Relativism and the Visual Turn’ p275.
life was no longer possible in the culture of capitalism. On the other hand, there are critics such as Walter Benjamin, who tentatively signal coming developments, in a mixture of wariness and curiosity.

One way or the other, it is clear that the imagery of the 20th century and mass culture in general (such as paperback books but also propaganda posters) have a complex relationship with each other, and with the later developments of Pop Art. One of the fundamental conditions of this relation is the hierarchy between the intellectuals or the avant-garde and the masses. The masses are an early 20th century concept, related to such works as Canetti’s Crowds and Power, to mass industrialization and the workers in industry as part of a factory assembly line. These masses of the assembly line, interchangeable and eminently replaceable are alienated from the products of their own work according to Marx. This alienation was then mollified by extensive consumption—again directed at ‘the masses.’ This is the line of thought that prompted work like The Society of the Spectacle.

However, today’s systems of production and consumption have become too sophisticated to talk of ‘the masses’ any longer. In contemporary culture, it has become more useful to speak of niches and target groups rather than ‘the masses.’

The Image as Resistance to and Rearticulation of Modernism

Reyner Banham’s work on surface decoration and expendability indicates a beginning to this rearticulation, though still in the vocabulary of architecture history. Alongside this internal deconstruction of the most widely accepted principles of modernism, was also an ‘external’ deconstruction through the introduction of the imagery of mass culture by other members of the IG, notably Paolozzi, Hamilton and to some degree the Smithsons (especially Alison, with her interest in advertising images). The IG intended this commercial aesthetic as a democratization of architecture and art; and as a reintroduction of a certain vitality in the slumbering remains of high modernism.

It was the vitality of these popular images and their disregard for the accepted categories of aesthetics and art criticism that drew the IG to them in the first place. And, like in earlier avant-garde movements (such as dada), it was just outside of their own discipline that they found this vitality: these images were objets trouvés, simple manifestations of everyday culture without the intervention of architects and artists.

There is definitely a pleasure of discovery in the collages of Paolozzi as opposed to, say, the more demanding experience of the sublime sought after by the Abstract Expressionists. The Paolozzi work is all about a different kind of viewing—the pleasure of recognition (well-known artifacts related to the home, technology, childhood), the enjoyment of discovery (in the extensive universe of collage, so full of things), the reframing of everyday objects, thus making them seem more valuable. The collage here works as a framing device involving jarring combinations, odd juxtapositions; it incorporates the element of shock as in Dada.

Image – aesthetics – meaning

Form and its relation to meaning can perhaps be a little more easily determined on the basis of popular opinion. For significance is generally given in context, not inherently. Although again here we should refer back to Martin Jay’s piece, and understand that visual meaning or significance is more universal than linguistic. In this sense, the visual turn is arguably a natural development in the context of globalization. In the confrontation with a larger number of cultures and languages, visual communication, at least on a basic level, may be the more logical path.

Here then the trickiness of the aesthetics debate becomes apparent: are images meant to convey an experience of the sublime, or of aesthetic reflection based on conventions learned through extensive education? Or are they meant to communicate meaning? Offer symbols for a society to hang its traditions on? This debate has gone back and forth throughout the twentieth century, all in the name of the ‘proper’ aesthetic approach. This is what made Pop radical: it was not about legitimacy but about experiment, not about conventional aesthetics but about crossing traditional boundaries. And at the time it was on the rise, what better place for it to seek its images than America?

237 Following for example the arguments of McLuhan in Understanding Media
238 Denise Scott Brown, unpublished interview with the author, June 2003. “Architecture is always behind – marketing has been handling niches since the 60s.”
Chapter 3
Mechanical Reproduction and CyberSimulation
(Re)visions through technology

0. Introduction
The power of technology is yet a third critical issue in modernism, occupying a position similar to the issues of city and image, and is still one of the central problems in our society. This is by no means new; for example, if we understand writing as a technology, then Plato wrote one of the earliest surviving diatribes against the implications of a new technology in Phaedrus. Here, he argues that the younger generation will lose mental agility and strength by depending on writing and no longer needing to train their memory. More critical is perhaps Heidegger’s discussion of modern technology and the transformations it wrought upon man’s relation to the world – that since the advent of modern physics, we have been able to force nature to give us what we once accepted as gifts. In the 1960s, this forcefulness of modern technology was questioned, yet the transformative potential it had was still an important part of the discourse. For this aspect, two primary texts are focused on for their impact on the architecture discourse: Marshall McLuhan’s Understanding Media (1964), which found a cult-following among many technophiles, and Reyner Banham’s Theory and Design in the First Machine Age (1960), which questioned the accepted perception of the role of technology in modernist architecture.

In part it is the element of force or determinism that underwrites many of the modernist tracts on the relation between technology and architecture. The Enlightenment belief in liberation through rationality underlie the belief in salvation through technology. Once again, this is an aspect of modernism that was under attack in the sixties. The claims and complaints will sound all too familiar: technology dehumanizes; it takes away freedom of choice; it is not made to suit human form; it is cold, abstract, unfeeling, unthinking. The imagery that accompanies technology expresses precisely these perceptions, and new representations were also instrumental in attempting to find a new role for technology in architecture.

The issues revolving around the relationship of technology and architecture involve a number of different questions, such as control and dominance (man’s control over nature, followed by technology’s dominance over man). The question of control

241 Plato, Phaedrus. (in: Essential Plato, pp844-851). This argument is discussed by Eric Havelock (‘A preface to Plato,’ 1963). Havelock’s analysis is situated as a ‘theory of transformative technology’ by Michael Heim in Electric Language.

242 Heidegger, Die Technik und die Kehre. Although this argument on modern technology does seem nostalgic towards a pre-technological era, its analysis of the forcefulness of modern technology is very precise.


244 This issue of control has become even more important with the advent of cybertechnology and biotechnology. These have made a hybrid form of technological life
contains within it the question of choice: freedom of choice was seen as one of the ultimate triumphs of the 1960s, but when that choice is limited at the outset by parameters of, for example, consumerism and maximum profit, the choice is merely a pseudo-freedom. One of the typical arguments utilized in pro-technological manifestoes since modernism was the promise of leisure. Each machine introduced in the household or workplace promised less labor and more free time. Household devices in the 1950s were continually praised for the relief from drudgery they would offer the housewife. To some degree this is of course true: a washing machine allows a significantly shorter time to be spent washing clothes. However, the introduction of such appliances also changed household habits, and work often shifted elsewhere rather than disappearing entirely. In other words, the leisure time was usurped as much as it had been created. Another question revolves around the presence of the body and the distinction between the mechanical and the organic body. As will be seen in the work of Archigram and the science fiction imagery of the 1960s, the issue of embodiment becomes more and more powerful, especially in its resistance to full technologization – the body then becomes the locus of human ‘authenticity.’ This question of embodiment has become even more critical in the age of cybernetics, where disembodiment is an important mode of being and the boundaries between the human body and the technological body are increasingly indistinct.

Modernist Technology: Liberation or Millstone?

Underlying many of these questions lies the perception of technology as purely instrumental. To be modern is to be technological – the modern society is based on technology and constantly seeking to improve it, which has progressed with leaps and bounds since the late eighteenth century. Technology is seen as the instrument by which we establish dominance and control over nature, by which we improve our living conditions (among other due to this independence from the natural environment) and by which we determine and configure our own futures. Yet contemporary western society is so heavily dependent on technology that we might also ask whether technology as such is purely liberating, or also a threat. This in particular an issue that crops up continually in the 1960s, and is still crucial today, since it questions the notion of a pure instrumentality as posed within modernism. Just as ‘form’ was considered a neutral, universal thing, so technology was seen as morally and culturally neutral. In reality, the relationship is far more complex, since some issues arise only due to technological progress. Our independence from the natural environment in the form of heating and cooling inside the home also demanded new spaces be created within the home to contain the necessary equipment.

In part all of the above questions derive from the unbridled faith in technology presented by a modernist progressivism. The perception of technology was that it would continue to liberate man from the constraints placed upon him by nature. Moreover, this is a belief in the powers of rationality as distinctly human, since technology is a purely human achievement. This unwavering faith in rationality began to falter after World War II, since it proved that rationality alone was not a sufficient condition towards humane and moral behavior. Moreover, it proved that technology was not simply instrumental: as in any bureaucracy, the rules (means) begin to determine the goals (ends) eventually.

Here again there is an the ambiguity in this 1960s revolution, where the relationship with technology is questioned and brought to the forefront, yet perhaps not entirely reconfigured. Although the neutrality of technology is questioned in many forms, an optimistic belief remains that salvation may still be attained merely by reconsidering our relation with modern technology. Archigram in particular explores this reconfiguration of the position of technology. One final distinction should be made here, between the ‘machine’ and ‘technology.’ The modern age was seen as the age when ‘mechanization takes command,’ and the machine became both the emblem of the new technology as well as its defining character. In the 1960s a distinction was increasingly made between the machine and mechanization on the one hand and technology in general on the other. Technology as a whole was not necessarily perceived as a failure, but the mechanization at the root of the architecture discourse was.

possible, as prefigured in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818). This line of argument has become increasingly important as technology has shifted gears from an ‘external’ industrial mode to a more embedded cybernetic mode.

246 This is one of the main arguments of the SI (esp. Guy Debord), mainly in relation to capitalism and a consumer-oriented society. Although technology itself retains a liberating potential in his work, this distinction in terms of consumerism and choice is crucial in relation to the discourse in the UK and US.


248 This is a very loaded interpretation, especially as the identity studies of the 1980s demonstrated the non-neutrality of virtually every phrase and perception. Dominance and power were seen to be present in every cultural expression.

249 For example Godard’s film Alphaville presents us with a future city controlled by the computer Alpha-60. The background for this apocalyptic scenario of technology was formed by the Parisian banlieues modeled after high modernist tenets of architecture and urbanism, demonstrating how interlaced the modernist environment is with a high-tech perception of society.
Technology and Rationalism

The way technology was handled in the modernist manifestoes was centered on order, rationality and efficiency.  

In this context, imagining a technology not purely oriented towards efficiency, and not entirely rational, seemed to open up new possibilities. Analogous to the situationist notion of the dérive (see chapter 1), an intentionally different use of technology was explored to help undermine the pure functionality of the machine as posed by Le Corbusier. Archigram in particular can be seen as exemplary for this development. They did not contest the importance of technology for contemporary life and for architecture, but they did contest the manner in which it was employed by the modernists, again (as the inevitable target of high modernism) exemplified by Le Corbusier’s discussions of the machine. Their proposals for seemingly organic machines such as the Walking City helped reconfigure the typical understanding of what a machine should both look like and do.

Again, as with the recalibration of the city and the image within the architecture discourse, certain keywords surface time and again throughout the 1960s, showing a resonance in the critiques. Essentially human qualities besides rationality form one central point (for example through the needs and desires of the human body).

As noted above, freedom of choice becomes crucial, which is expressed through distinct individual elements as opposed to modern standardization. Furthermore, technology is often adjusted towards a ‘natural’ appearance, rather than an earlier modern tendency of encouraging people to become more machine-like (more efficient and more rational, for example).

Re-evaluating the Machine

Reyner Banham’s dissertation, Theory and Design in the First Machine Age (1960) offers a basic framework for the treatment since it explicitly addresses the role of technology and the machine in architecture. His suggestion that modernism was employing technology in a way appropriate to an early form of technological society (the first machine age), and that the work of the 1960s demonstrated the advent of a second machine age, frames precisely these shifts in the relationship between architecture and technology. Moreover, as in a slightly later essay ‘Symbolic and Literal Aspects of Technology’ by Alan Colquhoun, the distinction between the rhetoric and the production of modernism is reassessed.

The machine is re-evaluated in terms of its functions, its presence in the discourse as a metaphor, and its visual manifestations in architectural design. The image of technology is as pertinent to this discussion as its typical usage. These issues also illustrate how difficult it is to maintain a distinction between machine and technology in discussing the work of the 1960s. While Banham distinguishes a ‘first’ and ‘second’ machine age, McLuhan distinguishes mechanization from technology and Colquhoun frames his distinctions through the terms literal and symbolic. Despite the inconsistency of the use of mechanical and technological, all of these distinctions circumscribe a simple observation: that the relationship with technology has somehow changed in or around the 1960s, and that it is now necessary to reconsider the conventional understanding of technology and its impact on architecture and society.

In sum, the reconsiderations of the position of technology in architecture again responded to modernism: its fetishization of the machine and faith in the transformative potential of technology produced an architectural climate that was too easily simplified into the technophilia of progressive architecture or technophobia of traditional, conventional architecture. In the resistance to a modernist treatment of technology, both form and use of the machine were reconsidered. Some of the potential of this revolutionary stance remained unfulfilled thanks to its continuing dependence on future technology as savior. However, by actively questioning the relationship between architecture and the technology of the society it builds for, the 1960s opened up the possibility that a mechanical society might not offer the pure perfection of the machinary Le Corbusier admired.

I. Transformations: Imagining a different kind of technology

A. UK: Technology revised and re-envisioned – Archigram

The most radical expressions of a revised technology came from Archigram, a group of recently graduated architecture students who worked together in London from 1961 to 1974. The group consisted of Warren Chalk (1927-1987), Peter Cook (b. 1936), Dennis Crompton (b. 1935), David Greene (b. 1937), Ron Herron (1930-1994) and Mike Webb (b. 1937). Their first pamphlet appeared in 1961, the last one in 1970. Not only did they completely revitalize future technology and its possible impact on architecture, they posed important questions to the strictly

---

250 This did not necessarily preclude spirituality (Theo van Doesburg) or poetry (Le Corbusier), yet the reception of the discourse in the 1960s focused on the problems caused by a purely mechanical and functional rationality.

251 Here again, it is important to keep in mind that the critiques of the 1960s were derived from their own perception of modernism: the problem of mechanization was as much a problem of their own society as it was inherently connected to modern architecture.


mechanical technology that had become such an important visual metaphor in modernist architecture.

Furthermore, they began to incorporate the conditions of mass culture within their visions of technology. Basic premises of consumer culture such as obsolescence and freedom of choice were seen as relevant to a new understanding of technology in architecture. The most famous comment on this comes from Peter Cook, who wrote: “The pre-packaged frozen lunch is more important than Palladio. For one thing it is more basic. It is an expression of human requirement and the symbol of an efficient interpretation of that requirement that optimizes the available technology and economy.” In contrast to the modernist use of the machine as a formal and symbolic metaphor for transcendent values such as efficiency and rationalization, Archigram joined their contemporaries in examining what was already present and visible in the world. In their predilection for mass culture, they also demonstrate their indebtedness to the IG, whose main activities and writings preceded them by a few years (see also Chapter 2). It seems that the slight difference in time-frame somehow allowed Archigram a looser approach to technology, more saturated in the mass culture that the IG was interested in. Although technology was important to many of the IG writings on the contemporary environment, within the group, Banham is primarily the one encouraging an explicit reconsideration of the role of technology in architecture. As an independent visual theme this pop-saturated version of technology truly came to the forefront in the work of Archigram in the early 1960s, who were promptly championed by Banham.

The young architects of the Archigram group are the obvious choice to center this question of a revised relationship between architecture and technology. Not only did they display a boyish enthusiasm for technological innovations, but their choice of platform to distribute their work was also dependent on technology. From 1961 to 1974 they published their work in small pamphlets, their name deriving from architecture telegram. These pamphlets, selling about 300 copies of the first issue and reaching a sale of 5000 by their ninth and final issue in 1970, contained the final student projects of a number of their members, small manifestoes in the same style as the Internationale Situationniste, or L’Esprit Nouveau before them, and various collaged images intended to provoke reactions or express questions related to a post-modernist (in the literal sense of ‘after modernist’) architecture (figs. 3.1, 3.2).

This platform of the little magazine allowed for a flexible positioning in the architecture debate; before needing to execute their ideas, Archigram was able to build up a solid repertoire of designs and provocative essays, creating an oeuvre of unbuilt work that was nevertheless influential. Furthermore, Archigram was deeply embedded in the London scene coming out of the Architectural Association, and exposed to the work of the IG and the lectures of Reyner Banham. The importance of Banham to this small circle can hardly be underestimated, and will be examined in more detail. As discussed in the previous chapter, the IG was already incorporating the imagery of a popular culture, to begin to question the purity of a modernist aesthetic.

Archigram in its own fashion was doing something similar, in undermining the purity of engineering aesthetics as Le Corbusier had presented, and turning towards the expressions of technology as they were found in science-fiction movies, comics and other mass-cultural expressions of technology and its relationship to society. Furthermore, Le Corbusier had proposed that an aesthetic based on technological, functional and rational requirements would embody the perfection of a rational humanity; he also deemed it necessary to create architecture as the perfect environment – the house as a ‘machine for living in.’ Archigram was more intent on examining other conditions technology made possible, such as planned obsolescence and disposability, as well as nomadic forms of dwelling. Moreover, they may have taken Le Corbusier’s maxim of the machine for living in to an extreme: Mike Webb’s Cushicle certainly served no purpose beyond providing shelter for the nomad (fig. 3.3). Living became not the Corbusian experience of a rationalized life, but rather the freedom to be wherever one wanted to be.

Plug-in City

To begin with the distinctions between the use of technology by Archigram and that of an earlier, modernist expression, the Plug-in City by Peter Cook (1964) may prove helpful. Just as the Golden Lane Housing images reveal an explicit dialogue with Le Corbusier, the Plug-in City attacks the Corbusian interpretation of technology directly, critiquing its preference for standardization and mechanization, requirements of CIAM.

258 In the end, additions and modifications were made to the Plug-in City over a longer period of time, but the design itself is generally dated as produced in 1964.

257 This again is also a matter of the 1960s reception of modernist technology, arguably based on the vast amount of postwar building following the rational (and minimal)
yet it does not entirely destroy the perception that technology is primarily instrumental, to be employed in any fashion. The project consists of an enormous infrastructure that allows a flexible movement of its parts. Literally, the inhabitants may ‘plug in’ their dwellings wherever they so desire. A basic infrastructure is given and the rest must be formed as it goes along (figs. 3.4-3.6). In some ways, this is reminiscent of the New Babylon project by Constant, based on the ideas of unitary urbanism: it allows for a flexible infill of a basic infrastructure.259 This use of infrastructure parallels the Corbusian ideal of a radiant city, where the technological infrastructure is instrumental to an ideal type of dwelling: yet it is distinct from it in both the flexibility of its infill, and the visual language used to express it. Gone is the language of a pure and transcendental architecture that solidly offers its occupants space, light and air. Rather, in the plug-in city we have an architecture that is much closer to an industrial design object, offering its owner a sense of flexibility, mobility and expressive identity.

There is also an ambivalence in the modernist position, in the sense that technology is seen as an instrument to the higher goal of a determinable, rationalist society. Yet at the same time, that image of technology is held up as a transcendent form.260 This ambivalence is maintained in the plug-in city. On the one hand, the problem of complete standardization is resolved by allowing the infill to be highly specific and individual. On the other hand, the system the individual plugs into is completely standardized, to allow the individuality of its parts. The expression of the individual thus not only relies on technology, but is also shaped by it. The question here revolves around precisely the literal aspects of technology: to what degree is the modernist presentation of a ‘high-tech’ home truly modern?261 On this level, Archigram certainly surpasses its predecessors. Yet although their projects are extremely detailed and take technological progress under serious consideration, so much of their technology is based on the mass cultural expressions of a science-fiction technology that its true literal impact on architecture remains somewhat questionable. In their work as well, a symbolic element remains present.

The Plug-in City can very much be seen as a critique of Corbusian city proposals such as the Ville Radieuse, where each individual is completely subsumed by his insertion into the greater (mechanical) whole of high-rise with grand vistas. Instead of a systematic grid of equalized dwellings, there is a complex and systematized infrastructure that allows highly individual dwelling pods to plug into the larger system – the communal structure and the connections are standardized, yet each

259 Archigram does note a distinction between the two, in that the Plug-in City incorporates some of the technology in its basic structure, while New Babylon has an infrastructure that is completely neutral and purely about infill. Archigram 5, p12.
261 Colquhoun, ‘Symbolic and Literal Aspects of Technology’
fig. 3.3. Mike Webb, Cushicle (1966-67). Illustration of the stages of unfolding

chapter 3 – technology

fig. 3.4. Peter Cook, Plug-In City (1964). section
fig. 3.5. Peter Cook, Plug-In City (1964). axonometric

fig. 3.6. Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton. Plug-In City (1964). Various components and national network
dwellings is potentially completely different. The imagery of the Plug-in City as it was presented denies this individuality in that each pod is designed by Cook, but the potential is still clear.

There is another interesting problematic here, though, in examining what happens to the work of the architect: it has now been transformed (or reduced?) to the design of an (urban) infrastructure, and its infill (as an industrial design product). The notion of spatiality as an architectural intervention, as Alison and Peter Smithson propose, has by and large been reduced to a simple economic problem here: how much space does one need? These arguments are reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan's notes on the complexity of technological influence. McLuhan, Understanding Media.

The questions tackled in the Plug-in City also find a resonance with their contemporaries. In the 'Metropolis' issue of Archigram, issue #5, the discussion of the Plug-in city is embedded in an evaluation of metropolitan projects such as those of the metabolists, Constant's New Babylon and Yona Friedman's Spatial City (fig. 3.7). These projects discuss and incorporate keywords typical of the 1960s.

262 Jurjen Zeinstra, 'Houses of the Future'. Oase 32, 1992. pp. 8-31. He argues that 'space' is still important to the Smithsons, while Archigram reduces architecture to little more than a technological intervention between man and environment, neglecting 'space' as part of the craft of architecture.


264 These arguments are reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan's notes on the complexity of technological influence. McLuhan, Understanding Media.

265 Peter Cook, Architecture: Action and Plan, p18. This line of questioning will return in chapter 4; the resonance between various critiques of modernism through the paradigms of city, image and technology shows the 1960s to be more of a transitional period than a revolutionary one.
discourse such as growth and change, clusters, networks, connectivity, continuity, environment. The transcendental overtones of a universal machine-oriented metaphor of modernism has again made way for the importance of more people-oriented ideas of convention, growth. For Archigram, the Plug-in City demonstrates a technology that is used to facilitate the creation of a total environment (much as Constant hoped his New Babylon would), rather than the Corbusian notion that emulating technology would lead to a perfect environment. In other words, in response to the rationality and mechanization of the functional city, a new form of technology was envisioned which would initiate and encourage the development of a living, breathing, total environment. 266

In this sense, the premises of the Plug-in City resemble some other tendencies discussed in chapters 1 and 2: rather than holding up an image of the machine (as used by Le Corbusier in his Vers une architecture), the projects of Archigram tend to look for a way in which new technologies can enable a more human environment. The idea of the ‘total environment’ returns often within their projects. The introduction to the Living City exhibition included the following observation: ‘In the living city all are important. The triviality of lighting a cigarette, or the hard fact of moving two million commuters a day are both facets of the shared experience of the city ... When it is raining in Oxford Street, the architecture is no more important than the rain, in fact the weather has probably more to do with the pulsation of the living city at a moment in time.’ 267 Although their understanding of the total environment is not the same as that of their contemporaries, a similar sentiment underlies it: the notion that not only buildings contribute to a spatial experience, but also sounds (Lefebvre, Jacobs), personal interventions (Debord, Constant), non-architectural signs and symbols (Venturi and Scott Brown). At heart, this implies an understanding that more than merely programmatic needs are to be addressed when building.

As noted, the distinctions are also important. Constant’s New Babylon is the most obvious comparison project (although it was begun a little earlier, in 1956; as shown in Archigram 5, they had knowledge of its existence), but the handling of architectural space and infrastructure is quite different. Both projects offer an infrastructure with flexible infill. However, in the case of New Babylon, the infrastructure is little more than a load-bearing system of columns and beams, also intended to be transformed by its inhabitants. As little as possible was meant to be defined by the architect. In the case of the Plug-in City, the infrastructure fulfilled a dual function of load-bearing system and, for example, sewage and transport (elevators). The architecture of the infrastructure itself became more defined and more loaded with technology as the infill became more flexible. Both projects believe that a future technology would be somehow enabling towards a more beneficial and total experience of the city environment. But for Constant, this technology was to be employed almost as a phantom: it was meant to make the human environment possible, not to make the technology somehow ‘visible.’ Peter Cook instead utilized the actual space of technological implements such as wiring and plumbing to further define the basic structure of the space, and to rid the infill of autonomous technology. In both however, as in the work of the Smithsons on the Cluster City and Golden Lane City, the city was in the end understood as a conglomerate form, as something that could grow, change and develop (fig. 3.8). 268 This basic notion, as noted in chapter 1, was a response to the pure rationality and functionality of the modernist city – the ‘balanced brief’ of the functional city was placed against their notion of the total environment. 269

Radical technology, radical architecture

The radicality of these projects directly questions the position of technology in relation to architecture and the experience of space. From enormous collective city projections like the Plug-in City, the Walking City (Herron, 1964) and the Instant City (Crompton, 1968), to extremely individual projects like the Sutaloon (Webb, 1968) and the Living Pod (Greene, 1965), radical uses of technology were envisioned to completely reconfigure the perception of architectural space (fig. 3.9).

Archigram thus offered possibilities of resistance to high modernism and saw opportunities in contemporary design. In their own work, this became manifest through their exploration of many aspects of technological developments: the technology in and of the city, obsolescence, networks and computerized environments. Their technology was instrumental (much as it was in New Babylon), enabling people to control and transform their environment or live in the environment of their choice. At the same time it was also thematic: they took the possibilities of technology to extremes. A project such as the Interchange (Herron and Chalk, 1963) took the technological potential of new forms of mobility and designed a complex interchange between monorails and self-guided transport systems (fig. 3.10). The Instant City offered a technology-supported traveling metropolis, which would temporarily offer all the amenities and the excitement of urban life to out-of-the-way sleepy villages. The Cushicile (Webb, 1966-67) was the ultimate high-tech backpack, providing the future nomad with food and shelter.

266 Archigram note that they are not against ‘functionalism,’ but rather that they believe the modernist machine aesthetic is not truly functional towards a human environment. Archigram 7.


268 “Cluster” is a word also used by Archigram at times, though developed in a different fashion from the more specified ‘cluster cities’ of the Smithsons.

269 Archigram 5, p.3. On the same page, there is a comment that deserves further study: they claim the need for a ‘governing structure.’ This distinguishes them both from the anarchy of the situationists and the liberalism more common in the US.
Furthermore, to Archigram technology was not an image or a static example of human development. Rather, it had the potential to facilitate growth and change. Instead of opposing technology to an organic and developing human society, they saw notions such as growth and change as also built into the technology itself. This forms the premise for the Plug-in City. Keywords used throughout the debates in the 1960s such as continuity, connection and change are here not only applied to human society in opposition to machinery, but also to future technological developments.

The crux of this approach is that it takes a broader view of technology, not as something static to fulfill a certain function, but also as an integral part of human society, destined to be transformed in equal measure. In this belief, they perhaps moved beyond the modernist approach to technology. However, at the same time, an unwavering faith in the ability of technology to overcome all obstacles is reminiscent of an earlier confidence in the liberating potential of the machine.

**Revising modernism**

As with other groundbreaking architects of the 60s, the Archigram group maintained a strained relationship with modernism. On the one hand they raised critical issues that would appear to shatter the foundations of modernism. Projects such as Michael Webb’s Sutaloon destroyed the notion of an architectural space by transforming the stable space of the home into a flexible piece of clothing (figs. 3.11, 3.12). Issue 5 of Archigram, ‘Metropolis,’ was primarily interested in completely re-envisioning the ideal city on the basis of flexibility, freedom and choice, with little regard for ideal forms. This makes it possible for Isozaki to see the work of Archigram as truly dismantling modern architecture. Yet to what degree the group actually set out to dismantle modern architecture remains a question; in many ways, they were simply revising (and revisualizing) some traditional modern beliefs; updating a modern architecture they still believed in. In fact a piece of text by David Greene in Archigram 1 expresses this position of ambiguity: “A new generation of architecture must arise with forms and spaces which seem to reject the precepts of ‘Modern’ yet in fact retains these precepts. WE HAVE CHOSEN TO BYPASS THE DECAYING BAUHAUS IMAGE WHICH IS AN INSULT TO FUNCTIONALISM.” The first piece (about rejecting ‘modern’) is reiterated on the main page of the broadsheet, giving it additional emphasis, and is interspersed with comments such as ‘a rich, vital,

---

270 Archigram 5, ‘Metropolis’, Nov. 1964, p. 12
fig. 3.10. Ron Herron, Warren Chalk. City Interchange (1963)

fig. 3.11. Mike Webb, Suitaloon (1968). Diagram of use, various stages of transformation.

This also demonstrates the distinction between the premises of modernism and functionalism they did believe in as evidenced by their tendency towards a technocratic scientific ideal, and the reception and manifestation of those same ideals by the late 1950s, which was the target of their critique. In other words, Archigram can be more accurately positioned in between affirmation and negation: they questioned and re-examined modernism by raising questions crucial to the experience of modernity which remain unresolved, such as issues of standardization and mass society. Yet they simultaneously reaffirmed the utopian ideals of modernism in other ways, remaining certain that someday in the future there would be more leisure time and much pleasure to be had due primarily to the wonders of modern technology. Especially this last belief is extremely visible not only in the modernists, but also in the situationist belief that unlocking everyone’s creativity was the way forward (see also section I.B., below). As noted earlier in relation to the city, modernity itself encompasses certain conditions that may be seen as premises for ‘being modern,’ and technology, like the urban condition, is one of these formative premises.  

Banham: Machine aesthetic vs. technological sensibility

In terms of the relationship between technology and architecture, the critic who contributed the most is no doubt Peter Reyner Banham (1922-1988). His doctoral dissertation resulted in the book Theory and Design in the First Machine Age, one of the critical contributions to a revision of modernist propaganda, especially in their relationship to the machine. Banham was one of the driving forces behind the ICA meetings of the 1950s that resulted in debates on modernist principles and their revision. What was to become the Independent Group was actively involved, but other key figures like Denise Scott Brown were also present at these meetings. The exhibit ‘This is Tomorrow,’ discussed more extensively in the previous chapter, was one of the turning points in the revised and also public discussion of modernism. Banham was involved with this exhibit, and was extremely sensitive to the class-based issues of democratization to be seen in the visual culture in the exhibit—the use of pulp imagery was to him a step forward in taking architecture out of the ossified discussion between high and low, culture and the masses. As an aside, the radicality of his gesture towards pop culture might be considered a new

273 This also follows Heidegger’s distinction between techmé, which still has a ‘natural’ relationship with the environment, and modern technology, which essentially enslaves the natural environment. This alienation from a ‘natural’ life remains thematic throughout the 1960s. It is most explicit in the writings of the SI.  
form of ossification – by preferencing pop and mass culture, high culture is then denied the validity of its place within culture.

Banham can be seen to follow two major directions in his work: the relationship between architecture and pop, and that between architecture and technology. Although his work on pop is absolutely important, for the purposes of this chapter and in relation to the work of Archigram, the focus on technology will be more relevant. Yet the two tendencies of Banham also find a union in Archigram, since their imagery shows its power through precisely the popular references of science fiction and the like, but it is their attention to technological detail that represents a break with some of the technology references in modernism. At the same time, I hope to show that this breakthrough is both fundamental and only partial, similar to some of the issues confronting the polemical use of imagery and the surface as discussed in the previous chapter. While Banham offers a revision of some of the myths of modernism, his passionate love for technology also exemplified the modern myth of technology: not our relationship with technology was to be revised, but rather the objects of technology themselves. The moderns were simply not modern enough.

A crucial distinction that Banham makes is one between a machine aesthetic, or an engineering sensibility, which he attributes to the moderns, and a technological sensibility, which is what he believes is beginning to manifest itself in his own time. The distinction, interestingly, rests in large part on representation: the machine aesthetic, in his view, is an abstraction of the idea of a machine into imagery that is smooth, abstracted, devoid of ornament. These qualities are seen to represent an idea about engineering and the machine, rather than the actual machine. Hence his emphasis on the technological sensibility: to Banham, a true technological sensibility will incorporate technology rather than represent it formally. He sees it as an attitude rather than a style of design. This seriously questions the modernist position on technology, and Banham’s revision is full of supporting evidence in the form of projects that were crucial to the development of modernism but repressed in the publications surrounding it. For example, Banham points to the expressionism of Mendelsohn and the futurists as critical to modernist architecture yet denied a proper place in its written history. As will be discussed in more detail later (section LC.), Charles Jencks forms an interesting next step in this line of history and polemic: as a thesis student of Banham’s, he seems to distance himself again from the work of his advisor. Jencks, in response to his advisor, moves towards the surface expression in his espousal of postmodernism, just as Banham moves away from pure progressivist historical revision in response to Pevsner, thus continually completing the oedipal circle.

Banham has much to teach us in his meticulous examinations of architects such as Mendelsohn; it is precisely the specificity of his work that makes it so important, yet his prejudices are also legible in this specificity. As already noted, however, the relationship between technology and architecture is fundamental to the discipline, and can be seen to encounter a turning point in the 1960s in two fundamental ways. First, there is a shift away from the progressivist ideal of the machine being purely instrumental and offering nothing but good, since it is up to us to utilize it as such. Second, there is a shift in the very nature of technology, from the industrial machine, which is a tangible object and has a direct impact on the physical environment, to cybernetic technology, which is both networked and invisible, thus making its impact on our environment far more difficult to trace yet potentially much more powerful.

Visualizing radical technology

An important aspect of the Archigram group is that they were extremely interested in the visual aspect of their work – something they shared with contemporaries such as Richard Hamilton (IG) and Venturi and Scott-Brown. The oft-quoted epithet that Banham has left them with – that they were ‘long on draughtsmanship and short on theory’ – is in fact only partially true. They were certainly long on draughtsmanship, but they can only be seen as ‘short on theory’ if we consider theory in the linear, manifesto-like fashion traditional to modern architecture. The ‘theory’ of the Archigram group was as associative an assemblage as the time they were dealing with – with pluralities beginning to appear and the various connected aspects of technology no longer able to fit neatly into a box. The evident clarity and simplicity of modernity, its technological progress and the ensuing paradise had been undermined not only by the war machinery of World War II, but also by the economic efficiency of late modern building and the urban blight beginning to become evident in many cities built along modernist principles.

The clarity of lines that Le Corbusier considered part and parcel of a technological and scientific age, is now transformed by Archigram into an explosion of color, and complex and non-linear forms (figs. 3.13, 3.14). Furthermore, although

275 Banham, Theory and Design in the First Machine Age. pp 153; 327-329
276 Banham, Theory and Design in the First Machine Age. pp10-12; 328
277 See especially M. Christine Boyer, CyberCities: Visual Perception in the Age of Electronic Communication. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996. Although cybertechnology is an important connection to contemporary conditions, it remains outside of the scope of this study. Its developments and ideas in the 1960s were still relatively young, and did not truly enter the architecture discourse beyond the science fiction projections of Archigram, which arguably also still hold to an earlier, industrial paradigm of technology, with occasional gestures towards cybernetology.
standardization was envisioned as inherent to the machine age (or the 'first machine age,' in the terminology of Banham), the expressive technology of Archigram tried to do away with the formal expression of standardization, by replacing it with the industrial design version of standardized components, to be exchanged or transformed as needed. Thus the importance of technology as such to architecture remains equally significant, but its relationship and its impact are at least reconfigured. Instead of the modernist promise of a rational, perfected, machine-oriented society, Archigram offered an individualistic, consumer-oriented technological society premised on non-rational mechanisms such as desire.

The extent to which visual production and technology, both as instrument and as image, are intertwined in the work of Archigram also clarifies why their work is fundamental to the re-evaluation of the position of technology in the architecture discourse. The ease with which new technological developments are incorporated into a positivist and technocratic position harks back to the modern era, when technology was seen as liberation and saving grace. At the same time, the production of architecture itself (the building of architecture) is significantly slower than other fields; Banham argues that the 'second machine age' will require an architecture that develops at equal speed. The visual representations given by Archigram presumed a radically accelerated development of (building) technology. On the level of pure construction possibilities they were correct, as is shown in their references to Cape Kennedy for example. Yet the radicality of their imagery in projects such as the Walking City also demonstrates the dichotomy between architecture as a medium defined by tradition and convention and an architecture subsumed by technology.

Here again we find an ambiguity in the projects, however. The imagery was on the one hand radically technological – the notion that cities might someday walk the globe – yet also referred continually to traits typically considered the domain of living creatures: walking, growing, transforming. In this sense, the visual manipulation presented both a radical inversion of earlier perceptions of technology and a familiar context with which to judge them: these objects were bio-mechanical life forms that made contemporary technology seem truly lifeless. Thus the Archigram series offer us both a visualization of a new technology and at the same time a thematic questioning of the possibilities.

---

280 In the contemporary discourse this issue has become primarily the domain of computer technology.
282 “I took off for Cape Kennedy ... and saw that ‘walking buildings’ easily the size of Seagram were, in fact, a reality.” Peter Blake in: P. Cook, ed. *Archigram*. p. 7.
Obsolescence replaces transcendence: consumer technology

Another critical revision of modernist technology is to be found in the introduction of the consumer. VSBA are perhaps more directly oriented towards the consumer and the everyday user as an explicit theme, but as early as 1963, Archigram were introducing the notions of expendability and the consumer as fundamental to contemporary architecture, not merely as decorative elements added to an architectural environment. Where Le Corbusier seemed to engage with technology as a visual model insofar as it tended toward rationality, abstraction and universality; Archigram introduced the idea that technology in this age of capitalism was also interlaced with the existence of the consumer (figs. 3.15, 3.16). They radically opposed Le Corbusier’s technological rhetoric based on the rational functionality of the machine, with their fascination for disposable items. In a sense, they offered a temporary identity to architecture, which was to be revised when new developments came along. On this level, Archigram did embody a modernist sense of ephemerality: that everything was temporary, and change would be engendered by technological rather than cultural developments.

There is, moreover, another aspect to the condition of obsolescence: it also forms the desires and conforms to the needs of the consumer society. When consumption becomes as important as it has in the past 50 years, ‘planned obsolescence’ becomes a vital tool. By giving products a limited life-span, the producer also ensures that customers will need to consume more. Whether that planned obsolescence is built in through the fashionability of an article, the lack of replacement parts, or its incompatibility with the latest software, is irrelevant: as long as a consumable good is not built to last a lifetime. This is in radical opposition to the eternal and universal character of modernist form. Following this argument, Archigram may well have made one of the most persuasive arguments to ensure a permanent career for architects in a society of temporary forms: not to build a single monument to last forever, nor to produce a product-line that can be assembled as the owner/occupant wishes. But rather as an industrial designer: to build houses and offices and other buildings that suit a very specific need, in a very specific time-frame, and to be replaced within a human generation or less. By introducing the consumer as the inhabitant of their architecture, Archigram crossed the line from incorporating the enlightened rationality of a (Marxist) revolution in architecture to embodying the cultural logic of late capitalism.

Here again, though, not all is as it seems – for the ideals of the nomadic society in the work of David Greene with his Living Pods amidst the natural environment, as well as Mike Webb’s Cushicule and the Sutilloon, allowing the occupant to settle in a similar context, are reminiscent of the socialist utopia of a society with enough space and leisure for all to live as they would wish. In their utopian dream of a

---

The work of Archigram however covers the spectrum from obsolescence and a surprisingly close to the notion of a leisurely life underlying the political statements of Guy Debord. Their means of attaining this life was, perhaps naively, attached to technological progress, while Debord remained more skeptical of the ramifications of new technologies. Yet the final aim seems surprisingly similar: the peace and quiet to live as one would wish, and above all being released from the alienation that underlies the modern condition as written by Baudelaire.

The notion of planned obsolescence combines both technology and economy: while technology moves too fast to be permanent, the economic necessity of consumption is too large to ignore. Yet architecture has typically held a different position in (Western) society. It has usually been the placeholder, the local, the permanent. Archigram was not the first group to unhinge architecture from the soil; the modernists were there long before them. The pilotis so popular to modern houses, the skyscrapers of the Radiant City, were all about a position freed from the earth and freed from the solidarity of generations of tradition. By taking this principle to its logical extreme in the Plug-in City and the Walking City, some of the more monstrous aspects of this technological relation with the world became apparent. Within the wondrous imagery of large, insect-like walking cities there was also a shadow of dislocation, of the loss of architecture as a guarantor of existential stability.

The work of Archigram however covers the spectrum from obsolescence and a dystopian dissolution of architecture to the projection of a rural utopia, by also presenting an enabling form of technology in the Sutaloon and the Cushicle. While these projects similarly presume a reduction of the space and significance of architecture, they replace the existential comfort of the home with the permanent autonomy and self-realization. The project most actively engaged with these questions of choice and how they represent a degree of control over the environment is Archigram’s 1967 Control and Choice project, representing Great Britain at the Paris Biennale of that year.

As the description of the project itself indicates, paradoxes (such as control and choice) were central to its inception. Finding ways to leave the architectural environment free to be determined by its occupant while still representing possibilities was one of the problems Archigram were confronted with. In a precise description of what was sensed as the danger of technology in the 1960s, Archigram notes: “There is a natural fear in most of us that suspects the power of the machine and its takeover of human responsibility. This familiar bogey of the first machine age becomes even more terrifying with the dependence upon the unseen potential of electronic systems.” At the same time, the key to circumventing this problem is found in the individual user, just as in the transformative discourses discussed in chapters 1 and 2 of this study. The affirmation of the active potential of the user, which is found in choice as an expression of individual agency, is described as follows: “The determination of your environment need no longer be left in the hands of the designer of the building: it can be turned over to you yourself. You turn the switches and choose the conditions to sustain you at that point in time. The ‘building’ is reduced to the role of carcass – or less.” In the images produced for this project, hints of a situationist sense of action are scattered throughout the texts, containing phrases such as “anarchy city” and “architecture is just a game.” Implying the creation of

Consumerism and choice: liberation and self-realization

With the rise of consumerism, not only the market-driven condition of obsolescence, but choice also becomes a central point in the transatlantic discourse of the 1960s. As discussed in the previous chapters, the freedom to choose became prime within various fields of action. Whether that meant choosing a non-functional way of experiencing the city as in the dérive (Chapter 1), or the opportunity to explore non-sanctioned imagery such as advertisements (Chapter 2), the freedom of the individual to determine what he found valuable or aesthetically pleasing became an important form of resistance to the demanding abstraction and deterministic purity of modernism. On this level, the freedom of choice inherent in consumer-driven capitalism appeared to seamlessly integrate with the ideals of autonomy and self-realisation. The project most actively engaged with these questions of choice and how they represent a degree of control over the environment is Archigram’s 1967 Control and Choice project, representing Great Britain at the Paris Biennale of that year.

As the description of the project itself indicates, paradoxes (such as control and choice) were central to its inception. Finding ways to leave the architectural environment free to be determined by its occupant while still representing possibilities was one of the problems Archigram were confronted with. In a precise description of what was sensed as the danger of technology in the 1960s, Archigram notes: “There is a natural fear in most of us that suspects the power of the machine and its takeover of human responsibility. This familiar bogey of the first machine age becomes even more terrifying with the dependence upon the unseen potential of electronic systems.” At the same time, the key to circumventing this problem is found in the individual user, just as in the transformative discourses discussed in chapters 1 and 2 of this study. The affirmation of the active potential of the user, which is found in choice as an expression of individual agency, is described as follows: “The determination of your environment need no longer be left in the hands of the designer of the building: it can be turned over to you yourself. You turn the switches and choose the conditions to sustain you at that point in time. The ‘building’ is reduced to the role of carcass – or less.” In the images produced for this project, hints of a situationist sense of action are scattered throughout the texts, containing phrases such as “anarchy city” and “architecture is just a game.” Implying the creation of

As we shall see below, Debord too remains faithful to the idea that technology has the potential to liberate, depending on how it is used. His critique is aimed principally at consumerism.

This was the ultimate goal for the hippie movement: peace, love, happiness, freedom; the ramifications of total, uninhibited individual freedom (the ‘liberty from ordinary responsibility’ noted by Jane Jacobs) were not entirely comprehended.

The combination of technology and economy clarifies why Marxism and capitalism can manipulate the argument as they wish – both ‘ideologies’ (insofar as capitalism is an ideology) are based heavily on both technological and economical arguments.

284 As we shall see below, Debord too remains faithful to the idea that technology has the potential to liberate, depending on how it is used. His critique is aimed principally at consumerism.

285 This was the ultimate goal for the hippie movement: peace, love, happiness, freedom; the ramifications of total, uninhibited individual freedom (the ‘liberty from ordinary responsibility’ noted by Jane Jacobs) were not entirely comprehended.

286 The combination of technology and economy clarifies why Marxism and capitalism can manipulate the argument as they wish – both ‘ideologies’ (insofar as capitalism is an ideology) are based heavily on both technological and economical arguments.

287 The SI, especially Debord, viewed this complicity with a skeptical eye; this will be discussed below in section 1.B.

288 Cook, in: P. Cook, ed. Archigram, p70

289 Cook, in: P. Cook, ed. Archigram, p68
of modernism and the freedom of choice of the 1960s, aim towards a final goal of as being expressive of the uniqueness of individuals helped redefine a ‘humanity’ disappeared. The sense of a loss of control in the face of an increasingly mechanized world can be seen in various disciplines from the mid-1950s onward. One of the best examples is perhaps Godard’s _Alphaville_ (1965), where the inhabitants of the city Alphaville, run by the computer Alpha-60, passively allow themselves to be executed for demonstrating human emotions. One of the common forms of escape in literature and film is by exercising freedom of choice: the ability to break the rules and choose a different path. In _Alphaville_, it is the protagonist Lemmy Caution who exercises his freedom of choice, thereby retaining control over his own destiny.

The issue of choice is critical for two reasons: first, it exemplifies a distinction with modernism. In a sense, the notion of choice is limited in modernism: by presupposing that man is largely, if not exclusively, a rational being, the issue of choice is almost obliterated. Each situation, when rationally assessed, is presumed to have one ideal solution. Therefore, once we have unlocked the full rationality of human society, choice will no longer be an issue: everyone will ‘choose’ to respond in the same ideal fashion. To oppose this homogeneity, the idea of different choices as being expressive of the uniqueness of individuals helped redefine a ‘humanity’ in opposition to a rationalized, machine-like version of man. In this sense, choice becomes a means of manifesting the humanness of the individual in the face of an overly rationalized (and thus machine-based) society. Second, it offers the means to assert individuality. This is related to the previous point: both ideas, the rationality of modernism and the freedom of choice of the 1960s, aim towards a final goal of self-realization. In the one case, however, it is achieved through the discovery of the ultimately rational character of all human beings. In the second, it presumes the individuality of each human being, expressed through their desires and distinctions (which is also emphasized in situationist writings).

The Control and Choice project might be seen as exemplary for the general relationship with technology as it began to be formed in the 1960s, and is also at the heart of the imagery issue. Although there is an apparent freedom of choice, the actual range is still limited by ‘programming’ – on TV, choices are still made by network executives, while Archigram of course also offers only a limited range of choices. Although they are conscious of the paradox that each design presents a limited solution, they typically handle it by stating in their text that this is one of many options. This however recalls Guy Debord’s position that the logic of the spectacle is so all-consuming that choice is merely an illusion. Following this argument, each implication of an alternative within the work of Archigram would be no more than a chimera, impossible within the constraints of their own proposition. Yet the spectacle-argument too presents a problem by presuming that it is possible (for enlightened individuals) to step outside of its logic, that there is another ‘reality’ that we need simply to discover and acknowledge. On this level, might Archigram’s verbal acknowledgement that each solution has its limitations be the best architecture can offer?

This issue of control and choice remains complex and absolutely fundamental to the 1960s. Choice in each case implies a personal freedom that was seen as liberating from the constraints of a class society in some cases, or a deterministic mechanical society, or other forms of constraint. In the case of the SI, however, this choice was about being able to free oneself from the constraints of consumerism and the spectacle. In the case of Archigram, certain aspects of consumerism were seen as constitutive of freedom of choice. These notions of freedom return in various forms, be they the freedom from place in the case of the Walking City or the Plug-in City, or the freedom to transform the individual environment in the case of New Babylon. The main difference here is that the SI would argue that the apparent freedom of choice in consumerism (with a preselected range of choices and an overbearing marketing mechanism) again takes control away from the individual.

In contrast to the SI, Archigram saw no problems inherent in the combination of technology and consumerism. If anything, on this topic they tended toward the American belief in consumer freedom as a means towards self-realization. Yet as in so much of the work in this period, the underlying goals show a strong resemblance – the strongest differences are in the means proposed to attain them.

One striking similarity to the statements of the SI, and in particular Guy Debord and Constant, can be found in a piece by Warren Chalk in *Archigram* 3, ‘Housing as a consumer product.’ Although the title would appear to be at odds with the anti-consumerist position of the SI, Chalk writes that it is time to realize that “everyone in the community has latent creative instincts,” and promises a future not unlike New Babylon: “In a technological society more people will play an active part in

290 A ‘situation’ as defined by the SI is always ‘A moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed,’ implying a certain level of control (see also Chapter 1).
291 Even more well-known perhaps is the description of a population’s absolute submission to the totalitarian regime of Big Brother in George Orwell’s _1984_, although the phrase ‘Big Brother’ has by now gained other connotations.
determining their own individual environment, in self-determining a way of life. It is important to realize how similar these ideas were at the time, although they came from fundamentally different backgrounds. Distinctions are to be found more in the presumed audience: Archigram was not producing these projects for workers alienated by their subjugation to industrial labor, but was moving more towards the realization of what could be considered a middle-class ideal. This liberation, by means of a continually progressing technology, was not from the consumer-driven spectacle, but rather from an overly mechanized and repetitious environment.

Again, this sense of self-expression or self-realization also relates to the question of choice. It offers the same understanding of freedom visible in the work of VSBA as discussed in chapter two: the idea that people can make their own decisions about aesthetics and symbolism. This too is endemic to the period, when the hierarchy between high and low art are questioned and sometimes outright overturned. This freedom of the individual (to act, as discussed in relation to the city, or express himself through symbols as discussed in relation to image) is now expressed through a technology that enables a self-expression or a personal act — again an enabling of self-realization, which is in accordance with the ideals of modernism.

Architecture replaced by technology?

The diversity of positions within the Archigram group remain connected by their investigations into the relationship between architecture and technology. The Plug-in City and the Walking City are two obvious examples of technology becoming architecture. As is pointed out by Peter Blake this is not so strange at a time where the structures on Cape Kennedy were outgrowing most buildings; or even earlier, as Le Corbusier had demonstrated, the steamship had already by far surpassed the apartment building in size. The progressive steps from steamships to oil-rigs and rocket-launch structures, to the megastructure of the Walking City are thus smaller than they would appear when considering these projects purely on their own, or in relation to the programmatic manifestoes of CIAM.

Mega-structures such as the Walking City are not the only revolutionary technologizations of architecture from the Archigram group. Mike Webb in particular moved in the other direction, making architecture smaller and more intimate. He produced projects that walked the fine line between technology and architecture, often collapsing the two to an extent that every ‘existential’ aspect of architecture in terms of its relation with the surrounding context and notions of stability and ‘grounding’ completely disappeared. The Cushicle and the Sualoon offer the most minimal structures of technological architecture, where space is reduced to no more than clothing (previous figs. 3.3, 3.11, 3.12). The Cushicle contains two main parts that “expand out from their unpacked state to the domestic condition.” This is a shell that can expand into a minimal dwelling space including food, water, radio/TV and heating, sufficient to basic survival in any desired environment. These projects are an architect’s interpretation of the spacesuit: a self-sufficient bubble that allows its occupant to move about freely and live anywhere. Eventually, the Cushicles might develop into a larger, more comprehensive system of ‘personal enclosures’, thus transforming this technological object not only into an architectural space, but also into an entire urban environment.

Rediscovering the body: the machine as organism

The Cushicle and the Sualoon, as the two most well-known small-scale projects of Archigram, also bring architecture closer to the body. Rather than the social, communal aspects of architecture apparent in the megastructures, these projects by Mike Webb bring architecture down to the scale of a piece of clothing, therefore scaling it down to the individual body. Somehow, this hypercorporeality became one manner of reintroducing the human element into an increasingly technological and industrial society. This recalls the work of many contemporaries such as the Smithsons and Jacobs, as well as the SI: the human element is crucial. The individual person, in this case exemplified by the individual human body, defines the new position of architecture, the departure from modernist mechanization.

This reintroduction of the specifically human element primarily took shape in two ways: the scale of the body and the tactile. On the level of the body, many of the architectural interventions are at the scale of the private space (small plug-in capsules), elemental living pods and space suits as the membrane between the individual and the outside world. In this space, architecture often begins to manifest itself as the space of a single body (and therefore the pure expression of individuality) settled within a larger infrastructure (figs. 3.17, 3.18). The reintroduction of a tactile experience of space indicates the transition from seeing to feeling, which was discussed in the previous chapter as an undermining of the modernist hegemony of vision (which results in a disembodied representation and experience of architecture).

A biomorphic expression of machinery was one way of reconquering technology towards a more human environment. Archigram’s transformation of the visuality of

293 see note 41, above. The reference to Le Corbusier is to the section on Liners in Vers une Architecture

295 This transformation is perhaps best expressed in the film Barbarella (1968). Barbarella’s spaceship is lined with fur, the walls of the city Soho have soft tentacles or jagged points, and nearly every scene shows some kind of ‘feeling’ of space, rather than seeing it.
technology both responded to the mass culture of the period, as well as to the discomfort with the increasingly mechanical surroundings of the modern city. A return to the human body was one manner of shifting the focus of technology from the primacy of the machine to the primacy of the people it was to serve. The scale of the individual body is one of the primary ways that Archigram emphasized this importance of the individual person. The organic forms of the Cushicle and the familiar form of the clothing-based Suitaloon preferred the position of the inhabitant over the needs of the machine.

**Technology of the medium**

The ideas of Archigram were mainly developed in and through their pamphlets, similar to the SI in France. Archigram used their magazine issues to find their way towards an increasingly defined technological architecture, and their pamphlet remained extremely visual and full of architecture drawings. This stands in contrast to the SI, which in its visual production was continually attempting to undermine the visual sedation of the spectacle. Furthermore, it is notable that the Archigram issues slowly congealed more into single questions per issue. As they produced more, they began to find themes they shared. *Archigram 3* was the first of the series that revolved around a single theme, which became the format for the rest of the series. This issue revolved around technology, obsolescence and consumerism, and what impact they might have on architecture. Other themes Archigram addressed in their pamphlets included science fiction (*Archigram 4*), the (future) city in issue 5, and the idea of the plug-in city in issue 7.

The fact that they produced their most significant work in this form is appropriate to their firm positioning within mass culture and consumerism, as well as the references to various forms of visual production embedded in their projects. In the pamphlets, they also remained closer to technology as a primary instrument, since the speed of print and distribution by far surpasses the agonizingly slow trajectory of architecture. From 1960 to 1962, three of the members (Warren Chalk, Dennis Crompton and Ron Herron) worked on the South Bank Arts Centre for the London City Council, and the magazine gave them the opportunity to draw and present the projects otherwise unfulfilled. The medium of the pamphlet in all likelihood also allowed a radicality of positioning similar to that taken by the SI and the Las Vegas manifesto of Venturi and Scott Brown. 296

In their pamphlets, the members of Archigram created a platform for their collages and assemblages of a highly technological near-future. Their images were closely related to the imagery of science fiction, of advertisements and billboards, all part

---

296 In comparison to architecture, the platform of a pamphlet or a publication may often be a more effective means to communicate ideas, especially since buildings are often so much more expensive to produce that the architect is dependent on a patron.
fig. 3.18. François Dallegret, Un-house. Transportable Standard-of-Living Package (1965)

fig. 3.19. Archigram 4, cover and Space Probe article (1964). Science fiction as reference material for architecture.
of the visual language becoming increasingly familiar in the early 1960s. Moreover, as a new development, the explosion of color and low-culture or ‘light’ images such as comic strips opened up a new world of visual expression for this reconceptualization of technology – a stark contrast to earlier images of steel latticeworks and smooth concrete surfaces. Instead, the public was now offered colorful bubbles of plastic housing units and inflatable dwellings. Both the platform of the ‘little magazine’ (as Denise Scott Brown calls them) and the visual content of it resonates with the other repositionings we have seen of the time: the IG, as their direct precursors in England, introduced collages of contemporary mass culture images (in color), in America VSBA presented the colorful and glittering neonscapes of Las Vegas, while the SI turned to the small pamphlet as a direct method of approach, not trapped within the constraints of a high or academic culture.

Visions of the new technology

The diversity of the work of Archigram allows it to hold such interest even today. The pleasure they have in their gadgets is of a different conceptual order than Le Corbusier’s or Gropius’ missionary zeal in proposing the model of silos or factories as a transcendent form. They worked more on the basis of ‘what might this button do?’ As noted above, their imagery is comparable to that of the mass cultural imagery around them of the time – the TV series The Thunderbirds, also an English production; the space comics they use in Archigram 4 (Zoom!); Robbie the Robot in The Forbidden Planet. This too is an essential trait of 1960s technology: it was inundated with fun and frivolity, to offer a counterweight to the sober abstraction of modernist technology (figs. 3.19, 3.20). This can be seen in Banham’s passion for American cars, as well as in Archigram’s electronic tomato, “a groove gizmo that connects to every nerve end to give you the wildest buzz.”

As noted, many of these expressions of technology show an organic form rather than a mechanical one. Anthropomorphism became more important, at the same time that technology became more about the substructure than its visual expression. The film Barbarella for example introduces a materiality together with its high-tech society – this is not only about the ephemeral or dystopian technology of Jean-Luc Godard’s Alphaville, but also about fur-lined spaceships and walls with soft antennae. Much of the work of Archigram is comparable to this: instead of the reduction of form appealing to a perceptual construct of engineering (straight lines, no ornamentation) that in its plan and facade was often still extremely classical (the symmetry in Mies’ work, the golden section in Le Corbusier’s villas), there was an explosion of form that expressed a technology run rampant. In this case, the

technology was not meant to serve a higher formal ideal, but rather to explode those formal ideals from within. Again, in a visual maneuver similar to what was presented in Learning from Las Vegas or in ‘This is To-morrow,’ the abstraction of modernist forms (in this case of machinery) was subverted by presenting familiar and everyday imagery.

On this level, Banham was highly perceptive in his distinction between an ‘aesthetic’ and a ‘sensibility,’ or an attitude. His theory was also based on the non-sanctioned aesthetic of American cars and Las Vegas neon. The Archigram group was not progressing steadily towards a preconceived aesthetic, but like their contemporaries, was collecting, collaging and assembling things and materials that seemed striking in terms of their technological or architectural ramifications, or their visual qualities. Again this seems analogous to what Venturi and Scott Brown were doing with Las Vegas, or the Situationists were appropriating from the culture of the street. Archigram certainly had some connections with the Independent Group (primarily through Banham), which may have encouraged the assemblage quality of everyday imagery. Archigram however was not turning toward the working class and sociology in the manner of the IG and the New Brutalism, but rather toward the mass culture items such as science fiction films and at the same time technological breakthroughs such as cybernetics.

In the previous chapter, it was argued that mass cultural imagery was taken up both on a direct level, in response to the enthusiasm it engendered in the art and architecture scene (Hamilton, Paolozzi, Smithsons, Venturi); and at the same time because it offered a polemic against certain aspects of modernist architecture (the repression of the mass cultural image as kitsch). This is comparable to the manner in which Archigram handled their technology polemic: on the one hand there was a highly direct appropriation of certain perceptions of technology, primarily from science fiction and popular science, yet at the same time there was another level of discourse, that revolved around a reconceptualization of the role of technology, especially in response to the place it held within modernism. This second aspect primarily found its expression through the visual forms of mass culture in opposition to the abstracted forms of modernist references such as grain silos.

In the case of Archigram, the imagery they used was intended to remove technology from its transcendent throne – to reintroduce the idea that technology was meant to serve the ideas and interests of people, rather than the other way around. In so doing, they also question the modernist connection between rationality as the highest human trait and its manifestations through technology. Yet in their arguments, they also clearly retain a closely related belief in technocracy – that ‘true’ functionalism (which in their eyes should still be objectively attainable) will create a flexible environment perfectly adapted to the needs of its inhabitants.

In other words, beyond the non-functional factors such as symbolism and representation, there is an objectively functional ideal that will hold in all cases. It remains unclear whether they see this functional ideal as something economical (as one could see the Existenzminimum) or as something perfectly attuned between all systems (in a more network-oriented context); it also remains unclear whether they have considered the kind of compromise often necessary when conflicting interests all need to be considered (which is perhaps a condition of paper architecture: there remains a radicality about it).

Interestingly, they seem both aware of and naïve about their own use of imagery. While they imply that the image has less to do with the functional arguments, they also manipulate it to intervene in our perception of technology – on that level, they seem equally prone to a symbolic use of technology. This is historically an obvious point to make – just as Benjamin argued that the introduction of film would change people’s perception, and just as the rhetoric of architects such as Gropius and Le Corbusier proved that the relationship between imagery and argument remains highly complex.

Aside from the representation question here, there is also the relationship between architecture and technology. Although it is clear that technology has its place in architectural practice on all levels of building, the slowness of the building industry is often a target of ridicule by the more visionary technocrats. It must be acknowledged that the building industry is one of habit, routine, consensus and convention. On the other hand, arguments that new technology will transform the practice of architecture have been around since the introduction of steel in the Crystal Palace, and remained present throughout modernism and the subsequent critiques aimed at it. Today, the architects who presume that computers will truly transform building process follow in this lineage of hopeful technophilia. Again, the problem with this line of argumentation is its reductivism, as if technology determines architecture entirely. The radicality of Archigram’s inventions help clarify the questions, but technocracy can no more be seen as a final solution than the ultimate anarchy of the situationist city. Furthermore, a true technocracy would miss the depth and complexity of the work of Archigram, which is equal parts technophilia and mass culture, frivolous imagery that has nothing to do with the essence of the technology it represents. The work hovers between Colquhoun’s symbolic and literal aspects of technology, and in doing so perhaps goes beyond Debor’s fear of idyllic modernist representations of machinery. Yet a light form of critique, still visible in the disturbingly happy faces of the domestic women in Paolozzi’s collages, does not seem present in the Archigram oeuvre. Thus throughout their highly provocative and visual assemblages of possible technologies, they remain somewhat spellbound by a modernist sense of promise inherent in technology itself.

chapter 3 - technology

142

chapter 3 - technology

143
B. France: Liberation through technology – SI

Although the SI did not employ technology as a thematic exploration in the same way as Archigram did, they also demonstrate a similar struggle with the position of technology in contemporary society. As seen throughout the various discourses and manifestoes, a strong disillusionment with the technocracy of modernism had taken hold in the mid 1950s, and the SI was similarly critical. As discussed above in relation to Archigram, they sought a new fashion of employing technology towards a more human life. Where Archigram was radically re-envisioning the form and manifestations of technology, however, the SI was focused more on reconsidering the position of technology and how it was used – the potential creativity of the individual was to be enabled through technology, but it should not be allowed to run rampant.

Moreover, to the SI the dangers of consumerism were potentially the greatest threat to a liberated creative humanity. Therefore, any technology that was supported by or was placed within the superstructure of capitalism and consumerism was suspect (fig. 3.21).

Images of technology

Throughout its work the SI, and in particular Guy Debord, remains more skeptical of imagery than any other group discussed here. Each image encountered is easily dismissed for its complicity with the status quo, and creative expression should be something from within each individual, something essential to each human being and expressive of their uniqueness (and their liberation from the world of the spectacle). Technology in and of itself, however, is not suspect unless it is wrapped up in the same world of consumerism and spectacle. This presumes an ability to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ uses of technology, and again presupposes that technology is simply instrumental.

As befits their Marxist tendency, the problem with technology is considered to be one of use. Technology as applied in the society of spectacle is oriented towards maintaining the status quo. In other words, in a critique that could bring to mind the images of Paolozzi, Debord and his compatriots are skeptical of the introduction of new household gadget implies more labor necessary to afford it, another misplaced desire (the desire to have as opposed to create) and potentially another housewife enslaved by her love of the vacuum cleaner.298 The situationist critique appears to separate an image of technology from a use of technology. This is similar to what Colquhoun discusses as literal and symbolic technology, yet the critique is aimed not specifically at the use of technology within modernism, but rather at the untenable alienation between reality and appearance. To the situationists, technology will someday prove the instrument of liberation, once it has freed laborers from the drudgery of work that can be done by machines. In this case, in contrast to Archigram, the fundamental presupposition is not so much a transformation in the technology but in the way it is utilized.

Throughout this position, technology remains an instrument, potentially neutral even, in the hands of humans. Its incorrect employment has everything to do with the narrow-mindedness of the dominant power structure. Technology itself is not the evil, but the machine aesthetic of Le Corbusier is.

Constant is the situationist member most engaged with forms and potentials of technology. While Debord retains his critical position towards consumerism and the use of technology within that, Constant is seeking ways to envision a technology that would help create the human environment he proposes in New Babylon. Constant’s writing about this environment is strangely reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan, who hopes that eventually the new technologies will become the true extensions of man. Debord’s discussions of technology remain somewhat more abstract, although both seem to agree that someday man will be freed from labor thanks to technology. They underestimated the new types of labor that would arise with the introduction of the network society and its global time schedule.

Liberation, technology, consumerism

The positions of Archigram and the SI are remarkably in agreement yet in complete opposition. Both agree that freedom (of expression, self-realization, choice, individual action) is paramount. And both somehow maintain the belief that technology will engender this freedom. Yet Archigram approaches this from the position of freedom of choice within the consumer world. This presupposes that the consumer is able to make a carefully considered choice. In other words, in Archigram’s position the consumer remains an autonomous entity. To Debord, each choice made from within consumerism is ‘wrong,’ or at least, remains in support of the system of control enforced by capitalism and the spectacle. Therefore, to Debord the only liberating technology is one that would be positioned outside of the system of consumerism and spectacle. This technology is enabling in the same fashion that the dérive is: it antagonizes and goads the passive spectator into personal expression. Constant’s New Babylon (especially at the time it was still sanctioned by the SI) is premised on this understanding of the potential of technology. Aside from that, there is a simpler level on which Debord sees technology as liberating which derives directly from his Marxist background. This is the notion that technology will eventually free the worker from his mind-numbing industrial labor, since any unchallenging labor can be fulfilled by

298 This last comment may not quite suit the SI critique, since a feminist critique is not typically present in their work. However, applying the enslavement of the worker to domestic gadgetry might result in such a supposition.
machines. The leisure time thus acquired may then be utilized to discover the more creative aspects of life, to free the individual for his own endless dérive, for example. How Debord finally envisions this relationship with technology remains however somewhat unclear: will the ‘everyman’ eventually be freed from his current perceptions by the machine, or will the machine remain in the form we understand now, simply liberating the everyman from his chores?

The interpretation of the place of the machine in contemporary life seems somehow less radical than his understanding of the city however, since it negates the complex interrelationship between technology and everyday life, and seems to misjudge the extent to which a progressive belief in technology can create the autonomous entity so feared after modernism. The idea of progress for progress’ sake, where liberation is always just around the corner, is one of the great failures of modernism. For Debord to hold fast to this position, even with his cynical edge, seems untenable now.

Instrumental technology?
This leads to the final problem (and possibly even the paradox) of the 1960s as a ‘second machine age.’ The presumed neutrality of technology was certainly questioned throughout the period discussed here – by Colquhoun in terms of symbolic and literal uses, by Banham in his distinction of machine ages, by Debord in his understanding of the mechanisms of the spectacle. Yet the neutrality of technology shifted its place more than that it disappeared. To the modernists, the neutrality of technology was an emblem of the modern era, demonstrated the universality of human endeavor and rationality. In the discourse of the 1960s this universality was no longer tenable, nor was the presumption of a neutral technology since society was becoming increasingly dominated by machinery. Yet here the neutrality was displaced onto the notion of instrumentality. That a machine was not culturally ‘neutral’ became obvious. However, it was still morally ‘neutral,’ to the extent that it could be reconfigured to suit the human needs denied by their subjugation to the image of the machine.

This moral neutrality is expressed in highly technological future cities such as New Babylon, which are premised on the ability of their inhabitants to create their environment with a kit of parts. The image of these cities is technological, but the idea is that the final form of the city remains undefined. This implies that the technological image they present is not something to aspire to directly, but rather a subtle means towards human freedom. What distinguishes New Babylon from the Plug-In City is that it does not refer to consumer freedom, but to the freedom of self-determination inherent in creating one’s environment – liberty and emancipation are achieved through production, rather than the selection of prefabricated products (figs. 3.22-3.24).
fig. 3.22. Constant, New Babylon

fig. 3.23. Constant, New Babylon, models. Articulation of the city's technological framework.

fig. 3.24. Louis Kahn, tower with flexible structure (1959). 'Let structure be played as a game'

C. US: Technology and consumerism – VSBA

In contrast to the SI, the general position on consumerism in the work of VSBA is similar to that of Archigram. The notion of consumer choice is seen as liberating and enabling. Especially in the project ‘Learning from Levittown,’ the symbolic aspects of consumer choice are charted out in relation to their meaning in a broader social context.

The enabling of mass culture

Arguably, the most important feature of the technology debate in the US was in fact its enabling character. Technology is part of what allows mass culture to arise, what allows a greater group access to a formerly elite side of culture. Technology and standardization is what allowed the soldiers returning from World War II to have a range of choice in homes, thanks to the efforts of William Levitt and sons. Technology on this level opens up a culture otherwise closed. At the same time, its value of singularity and authenticity are destroyed by standardization (which is, in the end, a modern phenomenon).

Technology was not necessarily employed as an image. Where modernism was still concentrating on the iconic value of the machine, the technology of the 1960s was seeking ways to be less visible, less present. The American handling of technology was more pragmatic, it was simply put to use. Warhol understood that the technology of replication allowed an artist to remove his ‘authenticity’ as artist from the equation and instead become part of the machinery of reproduction.

The progressive potential of the machine was still part of the American dream, yet bundled in the consumer ideal of more things: an emulation of wealth was becoming steadily more attainable in the form of vacuum cleaners, two cars, kitchen gadgets and TVs. Ironically, as a prime example of this enabling consumer technology, Levittown is not unlike the Situationist notion that technology should not only enable but also encourage the freedom of individual expression and action. In Levittown, each future occupant was given a choice between a number of standard types and extra features. This allowed a ‘mass customization’ of their living environment. As Debord had envisioned, progress in the technology of building had now created the opportunity for people to actually impact their space. What he would absolutely be set against in this case is the preselected choices and the lack of personal intervention, the agency of the individual. When an overhead photo of the Levittown developments is shown, Debord’s aversion to this version of mass culture is immediately visible: an endless sea of identical homes, no less standardized than Le Corbusier’s Unité, with seemingly no room for individuality.
(fig. 3.25). Yet if we zoom in on an everyday scale, as VSBA did in their Learning from Levittown studio, we find a kind of expressive individuality: small additions, variations in lawns, gardens, front doors and the like (fig. 3.26). The question is simply whether this is sufficient.

A mass society is technological. The technology of modernity has enabled the rise of mass culture, and mass culture in its turn has made a technological society palatable or at least somewhat comprehensible in the form of science fiction films and James Bond gadgetry. The dual nature of this technology remains, but it cannot be seen as one thing or another—it is not merely an amoral instrument in the hands of moral people, because the challenge offered by new technologies is also one of discovery and curiosity.

**Machine and everyday consumerism**

The modern, demanding image of the machine (as something to emulate) was replaced by a dystopian view of the machine (something that may overrun human society). New images of technology were therefore perhaps more domesticized in the form of household machinery, or in the case of objects of desire became potential consumer goods such as the James Bond gadgets. All these machines were again filled with dreams, similar to the modern notion of machinery, yet now more cut to the human form, to everyday usage and to individual tastes. On this level, the technology remained implicit—fulfilling more of the function of literal technology or the second machine age, than its symbolic counterpart (the first machine age).

Along the lines of a Marxist critique, a liberating form of technology might help release the creativity of the common man and free him from the dominance of machine technology. The consumer-oriented version in this view would be little more than another enslavement. Each new gadget produced a desire to possess it, which offered the dual enslavement of needing to work and remaining tied to the continuous renewal of obsolescent gadgets. In contrast, VSBA perceive a certain level of freedom within this consumer society, since its inhabitants have the choice to fulfill their own desires (even if predetermined by advertising) by going to Las Vegas or emulating a colonial home with a do-it-yourself kit of parts. Here the resonance with the work of Archigram is quite clear—where the consumer society is seen to clear the path for a realization of desires simply by reorganizing architecture practice to respond to user-based needs.

**Reconsiderations of technological potential: McLuhan**

The opposition between creativity and purchasing an identity is not as solid as the discourse of the 1960s often makes it appear. The thinker who may have contributed most to the understanding of the technology of media and its potential qualities is Marshall McLuhan.299 Although his discussions of the technology of media are so wide-ranging they can often seem vague, their very embeddedness in a media culture lends them a seductive quality that Archigram, among others, was susceptible to. The work straddles the line between an anarchistic understanding of technology as enabling a (pure) human creativity, and the possibly liberating potential of a consumer-oriented form of capitalism.

His argument centers entirely on technology and the liberating potential it has. His statements are not unlike the arguments of the SI, only his version of a radical revolution against the power structure is more implicit, concentrating on the potential of new technologies on a highly individual basis. His ideas on the global village resonate with contemporary ideas, as well as with the premises of the Archigram projects discussed above. Moreover, we find a connection between McLuhan’s belief that technology in all forms are ‘extensions of man,’ and Constant’s premise that the technological environment he proposed in New Babylon is full of these ‘extensions’ of man into the environment.

Note here again that the phrasing is specific to its time: the machine is no longer the perfect expression of the rationality of man, but it is an extension. It is not an autonomous yet subjugated object, an instrument in the hands of enlightened scientific man, but it extends him outwards, it begins with him and connects him to the environment. In contemporary terms, technology is an interface, bridging the gap between man and environment, and between symbolic and literal. This truly must be whatConstant desired with his New Babylon. Yet this also must be what VSBA presume underlies contemporary society. By becoming an interface, an intermediary, technology as McLuhan understands it is both ‘there’ and ‘not there’: the medium itself is now indeed the message, and the two can no longer be extricated from one another (fig. 3.27).

This position both helps understand our contemporary society, as well as indicating some of the problems we have created by maintaining a firmly progressive stance towards the machine. The ‘hybrid’ understanding of technology as both medium and message is endemic to contemporary society: we can no longer isolate ourselves from technology, yet we also cannot examine it as an autonomous object (since it is in our daily existence).300 In the optimistic years of the 1960s, this was taken up to indicate that we were again moving ‘forward’, that a new step in human evolution had arrived.301 The skepticism towards the technology of the moderns

---

300 This also follows from Heidegger’s position that modern technology and science already determine how we understand the world, not just what we do with it (therefore we cannot step outside of this understanding).
301 This positivism had disappeared almost entirely by the mid-1970s (Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring), and in film is best seen in Blade Runner (1984) for example.
II. Foundations: Modernism and Technology

A. The machinery of modernism

The First Machine Age – a steady progression to the future perfect

Banham and Colquhoun are quite similar in their critiques of the modernist attitude to technology, and thereby indicate at least part of what caused such diverse yet similar reactions in the 1960s. Two main points come forward in their work: first, that the reception (and writing) of modernism falsely denies the symbolic function of machinery in modernist designs. Second, they both in their own way note that the so-called progressive technology espoused by the moderns was simply not so progressive.

A progressive understanding of technology was especially strong during the modern era. Technology was one of the most important foundations of modernism: the potential of the modern machine appeared limitless, and it was believed best to utilize it to the fullest. Yet at the same time, as Banham points out, the architecture of the time was still oriented on a traditional conception of space – “cooking facilities went into the room that would have been called ‘kitchen’ even without a gas oven, washing machine into a room still conceived as a ‘laundry’ in the old sense, gramophone into the ‘music room,’ vacuum cleaner to the ‘broom cupboard’ and so forth.” In the same paragraph, he contrasts this with Buckminster Fuller’s highly technological home, which brings all the mechanical services “together in the central core of the house, whence it distributes service – heat, light, music, cleanliness, nourishment, ventilation, to the surrounding living-space.”

Apparently, the rhetoric of technological progress is not as simple as it generally applied.

The relationship between architecture and modern technology is more complex than it appears. In the simplest of terms, many of the modern masters (Le Corbusier and Gropius as perhaps the most vocal of them) firmly believed that technological progress was not only inevitable, but also desirable, since it could bring a utopian society within reach. The flaws of the industrial society were easily overlooked in favor of the powerful imagery of machine technology (silos, steamships).

Enlightenment and rationality expressed in the machine

The machine as a means to a utopian end was present in modern manifestoes ranging from CIAM to De Stijl, especially because of the perceived correlation between the idea of the machine on the one hand and a scientific and objective foundation to design on the other. The expressive qualities of the machine were especially manifest in Le Corbusier’s Vers Une Architecture, where the clean lines of the machine were seen to represent (or embody) the ultimately rational character of man. Similar to his diatribes against the clutter of the city, on the scale of the object and the idea of modernity, Le Corbusier turned to the wonders of engineering to express his ideals of enlightenment of the common man. In Le Corbusier’s utopia, to be achieved by means of technological developments in architecture, people would function in the same manner as the parts of these machines: each piece would have its place and by functioning in the most efficient way possible, the whole of society would embody the mechanical perfection he saw in steamships.

It is important to keep in mind here that technology assumed an ambiguous position in modernist manifestoes. First and foremost, it stood for this idea of objectivity

Inevitably, their points of view were mutually influenced – the article by Colquhoun appeared two years after Banham’s book, but in his specification of symbolic and literal certainly adds to the argument. The two were both present in England in the same mutual circle of the IG, the ICA and Archigram.

Banham, Theory and Design in the First Machine Age, p327.

304 Fritz Lang’s Metropolis (1927) is one of the earliest visualizations of the problems of industrial society. Most architects take up a radical position: either technophobic or technophile.

305 Conrads, Programs and Manifestoes. p. 89. In the same piece, he also notes the importance of poetry. Although this love for the poetic is an important part of his work, it is of relatively little consequence to the reception of modernism in the 1960s, and hence remains untreated in this dissertation.


307 To Le Corbusier, rationality was one of the most important human characteristics, and the best way to rise above his own shortcomings (see Chapter 1).
and rationality (and thus a Platonic ideal). In part as a result of this fixation on objectivity, the discussion of 'beauty' as an end or a sensibility in itself, as a classical order and harmony that was dependent on the individual qualities of the artist, was largely 'oulawed' in modernist tracts. Yet at the same time, technology was also used in a symbolic manner to express the power, speed and excitement of modernity. Although hidden behind rhetoric of objectivity, the concept of beauty was continually utilized in the argumentation on machinic perfection.\footnote{This will be discussed further in relation to Reyner Banham's \textit{Theory and Design in the First Machine Age} below.} Moreover, the tension between technology and architecture was continually present in modernist manifestos. Yet the radicality with which the discourse eventually developed (towards a full-blown mechanization of life, rather than a complex whole of interrelated developments) essentially prefigured the resistance that was to arise in the 1960s.

The basic premise of the Enlightenment revolves around the ideas of human rationality and technological capability. Both of these qualities distinguished man from the other creatures he shared the world with. Descartes' \textit{cogito ergo sum} defined man's very existence as founded on and defined by rational thought. At the same time, the advances being made in physics, chemistry and all the related natural sciences, brought the confidence that given enough rational thought, all the secrets of nature would finally be unlocked. In the advent of the industrial age, when our technology was beginning to transform the face of the earth, and also replace certain natural modes (notably in travel, but also in mining and manufacturing, for example), the joint concepts of rationality and technological progress encouraged the confidence that at some point in the future, the world itself could be perfected.

In the dominant modes of modernism, this confidence shifted its locus from the expression of an Enlightenment belief through rationality and technology, to being essentially situated in the machine itself.\footnote{In this sense the machine fulfills the conditions of the Freud's definition of the fetish: it is a displaced desire.} Through this displacement of emphasis, the machine became not only the instrument by which human rationality was expressed to its fullest, but also the very representation of that rationality: the image of the machine achieved equal importance to its functions.

\textbf{B. New technologies to transform the old}

In the end, architecture by definition has a relationship with technology – its processes of building are technological. Therefore it must find a mode of relating to or engaging with the technology that sustains it. However, the very nature of technology has changed so vastly between its origins in the Greek \textit{techne} via the industrial era to the contemporary postindustrial or digital era, that this relationship has of necessity undergone changes. This necessitates a revision as well of our understanding of the position of technology in architecture.

Modern architecture as used in \textit{Alphaville} became exemplary for the technocratic attitude of the modernists. Le Corbusier is of course at the head of the line here, as is apparent in Archigram's critique. But here, too, we may ask – are their proposals not technocratic? Or do they truly employ technology in a liberating way, as they themselves might suggest? On the one hand, just like the IG before them, they display a strong sensitivity to the pleasurable and joyful sides of a technology-oriented architecture that tries to break with the more dystopian aspects of modernism. Where standardization was at first the prime expression of technological advance (Le Corbusier, CIAM), Archigram proposed a level of flexibility and individuality, aided by the next wave of technological advances. They thus managed to at least undermine the notion of a transcendental or universal form that was apparently (at least in the way Le Corbusier framed it) the foregone conclusion of a technological society.

By examining various aspects of this advanced technological society, Archigram entered into dialogue with the simplified rendering of technology as good and progressive. In this sense, they can easily be classified under the general culture of questioning the primacy of technology and rationalization following the late 1950s. At the same time, they used technology in a symbolic fashion to create a powerful fantasy world, seducing the viewer with images of walking cities and nomadic villages in martian landscapes. This aspect of their imagery made technology a given – a fundamental factor in a brave new world; only this brave new world was populated by happy individualists, not encumbered by a Big Brother watching them.

Robert Maxwell also points out the potency of this visualization.\footnote{Banham – Historian’ in: Robert Maxwell, \textit{Sweet Disorder and the Carefully Careless: Theory and Criticism in Architecture}. NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993. pp. 163-176.} He seems to imply that the difference between the work of Archigram and that of the technophilic modernists preceding them is minimal, yet that it is their detailed visualization of technological elements that allows a critic like Reyner Banham to see (or construe) a real difference. Thus it becomes important to examine this difference more closely: the formalism resulting from a conceptual treatment of the phenomenon ‘technological,’ versus Archigram’s fantasy world that is stabilized and made powerful through the use of \textit{visual} renditions of technological elements. In other words, was the work of Archigram simply replacing the idea of technology with an \textit{image} of technology? Was the relationship between architecture and
technology truly transformed, as their nomadic dwellings and instant cities seemed to proclaim?

In the end, the 1960s fetishization of the machine works two ways: it is on the one hand focused on resistance, sketching out the problems of technology, thereby also attributing it great power. On the other hand it also favors the sense of unlimited promise available in future technologies – the potential remains ever greater, despite the threats of current technology – in this sense it remains a romantic view more than a pragmatic one.

Visualizing the questions – technology in film

Three separate yet very pointed representations of technology in film can be found in *Alphaville* (1965), *Barbarella* (1968) and *Mon Oncle* (1958). In *Mon Oncle*, as noted in an earlier chapter, Mr. Hulot is overwhelmed by the technological gadgets in his sister’s house. We see him struggling with kitchen cupboards that close and open of their own accord, preferably when he has his hand stuck between the doors. We see his panic at dropping a pitcher and his subsequent relief and puzzlement when he sees it bounce. We even see his sister and her husband get trapped inside their own garage, since the dog trips the motion detector, closing the door. Needless to say, every gadget shown by Tali in these scenes has no backup – once the garage door is closed there is no escape latch. Similarly, Mr. Hulot proves the impossibility of simply opening a kitchen cabinet manually. In his portrayal of these emblems of technological progress as dominant, no longer serving people but determining their motions, Tati recalls the scene in Lang’s *Metropolis* where a machine worker is suffering from exhaustion but must continue to contort his body to fit the machine. As in *Metropolis*, he also positions this technology as instrumental to the dominant (modernist) paradigm of technological progress. At the same time, Tati lightheartedly questions what it means when the instrument towards a better world (as Le Corbusier continually reaffirms in his *Vers une architecture*), namely technology, becomes an end in itself: the constant need for the new. He demonstrates that the view of technological progress as by definition good (or in other cases its inverse, by definition bad), makes it impossible to weigh factors of usefulness, necessity or desirability. The debate becomes reduced to ‘for’ or ‘against,’ when it should offer a critical view of specific solutions. Most importantly, what becomes painfully clear in this film is how the petit-bourgeois lifestyle and its conventions struggle with modernist inventions. In the end, Corbusian ideals of dwelling are subverted rather than appropriated – indicating that technology and architecture by themselves cannot change social habits and cultural tradition. Although the relationship is perhaps not as mutually exclusive as Gans argues in terms of his fallacy of physical determinism, the relationship remains tense at best.

In *Alphaville*, the dark tone of the film noir model poses a far more dystopian view than Tati offers with his cheeky tongue-in-cheek satire of modern life. The city of Alphaville is an Orwellian society run by the computer Alpha-60. Godard used the existing Parisian banlieues, extensive fields of modernist high-rise apartment buildings, as a background for this society that had lost all sense of humanity and was governed by the purest rationality – the computer. The bible has been replaced by the dictionary, yet this dictionary has also been stripped of words such as ‘love’ and ‘conscience.’ People who cry at funerals are executed for their inappropriately irrational behavior. Godard offers us an ominous vision, where technology run rampant truly destroys humanity. He condemns the ideal of standardization, shows us the environment of modernist architecture in the most unfavorable light: as disorienting and overbearing. Its uniformity makes it impossible to gain any sense of direction (similar to what Kevin Lynch argues in *The Image of the City*) and the surrender to a technology-based life implies the destruction of what it means to be human. Where Le Corbusier once argued that rationality (which he implies is best expressed through technology) is the distinguishing trait of human beings, Godard here takes the inverse position, and portrays the sole dependence on rationality as capable of destroying humanity. Although the SI is not favorable in its discussions of Godard, he here illustrates their aversion to a pure rationality and functionality. In this film, he still leans heavily on the (modernist) notion that technology is integral to progress – he does not offer an alternate, technology-free form of progress, nor an alternate understanding of technology itself – yet he does question whether this form of progress is desirable.

In *Barbarella*, the response may seem trivial, yet its campy soft-porn format hides some of the underlying assumptions that are symptomatic for its time. Technology is still conceived of as instrumental, as it can be used for either good or evil, which ties into typical instrumental notions of modernism, and the Enlightenment before it. Throughout the film emphasis is placed on the need for human authenticity (as manifest in both the body and emotions) and the idea that we can achieve that by using technology only in a good way. This is at odds with the determinist view of technology propagated by Alphaville. Yet it would be unfair to call the film joyously technophilic: it still questions how we relate to the technology we have created. The classic scene in this movie is when Duran Duran, the evil scientist, hopes to destroy Barbarella by placing her in the ‘orgasmatron,’ a machine made to kill people by way of their hedonistic Achilles heel: an overdose of pleasure and desire in the form of a ‘killer orgasm.’ In this case, however, Barbarella enjoys

---

312 One of the seminal texts on the issues surrounding industrial technology is Marcuse, Herbert. *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964. As will be discussed below, this perception of the power of technology is also present in the 1965 film *Alphaville* by Jean-Luc Godard. Both avail themselves of a ‘conspiracy theory’ understanding of the mysterious forces of technological domination.
herself immensely and in doing so breaks the orgasmator—thereby proving the strength of an enlightened and embodied human over the machine.

Although technology is typically treated as purely instrumental, especially in the modernist era, this apparent moral and cultural neutrality (and its dependence on the ethics of the people utilizing it) begins to be questioned in the 1960s. The development is one towards ambivalence: technology is neither purely instrumental nor purely deterministic. This begins to open up the idea that a pragmatic yet critical use of technology is necessary; yet especially in architecture the optimistic designs of such groups as Archigram still contains the utopian implication that technology may be freely turned towards a more human-oriented use. Despite the inherent optimism of the SI (that technology will someday liberate all humans from labor), their acknowledgement that technology is transformative is perhaps closer to the analyses of McLuhan, whose position on technology embraces both an instrumental and transformative use.

III. Technological Transformations: from high tech to sly tech

A. Paradigms of technology in architecture

Technology in its symbolic and literal manifestations

In 1962 Colquhoun offered a distinction between the expressive aspects of technology, the ‘symbolic,’ and the instrumental aspects, the ‘literal.’ For him, the symbolic value of technology is more manifest in modernist architecture than its literal value: in modernism, “the new technology was an idea rather than a fact... Our admiration of the buildings it created is due more to their success as symbolic representations than to the extent to which they solved technical problems.” In other words, the idea of technology fulfills a symbolic and ideological function. Modernist architecture offered a symbolic rendition of the value of technology (speed, power, rationality, order) more than it actually used the latest technologies to transform the art of building. Although his notion of the literal aspects of technology are perhaps a little closer to a truly instrumental understanding of technology than he acknowledges (thereby neglecting the inherent...

313 Achterhuis, H. e.a., red. Van stoommachine tot cyborg: Denken over techniek in de nieuwe wereld. Amsterdam: Ambo, 1997. Particularly Achterhuis’ introduction and his analysis of the work of Andrew Feenberg argue the usefulness of a pragmatic approach.


316 It cannot be emphasized enough how important this observation is, since many of the modernist manifestoes were founded on the notion that the rational and technological society was freed from ideology. In other words, to be technological was to be value-free. Both Colquhoun and Banham clearly argue why this is a (possibly intentional) misrepresentation.
On of the great arguments about technology was thus on a symbolic level; and because its symbolism was denied until the early 1960s, it also became difficult to see the extent to which the existing symbolism of modernist technology was simply reinforced, since the field of debate was shifted away from the actual issues at hand. This is an important distinction, because although Banham and Colquhoun do clearly discuss the symbolic issues involved in technology, the production of the era still follows a utopian drive not unlike its modernist predecessors, but then conveyed in a different form. The fundamental opposition remains between an architecture drenched in the notion of technology as symbolizing progress, or a luddite resistance to technology as maintaining the quality of human existence. Hence again the potential usefulness of a more pragmatic approach: by merely acknowledging the complexity of the relationship between technology and architecture, the discourse might circumnavigate the ossification into pure and universal presumptions such as ‘technology is by definition good.’ This might allow the more difficult yet crucial question of what goals a specific technology serve and how at the same time innovations may introduce new goals.

Banham: The symbolic nature of modern technology

Reyner Banham in a different manner acknowledges the symbolic content and use of technology and rationalism. Yet he also notes that it is precisely the way the debate developed that functionalism became crucial to arguments on architecture—moving the debate away from aesthetics was a better way to achieve goals than by appealing to a sense of symbolism. So here we find symbolism present yet cloaked; since it was cloaked, Banham points out that the debate was easily reduced to the notions of logic and necessity.320

Just like Colquhoun, Banham here clearly notes the need for acknowledging the symbolic aspect of technology. This point is a critical one to the general debate on perception of technology, since its very formalization, and moreover finalization in the sense of universal form, in modernist design contradicts one of its inherent principles: that of continual transformation and development.321 Banham himself observes this inherent contradiction in the work of Le Corbusier: “There is a curious point here: Le Corbusier had made great play with the idea of a fairly high rate of scrapping, but he seems not to have visualized it as part of a continuous process inherent in the technological approach, bound to continue as long as technology continues, but merely as stages in the evolution of a final type or norm, whose perfection, he, Pierre Urbain, Paul Valéry, Piet Mondriaan and many others saw as an event of the immediate future, or even the immediate past.”322

321 I largely refrain from using the word ‘progress’ because the notion of progress implies a forward movement, or a becoming ‘better.’ The words ‘development’ and ‘transformation’ imply that change is involved without arguing the moral quality of that change.
fig. 3.30. The advent of TV science fiction: Star Trek (1966)

fig. 3.31. Raimund Abraham, Air-Ocean City (1966)
This "high rate of scrapping" as Banham calls it, is in direct contradiction to the idea of universal form, and presumes a need to remain continually reactive to new developments. This is indeed the ephemeral quality of modernity that Baudelaire wrote about, the other side of which is eternal and immutable. Also, Banham here emphasizes the importance of visualization as an autonomous and critical element in the process of investigating the relationship between technology and architecture. In other words, might we then regard visualization as clarifying that technology is both symbolic and instrumental – and if so, what impact does this have upon the architecture discourse as a whole? The arguments put forth by Banham and Colquhoun imply that the technology of the 1960s will soon fulfill and surpass the ideals merely illustrated in modernism. However, the technology shown in many forms in the 60s still retains a similar symbolic function. Images showing the plasticity of "organic" form, streamlining, space-exploration and computers play a similar role to the grain silos and industrial machinery shown in earlier modernist work (figs. 3.28-3.32).

Yet the discrepancy between these images and the return to traditional form is another aspect of symbolism: the symbolic quality of technology is also dependent on its ability to communicate. Colquhoun distinguishes an earlier time in which symbolism was so embedded in tradition that meaning was easily interpreted or at least derived from symbols. The 1960s largely seems to have reverted only to an 'original' symbolic content of traditional forms – or at least, the preludes to post-modernism follow that trajectory. On the other hand, Venturi and Scott Brown's attention to the vernacular offered a view to symbols that were both of our time and related to mass communication. Technology itself is however still placed outside of the symbolic realm.

Archigram – symbolic or literal technology?
Archigram raises some serious questions about the value of Le Corbusier's modernism. The main question revolves around what Banham has already signaled: the problem of the utopian universalism that Le Corbusier proposes. Archigram counters that disposability is an aspect as yet unexplored for architecture, yet critical to it in this day and age of planned obsolescence. They seek the freedom to be found in technological developments that allow freedom of movement and individuality (as opposed to Le Corbusier's standardization). Yet their unquestioning turn to technologies 'soon to be developed' or already in use in 'other applications' misses the point of societal embeddedness that Colquhoun notes as crucial.

Standardization and universalism as expressions of an industrial technology formed
the crux of what Archigram was critiquing. Originally standardization expressed
machine technology as opposed to handicraft. Yet with the introduction of
cybernetics, more sophisticated forms of technology and consumer-oriented
production, standardization became less pertinent to the final product. This issue
has been transformed today into the more formalist premises of ‘blob’ architecture,
but the critique itself was strong and important. The introduction of the consumer
tributes into notion of individuality that was also transforming perceptions of the city.
Here again however the problem is one of radicality: the abstract ideas of flexibility
and hyperindividuality have become a new kind of universal value, offering non-
conformism as the highest ideal.324

From alienation to liberation

One of the main oppositions throughout the debates on technology is in essence
whether technology produces effects of alienation or liberation. The results of the
first machine age were considered dehumanizing due to the emphasis on
standardization and mechanization and their inability to adapt: “the paradox of
mechanization is that although it is itself the cause of maximal growth and change,
the principle of mechanization excludes the very possibility of growth or the
understanding of change.”325 In the 1950s, the discourse began to focus on the
dominance of the machine, the lack of natural surroundings and how to reintroduce
a sense of identity and individuality in this highly technological era. Ironically, the
means for this transformation was often seen as in the technology itself – the quote
above, from McLuhan, introduces his idea that electricity marked the beginning of
instantaneity as a condition that will reconfigure the world into a global village.

Most of the propositions discussed in this chapter were highly skeptical of the way
technological progress had been employed as inevitable solution, yet were still
confident that technology itself was not to blame, but rather the manner in which it
was utilized. This again is something we find throughout much of the production in
the 1960s. The alienation of the modernist environment could be overcome by
transforming their machinery into the technological wonders that would truly be
suited to man. Banham believed that the problem with the modernists was not so
much their ideas of technology, but rather the sad state of the technology available
to them – the first machine age was characterized by promises “never properly

324 This will be further discussed in chapter 4, since the notion of non-conformism or
hyperindividuality has found a strangely conventional translation into the standardized ideals
of beauty expressed in such TV shows as ‘Extreme Makeover.’ The average participant
claims to want to be ‘normal’ like everybody else, yet emulates a media image of normalcy
that results in a uniform appearance.
325 McLuhan, Understanding Media, p.12

chapter 3 - technology

160
delivered.”326 Plug-in homes and do-it-yourself environments were an answer
within the realm of technological progress that answered to the disillusion with the
results of a mechanized society, if not its premises. McLuhan, believing that the
electric age was different in its very nature from the mechanical age, ventured a
step further, claiming that the world itself was already different, “[w]e actually live
mythically and integrally, as it were, but we continue to think in the old,
fragmented space and time patterns of the pre-electric age.”327

The myth of instrumentality

As was pointed out by Heidegger in his Technik und die Kehre, the notion that
technology is a neutral and objective, or amoral, instrument has been destroyed by
the advent of modern science.328 In Die Technik und die Kehre, Heidegger
persuasively argues the transformation in the relationship between people and their
environment due to modern technology – among others because we can now truly
subjugate nature to our needs. However, this argument leads him to conclude
that we need to rediscover a more ‘authentic’ way of living in the world (or that we
have given that up forever). In a sense, he again dichotomizes the position into
entirely for or entirely against modern technology.329 What we have gained by his
arguments is an insight that technology cannot be deemed an amoral or neutral
instrument; it does, however, still possess an element of instrumentality. There is,
as Colquhoun notes, a literal side to technology: the aspect of “how shall we make
it?” This is what can aid in analyzing the opportunities of the middle ground as can
be found in realism or pragmatism.330 Just as analyzing imagery in their fullest
depth and breadth helps undermine the reductive quality of earlier debates, so the
manifestations of (underlying) technologies may do the same.

From the industrial to the cybernetic

While the ‘pure’ instrumentality of technology was being questioned, the type (or
nature?) of technology confronting society was transforming as well: from the
industrial works of the modernists, there was a perceptible shift to a more organic
and more integrated form of technology, through cybernetics. Also, inverting the
logic of Lang’s Metropolis, the imagery that had shown us how people were forced
to adapt to enormous machines, reducing themselves to mechanical elements was
now transforming into the imagery of Fantastic Voyage (1966), where a spaceship

328 Morality remains a touchy issue in architecture, especially since the modernist discourse.
See especially: Watkin, David, Morality and Architecture. In chapter 4 this issue will return
with a brief discussion of the leftist moralizing tendency of the 60s, where anti-establishment
becomes a rigid norm rather than a liberating response.
329 This radicalization is noted throughout Achterhuis. Van Stoommachine tot Cyborg, not
only in relation to Heidegger, but also to Marcuse for example.
330 Achterhuis, Van Stoommachine tot Cyborg. pp. 7, 10-12, 16-17, 29.
was reduced to microscopic size and then injected into the bloodstream of a human being.

In part this may be attributed to the advent of the computer age. For example, in Godard’s *Alphaville* computers have transformed human society; yet the transformation Godard shows us is the rationalized ideal of modernist technology: words describing human emotions have been eliminated from the dictionary, which is also the new ‘bible’ for this society. Godard’s depiction of this society is critical, and remonstrates modernism for its technological idolatry. At the same time, he is also aware how thin the line is becoming between man and machine, a development presaged by Lang’s portrayal of the robot in *Metropolis*.

Banham offered us the ‘first machine age’ in his analysis of the modern masters, positioning his own time as the second machine age and distinguishing it from the first. Yet in his final sentence he also reminds the reader that “we may believe that the architects of the First Machine Age were wrong, but we in the Second Machine Age have no reason yet to be superior about them.”

By 1964 he did appear to be somewhat more confident that the work of Archigram offered a good direction for the second machine age. While the definitions for this first machine age centered on standardization, repetition, and the idea of technology in terms of speed and motion, it framed all these highly modern ideas within a traditional architecture. The second machine age should at the very least acknowledge and utilize the fundamentally different formal language of technology, as manifest in for example American cars. Archigram, in a further justification of their own work, also appropriates Banham’s idea that the 1960s are the advent of the second machine age.

**B. From dialectic to plurality: technology and imagery**

**Popular science, popular technology, pop imagery**

The relationship between technology and the image has been extremely complex since the 1960s, and before that was almost inextricable as of the 1920s. Walter Benjamin points out some of the complicated connections in his ‘Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’ while Andy Warhol’s work appears to embody the paradigms and paradoxes of this relationship between technology and aesthetics. McLuhan’s motto ‘the medium is the message’ is nowhere more appropriate than here. As discussed in the previous chapter, the IG worked with much of the popular imagery of its day; in their use of imagery, one could argue that they follow an approach that accepts technology as underlying condition; yet they also fetishize the gadgetry involved. The mechanics of reproduction and the technology underlying the society of the spectacle are accepted as precondition, and the main body of work focuses on the power of the image itself. The fact that the

image is omnipresent remains unquestioned. Archigram follows the other side of this technology-art equation. They express technology in such a visually powerful way, that it becomes laden with the kind of symbolism we would traditionally expect from a ‘purely’ aesthetic endeavor. In other words, this is an aesthetic technology, and their medium is the message.

Changing technological appearances
Works such as the Spray Plastic House (1962) by David Greene are not only conceptually interesting but express a different kind of formalism than that of modernist houses. Le Corbusier tended to use engineering and technology as an argument towards the reduction of ornament, the need for thinness, order and a rational appearance. In Archigram, especially David Greene and Mike Webb tended to make highly technological looking artifacts that nevertheless contained a certain organic formal expression. In the case of the spray plastic house, this was expressed through the non-linearity of the house itself: the dwelling is a kind of bubble, with not a right angle to be found in it. This kind of expression is found as early as 1956 in Alison and Peter Smithson’s House of the Future – where plastics are seen as the new concrete. Equally malleable and durable yet extremely lightweight, it helps achieve an expression of organic forms, shaped around the human body, molded to the most comfortable ergonomic form (figs. 3.33, 3.34).

Since technological expression was often employed in a symbolic fashion, this ‘organic’ reformulation of the final result of technological architecture may have transformed the perception of the machine. Yet the fundamental relationship between architecture and technology remains instrumental here.

Pragmatism meets aesthetics in technology and architecture
Jurjen Zeinstra argues that Archigram’s tendency to design hyper-technological artifacts that are no more than a lightweight mobile shell for the human body reduced the very essence of architecture not to a problem of dwelling, but to a kind of zero-degree issue of clothing. He prefers the Smithsons’ House of the Future simply because it still sees a future for the discipline of architecture: the Smithsons are still making spaces for the future dweller, while Archigram are producing artifacts that will end up making the space around them flexible, undefined and thereby generic.

What this argument dismisses however is the very specificity of the visualizations of technology in Archigram, the fact that it does (especially now) show itself as a polemic engaged with both prior uses of technology (in modernist architecture) and the potential when one enters the fantasy world of young boys with a passion for

---

332 The obvious exception here is Kiesler’s Endless House, but since it falls outside of the canon discussed here as the source of conflict, it also remains outside of this discussion.
science fiction and future technologies. Possibly, Archigram never meant for technology to kill architecture or to make it obsolete – maybe they simply wanted to explore how far we could join in these experiments, in their pleasure of exploring new possibilities. However that may be, it is clear that they displayed the same kind of undisguised and unapologetic joy as their predecessors in the possibilities of technology and media, in the various manifestations of the spectacle society.

Again, we can see the very direct attacks on earlier uses of technological idolatry, yet at the same time they do not so much destroy it, as sidestep it by introducing a different form of expression. Again, this work on the one hand poses some extremely critical questions: should we want to live in a mechanistic world? Should we want to standardize our environment? Should we want to follow only the rules of engineering, and if so, should they also dictate our aesthetics? If we want to appeal to functionalism, should this offer a functional appearance, or simply ‘be’ functional? These questions approach the condition of pragmatism as propagated in a recent dissertation by Martijn Smits, yet remain just shy of entirely subverting the dichotomy inherent in the questions.334 In the end, technology remains both a symbol of a better world soon to come, and a neutral instrument that requires little more than some well-designed guidance to help us attain utopia. Archigram has envisioned many different potential technologies, but their reveling in gadgetry prevents a careful assessment of how these technologies impact everyday life. What appears necessary here is a form of critique that can navigate the McLuhanesque condition of contemporary technology, a critical position that simultaneously acknowledges how strongly technology has become embedded in our world.

334 Martijn Smits. Monsterbezwering: De culturele domesticatie van nieuwe technologie. Amsterdam: Boom, 2002. The dissertation revolves around methods of domesticating new technologies. Smits concludes that a pragmatic approach is most fruitful, where both the technologies themselves and their conceptualization are reconfigured, depending on what the issue at hand is. Her discussion of pragmatism parallels a notion of ‘contamination’ that presumes the mutual dependency between a transcendent idea and its specific application.
0. Introduction

The 1960s: a time of transformation

Questions and revisions

The architecture discourse of the 1960s was one full of critical questions towards modernity and radical revisions of the principles of modern architecture. The central tenets of modern architecture, mainly as disseminated by Le Corbusier and CIAM, were seen to be severely lacking in many of their results. Rather than a perfectly clear and rational environment, many people experienced the modern city as increasingly disorienting. The radicality of modern architecture was seen less as the ultimate expression of man’s capabilities, and more as an architecture dissociated from human concerns. The great refusal of ornament as propagated by Loos was increasingly questioned in relation to the desires of the user. The imminent freedom promised by modern architecture was slowly perceived as a dominant style with little regard for its occupants.

In response, many of these tenets were contested or transformed in the 1960s. Reyner Banham confronted the perceived failure of modern architecture by claiming that its ideas were far more progressive than the available technology. Guy Debord and the situationists developed the idea that the individual was to create his own environment instead of merely responding to the poverty of the functional city. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown proposed that the everyday interpretations such as the social space of the sidewalk introduced by Jane Jacobs. In response to the abstraction of modernist architecture, the desire for symbolism and ornamentation was utilized to revise this aesthetic purity. This interest in symbolism ranged from the analysis of the symbolic richness of mass culture by Lawrence Alloway to the extensive documentation by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown of decorative billboard symbolism on the Las Vegas Strip.

Finaly, as technology began to seem more dominant than merely a useful (and neutral) instrument, diversions were sought through a more people-friendly technology. The introduction of organic forms and individual choice (customization replacing mechanization) was reflected throughout the work of Archigram and the Situationist International.

As we shall see later in section IV, one other crucial point of resonance throughout all of these transformations is the necessity, relevance and position of critique. This goes to the heart of the gap between practice and theory, which may be bridged to a degree by holding to an integrated notion of ‘praxis’ in the Aristotelian rather than the Marxist sense.

Areas of critique – city, image, technology

These general issues of critique and revision are manifest in the three areas outlined in chapters 1-3: the city, the image and technology. These thematics were central to the modernist discourse on architecture, formed areas of transition in the 1960s and remain relevant to the discourse today. Throughout the chapters, I have traced the critical responses in the transatlantic architecture discourse that demonstrate a resonance within these topics. Not only is each critique specific to its context, but it also shares a general sensibility in response to the modernist discourse that has triggered it.

In response to the functionalist city, the non-functional needs of its human occupants became a key strategy to unseating some of the CIAM precepts. These non-functional needs became manifest in various ways on both sides of the Atlantic, ranging from radical ideas by the situationists like the dérive to more everyday interpretations such as the social space of the sidewalk introduced by Jane Jacobs. In response to the abstraction of modernist architecture, the desire for symbolism and ornamentation was utilized to revise this aesthetic purity. This interest in symbolism ranged from the analysis of the symbolic richness of mass culture by Lawrence Alloway to the extensive documentation by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown of decorative billboard symbolism on the Las Vegas Strip.

Finally, as technology began to seem more dominant than merely a useful (and neutral) instrument, diversions were sought through a more people-friendly technology. The introduction of organic forms and individual choice (customization replacing mechanization) was reflected throughout the work of Archigram and the Situationist International.

As we shall see later in section IV, one other crucial point of resonance throughout all of these transformations is the necessity, relevance and position of critique. This goes to the heart of the gap between practice and theory, which may be bridged to a degree by holding to an integrated notion of ‘praxis’ in the Aristotelian rather than the Marxist sense.

Terms of transformation in the 1960s

In summary, I have argued in the previous chapters that the various radical critiques of the 1960s were both radical and reactionary. Although the critiques of the failures of modernism pointed to absolutely fundamental problems, they simultaneously replicate some of the underlying assumptions, thus producing more of a pseudo-revolution. As noted above, three areas that have been essential to this process of revision in the architecture discourse are the city, the image and technology. Each theme is not treated as an entire topic in itself, but rather for its importance and relevance to the architecture discourse of the time. It is my contention that this discourse reveals a struggle with manifestations of modernism in architecture. This process of analysis and comparison, of individual discussion as well as drawing parallels, has led to an identification of principal strategies of

337 In this dissertation it is treated as a single transatlantic debate since the exchange of ideas was continuous throughout the twentieth century, ranging from Gropius, Breuer and Van der Rohe to Archigram, Venturi and Scott Brown, and Lawrence Alloway.

338 This is not to enter into a discussion of objective or scientific ‘truth.’ Rather, in a discourse analysis such as this, a certain ‘perceived’ truth, in this case my interpretation, simply frames the discussion. My interpretation is a theorization, not an objective reality.

335 These revisions of course prefigure the slightly later developments of postmodernism in architecture, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. Below, some of the traits that might be considered particularly postmodern are noted explicitly.

336 Although other topics are also important to these developments from the 1960s through today, these three are immediately present in the discourse of various journals, and are also circumscribed by both the radicality and the contemporary revival of the manifestoes discussed in each chapter.

chapter 4 - pragmatism

166

chapter 4 - pragmatism

167
resistance that I discuss at length in each chapter. These are what I would call the basic terms of transformation, or in other words how this 1960s revolution of discourse is framed. Most of the words and suggestions involved return throughout various writings and projects, thus indicating that a critique was formed that was more than merely local. Again, these terms (such as ‘growth,’ ‘change,’ and ‘flexible’) form the parallels in the transatlantic debate.

In brief, these terms encompass the following. In relation to the city, a shift is to be seen from the universal to the individual: a shift from universal and collective tenets in city planning to a primacy of the individual, and the personal experience of city space. The discussion of the city is framed no longer through universally valid tenets of functionalism, but through the specificity of human interaction. In relation to the image, a transformation takes place from abstraction to figuration. Instead of streamlined and standardized (again universal) forms, the relation with imagery is now based on symbolic meaning and communication with an everyday audience. Rather than an ‘essential’ meaning that should be deduced from a non-ornamented abstract form, the role and significance of appearance has now become prime. In the realm of technology, the main shift is from mechanization to a technological ‘sensibility’ that incorporates the benefits of a consumer-oriented flexibility. Rather than view technology as something machinic and lifeless, technology becomes visualized more as a prosthetic device, as an extension of man himself.

A number of these topics still hold an important place in the contemporary debate, especially to the degree that it revolves around reality and representation, object and image. Still especially relevant are the tension between the individual and the collective (discussed in chapter 1) and the role of a distinction between appearance and essence in the media era (chapter 2). It is the sheer radicality of the discourse throughout the 1960s that troubles me, whether it is radical resistance or radical affirmation (in relation to modernism or consumer culture for example).339 This has led me to propose a few terms for reconsidering architecture discourse (as practice and theory both) – realism, pragmatism and contamination.340 Each of these terms are already loaded yet they are the most appropriate to the model I am proposing here. The crux of this is the theory/praxis conjunction and the shortcomings of a radical position in its clarity and purity. This will also be discussed through the role of the critical, which underlies many of these concerns (see also section IV).

339 Yet radicality should not be replaced by all-out fatalism: some level of criticism remains necessary to to not fall into pure formalism with no conscience.
340 Authors who similarly address this hybrid of theory and practice or a ‘contaminated’ or ‘realist’ condition are Stan Allen, Douglas Kellner, Martijntje Smits, Douglas Rushkoff.

I. Conclusions

Solidified dichotomies

Each chapter first positioned the most radical critique of modernist tenets (which could be seen as a prelude to postmodernism), yet in conclusion identified some underlying ideas that remained unchallenged. In each chapter, in examining both the critique and its suppositions I conclude that a number of the underlying assumptions form ossified dichotomies. These include the idea of the opposition between the individual and the collective (chapter 1), aesthetics and ethics (chapter 2), as well as the opposition between technology as instrument and technology as symbol (chapter 3).

These are oppositions that we should not hold to be ‘true’ in the empirical sense, but rather a conceptual framework that may function as a crowbar in relation to the contemporary discourse. It is my contention here that a further examination of these very ideas may help reveal an escape from the pendulum of radically revolution to radical nihilism (1970s).

Responses

As indicated earlier, some of the best-known tenets of modernism were addressing fundamentally different cultural conditions in the late 1950s from the critical years of the 1920s. One of the most explosive changes was the rise of late capitalism, which was linked to what Debord called the society of the spectacle. The high modernism of Le Corbusier that could depend on a reasonably strong (often socialist) government to introduce efficient mass housing that held to high standards, for example, was beginning to be overwhelmed (particularly in America) by the driving forces of market capitalism, leading to a cost-efficient version of the same socialist principles – without regard for the community-based qualities underpinning them.

The freedom implied in consumer choice also undermined the notion that standardization was appropriate to the industrial era – contemporary forms of industry in the late 1950s, especially in the US were in fact highly adaptable to ‘mass customization.’ The freedom of individual expression was slowly beginning to overtake the principle of standardization. With such basic concepts at odds with one another, a revision of some modernist principles in architecture appeared necessary. These revisions came in various forms – from the Independent Group’s exploration of new sources of inspiration (the Smithsons ‘today we collect ads’), to Team X splitting off from the original CIAM constellation, to Venturi’s eloquent plea for complexity and contradiction, set against purity and abstraction.
The 1960s as incomplete revolution

What is interesting is that these revisions are somehow ‘incomplete.’ In the crudest formulation: Venturi’s complexity became a new kind of purity: as the figural had once been anathema, now the non-figural was virtually forbidden; new sources of inspiration such as the Independent Group’s use of ads and popular imagery were simply revalued into high art rather than examined critically. The questions raised in the 1960s in response to modernism are fundamental to what is seen as the postmodern condition. However, the resolution of these same issues are still embedded in a modernist sense of space and teleology.

The 1960s, on the cusp between modernism and postmodernism, can be examined to find the roots of questions we have today: in the determined search for a contaminated image (mass cultural imagery as used by the IG), have we not critiqulessly surrendered the craft to market forces? Or, by receding into the theory of deconstructivism, have we not denied any social responsibility as architects? Is it not partly the incessant dichotomizing between social responsibility and pure aesthetic pleasure that has left us in this bind? Is it not possible to both be aware of the context we are working in (in accordance with structuralist theory and social responsibility), yet also understand what the limits of this context-dependence are (in accordance with the specificity of an aesthetically-based expertise)?

In the end, although the generation of 1968 formulated some critical questions, it subsequently locked in both the answers and the parameters so tightly that any subsequent gesture was incapacitated from both sides: first, the definition of ‘radical’ and ‘revolutionary’ was frozen into a highly specific category, based on a moment in time; second, once the ‘truly’ radical generation had found themselves well-established in power, they were able to dismiss any other form of revolutionary gesture under the presumption that it was reactionary if it came from any other camp than the established Marxist/leftist one. It is high time we question what a radical move towards contradictory notions such as an ‘ideological pragmatism,’ or perhaps rather ‘romantic pragmatism,’ or maybe an ‘aesthetic pragmatism,’ ‘ideological realism,’ ‘pragmatic idealism’?

II. Propositions: learning from then, producing for now

The obvious question now is: where do we go from here? We have seen a number of highly productive questions posed about the changing relationship between architecture and everyday imagery, or the position of the individual in the city, or the shifts in the relationship to technology. Although each of these problematics deserves its own extensive analysis, in this dissertation I have concentrated on connections, on resonance in relation to today’s practice. I am proposing how the often-discussed ‘paradigm shifts’ of the 1960s can become productive today. I hope to demonstrate that there is a distinct connection between the way in which the ‘revolution’ took place in all these areas, and what this connection offers an opening to a different way of discussing architecture and its mediations, or the practice and its theorizations.

In other words, my assertion is that the 1960s architecture discourse lies at the center of contemporary questions – so how can we learn from them? If there is something in their form of questioning that resonates with issues today: spectacle, metropolis, rampant technology: how can the architecture discourse use this reflection to reevaluate its own position?

Foundations

To a large degree, my agenda here is as ideological as what I am trying to pull apart. There is an elementary and not so hidden agenda here: architecture discourse is often unsatisfying in how it handles a number of contemporary conditions, most notably the question of critical thinking in a media-saturated society and what position mass cultural imagery takes in that. This begs the question of possible revisions. The discourse referred to here is still primarily that of transatlantic postmodernism in its various forms – yet in terms of historical continuity it might be more appropriate to speak of postmodern revisions of modernism and the apparent inability, still, to come to grips with certain aspects of the modern or the postmodern condition. 342

341 The problem of uncritical populism lies in its appropriating material from low culture and simply elevating it, providing no critical examination of aesthetics or meaning. In Media Spectacle (2003), Douglas Kellner suggests that a careful analysis is necessary to understand the position of these images within the spectacle and their social meaning. pp. 12-15.

342 I have been using ‘embedded critique’ as a shorthand for critique that does not try to reveal a condition of false consciousness in the tradition of the Frankfurter Schule, but rather remains embedded within its societal structure while still reflecting critically on specific conditions within the larger context (see also Chapter 2)

343 I remain with the transatlantic and global terminologies here, and the most obvious issues under attack are: the speed, ephemeralization, rationalization, and standardization of the modern condition; and additionally, the fragmentation, plurality and mediatization of the postmodern
To further understand these contemporary issues I trace them back to their roots in the 1960s. This includes looking at how and why some of the projects failed at the time, and why they are in part being resurrected today. The ambiguity in the work of the 1960s has not been adequately examined — it has simply been utilized either to ridicule the unrealistic venture of the utopian project or to hide behind the safety of waiting for the world to change. Although I concur with David Harvey when he states that postmodernism’s eclecticism was not a thorough way of engaging with the cultural transformations in perceptions of space and time, I’m not sure that the American Marxist discourse can offer the plurality he considers fundamental to the postmodern condition. As long as a single discourse is considered preferable to others, plurality is by necessity undermined.

In short: I believe the democratization that took place in the architecture of the 1960s (through such images and mechanisms as a valuation of individual opinion and the everyday life of the street) was significantly indebted to the rise of the mass media and the way they were incorporated in architectural practice. Mass imagery offered a release from the more 'purified' forms of high modernist discourse, and introduced a mode of communication with the man in the street. Yet the liberating aspects of this excursion outside the bounds of 'high architecture' also opened a Pandora’s box of public relations, complicity with vested commercial interests (replacing traditional power structures), the problems of advertising and the tendency to relinquish expertise in favor of 'what the people want' (uncritical populism).

In other words, what the 1960s left us with is a mixed blessing: the promise of individual freedom is exhilarating when set against the authoritarian society of the 1950s, yet rings hollow when public cohesion seems lost, when there is little communal structure to help define this individuality. The idea that mass imagery and the ephemeral, fleeting quality of the mass media might help form a new aesthetic for a more communicative architecture is admirable, but becomes suspect when architects avoid responsibility for their work by simply replicating mass culture rather than making clear and well-argued choices. Finally, the notion of technology as an instrument of liberation is crucial to the ongoing developments in both the modern and the postmodern, but that does not mean we can close our eyes to the less pleasant consequences of technological progress — in that sense, we cannot hold to a neutral instrumentality of technology, but must acknowledge the autonomy it has also displayed.

These issues are the foundation of the society of the spectacle — they circumscribe the 'paradigm shift' of the 1960s, and indicate the similarities between questions that were raised. Although the SI and VSBA and Archigram were all working within extremely different cultural contexts, there was a more globally-oriented, transatlantic debate that had everything to do with the position of the individual in an authoritarian form of modernism and the question of a critical stance at the advent of late capitalism, determined by mass media and commercial interests. This position of the 'critical' is thus defined by resistance against the spectacle, while all else becomes a form of affirmation. On the one hand, we then have complicity with the media spectacle in the form of not only star architects but also celebrity chefs, celebrity fashion designers and even celebrity castaways on Survivor Island. On the other, we have a general form of resistance such as that posed by the SI against the spectacle. This resistance however also paved the way for an apolitical stance as exemplified in deconstruction. Since it is based on resistance as its fundamental strategy, it never takes a stance for anything but always remains against, thus remaining by definition apolitical.

While Guy Debord appeared to believe that there were visual strategies that could undermine the condition of the spectacle (déjouement), VSBA suggested that the 'natural' expressions of the spectacle (Learning from Las Vegas) perhaps contributed more to the vitality of the everyday than 'high art' could; and Archigram, in its spectacular expressions of futuristic technology offered a criticism of the purified forms of the machine aesthetic. Each of these strategies implied a revision of modernism and expresses a moment of critique: each one exposes another small piece of the underbelly of rigorously technocratic and progressivist modernism. That critical moment, the discovery of a technique or an aesthetic that can help revise our cultural perceptions, or even only an expression of dissatisfaction, was absolutely crucial to subsequent developments. Yet on re-examination, it seems that each strategy somehow became a little too complicit with its own ideology — Debord’s Marxist principles undermining the possibility of a critique within the society of the spectacle, since to him the revolution needed to be total, or he considered it failed; VSBA’s uncritical populism leading to slightly too smooth replications of mass icons; and Archigram’s technological sensibility...
demonstrating a level of technofetishism that seemed doomed to replicate an earlier machine aesthetic.

Each one of these critical moments thus concealed into a more purist principle. I venture to suggest here that it is the moment of contamination that creates new forms, that truly makes a step forward, however small that may be. The moment of contamination is after all a moment of 'between categories' as Smits calls it, and this 'betweenness' can create new forms or offer new perceptions. Yet this moment is also just that: a moment. It is ephemeral, since it will either be rejected or incorporated, and subsequently become irrelevant.

Although I am uncertain that today we have as obvious an instrument as the imagery of mass culture was in the 1960s, I do believe that the basic condition of contamination: the possibility to see across categories, is helpful. The most interesting projects right now are perhaps not the ones that subjugate aesthetics to a social goal, or the ones that are so immersed in formalism that they can only be discussed in terms of composition; but rather the ones that hope to offer a micro-intervention: a beautiful building that takes its context into account without presuming it can change the world. Might a building perhaps be both attractive to the general public and inspiring to professionals? Could it potentially offer a space in the city to all the public, even if privately funded? Critique becomes more difficult when the presumption is that we should discuss things as they are in the world, when we accept that we too are embedded in it. But the fluidity and fragmentation of postmodernism should not lead us to think that all can be made uncritically, that an architectural or urban intervention means no more to its inhabitants than the formal discourse we manipulate. The position of critique is a vital question resulting from the 1960s that deserves close attention, and will be discussed further in section IV.

The praxis/theory divide
One of the areas we might reconsider here is the relation between theory and practice. This thesis has examined the discourse in words and images, concluding that it remained somehow ambivalent by answering revolutionary questions with reactionary responses. In this history of ideas, the discipline itself (both in terms of practice and its theorizations) has shown a tendency towards ideology-based critique and practice. An example was given in chapter 3 in the trajectory from Pevsner’s version of modernism (interpreting history to demonstrate the inevitability of modernism) to Banham’s reconfiguration of this history by on the one hand reviving crucial but somewhat effaced movements (Futurism, for example) and on the other opening up the architectural discourse to mass cultural imagery and influence of (for example) popular design. Similarly, though in a different context, the Situationists explored the revolutionary power of everyday through utopian projects like New Babylon and through strategies such as détournement. Yet in the case of the SI, a full-scale revolution was meant to precede any possibility of form, thereby leaving the work far more in the realm of theory than of practice, despite their encouragement to take to the streets.

In the end, although the various critiques in the 1960s explicitly uncovered a number of weak spots in the tradition of high modernism as it had developed in the first half of the twentieth century, the utopian aspects of that very same high modernism were by no means yet exorcised. Although the rhetoric of the 1960s was filled with notions like ‘instability,’ ‘flexibility,’ ‘individual expression,’ and ‘freedom,’ there were obviously totalitarian aspects to many of their designs. And, much like their predecessors, they often showed a blind spot in relation to their own rhetoric. The distinction between text, image and building thus becomes important. We could argue that this is an inevitable condition of the problem of architectural design, relating to the fact that the very practice of architecture has a tendency towards dictating both how one should live and how one should understand space. On the other hand, we can also attempt to untangle the difference between some of the incredibly insightful critiques of this period, and the resulting designs. Perhaps there is even a different framework for understanding both design and theory in a semi-autonomous and mutually productive relationship, in the sense of what Stan Allen has called ‘material practice.’

Potential models
What I am aiming at is to find a different conceptual structure here, something that theorists and practitioners will find useful to work with as a new set of ideas, and which may help illuminate forms of practice that are innovative yet underexposed. The basic characteristics of this model are many, but they include a tendency towards plurality rather than the dialectic, and a place for aesthetics as more than just representational or matter of taste, as productive in their own right. It is built on the notion of a ‘material practice,’ encompassing the contamination of reflection and production, as appropriate to a contemporary culture steeped in contamination.

---

347 Smits, Monsterbezwering. Smits suggests here that categories as defined by Mary Douglas (Purity and Danger) offer clear-cut definitions to a society, while the few objects between those categories are not only undefinable, but question a society’s very vocabulary.
rather than modern purity. The combination between theory and praxis is viewed as helpful in trying to move beyond cynical reason. The notions of contamination and plurality are essentially postmodern, while the interpretation of aesthetics as productive can be considered modern. The notions of material practice and the combination theory/praxis settle this into the contemporary debate, which is seeking a form of engagement with reality.

To look further into the idea of architecture as a material practice, Smits' analysis of the theoretical model posed by Mary Douglas is helpful. Smits separates the productive aspects (the idea of contamination, leading to her own proposition of a pragmatic attitude towards technology) of this model from the 'conceptual paradigm' Douglas is locked into. This is what leads Smits to propose a pragmatic approach: according to Douglas, 'contaminated' objects are those that do not fit within a clear conceptual category. This leads to their remaining undefinable. Smits instead suggests that this notion of contamination is more productive when seen as a potential means to reconfiguring formerly stable categories. This leads to a continuous process of redefinition, with a mutual influence between transcendent ideas and their specific instantiations. Material practice similarly suggests that there is both an autonomy to the practice, but that it is fed by reflection; it is the mutual contamination that might revitalize both aspects of architecture. If we can agree that the notion of an 'ocular ontology,' or a 'discursive' understanding of vision and/or images is the main conceptual paradigm being taken under fire in the 1960s, then we can perhaps begin to discuss both why it needed revision (i.e. the serious problems it was producing) and subsequently, why it was only partially revised.

The reason for proposing a new frame for contemporary work is that it might make some elements visible that cannot be seen when a work is considered through existing categories. Las Vegas was sitting in the desert as it was by the time Denise Scott Brown arrived, but there was no architectural vocabulary that could acknowledge it as something interesting. Scott Brown and Venturi made it possible to incorporate billboard architecture into the discourse. It is this kind of shift in vocabulary and seeing (since words and images work together in mysterious ways) that might be helpful in uncovering some qualities of buildings that may not yet be acknowledged.

In tracing these possible meanings, I follow Banham's notion that it is more about a 'sensibility' than an 'aesthetic.' I believe that still holds true today, though in retrospect a slight question may be put to the work of Banham. To him, the idea of a 'sensibility' was a way to open up a restricted understanding of 'aesthetics.' Yet in some ways it also allowed him to hide his own preferences, since his 'technological sensibility' was not yet a well-defined category and had no specific aesthetic rules. His own aesthetic preferences (such as American car designs) thus become theorized through this idea of a 'sensibility.' Aesthetics are a critical aspect of architectural practice. A 'sensibility' should not preclude an aesthetic judgment. Most of the examples I will discuss here are set in the margins of architecture; they do however involve all forms of the visual and of city space.

Suggestions towards this 'sensibility' from other forms of culture outside of architecture might include: skateboarding as a subversive urban activity, especially when it appropriates corporate space, or the idea of culture jamming as in between commodity culture and aesthetic resistance, a contemporary form of détournement. Another point of interest might be hacker ethics with the belief in equality on the internet, yet also subverting power structures by targeting Microsoft in its position as a powerful corporation. Furthermore, in many areas of aesthetic production there is a revaluation of craft, expertise, and beauty as a form of resistance to overly politicized work, possibly since overpoliticization offers only a single interpretation. In this sense, private reflection is productive, and contemporary imagery possibly allows that by being less linear or direct. Moreover, high technology and new materials are also being utilized as more than a mere image of functionalism or of modernity, and instead seen as experimental steps in a continual reconfiguration of the architectural environment and what is required of it.

Zones of importance
If we can agree that, on the scale from 'pure' (dogmatic) thought to 'contaminated' thought, the contaminated side seems to have offered the most interesting strategies in the latter half of the twentieth century, we can then question: is this notion of 'contamination' something we can put to use as a productive strategy? Perhaps now, purely acknowledging mass culture can no longer be considered a form of contamination, since it has become the status quo. But maybe some other areas of mass culture can oblige us with a hint of where we might find productive interference.

---

350 The phrase 'cynical reason' as borrowed from Peter Sloterdijk revolves around the cynicism that ensues when the 'enlightened' rational being is entirely buffered from any impact, any form of critique thanks to theory. In other words, the senses of both meaning and value begin to fade. This is closely related to the smug position of the critic as will be addressed below in relation to Bruno Latour.
351 Martijntje Smits. Monsterbezweerinxing. Discusses the ideas of purity and contamination as a productive set of terms in analyzing our relationship to technology. See also chapter 3.
352 These ideas on vision were discussed in chapter 2.
Just like Jane Jacobs, what VSBA encouraged us to do was to see rather than 'measure up' our perceptions to an 'ideal.' Visual culture in the contemporary sense allows us to cross boundaries of 'good taste' or 'high art' and discuss, analyze and absorb various images in various contexts. Although this is a bit of a risky comparison, the work of VSBA might be compared to the children’s television cartoon The Simpsons purely in its strategy of engaging with popular culture. Architecture versus a cartoon might sound like apples and oranges, but I do believe there is an underlying structure that allows a (brief) discussion.

VSBA have been very clear in all their writing that they wish to create an environment that connects with the experience of actual people living in the world. Denise Scott Brown writes of social patterns as critical to their designs, while Robert Venturi discusses the importance of symbolism as a communicative device. Both of these concepts are explicitly intended as a critique of what they feel lacking in modern architecture; at the same time, they are also intended as design tools towards a gentler and more communicative architecture.

The Simpsons, a dysfunctional but loving family of five in the town of Springfield, Illinois, have been on TV since 1989. The show is quite popular, and poke fun at everything it encounters: it is aired by Fox Television, owned by Rupert Murdoch. The show engages satire and humor as forms of critique, something less available to architecture as a strategy (how would one understand a satirical building 70 years later?). However, there is an interesting point to the fact that the show is paid and aired by Fox: it 'lives' in possibly one of the most conservative networks on television – Murdoch is well-known for his reactionary political views. Yet he allows a show to be aired that critiques everything from politics to the production methods of television. One explanation for this has been posed by Douglas Rushkoff, in suggesting that cartoons more easily bypass censorship. On the other hand, there is also a mechanism of capitalism at work here: the show is popular, gets high ratings, and therefore makes money. Is this a signal that criticism from within is possible? That the Simpsons can actually offer a critical eye in the bedroom of all those millions of households? Or is it instead (as Debord might suggest) a way for Murdoch to incorporate the critical view, thereby making it complicitous with the apparatus it critiques?

Architecture might be said to occupy a similar position to contemporary commercial television in that it is a collaborative effort and involves enormous budgets. It is not as autonomous a venture as, say, sculpture. Yet it has retained a notion of 'high art' with a utopian twist as visible in the work of VSBA. Although they position themselves as mouthpieces of 'what the people want,' they simultaneously argue that their 'genius' is unacknowledged by their colleagues. They still operate within separate worlds – the lack of acknowledgement within architecture discourse, yet the 'people's architecture' in terms of the everyday environment. At the same time, they are firmly positioned in the corporate world: their work is omnipresent on campuses across the U.S., and despite their sense of remaining unacknowledged, they are extremely successful within the world of (semi-)commercial architecture. Hence the analogy with the Simpsons: has VSBA found a way of offering criticism from within, or has it instead become complicitous with the corporate world?

The strength of the Simpsons lies in its breaking with the restraints of classic TV, in its introduction of elements of otherness (thus reminiscent of SI détournement). For example, the creation of an integrated world is sometimes interrupted by the self-consciousness of its actors (in somehow acknowledging that it is 'just TV'). This kind of non-linear crossing over of boundaries is exactly what was so powerful about the early Las Vegas studies: the study object was not an acknowledged object of established architecture, but rather an expression of spectacle and commodity, arisen from the basic premises of capitalism and entertainment-based profit. VSBA's study of Las Vegas crashed through the white picket fences of what was considered worthy of the label 'architecture.' What is questionable is the subsequent development, when the vitality of the material from a study like LLV is transformed into a set of guidelines for how to design communicative or populist architecture.

Genre-blending is also indicative of the pluralist perspective surfacing in the 1960s. The rules of the traditional detective story are today interspersed with science fiction (X-files), encouraging us to understand that there is more than one side to every story. This too is an indication of the non-purity of the late 20th century. In a sense, genre-blending already underlies the exhibition 'This is Tomorrow' (with its combination of popular science fiction imagery, the setting of the art gallery, the collaborative groups of artists and architects). It also underlies the Las Vegas study (in the careful examination of the architectural principles in a city created by and through commercialism). But apparently it remains uncomfortable to actually work within this fluid framework: VSBA distilled a specific and aestheticized style out of the fragmentary bits of billboard signage they so loved, thus allowing a certain

---

355 Some episodes are explicit political critiques, usually aimed at the Republicans; an episode that mocked television itself was a 'flashback' episode, where fragments of earlier episodes were used to fill the half hour – a cheap production method for writers who are temporarily without inspiration. Furthermore, many episodes are filled with a consciousness of TV-conventions.

formalism to supersede their critical arguments on accepting popular culture as a productive constituent of architecture.

**Beyond cynical reason**

Above all, this also questions the role of theory in the architecture discourse. While the nihilistic analyses of the 1970s and 80s revealed the failure of the 1960s in the most painful light; and while they also contributed to a highly conscious mode of architectural practice (awareness of underlying presumptions on gender etc.), they also left a gaping hole where the orientation towards a better future once had been. The pure analysis (to the point of destruction) of underlying societal meanings in architecture neglects the importance of aesthetics and of architectural meaning.

In recent years, many publications have testified to the need to once again reconsider a positive, active role for theory. These suggestions again resonate throughout various sources of architecture theory, from architects’ writings to philosophical and cultural studies texts. A key text as yet undiscussed in the architecture debate is a rigorous questioning of the contemporary position of ‘critique’ by Bruno Latour, which will be discussed in detail below. Others negotiating the terrain of ‘critical theory’ and its position in a late capitalist world of spectacle are Michael Hays, Kate Nesbitt, Sarah Whiting, George Baird (in architecture), and Douglas Kellner and Douglas Rushkoff (in media studies) to name but a few.

Michael Hays has suggested a strategy called ‘scanning’ to help define the work of Diller + Scofidio; this would view architecture more as a “tool of social cartography.”\(^{358}\) This strategy as described by Hays performs a critical function in its assessment of underlying sociocultural assumptions, yet also retains some agency in its (positive) invention of new modes of thinking (and creating) architecture. The salient aspect of ‘scanning’ as defined here is its distinction from critique simply by being embedded or complicit with its surroundings – it works within the mechanisms of the market, yet also documents problems within this very context. To Hays, Diller + Scofidio “are aware that even the more self-conscious and sophisticated tactics of rebellion and negative critique seem to be, in our time, not so much co-opted by “the system” as they are a strategic part of the system’s internal workings.”\(^{359}\) Sadly, he also proposes that if architecture is primarily valued as a tool of social cartography, the “architecture henceforth need not achieve or even propose a building,” while it would seem that this is precisely where the major potential of architecture lies – in its bridging of social commentary and construction of the environment.\(^{360}\)

In a recent publication George Baird examines the current position of ‘criticality’ in relation to the field of architecture, suggesting also that this is the moment that a renegotiation of the position of theory within architecture is inevitable.\(^{361}\) He even relates this to a distinction between the European and American practices of theory and architecture. He notes that criticality in its traditional form is under attack, and that critics such as Michael Speaks, Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting are all trying to formulate something other than the (by now traditional) resistance against conditions of commodity and spectacle. This would lead to the formulation of a new program for architecture practice (called ‘projective’ by Whiting and Somol) that leaves behind the Marxist or leftist notion of criticality.

The sociologist Scott Lash points out that in contemporary society, part of the problem is that the “speed and ephemerality of information leaves almost no time for reflection.”\(^{362}\) Here I would argue that we might want to reconsider the relationship between critique and reflection. Maybe it is less about slow, careful ‘disinterested’ reflection on a single object or concept, and more about a slippery form of reflection based on pattern recognition and comparison, on discovering and examining what I call resonances in order to reflect on a more strategic (as opposed to essential) level. This is called a ‘slipping in and out’ of critical modes of thinking as Whiting uses (see below), or an ‘embedded critique’ as I’ve called it. Whatever the label may be, it undermines the notion of a fixed essence, but still demands definition and specificity. Related to this is his observation that information “makes no claims to universality but is contained in the immediacy of the particular.”\(^{363}\) This also recalls one of the aspects of the failure of 1960s utopias: by extending individual revolution to a universal condition, the specificity of the particular was lost.\(^{364}\)

Most important in the renegotiation of critique is perhaps a subtle comment by Sarah Whiting that indicates just how crucial the intermingling of practice and theory has become in the contemporary debate. To her, utilizing architectural expertise is crucial: “architects must engage, lead, catalyze – act, rather than react. Our expertise lies in defining forms, spaces, and materialities; we should not be

---

364 This is perhaps what Whiting’s idea of ‘slipping in and out of critical theory’ is aiming at: it combines the moment of production (specificty) with other moments of reflection (universal context).
afraid of the results and subjectivities (read: biases) that such definition implies. Unlike other disciplines in the liberal arts, architecture’s relationship to critical theory is not entirely concentric. Rather than bemoan this fact or conclude that theory has no bearing on architecture – two options that guarantee architecture’s intellectual suicide – architects interested in the progressive project have no choice but to take advantage of our ability to slip in and out of critical theory’s rule. The call to action is unmistakable here, and tends perhaps even to the modernist theory is not entirely concentric. Rather than bemoan this fact or conclude that theory has no bearing on architecture- two options that guarantee architecture’s relationship to critical and affirmative function: the possibility to slip in and out of critical theory, acceptance of a relationship that transcends these interests than it is to not design anything at all, or than it might be to merely point out that something is complicitous.

Critique and consumer culture
Most of the notions of criticality as handled in contemporary (transatlantic) discourse are founded on a Marxist position embedded in consumer culture. Taking pleasure in consumer culture and various forms of mass culture is accepted, but the analysis of these forms of cultural expression is typically premised on ideas of reification and a need for critical assessment to penetrate beyond the surface affect. The tenuousness of this position is usually emphasized within the text through a discomfort with the slippery conditions of media and commodity culture, often positioning architecture as either hopeless affirmation or the locus of resistance.

The strength of the few hints given by Whiting is that it discards these notions of the critical in favor of a position of neither autonomy nor servitude but rather a critical and affirmative function: the possibility to slip in and out of critical theory, as she calls it. Again, I take the 1960s as the grounding of this transformation since it both wallows in the profusion of the time yet formulates a program of (general) critical resistance (to modernism, to the spectacle, to standardization).

Whiting’s position appears to offer the kind of relationship with consumption that Hays mentions as a relationship no longer defined by resistance and negation but transformed into something other. And this seems a way to sidestep the congealed definitions of revolution that continue to be based on 1968. Revolution now may well be found in culture jamming rather than burning the streets. In architecture, it may well be based on creating the best building for a specific program. Perhaps the problem is no longer to build a radically different environment (which also, in the forms suggested by Archigram and the situationists, embodies a singular logic, negating their own rhetoric of individuality and difference), but rather to build a beautiful environment.

III. Theory and Critique in the Age of Spectacle
To help frame my suggestions which are still by necessity incomplete due to their contemporary focus, I would like to borrow some suggestions from Bruno Latour. As noted above, a need for a different direction has been expressed in various forms. Yet architecture theory has not yet been able to fully address this. It seems that Latour, among others has at least some suggestions on a ‘sensibility’ that may prove fruitful to architecture.
One of the ‘problems’ in the architecture discourse today is the notion of critical and whether it is not too nihilistic an endeavor. This leads to suggestions such as a ‘projective practice’ (Whiting and Somol) which is understood to incorporate both critical elements and a component of agency. However, I turn here to Latour because he offers a different suggestion for critique.367 My hope for what I have called ‘embedded critique’ is here simply used to reframe our current understanding of critical. As noted above, ‘critical’ in this discourse is often conflated with negation and resistance. Or, as Latour puts it: “What if explanations resorting automatically to power, society, discourse had outlived their usefulness and deteriorated to the point of now feeding the most gullible sort of critique?”368 He identifies certain problems with the very structure of critique in cultural studies that derive from the type of analyses I have discussed in the architecture discourse of the 1960s. Latour also immediately warns against a facile appropriation of earlier arguments such as those used by situationism or Archigram to address contemporary problems. Although the resonance in their questions may be striking, a critical eye is always necessary. The failure of an earlier solution “does not mean … that we were wrong, but simply that history changes quickly and that there is no greater intellectual crime than to address with the equipment of an older period the challenges of the present one.”369

Another reason to turn to Latour for suggestions on a different approach in architecture is his emphasis on realism. As a critic, he distances himself from purely theoretical observations that remove themselves from the world at hand. He posits: “The question was never to get away from facts but closer to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism. What I am going to argue is that the critical mind, if it is to renew itself and be relevant again, is to be found in the cultivation of a stubbornly realist attitude – to speak like William James – but a realism dealing with what I will call matters of concern, not matters of fact. The mistake we made, the mistake I made, was to believe that there was no efficient way to criticize matters of fact except by moving away from them and directing one’s attention toward the conditions that made them possible. But this meant accepting much too uncritically what matters of fact were.”370 The idea Latour posits here of a ‘stubbornly realist attitude’ encompasses a realism that goes beyond the traditional understanding of empirical realism. Latour is referring primarily to the sciences, defined by an empirical realism that was eventually reduced to only measurable and quantifiable entities. His desire to move beyond this to a ‘stubborn realism’ is about taking other factors into account as well (not instead of but in addition to measurable traits), such as social influences or (conventional) meaning. I use the phrase ‘critical realism’ here to maintain the sense of careful observation and reflection implied with the word ‘critical.’ As an extension of his argument, ‘matters of concern’ entail seeing the object as more than a merely quantifiable entity, or a ‘matter of fact.’371

This strong sense of what I am calling a ‘critical realism,’ concerning itself with both the observation of reality and the critical view of what constitutes that reality, seems precisely where architecture discourse will find a productive strategy, by both acknowledging the reality of the world it is building in, yet remaining aware of how it is constituted. Moreover, Latour’s distinction between matters of concern and matters of fact is a beautifully precise formulation of one of the problems of the discourse: that somehow matters of fact have been either radically affirmed in an objective scientific tradition, without the opportunity for questioning their context, or radically negated in architecture theories like deconstructivism, where every ‘fact’ was constituted only by its context, and thereby lost its own status in reality.

In the rhetoric of the 1960s, these problems begin to surface in critique not necessarily when it appeals to disbelief (as a mode of skepticism to aid in resisting facile presumptions), but when it appeals to what Latour calls “powerful agents hidden in the dark acting always consistently, continuously, relentlessly.”372 These ‘agents hidden in the dark’ are continuously lurking at the edges of Debor’s critique of the spectacle – the dominance of capitalism is indeed acting relentlessly and consistently, and therefore in a sense already undermines the possibility of critique. This tension between the dependence on critique for liberation, and on the other hand the ‘secret powers’ that mercilessly define our world is an unproductive illusion still plaguing some ideas on the role of the critical in architecture. It simultaneously posits the need for an active resistance while fatalistically accepting the pointlessness of this resistance. The impasse in this position suggests that perhaps the problem today is not that resistance needs to be reactivated, but rather that critique and agency need to be redefined. Critique in its traditional sense puts everyone in a bind: are you seeing what you think you see? Is there not another level of reality behind that, controlled by some evil forces of domination? And therefore, is not meaning as you know it completely without value? Agency as defined by a leftist scheme of power and alienation is simply impossible in the society of the spectacle. Yet is it not true that within the spectacle there is also agency? Is a consumer-boycott not a form of agency with respect to corporations? And is the act of building by definition not a form of agency?

369 Bruno Latour, ‘Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?’ pp.231.
370 Bruno Latour, ‘Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?’ pp.231.
371 Following this line of reasoning, the social issues that the modernists addressed in their manifestoes, in principle ‘matters of concern’ were reduced to ‘matters of fact,’ by their tendency to quantify.
Strategies
The primary reason to discuss this issue of critique and theory so extensively is that a revised strategy could aid in escaping some of the 1960s dichotomies mentioned earlier. The failure of the 1968 revolution deepened the chasm between theory and architecture; by navigating the middle ground and revising the relationship between theory and practice we may find a way to move beyond the polemical reductions of pure radicality. This has become ever more important in the age of late capitalism, where the consumer society has fundamentally transformed conditions of production. Following a comment by Michael Hays: “It may well turn out that a different, younger audience, whose relationship to consumption is altogether altered, whose memories may not include any notions of resistance or negation, may have to produce another kind of theory premised on neither the concept of reification nor the apparatus of the sign, both of which have their ultimate referent in the vexatious territory of reproducibility and commodity consumption.” Note here the key concepts of consumption, resistance, negation, the sign; all of which are omnipresent in the 1960s discourse on architecture. The roots of what Hays is suggesting as a new direction for theory lie in the 1960s, and before that in the 1920s.

Although I believe we should look to our own field for the critical questions and the expertise to resolve them, there are perhaps some suggestions we can take from other disciplines for strategy. The examples above of the shifting of architecture theory and the debate are intentionally culled from the architecture debate – they indicate what the issues are within the discipline. Moreover, the discussion in this thesis of how we got here is through the architecture debate, albeit framed through mechanisms of mass culture and the media. The knowledge of the history of the discipline and the expertise of the field in its fullest extent – from rhetoric to image to building – is crucial to developing the discipline in a sensible way. Yet since critique itself has become such an important element in this constellation, I also believe it wise to look just over the fence and examine some alternative strategies. Hence the introduction of thinkers such as Kellner, Rushkoff and Latour, diverse as they are, to offer some possibilities of reframing the arguments, not the content, of architecture production.

Images and words
We could also question whether part of the so-called impasse or crisis of contemporary architecture lies not so much in architecture but more in two things: the simplistic rendering of the power of words and images and their relationship; and also the professionalization of the discourse in the twentieth century. Especially the latter has presented some problems in the relationship with imagery, since each image was taken to signify an infinite expanse of problematic assumptions, most socio-political. Yet the significance of aesthetics and the image itself was denoted to a lowly spot in the hierarchy of meaning. This allowed an extensive analysis of meaning without ever needing to enter the difficult arena of the power of imagery, unless that image was somehow dominant in a dangerous fashion. Yet the poetry inherent in the aesthetic experience was set aside in favor of the social construction of meaning.

The complexity of the relationship has increased – images are now not only settled within a specific cultural context, but also in a global setting. Yet the common complaint is that the richness of an earlier aesthetics has disappeared. This could indicate that contemporary imagery is lacking in imagination or aesthetics, or it could indicate that the vocabulary we have is not (yet) prepared to address it.

Individuation in the collective
Along the same lines of traditional critique, the city itself can be deemed in crisis. However, the vocabulary used to address the city is often still defined by the distinctions between the rural (collective) and the metropolitan (individual). Instead, by examining the manifestations of an urban form of Gemeinschaft, a new set of definitions could be found to address the place of the individual within a collective without destroying his individuality. This redefinition of community might also involve the visual symbolism of contemporary everyday life as support for social conventions. We might even see in this a return to the communicative nature of visual understanding of the (pre-)nineteenth century. This turn towards images as communicable (as opposed to consumable) could then fulfill a counter-function to the total loss of public space. Above all, the mutual interaction between an individual and the collective should remain at the forefront of any discussions. Here again, the importance of a level of realism becomes clear: each individual has a right to self-realization through individuation, but contrary to what was claimed in the 1960s manifestoes, each individual also has a responsibility within the collective which is not necessarily served by individual emancipation.

Technology in various forms
Technology too may find new forms of criticism from within. Although the quintessential expression of modernity has been through technological metaphors of speed and the machinic, the reassessment of technology as a metaphor in the 1960s has also opened up a different view. Yet a pure negation based on an apocalyptic view also denies the very real progress that has been offered through technologies. The introduction of the Internet in China, despite attempts by the government to regulate and police it, helped information exchange.

Critique, the visual, and the radical

Critique is in fact a problematic notion: by extending the avant-garde idea of a principally critical function of the visual, of symbols and of imagery, the 1960s discourse presented a problem in addressing the visual. The aesthetics of visual production are not reducible to only a critical function, nor does a critical attitude encompass only one strategy: it may have as much to do with transforming aesthetic convention as it does with social liberation, or with questioning contemporary developments. The continuous mutual influence of tradition and innovation is important in creating a productive interplay between the conventional and the critical. In this sense, the radicality of the 1960s revolution was ambiguous: it presented tradition and vernacular as a revolutionary intervention in the discourse, yet by virtue of its radicality it also was reminiscent of an earlier revolutionary position which was opposed to an embedding in tradition. On that level the 'purity' (again for lack of a better word) is very much at the heart of today’s problematic: if the everyday and the pragmatic and the real were somehow more incorporated in a discourse, the general rules of revolution and return could be modified to a point of specificity. This would mean accepting innovation takes place on a small scale equally to the large (and mediagenic) scale of manifestoes and publications.

Critique and the moment

The critiques I have discussed are simply moments, and perhaps that indicates precisely that some of the grand narratives have disappeared: instead of critique leading to a stable or defined reality, it is now a moment in time. This does allow it to retain its historical dimension, but not in the Hegelian or Marxist sense, where there is a discernible progression in the course of history. The notion that revolution is a lead-in to a permanent state, and that it is a pure process, divorces from the reality of its roots, seems no longer tenable (even if only judged by its own premises).

In the end, maybe the spectacle can do little more than teach us that critique itself is ephemeral. That when it does its job well it will be superseded by transformed conditions and need or seek a new target. The critical moment is fleeting but also a permanent condition.

Is contemporary architecture indeed primed for this awareness and the ability to operate within the ephemeral? Judging from some journals of architecture (Archis, Grey Room, A.D.) the ephemeral moment is still treated as something that can be given eternal form (as in blob architecture). Diller and Scofidio are perhaps the only firm who have made an ephemeral form in their Blur building, even though the notion of the ephemeral is avidly sought. Is theory even ready to be aware that each critique will be superseded or no longer relevant shortly, yet also remain conscious of the absolute necessity of agency? Permanence and architecture are at odds with the revolutionary program of critique, and have been for some time. Is it now perhaps time to revise the form of critique rather than the form of architecture?

Critique and PR

Media-saturation is often blamed for an inadequacy of the contemporary debate to really address issues. The perception that an image is worth less than 'the real thing' feeds this skepticism. Yet is it not more a matter of complicity with the media rather than media-saturation as a general condition? When magazines begin to publish the personal statements of architects as their critique of a building, one could wonder how it might still be possible to maintain any form of critical position. There is a sense of the corporate in the contemporary debate with the professionalization of the journals as a platform, placing marketing techniques at equal importance to a careful discussion of architecture. At the same time, by their very isolation as a platform, they only take the world around them into account in a limited fashion.

General conclusions

This thesis has discussed a number of diverse phenomena that are intimately connected, such as the media spectacle, the idea that passivity is concomitant to the spectacle, and the difficult position of the critical within an image-based culture. These are all issues that are rooted in the 1960s, and have become increasingly crucial to contemporary discourse. Each theme is interesting in itself, but in this thesis, I have been interested in delineating and understanding the resonance between these phenomena.

As a result, one of the concluding questions remains: is agency absolutely pointless in the society of the spectacle? Are we doomed to create only some kind of constructed PR for capitalism? Or is there a mode of 'critical practice', of 'praxis' that can be in the world yet critical? Is a 'critical realism' as described by Latour possible, and does 'projective practice' escape the constrictions of pure commodification? This position would attempt to hold a median between critique and idealism, yet do so with the context as a given.

This requires some adjustments - though nothing necessarily drastic. A reexamination of where we stand today - and a refusal to play purely formal games, yet also a refusal to subjugate aesthetics to social rhetoric. This proposal is close in spirit to notions like 'material practice' and 'projective practice.' Yet what

\footnote{Or, as Koolhaas has stated: before architecture, anything is possible, after architecture, nothing is possible.}
I argue here is not radical, and therefore not necessarily attractive as a media representation. It is not clean, clear-cut. But it is useful – it goes into details, asks more questions that it can provide answers. I am also trying to connect here to tendencies in other disciplines, and to draw a line from developments begun in the 60s (such as freedom of the individual and critical thinking) and find the limits of these ideas as well as their potential. All this within the media spectacle, both despite the influence of the media, of the image, of the spectacle, and because of it.

Although my suggestions here have not yet found material form (this does remain, after all, a theory) I hope that a more subtle negotiation of the conditions of late capitalism, of the spectacle, of commodity culture, a strategy that is not based on radical revolution but rather on a form of embedded critical view, will bring architecture both closer to its own discipline (in terms of building) and remain true to the notion of not being purely affirmative (in the sense of merely replicating existing conditions). Should we be afraid that media will overtake the meaning of architecture? Or should we be afraid that the media have offered a new platform for architects to replicate their manifestoes more effectively? Or should we be ‘sliding in and out’ of the logic of the spectacle, looking for the gaps where the confrontation between architecture and its image produce new meanings, new forms of independence for its users and (maybe even above all) new moments of beauty in the world at large?

In conclusion, Latour describes a new potential role for the critic, which I believe resonates with the notions of projective practice and embedded critique: “The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between antifetishism and positivism like the drunk iconoclast drawn by Goya, but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in need of great care and caution.”

Sources


375 Bruno Latour, ‘Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?’ pp.246


Radical Games: Architecture and Revolution in the Age of Spectacle
Dutch summary
Samenvatting, promotie-onderzoek
Lara Schrijver

Samenvatting
Dit proefschrift handelt over de jaren zestig, specifiek toegespitst op het Europese en Amerikaanse architectuurdiscours in de jaren 1956-1972. In deze periode is een weerstand ontstaan tegen de heersende opvattingen van het modernisme. De gangbare historische opvatting dat het hier een radicale revolutie betrof wordt in dit proefschrift ondervraagd. In deze jaren kwam onder andere de problematische relatie tussen de architectuur, massacultuur en beeldcultuur aan het licht. Vandaag de dag is deze beeldcultuur (gedefinieerd door visuele media en de laatkapitalistische maatschappij) een wezenlijk onderdeel geworden van de alledaagse ervaring. In de jaren zestig wordt het gebruik van het beeld in de architectuur getransformeerd van de propaganda voor de modernistische utopie (begin twintigste eeuw), tot een combinatie van de ironische acceptatie van massacultuur (Pop Art) en een zwelgen in pop-culturele technologische fantasieën (Archigram).

De hedendaagse relevantie van de jaren zestig komt voort uit de ambivalente relatie tussen architectuur en de cultuur van het beeld als consumptie-object. Deze tweeledigheid berust op de tegenstelling tussen hoge en lage cultuur (massacultuur); in de jaren zestig werd deze tegenstelling zowel ondervraagd als bevestigd. De complexiteit van deze relatie roept de vraag op wat de consequenties zijn van de ‘spektakelmaatschappij’ voor de architectuur. En als dit spektakel inderdaad de ‘massacultuur’ belichaamt in een positie van radicale autonomie, hoe kan het beeld dan kritisch worden ingezet?

Daarbij blijft er nog altijd een kloof bestaan tussen kritiek, als een project van negatie, en de praktijk, als een vak waarin iets gemaakt moet worden in plaats van ontmanteld. De voornaamste kritiek op de jaren zestig is dat hun radicalisering van de theorie de mogelijkheid heeft ontnomen tot een productieve interactie tussen theorie en praktijk.

Structuur
Het proefschrift bestudeert drie gebieden waarin het modernisme onder vuur kwam te liggen in het architectuurdебat van de jaren zestig: de stad, het beeld en de technologie. Elk gebied wordt onderzocht via de overeenkomsten in het transatlantisch debat en ook de verschillende lokale reacties in Engeland, Frankrijk en de Verenigde Staten.

Hoofdstuk 1 (de stad) is gericht op het werk van de Situationistische Internationale (Frankrijk, 1957-1972). De radicale kritiek van deze groep op de moderne stad
introduceerde het creatieve, verlangende individu als een tegenwicht tegen de rationele stadsbewoner uit het modernisme.


Hoofdstuk 3 (technologie) stelt het werk van Archigram (Engeland, 1961-1974) centraal. Zij slaagden er met hun futuristische projecten in om de techniek uit het domein van de ingenieur te halen (zoals ingegeven door het modernisme) en om te zetten in consumptie-objecten via de beeldtaal van de massacultuur.

Hoofdstuk 4 (praxis) is zowel synthetisch als speculatief, en bestudeert de conclusies van hoofdstukken 1-3 om de interne contradicties in het discours bloot te leggen. Het idee van een ‘reflective practice’ of ‘praxis’ wordt hier geïntroduceerd als een manier om zowel kritisch als productief te werk te gaan.

Lara Suzanne Schrijver

Lara Schrijver was born in Edmonton, Canada. She holds degrees in architecture from Princeton University (B.A., 1993) and the Technical University in Delft (M.Sc., 1998).

She has worked in various architecture offices, and taught both design and theory courses as well as given lectures at the TU Delft and the TU Eindhoven. For the past seven years, she has been a member of the editorial board of OASE, an independent journal for architecture.

Publications include:
‘From Public City to Publicity... and Back Again? Collectivity in the Twentieth Century’. OASE, no. 59 – ‘Scratching the Surface’.
6
Today, critique is usually framed through resistance and negation, as Michael Hays notes. In the contemporary world, Douglas Rushkoff’s notion of recapitulation, as a kind of distanced participation, is far more useful.

7
The institutionalization of theory in architecture has caused it to become less concerned with the object of its analysis and more concerned with staking out its own ground. On this level it has become complicitous with the propaganda machine it critiques.

8
Baudrillard suggests that the television image has become more authoritative than the live event. Thus a major transformation has taken place: the threat that ‘Big Brother is watching you’ has been replaced by the anxiety that our lives might not be registered.

9
Virginia Woolf noted that it is necessary to have a room of one’s own to write a book. Therefore the new design for the Faculty of Architecture in Eindhoven will not be producing many books.

10
As the TV-series Buffy the Vampire Slayer proves, a re-examination of the opposition between high and low culture is long overdue.

11
The overuse of philosophy in architecture theory has led to incomprehensible manuscripts that are better described as bad philosophy than as architecture theory.
Propositions
accompanying the dissertation Radical Games: Architecture and Revolution in the Age of Spectacle by Lara Schrijver, TU Eindhoven

1
In his demand for life as an experiment, Nietzsche can be considered the first situationist.

2
As a demonstration of the flexibility of Lefebvre’s legacy, the idea that a social agenda tends to disappear in the transition from Europe to America is belied by the work of Castells, who offers more space for individual agency in relation to society at large than Baudrillard does.

3
The tension between philosophy and architecture theory is best illustrated by the fact that philosophers, when proposing a new ideal for architecture in relation to contemporary society, never fail to return to a nostalgic image of a cottage in the woods as described by Bachelard: with an attic full of memories and a cellar full of food.

4
The recent selling off of collective facilities in the Netherlands by the revolutionary generation of 1968 proves that Johnny Rotten was right: you can never trust a hippie.

5
In relation to the architecture discourse of the 1960s, Oscar Wilde prefigured a crucial point in his dandyism: “It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.” (Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray)