

The Invisible in Architecture could be conceived as programme. A programme is implicit in every act, be it mental or physical. It is often said that we know a man, and what he stands for, through his actions. The action discloses an underlying programmatic logic, which binds that action with presentation and representation to form a seamless whole.

But, in architecture, because the programme transmits the functional, instrumental and rational demands of a project, it simultaneously conveys an order that hopes to prolong itself in, and by means of, that project. The programme is thus also the vehicle of an ideology. There are special, perhaps political, interests involved; there are hidden agendas and psychological preoccupations. This kind of programme is an invisible one. It manifests itself through everyone's immanent, involuntary enmeshment in the social and cultural order in which they live. And it is a programme no-one may depart from, we are forced to continue accepting that order as normality.

It is precisely through this invisibility that action slips into stylised representation and quick fixes for utilitarian problems. A consequence of this is that the programme concealed in the action becomes visible principally at the level of cliché. Hence the programme can no longer be a subject of public dispute; instead, it becomes a *fait accompli*. This state of affairs is exacerbated nowadays by the great ease with which we can pour ridicule on historic programmes with utopian goals. After all, in practice, these programmes were fixated far too naively and mechanically on their goals. We now know how much harm they did. The result is that we are less inclined than ever before to tackle the all too evident problems by taking a programmatic approach. Our aim is no longer to actualise a utopia, but to stem the dialectic side-effects of a utopia. These problematic side-effects have taken over the central role that was once the preserve of a utopian purpose.

Our own times, when form predominates and content goes unrepresented, do not provide a climate that favours an under-

Programme

standing of the programme. We have a poor view of the reasons and motives behind the form. The importance of the 'programme' vector is that, when we are aware of it, it places us in a position to trace the commodity structure – the ingrained practice of daily life that invisibly reproduces the functional position of the dominant ideology – in theory, politics and art.

Who still believes in the programme as a plan for the future couched in positive terms? Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the bipolar world order, the political programme seems to have lost its solidity as a formula for people to hold onto. That old programme was based on a certainty about the right way ahead. This certainty has vanished. All we know now is that many ways ahead are wrong. Whatever remains of social concern concentrates on staving off the most alarming threats: the greenhouse effect, large-scale deforestation, ozone layer depletion, wars, famines and epidemics. These matters are seldom placed in a political perspective by those who can really do anything about them. Involvement with such phenomena goes no further than a system of indulgences, donations, development aid percentages and awareness campaigns. In other words, the problems of this world have become apolitical. The programme of Late Capitalism is accepted as being an 'impartial' mechanism. It goes together with a fundamentally new mentality, and moreover with a new conception of the programme. Instead of a notion of the will, it becomes a deterministic fact.

Here, at last, is the moment at which the disassociation of form and substance, about which people have been complaining for so long, can finally and unreservedly take place. And as far as the vector 'programme' is concerned, what better illustration could there be than the fate suffered by the public domain. That domain is now no longer a necessary consequence of public action, but is a problem of form that precedes public action – to such an extent, that the problem of form overwhelms the public problem. It produces a situation in which people are no longer concerned with politics but with the face of politics.



Our contemporary public domain knows no 'natural' locus, and this leads to a loss of community. We no longer congregate to engage in the public clash of interests. Individually, we have plenty to say, to criticise and to protest about; but there is no obvious domain in which we can convert our words and dissatisfactions into actions. There are no addresses. We are thrown helplessly on our own devices. The treatment of the programme reflects this development in that it is becoming more and more the dominion of the starring personality. This individual objectifies his own subjective position – in the literal sense, too, of materialising it as a physical object. When the object rules the roost, it is hardly surprising that the image is everything. Our interest can go no further than the prestige of the image, and understanding can go no further than that which is allowed by the limited framework of our own, familiar discipline. Exposure and confrontation on the grounds of super-disciplinary criteria has become practically impossible.

A direct consequence of the widespread distrust in any positively-couched political programme is the flagging programmatic ambition of architecture. Since everyone wishes to or has to formulate his own micro-narrative, doing it by means of a programme is becoming a rare thing indeed. The outcome is that the economic capital of the function is becoming detached from the intellectual capital of the design. Now that justification on programmatic grounds has lost its credibility, architecture tends to strand in self-legitimising craftsmanship. Neither will architecture find salvation by binding on its shoulders the wings of art, as long as that art remains one that distances itself from any political programme.

Certainly now that architecture has to resign itself to increasing marginalisation as a craft of formal design and packaging, it seldom probes the possibility of guiding or influencing action. The bulk of building comes about as a pragmatic answer to functional programmatic requirements. In such architecture, the programme, conceived though it may be in purely utilitarian terms as a required number of square metres, is practically the *raison d'être*. But even in those few scraps of architecture that aspire to being more than just an efficient husk, the ideological programme remains concealed behind the representational programme, behind the 'luminous' architecture's own narrative.

Architecture's neglect of the programme is rooted deep in the past. In the early days of modernism's radical utilitarianisation of society, the progressive wing of the architectural fraternity became increasingly dissatisfied with the aestheticism of antiquated neo-styles. These architects were fired with a desire to contribute to the modern project, and accordingly supplied the neutral platform it demanded. But in doing so, they abandoned the critical faculties of their craft and reduced it to no more than a tool. The programme was narrowed down to the immediate utility of the project, and ultimately to a dutiful parallelism with the (concealed) programme of the status quo.

When architects woke up to this state of affairs during the sixties, it was already too late. Many of their tasks had already devolved into the hands of engineers, bureaucrats, managers and environmental artists. The architects still had one speciality with which to fight back, their skill as designers. Thus, not long afterwards, they proclaimed the autonomy of their craft. But it turned out to be the craft of the packaging expert. Within that craft, the programme of requirements and the ideological programme manifest themselves mainly in the form of unique artistic and autonomous acts. The programme is welcomed in as a frame to prop up the teetering edifice of free-standing design. That this course of action has now become an integral part of building practice will be clear from the immense resistance that the architect meets when he or she wishes to become involved with the deeper content of the programme. Such involvement is generally seen either as involving an exorbitant cost, or as implying that the project will remain limited to a folly, a fun thing to brighten up a public space but without serious social import.

Three strategies and three architects Most architects waste few words about the programme. Nonetheless, in their designs, we can read the whole functional and representational programme of their target group and their clients. In the respect of manipulation of the programme, we distinguish the following attitudes:

Archaism Archaism is effectively an anthropological interpretation of the programme, as the totality of mankind's unchanging practical needs. Because our everyday needs are recognised by one and all, this architectural tendency is fundamentally apolitical. The programme refers here to largely unconscious 'universal' premises of our existence, to somatic identity and to needs for security and identification. The programme aims to offer *everyone* a foothold, and it therefore manifests itself in the architecture as a relatively neutral and subtle game of spaces and volumes. This modest approach has undeniable political consequences, in the sense of its being an example of resistance to the unrelenting march of modernism. But, at the same time and through its very nature, it is incapable of proffering a programme of change; for, after all, it concentrates on what is, or is supposed to be, permanent. As far as propagating an intellectual programme is concerned, **Lucien Lafour & Rikkert Wijk** have tuned their ambitions to a very low pitch. They reveal themselves, by principle, as master builders in restraint. The programme is seen here in the most basic possible terms: Lafour and Wijk create an open space for the less well-off, a space that gives people a feeling of belonging to a community. At the same time, meeting and privacy, accessibility and parity, are on offer to all.

Façadism For the façadist, the programme is not so much a problem as a fact that has to be represented in (consumable) signs. For this purpose, Design is the method *par excellence*. Design gives everything distinction in form without perceptible differences in content. Although this approach clearly pursues the linking of programme and form, it rarely rises above the level of a recognisable, figurative palliative. It raises no questions but offers an unbroken stream of (at least ostensible) solutions. The 'slowness' of content is concealed behind the 'speed' of sign. The design is a masquerade, an aesthetisation of the poverty of experience. The museum is not merely **Hans Hollein's** preferred kind of project; he makes everything into a museum. In other words, he prefers to strip his programmes of their public significance as the locus of confrontation. He likes to offer us togetherness with atmosphere. In his buildings, we - that is to say, the well-heeled public - can take pleasure in a digression. Art is no longer a call to action but a decoration of spare time. This is accompanied by a theatrical *mise-en-scène* that, in Hollein's work, goes far deeper than the building's skin. The façade concept is expanded to become a metonym for consumable, static information.

Fascinism Fascinism aims to enrich the given programme with post-historical (i.e. post-programmatic) insights, and create an atmosphere that evokes not a sense of recognition but the ecstasy of alienation. The human subject is not expected to simply enjoy what he is offered, but to be overwhelmed by a sublime fascination for the hyper-present. Although the frequently sharp-witted inspiration of this intellectualistic strategy is seductive, it produces spaces that are practically 'unmanageable'. Indeed, in these surroundings, history is no longer written; on the contrary, the liberal ideology of the end of history is proclaimed. The highly sophisticated, abstract conception of form does not refer to the substance but to the *atmosphere* of a programme. **Bernard Tschumi** does everything possible to avoid static images. He even professes a desire to manipulate the programme to the level at which architecture can escape its own aesthetic straitjacket. But neither does Tschumi effectuate an expansion of the discipline's expressive means: they are and, as ever, remain confined to form. The action is not influenced. Thus Tschumi is at his best when making programme-free follies. These provide the perfect illustration to accompany an intellectual culture that has let the object of its criticism slip through its fingers.

Architecture can have a liberating effect on mankind. It will develop and guide us in life. Society will have a soul again, which of course requires new creative energy if it wants to be realised as an integral human perfection... **Ton Albers & Max van Huut**

The creation of architecture must be a criticism of problems of today. It must resist existing conditions. It is only when one faces up to today's problems that one can really begin to deal with architecture. **Tadao Ando**

Programme and use do not coincide with form, even though they converse with it.

Ricardo Bofill

The programme is a transitory invention that cannot be ignored. Most programmes are banal, it is the overcoming of this banality that injects life into buildings, the object. The process of drawing up a programme is an attempt to give objective and numerical value to transitory needs, desires and habits. The writing of the rules of a puzzle which must be both questioned and solved with absolute seriousness. It is only at a moment that the object comes into focus that the programme is authenticated. **Julia Bolles & Peter Wilson**

Any architectural or engineering work has a technical or practical purpose, for example to span a river, to cross an obstacle. The task of the architect consists in learning, educating, in urbanising, in practising urbanness with the design. **Santiago Calatrava**

We wanted our designing to become forthright and expressive, for the distortions of the mind to be thrown out onto the buildings so that once built, they would throw some of the same feeling back. If architecture really were to have more than a guest/host relationship with the people that filled it, it would have to anticipate the way experience constructs its own narratives, constantly superimposing logic and emotion. Architecture, we said, should define an anthropomorphic field which constantly parallels and opposes experience itself. **Nigel Coates & Doug Branson**

The project is a limited programme: it does not seek general rules as the basis of an absolute legitimacy. It appears, instead, as a strategy to extricate ourselves from the complexity of the appeals in progress in a place. The appeals are political, functional and economic in nature, and come from the history of the place and that of the designer. The project is the temporary representation of a mediation in the midst of the pluralism of the appeals. **Pietro Derossi**

How can the 'revised' body re-enter architectural discourse and put into question our assumptions about space and about program particularly at a time in which architecture has irrevocably broken away from anthropocentrism?

Elisabeth Diller & Ricardo Scofidio

At the risk of over-simplification, the designer's task could be summed up as analysing set problems in the widest sense and organising the best available resources to achieve the highest performance solution in the most economical manner. **Norman Foster**

One could see a park in the city as a window on the past or on the future, a recollection of what was there before or a hypothesis as to what might be there after, a subtraction or a superposition of a few layers of history, or an operation that makes them selectively transparent. **Beth Galí**

I try so much to fight the programme as to re-order the priorities. And then I take great pleasure in being able to get the thing to function in conventional terms and to have a certain visual character – all within a budget: what I like to do is develop a project's potentials. **Frank Gehry**

It is crucial that we re-establish the thematic associations invented by our culture in order fully to allow the culture of architecture to represent the mythic and ritual aspirations of society. **Michael Graves**

One of my aims is to reconsider architecture of the past, which was adapted to the climate and the land, and to see human beings and architecture as part of the earth's ecosystem. This includes a challenge to propose new design connected with new science and technology. **Itsuko Hasegawa**

I think we are trying to make a piece of reality which can be taken apart, which works rationally. Since we are surrounded by so many things and events which we cannot clarify at all, to which we have no access, we make an object which offers a language all of its own. This offering of language is an expression of hope. To some extent this attitude is clearly utopian, because the enlightening is always utopian, not resigned. And this attitude is certainly far from being affirmative. **Jacques Herzog & Pierre de Meuron**

General theories of architecture are constrained by a central problem; that is to say if a particular theory is true, then all other theories are false. Pluralism on the other hand leads to an empirical architecture. A third direction is the adoption of a limited concept. Time, culture, programmatic circumstance, and site are specific factors from which an organising idea can be formed. A specific concept may be developed as a precise order, irrespective of the universal claims of any particular ideology. **Steven Holl**

All building is ritual.

Hans Hollein

Modern barbarism can only be defeated by bringing urban civilisation into the suburb, i.e. by building true urban centres in the suburban desert. Not expanding the cities but expanding the public realm by redeveloping the suburbs is, I believe, the main goal of civilisation. Even though commerce is a constitutive part of it, the establishment of a public realm is not and cannot just be a by-product of commerce; it is primordially a matter of public interest, of building communities. The urban master planner needs the independence of the legislator, his loyalty being to the 'public interest' of the community and not to the private interests of the shareholders.

Leon Krier

Of course a solid programme is necessary to build something that will stand up to the test of utility. The question is, though, how is this programme implemented in practice? Is it the architect's fate to always follow the schizophrenic wishes of the specifier of the brief? Or is it the brief-writer who must expect the architects to come up with ideas that will give their precise, regimented schemes life and blood, body and clothing?

Lucien Kroll

Since human beings live in contradictory ways, it is only natural that societies and cities too should contain mutually contradictory, opposing elements. As might be expected, however, the analytical approach strives to eliminate from architecture and cities the intermediate spaces and vagueness that formerly existed harmoniously there. In doing away with these things, they decrease ambiguity and diversity in human beings as well. I do think we should glean and pick up again the things – intermediary zones and vagueness – that the Functionalists have cast away. Oriental philosophy and Japanese culture provide an excellent groundwork on which to do this gleaning.

Kisho Kurokawa

We like to work on the very simple things that closely affect people. The programme of course is the most important, but that goes without saying. We do not design North-facing living rooms if it can be avoided, because on the few days of the year the sun shines people want to enjoy it. I think it is very important we believe we are building for people.

Lucien Lafour & Rikkert Wijk

Every architecture programme requires a response that can not only be seen as a physical or objective: its response comes from elsewhere, and therefore does not lie in the realm of proposition of knowledge. It has to be revealed in the process of thinking about a project. Now, one may want something to be revealed, but that doesn't mean it will reveal itself.

In my own work I would never want the methodological issue to obscure the first place of madness which is involved in the spiritual quest for an adequate response to the architectural programme.

Daniel Libeskind

I see architecture as always addressing the same questions throughout history. Each generation will try to answer the question of meaning in the work of architecture in its own way. For some, this reality will be found in the interpretation of programme or in the investigation of typology. For others still, the reality of the building will be sought in its lasting tangible presence, which speaks about the architectural principles behind its construction. That is where I would like to be.

Rafael Moneo

If writers could manipulate the structure of stories, words, and grammar, couldn't architects manipulate the programme? If architects could use such devices as repetition, distortion, or juxtaposition in the formal elaboration of walls, couldn't they do the same thing in terms of activities that occurred within those walls?

Bernard Tschumi

The social vision of the client should guide the programming process and help direct the vision of the architecture. In our experience clients are not ignorant of their own business, but there may be countervailing forces within their group and, if they cannot mediate for themselves, we must do it for them. In programming the architect has the right to state a personal value position but no right to secretly manipulate the programme or design in directions different from what the client wants. If the architect cannot accept the client's value system then this is not a project to accept. On the other hand, the need to allow for future changes of programme over the years, or to think of the next director and users and indeed the next community, should certainly be brought up by the architect. It is not the architect who should make decisions for the future, but possibly a combination of elected representatives and artists should – those deputed democratically to make such decisions and those who have an ability to intuit the future, without self-indulgence but with extra sensitivity.

Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown