

6. Conclusion

The dissertation is an investigation of public space - specifically, the architecture surrounding public space. The author is of the opinion that the notion of architecture as a container of programme is not adequate for the creation of stimulating and productive environments. Cedric Price echoes this opinion:

“I think that at the present architecture doesn’t do enough, it doesn’t enrich or enliven people’s lives as much as, say, the internet does, or a good story, or music. Architecture is a poor performer...”

(Price 2003:64).

A key determinant of this investigation was the influence of Situationist thought, that privileges atmosphere above buildings and artefacts and promotes the *gesamt Kunstwerk* (Wigley 1998 :12). However, it is acknowledged that ambiance and atmosphere are the effects of objects in their surroundings. This led to a sustained interest in art and its influence on its context. Not constrained by the basic tenets of architecture (budget, time, client and gravity), the artist can explore what the architect can not. By examining how an object or situation is able to alter behavioural patterns and influence thought, art hints at a method of creating an aesthetic, affective, memorable and humane architecture.

Some lessons gleaned from the work of the artists under investigation:

6.1. Size does not matter

The effect of an object on its surroundings is not a direct consequence of its physical scale. The subjective nature of observation means that the impact of an object depends on the relationship (both spatially and metaphorically) that it assumes to its surroundings.

6.2. Absence as a tool

Bearing in mind the importance of the relationship between an object and its environment, it is clear that this surrounding space influences the observer’s perception of that object. Thus, providing a large space around, within or next to an object highlights its significance. Absence becomes a signifier when applied with clear intent. However, high-modernist architecture has been criticised specifically on these grounds.

6.3. Charged terrain

The key to countering the dead-space that is the scourge of High-Modernism, lies in the artist ability to orchestrate transient events. Designers can follow this example through careful programming with changing occupancies. Conversely, by equipping unprogrammed space with a variety of services the designer is able to ‘charge’ a terrain to accommodate potential events.

6.4. The value of perceptible mechanisms

The work of the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson points to the importance of perceptible mechanisms. On the one hand, the mechanism that causes an effect or atmosphere should possess aesthetic merit in itself. On the other hand, Rachel Whiteread’s sculptural casts bear out the marks of their manufacturing. Thus, the object as mechanism of effect, becomes an instructive tool, allowing insight into the process of its manufacture and the means in which

it manufactures an effect.

This dissertation draws selectively on the work of a handful of contemporary and near-contemporary artists. Artists were selected on the grounds of their strategic approach to creating immersive, atmospheric environments. Intensive study on a broader field of art will no doubt yield numerous strategies for the architecture to draw on.

The terrain under investigation posed its own challenges. The railway tracks separate the site from the rest of the city fabric – an ambivalent situation that the designer undertook to preserve. Traces of the site’s historic past remain visible – train tracks, retaining walls and foundations. The significance of these traces had to be considered and the author chose to use the traces to guide design decisions.

On returning to the site in November, many of the existing railway tracks and concrete foundations had been damaged or removed. No doubt, in time, these will disappear entirely, erasing the site’s industrial legacy.

The dissertation proposes an architecture that fulfils its programmatic requirements eloquently and efficiently - an architecture that is a product of its environment and social context.

Not merely because it fits in, but rather because it alters its surroundings through active engagement.