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I will argue in this paper that the commodification of art, the production of artists, is just as in evidence, if not more so, in the "art" of architecture. Architecture is perhaps the most obviously commodified and most essential to western capitalism of all the arts. Specifically I will look at architecture through the lens of housing as a form of architecture which Read mentions in his essay and a key area in which can see the rampant monetisation of the art of architecture. Is architecture as we experience it today an art? And can it ever be de-commodified are key questions that I will deal with in the course of this paper.

Architecture, famously referred to by the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright as the 'mother art', it can be argued is the basis of our civilisations, or as Wright continued it's soul: 'Without an architecture of our own we have no soul of our own civilization'.

Architecture therefore stands alongside the production of artists per se as a key element of a society's culture. Like valued art valued architecture is preserved, glorified, and held up as an example of the cultural achievement of a civilisation. Architecture

is also a manifestation of society's politics and, as Bill Risebero explores, the hegemony of a culture:

> 'Architecture, like all other elements of the social superstructure, rests on our society's economic base, that is the capitalist mode of production, which determines its essential nature. [...]
>
> Conversely, politics depend on culture. What Antonio Gramsci calls 'hegemony', that is, the ability of a bourgeois-democratic state like that of Britain to obtain and exercise power, depends not only on the coercive machinery of state itself but also on the participation of the people.'[1]

The participation to which Risebero and Gramsci are addressing of course is the same as that which Foucault describes as the invisibility of power. As the state apparatus has taken on new identity in the modern era it has moved from being visible to invisible. As Gordana Fontana-Giusti explains:

> 'This model was now reversed: new disciplinary power imposes compulsory visibility upon those whom it subjects to discipline, while those in power remain invisible.'[2]

Art and architecture are then both tools of hegemony the latter perhaps more so than the former, as whilst art may attempt to be revolutionary and to ask question of the *status quo,* architecture is, due to the very nature of its realisation bound to the hegemony of its culture. As Risebero goes on to say:

[1] p.34, Risebero, B (1992) *Fantastic Form: Architecture and Town Planning Today*. London: Herbert Press.

[2] p.87, Fontana-Giusti, G. (2013) *Foucault for Architects*. London: Routledge.

But in the end the drive for these changes come now from the people as it did in the 1970s in the UK. Whether we today have an opportunity truly subvert the nature of architecture, to turn it into genuine tool for democratisation of development, of design and of land ownership remains to be seen. But the examples of the ARC give us further evidence that this tradition of alternative building, which is building without architects or architecture, is a lot older than architecture and representative of something and perhaps somewhere else.

[online] [url: http://blogs.artinfo.com/objectlessons/2013/11/06/5-thoughts-from-michael-sorkin-on-architecture-and-capitalism/]

> '"The ruling ideas of any age", as Marx and Engels have said, "have ever been the ideas of the ruling class"2 – and these ideas include architectural ones.'[3]

The two forms (art and architecture) have become so intertwined that in the contemporary period we often experience them together, that are sold to us as part of the experience of the museum or gallery visits. One only has to consider Herzog and De Meuron's Tate Modern / Bankside, Rogers and Piano's Pompidou Centre or the Gae Aulenti's Musée Orsay to see the virtually symbiotic relationship between art and architecture. Visitors may visit these galleries just for the art or just for the architecture but it is the interrelation between the two that has been curated as a tourist attraction.

As Hans Ibelings explores this happens not just when we are on holiday, or just at tourist attractions:

> '…tourism has spawned a mind-set whereby buildings, cities and landscapes are consumed in a touristic manner even when people are not on holiday, and the environment, consciously or unconsciously, is increasingly regarded as a décor for the consumption of experiences.'[4]

The consumption of experience to which Ibelings here refers is in relation to the post-modern development of architecture where, since the by-and-large abandonment of the Modernist project in architecture in the 1970s, architecture has become yet another vehicle for consumption and consumerism. The value placed on buildings may in some cases be more tangible but can also be just as

[3] p.34, Risebero, B (1992) Fantastic Form: Architecture and Town Planning Today. London: Herbert Press.

[4] p.135, Ibelings, H. (2002) *Supermodernism: Architecture in the Age of Globalisation.* Rotterdam: NAi.

conceptual as with art. If a building is not valued for its physical properties, its materiality or its use value, it can only be valued for the experience it enables one to consume within its confines. (Vegas)

But is architecture art? And if so, has it been commodified in the same way as Read argues in this essay art has? I would answer yes in both cases. To illustrate point, I invoke Read himself:

> 'If an object is made of appropriate materials to an appropriate design and perfectly fulfils its function, then we need not worry any more about its aesthetic value: it is automatically a work of art. Fitness for function is the modern definition of the eternal quality we call beauty, and this fitness fir function is the inevitable result of an economy directed to use not to profit.'[5]

The example that Read gives in the essay is that of a chair but the analogy can be extended to buildings or entire towns which are in and of themselves objects only differing in scale from the chair.

Therefore, by Read's definition the work of Modernist architects such as the famed Le Corbusier, or Alison & Peter Smithson, or Chamberlin, Powell & Bon can be classed as art. This architecture is often decried as ugly or cold and perhaps betrays Read's call for us not to '…worry any more about its aesthetic value' perhaps because pure Modernist architecture is considered by many to have no such value. As a purely functional, yet I would argue beautiful, way of building buildings it is perhaps the closest architecture comes to Read's conception of a work of art.

The fate however of Modernist architecture was that it failed because the civilisation needed for its success was not ushered in by the revolutions of the early 20th Century. Instead, capitalism of

[5] p.18, Read, H. (1941) "To Hell With Culture", in Read, H. (2002) *To Hell with Culture*. London: Routledge.

> 4. Commitment to greater public accountability of the profession as a whole.'[17]

This is a 37-year-old set of principles that would not go a-miss today in architecture education, theory and practice. The motivation here is not however the grandiose ideas of a social or architectural revolution but of "ordinary" people doing their own architecture, without architects and without trying to destroy architecture. The questions, which are being asked in many circles about architecture's role in society now, about its lack of user focus, its insular professionalism, have been asked before.

So as Read said regarding the artist, I say to hell with the architect!

> 'I have said: To hell with culture; and to this consignment we might add another: To hell with the artists. Art as a separate profession is merely a consequence of culture as a separate entity, in a natural society there will be no precious or privileged being called artists: there will be only workers. […]
>
> "The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is special kind of artist".'[18]

That precise argument is the one I would make for architecture and architects, as a mode of cultural production, as a form of elitist and privilege. I concede however some of these questions and challenges do come from inside the professions, as the architect and theorist Michael Sorkin said last year in New York '[We architects] should not renounce our expertise, but use our expertise in order to build socialism.'[19]

[17] p.735, Woolley, T. (19/10/1977) "Alternative Practice" In Architects' Journal, v.166 n.42, pp.735-750.

[18] p.23, Read, H. (1941) "To Hell With Culture", in Read, H. (2002) *To Hell with Culture*. London: Routledge.

[19] Sorkin, M.(2013) "Architecture or Capitalism/Architecture and Capitalism" at Storefront for Art and Architecture, 97 Kenmare St, New York City.

The Bridgtown project was successful in that the Bridgtown Residents Action Group (BRAG) with the assistance of the ARC was able to resist the local authorities' plans for the area. However, this campaign was not without its difficulties in terms of the ARC's relationship with BRAG.

However Anson in a letter to BRAG expressed his frustration with the apparent success of the divide and rule tactics of the powers that be. Anson also appears to express concern about the lack of radicalism on the part of the residents group.

The ARC's attempts to reveal to the residents of Bridgtown the inevitable inequality of the planning process biased then as now towards money and expertise, was ultimately unsuccessful. As with other projects the ARC engaged in the local community who had initially called on their help were not interested in the revolutionary ideals that came with them.

Thus the disassembling and reconstitution of the relationship between the architect or architectural professional and the residents or occupants was the key to the transgressive work of the ARC. The ARC also fits Peter Woolley's definition of "Radicalism" in architecture from 1977 in the Architects' Journal, where he states that a radical architecture will ensure:

> '1. Changed relationship between architectural worker; breaking down employer/employee alienation.
>
> 2. New sectors of work in which services are available to sections of the population, the actual building users as opposed to corporate clients.
>
> 3. New participatory techniques to demystify the status of expertise and to help lay people understand architectural problems more fully.

one sort or another took hold throughout the world. Bill Risebero places this in an architectural context for us when he says:

'Under capitalism - eastern or western - modernism is incapable of living up to its promise. A movement which comes to express only alienation, or actively oppose the society in which it exists, or to express social alternatives, cannot fully develop until that society is superseded. Any form of modernism that exists under capitalism is inevitably flawed: constrained by the logic of the capitalist mode of production and compromised by bourgeois ideology.'[6]

The modernist project in architecture foundered on these same rocks and as a result was reinvented as a key part of post-modern project. Culture and specifically architecture for experience has therefore become an essential part of the contemporary forms of architecture.

I will argue that housing, and by extension housing architecture, has become a key example of the commoditisation of the art of architecture. Housing, as opposed to just houses, has since Thatcher's 'Right to Buy' become an integral part of the UK and indeed Western economies in general. The "sub-prime mortgage" collapse in the US precipitated the global financial crisis of 2007. A similar such collapse occurred in Ireland and Spain prompting economical calamity in these countries. Indeed the UK is believed to be only one interest rate hike away from a property market "re-set".

Architecture more generally has become so much a part of the capitalist establishment that the arrival of the neo-liberal agenda had little notable impact on architecture. It had already 'sold its soul to the devil' and Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building, New York (1958) could be taken to mark the point that European Modernism became the "Architecture of capitalism". The glass curtain walled architecture of the Seagram Building became the modus

[6] p.7, Risebero, B (1992) *Fantastic Form: Architecture and Town Planning Today*. London: Herbert Press.

operandi for capitalist architecture by the 1970s with the completion of the New York World Trade Center [sic] "twin towers" by Minoru Yamasaki in 1973. Their targeting and destruction in 2001 as symbols of US power demonstrates on an architectural level the degree to which this form of architecture has become symbolic of US economic power and Western capitalism more generally.

It was in housing that something of a sea change occurred after 1980 in the UK. The post-war social project of providing decent publically owned housing for all, not just the working classes, that had begun to be eroded by the Labour administrations of Wilson and Callaghan, was dealt a crippling blow by the 1977 Housing Act and the knock-out punch by the 1980 Act that introduced 'Right to Buy'. Housing then began its inexorable slide into a commodity to be traded and to be used to create wealth for the group of people who owned it or would come to own in the 1980s. This is not to say that housing has not been a commodity before the 1970s, it clearly had, but the 'Right to Buy' generation made the failure of the project of social housing all the more acute due to the fetishism thereby associated with the ownership of property. Property has therefore become a means of creating wealth from nothing.

It is perhaps possible to argue that contemporary housing does not represent a form of cultural production, or not in the way that Read uses the term. However I see the current condition of housing architecture to be a consequence of the development of housing from a social project into an element of commodity fetishism. The subjective market value of property has become realised to such a degree that houses are now valued above and beyond their functionality, or their reliability or sustainability. Their value is now determined by the price it is possible to sell them for and the market determines this, as do the locations and the professions involved in their sale. It is therefore the case that whilst architecture awards were doled out to public housing by the sackful in the middle part of the 20th Century now the architecture profession and the architectural press roundly ignores the vast majority of private housing.

icant as the ARC was targeting the power structures of architecture - primarily the RIBA, this is evident from earlier sections of the manifesto, rather than individual practitioners of architecture.

Their aim was to destroy the pedestal upon which the RIBA sat, supported by the capitalist mode of production and the moneyed classes. The first paragraph of the manifesto deals with this most explicitly:

> 'ARC calls on all those architects and others involved in the built environment who believe that we should cease working only for a rich powerful minority or the bureaucratic dictatorship of Central and Local Governments and offer our skills and services to the local communities who have little chance to work directly with architects and architecture.'[15]

This places the ARC politically less in the revolutionary Marxist socialist camp and more in the anarcho-syndicalist camp of temporary syndicates formed for the purposes of solving specific problems or meeting specific needs. Its ultimate aim however always remained the destruction of Architecture as embodied by the RIBA.

The ARC involved itself in many projects and schemes to frustrate the progress of mainstream corporate architecture in the 1970s in the UK. Brian Anson considered the ARC's involvement with residents of Brigtown (a former mining village, now part of Cannock, Staffordshire) in its successful campaign to defy planners' attempts to demolish the whole area for industrial uses, to be more significant than its 'RIBA-baiting' activities. Quoted by Anne Karpf in 1977 Anson said: '"In Bridgetown [sic], we've got closer to the people and it's logical that we spend more time at the grass roots".'[16]

[15] p.17, Bottoms, E. (2008) "If Crime Doesn't Pay: The Architects' Revolutionary Council", in AArchitecture, Issue 5, Winter 2007/08.

[16] p.731, Karpf, A. (19/10/1977) "The Pressure Groups" In Architects' Journal, v.166 n.42, pp.728-734.

"art of architecture" we must entirely reinvent housing. This does not necessarily constitute a reversion to hand building techniques however but the process must be made again an immediate concern to the lives of all. Machinery and modern building techniques can be and would need to be employed in order to build for the rapidly increasing human population. As Read says:

> '…there is no need to become primitive in order to secure the essentials of democratic liberty. We want to retain all our scientific and industrial triumphs – […] We do not propose to revert to the economy of the handloom and the plough…'[13]

It does however necessitate the deconstruction of the architectural professions and the social stratum that they occupy.

For this we also have a model from history at our disposal. *The Architects' Revolutionary Council* (ARC) formed in 1974 at the Architectural Association, London; and led by former Greater London Council planner Brian Anson set out to destroy the architectural establishment, most pointedly the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). Their disruption of the RIBA 1976 Hull conference and posters asking, "If crime doesn't pay… Where do architects get all their money" gives us a good sense of the level of animosity held by this group towards the architectural establishment.

The manifesto produced by the ARC in 1975 made a number of key claims for the future of the ARC and, by extension the architectural profession itself. Key amongst these were the calls for members of professions both qualified and students to '…join the new international movement and through solidarity help to bring about the architectural revolution.'[14] The call to solidarity is signif-

[13] p.25, Read, H. (1941) "To Hell With Culture", in Read, H. (2002) *To Hell with Culture*. London: Routledge.

[14] p.17, Bottoms, E. (2008) "If Crime Doesn't Pay: The Architects' Revolutionary Council", in AArchitecture, Issue 5, Winter 2007/08.

So has architecture in this field stopped being an art? Yes and no. Where housing architecture is actually produced for specific clients and sites or in similar circumstances by co-operative groups or self-builders then yes, much housing architecture may qualify as an art as defined by Read. Where however it is produced by "volume housebuilders" it may be consider as nothing more than an object, and badly produced one at that. The chair analogy that Read uses in *To Hell with Culture* will suffice here for the description of the volume housebuilder's product:

> '…the capitalist must progressively lower the quality of the materials he is using: he must use cheap wood and little of it, cheap springs, cheap upholstery. He must evolve a design that is cheap to produce and easy to sell, which means that he must disguise his cheap materials with veneer and varnish and other shams…
>
> Such is production for profit.'[7]

The self-builder, whilst historically serving as an example of "other ways of doing architecture"[8], has also recently been co-opted by the housing market owner-occupier fetishism. This form of housing architecture (I will focus on housing again as this is chief area in which self-build manifests) is one example of where the architect and more importantly the architectural profession and establishment has been excluded from building for the first time in the industrial and post-industrial ages.

Prior to the industrial age architects as we conceive of them today did not in fact exist. As Read explains: '…the Middle Ages, is rivalled only by the Greek Age; but, oddly enough, it too was not conscious of its culture. Its architects were foremen builders, its sculp-

[7] p.17, Read, H. (1941) "To Hell With Culture", in Read, H. (2002) *To Hell with Culture*. London: Routledge.

[8] Awan, N.; Till, J.; & Schneider, T. (2011) *Spatial agency: other ways of doing architecture*. London: Routledge.

tors were masons…'[9] As such architects were skilled craftsmen not a rarefied stratum of society, an over-educated and culturally elevated professional. The skill of the craftsman still exists in architecture but often now as an element of a lengthy and anonymised process. This is sometimes at an extreme, as in the example of the volume housebuilder, where the skilled craftsman is utterly divorced from the totality of the work of art (*gesamtkunstwerk*) and the end user as to make their presence meaningless.

The master craftsman role does manifest in the example of the self-builders building their own homes. Be that as a group of autonomous individuals in a co-operative or a single individual employing craftsmen to build for them. The self-builder has returned to what N. John Habraken called, in an echo of Read, the natural relationship. The natural relationship is at its most pure in the expression of individuality: 'It [the natural relationship] all started at a primitive stage when this relationship expressed itself directly in the action of man who by himself, without any help, built his protective environment'[10]. Clearly many degrees of separation now exist between the occupant and this direct expression of the 'natural relationship' in mass housing. It was the mass housing process that Habraken was railing against in 1967. The self-build thesis therefore presents an opportunity for the natural balance to be restored.

It is necessary to deal with this term natural or nature as Read and Habraken use it. Read says:

> 'If we follow this natural order in all the ways of our life, we shall not need to talk about culture. We shall have it without being conscious of it. But how are we to attain this natural order of things, which is my particular concern in this essay?
>
> Obviously, we can't make things naturally in unnatural surroundings. We can't do things properly unless we are properly fed and properly housed. […]
>
> In other words, before we can make things naturally, we must establish the natural order in society, which for my present purposes I assume is what we will mean by democracy.'[11]

By democracy Read evidently means anarcho-syndicalism and in such a society the model of the self-builder as individual, or more likely autonomous individuals in a co-operative, serves as a typeset for the future of housing and house building.

The professionalisation of architecture, the commoditisation of it as a form of cultural expression, as Read defines it, has created such a gulf between itself, its products and the rest of society that said gulf seems almost unbridgeable. Read argues this is in fact two-way, and this is a problem Habraken identifies too. It is not just the artists/architect that is withholding all power but the unwillingness of the populous to engage with "culture". As Read says:

The more I consider people, the more clearly I begin to perceive that though there may be a minority who have been hopelessly brutalized by their environment and upbringing, the great majority are not insensitive, but indifferent. They have sensibility, but the thing we call culture does not stir them. Architecture and sculpture, painting and poetry, are not immediate concerns of their lives.'[12]

In order to break the stranglehold of the volume housebuilder and the housing market, and thereby the commoditisation of the

[9] p.11, Read, H. (1941) "To Hell With Culture", in Read, H. (2002) *To Hell with Culture*. London: Routledge.

[10] p.25, Habraken, N.J. ([1972]1999), *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing*. (2ndEdition), London: Urban International Press UK.

[11] p.14, Read, H. (1941) "To Hell With Culture", in Read, H. (2002) *To Hell with Culture*. London: Routledge.

[12] p.26, Read, H. (1941) "To Hell With Culture", in Read, H. (2002) *To Hell with Culture*. London: Routledge.