

manifesto of the Space Hijackers

Introduction

The Space Hijackers are Anarchitects, we oppose the hierarchy that is put upon us by Architects, Planners and owners of space. Through the events that we hold and the objects that we produce we are attempting to corrupt the culture of architecture, and destroy the hierarchies that exist. The world is moving faster and faster towards a state of global capitalism, meaning that corporations and institutions are playing an ever-increasing and more important role within our lives. Companies are being forced into an ever more competitive market, where even the slightest of changes in approach, can make a big difference to their turn over. This has created the need for highly specific methods of research to be developed, to trace trends within populations and monitor habits. Information is now stored about every minute detail of life, this goes on to aid business and government in predicting our reactions and therefore to plan accordingly. Data collection agencies exist in order to predict things ranging from what you are likely to spend your wages on, through to which direction you are most likely to turn when entering a shop (right, in case you were wondering). The creation of the right environment for work or retail space, can greatly affect the productivity of that space, and is becoming a matter of ever more anxious and particular attention. In our current climate business can't afford to get these things wrong You can no longer innocently go about your business, people will want to know and be prepared for every move you are likely to make. Every space that you pass through will have been designed with you in mind. The utilisation and design of architecture, is playing an ever more important role in the corporate world. When used in the correct way it can be a very effective thing. As time has gone by governments and corporations have played a larger part and become increasingly present in urban space. Every high street is now brimming with security cameras, (for our protection of course) and every public space is designed with traffic flow in mind. People have become units to be directed and physically moved around space. The state creates a system within which we move and live, a functional space on a massive scale. Control of the users of space has often taken the form of obvious physical devices within architecture, however contemporary architecture also puts to use much more subtle devices within its design. It now works on a psychological as well as physical level. Space is designed to affect our moods, and put us into the frame of mind that companies require in order to be in a position to compete with their rivals, to do this they use both the language of their architecture and knowledge of how we react to space.

Retail

Retail establishments are designed with specific devices, which have been developed by painstakingly watching hours of security tapes of our reactions, and monitoring sales figures in comparison to shop layouts. Competition between such establishments is rife, and in order to compete these companies are resorting to ever more clandestine methods. Companies are contracted to research consumer habits, and pass on this information to shop designers who put it to use. The end of supermarket aisles are now rounded so that your eyes need never be averted from the stock, different sized tiles

are placed on the floor with smaller ones in more expensive areas, causing your trolley to click faster and you to slow down. Department store executives know that most people turn right after walking through the door, so this is where you will often find the best bargains, or lines they have an interest in selling. They also carpet sections of their stores and leave others with vinyl passages, in order to control your movement around the shopping floor. Architecture is analogous to a type of language, buildings, and the layouts and components within them can act as a text, instructing users how they are intended to be used and affecting ambience of the space. However users of space read this language in a distracted manner, the messages and signifiers within are therefore not consciously noted. We are too busy getting on with whatever business we are there for, to spend time laboriously deciphering the language of the space. It is because of this that companies can guide us around retail space and control our experience of that space.

Corporate Space

Corporate space works along the same lines, it is through a process of mythification that business space claims a dominance over the users and visitors to that space. This is an essential part of contemporary business, where corporate image and reputation can make or break a company on the stock market. A certain paranoia exists within the corporate world because companies and the people that work for them, are being forced into constantly projecting an impressive and competent image. Confidence is valuable currency in the stock market and business world as a whole. Corporate architecture acts as a signifier of the myth of the efficient and powerful corporation, it is a physical symbol and public face of that corporation. Its forms imply the myth and are read as such, although as with all signs the link is arbitrary. A vocabulary of signs is built up and reused by corporate architects in order to exert some control over the mood and behaviour of the users of that space. The people who work in the city begin to believe the myths of the city, and try to live up to the image of the efficient and business like lifestyle. Of course they don't manage it, nobody does, from office clerks to managing directors, so dissatisfaction sets in. People work harder in order to keep up their appearance and the corporations benefit.

As we can see, users of space are placed in a position of subordination in comparison to the owners of space, a hierarchy exists, although hardly an unexpected one. Space is designed in order to exert control over its users, for the means of the people who own it, to do this the services of architects are employed.

Architects

Architects work by commission, they are presented with a set of requirements and design a space to meet them. They have to drop any moral obligation to the users of space when accepting the commission, this can be achieved as architects have a very different relationship with space, than other users. Architects design space in an almost sculptural way, they look to create a pure

architectural space that can then be contemplated much like a work of art. This being very different from the way that general users of space see it, we use space, it is the background to our experience of the world. We look at architecture in a distracted way; it is on the periphery of our vision. An architect could never react with space in the way that a shopper could, as they both approach space looking for different things. An architect has been formally trained with an appreciation of the subtleties of space, they can never look at it with innocent eyes. Users of space are disturbing elements that enter into architecture, they are something random that the architect cannot design. To compensate for this, space is designed to control and manipulate its users into harmony with their surroundings. In order for this space to function as it is meant to, the users must be guided around it by various architectural methods. Because people disrupt the harmony of built space, they are not something the architect relishes, and so do not form part of his or her vision. We simply need to look at architectural photography to see this in evidence. Almost any architectural photograph you care to look at will have been shot with one very specific requirement, that the space is clear of people. The spaces of the proposal, architectural photography, computer generated designs and plans give the architect a space within which he can create without the invasion of people. People need not come into the equation, the architect can concentrate on the architectural elements within his construction, as people are not required and can be ignored. Through representing space in photography and design, the architect can withdraw it from reality, and therefore escape any moral obligation to the intended users of that space. It is a chilling thought to think that it is precisely through mediums such as these that architects win multimillion-pound commissions. It is by showing photography, mock ups and plans that architects apply to design the space that we live in. It is by looking at humanless drawings and lifeless plans that commissioning agents decide on how they would like their spaces to look. Governments and corporations pick our landscape, the stage that affects everything that we do, from designs which by their very nature attempt to withdraw all human life and present empty "pure" space.

Language

It is this mentality and culture of architecture that we oppose, Through direct action in the very space that attempts to control us, we work to destroy the hierarchies that are in place. This can be done by very simple means, as the Language that architects and corporations employ in their architecture is a very fragile thing. Architecture is like a written language, and just like the letters on this page, it requires a certain knowledge in order to be understood. As with any language system, the link between signifier and signified is an arbitrary one. It is only by social convention that we read language as we do, this applies to architecture as much as it does to English. Language is a construct of the society that uses it, it is a set of signs that are developed and used by that society in order to have a common understanding. Language only exists within the group of people that use it, it is not a physical but rather an abstract thing. Language is also something that can change over time; a simple example of this is the word "gay" in the English language. Once meaning a person who is cheerful or merry, it is now more commonly used to refer to a person who is homosexual. The potential flexibility of architectural language offers a weakness in the grip of architects and corporations over the users of space. It is through corrupting the language and signification of architecture that a real form of

resistance can be found. Myths can be demystified and signs rewritten. The Space Hijackers operate here, working to corrupt the language of architecture. We attempt to create situations or place objects within architectural space that affect the way in which that space is then experienced. We create myths within space that then go on to become a part of that space. Therefore the authority of the owner's text is unbalanced as another voice is now heard. The actions and objects become a part of the history of the space and thus become part of its language. We attempt to produce an oral architecture, which critiques the text of the architect and re-contextualises it. The oral language exists within the minds of the community that use the space and witness the event or become aware of it. It is through spreading by word of mouth that the intrusion becomes part of the oral history of the space. As more people become aware of it, it begins to affect the written text of the space and the signification of this text is changed to include the oral language. Singular authoritarian texts are lost under a confusion of other conversations. The changes to the language occur because the events change not only the history of the space, but they also imply a future. For example, we held a party on the Circle line for commuters, Hijacking a carriage and turning it into a disco. This changed the tube system into a potential venue for further parties. The possibility of having a party on the train has now been made concrete, and so there is a potential for future events. It is now conceivable that the carriage you are riding in could be the next to be hijacked. By setting up alternative realities for space, we confuse the meaning and language of that space, therefore reducing the authority of the people that own it.

Corruption

We work to confuse as opposed to replace the existing language of architecture. It is not a case of one belief replacing another, but rather a process of corruption takes place. We are not attempting to produce some kind of revolutionary other, which is almost destined to fail. Global capitalism and the architectural systems that it has produced is a mighty adversary, one that grows stronger still by using the very people that oppose it. If we are to change the way that the world is, we can't play by the same rules, as we will obviously lose. However these rules, the architecture and systems that oppress us, are all formed through language. This language is something that exists solely within the heads of the people that use it. If we change the language, we change the game. We mess with the system as opposed to simply feeding it. By affecting architecture in this way, it offers users of space a way around the control of the people that own or design the space. These people have no control over the oral nature of architectural language. A company can only own the written text of a building, the fabric that makes it up. A text whose author is effectively dead, and one that can be read in many different ways. Architectural language exists within the people that use it, and not within the architecture. Control for corporate gain is allowed by the very people that are controlled. We are as responsible for the state of language, as are the people that use it to their own profitable ends. The users of space create the greatest and most powerful force within the world of architecture; everyone is a user of space. We simply need to change the language that we use. By creating new and contrasting myths and stories within space, we can create 'Anarchitecture', whereby there is no hierarchy of control. It can easily be done, by methods as simple as making up and talking about various stories for places,

by simply verbally adding to the signification of space. The architectural language of places can be corrupted by merely spreading ideas about these places, within the communities that use them. It is a method of splitting apart architectural myths and creating space that is open to appropriation. A method of change as opposed to another revolutionary utopian ideal.

INSTITUT FUER RAUMFRAGEN 2003