Abstract

The period from the 1960s to the 1990s is very important for the emergence of architectural discourse in First World countries. This discourse was the result of the prolific publication of texts during this period that proved to be markers of a shift in architectural practice, raising awareness among architectural professionals and lay people alike regarding the state of the discipline and suggesting a need to alter methods of conceptualization, design and practice. This article reveals the relationship between print media and architecture, with a focus on the texts published in the selected time period.

This paper bases itself on the hypothesis that there was a prolific publication of architectural texts between the 1960s and 1990s and recognizes the emergence of the public sphere due to the impact of a variety of print resources, such as books, journals and magazines, on human thoughts and actions. This paper is divided into three parts: the first discusses print as a medium of communication, the second traces the evolution of the public sphere in architecture and the third identifies theory institutions as being part of the public sphere.

Keywords: architecture texts, theory institutions, printing press, public sphere.

In architecture, there is a constitutive relationship between built environments and the text. Both are forms of practice and are mutually interdependent. The act of writing in architecture has been given prominence since the beginning of the twentieth century. After World War II, the act of theorizing spread due to changes in concerns about life and the design of built environments. The anthologies published in the 1960s, edited by Nebel, Lenz and Knopf, show that theorizing and publishing were at their peak. Texts had a major impact on architects, architectural theorists and philosophers and encouraged rational-critical thinking.

The years between 1960 and 1990 were a key period, marked by the emergence of two superpowers (the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and their struggle for dominance. In the midst of this rivalry, there were those who began to question society's prevailing ethos. The search for freedom and a new way of life and the urge for human connectedness prevailed, with the emergence of countercultures and the rise of social media both in the United States and the U.S.S.R. Europe, though divided, had a rich intellectual history. This period laid the groundwork for a paradigm shift. The changes this implied have been analyzed by Kisho Kurokawa from a variety of perspectives. In architectural thinking and practice, there was a shift from conceptualizing designs with the human mind to using algorithms in design, as well as from print to electronic media, from the 1960s to the 1990s. Theorizing was on the agenda of the time; the period was largely affected by the upheavals within the profession, as well as among students. Critical debates, discussions and exhibitions were organized by the faculty and the student community. Major institutions hosted critical debates that were specific to the period, creating a public sphere by gathering together like-minded people who intended to change existing practices. The publication of this architectural discourse played a major role in the dissemination of new ideas and practices. This article argues that the architectural discourse is the result of the discipline's public sphere, which emerged through the impact of a variety of print resources, such as books, journals and magazines, on human thoughts and actions. The paper is divided into three parts: the first discusses print as a medium of communication, the second traces the evolution of the public sphere in architecture and the third identifies theory institutions as being part of the public sphere.
Print as a Medium of Communication

Throughout history, mankind has gone through four major phases based around different mediums of communication: oral (oral), manuscript (writing), print and electronic. Each medium has had a strong impact on the human mind and, therefore, on the thinking process. Of all these technological revolutions, writing has been important as it has not only transformed societies, but also restructured the way individuals think and express themselves and the meaning of belonging. An epistemological breakthrough can be accorded to the moment in which a coded system of visible marks was invented through which a writer could determine the exact words that the reader would understand. This is what is usually meant today by writing in the strictest sense.

In terms of phases of communication, the period from the 1760s to the 1960s was characterized by the shift from print to electronic media. McIntuhan’s writings analyzed the earlier change in consciousness caused by the shift from the spoken word to the written word. He observed this change in the thinking of European man and the consequent evolution of a new culture. This was also true in North America and the rest of the world, as there was a major reliance on print materials in academia. Universities such as Cambridge, Toronto, and Massachusetts, along with a few, had their own printing presses, allowing the voices of individuals to reach the masses. This period was characterized by Typographic Man, an individual who obtains a great deal of information through the written word and interprets it in accordance with their own personal understanding.

The period between 1962 and 1989 was marked by the transition in which humans started dreaming about a world connected through electronics. What happens to the human psyche and, therefore, to society when a lot of the information available is in the form of printed documents? The historian, theorist and philosopher of English literature Walter Ong argued that there is a relationship between human consciousness and the written word as “writing restructures consciousness.” His research demonstrates that writing attained its dominance with the invention of the movable type in fifteenth-century Europe. Print, an extension of writing, involved an external agency (a machine) that helped the text attain its final form. The typographic space fixed the author’s ideas on paper and was reprinted as needed, thus reaching a large number of people. Electronic media uses electronic or electromechanical equipment to transmit data to its audience, which can be accessed via video and audio recordings, slide presentations, CD-ROMs, computers and the internet.

In terms of phases of communication, the period from the 1960s to the 1990s was characterized by the transition in which humans started dreaming about a world connected through electronics. What happens to the human psyche and, therefore, to society when a lot of the information available is in the form of printed documents? The historian, theorist and philosopher of English literature Walter Ong argued that there is a relationship between human consciousness and the written word as "writing restructures consciousness." His research demonstrates that writing attained its dominance with the invention of the movable type in fifteenth-century Europe. Print, an extension of writing, involved an external agency (a machine) that helped the text attain its final form. The typographic space fixed the author’s ideas on paper and was charged with meaning, generating a virtual dialogue between the author and the reader. Analyses and critical review of a piece of writing were born when print materials on the same topic were published by various authors. This opened up the possibility of instant connectivity. According to Ong’s research, print culture led to a transformation in the West in the twentieth century with its intense publishing activity. The situation may be similar in the East, but the period may vary.

The effects of print are immense, but not explicit. It subtly generates a personal dialogue with the reader. Print media made different types of data available, which had a major impact on society. The diffused effects of print include the quantification of knowledge through the publication of mathematical analyses, charts and tables, the “correctness of language through the publication of dictionaries, and the confidence given by the private ownership of words.

The invention of electronics led to a new age that Ong calls Post-Typography and recognizes as a “Secondary Orality.” Radio, television, computer and long-distance messaging equipment have taken over the typographic space that was dominated by books and newspapers. These developments have not eliminated the role of books and newspapers, but they produce more information and transmit it to more people. It can be observed that the period of major upheaval during the Cold War and the transition from print to electronics occurred simultaneously. This transition can be seen in the massive theoretical activity in the field of architecture after World War II. The role of print was important to developing a culture that questioned the old ethos. This questioning affected all domains of knowledge and architecture, too, was transformed by the publication of writings that generated discourses and debates. Each text means something to an individual, which in turn leads to certain observations, either in consensus or in opposition.

The period starting in the sixties was one of upheaval, which was softened by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1991. The many writings on architecture that were published suggests that people were critically looking at issues in the field. The response to this professional crisis took the form of exhibitions, publications and the rise of theory-institutions. Notable institutions where theoretical writing was being done were located in New York, Venice and London. Lotus, Cavelletti, Dionis, the Yale Architectural Journal and the Architectural Association Quarterly were a few of the prominent magazines and journals that brought together various perspectives on issues of concern. The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts in 1976, Transformation in Modern Architecture, in 1979, and Deconstructivist Architecture in 1988, were a few of the major MOMA exhibitions where emerging architecture was displayed, discussed and analyzed. Debates and discussions on developments in architecture spilled out of the institutions to other places and platforms. This suggests the emergence of a public sphere.

Jürgen Habermas’s concept of the public sphere drew a parallel between eighteenth-century society and the Cold War period that was the focus of this research. The concept of the public sphere is not to be equated with that of “the public” – i.e., a group of individuals who gather together – but rather an institution that assumes concrete form through participation. It cannot be characterized as a crowd, however. The public sphere is “the sphere of private people who come together as public.” The formation of the public sphere implies a domain of our social life where public opinion is shaped, its access assured to all citizens.

The most important characteristic of the public sphere as it existed in the eighteenth-century was the public use of reason in rational-critical debate. The concepts of the public sphere and public opinion first arose at this time. Rational-critical debate occurred among the bourgeois public in response to literature and took place in institutions such as salons and coffeehouses. Habermas calls this a “literary public sphere.” For the first time, art and literary criticism became formal disciplines where those interested could make their influence felt. Inclusiveness was a characteristic feature of the public sphere, but acceptance depended on one’s education level and status as a property owner. Habermas emphasizes the role of the public sphere as a way for civil society to articulate its interests through gatherings at which societal issues were discussed. Translated into English at the end of the Cold War, Habermas’s thesis guided scholars studying the relationship between the state and civil society, the emergence and possibilities of democracy and the role of the media. Postmodern architects turned to the written word and theoretical projects to explore complex issues. The widespread academic publishing during this period resembles the recent impact and accessibility of desktop publishing on non-commercial markets.

Theory Institutions as Public Spheres

Public spheres emerged in the United States of America and Europe, engaging in theoretical activities pertaining to their own professional trends and currents in architectural thinking and practice. These multi-disciplinary think tanks consisted of individuals who questioned, debated, experimented, explored and rethought architectural education and practice.

Many architectural institutes and publishers were actively involved in bringing about an architecture that questioned the modernist movement. The most influential architectural schools were the Technical Architecture at the University of Venice (IUAV) and the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies (IUS) in Manhattan, which became nodes for architectural research and teaching. During the existence of the IUAV, those involved questioned architectural education and practice through lectures, seminars, symposiums and publications. The archive of both institutes suggest their formal connection by the concept of introducing theoretical viewpoints into architectural practice. Their conceptual grounding can be explicitly seen when the theoretical projects and teachings of their members are investigated.
The IUAV’s most influential professors included Aldo Rossi and Manfredo Tafuri. Rossi taught and conducted research at IUAV, and Venice was the city from which he developed his idea of “the architecture of the city.” From 1963 to 1965, during his time at IUAV, he and Carlo Aymonino questioned conventional teaching methodologies. They introduced “the idea of the design studio as a place for research. Their teaching environment became a kind of laboratory for exploring the idea of design as collective work, an approach that challenged the idea of the architect as either a solitary artist, the maker of images or a mere technician. From their viewpoint, the architect should be an intellectual practitioner working against, yet within, mass culture.”

This instilled a questioning attitude among their students and opened up avenues for research in architectural education and research. History teaching became another radical move that inspired critical thinking at the institute. The architects who taught history at the institute included Zevi, Benevolo and Tafuri. “At the IUAV, ...” Tafuri discussed Benjamin and Adorno, Lucas and Nietzche, about semiotics and psychoanalysis, establishing a dialogue between young students and left-wing thinkers like Massimo Cacciari, Alberto Asor Rosa and Mario Troni. Within the political climate of the time, this exchange was considered extremely controversial. Through his writings, Tafuri established a relationship between architecture and Marxism. Francesco Dal Co was an IUAV student with whom Tafuri coauthored research on modern architecture, published in two volumes in 1987. They identified and contextualized architectural challenges and questioned the emergence of form and environment as an arm of politics. This work was examined with reference to philosophy, history and urbanism and those associated with the institute were collectively identified as belonging to “the Venice School.”

As Italy was one of the major centers for the dissemination of theory, a public sphere focused on architectural discourse emerged. Here it is important to understand the role of the Milan-based publisher Electa and Contropiano or Controspazio, an Italian journal published in 1968 in the sixties and seventies, Electa promoted the “studies and knowledge of art as well as protecting it through increased public recognition; photographic documentation and the subsequent publishing of academic books.” Acting as a platform for dissemination, Electa published important magazines and books series in the field of architecture. Tafuri, Dal Co, Gregotti and Frampton were among the many who published their writings through Electa. Contropiano was a short-lived journal that grounded various aspects of material culture in theory. It was edited by the writer and linguist Alberto Asor Rosa, the politician and philosopher Massimo Cacciari and the Marxist sociologist and philosopher Antonio Negri. They addressed politics and ideology and the magazine responded to contemporary developments.

IUAV, an institute, Marxist and active member of IUAV, published the essay “Towards a Critique of Architectural Ideology” in the first issue of Contropiano in 1969. When it was later translated into English, it reached a wider audience. IUAV was an independent, nonprofit educational institution that served as an alternative to New York’s conventional universities. Students worked as interns and architects as research assistants, associates and fellows. Architects, both domestic and from abroad, engaged in a variety of activities at the institute, and the methodology and teaching styles they explored in their theoretical practices were adopted as a model for intellectual development and experimentation in later stages of their lives. Notable architects and critics associated with the IUAV included Kenneth Frampton, Manfredo Tafuri, and Peter Eisenman. They were not only interested in exploring new ideas and techniques but also in applying them in different contexts. They covered a wide range of projects and issues and their work was published widely in journals such as Domus, Casabella, and Modus.

Passionate yet varied in their approach to architecture, the institute’s fellows produced a tremendous amount of literature that investigated then-contemporary practices. They enunciated their ideas in essays and articles that were published in journals that were conceptualized at the institute. Opusen, a journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture and October was first published in 1973 and 1976, respectively, and the newsletter Skylines: The New York Architecture and Design Calendar was published at the end of the seventies. While focusing just on architecture, Opusen captured the architectural, social, political and cultural climate of 1970s Europe and America. Unlike Opusen, October focused on then-contemporary art and theory. The writings published in October were interdisciplinary, but architectural projects and practitioners were not published. However, a certain common ground did exist between the journal and the architectural community. The reconsideration of criticism in the light of structuralist and semiotic theory can be seen as an intellectual project shared by the editors of Opusen. Authors and editors at Opusen included Kenneth Frampton, Manfredo Tafuri, Peter Eisenman and Anthony Vidler and their writings for IUAV have been republished in many anthologies.

Independent groups of students and alumni at different universities engaged in debates and discussions and their ideas were published by their respective universities press, adding to ongoing debates on architecture and urbanism. Architectural journals published during this period include Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal, published by the Yale School of Architecture and distributed by net Press since 1952; the University of Pennsylvania’s va: and Architectural Association Quarterly from 1969 to 1982, the University of Virginia’s Modulus, which first appeared in 1979; Polis, a student publication from Columbia’s graduate school, which was published from 1979 to 1987; the Harvard Architectural Review from Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design, published since 1980; the Princeton Journal, published by Princeton University Press since 1983 and renamed the Princeton Architectural Journal in 1992; and Center published by the University of Texas at Austin since 1985.

In addition to these institutions focusing on theoretical discourse and the publication of journals by university presses, there was a variety of magazines that published important works of architecture from their places of origin, but during the seventies and eighties, they began to cater to an international scene. They proved to be the real marker of then-contemporary practices.

In response to a period marked by architectural challenges, many platforms were created where like-minded people gathered together and critically investigated the situation. They not only questioned traditional belief systems and patterns of work, but also provided solutions that were formulated theoretically and, therefore, could be applied in different contexts. They covered a varied range of topics and issues, and their work was published in journals such as Domus, Casabella, and Modus.
Conclusions

In sum, these public spheres focused on print as a medium of communication, allowing debates and curated exhibitions to reach a larger audience. They voiced their concerns in a way that situated architectural production not just based on words, but also supported by drawings and images.

Print media has had a huge impact on architecture since the twentieth century. The electronic printing press was able to generate a corpus of literature that was much greater when reading books, periodicals and newspapers. With the proliferation of printing, the world truly became a global village. For example, in post-World War II Japan, when traveling outside Japan was restricted for Japanese citizens, Kenzo Tange saw and read about the architecture of Le Corbusier in magazines, which inspired him to become an architect. The electronic printing press was able to generate a corpus of literature that was much greater when reading books, periodicals and newspapers.

Electronic printing press was able to generate a corpus of literature that was much greater when reading books, periodicals and newspapers. With the proliferation of printing, the world truly became a global village. For example, in post-World War II Japan, when traveling outside Japan was restricted for Japanese citizens, Kenzo Tange saw and read about the architecture of Le Corbusier in magazines, which inspired him to become an architect. The electronic printing press was able to generate a corpus of literature that was much greater when reading books, periodicals and newspapers.

Endnotes

10. Kate Nebenni, Throwing a New Agenda for Architecture, 22.
11. Jürgen Habermas, A German sociologist whose thesis on the structural transformation of the public sphere, published in 1962 (translated into English in 1991), was influential during this time.
12. Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, 27.
13. Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, IX.
14. Kate Nebenni, Throwing a New Agenda for Architecture, 22.
15. VLAN was one of the first architectural schools in Venice, established in 1926, but the period from 1945 to 1970, under the leadership of Giuseppe Samonà, was when it began to explore theoretical discourse.
16. VLAN, on the other hand, was set up by a board of architects led by Peter Eisenman in 1967. The institute was shut down in 1995 due to the financial crisis.
23. Kate Nesbitt, ed. Throwing a New Agenda for Architecture, 17.
24. Kate Nesbitt, ed. Throwing a New Agenda for Architecture, 22.
25. VLAN was one of the first architectural schools in Venice, established in 1926, but the period from 1945 to 1970, under the leadership of Giuseppe Samonà, was when it began to explore theoretical discourse.
26. VLAN, on the other hand, was set up by a board of architects led by Peter Eisenman in 1967. The institute was shut down in 1995 due to the financial crisis.

References