MANIFESTO for Architecture, issue: final draft

PRELIMINARIES

The Author is Stuart Harrison (stuart.harrison@rmit.edu.au)

The Manifesto is defined as this document and accompanying model-object. It utilises the Architectural Specification as type.

1. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Where possible, retain existing building and re-use. Identify significant historical features and make good. Engage in histories of existing buildings and their architects and possible precedents for these buildings. Extend where possible, rather than start anew.

2. SITE & GROUNDWORKS

Use the site and the immediate context as a generative limitation that affirms the nature of the site and this context. This context should be studied and engaged with. Utilise the typological nature of the site to advantage the design of new works; such as the use of hidden levels, roofscapes and the like.

3. STYLE & FASHION

Be critically aware of current taste in design and subvert. Identify the previous decade as dated and label all that is not to your liking as such. Identify the most unfashionable trends in recent architectural history as possible sources.

4. STEEL & CONCRETE

Be aware of the two primary methods of medium and large building construction and use as required – that is to know how the building is to be built is important. Avoid the process of converting design into building; design a building. Conversely, be wary of the expression of structure as an idea in itself.

5. IDEAS & EXPRESSION

Ideas are the result of either appropriation or originality. Good ideas are often both. Ideas have a history and these are manifested through architecture. “Economy of Expression”[1] tells us that gestures should work hard, do several things – so that we get as much “Bang for the Buck”[2]. There is no separation between programmatic function and expressive function. It is required that all Architectural Projects have a minimum of one Idea.

6. WINDOWS & DOORS

Know that most buildings are primarily faced through walls with windows. Consider that windows and doors are two-way and that leaving may be as important as arriving, night as important as day. Know that light is a central consideration in architecture, but is not an idea in itself, that is to say Phenomena are not necessarily interesting. Windows and doors are some of the most ordinary components of a building, and buildings are ordinary.

7. HISTORY & CULTURE

Know that Architecture is a cultural act, and is both able to define, but more often act as framework for culture. History has not, despite some thought suggesting otherwise, ended. What is being attempted in any Architectural project has probably been attempted before in various cultures, and the Architect should obtain this information and utilise. Architects, whilst being agents of a particular discipline, should draw from other cultural output, particularly Film and the Visual Arts.

8. GEOMETRY & SHAPES

Question whether the building to be designed is an object or an extension of the site. Where possible, follow a consistent geometry through different scale and drawn projections of the project. Be aware of the potency of being able to describe the building as recognisable shape, and know that it will be described as such by others.

9. PLUMBING & ELECTRONICS

Centralise plumbing locations unless a good reason dictates otherwise; enable reasonable access in the future for maintenance. Architects should be wary of excessive wet areas in buildings. Provide provision for current and future electrical cabling, as to ensure flexibility.

10. COMPUTERS & TECHNOLOGY

Computer machines are used widely in the design and documentation of buildings and products. They provide many opportunities to the Architect for efficiency and new design thinking; and should be used exhaustively by the Architect in addition to existing methods and thought. The outcome of architecture remains the design of buildings. New materials remain the principal engagement with Technology for the Architect. New materials should be used where possible to both improve amenity and for new effect. Architects should know buildings are low-tech objects and embrace their inherent qualities.

11. COMPROMISE & INNOVATION

It is the nature of the development and realisation of the Architectural Project (Building) that compromise will occur. This should be seen as part of a design process and an opportunity to improve the scheme through the act of re-design. It is uncommon that after this the design is worse; in addition the most important qualities of a design reveal themselves though compromise. Innovation occurs through negotiation and the openness to both new methods and historical models.

12. DRAWINGS

The role of drawings is central in the communication of the intention of a project. Projects should be intended to be built – even if it is known that they will not. All methods of drawing should be at the disposal of the Architect, and should be employed in order to suit the nature of the project. These include the Plan, as the principal vestibule of architectural intent, the Section, the Elevation, the Aerial View, the Interior View, the External View, the Diagram, the Axonometric and the Collage. Drawings should describe the Ideas of the Building, and outline the path to a consistent outcome. The act of drawing is part of the process of design. Drawings are not merely a representation of design; they are the project until built.

13. COLUMNS, FLOORS AND WALLS

The fundamental components of a building present a fundamental test of the Architect. Columns should engage with walls in one of three key ways - in front of, behind or in the wall. The Architect should consider that walls can be considered as columns after a certain proportion is reached; that columns can have interiors - that also floors and walls also can. It is known that floors are primarily flat for a good reason, but that in some cases do not have to be. The same is true of walls and columns being vertical. The alteration of the normative mode for these elements is not on its own interesting.

14. RESOURCES & RESPONSIBILITY

It is the ethical responsibility of the Architect to use resources in a mindful and economic way. Wastage is to be avoided. Economy of resources forces a more intelligent response. It is the key responsibility of the Architect to satisfy an accepted relevant problem, be it inherited or developed by them; whilst adding to the culture of Architecture by doing.

---

[1] Michael Markham
[2] Peter Corrigan