

DECONSTRUCTIVE DESIGN

6



One of the outstanding features of early twentieth century modernism lies in the seamless integration of art and design. De Stijl, Constructivism the Bauhaus and their successors brought art into life via design and architecture. Such movements had a much more direct impact on life-praxis than Dada and Surrealism. Although there was a significant degree of interaction between the dadaists and the constructivists there was no ‘postmodern’ hybridization of these genres in the early twentieth century. Instead geometric abstraction in art, design and architecture became a stylistic hegemony that claimed to be the ideal form for an industrialized world. Herein lies a crucial distinction between modernism and postmodernism, the former seeks after the ideal style for the modern age whereas the latter is based an appreciation of difference and diversity.¹

The elegant restraint of classical modernism became the dominant corporate style throughout the twentieth century. But vanguard art demands variety and after the cultural hiatus of WWII the transgressive side of modernism epitomized by Dada and Surrealism moved from the fringes of fine art to the centre.

Transgressive modernism expressed itself in the primarily conceptualist direction inspired by the readymade,



the dada and surrealist explorations of chance, and the relationship between fine art and popular culture. By the 1980s transgressive modernism had made sufficient cultural inroads for the architectural historian Charles Jencks to use the term 'postmodern' to refer to the work of architects who turned away from the ideal forms of modernist geometric abstractionism towards a pluralist eclecticism {Jencks, 1987}. Jencks' notion of a postmodern turn pointed to an emerging visual-discursive territory wherein design was reintegrating with art and art with design.

There has been a slow but significant return to an integration of art, architecture and design at the turn of the millennium. And in the new climate the 'form follows function' dictum of classical modernism is challenged by the capacity to play with the repertoire of ism's that is a key feature of postmodernism in both art and design. A reintegration of art, and/or architecture and design in art of the 1990s and 2000s is evident in the work of Liam Gillick, Langlands & Bell, Atelier van Lieshout (Joep van Lieshout), Jorge Pardo, Tobias Rehberger, Andrea Zittel, Andreas Wohnseifer and Heimo Zobernig.

The reintegration of design and art was amplified in Documenta 8 (1987) when the famous Italian designers Paolo Deganello (of the Archizoom group) and Ettore Sottsass (of the Memphis group), exhibited items of furniture that pushed the boundary of form and function to the point where they intersected with Kant's definition of art as form without function.

Interestingly, there are many sculptors who cross-fertilize their work with furniture, they include: John M Armleder, Richard Artschwager, Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset, Thomas Grünfeld, Niek Kempes, Atelier van Lieshout, Joep



van Lieshout, Reinhardt Mucha, Jorge Pardo, Tobias Rehberger, Jan Vercruyse, Manfred Wakolbinger, Franz West, and Andrea Zittel. From the elevated perspective of Fine Art 'furniture' might seem a lowly topic. But in the wake of the readymade and the 'just one more object' attitude of American minimal artists a focus on furniture has acquired avant-gardist status.