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Introduction to spectacle and the screen

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From the Latin *specere* (to look at), *spectare* (to view, watch, behold) and *spectaculum* (place from which shows are seen), the meaning of spectacle has evolved from the 13th Century French spectacle (public show) and mid-14th Century English (specially prepared or arranged display) to the more contemporary and widespread connotation of “visually striking performance,” a “scene regarded in terms of its visual impact” and “an event that is memorable for the appearance it creates.”[1] Progressing from the original meaning of Roman games and preindustrial festivals, carnivals, fairs and theaters, to that of radiophonic, televised, cinematic and/or Hollywood representations in both industrial and postindustrial societies, the meaning of spectacle has acquired such extensive recognition so as to apply potentially to each and every sphere of contemporary existence. Among them, those pertaining to the spectacular dramatization of individual differences through to the “glamour, heroism [and] the libidiously successful [...] [of] the narcissistic self.”[2]

Providing a context, background or framework for such an all-encompassing concept is therefore challenging. And not only due to its inexhaustible range of applications but also and foremost due to such possibilities only beginning to be recognized as a potential field of research by the broader academic community in the last decade of the 20th Century. Appearing to offer a form of liberation from work or activities and institutions concerned with social production and reproduction, the spectacular has come to be defined not so much as the opposite of the everyday, but rather as a *representation of the opposite of the everyday* whose complex ontological configuration “presents itself as extraordinary whilst confirming the dominance of the everyday.”[3] This has made the notion of spectacle and its corresponding adjective, spectacular, relevant and applicable not just to virtually every aspect of architecture, urban studies or design, but also to the mundane by and large.

To the same degree and being recognized as an integral aspect of contemporary spectacle, entertainment and/or manipulation of appearances, the screen is also undergoing an increasing degree of interest and investigation as seen in, for example, the work of the film historian and documentary maker, Charles Musser, or the visual archaeologist, Eriikki Huhtamo. While the former is repositioning cinematic studies in the broader context of the *history of screen practice*, the latter first proposed the word screenology for the launch of a new branch of archaeological studies.[4] By far exceeding the classic opposition characterizing public and domestic screens (cinema and TV), and now including such diverse screen configurations as tablets, mobiles and computers, contemporary forms are providing such a generalized and diffused interface with the world that not only 50% of future jobs are predicted to be screen-related, but the way in which our brain’s functioning is being reshaped by such new modes of interaction with reality may rapidly turn into a dedicated area of study, *screenopathy*. [5] It comes as no surprise then that this attention is further evident in the research of the visual culturist, Giorgio Avezù.

Of the manifold meanings and deployment of the screen embraced by Avezzù in his enquiry, such as the use of the now-removed screens separating the nave from the choir in Gothic religious architecture (*scrinium*, shrine) or the acknowledgment of archaic theaters as collective but detached spectacles of the world (*visorio*), the most cogent here seems to be the reference made to the fiction produced by the insertion of a screen between the viewing subject and the scene gazed at in the practice and theory of the perspective window as illustrated and systematized by Leon Battista Alberti during the Italian Renaissance (*perspectiva artificialis*).[6] Its inception, which the psychoanalyst, Gérard Wacjman, celebrates for originating modern subjectivity, is not only an indissoluble aspect of spectatorship, but encompasses the idea of a *medium* long before the inauguration of the digital.[7]

Predictably, the dissemination of spectacle initiated by the universal exhibitions of the 19th Century, accelerated by mass production in the second half of the 20th Century and increasingly dominated by the *entertainmentization* of daily existence in the first half of the 21st Century, has resulted in the screens of media culture currently working as sounding boards and even triggers of daily sensations and screened-out phenomena.[8] Further amplified by the formation of mega-corporations and the consequent interpolation of diverse sectors, such as communication (television, film, pay-per-view), gaming (video games, casinos), architecture (theme parks, resorts) and so forth, spectacle is now floating and mushrooming everywhere in what philosopher Marshall McLuhan prophesized as the *global village*. [9]

Contemporary modes of spectacle (and consequent spectacularized occurrences) are in this respect broad and various. They can span from politics, such as Bill Clinton's hugely media-covered sex scandal or Donald Trump's ascent to the White House by way of his freshly acquired media stardom through the TV series *The Apprentice*, to military conflicts broadcast everywhere on the planet with the Gulf War possibly becoming the first real-time televised military action ever back in 1991. From sporting events (Olympic games, World Cup soccer, NBA, Super Bowls) to the film and media industry including blockbuster movies (*Spider Man*, *Star Wars* and *The Avengers*), TV series (*X-Files*, *House of Cards*, *Big Brother* and *Love Island*) and international theatrical shows (*Les Misérables*, *Phantom of the Opera* and *Mamma Mia*, a pop mega-hit subsequently evolving into a long-running Broadway/East End production and two blockbuster movies). From *fashion weeks* and the spectacular lives of fashion designers such as Gianni Versace, whose assassination was a "major spectacle of his era" recently recreated by a double-platinum single (Bruno Mars, 2016) and a Netflix TV series (2020),[10] to the contemporary pop music scene as spectacularized by dedicated TV channels (MTV). The extravagant live and recorded performances of mega-stars such as Michael Jackson, Madonna and Britney Spears have, in this sense, paved the way for the 'spectacular' comeback of the 1970s Swedish band Abba, lately transformed into multimedia virtual performances.[11]

To the same extent, spectacle has retrospectively revitalized vintage theatrical genres, such as burlesque and vaudeville, as much as it has actualized, intensified and staged all possible sorts of situation, taboo and/or fantasy as those being displayed by the flourishing pornographic business. Hand in hand with the spectacularization of science and technology, including the landing of a human on the moon, cloning techniques (biotechnology), big data (predictive and userbehavior analytics)[12] and, last but not least, new revelations of black holes (astrophysics), spectacle is colonizing our existence to such a degree that all aspects of the quotidian, from the most banal and ordinary daily events (feeding a dog, painting a wall), up to a whole parallel universe of microbiology, nano-biology and quantum physics can be said to be shaped and mediated by it, for example, on mobile apps such as TikTok.[13]

Of course, spectacles have been traversing history in both the western and eastern hemispheres.

If the kings and emperors of the modern states have cultivated spectacle as part of their supremacy, this is not just due to the 16th Century diplomat and historian Niccolò Machiavelli advising his prince about the effective deployment of spectacle for governance, but also to the rise and fall of the ancient empires establishing universal precedents in their own right.[14] Starting with the Haussmanization of Paris and the introduction of arcades and galleries in the City of Light from the 19th Century onwards, the spectacularization of architecture and the built environment can be considered yet another ongoing and proliferating phenomenon far from full comprehension and analysis.[15]

What is unprecedented about contemporary spectacle, however, is its diversification and omnipresence both a consequence of as well as reliant upon the multiplication of digital media and communication technology, including social networking formats such as Facebook, YouTube, Skype, Twitter, Instagram and the like.¹⁶ Building upon a tangled process of digitalization of information, mostly implying “the crossing of boundaries between technologies and digital platforms, paid and unpaid, work sphere and leisure sphere, public and private sphere, consumption and production,” spectacles and mega-spectacles incorporating globally networked, internationally screened, virtually circulated and virally consumed events constitute the highly contradictory scenario within which architecture is found colluding, supporting and, increasingly, originating even more structured models of manifestation and consequent investigation of the spectacularization of both the visible and the invisible, as is the case with the phantasmagoric exposure of the Covid-19 submicroscopic infectious agent.[17]

By far exceeding the idea of representation, theater or performance, and part of a broader trajectory spanning from the Roman demagogical enactment of public entertainment to the most recent outcomes of *technocapitalism*,^[18] the meaning of spectacle addressed in this section of the Handbook is thus expanded and methodologically interpolated with allied disciplines in order to accommodate the progressively more diversified contexts within which contemporary architecture is either examined or materialized. Eventually charged with social, political, cultural and economic implications that, for the sake of brevity, are not always made apparent, spectacle and spectacularization emerge as driving forces of the newly coined notions of media-driven events and *spectacle 2.0*. [19]

Consumption to anesthetization

Although the contemporary notion of *spectacle* first appeared in *The Production of Space* by the Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henry Lefebvre, it is with the theorist, political activist and filmmaker Guy Debord that the term turned into a major conceptual tool to address the spreading of *The Society of the Spectacle* as intimately associated with and linked to the unprecedented production, and consequent consumption, of images advanced by a newly established and hyper-technological media culture.²⁰ Meant to describe the shift to a more invasive and pervasive form of capitalist accumulation, Debord's spectacle ended up describing a controversial form of society where individuals are prompted to consume due to all potentially antagonistic forces being neutralized and pacified. Situationism was born, a politically engaged, avant-garde movement horrified by the distraction brought about by the unparalleled proliferation of images circulated by both corporate capitalism (advertisements) and the culture industry (from cinema and magazines to

television). Lured into the unachievable dream of happiness and social upgrading promised by the consumption of spectacle, the spectacle of consumption and the entertainment therein, the masses were thus pushed toward liberation by the implementation of strategic forms of resistance intended to overcome both ideological oppression and political and economic manipulation.

The spectacularization of the built environment is far from unprecedented. From Shanghai's exciting new glossy façades, which one free market economist did not hesitate to describe as a "Potemkin village,"[21] to the hyper-buildings now populating the skylines of competing international super-environments such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Beijing, Dubai, Kuala Lumpur and Seoul, [22] extreme urban configurations have gone hand in hand with mega-events for which they provide an ideal scenographic stage prop. By promising a "world of dream,"[23] a "civic mobilization of achievement and overcoming"[24] is displayed as seen in the controversial Nationals Park sports stadium in Washington DC, where the image of vitality and progress provided by the relatively new facility only masks the material deprivation of the many residents excluded by gentrification.[25] An "instantiation of postmodern globalization," the triple movement of the globalization of spectacle, globalization through spectacle and the spectacle of globalization, such as that occurring in Latin-American countries has given rise to a systematic process of gentrification inexorably excluding the disadvantaged strata of the population, as Pedro Arantes and Cláudio Ribeiro reveal in "Western fantasy and tropical nightmare: Spectacular architecture and urban warfare in Rio." By turning a fake representation of socio-political changes into a *fait accompli* (a thing accomplished), according to a process that critic and theorist of architecture, Neil Leach, has addressed via the notion of architectural *anaesthetization*, ideology is endowed with the most disturbing illustration of its functioning ever.[26]

Guy Debord and his distinguished notion of spectacle is the obvious point of departure for Arantes and Ribeiro's chapter investigating an unprecedented admixture of spectacle, control and colonization which is rapidly impoverishing, manipulating and pushing aside the existing population in the name of an alleged "urban welfare" in Rio de Janeiro. The "tropical belle époque" experienced by the white community as a consequence of the slum clearances affecting the megalopolis – now complemented with the glossy facades produced by a sequence of newly built mansions, parks and boulevards, along with cafés, salons and the spectacular promise of urban renewal brought about by the spread of neoclassic architecture occupying the city center – clashes with the "black nightmare" aggravated by "epidemics of cholera, smallpox and tuberculosis."

The notion of *economics of appearance* by philosopher Giorgio Agamben thus correctly supports a further understanding of the ongoing 'rioification' of Rio de Janeiro in terms of the deterrence and apparent pacification induced by the *mega-events* staged in the city by means of spectacular urban and architectural operations. Under a thick layer of what Arantes and Ribiero term *extreme architecture and urban forms* that dazzle the world via mediatized varieties of exotic urban escapism, what we are left with is a pure and banal process of ongoing capitalist exploitation and sanitization in the region for far too long.

What is unexpected, however, is not just the role played by star-architecture in its total lack of engagement with the preexisting human environment but rather the role played by *urban imagineers* in reshaping the municipality in a way not dissimilar to that of Medellín as addressed in *Images of Medellín*, an innovative study by Christina Deluchi, where advanced sport facilities have reportedly turned Columbia's second largest conurbation into an "innovative and visionary city." Stemming from the collaging and superimposing of newly futuristic fragments onto the existing urban fabric, the ongoing patterns of social inequality shed light on the shocking contradictions caused by the spectacularization of emerging countries. Completely oblivious to the regionalist drift

animating relatively recent approaches in the discipline, such spectacular interventions both ignore and bypass any chance of a profitable interaction among the parts.

Some of Debord's insights, such as the passive condition of the spectator, the mediation of real life through pseudo-events, and the spectacularization of the built environment, were hardly exclusive. The idea that social inequalities were achieved by a system of falsehoods deliberately promulgated by the ruling class as a means of self-perpetuation had been inherited from the philosopher, Karl Marx, in his *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, as much as the view that political propaganda was further expanding in the nascent business of mass entertainment had been developed by a group of German intellectuals better known as the Frankfurt School, active since 1929. The Cathedrals of Light constructed for the Nazi rallies (Albert Speer, 1934, 1938) and Joseph Goebbels's ideological screenings for the Third Reich (1927–45), which made the most of the rising Hollywood techniques of ambience, scenography and film montage, are probably the best precedents to introduce the circumstances delineated by Aikaterina Antonopoulou in "Mediated spectacles: urban representation and far-right propaganda in crisis Athens" (this volume). By reflecting on the filmic representation of *Agios Panteleimon* (Saint Panteleimon) Square and the role that this contested public space in Athens played in the rise of the far-right and ultra-nationalist Golden Dawn movement to national prominence, the urban setting is spectacularized for both the *Other* (Asian immigrants) and the government to be scapegoated for the recent Greek financial crisis (2010–15).

According to the analysis presented by Antonopoulou, not only did the amateurish filmic material collected, montaged and posted on YouTube by the party's supporters prove crucial for Golden Dawn to gain popularity via a mediatized representation of the events staged in the square between 2008 and 2017, but it did so through a reconceptualization of the urban experience made available by technological representation and speed. Attentively choreographed and anticipated by footage of the party's aid to destitute Greek residents in the form of free food, the confrontations arising between far-right supporters, anti-fascist groups and the police as a consequence of Golden Dawn's xenophobic attacks on the immigrants populating the multi-story residential buildings surrounding the square is spectacularized to the point of providing incontrovertible evidence of the government's ineptitude, as well as of the threat posed by the immigrants. The cultural theorist, urbanist and aesthetic philosopher Paul Virilio's methodological framework on mediatized representation, here complemented by feminist thinker Donna Haraway's concept of *situated knowledges* and philosopher and feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti's *nomadic subjects*, supports an original understanding of the real-time manipulation of the built environment.

The stress on particular place-symbols in the square in order to build what Antonopoulou describes as "unsituated claims for 'Greekness' and 'pureness'" has, of course, many correlations with the rise of the Nazi party in Germany in the 1930s. From the symbolic reference to a past grandeur (Eurasian swastikas, Roman imperial eagles) up to the delirious and unrealized city plan developed by Hitler's party ideologue, Albert Speer, architecture has supported a long tradition in the propaganda staged by modern authoritarian European regimes, most recently reflected in the Gothic revivalism of Soviet public buildings in Moscow (State University, 1953) or the eclectic magniloquence of the most reactionary Fascist outcomes (the monument to Italian unification in Rome, 1955). What is remarkable in Antonopoulou's analysis, however, is the shift from the grand narrative of outmoded totalitarianism to the everyday as staged and encapsulated by ordinary individuals in their routine struggle for survival. The church and the square, more symbols of tradition and belonging rather than of power and authority, turn out to be the contested terrain to assert the making of history by the people for the people – or whatever is left of history once witnessed by the recording device.

Incidentally, it was through the groundbreaking genealogy of spectacle provided by Debord that notions of image, ideology, commodity, spectatorship and entertainment were reborn as essential aspects of a burgeoning intricate phenomenon. Progressing from concentrated (European totalitarian regimes of the past century) to *diffused* (Hollywood celebrity culture) and *integrated* (liberal democracies), spectacle eventually morphs into a totalizing concept whose power to disseminate, naturalize, universalize, exacerbate and further expand social inequalities remains extraordinary.

Duplicating reality

Since Debord's innovative breakthrough, the notion of spectacle has been constantly expanded to include and further contend with the *becoming image* of the world, thus confirming that the relationship architecture entertains with the photographic medium has a long history. Le Corbusier's photographic alterations of his own architecture, as much as Mies van de Rohe's photomontages of unrealized projects that were created by cutting and pasting photographic reproductions and drawings,²⁷ may by right be considered the primordial examples of a tendency now encompassing the collaboration developed during the 1980s between the photographer, Hans Danuser, and the architect, Peter Zumthor, whose early projects were hurled into international stardom thanks to the re-reading of the latter's work in terms of a profound connection with nature. The inversion of the circumstances that saw the successful contribution of the photographer, Maison Durandelle, to the fundraising campaign for the construction of Sacré-Coeur in Paris largely ignored, to a condition where photography is responsible for the increasing conversion of the built environment into a media event, very well makes the point that the architect's authorship no longer appears as the "main orchestrator of the message."^[28]

Commencing with literary theorist, philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes' pioneering analysis of photography and his understanding of the *punctum* as one's personal connection to a photograph, spectacularization marks the shift to a phenomenon whose proportion and magnitude actually exceed rational or logical explanation unless scrutinized from the broader rationale of the exponential acceleration of the capitalist logic.²⁹ Hence the acknowledgment of photography as one of the most powerful deceptive means for human contemplation in the chapter by Robin Wilson, "A 'crisis' of indeterminacy in the architectural photograph: architectural spectacle and everyday life in the photography of Lacaton & Vassal's Coutras House." Extracted from the works that have made the French architectural firm, Lacaton & Vassal, celebrated worldwide are analyzed in terms of a deceptive manipulation of the interiors via the photographic medium and the complex optical game that makes the most of its alleged self-evident transparency.

By interpolating post-structuralist philosopher Louis Marin's notion of *descriptive gaze* with art historian Norman Bryson's interest in the *low-plane reality* of the everyday, the issue is raised not so much about the increased limitation imposed by the editorial autonomy of the camera work to the authorial autonomy of the architectural discipline, but rather of the ideological substratum embedded in the photographic medium itself. Stuck between rhopography and megalography, such interiors reveal to the attentive yet skeptical eye of the author the manipulative intentions of the photographer (and clearly the architects themselves) by far exceeding the modernist use of the pictorial rendering. The widespread production and consumption of architectural images, through which the original artefacts are both mediatized and conveyed, henceforth enabled the shift from

the grandiloquent photographic style of the modernist era to the informal and indeterminate, almost intimate, everyday space of the post-post-modern age.

In this respect, photographer and theorist Allan Sekula's critique of the *illusory neutrality* of the photographic approach is corroborated to the point where not only is photography charged, as Wilson says, with creating "a complex and contested discourse about the architectural object within its media portrait," but one whose ideological dimension is obliterated to the extent of displacing the "absolute centrality of the architectural referent." The variants introduced within the compositional codes of the image, which the critical theorist, philosopher and post-structuralist thinker, Jean Baudrillard, first discussed as part of his seminal studies on the role of the image in contemporary society, turn the visible and straightforward language of architecture invisible and opaque.

It is for this very reason that the notion of image coding, subsequently developed by Baudrillard into the media-related concepts of *simulation*, *hyperreality* and *precession*, has intermixed with consumer culture, reality's duplication and indirect forms of capitalist exploitation like those performed by clients in apparently innocent activities such as leisure, shopping and entertainment.[30] In the case of X-Factor, the international talent show franchise now aired in 147 countries worldwide, the audience is exploited twice: first as a witness to the spectacular exhibitions of the contestants, and second, as a consumer of the product that the audience itself has contributed to shape, mold and promote in their role as undisputed and self-referential judges. Indeed, the x-factor(s) at play have less to do with music than with the drama and traumas of contestants, here spectacularized for the sake of an increased familiarization and emotive attachment of viewers to their favorite wannabe pop stars.[31]

As the heir of philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre's concern with the urbanization of society, as much as of philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (1927–40), in which the unprecedented combination of gas lighting, large shop windows and female prostitution dematerialized spectacle into desire, Baudrillard developed Debord's notion of spectacle into simulation, a genealogical investigation of representation where the pivotal notion of hyperreality is key to understanding the translation from a solid, tridimensional form of reality into the gradually impalpable substance of the image. Renaissance Italy can retrospectively be viewed as that particular period in Western history when the image correlated to banking techniques and the double book-keeping system reflected by and transposed into the mathematization of vision pursued and accomplished through the 15th Century perspective window.[32]

Consequently, Baudrillard's position opens up to a far more radical appreciation of spectacle than the one pursued by both Marxist and post-Marxist thinkers like Debord. By far exceeding the two-layered acceptance of reality informing the existing notion of ideology, Baudrillard's viewpoint stops working as a cover-up for a deeper, more genuine form of reality to become a self-referential simulacrum that prevents political counteraction. The experiential consumerism *a la Starbucks* in Milan (brand-scapes),[33] the deployment of ready-made images and popular culture in the Portland Building in Oregon (image-buildings),[34] communication and infotainment in well-known locations such as Times Square with its Nasdaq MarketSite in New York (media buildings),[35] and signature architecture like the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur (César Pelli, 1996), thus furnish the best examples of the expansion of spectacle to all levels and scales of the contemporary megalopolis.

Following the publication of philosopher, sociologist and literary critic Jean-Francois Lyotard's 1984 *The Postmodern Condition*, Umberto Eco's 1987 *Travels in Hyperreality*, John Urry's 1990 *The Tourist Gaze* and David Harvey's 1990 *The Condition of Postmodernity*, the proliferating translation of

architectural perspectivism into the flat and immediately intelligible format of the image has eventually spectacularized the urban sublime through the Westin Bonaventure Hotel (Los Angeles, 1976), ubiquity and simulation through *Shanzai* architecture (ongoing), novelty and authenticity through the Guggenheim Museum (Bilbao, 1997) and the collapse of architectural metanarratives (beauty, utility and durability) through the instantaneity and perishability of spectacle.[36] Expanding into hyper-buildings,[37] super-structures[38] and *simulacrascaples*,[39] such as Rem Koolhaas' CCTV building (Beijing, 2012), the Euralille masterplan (1989–94) and Disneyfied Asian megacities, the *trans-aestheticization* of the environment[40] is unsurprisingly and progressively being recognized as the greatest threat to metropolitan forms of resistance against cyberspace. As described by Farzaneh Haghighi in her chapter "Street Protest and Its Representations," the Iranian Green political movement of 2009 seems to produce the paradoxical effect of challenging the system at the same time as stabilizing it.[41] The ability of urban components, such as streets and squares, to work as catalysts of substantial political advancement, especially in the Middle Eastern context, becomes in this respect a research problem around which many other cogent issues revolve.

Among these are architecture's limited understanding and critical analysis of urban areas as restrained by an overwhelmingly constricted positivist approach; the contested *space of autonomy* raised by cyberspace, which, according to the author, may not eventually replace public demonstrations as the prevalent incarnation of political interaction; and finally, spectacle itself, with its seeming power to undermine social protests as an effective articulation of popular dissidence. By building on historian Iran Ervand Abrahamian's and sociologist Asef Bayat's notion of *pouring into the street*, David Harvey's and Henry Lefebvre's concept of *right to the city*, and Anthony Vidler's awareness of the city as the site where architecture and urbanism inevitably merge, an increasing inability to discern the difference between reality and its image-constructed counterpart is given prominence. Sociologist Asef Bayat's understanding of the street as the only theatrical urban model left to express discontent against institutional power, economic normativity and lack of visibility is here put to the test in the light of the degree of aestheticization with which footage of uprisings is amateurishly captured, shared and consumed. Increasingly looking premeditated, it is for this very reason perceived as a derivative form of entertainment.

In fact, it is from within the image that the migration of aesthetics from its original field of significance (fine art, design, cinema, etc.) to other spheres of existence occurs. The question is therefore posed about the street's ability to act as *both* a theatrical urban model to express discontent and to oppose the simulacra model imposed by an increasingly overexposed society. How this could be realized in a self-devouring, media-saturated environment, where the seemingly objective evidence of the violence witnessed ultimately turns into a contingent form of self-demystification, remains the challenge posed to the reader.

Dromology and stereoreality

Following urbanist and philosopher Paul Virilio's apprehension of the instantaneous sharing and feedback of information (*dromology*), and the concomitant doubling of phenomena (*stereoreality*), Marco Briziarelli and Emiliana Armano have recently integrated Debord's notion of spectacle in light of the rapidly expanding digitalization of existence.[42] Nearly 30 years after Virilio's 1980 theorization of the *Aesthetics of Disappearance* and almost 20 years after Neil Leach's *Anaesthetics*

of *Architecture*, informational capitalism is eventually accounted for by “the rising prominence of the intersection of information and communication.”[43] Notions of production, consumption, distribution, exchange, cyberculture,[44] video-gaming, mediatization, as well as mega- and microspectacle [45] are integrated in order for a new form of consumer to be addressed: one whose original and ostensible passivity promoted by Debord’s conception of alienation has rapidly shifted toward a more interactive engagement with the web.[46] In the shift from fixed to flexible accumulation, and from mass alienation to individual disintegration, private initiative, creativity and precariousness are seen as merging and coalescing into a variation of inactive participation that supports, almost unchallenged, the spectacular emergence of social media.[47]

The most compelling contribution of what has been termed *spectacle 2.0*, however, is the special focus given to the development – and successive integration – of contemporary subjectivity in the apparatus of present-day spectacle, which the communication specialist, Nello Barile, perceptively explores through the figure of the productive consumer, or *prosumer*, originally formulated by Alvin Toffler in 1980.[48] An extension of the working relationship between clients and professional designers, like architects specifying project requirements, the prosumer takes part in *spectacle 2.0* by completing every possible narration that connects the product to the brand. A subtle strategy through which people’s images are not just promoted but also endowed with a sense of emotional depth, unknown to the philosopher and political theorist, Herbert Marcuse, at the time when he first described the ideology of advanced industrial society, *self-branding* or engaging in the economy of the emotions is an ongoing tactic steadily shifting the spotlight from mass spectacles to their more recent and customizable counterparts.[49]

Dating back to the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, where the consumer experience was linked to the architectural setting in a way not dissimilar to the 1851 Great Exhibition in London and the 1889 Paris *Exposition Universelle*, this phenomenon finds in architecture the very catalyst for social, political, and cultural metamorphosis. At the moment when masses and more masses were driven for the first time into a relentless visual experience that promoted the primacy of the eye, *seeing* and *being seen* became the precondition for the subjectification and exteriorization of the gaze thanks to the major role played by technological advancements in turning ordinary architecture into overwhelmingly magnificent glass typologies.[50]

It suffices to mention, on this subject, the ideology of transparency in French president George Pompidou’s modernization of Paris,[51] the urban reconfigurations through space management,[52] the spectacularization of slums and homelessness,⁵³ and, of course, the challenging and innovative section of this Handbook, where the intrusive role that mega-events, media imagery and the massive deployment of signature buildings (*starchitecture*) are regularly playing in the expansion of spectacle into all possible spheres of the built environment is made all the more conspicuous. Via an invaluable assemblage of complex methodological approaches that range from visual culture to critical theory, from semiology to political economy, anthropology, geography, sociology, media studies and beyond, not only is the spectacle of architecture scrutinized and recorded as imperceptibly overlapping with a mounting interest in the architecture of spectacle *tout court*, but also manifested in the re-articulation of an increasingly complex imbrication of architecture with reality. Architects’ involvement in the decoding, redirection, re-signification and making sense of that same spectacle that they themselves have contributed to over centuries of untiring manipulation of appearances stems from nothing less than this.

Notes

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