THE GOOD NUGGETS

Orli Hakanoglu, M.Arch I, '19

These four Biennial projects were markedly different in their negotiation of the prompt, yet united in their success of producing meaningful, comprehensible, and visually interesting work.

1 T+E+A+M: *Ghostbox*

The 19th century romanticization of ruins as "authentic materiality" and their mediation through technologies of image production seed T+E+A+M's approach to what they call a modern-day ruin: the big box store. Once a popular destination on the outskirts of cities, this building typology is increasingly abandoned. Instead of proposing an adaptive reuse project, T+E+A+M takes a 'reassembly approach'—from the big box store's disassembled components, they create a stockpile of new materials which can be taken apart, moved around and built anew. Responding to the proliferation of images of postindustrial "ruin porn" (i.e. Detroit's Packard Plant), they populate their model with printed imagery of ruinous textures and landscapes, destabilizing the relationship between physical materials and their representation, and inviting new image-making in the process.

1

2 Pezo von Ellrichshausen: *Finite Format 04*

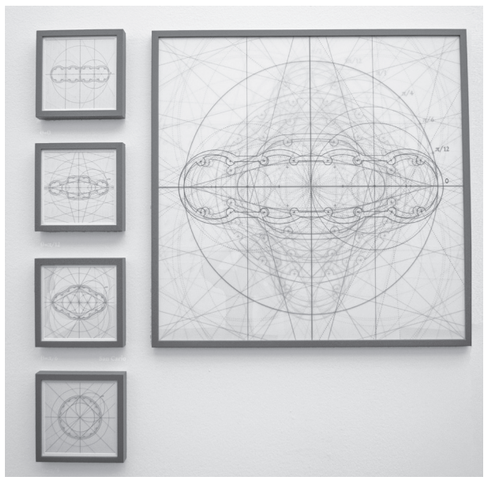
A seemingly endless grid of 729 meticulously painted watercolors of an imagined building form—half tower, half plinth—covered the white walls of the Chicago Cultural Center. The serial nature of the work was clearly in dialogue with process and serial art of the 1970s. Appropriately, Stanley Tigerman's 1964–1968 paintings were included on the opposite wall, clearly indicating the historical precedent von Ellrichschausen was responding to. Instruction-based building production never had a moment in history the way it did in artistic practice (such as Sol LeWitt's serial art.) Beyond its aesthetic appeal and impressive craft, this project makes new history by inserting architecture into a moment in history it was largely not a part of.

2

3 Cameron Wu: *Baroque Machinations*

Decades of Yale students who have taken Formal Analysis with Peter Eisenman and looked at Baroque churches will surely experience knee-jerk reaction to this piece: printed drawings illustrating the underlying geometric relationships within Borromini's churches. Upon closer examination, however, they feature a far more complicated network of red and black lines. Wu creates reference points for flexible parameters derived from the baroque buildings, creating modern parametric interpretations that straddle a current(ish) moment within architecture and the Baroque. The project makes an elegant arc through history in its historical precedent, parametric methodology, and traditional means of representation.

3



4 Charles Waldheim with Harvard GSD Office for Urbanization and Siena Scarf Design: *Heliomorphic Chicago*

Heliomorphic Chicago proposed a field of buildings describing two Chicagos that might have been: the viewer weaves through knee-height skyscrapers, whose precedent was recognizable within the Windy City's overall distinctive form, but reconfigured and reshaped for improved solar access and ecological performance. I was delighted to see a visually engaging, clearly explained urban project that engaged urban history while proposing ideas for future sustainable building practices.

4

RE: CHICAGO
Paprika! Volume 3, Bulletin 1
September 28, 2017

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MAKE NEW HISTORY

Over the weekend of September 13–17, *Paprika!* sent two student correspondents, Orli Hakanoglu (M. Arch I, '19) and Jeremy Jacinth (M. Arch II, '18) to the second Chicago Architecture Biennial, where the Artistic Directors Shannon Johnston and Mark Lee challenged the participants to "Make New History". The directors identified a number of emerging topics within the proposals, curating installations around the following themes: Building History, Material History, Civic History, and Image History. Throughout the weekend, Orli and Jeremy familiarized themselves with the work of over 140 participants, attended supplementary symposia, and participated in a number of events in the city of Chicago. In this bulletin, Orli and Jeremy reflect on their respective experiences and takeaways. The bulletin also features the work of guest contributor, Jonathan Heckert, Chicago-based architect and adjunct professor at IIT. The following articles attempt to relate the content of the Biennial to the broader field of contemporary architecture by raising questions surrounding authorship, audience, and context.

MAKE NEW MYSTERY

Orli Hakanoglu, M.Arch I, '19

This year's Chicago Architecture Biennial artistic directors, Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, identified a generation of architects who share a renewed interest in architectural precedents, inviting over 140 participants to "make new history."

As a student still relatively new to the profession, I came with the aim of exploring the state of our field through this lens, hoping to expand my understanding of the boundaries of our discipline, so as to place myself and YSoA within a broader contemporary context. Over two days, I methodically and deliberately digested each project's content, a process that understandably prompted my co-correspondent Jeremy to jokingly describe my pace as "glacial."

This process allowed me to realize with alarm that I only truly understood about 60% of the projects. To me, 'understanding' occurred only when the explanatory text was both comprehensible and consistent with and illustrated by the physical media (model, drawing, film, or otherwise) it accompanied. A project's aesthetic appeal was supplementary; it did not necessarily guarantee my understanding of it.

Indeed, the prompt seemed to mire many of the projects within the intricacies of history, pushing them into a domain so self-referential that those unfamiliar with the nuances of the profession would surely be alienated. For example, Baukuh and Stefano Graziani's (Study for) Chapel for Scenes of Public Life—The Meeting of Enrico Mattei and the Queen of Sheba, while certainly memorable for its scale and reflectivity reminiscent of a fun-house, presented an argument that altogether eluded me. Line drawings within the colorful double-height "chapel" space alluded to the fictional meeting of Mattei and the Queen of Sheba, a reference to Piero della Francesa's fresco in Arrezzo, Italy. With neither the model nor the explanatory text giving any clue as to the broader significance of the model's subject matter or form, it failed to leave a meaningful impression beyond its aesthetics.

I find it concerning that I, a student of architecture, was still blinking in confusion at more than a handful of projects. Bouncing between work and didactic panel twice, three times, sometimes four, and still walking away with a lingering sense of confusion was a situation I found myself in far too often. Given this obfuscation, it is not hard to imagine the average person, presumably less versed in architecture, feeling infinitely more confused.

My intuition is that the theme of the biennial, "Make New History," was detrimental to its stated aim to open up our profession to the public. The need to refer to history pushed many projects deeper into an already self-referential discipline. (The importance of self-reference within architecture is beyond the scope of this article, but I would argue that it often obscures, intentionally or not, understanding by those "not in the know.")

Within Johnston and Lee's statement for the Biennial were two conflicting aims. On one hand, they envisioned the biennial format as "a forum to reach and produce new audiences." On the other, they encouraged the participants to produce "innovative and subversive works grounded in the fundamentals of the discipline," and to not worry about keeping up with "micro-trends."[1] Effectively, participants were given a free pass to deal with substance rather than surface. However, in doing so, they repelled the very audiences they hoped to reach. The historic specificity of the prompt allowed participants to deny contemporary culture's appetite for rapidly consumed and comprehended images. Hence, the biennial attempts to invite the public into the inner workings of our discipline, but effectively closes the door in its face. Through its intellectual impenetrability, much of the biennial's content ironically prompts engagement with surface rather than substance.

At the 2017 Biennial, the reaction to architecture's opacity manifested in an ironic return to image-making. Paying close attention to how other people were digesting the work around them, I observed the projects which had the power to make viewers stay, engage, and often, photograph. These same projects appear repeatedly on Instagram. The projects are united by their general visual interest and aesthetic appeal, independent of their conceptual underpinnings. A quick #chicagoarchitecturebiennial search reveals the same few projects photographed many times over: the selfie opportunity offered by the infinitely mirrored surface of UrbanLab's The Re-Encampment, and the playful array of the on-trend millennial pink furnishings in MAIO's The Grand Interior. If the value of architecture, as conveyed at the CAB, is ultimately reduced to Pantone's color of the year and an infinite selfie, are the participants doing our profession a disservice?

To embark upon the making of new history is to navigate through a layer of challenges. At a fundamental level, it is difficult to construct or synthesize something new out of something old without repeating it. In addition to that—and this is where the obfuscation I experienced likely arises from—it is difficult to draw from from an architectural history known by very few outside of the discipline. To make a project that both responds to the prompt and illustrates its theoretical underpinnings to the non-architect is an immense challenge which only a few of the participants were able to finesse.

"WHOSE HISTORY?"

Jeremy Jacinth, M.Arch II, '18

The second Chicago Architectural Biennial opened to the public on Saturday, September 16th, featuring over 140 designers from more than 20 countries. Given the breadth of work, I emerged from the rooms of the Chicago Cultural Center dazed and overly stimulated, wondering what the takeaway from this year's show is. Slowly my eyes began to adjust from the flashy fluorescent models, the ironic furry thing, the dizzying reflections of reflections and the overwhelmingly bright pink arrangement of furniture referencing a Duchampian paradox. Sensation returned to my feet after traversing four floors of the densely packed exhibition: room after room of dressed-up models on custom bases, walls plastered with alluring yet obfuscating imagery, and impenetrable texts referencing obscure theories. When my mind was finally able to refocus, I couldn't help but notice an overarching tone to the work; I was left scratching my head. What do we call this—dare we say—Neo Post-Modern Architecture?

Reflecting further, and taking into account this year's theme, "Make New History," I am confronted with a question regarding this so-called "New History:" whose history are we talking about? Given the work in the show, is this not just an ironic rehash of recent Western architectural histories, removed from the larger context of history? If we accept that the vast, diverse category of Post-Modernism in architecture was birthed through a critique of Modernism's avoidance of ambiguity. And that this avoidance resulted in a desire to infuse richness in architecture through embracing ambiguity, can ambiguity exist if its only source of comprehension is from the inside? Arguably, Robert Venturi's notion of the the "both-and" in architecture led to the historical citation so prevalent in postmodernism, but what is the significance, culturally or disciplinarily, of a historical citation of a historical citation? The "both-and" lead to Venturi's concept of the "difficult whole," which, seemingly, is now being embraced with a new vigor. Yet cultural content is lacking in this new incarnation, leading the work to fall into one of two camps: the simply ironic or, perhaps more deplorable, the kitsch (where the worst of Post-Modern architecture drove the final nail into the coffin). Are we truly embracing the "complexity of meaning, with its resultant ambiguity and tension?"[2] Venturi says "order must exist before it can be broken,"[3] but to what order are we referring in this new architectural form? If we call this movement Neo Post-Modern, what is the cultural milieu that these designers wish to stake out and what histories are they substantiating in today's globalized consumer culture?

At the Chicago Architecture Biennial, citation does not reference antiquity or modernism, but the ghosts of the Postmodern project, with, at times, an ironic engagement with the kitsch. With projects such as T+E+A+M's *Ghostbox*, I can't help but see the literal references to James Wines's proposals for the BEST stores from the 1980s, right down to the scalar letter graphic that adorned those stores. Additionally, these literal references are built into the curatorial design, with the two main exhibition spaces, Vertical City and Horizontal City, referring to two significant historical projects in Chicago. Vertical City, located in Yates Hall, reprises the 1922 Chicago Tribune Tower Competition as well as the "Late Entries" by a predominantly postmodern cadre of architects from 1980. The Horizontal City contains a series of back-breaking models designed for looking down into scenes of iconic interiors, all curated within the G.A.R. Hall based on Mies's 1947 master plan for the Illinois Institute of Technology.

As an architect, I must admit that I am excited to see a return to an architectural discourse rooted within the discipline—a certain disciplinary introspection. The overwhelming glee at comprehending the esoteric references gleaned through years of time in the Ivory Tower of academia, positions me squarely as an insider having a conversation with other insiders. But as I tap the keys of my keyboard, sharing my self-indulgence, I can't help but ask: "What is it that we are saying about architecture as a cultural practice, if all we do is speak to each other while isolating 99% of those who experience architecture? If we are to argue for relevancy, shouldn't we seek a myriad of histories with which our diverse world is capable of engaging?" In thinking of this year Chicago Architecture Biennial, perhaps we should remember Marx's expansion of Hegel's remark, "that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice." He (Hegel) forgot to add: "first as tragedy, the second time as farce."

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHICAGO ARCHITECTURAL BIENNIAL

Jonathan Heckert, Chicago Architect & Adjunct Professor at IIT

A looming question over this year's Chicago Architecture Biennial: what does it mean to "Make New History?" One can imagine the potential of an architecturally significant argument, ahistorical in nature, taking stock of the ruptures created between the fricative forces of progress and change. If this year's biennial is to be believed, then we have yet to fully transform from the physiological weight of our Modernist predecessors. As if all other interpretations are nothing but the redacted footnotes of some larger struggle for an intellectual autonomy within our own discipline. This benevolent interpretation has one, if not many, fatal flaws.

For one, if time is an arrow, then it moves in arcs, only scraping the surface of our curiosities and moving ever further into the horizon of our collective understanding. I can feel the weight of history pressing at my door, but I should never answer if I am truly an actor of my present time. History in this sense is nothing but a network of many histories, knotted together into a strange cooperation of competing events and subsequent discourse. In architectural thought, a new history can only exist within the liminal forms of this space, which is to say it does not exist at all, except within the architectural imagination.

A modern Biennial does not function to serve these means alone. It answers to a different type of master, one which is more political in nature. It claims to steer discourse in progressive directions while entrenching old notions. A show of this magnitude must be inclusive of many forms of participation, at the levels of expert and novice alike. As architects, we don't need the smooth materialism of an architectural Biennial to project our experiments to mass audiences, but we accept these challenges anyway and revel in their effects. The mechanisms already at play within our daily practice should allow for a more fractured reading of the types of historical events that this Biennial ponders. At its points of highest potential, the Biennial unmoores these discussions from their interior rooms and out onto the streets where architectural speculations can be free to engage, unbounded from the grasp of a curatorial few. It is here where the work sets its deepest foundations and creates its strongest bonds and it is in this tradition that it should continue. We should encourage a more radical transformation of the Biennial event if we are truly serious about the show's potential to "Make New History."

Walter Benjamin states, "Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art, the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction."[4] As we take stock of Chicago's two Biennials, do they measure up to the weight of their promises? In certain cases they do; the exhibited work as individual explorations into their own idealisms warrants a closer inspection. The vernacular is evolving—words like whimsy and pleasure have become platforms for addressing the contemporary arrangement of social spaces. Sites for the consideration of architectural intervention are extending further into the post-digital age as landforms continue to become supplanted by digital vistas. These new territories for exploration are now taking on refined forms as they re-engage their sites with highly attuned degrees of specificity.

Indeed, there are complex issues at work within the production of "Making New History" Perhaps "Making Future Histories", or "Making Past Futures" would better suit a thesis about the categorization of the present.

1 Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, "Statement," Chicago Architecture Biennial website, last modified September 2017, http://chicagoarchitecturebiennial.org/statement/

2 Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 1966. 20

3 Ibid. 41

4 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Book Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, 239. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2007