

The Museum of Modern Art

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RELEASE NO. 47

ITALY: THE NEW DOMESTIC LANDSCAPE

Counter Design as Postulation

Director: Emilio Ambasz

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Designer: Archizoom

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Patron: Abet Print

Archizoom presents an empty cubic environment which does not purport to be a space in real scale but stands for a universal space. The visitor finds only a microphone suspended from the ceiling. Lights go off in the room, and a voice speaks through the microphone a hard message announcing the destruction of the culture of the object. Briefly after, lights go on, a breeze arrives, and a soft gentle voice describes the confines of utopia.

Material: plastic laminate

Designer of audio score: Giuseppe Chiari; Voice: Susan Contini

Statement by Archizoom

Listen, I really think that this will be something quite out of the ordinary. Very expansive, clear, really well-ordered, with no hidden corners, you know. There will be a fine lighting, really brilliant, that would show up all those disordered things on the flat plane. The fact of the matter is that everything would be simple, no mystery and no extravagance of spirit, you see. Wonderful! Truly quite wonderful, very wonderful, and very big! Quite out of the ordinary. It would be cool there too, with an immense quiet...

Good Lord, how could I explain to you the wonder of the colors? Listen, many things are really quite hard to describe, because they are used in such a new way. And then, there's glass, there's wood, and linoleum, water, plants, pots and bases, and a lot of those used boxes, all in wood or plastic, and all empty...

The really extraordinary thing about all this is that many of these things are hand-made, especially the bigger things. Others are obviously the stamped-out sort. Household services will be just perfect, in wonderful colors, neutral colors, I'd say. The rest is all in light color, and there will be a big swing with room for two.

You see, there will be a lot of marvelous things, and yet it will look almost empty, it'll be so big, so fine. How good it will be, the whole day, just doing nothing, without working, and so on. Just wonderful.... (and so on, from the beginning

(over)

again). What we use then, in the creating of our own environment, is the least physical of all things, namely words.

Of course all this doesn't mean that in deferring the physical realization of this environment, we have let its image slip. On the contrary. We have instead given ourselves over to realizing a single image -- our own -- choosing to achieve as many again as there are people listening to this tale, people who will figure out -- and quite beyond any control of ours -- this environment within themselves.

Not a single utopia, then, but infinity of utopias, as many as there are listeners. Not just a single culture either, but an individual individualized culture.

We have given up making an environmental model, because in general, we think that we need to begin learning how to do without models. And because in presenting only one model -- the one that we seriously think is best -- we must keep out innumerable others, which is quite a waste. The creation of culture today is no longer -- or shouldn't be -- the privilege of a few chosen intellectuals, who supply users with tools of criticism that would explain the world, and formally organize an environment too. The right to go against a reality lacking "meaning" -- because it is a reality produced by a system itself lacking in "meaning" -- is the right to act, modify, form, and destroy the environment that surrounds us. This is an inalienable right, and a capability that every one of us possesses.

Culture, and the making of culture, with the formal action of doing so, doesn't mean expressing oneself in allegory or metaphor. It is a political right and not the subject of a linguistic critique. The task is one of re-discovering and affirming those physiological capabilities that are linked to the material facts of the body, and to the electric energy of the nervous system. Thanks to these, being artistic, the making of culture, both take on a meaning already complete in itself, like a kind of liberating psycho-physical therapy.

Self-production and self-consumption of culture together mean that one is able to free oneself from all those repressive structures that "official culture" has woven around us all. This culture, in attributing an infinite variety of "values" and "meanings" to the reality around us, in fact takes away our liberty to move about freely within that same environment. Our task is then to cut the moral weight of things back to zero, methodically contesting all the models or religious, aesthetic, cultural, and environmental behavior as well. In putting aside -- even for a moment -- the formalizing of our ideas as designers, we also interrupt that one-way direction by which things become a means of communication, of which the users themselves are inert and unconscious receivers. We can't have anyone else plan our private model of behavior, and limit ourselves to hanging up inside some reproductions of the French impressionists.

To go on planning "different" houses isn't much use if the way of using them is always the same -- that is, if the relationship that society imposes upon us is identical with all that which is not directly related to work

(more)

itself -- a limbo in which to regain that minimum of energy and that minimum of balance needed in order to produce once more during the day after. And in this way, our home becomes our most conservational place, where we seek all the contacts with a motionless landscape, which doesn't stimulate, but rather whose immobility soothes us during the contemplation of one's own status. It is clear then, that the form of the home is no political problem -- as Engels once said, the problem is rather the one of commandeering the homes already built. To be precise, the important thing is to modify the using of things and objects, and of cities, and their buildings. And the only efficient way to do this is to take possession of them. To own them, that is the problem, since first of all we must be able to become "owners" of our own existence, our own time, our own health and our own actions.

To become the owner of one's own life, one needs firstly to get free of work. Only in this way is it possible to recover all that virgin creativity, faculty that Man has available within himself, but which has atrophied down the centuries because of frustrating work.

The home -- that small, functional organization at the service of the tiny production firm which is the family itself -- the home in the form and fitting out that resembles that culture and those choices which no user has ever made and has never had time enough to verify.

Only by rejecting work as being an extraneous presence in one's life can one picture a new use for and of the home -- a perpetual laboratory for one's own creative faculties, which are continually tried out and excelled.

And so it is no longer important to imagine the form of this home, because the only thing that counts is the use that is made of it -- and its image is many-sided, never final, and has no codified meaning or spatial hierarchy.

A sort of "furnished parking lot," if you like, from which all the antecedent types have vanished, giving way to a spontaneous representation of the environment, in which one can practice one's regained liberty of action and judgment.

For us, the problem is no longer that of trying to understand what kind of liberty Man is seeking, or maybe of trying to foreshadow it in its current reality. The problem instead is that of giving Man an extra degree of liberty that will enable him to get it for himself.