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Theory 2 Midterm

Question 1

Postmodernism - the cultural since of rejecting modernism, characterized by the use of historicist references (EDJ, Late Capitalism and Postmodernism). The development of postmodernism in response to the problems of modernism has taken many forms. It is the intent to discuss postmodernism in relation to the writings of three different authors each of which take a different stance/form in relationship to their being postmodern and their contributions to the postmodern architecture. The authors being discussed include Robert Venturi ("Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture: Selections from a Forthcoming Book"), Alan Colquhoun ("Postmodernism and Structuralism: A Retrospective Glance"), and Bernard Tschumi (Parc de la Villette, Paris).

Based on the views of Venturi, one of the major distinguishing factors between modernism and postmodernism is the complexity within postmodern architecture. This complexity includes a renewed consciousness of history, the concept of both/and, along with the idea that "more is not less"(Venturi, Complexity & Contradiction). Modern architecture is known for its pure forms without any relationship to the program, it is simply an object of form. How it becomes what it is comes from the fact that many of the architects limit the problems within the program in order to create this pure form. "Less is more," follows the mind set of modern architects but from Venturi's point of view "less is a bore." The complexity of the program alone lends itself to a more complex architecture than that of the over reductive modern architecture. The exclusion of these problems within the program separates architecture from the experience of life and the needs of society (Venturi, Complexity & Contradiction). At the same time the desire to create meaningful and impressive form does need to play out (postmodern architecture is not a total disregard to modern architecture, it is simply modern architecture and... meaning, function, history, complexity, duality...). Postmodern architecture is about both/and, both form AND function. There is a duality between form and function, they are interdependent. The form must recognize that there is a function and within this function there may be problems that need to be resolved. Some of these problems may never be able to be resolved so rather than ignoring them

as if they do not exist, there should be room in the form for fragmentations, improvisations, moments of tension to be expressed (Venturi, Complexity & Contradiction). Along with the duality of form and function, the expression of history within the form is needed to add meaning to the building. This does not mean a hodge podge of historic ornamentation creating a false but picturesque building. It means taking cues from historic form to influence the complexity of the building thus reinforcing the idea that “more is not less” because more is adding meaning to the building.

While Venturi has very distinct ideas and concepts on what postmodern is; Alan Colquhoun seems to be trying to decipher the coming about of postmodernism and structuralism yet at the same time there tends to be a “devil’s advocate” being played out in his discussion of modernism and postmodernism. The major significance of Colquhoun’s article would have to be the progression of modern movement in architecture in reference to discussion of its “failure” and the antimodernist reaction against the modern movement. The belief that Colquhoun is playing “devil’s advocate” comes to light in a number of statements that he makes. He actually begins his article with “the term postmodern seems, by turns, empty or tendentious. Probably the nearest we could get to an acceptable definition ... the movements in art and architecture that have taken the place of an exhausted high modernism” (Colquhoun, Postmodernism & Structuralism). What this begins to portray is that there really is not a major idea behind postmodernism, there is no guiding ideas. Though later in the writing in the midst of his retrospective discussion on modernism and its good and bad points he almost seems to throw in the thoughts on postmodernism and its functions being tied to the particular work along with historical references and this “weapon of attack” that is structuralism. One will note that historical reference and the integration of function had also been major points in Venturi’s arguments for postmodernism. The issue that arises is that when one reads further into the paper he will encounter the following; “the problem that we encounter in the typical postmodern American office building is the lack of connection between the purpose of the building and the historical associations of its artistic form” (Colquhoun, Postmodernism & Structuralism). What is he truly trying to say here? Referencing Venturi’s idea’s of false complexity and picturesqueness, is he trying to say that the American postmodern isn’t living up to the desired standards and ideals of postmodernism or is this simply putting a negative spin on

postmodernism yet more concisely than the drawn out discussions on modernism and its negative aspects.

Another phase within postmodernism is that of deconstructivism. Bernard Tschumi's Parc de la Villette, Paris is a prime example of this discipline. Tschumi describes Post-Modernism as involving "an assault on meaning or, more precisely, a rejection of a well-defined signified that guarantees the authenticity of the work of art" (Tschumi, Parc de la Villette, Paris). With this mindset he denounces the existing categories of Post-Modern architecture and favors the idea of post-humanist architecture. The major intent of La Villette is to prove that it can be done without resorting to the traditional rules; hierarchy, composition, and order. The folies created are laid out with out any relationship to the site and surroundings and they their forms are manipulated with little regard to the program. "Deconstructing a given programme meant showing that the programme could challenge the very ideology it implied" (Tschumi, Parc de la Villette, Paris). The mind set is that the folies will remain with no regard to what the program is within them and the program that changes out within each folie will adjust to fit its surroundings. With the various manipulations that occur at each folie along with the meandering cinematic path around the folies, the intent is for the viewer to make his own interpretations of the individual folie along with the project as a whole.

Looking back on Tschumi, Colquhoun, and Venturi, there are major ideas of postmodernism that come to play. Venturi is a major initiator of the ideas set down influencing postmodernism. Looking back at Colquhoun, his writing actually makes one question not just the goods and bads of modernism but also question postmodernism as it is being played out at the same time. Tschumi, while admitting that La Villette is more posthumanist than postmodern still has a major foot in postmodernism, his extreme deconstruction of the program and the project goes against just about all there is to modernism and in so rejecting modernism it is postmodern. Modernism to postmodernism; what is next, where will the many branches that is postmodernism take architecture in the future?

Question 3

The design of the urban environment has gone through major transformations over the years, from the great Greek and Roman Cities to the towers in the park of Modernism, to the new urbanism trying to fix and salvage what has already been done. Not only have the transformations that have come over time affected the built architecture and its relationship to the urban space, it has also caused change and rethinking of public and private. To further elaborate on these topics, the ideas of Rem Koolhaas and his urbanism of uncertainty along with Margaret Crawford and her views of the blurring of private life and public space will be discussed.

Modernism hoped to create a new beginning, a new city that was clean and safe and had plenty of green space. But it failed; it created rundown public housing and super blocks with absolutely no human scale taken into consideration. The architect was trying to impose the building on the urban environment to try to influence and develop the urban environment as the architect believed to be the right way. In the midst of all of this the city still continues to grow and develop in unforeseen ways around all that has been created without consideration to what the professionals are attempting to do. The nostalgia of urban design is gone; urbanism has come to its demise. All that is left is architecture, “ever more architecture.” Because of this we have given in to the aesthetics of chaos, the randomness of infiltration. According to Koolhaas the only way for there to be a “new urbanism” is for it to be a stage for uncertainty, it will not be about the new and the theories and what could be, it will be about what exists what is and how to be a part of that. All that can be done is to surrender to what is already in place and develop around it inclusively. “In a landscape of increasing expediency and impermanence, urbanism no longer is or has to be the most solemn of our decisions; urbanism can lighten up, become a Gay Science – Lite Urbanism” (Koolhaas, Whatever Happened to Urbanism).

With the changing ideas of urbanism even in respect to the Koolhaas’ ideas of Lite Urbanism, the ideas of public space and assembly in relation to private space and life are continuing to change. Historically, public space had been the gathering place for men to speak and debate on issues and concerns of the day. This structured space of debate was a very exclusive space excluding women and slaves, women because their interest were presumed private and of the domestic realm and slaves because worker concerns were merely economics and self-interested.

Over time the barriers between private and public began to blur with women finding other private spheres where they were in public displaying their interests and voicing their concerns. Everyday space: “the connective tissue that binds daily lives together, amorphous and so persuasive that it is difficult even to perceive.” This is the space that becomes what is needed when it is needed for public affairs. This could be the overtaking of the streets in protest of a political agenda that is being pushed. It could be the simplest of things as a garage sale where the private garments, knick knacks, furniture, etc. are put on display in the yard transforming the space into a public market for the moment. This everyday space is the space that is “temporarily transformed into sites of protest and rage, into new zones of public expression.” It is a space of representation with the ability to have many meanings at any given time. Acknowledging the existence of this everyday space and the public implications and effects it has must occur. The ever changing urbanisms and the chaos and unknown of Lite Urbanism lend itself to the beauty that is the unknown of the everyday space, the Everyday Urbanism of the common people; the things that can be passed up because they are routine.

A great deal has changed over the years with the changing ideals of architecture and urbanism. In light of this, one must accept the uncertain, the unknown as inevitable. There is only so much that can be controlled and prescribed. But in the end, what will happen, will happen, an architect may design a space for a specific use but the people will use the space as they deem fit, a planner may lay out a city but the public, the venders will use the space within the city as they desire. Only so much control over what is to happen can be held on to, the rest must be left to the uncertainty of chaos.