Alles ist Design? Hans Hollein, MANtransFORMS, and the Cooper-Hewitt

In a survey of the literature on architectural autonomy, one quickly realizes that 'autonomy' can mean a number of different and often contradictory things. Autonomy has been invoked to call for a rupture with history and also for its reengagement; it has been used to argue for and against the duties of criticality; and in the name of autonomy architects have promoted and rejected the centrality of building to the architectural project, to name a few.

Lately, after the tumult of the post-critical, it is more interesting to consider autonomy as not an absolute condition, but rather as an interpretive lens that allows us to make sense of the design process and its products. Autonomy's slippery and multivalent character prompts questions about what kind of power or agency we seek when we claim autonomy, or when we reject it.¹ To reflect on this question, I first look to the early polemical work of Austrian architect Hans Hollein, specifically his infamous 1968 manifesto "Alles ist Architektur." Considered widely to be a wholesale rejection of architectural autonomy and a call for the dissolution of its disciplinary boundaries, I compare Hollein's textual argument with his visual polemic to find a great deal more conservatism than has previously been acknowledged. Secondly, I examine a moment when Hollein revisited his arguments from "Alles": his 1976 design of MANtransFORMS, the inaugural exhibition of the Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Museum of Design. There, he reformulates his polemic in terms of design, rather than architecture, positing this time a real and radical contingency for architecture.

WORD VERSUS IMAGE: THE AUTONOMY OF "ALLES IST ARCHITEKTUR"

In 1968, at the beginning of his third year as co-editor of the Austrian architecture journal *Bau*, Hans Hollein published "Alles ist Architektur," a manifesto that served as a call to the profession to rethink its disciplinary boundaries by radically expanding the category of architecture. With only one page of text and twenty-eight pages of photographs, drawings, artwork, advertisements, and collages, Hollein's manifesto primarily employed visual argumentation to take aim at some of architecture's defining characteristics. Architecture could no longer be defined by its end product—building—but rather by way of the problems it was historically called upon to solve. Architecture, for Hollein, not only provided shelter and physical comfort, but was also traditionally served as a representation of identity and cultural meaning, a mechanism of spatial and social ordering, and a primary determinant of mood and psychological well being. In Hollein's view, new forms of technology had gradually

ELIZABETH M. KESLACY University of Michigan superseded these traditional functions. However, technological innovations such as climate control, the television, psychopharmaceuticals, and the spacesuit proffered "perfected" forms of architecture, both sheltering the body and augmenting it. These allowed humans an extended reach through time and space, as well as a new level of control over their immediate environment—something that architecture, within its traditional limitations, could not furnish. Hollein exhorted architects to look beyond their traditional purview of building, redefining architecture from a particular form of production to a set of problems and desires that could now be met in other more effective ways. The implications for architects were received as nothing short of radical, serving to dislodge the profession from the authority that was derived from its traditional areas of expertise.

A true architecture of our time will have to redefine itself and expand its means. Many areas outside traditional building will enter the realm of architecture, as architecture and 'architects' will have to enter new fields.

All are architects. Everything is architecture.2

As articulated *textually*, Hollein's position, seems to dissolve the boundaries of architecture, obviating its forms, techniques, and products, leaving its practitioners with little in the way of firm ground and throwing its educational practices into question. Hollein's manifesto, assembled through *images*, tells a very different story in which architecture retains many of its primary characteristics that become important for understanding the larger world.³

Hollein opens his visual manifesto with a collection of portraits under the heading "Architects Ex-Architects," assembling together eleven men who were trained and worked as architects, and who were also writers, artists, fashion designers, filmmakers, activists, and political leaders. Paired with its facing page that features the 18th century astronomical architecture of the Jaipur Observatory and a critical portrait of Lyndon B. Johnson as a monumental edifice constructed from mechanical tubing, Hollein telegraphs a claim about generative and expansive nature of architectural enculturation and architecture's deep imbrication with political and scientific endeavors. Architects have always gone on to make contributions in a variety of other fields; architecture has always been deeply intertwined with other pursuits. Perhaps, Hollein seems to suggest, everything has always been architecture.

Hollein took aim at the notion of *scale* as a defining factor of architecture by showing how easily form moved across scales. One of his collages, "High-rise Building," features a spark plug set into a rural landscape where it was refigured as a tower, suggesting that functional geometries work across different scales of design. Similarly, a wingnut forms the basis for a monumental sculpture in Claes Oldenberg's proposal for an urban plaza. On the facing page, a Christo collage and a Robert Morris sculpture play with the perception of scale, suggesting that "huge" and "tiny" are not absolute categories but rather relative judgments of perception. The traditional bodily scale of architecture is challenged through these groups of images, as Hollein demonstrates the difficulty in perceiving scale as absolute, and suggests the sameness of design propositions between disparate scales. However, other aspects of architecture remain *un*challenged: form, material, and visualization techniques remain stubbornly present as that which architecture cannot jettison.

Hollein's polemic also returns to the longstanding relationship of the body and architecture. Once conceived as an important *model* for architectural proportion, organization and ornament, Hollein remakes the body as itself a *site* of architecture. Sunglasses and fashion are recast as forms of environmental and psychological control—the sunglasses as a kind of micro-architecture of environmental conditioning, and fashion as a communicative medium that alters how the (social) environment responds to the body. Photographs and drawings of Niki de Saint Phalle's "Hon" literally conflate the female body and architecture in the form of a large-scale sculpture of a reclining nude, whose interior spaces are accessed through a

vaginal opening. Just as the body has grown metaphorically larger, architecture is shown to have shrunk down around the body, contouring itself more closely to its needs. Photographs of Haus-Rucker-Co.'s project, "Balloon for Two," depicting a platform extending out from a Vienna apartment window enclosed by a clear plastic bubble are paired with a faux-advertisement for canned air that promises to eliminate such scourges as pollution, depression, and even boredom. Through these images, Hollein pressed the point that the modulation of environment and its corresponding effect on the human psyche—functions that are at the heart of architecture—could newly be accomplished more effectively by other means.

Two examples demonstrate the greatest advances in the solution of architectural problems by other means: first, the spacesuit is posited as fully-integrated bodily support system that replaces architecture as the ultimate form of bodily protection. Secondly, a blank page containing nothing but a gel capsule at actual size faces a reclining woman enjoying a reverie. Though she is dressed in a fantastical costume consisting of a metallic breastplate and delicately patterned stockings, lying supine on an intricately carved bench, the psychopharmaceutical has transported her to another place and time, to an experience more real than the one she is living physically. Through this collection of projects and ideas, Hollein simultaneously reasserts, first, the centrality of the body and the mind's embodied experience in the architectural problematic and, secondly, that building has been superseded by other forms in responding to that problematic.

Hollein's polemic in "Alles" has been typically understood as a call for the dissolution of architecture's disciplinary boundaries, "the removal of all boundaries between it and other fields," as well as a dissipation of its physical fact. This was a move likened by Liane Lefaivre to contemporaneous developments in conceptual art in which the physical object was deemphasized in favor of its cognitive underpinnings. Similarly, Craig Buckley has interpreted "Alles" as a view of architecture as a "connective device" that gathers up more of the physical and social world as an *idea* than it would seem to effect as a *physical object*. In both of these readings, architecture's integrity as a discipline, and its autonomy from external forces, comes under fire not so much as a matter of contingency, but through a war of attrition in which architecture's fundamental agency is eroded alongside its material manifestations.

Viewed another way, however, architecture maintains a real form of agency and autonomy in Hollein's polemic. When he proposes that "everything is architecture," rather than "architecture is everything," Hollein maintains architecture as an interpretive lens through which to view and understand the world. To say that everything is architecture is to thus structure everything in terms of architecture. Hollein writes that the core of architecture, which serves as that structuring system, are those functions it has historically performed and the desires it has historically satisfied. But what Hollein argues visually is that architectural notions of form, scale, environmental control, and representation not only remain valid, but are in fact central to navigating the complexities of the modern world. In other words, architecture's particular logics, techniques, structures and histories become an ordering system applied to the expanded field in order to transform the chaos into something cognizable. In this way, architecture does not dissolve, but becomes the conceptual lens by which the diversity of the world can be structured. It is not architecture that is contingent on the world, but the world that becomes contingent on architecture.

REVISITING "ALLES": MANTRANSFORMS AT THE COOPER-HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN MUSEUM OF DESIGN

A few years later, Hans Hollein began work on another project that allowed him to revisit the polemics presented in "Alles," one that conceived of architecture in a very different way—as a form of design. Rather than view architecture as crucial to understanding the world, even while expanding its products to the point of unrecognizability, architecture once again became a coherent endeavor centered around buildings and space, but it did so having lost

its conceptual dominance and even its claim to being a distinct field of endeavor. Now just one form of design among many, architecture is motivated and understood by ideas and desires outside of itself.

Working in collaboration with a diverse and international group of architects, designers, and critics, Hollein served as the 'conceptualizer' for MANtransFORMS, the inaugural exhibition of the Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Museum of Design in New York. The Museum began its life in 1897 as the Cooper Union Museum for the Arts of Decoration [CUMAD]. Founded as a "working museum" by granddaughters of Peter Cooper—Sarah Cooper Hewitt and Eleanor Garnier Hewitt-for use by designers, manufacturers and students, the museum's diverse collections included architectural drawings and plaster casts of architectural ornament, textiles, furniture, glass, ceramics, lacquer, and metalwork, among others. The Museum operated as an independent division within the Cooper Union, alongside its schools of engineering and art and architecture. In the mid-1960s, the school decided to discontinue the museum, citing its waning relevance to the Union's educational mandate as well as its cost. After a great deal of controversy, the museum was transferred to the Smithsonian Institution and a new home was found uptown in the Carnegie Mansion. The museum reopened in 1976 with MANtransFORMS serving to proclaim the museum's new orientation towards design rather than the decorative arts. Hollein collaborated with the museum's director, Lisa Suter Taylor, to elaborate the museum's philosophical approach to design, and the show served to engender that approach in a way that was accessible to the general public. To develop the exhibition, Hollein recruited a team consisting of architects Arata Isozaki, Buckminster Fuller, O.M. Ungers, Richard Meier, Nader Ardalan and Karl Schlamminger, designers Ettore Sottsass and George Nelson, filmmaker Murray Grigor, and design critic Peter Bode, each of whom contributed an installation to the exhibition as well as a companion essay to the catalog.

The exhibition served to accomplish a number of aims. First, it took pains to distinguish the Cooper-Hewitt from its predecessor, the CUMAD, whose controversial closing and transfer were fresh in the minds of the New York museum-going public. The target audience of the CUMAD had gradually shifted over the course of its lifetime from designers, manufacturers and students to scholars and specialists who approached the collections primarily historically. The Cooper-Hewitt sought to recapture the imaginations of designers, but it was even more concerned with developing a broader audience in the general public. As such, it radically expanded the categories of objects with which it would be concerned beyond the traditional boundary of the decorative arts to include not only everyday objects but also the larger scale of environmental design, including urban planning and architecture. Furthermore, it refigured the museum's approach to objects, shifting from the historic, technical, and stylistic specificity of the decorative arts paradigm to one that viewed objects through the lens of paradigmatic situations to which they belonged (eating, sleeping, working) and through abstract categories such as color, line, form, material, and texture.

Secondly, the museum sought to distinguish itself from other area museums and their approaches to design, such as the Museum of Modern Art's "Good Design" exhibitions, held from 1944–1956, or the earlier industrial art exhibitions organized by Richard Bach at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. These exhibitions displayed contemporary consumer products as a way of disseminating good taste to the museums' lay-visitors, and the names of individual designers and manufacturers were emphasized as markers of good design. In contrast, Taylor and Hollein rejected the "good design" paradigm in favor of a view of design that was anonymous, quotidian, and pervasive in daily life. Design was not a product, but a process—one in which everyone participated, not only trained professionals. Toward this end, the Cooper-Hewitt rejected the traditional split between design and making, an inheritance from design's origin in the Renaissance concept of *disegno*, which saw the intellectual work of conceptualizing and drawing a design as distinct from the physical labor of its

production. Instead, *MANtransFORMS* emphasized the myriad everyday situations in which design was simultaneously ideated and enacted, such as cooking, dressing, or arranging one's living space. Further, design was portrayed not as the culmination of a lone designer's singular efforts that concluded when the object went into production, but as a form of collective labor that gives rise to forms over time.

Hollein and his collaborators sought to engender these aims in MANtransFORMS. One of Hollein's installations, entitled Daily Bread, presented a long table reminiscent of the Last Supper on which lay one hundred and forty-four types of daily bread from countries and cultures around the globe in a dizzying array of shapes, colors, techniques and textures. Bread, an ephemeral and ubiquitous thing, was posited here as a designed object. The myriad types of bread presented were produced not by trained design professionals in response to a client's brief, but rather as a series of variations developed through making over long periods of time by way of collective consensus. The table was enclosed in a bronze and glass vitrine that sat atop a marble base, which lent an air of the sacred to the most common and profane form of human sustenance. Similarly, another installation entitled Hammers displayed some 160 types of hammers, from the most delicate jeweler's hammer to the most brutal sledgehammer, which were hung on the wall in ascending size. This display too depicted the large variation possible within familiar types, and presented objects of daily use that were rarely associated with a "designer" but whose forms developed according to the needs and preferences of their users across centuries of refinement. At its most fundamental, these and other installations in MANtransFORMS did not seek to convince the museum visitor of design's importance in their life, but to show that design was always already woven into their everyday practices and that they already operated as designers in multiple capacities in their daily lives.

MANtransFORMS took special pains to foreground not only the variety found within object types, but also the range of human ingenuity that was involved in their utilization. In an nod to the museum's substantial textile collections, Hollein designed a wide-ranging installation that explored the variety of uses to which fabric has been put. At its most elementary, A Piece of Cloth illustrated the myriad ways a simple white square of cloth could be employed. From the doo-rag to the scarf to the blindfold to the hobo's sack, the richness and range of cultural meanings called up by the series of photographs was striking. Hollein then explored cultural differences in clothing production, contrasting a Japanese kimono and an Indian sari, in its flexibility and drape, with western tailored clothing such as the suit or the brassiere hewn closely to the body. Next, Hollein displayed architectural-scale uses of cloth in the context of windmills, sailboats, and tent structures to show how fabric was used to harness or resist natural forces toward human ends. Finally, Hollein presented a selection of embroidered cloth from the museum's historical collection to explore the cultural significance of embellishment. The broad category of textiles became a site of unification where disparate historical and cultural productions were collected together and made equivalent under the banner of 'design.'

Architecture in particular took on an important role in the *MANtransFORMS* exhibition. Not only did architects make up the bulk of the contributors, but architectural notions of type, form, scale and space permeated the installations. Indeed, the distinction between architecture and designed objects was blurred by exhibition strategies that emphasized their continuities. For example, Arata Isozaki's *Cages*, involved the display of historical birdcages from the museum's collection alongside a human-sized cage that visitors could enter and which featured Fra Angelico's Angel of Annunciation as its captive. Visitors were thrust into the space of the birdcages through a series of photographs depicting the view from within them. Here, a scalar shift allowed the visitor to experience the birdcage both as object and space. In a similar vein, Hollein's installation entitled *Stars* combined the plans of ideal cities, sheriff's badges, light fixtures, cut glass plates, and corporate logos to demonstrate how a

ENDNOTES

- In this way, I draw a great deal from the work of Jeremy Till, particularly his 2009 Architecture Depends—a cri de coeur of contingency—which critically examined the ideology of the autonomy discourse
- Hans Hollein, "Everything is architecture," in Architecture Culture, 1943-1968: a documentary anthology, ed. Joan Ockman and Edward Eigen (New York: Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation: Rizzoli, 1993). 462.
- Interestingly, two of Hollein's recent interlocutors, Liane Lefaivre and Craig Buckley, have both described the visual argument in "Alles" as created by a series of disparate images held together only through juxtaposition and bricolage. On the contrary, this paper takes the position that, first, it is crucial to understand the individual images in order to understand how they operate together as a whole; and secondly, that they operate rather cooperatively through similarity and affinity rather than difference. See Craig Buckley, "From Absolute to Everything: Taking Possession in 'Alles Ist Architektur'," Grey Room, no. 28 (2007); Liane Lefaivre, "Everything is Architecture: Multiple Hans Hollein and the Art of Crossing Over," Harvard Design Magazine, no. 18 (Spring/Summer 2003).
- "Everything is Architecture: Multiple Hans Hollein and the Art of Crossing Over." 2.
- Buckley, "From Absolute to Everything: Taking Possession in 'Alles Ist Architektur'." 119.
- 6. The CUMAD was also concerned with architecture, but in a way that was distinct from the Cooper-Hewitt. While the CUMAD collected plaster casts, drawings and engravings of 17th and 18th century primarily French architectural ornament, the Cooper-Hewitt's approach to architecture was more contemporary. They staged exhibitions on canonical architects, such as Palladio, as well as on contemporary architecture, and they were interested in form and spatial experience—under the aegis of environmental design—in a way that the CUMAD was not.
- Hans Hollein, "Concepts for an Exhibition," in Man transforms: an international exhibition on aspects of design (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1976).
- Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting emphasize the
 connection of autonomy and disciplinarity in their
 essay "Notes Around the Doppler Effect," though
 their aim in that essay is to elaborate the alternative (what has been dubbed the "post-critical") to
 autonomy found in instrumentality, which emphasizes "projection, performativity, and pragmatics"
 over "critique, representation, and signification". Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, "Notes
 around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of
 Modernism," Perspecta 33 (2002). 74.

shape or motif could be utilized across multiple scales, in both two- and three-dimensions. Architecture was shown to be but one scale at which a form could be engendered.

Hollein also utilized archetypal architectural elements as a way to direct the visitors' attention to "design all around them." In one installation called *Environmental Prototypes: Doors*, Hollein presented a series of operable doors that the visitor could either circulate around or move through. Starting with an archetypal door in the center, those to either side were manipulated to illustrate design operations such as subtraction, addition, enlargement, multiplication of choice, flexibility, camouflage, dematerialization, and so forth. The long series of doors were installed at a slight angle to the walls of the Carnegie Mansion, stretching from the lobby, where they intersected uncomfortably with the grand staircase, through a hallway, and into an adjacent gallery. In order to circulate through the ground floor, the visitor was forced to interact with the doors, and their disjunctive siting served to highlight the strangeness of Hollein's design manipulations. Ultimately, the doors communicated both the ubiquity of design, as well as the potential to apply formal manipulations to objects across scale and use.

FROM ARCHITECTURE TO DESIGN: EMBRACING CONTINGENCY AS A FORM OF AGENCY

Taken together, MANtransFORMS' unwieldy collection of exhibition installations and written catalog essays might be characterized by a revision to the thesis of Hollein's 1968 manifesto. Instead of "Alles ist Architektur," here Hollein and his collaborators seem to suggest: Alles ist Design. All are Designers. Everything is Design. Indeed, Hollein himself described MANtransFORMS as a "parallel" project to that of "Alles." However, the position of architecture in relation to the world in the Cooper-Hewitt exhibition is significantly different from the one posited in "Alles." Consequently, the claim to a form of autonomy—conceptual priority—implied in "Alles" falls away and instead become a compelling argument for architecture's contingency as one of many in the broad field of endeavor designated by 'design'.

First, it must be said that the claim for autonomy in "Alles" departs rather widely from the ways it is usually articulated in architectural discourse. Autonomy as a architectural claim is largely a twentieth century phenomenon, though its origins go back at least a century earlier. Autonomy is often thought of in terms of freedom from some duty or obligation, or freedom to reach beyond some traditional limit. In architecture, autonomy is deeply imbricated with disciplinarity, or the notion that, more than a profession, architecture constitutes a whole and complete field of endeavor whose history, aims and rationales are independent from other fields.8 Furthermore, in positing a work of architecture as an autonomous object, architecture has claimed a form of criticality.9 In extricating itself from concerns external to it, architecture sought a position where it might look back upon the world from which it separated with a newly critical eye. Part of that extrication was the founding of architectural rationale within itself—within its own practices, logics, customs, techniques, and history. In other words, an autonomous architecture finds its fundamental principles in itself.¹⁰ The question of any single work of architecture existing as an autonomous object is a complicated one. Architects such as Peter Eisenman have certainly posited their work as engendering autonomy, though part of that claim has been to reject the building as the necessary and final product of architectural endeavor, instead proffering drawings and models as legitimate and fulsome sites of architectural production. The art historian Christopher Wood, in an essay deeply critical of such claims, reframed autonomy in terms of what an architect gains from such a claim.

[A]rchitects who ask for autonomy today usually are not asking for carte blanche or a heroic license to shape life for the rest of us. They are asking for a recognition of the systematicity of architecture. Architecture is autonomous or free, in this view, because it is capable of generating meaning out of its own internal symbolic resources without having to rely on auxiliary iconographical devices and without having to wait for its cue from the commission, the function, or the materials.¹¹

Autonomy, it seems, has been most important as a way to establish a certain conceptual independence from traditional obligations, allowing architects to utilize architecture as a medium to think about itself.

If "Alles" can be seen to make an argument for autonomy at all, it is not the same version as that which has emerged in the past 30 years. Hollein's is largely anti-disciplinary, it is apathetic to demands for criticality, and it spurns systematicity and self-referentiality. While autonomy is typically concerned with liberating the architectural design process and its product from external obligation, in his radical expansion of architecture's possible manifestations, Hollein essentially dismisses building as anachronism. What becomes constitutive of architecture is not its product, but rather the problems it seeks to solve, the roles it seeks to play, and the effects it seeks to create. The center of architecture becomes its problems and its intentions rather than the traditional form of its solutions. This redefined notion of architecture becomes in "Alles ist Architektur," then, that which becomes instrumental as a lens through which to see and understand the world. There is something essential and unique to architecture, and it occupies a place of intellectual importance—but architecture's autonomy becomes emptied when its traditional object no longer serves to engender it.

MANtransFORMS, in contrast, inverts this equation, restoring the traditional purview of building to architecture but then placing it on a level horizon alongside every other species of design. Architecture is no longer the lens by which the world must be understood. In the Cooper-Hewitt exhibition, bread, hammers, cloth, doors, rooms and cities each respond to the same call—the design impulse that beats within each human breast. Further, the paradigmatic situations of daily life, once at the center of architecture's sphere of concern, are reformulated as those human conditions that prompt the development of objects at all scales. Buildings and spaces are no longer special in the flattened territory of design—architecture is to be made and understood by concepts and techniques shared with other fields.

In the development of Hollein's ideas from "Alles" to MANtransFORMS, architecture shifts from a kind of bloodless autonomy to an embodied contingency. Following Jeremy Till, the question becomes: towards what end? Who benefits? To answer these questions, it's important to consider the audience of the respective works. "Alles" was published in a trade journal whose readership was largely made up of architects. In this context his polemic can be understood as encouraging professionals to expand their toolkits in order to better achieve their goals, however defined. The aspects of architecture that form a unique perspective—its historically-defined aims, and its particular types of formality, visuality and spatiality—are foregrounded in order articulate a coherent conceptual lens. MANtransFORMS, on the other hand, was geared to a lay audience and formulated to empower its visitors as designers—and indeed suggested to them that many of their daily activities could be considered forms of design activity. Here, Hollein emphasized the similarities and continuities between architecture and other forms of design as a way to make architecture more familiar and accessible. The thorough contingency of architecture, driven and understood by motivations and ideas external to it, is a means of empowering the layman just as much as "Alles" empowered the architect.

- For an excellent discussion of the relationship between autonomy and criticality, see Andrew Benjamin, "Passing through Deconstruction: Architecture and the project of autonomy," in Critical Architecture, ed. Jane Rendell (London; New York: Routledge, 2007). 40-47.
- 10. Indeed, the first use of the term autonomy with respect to architecture is found in Claude-Nicholas Ledoux's writings. Emil Kaufmann. writing in the first half of the twentieth century, was the first architectural historian to treat Ledoux, and the question of autonomy was a central aspect of Ledoux's work that Kaufmann felt connected Revolutionary architecture with the Modernism of Le Corbusier and others. Both Hubert Damisch and Anthony Vidler have considered Kaufmann's work on Ledoux, examining both Ledoux's ideas in his intellectual context as well as Kaufmann's reading of him in the context of twentieth century developments. Hubert Damisch and Erin Williams, "Ledoux with Kant," and Anthony Vidler, "The Ledoux Effect: Emil Kaufmann and the Claims of Kantian Autonomy," Perspecta 33 (2002).