READING THE ARCHITECT'S MONOGRAPH

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Despite the emergence of digital textuality, the architecture monograph has remained a steadfast printed publication that is utilized to promote the work of an architectural firm, to add stature to a firm's legitimacy, and to encourage the cultural knowledge of architecture for society at large. This phenomenon has a unique historical backdrop with regard to marketing in the professional architectural practice. The first Principles of Practice adopted by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in the early 20th century barred architects from using even the simplest forms of marketing. They could not advertise—defined as paid publicity—or even put their names on a sign in front of one of their buildings during construction. They could not offer free services, such as proposals or sketches, and any use of "exaggerated or self-laudatory language"[1] in brochures or press releases was against the codes of conduct. When this ban was fully lifted in the 1970s, architects began to take marketing seriously, resulting in a proliferation and subsequent dedication to the architect's monograph. Now a widely recognized initia-

[1] A.M. Shanken, "Breaking the Taboo: Architects and Advertising in Depression and War", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 69, no. 3 (2010), pp. 406–429.

tive,[2] the monograph presents a persuasive tool that can promote the reading of architecture through printed media to a large audience. This essay explores the precursors of the architectural monograph, the role of reading an architect's monograph, the history of architectural marketing culture, and examples of cultural ideas that are brought forward via the publication.

The academic monograph is the starting point for the architectural monograph; it is a book written by specialists in a certain field, which deals exclusively with a particular subject. For scholars within the realm of humanities, the academic monograph functions as the primary means of research and scholarship. Publishing a monograph—for many academics—is considered important to their success; it is seen as critical to anyone that wants to be taken seriously in the humanities. Utilizing several years of research, the academic monograph is tediously assembled through interviews and studies of a collection of works, theories, or a person (or a group of persons). The academic monograph that narrows in on artworks and artists encompasses a range of subject matters from historic works, biographies of artists, iconography, and art theory.[3] This area can be further broken down into topics of study such as evaluating the quality, starting a critical dialogue, developing a shared meaning or concept, or tying the artwork to historical canons.

Taking its cues from the academic monograph, the exhibition monograph became popular in the late 19th century as a way to visually archive the development of an artist, provide a

[2] M. Rammohan, "The Architectural Monograph Is Here to Stay", *ArchDaily*, <www.archdaily.com/640615/the-monograph-is-here-to-stay>, (15 December 2018); ArchDaily, "How Has The Monograph Become A Default In Architectural Publishing?", <www.archdaily.com/632117/why-has-the-monograph-become-a-default-in-architectural-publishing> (15 December 2018); M. Lamster, 'The Architectural Monograph: A Defense', *Places Journal*, <placesjournal.org/article/the-architectural-monograph-a-defense/?cn-reloaded=1>, (15 December 2018).
[3] J. Cullars, "Citation Characteristics of Monographs in the Fine Arts", *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 62, no. 3 (1992), pp. 325–342.

venue for connoisseurship, and provide new opportunities for scholarship. Accompanying an exhibition or event hosted by a museum or gallery, the publication is an opportunity to offer more depth, scope, and historical value to the exhibition or to the objectives of the institution. There are some museums and galleries that maintain their own publishing program to produce exhibition monographs. As with the academic monograph, the authors of exhibition monographs are put through conceptual rigour, and chosen writers are well regarded by academics or are the up-and-coming thought leaders in the world of academic discourse. Contemporary publications are thoughtfully designed, attractive, and flashy enough to convince visitors to pay a pretty penny. While not as lavish, exhibition monographs from the early 20th century included images that were otherwise hard to obtain; people who were interested in the art world relied on these publications for their representation of artworks. A common architectural anecdote—originally identified by Beatriz Columina—states that Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion only rose in popularity after it was included in an exhibition monograph published by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. The Barcelona Pavilion—now regarded as one of the most influential buildings of the 20th century—was originally built in 1929 for the International Exhibition in Barcelona, where its audience barely noticed its alien form.[4] Philip Johnson (one of the most significant American architects and critics of the 20th century), however, did see the Pavilion and identified its avant-garde, thought-provoking design in his curation of an exhibition in 1947 at the MoMA. In the accompanying monograph (published by the MoMA) dedicated to Mies

[4] B. Colomina, "Media as Modern Architecture", in *Architecture Between Spectacle and Use,* ed. A. Vidler (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 58–73.

van der Rohe, Johnson remarks to his surprise that "no monograph treating his work as a whole has yet been published". From this point, the Barcelona Pavilion proliferated in magazines and became celebrated as the most beautiful building of the century. Until it was reconstructed in 1986, the Pavilion existed in the minds of a mass audience as a photograph (originally shown in a monograph).

In recent decades, the architectural monograph that is neither affiliated with academia or museums/galleries has gained remarkable popularity. There are a variety of publishing methods available for firms, should they be interested in initiating such a publication. This can range from a traditional/commercial publisher, to subsidized publishing, to hybrid publishing, or hiring a printer. With a traditional/commercial publisher, the author does not pay any of the cost to produce the manuscript. The publisher will pay upfront for the manuscript and will distribute the book under its own imprint. A subsidy publisher also distributes books under its own imprint; however, it does not purchase manuscripts and it asks authors to pay for the cost of publication. A self-publisher is an author who pays for the cost of designing, printing, and distributing their book. A printer would typically work with self-publishing authors to produce professional-quality books. Hybrid publishing is a relatively new term in the world of publishing, and it can be vague since most people have different definitions for the method. A hybrid publisher could be: a small press publisher that pays royalties and does not charge any author fees but does not pay advances; a publishing services provider (also called a subsidy publisher or vanity publisher) that charges fees for editing, layout, and book production; a traditional/commercial publisher that also sells publishing services on the side; or some combination of all of these. Essentially, there are two kinds of publishers available

for architectural monographs: publishers that will invest in a firm and cover the financial risk and publishers that require a firm's financial participation. Since it is relatively rare for a firm to secure funding, we will use a catch-all phrase for the latter as firm-initiated monographs. These firm-initiated books are seen by some as a bastardization of the academic and exhibition monograph, since the publishing method implies that the content had been rejected by a traditional/commercial publisher. Because academic libraries only accept monographs that have been reviewed, the firm-initiated monograph is typically ignored by academia. While firm-initiated books have outlets available to them to be reviewed, it is not as direct or simplified as with traditional/commercial publishers. Furthermore, academia does not recognize self-published books when assessing faculty members for tenured positions.[5] Academia's implied disdain toward these publications would surely trickle its way through intellectual culture to influence how we view the firm-initiated monograph.

Upon further inspection, however, the firm-initiated monograph occupies a unique interstitial space between academic and pleasure reading. To be successful, a monograph must invoke appeal through a variety of means that convey an expected experience. Sometimes, the name of the artist/firm can be enough to spark interest in the reader. For other authors, a common strategy is to fashion the book in the latest layout design trends. The result is the "coffee table book"—a publication that sits on a reader's coffee table to display to all visitors that their identity includes an interest in leading-edge design. Lifting away the cover reveals a palatable amount of text written in a Plain Eng-

[5] K.A. Cassell, "Do Large Academic Libraries Purchase Self-Published Books to Add to Their Collections?", in *Self-Publishing and Collection Development: Opportunities and Challenges for Libraries*, ed. R.P. Holley (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2015), pp. 27–36.

lish tone of voice that tries to engage the reader, all while allowing the eyes to rest on full-page, high-quality images of beautiful forms. By incorporating thoughtful artistry into the layout, the reader expects to gain inspiration from novel designs, cultural insight into the latest and greatest in the architecture sphere, and perhaps a sense of relaxation as they sift through an experience that has been curated specifically for them. Many of these monographs bring in an element of human interest, explaining the early years of the person in question. This persuasive technique makes the content instantly relatable to a general audience; everyone can understand and admire an architect's journey through life. While being guided on this journey, the reader can also pick up and brush up against some—more difficult—ideas about architecture's academic discourse. This is often fulfilled by bringing on an external writer (typically a professor, museum affiliate, or seasoned freelance writer) who can provide an objective and meaningful interpretation on the collection of works. Underneath this role is the subtle benefit that a highly regarded writer will add prestige to everything they touch. A monograph that contains a foreword written by an internationally recognized name will surely give the firm a higher status. A unique power dynamic ensues: architecture firms will spend hours developing relationships and convincing renowned thought leaders to contribute a foreword to their monograph, while the lesser-known writers will spend hours developing relationships with architecture firms to convince them that they, in fact, should be the essayist for their monograph.

This unique document—the monograph—performs multiple roles to a variety of audiences, such as students, general public, journalists, architects/designers not affiliated with the firm, and the firm itself. For all publics, the monograph is likely to perform as a coffee table book, as described above; however, there

are also specific uses for certain demographics. For the design student, the monograph may contain documentation on a project's process—from sketches to elevations, plans, sections, wall details, and conceptual renderings. Viewing these images serves an educational function that the student can use to develop their own practice. For journalists, the monograph contains descriptive text that is unlikely to be published elsewhere; for example, this would likely be information on materials, subconsultants, design inspiration, client's goals, etc. The journalist can then parse out specific details that are relevant to their article. For architects and designers who are not affiliated with the firm, the monograph describes the quality and rigor of design at the firm, which potentially can be a recruitment tool for that interested architect/designer. Finally, the monograph performs a role for the firm itself. Through mimicking the structure and authority of the traditional academic and exhibition monograph (by recruiting external authors and following a similar sequence), the architectural firm imagines themselves as reinscribed within an elite art and academic culture.

More so than other practices, architecture firms in North America have developed a special reliance on the monograph. Many firms see it as an important marketing tool, giving it an unusual amount of importance. This phenomenon could be explained by a turbulent relationship with marketing and public relations that was previously dictated by a firm's regulating organization. More specifically, in the early 20th century the American Institute of Architects (AIA) created regulations in their Principles of Practice that discouraged—even condemned—self-promotion. The same attitude toward self-promotion could be implied for Canadian firms, since it is generally understood that Canadian firms use American practice as an exemplar. However, there is little secondary documentation

on the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada's policies on self-promotion, and it would be worthwhile to investigate further through primary research. Regardless, the AIA's rationale is as follows: architects should not compete and should not enter into a game of underbidding each other, so the AIA created a fixed-fee schedule. Within the fixed-fee schedule, advertising caused an unsustainable financial burden on the architecture firm (since they were all making roughly the same profit), and it was banned so that other firms were not expected to advertise, participate in design competitions, or produce conceptual designs without payment.[6] Architecture firms could, however, allow external (and respectable) organizations to educate the public about their work. The AIA tiptoed around this distinction by allowing "public information"[7] but not allowing publicity, which understandably created a grey area. Public information was defined as the good work of architects that could be transformed into newsworthy items. This was micro-managed to a point that, in the 1910s, there was one AIA employee vetting all media relations outreach for all their registered firms in America.[8] The AIA's perspective on advertising was met with constant pushback, but the Principles remained until 1972 when the U.S. Justice Department determined that the rules restrained the profession from developing its practice. Up until the 1970s, however, architects were encouraged to participate in exhibitions and media that could educate the public[9]. As such, there were dozens of exhibition monographs published in North America during these dark ages of architecture marketing. When the ban on self-promotion was lifted, perhaps architects (nervously fum-

[6] A.M. Shanken, "Breaking the Taboo: Architects and Advertising in Depression and War", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 69, no. 3 (2010), pp. 406–429.
[7] A.M. Shanken, "Breaking the Taboo: Architects and Advertising in Depression and War", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 69, no. 3 (2010), pp. 406–429.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

bling with their indoctrinated values on salesmanship) naturally turned toward a successful, established, and ordained vehicle to promote their work.

Despite being a consumer good, the firm-initiated architectural monograph is not necessarily dictated by market-driven concerns. It would be more accurate to describe it as a tool that inscribes the office within an elite art-related culture, which can be explained by architecture's history with marketing. As such, many firms use it as an opportunity to introduce concepts that benefit the betterment of society to their chosen demographic. By doing this, the monograph connotes the intellectual esteem that comes with an academic or exhibition monograph. We will now study a few examples of monographs that were printed neither by an academic nor by a museum/gallery publisher. It is difficult, however, to esthablish the exact contractual agreement that the firm had with its publisher, so the following studies do not discriminate between traditional/commercial publishers, vanity publishers, hybrid publishers, or hired printers. Regardless of contractual agreement, they serve as exemplars for the monographs that do require financial participation from the firm.

A highly regarded Canadian firm, Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg (KPMB) created a monograph with Birkhäuser in 2004, utilizing the prestige of an all-star team with ties to Toronto: Phyllis Lambert (Canadian architect, philanthropist, member of the Bronfman family, and founder of the Canadian Centre for Architecture) writes an introduction, Detlef Mertins (architect, writer, and professor at the University of Pennsylvania) provides an introductory essay, Bruce Mau (founder of Bruce Mau Design, and designer/contributor to *S,M,L,XL* by Rem Koolhaas) interviews the founding partners of KPMB, and Rodolphe el-Khoury (designer, critic, and Dean at the

University of Miami School of Architecture) writes the closing remarks. KPMB was founded in 1987 by Bruce Kuwabara, Thomas Payne, Marianne McKenna, and Shirley Blumberg; they are most known for the TIFF Bell Lightbox, the National Ballet School of Canada, and the Canadian Museum of Nature. Lambert, in her introduction, gives the firm high praise for their success despite their minority status: two of the founding partners are women and one is a Canadian with Japanese ancestry. It is Mertins, however, that introduces a critical challenge, arguing that KPMB is the champion of a distinct Toronto Style. To prove this point, he starts with a theory from architectural theorist Sanford Kwinter, who states that a person can have unique experiences that expand and intensify their participation of a situation if that event is designed with a new form that is not rooted in preconceived notions of style. Mertins interprets this as the classical styles (i.e., Victorian, Edwardian, Gothic Revival, etc.) being outdated terms, and that they imply a reproduction without critical thought. Within the context of Canada's relationship with modernism in the 50s-60s and the "revised modernism" reaction that came afterward, KPMB successfully fulfills Kwinter's theory by treating Toronto's history as a reservoir of styles. Instead of robotically repeating forms, KPMB designs with a historical repertoire where each element has a place in certain situations. To this, he provides Kitchener City Hall, King James Place, and Woodsworth College as examples of a "neo-modern style that goes beyond our expectations of how a style performs, beyond the signifying effects of style."[10]

Under the leadership of Kimberley Holden, Gregg Pasquarelli, Christopher Sharples, Coren Sharples, and William Sharples, SHoP Architects (the name being a combination of the

[10] D. Mertins, "Toronto Style", in *The Architecture of Kuwabara, Payne, McKenna, Blumberg,* ed. A. Sebris (Boston, MA: Birkhäuser, 2004), pp. 13–23.

founders' last initials) published a monograph in 2012 with The Monacelli Press. While the bulk of the publication was written by Holden, they employed Philip Nobel (architect and critic) to write the introduction. Nobel writes in an approachable tone, starting with the question of "what kind of architect are you", which is frequently asked at dinner parties, networking events, and any party where small talk among non-architects might be exercised. For Nobel, this is an entry point into a topic that has riddled the architectural field for most of its history. With regard to architectural pedagogy, the field has seen several moments of radical change; the most recent happened in the postwar period, when many were questioning the authority of institutional, bureaucratic, and capitalist structures. Professors and students alike were experimenting with the margins of architectural study and practice, revealing the anxieties surrounding the field's indeterminate identity.[11] For Nobel, the enemy of architecture is this crisis of method, purpose, and scope: an incorrect division between right brain/left brain, between poets and technicians, and between artists and technicians.

In 2013, Richard Meier Architect brought on Kenneth Frampton—an internationally recognized professor, architect, critic, and historian—to write the introduction for Meier's monograph, published by Rizzoli International Publications. Frampton provides an overview of Meier's work by going through two overarching concepts. He credits Meier for being successful at a challenge that few architects have been able to solve: creating a convincing transition from a smaller, residential form to a large, monumental public structure, using the Montagnola Residence as an example. This comment refers to a larger dis-

[11] B. Colomina et al, "Radical Pedagogies in Architectural Education", *The Architectural Review*, <https://www.architectural-review.com/today/radical-pedagogies-in-architectural-education/8636066.article>, (20 January 2019).

cussion on movement through dynamic spaces, which is a formalist topic that studies the visual effect of passages and stairs, ramps, elevators, escalators, corridors, hallways, etc. Frampton also remarks on Meier's obsession with rational grids that make use of logical divisions and subdivisions. Here he is invoking the idealism of the Modern movement; an early 20th-century movement championed by Le Corbusier and Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) that used the logic of optimized manufacturing as an ethos for architectural design and construction. Although Frampton's introduction veers into the direction of jargon, he is able to bring the reader into a perspective that is commonly kept hidden away from the hobbyist. From this, the average reader may be challenged, but will feel that they understand more about architecture's history, how Meier (presumably an architect they have interest in) plays into that history, and will have a greater appreciation for the relevance of his work.

A monograph is a serious undertaking; it can take between 12 and 24 months to complete and can cost a firm upwards of $30,000–$60,000 in publication fees and staff power necessary to compile and edit the content. Although firms may pursue these goals in the name of marketing, the unique history between American firms and self-promotion shows that the architecture firm is instead trying to reinscribe the office within an elite art-related culture. As a result, when deciding how to compose the book, creators of the monograph look to its precursors—the academic and exhibition monograph. Following the conceptual rigor of these ancestors, the firm-initiated monograph often includes a foreword containing ideas rooted in academia, and not driven by market demand, despite being a consumer good intended for mass distribution. This unique composition provides a vehicle for the everyday reader to brush up critical

ideas that otherwise do not have a medium. The exploration into this topic brings up several questions that could lead to further study: what is considered architectural academic discourse and where is the boundary with pleasure reading?, how is the monograph regarded in other countries?, and did Canada also have specific policies barring architects from marketing in the early 20th century? Regardless, the architecture monograph has remained a steadfast printed publication in the last few decades and shows no sign of falling out of favor with architecture firms.

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