

ARTCITY PEEPSHOW PAVILION DESIGN COMPETITION

CALGARY ALBERTA

aj vaid

99328963

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PROFESSOR: TERRI MEYER BOAKE

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ESSAY COMPONENT

COMPETITION TEAM MEMBERS: AJ VAID & BJ SMITH

The Exchange Pavilion – Social Art and Architecture

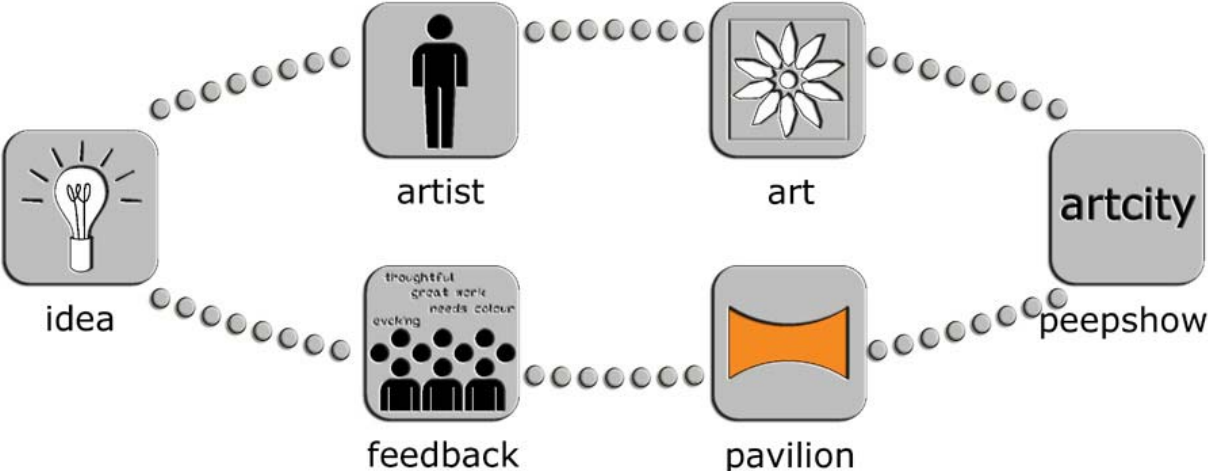
The idea of an art made for the social, from people participating in social interactions, descends from the Dadaists, revolutionaries, and utopians, infusing various strands of art making in the 50's and 60's including John Cage's Black Mountain events, Alan Kaprow's happenings and conceptual, body and performance art work of Joseph Beuys - coining the term 'social sculpture.'

Joseph Beuys defines public art as "how we mould and shape the world in which we live." It is in this context that he made his famous statement that "everyone is an artist." He envisioned an art that was literally revolutionary, in which every human being would be participating in "the total artwork of the future social order."

A dispersed group of contemporary artists began working with the idea of social artworks during the late 80's and through the 90's into the present. Ben Kinmont explicitly uses Beuys' term social sculpture to refer to his pieces consisting primarily of one-on-one conversations. Rirkrit Tiravanija creates use-spaces, which are activated when people gather and hang out (his lists of materials typically includes "lots of people"). Identifying a trend towards art, which involves interaction and interpersonal connection, Nicholas Bourriaud discussed a number of these artists in his book *Relational Aesthetic* that appeared in 1998. Currently there is an up swell of collaboratives and cooperatives working in the social sphere, especially in Europe -- one example is the German group 'Finger' whose "Evolutionäre Zellen" (Evolutionary Cell) project invites artists and groups from all over to contribute their proposals for new social inventions.

The term 'social architecture' is used sometimes interchangeably with 'social sculpture.' The idea of social architecture implies a use which switches the constellation of art from a hierarchical and unidirectional "communication" from artist to audience, towards a model which is more participatory and experiential, where it matters equally what the artist has provided and what the "audience" makes of it.

Similarly, the city of Calgary’s invitation for ‘Artcity Peepshow pavilion competition’, called for the utilization and investigation of the potential within the city’s public infrastructure. Our design proposal of the ‘Exchange Pavilion’ is propelled by the Artcity’s theme of ‘currency.’ The word ‘currency implies not only the state of being current but also the act of exchange and circulation. Unlike the conventional, passive display of art, this pavilion is specifically designed and placed along the pedestrian street - Stephen Avenue in Calgary to enhance the conversation between the artist and the local public. The pavilion is developed as a device to create the circulation of ideas from the artist to the public and vice versa.

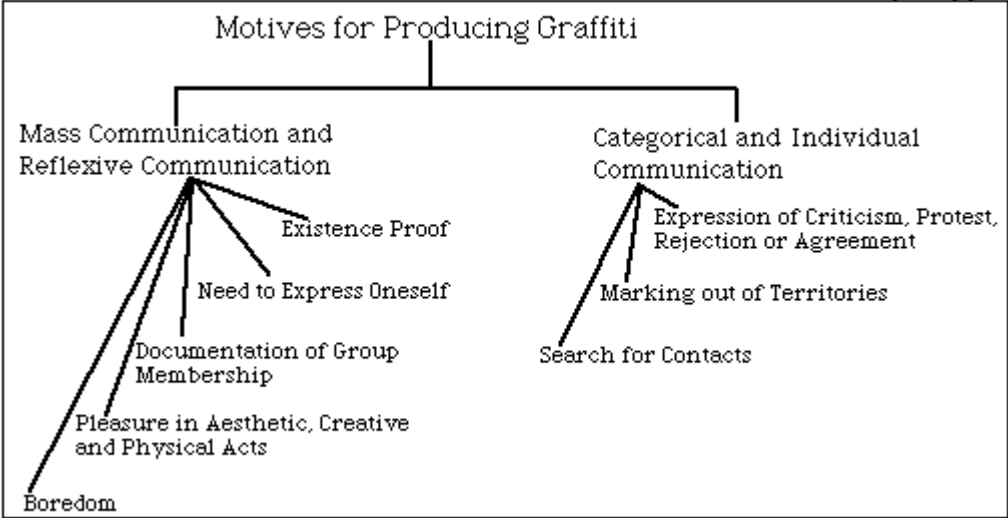


With social architecture, as with physical architecture, there is a kind of dialogue between use and structure. To some extent structure determines and/or conditions use, this use in return reworks the structure and the physical appearance of architecture by redefining, destroying or rebuilding it. Use can be both constructive and destructive but it always reconstructs unlike the contemplation, as in the traditional art experience, which is neither destructive nor constructive, it takes a passive stance - the receptive.



The modern precedent that creates this dialogue between the use and the structure is the art of Graffiti – the legitimate vandalism. Graffiti is the medium of choice for individuals seeking public exposure, as well as means to communicate with the society. It is an art form introduced into the public realm usually undercover and often as a vehicle for messages of a political, cultural or very personal nature. The most common expressions of this spontaneous protest are writings or drawings on walls, stone fences, concrete bridges or train stations.

Figure 2 [3]



The Berlin Wall was probably the largest and most important canvas for graffiti artists of the twentieth century. The protest writings, which appeared immediately after its establishment in 1962, expressed citizens' frustration at limitations on their freedom of movement. Gradually, murals and artistic paintings began to decorate it - some created by important artists. With its destruction in 1991, the Wall's preservation as the most authentic art work of the twentieth century led to the sale of large chunks of masonry to museums throughout the world; thousands of fragments were snatched up for good prices by the hordes of tourists to the unified city. The recognition of graffiti as a legitimate artistic endeavor has allowed the liberation of prominent mural painters, and their ranking among accepted artists while remaining as the voice of rebellion.



The transformation in labeling from "vandals" to "street artists", means that works can now be commissioned by establishments and authorities. A fine example of this process is the huge mural painted by a group of French street artists on the wall of a residential building on Agrippas Street in Jerusalem. The city's mayor and council members recently inaugurated this "graffiti".

Integrating this concept of participation into the design of the 'Exchange Pavilion,' the transparent curved viewing surfaces of the pavilion engage the public on two levels. Firstly, they draw the passerby in closer to the art, gently embracing with their form. Secondly, the same surfaces are used to provide the viewer with a unique opportunity to write their feedback for the art; thus acting as a sheet of trace over a drawing, open for criticism, exchange and development of future ideas. Consequently, this use may be seen as deconstruction of the pavilions façade, yet constructing a communication and exchange between the art and the public. This exchange leads to viewing of the displayed art in the pavilion through a new lens – the graffiti of handwritten public comments.



The 'Exchange Pavilion' – interaction, public message board

"I see letter forms as very powerful symbols. Either alone or in combination as words or partial words, they give additional meaning to a painting.

-Robert Cottingham

Although, not every writing on the wall is a work of art, and not all street art is graffiti, it is important to recognize a number of relatives in the category. For instance, artwork displayed in the public transit is as authentic and spontaneous as graffiti messages. In the 1960s and the 1970s, the New York subway system, the city's doorways and blank walls became internationally famous as the breeding ground and blackboard for the most fertile and pervasive crop of 'Transit Art.' Since the 1980's, a new presence has been seen and felt in the North American subway systems, buses and any other form of public transportation. Radiant Babies, Barking Dogs and Zapping Spacecraft, drawn simply and with great authority, have entered the minds and memories of thousands of New York subway passengers. 'Poems on the Underground' launched in 1986 has revived London Underground's reputation as an arts patron and has helped the city of London make a welcome return to the high artistic standards of the pre-war years. In North America, public artists such as Keith Haring are responsible for this art transition from the museum to the free public forum. The modern form of artwork interacts with thousands of passengers everyday with its goofy cheerfulness that strikes immediately and through repetition, becomes a leitmotif that sees one through their days - a tuneful celebration of urban commonality.



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The use of the social architecture and structure to discuss the world of art made up of symbols and pictographs communicate visually and soundlessly, dynamically changing as passerby view the process of the art in the making. Therefore, the structures in social architecture are not static, but dynamic. They must be constantly created and recreated from their own material. As artworks, social artworks are generative and fundamentally

unpredictable - structures of expectation that create the 'architecture' created from particular spontaneous and changing qualities of the material, the material in this case being the social desires, capacities, and interests of the participants.



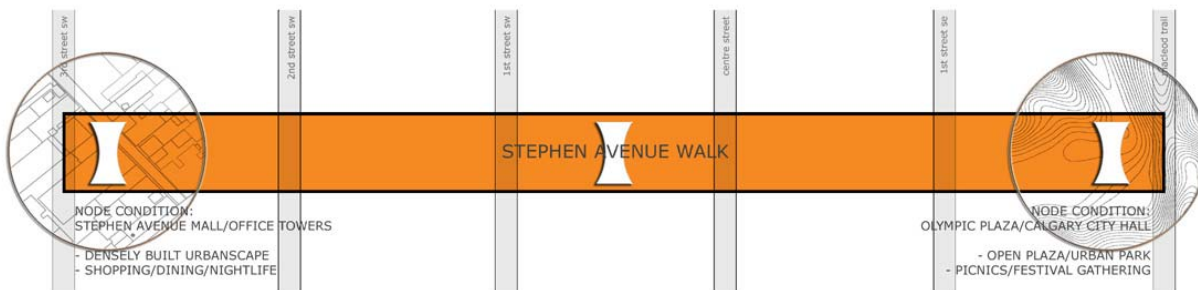
Keith Haring – drawing at the NYC subway, with passengers watching



The 'Exchange Pavilion' – accessibility for the artist and public

The design of the 'Exchange Pavilion' embodies this fluidity between the structure and art. The strategy of the artwork in public transit is to enhance the traveling environment through a programme of fine art sponsorship, with the benefits of giving the public a taste of fine art, a moment of curiosity and relaxation free of charge. The placement of the exchange pavilion

on the pedestrian strip of Calgary's downtown is designed to achieve similar effects. Not only the space created by the pavilion is able to hold a variety of art forms, giving it a dynamic and fluid character, the architecture of the pavilion itself is interactive, transparent and offers a moment of intersection within the hectic pace of urban life. The pavilion is adaptive and responsive, opening and closing in order to meet the needs of its environments and to attract the public by intercepting their path; acting to enhance Calgary's Stephen Avenue Walk where the public is shopping, dining, relaxing, working and interacting at many other levels.



Calgary: Stephen Avenue walk – node conditions



Consequently, the social architecture as artwork functions as the shaper of experience rather than just the carrier of communication and art. It turns from the idea of medium and mediation towards the immediate. If the art, as John Dewey suggests, is what happens in and with experience, then the social architecture opens up a wider field of how to create these experiences. Eventually, the need for an art as an object and as an artifact vanishes. As Robert Irwin put it, "to be an artist is not a matter of making paintings or objects at all. What we are really dealing with is our state of consciousness and the shape of our perception."

The Exchange pavilion attempts to create a democratic forum that provides integrating of cultural experiences for the general art audience. The design endeavors to provide some of the aesthetic qualities of social art and architecture that differs from the object-based counterparts as it acknowledges that the art experience of different participants vary widely. There is no attempt made to narrow or control the art experience into a single "expression" or "communication:" it foregrounds use over contemplation, participation over reception, direct experience over mediated communication and it has a dynamic formal structure using the interactive message board, transparency of materials and the displayed art as its tools. Therefore, social architecture tries to not only integrate the beauty of the structure but also the beauty of public participation with it. This exchange between the art and architecture, the artist and the audience is progressing on the path laid out by the artists in the 1960's when they declared, "The new type of beauty can only be a beauty of situations."

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