AFTER THE MANIFESTO

EDITED BY
CRAIG BUCKLEY

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WRITING, ARCHITECTURE, AND MEDIA IN A NEW CENTURY

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FROM MANIFESTO TO DISCOURSE

—

ANTHONY VIDLER

LET ME BEGIN with a modest inquiry into the etymology of the word "manifesto." "Manifest" comes from the Old French word *manifeste*, which in turn comes from the Latin *manifestus*, meaning "struck by the hand, palpable, evident, made clear." *Manifestus* itself comes from the conjoining of two words: *manus*, or "hand," and *festus*, "struck"—which itself derives from *infestare*, "to attack" or "to trouble," and is closely related to *infestus*, "to be hostile, to be bold, attack, to overrun in large numbers, to be harmful or bothersome, to swarm over, to be parasitic in or on a host." Countering this set of negatives, the Latin *festum* also means "feast," or "celebration." In short, this means that at the same time as manifestos make trouble they also celebrate the fact.

It is well established that the first modern manifesto—indeed the first of its kind to form the modern form of the manifesto in its most complete guise—was *Manifest der Kommunismtischen Partei*, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1847 and published the next year (1). What they

1 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (1848).

Manifest

der

Kommunistischen Partei.

Veröffentlicht im Februar 1848.

Proletarier aller Länder vereinigt euch.

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invented was an entire genre, brilliantly concocted from a wide range of previous genres and eloquently rolled into a single form that continued to operate not only in politics but also in poetics for more than a century. Nevertheless, it is a form that, despite attempts to revive it from time to time, has for all intents and purposes now fallen into disuse, or rather, has seemed to outlive its use.

Now this is a contentious statement, especially for those artistic, architectural, poetic, and literary movements that have couched their post-World War II statements of principle in the form of manifestos, but it will, I hope, become clear that I define "use" not in terms of intention—that of the writer—but in terms of context—that of the audience. And I would hold that from the high times of manifesto writing—i.e., from 1848, through 1945—there has been a significant shift in the forms through which any cultural revolution is parsed, and a corresponding shift against the manifesto as the defining genre of the trade.

Let me return for a moment to the genre itself as cooked up by Marx and Engels. Where did this astoundingly influential model come from? How did this text—one that Martin Puchner in his brilliant study *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* counted as influencing "the course of history more directly and lastingly that almost any other text"—come into being, so to speak, seemingly out of whole cloth and ready to be adopted, as it was from 1909 on, as a genre equally effective in cultural realms as in political arenas? "The answer to this question," Puchner writes, "must be sought not so much in the history of revolutions but in the Manifesto itself, and must be sought not only in its content but also in its form."[1]

As a form it was indeed a strange hybrid: for traditionally what was called a manifest was not at all revolutionary, but rather a dictate—the declaration of the will of a sovereign, a state, or its military. But it was also connected to a potentially more subversive act, the religious act of revelation, or, manifestation—the tradition of the apocalyptic revelations of Saint John—and this link to the apocalypse was folded into the Marxian genre, too. Thus the manifesto becomes both a call to action (military or otherwise) and a revelation (religious or otherwise). Historically, this amalgam was first adopted by Luther on behalf of the Reformation (the Ninety-five Theses), and then used against him by Thomas Müntzer for the Swabian peasant revolt, and by the Diggers and Gerrard Winstanley in their radical revolt against the Puritan Revolution in England (2). In each case the tracts of the more violent revolutionaries were couched in apocalyptic formulations. Indeed the radical Puritans, the Levellers, were the first to call their statement a "manifesto" (1649)—coincidentally exactly two centuries

before Marx and Engels—thence to be inscribed in the history of radical revolutions traced by Marx himself (3). If we add to this the fundamental Declaration of Independence, and the French Revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man, the genre is ready to be completed (4). But with one significant difference.

The "manifestos" that preceded Marx's were all founded within a sense that history formed a continuity out of which would be born reform or revolution. For Marx and Engels, however, as described in their correspondence, the aim was to rewrite history itself, reframe it entirely, so as to conceive it as a continuous process of evolving revolution, toward a new and imminent revolution—"history-as-revolution," as Puchner has noted.[2] *The Communist Manifesto* was something more however; it was a special kind of what J. L. Austin would call a speech act—the transformation of words into actions. As Puchner has it, Marx and Engels achieved the performative content of their manifesto by combining a sense of total authority

2 Martin Luther, the Ninety-Five Theses (1517).
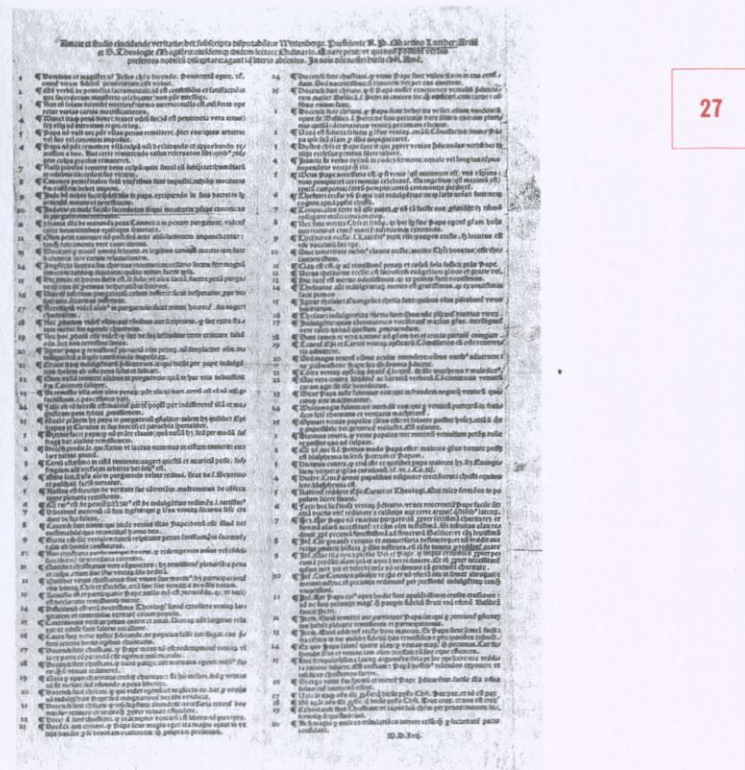
drawn from history, a challenge to the present to recognize this history, as a brilliantly theatrical gesture, and a clear position from which, they, as authors channeling this history, spoke. All these attributes will, as we will see, be taken over by the cultural avant-gardes of the twentieth century.

Thus we get the "haunting" of the "specter of communism," a reference to the ghost of Hamlet's father; or the famous phrase "All that is solid melts into air," echoing the last lines of *The Tempest*. (It is an irony of history, as Puchner points out, that both these phrases come not from the original manifesto, but from the literary traditions of the second translator of the *Manifesto* into English, Samuel Moore. In German the literal translations of these phrases would be more like "a frightful hobgoblin stalks through Europe," or "Everything feudal and fixed evaporates.")[3]

This, however, does not detract from the importance of the position from which the speaker speaks—and the importance for manifestos to possess an oral, theatrical ring to them in order to assert the backing of history, or its entire revision; the deep structure of a quasi-religious credo;

[3] John Lilburn, William Walwyn, Thomas Prince, and Richard Overton, Leveller pamphlet, *A Manifestation* (1649).

the anticipation of apocalypse in the present; and the assumption of the possibility, if not the immediate inevitability, of a revolution. All make a genre, ready for the picking.

And, we remember, it *was* so picked—by F. T. Marinetti and his friends in Milan as proclaimed in "Le Futurisme" in 1909, on the front page no less, of the French daily newspaper *Le Figaro* (5). Not even Marx was given that spread. The structure of this early foray into the aesthetic manifesto instantly became a classic. First the location was sketched: "We have been up all night my friends and I;" then the back story—in the claustrophobic surroundings of their parents' over-decorated and decadent apartment; then the revolutionary gesture—racing from the past into the future in their new automobiles; then the apocalyptic revelation or rather baptism—immersion in and emerging out of the canal-side mud, as if the writer was new born and sucking on the teats of his Sudanese nurse (a primitive rebirth indeed); and then finally the *credo*: "we believe," "we call," "we deny," "we …" etc. etc. The rest is, so to speak, history—the history of a genre,

[4] Thomas Jefferson et. al., United States Declaration of Independence (1776).
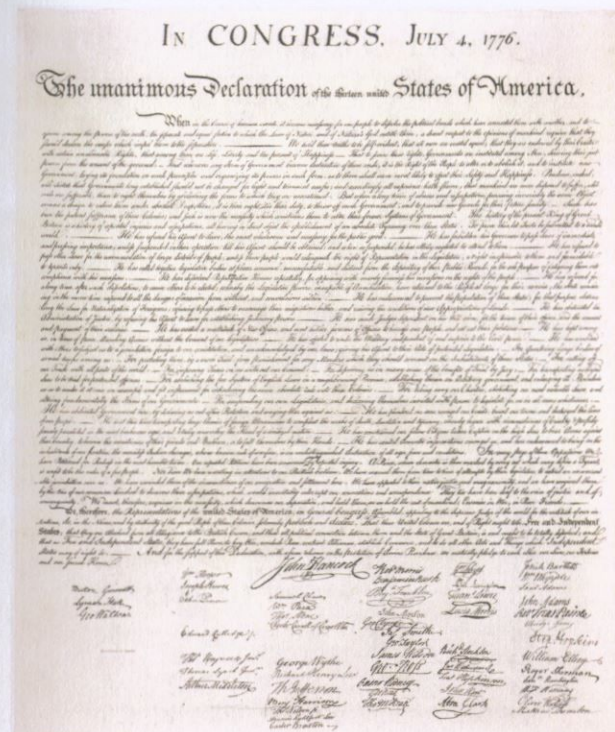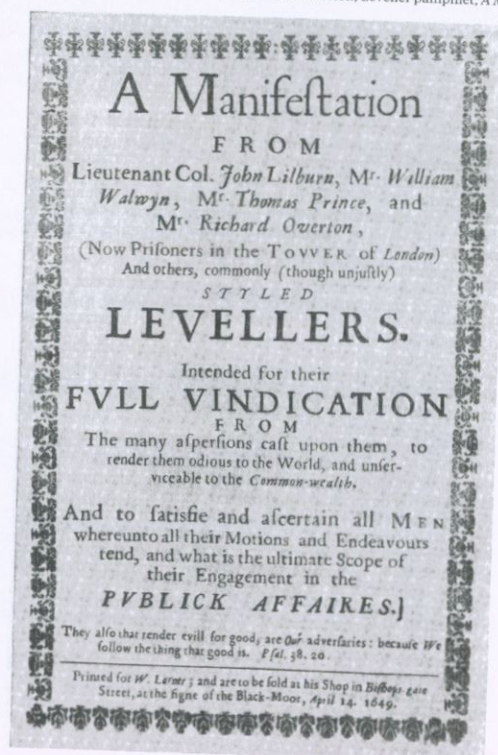
reformulated, readopted for new purposes, reinterpreted, and rewritten on behalf of artistic and cultural revolution; an effective genre for almost every avant-garde movement in the period 1909 to 1968.

But what about the architectural manifesto? Was this a specific genre of its own, following the respective political and cultural manifestos of Marx and Marinetti? In this context we can see that the architectural manifesto, following Marinetti, was conceived in order to destroy the authority of the *disciplinary treatise*, the preferred form of architectural discourse since the rediscovery of Vitruvius in the Renaissance, the last of which, by Julien Guadet, was published at the very end of the nineteenth century (6, 7). During the following decades it was clear that Marx and Marinetti had had their effect—in the avant-garde manifestos of this period history was suspended in favor of a complete overturning of traditional theory and practice. As Marx had noted in his essay on the failure of the 1848 revolution, "The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot
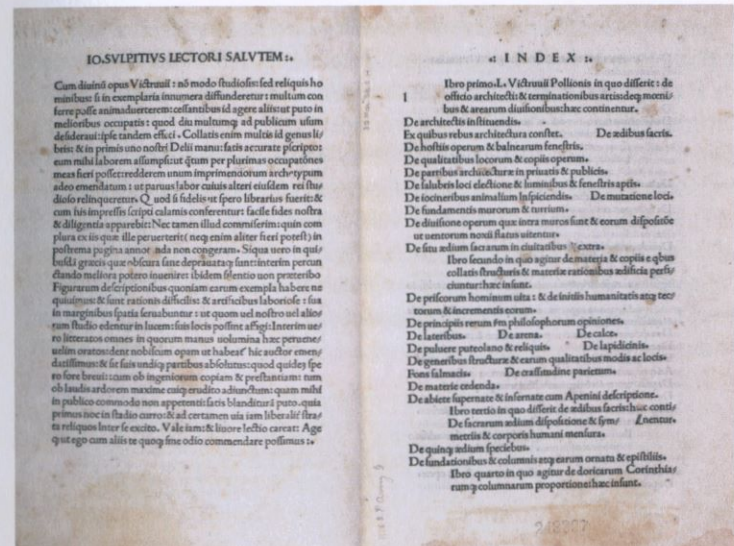
derive its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself, before it has shed all superstitious belief in the past… The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury the dead in order to

6   Vitruvius, index to the *Ten Books on Architecture* (c. 15 BC).

7   Julien Guadet, *Éléments et théorie de l'architecture* (1909 edition).


5   F.T. Marinetti, "Le Futurisme," in *Le Figaro* (1909).
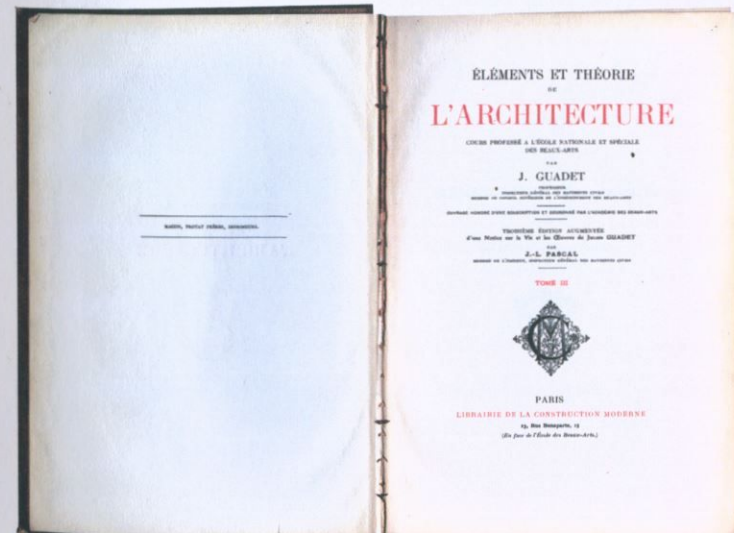
arrive at its own content. There the phrase exceeded the content. Here the content exceeds the phrase."[4] The architects of the early twentieth century were of the same mind: abstraction and the suspension of history went hand in hand in order to erase all traces—or so it was hoped—of the academic system of classicism and the styles.

Architectural manifestos proper, however, surprisingly did not proliferate as they did in the other arts. Antonio Sant'Elia had to be induced by Marinetti to compose (or be credited with) a manifesto of Futurist architecture in 1914; the De Stijl group published five explicit manifestos; Oskar Schlemmer published a "Manifesto for the First Bauhaus Exhibition" in 1923; the Russians under the influence of and contesting the dictates of Futurism published quite a few—among them Malevich's *Suprematist Manifesto* of 1924 (8). On the whole, architects tended to prefer "theses," "principles," "tenets," "definitions," or "projects," rather than outright mani-festos, in an attempt to preserve the essence of what they were purporting to destroy.

8 Antonio Sant'Elia, perspective from *La Città Nuova* (1914).
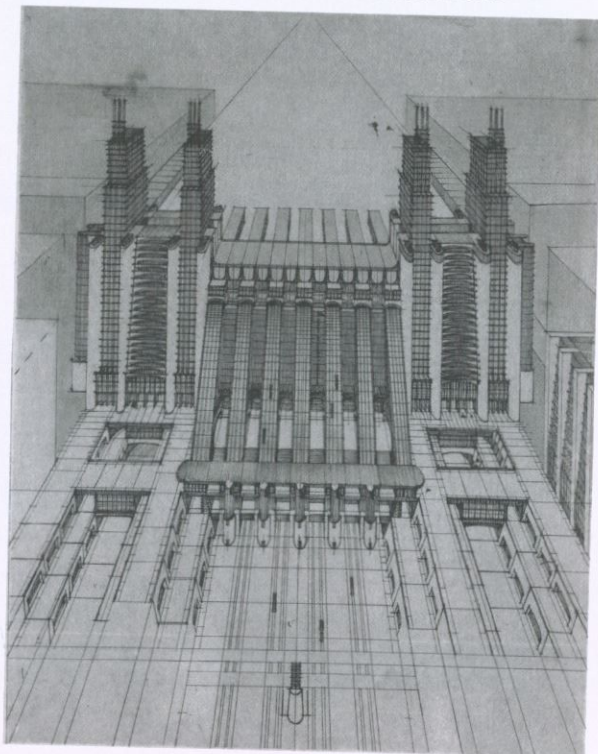
Indeed the test came with Le Corbusier, correctly accused by Reyner Banham of hiding his academicism beneath the rhetoric of abstraction and the idea rather than the fact of technological progress. Le Corbusier openly stated his dislike of Futurism in the preface to *Vers une architecture*, and certainly had the intention of writing the next great treatise, but nevertheless interspersed his didactic chapters on working principles for architectural form and function with what one might call residual or analogi-cal manifesto statements italicized at the head of each chapter (9).

In this sense, the title of the first anthology of such statements, Ulrich Conrads's *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, published in German in 1964, was apt enough.[5] In this little volume, which formed the basis for "theory" courses over the next two decades, Conrads published some 60 "programs," from Henry van der Velde's "Programme" of 1903 to Yona Friedman's 1962 "Ten Principles of Space Town Planning," but very few that were truly "manifestos." Here the difference between a program and a manifesto became specific, and the

9 Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (1923).

Centrale électrique de Genevilliers. Turbine de 40.000 kw.

ARCHITECTURE
OU RÉVOLUTION
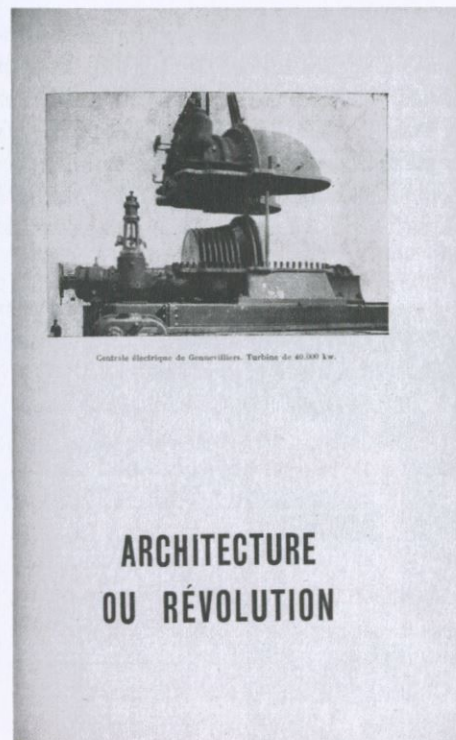
reluctance of architects to join with their artist friends was patent, and an intimation of what was to come in the 1960s and '70s, when, despite the revolutionary affect of the era, the manifesto became almost extinct, at least in architecture.

But before becoming extinct, of course, the manifesto had to be historicized. For Conrads's book was the direct heir and result of Banham's research in the late 1950s into the origins and history of the Modern Movement. It was after all Banham who had publicized the Futurist manifestos of Marinetti and Sant'Elia in the *Architectural Review* in the mid-1950s, and his history was in effect a way of relegating the manifesto culture of the first half of the century to its proper, if covert, academic home, all the while trying to associate himself with a new manifesto culture based on technological progressivism; hence his 1955 essay "The New Brutalism," which called for an "architecture autre," and his "Taking Stock" articles of 1960 (10).[6] As a result, it was Conrads's anthology that we read in school in the late 1960s, in tandem with Banham's *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* of 1960.

If we take a glance at the contents of the next few anthologies of architectural theory statements, the decline of the manifesto becomes clear. Joan Ockman's unsurpassed collection of 1993 abandoned the words "manifesto" and "program" altogether in *Architecture Culture "A Documentary Anthology" 1943–1968*, a collection consisting almost entirely of longer statements or excerpts from essays.[7] Out of over seventy selections, only one retained the title "manifesto" and, indeed, that one might be counted as the last of its modern genre: the *Doorn Manifesto* of

10 Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism," in *Architectural Review* (December 1955).
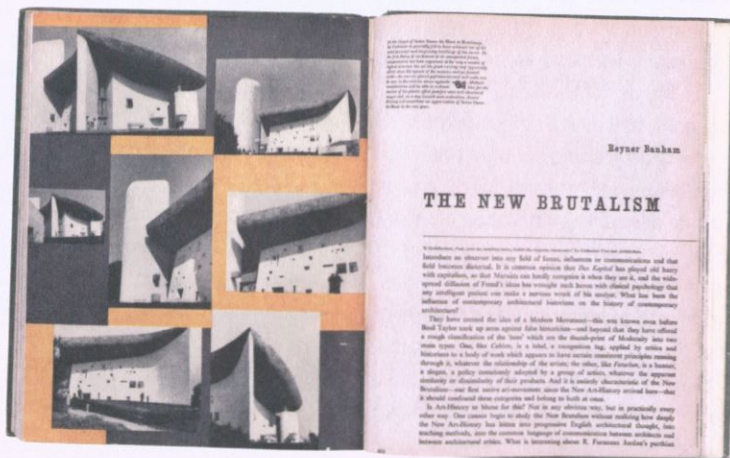
1954, composed by Team Ten's Jaap Bakema, Aldo van Eyck, Blanche van Ginkel, Hans Hovens Greve, Alison and Peter Smithson, and John Voelcker.

Later compilations were even more discursive: Kate Nesbitt's 1996 book, called *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, was subtitled "An Anthology of Architectural Theory," and contained long selections from even longer books.[8] K. Michael Hays's follow-up collection to Ockman, *Architecture Theory since 1968*, published in 2000, was equally if not more discursive, taking whole long articles and chapters from books.[9] Interpretation, historical examination, analysis, and quasi-philosophical exploration replace the short and sharp manifesto. Revolutionary stridency has given place to a worry about the right way to do architecture not seen since the late nineteenth century.

Indeed, it was a worry that produced not a few attempts to write new treatises for the discipline, a discipline that, threatened by science, technology, and economics, had resorted since the 1960s to a search for (quasi)-autonomy and new guiding principles that would authorize its role in a newly heterogeneous world. Unlike previous treatises, however, these new versions revealed a deep sense of inferiority to adjoining disciplines—to science of course, but also to psychology, and above all to philosophy. Thus Peter Eisenman's claims for the autonomy of formal principles were heavily reliant on the "formal" principles of Gestalt psychology; Christian Norberg-Schultz's *Intentions in Architecture* were derived, despite an apparent neutrality of approach, from his misreading of Heidegger as defining a phenomenological comfort zone rather than the abyssal implications of the author of *Being and Time*.[10] Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* was more a reflection on modes of interpretation and compositional strategies than a polemic for a new way of designing, despite Vincent Scully's claim that it was the most powerful call to arms since Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture*.[11]

My use of the word "discursive" in relation to these treatises is not innocent, however. For I would note that it was symptomatic of this shift from manifesto to discourse that Michel Foucault's inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1971 was entitled *L'Ordre du discours*, taking the form of a lengthy elaboration on how to conduct "discourse analysis," as a way of unpacking the analysis-resistant "discourses" of the traditionally hegemonic disciplines and ideologies.[12] As interpreted by social and even architectural historians and theorists, this was an open invitation to identify the "discourse" of architecture, which was revealed as not only hegemonic with respect to design ideology but also deeply ramified within a spreading network of relations with other discursive formations, from law to religion

to medicine and the like. The brilliance of Foucault's *Surveiller et punir* (*Discipline and Punish*) in selecting Jeremy Bentham and the Panopticon as a trope for the installation of social order for the bourgeois throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries relied not so much in its picking on architecture as a tool of such order, but in revealing the complex complicity of architecture in this order—a complicity to be historicized and theorized by Manfredo Tafuri after 1968 (11).[13]

Thus by a strange twist of fate, critical architectural thought that stood for architectural theory in the 1970s and '80s found itself fundamentally *against* architecture, or at least against the very discipline that the new treatises were trying to reinstate and support. Architecture against itself was at once meta-historical and meta-disciplinary, and thus left very little in the way of principles or rules of composition for the students of these years. If there were any manifesto-like statements, from Guy Debord to Hundertwasser, to R. Buckminster Fuller, to Archizoom or Superstudio, they were statements against architecture—dystopian or techno-Futurist— or, as in the case of Ant Farm, of the innumerable claims for "architecture without architects," proposing simple "returns" to a supposed prelapsarian state of preindustrial, or vernacular self-building.

Today we have inherited all these heterogeneous texts, and despite Charles Jencks's brave attempt to call his own anthology of 2006 *Theories*

11 Jeremy Bentham, plan and section of the Panopticon (1791).
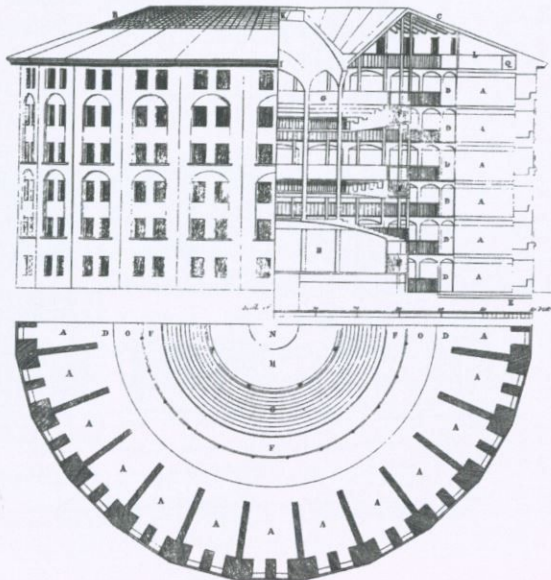
and Manifestos of Contemporary Architecture, only a single manifesto can be found among his 144 excerpts, and that, a brave one, by Lebbeus Woods, excerpted from his 1993 *War and Architecture* pamphlet and written in the true spirit of Futurism (12). I conclude with its echoing tones that reverberate back through the twentieth century to 1909, but even more to 1847, and forward to the war-torn present:

> Architecture and war are not incompatible.
> Architecture is war. War is architecture.
> I am at war with my time, with history, with all authority
> that resides in fixed and frightened forms.
> I am one of millions who do not fit in, who have no home, no family,
> no doctrine, nor firm place to call my own, no known beginning or end,
> no "sacred and primordial site."
> I declare war on all icons and finalities, on all histories
> that would chain me with my own falseness, my own pitiful fears.
> I know only moments, and lifetimes that are as moments,

12 Lebbeus Woods, cover of *War and Architecture* (1993).
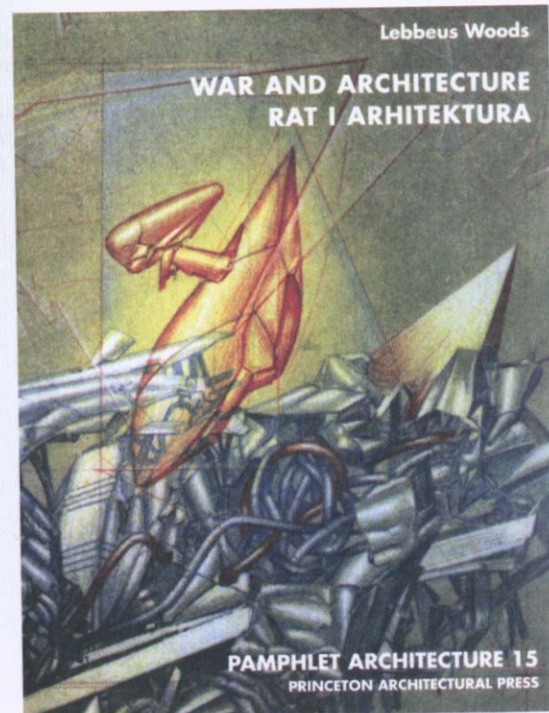
and forms that appear with infinite strength, then "melt into air."
I am an architect, a constructor of worlds,
a sensualist who worships the flesh, the melody,
a silhouette against the darkening sky.
I cannot know your name. Nor can you know mine.
Tomorrow we begin together the construction of a city.[14]

Woods's cri de coeur might be dismissed now as a romantic nostalgia for a time when such fighting words had real social and architectural resonance—Jencks sandwiches it among a heterogeneous group of dissimilar writings that he dubs "New Modern"—but it does prove that the manifesto form might well have a new life, if only to counter the message of certain contemporary treatises, dedicated as they are to absorbing architecture seamlessly into the technological world of global development.

1   Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

2   Ibid., 23.

3   Ibid., 53.

4   Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 8 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1960), 117. Cited in Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 1.

5   Ulrich Conrads, ed., *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970).

6   See Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism," *Architectural Review* 118, no. 708 (December 1955), 361; "Futurism and Modern Architecture," *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 64, no.4 (February 1957), 133; and *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London: The Architectural Press, 1960), where he devotes an entire section to Futurist manifestos and projects.

7   Joan Ockman, ed., *Architecture Culture 1943–1968: A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993).

8   Kate Nesbitt, ed., *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965–1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

9   K. Michael Hays, ed., *Architectural Theory since 1968* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).

10   Christian Norberg-Schultz, *Intentions in Architecture* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1963).

11   Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966).

12   Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

13   Michel Foucault, *Suveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); Manfredo Tafuri, "Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica," *Contropiano* 1 (January-April 1969), trans. Stephen Sartorelli, "Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology," in Hays ed., *Architectural Theory*, 6-35.

14   Lebbeus Woods, "Manifesto [1993]" in Charles Jencks and Karl Kropf, *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture*, 2nd edition (Chichester: John Wiley, 2006), 304.