thesis committee

Thesis Advisor:

Ellen Dunham-Jones, Associate Professor of Architecture.

Readers:

Fernando Domeyko, Senior Lecturer in Architecture.

Michael McKinnell, Professor of the Practice of Architecture.
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*not to forget...*

The bum who abducted my original models which got me to make even better ones.
In modern consumer culture where history and tradition are mere footnotes to the insatiable obsession for instant gratification, much of today's architecture profession has maintained its philosophy around past glory and heroism. Many of us continue to approach architecture with the conviction for the enduring qualities of our craft while dismissing the ephemeral but most valuable attributes emanating from the popular trends.

At a time when even the "avant-garde" -- once symbolizing the revolutionary social and economic efforts through art-- has come to mean cozy peddling of the exclusive few's whims, a non-exhaustive sequence of momentary trends is all that is left to inform the architecture for the rest of us.

I propose architecture that can be more culturally relevant and less hypocritical about its connection to that same culture.

I have designed an entertainment center for a television station to illustrate this thesis.

Timely/timeless:
temporality and perpetuity in architecture

by
Chris Y.J. Lee

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Thesis Supervisor: Ellen Dunham-Jones
Title: Associate Professor of Architecture
introduction
in a field where the iconoclast is hailed as hero while the trend-follower is summarily dismissed. Yet architecture and fashion are in fact intimately related — trends in design and criticism determine who's hot and who's not, touting or toppling the "superstar" architect of the day. But the connection between architecture and fashion has been condemned, ignored, or endorsed to such a degree that it is rarely examined by historians, theorists, or practicing architects. Indeed, it is taken for granted as the pre-critical position of all design.

00.2 Critique ...So chic?

Words like “trend, fad, and fashion” are disdainful, if not outright appalling, to most architects. These words appear to cheapen a design; often incipiently dismissing it as lacking inventiveness or a serious thought process. These words trivialize our noble profession that has been around since the beginning of “professions.” We architects are intellectuals and our achievements are far more meaningful than these words would imply.

Architecture is in many ways distinguished from other creative disciplines due, if nothing else, to the issue of scale and its accompanying environmental repercussions.

However, is it not hypocritical to insist that contemporary architecture is above other “less-than-spiritual” pursuits predicated solely on popular trends while quietly partaking to foster those same fads?

We celebrate the avant-garde as we simultaneously disregard fashion. Where is the empirical distinction between the avant-garde and fashion? Pedantic interpretations would designate originality and experimentation to one and imitation -often kitschy- and vagary to the other. At present, there is only a little
separation between the two processes outside of their disparate social basis. **Avant-garde**, once used to reference the leading modern artists' and theorists' efforts to guide a social, political revolution has been diluted and implies far less in today's terms. The **ideology** that compelled the past Avant-garde is absent in both current versions of Avant-garde and fashion. It is missing in today's Avant-garde because the sense of leading a "revolution"—especially succeeding one that didn't happen—is hard to sustain and the same claims the forebears made can not be applied within our new and very different social, cultural climate. **Fashion** also does not encompass any political aspects; at least not as an explicit intention.

The current and widespread custom or usage. origin of **fad**, first recorded in 1834 with the sense "whim, crotchet,". In 1754, 80 years before this occurrence of fad, we find an instance of the word **fidfad**, meaning "a fussy person": "The youngest ... is, in everything she does, an absolute fidfad." Fidfad is found in the latter part of the 19th century with the sense "small detail, frill," and the adjective **fidfad**, meaning "trivolous, fussy, petty," is recorded in 1830. Fad could thus be a shortened form of fidfad, itself shortened from fiddle-faddle.
Instead, today's Avant-garde applies more to the exclusive creative mediums for the moneyed upper percentile of the society: it is Jean-Nouvel designing an obscenely extravagant home for the head of a Korean business conglomerate, and it is a painter selling his work for half-million dollars out of his/her plush New York gallery.

Only as Fashion, do these forms and ideas get imitated and choreographed for the rest of us. (Quite ironically though, in our much trumpeted hyper consumer culture, it is the popular trend of the masses that is far more fundamental to the wealthy's means as the source of their riches.)

Never mind the philosophical/moral arguments for a more democratic perspective of architecture and its roles; it would be economically logical then, to cater to a fad and everything else that is TIMELY to advance our profession rather than playing for a small, elusive, and often finicky crowd.

Contemporary architecture academics and practitioners alike often point to "the stagnant, no-longer-appreciated, and under-compensated" profession.
At the same time in cases of academic tenure or the media, being avant-garde is synonymous with the advancement of our practice when there's clearly a more practical and economic fashion-linked means of better positioning our profession within the modern social structure.

Most of us architects concentrate much of our efforts in either of two beliefs: into making "timeless" architecture that will "withstand the test of time and all passing trends" and ignore any popular sentiments, or creating that of the avant-garde which does aspire to be timely but subsequently become memorialized as a permanent marker of that past moment.

How then, can we demand recognition from the same segment of the society that we have in effect shunned all together?

Even more perplexing are the architecture of the avant-garde that perpetually try to be permanent
markers of time even while fully understanding that the same era being ushered in by those "trend-setting" elements are bound to be short lived.

**Fashion**, while equally reflective of popular taste, accepts its ephemerality. In architecture however, this would then spell the dismal prospect of a building as an immanent neglected heap of trash.

Because architecture is the "heaviest" of all creative disciplines and buildings by nature tend to outlast fashion, there is always a rooted difficulty in buildings ever really being relevant to the current moment.
Chic. Not geek.
Chic. Not brick.
Proposition 00.3
00.3 Proposition for a *timely* architecture

The objective of this thesis is to explore means for architecture that can *responsibly accept its transience* through the *synthesis of timely and timeless, perpetuity and change*: Architecture which is absolutely consumable to the fullest extent, accurately reflecting and even indulging in popular taste, and functioning at its peak spatial and symbolic capacity.

Because time marches on and the building has to stand alone divorced from all initial metaphors and ideas imposed by the architect, a strategy that accommodates continual new fads and ideas must be established. It must be capable of changing its phase as often and with great precision as required in response to fluctuating demands even within a singular fad: *from a public or private volume to commercial surface to light and back again*. When the fashions change and the original building becomes obsolescent, the building itself must reconfigure, refurbish, and reinvent itself for the next fad.

Typical criticism of utter wastefulness in popular trends and the consumption of commodities would then be immaterial.
My strategy for accommodating continuous fashion changes begins at the initial development and implementation of new and evolving programming that mirrors the popular trend of an era and culminates at the architecture's spatial and material attributes that incorporate fluidity, mutability, and recondition-ability.

I propose that instead of freezing the present in perpetuity as the avant-garde does or speaking only to enduring qualities as timeless architecture aspires to, architecture can be both more culturally relevant and less hypocritical about its relationship to popular culture. By acquiring strategies to ceaselessly embrace fashion, I recognize that this poses dangers of built-in obsolescence. To that end I propose a series of systems of non-wasteful and promptly changeable surfaces and enclosures within a larger fixed infrastructure as a way to decorate the obsessive social need for public spaces of display and fashion.

I am designing an entertainment complex for a television station to illustrate this thesis.
In a world where the currency of the new/now is often valued more than that of tradition, stability, and legibility, what can Architecture, perhaps the heaviest of all disciplines, do to contend with the flexible currencies of money, politics, aesthetics, technoscience, speed, and above all, the world imagebank which saturates our short-term memory?

Make architecture become a currency itself.

00.4 Program

MBC Entertainment and Talent Auditions Center:

- interactive theatre: 1000 m²
- dance club: 1000 m²
- concert stage and floor: 1500 m²
- private dating cells: 400 m²
- retail media recording studios: 800 m²
- talent audition/selection booths: 1300 m²
- theme shops: 500 m²
- parking: 2000 m²
- circulation and ancillary programming: 2500 m²

11000 square metres
The architectural program for my thesis is an updated museum/art center typology which best represents the current trend: a commercial entertainment complex with a fashionably thriving network TV station as a theme.

More than enough has been said about the fact that Western Culture exports are especially thriving in the fashion-happy Asia: Korea is of course no exception to the crazed trend.

A global (=American) trend is easier to perceive and understand in a developing Asian nation like Korea than even in America itself. A trend, fad, or flow of a culture is culled, summarized, then exaggerated when it is imported wholesale by another society.

For example, in the early 1990's when Reggae music
was sweeping Japan, plenty of teens were sporting *dread-lock* wigs to model themselves after the musicians. I don't need to paint the pathetic picture of hoards Asian kids running around with flowing *dread-locks*.

For this reason, I have chosen Korea as the site of my thesis project.

MBC (Munwha Broadcasting Corporation) owns the center. It is one of the three network television syndicates in Korea that is frequently cited by the popular culture as the leader in *Korean Chic*—again a hybrid of exaggerated Western influences and watered-down Korean motives.

At the entertainment center, as the obvious goal is for MBC to take advantage of their immense popularity and *make even more money*, MBC's in-house popular actors and actresses from
their high-rating shows will be featured in the event areas: personal appearances at the dance club, theatre screens, as judges at the public audition booths, etc. MBC's music show(s) affiliated popular singers will also host concerts and interact with the public. And finally, MBC will further benefit from sales out of the theme shops.
00.5 Site

Munwha Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) entertainment and talent audition center: Seoul, Korea.

MBC’s media entertainment complex site is in the Yoido district of Seoul right across the street from MBC’s broadcast station. Yoido is an island on the Han river which divides the older north city center and the newer sprawl to the south.

Starkly flat, Yoido was generally neglected during the historic years of Seoul--for about 540 years prior to the Korean War in 1950--when the city’s form and culture was founded upon the Confucian geomantic/cosmological principle that places high values on topographic undulations.

Yoido’s sandy plain was initially developed as a military airbase during the Korean conflict. During the brisk land development years of 1970s and 80s that was ancillary to the concurrent hyper economic expansion, Yoido transformed itself into a financial, governmental, and media center of not only Seoul, but of the entire Korean peninsula.

Yoido is now dubbed a "Manhattan of Seoul."
Seoul's Manhattan is both the literal and figurative nexus between the often incompatible macro-cultures of the metropolis' north and south.

But unlike Manhattan, **Yoido** in many ways is evocative of the wide-open, scattered grids of Los Angeles. It's quality of "openness" and mega-scale in a crammed city that is one of the world's ten largest and regionally second only to Tokyo in population density (17,836 persons/square kilometers), is somewhat of an anomaly.

At about the time Seoul was celebrating its 600th year in 1994, a telling joke about three no-nos was making the rounds in the city.

**Question:** *Do you still smoke? Do you still drink? Do you still live on the north side of the river?*

As the wisecrack suggests, residing in **Kangbuk** --"north of the river"-- neighborhoods became no longer socially viable or fashionable. Kangnam --"south of the river" as a whole became the default portrait of a nation

**it is absolutely fashionable to be in Yoido.**
145m X 30m site boundary at the heart of Yoido; facing MBC broadcast station.
Looking South towards MBC broadcast station

Looking Northeast from the broadcast station
Looking East along the front of project site

Looking North directly at the site from the broadcast station entrance
00.6 Concept

No building exists without a "permanent", fixed infrastructure. I consider this necessity to be the **timeless** characteristic of my design. This unchanging aspect of the building is kept to a neutral aesthetic and functional minimum. They are the concrete, steel, and glass-curtain structural membrane and general climatic enclosure; what amounts to a large box or container of sorts.
Inside the container, onto the immovable infrastructure of platforms, elevators, stairs, egress and bathroom cores are affixed, clipped-on, electronically programmed timely components. They are two-way liquid crystal displays, clusters of CRT monitors, fabric screens, image projection units, light-weight coverings, stages, and partitions—such as fiberglass shells, vinyl curtains, and paper tubes and planks—to provide mutable individual program enclosures and display within the larger fixed enclosure.
This allows for the uncomplicated and swift assembly, dismantling, and reconditioning of ever-changing environments to respond to the popular trend in constant flux. For example, the design may accommodate today’s craze for techno-trendy virtual reality machines, host a rapper’s concert, house an all-night disco, and have the entertainment center patrons individually select movies for themselves.
A month, a year, or perhaps even the next day, if the fad happens to be zen-buddhism inspired group meditation sessions and calls for
minimal monotone attire and environment, the changeable components can be rearranged, reassembled, put away, and programmed to project nothing and transmit natural light (two way LCD’s) to provide for that trend.

Similarly within the larger vocabulary of the building, its construction should be carried out with as little fuss as possible through extensive modularity of the components. It will allow relatively effortless dismantling and recycling of the entire building itself when the building can no longer indulge the popular movements only through internal elements’ fluctuations.

Modular steel and concrete framing, uniform panels for both concrete and glass skinning of the building and assembly of platform levels are used for the design of this entertainment complex. Minimal digging of the earth to preclude the building from embedding itself to the site and keeping all program areas on-grade will not only mitigate its future replacement but will also create a spatial sensation of temporality for those who experience it.
Within the concept of timeless/perpetual and timely/mutable's synthesis, there are two sub-categories that informed the design of this entertainment center. One is a metaphorical idea (based on the discussion in section 00.4) and the other responds to the site conditions (noted in section 00.5).

**Metaphor:**

My aim here is to create an environment where the occupants of the building are in/on TV — both on levels of being a cast member of a TV show and being inside an actual TV set. People become a part of the display themselves.

When inside the building, clothes they wear, what they are doing, etc. are just as important in reflecting that moment's trend as the images exhibited on the screens. They are active part of the building, or the TV set, and to the outside viewer they
play a vital role. Moreover, because the occupants have control over what is programmed onto the displays, the newly imported western fashion of the time can be represented with all the exaggeration—however tacky—that they may want.

Micro/Macro site conditions:

As I have noted previously, Yoido and Kangnam districts are polar opposite to the old city center of Seoul. Sprawling, impersonal grids filled with automobiles have replace the friendly, busy but charming, and seemingly haphazard layout of old Seoul. Koreans, along with most other Asians, have accepted in its entirety this Post-Industrial Revolution Western city planning strategy without much inspection or attempts for local adaptation.

Ironically though, as I have also mentioned earlier, it is dated and “un-cool” to live in the older parts but thoroughly trendy to be living in newer areas; all the while complaining of its monotony and unfamiliarity.

My objective here is to replicate the “busy-ness” of the past public gatherings through sensory saturation for the occupants of the entertainment center.
Aside from the visual fuss within the building, stimulants of other senses are left to take their own course rather than controlling them. Whatever sound, odor and touch is free to blend; pleasant or unpleasant. Only in the core—the timeless—is the occupant free from natural bustle. Within the core, the building patrons can gather their thoughts and reacquire their sanity.
Street level view into the building
Ground level
Major Entries: Pedestrian and from Parking
Front Views (TV Screen)
Context: night


2 Drawing Panels: Color, 42 inches wide X 30 inches tall.

Models:

Concept Model - 2.5 inches X 1.5 inches X 6.5 inches.

Overall Model at 1:500 m - 14 inches X 3.5 inches X 5 inches.

Section Detail Model at 1:200m - 9.5 inches X 5 inches X 7.5 inches.

Material used: Cardboard, paint, sheet metal, acrylic, light bulbs, wiring, and batteries.
Concept model
Detail model @ 1:200
Overall model @ 1:500
Level +11.6 m

Levels +6.2/+7.4
Conclusion

Addressing popular trends as something other than a trivial social phenomena can only aid in architects' efforts to be more responsive and relevant to our rapidly changing culture.

When the phrase “it’s just trendy” is no longer disparagingly used to describe architectural designs, our profession will not be regarded as slow-moving dinosaur.

Architecture is no longer about heroism but it is not about prostituting either (as Phillip Johnson once said it was). Robert Venturi, although methods he employed was bound to eventually make his architecture irrelevant, he still had the right idea by attempting to take architecture mainstream and popular.

Only when we architects lose our stubbornness to leave permanent marks – both literally and figuratively– can our profession find its rightful place in this fast-changing society.

I am certain that there are numerous processes in which architecture can respond to the social, economic, and technological changes in a timely manner. I, for one, will continue to seek methods in which architecture can be just as fleet-footed as the media, entertainment, scientific, and all other leading disciplines.
Bibliography

MEDIAMATIC Magazine Vol.7 No. 3/4, Various Authors, 1993.

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