

SOME OTHER SYSTEMS OF ORIENTATION

PUBLISHING EXHIBITIONS

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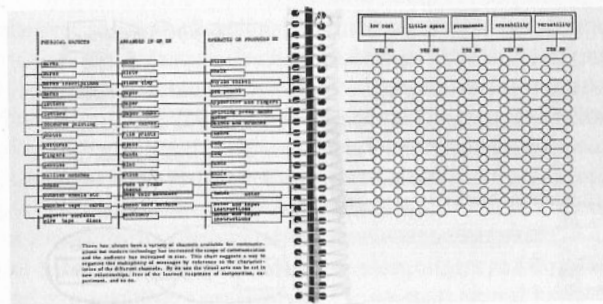
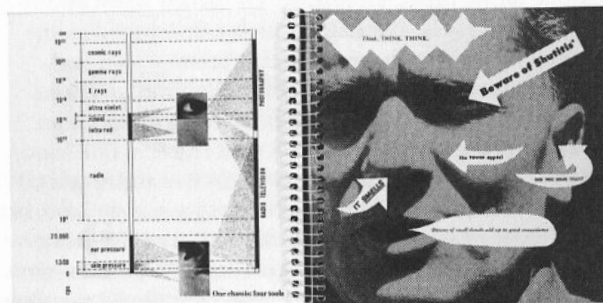
In architecture and design exhibitions, the spaces of ideation and creation are intensely intertwined. Showing work from these disciplines requires contextualizing objects not originally conceived for display and contemplation, which may involve de- and re-contextualization. The curatorial narrative of an exhibition might conjure for viewers the essence of the space that would usually surround the objects or, contrarily, create an opportunity for space itself to be the object for display. Whatever approach curators take, they will express it through the designed mechanics of the exhibition form itself, such as display furniture, layout and path, section titles, and didactic labels. In other words, a close relationship develops between the curatorial narrative and the designed environment that will present it to the viewer. Does this complex interrelationship between object and space, idea and display, also apply to the catalogue, the other “designed environment” of exhibitions? That is, is there something unique about the architecture and design curatorial process that might engender a different kind of associated publication? One that is more visual, instructive, sensual, or spatial? A survey of the catalogues accompanying some of the exhibitions considered in the present book suggests that there is.

Whereas exhibitions of art such as painting and sculpture frequently rely on geography and chronology to create context or narrative, architecture and design exhibitions have often strayed from these linear methodologies, instead employing questions or material observations as organizational principles. So, too, have architecture and design catalogues tended toward more complex frameworks, integrating voices from outside the fields of criticism and scholarship, and creating hybrid relationships between text and image. Many such books are made by practitioners who are only temporarily inhabiting the role of curator in collaboration with institutions. As such, these publications reflect not only the institutional context in which they were made but also a designer’s or architect’s approach to practice—in particular, a heightened attention to finding the most appropriate form for ideas and ways of doing. This method of thinking and making is particularly intriguing when applied to publishing curated spatial narratives. The endeavor is, essentially, an effort to publish a system of orientation. Considered in this way, a publication might be a wayfinder

for improvisation, a field guide for identification and reference, or an active interlocutor, suggesting new kinds of dialogues. Each of the catalogues surveyed here finds new ways to orient readers while simultaneously publishing the actions of making and experiencing an exhibition.

CATALOGUE AS WAYFINDER

The term *wayfinding* usually refers to techniques used to find a route or choose a path; a *wayfinder* is a tool that assists in doing so. Wayfinders might need to be improvisational, or even map destinations that have not been fully formulated. In book form, such a wayfinder might be characterized by an openness in physical structure, using light binding or folded forms (strategies that eschew fixed page counts and the limitations of the sixteen-page signature required for a sewn binding); similarly, they might favor generative approaches to content that allow contributors to determine the forms of their individual contributions.



- 1 Richard Hamilton, John McHale, and John Voelcker's illustrations of modes of dissemination and perception in Theo Crosby, ed., *This Is Tomorrow* (Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956).
- 2 Geoffrey Holroyd, Toni del Renzio, and Lawrence Alloway's chart of communication systems in Theo Crosby, ed., *This Is Tomorrow* (Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956).

The now landmark 1956 *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition travels to us through a modest six-and-a-half-inch square, 126-page spiral-bound publication (recently reissued in facsimile).¹ Designed by artist and designer Edward Wright, edited by Theo Crosby and produced by Anne Walby, its pages convey a specific time and place with a still-fresh now-ness. The exhibition's guiding principle, as Lawrence Alloway points out in his



3 "Five Questions about the City," in "Osakagram," special issue, *Archigram*, no. 9 (1970).

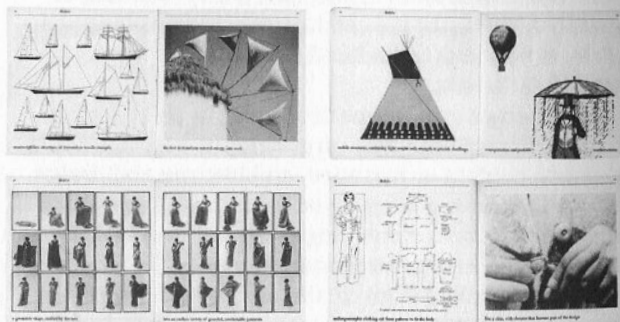
introduction, was "the desire to experiment in various channels without submitting to the idea of synthesis."² This democratic, open-ended approach is evident in both the catalogue's form and content. The spiral binding allows the book to open flat, and its layout is equally flexible, allowing for simultaneous formal innovation on multiple levels. The catalogue is a fast-paced romp through three introductions and original visual and textual contributions from all the collaborative teams that participated in the exhibition. It also includes an advertising supplement that allowed the first one thousand copies to be sold on-site for only five shillings. All the collaborators were given similar space and resources but allowed to take a direction of their own choosing. The written contributions range from first-person narration to declarative manifesto. Visual contributions range from the poetic and schematic (see fig. 1) to the representational and diagrammatic (see fig. 2). In short, rather than use the book structure to force a synthesis into a coherent whole, Wright and Crosby created a space for multiple approaches, unified through layout but not voice. In this way, primary research is disseminated in something very close to its raw form, and drawing conclusions is left up to readers, present or future.

This approach—establishing a framework and seeing what might grow within it—has since been adopted for catalogues of larger group exhibitions and biennials, where dispersed curatorial control and the involvement of multiple stakeholders can foster creative forms of publishing. For example, as part of Expo '70, the avant-garde group Archigram expressed their vision of the future in "Osakagram" (see fig. 3), not just in built structures. A two-sided, two-color print, "Osakagram" resembles a poster-style broadside when flat; folded, it resembles a pamphlet or small DIY magazine. In spirit it borrows from all of the above. "Osakagram" graphically explored five questions about the city, from its organization and facilities to ways of living in general, with the ultimate goal of dissolving the role of the city in everyday life. It combined found images with architectural diagrams in a series of

semi-cinematic storyboards and was designed to be carried and reflected upon while passing through the installation itself. In this way, the publication became part of a guided experience in which text and image were combined with a designed reading environment to make a synthetic whole greater than its parts. "Osakagram" is both a publication and an action, and in this way it resolves one of the more troublesome aspects of exhibiting architecture: how to talk about the building as subject while maintaining a distance from the building as object. "Osakagram" is a suggestive alternative; although enhanced by being read in a particular environment, it can describe, model, and project the qualities of an atmosphere.

CATALOGUE AS FIELD GUIDE

Field guides are highly portable illustrated books designed to help identify things while on the move (for example, birds, plants, or rocks while on a nature walk), but they are also a sourcebook for in-depth data to be read at leisure. Some catalogues function in this manner—and appropriately so, as exhibitions are both meant to be understood while viewing them and reflected on after that visit. As George Nelson states in his introduction to the catalogue for the 1976 Cooper-Hewitt Museum of Decorative Arts and Design exhibition *MAN transFORMS*, "Any exhibition, no matter how lively its themes or inventive its devices for presentation, can never be more than headlines and footnotes. The con-



4 Illustrations of the ways cloth may be transformed from Hans Hollein, ed., *MAN transFORMS* (Smithsonian Institution, 1976).

straints imposed are the feet of those who come to look." He continues, "It becomes essential to create a 'sit down' component of the exhibit. . . . this is the catalog."³ This is to say, some catalogues serve as detailed supplements to their exhibitions, expanding upon the ideas presented in the shows by going into further depth than is possible when limited by physical space constraints and viewers' stamina.

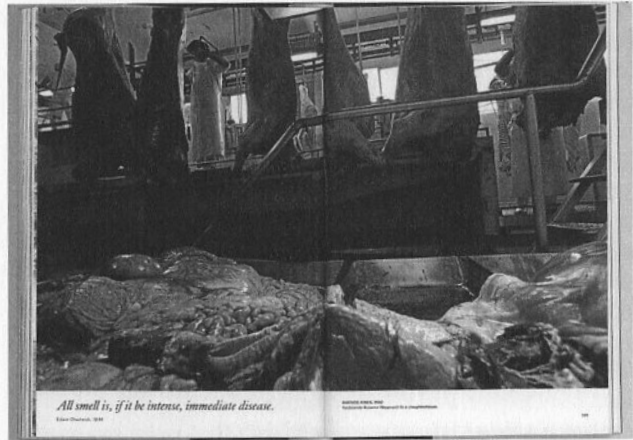
The *MAN transFORMS* exhibition inaugurated the Cooper-Hewitt as the Smithsonian Institution's national museum of design. The project was initiated by Lisa



5 Pages 286–87 from Mirko Zardini, ed., *Sense of the City: An Alternate Approach to Urbanism* (Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2005).

Taylor, the museum’s director, who selected as curator or “conceptualizer” architect Hans Hollein. Unifying diverse items within an experiential framework, the exhibition featured both objects from the Cooper-Hewitt’s collection and work from Hollein’s peer architects. The catalogue (Hollein’s “sit-down component”) opens quite literally with the figure of the architect: the first full-page image is an X-ray of a skull juxtaposed with a full-page montage of Hollein portraits. Moving out from the mind of the architect-curator-conceptualizer, the following pages are driven by material and process, with visual inventories of objects accompanied by factual and evocative captioning about them and their uses. One fourteen-page sequence takes readers through the transformation of a piece of cloth from tensile element to lightweight shelter, garment, and symbolic cultural object (see fig. 4). This contextualizing approach runs throughout the slim volume, both filling in blanks in the exhibition and bringing readers into the fold with the designers and other practitioners—thus helping visitors navigate a display in which Hollein aimed to communicate through visitors’ “receptiveness and willingness to experience, associate, transform, think.”⁴ If in the exhibition it is assumed that the complex provenance of a handle, a cloth, or a star will be readily felt and understood, in the catalogue attention to detail and documentation spells it out instead.

Similarly, the 2007 *Super Normal* catalogue by Naoto Fukusawa and Jasper Morrison is a case study in attention to everyday material detail. Sized to the hand at six by eight inches, it borrows its proportions from classic field guides. There is no chapter styling or thematic grouping; instead the pervasive flatness of the index predominates. The emphasis is not so much on formal innovation but rather on cataloging. Captions are data oriented, including details about the objects shown, such as what they are made of and where they may be purchased. A total of 210 objects are documented—with number 210 being the book itself! In the last pages of the book all of these are further “super normalized” through their hand-drawn portrayal in



6 Pages 288–89 from Mirko Zardini, ed., *Sense of the City: An Alternate Approach to Urbanism* (Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2006).

a visual index that transcends typologies (see fig. 2 on p. 77). It is this care and precision—analogue to the thorough contextualizing of *MAN transFORMS*—that makes this book not only a useful guide to the exhibition, but also a timeless guide to objects in general.

CATALOGUE AS INTERLOCUTOR

Interlocutors ask questions (at times, ones we would not think to ask ourselves) and invite dialogue (at their best, the conversations we aim to participate in). Some catalogues function in this manner. Discussing the form of the architectural book and, more specifically, the architectural exhibition book, publisher Lars Müller observed that the “appropriateness of internal structure and external form to its contents results in an aura.”⁵ It is this aura that marks out certain books as special, desirable, or useful. Considered from this perspective, the catalogue can be more than a form of exhibition documentation that has the tactical advantage of portability and easy circulation, but can also become an intellectual companion that develops alongside the exhibition—a vital tool for explaining, expanding, and even enacting content.

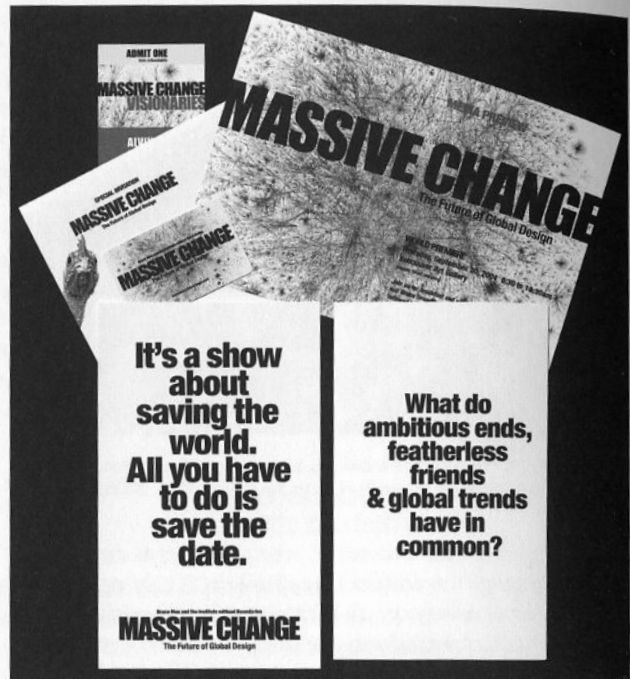
The 2005 publication *Sense of the City: An Alternate Approach to Urbanism*, edited by Mirko Zardini and based on a concept developed by Zardini with fellow architect Giovanna Borasi and designer/publisher Lars Müller, is an experiment in making a sensorially driven publication. As Phyllis Lambert, the founder of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (the exhibition’s venue), suggests in her preface, the publication brings into focus “an uncharted landscape of interdisciplinary research,” introducing experiential aspects of the urban environment into the purview of urban studies.⁶ The catalogue is itself a type of Trojan horse: in a precise and clinical format, it presents the subjective and visceral experience of daily life. Measuring eight by ten inches

and wrapped in a cold powder-blue cover, the book resembles an academic or medical journal in format and layout. It has wide gutters, is set in a serif typeface, and employs a chapter structure that progresses thematically. Unlike a typical academic journal, however, *Sense of the City* plays factual information and quotation against visuals whose emotional resonance the design amplifies: when images depict light and airy sensations, flower petals seem to kiss the top of the page (see fig. 5); when images depict stinky phenomena, they glisten in bloody clots in the book's gutter (see fig. 6). The book engages readers on multiple levels, using quotation and visual narrative in graphic juxtaposition to pull them into the deeper and more complex content, ultimately creating a third, visual-textual thing that requires participation to activate.

The 2004 catalogue *Massive Change: The Future of Global Design*, casts in a different light the relationships among text and object, text and image, book as object, text as object. Created by Bruce Mau and Jennifer Leonard, the publication aimed to map the terrain of contemporary design. Mau and Leonard invented an editorial-graphic strategy to articulate process-based decisions, creating text-object artifacts to temporarily materialize processes that do not produce physical things. Contributors to the publication came from diverse backgrounds, ranging from the biological sciences to journalism and data analysis. Loosely organized by so-called economies, thematic chapters were grouped around materials and production methods, outlining the influence of design in every sphere of daily life, from manufacturing to the military and from politics to the supermarket. Measuring seven by nine inches, the book's supersaturated pages flip like a magazine's. Heavily illustrated with 250 color and fifty black-and-white illustrations, including data maps and photographs of corporate refuse, you feel its (then) contemporaneity even before reading its proclamations of how design is affecting your life. One has the sense that Mau's book wants to explode from its pages, and through various means it does: the publishing strategy for this project was multivalent, media-saturated, and decentralized, encompassing parallel ephemera, a microsite on the web, and an ambitious proposal for a feature-length documentary film (not realized). In short, the publishing program for *Massive Change* was already engaged with questions that curators grapple with today, as research is translated or created through a multitude of platforms: not only the exhibition and the print publication (see fig. 7), but also websites and social media channels.

If a design and architecture exhibition aims for a glimpse of something we haven't seen before, or an experience of things that are familiar but presented in a heretofore unimagined way, then the catalogue often aims to fill in the blanks by telling us why—

112 why these ideas and objects have been selected



7 Ephemera from *Massive Change*. Vancouver Art Gallery Archives.

and presented and why we might be interested in knowing more about them. Using images and words in a fundamentally sequential format, the catalogue affords a different kind of space in which to guide its audience through ideas—sometimes a space in which to be even more inclusive, mapping existing directions while pointing the way to new ones; sometimes a space that serves as a sourcebook for how to find, use, or appropriate original content; and sometimes as a companion that prompts dialogue and poses questions, explaining ideas while also demonstrating them.

In books published to accompany exhibitions, curators, architects, and designers seek to make legible the context surrounding what they've chosen to exhibit, highlighting the connecting links that made them choose those objects for exhibition in the first place. They do this using ever-evolving means and, frequently, many different voices and images. This process itself builds new logics, theses, and points of view. In this way, catalogues reflect back both the world as we know it and the world of the exhibition, but also a world of their own.