Unveiling the Ultraviolet: 'Vita' Glass, bodies and the marketing of material performance

John Stanislav Sadar

In the mid 1920s, British glass giants Pilkington Bros. and Chance Bros. undertook an unlikely, cooperative project which promised to turn buildings into medical instruments. Through advanced chemistry, their effort compressed an entire epoch's hopes for a healthy life, free from the ravages of tuberculosis and rickets into 2.5mm of purposefully-designed 'Vita' Glass. Yet, its visual transparency rendered its enhanced ultraviolet performance opaque. Thus, to succeed in creating a disease-free paradise, they would have to communicate materials not as things in themselves, but as carriers of desirable effects, which they did through a groundbreaking campaign to *engineer need*. 'Vita' Glass reveals that our attitudes towards health and well-being transform our materials and the material possibilities for design, and that, in communicating material performance, advertising shapes our needs regarding the ideal relationships between our buildings, our environment and our bodies.

Biography:

John Stanislav Sadar is a Senior Lecturer in architecture at Monash University and a partner of Little Wonder design studio. Having studied architecture at McGill University, Aalto University, and the University of Pennsylvania, he is interested in the way our technological artefacts mediate the relationship between our bodies and the environment.