

## Summary

### Minimalism and Ornament

Herzog & de Meuron in conversation with Nikolaus Kuhnert and Angelika Schnell  
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*ARCH<sup>+</sup>: Presently, in America there is a provoking reception of Northern-Swiss architecture as 'German Swiss.' During the discussion that was held in conjunction with the opening of the Museum of Modern Art exhibition, 'Light Construction,' Greg Lynn supposedly spoke of the Northern-Swiss fascists.*

Herzog & de Meuron: I believe it was Peter Eisenman who spoke of the 'Swiss Fascists,' and thereby meant us as well. Ideologically, some see us as leaning toward the 'right', whereas during the same discussion, Kenneth Frampton described us as speculative and decorative. In a certain way that makes me happy, but it demonstrates the absurdity and to what extent the understanding of a single thing depends on different cultures and perspectives.

*Where does this misunderstanding come from?*

First of all, there are political grounds. Our architecture is part of a huge market and everyone wants his share of the pie. The Americans aren't building and therefore want to maintain, at least, theoretical dominance. Since winning the competition for the Tate Gallery we've experienced much stronger resistance than before, when we weren't so important. Now we have our feet right in the middle of someone else's table. But this is so in every business.

But it's important to challenge the ideological misunderstanding and accusations. One has to examine them critically so that they can be settled. That's why we go there; in order to understand how people in Japan, in New York or in Vienna, in Germany or in Switzerland can have entirely different, contrary, understandings of the same thing. It is important for every person to be globally understood, yet at the same time maintain his own identity. You must remain yourself, only then are you credible, whether it's in Japan or elsewhere. We're trying to understand how a work can be internationally understood yet, nevertheless, originate and grow in Basel, a local, demarcated space.

*Your own identity is clearly understood by others in relation to a regional context. The re-discovery of regional identity through the Postmodern did not only lead to a liberalization (from the dogma of International Style). Architecture was, in some cases, forced into a role in which it was to deliver images that were to stand as a 'Weltbild'; for example, the retreat of urban design in history in order to write over present-day insecurities. This image of regional identity becomes ideology. The example of Berlin with its 'Berlin Architecture' (New Simplicity) is all too well-known - but for you as 'Northern-Swiss' or 'German Swiss' it's not much different. How do you relate to these demands of societal groups, in a time when other disciplines (culture, politics, business) are renouncing ideology?*

### Tradition

Fundamentally, we come out against all ideologies. Beuys said ideologies are ossified forms about which there is nothing more to say. We're more interested in ideas than ideologies. Ideas are more open, they offer more room for design because one searches for different strategies and can be open to different situations. Our work demonstrates that we would never agree to one of these reductive, ideological images. Whether it's an image of 'Northern-Swiss' or a steadfast prescription for how a city should be built. Such rules - unfortunately - can no longer be used. The city of Berlin would resist such an occupation, whether the architects like it or not. The city won't allow itself to be locked in a prison of the 19th century. Ideologies are there only to be destroyed, because they're not livable. The city with its enormous potential energy opposes ideology from the first.

*Not entirely without irony, the Berlin 'New Simplicity' likes to refer to its connection to Switzerland, to the building culture which still exists here. There are personal interconnections; Berlin students who either follow Kollhoff to Zürich or work here and Swiss architects who have success in Berlin. All emphasize the fact that is was in Switzerland where they learned what they are now doing: namely, simple and clear facade composition, employment of traditional materials, etc. How do you relate to this utilization, to this Germanic embrace, as we call it? You are the quotation.*

The quotation is founded on a complete misunderstanding. But naturally, we can only answer for ourselves. We are friends with Hans Kollhoff; nevertheless, we also look at his work critically. We respect his work, especially those projects where he sets down a relatively isolated massive rock - like a foundling - against what he considers chaos. The Piräus Building in Amsterdam or the brick monstrosity on Potsdamer Platz in Berlin have this attraction. There's something sad, melancholic, like the good buildings from Roger Diener. His stone schoolhouse which appears so strange in the landscape, can no longer have an ideological effect. Roger Diener's buildings provoke letters from readers in the newspaper because people hate that and find it horrible and find much worse developer's buildings nicer. Perhaps you're going too much on the architectural discussions and not the reality of the city, which is not as Hans Kollhoff wishes it were. When the developers build stuff out of stone then it's ideology, then it's frightful. Hans Kollhoff can build good buildings with an ethic, a standard of craft and quality, that we can subscribe too. What's bad is when it's ideologized and when one believes that through it the city can once regain its old functional ability. There's probably nobody in Switzerland who considers this kind of breadth possible. The history of Germany, also the cultural history, leans toward polarization, always moves to the extremes. It is this that the neighbors of Germany are always afraid of.

*Steel, glass are modernistic. Stone is traditional and proper...*

That was true even earlier, during the romantic, in Goethe's time. Polarization always dominated the discourse, it's a German phenomenon. Switzerland lacks such a culture of radicalism. Therefore, one can't really take the Swiss as an example, or apply it to a large-scale urban situation. The image of Swiss or Northern-Swiss architecture is an invention.

*Given this rejection of local identity as an operative instrument, what is your attitude toward tradition?*

Something like tradition doesn't exist anymore. This is not only true in architecture but in most areas of culture. An architect can no longer base his work on traditional information. This means that the security and self-evidence that architecture maintained in traditional cultures has vanished. We don't mourn this lack of tradition because it opens up new, previously non-existent possibilities in architecture. We like to take advantage of the possibilities offered by new materials and new tools such as video and computers. This doesn't imply a distaste for traditional objects. We love traditional architecture - Swiss mountain houses as well as Japanese or Arab courtyard buildings. This architecture can reveal many secrets if we are willing to listen. But we should be aware of the forces at work in the age in which we live. There is no such thing as timeless values. Time is a reality; time is part of the project. Time changes, not very fast, but with a constant and invisible rhythm. Perhaps architects are not so aware of time because they cannot see it. Film-makers and writers can express 'time', can use it as a tool.

*That makes it sound as if you're not all that far from themes which are discussed in America. As a magazine publisher, we're very interested in the theoretical orientation of people like Sanford Kwinter, Greg Lynn, Peter Eisenman, younger theorists as well, and the attempt to see architecture in relation to the paradigm shift in the natural sciences. As a rule, younger American architects aren't judged by the place where they studied, but rather, by whether or not they've read Deleuze. Questions of continuity and difference, of the flow of energy and information, the collapse of overriding order, the critique of the classical models of representation are important not only in America, but in Europe - France - and in your own work as well.*

### Light and Transparency

It depends on how one looks at it. The question of flow is for example very important to us. We would like to unblock the city, meaning, make it more permeable. In doing so, we work from a phenomenological perspective. We use what exists in nature to orientate ourselves; not ideology, whether it's Deleuze or some other Frenchman. All of our projects are based on observed and described perceptions. The solutions for our projects have been found, so to say, on the street. We project our perceptions onto our architecture. This is the reason why our buildings are so different from one another. Our point of view is never the same, therefore our observations are always different. Our work consists, essentially, of observation



and analysis, thereby what already exists. Naturally, there are also constants in our work. These recurrent elements emerge again and again, like attractors in natural processes. Above all, with the attractors, it is not a matter of stylistic features or ontological categories. Classification doesn't help one to better understand our architecture.

*Working with light is an elementary means of attaining a multiple perspective on objects. Clearly that is what the organizer of the exhibit 'Light Construction,' Terry Riley, was interested in in your work. As formulated in the catalog introduction, he wants to move away from the arguments of Rowe and Slutzky in order to develop a new form of transparency, which he refers to as a veil, or veiling.*

What's interesting in this show, is that it points to how corporal transparency can be. Glass not only forms a surface, it is experienced as volume; and with light, it's no longer that it flows through a room, but that it takes on a structural aspect, and is thereby visible as form.

*That's exactly what's new. Rowe and Slutzky sight the so-called phenomenological transparency of Le Corbusier as a positive example; with these buildings one can recognize the spacial structure behind the facade through its interruptions. The exhibition wants to show that this can also be achieved with a glass building, meaning he criticizes Rowe's incorrect understanding of Gropius. Glass is no longer termed exclusively as something see-through: the interior presented from the outside view. Instead, it's about more than one layer of glass, or translucent elements, that inhibit an x-ray view. One can recognize only the outline of something that shines through and with this arises something secretive.*

... something magical and ghostly ... The shining through - light and transparency - is clearly something which draws people in; it has an erotic, physiological component. Mind you, one has to say that the discussion in conjunction with the exhibition opening didn't deal much with this, because in English the word light means 'Licht' as well as 'leicht'. For Toyo Ito, for example, 'light weight' - Leichtbau - means of little weight and mass. I believe that's possible, but: so what? For me that's not progress. Sometimes I want to build a house that's really heavy because weight is just as much a topic as light. To name ideological directions after formal categories is something of the past. We want our architecture to infiltrate the perception process. To set the perspective, so to say, into swing, we work very consciously with light. Depending on the way the light enters, on the day or the season, the building changes in appearance. The SUVA building, for example, sometimes looks like a glass box, at other times like a house of stone. Perception is exasperated so that one is forced to ask: What is a building? Where are its physical boundaries? To reach this border between that which is there and that which is perceived, interests us. The Goetz Collection is such a success, for these reasons. It has something magical. Warmth and light attract us. The building has a specific reserve, which some people simply didn't

get. With Mies's best buildings there's also this phenomenon. It is obdurate and boring and serial and repetitive but he plays that to such a point and internalizes it so completely, like a Japanese fighter, that it suddenly flips and becomes something entirely different. Naturally, that again has something to do with the culture or with one's own predilections. The demonstrative, which keeps re-emerging in Austrian architecture is, I must say, foreign to us: this regurgitation, this expressivity which is the blood of Austrian performance art - Christ on the cross and the attempt to represent this. We can accept it despite that. The massive white baroque churches in Bavaria are foreign to us. But despite that I find them great. We are also fascinated by Frank Gehry, though we would never make such things ourselves. We find it good that various qualities exist in the world. What's boring, is all that settles somewhere in between.

*Is this border between normal and cracked the moment where 'The Hidden Geometry of Nature' (Herzog & deMeuron, Zürich, 1992) and the invisibility of material becomes visible?*

#### Multiple Perceptions

We have learned much in reading about chemical processes and crystallographic descriptions in which microstructures, i.e. 'invisible' structures such as atomic grids of materials, are compared to the 'visible' aspects and qualities these materials or substances reveal to us in everyday life. These invisible structures determine such things as the shape, color or physical stability of an object. That's why it's so important to recognize the physical characteristics of all materials; the chemical construction of materials is basically the same, only the energy, the density of the molecular structure - which determines the crystallization forms - is different. Light is the medium that brings difference and similarity into appearance. Behind every project there is a concept of perception which is the result of this consideration; meaning, every project is an attempt to project and make visible the differences and similarities. With the library in Eberswalde we're printing exterior concrete slabs as well as the glass windows with photos from Thomas Ruff so that the materials appear to run into one another. We did something similar with the Goetz Collection. Plywood, sand-blasted glass and aluminium compose an even surface. The materials differentiate themselves from each other, only slightly or perhaps extremely, according to the light. The ability of material to appear very similar and then very different, interests us. Because this can still be executed in architecture.

*Will this effect of simultaneous proximity and distance not also be produced through a certain scale, a process of self-similarity in which at every phase of the project one is faced with analogous types of material organizations?*

We like it when buildings question the scale of their neighborhoods. What is big or small? Why does one have the impression that something is long or short? Examples of such investigations of scale are the Ricola storage building and the copper-clad signal

box. Our buildings are not without scale but they do not affirm in advance what one might know about or expect from scale. Computers have no scale. They calculate, they compute endless amounts of information and at no point in this endless line does the information have any 'meaning' other than that at another point. But you can, of course, write programs that function like organic structures, generating self-similar details by iteration. Such 'natural' computer programmes are actually closely related to our attempt to use self-similar images in developing a building's details - in traditional cultures, building masters further developed, in small increments, the details which had been handed down for centuries. We came to the structural analogy (self-similarity) between organic and built structures around 1984, when we began working with the text 'The Hidden Geometry of Nature'. Designing and detailing a building become a mental trip into the interior of a building. The exterior becomes like the interior. The surface becomes spacial. The surface 'attracts.' It attracts you while you work on it as a designer. You mentally penetrate the building in order to know what the building will be like.

*The depth of the surface, and its perception as such, arouses, for many critics, an association to minimal art. Rosalind Krauss characterized minimal art, specifically the work of Agnes Martin, as geometry without a center, or better said, with a hidden center which forces the surface, to the play of light or the texture of materials.*

In the 70's I studied the work of Donald Judd, and that has had an undeniable influence on me. That's also true of the theoretical issues which at that time were discussed first and more radically in American art. That we live in an information society is something we were dealing with fifteen years ago through questions of the missing center or questions of abstraction. Today's epigones of minimalism produce only reductionism. Although it appears to be about the simple - it is here that our work comes into contact with minimal art - the point of minimal art was never to be simple. The artists of the 60's wanted to be as independent of models as possible, to evoke the fewest possible images of things already in existence. That also had something to do with the time, with the new society that one wanted to found. Therefore it's like a left-over of the modern: to create something new without a preexisting model. Most importantly, the Americans wanted to create something that wasn't European. Abstract Expressionism reflects the expanse of the American landscape (Barnett Newman). And minimal art was invented in America. Therefore Eisenman, Lynn, and others' dismissal of us is not comprehensible. At the entrance to the 'Light Construction' exhibit hang four or five incredibly fine pictures from Agnes Martin which everybody ignored at the opening. The architects simply walked by. When the podium discussion came to the subject of boredom, simplicity and geometry, I referred to these pictures, by an American artist who is at home in New Mexico and influenced by Indian culture and its webbed structure, and said that if this is what is meant by boring, I'm happy to be boring.



*Do you not also rely on this boredom or simplicity, especially of form, in order to inhibit an ideological occupation of the materials; since for you it's about eliciting specific instead of universal messages from the material which are determined by a given location, through perception (of light, for example) and through their own physicality? Strikingly, in most of your projects you use a simple form, the rectangular box, which is profaned as the only geometrical base form. The strong form and the structure have to be oppressed so that the material of this form can be physically and sensually effective?*

We choose predominantly simple building structures when we want to draw attention to the surface. The geometric base forms are already much too symbolic. The Ando, Botta generation loves that because they see something archaic there, that is assumably anchored in man. For us, it's not about traditions of style or form that should provide protection from the chaotic reality in which we live. Our approach is different. Objects only exist through their context. The library in Eberswalde for example is related to the Goetz Collection, a simple rectangular form with an even surfaced facade. Due to the printing of the concrete and the glass, the facade works as a unified whole, although at the same time, it is structured by the windows. One looks out of some windows and through others light comes in. And if the light pours from inside outward - we have photos of the model which demonstrate this - it's like a container comprised of stacked plates or planes, in which books stand. At the same time, the printed images along the building work like a film sequence. Clearly, this overlapping of various forms of reading is only effective through the simplicity of the form. There are other reasons as well. If one erected too complicated a form in Eberswalde it wouldn't have fit the existing urban-design situation. There is a wide variety of buildings there but their ordering is relatively clear; like stones in a Russian Orthodox bracelet, here a red chunk, there a green and a rectangular, etc. A nice and simple city plan. Our box seems brutal and hard in its rectangular form, but the light and its images will serve the eyes. Many won't even know that it's a rectangle. The building becomes an essential piece in the bracelet.

*You overlap the hardness of form and the handling of texture...?*

Exactly. In our architecture, we want the surface to throw the form into question, so that you no longer know if it's a rectangle. The things mutually relativize themselves so thoroughly that it's no longer clear; because clarity usually proves itself deceptive. I don't have to further justify a clear and simple rectangular form - it is further relativized through the surface, because even this simple rectangle can't be accepted as a given.

*That backs up the thesis of Terence Riley. The postmodern exhausted itself with formal ornamentation, therefore we presently find ourselves, in a shift from form to surface, a multiple mode of perception. Is this why you work so closely with photographers and visual artists like Thomas Ruff and Rémy Zaugg?*

## Ornament

We've always worked together with artists. I've known Rémy Zaugg over twenty years, and we'd like to work with Thomas Ruff because he's dealing with questions of perception which are decisive for us. There are analogies between the work of Thomas Ruff and our own. His new series, for example, is called 'Andere Porträts' (Other Portraits). They are silk screened photographic portraits which are manipulated in a particular way. Parts of the faces are exchanged or overlapped with those of other faces, like with police identification photographs; he actually took the portraits with an old police camera. This overlapping is like our facades. You notice that something isn't right but you can't say exactly what. If you look at the images which he made of our projects you realize that everything that appears fine is all wrong, for example, that night scenes are copied into a image of daytime; all of the images are altered with computer. They are genetic operations. The printed concrete and glass slabs for the library in Eberswalde is the first project that we're collaborating on. Because tatoos, as the building's concept, determines the logic of our work, he choose the images. They come from his series, 'Zeitungsbilder' (Newspaper Images). For years he's been collecting these newspaper clippings and has in the mean time assembled a private archive. It's interesting how these images come out of the concrete. Suddenly they are embodied.

*Is the engagement with art a possible means of protecting yourselves from ideological demands?*

It's possible. Art has always been more fascinating than architecture, for us. This is not just an attitude. I read very little about architecture and don't know it well, because it has never interested me. However, I can learn a lot when I go out in the city on my way somewhere, from things and details that were not consciously planned. And actually architecture has always had more to do with that than with existing models. Rem Koolhaas, for example, certainly has something contemporary, but at the same time has something antiquated because of the quotations he uses. A quote would never appear in our architecture. Nothing bores me more than that: art about art, or architecture about architecture.

Naturally, collaborative work with artists always produces, as a side effect, something decorative: as 'waste product' you get an image. But it is not about the image itself or its contents, but rather, the arrangement of the image, meaning its technique. Thomas Ruff also works with stereographic images. He made one for our exhibit in the Peter Blum Gallery in New York: the image of the SUVA-building is comprised of two images that have a spacial effect when viewed from a specific point.

*Then Baroque churches are the best example, or a designer like David Carson who layers computer texts and images behind and over one another. The texture, for example the surface arranges itself as a kind of intelligent layer over the form? It should be spacial and have depth?*

What's interesting is when you can penetrate the materials. On entering a space you should become conscious of your own movements, your own perception. With the photos in Eberswalde you almost physically penetrate them, because you perceive the image in relation to your own body. I find this form of penetration of depth very interesting because it reminds you of your own physicality, your own being. After a day long meeting about the Tate Gallery you don't know if you even exist, you have to pinch yourself or go jogging so that you notice that you're still there.

*At some point you spoke of tatoos. For you it's about the re-introduction of ornament?*

We find tatoos interesting, in antique, as well as, contemporary culture. Therefore, we find what Loos describes seemly reactionary and difficult to understand. Ornament has always been interesting when it has a spiritual dimension. Although that sounds so old fashioned, it's important that it has meaning. The fact is that with the young, for example in the Rap Scene, the symbolic plays a particular role again.

*Graffiti...*

It's foreign to me, but I find the images interesting because they have something secretive, sometimes subversive. If one is condemned by Kenneth Frampton for using even one image, it's nothing more than ideological iconoclasm in accordance with the moral hypocrisy of modernism. With the design for the Greek-Orthodox church we tried to engage this question directly. What is an image? What is an icon? What are the origins of an image? The whole idea of the icon comes from the Platonic; there are ur-images that exist independently of artists. They are the true religious images that the artist as a seismographic medium brings to the fore. Therefore the images have been repeated over the centuries, according to a canon. Everything means something in the Orthodox Church, also in the Roman, the colors, the form, the positioning of the frame, etc. For example, St. Nicolaus is always in the same place - if you look at the choir, to the far right in the center... We took this as a concept. Photographic images are repetitively etched on translucent marble, the entire building was to consist of a canon of images; but naturally, the Bishop didn't get it. It is absolutely not so, that we thoughtlessly handle images and decoration.

*Through repetition and seriality images are liberated from the figurative. The storage building for Ricola in Mulhouse, for example, reminds one of Andy Warhol's work.*

We often use things that don't necessarily belong to architecture, for example silk screening or photos, texts, etc., and apply them so that in the end they are only architecture. It is most interesting when they are transformed to such an extent that they almost lose their original source. The photos of the individual plant leaves, with Ricola, become a wall. It has nothing to do with decoration.

The comparison to Andy Warhol is flattering. For me he's one of the greatest artists. There are images by him that despite seriality



and cheap technique have the power of an old master. He built a relational frame that allows the image to become icon. The iconographic arises only from complexity. Ordinary pop art is, in contrast, totally banal and boring.

*But outside of sign theory, icons also have an everyday meaning, for example, icons of popular culture. Is it not, for you, also about such popular things?*

Clearly. It is important to us that people understand us correctly. We don't want to shock people. We used copper as material for the Signal Box because it's comprehensible; it also has something noble, precious like the fragile computer system inside which is protected from the effects of radiation by the copper banding, like a Faraday cage. Everyone has an association with batteries and motors. Just like the leaves with Ricola, which is almost a pop element. Above all, we're not striving for simple illustration, rather we attempt to bring the applied photographic motifs into new meaning so that they can become a piece of architecture, similar to the case of antique icons. Art historically defined, what is meant by icon is an image that belongs to a liturgical context. One may never isolate an icon; hang it on the wall alone, as is often done. An icon is architecturally interesting because it is part of a space which ceases to exist the moment the icon is removed. The icon, space, scent, song and liturgy are part of a holistic image of the world. Today, naturally, that is ruined.

*Do you consider such things? Obviously, you attempt to approach people through means other than abstraction, technical systems, etc.?*

Abstraction and reduction are absolutely not our theme.

*...but rather the production of an emotional contact between the building and people...*

To speak of emotional contact is questionable. When abstraction means that something rich or organic is continually fragmented and reduced in order to refer to something supposedly fundamental - like for example Franz Marc - we find it an uninteresting formal exercise. Abstraction can be developed as a synthetic concept, meaning one produces a simple image from nothing, like Ad Reinhardt or Malevich did. Therefore, we have projects that are brutally simple like, for example, the student dormitory in Dijon or the Sports Center Pfaffenholz, St. Louis. It was, however, never our intention to make something abstract in the same sense as fine art, a *creatio ex nihilo*, so to say, which recalls nothing. That could never function in architecture anyway, because architecture is by nature very physical and brings certain moments of remembrance to the surface. Simplicity and the self-evident are more than simply interests of ours; they are absolutely necessary advancements, of increasing importance to every architect. Thereby, we also mean technical simplicity.

Translated from the German by Elizabeth Felicella

## Between the Face and the Landscape Alejandro Zaera p. 96

Hermann Rorschach was a Swiss psychiatrist who, at the start of this century, gathered a collection of inkblot sheets as an instrument for the analysis of personality.<sup>1)</sup> These plates, initially produced at random, were finally reduced to ten blots through the development of a phenomenology of the associations produced by such figures in the imagination of more than 40.000 subjects, both sick and sound. The Rorschach Test is classified as a projective test where the inkblots become screens on which the structures of personality are projected. The method consists of the utilitarian and scientific rationalization of a series of perceptual operations with a long history: from primitive paintings as completion of the figures formed by the rocky shapes of caves, to the contemplation of the capricious forms of clouds which delight the romantics, through the interpretation of flakings and damp stains used by Leonardo Da Vinci to train his disciples.

The brilliance of the Rorschach method resides in the proposal of material organization as depositary of meanings that are prior to the constitution of a representative language. Along a similar line, the 'sémiophysique' of René Thom explains that significant effects - pregnancies - have nothing to do with the essence of things, but rather with their ability to enter an intelligible and thus operable world.<sup>2)</sup> Nature is continuous; it is human conscience that is capable of individualizing discrete entities, figures, in order to operate on reality.

Both proposals have a special repercussion in the work at hand. In Herzog & de Meuron's work, the emergences of material organizations become pregnant elements, without having to blend to the established structures of significance. It is not a matter of concentrating on the description of phenomena, but rather of providing them with pregnancy, intelligibility. The strategy may also include dissolving the forms of experience, of weakening its structuring power to recover the freedom to reorganize matter. Hence their questioning of figuration - the use of figures with established pregnancy - a means of significance.

It is a question of gender: Herzog & de Meuron oscillate between portrait-architects and landscape-architects; between the Italian and the Flemish school... Their work possesses the precision and structure of those who find light years of difference between slight deformations of outline and gesture. But their work also shows the richness in texture and sensuality of those who are able to abandon themselves to the disorder of matter. What they are probably not yet is still-live-architects...

Herzog & de Meuron's projects evidence an enormous effort - also noticable in their texts - in the construction of surfaces as preminent elements of architecture. The envelope becomes their main research field, beyond structural or spatial organizations. Envelope as the area of articulation between interior and exterior, where the public values of the architectural object are registered: the face of the building. In contrast to a large part of modern architecture, determined to make this boundary disappear, Herzog & de Meuron concentrate on defining it, generat-

ing new constructions without nostalgia for the form-function identity - the 'primitive head'<sup>3)</sup>. Their work displays a determination to operate within a paradigm - that of 'faciality' - that could tend towards both the cancellation of the body as well as its ultimate release from natural determinations. The sensuality of surfaces in the work of Herzog & de Meuron does not originate in the primitive and innocent sincerity of those who aimed at the disappearance of veils - the pure manifestation of the naked body as the source of significance. Nor is it identified with the faciality that has traditionally constituted the academic architectural discipline, based on the virtuous application of a code, established as adequate to public morality, to the body of the building. It thus escapes a system of significance with a long tradition dating back to the Renaissance: Alberti divided architecture into alignments, deriving from the mind, and matter, deriving from nature. The body of a building should be covered by a skin made of several layers of stucco that must "shine like marble"<sup>4)</sup> and subject the material body of the building to the dominance of an appropriate visual order that is manifested in the organization of the surface: to act like a canvas or a screen for the imposition of significances on matter.<sup>5)</sup>

The fundamental strategies of such a form of faciality are those of defining the edges of the plane - base, body and coronation -, to appropriately organize the duality between holes and screens - establishing centers and symmetries -, to determine unequivocally the function of each hole, - signifying doors, windows, etc...-, to control the screens - moulding panels, adding ornaments -, to graciously overcome the discontinuities produced by the corners in the application of a type of police strategies aimed at the strict control over the expressiveness that rearises when we immerse ourselves in the uncoded, raw matter, to generate new percepts from it... What Jean Dubuffet was heading to in his statement: "The world of formal ideas has always seemed to me of very little value in comparison with the sovereign kingdom of stones".<sup>6)</sup>

Herzog & de Meuron's determination to operate from the surface is quite clear from their very design process, which originates in the characteristic lead pencil drawings on paper where a two-dimensional organization is asserted as the seed of the project. The notable absence of perspectival or three-dimensional representations in the elaboration and presentation of projects are an evident manifestation of a specific style that is clearly exemplified in the Tavole House, where the figure of a cross is projected and rotated successively to constitute the central feature of the project.

This traditional way of approaching projectual operations does not, however, inherit the constrictions of a system, that of faciality, born within the representational paradigm. The faces of Herzog & de Meuron are not stable, they do not define edges, borders or frameworks. They diffuse, through the materiality of the surface, the limits between holes and screens. They do not specialize the parts functionally, but rather turn them into traces.<sup>7)</sup> Their work is on the verge of alternation between the face - what is ordered, pregnant - and the landscape - the chaotic, emergent.<sup>8)</sup>



In the Schwitter Building, the Ricola Store, and the 'Auf dem Wolf' Signal Box, we find an initial strategy of liberation from the classical precepts of faciality: an instability of the visual order - like in an op-art composition - of the configuration of the facade plane, the easing of control over the identity of the face. In the case of the Sandoz Laboratories, a visually destabilizing - moaré - effect, is produced through the serigraphy of the insulation texture on the enveloping glass, to visually overlap two layers of the same texture.

In the Hebelstrasse House and the Schwitter Building, we find another form of dissolving traditional structures of superficial organization: the serial order that constructs the main elevation is suddenly interrupted, revealing the discontinuity of the corner. To obviate the need for a specific treatment of the edge of the surface and the definition and articulation of its boundaries, is a strategy that was foreseen in the Tavole House through the concealment of the corner structure. Through this operation, the structure as closed form turns into trace, or form that does not delimit an interior domain. The lack of an edge definition involves a reduction of the hierarchic structure of the surface, through the absence of a framework.<sup>9)</sup> The best example of this operation is undoubtedly in the configuration of the corner of the Ricola Store, where both planes meet directly, without any component that resolves their edge, turning the facade elements into traces instead of individualized forms. Like in Godard's films, the joint is made through direct cut, without fade-outs...

Herzog & de Meuron express their deep dislike for "white models" and "conventional architectural perspectives", which reduce architecture to volume and geometry.<sup>10)</sup> Instead of this, they propose the inclusion of material singularities in the construction of the surface. The operation that is applied to the envelope of their buildings is a materialization of the face, in opposition to the hylomorphic faciality consisting in the application of formal entities to an essentially inexpressive and unintelligible matter. Material specificity produces the dissolution of figures. Binary configurations of holes and screens<sup>11)</sup> are replaced by textural structures without a figure-background duality. Already in the Blue House, the simple application of the intense Yves Klein's blue on the plane of the facade, cancels out the stability of the wall as a screen. Similar pictorial mechanisms can be found in the Schwarz Park Appartements project and the Dijon University Students' Residence. In both projects, the alternation light and dark horizontal bands, - a mechanism often found in pre-Renaissance Italian architecture, at the dawn of modern faciality -, disintegrates the plane of the facade as a surface for visual reflection.

We also find other strategies to dissolve the figurative pregnancies and the functional determination of the elements of the surface. Doors, windows and panes are disfigured: which are the doors and which are the windows in the Hebelstrasse House? Where is the entry to the Ricola Store, the Blois Cultural Center or the Goetz Gallery? They have disappeared into the texture; the face is

transmuted into landscape. Centralities and symmetries, recognizable hierarchies, have disappeared to release the power of repetition,<sup>12)</sup> to turn the face into specific territory, into a rhythmic landscape.

As in Rorschach's inkblots, a material organization that is not determined by significant structures becomes a surface for the projection of meanings. (If centrality and symmetry are still maintained in them, it is probably by inheritance of certain perceptual conventions that are unquestioned by the author: perhaps we should start an asymmetrical, eccentric and chaotic Rorschach, free from the conventions of representative perception and the organization of form). The disfiguration of the face enables Herzog & de Meuron to return to the chaotic landscape of matter without having to abandon intelligibility, in the search of new percepts.

#### The sensorial difference: repetition and self-similarity

Herzog & de Meuron's work is distinguished, especially in comparison with the vast majority of contemporary architecture, by the use of repetition as a compositive technique. At the other extreme, the historicist, regionalist and deconstructivist architectures have been presenting themselves as incorporations of the concept of difference, one of the specific categories of contemporary productive and political modes. Instead of difference as a temporal identity (Popper-Rowe), difference as regional identity (Heidegger-Frampton) and difference as linguistic identity (Derrida-Eisenmann), the work of Herzog & de Meuron approaches repetition as a sensorial form of difference, as "non-representative difference" in the words of Deleuze.<sup>13)</sup>

It is precisely repetition which enables them to approach the specificity of the work in a more consistently architectural way, instead of operating by the systematical proliferation of difference, as Lefebvre explains, proposing textures and rhythms, as the material, temporal and spatial, organizations, with significant entity beyond linguistic codes.<sup>14)</sup>

The use of repetition in the work of Herzog & de Meuron is a good illustration of this operating mode in which particularity is affirmed in opposition to generality. It is an alternative strategy to the operation with represented concepts or figures within a pre-existing linguistic space. Repetition as the supreme manifestation of freedom and particularity, as the dynamic order that creates a space, a time, a rhythm, a temporal synthesis that includes past and future, and avoids both the narrative arguments and the chaotic succession of phenomena.

Here, repetition has a quite different meaning from the objecttype of industrial production. It has an intention that goes back to the most basic operations of the construction of space and territory: the rhythm of the tam-tam, the territorial signs, the ornamental motifs of tattoos... Repetition in Herzog & de Meuron is only related incidentally - vaguely in the effects, never in the intentions - to reproduction, to the model-copy system. This is where their work is also distanced from architectures that insist on serial production, on repetition as identity. It is different from these architectures where

the repeated component occupies a milieu by reproducing an identical concept: it repeats a meter instead of generating a rhythm.

In Herzog & de Meuron's work, repetition is the instrument that permits the generation of a space in which differential intensities become expressed. In the Hebelstrasse House, the repetition of the tie structure and the corresponding pillars makes expressive the change in the alignment of the enclosure ... to escape finally from the meticulous reproduction of a measurement; to enter the expressiveness of rhythm. Rhythm is opposed to meter because its significance is registered on a different plane to that of actions.<sup>15)</sup>

Its meaning must be found beyond the plane where the action takes place, that is, not in the nature of the component that is repeated, but rather in the mode in which the repetition is produced.

Repetition works by contraction of cases. This is the point where we find the specificity of a rhythm, where differences is manifested sensorially. It is the opposite process to the representation of difference, to the occupation of area through essentially differentiated configurations - as in historicist, regionalist and deconstructivist architectures - or the organization of a framed milieu that is occupied through elements subjected to a hierarchic organization, - as happens in high-tech architecture -. Herzog & de Meuron's architecture works effectively by contraction, by reduction to a nucleus of material organization that constructs the specificity of the architectural object through repetition. It is not a question of imposing forms on matter, but of elaborating an increasingly rich and consistent material, all the better to tap increasingly intense forces.<sup>16)</sup>

Polyrhythmic material produces the specificity of a territory without pre-defined boundaries. As in the nonius, the sensorial difference is materialized in the overlapping of different series; a polyrhythmia. Herzog & de Meuron's architecture is rich in these effects: the railing of vertical bars on the repetition of structural elements on the facade plane of the Schwitter Building, highlighting the curved volume; the series of railings, fusiform columns and metal ties on the panel-shutters that explaine the change in alignment of the balconies of the Hebelstrasse House; the overlapped rhythms of the structure and the divisions on the enclosure in the Ricola Factory extension...

Herzog & de Meuron's operating mode denotes a self-similar relationship that not only affects the repeated elements, but also configurations on different scales and conceptual levels. It is not a geometric or mathematics self-similarity. The logic of identity on which mathematics - even fractal mathematics - are based, makes it difficult to think that an algorithm could effectively cover the material organization of an architecture, or even reveal highly significant data about it.

It is a self-similarity on a fundamentally conceptual level, manifested in both the syntactic structure of the architectural object, and in its relationship with context.

A self-similar architecture is particularly efficient when working in an unstable environment, such as that of an advanced capitalist economy: it not only gives the object an extraordinary solidity against a potential amputation or enlargement, but also makes



it more independent of its relationship with context from the moment it eliminates scale as the constituent essence of the project. Scale always depends on a reference system, and is thus inappropriate as a mechanism of signification in a position of instability. Projects such as the Ricola Store and the Auf dem Wolf Signal Box are examples of the scalar indetermination in Herzog & de Meuron's operating strategies. In these projects, scale is not a constant, linear function as in classical architecture, but a differential function that depends on its border conditions. It is not that there is no scale relationship with context in these projects, but rather that this relationship is ambiguous. It does not become inherent to their material organizations. One must not forget that both repetition and self-similarity are structures of colonization and survival rather than of codification of the milieus...

There is a third operative strategy in the work of Herzog & de Meuron that is closely related to the procedures analyzed previously. How, in the light of the arguments that we have maintained, can one explain the serigraphy of religious icons on the alabaster envelopment of the project for a Greek Orthodox Church? How can one explain the facades of the projects for the Flowtec, SUVA and Sandoz Laboratories, where the enveloping surface is printed with images or text? How to explain the electronic letterbands in the Blois Cultural Center, the Berlin Zentrum project and the Munich Modern Art Museum? Is it perhaps an abandonment of material concretion and abstraction as expressive forms? How to explain this sliding between material and representative milieus?

The categories advanced in the previous sections are precisely those which permit us to establish a continuity between both operational modes, beyond the traditional artistic categories of the abstract and the figurative, beneath classifications or codifications of the milieus. Herzog & de Meuron's work can be understood better in the ambiguity between emergences and pregnancies, between what is revealed and what is projected, at the point when it mediates between chaos and the appearance of specific territories.

The categories of figurative and abstract are produced in the domain of representation; figuration is already a form of abstraction of reality, a form of art. It is the crisis of representation that produces the transcendence of the figurative-abstract duality.<sup>17)</sup>

The introduction of figurative motifs in Herzog & de Meuron's projects (the Blois Cultural Center, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Flowtec Laboratories, the Paris-Jussieu Libraries...) occurs as an inverse procedure to that of the abstraction needed to produce order or intelligibility in a chaotic material organization (the process in the Rorschach plates or in the urban designs for Stuttgart-Mühlhausen, Dijon and Basel). Figuration is disfigured to become texture, to abandon its representational nature. Pregnancies become emergences, through repetition and juxtaposition.

This is a process that has a clear precedent in some of Warhol's productions such as the Car Crash, Campbell's Soup Cans and Marilyn Dyptych series... where an image of socially high pregnancy did integrate into a

texture from which color stains, dispersed parts... , emerge. (It is not coincidental that Warhol was also attracted by the Rorschach as an artistic process...). This ambivalence between abstract and figurative languages is what distinguishes Warhol and Herzog & de Meuron from Oldenburg and Venturi, Rauch & Scott-Brown. In the former, the figurative component tends to disappear in a texture, while in the latter, it is used as a recognizable, pregnant - albeit recontextualized - element. The work of the latter is still produced within the linguistic-representative paradigm, while in both Warhol and Herzog & de Meuron's work, the figure becomes a rhythmic incident, precisely what produces the transfer between milieus: the rhythm connects a social construction to a material structure. The inclusion of text in the surface of buildings occurs within this same operative mode. With text, the manoeuvre is ever more obvious in the sense that words are the paradigmatic representative code. In Herzog & de Meuron's work, text functions as a significant texture, rather than as another sign amongst the different linguistic operations that construct the significance of the building - the case of many projects by Venturi, Rauch & Scott-Brown, where text is referred specifically to the content of the building. In the Blois Cultural Center or the Paris-Jussieu Libraries, text becomes a social texture, not necessarily determined by the signification or character of the building.

The work of Herzog & de Meuron is therefore independent of the milieus. Travelling in both directions along the vector that links order with chaos, nature with artifice, emergence with pregnancy, matter with signs; connecting the abstract and the figurative.

And facing the established rhetorics by putting on a landscape face...<sup>18)</sup>

#### Notes:

- 1) Hermann Rorschach. Psychodiagnostics. Berna: Huber, 1942. See also Rudolf Arnheim's analysis in *Towards a Psychology of Art*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966
- 2) "Instead of establishing Geometry on Logic, it is a question of establishing Logic within Geometry. Thus, we produce an overall scheme of a world made of emergences and pregnancies: emergences are respectively impenetrable objects; pregnancies are hidden qualities, efficient virtues that, emanating from source forms, impregnate themselves with other emerging forms and produce visible (figurative) effects." René Thom. *Esquisse d'un Sémiophysique*. Paris: Interéditions, 1988.
- 3) On the distinction between the body-head system and the faciality system as machines of significance for material organizations, see 'Year Cero: Faciality' Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987
- 4) Alberti. *On the Art of Building*, Book IV. Madrid, Albatros 1977
- 5) See also Victor Burgin and Mark Wigley's analysis of the control of the body by the glance in *Sexuality and Space*. New York: Princeton Arch. Press, 1992.
- 6) Jean Dubuffet in Peter Selz. *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*. New York: MoMA, 1962.
- 7) I refer to the distinction that René Thom makes between form as the figure which defines an interior and an exterior, distinguishing itself over a background, and trace as the figure that does not outline an interior, and therefore has an ambiguous relationship with the background, even when it is expressed as pregnancy. According to Thom, topological connectivity of form is

one of the characteristics that enables its individuation by definition of an interior domain. René Thom. *Esquisse d'une Sémiophysique*. Paris: Interéditions, 1988.

- 8) A landscape is something essentially chaotic, but is found in the scale of sizes amongst the ordered forms of, let's say, a flower and the globe. Rudolf Arnheim in *Towards a Psychology of Art*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966
- 9) However, all hierarchic distribution presupposes two steps: framing and filling. One outlines the field or fields, and the other organizes the resulting space. E.H. Gombrich. *The Sense of Order*. Oxford: Phaidon Press Limited, 1979.
- 10) See 'The Hidden Geometry of Nature', in Herzog & de Meuron. Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1992.
- 11) See 'Year Cero: Faciality'. Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- 12) "Indeed, it is through symmetry, that rectilinear systems limit repetition, preventing infinite progression and maintaining the organic domination of a central point with radiating lines, as in reflected or star-shaped figures. It is free action, however, which by its essence unleashes the power of repetition as a machinic force that multiplies its effect and pursues an infinite movement. Free action proceeds by disjunction and decentering, or at least by peripheral movement: disjointed polythetism instead of symmetrical antithetism." In 'The Smooth and the Striated', Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- 13) See Gilles Deleuze. *Différence et Répétition*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968.
- 14) "Repetition not only does not exclude difference, but begets them, produces them. Sooner or later, repetition finds the phenomenon that arises, or rather happens, though its relationship to the whole or repetitively produced series. In other words, the difference". Henry Lefebvre. *Eléments de Rhythmanalyse. Introduction à la Connaissance des Rythmes*. Paris: Syllepse, 1992
- 15) "The territory is not primary to the qualitative mark; it is the mark that makes the territory. Functions in a territory are not primary; they presuppose a territory-producing expressiveness. In this sense, the territory and the function performed within it, are products of territorialization. Territorialization is an act of rhythm that has become expressive, or of milieu components that have become qualitative. The marking of a territory is dimensional, but it is not a meter, it is a rhythm. It retains the most general characteristic of rhythm, which is to be inscribed on a different plane than of actions." In 'Of the Refrain', Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.
- 17) "The abstract is not directly opposed to figurative. The figurative as such is not inherent to a 'will to art'. In fact, we may oppose a figurative line in art to one that is not. The figurative, or imitation and representation, is a consequence, a result of certain characteristics of the line when it assumes a given form." Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- 18) "Putting on a landscape face": direct translation from the Spanish "poner cara de paisaje", a colloquial expression meaning "keeping a straight face", "dissimulating", "not waiting to show one's attitude"...



Architectonics have played an important role in the aesthetic theory of minimal art – one spoke of the 'becoming architecture' of sculpture. Reversely, minimal art plays an important role today within the latest Swiss-german architecture – accordingly, one could speak of the 'becoming-sculpture' of architecture.

A new type of architectural simplicity has proliferated Switzerland. It is too radical, too much a kind of platonic 'Kalokagathie' as in 'simple=real and true', for it to correlate in any way to the superficial architectural debates of Berlin. It is about the essence of modern architecture, if not with the entirety of architecture – an essence, that should be filtered like gold, from the silt of the Post-modern.

#### Becoming-Sculpture of Architecture

Further details on the subject can be found in the afterward of Marcel Meili's 1991 company report, based on over ten years of work experience. The talk is of an alliance within new Swiss-german architecture. Seamlessly bound to the experience of their colleagues who determined the debates in the 80s, are projects from less known architects such as Peter Märkli, Axel Fickert, Annette Gigon & Mike Guyer, Matthias Bräm and Markus Wasmer. Like the ones who today have returned to abstracter form, the others have confined themselves to the essential and move to radicalize the convention. For this purpose, architecture adopts art as a guide – but not an understanding of art which emphasizes the expressive gesture, rather art as an "exposure of the principle characteristics of design," a "means of self-representation" as form. So understood, reduction – "a keyterm for local tendencies" according to Meili – takes on new meaning in that "its not the expression of a Calvinistic ascetism, but rather an attempt – within an extremely complicated set of cultural conditions – to defend the truth and the pleasure of seeing from the propoganda of form."

The reality of traditional, Swiss building is deliberately ignored; instead the stronger 'form itself' of building is underlined. The mark of a new Swiss-german architecture is something as follows – pregnant volume, draped in a shell of serial elements, layered through horizontal ledges, like layer cake. The Kirchnermuseum in Dove (Gigon & Guyer, 1992), the Holzproject (Meili & Peter, 1993), the Bâlois Office Building in Basel (Diener & Diener, 1994) exemplify this tendency. Bruno Reichlin's notion of architecture as "a system of immanent rules always in the back of one's mind" is voluntarily renounced in the name of formal liberty in design – even if ultimately this goes against the line of more recent production procedures.

The otherside also enlists a program of abstract form, with the same goals in mind. Wolfgang Schett, the first ETH professor from the group of younger Swiss-german architects, began in 1991 to differentiate "new images of comprehensible construction" from "old images of atmosphere". Martin Steinman supported a corresponding transformation of images as a design-rele-

vant theme; important in regards to this argument is his essay, 'La forme forte' (FACES Nr. 19), in which he backs up with Gestalt-psychology arguments from Rudolf Arnheim. This eventually lead him to minimal art, which was already important to Arnheim in the 60's. The language of a building, seen from this position, no longer needed to follow word-for-word its function or construction, rather it had to convey an intelligible presentation of the 'construction apparente'. For Steinmann, this generalization of form was very much connected to minimal art: "this is the lesson that minimal art offers: the objects point to their presence which is inscribed in their materiality. On the other hand, it is exactly the material which their presence points out." There is no idea behind, above or in the object; architectonic elements are present – that is all that an architect of New Simplicity has to be concerned with.

The esteemed position of minimal art in Swiss-german architecture goes back to the early 80's. At that time Jacques Herzog spoke of the "specific weight of architecture" which perhaps unintentionally reminds one of a very different expression from Robert Morris, "the specific weight of the the presence of a particular shape," or the "specific objects" of Donald Judd. Judd's stacked, prismatic, hollow forms of 1985 can be understood as 'specific objects'. In the realm of architectural projects, it is then that an engagement with minimalist aesthetics became concrete, and since then that Herzog & de Meuron have been working, on occasion, with the Swiss artist, Rémy Zaugg. Today when Herzog uses the expression 'specific architecture' in order to characterize his own creation, as in an interview with Moritz Küng (Scala, nr. 19, 1993), the term takes its meaning in relation to Judd.

An early collaborative project of Herzog & de Meuron and Zaugg was the Project Elsässertor in Basel (1990). The model, built in 1:50 scale begs a comparison to minimal art, particularly to the Cartesian spatial grids from Sol LeWitt. Despite different respective proportions and construction solutions; conceptually, both works derive definition from the correlation between sculpture and arrangement, though each is differently geared. With Sol LeWitt the arrangement of the whole crystalizes within the logic of the structure; with Herzog & de Meuron and Zaugg, the structure is effected by functional and contextual orders outside of the structure which demarcate the endless in-, next to- and above each another of its elements and determine the resulting arrangement.

The concept of 'specific architecture' has a double significance in our argument. The first is best illustrated by what Steinmann means by the show of presence and Meili by a 'means of self-representation' as form; it has to do with the special, complex, better: specific reality that is contained in every project. The other is the disclosure of the fact that New Simplicity in Swiss-german architecture does not make Switzerland exceptional. Minimal art in the end of the 80's was questioned heavily and the methodological connections between minimal art and contemporary architecture were discussed

thoroughly. In a 1989 issue of *Rassegna* on minimal art, there appeared a contribution from José Luis Mateo – then the editor of *Quaderns* – entitled, 'Artiness and Design in the European Situation', which came to the fore of the debate. In a consideration of Europe, Mateo makes each and every observation which Meili would make a year later of the Swiss situation; namely, that everywhere the desire is palpable to engage oneself with the artistic form of architecture – "the appearance of a desire for artiness." Also in accordance with Mateo's argument, is the denouncement of expressivity, in favor of formal reduction and the search for the essential; something which set the tone for minimal art. Another factor in the importance of minimal art as a model is its ties to contemporary metropolitan reality.

In this correlation, lies a contradiction for the architects affected by minimal art. On the one hand they want to keep pace with technological progress, but on the other they fight time to maintain the pretension of having revealed the final truth of architectural design. In this way they assign themselves a task not unlike that of Deckard's, alias Harrison Ford, in the film 'Bladerunner' – namely, to protect the highest level of technology in which society still comes before the progress of technical products. Indeed, the Minimal Architects act as 'Gestalt' police who defend the presence of building materials as an ultimate, inescapable factor of architecture against the form-replicants of the postmodern. Under the given terms of production, material presence is increasingly dispelled, and takes on a similar ranking to erstwhile industrially manufactured products that were made to appear hand-made.

Characteristically, the only building in 'Bladerunner' that is formally related to minimal art is the headquarters of the all powerful Tyrell Corporation (also similar is the film 'Stargate'). The gigantic complex comprised of the base-form of a pyramid and two rhombos-shaped forms, is where Dr. Tyrell produces the replicants, with the single goal of attaining immortality. The remaining population of the city is comprised of 20% punks, 30% Mexicans and 50% Chinese living in deceitful apartments on the rations of provisional food stands.

Without impugning the advocates of New Simplicity and their motives, one can ascertain in them a phobia of the chaotic masses which is similar to that of the Tyrell Corporation. What would a science-fiction film look like in which New Simplicity's program of purity were followed to its logical extent? And on which side would they stand were they to build in Los Angeles in 2017?

In any case, it is clear that the new abstract tendency in Swiss-german architecture belongs to a larger movement dealing with the argument that Minimal art replaced pop art as the provider of raw material. Minimalization asserts that it is everything else but minimal when it comes to the arrangement of form. Minimal art becomes a guarantor of the truth of seeing and of the preservation of a specific presence against the postmodern persuasion of form. Zaugg's book with the title, 'The List of the Innocent' (1982) about six steel boxes by Donald Judd, is taken up by many younger Swiss-german architects to serve as a 'confessional mirror' in the exploration for their own formal truthfulness.



### Becoming-architecture of Sculpture

Just as minimal art has come to be a fixed component in architectonic debates, so were the minimal artists involved with architecture. Many dealt directly with building projects. Tony Smith, whose work was described by critics of minimal art as first-rate 'corpus delicti', was a successful architect who worked as an assistant for Frank Lloyd Wright in 1936-37 and taught architecture at The Cooper Union in New York before turning entirely to sculpture in 1960. Sol LeWitt was employed in the office of Ieoh Ming Pei, Robert Grosvenor studied architecture in Paris and Ronald Bladen gained construction experience in a San Francisco shipyard. As foremost example stands Donald Judd, who worked steadily as an architect.

Therefore it is no surprise that architectonics occupied a broad space in the theoretical reflections on minimal art. This is especially true of the afore mentioned essay 'Specific Objects' by Donald Judd (Arts Yearbook, 1965) which has served as an unofficial program of minimal art since its publication. Other artists like Robert Smithson ('Entropy and the New Monumentality', Artforum, June 1966) and Robert Morris ('Notes on Sculpture' Artforum, February and October 1966) have, to be sure, responded to 'specific objects' with their own interpretations, but not without bringing their own architectonic terms to bear. Therefore, Judd's essay may be considered representative for its articulation of an artistic interest in architecture within minimal art.

As 'specific' Judd points not to the particular way in which an object is constructed but to the relationship that a form has to its contents. For Jacques Herzog, on the other hand, 'specific objects' are ordinary containers. Clearly, traditional artworks could also be understood as such; a modern painting is a container that is specially made for the contents of its compositional elements, the facade of the Palazzo Rucellai in Florence is a container comprised of strictly ordered parts. In contrast, a 'specific object' does not compose itself of parts, but rather takes on only those characteristics which are defined by the form of the whole – paint color, geometry, virtual volume. The 'specific object' is non-relational, that means "the thing as a whole, its qualities as a whole draws interest." It is about the production of compact forms that nevertheless, should be "extended, open and more or less environmental." Judd refers to the book 'General Theory of Value' by the American philosopher Ralph Barton Perry. Specific Objects don't need to possess aesthetic value. It suffices that they are 'interesting', whereby the void that the containers contain comes to the front line, as if draped from the outside. Hence, the specific is that value which is left over when an object has lost its value and when the container presents the void that it contains as its content.

Judd developed the term 'specific' in his formulation of the exhibition "Twentieth Century Engineering" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1964. He dismisses the customary division between art and everything else, as merely an invention of collectors and art

historians. Art and not-art – in so far as made things are intentional – can only be distinguished from one another in degree. Accordingly, things can be ordered by a scale that runs from general and objective to specific or concrete: moving from geometric form, to tools, to engineering, to building and finally to works of art. Engineering forms, for Judd, are more general and less specific because they are the product of objective circumstances. He grounded the fact that this order could not be applied without exceptions through a reference to Arthur Drexler – the director of the Museum of Modern Art and organizer of the exhibition – who was of the opinion that the exhibited work was not exclusively scientific but rather part art. Judd offered three examples of really good architecture, meaning interesting and specific: the geodesic dome from R. Buckminster Fuller, the City Towers Project from Louis Kahn and the factory hall of the firm Goldzack in Gossau from Danzeisen & Vossler (1954-1956).

The Goldzack-Fabrik's place in the vicinity of minimal art is due not to an employment of the latest technology or formal reduction, but rather to an aesthetic phenomena that is best recognized in the appearance of the facade. When viewed from the side, the wafer-thin, funnel-shaped concrete bowls, stacked on top of one another look like scaled armor. If one looks up, however, in the direction of the skylight, the form opens itself up and appears to be filled, so to speak, with the surrounding space. The outer layer of the surface defines a perspectively and psychologically simple formation, opposed to the inner layer of the surface which opens a faucet to let the universal space pour in.

If pop art brought attention to 'decorated sheds', minimal art brought attention to empty architectonic boxes with surface tension, which suspend the containers presence in a state of peculiar indecision. Judd was not interested in the representation of a nihilistic industrial descent. It is only that the simple structurally-supported boxes, appear to contain dynamic, virtual volume that even penetrates the HiFi finish of the boxes; whether this is through their positioning in space or through a specific order to one another is not certain. Did Le Corbusier already know something of this solution when he described the simplest prismatic building structure as a "très difficile (satisfaction de l'esprit)" composition?

### Canals instead of Roots

Container without sign – could be the shared aesthetic calling of New Simplicity in architecture and minimal art. The production of the container is entirely different – something connected less with functions as with aesthetic foundations. On correct grounds, Robert Morris emphasized the public character of the work minimal art. His term, the 'extraverted encapsulation' refers to the fact that its not only a matter of formal reduction, but more still of proportion and the order of objects in a given spacial context. In short: its about the container that needs the space around it as a resonating form. In contrast, architects of New Simplicity insist on a traditional, internally ordered aesthetic. The arrangement of the architectonic container humbles itself to a steady intensification of specific condi-

tions. It is formally rearmend for each special circumstance. In Morris's sense one must speak here of a more private investment, not because the building dimensions really are small, but because they have the effect of small: with the sculpturalization of architecture everything of interest is based on the perceptible structure of the form, the dimensions are in every instance entirely uninteresting because they are dictated by the context.

Comparison of the attentiveness of architects and artists points to the fact that the 'becoming sculpture' of architecture remains stuck in a modernist aesthetic, which is not directly measurable against minimal art. What Minimal art has done, as the most important movement within the Postmodern, is ground the fact that the artist participates in the material foundation of post-industrial civilization – not to master these HiFi technologies but rather simply to follow the canals of the material interconnectedness in order to sound out the productive and entropic currents and to embody them monumentally in artworks. This recalls a remark Robert Smithson made in passing about exhibitions of modern art not being aesthetic events but rather cartographic representations of the material and spiritual conditions of our civilization. Just like the industrial products which are no longer manufactured from natural materials, the sculptures of minimal art are no longer of marble, wood, and bronze, but rather fitted together from artificially produced, polymere materials.

Why is it necessary to tend to the roots if the conditions are so completely confused? Why not follow the canals that flow through an architectural work which are tied to present conditions? 'Leave the Roots, follow the Canal': this devise is valid not only in the name of efficiency, but rather, before all, in the name of intellectual orientation. The human condition represents more than a shifting background of a theatrical ring for architects to think out precisely formulated orders. It is the only steadily shifting ground that can deliver maps of buildings and art works in a 1:1 scale. In rejecting the conditions of the postmodern, one does away not only with the tiresome quotations of style but also with each 'extroverted encapsulation' that Morris spoke of which is meaningful for architecture as the most public of all art forms.

Translated from the German: Elizabeth Felicella

### Reflections on Skin

Mark C. Taylor  
p. 113

Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial – out of profundity.  
Nietzsche

The deepest thing in man is his skin.  
Paul Valéry

Skin. Surface. What is so deep about skin? What is so profound about surface? What is so superficial about profundity?



Though it seems obvious, it is no longer clear...clear that we know what surface is. Nor is skin any longer transparent. We must, therefore, begin by asking about the point at which we all begin...and end: the skin. What skin? As is always the case, the positive emerges through the negative and vice versa. Thus, we might rephrase the question of skin. Not yet a question of bones but of skin – dermal layers that hide nothing...nothing but other dermal layers. Humpty Dumpty need not have fallen to be faulted, for every fertilized egg is always already divided between vegetal and animal poles. The process of embryonal development involves cellular division and further differentiation. Through a quasi-cybernetic process governed by preprogrammed DNA, the pluripotentiality of the ovum is limited in ways that allow for the articulation of different organic structures and functions. Cells multiply by division to create a hollow ball called a blastomere. This sphere eventually invaginates to form a lined pocket comprised of two layers known as the mesoderm. The mature organism develops from these three dermal layers. Since the organism as a whole is formed by a complex of dermal layers, the body is, in effect, nothing but layers of skin in which interiority and exteriority are thoroughly convoluted.

'Light Construction', so ably defined and explored by Terry Riley, reflects such dermal convolution. The result is a transfiguring of the very architecture of skin and surface. Surface, for the architects whose work is included in this exhibition, is no longer what it was for classical modernists. In his catalogue essay, Riley writes: "That all of the preceding projects might be referred to as 'transparent' suggests a newfound interest in a term long associated with architecture of the modern movement. Yet the tension between viewer and object implied by the use of the architectural facade as a veiling membrane indicates a departure from past attitudes and a need to reexamine the word transparency as it relates to architecture." Riley develops his reexamination of transparency by contrasting it with translucence through a series of binary oppositions: e.g., clarity/ambiguity, penetration/delay, etc. Drawing on Starobinski's interpretation of the gaze, Riley concludes that a new, very unmodern surface emerges: "the facade becomes an interposed veil, triggering a subjective relationship by distancing the viewer of the building from the space or forms within and isolating the viewer from the outside world."

As a way of advancing debate, I would like to make three observations about Riley's analysis.

1. There is a closer relationship between transparency and translucence than Riley suggests. Though not immediately evident, it is precisely transparency that leads to translucence. It is important to realize that the polarity of surface and depth is isomorphic with the polarity of interiority and exteriority. When depth becomes transparent, it is another surface; and when interiority becomes transparent, it is exteriorized. As everything becomes transparent, depth and interiority vanish. Paradoxically, the result of such radical transparency is not lucidity but translucence. In a certain sense, depth

and interiority – even when they remain hidden – secure or ground surface and exteriority. If depth is surface and inferiority is exteriority, then the very proliferation of surface renders it not only opaque but enigmatic. This enigma is what renders surface profound.

2. The profundity of surface and superficiality of profundity make it necessary to rethink both surface and depth. When depth and interiority disappear, surface is transformed. Surface, in other words, no longer can be conceived as it was when it was the opposite of depth and inferiority; it becomes something different, something other. Riley offers a gesture toward this insight when he introduces the notion of the veil and, by extension, emphasizes the between – or, I would prefer, the liminal character of surface. But no sooner does he offer this notion than he reinscribes it within precisely the opposites it undoes. The veil, we are told, distances the viewer from the space or forms within and isolates the viewer within the outside world. If, however, it's surface all the way down, then does the membrane any longer separate in this way? I would suggest that we must rethink surface as interface, or, more precisely, interfacing.

3. Interfaces must be read in terms of information processes. With this observation, I return to the question of skin with which I began. Though we usually think of skin as the sack that envelops the body's organs, it is actually the largest organ of the body. This organ is not only the interface where body meets world but, like the organs that develop from it, is the interface of the so-called material and the so-called immaterial. This interface, I noted, is a quasi-cybernetic process governed by preprogrammed DNA. The skin, in other words, is an information process in which material realities appear to be immaterial processes. If, however, the entire organism develops from dermal layers, then all of the organs – even the skeleton itself – are transparently information processes. Information processes are not merely displayed on the screen of the skin but pervade the very depths of the organism. In this play of data, surface and depth, as well as exteriority and inferiority are reinscribed. Riley is right when he argues that veils veil other veils. But, I believe, he is wrong when he insists that veils separate rather than interface.

Three points, then: transparency that becomes translucent; surfaces that become interfaces; interfaces that are informational processes. Herein lies the depth of skin.

#### New Discipline, Rem Koolhaas p. 114

In the past few years, Herzog & de Meuron have established themselves with astonishing brilliance at the center of European architecture.

Their architecture is intelligent, beautiful, rigid, sensual, tense, yet apparently serene. Where early works like the Photographic Studio Frei raised questions, questioned habits, emanated ambiguities, their recent work gives answers, conveys certainties.

Part of their strength is that they are, in a new and inspiring way, 'in between' the north and the south, the unstable and the stable, the difficulty with being that haunts northern Europe, the oversimplification of being that limits the south. In the context of a north-south dialectic, you can see their work as a 'new live' for the seemingly moribund rigidities of the *tendenza*, or as a 'new discipline' for the chaotic explosion of a new gothic.

Their buildings are emphatically real and there, yet they increasingly display layers of diffusion and dissimulation which soften their initial harshness. Their oscillation between almost brutal existence and a more virtual aura is beginning to reveal a deliberate strategy of separate roles assigned to the skin of buildings and their interior planning.

Without any superficiality, nobody conceives more desirable facades than Herzog & de Meuron. They ooze smoothness, a kind of otherworldly perfection; they are hardly of this world. Yet without apology, nobody offers harsher, more rigorous planning. They reveal increasingly a tendency toward programmatic reiterations – a room is a room is a room – combined with an absolute resistance to the formal intricacies of their contemporaries. Usually, work on the skin implies adhesion to the mediated, to the virtual, to the simulated, to a discourse on a less 'heavy' form of existence. Paradoxically, Herzog & de Meuron use the same materials and strategies to emphasize the real, to assert presence. At the core of their work is a surprising, almost peasantlike robustness.

Herzog & de Meuron are still more solid than they seem. Their apparent resistance to programmatic invention places them in the camp of certainties. But seen as objects, their buildings suggest a lingering interest in dissolution, adventure, uncertainty.

Those who know Jaques Herzog confront an explosive temperament rigidly controlled; in the work, the control is always evident, the explosive energies repressed, displaced... to where?

The position between the progressive and the conservative, between explosion and control, explains perhaps why Herzog & de Meuron are a rare office able to deal with both the center and the periphery, the old and the new, the modern and the traditional. They are always correct, always serious, but at the same time with a suggestion of danger. Together their paradoxical abilities explain their success and critical popularity.

Their work makes architecture again believable.

But these are the possible questions:

Does architecture always deserve to be believable?

Does every situation have a right to architecture?

Is certainty always appropriate?

Is architecture reinforcement therapy, or does it also play a role in redefining, undermining, exploding, crasing...? An impressed spectator of their virtuosity, I am waiting for the hidden temper, for the moment things will spin out of control.