

Continuity and Wholeness in Architecture

Three Recent Examples from Switzerland

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Intentions

Architecture straddles a line between convention and invention similar to its vague position between engineering and art. Creativity is privileged as a high expression of human culture and thus architects are pushed to develop inventive designs. As Venturi has argued, architects often throw out well working established ideas without being capable of replacing them, which shows their ego and ignorance. This results in a lot of unsuccessful buildings.

Simultaneously, true architectural innovation is prized. The Dom-ino system, the curtain wall and the light and air they let in actually offered something new to human habitation. The invention was so useful that it was truly innovative, replacing older forms of construction and becoming a new standard.

Modernism was a period of large scale innovation. But there are also more subtle signs of creativity that bring richness to daily life. This is a type of creativity that appears ambiguously between convention and invention, and thus it is fully architectural.

This concept is linked to the notion of architectural autonomy that developed in the 1960s. This discourse maintains that architecture must look within itself (its history, forms, materials) for inspiration in architectural design. It is a marking of boundaries, a cordoning-off of the field of architectural possibilities. But rather than appearing to limit creativity, I take this approach to be an important guideline, an instruction to focus one's approach. By studying architectural history, or more recently, the structure of the contemporary environment, we can measure our intentions against real examples.

I believe that such an approach is a humble first, essential step for an architect's professional education. Only with a



Diener & Diener, Extension Swiss Embassy, Berlin.

solid base and familiarity are we able to speak the language of architecture with coherence and poetry.

This approach has its detractors. The demand for invention pushes many to see the past and the real as “has-been.” Postmodernism, which became a superficial and widely-derided international variation of these ideas, put an end to most people’s interest in them.

Yet Northern, German-speaking Switzerland experienced this period differently, transforming the same impulses into a profound investigation of atmospheres and sensations, characterized by weightiness. Between 1980 and the early 2000s, Switzerland became famous for a new, internationally-respected approach that proved exactly how a focus on the essence of architecture could produce not only creative invention (Herzog de Meuron) but also sober and sensitive pieces of the city (Diener & Diener).

In this work, a further important aspect of architecture is demonstrated: the search for wholeness, for unity of the architectural design. The complex interpretation of the existing environment is only made clear when the elements of the architectural project balance themselves out, gaining a sense of equivalency that produces unity. While the study of the existing environment has been overtaken by new concerns among a younger generation, the search for wholeness remains a fundamental indication of design integrity (in Switzerland). Wholeness permits the balancing of the conflicting demands or interests of the project to achieve the quality of a statement, a sign of creativity and individuality that refers to the inventive expectations of the architectural project.

This project investigates architecture that takes the conflicting demands of the site and program as its basis, that makes reference to the forms and symbols of its environment and seeks an affirmation of its place through a clearly articulated, comprehensive design strategy.

Concept of the Swiss Project

A. An architecture of continuity as a rational and ethical legitimization of design

Developing an architecture in dialogue with the history of the city, an architecture of continuity, was the main premise of the landmark 1966 works *Complexity and Contradiction* (Robert Venturi) and *The Architecture of the City* (Aldo Rossi). An architecture of continuity seeks new architectural forms in the reinterpretation of existing ones, premised on the notion that the previous existence and persistence of certain forms is an indication of their validity. Furthermore, an architecture of continuity is founded on the ethical proposition of the city and collective living as a natural resource; rather than changing it the city should be reinforced.

Crisis of Modernism

The importance of continuity in the 1960s can be understood in contrast to the discourse on Modernism begun at the turn of the century. Advocates of Modernism believed that new high-quality living standards could be achieved on a large scale through the implementation of industrial manufacturing processes. By the 1960s, the sense that Modernism had failed to produce new social equality was reinforced by social unrest typified by the Civil Rights Movement, opposition to the Vietnam War, and the events of May 1968. Furthermore, the functionalist planning of cities had produced sprawling regions out of touch with familiar forms of living and occupying the land. Separately, Venturi and Rossi's works advocated for architecture that took human experience and perception into consideration.¹ By looking to history for examples of architecture's role in structuring experience both inside

1. Adam Caruso adds: "Despite modernism's self-interest in the quotidian, with its emphasis on housing, hygiene and the design of kitchens, these all too often lead to simplification rather than the complexity that one would expect from an interest in the everyday. With its overarching emphasis on a formal radicalism, modernism is unable to use either experience or existing situations as a basis for a new architecture". He also says that Rossi and Venturi revealed the 'emotional effect of the built environment,' since familiar forms are widely accessible on an emotional level. See: Šik, Miroslav, *Pro Helvetia*, and *Mostra Internazionale di Architettura Šik, Pro Helvetia*, and *Mostra Internazionale di Architettura*, "Caruso, Adam. 'The Alchemy of the Everyday.'"

buildings and at the scale of the city, Venturi and Rossi catalyzed a debate on architectural autonomy that marks Swiss architecture to this day. Rossi's influence is the most notable because he taught in Zurich; Venturi's ideas were disseminated more slowly through his writings.

Autonomy as political resistance

Mario Botta describes autonomy in architecture in the following way: "Walter Benjamin said that the political value of a literary work is its literary value. In a similar vein one can say that the political value of an architectural work is its value as architecture. To commit oneself to a political agenda as an architect is possible solely within the discipline."²

Botta's explanation is also a succinct description of Rossi's effect on architectural education in German-speaking Switzerland when he began teaching at the ETH in Zurich in 1972. In the late 60s, the sense of international social crisis led students to become antagonistic toward their design courses. New studios like that of Lucius Burckhardt were offered that approached architecture through the social sciences. Other efforts focused on researching the origins of the modern movement in order to recover the link between architecture and social issues.³ Well known as a communist, Rossi was perhaps only more passionate about architecture. This led to his concept of autonomous architecture as a theoretical position of political resistance.

Pier Vittorio Aureli has explained that the project of autonomy began in Italy in the 1960s as a movement for the individual's recuperation of power from within the structures that dominate them.⁴ Tied to socialist thinking about capital and labor, for Rossi autonomous architecture involved the use of rational forms—that is, forms legitimized by their persistence through time and changes in architectural style⁵—that, because of their familiarity and preexistence, could be adopted and transformed in service of new political goals. He learned this from his study of Milanese Neoclassicism, which he described as the bourgeoisie's appropriation of the tradition of classicism in order "to assert and represent itself as the dominant new class." "In Rossi's view, it was time for the socialist city to likewise construct its own tradition by appropriating and reinventing the legacy of its predecessor, namely the city of

2. Angéllil and Adam, "Mario Botta [October 14, 2008]."

3. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 48.

4. "As I am to demonstrate, these two types of autonomy projects—one applied to politics, one applied to the city—were not about the destruction of capitalist culture and bourgeois history per se but, on the contrary, their deep analysis and instrumental use. Autonomy was not the creation of politics and poetics *ex nihilo* but rather an audacious effort to appropriate the political realm in order to construct an alternative to capitalist domination". See Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture within and against Capitalism*, 14.

5. Curl, "Rational Architecture," 625.

the bourgeoisie.” Additionally, Rossi’s search for a language of recognizable forms occurred simultaneously with his conception of an urban theory “capable of challenging what he saw in the early 1960s as capitalism’s new form of urban project: its totalistic planning of the city.”⁶ Rossi thus gave inspiration to the search for a rational architecture⁷ and for an urban architecture of political resistance.

Locus: The specificity of place against the totalizing view of capitalist development

Aureli shows that in order to develop a rational, i.e. political architectural language, Rossi proposed a study of the city that would reveal both general architectural structures (typology) and demonstrative, individual built examples (urban artefacts). Typology can be said to be the general character of an urban society represented in architectural form, whereas urban artefacts reveal that out of the abstract generalization of typology the city is made of individual moments, which are variations on the familiar. The interaction of typology and urban artefacts are the dominant and recognizable way that architecture defines societies and vice versa; urban artefacts are architecture’s irrefutable link between culture and geography.⁸ The idea linking architecture and culture is an attack on the idea of an “International Style” and reestablishes an architecture mentality with broad appeal. From these two notions, Rossi proposed the concept of *locus* as the precise identity of a location composed of its immediate specificity and its affinity to a general shared model. By recognizing the specific character of a place, one could derive a working model of the city that was itself political, against “the technocapitalist conception of urbanization.”⁹ By focusing on the singularity of “defined forms” over territorial organization, Rossi reiterated the political agency of the individual architectural project and its power to build an identity of place that could resist the forces of capitalism.

“...the architectural project was understood as autonomous vis-à-vis the city, yet not detached from it; on the contrary, the singular intervention had a clearly articulated relationship to the overall social and political context.”¹⁰

6. Aureli, 57-58.

7. Bruno Reichlin says: “By *architettura razionale* he meant the attempt to establish a system of legitimization within the traditions of architecture, some kind of transparency between theory and praxis” [Reichlin interviewed in Maspoli and Spreyermann, 1993, p. 15, translated] in, Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 56.

8. Lampariello, “Architecture Autonome, AR-526, EPFL Spring 2017.”

9. “...it was possible to interpret the category of place as a political category, which, by virtue of the separateness that it evoked, de facto opposed the broad-scale subjugation of the territory to the totalizing forces of capitalist development.” See, Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture within and against Capitalism*, 63-65.

10. Aureli, 65.

11. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 56.

12. Allenspach, *L'architecture en Suisse : bâtir aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, 56.

13. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 45.

14. Allenspach, *L'architecture en Suisse : bâtir aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, 126. (my translations)

15. Recollection of Roger Diener in Davidovici, Irina. *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*. Zürich: Zürich : gta-Verlag, 2012, p. 135.

16. For example, Mario Botta says: "The city is the most evolved form of human or social aggregation. And I believe the European city is the best model we know". "Faced with the potential for destruction that is implicit in globalization, we have to tread carefully. The European city with its wealth of historical stratifications is perhaps the final antibody, the final form of resistance. For the architect it is the ultimate reference" in *Angélli, Marc, and Hubertus Adam. Architecture Dialogues: Positions - Concepts - Visions. Sulgen: Niggli, 2011.*

17. Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy : Politics and Architecture within and against Capitalism*, 62.

Rossi thus provided his students with a complete design method and theory legitimized in the notion of rationality and political instrumentality. In his popular studios, students conducted surveys of Ticino villages or the city of Zurich, looking to define typology through historic surveys and on-site analysis. Once established, typology was used as a "rational basis" for the development of the architectural project.¹¹ With a rational-typological foundation, students were allowed complete freedom in the development of form.¹² Educated in Bernhard Hoesli's first year *Grundkurs* in the Modernist tradition based on the "elimination of references to concrete historical models,"¹³ the students "found in Rossi and Snozzi personalities that stimulated their creativity. They gave them a new perception of their role as architect-researcher, an open project method as well as ideas regarding the continuity of the fundamental principles of architecture, leading to the rediscovery of the city, architecture, and history as a field of reference." As Christoph Allenspach writes in his history of Swiss architecture: "Thereafter, inventory work and the analysis of old substances are considered indispensable for the development of a new architecture."¹⁴

Tendenza

The group of Italian architects associated with Rossi's ideas was known as the Tendenza. This group extended into Italian-speaking Ticino in Switzerland and included ETH professor Luigi Snozzi. Dispersed among the group, Rossi's ideas were naturally transformed and reinterpreted. The Tendenza and other international movements became synonymous with a general idea of autonomous architecture, one that could tend towards the purely theoretical, or towards object-like design, and which could be detached from its original political ideas. On the other hand, Snozzi is remembered as reinforcing the link between people and architecture, describing the city as the highest form of architecture, "a natural part of man."¹⁵

The notion of the city as an advanced form of architecture is an enduring concept, and such claims are repeated often by Swiss architects.¹⁶ Yet it is also politically ambiguous. It should be remembered that Rossi's theories were constructed in opposition to the "contemporary planning discourse that he saw as products of a blind and positivistic faith in urban development."¹⁷

The Third Typology

In “The Third Typology” written in 1977, Anthony Vidler defines typology in architecture as design based on a model and compares Rossi’s use of the term with the history of the concept of type. In contrast to the 18th century typology of the “primitive hut” and the Modernist typology of the machine, the “third typology” takes the traditional city as a model.

Whereas the first two typologies referred to something outside of architecture as a source of legitimacy—the rational order of nature in the first case, and the nature of the machine in the second—“It is clear that the nature referred to in these recent designs is no more nor less than the nature of the city itself, emptied of specific social content from any particular time and allowed to speak simply of its own formal condition.”¹⁸

That a subject finds legitimacy *in itself* rather than through comparison to something else is the definition of autonomy. That architecture finds legitimacy in “the city itself” should be understood in the same way; for Rossi and the Tendenza, architecture is first and foremost a public endeavor.¹⁹

Furthermore, architecture understood as form, as something that structures space and experience regardless of change of use over time is not only an attack on functionalism and an ultimate claim for architectural autonomy, it also enabled these theories to mutate overtime into questions of perception, emotion and memory that are enduring motivations in Swiss architecture.

Architettura analogica

In the 1970s, Rossi added to his scientific, rational method a new role for subjective and autobiographical reasoning. Based on the work of Carl Gustav Jung, analogies offered a more deeply human connection to the realm of shared human experience than the cold rationality of typology. “This model acknowledged the experimental, pre-reflective moment during which we recognize and respond to something typical.”

Rossi’s work transitioned to the autobiographical, subjective, personal sphere of memories, where “the typical is embedded in a shared praxis, pointing to something that is fundamentally held in common, and thus universally intelligible.”²⁰ For Rossi it led to the reduction of architectural form to elementary geometry, to shapes that were universally recognizable. For

18. Hays and Agrest, “Vidler, Anthony. ‘The Third Typology’. 1977.”

19. The third typology “...places its faith in the essentially public nature of all architecture, as against the increasingly private visions of romantic individualists in the last decade. In it, the city and typology are reasserted as the only possible bases for the restoration of a critical role to an architecture otherwise assassinated by the apparently endless cycle of production and consumption” see: Hays, K. Michael, and Diana Agrest. “Vidler, Anthony. ‘The Third Typology’. 1977.” In *Oppositions Reader : Selected Readings from a Journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture 1973-1984*, 13–17. New York, NY: New York, NY : Princeton Architectural Press, 1998.

20. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 11.

his students, the use of analogical associations as a device to establish or embed familiarity—and thus, continuity and legitimacy—was Rossi’s most profound influence.

As Irina Davidovici points out, *architettura analogica* complicates Rossi’s more objective appeal: “Rossi’s development since the mid-1970s, articulated in *A Scientific Autobiography* in 1981, took analogy into the subjective sphere, implying an experience of the object through perceptions and associations that were haptic rather than purely visual. However, this shift to subjective experience and associations transferred authority from the nominally objective typological history to that of the designer-*auteur*, an exchange that lay latent in the formalism of typology itself. This sensual understanding of architecture appears as a leitmotif in subsequent Swiss production, in particular in the work of Herzog & De Meuron and Peter Zumthor.”²¹

21. Davidovici, 64.

German-Swiss architecture can be understood as a continued site of negotiation between ethical and aesthetic claims of legitimacy in design. As such it encapsulates the dialogue between architecture conceived as a functional tool and ideas of its representational value.

B. German-Swiss interpretations

If the teaching of Rossi and the exhibition on the *Tendenza* at the ETH in 1975 left a lasting impression on students in the 1970s, the ideas had to first pass through a period of translation from Italian to Swiss-German culture. As Martin Steinmann indicated in the introduction to the exhibition, autonomous architecture was understood in one part as progressive architecture based on history, and on the other as a conceptual approach that began and ended with the architectural object itself.²²

22. “Starting from the dialectical proposition of architectural autonomy, Steinmann reiterated the contradiction inherent in its nature: that form is developed in relation to history and society, and yet the determining principles must be legible within the works themselves,” in, Davidovici, 58.

Translation of typology to typical atmospheres

Marcel Meili explains that, whereas the Italians could find the elements of an architecture of continuity in the tradition of classicism, the Swiss looked for their roots in the era of industrialization and the modern movement. At the ETH, the translation of Rossi’s ideas was primarily advanced through the *Analoge Architektur* studio led by Miroslav Šik. Their search

for familiar and typical forms looked to the urban periphery and industrial wastelands, to the familiar environments of the students' childhood landscapes in an attempt to "translate through images the quality of the recent historic city."²³

This change denotes an important shift away from typological studies of urban architectural forms towards the active perception and memory of typical built environments. It is a transformation from the rational surveying proposed by Rossi to the subjective understanding of environments that structure urban space. Meili says: "It is not the reconstruction of the place or the completion of the city that motivates the research, but the signs and ambiances of a character generally accepted as "typical."²⁴

Adam Caruso explains that Venturi was influential, offering an alternative from an American perspective that could comprehend both piazzas and car dealerships, and which offered an alternative to Rossi's world of old Italian cities. "The examples of Venturi provided a new world emotional counterpoint to the old-world certainties of the Tendenza and was useful in engaging with the heterogeneity of Zurich and the sprawling ubiquity of its suburban edges."²⁵

If the Tendenza had shown how analogies to history and site could be used "to evoke location and to consolidate a certain form of expression or create a new dynamic within a location," which held the promise of embedding new architecture in the historic continuity of the site, architects such as Herzog & De Meuron and Peter Zumthor added to this associative approach new aesthetic demands, transforming a more rational, moral argument into something more sensual.²⁶

Importance of the autonomous object

This change represents a shift from the project of autonomy as a moral trajectory for establishing an architecture of continuity to the idea of the autonomous object as an entity legitimized by the fact of its very construction. This should not be seen as a rejection of the idea of continuity; in fact, the shift here places emphasis on the architectural object's duty to be a carrier of meaning. As Markus Breitschmid has explained, Rossi also taught the importance of the autonomy of the architectural object. Rossi's reading of Emil Kaufmann's *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier* on the origin of autonomous

23. Allenspach, *L'architecture en Suisse : bâtir aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, 134–35. Laurent Stalder's interpretation of Meili: "The confrontation with Helvetic reality – the non-urban character of the cities, the faceless modernity of the service economy and its commonplace rationality – allowed them to free themselves from the historical pathos of Latin rationalism," in in Angéilil, Marc, and Hubertus Adam. *Architecture Dialogues: Positions - Concepts - Visions*. Sulgen: Sulgen : Niggli, 2011, p. 135.

24. Allenspach, 134–35. This can also be seen in statements by Mario Botta and Mike Guyer: Botta, "Today, the architect works in the realm of memory. It is this dimension that connects us to a glorious past;" Guyer, "We derive our inspiration from our everyday life experiences of a personal or trivial nature, or those tied to architecture, art, social matters, music, literature, travel, and so on," in Angéilil, Marc, and Hubertus Adam. *Architecture Dialogues: Positions - Concepts - Visions*. Sulgen: Sulgen : Niggli, 2011.

25. Caruso, "Whatever Happened to Analogue Architecture."

26. Breitschmid, *Three Architects in Switzerland: Beat Consoni, Morger & Degelo, Valerio Olgiati*, 11.

27. For Rossi, "The reaffirmation of the autonomy for architecture also buttressed the thought that there exists autonomy of architectural form and that architectural form possesses value as an independent artistic expression." See Breitschmid, *Three Architects in Switzerland: Beat Consoni, Morger & Degelo*, Valerio Olgiati, 154-155.

28. Aureli, *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*, 143.

29. Breitschmid, *Three Architects in Switzerland: Beat Consoni, Morger & Degelo*, Valerio Olgiati, 11.

30. Angéilil and Adam, "Stalder, Laurent. 'For the Museums.'"

31. Meili, 1996, p. 25 in, Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 194.

32. Allenspach says "Un travail pragmatique – aux niveaux de la conception et de la construction – au service de la tâche représente l'essence même de la tradition de l'architecture suisse. ... On décèle ici, profondément enfoui, un sens moral profond du devoir. ... Contrairement aux projets plus narratifs de leurs collègues du sud du pays, les architectes alémaniques visent l'économie des formes. Au sens du minimalisme dans l'art, ils épurent les formes à l'extrême pour arriver à des énoncés et des images qui frappent directement. Il va de soi qu'une telle méthode réductrice met en évidence les détails techniques et matériels et leur multiplication. Construire moderne signifie aussi utiliser, voire célébrer, les techniques constructives contemporaines" in Allenspach, *L'architecture en Suisse: bâtir aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, 138–39.

architecture and his interest in Étienne-Louis Boullée paralleled research at the newly founded Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture at the ETH. From Boullée Rossi learned a "highly compacted historical mode" which he adapted "for his didactic methods that include an analysis of place and the conversion of that analysis into a concise sensuously and intellectually comprehensible picture of the architectural idea."²⁷ Aureli has said that in Boullée Rossi identified the idea of the monument as a work of public architecture with a specific design strategy, through the "making of architecture as exceptional, specific, and finite forms." Through Boullée Rossi's ideas of a political architecture are translated to an autonomous understanding of "the limits of architecture as a circumscribed, finite object."²⁸

The importance given to the representational power of forms combined with the idea of an autonomy of architecture as a constructed object goes some way in explaining a figure like Zumthor, for whom details are the key to making "an architectural object, at one with itself."²⁹

Construction of the object

But what meaning should be carried? Can architecture carry meaning or does it only represent itself?

Laurent Stalder says that the Swiss version of autonomous architecture was "formulated first and foremost as a claim to an understanding of architecture as the art of construction governed by its own rules."³⁰ Meili sees this as an update on the political claims of the earlier project of autonomy, as a sign of authorship in the face of a changing construction market, as resistance to global changes.³¹ Yet, Swiss architecture has always been defined in its attention to construction.³²

What is new with the generation beginning to practice in the 1980s is the coincidence of concept and construction. This is an autonomous architecture that seeks meaning as a project of construction. Simultaneously, its architectural form and materials are derived from its location as a measure of legitimacy. The result is an object with a theoretical claim for continuity.

A good example of this approach is the house in Therwil built by Herzog & De Meuron in 1986, described by Steinmann in

Die Form der Baracke. He says Herzog & De Meuron's early works, like the house in Therwil are like "collages composed of things taken from different contexts ... This process presupposes that the signification that the things have outside of the work is undiminished (like a Duchamp Ready-Made). Meaning comes from the combination of these elements (abstracted of signification), in the way that they are put together in a work. They use ordinary elements that we might find in an industrial stockyard. And the images they make with their construction remind us of such places, which has an affinity with Venturi's 'ordinary architecture'... The concrete elements which form the walls of the house evoke the barracks that one finds, for example, on the site of the freight yard in Basel... As soon as the same things are employed for a house, a barrack, or whatever other kind of building, they are released from the obligation to be anything except themselves. The meaning of the barrack is the image itself: its structure. In the house, the prefabricated concrete elements are *pars pro toto* (parts of whole). The architecture of Herzog & De Meuron is precisely opposed to such simulacra, by the measure that it endeavors to transmit experiences that can only be transmitted by architecture alone. This architecture, which is defined as autonomous, is based on the tectonic. This notion corresponds to the measures taken to transform the structure from a technical fact to an architectonic fact, in which the form of the parts which correspond to function are treated so their function is expressed. The reality of the work site and ordinary, banal things are treated as compositional elements of the first degree, like the colors and surfaces that become basic elements to Mondrian. We perceive the concrete elements as ordinary because they have been used in their original form: they are recognizable as concrete elements like the wood panels are recognizable as wood panels. It's not a question of idealizing their banality. What makes them remarkable is their autonomy: in their standardized form, the things are 'themselves.'"³³

33. Lucan and Steinmann, "La Forme de La Baraque : Die Form Der Baracke," 242–45. (My translation)

Steinmann's description makes evident the fusion of the dueling notions of autonomous architecture of which he had spoken at the time of the *Tendenza* exhibition. The notion of continuity with the existing environment as a political possibility of autonomous architecture is transformed into an intellectual aesthetic operation based on the appropriation of



Herzog & De Meuron, House for an Art Collector, Therwil, Switzerland.

familiar atmospheres. Architectural autonomy—legitimacy and authority of form—is derived not only from this familiarity but also in the forthright assembly of the elements. Like Rossi's ideas of artefact and typology, the conception of the specific object is always seen in relation to its environment.

The object in the landscape

The work of Miroslav Šik and the *Analoge* studio became well known for an “elaborate, assiduous knitting of architecture in its setting.”³⁴ Heinz Wirz describes Šik's own work as ‘blending with its location:’ “The design begins with an unprejudiced endorsement of the existing structures...The location, not the architect, determines the theme. The balance is not threatened by the architectural measure; it is strengthened or newly created” in a design that is ‘empathetic.’³⁵ In fact, Šik's work tends to blend into the landscape to the point of disappearing. But many other architects aim for a more ambivalent position, in creating works both part of and distinct within the landscape. The prevalence of such approaches led Steinmann to call them “strong forms” (*formes fortes*). For Davidovici, Steinmann's “‘Strong’ buildings...belong there not by means of contextual quotation but by revealing, through their positioning and effect, the site's organisational structure, by making its order intelligible in confrontation with their own, independent order.”³⁶

34. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 65.

35. Šik and Wirz, “Wirz, Heinz. ‘Foreward.’”

36. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 71.

The moral dimension: deference to the public sphere

If Herzog & De Meuron and Zumthor demonstrate how ideas of architecture as the carrier of a political meaning are transformed through artistry into questions of perception and aesthetic contemplation, others like Diener & Diener focus on the political dimension of architectural autonomy, leading to a reinterpretation of the tradition of rationalism. “For Roger Diener, ‘the ideal would be a façade that appears so evident, that it finally belongs as much to the city as to the building,’ a façade in which the windows, in their banality, integrate ‘the reality of the daily life in buildings.’”³⁷ Through formal reduction, legible geometry, repetition and symmetry, architecture builds on the tradition of classicism. This conception of architecture returns to one of its oldest definitions, that of an ordering system. With various positions on the Rationalist spectrum,

37. Lucan and Steinmann, *Martin Steinmann - Forme Forte : Ecrits 1972-2002 = Schriften 1972-2002*, 12.

German-Swiss architecture in general is opposed to “licence, individualism and arbitrariness, all architectural manifestations of a wider cultural malaise.” Herzog & De Meuron: “We are against arbitrariness because it always serves to dismantle resistance, an aesthetic political resistance to simple consumerism, to the dizzying speed with which this consumer behaviour has to be maintained by new picture material.”³⁸

38. Herzog & De Meuron, 1992, p. 114, in: Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 227.

C. The canonization of Swiss architecture

“The insistence on form as the concrete manifestation of universal meaning, an architecture legitimised through a conceptual framework, the tension between buildings as individual artefacts and their relationship to urban order, the recycling of primary, stark forms for contingent circumstances – all these constitute a cloud of presuppositions, to which architects return to define their own approach.”³⁹

39. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 66.

The last two decades of the twentieth century are largely considered to be a distinctive period of strength and identity of Swiss architecture. The theoretical positions established by Rossi and their translation into German-Swiss culture found their most widely-publicized expression in the early built projects of Herzog & de Meuron, Gigon & Guyer, Diener & Diener and Peter Zumthor. While each architect pursued their own interests over any sense of a collective project, the theoretical positions traced here and the interconnected German-Swiss professional and academic architectural culture, centered around the ETH in Zurich but also including practices based in Basel or Graubünden, leads to the possibility of interpreting German-Swiss architecture of this period as a “cultural phenomenon,”⁴⁰ which Irina Davidovici describes in *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture, 1980-2000*, a work that has taken a defining influence in this analysis. Davidovici demonstrates the complex theoretical construction of this production, focusing on six projects as representative of this era.⁴¹ I consider these works and time period to represent a canonical period of contemporary Swiss architecture.

40. Davidovici, 8.

41. The projects are: Herzog & de Meuron’s Stone House (1985-88); Peter Zumthor’s *Schutzbauten* (1985-86); Gigon / Guyer’s Kirchner Museum (1989-1992); Diener & Diener’s Warteckhof (1992-96); Valerio Olgiati’s Paspels School (1996-98); and Von Ballmoos Krucker’s Stöckenacker Housing (1997-2002).



Herzog & De Meuron, Stone House,
Tavole, Italy.

Peter Zumthor, *Schutzbauten*,
Chur.

Gigon / Guyer, Kirchner Museum,
Davos.



Diener & Diener, Warteckhof,
Basel.

Valerio Olgiati, Paspels School,
Graubünden.

Von Ballmoos Krucker, Stöckenacker
Housing, Affoltern.

Davidovici's analysis reveals that German-Swiss architecture, generally understood as 'authentic,' solid, or even monolithic, is a product of instability; it operates in a constant dialogue between individuality and commonality. Recourse to familiar types or atmospheres reflects Rossi's influence and engenders a sense of humbleness through respect for "culturally relevant, ordinary models."⁴² Yet architecture is hardly seen as something systematic; German-Swiss architecture's foundation in the polytechnic tradition—the Zurich Polytechnikum (later ETH) was founded in 1855 "as a first expression of federal unity" to train engineers for the modernization of the country⁴³—is likewise confronted with representational demands: "The cultural reverence manifested towards the act of building – even as a well-made thing, an investment apt for the value of the ground beneath – is incorporated in the Swiss production and reflected in the professional status of the architect."⁴⁴ The democratic, civic-minded Swiss architect further deals with "an anxiety regarding their intrinsic Swissness." As such, German-Swiss architecture affirms its intellectual, creative dimension: "The professional circles' identification with an artistic agenda and their distaste for being read in terms of cultural stereotypes betray an aspiration towards creative independence."⁴⁵

42. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 216.

43. Davidovici, 26.

44. Davidovici, 33–34.

45. Davidovici, 33.

The result is a body of work operating on an elevated level that is concerned with the real and the everyday. Where the architecture comes together in a shared progressive social sensibility, it also diverges as independent claims to authorship; a building's readability becomes a moral argument expressed in aesthetic terms. Davidovici quotes a conversation between Jacques Lucan and Martin Steinmann from 2001: "The objective is not just to make decent buildings. [...] Designing a scheme nowadays means taking a stance with respect to what we believe architecture to be. It's a commitment."⁴⁶ As Davidovici says: "Ethical claims defined this memorable period of Swiss architecture more than any of its stylistic predilections"⁴⁷

46. Lucan and Steinmann, 2001, p. 9, in Davidovici, 78.

47. Davidovici, 15–16.

D. The Swiss Project: a canonical analysis

Because it represents a period of theoretical consolidation and recognized quality, the period between 1980-2000 represents a definitive body of work. I have named this canon "The Swiss

Project.” As we have seen, German-Swiss architecture offers a platform from which to study both theoretical arguments and design strategy that are purely architectural, founded in the discourse of autonomy. I saw this work first for its visual power and came to realize its matter-of-factness was the result of analytical reasoning. I have aimed to study this work in my own terms, hoping to understand its logic and conventions.

The Swiss Project combines the search for an architecture of continuity with the notion of wholeness. From my reading of Davidovici’s six canonical examples, continuity is constructed through the structuring of three different elements: factual elements, symbolic elements, and ethical elements.

On one side, factual and symbolic elements are taken from the field of references that are chosen for their ability to reinforce and represent the heterogenous existing city. On the other, ethical elements represent the political outlook of the architects, which could be summarized as a response to the question: how should people live together?

The Swiss Project’s integrity comes from its paradoxical need to reflect the diverse nature of the city in an architecture that is itself an entity. This results in the integrating of contradictory elements in a single design, which gives the “object-like” building a sense of tension. This tension is analogous to the idea of the city as a unity made of heterogenous parts.⁴⁸ As such, buildings are conceived to validate urban diversity by representing it.

The idea of architecture as the combination of three design parameters and their resolution in a unified design strategy is analogous to the notion of “problem and solution” and furthermore corresponds to Davidovici’s description of German-Swiss architecture as a conceptual practice.⁴⁹ Davidovici traces the primacy of conceptual thinking in architecture to the introduction of typology in the 18th century (“typology turned buildings into concept”⁵⁰). While German-Swiss architecture has generally privileged real buildings as the “highest goal,” starting in the 1960s it became important for architects “to separate style from substance... to demonstrate the ethical dimension of their architecture,” through theory.⁵¹ This is the result not only of the Tendenza’s moral claims but also of Hoesli’s “intellectualisation of design

48. Davidovici says that “the idea of the city” allows one to visualize “a continuity in which differences can successfully co-exist,” in Davidovici, Irina. 2012. *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*. Zürich: gta-Verlag, pp. 33-34.

49. Markus Breitschmid has also said that Swiss architecture is “an intellectual act of the architect that originates in their minds and is documented in their drawings and other forms of building documentation.” See: Breitschmid, *Three Architects in Switzerland: Beat Consoni, Morger & Degelo, Valerio Olgiati*, 10.

50. “Despite the residue of building experience contained in type, typology turned buildings into concept. Ever since, meaning has been associated less with the context in which the building stands, than with the abstract type that it represents,” in Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 10.

51. Davidovici, 44–45.

processes.”⁵² Rossi also taught design as the composition of three elements—typology, modification, and design—where a project was evaluated “from the dialogue between original creativity and the interpretation of existing conditions.”⁵³

The dialectical or contradictory nature of canonical (and contemporary) German-Swiss architecture is rooted in the tradition of *Analoge Architektur*, which incarnates the German-Swiss translation of an architecture of continuity. Šik’s concept of *Altneu* (old-new) attempts to erase architecture’s ‘temporal framework’ through designs that blend into the existing environment.⁵⁴ *Altneu* treats reality as a concept, and as Davidovici says, “precisely because of its conceptional nature, this claim is not realistic.” There is a tension inherent in a building’s demand to be both a limited operation and a continuation of an atmosphere. “While part of the city to the point of indistinctness, the proposal also demands self-definition, coherence, and unity,” because for Šik, continuity also applies to the creative process: “‘Everything that originally lay on the project table, everything that has found its way into a new composition, must in the end have the effect of unity, an indivisible wholeness, as a monad.’”⁵⁵ The *Analoge* approach demands a fully-conscious practice that produces a sort of absolute order, a coherence that is internal to the project. This, then, is the opposite of the “project of the city,” which is an entity composed of many different ideas, forming an uneven and sometimes messy whole. Since architecture is conceived as an intellectual operation, its role is not simply to mirror its context, but to reconfigure and restate a(n urban) position. These positions are only deemed clear when the project appears to make a unified statement.

The ‘impossibility’ of Šik’s proposition—object and continuity, the two sides of an autonomous architecture—is the source of the Swiss Project’s richness. The Swiss Project is the organization of legitimized project elements, those that have a rational or social pre-existence, and an ethical proposition within a totalizing design concept.

52. As architecture relied less on formal precedents and more on its relations with contemporary society, Hoesli had to teach students “to make informed decisions.” “In this framework design became less a matter of individual creativity, as invited by the Bauhaus, than the ability to justify decisions through the conceptualisation of common architectural tasks. The intellectualisation of design processes and their transformation from ‘an empirical way of dealing with things’ to ‘a way of thinking’ became Hoesli’s principle for studio teaching.” [Hoesli quoted in Jansen 1989, pp. 38,40. Also see Oechslin, 1997, p. 11.] “The primacy of concept as the central generating force in design, the treatment of urban context as a mass of solids and voids, and the reliance on the abstract notion of “space” can all be traced back to Hoesli’s influence,” in Davidovici, 46–48.

53. Davidovici, 56.

54. “It brings into relief the tensions between architecture as autonomous object and typical urban order, between individual artistic expression and the universality of unmediated, concrete reality. The proposal questions the limits of architecture as a self-conscious enterprise, and tries to approximate the unconsciousness of ‘trivial’ architecture, understood as a social, functional and economic act without artistic pretensions,” which, conceivably, has a moral superiority. See Davidovici, 65–66.

55. Šik in Lucan, 201, p. 47, in Davidovici, 65–66.

E. Factual, symbolic, and ethical elements of canonical Swiss projects

“The interplay of reason and subjectivity is symptomatic of a wider ambivalence between claims of objectivity and what constitutes an architectural gesture. The objective common ground results from the observation of existing patterns and the adherence to established conventions. The mark of individuality goes back, as one would expect, to more subjective readings of context.”⁵⁶

56. Davidovici, 222.

“Design process is based on a constant interplay of feeling and reason”.⁵⁷

57. Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, 21.

The Swiss Project is conceived as the negotiation of three fields of knowledge (the factual, the symbolic and the ethical) within a comprehensive design concept. The integrity of the work is determined by how successfully these contradictory aspects are resolved into a whole. In the following two sections, the concept of the Swiss Project will be explained through an analysis of Irina Davidovici’s six canonical examples in the book *Forms of Practice*.

Factual elements include all rational factors of the design process (urban morphology, physics, standardized logics, history). Symbolic elements relate to our perception of buildings and the sense we have that they can convey something (typical or familiar forms or atmospheres, aesthetic and emotional experiences). Ethical elements relate to the question “How should people live together and how can this be reinforced through architecture?”

These elements and their organization may be seen as equivalent to the “systems” mentioned by Jacques Herzog: “In our projects we have always tried to establish as many links as possible between the different systems at work. Our best projects are the ones in which the visibility of such links has been reduced to zero, in which the links have become so numerous that you don’t ‘see’ them any more.”⁵⁸

58. Jacques Herzog, Alejandro Zaera: Continuidades. Continuities. Entrevista con Herzog & De Meuron. Interview with Herzog & De Meuron. In: Fernando Márquez Cecilia, Richard C. Levene (Eds.). *El Croquis*. Herzog & De Meuron 1983-1993. Vol. No. 60, Madrid, *El Croquis*, 1994. pp. 6-23. In “Continuities - Herzog & De Meuron.”

Factual elements

“Regulations serve to place architectural gestures under the control of a common order; the withdrawal from individual manipulation legitimises the built form.”⁵⁹

59. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 148.

Factual elements are design parameters that can be objectively justified. This includes the obviousness of building codes and the laws of physics, but also the influence of urban morphology and typology, and also the 90° angle, which is seen as “neutrality itself;” “The assumption here is that the orthogonal is not arbitrary;” “unlike other design devices, the orthogonal lays claim to a kind of inexhaustible universality. It simultaneously represents a blank canvas, radical reduction, normality, and the rigidity of academic convention.”⁶⁰

60. Davidovici, 222.

Herzog & De Meuron’s Stone House is completely composed of right-angles.

In Peter Zumthor’s *Schutzbauten*, the existing ruins were taken as the footprint for the new building.

In Gigon/Guyer’s Kirchner Museum in Davos, the flat roof pays homage to the *Davoser Flachdach*, the name given to the first flat roof in Switzerland, which still characterize the city.

Contrary to many architects, for Diener & Diener, external negotiations, public debate and their impact on design is seen as an element of the architectural project.

In Valerio Olgiati’s school in Paspels, the arbitrary tug in one corner only reinforces our awareness of the determinacy of the right angle.

In Von Ballmoos Krucker’s Stöckenacker Housing, the *Siedlung* typology is taken as a given.

Symbolic elements

“One way in which projects adapt themselves to their surroundings is through formal similarity.”⁶¹

61. Davidovici, 214.

Symbolic elements relate to our perception of buildings and the sense we have that they can convey something. This is a subjective dimension and thus it is open to interpretation

and critiques of falsehood or arbitrariness. Rossi's *architettura analogica* demonstrated the extent of autobiographical understandings of familiar forms. In order to communicate, the subjective element makes use of things which are typical. The intention is that by drawing on the world of images that are familiar to us, perhaps subconsciously, the building makes a connection to the world as we already experience it.

Davidovici explains: "Swiss theory ... is intrinsically connected with the emphasis on form." "Form is, and as such it becomes factual, a measure of objectivity. The fact that form conveys different meanings arises from its presumed innocence of all meanings." If there is a "Swiss architecture", "Swiss architecture's initial orientation towards the collective dimensions of culture, manifest in architecture as in art, holds attention as the attempt to uncover their communicative potential."⁶²

62. Davidovici, 72.

In the Stone House, Herzog & De Meuron use familiar local stone for its associative rather than structural capacity.

Zumthor's *Schutzbauten* turns local wood construction into an image; "It is thus not a display of tectonic coherence but an idealization of it."⁶³

63. Davidovici, 103.

The Kirchner Museum's pure white spaces were inspired by accounts of the famous Davos Sanatorium.

In Diener & Diener's work, materials "deflect attention from themselves to allude to the bourgeoisie industrial city."⁶⁴

64. Davidovici, 144.

At Paspels, the outside refers to urban typologies while the inside is like a mountain *Stube*.

At Stöckenacker, Von Ballmoos Krucker used dark concrete and special prefabrication geometries to instill a sense of urban "*gravitas*" in the suburban setting.

Ethical elements

The Stone House was nicknamed "The Solitary House;" its outsider status on the edge of the village corresponds to its use as a German couple's vacation home. It is intended as a formal experiment, and it takes an intellectual approach to the idea of primitive rusticity.

Through the fact of construction, Zumthor rejects symbolic

arbitrariness as political resistance: “I believe that architecture today needs to reflect on the tasks and possibilities which are inherently its own. Architecture is not a vehicle or a symbol for things that do not belong to its essence. In a society that celebrates the inessential, architecture can put up a resistance, counteract the waste of forms and meaning, and speak its own language.”⁶⁵

65. Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, 27.

In 1992, the Kirchner Museum went against the dominant artful aesthetic of the museum, declaring architecture’s ability to find meaningful solutions in everyday forms and materials. “This position reinforced the role of concept over and against individual impulse. As long as the internal logic governing all design moves is infallible, buildings can present themselves as unapologetically autonomous. Thus the design effort is directed less at the mediation of the surrounding situation than at a mediation of all problems set by context, programme, and technique.”⁶⁶

66. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 128.

Roger Diener is inspired by Snozzi, who he remembers saying: “the object, the building, is no longer the focus. [...] Rather, the issue is one of recreating within the context of a specific site a design in which values that guarantee human existence are exposed.”⁶⁷

67. Davidovici, 135.

Olgiate seems to see Switzerland along the same lines as Studio Basel, as a completely urbanized territory, in which the aesthetics of a speculative commercial typology are equally at home in a mountain landscape. Simultaneously, the value that has been accorded to the school is aligned with the local populations expectation for a public building to have the effect of a meaningful gesture.

Von Ballmoos Krucker “inject urbanity into a suburban situation.” They see more urban protentional in the typology of the isolated building floating in a sea of greenery, reinforcing it through the careful positioning and fragmentation of the building. The arrangement “acknowledges urban order as pluralistic and contingent, but also seeks to act within this to create a new kind of coherence.”⁶⁸

68. Davidovici, 135.

F. Strategies of wholeness

“An architecture of complexity and contradiction has a special obligation toward

the whole: its truth must be in its totality or its implications of totality. It must embody the difficult unity of inclusion rather than the easy unity of exclusion. More is not less.”⁶⁹

Wholeness is a balancing act; these elements represent the poles between which a design concept must find a balance. What is specifically Swiss is the need for the design concept, the balance of the objective, subjective and the political, to appear as a self-evident whole, as a well-argued proposition.

Tension

Thus, for a Swiss Project, the architect must balance objective and subjective elements in a design solution which holds an ethical proposition. Furthermore, for that proposition to be clear, the building must be readable, straightforward, simple in appearance. The result can be described with the words of contradiction: *conflict, dichotomy, paradox, opposition, oscillation, duality, balance*. “Ambiguity and tension are everywhere in an architecture of complexity and contradiction ... An architectural element is perceived as form and structure, texture and material. These oscillating relationships, complex and contradictory, are the source of the ambiguity and tension *characteristic to the medium of architecture*.”⁷⁰

Examples

In the Stone House, the double materiality creates an “endless text” (Colquhoun). Which one controls the other? The plan, section, and elevation have nearly the same geometry, creating unity through an “equality of space.” “The Stone House oscillates between object and landscape, compactness and limitless expansion, formal villa and hut, stone pile and modular system, archaic and modern, primitive and sophisticated. Although it appears straightforward, this “shows the impossibility of ‘simply being.’”⁷¹

In the *Schutzbauten*, the form and materials seem imposed by the site, but they’re detailed to artistic effect. The apparent simplicity masks refined construction, the stairs float to allow the skin full autonomy. “The architecture displays two orders of meaning. Firstly it merges constructional logic and artistic gesture; secondly, it makes implicit reference to tradition

as a repository of continuity. Subsumed under this notion of tradition there is a primitive aspect, understood not as rudimentary, but as a primordial guarantee of authenticity.”⁷²

72. Davidovici, 106.

In the Kirchner Museum, the gallery typology is repeated with factory precision – one after the other – and the materials and overall ordering suggest a fully systemized logic. Yet, the subtle shifts in plan create poetic spaces and unexpected views. The glass wrapping is a mapping of the internal program on the exterior, but simultaneously refracts natural light, transmitting the environmental conditions. The plan shows a perfect duality between primary and secondary spaces, undermining just such a description. Meili called it “a total rupture with the traditional hierarchy of type,”⁷³ and in as much it proposes a new one.

73. Meili, “Ein paar Bauten”, 1991, p. 21, in: Davidovici, 126.

Diener & Diener’s Warteckhof uses the typology of the city, an agglomeration of houses, as a model for a single project. The city, made of diverse elements but still comprehensible as a unity, allows the factual, communicative, and political aspects to coexist with a certain cohesiveness. Meanwhile, “it renders visible a century-long transition between closed perimeter blocks, typical of the nineteenth-century city centre, and the peripheral fragmentation of twentieth-century developments.”⁷⁴

74. Davidovici, 140.

Paspels follows the new typology established by the Kirchner Museum, translating the relationship between rooms and hallway into the diagrammatic plan of a city. The classrooms are like a gathering of houses that create an interstitial space in the hallway. The regular orthogonality of the plan is simultaneously undone and reinforced by a single arbitrary gesture. Olgiati rightly justifies it as an “indivisible whole”. There is “complementarity” between elements. Small windows are aligned to halls, flush outside to provide interior seats. Horizontal windows are flush inside and run the length of one classroom, revealing the dimensions of the plan.

Von Ballmoos Krucker’s Stöckenacker Housing is “revisionist”. It critiques the estates of the past through a more urban orientation; it injects urbanity into a suburban situation, while still maintaining suburban typology. It shows “a critical understanding of suburbia that oscillates between marketing concept and the colonisation of nature.” “The project is, ultimately, a hybrid between two distinct and often contrasting urban types.”⁹⁵

75. Davidovici, 183.

Method

The Swiss Project uses several methods to achieve wholeness:

An “over-all” appearance achieved by wrapping a building in a uniform materiality.

Using “rough or natural” materials to create associations with ideas of the “archaic, traditional, or humble.”⁷⁶

76. Davidovici, 216.

Designing plans as “parts to whole:” “The adoption of non-hierarchical spaces as a substitute for the conventional duality of rooms and corridors.”⁷⁷

77. Davidovici, 218.

“Abstraction:” For Olgiati, the struggle with the impossibility of making non-referential architecture leads him “to sort out’ what is significant for his architecture, and ultimately, ‘to design an architecture that in the end is ‘only’ abstract.”⁷⁸

78. Breitschmid, *Three Architects in Switzerland: Beat Consoni, Morger & Degelo, Valerio Olgiati*, 11.

“Monumental distance:” “HdM look for an autonomous quality of the individual building that is achieved by means of a curious, almost monumental distance that is constructed between the building and the surrounding space.”⁷⁹

79. Breitschmid, 159.

“Cleansing:” Generally, reduction and simplification is not a starting point but a final state; it is a process of “cleansing, to a totality that encompasses everything;” “an entirely organic architecture that is a oneness the holds everything.” This is achieved by creating an “optical homogeneity,” “architects force a harmonization of surfaces, spaces, and structure,” it is not a transmaterial unity, nor a collage. Subtle modulations are desirable, “soft modulations that seek to bring forward fundamental differences through a visual bringing together.”⁸⁰

80. Breitschmid, 163.

“The general form:” The interest in neutrality comes from the perceived chaos of the urban realm. Meili has said that the contradictions of the city “robs the form of its reason.” Thus Diener & Diener look for “general forms,” using abstraction as a tool to make sense of overwhelming significations of urban environment.

The “city as a metaphor” permits the expression of differences within an overall whole. “The architectural currency of type-configurations raises questions about their proliferation as geometric abstractions of urban order.” Paspels is a monument of urbanity in rural setting. The Kirchner Museum is an “interpretation of the urban structure of Davos, turns a

process of piecemeal growth into a serial, modular version of town.” “Wartec, another established example of the ‘constellation’ typology, extends the ambiguity from the one building to an entire urban block. The flowing spaces between buildings create an internal cohesion within the block and establish its connection to the city. The ensemble acts like an urban landscape, setting a tension between the project’s individual aesthetic and the collective conventions of the urban continuum.” In Kirchner and Paspels, “the corridors are given a rough concrete finish to convey their condition of being “outside” the inhabited rooms.”⁸¹

81. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 220.

G. Objects of continuity

Architecture as a form of communication

German-Swiss architecture’s stark forms and material presence reveal architecture’s role as a vehicle of communication. Architecture is conceived as the translation of theoretical positions through built form. That the forms are simple or familiar represents the Rationalist interest in shared human experience, whereas the attention to materials, construction, and questions of perception aim for individuality, as a critique of the contemporary world. This is architecture understood as a reflection of society, where the architect is both anthropologist and critic. Pulled in two directions, the architect is unable to make an unequivocal statement and architecture becomes ambiguous. But, concerned with being understood, conceptual coherency becomes paramount; it is not the architect who is confused but contemporary society which is confusing. Thus, architecture can turn in on itself, to search for meaning by affirming its autonomy. The abstraction and ambivalence of the buildings as statements is a sign of their complexity. Their whole, object-like quality is measure of their integrity.

Escape into wholeness

The importance of wholeness is a result of anxiety about architecture’s role in the contemporary world. Turning to questions of pure architecture can also lead to a denial of the relationship between architecture and society. Included

among the canonical generation with his school in Paspels, Olgiati nonetheless breaks from the tradition of continuity that underpins Swiss discourse since the 1980s. He seeks to disregard moral or political legitimation for architecture by consolidating meaning in the purity of the idea. His architecture is conceived as an explicit experience of space and form. Legitimacy comes from the originality and clarity of the architectural proposal, measured by its quality of wholeness. Thus, Olgiati takes wholeness as the primary condition, denying the ideas of factual, communicative, or political elements. His buildings are extreme, generally rendered as concrete monoliths.

Olgiati is the most outspoken example, but such a position can result in a certain abstraction from reality. In Herzog & De Meuron's Stone House, the highly-conceptual project led to an abstract, all-white interior. It seems almost like a backstage setting where the spectacle is completely directed towards the outside. Speaking of the tendency towards neutral interior environments, Davidovici points out that the dependence on conceptual thinking can produce questionable results: "Adapted from public to private projects, the provision of abstracted interiors is at odds with the programmatic needs of dwelling."⁸²

82. Davidovici, 218.

Art, abstraction, silence

Recourse to an aesthetics of perception and the use of abstraction are two tools with which architecture responds to a world perceived as commercialized or chaotic.⁸³

83. Davidovici, 229.

Davidovici explains that artistic objects act as a separation from daily experience: During aesthetic contemplation, the viewer is absorbed into the moment; history seems to stand still. The perception of the object takes precedence over its intended use, and its connection to the world is severed by the fixation on intrinsic physical qualities. "The recourse to art, whether as the architect's justification of design or the critic's interpretation of it, represents a search for stillness."⁸⁴

84. Davidovici, 224.

Art, then, is a form of resistance in the Russian sense. Left unanswered however is the question of legibility and observer.

Apart from expressly artistic objects, abstraction/neutrality reinforces architecture's role as an ordering system. Within the abstract order of the work of Diener & Diener, affect becomes

subtle rather than overt. Swiss abstraction is not pure rationalism. It aims to reduce gesture to clear and purposeful articulations. But because they have aesthetic content, abstract buildings can simultaneously give an “anonymous” stabilizing order and be viewed as statements of individuality. “Reduction is, at last, a defence against the wild proliferation of meaningless and uncontrolled constructive connections.”⁸⁵

85. Meili, 1996, p. 25 in, Davidovici, 229-230.

As different as the approaches of Diener & Diener and Herzog & De Meuron are, the work of this canonical period of German-Swiss architecture is recognizable as having a ‘quiet presence’. As Davidovici explains, Swiss architecture uses consistent abstraction as a common order: “Swiss architecture uses everyday situations as a background for formal consistency. This in turn induces a need for the work to attain a high degree of abstraction, in order that the formal consistency is not only legible, but also positively emphasized...The preference for an understated formalism has attracted, alongside the aesthetic attributes of “reductive” and “minimalist”, the ethical tags of “modesty” and “appropriateness”. The aesthetic and moral dimensions of this architecture are in conflict. The former presumes absolute subjective control, the latter discretion towards and openness to the architecture’s context. A resolution is attempted through a reduction of both the aesthetic and moral aspects, leading to an expression of blankness or emptiness. The architecture’s laconic stance distances it from readable architectural statements; its silence is its strongest statement.”⁸⁶

86. Davidovici, 12.

H. What happened after 2000?

Rossi and Venturi are commonly cited as instigators of Postmodernism, a development they rejected. German-Swiss architects could be considered as the inheritors of Rossi and Venturi’s true conceptual positions. The period of 1980-2000 represents a continued struggle with the ideas of continuity and autonomy in the face of architecture’s commercialization and globalization. “For Swiss architecture around 1990, the reaction against Postmodernism created a gesture of negative intervention, a retreat into silence against the background *muzak* of market culture.”⁸⁷

87. “The search for a specific presence and the aspiration to timelessness can be read in these projects as forms of resistance. They belong to the horizon of artistic autonomy in modern capitalist society. The adherence to this horizon declares architecture’s removal from the everyday, to a level purified through intellectual or constructional coherence.” Davidovici, 224.

As Davidovici explains, in contrast to the development of starchitecture, “in the late 1980s, Swiss projects established a

province of ‘resistance’ to the commodification of architecture, an architecture without irony.” In contrast to their overseas colleagues, Swiss architecture was critiqued as “too sincere, even pious”. In the twenty-first century, Swiss architecture became more consumerist.⁸⁸ Herzog & De Meuron seem to have led the way out of the Swiss Project, by “succumbing to the possibilities of scale and coverage afforded by global practice. So influential is their position in Basel and Zurich that this decisive move was read by their contemporaries, and by the generation that followed, as a condemnation of what had come before.”⁸⁹

88. Davidovici, 225.

89. Caruso, “Whatever Happened to Analogue Architecture.”

Marc Angéilil and Jørg Himmelreich’s book *Architecture Dialogues* aimed to take the pulse of Swiss architecture a decade into the new century. In the book, Himmelreich writes “After a phase of consolidation in the last two decades, Swiss architecture, one might generalize, is in a state of awakening. The pursuit of coherence and reduction is still regarded as a reference point but also as a dead end.”⁹⁰ Many younger practices express the need for new directions or cite changing economic situations as an impossibility to meet the high standards of “the father’s generation.”

90. Angéilil and Adam, *Architecture Dialogues: Positions - Concepts - Visions*, 118.

For her part, Davidovici finds that Swiss architecture runs the risk of treating the problems of continuity as a conceptual problem. At the close of her book, she cites Swiss obsessions with autonomy as ultimately alienating: “Architecture needs to relinquish its preoccupation with artefacts and turn instead towards an assessment of programme in which the building becomes a real framework for praxis. In this way, architecture can mediate between the universal conditions of human existence and the particular situation it addresses. Architecture is a form of practice committed to the creation of urban structures, mediating between individuals and the anonymous collective. As a network of such structures, the city remains open to interpretation. A sustainable architecture, in an ethical sense, pertains to the collective sphere, and to the preservation of the urban realm in contemporary conditions.”⁹¹

91. Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German-Swiss Architecture 1980-2000*, 261.

Asked more recently about their impressions of contemporary practice, architects like Herzog & De Meuron and Diener & Diener find that it lacks a critical political dimension. In their work together at Studio Basel, they seem to return to the ideas of continuity: “Our proposal for a reorganization of

Switzerland on the basis of five urban typologies with specific potentials was not simply snatched out of the air, because then their chances of becoming reality would essentially be zero...[they] were chosen following an obsessive reading of the existing situation; they merely reinforce economic, social, topographical, and architectural potentials that are already recognizable as latent forces.”⁹²

92. Diener and Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich. *Studio Basel, Switzerland - An Urban Portrait*, 150–54.

Although the current field is more varied and less distinct than previous generation, the strongest positions seem to be maintained by Valerio Olgiati and Christian Kerez, who Adam Caruso describes as producing substantial work in a time when the world no longer demands it: “Kerez and Olgiati continue to declare the autonomy of architecture.”⁹³

93. Caruso, “Whatever Happened to Analogue Architecture.”

More recent case studies in wholeness

The following chapters present three architects whose positions are a development from the theme of continuity and wholeness of the canonical generation. Three contemporary projects are presented, each of which is in Switzerland. Otherwise they are totally unlike one another. They use different types of construction, have different functions, and are stylistically dissimilar. This diversity is intentional. It demonstrates the versatility of the design approach here considered and the different possibilities for individual expression permitted to each architect.

Miller & Maranta

“The more complex a building is, the more it permits – and that way it becomes culturally sustainable. Because we seek ambiguity, we view ambivalence as a positive quality.”¹

1. Angéilil and Adam, “Miller & Maranta ‘Robust Types Persist over Time,’” 316.

A. Continuity

Miller & Maranta are direct descendants of the *Analoge Architektur* tradition and thus their work most closely mirrors the canonical work of the 1980s and 90s. They reiterate Rossi’s call for type as a rational basis for design. For them, the city is a continuously-growing organism, a “continuum.” Objective observation reveals enduring typologies that form the natural structure of human settlement, “which cannot be rebelled against without good reason.”² Following *Analoge Architektur*’s expansion of typology to atmospheres, Miller & Maranta define typology as the “imprint of life on the landscape at various scales,” based on function and the repetition of an activity; “in our building culture, our way of life crystallizes into matter.”³ For Miller & Maranta, typology provides an ethical legitimacy for design.

2. Šik, “Miller, Quintus. ‘City Thinking and Collective Memory,’” 37.

3. Šik, *Pro Helvetia, and Mostra Internazionale di Architettura*, 35-36.

Because their work is conceived as an ethical obligation to the continuation of existing modes of life, deference to the existing environment is automatic. It is also useful for defining a limited point of entry since “the global” is too big of a scale from which to determine a building. This implies that an architect should be able to identify with local populations. This approach mirrors that of Zumthor when he says that he has to develop a feeling of love for a site in order to find “attunement, harmony or possibly even tension. I think loving the landscape, looking at it with one’s heart, is requisite to finding the right measure.”⁴

4. Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, 98..

But this position is open to critique. When Quintus Miller says that one should ‘conceptualize’ the city as a ‘social totality,’ there is a contradiction between the idea of the city that is actually heterogeneous and one’s concept of it, which is univocal. If types represent “life crystallized into matter,” one wonders if this approach presupposes a uniform culture. Furthermore, if our ability to work is tied to our familiarity with a culture, does it preclude or undermine works by a foreign architect? The approach could be viewed as conservative and nativist. The development of abstraction in Modern Art demonstrates the inadequacy of representational models for modern life.

When asked about the possibility that types can become outdated and the point at which an architect is required to replace them, Miller reminds us that the legitimacy of typology is tied to its robustness; it has proven the test of time. He also acknowledges that the suitability of type must be constantly examined and eventual innovations can be integrated.

Perception/Recognition

To ‘communicate cultural content,’ Miller & Maranta describe the importance of visual perception and the power of memory: “...we benefit from our human ability to immediately analyze what we perceive as its essential properties.”⁵ Referring to our memories, we infer relationships of sameness or difference and connect these to our past experiences and sensations. It is the use of memory that comes to the aid of typology-based arguments. As Rossi’s shift to *analogical architettura* demonstrated, pre-reflective thought offers a deeper level of meaning, ultimately transferring authority to the personal dimension, which through its “archaic” aspect claims universality. Miller & Maranta seem to continue the two arguments for legitimacy, one based on the rationality of type, the other on the legitimacy of experience.

Laurent Stalder said of the *Analoges*, “thinking of architecture in terms of atmosphere, as interpreted at the time in its visual and tactile dimension, means understanding architecture as surface.”⁶ For all their interest in reading and reflecting the link between culture and architecture, Miller & Maranta translate their interpretations through autonomy and abstraction. Thus “blending-in” to an environment can mean choosing a material

5. Šik, “Miller, Quintus. ‘City Thinking and Collective Memory,’” 36.

6. Angéilil and Adam, “Stalder, Laurent. ‘For the Museums,’” 137.

conceived as an average or general texture of the existing environment.

B. Wholeness

For Miller and the *Analoges*, design legitimacy comes from architecture's ability to reveal both the continuation and alterations of familiar ways of life. Miller cites the case of Lois Welzenbacher, who in the 1920s combined the new international style with typical vernacular elements of his native Innsbruck. In Welzenbacher, Miller shows a possible method: if future-looking methods contain the expression one is looking for, they can be combined with traditional elements to make their statement even stronger, bringing into sharper contrast the new ideas and the old, while harmonizing their visual dissimilarity. This *Analoge* approach clearly leads to the idea of contradictions subsumed within the whole.⁷ Through the superposition of various analogies in one building, architecture reflects the multifaceted character of the city. Through a synthetic process a unified statement is produced that is analogous to the city as a statement of collective will.

7. Šik, "Miller, Quintus. 'City Thinking and Collective Memory,'" 37.

The result is buildings that are ambiguous, which is seen as architecture's openness: "If we superimpose onto the obvious various different aspects that we associate with it, we expand the range of the design's meaning: it gains ambiguity. By consolidating different layers of meaning we ensure robustness amidst conditions subject to change over time."⁸ For Miller & Maranta, design is a cycle of analysis, citation, and collage followed by clarifications and "reduction to the essential... As soon as we have made a choice, we again question the direction we're taking and superimpose it. Our society is contradictory."⁹ In the end, clarity is important: "A design should make a statement. But because it is multivalent, there is a greater chance that it will still be socially relevant in 50 years."¹⁰

8. Šik, 40.

9. Angéil and Adam, "Miller & Maranta 'Robust Types Persist over Time,'" 316–17.

10. Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, "About Architectural Concrete."

The material of architecture

Throughout their repeated reference to the typologies of familiar atmospheres, Miller & Maranta's analogies are mostly made to existing built structures, which reveals their affirmation of an autonomous architecture. Their systematic



Miller & Maranta, Villa Garbald,
Castasegna.

Miller & Maranta, Schwarzpark,
Basel.

use of abstraction and reduction masks any direct citation. The Villa Garbald is a short five-story tower that blends with its historic hillside context as ‘an extension of an existing wall;’ the mixture of the rough concrete façade was carefully studied and then sandblasted to imitate the surrounding stone and stucco buildings. The Schwarzpark residential building has an exposed concrete exoskeleton that, incidentally, was inspired by the trees in the surrounding park. But one would never confuse the building for a tree; mimicry is limited to the fact that the concrete façade is joint-less, like a tree’s branches.

Still, Miller & Maranta’s use of the image of a tree calls into question the idea of architectural autonomy. If an autonomous approach searches for legitimacy in history or familiar (built) environments, the idea that architecture might also be analogous to nature opens architectural form to other sources of authority. If autonomy and typology were originally invoked to provide a rational basis for design and an architecture of continuity, the idea that architecture may be “continuous” with nature seems irrational. Miller & Maranta seem to be aware of the potential confusion; in an interview Quintus Miller said: ‘Tree is the meaning, but it is a building.’¹¹

11. Angéil and Adam, “Miller & Maranta ‘Robust Types Persist over Time,’” 320.

Irritation

For Miller & Maranta, the layering of ideas and analogies creates ‘oscillating meanings’ like Venturi’s “both-and.”¹² At Schwarzpark, the smooth, painted grid façade appears like a steel-frame at a distance. Up close, the cantilevering system of the ground floor reveals itself as a concrete monolith. This sort of “irritation” is “a tool to train awareness and experience familiar things in a new way.”¹³

12. Šik, Pro Helvetia, and Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, “Šik, Miroslav. ‘Introduction,’” 4.

13. Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, “About Architectural Concrete.”

Ultimately, “irritation” in Miller & Maranta’s work is subtle, verging on the subliminal. Their process transforms all environmental or associative inputs into abstract, solid architectural material.

C. Object: Volta School, Basel, CH, 1997-2000

Urban reading

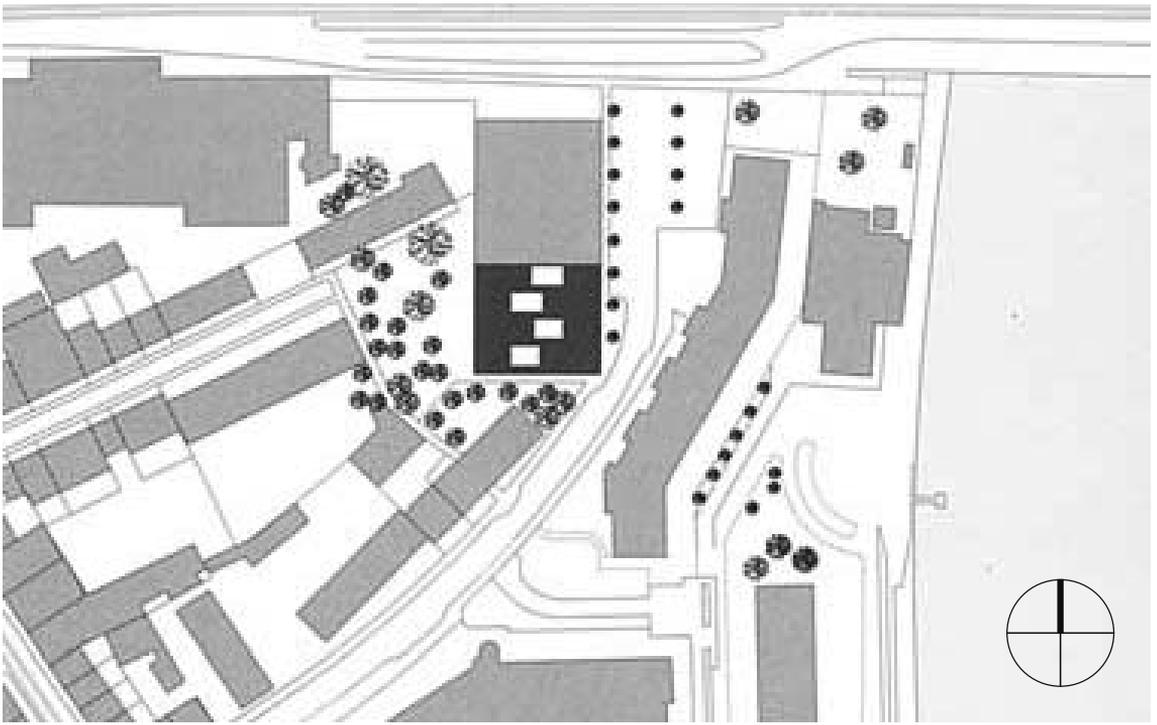
Is it a factory or a school or an office building?

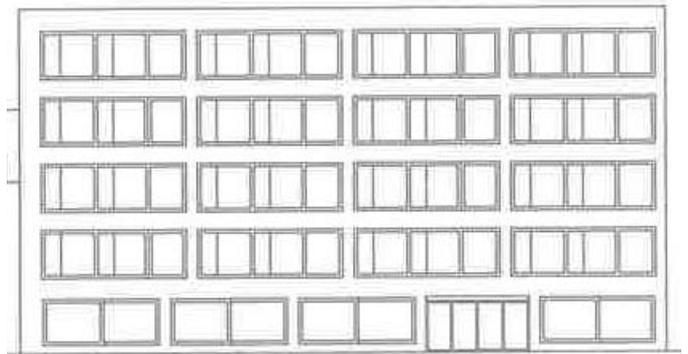
The school is located on block that tells the story of the neighborhood's development: The site is surrounded by many blocks of perimeter housing to the west and the large buildings of an industrial neighborhood to the north. The triangular block made by Elsässerstrasse, Mülhauserstrasse, and Wasserstrasse is interrupted on Wasserstrasse by a former coal storage depot. The actual site of the school was formerly occupied by an underground storage tank. These two structures suggest a slippage of the industrial zone into the historic residential fabric.

The Volta school's silent facades and industrial materials are a neutral statement yet affirm the history of the site. Contrarily, the school could have been conceived to cap the perimeter block, allowing Wasserstrasse to connect to Mülhauserstrasse, which would have been a kind of urban repair. Instead, the school extends the large form of its industrial neighbor, covering and reusing the excavation of the former tank as a gymnasium. Furthermore, the school turns its entrance towards the interior of the perimeter block, transforming the peculiarities of the site into an advantageous situation where students can enjoy a calm entrance courtyard protected from traffic.

Concrete

The simple cubic form, bare concrete walls and metal industrial windows are brutal in comparison to familiar imagery of an elementary school. It is perhaps this disconcertment that best reveals the *Analog* approach that seeks to affirm and represent its surroundings. Miller & Maranta's reading of the site has apparently favored the proximity of large industrial facilities as the predominant neighborhood characteristic. Aside from its form as a cubic extension of its industrial neighbor, the Volta school also matches the yellowish tint of the factory's concrete. This is also apparent in the view from a top floor classroom through the single North-facing window, which frames the nearby smokestacks.



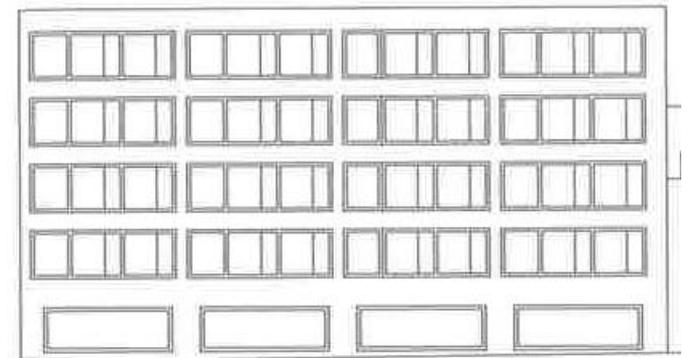


Miller & Maranta, Volta School,
Basel. Site plan, top left.

Miller & Maranta, Volta School,
Basel. Exterior view, top right.

Miller & Maranta, Volta School,
Basel. West elevation, middle right.

Miller & Maranta, Volta School,
Basel. East elevation, bottom right.



Yet the building is not without poetry. The windows are especially generous and combined with the overall proportions the building radiates a purposeful calmness. In fact, the school has a subtle classicism that evokes the previously expressed “irritation;” the reading of the building oscillates between factory offices and some higher civic value.

Miller & Maranta have said that when introducing a change, subtleness has more power than obviousness, because “it harbors more ambiguity and is therefore able to create poetry.”¹⁴

14. Šik, “Miller, Quintus. ‘City Thinking and Collective Memory,’” 40.

While the rationalism and large windows of the facades appears attached to the logic of the industrial neighbors, the modifications on the ground floor create an abstract classical plinth, suggesting the building’s elevated cultural status. This is achieved by the apparent thickening or reinforcing of the ground floor. On the east side, the windows are reduced in size, expressing the forces travelling through the wall. On the west side a shift in the grid creates an extra grid and “column,” which appears as a plinth-like reinforcement but paradoxically suggests the façade’s non-structural role. Here, tension is developed through the balancing of structural needs with those of expression, serving not to break the harmony of the whole but to render it visible and active.

A Unifying Materiality

The use of wrapping and all-over techniques is one of the most common ways of giving a building a sense of unity. It was a central theme in canonical German Swiss architecture, typified in the work of Herzog and de Meuron. Davidovici has shown that the evolution of Diener & Diener’s work validates the function of this technique especially well. In the early Hammerstrasse project from 1981, the facades are composed differently towards the street and towards the inner courtyard, each conceived to refer to the specific context in their vicinity. In the Warteckhof project from 1996, the choice of materials and detailing is abstract, taking the general image of the city as its context. This abstraction proceeds through the wrapping of buildings with their chosen materials, brick for one and concrete panels for the other. In this way, the two buildings dialogue with each other, as two entities within a larger field, at the scale of the city.



Miller & Maranta, Volta School,
Basel. Interior view.

Miller & Maranta's Volta school demonstrates a further development of the all-over technique, taking into account the interior space. Monolithic concrete construction is especially well adapted to this technique, but the Volta school further melds the aesthetic with the structural and spatial in a heroic uniform concrete construction that recalls the work of Marcel Breuer or Paul Rudolph. Yet it achieves this task while masking any overt display of effort. Outwardly, the school is more concerned with being an understated neighbor, saving its richness for the users of the school, offering them a unique and personal environment within the city.

Although the building appears nothing less than a monolith, its structural and external surfaces are nearly completely disconnected. Here we realize that the primitive and immediate character of the monolith, all the impression of weight and unity, is in fact a carefully orchestrated appearance. We see that our impression of wholeness as a sign of architectural integrity does not require the actual bonding of all elements in a uniform whole, but is a question of perception, one that nonetheless relies, in this case, on the sort of tromp-l'oeil effect generated by the use of the same concrete mixture for structural and non-structural parts.

Multifunctioning elements

The structural solution balances both the large span and the need to bring light inside, resulting in a tension on the outside which is visible in the blank wall with one row of windows.

After passing through the lobby parallel to the entrance courtyard, one moves up the main stair to upper floors where the orientation of the space changes 90 degrees. The floor is organized in bands of alternating dimensions, wide for classrooms and narrow for circulation. The layout means that rectangular classrooms are pushed to the periphery, with only narrow ends exposed to the building edge. Here one is made aware of the extremely deep floor plates. Only the narrow ends of the rectangular parcel are open to the street, a third wall appears mysteriously blank, save for one window.

Instead a series of light wells are intertwined in the middle of the floor plate offering abundant light and creating unexpected dynamism and views in an otherwise regular building.



Miller & Maranta, Volta School,
Basel. Fourth level, above.

Miller & Maranta, Volta School,
Basel. Patio, below.



Sufficient separation is created between one classroom and the next and only four classrooms share a courtyard, minimizing potential noise disruptions which could be a problem for a compact urban school. The somewhat smaller windows through the concrete wall, and its bare finish, reveal its special function.

The dynamism of the layout is a direct consequence of the structural need to span the gymnasium below. Dividing the floors into four bands, five shear walls are fused with the floor plates to span the void of the ground floor. The courtyards are stuck to these walls, which can only be carefully penetrated, leaving a passage between the courtyard and structural wall. To maximize spatial variety and efficiency, the courtyards are staggered, resulting in the labyrinth effect. The resolution of the plan shows the unified solution of structure, lighting, and spatial needs of a school and offers unexpected possibilities in a dense urban building.

The Volta school demonstrates the development of an architecture based on a reading of the site. It is not only the industrial image of the neighborhood that informs the school's character, it is also the peculiarities of the site—its fragmented block and especially the existing excavation—which provide the design's starting point, ensuring legitimacy from the beginning. The integrity of the design is exceptional: the structural system which permits the reutilization of the underground space is also adapted to great spatial effect inside, providing a special interior world for the students.

Edelaar Mosayebi Inderbitzen Architekten (EMI)

Context

Idea of place as the site of differences

Citing his work with Studio Basel, in an article entitled “On the Architectural Potential of Urban Density” Christian Inderbitzen reads cities as a “plexus of internal differences,” the interplay of which produces “an unexpected and multilayered urban dynamic.” Recognizing that architecture alone cannot produce the complexity of urban density, since it is “ultimately determined by the interactions of its players,” he nonetheless maintains that architecture “sets the stage” for urban life. Thus he proposes to flip the equation: instead of designing complexity in an abstract way, he proposes to extract from the site its existing, multiform qualities as design parameters for architecture. Inderbitzen presupposes a link between the dynamism of cities and that of its architecture.¹ The idea of reflecting the city as a means to reinforce it appears to parallel arguments of the *Analoges*.

1. Inderbitzin, “Über Das Architektonische Potential Urbaner Dichte.”

Reading of the city

This is also true for EMI’s statement: “anchoring the project in its context is achieved through volumes indebted to the specific requirements of a lot and to an atmospheric affinity with the place,” which recalls Tendenza-era arguments for establishing continuity in new architecture. But for EMI, achieving this does not require the accompanying discourse on architectural autonomy. In a “first attempt” to describe their design process, EMI chart a territory in opposition to this discourse, describing an interest in adapting observations of nature and the design of landscapes for architecture.

2. EMI Architekten, "Model and Image."

Context is not morphological or typological, as something to be understood with scientific pretensions, but "a field of suggestions" which may be "imagined and idealized," rather than observed.²

Thought models

EMI further describes a process by which a theoretical model is constructed that guides and gives coherency to a project. Starting from a site reading, EMI search for rhetorical associations as a means to develop architectural language. The site analysis becomes all-encompassing, serving as a "thought model" which allows their considerations of context and program to find harmony in architectural form. The thought model provides the key to wholeness. EMI explain that a reference, for example, a natural image, it is adapted and translated into architecture, whereby it acquires independence. Followingly, each decision or design element can be compared to the thought model to determine its coherence. The thought model is a fictional construct, it is analogously or metaphorically translated to form.³

3. EMI Architekten.

Metaphors in some projects are highly-specific: Speich Areal (2010-2015) is on one side conceived as an "amalgam of the three (neighboring) areas" and on the other as a vertical garden "superimposed by the conception of a section of greenery that becomes successively cultivated the higher it rises."⁴ At Avellana (2010-2012), because of the interior-lot location, the architecture defers to the "representative, street-facing main building" and takes as its metaphor "structures like sheds and barns;" EMI call it "informal, imbricate garden architecture." In both of these projects, these highly specific and multiple metaphors lead to the creation of hypercontextual, complex architectural forms. That both Speich and Avellana appear "fractured," from some views appearing to be made of multiple buildings overlapping in perspective, shows how EMI work specifically against the whole, autonomous object of the canonical generation.

4. Inderbitzin, "Über Das Architektonische Potential Urbaner Dichte."

In other projects EMI develop a more abstract metaphorical thought model based on a more general site reading. These projects tend to be more uniform. For the project in Hottingen (2011-2015), after "reading the urban surroundings," it was determined that urban consistency comes not from buildings

but from open space (“streetscapes, gardens, old trees”) thus building form was determined as dependent on ideas about open space; “we sought to establish a closeness to the existing trees ... and make them a determinant aspect of the architecture.” The theme, generally, is reference to nature. As the project advanced, an “intellectual model of ‘stone formations’ ... ensured a coherence between the urban scheme, the architectural expression, and the floor plan,” and the ceramic tiles were conceived as abstract leaves.⁵

5. EMI Architekten, “Model and Image.”

Program

If one of the aspects of an architecture of continuity is the nurturing of the city through the provision of adequate housing, EMI’s interest in continuity arrives at the rival rejection of “timeless” notions like typology. EMI’s position stems from their extensive experience in urban housing. In a lecture entitled “Forms of Living,” Inderbitzen compares the traditions of functionalism and rationalism, eventually developing a new hybrid concept of “anecdotal functionalism.” If functionalism legitimizes design through measurable usability, it tends to silence other architectural concerns related to aesthetics or adaptability. Rationalism, Inderbitzen quotes Adolf Behne, is concerned with ‘the primary consciousness of belonging to a human society,’ and thus takes human sensitivity into account. These two approaches converge in urban housing. Since apartment buildings are designed for imaginary or typical users, they make use of conventions derived from functional equations, to the detriment of human sensibility. “Anecdotal functionalism” is the idea of determining new uses that “comes from subjective, often even random and narrative ideas;” “The aim here is explicitly not smooth processes and efficiency, but a poetic wealth of experience in space;” “Behind it are mostly everyday experiences.” Based in the world of the everyday and the incidental, EMI seek to maintain architecture’s relevance to human modes of habitation: “Conventions are static, while societies and cultures evolve continuously.”⁶ They thus establish authority through the observation of human patterns of dwelling, apart from the restricted realm of autonomous architecture.

6. Inderbitzin, “Forms of Living: Space and Function. Towards a New Relationship?”

Through the idea of anecdotal functionalism, EMI use human sensibility as a design metric. Because we rely on conventions,



EMI Architekten, Speich Areal, Zurich.
Above.

EMI Architekten, Avellana Housing,
Zurich. Below.



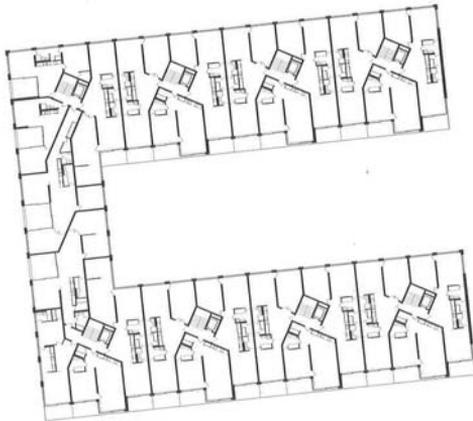
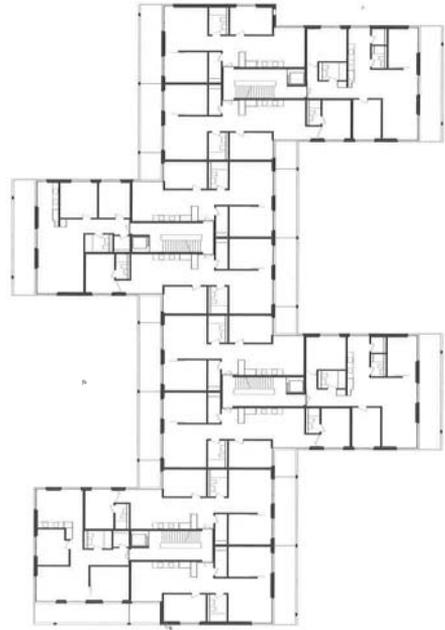
and because standards and dwelling are very narrowly defined officially, “our concepts of living are very limited, compared with what would be thinkable.” In their teaching at the EPFL, EMI had their students research new types of apartments. Their own work shows a variety of layouts and irregular agencies. At the Brüggläcker project, “it is not particular necessities or considerations of efficiency that define the floor plan, but a concept of desire and delight driven flaneur.” In Brüggläcker and Guggach, ensuring that apartments were oriented with balconies in two directions was driven by “the idea that there are people who prefer to eat outside in the evening, and others that would rather sit outside in the morning.”⁷

7. Inderbitzen.

Figures

EMI's extensive built work, nearly exclusively housing schemes around Zurich, shows a tendency towards compositional aesthetics that contrast with the unified productions of Diener & Diener or Von Ballmoos Krucker's Stöckenacker housing. EMI seem wary of the global uniformity that characterizes the canonical works. For them, wholeness is fragmented by a desire for contingency, as a measure of humanity. But if the image of wholeness appears diminished, the theme of wholeness is nonetheless an active force in the conception and spatiality of their projects. This is evident in the importance given to the plan, which shows the careful interlocking of apartment shapes, sometimes wildly angular, within larger overall compositions that create a striking figure of the project within the site. For EMI, figures serve as recognizable silhouettes that structure and give coherency to the conflicting elements of the architectural project.

In their discourse, EMI makes specific reference to Venturi's concept of “the difficult whole” and describe two essential concepts in their work: the open form and the picturesque. For EMI, open form is “form that has many layers and many parts and can be unclear, blurry, imprecise, anticlassical, antitypological, informal, noncausal, fragmented, weakly determined semantically or ambiguous and sometimes even ugly.” In the Graue Haus, EMI describe open form as an open figure, a means to bring together design elements that are difficult to resolve in a whole.⁸ Open form is thus in contrast



EMI Architekten, Hottingen Housing,
Zurich. Plan, top left.

EMI Architekten, Brügglacker Housing,
Zurich. Plan, top right.

EMI Architekten, Toblerstrasse
Housing, Zurich. Plan, bottom right.

EMI Architekten, Manegg, Zurich. Plan,
bottom left.

to something clear and precise—closed form, or perhaps, the notion of wholeness. Yet, if EMI mark a territory antithetical to that of wholeness, their description through negations suggests that open form is understood by way of closed form. Form, as a recognizable entity, belongs to both categories.

Within open form, the notion of the picturesque is used to give order. For EMI, the picturesque “was used to integrate the irrational into aesthetic theory and to call into question the classical ideal of totality, purity, harmony, and symmetry.” EMI use the picturesque to give hierarchy and coherency to the conflicting demands of the project, claiming that “neither narrative, expressive power, nor even shape” require closed form; ‘these can exist side by side in open form.’

Object: Glattpark MIN MAX Apartment Building, Opfikon, 2013–2016

EMI say that the project in Glattpark was the first time they were able to truly experiment with creating new forms of living. In a recent interview, Inderbitzen describes a “mentality of risk minimization” among Swiss developers and a preference for conventional notions of single-family apartments even though statistics show that “only 30% of households are families.” This conclusion led to the subject of their “Forms of Living” studio at EPFL and they cite Glattpark as their only project which “doesn’t follow a conventional setting.”⁹ Glattpark is an unusual development intended for people who work in Zurich during the week and spend the weekend elsewhere. The MINMAX designation includes several apartment typologies around 40m² and a shared flat type for 5 residents. This situation allowed EMI to begin the project with a rejection of typology: “Residential typology, in as much as it still exists, is usually the result of a project rather than its starting point. Even if our proposal would appeal to a large number of people, we do not begin with the question of what a small apartment should look like or how it should be lived in.” Instead, “in order to avoid speculation and idealization,” EMI began the project with four theses.¹⁰

8. “Unter Einbezug von Vorhang- und Simsblettern sowie Vorhängen und Radiatoren wurde eine offene Figur geschaffen, welche die Giebelfläche weitgehend besetzt und das Fenster in «sperriger » Weise in der Fläche verortet. Die Vorhänge reichen bis zum Boden und verbinden zusammen mit den Heizungsleitungen das Element mit dem Boden. Das Simsblett ist auf Sitzhöhe angebracht, so dass das Fenster zu einem «bewohnbaren» Element wird.“ In: Edelaar Mosayebi Inderbitzin Architekten ETH SIA AG, “Das Graue Haus, Männedorf - Projektdokumentation.”

9. Huard and Horn, “Logement, Architecte, Client (Forthcoming EPFL M.Sc. Architecture Thesis).”



EMI Architekten, Glattpark Housing
Zurich. Exterior view, above.



EMI Architekten, Glattpark Housing
Zurich. Plan, below.

Site reading

EMI's first thesis establishes the idea of an "uncompromisingly" urban building. Typically, the project began with an urban analysis in which they attempted to crystallize a sense of place. Glattpark is a completely new development on the periphery of Zurich with a strong gridiron block structure. The neighborhood is predominately 5 story, architecturally-distinct residential buildings of approximately equal size. EMI determined a principle character of the building as a result of the urban analysis: "Glattpark is an impressive example of the fact that there is no longer any clear hierarchy between center and periphery – this is clearly a piece of city. This city will become more urban the more that architecture declares it."¹¹ EMI's position reflects a general consensus that Switzerland continues to unsustainably develop the suburbs and should engage in denser development. Thus, in the manner of Rossi, they conceive of their project as a critical tool that can put up resistance to systematic patterns of development.

For EMI, an urban building is built to fill the limits of its site. It is also tall: the regular floors are 3 meters high, with a 4.5-meter high partially-commercial ground floor, and attic level "maisonettes" reaching 5 meters. It has a matte dark-grey seriousness and its verticality is emphasized throughout by narrowness: narrow vertical sheet metal façade panels and window frames, tall and dark passageways leading into the inner courtyard, and the special towers of the top floor which EMI call "battlements" (*Zinnen*). It has the qualities of an urban fortress, yet the austerity is tempered by its vertical 1-3-2 ordering, a tripartite façade that evokes tradition, and the undulations of its sheet metal façade, which undercut the building's solidity but not its presence.

Pinwheel figure

Glattpark's seriousness and large cubature also correspond to another thesis, that of "openness:" 'the building should not be too closely identified with its inhabitants but take on a general character, appropriable for everyone and able to pass on to other uses.' It is also literally open. It is possible for anyone to walk from the street through the open courtyard and out two different *faillies* to the other sides of the building. Glattpark

10. „Thesen zur Aufgabenstellung: Eine grosse Schwierigkeit im gegenwärtigen Wohnungsbau besteht in der Individualisierung bei gleichzeitiger Anonymisierung der Mieterprofile: Aufgrund unseres Wohlstandes ist praktisch jedermann in der Lage, seinen individuellen Lebensentwurf zu realisieren. Die Summe dieser Entwürfe führt zu einer Anonymisierung der Mieterschaft. Diese Tatsache bedeutet, dass Entwickler und Vermieter die Bedürfnisse ihrer zukünftigen Mieter nicht mehr genau kennen. Und für die Architekten verunmöglicht sie ein entwerferisches Denken in klar umrissenen Typologien. Der Typus einer Wohnung, sofern es ihn noch geben kann, ist vielmehr das Resultat eines Projektes, nicht aber der Ausgangspunkt.

Obschon die gestellte Aufgabe ein interessantes Segment von Menschen anzusprechen versucht, bleibt auch hier die Frage unbeantwortet, wie eine solche Kleinwohnung auszusehen hat und bewohnt wird. Um nicht Spekulationen und Wunschvorstellungen aufzusitzen, haben wir vier Thesen zum Wohnen im Glattpark Opfikon aufgestellt.“ See: "Glattpark | Edelaar Mosayebi Inderbitzen."

11. "Glattpark | Edelaar Mosayebi Inderbitzen."



EMI Architekten, Glattpark Housing
Zurich. Courtyard view.

has a polar generality formed by its square pinwheel plan. Each side of the square is an independent structure linked only by the courtyard walkways. The Glattpark plan is a clear example of EMI's "open form:" The building is recognizable as an extrusion of the square site but it is also readable as a pinwheel formation made of unequal elements. The global figure gives coherency to the open form.

The relationship between EMI's open forms and recognizable figures produces a *tense whole*. If EMI find that open forms better correspond to the diversity of modern experience, they also favor systems of clarification and rationality. The result is a certain amount of openness within a system that is otherwise rational or controlled. In the typical floor plan at Glattpark, the interior of each form is perfectly divided into individual apartments. And, as EMI indicate, the special 5-person apartment can be inserted anywhere on a typical floor because the load-bearing and technical structure is "space neutral." Neither random nor fully defined, open form is a proposition for ambiguousness.

New forms of living

Rationality of the neutral plan permits flexibility. Another of EMI's theses was to position the building 'between community and anonymity.' The opportunity to think about typologically-undefined lifestyles and EMI's resistance to define them leads to interior spaces that are flexible but stark. Aside from the bathroom, the typical apartment has no solid walls. This is partly due to the compressed layout of small apartments in a ring around the interior courtyard. This arrangement allows each unit to have an entrance from the shared courtyards and a large, private balcony towards the exterior, but it also means that the apartments are twice as long as wide, with the major source of natural light coming from one small end. Fortunately, the design of two story units at the attic level permitted an economy of vertical dimensions (since the gallery floor inside the "maisonettes" doesn't require insulation), which allowed the typical floor to grow to 3 meters in height. Aware of the potential lack of natural light, the apartments have been fitted with glass walls, which EMI claim permits the apartment to be seen as single space. For this reason, the floor is fully covered in hard terrazzo tile. These spaces exhibit a certain



Le Corbusier, Atelier Ozenfant.

EMI Architekten, Glattpark Housing
Zurich. Apartment view, below.

desire for purity and neutrality, but they also stop short of presenting the spaces as fully lived in. One wonders if EMI's interest in flexibility and new housing forms is able to pass on to the dimension of the real of if it remains conceptual, like the typology that they criticize.

EMI's final thesis was that these special small apartments should not be designed as a 'reduced, conventional apartment' but must start from an original idea. Le Corbusier became a key model for the project. His Atelier Ozenfant, which they discovered was also 40m², showed the value of a simple shape, large window, and high height that grew into the idea of the "maisonettes." The interior courtyard was designed as a "stone garden" with plastic concrete forms in the manner of the *Cité Radieuse* in Marseille. Like the "shared street," EMI designed a casual communal space on each level which takes the form of a tower, a "symbolic shape" representative of the unique housing project. If EMI reject typology, they actively search for authority in the history of architecture.

Pascal Flammer

A. The idea

Background

“While working on the project for the school in Paspels, I noticed for the very first time that I actually need a concept before I can begin. I can’t approach a project merely on the basis of atmospheric considerations, for example – which is how I had proceeded up to this point.”¹

1. Angéilil and Adam, “Valerio Olgiati (November 3, 2008).”

Olgiati, for whom Pascal Flammer worked and to whom his approach will be compared, has claimed that originality is the only way to create social significance, that a greater impact is not possible, and that his work does not profess to improve anything; “I want the content to drive my work, not a desire to better the world.” He is also disinterested in context: a temple is not contextual, nor is a stable; they’re based on needs, and they become wonderful; “For farmers, there is no romantic view of context.” He rejects a deliberately phenomenological approach, although his work often has profound or magical effects on perception.² His architecture is a mental construction: “I want to find criteria that come directly out of an idea while not being abstractions of the surroundings or from anything else.”³

2. Angéilil and Adam.

3. Hasegawa, “Conversation with Valerio Olgiati.”

Simultaneously, Olgiati acknowledges the influence of “quintessential” architecture, international references that “solve even non-architectural challenges, lending these works a universal character.”⁴ If we follow Rossi’s logic, this history constitutes a discipline of architecture, and thus reference to these ideas constitutes an autonomous approach. “While

4. Angéilil and Adam, “Valerio Olgiati (November 3, 2008).”

Olgianti desires ‘to rise above the traditions handed down to [him] ... to the extent that [his] architecture would become non-referential, he is clearly ‘aware that this is impossible.’” This struggle leads him “‘to sort out’ what is significant for his architecture, and ultimately, ‘to design an architecture that in the end is ‘only’ abstract.’”⁵

5. Breitschmid, *Three Architects in Switzerland: Beat Consoni, Morger & Degelo, Valerio Olgianti*, 11.

Rejection of dogmas

At Olgianti’s office, Flammer saw architecture as “a physical extension of its creator.” It’s “an interpretation of your understanding of the world.”⁶ He says he has tried to rid his thinking of all dogmas: Developing an idea out of a place is “a certain school. I’m not against it, but I don’t want to put it as a first condition. The first component is the person who will perceive the building.”⁷ Flammer and Olgianti locate architectural authority in the value and originality of its experience. For Flammer, the discourse on continuity is a dogma. He is right that since Rossi’s years, deference to context has generally been an automatic assumption. Its continued hold on Swiss architecture is more conventional than political. But without the discourse a rational basis for design is missing. Where does authority come from?

6. Hasegawa, “Conversation with Pascal Flammer.”

7. Flammer, UDK Tuesday 186 / A Talk with Pascal Flammer.

Flammer’s resistance of automatic cultural positions is not due to insensitivity. At the house in Balsthal, a door and window coincide at a ninety-degree angle, which he describes as “bad” design by conventional standards: a gap is created, visual and sound separation of the spaces is incomplete, and the assembly is fragile. Flammer views this as “good;” “architecture should be fragile, should be able to be broken, because when people realize that they have to treat it carefully, they will. It makes people more aware. When everything is built to the same level, it becomes abstract and foreign to us.”⁸ He sees a resistance to norms and conventions as a resistance to the banalization and standardization of modern experience.

8. Flammer, “UDK Tuesday 186 / Pascal Flammer.”

Without continuity, authority is fully transferred to the creative dimension. When teaching his own students, Flammer proposes that legitimacy is ultimately personal: “Doubts (and hopes) reveal topics one cares for.” They can be used to question automated answers, to leave personal aspects behind and to find general (public or universal) issues. Once these have been established, form can be developed, “So,

its guaranteed that the work is both authentic and general.”⁹ Universal authority derived from the personal dimension recalls Rossi’s *architettura analogica*.

9. Abhelakh and Flammer, “Manyness and Contradiction.”

System

To organize an idea, both Olgiati and Flammer refer to the idea of a system, “whereby each element grows out of the one before it and everything is interconnected.”¹⁰ For Flammer, systemic architecture is autonomous and doesn’t have any subjective content. In his project for an Office with Two Stairs, *system* describes the relationship between structure and space: A concrete core holds two stairwells, one offering special access from the bottom to the top floor; at the height of the second floor, four floor-height walls run diagonally from the corners of the core to the corners of the slabs, supporting them; the roof slab edge is a beam with peaked geometry to resist moment forces at its center, this in turn supports the same forces in the slab below with a vertical member in tension; the first floor is suspended from the umbrella structure above at its corners and with columns at the midpoint of each side.¹¹ For Flammer, the primacy of the idea of providing special access to the top floor becomes a provocation for the structure and organization of the rest of the building. The legibility of the system is ambiguous. Due to its visual simplicity and refinement, the structure appears to be at a perfected limit; at the same time, clarity about the actual structural forces is withheld as the thickness of all elements is a consistent 20cm and rendered in abstract white concrete. System-thinking and visual abstraction are tools for conceptual justification that also provide visual ambiguity and thus provoke curiosity in the observer, which is the site of architecture’s legitimacy.

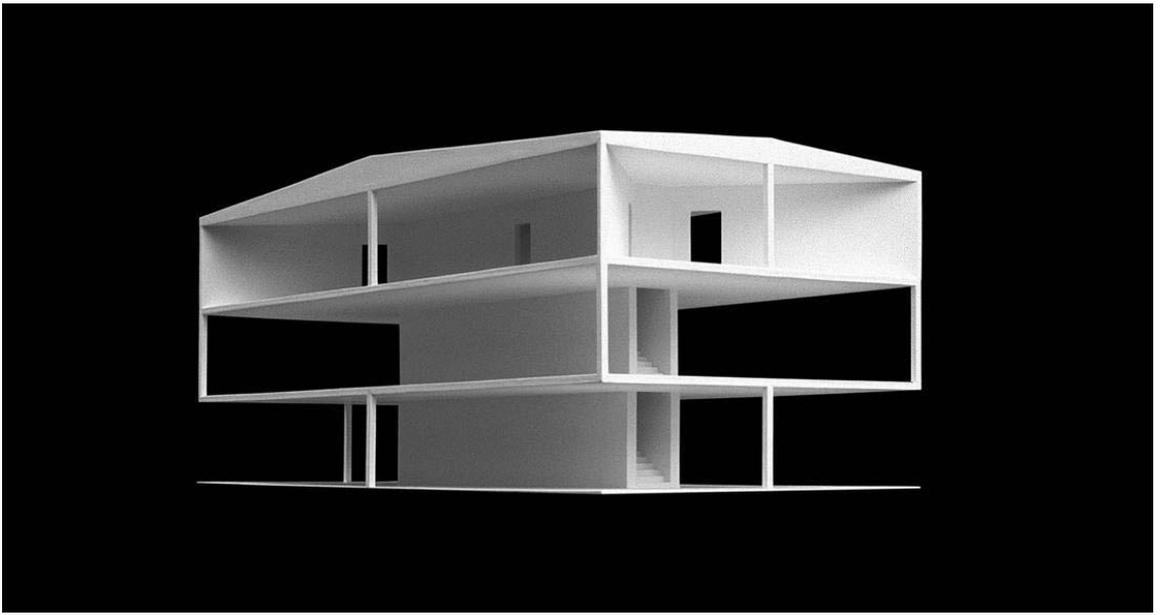
10. Angéil and Adam, “Valerio Olgiati (November 3, 2008).” In the same book, Made in Architects describe a similar approach: “We believe the ‘best’ ideas are those with radicalism that implies the longest succession of logical consequences...The logical sequence was thus established at a very early stage of the process. This search for coherence is perhaps also the fundamental link between all our activities, from the competition, to the constructed project, to publication. And this cohesion is the sole guarantee of the quality that we must and want to attain.” See: Angéil and Adam, “François Charbonnet, Patrick Heiz - Made in (November 24, 2009).”

11. Flammer, “UDK Tuesday 186 / Pascal Flammer.”

Putting two things together

Flammer often claims that he is interested in the simple fact of putting two things together, claiming construction alone produces meaning, or at least, curiosity and reflection. He reveals this in images of simple stacked arrangements of household objects, or in his work when he superimposes images of paintings in architectural plans, creating a ‘double or parallel existence.’¹² Echoing Olgiati, for Flammer the

12. Hasegawa, *Conversations with European Architects*.



Pascal Flammer, Office with Two Stairs.

13. Flammer, "UDK Tuesday 186 / Pascal Flammer."

importance of this phenomenon is the mental experience. He cites the Japanese architect Kazuo Shinohara who, he says, often combined two simple geometries in his projects, arriving at a form that is no longer easy to understand. The result is stimulating (*spannende*) architecture because "we can understand it with the brain but not by looking at the result."¹³

14. Flammer.

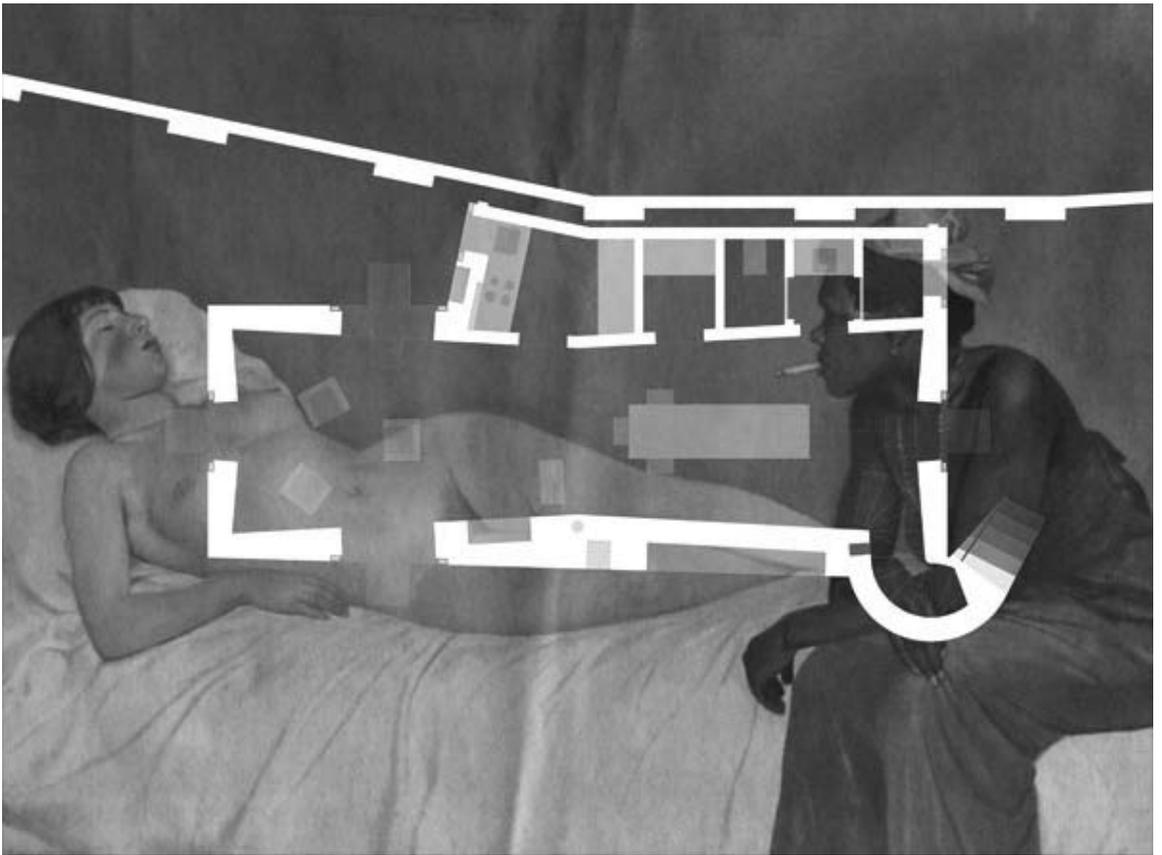
Several of his projects are conceived as the juxtaposition of two opposing spatial types. The house in Bonassola is "one room that is two rooms;" a rectangular volume one half of which is for summer living with openings in all directions, the other half closed except for a skylight: "One sees the A and the A'. One sees the thing and its opposite." The 7x7 house is "worlds or ways of observing or understanding the world" built simultaneously one on top of the other.¹⁴ These dueling experiences must nonetheless be contained within a whole that binds them together. Wholeness remains a strategy for architectural coherence. Flammer says that "the nice thing about architecture is that when one concretes everything together, makes everything out of the same material, it becomes simply one."¹⁵ For Olgiati buildings that comprise "a single entity" are "the ultimate achievement for an architect."¹⁶

15. Flammer.

16. Angéilil and Adam, "Valerio Olgiati (November 3, 2008)."

Context is still a starting point

Although Olgiati says he is uninterested in context, Flammer seems frequently inspired by it. His readings look to extract the most general or universal qualities of the site. For the house in Bonassola, his project began with the identification of a general sentiment: the old houses were nice, the new houses were ugly. Missing was the patina of the older constructions which failed to appear on the modern materials. This led to the (metaphorical) idea to make a project that looked like a ruin, from brutally-handled rough concrete. In his House I on an Island in Scotland, he described the theme of the project as "context" (*Umgebung*), which, when abstracted, was water and stone. He thus designed two rooms, one corresponding to each atmosphere. Flammer then, like EMI, posits a certain one-to-one relationship between architecture and site.



Pascal Flammer, House in Bonassola.
Plan, above.

Pascal Flammer, House I on an Island.
Rendering, below.

C. Object: House with Two Rooms, Balsthal, CH, 2014.

The House in Balsthal is Pascal Flammer's first project as an independent architect. The house clearly demonstrates the conceptual nature of Flammer's approach, but it also manifests contextual references that give it richness, although they break from the house's explicit conceptual logic. Perhaps this is why Flammer has said, "Actually, I don't like the project."¹⁷

17. Flammer, UDK Tuesday 186 / A
Talk with Pascal Flammer.

The project began with a reflection on the landscape of agricultural fields in a valley in the town of Balsthal where Flammer was raised. He described the landscape as "lonely," finding that in the countryside there is no public space. He concludes that, in the countryside the living space of an individual home is much more important and intense than in the city since it has to make up for the lack of urban life; "A single house must be able to offer all that a city does."¹⁸ Thus he conceives of a house that offers diversity, which he translates through the medium of architecture as a variety of spatial experiences.

18. Flammer, "UDK Tuesday 186 /
Pascal Flammer."

Reintroducing familiarity

The house in Balsthal is immediately recognizable due to its small size, freestanding site, and familiar form. Precisely because its radical spatial proposition is combined with familiar imagery, it gains a phenomenological presence, oscillating between familiarity and unfamiliarity. The motif of the stacking of spaces could have been achieved with a flat roof. Flammer says he picked the pitched roof because it is a typical form that means nothing; it is "unspecific and generic to that region."¹⁹ But familiarity and generality, when employed with other less-conventional elements, has a profound effect on the perception and emotion of the space, and causes surprise and ambiguity. The effect recalls Venturi's demand for the use of conventional elements in unconventional ways.

19. Hasegawa, *Conversations with
European Architects.*

Construction of the landscape

Through its rustic materiality—wood—and typical vernacular form, it makes a claim to nature. The edge between the natural and constructed realms is blurred by the position of the ground floor 75cm below grade, creating unfamiliarity and richness. Here, the thick band of cabinets around the perimeter bring

the natural level inside the house. The simple rectangular form which typically divides inside from out is thus put in tension, developing the theme of oscillation between natural and built worlds.

Stacking of spaces

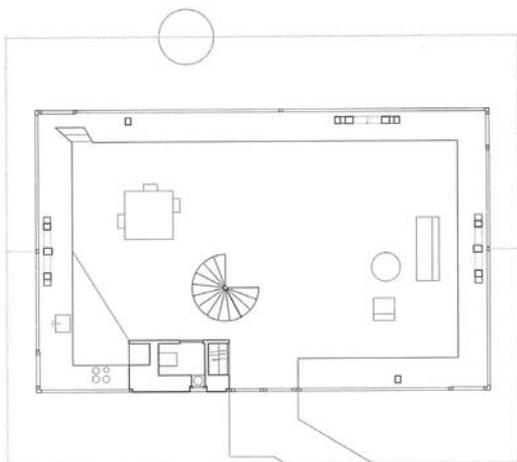
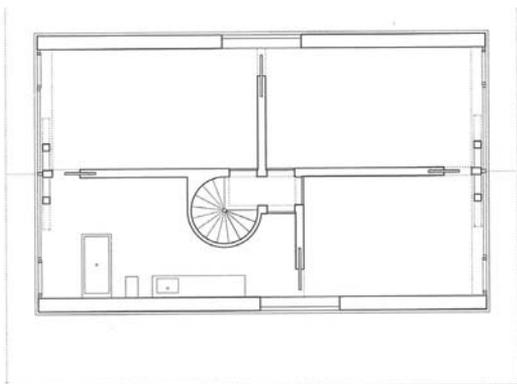
The house is designed as the stacking of three worlds. The ground floor is “animalistic,” completely exposed by a band of windows, but also partially protected underground. The upstairs gives the opposite experience: the landscape appears framed from within the confines of the house. But this is also unusual: at just 1.5m above ground level, it is strangely in-between floors and offers an unusual vantage point toward the outside. A third space is the basement, which has only a skylight and “could be anywhere,” completely disconnected from the ideas of landscape on the other two floors.

Equality of plans

The dialogue between the open/closed experiences is further reinforced by the division of space: the ground floor is fully open while the upstairs is evenly divided into 4 equal rooms. The purity of these spatial experiences are diametrically opposed. Flammer says it is as if the upstairs was divided by a military general, with perfect rationality. As the walls on the upper floor are opened along their outermost edge, each level can be experienced in a circular journey along the perimeter, which reinforces the overall simple rectangular plan and produces an equality of the three hundred sixty-degree experience on both floors. A further equivalence is accorded to the basement level, which appears to take the short elevation of the house—itsself equal to a child’s sketch of a house—and rotate it ninety degrees as the shape of the basement floor. Such equalities recall those of the Stone House’s plan, section, and elevation.

Wood: the integrity of the idea withstands change

Inside, the theme of new perspectives on nature is also taken up by the uniform use of pine wood paneling. The knotty pine retains its natural variation in texture while simultaneously forming pure geometric surfaces and volumes. One can





Pascal Flammer, House in with Two Rooms, Balsthal. Plans, left.

Pascal Flammer, House in with Two Rooms, Balsthal. Exterior view, right.

well imagine the scent of a wood house contribute to the experience of this place in way a concrete structure could not.

Interestingly, the house was not designed to be a wood house, and Flammer says he was forced to build it as such, presumably due to building restrictions. If Flammer and Olgiati generally prefer the abstraction of concrete as a tool for the clarification of their ideas, Flammer says that with this house he learned that if a material is used all over in the same way, it loses its materiality because it has no point of reference, it becomes abstract.²⁰ The fact that the idea of the house seems to be at odds with its actual construction, identified in the reluctant use of wood and pitched roof, produces an interesting situation. First, that the idea was abstracted from these aspects of reality calls into question the validity of the idea. But also, by my reading, these externally-imposed 'realities' give the house its special magical qualities. They affect through their familiarity and contribute to the house's ambiguity, as a measure of its richness. Olgiati's houses in monolithic concrete are surprising and compelling but don't offer the sumptuousness and curiosity found here.

The round window on the first floor indicates that the house was originally conceived in a fluid material like concrete. In a lecture, Flammer explains how the round window is a unifying element of the design. Since he, like Olgiati, is concerned with the perception of architecture as a complete entity, he found that the division of the upstairs rooms created an experience of separation, isolating the experience from inside. Using sliding doors at the intersection of the dividing and perimeter walls overcomes this, but only when the doors are open. For Flammer, the round window remediates the situation, for when the door is closed, the window appears incomplete, and thus suggests the continuation of the wall, and thus of the spaces.²¹ For Flammer, wholeness is a cerebral operation.

20. Flammer, "UDK Tuesday 186 / Pascal Flammer."

21. Flammer.



Pascal Flammer, House in with Two Rooms, Balsthal. Interior view, right.

Impressions

Autonomy

Among the most frequent words in this work, “autonomy” has been the concept under deepest investigation. The course of this analysis has followed an inversion of the idea of autonomy in architecture. Conceived by Rossi as a tool of political resistance, in Olgiati/Flammer it is a tool to rid oneself of dogmas, taking a position of ‘I don’t claim to improve anything.’ Rossi’s shift to analogical architecture began the obfuscation of architecture’s role as a tool of social transformation. As autonomous architecture shifted from something that puts up resistance to capitalist planning and expansion, it came to accept the new suburban landscape, only putting up resistance to the signs of commercialization and capitalist life. It retreated into the domain of art and aesthetic contemplation and in so doing it gave up its interest in popular political concerns. This loss may well be mourned. But again, through the newer interpretation of autonomy, architecture that takes as its meaning its own constructional logic and experiential effect has a legitimate appeal. Should architecture require politics, or can it just be itself? Following this rationale, riding oneself of dogmas has the most “rational” appeal. In the present study, it is EMI, who make no claim to architectural autonomy yet end up with the most political argument.

Ambiguity

Whether one starts from contextual readings or not, or whether one develops ideas out of the history of architecture or turns to invention and creativity, ambiguity offers a project richness. This is perhaps the greatest lesson taken from the canonical

generation. Projects that are the result of deep reflection end up revealing it as a quality of tension. Tension is a sign of human intelligence in architecture.

Wholeness

Finally, what these projects share, and what should be taken as their lesson, is their object-like quality—their quality of wholeness. Each one possesses an internal order visible in the clarity of the plan, but each also shows an attention to detailing that reveals the translation from concept to construction. The ability for a construction as complicated as a building to take on the quality of an object—defined, finished—reveals the solidity of the concept and the architect's resolution of it in built form.

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