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boîte lumineuse à verres rayés dans laquelle est montée une diapositive. Le bâtiment est encore identifiable, mais il est flou et relégué dans un lointain insaisissable. Ce n'est sans doute pas un hasard si la démarche de Hartley s'applique particulièrement bien à la conception idéalisée de l'espace qui caractérise les bâtiments ou les intérieurs du modernisme. Les structures, reconnaissables, génériques, permettent à l'artiste de sonder les ambiguïtés de la perception et de montrer l'architecture comme un phénomène paradoxal: les boîtes lumineuses sont une invitation projective à l'adresse du spectateur, mais elles l'excluent aussi, physiquement. Paradoxe particulièrement visible dans les installations, où le rapport entre les espaces intérieurs représentés et l'espace réel dans lequel s'inscrivent les boîtes lumineuses, est pratiquement de un à un.

Malgré les différences que présentent leurs œuvres, Hartley, Casebere et Voïta sont tous des représentants d'une photographie constructiviste – Casebere en étant le co-fondateur, Hartley et Voïta les héritiers – où le concept de maquette, au sens de mise en scène conçue spécialement pour la caméra, occupe une place primordiale. Un appareillage ou une maquette créent l'illusion d'espace, ou du moins y ont part. Les œuvres tirent toutes – quoiqu'à un degré variable de l'une à l'autre – leur vie de l'apparence qu'elles produisent d'une seconde réalité en parallèle, sans néanmoins livrer entièrement le spectateur à cette manœuvre de leurre. Au contraire, ces artistes utilisent les possibilités qui existent, au moyen de l'architecture ou de l'architectural d'analyser l'espace – ou, plus précisément, de refléter la texture complexe du souvenir et de la projection, de la mémoire et de l'inconscient collectif, inscrite dans l'expérience – rétinienne – de l'espace culturel.

Des reflets de constructions

Quelle est la direction que prend actuellement l'assimilation de l'architecture par les pratiques filmiques, vidéographiques ou photographiques des beaux-arts? S'il est exact que, par la métamorphose que lui fait subir le médium, l'architecture devient un simulacre, cela ne signifie pas que l'expérience devienne du même coup «virtuelle» ou «fluide». On met au contraire plus d'insistance et de sens critique à signaler la médiation de l'expérience. La mise en scène reste identifiable dans tous les cas: nous voyons l'image et reflétons en même temps sa construction. Mais ces œuvres nous permettent aussi, au-delà de la réflexivité, de prendre en compte notre mémoire subjective et notre accès à l'inconscient collectif, conditions d'une expérience agissante. Que se passerait-il si ces aspects étaient négligés? Il en irait pour nous peut-être de même que pour le héros du film «Memento», réalisé en 2000 par Christopher Nolan, où le protagoniste, un homme dont la mémoire à court terme a été détruite à la suite d'une agression nocturne, se heurte, dans la recherche du meurtrier de sa femme, à un monde sans visage, en l'occurrence – et il ne faut pas y voir un hasard – un décor de banlieue américaine. Il s'aide de photographies, de billets, de plans, de tableaux, de diagrammes, de cartes et même de tatouages pour tenter de reconstituer le cours des choses et de s'orienter dans l'espace, au sens propre et au sens figuré. Mais dès lors que sa capacité à produire des souvenirs s'est éteinte – ou qu'il l'a refoulée intentionnellement? – il finit par s'empêtrer toujours plus dans un système claustrophobique de renvois à des pseudo-signes, dans le cabinet aux miroirs de ses propres angoisses et obsessions. Car la vérité qu'il recherche, il l'a déjà détruite.

1 Cité d'après Samuel Wagstaff Jr., Talking with Tony Smith, in: Minimal Art, A Critical Anthology, ed. by Gregory Battcock, University of California, 1995, p. 386.

2 Roland Barthes, Le troisième sens. Notes de recherche sur quelques photogrammes de S.M. Eisenstein, in: L'obvie et l'obtus. Essais critiques III, Paris, éd. du Seuil 1982, p. 59-60.

3 Robert Smithson, «A Cinematic Atopia» (1971), in: id., Collected Writings, University of California Press 1996, p. 142.

4 Ibid., p. 138.

5 Ibid., p. 70; publié d'abord sous le titre «The Monuments of Passaic», in: Artforum, décembre 1967.

6 Julian Opie, Delhi, Chandigarh, Bhopal, Calcutta, Bangalore, Mumbai, British Council, 1997, p. 3.

7 Ibid.

8 Ou la référence même académique, comme lorsque l'artiste, dans «Backsliding, sideslipping, one Great Leap, and the ‹forbidden›», de 1994, reproduit sous forme d'installation dans une galerie un fragment de plan de la villa Savoye de Le Corbusier (1929-1931).

9 Entretien avec l'auteur, avril 1999.

10 Ibid.

11 Jane & Louise Wilson, Catalogue d'exposition, Serpentine Gallery, 1999, p. 10.

12 Steven Jenkins, A Conversation with James Casebere, in: James Casebere, Model Culture, Photographs 1975 - 1996, The Friends of Photography 1996, p. 80.

English

Daniel Kurjaković (pages 18–37)
English translation: Ishbel Flett

Imaging Architecture

On a media transformation in contemporary art

References to architecture in contemporary art tend to focus more on the image it projects than on the design processes and methods involved. As a sign that is quoted, parodied and transformed, architecture is seen within evocative visual worlds that also bear witness to a certain scepticism with regard to purely illusionistic settings. One of the most distinctive aspects in this respect is the filmic paradigm, which is discussed in the following by way of selected examples. Architecture appears in works imbued with a high degree of ambiguity and a cinematic narrative approach. Initial indications of the filmic paradigm can be found in the aesthetic discourse of the 1960s and the 1970s, but not until now has it included a broad spectrum of contemporary artists addressing the image of architecture, or rather, exploring the "architectural" condition of visual reality.

"A camera's eye alludes to many abysses."
Robert Smithson, 1971

"Created worlds without tradition," is how the American architect and sculptor Tony Smith (1912-1981) describes the post industrial wasteland that he discovered in the early 1950s while driving at night along the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. His influential essay, penned in the late 1960s, is not a documentary description, but a fictional report permeated by the filmic discourse. From today's vantage point, it is relatively easy to recognize the "cinemascopic" character of his experience: "It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and coloured lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. ... The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it."[1]

Smith speaks of an "artificial" landscape that seems to invade his perception as though it were a limitless expanse ("There is no way you can frame it..."). Yet the space can nevertheless be described, not least of all because there is a phenomenological boundary: Smith perceives the image of his surroundings projected onto the flat surface of the car window (though unaware of it himself, his rhetoric indicates this). Framed by the window, the monumentality of the environment becomes tangible. Thus, the three-dimensional space silently becomes an image, a gallery of images, in short, a film.

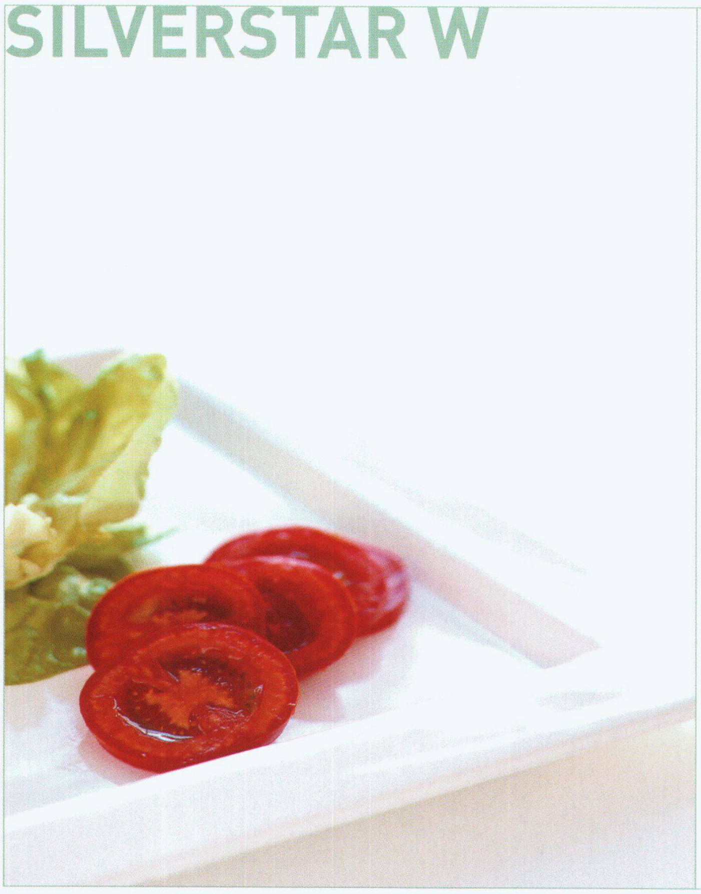
Even though this experience did not actually prompt Smith himself to use film as a medium, there is probably no other text of this period that so clearly anticipates later approaches to the media-ized image of architecture (in this case the post-industrial landscape). The image that Smith describes is artificial, because representation takes precedence over reality, whereby, strictly speaking, the distinction between reality and representation cannot be upheld. It is no coincidence that the situation perceived by Smith is redolent of the camera obscura: it is as though Smith were sitting in a dark chamber

into which light could penetrate at certain points, producing the image.

Film and Photogram

What is meant here by the word “image”? What does Smith actually perceive, given that his vision is necessarily reduced to a minimum on this night-time car ride? Does he really see only a post-industrial landscape with fragments of architecture scattered through it? How could this space be portrayed, and by what synthesis might it be captured? After all, Smith himself noted its resistance to representation (“there is no way you can frame it…”). With the wisdom of hindsight, the answer is clear: through the filmic paradigm. In the following, however, it is important to understand the concept of the “filmic” in the sense of Roland Barthes, who did not see it in a sequence of moving images, but in a montage of images, that is to say of individual images – or, as Barthes writes – of photograms: “If, however, the specific filmic (the filmic of the future) lies not in movement but in an inarticulable third meaning that neither the simple photograph nor figurative painting can assume since they lack the diegetic horizon, … then the ‘movement’ regarded as the essence of film is not animation, flux, mobility, ‘life’, copy, but simply the framework of a permutational unfolding …”.[2] With its concrete media, that is to say photography, video or film, this paradigm provides the means of representing duration, process, narrative moments and drama, memories and associations as they are linked with the experience of architecture.

Another outstanding representative of a discourse addressing the relationship between architecture and art is Robert Smithson (1938 – 1973). Smithson was enormously influential (especially for a number of younger artists) and, like few other artists of his generation, considered the possible influence of cinema on the representation of architecture. His work is teeming with designs, drawings, photographs and texts that focus on the theme of “atemporal” architecture and “anti-monuments” situated not above the earth’s surface, but sunk deep into the geologically stratified (and even metaphorical) ground. It is no coincidence that his most famous work is a combination of anti-architecture and film: a filmic essay on the Spiral Jetty structure that he created in Salt Lake, Utah in 1972 (now submerged below the waterline). Like Tony Smith, Smithson was also interested in the dialectics of appearance and disappearance in the context of architecture, and the topos of the dark room also occurs in his work. His unrealized project “Towards the Development of a Cinema Cavern ‘The Moviegoer as Spelunker’” (1971) in which Smithson dreams of a cinema in a cave, is far more than a mere footnote to his oeuvre. The cave appears as a kind of a natural camera obscura, the ideal trope linking both aspects of architecture and cinema within a programme critical of representation: “What I would like to do is build a cinema in a cave or in an abandoned mine, and film the process of its construction. That film would be the only film shown in the cave. The projection booth would be made out of crude timbers, the screen carved out of a rock wall and painted white, the seats could be boulders. It would be a truly ‘underground’ cinema.”[3] The reason for Smithson’s interest in the cinematic medium lay not only in the persuasive power of the cinematic experience and film’s capacity to transport the mind to another place: “One thing all films have in common is the power to take perception elsewhere”.[4] As “Towards the Development of a Cinema cavern ‘The Moviegoer as Spelunker’” shows, Smithson links the illusionism of the filmic experience with a problematization of the image. He suspends the illusion at the moment at which he introduces the reflection on the location of the image itself – and, with that, on the spectator’s own sense of location. Yet Smithson knows full well that illusionism is not merely a factor inherent within the image, but one that points towards a cultural given.



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Transformation of Architecture

In “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” (1967) Smithson gives a parodistic report on bridges, pumps, sewage pipes and such like in terms of pre- or post-historic phenomena, and describes simulacrum-influenced reality: “Noon-day sunshine cinema-ized the site, turning the bridge and the river into an over-exposed picture. Photographing it with my Instamatic 400 was like photographing a photograph. The sun became a monstrous light bulb that projected a detached series of ‘stills’ through my Instamatic into my eye. When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I was walking on an enormous photograph that was made of wood and steel, and underneath the river existed as an enormous movie film that showed nothing but a continuous blank.”[5]

In contemporary art, more traditional means of designing and shaping spatial reality have been assimilated by photography, video, and film. The term “assimilate” is an important one, since painting, sculpture, drawing, plan or model are not simply cancelled without substitute, but are transposed into a new medium and thus transformed. It remains possible for the various media of projection to exist independently alongside one another (as is indeed the case in most of the artistic positions presented here). Just how they are transformed is evident in the work of a remarkable number of contemporary artists whose practice is permeated by the filmic condition.

Julian Opie

British artist Julian Opie (1958) uses his installations featuring wall paintings and various objects to simulate an all-encompassing grammar of the natural world: architectural structures, urban scenes, landscapes with or without people and animals. He bases simulation on pictographic elements. Opie’s works are, in principle, pictures even when they take the form of three-dimensional objects in space, since such objects are merely different sides of a picture presented together and juxtaposed with sharp angularity. The pictographic aspect makes it possible to identify individual elements within seconds, giving spectators the impression that they could actually project themselves into the scenes portrayed. However, the geometric “generalization” of forms precludes any real identification, let alone empathy, with what is there. Although Opie refers in all elements to the natural world and although he quotes various typologies (cars, architecture, landscapes, etc.), he suppresses any aspect – such as an insistence on detail – that might transfigure the generic character of the pictorial types. In spite of the immediacy of Opie’s work, the metaphorical door leading “into” it remains closed. Opie’s worlds consist of surfaces, passing by us or passed by us. In his installations, space is primarily a question of planes set behind one another. “For the last few years I have been using the passenger’s sideways view moving past things. As in Japanese prints, the landscape and objects within it are seen flat on. There is a gentle sliding of close objects over distant ones.”[6] For Opie, images are not only placed one behind the other, but actually follow one another in a sequence of temporal continuum, as in forward movement – whether in a car or as a visitor strolling through an exhibition or merely casting a glance through it. This is a potentially cinematic experience: “One of the truly modern experiences is speed ... Driving fast is cinematic, vision becomes fluid.”[7] Accordingly, the architecture quoted in Opie’s installations is an element in an essentially cinematic narrative, another projection screen. However, Opie clouds the illusory effect: he lends his installations a distinctly in situ character, by referring to real architecture in the immediate or wider vicinity of the exhibition venue.

Rita McBride

American artist Rita McBride (1960) creates in situ works, objects, and photographs. In some of her works, she refers expressly to architecture and design.[8] In her “Parking Structures” or “Skylights”, model-like bronze sculptures of the late 90s, and in her photographs, McBride addresses

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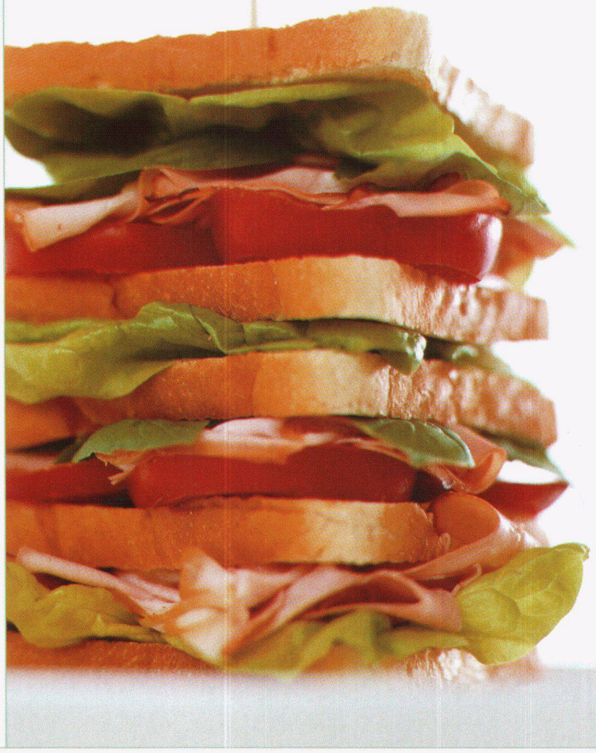

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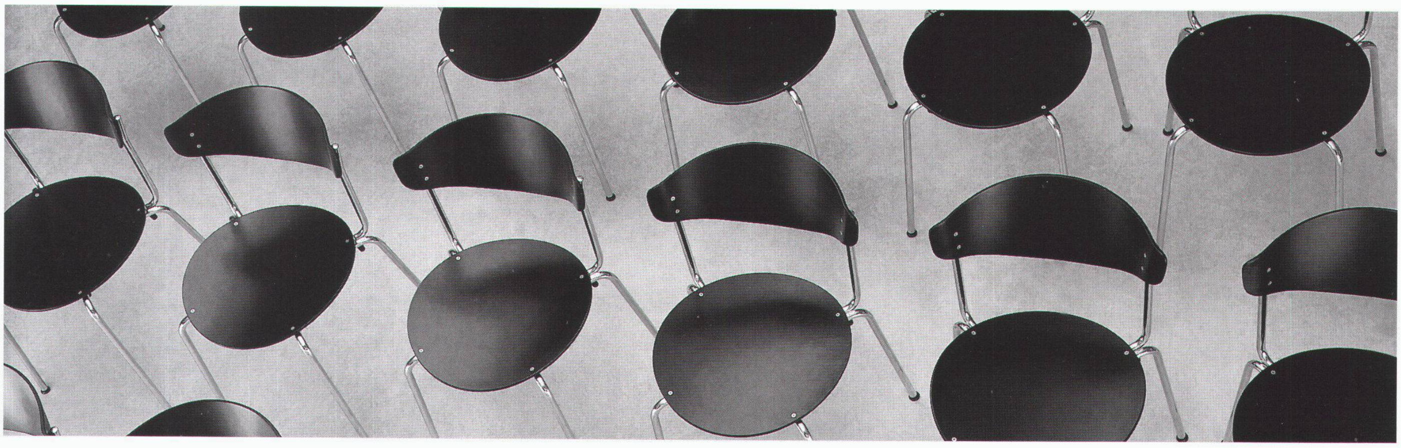
anonymous, alienated buildings. Her works take a critical approach to sculptural praxis, interpreting architecture detached from society as a linguistic element capable of shifting the boundaries of the sculptural discipline by bringing into play the collective consciousness conveyed by architecture as a sign. The “Parking Structures” and “Skylights” are derived from unpeopled spaces and uninhabited real estate. In a sense, this is negative space, given that it is used, if at all, only temporarily and sporadically. The authorless status of such spaces predestines them as general areas of projection whose sculptural function is thoroughly filmic. According to McBride, “My experience of garages or roofs was invariably disorienting. These were spaces in which I could concentrate on observing. On the other hand, a filmic way of seeing does play a role: a lot of dangerous situations are set in garages or on rooftops, culminating in all that dramatic action involving helicopters and escape attempts.”[9] The reference to feature films – action films and thrillers – complicates the relationship to architecture in McBride’s work, since it is obviously conveyed in a filmic sense rather than a mimetic sense. This deliberate proximity to the filmic discourse permits the artist to bring the dimension of time into the spatial and material presence of the sculptures, introducing a (fictitious) filmic narrative. In the work of McBride, the reference to the architectural model is to be regarded as an endeavour to avoid formalism in sculptural praxis by lending it a new syntax. In this respect, particular attention should be paid to the formal approach: by having these redimensione replicas cast in bronze – the medium of an anachronistic sculptural praxis – McBride is making an ironic comment on their status as objects. According to the artist herself, “Created objects panicked me. They’re so complete. That’s what gave me the idea of regarding objects – a model of a property or building – as trophies.”[10]

Jane and Louise Wilson

British artists Jane and Louise Wilson (both 1967) have also developed a specific method of addressing alienated, abandoned, or uninhabited architectural spaces. Their work consists of rooms full of video installations using sophisticated montage and cutting techniques and their photographic and sculptural equivalents. In a number of projects, these artists have addressed historic architecture associated with the Cold War years. Such buildings have a paradoxical status in the public mind. They stand for places that symbolize power and concentration of authority, but at the same time are inaccessible to the public consciousness, especially with regard to their specific architectural appearance and spatial structure. The project “Stasi City” (1997) based on bureaucratic architecture, in this case the headquarters of the East German secret police (Stasi) in Berlin, features building tracts with hidden rooms, corridors, and elevators. The work of the Wilsons is not only documentary, but also psychoanalytically and mnemotechnically coded: they seek to analyse the ambiguity of certain historic buildings, which is only now becoming evident, albeit under entropic conditions, whereby the gaps in our knowledge are due to the social obscurity of the institutions themselves. The sense of tension in the Wilsons’ installations is due not least of all to an awareness of the specific functions and historical impact of the institutions in question, and their shocking insignificance in a contemporary context. The Wilsons do not attempt to report on the place, but to address the location as the narrative which the artists seek to uncover in a kind of filmic archaeology: “The narrative comes from a location, our connection to the space that we are filming in. ... The narrative, if you can even call it that, is something that comes from within the actual place that we are examining.”[11] In the installations themselves, the high degree of ambiguity inscribed in such an archaeology is addressed by stereoscopic projections: the architecture is projected at an angle, fragmented, mirrored, doubled or montaged with a time lapse. As a result, the conflict of perception between real space and filmic space remains effective. Although we now know about the architecture of these institutions (because it has been shown to us), it remains an intangible and enigmatic dimension that undermines representation.

James Casebere

A number of contemporary artists create photographs that are not literally filmic, but nevertheless belong to the filmic paradigm. These are artists who present architecture in the “photogrammatic” sense, as described by Barthes. The American artist James Casebere (1953) refers in his photographs to the media image of architecture. Like the Wilsons, he is interested in the latent aspects of architecture (How does architecture influence the collective subconscious? How is architecture represented in the collective subconscious?). Casebere’s photographs, however, do not show real architecture, but translate three-dimensional models (which the artist himself builds using cardboard, plaster, paint and other materials) into the two-dimensionality of the image. Since the mid 1970s, he has composed interiors, landscapes, suburbs, ghost towns and institutional buildings as enigmatic images void of human life. Casebere’s models often refer to photographs of architecture, especially to “disciplinary” architecture such as institutions, convents, hospitals, schools, etc., without actually replicating them on a one-to-one basis. Casebere’s most harrowing recent works are those that refer to prison architecture – views of façades and individual interiors. They represent what Casebere describes as “hidden architecture”: buildings relatively unknown to the public. Transformed by the model and the photograph, these architectures become planes of projection in which the return of the repressed, in the Freudian sense, becomes possible. In the course of time, Casebere’s models have become more and more perfectly crafted, yet the model itself is relatively unimportant according to Casebere: “The models are not very interesting in themselves. It’s only when they’re transformed through lighting and take on all the associations and illusions that photographs produce that they come alive.”[12] Since the mid 1990s, these works have seemed increasingly like solitary photograms in the sense



that their perception includes the experience of film noir suspense. Recently, Casebere has heightened the trompe l'oeil character of his work by introducing the elements of “water” and “fog” into his models of sparsely-lit bunkers and sewage canals, corridors and office spaces. By evoking the dimensions of movement and sound, these elements underline the dramatic and enigmatic character of an architecture imaged by night, uninhabited, and cut off from the social body. Although Casebere's works are based on strongly connoted subjects – “Four Flooded Arches from Left (v)”, (1999), for example, is based on the bunkers under the Berlin Reichstag – they go beyond the concrete historical and political discourse to address a specific and metaphorical vacuum that denies sociological explanation.

Bernard Voïta

The photographic works of Swiss artist Bernard Voïta (1960), too, are illusions created by means of three-dimensional models, which invite metaphors of “architectural” vistas. The term model is something of a misnomer in the case of Voïta, since these are not miniature replicas of existing architecture. Instead, the artist, a true sculptor, arranges various small and tiny objects, such as pieces of wood, basins, grids, household objects, pieces of carpet etc., into three-dimensional conglomerates that are meaningless in themselves. It is only when Voïta illuminates them with several spotlights and skilfully stages them for the camera (discovering “images” by means of a video monitor aimed at the arrangement of materials) that they take on meaning. His earlier works are less equivocal in their evocation of modernist architecture, but even there, architecture is treated in a more general and visually specific way. This is not so much a question of direct references to architecture, as a conceptual grid or filter that fulfils certain functions of psychological perception and is rooted in the collective consciousness. In semiotic terms the architectural (not only in Voïta's work) introduces the reference of all references: physis, physicality. Yet this reference is not the source of Voïta's photographic camouflages. Instead, it is an effect of the image, of representation. It is not a question of mimicry (making something look like architecture), but of activating codes of perception. This tendency is even more radical in his most recent works. The scenes appear more diffuse, things less focused, and the relationship between near and far more ambivalent. Perception becomes a self-reflexive act: associations triggered by the visualized structures are undermined before our very eyes.

Alex Hartley

British artist Alex Hartley (1968) also explores the relationship between space and gaze in illuminated boxes and installations, and, like Voïta, analyses the central role of light and shadow in the perception of space. In his “Untitled (Seagram Building at Night)” of 1997, for example, a light box with etched panes, into which a slide has been inserted, allow us to identify the building, but it is out of focus and placed at an intangible distance. It is probably no coincidence that Hartley tends to use images of buildings or interiors associated with idealized spatial concepts of modernism. The recognizable generic structures permit the artist to plumb the ambiguities of perception and architecture as a paradoxical phenomenon: His light boxes invite spectators projectively, while at the same time physically excluding them. This is particularly true of the installations in which the relationship between the interiors portrayed and the real space in which the light boxes have been set is almost one-to-one.

However much the works of Hartley, Casebere, and Voïta may differ, these artists are all representatives of a constructivist photography – Casebere as co-founder, Hartley and Voïta as heirs – in which the concept of the model as a mis-en-scène created specifically for the camera is a central tenet. To varying degrees, the vitality of all these works lies in their capacity to generate a second parallel reality – albeit without making this illusion entirely the responsibility of the spectator. On the contrary, the artists use the possibility of analysing by means of architecture or architectural space, or, to be more precise, of reflecting on the complex fabric of memory and projection, recall and collective subconscious, inscribed in the (retinal) experience of cultural space.

Reflecting Construction

In which direction is this current phase of assimilation of architecture through filmic, videographic or photographic practice in the fine arts heading? If it is true that architecture, medially transformed, becomes a simulacrum, this does not necessarily mean that experience is becoming “virtual” or “fluid”. On the contrary, the media-ized character of experience is highlighted even more precisely, more emphatically and more critically. The mise-en-scène remains recognizable in any case: We see the image and at the same time we reflect on its construction. Beyond self-reflexivity, however, the works permit us to take into account our subjective memory and our access to the collective subconscious as conditions of real experience. What would happen if these aspects remained unacknowledged ? We might then find ourselves in the situation of the protagonist in the film “Memento” (2000, director Christopher Nolan) which explored the relationships between architecture, image and subjectivity: the protagonist, a man whose short-term memory is destroyed in an attack, stumbles through a faceless world in search of his wife's murderer (by no coincidence the setting is the sterile architecture of American suburbia). With the aid of photos, notes, maps, charts, diagrams and even tattoos, he seeks to reconstruct the situation, finding his way both literally and metaphorically. Yet, having lost (or perhaps deliberately suppressed) his ability to memorize and recall, he becomes increasingly entangled in a claustrophobic system of alleged signs, caught in a mirror cabinet of his own fears and obsessions. For he has already destroyed the truth he is seeking.

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[1] Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., “Talking with Tony Smith: 'I view art as something vast,'” in: Artforum 5, no. 4 (December 1966): 14-19.

[2] Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning. Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills”in: A Roland Barthes Reader, edited by Susan Sontag, London 1982, p. 331-332.

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3 Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia" (1971) in: Robert Smithson, Collected Writings, University of California Press 1996, p. 142.

4 Ibid., p. 138.

5 Ibid., p. 70, originally published as "The Monuments of Passaic" in: Artforum, December 1967.

6 Julian Opie, "Delhi, Chandigarh, Bhopal, Calcutta, Bangalore, Mumbai", British Council, 1997, p. 3.

7 Ibid.

8 Sometimes the references are explicit, even academic, as when the artist reconstructs a section of the ground floor of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1929-31) as an installation in a gallery, in her 1994 work "Backsliding, Sideslipping, One Great Leap and the 'Forbidden'".

9 In conversation with the author, April 1999.

10 Ibid.

11 Jane & Louise Wilson, exhibition catalogue, Serpentine Gallery, 1999, p. 10.

12 Steven Jenkins, "A Conversation with James Casebere" in: James Casebere, Model Culture, Photographs 1975-1996, The Friends of Photography 1996, p. 80.

Jörg Heiser (pages 38–45)
English translation: Roseanne Altstatt

Spatial Feedback

Works by the Danish artist Jakob Kolding

Jakob Kolding's collages oscillate between social issues, political messages and references to art. In terms of content they centre on the foremost urban planning error of the 1960s and 1970s: the belief that social contentment could be planned architecturally. By exploring the legacy of welfare state housing archaeologically, Kolding reconfigures abstract formal systems of architecture. He combines the spaces and utopian ideals of industrialised building with the practices of contemporary popular culture.

According to Henri Lefèbvre, roughly simplified, the following equation can be made: city = space + everyday life + reproduction of capitalist conditions. An equation however, that is complicated – like every attempt for planning – by each "plus" being possibly replaced by "times" or "divided by" depending upon the specific situation. In this equation the work of Jacob Kolding can be discovered, translated into the language of montage and drawing: space is pictured or drawn in the form of suburban architecture and terraced house façades, but also left free-standing in almost Malevich-like charged zones of white, which are defined by their edges. Everyday life appears, above all, in the form of scraps from pop and fan culture: hence where it, at least potentially, thwarts urban planning. The reproduction of capitalist conditions is structurally present in the advertising slogan-like staccato shapes of the collages.

Successful sociability often seems to occur in spite of residential architecture rather than because of it – something almost everyone knows from a number of examples from his or her own region. But Jakob Kolding has more than only negative to report on Albertslund, the satellite town of Copenhagen where he was born in 1971 and raised. Built in the context of a socio-political ideal of social compensation and half-way just basic provisions, and on the fundament of a relatively unprecarious economic situation, Albertslund offered a 70's kid enough possibilities for socialisation in a secure environment – what one would call "family friendly".

Pop-cultural disturbances in suburbia

Exactly this factor is simultaneously the one that – at the point of "everyday life" in the suburban equation – becomes a corset for the adolescent's will to break free. Kolding's works show which dreams stood at the beginning of such planning, how they began to be ground threateningly small by the crunching of the millstones and how, on the other hand, one wants to escape the dilemma with good planning and control, and how extremely fleeting pop-cultural moments successfully thwart the planned-out suburban world and its socio-political coordinates.

A group of four collages in A4 standard size ("Untitled", 2000) line up these elements from left to right almost like pearls on a string. On the left we see city planners bent over a model and helpers busy fidgeting with model houses. Mounted next to this in large letters: "CONCEPTIONS OF THE CLASS STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON ATTITUDES IN ENGLAND AND SWEDEN". What sounds like a plain chapter title from a sociological study becomes the mission for the other visual elements. You start to track down the attitudes in the city planner's 70's hippie shirts and hairstyles. On the second sheet, on the lower end of the vacuum of white the planners seem to have left behind, we see the grid-shaped keyboard of an 80's rhythm computer as if there might be a possibility of reprogramming the grid of balconies mounted below. The upper portion of the third sheet shows, in typewritten letters, a catalogue of questions that are obviously directed at the developers of council flats and first raise questions on the functional criteria of the planning, on the income groups they had in mind, where children should play, etc. Finally, questions 19, 20 and 21: "To what extent has an attempt been made to make the precinct aesthetically pleasing? How successful has this been? To what extent do the residents think that these aesthetic touches have proved successful?" The succinct answer is the high rise pictured below the questions with its windowless side façade tarted up with garland shaped patterns of colour – probably in the early 90's – as if it were enough to put fresh make up on the "malfunctions" of the social which, among other things, become visible in the grid shaped buildings (in an earlier untitled series of drawings from 1997, Kolding already proposed ironic and fictive suggestions for the beautification of façades with cheerful patterns of colour). In the fourth image Carl Andre floor elements collide with the weedy, coarse concrete tiles of a public square that was probably planned to be a "meeting place" at the high rise. In between hangs an isolated skateboarder with his board in the air, as if he just reached this short-circuit of the realm of Minimalism with the downfalls of the failed planning of "social meeting places" in a single courageous leap, while simultaneously, and even in flight, he had already become the icon of the youth culture industry.

Digital resampling of Utopia

Adolescent outburst as "culture" (whether as Pop music or in other art forms) is naturally always already translated into the form of goods. Anyway, there is no real utopian outside to a digitised reproduction of capitalist conditions pervading all areas of society – especially everyday life. Architectural criticism shares an odd pleasure with popular culture, sometimes an almost open satisfaction in pointing out the "toppling" of the utopian housing schemes that were once fired on with enthusiasm. The image of the gloomy suburb – from Kubrick's Thamesmead in Clockwork Orange (1971) to Neukölln, where Christiane F. in We Children from Bahnhof Zoo (1981) comes from – becomes an empty shell of social criticism that omits the possibility that a humane life could even exist in the grey housing blocks if something fundamental would change in the general social framework that causes the inhabitants there to stagnate.

Jakob Kolding's collages and posters work with the techniques of re-coupling isolated elements from aesthetics and politics in order to go beyond such a one-dimensional description of the question of the suburbs. One of his images ("Untitled", 1999) is dominated by the photocopy of a staircase that is not coincidentally reminiscent of the Bauhaus "Scene on the Stairs" immortalised by Oskar Schlemmer in the painting of the same name from 1932. Only this time it is not populated by faceless and enraptured ballet bodies floating along their way, but by a battle robot from the Star Wars ice planet, a Hip-Hop DJ bent over his Technics turntables and a frail boy with a bare chest and a sinister look on his face who pauses over his BMX bike as though he were looking into that uncertain future described by the slogans next to him: "How working class kids get working class jobs", and "9 Monday Morning, dub version ++ (5:15)". It becomes clear that Kolding consciously draws a direct lineage from the original mixture of the plainly Constructive and the passionately Romantic, which was characteristic of Bauhaus, to the beginnings of the deconstructive-sober Agit-Prop of Dada montage (Hanna Höch, Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield) and its Pop variations of the 60's and 70's (Sex Pistols designer Jamie Reid, Martha Rosler) to the recombining sampling of contemporary dance culture, which in turn has its origins in the reductive mixing technique of dub reggae.

Structurally, Kolding takes up, above all, Martha Rosler‘s retrieval of what had been banned into the media to the site of decked-out domesticity. Where she suddenly has victims and perpetrators of the Vietnam War pop up between the kitchen pantry and the sofa, what finds its way back to the high rise fortresses in Kolding’s work are the questions he poses, which are usually only raised in sociology text books, or DJ sets that only take place in those cool inner city clubs: perhaps this is most clear where the title of the New Order record “Power, Corruption and Lies” from 1983 floats above a shower curtain and dirty clothes basket in cut out letters like a blackmail note (“Untitled”, 1999).

The montage/collage of the Dadaist tradition is, so to speak, not the Surrealism of dreams but of everyday experience. It shares Surrealism’s advantage of being able to confuse symbolic order through recombination, and the danger of deteriorating into a “symbolisicism” of archetypes on the way, which only produces clichés of resistance instead of imagination and humour. In other words: The productive whirr of relationships of signification turns into deceptively unambiguous classifications.

In their straight cut and paste simplicity, Kolding’s montages walk along the edge of this abyss. When Kolding mounts the buttons from electronic music equipment next to the façades of balconies it is not supposed to mockingly assert the superiority of taste of the former over the latter. On the contrary, parallels are made between the “industrial”, precise time of dance music and the industrial method of construction, which is eventually a clue to their common numerical basis.

Identification with the other side

With El Lissitzky himself and the Constructivists, it was still about putting the art of the proletariat revolution on a scientific basis. In the meantime, the dreams of utopian tabula rasas on a mathematical basis have already become historical particles themselves, and they appear in pop culture as such. It was no coincidence that Techno and House originated in the early strongholds of industrial-Modernist production (Detroit) and methods of construction (Chicago). Roughly simplified: they were created by the children of the first generation of a black middle-class who, in an ambivalent way, tried to distinguish themselves simultaneously from their parents’ traditional idea of Black Culture and the image of the black kid from the ghetto. And this desire was expressed in a sort of “europhilia”, that in the enthusiasm for the technoid, enrapturing metronomic music of Kraftwerk seemed to be the exact mirror image of the “negrophilia” of white British Rock musicians who were inspired by Robert Johnson.

It is exactly in this failure of full identification with the other side – one could also say in the failure of a futuristic model of history – where the power of renewal lies, an amalgamation of historical particles. Mistaken are also the critiques of dance culture that sweepingly denounce its supposed soldier-like metronomic rhythm as destroying what is humane in their “black roots”. In electronic dance music, there is a pleasure in the relentlessness and monotony of the mechanical beat precisely where it is subjected to a sort of funky twist – in the music itself (the stumbling, the gap) as well as in the dance moves meandering around the beat.

This meandering may be exactly what Jakob Kolding looks for as a social function, including in the high rises of the suburbs: making the metronomically timed grid of the buildings inhabitable through pop culture. That becomes especially clear, perhaps more so than the explicit montage of turntables and façades, in the series of drawings where a monotonous series of flat, single-storey buildings with one door each are put in a row (“Our House”, 1997). The doors are the only colourful elements and, in seemingly random order, four saturated orange doors follow two frontages with dark red doors, divided by stylised wooden gates and a single line for the horizon. And in the next image, three night-blue doors follow three orange ones. In the third there is a lemon yellow one after four blues. In the fourth, then again, there are six yellows followed by nothing more than the wooden gate and the thin horizon, before in the fifth and last image seven frontages – each with a blue door – are restricted on both sides by wooden gates. Looking back, one realises that the impression of it being an irregular series was only created by what in reality is a completely regular series of seven doors each taken apart and therefore ‘tripped up’ by a different regular series, namely the five same-sized details. They are actually isolated fragments from an estate of terraced houses in Albertslund where the colours of the doors indicate the subdivision of the houses according to the names of flowers into “rose” or “violet” areas. Through an asymmetrical break in this beat, a constantly changing rhythm is then produced. In a video from 1998 for the song “Star Escalator” by the electronic act Sensorama something similar happens. A monotone series of coloured garage doors is set into motion. They go up and down like legs in a musical‘s chorus line to the rhythm of the music.

Moiré

“Writing about art is like dancing about architecture”, the comedian Steve Martin once said. And dancing about architecture is obviously possible (as is writing about art). I lay two regular patterns on top of each other and a third, irregular flickering pattern is produced – the optical moiré effect. Dance culture can thus be seen as a possible means of setting the immobility of the fully planned suburban world into moiréesque oscillations with the help of reduced digital technologies. And for no other reason it appears in Kolding‘s work as both an iconic reference (turntables, skateboarder, drum computer) and as the structural element of creating rhythm with loops (the breaks in the white or between the series of images). Instead of being stuck onto the façades as “beautification”, it penetrates the grid pattern and makes it dance. That would be the social meaning of music (and some other forms of pop culture) at this point. Instead of gothic-dystopic complaints about the uninhabitability of the earth, a coming to terms with the architecture is aspired, making it inhabitable under self-determined conditions. At the same time, in the rhythmic flickering, the utopian opportunity of other, better, as yet undefined, breathing spaces is opened. In successful moments, prisons of families, education and work are transposed with provisional, illegitimate, “artificial” families, self-developed knowledge and independent productions.

In order to get there, pop subcultures basically always used two dialectically linked strategies. The first is what could be called the Schweijkian strategy of overaffirmation, taking the conditions literally in order to reveal their structure: perhaps most openly expressed in the 80‘s song slogan “Wir sagen ja zur modernen Welt” (we say yes to the modern world) by the band Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle from Munich – you yourself can become a machine or a high rise. The other is the strategy of settling the peripheries and in between zones (from trains sprayed with graffiti to illegal raves in deserted hangars to the street parties of Reggae and Hip Hop sound systems), all those transitory traffic zones Le Corbusier so hated and wanted to either build over or put underground.

The re-coupling of both of these strategies – which is more or less equal to the above mentioned re-coupling of the places of marginalisation and the centres – is perhaps expressed in William Burroughs‘ famous demand: “Where are the personal helicopters you always promised us!” Taking technology and power by their word and claiming air space at the same time. Very similar links are conveyed in Kolding‘s images. Finding the high rises beautiful in their historically oblivious uniformity while simultaneously demanding them to be unconditionally handed over to the remix by their inhabitants! Embracing Conceptualism‘s administrative design and Minimalism‘s reduction in colour and form. At the same time chipping away at their spatial placement from the edges and with the dirty fingernails of popular culture.