Zeitschrift: Werk, Bauen + Wohnen
Herausgeber: Bund Schweizer Architekten
Band: 89 (2002)
Heft: 03: Imagination, Notation

Werbung

Nutzungsbedingungen
Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.

Conditions d'utilisation
L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. Voir Informations légales.

Terms of use
The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. See Legal notice.

Download PDF: 29.03.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch

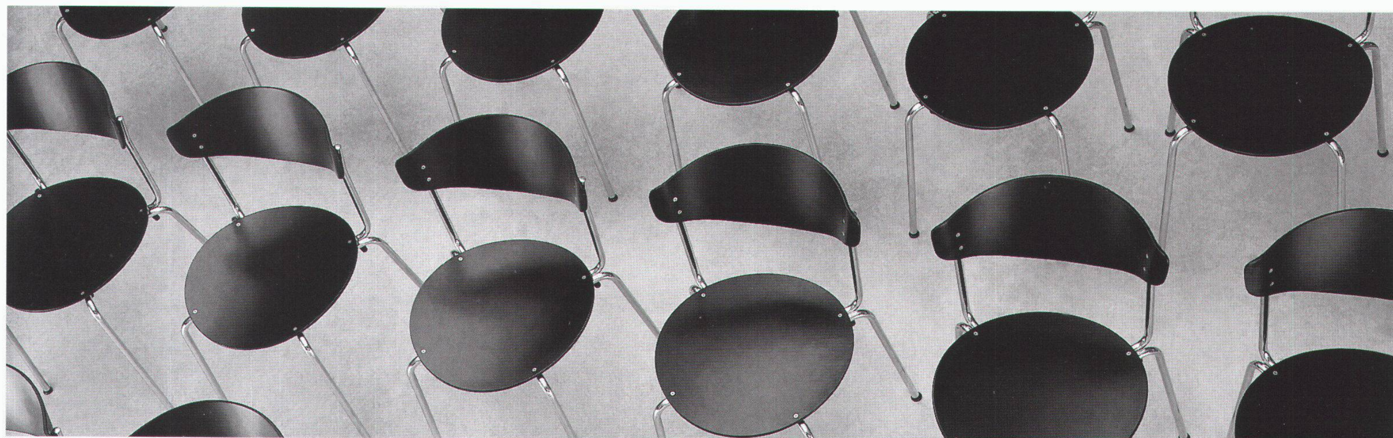
anonymous, alienated buildings. Her works take a critical approach to sculptural praxis, interpreting architecture detached from society as a linguistic element capable of shifting the boundaries of the sculptural discipline by bringing into play the collective consciousness conveyed by architecture 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.

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.

Die neue Stuhlserie von Kurt Thut für Thonet

Modell S 252 stapel- und kuppelbar
Sitz und Rücken Formsperrholz, Stahlrohr verchromt
Einsatz im Objektbereich
Modell S252 F mit Armlehnen
Sitz und Rücken Formsperrholz, Stahlrohr verchromt
Einsatz im Wohn- und Konferenzbereich
Generalvertretung CH:
Seleform AG, 8702 Zollikon/Zürich
Fon +41 1 396 70 10, Fax +41 1 396 70 11
seleform@seleform.ch, www.seleform.ch

THONET