

SCHMUCK

- *Schmuck (German): decoration(s), ornament(s), adornment(s), embellishment(s)*

The house has to please everyone, contrary to the work of art that doesn't need to please anyone. The work of art is something personal of the artist. Not so the house. The work of art is put into the world, whether there exists a need for it or not. The house fulfils a need. The work of art doesn't owe a justification to anyone, the house to everyone. The work of art wants to wake people from their comfortable position. The house needs to serve their comfort. The work of art is revolutionary, the house conservative. The work of art points out new roads to people and thinks of the future. The house thinks of the present. Man loves everything that serves his comfort. He hates everything that threatens the position he has conquered and assured and everything that bothers him. And so he loves the house and hates the art.

*So the house has nothing to do with art and isn't it so that architecture can be considered as one of the arts? That is correct. There is only a very small part of architecture that belongs to art: the funeral monument and the statue. All the rest, everything that has a function, should be excluded from the realm of art.*¹

Today, however, art has appropriated new meanings. In addition, we see that the entire world of art, design and architecture no longer has clearly defined delimitations. Architects think they are involved with art, artists are convinced they design better spaces than architects. Designers develop their products as art objects and artists are asked to design design objects.

There are more than enough examples of interaction in which the division is barely discernable. In his "tract" *Architecture*, Donald Judd described certain methodologies such as symmetry, series of numbers, building in locations in which had been built before, and so on, ... while he was able to conceive his own building complex in Marfa. Do these buildings belong to the world of functional architecture or are they pavilions – follies - based on a historical model, with their own distinct eloquence as they have been designed functionless, something that can't be said of Judd's complex.

Gerhard Merz designed a small school building that incorporates all characteristics of architecture (Merz also signed the pamphlet "*Io sono Architetto*"). And more diverse examples can be mentioned. What, for instance, is the significance of Theo van Doesburg's studio home? Isn't it so that Helmut Federle's "Kunst am Bau" project for the Swiss Embassy in Berlin (designed by Diener & Diener) provides a clear statement in which he clearly reacts against "on the building" by conceiving his work for the opposite façade? A similar story goes on in the Novartis building in Basel where he covers the entire building with panes of colored glass: a particular consistency that doesn't damage the building mass: *Konsistenz versus Substanz*. A similar attitude can be seen in the art interventions of Adrian Schiess and Felix Müller in the works of the architects Gigon&Guyer. Colored walls singularly create three-dimensional spaces that support the architecture.. They have a system of their own, and an inextricable coherence.

Conversely, during the last decades architecture has become, both in appearance as in basic matter, one of the most important themes in art and photography. This phenomenon, however, is not so new. In 1460, a student of Piero della Francesca made the painting "*Veduta della città ideale*" (Palazzo Ducale, Urbino) in which various architectures are presented as one urban entity. A similar story appears three centuries later in the painting "*Rialto con il ponte secondo il progetto di Palladio e con altri edifici palladiani*" (1759) by Antonio Canaletto (Galleria Nazionale, Parma). Aldo Rossi described that this image "*has the power of fantasy, originated from the concrete*".

This quote of Rossi is all the more fascinating as it implies a reason for grasping the recent developments in presenting architecture. Obvious is that, next to the actual presentation, it is often about construction an image. Where most of the (architecture)

about the registration of several moments in one single image, as, for instance, in portraits.. In this context, architecture can be considered as a portrait with an own character and identity..

In recent history, remarkable conceptual positions can be noticed: in the United States, early photographs of, among others, Alfred Stieglitz, William Strand and Lee Friedlander and, more recently, photographs of, among others, Ed Ruscha, Lewis Baltz, James Welling, Stan Douglas and Peter Downsbrough. On the other side, the entire Düsseldorfer Schüle with Bernd and Hilla Becher, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Gunter Förg, Thomas Struth, Heidi Specker, Candida Höfer and others. The Bechers work in the first place with “cataloguing” architectural fragments. It might be interesting to know that Becher’s father owned an entire library of photographs. A similar neutral approach can be seen in the early twentieth century in the work of Karl Blossfeldt (enlargements of herbs and plants), Albert Renger-Patsch (photographs of the first industrial landscape in the German Ruhr area) and in the work of August Sander (types of human figures) and that has been passed on by the Bechers as an *Erziehung* (apprenticeship) to that new generation. One of the first exhibitions was ‘De Verzegelde Bron’ (The Sealed Source) in Rotterdam in 1984.

The grasping of architecture in photography peaked at the 1991 Venice Architecture Biennale when the buildings of Herzog & de Meuron for the Swiss Pavilion were explained by means of the photographic work of, a.o., Balthasar Burkhardt, Hanna Villiger and Thomas Ruff, with whom, by the way, the architects realized more buildings as well as publications.

Exactly their work takes on the pertinence of art interventions in architecture. Their buildings –originally of a pure nature and with structural logics – have become a mechanism of *SpätBarock* or *Rococo* in which screens en façades claim their self-importance, almost entirely detached from the entire content of the building. The façade becomes a story in itself, a system of “Schmuck”. The ultimate example here is Thomas Ruff ‘s intervention for the library in Eberswalde, where German history is incorporated in the photographs screened on glass and concrete along the exterior side of the building. Art in public space. A confrontation with native history as a public tract. Might we discern here the reference of the old Swiss houses with their painted façades?

Yet there is also the other side of the *parcours*, that is, the photographic image of architecture has modified architecture in itself. On the one hand, there are those photographic screens on various façades of buildings of the most recent decades. On the other hand, the photographic recordings lead to new reproductions, new identities in architecture. In this context we can wonder what the implications are of “framing”, “setting”, “placing”, “screening”, and so on, in the vocabulary of architecture.

Not only the fixed image is important, but also the moving image makes an entrance in architecture. Bernard Tschumi, for one, describes this theme in his buildings. “*Parcours*”, “intervals”, “sequences”, and so on, also belong in the new terminology. Not to speak about video-clip interventions in which architecture becomes a 3D-configuration that is avidly sampled and re-used starting from this image to a possible reality. Exactly this generic attitude leads to “borrowing” (taking, copying), more specifically about words and ideas, and as a consequence, also referential images.

The previously mentioned quote of Adolf Loos, together with the entire content of his most famous text “Ornament und Verbrechen”² in which Loos reports that for contemporary artists and architects creating ornaments equals criminality, is even more pregnant, certainly when we see that art is defining public space in some areas. Has the architect or city planner failed to develop a good plan? Doesn’t this make the artwork into a decoration of space? Isn’t this attitude a prolongation of a mentality in which works of art fit above the mantelpiece? Or should they disturb that space in order to be good? Or does art need to belong to the world of finance just as architecture belongs to real estate and heritage?

Isn’t it necessary that architects deal with their own profession, that is, architecture? Shouldn’t they again conceive and shape the urban space? Does art belong to the

we seen that an urban space is also an interior, an urban room within which art can prosper? And isn't it so that "schmuck" belongs to the world of making things, buildings or architecture understandable, as long as we deal with the notion's consistency without adding supplementary adjectives such as 'decorative'? Isn't it necessary to work again with tectonics and shouldn't architects therefore design façades that are built in tectonics rather than a screen or a glass pane or a photographic image, but as a place in the city, the city that belongs to everyone. Shouldn't we therefore work again with the essence "schmuck": one of an archi-tectonic nature, a kind of "abstrakter Schmuck" ?

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¹ Adolf Loos, fragment from *Architektur*, 1910, in 'Trotzdem', Wenen, 1931

² Adolf Loos, *Ornament und Verbrechen*, 1910, in 'Trotzdem', Georg Prachner, Wenen, 1931

Both texts appear in a Dutch translation in 'Dat is Architectuur', edited by Hilde Heynen a.o., uitgeverij 010, Rotterdam, 2001