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In 2012, after more than two decades of teaching and practicing architecture, I started on an architectural investigation into how we sensually experience aesthetic quality in architecture. This PhD project springs out from a long time interest and curiosity of what materials and space is or can be, that led to a growing preoccupation with how things appear in the world. I have approached this research project from several positions, by a series of short texts, by visiting and photographing three selected buildings and by series of practice-based investigations.

ARCHITECTURE AND THE PRODUCTION OF PRESENCE

The research project, *Architecture and the production of Presence*, focus both on the process of making architecture and that which architecture produces. Presence refers to a spatial relationship where things are in reach, are tangible and thus have an immediate impact on human senses - the word "production" literary means to "bring forth" an object in space. The way architects assemble structures; materials and spaces, produce appearances that sensually affect human bodies. We can associate "appearance" with "presence" – whatever "appears" is "present" because that what appears makes itself available. Presence is already well established and active in several disciplines, as in literature, history and philosophy. I have borrowed the formula "production of presence" from the literary scholar, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who is interested in the potential of presence in literature opposed to the hermeneutic traditions.¹ Like Gumbrecht, my ambition has been to avoid interpretation in my approach to buildings and in my work and instead acknowledge and capture temporary moments of presence.

My discussion on aesthetic experience in architecture is primarily framed by the political philosopher Brian Massumi's aesthetic concept of semblance. Massumi describes the concept of semblance as a lived abstraction, an experience of something abstracted from a context for a short moment, a context that is in itself palpably concrete.² Massumi asserts that the novelty we experience in a semblance is that what appears as unfamiliar, and thus obliges us to think otherwise. The

introduction of the concept of semblance into the domain of architecture enables new perspectives and ways of understanding the forces that sensually affect human bodies, both in the process of making architecture and in our experience of buildings.

A lived abstraction is ambiguous as it lacks definition. The potential of a further understanding of architecture may be found here: to move behind what is already defined and find the new, to name it and to materialize it. The American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead argues that abstraction “may function in experience so as to separate them from their relevance to the totality.”³ The dynamic process of abstraction is activated by our intuitive interest in something around us. The abstracted is separated from where it originates, to again return, leaving us with a new insight that we didn’t have before. As the abstracted always is connected with its origin, that what triggers us, confronted with the unrecognizable, is that what actually is known. Whitehead writes that we, “experience more than we can analyze. For we experience the universe, and we analyze in our consciousness a minute selection of its details.”⁴ Whitehead insists on the importance to “enlarge our effort at understanding (...) by trying to go beyond that which is already known.”⁵ He points to the fact that “language halts behind intuition (...)” and that the difficulty of philosophy, “(...) is the expression of what is self-evident. Our understanding outruns the ordinary usages of words.”⁶ Words have the potential to give access to the mute world, the world that is not yet defined and described. However, and as Whitehead points out, language can never completely describe the world we experience and every attempt to describe the real world with the aim to bring forth new understanding creates limitations at the same time. Artistic research recognizes different medias, that is in this project painting, photographing, drawing and physical structures, individual potential to search for and communicate new meaning, as the medias are equally important and capable in their capacity to bring forth the new.

The project *Architecture and the production of Presence* is concentrated around the zone of in-betweenness, moments when things appear and sensually affect our bodies but still not have meaning, moments defined according to the concept of semblance. Affect is rooted in the body, as it is an autonomic response that occurs before entry into consciousness and cognition. The concept of semblance blends into concurrently fields of aesthetic theories, phenomenology, object-oriented philosophy and affect theory, theories that are, to a certain degree, interesting and relevant related to my discussion on architecture and the production of presence. However, the focus in this project is on the concept of semblance and how a building can be understood related to abstractions, that is to say, through the way it is built and its capacity to produce affect. The aesthetic potential of a building is thus understood as its capacity to enable appearances that is physical tangible, if not always visible. One might argue that this has always been the aim of architecture and that, in principle, all buildings produce affect, intentionally or not. Aiming at affect is not new to architecture, however, to make architecture's main focus the buildings' capacities to produce affect, and thus an affective response in human bodies prior to consciousness, move the discipline of architecture and the role of the architect further into the world of sensations.

Architecture does affect us and in the moment of affect, the embedded aesthetic experience unfolds. Studies of the interaction of bodies and architecture and what it can tell us about how we perceive, imagine, interpret, and respond to buildings is a huge field that opens for multiple approaches. As stated above, my interest in affect theory is reduced to the fact that affect is a product of appearances of abstractions encapsulated in architecture, as in anything in the world around us. To acknowledge sensual experiences opens for an understanding and appreciation of a dimension of architecture that very often is difficult to identify and discuss.

Works

Ambiguity is a well-known topic in visual arts, music, and literature as ambiguity or related words as tension, undetermined, or indefinite is used to get beyond a predefined understanding of the world. The fact that everything is in flow – even that what we initially know as static – can thus be discussed and understood in terms of events, collisions, forces and appearances. I have studied three buildings with the aim to bring my discoveries on how ambiguity is found in the relation between substructure, structure, material and space and how these relations are put into action into a discussion on aesthetics experiences in architecture. The challenge when aiming for ambiguity in buildings is to assemblage substructure, structure, space and material in a way that delays recognition. The unfamiliar, which appears, will affect our bodies and unfold an aesthetic experience, thus makes us present. When the moment of epiphany is gone the way we understand the context has changed. In being affected, moments of presence, lay the potential to a richer life and for the “new”, the discovery of new meaning.

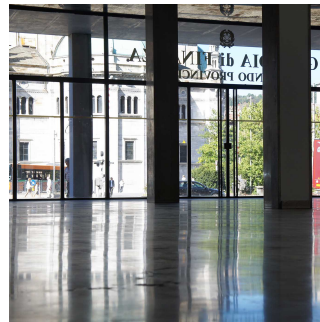
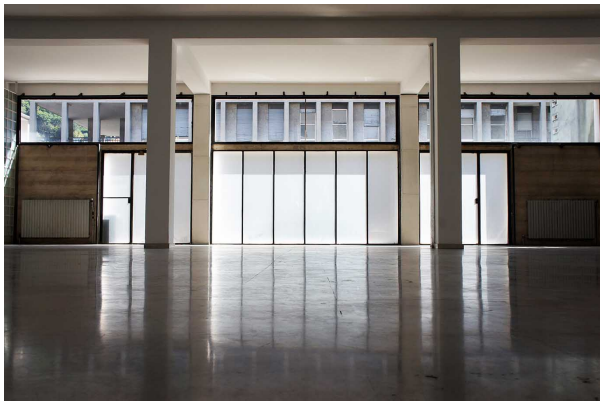


PHOTO I and II

Case study: Casa del Fascio by Giuseppe Terragni

Media: Color photo on paper

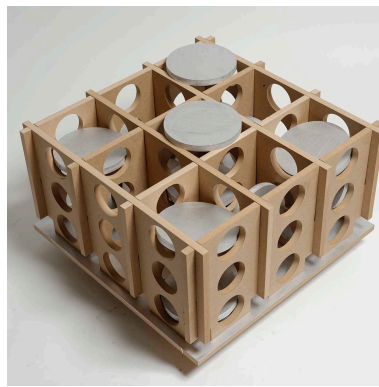
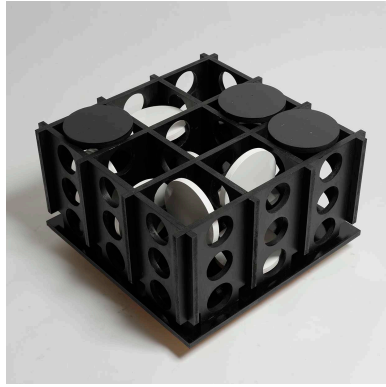
Photo I: Measure: 1200 x 800 mm

Photo II: Measure: 650 x 650 mm

I visited and photographed three selected buildings, among them the Casa del Fascio in Como by Giuseppe Terragni. Based on my sensual experience of the buildings a series of practice-based investigations was conducted.

Photographs is abstractions from a real situation stays in the abstraction. Brief moments of a sensual spatial experience is abstractions from a context that produces similar conditions as that what a photograph is able to capture and hold on to. The abstractions are deprived their original context and appears autonomous; sensual experience made present. When photographing the three selected buildings I searched for situations where the hierarchies were re-established from preconceived knowledge and measurable facts of the buildings. Detached from its context, abstracted from its original setting the motif of the photographs is isolated, understood anew. The photographs manifests those moments were new knowledge is gained, if only a minor step beyond its earlier limits.

In Casa del Fascio the ambiguity is found in the relation between the spatial grid structure and the diversity, and presence, of material properties, added to the spatial grid structure. The structure has a strong presence, and act like a web able to collect and order a manifold of different materials, assembled in intimate meetings, like organic clusters. In addition to the material belonging to the building, the structure feeds, in a very subtle way, on the surrounding urban fabric, particularly its relation to Cattedrale de Santa Maria Assunta, situated in front of Casa del Fascio further down the sloping Piazza del Popolo. Entering Casa del Fascio from the piazza, on the backside of the cathedral, the building embraces you and closes behind you, however, standing in the central atrium the seemingly spatial openness is fooling you. The only transparent surface and opening to the outside is the panoramic framing of the cathedral towards southwest as the opaque glass bricks in the ceiling, the frosted glass wall towards northeast, and the rows of offices to the northwest and southeast are all blocking the outlook. The cathedral dominates the low horizontal space of the entrance, a condition that is further strengthen as the image of the cathedral is prolonged into the inner court by the reflecting floor. Separated in time and space, in a moment, the subtle presence of the ecclesiastical building blends into the structure of Casa del Fascio, and the two buildings symbolic power and spiritual values merges and becomes palpable.



STRUCTURE I and II

Project: Architecture and the production of Presence

Case study: Casa del Fascio by Giuseppe Terragni

Media: MDF, black color

Structure I and II: Measure: 600 x 600 x 300 mm

The two spatial structures are part of a series of eight that investigates the relationship between substructure, structure, space and material informed by my experience made in situ at the Casa del Fascio in Como. With this series I set out to change the hierarchy in a structure, by challenge the dominating elements, in this case the nine-grid structure and its material. The hierarchy changed when the various factors were compounded differently or when the dominating factors were gradually challenged by added layers of structures, materials, elements, colors etc. and become secondary. By applying new structures and material the presence of the grid and its materiality withdraws to a certain degree. The structures in this series aim at ambiguous appearances as a result of colliding structures and conflicting hierarchies.

¹ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence, What Meaning Cannot Convey*, Stanford University Press, 2004

² Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*, 2011

² Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*, 2011

³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, The Free Press (A division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York), 1968, p.123

⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, The Free Press (A division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York), 1968, p.89

⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, The Free Press (A division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York), 1968, p.45

⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, The Free Press (A division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York), 1968, p.49