

# English

Objekttyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Werk, Bauen + Wohnen**

Band (Jahr): **88 (2001)**

Heft 3: **Tiefe Oberflächen = Surfaces profondes = Deep surfaces**

PDF erstellt am: **23.05.2024**

## **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

## **Haftungsausschluss**

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

effets qui tendent à sceller l'extérieur et rendent hermétique l'intérieur du bâtiment. La variation insensible des effets ne rend-elle pas caduc toute velléité d'interprétation? Plutôt que d'ambiguïté, nous avons donc intérêt à parler d'un éventail large ou d'un registre d'expression. Il couvre différents thèmes relatifs au volume, à l'espace et à l'image du bâtiment. Ces effets convergent et interagissent sans jamais entrer en concurrence les uns avec les autres au point que le signe cesse de représenter autre chose que lui-même. Nous ne sommes pas seulement en présence d'autres significations que celles des façades mais surtout d'une structure de signification qui se situe à un niveau complètement différent. La surface ne renvoie pas à un signifié qui se situerait au-delà. Elle est un objet physique qui se transforme intérieurement sans que sa propre matérialité ne soit affectée. La structure imagée ne recouvre pas le bâtiment comme dans un decorated shed. Nous pouvons assimiler la surface à une image qui aurait une qualité matérielle. Nous pouvons la comparer aux surfaces formées de cristaux liquides, à la différence près que la transformation, sans changement de propriété, résulte dans un cas du traitement grossier de la matière et, dans l'autre, de manipulations de sa structure. Au Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, des effets variables animent la surface externe d'un volume disposé dans l'espace. Ils ne découlent pas de la dématérialisation de l'enveloppe. La surface constitue plus qu'une simple interface architectonique dont la fonction se limiterait au rôle de masque. Elle a une réalité physique et diffuse, pour ainsi dire, son essence idéale.

#### Les deux côtés de la surface

À l'intérieur du musée, les auteurs transcendent également, mais de manière différente, le processus de neutralisation. Ce que la black box constitue pour l'extérieur, le «white cube» le représente pour l'intérieur: un élément de cloisonnement qui, idéalement, coupe court à tout échange entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur. Il unifie l'espace interne encore plus fortement que la surface noire l'externe. Le système de desserte joue un rôle important dans ce processus. Il devrait être le moins présent possible: sa vocation est d'assurer la neutralité du white cube et celle de sa subdivision. Sur ce point, le Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein ne correspond pas aux attentes. L'aménagement des salles d'exposition répond certes aux exigences d'une architecture neutre et retenue qui est le propre du white cube. L'ensemble du musée – à l'exception de quelques locaux annexes sur les angles – s'intègre néanmoins de manière parfaite au système de desserte qui en constitue l'élément principal. Les dessertes se réduisent à deux volées de marches tandis que les halls d'exposition jouent la fonction des paliers manquants. Le système raffiné formé de deux escaliers de sens contraire lie les étages entre eux. Il définit un espace continu qui se

développe sur plusieurs niveaux. À l'intérieur, la division du plan accentue le sentiment d'ouverture. Les cloisons entre les halls d'exposition sont disposées tangentiellement aux escaliers et dégagent des vues diagonales à travers tout le bâtiment. Aux surfaces, de grandes ouvertures décloisonnent les séquences spatiales dynamiques sur l'extérieur.

Morger, Degelo et Kerez n'ont pas masqué la rupture entre les deux côtés de la surface. Leur relation est néanmoins d'une autre nature que celle d'un white cube intégré dans une black box. Les auteurs du projet semblent avoir mis les choses en place de manière à ce que l'intérieur et l'extérieur soient en contact sans toutefois établir un rapport de transparence ou de type signifiant/signifié. La communication et l'échange des propriétés entre les deux faces sont précisément assurés par la douceur immatérielle de l'extérieur et l'ouverture dynamique de l'intérieur. Dans une façade, les deux côtés sont dans un rapport de dépendance et de hiérarchie; une face représente ou, au contraire, imprègne l'autre. Les choses se passent différemment au Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein: les qualités morphologiques des deux côtés ne se confondent pas. Sur les deux côtés, les architectes ont par ailleurs ménagé des effets immatériels qui traversent, pour ainsi dire, la matérialité de la surface. Ils ont ainsi créé un entre-deux qui détermine l'identité du bâtiment. L'enveloppe n'est pas l'expression d'un contenu, mais bien plus et, au contraire, la synthèse de ses deux faces en soi incompatibles.

Le Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein présente une volumétrie orthogonale de boîte moderniste aujourd'hui courante. Dans un monde plein de stimuli, il affirme fortement un degré zéro de l'expression architecturale. Cependant, ce degré zéro n'est ici pas une finalité, mais un point de départ. Ce n'est pas l'absence de toute signification qui caractérise le degré zéro de l'architecture mais, au contraire, un espace qui est en mesure de produire n'importe quelle signification. Ce qui importe en définitive, c'est la stratégie qui permet la convergence des deux côtés de la surface. En revanche, ni les correspondances formelles, ni les systèmes de signes préétablis sont pertinents. La notion de surface implicite non seulement que l'on se soit libéré de tout système de signification, elle explicite également la pluralité des significations possibles.

Notes: Voir texte allemand p. 32

# English

Anthony Vidler (Original version of pages 10–17)

## Full House

Rachel Whiteread's Post-Domestic Casts

In 1993, Rachel Whiteread acquired the use of a terraced house and its plot of land in the East End of London for a temporary intervention: House, a concrete cast of a working-class dwelling, documented the disappearance of a typical terrace of houses, and also the transience of places in which people live. The short history of this work of art is also a story of irreconcilable views about radical iconography in public places. As the debate about all aspects of the "abstract quality" of House showed, its blind surfaces became real screens on to which meaning and consternation could be projected. The following commentary explores the various interpretations of Whiteread's work.

The notion of architecture as comprised of "space," rather than of built elements like walls and columns, is a relatively modern one; it first emerged with any force at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of German psychological theories of "Raum" – one thinks of Schmarsow, Lipps, and their art-historical followers Wölfflin, Riegl, Frankl et al., who attempted to universalize the categories by which historical art was analyzed. Space, together with other formal categories of three-dimensional composition – mass, surface, line and form – gradually became the key to the study of architecture, an art that in its essence seemed to compose with and through space. As a concept, space was adumbrated as a product of, and experienced through, bodily movement and psychological and optical projection. Space was interior, enveloping, enclosing, ritually sanctioned and structured by the body's motion through it. As such it tended to break down the rigid stylistic categories of architectural history, privileging internally engendered architectures from Egypt to the Baroque rather than the conventional idealization of Greece and the Renaissance.

Space, indeed, became one of the watchwords of modernist architecture from Adolf Loos to Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, and rapidly emerged as a primary critical term for establishing what was actually "modern." "Space," more than even "function," became a defining term for modernity, not least because of its connection with "time" both before and after Einstein. Space moved; it was fluid, open, filled with air and light; its very presence was a remedy for the impacted environments of the old city: "space," the modern carrier of the Enlightenment image of hygiene and liberty. For



most modernist architects, space was universal, and was intended to flood both public and private realms equally. Le Corbusier spoke of l'espace indicible, which can be roughly translated as "ineffable space" but properly denotes an idea of infinity, of interpenetration between house and city, of an ever-expanding horizon. Space in these terms, at least after Frank Lloyd Wright, was even politically charged – the Italian critic Bruno Zevi argued insistently after the War that Wrightian space was synonymous with democratic space, as against a previous and un-democratic "Fascist" inattention to space.

#### Space as reflex and obsession

With hindsight, the specific kinds of politics embedded in the idea of modernist space have inevitably become more ambiguous, as the trumpeted beneficence of modern architecture and its attendant "space" for contemporary living has all too clearly demonstrated its shortcomings, and as alliances between modernist architects and unsavory patrons in the Thirties have been revealed by historians.

But the notion that space is good has hardly been erased completely from our mental vocabularies. This might well be a result of what one might call space's historical pedigree. As a product of theories of psychological extension – either of projection or introjection – space naturally and at an early stage took on the characteristics of a preliminary introduction wielded

by educators opposed to the twin phobias of late-nineteenth century urbanism – agoraphobia and claustrophobia. To open up the city would, in Le Corbusier's terms, and in much post-CIAM rhetoric, rid it of all closed, dirty, dangerous, and unhealthy corners; and, in the absence of dramatic contrast between open and closed spaces, rid metropolitan populations of any spatial anxiety they might have felt in the first wave of urbanization.

Perhaps it was simply the residue of this attitude that partly accounted for the virulence of the local authority's attacks on Rachel Whiteread's House; attacks that saw it as standing in the way of slum-clearance, of blocking the planting of healthy greenery, of creating a monument to an unhealthy and claustrophobic past. On another level, that of the "house," the simple act of filling-in space, of closing what was once open would naturally counter the received wisdom of a century of planning dogma that open is better if not absolutely good. Rachel Whiteread's House was a clear enough statement on the surface, and one carefully executed with all the material attention paid by a sculptor to casting a complicated figure piece. But seldom has an event of this kind – acknowledged as temporary, and supported by the artistic community – evoked so vituperative a reaction in the popular press. It was as if we had been transported back in time to the moment when Duchamp signed the "Water Fountain." Since its

unveiling in October 1993, Whiteread's house has been portrayed in cartoons, and in the critical press, with varying degrees of allegory and irony, even its supporters resorting to punning headlines – of the order of "the house that Rachel built," "home work," "house calls," "a concrete idea," "the house that Rachel unbuilt," "home truths," "no house room to art." House looks to the always uneasy status of the monument within architecture, wavering between art and use. As Adolf Loos recognized, and Hegel had theorized, architecture's symbolic role at once constitutes its "essence" – art turned to symbolizing life in three dimensional form – while its use role entirely undermines this primal symbolism – architecture defined not in terms of idea but of function. Whiteread undermines this binary problem by deliberately confusing sculpture and architecture, and by developing a kind of mutant object that cannot be defined in terms of either, indeed that asks to be defined by this very refusal.

#### Modernism made palpable

Far from undermining modernism's spatial ideology, Whiteread's House reinforces it, and further, does this on its own terms. For, since the development of Gestalt psychology, space has been subject to all the intellectual and experiential reversals involved in identifying figure and ground, as well as the inevitable ambiguities between the two that were characteristic,

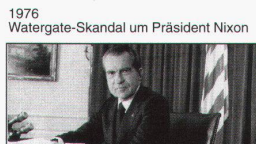
1963  
Tragischer Tod  
von Präsident  
John F. Kennedy



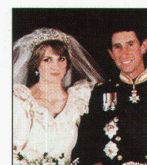
1969  
Neil Armstrong  
betritt als erster  
Menschen  
den Mond



1972  
Entwicklung der  
ersten CD



1976  
Watergate-Skandal um Präsident Nixon



1981  
Heirat von  
Prinz Charles und  
Lady Di

1960

1970

1980



1968  
Vola wurde von dem  
dänischen Architekten  
und Designer  
Prof. Arne Jacobsen  
gestaltet

Vola bleibt Vola

Vola bleibt Vola



as critics from Alois Riegl to Colin Rowe have pointed out, of modernism itself. Thus many modernists have employed figure/ground reversals to demonstrate the very palpability of space – the Italian architect Luigi Moretti even constructed plaster models in the 1950s to illustrate what he saw as the history of different spatial types in architecture. These models were cast as if they were the solids of what in reality were spatial voids; the spaces of compositions such as Hadrian's Villa were illustrated as sequences of solids, as if space had suddenly been revealed as dense and impenetrable.<sup>1</sup> Architectural schools from the late 1930s on have employed similar methods to teach "space" – the art of the impalpable – by means of palpable models. By this method, it was thought, all historical architecture might be reduced to the essential characteristics of space, and pernicious "styles" of historicism might be dissolved in the flux of abstraction.

In these terms, Whiteread's House simply takes its place in this tradition, recognizable to architects, if not to artists or the general public, as a didactic illustration of nineteenth-century domestic "space." To an architect, whether trained in modernism or its "Brutalist" offshoots, her work takes on the aspect of a full-scale model, a three-dimensional exercise in spatial dynamics and statics. A not accidental side-effect of this exercise is the transformation of the nineteenth-century realist house into an

abstract composition; Whiteread has effectively built a model of a house that resembles a number of paradigmatic modern houses, from Wright and Loos, from Rudolf Schindler to Paul Rudolph. Here, if one were to read her inside as outside, the concrete shell simply registers what might be an exercise in three-dimensional composition based on the procedure of cutting away or excavating a solid block for the contingencies of site or use. Le Corbusier, in his paradigmatic illustration of "Five Compositions" in 1925, had already codified such a method of composition side by side with four other "types" of architectural design, including the open-plan and the prismatic solid. In this sense Whiteread's House is modernist to the core, and would arouse the ire of the entire post-modern and traditionalist movement in Britain and elsewhere, dedicated to the notion that "abstraction" equals "eyesore".

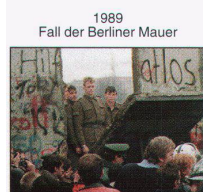
#### The façade, an uncanny place?

But it also seems true that this project touched another nerve entirely, one not disassociated from those we have mentioned, but more generally shared outside the architectural and artistic community, and deeply embedded in the "domestic" character of the intervention. Whiteread touched, and according to some commentators, mutilated, the house, by necessity the archetypal space of homeliness. Article after article referred to the silencing of the past life

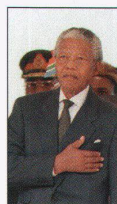
of the house, the traces of former patterns of life now rendered dead but preserved, as it were, in concrete if not in aspic.

Added to this apparent extinction of the traces of life was what many writers saw as the disturbing qualities of the "blank" windows in the House; this might again be traced back to romantic tropes of blocked vision, the evil eye, and the uncanny effect of mirrors that cease to reflect the self; E.T.A. Hoffmann and Victor Hugo, in particular, delighted in stories of boarded-up houses whose secrets might only be imagined. The abandoned hulk of Whiteread's House holds much in common with that empty house on Guernsey, so compelling for Hugo's fantasies of secret history in *Les travailleurs de la mer*.

Psychoanalysis, however, especially since the publication of Freud's celebrated article on *Das Unheimliche* (The Uncanny) in 1919, has complicated such romantic reactions, by linking the uncanny to the more complex and hidden forces of sexual drives, death wishes and Oedipal fantasies. Taking off from the difficult formulation hazarded by Schelling in the 1830s that the uncanny was "something that ought to have remained secret and hidden but which has come to light," Freud linked this sensation to experiences of a primal type – such as the primal scene witnessed by Little Hans – that had been suppressed only to show themselves unexpectedly in other moments and guises. Joined to



1989  
Fall der Berliner Mauer



1994  
Nelson Mandela  
zum Präsidenten  
von Südafrika  
gewählt



1997  
Dolly - das erste  
geklonte Schaf

2003  
Wird der Weltraum-  
tourismus zur  
Realität?



2010  
Sind die Forscher dann  
vielleicht im stande,  
Zellen für bestimmte Zwecke  
zu züchten?

1990

2000

2010

Vola bleibt Vola

Vola bleibt Vola



www.vola.ch

VOLA AG · Mülistr.18 · CH-8320 Fehraltorf · Tel: 01 / 955 18 18 · Fax: 01 / 955 18 19 · e-mail: info@vola.ch

vola®



such primary reactions, the causes of uncanny feelings included, for Freud, the nostalgia that was tied to the impossible desire to return to the womb, the fear of dead things coming alive, the fragmentation of things that seemed all too like bodies for comfort. Here, we might recognize themes that arose in some of the responses to House, among which the literal impossibility of entering the house itself, as well as the possibility that its closed form held unaccounted secrets and horrors. In psychoanalytical terms, Whiteread's project seems to follow the lead of Dada and Surrealism in their exploration of "unhomely" houses precisely for their sexual and mental shock-effect: the "interuterine" houses imagined by Tristan Tzara, the soluble habitations delineated by Dalí, the "soft" houses of Matta offer ready examples, against which in post-avant-garde terms the House seems to pose itself as a decidedly non-uterine space, a non-soft environment. As critics have noted, Whiteread's notion of "art" as temporary act or event similarly takes its cue from Dada precedents.

But Freud's analysis seems lacking precisely when confronted with terms that imply a non-object based uncanny – uncanny generated by space rather than its contents. Freud, despite a late recognition that space might be less universal than Kant had claimed, remained singularly impervious to spatial questions and it was left to phenomenologists from Minkowski to Binswanger to recognize that space itself might be psychologically determined and was thus to be read as a symptom, if not an instrument, of trauma and neurosis. Tellingly, Minkowski writes of "black" or "dark" space, that space which, despite all loss of vision – in the dark or blind-folded – a subject might still palpably feel: the space of bodily and sensorial, if not intellectual existence. It is such a space that Whiteread had constructed, a blindingly suffocating space that, rather than receiving its contents with comfort, expelled them like a breath.

And it was this final reversal that seems in retrospect to have been most pointed. For what was the modern house, if not the cherished retreat from agoraphobia – that "housewife's disease" so common in suburbia, and so gendered from its first conception in the 1870s? Thrust so unceremoniously into the void, the domestic subject no longer finds a shell, clinging, as if to Géricault's raft, to the external surface of an uninhabitable and absolute claustrophobic object, forced to circulate around the edges of a once womb-like space. Nostalgia, noted Freud, was always to be connected to that impossible primal desire to return to the origin, the womb itself. Therein lay an origin of the uncanny feelings that arose when such desires, long repressed, suddenly re-emerged in unexpected forms. In Whiteread's world, where even the illusion of return "home" is refused, the uncanny itself is banished. No longer can the fundamental terrors of exclusion and banishment, of homelessness and alienation, be ame-

liorated by their aestheticization in horror stories and psychoanalytic family romances; with all doors to the *unheimlich* firmly closed, the domestic subject is finally out in the cold forever.

1 See Luigi Moretti, "Strutture e sequenze du spazi," *Spazio. Rassegna delle arti e dell'architettura*, No. 7, December 1952/April 1953, pp. 9–18.

Hans Frei (pages 26–33)

Translation from German: Michael Robinson

## Faceless Skin

The corporeal immateriality of Morger, Degelo and Kerez's Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein

We seem to hear more about surfaces than façades when people talk about architecture today, and there is a good reason for this. "Façade" suggests a fixed and meaningful relationship between interior and exterior, but a surface keeps us outside for longer: we do not immediately go rushing behind it. The reign of the sign is over, and now we are faced with the question of what new meanings architecture might be able to generate when starting from an expressive zero point.

The idea of transparency, as developed by Colin Rowe with Robert Slutzky in the two essays on Transparency: *Literal and Phenomenal*<sup>1</sup>, is closely linked with the façade. It does not matter whether a glass façade makes it possible to look directly into the interior or whether "transparency in the transferred sense" is created on the basis of parallels between interior and exterior physiognomy, we are always dealing with a pure need to make content visible. In this sense transparency can be related both to tectonics and to the theory of cladding, except that the signifying mechanism always functions in the opposite direction. Façades express an inner essence, masks establish public roles. Dan Graham's projects like *Alteration of a Suburban House* (1978) are thus particularly revealing: they reveal otherwise invisible signifying mechanisms through changes to façades.

But if we talk about the "surface" of a building we are liberating ourselves from the dominance of significance. The architectural surface seems like a landscape, not like a face. Certainly landscapes also have something hidden underneath them, but this is much less interesting at first than complex connections on the surface itself. The crucial element in the specific form of a landscape is its epigenesis, which biologist Conrad Waddington describes as a relatively mysterious process "in which form emerges gradually but dynamically from a formless or homogeneous milieu or substance."<sup>2</sup> So the form

of the surface does not depend on a significant sign regime. In fact it emerges from nothing, forms an unstable sectional plane on which the effects of external factors and attachments to genetic markers show up only very mysteriously – and thus not significantly.

The question is: how can meaning emerge at all in this way? In any case, it is no longer possible for a landscape surface to be interpreted according to the classical rules of physiognomy. The answer that architects usually have ready for this question is to propose an architecture at the zero point of significance. Architecture that means and wants to mean nothing more than the perceptibly interesting quality of its surface. What lies behind it is withdrawn from view as if by a veil. In complete contrast with the façade or mask, attention is drawn simply and solely to the effects being played out on the surface.<sup>3</sup>

Revealing in order to conceal

But this does not solve the problem of what lies behind. A surface has two sides, even if they have nothing to do with each other, and a viewer's look at one side can be thrown back as if from the surface of a mirror. All we are doing here is leaving the realm of innocent faith that suggests that meanings are based on significant correspondences between the two sides. Even if transparency requires significant connections between signifiers and signified, this is far from meaning that significance also needs transparency if it is to maintain control. When interpreting non-significant surfaces it is far better to work on something the Berlin media theorist Friedrich Kittler said about graphic user interfaces in computers: "They show you one thing so that you can't see another." In other words: surfaces, including architectural ones, tend to distract away from questions towards content, and this opens up unforeseeable scope for arbitrary manipulations of all kinds. Kittler warns us against the false allure of graphic user interfaces and seems almost desperate to get back to the good old lines of code: there is an equivalent to this in the admittedly over-simplistic way in which Berlin architects, for example, demand a return to façade architecture and tectonics.

But rather than rushing back to the old sign regime of the façade, we should first of all give some thought to specific expressive possibilities associated with the surface. Are we in fact faced with the stark alternatives of significant links with the façade or the absolute break represented by the two sides of a surface? In the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, architects Morger, Degelo and Kerez have shown that there is a third way, or more precisely: that new expressive mechanisms can be set up on the surface. It is entirely possible to assume that the face has been landscaped in this building, and that there is a radical break between the black exterior and the white interior. But on closer examination we see that the same thing is repeated on these



two completely contrasting sides: the two sides turn to each other without one being subject to the dictates of the other. Instead of a dialectic of signifier and signified, instead of a radical break between the two sides we have two irreconcilables approaching each other.

#### Supple and extroverted

At a first glance, the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein is nothing but a pragmatic solution. The architects had no other choice than to realize the maximum building volume that was legally permissible. They made a virtue of necessity by accepting the irrevocable as form. The decision to treat the maximum building volume as a black box is understandable. The black box does not raise any unrealistic expectations in terms of expression and contextual inclusion: it is expected that nothing will penetrate it and nothing will force its way out, and that there is absolutely nothing that has to be made interesting about it. In this spirit, the architects started work at the lowest level, i.e. at the level of naked structural facts. The black box offers the opportunity of reducing problems of architectural expression to nil. Seen in this way, its blackness relates to conceptual rather than material qualities. A black box does not have to be black in the same way that the black market does not have to be black. It is enough if its blackness is content with absorbing any hint of expression.

But it did not remain a mere black box. The Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein is indeed black, and it is black in a very spectacular and expressive way. In retrospect it would be possible to say that the black box was simply a means of getting rid of any significant link between the interior and the exterior. Then, in a second stage, the blockade was used to set up an experimental area for new effects on the neutral surface.

In fact the architects have done everything they could to direct attention to nothing other than the compact homogeneity of the surface. The lettering saying "Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein" is etched in, not surface-mounted. All the openings are brought together in two large incisions whose dark glazing is discreetly adapted to the monolithic block. Not even a single expansion joint breaks the continuous expanse of the surface, which measures 170 metres across. Workmen were busy on the surface for months, just as façade decorators used to be, but instead of adding something they were grinding off a thin layer of approx. 8 millimetres, until the surface looked like an Impressionist painting made up of coloured Rhine gravel, black basalt and black-dyed cement. The building lost about 40 tons in weight this way. But this part that has been taken away still seems to exist as a phantom body, creating the incredible effects that make the surface shift from shimmering like mother-of-pearl to a velvet softness or the high gloss of a car's bodywork.

Of course it would be possible to interpret each one of these effects as a facial expression

on a façade or mask. In this way the building could be described as a "decorated shed", then as a monolithic block or a spatial container. Taken together, these facial features would produce a contradictory and complex expression for the whole. But something that would come off badly given this sort of description is the mixture of effects that seal off the exterior from the inside, making it impenetrable. Is it not precisely these seamlessly changing effects that actually resists any significant interpretation? And therefore rather than talking about ambiguity let us address the whole range of a register of expression, including a number of different elements: the corporeal element, the space-containing element and the pictorial element. These effects converge, work together in a new way, and are definitely not played off against each other. Everything is taken to the point where the sign stops being there for anything else. It is not just about implications that go beyond those of a façade, but about a fundamentally different structure on all planes of meaning. The surface is a material object that produced a non-corporeal transformation within itself, rather than referring to something significant that lies behind. The pictorial element does not conceal the body of the building as it would in the case of a decorated shed. On the contrary, the surface is an image that has become a body. The best comparison here would be a surface made up of liquid crystals, except that here the non-corporeal transformation derives from rough treatment of the material, while in the case of liquid crystal surfaces it is based on manipulating the deep structure of the material. In the case of the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, this non-corporeal suppleness is the quality of a distinctive and extroverted body, and not a consequence of its dematerialization. To this extent the surface is more than an architectural user interface that merely covers something up; it is a material object, radiating its ideal essence.

#### The two sides of the surface

A blocking situation is similarly transformed under different conditions inside the museum. What the black box is to the exterior the white cube is to the interior: a blocking feature that ideally prevents any exchange between the interior and the exterior. But ultimately even this serves to enclose the interior even more securely than is already the case outside because of the black surface. The access system has an important part to play in this context. Actually it should guarantee that the white cube is subdivided neutrally, and therefore be as discreet as possible. It is precisely in this respect that the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein runs counter to all expectations. The exhibition spaces certainly meet all a white cube's requirements about neutral and reticent architecture in terms of decoration and furnishings. And yet the museum as a whole – with the exception of a few small

side rooms in the corners – is fully incorporated into the access mode. Access becomes the main thing, precisely because the staircase is reduced to the two flights of steps and the exhibition galleries have to take on the function of the missing landings. The two flights of steps run counter to each other in such a refined way that the floor area is brought together into a continuous run of space extending over several storeys. This open atmosphere in the interior is further accentuated by the way the ground plan is broken up. The dividing walls between the exhibition galleries are placed by the two flights of steps in a windmill pattern, opening up diagonal views through the whole of the building. Finally, the large openings in the surface ensure that internal movement can develop in relation to the outside of the building as well.

The rupture between the two sides of the surface is not concealed. And yet the relationship between them is not simply the same as fitting a white cube inside a black box. It is as though both sides have been set up in such a way that one can reach the other. A relationship is created between inside and outside that has nothing to do with transparency of significance. What happens to the exterior surface – its non-corporeal suppleness – and what happens to the interior – its dynamic openness – are the two factors that make the two sides able to communicate with each other and to exchange their immaterial forces. In the case of a façade we would have to assume that the links between the two sides lead to a hierarchical dependency between the two sides, according to which one side presents or shapes the other. Things are quite different in the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein: the two sides leave each other in peace as far as their material attributes are concerned. Beyond this, non-corporeal effects are produced on both sides that permeate the material surface and create something in between that produces the building's specific identity. Ultimately the surface does not express a specific content, but the synthetic product of its two essentially irreconcilable sides.

The formal pedigree of the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein corresponds largely to modernist box architecture as practised today. Architecture that defiantly insists on a zero point, given our over-stimulated world. But for the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, this zero is a starting point and not a terminus. At the zero point in architecture it is not the absence of any meaning that defines, but the particular spot that is able to produce any meaning you like. What is ultimately important is a strategy that produces convergence between the two sides of the surface, based neither on formal correspondences nor on sign regimes that have been fixed a priori. The surface does not just imply liberation from significance, it also makes the abundance of possible meanings explicit.

Notes: See German text p. 32