

During the late 1980s, the debate in architecture was dominated by the emergence of deconstructivism. A version of postmodern architecture, deconstructivism presented itself as an alternative to architectural postmodernism. Both formulated a criticism of modernist architecture and its dogmas such as *purity of form*, *truth to materials*, and *form follows function*. Postmodernist architecture did this through the conscious and sometimes ironic reorientation towards earlier historic periods and a renewed interest in decoration, while deconstructivism exercised the distortion and fragmentation of form, space and surfaces and therefore developed complex, if not complicated geometries.

In the lee of this debate, an architectural approach developed that is often associated with the notions *purity of form* and *truth to materials*, but nonetheless is not a rectilinear continuation of modernist ideologies.

Instead of the truth of materials, this position explores the richness of materials. It does not attempt to reveal a single truthful essence of construction, but it rather considers construction to be an essential means of architecture that can narrate the rise of an edifice in various ways and in multiple layers. It is not interested in having the form of structures follow the lines of their load-bearing function alone, instead it considers the form of load-bearing structures to be just as important in relation to the articulation of space and how it is experienced.

Architectural practices that are sympathetic to this approach came to be labelled as 'minimal' in the mid 1990s, because of their formal similarities to the well-known art movement of the same name. This is perhaps the reason why the equally, if not more, important orientation towards architectural examples that diverged from the dogmas of the International Style in the period before and directly after the Second World War, remained much less discussed. The work of architects Sigurd Lewerentz, Rudolf Schwarz and Max Bill belong to these precedents, to which *OASE 45/46* draws attention.

The affinity for the use of essential architectural means and the realization that this design attitude often 'seemed reserved for assignments that reminded people of essential matters of life and death – churches, cemeteries and crematoria' brought the editors of *OASE 45/46* to entitle the issue 'Essential Architecture'.

Although the questions that the editorial raised – 'What happens when the often religiously motivated rejection of architectural rhetoric mutates into a design strategy in the non-committal context we live in today? What meaning does architecture have that aims at creating authentic experiences when this is used as one of the many possibilities to distinguish architecture on the vanity fair? And is architecture in a position to fulfil this need – an experience that really has the power to move – or will the inevitable result be one style among many, a lifestyle variant?' – remain largely unanswered, it is the merit of this issue that both the close reading of the works of Lewerentz, Schwarz and Bill, and the reflections on this work by a younger generation of architects nonetheless give an understanding of an attitude and *modus operandi*, which achieve magnificent architectural qualities that range outside the reach of labels such as minimal architecture.

Christopher Woodward is well-disposed towards the work of Max Bill, who of the three discussed predecessors still operated most of all within the ideological legacy of modern architecture. Woodward sees in the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* at Ulm Bill's theories of artistic, industrial and architectural design aligned in a building that proved to be influential for a generation of architects that reoriented itself through the serious consideration of robust building techniques, processes of production, and the thoughtful assembly of material and components.

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