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○ Interview with Jacques Herzog

Archaeology

P49 You describe your creative process as a series of “discoveries,” not revealing the old or the new, but rather the “world that exists.” You categorize this methodology as neither anti- nor post-modern, but rather as “after-modern.” Is the “after-modern” architect an author or archeologist?

JH Archaeology is fascinating because it very concretely excavates, re-creates, and reinterprets the physical remains of past cultures and societies. We always find it obvious and necessary to understand what we do now in the wider context of the given structures on a site—whether these are so called ‘natural’ or man-made topographies.

P49 With regard to the Serpentine Pavilion, the final design emerges from what was latent in the ground. How were the fragments selected, placed, curated, or otherwise “designed”?



JH We wanted to include structural remains from every single pavilion built in the years before, with no preferences whatsoever. We laid all the ground plans of these pavilions on top of each other, which created a fascinating maze of lines, kind of a pattern chart. We hoped to find some of their physical remains in the ground, but they all were eliminated and had been refilled with sand and earth. The holes of what once was a foundation had been refilled again and again, so in some way these past foundations were still there, as “ghosts.” We immediately understood that this absence of physical remains would free us and open the door to a new landscape, which we could put together out of the virtual pattern chart of the forms offered to us by all our predecessors.

P49 Though the Serpentine Pavilion presents a collection of fragments, all of the elements below the roof pool are covered in cork. How do you reconcile the deliberate collage with this material uniformity?



JH It was easier to reconcile the different fragments in a material uniformity. We knew it should all be one material; only then would the new landscape work as a whole and not as a crowd of individual statements. Cork came very naturally as we had been studying new ways to use this wonderfully warm and soft material for quite a while. Its tactile qualities have certainly helped make the pavilion more attractive and friendly for the many visitors.

P49 Does this suggest that after the passing of time, artifacts and ideas fall out of the contexts for which they were designed and are subsumed into their new environment?

JH Time transforms and even destroys everything. Some things—artifacts or even ideas—survive a bit longer, but paradoxically only if they have a “transformative potential,” i.e. if they attract coming generations to embrace them, transform them and make them their own thing.

Methodology

P49 While the Serpentine Pavilion presents collaged fragments of foundations and existing site elements, the Eberswalde Library multiplies images that are whole. Do these acts represent different attitudes toward context? Different attitudes toward presenting history?



JH We are not “presenting history.” What might be a common element in those two, and in other projects, is that we try to find new ways to generate architecture. One way that we do this is to work with the projects “materiality.” In both projects, you mention that we developed a specific building material that had never been used before: a mix of archeological fragments and new pieces, all in solid cork for the pavilion; historic photographs etched not on paper but into stone for the Eberswalde library. For the Eberswalde we really found a new technology which was going beyond other attempts of just painting and decorating a facade. The photographic images literally mutated into a building material shaping the entire building.

P49 We read another attitude in the presentation of your work when it is layered as transparencies, such as in the 1988 *Architektur/Denkform* exhibition in Basel. When your work is both seen and seen through, it embeds itself within the urban context. What is at stake in this superimposition?



JH *Architektur/Denkform* remains a very key moment in our biography. We always found architecture exhibitions boring and intellectually naive compared to art shows. Art is art and is made to be exhibited in galleries or elsewhere. Architecture is also just architecture but it is made to work on and for a specific given site. Architecture exhibitions cannot do that, so every show requires a big effort in order to inspire a convincing identity and beauty to the substituting elements: models, projections, texts, etc. In the exhibition you mention, we took the museum building itself—a modernist lantern-like building of translucent and transparent glass—and made it ours. We appropriated the museum, like a “found” object which reflected the urban context, its own structure, and our projects in an intrinsic way.

P49 In your work, the operation of quotation appears to always be linked to a material and its specific properties (cork, transparencies, concrete screen prints). What is the importance of materiality in revealing or undermining specific citations?

pages 168, 171–74
Serpentine Gallery
Pavilion 2012.
Herzog & de Meuron
and Ai Weiwei.
Kensington Gardens,
London, UK. Project and
realization 2011–2012,
opening dates 1 June–
14 October 2012.

page 169, top
Eberswalde Technical
School Library.
Eberswalde, Germany.
Project 1994–1996,
realization 1997–1999.
Photo Margherita
Spiluttini,
© Architekturzentrum
Wien, Collection.

page 169, bottom
Architektur Denkform.
Architekturmuseum
Basel, Switzerland.
Exhibition 1 October–
20 November 1988.

below
The Tate Modern Project.
London, UK. Compe-
tition 2005, project
2005–2016 (planned
completion 2016).

JH Citations, just like references, do not interest us. They may be an immanent ingredient in many of our buildings, otherwise you wouldn't keep asking... but as I said before, they may pop up or appear in the mind of people as they see the building, they appear as one of hopefully many other possible forms and interpretations. Our intention is not to bind people to our own images and memories but to their own.

P49 Is it possible to quote a particular craft or material usage to evoke a specific moment, place, or person? Or are the traditions inherent to architectural practice impossible to quote specifically?

JH The specific moment that an "author," be it an architect, fashion designer, or film maker has in his mind may be a driver, a kind of primary energy for the early phase of a project. The more you then work on it, the more that specific moment, that memory, etc., fades away and makes room for the new project that needs to be shaped. If a project doesn't succeed in "destroying" that memory it ends up being a nostalgic fart.

Legacy

P49 How could you return to the Serpentine? Is it a work in progress or is it complete?

JH As a project it is complete. As a concept it, like many of our projects, is a work in progress.

P49 How do you see the Serpentine Pavilion in relation to your work dealing with renovations, such as the Armory, the Tate Modern, or the House of Alfred Richterich?

JH Clearly, since our very early days, renovating, reconstructing, preserving, destroying, and simulating, etc., are key tools and methods for all our projects. Very consciously, we tackle a project as part of an existing specific and real world and not of an ideal one.



P49 Your partnership has served as a model for collaborative practice, whether it be with each other or with artists, curators, or collectors. Are there still traces of individual voices in the final product or are they subsumed in the transformation?

JH I am not aware of such traces. Experts and historians could perhaps trace back specific influences and obsessions, etc. of ours, or, eventually, of another involved partner.

P49 Might your work be so rich with reference that it itself resists appropriation and citation?

JH We have seen some rather awkward copies of some of our buildings which are a bit embarrassing, honestly. It is often more advisable to learn from strategies and methods than from finished form.







