

## Scenography as Architectural Experimentation<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Architecture and scenography have been sharing, historically, researches on the concept of space, time dimensions, illusion and reality. Whenever science and technology propose new dimensions, it is Art that tries to experiment them first and remind us that space and time are constructions that can be re-read and disassembled. In this first section, we investigated Diller+Scofidio sceneries for *Moving Target* (1996) and *EJM 1 and 2* (1998) Frédéric Flamand's choreographies; and Herzog&DeMeuron sceneries for *Tristan und Isolde* (Berlin Opera House, 2006) and *Attila* (Metropolitan Opera House, 2010). Crossing theorist's thoughts on art, theater and architecture, as Hal Foster, Rafael Moneo and RoseLee Goldberg, the investigation seeks to baste the scenography and architecture projects in the same research field claimed by each of the architects. In the work of Diller+Scofidio, stands out the thought about real and mediated images and the new dimensions of space. For Herzog&DeMeuron, the screen and the texture materials power up the light design, starting questions about volume and planarity, as well as theatricality and reality. The works studied reflect in these artistic fields the contemporary notions of space-and-time, hybridity and virtual processing. They show how the nature of the spectacle has taken architecture, launching it into a research on illusion, space-time and movement or, for Tschumi, the replacement of "*utilitas*" or "function" by the "event".

KEYWORDS: Scenography: Architecture: Diller+Scofidio: Herzog & De Meuron.

## Scenography as Architectural Experimentation

Architecture is the art that, before sheltering or enchanting, intended to defy time. For Juhani Pallasmaa (2005, p. 49), one of the architecture qualities that touches us the most is exactly the possibility of experiencing a life's cycle that goes beyond our own existence, and confronts us simultaneously with past and future generations. Architecture "domesticates limitless space and endless time to be tolerated, inhabited and understood by humanity" (*idem*, p.17). This is a quality that is supposed to be diametrically opposed to that of the theatrical spectacle, which places the spectator before an ephemeral event and from that withdraws its force of expression: the opening of an infinite time, of intolerable and incomprehensible truths. The cruelty of the theatre is only admissible for its ephemerality, and for the co-authorship of those who are present, unalienable witnesses of the work that will leave traces only in its memory. Although in so different ways, architecture and scenography historically share investigations on the concept of space, temporal dimensions, illusion and reality. Whenever science and technology propose new dimensions, it is Art that tries to experiment them first and remind us that space and time are constructions that can be re-read and disassembled.

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The most important transformation of the 20th century in the field of Art was the intensification of media. The information transmission became as important as electricity in the previous century. Art has become independent of its support to be considered a "communication process". Therefore, any object capable of burst this process out can be considered a work of art (see Duchamp). "Being a work of art is a function in a process of communication, not an intrinsic property of a thing" (SCHENBERG, 2010, 139, my translation). In this sense, the revision of geometric space, carried out by Einstein's physics and the new topologies (non-Euclidean geometries), has been incorporated into art, as well as the micro atomic space, where matter and energy converge. It is Art that transmits to the social world the spatial possibilities that would remain as hermetic ideas of the scientific field.

The issues addressed by artistic performances throughout the 20th century look for more direct ways of dealing with emotion, desire and movement within the infinite open frame of new spatial possibilities. As Foster (2011, p. 93) points out, when analysing the work of Diller, Scofidio + Renfro,

"Architecture might seem to be extrinsic to such topics, dear as they are to postmodernist art, but, *pace* the discourse of "fusion", the interdisciplinary thrust of these projects is first to suggest that architecture is always already present somehow - as unseen setting or frame - and then to disrupt this normative use of architecture with a critical intervention."

Foster suggests that, in the work of DS + R, there is in fact no boundary between architecture and scenography, since everything is, in fact, architecture. This interpretation is reinforced by Elizabeth Diller's statement: "Architecture is everything that can be made or done between the skin of one person and the skin of another person."

By its characteristic of "space essay", the scenography allows phenomenological experiments in some ways "isolated". The Italian stage, with controllable qualities of light, sound and visibility, functions as a kind of "test tube" for architects interested in the essential phenomenon of space, body and movement.

### **Diller + Scofidio: the thought about real and mediated image and the new dimensions of space.**

New York architects Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio have been in contact with artists and performers since the beginning of their career in the 1980s. In the press release of the architecture firm, now called Diller Scofidio + Renfro, for the integration of one more member in 2004, we read that "DS + R is an interdisciplinary studio that fuses architecture with the visual and performing arts". Permanent actions in these areas is justified because, according to Elizabeth Diller, "the challenge wasn't just to imagine space, it was to produce new problems in space, to disrupt it. You couldn't do that on paper" (apud HANN, 2012, page 11).

The first scenographic experiences took place together with the New York collective *The Creation Production Company*. The architects created the

ambiences for the spectacles *The American Mysteries* (1984), *The Memory Theatre of Giulio Camillo (Synapse)* (1985) and *The Rotary Notary and His Hot Plate (Delay in Glass)* (1987).

*The American Mysteries* (fig.1) is a detective thriller that updates the classic *Oedipus Rex*, by Sophocles. During an investigation, the detective self-acknowledges guilty, and the scenographic device, which starts as a closed cube, unfolds as a metaphor for the mental (conscious and unconscious) movements of the protagonist.

The device consists of a plywood cube, painted in gray and articulated by pulleys and counterweights. The dramaturgy is developed in nine acts, represented in nine "places", formed from the cube whose faces open, on a nine-square grid in the floor. The total or partial opening of the faces - which sometimes define inclined planes, forms the nine different configurations. The geometry of space is interrupted by dotted diagonal lines that appear on the faces of the cube suggesting imaginary planes, and by a screen at the bottom of the stage, which introduces a new dimension, changing the geometric logic. Furniture hangs to the slanting faces, defying gravity and referring to a space far from the material laws (perhaps the detective's mind), showing the architects' interests in redefining basic spatial concepts and the appeal to perceptions in multiple dimensions.

This experience of reassembling the everyday environment can also be seen in the duo's artistic installations, such as *Withdrawing Room* (1987) and *Para-Site* (1989). Research on spatial perception goes beyond the references of everyday space and seeks a closer relationship with body movements in scenographies produced by the architects in the 1990s for the dance performances: *Moving Target* (1996), *Monkey Business* (1996) and *EJM I and II* (1998).

Figure 1: *The American Mysteries*. The Creation Production Company, 1984.

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Font: Diller Scofidio + Renfro ([www.dsrmny.com](http://www.dsrmny.com))

*The Memory Theatre of Giulio Camillo* is based on a fiction about the Renaissance philosopher who created a theatre where a single spectator, before contemplating allegories of techniques, arts and myths, could establish bridges between them, assimilating "all the knowledge of the world". In this site-specific performance, director and playwright Matthew Maguire creates a play within the play within the play, in which a troupe of *Commedia dell'Arte* plays in Camillo's theatre next to himself (MAGUIRE, 1986). The audience follow the three layers of the performance by walking through three chambers of the Brooklyn Bridge

anchorage. The installation of Diller+Scofidio, called *Synapse*, is a bridge that interconnects the three successive chambers of the anchorage. The bridge is formed by two structural swings with a swivel chair at each end that do not touch the middle, creating a gap. This gap represents at the same time the space between the neuronal terminations where the synapse happens and the mysterious space where memory develops, "the existential moment that is no longer here, but not yet there," according to the architect's memorial.

*The Rotary Notary and His Hot Plate* (fig.2), whose enlightening subtitle is *Delay in Glass*, is intended to be the performative transposition of the 1915-23 Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* or *The Bride Stripped by His bachelors, even (The Great Glass)*. The performance reproduces the division of Duchamp's work: the top is the dream world of the bride, while the bottom shows the nine celibatarians rotate a mechanism similar to a carousel, or a press, whose three-dimensionality is achieved with competent perspective foreshortening. The stage is divided in half with a dotted line parallel to the limelight. In this line, a wall rotating panel in the centre of the stage divides the bride's area (behind the panel) and the bachelors' area, the front. The back is revealed by the reflection of a mirror at 45 degrees suspended at the bottom of the stage. The areas can be reversed by turning the panel, but keeping the idea that between bride and bachelors there will always be an insurmountable gap that feeds desire. According to Hal Foster (2011, p.92), "a perpetual motion machine" of bodies, prosthetics, and images that, again, like *The Large Glass*, kept the performers in a state of continual (dis)connection".

Figure 2: *The Rotary Notary and His Hot Plate*. *The Creation Production Company*, 1987.

Font: Diller Scofidio + Renfro (www.dsrmny.com)

In this performance, Diller + Scofidio uses, for the first time, the mechanical device of mirror, quite traditional in the illusionist stage, but whose relationship with the architectural design of space (plant and elevation) did not go unnoticed. The conception and perception of space, which goes through a "dismantling" in contemporary times, is here a point of interest of the duo. For Foster, in addition to the architectural parallel, one of the prepositions of D + S's work is that "a prime condition of contemporary culture is a convergence of immediate seeing with mediated viewing" (idem, p.96), represented here by the mirror.

The unfolding of space, constant movement and temporary durations or gaps, themes developed by the architects in these early stage experiences, will be transformed into an architectural proposal in the *Slow House* project (Long Island,

New York, 1991). Although not built, this house elevated architects to a leading position in contemporary architectural research (Fig. 3). The duo is one of the pioneers in the attempt to reformulate architecture according to the new concepts of "medium" - replacing the less fluid concept of "place" - and "event" - instead of "function" (SCOFFIER, 2009). Rem Koolhaas defines Slow House as "itself a kind of *mise-en-scène*" (apud MOON, 2015: 432).

Figure 3: Slow House project. Diller+Scofidio, 1991

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Font: Diller Scofidio + Renfro (www.dsrm.com)

The house has the shape of a curved visual cone (moving vision) that leads from a narrow door to a huge window over the maritime landscape. In this unique tour, the rooms are sections of the cone, and they have screens next to the windows, in which the view of the window is reproduced. But on these screens,

"(...) the framing is displaced, so that what you see on the monitor could never be associated with its actual position in space. Vanishing point and point of view of the observer are misaligned, as in scenographic works and parallax. The horizon is misaligned, multiple and causes the observer to lose its position reference in space." (VIANA, 2013, p. 18, my translation).

These "virtual windows and technological overlays to landscapes" work with a "displaced" spatial and temporal perception, incorporating the gap with which we became familiar in the world of virtual images. "(...) architectural representation occupies the threshold between the script and the scenography" (MOON, 2015, p.432).

The displacement or space-time overlap provided by the use of cameras is a recurring experience in the works of Diller + Scofidio. At the 1989 *Para-Site*, at The New York Museum of Modern Art, security cameras are placed over three museum spaces (entrance, escalators, and door to the sculpture garden). The images captured by them are projected on the screens that are part of the installation, showing the movement of doors and passers-by from above. The installation gallery was redesigned, with chairs and screens occupying ceilings and walls, reversing gravity and promoting a second inversion of vision (the first is the image captured by the cameras). Some mirrors were allocated to reflect this installation, so that the reflected image returns the pieces to their traditional position. This same exhibition of the movement of the bodies from surveillance perspective have also been used in *Jump Cuts* (1996), an installation of liquid crystal displays in the façade of the United Artists Cineplex Theatre of San José in California, where the images of users on the escalators and in the lobby are

projected in real time. Here, also the movement of the escalators is used to dynamize the image of the facade. Chosen by Rem Koolhaas as one of the fundamental elements of contemporary architecture, the escalator incorporates the visuality and the temporality of the current media. The images of the internal circulation are interspersed with cinematic trailers, denouncing the increasingly exhibitionistic and fictional nature of American daily life.

In fact, the relationship between mediation and lived reality is conceptually highlighted by the architects when elaborating on the "transvaluation of transparency":

"the fear of being watched has transformed into the fear that no one is watching (...) electronic surveillance is now the accepted social contract in public space, a welcome assurance of security, and a performance vehicle" (*apud* FOSTER, 2011, p.98).

Certainly, this reflection can be applied to the intense need for exhibition, especially for American society. The architects made a clearer use of the concept in the renovation of the *Brasserie* (2000), located on the ground floor of the Seagram Building, where the transparency of Mies van Der Rohe's facades was replaced by the distribution of dozens of internal monitors that show users as they pass through the front door. After having their "entrance performance" multiplied on the walls of the restaurant, the clients cross a raised walkway to reach the hall, in a true exhibitionist parade. In the Diller + Scofidio projects, "(...) viewing was aligned with surveillance, and both were disrupted in the process" (FOSTER, 2011, p.97).

### **Moving Target (1996) e EJM 1 e 2 (1998)**

In 1995, the duo participated in a project by the Belgian choreographer Frédéric Flamand, who called for the collaboration of architects to create spaces for their choreographies inside stage boxes. Acquainted to work on specific sites, Flamand now sought conceptual spaces that could go on tour. In *Moving Target* (Fig. 4) and *EJM I and II*, Diller + Scofidio returned to the issues of disassembling three-dimensional perception (symbolized in a special way by the Italian stage box). Here, the resource of the mirror suspended at 45 degrees in the background of the stage is meticulously exploited and called "*interscenium*" by the architects: an intermediate space between the *proscenium* and the audience, that makes possible the inversion between plant and elevation. With this resource, not only the perspective of the stage box is reversed but also a doubt is created about the nature of the theatrical spectacle that signs its identity in the physical presence of the actor. What is in question is the architecture of the scenic box and "how architecture itself might change the perception of the lived and moving body" (SALTER, 2010, p.80).

The semi-transparent mirror, where images are projected and reflected at the same time, enables unprecedented movements for the dancers, who enter a state of "hyper virtuosity", being able to act lying down overcoming gravity, and having their movements reproduced and manipulated by video-morphing. The title of the performance *EJM I, Man Walking in an Ordinary Speed*, is probably a reference to the suspended image in the mirror and its relationship with the seminal work of

Trisha Brown *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970), in which the dancers made their performance at 90 degrees, suspended in the wall of the buildings.

Figure 4: *Moving Target*. Charleroi Dances (dir. Frederic Flamand). 1996.

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Font: Diller Scofidio + Renfro ([www.dsrmny.com](http://www.dsrmny.com))

The mirror also reveals the "structure" of the dance in the plan, showing the marks and artifices of theatrical making, and the scenic space built by the movement, which is almost always poorly perceived by the front audience. In this sense, the laser projections in *Moving Target* are used almost literally. The target that pursues the dancer through a motion sensor, walks the floor "generating yet another taxonomic tension between the dancing body through architecture and 'a dancing architecture itself'" (COLLARD, 2014-15, p.5). For Pallasmaa (2005, p. 13), "Peripheral vision integrates us with space, while focused vision pushes us out of the space, making us mere spectators ". One can think that, by multiplying the frames within the box, the space conceived by Diller + Scofidio seeks to recompose, in another way, peripheral vision, launching the viewer into an experience that does not entail alienation but rather requires phenomenological and meta-artistic considerations.

By combining the perceptions of real and virtual, the architects transpose to space the sense of the dramatic script, based on Nijinski's diaries, blurring the dichotomies man vs. woman, normal vs. pathological, natural vs. artificial. In fact, as in *Para-Site*, the mirror often reveals to the audience a clearer and more coherent image than the one we see on the stage, proposing that the fragmented and mediated image may seem more "normal" than the real element.

For Viana (2013), the mirror/screen strategy is also "a way to distort the traditional perspective and insert the viewer into the work", placing it no more frontally, but "in", once he has, at the same time, the front and the top views, or rear view or even side views, depending on the projections and the position of the mirror. Scoffier (2009, p.199) similarly highlights the sensation caused by glass facades half-transparent and half-reflexive, which face us at the same time with what is in front and around us, leading us to a sense of suspension of being: "(...) this perception implies that it is no longer the building that is transparent, but he [the observer] himself". The confrontation between the Brunelleschi's perspective axis, which unites the subject and the object and defines the nature of the stage box, with the "invisible axis that runs towards the image, the projection axis that does not connect point of view with vanishing point and is suspended in a space

that is neither of the subject nor of the object "is one of the main themes of the work of D+S". Multiplied by the mirror, these axes cross and transport the subject through a new space "that is not relative or representative, but inconstant." (VIANA, 2013, p.7-8, my translation)

In several of their architectural projects, the architects use overlapping images, not only in virtual screens over windows (as in *Slow House*), but also in the use of transparencies over transparencies, as in the case of the *Museum of Image and Sound*, in construction in Rio de Janeiro. Located at the Atlantica Avenue, it was conceived as a landscape showcase, "a megascopic promenade", in which the architecture hides or highlights certain views of the panorama, making use of hollow elements and lenticular glasses capable of establishing the exact axis of visibility. The term "scanned", used by Aaron Betsky to define the architecture of Diller Scofidio + Renfro, highlights exactly the power of these architectural objects to determine so specifically the visual relations with the environment.

The written production of Bernard Tschumi exposes a growing interest in the relationship between body and space, and body and matter, as transforming the notions of architectural program and spatial articulation. Concern that is also present in the work of Diller Scofidio + Renfro.

*"(...) space is not simply the three-dimensional projection of a mental representation, but it is something that is heard, and is acted upon. And it is the eye that frames – the window, the door, the vanishing ritual of passage... Spaces of movement – corridors, staircases, ramps, passages, thresholds; here begins the articulation between the space of the senses and the space of society, the dances and gesture that combine the representation of space and the space of representation. **Bodies not only move in, but generate spaces produced by and through the movement**" (TSCHUMI, 1996, p.160)*

For Foster, however, it is still necessary that the duo succeed in transforming this "confusion between architecture and media" into a "deeply corporeal experience" in their architectural projects, escaping the easy culture of special effects (FOSTER, 2011, p.96). Maybe that's why Diller Scofidio + Renfro continue to devote so much time to ambitious performances.

### **Herzog & De Meuron: screen and texture, volumetry and planarity, theatricality and reality**

The Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre De Meuron graduated in the Zurich Polytechnic Institute and started to act professionally in the 1980s. Uninterested in architecture that was then focused on the signs of postmodernity, they intended to find in art, mainly in the stream of minimalism, the inspiration to develop their projects. The two architects were involved with Joseph Beuys and the artists of the minimalist movement from which an important part of their conceptual behaviour comes from.

Minimalism seeks in the physical qualities of the work (scale, material, spatiality) the aesthetic impact, instead of investing in metaphors or rational reading. With this aim, artists started from a "formal reductivism", so that the object could not be read as a composition, but as a totality (or series). Its greatest interest lies in the tension between the literalness of the geometric form and the phenomenal effects (FOSTER, 2011, p.XI-XII). Herzog & De Meuron proposed an architecture



with "the ability to affect people first physically and emotionally before they are intellectually aware of what is going on." To do so, they sought to explore the material "before the image". Hence its "volumetry" is almost always a single prism, a gesture that can be called "megatectonic": "Dialogically oscillating between factual tectonics and megatectonics, between material reality and the great structural gesture, (...) They chase the paradoxical effect produced by the strict forms and the articulated materials" (WANG, 2000, p.12, my translation). Their first outstanding project, the warehouse of the Ricola industrial complex in Laufen (1986), is a clear manifesto of this method of work:

"Whatever material we use to make a building, what we are looking for is, above all, a specific encounter between construction and material. The material is there to define the building, but the building, in equal measure, is there to show of what it is made of, to make the material "visible". Seen in this way, there is absolutely no difference between the stone walls of our house in Tavola and the text facades of the Blois Arts Center. In both cases, we force the material we use to an extreme, to show that it is stripped of any function other than "being" (In ZAERA-POLO, 2016, p.104, emphasis added).

The meaning of tectonics "not only indicates a structural and material probity but also a poetics of construction, as this may be practiced in architecture and the related arts" (FRAMPTON, 1996, p.520). Generally, in the works of Herzog & De Meuron, "the materials enable the appearance of form and help define the structure", that is, the duo stands before material as the artist, asking it to suggest the form. Of course, it's not a random choice of material, but suggested by the architectural problem. The two architects emphasize that the material, whether *in natura* or industrialized, possesses, besides an external, visible form, an internal structure, invisible, but determinant. From the beginning of their careers, they have been interested in the relationships that can be established between these invisible structures and the image, as well as between them and social behavior or human psychology. A method they describe as "a search for codes that adapt both natural and cultural information" (in ZAERA-POLO, 2016, p.83). This concern resulted in the manifesto-text "The Hidden Geometry of Nature" (1989).

Pallasmaa highlights the impact of modern, industrial materials for the loss of tactility and the human scale of construction. "(...) architectural structures become repulsively flat, sharp-edged, imaterial and unreal." This would have gradually bring the architecture closer to scenography, no longer in the sense of artifice - as in the colossal orders or the *trompe l'oeil* - but in its own nature, transformed into a pure visual image, hiding its craftsmanship and its structural reality (PALLASMAA , 2005, p.31). Without denying this new reality, Herzog & De Meuron work to re-focus the tectonics, exploring new and old materials in the face of changes in human perception. By decalcing images on the glass, an impression of time or feeling is restored on the immutability of the industrial materials surfaces. They invent materials recombining techniques and displacing uses and, in this way, are interested in issues implicit in theatricality: two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality, truth and illusion.

### ***Tristan und Isolde and Attila***

"(...) the invention of a new material addressed a specific architecture. It wouldn't be easy, therefore, to extrapolate the invention elsewhere". This sentence by

Rafael Moneo (2004, p.366) on the work of the architects is valid for the scenography made in 2006 for *Tristan und Isolde* (Fig. 5), by the Berlin Opera, directed by Stefan Bachmann. After months of attempts, it finally came to the mechanism of a negative pressure chamber that allowed the moulding of a rubber membrane on different backgrounds, realizing the conception of Herzog & De Meuron:

Figure 5: *Tristan und Isolde*. Dir. Stefan Bachmann. 2006

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Font: Herzog & De Meuron ( [www.herzogdemeuron.com](http://www.herzogdemeuron.com) )

"The stage sets and the staging would not represent the things themselves but rather their appearances. (...) that were constantly changing, breathing, imperceptibly overlapping, fading in and fading out. With the addition of precision lighting, these appearances acquired an almost hallucinatory effect".<sup>i</sup>

The technique has a strong effect, as it realizes the material abstraction in which the music is conceived. The continuity in which the images are mounted and unmounted is the visible parallel of the invisible structure of the notes, which run toward a harmonic "attractor" and, when they converge, they materialize into a full realization. At the same time, it reminds us of architects' interest in the microscopic invisibility of materials and the substitution of determinism for probabilistic predictability, which describes the essential nature of particles, between energy and matter (SCHENBERG, 2010, p. 148). The device makes us intuit the material without guiding it, but the light-texture sensation comes first, before the image-appearance that informs the scenery. ("The appearance of the hull of a ship, stairs, a cave or part of a body, a concrete form and identity, and the appearance of emptiness, of nothing, of a zero space"). Material intuition "informs" something, and then misinforms. The solid condition disappears, although this achievement is due to the material texture or, rather, due to our desire for the material that insinuates, but does not materialize. Rafael Moneo describes this same sensation when analyzing the office building also made for Ricola in 1999, where the effect is achieved by the use of glass:

"(...) the importance of the reflective property of glass, thanks to which we forget about the building's solid condition. (...) The volume virtually dissolves with the superposition of images in an infinite play of reflections, rendering impossible any reading that might understand the building as a static reality. The image multiplies and dissolves, and the architects seem to be interested not so much in the values accompanying a world of presumably impenetrable solids, as in the values that are present in the virtual and atmospheric spaces to which the systems of voids have accustomed us." (MONEO, 2004, p.402)

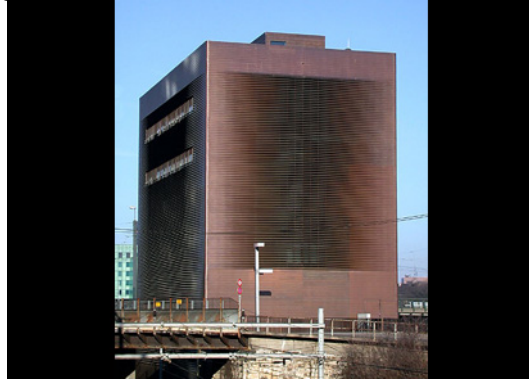
The membrane created for *Tristan und Isolde*, a bit like the works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, sharpens our curiosity about the image by hiding it, and revives

the perception of matter when it reveals its qualities of volume, texture and shadow still perceptible under the skin. The membrane, when applied to architecture, proposes the resumption of something lost in the passage from the traditional façade to the contemporary screen (SCOFFIER, 2009). It retakes the sense of interiority and exteriority that modernism intended to snatch in a universal isotropic space, revealing, and at the same time hiding, the interior, in a game of seduction that summons our imagination.

In several of the duo's works, the envelope, or skin, is responsible for the lasting impression. Sometimes it is treated as a screen, sometimes as a material surface of which light highlights the thickness, and often tensioned between these two perceptions, as in the design for the *Signal Box*, the tower of the railway line in Basel (1989) (Fig.6). It is a box whose skin is formed by horizontal blades of copper that, rotated at some points, let the light through them, "making the whole thing vibrate like a work of Op Art. (...) the building looks like a kind of 'coffer from the other world' (...) at the same time diaphanous and intensely material" (WISNIK, 2012, p.186, my translation).

The duo comes, in the 1990s, to techniques that put in question the planarity and the deepness, screen printing images on glass, as well as printing relief images on concrete blocks. These techniques, invented by the two architects during their research on screen and texture, textile and three-dimensional qualities, transparency and reflection, possibly originated from their observation of ornamental patterns. Pierre Herzog note his perception about the Alhambra Palace: "the illusion of a plane instead of space, or of a trellis in front of the infinite space. Surface-stone (mundane, heavy) becomes clothing (textile, immaterial)" (apud MELO, 2002, p.55). In *Tristan und Isolde*, the membrane is sometimes illuminated from behind, becoming transparent screen and revealing the profile of the materials, sometimes illuminated by the front when stressed on the materials, revealing its texture. This ambiguity between texture and screen, materiality and image is, as the duo seems to tell us, what matters most in our relationship with the contemporary world.

Figure 6: *Signal Box*. Herzog & De Meuron, 1989.



Font: wikimedia commons (Roland Zumbühl)

For *Attila's* scenography, at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, led by Pierre Audi in 2010, the architects designed two devices that work in contrast. In the prologue, the mountains are represented by concrete rubbles, with smaller pieces below and large slabs above (Fig. 7). In other acts, the forest around Rome is a "cloth" of leaves that covers the whole scene, from floor to ceiling, in a dense texture with holes for the characters' apparitions (Fig. 8). Here, the duo abolishes "form" so that the focus falls on the qualities of materials that, in contrast, follow the main theme of destruction and rebirth. The textile quality emanating from the texture of the material is intended to accompany the texture of the music and, as they say, reinforce its perception. By giving up decisive forms, the duo submit the visual space to the sound space.

Figure 7: *Attila's prologue*, dir. Pierre Audi, 2010.

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Font: Herzog & De Meuron ([www.herzogdemeuron.com](http://www.herzogdemeuron.com))

If the polystyrene mountain transmits weight and indicates that the image and the matter are increasingly closer, they do it in the opposite direction of the gabion walls of Dominus Winery, where the spaces between the "real" stones make them "float", betraying the ontological meaning of the material. The curtain of leaves, by turn, leads us to a direct parallel with the Vertical Garden of the Caja de Madrid (2008) (Fig. 9), where it provokes the same contrast and, less directly, with the Ricola pavilion (1993) and its polycarbonate façade applied with images of a leaf (Fig. 10). Repeated hundreds of times, the leaf becomes a sign like those of Pop Art, going from image to texture.

Figura 8: *Attila's* scenography, dir. Pierre Audi, 2010.

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Font: Herzog & De Meuron ([www.herzogdemeuron.com](http://www.herzogdemeuron.com))

Figure 9: *Caja de Madrid*, Herzog & De Meuron, 2008.



Font: wikimedia commons (Javier Martín)

Figure 10: *Ricola pavilion*, Herzog & De Meuron, 1993.

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Font: Herzog & De Meuron ([www.herzogdemeuron.com](http://www.herzogdemeuron.com) - cropped)

Scoffier takes up the "tattoo" condemned by Adolf Loos in "Ornament and Crime" to analyse the screen-façade so used in contemporary architecture. Counter to the "athletic and functional body" to which the modernists compared their architecture, the contemporary architectural object is "a glorious unity enclosed in its mystery and governed by the Law of Desire." The silk-screened glass created by Herzog & De Meuron does not let itself to be imprisoned. It is almost impossible to comprehend the matter of their mutant surfaces. The material deceives the eyes and plays with our perception, which travels between surface and depth, between the leaf design and the transparency of the glass. "They apply its idioms cannily: often they use serial units in such a way that material

and image are all but conflated, sometimes with materials deployed as images and sometimes the reverse.” (FOSTER, 2011, p.123)

For Herzog & De Meuron, “[glass] is as solid and stable as stone or concrete. In opposite, by printing on concrete, it suddenly becomes porous or shiny like glass”. (*apud* FOSTER, 2011, p.263 [32]). The duo show here a theatrical posture in front of the materials, in a kind of baroque way. No longer the rational mechanism of illusion that confronts the two-dimensional surface installing an illusion of three-dimensionality, but a phenomenal mechanism by which a tactile material surface is confronted with an image that destroys its reality. An architectural experience that perfectly symbolizes the contemporary precedence of gaze and the creation of a purely visual world.

Returning to Pallasmaa, since one of the goals of architecture is domesticate endless time to be tolerated by humanity or, in other words, to superimpose the work of human genius to time, we can understand that in the strategy of postmodern art, integrating the flow of time seems more effective than trying to hold it up. David Harvey, analysing the postmodern condition, reminds us that while social theories focus on temporal changes, aesthetic theories usually investigate the communication of values in a frozen spatial order. Harvey wonders how aesthetic practices, which are spatializations, can communicate flow and change when these become essential values. He admits the protagonism of music and cinema in postmodernity and emphasizes that the dilemma is especially serious for Architecture. Therefore, it does not seem strange that the architects approach to the performance - especially to the dance (choreography) and to the music (opera) - that is rooted in the flow of time, to try, once again, to dominate it. After all, as Harvey tells us, quoting Elliot, “Only through time, time is conquered”.

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<sup>i</sup> Memorial text found in the official site [www.herzogdemeuron.com](http://www.herzogdemeuron.com)