

Architecture in Switzerland: the new generation

Almost everywhere we are witnessing a temporary triumph of design, from car bodies and seasonal collections to Nasdaq performance diagrams. In this discussion, all topics seem to be viable as architectural propositions, to the detriment of the value of things and their metaphors. But this is like talking about the static problems of the floor of a building without knowing which storey you're talking about. This kind of discussion is still foreign to Switzerland; the discipline remains clear in its underlying structures. Any shifting of its foundations is minimal and does not undermine the bases for discussion. The architecture schools - the ETH in Zurich, the EPFL in Lausanne, Geneva University and the new Architectural Academy at Mendrisio - are a formative part of the debate, as are private organizations such as the Architecture Forum in Zurich, the Architecture Museum in Basel and Quart Publishers in Lucerne. This situation, and the length of its terms, has engendered a coherency between civil society and architectural thought, thereby enabling deeper discussion to thrive at different levels. Witness the daily newspapers, which give extensive coverage to architectural issues, from complex urban design and the latest building technologies. If newspapers can afford to publish such detailed information, the common ground of understanding and interest between the general public and architects is widely shared. Thus in Switzerland the architect's profession - including that of younger architects - continues to respond to clear social considerations and expectations. Young architects are called upon to resolve certain issues. This perception allows a far-flung awareness of architectural design and calls for a pronounced sense of realism. This, however, is never commonplace, because architects, clients, politicians and also the media speak the same language. Take Zurich, a city that in recent years, under Ursula Koch and Franz Eberhard's directorship of the Urban Planning Council, has completely rethought its territory. Since the practice of architecture is shared and collective (the architect's craft is not protected; there are no state examinations), firms are often composed of two initial partners - so that here, too, the design process is always shared and flexible. Thus, while maintaining a strong sense of widespread communal quality, the younger Swiss architectural scene is not monolithic, as it might have seemed in the past, but rather enlivened by a variety of driving forces. Things are changing shape, and architectural thinking is opening toward a search for form and content suited to the dynamic mood of contemporary society. Therefore certain designs (recently shown at the *Transa/pinarchitettura* exhibition at the CCS in Milan), from the chameleonic contextualism of Grego & Smolenicky to the cultural sensitivity of Muller & Truniger and right up to the ironic and minimalist mannerism of Graber & Pulver represent examples of architects caught in the midst of personal but mutually acceptable endeavours. For they are engaged in answering the questions of *why, what, how, where, when and for whom* architecture should be produced, with a concrete application to projects as descriptions, definitions and positions relative to those questions - and starting from them.

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