

# The Surface of Capital

*Space, Capital and Power at Thurgauerstrasse*



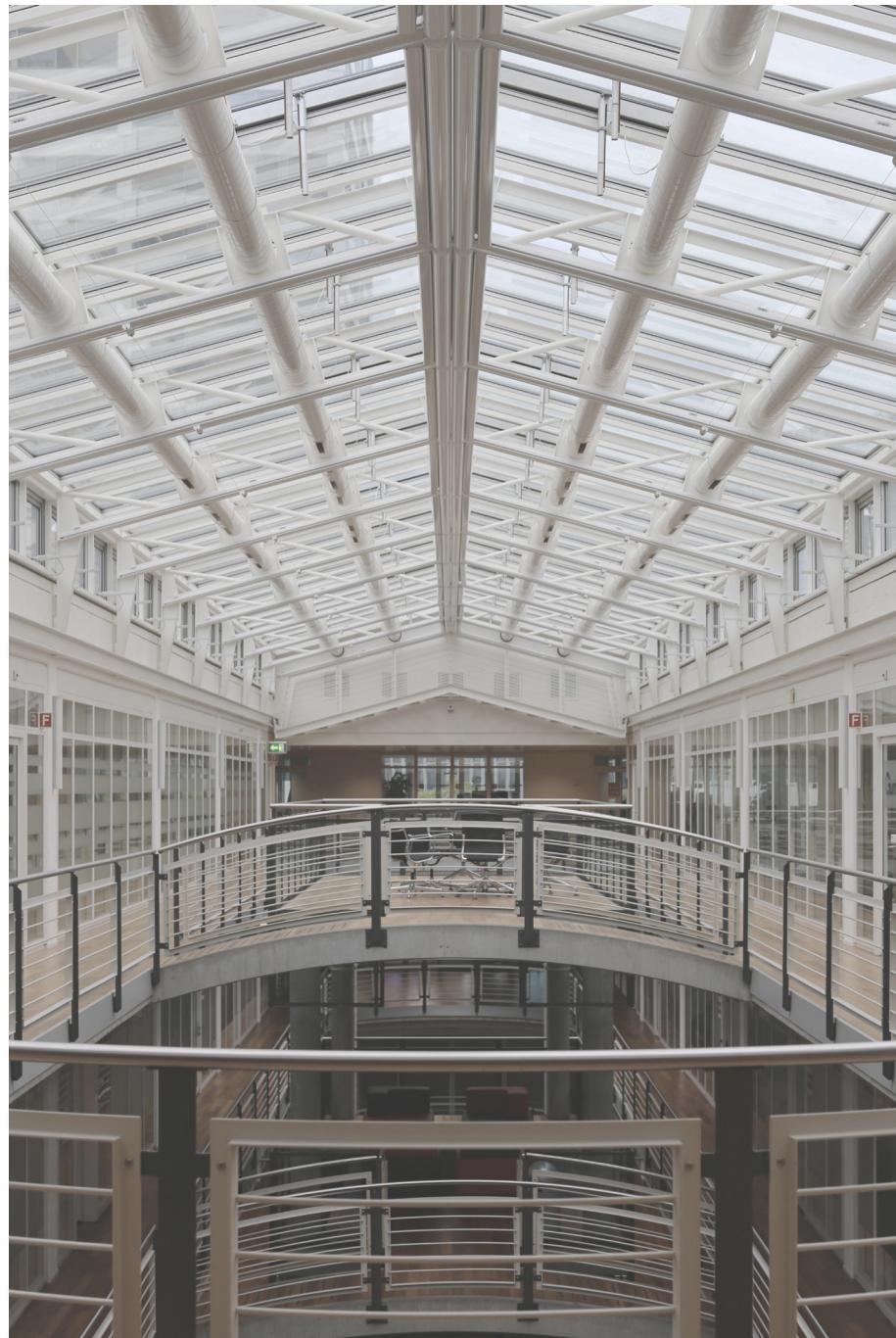
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## PALACES OF CAPITAL

The buildings at Thurgauerstrasse are Palaces of Capital. The developement of the area in the late capitalism of the seventies and eighties coincided with the abandonment of the gold standard and the strong deregulations undertaken by many governments which gave way to the process of globalisation. Until that time, the land near Thurgauerstrasse was mostly used for agricultural purposes. However, its strategic position between the city and the airport soon drew the attention of constructors and enterprises, who imagined to establish there a glamourous and highly innovative business center named with the futuristic “New Space”, in the manner of “City-Nord” in Hamburg or “La Défense” in Paris. The big amount of available land made it possible to imagine a kind of “New Beginning”, in which each enterprise had the opportunity for building as big as they wanted and the chance for self expression, to represent the values of their enterprises through their new headquarters.

As such, the luxurious office buildings arranged along the new “promenade” of Thurgauerstrasse express the optimism and the strong belief in the future which characterizes the beginnings of globalisation, through their façades, interiors and surfaces. Nevertheless, the economic crisis in the nineties suddenly stopped the developement of Thurgauerstrasse and slowed down the completion of several buildings. Today, almost all of them experience high vacancy rates, with an average vacancy of 25,1%. Therefore these palatial edifices tell the story of the late capitalistic system and its strong belief in accumulation, profit and economical growth, as well the story of its momentary decay.



The most important turn in history for real estate investments was on August 15, 1971. On that day, the foundation was laid for the current economic and monetary system. US President Richard Nixon abolished the gold standard of the dollar on that day. Until that day, anyone could exchange 35 dollars for a troy ounce.<sup>5</sup>

suddenly had free hand in their monetary policy. The time of fixed rules was over and the way open for large financing, amongst others also of capital-intensive real estate investments.

The first commercial properties were developed in the 1980ies, shortly after the arrival of the Swiss National Television SRF in the 1970ies which draw attention to this part of the city.

«Bald gibt es die neuen Geschäftsräume an bester Lage im Norden der Stadt Zürich:

New Space. Für innovative Unternehmer und deren Mitarbeiter, die eine moderne, anregende Atmosphäre in der Nachbarschaft von weltbekannten Firmen suchen»,

#### Airgate Zürich – die Lage.

Sie landen in Kloten und sind 5 Minuten später schon in der Firma. Sie haben eine Besprechung down-town und sind in spätestens 12 Minuten mitten in der City. Sie fahren im Lift zu Ihrem Wagen und 4 Minuten später auf der N1. Direkt nach St. Gallen, Bern, Basel oder Chur.

Airgate Zürich. Thurgauerstrasse. Im Zentrum der grössten schweizerischen Wirtschaftsregion.

Gebaut wird das Luxusbürozentrum mit dem futuristischen Namen im Oberhauser Ried.

teuerste Wiese Europas.

Thurgauerstrasse, schimmern die Fassaden einer ganzen Zeile von grosskalibrigen Büropalästen, die einen unwillkürlich an Amerika denken lassen. «Spross baut hier das Air Center»

#### Airgate Zürich – das Gebäude.

Das wird ein Bürogebäude, das mehr ist als nur ein Bürosilo. Airgate – das Bürogebäude, von dem Sie bekommen können, soviel Sie brauchen, und mit dem Sie fast alles machen können:

- 13 400 m<sup>2</sup> vollklimatisierte Bürofläche mit flexiblem Grundriss
- 10 000 m<sup>2</sup> Verkaufs-/Ausstellungsfläche
- 6 300 m<sup>2</sup> Lagerfläche
- 600 Parkplätze
- Miete ab Fr. 120.–/m<sup>2</sup>

Airgate Zürich ist das vielseitigste Bürogebäude, über das Sie jetzt noch ganz nach Ihren Wünschen verfügen können.

Noch vor dreissig Jahren war diese Zone zwischen Oerlikon und Kloten tiefstes Riet- und Ackerland. Kostete dazumal der Quadratmeter noch fünf Franken, wird er heute mit bis zu sechstausend gehandelt.

It used to be the first high-rise building in this perimeter.

In the boom of the late 1980s this quest for symbolic capital reached new heights, transforming our cities in a quest for domination, both symbolic and literal (Barna 1992).

elements to a logic of majesty and authority. This is in the form of cathedrals and palaces through which the Church or the State addresses and imposes silence on the multitude.

Collectively these meanings lead to a city where every building wants to be different, to claim identity, authenticity and power.

The American example provided a pattern for planning and architecture that transpired to be perfectly suited to *laissez-faire* capitalism, and to easy dissemination to other distant environments primed for its reception. This 'American space', and

Further developments of office and hotel properties followed along Thurgauerstrasse until the market crash in the 1990ies when further expansions were suddenly stopped.

Zurich and Opfikon differ greatly in the supply ratios of office space: While the ratio in Zurich is 4.6%, 43.2% of office space is offered in Opfikon. For comparison: the Swiss average is 7.0%.

The vacancy rate for office space on Thurgauerstrasse is currently at 25.1% overall, and for retail space as high as 11.0%. Since the supply of office space is very large, it is not surprising that the vacancy rate is very high as well. The vacancy rate for retail space is surprising in that the supply rate is not high.

## Ab sofort zu reservieren.

**Folgende Flächeneinheiten stehen zur Vermietung frei. Fahren Sie mit dem Cursor über den Häuserkomplex, um per Klick die Flächenangebote zu betrachten.**

A look at the existing office hot spots of the city of Zurich shows that Thurgauerstrasse, at CHF 275.- CHF/m<sup>2</sup> p.a., is one of the least expensive locations.

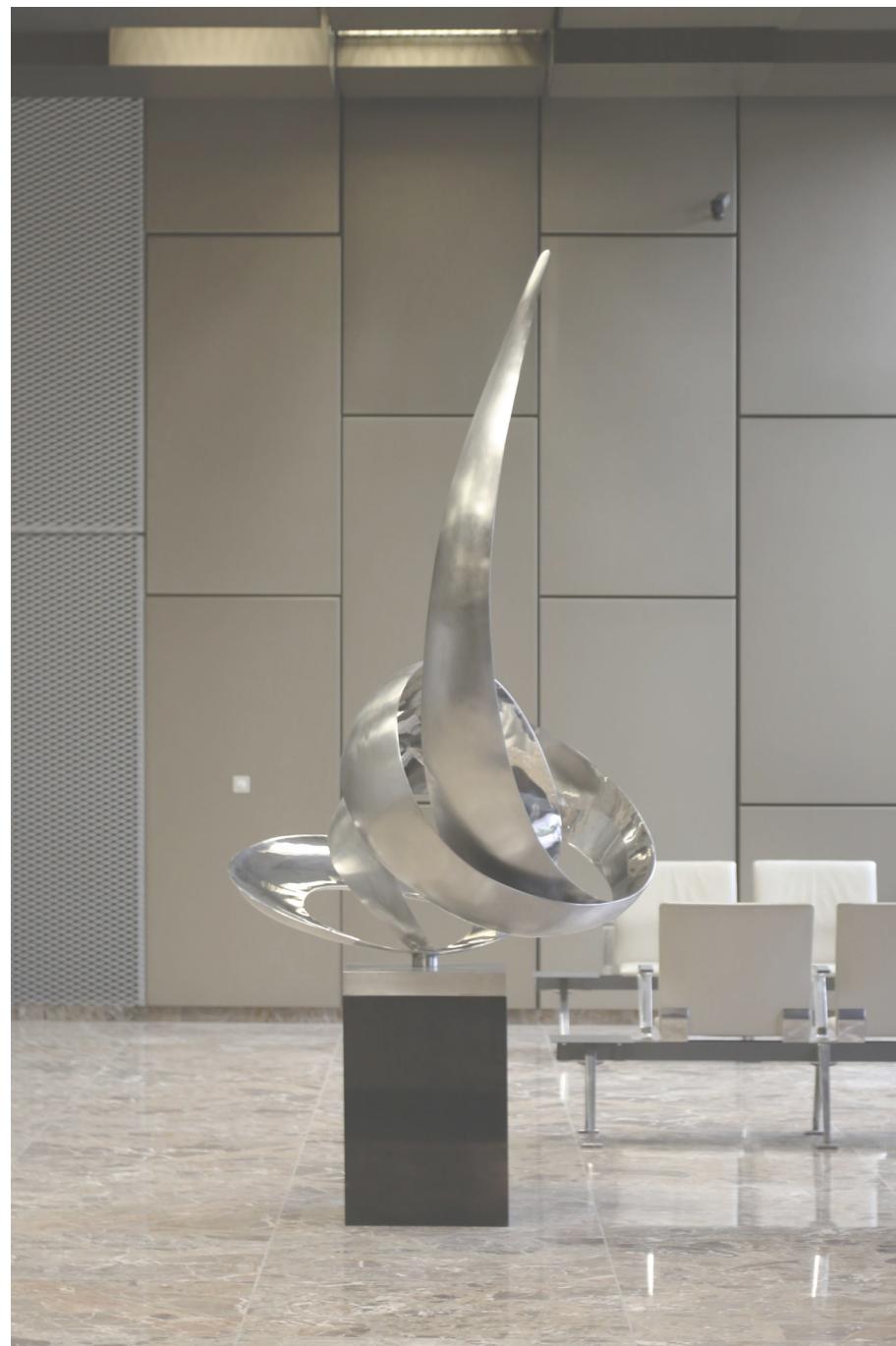
The trend towards flexibility is questioning the large headquarters as we know it today. Instead, the focus is on a network of different rooms in different locations.

## CAPITAL AND POWER

In the same way that Georges Bataille identifies cathedrals and palaces as signifiers of a divine order imposed by a ruling elite to the silent masses, the palatial edifices along Thurgauerstrasse signify the rule of profit, as well as its momentary decay. Their façades, their lobbies and office table rows provide the pertinent scenery for the capitalistic machinery of productivity and economical growth to take place. It is a subtle form of power which acts on the players without them being completely conscious. As Foucault argues “power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.” It can be assumed that the spatial configurations at Thurgauerstrasse impose in a subtle and unnoticeable way a very specific behaviour on the occupants, that have to be able to perform it in order to take part in the play.

Some of the buildings already suggest power in a very literal way through its imposing size, which is what Ursprung denominates as “das Kapitalistische Erhabene”, the Capitalistic Sublime.

In some cases through the typology of the office tower and in some others through rather literal postmodern palatial facade compositions, both an export of American office buildings the Thurgauerstrasse buildings adopt expressions of dominance. Not only do these buildings represent the dominance of globalization, but they are as well a globalized product. Special attention must be given to the entrance situations, since they are the moments where the publicness enters the buildings, and at the same time the places of the highest representation and power performance.







*territories are ideological realms of constructed narratives and imagery within which the individual subject is given illusory impressions of freedom.*

The built environment reflects the identities, differences and struggles of gender, class, race, culture and age. It shows the interests of people in empowerment and freedom, the interests of the state in social order, and the private corporate interest in stimulating consumption.

In fact, only society's ideal being (that which authoritatively orders and prohibits) is expressed in actual architectural constructions.

The more that the structures and representations of power can be embedded in the framework of everyday life, the less questionable they become and the more effectively they can work.

As Foucault (1980:86) argues: 'power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.'

The most successful ideological effects are those that have no words, and ask no more than complicitous silence.

Bourdieu (1977:188)

Yet the power of metaphor is linked to its subtlety; it is most powerful when least literal (Ball 1992). Metaphor has the capacity to seduce and legitimize simultaneously while masking these very practices.

This is in  
the form of cathedrals and palaces through which the  
Church or the State addresses and imposes silence on  
the multitude.

The building image takes on renewed economic importance as a primary generator of symbolic capital. As capital has become increasingly concerned with the production of signs and images rather than use value (Baudrillard 1981; Ewen 1988)

In the boom of the late 1980s this quest for symbolic capital reached new heights, transforming our cities in a quest for domination, both symbolic and literal (Barna 1992).

Collectively these meanings lead to a city where every building wants to be different, to claim identity, authenticity and power.

Thus great  
monuments rise up like dams, opposing all disturbed  
elements to a logic of majesty and authority.

Well, I also was fascinated by all these little people walking by these great big sinister, almost threatening shapes [...] these black, repetitive, rectangular shapes – sort of blind shapes, because you can't see in, with people going by.»<sup>51</sup>

### these environments

they seem to constitute a normative condition; in other words, they suggest that they are normal, and public, and so they represent the notion of freedom of individuals (rather than captive consumers) through the paradoxical advocacy of the freedom of consumption and its promise of the fulfilment of self-realisation.

antidote to the neoliberalism's (or authoritarian regimes') coercive and anaesthetising condition of interior, its systemisation of the urbanised environment and its infrastructures (which is everywhere) to shape behaviour towards predictable patterns, performances, preferences and outcomes and its apparent adaptiveness to

Ein Emblem des Monopolkapitalismus ist der 1913 fertiggestellte Hauptsitz der J.P. Morgan & Company Bank in New York, entworfen von den Architekten Trowbridge & Livingston. Es handelt sich um einen fünf-eckigen, neoklassizistischen Bau, verkleidet mit rosa Granit. Wegen des

ihren Rhythmus auf. Die Fensterreihe verkörpert gleichsam die Autorität der Finanzindustrie, die Segmentierung von Raum und Zeit, die Repetition und Akkumulation als Prinzipien der Industrialisierung und des modernen Kapitalismus. Die Fenster strukturieren die

Thurgauerstrasse, schimmern die Fassaden einer ganzen Zeile von grosskalibrigen Büropalästen, die einen unwillkürlich an Amerika denken lassen. «Spross baut hier das Air Center»

## RULES AND BEHAVIOUR

The office buildings at Thurgauerstrasse prescribe a very specific set of rules. Particular attention should be drawn to the entrance situations, the foyer and the atrium, since they are the spaces where the visitor receives the building's first impression and therefore they become the major settings for representation as well as for behaviour control, sometimes even literally through the installation of video cameras.

Although these interiors are commonly perceived as spaces for the public, which embody the ideal of individual freedom, there are certain actions that are implicitly not allowed to happen inside of them and others that are encouraged. In the first place, the apparent individual freedom is subjected to the imperative of productivity and consume, without which the individual is incapable of fitting into the setting. Therefore, people that show signs of poverty or do not respect the etiquette are systematically not allowed to go inside. Moreover, they are highly conditioned and purified spaces in which the visitor's behaviour is already predefined. As an example, people are not expected to speak loudly or to run. Any kind of political or religious manifestations are strictly forbidden and *out of place*. One could even go as far as to state that any kind of criticism or negativity which could interfere with the higher aims of agreement and business making are discouraged. Instead, a logic of productivity, economical growth and accumulation, a complete subjugation to the power of capital, is encouraged through the various settings. The visitor behaves rather carefully, with correctness and according to a social code.

However, these rules or social codes are not written anywhere explicitly. And yet, through a very specific choice of materials and surfaces and through the typological analogy they make to other spaces, the visitor recognises a certain set of rules and behaves accordingly in a very specific way, that is expected from him.



built (Pimlott, 2007). The American example provided a pattern for planning and architecture that transpired to be perfectly suited to *laissez-faire* capitalism, and to easy dissemination to other distant environments primed for its reception. This 'American space', and

them. They propose conditions in which prescribed behaviour is required of the visitor; and yet they project, despite this, the notion of individual freedom. As these environments proliferate worldwide,

of individual freedom. As these environments proliferate worldwide, they seem to constitute a normative condition; in other words, they suggest that they are normal, and public, and so they represent the notion of freedom of individuals (rather than captive consumers) through the paradoxical advocacy of the freedom of consumption and its promise of the fulfilment of self-realisation. Of course, this

with them. It is this interiority that is valuable and is offered as an antidote to the neoliberalism's (or authoritarian regimes') coercive and anaesthetising condition of interior, its systemisation of the urbanised environment and its infrastructures (which is everywhere) to shape behaviour towards predictable patterns, performances, preferences and outcomes and its apparent adaptiveness to individual desires through omnipresent 'smart' technology.

ihren Rhythmus auf. Die Fensterreihe verkörpert gleichsam die Autorität der Finanzindustrie, die Segmentierung von Raum und Zeit, die Repetition und Akkumulation als Prinzipien der Industrialisierung und des modernen Kapitalismus. Die Fenster strukturieren die Fotografie wie Perforationslöcher einen Film und unterstreichen damit den Eindruck der Wiederholung; ja, sie erinnern an die industrielle Struktur nicht nur der Fliessbandarbeit, sondern auch der Arbeit der Angestellten in ihren Büros und Verwaltungen. Die Nischen lassen directed towards realising one type of behaviour. In the model's deployment in a shopping mall, its object is consumption; in an institution it is the achievement of a well-behaved temporary community; in a corporate office building, it is employee efficiency. All solutions are oriented towards the psychology of the group, who are made to feel as though they are a public, together in public.



## TECHNOLOGY

The buildings at Thurgauerstrasse are an expression of a technology driven society, which believes in it almost religiously as the motor of social improvement, economical growth and, nowadays, the answer to climate change. The innovative and forward-looking enterprises that would settle at Thurgauerstrasse, many of them even amongst the most technologically advanced, such as General Motors, demanded to be accordingly represented through avantgarde architecture.

At that time, edifices such as the Airgate Business Center, the first skyscraper built in Zurich, were even typologically innovative within the Swiss context.

However, it is the case for most of the buildings that the materials used in their construction are higly processed materials, such as anodized aluminium, coloured glass or polished terrazzo tiles. Some are more explicit the others, showcasing a technology-driven design, such as the Marti Building by architect Theo Hotz, or implementing high-tech ornamentation, which is the case in the Angst & Pfister building.

Donna Haraway alerts from the dangers of believing in technology as a kind of saviour which will fix the problems of a damaged earth, since it prevents people of taking action in the present time.

Furthermore, (technological sublime)



It is appropriate to recall the excitement of machinery in the moment of capital preceding our own, the exhilaration of futurism, most notably, and of Marinetti's celebration of the machine gun and the motorcar.

einen an die Hypothese denken, die Henri Lefebvre in seinem Buch *Die Revolution der Städte* (1972) verfolgte, dass nämlich die Produktionsform die Wahrnehmung des Alltags bestimmt, dass also der Takt der Maschinen das gesamte Leben durch Strukturen der Repetition und rhythmischer Sequenz beherrscht.<sup>52</sup> Indem die Nischen das Bild

sierung und des modernen Kapitalismus. Die Fenster strukturieren die Fotografie wie Perforationslöcher einen Film und unterstreichen damit den Eindruck der Wiederholung; ja, sie erinnern an die industrielle Struktur nicht nur der Fliessbandarbeit, sondern auch der Arbeit der Angestellten in ihren Büros und Verwaltungen. Die Nischen lassen

**It used to be the first high-rise building in this perimeter.**

It is immediately obvious that the technology of our own moment no longer possesses this same capacity for representation: not the turbine, nor even Sheeler's grain elevators or smokestacks, not the baroque elaboration of pipes and conveyor belts, nor even the streamlined profile of

the railroad train—all vehicles of speed still concentrated at rest—but rather the computer, whose outer shell has no emblematic or visual power, or even the casings of the various media themselves, as with that home appliance called television which articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself.

sculpture. Here we have less to do with kinetic energy than with all kinds of new reproductive processes; and in the weaker productions of

**Dank der geschickten Anordnung der Sonnenpanelen konnte auf eine Klimaanlage verzichtet werden. Im Som-**

tent the work seems somehow to tap the networks of the reproductive process and thereby to afford us some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime, whose power or authenticity is documented by the success of such works in evoking a whole new postmodern space in emergence around us. Architecture therefore remains in this sense the privileged aesthetic language; and the distorting and fragmenting reflections of one enormous glass surface to the other can be taken as paradigmatic of the central role of process and reproduction in postmodernist culture.

sade. Das vorgehängte Brüstungswellblech sowie der Laufsteg und die Sonnenschutzlamellen sind aus farblos eloxiertem Aluminium gefertigt. Interessant ist sicher

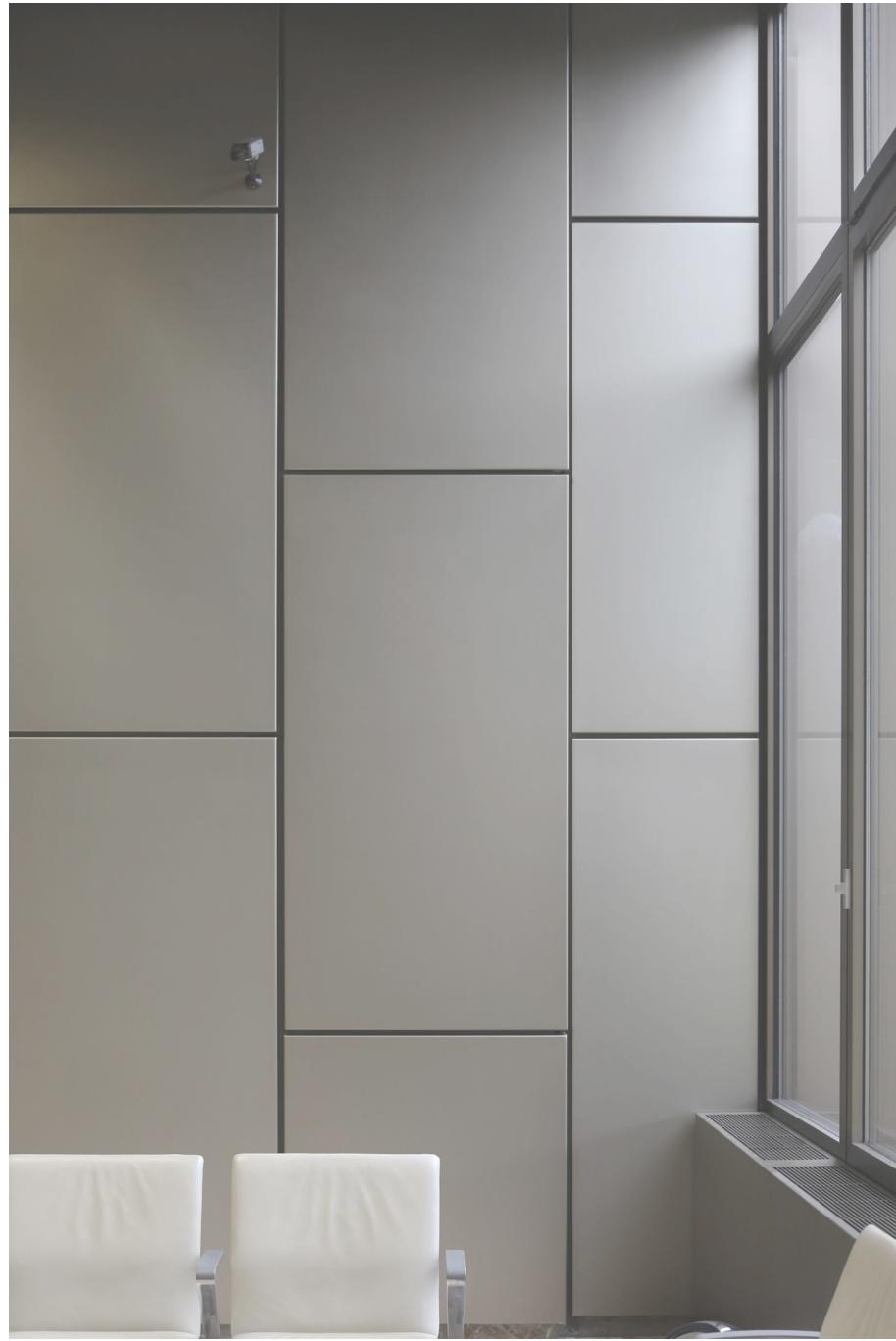
As I have said, however, I want to avoid the implication that technology is in any way the “ultimately determining instance” either of our present-day social life or of our cultural production: such a thesis is, of course, ultimately at one with the post-Marxist notion of a postindustrial society. Rather, I want to suggest that our faulty representations of some

society. Rather, I want to suggest that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely, the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of

faden Umgebung wie eine Prise Pfeffer wirkt. Das Haus besticht durch seine schlichte Grundrissfigur wie auch durch den technischen und futuristischen Ausdruck der Fassade. Im Grundriss sind

It is well known that smoothness is always an attribute of perfection because its opposite reveals a technical and typically human operation of assembling: Christ's robe was seamless, just as the airships of science-fiction are made of unbroken metal. The D.S. 19 has no pretensions about being as smooth as cake-icing, although its

dismiss, namely, a comic faith in technofixes, whether secular or religious: technology will somehow come to the rescue of its naughty but very clever children, or what amounts to the same thing, God will come to the rescue of his disobedient but ever hopeful children. In the face of such touching silliness about technofixes (or techno-apocalypses), sometimes it is hard to remember





## THE LOBBY

The prototypical entrance space to the capitalistic office building is the lobby, or, its grand version, the atrium. Their symbolic importance as the spaces of the highest representational function and in which the spatial grandeur reaches its highest degree is almost self-evident.

This is the case as well in the office buildings at Thurgauerstrasse, in which it becomes noticeable at first sight that there has been a considerable amount of capital and resources invested. The most expensive and valuable materials are to be found here and in many cases the value of the materials decreases as the visitor enters further into the building. Marbles, terrazzo, polished aluminium and luxurious furniture represent the enterprise's ideals of value creation and accumulation. And, what is more, the effort invested in the cleaning and maintenance of these spaces is significantly higher than in any other.

Mark Pimlott argues that the setting up of these interiors is comparable to the way that Romans used to colonise new territory, by delimiting a space and establishing rules and behaviour conditions within the new boundaries. Similarly, the spaces of capitalistic domination establish a representative order and several constraints, which can be implemented everywhere. Their conditions of interior are comparable to the prescribed codes of behaviour of a domestic interior, which respond to an established social code, instead of representing real freedom of action.







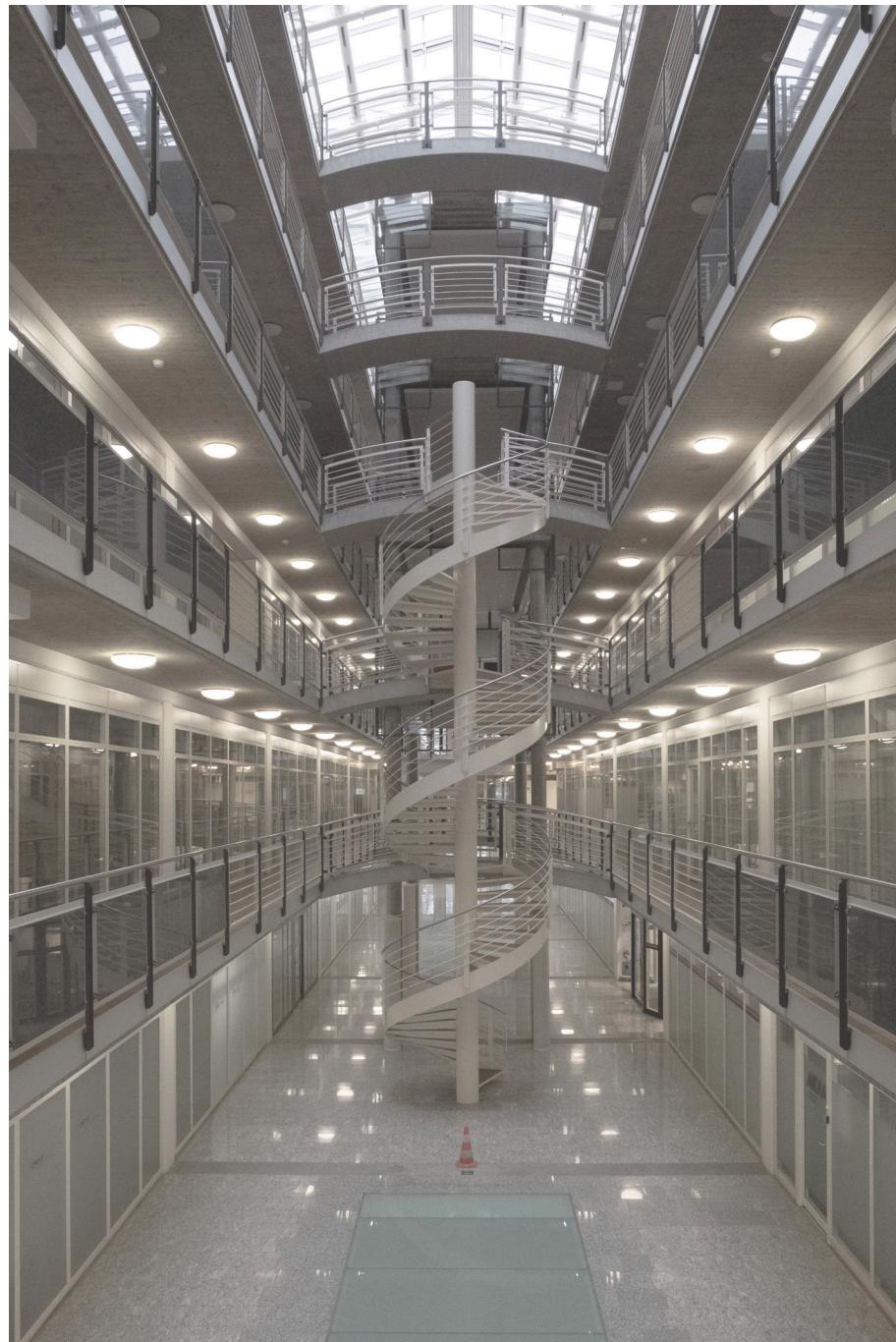
## THE ATRIUM

The other major space of representation in the capitalistic office building is the grand version of the lobby, the atrium.

In his major oeuvre “Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, Fredric Jameson denominates these spaces as the “postmodern hyperspaces”. Its sheer scale and its constant flow of people and impression of busyness has an effect of disorientation and distraction for the visitor. Within these spaces, which try to recreate the density and liveliness of inner city squares, the individual is unable to locate himself, resulting in an “alarming disjunction between the body and its built environment”. Thus, the atrium is a spectacular space which impresses and astonishes through its vast scale and its vertical dimension. Hereby, the visitor becomes unable to grasp its geometry and loses its sense of orientation. In the case of Thurgauerstrasse, the movement and bussyness found in the atriums is in great contrast to the loneliness of the streetscape, resulting in a true inversion of the city, as it is the case in shopping malls.

The corporate atrium, a typology which is to be found as well in the office buildings at Thurgauerstrasse is comparable to the typology of the shopping mall. The atrium creates vast interior space which is seemingly public, a promenade, but which is nevertheless directly controlled by a sort of etiquette or indirectly by its arrangement as a panopticon.







The prevailing materials in the foyer are marble and smooth stone. As in Speer's Berlin it is the sheer scale and volume of space that constitutes the foyer's contribution to the discourse of power.

granite'. Stone is an important signifier of permanence and nature, for authentic values that do not change. Small matter that the stone has been crushed and reconstituted to achieve consistent quality across its very thin sheets.

meaning. The crystal palace motif applied to the interior concourse was therefore ideal for those uses and building programmes which demanded an impression of public space to enhance their operations.

the crystal palace type and its Baudelairean offer of anonymity permitted downtown malls to feel like public spaces and be more firmly integrated into urban networks, to be continuous with urban patterns of use and meaning. The crystal palace motif applied to the interior concourse was therefore ideal for those uses and building programmes which demanded an impression of public space to enhance their operations.

suburban development had recast them; the atrium soon assumed the characteristics of a suburban shopping mall, punctuated by cafés and lunchtime concerts. Although the church adjacent to the atrium provided

The corporate atrium in the urban centre shared characteristics, particularly in its representations, with the suburban *public* spaces of the shopping mall. The atrium offered new and vast interior spaces monitored by offices, constituting an environment that effectively controlled its occupants either directly, through the policing of its private space (precisely in the manner of the shopping mall, and similarly masked as public space),<sup>98</sup> or indirectly, through its inherent capacity for panoptic surveillance.<sup>99</sup> (This latter aspect was not new to office environments:

of a coal yard<sup>100</sup> and cut off from the world around it.<sup>101</sup> This interiority made its atrium an essential and central source of daylight. A working area for clerks lay at the base of the atrium, watched from managerial offices that surrounded it on upper levels. The atrium rendered the

I am more at loss when it comes to conveying the thing itself, the experience of space you undergo when you step [...] into the lobby or atrium. [...] I am tempted to say that such space makes it impossible for us to use the language of volume or volumes any longer, since these are impossible to seize. Hanging streamers indeed suffuse this empty space in such a way

might be supposed to have, while a constant busyness gives the feeling that emptiness is here absolutely packed, that it is an element within which you yourself are immersed, without any of that distance that formerly enabled the perception of perspective or volume. You are in this hyperspace up to your eyes and your body.<sup>142</sup>

The atrium was frequently called upon to represent '*corporate values*': the Ford Foundation's atrium garden was designed to reflect the Foundation's benevolent activities; the John Deere West Office Building's winter garden stood for the company's attitude to its employees' well-being. Roche described it as a '*living room*'.<sup>103</sup> In the case of the Citicorp building, the atrium conceded its role as a strictly corporate environment to the public domain. In each case, the atrium was a demonstration of

this character—or as a powerful entity that could demonstrate its influence through dazzling spectacles, enchanting visitors and workers. The appearances of atria were derived from the department store, the

The use of spectacular, vertiginous spaces and glittering surfaces was associated in particular with John Portman, an architect and developer whose Atlanta-based practice specialised in sphinx-like buildings that occupied entire city blocks and contained full-height central voids. The buildings offered very limited visual connection between their vast interiors and the outside world.<sup>105</sup> In Detroit, the Renaissance Center's

Center betonte Eisenman, wie ich mich erinnern kann, dass es ihm gerade um diese Desorientierung gegangen sei, um die Aufhebung der räumlichen Ordnung und Gewohnheiten, um die Destabilisierung der Besucher. Er nahm damit ein Motiv vorweg, das später in seiner kom-

they rose above it at high speed. Typically within Portman atria, carefully illuminated balconies looked down upon spaces with reflective floors, sculpted fountains, artificial plants, tiny marquee lights and leather sofas. From below, continuous balconies stacked up and receded into impossible distances. Structures and surfaces were filigreed in decorative motifs that appeared to be hypertrophied versions of those of Frank

So I come finally to my principal point here, that this latest mutation in space—postmodern hyperspace—has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to

itself stand as the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.

## SURFACES

The surfaces in the capitalistic space of representation have a common denominator: They are clean, shiny, shimmering and reflecting. Polished stone, anodized aluminium and coloured glass present a smooth and perfectly flat surface. With their immaculate and highly hygienic surface treatments, they prevent the visitor of interacting with them, since every minimal presence of dirt or organic matter will be noticeable at first sight.

Moreover, the employed materials are usually anorganic, such as the anodized aluminium, and thus they do not show any traces of aging.

However, all of the surfaces have a very specific value. In most of the cases, the materials employed to ornament lobbies and atriums are extremely expensive. As an example, a new sheet of bronze mirrored glass for the Airgate building is as costly as 2700 CHF. In order for them not to show any kind of dirt, of usage or aging, there is a considerable effort invested into their maintenance. Joël Stöckli, facility manager at the Airgate Business Center explains that the anodized aluminium sheets that cover the walls and the terrazzo floor have to be cleaned, sanded and polished once in a month, risking otherwise to lose its brightness and reflective quality. Thereby, there exists a kind of backstage which is responsible for maintaining the decor of the lobbies and atriums.

Concerning the smoothness and reflectiveness of surfaces, Byung-Chul Han highlights that they do not allow for any kind of injury, rupture or seam to be visible. Like this, they eliminate all kinds of negativities and invite the user to establish a haptic experience with them, which eliminates the contemplative distance needed for a critical attitude. He then quotes Roland Barthes, who states in his "Mythologies" that the "smoothness is always an attribute of perfection, because its opposite reveals a technical and typically human operation of assembling".

Similarly, Fredric Jameson argues that the reflectiveness of the immense glass surfaces in postmodern architecture, may be mimicking the processes of reproduction of technological devices such as the television or the computer.



The smooth is the signature of the present time. It connects the sculptures of Jeff Koons, iPhones and Brazilian waxing. Why do we today find what is smooth beautiful? Beyond its aesthetic effect, it reflects a general social imperative. It embodies today's *society of positivity*. What is smooth does not *injure*. Nor does it offer any resistance. It is looking for *Like*. The smooth object deletes its *Against*. Any form of negativity is removed.

The prevailing materials in the foyer are marble and smooth stone. As in Speer's Berlin it is the sheer scale and volume of space that constitutes the foyer's contribution to the discourse of power.

adaptability and absence of resistance are essential characteristics of the aesthetics of the smooth.

even positivities, which are exchanged. 'Sharing' and 'Like' represent communicative means for smoothening. Negativities are eliminated because they represent obstacles to accelerated communication.

tivity. In Jeff Koons's work, by contrast, there exists no disaster, no injury, no ruptures, also no seams. Everything flows in soft and smooth transitions. Everything appears rounded, polished, smoothed out. Jeff Koons's art is dedicated to smooth surfaces and their immediate effect. It

'granite'. Stone is an important signifier of permanence and nature, for authentic values that do not change. Small matter that the stone has been crushed and reconstituted to achieve consistent quality across its very thin sheets.

mehr klar voneinander trennen. Es scheint, als wäre die harte, glatte Oberfläche des Granits, dessen Textur durch das helle Morgenlicht hervorgehoben wird, in der fein gekörnten Oberfläche des quecksilberbeschichteten Platinabzugs enthalten, der ja ebenfalls durch den

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Haptic compulsion and the desire to suck can only arise in an art of the smooth that is devoid of meaning.

they rose above it at high speed. Typically within Portman atria, carefully illuminated balconies looked down upon spaces with reflective floors, sculpted fountains, artificial plants, tiny marquee lights and leather

che des Lebens durchdrungen haben wird. Was schon Jameson für die Postmoderne diagnostizierte, nämlich die Veränderung des Raums hin zu einer «tiefenlosen» Oberfläche, die eine (kritische) Distanz unmöglich mache, gilt für Hardt und Negri auch im «Empire»: Es gibt für die Ewigkeit festschreibt».<sup>145</sup> Sie sprechen von einer «geglätteten Welt»<sup>146</sup> sowie davon, dass das Empire den Raum in seiner Totalität vollständig umfasse und keine territorialen Grenzziehungen kenne.

It is well known that smoothness is always an attribute of perfection because its opposite reveals a technical and typically human operation of assembling: Christ's robe was seamless, just as the airships of science-fiction are made of unbroken metal. The *D.S. 19* has no pretensions about being as smooth as cake-icing, although its

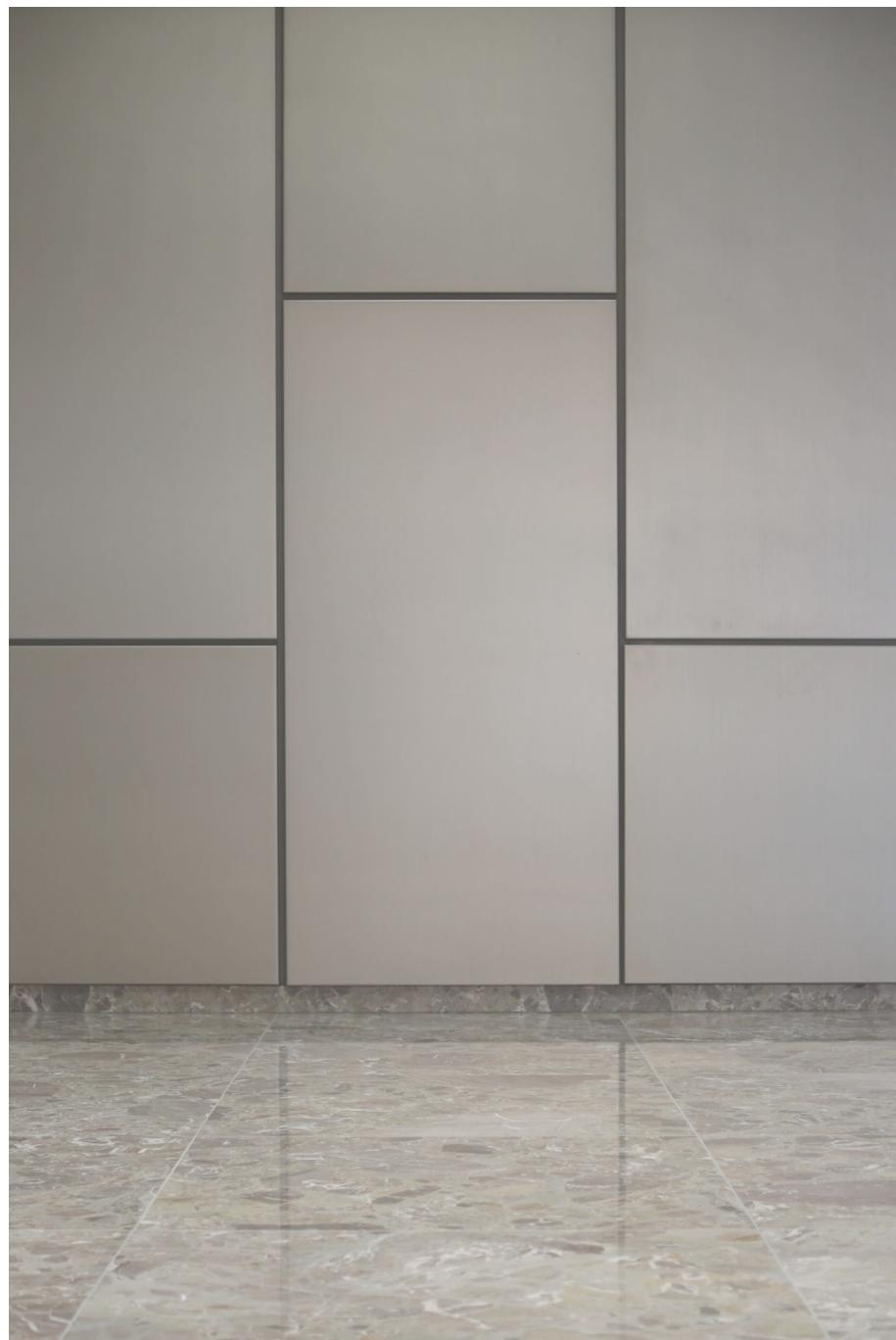
metal surround. There are in the *D.S.* the beginnings of a new phenomenology of assembling, as if one progressed from a world where elements are welded to a world where they are juxtaposed and hold together by sole virtue of their wondrous shape, which of course is meant to prepare one for the idea of a more benign Nature.

As for the material itself, it is certain that it promotes a taste for lightness in its magical sense. . . . Here, the glass surfaces are not windows, openings pierced in a dark shell; they are vast walls of air and space, with the curvature, the spread and the brilliance of soap bubbles,

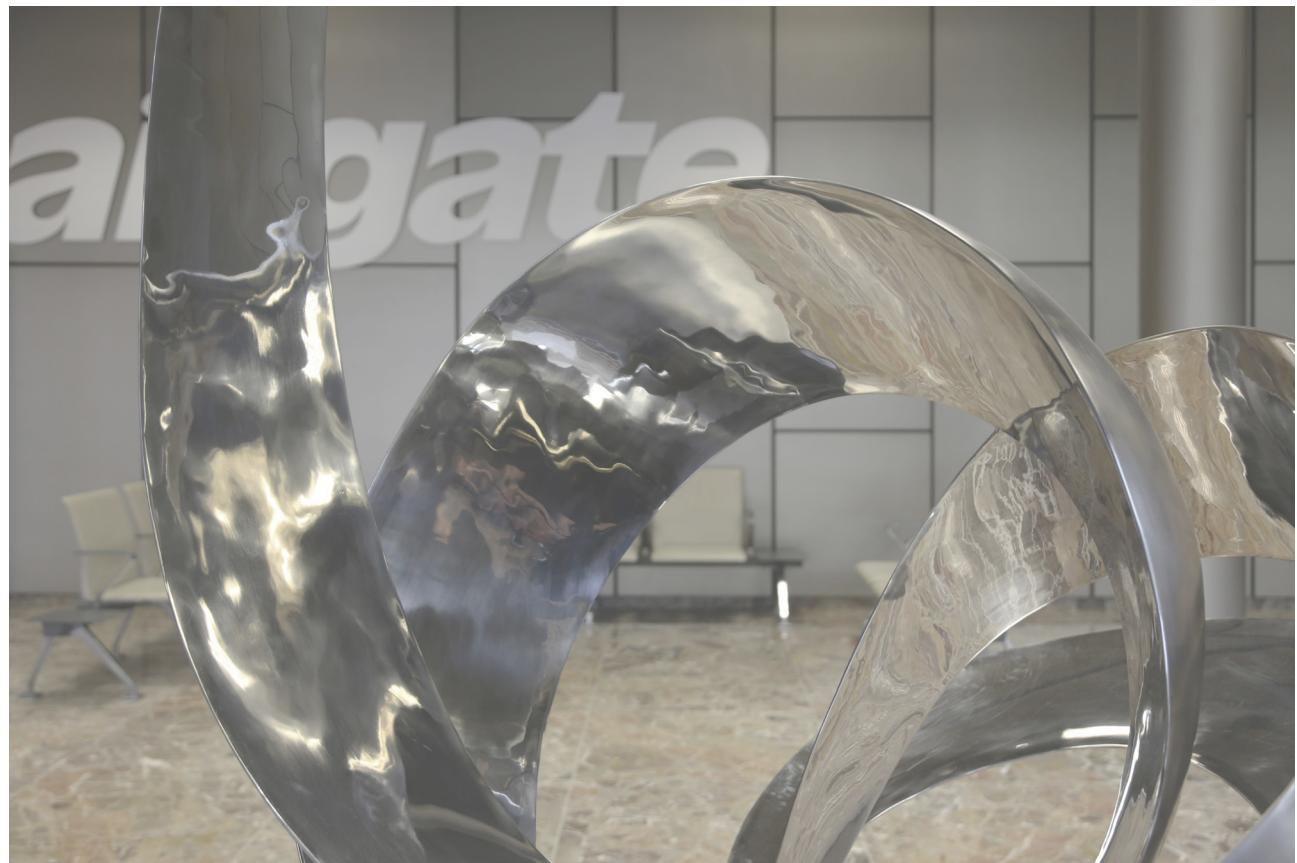
*The Balloon Dog* is really a wonderful object. It wants to confirm the observer in their existence. I often work with reflecting, mirroring materials because they automatically raise the self-confidence of the viewer. Of

The quest for visual distinction is also pursued through materials. High-tech images of reflective glass where buildings 'Reflect your corporate image', gave way during the 1980s to polished facades of granite and reconstructed stone. One building, it is argued, will 'dominate with its superb detailed stone exterior' and another 'stands out in a forest of concrete'.

titled *Baptism*. Jeff Koons's art practises a *sacralization of the smooth*. He stages a *religion of the smooth, the banal*, even a *religion of consumption*. In their service, all negativity is to be eliminated.













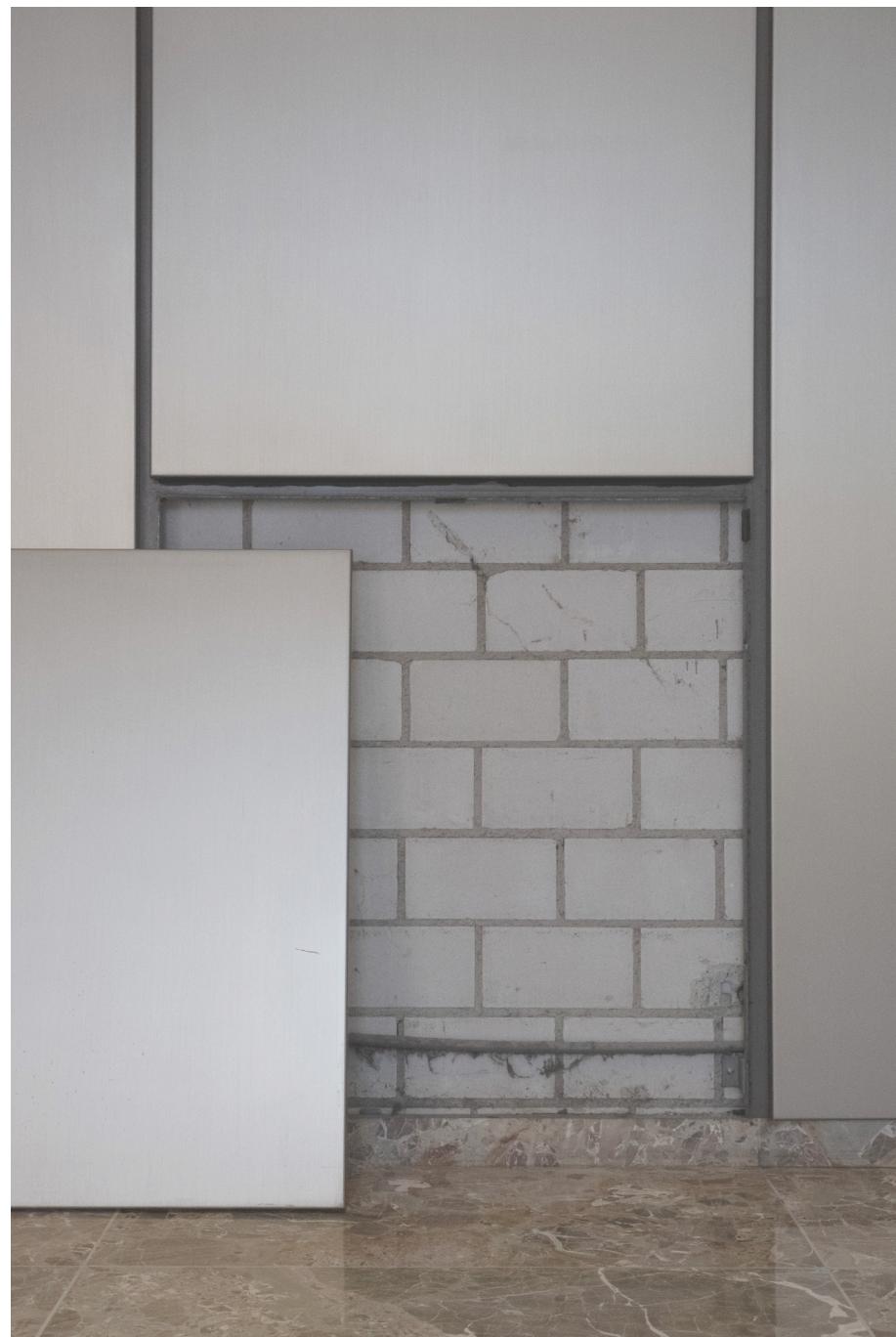
## A STAGE FOR ACTION

If new actions are to be developed in the remnant buildings of Thurgauerstrasse, it is essential to disrupt the found dynamics of capitalist power and their expression through the buildings' organization and outer appearance, reliques if the Capitalocene.

Adapting the building to new uses and programs requires a subversion of the old aesthetical system and material semiotics. However, the aim is not to propose a new aesthetic, but rather to provide a stage for action, in which revolutionary activities may take place.

Hannah Arendt distinguishes in “The Human Condition” between two types of experience: behaviour and action. Whereas the former relates to the social code in domestic situations, the latter is its empowered version, the individual’s true experience of taking decisions and appearing as such in public space. It is in this spaxe of appearance, in which “action and speech can create a space between the participants, which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere, [...], the space where I appear to others as they appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.”

In this sense, Gordon Matta-Clark inspired people through his piercing of ruined buildings in Manhattan to take actions by themselves and interact physically with the built environment. By using techniques of “Décollage” and “Collage”, a space suddenly becomes a different setting,, which enables people to act differently and to take actions individually and consciously. Therefore, the settings at Thurgauerstrasse should become stages for action.



designers and architects of the interior, is attention to the *public interior*—as that space, interpreted as public regardless of its ownership, that illustrates the values of a society and its ideas about citizens' relations to each other, to the various agents of power and to the world—and the making of spaces of appearance. The public to the world—and the making of spaces of appearance. The public interior can be designed to resist its deployment as an instrument and its reduction to a kind of scaffolding for coercive spectacle.

Rather, it can become—as it has been, historically—a stage (Serlio, 1545) for people, upon which they can appear (Arendt, 1958; Baird, 1992), move, act, associate, and become conscious of themselves and their place in the world as individuals, as selves, as others, as selves among other selves, together and distinct, in public. In such

analogy is another strategy for inclusion. Throughout history, architecture has been a tool of power: the temple, the palace, etcetera. I am often reminded of a

His actions demonstrate a possibility for change—change that can be made by any individual—and so by sharing this stage, or creating a stage that is the everyday, he focuses that potentiality for empowered change, for action by any-

In the third of the sets of constructs I have cited, she contrasts two forms of experience: 'action' and 'behaviour'. According to this opposition, action is the form of experience that typifies the public world, while behaviour is that which, in the first instance, is typical of the private, domestic world. According to Arendt, we all participate in the experience of behaviour, since none of us has the capacity to escape quotidian, domestic existence altogether. On the other hand, as she sees it, only some of us, some of the time, succeed in reaching the level of experience of action.

centuries-old plaster walls in *Conical Intersect*—this personal physical engagement with architecture was central to the work and durational, so I view it as performative. And so many of his works exist in the space of a kind of stage—a

here again with this exhibition, he asks us now, How do we transform destruction and obsolescence into empowerment and inspiration? How do we recycle the debris of failed states into new communities inclusive of the past, yet innovating future spaces by, for, and of the people? How can we evolve the everyday

Thus it is clear that 'the public' is not to be thought of simply as a desirable or attractive mode of human experience in the world; rather it constitutes the definitive, highest possible form of human achievement. To the dismay of her liberal critics, Arendt went so far as to identify with a view of Niccolò Machiavelli, to the effect that the ultimate political objective of 'action' wasn't even 'goodness', as might have been expected, but rather 'glory' instead.

Action and speech create a space between the participants, which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as they appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.<sup>22</sup>

with the trouble is both more serious and more lively. Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become—with each

Three long chapters open *Staying with the Trouble*. Each chapter tracks stories and figures for making kin in the Chthulucene in order to cut the bonds of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene. Pigeons in all their worldly

The world is not a giant artwork any more than it is a mammoth broiler house. It is, to use a cliché, a stage . . . a stage for action, not *our* action but *their* action. “Anarchitecture” facilitates action. It ought to be the human analogue of continuous creation from the void.

dience—his writings were personal. He worked through ideas with the same approach to the materiality of language as he had to the material of photography, architecture, drawing—that is, he evolved it through cuts, collages, holes, and juxtapositions. Language as signifier but also as object to be transformed.

threshold of function to nonfunctioning space. Evaluating them as place. Giving them value in defining their non-use as essential to our lived environmental experience—acknowledging history, transforming without destroying—occupying space in an empowered way.

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