

## **DEUTSCHLANDSCHAFT/DEUTSCHLANDSCAPE**

### **Epicentres at the Periphery**

The exhibition at the German pavilion for the 9<sup>th</sup> international Architecture Biennial draws attention to the featureless and everyday architecture symptomatic of the outskirts of contemporary cities and towns. With the focus upon built projects that transform conventional modes of building and reactivate overlooked areas within the urban sprawl, suburban areas and de-industrialised spaces, the exhibition confronts the periphery as a contemporary condition acutely identifiable within Europe and beyond.

The DEUTSCHLANDSCAPE features a heterogeneous selection of 38 architectural projects built over the last 4 years throughout Germany. It may well confound preconceived notions of the contemporary German architecture scene. The exhibition offers insight into new strategies employed by a critical generation of architects confronting problematic and often limiting conditions. It reflects a debate that focuses upon the urban margins and provincial towns; the agglomeration made up of storage warehouses, malls and business parks interspersed with housing estates. The relentless spread of such diffuse landscapes is increasingly becoming a point of issue amongst architects and urban planners.

The DEUTSCHLANDSCAPE thus unfolds throughout the pavilion as a vehicle for transformative architecture. The photographic collage 80 metres in length makes use of the panorama - the privileged instrument of the modernist urban vision. However, where once the citizen was educated via the panorama in the form and social structure of the metropolis, the DEUTSCHLANDSCAPE is a reinterpretation that depicts the ambivalence and unease experienced at the peripheral areas on the urban fringe. The focus upon photography – architecture's most seductive medium, enables an interplay of reality and fiction, though the projects are incorporated within their thematic context. Behind the panorama, a second, disruptive layer of 'source code' is revealed: restrictive planning regulations that provide insight into often surreal juxtapositions and distinctive architectural transformations within the scape. The architectural projects embedded within the DEUTSCHLANDSCAPE constitute a collective statement, reflected through video interviews exploring the themes in the central space of the pavilion. Seating designed for the exhibition and bearing quotes by the protagonists invite the viewer to enter the debate and peruse the catalogue.

The selected projects – 'epicentres at the periphery' - represent architectural flashpoints. They reveal that it is possible to generate paradigmatic shifts by administering architecture in homeopathic doses in areas seemingly impervious to change. The urban margins offer significant potential for architectural experimentation.

### **Reworking the norms**

Provincial settings weighed down by convention represent a challenge that leads to provocative buildings which bring irony and ambivalence to bear in both their form and their use of materials: Almann Sattler Wappner exaggerate the classic form of 'monopoly' house and use steel as a cladding to lend the headquarters for Südwestmetall in Reutlingen an unreal aura; Bottega Erhardt polemicise the planning codes by building an urban monolith in a residential street in Ludwigsburg. Florian Nagler

adds an aesthetic twist to traditional building forms by cladding a family house in Gleißenburg with a polycarbonate facade, and Rheinflügel Baukunst, and Heide von Beckerrath Albers take on the strictures of the housing estate – with incisions, a shifting and a scaling down in order to reclaim a sphere for the architect within the world of DIY.

### **Architecture at a second glance**

Ingenious interpretations of context - a reshaping of the familiar with skill, transform the functional structures of the everyday. Regina Schineis converts the mundane – transformer stations and tram stops - lending them sculptural qualities with a play on light and materials. Arno Lederer (Lederer,Rangsdottie,Oei) calls for 'architecture at a second glance' - in which minimal changes in material and typology lead to enigmatic forms. Thus the school building in Scharnhäuser Park evokes memory in a new town development that has yet to find its identity. Bolles Wilson designed a water pump in an otherwise unprepossessing business park in Loddenheide as a folly in the landscape - declaring that within the periphery one has to work with the profane or unbeautiful. Hild & K employed such a strategy by adding subtle ornament to a multi-story car park.

### **Reactivating residual spaces – mining the gap.**

Several projects transform situations by skillfully reworking leftover spaces. By making the most of limited spaces and loopholes in planning regulations, Manuel Herz (Legal/Illegal) and Deadline (Slender/Bender), produce singular forms, often with a conceptual recycling of materials that underline the status of the in-between. Surreal architectural implants and transient, modular structures generate potential for the revival of disused spaces and former industrial sites: Peter Haimerl's Cocobello, the floating snack Pontoon by Meixner Schlüter Wendt, or the 'Werkschwimmbad' by the artists Paschke/Milhonic set within the coking plant Zollverein in Essen. Projects by MSP Meier Scupin Petzet, Zimmermann + Partner, set architectural precedents by finding workable/viable alternatives to wholesale demolition in the prefab housing estates of satellite towns facing a dramatic shrinkage of the population.

The DEUTSCHLANDSCAPE reveals how the combined ethos of pragmatic 'making do' and ironic self-reflection gives a generation of German architects the resilience and the perceptual twist to turn limits into opportunities.

Francesca Ferguson, August 2004