

Culinary Military Space

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The building type of Military Architecture is an interesting indicator as a changing cultural understanding in the act of aggression by human beings. In the early days mankind hunted for food but also needed protection, which led to inhabitation of the cave as the suitable space. As civilization progressed; more aggression was directed against other human beings, which shaped social and architectural configurations. Proportional to their relevance in human behavior, the architecture of "protection and offense" achieved a privileged status and priority.

The current tourist attractions of picturesque castles and fortifications from all over the world prove the categorization of former military architecture as "high" architecture.



Figure 1. Salses fortress Figure 2. Samos's tunnel

The building typology of spaces specifically created for military purposes, achieved a certain distinguished character and identity. It was apparent in history building standards and articulation that showed an architectural hierarchy separating between the leaders and the ordinary soldiers, for the latter ones the sheltering architecture has always been much more pragmatically than poetically articulated.

Throughout the modern times of industrialization military architecture was

finally overall degraded down to become "low" architecture.

Since modern civilizations still have not overcome the point of fighting against each other, they currently tend towards an institutionalization of the business of military. Therefore contemporarily military architecture has clearly lost its defined typologically style, the administrative compartments look like every other corporate commercial development. The buildings for the ordinary average soldier, where she/he lives, sleeps and eats has certainly achieved contemporarily a high technological standard, much different to the unbearable barracks of former times. Although a place of human inhabitation, it is still kept out of the realm of architectural space and form.

In the mid 1990's shortly following my graduation, my future began in becoming addicted to the prosaic, ordinary architecture, which serves people who basically do not have a choice.¹ It started exactly with this typologically unusual task to design a dining hall for soldiers in Eastern Germany.² Embedded within an existing structure of the military base, the design became a solid and void driven brick monolith, substracted and immaterialized to the south and visual access to the outside world.



Figure 3. military diner Stallberg Germany 2000



Figure 4. Military diner Stallberg Germany 2000

Years later after the opportunity to design other socially related types, such as train stations, kindergartens, schools and grocery stores^{3...}, based upon the client's satisfaction from the earlier one, I had the opportunity to think this building type over again.



Figure 5. Grocery store Hannover Germany 2004³

This time the given condition was much different. In the middle of nowhere, the building was determined to be the infrastructural heart for a new base. The first time in my life the concept could not anchor to given conditions, could not continue to echo the old story of the *genus loci*.

The recapitulated reflection on the typological evolution became a major space and form



Figure 6. site condition Warbelow Germany

determining factor. Remembering my childhood with intensity in touring the castles along the German Rhein river in seeking for light and final linkages to the outside world in juxtaposition to the fascination of the dark solids became a most intriguing experience. Remembering back, I identified it as something archetypical, somehow similar to Louis Kahn's fascination, that he brought back from his European travels of the ancient archaic structures. From that point it led me to the notion of thinking, that the building type belongs to Le Corbusier's Monol system category, the "limitless subjectivity rising against a clouded sky..."; rather than the "Domino" approach, as the example of a floating pavilion diner by Auer and Weber in Dresden / Germany.⁴

Another performance potential became the strict and limited budget, which is normally seen as a negative limitation. In my work over the years, I became used to dealing with this issue and I began to see it as a challenge to concentrate on the essentials and seek complexity and multicoded meaning within a synergy of comprehensive simplicity.

The building design was in a trial and error manner developed out of a sequence of volumetric studies, all having in common the creation of a sense of place in the no-where's land.

The first, being a courtyard shaped form with the next masses sloping out of the ground responded to the only existing reference as burned bunkers under the wide horizon, broken up by sloping forest lines. These versions were denied by the client authorities because they thought of them as too free spiritedly interpreting the program. In this way they helped to distillate the quintessence of the project.



Figure 7. military diner Warbelow design study 2



Figure 8. diner Warbelow 2006 from Southeast

In the finalized design, monolithic mineral masses rise with low sloped roofs from the ground to the surroundings. Deep cut-in voids define the entrance and focusing relationships to the outside world, like the panorama framing slit window in the dining hall and the vertical one by the entry and kiosk zone.

In regard to the monolithic tectonic concept, the building material is aerated concrete, which provides sustainability throughout robustness and good indoor quality by thermal mass.

In collaboration with the exterior walls, flush set windows and roofs, the monochromatic notion of the grey colored stucco and the folded zinc roof camouflages the volume.

The intersection of the volumes in the central hinge of the dining hall creates an interior character, that physically enhances a culinary aspect within the act of eating. Achieved by simple means of volume and space arrangement the self-contained exterior appearance intentionally contrasts an interior characterized by the differentiated



Figure 9. dining (with) slices of sun

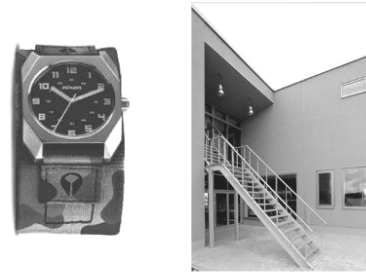


Figure 10. Nixon watch

broadcasting of light in a sense of the "slice of sun that your building has" as Louis Kahn quoted the great American poet Wallace Stevens.⁵

The same recaptured kind of light that once fascinated me with grandpa discovering military artifacts.

As a child of late postmodernism I am naturally suspicious about literal analogies like chrome grills as parking garage facades or in the following war museums resembling detonated metal in a frozen condition.



Figure 11. invitation to dine inside and outside



Figure 12. VW 181

Objects related to this type in a much more unliteral way though helped, such as observing the complex simplicity and richness of multifunctionality that the Volkswagen engineers long ago gave their VW 181 (the thing) model or the Nixon watch creators their hybrid technical design objects.

These objects themselves did not directly influence the design but rather the methodology of the thinking and making process, at the end achieving a distinguished notion of joy and happiness within the seriousness, something we thought society owed the youth, no matter where they are or what they are doing.

References

- ¹ Martin Despang of Despang Architekten with his practice base in Hannover Germany (www.despangarchitekten.de) and his academic platform at UNL (<http://archweb.unl.edu>) acts as a "street fighter" of Architecture, who peacefully fights the lack of meaning of the contemporary average environment.
- ² Franziska Leeb "Gemauerte Variaten" architektur magazine Vienna issue 8 12/2000
- ³ Cornelia Krause „Palettenweise“ db 9/2004
- ⁴ www.auer-weber.de
- ⁵ Kahn, Louis I.: "Silence and Light" (1970), in: Kahn, Louis I., The architecture and silence, Basel; Boston; Berlin 1993, page 109ff.