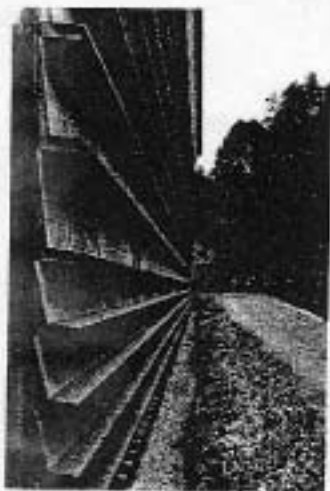


Emerging European Architects

Edited by
Wilfried Wang

RIZZOLI

Harvard University
Graduate School of Design



Ricola Storage Building,
near Basel, 1986–87

View of exterior cladding

Jacques Herzog

I am an architect. Before becoming one, I went to school for so many years that I learned to do everything with my head. Things pass from the head down to the hands, which draw the plans for the craftsmen. I had seen the drawn construction detail previously somewhere in the built world; I may even have seen it in a film or in an image.

When I show my drawing of a detail to the craftsman, I realize that the real world has changed since I made my observations, and changed to such a degree that the craftsman no longer understands the detail. Construction technology offers him another, presumably better, detail, and he takes it because he believes that such details must change according to developments that are equated with progress. Thus, in endless succession, emerge new door handles, windows and faucets, new window frames, new forms for bricks and blocks, for toilets and baths, and new color ranges.

The construction industry has changed the crafts and replaced the craftsman tradition all over the world. There no longer are any traditions in the consistent and comprehensive sense of the word. I no longer can depend on the craftsman because he has ceased to exist, replaced by the construction industry managers. They might be able to offer me certain words of advice—mostly words of warning concerning some stupidity of construction—but their hands no longer think and their brains are unconcerned that this is so. Therefore, I must try to understand what the industry has to offer; my images of the built world must confront the building industry's production processes. I analyze those products that are at my disposal: the images in my head and the industrial products. Again and again, I heat both products, melt them down, take them apart and allow them to cool down in my own bath of sweat.

While architecture has ceased to be a product of craft, it no longer is a *purely industrial* product either. The coincidence, the harmonizing of industrial aesthetics with an architectural aesthetic has been lost with the fading of Modernism. A tradition of Modernism is as impossible and lifeless as the crafts traditions. Never before in the history of architecture has there been such a striking lack of support for architects. And never before has there been so much miserable architecture as today.

There has never been so much freedom either; architecture is closer to the work of art than ever, yet never has it been so distant. Architecture is knowledge; architecture is research, without a claim to progress.

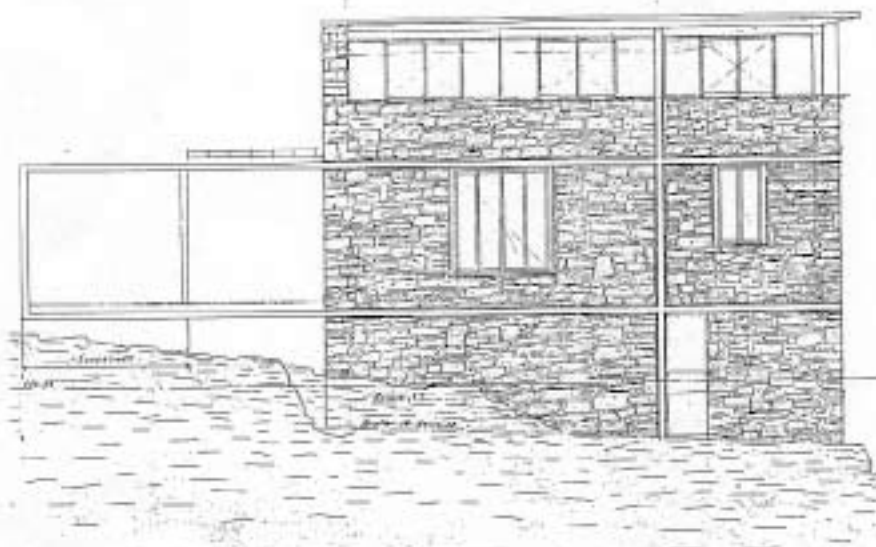
The concept of tradition is central to these considerations. In earlier cultures, tradition was a kind of ethical basis, a matrix for the identity of things and relationships, and for their obviousness.

Tradition is culture's utopia. It reflects the desire for the integration of life within a differentiated collective. Tradition is a comprehensive category of existence and, for that reason, is not divisible.

Our architecture is not part of any actual tradition, but relates to earlier architectures through observation, critical perception, imitation or rejection. It is as if an earlier, mediating generation had been eliminated by an environmental catastrophe. This is the point of rupture where our contemporary culture begins, a culture that is often described as a postmodern one. Such a culture only carries on earlier patterns of behavior and buildings as apparitions of the original, comprehensive forms.

A building's relation to given architectural forms is inevitable and important. Architecture has never been created out of the void. However, there no longer is a mediating tradition, which is also noticeable in the manner in which contemporary architecture frequently tries to establish a connection with historical forms, yet is unable to move beyond the eye's surface.

What can we do but carry within ourselves all these images of the city—of the given architecture, building forms and materials, of the smell of asphalt, exhausts and rain—and proceed from these images as our given reality, thereby creating our architecture by means of representational analogies? The treatment of these analogies,



Stone House, Tuscany, 1986—
North facade

taking them apart and renewing them within an architectural reality, is a central theme of our practice.

The reality of architecture is not its built form. Removed from the realm of built and unbuilt, an architecture takes on its own reality, comparable to the autonomy of a painting or sculpture. This reality therefore is not the built, the tactile, the material. We love this touchable aspect, but only in connection with the entire work of architecture. We love the work's intellectual quality, its nonmaterial value.

The work of art is the material's highest form of existence once it has been removed from its natural surroundings. All other forms describe the material's gradual devaluation, ending in its complete violation in the production of objects for daily use and in today's common architecture.

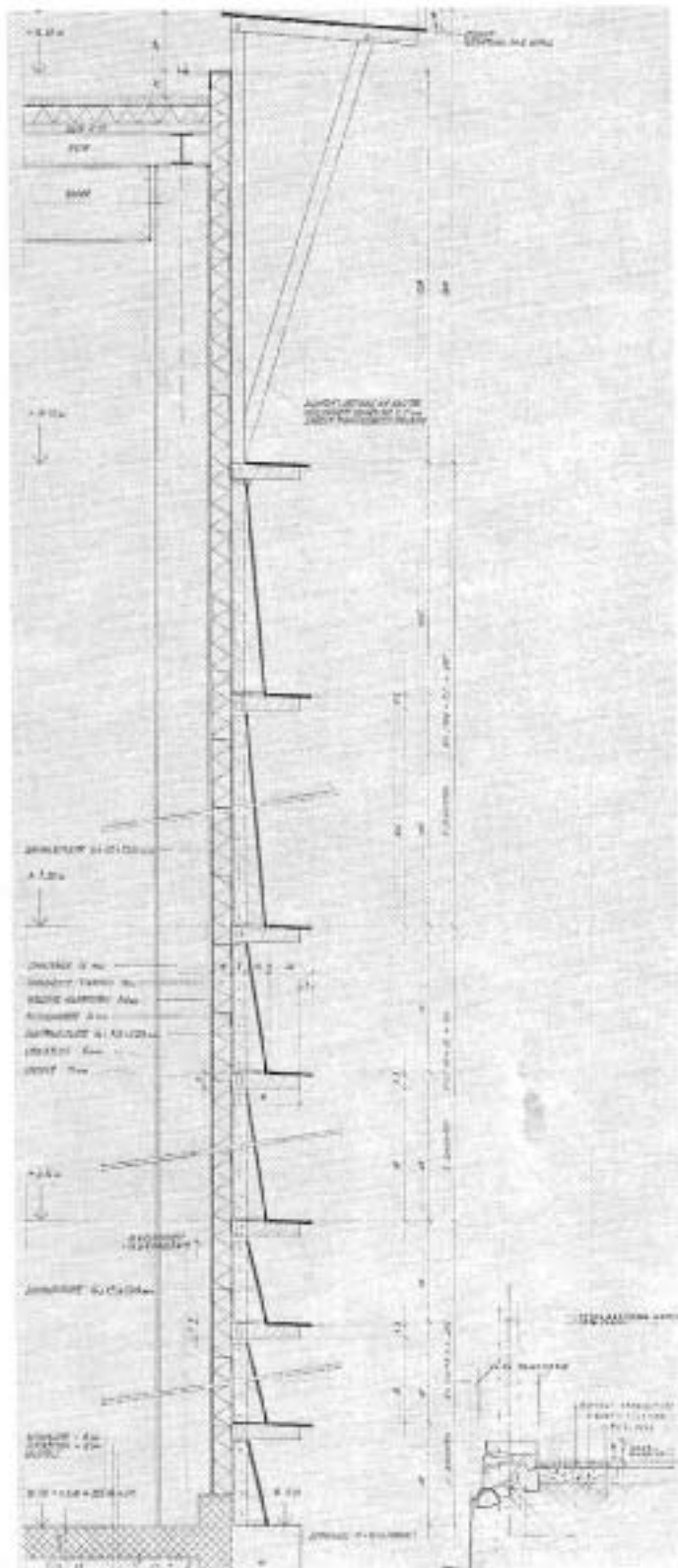
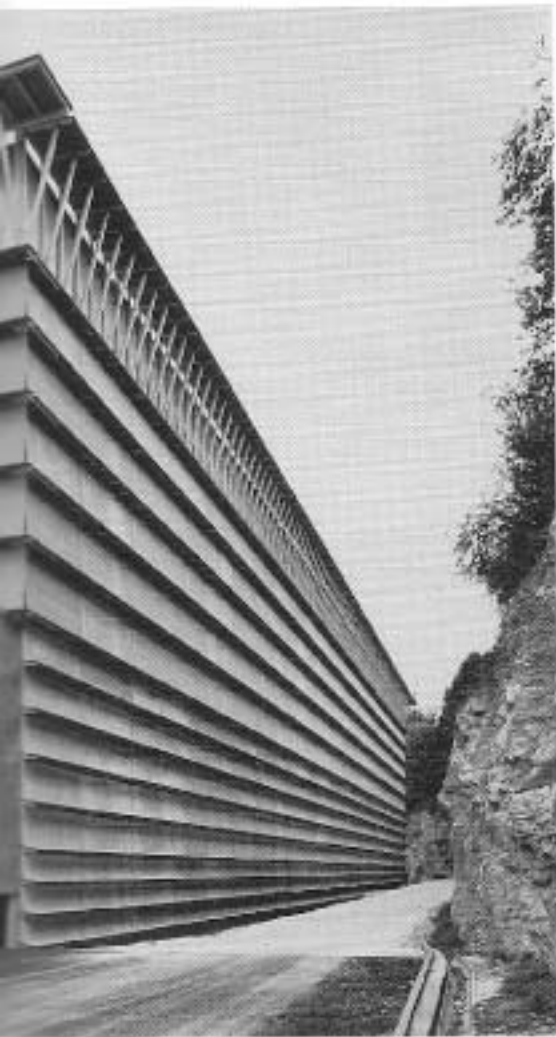
The process of architectural design interests us as an instrument for the perception of and engagement with reality. This is where we search for the ethical and political contents of our work. This search is not merely an attitude affecting the design process, but also is a quality that we try to introduce within our buildings.

By ethics I do not mean a limpid, affirmative notion of ethics or even a moral ethos. It is not the ethics of good form or pure stylistic means as were used by Modernist architects for the new, "modern man." We are not against the different stylistic means, but against their arbitrariness.

We are against this arbitrariness because it dismantles the aesthetic and political resistance to facile consumption and to the frantic speed with which consumerism must constantly be entertained with new imagery. Our ethical and political resistance to arbitrariness is also connected to a fear of being absorbed within this so-called media era, and of being degraded to a mere image.

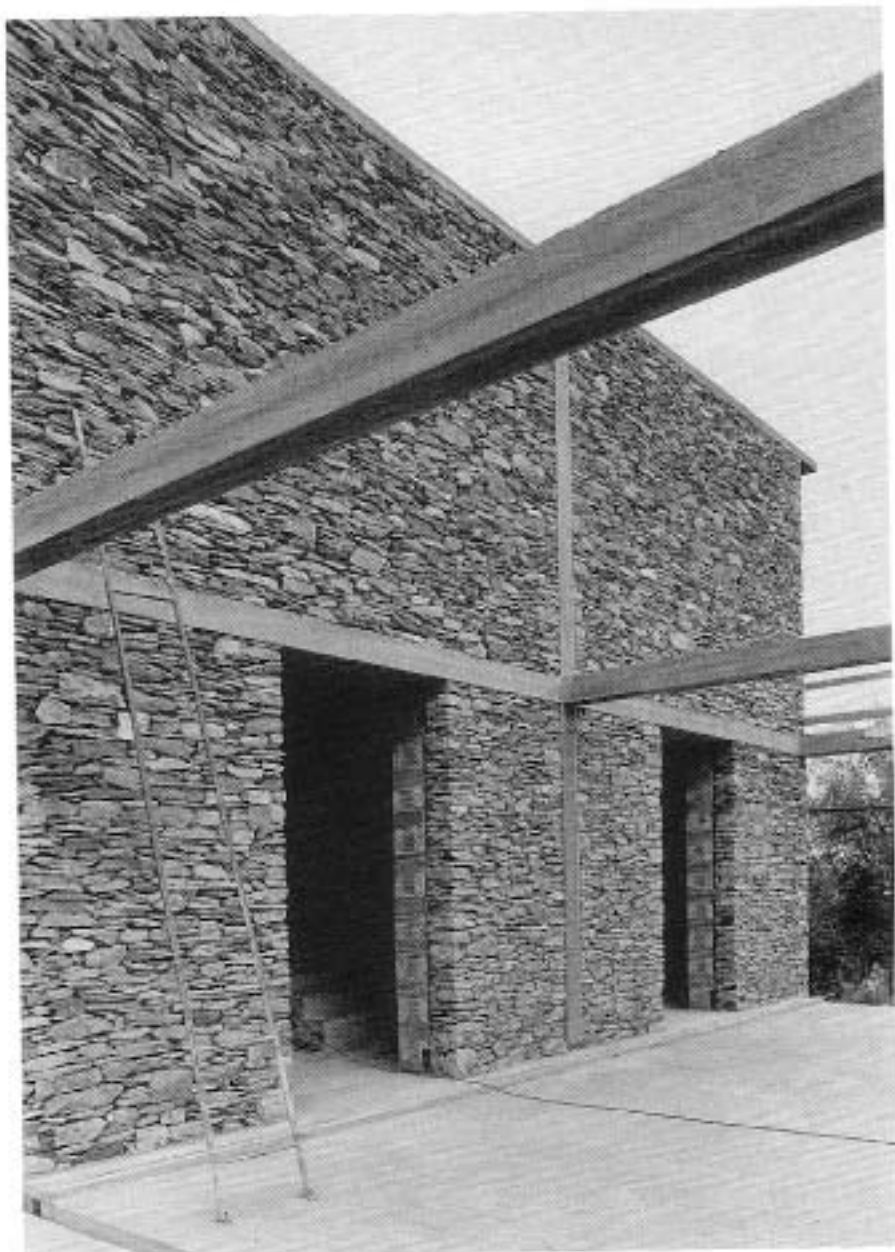
I speak of the visible principles of our architecture, and the invisible ones. We have seen how our daily perception differentiates the objective world according to a known pattern without questioning it. Our interest in the invisible world is in discovering a form for it within the visible world, that is to say, in breaking up the deceptively familiar, visible appearance by taking it apart, atomizing it, before we come to terms with it once more. The invisible world is not the world of the mystical, nor is it solely the world of the natural sciences and of the invisible, atomic, crystalline structures. This world is much more a system of relations that aid us in making the visible world—to which, after all, our products belong—comprehensible.

Jacques Herzog was born in Basel, Switzerland, in 1950. He received his degree in architecture from the ETH Zurich in 1975. With Pierre de Meuron, Herzog is a principal of Herzog and de Meuron in Basel.

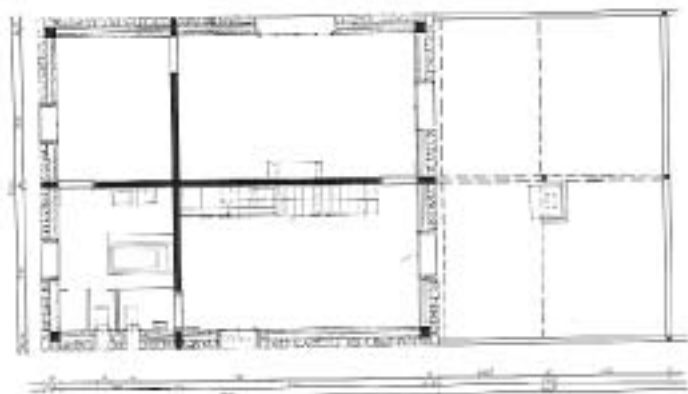


Stone House, Tuscany, 1986–

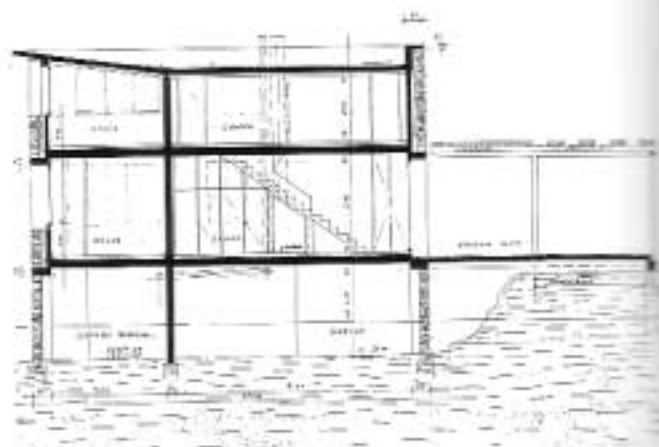
- a. View of entrance terrace
- b. Entrance floor plan
- c. Principal section



a



b



c