Heinz Tesar. Architecture of Layers. Nine Recent Works
With a text by Friedrich Achleitner. 128 pp. with 195 ill., 242 x 280 mm, hard-cover, English
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Heinz Tesar's architecture is associated with holistic ideas, and is »value-conservative« in this sense. But at the same time, this architecture relates to its time, is modern, frank and open to consensus in a subjective dialectic between connection and isolation. However, this holistic concept is not concerned with hierarchical orders, but with relative weighting in a denomination process. Tesar is someone who names things, a »baptist« who makes his objects that have acquired form individual and thus unmistakeable.

For Tesar, the linguistic approach to architectural ideas is a pictorial event, and the draughtsman's sketch a further »linguistic« step towards articulation. Language operates first and foremost in images. The original, primal concepts are to be found in his early painting, in which he addressed homotypical proto-forms, a kind of subjective expansion of the archetypal formal world (embryonic form phases, soft monuments, fossils etc.), in other words followed the birth-process of forms, with denomination playing a major part on the one hand, whereas on the other hand we see the effect on the plane of painting or drawing of the proto-form, the sense of shape, the crystallization of something in thought. Here concepts like finding and fixing in the field of tension between individual and type is important, and so are the levels of subjective and collective experience and the way they are processed. Heinz Tesar works, to put it differently again, from a fictitious, almost ritualized dialogue situation, in which the levels for coming closer to a building idea can be accessed – in terms of drawing and of building itself.

Whatever concepts Tesar might fix in this context, one thing is clear: it is a dialogue situation, a process of gradual articulation between convention and questioning, it is about connections and at the same time the isolation that Tesar expresses when listing his work.

Friedrich Achleitner, born in 1930, studied architecture at the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna. After early work as a practising architect he became a writer in 1958. As a member of the »Wiener Gruppe« he wrote dialect poems, montage texts, and concrete poems. In 1961 he began his career as a highly regarded observer of contemporary architecture, finally as professor of the history and theory of architecture at the Hochschule für angewandte Kunst in Vienna. His main work as an architectural historian is *Österreichische Architektur im 20. Jahrhundert*, published in three volumes between 1980 and 1985.

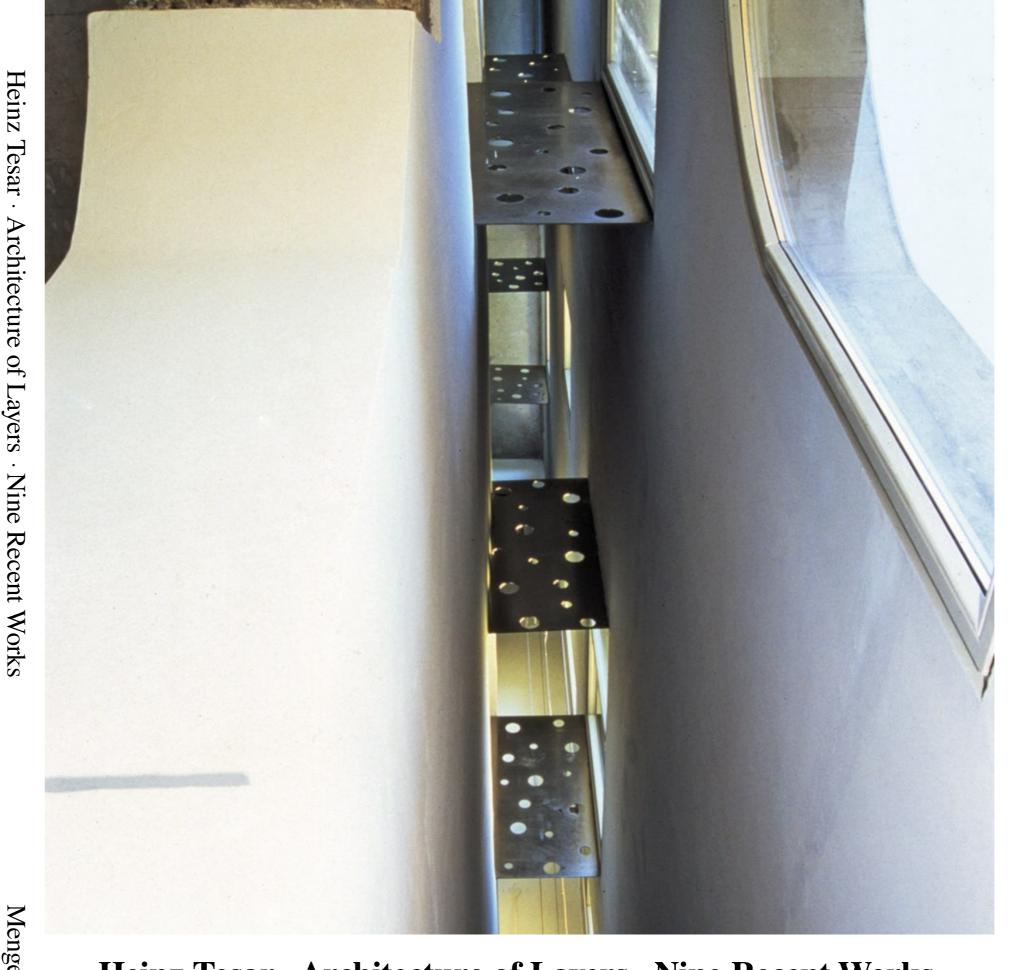Heinz Tesar's work shifts engagement with the traditional concept of architecture on to a new plane. Since Viennese Historicism at least, Austrian architecture has shown a tendency to blend phenomena and positions which are on the face of it mutually exclusive. As much as the architecture itself, the psychological approach to architecture uses a double mirror, i.e. a reflection of a reflection, which completely relativised it once and for all as a resource within the social context of the Danube monarchy. After Otto Wagner, Viennese architecture even had to endure accusations of "an irritating readiness to compromise". It is certain in any case, to put it positively, that in later years as well this architecture was incapable of narrow-minded one-sidedness, and that it, like Josef Frank, showed intolerance only toward intolerance and exclusion. (...)

Tesar's brand of architecture relates to the concept of *entirety* and in this sense has "conservative values". At the same time however, this architecture is situated at a particular point in time in a subjective dialectic between *context* and *isolation*, modern, open and capable of consensus. And yet this holistic concept is not concerned with hierarchic ordering, but rather with relative weighting in a process of *naming*. Tesar is a name-giver, a "baptist", who gives his embodied objects individuality, i.e., an unmistakable quality. (...)

Whereas architecture today increasingly tends to focus analytically on its constituent areas (material, construction-related, function-related, economic, ecological etc.), Heinz Tesar maintains a concept of totality, not as a universalistic fallacy or an encyclopaedic monster, but as an individual achievement of form which marks a specific moment of personal synopsis. (...)

Entirety for Heinz Tesar is, in my opinion, not a hierarchical or in any way static concept, it is defined as a combination of architectonic decisions which have ultimately been found consistent by the architect and are sound in all functional, pragmatic and programmatic areas.

Friedrich Achleitner

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Heinz Tesar: contexts and single cases
Friedrich Achleitner

Heinz Tesar's work shifts engagement with the traditional concept of architecture on to a new plane. Since Viennese Historicism at least, Austrian architecture has shown a tendency to blend phenomena and positions which are on the face of it mutually exclusive. As much as the architecture itself, the psychological approach to architecture uses a double mirror, i.e. a reflection of a reflection, which completely relativized its means once and for all within the social context of the Danube monarchy. After Otto Wagner, Viennese architecture even had to endure accusations of "an irritating readiness to compromise". It is certain in any case, to put it positively, that in later years as well this architecture was incapable of narrow-minded one-sidedness, and that it, like Josef Frank, showed intolerance only toward intolerance and exclusion. Rather, the common factor, even between positions as far apart as those of Loos and Hoffmann, Welzenbacher and Plischke, Holzmeister and Rainer, or indeed Arbeitsgruppe 4 or Hollein, is a highly developed sensorium for the ambivalence in architectonic statements.

In my opinion, Heinz Tesar's work has to be seen in terms of a tension between the poles formed by distinct elements which established itself at an early stage and became ever more fertile and productive. But what are these elements? Typically expressed, Tesar's architectonic articulations come to fruition in three different media simultaneously; in the medium of language through highly individual expressions, in the medium of drawing, in which concepts are also revised and transformed by him, and finally in the actual medium of building, from model to concrete realisation.

In his notebooks, as part of "thought-prompts" for drafts, there are chains of associated concepts which actually have to be read from bottom to top, as towers:

An example:

herzpfeilergedenkkreisbrückenkopfsynagoge
heartpillarmemorialcirclebridgeheadsynagogue
or
hallwandkörperantwort
hallwallbodyanswer
glasshallehimmelhofasymmetrisch
glasshallskycourtasymmetrical
schwebehohlblockglasstein
floatinghollowblockglassstone

I'll just read the next word-chain, or word tower:

lufthöfelichtkubentransitorium
aircourtyardslightcubestransitorium

An architecture critic lacks the specialized knowledge needed to analyse these linguistic constructions. It is striking that most of these words are entirely concrete terms and that their juxtaposition provokes spatial, architectonic ideas.

The drawing and drafting aspects of his plans are also characterized by an intimation search, often a distillation of the perception of places, architectural situations and cultural topoi. These intimations of form are not yet bound to a concrete assignment or function, they are still seeking their own legitimacy in a kind of higher-order valuation (a fashionable expression) of the assignment.

Tesar's brand of architecture relates to the concept of entirety and in this sense has conservative values. At the same time however, this architecture is situated at a particular point in time in a subjective dialectic between context and isolation, modern, open and capable of consensus. And yet this holistic concept is not concerned with hierarchic ordering, but rather with relative weighting in a process of naming. Tesar is a name-giver, a baptist, who gives his embodied objects individuality, i.e., an unmistakable quality. In my opinion, it would still be legitimate in Heinz Tesar's case to speak of "gestalt properties" as defined by Classical Modernism.

When seen in these terms, one can detach Heinz Tesar's work from the discussion surrounding postmodernism and post-postmodernism, because it is not concerned with a conscious use of architectural vocabularies. However, he does not pay much attention to the analytical study of the elements of aesthetic phenomena either (for instance, the effects of new materials). It can safely be said that both Baroque (Counter-Reformation) and rationalistic (Enlightenment) elements are evident in his singular body of work, and perhaps the most remarkable thing is that they are mutually exclusive.

For Heinz Tesar, the rapprochement of language and architectonic thought is a visible occurrence, and the hand-drawn sketch a further linguistic step in the direction of articulation. This language is active primarily in images. The first and fundamental elements of it can be found in his early paintings, in which he engages with homotypical pre-forms, a kind of subjective extension of the world of archetypal forms (embryonic phases of form, soft monuments, petrifications etc.), a birthing process of form in which on the linguistic level naming played an important role but on the painting and drawing level the state of the pre-form, the intimated form, the thought-prompt for a thing. Expressions such as find and fix in the field of tension between individual and type, the different levels of subjective and collective experience and their processing, play an important role here. To put it another way, Heinz Tesar's work develops in a fictive, almost ritualised dialogue, in which the levels of further rapprochement with building – related thought are determined – the actual drafting and building stages.

Whichever terms Tesar decides on in this context, one thing is clear; what is happening is a dialogic process of articulation which progresses in stages, between convention and its questioning, contexts and at the same time isolation, as Tesar puts it in the catalogue to his work.

As Tesar's architecture shows a tendency to assimilate rather than a tendency towards selectivity and radical exclusiveness it may not after all be uninteresting to direct our attention to those very aspects which never or only under very specific conditions appear in his work. His central basic creative approach is based on a kind of coherent worldview, but on the other hand there are clearly identifiable exclusions, areas of current architectural planning which are simply not included.

One area which falls into this category is the use of architectural languages in the sense of historical availability. Tesar does not change language, style or formal system to fit the analogue content. The narrative element of architecture, the accompanying story, is left out. This means that postmodern techniques such as semantic collage, formal referencing (quotations), contextualized readability etc. are or were by their nature also excluded. Although Tesar is always speaking about language in connection with his sketches, this is not a question of vocabularies, but of linguistic functions in the articulation of thoughts, with the assistance of drawing.

Working on this principle, one can exclude other areas of methodology from the drafting process, specifically all techniques with a systematic character, whether constructive system, modular ordering, additive methods or any other aid that inclines to schematic or uniformity. This does not mean that such methods are not present at all. However, when they are applied, then they have a very specific role in the entirety of the construction, a limited function to perform. They could never be the guiding principle of a draft. Something similar goes for the overemphasising of individual formal aspects, for instance the material aesthetic which arises in connection with the modern tendency towards purity (glass, for instance). While accepting its historical role in the discussion of architecture, it plays no independent or even definite role in Tesar's work.

Whereas architecture today increasingly tends to focus analytically on its constituent areas (material, construction-related, function-related, economic, ecological etc.), Heinz Tesar maintains a concept of totality, not as a universalistic fallacy or an encyclopaedic monster, but as an individual achievement of form which marks a specific moment of personal synopsis. One could take this attitude as a kind of Baroque omnipotence (for which the social background no longer exists) if it was not for traces of a Leibnizian worldview which in his church designs for instance are unmistakable. Entirety for Heinz Tesar is, in my opinion, not a hierarchical or in any way static concept, it is defined as a combination of architectonic decisions which have ultimately been found consistent by the architect and are sound in all functional, pragmatic and programmatic areas.
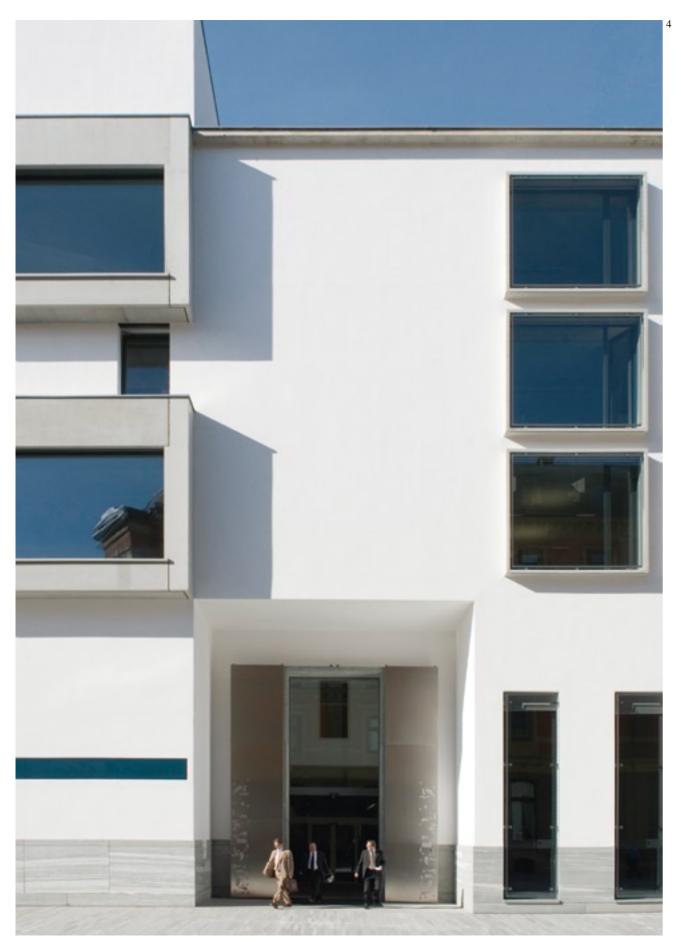
Entirety (in this context) is therefore not a preordained quality, but a quality which emerges after a protracted planning process, in which the planning individual engages in a dialogue with all the concrete elements involved. The tension is created by resistance, by the sum of all factors and by the subjectively organizing, intervening individual. Seen in these terms, it doesn't matter what manner of location the architect is confronted with or with which cultural time sequence he is integrating, whether the work in question is a small design object, a building or a plan for a town.

I will attempt to support these assertions somewhat based on three buildings and one project:

Keltenmuseum Hallein, Hallein, Austria (1991–1994)

The reorganisation of the Celtic Museum in Hallein in a complex of buildings which had been used by the Salinen government in the 17th century and the connecting of two houses by means of a multi-storey entrance hall which this entailed (the Pfleghaus and the Wasnerhaus) led to a characteristic solution by Heinz Tesar of what was on the face of it only a technical problem, but in actuality represented a thorny architectonic issue. Due to the removal of all floors and the building of a flight of stairs and a lift, the thick but heavily perforated 16 metre external wall was revealed and (due to the removal of the stiffening effect of the floors) needed to be secured. This was done by means of a double wall made of reinforced concrete, attached to the old wall by perforated chrome steel plates to stabilize it. This architectonic decision was not only due to the desire to preserve the old, it could
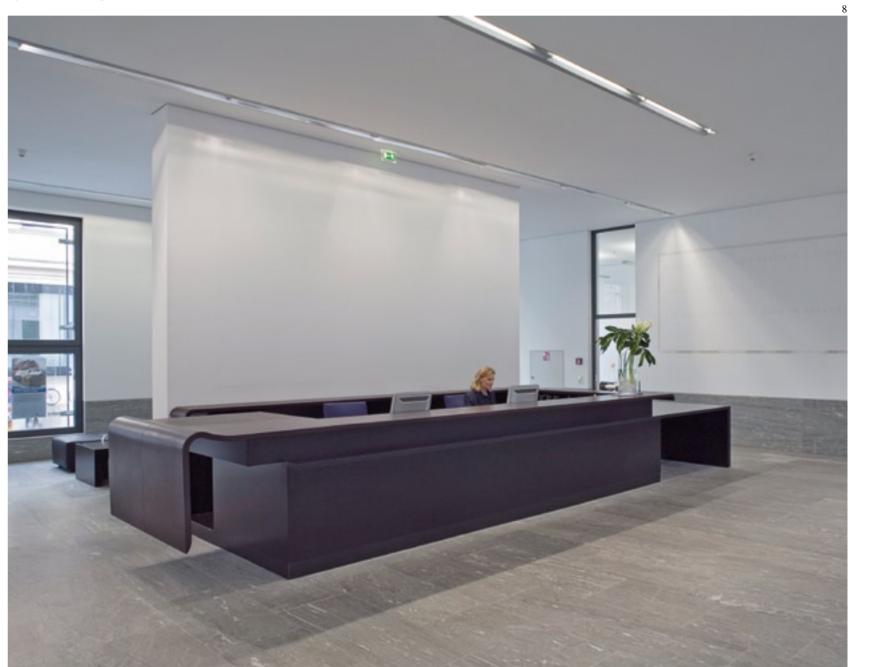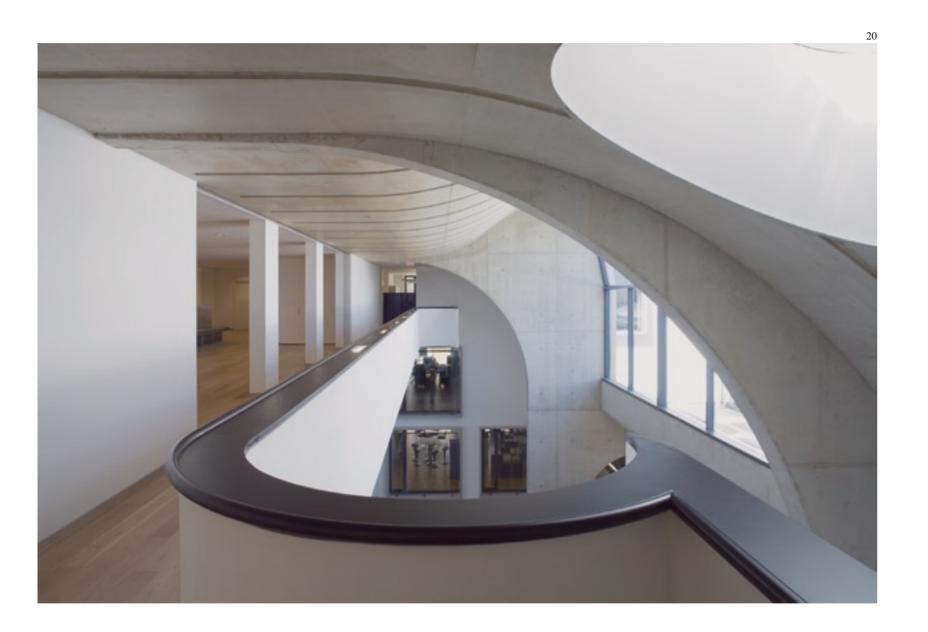
4 Entrance to BTV Stadtforum.
5 Stadtforum block corner.

6 BTV portal leaf, 2006, water colour. **7** Chromium steel
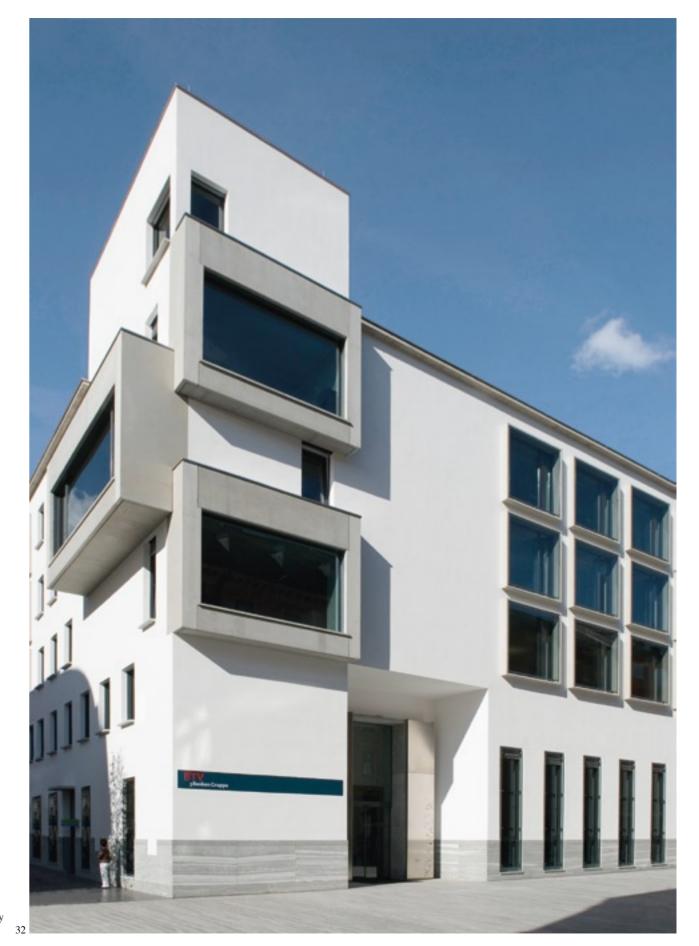layers, detail. **8** Reception.

20 Customer service centre, hall on the 4th floor. **21** Undulating roof with Nordkette range. **22** 3rd floor lateral section.

30 Forum, evening event. 31 View of the city from the building. 32 Bay window at the main entrance.