Rafael Lorentz

Factual

Abstract   Factual

The word *factual*, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is defined as an adjective indicating the characteristic of something 'based on or concerned with facts'. As in the current use of language, the substantive accompanied by it tends to be interpreted as something evident, non-questionable, close to the concept of truth. 'Factual information', for example, would be that based on the report of events that actually took place and whose validity therefore must be taken into account, since it is not subject to interpretation. The adjective, however, finds its root in a noun, *fact*, from which stems not only the referential quality lent to the object, but also the very base of its legitimacy.
'Factual architectures' can be defined as those whose design operations seek legitimacy in the manipulation of *real things* – those that exist in the realm of experience – presenting itself in the duality of an architecture that is *made of facts* and at the same time conceived as a *fact itself*.

Factual

La parola *factual*, secondo l'Oxford English Dictionary, è definita come un aggettivo che indica la caratteristica di qualcosa "basato su o interessato ai fatti". Come nell'uso corrente del linguaggio, il sostantivo che lo accompagna tende ad essere interpretato come qualcosa di evidente, non discutibile, vicino al concetto di verità. L'"informazione di fatto", ad esempio, sarebbe quella basata sul resoconto di eventi realmente accaduti e la cui validità deve quindi essere presa in considerazione, in quanto non è soggetta a interpretazione. L'aggettivo, tuttavia, trova la sua radice in un sostantivo, fatto, dal quale deriva non solo la qualità referenziale prestata all'oggetto, ma anche la base stessa della sua legittimità.
Le "factual architectures" possono essere definite come quelle le cui operazioni progettuali cercano legittimità nella manipolazione delle *cose reali* – quelle che esistono nel regno dell'esperienza – presentandosi nella dualità di un'architettura *fatta di fatti* e allo stesso tempo concepita come un *fatto stesso*.

Olivo Barbieri, *site specific_LAS VEGAS 07*, 2007

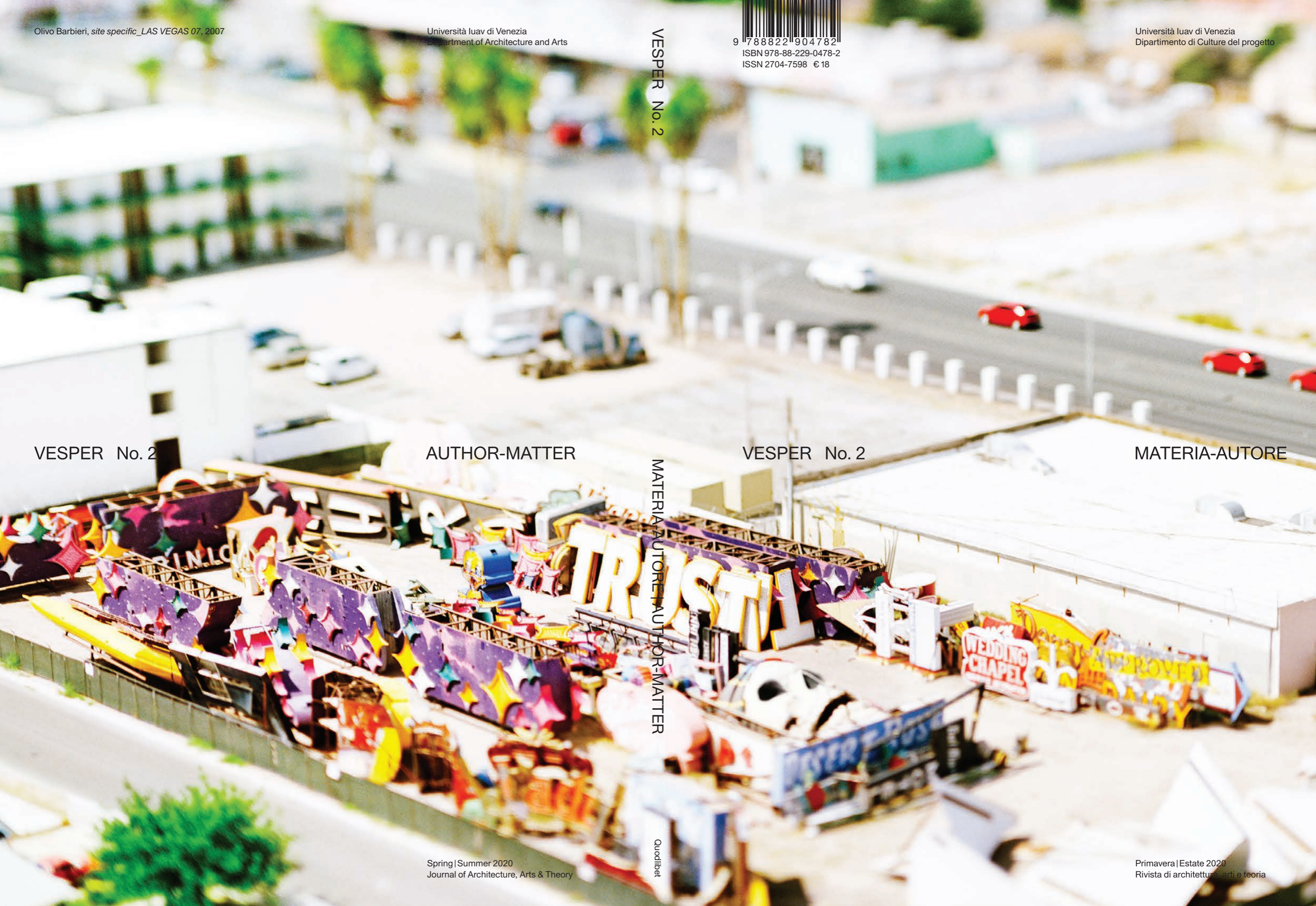VESPER No. 2   AUTHOR-MATTER   VESPER No. 2   MATERIA-AUTORE

MATERIA-AUTORE / AUTHOR-MATTER

Vesper è una rivista scientifica semestrale, multidisciplinare e bilingue, si occupa delle relazioni tra forme e processi del progetto e del pensiero. Ponendo lo sguardo al crepuscolo, quando la luce si confonde con il buio e l'oggetto illuminante non è più visibile, *Vesper* intende leggere l'atto progettuale seguendo e rendendo evidente il moto della trasformazione. Pitagora identificò nel pianeta Venere sia la stella della sera (*Hesperos*) che quella del mattino (*Phosphoros*), i due nomi si riferiscono allo stesso astro ma posto in condizioni temporali differenti. *Vesper* dichiara quindi una posizione più che un oggetto e privilegia il situarsi che ne profila lo statuto. Non è qui accesa la luce tagliente dell'alba, che promette giorni completamente nuovi e alti sol dell'avvenire, ma quella che fa intravedere nella penombra una possibilità nell'esistente.

Richiamando e rinnovando la tradizione delle riviste cartacee italiane, *Vesper* ospita un paesaggio articolato di modalità narrative, accoglie forme di scrittura e stili differenti, privilegia l'intelligenza visiva del progetto, dell'espressione grafica, dell'immagine e delle contaminazioni tra linguaggi. La rivista è pensata nella sua successione di numeri tematici come discorso sulla contemporaneità, nello spazio di ogni singolo numero è articolata in un insieme di rubriche che gettano luci differenti sul tema. Nel procedere delle diverse sezioni – editoriale, citazione, progetto, racconto, lezione, saggio, inserto, traduzione, archivio, viaggio, ring, tutorial, dizionario – mutano i riverberi tra idee e realtà, si accende l'intreccio tra evidenze concrete e loro potenzialità, potenziali trasformativi, immaginari. Le rubriche sono pensate non per aggiornare istantaneamente ma per indagare condizioni progettuali e per fornire strumenti e materiali dall'*ombra lunga*.

Vesper is a six-monthly, multidisciplinary and bilingual scientific journal which deals with the relationships between forms and processes of thought and of design. Gazing into the dusk, when light slowly merges with darkness and the illuminating object is no longer visible, *Vesper* aims to interpret the act of designing through tracing and revealing the movement of transformation. Pythagoras identified in the planet Venus both the evening star (*Hesperos*) and the morning star (*Phosphoros*), assigning the two names to the same star observed in different temporal conditions. *Vesper* thus states a perspective rather than an object, privileging the condition that defines its status. Rather than the sharp light of dawn, heralding a brand-new day and promising a brighter future, it is the twilight that allows you to have a glimpse at the potential of what is already there.

Following the tradition of Italian paper journals, *Vesper* revives it by hosting a wide spectrum of narratives, welcoming different writings and styles, privileging the visual intelligence of design, of graphic expression, of images and contaminations between different languages. The journal is conceived as a series of thematic issues that build a discourse on the contemporary. Each issue is divided into sections that offer a range of diverse perspectives on the theme analysed: editorial, quote, project, tale, lecture, essay, extra, translation, archive, journey, ring, tutorial, dictionary. Throughout the different sections, reverberations between ideas and reality change, connections emerge between tangible facts and their potentials, transformative prospects, collective perception. The principal aim of these sections is not to provide instant news, but to offer an in-depth investigation of different instances of design and to provide tools and materials that have a long-lasting effect.

VESPER No. 2

MATERIA-AUTORE

Olivo Barbieri, *site specific_LAS VEGAS 07*, 2007

Breve estratto da un testo critico che definisce la rotta o le coordinate di attraversamento del tema. | Brief excerpt from a critical text concerning different perspectives on the topic.

Narrazioni testuali o per immagini attraverso realtà note o ipotetiche. | Textual or visual narratives exploring actual or hypothetical worlds.

Contributi che indagano le ragioni, le *mise-en-scène*, le risultanti di progetti realizzati attraverso le voci degli autori e/o di critici. | Contributions that investigate the reasons, the *mise-en-scènes*, and the results of an accomplished project throughout the voices of the authors and/or the critics.

Testo critico che accompagna una selezione di materiali d'archivio presentati con le loro coordinate di provenienza. | Critical text accompanying a selection of archival material presented with its source reference.

Forma e modo d'espressione di questa rubrica sono a discrezione dell'autore. | The section consists in the original contribution of an author.

Resoconto di un viaggio fisico o immaginario e delle sue evoluzioni temporali e spaziali. | A physical or imaginary journey in its temporal and spatial development.

Saggi critici articolati in citazioni, note, iconografie e una bibliografia. | Essays including quotes, notes, iconography and bibliography.

Traduzione inedita di un documento anticipata da un commento critico che ne evidenzia rilevanza e attualità. | Unreleased translation of a document introduced by a critical comment highlighting its relevance.

Manuale d'uso per l'esecuzione di pratiche e/o operazioni. | Instructions to carry out practices and/or operations.

Definizioni critiche di tre lemmi in italiano e tre lemmi in inglese contribuiscono alla precisazione del tema. Il dizionario prosegue con l'evolvere di "Vesper", si compone in itinere. | Critical definitions of three headwords in Italian and three headwords in English that contribute to point out the issue's topic. The definitions through the issues of "Vesper" will compose an ongoing dictionary.

factual adjective, based on or concerned with fact or facts. Derivatives: factuality (noun), factually (adverb), factualness (noun). C. Soanes (ed.), *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003.

The word *factual*, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is defined as an adjective indicating the characteristic of something 'based on or concerned with facts'. As in the current use of language, the substantive accompanied by it tends to be interpreted as something evident, non-questionable, close to the concept of truth. 'Factual information', for example, would be that based on the report of events that actually took place and whose validity therefore must be taken into account, since it is not subject to interpretation. The adjective, however, finds its root in a noun, *fact*, from which stems not only the referential quality lent to the object, but also the very base of its legitimacy. The definition of the word *fact*, as found in the same dictionary, is that of 'a thing that is known or proved to be true', stressing its self-evident character, while its etymological composition – originated from the Latin *factu(m)*, past participle of *facere* (doing) – indicates the term's condition as the product of an action. A 'fact' can thus be understood as something whose meaning condenses the objective description of a concrete event and simultaneously contains the traces of a potential subject-author.
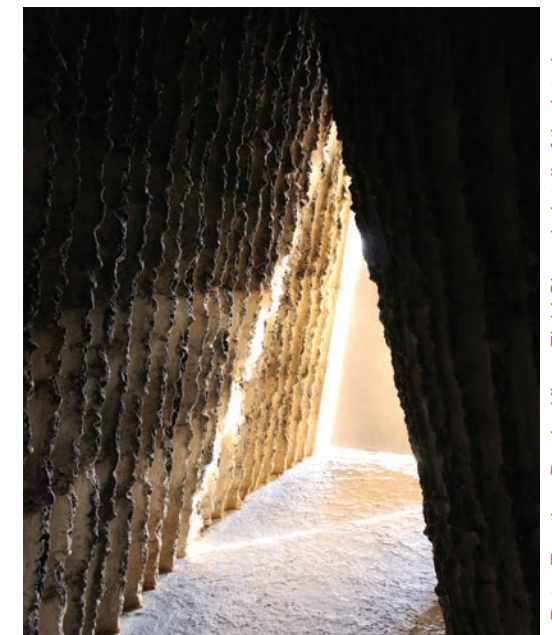
'Factual architectures' can be defined as those whose design operations seek legitimacy in the manipulation of *real things* – those that exist in the realm of experience – presenting themselves in the duality of architectures that are *made of facts* and at the same time conceived as *a fact itself*. A contemporary example of such an approach can be identified in the architectural production of 1980s and 1990s German-speaking Switzerland, as Wilfried Wang suggests when describing it as an architecture that 'engages the visibly built and hence really perceivable and thus potentially experienceable, that once again allows an architecture to state its specific conception without mediation' (Wang 1994, p. 26). His use of the word *factual* as a more accurate translation of the German *sachliche* – also translated into English as *objective* – reveals the intention to keep the meaning closer to the idea of an adjective that indicates the evident quality of a thing or fact – the term *Sache* meaning literally *thing*. The choice subtly indicates a differentiation from other instances of *objectivity* that tend to assume a pragmatic attitude towards the technical aspects of design in what could be called a functionalistic vision. The idea of a self-sufficient architecture is described by Philip Ursprung as 'a consequence of the general shift in a notion that pervaded architecture in the 1980s [...], the transition from the notion of architecture as a system of signs, as a text or language that can be "read", to that of architecure as an image that affects the viewer and is "experienced"'(Danuser, Gantenbein, Ursprung 2009, pp. 64-65).

The *factuality* of the Swiss production of the period derives from the assumption of facts as the constitutive components of a spatial event, concrete elements that are not abstractly translated into symbolic language, but manipulated as self-sufficient phenomena to be activated through individual experience. Consequently, architecture's main interface tends to be defined in its physical presence – a primary means to convey meaning.

The role played by materials in the genesis of architectural form is perhaps more evident in the work of Peter Zumthor, in which the invention of materiality becomes the author's first action in a process that seeks to derive the design concept from its physical constitution. In that sense, the maintenance of authorship as a fundamental value – standing as a claim for integrity and autonomy – is not expressed in a recognisable formal language but continuously reaffirmed in a process of transforming materials into meaningful construction. For Zumthor, 'material is a primary choice. It is not possible for me to design without material. If it were otherwise, I would not work on the body of architecture, but think of an abstract thing. I can theoretically imagine that you can do that, but I do not work that way. I am much too impressed, even enthusiastic about the body of architecture' (Tschanz 1996, p. 30).

However tempting it might be, a romantic interpretation of his work would only be misleading, since it is not as much concerned in praising the natural qualities of a given material as it is in actively manipulating those qualities to obtain a whole new element that crystallises the transformation contained in the design. 'Materials in themselves are not poetic' (Zumthor 2017, p. 11), says he in *Thinking Architecture*, indicating that the body of architecture is not something to be found in nature, but intentionally created by human hand – materiality is an invention that keeps the traces of the inventor.

In Zumthor's architecture, form tends to be defined by a radical constructive principle (Steinmann 1997), almost as if the final design would be the frozen frame of a continuous action. Examples of such composition can be found in projects such as the non-realised Topography of Terror Documentation Center (Berlin, 1993-2004) where the building's shape literally coincides with the continuous replication of an intertwined scheme of prefabricated columns and beams, and in the Thermal Baths of Vals (1990-1996), where the arrangement of masses and voids, blocks and slabs recalls the basic action of pilling rocks – as visible in the study models made out of natural stone. In some cases, the invention of a materiality seems to go beyond the meaningful use of a given material within a constructive scheme, and matter itself becomes the object of the author's transformation. That is the case of the

Kolumba-Stein, the tailor-made bricks developed for the Kolumba Museum (Cologne, 1997-2007) which, through their specific consistency and appearance, allow the design's basic idea of merging new masonry walls and old stone walls to take place – eventually acquiring autonomous value and becoming themselves a product of the manufacturing company. A more visible example of this material metamorphosis can be seen in the project for the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel (Wachendorf, 2001-2007). Built as a concrete monolith around an inner tent-like structure made out of tree trunks and ultimately burned, the chapel is the outcome of an almost liturgical act of construction, one that created a unique material presence condensed in the blackened ash-scented concrete of its interior – a matter that exists only as part of this design. As in the double content of the word *fact*, material in Zumthor's work becomes the means of architecture's self-sufficiency and self-evidence, while at the same time condenses a creative process that stands for its authenticity.

The transfer of meaning from the symbol to the fact, and consequently the hypothesis of an architectural language whose communicative dimension is defined in the interaction with its concrete presence, indicates the potential of 'factual architectures' to retain traces of authorship. In that sense, their eminent materiality seems to resist more efficiently to the reductive trend of dissolution into our days' never-ending flow of images, offering the composition of 'facts' as the gap through which to convey the message of the architect-author. The effectiveness of such communication, however, depends on the latter's ability to escape the conceptual trap of self-referentiality and fully explore material's potential as condenser of an architectural process. In that sense, the very legitimacy of 'factual architectures' as meaning-bearer events relies on the fundamental presence of the author.

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