

The Balance between Sustainability and Innovation

Remarks on HPP's Oeuvre
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Architectural firms are highly complex structures that are comparable in many ways to living organisms. Architectural associations, as a rule, arise more casually, and are often architecturally active for decades, until, along with the death of their founders, they quietly take their leave. From the standpoint of architectural history, only a few architectural firms have been able, or are still able, to outlive the lifetime of their founding fathers. In the Baroque period, generation-spanning dynasties of master builders—for instance, the Dientzenhofers of Upper Bavaria—were not exceptional. There are only a few today, though, one of them being a prominent family from Cologne that has produced third and fourth generations of architects. There is another dynamic involved in the influential partnerships of convenience that began to appear in the nineteenth century. One can truly count on one's fingers the names of the great firms that have made architectural history for decades, if not for almost a whole century.

Which firms that were prominent at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries immediately come to mind? Ones such as Adler & Sullivan, Burnham & Root, and McKim, Mead, and White, not to mention the great firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, known around the world as SOM, which was founded in 1936 and is still extremely active today. There is only one institution in Germany that is comparable: three years before SOM was established, Helmut Hentrich founded an architectural firm bearing his name in 1933 in Düsseldorf. The management and employees of this firm, today called Hentrich Petschnigg & Partner GmbH + Co. KG and known by the acronym HPP, have erected more than a thousand buildings worldwide since 1933. But by their nature, numbers say little about architectural quality. Of necessity, the question therefore arises of how it is that one of the largest architectural firms in the world, in spite of changes in personnel and the turnover of generations, has managed to maintain such a high level of quality, and even increase it, since its founding? Without a doubt, given the fundamentally different conditions of the global building experience of today, HPP's oeuvre can be considered a true work of art.

If one reviews the seventy-five years of buildings that HPP has produced, one gets the impression that although there has been a basic ethical and aesthetic consistency in the firm's architectural approach, there has been no demonstratively binding canon of design or simple, space-and-time-transcending guidelines restricting its architectural expression. Although at first glance this may seem to be a flaw, it actually proves upon closer inspection to be a great asset: each generation of HPP's architects has had to develop their own design repertoire in a highly impressive way—their own generation-specific architectural language and repertoire of building typologies. This has happened with extraordinarily precise outlines and a clearly defined profile, and though it has been backed up by the corresponding architectural theory, it is always expressive of the discrete, invisible charm of the internal corporate identity of a firm that has been thoroughly successful for seventy-five years. One can only concur with Henry-Russell Hitchcock, who recognized as early as 1973 that multifacetedness and a wide spectrum of variation are the factors that characterize both the high, international level of HPP's work and the greatest achievements of postwar architecture.

If one could, so to speak, let HPP's buildings parade by in slow motion, then the projects of the firm's early phase, which were mostly residential buildings from the nineteen-thirties and -forties, radiate craftsmanlike solidity, elegance, and a consciousness of history. After

World War II, HPP turned increasingly to public buildings, that is, to administrative buildings and other prominent projects of this kind. In the process, HPP created buildings which have long since taken their places in the architectural history of the twentieth century. Among these remarkable projects are the Drahthaus (1952), the Aluminium Haus (1953), and the Dreischeidenhaus (1960), all of which were built in Düsseldorf.

The Dreischeidenhaus represented a groundbreaking investigation of the building typology of the skyscraper in Europe. Also known as the Thyssenhaus, this high-rise was mentioned in the same breath as Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building (1958) in New York very early on in terms of its elegance and spatial qualities. But HPP continued to develop its own high-rise typologies. With the Europa Center (1964) in Berlin, the Unilever High-Rise (1964) in Hamburg, the Standard Bank Centre (1971) and the Highpoint Hillbrow in Johannesburg (1971), and the De Beers diamond sorting facility (1974) in Kimberly, South Africa, HPP produced high-rises that took on a prominent role in their respective cityscapes and offered innovative solutions for tower construction of both the towers themselves and the connecting zones between them and their urban surroundings. With the Ruhr University in Bochum (1970), which HPP recently partially overhauled in an impressive fashion, a complete university city surrounded by green spaces was created. In addition, there are very quiet, contemplative buildings, such as the sculptural Dietrich Bonhoeffer church (1965) in Düsseldorf-Garath, or the extraordinarily empathetic alterations made to the Expressionistic Rheinhalle, a multifunctional facility and planetarium building constructed by Wilhelm Kreis in 1926 that HPP converted into the Düsseldorf Concert Hall (1978).

The buildings of the nineteen-eighties and -nineties are characterized by a change in paradigm. According to what Tilmann Buddensieg, HPP's projects in this period were increasingly focused on the concept of the city, and even mutated into small "cities within cities." The Olivandenhof (1988), without a doubt one of the most extraordinary architectural structures from this period, reclaimed public and semi-public spaces in the heart of Cologne between old and new. The main administration building of the Cologne Stadtparkasse (1992) strengthened the urban fabric vis-à-vis the medieval Hahnenort by interconnecting the preexisting buildings with new ones and by accentuating the newly created district from both inside and outside with an impressive rotunda. A similarly effective rotunda also dominates the main headquarters of the Hannoversche Leben insurance company in Hannover. Large-scale administration complexes in more peripheral locations, such as the TÜV Akademie in Cologne (1994) and the expansion and new construction of the LVM insurance company building in Münster (1994), were based on broadly laid out, clearly delineated, basic geometric forms from this point on.

Even the completely newly laid out residential areas, such as the residential Beethovenpark in Cologne, which was realized in collaboration with Büro dt 8, underscore HPP's desire to rehabilitate the dense, but nonetheless lovable and livable, atmosphere of downtown life. The same attitude is evident in one of the most remarkable HPP buildings of the 1990s, the retirement residence in Wesel (1996). Seeming more urban from the outside, in the sense of its strict peripheral configuration, this complex presents a riotous, intimate, almost villagelike residential landscape on the inside. Glassed-in verandas function as orientational lookout points over the complex's almost improvised-looking housing units grouped around green courtyards.

But in addition, HPP's significantly more numerous multistory office buildings, such as the main administration building of the Provinzial insurance company in Düsseldorf (1995), the Anthropolis complex in Berlin (1997), and Neven DuMont's publishing center in Cologne (1998), break the customary, large-scale forms of the nineteen-sixties and -seventies down into smaller clusters with livable inner courtyards connected by lattice-enclosed atria and passages.

Projects dedicated to retrofitting landmark-protected buildings for modern use were not underrepresented in the eighties and nineties either, thereby maintaining Helmut Hentrich's passion for the scrupulous maintenance of historical structures. This was expressed programmatically in Pyrmont Castle in the Eifel region. Hubert Petschnigg had purchased the castle in a ruinous state, and from 1963 to 1970 HPP reworked and expanded the structure as a conference center and relaxation retreat. The scrupulous high-tech conversion of the Expressionistic Düsseldorf Rheinhalle completed in 1995, the revitalization and conversion of the historic Yenidze tobacco factory in Dresden (1996), originally built in the Moorish style, and the spectacular renovation and refurbishing of the main Leipzig train station (1997) with the addition of multistory commercial passageways are like contemporary references to HPP's founding father.

And what about the high-rise? This building type, of course, also had to undergo a new interpretation in the eighties and nineties. Whether the high-rises were integrated as urban development accents into vast complexes, as in the cases of the building of the Cologne publisher DuMont and the Düsseldorf main administration building of the Victoria insurance company (1998), or left freestanding, as in the case of the office tower erected at the end of the nineties in the Berlin Spittelmarkt, they are always clad in delicate, relieflike steel-and-glass structures and knit into their respective surroundings at their bases by means of spatially commanding settings.

In December 2007, HPP published a thoughtful book. It was thoughtful, because it was neither the typical architect's book nor a conventional monograph. Instead, it was small, thin, rather modestly designed, and sparsely illustrated, with only a few textual explanations of the projects addressed. What distinguished this little volume from the general masses of printed material on architecture was the fact that despite HPP's extensive oeuvre, only a few representative works were selected and presented by means of appropriate keywords and without lengthy accompanying texts. The keywords included terms such as flexibility, significance, poetry, identity, sustainability, and time. With the use of keywords as a means of cross-referencing and interconnecting the design paradigms underlying the building projects, this little book escaped the dilemma of more ponderous publications. Instead, it evolved into a sort of diary that illuminates the buildings and their concepts, so that they explain themselves without requiring wordy descriptions.

In order to assign keywords to HPP's most recent projects, let us return to the categories of content in this earlier book. We see that the new construction of the Breidenbacher Hof hotel in Düsseldorf (2008) belongs to the group of buildings grouped under the title "Context" in the book. HPP provides a straightforward explanation of the importance of context for the Breidenbacher Hof: "In our design, we bring together a building whose origins lie in the classical hotel architecture of the nineteenth century with the highest demands of a modern, five-star-plus hotel. . . . The new Breidenbacher Hof represents a certain challenge for modern architecture. Therefore, we looked at