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Building a Fetish - Sacrificing a House. Building Types as Technologies or Fetishes

Introduction

A fetish is an object that has the capacity to act, for which a distrusting observer can give no causal explanation.¹ Since the idea of causal explanations is tightly bound to the history of modern science, fetishes are thus typically objects that are placed in non-modernity by moderns. Thus the fetishist is always the other, the religious believer, the primitive, the sexually misguided, or the person with false consciousness.² To call somebody a fetishist and to call an object a fetish means to exclude them from the rational realm of causal explanations and put them into a realm of mere beliefs in unfounded actions of otherwise dead and meaningless objects. To call somebody a fetishist is always an accusation. I am not in the mood to accuse. I do not assume, as the Marxists and Freudians and others do, that it is apparent what a fetish is and who the fetishist is. If I am analyzing buildings in this chapter I do not do so with the aim to judge people who believe in powerful buildings of given styles or types.

The literature on architectural fetishes so far has largely argued along those lines. A typical example for this kind of accusation is David Harvey's condemnation of postmodernism as a fetishistic style. Postmodernism, Harvey claims, is „celebrating the activity of masking or covering up, all the fetishisms of locality, place, or social grouping, while denying the kind of meta-theory

¹ I reformulate here an argument that was made in similar form by Bruno Latour in his chapter „The Slight Surprise of Action. Facts, Fetishes, Factishes“ in Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

² For a thorough history of these accusations see Hartmut Böhme, *Fetischismus und Kultur. Eine andere Theorie der Moderne* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006). Specifically for the context of anthropology see Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge. Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte* (München: C. H. Beck, 2003).

which can grasp the political-economic processes“³. Postmodernism, in this view, is not only a fetish, but it is even a delusional fetish that is produced to cover up other, more real facts. Mark Wigley, in an illuminating article in the only publication devoted to the theme of fetishism and architecture has commented that the literature on fetishes is usually cast in architectural terms. The facts are masked by ornament, which has to be torn down to reveal the real structures.⁴ But if you think the solution would be modernism, you underestimated the possibility of postmodernists like Charles Jencks to revert the accusation: Jencks comments on Mies' van der Rohe's architecture with "... this impoverished system [of reducing modern architecture to its seemingly rational and universalistic properties] has become fetishized to the point where it overwhelms all other concerns (in a similar way the leather boot dominates the shoe fetishist and distracts him from larger concerns).“⁵ In short, postmodernism is a fetish because it masks the structures of capitalism; modernism is a fetish because it displays the structures of modern capitalism.

This kind of discourse remains unsatisfactory because it fails to give a neutral definition of a fetish. To tear the mask of the fetish down and reveal its real structure, let us look more closely into the constitution of agency of objects with the help of actor network theory. For Bruno Latour, every object is a factish, a mixture between fact and fetish. Every object in this conception is thus always a mixture between a thing that causally acts, an autonomous, non-fabricated fact and a thing for which we do not have a causal explanation, a fabricated and illusionary fetish. If everything is fabricated and everything has effects because it is fabricated, then, Latour proposes, we should rather ask: what are the criteria for the fabrication of good objects? By this, he means we should abandon our modern attitude to criticize people for their wrong beliefs about either facts or fetishes and that we should give up our naïve belief about the naïve belief of the others and start to analyze the fabrication of all kinds of factishes.

This however is not the route that I would like to take here. I would like to go one step back and ask whether the structure of accusation actually resembles the diagnosis. More precisely, I would

³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Reprinted ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 117.

⁴ Mark Wigley, "Theoretical Slippage," *The Princeton Architectural Journal, Special Issue on Fetish* 4 (1992). The other articles of this special issue unfortunately do not match the theoretical elaboration of Wigley's article but rather ponder in jouissance or accusations of fetishism.

⁵ Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1977), 15.

like to ask whether the differentiation between facts and fetishes really runs along those lines as the anti-anti-fetishists⁶ claim and as we would expect them to do in late modernity. As I will show, it is too early to simply diagnose that rational modernists believe in facts and pre-modern believers believe in fetishes. I would like to show here that the diagnosis does not hold anymore, and that there are reasons, why modernists are fetishists and non-modernists are anti-fetishists. I would like to show this by analyzing a very typical factish, namely buildings. Buildings are typical factishes, because in modernity, buildings have always been what I call quasi-technologies, that is, they have always been objects that causally act and do not act. They were factishes even under the circumstances of a modernism where the distinction between facts and fetishes was paramount. After introducing the theoretical concepts more precisely I thus compare three different building types, namely shopping centers, museums and churches regarding their status as fetishes.

Fetishes and technologies

Before I start with these observations, let me shift the difference between facts and fetishes to help to sharpen these observations: Instead of facts, as Latour does, I prefer to distinguish between technologies and fetishes. A technology in modern thought is an object that can 'really act', in the sense that a majority of people can give a causal explanation for its actions. Usually the causal explanation is initially developed in science and engineering. Cars are technologies, because everybody agrees on the causal explanation why they move. Conversely, a fetish is an object, whose actions are not causally explained, either because a majority of distrusting observers does not believe a given explanation or because an explanation is not even attempted. Nevertheless, the fetish causes the users to believe that it acts. The difference between technologies and fetishes is not an intrinsic one but the observation of a judge, who decides whether he can follow a network of translations (of physics, chemistry or even economics, or religion) that causes the object to act or not.

Thus technologies are objects that act, because we have a step-by-step explanation for their power to act in which we believe. Fetishes are objects endowed with a capacity to act for whom

⁶ For a similar construction see Clifford Geertz, "Distinguished Lecture: Anti Anti-Relativism," *American Anthropologist* 86 (1984).

such a step-by-step explanation is missing, or not plausible and proven. A fetish is the accusation that *you* can follow a network of plausible translations, whereas *I* cannot, or rather: *I* do not believe that these translations hold.⁷ So far this is actor-network theory. Now we can empirically analyze who can plausibly build such networks and defend them and who cannot or does not want to do so.

For some objects in modern society this distinction seems clear: It is commonly agreed that cars are technologies (that their network of translations of physics holds) and that UFO's are not (since almost nobody believes in them). But there are other objects, where this distinction is not clear at all and moreover, where we encounter quite different claims about the power of these objects to act. For instance, there are many objects whose status to act is highly disputed, as for example most of the objects of so-called alternative medicine. Then, there are those objects whose status to act is unevenly distributed. This latter class is of specific interest, because we can ask why certain groups of people believe in the capacity to act or not. Typical cases for such objects are buildings.

Building Types as Technologies and Fetishes

Buildings in general have historically had different capacities to act: in a long process modern architectural theory turned buildings into real technologies only to undo them as technologies thereafter.⁸ But not only have buildings in general an uneven status as technologies, they also have an uneven status as building types. Building types such as banks, courts or prisons are categories that merge buildings with their uses and in some way or another, assume that as building types they are technologies to stabilize these uses.

⁷ The notion of translation is taken from actor-network theory, see for example: Michel Callon, "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fisherman of St. Briec Bay," in *Power, Action and Belief. A New Sociology of Knowledge?*, ed. John Law (London: Routledge, 1986).

⁸ Michael Guggenheim, "(Un-)Building Social Systems. The Concrete Foundations of Functional Differentiation," in *Observando Systemas Vol 2.*, ed. Ignacio Farias and José Ossandon (Mexico City: 2008).

We can now ask which building types are more like technologies (and for whom) and which building types are more like fetishes (and for whom). We thus ask, which building type is described as a technology and which is not? Who is giving these descriptions of buildings as causal or non-causal actors and why?

The null-hypothesis for contemporary western societies would probably be the following: with respect to consumption (commodity-fetishism) we would assume that shopping malls are the real fetishistic buildings.⁹ According to the logic of the modernist anti-fetishist, capitalism would turn those buildings that have no other purpose than to sell more products for capitalism's sake as the cathedrals of fetishism. That is, shopping malls should be those buildings with the least causal explanation for their qualities. They are allegedly the building type with the most exaggerated capacity to act with the smallest network to support this claim, where architects, owners etc. believe in a power to act. With respect to religious fetishism, we could obviously expect that churches are the real fetishistic buildings. Whereas the most non-fetishistic and thus the most technological buildings would probably be museums and universities, those halls of pure contemplation of art, and pure fabrication of modern knowledge, the absolutely anti-fetishistic, non-consumptive game of the enlightened bourgeoisie.

Now let me look at these three building types, the mall, the museum and churches in more detail. I will use three different kinds of materials to analyze these building types. For the malls I refer to an analysis of technical literature that describes how malls should work. The reason for this is

⁹ Walter Benjamin made a similar observation already in his „Passagen Werk“ when he described the Passages of Paris as „temples devoted to religious drunkenness“ Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), 109. But he more precisely mentioned the booming world fairs as „places of pilgrimage for the fetish commodity“ Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, 109. Writing in 1982 about types as fetishes, Alan Denis Mann distinguishes buildings as positivistic fetishes (what I would call technologies) from idealistic fetishes, that build on myths, dreams and fantasies. Among the former, he mentions the then emerging computer companies as fetishes „for the notion that ‚facts don't lie‘“. For the latter he mentions large scale utopian city-designs such as Ebenezer Howard's Garden City or Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse. See: Denis Alan Mann, "Fetishes in Architecture," in *Objects of Special Devotion. Fetishes and Fetishism in Popular Culture*, ed. Ray Broadus Browne (Popular Press, 1982), 263.

that the mall is a generic and highly standardized building type for which very precise descriptions exist. For the museum, I refer to literature that directly deals with the fetishistic qualities of museums. Finally, for the case of churches, I use my own fieldwork on converted churches. This is justified because there is hardly any literature on buildings that are converted to churches. Methodologically, this is a muddy undertaking since the different materials are not directly comparable. But this article is not so much a methodologically clean piece of research, as an experimental inquiry into buildings as technologies and fetishes.

The Mall as Technology

Let me briefly start with the example of the mall. The mall as invented by Victor Gruen and subsequently popularized around the world is quite unlike the passages of Paris that Walter Benjamin described as fetishistic objects.¹⁰ This becomes evident from two facts. First of all, there is hardly a building type that is better researched regarding its technological features and whose form follows nothing else than the results of this research. Virtually everything of a mall is the result of research and its implementation. All this research is only directed at increasing the sales. Since malls cater rarely to the upper class and are not buildings to create instances of conspicuous consumption, research is not so much directed to understanding the tastes and creating visual stimuli to satisfy them, but create a general environment that reacts to basic consumer needs.¹¹ To give a very incomplete list of these technologies: All shops and other amenities and all the items inside the shops are ordered in such a way that a shopping experience follows the needs of visitors. Aisles are neither too wide nor too narrow, neither too long nor too

¹⁰ For Victor Gruen and the invention of the mall see M. Jeffrey Hardwick, *Mall Maker. Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). For Benjamin's view of the Passages: Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, 93.

¹¹ For the idea of conspicuous consumption see Thorstein Veblen, *A Theory of the Leisure Class. An Economic Study of Institutions. With the Addition of a Review by William Dean Howells* (New York: MacMillan, 1975). For a counterexample to the above claim, see the recently opened mall „Westside“ at the outskirts of Berne, designed by the starchitect Daniel Libeskind run by the largest Swiss retail firm Migros and catering to a general middle-class audience (www.westside.ch).

short, to give visitors a feeling of social experience without feeling lost.¹² Food courts allow for breaks and more consumption. Sound and odor are controlled and the air is enriched with stimulating odors. Sound is smooth to slow down the walking speed of visitors. The floors are antislip to make consumers walk slower and have their senses not to think about movement. Watches are absent and daylight is rare to make the visitor loose a feeling for the time spent in the mall. Plants are dispersed through the mall to make it feel natural and avoid the impression of manipulation, thus manipulation obscures manipulation. The malls get cleaned very often, trashcans are within reach and visitors are given the feeling to be at home. “Dirty” visitors are excluded to create a feeling of safety.

Second, the exterior of malls provides some of the most anti-fetishist architecture that has ever been built. Mall architecture does not even attempt to *produce a belief* in its working. Rather, malls are often containers with a big sign that indicates the name of the mall. There are often no windows, no window displays, and no hint at all to the goods on sale or the nature of the building. In short, they are prime examples of what Robert Venturi has called the decorated shed.¹³ In some of the few differing mall designs the American architectural firm SITE has played with the exterior of malls by using the exterior to downplay the stability and nature of the building.¹⁴ One design for the Best-superstore chain named “Indeterminate façade showroom” comprises exterior brick walls that seem to tumble as if the building were shook by a recent earthquake.¹⁵ Another of SITE’s designs for Best is the “Peeling Project”, where the brick façade peels off the building like a sheet of paper.¹⁶

¹² These and the following observations are taken from: Karen Sievers, "Center-Science. Kunden- und Verhaltensforschung als Grundlage der Planung und Betreuung von Shopping-Centern," in *Shopping Malls. Interdisziplinäre Betrachtungen eines neuen Raumtyps*, ed. Jan Wehrheim (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007), 232-35.

¹³ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge - Mass.: MIT Press, 1972).

¹⁴ SITE Inc. (New York NY), *SITE - Buildings and Space. A Circulating Exhibition Initial Showing at the Virginia Museum, Richmond - Va., June 10-August 19, 1980* (Richmond: Richmond Museum, 1980).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

In any case the SITE designs proves that if the exterior of the mall is more than simply a box, this is again not used to fetishize the building in the sense that it is turned into an object that makes you believe it is a machine for shopping but rather the opposite: it displays the fragility and ridiculousness of the building type mall.

The Museum as Fetish

There is one building type today that has turned into an almost total fetish, including the typical anti-fetishistic criticism, and the fetish effect has even been given a name of the most fetishistic of these buildings, namely the “Guggenheim effect”. The Guggenheim effect is the name for the claim that a building can virtually do anything, with no substantiated networks whatsoever, on a scale unmatched by previous buildings. The Guggenheim effect is thus the fetishistic belief that a city can build a single building with somewhat eccentric shapes, built by a famous architect, and that such a building can change a whole region. The claim is fetishistic, because the admirers of the building *do not even try to find* a technological explanation for the power of the building and the anti-fetishists do give a plethora of technological explanations, why the building is not a fetish.

Here are some examples for the fetishistic explanations of the power of the building: The German leftist daily TAZ, probably one of the most anti-fetishistic newspapers in the world, wrote: “The so-called Bilbao effect has reconstituted a whole area.”¹⁷ The German daily “der Tagesspiegel” remarks a bit more detailed: “The tubby building, wrapped in glittering Titanium, did not only change an old industrial wasteland into a boulevard full of Cafés and fashion boutiques, but also brought the city of 400 000 an enormous increase in visitors.”¹⁸ In both cases, the newspapers

¹⁷ “Der sogenannte "Bilbao-Effekt" hat eine ganze Region neu konstituiert.” Rolf Lautenschläger, "Ausstellung zum Museumsbau. Der "Bilbao-Effekt", " TAZ, 8. April (2008), <http://www.taz.de/1/leben/kuenste/artikel/1/der-bilbao-effekt/?src=TE&cHash=62e2303f90>.

¹⁸ “Der mit funkeln dem Titan ummantelte rundliche Baukörper Frank Gehrys hatte nicht nur eine einstige Industriebrache in eine Flaniermeile mit Cafés und Boutiquen verwandelt, sondern der 400.000-Einwohner-Stadt auch einen enormen Besucherzuwachs beschert.” "Jubiläumsschau. Guggenheim Bilbao: Streit um Ausstellung," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 23. Oktober (2007), <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/ausstellungen/Guggenheim-Jubilaeumsschau;art2652,2404880>.

produce pure fetishism: they show no interest in the complex question of why such a change happened and who brought it about, but take it for granted and assume that the building produced it single handedly. But the most religious and overtly fetishist comments came from the late Herbert Muschamp, the NY-Times architecture critic, who in an often-quoted article wrote: "Bilbao has lately become a pilgrimage town. The word is out that miracles still occur, and that a major one has happened here. The city's new Guggenheim Museum, [...], opens on Oct. 19. [...] "Have you been to Bilbao?" [...] Have you seen the light? Have you seen the future? Does it work? Does it play?". After this religious epiphany, he continues: "Fools give you reasons. Wise men never try. An architecture critic has no choice but to be foolish on this occasion, however. If a critic wants to say that the Bilbao Guggenheim is, in effect, a Lourdes for a crippled culture, then some kind of case must be made." That is, Muschamp himself reversed the definitions of fetishism. "Fools" are now the anti-fetishists who believe in reasons, whereas the wise men are those who submit to the unexplained powers of objects.

Joseba Zulaika, one of the more subtle commentators aptly observed: "Gehry delivered what Krens had asked of him: a building that would make visitors fall to their knees."¹⁹ But, as Zulaika further observes, good fetishistic objects themselves are media for a more unspecified desire and only objects in a long chain of objects, that can cater to these desires: „Krens's franchise exists only in one marginal European city, yet the Krensified museum exists everywhere in the media and in the desire of every city to have a sample of the elusive thing itself. ... But that is precisely what an unending desire needs, a reality that in the end does not exist."²⁰ Since fetishes are not technologies, they can be transformed into other substitution objects. Thus, the Guggenheim even has become a sexual fetish. Chef Quique Dacosta of El Poblet restaurant in the small town of Denia, close to Alicante, invented a dish called "oysters Guggenheim Bilbao". The dish is composed of oysters under a roof made out of

¹⁹ Joseba Zulaika, "Desiring Bilbao: The Krensification of the Museum and Its Discontents," in *On Difference #3. Raumpolitiken / Politics of Space*, ed. Iris Dressler and Hans D. Christ (Stuttgart: Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, 2007).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 459.

an edible foil of titanium. Da Costa himself commented: „Some swear it’s addictive. Others say it’s an aphrodisiac“.²¹

The Guggenheim-effect is a typical fetish, and moreover, it is a fetish in the eyes of even those who are supposedly not being taken over by fetishistic qualities, like architecture critics from the NY-Times or German leftist journalists. In the case of the Guggenheim effect, the fetishistic effect ranges from changing bleak wastelands into lively neighborhoods to changing a whole regional economy.²² But how did museums become fetishes in contemporary societies?

Apart from the general history that turned modern buildings into fetishes, I would like to argue, that museums show exactly what the enlightened modernists so forcefully denied: Namely that fetishism is either a rhetorical strategy to debunk the beliefs of your opponents, or that it is part of what makes humans humans: namely the capacity and need to believe.

Museums are the ironic proof of this universalism of fetishism. They constitute the building type, that is most unlikely to be a fetish: It is not banks or supermarkets that are fetishes as the idea of commodity fetishism would probably imply, and not churches, or mosques, as the idea of religious fetishism would have it, as I will show in the next section, but museums: the very building types that are supposed to be emblems of civic culture, of being houses that treasure art that is removed from the evil forces of the market and commodity fetishism. Museums as fetishistic building types ultimately prove, that in the beginning of the 20th century fetishes are universal facts and that we can stop blaming others for their misguided fetishism.

²¹ El Poblet, *Oysters Guggenheim Bilbao* (2007 [cited 23. April 2008]); available from <http://www.lomejordelagastronomia.com/eng/recetaselec.asp?key=43>.

²² As is always the case with fetishes, the anti-fetishistic admonishers are not far away. They enlighten the fetishists about their misguided beliefs and show that it is not the building that has these effects, that in fact, the effects are not visible at all, see: Maria V. Gomez and Sara Gonzalez, "A Reply to Beatriz Plaza’s ‘The Guggenheim-Bilbao Museum Effect’," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25, no. 4 (2001). But, as always with fetishes, enlightenment does not help: the fetishists truly believe in the power of their object and thus mayors all over the world ask architects such as Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, or Daniel Libeskind and a few others, to build one glittering museum after the other, from Wolfsburg to Dubai, hoping that their cities would undergo a similar transformation as Bilbao.

It still remains the question why the universalization of fetishism takes place at the end of the 20th century. A first answer would be that we had to first enter a time when routine accusations of fetishism had to run out of steam, when the psychoanalyst, the Marxist and the religious interpreters just got tired themselves of their always similar accusations. The repetition of accusations then also led to the situation where Marxist and psychoanalyst interpretations were no more voiced from an outsider's viewpoint and could no more guarantee a position of detached cultural critique, but became (academic) commonsense.

A second answer would be that because the accusations of fetishism did not irritate anyone anymore, but rather became an issue of jouissance. The museum becomes the ultimate fetishistic building type, when everybody, even the Marxists and Freudians accept that consumption and sexual aberrations are human and normal. In such a society, even those most critical of fetishes, higher educated, usually left-leaning art lovers join the ranks. And since they join the ranks but have no interest in small-scale science-type construction of networks, they react with exaggerated ideas of what objects can do.

Technological Churches

Not only have museums become the most fetishized buildings; also, some of the most fetishized buildings have become the most technologized. Here I would like to discuss briefly some results from an ongoing study I am doing on the conversion of sacred buildings. These are examples from an evangelical church in Berlin, called "Berlinprojekt". Already the name of the church denies any fetishism, by hinting at the project, this most post-modern category of step-by-step engineering. When I did my fieldwork in Berlin in 2007, Berlinprojekt was in the Kulturbrauerei in Prenzlauer Berg, a former brewery turned into a cultural centre, where Berlinprojekt rents every Sunday a space (Picture 1).

According to Christian Nowatzky, one of the priests that I interviewed, the idea of Berlinprojekt is to set up a church in Prenzlauerberg, the hipster part of Berlin, because there is no church in this area. Nowatzky assumed that many people would like to attend services, but did not find a place to go to that suits them. Thus Berlinprojekt searched for a place that the young families and hipsters of Prenzlauerberg would like (picture 2).

The interior of the space, as seen on picture 2, gives no indication that it is a church; indeed, such indication must be missing, since Berlinprojekt rents the space only for the service. But there is

not even a movable object, no cross and no altar, no podium and blankets that would indicate the use as a prayer space. There is nothing that could even give a hint of idolatry, of fetishism, of doing religion. The space has probably everything that a church does not have and nothing that a church would have. However, the space was carefully selected, and it is a very technological space in the sense described above. It is doing exactly what the community wants it to do, and it does it with a well-described array of things.

Here are some statements of community members about the qualities of the space. A woman in her twenties, let's call her Abigail²³, says: "I find it perfect for a young community. But because we have increasingly more members with little kids, it's becoming more difficult. It's a problem that the toilets are not in the room. But otherwise, the location is perfect, many people just pass by." Asking her about the interior, she continues: "It's cozy with the carpet. Well, there are some columns. I do not understand too much about acoustics. It's bright." Having given this matter of factish account I continue to ask her, whether she likes it that there is no decoration at all, which she answers with: "Well, we want to keep it simple, right?" and then simply denies that the architecture of church is a reason to participate: "I don't go because of the looks, I go because of what happens."

Abigail considers first the church space alone as a technological problem. A problem that refers not to what a church in a religious sense could or should do, but for other practical reasons, like the location of toilets and accessibility for people with kids. Then, when asked about those aspects that would relate to the spatial forms in relation to religious aspects, she simply denies that any such relation could matter.

Another member of the community, Bathseba, shows that the neutrality of the church space serves not only the community but also the representation of the environment of the community: "Well, I find it very positive here, because a lot of people drop in from the street, who are not interested in services, and because it is not a church-like space it is very open for strangers, also for non-Christians." And she continues with: "I believe traditional church-buildings prevent people from making the first move and they are just afraid and reverent."

Bathsheba believes that one of the very reasons for why buildings have forms at all, why they visually indicate their type, namely to indicate what they do, is mistaken in case of churches, because to know from seeing that a building is a church in late modernity turns people away. A

²³ All interviewees are given biblical names as pseudonyms in ascending alphabetical order.

church should thus do nothing. As a type, it should not attract people; rather it should hide its type-specificity. The same strategy applies to the interior and the very fact of the service, when Bathsbeba characterizes “visible” churches with: “It is difficult to concentrate”.

Finally, I spoke to Chloe, an architect and also a member of the church, who is professionally planning the Schönefeld airport. She said: “I like it that it is unadorned, the high ceilings, that it is straight and bleak, and that you can still see the original construction. I like that there was a previous use that is still visible. Asked what she does not like she answered: “The carpet (...) because it does not correspond to the former use.”

Here, the very arguments that are made in architectural discourses for the generic justification for modern architecture, simplicity, bleakness, truth to material and use, are used to legitimate the form of the church. The form of discourse is the very same that legitimates old factories as fancy lofts. Again, no reference is made at all to the building being a church.

In short, all these statements show, that the Berlinprojekt is using its building in a way that is as unfetishistic and as technological as it can get with respect to religion. Whatever the building is doing for the Berlinprojekt, it does it in a purely technological way, and all these technologies are not related to religious substance, but to usability of the space.

One could argue, that this is a specifically protestant form of dealing with buildings. But even if this is partly true, what is more important here are non-theological reasons.

First of all, as we have seen, since sacred buildings that are identifiable as sacred buildings stir strong reactions, it is an advantage to be in a non-recognizable building. Typological theory is turned on its head. *Second*, going to and choosing a church has become a matter of taste and lifestyle, that is not so much informed by theological considerations but by other, more general trends. This is specifically true in a place like Prenzlauerberg, with its many hipsters. The theological arguments for or against specific interiors matter very little for the audience of Berlinprojekt. *Third*, for the Berlinprojekt, the building should not evoke religious feelings because it is the community that should produce these feelings. In the eyes of the community it counts as a weakness of the community, if the building has to do the work. The building should only be a technology (not a fetish) to accommodate the community, so that the community can perform religious acts.

Conclusion

If we do not understand fetishes as accusation, but if we use the distinction between technologies and fetishes as a means to understand present society, we can see that building types do not follow our routine assumptions as to what constitutes a fetishistic building type and what does not. Rather, as I tried to show, those types such as the museum that we would, according to Marxist and psychoanalytic fetish theories think to be the least fetishistic ones, are treated as fetishes exactly by those groups of persons who are very anti-fetishistic. Faced with the Guggenheim effect, art critics turn into believers and those whom we think to prefer causal explanations infer from a small building to a change in a whole region. Conversely, those building types that supposedly act as fetishes, the malls and the churches, and whose designers and users are believing in their supernatural powers turn out to be the most technically designed examples of step by step engineering.

Even if some of these examples, such as the Guggenheim and the Berlinprojekt, are extremes and do not reflect the position of museums and churches in general, I propose that we can still infer from these cases, that the fetish is not where we assume it to be and that the idea of the fetish ceased to work as a game of accusation. The converse position of jouissance has become stale too, since if you do not run the risk of becoming accused, it is not very heroic to enjoy the seemingly dangerous. It remains the riddle that we do not have a proper concept yet of what buildings do and how far their power goes. It seems that buildings are those objects whose quasi-technicality makes them prone to be understood as fetishes *and* as mere technologies and no consensus seems to exist as to what could define a building as to be either the former or the latter. If we can stably decide about the status of an object by looking at it's position in society or the profession uttering the verdict (for engineers, UFO's are fetishes, for others they are not), for buildings no such consensus exists.

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