

**Interview w/ Markus Schaefer of Hosoya Schaefer Architects, conducted by Erhard An-He Kinzelbach (2007\_0508 @ the Academy of fine Arts Vienna)**

HOSOYA SCHAEFER is a Zurich based studio for architectural designs, strategies and research. It was founded by Markus Schaefer and Hiromi Hosoya in 2003. With an international network of collaborators, the studio is involved in building design and realization, media installations, strategic planning and consulting. Markus Schaefer and Hiromi Hosoya currently teach as Guest Professors at the Institute for Art and Architecture.

Erhard An-He Kinzelbach is a practicing architect in Vienna and currently teaches Architectural Design at the Institute for Art and Architecture.

## **Design as Research – Research as Design Mapping, Scripting and Prototyping**

### **Erhard An-He Kinzelbach:**

The occasion for this interview is your appointment as Guest Professors at the Academy, so let us start with a question about teaching. Is there an interface between your teaching and your practice? Are there inter-relations, is there interdependence and cross-fertilization? Or, do you keep both rather separate?

### **Hosoya Schaefer:**

Teaching is an opportunity to pass on methods and knowledge. But it is also an opportunity to experiment with new concepts, insights and contents. We use research on the one hand in an academic context to fertilize other studios to get new ideas of what to pursue. But on the other hand, we use it to constantly question and re-position our own professional thinking. So, the academic work is a kind of generator for new ways of approaching architecture and for developing new insights. I think any kind of young firm does that quite consciously today. Academia is a reeding ground for new ways of performing as an architect outside academia afterwards.

### **EK:**

Almost like an incubator. We were formerly trained as individuals doing individual projects, and many schools still continue to educate students as individual creators. Now, more and more studio work is being undertaken as a collective endeavour. Is that something that you also pursue and subsequently translate into practice? How do you feel about this collaborative effort both in the context of research in an academic studio environment and in a practice environment?

### **HS:**

First of all, I think we have to define the term research a bit more precisely. There is a huge confusion in architectural academia of what the term actually means. Of course, research in design and research in science are two fundamentally different things. To be precise they should actually be called differently. Research in science is a kind of expansion of knowledge in an established system, in a framework of verifiable or rather falsifiable thought that is shared and becomes a common good. Research in design is inherently more idiosyncratic and it is meant to be much more generative. It is something you do to get at newness - which is a good in constant short supply. Because in the end, newness is what both architects and institutions use to position themselves in an academic as well as a commercial market.

So research in design is maybe more comparable to research by a novel-writer or script-maker. It is research that gathers facts in such a way that they can then be recombined into new types of insights and storylines. Or it is research that is used to develop new ways of literally constructing things, which might be a real technological advance, or simply a design innovation. So, it is something that is inherently more idiosyncratic and individual. It is sharable and communicable but its aim in the end is to create a body of thought which results in specificity, for better or for worse.

# HOSOYA SCHAEFER ARCHITECTS

AG Zürich

**EK:**

Why has research become so important in design?

**HS:**

Research has become increasingly important in design because the big explanatory frameworks of first modernism, and then the post-modern aftermath, are increasingly being questioned. These monolithic models or paradigms are being doubted. On the one hand this has cultural reasons - diversity and difference are simply a mainstay of contemporary life, playing itself out in media, the market, but also in what is perceived as politically correct. On the other hand, they are also doubted for very pragmatic marketing reasons, because if you are too much like others then you are not different enough to compete in the contemporary marketplace. Difference is key. Difference - enforced by the market - is a necessity. That of course is seen by some, Frederic Jameson for example, as the essence of post-modernity.

So research is something that is making up for the fact that you do not have those big explanatory models anymore, that you do not have schools anymore but very many offices that have to create their individual platform of content and their own strategies with which they can then try to be active in reality. And the more architecture becomes a discipline which is able to act also outside of architecture - be it in consulting, strategic planning or all sorts of other fields - the more this kind of a unique body of thought, this kind of content becomes a source to draw strength from.

But to get back to the second part of your earlier question about group work, I think group work is interesting in academia simply because you are able to construct a body of thought which has more breadth and depth when developed by many people than when it is done by one person. The architectural discipline, especially in academia, is going away from simply designing a building as sound and as beautiful as possible and is now rather attempting to innovate in a particular direction. Therefore it becomes interesting to consolidate studios like that, to move away from the authorship of the individual to this kind of shared bodies of work. I think this is both a necessity as well as an incredible opportunity. What the students also learn from it is that this kind of platform is something they really also need to have later. In a situation where professional disciplines are increasingly blurring and merging together, it is not important anymore what you are - whether you are an architect, an artist, a graphic designer, or a consultant. It is much more important how you define yourself, and what kind of sources of content you can draw from in order to make that definition. This is a much more interesting and important differentiating point.

**EK:**

You were mentioning that research in design, in opposition to research in science, holds a certain necessity for a generative quality. In parts of your projects in practice, you are using methods of mapping and scripting - not only to represent and communicate but also to conduct research. Could you describe a little bit how an originally analytical tool can be used in a highly generative way?

**HS:**

Map-making is world-making. You create a *Weltbild* through map-making. And, in a situation where the world is very unstable in many ways, because you have a lot of forces, feedback-loops and emergent potentials that change rapidly due to globalization - in a situation like that the map-making is a constant re-conceptualization of where you stand in this quickly changing environment. What is interesting about map-making for us is that you create this *Weltbild* continuously and are able to put these maps into storylines and then narrate a particular position. You can narrate that position when structuring a project, the basis for a project, but you can also narrate a position when you are interested in creating an entirely new project. So, what we often do is to talk to potential clients also without having a clear demand on the client-side. There simply might be a desire to change something or the realization that they are maybe at a conceptual dead-end, or a realization that they want to try something entirely new. The construction of a narrative is then something which is very helpful in defining what kind of project they could or should undertake. This process we call scripting. The result might be architecture. But solutions might manifest themselves also in other ways.

# HOSOYA SCHAEFER ARCHITECTS

AG Zürich

**EK:**

Since any map-making, but similarly also the collection of data and the production of statistics, is highly subjective, doesn't this imply that it is potentially very powerful or even manipulative? By choosing the data you include and the data you do not include, a certain reading of the data and of course by putting it in a specific representation, you are able to manipulate thought and convince a client for example. If this is the case, is there a certain agenda that reappears in every project you do, or is this something you redefine each time - with the method remaining similar?

**HS:**

I would not call it manipulation. I would call it the definition of a project. Yes, it is something which is constructed. Certainly, it is in some ways different to a scientific approach (which, by the way, is also not entirely value-free) in that it consciously constructs an argument and uses this map-making as a rhetorical tool. The aim finally is to be relevant in reality; the aim is not to create an ivory-tower, a kind of contemporary form of paper architecture. The aim is relevance, and relevance you create by defining a rhetoric that is projective that can have an effect in reality, that opens up opportunity, maybe polarizes, makes hidden potential visible and at its best creates desire. In difference to modernism, which was one huge project like that, these positions are much more individualized and fragmented. You have to realign yourself constantly with other people and new events, in a constant process of re-defining your position.

**EK:**

Is this re-definition different from project to project, or is there a line of consistency?

**HS:**

I think there is consistency. In our practice there is a belief in something like modernity - the idea that there is a need to define the new, and the belief that the new can still be better than the old. There is also, and that is something that we have not defined well yet, the realization that we are increasingly running into limitations of all sorts - demography, resources, space, water, ecological footprint. Increasingly, the discussion will not be one of a continuous differentiation, a kind of a continuation of post-modernity, an expansion of the market by ever-more finely dividing up and drawing from a mass of consumers, but it will be one of strategically trying to rebuild the way we live. We might realize that some of the cities which are attractive and offer lots of choice are simply not well-built. Increasing limitations rather than increasing differentiation will have to drive innovation - which will require an entirely new mindset that is, by the way, not an OMA mindset. It is an interesting and vital issue for our generation to deal with. [Note: OMA = Office for Metropolitan Architecture]

**EK:**

I would like to come back to your office as a research-based practice. Both Hiromi and you as the two partners in the office seem to have different, almost complementary interests in architecture. There is the occupation with virtual material and strategies on the one hand, and the focus on physical material effects and built structures on the other. In your recent lecture at the Academy you called these fields of interest mapping, scripting and prototypes. How do you reconcile these different foci in one practice? First of all, on a more personal level, do you divide these fields within the office? And, on a content level, do these inform each other? Is there an interface; are there feedbacks between the virtual and the actual in your practice?

**HS:**

I am interested in systemic thinking. And when you think systemically, you have to think about reality as a gradient from the real to the virtual. It is not two different things or two different sides, or two different ways of being. It is a gradient, and one acts in the other in manifold ways. What we realize in our work is that the ideas fertilize each other very much. So we use the same kind of tools to create data-constructs, like these expanding globes in the Volkswagen project, to make that hybrid virtual and real news studio for a German TV channel, or to calculate algorithmically the cells in the noodle bar project which we actually built in the end. It is all done with the same tools, and the same interest in precision and clarity which guides them.

In terms of thinking we also realize that there is a continuity of architectural methods and strategies which span from consulting to actually implementing a project - although we are not yet able to fully use this as an architectural office. And finally, regarding reality I think the interesting thing right now is that you are unable to understand reality when you only look at the so-called real. What you see is that the city or architectural typologies can increasingly only be understood when you understand their virtual component. For example, the Japanese department store in many ways is something very similar to a chain of Japanese convenience stores, in that they both are big structures

# HOSOYA SCHAEFER ARCHITECTS

AG Zürich

which are owned by a large corporation which make a certain amount of money with it. But the Japanese department store is organized architecturally, whereas the Japanese convenience stores are organized in discrete little elements, distributed over the city. In the latter, coherence and continuity is organized not by architecture but on the one hand by branding and on the other hand by infrastructure and logistics. The point is: you do not understand the effect of a convenience store if you look at the convenience store as a purely architectural object. As an architectural object it is absolutely uninteresting; as a system it is fascinating. So, on all three levels, in our own work, in our thinking and also in reality, we believe in a gradient from the virtual to the real where both affect each other and define a *new real*, as Toyo Ito already calls it. We exist in these two worlds, in a world of semantics and in a world of physics, and in our construct as human beings one does not work without the other.

## **EK:**

If you look at this from a disciplinary point of view, architecture seems to be extending its field. We realize that the traditional image of the visionary designer who develops a kind of master-idea in reference to original intuition is not valid anymore. Instead, there seems to be two alternative models of architecture as a research practice: that of the highly specialized expert (in a certain technique or method for example), and that of the manager and mediator – a sort of last polyglot and trans-disciplinary generalist in a society of experts. Where do you see the future role of the architect? What is your role?

## **HS:**

I would turn it around. I would say that there is clearly a market demand for this trans-disciplinary thinking, whoever is providing it. It is also a reality that this trans-disciplinary thinking is happening in other disciplines - you have graphic designers doing fair stands, or media designers doing building facades - you have all of these changes anyway. And, thirdly, I think the architectural discipline has a great opportunity there, whether architects take it up or not. Architects have always been generalists, they have always been trans-disciplinary by necessity. They are also able to think in scales and they are able to communicate in abstraction, always. Architects are not manufacturing the project itself; they are producing an abstraction of it, whether it is the plan set or a rendering. The direct result of an architect's work is always an abstraction which then painfully needs to be translated into reality. Architects have also been trained in process management. All of these abilities together would endow architects to jump to the task. And in many ways and in different kinds of forms, many architects are actually doing just that. And, one more aspect that is important is that there is always utopia at heart of architecture. As an architect you have a reason to want a situation or a place to change; you have a built-in agenda, ideally. So, there is opportunity, there is ability and there is motive.