









Somatic Structures

1. The Preiser Figurine

The Preiser architectural figurine company was founded by Paul M. Preiser in Germany in 1948. After having started out with the production of hand carved wooden figures for architectural models, they later switched to plastic injection moulding manufacturing processes to meet demand. To this day, each one is still hand-painted and marketed as part of a unique set ready to inhabit scaled models of potential constructions.

I picture the young Preiser as an idealist in a small town that has been decimated, attempting to therapeutically rebuild the community by carving effigies of the people around him. There is a large table installed above his modest workshop upon which he would constantly be rearranging models of the local townspeople in an attempt to build a new egalitarian society, distinct from all social economic, and political divides, in which all would be able to prosper equally.

He reaches the point at which he has produced an effigy of each of the inhabitants of the small town. He believes he has found the perfect balance in which each citizen supports the other without the need for currency or hierarchy. All goods, labour, and decisions are equally distributed, with each inhabitant contributing their unique skills, experiences, and strengths to the community. He excitedly attempts to present his model to the people, but to no avail. Struggling through states of exhaustion and disarray, each is sceptical as to whether the other would hold up to their end of the agreement.

Ravaged by hunger, the young Preiser is forced to look for work. Reluctantly, he begins to sell his figurines, mainly to the very people they were made to represent. With each sale, Preiser's tabletop society gradually declines and with it also his desire to realise it. Word of Preiser's lifelike miniature figurines soon spreads to the neighbouring towns. He is commissioned to carve new people that he has never met and dispatch the figure directly to them without it even reaching the tabletop. To meet the rapidly increasing demand, Preiser takes on an apprentice. Being the perfectionist that he is, he becomes unhappy with the inconsistencies between the original carvings and those of his new employees, so instead he opts to cast figures

based on the original model. The local baker becomes the universal baker, the local policeman becomes the universal policeman, even Preiser's own apprentice clad in blue overalls becomes the epitome of the manual worker.

As the economy begins to stabilise, the Preiser Figurine Company swiftly becomes the new industrial and economic core of the small German town. The local business owners and artisans that Preiser had once hand carved effigies of were now all working in his purpose-built factory that now stands next to his former workshop. The tabletop still remains, now stacked high with boxes of hand-painted models of workers in blue overalls.

2. The Architectural Renderer

Proposed architectural sites are now commonly represented by computer-generated renderings inhabited by cutout photographs of their proposed future inhabitants. Mostly created at the eleventh hour by junior staff members at the architectural practice under strict deadlines, the common method is to hastily select stock images to create a sense of how the future inhabited construction will look. These images depict utopian scenes of content workers and healthy families with enough disposable income and time to enjoy leisurely activities. Shopping centres, town squares, office blocks all operating in a perfect balance between production and satisfaction.

The function of these images is not only to visualise a projection of the physical architecture of the proposed site for its investors and future inhabitants, but also to offer a vision of the society it intends to create or reinforce. The resulting image will most likely be installed on the fences surrounding the construction site, creating a projection or blueprint to instruct the area's current inhabitants on how to use their shifting surroundings, and on who is (and who is not) welcome.

This image, in situ, creates a space of engineered potentiality. The office junior plays a pivotal role in social engineering through their cycles of selection based on the limited width of choice within the stock image archive and their preexisting beliefs of a desirable public in the eyes of the client. Their aesthetic choices from this bank of bodies forms a certain rigidity within the

development, or lack of development, of social dynamics. The appropriated bodies that inhabitant the proposed space become as rigid and modular as the bricks and steel beams that will hold it together

This virtual projection creates a new spatial and, more crucially, visible temporal layer within the proposed site. Its current inhabitants are given a clear timescale in which they may either adapt to the oncoming physical change in their environment, or relocate to a more suitable setting. Just as the structural or ornamental period features of existing architecture provides a subjective memory into the past, the CG rendering in situ provides a rigid linear construction of the future. Caught in between, the public are subtly coerced into belief in a perennial ideological system, dictated through its perceived aesthetic sequentiality.

3. The State in Architecture

Amidst the vast media coverage of the suicide bombings in Brussels in 2016, one image resonates. Depicting the aftermath of an explosion, the image in question does not contain any trace of the bodies that were caught or instrumental to the blast, but instead depicts the predominantly superficial damage to the airport terminal: a tangle of wires, ceiling panels, and dust strewn across a tiled floor. The internal airport infrastructure is exposed and mangled. The image signifies a rupture in the rigid narrative of aesthetic memory and projection. It has created a new alternative space of non-linear potentiality.

For most, architecture operates primarily upon its many edges and surfaces. Buildings are generally limited to perceptions of the immediate surroundings, on a room by room or area by area basis. Passages that run through them operate as personal sequential narratives, unique to each inhabitant or user. Little attention is paid to the holistic operations of the structure, as each inhabitant acts as a singular component, absorbed into its own predetermined operational system.

The act that causes the destruction of façades is further proliferated by the wave of media coverage that follows. The ubiquitous minimal features of the damaged airport interior provide a potential stage for fear and doubt across

innumerable aesthetically similar alternative locations. This potential for destruction or rupture becomes embedded into the personal narrative upon entering what were previously considered relatively stable public spaces. In contrast to the exclusive nature of the architectural digital render, these images are intended to create unstable spaces of universal inclusivity by the perpetrators, consciously or unconsciously aided by the media.

In an attempt to counteract or regain control of this inclusive ruptured space of uncertainty in Belgium, the state has deployed its military to sites of potential attack. In these areas, the presence of patrolling soldiers has become a permanent architectural feature. They act simultaneously as symbols of both state protection and control by way of dependence upon the safety which they are perceived to provide. Their effectiveness is impossible to quantify, and so remains as a supposedly necessary countermeasure. The soldier, the ultimate agent of state compliance, determines a new space of bias and potentiality. Acting as both a constant reminder of the violent act that led to their deployment, and as a speculative projection of potential further attacks, their presence provides a new temporal surface with which to galvanise the narrative.