

# The Feeling of Things

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A+T ediciones (Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain: 1999)  
Issue 13, pp.48-51

When Joseph Beuys was reconstructing the practice of art in post-war Germany, his work was intentionally inexplicable, rejecting a priori theories as a valid basis for art. Instead he drew on emotional and intuitive forces deep within himself in order to articulate this condition of starting anew and to connect as directly as possible with the viewer. The seeming irrationalism of the work could be seen as a direct critique of the productivist ethic of the post war era, which itself could be seen as an extension of the wartime economy. Far from being naive, this work was a powerful critique of the quasi-religious status that science and progress had achieved. The work had an open, environmental quality that articulated a new relationship between the object and its installation, and one which predicted a wider and deeper audience for new art.

There is a group of contemporary artists whose work develops Beuys' attempt to prioritise intuitive forms of intelligence. The work of artists like Katharina Fritsch, Robert Gober, and Juan Muñoz use the human figure and objects from everyday life. But rather than use these forms with any explicitly iconographic intent, as would have been the case in historical figurative art, this work attempts to operate first and foremost at an emotional level. The image in this work, with its associations to childhood, appeals to such commonly held experiences that one forms a strong feeling about the work almost as soon as one sees it. In common with much conceptual sculpture, this work attempts to operate primarily by way of the object, seeking to short-circuit any didactic or literary readings. However, unlike that work of Donald Judd or Richard Serra who claim to eliminate associative readings of their work, the work of these younger artists intentionally contains a surfeit of emotional content, which emerges simultaneously from the image and from the fabric of the artefact.

Why does everything have to come back to concepts? Being disturbed visually, experiencing ambivalence-why does that have to go straight into the language cage? It's just an escape into didacticism. A very important element in my work is that you come in, experience an image, allow yourself to be drawn into it, perceive it directly. 1 K Fritsch

### Construction

We are interested in making an architecture that does not rely on language. An architecture whose physical presence has a direct emotional effect.

We think that construction has a direct effect on the emotional character of spaces. Although discourses on construction often centre on issues of performance and technique, ultimately construction is about appearance, about choosing appropriate constructions in the production of space.

Within architecture there is a strong tradition to regard construction as a means to achieve a priori intentions, whether they are compositional, iconographic or ideological. Construction can, however, be considered as a media, simultaneous with form. Ideas of volumetric elaboration or descriptive grids seem impoverished when compared to the material condition of a stacked, log wall or an unpainted lining of skim jointed plasterboard.

Unlike architecture, vernacular constructions are not a self conscious act. They do not exist through formal abstractions independent of their construction. The vernacular is not about appearance but about presence. It is a physical artefact which contains within itself the continuously evolving social and technological situation in which it was built. Vernacular constructions are increasingly difficult to define. Globalisation of technology and information has made the local a more complex condition. However, the ad hoc manner in which forms are built up in the vernacular, through agglomeration and adding, the

slow and steady way in which technologies are taken up into a tradition, these things are still worthy of study -one is not interested in a 'new vernacular' but in giving a higher priority to the emotional experience of buildings and developing an understanding of how fabrication can hold emotional intent.

There is possible a precise relationship between each situation and fabrication. In this way every material is equally available for consideration. Social, environmental and aesthetic parameters are balanced within this process of choosing.

Although architects cannot make vernacular structures one can attempt to recreate the processes through which the vernacular emerges in each project. In the place of invention, rhetoric and signification one can embrace convention, awkwardness and repetition. In this way buildings can achieve an auratic presence that comes through associative memory and direct experience.

## References

1 'Matthias Winzen in conversation with Katharina Fritsch', Katharina Fritsch, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel, 1997