Wrong Features: Re-Framing the Everyday Through What it's Not and What it's Near

Paul J. Lee

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In the world’s ubiquity of images and growth of visual culture, it is appropriate to reconsider images as a source for producing architecture. Search engines and image-based social media illustrate Jacques Rancière’s alterity of images — that images are autonomous from and other than the objects they represent — to a degree like never before. Given this vast field of images that make up our perception of reality, this thesis exposes and embraces the inherent distinctions between images and their represented objects to arrive at an architectural sensibility of distinction and otherness. By re-drawing, re-imaging, and re-presenting Bernd & Hilla Bechers’ “Typologies” series, this thesis produces a matrix of images and artifacts that re-frame the everyday by what it’s not, the removal of essential similarities, and what it’s near, the privileging of subtle distinctive features.

Discursively, typology has had any different definitions. Bernd & Hilla Becher present typologies visually. Their work is accurately described through Quatremère de Quincy’s definitions of Essential Character and Distinctive Character, which deal purely with the appearance of architecture—entirely beholden to visual perception. Essential Character is the appearance of the means and methods of construction and Distinctive Character is the ways these assemblies result in different configurations and originalities. The Bechers’ series have also been described as a document of reality in their style, or non-style. But according to Ranciere, all images are documentary — of something other. The question then is not “what is true documentary photography”, but rather “how should we perceive the images before us?” This thesis responds through a matrix of images in relationship to Character while producing alternate logics.

In his definitions, Quatremère alluded to the etymology of character, the marks and traces of writing, which translated into the marks and traces of construction methods and techniques. Architectural Character is now captured and disseminated through images, effectively de-familiarizing them. While Quatremère didn’t consider Character through the camera, his conceptualization of character as purely through appearance and visual perception aligns with how we see images today. Resulting from this thesis is an embrace of distinction and the architect’s mastery applied to the wrong things offering a way to see, analyze, and classify distinctions in images across media to utilize them as a resource for architectural design.
II. Altery of Images

Architecture always starts and ends with images - first the design drawings and then the professional photographs of the built work disseminated into the world. However, design drawings and professional photographs of built architecture don’t make up even a fraction of the infinite circulation of images across the internet landscape. We are inundated with images every single day and they influence our perception of reality just as much as reality itself, if not more. With search engines like Google and personal photography feeds like Instagram, Jaquc Rancière’s alterity of images - that images are autonomous and other than the objects they represent - is illustrated to a degree like never before. Hierarchy between objects and their representations are flattened and thus need another set of criteria to see them.

For example, in a simple image search in both Google and Instagram of a water bottle (figure 1), every image of a water bottle is different. Sometimes there are many in one picture, sometimes there is one, sometimes it has a background, sometimes it is entirely isolated in PNG format. This disconnect applies the same way to architecture. For the Seattle Central Library, some images show a single moment, different exterior faces, interior spaces, and others still even drawings and diagrams. Without prior knowledge of architecture or of the project, one may not know that these images refer to the same thing. This is the state of images today, an infinite circulation across the internet landscape. Given this vast field of images that make up our perception of reality, “Wrong Features” exposes and embraces the inherent distinctions between images and their represented objects that occur across media to arrive at an architectural sensibility about distinction and otherness.

An example of this gap between images and reality in art is in the work of the Bernd & Hilla Becher. Bernd & Hilla Becher photographed disappearing industrial machines and vernacular landscapes under the same conditions with the same techniques and catalogued them according to similarities. There is a gap between their images and the original objects in at least two ways. Firstly, many of these industrial landscapes were abandoned and torn down as Germany moved into a postwar economy and thus no longer exist. Secondly, it could also be argued that these images exposed typologies that did not exist in people’s consciousness because they existed in different cities and across the world. By capturing images and cataloguing similarities, the Bechers created a perception and memory of building types that did not previously exist.
IV. Typology or Character?

While the Bechers’ images have been described as typological, in architectural discourse, there are many different ways that typology has been theorized and understood. For example, in Rudolf Wittkower’s drawings of eleven Palladian Villas, Wittkower specifically analyzes the plan for its spatial qualities through geometry. He then draws a twelfth villa that cancels out differences in geometry between each villa to arrive at an idealized version.

Conversely, the Bechers’ series present typologies as similar part to whole relationships, form and postures, and functions. But as one studies the series as a whole, other characteristics become primary to the composition, such as almost symmetries, clumsy detailing, and awkward combinations of disparate parts. The Bechers’ work is then more accurately described through Quatremère de Quincy’s definitions of Essential Character and Distinctive Character, originally written for the world’s first comprehensive Encyclopédie Méthodique in 1788. Quatremère’s definitions deal purely with the appearance of architecture; they are entirely beholden to visual perception.

Ultimately, Rancière’s “Alterity of Images” is not limited to photographs taken by the machine, but includes drawings and any representation. Any time a new representation of something is made, information and details are ignored and left out. Wittkower’s plans are abstractions through lines ignoring any literal representation, and the Bechers’ capture near-elevational views ignoring any logic of the plan or the entire back side, half of the actual subject. All that is left is the visual perception of the image before us, and Quatremère’s definitions of character serve to discuss the image.

Rudolf Wittkower’s analysis of Palladian Villas from Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism

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Definitions: Essential Character

Essential Character is the appearance of the means and methods of how something is built, originally linked to the construction techniques of primitive societies. Quatremère theorized that all primitive societies’ architecture derived from three original types which were dependant on their responses to climates and ways of survival - the hut, the tent, and the cave. But in the Bechers’ blast furnace series, essential character is the rationalization and optimization of form - manifested through equal spacing of columns, the spherical center, and the way that the stairs and ladder wrap around it - a kit of parts coming together.

It should be clarified that in the late 1700’s and early 1800’s Quatremère wrote about the work of contemporary architects, namely Ledoux, Lequeu, and Boulée and described the essential character of their work as the sublime. Others have also conceptualized essential character through force and grandeur. However, I believe that this definition of essential character as the sublime was specific to the time in which he was writing. To recontextualize his definitions of character specifically to the Bechers’ work and generally to images today, I have decided to focus specifically on his definitions in relationship to primitive societies. The fact however, that Quatremère wrote of these contemporary architects’ and took an interest in their drawings - images - feeds into the claim about Quatremère’s conceptualization of character through visual perception as being an accurate depiction of how to view images.

Blast Furnaces, Essential Character
Distinctive Character is then the way that these assemblies result in different configurations and originalities, distinction within the rule set of essential character. It can be compared to the physiognomy of a face where the configurations of one’s facial features look different and convey different meanings but are all of the same person. Thus the Bechers’ images, although typically viewed for their uncanny similarities, also catalogue distinction. A purely typological perception of their work would like us to view the essential similarities of each blast furnace, but Quatremère’s definitions and written work go beyond simply uncovering origins of type but also analyze change and distinction across a series.

Definitions: Distinctive Character


Charles Le Brun, Physiognomy
**Otherness (and the inherent de-familiarization of photography)**

The Bechers’ series have been described a document of reality in their style, or non-style. But according to Rancière’s alterity of images, all images are documentary, just of something other. The question then is not what is true documentary photography, but rather how should we perceive the images before us? “Wrong Features” sets this up through a matrix of images including analytical drawings and speculative collages that reveal and privilege distinctive qualities typically not considered in traditional architectural design techniques to create alternate logics of image perception and analysis that is neither in step nor totally out of step with essential character and formal analysis. The camera, although described as the most accurate of media, inherently defamiliarizes us from its subjects. In creating a photograph, a single moment is made still and we can focus on aspects we normally wouldn’t or couldn’t. In this way, the Bechers’ defamiliarized us from the world by exposing unknown types.

7. Klaus Buhmann, Typologies, (Cleveland, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 1991), Preface.
8. Andrew Zago, “Awkward Position,” Perspecta 42: The Real (2010), 213-215. In describing the Awkward in architecture in relationship to traditional mastery and correctness, Zago writes: “It doesn’t align with normative manners, but it doesn’t critique them either. It gains its special resonance by maintaining a clear relationship to larger cultural norms while constructing an alternate logic within them; neither in step, nor totally out of step. This alternate logic does not clash with the normative so much as it bumps and grinds against it.” Zago also describes the awkward as post-authentic by being intentionally incorrect. “Wrong Features” posits a similar position toward essential character and traditional formal analysis of architectural images in order to expose other qualities and features inherent in images but typically overlooked and ignored.
Wrong Features

When I visited Germany, I experienced first-hand the alterity of images. Looking for the sites that the Bechers photographed, it was difficult to find some of their subjects as they have disappeared. Secondly, there was a great disconnect between the image I had in my head and what I actually saw. It was truly as if seeing them for the first time. The following is an unfiltered series of photographs that intentionally break the Bechers’ photographing techniques. The Bechers’ photographed with the motif placed in the middle of the picture, mostly frontally, seldom diagonally, photographing without perspective distortion, never from above or below, under a sky as cloudless as possible, without shadow in a diffuse light, in absolute abstention from an expressive superelevation\(^9\). In this series, the motif is not placed entirely in the picture, it is not placed in the middle, almost never frontally, usually diagonally with perspective distortion, sometimes from below, indifferent to the weather and to the light, and it is non-elevational.

\(^9\) Klaus Buhmann, Typologies, (Cleveland, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, 1991), Preface.
Three Originals

As perhaps the Bechers’ most iconic subjects, *Blast Furnaces* inspired the creation of two alternate sets that push up against traditional notions of typology, iconicity, and character. These three sets of disseminated images serve as the originals for the matrix of distinction. In this matrix, images are altered in various ways to privilege distinctive character over essential character.

This series titled *Other Blast Furnaces* is a collection of blast furnaces from books and the internet. These images try to match the Bechers’ technique, but through a more dominating role of background, and sunny conditions as opposed to overcast skies. Differences solely in technique become distinctive qualities in these images. Additionally, the subjects themselves are more broadly defined to include columns with larger footings, thinner frames, and color.
This series is titled *Informal Blast Furnaces*. It is a curated collection of photographs of a pair of blast furnaces at Marienpark in Berlin. Where in *Other Blast Furnaces* the images failed to capture the Bechers’ subjects either through imperfect photographing technique or qualities that were too distinct, *Informal Blast Furnaces* doesn’t attempt to match the Bechers’ technique but rather breaks it intentionally. The result is an aspect-to-aspect transition of details and spatial experiences of and around the pair of blast furnaces.
Idris Khan is an artist who is also working with the Bechers’ series in order to expose other qualities and characteristics. By collapsing each of the Bechers’ images into one, Kahn effectively cancels out difference, similar to Wittkower’s twelfth villa. However where
Wittkower ends with an idealized version through geometry, Khan creates an idealized version of essential character is represented purely through inexact ephemerality and atmosphere.
V. Plates
Descriptions

1.1: Pizza Axon
Split into fifteen equal but arbitrary parts, columns split at unideal angles reveal new relationships to other columns.

1.11: Fake Res
By changing the resolution several times, the computer is forced to create fake pixels. By changing the medium, the image inherently changes as well.

1.2: Pizza Slices
The blast furnace is split into fifteen equal parts, one fifteenth from each original blast furnace. At first glance the plan is seemingly like any other blast furnace.

1.12: 15 or 30?
Even when strips do not align, we are momentarily satisfied by reading misalignments. At moments we are satisfied reading 30 near-wholes as opposed to 15 wholes.

1.22: New Legs
Progressively the original columns are made illegible and in the end read as a different figure by itself.

1.21: New Legs
Launched from the foreground through shared shapes and aspects.

1.3: Isolated Legs
The blast furnace is split into fifteen equal parts, one fifteenth from each original blast furnace. At first glance the plan is seemingly like any other blast furnace.

1.13: Vertical Error
A single moment is stretched and exaggerated piece that maintains a level of clarity and unity to the original, neither in step nor entirely out of step with essential character.

1.22: New Plans
Literal Plans cut through combined columns produce new figures from which the originals are illegible, but another figural sensibility arises.

1.23: Mashed Up
Distinctive features are combined with a surface to further remove the memory of the original figures but rather welcome another reading.

2.1: Awkward Splits
Columns are isolated and given adequate spacing - but they are only held together by the ring above and below. The meaning as structure is lost.

2.11: Fake Res
In the blurred image we can still make out a singular reading of the whole not only through shape but through color, structure, background, and other distinctive elements.

2.12: Vertical Strips
Misalignments are furthered due to imperfect photographing technique. We never see a perfectly aligned whole until the original image is remade.

2.2: Equal Slices
While each column is split ideally (never cutting through the column) the reading of the whole is difficult because the features are so distinct.

2.21: New Frames & Legs
Like 2.3, although original features are illegible, features like the ring near the bottom and top help to combine elements into a perceivable whole.

2.12: Vertical Strips
Misalignments are furthered due to imperfect photographing technique. We never see a perfectly aligned whole until the original image is remade.

2.22: Plan Densities
New formal gestures arise through addition and the cuts through the frames begin to read as densities rather than mass.

2.23: Mashed Up
Unlike 1.23, the object's distinctions are not read through new figures but rather through the densities of frames.

2.3: Other Legs
Compared to 1.3, the isolated column definition as a feature is broadened. Some blast furnaces have only diagonal columns thus diagonal frames are included as well.

2.32: Many Cones (2)
Aspect to aspect transitions lend themselves to spatial and formal understandings of the blast furnace as opposed to temporal ones, thus views are collapsed into one image.

2.13: Vertical Error
The exaggerated piece maintains a level of clarity to the original but offers another way of considering distinction to produce form.

3.1: Many Cones (1)
Diagramming the image series literally through axonometric shows the series' vantage points.

3.2: Many Cones (2)
Aspect to aspect transitions lend themselves to spatial and formal understandings of the blast furnace as opposed to temporal ones, thus views are collapsed into one image.

3.11: Fake Res
Trees in the background blend with the foreground through shared shapes and aspects.

3.12: Half Strips
Momentary overlaps - despite different views and scales - create new relationships between similar existing features and aspects.

3.21: Almost Spheres
Viewing just the features, the new overall form is perceivable in its own absence, an "almost" sphere, rather a series of ellipsoids.

3.13: Vertical Error
Two separate blast furnaces are perceptually combined into one via common characteristics.

3.22: Crooked Views
Distinctive features “almost” line up elevationally and allow us to view a remnant of the original images’ views but are de-familiarized by their crookedness and awkward splits.

3.23: Other Views
Splitting areas that resulted from the image frame are highlighted to show and present the frame as a three dimensional distinctive feature.

3.24: Plan Densities
New formal gestures arise through addition and the cuts through the frames begin to read as densities rather than mass.

3.3: Cones of Vision
Taking the image as the reality of the photographed objects, the objects are split where the image is cropped.

3.32: Many Cones (2)
Aspect to aspect transitions lend themselves to spatial and formal understandings of the blast furnace as opposed to temporal ones, thus views are collapsed into one image.

3.4: Cones in Plan
Cone of vision drawn in plan.

3.33: Cones of Vision
Taking the image as the reality of the photographed objects, the objects are split where the image is cropped.

3.41: Horizontal Error
The imperfect framing of the subject is exposed as the features reveal the non-centered spheres and almost-frontal views.

3.42: Other Plans
Literal Plan cuts reveal more variety of column spacing and figure than in the Bechers’ series.

3.43: Cones in Plan
Cone of vision drawn in plan.

3.5: White Out
The imperfect framing of the subject is exposed as the features reveal the non-centered spheres and almost-frontal views.

3.51: Color Palette
Where in the Bechers’ series we see many layers of gray, in this series we see a variety of color. This breaks the Bechers’ rule of only photographing in gray scale.

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1.6: Bechers
The Bechers used the same photographing techniques and circumstances in order to expose an unknown building type into our consciousness.

1.16: Strips
Slices of each image put next to each force a reading of a single entity while positing all the differences at once - each distinctive qualities from each image are given equal footing.

1.7: Essential or Distinctive?
Despite being the figurally perceived as essential character, the spheres’ texture differ a lot from one to another.

1.17: Idris Khan
Idris Khan’s technique of superimposing each image cancels out all difference and we are left with a visual, rather than quantifiable, representation of essential character.

1.8: Foreground
By isolating the “subject” it becomes apparent that the background, although initially taken for granted, makes up a large amount of the initial perception.

1.18: White Out Collage
This image slightly widens the gap from furnace to furnace and shows how far each is from the next.

1.9: Deadpan Backgrounds
By removing the “subject”, we treat the image autonomously and find that background makes up distinctive character as well.

1.19: Speculative Dots
To represent the ephemerality of Khan’s image, dots are speculatively mapped based on tone density. It is a representation purely of distinction.

1.10: Low Res
Digital images are entirely beholden to their pixel size, a language different from traditional photographs.

1.20: Legs on Legs
Collaging in three dimensions, column sets are added atop another. Hierarchies of distinction and individuality are flattened and the original becomes illegible.

2.6: Other
Similar images to the Bechers’ series found in books and on Google, Instagram, and Pinterest searches reveal other distinctive qualities and similarities.

2.16: Strips
Misalignments result not necessarily in a lesser reading of a whole, rather it is not read as a perfect sphere nor with its essential character anymore.

2.7: Color or Light?
Color and lighting become part of distinctive textures. Comparing these textures to the Bechers’, the autonomy from image to image is heightened.

2.17: Another Collage
Despite a wider range of distinctions, the collage still is primarily gray and cancels out difference leaving us with another essential character.

2.8: Foreground
The imperfect photographing technique is exposed as aspects of the furnaces become cropped when the background is removed.

2.18: White Out Collage
As the found images are less alike to one another, there are many more distinguishing features that obscure our reading of the spherical void.

2.9: Background Realities
Soley comparing the backgrounds, the images don’t seem related at all.

2.19: Speculative Colors
Distinction is drawn in the form of colored dots. It allows for a reading of comparison and contrast between each furnace.

2.20: Frames on Legs
Taking three-dimensional collage and more diagonal frame pieces added atop one another, we arrive at a bigger mess of frames atop frames.

3.6: Informal
Informal photographs taken by author at Marienpark in Berlin breaking the Bechers’ rules revealing other aspects not included in the Bechers’ series.

3.16: Strips
Our mind desires to read the scattered aspects of the images in relationship to one another through the rules of essential character.

3.7: Textures Not Alone
These features are very specific and meticulous. Thus it is very difficult to read the texture as separate from them.

3.17: Yet Another Collage
The images are treated as autonomous as they do not change scale to match one another - positing the image as the “real” object itself.

3.8: Foreground
A series of aspect to aspect transitions lends itself to being read in relationship to one another. This series lends itself to becoming collaged together.

3.18: White Out Collage
Our mind reads the imperfect spherical void space before reading part-to-part relationships.

3.9: Background Qualities
Isolating background further emphasizes the breaking of the Bechers’ rules by exposing unideal and informal realities of the existing condition.

3.19: Speculative Panorama
Despite following the sphere’s profile and essential character, new forms and relationships are made via the language of the photograph and camera.

3.10: Low Res
Previously perceivable as trees, elements of the background blur with the foreground through shared similar colors and tones.

3.20: Collapsed Views
Accepting the picture frame as reality, the objects are cut by the cone of vision. Combining them collapses several specific moments into each other.

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VI. Artifacts

The following is a speculation on how these analyses and projections of distinctive character in images can translate into three-dimensional artifacts that maintain the same qualities of distinctive character while bump and grinding with essential character through perceptions and productions of new wholes. Not to be considered “final products” or a “catch all” for the series, rather these artifacts take three or four columns from the matrix and pause them to speculative on specific qualities three-dimensionally.

Speculations and manipulations of the digital inspired the first artifact (right). Just as a single moment in the image is stretched and exaggerated, silhouettes are extruded as masses. The artifact’s overall mass is read purely in relationship to distinctive character and a reading of essential character becomes secondary. Several different column types are collapsed into one another, different figures are horizontally and vertically stretched, resulting in wholes that are different from the original “type” but maintain its distinctive character through literal qualities and abstract moments.

In the second artifact, strips of difference are forced into a whole. Different textures are placed next to each other to be read together and the in-between moments are meant to read as transitions.

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The Informal Blast Furnaces series takes the frame of each image to be the reality of the blast furnace. For the third artifact, four different images and views are connected into a single mass. At different moments and angles one can see the original image from the original frame, but from any other angle we have a different form and a different relationships between parts and features.
Whether academic, professional, critical, speculative, or technical, everything an architect produces today results in digital images. Even construction documents lead to the construction of buildings that will eventually be photographed professionally or amateurly and disseminated through multiple media and the internet. Architecture still starts and ends with images and always will as it is a visual discipline. Can the medium be the message if everything an architect makes is presented in the same medium - digitally pixelated images? The answer of course is not simply a yes or no. In relating character to architecture, Quatremère alluded to the etymology of character which spoke of the marks and traces of writing initially as engravings into cave surfaces and later as typeface. This translated into the visual appearance of the marks and traces of design methods and techniques of architecture. These methods and techniques now are captured through images in our growing visual culture effectively defamiliarizing them even further. While Quatremère didn’t think of distinctive character through digital media or through the camera, his conceptualization of character as purely through appearance and visual perception is exactly what images are and how we see them today.

Quatremère had a third definition of character, Relative Character. Relative Character is defined as the meaning that resulted from the Essential and Distinctive Character of architecture. For everyday buildings this was its function and for canonical works it was the ideal proportions and collective acceptance of beauty for that society. However in our postmodern world and with the phenomenon of the bottom-up collective, including the flattening of hierarchy between images across the internet, exact meanings to architectural features scarcely exist and specific messages are not always derived from the medium. What then results from the matrix of images and artifacts of this thesis is not exact meanings to distinctive architectural features but rather an embrace of distinction and the architect’s mastery applied to the wrong things, offering a way to see, analyze, and classify distinction in images across media and of the everyday to utilize them as a resource for architectural design.

VII. In Conclusion or Inconclusive?

VIII. Annotated Bibliography

Colquhuon, Alan. "Typology and Design Method" (1969)

Here Colquhuon is writing about design in a very specific time, during high modernism. He was writing about design methods that pushed up against the expertise of modernism and cites projects that design with intuition over rational where rational fell short. He claims that typology is usually a back-up in design method, where if the architect cannot find a new solution to something, the architect will use the existing solution, the previous spatial composition, the known typology. He writes about a process of exclusion, this exclusion being specifically our scientific understanding of a design problem, simply the best way to fix it. By excluding a scientific understanding which brings us to an objective answer so quickly, it enables us to see the potentiality of forms as if for the first time, what he describes as with naivety. This expands the possibility for new design to be put forth.


In this essay, Di Palma focuses specifically on Quatremère’s three definitions of character and explains how for Quatremère character was not only visual but also unusual or moral. For this thesis and in architecture, Quatremère’s definitions of character are purely relating to the visual. Di Palma puts forth the notion that all architecture, through its character, speaks more to our emotions and intuitions rather than our intellect, architecture is felt as opposed to read. This thesis doesn’t align completely with her quotes as it pertains to a notion of environment, atmosphere, and phenomenology, but leverages the point made about our intuition and feeling. The projective associations described in this thesis come from intuitions and not intellectual readings.

Joselit, David. "What to Do with Pictures" (2011)

Joselit writes about the ubiquity of images today and its resulting visual culture. He writes about the work of Seth Price who leverages the ubiquity of images in his art work. He writes about three projects that use three different methods that leverage the plethora of images in our digital world as a source of producing art, and as a means to defamiliarize them to create new affects.

Kulper, Amy. "Out of Character" Published in Log 31 (Summer 2014)

Kulper writes extensively analyzing and theorizing about Andrew Holder’s 48 Characters. She uses Quatremère’s definitions of character (which I would specify as distinctive and relative character) to discuss Holder’s process and the way Holder’s characters are read, as proto-organs lacking species specificity. She also compares his work to that of Robert A.M. Stern in how they both refer to history in different ways. She writes about how Holder is using analog techniques to produce quasi-digital forms to posit himself with the digital project. In this way both he and Stern work as historians in different ways.


Lai’s comic "On Projection" claims that the section is more easily remembered and recognized than the plan, and criticizes how mainly plan-based projects are often simply plan extrusions. This comic specifically is in dialogue with contemporaries notion of character as it pertains to inexact postures and figures. This thesis seeks to privilege the image, which are neither plan nor section but rather autonomous. But Lai’s description of the section as something perceived visually aligns more closely with the perception of images. In "On History", Lai speculates on the future generations, asking if our architecture was about this or that, capital A architecture or everyday buildings. This thesis does not take a clear stance on this debate, but does elevate the everyday by reframing it with digital media and thus elevates it to the level of architecture; the Bechers did the same of their subjects but with the camera and to the level of art.

Lavin, Sylvia. Quatremère de Quincy and the Invention of a Modern Language of Architecture (1992)

Lavin’s book, which comes from her Ph.D. dissertation at Columbia University, offers a great summary and synthesis of not only Quatremère’s work in the Encyclopedia and his Essay on Character, but also his life work and career. Lavin offers the context of Quatremère’s contemporaries and describes how his writing was different. While his contemporaries were seeking answers to questions regarding to origins in architecture and Quatremère’s career started there in his initial research about Ancient Egypt, his writing became defined by not tracing origins but rather analyzing change. This manifested in his definitions of character as a means to compare all works of architecture, and his conceptualization of architecture as a language that allowed all architecture to be considered in a similar way.

Moneo, Rafael. "On Typology" Published in Oppositions (Summer 1978)

Typology may be misunderstood by many as the shape of something that is repeated and slightly altered. Typology however is more complex than just a shape. Moneo writes about how typology is inherently about spatial composition through geometry. He offers images of typology as diagrams that precede or start design process. Moneo, along with Aldo Rossi, claims that typology in this sense is the very essence of architecture.


Rancière writes about the alterity of images; images provide autonomous and alternate realities. He writes about how images are not faithful copies but rather serve to stand in place of something else. Every image removes information from whatever it is an image of. Rancière writes that the commonest regime the image presents is a relationship between the sayable and the visible and that he visible can be arranged in meaningful tropes. This thesis takes this for granted in the matrix as the images are not faithful.
copies of originals but stand in place for them. In the way the images are altered, they remove information about essential character and privilege distinction.

Somol, Robert E. "Green Dots 101" (2007)

Somol writes about design practices whose techniques emerged from the roots of Post-modernism in order to produce a post-critical and post-indexical project, or projects that produce projective affect. The practices that Somol describe are the ones who are the firsts to put forth an architecture that is understood through its character (in a contemporary sense) as opposed to its spatial composition, geometry, and typology. He also offers a few design techniques that offer ways to "cool down" a design, or make it less critical and more projective.

Somol, Robert E. and Whiting, Sarah. "Notes around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism" (2002)

Here Somol expands his ideas of a post-critical and post-indexical projective project with a duality he calls hot and cool. He claims that the critical project is "hot" in that it feels like work, it is inherently seemingly complicated. The projective project is "cool" in that it conveys an easiness to it, whether the design method is easy or not; he is not getting at the skills of the designers but rather the perception. He furthers this duality with a comparison to the performances of actors Robert de Niro and Robert Mitchum (hot and cool respectively) playing the same character in separate versions of the same movie. De Niro is an expert in his craft and he is intensely engaging his character while Mitchum is calm and collected and leads the audience to question whether he is truly acting, working, or simply being himself on display.


Zago appropriates contemporary theory of comedy, specifically cringe comedy relating to "The Office" and brings it into the discourse of architecture. He writes that traditional mastery and expertise, or set of skills, in architecture is limited in what it can make, or how "good" its product can be and eventually backfires on itself. He claims that easy expertise, or what Bob Somol might consider "cool practice", can reach a level of "goodness" in design more quickly and easily than traditionally mastery but also has a limit. He writes that the awkward as a design tactic doesn't use traditional mastery but doesn't necessarily critique it either (like Post-modernism so clearly did), and thus has the ability to produce something unpredictable and can supersede the "goodness" or traditional mastery and easy expertise.

Other Texts

de Duve, Thierry. "Bernd and Hilla Becher or Monumentary Photography", Published as the Introduction in Bernd and Hilla Becher Basic Forms


Krauss, Rosalind. "Sculpture and an Expanded Field"

Lavin, Sylvia. "Rereading the Encyclopedia"

Neimark, Anna. "On White on White", Published in Log 31

Vidler, Anthony. "The Third Typology" Published in Oppositions (February 1999)