PRADA Aoyama Epicenter herzog & de meuron

EVDA 621: formal strategies in architecture
CASE STUDY: body analysis
JACLYN BURGESS: 10039105
11.24.2009
Prada commissioned Herzog & de Meuron to design an iconic building for their Asian Epicenter in Tokyo in 1999. The site is located in Aoyama, a trendy fashion district consisting of dense but relatively low-scale commercial buildings. This chic location, aided by a highly recognizable building, resonates a brand identity with consumers. With the Epicenter, structure and fashion are joined together, crucial for one of the most influential fashion companies in the world. Herzog & de Meuron aimed to redefine a place for shopping and to create a building whose existential purpose was to provide an entirely new shopping experience.

Herzog and de Meuron designed the Tokyo Flagship store for Prada, as it is a highly recognizable architecture with no emphasis on any specific aspect of the building. Here, structure and fashion are joined together, creating a unified body with the intention of promoting brand-identity. Structure and fashion are not the only elements within this building that are unified, everything from the walls, ceilings and the display cases are holistic, becoming a blank canvas on which to display the high-end merchandise.

The Prada Epicentre is a holistic architecture, the displays, snorkels, walls, floors, and horizontal tubes represent a single unity. The building itself is a projection of the body contained within. “Because the arm seen and the arm touched, like the different segments of the arm, together perform one and the same action.” (Marleau-Ponty 151) The architecture of the store is holistic; when interacting with the displays one is in fact interacting with the architecture, as is the same of the change rooms and circulation routes. This body interweaves the ‘motif of the thing’ and the ‘motif of space’, reducing the qualities and separateness of the things to those of the holistic space. The snorkels and displays utilized throughout the building are extensions of the body; they are bodily auxiliaries, an extension of the bodily synthesis (152). These auxiliaries become a unity of the building, less a singular instrument.

The exterior of this body, the envelope, becomes interior element as well as structure. The white structural grid, within the horizontal tubing, blends seamlessly with the integrated lounge benches. When located within the horizontal tubing, the boundary between ceiling and wall is blurred, as the ceiling of the tube becomes the wall of the display area. Even mundane essential elements such as mechanical diffusers are integrated seamlessly
into the body, appearing neither unintentional or out of place. “The perception of space and the perception of the thing, the spatiality of the thing and its being as a thing are not two distinct problems.” (148) The complete interior of this bodily space is stark white, providing a neutral canvas, a unified homogenous body, to display merchandise.

The architecture directly responds to its inhabitants, allowing the bodies of visitors to have an impact on the spaces. The change rooms respond to patrons interacting with them by the walls transforming from transparent to opaque glazing. Without these occupants, the building would not be complete, the experience would not be holistic, as “our body is not primarily ‘in’ space, it is of it.” (148)

Herzog and de Meuron placed no hierarchy on the exterior envelope of Prada Tokyo, further implementing the concept of a homogenous, unified body. There is no obvious grand entrance to the boutique, no single focal display case; the body as a whole becomes the display, heightened during the evening when the light seeps out from behind the grid.

Prada Tokyo is constructed within the post-modern realm, rejecting classicism and traditional methods of building. However, it does not result in a fragmented body as outlined by Vidler. He discusses the shift from traditional methods that were a model of unity, to a technologically dependent architecture where the body is fragmented and contorted. Herzog and de Meuron designed a post-modern architecture within a technologically driven environment while still managing to evoke a unified body. He suggests that “the power lies no longer in the model of unity, but in the intimation of the fragmentary.” The power within Prada Tokyo, however, lies in its unity of structure and displays, a highly innovative architecture becoming a homogenous display canvas. The division between wall and ceiling, display apparatus and floor, structure and envelope, is not evident, “it’s limits, interior and

interior of horizontal tube as holistic space
surface as holistic entity

surface as multiple entities
exterior, seem infinitely ambiguous and extensive; its forms, literal or metaphorical, are no longer confined to the recognizably human.” (Vidler 3) The boutique by Herzog and de Meuron shattered the statement made by Vidler, with each piece of the body folding into others; the body is a whole, a unified non-traditional architecture.

With the Prada Tokyo Flagship store, Herzog and de Meuron created a cohesive and holistic architecture, one where it becomes difficult to draw the line between its various bodily components. They succeeded in providing a blank canvas for Prada on which to display their merchandise.