

MASTHEAD

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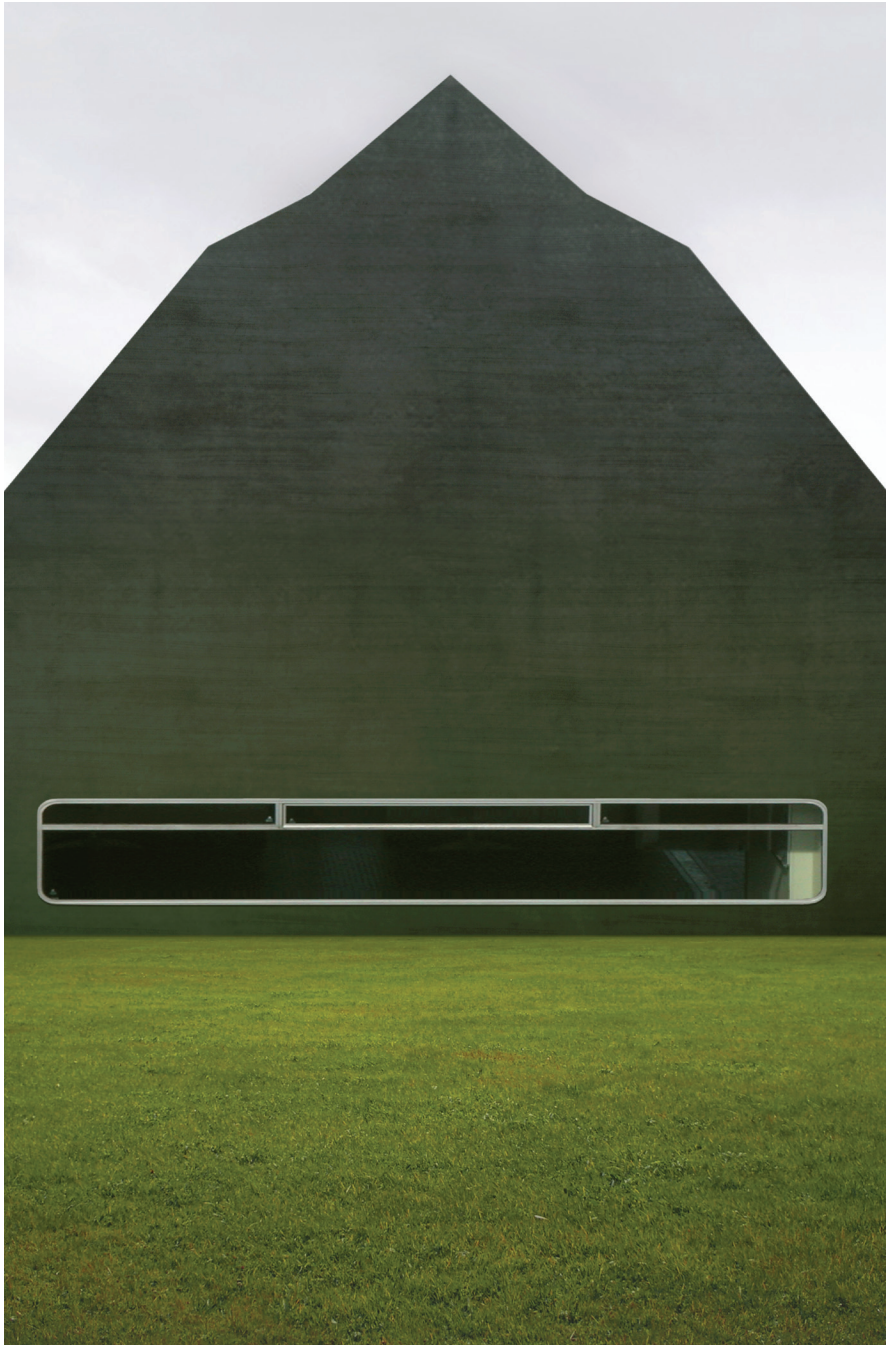
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ARCHITECTURE UNTREATED

ALFIE KOETTER

Architecture is crazy. Not wild or awesome or amazing crazy, but I'm-afraid-to-introduce-you-to-my-mother crazy. As a discipline, architecture has committed itself to simultaneously engaging three-dimensional reality and two-dimensional abstraction in varying proportions. As a result, it has had to address two, often conflicting, modes of representation and has found itself suspended between dimensions, carrying out a schizophrenic existence that straddles two distinct personae: one obsessed with perspective, volume, and realism; the other with flatness, abstraction, and potential fiction. Generally it would be socially unacceptable to leave such a condition untreated: antipsychotics would be administered and therapy sessions would follow. And while those personalities that have been classified as disruptive would be suppressed, a sedated life of reduced pleasure, limited sexual appetite and increased apathy would surely follow. However, as far as architecture is concerned, it would be best to leave this disorder untreated. Some of the greatest moments in architecture lie in the unexpected dissonances that reverberate between buildings and their representations. When the inherent qualities of architecture's dueling personalities are embraced and left uncompromised, the outcome is promising. More specifically, architecture is most powerful when the limits and consequent potentials of two-dimensional representation are acknowledged. One thinks of Mies's collages or Archizoom's plans of *No-Stop City*—pieces that exceed the possibilities of literal representation and embody a quality of composition that allows them to stand on their own as easily as they stand as complements to their respective

projects.

Flipping through magazines and scrolling through blogs, however, one is confronted with the distinct and unsettling possibility that architecture's two-dimensional persona has been deemed aberrant. Even more troubling is that architecture seems to have been subdued into harmony. Qualities of flatness and abstraction in architectural representation have been discarded in favor of the underwhelming reality of high-gloss, lens-flared didactic renderings. Gone is the schism between reality and representation; what is left is a completely synchronized (albeit muted) personality, obsessed with perspective, lighting effects and hyper-realism and thoroughly opposed to misinterpretation.

There are glimmering exceptions. In Philipp Schaerer's *Bildbauten* series, architecture has accepted its antisocial tendencies and 'forgotten' its medication for a couple days. As an exercise in architectural fantasy, the digitally created environment of the *Bildbauten* series exists solely in two-dimensions. Though these images are photorealistic in terms of light and materiality, Schaerer makes no attempt to engage perspective. Instead, he accepts the flatness of the medium, a flatness that hums in juxtaposition to the otherwise hyper-real qualities of the renderings. An obsession with the real is very much present in Schaerer's work; however, it doesn't come at the expense of the flat surface. Both are allowed to exist simultaneously, each speaking at once in support of and opposition to the other. It is refreshing to see architecture arguing with itself—reminded of its schizophrenia, in utter discord.