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WEAK MATERIALITY REPRODUCTIONS OF THE RENOVATION OF THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MIES VAN DER ROHE'S BARCELONA PAVILION

"About 1930 the pictures torn by hand from paper came into being. Human work now seemed to me even less than piece-work... Everything is approximate, less than approximate, for when more closely and sharply examined, the most perfect picture is a warty, threadbare approximation, a dry porridge, a dismal moon-crater landscape. What arrogance is concealed in perfection. Why struggle for precision, purity, when they can never be attained? The decay that begins immediately on completion of the work was now welcome to me. Dirty man with his dirty fingers points and daubs at a nuance in the picture. This spot is henceforth marked by sweat and grease. He breaks into wild enthusiasm and sprays the picture with spittle. A delicate paper or watercolor is lost. Dust and insects are also efficient in destruction. The light fades the colors. Sun and heat make blisters, disintegrate the paper, crack the paint, disintegrate the paint. The dampness creates mould. The work falls apart, dies. The dying of a picture no longer brought me to despair. I had made my pact with its passing, with its death, and now it was part of the picture for me. [...] Form had become un-form, the Finite the Infinite, the Individual the Whole."¹

Hans Arp (1948)

Considerations of the formless or "un-form" suggest a reassessment of the material domain of architectural form, namely the possibility of regarding materiality as something that cannot coalesce into a singular entity, accepting its irresoluteness, and in this sense, weak condition. In order to address such a proposition, one might examine that which is repressed within the material realm of form production, the very other of elevated materiality—the ordinary, inferior, impure, crude, messy, or wasted, that to which no form is attributed in the ideal sense. Sigmund Freud's assertion that "dirt is matter in the wrong place" could be taken as a point of departure from which to possibly overturn the notions of material rightness or wrongness.

1 Hans Arp, "And so the circle closed," in: *On My Way. Poetry and Essays 1912* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), 77.

Hans Arp's reference to the essentially impure material condition of artworks is indicative of such a posture. While creating assemblages with torn paper, he came to realize that the notion of the idealized work in its materially pristine state needed to be questioned. "What arrogance is concealed in perfection," he writes, "why struggle for precision, purity, when they can never be attained?" Every art object is exposed to a process of decay beginning immediately upon completion of the work: the fading of color, the cracking of paint, the disintegration of paper. This inevitable dissolution of artifacts, where "form becomes un-form," according to Arp, needs to be accepted as an integral part of art production.

Such a propensity, driven by a determination no less idealistic than its predecessors, is epitomized in what Robert Morris would come to identify as "Anti Form."² Morris's term is based upon a negative signifier—a designation of that which one ought not to do. "The perpetuation of form," he writes, "is functioning idealism." Anti Form, on the contrary, "is part of the work's refusal to continue aestheticizing the form by dealing with it as a prescribed end." Morris's critique is directed toward a general reliance on object-type shapes determined, for example, by the use of the right angle. "Its efficiency is unparalleled in building with rigid materials," he writes. "This generalized usefulness has moved the rectangle through architecture, painting, sculpture, objects." Morris extends this charge to the notion of the well-built artifact, representing an enduring form of expression.

Instead, according to Morris, emphasis could be placed on an investigation of the entropic conditions of production processes, tools, methods, and materials, resulting in forms that are not delineated in advance. Jackson Pollock acknowledged the fluid properties of paint while creating his drip canvases. The forms he produced were not *a priori* equivalent to the means. Similarly, "random piling, loose stacking, hanging, give passing form to the material," Morris writes. With such operations "chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied." In Morris's experiments with randomly suspended felt fragments, "considerations of ordering" are "casual and imprecise and unemphasized."

While Morris introduces a process-oriented direction within artistic production, pointing to the heterogeneous properties of material appropriations, he nevertheless relies on the juxtaposition of mutually exclusive terms. Anti Form only exists in reference to the preestablished status of form. Robert Smithson, responding to Morris's dialectical framework, unveils the potentials inherent within the boundaries of such classifications.³ "It isn't a question of form or anti-form," he argues. "I'm not all that interested in the problems of form and anti-form, but in limits and how these limits destroy themselves and disappear."

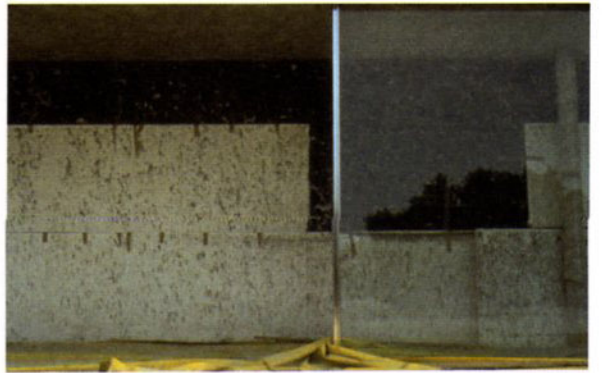
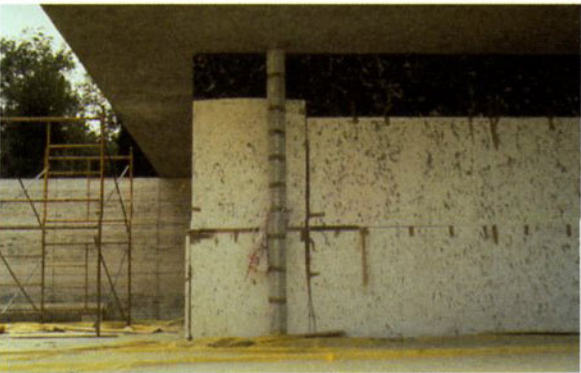
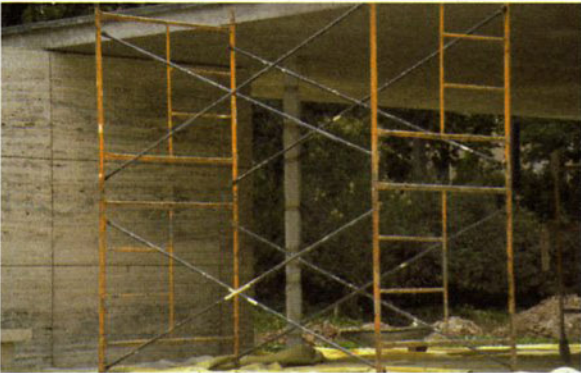
2 Robert Morris, "Anti Form" (1968), in: *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993). The following passages are found on pp. 41–49.

3 Robert Smithson, "Fragments of a Conversation" (1969), in: Nancy Holt, ed., *The Writings of Robert Smithson* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 170.

The work of Gordon Matta-Clark can be seen within this context for it operates at the edges of classificatory delineations uncovering customarily rejected and thus suppressed material aspects of architecture. The intervention *Conical Intersect*, a response to the revitalization of the Quartier Beaubourg in Paris, suggests alternative approaches to the issue of materiality in juxtaposition to the immaculate construction of the adjacent Centre Georges Pompidou. Matta-Clark's process involves cutting and removing in order to reveal that which is concealed. Studs, rubble, wiring, and other disparate parts of subassemblies, as well as the messiness of building processes, are literally exposed. The work engages in a kind of uncovering of presumed assumptions, not only as to architecture's physical constitution, but in terms of its solidly anchored ideological structure.

The issue of materiality has been repeatedly brought up within the Modern Movement as a means to disengage from traditional precepts. Adolf Loos's assertion that no distinction of value should be made between materials, Le Corbusier's *béton brut*, and Mies van der Rohe's employment of industrialized steel sections are attempts to liberate material possibilities from particular significations. Alvar Aalto's experiments with materials and techniques in his house at Muuratsalo reconsider the question of construction assemblies. The notion of homogeneous principles to which a work must comply is forsaken in favor of heterogeneous assemblages of loose cohesion. The possibilities of incongruous constructions are exploited, questioning the value of all-encompassing systems of order to which material assemblies normally abide. Notwithstanding ontological interpretations of such approaches, their liberating aspect has incited reconsiderations of materiality within recent architectural practices.

Frank Gehry's early work employs materials taken from the banal and ordinary domain of cheap construction—plywood, gypsum board, chain-link fencing, corrugated metal, and the like. Although ubiquitous and appropriated from the so-called cheapscape of the contemporary urban fabric, such materials are traditionally repressed in the collective consciousness. According to Gehry, they belong to the realm of an "invisible architecture," produced by the realities one elects not to see. Considered from such a vantage point, Gehry's contention is not to reveal that which is presumably hidden, but to displace such systems through unfamiliar allocations and fabrications. The casual and transient—if not to say degraded—qualities of informal constructions are pursued. Allowing material form to evade particular significations, materiality in its indecisive and weak condition is deployed as a tactic of the formless.



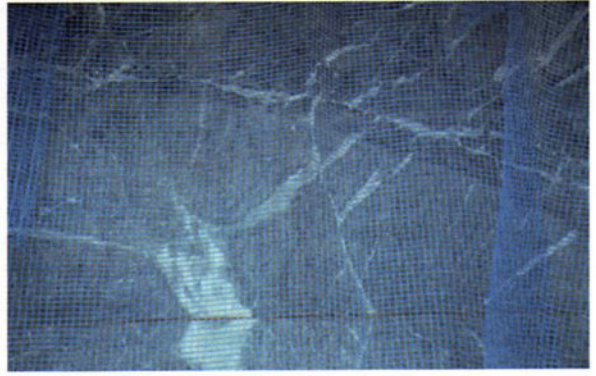
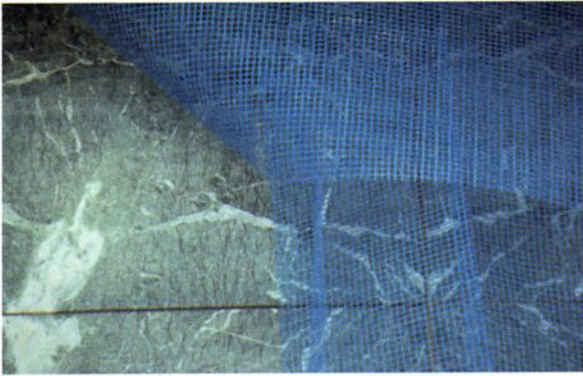
Figs. 1/2: Restoration of a reconstruction.
Figs. 3/4: Steel scaffold below roof plane.
Figs. 5/6: Styrofoam on alpine marble.



Figs. 7/8: Mouse gray glass in front of the styrofoam on alpine marble.

Figs. 9/10: Plastic curtain on mouse gray glass.

Figs. 11/12: Yellow tarp on travertine floor.



Figs. 13/14: Wooden frame on Roman travertine.
Figs. 15/16: Blue plastic mesh on alpine marble.
Figs. 17/18: Yellow tarp on travertine stairs.