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HIRSCH PERLMAN

THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
OCTOBER 2 — NOVEMBER 6, 1988

ESSAY BY
STEPHEN MELVILLE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Society and its membership are pleased and grateful for the opportunity to present this first museum exhibition of the work of Hirsch Perlman. We extend our thanks to Hirsch for so generously sharing his resources, information, and his confidence, which we have enjoyed throughout this project.

We are especially grateful to Stephen Melville, literary critic teaching at Syracuse University, New York, for providing an essay; to AnzoGraphics Computer Typographers of Chicago for their careful typesetting; to Congress Printing for their production expertise, and to Hirsch for his design of both invitation and catalogue.

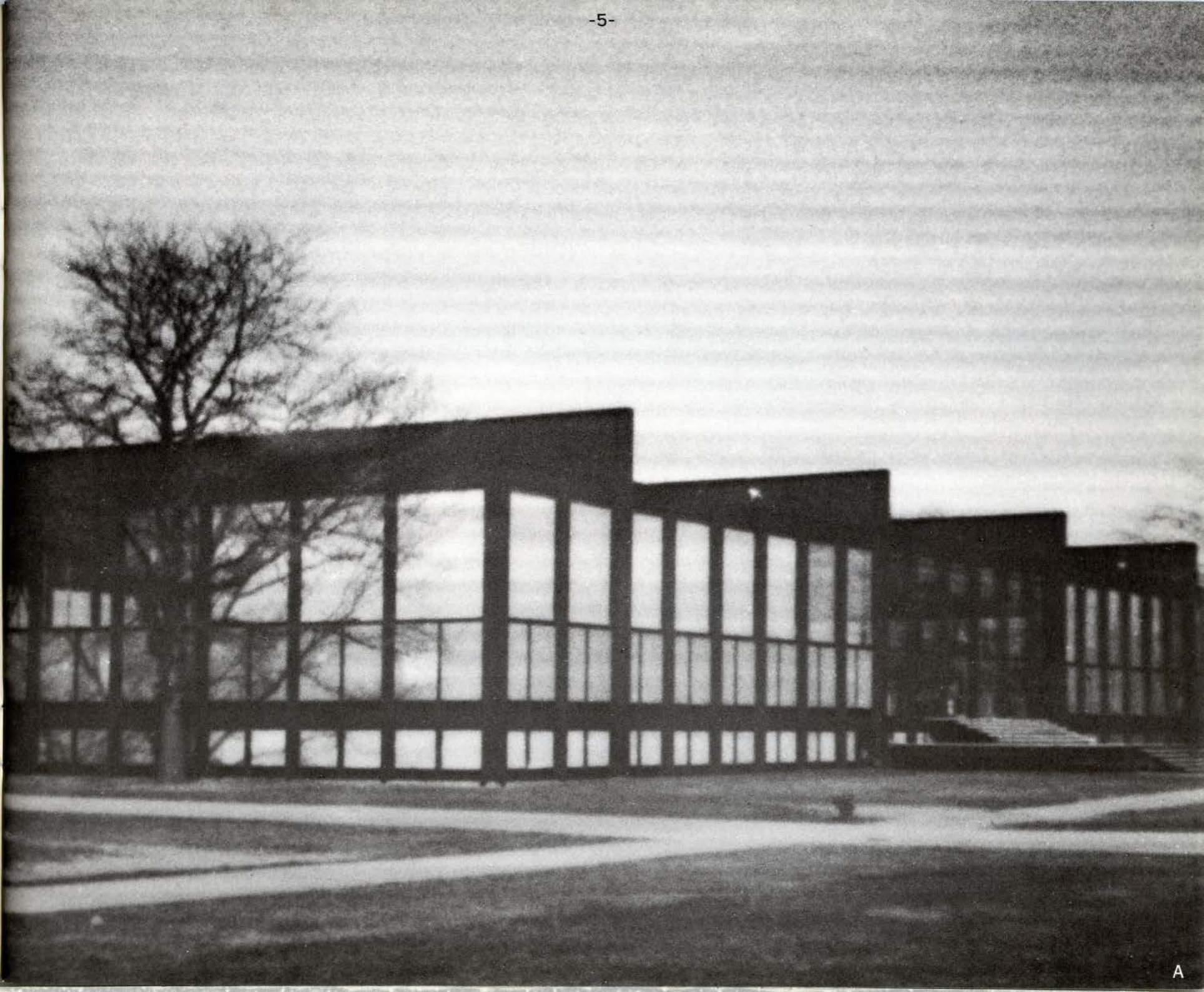
Special thanks are extended to the staff of The Renaissance Society: to Thomas Karr Ladd, Development Director, to Joseph Scanlan, Assistant Director and Education Coordinator, to Patricia Scott, our bookkeeper and secretary, and to Ben Portis and Steve Jo, gallery assistants. Their personal interest and diligent work greatly strengthened this exhibition and its accompanying programs and catalogue.

Throughout, Hudson of Feature Gallery, New York, provided information and encouragement. He deserves special recognition for his support of the artist, and his generosity in sharing work with us.

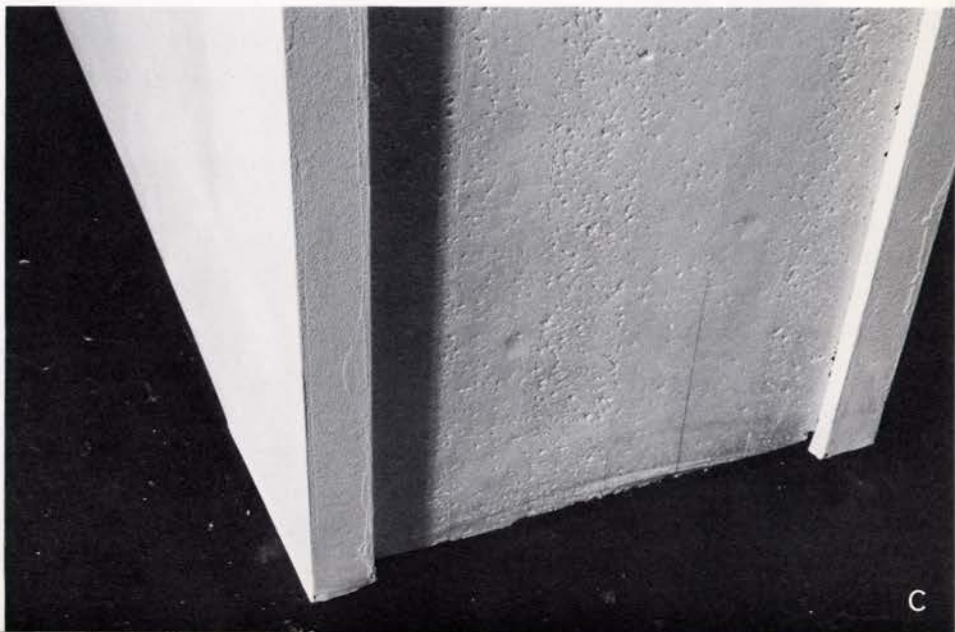
As always, my deep appreciation and gratitude go to the Board of Directors of The Renaissance Society for their continuing support and trust. I hope the reader will take the time to look through the list of these outstanding individuals from the Chicago community who contribute so generously of their time, energy and resources.


This exhibition and catalogue has been funded in part by a grant from The Illinois Arts Council, a State agency, Exchange National Bank of Chicago and by our membership. General operating support has been received from the Institute of Museum Services, a Federal agency. Generous private support has been provided by Timothy and Suzette Flood. Support from these agencies and individuals has been vital, and my gratitude is extended to them.

Susanne Ghez
Director









Leitner, Bernhart, Th

(DETAILS)

1 DOOR AND WINDOW ELEMENTS This essay exists only by virtue of a variety of intersecting technologies – the publication process through which Hirsch Perlman gained his initial acquaintance with me, the phones and postal systems through which I gained such acquaintance as I have with him, and, of course, all the technologies of word processing and printing that lie behind the material fact of the present text. There is to start with no face-to-face encounter between artist and writer or, for that matter, between writer and work: the work is – will be – was for you in some “now” – in The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago; but I, now, in your past, am in Syracuse, projecting slides on the wall of an empty classroom.

But it will of course not have escaped you that such circumstances of writing are not utterly alien to the terms of the work you face or have faced in that room on that campus as I presumably do not and have not in this room on this campus. We speak, after all, of an age of mechanical reproduction and of simulacra; we take these phrases to touch the postmodern.

The task of criticism is to enter the work. “The work” here means the work of art, but criticism, however informed by thought, having no method or rule, is called upon also each time anew to enter into its own work. Under the present circumstances these entries diverge, slide away from each other; something is missing.

This then is not and cannot be an essay in criticism. It is something else, a kind of greeting perhaps, a pause at

the door, a glance into the room.

The room is of course one with which you are familiar: a gallery whose walls support or frame words and images, photographs and printed texts, art works. You have entered and recognized it, although your entrance was perhaps a little uncertain. The gallery, however familiar it may be, is not quite itself – the walls, for example, are a little too high, a little askew, and, like the text pieces, they have edges, as if they were somehow not simply self-supporting but had been cut from some other wall and placed here for you.

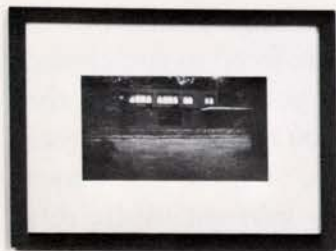
There is then a kind of folding of the gallery onto itself and this folding is double: if the texts and treated walls seem to undercut a picture of autonomy that allows us to imagine one thing – a gallery, some lengths of wood or metal – framing another and to reduce that imagination to the simple fact of cutting, still the photographs in their frames, as if in themselves, continue to hang securely on walls that remain the walls of a gallery in which another show will hang next month. Or do you want to say it the other way: that the walls and texts are somehow autonomous in their disattachment and that the photographs like the gallery betray that simplicity to artifice, convention, institution? Perhaps you should want to say that autonomy divides itself here; that it is only as it confounds the cut with the healing of that cut, shows each in the other.

There would then be a kind of call-

and-response between the exposed cores of the walls and words in one place and the not-quite flat surfaces of the photographs in the others – as if those surfaces were everywhere a healing over of their depth, their striations marking their core, their support, as insistent in them. And this would mean that the puns and allusions that hold the exhibition together do not function simply to manifest some more or less infinite flight of signification in the face of which you are freed to such indecision or decision as you will. Rather they would work to fix you within an awareness of ineluctable depth, of space and dimension as permanently inherent in the rhetoric of interpretation and as offering continuing standards for your dealings with sense.

The pictures are of buildings, interior and exterior, private and public, and if they are not pictures of pictures, they hover within that space. You have stood in front of them and looked into them; you have been invited to stand within them. Perhaps, invited, you have discovered yourself already to stand within them. We build to give ourselves shelter from circumstance and hazard; building we create what remains circumstance because so long as we stand somewhere nothing can deliver us from it and until that choice is taken from us we have no choice but to stand. Circumstance, like rhetoric, names the space within which we are – permanence of accident.

The task of criticism is to enter the work, to enter into its work, to extend the work, to alter and other it, to tilt a wall, display a door, invent an opening.



The treatment and location of the door emphasize the connection of these two spaces. The plain metal door contrasts with the other doors in the hall which are all of glass and symmetrically related to each other.

The door has two wings, and the door opening, on either side, is on the central line of its respective wall plane. In the hall, the framing wall plane is itself one half of the symmetrical northeast elevation.

Leinor, Richard, The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Documentation. New York: New York University Press, 1978, p. 72





Switches (knobs recessed, flush with surface of wall).

Lehner, Richard, *The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Documentation*. New York: New York University Press, 1978, p. 118.

2 INTERIOR The gallery has, distinctly, a front entry and, equally distinctly, a back. On the back of the second inner wall, on the far side of the exhibition, hang two pictures and a text. The whole ensemble is entitled *Stonborough Wittgenstein House, 1928, Peter Altenberg and Ludwig Wittgenstein*. The pictures are of the house Wittgenstein built in Vienna; one is an appropriated image, the other borrows only the look of appropriation. The text mounted between the two, like all the texts in the gallery, is from Bernhard Leitner's *The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Documentation*. But here, of course, it "fits," finds itself in some proximity to its proper object, as if here the show closes itself, marks its limit. Like all the other texts, it is a fragment of description. It reads: "switches (knobs recessed, flush with surface of wall)." The pictures no more illustrate this than the earlier pictures have illustrated their companion texts. They perhaps illustrate it also no less.

But one's first thought is as likely to be that it is not clear how it illustrates itself. Every previous text in the show has mimed its message: the remark about doors and entries [*House for Vienna Werkbund Exhibition...*] are given that shape; the "column and a half" so arranges itself both on its ground and in its relation to the accompanying image [*House for Weissenhofsiedlung...*]; the analysis of symmetries in the doors divides itself into exactly balanced paragraphs and in so doing places itself at notable odds with the photographic images it nonetheless might also be said to display [*Haus Lange and Haus Esters...*]; the "elevation with main entrance" deploys itself in the horizontal tripartition it names [*Leitner, Bernhard, The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein...*]. If the *Stonborough Wittgenstein House...* text also



mimes itself it can be only by being what all the others also are: words on the surface, switches (flush with the surface of wall). And are then the two photographs of the house themselves adequately captioned by this text? Is "switching" the piece's name for their relation? What if one says, yes and no: there is a switch, but these things are mounted on the wall and not flush with it, are framed and do not open their core to inspection? Does the impulse to say yes win out through the recognition that "yes-and-no" itself reflects the structure of a switch? – But then switches do not in fact go both ways; they go one way or another, their logic is yes-or-no. – These text-switches work differently, naming and not naming their selves, or their placement in relation to the accompanying image or images, or those images themselves. They depend upon their slippage; they become peculiarly autonomous.

If then it is not wrong to think of the work of this back wall as being to close the show, to close the space, the complexity of that closure needs to be fully noticed. This closure registers and repeats a disturbance that runs throughout the room – a disturbance that is, one might say, the very opening of that room. The openness of the space would not be something given in advance and simply to be arrested by the external imposition of some bound. This space, this room, would not exist prior to or apart from its enclosure within walls. The text and pictures on this back wall are in fact not on the back wall; they are, as it were, on the back of the show while facing the back wall of the gallery, as if the end of the room were not a surface available to the work but one only to be engendered or justified by it. The show hangs on two walls in the center of its room, and it shapes, opening and closing, that space. Hanging there, it plays itself off against its other



Column and half column in hall.

Leitner, Bernhard, *The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Documentation*. New York: New York University Press, 1976, p. 103

element: the three detached images (switches, not quite flush with this outer wall) that remark the inevitable incidence of the institution – the armory bought by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Mies's School of Architecture at I.I.T., the Chicago Historical Society, The Renaissance Society – upon the work's claim to autonomy, to mastery over the space within which or as which it works. One might speak here of the implication of the gallery in the work; it would perhaps be more accurate to speak of the work's willingness to admit its implication in the gallery – and one might gloss this critically through a certain willingness to confound indicative and subjunctive.

The installation then (but one can wonder if "installation" is the right word here – "exhibition" or even "demonstration" will at times seem more apt, and even the simple word "show" can be heard differently here) works its room, lowering a baseboard here, lifting it altogether there, sealing the balcony, skewing or heightening the freestanding walls. It is these freestanding walls that have had their baseboards removed, so that in one mood or from one angle one will think them to float, to stand free, while in another mood or from another angle one will see them more nearly to remark the supporting floor. One's understanding, say one's reading, of the works hung on those walls will shift as one's understanding or reading of the walls themselves shifts; the switch opens or closes both ways, opens and closes both ways.

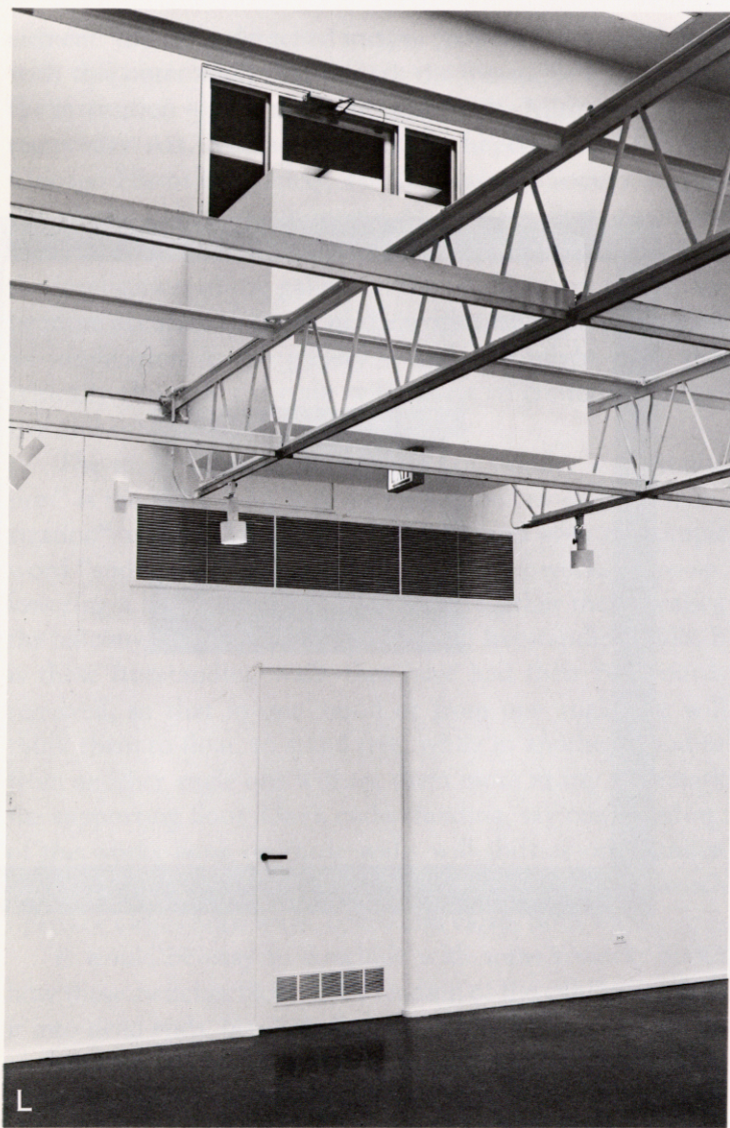
It would be easy to conclude with some remarks about how these switches block one's reading of the exhibition, lead it into dead ends, blank walls, and radical indecisions. To do so however would be to mistake one's own experience, to forget the depth to which one has read these surfaces, the extent to which in them or as them something insists.





Armory (altered)
1917-19
Holabird & Roche





3 LIGHTING It is perhaps too late now to think to define the postmodern; the matter has taken on a frivolity and industry all its own. But it is perhaps worth noting that when the conversation was serious, there were at least two powerful alternate visions, one tied to architecture and the other tied to photography and visual appropriation. It has not been clear how, if at all, these two images of the postmodern might be placed in communication.

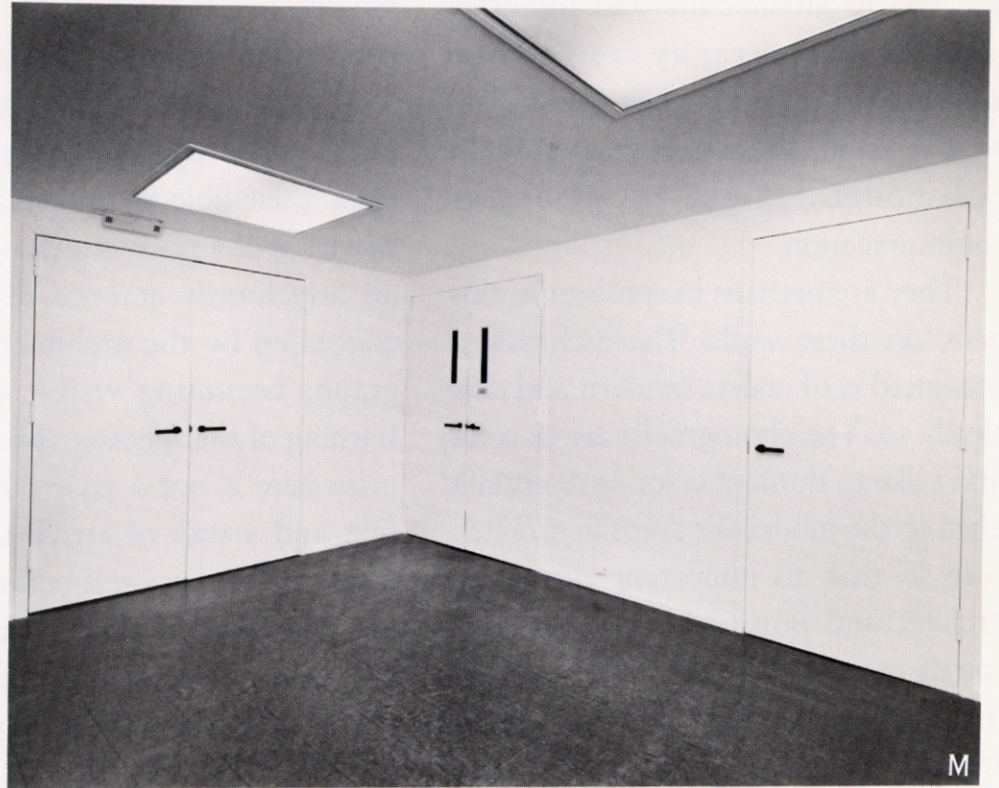
They are perhaps in communication here, on these walls. The architecture presented is of course modern and classically so. The photographs are in color, and I like to think of color as essentially alien to the modernist spirit in architecture so that an important element of architectural postmodernism seems to me its recovery of color. I think of this as having to do with the way in which modern architecture finds its forms and problems in space as opposed to what I take to be a postmodern insistence on place. The appearance of color in these photographs is too slender a reed to support any major point but I am tempted nonetheless to take it as an emblem of the displacement Perlman's

chosen buildings have undergone, and I do so in order to stress that what they have undergone is precisely a displacement and not, say, a relocation in space. This appeals to my sense that the postmodern cannot be so much a break with as a repetition of the modern, a repetition that shows it to have already been other or more complex than it took itself to be — as, for example, Perlman's rephotographings and framings show their objects as displaceable only by virtue of a prior attachment to place, an attachment at once displayed and concealed by the architectural photograph, becoming visible only in the framing of that photograph. Postmodernism here is not a style but a recognition and a way of arriving at recognitions; appropriation is bound less to the presumed fact of mechanical reproduction than to the permanent but not always activated possibility of something's being out of place. It is tempting to say that what has so relatively recently become available to us as "art" has always depended precisely on our more or less explicit willingness to activate this possibility, and that the turn we keep trying to call postmodern simply continues the modernist explora-

tion of autonomy that comes with the historical availability of "art."

I have, in any case, had trouble keeping Heidegger out of my mind as I draft these remarks. I think, as always, of "The Origin of the Work of Art" — I think of the conditions under which Heidegger's Greek temple assembles a world and of the conditions under which it shows itself to do so; I think of the struggling intimacy of earth and world, an intimacy not quite of form and matter, nor of frame and content, nor of shape and line; and I think, perhaps above all, of the more difficult intimacy Heidegger seems never quite able to think between the world a work frames and the world reduced to picture. This seems to me the joint between the modern and our desire for the postmodern, the place where the core is exposed.

I am reminded also that after Heidegger conjures the world of his peasant and her equipment out of the apparently neutral illustration of the Van Gogh shoes, he remarks, crucially, that it is perhaps only in the painting that we see this. This is, I suspect, something like what I want to say about the fit of architecture and appropriation here.

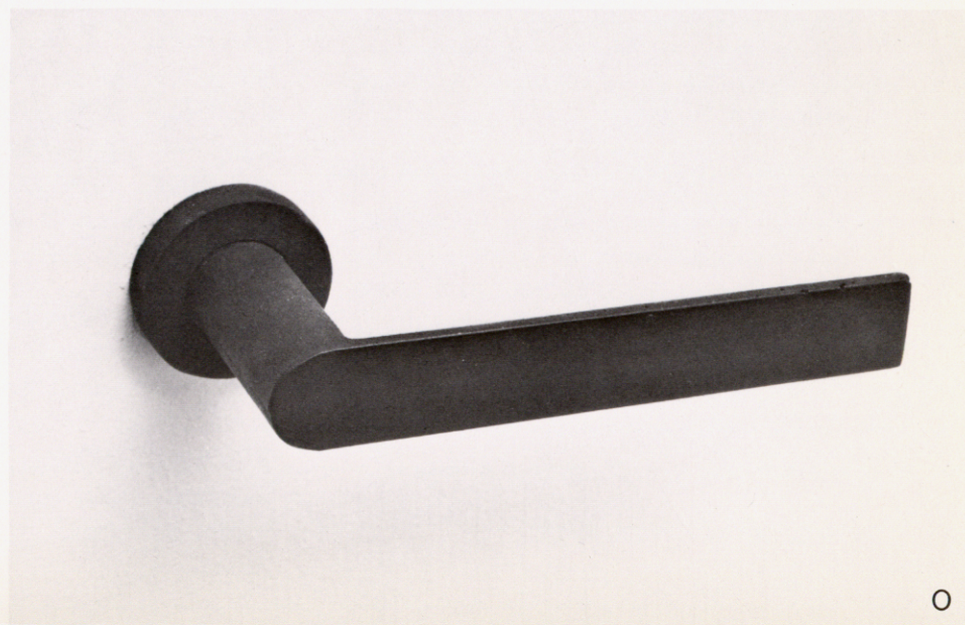




4 ENTRANCES So, Hirsch, we still have not met – circumstance divided us there – but I have some time entered your work, some time paused in that small anteroom with its almost-identical doors with their modified Wittgensteinian handles – paused perhaps not long enough, because they were too quick to spot me through the unalterable office door – and even that had for me the right thickness of life and accident to it. There are dissymmetries that do not recover their balance; core and surface never quite fold into one another. If they did there would be no need of the work and no need of entering it. Too many doors in one wall, not enough in another; one enters as best one can – when one has done so and which alterations are the work of which hand are questions best left to fend for themselves. What remains true is that given the telephone and the photograph and the whole dazzling world of media, the thing must still take place.

Stephen Melville
Syracuse University

October-November 1988



LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

- A) Detail, *Untitled (I.I.T.)*, c-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, laminated b/w photograph, sintra and honeycomb board, 26" x 72" x 1.5" overall.
- B) Installation view, The Renaissance Society, 1988.
- C) Detail of shifted wall showing exposed styrofoam core.
- D) Detail of edge of text panels, sintra and honeycomb board.
- E) *Haus Lange and Haus Esters, 1927, Mies van der Rohe*, c-prints, polyethylene fluted sheet, frames, laminated b/w photograph, sintra and honeycomb board, 34 $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 129" x 1.5"
- F) Installation view, The Renaissance Society, 1988.
- G) *Stonborough Wittgenstein House, 1928, Peter Altenberg and Ludwig Wittgenstein*, c-print, b/w photograph, polyethylene fluted sheet, frames, laminated b/w photograph, sintra and honeycomb board, 41 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 134" x 1.5" overall.
- H) Installation view, The Renaissance Society, 1988.
- I) *House for Weissenhofsiedlung, 1927, Le Corbusier*, c-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame b/w photograph, sintra and honeycomb board, 44 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 87 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 1.5"
- J) Installation view, The Renaissance Society, 1988.
- K) *Untitled (Armory)*, c-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, laminated b/w photograph, sintra and honeycomb board, 26" x 66" x 1.5" overall.
- L) Door from exhibition space to vestibule with balcony above, The Renaissance Society, 1988.
- M) Vestibule, The Renaissance Society, 1988.
- N) Vestibule, The Renaissance Society, 1988.
- O) Detail of cast iron door lever.

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

Haus Lange and Haus Esters, 1927, Mies van der Rohe, 1988

Three panels

left: 17 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 23 inches; C-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, plexiglass
middle: 16 x 21 inches; C-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, plexiglass
right: 34 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 44 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches; laminated B&W photograph, sintra, and honeycomb board
overall: 34 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 129 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches

Courtesy of the artist and Feature, New York

House for Vienna Werkbund Exhibition, 1932, Adolph Loos, 1988

Two panels

left: 20 x 21 inches; laminated B&W photograph, sintra, and honeycomb board
right: 36 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 42 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches; C-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, plexiglass
overall: 42 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 87 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Feature, New York

House for Weissenhofsiedlung, 1927, Le Corbusier, 1988

Two panels

left: 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches; C-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, plexiglass
right: 44 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 33 inches; laminated B&W photograph, sintra, and honeycomb board
overall: 44 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 87 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches

Courtesy of the artist and Feature, New York

Leitner, Bernhard, The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Documentation, New York: New York University Press, 1976, p. 40, 1988

30 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 60 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches

Laminated B&W photograph, sintra, and honeycomb board

Courtesy of the artist and Feature, New York

Stonborough Wittgenstein House, 1928

Peter Altenberg and Ludwig

Wittgenstein, 1988

Three panels

left: 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 20 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches; C-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, plexiglass
middle: 41 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 31 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches; laminated B&W photograph, sintra, and honeycomb board
right: 20 x 22 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches; B&W photograph, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, plexiglass
overall: 41 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 134 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Feature, New York

Untitled (Armory), 1988

Two panels

left: 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches; laminated B&W photograph, sintra, and honeycomb board
right: 26 x 26 inches; C-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, plexiglass
overall: 26 x 66 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Feature, New York

Untitled (Chicago Historical Society), 1988

Two panels

left: 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches; laminated B&W photograph, sintra, and honeycomb board
right: 26 x 26 inches; C-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, plexiglass
overall: 26 x 66 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Feature, New York

Untitled (I.I.T.), 1988

Two panels

left: 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches; laminated B&W photograph, sintra, and honeycomb board
right: 26 x 26 inches; C-print, polyethylene fluted sheet, frame, plexiglass
overall: 26 x 66 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Feature, New York

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1960

Education B.A. Yale University, 1982

lives in Chicago

one-person exhibitions

1989 Feature, New York, N.Y.

1988 Galerie Claire Burrus, Paris, France
The Renaissance Society, Chicago, Il.
Hufkens/Noirhomme, Brussels, Belgium
Cable, New York, N.Y.

1987 Feature, Chicago, Il.
Cable, New York, N.Y.

selected group exhibitions

1989 "Whitney Biennial," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.
"The Photography of Invention: American Pictures of the 80's,"
The National Museum of American Art, Washington D.C., curated by Joshua Smith
"Mediated Knot," Robbin Lockett Gallery, Chicago, Il., curated by Gaylen Gerber
Galerie Claire Burrus
"Cinderella Rockefeller," Feature, New York, N.Y.

1988 Wolff Gallery, New York, N.Y.
"Information as Ornament," Feature and Rezac Gallery, Chicago, Il.
"Near Miss," Feature, Chicago, Il.
"The Goldstrum Family Collection: Contemporary Icons and Exploration,"
Davenport Museum of Art, Davenport, Iowa (travelling)

1987 "New Photography," Feature, Chicago, Il.
"Staging Recollection," MoMing Art Gallery, Chicago, Il.
"Photomannerisms," Lawrence Oliver Gallery, Philadelphia, Pa., curated by Klaus Ottman.
"Signs of Intelligent Life," Greathouse Gallery, New York, N.Y.

Wolff Gallery, New York, N.Y.

"The Hallucination of Truth," P.S.1, Long Island City, N.Y., curated by Paul Laster and Rene Riccardo.

"Knew," Feature, Chicago, Il.

"Anxious Objects," University of Illinois Gallery, Normal, Il.

"The Non-Spiritual in Art-Abstract Painting 1985-????," curated by Hudson, organized by Maginnis Graphics.

"July," Wolff Gallery, New York, N.Y.

"Mitchell Kane/Hirsch Perlman, Collaborative Work," Bates Gallery, Chicago, Il.

"Beyond the Image," First Street Forum, St. Louis, Mo.

"Nature," Feature, Chicago, Il.

1986 "Promises, Promises," Feature, Chicago, Il.

"Hirsch Perlman, Charles Ray," Feature, Chicago, Il.

"Dull Edge," Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, Il.

1985 "Outdoor Installations," Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, Il.

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The University of Chicago

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Wittgenstein: A Documentation*, (New York: New York
University Press, 1976), p. 33.

Back cover: *ibid.*, p. 85

Service entrance. The door handle

and lock are not original although the

original position has been retained.

The main entrance, on the opposite

side of the building, is basically of the

same design but one foot higher.