Defining the Internal Essence of the Materiality of Institution
ICA Essay
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Preamble

The post war Germany looked towards creating a new image for its economy, under the heading ‘soziale Marktwirtschaft,’ social market economy, with humane dimensions that set out to encompass the whole of society. This system distanced itself from state intervention; however, it was inevitable, over time and particularly with the reunification of Germany in October 1990, that the state would play a larger role. Despite this submission, the multiple ownerships of banks increased competition from within the country strengthening the economy further. The German economy developed a conservative yet dynamic approach growing steadily over time. This brought the country economic success and got global recognition while still maintaining to a large degree the values it initiated in the beginning of a social welfare system. The banking grew into a three tier system, private, cooperative and state owned banks, all with different objectives.

The public banking pillar comprises of saving banks, which are organised in regions, and the State banks (Landesbanken), in which one is located in each region and acts as the head of the institution of the saving banks. The State banks have mixed interests, working partly on a global scale but also on a regional level. They appoint their management and employ people from local politics and businesses as well as from the general public. Furthermore, the banks help economic development in the region and even subsidise local public facilities and events such as art festivals.¹

The Nord Landesbanken, located in Hanover, decided in 1996, after the ramifications of the reunification had subsided, to centralise its administrative services into one location in the city. The building would combine sixteen branches from across the city and accommodate a total of fifteen hundred employees. On the one hand, the bank wanted to further itself internationally, building on what is currently the largest bank for national and international bond issues which has branches in major financial and trading centres around the world, and consequently the image of the building had to reflect this. On the other, the building needed to fulfil its requirements on a regional and importantly on a local scale not only in subsidising cultural events, including the Schützenfest Hannover, the largest Marksmen’s Fun Fair in the world attracting two million visitors, but also create a building and public space that was accessible and transparent to the public.

The complexity of the situation meant that not only did the site have to act as a home to the bank but also provide for the people in terms of retail, commercial, cultural and sport and leisure opportunities. It was important the public could penetrate the site and a public space could be formed. The design had to deal with the issue of the size of building necessary after the company’s amalgamation and make important links to the immediate context and the city as a whole. The building had to make links to the activities of the city to the north, the leisure facilities to the west and respond to the residential in the south. A challenging complex brief was created.

Behnisch, Behnisch and Partners won the competition in 1996 completing the project in 2002.

Abstract

The text leads a critique of the practise Behnisch, Behnish and Partner’s prolific work, the Norddeutsche Landesbank (Nord L/B), the North German State Clearing Bank (1996-2002), on Friedrichswall. Günter Behnisch (1922-), the founding member of the practise in 1952, in reaction to bureaucratic regimes that restrict if not demolish the freedom in architecture, has created an approach to which he calls ‘situationarchitektur,’ an architecture that is unique to the brief and context. Behnisch, continuing in a tradition of work dating back to the German architects and theorists, Hugo Häring (1882-1958) and Hans Scharoun (1893-1972), has been labelled broadly as a deconstructivist architect. This text looks to explore the relationship between these two influences in creating a liberated architecture that fulfils his beliefs and those of the bank.

A liberated architecture

After the war, Germany could not meet the demands of reconstruction. Behnisch’s reaction was to develop an industrially prefabricated construction system in the early 1960s. Architectural systems, however, after being developed and becoming wide spread, start to go under the control of bureaucratic institutions which turn it into a means of power and this consequently inhibits architectural freedom.

In responding, he turns towards the work of Häring and close friend Scharoun. Behnisch acknowledges the influence of Scharoun not only on himself but on contemporary German architecture, at the Scharoun Exhibition held at RIBA in February 1995. His work denotes the attitude of the past master as he set out to recapture an architectural freedom free of institutional control, ‘The world of architecture needed to be perceived as wide-ranging, diverse and colourful.’ Behnisch describes this new approach of architecture as ‘situationarchitektur.’ He believed in an approach that solved design problems in regard to the uniqueness of the location and point in time. He believes that ‘generalisations, such as ‘construction systems,’ constantly recurring systems of architectural styles or preconceived notions of geometric order, were to be avoided as much as possible,’ a view very much in line with the theories of Häring.

Interestingly, what appears to have had a major impact on his work over the last forty years is from Deconstructivism. Within the texts of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), there are many contradictory elements towards Häring’s theories. It is fascinating to see how he has reinterpreted these texts allowing him to realise the theories of Häring to form an architecture that works towards his own goals and fulfilling the very complimentary aims of the North Landesbank on an economic, political and social level. Playing with the ideas of transparency and event in relationship to functionality and form, he breaks down hierarchy, creating arguably an everyday architecture accessible to all, fulfilling his ideas of an architectural liberation.

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4 Behnisch, Günter, The Everyday and Architecture, p.89.
5 Ibid., p.89.
6 Ibid., p.89.
The formation of the internal essence of a building

‘Undefined in its slope of roof, height of shaft, breadth of arch, or disposition of ground plan, it can shrink into a turret, expand into a hall, coil into a staircase or spring into a spire, with undegraded grace and unexhausted energy; and whenever it finds occasion for change in its form or purpose, it submits to it without the slightest sense of loss either to its unity or majesty.'

John Ruskin

Rooted in the Gothic ideas of John Ruskin (1819-1900) and the followers of the English Arts and Crafts movement, an approach to architecture materialised in the twentieth century that was seen somewhat on the outside of the more mainstream ‘Modernist Architecture.’ Häring wrote extensively and designed and built to a lesser degree on the motto that surrounded the modernist architects, form follows function, but believed that this could be achieved through what he called ‘Organisches Bauen,’ organic buildings.

Häring believed in taking the principle of nature, the way creatures are shaped in accordance with the lives that they lead and with their inner identity, and finding the correct form for the task in hand, not borrowing organic forms or merely trying to imitate. Furthermore, Häring was deeply influenced by Theodor Fischer (1862-1938) whose concept that the building should grow organically from the inside to the out became the heart of Häring’s philosophy. He felt that the layout should be governed by use or movement, ‘building fabric follows the internal anatomy and the need for specific connections to the outside world,’ ideas that he displays in his house own house design of 1923. (Fig. I)

Following the work for his house, he went onto design his most notable buildings, the farm buildings at Garkau of 1923-25 (Fig. 2). The project embodies his belief that form should express the claims of performance-fulfilment in the simplest, most direct manner. The form passionately expressed the function and this gave an identity to the building. He claimed that this was an exemplar for the new

Fig. I: Häring, Plan of own house  
Source: Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Fig. II: Häring, Plan of Garkau. His client told him that the most natural feeding pattern for cows was circular and, consequently, as a circle for the forty-two cows required was inefficient, chose an oval form with the bull at the head. He justified the forms used in terms of structure, construction, day lighting, ventilation, ease of fodder distribution, and other such practical considerations. His work had increased the efficiency of agricultural practise.  
Source: Akademie der Künste, Berlin

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9 Ibid., p 186. 
11 Blundell, P.J., Hugo Häring: the organic versus the geometric, p. 19. 
12 Blundell, P.J., Hans Scharoun, p. 96. 
13 Häring, Hugo, Funktionelles bauen: Gut Garkau, das Viehhaus, in Die Form Volume 7 (October 1925), pp. 16-17 
14 Blundell, P.J., Hans Scharoun, p. 98.
functionalism. Each building task has its own identity, growing out of its own nature, obeying its own rules, responding to content and context. Häring believed that expressing this inner energy of a building allowed an architecture of greater character to be produced that was specific to the particular project.\textsuperscript{15} Expanding on this concept, Häring suggests a being-like form is discovered and that this can not be imposed. He believed in every situation demanding a building there was an inherent order to be discovered and fulfilled, ‘The way in which use bestows meaning.’\textsuperscript{16} Preconceptions of ‘geometry’ must be scrupulously avoided and forms must be generated from the roles they play in life and from their context. This avoidance of imposing geometries was something also shared by Fischer who saw it as a continuation of a classical tradition.\textsuperscript{17} In the pursuit of an Orientation in 1932, Häring states that in the pursuit of geometry, there was an interest in the eternal that created lifeless, static forms that prevented an exploration into ‘the energies in Nature.’ The age of geometry had passed and just as man explored the potentials of the building materials of nature before ‘the advent of geometry,’ a new opportunity to do so again had arisen.

The new technique, which works with light constructions, with elastic and supple materials, no longer demands that buildings be rectangular and cubic, but permits or realises any form which the house as an organ of habitation might suggest. This does not mean that there can no longer be rectangular rooms in a house: certainly not. It means that rectangularity is not the determinant of the form, that the rectangle appears only as the form of performance-fulfilment, which is something else entirely… In organ-like Gestalt-formation the rectangle is a technical figure, and the geometry is there only as a tool.\textsuperscript{18}

Häring thought that modernism could become a liberation from the past. He did not believe in universal proportion systems and differentiated between the geometries used for procedural, symbolic and aesthetic reasons and looked at architectural ordering in relation to its cultural context.\textsuperscript{19} Consequently, this brought him into great conflict with many modernist architects.

Häring would not impose geometry or form and debated with Mies van der Rohe, who believed in imposing universal forms, prizing their simplicity and argued this brought a greater flexibility. The strength of Mies’ work lay in this detachment.\textsuperscript{20} Mies believed that Häring’s approach hindered flexibility and states that Häring had a habit of designing a tight corner for everything.

We don’t know at all whether people will do with them what we expect them to. Functions are not so clear or so constant: they change faster than the building.\textsuperscript{21}

For Häring, content became all important but pragmatics of flexibility was an issue.\textsuperscript{22} The dispute between the two men continued, with Häring arguing that Mies’ imposed forms, creating a typical solution could not be functional.\textsuperscript{23} They did, however, share a common belief in going beyond forms and styles in their architecture. With content and context as the generator of form, Häring believed that the being of the building was tied up with its role in serving life and this was his idea of the essential and a way of creating ‘natural, timeless and anonymous’ forms.\textsuperscript{24} The ideas of function and flexibility start to turn into questions about much larger and much deeper questions about form, content and image and even beyond this Häring starts elaborating on mystical qualities that are apparent in buildings.\textsuperscript{25}

Häring suggestion of the more elaborate ‘wesenhafte Gestalt, being-like form’ was something that later interested Scharoun.\textsuperscript{26} He became interested in ‘Strukturprobleme des Bauens,’ the structural problems

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 102.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 97.
\textsuperscript{17} Blundell, P.J., Hugo Häring: the organic versus the geometric, p. 8
\textsuperscript{18} Häring, Hugo, Pursuit of an Orientation, in Die Form, Volume 7 (15 July 1932), 218-223 (p. 29).
\textsuperscript{19} Blundell, P.J., Hans Scharoun, pp 98-99.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 98.
\textsuperscript{21} Blundell, P.J., Hugo Häring: the organic versus the geometric, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{22} Blundell, P.J., Hans Scharoun, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{23} Blundell, P.J., Hugo Häring: the organic versus the geometric, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 77.
\textsuperscript{25} Blundell, P.J., Hans Scharoun, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 97
of buildings, that is to say the ordering of the building. Exploring Gestalt psychology, form psychology, Häring defined that forms significant for perception concern themselves with the overall and with the way their parts are ordered. Moreover, Häring writes about Gestaltwerk in which form passes beyond the mechanical performance into a realm of the spiritual. In German, Gestalt represents something of a mystical concept but at the same time is sensory. Hugo Häring refused to call it religious and relates it to the condition of dwelling on this earth, explaining it through experiential and sensory terms.

Martin Heidegger (1889 –1976), expresses a similar idea of reaching beyond, stating that an emphasis on place as opposed to abstract space, on relationships as opposed to objects, ‘on the secret unity of earth, heaven, the mortal and the divine summed up in the archaic word Geviert (fourness).’ This statement leads back to the debate of geometries, the opposition between organic and geometric, but this time not only applying the idea to form but also in defining space. Just as there is a natural order in the forms of living beings so there is a natural space in which movements and activities take place within, which Häring calls Geschehensraum, the space of occurrences. Not only is it shaped in accordance with processes and activities, it is also the space directly linked to experience. A space that would be based on the abstraction of geometry could not have this same effect.

Häring and similarly Scharoun believed that the ordering of space was related to creating an order that served social life and work and that this space could be called a cultural space in which spiritual events occur. The task of creating space was not just a technical solution but one on a spiritual level. Economic conditions have forced technical issues to come to the forefront and what should be a close relationship between technical aspects and form, form acting as a spiritual guide, have become separated.

**Politics and the Institution**

Scharoun began to organise spaces of great complexity with a focus on the ‘essence’ of things in social and historical contexts and this was intertwined with a sense of the constant flux of space and time to which he brought to his architecture. Behnisch reinterprets Scharoun’s ideas. In particular, Peter Blundell-Jones states the Bunderstag in Bonn, completed in 1993, as having Scharounian qualities. It is a specific proposal that makes the most of the place and its purpose and would be unthinkable to place this building elsewhere. Behnisch’s layout of the parliament shows a shared political belief with Scharoun of an egalitarian architecture, a circular parliament in which sets ministers and back benchers of all parties on equal terms. (Fig. III)

Through playing with transparency and creating a functionality of greater complexity, creating a more open architecture, Behnisch starts to relate individual elements to the greater whole and whole to the surroundings. Behnisch begins to create new relationships with the internal workings of the building and the outside situation; he addresses an idea that Derrida states has been a central part of Western culture since Plato. Derrida states that the ‘external image of things gets inside their internal essence’ and argues that there has always been oppositions between the reality of something and its representation, the original and its copy and the mind and the body and that one side of the pairs has been valued over the other. In Christian tradition, for example, the body is as an external shell for the

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27 Blundell, P.J., Hugo Häring: the organic versus the geometric, p. 138.
28 Ibid., p. 184.
29 Blundell, P.J., Hans Scharoun, p. 136.
30 Blundell, P.J., Hugo Häring: the organic versus the geometric, p. 187.
31 Ibid., pp. 188-189.
32 Blundell, P.J., Hans Scharoun, p. 226.
inner soul. A relationship is established between the political activities inside and the public. It becomes not only a celebration of the success of post war German democracy but also an architectural liberation. These ideas are reinterpreted more subtly in the Nord L/B and these relationships gain a particular importance where multiple aims are attempting to be achieved at different interlinking levels. As well as setting out a global brand and image, the bank links back to community in an economic way of subsidising events and also overseeing a financial growth throughout the region. This requires an architecture of transparency and an image of security but also being penetrable in terms of it being a public building and space. The multiple functions and tasks create a complexity and almost become contradictory. The architecture must take on a certain freedom. A question of hierarchy is asked in terms of its structure as both an institution and how this relates back to the materiality.

Derrida states that the relationship between institution and materiality are intrinsically linked and that the questioning of the very idea of building is aligned with a questioning of institutional authority. It is the rethinking of architecture that defines the politics of deconstruction. By identifying and questioning traditional relationships with authority, authority is not discredited but made stronger. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who’s work on phenomenology took the interest of Derrida, stated that it was not the ‘unbuilding’ of the old tradition which was to be followed by a new construction but ‘deconstruction belongs to construction.’ In the context of the Nord L/B, the building represents the amalgamation of a powerful institution and at the same time has questioned hierarchically the institution and its relationship with the public. The Nord L/B breaks down many physical hierarchies through questioning order and journey, creating a liberation of space grown from functionality, form and transparency, tapping into the sensuality and subtly of construction, materiality and nature. This creates a strong force architecturally and institutionally in the relationship between the bank and the people.

The Nord Landesbank

The Nord L/B is located between the city to the north and residential districts to the south. Immediately north of the site is the main road Friedrichswall and to the north east is one of Hanover’s most busy traffic junctions, Aegidientorplatz. To the west lies the town hall and the Maschpark which contains sports and recreational facilities. (Fig. IV)

Fig IV: Site plan, yellow representing the Nord L/B
Source: Archive of Behnisch, Behnisch and Partners

An orthogonal outer layer, at the height of surrounding buildings, responds to the urban fabric of the surrounding district. It has certain clarity and is much more restrained than its nucleus. Inside this layer an intimate courtyard opens up

34 Blundell, P.J., Hans Scharoun, p. 138
36 Ibid., p. 49.
37 Ibid., p. 38.
and an inner core rises up seventeen stories, reflecting the older more unplanned part of the city. The inner courtyard opens out at various points around the site. To the north east a restaurant is located off Friedrichswall and on the north west, the site opens up at the junction of Am Maschpark and Friedrichswall.

The ground floor is an essential link to the variety of different activities that surround the building and acting as a buffer zone between residential and commercial districts and also between the districts and the green recreational areas to the west. It permits the public to access the site without interfering with the administrative activities of the bank. Shops, restaurants, cafes and galleries enliven the courtyard. The inner courtyard contains spacious expanses of water, landscaped roofs, terraces and paths, resembling an artificial landscape.

The ground floor plan conceptually is based on inner points of radiance contained within an outer wall. (Fig V) The major point of radiance falls inside the entrance from which public spaces radiate out. A sense of orientation is given and, moreover, a strong sense of growth from within the building is felt. Lines of radiation are carefully considered and manipulated but are not imposed. Behnisch states, ‘Established concepts of formal, material, geometric structures should not dominate but, instead, individual objects should come together forming a whole ‘of their own free will.’ The plan is developed with an understanding of the functions of the spaces. However, there is an interesting play between the applied geometries from the concept and the formation of functional spaces. The more public spaces, such as the restaurant and reception hall, take on a more free character and this is carried on throughout the building while the more private office spaces are rectilinear, providing the necessary, efficient functionality required.

![Design sketch, ground floor plan](source: Archive of Behnisch, Behnisch and Partners)

There is a difference between a form that has been created from the internal essence and a form that has been created by distorting a mass and then only afterwards applying a function. In deconstructivist architecture, this distortion can provide a dynamic complexity to the space and this can relate to a greater complexity in function. Derrida states that solidity is organized in an unfamiliar way, shifting our traditional sense of structure. This displacement of traditional thinking about structure also

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38 Behnisch, Günter, The Everyday and Architecture, p.89.
displaces traditional thinking about function. The play between Häring’s ideas and Behnisch’s reinterpretation of Derrida creates a tension in Behnisch’s work, the forms, as Mark Wigely writes in his MOMA catalogue essay, are created from ‘a combination of gentle coaxing and violent torture: the form is interrogated.’

Behnisch uses the idea of movement and use governs the space. The building opens up in section and plan to the North East of the site, where a restaurant is placed. (Fig VI) The corner disintegrates and is defined by columns that reach up slowly dissolving into the glass façade that hangs down from the structure above. (Fig VII) The movement from the entrance off the street to the loci, situated at the main reception, increase in privacy.

Once in the courtyard, the space becomes more intimate through the use of glazing, structure, nature and water. Behnisch creates a sensory space through transparency and nature. In tune with Häring’s writings on creating a sensory condition, the same ideas are evoked through the materiality of the building, breaking down form and through the pools of water. Experience, materiality and functionality combine. The courtyard itself is broken up through jutting forms of radiation. Although the outer offices

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40 Wigely, Mark, Deconstructivist Architecture, in MoMA Catalogue (1988)
act as a barrier to the outside, angled forms of the inner core and pools of water reflect the external world. The entry path gently squeezes together as the doors to the reception are set slightly back under an angled portico that reaches down into the water to the west. (Fig. VIII)

The sculpting of spaces and focus on journey is seen in Scharoun’s work, leading him to question architectural ideas, breaking down notions, an idea which later forms in deconstructivist theory. Derrida rejecting that Deconstruction is the dismantling or demolition of an architecture, states that deconstruction is the questioning of the whole architectural rhetoric of foundation, construction, architectonics. Scharoun built up his projects based around the essence of the space, the ‘shell’ was formed and expressed his interior motives. (Fig. IX)

This idea is visible in an early work, St. Benno-Gymnasium (1992-1996), by Behnisch. By a distortion of form, a glazed element angled back from the street, unites a series of floors at the entrance. (Fig. X) The same idea is repeated in the Nord L/B. The space achieves harmony from a combination of understanding the materiality of glass but also the use of space and light and its articulation of form. The angled portico that marks the entrance to the inner core then forms the ‘roof’ of the reception hall. (Fig. XI) Rising up over several floors, the angle and structure create a relationship with the stairs and balconies to the more private offices above as well being designed to prevent issues with sunlight. Views are created down from the balconies into the space below and outside into the courtyard.

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From entrance hall, the staff restaurant radiates out in two directions, breaking into the central pool of water. There is a feeling of freedom in Behnisch’s work and states himself ‘that the individual object should become the way it wants to be itself.’ The spacious public areas are also used for special functions, events and exhibitions and also as a forum. The corridor of the more southern restaurant responds to the use, thinning out towards the end as the number of people gets less. The geometries that initially started as a tool have been used to naturally form spaces. In the opposite direction, coming out from the entrance to the north east is an exhibition space and, beyond, the restaurant. The more flexible exhibition space occupies the more unorthodox form while the restaurant interesting wraps around the outer corner of the block creating a link with both Maschstrasse and also the interior courtyard.

A sense of layering is built up through a play of transparency and form. (Fig. XII) From the more southern restaurant coming off of the reception space, views into the courtyard, adjacent eating area, corridors over the courtyard, offices on the perimeter and spaces beyond can all be seen to varying degrees. The varying depths and the sense of discovery, mystery and shadow create a truly multisensory and multifaceted experience of the metaphysical. Fragments of form are unified together through varying degrees of light and opacity. The connection of diverse functions, which assume different levels of movement creates a varied atmosphere on one level but on another breaks down hierarchy and strengthens the link between workers of the bank and the public.

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43 Behnisch, Günter, The Everyday and Architecture, p.89.
The workers in the outer buildings have offices facing into the courtyard or facing one of the roads with an undulating corridor down the centre. The corridor is alive and responds to use and movement, expanding to allow a central void letting in light and setting up a view or to create space for services. (Fig. XIII) In other places, a darker, more intimate setting is created, such as a seating area. (Fig. XIV) These spatial qualities lie in the existential awareness of light and dark, in the openness and concealment of function. 45 This understanding of light brings a synthesis of the different functions that the corridors hold. The varying widths of the corridors push the inner offices into the courtyard creating an undulating elevation.

Fig. XIII: View showing corridor and light wells. The energy which is given to the plan is complimented by the play of colour, overlapping ripples of various yellow and blue tones structure the longer hallways and this continues into the staircases and multi-purpose areas. In the office areas with the exception of the cabinet doors, the use of colour is restrained. 46

Source: Hallbe, Roland

The exterior to the office building reflects the surroundings, integrating with its context, in terms of massing and height. The rhymes embodied in the façade and the articulation of glass panelling gives a sense of authority, necessary when building on its global image. Towards the Friedrichswall, Willy-Brandt-Allee, and the Theater am Aegi, there is a double façade, which acts as both climate control and as a sound insulation. It carries unpolluted outer air into the rooms through operable windows.

The facades relate closely to the site boundary, incorporating a listed building into the façade on the south west side, showing further its respect for its context, and stepping back as the road widens to the north. This more restrained façade, in respect to its surroundings, has only one very private opening in the centre, between the old and new. On the south east side, existing buildings cut into the site and in response a more formal approach is taken. On entry from the east, a colonnade is constructed between the existing and the new while from the south, ramps lead from the quieter Bleichenstrasse down into the underground parking.

The facades of the inner courtyard have a much lighter feel and are more intimate as the sound levels are lower. The style of the facades is replicated on the side facing the residential area. On the higher parts of the building demands of increased wind load, higher exposure to solar radiation and rainfall must be met. A double façade on the south side protects the interior from the sun. \(^{47}\)

Behind the outer offices, the inner core rises up and reflects the freedom of the inner courtyard. The top of the high-rise is marked by a steel-glass construction, which becomes less defined. Light falling on this emergent and transient architecture playfully draws a veil over the form creating ambiguity in its in mass. Creating a coherent whole, the forms are glazed with a vapour applied metallic coatings which reflect the light tones of yellow and blue depending on the position of the sun. At night, light diodes, set into the construction, playfully light up.

The interior of the central offices radiates out from the central core. (Fig. XV) Protruding forms from different angles create terraces with lounges, group offices and kitchens situated behind. During breaks, these spaces give orientation, vantage points and structure to the building. They also create an important link to the ground floor and the courtyard. (Fig.XVI ) The offices again are functionally rectilinear with spaces the more angular spaces in between being used as meeting spaces or even cupboards.

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\(^{47}\) Ibid., p. 218.
The opportunity created through design, which allows for visual links down from the central office core creates a relationship with other functions and users and also with nature, not only in the reflections but also in the green roofs of the outer buildings and the central restaurant. Sustainability is considered along side the well being of the inhabitants and not as a separate entity. The double glass facades have an effect on how the passer by understands the façade alternating between the transparent and the opaque and the formal and informal, the tranquil environment, in touch with nature created just off from the main junction, as well an effective natural ventilation system.

A subtle reminder

Behnisch approached the project with a subtlety towards materiality and the institution catering for the wide range of users. Through developing a more accessible architecture the building links the different surrounding areas while allowing the public to inhabit the site. It is a humble approach in an age where many buildings show ignorance towards context, culture and philosophical understanding. Behnisch comments,

‘Objects are treated with great brutality. People feel as if they own the world, as if they can freely make decisions about everything in it, as if they have the right to judge and condemn things. Our reaction is to place objects within our architectural landscape and carefully preserve the integrity of each.’

The building has qualities of the everyday. The essence of the building is there to be felt; sensitivity is given towards its natural growth from the interior with a feeling of a global institution created on a human scale. The building sits peacefully in its setting in line with the concepts of the German architectural master, Scharoun.

Scharoun’s influences are again felt with the dynamic spaces and Behnisch challenged his idea of ‘shell.’ The solidity of the ‘shell’ takes on different forms and varies in transparency. The structure sometimes shows its self, sometimes hides and sometimes becomes an ambiguous entity. The architecture flourishes with a spatial freedom that liberates the inhabitants. With egalitarian ideology form, space, materiality and construction are approached in a non-elitist manner providing spaces at everybody’s disposal.

Through creating a complex series of spaces, the hierarchy between the bank and the public is broken down while still maintaining necessary architectural and security boundaries of public and private. The

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49 Ibid., p.89.
treatment of public and private in space making creates varied and exciting spaces while staying economic.

The materiality has a delicacy that evokes the senses and while on the one hand the building stands as a rigid mass and in places shows structure as a symbol of strength, there is a more ambiguous nature to the building. The shimmering of water in the glass reflections hint maybe at the fragility of the economy we live in. It is a subtle reminder of the instabilities that surround us.
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