

## Architecture and Education I Interview 5

### Peter Märkli I January 2012

**Samuel Penn:** You said something very interesting in a short interview with Florian Beigel during your visit to London. You said that Swiss German education had become too abstract - excluding life and that this generation had no premise with which to understand society, had no solidarity, or political vision - all of which are important factors in generating good buildings and the planning of cities - architecture is more than just building buildings. This surprised me, because I always saw your work as that of an artist pursuing a particular architectural logic. So, I'd like to ask you to explain how you place the private work of the artist/architect within the greater public context and if or how the creation of architecture binds us to that shared culture?

**Peter Märkli:** You are asking a question about fundamental principles which I will have to break into different sections to be able to answer properly. Firstly, here in Switzerland, and I think everywhere in Europe we have to attend primary school. I remember very clearly being a small boy in class and being told by my teacher not to write the letter A in that way, that it always has to be written like this - upright - she taught me that a B shouldn't be written like a C - that they all had their unique form. There was no freedom to improvise and we accepted without question. As time went on I noticed that if I placed the letters next to each other they would make a word and that that word didn't only make sense to me, but was used to communicate the same to others - to make contact. Later I realised that not only could these words be used to describe things, like describing a particular loaf of bread to the baker, but also that it had, in literature, the power to describe feelings and world views. It became clear to me at school by reading books and literature from different periods, even though I didn't necessarily understand everything, how unbelievably diverse our language was. Even between Goethe and Kleist who wrote in the same period, there is a huge difference in style - then to Kafka and so on - but the thing they had in common was the language, and this I could understand. We can take it for granted that our God created the world, but we can't be so sure about language. He may have created the mountains oceans but it was us humans who invented language out of necessity - and I am sure that there isn't only a spoken language but also one that functions through the eyes, a visual language. This visual language is ancient, it can be seen in painting, sculpture and of course also in architecture - and I assert that this is a language that can be understood, and that it can be learned. When you work within these conventions, without allowing them to restrict your imagination or personality - I mean, in your question you talk about private work, I would counter that by saying that there is no private, that your personality isn't private, that nothing is private - it concerns the structure of your self of your personality, or rather your self-will and motivation to find a language in which you can express what you want to say. Do you understand? To give you another example. When you walk on a pavement there is an agreement, at least here in Switzerland, that cars won't drive on the pavement - normally - but if I stand in the middle of the road, there is a chance there could be an accident. I have another example, this is the last one I promise. I eat my soup in bed. I lie horizontally and use a bed table. When the table is horizontal like me I have no trouble in eating my soup, but if the table is squint then the soup tends to spill out all over my bed and it's uncomfortable. This means that there are things that we simply accept. In relation to this we have to ask what the meaning of the various strands of architecture, predominantly developed after the second world war, was. What the consequence of this kind of architecture was - like deconstructivism and so on... a kind of arbitrary architecture that had no real reason/foundation and then was permanently abandoned, and was also inconsequential because it did not recognise any rules. When I study these works I always ask myself why everything is at odd angles - things seem to be done just because they can be done - and I recognise that this, at least for me, is not a language. That's the first thing. The second is that architecture is basically always restrained by its surroundings, whether it is in the space of the city or in the space of the countryside - and the countryside/landscape doesn't provide the visible world with any specific geometric figures - it only provides spatial approximations or organic shapes. And the ability to position precise geometric figures in this organic landscape - by creating a visual dialectic - is unbelievably attractive for the eye. A vertical wall next to a branch of a tree is so beautiful that I never once thought that I should create anything other than the geometrical. In the city we have decided to come together, made an agreement to build a community and to comprehend ourselves as a community, and not just as an individual being. So first we have to understand the spaces of the city, those common to us, the street and then eventually the house that forms the street. We produce a certain hierarchy out of which we form rules that are not necessarily about the single house, but about the creation of great common spaces. Then every house has a responsibility to comprehend and enhance this common space. This is the most basic principle. However, when you then say that your world vision doesn't correspond to my world vision then that's a declaration - which I can accept - as long as the vision is radical and not just a half-hearted gesture. I mean you have to make a good case

for being the exception to the rule. But if it's really radical then I could say, ok, this guy has convinced me. Then I will reason that he's singular, a one off, happy on his own, is unhappy when he has to communicate with others, and that his unhappiness is created by the fact that he is not the only person in the world. This I would have to accept. The whole of our culture, all our different epochs has circled around this basic question. There have always been exceptions. But exceptions have always meant something. The exceptions, if one understands oneself as a community, have nothing in common with those clients who take a holiday to Spain, visit the gallery at Bilbao and now must have a house that looks like a Gehry - but rather, the real exceptions always come from a collective need - whether an amphitheatre or a baptistery, one knew collectively when one had to build an exception. During the renaissance it was their world vision that built the city, and before that it was the principles of the medieval mind that produces the tight knit lanes and market squares. And it is because we no longer understand the collective that we now find ourselves in a huge crisis - we are restricting our imagination, beauty and our joy of life. I consider myself to be straight forward and positive guy. I have looked at the world clearly, as it stands, and have deduced, what I think its problems are - or its lack of order. I've made my critique, its done, and now have decided to concentrate on creating beautiful buildings. And not only beauty for consumption, but beauty that touches you, that makes you question. I try to create something that I would like to have for myself. That, I believe, is beauty at a political level. This very idea that I would also want what another wants. And I am only motivated by things that are beautiful. This is what humans are capable of and it is also the origin of their motivation - and of their conceptions. So now I have to return to the story of school and learning. When we in Switzerland do our 'Matura' (an exam taken around the age of 18/19), it is essentially a test of our maturity. It's when one becomes somebody. By that point we had all learned language, maths, some literature and so on. So, when I arrived at architecture school at the age of nineteen I became very anxious because I didn't know the language. It felt like I was back in primary school because I didn't know any of the letters, any of the words and certainly didn't know how to make a sentence - I didn't understand any of it. Because we weren't taught about any of these architectural things at high school, I had to start from scratch. At this time I was lucky enough to know Rudolph Olgiati, the father of Valerio, who taught me to notice certain fundamental things about architecture - and because we only have the past at our disposal and the future is still for us to build, I spent my time studying and trying to understand the grammar of past architectures. I looked to profane and the visual arts and started to observe and slowly learn the language. I simply began by observing the grammar of our discipline. I mean, I had to learn French, German and English. I was taught those languages, but no one taught me the how to understand architecture. So I had to do it myself. I've been working on this for thirty years and still give lectures on the theme to my students. Now I can describe everything, but that still doesn't necessarily produce a good building - you just understanding the language.

**Samuel Penn:** And then you have to rely on talent.

**Peter Märkli:** Exactly, a combination of talent and work - it's only by practicing and continually testing your ideas that you discover how things really work. But I see that a lot of the younger generation don't realise that it's necessary to start at the beginning. They always want to be good straight away. It's difficult because this also concerns the question of style and what is seen as fashionable at a certain moment - and this is always changing. Sometimes it's difficult to recognise what is right.

**Samuel Penn:** But this language of architecture that we are talking about has to be a living language. And in the past one assumes that a living language was transmitted from person to person in the form of conventions, like learning how to shape a piece of wood, and then a stone and so on. With the artificial division of labour we have somehow lost this basic transmission. It seems to me that this is why you had to begin at zero when you arrived at architecture school. And then I think about how Paladio or Borromini might have been taught and how we learn, and I imagine it as a totally different world and that the language that you are adopting doesn't exist anymore. Maybe it is sealed in these very old buildings, but not in the life of the people now. The question is whether it was always like this. We can't say definitively that there was always a language to be passed on. We could posit that this fractured situation is the norm and that the convention of transmission is the exception - and that people like you come along every now and again and see the value in it as a language, but that it is not something we can take for granted. I question whether it is something that we can simply learn in school like the alphabet?

**Peter Märkli:** Why not?

**Samuel Penn:** Because just like you said, there was no one there at school that could teach it to you. There are no longer any teachers who know it. And I find it difficult to speculate that in the past the situation was any different. That there was somehow a perfect transmission of knowledge. I think it has always to some extent been fragmented especially in architecture and the visual arts. It could be that the idea of a continuum is also a bit of an illusion. I mean, I believe there are rules but that they also change. To use the tale of Babel as an example - after Babel we had many languages. I see this as positive.

**Peter Märkli:** Yes, but this was a punishment. The many languages that now exist in our discipline is a Babel-like punishment. It's a misfortune. How everything was taught back then is another question. In the 20th Century new things came into play that excited and seduced people - cars, the aeroplane, the escalator, the television and so on - and at this stage people became distracted. Before this people had an emotional life and expressed interests above and beyond the various professions. For thousands of years, if you had enough money you would build yourself a beautiful house. When the farmer had a bit of money he would do some decorative painting on the front of his house to express an inner need and necessity. You didn't fly to Hawaii for a fortnight to go swimming - you stayed at home and concentrated on cultivating the eye, the ears and the spoken language. At this time we expressed our emotional life through these channels - but then we became distracted - and when you become distracted then you stop using the facility of judgement - just like muscles that don't get used any more, it becomes weak. It's also more comfortable now. We live in a consumer society which is a product of capitalism. And I think because of this buildings have become no more than something to wrap around ourselves - an apparatus to provide comfort. I think in the past buildings had more meaning and these linguistic rules were used to signify and express certain common aspects of society and the life of its citizens - through the art of building, the type of construction and economy. Of course we shouldn't be afraid of the new, but it doesn't exclude our claim to the past.

**Samuel Penn:** So, when we look back to the past - to this big world full of significance - and then look to the present it must seem very painful. We have to make a critique of our present condition and work accordingly. But our suffering arises because we don't have a relationship with this other world in the past and because we have a troubled relationship with the present. But that's maybe a bit too existential. Can I ask you a little bit about your relationship with two of the significant people you have mentioned in the past - the architect Rudolph Olgiati and the sculptor Hans Josephsohn. From what I gather these were the two people that opened your eyes to the world.

**Peter Märkli:** Yes, but also the ETH.

**Samuel Penn:** But from what I read, the ETH at that time was mainly concerned with modernism and that you gained your more personal insights from these two individuals. What did they teach you?

**Peter Märkli:** At nineteen I found myself in a position with three influences - a triangle - the ETH as a protected space, which was very useful, and also my visits to Olgiati and Josephsohn. Both of them were older and practiced a discipline that involved the eye. Both these individuals lived their life, expressed their views and their discipline in a way that I had never experienced before. They didn't separate their life and their work. Everything was always together. Olgiati used to tell me about his life, the thoughts that preoccupied him and everything that he admired. He opened my eyes to the wonders of the Greeks, to socialism and to our own Christian culture. Josephsohn was similar. Of course both of them were also a product of their time politically - part of their engagement and thinking had a lot to do with the war - they felt hugely threatened by the atrocities of the second world war. It was out of this background that they produced their work. You can't live life without a view - as Kafka once said - you have to have a view to gain life, you need to figure out your position to be able to live. Without a position or an opinion one can't do anything. So, this search for a position, for an opinion, a view, then determines your work. There isn't a work in the world that is 'timeless' without having a position - I'm convinced of this. Beauty is never without a position, it is due to the position that beauty exists. This is what Olgiati and Josephsohn held to be true and this made a deep impression on me. Naturally I didn't understand everything they said. At that time I understood things much more through emotion and feeling rather than through intellect. My intellectual appreciation happened more gradually years later. I was more discerning when using my feelings and they, my feelings, provided me with a more direct access to certain people and cultures.

**Samuel Penn:** So, when do you think you became architect?

**Peter Märkli:** Always. I have always been an architect.

**Samuel Penn:** But isn't it a language you have to learn?

**Peter Märkli:** Yes, but I always had the intention to learn it. When I was young I showed an interest in art, painting and sculpture. But I couldn't draw people, so how could I become a painter, how could I become a sculptor? I have incredible difficulties mixing colours, so I couldn't be a painter. But I love lines, lines that become spaces - these super abstract lines that become buildings, cities - I simply love this. I can't explain - it's like I didn't have a choice. It was never a question for me.

**Samuel Penn:** It's important for us to explore new things, to advance and to always ask questions about the practice of architecture. I have had a number of conversations with architects and thinkers and many of them return to conclusion that it's somehow a personal journey. This never totally satisfies me, and I don't mean personal in the way we talked about earlier concerning the public and private, but more in the way the elements of a language are used and interpreted to make a work. As you say, just because you can use a language, know the alphabet, can construct a sentence, still doesn't mean that you can write a piece of literature. This takes something extra. We agree that first we have to learn the language in order to use it. It could be that to be useful and to express the present, language has to change and advance, that the answers can't all be found in the objects of the past but that positions have to be constructed and tested again and again conceptually?

**Peter Märkli:** Yes, of course, and every generation has a different view of the past. For instance, African art didn't require an art history to be written about it. They didn't ask for it. It was a living art whose history was constructed in the 20th Century by art historians. Historicism always follows the creative act. But likewise, all those that create work for now and in the moment, make subjective choices by delving into the past to highlight specific epochs they feel are relevant for the present.

**Samuel Penn:** And you think this is a good thing?

**Peter Märkli:** Not just good. Necessary! Of course you don't have to study the whole of history, but a piece of work can be as relevant today as it was ten or even a thousand years ago - because the material is still present, still current. It's about the content.

**Samuel Penn:** And then there are those, like your colleague at the ETH Miroslav Šik, who think of it another way. The idea in Switzerland that came from Rossi through Reichlin and Reinhardt which has become a teaching method. I think it would be useful to compare these two positions. Because obviously they are different - quite subtly different. But I think the idea of Analog is another concept from the one you are talking about now?

**Peter Märkli:** In my opinion the Analog idea of architecture is all about complete pictures/images - finished - in that you already know what is made and what to make. And the grammatical idea, observing, is not about complete things but rather about principles which you test against the present reality. Forms that are based on the principles that you have learned - and your own personal structure - can then be brought together in a totally new way to create an image. What Analog does is to start from the other end, from the finished work, the image of someone else, with the finished work of other generations. It's the total opposite of the grammatical approach. With Analog you don't learn the content or meaning but rather just the externality. You can't just provide images or pictures. You have to work out why something has to be the way it is - it has to be transformed to be an expression of our time.

**Samuel Penn:** But do you not think that a lot of work that was produced in the past was also about this kind of imagery?

**Peter Märkli:** I don't think it. I know it. Images were influential, yes, but they were always converted to reflect modern attitudes toward life, and it's important to distinguish between profane architecture, with its worldly conventions based in continuity, and those works that were plucked out of thin air to satisfy the caprices of fashion.

**Samuel Penn:** So, much of the architecture of the past was based on the simple idea of an individual finding a piece of work that they liked and just using it to make their new building?

**Peter Märkli:** Yes. This was principally the way of the Academie and of neoclassicism (Beaux-Arts). This is normal. But every generation has a task that isn't just about the private individual expression,

but rather fundamental questions to answer about their entire culture - their entire philosophy, the entire arts, film and architecture become pivotal in trying to address these fundamental questions. The last great example of an epochal question was existentialism which produced wonderful literature - like Cesare Pavese - such radical figures, from which Antonioni drew so much inspiration. Then Morandi painted these assemblies of objects that are so close but never come together - and then Giacometti. And in philosophy Camus. So not every single person has their own question to contend with but rather every generation has to try to understand their common task. In all these generations, out of all the people in those generations, only a handful of people, small groups in each, were the ones that wanted build a new attitude towards life. This often manifests in the younger generation trying to break from their parents, their father's generation - and out of the basis of this confrontation with convention, a totally new world would emerge. From the basis of convention emerges a new world. In the middle ages, as people moved to the centre of cities, the small lanes became parallel streets. this was the expression of this new attitude toward life, and you can see these streets in Rome and in Florence, these are the first cities where you can see them trying something new. Then the spans of the buildings get wider and it changes the rhythm of the street. At the beginning only a few people try these new ways, but soon everyone is building like that. And you can see motifs in the architecture. For instance the portico motif that comes from Greek temples lasted all the way into the neoclassical period and can be seen in villas in Scandinavia - that's a time span of two and a half thousand years. This same motif endured and transformed and it's not that one is better than the other, the older or the newer, but that the motif has existed forever. Palladio was accused of using it for the profane, a house, when it belongs to a church or temple - but he wasn't the first. Long before him there were builders that used it in many ways - and I think architecture is richer for it. I mean Palladio simply said that he was going to use this motif a different way, to turn it on its head, because it had already been used for thousands of churches and temples. And likewise all the following architects - all the way to Semper - who used the motif the way Palladio did, sited his buildings as their precedent. I mean it's endless.

**Samuel Penn:** I would like to test this motif a bit further because it's a useful example. When we talk about language and motifs - let's use the letter A for example - the letter A is a symbol. It's a common tool that links us to a sound and a thought - and many different letters, sounds and thoughts make a sentence which enable us to communicate with each other. Would you say that this motif, this visual motif is the same as the letter?

**Peter Märkli:** I would say that it's a lot more.

**Samuel Penn:** And if that's the case you must understand what it means - you must know why it's important and why it has endured for two and a half thousand years?

**Peter Märkli:** Yes I know why. But for this I will have to give you a lesson (starts to draw a house with a pitched roof on a piece of paper). This is what we are talking about. A building has its own logic - stands in a town or in the countryside. Depending on its site and orientation one side of the building will be its main side. Today's generation are obsessed with creating buildings that are equal on all sides, all sides are equally important, but that's not right. This only exists in special buildings like a baptistery for instance. In profane/ordinary buildings this simply isn't the case. In Switzerland we have simple houses and if they are on the side of a hill it is very common that they are orientated lengthways along the hill (to avoid having to dig into the hill), and the pitched roof tends to sit across the narrowest span. In order to mark out an entrance on this low elevation one has to lift the roof up and create a kind of portico. This helps to order the building, the openings and the façade. But it has to be understood that this is quite a significant modification of a motif originating in Greek temples - from the temples to the Pantheon to these houses, this motif has found its way. But principally the portico is a triangular geometry. It doesn't matter if there are ten in a building - in principle there exists only one triangle, and we have only one circle, only one square. These are fundamental geometries. They are all basic forms. This is a circle (draws a circle with a centre point) and all the distances are the same from the circumference of the circle to the centre. The centre is like pole, a tree trunk, even if there isn't a physical pole there you experience everything in relation to the centre point. But out of this geometry I can also make other forms. The circle is the most radical, but I can also cut it in half to make an arch and I can stretch it to make an ellipse and so on - the same goes for the other basic geometries. Almost all orthogonal shapes in architecture and floor plans of buildings - even the plans of cities and towns - are based on these basic geometries or approximations and derivations of them. It is possible to create everything with them in the present and in the future.

**Samuel Penn:** So it goes back to geometry and mathematics?

**Peter Märkli:** Yes, that's the basis of our discipline.

**Samuel Penn:** This may sound a bit esoteric, but do you think these mathematical principles are a human product or universal, or do think that man as part of his greater universe naturally reproduces its order?

**Peter Märkli:** The crazy thing is we only have twenty-six letters in the alphabet, and in German we have a full stop, an exclamation mark, a question mark, a colon and a semi-colon. These are very important things. And then we have ABC - altogether about thirty things - but what you can do with so few elements is incredible. It's like an explosion. Without us the universe or the world would not have these things. These are things that we brought. Let me put it like this. Before Petrarca discovered the landscape, it was not seen in the same way. There was a philosophical direction in France called Nominalism (14th Century) Ockham was one of them - and he said - outside of our soul everything is one - one in number. This means that only our soul adds these elements into the landscape. Other than our addition everything is just the way it is.

**Samuel Penn:** This developed further in the Enlightenment with the idea of 'reason' and that we are the ones that create the world. But today there seems to be a problem, inasmuch as we seem to be undermining these deeper formulations of our relationship to the world and our being in it.

**Peter Märkli:** Yes, this is normal. It's always been that way. It's not a linear progression of ideas. We continually have to reassert our position in the world - and this feeling of being 'nowhere' is not just in architecture, it's also in politics. We are basically on our knees politically, and we have to end it. But I'm also optimistic. And I think this is why we have to help the younger generation to understand the importance of our community and society, we have to teach them how it all works because they don't have the knowledge about how to implement change at a political level. I'm very serious about this. It's incredibly important that these things are understood - and it has nothing to do with arguing over opinions - over your position or mine but more about how we bring things together, how we organise ourselves collectively and how we discuss these matters collectively. These are also skills that take a long time to learn.

**Samuel Penn:** If you had the chance, in terms of our architectural training, to rethink the way we teach it, what would you do? I mean, politics aside, how did you learn the grammar of architecture?

**Peter Märkli:** Personally I would start at the very beginning. It takes a long time. The way I learned was through building and study - together. I found a photograph of a house (shows a photograph of a house). This is a house that I built while I was still a student. When I was building this house I used the style of columns that Rudolph Olgiati used in his houses. They are still his columns. But then I saw this church in Italy - and the house is a little bit of Olgiati and this church. I was very young when I did this but my houses always had a front side, because for me it was simpler. I didn't really understand any more at that time. This allowed me to organise my plan and to set it properly in its context - and the window was always in the middle of rooms because that was the most conventional place to put it. Everything asymmetrical came later for me. At this time I couldn't handle additions. Six years ago I took my students on a study visit to Italy and we visited the Villa Valmarana Bressan by Palladio and as I turned the corner coming through the garden I saw this (shows a photograph of the villa by Palladio) and I got such a surprise/shock! I mean, I had never seen it before - but it was almost exactly the same as the first house I built. Then I realised that the way these people, like Palladio, would have learned architecture was not only because of their interest in antiquity and their customary grand tours to Rome, this had a part to play of course, but more fundamentally because they were immersed in and surrounded by these kind of profane buildings, these lessons. It undoubtedly left a mark on them. But this is just an illustration, just a page of a story. So when you ask - how would I rethink architectural education, I would say, let's start at the very beginning. I would ask everyone very fundamental questions, even adults, like - what is white - and which red - and what does this red mean for your building? For instance, here in Switzerland I always need to use red instead of ochre - ochre is always too weak for our light. I've never been able to use ochre. And white, if you know the paintings of Pierre Bonnard which show these interiors with women bathing there are infinite sum of whites, and this is all crucial. We speak like barbarians. White, red, blue. That's nothing. If one doesn't see the differences between a cold white and a warm white then we have to talk about this - we have to engage at this basic level somewhere between fine art and architectural geometry. In my experience our students, before they receive their diploma, look at a tree and call it 'a tree'. They don't talk about the leaves, the way the light sits on it, how it is proportioned and so on - it's

simply 'a tree'. So then when it comes to more abstract things like 'white' or a 'square' or a 'circle' then it's almost impossible for them to explain. But they have to learn because this is our language. We have to ask what arises from all this. So again, I have to say that we just need to start from the beginning. The fine artist/painter and a writer/novelist will also have to do this independently. For instance Kafka had a particular way to use a verb - he pushed the verb further - he didn't say - he climbs up the stairs but rather - his climbing of the stairs. And by using it this way he communicated more feeling, made an emotional impact - and that's the entirety of art. No more, no less.

**Samuel Penn:** I totally agree, and this reminds me of something. I don't know if you are aware the Scottish architect Isi Metzstein, best known for his work with Gillespie Kidd and Coia Architects. He passed away last week and I have a text with me which I think I'd like to read to you - because it's quite pertinent. It's something that Penny Lewis wrote based on one of his essays: "Metzstein argues that architecture has been internationalised since the Roman Empire. As soon as you have a division of skills and labour in building, you move away from the local. When the Romans built the Pantheon they drew on the resources of the entire Empire to find the best materials for their most important buildings. It was both an intellectual and material exercise, and the product had a meaning for the empire as a whole. Metzstein believes that every building, depending on its function and social purpose has a 'gathering ground' which may cross national boundaries, and from which ideas and materials should be drawn. As far as Metzstein is concerned it's not the internationalisation of architecture that is the problem, but the fact that we struggle to find the appropriate 'gathering ground' for each project. He also believed that we are suffering from an inability to understand and discuss architecture because we are no longer operating according to a shared system of ideas about what architecture could be". I think his was a critique of the often parochial discourse that architects since the 70's have had around regional architecture. Metzstein is saying that there is an appropriate scale, but that it's not only based on the existing character, conventions or grain of the buildings in the vicinity, but rather on the resources and ambition of a particular culture/society - that scale can not be separated from this. We often ask our students to consider the context in which they are building but rarely stop to ask what aspects of context should help generate a new building. This is especially significant when building in a foreign country, in another context. Does this developed idea of scale resonate with you in any way?

**Peter Märkli:** Yes, the idea of an appropriate scale interests me. But I'm convinced that scale has little to do with art. I know very small works that are 'timeless' and speak of something much bigger. It's simply a question about how you communicate it and how it's understood. Art has nothing to do with quantity - nor has the art of building. The other thing is that we are individuals, and this person that I am - I am also in Portugal and also in Vienna. It's impossible for me to be something else. I observe things but I am me, the way I am - and when I'm in Portugal I look around, but I'm still me. I can't be like those Dutch, who will analyse Spain in a week and then develop projects out of the data - insisting that it's correct. For me that's totally unacceptable. I have lived together with some people for a long time and I still don't know them precisely. They still have secrets. This means that I have to assess the mood of the landscape in a more general way - and then I build something that is correct according to my judgement - but it will always come from me. I can never stand outside of myself. Nonetheless, because of all the trade routes that led to Rome an infinite amount of culture was exchanged and adapted. And it's a mistake to think that just because we are here in the high valleys that we have established our own isolated culture. The only reason we read Plutarch is because the Saracens brought it with them in their caravans. We can abandon our small-minded conservative way of thinking because it's not the way things happened in the past. We can let go of our borders and we would find that our different cultures would still flourish and their languages would thrive. After all Europe's nation states are very young. They didn't form these individual characteristics. People are just different. Someone from the area we call Holland is the way he is because of the culture there, and the landscape and their history and so on - same for the French or the Germans. This is why I think we have to reverse the question today. When I have forty different students in a class from all these different areas in the world then I have to ask why they are all producing similar work, similar designs. In fact this is a more pressing question. I tell them, ok, you don't have a lot of knowledge right now, but you do have a particular sensibility - are you like him over there, or did you see this in a magazine? This is the point, that they have to be able to unlock their own treasure, so that they can understand their own rules - and not only produce pretty drawings. Then there are certain groups of people for whom this will never come, and then there are those who can make a world. Those for whom it doesn't come naturally therefore have to have some rules to work with - to observe. When you visit an art museum you see beautiful paintings. For every painting there will be three thousand painters that didn't make it in to the museum. One genius will use a motif in certain way and then the rest follow, and that's culture. But culture isn't a sporting event where each competitor wants to jump

higher than the next, but rather an urge to bring as many people with you as you can, to urge us all to do something good, and then it creates culture. A single individual isn't a culture. Michelangelo or Kafka on their own is not culture - others have to join too. In Europe we have a lot of buildings that have been created by master-builders and carpenters which are classics - wonderful. I put them at the same level as Cathedrals. There was no architect, but there was culture. And today an architect can't even position a chair in a room properly. We have lost all sense of basic feeling for these things. Who can place a tree next to a house properly. It's a doctoral exercise in judgement - and every farmer in his yard had this skill in the past.

**Samuel Penn:** Why do you think this is?

**Peter Märkli:** Because we don't think it's required anymore - but we have to make sure that this sensibility survives. But first we have to have a need for those principles for them to survive - we, the client, the banker, the financier, the planners, everyone involved has to understand the importance of these issues - all of us together. At the moment all we are doing is pretending to be specialists pulling ourselves through a swamp making sure we don't get lost. But if you have a need then you will find a way to express your feelings and your togetherness. As a teacher all you can do is try to arouse that need in your students. This is not something that you can instil in them, it's only something you can help release - otherwise it's just prescriptive. You can trick a student into believing they have to become a specialist - like an architect - but the truth is doesn't make a difference. This is my opinion. Here in Switzerland we have an immense treasure of buildings. The farm buildings and the houses for town elders (Bürgerhäuser der Schweiz) were not built by architects, and yet every valley without fail, has beautiful buildings in it.

**Samuel Penn:** So then, do you think we need a profession?

**Peter Märkli:** Yes I would say I need there to be a profession at the moment. Because our influence is diminished and I'm not sure we will see it rise again in my lifetime. So I think it's important to set ourselves apart as a profession at the moment for structural and systemic reasons. But the success of our discipline is proportional to the service we offer, and how necessary we make ourselves. We have to try and answer all the questions that appear one by one - the question of diminishing resources for instance. We have to take the lead in these discussions and show how we can change architecture, city planning or regulatory policy to make the necessary changes. We as a profession have to change our habits too. I mean, it could be that by working together as professional colleagues we will find our collective majority and our collective task?

**Samuel Penn:** That would be nice. Unfortunately in the UK things are a bit tougher. From talking to Andrea Deplazes yesterday - and by the way he thinks the profession is necessary too - it became clear that here in Switzerland the profession still values the idea that they can do something together, that you can work to help one another. The winds are against us and seem ten time stronger. It's a real struggle to keep an even keel.

**Peter Märkli:** I understand. Is it too much of a leap talk about Gustave Flaubert to try and illustrate my next point?

**Samuel Penn:** No, of course not.

**Peter Märkli:** When Flaubert began to write his novels in the 19th century he didn't have a choice. He simply observed his period in time. This was his temperament and either way he realised that it is always the time you're in that provides the task - not you. There's no freedom. It doesn't exist in any way whatsoever. It's a total misunderstanding. One only finds freedom within a subject that one studies. One is never born into this world free - never ever. And we also have unconscious influences and duties. To free yourself of these it first requires that you work. Before you find your freedom you have to work a lot and risk a lot. I know this from experience. Flaubert described the middle class people simply because they were current - Madame Bovary the wife of a doctor - about her affairs - because this was a theme of the day. In four newspapers, three critiques wrote columns demanding more beautiful stories - things that you could read on Saturday and Sunday and forget on Monday. But he denied them. Because of this he was disliked and even censored. But this was his task. For many younger writers like Maupassant and Zola he was a tremendously important influence. This is the way things are. And in your country in the fine arts you have the same phenomenon in the 19th and maybe even as early as the 18th century - as it separated itself from the aristocracy. Then there was the question of the exhibition, or the artist as an independent entrepreneur, and whether



admissions could be charged to see the work. Before all artists had wealthy patrons, and suddenly they disappeared. None of this is new it's just more radically exaggerated at the moment. Things have changed. and I know we somehow have to correct things, but in order to do so there has to be the will. On the weekend I read the newspaper and there was an article in there about Muhammad Ali and his refusal to be drafted into the army during the Vietnam war. He said, 'what do I have against these people in Vietnam - I don't have any issues with them?' A sports figure was political! I look around me now and all I see is promotional gear - there's not one political thought that comes out of this money obsessed sports industry. They grin, don't say anything and wear big expensive watches. It's a brutally different world we live in.