CHAPTER

05

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

An investigation into the relevance of contrary or contemporary arguments surrounding ways of making place and form.

5.1

BTU COTTBUS IKMZ

ARCHITECT :

Herzog and de Meuron

LOCATION OF PROJECT	DATE OF COMPLETION	REASON FOR INCLUSION
Brandenburg University of Technology, Brandenburg, Germany	2004	Understanding the nature of the contemporary 'resource centre'

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In the interest of distancing the new facility from the traditional library type in order to appear forward thinking and technologically sophisticated, the new library at BTU Cottbus was given the somewhat inelegant title of the Information, Communications and Media Centre. Due to having an uncomfortably long title, the facility is usually referred to as the IKMZ (an abbreviation of the official name), or despite the intentions of the university, as the library. Along with a new name, the IKMZ was designed with a novel architectural form to deny the possibility of association with the traditional library and announce itself as a landmark building for the campus. Its amoeba-like plan was allegedly informed by mapping and overlaying natural flows of human movement (Herzog and de Meuron 2005), a claim that falls short on closer inspection of the plan which reveals that the form was generated by layering a series of perfect circles (fig.5.2). Even if the circles did generate a volume capable of facilitating the optimal flow of movement within, this is interrupted by long parallel rows of orthogonal shelving which effectively cut through the organically designed space and funnel or block the flow of movement within.

The shapeless form of the building is wrapped in a continuous glass outer skin, which is uninterrupted and unarticulated regardless of whether the inner skin be-

hind it is solid or transparent. This lack of articulation makes the building appear larger than what it actually is from the exterior, a condition that is emphasised by the homogeneity of the pattern that covers the entire continuous façade. Due to its lack of references to any typological informant, and in accordance with the trend of contemporary libraries, the exterior skin of the building is decorated with a text based motif of layered and jumbled letters from various alphabets. Rather than use the form, material or essential elements of the architecture to express the buildings functional role, it instead relies on this superficial and meaningless pattern applied to its outer skin. Used to control solar gain into interior spaces, when experienced from inside, the arrangement of letters in the pattern blocks important views of the campus, such as those of important buildings, and instead frames arbitrary views of things around the base of the IKMZ such as pavement kerbs and dustbins.

Because of the uninterrupted flowing skin within, the organic form and the intention that all interiors spaces be connected and seamlessly flow into each other, the interiors lack spatial hierarchy and recognisability making them impossible to easily navigate. In an unsuccessful attempt to rectify this issue, the interiors are painted with garish, artificial colours, presumably chosen in accordance with the

information-age theme of the building. Instead of using these colours in specific functional areas to demarcate space and establish specific rooms marked by specific colours, the bands of colour stretch across floors, walls and even different levels binding spaces together rather than distinguishing them. The metal ceilings and shelves within are used to reflect these bright colours in order to create a psychedelic effect (Herzog and de Meuron 2005) rather than assist with the problem of wayfinding, and despite this aesthetic gimmick, the fittings are generic and unremarkable, as is the way the building is planned and constructed. Despite intending to appear forward thinking and define the new information age library, the IKMZ is essentially a conventional modern library, built and laid out in the same way as its pre-internet predecessors where columns arranged on a grid support floors which house books clustered in the centre of the plan with reading areas arranged around the periphery.

Figure 5.1 - The shape of the new 'library'
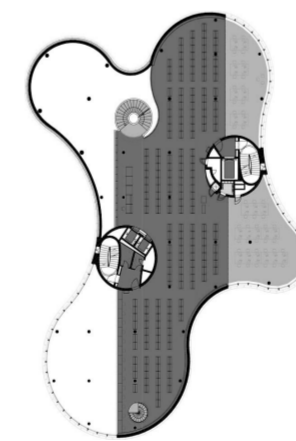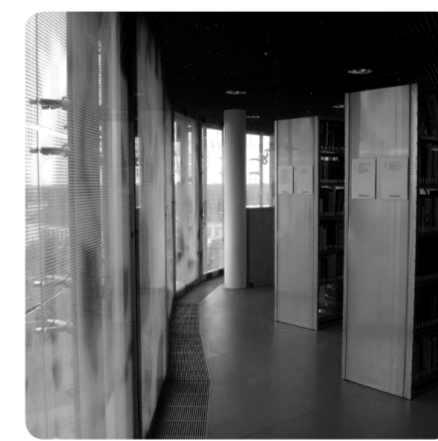

Figure 5.2 - Amorphous typical floor plan

Figure 5.3 - Facade as continuous, unbroken skin

Figure 5.4 - Using colours to define space

5.2

DISNEY WORLD SWAN AND DOLPHIN RESORT

ARCHITECT :

Michael Graves

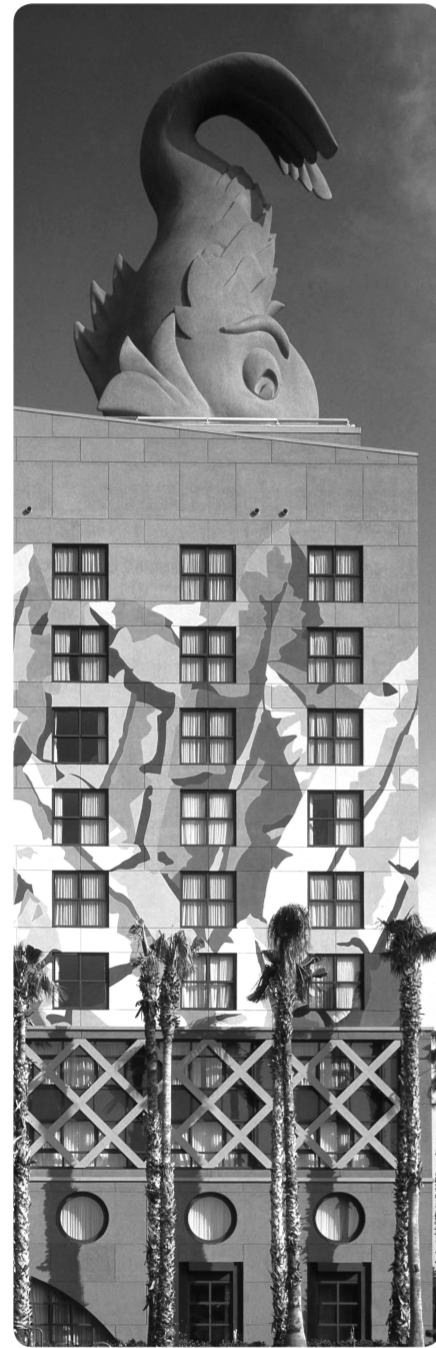| LOCATION OF PROJECT	DATE OF COMPLETION	REASON FOR INCLUSION
Epcot Resort Area, Orlando, United States of America	1990	In order to prevent any associations with postmodern classicism

Figure 5.5 - Applied, themed decoration

Figure 5.6 - The central triangular wing

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Analysed to understand the contemporary association between formal geometry and the failings of postmodern neoclassicism, the Swan and Dolphin resorts have no doubt contributed towards the current apprehensiveness amongst architects surrounding the value and contemporary role of 'historical' or formal geometry. A condition that has taken root not because of any inherent failings of the geometry itself, but rather because of its association with a particular movement and the movement's subsequent failure to convince.

Based on a narrative contrived by Graves himself in the hope of creating characters worthy of their own film produced by Disney, the resorts were designed to symbolise the story of a pod of dolphins, a pair of swans and a mountain erupting from the depths of the ocean, with the central triangular wing representing the mountain (Perez 2010). The architecture is an essentially Modernist edifice with an applied decorative theme, the decoration is superficial and rather than imbue the work with any kind of cultural or aesthetic value, it is deliberately inauthentic in an attempt to evoke a sense of irony. Void of any functional roles like protection from weathering, the decorative elements lend the architecture a tangibly cheap and artificial quality thanks to the fact that they are hollow ornaments built from wood and fibreglass or painted murals of pastel col-

ours. To complete the superficial theme, the presence of water which is central to the narrative of the resort is not integrated in the architecture in any meaningful way (such as celebrating the handling of rainwater from above or the marshy soil below), rather water has been incorporated in the form of fountains that occupy central spaces in front of the buildings or within them and are inconsequential to the architectural manifestation of the scheme. Critical analysis of the central triangular wing in the context of such a project reveals that although its form is not inherently spatially problematic it is rather the form's inclusion in a design replete with the above-mentioned artificial and ironically applied decoration which acts to undermine the form's essentially stable and monumental character. The extrusion of a triangular plane as a mountain in the context of such a scheme evokes an association with a cardboard cut-out of a mountain, a thin and unconvincing representation. The entire wing is made into an insubstantial applied ornament thanks to the architectural approach of the resort within which it is contextualised indicating that it is not the form itself which is problematic, but rather the nature of the overall scheme within which it is found that defines the user's experience and the form's architectural potential.
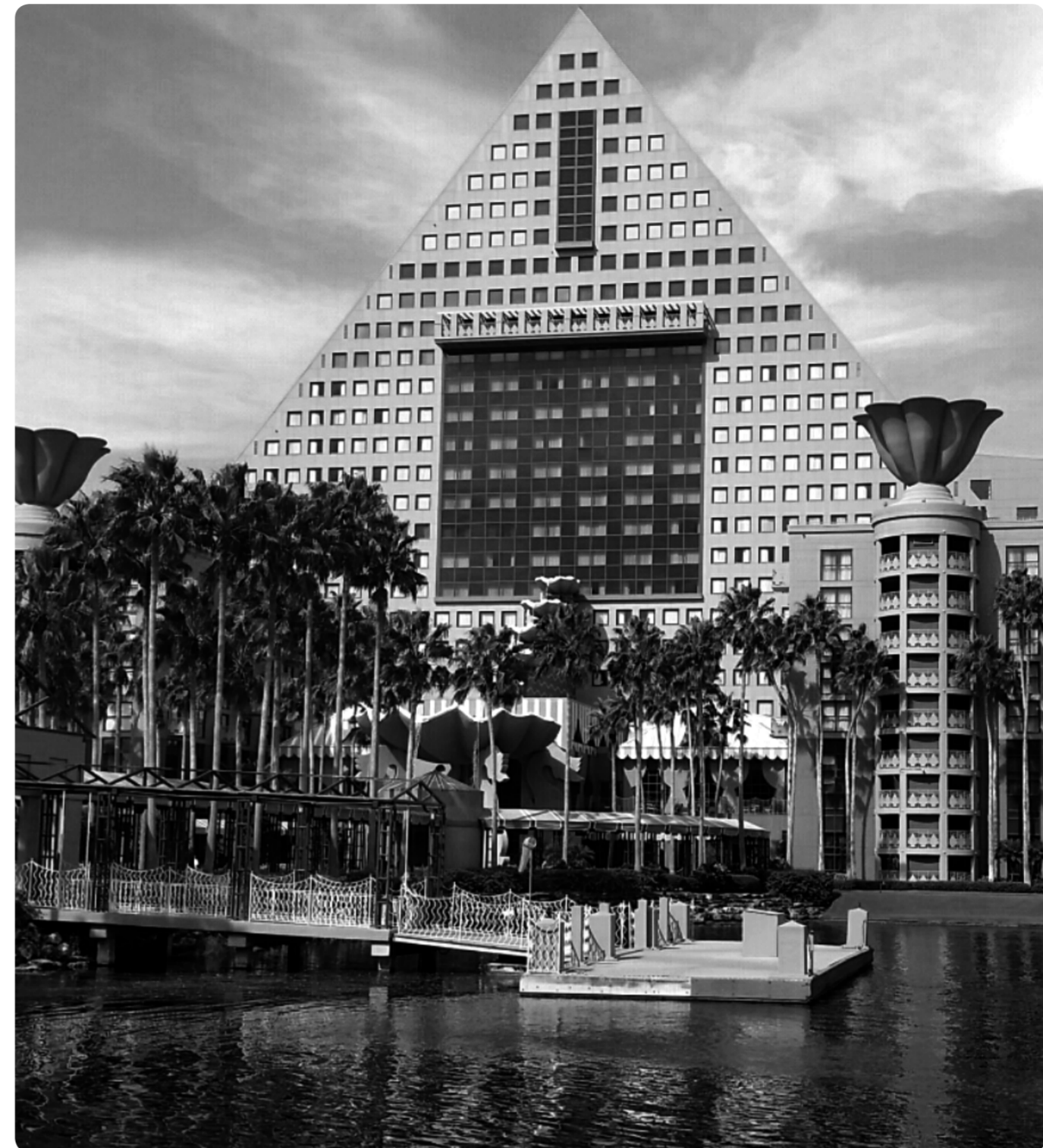

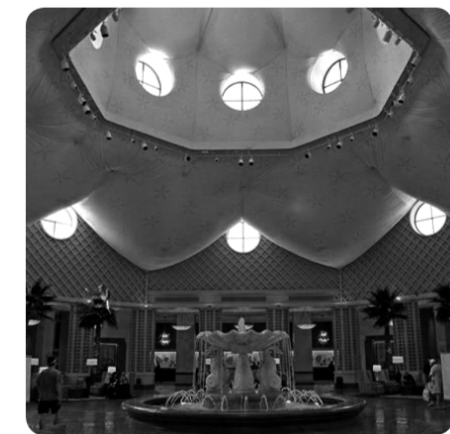Figure 5.7 - Inhumane scale of the hotel blocks

Figure 5.8 - Superficial use of water

Figure 5.9 - Ironically cheap decoration