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Re-righting THE MONOLITH, or an antidote to Architectural Accessory Attachment Disorder

The simplicity of the architectural monolith does not aim at abstraction, nor does it share the minimalist aspiration to nonreferential objecthood. Rather, it seeks to maximize the expressive potential of common architectonic configurations by condensing their figurative allusions into one eloquent gesture.¹

In his recent article in *Flash Art Volumes: Crisis Formalism*, Edgar Rodriguez describes the current state of architecture as a movement of 'Almost Nothing.' 'Almost Nothing demands evading authoring geometric form and favoring the composition, alteration, and re-signification of preexisting elements.'² Strategies of Almost Nothing include Minimal Intervention, reinterpretation of existing material components, Poeticized Function, and Evident Subtlety. In addition to this theory, I would add to the current moment 'Performative Building Performance,' or signifying sustainability without form. To design a building in the contemporary cultural context one must proudly, if not irrationally, brandish the signs of responsible architecture: mass timber, PV cells, angled canopies, rammed earth,

exposed MEP systems, green roof everything. And while there is nothing inherently wrong with any of these sustainable strategies, (quite the contrary – they are what few tools we have in the fight!), the unfortunate result of adherence to the current doctrine is the abdication of architectural form; the aggregation of architectural elements as an aesthetic end in and of itself.

In contrast to the current zeitgeist, the aim of this studio will be to produce an architecture of the Monolith. ‘Free-standing, striking shapes charged with identities, logics, or ideas that promote recognition while remaining ambiguous and indeterminate,’³ the Monolith suppresses the legibility of disparate material assemblies in favor of unified essentialism. Characteristics of monolithic architecture include ‘extreme economy and simplicity of overall form...consistency of external appearance...[and the] capacity to deliver tremendous eloquence with very limited formal means.’⁴ The Monolith, through its volumetric restraint and civic sobriety, has the power to reassert a discourse of form in a time that demands almost nothing of us.

¹ Machado, Rodolfo and Rodolphe el-Khoury. *Monolithic Architecture*. Prestel-Verlag, 1995.

² Rodriguez, Edgar. “Almost Nothing.” In *Flash Art Volumes: Crisis Formalism*, 24-37. 2025.

³ Machado, 36.

⁴ Machado, 12.

