

In the early 1950s, the architect and sculptor Tony Smith went on a drive. “When I was teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the 50s, someone told me how I could get on to the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. I took three students and drove from somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored lights. ... Artificial landscape without cultural precedent began to dawn on me.”* In 1961, some ten years later, Smith was seriously injured on the road between Albany and Bennington. He subsequently developed polycythemia, a blood condition in which red blood cells—themselves a kind of vehicle—proliferate and slowly destroy the organs of the body. Unable to drive anymore without fear of blacking out, Smith abandoned architecture, and turned to sculpture—of a particularly mute, minimal kind.

Like Tony Smith, Andreas Tschersich practices a kind of abstraction; complex pictorial compositions in which a line of windows provides a fusillade of skewed squares, an electrical wire traces out a pure line, diagonally bisecting two muted color fields, and a leafless tree is an impossibly kinetic sketch, chiefly significant for the fact that—in contrast to the dead cottage next to it—it has no front and no back. Photography was invented not least to provide souvenirs of the best and proudest of cities, to let us record the world we have freely made. The evidence, however, that Tschersich makes photography yield is of a world that no-one could have intended.

Before it is built, architecture must be drawn. Floorplans, façades, and sections are drafted by professionals of many years training, before being lodged with responsible civic planning authorities. The conventions of architectural drafting are rich with tradition, dating back to a letter from Raphael to Pope Leo X. By now, even the most rudimentary structure must conform to various local by-laws: to fire codes and set backs, to drainage rules and analyzed shadow lines, all harmonizing to unfurl the dense grid of the city over the landscape.

Planning codes tend to fray at the edges, where residential zones blend into industrial estates, brown fields, or unkempt periphery forests. The spatial rules that have been evolved to serve city centers make less sense out here, are applied with less consistency, or seem more arbitrary in their result. Suddenly it becomes possible to step back far enough to see a multi-family apartment block sitting like a broken tooth, and ask, “what is this?” Sometimes it is hard to believe that it was actually designed at all, or that it serves any human purpose. It becomes implausible, ludicrous, a black joke, to think that anyone ever worried about the orientation of this building, detailed its windows, carefully drew it in axonometric projection, chose this color over that, or prepared perspectival views of how it would look when it was finished for the pleasure of its future inhabitants.

Andreas Tschersich has repeatedly said that he is not an architectural photographer. In a sense, this is true. These are not architectural images. These are not images of a city. The image of a city is a Renaissance phenomenon, a statement of the decorum and pride of a political community. Rather, on the one hand, these photographs are documentary proof that modern architecture does not exist and, on the other, they exploit buildings as familiar elements in unfamiliar compositions.

The standard account of Renaissance perspective is that it coincides with the appearance of a new kind of subject: a man whose gaze ranges over homogenous space and thereby dominates it, and who realizes, even before the Copernican revolution, that at any given moment it's not the Earth that's at the centre of the universe. Rather, he is. Superficially, Tschersich's depopulated photographs conform to this model, but there's something uncanny about them. They appear like a single shot, but something is subtly spatially awry: there's no single vanishing point to orient the gaze by. Rather, the image is a collage of meticulously stitched together photographs, each with its own vanishing point, mechanically determined by the camera. The result is a series of moments condensed into a single impossible space, almost in the manner of a medieval painting.

The shells of the buildings provide platonic volumes to populate a strange fugue of laneways and traffic islands, signage, and street lighting, of underpasses, tunnels, and drain entrances. A bin in the foreground mocks the attempt of two residential towers to assert their scale, an abandoned plaza provides an occasion for a broken mosaic, and the pavement becomes a canvas for drawing road markings on. Meanwhile, car tires sweep out fixed curves in dirt with as much regularity as a Buddhist monk can rake a gravel garden. The buildings have façades, which is to say, they provide planes and parallel lines, imply vanishing points and hint at depth of field, but this is a city no more inhabitable than a billboard. It goes without saying that there is no-one home.

At an unmarked location outside the London Orbital, back in 1967, a filamentous mold was found growing underground. Named *Fusarium venenatum*, it is easy to cultivate, competent at turning sugars into proteins and, when compressed, has an elasticity and texture not dissimilar to meat. Marketed as “Quorn,” it is a single organism that was shown to grow exponentially (in a 40 cubic meter airlift zymotech fermenter) when supplied with unlimited sugar and water. From its body, 250,000 meals a day are shorn: meat-free hotdogs, chicken-style nuggets, burger patties. *Venenatum* is a Latin adjective meaning poisonous, enchanted, bewitched. Andreas Tschersich’s landscapes are the landscapes of Quorn: banal, all around, but also alien.

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* “Talking with Tony,” Interview with Tony Smith by Samuel J. Wagstaff
(*Artforum* 5, December 1966)