

# THE MONOLITHIC

The derivation of the word monolith (from greek *monó-lithos*, "one" and "stone") means objects all of a piece. Historical examples like egyptian obelisks (fig. 1), that have been carved out the rocks in one piece, are monolithic in the very meaning of the word. This seems not yet conferrable to more complex architectures because those are - besides cave-like constructions carved into rocks - necessarily joint constructions. Nonetheless there are many cases in architectural history - from the Pyramids of Gizah and the Stauer Castel del Monte to the Kolumba (fig. 2-5) - that are joint construction and called monolithic at the same time.

This observation adds another interpretative level to the analysis. The contemporary concept of the monolithic seems to be different from the original, greek derivation. The examples similarity is first of all their *monolithic appearance*. The monolithic in contemporary understanding seems to be rather a perceptive than a ontological category that is to be found in the origination process.

Inevitably another interpretative level appears: The individual perception. If the monolithic is a characteristic defined by visual attributes, it only exists in dependance to the perception of a beholder and his attribution. Therefore the monolithic is the result of reconciliation of individual perception and criteria (e.g. homogeneous surfaces, few openings, heaviness, volume) defined by collective consensus.

The invention of reinforced concrete and its rise to the leading construction material of present time has revealed the contradiction between contemporary definition and proto-meaning of the monolithic. One the one hand, it is the only material, that offers monolithic character in the words derivation. The handling in liquid condition allows for constructions of a piece. On the other hand it manifests the contradiction between the interpretative levels. The filigree constructions, most notably from civil engineering (fig. 6-9), match the the proto-meaning but not the contemporary concept. Meanwhile monolithic architectures in terms of the latter concept (e.g. fig. 10), do not match the former. The discrepancy between material and form seems undissolvable.



Fig. 1: Obelisk in Giza, Egypt  
Latern Side Collection, Brooklyn Museum, New York



Fig. 2: Pyramid of Giza, Egypt  
Latern Side Collection, Brooklyn Museum, New York



Fig. 3: Pyramids of Giza, 2005-2010, Cairo  
Photograph: R. L. Lacey, 2006



Fig. 4: Castel del Monte  
Photograph: S. L. Lacey, 2006



Fig. 5: Pruitt-Zoo, Kansas City, 2007  
Photograph: S. L. Lacey, 2006



Fig. 6: U.S. Capitol, Washington D.C., 1800  
Photograph: S. L. Lacey, 2006

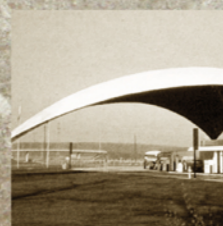


Fig. 7: Hansjörg Zehrer, Stuttgart, 2007  
Photograph: S. L. Lacey, 2006



Fig. 8: U.S. Capitol, Washington D.C., 1800  
Photograph: S. L. Lacey, 2006



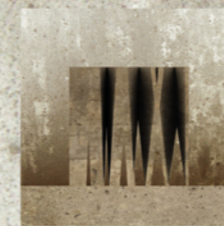
Fig. 9: Hansjörg Zehrer, Stuttgart, 2007  
Photograph: S. L. Lacey, 2006



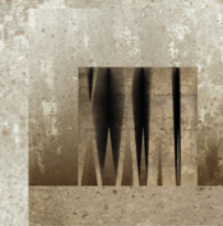
Fig. 10: U.S. Capitol, Washington D.C., 1800  
Photograph: S. L. Lacey, 2006



top view



side view



Analytic continuation of the examination of the monolithic is the design of a architecture, that illustrates the theoretical concept in third dimension. Despite the assemblies simplicity, the form shows enormous complexity. A massiv block presents the beginning of a outfanning movement inside cubic external dimensions. The perception of the sculptural form - depending on viewpoint and angle - within a spectrum from massive/enclosed to permeable, from *monolithic to filigree*. Although there are apparently single, quasi-structural elements - e.g. shear walls - clearly identifiable within the formal development the sculpture seems to be *created all of a piece*. In this way paradox between the derived ontological definition on the one hand, and the individual receptive on the other becomes clear. The question of the primacy of perception over origination process and vice versa remains, at least objectively, unacknowledged.

