7 Questions and Answers on the Façade.
Flexible Façade, Austrian Student Competition.

Manfred Berthold

01 How does a façade function as an interface or threshold?
The façade is an open system, with an internal milieu.
The façade is neither an interface nor a threshold, it is both.
At first sight, the surface of the façade would seem to be a hermetic layer.
At second sight we can see pores and openings that enable and provoke communication with the surrounding.
Façades are absorbers through the pores of their skins.
The façade as the skin of a building keeps a constant contact with its surroundings.
Our skin has sensors - sweat glands, blood vessels, fat tissue serve to regulate temperature.
A flexible façade, comparable to our skin, could interact and react with the surroundings.
Our 'third skin' - the façade of our buildings - could be adapted to our human needs of communication with the outside and at the same time protect from external influences.

02 Is the façade part of the street or part of the building?
Only the contour of the heavy snowdrifts indicates that there is a house below. This picture shows a perfect architectural fusion between façade and landscape.
Without a doubt, there is a link between the surface of the façade and the natural or urban environment, as there is another link between the façade and the construction of the building.
In following this, we can understand the question - the façade is part of the street and from the example given, the street is a part of the façade.
In some of the sown projects the street is part of the building.
Paths leads across the façade. The horizontality of the building defines its vastness (of the façade).
Could a building then even have a garden or landscape as a façade, instead of being only made of clay or concrete tiles?
The horizontal facade, in this context, serves as a stage for various public activities.
03 What is the difference in designing a façade for a freestanding building vs. an urban infill project?
In a complex of buildings the façade is in relation to its neighbour buildings.
Where architectural planning and city space interpenetrate and the architecture itself becomes the means and measure by which one comprehends the urban landscape.
Freestanding buildings don’t have neighbouring façades.
They are related to the free landscape – the creation of nature.
As soon as humans started to cultivate nature, the wild and free landscape became an artificial one.
I want to quote Paul Shepheard: “The cultivated wilderness, or what is landscape”.
What, if a building becomes an artificially designed landscape as a horizontal façade?
And what if freestanding buildings become part of this artificial landscape?
The following pictures are examples of the idea of such a combination of freestanding and urban infill façades.

04 Is the façade a property of certain kinds of architecture? Can a blob have a façade?
The word façade, borrowed in the 18. Century from the French word façade, has its origin in the Italian word Facciate, a decension of Faccia, which means Face or Front Side.
The façade is the outer visible layer of the invisible internal.
The inner-measurements of buildings, towns and lands were in history limited by the circumference of facades as protecting walls.
In this example the facade is just a wall. It creates an illusion, like in a movie production as scenery for a building, or a whole town.
Architecture is indistinguishable from décor. To quote Mark Wigley:
"To (design or) construct architecture is simply to prop up a surface that produces an atmosphere."
Any shape that is understood in an architectural context can claim to be a façade.
Back to the question: Can a blob have a façade?
Certain blobs could have a façade. The perfect form of a water reservoir follows the surface tension of the medium water.
Not only blobs can have a façade. Certain loops can have a façade too.

05 Is the problematic nature of the façade merely an illusion created by representational methods, in particular elevation drawings?
What is the façade of a 'space behind', if not a surface that manifests certain structural, sculptural, material, colourful and tactile properties?
There exist façades that never have been designed.
There are façades that have been designed.
There are representational methods for façades leading back to the measurements of nature.
Many of these examples are unplanned; spaces created to receive light, air and sun.
Historically, façades developed from a negative shape, in the case of a kind of 'minus architecture' (in the construction of caves). Used during the grey prehistoric period for protection against the influences of the weather and, above all, against hostile animals.
Entire towns were later hollowed out of the earth, as in the case of the Christian churches and the dwellings of Göreme in Anatolia.
What is interesting in this case, is that columns were no longer necessary to support the cupola.
An architecture arose which is in no way visible to today's unsuspecting observer, flying over the area in an aeroplane, since the natural formations were not touched. Even for enemies of old, who had to do without the aeroplane, the entrances to the flats were extremely difficult to find.
We are dealing with a highly differentiated, very independent and characteristic architecture whose premise is the façade as camouflage.
06 How do transparency and reflectivity change the status of the façade?
The transparency of the façade allows a view into and provokes the communication between indoor and outdoor. The internal will be much more understood as part of the external and vice versa. The observer experiences an enlargement of the living space, if a visual flowing transition between inside and outside is created. Reflecting walls create a distance between an indoor and outdoor. The spectator can only view himself. They enlarge the space outside and make us forget that there is something behind. Today we develop reflecting façades that serve as collectors, solar-cells or sun protectors. The low energy house, the passive house, the zero-energy house are a combination of transparent, reflecting and opaque façade facing. Double skin glazed walls have the effect of a climatic shield.

07 Do all buildings need a façade, or can we dispense with it?
The concept of the façade troubles architectural discourse – haunting those that try to escape it and eluding those that chase it. A long tradition of architectural theory suggests that architecture is never more than a theatrical effect. In this sense Architects are special effects experts. Siegfried Giedion says: „Forms are not bounded by their physical limits. Forms emanate and model space.” (Siegfried Giedion, Raum, Zeit, Architektur)

If we define the façade to be the physical limit, than the façade is the anatomical raiment of architecture. The question: Do all buildings need a façade, leads us to further questions: Do buildings need a roof, a ceiling, a wall? Do they need a construction at all? Do we need architects for designing façades?

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