Poetic of Architecture Elements

“…Architecture depends upon its time. It is the crystallization of its inner structure, the slow unfolding of its form. That is the reason why technology and architecture are so closely related. Our real hope is that they will grow together, that some day the one will be the expression of the other. Only then will we have an architecture worthy of its name: architecture as a true symbol of our time” (Mies van der Rohe, 1950).

For Alejandro Zaera Polo the building volume – the envelope – is currently the most relevant element of architecture because it best expresses the link between technology, representation and politics. According to Zaera Polo, the outward appearance of a building volume, The Envelope, is probably the oldest and most primitive architectural element. It materialises the division between exterior and interior and is therefore automatically charged politically.

Envelope, Technology, & Society

The Socio-technological Hub is wrapped in a double skin of glass (inner) and fabric (outer). The outer envelope (fabric) is flexible and can be changed or replaced by other types. This represents the needs of contemporary society in changes and variation in relation to time. This outer layer of the façade is planned to be changed yearly and be replaced by the one appropriate to the technology of the time. The in-between space is programmed to connect the office spaces through spectacular staircases. Here the occupants produce the dynamic representation of facade, while the building itself maintains a homogenous skin. At the same time, the double skinned and balconies behind form a climate buffer between interior and exterior. Here, representation, function and climate control form a single unity. Such a symbiosis would reflect on what Zaera Polo has been scrutinizing in his essay “The politic of envelope” and Mies van der Rohe’s concern of architecture and technology of its time. One ambition in this project is deploying architectural tools to organise climate-control aspects such as natural ventilation and, at the same time, define the identity of the building.

The envelope in many ways touches on the core of architecture. Usually, the building volume is related to either representation or technology. The increasing political interest for sustainability and the need to represent this effectively, now provides great opportunities to integrate climate-control technology, function and representation in buildings.