Porsche and Volkswagen also have plants in the region. Though Leipzig has fared slightly better than other former GDR cities, unemployment is still around 20 per cent and since reunification its population has decreased by some 100,000 (nearly a fifth). The half hour drive out northwards from the centre of Leipzig to the plant on its brownfield site takes you through a curious post-industrial landscape of derelict factories and deserted streets. Yet on the northern fringe there are stirrings of revival – a new airport, motorway, the Trade Fair complex dominated by Ian Ritchie’s great glazed Messehalle (AR, March 1996) and, of course, BMW’s plans for the area with 5500 new jobs.

Programmatically, the Central Building is a modern chimera – part office block, part factory, part laboratory, part cannery. Drawing together these different aspects, it also mediates between factory floor and office, between white collar and blue collar, and between product and process. A key aim was organisational transparency, achieved by a fluid layering and interpenetration of spaces so that people are aware of other kinds of activities going on around them. Most especially they are aware of overhead conveyors that snake around the building at ceiling height ferrying car bodies from one production department to another. As this segmented line of gleaming gleaming car glides silently past cascading terraces of open plan offices and the staff cannery (the reference being shared by workers and management), there could be no more overt reminder of collective purpose.

Hemmed in between these huge production halls, the site, pre-allocated by BMW, offered particular challenges. Hadid’s buildings are more used to being objects in a landscape, and Leipzig is clearly in the lineage of topographic, horizontal structures such as the Vera fire station (AR, June 1993) and Land Form One (AR, June 1999). Here, however, the taut, muscular streak of the Central Building (no slip at 40,000sqm) is dwarfed by the grey hangers of industrial