The Architecture Has Become an Actor in the Process of Negotiation

Barbara Steiner (Director of the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst – GfZK / Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig), Paul Grundei, Stephanie Kaindl, and Christian Teckert (as-if berlinwien) in an interview with Leipzig writer and critic Arnold Bartetzky in February 2005, shortly after the opening of the building.

Bartetzky   The idea for the new exhibition building of the GfZK Leipzig is based on a design process, which not at first, as is usually the case, arises from the appearance of the building or from the integration of the building to its urban environs, but rather from the curatorial practice, from the specific needs of the institution. What experiences did you gain in the process?

as-if   The decisive point was to define the project agenda together and to find a common language for it, to transform it step by step in the direction of architecture. There were already common experiences with Barbara Steiner, in which similar thinking about architecture, about exhibition spaces, and about the politics of visibility of the institution emerged. That point strongly interested us, because the practice at work in an institution like the GfZK is very much about a strong reflectivity towards its own institutional mechanisms and the institutional practice as a whole. It is a way of working that is really about complex layering of diverse activities that are also permanently reflected and discussed in relationship to one another.

Steiner   In contemporary art, there is an incredible multiplicity of possible positions and for these a screen is also needed – spatial conditions that can properly address these various challenges. These consistently new positions require a corresponding architecture that in the end allows for and responds to these changes in artistic positions. In our case, it was important to collaborate with architects who really have a strong awareness of the needs of contemporary art. The building owes itself at least as much to inspirations from artistic practices as from the history of architecture.

Bartetzky   How are these premises for the actual building then manifested, on the one hand the wish toward visibility or articulation of a specific institutional profile and on the other hand toward changeability, toward a variable, should one say stage – set or a display for contemporary art?

as-if   During the design process and in consultations with the GfZK, we tried to develop many moments of friction – between adjoining spaces with different uses placed next to each other, which might be brought into new relations with each other again and again through specific architectural elements. It also became important that the spaces themselves could change their functional meaning. At the beginning of the design process, the spaces had clearer functional assignments than they currently do.

Bartetzky   So they were more clearly defined as rooms?

as-if   Their roles were more clearly defined. They were still simply called "collection," or "cinema," or "storage," or "project space." That was then also a question for the GfZK, what type of definition is necessary and relevant, which definition is somehow bothersome, which variability of these usages is possible, and in which setting could the spaces be arranged together. The discussion over the design also dealt with the mode of operation of the institution, which is always connected to the power of defining art and viewing art, architecture, or the perceiving subject, with all mechanisms that are inscribed into every institution and that begin to exercise their power the moment someone visits an institution and crosses over these staged, clearly defined thresholds. The question was, how can one really critically reflect the

Performative Architecture as the Basis of the Performative Museum[1]

Barbara Steiner

The analysis of performativity has been a staple in the GfZK program since 2004. The term was first used in the context of the exhibition *Performative Architecture*, organized in collaboration with the Siemens Arts Program.[2] The show was inspired by the construction of the GfZK's new exhibition space in Leipzig by as-if berlinwien. Taking this "performative" building as a starting point, BLESS, Monica Bonvicini, Angela Bulloch, Oliver Hangl, Jeppe Hein, Olaf Nicolai, Anita Leisz, and Pro qm were invited to create work dealing with the relationship between architecture and performativity. Since then, performativity has been extended to incorporate the concept of the museum as well. Both the terms "performative architecture" and "performative museum" seem to evoke a double contradiction, as neither the static concepts of architecture nor the museum appear at first to correspond with the notion of performativity.

According to John Langshaw Austin, a performative speech act is an act in which the speaker produces the thing (s)he names: I express myself by means of language and accomplish an action – because "saying makes it so."[3] Austin's concept was later reformulated, amended, and extended – drawing into account the patterns, possibilities, and limitations of the functions of language; the contexts, social structures, and the respective competence of the speakers; the rituals and stereotyping to which performative utterances are subject; and finally in consideration of the consequences and effects of the reality-constituting power of language. In this context, gender study assumes special importance, investigating the relation between speech acts and identity constitution.[4]

In the 1960s, the term appeared in art in a modified form as *performance* and primarily denoted a unique event occurring within time limitations, frequently involving a situation-based ad hoc action: particularly in the western hemisphere, performances aimed to challenge the prioritization of the static esthetic object and the "commodification" of art, and demanded a change of production and reception conditions.[5] In turn, the "white cube" – as the predominant model of the exhibition display in the postwar era – became the focus of critical attention, and was, like the object too, forced to undergo temporalization. The exhibition space no longer acted as a representative repository for immovable values and attributes, but as a place for temporary and changing spatial proposals: the space transformed into an event venue, assuring unrepeatable experiences and encounters in the here and now.

These developments affected the conception of museums: Willem Sandberg, director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, even considered abandoning completely the old idea of the museum that holds a permanent collection. Seeking to render the museum more dynamic and acces-

1   Parts of this text have already been published in the essay "Performative Architecture" in: Angelika Nollert (ed.), *Performative Installation*, Cologne 2003, pp. 180–194

2   Under the umbrella title *Performative Installation*, the Siemens Arts Program organized a five-part exhibition series, which took place in various institutions in Innsbruck, Cologne, Siegen, Vienna, and Leipzig. Different aspects of the central topic were dealt with in each respective location: Construction & Situation; Narrative; Communication; The Body & Economy; Architecture.

3   Cf. John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford 1962

4   Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution. An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in: Sue-Ellen Case (ed.), *Performing Feminism: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, Baltimore 1990, pp. 270–282; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, New York/London 1990

5   Concentrating on the artwork's "material" substance was understood as an extension of capitalist logic and the need to overcome that logic. It was thus necessary to confront the autonomous esthetic object, seen as a crystallization of materialism, with a definition of work based on process. Cf. Robert Morris, "Anti Form" (1968) in: *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, Cambridge/London 1993, p. 68
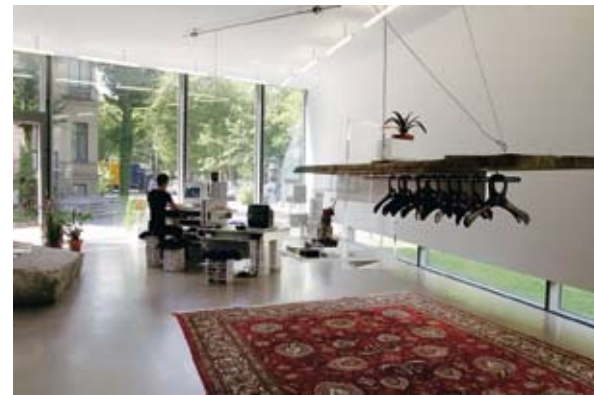
GFZKLEIPZIGbless.

perpetual home motion machine cashdesk and perpetual home motion machine wardrobe

Steiner   You came up with two draft sketches for the design of the GfZK-2 entrance area.

BLESS   Usually we don't make any sketches for our products – at most, a couple of "doodles" to visualize our thoughts and thought processes, mostly to make us remember things. But we usually do this in verbal form. After all, we don't design houses but products – precisely because we can do that "directly." We have always seen ourselves as "doers."

Steiner   However, in this particular case, properly formulated plans do exist: were they a result of the planning process?

BLESS   For things that are bigger than a piece of clothing, a carpet, or a lamp, then a drawing is always helpful. As soon as things are manufactured by a third party, then a technical drawing is usually indispensable. But it's probably more our nature to exchange thoughts verbally, to bounce ideas off one another, and then simply to try something out.

Steiner   More of an empirical approach …

BLESS   Yes, exactly. This turned out to be quite difficult in terms of the furniture, which explains why we had to build models to attain the final forms. Christoph Degenhard, an architect from Berlin, also helped us to communicate our ideas to the executing crafts and trades, thus supporting the project "dynamically."

Steiner   What is great about the entrance area is that it's in a permanent state of flux and improvement – a situation fundamentally due to permanent shortages and deficiencies, leading to new modifications time and again.

BLESS   That's because of the enormous challenges that we were faced with. We had improvised with all the various solutions possible (reads from old notes): "securing the cash desk mobiles using a pulley system every evening – the idea that one secures things as on construction sites, for instance, fastening of a tool bucket on a crane; railings as delicate as possible; cash desk mobiles above ramp attached to the railing; benches suspended; seats rigged to


After this first conceptual phase, it became clear that we would consider the design of a **new separate building** that would represent a different model from the spatiality of the existing villa, where the temporary exhibitions had been housed so far. After the confirmation from the Free State of Saxony for the financing of building costs within a clearly defined financial framework, the first concepts for the site were developed.

The early conceptual plans were continuously adapted in order to specifically deal with the conditions, needs, and **options of the site**, with its rather complex arrangement of trees and its potential of various references to the surrounding area. We wanted to leave the borders of the site as open and accessible as possible. We appreciated the potentials of the meadow, which was positioned in the urban fabric like a

carpet, enhanced by the open corners of the site. Also, the positioning of the villa at a 45-degree angle to the roadside contributed to a reading of the site as a homogeneous surface on which spatial elements seemed to be placed like islands.
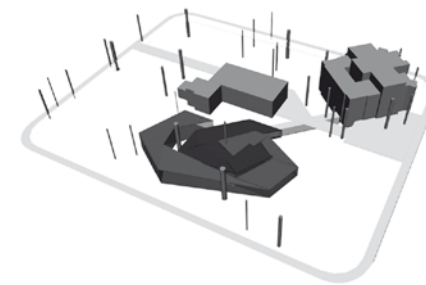
First attempts were undertaken to directly connect the buildings, either with a bridge or underpass.

First design sketches, 2001

Curating in Models
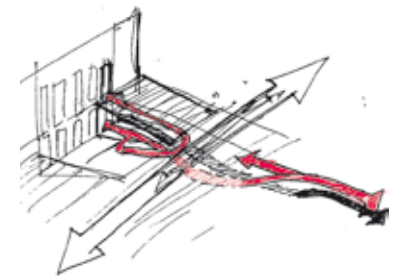
imagine the architectural space of the GfZK in my mind – a circumstance hitherto new for me.

I almost always plan my exhibition projects with a concrete idea in mind for the particular location: a mental model that is probably the result of engaging with the discussion of "site specifity," which influenced me when I began exhibiting in the context of contemporary art in the early 1990s. Although the exhibition rooms of the GfZK-2 reflect aspects that are fundamental to my artistic approach – as the architecture itself mirrors the theoretical parameters of the production of space – they did not offer any simple guidelines for the concept of the exhibition. On the contrary, this turned out to be much more complex than initially conceived. It was as if I had to

reassess my previous approach two or three times over, in order to position works all addressing themes similar to the architecture itself, which explores the interaction between constructed space and its function as a model.

Julia and I decided to adopt a radical approach, namely, to exhibit works that had either been intended for a different space or ones that describe a particular or specific place. We arranged the exhibition in such a way that there was no linear or narrative exhibition circuit with a beginning and an end, but rather that the visitor had to walk back through the same rooms again to reach the exit. This aimed at revealing both the respective artwork's conditions of production as well as drawing a parallel between the latter and the construction and principles of the new building.

The spatial arrangement of the building is not only functionally adjustable, but the spaces can also be combined in a variety of ways. This is facilitated by the single-floor structure of the building with two main entrances and two additional side entrances that can be activated at any time.

The café can thereby operate and generate revenue independently from the schedule of the exhibition spaces. The screening room next to it can be used independently as an external event space, and the exhibition areas can be divided up into several exhibition and project areas.
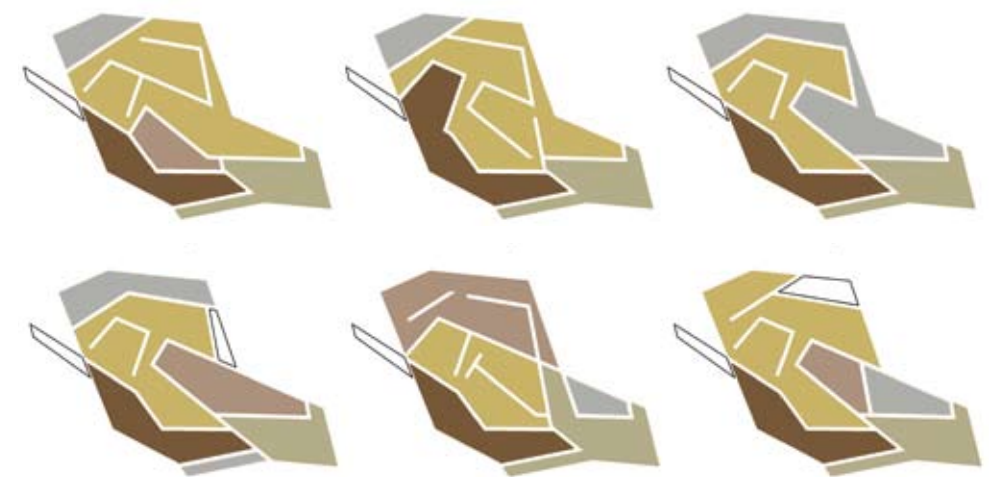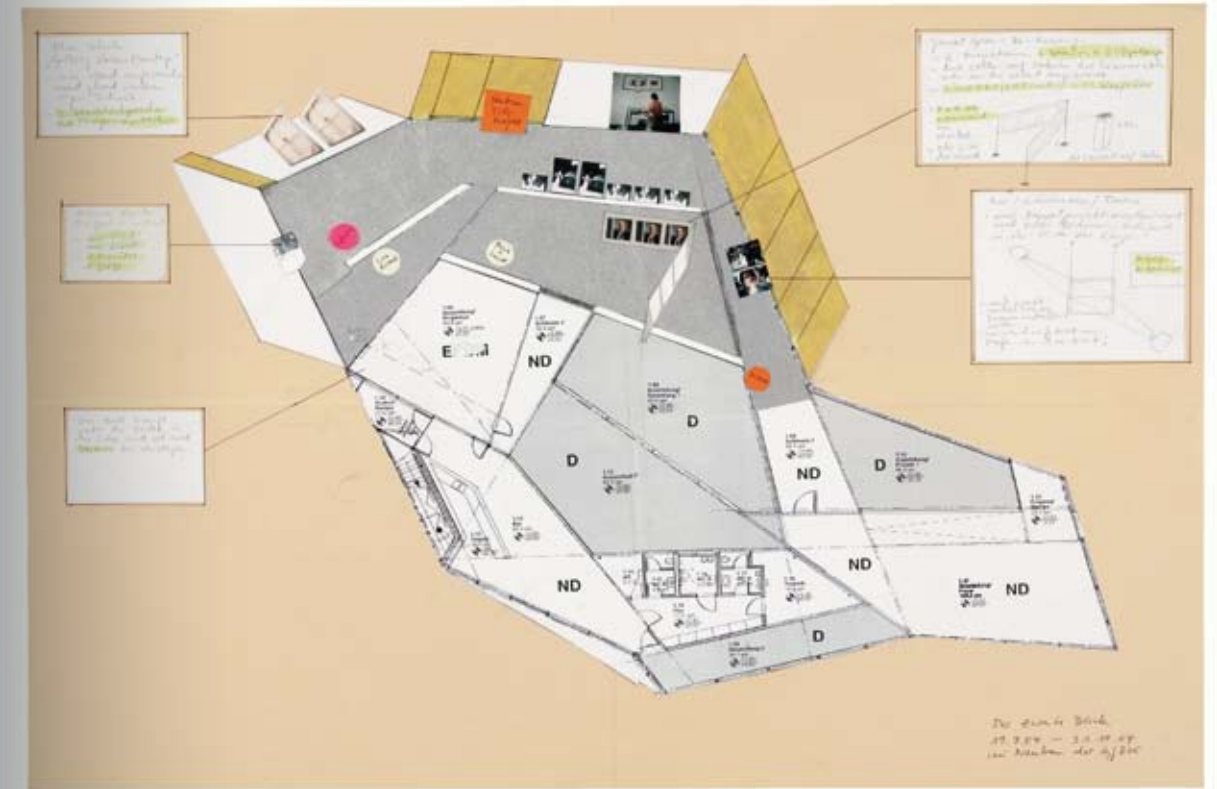
Six exemplary configurations of programming the building
■ Exhibition 1 ■ Exhibition 2 ■ Exhibition 3 ■ Project space ■ Bar/cinema

I tried to create additional links so that the five artistic positions (Brooke, EXPORT, Porten, Asdam, and Burr) stood in constant relationship to one another **(Figs. p. 90, 91)**. One of the so-called display windows was also used to showcase a wall painting by Kaucyila Brooke. On a wall 9.60 meters long, she constructed a city map of Los Angeles consisting solely of lesbian bars both present or meanwhile closed down **(Fig. p. 93, above, left)**. Indeed, the display window became a way for the exhibition to communicate with the outside world. This was also the case with Dora García's exhibition, in which the artist, using huge film stills from her work Rooms, Conversations exploited the display window as an announcement platform, writing the title of the film on the outer wall **(Fig. p. 93, above, right)**. I had introduced the dual principle "display window plus outer wall = exhibition wall" at the exhibition entitled *What If*. The Berlin fashion label, Frisch, had used the window as a kind of store display and Terence Gower had used a light box to turn the façade into an exhibition wall **(Fig. p. 93, below)**.
The pictures of the preliminary planning ideas for the 2010 collection exhibition show the individual spatial zones of the new building as various puzzle pieces **(Figs. p. 94)**, which also explains the working title of *PUZZLE*. I came up with the idea for the exhibition through the notion of form and the play with spatial "splitters." People from various professions are invited to engage with the GfZK collection on a number of levels: students, artists, art mediators, art restorers, curators, and members from the GfZK's Friends' Organization will express their own understanding of the collection, thus helping to form the exhibition in parallel.

Every time a new exhibition is planned in the new building, a small dose of the unforeseeable and incalculable remains, which makes the arrangement of the exhibition exciting. Only at the opening can we see the way in which the concept of the exhibition is displaced through the act of engaging with the architecture. Thus, I regard the new building as a challenge to constantly reconsider the art of exhibiting anew. If one doesn't work "with" the building, then the architecture can very quickly become a form of limitation.

I would like to end on a comparison. If we characterize a building as the contextual parameters for an exhibition, then the new building is a very flexible frame that adapts to a given exhibition with all the "mediation adapters" available. The quality or nature of the GfZK is that it offers two models of exhibition architecture which, according to each exhibition, ideally make us consider which architecture is in turn fitting for which content.

The on-site construction of the large sliding walls presented another challenge. The lateral joints of the sliding panels had to be small and consistent, therefore, all the connecting parts had to be accordingly precise. The sliding panels cross an already geometrically complex building like guidelines, connecting distant sections of the building to one another, requiring a dimensional precision that had to be constantly monitored in all phases of planning and building.
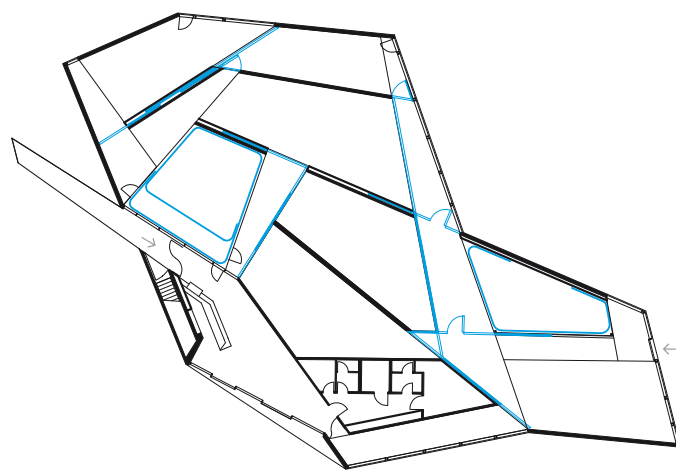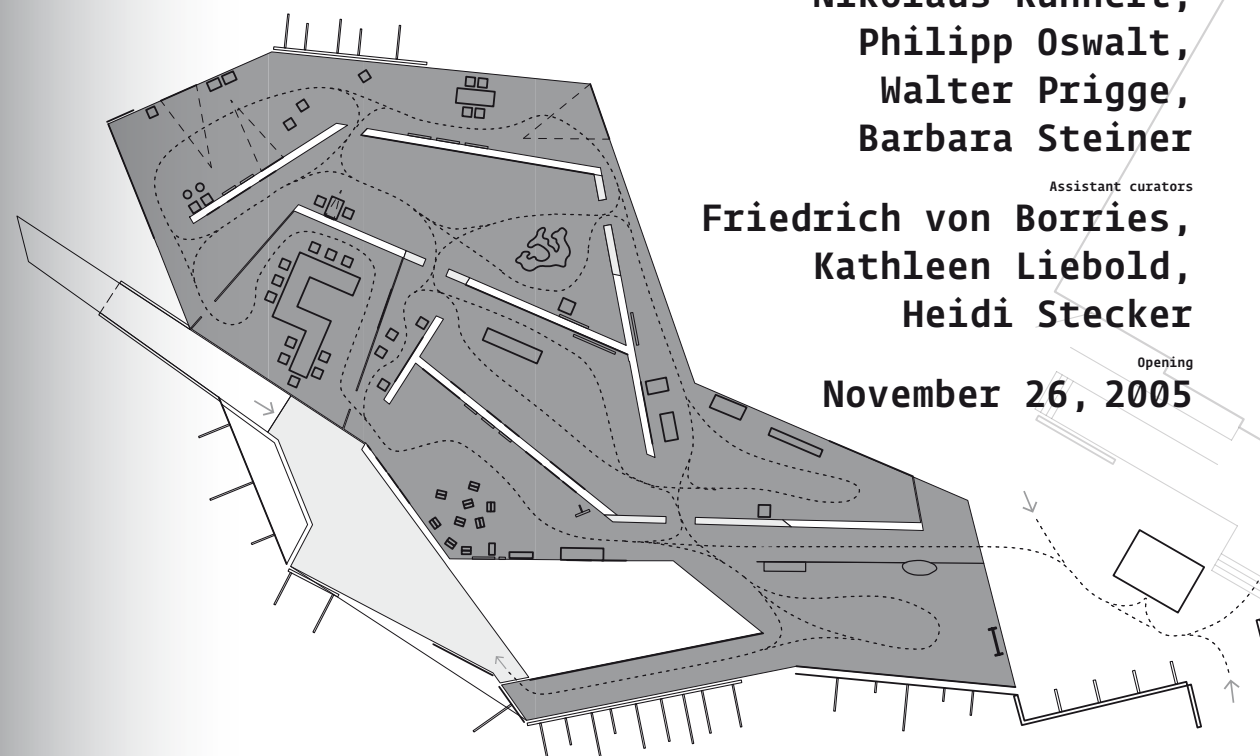
Shrinking Cities 2

Curatorial team

**Nikolaus Kuhnert,
Philipp Oswalt,
Walter Prigge,
Barbara Steiner**

Assistant curators

**Friedrich von Borries,
Kathleen Liebold,
Heidi Stecker**

Opening

November 26, 2005

In addition, the display shells support the connections and interplay between the exhibition spaces, as some of them run from one area into the next, led by floor-level glass slits. The display shells create zones and define borders within the fluid space, making the dialog between architecture and exhibition design necessary.
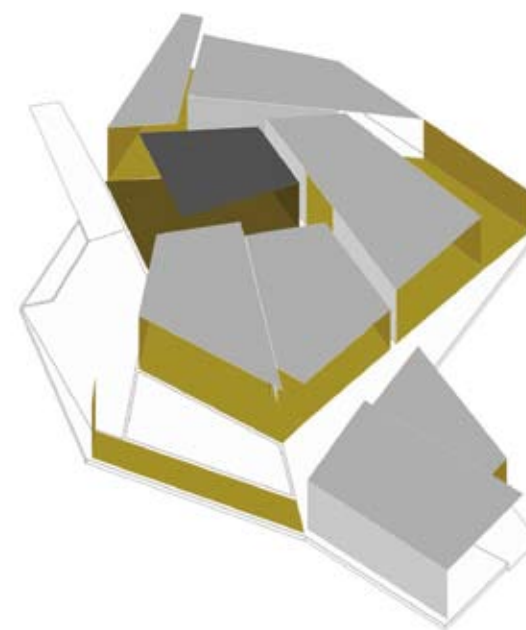
screening for instance, the luminaires can be removed altogether so as not to remain in the space in the off state. The luminaire system comprises a flush mount ceiling fixture, the base plate of which is fastened to the supporting frame of the suspended ceiling, and pluggable fluorescent tubes and spotlights. The mandatory emergency lights consist of three LEDs respectively, mounted into the luminaire mounting point behind a ring of matte finished plexiglas. The dimmable fluorescent tube

lights consist of a vertical housing of aluminum and a luminous tube of translucent plastic.

In order not to interrupt the linear arrangement of ceiling lights throughout the space and to ensure omnidirectional light emission, the electronic components necessary for operation are not mounted in line to the luminous tubes, but rather concealed within the vertical housing of each individual luminaire. The space between the light tubes and the ceiling – besides being beneficial

in terms of light distribution – serves to emphasize the disconnectedness of the lighting from the architecture. To ensure that the distance between lamp and ceiling is not too large, the ballasts are recessed into the ceiling, extending in as far as the timber framework. Since the spacing between the timber beams is very small, the precise positions of the lamps had to be verified by the structural engineer. In addition, mechanically swivelable reflectors made of perforated metal can be mounted
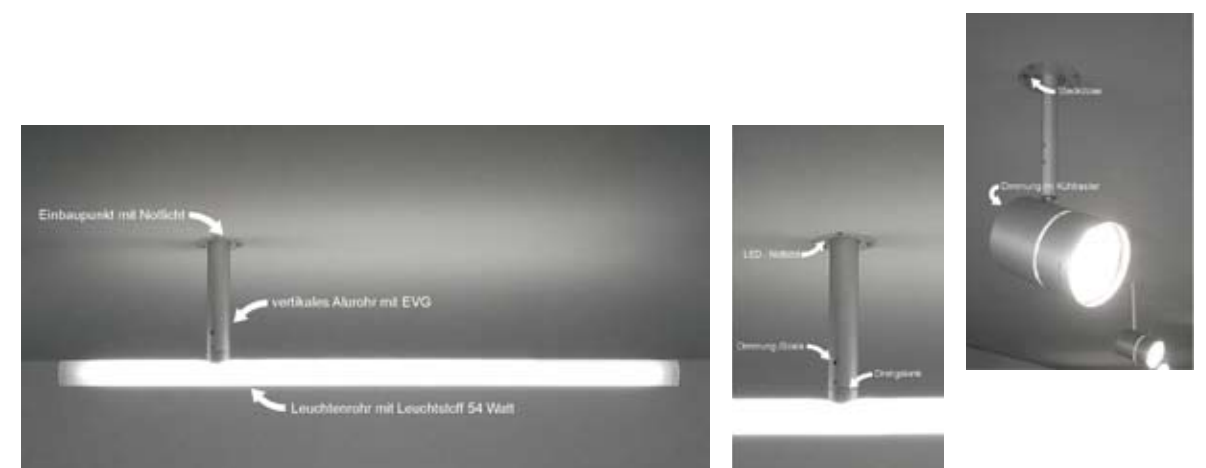
The Aura of the Institution

153
Christian Teckert

**On Affect, Atmosphere, and Immersion as Problematics in
Contemporary Architecture and Art**

Museums and exhibition buildings dedicated to contemporary art have experienced an unparalleled boom in the last few years. It seems that hardly any city can afford to do without a spectacular new museum designed by a star architect. The "success" of a Tate Modern in London, a MoMA in New York, or a Guggenheim in Bilbao, as well as the Museumsquartier in Vienna, sets the standards. If museums were once dedicated to a complex of exhibits and shows,[1] they have now significantly taken over the function of tourist sites, of urban communication centers with a multiplicity of commercial programs. In most contemporary museum conceptions, a significant reversal of conditions can be observed: while in traditional museums, at least two-thirds of the spaces were dedicated to exhibitions and one-third to infrastructural requirements, this relationship is now reversed. Large areas of museums are now designated to commercial ventures such as museum shops, restaurants, and cafés. This growth of multifunctional areas in the museum converges with an increasing economization and commercialization of culture.

Even before the museum boom of the last few years, the "art institution" had already become "the place to be" in the truest sense of the word: ubiquitous lounges with reading areas or social environments, which were meant to generate temporary and local communities within the exhibition context, formed a kind of substitute dwelling in which the art-affiliated urbanite knew he/she could feel at home. These communicative spaces exemplified the characteristics of many artistic and curatorial practices subsumed by the curator and writer Nicolas Bourriaud under the intensively discussed term "relational aesthetics." According to Bourriaud, "relational aesthetics" was no longer about a utopian design based on a prefabricated idea of evolution, but rather about inhabiting the existing world in a "better" way.[2] After a period of sometimes rather moralizing contextual art practices, subsumed under the term "new institutional critique" in the 1990s, the development of "art as a social space"[3] made it possible to feel comfortable again in the institution, while at the same time allowing for reflection and critique, and establishing the "coolness" of the art world as a scene of distinction. The "white cube" debate, a main catalyst for the critical and artistic strategies of the 1990s, had lost its momentum after the potency and "aura" of this hegemonic model for exhibition spaces had been analyzed, deconstructed, and criticized in detail. For the time being, I would like to address Bourriaud's thesis that the production of aura no longer takes place through the artwork (nor, for that matter, through the exhibition space), but instead through the assembly of a micro-community.[4] In his book, *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud describes an increasingly participatory practice that results in more collective and user-friendly exhibition projects, with an atmosphere that is primarily generated by "a momentary grouping of participating viewers."[5] The notion of atmosphere has created a comeback for the concept of the "aura" (whose gradual disappearance under the influence of mechanical reproduction was already stated by Walter Benjamin in 1935), but under changed auspices. The work of art and the white wall are no longer the sources of this aura. Instead, it seems "as if the micro-community gathering in front of the image was becoming the actual source of "aura," the 'distance' appearing specifically to create a halo around the work, which delegates its powers to it."[6]

1 Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," in: Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London 1996, pp. 82–109 (p. 84)
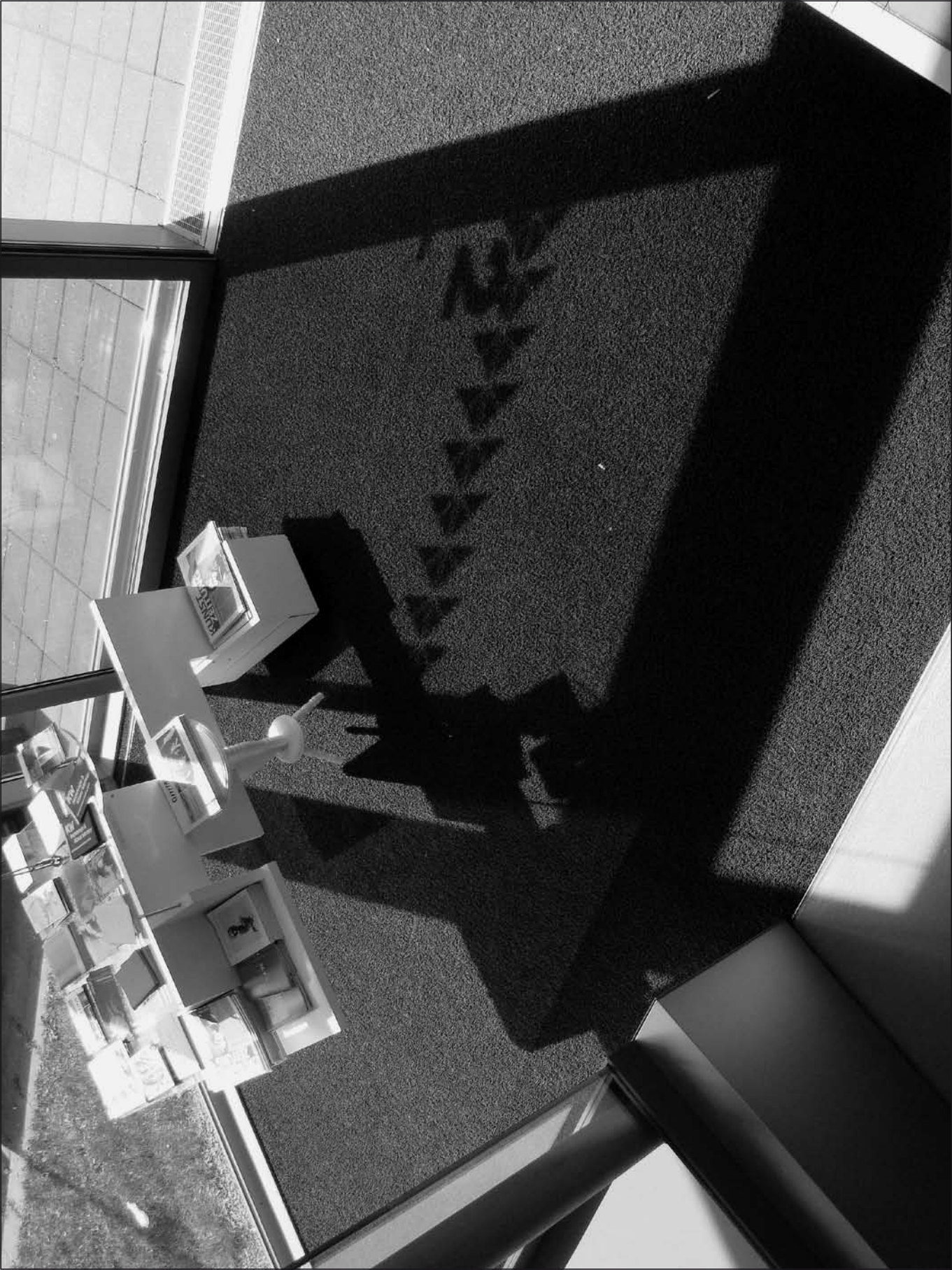
2 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon 2002

3 Nina Möntmann, *Kunst als sozialer Raum*, Köln 2002

4 Bourriaud, p. 61

5 Bourriaud, p. 58

6 Bourriaud, p. 61

AS IF A to Z …

Architecture – as in the case of the new building of the GfZK – is essentially based in a concept of time. In this concept of time, the only constant is change. Given cultural, social, political, and economic change, constructing a contemporary space means to construct the possibility of spatial change. It seems paradoxical that an awareness of the potential of change anticipates change. The structure within which changes might occur remains as a constant. In this sense, space represents an order and, at the same time, changes providing the spatial order with a program. As the exhibition schedule serves to program time well in advance of each respective change to the space – implying that each spatial alteration may be superseded for each successive exhibition – space appears as a secondary dimension. Space is the medium in which time reveals itself. What emerges as (a) space appears as the bare present, captured here and now as a spatio-temporal aperture for the duration of an exhibition – comparable to photography and its phantasmatic core, capable of purloining a single moment from the flow of time. Thus, the changeability of the space temporarily captured evokes notions of presence, contemporaneity, and the aura of an event. Contrary to expectation, here, the "event" consists of a state in which nothing changes for a specific period of time. In this sense, architecture is a time machine: it represents the constant of change while simultaneously eliciting a hiatus – a moment in time, the architectural "snapshot" of the present.

A
Architektur → Architecture

Visitors are invited to make decisions while on their way through the exhibitions. The building's modifiable internal order is designed to offer a variety of alternative routes through the exhibitions and gallery spaces. The movable walls make it possible to create varying visual axes – thus introducing the option of producing different relationships between the artworks and spaces. As a result, the route chosen by the visitor is decisive for the perspectives and specific ways of perceiving the spaces and works. Like looking, walking is integral to the production of meaning. Regardless of whether we stroll, meander or cover a predetermined distance – walking defines a form of mobility and satisfies a desire for movement. Here, movement implies no more than expressing mastery over time: walking is a form of spending time, and the selected form of ambulation defines the temporal concept from which it departs. Conscious of the fact that the spatial situations may change, the visitor does not know where the way through the spaces and exhibitions will lead him/her. Paradoxically, precisely this lack of knowledge about the spaces demands that we scrutinize them – perhaps only as an expression of that temporary state when, afraid of losing our way, we seek orientation. Basically, the architecture prescribes the routes to be taken, knowing that we may find or leave them.

B
Besucherinnen und Besucher → Visitors

Cafés take into account that institutions, alongside their core tasks, also fulfill functions that are primarily concerned with the institution's cultural embedding. In this sense, the café is also an institution: it is its host institution's alter ego,

C
Cafés

In November 2004, the building was officially opened with the exhibition project, *Performative Architecture*. The design process of the building was characterized by a fluid transition between variously overlapping interfaces. For example, we designed the café as a space that leaves enough room to be altered and redesigned by artists every two years. A bar counter was designed, but the lighting and the surfaces were kept for the most part alterable. The design of the building's entry area further developed and changed over several years through the cooperation of the GfZK with BLESS and thus, the process of spatial adaptability on the structural level was continued. Just as the spatial variability of the movable elements of the building guarantees that it never arrives at a perfect final state, the process of its planning will continually update itself through the process of the artistic and curatorial negotiations with the building.