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Frame as Medium as Presence:
 Historical and Conceptual Perspectives
 on the Kunsthalle Bern as a Model
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Defining a Space for Contemporary Art in Society

Looking back at the history of the Kunsthalle Bern, it could be said that this institution embodies one of the foundational challenges of modern art in that, as both an institution and a physical space, it asks several fundamental questions: Which mechanisms, which players and contracts, and which settings were historically negotiated, and which typologies were distinguished from one another, and established as parallel streams of exhibition practice, such that art could *take place*?¹ The implications of these questions should not be underestimated. They are relevant not only to very general developments in cultural and social history, but also to the surprising fact that a model for the presentation of art that was inaugurated in 1918 still serves as a productive and relevant microcosm for the interrogation of artistic concepts and strategies today. The historic building, it turns out, represents and materializes nothing less than the very concept of a kind of public space that enables all the utopian thoughts of a mutually beneficial relationship between art and society. The artists who initiated the setting up of the Kunsthalle Bern identified the need for a showroom, and engaged with residents of the city who aligned themselves with the argument that the arts are in the service of society. This relationship goes

1 Cf. Schneemann 2015b.

back to initiatives that appeared as early as the late 18th century in England. At this time artists' clubs and societies (*Künstlergesellschaften*, *Kunstvereine*), as well as art unions and subscription societies, were founded all over Europe.²

In Switzerland, the national organization Gesellschaft Schweizerischer Künstler und Kunstfreunde (1806) later became the Schweizer Kunstverein (SKV).³ Crucial for the Kunsthalle Bern was the Swiss Society of Painters and Sculptors (Gesellschaft Schweizerischer Maler und Bildhauer, GSMB) that was founded by artists in 1866, and that continues to exist today under the name visarte.⁴ The Bernese section applied to the Swiss Federal Council to construct a Kunsthalle as early as 1908.⁵

The Kunsthalle might be understood as an institution that, contrary to the museum, has as its pivotal starting point a commitment to the sphere of production of art, as opposed to the collection of art.⁶

The documents stored in the archives of the Kunsthalle Bern offer rich material for discourse analysis. In the eight-page letter and motion the president of the Association of the Kunsthalle Bern addresses to the cantonal government in 1916, all the key issues are developed⁷: contemporary art was in need of a place ("Stätte") for presentation to a wider public ("weiterer Kreise"), which, in reverse, would profit from it, even in economic terms. The format of the temporary exhibition, focusing on the contemporary, is developed in its entire typology. Adolf Tüèche also mentions the growing competition among Swiss cities.⁸ For temporary exhibitions, a *permanent* building is requested, and both the initiative's champions and its financial requirements are presented in detail.

It is worth recognizing the development of very strong and explicit administrative structures of democratic self-organization in the model of Kunstvereine and Kunsthallen. As formalized associations, they constitute a bond between artists and the bourgeoisie.⁹ The administrative arrangements appear like democratic rituals that explore specific formats and define a set of corresponding roles: the Kunsthallen commission, the elected president, the treasurer, the managing board, and the members who

2 Sheehan 2000; Behnke 2001; Hieber et al. 2005; Gerlach/Herzogenrath 1988; Schmitz 2001.

3 Cf. *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, "Kunstvereine," www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D17019.php (last accessed May 2018); Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft 2006; Omlin 2002; Marfurt-Elmiger 1978.

4 In 1906 the name changed to GSMB, and is now also open to architects.

5 Steck [1943]; Ammann/Szeemann 1970. As an early important printed account cf. *Neubau einer Kunsthalle in Bern*, GSMB (ed.) (Appeal signed by the president of the Bernese section, Tüèche,

Bern 1911, 12 pages. The painter Adolf Tüèche traces the initiative for an exhibition building in Bern back to 1892.

6 For the discourse on the relationship between contemporary art and the museum cf. von Bismarck et al. 2017.

7 *An die Hohe Regierung des Kantons Bern*, letter dated from February 1916, signed by the "Verein 'Kunsthalle Bern,'" Kunsthalle Bern Archive.

8 This competition, which puts pressure on regionally located cultural institutions to distinguish themselves from one another, has intensified.

9 Schmitz 2001.

acquired share certificates. And of course, this corresponds to the administrative rule system in its ritualistic performance: the statutes, the general assemblies, commissions and committees, the applications, reports, protocols, and minutes, the vote, the program, and the membership choreograph civic engagement.¹⁰ This question of the democratic dimension, its collective structure, and its programmatic stance toward the potential of art as a political issue is still relevant.¹¹

The Kunsthalle Bern's prominent site in the city corresponds to a paradigmatic question of localizing an art scene that in 1918 was already cosmopolitan.¹² From early on the Kunsthalle understood itself as both locally engaged, serving the artistic community of Bern and Switzerland, and internationally connected.

In the development of modern art the necessity of presenting artistic production to an interested public had led to a new role, the Exhibition Artist (*Ausstellungskünstler*),¹³ as well as to a complex typology of display formats. The specificities of each exhibition hall as a site for staging art continue to influence the rhetoric of production and its perception. This has been analyzed in detail not only in terms of the Salons of the 18th century, the Academy Exhibitions, or the universal exhibitions, but also in terms of biennials or a format such as John Copley's exhibition tent in London's Green Park in which he displayed his massive *Siege of Gibraltar*, with a commercial twist, in 1791.¹⁴

Certain labels have been used to describe the schemes that can be understood as responses to this setting.¹⁵ However, notions like site specificity, or labels evoking genres, like installation art,¹⁶ and even categories of historic movements, like Institutional Critique, offer only a limited understanding of the highly diverse artistic strategies and their particular way of dealing with the challenge of localizing the contemporary.¹⁷ In the following, I will concentrate on aspects that highlight the significance of the site and space of the Kunsthalle Bern as a format that generated responses to the formal as well as ideological construction of an art space in a community.

10 *Statuten des Vereins Kunsthalle Bern, 1912*, Stadtarchiv Bern, D Couv Kunsthalle. The bylaws were supplemented in 1918. Consider also the festivities (*Kunsthallenfeste*) that were organized in order to raise the necessary funds.

11 In summer 2013, the conservative political party Jungfreisinnige started a polemical campaign against the Kunsthalle Bern: to close it, or to repurpose the building for a use that the general public could envisage as concretely social, like a discotheque; for the political aspect of the Kunstverein see also: Milla/Munder 2001; Anspach/Waldvogel 2013; Eigenheer/Richter 2007.

12 For the local scene cf. Baumgartner 1984; Helfenstein/Von Tavel 1988.

13 Bättschmann 1993.

14 Altick 1978, 105.

15 Cf. Möntmann 2002.

16 Cf. Dan Karlholm's critical commentary, "The Last Book on Installation Art?" on the recent study on installation art by Ann Ring Petersen, *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage*, Copenhagen 2015, Karlholm 2017; Kaye 2003.

17 The wider metaphorical potential of the term "localizing" might be even found in a dictum that was crucial for Ulrich Loock, "der Ort des Werkes," (the place of the work), cf. Cuff 1992.

Being Present

In the 19th century, the rise of international exhibitions as events and as highly competitive endeavors focused on the mobility of the works themselves. It was a question of logistics that determined the maximum weight and the maximum format for a painting or sculpture.¹⁸

Group shows dominated the program of the national pavilions in Venice, and similarly occupied the rooms of the Kunstvereine and Kunsthallen for a long period of time. For the Kunsthallen, however, the local and the national art scene made up a significant part of the program. Group exhibitions of the younger generation,¹⁹ *Gedächtnisausstellungen* (commemorative exhibitions), the yearly so-called *Weihnachtsausstellung* (Christmas exhibition) by Bernese artists, the rotating exhibitions of the Schweizer Kunstverein, and the exhibitions of work from regional associations like the sections from Aargau or Basel, demonstrate the national, regional, and local anchoring of the institution.²⁰

From early on, however, there was a wish to participate in an international network, as demonstrated by exhibitions like *Neue Münchner Malerei und Graphik* (1919), *Sonderbund deutscher-österreichischer Künstler* (1921), and *Ausstellung von Gemälden jüngerer Künstler aus Deutschland, England, Frankreich, der Schweiz und den Vereinigten Staaten* (1926) that were organized during the 1920s.²¹ In the 1950s the Kunsthalle Bern's engagement with the international art scene grew. Personalities like Arnold Rüdlinger, director of the Kunsthalle Bern (1946–1955) and Kunsthalle Basel (1955–1967), not only supported young Swiss artists, but introduced the public to recent developments in French and German art, and to American postwar art.²² Thus, the Kunsthalle developed something akin to the function of a global interface that would show a variety of movements and positions. The respective curators developed a personal network and invited artists to come to Bern. It is noteworthy that for many international artists, still today, Kunsthallen serve as the first platforms for the introduction of their work to a local audience, and thus as mediators of a sort. Certain partners became especially important for an institution like the Kunsthalle Bern, establishing a far-reaching network of progressive curatorial concepts. There are

18 Schneemann 1996.

19 *Junge Berner Künstler*, Kunsthalle Bern, August 24–September 21, 1930; *Junge Berner Künstler*, Kunsthalle Bern, March 8–April 2, 1945; *Junge Berner Künstler*, Kunsthalle Bern, May 21–June 19, 1955; 22 *Junge Schweizer*, Kunsthalle Bern, June 7–July 6, 1969.

20 Gamboni 1987; Wyss 1992.

21 Kunsthalle Bern 1926.

22 Cf. for example *Tendances actuelles de l'École de Paris*, 1952; *Tendances actuelles de l'École de Paris* 2, 1954. For *Tendances actuelles* 3, 1955, he included American artists; cf. also *Neue amerikanische Malerei*, 1958, in Basel; for Rüdlinger cf. von Meyenburg-Campell 1999.

examples of exhibitions that were partly coorganized by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, and the Moderna Museet Stockholm, but also shown in the Kunsthalle Bern either prior to or after being delivered to these institutions.

The concepts of hospitality and mediation are crucial to the shift in artistic practice and the expansion of the functionality of the building that took the Kunsthalle, and the art within, beyond predefined models of display. The increasing prominence of discussion groups and public lectures might be understood as indicators of this shift toward a socially oriented model of exhibition practice. Much more important, however, is the fact that the functions assigned to the building itself have entered a state of flux—ranging from festive ceremony hall, lecture hall, academy, auction house, and museum, to artist's studio, research site, yoga hall, cinema, and laboratory. These designations are visible in activities that have actually taken place, such as the auction in 2008, or constituted works of art in themselves, and also appeared in metaphors employed by curators and artists in their programmatic discourse.²³

The shift in the status of the building and its relation to the art therein has further implications for the mobility of art and artists. Since the 1960s, artistic nomadism challenged the paradigm of the transportation of prefabricated objects. Documents generated by the Kunsthalle Bern—correspondence pertaining to upcoming shows, artists' site visits, and pictures taken before an opening—are evidence of the quality of personal encounters and on-site work processes.²⁴

In a more fundamental way, works that developed this aspect into a dialectical dimension that plays with the artist's presence versus bodily absence form a group in themselves. Of course, we know the promise "the artist will be present" from the vernissage. But the implication of actually *being present* goes much further. The information gathered about the specific place before actually arriving and working/installing on site, or the documentation of the work with or without the artist can be understood as a form of presence in itself.²⁵ The rhetoric of presence leads us to projects like that of Tomoko Takahashi in 2002, who insisted on sleeping in the Kunsthalle overnight while she worked on the installation of her work.²⁶ This is similar to Richard Long exhibiting an announcement that he would hike through the Berner Oberland, or Walter de Maria's promise that one might experience a phone call from him as part of *Live in Your Head*.

23 Gachnang, for example, repeatedly used the term *Forschungstätte* (research establishment).

24 Indeed, the administrative records even mention the amount of beer consumed by artists while working at the Kunsthalle.

25 Cf. for the wider implications of this question: Neußer 2011.

26 Kunsthalle Bern 2002.

When Attitudes Become Form: Works—Concepts—Processes—Situations—Information, projects that already elucidate the artists' sensitivity to the importance of presence.²⁷

The Frame Turns into a Medium

Over the course of the 20th century, architecture gained importance as a literal and metaphorical site of artistic and curatorial collaboration. When the call for proposals for the design of the Kunsthalle Bern was launched, it listed the expectations and requirements for an infrastructure that would serve as the ideal conditions for the display and mediation of art.²⁸ This infrastructural character was emphasized through the expectation of a *rational* use of space. Expediency or serviceability (*Zweckdienlichkeit*) was the decisive criterion.²⁹ The necessity of a cloakroom with washroom, or the need for a cash desk with bookstore were given the same importance as the criterion that exhibition rooms with skylight and sidelight should provide a minimum of 500 linear meters of wall area.³⁰ The rooms should enable flexible subdivision for smaller shows. The height of the rooms was also stipulated (4–5 meters), as were the conditions for the circulation of visitors. Even the toilets and heating were described in detail.³¹

The call asked for a simple and dignified exhibition hall (“einfach und würdig”). Looking back at this program for the localization of contemporary art in Bern, it may be understood within the context of a conceptual discourse about the ideal conditions of display claimed by artists for their work. The question of how architecture has to serve the intended perception of a work—the idea that even the work itself defines its own needs—is the subject of countless artist's manifestos and strident polemics concerning architectural experiments.³²

For the Kunsthalle Bern, however, an almost paradoxical dialectic exists: the building has undergone only small alterations and yet has become, in spite of its historically consistent appearance, an icon for some of the most radical and important gestures from the 1960s to the present. Designed above all for painting and sculpture, the Kunsthalle Bern grew into a site for the entire variety of contemporary artistic practice.

27 *Richard Long March 12–22 1969, A Walking Tour in the Berner Oberland*, Bern, 1969; Walter De Maria, *Art by Telephone*, 1967/1969, announcement on the floor in front of the telephone: “If this telephone rings, you may answer it. Walter De Maria is on the line and would like to talk to you.” Cf. Kunsthalle Bern 1969.

28 *Architekturwettbewerb*, March 31, 1910, AK1 *Programm zur Erlangung von Ideenentwürfen für ein Ausstellungsgebäude der Sektion Bern, Schweizer*

Maler, Bildbauer und Architekten (Kunsthalle in Bern), Kunsthalle Bern Archive, *Diverses* 1910–1917, 1910.

29 *Architekturwettbewerb*, March 31, 1910, AK1, c Allgemeines 4.

30 Cf. also the explicit discussion of this requirement in the meeting of the Jury, October 7, 1910, Kunsthalle Bern Archive.

31 *Architekturwettbewerb*, 4.

32 KÖB 2000.

The notion of environment was introduced to describe art forms that made use of this specific setting.³³ Explicitly planned as a structure for temporary exhibitions, it developed a unique quality as a kind of stable counterpart to the transitory interventions and positionings that it housed. The simple pavilion structure served as the presence of a given condition. Implying that this manifestation is a telling one, the artist could work with it in terms of resistance, taking it as a kind of dialectical partner.

Artists traveling to Bern to work in the Kunsthalle would have come in order to work in concert with the concrete—stable—forms of the space, as opposed to coming with a concept of space akin to scenography, whereby the housing of the exhibition is understood as flexible, or as yielding to the ideas to which it plays host. High profile artists such as Christo and Jeanne-Claude (1968), Donald Judd (1976), Hans Haacke (1985), Michael Asher (1992), Gregor Schneider (1996), Andrea Fraser (1998), Maria Eichhorn (2001), Serge Spitzer (2003), and Oscar Tuazon (2010), to name just a few, realized signature pieces in Bern. There are two important aspects to this list. The first is the fact that it is not a homogenous body of artists. Each of these practitioners was operating within a different thematic environment when they were invited to conceive works for the Kunsthalle. The second is the fact that the term “installation” is not sufficient to describe the complexity and variety of their interventions. Their artistic gestures must be understood as having reacted to the specificities of the space of the Kunsthalle Bern itself, and not only to the broader idea of a space for exhibition in general.³⁴

The image of the Kunsthalle Bern has been taken up as an integral part of the documented works, such that work and the Kunsthalle could not be separated, as in the iconic wrapping by Christo and Jeanne-Claude. The modesty and simplicity of the building, its self-containment, offers itself as a structure and as an institution to be collaborated with, resulting in a new iteration of the Kunsthalle as both site and work, in and of itself, and thus as a metaphorical image. Christo and Jean-Claude’s wrapping of the Kunsthalle on the occasion of its 50th anniversary has certainly become the strongest iconic example for this focus, perceived as a reflection on the status of this public institution, as a physical reality that has become an image that should be constantly reimaged.

33 Cf. for this notion, the essay by Bazon Brock in the catalogue to the exhibition *12 Environments*, Brock 1968, [2]: “Die von Künstlern konstituierten Umgebungen nennt man Environments.” He was referring to Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environment & Happenings*, New York 1965. The term “environment” is used extensively in the titles of

exhibitions in the 1960s. Cf. for example, *Between Object and Environment*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, April 2–May 3, 1969.

34 A similar reflection led to the important show Bernhard Fibicher conceived under the motto *Genius Loci*, Kunsthalle Bern, January 24–March 8, 1998.

In 2014 the architect Rem Koolhaas chose the title *Fundamentals* for the Architecture Biennale in Venice.³⁵ He investigated the basic, physical vocabulary of architecture; the necessary components to build a house, to make it work. The visitor could explore the history of the staircase, the door handle, the wall, the floor, and so on. The fragments on display were understood not only as an introduction to the conventions of building, but as a reflection on the anthropological fundamentals of an infrastructure of housing. In putting collected fragments on display, Koolhaas simultaneously engaged in an act of analytical deconstruction and promoted a typology.

Similar processes of decoding the infrastructure of the Kunsthalle Bern occur with astonishing consistency and logical rigor in the sequence of exhibitions since the 1960s. Not by chance do we find artistic strategies that work equally with inscription, fragmentation, and even counter-structures. The architectural frame turns into an anagrammatic space, as demonstrated by such paradigmatic interventions as that by Pedro Cabrita Reis in 2004.³⁶

The Social Site

It is possible to pinpoint at least two levels to the dialogue that exists between architecture and the art practices that engage with it. One level addresses the physicality of the building through abstract dichotomies such as lightness/darkness, open/closed, inside/outside, fullness/emptiness.

Another dialogic level refers, however, to the social dynamics inherent to the infrastructure. The artistic interventions in the Kunsthalle Bern always made use of its furniture and fixtures—the radiators, the floorboards, the skylights, the staircase, the walls, or the washroom—which were treated as the medium in itself, in other words as the fundamentals of a site for art.³⁷ This means the artistic interest in architectural features is invested in the very elements that lead to recognition of the Kunsthalle as a functional space. In this way, concrete armatures act as docking stations, such that the art can address the Kunsthalle not only as a formal frame, but as the concretization of a social space.³⁸

A telling example may be found in the documentation of the working method undertaken by Michael Asher for the project he realized in 1992.³⁹ A handwritten note entitled “Questions for Ulrich” sent from

35 Koolhaas 2014.

36 *Pedro Cabrita Reis*, Kunsthalle Bern, October 23–December 5, 2004. For the notion of the “anagrammatic space” cf. Schneemann 2018.

37 For the wider context of such artistic strategies cf. also the important study by Vieth 2014.

38 For the notion of the “social space” cf. Möntmann 2002; Löw 2001.

39 Loock 1995; Rorimer 2012; Peltomäki 2010.

Michael Asher to Ulrich Loock in August 1990 aimed to determine the specificity of the city and its art space. Loock, at that time director of the Kunsthalle Bern, was organizing an Asher exhibition to be shown two years later. In preparation, Asher posed questions and gave instructions in a bullet point list, including: "What countries and cities does Swiss Air travel to?" "Keep looking for Einstein patents," "Find out what kind of energy fires the radiators," "What are the different insects and their function around the Kunsthalle?" Asher asked the institution to do research for him, and the archive of the Kunsthalle proves its obeisance.

Asher's questions and requests related to Switzerland and its position in a global network, to Bern and the architecture of the Kunsthalle. The artist inquired after every imaginable (and odd) specificity of the site. Every item in and surrounding the space was treated as part of a vocabulary of site specificity, which described and constituted the building. Asher finally realized his iconic work by removing the radiators from their alcoves around the gallery spaces and reinstalling them in the foyer, so that they would repeat the layout of the building on a smaller scale. Asher stayed in Bern from October 7 to 20, 1992, during which time he supervised the installation and attended the opening on October 16. It might also be worth noting that on the following day he gave a lecture at the Kunstmuseum, arguably drawing the Kunstmuseum into his artwork's sphere of influence.

Asher had already published an account of his development of the concept of situational aesthetics in 1983, in which he commented on his intervention on the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1979. He defined it as "an aesthetic system that juxtaposes predetermined elements occurring within the institutional framework, that are recognizable and identifiable to the public because they are drawn from the institutional context itself."⁴⁰

The project in Bern exemplifies the collective production of a work of art: Asher had to collaborate with a local plumber to disconnect the radiators and to put them back into service in their new constellation as a heated sculpture.⁴¹ The catalogue works programmatically with the technical floor plan of the Kunsthalle—used by the local plumbing contractors Andrini AG—and the professional photographs taken by Roland Aellig. The floor plan of the Kunsthalle is used repeatedly in the documentation generated in advance of exhibitions as a technical tool for planning

40 Asher 1983, 209; Streitberger 2009; Peltomäki 2010, 12; Gintz/Aminoff 1993, 113–131.

41 It seems noteworthy that on the one hand we find exemplary cases of complex, collective processes of production that go beyond art world protagonists

to include craftsmen, the fire department etc., while on the other hand, the traditional role of the singular artist has remained stable. For the collective production of art, cf. Becker 1974; Stimson/Sholette 2007.

and construction, as a way of planning the movement of visitors, and to define the thematic distinctions within an exhibition. Asher's project neatly illustrates the thesis that the Kunsthalle Bern has historically been both a staging area, a model, and an integral part of many defining projects of the contemporary era. The floor plan, that utilitarian and indispensable document for the production of art, comes to embody the frame it reproduces. It performs the very work it enables.

Self-Referentiality or When History Depletes Contemporaneity

Some artists not only used the frame as a resonant space for their own ideas, independent of what meanings were already attendant to the institution, but as a medium in its own right. The shift toward the interrogation of the institutional setting for art led, as a logical climax, to the empty exhibition hall, in which the space itself comprised the exhibition. This emptiness is not akin to the immateriality explored by Yves Klein, but rather a reflexive exposure of the institution in and of itself. Further, the Kunsthalle as setting started to be defined as an object to be exhibited, as a subject with an ideology, and a history that threatens to usurp the place reserved for contemporaneity itself.

In 1998, Andrea Fraser relocated the institutional archive from the basement into the exhibition space. The group exhibition *Genius Loci*—the context for her installation *Information Room*⁴²—is one of several investigations into the institutional history of the Kunsthalle Bern that has taken place over the years.⁴³ By means of Fraser's symbolic transfer, the accumulated traces formed a kind of paratextual corpus, which then filled the lower level of the gallery as physical reality, offering public access to the material.⁴⁴

There has been a tradition—or even an obsession—with such auto-referential gestures at the Kunsthalle Bern. Whenever the art's *locale* exhibits itself as empty shell or filled with its own legacy, the issue of

42 Dziewior 2003, 202–203.

43 A list of such self-referential and self-historicizing exhibitions would include *Heimo Zobernig*, October 26–December 4, 1994; *Genius Loci*, January 24–March 8, 1998; *Villa Jelmini—The Complex of Respect*, January 28–March 26, 2006; *Olivier Mosset—Born in Bern*, April 9–June 19, 2011 (including a reference to the old exhibition catalogues from the 1960s); *Voids. Eine Retrospektive*, September 12–October 11, 2009, a coproduction by the Centre Pompidou and the Kunsthalle Bern (Centre Pompidou: February 25–March 23, 2009), Copeland, et al. 2009.

44 “Generally, the questions I have about these phenomena relate to the transparency with which the (usually hierarchical) organization of information is treated; with the often somewhat patronizing generosity with which institutions ‘make accessible to the general public’ what professionals see as ‘insider information’; with the objective orientation that this has of legitimizing specialized debates within non-specialized spheres and thereby creating or increasing the need for specialized opinion and with the promise of self-improvement through self-education that is often implied.” Email Fraser to Bernhard Fibicher, November 28, 1997, Kunsthalle Bern Archive.

contemporaneity is interrogated anew. Critical deconstruction can be neutralized into an affirmative nostalgia, and thus the solipsism of the contemporary art scene comes into play.

Institutional archives attract more and more interest and require physical storage space beyond what was imagined necessary when the institution was founded, especially given its non-collecting status. As Fraser has demonstrated, the archive incidentally also has the potential to question the hegemony of the artist's identity as a source of meaning: she just moved it up into public view, but the archive itself is the work of many; artists and art historians alike. The archive is accumulating fragments of communication: expectations directed toward the contemporary, as well as curatorial self-assertions and institutional negotiations.⁴⁵ These traces document the processes and rhetorics of the social bonds between the Kunsthalle Bern and artists, between the local and the international, the general public and the community of insiders.⁴⁶ Thus, exhibitions appear as event and collective endeavor that supersede the idea of the iconic masterpiece, and the Kunsthalle understands itself as a place of social collective performance and negotiation.

In 2001, Maria Eichhorn referred back to the founding initiatives by artists and citizens to raise money by selling share certificates. The money was put toward the restoration of the building that presented itself as empty space during the exhibition period.⁴⁷ Her archival research went into a two-volume catalogue that documented the restored spaces. Although intended as a highly critical investigation, the exhibition did not really trigger any lasting debate.

What becomes clear is that the empty space of the Kunsthalle is now not only a space of freedom or independence, but also a space in which a kind of auto-musealization plays out, with the attendant risk to that very freedom, which can be understood as being inscribed in its charter as a site for the contemporary.

Yielding to the temptation to uncover a pattern, one might point to the vogue for reenacting historic exhibitions. Avoiding hasty judgments, however, I suggest understanding this development as a complex symptom arising from a *mediated* art experience that might change the task of the Kunsthallen altogether. The paradigmatic stress on "presence" and immediacy in the concept of perceiving contemporary art becomes replaced by strategies that work with reconstructions, documents, narratives, and

45 For this discourse and Fraser's strategies cf. Möntmann 2002.

46 For a methodological versus an anecdotic approach to this highly complex notion of the scene cf. Munder/Wuggenig 2012.

47 Kunsthalle Bern 2001. For related artistic strategies toward the institutional building cf. George Steinmann's project for the Kunsthalle Tallinn 1995, Steinmann 1995.

memory.⁴⁸ The potential of controversy and scandal, of misunderstanding and protest turns into a celebration of legacy transmitted by anecdotes.

Even in the paradigms of art appreciation, the concept of *presentness* is challenged by reenacted experiences. In Venice in 2013, the number of visitors attending the reconstructed exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, surpassed the historical attendance figures by far.⁴⁹ In the framework of this volume, the ways in which the Prada Foundation included elements of the infrastructure of the original site in their reconstruction seems highly significant. Such an act evokes and exhibits the architectural frame as a crucial referent and object of memory. The floor tiles of the Kunsthalle were printed on linoleum, the appearance of the staircase was imitated, and even the radiators were cited as pure sculptural forms. The original works, by contrast, now appeared as props for the frame.

In conclusion, I would like to juxtapose the prototypical and seemingly ideal history of the Kunsthalle Bern with an antithetical project that was carried out in the town of Skoghall. This project investigates the public will to provide—and celebrate—a space for contemporary art in quite a radical way. When the artist Alfredo Jaar was invited to realize an intervention in this Swedish town in 2000, he offered the community a *Konsthall*.⁵⁰ A simple, lightweight pavilion made entirely of paper, it was adopted by the local community for the social ritual of presenting and perceiving artistic practice. The show installed in this building served as a platform for emerging Swedish artists. As announced in the project's concept statement, the building was set on fire and burned to the ground a mere 24 hours after the opening ceremony. Demonstrating both the presence and the loss of a building that would localize the contemporary, the project initiated discussion on the value of art to society in general, and to this community in particular. As a place dedicated to performing, practicing, and promoting the contemporary, a Kunsthalle is subject to a different social obligation from that which pertains to the conservational role fulfilled by museums. It offers itself as a process, not as a repository. Yet in its longevity, the architecture of the Kunsthalle Bern poses its own challenge to this championing of the processual. The specificity of the space given over to art has been repeatedly challenged from within by the art itself. Yet the challenges are essentially conceptual, even when taking the form of physical interventions

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48 Von Bismarck et al. 2014b; Schneemann 2017.

49 Celant 2013.

50 Doherty 2015, 11; Chantal Mouffe discusses Jaar's project in the context of collective processes and

artistic interventions, Mouffe 2014, 144–149; cf. the short video by Jaar, published on his website: www.alfredojaar.net/skoghall/skoghall_1.html (last accessed May 2018).

on the space, such as Lawrence Weiner's removal of plaster from the wall in 1969, or Michael Asher's reworking of the heating system in 1992. While no less material, the provisional nature of Jaar's *Konsthall* as a place contrasts with the presence of the Kunsthalle Bern, both in terms of its architecture and its archive—which can be understood as enabling historicity. These anchors might therefore be understood as static, and as indicative of the challenge faced by the Kunsthalle Bern model in providing a place for the staging of the contemporary, and yet remaining alert to the processual nature of society.



Tomoko Takahashi, *Deep Sea Diving*, exhibition view, Kunsthalle Bern, 2002.



Serge Spitzer, *Breathing Light*, exhibition view, Kunsthalle Bern, 2003.

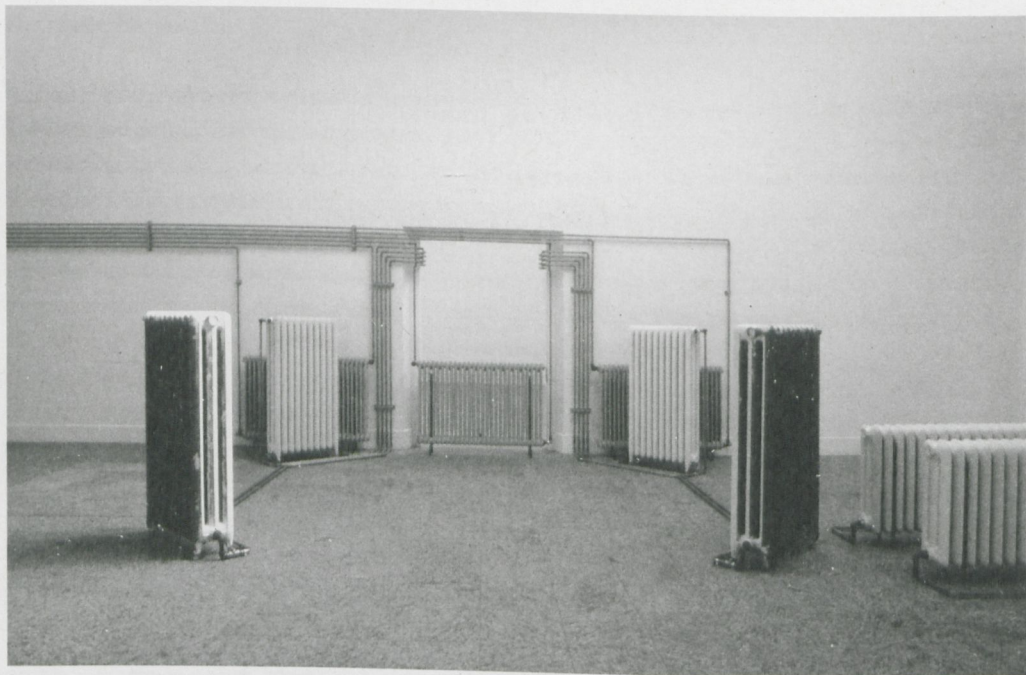
QUESTIONS FOR ULRICH

8/24/90

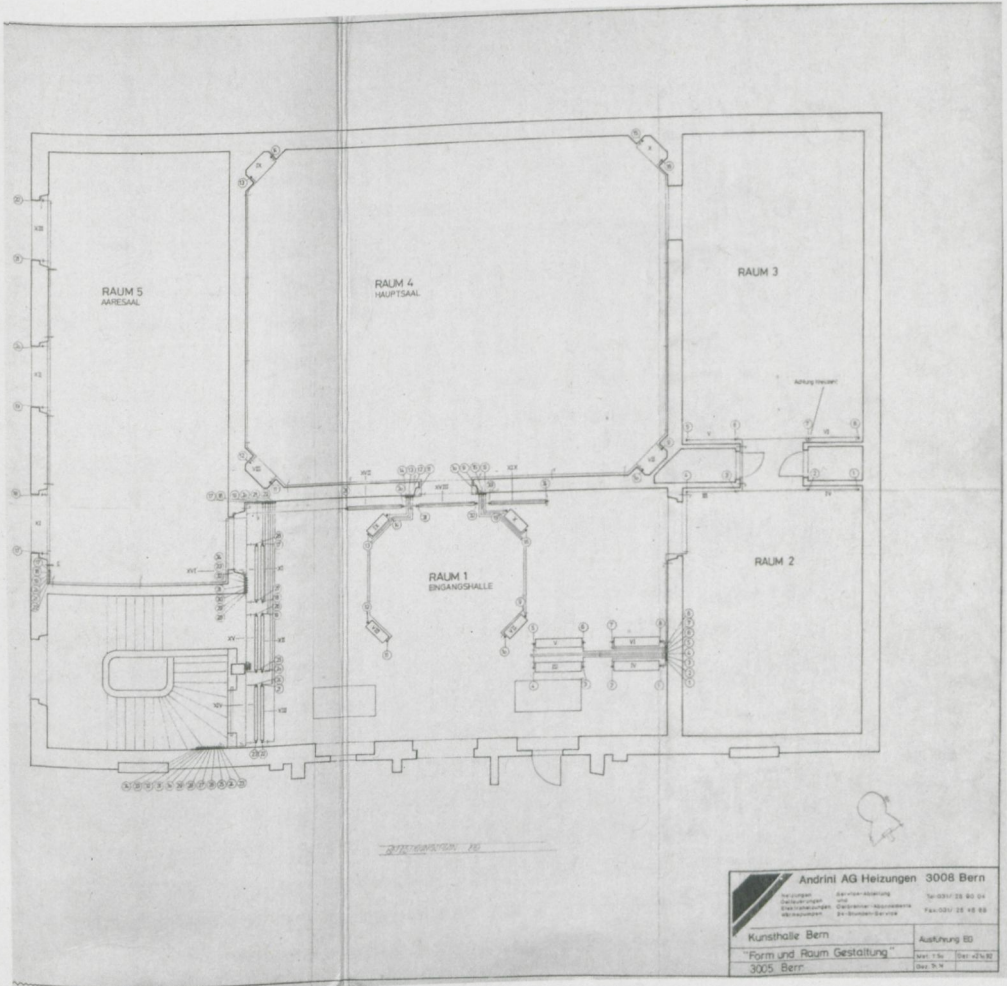
- 1 WHAT COUNTRIES AND CITIES DOES SWISS AIR TRAVEL TO ✓
- * 2 WHAT REGION OF THE ALPS OF THE ALPS HAS THE MOST OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF DOORS
 - A. FIND OUT SIZE OF DOOR
 - B. ITS USE (IS IT CLOSING OFF A MILITARY, RAILROAD DUMPSITE ETC.)
 - C. FOUND OUT ITS SIZE
 - D. NOTE ITS COLOR (TAKE MATCHING COLOR CARDS WITH WHEN THESE INSTALLATIONS ARE SEEN)
 - E. HOW DOES IT SERVICE SWITZERLAND ECONOMICALLY?
- 3 KEEP LOOKING FOR ENSTEIN PATENTS (ESPECIALLY THOSE DEALING WITH WATER OR ENERGY)
- 4 FIND OUT WHAT KIND OF ENERGY FIRES THE RADIATORS - GAS ?
- 5 FIND OUT WHERE INK ON STAMPS COME FROM
- 6 WHAT ARE THE BACK REGIONS OF TOURISTIC EXPERIENCE IN BERN
- 7 WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT INSECTS AND THEIR FUNCTION AROUND THE KUNSTHALLE. THESE INSECTS OUGHT TO BE NATIVE TO BERN
- 8 How many postcards of the mountains are sold each year?
- 9 How much is brought in from the resorts and skiing?
- 10 How much money comes to the alps to subsidize these attractions? Attraktionen
- 11 How much does it cost to advertise the alps as an attraction?
- * 12 How much is brought in from transport across the alps by train and truck ✓ AGFP's
- * 14 Keep finding out where the chemicals of postcard ink come from

15

6, 8, 10, 12, 13

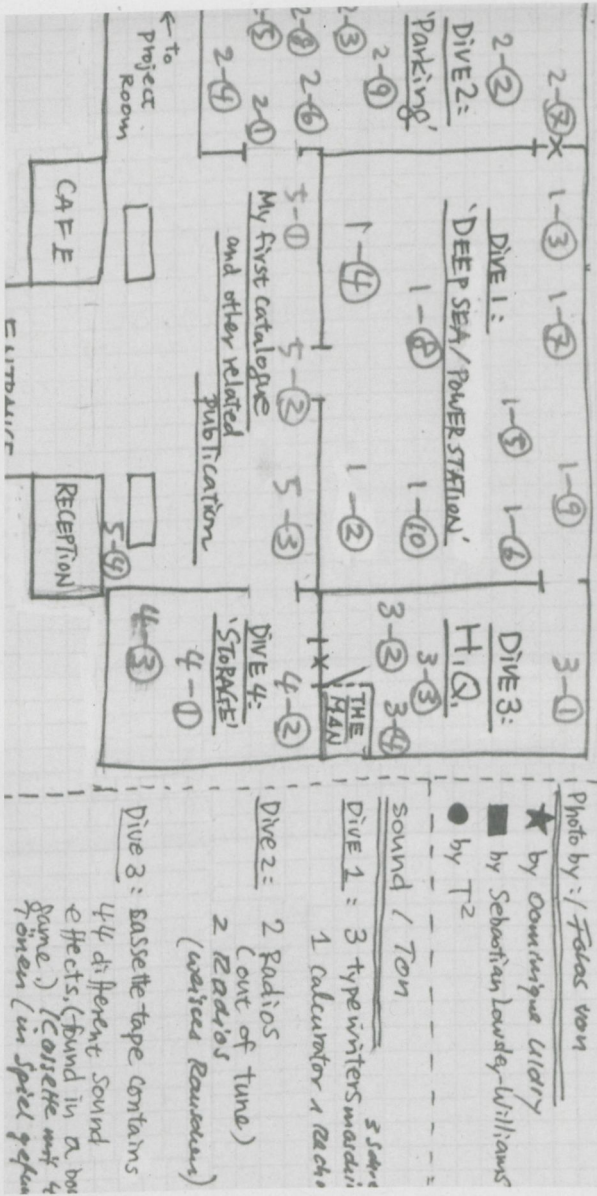


Michael Asher, exhibition view, Kunsthalle Bern, 1992.

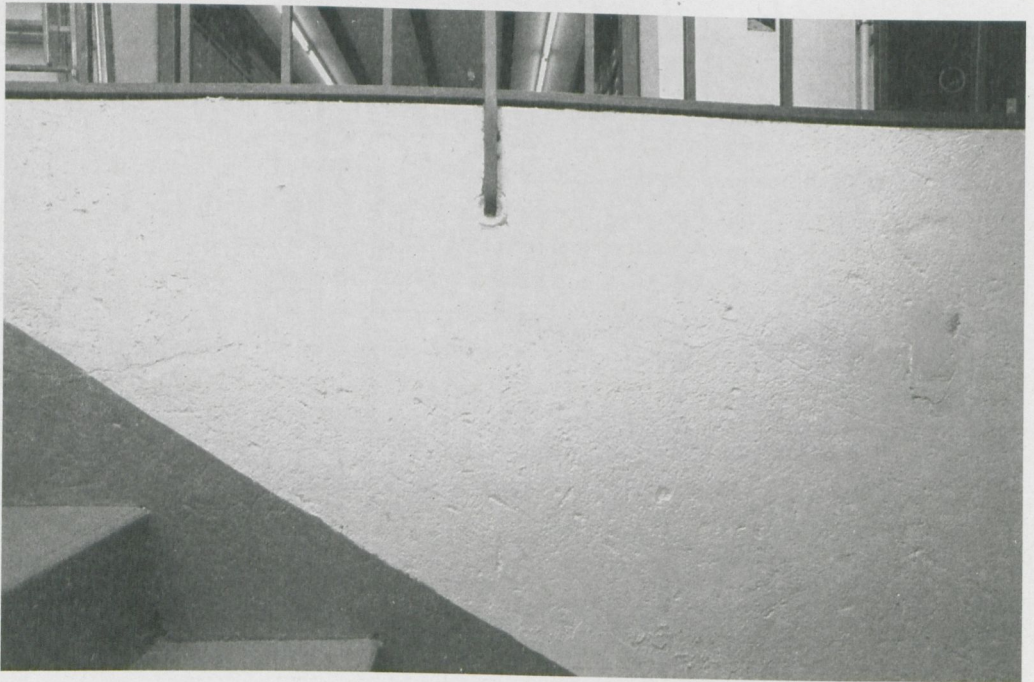
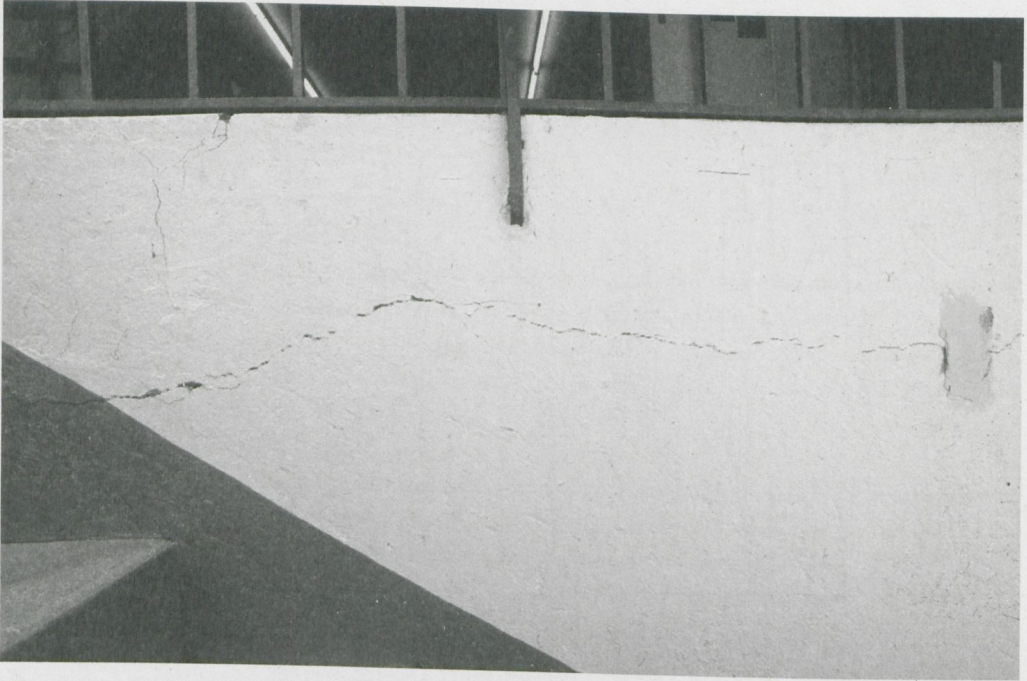


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Floorplan in *Michael Asher* exhibition catalogue, Kunsthalle Bern, 1995.



Floorplan in the exhibition catalogue *The Catalogue of All Most All the Works Done By Tomoko Takahashi (Between 1985-2002)*, Kunsthalle Bern, 2002.



Maria Eichhorn, *Money at the Kunsthalle Bern*, exhibition views, Kunsthalle Bern, 2001.



Andrea Fraser, *Information Room*, exhibition views, *Genius Loci*, 1998.



Oscar Tuazon, exhibition view, Kunsthalle Bern, 2010.



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