EX BOX

A project in the urban area of Frankfurt in cooperation with the Frankfurter Kunstverein
On November 25, 2005 the transportation of a facade was interrupted in the Hohenstaufenstrasse and exposed to light for a period of 12 hours.

While researching for her project 'time construction' Ilona Ruegg became aware of the Info Box by the architects schneider + schumacher which, just like its predecessor on the large development site at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, had the function of offering the public a wealth of technical and historical information together with a direct view of the construction work. The tower-like Frankfurt version was located beneath the Friedensbrücke bridge on the bank of the River Main and accompanied the Westhafen development project from 2001 onwards. The Westhafen project was completed in autumn 2005 and the dismantling of the temporary information structure took place at the at the same time as the art project.

Ilona Ruegg's intervention was focussed on the dismantling stage and interrupted the deconstruction and transport process by diverting it. The Info Box was stripped and divided up into its component parts as planned. The dismantled red sections of the façade were stacked on one of the numerous low-loader trucks which were used to remove the materials from the site. This is where the departure from the planned process began: the various stacks were arranged on a bed of light which consisted of a number of lamps of the type used in the Info Box. The truck was diverted from its original route and brought to a halt in Frankfurt city center between the Messe district and the railway station. On this temporary transit site the lamps, powered by a generator, shone from 11:00 until 23:00. Afterwards the low loader continued on its way to its original destination.

PUBLIC CONVERSATION BETWEEN RUDOLF SCHMITZ AND ILONA RUEGG

In conjunction with the project on 25 november 2005 in the Atelierhaus, Hohenstaufenstrasse 27, Frankfurt

Introduction

RUDOLF SCHMITZ   Artcritic and writer, Frankfurt

There is a definition of 'museum' by Marcel Broodthaers which, if I remember correctly, appears as spoken text in one of his films. It is the voice of a child, presumably that of his daughter Puck, that reads it aloud. It stayed in mind also because of this shift of perspective: "Museum – a form, a surface, a volume – eager to serve. An open angle hard edges. A director, an employee, a cashier – museum. Children are not allowed in, open all day until the end of time." For me this is first and foremost a piece of poetry because behind the semblance of analysis, such heterogeneous modalities of description are combined so that the definition can only fail. But at the same time this failure is the statement's triumph – the complexity of the project that is a museum finds appropriate articulation here. Another memory comes to the fore, which is also to do with the theme of inverted 'architecture': an installation by Michael Asher in the Kunsthalle in Bern which, despite its huge effort said something quite simple, or at least fundamental about how exhibition institutions function. Michael Asher had a number of radiators removed which he then arranged in the entrance hall into a humming battery of circulating streams of warmth. This amalgam of usually cleverly hidden radiators was an unmistakable reference to the material conditions of a gallery: the need for heating, to guarantee the comfort and wellbeing of the visitors. There was obviously also a metaphorical aspect to the work: the art institution providing warmth, as a system of connecting pipes, as energy transfer. In any case, the combination of a sculptural and conceptual approach was strangely proportioned. One thing was momentarily made clear: that objects and relationships which are ignored often require huge emphasis to achieve the recognition they deserve.

In May 2002, Ilona Ruegg showed a work in the Kunsthalle Bern which was called Volume/Unpublished and which spread out in the entrance hall a load of sound insulation panels which had been already assigned to the ceiling of a sports hall. The insulation panels were placed on their lengths on bases made from wooden slats and held together in blocks by small 'fences'. The acoustic dimension to the work consisted of spoken and sung fragments of text and silent passages. At the time I didn't know about the exhibition.

When I first became acquainted with Ilona Ruegg she was in the middle of a project which she called Hempels Hütte (Out of House and Home). It involved storing the elements of a prefabricated house, which had been designed by the Frankfurt architects schneider+schumacher and sold to a photographer called Hempel, for a certain period before the house was assembled near Aachen. Ilona Ruegg thus wanted to create an insertion or delay in the processes of time, space and organisation. For this the house's components were to be displayed in a disconnected and loose arrangement in an "art space" (exhibition hall) for a typical period of exhibition. The sketches of the building showed it as a truncated pyramid cut in half with large glass panels which opened out onto a veranda area. This project was not realised in the end because the owner would not accept the six-week delay.

The final purpose of the building components of Hempels Hütte as elements of a future house seemed decisive and full of meaning: only in this way could Ilona Ruegg's planned storing of them be understood as an anti-categorical option and artistic alternative form of space, time and everyday economics.

The situation is different with Ilona Ruegg's current project, the storage of components of schneider+schumacher's Info Box on a low loader trailer. The Info Box, originally erected in a different form in Potsdamer Platz in Berlin to give visitors an insight into the planned development there, had come to the end of its purpose. It fulfilled a similar information and overview function at the site of the Westhafen development in Frankfurt but had found no buyer for its continued use. The hybrid construction, recognised for its mobility, was dismantled ready for disposal.

For her installation, Ilona Ruegg has created a one-day delay in the process. For this purpose a low loader trailer was stocked with the red elements from the façade. They were stored above an empty space created by wooden planks into which the artist inserted neon tubes and small lamps in a loose arrangement which were brought to light during the 12-hour parking phase by means of a generator. The "underground" exposure of the stored parts of the façade not only creates a strangely dysfunctional and immaterial space inside and outside the trailer. The noise of the generator, too, generates such a clearly perceptible yet siteless location.

It so happens that at the same time, in the Portikus in Frankfurt, an exhibition is taking place of work by art students from Pristina, and one of the works describes the continuing state of emergency, but also the new topography of that city by means of an arrangement of generator sounds which envelop us at intervals in a darkened space.

The following conversation was transcribed. It is published in an edited and abridged form.

Rudolf Schmitz: Now, in order to define the components which gain significance in Ilona Ruegg's installation, we could adopt Broodthaers's definition and attempt to call on categories whose purpose is apparently to lose their rigidity. For example, is the generator in a sense the heart of this event, because it represents autonomy and introduces a new functionality of originally spatially-defined elements?

Ilona Ruegg: The low loader is carrying a three-fold load: façade components, light and the generator. Without the generator, there would only be lamps, but no light. It therefore makes a significant difference, by supplying materials with energy. Through its noise it isn't only perceptible on site. Strictly speaking, the sound frequency can be heard on the other side of the river and beyond. The light radiates constantly, too. I'm interested in these borders that are open. The generator is necessary and a very pragmatic element, and yet it reveals a point in perception which shows that the object is not limited to its current location. I think it's important that this work creates a notion of 'multi-sitedness'. The generator gives the situation a certain autonomy, but still requires a supply of energy from elsewhere in order for it be transformed into light. I think we always try to do this in art: accept the given conditions but also maintain an independence out of which a transformation is only then possible.

RS: For me, it is also an image which simply disrupts certain usual connections, but in such a way that a new form of connection is created, semantically and pragmatically.

IR: The transportation of the façade was interrupted in a parking space next to a three-lane carriageway in the city centre and exposed for twelve hours. That is, of course, completely uneconomical. The transportation will then complete its journey without light. The interruption allows us to appreciate something, which we like to call an image because you can already see the photographs of it. In fact, the situation is much too intricate to be captured in an image. You can see the dismantled façade of the Info Box, but in the form of a load, an exposed mass, taken out of circulation for a while, but also placed in circulation. It is at the moment only a volume of possibility, it has potentiality. It could take on some new function. This selected moment, which only postpones the continuation, is at the same time embedded in the flow of events which are determined somewhere else. The daily traffic flow, which here draws the low loader into view temporarily and releases it again, shows just one of the connections which this work attempts to reflect.

RS: Perhaps we could open up the discussion here. I would be interested in how the effort involved in this work is experienced. With Michael Asher's installation, the effort produced a smile: what he wanted to articulate could also have been said in a few words. But the effort was necessary in order to notice the facts concerned and to ensure there was no way back from this insight.

IR: I think the effort produces an energy potential which has something to do with resistance. An active material situation is produced with which something can be absorbed. With this work I'm actually returning to a point before the beginnings of conceptual art which opened up the possibility to conceive without having to carry out the work. At the same time I want to go beyond the materialization of an object and make a space tangible in which we have always been, which we therefore know but which seems mostly not to belong to us. Thinking about Michael Asher's work has always been very important to me. I was impressed by the work with the radiators in Bern. When you were discussing it earlier I wondered when the question of 'multi-sitedness' began for me. Probably with the work Volume / Unpublished, when I re-directed a future ceiling to the Kunsthalle Bern. But going further back, I could say that it began with the appreciation of Michael Asher's works. There is also an early work by Kabakov which was the first work he showed in the West, in the Kunsthalle Bern. He set up low, large-scale tables and allowed for only narrow spaces in between through which you could move. Along the edges of the tables ran a frieze of small men with sacks on their shoulders. It was one of my first conscious perceptions of art in which an overview became impossible. I found myself in the middle of a structure of relations and I, together with the other observers, was a part of it. Of course, the moment when something began stretches further back into other, personal spaces. Such experiences have also accompanied me as irritations and are a motor for my work.

RS: When we were having a look at the low loader this afternoon I asked you about the function of the light, and you said: "For me it is the exposure of the situation." Exposure in analogy with the process of photography: something is made visible which anyway exists in reality but which is suddenly removed and through the light becomes visible as

IR: In English Belichtung is 'exposure', which is very close to exposition. In 1998 I produced a work called Exposure of the Showcase, to which I added later the title Time Construction 1. In the gallery in which I was showing there was a strange looking large wall which was set back 10cm from the rest of the wall. I was told that there was a showcase behind it which had been built into a former doorway. For the duration of the exhibition I had the wall moved 40cm further into the room so that light fell on the showcase again from the sides. I thus made an exposure, virtually a photograph without a print in the complex real situation. Today I would say that the lamps that lie under the façade sections not only give light but create an exposure, exposure of a multi-sited situation which doesn't allow you a view in the normal sense of the word. They are economic events and processes which are largely determined by others: ideas from the architects, concepts from the town planners, offers, restrictions and promises from investors, etc. In this moment I am making an exposure of this wider situation. This is related to my questions about the visibility of situations which appear in different times and places.

RS: But you must also be fascinated by the thought of cutting through this jumble of system logic which such a thing is caught up in, and taking it to another level?

IR: I have always been fascinated when I notice that there is an overloading, or when there is a surfeit of references to be organized so that the overview gets lost. When I discover situations, they only interest me when I can no longer get into the picture. In other words, I try to place myself in a position which I can't adopt completely and which I therefore have to use differently. This can happen when there is 'too much', so that I fall through the holes, holes which then produce new references. In the situation with the low loader you can, of course, also see a picture. I don't want to deny that a picture emerges there. But that is only a part of the wider situation. There's a lot more to it. In order for that to be visible I make an incision in something bigger, more far-reaching.

RS: You also take photos of this low loader, of this situation. So the photos that remain are only a small excerpt of your work. Exposure, as a metaphor, extends much further into the social sphere. In the process all the system logic is perhaps not being examined, but is broken up and laid bare.

IR: That raises the question: what can I expose? On photographic film, what is exposed is only what happens in time and place during a fragment of a second and is projected on to a surface. What I am exposing here is perhaps too difficult to be fixed on to a surface because it doesn't take place exclusively at the low loader's location in time and space. I actually work on these things precisely in order to be able to raise these questions. The façade is being exposed in a state of potential while the components have given up their space-dividing and enveloping function and any level of significance. That's why the exposure goes further and we can catch a glimpse of something which apparently doesn't belong there but which goes on all the time.

Audience 1: When I think of exposure I think of the depiction of a reality. For that you need equipment, lenses which then reverse the picture. I want to ask about the references, the relationships which exist here with the exposure of reality, and about what

I noticed the light as a bright light but as nothing unusual. I also didn't notice the generator as something unusual, as a depiction, for example, which gains such intensity via the exposure. From what you said, I understand a kind of pathos of the material as opposed to the cursory nature of the discursive. What makes this exposure metaphor more than just the lighting up of something which would otherwise be in the dark?

IR: I don't think this is a depiction or representation. I am trying to expose something which can't be captured in a depiction. The equipment would then be the low loader with its three-fold load. It would make something visible which goes beyond the equipment itself.

A1: But what then makes the difference?

IR: There is something comparable in language. When something is said, you can't find the representation. Spoken words always become frayed and have many interpretations which can only fail. A sentence would therefore be an incision in the economy of speech, in which there are always several participants. In order to find clues as to where the representation in this project fails, as it were, we could break the whole thing down by focusing exclusively on the lamps. They are in a similar state as language and appear only in relations: lamps support lamps, lamps shed light on lamp stands, lamps are connected with cables, lamps shed light on objects which are not lamps, lamps burn for a certain period of time. Moreover, lamps themselves are lit up by daylight and by darkness. The lamps are not just objects for giving light or independent signifiers; they are stuck in their condition, internally and externally. They produce a picture which we can return to and transpose to another level. The picture can be a reference to the fact that reflection is happening on more than one level. That's how I would frame it.

A2: But there must have been a point at which a decision was made to stack the components in a series, because it's logical, and the lamps are to be arranged not in a way that an electrician would do if he had to set them up. He would probably put them in rows and parallel because that's easier. At that point you made a decision: I'll throw the lamps in. That's what struck me, that the lamps contradict the order of the components above them.

IR: The serial stacking of the components is not a formal decision on my part but an economic decision by the foreman who oversaw the loading. The loading process was part of his logic; he was interested in using all the space available. I only asked the workers not to load anything at the beginning so as to create an empty space. I wanted to get round the loading process and to put nothing under the weight of the stacked façade components. During the stop the lamps together with their cables were inserted. I didn't want to create an order which would refer back to the parallel widths and lengths of the load. You put it very nicely, that the lamps were thrown. If I'd had nuts, I would have thrown them, but they were fragile lamps with cables which were unmanageable. I asked the helpers to use the space by first inserting the neon lamps in all directions, placing them on top of each other and then inserting the smaller lamps in the gaps so that they

wouldn't be destroyed by the heat. I had no formal interest there but I did want to differentiate between the different loads in their layout.

RS: This afternoon, when we were standing on the other side of the street and a bus drove past, the noise of the generator was suddenly gone and with it this extra space: on the one hand, because we couldn't see the low loader any more, but also because of the interruption of the acoustic element. I thought it was interesting when someone said "OK, that's Frankfurt normality, what's so special about that." This afternoon I realized that a proper territory was being marked by the light and also by the noise of the generator.

IR: There is a border along which so-called reality can tip over, depending on the point of view of the observer. In day-to-day life, I get by more easily if I arrange everything in some kind of order. Ex-Box / Time Construction 3 is located on this border. When it disappears from view or earshot behind another vehicle for a moment and then reappears, you can recognize its appearance and its disappearance very clearly. If there can be said to be a marking of territory here, then only in an interplay of over- and under-determination. The artificial light shines differently in daylight from the way it does now in darkness. Meanwhile the passing cars bring headlights and brake lights into play.

A3: Were the lamps already loaded on to the low loader at the construction site or did you have them inserted here?

IR: Late on in the preparation phase there was a restriction imposed by the owner of the Info Box, an investment firm. I was not allowed to stack the façade components on their property, as was originally planned. The version with the low loader arose from this setback. In order to get around this restriction I didn't look for another site, but rather a situation which would not be dependent on the usual conditions of a site, and that was the transportation. Despite the stipulation that nothing should happen on the construction site, the intervention did actually begin on the Info Box site, before the light was added. The lamps and the generator were only added at the location of the stop. By the way, the lamps are of the types which were present in the Info Box. The number of lamps would have been too small to establish a relationship with the volume of the façade and change the weight of the load. The Info Box had a shell which consisted of these uniform red panels and where light entered through the windows, panels were missing. Had they been there, the façade would have been in tact and the interior as dark as a black box. In total, 94 components were missing, and I chose this number, so it was 94 lamps that opened the exposure.

A1: With its interruption of the actual events, e.g. the fact that the Info Box has no buyer, that it will be used or disposed of in a different way, makes the artistic intervention in the normality of this chain of events a tear – and this tear, it seems to me, opens up the opportunity to think about other possibilities in the broadest sense of dealing with reality. Today it hardly seems possible to interrupt and make tears in which other approaches and temporalities could become plausible or even necessary – at least on an abstract or a very fundamental level. In your work, is your theme this whole other approach to space temporalities and to social questions? Do you have a

IR: I think that art has always opened up these possibilities of transgression. When Cezanne painted The Hanged Man's House, he did it on a surface which we as observers then stand in front of, but which we immediately open up. We drift off into other spaces of our own and of society or into those which are created through the perception of the painting in relation to it. This is quite complex. Of course, I'm not producing paintings here. Neither do I believe this is a thematic work. I attempt to produce a situation in which I'm not the only participant. Many temporalities and economies play a role in this. What is an issue for me is the surface I'm playing on. Who does it belong to? Is it still a surface? Those are the questions I'm dealing with. And in this assumed surface I make a tear which can hopefully never be repaired. Is this political art? Does art not fundamentally have a political aspect, since it always has a relationship with society? Then again, I would personally label myself apolitical since I don't participate in actionism.

RS: There would need to be some coercion and I don't think there is coercion here. The mad thing is that this is not art in situ. You go into a kind of public space like a parking space next to the road. People who don't have a 'coded' point of view pass it by and think it's just Frankfurt normality. Are you interested in such a question; are you concerned with the attention effect that somehow has to be forced? The word pathos was used earlier. What do you think about that? Isn't a certain emotive formulation necessary to draw attention to certain things?

IR: I have a difficult relationship with pathos, I think, which I would like to avoid. I enter a space full of conditions. Clear logical events, technical problems, human capacities, and local regulations are all given. I see the conditions of time, space and, above all, economy, and work with them. Through this postponement of a process I create a space, which, in fact, is not site-specific, and into which I can bring my own conditions, such as the stopover in a parking space in city traffic and the loading of light. These, then, in confusing the economy for a short period, subvert and transgress the preconditions and create a space of potentiality. I can't and don't want to force people's attention onto this point. I prefer to think of a perception that sees too much or too little, that rises and falls or stutters and branches off. For that you need time.

RS: To what extent does the semantic coding of the final material that you use interest you? It was said, with some justification, of the Info Box that it was more interesting than what was emerging at the Potsdamer Platz or the Westhafen site. If you look at it closely, the Info Box suggests a certain variability, as if you could take it apart and put it together again in a different way. We can now see that this is not true, that it has to be destroyed. You can't build it any other way. These aren't modules, it's only a suggestion. From this perspective it is architecture with a component of simulation, with an interface for information or communication, but it doesn't ring true as a whole. It is not as flexible as it pretends to be.

IR: I don't worry about whether it rings true or not. I think: what happens in this situation? The Info Box is a promise, just as many things, everything in fact, is a

RS: Or a slip of the tongue.

IR: Yes, that does suggest itself, of course. Through this whole process I've learned a lot about the mobility and immobility of the Info Box, above all as it relates to the weight-bearing structure.

RS: Your Hempels Hütte project had a different aspect. That was a real house, a prefab house, which could be assembled from individual functional components. And showing these elements in separation says simply: here are component parts which in some near future will signify a functional house. And that is a qualitatively different event.

IR: The Info Box is loaded in this sense, it has a past. That could make my work more difficult. I was interested in the fact that the Info Box promises information. In a way it was the trailer for the Westhafen development.

RS: Trailer, that's a kind of simulation, too. Material is being used that professes to have a completely different function. And that affects the concept of the image. The Info Box is an image, an image in a city space. Do you isolate this image in your installation or does this aspect not interest you so much?

IR: I thought it made sense just to work with the façade of the Info Box. It is largely the modular component, visually, but also materially. I was interested also because it presents a surface and more specifically because this surface promises information, which it, as you said, does as a simulated image. My question was: can I work out a form in the moment – not when I dismantle the structure, but when it is dismantled and the parts are in flux – can I create a form which doesn't want to indicate information or promise information but which will behave like information. I'm therefore not doing a deconstruction but rather a transposition.

A4: There are different intentions in the two projects. The Info Box was previously a building and has now been dismantled. It had fulfilled its original purpose. In Hempels Hütte it's basically the other way round, the component parts are already there which then have to be assembled in order to fulfill its purpose.

IR: Of course, the Hempels Hütte project, which is now called als ob die Hütte Hütte wäre, is another project. By the way, I'm carrying on with it even after the initial failure and looking for a collector who is interested in an inhabitable house as well as a disappearing artwork. I work with different spaces, economic flows and events in time. What interests me in this project is that the Hütte doesn't yet exist, but is already available before its construction in the form of its components, that it doesn't exist in my economy but it does in someone else's, that it doesn't have a location yet but already signifies one in the future. I postpone the house before it exists as such, and it can then go on to become the house it always wanted to be, an inhabitable house. Those movements are quite different from those I'm carrying out with the facade of the Info

A2: I personally find the approach of Hempels Hütte more exciting from an art history viewpoint. The photos of the Info Box and the low loader work (Ex Box) make me think of Gordon Matta Clark. The aspect of the untouchable virginity out of which someone makes something without destroying it – the parts may not be broken, so that the building can be reassembled later – that's an extremely exciting approach because you wonder whether the person who goes on to receive the house will allow anything to be done with it. I mean, I would certainly have the feeling: what's going on with my house beforehand? With the Info Box, it's already over. So it's not so serious if a corner of the sheet metal is dented. It wasn't dismantled, either. I have the feeling it was kind of torn down, destroyed, and that brings me back to Matta Clark, who did the same thing. He was more interested in the process of breaking something up, he drilled holes in the houses himself because he was interested in that. That's not what you're interested in.

IR: The Hütte (Shed) would then be the Immaculate Conception and the low loader the prostitute. Both interesting models – a moment in time in which you wonder whether something is over or still to come or whether you can maintain this moment of suspense. I think it's important that works which have been completed, such as the wonderful work of Gordon Matta Clark, are able to find their continuation, also in conscious redirection. GMC was concerned with splits in a much more concrete sense and with the newly-created relationships of light, both internally and externally, which are created by the splits, a kind of exposure. I didn't derive my work from GMC, but you can ask how this work relates to that of GMC. I became involved in the Info Box project at a time when it was to be sold in order to reappear somewhere else. A buyer was sought and several times a contract was almost signed, but it never happened. The decision was finally taken to destroy the Info Box. I had to ask myself whether I could continue with my project. I don't think it makes such a big difference. The Info Box will continue on its way, one way or another. It will simply be in another combination. Now I know that part of it is to be used again, i.e. half of the Info Box will be reassembled in a new and different form. Some parts may be used in allotments and someone might use one of the planks as a table top, or the staircase will be used to connect different floors. It goes on. There is this entropy which always also means transformation.

A2: I would like to add on that point that I think it's great that GMC's idea or thought is being developed further. I don't think his work is finished because was finished, but because he simply died. He would certainly have continued working. For a long time there's been nothing which develops or changes this idea.

IR: Perhaps I'm lucky not to be strong enough to make material incisions, with my own hands.

RS: That was a nice last word.

IR: But there is no end, of course not.