

## Pecarious Presences

Edgar Schmitz, London and Ilona Ruegg Frankfurt / Bruxelles

*London 14.03.07.*

*Dear Ilona, With regard to your works the question arises again and again of where the works are leading or what they are referring to. Perhaps we can begin in the opposite direction, with the question of what they connect up to. For you, does a work such as Air House connect to the architecture which it is delaying, to the location which it is interacting with or to the material which it is rearranging?*

Brussels 15.03.07.

Dear Edgar, Yes, the work is a connecting up to a process in an economy outside art. If you mean architecture in its broadest sense, i.e. not simply as form and function, but also its entire historical context and its economic subordination, then Air House / Time Construction 4 does indeed link up to the architectural situation. But in no way am I concerned with the final form of the afore mentioned orchid house, which is anticipated, the architect's plans and the client's requirements do exist. At the time of the displacement of the building components on to the Mathildenhöhe, the form is fragmented, i.e. merely stored material which only just suggests form, but that form remains latent during the delayed process. It therefore seems to me that architecture is involved as well as just the materials themselves. At the same time the latter empties the situation of the context of its origin and its destination. Is it not a disintegration of something which is still caught up in becoming? It is also this process which is diverted in terms of time which interests me, and which I try to locate somehow. However, I do not believe in a pure revelation of the facts. The delaying of the slabs at a particular place above all extends the links of the new situation.

*London, 19.03.07.*

*Dear Ilona, As soon as you introduce history, for example, into your notion of architecture and thus create integrations and openings, then art is just as integrated and open as the other contexts which could be listed here (architecture, market economics among others). I am thinking in particular about the time years ago when we had a discussion in your studio in Brussels, which arose from seemingly very different works (a series of paintings), about indifference, about how parts can come together without forming something larger, and how interesting you found that balance, and probably still do. I think that this case is perhaps also about this central formation of a question: How connections can reach out to others by insisting on their precarious presence. Architecture or art or painting or drawing or material economies then overlap and start losing their clear outlines. Delay is one dimension, anticipation another, because from the here and now you have to rethink each direction in time afresh. Chronologies can then be reversed, in relationship with memory and expectation, which can then no longer be kept apart. And if that is the case, how does your Air House relate to its architectural framing on the Mathildenhöhe? Can it even form a frame at all? Was it supposed to? To what extent are you interested in the frame and the tension with it, or are they simply the necessary preconditions for your work?*

Frankfurt, 23.03.07.

Dear Edgar, I do not interpret the architectural situation of the Mathildenhöhe as a frame at all, but rather as one of the loose connections in an operation. My interest, back then in our conversation, in the indifference of the individual incidents in the chronology of painting is approximate to the more recent works, except that the painting took up a precisely defined space with clear edges. After painting I was interested in the question of the extensions of the space in the real time of all events. I didn't want to place an object into a space because there are already countless objects. They are all constantly in motion, more or less and caught up in all kinds of economies. Suddenly it was about the connections of that which was already in existence in a multi-placedness. – I therefore don't need to recreate anything but rather select from what is already available so that an operation is possible in which everything can be connected with everything else. I don't want to present this situation as completed, but rather leave it in its partly contradictory processes. Everything becomes frayed: why something is being preserved or produced, why something comes from wherever, why something goes wherever... with the eventuality that it could also be the other way round. The material is only being kept, delayed and displayed or placed in a chosen situation so that the time processes are not allowed to run to completion, but instead open out and become visible in this openness. This is where indifference is important to me. The structure of meaning must be dispersed at the time of the display without being completely lost. The orchid house has already been announced in the future, the Mathildenhöhe has its own historical context, the museum is performing its task. The stored components, however, are stuck in indifference and can only loosely attach

themselves to the various economies on the ground which exist partly in parallel and partly in contradiction with each other. Yes, there is friction, which is interesting inasmuch as everything has a tendency to become something and everything will surely become something or has already become something. It's just that I don't want to add anything there; I just want to make an incision at that point. That is then an economy on another level. You can plan a budget with an objective in mind and invest it for whatever reason with particular aspirations. However, there is perhaps - without having or spending - the possibility of engaging with differences and producing something out of that which doesn't condense into form.

London, 26.03.07.

*Dear Ilona, Is the art world also interesting for you because it allows certain openings more than other, more restricted fields? Even though it's not for you about a display, doesn't this field allow for a kind of putting-in-parentheses, as you do typographically in your Time Construction projects. Despite all the openings in the arrangements you set, it seems to me that it is also important and unavoidable that your works do not simply disappear in their own connections, but they also insist on their incompatibility – not necessarily in a contradiction, that would be a simplification, but through an intensity of another kind? I think that it has something to do with the way you animate your arrangements, whether that is in Frankfurt with the lights and the noise of the generators which were feeding them or on the Mathildenhöhe with the ventilators and how they refer to a circulation of air or breath.*

Brussels, 27.03.07.

Dear Edgar, First of all, involving the institutional art context in an operation is relevant because it is constrained by the economy in which works have always been discussed, bought and sold, and today this "business" is booming, even partly overheating. So what I am offering is negotiable, and yet because the product that I displace, delay and allow to continue on its way is also constrained by other economies, it cannot entirely be reified in the art context. The value structure is not complete in and of itself, i.e. there are other values which are in play at the same time and which are not worth anything in art. The future orchid house is a dream of a different kind, however it can still be connected to parallel requirements of the art world. Will it, too, not become a separate container whose function will be to accommodate a quite particular species and to give them care and attention, show them off and compare them? – I am therefore opening up a place in the field of art which is simultaneously occupied in another field. The production of art is indeed never perfectly regulated, on the contrary, works are constantly expected which expand this field through unexpected regulation systems and which do not satisfy the consensus, as would be the case in other fields in free market economics. There the winner is the one who expands the market through new rules but still satisfies the consensus of consumption. I would say that in the field under discussion, the economy is not propelled by means of added value but through possible contradictions which, on the one hand, produce the connections, and withstands them, on the other. What I am interested in is what processes from different economies I can draw together so that it is no longer a question of supply and demand but rather that dependencies begin to unravel. The unsuitable, that which doesn't belong in that location, is of course more agile in that sense. On the other hand, a stack of building components could quite easily appear to belong there. On the second day of my project on the Mathildenhöhe, where the renovation of the Russian Chapel was underway, iron slabs were delivered and stacked up nearby. The same air which was moved around by the ventilators in my stack, also passed over those slabs. The plane trees on the lower grove were about to lose their leaves, while in front of the museum the banners for the Boltanski exhibition moved slowly in the wind.

London 30.03.07.

*Dear Ilona, So it would always be both: the possible allegory of whatever and an offer of experience in relation to everything else. In its dual orientation that already provides a multiplicity of meanings and is thus very promising. But can we not also read the question about the dependencies the other way round (against your interpretation, perhaps): Instead of dependencies beginning to unravel, are they not also just being established in the first place. On the one hand, for the work itself, which is reaching out towards its situation (a situation which is not simply its own, but is always being laid claim to in many ways. On the other hand for the situation itself whose multiple connections first become visible perhaps from the work and its operations or which are even generated by it. Only the dependencies then no longer function in a linear way, but rather as extended connections and knots. In your photographic series ,Trees Older Than Me, Waiting' (1997/2002) we have the same thing under different conditions: how on the one hand a network forms around the trees in their containers, and on the other hand, precisely that, but only semi-allegorically, ties together images and timelinesses with the creator and the audience. Are the forest in Italy, the road in Frankfurt and the estate grounds at the Mathildenhöhe then very similar in the end?*

Brussels, 01.04.07.

Dear Edgar, Yes it is strange that independence invites dependencies. They are always both in play together. I neither avoid the one nor the other. I partly continued with these projects because of my real situation which was that I was receiving few offers for exhibitions. The invitations which were coupled with reassuring budgets were few and far between. And so it wasn't far-fetched to think of connecting up with other economies. Precisely in this apparent independence did I discover the parallel economies and I began to engage them as an operative form. This linking up and decoupling makes me somewhat more independent of the institutions, but on the other hand the mutual dependencies, interests and desires of many also come to the fore. Everything is caught up with everything else. Suddenly there is no longer a protected exclusive art space from whose special status the world is placed in a relationship. It is about moving in another way, or more precisely, in between the economies which are already underway, but also about moving them by my attempt to engage them and to bring them to a halt. Quite lively material with its own resistance and contradictions but also with further possibilities. With the Info Box in Frankfurt, which was due to be dismantled, and which I wanted to borrow, which I therefore had to negotiate for, I never got through to those in responsibility. I was blocked apparently because they didn't want the dismantling on the Westhafen site to have publicity, despite the fact that the Info Box itself suggested publicity. I then decided to change tack on to the transportation of the façade, a kind of No Man's Land, on the roads which are public anyway. I was thus able to get round the resistance of the owners, an investment company. I worked with the demolition firm who had quite different interests. With the orchid house, the architect was herself interested in experiencing her construction in its multiplicity of meanings as a temporary part of the art. The costs of the deviation of the borrowed building parts were met by the various companies involved in the construction. The same for the publication in which this text will appear. These people discovered an interest in the immateriality of the material which they dealt with every day. I always thought that there should be no difficulty to see the whole together with the countless details and to play with its connections. The very old trees which were waiting in 'Trees Older Than Me, Waiting' come from groves which they have left. They were each potted and connected up with a branched system of irrigation and cared for until gradually each of the trees will have broken out in search of new terrain. That's called a tree nursery. There are not just rows of young saplings, but also these ones that have grown up elsewhere, which are visiting for a while and whose further growth is delayed. I meant perhaps productive, loose dependencies whose end products are branchings.

London, 10.04.07.

*Dear Ilona, Perhaps we can move from the beginning, which was no such thing, to an opening which isn't as open as it might suggest (i.e. the question of where it goes / could go / is supposed to lead from here)? If economies are also economies of desire, do they not become confused sometimes in such a work too? Let us invert its elements from the orientation towards openness to one of solidification which then produces openness in another way, not by indicating it but by producing it through paradox. In our podium discussion "Patterns of Displacement" in Frankfurt concerning the Low Loader work (2005) there was a point in the discussion which I found exciting and which has somehow remained open. It concerns the relationship between the parked low loader and the architecture which surrounds it and how the dimension of mobility can spread out into the sphere of the work, how the architecture and the traffic running through it can, through their equilibrium of energy and motion, be read as differing speeds, so that even the apparently constant can be emptied in a general and boundless dynamic. Because the low loader stands still during its stay and yet is explicitly connected to an overarching dynamic of movement and reconstruction, the apparently solid architecture behind it is maybe only a movement of construction, demolition and reuse which has been paused for a particularly long time. In such an intricate relationship between material and what Lyotard once called an economic register can form set so completely so that the permeable has to be relocated somewhere else? Your thoughts about a work which could be targeted towards a collector who would acquire both the work and the completed house together (and opposed to each other), seems to indicate something similar, too. If the work's operations of delay and material deviation really disappear in the final product, and if that raises the issue of the virulent remains of the work in contrast to its lasting material manifestation, are the provisional and suspended nature of the work not then produced by that which is itself completely solid, visible and permanent (You yourself emphasize again and again how important it is to you that your works do not merely exist as gestures and draft designs. For their economies to be of interest to you, they require the effective empirical resistance of their material realization.*

Brussels, 16.04.07.

Dear Edgar, Probably every artistic production has a greater or lesser claim to determine its own unachievable desire for independence. The production environment is seen in relation to the romantic image of the artist's studio with absolute self-determination. This pureform is an illusion; it doesn't exist now and it never has. A paint pot can tip over and spill over a flat canvas, or a layer of dust settles on the work while the artist is absent. It's true that I count on

outside influences from the very beginning because I want to move or delay something which is already in motion. My desire is thus interwoven with those of others and vice versa, without their desire becoming mine. For a short while we share together its derailed economy. It seems to me that there is a great openness or potentiality in this moment. Everything is borrowed, fragmented and delayed for a while. We cannot say it has become solid if we are not referring to the past or future. The location where the delay takes place is not random. With Low Loader it was the three-lane one-way street next to the massive old sandstone building of the old police building, or with Air House it was the Mathildenhöhe park with the art nouveau architecture. These are indeed designs of great solidity. You describe very well how the various tempi of the apparently solid and the moving (which is momentarily paused) become noticeable and can be compared in their stretching and shortening. I am interested in materiality particularly in the differences and the similarity of the tempi. Out of that arises a temporary economy which goes beyond the economies which are already operating. The porous is perhaps their modus. I don't believe it can be located... At the moment I am busy with a new work whose subject will be the prototype of a house for a collection. It's important here that the house is really planned and will be materialized one day at a particular site, made solid as you said. There are real economic processes; architects plan a house, a collector acquires the house, the house is built. That is where the building and its solidity collide with the contemporaneous possibility of its own premature dissolution, and likewise its status as an artwork as a fragmented form of the future house collides with the pure function of the same building which will possibly accommodate artworks. I don't want to avoid the experience with these productive collisions within the materializations. They open up the space in time for contemporaneities and unusually inverted processes.

London, 23.04.07.

*Dear Ilona, What kind of intervention or delay do you have in mind for this collector's house? Are you thinking here too of an intervention which is limited in time but empirical, or is it a purely conceptual intervention which is related more to the status of the material than to its arrangement in time and space? But the question which interests me more here (and which is related) is about your relationship to other works. Because it is specifically supposed to be a collector's house, you speak of the works which will probably be kept in it, and that then raises the question of the relationship you see yourself in with these works. I wonder how far your presence is here inscribed in these other works, and to what extent that has to do with curatorial processes? I am thinking again of two snippets of conversation in Brussels – one had to do with your work in the Loterie Nationale building and with the question about the holes in which you sank the chair legs on which the visitors could then sit, and the extent to which you had predetermined a choreography of space (and of use), and how imperative this predetermination was (or was supposed to be). The other snippet was from a conversation we had concerning your exhibition ‚Die Echte Breite :Behalte Eins!‘ in Zurich (1995), specifically the extent to which the inclusion of drawings which were not yours, removes authorship or at least problematizes it. Or whether the inclusion transfers your authorship rather to a choreographic (or even a curating) level.*

Frankfurt, 24.04.07.

Dear Edgar, The form of the interruption in the new project remains open. The house is still in the planning stage and I don't know yet what the individual components will be like. There will certainly be a holding up of the components, for a limited time, on their way to the real construction site, but it has not been decided in what kind of museum space this temporary transit storage will take place. There will be some logistical conditions. I do see the intervention as an empirical possibility, e.g. the experience of going through the components of a future house which does not yet distinguish between interior and exterior, or the experience of the absence of direct purpose: the floor doesn't have to run horizontally, a door can open onto a ceiling. All the components in their state of arrest are only latently what they are and are located in the context of a museum collection, and have themselves the status of art. Later, when the house is built, the collector is free to choose what works he introduces to the house, or whether he brings in any at all so that he has a place where he can always escape his collection, in which he can dream of works which are not here. I have no curatorial function. The collector is the proprietor and does whatever he likes. I am interested in the fact that the collector acquires a real object, a functional building which is designed by architects and that this is at the same time during its premature rearrangement an artwork which will after its planned and executed construction be a house which can house artworks. My relationship with these art works is only such that I too am engaged in producing such. I am extending the camouflage of the artwork to the extent that it can almost disappear in the congruity with something else. You refer to the seating arrangements on the dual flooring of the lottery building. The guideline was a sequence of counting, almost like the counting verse... 1-2-3 and you are out. 10 chairs: 4 against the first wall, 3 against the second wall, 2 against the third wall and so on... there were 5 walls. But the distance to the wall varied according to the counting sequence, so that some were very close to the wall and others were quite far. They were all placed in holes in the floor which I had doubled so that they stood on the original floor and thus lost 10 cm of its seating height. That was a kind of pattern in which the chance movement of the guests could be felt. Whenever I was

alone in the room I always sat on the one chair against the wall which contained the large glass window of the conciergerie. Whenever visitors came I moved to another place. So the shifting possibilities of the seating arrangements were clear with no need for explanation. Everyone sat where they wanted to. The constellations arose by chance and changed whenever anyone stood up or moved places, following the mood of the moment. The invitation was sent to the guests with the request to make room for the absence of the concierge. The space was originally built as a conciergerie in a hotel, which had soon turned out to be a failure so that the Lotterie Nationale adapted it for a game of lotto. It was used for that purpose every week. In front of the big window which had given the concierge a view of the entrance hall a curtain had been drawn for all those years. At the time of my project "And if you came only to take care for the caretaker's place, who would take care for you in your place" the lottery had moved out. I was interested in the question of the substitution through all levels which had been written through history in this space. In the case of the exhibition "Die Echte Breite :Behalte Eins" I showed alongside my own drawings works of the deceased Gertrud Schwyzer. This too was more of a gesture of doubling than something curatorial: wherever a work is, there are always other works too. Since the artist's drawings had remained without renown, it was not already loaded with significance. Both works related to each other with a certain indifference and gave no reason for overloaded interpretations. They were rather loose links of two chains. This gesture also highlighted the skepticism with which I had always viewed solitary authorship. In both cases my interest was not really in what you have referred to as the curatorial. It was more a search for operative forms, forms which bring contemporanities into play. After painting I was interested in questions of locating operations in the time field of all events and I was looking for forms which would reveal something of that without depicting and without calling on narration.

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This exchange of ideas was held by email in March-April 2007 in German. Translation from German, Craig Rollo, Brussels

Dieser Gedankenaustausch wurde per email im März / April 2007 zwischen Edgar Schmitz und *Ilona Ruegg* in deutscher Sprache geführt