

# (IM)MATERIAL PRESENCE

*ELLEN MARA DE WACHTER*

What happens if we agree to abandon our cherished habits of logic, our conceptions of space and geometry; if we stop believing our eyes and start believing our ears instead; if we decide to believe in the magic beyond the illusion, the ghosts haunting spaces; if we agree to invert the laws of rationality, just to see? What would such excursions achieve beyond an initial confusion and disorientation? Could the worlds we access by way of these excursions have a feedback effect on our own, supposedly reliable world? If one's cosmology is the way in which one explains the world to oneself, could art installations become machines, devices for generating new and different cosmologies?

## Irrational Spaces

In moving away from two- and three-dimensional art into multi-dimensional spaces, installation art makes a radical break with the practice of representation. These works do not seek to reproduce something from the world in pictorial or artistic form; nor is it about the visualisation of concepts or abstraction of existing forms. Something else is going on. The binary relationship between original and copy that has historically grounded practices such as photography, painting and sculpture is rendered irrelevant, or at least subsumed under the larger body of the works; relegated to a secondary position as a part of the whole, rather than constituting

the work itself. This break with representation also entails a move away from tendencies of anthropomorphism and illusionism. By severing the umbilical cord between the work of art and the “real world”, installation art makes way for hyperspaces, other worlds: the impossible, kaleidoscopic spaces created by moving and folding mirrors in Laura Buckley’s *Mechanical Poem*; the auratic world of Mark Titchner’s *When We Build Let Us Think That We Build Forever*, in which symbolism and oppression are the dominant languages; or a monumental stepped helix that could have been the set for a reconstruction of Marcel Duchamp’s *Nu descendant un escalier N°2* (1912) in the Escherised space of Graham Hudson’s installation *On Off* (2008).

Cubism and Futurism ushered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century using radical new viewpoints. With *Les demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907) Pablo Picasso suggested a three-dimensional world of sliding and interpenetrating planes on the two-dimensional surface of the painted canvas. Projecting their multiple perspectives into the space of the viewer, Cubist paintings broke with the Renaissance tradition of illusionistic representation and a single vanishing point, creating a sense that their world was “becoming very strange and not exactly reassuring”.<sup>1</sup> This unease was taken to extremes by the belligerent Futurists, led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, whose first manifesto in 1909 tapped into the anxieties of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and glorified war in all its forms, lauding it as “the only true hygiene of the world – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchist, the beautiful Ideas which kill and the scorn of woman”.<sup>2</sup>

Futurism incorporated the Cubists’ revolutionary style into a radical political agenda. With a style that involved a fragmentation of perspective and the scattering of vision and matter, the Futurists adopted a new viewpoint, situated within the work rather than simply in front of it. This spatial rearrangement and its attendant new perspective extended to the viewer, who

was now able, by way of the artwork, to access the world of the future and experience the urban energy that characterised the era, catching a glimpse of the new logic of technology, warfare and power – a foreign language exceeding any previous system and seemingly arrived from a different planet. The Futurist concept of “lines of force” – according to which objects reveal their states, emotions and characteristics to the artist or viewer – also hints at a sensibility to presence beyond mere material. The Futurists were prescient in their understanding of the possibilities of art in creating new worlds, reaching beyond received wisdom and reason to see through to the future potential of art, technology and perception, as well as to the darker undertones of these potentials. Was installation art, a genre that came to prominence in the 1970s, the inevitable culmination of the Futurists’ enmeshing of shattered vision and dark geo-political fantasy?

Around 300BC, Euclid of Alexandria developed the principles of his geometry to explain and account for physical space according to the coordinates of length, depth and breadth. His laws still govern lay understanding of the workings of space; they constitute our framework for apprehending the places we inhabit and the events that occur in them. However, Euclid’s axioms fail to account for what lies beyond common understanding; his system is ill-equipped to speak of other worlds, the strange, the mystical or the ineffable. Leaving the Euclidean framework behind when approaching a work of art might allow for the emergence of any number of additional dimensions in the space of painting, drawing or photography. Adding a third dimension to the picture plane yields sculpture, while a fourth dimension, time, begets film; but a potential infinity of other dimensions exists in installations, enabling them to operate as other worlds with their own logic and rules. By exploding our conventional notions of space and adding other elements to point, line, plane and time, installations create versions of space that cannot be represented according to

Euclidean rules, which is not to say that they cannot exist. The surreal mathematics in the spaces created by a visionary like M.C. Escher may prove to be more useful than Euclid's axiomatics when approaching the artwork as installation.

#### Eyes, Ears, Mouth & Nose: Senses, Synaesthesia & Effects

Artworks then, especially installations, can create their own worlds, exceeding our naturalised means for explaining or experiencing physical space. These territories operate according to their own laws and are governed by their own forces, which in turn construct the viewer in new ways. The physical boundaries the artist has chosen to put into place, positioning sculptural components, outlining moving image projections or extending soundtracks and live performance, limit the space of the installation. But within these borders, a fullness is constituted by a range of effects including a kind of transubstantiation that can also yield the smell of materials and the sensation of textures. The viewer is immersed in this fullness as in a pool of water and acted upon by the different components of the work; sensory effects that create feelings and intuitions that exceed the pure materiality of the installations, creating a surplus and pointing to extra dimensions of physical space and experience.

Mark Titchner's installation *When We Build Let Us Think That We Build Forever* (2005) is cloaked in a murky soundtrack: the first few notes of the opening fanfare of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony, stretched to the duration of the entire movement. Beethoven's dramatic symphony, so revered by the young protagonist of Anthony Burgess's dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) is here desecrated by special effects, transformed from a glorious composition into a creeping presence. Stretched beyond recognition, ghostly voices and sounds begin to emerge from the vibrations of the track; the pure force of the symphony is isolated, distilled from

its melodies and harmonies and thus from its ostensible meaning. Sonic apparitions materialise and populate the space in which it is played. We begin to imagine the symphony, to "see" it, much as Beethoven, who was already suffering serious loss of hearing when he composed it, might have. Along with the other sinister or occult references in the installation, including pictorial signs taken from anarchist torture chambers used during the Spanish Civil War, biblical references and cabalistic symbols, the soundtrack fills the room with a rich mixture of tyrannical vibrations.

This oppressively textured sonic environment contrasts starkly with Laura Buckley's use of sound in her installation *Mechanical Poem* (2007), in which a series of clear, sharp sounds is produced by the meeting of clean slick surfaces: squares of pristine materials such as perspex and mirror collapsing together with a slap. The clarity of these punctuating sounds stands out against a murmur of conversation and ambient sounds from the lakeside forest in which Buckley filmed one of the moving image components of the installation. In homing in on the sounds of materials colliding, synaesthesia creeps in: they are such distinctive sounds – nothing else produces that part-sucking out of air between the surfaces/part-fraction of a clatter – that the eye seems to hear the lucid and slick sounds while the ear sees the manipulation of flawless materials. Buckley has noted the importance that sound holds in certain sequences and the influence the soundtracks of her footage have on their editing; the staccato interjections of the hard materials coming together govern the way moving images are cut and intercut.

Graham Hudson's sculptures and installations often incorporate record players and a motley selection of records that demand a new and illogical way of listening. A recurring crossbreed in his work is the outcome of pairing a turntable with a suspended light bulb dangling over it in such a way that the bulb rests on the surface of the spinning record. This dislocation of the usual logic

of machines evokes Comte de Lautréamont's statement, adopted by the Surrealists, about the beauty of "the fortuitous meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella!"<sup>5</sup> Not only does the combination of light bulb and turntable create a visual conundrum by bringing together light, sound, motion and time in a single though multifaceted point, but it also makes for a unique and slippery sonic performance. The turntable struggles to play in spite of the bulb, which repeatedly slides off the surface of the record, dragging it back and causing the music to stutter in a new and baffling language, before crashing into the record player's arm. In this odd coupling, the records occasionally burst into a proud concert, but more frequently stutter and stammer their way through to the bitter end when their grooves disintegrate, the machine collapses and the record stops playing – only to be replaced by a fresh specimen from the wide collection of records available for the installation. With *On Off*, which in addition uses a sequencer to switch a series of turntables on and off for a few seconds at a time, Hudson produces a confounding sonic undulation housed in a helical tower whose design might have featured in one of Giovanni Piranesi's prison drawings.

#### Machines Under Duress

In Laura Buckley's *Cubic 2 (Green Cube Rotate)* – one of the moving image components of *Mechanical Poem*, filmed with a digital video camera set to auto-focus – the action consists of a series of scenes in which a perspex cube is gradually assembled on a revolving plinth, beginning with a base and single side in the first sequence, and culminating in a five-sided open-topped cube in the final scene. During the course of the film, a single light bulb, "a light-based drawing tool", is variously dangled over and around the cube or positioned in relation to one of its sides.<sup>4</sup> The rotating planes of colour and transparency, along with changes in

the position of the light source, create a motion and a false sense of depth and distance that the camera is at pains to keep up with. Putting such a sophisticated piece of technology in a stressful situation results in something unexpected, hinting at a potential that exceeds the original intentions of the machine's makers; an exquisite by-product of abuse. This excess produces the art; in the case of Buckley's films a combination of uncannily precise geometric shots that resemble computer-generated graphics, and blurred sequences during which the camera visibly works through its options, finally settling on a focussed image for a brief moment before the revolving structure returns to disrupt its equilibrium once again. The slick perspex surfaces of the cube occasionally reflect their surroundings, allowing for a fleeting glimpse of the artist, her studio and her camera, while creating another tripartite viewing relationship between artist, sculpture and recording device, and enabling the viewer a momentary access to this charmed world.

Such artful misuse of machines or materials – the distressed symphony, the camera put under acute strain in order to capture surfaces and the play of light, the turntable diverted away from its intended use – marks the difference between approaching an instrument as a tool and as a material. When Graham Hudson uses as his materials standard units such as scaffolding poles, transportation pallets, cardboard boxes and hazard tape, it is with a twofold view to their utility and to their potential to do something other than that for which they were designed. The relationship between artist and material is one of engagement and reconfiguration rather than simple use; it has a different intentionality than the relationship with tools. This difference extends to the distinction between sculpture and architecture, in which the use-value of buildings is separated off by the sculptural approach and chance comes into play. Distorting the language and logic of machines, parts and materials diverts them away from the pragmatic and guides them towards the poetic. It is this inherent con-

tradition in the works, which can be mild or acute and which arises from the disjunction between the intention of materials and the uses they are ultimately put to, that enables them to actually work – to have an effect on the viewer that goes beyond a mere contemplation of shape and materiality.

### Hauntology

Julia Kristeva has written that in an installation “it is the *body* in its entirety which is asked to participate through its sensations, through *vision* obviously, but also *hearing*, *touch* on occasions *smell*. As if these artists, in the place of an “object” sought to place us in a space at the limits of the sacred, and asked us not to contemplate images but to communicate with beings”.<sup>5</sup> It is this capacity of installations to incarnate something entirely new, almost alive, rather than to represent something outside themselves, which constitutes their presence, their surplus value. There is a palpable but uncontainable energy to these works, an alchemy whose elements include scale, materials, ideas and effects.

*When We Build Let Us Think That We Build Forever* contains a number of visual components that act as a sort of pictorial refrain running through the installation. Images are taken from a variety of sources including the Bible and a book about torture cells designed and used in the 1930s during the Spanish Civil War.<sup>6</sup> The cells bear an uncanny resemblance to sculptural shapes, visual patterns and signs from modernist aesthetic trends and abstraction, making their designer something of a former-day sampler of visual culture, excising elements from their original context and lending them new political and aesthetic significance.

The patterns and signs used in the torture cells, avant-garde when first made, are now visual tropes firmly ensconced in the canon of modern art. They are reminiscent of modernist artworks such as Marcel Duchamp’s Rotoreliefs, of Luis Buñuel’s

anxious cinematic spaces, and László Moholy-Nagy’s experiments with kinetics, but they also signal a future potential, pointing towards sculptural-perceptual works by contemporary artists such as Carsten Höller, Gregor Schneider and Anish Kapoor. In these torture cells, geometric shapes and patterns were combined with curved surfaces, intense colours, textures and temperatures to create spaces, non-Euclidean worlds, intended to make their victims suffer perceptual trouble and ultimately madness. Their nefariousness is a question of intensity: a lesser intensity in the deployment of these tactics resulted in high art. Pushed to the limit, they became instruments of torture.

To know of the origins of these symbols, which now exist in Titchner’s installation in a second-degree abstraction from their original *détournement* from modernist artworks, is also to be aware of the victims who suffered from being subjected to their forces. These visual elements carry an undecidable presence in the installation: do they laud avant-garde developments in the visual arts or are they indicators of a much darker legacy? Such undecidability recalls the fate of zombies: neither alive nor dead, they roam without hope for closure, unable to be revived or put to rest. The zombies of modern art haunt Titchner’s installation, as do the ghosts of the torture victims who suffered from malicious intensification of avant-garde aesthetic signs. The legacies and tendencies of modern art live on in the work of countless contemporary artists and it is up to the viewer to decide the connotations of progress in the arts and technology; to determine whether the ghosts are friendly or terrorising.

### Technology = Magic

In Laura Buckley’s film *Cubic 2 (Green Cube Rotate)* a two-sided perspex construction sits on a rotating cloth-covered platform, “but then a hand appears to push and expose the driver of the

movement and the technical tone is lowered. Including the hand removes the magic and shows you how to do the trick”<sup>7</sup> To demonstrate how things work in this way, to reveal the science of movement is also, paradoxically, to reveal their magic, a magic that lies beyond trickery. Revealing the science, the mechanics of the work, paradoxically serves to underscore the surplus that can never be revealed, the part of the work that is untouchable by reason and that operates in accordance with the rules of another logic altogether.

The act of revealing the technology behind the work is one way of hinting at the magic. Another is to use technology to reveal something that usually lies beyond our grasp; what would otherwise be inaccessible or unbearable. Buckley’s sculpture *Another Place* (2007) consists of a naked light bulb hanging behind a sheet of black perspex. This shield protects the viewer from the glaring light waves and allows the red element, alive with electricity, to be seen. Plastic and bulb together allow us to see a thing whose detail would otherwise be ungraspable by the human eye. By framing a light bulb, or filming the reflection of the sun in a puddle as in the film *Cubic 1* (2007), Buckley actualises a vision that otherwise would exist only in the realm of the virtual.

Sigils are signs, words or devices of supposed occult power in astrology or magic. Titchner’s installation *When We Build Let Us Think That We Build Forever* includes four lamps with shades whose cut-out patterns are made up of a specific sigil known only to the artist. The lore surrounding sigils tells that when creating a sigil, a particular phrase, wish or spell is reduced to a visual symbol and in so doing, the wish is captured in the symbol, infusing it with a power related to the wish.

This sigil technology shares the space of *When We Build Let Us Think That We Build Forever* with a number of other technologies, all modes of communication: moving image, electronic

sound and typography. These technologies aim to affect the viewer with their power, be it merely artificial or decidedly supernatural. By containing and conveying meaning in more or less obscure ways, they demonstrate that no mode of communication is transparent or untainted. In each case – the use of Beethoven’s 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony, a piece of music associated with the psychological re-programming of a juvenile delinquent in *A Clockwork Orange*, or the sampling of visual patterns from a mixed legacy of fine art and torture or sigils – the ultimate aim of a particular technology is to exert a specific type of control over the viewer. As writer Kodwo Eshun points out in his analysis of Gothic Futurist Rammellzee, “writing, alphabets, typographies are all ubiquitous elite technologies that have lowered themselves into your consciousness where they adapt you to *their* habit, *their* reflex, *their* perception. The alphabet is not just a transparent communication but a ubiquitous technology, a system adapted and encrypted by successive religious regimes for warfare: the Roma, the Christian, the Medieval, the Gothic. Words, letters, signs, symbols are all weapons, stolen, ornamented and wrongly titled to hide and manipulate their meaning. The prize? Control of the means of perception.”<sup>8</sup> The magic is that we have assimilated these technologies of communication to such an extent that they seem the natural – the best and only way to communicate. By incorporating them into his installation, Titchner mirrors the constructed artificiality of their role in our daily lives and reveals the underlying strangeness of the way we have wholeheartedly adopted them as organising principles.

Such guiding principles control much of our understanding of and interaction with the world. Their ubiquity masks a fear that things might fall apart if we were to risk living according to a different logic. Artworks and installations, by virtue of their capacity to act as containers for the viewer, destabilise and disrupt this compulsion to control. Rather than predetermining meaning

or a particular outcome, they allow for unpredictable relationships to emerge, for strange forces to come into play, and altogether different logics to govern our experience in a process that affects and re-creates the viewer as it does the artwork.

<sup>1</sup> Pablo Picasso quoted in Amy Dempsey, *Styles, Schools and Movements*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2002. 86

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unknown.nu/futurism/manifesto.html> (accessed August 2008)

<sup>3</sup> Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse), *Les Chants de Maldoror*, NY: New Directions Press, 1965. 263

<sup>4</sup> Laura Buckley, *Revealing the System: A self-reflexive exploration of practice and methods*, artist statement, October 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: thought beyond representation*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 51

<sup>6</sup> Jose Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, London: Freedom Press, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Buckley, *Revealing the System: A self-reflexive exploration of practice and methods*, artist statement, October 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than The Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, London: Quartet Books, 1998. 52

## SCHRAM AND SCHEDDLE

*ELIZABETH NEILSON*

The door was left ajar. Feeling the magnetic force of the room ahead, they stepped into a tumbling, somersaulting space of spaces. Daylight acted upon the surfaces as they roamed; painted, ferrous, polished, blackened, chromed and untouched. Any standard description left them aghast, floating in a scale-free fantasy of a landscape they partially recalled. Measuring themselves against the space, they were both dwarfed and magnified. Perceptions shifted from surface to wall to curve to branch. In a series of sweeping steps they advanced through landscapes that counted themselves in cubic feet, their sense of dimensions shattered by the fall into space.

Entering the lair was their choice, they were vigorous in their movement into the unseen. The lights that whirled and bucked, splashing onto the dishevelled walls, were alluring yet alarming in their action. The promise of a space to form thought pulled them forward. Heads a-whirl their collective action was unspoken, no leader established, they moved as one into the disorientating realm of the unnamed. Symbols crashed around them, names, ideas, colours and memories clambering for attention; jostling for position in the space with no memory, sullied in its materials but clean of any one interpretation. A monument to nothing except itself, a house of *No*; defined by what was not there. No place to rest, no space to read, no structure of domesticity, not

an architecture but an archetype. Its walls were alive with the remembering of different voices, stuck records playing themselves out, destroying themselves in their noisy existence, offering them a site of remembrance but then forcing them out of it a moment after being allowed a glimpse of their past selves.

What their mission was, it was hard to tell. An unspoken journey of discovery, a Sunday afternoon well-spent looking for answers to questions posed by others. A project for the affirmation of the new; everything that was once familiar recycled and repurposed until its alien nature was exposed. Bare metal bones tucked under a wooden carcass, a rib or two stuck out to show them the way, onwards and upwards. What their movement desired was left hanging, suspended by cheap string, twisted and turning under a sword of Damocles, its fate undecided. But they pushed forth heads high and felt their way up into a towering cyclone of detritus.

Whose lair it was – this space where time collapsed and energies ruptured – was unclear. It existed, they were in it, surrounded by it, their movement, their understanding, created by its presence. Their imagination followed the sweeping staircases of roughly-hewn wood which called them upwards into nooks and crannies of nostalgia. Vistas of bizarre angle and orientation left all ill at ease. Lost in the experience of an empty room, familiar objects pushed toward misunderstanding.

What had brought them to this place was on the edge of their utterings, unspoken histories now questioned their visions. But still they climbed, aware that it was a trap, a helix that would hold them in its centre and force them to exert themselves. Their efforts acknowledged – they rose up and through the realisation that this was inside not out, that what had appeared a lair was inside the behemoth's belly. Examining their faith they mounted its spine and were spun down into its intestine to be shown tricks and laughter, spirits rising as they realised their fate. The trickster gave them the last laugh, that up and down is the only way in but also

the only way out. A dead-end to end them all, a circle, an endless replaying of that which they had always ignored.

Lights flashing in their eyes again they pushed onwards, through uneven doorways and sloping floors. On they walked – through the schram and scheddle, the give and take, the up and down, the round and round and round and round – spinning in on themselves they were immersed in a space of projected colour, their ephemeral bodies becoming intermingled. Images played across their faces as they looked, seeing each other again in different lights. Smoked lenses obstructed their views and abstracted their visions. A flash of unfaltering sunlight shone into their eyes, blinding at the same time as exposing essential elements that normally went unseen. This internal world was theirs, the belly of the beast belonged to them, they conjured it with their substance. Their bodily existence co-joined with the materials as they walked. Images fell on their eyes and bodies implicating them in the creation of another realm; an internal search for experience of meaning turned outwards and made physical.

The eye flashed and burned before being replaced by the real giant's gut, its grid-like structure melting under the flames of possibility and confrontation. Whose site was this? What owner inscribed their story in this space? Their journey seemed one of immersion, existing perceptions altered by the water's ebb and flow. Crosscurrents dictated their paths, while undertows pulled them back and hammered them against rocky outcroppings of sensitive information. Their senses were overturned and their reason confused as they searched for meaning in the signs and sigils. Alphabets they recognised swam before them, sideswiping their readings and shifting their focus elsewhere. The belly grumbled and whined, leaving them with a mind of suspicion as the symphony played out its ghost-filled bar.

Spat out into whiteness, blasted by winds and weather unforeseen. Their minds exploded with information of subtle

intepretation, their bodies tingled with the palpable excitement of experience. Muscles were stretched and emotions heightened. Up up up they climbed again, into other worlds unknown. Worlds where demons crept in through closed doors, their plans not always magnanimous. They were the behemoth's familiars, their minds co-opted into the activity of distraction. Their presence menaced and befuddled. Rocks of glass truncated their movements and reflected their experience back into their awareness. Again that which they recognised was rendered unfamiliar. Their role became clear; creator for the creator. In a steady move of grace and composure they smiled and dropped their hands, picked up their baggage before heading on and out into the crashing symphony of the world.

## ARTISTS' CONTRIBUTIONS

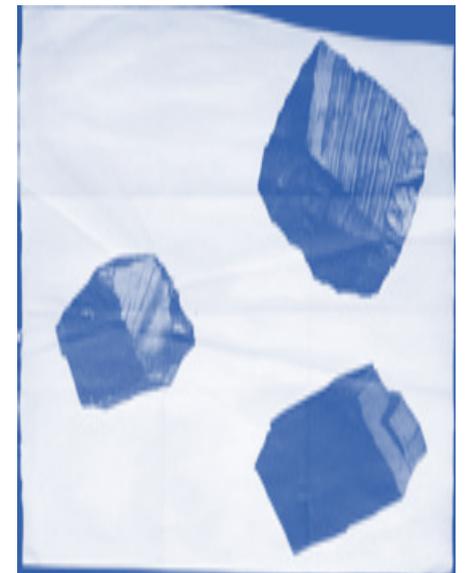
### *LAURA BUCKLEY*

THE WIT OF THE STAIRCASE



### *MYRIAM HOLME*

CRYSKO



### *GRAHAM HUDSON*

BALLOON



# *JAMES IRELAND*

FOLLOWING A DREAM



# *ALEXEJ MESCHTSCHANOW*

HOUSEHOLD CLOTH



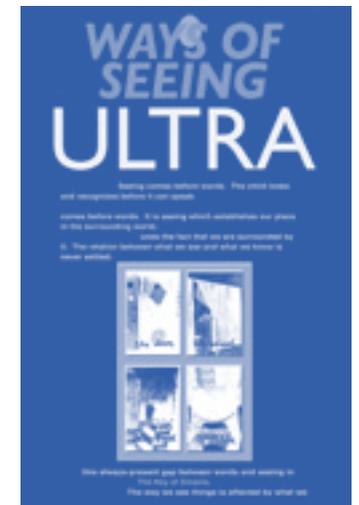
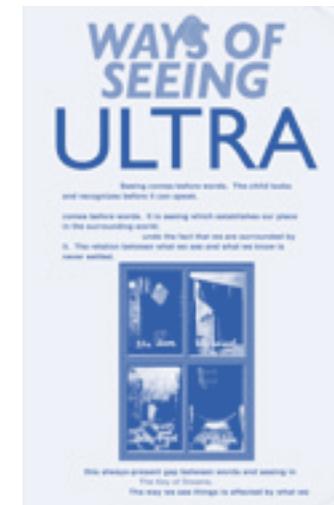
# *KATJA STRUNZ*

FALL INTO SPACE



# *MARK TITCHNER*

WAYS OF SEEING (ULTRA)



# ABSOLU AVEC VACHE<sup>1</sup> (AND THE SPECTRE OF THE GUN)<sup>2</sup>

*WALEAD BESHTY*

“Artistic critique is currently paralysed by what, depending on one’s viewpoint, may be regarded as its success or its failure.”<sup>5</sup>

— Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello

“The redemption of an epoch assumes the structure of an awakening, thoroughly governed by artifice. Only with artifice, and not without it, do we free ourselves from the realm of dreams.”<sup>4</sup>

— Walter Benjamin

The proposition of materialist aesthetics carries with it a seductive promise, not only that the world of appearances can be punctured, shedding light into its darkened recesses, but also offers that there is something to be found lurking behind the curtain, a repressed “truth” at work within all things. Such a revelatory proposition is nowhere more embraced and confounded than in Marcel Duchamp’s innovation of the readymade, an object, which in its moment of display, skirts between concrete literalism, and imagistic spectacle. *Fountain* (1917), perhaps the most notorious example of the readymade, is often reduced, by proponents and detractors alike, to a testament of the artist’s ability to arbitrarily

confer value onto any object, and an irreverent disruption of the division between high and low. Yet this legacy cloaks a far more corrosive and unforgiving revelation. While on its first face, the readymade represented the power of the work of art to reflect and problematise its context, positing what would prove to be one of its most disarming critical abilities – i.e. its capacity to reflexively examine its own social function as it is tied to the conditions of exhibition – it preemptively refuted the direct political efficacy of anything that called itself art. For if a gesture as simple as the recontextualisation of a common object could obliterate its use-value, thus transforming it into an effigy of its past function, it also made clear that this quality of uselessness was alone the thing that made art art. This intervention into instrumental meaning was not simply a negation, but a distillation of the art object to its base social condition, a quality Rosalind Krauss called “exhibitionality”.<sup>5</sup>

Far from democratizing and demystifying, as many of Duchamp’s more stridently ideological contemporaries claimed as their aspiration, the readymade proposed art as an institutional gesture, the expression of a silent agreement. What constituted the readymade was not the object on the display, but the frame that surrounded it. To follow the logic of the readymade, each art object, equally dependent upon the frame of exhibition, was also equally mute when it came to the address of an external state of affairs, the art object’s enunciatory power being, if not simply a manifestation of its conditions of display, then at least wholly dependent on them to be recognised as art. In this gesture the radical proposal of the avant-gardes, for both a materialist transparency and the utopian merging of artistic production with the quotidian, was simultaneously parodied and rendered moot. The disjunction that the readymade exploited – between the utopian aspirations of art, and art’s relation to the everyday – was more than simply the by-product of exhibition. It was the very foundation of it.

In *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, a text that would become the foundation for his epic and unfinished treatise on modernity *das Passagen-Werk* or *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin echoed Duchamp’s insight into exhibition with similar irony. Benjamin surmised that the impetus to collect and display objects derived from the desire to evoke “a world that is not just distant, and long gone, but also better – a world in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the real world, but in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful”.<sup>6</sup> In both Duchamp’s and Benjamin’s constructions, the making and displaying of cultural artefacts and their associated abilities to imagine an alternative to the status quo are inextricably tied to their incompatibility with the world of instrumental use. We thus have a paralysing double bind: the proposal of a transformative utopian vision of functionalist and materialist aesthetics required the absence of instrumental use to even be spoken, a seemingly unacceptable trespass upon the very ideal that defined the productions of the avant-gardes (and political art in general). Conscripted to a limited field of possibilities, a producer who acknowledged the implications of the readymade was forced to position themselves within an array of equally bleak options, either resigning to a general attitude of bourgeois complacency, a naïve zealotry, or an engagement with a prolonged negative characterisation of their own crisis of efficacy by rephrasing it in a multitude of equally deadened forms.

If there is any lesson to be learned from Duchamp’s innovation of the readymade, it is that no object within an exhibition can be taken literally. In concrete terms, making an exhibition is to work by analogy, to work via a model. Extricated from the world of use, exhibitions operate allegorically, no matter how one defines the parameters. To confuse this is to fall into the looking glass, to live life within phantasmagoria. Exhibitions act as hypotheses,

and perhaps this is why they have become affixed to the mute tabula rasa of Cartesian grids, far removed from sites of common exchange, cloaked in museum white.

The Great Exhibition of 1851, held in London's Hyde Park, defined the conditions of exhibition in the modern sense. From the early 1500s onward the term "exhibition" had only specialised legal meaning, referring to a giving of evidence: literally to "hold out". But with the Great Exhibition, and in World's Fairs that followed, the antiquarian meaning and implications of the term blossomed. Born of the nascent consumer culture of Victorian England, the World's Fairs were a key distillation of modernity, uniting technological innovation, immersive spectacle, nationalist ideology, and a forewarning of the borderless world of global capital. In short, they were an instrumental expression of modern life by symbolic metonymy.

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century also gave rise to the modern corporation. The corporation, which would achieve the most radical redefinition of personhood in a legal sense by the end of the century – re-imagining the very qualifications of the term "individual" as constituted by the state – was in its earliest stages at the time of the World's Fairs. The subjectivity that arose in this period is typically characterised as fractured and anomic, an optically-centric incorporeality initiated by a constellation of discursive forces that are far too expansive to discuss here. However, the invention of the modern corporation as an individual under the law is perhaps the clearest and most complete expression of this transformation, although with the terms transposed, for instead of seeing what we thought was a unity fractured into disparate parts, the corporation as citizen-subject arises *out of* discursive fragments. What for the humanist was the indelible and ineffable fact of the individual was rendered porous and contingent, stripped completely from the notion of the body (a term corporations semantically contain, i.e. *corpus*). Corporations are instead a multitude

of voices congealed into a singular entity, a transcription of an ephemeral set of compromises and competing agendas given a singular voice. It seems perverse for the groundwork of humanist democratic ideals to be deployed in this manner, an uncanny proposition because, if the same rule of law endows an immaterial entity the status of autonomous individuality as guarantees our own, then our own selfhood becomes troublingly precarious. This is why McDonald's can now speak in the first person, but it also provides for the possibility of a series of ruses, provocations, and liquidities.<sup>7</sup> As Gilles Deleuze noted, the corporation is "a spirit, a gas", and we must wonder what it means for this ghost to speak, for daily life is filled with such voices.<sup>8</sup>

Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace, which housed the Great Exhibition of 1851, was a singularly remarkable material manifestation of this paradox posed architecturally. The Crystal Palace was the prototype of the modern steel and open-frame, glass, curtain-walled architecture, providing the template for what would become the modern museum, the corporate complex, and the department store. The structure took the industrial dream of endless production and limitless expansion as defining principles, innovating a design that eschewed the monolithic stone construction and the revivalist pastiche popular in its time, opting instead for a modular structure of four-foot-square cells comprised of wrought iron. Despite its immense scale – it was over 1,800 feet in length and covered nineteen acres – and industrial construction, it had an overall feeling of "lightness", the glass panes alternating between reflections of blue sky and surrounding greenery. Its sheer ephemerality so perplexed contemporary critics that it was denied even its existence as architecture.

The Crystal Palace was not of the world of buildings and monuments. It was a machine, a container for vistas, a scrim upon which spectacle could occur; a proposal that was alien to the public affirmation of cultural stability that architecture had come

to represent. It was perpetually new, a structure whose modular construction allowed endless substitution. Or, more exactly, it was an embodiment of newness. At every turn, its interchangeable serial components shone with a “fairy-like brilliance”, as if dropped from the heavens.<sup>9</sup> Architecture and vision became a singularity rendered in iron, as though Alberti’s diagram of renaissance perspective had been made concrete. When it was gone it would leave no auratic ruin for tourists, burning up in an explosive fire that was all too fitting for a building seemingly made of gas. But the structure persisted, built and rebuilt with little concern for the authenticity of an original. As Dostoevsky wrote, “You believe in a crystal edifice that can never be destroyed, an edifice at which one would not be able to stick one’s tongue out, or to thumb one’s nose, even on the sly. And I am afraid of this edifice because it is of crystal and can never be destroyed, and because one could not stick out one’s tongue at it on the sly.”<sup>10</sup> The only true damage that could be done to it couldn’t come from the material world of fires and explosions, but from the symbolic order from which it gained its authority. The fickle wavering of tastes marked its demise.

General consensus denied the Crystal Palace a place in the esoteric battle over architecture’s identity.<sup>11</sup> It was the work of a technician, not of an architect (artist). Paxton wasn’t ideological enough to be labelled a heretic. There was no manifesto for the Crystal Palace; that project could be left to the high practitioners. He was simply making do, problem solving – there was no program, no doctrine. Its effect was an “intoxicating” and disorienting experience. As one critic described, “It is, in my opinion, extraordinarily difficult to arrive at a clear perception of the effect of form and scale in this incorporeal space.” Or as another visitor wrote, “There is no longer any true interior or exterior, the barrier erected between us and the landscape is almost ethereal.” He continued, “If we can imagine that air can be poured like a liquid, then it has, here, achieved solid form.”<sup>12</sup>

The threat that the structure posed to architecture proper was its challenge to humanism and the authorial mark. It contained no singular architectural event, no recognisable style. It was, instead, a frame, a guide by which discontinuous objects could be laid out as though in a picture. The architecture embodied not only a technological sublime in its modular and serialised industrial form, but exemplified the very concept of exhibition, of display. While its chief attribute was invisibility – its grand halls described as a container for “a perspective so extended” that it appeared to be “a section of atmosphere cut from the sky;” – as a site, it was a microcosmic image of the reach of the western world, an egalitarian fantasy that invited visitors to engage in virtual transport, offering a compression of time and space, a short walk bringing visitors from contemporary South Africa to the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>15</sup> It was a safari of capitalism staged in an interior.

It was then, not some fifty years later, that architecture would succeed in cleaving the visual from the corporeal. Long before Le Corbusier’s *Maison Domino* (1914–15) ushered in an era of functionalism and the “international style”, the ubiquitous contemporary form of the art exhibition space, architecture and time travel were one and the same, already having been born as a Cartesian virtual reality. The speculative fantasy of glass architecture is nowhere better articulated than in Paul Scheerbart’s manifesto *Glass Architecture* (1914), itself a celebration of materialist transparency adhering to all the conventions of manifesto-writing as it undermined them, veering between an earnest yet hyperbolic utopianism and parodic science fiction. Its excesses were something the self-valorising Corbusier could never manage; only obliquely allude to. Yet for both men, everything within the architectural field, from the accumulation of objects to the world framed by its windows, was an element in an expansive order, an abstract topography that inhabitants are invited to float above and through like ghosts in an indefinitely expanding world within a world.

Le Corbusier's 1948 United Nations Secretariat building was the first glass curtain-walled architecture in Manhattan. The jeers were not unfamiliar, nor were the myriad technical problems. In fact, Corbusier was so frustrated by the difficulties that he abandoned the project. Glass architecture found its ultimate form here, an international style for international compromise. Here was a building which simultaneously stood out and blended in, reflecting what Michel DeCerteau called "the city as text" on the surface of its modular panes. This was a peculiar brand of hiddenness, all too fitting for a practitioner who opted to produce under a well-publicised alias, just as so many of his contemporaries who gave form to modernist principles chose to do (notably, all businesses begin with the adoption of a "fictitious" name, even if that name happens to be your own). Brecht famously stated that the image of the exterior of a factory could tell you nothing of the lives it contained. The Secretariat was no different, despite its glass façade. When the lighting conditions of the Secretariat building were reversed by night, after working hours, the modular interior was displayed devoid of its labour force. Corbusier allowed this desire to see in, without revealing anything more telling than what the reflective modular exterior offered by day: a procession of blank boxes.

Theatre operates in this way – feeling both near and far, transparent and opaque – a living likeness that is more akin to a reanimated corpse than the social field it duplicates. If the Crystal Palace was the first building that fully capitalised on the theatrical spectacle of exhibition, the readymade was the first art object to be solely constituted by theatrical distance. Here the ritual act of viewing became the artwork's material, the object itself a hollow shell, a decoy. Thierry de Duve put it succinctly when he wrote that, in the wake of the readymade, the only truth to which the art object could attest was the power of its own name, rendering palpable the "pact that would unite the spectators of the future around some object ... that added nothing to the constructed environment and

did not improve on it but, quite the contrary, pulled away from it, bearing no other function than that of pure signifier."<sup>14</sup> Art was, in this liminal state, simply a category, nothing more than a name.

It seems no coincidence that just as Duchamp brought the foundational theatricality of art objects to the fore, the "zero point" of painterly materialism would surface thousands of miles away as a theatrical backdrop. In 1913 Kazimir Malevich was asked to contribute costumes and set designs for the Cubo-Futurist play *Victory over the Sun*. Aside from the almost unwearable costumes, Malevich produced a series of concept drawings for the sets, which, in stark black and white, appear like preparatory sketches for the Suprematist canvases he would begin producing two years later. When asked about his tautologically titled *Black Square* (1915), and its placement at 45 degrees in the top corner of the room of the 1915 exhibition *0.10*, Malevich referred back to these early set designs as its origin. The monochrome was simply a place-holder, a gap, a black hole, identifiable only by its event horizon.

While *Black Square* is often credited with being the first monochrome, this is not actually the case (not that being first matters). Some thirty years earlier this totem of total materialist refusal was realised by the poet Paul Bilhaud, in an exhibition staged in the apartment of the writer Jules Lévy in October of 1882. Such modernist notables as Edouard Manet, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, and Richard Wagner were given a peek at what would be framed as their legacy.<sup>15</sup> For the exhibition, Bilhaud contributed a small black painting titled *Combat de nègres dans une cave pendant la nuit* (Negroes Fighting in a Cellar at Night), a joke that was stolen not once but twice: first by Alphonse Allais who produced a book titled *Album Primo-Avrilesque* (1897), which expanded the series to a range of colour swatches and contained no mention of Bilhaud despite their acquaintance; and later by Malevich, who in the same year as *Black Square* produced the painting *Red Square* which included a particularly Bilhaudian



parenthetical addendum in its title (*Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions*). The invisibility of the site of work was here matched by the invisibility of the marginalised, both relegated to infrastructural obscurity. Daily life’s representability was again scathingly parodied, the quotidian again displayed in abstentia. Such mistrust of images has become a staple of modern life, although photography – not painting – has been the primary recipient of this ritual derision for the past half-century. Stoic deconstructive critique, and hedonistic celebrations of nihilism often result in identical outcomes; it is just the captions that change. One is prompted to wonder how many times we can restage this anxious war on images to satisfactory effect?

David Robbins warned us about playing these games of total opposition for too long. Characterising the Cold War as, “the war between Fun and No-Fun,” and going on to surmise, “Eventually the American-led forces of Fun won, of course ... Had its contribution only been limited to the recognition that, at certain moments, people want nothing more than to Do The Monkey – moreover, that they have the right to Do The Monkey, and should have the right to do it – by itself it would have been something ... [but] can a culture keep a moment, even one derived from authentic inspiration and need, going that long? To respond in the affirmative is to suppose that a culture can keep Doing The Monkey *indefinitely*, and that there’s no point beyond which the Monkey-Doing culture will suffer damage or hurt itself..”<sup>16</sup> Robbins ends this essay, “The Compass is the Map” with a claim for entertainment as the last possibility for artistic efficacy.

In the late 1980s and early 90s, many artists were going corporate, sweating out the entrenched polarisation that fuelled the critical debates of the preceding decades. The paragon of 1960s artistic radicalism, the art worker, received a promotion to bourgeois entrepreneur. Warholian dandy-nihilism is now less provocation and parody – becoming earnest was the trump card to an earlier

generation's irony – and more so a viable business plan. At its worst this is cynical realism; at its best it is a reflexive understanding that the traffic of a work of art, its role in the market, is a key element of its meaning. Recently one contemporary artist said in a lecture that the most important artistic precedent in recent times was American Apparel – asserting that it is effective as art because it sustains itself outside of art, a complete reversal of the bourgeois readymade. But this example forces the question of whether any art can exist outside the frame of exhibition by simply stepping to the side – by resigning the title 'art'; and even if it operates outside the literal context of a book, museum or gallery space, can it exist without an implied 'exhibitionality'? Or in Duchamp's words, "Can [an artist] make works that are not 'works' of art?"<sup>18</sup> Still, with the erosion of the mythology of a white cube, or the printed page as a pure site of experiential exchange, the backstage machinations of the marketplace and its relation to the network of exhibition spaces remain impolitic topics of discussion. This despite the fact that the proposition of art as a vehicle of reflexive critique no longer seems quite so radical.

While art has proven hesitant to veer into pure didacticism, science fiction displays little reticence. In the 1968 episode of Star Trek, "Spectre of the Gun", Captain Kirk and crew set out under strict orders to contact an advanced yet unknown race called the Melkotians. Warned off by an automated buoy, they proceed to the surface of the planet, since their mission of peace came with the stipulation from their superiors that this contact must be made "at any cost" (peace at any cost being an American hallmark). On the planet the crew are transported into a schematic version of the American Old West, specifically the very moment of the shoot-out at the O.K. Corral, finding they occupy the role of the losers of this fight. Although the scene is notably fictitious, even to the crew, death is not. As Dr McCoy observes, "In the midst of what seems so unreal, a harsh reality. This is not a dream."

No matter what claims they make to the inhabitants of this virtual world, no one believes they are who they say they are, instead referring to them by the names of the men that the Earp brothers and Doc Holliday had vanquished on that day. Instead of being seen as purveyors of peace, they are seen as familiar enemies who refuse to leave despite the townspeople's warnings. The world was wrested from Kirk's mind, released when the aliens scanned his brain, and Kirk goes on to explain that the history into which they had been thrust was a character-defining moment in his ancestral line. That the Old West town is partial (missing walls, facades, and other architectonic necessities) is explained within the narrative as being the result of missing information in Kirk's knowledge of the site and his own history, yet the true reason for the town's appearance was the show's budgetary restrictions, which forced the producers to recycle parts of Old West sets on Paramount's studio back lot. The scene of the crew's confrontation with its own historical mythology (they were, after all, space cowboys, colonising "the final frontier") occurs in remnants of past Hollywood narratives, a bricolage of the ruins of past fantasies, past scenes, past viewpoints.

As the crew waits for the impending showdown, it is reasoned that the only way to transcend this prison is to reject the fiction altogether. As Spock goes on to warn, "I know the bullets are unreal, therefore they cannot kill me. The slightest doubt, and the bullets will kill you..." continuing, "The bullets are unreal, without body, they are illusions only, shadows without substance. They will not pass through your body for they do not exist. Unreal, appearances only, they are shadows, illusions, nothing but ghosts of reality. They are lies, falsehoods, spectres, without body. They are to be ignored." But realising this is not enough, for they cannot remove the kernel of doubt about the reality of what they see, and this doubt, or more exactly, this belief in the facticity of images is exactly what will kill them. Only after a mindmeld with Spock is



the crew immune to the weapons used against them, the “false consciousness” of the world of images transcended, they are then allowed audience with the timid yet advanced aliens, an audience we never see in the episode, for we are still in the world of sets and allegories, just as the crew was when they landed on the planet, capable perhaps of understanding fictions, but not able to ignore them. An alien world that is beyond images is also beyond representation, a zero point that the crew of the Enterprise proved itself worthy of, but that we have yet to earn.

But what of Malevich’s zero point, and its proposed transcendence? With the climate in post-revolutionary Russia progressing into Stalinism, the proposition of materialist abstraction had become a symbol of bourgeois elitism. Malevich returned to his pre-Suprematist foundations, producing canvases that aped those of his antecedents, first the Cubo-Futurists, and at its most extreme, the Impressionists. Stranger still, Malevich backdated these works, so that his Suprematist works remained the forgone conclusion of these styles, turning his own progression into an ellipse, doubling back on itself. Since he held to the conviction that he had reached the endpoint of painting, the height of purism in form, there was nowhere to go but backward. He was trapped in his own Wild West origin story of false starts and primordial violence.

The endless circulation of purisms in a culture of copies always seems to lead to the same place, back into the blank, which leaves the sites of production camouflaged in plain view, like Paul Bilhaud’s pre-emptive joke on monochrome painting’s radicality. In the debris of such battles, one is prompted to ask where does the ground of the real that these struggles are supposedly in the service of actually lie? In the wake of these double negations individual producers are relegated to one more modular element, the social field appearing as a static constellation of interchangeable parts. The citizen subject realised as a relational component, a unit of measure, an abstraction. But what of the visceral residues of work?

Where labour's vulgar bodily exertions are required, it exists out of view, in off-hours, backrooms, cellars, and distant factories, negotiated in private communications and invisible transports, sanitised by aggregation, illegible in seductive surfaces.

As viewers, our role is to dissolve into these frames, into an aggregated mass: out of time, out of space, and into an abstract gleaming world. Yet, seeing ourselves as part of the mass, our individuality in a perpetual vacillation between disappearance and reappearance, does not have to be debilitating. Rather, it can be a source of strength. Autonomy has historically emerged from marginal zones; pirates and radicals hide like rats in the walls, housewives stage mini-revolutions in their kitchens, office workers in their cubicles. An understanding of this can make it clear that production is a common fact, a daily ritual of compromise enacted with various levels of awareness, but present nonetheless as a lingering force. We can be both inside and outside of the picture, one of its parts and one of its producers; there need not be a stratified hierarchy in our relationship to aesthetics. The embedded compromises and negotiations present in any production and their subsequent lack of authorial solidity need not be seen as dirty secrets. This would not be an absolutist proclamation of the corruption of authorship, but rather, an assertion that this authorial position is a communal one of transparency and subterfuge at once. In this realisation, there is a middle ground of negotiation. All production – even “authorship” – is comprised of myriad transit points and competing forces which deceptively assume the appearance of solidity.

The world we see from transitional spaces – the world outside the window; the world from the perspective of escalators, people movers, monorails, and shopping centres – has become an intellectual bogeyman, a storage container for all our alienations. These infrastructural interstitial zones stand as compromised, indeterminate way stations between chimerical destinations. As an open field they occupy the space of bare fact, which we should

approach with suspicion, but they are also undecoded, unprocessed, and this has potential. Perhaps it is our presumption that all things, in order to exist, must have a determinable authorship and a plausible origin story is what renders these plays of compromise inscrutable.

Railing against architecture has become a noble leftist cause. Perhaps this is because architecture's seeming solidity offers the hope for a stable and dominant ideological power to fight, a metaphor for the patriarchal institution, social and otherwise, a wall to bloody one's knuckles against. As Bataille wrote, “The storming of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of affairs: it is hard to explain this mass movement other than through the people's animosity ... against the monuments that are its real masters.”<sup>17</sup> From a distant vantage point, all action is symbolic, but models such as the Crystal Palace are unstable; they float, they are mass-cultural collusions. Seemingly monolithic expressions of power are a similar accumulation of compromise and negotiation, containing gaps where any visitor may assert their own agenda. We too are collaborators, even if we choose to relinquish our place in the credits. These momentary openings, the pockets between, their ruins, their transitory spaces, their ignored seams and forgotten vistas promise a site from which the either/or of utopian and apocalyptic thinking – or the political/formalist opposition – can be dismantled, and production can be both symbolic and literal at once.

<sup>1</sup> The title, “Absolu avec Vache” is derived from the following passage written by Arthur Danto, in “Paint it Black” in *The Nation*, August 18, 2005. As Danto writes, “Hegel likened the Absolute in Schelling to a dark night in which all cows are black, so a clever student in Jena might have had the bright idea of painting an all-black picture titled *Absolute With Cows* – witty or profound depending upon

one's metaphysics.”

<sup>2</sup> This essay is the fourth iteration of a text published in revised and varied forms beginning with a publication for the exhibition “Bunch Alliance and Dissolve” (2006) organised by Public Holiday projects, titled “A white cow in a snow storm”, and later re-edited, and rewritten under the title “Glass Frames” for Dot Dot Dot, “Fenestration” for the Institute im

Glas Pavillion.

<sup>3</sup> Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (trans. Gregory Elliot), New York and London: Verso, 2006. 466

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Erfahrung und Armut", in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972. 254, as translated in Detlef Mertins, "The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory: Walter Benjamin and the Utopia of Glass", *Assemblage*, No 29 (Apr. 1996). 18

<sup>5</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces", *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1985. 151–50

<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century: Exposé of 1939", *The Arcades Project* (ed. Roy Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin), Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999. 9



<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Societies of Control", *October*, vol. 52, Winter 1992. 4

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Beaver, *The Crystal Palace, 1851–1936: A Portrait of Victorian Enterprise*, London: Hugh Evelyn, 1970. 34

<sup>9</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, New York and London: Penguin Classics, 1972, Jesse Coulson, trans. 35

<sup>10</sup> "...the conviction has grown upon us, that it is not architecture; it is engineering — of the highest merit and excellence — but not architecture." From

"The Design of the Crystal Palace", *Ecclesiologist* 41 (1851). 269, as cited in Louise Wyman, "Crystal Palace" in Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas, Sze Tsung Leong, eds. *Project on the City 2: Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, Cologne: Taschen, 2001. 236

<sup>11</sup> Cited in John McCean, *Crystal Palace: Joseph Paxton and Charles Fox*, London: Phaidon Press 1994. 4

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 32

<sup>13</sup> Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade* (trans. Dana Polan and Th. de Duve), Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991. 115

<sup>14</sup> Phillip Dennis Cate, "The Spirit of Montmartre" in Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw eds. *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875–1905*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 1

<sup>15</sup> David Robbins, "The Compass is the Map (2005)", in *David Robbins, The Velvet Grind: Selected Essays, Interviews, Satires (1983–2005)*, Zurich, Dijon: JRP/Ringier, Les Presses du réel, Lionel Bovier and Fabrice Stroun eds. 270–272

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Hirschhorn offered an answer to this question in *Somebody Cares About My Work* (1992): placing a series of collages on the street outside his studio, Hirschhorn photographed garbage men hauling off his works. In relinquishing the frame of exhibition, the works he deposited met the same end as any other object freed from use: the dump.

<sup>17</sup> George Bataille quoted in: Dennis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992). 15

THE FIRST POEM FROM  
*THE HANDBOOK FOR CITY-DWELLERS*

PART FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT THE STATION  
ENTER THE CITY IN THE MORNING WITH YOUR  
COAT BUTTONED UP  
LOOK FOR A ROOM, AND WHEN YOUR FRIEND KNOCKS:  
DO NOT, OH DO NOT, OPEN THE DOOR  
RATHER  
ERASE YOUR TRACES!

IF YOU MEET YOUR PARENTS IN HAMBURG OR ELSEWHERE  
PASS THEM LIKE STRANGERS, TURN THE CORNER, DON'T  
RECOGNISE THEM  
PULL THE HAT THEY GAVE YOU OVER YOUR FACE, AND  
DO NOT, OH DO NOT, SHOW YOUR FACE  
RATHER  
ERASE YOUR TRACES!

EAT THE MEAT THAT'S THERE. DON'T STINT YOURSELF.  
GO INTO ANY HOUSE WHEN IT RAINS AND SIT ON ANY  
CHAIR THAT IS IN IT  
BUT DON'T SIT LONG. AND DON'T FORGET YOUR HAT.  
I TELL YOU,  
ERASE YOUR TRACES!

WHATEVER YOU SAY, DON'T SAY IT TWICE  
IF YOU FIND YOUR IDEAS IN ANYONE ELSE, DISOWN THEM.  
THE MAN WHO HASN'T SIGNED ANYTHING, WHO HAS LEFT  
NO PICTURE  
WHO WAS NOT THERE, WHO SAID NOTHING:  
HOW CAN THEY CATCH HIM?  
ERASE YOUR TRACES!

SEE WHEN YOU COME TO THINK OF DYING  
THAT NO GRAVE STANDS AND BETRAYS WHERE YOU LIE  
WITH A CLEAR INSCRIPTION TO DENOUNCE YOU  
AND THE YEAR OF YOUR DEATH TO GIVE YOU AWAY.  
ONCE AGAIN:  
ERASE YOUR TRACES!

(THIS IS WHAT I WAS TAUGHT)

—BERTOLT BRECHT (1930)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With this, our fifth publication, we celebrate a number of momentous events. We have now been open one year, exhibiting to the public our Collection of works by contemporary and emerging artists. In one year, almost 10,000 visitors have discovered 176. Now we stride out to continue. *Material Presence*, our second Collection exhibition at 176, has been put together by Elizabeth Neilson, our Curator and Head of Collection, and our Exhibitions Curator, Ellen Mara De Wachter. Their choice, to activate the spaces with a few carefully selected installations, offers another extraordinary journey into our ever-growing and evolving Collection. All of the works have been carefully installed in conversation with the artists. And in this exhibition, Graham Hudson makes his largest and most ambitious sculpture to date in the main hall of 176.

Each of the works in *Material Presence* offers infinite possibilities, and in some way lends definition to the indefinable. These works allow subjectivity to reign true; for this reason we asked the artists to think of something they would like to put into a publication. Their responses were so exciting and varied that a book soon became a box, and so this fifth book/box continues our innovative series of publications. This time, the design collective Europa was invited to work with us and the artists to produce this “exhibition in a box”. Ellen’s essay, as insightful as the works it discusses, is an alluring pull at the edges of the works, while Elizabeth’s story weaves a fiction about experiencing these works

with facts about their construction. Artist and writer Walead Beshty was invited to contribute a text that imparts multiple layers of meaning to the publication and exhibition. Thank you all for pushing this publication and the exhibition design to another level.

The contents are intended to be activated and removed from the confines of this box and its *Material Presence* ... blow up Graham's balloon sculpture, install it in your home, release it in the park; pin up Myriam or James' posters; use Alexej's cloth to clean your world and make it something different; or simply fall into the spaces that are conjured by the artists.

I want to thank the artists for their involvement in the Collection, exhibition and this publication: thank you to Laura Buckley, Myriam Holme, Graham Hudson, James Ireland, Alexej Meschtschanow, Katja Strunz and Mark Titchner; and also to their galleries for being so supportive of the exhibition, Iris Kadel at Galerie Iris Kadel, Beth and Ed Greenacre at Rokeby, Nicholas Baker and Zoe Foster at fa projects, Sebastian Klemm at KLEMM's, Almine Rech and Renaud Pillon at Almine Rech, and Rachel Williams and Kate Fisher at Vilma Gold. I would also like to thank and commend the technical crew, led by Matt Williams, for having built and installed for the fourth time in the fantastic but tricky spaces at 176. Thank you also to Maitreyi Maheshwari who, as always, has put together an exciting and innovative programme of events for visitors to 176. From talks to ghost hunting, there is something for everyone to be involved with and experience, in ways that go beyond the works in the exhibition. As always, there is one final individual who makes all of this possible, my husband Poju, whose never-ending enthusiasm and excitement keep us all going.

— Anita Zabłudowicz, September 2008

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Tom Reich

176 Advisory Board:  
Brian Boylan  
Thomas Dane  
James Lingwood

In 2008/9  
they are joined by:  
Matt Stokes,  
176 artist-in-residence  
Anna-Catharina Gebbers,  
176 curator-in-residence

**MATERIAL PRESENCE**

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Artists in the exhibition: Laura Buckley, Myriam Holme, Graham Hudson, James Ireland, Alexej Meschtschanow, Katja Strunz and Mark Titchner.

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Interaction Curator:  
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Collection Manager:  
Ginie Morysse

Installation Co-ordinator:  
Matt Williams

Assistant Collection Manager:  
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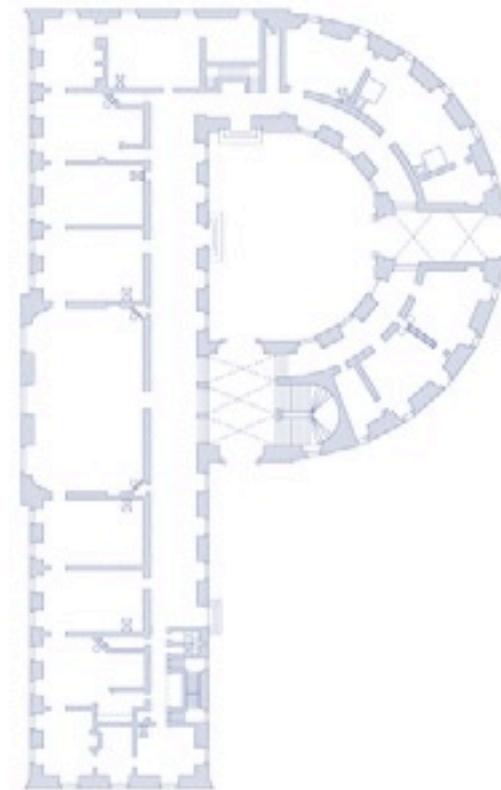
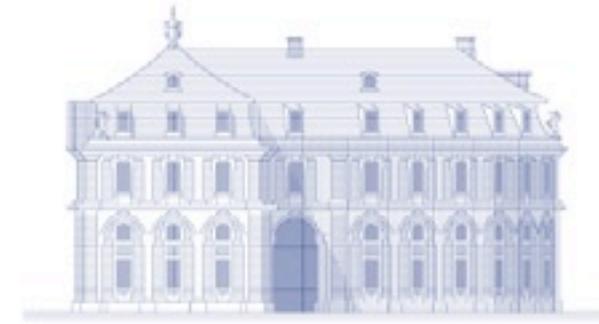
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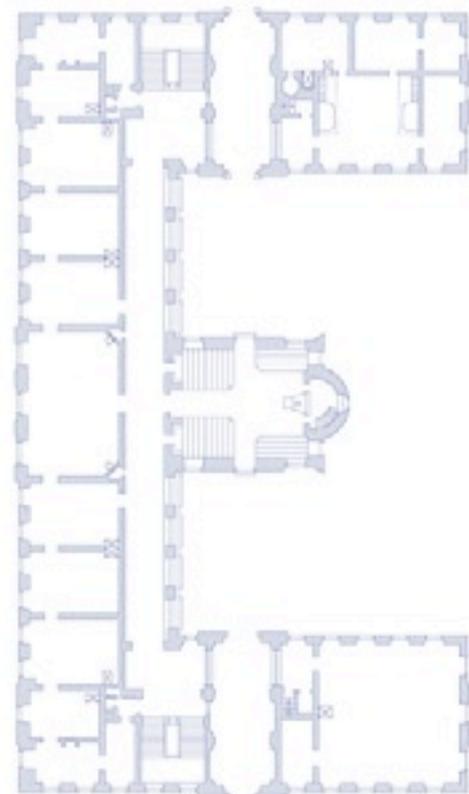
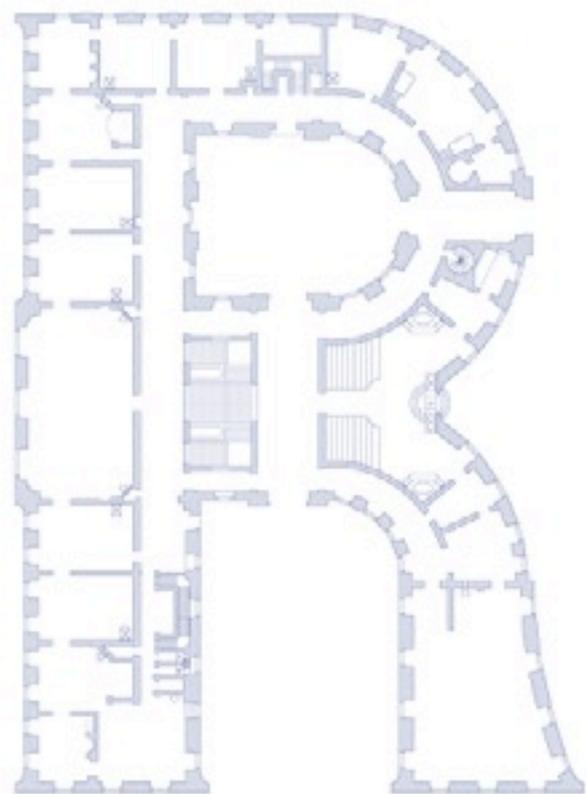
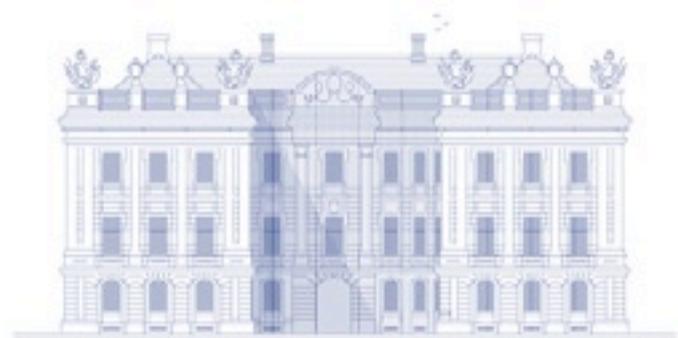
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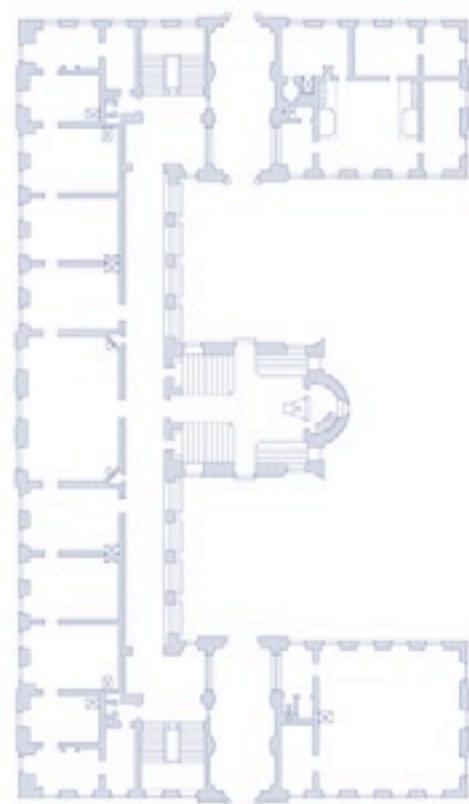
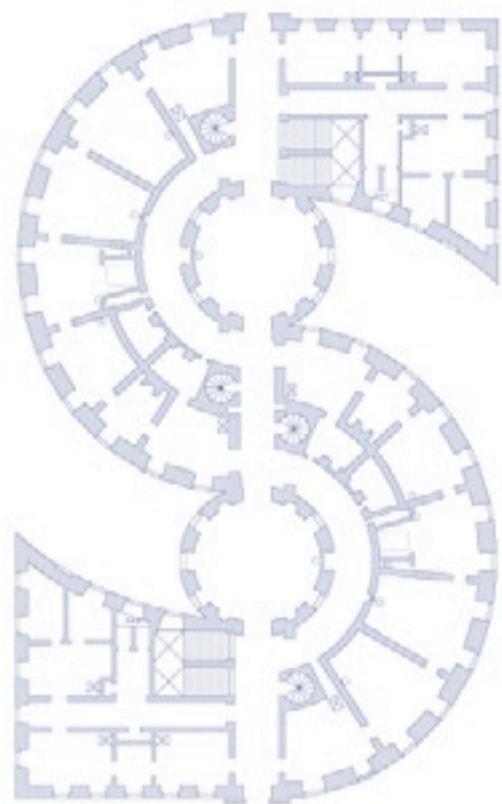
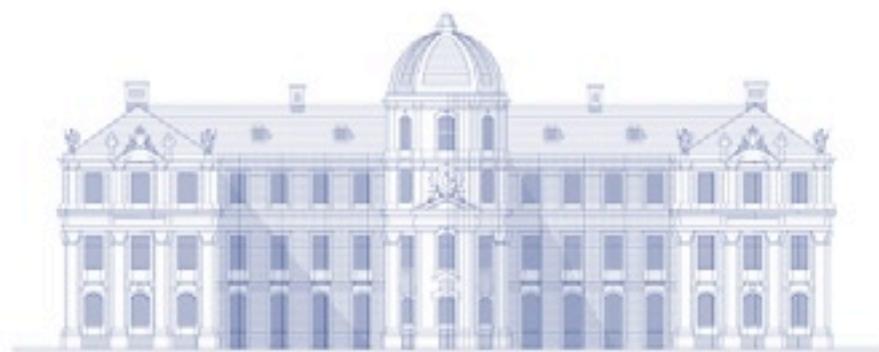
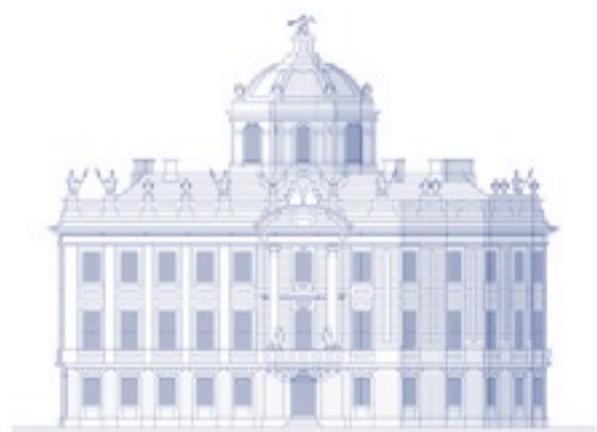
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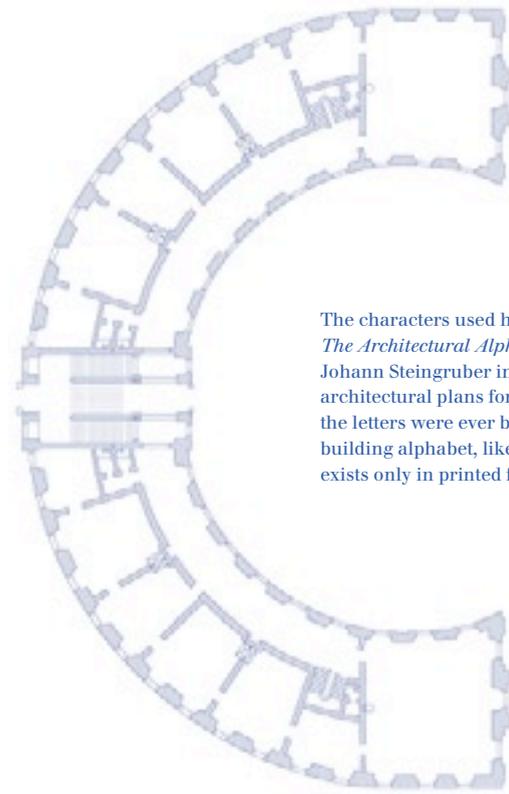
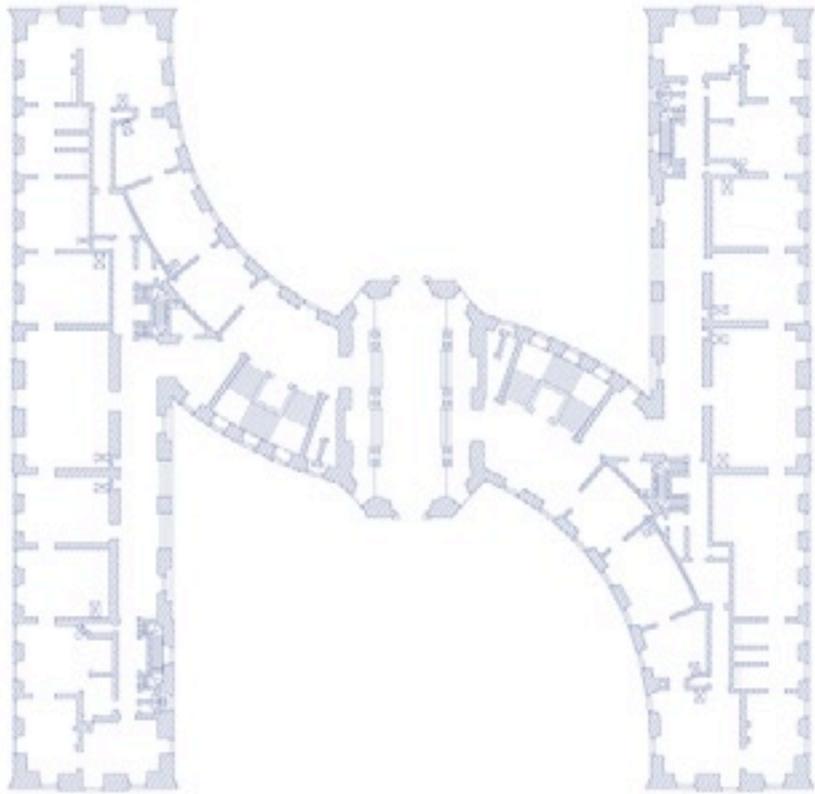
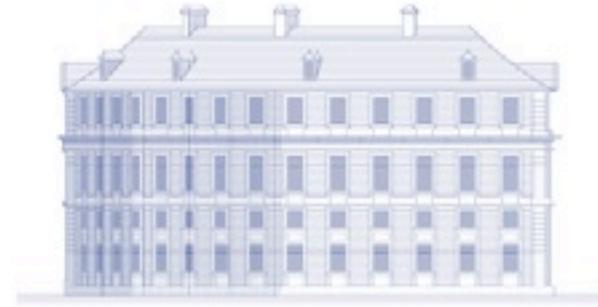
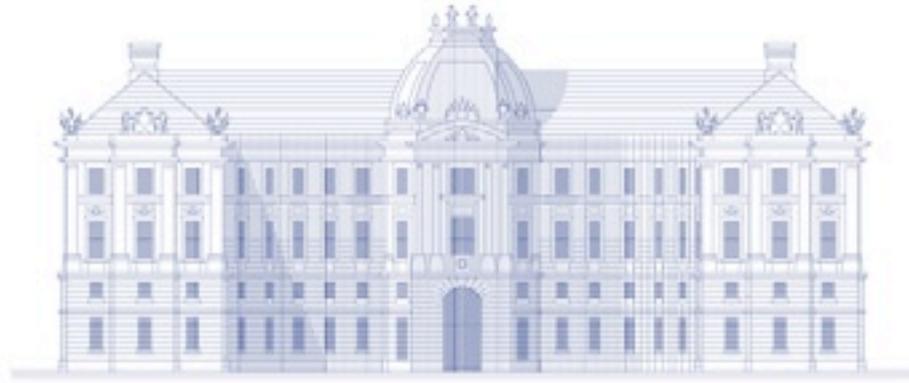


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The characters used here are derived from *The Architectural Alphabet*, designed by Johann Steingruber in 1773. The letters are architectural plans for palaces. None of the letters were ever built; Steingruber's building alphabet, like most alphabets, exists only in printed form.

