

In May 1999 Renate Buser invited fifty people to a half-hour artistic, performative experiment entitled *Rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu excepté peut-être une constellation.*"

The event took place in the *Kaskadenkondensator* in Basel, an exhibition space in a former beer brewery, whose 1995 renovation as a cultural center included the new construction of a four-story, free-standing apartment house. The side of the apartment house facing the *Kaskadenkondensator* is a full-height, glass curtain wall.

Renate Buser used this special situation of transparency to set up the context for her event. The participants entered the empty exhibition space of the *Kaskadenkondensator* in the dark, eventually discovering that videos of Absalon, *Proposition d'habitation* (1991) and *Solutions* (1992) could be seen on the window of an opposite apartment. (The source was a beamer in the apartment which projected an image on a screen at the window.) The videos showed a man in a sterile, white stage space ("White Cube") doing everyday, unspectacular activities such as sitting, eating or undressing and getting into a bathtub. The corresponding sounds were audible in the exhibition space. Implicitly, at the same time the spectators saw in other adjacent apartments the ordinary Sunday evening routines of the inhabitants.

Martina Siegwolf and Renate Buser had the following conversation about the experiment.

M.S.: The title of your experiment *Rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu excepté peut-être une constellation* is a quotation from Stéphane Mallarmé. What interests you about the theme alluded to in this title?

R.B.: It has to do with the coming together of circumstances which are not foreseeable and therefore are also not completely calculable. At a particular time of day I invited guests into a dark, empty exhibition space and directed their view onto the opposite facade. The selected videos of Absalon as well as their location in an apartment are the givens; however, what actually happens in the other apartments is not. That is, a component of the experiment is a kind of construction, or, in other words, a staged set-up. In contrast, there is the incalculable and fleetingness of that which is enacted on this Sunday evening in the apartments. The connection the public then makes cannot be pre-determined. The video is one component, the other is the views into the apartments. As a constellation, these come together in a complete "image." The staged actions in the video collide with the events of the everyday life in the apartments. The question, which thereby concerns me, is: What happens when I bring these two components together?

M.S.: Why exactly did you choose these videos?

R.B.: Architecture is a theme with which I have been concerned and fascinated since 1996.

Architecture unites my notion of the built and the constructed with the living and the incalculable. A building provides its inhabitants with certain given conditions, but how the occupants then settle in, live, and move within this framework is up to them. The figure in Absalon's video shows reduced, completion of activities without any individuality. In showing the video in the context of a real apartment, I transposed it. As the scale of the figure in the video conforms with those of the actual apartment inhabitants, I interpret the art work of Absalon further. With my presentation of the video I direct the view of the public unavoidably towards the neighboring apartments. I stage an opposition of real and fictional space.

M.S.: The experiment in the *Kaskadenkondensator* shows your concern with both concrete as well as abstract space. In terms of our everyday language we use the word "space" almost excessively in the most various kinds of contexts. Could you explain more specifically your own understanding of space, perhaps in relation to some other projects of yours ?

R.B.: In the *Projektraum* of the *Kunsthalle Bern* I wallpapered the exhibition space with different views of facades of high-rise buildings whereby the buildings -- disengaged from the context of their architectonics and contents -- appeared to float on the wall. The volumes were transformed in this way into a multi-perspectival rendering in two-dimensions. This shattering created a new fictional space. In my experiment in the *Kaskadenkondensator* I used space differently. By putting the "White Cube" like space of the video of Absalon in a real apartment, the two image spaces -- architectural space and the pictorial space of video -- were brought together. An important aspect in both these works was that the public can perceive different spaces and perspectives at the same time.

M.S.: The windows are the eyes of a building. They give us views into the concealed, the private. At the same time they are the threshold between inner and outer. So considered, one can compare a window with the lens of a camera.

R.B.: Yes. Instead of a camera I use a space in which the people find themselves together. Instead of a lens I use a window and instead of a shutter release I determine the length of the performance. That is another form of taking a picture. Here I need neither camera nor film, but the image is created on a conceptual level. Nevertheless, it is a very photographic work, as it thematizes viewing.

M.S.: The concept of your art work is actually “to point to something.” It is a form of collective voyeurism, even staged voyeurism.

R.B.: I think both terms are right -- one observes, unmindful of the observed object; at the same time, however, one is observed by the other guests. The public takes part, yet also stands outside of what happens, which is a central property of voyeurism. This leads to an experience of limits, to a threshold of social taboos.

M.S.: The camera is increasingly the place of voyeurism. It provides a moment in which one releases [the shutter] and in which one also clearly says, this is a moment that I *capture*. Here you have translated your photographic way of working into a spatial situation. Can you briefly describe what interests you about this?

R.B.: As you have already said, photography concerns a frozen moment which is taken out of the flow of time through the medium of the camera. That which is stolen through photography is the past. Through my experiment I created a voyeuristic situation which is enacted in a real time.

Martina Siegwolf, art historian, teaches at the Basel *Schule für Gestaltung*, is co-organizer of the *Kaskadenkondensator* and works in the *Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel*.

Eye-witness reports: Monika Diller, Susi Juvan, Lilian Pfaff, Claudio Moser, Uri Urech, Joseph Egan, Dominique Salathé, Renate Buser.

Image: Renate Buser. “Nr. 16.2” and “Nr. 12.1”. Exhibited in *Allee der Kosmonauten*, Kunstraum Aarau (Switzerland) 1999.

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