

Hinrich Sachs

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An Afterword
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Edited by Hinrich Sachs and Eva Schmidt
With an essay by John C. Welchman

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Rémy Zaugg

The Art Museum of My Dreams
or A Place for the Work and
the Human Being

Sternberg Press

DREAMING TO POINT OUT A SITUATION. AN AFTERWORD

Hinrich Sachs

On an autumn day, within the context of preparing for an exhibition project, I was standing in an empty factory building in Geneva. The changes associated with the Berlin Wall were still a thing of the future. As I wandered among the regularly spaced columns on the vacant factory floor, I could not help but think of a number of criteria for exhibition spaces presented as necessities: solid walls, the white of those walls, entrances, series of adjoining rooms, and their influence on the act of exhibiting. At that moment it became clear that my own contextual perspective was very much bound up with a booklet Rémy Zaugg had published two years previously.

In the recurring debate over whether architecture is the artist's ally or his adversary, or whether, in view of the givens, one would simply cold-shoulder it, I have often brought up the incisiveness of the text by Zaugg. Because that text is an artistic work which intervenes in precisely the debates that characterize the history of the development of artistic practices in and with architectural space to the present day.

Not that it is possible to put the text, which is hardly sixty pages long, quickly into a nutshell. Details of it can be conveyed or, under certain circumstances, even be understood as practical instructions. Yet it is the narrative of the emergence of an ideal building, the flow and order of the chapters, interspersed with simple graphic signs—which, in the course of the text, transform into floor plans—as well as the unexcited typographic design and the striking title which form the constitutive gestalt of this work. It should also be mentioned that, until now, the text has existed “only” in German and French and thus withheld from the attention of the English-speaking art world. It is amazing, and slightly alarming, that in the more than twenty-five years since its publication, the impact of this key work by Zaugg has had to be judged by the yardstick of the missing English edition. Today *The Art Museum of My Dreams or A Place for the Work and the Human Being* has its place among various only partially interrelated threads of reception, acquaintance with which clarifies its significance.

In the 1990s the vision of exhibition and the exhibited formulated in Zaugg's work exerted a concrete influence on architectural thought and the conception of exhibition spaces. In friendly affinity to Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, Zaugg collaborated with them on various projects from 1989 onwards; it was with the exhibition space realized in Munich in 1992 for the Goetz Collection, and above all the alteration of the Bankside Power Station for the Tate Modern in London (1994–2000), that the Basel-based architectural firm set international standards in the conception and realization of museum architecture.¹ For both

¹ Joint projects by Herzog & de Meuron and Rémy Zaugg: Goetz Collection – competition 1989, realization 1991/92; Tate Modern – competition 1994/95, realization 1998–2000; Aargauer Kunsthau – competition 1996/97, realization 2001–03.

of these projects, Herzog & de Meuron made explicit reference to Zaugg's deliberations on lighting and room sequence. The art museum in Davos, Switzerland, designed by Gion Guyer (1989–92) also deserves mention here as an early example of the translation of a number of the deliberations formulated in Zaugg's work into practice.

Another crucial strand of the text devises a museological perspective that dissolves all art-historical chronologies when presenting artworks. The relationship of the Zauggesque proposal to the new museological approaches that entered the arena in conjunction with the 1990s boom in new museum building has hitherto gone unnoticed. If in the field of museological practices there were ultimately no more than a handful of instances of cooperation between Zaugg and curators,² from the present-day perspective we should ask ourselves how comparable concepts of the reassessment of museological orders by museum curators for their institutions have been formulated and implemented.

From a third perspective, attention may also be paid to the text's publication in 1987 as a work of visual art—and thus also to its narrative, its specific form and its postulation. Whereas the pragmatic and analytical aspects of the work can be read within the context of a linguistically informed concept art, a peculiar proximity to the literary form of the parable is also immanent in it.³ And indeed, this form, which brings fiction into play, conveys the key object of interest—the conditions of exhibiting in an art museum, likewise a major focus of critical attention among many conceptual artists of Zaugg's generation—into a different realm, the realm of an emphatic way of thinking.

Finally, the following remarks are guided by an aspect which can be considered the impulse for the initiative I have been pursuing steadily for several years to publish the first English edition of Zaugg's "bookwork". I would like to permit myself the question as to whether the precise place (within the genealogy of the White Cube) imagined in the work has current potential with regard to the reality of hybrid and unavoidably imperfect exhibition conditions, in particular its temporary routines owing to the dynamics of private collecting and biennialization. Does *The Art Museum of My Dreams* continue to generate meaning in the context of contemporary artistic practices, with their often complex productions?

At the end of 1986, Zaugg completed the text version for the public lecture he was to hold in German at his familiar Kunstmuseum Basel, a lecture manifesting his minutely developed deliberations on the properties of exhibition rooms in a form suitable for a listening audience.⁴ In the same period, he was also working intensively on his contribution to the "Skulptur Projekte" exhibition in Münster, and for that context envisioned a text as a work form for his reflections on the role of art in the public realm—an approach he discarded, however, in the course of the working process. Actually, the deliberations related to the urban

2 In Lucerne (1992), Hamburg (1993), Otterlo (1994) and Vienna (1994), Rémy Zaugg integrated works from the respective museum collections into his own exhibitions to test the dissolution of chronologies with the aid of dialogical presentation.

3 Pedagogical language and metaphorical figures are qualities of theological and certain historical text genres. In the twentieth century, for example, Franz Kafka, Ludwig Hohl and others wrote parables of indissoluble ambiguity. Bertolt Brecht his parable plays as a medium for reflection on the societal conditions.

4 Nikolaus Meier, at the time chairman of the society of friends of the Kunstmuseum Basel and organizer of the lecture (1986), and members of the audience at that event have confirmed that Zaugg gave his lecture—the first presentation of the text to a larger public—in German, and that the accompanying diagrams were shown in the form of slides. The lecture thus made use of the first German translation of the original French manuscript, which had been carried out for Zaugg by Ariane

context in Münster, like those on museum architecture, had originated within the larger context of the critical explorations with the perception of exhibited art and its exhibition conditions carried out by Zaugg over a period of many years.⁵ In this situation of international attention, the idea of turning the trenchant lecture into the textual form of an independent work was a logical one, and in the spring of 1987, Zaugg proposed it to Kasper König.⁶ “Right on time for the opening...” of “Skulptur Projekte” in Münster, *Das Kunstmuseum, das ich mir erträume, oder der Ort des Werkes und des Menschen* was available in German, as the publisher Walther König recalls.

Zaugg wrote his texts in French, weighing every word with regard to its connotations and accordingly overseeing every translation with the utmost precision. In 1998, in conjunction with the second German edition published by the Verlag für Moderne Kunst in Nuremberg, he decided to subject the translation of the text to thorough revision once again. Thus we also have a second version—the final one, so to speak—at our disposal. However, it was the edition he composed in his native language that served as the basis for our translation into English—*Le musée des Beaux-Arts auquel je rêve ou le lieu de l'oeuvre et de l'homme*, which was published by les presses du réel in Dijon in 1995 and which we compared with the two existing German versions.

In the English version, the text thus retains its stylistic rhythm, the dramaturgy which still bears a relation to spoken language, and its unquestionably apodictic emphases. In the translation process, a peculiar problem cropped up with a term of decisive importance for the text in general as well as the title in particular: the term “l’homme”, for which there is no exact equivalent in English. In our capacity as editors, we considered the suggestion made during the translation process to translate “l’homme” with a range of words such as “subject”, “human being”, “person” and, for the plural form, “people”, as well as to use the personal pronouns of both genders in keeping with present-day linguistic forms of gender-conscious address and designation. When we took into account the point in time in which the work was originally written, however, we decided in favour of intervening as little as possible in the style of the language.

If language has its firm place in the spectrum of the present-day concepts of artistic materials, the same did not apply for the generation before and around Zaugg, especially not in German-language art contexts where, if at all, only brief personal statements in the tone of poetic subjectivity were customary.⁷ Zaugg, a person schooled in French, once remarked that fundamental texts by artists—for example the regular epistolary reflections Gustave Courbet wrote to artists, literary figures, theorists and politicians or Andre Lhote’s theoretical treatises *Traité du paysage* (1939) and *Traité de la figure* (1950)—had been important for him. As a form of working parallel to painting, however, his writing presumably emerged from his

Müller and Markus Jakob. Ariane Müller remembers that the translation was intended for the dossier of an architectural plan drawn up by the Atelier 5 architecture firm in Bern in collaboration with Rémy Zaugg for the Thyssen private collection on the Lake of Lugano in Switzerland, and that, at the time, Zaugg had drawn up a compendium of a number of the French terms and how he wanted them translated into German. Zaugg points at this first publication context in a footnote to the main text (see p. 58).

⁵ See earlier writings in the annotated bibliography.

⁶ Walther König in an e-mail of 28 May 2013.

⁷ Zaugg’s deployment of the term “dreams” in *The Art Museum of My Dreams* can by all means be understood as indication of a language of aesthetic subjectivity: the narrative and iconography of the dream since European Romanticism, and Surrealism in particular, vouch for such a reading.

examination of the question of how painting, as well as the role of the artist, could be newly established. In view of this written reflection on principles—the underlying principles of painting, of architecture, of art's role in society—Zaugg can, to an extent, be seen in the role of a polymath. When he presented his book *Die List der Unschuld* (The Ruse of Innocence) as a work in 1982, at the documenta 7,⁸ it gained him admittance to the ranks of the first generation of concept artists.

Our edition of *The Art Museum of My Dreams* now offers a means of comparing the work and its language with conceptual (and other) works in English—the prevailing language in the art world—and of reading it accordingly. Eva Schmidt and I, the editors of this volume, are convinced that the text should no longer be published solitarily—as it was originally by the artist—since it has a historical dimension which deserves to be made visible. We accordingly invited the art historian John C. Welchman of Los Angeles to take the time for the first in-depth reading from the present-day Anglo-Saxon perspective. Applying issues from Zaugg's work to facets of Conceptual art and Institutional Critique, he points to the importance of rejecting metaphorical or metaphysical pretensions in the aftermath of, amongst others, Abstract Expressionism, and a subsequent focus on the commonplace. In fact, his essay elucidates an "order of language and proposition", within which Zaugg blends matter-of-factness, the vernacular, as well as an "enhanced uncertainty". However, even if Zaugg's projects share formal resemblances with its American counterparts, they somehow never align with them.

In the early 1990s, an installation plan of the Kunsthalle Bern dating from the year 1937 came to my attention.⁹ It contained precise handwritten indications of how the paintings were to be hung. In a letter written in the same year to a museum director in Paris, the artist implored that the motif-based sequence be observed for the hanging of the paintings, as well as the minimum "... space between the works".¹⁰ The author of both documents was Wassily Kandinsky. He had already published a text bearing the title "Die kahle Wand" (The bare wall) in which he cited a number of qualities by which a bare (i.e., "white") wall can be experienced and "...prepared for the experience of a painted work".¹¹ Kandinsky's text is a representative example of the intense attention paid to exhibition conditions by an artist belonging to the generation of the first half of the twentieth century. The step to the perception of and critical examination of architecture as an immanent element of the work was reserved for a later time. The fact that a number of the properties of walls also turn up in Zaugg's work with similar wording—albeit far more extensively—is hardly surprising.

8 For more details on *Die List der Unschuld* see the annotated bibliography, p.85. The two volume catalogue produced at the occasion of documenta 7, 1982, identifies the historical context of writing as an element of artistic praxis and on how it took poetic and autobiographic narratives as an orientation. In that catalogue, sixteen of altogether 176 artists published texts, six of them adopting a reflective and/or propositional approach. The majority of the latter were Anglophone artists, for example Donald Judd, Claes Oldenburg and Martha Rosler. Joseph Beuys also ranked among them.

9 Wassily Kandinsky, installation plan for his solo-show at Kunsthalle Bern, 1937, Collection Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Kandinsky Bequest. Reproduced, amongst others, in: *Kandinsky in Paris, 1934–1944* (New York, 1985), p.23.

10 Wassily Kandinsky, "L'espace libre entre les toiles devrait être au minimum..." comes with the hanging instructions at the end of the second page of a letter to André Dézarrois, director of the Musée du Jeu de Paume, 15 July 1937. Reproduced, amongst others, in: *Kandinsky in Paris, 1934–1944* (New York, 1985), p.99.

11 Wassily Kandinsky, "Die kahle Wand" (1929), in Max Bill (ed.), *Essays über Kunst und Künstler* (Stuttgart, 1955; 3rd edition: Bern, 1973), p.129.

In 1996—the Tate Modern structural alteration project had already gotten underway in London, Herzog & de Meuron were collaborating with Zaugg within the framework of the competition for the expansion of the Aargau Kunsthhaus in Aarau, Switzerland, and the reception of *Das Kunstmuseum, das ich mir erträume* had evoked a response in the German-speaking art context even in book titles¹²—Nicholas Serota, Tate director and *spiritus rector* of the Banksie project, published an essay discussing museological concepts in history and the then present: *Experience or Interpretation*.

In that essay, in addition to a casual rejection of chronologically or stylistically based museological arrangement, the author criticizes the late 1980s' presentation, a "now even dominant convention",¹³ citing, by way of illustration, an example at the New York Museum of Modern Art in which the works were dramatically lit by artificial light. Attention is also paid to the changing attitude of a number of artists towards the conditions for the production and presentation of their works to the museum public. The train of thought nevertheless ends as a plea for a thematic system taking the conventions of the pictorial genres as its orientation, in order to generate "overlapping and merging zones of influence",¹⁴ and the statement that "the best museums of the future will ... seek to promote different modes and levels of 'interpretation' by subtle juxtapositions of 'experience'".¹⁵ Among the examples cited is the Frankfurt Museum für Moderne Kunst which had been testing museological perspectives of changing work constellations since the early 1990s. The director of the MMK at the time was Jean-Christophe Ammann who, in the 1980s, when serving as the director of the Kunsthalle in Basel, had conducted productive discussions with Zaugg.¹⁶ It remains for future research, however, to figure out why the incisive vision set forth in *The Art Museum of My Dreams* did not appear in museological discourse.

Zaugg was well acquainted with the figure of the fiction of an art museum—one of Marcel Broodthaers's core artistic postulations—as is evidenced by his discussion of the latter's working manner in *Die List der Unschuld* (The Ruse of Innocence).¹⁷ On the other hand, owing to his lack of command of English, he was not familiar with (artists') texts in that language.¹⁸ The descriptions of spatial conditions in exhibition contexts in *Writings, 1973–1983, on Works 1969–1979* published by Michael Asher in collaboration with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in late 1983 will accordingly have borne no relation to Zaugg's writings in the period in which *Das Kunstmuseum, das ich mir erträume* was evolving. Be that as it may, the rejection of a former function of painting—to present itself to the beholder with techniques of visual seduction, the "ruse of representation"—that runs like a thread through Zaugg's work

12 E.g. in the thematic title of the magazine *Meta*, no. 1, *Die Kunst und ihr Ort* (Stuttgart, 1992); in the title of the book *Aus dem Musée éclaté an den Ort des Werkes, Kunsthalle Bern 1969–1993* by Hans-Rudolf Reust (Bern, 1993); or in the title of the lecture *Orte der Kunst – Museum*, Ulrich Loock, 2000.

13 Nicholas Serota, *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art* (London, 1996), p. 15 and p. 9.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

16 Rémy Zaugg, *Conversations avec Jean-Christophe Ammann: portrait* (Dijon, 1990); German edition: *Gespräche mit Jean-Christophe Ammann: Portrait* (Ostfildern, 1994).

17 Zaugg 1982 (see note 8), pp. 206–09.

18 However, Zaugg was familiar with artists' texts which had been published in French translations by les presses du réel, including works by Dan Graham, Vito Acconci, Richard Nonas, etc. as well as texts written in French by Daniel Buren, Claude Rutault, Paul Armand Gette and others.

possesses far greater affinity to the reflective modernism of those authors than the “anything goes” attitude of the artists and architects of the 1980s who thought of art history as a set of stylistic building blocks available for them to play with as they liked.¹⁹

Zaugg’s artistic approach manifests the transition from an artwork conceived as a finished and self-contained object—with an insistence on the corporeality and the materiality (i.e. the conditions) of the work and of the human being—to the propositional and societal impact of the artwork, which has to be conceived in dialectic communicative terms,²⁰ and forms far more than just linguistic material. I could hardly believe my eyes when, in Michael Asher’s exhibition *Kunsthalle Bern 17.10. – 29.11.1992*, in the empty wall niches of the radiators which had been moved from the basement to the ground floor I encountered a dirty brown: the wall colour dating from the period when Kandinsky hung his works in the same rooms? *The Art Museum of My Dreams*, for its part, continues to imagine artworks as artefacts, hardly as space-integrating, sculptural and installation-based work forms, and is not acquainted with performative practices. Cinematographically structured works and their darkened spaces²¹ are virtually rejected,²² and little attention is paid to the curator’s activities in the selection and arrangement of works.²³

In architectural praxis and the accompanying discourses on museum buildings, exhibition spaces and concepts since the 1990s, not only the abovementioned implementations—such as those by Herzog & de Meuron with their inclination to give preference to object-based artworks—made their influence felt, but also parallel tendencies which redefined the role of (exhibition) architecture not in terms of permanence and constancy, but via their temporary constructions. A good ten years ago, Ulrich Loock identified this type of museum architecture as “virtual architecture” in which, on a basic grid, moveable walls become projection surfaces on which works appear to float and become placeless.²⁴ But is that what the curatorial programme of the 2011 Istanbul Biennial was aiming for when it had the Saana architectural firm realize a spatial concept of “floating”, decentralized rooms in a scenographic manner that could almost have been based on a floor-plan diagram from *The Art Museum of My Dreams*?

Within the floundering contexts of place, site, managerial economies and politics, Zaugg’s insistence on appearance and encounter—i.e., on an emotionally active relationship to the artwork above and beyond a temporary staging, formulated in his language of the prospective imagination of this relationship to art—seems to bring into play a dimension which is a subject of keen attention today. Here I refer to the temporal horizon from within which

19 Among others Léon Krier, Aldo Rossi, James Stirling, etc. Both Rossi and Stirling also realized museum buildings: the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht, Holland, and the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Germany. In a lecture in 1997, Zaugg talked about the Stuttgart museum building and those of its inherent problems he considered prototypical. See annotated bibliography, p. 87.

20 Allan Kaprow, “Experimental Art”, 1966, reprinted in Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. by Jeff Kelley (Berkeley, 1993), p. 74.

21 See Chris Dercon, “Sonnenflügel – Mondtrakt”, in *Museum 2000 – Erlebnispark oder Bildungsstätte?* ed. by Uwe M. Schneede (Cologne, 2000), pp. 65 and 78.

22 Zaugg rejects spatial situations in the form of theatre stages, and accordingly also of cinemas, for the art museum context because they organize perception in a hierarchical manner: the work is brightly lit and the beholder is assigned a passive role in the dark; see pp. 47, 48 in this volume.

23 Zaugg’s strong curatorial dedication to the installation of the Alberto Giacometti exhibition at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1991) makes the absence of this aspect in *The Art Museum of My Dreams* recognizable as a rhetorical device: emphasis through omission.

artworks act and bear an impact. Allegorical figures and broad temporal horizons are at the core of some of the most productive artistic practices today²⁵... In the case of *The Art Museum of My Dreams* the precise form of the book as a work and the imaginary future it envisions join to create an artistic formulation which is at odds with practices of exhibition event staging and museological concepts of thematic mediation.

And if in the past four years the symposium “Why exhibit?” had to be organized in order to conduct a discussion on the dynamics and conditions of exhibition,²⁶ or exhibition projects—likewise formulated by artists—such as *New Dystopia*,²⁷ *Intolerance*,²⁸ or “Tell It To My Heart”²⁹ challenged the museological orders, let the English version of Zaugg’s work be assigned the role of mirroring the perception of society’s situation, of keeping the “work” of perception in motion: “...the perceptive relation between the subject and the object fluctuates boundlessly. The work of perception is essentially endless (...) and equally, the result of an act of perceiving is always provisional.”³⁰

24 See Ulrich Loock, “Orte der Kunst – Museum”, in *Kunst des Ausstellens: Beiträge – Statements – Diskussionen*, ed. by Hans Dieter Huber et al. (Ostfildern-Ruit, 2002), p. 101.

25 See, among others *The Weather, A Building* (Berlin, 2012), a work by the New Zealand artist Ruth Buchanan which can be considered a prominent example of the complexly formulated concurrence of narration, document, fiction, typographic design and materiality of the book. Also worthy of consideration in this context are those practices that productively link exhibitions and publications, for example those referred to in the following notes.

26 The international symposium “Why exhibit?” on artistic perspectives on exhibiting and the role played by the exhibition medium in the current societal settings was organized by myself in cooperation with Cecilia Widenheim, then director of Iaspis, Stockholm, in November 2009. Anselm Franke, who was a guest speaker at that event, recently once again made reference to the so-called biennialization and artwork production forms specific to biennials. See the video interview on the *The Whole Earth: California and the Disappearance of the Outside*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2013.

27 *New Dystopia* (2011) is the title of a story published as a paperback as well as the title of an exhibition curated by the writer Mark von Schlegell in collaboration with the curator Alexis Vaillant at CAPC Bordeaux.

28 *Intolerance* (2010) is a work by the artist Willem de Rooij which, installed as an exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, places a group of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings of birds on a level with Hawaiian feather objects of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, among other things, complexly transforms museological orders. The work also encompasses a three-part publication.

29 “Tell It To My Heart” (2012) was an exhibition of works from the collection of the artist Julie Ault which was first shown at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel. In the current context of powerful presentations of public and private collections, this exhibition manifests the possibility of a different, emotional relationship between the artwork, and the acts of collecting and exhibiting. Here again, a book published as an exhibition catalogue plays an important role; this particular book exposes and represents an absence: that of the privacy in the original placement of the collected works.

30 “...la relation perceptive entre le sujet et l’objet fluctue indéfiniment. Le travail de la perception n’a, par essence, pas de fin (...) de même, le résultat de l’acte perceptif est toujours provisoire.” Rémy Zaugg, “Fragments. Du lieu de l’oeuvre et de l’homme”, in Bernard Fibicher (ed.), *L’art exposé* (Sion, 1995), p. 103.