

# MY BODY: THE HEART OF ARCHITECTURE

## Loose thoughts about utopian buildings and artistic rooms by artists<sup>1</sup>

by Danièle Perrier

Translation rev. ed.: Julia-Constance Dissel

In his work about architecture, the architect Vitruvius claims that the measurements of man are arranged by nature in such a way that four fingers are a handbreadth, four handbreadth a foot, six handbreadth an ell, four ells the size of a human being and a step and twenty-four handbreadth the size of a human being. And his buildings incorporate these measurements... (extract from Leonardo's comment on Vitruv).

The relations between body and house are so manifold that it seems hardly possible to reduce them to a common denominator. The house can be understood as architectonic structure with a certain volume creating living space in a particular place. From this viewpoint, the house is a measurable unit whose erection is subject to certain criteria. In this connection, Leonardo's scheme of proportions of the human figure illustrating Vitruv's theory of proportions on architecture seems apparent. The drawing above shows how the human body, depending on its posture, can be drawn into a square or a circle or how the relation of these two geometric figures to each other depends on the respective posture of the human body. If the human being stands on the floor with closed legs and stretches the

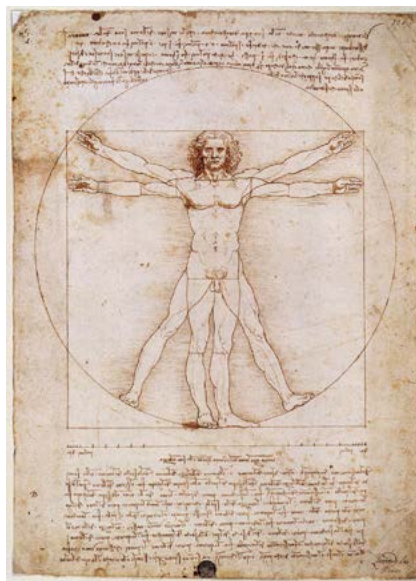


Fig.1: Leonardo da Vinci, Proportion Pattern, Venedig Accademia

arms, he draws himself in a square, if he spreads his legs and raises his arms, he forms a circle whose basis touches the basis of the square.

For the Renaissance man striving for harmony, architecture is a mathematical science. Each Part of a building can be classified in a unified system of mathematical relations whose proportions reflect those of the human body. Literally, the human body is the measure of all things, because its proportions reflect the perfection of the world order determined by a superior force and thus become the arranging principle of all things.

When Le Corbusier develops his *Modulor* the human measurement determines its dimensions as well. As the name indicates, the *Modulor* is a standardized cell unit allowing a variable composition as further development of its *Dom-Ino*<sup>1</sup>. While the *Dom-Ino* was conceived as transportable house and should thus ensure its owner the opportunity of maximum flexibility, the *Modulor* is a building unit from which differently shaped living units can be built which, in turn, can be integrated in big building units like the *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseilles. Le Corbusier thereby dares to combine standardization and individuality. In our context, another factor of his urban development visions seems to be of importance. In housing estates like the *Unité d'Habitation* not only living units of different size but also shops, hairdressers, restaurants and even hotels are integrated. Thus, the estate is a town within the town and ensures complete autonomy. In this respect the *Unité d'Habitation* can be compared with the Karl-Marx Hof

<sup>1</sup> The name *Dom-Ino* is a pun consisting of the Latin word for house *domus* for house and of *Domino*, a party game. *Dom-Ino* was invented in 1914, it is composed of a standardized house skeleton of iron girders, ceilings and floors which can be arranged next to each other or on top of each other in any combination and which are only on site provided with facades.



Fig. 2.: Swiss Commemorative Coin showing the *Modulor* by Le Corbusier

erected by Karl Ehn in Vienna between 1926 and 1930. This almost one kilometer long building consists of 1382 apartments and it provides lots of community facilities – an estate designed as first town within a town. Both of them in their own way - Ehn and Le Corbusier - modify styles. Ehn puts into practice Adolf Loos' postulate of the absence of ornamentation within his project which should be characteristic for the facades of the community buildings in Vienna until the 70ies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the war Le Corbusier as well is seeking a solution to give people comfort as quickly as possible.

With Le Corbusier as well as with Leonardo, architecture refers to the proportions of the human figure. However, both the idea of architecture and the idea of the human being have changed: architecture consists of pre-fabricated, standardized parts allowing an individual arrangement only in the composition of the modules and in the design of the details. The flexible and mobile module suggests independence which is, however, restricted by the fitting together of the individually cut living units to big estates and by the pre-determined use of the space conditioning the living space of the

occupants in a certain way.

The changes in architectonic conditions also correspond to a serious change in the comprehension of the image of man. According to Le Corbusier's conception of the world, the human being is a social creature bound to harmonize his individuality with a social conduct. Also the relation to nature has changed: the housing estates take into account demographic expansion and try to ensure free development of nature by putting housing estates on piles and allowing free circulation underneath the house. Even stylistically they pinpoint new areas of attention by leaving the material raw. Exposed concrete and rough stones are part of the repertoire of the brutalism shaped by Le Corbusier.

While Le Corbusier's space stations are of visionary importance, taking care of nature and searching a balance between the individual and the mass, many housing estates on the periphery of the cities reveal the loss of any form of individuality, the specificity of a place. Masses of people live in these socially isolating housing conditions, thereby losing any sense for individual forms of thinking, existence and taste. Conditioned in such a way, there are no more hindrances to manipulation and mass consummation. It is no wonder that the prefabricated buildings were that successful in the Soviet Union.

Against this social backdrop, it is no wonder again that the artworks from the second half of the 20th century, measuring the relation of space and body to each other, do not longer reflect the harmony on which Le Corbusier's architecture was based. In the case of Bruce Naumann, for ex-

ample, the architectonic framework virtually dictates the visitor's conduct; in Double wedge Corridor with Mirror from 1970/74, the visitor enters a narrow, v-shaped corridor tapering off towards the front with a mirror of medium height at its end. The onlooker going into the corridor is reduced to his own body due to the tapering shape of the corridor, which is intensified by the sound insulation cutting him off against the outside room. On the other hand, the visitor is disconcerted about the perception of the surrounding area, because in the mirror the visitor does not see the corridor in which he is but another corridor. Thus, in the mirror he sees an empty corridor or another onlooker with whom, however, he cannot communicate, on the one hand, because the sound insulation swallows the sounds, on the other hand, because the picture of the other person is replaced by the own picture by approaching the end of the corridor.

In this state of non-communication, the other becomes a silent, mobile sculpture. The self, however, is again and again reduced to itself to its being alone in a room of optical deception. Rage, a feeling of helplessness, claustrophobia or perception of the inner self, everything is a question of the inner attitude and the question whether this apparently useless corridor makes sense for oneself.

The rooms of the artist *Absalon* also deal with isolation. Completely white and without any furnishing, they remind of the white room of Yves Klein in the house Lange in Krefeld, a rectangular room without any windows which is to allow the perception of mental abundance by simple emptiness. While Yves Klein's room stays hidden between

two other rooms, the living cells of Absalon look like bright, white, plastic bodies strongly standing out against the urban surroundings in which they are erected. Windows resembling firing slits allow an exchange between inside and outside; their position above door height and underneath the roof does not allow direct communication with persons. From the inside, the outside world seems like a picture, a distant dream, unreachable. In contrast to Naumans corridors, Absalon's cells are big enough that the artist can live in them and, despite the narrow cut, can unrestrictedly move. This is illustrated by his video tape *Bataille (combat)*: In an empty room, Absalon is lashing out wildly as if combating the narrowness of the room.

This reminds of Boris Vian's novel *L'Ecume des jours* (foam of the days) where the walls of the room are pulling tighter around the young bride until she suffocates. Absalon shows the individuals' combat against the hostile environment, certainly also the struggle of survival of the aids patient against death. Under this premise, the clinically clean room seems like an insulating block allowing communication between healthy and sick people only through a pane. The bright white is clinically clean and without any sign of life. To use Absalon's own words; his cells are more mental than real rooms, thus expression of the mental state and artistic realization of his inner worlds. Within this meaning, architecture does not only construct the subjects<sup>2</sup>, but it conditions their conduct to each other and determines the form of communication. When Absalon was still living his cells were put up at central

<sup>2</sup> See Vitus H. Weh, Absalon, in: Kunstforum Vol. 133, p. 390.



Fig. 3: Absalon, f. l. t. r.: Cellules No. 6/3/1/5/2 (Prototypes), 1992; Exhibition view, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin

locations in cities where the idea of isolation was shown off. Later they were exhibited in museums, for example at the Kunst-Werke Berlin in 2010, where they - as concentrated sculptural agglomeration - especially accentuate the artist's architectonic and structural affinity to buildings of the 1930s.

Upon reflection of Leonardo's drawing, one component has so far not been considered: movement. In this connection, in particular the movement mechanism of the legs is interesting. The strict axuality of the pair of legs standing firmly on the floor of the square is broken by a slight turn to the right and by showing the foot of the right leg in profile. In this way, the outer left leg can be related to the right standing leg, and the left standing leg to the right, swinging leg; thereby, a movement process is suggested so that the figure walks the circle. The circle becomes the room of the action, the human being the builder of the room. The reciprocal effect of the one on the other is triggered by the movement, which initiates a process of permanent change.

Thus, Leonardo was also the force behind Frederick Kiesler's<sup>3</sup> definition of the room which he describes as follows: "Room is only room for the person moving within this room."<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, there is only one way to optically describe the experience of room; the movement transforming to room. This conception of Kiesler can be seen in *The Endless House* (see picture three) a housing model, which he initially develops for the stage in 1924 and which preoccupies him a lifetime. Endless does not mean striving for the infinite like in Baroque architecture and does not contain any thoughts of infinity, but endless as conceived by Kiesler means a real system of room sequences returning to themselves and permanently continuing as expression of con-

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Kiesler was born in Vienna in 1890, where he met Wagner, Hoffmann and Loos. He liked to count himself among the third generation of avant-gardists. Among his most important building projects are *The Endless House* which he arranged for the stage in 1924 and which he presented during the world exposition in Paris in 1934. He was the first scene designer to substitute painted sets by video-projections.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Kiesler, in: Frederick Kiesler Architekt 1890-1965, Allerheiligen Presse, Innsbruck and Galerie Nächst Sankt Stephan Vienna, 1975, S.5.

tinuing movement of the human activity and the motor activity inherent to life. Such architecture can get its variety of forms only from the organic world, because it creates a cosmos intending to give protection and security to the occupant. Accordingly, the basic structure of the endless house resembles the original form of dwelling, the cave. In the interior, oval cells develop, which are arranged in such a way that a fluid co-ordination without connecting passages is possible. Everything is defined by the planed use of the rooms: room height, incidence of light, color. A common room is two or three times as high and generously proportioned as a bed room or a private room, because it is to promote social gathering. Secondary rooms, however, are small and low. Also the incidence of light is harmonized with the activities taking place in a particular room. For common rooms, Kiesler thinks of streaming light; in rooms where concentration is required, of a bundled source of light. A watch of colors bundling the sunrays through a lens to spread them afterwards through a convex glass in the rooms gives the interior color which, depending on the intensity of the sun, changes on an hourly basis. Thus, the occupant gets a sense for the course of the day.

It goes without saying that the *Endless House* based on the laws of bio-organics of man is built from the interior. Accordingly, the outer shell construction is characterized by the inner structure of the house and thus looks like connected parts of organs where more or less spacious "cut openings"—the windows—allow to look inside.

The same way Kiesler tries to harmonize life and architecture, he also

strives for a new harmonization between the arts. The arrangement of the *Salle des superstitions* (hall of superstition), which he realizes on invitation by Duchamp for the first surrealist exhibition in the Gallery Maeght in 1947 and which he creates as a room "in which architecture, sculpture and painting have the same share as continuum of the arts shows what he thereby means."<sup>5</sup> For this new form of co-operation of different artists, he coins the term of magic architecture which roots in the entire human existence and opposes the superstition of functional architecture.

The *Orgien-Mysterien-Theater* of Hermann Nitsch also aims at the experience of the human being in its entirety. Within this synthesis of art, heathenish rites blend with Christian symbols to a game of mysteries of Baroque dimension. The scene of the action is the real life; the place of activity is the body.

This can already be inferred from the action sketches: they seem like the plan of a labyrinth consisting of small chambers and rooms which are connected by narrow corridors. On strategic positions, the cells are organic, sometimes filled with entrails or designated with a cross from which arteries are radiating (*The conquest of Jerusalem*, 1971). It is the seat of the shrine in which life and death exist side by side. The plan with its winding corridors is underground. It shows the way to the unconscious. Unlike with Acconci, it is the seat of our instincts, the shrine of our deepest feelings and desires. "The town is in ourselves" - this was the motto of Acconci's exhibition in Vienna in which he deals with the inner pictures which the individual gets from

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Kiesler, op. cit. p. 58.

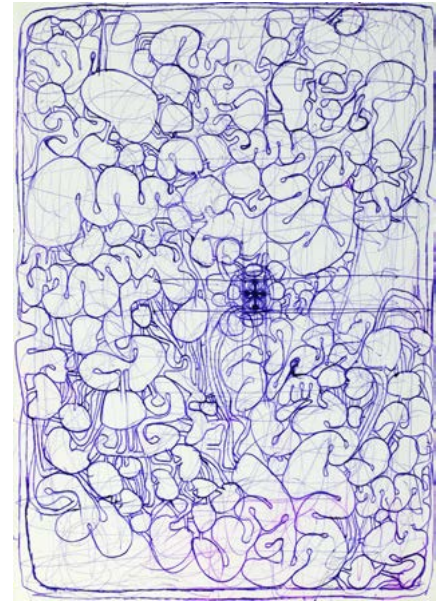


Fig. 4: Hermann Nitsch, architectural drawing, 1982

politics and the society and with the means used for the manipulation of these pictures.<sup>6</sup>

The body is not only a plan but also real place of the event. The person laid out in state becomes a living place of sacrifice on which the entrails are exhibited like an oracle or on which an entire lamb with the open body is sacrificed. Entrails and lamb become one with the individual lying underneath. The body becomes flesh; by turning his core outside, he becomes vulnerable, susceptible and open to grief and lust. In other words: he literally lives "out of the stomach", that means: Following the inner knowledge, he exposes himself to life to transcend life through what can be experienced.

Here and with Kiesler, an endless movement develops; a permanent back and forth between the determining inside and the experiencing outside. Impressions of vision and

<sup>6</sup> Characteristic is the work *American Gift*, a mobile stereo box in which one can sit down and which can be set up anywhere in Europe. The voice suggests to the Europeans that they do not have to think but that they shall only listen to the voice from America.

hearing, of feeling what one sees and hears, of comfort and discomfort are engraved and cause permanently new perceptions. The body is the shrine of life, centre of mystic-orgiastic experiences.

Following tradition, the shrine is the smallest dwelling for body particles of saints. Accordingly, its outside is lavishly equipped. In the Middle Ages, the shrine often takes the form of the preserved relic, becomes arm, foot or head of the worshipped. Paul Thek follows this tradition with the series of "Technological Reliquiaries". Under the impression of Capuchin catacombs near Palermo where the well maintained dead bodies "decorate the walls like blooms", Paul Thek produces *Meat Pieces* which are presented in remarkably arranged acrylic glass boxes. The elegant forms of the minimal shrines are in contrast to their content, hyper-realistic meat pieces which in contrast to the medieval ancestors cannot be referred to someone particular. These amorphous pieces of raw meat consisting of wax do not even remind of a particular part of the body. In *Meat Piece with Warhol Brillo Box*,<sup>7</sup> Warhol's cult object of Pop Art is degraded to a showcase. Only the top side displays the famous writing, as if one looked into it from below. The meat piece in the showcase resembles a cut through blood vessels as we know them from anatomical books. It is not dead matter but living flesh accusing the culture of Pop Art which intentionally fails to see the creativity in the human being. In this trendy Reliquiar,

7 Paul Thek, *Meat Pieces with Warhol Brillo Box*, series Technical Reliquiaries, 1965, wax, silk-screen printing on acrylic glass, 35.5x43x43cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, illustrated in: Alexander Braun, *Die wunderbare Welt des Paul Thek*, in: *Kunstforum International, Die Zukunft des Körpers I*, Vol. 132, Nov.-Jan. 1996, p.232.

the fragment of the body seems like a foreign body, a relic from the past which is preserved as curio because it is so rare. But even in the hiding of the Brillo Box, the presence of the relic can stand its ground.

The shrine and the meat preserved therein refers to the immanence of life also beyond death. This is the only way to understand *The Tomb*<sup>8</sup>. In the interior of a pyramid lies a life-size replica of wax of Thek stretched on the floor. Next to the dead body, some cult objects. The two cut off fingers of his right hand hang ostentatiously on the wall. Also the blue-colored tongue refers to a violent death. The cause remains unclear; has the artist cut off the fingers to punish himself in a lunatic gesture like van Gogh, or is he victim of his curiosity like in Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*? Nobody knows it, even less the visitor of the tomb who looks at the dead body in a lonesome confrontation. Alexander Braun<sup>9</sup> writes: "The dialog in *The Tomb* takes place on a largely equal recipient-work-level, quasi of entire corporeality to entire corporeality [an element connecting the work of Thek with those of Nitsch]. ...The scenario is determined by a pink-colored atmosphere which not only derives from the paint of the pyramid but also from the particular type of illumination. Together with the work, the onlooker is caught in a special color-room-continuum... The specific color has spread to the dead body and its clothes. Body and surrounding area blend with each other and become [together with the recipient] part of a common consciousness." This way, the dead body

8 Paul Thek, *The Tomb*, 1967, wood, wax figure, 295x320x320cm, installation Stabbe Gallery, New York, illustrated in: *Kunstforum*, op. cit., p. 237.

9 Op. cit. p.238.

is presented as having died, not as being dead. It has entered another form of life which is understood as continuum of this world. Referred to art, this means: "The artist is dead, long live the artist!" This does not refer to the monarchy where the old monarch abdicates and his successor is paid honor, but it means the continuance of the aura in the work beyond physical death.

Only rarely does the building of a house manifest the intention of a sculptor to make art, even more rarely does its permanent alteration of the outside and inside become a material component of the plastic creation. The Frenchman Jean-Pierre Raynaud dedicates twenty years to the building and rebuilding of his own dwelling. It becomes a permanent experimental field, an ontic adventure to find his own human and artistic identities. When Jean-Pierre Raynaud begins to build his *Maison* in 1969, he has already built several models in the course of his psycho objects.

As the title of this group of works indicates, the objects paint a mental picture of the artist, his fears, the growing need for protection arising from it through violent defense or insulation. In connection with *Psycho-Object. Maison* of 1963, Jean-Pierre Raynaud speaks of a house which as original of *La Maison* was tailored to the dimension of a life, his life, that means of a serious decision, a definitive commitment which completely absorbed him and left only few loopholes.<sup>10</sup> The visitor

10 The exact quotation is as follows: La maison était comme la maison (qu'elle préférait) à la dimension d'une vie, de ma vie, c'est-à-dire une décision grave, un engagement définitif, un choix qui m'impliquait totalement et dont les portes de sortie étaient et sont encore actuellement rares. 1986, Interview by Maiten Bouisset, in:

can enter this first house, although the loud, red paint of the facade and a sign with a pair of scissors and the writing "interdit" (forbidden) warns him from entering. Once the door is closed, all senses are bombarded: by flashily blinking light signals, by a gas tap on the ceiling from which Formol is escaping, by the sound of a motor on the ceiling, by prepared meals. The explosive aggressiveness in *Psycho-Object. Maison* which receives the other as intruder corresponds in *Psycho-Objet 72. Autoportrait* to a hermetically reserved conduct, because Jean-Pierre Raynaud's Autoportrait is nothing else than a white coffin with one hatch instead of the head and four smaller hatches on the narrow side next to the feet.

The jump from object to architecture is the logical consequence of his work which wants to expand to the room, a wish which has already manifested itself in his first installation of three hundred red painted flowerpots filled with concrete for the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. The desire for Width is diametrically opposed to the claustrophobic narrowness in which Jean-Pierre Raynaud locks himself.

From this situation, the permanent rebuilding understands itself as catharsis to identify oneself. He started in 1969, in the following year the interior is laid out with anonymous, white glazed tiles of 15 x 15 cm, including ceilings, excluding the floor. In 1972, the openings are gradually walled up until only a firing slit of five meters and sixty centimeters in length allows communicating with the outside world. A crypt develops whose access is denied by bars. In 1974, the paint of the outside walls in

khaki completes the impression of a shelter which is additionally delimited by a barbed wire from the neighboring fields. It offers Jean-Pierre Raynaud protection and security against any form of influence and means at the same time complete isolation. Death becomes the central topic and determines the character of the rooms; the bed room—so far a sick-room—becomes a death chamber. In the music chamber which resembles a sound insulated studio one year a single record is played: Mozart's Requiem. Clinically clean, dehumanized, without any sign of life, let alone individuality, the house has reached the zero point (espace zéro). Like in the case of Absalon, its purpose is to find a form of survival.

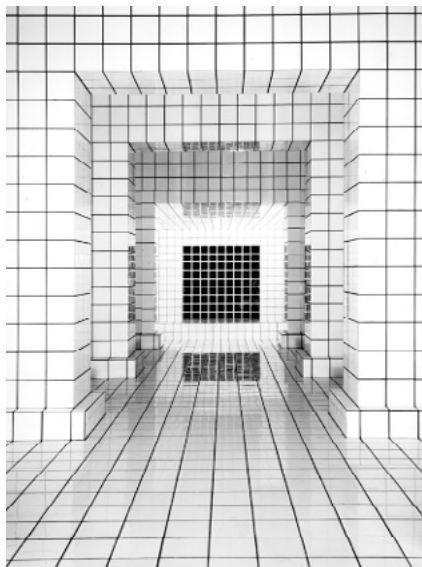


Fig. 5: Jean-Pierre Raynaud, *La Maison*, 1986

In the following year, a process of dehumanization and revitalization of the house begins; it is repainted white and gradually opens again. Light penetrates and behind the bars, continuing the pattern of the tiles in the windows, nature displays colored atmosphere in strict white. New axes, other room proportions and the extension of a tower and a further tract confer upon it sacred character which goes hand in hand

with its reanimation. An antique vase and some own flower pots are put in the foundation walls, to refill the house with human presence in the sense of its historical development. Jean-Pierre Raynaud has taken roots. The house has fulfilled its duty and can now be demolished. What remains are the *Pierres archéologiques*—broken pieces of the walls of glazed tiles which have been removed repeatedly—the single traces of his arduous search for his identity. They are the memory of a place, the trace of his personal story, souvenirs of his artistic development. Movement and continuity here do not designate a back and forth in the meaning of the *Endless House*, but the movement has a linear orientation forward and is a progression in time.

With her works the American artist Andrea Zittel combines sculpture, architecture and industrial design. Her works can be associated with most of the mentioned artists. Zittel's *Living Units* which she developed in the 1990s can be compared to Absalon since they as well constitute habitable sculptures which are exhibited in nature as well as in galleries. Like with Absalon they are prototypes, ideal living space in the narrowest of spaces. But, while Absalon is creating his white cells because of his need for motion and just for himself, Zittel produces living units out of industrially produced material for others. Her works are mass productions – what is indicated by the name of her "label" "*A-Z Administrative Systems*". Like already Adolf Loos had planned it partly, the interior design (room organisation and placing of furniture) are due to the architecture; within the *Living Units* every detail of the interior design

Glasyd C. Fabre/Georges Duby, Jean-Pierre Raynaud, Paris 1986, p. 128 et. seq.

is functionally equipped. Designed with noble material – a further analogy with Loos – they form a hollow sculpture which by its rationality is determining the actions of the residents in an authoritarian manner. Nevertheless, it's about the principle "My home is my castle" and in this respect Zittel wants residents to customize and adopt the space to their needs. So the ready made houses are tailored in detail. The *Travel Trailers* – a mobile home – allow for a change in space and a transition of residence as required, the lake-floating residential islands are permanently adapted to the needs of the temporary resident. *A-Z-Enterprise* is located in Joshua Tree in the California desert. It is her home and her field of experimentation as well, a place where she explores all aspects of daily life driven by the need to better understand human nature, man's social constructs and necessities. In a certain way Zittel – just like Jean-Pierre Raynaud – tries to realize living conditions, but not to cloister herself away but to harmonize with the living conditions determined by the outside.

"Tell me how you live and I will tell you who you are". Nothing else reflects so precisely the personality of the human being than life style; cave, pile dwelling, hut, chalet, villa, cell of a monk or palace, the dwelling and its equipment say a lot about culture, habits and needs of representation. Size, equipment, choice of the materials, design of the furniture, and finally bric-a-brac of any kind or the absence thereof describe the personality of the occupant. They unmask the "self" in its intimacy; speak of wishes and desires, of need for recognition and of comfort.

While Jean-Pierre Raynaud is build-

er of his own identity, Guillaume Bijl from Belgium builds with *Johannes Vogl Sterbezimmer*<sup>11</sup> a fictitious composer's identity. The spacious room constitutes a music chamber which, apart from the baby grand piano, is very sparsely furnished: a narrow Biedermeier bed with a green velvet cover, two chairs around a table, a chair with a side table. On the ceiling hangs a heavy chandelier, on the walls numerous paintings from the 19th century, the small ones arranged around the big ones. On the floor consisting of wooden battens three Oriental carpets of different size. Apart from some bric-a-brac on the tables, no trace of any life. The room is meticulously arranged as it is usual for a museum, and also the indispensable cord denying access to the room is not missing. As critical contribution to the Mozart year, Bijl reconstructs a room as there are so many everywhere around the world: Because every town has a foreign inhabitant who is used as figurehead to attract tourists interested in culture. They are only different in detail; generally they are all conventional in the same way. The authentic arrangement of the furniture is frequently completely disregarded because the use as a room of visitation is in the foreground. Also everything which would be the personal note has long been removed, has been taken as souvenir by relatives or has been thrown away. Little is shown, much is told, also a lot of wrong facts; what counts is that it sounds attractive. Mauricio Kagel's Film *Ludwig van...*, his contribution to the Beethoven year, also understands itself as satire against cultural tourism. In contrast to Bijl, Kagel directly refers to Beethoven

<sup>11</sup> Guillaume Bijl, *Johannes Vogl Sterbezimmer*, 1991, Museum of Modern Art, Ludwig Foundation Vienna.

and tells a legend which is as fictitious as Bijl's alleged biography of Johannes Vogl. Kagel commissions contemporary artists to furnish the house of Beethoven: Joseph Beuys, Dieter Roth and Stefan Wewerka. While Kagel deals with the topic in a parodistic manner, Bijl plays with irritation causing false pretences in relation to reality. In this connection, his room can be compared to Broodthaers Musée des Aigles which also exhibits a fictitious collection.

The Atelier Van Lieshout postulates the autarchy of art and its freedom by creating housing and useful spaces out of sculptures, by installations, performances and urban architectural complexes; they deal with power relations, politics and sex. *AVL-Ville (Atelier Van Lieshout-Ville)* – a city within a city with its own rights – is the first independent complex built by Lieshout which has as its prior principle the absolute freedom of art. The residents strictly have to follow the rules. Who ever defies the rules has to go. But infinite freedom of the arts can also lead to totalitarian solutions like with *Slave City*, a totally elaborated and fascist urban structure within which the individual is being classified by the principle of most efficient productivity. People who are too old or dumb to be efficient are recycled, for example they are worked into meat. This horror scenario bitterly satirizes the methods of the Nazi-Regime and consequently developed ecological systems as well. In a certain way AVL shows us what the "dictatorship of art" as it is posited by Jonathan Meese can possibly bring about.

Unlike the mentioned artists AVL does not restrict to one specific outlook on life, but analyzes different models of life. Its architectural

sculptures formed like guts and a womb are three-dimensional organic systems. Under the protection of this funny display of guts, which offer sleeping facilities or bars inside, man can retreat. "Forward to the past" could be a description for the *New Tribal Labyrinth Serie*, which is about concepts trying to explain how humanity reaching the end of the consumer society can get along with reduced resources. From the outside the *Hagioscoop* reminds of African huts which just like farmhouses, stables and studios shall make self-supply of ethnic groups possible. Not only the name Hagioscoop, which comes from the Greek word *hàgios* standing for holy and *scopein* standing for seeing and which therefore hints at a wall aperture granting a look from the outside to the inside, makes us think about the new living units as churches, even the cross shaped complex can be associated with this – just as if the ritual is re-established within the reawakened social structures as well. It strikes out that AVL draws on African design and not on European. This is not only due to the name of the building *Year Zero* marking a new beginning like "Ground Zero", but also it fits into the concept of the global world that is not only oriented towards Europe but also obliged to the idea of cosmopolitanism. The new interest in Africa can perhaps be compared to Christoph Schlingensiefel's idea to build an opera in Ouagadougou. Both of them work towards the encounter of two cultures within an open dialog. It's not about forcing the own culture upon others but about the enrichment of one another. AVL achieves this by the use of hand crafted material which reminds us of African huts, not by the form itself, which as

has already been mentioned, is that of a cruciform church whereby the cross structures the inner living area and workspace. Here, the idea of productivity which was extremely elaborated in *Slave City* reverberates.

While the utopian room analyses potential forms of the use of rooms and the relation of the human body to the room is organic, the fictitious room deals with the manner the human being describes itself through it. The mythologies of the ones set out on the way of knowledge, the mystification of the others leads to the disclosure of the arduously created appearances. In the case of the utopists, the relation between room and body is set in the area of the physis, sometimes also in the area of the organism, in the case of the representatives of fictitious realities, the room is fully equipped, it is living room, private room or museum—and the relation to the human being applies to its appearance. In both cases, man is the measure of all things. It is only a matter of position.

I: This article is a revised and expanded edition. The original article was first published in the catalogue *La casa, il corpo, il cuore. Konstruktionen der Identitäten. Museum Moderner Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig Wien*, S. 115-128, 1999.

#### References:

- Weh, Vitus H., Absalon, in: *Kunstforum International* Vol. 133, 1996.  
Kiesler, Frederick, in: *Frederick Kiesler Architekt 1890-1965*, Allerheiligen Presse, Innsbruck and Galerie Nächst Sankt Stephan Vienna, 1975.  
Braun, Alexander: *Die wunderbare Welt des Paul Thek*, in: *Kunstforum International*, Vol. 132, Nov.-Jan. 1996.  
Glasyd C. Fabre/ Georges Duby, Jean-Pierre Raynaud, Paris 1986.

#### Sources of Figures:

- Fig.1: Leonardo da Vinci, *Proportion Pattern*, Venedig Accademia; <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Vitruvian.jpg>  
Fig. 2: Swiss Commemorative Coin, *Modulor* by Le Corbusier; <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swiss-Commemorative-Coin->

1987-CHF-5-obverse.png

Fig. 3: Absalon, Exhibition view KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 28th Nov. 2010 – 6th March 2011, Installation view KW Institute for Contemporary Art, 2010, Foto: Uwe Walter, 2010.

Fig.4: Hermann Nitsch, architectural drawing, 1982, © Atelier Hermann Nitsch.

Fig. 5: Jean-Pierre Raynaud, *La Maison*, 1986, © VG Bild-Kunst Bonn.