

## **On Performance**

One could speculate that what happened here made a difference to somebody or something<sup>1</sup>

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Crossing the threshold of the Kunsthaus Bregenz through the main entrance's glass doors, one finds oneself in an expansive foyer with access to the cashier's desk and wardrobe, the upper exhibition floors, and the subterranean level with its lecture room, children's education center, and bathroom facilities. The ground floor of this Zumthorian art museum architecture is characterized by a plurality of activities, movements, and functions: bags, coats, and umbrellas are stowed in lockers, tickets are sold, headphones for audio guides distributed, postcards and catalogs purchased, comments jotted down in the visitor's book. As hinge between inside and outside, between the entering audience and the artworks presented on the ground floor and above, classical functions of the museum entrance setting are combined and condensed. Here, as also in the KUB Arena exhibition space, conditions of access and reception undergo a process of regulation, thereby occasioning a transition from a logic of public space to the logic of an art institution.

The inter-permeative state of interior and exterior space just described finds expression in the architectonic design of the ground floor. The KUB Arena, conceived as an entrance hall, has a height of 6.2 meters due to the absence of an illuminated ceiling. While on the three upper floors the spaces are enclosed by concrete walls, only allowing the entry of refracted daylight that is modulated and cast by illuminated glass ceilings, matte glass walls border the ground floor, shaping the space's appearance in interplay with massive concrete load-bearing walls. Hence, in combination with the building's facade of opaque glass shingles, this space is the only interior in Kunsthaus Bregenz whose sides open onto the city. While the black terrazzo floor reflects movement and the incidence of light originating in the interior, movements in the urban space surrounding the museum are cast onto the matte glass walls in the form of automobile headlights and shadows of pedestrians.

In addition to its functional features, the architectonic space is a container of sorts for artistic production and reception, even though it is associated with a spatial experience in its own right. The aim of the KUB Arena program, launched in 2010, is to open the ground floor as a site, independent of exhibitions on the upper floors, for the negotiation of experimental presentational formats and artistic forms of production. [...]

*On Performance*, the second KUB Arena project, endeavored to effectuate an open, dynamic appropriation of the ground-floor space by way of performative praxes. Our interest in performance art as a time- and event-based practice was centered on the

relation performance possesses with its audience and with other artistic formats as well as on the utilization of language and objects. The crossovers were to be interrogated and elaborated. [...]

The type of performance that interests us most in the following has a script, or at least a precise sequence of directives, as a foundation for its articulation. It sets a frame comprehensible to both performer and viewer. The possibility of several performances is thereby inscribed in its first public appearance, but it is of no significance for the execution of the performance itself—the bringing of performer, author, audience and the act of the action together—whether the performance taking place is being carried out for the first, second, or umpteenth time. If this were to have any significance, it would only point out that performance is essentially one thing: a condition.

As Eva Meyer explains in her text, what "counts is no longer the expression of the subjectivity of a speaker, but rather his ability to shift himself, through his speech, into a condition which opens itself up to the circulation of impersonal energies."<sup>2</sup> Her statement draws a reference to the significance that the performance of speech holds for this process. Yet a circulation of this kind—the performer's engagement toward the audience and the audience's engagement toward the performer, and hence toward the commitment both parties make to one another and to the other figures and protagonists of a performance, to the language, and to the objects—this circulation is a precondition for the possibility that a condition can be produced in different ways, time and again, and stand on its either modified or similar foundation. An engagement, "a simple rule, or even a complex structure of conditions"<sup>3</sup> that gives rise to a provisional condition. Such a seldom pronounced or addressed and yet, thanks to the setting of a frame, very clear commitment—"so that I can comprehend 'intimacy' instead of collusion"—can stretch over the course of one or several performances, break new ground each time, and could, according to Ian White, "be as much about the total suspension of any regulation or could be the replacement of one system by another system."<sup>4</sup> This condition in need of constant re-creation is immanent to every performance.

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is borrowed from *Nothing Is Closed—Lying Freely Part 1*, 2009, a performance by Ruth Buchanan.

<sup>2</sup> Eva Meyer, "Me as Language Game," in this publication, pp. 59-67

<sup>3</sup> Suchan Kinoshita, "Round Table", in this publication, flaps, period: minute 0-30.

<sup>4</sup> Ian White, "Round Table", in this publication, flaps, period: minute 30-60.