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## Architecture as an Allusion

The Work of Herman Hiller

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*Translated by Dr. Wilbur Jobe*



It isn't really clear who happened to start the game off. And it really makes no difference since, in the last analysis, you always need several people to play a game. What is more important is what is being played. It's a matter of beauty, life, cleverness, temptation, love, understanding, touch, having one's breath taken away. Is that strong stuff? The game is easy to play. In any case, it concerns more than the new construction of a weird museum in the wild and overgrown garden of a weird Lower Bavarian Baroque castle. In the same way it meant more to Marcel Duchamp with his bottle stand than the bottle stand in itself. Or, when expressing it the other way round, it was just exactly the fact that the bottle stand at that time came to stand in that world. As a new planet that strikes the

existing world with its own inhabitants setting off a kind of aesthetic shock wave. Hans-Georg Gadamer, the famous German hermeneutic writer, made the remark in his Salzburg lectures on the "Topicality of the Beautiful" that such a work cannot be simply put off as "public mischief". And it seems to be proper to leave architecture aside for a while and, with Gadamer as a starting point for all further thought, to put the hermeneutic quality of a work into the game being played. According to Gadamer, "it consists in the fact that something is to be understood and what it represents, means, or says wants to be understood. That is a demand issuing forth from the work that needs to be redeemed. It demands an answer, one that can be given only by the one accepting the claim. And this answer



has to be one's own answer that he or she himself furnishes in active participation. The players belong to the game."

Joining in the game means not considering Guttenburg Castle alone as a renovation project in the sense of protecting historic buildings. It means not viewing the new construction as a bizarre edifice on the plot of ground in front of it. It means not frowning upon the Russian MiG seemingly protecting the castle on the corner next to the golf course as public mischief. Whoever may then see the few streamlined Arabian stallions dancing around the antiquated excavator and lorry on the building site will notice that he or she has arrived in another world, arrived on its own planet to which more belongs than architecture per se.



Guttenburg Castle lies a good 80 kilometers east of Munich on a bluff overlooking the Inn River. There is no longer a motorway here, and the world seems to be just fine and dandy, that is, according to the values of good old Bavarian May-pole-embellished wholesomeness. Originally built as a Gothic citadel, then later remodeled in Baroque style, the castle went through several hands, at one time or another, before it was converted into a private residence, auctioned off, refurbished somewhat, then emptied again and left to fall into neglect before an admirer discovered it. He had struck it rich in telecommunications and had the ambition to create a kind of playground for beauty, life, cleverness there.

Nico Forster has been living in the

castle since 1996 and renovating it little by little. He has had horse stables built, opened the old chapel to the stairway, discovered an English garden grown over in young trees, has hung up his art collection indoors and his rather rusty old battered Citroens and Jaguars placed under the trees. There are rooms that can be rented for parties and a restaurant kitchen. The surrounding fields of maize have been sold and turned into a golf course, which borders dangerously close to the castle. Nevertheless, he has blessed the ground with a well-manicured lawn encircled with the MiG on the one side and a vehicle of a loud orange color taken from the former Tuntenhausen Volunteer Fire Brigade on the other. Peering out over the adjacent slope is the roof of the newly erected museum



building, a hovering structure made of steel, surrounded by an anarchistic orchestra of concrete walls, reinforcing iron, old construction machines, and piles of earth. "The castle," Nico Forster says, "is a superabundance of beauty and a superabundance of creativity in a space of time encompassing about one thousand years. Everyone who once lived there must have asked him or herself: 'What can I do myself to add to its beauty and what quality of life will it represent?' That's what fascinates me about the castle and the new museum: living for the beauty of creating something, changing something, setting something in motion. And also for the risk of going broke, if worst comes to worst, for the sake of beauty."

Playing the game with others. Nico Forster met Alexander Nüsslein, a man who can draw reflexes of the eyes. "When you look at someone in the eyes, you will see something in them: a relation between light and dark. That can be more or less interesting or maybe not so. That's what I draw. I mostly draw the darkness in the middle. When you look at someone in the eyes for a longer time, then more and more will reveal itself. That is a preliminary sketch. Departing from that, I then make very quick drawings in order to grasp the whole thing." Since Nico Forster wanted to have an edifice for his art foundation, he asked Hermann Hiller, the architect whether a building could be made from such



a drawing. Hiller, who is fortunately no full-blooded architect, was intrigued by the collective project. The drawing defined the ground plan and it needed a place on the castle grounds. “We had surveyed the grounds and found out that the ground plan could fit snugly into the place in question splendidly. It was like suddenly the woman you love holds you by the hand and is cuddling you with her curvaceous body. In the same way, the reflexes of the eyes gently cuddled, in the truest sense of the word, the topography of the survey.”

And that is how it came about that the building was not conceivable without the landscape in mind. It divides itself into weights and counterweights, built up—not built up, open area— tree-stocked space. Level and sloping, Baroque and Modern. The castle citadel stands majestically on the bluff overlooking the Inn River, defiantly facing the north. The new building, on the other hand, adroitly fits, as an extended curve, into the slope, peering with open-eyed inquisitiveness to the south, its roof surfaces flying out over the grounds to the east and west, the sky above and also below in a mirror of water out of which rises a part of the building with only one leg in the water and fleet-footedly looking back towards the glassy facade of the slope. Now the exercise in equilibrium in the landscape, however, is not everything, it would be classical sculpture if only the figures were playing under the sun. But there is more to the game. There is a program for the building. But it would violate the rules of the game to transform a typical program into pragmatic architecture. For his art foundation, Forster wanted to have something like an enclosed space where art and human beings can look at one another, perhaps as intently as Nüsslein delineates in his drawings: “The fascinating thing about the idea is that the offices and the exhibition rooms are one, that the staff work in those rooms and the visitors not only look at the artifacts on exhibit but also the staff look at them. But the members of the staff are at the same time the work of art that has its own eyes and looks at the observer.” What is more important than the space programme? “The pictures have to have eyes and should not be merely objects.”

Hiller was fascinated as an architect by the unusual procedure of the project, by not first dividing the total area up into so many square feet for the office, the kitchen, the adjoining rooms and then calculating the costs and writing down the amount of concrete to be poured. What filled him with enthusiasm was that it was to become a building full of secrets, not one exuding clarity. Hiller is poet enough to pass all bounds in carrying out these concepts. “I believe the utopia of all meaningful architecture to be so: there are rooms or spaces that change the soul, one in which a person enters in one frame of mind and



leaves it in another; simple, wonderful, mystical rooms, rooms dreamt about by humankind. But Hiller, on the other hand, is not a full-blooded architect enough to believe that in erecting a building one might be able to succeed or the building might be its fulfillment in itself.” I believe it is not a question of whether one is afraid of the extraordinary, but whether one can have enough staying power to want to build these mystical spaces of the soul, and also knowing that it most likely cannot be attained. The question is not to express the desire to do so; the question is how one can deal with seeing the enterprise fail because these rooms cannot be reproduced.” Taking a bow before reality and in spite of that dancing with the dream: architecture as an allusion.

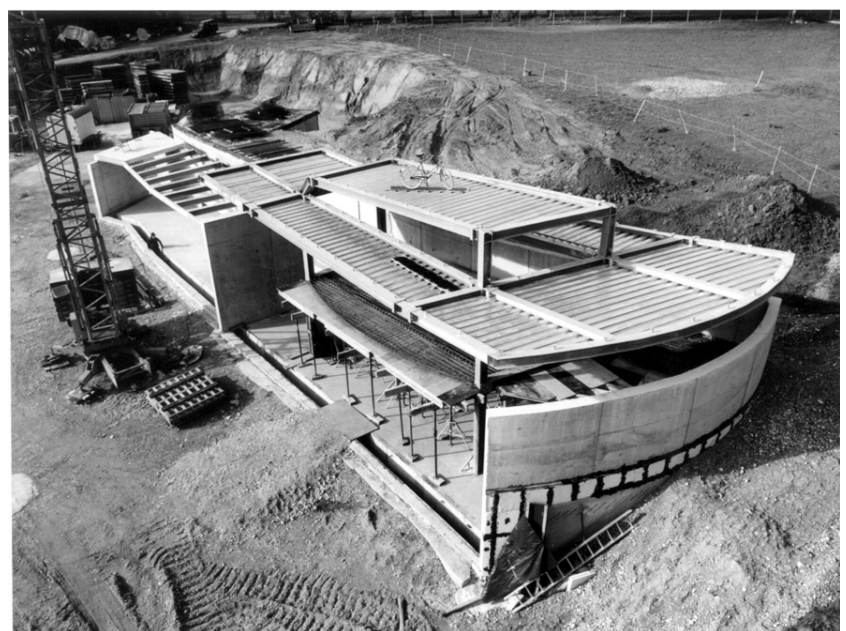
It is clear that this building cannot be erected in the conventional manner. The collective is at work here. And it will be built as long as there is the desire to do so and until the project is finished, which we hope will not be too soon. Forster is at work, as are Nüsslein, and Hiller, and Thomas Beck, the structural engineer extraordinaire, is doing his calculations. Forster’s building company workmen are carrying out the construction, and even the antiquated construction machines have been promoted and assigned such roles that they are working along with the others as persons. “Do-it-yourself surveying” and “Do-it-yourself-building” and “Neo-Casualness” require the collective, which is understandable when reflexes of the eyes are supposed to turn into topography and mysteries into space. And when the building is not the object but rather ought to have eyes itself—as long as construction is going on—that is correct. “Build only with machines from the junkyard,” further reassures the collective. Why? “First of all, they can be paid for, and secondly, you have no idea how many communicative levels will arise for those who will be working at the construction site, for the machines from the junkyard are always breaking down. The probability of machine failure mounts to about 100% per week, that is, we have long periods of failure that postpone every serious end of construction.” There is one old Fuchs power shovel, vintage 1948, the Russian well-driller now being used as a foundation driller. All of them are participating in the game and are seeing to it that there will be enough time to derive from practical experience a set of game rules that will address the collective as the “dogmas of architecture.” They are supposed to be ten in number; a few are mentioned above. In reality, there are somehow more, but that makes no difference on the planet Guttenburg. At Guttenburg, errors of measurement and calculation along with their ingenious correction belong to life, and those are the things that, make no mistake about it, render it even more beautiful. Whatever, going beyond Guttenburg, is completely useless as an axiom for everyday architecture, is best suited, in abstracting it from its architectonic context, to be the proto-logic of everyday

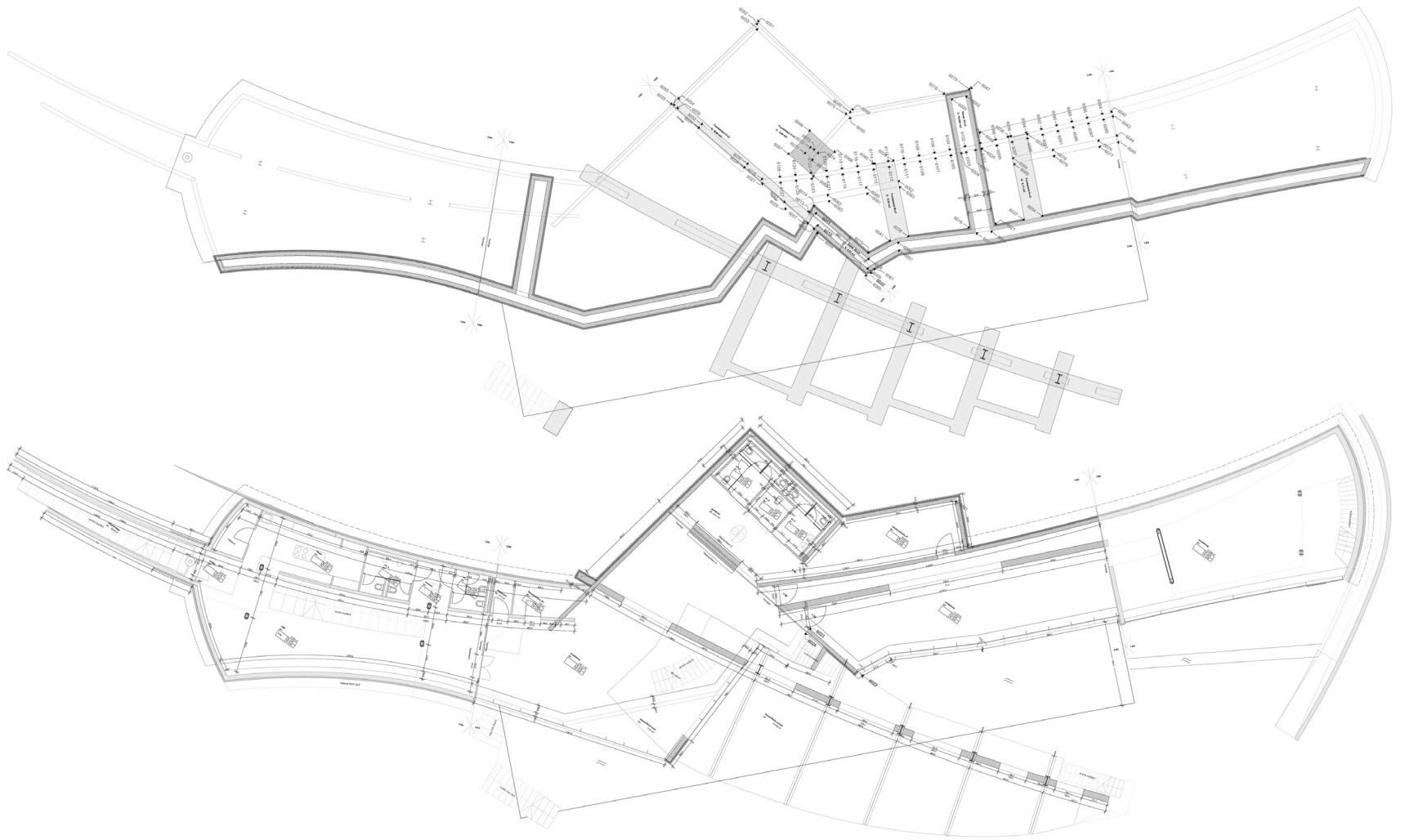


action. “The beautiful clothes and the beautiful buildings are the only reason why anyone climbs out of bed every morning.”

For Hiller, Guttenburg is not the first planet he has been working on. Since his study of architecture did not completely satisfy him, he felt drawn to the Munich Academy of Art where he founded the so-called “Freie Klasse” (Free Class) with four colleagues from various disciplines (beside Hiller are Wilhelm Koch, Gottfried Weber, Wolfgang Groh, Thomas Demand, who were later joined by Ralf Homann). For Hiller that meant being free from architecture, free from the graphic arts and design for others, and, in general, free from all that applied stuff. Maybe free from professors, free from master classes, free from social classes in society? It was none other than Joseph Beuys who had founded his “Freie Klasse” in Düsseldorf in the sixties as a class with open entrance without selection according to the motto: whoever lets himself be hand-picked by the professors has nobody to blame but himself—the rest will come to me. But the Munich “Freie Klasse” did not spend much time on the famous ancestors up North. They preferred to fly into orbit on their own. They discovered their own “planet of the Freie Klasse” and exhibited it in the Palace of Culture in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1993. It consisted of buildings. But of course it was not a matter of architecture there, but strong stuff and the easily played game. The building of beauty, of joy, of malice, of cleverness. Architecture as allegory. The buildings in the darkened room of the Palace of Culture stood as illuminated garments, pipes, skeletons in the universe, standing for themselves, for their idea, and for the swindle of the idea.

In his lecture on the “Aktualität des Schönen” (Topicality of the Beautiful), Gadamer doubted whether we can approach the art of today with the concepts of classical aesthetics. He suggests going back to a few fundamental human experiences and viewing art from a completely different perspective, namely as a game, as a symbol, and celebration. Without the game aspect, says Gadamer, is human culture not conceivable at all? For him, a game is, to start off with, the to-and-fro of movements without a goal or a purpose, and, to be sure, the to-and-fro of a game that arises spontaneously out of an excess of energy, which can be observed in the playful antics of young animals. When human beings play games, on the other hand, rationality takes over—humans subject their playful movement to discipline as if they were objectives, which takes place, for example, when a child counts how many times he or she can bounce a ball on the ground before losing control of it. The objective in mind is really pointless behaviour, but that is just what it is all about. With effort, ambition, and earnest devotion something is intended in this manner—and the spectator





must go along with the game. “When all is said and done, playing games is the self-projection of movements of the game.” Build in a spirit of joy and meaninglessness; that is demanded of the collective at Guttenburg. The “Freie Klasse” urges you to come to their planet. Architecture as game playing.

Gadamer goes on to say that the word symbol is a technical term in the Greek language meaning “memory potsherd.” A host gives a guest the so-called “*tesera hospitalis*,” which means that he breaks a potsherd in two pieces, keeping one-half for himself and giving his guest the other so that a descendant of the guest who might come to that same house thirty, forty, or fifty years later can be recognized by putting the two potsherds back together. A symbol is, therefore, something with which one can recognize another person as an

old acquaintance. Art also is concerned with recognizing something that does not lie in the immediate visible and comprehensible field of view. The potsherds that have to be fit together are the objects of sense perception and the idea behind them: that something is beautiful and that there is something behind it. While Hegel claims to perceive the sensuous appearance of the idea in the artistically beautiful, Gadamer argues that the opus speaks to us as a work and not as the transmission of a message. “The expectation that the signification addressing us from art can be grasped in the concept has overtaken art in a dangerous way all along.” That is why Hiller’s “House of Beauty” in the Bulgarian Palace of Culture can be viewed so simply. Like two slender chains peeking out under the delicate folds of an elongated gleaming tent building and ending in

charming shoes: semi-garment, semi-house; semi-human, semi-artifact; semi-beautiful, semi-beauty.

The five members of the “Freie Klasse” confirmed their work symbolically for the Munich Feldherrnhalle. Once erected by Ludwig I as the principal structure of his magnificent boulevard after the model of the Florentine Loggia dei Lanzi and then stylized by the Nazis after their abortive putsch in 1923 as a memorial to the capital of their movement, the building in Munich celebrated its 150 anniversary in 1994. The “Freie Klasse” proposed, according to the Italian model, stretching a clothesline there and hanging up underwear (contrary to its proper function and coloured accordingly German brown) and then installing a terrace cafe on its roof. Their proposal found no approval, and so the five friends decided to transport

the Feldherrnhalle away to its place of origin, symbolically of course, and it did get to Italy in fact. A panel painting of the Feldherrnhalle, the size of a cinema screen, was seen being carried over the Brenner pass, resting in the plain of the Po River, crossing the city limits of Florence, stepping past the rustico ground floor of the Palazzo Pitti and then arriving at the Loggia dei Lanzi. And since their happening was entitled “Learning from Italy,” they also brought back a lesson to Munich, which may turn out to be more useful than the terrace cafe and the pants: once again a cinema-screen-sized picture of the Palazzo della Civiltà, taken from the Roman EUR Quarter, built by Mussolini in Fascist Italy, a strict concrete cube, more a multi-storey car park than a palace. Since it was placed in front of the Feldherrnhalle as a construction site signboard, many Munich passersby



thought that the hall of fame would soon make way for a functional building. More attentive individuals recognized the parallel—the Feldherrnhalle as well as the Mussolini Palace are symbols of dictatorship. Architecture as unmasking, where architecture was denied the festival on the roof.

The “Freie Klasse” later celebrated the affair in the context of their meeting called “Jour Fix” on another Munich roof, namely on top of the “Haus der Kunst,” which was originally built as the “Haus der Deutschen Kunst” (House of German Art). On the 8 May 1995, Germany celebrated all across the land its 50-year-anniversary of the end of the second World War. Which place in Munich would have been more fitting than the roof of that one-time Nazi building, facing the American Consulate, adjoining the freedom of

the English Garden, above it only the sky, only heaven? You could hear the sounds of American jazz from the forties until a cloudburst finished with theatrical gusto the festivities as a matter of course.

Gadamer chose the festival as a third reference point of art. Everyone experiences a festival in the same way. Festivities are there for everyone; they are the best representation of common interest. And it accentuates a special moment whose perception of time greatly differs from that of the daily routine. Gadamer is talking about the normal, pragmatic experience of time, of time “for something” that has to be filled when empty at first. The festivity is there, and time is fulfilled; it has its own time, which has nothing to do with the movement of the hands of the clock. Works of art have their own

sense of time which one has to dive into. And in the same way, architecture demands more from the observer than only considering the facade as a picturesque prospect. “One has to go up to it, into it, to step out of it and walk around. You have to discover it on foot and acquire what the structure means to your own experience of life and its enhancement.”

On the 8 May 1995, the Haus der Kunst was opened all the way up to the roof, an otherwise inaccessible place with an otherwise inaccessible feeling and with an otherwise inaudible music. That was freedom standing over a metropolitan landscape, over the trees of the park under the evening sky. Everyone who climbed up there was standing in the middle of a moment of eternity. Architecture as a festival, a game for everyone.

