



INTERVIEW WITH ANNETT ZINSMEISTER BY PERNILLE
JENSEN FOR MARK, ANOTHER ARCHITECTURE,
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Please tell us why or how you decided to concentrate on Plattenbauten (concrete-slab high-rise buildings) as the object of your work.

A.Z. | I got in touch with Plattenbau during my studies at University of Fine Arts in Berlin, where I did an urban design project for a Plattenbau area in Berlin in the beginning of the nineties. Three years later I entered a Plattenbau design competition and won it. Immediately thereafter, a building company commissioned me to design a flat in Marzahn. Two years later, I won the second prize in an urban design competition. After all of these architectural projects, I developed the subject further as an art project: I was invited to exhibit two conceptual Plattenbau games in the international exhibition MUSEUTOPIA at the Karl-Ernst-Osthaus-Museum in Hagen in 2002. Today they are part of the collection and installed in the permanent exhibition. Invitations to other exhibitions and solo shows followed: for example to the international exhibition "urban drift" in 2003 in Berlin and a solo show in the media center of Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund in Hattungen in 2004.

Do you disagree with the unpopular legacy of Plattenbauten?

A.Z. | I started to work with Plattenbau in 1993. It was sort of the peak of its unpopularity. The common unreflected political statements damning this architecture, the areas, and the people living there were one-dimensional and undifferentiated, and annoyed me. In visiting these areas, I was surprised at a seemingly private neighborhood atmosphere and also about the comment of a friend who grew up in Riga and felt completely "at home" in the Plattenbau projects. These impressions were exactly the opposite of all the circulating Plattenbau clichés. For me it was obvious that Plattenbau shouldn't be reduced to ugly mass architecture: it is a multilayered cultural phenomenon that earns respect and serious criticism and needs to be analyzed precisely. As an artist and designer, I've been especially fascinated by the oscillation between the ugly and the beautiful. I've also been interested

in the superimposition of social, utopian ideas and the political repression inscribed into this architecture. So I started to deconstruct the Plattenbau in several (historical and conceptual) ways.

Please tell me a bit about the two exhibitions outside_in and about the chosen title?

A.Z. | My idea to realize an installation in turning the outside (façade) in a room or inner space came up in 2000. I therefore started to design a wall-paper series with Plattenbau façades. The reversal of the outside and inside augmented and focused the aspects that became important to me when I went deeply into the subject. I wanted to clarify and focus them and develop an experimental and sensual space caused by a high compression of the visual material in space.

What did the viewer see when entering the installations? What were your considerations in terms of using the exhibition spaces?

A.Z. | I wanted to create an extreme and pure space where this architecture's serial aspects could simultaneously unfold the cruelty of endless repetition and the aesthetics of the minimal. The oscillation between a restricted monotony and a fascinating beauty of a structural and serial pattern made the work into a tightrope walk for the visitor who often found him- or herself between two extreme effects. Two spaces for my installations were offered. One was the basement of the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart—an extreme space, about 50m long, slightly curved, without windows. So I got the opportunity to realize an approximately 50m long façade projection. The second space was offered by artists in the inner city of Stuttgart. This special art space is closed most of the time, the exhibition can only be experienced through the window from outside. So I decided to realize the exhibition as a simulation, projected onto the storefront of the gallery. I created a kind of virtual architecture of the exhibition space. Then I projected this picture from inside through the storefront window to the outside. The opening consequently took place outside the gallery (on the other side of the street) where the illusion was perfect!

Which media have you worked with?

A.Z. | The installations are based on a photographic documentation of Plattenbau types. I began this documentation in 1993, when the demolition and restoration of Plattenbau became an important subject in architectural practice. I started this documentation as an art project, and worked further with these photographs in condensing and alienating them with the computer. The images oscillate between document and artifact. In both installations, I used slide projections, which supported the densest and strongest spatial impression.



Your spatial installations are seen as “transformations and translations of your multilayered investigations”. What does that mean according to you and what do they translate into?

A.Z. | I started researching several aspects: history, construction, urban planning, ... and I confirmed my assumption that Plattenbau is a multilayered cultural phenomenon. 1. I deconstructed the Plattenbau system and showed it as a construction kit with unexpected creative possibilities (see Installation at Karl-Ernst-Osthaus-Museum in Hagen) 2. I worked out the historical and political reasons why Plattenbau became a reduced architecture of monotony, in contrast to my discovered inherent potentials (see Plattenbau oder die Kunst, Utopie im Baukasten zu warten, hrsg. von Annett Zinsmeister, Hagen/Berlin 2002). I developed and translated these investigations into art and architectural projects, that is—in using the construction kit in all its possibilities of combination and variation (see “kitchen for 1,2,3”, first prize in design competition “Bad und Küche für Plattenbauten” 1996; “Musterwohnung für wbs”, architecture and design assignment, realized 1997/98; “Plattenbausiedlung Hellersdorf”, second prize architecture/urban planning competition 1999;—in developing a memory game where one can play with the elements, discover how similar and different they are, and learn the different types of Plattenbau. It is also a game with the disappearance of the original façades.—In realizing the installations, I translated these investigations into spatial scenes, where the cognitions (I made) can be deeply experienced.

Does outside_in convey any preferred reading—a specific sense or feeling you hope for the viewer to walk away with after seeing your installations?

A.Z. | I was very happy to realize that the visitors of the installations were all struck in several senses—from fascination to deterrence—and had the strong will to talk about the subject or their impressions. So the artwork (as well as the book) led to a lot of discussions. I am very glad about this effect, because my interest was the subject and not a simple game with forms or images. This widespread interest is a huge compliment, because for me art is an experimental strategy that leads myself, and obviously the recipients as well, to a process of awareness.

