

On Dreaming Realities¹

Cultural critique, design speculation and full-scale mock-ups

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Abstract

This essay delves into the installation designed by Hans Hollein for the *Künstlerhaus* facade in Vienna in 1985. It serves as an illustrative case of material speculation in architecture, particularly regarding the incorporation of 'historical' elements in contemporary architectural practice. Through a close reading of this installation, realized in the context of the exhibition '*Traum und Wirklichkeit, Wien 1870-1930*' (Dream and Reality, Vienna 1870-1930), I discuss how such speculation entails the physical replication of carefully chosen 'historical' forms and their reassembly in what would be best described as a 'fragmentary whole.' However, the reintegration of historical fragments into the present can manifest in diverse ways. I argue that in the installation that reshaped the facade of the *Künstlerhaus*, Hollein explored two contrasting modes while tracing the possibilities (and pitfalls) of their synthesis.

Keywords

mock-ups, fragments, assemblage, Medicine, Karl-Marx-Hof, billboards

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To master irony in architecture is given to very few: Hans Hollein has done it for my generation.

Joseph Rykwert¹

However, the exhibition does not only take place in the inside, it also radiates onto the cityscape, through metaphorical elements that illustrate “dream and REALITY”

Hans Hollein²

1 Prelude: An Exhibition within an Exhibition

On Wednesday, February 2, 2022, the new permanent exhibition at the *Architekturzentrum Wien*,³ titled “Hot Questions – Cold Storage,” opened its doors at the Museumsquartier.⁴ The exhibition, curated by art historian Monika Platzer, presents a critical panorama of Vienna’s architectural production, spanning from the turn of the last century to the present day. It takes as its starting point the tension between the apparent inertia of archival material, resting in a suburban Vienna depot, and the challenging issues that, when addressed, can make this archive speak. Thus, the curator presents “hot questions” to unearth the knowledge embedded in the “cold storage”: Who shapes the city? Who provides for us? Who are we? These questions hang from the ceiling of the exhibition space, while below them, the paths explored by Viennese architects in different eras unfold.

One of these threads leads to another exhibition that took place almost four decades ago, significantly contributing to the redefinition of Vienna’s identity as a central European metropolis: the exhibition “*Traum und Wirklichkeit. Wien 1870-1930*” (Dream and Reality. Vienna 1870 - 1930). It was curated by the Viennese architect Hans Hollein for the Vienna Museum and hosted at the *Künstlerhaus Wien* from March 28 to October 6, 1985. This was also the year when Hollein received the Pritzker Prize, and five years after the first architectural Venice Biennale, themed “*The Presence of the Past*”, where he was one of the architects invited to collectively create the so-called *Strada Novissima*, a mock street that stretched across

1 Joseph Rykwert, “In Mönchengladbach, Hans Hollein’s Museum - Domus,” *Domus*, no. 632 (1982), <https://tinyurl.com/kxaah77h>.

2 Tino Erben, *Traum Und Wirklichkeit Wien, 1870-1930* [Wien]: Museen der Stadt Wien, 1985), 37.

3 *Architekturzentrum Wien* (AzW) is the Austrian museum of architecture, founded in 1993. As mentioned on its official website it is dedicated to exhibiting, discussing and researching ‘the ways in which architecture and urban development influence and shape the daily life of each one of us’.

4 I had the opportunity to get a glimpse of the preparation of this exhibition during my secondment at AzW, in the framework of my PhD research within the network ‘TACK - Communities of Tacit Knowledge Architecture and Its Ways of Knowing’. Discussions with Monika Platzer and her colleagues were immensely helpful in navigating Vienna’s expansive architectural landscape, and the *Traum und Wirklichkeit* exhibition in particular. I am profoundly grateful to the AzW team for their support.

the Arsenale. Indeed, the *“Traum und Wirklichkeit”* exhibition curated by Hollein in Vienna should be seen in the context of what is often referred to as ‘postmodernism’ in architecture, with the role of exhibitions being decisive in its identification.⁵ However, the aim of this essay is not to trace the coordinates of *“Traum und Wirklichkeit”* within the complex and heterogeneous developments of this period but rather to use a specific facet of this exhibition as an entry point to explore certain tropes of architectural research and experimentation.

2 Remaking: Critical value and heuristic potential

This paper considers the specifically architectural ways of investigating the critical value of past works and the potential for creative insight that is inherent in architectural reproductions. Throughout this exploration I align with a contemporary interest in the concrete modes through which architectural knowledge is constituted, in which exhibitions and installations, models and mock-ups play a crucial, if not always identifiable, part. The elusive agency of these media, however, reflects their ability to encapsulate meanings and experiences that resist straightforward categorization and conventional scientific methodologies, thus making them unique tools for grasping what has been described as Tacit Knowledge in Architecture.⁶ Recent literature attests to a growing interest around the potential of 1:1 architectural reproductions to function as both analytical and intuitive tools,⁷ and more broadly around the heuristic potential inherent in processes of re-enacting.⁸ In this framework, *Traum und Wirklichkeit* can be approached as a ‘laboratory exhibition’ providing ‘a testing ground in which architectural research is conducted (...) concerned with the investigation, development and experimentation of hitherto un-imagined, un-tested, un-established architectural propositions.’⁹ More specifically, I focus on the installation that reconfigured the facade of the *Künstlerhaus*, and which was largely based on the reproduction of two carefully selected cultural artefacts, drawn from two seemingly distant eras of Viennese history.

5 Léa-Catherine Szacka, “Exhibiting the Postmodern : The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale,” ed. Adrian Forty, *The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale*, 2016; Mary McLeod, “Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism,” *Assemblage*, no. 8 (1989): 22–59.

6 Lara Schrijver, *The Tacit Dimension Architecture Knowledge and Scientific Research*, 2021; Claudia Mareis, “The Epistemology of the Unspoken: On the Concept of Tacit Knowledge in Contemporary Design Research,” *Design Issues* 28, no. 2 (April 2012): 61–71

7 Michael Eidenbenz, *Lloyd’s 1:1. The Currency of the Architectural Mock-Up* (Zürich: Gta Verlag, 2021).

8 See for example Sven Lütticken, “An Area in Which to Reenact,” in *In Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, ed. Sven Lütticken (Rotterdam: Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, 2005); Angelika Schnell, “Performative Design Research: En-Acting Knowledge in Teaching,” in *The Tacit Dimension. Architectural Knowledge and Scientific Research*, ed. Lara Schrijver (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2021), 11–18; Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, and Julianne Tomann, *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2019).

9 Florian Kossak, “Exhibiting Architecture: The Installation as Laboratory for Emerging Architecture,” in *Curating Architecture and the City*, ed. Sarah. Chaplin and Alexandra Stara (Routledge, 2009), 117



FIGURE 1 The installation on the Künstlerhaus facade as featured in the exhibition catalogue. Source: Tino Erben, "Traum und Wirklichkeit Wien, 1870-1930."

2.1 Fragments, mock-ups, assemblages

The golden female figure on the left is Gustav Klimt's 'Medicine,' taken from one of the three famous paintings prepared to adorn the ceiling of the Great Hall of the University of Vienna (Philosophy, Medicine, Jurisprudence) between 1900 and 1907. These works stirred controversy among liberal humanists, conservatives, and anti-Semites, leading Klimt into a clash with a considerable portion of the academic and eventually the political establishment¹⁰. The architectural form reproduced on the right is equally notorious: it is one of the iconic towers designed by Karl Ehn for the 'Karl-Marx-Hof,' the flagship of Vienna's interwar public housing program. During the 1920s and '30s, the *Gemeindebauten* (municipal buildings) triggered reactions from both conservative critics (who viewed them as manifestations of communist aggression) and progressive modern architects (who saw in them backwardness and a historicist mood).¹¹ Thus, this architectural reproduction also harks back to another deep conflict from the city's history, with the Karl-Marx-Hof already at the center of ideological and aesthetic controversies before it came under literal fire from the Austrian army and right-wing militias in February 1934.

¹⁰ Carl E. Schorske, "Gustav Klimt: Painting and the Crisis of the Liberal Ego," in *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 208–78.

¹¹ Eve Blau, "Re-Visiting Red Vienna as an Urban Project," Austrian Embassy Washington, accessed September 24, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/5v66mwfd>. These early modernist critiques can be paralleled with the later criticism of Manfredo Tafuri who read in the *Gemeindebauten* the political contradictions of Austrian Social Democracy. See Manfredo Tafuri, *Vienna Rossa : La Politica Residenziale Nella Vienna Socialista* (Milano: Electa, 1980).



FIGURE 2 Drawing by Hans Hollein for the *Traum und Wirklichkeit* installation. Credit: AzW

These two mock-ups, along with the facade of the 'historic' building on which they stand, and the billboard bearing the exhibition title, constitute the main elements of the installation designed by Hollein, which I would classify as an *assemblage*.¹² Assemblage theory, with its emphasis on the notion of a 'fragmentary whole,' enables me to identify the different roles that 'Medicine' and the Karl-Marx-Hof tower are called upon to play here, removed as they are from their historical contexts and reintroduced as fragments in the form of mock-ups.

2.2 A twofold approach

Thus, the interpretation I undertake in this essay primarily unfolds on two levels. The first concerns the critical value of this installation, focusing on the web of relations it establishes and the range of associations it offers, both in the past and present, through its afterlives in exhibitions such as the one hosted by AzW. To understand the mechanisms of reception that this installation explores and upon which it acts, it is necessary to outline the cultural context of its time, as well as the periods from which the two fragments are drawn. It is against these backgrounds that the contours of this installation's critical value are sketched.

¹²

Referring to a dynamic complex or arrangement of various components or entities, the concept of assemblage is invoked here to highlight the essential heterogeneity of this composition, as well as to emphasize the interplay between material and discursive dimensions, which is key to understand how this installation works and the kind of architectural speculation Hollein pursues through it. For a comprehensive overview of the concept of *assemblage* see: Thomas Nail, "What Is an Assemblage?," *SubStance* 46, no. 1 (October 24, 2017): 21-37; see also Donvey Kim, "Assembling Architecture," in *Deleuze and Architecture*, ed. Hélène Frichot (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 131-48.

The second level focuses on the specifically architectural investigation carried out through the reshaping of this facade: the tools it adopts, the rules it sets or challenges, and the findings it presents. Hollein's prolific activity in the overlaps between art, performance, curation, architecture, and theoretical speculation allows me to read the intervention on the *Künstlerhaus* facade as a kind of research by design, particularly concerning the use of 'historical' fragments and their capacity to open up new directions for architectural practice.

At the same time, these two levels of interpretation seem to open the way for certain synthetic questions: How do the design choices of this assemblage appropriate or reinterpret the critical contents of the works reproduced? How do they relate to the artistic sensibilities or design rationales that gave rise to the past works? And in what directions do they steer them?

3 Traum und Wirklichkeit

3.1 A blockbuster's communicative strategy

Attracting more than half a million visitors, the *Traum und Wirklichkeit* exhibition played a pivotal role in establishing Vienna's reputation as a hub of modernism.¹³ It illustrated the influential contributions of architects like Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos, artistic movements such as the Secession and *Wiener Werkstätte*, and the emergence of epistemic cosmogonies, including psychoanalysis. The exhibition spanned the period from 1870 to 1930, effectively bridging two eras that had, up to that point, seemed isolated in historiography. Furthermore, linking these epochs implied a contrast of a psychoanalytical or philosophical nature, seemingly attributing the notions of "Dream" and "Reality" to each of them.

A key aspect of Hollein's curatorial strategy, aimed at engaging diverse audiences, was the creation of a series of large-scale models and 1:1 mock-ups of prominent works from these periods. These objects were intended not only to convey information but also to evoke a mood (*Stimmung*) that captures the spirit of the era.¹⁴ Hollein's reference to the concept of *Stimmung* hints at his understanding of the evocative power of tangible objects compared to, for example, texts or drawings. As a result, Loos's famous proposal for the Chicago Tribune competition (1922) reappeared alongside 1:1 reconstructions of the facade of the 'American Bar' (1908), and Otto Wagner's pioneering aluminum facade for the *Die Zeit* newspaper offices (1902). These works respond in various ways to the question of modern architecture's relationship to the past, especially in terms of its interpretation in facades, while simultaneously composing a genealogy in which Hollein himself appears to be situated on the edge.¹⁵

¹³ Hans Hollein, Catherine Cooke, *Vienna : Dream & Reality : A Celebration of the Hollein Installations for the Exhibition "Traum Und Wirklichkeit Wien 1870-1930" in the Künstlerhaus Vienna* (London: Academy editions, 1985).

¹⁴ Tino Erben, *Traum Und Wirklichkeit Wien, 1870-1930*, 37. In his 'Concept for the presentation of the Exhibition' Hollein clearly states that '[t]he exhibition is designed from the outset for a large, broad audience, a group of visitors with the most diverse educational backgrounds and interests'.

¹⁵ The interest in the column, the experimentation with scale and the formative experience of America are not only characteristic of Loos but also of Hollein, while the prominent role of aluminium in Wagner's *Die Zeit* facade evokes the one Hollein designed for the Retti Candle Shop in 1964. Such correspondences reveal the *Traum und Wirklichkeit* mockups also as indirect references of the curator to his own work and biography.

3.2 The Modus of 'Transformations'

In addition to the goal of engaging a broad audience, the reproduction of works at a 1:1 scale reflects a strong *design* commitment on the part of the architect-curator. This essay focuses on how this commitment was realized in the installation that led to a profound transformation of the exhibition building's facade. Built in the second half of the 19th century for the Austrian Artist's Association, the *Künstlerhaus* emulates the architectural style of an Italian Renaissance villa, featuring a main entrance flanked by two symmetrical recesses.¹⁶ On top of these recesses, Hollein placed mock-ups symbolizing the two focal points of the exhibition. On one side, a plaster statue resurrects the female figure from Gustav Klimt's 'Medicine,' painted in gold, much like most of this section of the 'historic' building. On the other side, there is a three-dimensional rendition of the distinctive motif of the Karl-Marx-Hof towers, painted grey. Above the central wing, on the parapet, the exhibition title takes the form of a neon sign, reflecting the contrast between the two sides through a graphic portrayal of words. 'Dream' is written in gold lettering with a slanted gradient against a blue wavy background, linking it to the plain white capital letters of 'reality.'

Drawing from his extensive artistic involvement within what has been termed the 'Austrian Phenomenon,'¹⁷ Hollein appears to build upon his experiments with the medium of collage. These experiments had already come to fruition between 1963 and 1968 with the 'Transformations' series of artworks, where a photograph of an everyday object is scaled up and collaged into a barren landscape. The visual vocabulary and design approaches explored in 'Transformations' are significant in interpreting the *Künstlerhaus* assemblage as an architectural experiment that further evolves collage into an installation, aided by the use of mock-ups.

4 The Traum Constellation

4.1 1890s and the bareness of reason

In adorning the University's Great Hall, the renowned ceiling paintings were intended to celebrate the modern disciplines of Philosophy, Medicine, and Jurisprudence. It seemed that no one could be more suitable for this task than the painter who excelled in decorating Ringstrasse monuments like the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* and the *Burgtheatre*. However, as Klimt's exploration of the 'true face of modern man' pushed him deeper into a critique of the institutions of humanism and further into the realm of instinct, his proposals for the University paintings evolved into one of Vienna's most heated debates at the turn of the century.¹⁸

¹⁶ Wladimir Aichelburg, *Das Wiener Künstlerhaus 1861 - 2001* (Wien: Österreichischer Kunst und Kulturverlag, 2003).

¹⁷ Gabriele Kaiser, Monika Platzer, and Martina Früwirth, *Architecture in Austria in the 20th and 21st Centuries* (Zurich: Park Books, 2016), 194-211.

¹⁸ Schorske, "Gustav Klimt: Painting and the Crisis of the Liberal Ego."

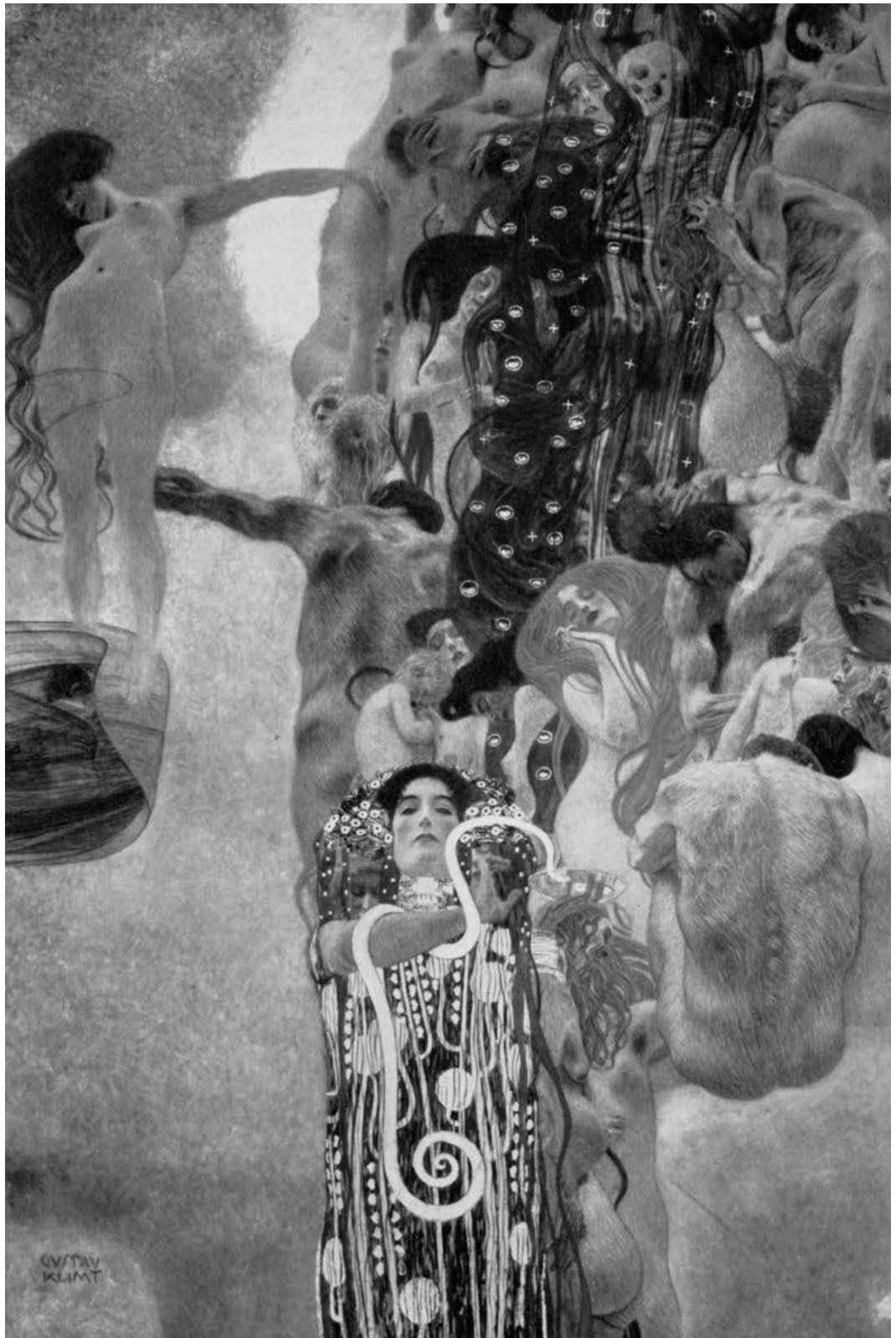


FIGURE 3 Gustav Klimt's *Medicine* (1901)

Presented in 1901 as part of the Secession's tenth exhibition, the painting portrayed an image of humanity as a tangle of bodies, suffering and voluptuous, at the center of which looms the specter of death. Amid this poignant mass, a hand reaches out in agony toward a naked woman, floating alongside the flow of bodies. Medicine also extends her reach, though in a different direction, with her eyes closed, content in a hedonic sphere of her own. At her feet, an infant plays, perhaps representing the future of mankind. In stark contrast to the figure of Medicine, at the base of the painting is the mythical figure of Hygeia, offering the viewer the cup of Lethe, from which the snake of Asclepius drinks.

Not surprisingly, the painting was met with resentment by members of the Department, who saw their discipline exposed as essentially detached from humanity. The drama of humanity played out alongside Medicine, with all its horror and grandeur. They must have clearly felt the painter's pervasive suspicion toward the powers of reason, a major theme of the fin-de-siècle intellectual atmosphere.

4.2 1980s and the reclaiming of figurativeness

Hollein's choice of this particular fragment evokes this conflict and, to some extent, re-enacts it. The very act of placing a nude figure of Gustav Klimt atop the headquarters of the (conservative) Austrian Artist's Association – from which Klimt departed in 1897 to establish the Secession – is a gesture rich with historical irony. The critical significance of this gesture becomes more pronounced when one considers the tumultuous journey of the Faculty paintings after they were rejected by the University. According to history, Medicine was initially acquired by a Jewish family, only to be later seized by Nazi Germany. It is widely believed that the painting was destroyed by a German SS unit, which, while on the run, set fire to the castle that housed the Faculty paintings. However, there is no concrete evidence to confirm this fate. The uncertainty surrounding the very existence of this artwork further strengthens its connection with the notion of 'dream.'

Moreover, the fact that Hollein chose the one painting owned by Jews and confiscated by the Nazis carries extra weight in Austria. In this context, Medicine seems to once again fulfill its provocative function, which derives not so much from its nakedness as from its posture and voluptuous pose. The comparison with the venerable male figures guarding the entrance to the *Künstlerhaus* heightens this sense of defiance, while her placement at the top of the building relegates the male figures to a minor and secondary role.

However, while these associations may evoke dissonant feelings, there are also aspects in which the introduction of this fragment harmonizes with the existing building. As the male figures themselves testify, the incorporation of statues into the structure of buildings or their protective presence atop structures is a familiar element of Vienna's urban landscape. It also alludes to the age-old connections between architecture and sculpture. Similarly, the use of gold in monument decoration, particularly in the case of the imperial city, appears to maintain an enduring significance.

In this particular instance, the symbolism of gold is also linked to its distinctive use by Klimt himself, in the abstract backgrounds of his paintings inspired by Byzantine art, which sometimes seemed to envelop the living figures.¹⁹ These associations recall cultural memories of Vienna, which they simultaneously distort, rendering them both familiar and unsettling, thereby creating a sense of the uncanny.²⁰

¹⁹ In this connection, Carl Schorske points to the *Portrait of Adel Bloch-Bauer* (1907) as the culmination of a series of paintings in which Klimt 'progressively extended the dominion of the environment over the person of the subject' (p. 269).

²⁰ For the shifting meanings of the uncanny (*unheimlich*) and especially for its understandings in architectural thought see Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999). Here I follow in particular Vidler's contention that 'architecture finds itself "repeating" history, whether in traditional or avant-garde guise, in a way that itself gives rise to an uncanny sense of *déjà vu* that parallels Freud's own description of the uncanny as linked to the "compulsion to repeat." The apparently irreconcilable demands for the absolute negation of the past and full "restoration" of the past here meet in their inevitable reliance on a language of architectural forms that seem, on the surface at least, to echo already used-up motifs *en abîme*. Deployed in this way, the uncanny might regain a political connotation as the very condition of contemporary haunting' (p. 14-15)

Indeed, the proportions of the 'statue' in relation to the building and the unconventional pose of the female figure, seemingly spilling gold, appear to mimic and exaggerate the urban and architectural context.

4.3 Uncanny continuities

In this way, the examination of the left side of this assemblage reveals the function of a vertical axis that, while disrupting the neo-renaissance representation introduced by the *Künstlerhaus*, does not definitively sever ties with it. On the contrary, it seems to establish analogies with it and reframes it, turning it into a portal to the realm of the cultural subconscious. One can reasonably assume that, especially for Hollein's generation, the sight of a fully gold naked female body is more likely to evoke James Bond and Goldfinger (1964) than the traditions of Byzantine iconography or architectural decoration, without negating the significance of the latter. Indeed, the image of Shirley Eaton as the murdered Jill Masterson has been 'one of the most enduring scenes in cinematic history'²¹ and pop culture, which Hollein placed at the center of his approach. Such an association also opens the way for the connections between sexuality and angst, fetishism, and dark humor that inform Hollein's work. From a different perspective, these images also invite a feminist reading of the particular way in which the female body is thematized, both by the Secession and Klimt, and by Hollein himself. Moreover, a feminist and decolonial framework may aid in a deeper critique of the assumptions that underlie the practice of detaching a form from its historical and cultural context.

4.4 Midas' touch?

What is particularly interesting here is the potential for a parallel (and possibly less deliberate) exposure of the processes of aestheticization that underlie the mining of history for its forms or motifs and the *extraction of value* from them. Similar to the cinematic James Bond, the golden female body alludes to the touch of Midas' hand. In this case, the myth may shed light on the violence inherent in the processes of abstraction that bring something under the realm of spectacle and exchange value, which are the mechanisms through which the commodification of history occurs.

This question of a necrosis of the historical form during its removal from its context is symptomatically revealed in Hollein's archive photographs of the mock-up being placed on top of the building with the assistance of a crane, with the camera capturing the agonizing moment of suspension, almost like a hanging scene. Adopting a decolonial (and anti-extractivist) perspective to examine how Western man mines his own history highlights the violence involved in the abduction of forms from their context, without regressing to idealizations of the 'original' or the search for the 'authentic.'²² On the contrary, such a perspective raises the question of whether and how such an act can be justified.

²¹ Lee Pfeiffer and Dave Worrall, *The Essential Bond* (London: Boxtree Ltd, 1998), 36.

²² Ramón Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Extractivism. A Dialogue with Alberto Acosta, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui," in *Knowledges Born in the Struggle*, ed. Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses (New York: Routledge, 2019), 203–18; Naomi Klein, "Dancing the World into Being : A Conversation with Idle-No-More' s Leanne Simpson," *Yes! Magazine*, no. December 2012 (2013), <https://tinyurl.com/yn228nvt>.



FIGURE 4 Left: Shirley Eaton as the murdered Jill Masterson in *Goldfinger* (1964). Right: Transferring the mock-up to the Künstlerhaus. Credit: AzW



FIGURE 5 Placing 'Medicine' on the Künstlerhaus. Credit: AzW

To address such questions, one must seek correspondences between the differing contexts, both in terms of cultural meanings and artistic practice. In terms of cultural critique, one may explore the issues raised by the new use of the fragment: does it engage with the cultural, ethical, and political tensions of the time in which it is (re)introduced? If so, does it aim to do so in a manner analogous to that of the work from which it is taken? Similarly, in the realm of architectural research and design experimentation, it seems necessary to search for correspondences between the new composition and the artistic insights that gave rise to the work from which a fragment is derived.

5 The Wirklichkeit Constellation

Through such a prism that explores the critical nuances between the re- and the de-contextualizing of 'historical' forms, the mock-up of the Karl-Marx-Hof on the right side of the *Künstlerhaus* can also be interpreted. Completed in 1930, the Karl-Marx-Hof is located in the Heiligenstadt neighborhood of Vienna's 19th district. Designed to house approximately 5,000 residents, this housing complex stretches over a length of more than one kilometer and is arranged through five inner courtyards (*höfe*), accommodating communal facilities.

5.1 “Scintillating Traditionalism” in the 1930s

As convincingly argued by historian Eve Blau, the heterodox modernism of the architecture of Red Vienna expressed a strong intention to modernize urban life for the benefit of the working classes, alongside a sensitivity to the legacies of the existing 'historic' city. The decision to integrate the new complexes into the old urban fabric (also dictated by practical constraints and pragmatic concerns), the adherence to the existing urban layout, and the adoption of the 'indigenous' type of the *Hof-Haus*, the perimeter block with an inner courtyard, all reveal the intention of an interweaving of the new with the old, or a strategy of *transforming* the old into the new. In the words of Anson Rabinbach:

By retaining the old city plan, the socialists honored the older, bourgeois topography. At the same time they transformed the bourgeois notion of private interiors by adding such public facilities as playgrounds and laundries. (...) The socialist's predilection for courtyards and monumental facades highlights not only their belief in the social function of architecture but also their sensitivity to the cultural memory of Habsburg architecture in the Baroque era.²³

In interpreting the historical sensitivity of the architects of Red Vienna, Eve Blau has pointed out that many of them were students of Otto Wagner, whose teaching and practice constantly revolved around the question of balancing the tensions between the old and the new.²⁴ Furthermore, Blau suggests that in the case of Red Vienna, the cosmopolitan monumentality of the *Wagnerschule* fused with Vienna's other major school of urban thought, namely that of Camillo Sitte – strongly rooted in the artisan tradition and the 'historic' townscape²⁵ – leading to what Friedrich Achleitner described as 'a scintillating traditionalism.'²⁶

²³ Anson Rabinbach, "Red Vienna: A Worker's Paradise," Virtual Vienna, accessed September 27, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/44xb2hz6>.

²⁴ Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-1934* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2018), 8–9. According to Blau it is significant that many of the architects of Red Vienna worked in Wagner's office while he was in charge of the realization of the city's modern railway network, the *Wiener Stadtbahn*. From Blau's perspective, the Stadtbahn is to be seen precisely as an endeavor to transform Vienna into a modern metropolis, while respecting its historical character. See: Blau, "Re-Visiting Red Vienna as an Urban Project."

²⁵ For the tension between these two schools of urban thought, but also their mutual emphasis on monumentality, see Carl E. Schorske, "The Ringstrasse, Its Critics, and the Birth of Urban Modernism," in *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 24–115.

²⁶ Friedrich Achleitner, "Comments on Viennese Architectural History: Motifs and Motivations, Background and Influences, Therapeutic Nihilism," in *A New Wave of Austrian Architecture*, ed. Kenneth Frampton (New York: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1980), 11. Cited in Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-1934* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2018), 9.

Importantly, this approach did not confine itself to the level of typological transformations but was strongly expressed in the decorative program, the ornament, and iconology of Red Vienna buildings: in mosaics and ceramic tiles, paintings, and, not least, in statues. These figures often recall the martyrs and saints that adorn Western cathedrals while gesturing towards the foundational narratives of socialist ideology. A similar function is served by the inscriptions commemorating the large property tax that financed the housing program, as well as the identification of the new *Höfe* with the names of heroes of socialist history.



FIGURE 6 Left: Placing the Karl-Marx-Hof mock-up on the Künstlerhaus Credit: AzW. Right: Sculptural ornament on the Karl-Marx-Hof. Photos by the author.

These elements, involving narrative and figurativeness, seem to have, on the whole, not received due attention, possibly because even today our perspective is still governed by modernism’s fundamental favor toward abstract form. However, it is precisely these elements that are essential for grasping how the architecture of the *Gemeindebauten* sought to link the everyday experience of new urban life, as expressed at the level of the functional program (clinics, libraries, nurseries, etc.), with the political thought and ideals behind it, expressed at the level of the iconographic program. What becomes manifest behind this approach is a specific understanding of the cultural role of architecture and its ability to link the ordinary and the extraordinary, the real and the ideal, or indeed, ‘dream and reality.’ But if the architects of Red Vienna were to follow such a conception of architecture, they had to work as much with the undeclared dispositions of spatial arrangements as with the cultural narratives articulated more explicitly in ornament and iconography.

5.2 Iconoclasm from the 1960s

Interestingly, these narrative elements are downplayed by the mockup that Hollein constructs. Indeed, it is not only the statues of Karl-Marx-Hof that are absent, but any element (ornament, symbol, or text)

that would figuratively convey the emancipatory promise of Red Vienna.²⁷ To be sure, this choice can be understood in the context of the overall scheme, where the sensual female figure on the left is to be contrasted with the abstract building form on the right: it is the pursuit of a sharp and clear opposition that dictates the stripping of the Karl-Marx-Hof of its ornament. The distance that separates such a pursuit from the design thinking of the Red Vienna architects becomes more apparent if one examines the 1930s pamphlet that was intended to introduce the Karl-Marx-Hof to the general public (fig. 7). There, on the top left of the cover, one finds a graphic representation of the building where, despite the high degree of abstraction, the form of the statue is *not* eliminated. On the contrary, the statue is introduced as a key element of the composition, occupying its central axis, and more specifically, the place of the arch *keystone*, thus following a long building tradition in which structural functions are densely interwoven with the discursive and narrative dimensions of edifices.



FIGURE 7 Red Vienna Pamphlet: "The Karl Marx-Hof: the housing complex of the municipality of Vienna on the Hagenwiese in Heiligenstadt." Credit: Vienna Library in City Hall.

But here, Hollein appears to be exploring an approach that purposefully steers clear of figurative representation and, perhaps more profoundly, an architectural attitude that, instead of seeking correspondences and uncanny continuities, focuses on discontinuity and rupture. In this direction, one can observe the vertical discontinuity between the Karl-Marx-Hof mock-up and the *Künstlerhaus*, which is reinforced by their chromatic divergence. If on the left side, a complex and contradictory relationship between the existing building and the mock-up was still tending towards a 'difficult whole' (to borrow Venturi's terms), the right-hand axis appears to question the very possibility of such a whole. The Karl-Marx-Hof is landing on the roof of the *Künstlerhaus*—or rather hovering over it—in a way that resembles an assault from the future, highlighting Hollein's affinities with aspects of the so-called '60s and '70s avant-garde, such as Archigram and the Italian Radicals.²⁸

²⁷ An exception is the element of the flag (often favored within the postmodernist framework), which is not only preserved but also multiplied, emphasizing the monumental character of the work. Overall, one might observe that Hollein's mock-up reflects more the 'exterior' side of the Karl-Marx-Hof – the rather unadorned East facade – and less that of the inner courtyard, in which the four statues are placed.

²⁸ For a critical reading of the experiments of this period and its attitudes towards the 'historical' city and 'traditional' architectural form see Pier Vittorio Aureli, "The Difficult Whole," *Log*, no. 9 (2007): 39–61.

More specifically, this design approach recalls the modus operandi followed by Hollein in his “*Transformations*” series, where ‘an agricultural or urban landscape, often barren, is the site for a monumental industrial object.’²⁹ Among these works, the famous ‘Monument to Victims of the Holocaust,’ where a train carriage is scaled-up, placed on a monumental pedestal, and thus transformed into an enigmatic and ominous architectural space, exemplifies the mechanism employed with the fragment from Karl-Marx-Hof. Furthermore, the architectural and urban ideas underlying the (dis)association of the mock-up with the *Künstlerhaus* are illuminated by ‘Aircraft Carrier City in Landscape.’ In this work, the towering image of an aircraft carrier (specifically the USS Enterprise³⁰) appears unexpectedly on a rural landscape, apparently suspended in a bucolic past: ‘an iconoclastic relic of its former function; its use here confounds common understandings of what it means to build in the contemporary landscape.’³¹

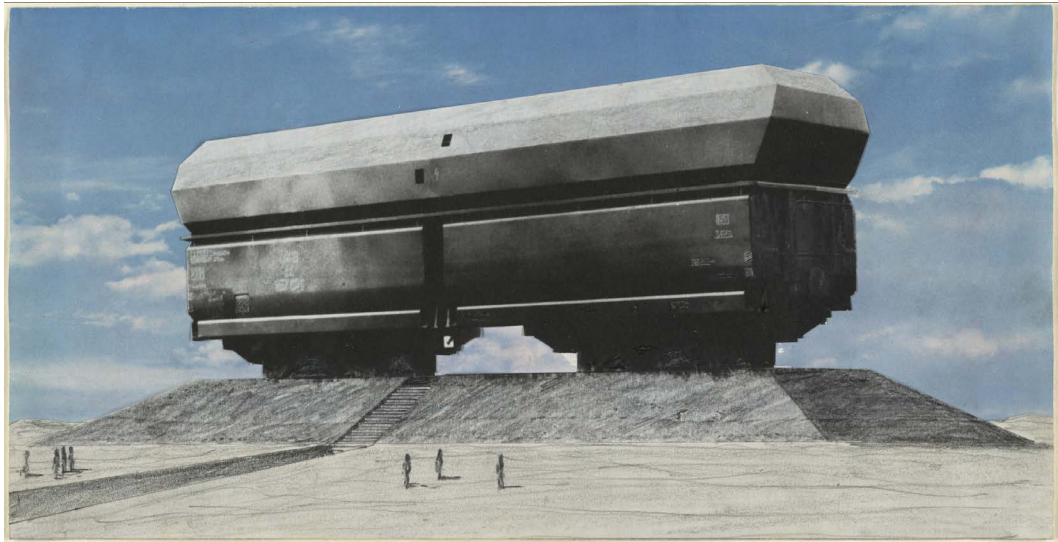


FIGURE 8 Monument to the Victims of Holocaust'. Source: Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Philip Johnson Fund, 1967

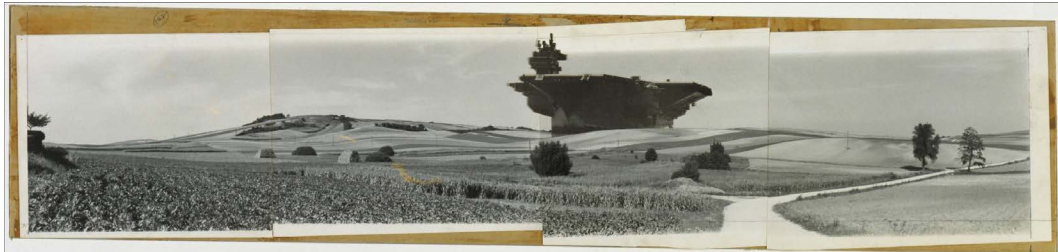


FIGURE 9 'Aircraft Carrier City in Landscape'. Source: Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Philip Johnson Fund, 1967

²⁹ “Hans Hollein. Aircraft Carrier City in Landscape, Project, Exterior Perspective. 1964 | MoMA,” accessed February 28, 2022, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/634>.

³⁰ Branscome, “Ship to Shore.”

³¹ However, as Eva Branscome has shown, Hollein’s resourceful irony requires such alienating associations to be also read in reverse: in the case of the ‘aircraft carrier’ the impression of a threatening warship in a peaceful landscape is subverted when we learn that the aircraft carrier has in fact been collaged on a vast minefield, on the border with Soviet Hungary – and thus it turns out to be trapped and utterly vulnerable. So too in the case of the right side of the *Traum und Wirklichkeit* installation, the cut-off tower of Karl-Marx-Hof may be seen as an allegory for Red Vienna itself: an isolated revolutionary enclave in an otherwise conservative country.



FIGURE 10 Working model for the *Traum und Wirklichkeit* installation, included in the catalogue of the exhibition. Credit: AzW

5.4 Curating rupture?

At first sight, the design approach followed on the right side of the installation does not seem to differ significantly from what one sees on the left: The critical fragment is once again drawn from a contested public sphere and a turbulent time in the city's past. Again, the image selected by the architect stands as a potent icon that has traveled across multiple media and has been instilled in different ways in collective memory, becoming, so to speak, part of a mythology. Also, in both cases, the fragment has been scaled and transformed into a free-standing sculptural object. And yet, what the mock-up reveals, and which is not conveyed as powerfully by Hollein's sketch (in which the right side is more tenuously drawn than the left), is that something different is at work here. I would argue that the key difference, in terms of design attitude, lies in the claimed autonomy of the fragment and the ways in which it does not converse with its new context. Specifically, if on the left side of the installation, the fragment of Klimt's painting tends to integrate into its new context by bending its ornamental order, the mock-up of the Karl-Marx-Hof on the right seems to strive for autonomy through a process of neutralizing its new context.

Certainly, there are key differences between the two fragments, endowing them with essentially different transformative potentials. As a human figure, Medicine readily lends herself to being transformed into a statue and thus engaging with the existing ornament. An analogous approach on the Wirklichkeit axis would perhaps treat the Karl-Marx-Hof fragment as a *turret*, mimicking the castellated edifices found in many parts of Vienna and which were widespread in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.³² In fact, such an approach is conveyed by a working model of the installation in which the right side of the *Künstlerhaus* is not represented in grey but *in red*, implying a continuity between the 19th-century building and the 1930s fragment (fig. 10).

On the contrary, the choice of chromatic divergence enhances the singularity of the fragment, while the selection of grey tends to render the existing building into a neutral background, suitable to bring out what is showcased, as an *exhibit*. This assumption is further confirmed by the treatment of the (non-)lighting of the right side of the *Künstlerhaus*, in the establishing shot of the installation in the exhibition's catalogue (fig. 1), where the right wing of the 'historic' building is literally switched off, in order to elevate the carefully illuminated fragment. The contours of the architectural stance explored here thus begin to take shape: To emerge as a self-sufficient presence, the work of (absolute) architecture must distance itself from its context; its aesthetic purity depends on its detachment from what surrounds it.³³

6 A Spectacular Bridging

If from the very start it was obvious that this assemblage is governed by a horizontal tension between Dream and Reality, an examination of its two vertical axes allowed me to delve into the particular design choices through which these concepts are interpreted by Hollein, and to derive from them two different architectural attitudes. It now seems appropriate to consider this assemblage as a whole and, more importantly, the way in which the architect comes to bridge the gap that he so diligently opened.

On a practical level, the luminous sign in the middle draws the name of the show in the night sky, heralding the event in the public space of the city, and especially to the fast-passing cars. Capturing the gaze of the rushing urbanites is supported by its size, materiality, and graphic expression, alluding to the tropes of advertising. The title itself is thus introduced as an advertising quote, succinct and persuasive. At the level of significations, it is clear that 'grey reality' merges with 'golden dream' thanks to the power of spectacle. Partly ironic and partly literal, this bridge is posited as both a critical comment and a positive architectural proposition: the idiom of mass culture is understood as the route (or maybe the highway) through which any attempt to connect the real and the oneiric must pass, in this post-industrial age; and perhaps more widely, as the one all-encompassing language of the contemporary world. Inseparable from this language is the habitus of consumption. Hollein's assemblage seems to declare an awareness of this condition, while leaving open the question of whether this leads to a quest of its undermining, or whether instead to an embrace of the phantasmagoria of commodity.

³² *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, January 1, 2006. Available at <https://tinyurl.com/48wrnvcx>

³³ This understanding of Hollein's concept of "Absolute Architecture" mainly follows Karsten Harries, "The Terror of Time and the Love of Geometry," in *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 230–31. See also Karsten Harries, "The Dream of Complete Building," *Perspecta* 17 (1980): 36–43.

7 Conclusion: On dreaming realities

If these observations are anywhere near the mark, one could argue that while both strands of the installation seem to follow similar logics, in fact, they move in different directions: the 'Dream' side seeking uncanny continuities and the 'Reality' side tracing ways of curating rupture. In this way, the two sides of the installation frame the concepts of Dream and Reality in a particular – and debatable – manner, as well as the two eras of Vienna they present. Most importantly, the installation at the *Künstlerhaus* can be read as an experiment in which emerging architectural values are tested. The constellation of *Traum* encompasses body and sensuality, color and decoration, continuity, metamorphosis, and figurativeness. The constellation of *Wirklichkeit* is associated with spirit and reason, structure and function, discontinuity and abstract form. The bridge that links the two as *Traum und Wirklichkeit* wears the neon light, consciously inviting the architect to learn from the advertiser and the product designer.

The architectural hypotheses Hollein explores are mainly concerned with (and revealed through) the relations between fragments and their new contexts. The interpretation I have put forward in this paper would see the architect, under his constellation of *Traum*, probing the attitude of critical re-contextualization that beckons beyond the fragment and the work itself, towards the broader urban and cultural context. On the other hand, under the constellation of *Wirklichkeit*, the architect appeared to explore the modalities of de-contextualization, driven by the search for a self-sufficient aesthetic presence.³⁴ Finally, in the neon sign, I saw the question of context taking on its most critical face: on the one hand, the phantasmagoria of the spectacle is posed as the dominant condition in which, willingly or not, the architectural work is called to find its place. On the other hand, the weight of the cultural references that constitute the anchors of the installation seems to undermine such a capitulation, recognizing mass culture as the condition through which architectural research must pass – and architectural practice should overcome.

The role of replicas and mock-ups in this exploration seems to be pivotal, not only because they provide powerful tools for testing and evaluation, but also because they encapsulate many of the tensions explored in this essay. On the one hand, when substituting for architecture, mock-ups may function as instruments of escapism to a 'Disneyland' past that remains unknown and unknowable. On the other hand, insofar as they are involved in a critical process of architectural (re)creation, they seem to point to 'early modern practices (...) when "copying was the normal way to make new things," and when the meaning of an artifact was found and preserved "across a chain of mutually substitutable artifacts," rather than by the authority of historical origins and first versions.'³⁵ This function of mock-ups also points toward their power to assist the architect in a more radical questioning of the axioms bequeathed to her by modernity, among which the dichotomy of dream and reality is not the least critical.

³⁴ It would be possible to trace these tendencies in the architectural developments of the 1990s, especially if we consider that three years later came the exhibition on 'Deconstructivist Architecture' at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The work of Eisenman, Hadid, Tschumi, Coop Himmelblau and Koolhaas, seems to be considerably concerned with the tensions that Hollein explored with the installation at the *Künstlerhaus*.

³⁵ Mari Lending, "Monuments in Flux. Introduction," in *Monuments in Flux*, 68.

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