

the negated room

ALBA D'URBANO



The Origin

"Pictures are meaningful surfaces. They indicate usually — something 'out there' in space and time which they want to make conceivable for us as abstractions (as abbreviations of the four space-time dimensions on the two dimensions of the surface)" (V. Flusser: "Für eine Philosophie der Photographie", 1991).

The installation "Der negierte Raum" deals with two issues: the relationship between reality, image, text and simulation with regard to the problem of representing an architecturally defined space (which can be considered a small part of the physical spatial universe in general and spaces constructed by humans in particular). The installation's point of departure is an exhibition space "equipped" at various times with pictures or objects which have a special meaning in a cultural context. On the one hand, this is a room for presenting the installation; on the other hand, the specific spatial situation itself becomes the subject of the artistic work, the "shelter" of which it represents. It represents something and is itself represented.

The installation allows one to experience the room in which it is on the one hand concealed and on the other hand visualized by means of media in many different aspects, thereby constructing almost a "portrait" of the spatial architecture.

The installation was developed in various phases. First, a photographic documentation of the empty room was made, during which every wall was photographed separately. The resulting pictures are in the computer in digital form and have been processed in various ways. At first, the binary data of the pictures' contents were interpreted in the computer as an ASCII text,

printed onto white paper and hung in the exhibition space as wallpaper. The difficult relationship between the pictures' magical power of imagination and the linear, conceptual nature of the text are translated directly to a ratio of 1:1 by means of the computer's interface and solved as a paradox.

Millions of characters cover the walls, the floor and the ceiling; each of the six surfaces in the room has its own coded pictorial content. This operation of transferring information about the data obtained from the object conceals the reality and hinders a direct view. The room is simultaneously negated and made to stand out, placed in the past, which is a part of memory only: a room which has been robbed of its material quality and an idea which has been made concrete.

Sunk in this unintelligible semantic ocean of characters, a wire model of the room is placed in the middle on a platform which is open on top. Within the platform, shoved back somewhat, is a small rear projection screen. The viewer can look through the model and see the images of a computer animation sequence on the screen. The source of this sequence is a miniature video projector placed inside the platform and below the screen. In this video, the digitalized photographs of the room form the walls of a simulated computer model. A spatial representation is born of this combination, in which the distortion of perspective in the reproductions is mixed with the computer's exact simulation of the room, thereby producing an aspect of dislocation in the representation of the object. A synthetic room is created which ignores the normal border created by the description of Cartesian space, in which the polarizations are relativized and the definition of interior and exterior is only a question of the point of view.

The Negated Room — The Model World

In the version for the "Ars Electronica '94", the actual room generating the work is done away with. Of the original object, only a few possible interpretations remain as traces - three architectural models constructed of various materials with different sizes and various qualities. They are like Russian dolls, parallel and concentric universes inside of which the computer-generated simulation is located as a fourth dimension.

The model of the language, the misunderstanding, is located on the outside — it is scaled 1:2 in relation to the original space, and both sides of its walls are covered with ASCII characters. It resembles the miniature reproduction of the room, which no longer exists and yet possesses the same function, that at the external shell of the entire installation. The visitor can enter this object in order to see the other parts of the work. On the inside, a closed object, a negative spatial model of the room, can be found first: the walls that surround this impermeable area consist of photographs of the interior space. A smaller wire model is added as a maximum abstraction of the architectural space's linear form. In the middle stands an open platform: The observer can look into it as if it were a fountain and let him or herself be led through the internal projection of a computer animation sequence into the non-material synthetic space of the computer.