

## **Plan**

### **FAREED ARMALY**

The new Design Center and a section of the Ars Electronica join together under the theme of "Intelligent Environment".

The other AE sites, Brucknerhaus or the Landesmuseum, belong to a history of permanent, purpose-built cultural spaces. Cultural activities occur within fixed rooms, allowing for the changes required for traditional classical forms. The rooms' permanent walls are drawn out from the logic of the architectural plan.

Cultural spaces indicate a program that implies a connection to a public, the social life of the city, and symbolic to the city plan. There are links between, for example, a certain sense of what should, or could be, experienced as 'culture' within the 'interior' space, and that expressed via the architectural 'exterior', as orientated within the overall city plan.

The DC is another type of structure. Its plan and program develop out from other orientations. As with all large halls, an important point of origin is the intention to 'supply' an environment. Particularly with the scale of such a space, the approach to planning concerns the unpredictable qualities related to: nature; covering the largest volume of unobstructed area; achieving a space with the most possible uniform units; a strict operating economy; large volumes of attending visitors.

The DC space visually, and conceptually, offers a new take on old situations. This is in relation to several histories of building solutions, of a type where engineering technologies responded to their associated concerns (problems relative to statics, etc) which resulted in experiences thought of as belonging to the 'higher' concerns of architecture.

The space should not be judged as simply a success in terms of 'building from the ground up' (and hopefully sustaining that) but in terms of what is indicated as 'environment'. This is evident in the kind of approach concerning the interweaving of various engineering technologies. A more apt description of the DC might be a 'user- area' defined by two 'interfaces': the floor and the ceiling.

#### **Interface 1) the floor**

The Ars Electronica exhibition takes place on the upper floor of the DC. The floor is emblematic for the space. Its apparent solidity is quickly revealed to be nothing more than a cover through which to plug-in to 'services'. Its surface is comprised of 50cm square tiles. Each can be pulled away to reveal an area underneath. Tiles can be exchanged with variations containing, for example, air-ducts. The space underneath awaits the positioning of channels for bringing and removing air, water, and plugs to be brought in from the main support lines. The necessary supplies for the environment are not just air, water or electricity, but now telephone, computer, and TV as well.

#### **Interface 2) Ceiling structure**

The glass ceiling spans the entire center, appearing to touch ground on both sides. The key of the DC is the handling of its most immaterial quality, the light. The change occurs here, from transparency, the ability for a view outward, receiving light, to 'interface'. There is in fact no 'window' here, but a set of filters. The clear glass actually contains 'lamellen'. Each glass

piece, and the angle of the 'lamellen' within, is individually calculated for its position in the arch, relative to the calculated positions of the sun.

As is the case with the physics of optics, such a filtering brings the light in, and shapes it as if to appear as material. Here the historical sign of engineering — a spanned area — no longer just stands for the ability to surpass vast areas, but as the point where occurs a filtering, converting, and shaping of light as itself a material property.

It presents an interfaced world. The sense of a space, our relations within and to the world outside, is achieved not only by physically 'being there', but as well, via the environment of filtering and converting the transmissions of various properties, not the least of which is indicated through light.

The use of light is a main historical structural orientation. Matching this to the DC offers an analogy to such spaces as gothic cathedrals, glass exhibition palaces, cinemas. But as environment, it also establishes a link to the sense of space we are accustomed to as TV, computer monitors and the coming new virtual technology, all of which are involved in respect of the flows and formations of large publics.

In terms of the public, the hall ceiling interface has one other subtle reminder of the hall's function as a site for commerce. As daylight shifts towards dusk, the properties of the lamellen introduce to the transparent glass, to the quality of light, one other — the reflection of the mirror.

### **Exhibition design as 'reflection'**

As with all halls, the DC comes with no set interior walls. A complete interior was required for this Ars Electronica section. In terms of exhibition planning, having fixed interior walls means there are some discussions already concluded. The more concrete the walls, the more final the discussion.

Temporary architecture is an element every large hall requires. The walls stand as a line drawn between what is necessary for two kinds of spaces - the DC, and that of the displays. The DC's permanent rules (access for wheelchairs and fire exits, only freestanding structures, etc.) relate to what shouldn't occur in virtue of the large-scale public structure. The rules for the temporary installations begin relative to what should occur in one designated room.

Any contemporary reference to 'environment' includes within it the flow of the media. It may be helpful to consider exhibition architecture as analogous to media. It has more in common with that, than the responsibilities of architecture. Posters, labels and guides are literally as equal in importance — and weight — as the walls. What is conveyed is a sense of display, a space, to the public as a flow of information.

In relation to such exhibitions, the mass media attempts to structure the public around information related to technology advancements. The mass media always works on building anticipation. This happens in particular with new future technologies, the type that profess the ability to allow one to fully experience another world. Virtual Reality is one example.

As such, it is easy to make the leap of faith, and assume that installations -involving displays, environments, new technologies, etc., require less of what a traditional room delivers — i.e. heavy, load-bearing, structures — and more a 'framing' which indicates 'space'. In theory,

decisions would be more related to indicating an area, for example, required in terms of viewing, or trying out, a head-mounted display set-up.

The development for the exhibition design pointed out that often the opposite was true. Planning the temporary structures, in respect of the installation's demands, often meant having to consider somewhat a more complex synthesis, a temporary structure mimicking exactly those qualities associated with permanent rooms load bearing structures, spanned ceilings, darkness, silence, and so on.

This is the opposite of what any large hall sets up to anticipate occurring as interior architecture. The exhibition design, the line drawn between the DC's architecture and the installations within, developed as a 'nexus' of various philosophies operating not always in tune but certainly in tandem with each other. These concern engineering technology, philosophical outlooks, worldviews — and sometimes simply the difference between a 'room' and 'space'.

Regardless of whether God or the devil is in the details, the level of some of the technical discussions concerning future technology installations may appear insignificant at points, but in fact, these reveal and stand for an overall philosophical outlook.

It concerns what kinds of relations are being set up, for an individual to experience, within the parameters of this world. It is informative to note how a concept design approaches, for example, whether or not to 'deny' the enormity and attraction of the engineering, the machines, projectors, computers, etc.

The framework which must be established, to allow the works to 'work', is an environment, that appears still has to begin with the traditional questions taking into account the weight and force of an accumulation of moving bodies, statics, gravity etc — the traditions of physical engineering. As such, the host site stands out as an exemplary contemporary comment on this plain truth about forces.

The design works to link the exhibition to the architecture and design strengths offered by the site. Works that can stand alone, ignore, deny, or be free of a 'room' were situated in respect of those various individual installations that required certain specific 'room' interior factors. These benefitted by being grouped together so as to share walls for greater support, bringing about the most space possible within a limited area, and allowing from an exterior vantage point, one apparent overall structured 'interior'. The structure's overall design, scale, symmetrical placement is intended to link up to relations expressed in the logic of the Design Center plan.

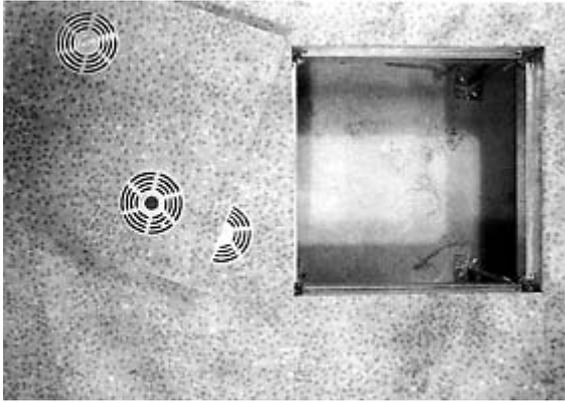


Foto: Horst Jaritz