

“Aus heiterem Himmel” (“Out Of the Blue”) by Daniela Keiser  
At the Kunsthalle Vebikus in the Kulturzentrum Kammgarn, Schaffhausen, 2016

### **Gifted time**

Some thoughts by Niklaus Graber, on the occasion of the vernissage of 19.9.2016

The relationship between art and architecture has long been the object of wide-ranging discourses. There have been many discussions, with much controversy, on the subject of how closely or distantly architecture is related to the most varied art genres. At present, I am not particularly concerned with whether architecture itself is also a genre of art or not; however you decide on such an attribution, it does not greatly affect the fact that every discipline has, in either case, its own inherent rules and key elements that make it specific and unique relative to other métiers. However, it is increasingly meaningless for any art form or form of expression to lay exclusive claim to any particular quality, since the theory of reciprocal influences, transdisciplinarity and cross-media projects has now matured to the point where it is taken for granted culturally. There is certainly no doubt that a plain relationship exists between architecture and plastic or sculpturally oriented art forms. Leaving formal and technical aspects aside, as an architect I am primarily interested in the shared aspects of different disciplines in terms of content, spatial features, and structure. It is therefore not unusual for me to get more inspiration from theatre, film, music, painting, or sculpture than from analysing the buildings and projects that are hot topics of discussion in current architecture discourse.

The version of Daniela Keiser’s artwork “Aus heiterem Himmel” (“Out Of the Blue”) that can be seen at the Schaffhauser Kammgarnareal (the Schiffhauser worsted fabric area) prompts a number of speculations about the relationship between art and architecture in general, and, more specifically, their interaction: the installation is not exhibited in some standard “white cube”, but in the context of very characterful industrial architecture from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, in Schaffhausen, the viewer has the chance to experience the coming together of sculpture and architecture in a way that is fully immediate. It also offers viewers the opportunity to encounter both of these media synchronously in the here and now – an experience that cannot be adequately substituted for by any photographic, filmic, or textual reproduction. It is like a musical event that continues to resonate long after one departs from the concert hall, and yet one cannot conserve its unique quality: the magical ambivalence of fragility and power inherent in Daniela Keiser’s Schaffhauser installation, which can really only be experienced on a one-to-one basis. A deeper understanding of the installation is not achieved by studying it deeply as an image, but through experiencing it in a dynamic, physical way; this comprises the first major common feature of the artistic intervention and the constructed architecture.

Numerous other artworks by Daniela Keiser show the artist’s affinity for the architectonic and spatial. Daniela Keiser’s interest in spaces is revealed not only by her “Die Stadt” photographic series, which is concerned with film architecture, but also her publication in multiple volumes entitled “Kairo”, her artwork “bergen” and numerous art-and-building projects reveal Daniela Keiser’s interest in spaces. It appears that it is not only space experienced three dimensionally that interests the artist. She is also interested in non-physical spaces: in social spaces, life spaces, and thought spaces. Many of Daniela Keiser’s artworks, especially her installation “Aus heiterem Himmel”, which has already been exhibited in a number of different locations, take the viewer on a journey of physical and mental experiencing of space – on several tracks.

When one approaches the spatially extensive installation, which is located in a low niche space in the intermediate story of the former worsted factory, at the initial level, it evokes associations with cityscapes, agglomerations, or “urban sprawl”. Several interlocking circular arrangements composed of glasses, adhesive strips, pieces of sugar, and pills are laid out on the floor, causing one to think of a polycentric, anti-hierarchical city or social structure which, with adjustments in scale, actually appear to measure the full length of the whole of this universe, lying in semidarkness. One is subliminally reminded of the architectural visions of Bruno Taut, Hermann Finsterlin, and the “Gläserne Kette” or “Glass Chain” movement, who, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, dreamed of a crystalline, transparent, and radiant architecture.

But what is it about this installation, which is composed of clearly recognisable everyday objects, that suggests architectonic images in the first place? And why does this artwork, which takes up barely a couple of cubic meters of space, evoke a level and scale associated with architecture and urbanism? Probably because the installation goes beyond simply giving us a picture to study, evoking parallels to architecture on a deeper level, one that extends farther. In Daniela Keiser’s work, beyond the concrete elements that we register, there are manifestly more abstract elements that reveal a kind of essential affinity between different disciplines and that help us to perceive the world according to the relevant overall contexts.

**Space:** To engage with space also means to engage with living space. When we see Daniela Keiser conducting a kind of quasi research into the spatial, this is also an expression of her thoughts on human coexistence and human existence, which are of primary importance. The architecture and spatial design of the environment are always an expression of human action, endeavour, and coexistence, and reflect the prevailing social conditions of any age in a particularly powerful way. Beyond these fundamental spatial themes, the artwork as seen in Schaffhausen engages with conditions in the exhibition site in a very specific way. It radiates out into the space three-dimensionally, appearing to embrace elements of the existing architecture. Between the tubular tentacles of the sculpture and the ceiling’s lattice-like support framework in the exhibition space, new spaces open up, inscribing themselves into the low and severely rectangular space, fragmenting it, and, as it were, multiplying it. When one walks around the installation in particular, every change of perspective constantly produces new spatial situations, conveying the impression that the installation itself is revolving in space. On the one hand, this blurs the overall scale; on the other hand, it makes the visitor more clearly aware of the composition and proportions of the cabinet-like exhibition room. A gravitational field is set up between the installation and the architecture; installation and architecture engage in dialogue, and we begin to see aspects of the space that we might perhaps not have seen in the empty space, except under certain conditions. In this sense, the installation is like a stone thrown “out of the blue” into water, which tells us something about the nature of the water itself.

In itself, the fact that the installation not only spreads out across the floor, but also hangs down from the ceiling (or rises up towards it) shows us that what we have here is not simply a ceiling, but a spatially effective load-bearing construction, composed of imposing steel girders. Thus, the installation becomes positively a perception machine, or a mirror that reveals to us more about our spatial surroundings and the architecture of the worsted factory.

The lighting dramaturgy employed by Daniela Keiser is particularly impressive and spatially effective; its radiating rays perforate the pre-existing space and appear to transcend the boundaries of the construction. Thus, the installation sometimes indicates that the surface we are standing on may be a “soft” element, inserted into the basic structure at a later stage, and that the factory space probably once had a different height to the gallery space of today. The adhesive strips, laid out radially across the floor and shimmering magically in the artificial light, transform

what is actually a robust load-bearing concrete floor into a fragile membrane that very suddenly resembles a brittle, fractured expanse of ice. In addition to putting the viewer in an uncertain and questioning mood, Daniela Keiser's use of this method reminds us that, in the late 20th century, the Schaffhauser Kammgarnfabrik was frequently a vessel for social, cultural, and political explosives, constantly rendering conventions questionable.

**Structure:** A further aspect common to installation and architecture is that of structure. In his somewhat autobiographical book "Der Teil und das Ganze" ("The Part and the Whole"), published in 1969, the German scientist and thinker Werner Heisenberg formulated a particularly illuminating thesis on the concept of structure: "*The same ordering forces have shaped nature in all of its forms and the structure of our soul; that is, they are also responsible for the way we think.*" What is interesting about this statement is that Heisenberg is speaking of the essential affinity of things, and saying that something exists in the nature of ordering forces that permeate everything around and within us. He also speaks of structure relating both to rationality and irrationality, thus affecting soul and thought alike.

This "synchronising" of feeling and thought is also something that one experiences intensively in Daniela Keiser's artwork. The concept of the installation puts the viewer in an oscillating, suspended state between feeling and grasping, between astonishment and analysis. On a structural level, the installation plays a puzzling game, suggesting to us, in feeling and spirit, principles of order that are located outside of the effective seen.

The associations with architecture or urban plans mentioned at the outset are awakened precisely because Daniela Keiser's artwork does not construct purely visual parallels to other disciplines, instead exploring the depths of their structures. In our imaginations, circular clusters of drinking glasses mutate into urban landscapes, and chrome steel pipes or adhesive strips become rays of sunlight that awaken the poetic scenery to cheerful life.

In Daniela Keiser's artworks, structure can initially be perceived very much as something mental and abstract, without measurable dimensions: a kind of thought process or thought model. The actual key to the artwork – the thing that actually allows us to perceive structures in the first place – is the minutely explored transference of an idea into something physical and real: the making solid of an intuition by material means.

**Materials:** One striking aspect of the installation "Aus heiterem Himmel" is the use of materials that are, in a certain sense, still engaged in a journey: whilst they have already been processed by human beings or machines, they have not yet achieved their ultimate predefined purpose. In this case, the pipes are transporting light, not water, and the adhesive tapes are reflecting light rather than holding parcels together as intended. The glasses are not filled with wine; instead they diffuse light, and the sugar cubes have not yet been dissolved so that we can enjoy their taste.

In this context, one might think of them as "semi-fabricated"; as things in an in-between state. If we are to believe online lexica such as Wikipedia, the status of "semi-finished product" owes its existence to the fact that production processes cannot always be completed by the balance sheet reporting date. In terms of business economics, semi-finished products have passed the stage of raw materials, auxiliary materials and process materials because they have entered the initial production phases, but have not yet reached the ready-for-sale stage.

If one transfers this definition to the installation "Aus heiterem Himmel", one can say that Daniela Keiser's artwork does not make any final reckoning. The installation is not a concluded, determined, or "ready-for-sale" product, but a fragile experiment that remains open (and open to interpretation), and actively incorporates us, the viewers. Thus, the artist invites us to engage in

dialogue that welcomes our speculations and spurs our imagination to construct daring civic landscapes from what we can see. In a similar manner, the architecture of the worsted factory, once intended for production purposes, shows itself as an open and adaptable “place of opportunities”, and as a stage where the spectacle of life can spread out freely.

It is a pleasing circumstance that the Schaffhauser version of “Aus heiterem Himmel” is exhibited in a place where semi-finished products were previously produced by means of physical and mechanical work. Created here by the artist with her own hands, the installation might perhaps be understood as a kind of homage to physical work – something that is increasingly disappearing from our digital everyday lives – and the magic of mechanisms. In spite of being anchored on the conceptual level, “Aus heiterem Himmel” is not the kind of brainchild whose physical presence springs from a technologically underpinned battle with materials or the homogenous hodgepodge of the powder printer (recently so keenly embraced by the art world). Instead, it remains an “artwork” in the truest sense of the word, dependent upon the personal actions of the artist during the realisation phase also. Thus, what Daniela Keiser is giving us is not merely a revelation about contextual working, but also the most valuable commodity of our epoch: time.