

Title: Mythopoetics of the Kunsthalle

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Abstract:

In the midst of an architectural landscape replete with empty discourses on technology, environmentalism, and fetishistic spectacles, is there space for an architecture that holds on to the idealistic values of modernity? Is there space for an architecture that has not succumbed to the flattening logic of the market, indistinctly banalizing space either as utilitarian infrastructure or as propagandistic theme park? In other words, is it still possible to construct an architecture underpinned by what we might call ‘humanist’ values: universality, egalitarianism, and civility – a civic architecture – in the face of a post-humanist critique? Can ‘the civic’ be encapsulated and activated by a building?

In this article we will trace two different approaches for addressing this specific question by looking at a typology, the ‘Kunsthalle,’ through the prism of two buildings: Turner Contemporary, UK, and Kunsthhaus Graz, Austria. Through this comparison we will examine the Kunsthalle as a typology articulating social ideas through seemingly opposing architectural forms, but, more importantly, we will question whether its underlying ideas and principles could be applicable to the practice of architecture itself. In such a hypothetical scenario we will suggest that the Kunsthalle could be viewed as more than a typology; it could be viewed as a conceptual model conveying the fundamental instability of ‘the civic,’ and thus challenge architectural culture – its normative forms of subjectivity and attendant social relations – from within.