

Give me a Subject!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

may I say, I am grateful to be here? Yes. I should. And I should mention all these people I owe a debt of gratitude, I should say thank you to Moritz Küng, who invited me to do this exhibition, I should say thanks to all my collaborators, thanks to Andreas Roth for his artwork, thanks to the members of my office, thanks to Silvan, thanks to my students – thanks to all the anonymous posters who responded to the invitation to partake in this exhibition. And why not say thanks to Mom and Dad, my grandparents too, my beloved ancestors? Thanks to everybody I love, thanks to everybody I hate. Thanks to the ones I know, thanks to the ones I don't know. Thanks to *you*. That's what I should say. And I do – so in a way this is my personal Thanksgiving Evening. But nevertheless. There is something queer. I am here to prelude my work, but this peculiar I feels slightly – inhibited. Yes, that's the word. The very contrast to everything an exhibition should be: inhibition

Why should I feel inhibited? Isn't it great to be here? It is. But this position, this me-in-front-of-you all, is a little bit more: As a very sophisticated and traditional setting it is a seduction to expose myself, pretending to be someone which I am definitely not.

I always wondered about the artist in triumph, giving himself the attitude of a self fabricated superego. Oh, it's nice to have a little court, it feels good to show off a little bit. But there's a price to pay – and this price stands contrary to the

intellectual ambition. To put it simple: The biggest enemy of art is the artists himself, the greatest hindrance of the intellect is the coronation, the label which guarantees intellectual legitimacy. Maybe this sounds, like every dialectical twist, complicated, but it's a very simple mechanism indeed –and it says, that the same moment a figure turns out to be an end in itself, it has reached it's historical end. It's over. I am over – and that was the moment I woke up.

I guess you see what I mean: I don't believe in the superego anymore. I don't believe in personal style. I don't believe in the persona the modern artist stands for. I don't believe in me standing here. I think: all this is crude and kitschy romanticism. I still believe in ideas, in the work of my brain pondering on something, doing strange things, fabricating ideas, I never thought of before. There are people who think that this is the very function of art. They may be right. But even then I would not bother about it. Because the very moment you make this your business and act like your own agent, you will lose the ability of being perplexed.

What does it actually mean when you say that the ego is dead? First: If it's just a way of speaking, an intellectual commonplace, it does not mean anything. Second: if it is taken seriously and understood as a reflex of a long intellectual tradition, it means you have had enough of it. Which implies – there might be something else, another fascination point which is worth following, but overshadowed by the occidental superego projection. There's a story which has not begun – a beginning that sounds much more promising than anything our tradition may serve us.

Since I am not here to serve you commonplaces, I will give you an example. There's an exhibition, and there's a catalogue. The mechanics of fabricating such a

thing are quite easy. If you're lucky, you happen to know some of the rare personalities who know how to handle language, concepts and theorems. And since there's a phone you ask them if they might contribute something, write about some of the objects you did, write about the underlying philosophy. In the best case: you will find some high-class philosopher telling everybody that indeed you are an outstanding architect, that your construction fits into his own visions etc. And here we are again: in the middle of the occidental superego project.

We take all this for granted. That's our business. But when we step back a little bit we can see that it is just a social machinery. In the middle ages there was an economy of relics (the main economical factor indeed, you couldn't build a cathedral without such a relic). Consequently there were lots of agents travelling all over Europe in search of a relic, an arm of a saint, a rib of an evangelist, a nail from the cross. When I refer to this, this is not a remembrance, but a structural correspondence: The contemporary relic trade is about narcissic images – and one of the highly esteemed images (the nail from the cross, so to speak) is the artist's biography.

So thinking about the catalogue I thought it was a terrifying perspective. I thought: I am forty years old and I am preparing my funeral. Why should I be so insane to do this? Moreover: isn't this a bit premature? I might live, I might work for another 20 years. So I pondered on ways of bypassing this embarrassment. One of the alternatives was: I would just ignore the logic of such a catalogue, I would not ask anybody to write a commentary of my work, but to do what he would have done anyway. I would look for a parallel instead of a commentary.

When I decided that this was the appropriate way I felt some relief. As if I was stepping out of the long superego tradition. A lot of new ideas and intriguing possibilities entered my head. A reader would follow two paths instead of one, but he would always look for a link, he would read it as if the story being told was a commentary to my story, recorded in models, drawings, photographs. The actual non- (or arbitrary) correspondence would (on the reader's side) transform into a perpetual work, a stimulated attention. What more can you want?

Ok, here we have a phone again. And the question now is: Whom can I ask? And how can I do this? Please, Mister X, there's a catalogue and it's about my work, but you don't have to stick on me or my work. Just stick on nothing! Do what you want. Write a science fiction story, write about deconstruction sets, it's all up to you. – Having students myself, I know that this is quite an unreasonable demand, almost a cheek. The invitation: *Do what you want*, regularly transforms into a painful scrutiny of some hidden logic behind. Why do give me such a freedom? Please – give me at least a hint! Give me a subject!

This is a strange answer – but in a way it's the other side. *Give me a subject*. Which, if you take it literally, means: There's somebody who, at the moment he is addressed as a free subject, asks you to give him *another* subject. A legitimate subject. Which is in fact the abbreviation of the occidental superego project – and could lead us to long lectures on medieval kinship, Kantorowicz King's Two Bodies for example, it could lead us to a lecture on gnosis and religious history...

I don't want to get on your nerves by making a philosophical excursion, but I will continue my story instead. Naturally I thought of an intellectual, of somebody doing intellectually what is related to my own construction set. But nonetheless: I

knew that I would not find too many people willing to take such a risk. When you ask an American, he will tell you that a German professor is “a real Kaiser”, and indeed, that’s true. Equipped with a permanent position (unless he rapes children, throws bombs or violates the law) he can do what he wants. Theoretically. But in reality it is much more probable that he would act like my own students: he would say, give me a subject. And if I wouldn’t, he would assume that this was no serious offer at all. – So I knew that the range of possible candidates for the catalogue would shrink to a handful, or less. This is very bizarre indeed. You will find a lot of intellectuals who will subscribe to the idea, that the occidental superego project is out of date (and they can refer to a vivid tradition, Freud, Heidegger, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault), but when you ask them to be consequent, they will recoil and start back home to Academia.

I met with two or three. And then I had the idea I could ask Martin Burckhardt. We knew each other very superficially. I read his work – the story about the genealogy of the machine -, and I gave him a book of mine. And we had a discussion in the hotel in Nuremberg where I teach and where he was a guest professor for a semester. We sat there in the middle of the night, in a strange place, a five-storey hotel with a hundred rooms and just five or six paying guests – in sight of the zoo, where you would here the cries of the animals in the morning. But in the middle of the night it was calm.

The bar had been closed – but we kept on talking in Burckhardt’s hotel room. It was one of there rare conversation where you try to melt things down to the core. I wondered about the origin of architecture, the first man sitting in a hole and speculating about the idea that there might be another hole, much more beautiful, much more attractive – which is indeed a strange thing: *speculation* as the initial of architecture, and Burckhardt agreed and said, that was exactly his understanding

of architecture. He would even go further. He told me that Freud, studying hysteria, had spoken about *the architecture of hysteria*, and what I called »speculation«, would be in his understanding »hysteria«. So we sat and talked – and the night passed by.

That's what I recalled when I decided to phone him and ask him if he could imagine to partake in such a publication. We met at a café in Berlin and I depicted him, much more detailed, what I was looking for. The parallel, not the commentary. I told him that I would love to see him write whatever pleased him to write – and that it might be interesting for a reader to see the parallels, but the differences also. Burckhardt sat and listened – and then he said something that struck me. He said that he wanted to write something, but it would be crucial, that the hero of the story would be called Brandlhuber and that he was an architect.– I can't say that I was prepared for such a proposal. He didn't ask for a subject – he just took me, he took my name as a subject. He said it would be interesting to hijack somebody else's identity, and I said, ok, let's do this.

I have to admit: I felt relieved. And I felt a little bit uncomfortable. I gave him a *carte blanche* - and the *carte blanche* was not only some freely-choosable-subject, some whatever-it-might-be, it was me. In an abstract sense – this was perfect. It had been kind of a surprise - but it fitted into my own concept. But from a bourgeois point of view, the prospect, that some casual acquaintance would act in my own name, was kind of strange. So – in a way the problem of the occidental superego project was not an abstract one, it turned out to be concrete.

So – that's what happened. From time to time I've received an email with a text attachment, and there I found another Brandlhuber, going to the doctor, watching

TV, talking to somebody at the phone. To give you a clue I just read a little passage to you.

Brandlhuber, having decided, at least on this occasion, to speak of himself in the third person, goes to the doctor. Ultimately, says Brandlhuber, it's superfluous to go to the doctor; it's hard to misdiagnose tendovaginitis - **senüe-onsteking** -, but Brandlhuber believes that for some time he has been suffering from myasthenia (**s-pirzwakte**), possibly even myasthenia gravis, and it's very important to him to rule out this perhaps unfounded suspicion. Myasthenia, the doctor says, looking him fixedly in the eyes, pretty rare, I'd say. You're healthy. And then, in parting (with the magnanimity of an MBA), you see, rare things happen rarely, frequent things frequently.

And there were other strange stories. There was me in the department store looking for underwear – there was me writing a farewell letter to my wife, and all these little stories were of that kind Burckhardt had annotated: an intimate gesture. I guess you can imagine what a peculiar thing that is: intimacy. It's not by accident, that morality arises not in an abstract world, but when intimacy is at the stake. Every moral system and every social system is a way of treating a personal shame, and that means, consequently, that you will only touch it if you are willing to pay this personal price. It is poor theory if you speak, with rhetorical grandeur, about some social paradigm shift – but try to uphold, at the very same moment, the illusion of the subject you have intellectually deconstructed. So I said to myself: ok, we're on the level where my underwear is at stake, but that's ok. Whatever he is going to do, you will stand to that.

Receiving all these texts (which described modes of disappearing) , I felt that there is a difference in just claiming the disappearing subject - or performing such a disappearance. There was a strange seriousness in this project, comparable to the transfer that happens in psychoanalysis. After a while I started to do what was written in the text fragments – I bought underwear when my alter ego went to buy underwear etc.

I cannot say that all this is a mere game. There were a lot of people, who knew about this project and were aware that the text Burckhardt had written could just be fictional, but they read it with the typical keyhole perspective. Just an example: Burckhardt invented a big busted intern – *een stagiare* - and placed her in my office, and everybody, even close friends, even the members of the office who never had seen a big busted intern in our place, wondered who this might have been, and more than that: they asked themselves if I was a notorious addict of big tits who just succeeded in making anybody believe that I am not. And that's just one of the most simple misunderstandings.

So this *me* disappearing was not vanishing, it was transforming into a fictional space. And I have to say, regardless of the puzzling side effects (and all this which I have to bear in the upcoming years): I don't regret, not at all.

The thing which is at stake (and which I mentioned before) is the capability of being perplexed. Name it. You can speak of randomness, you can speak of the Freudian slip, the so called *Fehlleistung*, you can speak, just technically, of teamwork – all this covers a logic which is not comparable to the former construction sets. It's the logic that has driven me all the time. Getting out of this hole, which, in philosophical terms, is called the metaphysical subject. When I

adapt my concept of architecture to the subject's place, I would say: I was born into the hole of the occidental superego project, but I have wondered, all day long, about places which are much more interesting. Crossing the border... Actually there's nothing peculiar about that. Anybody who enters an internet chat knows about the fascination of surpassing this border, but oddly enough: this only works secretly. In these hidden psychological dungeons you have a vital trade of private parts, but all this does not reflect to our every day's life. Stronger: It's the other way round.

Historically this is a strange situation: We have whole communities developing *alternative lifestyles* – but on the other hand we have an economy that is mad about branding, corporate identity, the petrification of logos. Indeed this is a reciprocal relationship: the more the modern subject dissimulates, the more society tends to hold up the illusion of steadiness.

This is, mentally, a sign of regression. If I had some political ambitions, one of my aims would be to shed a light upon that situation. I would try to point out that there is no solidity at all, on the contrary: that all these institutions that pretends steadiness, are in reality crazy simulation machines, running wild.

Can you be sure, that this is me, Brandlhuber? I could be somebody else. I could be an actor doing a strange Brandlhuber performance. And all this would make perfect sense, since the story Burckhardt wrote, showed *me, disappearing*. Consequently it would not make much sense to reappear again. It would be much more adequate if it was Burckhardt standing here. Anybody but me.

Maybe you get a clue, what I meant when I talked about *inhibition*. If I was Burckhardt, I would be inhibited, and if I was Brandlhuber I would be inhibited too.

This is the moment, I guess, I should switch over to the third person. Brandlhuber, speaking of himself in the third person (that's what Burckhardt recommended when he sent me to the doctor).

What can he do? Or better: what can be done for him? It would be great if we treated his inhibition with a certain respect. At least it would be much easier to understand what he's looking for. It would, at least, explain his abstinence, or more: his reluctance to appear as a law giving subject. It would explain why he chose an exhibition with a motto like that:

Where do you want to live? Where do you want to die? Where do you want to make love?

An exhibition, sending back the question to the recipient, is indeed some inverted exhibition. In a literal sense: an inhibition. In a way this word game is not so innocent, as I have presented it in this little lecture. An inhibition – would show: the inhibited. What is there, but is not allowed to come out. In a way this is notorious since the famous days of '68, you know, sexual revolution and so forth. We have had hundreds of coming outs. But notwithstanding: we didn't have a coming out what all this *coming outs* really stood for, what they meant. Sure: everything was visibly changing, but on the deep founded level of coded subjectivity the preliminaries stayed the same. In other words: the *fiction of subjectivity* remained untouched. Brandlhuber was too young to stick to the

naiveties of that generation. He always wondered about the fact that this process was not being told full-fledged, but to the contrary: that it was blended with the illusion of the liberated ego. In Brandlhuber's perspective this was different, and therefore he could read all these coming outs, the way they were told, as some kind of post-modern relic trade, or more precise: a selling out of narcissic images. It would be ok and not worth mentioning., if subjectivity was a private matter, but actually it is not. Every building which is erected, mirrors the unspoken phantasm of subjectivity. And if we follow – unconsciously - such a phantasm all our buildings will be projections of this ego ideal, but they will not reflect the state of society, our way treating and trading with each other. Structurally the outcome is a new Potemkin architecture, where the edifice has the function of an artificial limb and substitutes some inner void. It's so easy to diagnose. Take the attack of September 11. and recall what the managers told us. They said: it's a shame, that all these people have been bombed away, but, in terms of business, it doesn't really affect us. All the data is still there, the hard disks are running - so we can continue business as usual. In other words: what had been bombed away, was a *symbol*, but not the real value producing machine. The real building didn't consist of steel and glass, it was code – structurally atopic, disembodied, scattered all over the digital word. Which, mapped back to the question of subjectivity, would mean, that there is a new instance – atopic, scattered and disembodied.

When you follow the example of Brandlhuber, stuck in the hole, speculating of being somebody else, you would see that the subject here is not an architectural body, but something immaterial, an architecture of dreams, speculations and mind games.

The question, reformulated, says: If Brandlhuber was you, what would he dream of?

Take it again, this question: *Where do you want to live? Where do you want to die? Where do you want to make love?* This is not Brandlhuber who's speaking, but a multitude of voices. Could be me, could be you, could be anybody. It's the subject, desubjectified. But watch out, there's something strange again. When you take such a question, you will see, that the only plausible way of responding to it, is on the most personal level. And usually, everybody would do so. The idea of circumnavigating such an embarrassment makes no sense at all, since you can't call for *another subject* to answer. Theoretically - you can, but there's nobody else who will die for you, love for you etc. And from this we can conclude, that subjectivity is a necessity – more than that, that subjectivity is the building material for our so called real buildings.

I guess there are a few architects around – and I presume that some of these colleagues might disagree if such a question would be mapped upon architecture. But in this respect me and Brandlhuber are really stubborn. We would say: this is the hard core of architecture. Therefore we would prefer to speak of social phantasmata instead of *Flächenbegrünung*, we would speak of dreams instead of a new superblob software, we would rely upon the *immaterial* as the cornerstone of a building, of architecture in general. – You might notice, as a contradiction in terms, that we– after having buried the occidental superego project – now rely on a concept of radical subjectivity. That's right, but it's no contradiction at all. Because the contemporary ego in fact is different, he or she slips it's traditional bonds - and has turned into a strange, but foremost: unknown instance. It is like Rilke said, you neighbour is the most unknown being ever. You may know him,

superficially, but this daily contact is misleading, since the more you know him the more he turns out to be an alien being.

By the way: that's what another motto of the exhibition means: *Collecting the future*. It means, the future is already there, but it is not allowed to *come out*. So this is what we are aiming for. We should not only treat Brandlhubers *inhibition* with respect, we should allow him to come out. You will just understand him, if you understand his or her dreams – and one the dreams seems to be: changing the program, switching over to another identity. Isn't that the very function of our remote controls? This is the new frontier subjectivity faces: the ability of changing heads. Or better: *desire sets*. You may call that, in a pejorative way, populism, but it is indeed something new. It is subjectivity as an identity kit, as a toolkit.

So let's finish this little game, please allow me to come back to my first person talk. What I want to do now is to ask Burckhardt to come up and speak with me some five minutes. He was the one entering the Brandlhuber existence, making him disappear, and the least he could do now, is to pretend, for the rest of the evening, to be Brandlhuber. In a way there is no sense in this talk at all, it could be held in medieval Latin, it's just a ritual, the ordination of *another Brandlhuber*. So, please Martin, come up.

(we'll have a glass of wine)

ME: I prepared a little paper for you. You have written so many pages, so I thought, as an offset, it would be nice if you just read what I've written. – Just have a look. Where you see *ME*, it's me speaking, and where you see a capital *YOU*, it's you.

YOU: Oh, that's nice. I have made a little speech myself – but it is much more convenient to follow yours. I always fancied I might have a teleprompter like Ronald Reagan had. He was surrounded by teleprompter cameras, so he could turn his head at will, but never lost the text. This was really inventive – and naturally it struck his colleagues, all the other politicians, who could not figure out why he was so perfect in remembering everything. I guess this is because of the Alzheimer disease he felt coming.

ME: Compared to that, we act on a low-tech-level, that's true.

YOU: Shall I read the brackets? Here it says (*surprised*).

ME: No, don't read that. Just be surprised, that's all.

YOU (*surprised*) Oh, I knew that. I knew that your first question would be this:
How does it feel to be Brandlhuber?

ME: We can omit that. No problem.

YES: Yes, please. I really can't say how it feels...

ME: Next question then. There's something I wondered about from the beginning of this project. You have never ever responded to the question yourself — *Where do you wanna live, where do you wanna make love, where you do want to die...*

YOU: No. That's true.

ME: You will tell us now.

YOU: I could tell you – but not us!

ME: I did not want to be offending. You mean, it was out of place to switch the perspective.

YOU: Yes. Exactly. Maybe I am a little bit too peculiar, but I recall a situation at the telephone where I was telling somebody what I was working on – and he interrupted me and asked: When are *we* going to see this? We. He did not say: When will *I* see this, or: will you show it to *me*. He said, as if he was the public himself: *When are we going to see this*. It took me years to understand how impudent this question was. I mean, we were alone at the telephone... That was really impertinent.

ME: Oh, I see what you mean. Now it's too late, is it? And it would be too late if I asked you to answer *me*.

YOU: Yes.

ME: I could make the beginning. I could tell you where I would like to live..

YOU: No, please don't do that. This reminds me of a movie scene. An old man sitting there, completely dumb. And not a single word leaving his lips. From time to time he is addressed by the people who are around, giving him a pep talk and asking: *Say your sentence*. That's the way I feel —

ME: Oh, I thought it was charming, to have this little interview prefabricated. Usually the persons involved would make it up afterwards. Preproduction instead of prostproduction.

YOU: Yes. But to use your own words (this is not my text), it is kind of ridiculous sitting here and simulating a talk, which does not mean anything, which could be held in medieval Latin.

ME: I just had the idea I should work a little bit for my money. But maybe you're right. By the way – I know you are Brandlhuber for the rest of the evening, but this question reaches you in your capacity as Burckhardt. Is it true that the curator of this exhibition asked you to stop writing further pages...

YOU: Küng?

ME: Yes. Didn't you tell me that he phoned you to stop it – just to save some money for the rest of the exhibition?

YOU: Did I tell you that?

ME: Yes.

YOU: Really? But then it was a lie.

ME: Ok. Last question then. Isn't it great that after all these years you can respond: We are going to see what you have been working on all this time - and we are going to see it NOW.

YOU: Yea, that's fine. But please, don't hurry. I like that piece of music. I would say, we just sit here for another two or three minutes, listen to the rest of

the piece and have our glass of wine. And they will have theirs when the music is over.

ME: Ok. That's what we do.