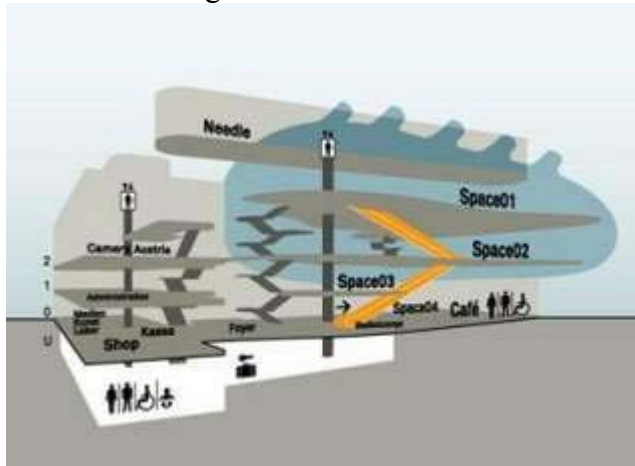


DAMIAN LENTINI

## **“Lights... Kamera... Action!” Introducing Graz’s Friendly Alien.**



Image 01: Kunsthaus Graz



Images 02: Schematic Plan

### **Introduction**

In September 2003 a large crowd gathered along the banks of the Mur river in the Austrian city of Graz to witness the opening of the city’s new contemporary art centre. Much like the opening of other large cultural institutions, the city threw a lavish ‘Open House Party’ to greet its newest occupant; creating a carnival-like atmosphere in the area

surrounding the building.<sup>1</sup> The scheduling of this opening party had been carefully planned by the cities authorities, as it represented the pinnacle of Graz's year-long 'European Capital of Culture' celebrations; a year-long cultural festival that had immersed the city and its inhabitants in a mixture of lights, colour, music and spectacle.<sup>2</sup>

Whether or not it was intentional, the selection of this Kunsthau – as the centre was called – as *the* emblematic figure of Graz's 'European Capital of Culture' celebrations was apt in more ways than one. Not only did the building's unique monumental form bestow upon Graz an easily-recognisable emblem by which visitors would remember the city, but the building's internal logic – its function and design – also drew upon the same spectacular qualities as that of the festival.

Similar to other modern-day contemporary art spaces, the Kunsthau Graz does not collect works of art. In lieu of maintaining and preserving a collection of artworks, the organisation instead bases its entire operation around the staging of an ever-changing and self-perpetuating string of exhibitions and events. Similar to an arts or cultural festival, the focus of this contemporary art space is on the production of spectacle; the creation of a particular experience in which the viewer/participant is immersed within a multi-sensory contemporary art environment. This switch in focus – from the idea of the arts centre as a *preserver* of culture, to one in which it is an active participant in the *creation* of a cultural environment – represents a major paradigm shift in the way in which an art space is used and understood. In place of the traditional understanding of the art museum/gallery as a 'temple of the muses' – places in which one quietly contemplates works in a quiet and scholarly atmosphere can be better understood as 'arenas of spectacle': venues in which the staging of such a contemporary art event is more akin to the experience one gets at a cinema, theatre, or amusement park (rather than at a 'traditional' museum).

However, although many of these spaces have received a large amount of coverage in the media over the last few years – due, primarily, to the fact that their numbers have increased significantly over the past decade – much of the content of these reports have been limited to a discussion of (exterior) form and context; in many cases completely sidestepping any examination of the building's internal spaces altogether.<sup>3</sup> This has resulted in paucity of serious dialogue concerning the internal workings of these spaces. This paper hopes to rectify the situation somewhat by providing a short introduction to

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<sup>1</sup> Mayer, 2003: "Kunsthau: Das Fette Herz Der Stadt Graz", *Die Presse*, September 27.

<sup>2</sup> All information pertaining to particular events that took place during Graz's "European Capital of Culture" celebrations have been taken from an interview that the author conducted with staff at the Kunsthau Graz on the June 14, 2006

<sup>3</sup> For example, many article regarding the Kunsthau Graz have focused exclusively on the building's form, its cost, and its placement within the city of Graz. When its "internal workings" are brought up, they have been, on many occasions, limited simply to a discussion on "curatorial programmes" or "mission statements". See, for example, Höfler and Sieder, 2005: "Monatlich 10.000 Euro Für Licht Und Strom", *Die Presse*, February 22, Saria, 2004: "Von Außen Betrachtet Ist Kunsthau Ein Hit", *Kleine Zeitung*, August 24, Timm, 2005: "Ein Haus Schaut Dich An", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 7, Titz, 2004a: "„Habe Eindeutigen Auftrag“: Kunsthau-Chef Peter Pakesch Über Qualitäten Un Blockbuster", *Kleine Zeitung*, August 25, Von Becker, 2003: "Die Kunst Der Erregung", *Der Tagesspiegel*, November 21, n.p

the contemporary art experience offered by the Kunsthaus Graz. In order to demonstrate how these aforementioned cinematic/theatrical devices contribute to the creation of a 'spectacular' art experience, the following discussion will be loosely framed around three famous cinematic terms: "Lights...", "Kamera...", and "Action!".



Image 03: Graz City Centre

## Graz

Graz – Austria's second biggest city behind Vienna – is located in the south-east corner of the country; near the Slovenian/Hungarian border. Although it boasts several major tourist attractions – including a UNESCO Heritage-listed Baroque city centre – the fact that Graz does not lie on one of the major train routes from Central Europe (which travels along the north of the country, taking in Innsbruck, Salzburg, Linz, as well as Vienna) means that the city is traditionally left off many tourists' cultural radar. Indeed, up until recently, Graz's most famous cultural export was not a Mozart, a Klimt or even an Adolph Loos, but one Arnold Schwarzenegger; governor of California (indicated by the fact that, up until recently, the local football stadium in Graz was known as the Arnold Schwarzenegger Stadion).<sup>4</sup>

However, towards the end of last century, things began to change. Significantly, the city's success in 1998 in securing the 2003 'European Capital of Culture' was seen as a turning point in its quest to brush off its image as a quiet, slightly conservative, Austrian city.<sup>5</sup> Since its inception in 1985, the 'European City of Culture' award (the title was changed in 1999 to 'European Capital of Culture') had greatly benefited the cultural/social re-awakening of several less-prominent European cities. Its desire to "stimulate the non-

<sup>4</sup> Lehigh, 2003: "Austria's Arnold Love-Fest", *The Boston Globe*, October 15

<sup>5</sup> See Dyckhoff, 2003: "The Blob Has Come to Earth", *The Times*, September 16, Lehigh, 2003: "Austria's Arnold Love-Fest", *The Boston Globe*, October 15, p.A15

economic dimension of the European Union and promote its greater cohesiveness, [as well as] provide individual cities and nations with an opportunity to proclaim their cultural leadership"<sup>6</sup> was seen as playing a key role in the recent social, cultural and economic prosperity of cities such as Glasgow, Lisbon and Copenhagen; a fact that was not lost on the government in Graz.<sup>7</sup>

The timing of this announcement was significant, as it coincided with the city's third attempt at erecting a centre for the display of contemporary art. The previous two attempts had been ditched at the last moment by a change in government and a popular backlash respectively. However, this awarding of the 'Capital of Culture' prize had generated a newfound confidence in the populace and, at the conclusion of that year the city's civic officials proudly unveiled the winning submission for Graz's new Kunsthau.<sup>8</sup> The 'Friendly Alien' (as the project was dubbed) was scheduled to land in September 2003; at the very peak of the city's 'Cultural Capital' celebrations.

## The Architects

Considering Graz's aforementioned reputation as a somewhat bourgeois, traditionally-conservative centre, the choice of this futuristic, bubble design by the architects Peter Cook and Colin Fournier took almost everybody by surprise. Cook was most famous as being one of the founding members of Archigram: a 1960s British architectural collective that had released a series of influential publications detailing designs for futuristic Walking Cities, Live-In Pods, and Electric Tomatoes. Despite the fact that Archigram – as a collective – built almost nothing (their built projects to this point were a children's playground in Milton Keynes, an exhibition at the Commonwealth Institute, and a swimming pool for the singer Rod Stewart),<sup>9</sup> their influence amongst modern-day architects was immense: with the designs of Diller+Scofidio, Norman Foster, Richard Rogers, Will Alsop, and Zaha Hadid almost instantly coming to mind.<sup>10</sup> The other partner in the project, Colin Fournier, was a late member of Archigram, and had earned his reputation working with Bernard Tschumi on Paris' Parc Villette; which also borrowed from Archigram's anti-modernist, bright, pop-aesthetic.

Despite initial hesitations about the Cook and Fournier's ability to transform their written ideas into built reality, the jury were unanimous in their praise for the ideas behind the design.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, considering the two architects – who were working under the title of Spacelab Cook+Fournier – had already participated in a previous competition for Graz's

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<sup>6</sup> Gold and Gold, 2005: "Cities of Culture: Staging International Festivals and the Urban Agenda, 1851-2000"

<sup>7</sup> Fishman, 2004: "Visionen Und Warme Luft", *Kommunaler Beschäftigungsdienst*, 11, pp.4-7

<sup>8</sup> Bogner, 2004: "A Friendly Alien: Ein Kunsthau Für Graz", pp.22-23

<sup>9</sup> Pearman, 2004: "Aliens Carrying a Friendly Message", *Sunday Times*, March 28, p.24

<sup>10</sup> See Dyckhoff, 2003: "The Blob Has Come to Earth", *The Times*, September 16, Dyckhoff, 2004: "Flashback to the Future", *The Times*, April 6, Pearman, 2004: "Aliens Carrying a Friendly Message", *Sunday Times*, March 28, p.34

<sup>11</sup> Bogner, 2004: "A Friendly Alien: Ein Kunsthau Für Graz", p.26

Kunsthau (located inside of the Schlossberg Mountain), one could draw the conclusion that they were able to go beyond the shock value of the design's appearance, and begin to engage with the ideas underpinning its function.

As has been noted in several sources, there are several precedents for the Kunsthau's hybrid, organic form. One could, for example draw many comparisons between this design and those of Antoni Gaudí, Frank Lloyd Wright, Jørn Utzon, and Frederick Kiesler.<sup>12</sup> In particular, Kiesler's designs – such as his Endless House of 1947-61, or his interior to Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century gallery in New York of 1942 – were to play a significant role in the ideas governing the building's form.<sup>13</sup> However, what truly set the design of the Kunsthau apart from these previous examples was the experience of building – its 'feel' – as well as its incorporation of theatrical and cinematic devices.

### **"Lights..."**



Image 04: BIX Façade

*„Architektur is das Spiel der Formen im Licht“ [“Architecture is the play of forms in Light” ]*

(Le Corbusier 1924)

Right from the outset, light was considered to play a pivotal role in the design and feel of the Kunsthau.<sup>14</sup> The most obvious example of this is evident even before one sets foot inside of the building itself. Drawing heavily on the idea of the communicative/semiotic potential of an organic structure, the architects elected to encase their Kunsthau in an

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<sup>12</sup> See comments made by Dieter Bogner (Head of the Jury during the Kunsthau Graz architectural competition) in Kunsthau Graz: "Kunsthau Graz: A Friendly Alien", DVD Film, Vienna: coop99 filmproduktion, 2003

<sup>13</sup> See Bogner and Növer, 2001: "Frederick J. Kiesler: Endless Space"

<sup>14</sup> This is exemplified by the numerous references to "lighting sources" and "light conditions" that pepper the Functional Brief that was given to all entrants in the architectural competition for the Kunsthau (see Bogner, 1999: "Kunsthau Graz: Raum- Und -Funktionsprogramm").

active, 'intelligent' skin. Calling on the assistance of the Berlin-based firm realities:united, the architects embedded 930 40W standard-circular florescent lights under the outer skin of the building. This created a 20x45m media screen on the building's eastern façade (the side that looks out onto Graz's Old City Centre). Each of the lights can be individually programmed and dimmed up to 20 frames per second; creating a low-resolution display environment which allows the building's outer skin is able to communicate its internal 'desires' to the rest of the city.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the BIX façade (as it is known) functions as membrane between the private, museum space and public, exterior space to which the Kunsthaus identifies and presents itself. At the same time, the communicating skin also functions as a potential working platform for art projects which address this interaction between media and space.<sup>16</sup>

This idea of the building's skin as communicative membrane has obvious cinematic links. By constantly altering and animating its surface, the BIX façade becomes, according to Silva Kalčić, both "a wall and a spectacle, the animated building shell defining and activating the space".<sup>17</sup> Drawing comparisons to the film *Blade Runner* – in which the metropolitan city is transformed into a succession of giant screens – he goes on to note that the façade combines "the idea of function with the idea of images [...] relativising the objective reality of the building. [T]he media façade becomes the symptom [of] a culture directed towards the media, focused on the image. While the fixed subject of the screen used to be implicit, it has now become dynamic, it is always 'on'".<sup>18</sup> As will be seen, this obsession with media/mediation – especially that of the screen – is not only the exclusive domain of the Kunsthaus' skin.

Another important way in which light functions as a mediating/communicating factor within the design of the Kunsthaus is evident in the design and layout of the centre's internal, exhibition spaces. A major problem with the internal design of many previous contemporary art centres is that they have simply offered the artist/viewer a variety of 'white cube' or 'black box' spatial configurations: whereby the white cube spaces function to display painting, sculptures and installations; whilst the black boxes catered for works requiring screen- or light-based projects. Acknowledging that many contemporary arts practitioners have moved beyond such simplistic light space/dark space dichotomies – instead producing shows that require a range of display scenarios within the one exhibition environment – the architects have endeavoured to create spaces in which one is able to produce a variety of lighting possibilities; without the need to create separate, enclosed structures that cut a certain piece off from the rest of the exhibit.

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<sup>15</sup> Bogner, 2004: "A Friendly Alien: Ein Kunsthaus Für Graz", p.220

<sup>16</sup> Kress-Adams and Adams, 2004: "Landing Alive", *Lightlive!*, 1, p. 8

<sup>17</sup> Kalčić, 2005: "A Spectacle of Everyday Life", *Oris*, 26, , p.51

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.53



Image 05: "Space01"

For example, within the Kunsthaus' main exhibiting hall ("Space01") – located at the very top of the building – one is offered a variety of lighting types: from full, natural light (which streams in from the nozzles perched on the building's roof); to florescent floods (which are encased within these nozzles); to a full theatre-like rig hidden in the room's roof (in which specialist lighting can be employed). The interaction of these three lighting scenarios – each of which can be significantly dimmed or blacked-out throughout the space – significantly alters one's perception of the space; and creates the ability to incorporate both light and dark spaces within the one environment.



Image 06: "Space02"

The Kunsthaus' second exhibition hall ("Space02") appears initially to be marginally less-successful in terms of its lighting potential. Due to the fact that this floor is sandwiched between two other floors – "Space01" above and the Educational/Children's space ("Space03") below – the space is unable to receive any natural light. In order to compensate for this lack, the architects have fitted the floor with several lines of high-



intensity florescent tubes; which imbue the space with a strange, unearthly character. In order to diminish/control this flood effect, each of the individual tubes can be removed and replaced with a more focused, specialised light; such as a pin-spot or dichroic. However, due to the inherent – almost sculptural – symmetry caused by these lines of fluoro-tubing, the removal of any individual element would result in the attention of the viewer to be broken; thereby detracting from the immersive potential of the exhibit/room. In addition to this, the nature of these particular fluorescent floodlights – as opposed to the circular lights on the BIX façade – would seem to make it a lot more difficult for a curator/artist to control or contain individual parts of the lighting environment; as floodlights are – by their very nature – designed to cover large areas with a bright, diffuse wash of light. The probable result of this would be to demarcate large sections of the space as either light or dim areas; thereby reverting to the same dichotomy that "Space01" works so hard to abolish.

However, although limiting, this feature is not completely detrimental to the Kunsthaus' operational logic. As the organisation's goal is to accommodate works from the "late 1960s onwards"<sup>19</sup> – i.e. not just new works – the provision of a more 'traditional' gallery environment within the shell of the Kunsthaus allows for exhibitions that are devoted to one particular medium – or in which large sections are taken over by one medium – to be shown here; thereby allowing "Space01" to focus *solely* on more recent/difficult installations.

### **"Kamera..."**

As can already be seen, the idea of focus, communication, and mediation play heavily on one's experience of the Kunsthaus Graz. Furthering the cinematic tie-in, several sites throughout the Kunsthaus are specifically dedicated to the creating a communicative space that is in some way mitigated by a framing or mediating presence. As theorists such as Marshall McLuhan or Jean Baudrillard have been quick to point out, the gradual ascension – and incorporation – of media and mediating devices within our day-to-day activities has resulted in a state whereby comprehension of the everyday world is usually tempered by some form of ancillary, digitalised presence.<sup>20</sup> McLuhan, for example, saw the "mediated extension" of ourselves as contributing to a new, immersive "sensory environment"; whereby our every action and response to an object is in some way informed- or tempered-by a media frame.<sup>21</sup> Baudrillard similarly highlights this trait

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Kunsthaus Graz staff 14/06/06

<sup>20</sup> Several commentators (such as Douglas Kellner, Mike Gane and Gary Genosko) have positioned Baudrillard as the logical successor to the ideas/methodology employed by Marshall McLuhan in his study of the media, and "mediated" environments. Although this link has subsequently been problematised (most recently by William Merrin), both practitioners' continual highlighting of the way in which the media frames and moderates our perception of the world, qualifies their inclusion within this paper. See Gane, 1991: "Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory", Genosko, 1999: "McLuhan and Baudrillard: The Masters of Implosion", Kellner, 1989: "Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond"; and Merrin, 2005: "Baudrillard and the Meda" [especially Chapter 3 pp.45-62]

<sup>21</sup> See McLuhan, Molinaro and Toye, 1987: "Letters of Marshall McLuhan", McLuhan, 1967: "Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man"



when he talks about the "implosion of the medium and the real in a sort of nebulous hyperreality where even the definition and distinct action of the medium are no longer distinguishable".<sup>22</sup>

An example of such an 'implosion' can be seen by the way crowds now take-in your average art exhibition. Whereas previously, one would go to an exhibition armed with very little or nothing at all, today's art viewer comes prepared with a variety of media devices – from audio guides, to digital cameras, to mobile phones – which they utilise to 'heighten' their gallery experience.



Image 07 & 08: "Mediated Spaces": Crowds at MoMA (NY) experiencing the exhibition via audio guides and camera lenses.

As if acknowledging the presence of such a mediated environment – both from within the walls of the Kunsthhaus, as well as in our experience of everyday life – it is apt that the Kunsthhaus' Function Brief states that the building should facilitate the inclusion two lens/frame-based organisations: one that incorporates photography (*Forum für Fotografie*); the other, 'new media' (*Medienkunstzentrum*).<sup>23</sup>



Image 09: Camera Austria



Image 10: Medienkunstlabor

<sup>22</sup> Baudrillard, 1983: "In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities, or the End of the Social: And Other Essays", p.295

<sup>23</sup> Bogner, 1999: "Kunsthhaus Graz: Raum- Und -Funktionsprogramm", p.12. A Functional Brief (which is also commonly referred to as a Design Brief) is a document which establishes the physical and ideological parameters that an architectural firms must adhere within their design. It does so by issuing strict instructions as to what elements the client – in this case the City of Graz – wishes the new space to contain, as well as how this construction is to relate to both the space around it, and the overall cultural make-up of the city.

The first of these tenants to occupy the Kunsthaus building was Camera Austria; an exhibiting and publishing organisation focused solely on lens-based media. Envisaged as a forum, this space was designed to cater for a wide range of photography-related activities: "conceiving exhibitions, initiating research projects, symposia and training, and the production of the magazine *Camera Austria*".<sup>24</sup>

In a similar vein, the Media Art Laboratory (*Medienkunstlabor*) – which is located on the floor just below Camera Austria – is a space which offers artists and "network activists" the means to create net-based works in-dialogue with other users; both within the Kunsthaus as well as throughout the world-wide web. Defined as a "platform for the examination of new media"<sup>25</sup> artists within this space utilise the laptop screen and high-speed connection as their framing-space, displaying and transmitting their activities with other users across the globe.

In addition to this, the provision of various other media outlets within the Kunsthaus, allow visitors to also access this information-transfer; the whole process being taking place within the framed environment of the media screen.



Image 11: Medienkunstlabor – CCTV Image

Furthermore, the entire process of 'artists at work' is continually filmed via a succession of CCTV cameras located throughout the Medienkunstlabor. Available 24 hours a day to

<sup>24</sup> „Dieses Forum konzipiert Ausstellungen, initiiert Forschungsprojekt, Symposiem und Ausbildungen und produziert die Zeitschrift „Camera Austria“ ibid., p.12

<sup>25</sup> „Plattform für die Auseinandersetzung mit Neuen Medien“ ibid., p.12

anyone with an internet connection, the inclusion of these cameras also project to the world the actual physical goings-on of the space – even if these goings-on are just an empty space!

Another, more literal, framing-space employed within the Kunsthaus comes in the form of the Nokia 770 Mobile Space Guides that can be borrowed from the information desk in the foyer. In addition to providing the visitor with a wealth of information about the particular objects, artists, and curatorial themes involved in each exhibition, these Guides are also programmed to respond to queries concerning other parts of the building itself; all of which can be updated wirelessly.<sup>26</sup> However, what really sets these devices apart from other portable gadgets is that the information-transfer that occurs with the Nokia guides is not limited to a one-way exchange. Due to each of the machines being fitted with the latest W-LAN (Wireless Local Area Network) and Bluetooth technology, one is able to use their Space Guide to send information to other devices exterior to the Kunsthaus (such as mobile phones and computers with an internet connection).<sup>27</sup> Future machines will come equipped with GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) cards: allowing users to view videos; receive emails, text messages (as opposed to just sending them) and selected news bulletins; as well as tune into local radio stations.<sup>28</sup> The use of these devices within the gallery-environment is a significant departure from previous gallery-aides, as it breaks away from one of the ideological/structural foundations considered essential to the creation of a museum space: the disconnection between the gallery and the outside world. Although artists, curators and architects have been attempting for some time to remove/problematised this relationship (or lack thereof) between the 'closed' gallery space and the outside world, much of resulting action has usually taken the form of either a mono-sensory, or one-way transgression (such as the provision of windows into the gallery spaces, or the relaying of *exterior* information to an *internal* source). These Space Guides, on the other hand, not only allow for a two-way exchange of information – utilising sound, movement, *as well as* visual information – but also, with the addition of the GSM cards, do not place any sort of restriction upon the *type* of information-exchanged taking place within the gallery environment.



Image 12: "Schlossberg Nozzle"



Image 13: View through "Nozzle"

<sup>26</sup> Frizberg, 2006: "Mobile Space Guide", *Steiermark Report*, p.17

<sup>27</sup> Schmidt, 2006: "Handlicher Führer Für Die Baluse Blase", *Der Standard*, April 12

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

This process of taking-in/receiving information through a framed or mediated portal is continued throughout various other parts of the Kunsthhaus; including the actual exhibition spaces themselves. The best examples are the several exterior views afforded visitors as they reach the end of their journey through the Kunsthhaus. One such view can be found through one of the nozzles in the roof of the main exhibition hall. Looking through this portal – which is placed lower-down than the others in the room – one is granted a perfectly framed view of Graz's famed Clock Tower at the peak of the Schlossberg mountain; an instance of Graz's newest landmark directly referencing and acknowledging one of its oldest. Another instance of such framing takes place in the needle; a large, glazed, gallery-like pavilion that sits atop – and pierces into – the bubble-like form of the building. Within this space, one is granted several stunning vistas of the Old City below and the mountains in the distance; all of which is framed through the square panes of glass that adorn the gallery.



Image 14: "Up into the Unknown" – The Pin

### **"...Action!"**

This movement – from the enclosed gallery floor out into the open needle/viewing platform – highlights the final important factor in the design of the Kunsthhaus: action and movement. As we have already seen with the building's intelligent skin, a kinetic spirit permeates throughout one's experience of the building; and this carries on into the exhibition halls.

For example, one goes from the completely-glazed ground floor – which, along with the needle in the roof, acts as to buffer between body of the Alien, and the rest of the city – to the exhibition floors above via a single-lane, one-way travelator (called the 'pin') that

slowly collects the visitor, and sucks them up – like Jonah – into the wale-like belly of the main building. 'Up into the unknown' is a phrase that was constantly used by the architects to describe this experience, and it is precisely this sense of excitement – of going into the unknown – that they hope the visitor will carry with them throughout their journey through the spaces.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, this sense of journey/excitement is continued once the viewer alights from the pin in each of the two exhibition halls. As the pin only ever appears to go in one direction – up – visitors enter these spaces with very-little idea how they are going to get out again (it is only upon further inspection that a stairwell and lifts – tucked away in the corner of the spaces – become apparent). As Colin Fournier notes:

[This travelator] provides a dramatic sense of elation as it sucks you up into the building, leaving you to resolve the puzzling question of how to come down again, since it only goes one way. It makes the exploration of the Kunsthaus an unbalanced kinetic experience, contributing to the unpredictability of the space and it luxuriously offers, as all museums should, two ways of taking in the artwork: a nonchalant one on the effortless glide up the pin and a more attentive one as you percolate back down to the ground.<sup>30</sup>

Both of the Kunsthaus' main exhibition floors draw upon this sense of an 'unbalanced kinetic experience' by maintaining completely open-plan structures. This, combined with the variable lighting system, and the fact that these spaces can accommodate several large walls and structures, means that even if one were had experienced these spaces before, the journey/path would almost always be completely different to previous visits. This being the case, Fournier believes that:

"the [primary] challenge is for successive curators to take us by surprise and to confront the public, each time, with a new experience of the building. The element of novelty and shock has to be maintained. Once is not enough. For the museum to continue to exist as an object of desire, its mystery must remain intact"<sup>31</sup>.

This sense of 'novelty and shock', combined with one's movement up and through the Kunsthaus' exhibition floors creates a sense of dynamism and flux that is in complete contrast to the focused and mediated perspectives offered by other parts of the building. Here, visitors are afforded complete freedom to move about and interact as they please; selecting the moments in which the gaze is focused, and the moments in which it is allowed to wander.

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<sup>29</sup> Bogner, 2004: "A Friendly Alien: Ein Kunsthaus Für Graz", p.6

<sup>30</sup> Colin Fournier in *ibid.*, p.110

<sup>31</sup> Colin Fournier in *ibid.*, p.100

## **Conclusion**

And it is precisely this play and interaction of perspectives and experiences – this combination of lighting, framing and movement – that creates the sort of immersive environment required for the staging of the contemporary arts. By drawing on theatrical and cinematic devices for both its interior and exterior spaces, the Kunsthau Graz recognises that the modern-day contemporary arts space has moved beyond the simplistic dichotomies that governed the design of other display environments (which are still caught up in discussions about white cubes versus black boxes, traditional versus new media, or the centre versus the periphery). It recognises that the key to enabling any contemporary art space to remain relevant beyond the here-and-now lies in its ability to change its form and its means of communication as the arts and cultural milieu around it changes.

The Kunsthau Graz is representative of a major paradigm shift in the way contemporary art is exhibited and shown at an institutional level. In place of the usual assortment of gallery spaces – a large space supplemented by a couple of smaller side galleries, with an additional dark, media space tacked-on for good measure for example – the design of this arts space offers the viewer the chance to view and interact with a number of different works, without the need to cut between different rooms. In this way, from the very moment visitors begin their journey into the Kunsthau, they find themselves immersed in the contemporary art experience. It is for this reason – along with the utilisation of the aforementioned cinematic and theatrical devices – that I believe that the Kunsthau Graz is representative of a significant paradigm shift in the way modern-day contemporary art spaces are designed and experienced. For in addition to providing spaces that facilitate the creation/reception of contemporary works of art, this art house (Kunsthau) also holds the promise of providing one with an engrossing, multi-sensory, and ever-changing ride inside of this strange, alien being.

**Damian Lentini** is a PhD. candidate in Art History at the University of Melbourne. His doctoral dissertation examines the design and function of non-collecting, contemporary art spaces in Austria, the United Kingdom and Australia.

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Image 11: Medien.KUNSTLABOR webpage still. Taken from  
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Image 12: Kunsthaus Graz, Schlossberg Nozzle. Photograph by the author

Image 13: Kunsthaus Graz, Schlossberg Nozzle. Photograph by the author

Image 14: Kunsthaus Graz, Pin. Photograph by the author

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