



Josef Paul Kleihues

Works 1981–1995

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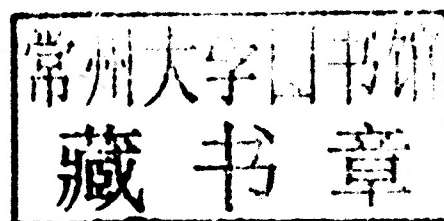


**Josef Paul Kleihues**

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Volume 2

Edited by Andrea Mesecke and Thorsten Scheer



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CANTZ**

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# Contradiction as an Aesthetic Principle

Josef Paul Kleihues as a Theorist in the Nineteen-Eighties

Thorsten Scheer

After assuming his position as a professor for design and architectural theory at the Dortmund University in 1973 (starting in 1984, professorship for urban design), Josef Paul Kleihues also expressed a great interest in theory and himself complied to a great extent with the call that he articulated for architects to voluntarily report on their theoretical basis. Following the remarks necessary to the creation of the Berlin-Atlas of 1974,<sup>1</sup> the *Erstes Manifest* (First Manifesto),<sup>2</sup> which was published in 1976 within the framework of the *Dortmunder Architekturausstellung* (Dortmund Architecture Exhibition), has special significance as a distinctly theoretical statement. What interested Kleihues here was not only the concept of poetry but also composing the manifesto itself as a poem and having it directly recognized as such as a result of its form as well as due to the centered typesetting of the text. In the course of the exhibition *Abenteuer der Ideen* (Adventure of Ideas), which was presented in the Neue Nationalgalerie (New National Gallery) in 1984, Kleihues also published his *Zweites Manifest* (Second Manifesto), a seven-part text with corresponding illustrations, as a poem on the subject of architecture. Kleihues's choice of this form and the consequences for the contents that result from it have a programmatic character, yet nonetheless present themselves as being misguided in the middle-term in regard to practical implementation. From the poem as a form of presentation, which was not directly relevant to the issue, Kleihues in particular did not derive, for example, the indeterminacy of form—in the sense of a liberation—as a paradigm for architectonic design but instead contrasted the idea of poetry with the rationalism of architecture in such a way that poetry itself seems rational and rationality, on the other hand, poetic.

## Poetic Rationalism

Kleihues accomplished the transposition of this approach to the practice of architectural design before the concrete backdrop of the state in which architecture and the architecture debate found themselves in the nineteen-seventies. This state was characterized above all by a planning culture that had become one-sided, was understood as scientific, and aimed at efficiency, and that had prevailed in the consistent implementation of functionalist ideas in the nineteen-sixties and seventies but which then came to be assessed a short time later as being problematic with respect to the quality of housing and life that resulted from them.

Into the discussion, which was tinged ideologically to a particularly intense degree, Kleihues

introduced, in contrast, the emphasizing of architecture as an artistic activity. Although what was concerned was a stance that is more or less as old as architecture itself and is already inherent in the etymology of the term "architecture," strictly speaking, the interpretation of the root of the word *techné* (art, technique, or tectonics), this stance also comprising a reference to the sphere of activity of architects in the explicit delimitation from architecture's reference to its basis in science and, in this way, intervenes foresightedly in the heated debates of the nineteen-seventies.

Kleihues undoubtedly saw himself in the role of an architect who carries out an artistic activity. Both his self-expression as well as his presentation of his works using artistic methods bear witness to this. The, in part, quite elaborate books and portfolios of graphics with silkscreen prints present architectural designs as comparably autonomous artistic creations. The contrasting of this artistic approach with the understanding of architecture as a science, as had developed since the beginning of the modern era as a result of the differentiation of the traditional role of the building master, is insufficient in the case of Kleihues. The call to link the aesthetic realization of the building task with the highest structural requirements cannot be overlooked, and shows itself to be a linking of the poetic with the rational in the precisely designed elements of his architecture. The great degree of rationality in this approach becomes clear, for example, in the way in which Kleihues created the initial sketches for projects. They are neither ephemeral nor impulsive, and not remotely Dionysian but already a visible result of intensive prior reflection. They bear elegant witness to an artistic individual who proceeds in a manner that is as targeted and methodically precise as possible. At the same time, the stiffness of a one-sided, purposefully rational planning culture that foregoes crossing the border to poetry is not inherent in the designs in any way. This leads to quite contradictory, precise dialectical situations that cross-fertilize each other as a result of the contrasting stimuli.

Kleihues was not interested in relativizing the rationality of modernism but instead in stripping away its ideological contents in order to once again put this rationality in the position from which it was supposed to be able to become conceptually effective and overcome the one-sided dictate of utilitarian purpose. This stance possibly results from an attentive reading of Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, which called for a form of artistic rationality as a redemptive instance in the face of the expedient rationality of the technology-driven world.<sup>3</sup>



The flat-head screws on the façade of Kantdreieck call to mind the façade motif of the Postsparkasse in Vienna by Otto Wagner (built 1904–06).

Poetry circumvents rationality yet not through hindering it but instead through creating new potential as a result of productive contradictions. In the process, the preliminary principle of ideational realization first becomes possible as a result of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the coincidence of opposites, as Kleihues called it, modeled on a figure of thought of the medieval philosopher Nikolaus von Kues. Just as poetry stimulates rationality, rationality should thus restrain poetry and rescue it from the suspicion of irrationality.

With this, Kleihues once again took up a theme that had played such a large role in modernism's process of self-constitution: architecture is comprehended and tested as a field of a re-established unity of aesthetics and technology. Although the process of separating the two aspects is rooted in the nineteenth century, it reacts above all to the reduction and self-limiting of architecture to the satisfying of basic human needs and a consideration of use that originates from functionalism. The fact that for the often-cited referee of functionalism Louis H. Sullivan and his fundamentally misunderstood dictum "form follows function," the aesthetic function, also an inseparable part of architecture, was often overlooked in the process. In place of the social impetus of the modernism of the nineteen-twenties and its search for a universally comprehensible language of architecture, appeared the constraints of an industrialized building industry governed by economics. With this in mind, two aspects compete in Kleihues's designs: poetry as the basis for an aesthetic architecture oriented toward expression and a simultaneously, conspicuously exemplified rationality based on geometry. A look at the Kantdreieck (Kant triangle) office and commercial building, which should be understood as utterly programmatic, makes a problem in dealing with these paradigms clear in an exemplary manner.<sup>4</sup> On the forecourt situated opposite the Theater des Westens is a sculpture created by Markus Lüpertz, *The Fallen Warrior*. This sculp-



ture along with a tree planted on the other side of the tower toward Fasanenstrasse and the *Wassertreppe* (water staircase) leading to the large display window on the basement level on Fasanenstrasse as well as the sail on the roof are among the elements that manifestly represent poetry. The elements that are defined purely architectonically unfold seamlessly in the architect's concept. The sculpture by Lüpertz is, nonetheless, apt to introduce the misunderstanding that art—meaning fine art—had the function of representing poetry while architecture remained in its customary role of the art discipline guided by rationality and science. Although this was surely not desired within the aesthetics of Josef Paul Kleihues, it can hardly be avoided, since Kleihues, who was friends with Markus Lüpertz, invited an artistic position in connection with his building that is clearly defined less by rationality than by its expressiveness. If one also adds to this the debate regarding painting in the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century and Lüpertz's cultivation of his image as a prince among painters, what emerges in terms of content is the brittle image that this constellation conveys.

What Kleihues actually envisioned was a poetry that was itself a medium for reflection in architecture, a metaphor for form that should be understood as being both determined by function as well as artistically as a result of its tangency to the ornamental. In the case of the same building, the evident interleaving of poetry and rationality succeeds in particular as a result of the crowning sail, which with its ornamental style is, so to speak, decoration in how it points to the striking green area of the building site with its historical references. It is, moreover,

“re-functionalized” in that it releases a gondola for the maintenance and cleaning of the façade from its interior via two flaps on the bottom side. Decorative function, symbol, and functional element are here interwoven with each other in the most concentrated manner. The symbolic value does not dominate the inner usefulness, nor vice versa.

A further pertinent example is the monumental aluminum wall on the eastern side of the exhibition hall of the Hamburger Bahnhof museum in Berlin.<sup>5</sup> The wall is made up of uniformly structured panels measuring 1.20 by 3.60 meters. It is eleven meters high and nearly eighty meters long. Twenty-one lenticular supports, which initially as well as apparently seem to be purely structural elements, form not only the supporting structure for the wall but also for the roof of the hall. Two-dimensional in substance with circular copings running semi-horizontally in the transition to the adjacent panels and structured in a mono-tactic manner by means of the supports, the wall seems potentially expandable, cutout-like, and entirely non-hierarchical. It dispenses with any structuring that does not arise directly from the necessities of construction. At the same time, the supports and the copings assume, in a technically necessary manner, a special role as the only ornamentation. As a result, they appear as such in the first place only because of the general lack of ornamentation on the wall, which as a result of its sheer size and due to the foregoing of additional structuring itself becomes quasi ornamental.

One feels reminded of Edmund Burke's interpretation of a large wall as an example of an experiencing of the sublime:

The aluminum wall of the new hall at Hamburger Bahnhof—Museum für Gegenwart—Berlin





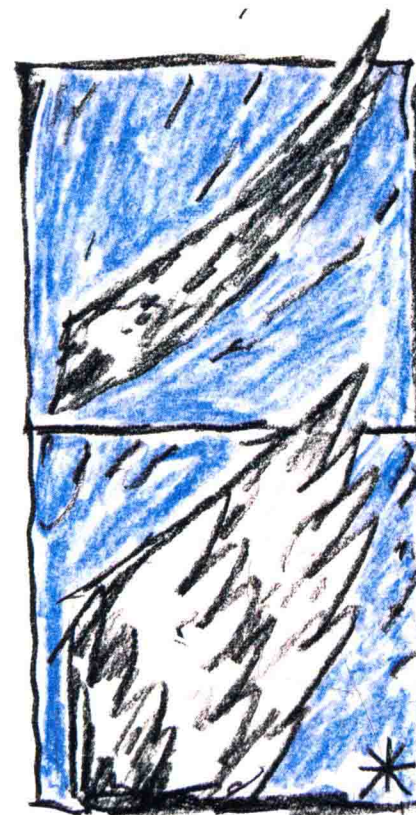
"The view of a bare wall, if it be of a great height and length, is undoubtedly grand; but this is only *one* idea and not a *repetition of similar ideas*: it is therefore great, not so much upon the principle of *infinity*, as upon that of *vastness*."<sup>6</sup>

This remark evidently also applies with respect to the aluminum wall in the Hamburger Bahnhof; at the same time, with the structuring by means of the supports and copings, even if also quite cautiously, Kleihues addresses the proportion of the individual elements that make up the wall. In this sense, the wall becomes a fundamental structure for representing the sublime and seems to evade measurability. Simultaneously, from up close, the repetition of the identical elements directs attention to the proportion and to the structural principle itself. From different viewing angles and distances, the abstract principle of sequence stands beside the concrete composition of the individual visible elements and thus represents aesthetic principles that have their roots respectively in tradition and modernism.

As a result of its appeal as a potentially infinite principle, this wall takes on the role of an ornamental element. It has an elemental character and substitutes a deliberately de-differentiated, stereometrically determined construction mass for complex variety, which one might utilize in order to avoid supposed monotony. Instead of sculptural refinement, the coherency of the surface dominates. From up close and with its large size, the wall is simultaneously difficult to comprehend, and it is first the panorama perspective of the viewer that opens up the overall coherence. The object character is intensified as a result of the sheer size and the materiality of the wall and also creates an aesthetic distance, which stands in a relationship of tension to the rational transparency of the design and structure.

On the one hand, the wall is indebted to the architectonic substance alone, while on the other, it refers in terms of its height to the eaves of the old building, and its base of Crailsheim shell limestone corresponds in its height to the base of the historical building. This dialectic of autonomy and connection corresponds to the relationship of tension between rationality and poetry.

Here, what Kleihues also had in mind was the model of breaking free from normative structures, which, with an awareness of tradition and modernism and their aporia, makes it possible to think of a third way. The questioning connected with this inspires reflection on the characteristics specific to traditional architecture and at the same time provides occasion for a re-assessment of modernism. The effectiveness with regard to content of the stance formulated by Kleihues in the field of ten-



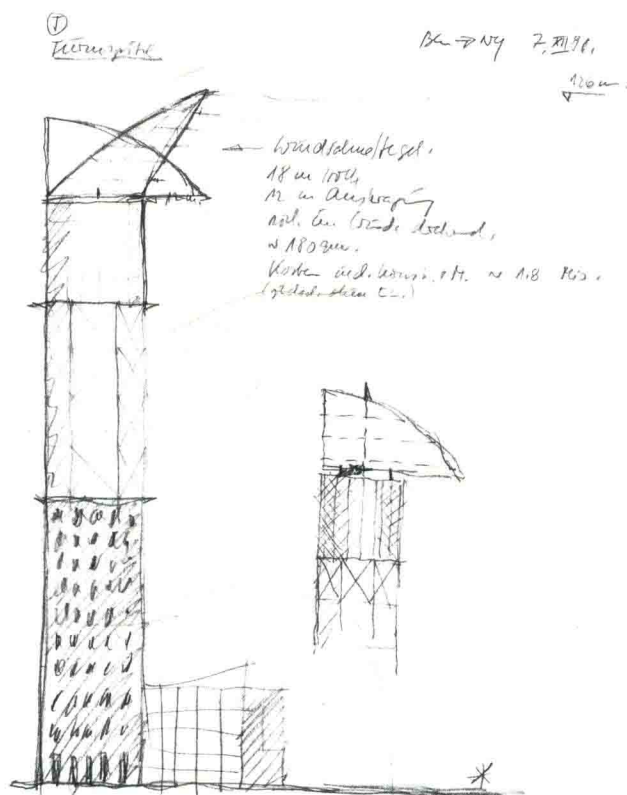
The illustration of poetry in Kleihues's *Seven Columns of Architecture*

sion between poetry and rationality as well as in their synthesis thus leads to the creation of a reflexive meta-level, on which elements of both tradition as well as modernism are considered and tested as quasi-available means. As a result, the relationship between tradition and modernism itself becomes the subject of architectonic discourse.

Josef Paul Kleihues's recourse to traditional characteristics thus occurred neither due to pure inclination nor anecdotally but rather as the result of a distinctly reflective act. An exception with respect to his far-reaching personal commitment to aesthetic necessity is represented to a certain extent by the pair of buildings Haus Sommer and Haus Liebermann on Pariser Platz in Berlin, which was initially, for instance, as a result of the employment of a "faux axis" and a highly matter-of-fact design, composed as a critical-reflective contribution to architecture's fidelity to tradition, but which also, under pressure from the client and historical building preservation interests, had to be adapted to such an extent that, from a contemporary perspective, it is the traditional elements recreated based on the original that stand in the foreground. In this way, the structures now show in reality which qualities can be achieved despite these huge restrictions.



The early design for the Kantdreieck sail takes up the motif of wings



A backward-looking culture of remembering is, in principle, precisely what Kleihues rejected. In “topicality” and “moment,” he saw instances of a present quality, which make the buildings into living witnesses to this process of reflection. He established the current topicality through selecting what was appropriate at the present time instead of either utilizing innovations in form or simply following one tradition. Tradition and modernism thus appear as a dialectical unit that does not strive to harmonize through establishing continuities in place of breaks but instead shows the dialectical opposition of the contemporary awareness of the present and past as structural conditions for the solving of architectonic problems. The present does not deny itself tradition nor is the present denied because of tradition. It is not self-reassurance and the ennobling of one’s own artistic position in normative certainties that stand at the fore but rather the imperative of reflection before the backdrop of a specific historical situation, which is shaped by the relativity of structures. Kleihues’s stance is, in the best sense, historical, not historicist, since it does not aim at deriving normativity from the material utilized but rather structures the material used according to the interests and necessities of the present in a critical-historical

working method. What concerned him was neither innovation in form nor establishing aesthetic norms, but rather the appropriate updating of traditional and modern structures in order to transform them on a meta-level and make reflection accessible. The recourse to the motif of the attaching of stone panels to the façade of Kantdreieck based on the model of Otto Wagner’s Postsparkasse (Postal Savings Bank) in Vienna is, in Kleihues’s case, not motivated by the grandeur of the historical example but responded to in terms of content as well as technique. Kleihues recalled Wagner’s device of justifying ornament technically and thus pointing the way to a visualization of architectonic substance reserved to the modernism of the twentieth century at one time because these aspects made such new reflection necessary in the discussions surrounding postmodernism in architecture.

### The Critical Reconstruction of the City

While Josef Paul Kleihues’s theoretical comments on architecture are summarized under the concept of poetic rationalism, his theoretical urban design concept is subsumed under the concept of critical reconstruction.

The overall concept is thus essentially determined by the prerequisite, despite all differentiation and the apparently independent treatment of the two aspects under the above-mentioned terms, of mandatorily correlating architecture and urban design to one another and comprehending them as one entity. In transferring the architecture-theoretic question regarding the character of rationality and its confrontation with non-reifying poetry to urban design, Kleihues was able to refer to the Italian architect and theorist Aldo Rossi.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the idea of permanence, what is also central in Rossi’s work is the concept of typology, which leads to an effective classification of urban design inventories and moreover to functional classifications. According to Rossi, the type is not a formal entity but instead embodies the actual essence of architecture. This is liberated from creative and programmatic guidelines and can also be developed from out of itself. In allusion to the pre-modern architecture theorist Antoine Chrysostôme Quatremère de Quincy, Rossi stated that the type is not a pictorial specification but rather an idea that serves the concrete model as a rule and thus is able to provide the basis for identity-shaping concepts.<sup>8</sup> With this, architecture and city are asserted as being in an aesthetically perceptible and applicable inter-relationship beyond their direct quality of use, as Kleihues and Rossi both noted.



If the city is comprehended as a self-reinforcing whole, it is explained by means of its elements and structure. Instead of mechanistically functional criteria, what was now shifted to the fore was the communicative potential of the city, which although it did not necessarily consist of the revival of traditional motifs, did allow these to reappear as possible alternatives in the first place. This however implies that the legitimacy of aesthetic expression was no longer exclusively dependent on conforming to the development introduced by modernism. In the nineteen-sixties, this had transpired in all artistic genres, and Kleihues's revival of the typology of the building block in the case of Block 270 in Berlin is a striking example of this approach.

Kleihues emphasizes dialectic as a basis for the examination of the city in modernism and thus the inevitable prerequisite for the critical handling of the modern city itself. How, Kleihues asked in an interview with Claus Baldus in 1986, can this manifest itself in the present "without becoming recidivist?"<sup>9</sup> He recognized modernism as part of cultural history—as something that had passed into history—and called for a concept of historicity that does not itself seem suppressing but instead strives to keep the modern protest against tradition alive.

This stance is opposed to the simplifying structural laws of modernism and pleads in favor of the principle of programmatic diversity. The fact that Kleihues was also willing to examine this diversity with respect to his own aesthetic positions is shown by the nearly programmatic participation of architects such as Stanley Tigerman, Richardo Bofill, Charles Moore, and Zaha Hadid in the IBA.

Josef Paul Kleihues first defined critical reconstruction in his essay "Städtebau ist Erinnerung: Anmerkungen zur kritischen Rekonstruktion" (Urban Design is Remembrance: Remarks on Critical Reconstruction).<sup>10</sup> This was then tested in urban design practice at various locations during the Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1984/87. While this measure was supposed to reconstruct the long-neglected inner city along the historical network of streets and above all to reclaim it as a place to live, the starting point was a campaign in the press that was initiated by Wolf Jobst Siedler along with Josef Paul Kleihues in a supplement of the *Berliner Morgenpost* daily newspaper (January 18, 1977 edition) under the title "Modelle für eine Stadt" (Models for a City). The main demand that was formulated there was that existing urban structures be examined. Kleihues became the planning director of the IBA and planned an integrated exposition that examined existing structures. Through the content-related recourse to his planning for Berlin-Ruhwald from

the late nineteen-sixties and his block perimeter development in the case of Block 270 on Vineta-platz in the city district of Wedding, the first of its kind to be realized in Berlin since World War II, he reacted to the dissolution of the urban space as it had existed until World War II.

For Kleihues, a strong reference to the historical ground plan promised a unity in the appearance of the city that corresponds with the European city. In it, the concentration of the built urban space—typical of the European city—is contrasted with the sparsely populated rural space. Since the Middle Ages, the street space had been oriented toward the course of narrow streets and been defined by means of the building façades running parallel to them. The fact that modern, postwar urban development rejected the original urban ground plan for reasons that were initially quite good, and in doing so ignored quite promising approaches to reform such as, for example, the reform buildings of Alfred Messel and Paul Mebes at the turn of the twentieth century, had something to do with the specific dynamic of the basic, historical-theoretical construction of modernism, which was oriented against tradition. The radical rejection of traditional frameworks had thus ignored the conceivable as well as practiced improvement of the structures of conventional blocks to the greatest extent possible through reducing their density.

Josef Paul Kleihues not only traced the outline of the city but also examined its traces of memory above all in the ground plan. The obligation of urban design was derived from this in order to elevate analysis of the city to become the basis for the planning pro-

Kleihues's architecture reflects numerous urban motifs. The Theater des Westens is located vis-à-vis Kantdreieck.

