

Susanne Titz

Partitur Stadtgarten

"Partitur Stadtgarten" should be considered a commissioned work. The NAK asked William Engelen to create a project whose theme would be the surrounding environment. In Aachen, the Stadtgarten is characteristic of contemporary urban parks. There is hardly anything left that would remind you of the period in which it was constructed. Visions of historical park areas can be seen as soon as you enter the park, but all of the glamour of these days is gone. It has become a stage, a prop for the current needs of city residents, who no longer require an urban idyll, but instead treasure space to move. Since October 2001 the NAK has been in this area. The move to the park, to the building formerly housing the city parks and cemeteries department, was joined with the city's wish to reactivate the park. In turning the building into an art space, the goal was to reawaken Aachen residents' consciousness of the park. Dutch artist William Engelen, who lives far away in Berlin, was made familiar with all of the elements of this constellation. A group working on the NAK project researched past and present history of the Stadtgarten. The city archive and citizens gathered historical documents. Tours of the site, photographic documents and sociological analyses of patterns of movement followed. Meanwhile, Engelen spent a great deal of time in the Stadtgarten. Diagrams, which the Dutch artist had hitherto created out of interior rooms and one single outdoor space, formed the basis for Engelen's work. In 2001 "Park" was created, a fictional design, whose spatial order is explained through the movements of chess figures and dancers. "Park" is a creative design as well as a new definition of the park as a space that has been planned. In this sense, a collision, a clash between the artistic concept and real situation was a deliberate part of the commission. What would happen if Engelen thought up a diagrammatic system for this park, if he translates the movement and life in this place into readable structures? The choice of this particular artist was based on the decision not to stick with a historic or socio-cultural analysis, but to experience a far-reaching, current artistic deed. Regarding the project as an acoustic intervention was of special interest, because it would strictly define the duration of the intervention at the site. In this, Engelen did not re-plan Aachen's Stadtgarten. Rather, it is more an interpretation of the space, using a musical score, which is not only acoustically or musically significant, but which can also be interpreted visually and structurally from a real-world perspective.

Engelen's project for the NAK is divided into four presentational elements. The composition, consisting of seven musical pieces, was performed at seven sites in the Stadtgarten. Altogether sixteen musicians from nine nations (Bulgaria, Germany, Iraq, Iran, Moldavia, Holland, Russia, Syria and South Korea) took part in the concert production. The international aspect had to do with the quality of the musicians, but at the same time represents a feature of life in the park, too. A studio recording of all seven of the concert's themes, the score and materials became part of a room installation that also contained drawings on the wall and texts by Engelen. The installation represents the work in the Stadtgarten in all of its complexity. Here, the real space is translated into a completely abstract version, occasionally mediated by plan-like structures, numbered series and a few video recordings. A second room contains many models from Engelen's work: the "Park" and other diverse three-dimensional structures developed from fictional and real spaces, whose blueprints and elements are based on movements of additional

figures. In one room the context explains the background of the artistic concept, through which possible principles and modes of representing the current project are manifested in the other room. Element number four is a documentary room for the historical and present periods of the Aachen Stadtgarten. For visitors, it is de facto the first room, where they get to know about the project after the concert. Containing a blueprint of the Aachen Stadtgarten, historical plans, stories and materials of different kinds, the room is the starting point for the objects that come next. During the entire period of the show, visitors can also borrow CD Walkmen to listen to Engelen's composition, and relive the performance of the concert while walking through the Stadtgarten. This way, the confrontation between real space and the artistic treatment remains present in the entire project.

"Partitur Stadtgarten" is an experimental effort to expand consciousness, in a real, tangible sense. There is no improvement, no design, no new plan in the foreground of the project for the city park. Rather, it has more to do with working on becoming aware of and experiencing this public space. A public park is a place that is often used and often useful, a place in the midst of the city where room to move can be appropriated. In this space, you will see lonely people, those who want to be alone, groups forming, cliques and circles, movement and stasis that cannot be experienced anywhere else in the city. Everyone who comes here follows certain patterns; they walk or run along particular paths every day, meet at the same place, play the same games, carry out the same rituals all of the time. Everyone who happens by notices the codes for life in this socially used garden. They are guests in the patterns, which were invented by park architects, but created by the residents.

"Partitur Stadtgarten" is an artistic study directed toward questioning social structure, needs and leisure time behavior. In doing so, it takes on the behavior of a flaneur. It is about observing, comprehending, about the kind of sensitivity composer Claude Debussy had in mind when, more than one hundred years ago, he began to be musically interested in the non-composed world of reality. The NAK's intention is to take this reality seriously and to make it visible as a real environment for the activities of today's artists. Documents and texts on Engelen's project, especially the following interpretations by Michael Glasmeier and Joachim Krause, explain the sense behind such ideas: they open up perspectives of the planned and experienced structures and thus might evoke new modes of perceiving in architectural and urban planners.

Thanks goes to everyone who worked on the project: the Mondriaan Stichting, the Royal Dutch Embassy in Berlin, the Dutch General Consulate in Düsseldorf, Initiative StadtBauKultur in NRW, and the City of Aachen, which supported William Engelen and the NAK in their endeavors to realize their intentions; the NAK Project Group, Margarethe Dietzel and Dr. Peter Gleißner, who worked with great energy on behalf of the city; the citizens who allowed us access to their memories and documents for an unwritten piece of city history; all of the musicians and the producing director for the concert, who undertook this daring interdisciplinary group project; the authors and everyone else who worked on this publication; the NAK team, board of directors, and artistic council. And special thanks goes to William Engelen, who accepted the NAK commission and worked very hard to successfully carry out the project.