

Fuzzy Logic

The Old Testament-influenced cultural sphere is built on the notion that language creates the world. However, since language has no longer been a tool for philosophical insight but its object for certain thinkers, its authority has declined. Despite every effort to meet an altered understanding of language and thus of the world with new methods of expression, there are phenomena that language fails to come to grips with. This is particularly obvious wherever the printed word appears—in books, texts that are organised in a linear way, demanding progress through them from beginning to end. In such a context, a description of simultaneities or overlaps is always only possible in succession. This also applies to the current publication, for it is compelled to approach—in a linear way—an artistic oeuvre that deals with just such a description of simultaneities and overlaps. Perhaps this discrepancy may even be advantageous to Olaf Holzapfel's work, for its qualities and properties are revealed as a consequence.

With his sculptures, paintings and digital prints, Holzapfel develops metaphors for the manners in which we might imagine and create the world and steer our passage through it. At first glance, his works seem to convey an interest in their material or in formal questions. On closer examination, however, their layering and folding—their “fuzziness”, as the artist calls it—makes them into conceptual models of a thought that does not progress in a linear manner, but can leap from one place to the next without needing to travel the interim path. They illustrate a way of thinking, whereby the apparently contradictory may suddenly be adjacent, which admits that it is capable of those leaps, certainly, but only within firm limits. Such an approach is manifest, for example, in the conglomerations of some cities, where very different types of architecture coexist as the expression of very different needs and ideas, where different navigation systems are at work, requiring different sign systems for the decoding of their diverse information, and finally in those virtual worlds where just one mouse-click may open up a new universe.

The massive installation “Das abseitige Freie” (2008) consists of two coloured, wall-like constructions that incorporate and demonstrate such supposed contradictions. With their impressive dimensions of 5 x 9.5 and 4.2 x 11 metres they dominate and divide the room, standing in the viewer's way, impeding a view or passage through it. However, at the same time they are fragile, flexible structures. Their material is not that of an architecture devised for permanence, but hard cardboard—the material of the provisional, of packaging, and thus of the migrant. Both “walls” are coloured; one is painted in a greyish light-green, the other in a deep inky blue, blurring and undermining associations with the structural—most viewers will probably connect “green” and “blue” with landscape, architecture's organic antithesis. The title, as in almost all of Holzapfel's works, conveys a further disturbance; a linguistic signal that sends our thoughts in diverging directions. “Das abseitige Freie” (“Remote Freedom” or “Remote Boundlessness”) names the opposites inherent in the work: while the concept of remoteness implies a spatial location or a moral, a classifying standpoint from which something may be regarded as remote, contemplation of the concept of “freedom” culminates in hardly assessable, often philosophical questioning. If works like “Das abseitige Freie” or earlier ones like “Squatter Bike Store” (2004) or “Weiches Haus” (2005) have models at all in the empirical world, they can be found in all the makeshift dwellings that result from need or from the desire for an independent, mobile life.

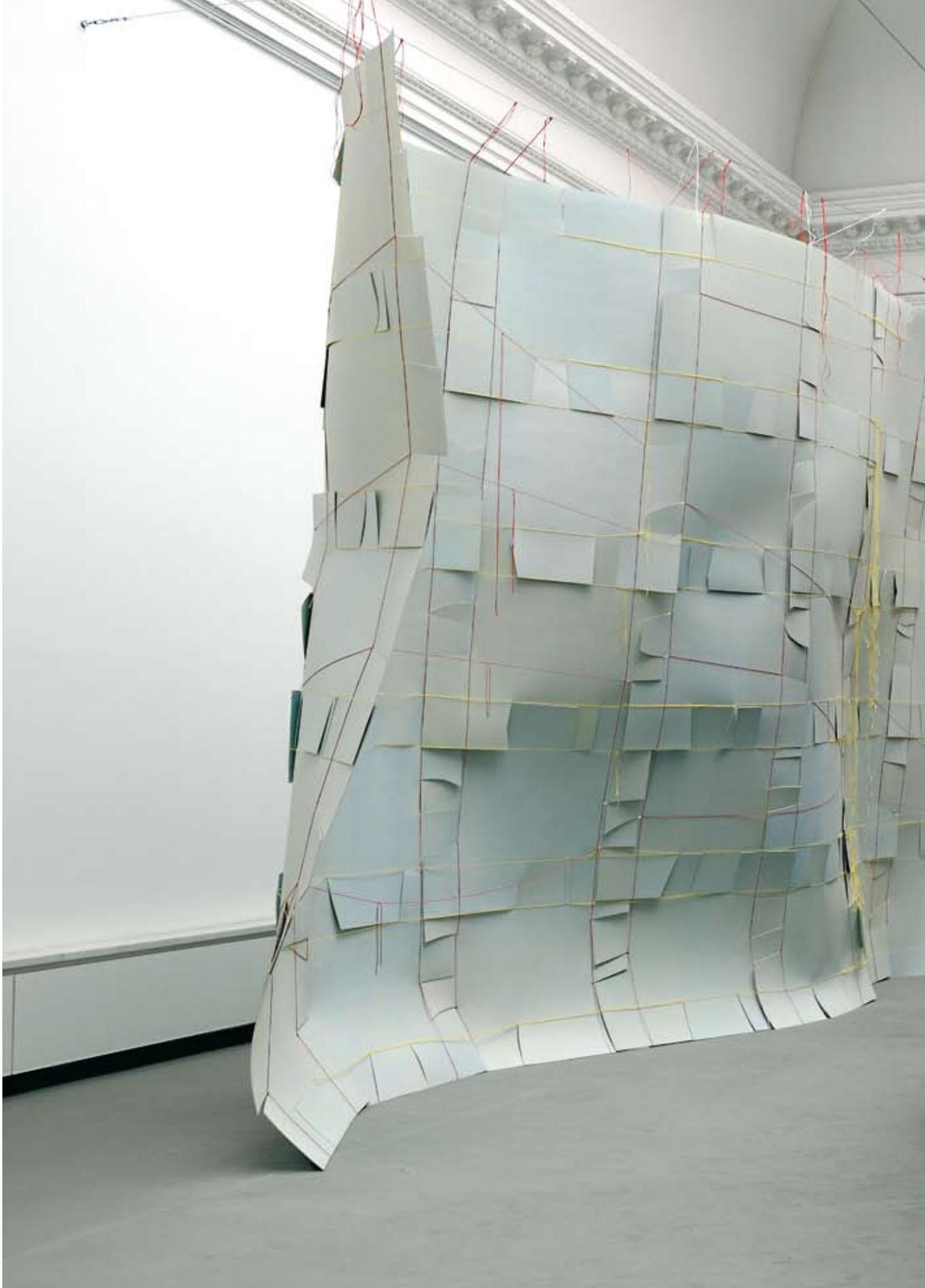
This installation is therefore not the result of a design with a coherent whole in mind; on the contrary, its structures allow transitions from one dimension to another, from one aggregate state into another, opening up conceptual wormholes, as it were. First, the “walls” are produced as drawings that lay a grid over a rectangular area and overlay this with even more lines. On the basis of this preliminary sketch modules are cut out of cardboard. Their edges have indentations like those in folding or interlocking systems, meaning that the individual elements can be assembled into a reasonably stable, statically independent construction. The green “wall”, for example, comprises five such modules in height, the blue one is made from four correspondingly larger modules. Yet



Holzappel adds further elements to create intricacy within this system. The modules have more such notches than would actually be necessary to build a stable structure; the purpose of these functionally superfluous cuts is to break up and extend the wall's planar quality into the third dimension. For Holzappel, they represent the options set out in complex systems, sites of potential for further or different developments, whether these actually evolve or not. A network of coloured threads is then drawn over these walls; it is arranged contrary to the orientation of the modular grid. The threads obey a constructive logic in some parts, but above all, they lead to a securing device on the ceiling. Yet the "walls" could certainly stand up in space without the need for prosthetic fixtures, even though—because of their material, and therefore quite intentionally—they would then deform and bend after a while. However, the deliberately casual and apparently not very rational hanging system introduces another contradictory moment into the work and overlays the first impression of a free-standing structure, static in itself.

And there is more potential for fuzziness inherent to "Das abseitige Freie". Modular systems—as in the architectonic or sculptural concepts of Modernism—imply a notion of boundless expansion into space and virtuality. The module, however, also always signifies restriction, since its fixed characteristics limit the properties of what can be potentially repeated or constructed an infinite number of times. The module's form prescribes the form of whatever is built from it, and this antagonism is a fitting description of how Holzappel's installation is intended—as an expression of individual choice among a number of possibilities that only appear unlimited. Holzappel himself recognises the restrictions in the act of selection, which, according to him, can only ever take place within specified parameters, a corridor of choices, as he puts it, and therefore his modular works are of clearly defined dimensions. Their extent, their finite quality is based on very conscious decisions made by the artist. It is true that further development of the "wall" is laid out as a potential, but it will not be realised. This potential is the very crux of the work—it is also expressed in the forking of the blue "wall". This structure thus demands more space in relation to the green "wall" and further complicates the already difficult task of viewing and grasping the installation as a whole. Its softness, its curves distract the eye, making it impossible to read the structure into an imaginary system of spatial coordinates. Viewers have to move around the work; they are only able to perceive specific, separate aspects, while the eye and brain simultaneously filter and sieve information, choose what is worth observing, they become entangled in the threads, move from the curves to the strict grid, become lost in the blue only to be caught up again by the folds and cuts. They know that they are standing in front of a wall, but it is one that disintegrates into so many small pieces before them. And with this act of recognition, viewers reproduce precisely what Holzappel does and seeks to depict in his art.

Translation by Lucinda Rennison



Das abseitige Freie 2008 Hartpappe und Polyamidschnüre / hardboard and polyamid cords,
ca. approx. 5 x 9,5 m, 4,2 x 12 m, Kaiser Wilhelm Museum Krefeld

