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This is a copy of the final version of an article published in ARENA Journal of Architectural Research . 3 (1) , p . 4 . DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/ajar.46>

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HUMANITIES ESSAY

Rurality and Minimal Architecture: An Inquiry into the Genealogy of Tate Modern's Bankside Gallery Spaces

Victoria Watson

When the Tate institution first announced its plans to build a 'Tate Modern' gallery on London's Bankside it stated its preferences for a 'rural' and 'minimal' architecture. These are contested terms whose significance for the resultant contemporary art space is by no means apparent. Focusing on the suites of gallery-rooms built on levels 2, 3 & 4, as part of the initial power station transformation, which opened to the public in 2000, this paper will examine the notions of rurality and minimal architecture that underpin the contemporary art space. It will weave their genealogy out of three themes: First, the Tate's stated interest in the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk as a potential model for the new gallery. Second, the influence of the artist Rémy Zaugg, who had worked with Tate's architects for the project, Herzog and de Meuron, on a number of studio-gallery projects prior to the Tate commission. Third, the modernist tradition of the 'white cube' and its post-modern critique dating from the mid 1970s.

Keywords: Minimal Architecture; Museum-gallery; Tate Modern; Rural setting; Landscape

Introduction

In 1994 the Tate institution issued a competition brief soliciting interest from architects for the project of transforming a redundant power station on London's Bankside into a brand new art space for the twenty-first century. As is well known, the competition resulted in the appointment of the relatively young and in those days relatively unknown Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron. Tate's brief referenced three spatial models as important factors for thinking about the new art space. The first two it explicitly classified as 'urban,' these were exemplified by the Museum of Modern art in New York and the Pompidou Centre in Paris. With the former described as a 'series of quasi-domestic, artificially lit rooms,' and the later as 'open floors of space, each infinitely adaptable to the new technologies and new uses over time.' The brief classified the third spatial model as 'rural.' It gave no sub-categories of the rural but it did give two exemplars, these were the Kröller-Möller Museum in Otterlo, Netherlands and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark. In addition to the three spatial models the brief referred to the findings of a recent survey suggesting that artists tended to dislike the urban models, instead 'preferring the rural prototype and, above all, skylit conversions of existing buildings,' with 'minimal' architectural intervention [1].

In what follows I will investigate the significance of Tate's aspirations toward a rural and minimal architecture, focusing on the suites of gallery spaces that were realised in the Bankside transformation.

The Rural Model

Since it was a former director of the Louisiana, a man called Lars Nittjve, who, in 1998, was appointed by Nicholas Serota to direct the new art space on Bankside, the Louisiana, rather than the Kröller-Möller, is taken to stand as a concrete example of the rural model.

The Louisiana first opened to the public in 1958, that is 36 years before the Tate issued its competition brief and 42 years before the Bankside art space opened to the public. Louisiana's founder was a man called Knud W. Jensen, he directed the museum for thirty seven years, until Nittjve took over in 1995. Formally the

Louisiana consists of a house in a garden setting, in the transformation from house to museum of art the ensemble of house and garden was modified through the introduction of a number of pavilion structures. The pavilions were distributed across the garden as a series of linked rooms connected to the house and to one another by glazed walkways. These original gallery spaces were built to the east of the house, terminating in a cafeteria that looks out over the sea. The buildings are characterised by a consistent formal language, one that is expressed in a modest material palette of whitewashed brickwork, timber and glass. The architects, Vilhelm Wohlert and Jorgen Bo, worked closely with Jensen to produce a new kind of museum, one where a combination of art and nature was 'made possible by an architecture of great lucidity. The combination succeeded because each of the three parts – display, park and building – played their role and each supported the other two' [2: p8]. Since 1958 the Louisiana has been extended several times with two substantial additions adding new suites of gallery-rooms, the first built in 1982 and the second in 1991. In each case the new gallery-rooms differ from those built in 1958 (**Figures 1, 2 and 3**).

The front of the house faces west, with the back facing east across a lawn and out to the sea. The original addition of 1958, built to the north-east of the house, is composed as a sequence of screens that alternate on a north-west/south-east and north-east/south-west alignment. The former are built from white-painted brickwork and the later from timber-framed glass. Seen in plan the layout is simple, but experienced in lived space the screens have the effect of layering the relationship between inside and out in complex ways. Pairs of white-painted brick screens run parallel to one another to create the gallery-rooms, although to call these spaces rooms is slightly misleading since they have no doors and windows. Instead of doors cut into them, the brick screens are off-set and extended through a 90 degree turn to form 'L' shaped extrusions that guide the flows of space and visitors through the gallery sequence (**Figure 4**). For the visitor the alternation of white-painted brickwork and timber-framed glass reinforces the perpendicular ordering of the gallery sequence, aligning it to the abstraction of the plan, but it also affects their gaze. For the visitor, turning



Figure 1: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art; views of the buildings, garden and landscape 01 (photographs: Victoria Watson).



Figure 2: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art; views of the buildings, garden and landscape 02 (photographs: Victoria Watson).

through 90 degrees and constantly switching between closed and open space, the field of vision varies and must constantly adjust as they move, experiencing close-up, middle-ground and even long-distance views. The placing of the artworks carefully reinforces this optical variety, with paintings on walls and large sculptures out in the garden, to be looked at in passing along and through, the pairs of glass screens.

The addition of 1982, built to the south of the house, forms an array of interlocking gallery-rooms, the rooms are linked to the house by a corridor (**Figure 5**). The corridor is opened-up on the eastern side, towards the lawn, by means of a half-height glazed screen. But there are no glazed screens within the gallery-rooms themselves, nor are there any windows. The walls are made of white-painted brickwork, like those of the original addition however, unlike the original, where the walls support an expressive skylit roof structure made of timber, the ceiling in the new gallery-rooms is unarticulated, appearing as a flat white surface radiating a faint glow of homogenous white light. In fact these rooms do have a skylit roof structure, but it is concealed behind white, glass-fibre strips suspended from a recessed metal frame. Spherical openings with spotlights run around the ceiling's perimeter, integrating artificial light into the fabric covering. The floor in these gallery-rooms is a grey marble, unlike the addition of 1958 which is covered in dark-red, brickwork sized tiles. The complex layering of internal and external space of the original galleries was not replicated in these new gallery-rooms. One reason given for the change is because from the mid 1960s, the Louisiana had begun to extend its collection to include not only Danish but 'recent European and especially American art':

This new policy ... had a direct implication on building ... Some artists had expressed a view that their pieces should be seen in surroundings less connected with nature; perhaps the new European and American painting was so essentially urban that it instinctively wanted to detach itself from the landscape. [2: p9]



Figure 3: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art; views of the buildings, garden and landscape 03 (photographs: Victoria Watson).

As we shall see, the differences between the gallery additions at Louisiana are symptomatic of changing attitudes to the public display and reception of art and the values that underpin them cannot be accounted for simply in terms of an opposition between 'urban' vs 'landscape.' And yet, as the changes took hold and began to inform the production of gallery space so one consequence was an increasing disregard for the kind of landscape-garden-architecture of the original Louisiana extension.

By the time Tate was announcing its Bankside competition the sequence of gallery-rooms at Louisiana had come to form a complete circuit, ringing the lawn that stretches between the house and the sea. In order to keep the lawn clear and to maintain the view the last addition, completed in 1991, was entirely detached from the landscape and built underground (**Figure 6**). The underground spaces are little more than corridors, a sequence of curved and linear passageways, of generous width but with no visual extension other than along the direction of travel. Walls are plastered and painted white, the ceiling is white too, with the same system of circular openings and spotlights of the 1982 addition. The floor here repeats the dark-red, brick sized tiling of the original. There are no distractions in these spaces, the only thing to do is to look at the paintings and drawings on the walls and move on by.

All in all the Louisiana presents a controlled promenade for the visitor, with the artworks distributed about the entire assembly, both indoors and outdoors. What is striking about this art space and perhaps the reason for its perceived 'rurality,' is the contrasting relationship between artifice and nature, which, notwithstanding the inward looking tendencies of the later gallery additions, the visitors experience as they move through the crafted environment of building, gardening and artwork, staged as it is within the splendid natural setting that looks out over the stretch of sea separating Denmark and Sweden.

The Bankside Galleries

The idea that Louisiana might be taken literally as a model for Bankside was out of the question, perhaps way back in the seventeenth century something of the kind would have been possible, but by the late twentieth century Bankside had become densely populated with warehouses, office buildings and, of course, the

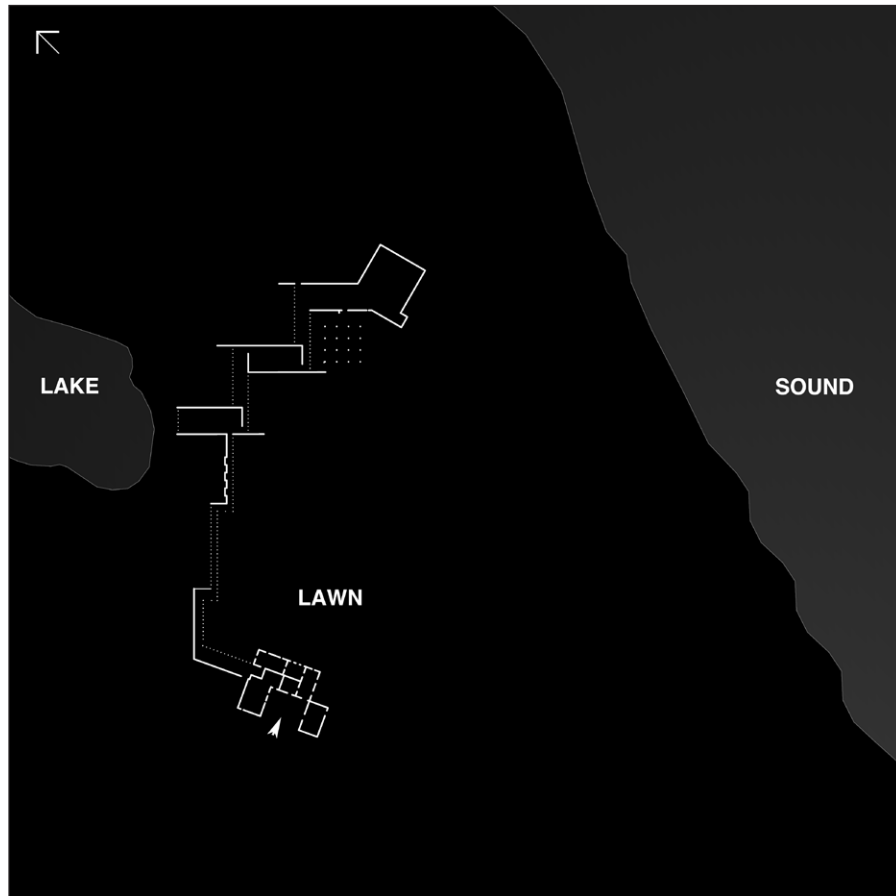


Figure 4: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art; plan diagram showing the extent of the structures and spaces in 1958.

power station. At Bankside the building and gardening approach was simply not possible, instead the new art space had to engage with the massive brick carcass of the de-commissioned power station.

The power station was conceived and designed in the 1940s by the engineering firm of Mott, Hay & Anderson. While working on the design the engineers had recommended their client, the London Power Company, employ a consultant architect to advise on the building's external appearance. The selected architect was Giles Gilbert Scott, also known for his Neo-Gothic design of Liverpool Cathedral. For the power station Scott rejected the Neo-Gothic style, opting instead for an Art-Deco 'look.' While Scott worked to devise an Art-Deco shell for the outside his engineering colleagues distributed the enormous machine assembly into three distinct zones on the inside. Each zone, arrayed with an appropriate infrastructure of steel supports, stairways and access decks, accommodated a key stage of the power-producing process: boilers, turbines and electrical switching gear.

In their commentaries on their scheme, Herzog and de Meuron often use the metaphor of the mountain to refer to the scale and appearance of the ex-power-station's massive brick-carcass [3: p209]; but they use the metaphor of the mountain in another, topographical sense too, where they allude to the mountain as a place of natural affordances, with plentiful opportunity for walking and discovery:

I believe that neither art nor architecture are here to entertain us but if you are interested it can be like a mountain. You know, a mountain is boring but if you look at it in a special way it can be amazing for you. You can walk on it, you can discover the plants, the different shades, the different light. [4: p52–53]

One part of the Bankside art space that affords very little opportunity for the visitor to decide for themselves is the by now infamous Turbine hall, where, on the whole, the consensus has been to submit to the space and enjoy it as spectacle. But Tate's Bankside art space is by no means restricted to the spectacular space of the Turbine hall, there are three floors of gallery suites included in the conversion. These are used in a con-

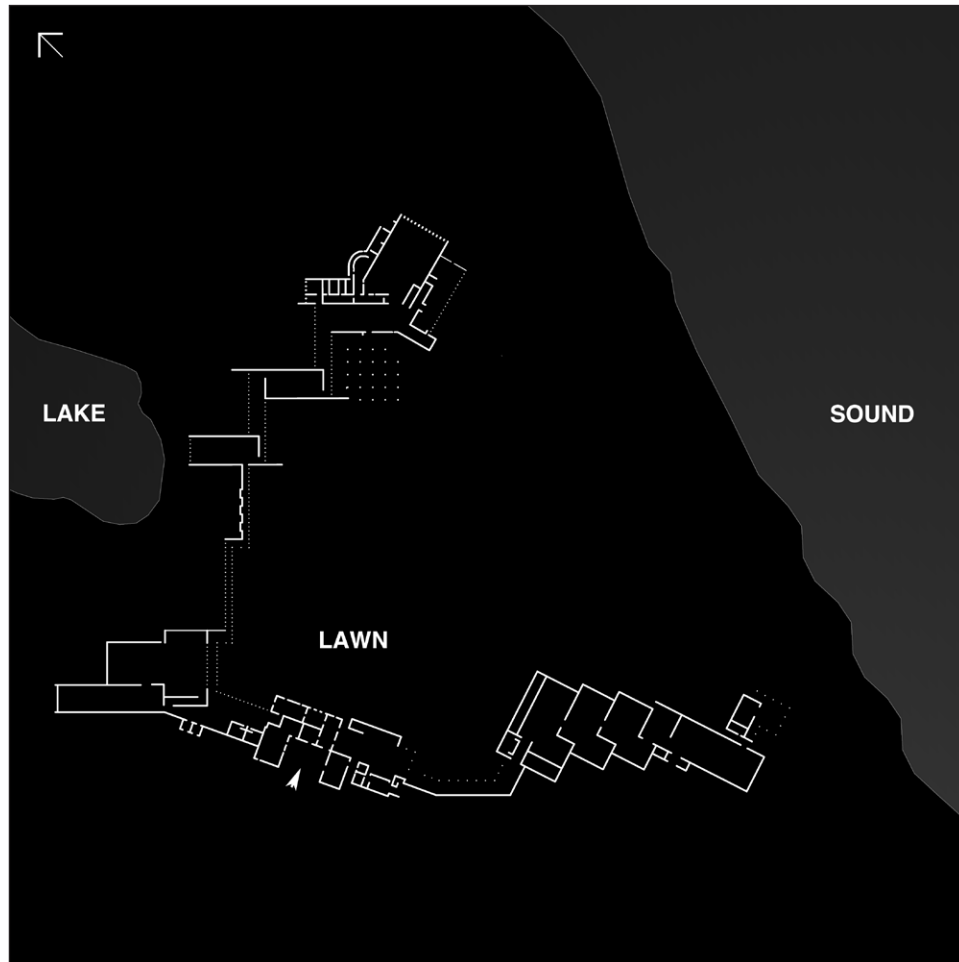


Figure 5: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art; plan diagram showing the extent of the structures and spaces in 1982.

ventional gallery manner, with paintings on walls, sculptures on plinths, specific objects on floors and film and video in darkened enclosures. The gallery suites are more resistant to spectacle and therefore, I would suggest, better suited to explore the significance of the architects' topographical metaphor of the art space as being like a mountain.

In contrast to the open space of the Turbine hall, the boiler house zone where the gallery suites are located was transformed by a process of first emptying-out the old engineering structures and machinery and then filling-in-again. The new infill structure is arranged on six levels, rising upwards floor by floor, where it is crowned at the top by a long, glazed attic storey, known as 'the light-beam.' The light-beam is reflective in the daytime and glows at night, it is a striking feature of the power station conversion and has by now become an iconic sign for London. Taken together the light-beam and ex-power station carcass evoke a poetics of light and heavy, mass and volume, earth and sky, with the light-beam acting as a compositional foyle to the mountain of brickwork below. The light-beam is an overt statement of the competition aspiration that the new art space appear as 'a sky-lit conversion with minimal architectural intervention,' where the quite considerable amount of design and building work necessary to achieve it has been made to effortlessly disappear in the final appearance (**Figure 7**).

The gallery suites are located at levels 2, 3 & 4 of the infill structure, they are arranged as sequences of rooms, one on either side of a linear lobby space that looks down into the Turbine hall, dropping vertiginously away, below, not unlike a mountain (**Figure 8**). The bipartite arrangement around the central lobby space results in two suites of gallery-rooms at each level, six in total. The individual gallery-rooms range in size and proportion, but what they have in common is their white walls, with illuminated panels in flat, white, unarticulated ceilings and their untreated oak or exposed and smooth-finished dark concrete floors (**Figure 9**). These rooms have something in common with the 1982 addition at Louisiana, except their form is much simpler. The walls do not interlock and joggle as they do at the Louisiana, they are pure, rectangular

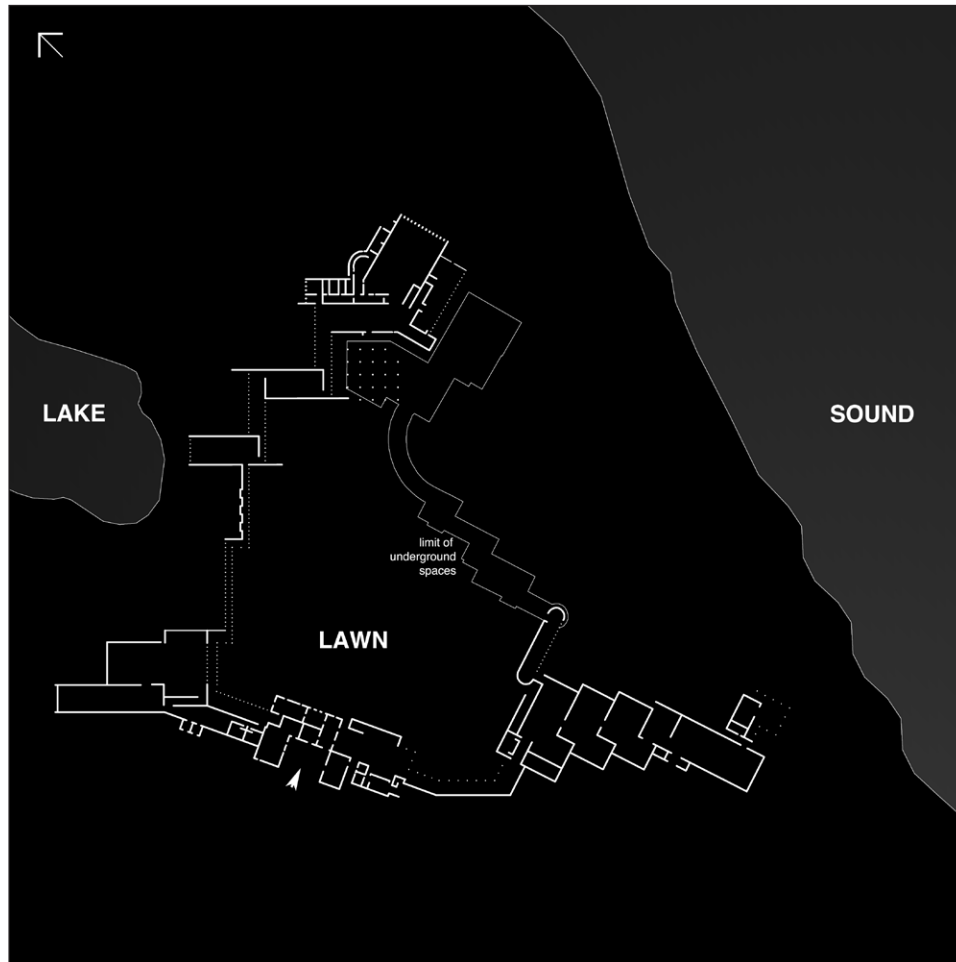


Figure 6: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark; plan diagram showing the extent of the structures and spaces in 1991.

figures, shaping prismatic volumes of air (**Figure 10**). Some of the gallery-rooms are permeated by natural daylight. On the 2nd and 3rd levels daylight is brought in through the vertical bands of windows striating the external walls. On the 4th level natural light filters in from above, passing through the system of blinds and translucent glass set within the light-beam.

White Cube

These Bankside gallery-rooms are reminiscent of the design convention of the 'white cube.' The white cube is a type of space for exhibiting artworks whose history and ideological connotations became the subject of art practice and critique in the 1970s. In his infamous white cube articles the artist and critic Brian O'Doherty gave a stimulating account of the historical development of the white cube and its ideology. The articles were first published in *Artforum* in 1976 and subsequently collected and published as a book edition in 1986 entitled *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*.¹

In considering the white cube as a genealogical factor in the formation of the Bankside gallery-rooms it is important to look at one crucial distinction from within the history of Modern painting that made the entire white cube argument credible. The difference in question, as O' Doherty puts it, is that between the 'absolute' and the 'equivocal' picture plane. Both kinds of picture plane are connected with easel painting, but whereas the absolute frame belongs to pictures that are structured through the device of perspective, the equivocal frame belongs to picturing structured in a different way. The equivocal frame produces the pictorial image as if it were a portion of visually stimulating matter, cropped out and isolated from a much larger and more extensive field of the same material. In the 'equivocal' model of image production the

¹ The book was first published by the Lapis Press in 1986. In 1999 it was expanded to include a fourth chapter and republished by the University of California Press.



Figure 7: Tate Bankside Art Space; external view looking toward the east end of the building (photograph: Victoria Watson).

picture is to the visual field rather like the pastry-chefs cut-out shapes are to the flat rolled-out spread of the pastry. To illustrate what he means O'Doherty gives the example of Claude Monet's Water Lily series, where each image looks as if it is a detail, randomly selected, from a much larger field: a pond in Monet's case. As O'Doherty explains, one effect of looking at a Monet painting is the release of optical tension. Unlike looking at a perspectival picture, where the interest of the eye tends to coalesce around the view point, with the equivocal picture the eye tends to scan across the surface, and the total image seems provisional, as if it had been settled on quite casually:

...The very featurelessness relaxes your eye to look elsewhere. The informal subject matter of Impressionism is always pointed out, but not that the subject is seen through a casual glance, one not too interested in what it's looking at. What is interesting in Monet is 'looking at' this look – the integument of light, the often preposterous formularization of a perception.... [5: p20–22]

To understand the historical development of the white cube it is necessary to be aware of the 'formularization' of perception that is effected by the kind of picturing O'Doherty calls 'equivocal.' As an architectural device for framing the experience of artworks, the white cube is grounded in the conceit that the process of perception can be experienced impersonally, slowed down and captured as if it were a thing: the perception. Most accounts of artistic perception in the white cube tend to overlook the highly formalised relationships that such perception depends on, raising instead speculation about the strange and sometimes mysterious feelings that can arise when the process of vision is appropriated and framed in this way.

Zauggian Space

At the time they were designing the Bankside gallery-rooms Herzog and de Meuron were also working on a small studio-gallery for an artist named Rémy Zaugg, they say that the Zaugg studio served, 'as a full-scale test for the exhibition galleries at Bankside' [4: p26]. But even before then the architects had collaborated

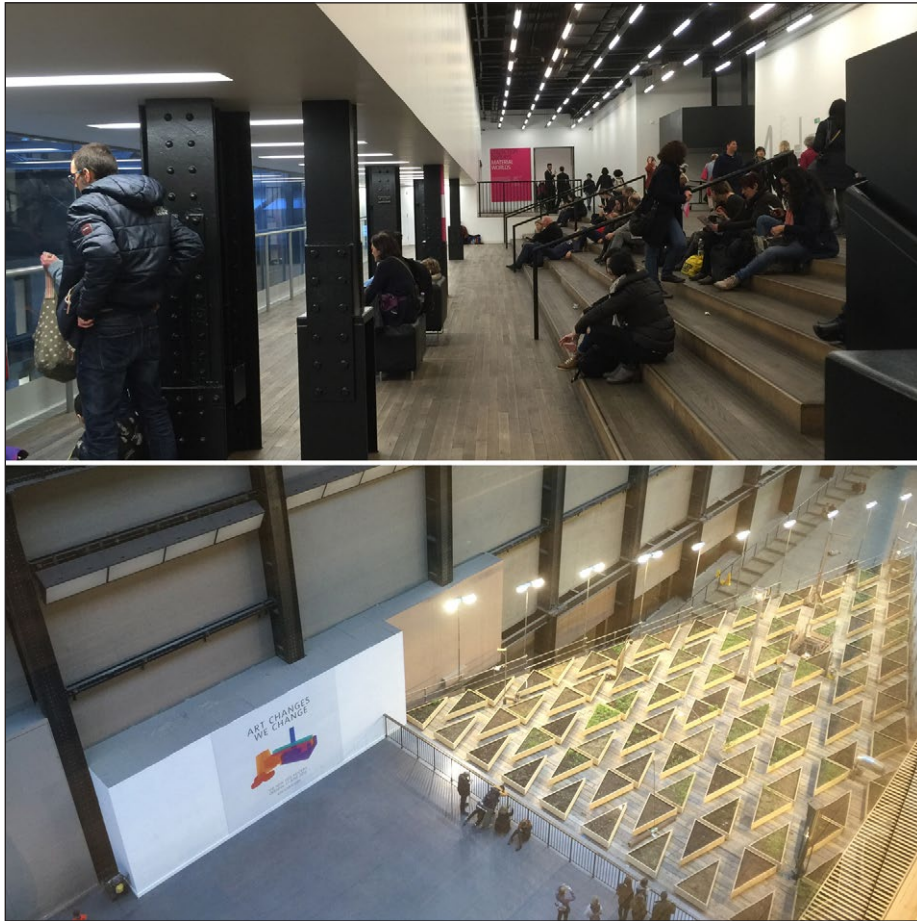


Figure 8: Tate Bankside Art Space; two internal views, above looking across the level 4 foyer, below looking down into the Turbine Hall from the level 4 foyer (the work on display beneath is an installation by Abraham Cruzvillegas entitled *Empty Lot*, commissioned by Hyundai Motor in 2015. Photographs: Victoria Watson).

with Zaugg on a number of projects, including the Goetz studio-gallery in Munich. In the selection process Tate's competition jury visited the Goetz, they were impressed by it and it became an important factor in the decision to appoint Herzog and de Meuron to the Bankside project [6]. And plausibly the matte glass strip that crowns and circumscribes the prismatic volume of the Goetz was the inspiration for the light-beam at Bankside. The Goetz and Zaugg are both pavilion additions set in the garden of an existing private house. The house and garden context aligns them with the Louisiana model; however the relationships between garden, building and artworks is not quite the same.²

The Louisiana establishes a sequence of linked gallery-rooms set within a garden and arranged as an ambulatory about a large, central lawn. The geometries are informal, but nevertheless form a closed gallery circuit. The circuit is devised to encourage and accommodate perambulating visitors, the architecture encourages the visitors to follow a set route through the museum. Yet, since the circuit is interrupted by openings out into the garden, where pathways permit cutting-across and doubling-back on the circuit, visitors are also encouraged to leave the set route. And, as well as the gallery-rooms and glazed walkways, other kinds of space, both functionally and formally diverse, such as the cafeteria and lecture hall but also double-height spaces and viewing platforms, are elided with the ambulatory, adding novelty and variety to the visitor's journey.

The Goetz and Zaugg galleries on the other hand were not designed to accommodate perambulating visitors, they are placed in their respective garden contexts as isolated, stand alone buildings (**Figure 11**). Even though they have external patios, full-height glazed openings and clerestory lights, these are not intended

² For more information about the Zaugg studio-gallery visit: <https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/index/projects/complete-works/126-150/133-studio-remy-zaugg.html>. For more information about the Goetz visit: <https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/index/projects/complete-works/051-075/056-goetz-collection.html> and http://www.sammlung-goetz.de/en/Architecture.htm#panel_gallery_building.



Figure 9: Tate Bankside Art Space; selected views of the gallery spaces on levels 2, 3 & 4 (photographs: Victoria Watson).

to encourage a continuous flow of movement around the building and garden. Neither are they intended to replicate the kind of layering of internal and external space of Louisiana's addition of 1958. These studio-galleries are places of work. The external openings function at a number of levels, bringing daylight to the interior, allowing the artist and occasional visitor to enter and leave, the self-consciously industrial looking doors allow raw materials and finished artworks to enter and leave, the outdoor patio offers an alternative place for the artist to work.

It is the interior ambience of the Goetz and Zaugg galleries that most resembles the gallery-rooms at Bankside, not just the white walls and ceilings and the overall homogenous light but the sense of interior containment facilitated by the control of discrete external relationships. Clearly these spaces are aligned with the convention of the white cube and yet there is something about them that is not quite the same, they are somehow less flowing, more room-like.

To explore a little further the kind of interiority shared by the Goetz and Zaugg studio-galleries and the Bankside gallery-rooms it is useful to know a little more about Rémy Zaugg. As well as collaborating with Herzog and de Meuron, Zaugg is well-known as an artist who made paintings of words and who wrote about the perception of art. Very little of his writing was translated into English in his lifetime – Zaugg died in 2005. Recently, however, in 2013, one of his texts has been translated and published in English. The text in question was first published in German in 1987, Zaugg appears to have written it in 1986, or at least that is the date given at the end of the text. Although there is no evidence of any direct connection, it is surely not without some significance that 1986 was the same year O'Doherty's white cube essays were first published in book form. The publication attests to their popularity, but it is likely Zaugg was already aware of the essays from their initial publication in *Artforum*. The title of Zaugg's book translates into English as *The Art Museum of My Dreams or A Place for the Work and the Human Being*, (from here on AMoMD) [7]. The English

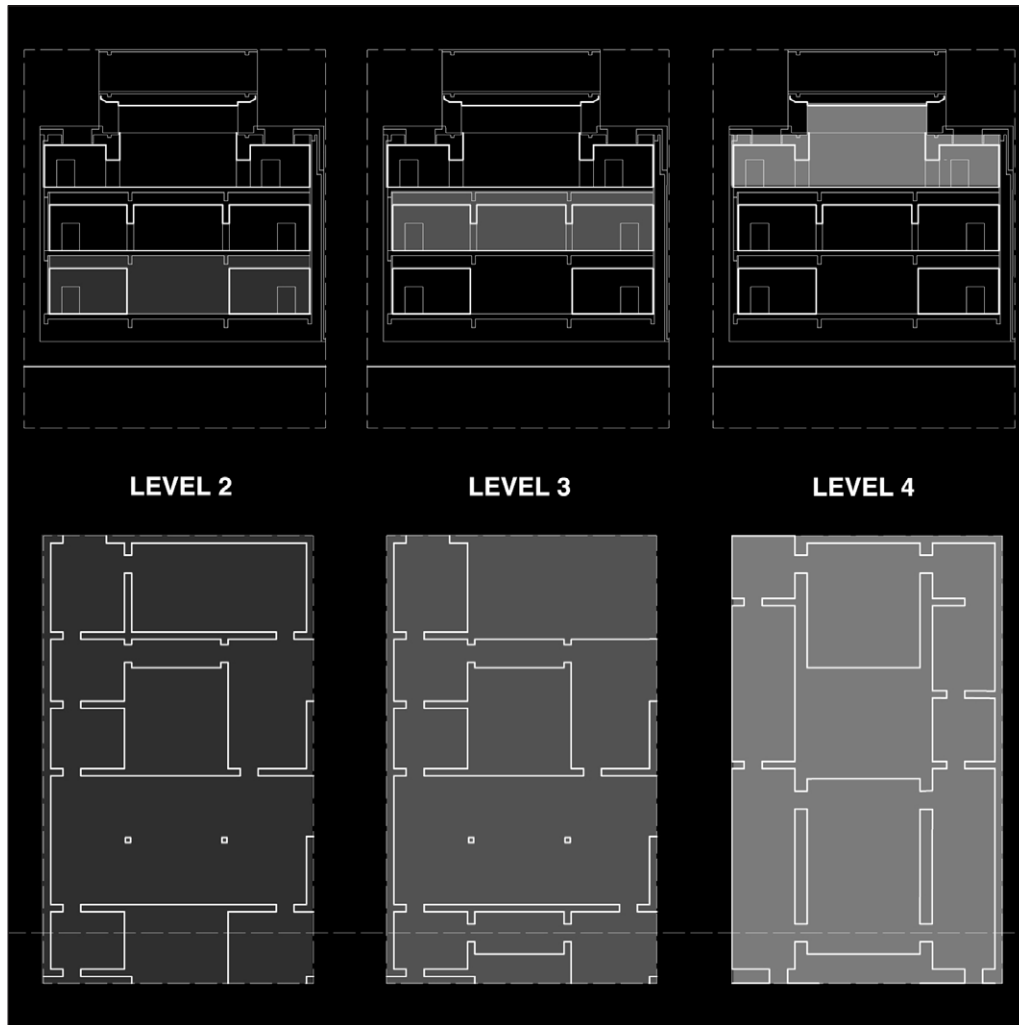


Figure 10: Tate Bankside Art Space; plans and sectional diagrams showing the gallery layouts on levels 2, 3 & 4.

publication includes a short eulogy by Herzog and de Meuron in which the architects express their gratitude to Zaugg, because by working with him they had received ‘a massive intellectual dose’ of ‘fundamental deliberations on the perception of the art work’ [7: inside cover].

As suggested in the eulogy, the theme of AMoMD is the human perception of art, with the text actually recommending preferred human-artwork relationships and stating spatio-temporal principles for their accommodation. In AMoMD Zaugg sets down the formal parameters of an ideal environment for human/artwork interaction. His basic unit is a rectangular room, consisting of four white walls of matt texture, a floor of wood or stone, and a ceiling, finished in the same material as the walls. Zaugg is unconcerned if the room be lit by natural or by artificial light, but he does stress the importance of even illumination, without shadows, beams or spot lights. It is this basic unit that most closely conforms to the convention of the white cube. But Zaugg goes on to prescribe the conditions of entry to the room, which should be by means of a door-sized opening, cut through one of the walls. The opening should be neither on the central axis of the wall it cuts through, nor too close to the corners of the room it opens into, certainly it should not be cut out of a corner; and there is to be no door. In the critical discourse and practices of the white cube questions concerning the manner of entry into the art space were explored in a variety of ways, O’Doherty gives some interesting examples in his essay *The Gallery as Gesture* [5: p87–107] but within the cult of the white cube the act of entry was never formally prescribed and incorporated in the way that Zaugg includes doorways in the structure of his ideal gallery-room.

Zaugg does not give precise dimensions for the room, but he states it should relate to the size of the human body, suggesting width and length be measured in units of arms-stretched-wide and height in units of arms-raised-upwards. In this way Zaugg sets the shape and size of the room within a generous range of possibilities: it may be small, it may be large, but what is important is that the room corresponds to the

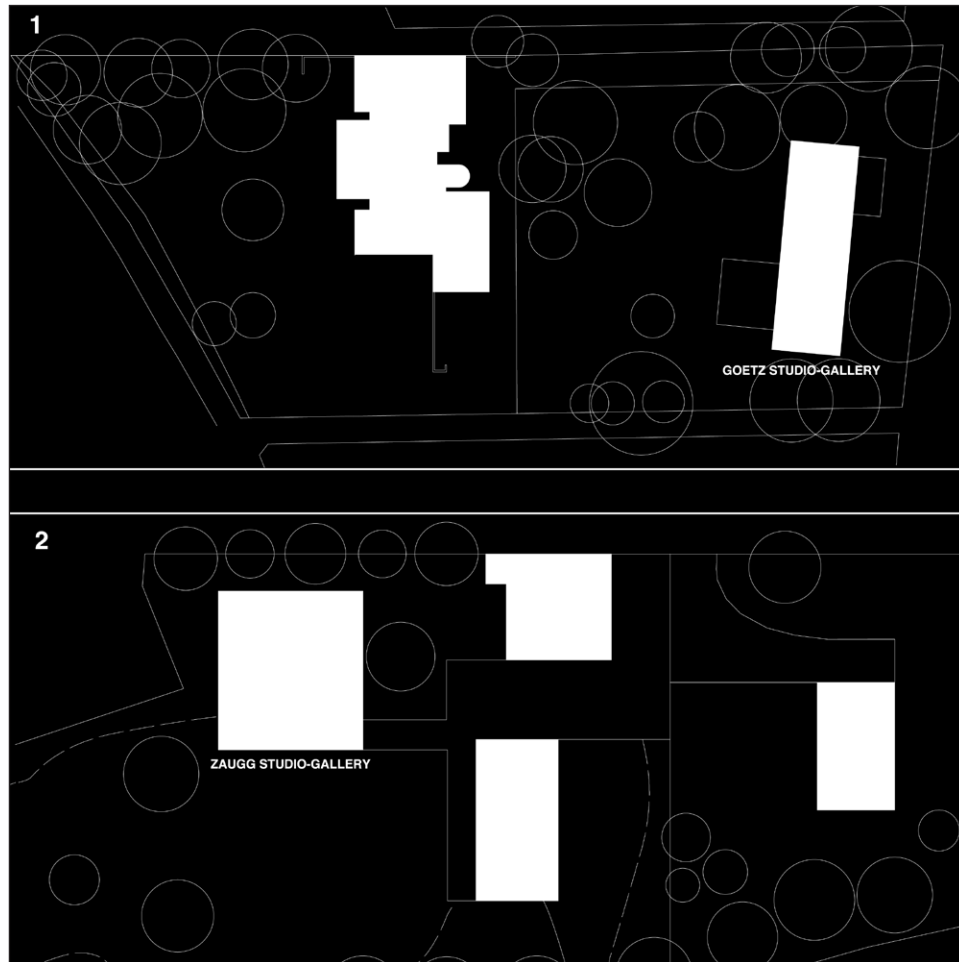


Figure 11: Zaugg (below) and Goetz (above); block plan diagram showing the relationship of the studio-gallery to the respective garden context.

measure of the human body. This way of controlling spatial extension is a well-known theme of architecture, it can be traced back to Vitruvius' Ten Books on Architecture and beyond, to the design of Greek temples. In Vitruvius the theme is explored in Book Three, which is primarily about temple design. However, it would be wrong to align Zaugg's ideal gallery-room with the spatial principle of the temple, Zaugg's room is not a secluded sanctuary. As well as the necessity to isolate the human/artwork interaction from everything else, Zaugg advocates the need for free and wandering desire, a space and time of roaming between artworks. Taking Zaugg's parameters for the room together with his stipulation about wandering desire, it seems the ambitions of Zauggian architecture and, insofar as they follow his ideas, that of Herzog and De Meuron, is twofold: on the one hand architecture must provide protected spaces for close encounters, on the other, architecture must accommodate a free-flowing space of desire.

Because the circulation of desire is so important to Zaugg, so his dream architecture must guard against potential coagulation. For this reason the idea of a single gallery-room existing in isolation is impermissible within the Zauggian system and he stipulates that rooms should be clustered together into groups of between 4 to 7. In ruling out single, double and tri-partite groupings Zaugg not only counteracts the shrine-like connotations of the single cell building but also disadvantages two others of the more conventional modes of spatial organisation: twinning and centrality.

Zaugg illustrates the application of his ideas about gallery-rooms and how they are to be grouped together through the example of a competition he had worked on with another firm of Swiss architects, called Atelier 5, to extend the Villa Favorita on the banks of Lake Lugano in Switzerland (**Figure 12**).³ Taken together

³ The home of the business tycoon and art collector, Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza. The baron had opened Villa Favorita to the public in the 1970s, but by the mid 1980s the collection had grown in size and popularity. The competition, won by the British architect James Stirling, was part of an attempt to persuade the Swiss authorities to fund an extension to the villa, which ultimately they refused to do.

with the Goetz and Zaugg galleries, the gallery-rooms at Bankside and the numerous examples that have appeared thanks to Herzog and de Meuron's success in recent years, we can see that Zaugg's spatial system has a wide-ranging application, it can be realised in a suburban garden pavilion in Munich or Mulhouse, in the gardens of a lakeside villa owned by a business tycoon or in a disused power station at Bankside.

The Zauggian spaces at Bankside are often understood as conforming to the tradition of the white cube, but as we have seen, such readings are superficial. Through form and expression these spaces signal their distance from and critical intention towards, the white cube tradition. To reinforce the critique it is worth turning to some of the observations made by Zaugg himself on the nature of perception; because just as Zaugg's thinking about the design of art space does not quite fit the tradition of the white cube neither do his statements about perception align with the observations in O'Doherty's white cube essays.

Zaugg posits an ahistorical basis for the production of art and he supposes a teleonomic foundation for the human interest in perception, arguing that art production and consumption have an important role to play in the psychological and social well-being of human individuals and groups. In describing his ideal place for artwork/human interaction Zaugg evokes a kind of environmentalism, likening the place of interaction to a 'biotope' and to an 'ecological niche':

The enclosed place is the expressive matrix of the work and of the human being. It is the biotope, the ecological niche of the perceptive dialogue between the work and the human being ... Every work present in the place for the work and the human being has its own perceptive matrix, its perceptive biotope, its particular perceptive ecological niche. [7: p14]

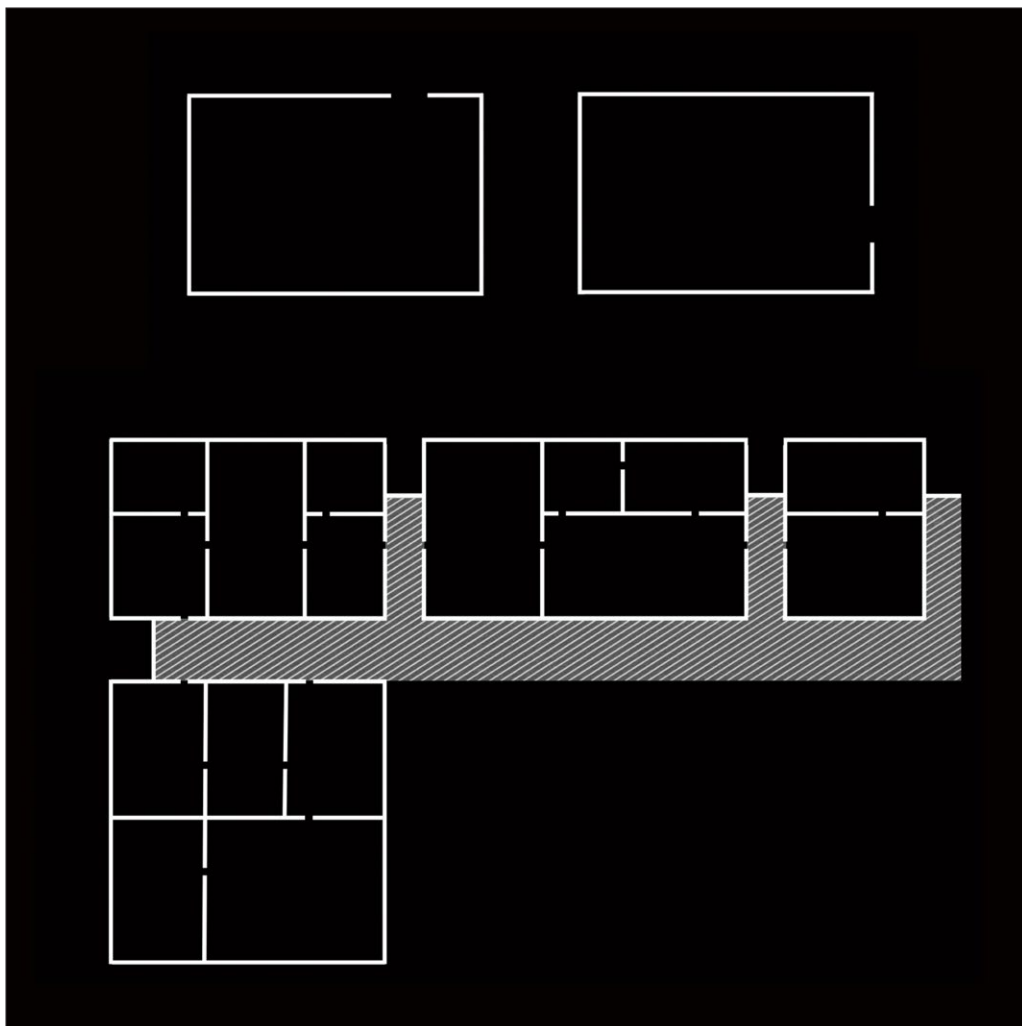


Figure 12: The Zauggian principles of gallery design, above right & left, plan diagram of the single spatial unit, below plan diagram of an aggregate of spatial units, based on Zaugg's design for the Villa Favorita.

Whereas O'Doherty directs our attention toward the formulaic nature of perception that is produced in the architecture of the white cube, for Zaugg the purpose of the art space is to provide a place where authentic, unmediated perception will naturally occur. Essentially Zaugg's argument with the white cube is based on an alternative idealisation of the structure of relationships in human/artwork interactions. As O'Doherty explains it, in white cube space the relationship between perceiver and artwork is accompanied by a third, mediating party, it is acted out between an eye and a spectator that stand-in as a surrogate for the real person:

They join us whenever we enter a gallery, and the solitariness of our perambulations is obligatory, because we are really holding a mini seminar with our surrogates. To that exact degree, we are absent. Presence before a work of art, then, means that we absent ourselves in favour of the Eye and Spectator, who report to us what we might have seen had we been there. [5: p55]

For Zaugg on the other hand, the relation between the artwork and the human being is an autopoietic relationship between two, mutually autonomous entities. Where the former expresses itself as fulfilled, the later is constantly moved by desire for the other. In describing the human/artwork interaction Zaugg evokes the same sense of wandering desire and self-motivated discovery that Herzog and de Meuron rely on in their topographical metaphor of the Bankside art space as being like a mountain:

The autonomous artwork is for the autonomous human being: the work that expresses itself through and for its own pleasure is for the human being who wanders around as he desires, searching for the constitution of a meaning or, which amounts to the same, searching for his own constitution. [7: p7]

Through this notion of the artwork as a mirror of human desire the Zauggian art space parts company with the white cube, for unlike the white cube, where artistic perception is deemed to distance the viewing subject, in the Zauggian space it is thought as a moment of confrontation.

It is this same aspiration toward immediacy that underscored Tate's ambitions for the new art space at Bankside and led them to search for a 'rural' and 'minimal' architecture. The question as to whether they have succeeded or not is another matter, way beyond the scope of this essay.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Watson, V. Rurality and Minimal Architecture: An Inquiry into the Genealogy of Tate Modern's Bankside Gallery Spaces. *ARENA Journal of Architectural Research*. 2018; 3(1): 4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/ajar.46>

Published: 15 May 2018

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