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Sabine Planka

Room Concepts and the Art of Work in the Oeuvres of Stanley Kubrick and Gregor Schneider

A Comparison

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Introduction

Stanley Kubrick's movies are special laboratories for their inhabitants: they are lost in dystopian spaces with no real future – and when a future seems to be positive as may be imagined in *2001 – A Space Odyssey* the next movie – *A Clockwork Orange* – shows a world that is more than dystopian. Kubrick's movies do not offer one possible interpretation but several. Everything is possible, everything is impossible. Keeping that in mind, it seems useful to follow the idea of concentrating on the formal (technical) appearances of elements such as rooms and colors,¹ especially when comparing Kubrick's works to selected artistic works, namely to two works by Gregor Schneider. The German artist, born 1969 in Rheydt (Germany), creates rooms that “tell stories, they are about possible experiences, intuitions and rumors.”² His work *Haus u r* (“House u r”)³, a house developed since 1985 – and the works that emerge from this project –, can be experienced as a labyrinth in the complex sense of meaning: rooms and corridors end abruptly in front of walls while passages appear at places where they are not expected. The rooms are, therefore, designed as labyrinths and mazes to confuse both the viewer, and the visitor, and include, therefore, form and action.⁴ His work changed because Schneider has been working continuously on his project and has connected this work with subsequent artistic works that emerged from *Haus u r*. A second artistic work by Schneider – also dealing with labyrinthine structures that emerged amongst others from visible and not visible elements that already exist but are hidden for example behind walls⁵ – picks up an additional special concept of color – and

¹ In this regard the following analysis picks up the conception of Ralf Michael Fischer's work on Kubrick titled *Raum und Zeit im filmischen Oeuvre von Stanley Kubrick* [*Space and time in the filmic oeuvre of Stanley Kubrick*] published in 2009. See Fischer, Ralf Michael: *Raum und Zeit im filmischen Oeuvre von Stanley Kubrick*. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag 2009 (Neue Frankfurter Forschungen zur Kunst; Vol. 7).

² Titz, Susanne: “The Walk-in Black Square. The Museum is E N D”, in: Schneider, Gregor: *E N D*. Exhibition catalogue. Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach. museum franz gertsch, Burgdorf. Ed. by Anita Shah and Susanne Titz. Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König 2010, pp. 59-68, here p. 65.

³ The name of *Haus u r* is still a reference to Schneider's hometown Rheydt as well as to the street where the house was originally located: Unterheydener Straße. In this case “the abbreviation ,u r‘ [...] is used to identify all the items that have arisen from this material: each room, each film that has gone out into the world from this house is marked with the code ,u r’” (Titz: „The Walk-in Black Square” (2010), p. 61). That means that even original rooms taken from the house itself have been shown in exhibitions.

⁴ See Titz: „The Walk-in Black Square” (2010), p. 65. Additionally Anita Shah points out that “[a]ll of the elements were confusingly interrelated, an interrelationship almost labyrinthine in its complexity” (Shah, Anita: „Into the Darknes. The Black Museum“, in: Schneider, Gregor: *E N D*. Exhibition catalogue. Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach. museum franz gertsch, Burgdorf. Ed. by Anita Shah and Susanne Titz. Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König 2010, pp. 115-122, here p. 119).

⁵ See Shah: “Into the Darknes” (2010), p. 116.

corresponds in this case to Kubrick's usage of color: Schneider's work *WEISSE FOLTER* ("white torture") – "[i]nspired by pictures of so-called black sites, secret dungeons in the maximum security unit of Camp V in Guantánamo Bay on Cuba"⁶ Schneider was interested in, especially in the inaccessible, secret and clandestine rooms that "could only be made tangible and comprehensible for him by building a replica."⁷ – plays with a combination of long white corridors, white rooms and red doors that lock behind the visitors as well as with a contrast of light and dark, the latter marking the center of the work in form of a big black box. The whole installation reminds one of a labyrinthine prison, as Kubrick's movies do in general.⁸

Against this background it seems to be helpful at this point to refer to only two movies from Kubrick, namely *2001 – A Space Odyssey* and *The Shining*.⁹ *2001 – A Space Odyssey* contains the typical 'Kubrick red' and 'Kubrick white' as I want to label them. Red in the meaning of a color that works as an "alarm signal"¹⁰ that is able to represent for example a fast death¹¹ – we remember the 'death' of HAL, itself disembodied and only recognizable by its red eye and voice, in another red room –, while white signalizes danger as Walker points out in regard of *A Clockwork Orange*: "the white tones, the combat 'uniforms' the gang wears, like carnival dress with the colors left out, [...] signal danger"¹², as can be observed, too, at the end of *The Shining* when "the story [culminates] in the literal 'white out' of a blizzard and the murderous pursuit through the snowy labyrinth of the garden maze".¹³ Additionally Seeßlen and Jung note that white represents the inability to act.¹⁴

The Shining has professionalized the character of the labyrinthine to the highest levels, even if the labyrinthine can be found in other movies such as *Paths of Glory* as one of Kubrick's earlier films but also later works such as *Full Metal Jacket* and *Eyes Wide Shut* as will be mentioned. Kubrick's rooms are labyrinthine and maze-like constructions the viewer cannot really understand: neither the Harfords' apartment in *Eyes Wide Shut* nor the hotel corridors of the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* are structured transparently and easy to reconstruct. While this illogical structure of a room is central for Kubrick something similar can be found within the works of Gregor Schneider mentioned above.

⁶ Ibid., p. 117.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ As for example Fischer has pointed out in his work. See Fischer: *Raum und Zeit im filmischen Oeuvre von Stanley Kubrick*. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag 2009 (Neue Frankfurter Forschungen zur Kunst; Vol. 7), p. 71.

⁹ In this case it is not necessary to differentiate between the European or American version of the film. The result – namely labyrinthine structures all over – is still the same and can be clearly seen in both versions of the film.

¹⁰ Walker, Alexander/Taylor, Sybil/Ruchti, Ulrich, *Stanley Kubrick, Director*. Revised and expanded. A Visual Analysis by Sybil Taylor and Ulrich Ruchti. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, p. 224.

¹¹ Seeßlen, Georg / Jung, Fernand: *Stanley Kubrick und seine Filme*. Marburg: Schüren 1999, p. 58.

¹² Walker et al.: *Stanley Kubrick* (1999), p. 233.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Seeßlen/ Jung: *Stanley Kubrick und seine Filme* (1999), p. 58.

The anticipation of the viewer/visitor

Before comparing Kubrick's and Schneider's works it seems necessary to take a brief look at the role of the viewer of Kubrick's movies and the visitor to Schneider's works that will show how comparable the single artistic pieces are.

At first sight it seems to be obvious that Kubrick's movies – a movie is normally understood as a juxtaposition of single images recorded on footage that is screened and viewed – are only watchable while in contrast Schneider's installation is tangible, can be experienced physically. At second glance this assumption can be refuted when taking into consideration that Kubrick often – and especially in *The Shining* – breaks through the so-called *fourth wall* to use a term normally connected to theatre plays – and makes a room become an “*unsafe space*” as Fischer points out.¹⁵ While Jack sits at the *Gold Room*-bar he meets barkeeper Lloyd. Even if Kubrick is blurring the boundaries between time and space as well as reality and imagination the spectator is directly confronted with Jack who seems to address the spectator. Fischer labels this break through the *fourth wall* as an “*Illusionsbruch*” [break of illusion]¹⁶ that involves the viewer in the filmic diegesis and makes him become part of it and, therefore, also of the labyrinthine structure of the movie itself.¹⁷

Taking into consideration that Kubrick was himself obviously a remarkable artist not only in the field of film but also in the field of photography as well as being very well informed about art – we think about how he refers in his movies to different eras of art history¹⁸ – it is no wonder that he was able to draw formal and technical developments from the field of art putting them specifically into his movies to create ‘labyrinthine films’ that are difficult to analyze.

This is a point where we can take Schneider's works into account. Schneider's works are tangible, the visitor is able to explore the rooms presented and will experience the labyrinthine structures of the rooms with their uncomfortable, very often claustrophobic and disorienting character that is evoked by design and structure but also underlined by the use of colors itself as, for example, Titz points out:

When a visitor walked into the house, he was in fact entering a sculptural work that had been exclusively generated from the contents of this home. Schneider used every last inch of the building – living areas and bedrooms, passages, stairs and basement – as his artistic material. The visitor encountered perfectly ordinary-looking rooms, where walls had been repositioned, rooms with dead space between them, passages and conduits with baffling sequences of doors, gaps and holes that drew one from the light into darkness, from familiar living areas to hidden, uncanny spaces. [...] The real place, the former family home with rooms that had once been lived in, became a vehicle for a very

¹⁵ See Fischer: *Raum und Zeit im filmischen Oeuvre von Stanley Kubrick* (2009), p. 505.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 416.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*

¹⁸ *Barry Lyndon* shows for example connections to painter Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *A Clockwork Orange* deals with the concept of Pop Art and *2001 – A Space Odyssey* can be connected to the design era of the 1970s.

particular kind of information. The original place instigated an incomparably intense, inescapable confrontation, with entirely unremarkable living spaces suddenly taking on a whole new significance.¹⁹

By creating such an ‘artificial place’ the artist itself functions merely as a “stage director who uses scenery and spatial suggestion to affect the viewer in a particular way and lure him or her into the given situation” with the result that viewers will be confronted “with the phenomenology of their own biological and psychological patterns of behavior.”²⁰

The labyrinth

Additionally it seems to be necessary to clarify briefly what a labyrinth is and how it may appear.²¹ The classical labyrinth – rooted in ancient times – is formally a winding path without junctions into other directions that people can stride down to the middle of the labyrinth. The form of a labyrinth – sometimes labeled as a maze when referring to a garden labyrinth – is of much greater complexity: it is not the single way that leads people to the middle but a complex system with ramifications, dead ends and loops – and high hedges that have been used since the second half of 16th century in Verona and became famous “[t]owards the end of the eighteenth century [when] the taste for mazes in private gardens had to some extent declined, but as an adjunct to places of public amusement the topiary labyrinth was still in great demand”²² – that makes it harder to find the way into the middle of the labyrinth – as may be found in Kubrick’s *The Shining* with the labyrinth outside of the hotel and the model of it in the hotel lobby. In this case it is obvious that Kubrick uses merely the second more complex form of a labyrinth to create a filmic atmosphere and to show how people behave, how they fail in known or unknown environments they are confronted with.²³ When taking a first look to Schneider’s work we find nearly the same complex labyrinthine room construction.

While some scientists have established the term ‘labyrinthine’ – for example Georg Seeßlen and Fernand Jung²⁴ – for Kubrick’s rooms, others have used terms like “mazelike” – for example Alexander Walker.²⁵ The following analysis will use the term ‘labyrinthine’ or ‘labyrinth’ in its

¹⁹ Titz: “The Walk-in Black Square” (2010), p. 62. Additionally see Shah: “Into the Darknes” (2010), p. 117.

²⁰ Titz: “The Walk-in Black Square” (2010), p. 63.

²¹ For example Colonnese, Fabio: *Il labirinto e l'architetto*. [The Labyrinth and the Architect.] Rom: Kappa, 2006; Kern, Hermann: *Labyrinth. Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen. 5000 Jahre Gegenwart eines Urbilds*. 4th, unchanged ed. München: Prestel, 1999; Birkhan, Helmut: „Labyrinth“, in: Kirschbaum, Engelbert (ed.): *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*. Band 3: *Allgemeine Ikonographie*. Rom: Herder 1971, columns 2-4; Matthews, William Henry: *Mazes and labyrinths. A general account of their history and developments*. With Illustrations. London/New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1922. Online. URL: <https://archive.org/details/mazeslabyrinthsg00matt/page/n10>; retrieved 16 December 2019.

²² Matthews: *Mazes and labyrinths* (1922), p. 137.

²³ Fischer points out that those labyrinthine structures can be found in Kubrick’s early works as well as in his major movies. See Fischer: *Raum und Zeit im filmischen Oeuvre von Stanley Kubrick* (2009), p. 498-509.

²⁴ See Seeßlen/ Jung: *Stanley Kubrick und seine Filme* (1999), p. 44ff.

²⁵ See Walker et al.: *Stanley Kubrick* (1999), p. 279.

complex meaning to describe the room concepts in Kubrick's movies and Schneider's artistic work.²⁶

The experimental character of Kubrick's labyrinthine rooms

The movies of Stanley Kubrick are amongst other movies dealing with spaces that include outer spaces as well as interior spaces; both can be labeled as central elements in his oeuvre:²⁷ The great hall in *Paths of Glory* minimizes the 'normal' people and demonstrates the power and force of the people pulling the levers that reside in their own protected area and plan the war on a drawing board. This interpretation is underlined by the checkered patterns on the ground – by the way another hint to Kubrick's passion for chess – that changes the actors into chess pieces moved by others and are, therefore, not able to act of their own will. The Overlook Hotel manipulates its new inhabitants and drives them crazy until – partly – death binds one protagonist 'forever, and ever, and ever' to the hotel. And *A Clockwork Orange* shows, amongst others, a destroyed but also theatrical room that works as a stage for pure but also celebrated violence that is underlined by Gioachino Rossini's music for his opera *La gazza ladra* (*Thieving Magpie*)²⁸ and which is explained by Kubrick himself: "in a very broad sense, you could say that the violence is turned into dance, although, of course, it is in no way any kind of formal dance. But in cinematic terms, I should say that movement and music must inevitably be related to dance [...]."²⁹ Central to this case are the rooms presented in *2001 – A Space Odyssey*. In times of the Cold War the viewer is catapulted into the vastness of the outer space only to be locked – together with the astronauts – in the claustrophobic space ship.

Additionally, other smaller rooms connected to a special meaning occur for example in the shape of the bathroom that marks or works as a turning point within the narration, be it the men's room in *The Shining* or in *Full Metal Jacket* or in *Eyes Wide Shut*. It goes without saying that they shine bright white and announce the upcoming danger, underlined by red accents that work as alarm signals.

The rooms in all variations – very often characterized by a screened geometrical structure – work as experimental laboratories in which their inhabitants have to act. However, the rooms

²⁶ Fischer, too, point to this differentiation (see Fischer: *Raum und Zeit im filmischen Oeuvre von Stanley Kubrick* (2009), p. 387-388, footnote 263) that can clearly be observed within the German language where two terms have been established to differentiate between the single forms of a labyrinth: the term „Labyrinth“ means the classical labyrinth with its winding path without junctions, the term "Irrgarten" – a 'hedge labyrinth' labels the complex form of a labyrinth with junctions and dead ends.

²⁷ As can be seen in Fischer's study (Fischer: *Raum und Zeit im filmischen Oeuvre von Stanley Kubrick* (2009)).

²⁸ See Philipps, Gene D./Hill, Rodney: *The Encyclopedia of Stanley Kubrick. From Day of the Fight to Eyes Wide Shut*. Foreword by Anthony Frewin. Afterword by Leon Vitali. New York: Checkmark Books 2002, p. 53.

²⁹ Ibid. See additionally Seeßlen/ Jung: *Stanley Kubrick und seine Filme* (1999), p. 188f.

also mirror the mental condition of their inhabitants who enmesh themselves in their own thoughts and behaviors.

With regard to the labyrinthine – and added to the experimental – character of the rooms Kubrick has developed, it is clear that especially the spaceship in *2001 – A Space Odyssey* can be used as a perfect example: people or – to be more precise – the astronauts are taken off earth and put into the spaceship in a constructed room/space to explore the monolith and its meaning. While the viewers are able to observe the astronauts facing growing danger caused by the on-board computer HAL they are not able to reconstruct the labyrinthine ways through the space ship themselves. This element of failing to grasp the complexity of rooms and room structures is remarkable and can be found within – as mentioned above – *Eyes Wide Shut*, when Alice and Bill roam their own apartment, but also when Bill explores the villa – in contrast to the labyrinth partly established as a high and in this special case sacral room but also as a labyrinth – in which the orgy takes place. Also *The Shining* shows a labyrinthine character – not only within the floor structure of the hotel itself but also in the “*maze-like patterns*”³⁰ of the carpet Danny plays on. Labyrinthine structures pervade Kubrick’s movies in general: the complexity of angled spatial structures – often combined with the typical shot of a long corridor – can be found in *Paths of Glory* with the trenches, in which the soldiers are caught and with them the viewers who are not able to reconstruct the paths, but can also be found in the above-stated movie *The Shining* when the camera follows Danny through the hotel corridors and loses him when he turns a corner.³¹

The labyrinthine structures are, therefore, not only ‘made’ for the viewers to irritate them but they are also combined with the aspect of showing the protagonists in their forsakenness and as lone fighters in artificial – and hostile – environments who have to fight against a system that controls the labyrinth itself. It is, therefore, remarkable that the unmanageable labyrinth sets the protagonists in motion: the more places and spaces become labyrinthine – and the more they are able to bind the protagonists to themselves – the faster – and more absurd – the movements of the protagonists are.³² This can be observed when taking a look at Jack in *The Shining*: his condition gets worst, he becomes lethargic, depressive until his mood changes rapidly and he hunts his family; (labyrinthine) isolation leads – especially in this case – to extreme violence.³³

³⁰ Walker et al.: *Stanley Kubrick* (1999), p. 279.

³¹ See in this aspect in general Fischer: *Raum und Zeit im filmischen Oeuvre von Stanley Kubrick* (2009), especially pp. 497-510.

³² See Seeßlen/ Jung: *Stanley Kubrick und seine Filme* (1999), p. 44.

³³ See *ibid.*, p. 164.

The labyrinth and the elements of captivity and prison

The element of being locked in a room, especially a labyrinth, leads to the thought of the labyrinth as prison.³⁴ While nearly all protagonists in Kubrick's movies are locked and captured somehow – the soldiers in *Paths of Glory* are locked in the trenches, the Torrances are caught in the Overlook Hotel, the astronauts in *2001 – A Space Odyssey* are caught on their space ship, and the Harfords in *Eyes Wide Shut* are caught in their home and in their own labyrinthine thoughts – the rooms themselves changed into prisons that develop an independent existence: the rooms bind people to their structures and when they try to escape, the rooms turn against them until people were harmed or until they die – or until they come back to the supposed shelter.³⁵ Every attempt Jack makes to leave the Overlook Hotel is accompanied by a deterioration of his health – until he dies outside the hotel. This aspect is, as Fischer points out, not only recognizable in Kubrick's later works but also in his earlier works that includes rooms and spaces with a labyrinthine character and that are strongly related to the aspect of prison. "Alle Figuren Kubricks sind mehr oder weniger deutlich als Gefangene bzw. Entwurzelte gebrandmarkt. Sie bewegen sich meistens in einer erschlossenen Umwelt, etwa der Großstadt, die nach außen hin abgeschlossen ist und nach innen zunehmend unübersichtlicher wird" [All of Kubrick's figures are more or less recognizably prisoners or uprooted people. They move very often in a locked environment, such as a metropole, that is closed off from the outside and is still unclear inside].³⁶ Labyrinths and prisons are, therefore, core elements of Kubrick's movies.³⁷

The element of being locked and captivated in rooms and spaces without the ability to leave can be transferred to the protagonists itself: they are locked into their own behavior and thoughts and are not able to escape. We remember Bill Harford who tries to resolve the mystery of his dreamingly erotic night journey and cannot uncover the truth but is merely caught in his own thoughts. He simply has to fail as Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* has to fail after leaving his usual environment marked by violence, criminality and rape and after becoming a conformist member of society. A labyrinthine environment and labyrinthine room structures reflect and mirror the inner life of the protagonists – and are very often connected to the high room as another structural room element (that cannot be analyzed here). What can be said at this point is

³⁴ A thought that Fischer has referred to several times. See Fischer: *Raum und Zeit im filmischen Oeuvre von Stanley Kubrick* (2009).

³⁵ Similarly Fischer points out: "Räume sind nicht mehr nur als mentaler Spiegel ihrer Bewohner oder Nutzer definiert. Sie können selbst zu Akteuren werden, die auf Figuren zurückwirken und ihr Bewußtsein determinieren [...]" [Rooms are no longer only mental mirrors of its inhabitants or users. They can become actors themselves and are able to influence the figures and determine their consciousness] (Fischer: *Raum und Zeit im filmischen Oeuvre von Stanley Kubrick* (2009), p. 209).

³⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 500.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 505.

that the labyrinths seem to set the captured protagonists off on a journey that will find its final end in the confrontation with the high room that marks the final failure of the protagonists.

In combination with the idea of understanding the labyrinth as an experimental laboratory that can be observed by others we can argue with Michel Foucault and his idea of the panopticon. He – with recourse to Jeremy Bentham’s design –

describes a special kind of prison where the warden can see everybody around him from a central perspective. Of great importance is the layout of the panopticon: the prisoners are arranged such that they can be seen by the control tower, but cannot see each other, and so the prisoners are permanently aware of being observed but cannot know, because the prisoners cannot see into the tower, if they are really being observed at any given moment.³⁸

While in Kubrick’s movies – seen from an innerdiegetic perspective – no one can be found who observes the ‘prisoners’ – they cannot see themselves, too; the moment of observing does not occur and is, therefore, strongly connected to the labyrinthine character of the rooms – the observer can be found on a meta level in the shape of the viewer of the movie itself. While he is not able to reconstruct the labyrinthine rooms itself he is able to observe the locked protagonists and their behavior in the experimental room design. The one-dimensional act of observing is easy to recognize.

Something similar can be found when taking a closer look at Gregor Schneider’s works *Haus u r* and – partly – *WEISSE FOLTER*. While no recognizable observer can be seen in Schneider’s works, the artist himself can be understood as observer and as the one who gains control over his work, over his (laboratory-like) labyrinth that he himself constantly changes – especially when we take into consideration that *Haus u r* is “a work that only a select few individuals had had access to in the attentive company of the artist”³⁹ – possibly a result of the fact that Schneider himself lived in this house⁴⁰ while creating a kind of palimpsest itself. Additionally the elements of captivity in combination with the labyrinthine structure of rooms are motives that can be found within Schneider’s works, too, combined with a special use of color.

Gregor Schneider’s *WEISSE FOLTER* and the connections to Stanley Kubrick

The aesthetical elements – claustrophobic structures, labyrinthine structures and unmanageable paths, rooms and corridors, combined with a special use of colors – characterize the work *WEISSE FOLTER* and were to be seen in the museum K21 in Düsseldorf (Germany) in 2007.

³⁸ See Foucault, Michel: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 200ff.; quoted after Planka, Sabine: “A Modern Pythia: The Oracle in *Minority Report*”, in: Barkman, Adam/Sanna, Antonio (eds.): *A Critical Companion to Steven Spielberg*. Lanham et al.: Lexington Books 2019, pp. 153-158, here p. 155.

³⁹ Heynen, Julian/Elliott, Fiona (transl.): “Reversing and Advancing”, in: Heynen, Julian/Köller, Brigitte (eds.): *Gregor Schneider: Weiße Folter*. Ausstellungskatalog anlässlich Gregor Schneider *WEISSE FOLTER*, 17.3.-15.7.2007, K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. Köln: Walther König 2007, pp. 12-16, here 12.

⁴⁰ See Schneider, Gregor/Ulrich Looock: “... Ich schmeisse nichts weg, ich mache immer weiter...”, in: *Gregor Schneider*. Exhibition catalogue. Kunsthalle Bern, 31 January – 6 March 1996. Bern: Kunsthalle Bern 1996, pp. 19-57, here p. 20.

The installation thematises especially the room as Schneider's earlier works *Haus u r* or rather *Totes Haus u r* do.

WEISSE FOLTER – connected to Schneider's earlier works⁴¹ – is an installation

without any traces of the past or of the ongoing presence of human beings. These rooms, almost suspiciously clean, sterile even, have either never been used or are constantly thoroughly cleaned to remove any traces of occupation. The 'cleansing' or clearing up even entails the reduction to a minimum of any telling details or 'props' that would give something away about the actual use of these rooms. At first sight this is perhaps all the more surprising in the case of this sequence of rooms that has arisen from photographs on the Internet of the American military detention centres for supposed terrorists that were first set up by the United States government in Cuba in 2001 as a consequence of the hostilities in Afghanistan. It is not just that there is a long tradition in literature and the visual arts whereby prison life and the relevant scenarios are directly associated with the detrimental sensory effects of enforced endurance and of wasting away in degrading physical conditions. Up until very recently Schneider's own work was all too frequently marked with the visible traces of the living human body or at least suggestions of the same. The discharges and detritus of anonymous yet corporeally imaginable bodies and lives were in effect deeply and irrevocably ingrained in the material and the geometry of his rooms. However, in the new rooms that constitute *WEISSE FOLTER* there are no such illustrative marks. And it is as though any attempt to understand the atmosphere or to make the largely empty spaces more accessible by inventing narratives merely bounces back off the unyielding, blank surfaces.⁴²

Besides the aspect that no sign of any human being can be found in Schneider's work it is remarkable that – even if he didn't find inspiration from Kubrick's movies (or even if a connection cannot directly be uncovered but only assumed) – a similar concept in comparison to Kubrick can be found. It's moreover the element of prison that marks the core element of the installation that stands in the tradition of his former works but that also includes the moment of repetition and duplication, itself characteristic of Schneider's work: "The act of duplication, as an artistic strategy, pervades Gregor Schneider's work sometimes more, sometimes less obviously."⁴³ At this point it seems to be possible to link his work to Stanley Kubrick's strategy when developing new projects: Kubrick, too, has integrated elements of former movies in new projects and in this way created a kind of palimpsest that referred to his earlier movies but that also transported remembrances of his movies into the future.

Additionally – and here a second important connection can be found – Schneider refers to a (in this case) specific prison while Kubrick's room constructions work as prisons for the inhabitants: Schneider was inspired by the American prison at Guantánamo Bay. Brigitte Kölle links this prison in particular amongst others to Giorgio Agamben's room concept of "inclusive exclusion" and notes that Schneider himself refers to Guantánamo Bay by saying "that within the national boundaries of certain states, camps or zones are being created where normal jurisdiction

⁴¹ See Heynen/Elliott: "Reversing and Advancing" (2007), p. 15.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁴³ Kölle, Brigitte/Elliott, Fiona (transl.): "The Challenge", in: Heynen, Julian/Kölle, Brigitte (eds.): *Gregor Schneider: Weiße Folter*. Ausstellungskatalog anlässlich Gregor Schneider WEISSE FOLTER, 17.3.-15.7.2007, K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. Köln: Walther König 2007, pp. 39-47, here 39.

does not apply, with the result that those held here have no recourse to protection from any legal system.”⁴⁴ The way to Foucault’s concept of a heterotopia is obvious.⁴⁵

Schneider developed a room installation that contained several corridors with small cells that reminds the visitor of intensive care wards or solitary confinement cells; “they can be read as a refuge or a prison, as places associated with the most devoted of care or with social and sensory deprivation.”⁴⁶ While the function of the rooms oscillates between the usage for ‘good’ or for ‘bad’ it is – again – remarkable that instead of ‘inhabitants’ the visitor has to explore the rooms that are connected to each other and leads the visitor through a labyrinth that makes the visitor feel increasingly uncomfortable. Doors lock automatically behind visitors, the path is unknown, visitors become disoriented, and the feeling of claustrophobia grows.

The sense of unease is overwhelming, even before one has crossed the threshold. Even worse, when the source of the terror is not out with our own physical boundaries but has shifted from the exterior and is now within us. For in this now immense interior there is only one inside that one is caught in and caught up in. [...] At its most extreme this claustrophobic, empty interior, cut off from the outside world, could be seen as a picture of our own human existence.⁴⁷ [...] We, as corporeal beings, are caught up in his art, for there is only an inside; we cannot view it externally, from afar.⁴⁸

While the term ‘white torture’ – provocatively chosen by Schneider for this exhibition⁴⁹ – refers to torture that “is the perfect, most perfidious tool for those engaged in cover-ups and secrecy, since it leaves few external marks, if any, which in turn makes it extremely hard to prove any allegations of torture”⁵⁰, the color itself is important in Schneider’s work, too. White, normally associated with virginity, is subverted and connected in this case to torture which evokes connections to Kubrick’s movies where a nearly similar use can be found as mentioned above: white as sign of danger and the inability to act can be found in Kubrick’s as well as Schneider’s works, the latter leads the visitor deeper and deeper in its inner spaces until he is spat out of the installation.

Kubrick and Schneider: similarities of and in their artistic works

Both, Kubrick and Schneider, work strikingly similarly when using a ‘clinical’ aesthetic for creating rooms.⁵¹ The use of colors is striking, besides the white color there is the red of the cell doors in Schneider’s installation that interrupts the clinical white of the long corridor with its deep alignment. Dark rooms and darkness itself mark the contrast to the bright white corridors

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴⁵ See *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 44.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 43.

⁵¹ Another similarity that cannot be analyzed but only mentioned at this point is the usage of the *Doppelgänger*-motif in the works of Kubrick and Schneider. Schneider doubles rooms, even whole houses and confuses viewers and visitors while Kubrick shows children who are clothed like twins and mirror the garden labyrinth (*The Shining*), and mirrors narrative filmic structures themselves. In case of Schneider see Shah: “Into the Darknes” (2010), p. 120.

and remind the viewer of the contrast of the black outer space in contrast to the white space ship in Kubrick's *2001 – A Space Odyssey* – a contrast that can very often be found in his movies when we think, for example, of the black walls in the Korova Milk Bar with their white interior.

No natural, only artificial light illuminates the rooms in Schneider's work and removes all sense of time. Additionally, initially shown and at first sight clearly defined rooms – often very symmetrically and geometrically developed and, therefore, another connection to the rooms Kubrick has shown on screen – enclose themselves as labyrinthine rooms and go far beyond a normal labyrinth by removing any sense of direction. The way out is, therefore, not visible, neither in Schneider's nor in Kubrick's work; viewers as well as visitors are locked in the rooms as well as in themselves; both have to deal with it and have to find a way out on their own.

In this case it is relevant to take a short look at Schneider's work *Haus u r* – he has been working on this project since 1985 in his home town Reydt (Germany) – that had to be transformed to the *Totes Haus u r* ("Dead House u r") by re-building it in the German Pavilion in Venice in 2001.⁵² Besides the color white, Schneider uses a labyrinthine room structure by transforming the single rooms of his house. Walls are covered by new walls – the above mentioned term of palimpsest has to be used again –, new rooms are integrated in 'old' rooms. Schneider himself has, by the way, pointed out that one relevant element of his work is the invisibility: the covered layers are still there but cannot be seen. However, single rooms turn on their own axes, other rooms can only be entered by walking through a cabinet – one is reminded of C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, especially the first book of the series *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*⁵³ – or climbing up a ladder; windows exist without allowing a view to the outer world.⁵⁴ The impact of Schneider's (labyrinthine) rooms on viewers and visitors is strong, some people leave the rooms earlier than expected.⁵⁵ The physical experience, which is to say the impact of the rooms on the visitors is guided by the artistic concept, the very special designs of the rooms.⁵⁶

⁵² See Heynen/Elliott: "Reversing and Advancing" (2007), p. 12.

⁵³ Lewis, C.S.: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Illustrated by Pauline Baynes. New York: Harper Trophy 2005.

⁵⁴ See Smolik, Noemi: "Verzweifle nicht, eines der Häuser ist gesegnet. Frohlocke nicht, eines der Häuser ist verdammt. / Despair Not: One of the Houses is Blessed. Rejoice Not: One of the Houses is Damned", in: *Secession. Gregor Schneider: Keller*. Ed. by Secession. Exhibition catalogue. 30 March – 21 May 2000, Vienna. Vienna 2000. See additionally Kittelmann, Udo: "Haus u r, Rheydt versus Totes Haus u r, Venedig. Haus u r, Rheydt versus Totes Haus u r, Venice", in: *Gregor Schneider: Totes Haus u r – La Biennale di Venezia 2001*. Hrsg. v. Udo Kittelmann. Mit Beiträgen von Udo Kittelmann, Elisabeth Bronfen, Daniel Birnbaum. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz 2001, pp. 9-30, here pp. 12f., 18.

⁵⁵ Anita Shah describes the experience while attending the exhibition: "Although knowing that you were in an exhibition, not really in any danger and soon able to return to the light of day, feelings like curiosity, the fear of being enclosed in a claustrophobic space, or a disoriented helplessness were overwhelming. Associations unfurled, with the illicit, the disreputable, the dangerous and the frightening, with places of danger" (Shah: "Into the Darknes" (2010), p. 121).

⁵⁶ See Kittelmann, Udo: "Haus ur, Rheydt versus Totes Haus ur, Venedig" (2001), p. 24.

The design of the rooms leads additionally to another room concept that can be labeled as a museological one. Especially Schneider's *Haus u r* makes the (exhibition) room, the so called *white cube*, to an object of observation. The room is the object itself. By playing with both the habits of the visitors and the rooms itself he plays with the museological room, the *white cube*, and the experiences of its visitors.

Traditionally a gallery space should – in reference to Brian O'Doherty – allow art to attain its artistic character by being

isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values. [...] A gallery is constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have at the wall. [...] Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial – the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics.⁵⁷

Even if in Kubrick's *2001 – A Space Odyssey* the floor is bright illuminated – the light seems to shine out of the floor itself – no single footstep of the foreigner Bowman, who can be seen as an intruder into this museological room staffed with several art historical objects, is recognizable and would, therefore, uncover the existence of a human being in this room. It is only his breath that reveals his existence. Bowman has to prove himself in the museological room with its objects – a phenomenon that can be found in O'Doherty's notes: he points out that by changing the museological wall – which means the design of the wall itself when 'decorating' it with paintings and art – the visitor of the museum has to change, too. He is the variable element in the room and will be himself defined by the art presented in this room; his self-concept will be proved.⁵⁸ Bowman has indeed to find his self-concept: by traveling through time and space he has changed and is now lost in space, lost in a futuristic space staffed with artifacts from the past that are presented in a timeless space.

The *white cube* changes not only the artistic objects presented – and makes them timeless somehow – but changes Bowman himself, too, and makes him a relict of the past that will overcome itself by its rebirth as a star child.

The power of the museological wall is pointed out by O'Doherty when arguing that the wall, becoming an aesthetical power itself, changes everything that it presented on it.⁵⁹ It is the wall that raises the image into the ontological status of art. Vice versa changes the wall as well as the whole room into an exhibition space that foreshadows the art shown.

⁵⁷ O'Doherty, Brian: *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Introduction by Thomas McEvelley. Santa Monica/San Francisco: The Lapis Press 1986, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 12ff., quote p. 27.

Kubrick's rooms – especially the Louis Seize-room in *2001 – A Space Odyssey* but also the spaceship itself where some scientists are sitting on red furniture while illuminated by indirect light sources – can, therefore, be interpreted as part of the discussion on museological rooms, on relicts of the past, and on the aspect that also the human being is such a relict. Insofar as the rooms can be interpreted as places and spaces of cultural memory according to Aleida Assmann. She points out that those rooms are important for the constitution of rooms of cultural memories; they strengthen and authenticate memories by making them localizable but also by embodying a special kind of continuity that overcomes the ephemeral memory of individuals, epochs and cultures that represent themselves in artifacts.⁶⁰

In Kubrick's Louis Seize-room it is the room itself that makes the single artifacts become artworks while Bowman is exploring the room – geographically as well as cartographically not localizable in contrast to 'normal' rooms⁶¹ – as a kind of visitor himself. The room changes into a "Projektionsfläche für die Vorstellungen, Werte und Normen sozialer Gruppen" [projection surface for ideas, values, and norms of social groups]⁶² showing a combination of 'old things' – the furniture – and 'new developments' – both technical and space/room conceptual – and pointing, therefore, to the fact that human beings themselves live in a world that consists of old values, norms, and objects that work as anchors to help during a phase of orientation⁶³ that enables the human being to stay open to new developments.

The contrast to this museological room that seems to remind Bowman of himself and his ancestors marks the fact that the room is not localizable⁶⁴ – it can therefore be localized everywhere and nowhere – which depends 'simply' on the fact that Bowman was travelling through a kind of vortex that can, therefore, be associated with a labyrinth. The way out is unclear, even unsure. Bowman as well as the viewers lose their sense of direction – an aspect that can be connected to Schneider's works where known elements are connected to unknown elements and structures that confuse the visitor.

⁶⁰ See Assmann, Aleida: *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*. 3rd ed. München: C.H. Beck 2006 (C.H. Beck Kulturwissenschaft), p. 299.

⁶¹ See Günzel, Stephan (ed.): *Raum. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*. Unter Mitarbeit von Franziska Kümmerling. Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler 2010, pp. 24ff., additionally p. 101.

⁶² Günzel: *Raum* (2010), p. 101.

⁶³ See in this case Berger, Peter L./Luckmann, Thomas: *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit. Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie*. Mit einer Einleitung zur dt. Ausg. v. Helmuth Plessner. Übers. v. Monika Plessner. 22nd ed. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer 2009, p. 28.

⁶⁴ In regard of the fact that Bowman is the only human being in this room the question occurs how a human being experiences its live as well as death without others but completely isolated. It has to be taken into consideration that a human being cannot develop into socialized a human being without the interaction with others and is, additionally, not able to produce something like an environment (see Berger/Luckmann: *Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit* (2009), p. 54).

It is interesting that “Schneider takes a similar stand, and the statement by O’Doherty [...] might even be read as the central tenet of Schneider’s artistic work as a whole”⁶⁵ when taking into consideration that his works have been transferred into a museological context itself:

the act of storing rooms from *Haus u r* in the basement of a museum, the special entrance to these rooms, their existence, out of the way, in darkness, and their simultaneous direct, symbolically charged connection to the street outside [...] are all instruments designed to mediate O’Doherty’s dialectic, which (thirty years on) is as cute and unresolved as ever.⁶⁶

Conclusion

In Kubrick’s movies places and rooms became places of failure. There is just no positive future for their inhabitants in sight, their doom seems to be unavoidable. In contrast, Schneider’s room concept varies drastically: visitors will find – of course – a way out. However, the original concept of living in a secure atmosphere is not given here as it is not given in Kubrick’s movies. In this case Schneider’s concept is similar, in particular to Kubrick’s living spaces: both artists show that the concept of living is doomed to failure. While Schneider has restructured his *Haus u r* as a labyrinth Kubrick does not give a clear overview of the homes shown in his movies. Here they are still fragments. The result is in both cases that viewers as well as visitors cannot hope to imagine a clear floor plan. Expectations will not be fulfilled, sense of direction will always be lost – even if watching the movies or entering *Haus u r* again and again.

Schneider’s oeuvre in general is characterized by the moment of referring to his other previous works.

His art is about working away at what is already there. The replication of givens, the recurrence of the same, shifts the focus of perception. The familiar, unusually, takes centre stage, the unremarkable clamours for attention, the obscure sees the light of day.⁶⁷

It is this moment of replication and, therefore, repetition that allows connections to the oeuvre of Stanley Kubrick as mentioned above. His movies are interlocked, connected to each other by picking up elements of past movies and foreshadowing future movies that show interdiegetically the closeness of his oeuvre. Well known elements are, therefore, integrated in new contexts and open up the possibilities of new interpretations, as can be seen in Schneider’s works: he is still working with known material, changing it and opening it up to the possibility of new interpretations.

⁶⁵ Titz: “The Walk-in Black Square” (2010), p. 66.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Kölle/Elliot: “The Challenge” (2007), p. 39.

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