
SOMETHING FANTASTIC

A
MANIFESTO
BY THREE YOUNG
ARCHITECTS
ON WORLDS,
PEOPLE,
CITIES,
AND HOUSES.

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RUBY PRESS

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ON WORLDS

Something Fantastic is about changing the world.

Our world is the earth; the earth is a globe. It has neither beginning nor end and yet has clear boundaries:

We've measured it thoroughly and know its wealth: How many animal species and how much water it holds, in all kinds of aggregate states, and how long we can go on hoisting raw materials from its depths.

→INFACT WE PASSED THE PEAK OF OIL PRODUCTION ALREADY: STATISTICS →P. 150.1

Our world grows with our increasing knowledge –unlike the earth. The more we know about its wealth, the better we know the limits of its exploitation.

The wealth of the earth and that of our civilization, which sees growth as a given, are worlds apart. Worlds, we never had a larger notion of, nor a

smaller certainty about:
Only a click away from every place and life
on earth, via our networks.

The earth can't continuously provide
man with what we need for a 'good
life': salmon, untouched nature, cheap
building lots, steel, secluded islands,
starry skies.

For our own sake we need to embrace
the ability to fit ourselves into the given
system of the earth. That means, on the
one hand, that the 'new frontiers' of our
future lie within what exists:
although we know what is available, we
most likely don't know the multitude of
things we can do with it yet.

On the other hand, it means that
economy, smartness, and adequacy will
become the key words of our future.

→HAVING A GREAT UNDERSTANDING OF ADEQUACY: MIES →P. 148.1

9.1: ↘
What makes sense is: what doesn't
consume to excess, what is simple and
works mechanically or what is solar-
powered, what can be done with a small
energy input.

→EMBODYING THE IDEA OF SIMPLICITY: THE DUMPLING EXPRESS →P. 48

9.2: ↘
So we will have to become more familiar
with our world within common boundar-
ies, learn about its coherences, and how
to take better care of it. We will have to
stop considering the earth as something
to be potentially conquered, waiting for
our invasion. We do not want to force,
or to capture nature.

→REDISCOVERING THE EXISTING: EIKE ROSWAG →P. 115.1

Only a prosperous earth can provide
worlds that are worth living in.

CAFÉ DEUTSCHLAND

→ WHY CONSCIOUSNESS IS KEY: ON PEOPLE → P. 11.1

→ ABOUT THE OBLIGATION TO INTERFERE: ROUSSEAU → P. 163.1

→ UNDERLYING CLAIM FOR DEMOCRACY: CELINE CONDORELLI → P. 154.2

Material: Shotcrete, glass, cable, tables and chairs, newspaper readers, waiters, 2000 m².

Place: Dorotheenstr. 85, 10115 Berlin.

Idea: A café that allows the people to check and participate in the intelligence gathering of its elected representatives.

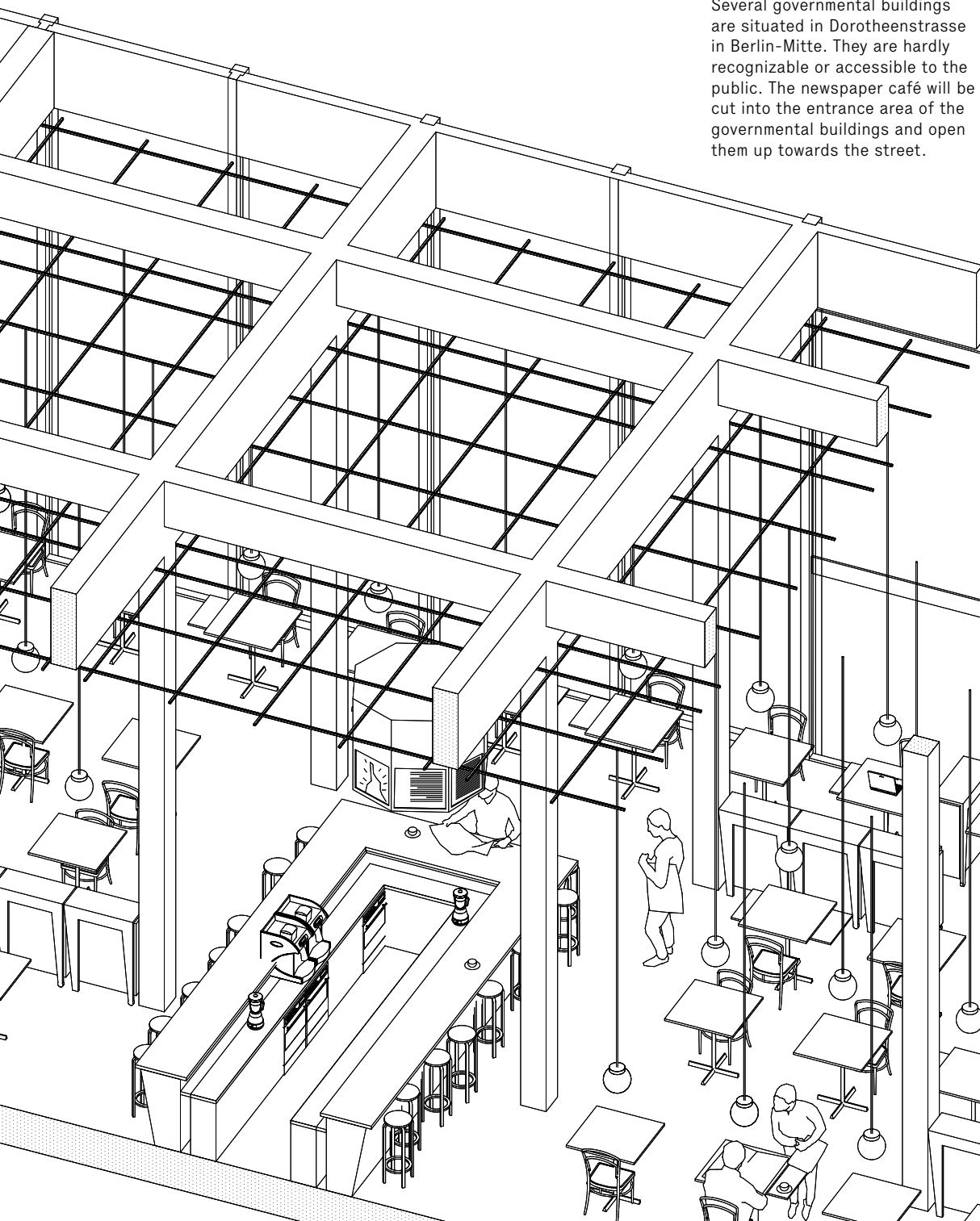
Consciousness is the premise for change. You can only change things if you are *in the know*.

This is a proposal for a governmental building, which instead of offering the citizens a moment of seeming participation, frozen in a spectator's perch, lets the citizens become a part of an existential precondition of democracy: the forming of opinion. The proposed new type of government building is the workplace of the official 'newspaper readers', who each morning prepare the up to date 'state of the world' for the politicians.

Café Deutschland is a place of transparency, where citizens can see, check, and suggest what their representatives are or should be reading.

1.

Several governmental buildings are situated in Dorotheenstrasse in Berlin-Mitte. They are hardly recognizable or accessible to the public. The newspaper café will be cut into the entrance area of the governmental buildings and open them up towards the street.



4.

Café Deutschland is a place where citizens can see what their representatives read. Via the counter everybody can exert influence on the politicians' newspaper readers by giving reading suggestions.

5.

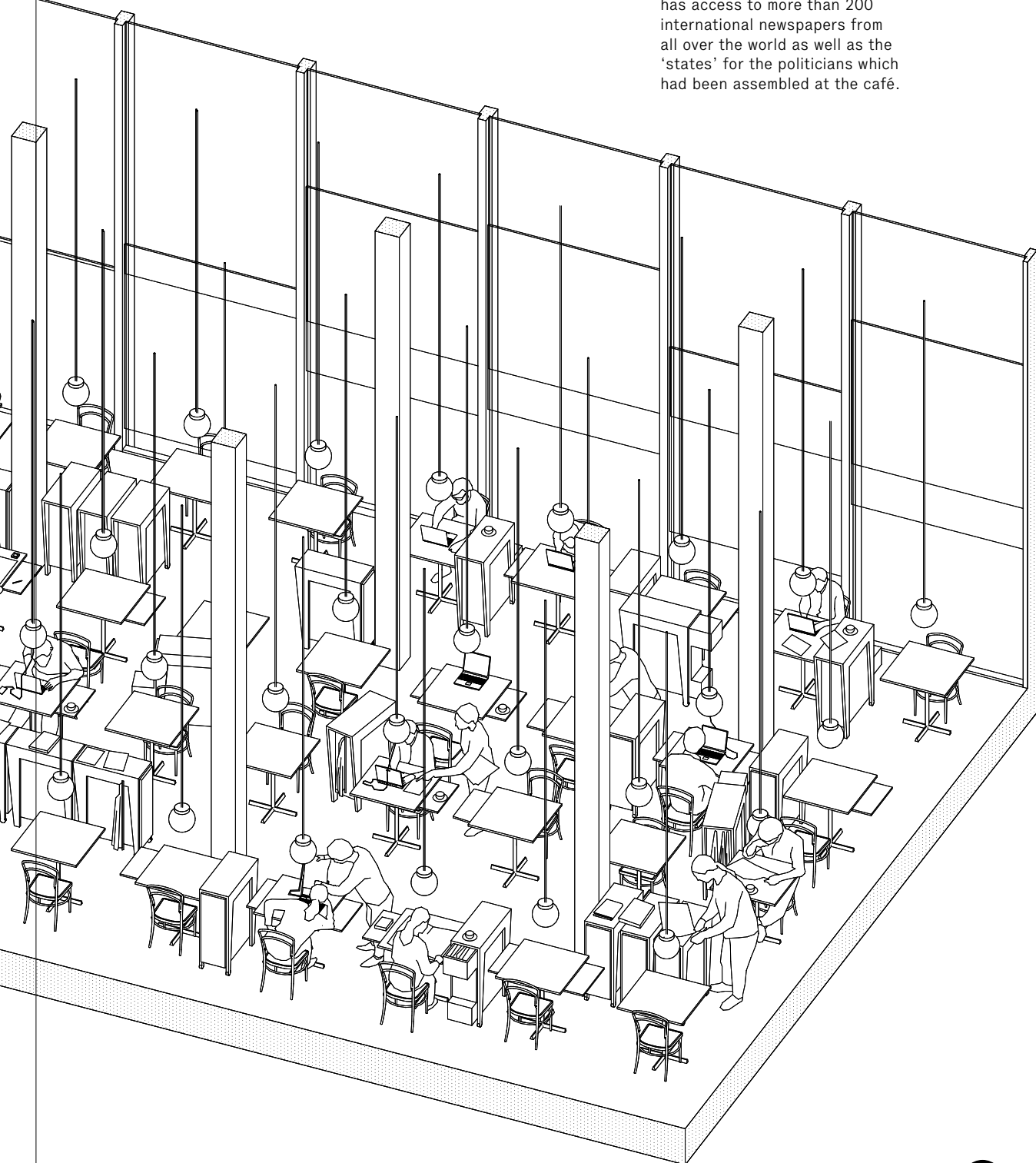
Professional newspaper readers and visitors sit at the same tables. But every governmental newspaper reader has a small locker that can be moved to his table. The lamps over each table offer electricity and connection to the network.

2.

Newspaper readers of delegates and committees work at the newspaper café. They put together the up to date 'state' which includes all press information that is significant for a special person or group and their decisions.

3.

At the same time the newspaper café is a public café, where one has access to more than 200 international newspapers from all over the world as well as the 'states' for the politicians which had been assembled at the café.



MARKUS MIESSEN: OUTSIDERS CHANGE THE WORLD

Markus Miessen was trained as an architect and started his office, Studio Miessen, out of his interest for topics outside and at the edge of architecture. **→SEE HIS WEBSITE: WWW.STUDIOMIESEN.COM** What we find especially interesting about his work are his case studies on how to interfere with and change established processes. In this context, he coined the term 'uninvited outsider' to describe a person who is situated outside the actual circle of decision makers, and therefore more independent and arguably powerful to generate change. In that way, Markus Miessen, like us, is looking for ways to change the world. His project 'substitute', which he explains briefly in this interview, is a perfect hands-on example of how architects could act to achieve stronger influence in the actual use of their buildings. What he calls 'architectural thinking' not only enables architects to achieve this, but also to apply their knowledge in fields outside building and planning. Understanding everyone who uses his or her expertise outside the limits of profession and in collaboration with others as a world maker, opens a whole new perspective on who will actually shape our future cities.

June 2nd, 2009, Strassburger Strasse, Berlin:

Does 'critical participation' go beyond the scope of objection? Can you define it?

It depends on the context: concerning architecture I am skeptical about whether participation actually works.

When thinking democratically you basically have to reach consensus, be considerate of things like the old woman who needs a handrail. There's virtually no way to outvote things like that.

It is different in regard to the scale of the city, where everybody takes part, because that is how the interesting spots within the city are produced. Architects tend to theorize about such things ...

Do you think architects should become entrepreneurs instead of theorists? Could that be a way of getting out of the dilemma?

Either that or a way to get in. You need to state your attitude when doing a project like that. Do you want to be a service-provider?

79.1: ↘

You need to decide which role you want to play. For participatory projects I think it is about building a frame, a structure that different people can contribute to.

Eventually every collaborative project is based on a participatory structure. What I think is crucial, and what makes a lot of participation experts criticize me, is to call for someone who takes the ultimate responsibility. Otherwise things tend to get stuck and there are no decisions made. I can see the same problem in politics.

I am writing a book on it right now, called *The Nightmare of Participation*. It is neither possible to please, nor to include, absolutely everybody if you want to make progress in a specific structure. After all, you can't assume that everybody has the same expertise. For me, when working on an architectural project, it is important to first establish a certain framework, then leave and therefore not necessarily participate in the physical phase of the project. An issue I am interested in, for example, is how to create a stable situation that rules out rack rents and expropriation for a period of 20 years.

→DEVELOPING SUCH A FRAMEWORK: PLATTENBAU ALGORITHM →P. 56

What does such a framework

look like? Is it a contract, a timeline, an organization chart?

It is actually all that together. All aspects have to be addressed adequately.

My thesis 'Substitute' dealt with these kinds of questions, creating a framework to develop a linear service structure for methadone patients close to King's Cross in London. The structure of England's medical system causes major difficulties, dividing the King's Cross neighborhood into different areas of responsibility. The organization of methadone dispensation thus became more and more complicated. The core of the project is a Private-Public-Partnership (PPP), which makes an appearance on urban scale, as well as architecturally in shape of a small hospital with a docking station at Houston Underground Station.

The main work was to define policies on funding and general organization which could survive the next 20 years and even gradually develop from the PPP to a public institution. That, in my opinion, is the point where things become interesting: When the architect acts beyond his or her assumed role.

I'm interested in developing

processes that give the architect the possibility to exert long-term influence. Usually as an architect you lose all say on a building's use when you hand it over to the user.

Of course this also comes with a large amount of responsibility. You can not exceed the budget by three times, leaving for example the museum you've just built without any money to finance an exhibition. This is happening all the time.

The MoMA has to turn down their heating every winter to save costs since they did their 800 Million Dollar renovation in 2004.

CONVERSATIONS

Do these kind of issues actually have anything to do with the profession of the architect?

80.1: ↘

'Profession' is something that is often seen as something with an extra value.

The problem is that as an architect, for people not involved with architecture, you are simply seen as a service provider. That it is a 'hard skill' you can learn, but it is not a profession. What is interesting about architecture, in the bigger sense, is to question existing models and foster change. The capacity of architecture to do that usually goes unnoticed by people outside of "the profession". I am interested in schemes and frameworks, because it seems to me the only position from which you can actually influence social processes, behaviors, and policies. Besides the financial aspects, it is also unbelievably hard to gain this influence only with architecture. You need to find your niche. I am working in this field as Studio Miessen, while doing architectural work with nOffice. What's interesting about this is the fact that Studio Miessen's work is usually worse paid but addresses a larger scale; it is a typical case of cross-financing. It is important to act multi-pronged and establish structures at an early stage. Once you've started working in an office, it becomes harder and harder to imagine anything else.

→SEEING VIRTUE IN BEING A 'SERVICE PROVIDER': GERD GERKEN →P. 121.1
→SEE THEIR RECENT PROJECTS: WWW.NOFFICE.EU
→SHARING THIS OPINION ON ARCHITECTURAL PROFESSION: WIEL ARETS →P. 77.1

Do you think this only applies to architects?

No, but I think in case of architecture it is super difficult. If you started a poll

on the prestige of professions I am sure architects would be among the top five. But of course this doesn't reflect reality. Architecture presumably is the most exploited academic job of all. People find it hard to sense the added value represented by architects.

→... INDEED THEY ARE: STATISTICS →P. 150.3

Let's talk about the city.

What do you think of the city as a habitat and how would you rate its sustainability?

In terms of sustainability the city is a sound place. Berlin for sure is interesting, but it can hardly be compared with a city like London. Both models are

sustainable in their own way. They are both going to change radically within the next 20 years but that will be far less extreme than cities in northern Africa or China. The question is if there's a flash point at which it becomes impossible for a city to change. For example, for infrastructural reasons: if a city like Mumbai grows and grows, but the infrastructure has missed the chance to adapt itself, that cannot be touched up.

What makes London and Berlin nonetheless sustainable?

They are each sustainable for their own reasons. Berlin doesn't have strong

migratory pressure for the reason that there are virtually no available jobs. It is extremely dispersed and therefore offers a fairly high quality of life. On the other hand London has put up such rigorous regulations that it will always be able to retain control and do things like cut migration. I believe that economic parameters like this do have a great impact on the quality of everyday life. They are connected directly via

CONVERSATIONS

rent indices, travel distances and so on. I think that everybody creates his or her own space, and therefore his or her own city, hence everybody has an individual reception. This means that there is "my Berlin" and "your Berlin". We all walk our individual, itinerant routes through the city, that lead us to our favored places. If you sketched a map of Berlin, it would list totally different spots than mine, as well as locate them differently in space. I think this is a key to quality in a city.

What I am asking myself is whether the increasing size of a city has negative influences on these kinds of things. Apart from that, questions like this always have to be understood and can only be answered individually. What the qualities of city life are and what restrictions you are willing to accept is a very personal, subjective question.

What is the nightmare of participation?

The nightmare is not being able to make decisions, and at the same

time seeing other people using participation to legitimize themselves politically. Right now I am working on two case studies, one about New Labour in Great Britain and another about the so-called Polder Modell in the Netherlands. Both are dealing with internal democratic transparency in conjunction with total closure toward the outside. There are some interesting statistics indicating that in Great Britain, in 2003, there was sort of a peak concerning newly developed participatory structures, going along with a historic low in willingness among citizens to participate. They were nevertheless developed further, but most obviously only for the reason of gaining political legitimization. The consequential question for me is how to pointedly intervene and unite forces to act in coordination.

... This refers more to a political context?

I'd say it actually is similar to what you are trying to do with your theoretical

work and your collection of excerpts, the 'Index of Now'. Why are certain things relevant? I am asking myself how to achieve some acknowledgement for the quality of the profession of architecture, and I think that this quality is outside architecture itself. Let's call it 'Architectural Thinking'. It can be effectively transferred to other fields, but within the building industry itself it has worn off, because today there are so many stakeholders within the business who are absolutely capable of taking over the traditional tasks of the architect. Whether we like it or not, the customers who finish a project with a developer often don't understand what we as architects can do for them. Right now I am interested in two concepts of alternative entry: the 'Uninvited Outsider' and the 'Cross-bench Practitioner'. The latter stems from the House of Lords, where independent cross-bench politicians eventually are the only ones who can initiate change beyond consensus. All others within the two respective blocks and parties are so much involved with each other that they can no longer drive forth anything. As an outsider, I am excluded from all these political games. Finally, it is all about finding a balance between the Uninvited Outsider and the insider, who is effectively at the controls.

And that balance in position has an incredible amount of potential. ←

81.1: ↘
→EMBRACING THIS ROLE IN HER WORK: BETTINA KRAUS →P. 84.1