

Ruined Hopes / Hopeful Ruins

by Mark Godfrey

Lists

Pieter Bruegel, Curzio Malaparte, Moshe Safdie, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Jean-Antoine Watteau, Friedrich Kiesler, Piero di Cosimo, Kenzo Tange, Archigram, Paul Scheerbart, Bruno Taut, Hieronymous Bosch, Alexander Beer.

Polythene sheets, a lump of blue foam, a dirtied plastic container, deflated football bladders, a stretched piece of fabric, an old and stained arm chair, silver foil, a polystyrene cube, cardboard packaging, a tatty table, watercolour paint, a pillow.

We start with two lists. First, a list of some of the architects, writers and artists whose works and thought Ian Kiaer has researched over the past few years. And second, a list of the materials Kiaer has deployed in his 'projects' made over the same period, projects generated by his research.

To each list we can attach a sub-list. The first names those contemporary artists who, like Kiaer, have followed an 'archival impulse', and who have responded through their work to previous artistic and architectural activities, connecting historical figures to each other.¹ The sub-list would include Tacita Dean, whose works have explored locations connected to artists such as Marcel Broodthaers and Robert Smithson; Sam Durant, who has videoed Rudolf Schindler's buildings in Los Angeles; Simon Starling, who researched Lilly Reich's curtains for Mies van der Rohe's buildings; and Pierre Huyghe, whose *This is not a time for dreaming* (2005) explores Le Corbusier's commission to build the Sackler Center for Harvard University.

A second sub-list groups other artists who have arranged materials in a similar way to Kiaer, or used the same kind of materials in different ways. This includes Richard Wentworth (who has shown arrangements of street-found objects) and Gabriel Orozco, who frequently uses football bladders. Alongside other contemporaries of Kiaer, such as Mark Manders and Koo Jeong-a, the sub-list would also present older artists like Robert Morris and Barry LeVa, who arranged matter over the horizontal expanse of the floor in their late 1960s scatter pieces; and Alighiero Boetti and Pino Pascali, who showed an equally resourceful approach to found industrial waste material (cardboard packaging, polystyrene, foam) in their Arte Povera sculptures of the same period.

Attaching the sub-lists to the first two lists, we can remark that, his distinctive interest and investment in the history of painting aside, neither the broad subjects of Kiaer's research, nor his approach to materials are particularly surprising in the context of contemporary art. What is uncommon is for an artist to use the materials named in the second list as a result of research on figures named in the first. Archival work tends to deploy photographic media: even in his altars, which have some materials in common with Kiaer's (polystyrene, foil), Thomas Hirschhorn uses photographic images that illustrate the named figures to whom the altars are dedicated. Kiaer's projects might carry allusive titles naming the subjects of his research – such as *Endless House project: Bruegel alpine pod*, but looking out over the objects before them, his viewer would never immediately recognise the figures to whom the 'project' responds. Kiaer's work is also surprising because artists using the kind of materials he prefers tend to be less literary and more literal: their work gains its impact from the raw force of found, discarded matter, and avoids simile – by which I mean Kiaer's efforts to make one object come to stand for another. Kiaer's ongoing pursuit has been to use materials of the second list to represent the subjects of his research, but why is it that an artist with his range of interests deploys materials in the way he does? This essay will attempt to describe what Kiaer's projects look like, how they come about, and what kind of a response they constitute to the figures that attract him.

Arrangements

To give a better idea of how Kiaer arranges his materials, I will briefly describe three works: *Endless Theatre project / St John at Patmos* (2003) [p.50]; *Endless House project / (pink)* (2004) [p.60], and *Erdrindenburg project: Building for Scheerbart* (2006) [p.94]. The first work had five parts. On the wall was a watercolour drawing of a bird perched on a spherical nest, a motif taken from Bosch's painting *St John the Baptist on Patmos* (1474). Kiaer had used Korean ink on paper, and had mounted the paper on cotton stretched over a thin wooden stretcher, but in such a way that creases and bumps were clearly visible. Below, towards the corner of the room, there was an old black swivel armchair, a pretty conventional piece of office furniture. This was angled to face out of the corner, and by the small round black wheels that served as its feet, there were three other objects. The largest was an old coffee-table top – a rectangular wooden block covered with black formica that Kiaer had placed along the same axis as the chair – pointing, that is, out of the corner of the room. To one side of the wood there was a black rubber football bladder, and to the other side, a smaller piece of curved black plastic.

Endless House project / (pink) was not arranged by a corner, but against a slightly broken wall. This time, one element hung on the wall rather than leaning against it, but it would be harder to term this element a painting, as one could name the vertical cotton rectangle of the previous work. Kiaer had taken a square of pink anti-rip parachute material, stretched it over a small frame, and hung it on a nail. He had not inscribed the fabric in any way, but thin lines already marked out a grid of tiny squares. The shape of the frame was echoed on the floor by a small polystyrene cube angled towards it, dented here and there by whatever it had come into contact with in its previous functional life. To the right of the cube were two inverted bowls, one white, its rim cracked and broken, and the other pink, picking up the colour of the wall square. These two squat cylinders lay closest to this fabric – to their left were eight or nine long cardboard oblong tubes, once used to protect fluorescent lights. Just like the polystyrene block, these were angled towards the pink square. Though most were laid out intact, Kiaer had cut the ends off two of the tubes and laid the sections upright, exposing the corrugations of the cardboard.

These two tiny sections could have been read as the most basic of architectural models, each standing for a miniature house. Many of Kiaer's works contain more obvious models, and the final work I'll outline here, *Erdrindenburg project: Building for Scheerbart* is one of these. The model in this case was made from a dirtied brown plastic rectangular container. Against one side of the object, Kiaer had inserted a sheet of cardboard with four square holes cut into it, and then inverted the container. The holes now appeared as windows in a building, as apertures that would offer a view out onto the grounds by which the building stood. In the imagined place of these grounds, Kiaer had spread out a rectangular plastic sheet, reaching just up to the edge of the model. The sheet was stained and tarnished and its edges were tatty and uneven. Kiaer had also made an intervention, slicing a rough arc in the plastic and folding it back over itself to reveal the floor of the gallery beneath the sheet. If the plastic were taken as a kind of garden, this slice resulted in a hole that might correspond to a lake. All this lay in front of the model: behind it, Kiaer had tacked up a sheet of paper that hung quite loosely from the wall. Onto this paper he had collaged a triangle of brown paper suggesting a provisional mountain peak.

With these three works in mind, some general remarks can be made about the materials Kiaer uses, and how he goes about arranging them. The materials are generally found objects – plastic sheets, round bowls, chairs, flooring fabric, etcetera, but whilst some materials are tarnished with dirt from their previous use, others are pretty pristine – the light packaging, for instance. Some found materials

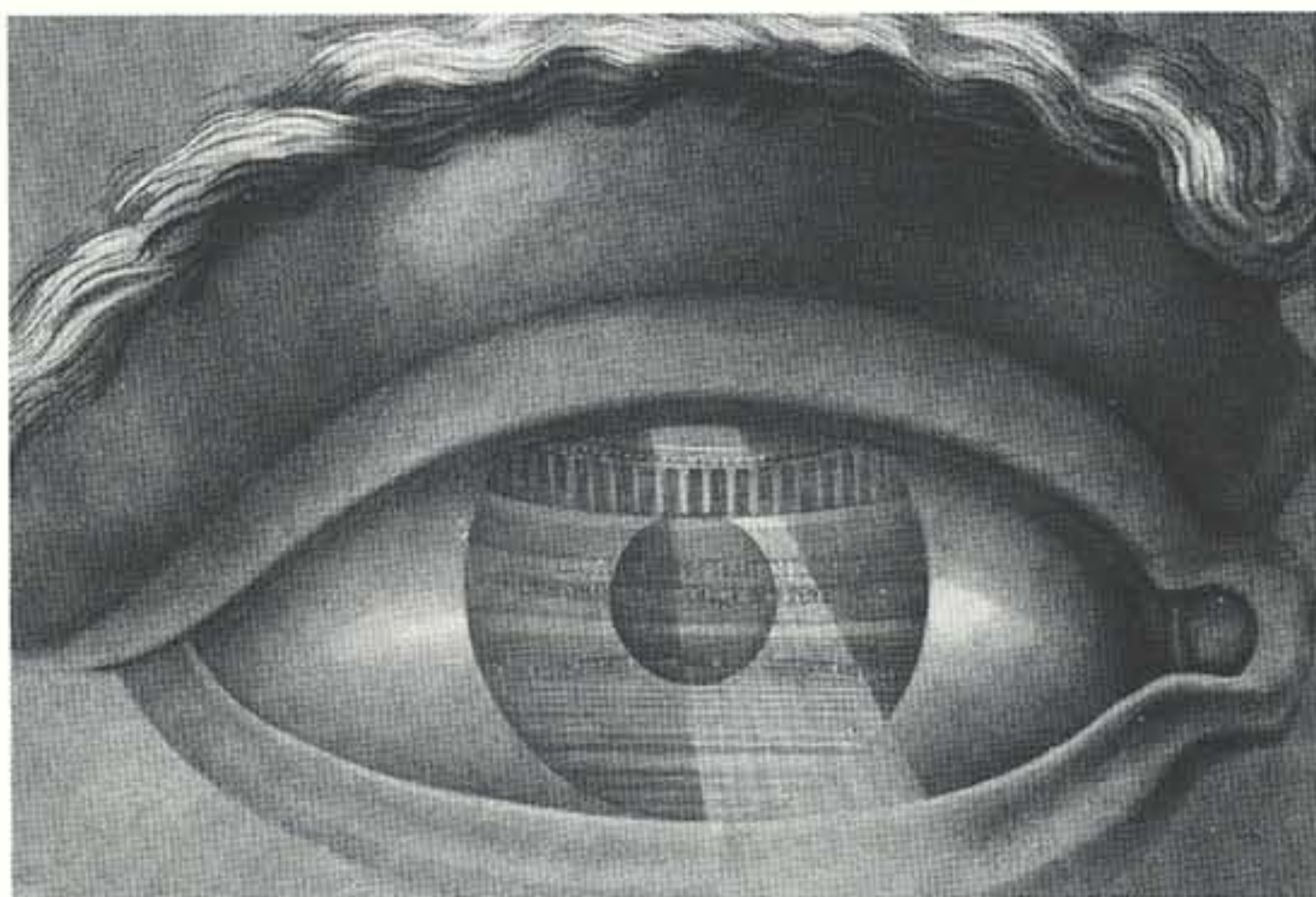
are not transformed at all; others are marked or cut in various ways. The 'found object' does not tell the whole story, though: as we have seen, Kiaer will also deploy more traditional art materials such as Korean ink, watercolour and collage.

In all the works, there is a fine balance between the sense of the provisional and the sense of the deliberate. Though the materials look appropriate in the context of the work, one can imagine that the work might equally have been made with slightly different ones. For instance, a differently shaped plastic sheet would have sufficed in *Erdrindenburg project: Building for Scheerbart*. This sense of the provisional is further rendered by the kinds of marks Kiaer makes on the wall-mounted elements, and by the nature of the floor-bound architectural models. The 'paintings' or 'drawings' have quite loose marks, often made with watercolour and pencil. They seem somewhere between preparatory sketches for future designs, and brief jottings made to recall resolved and completed works, and often the watercolour competes with the stains that existed on the found, old material Kiaer stretched around his thin frames. Meanwhile, the models are also make-do, comprising small inverted squares standing for dwellings, or an incised plastic box: certainly these models are not made with the same degree of care involved in conventional architectural model building.

Despite this provisionality, Kiaer's projects are far from casual. Everything is arranged just so: each element, no matter how tatty, is precisely placed in relation to the others, and in relation to the surrounding architecture. This is particularly obvious in *Endless House project / (pink)* where one senses how the objects on the floor are composed together with the pink wall square. The grid on the square might echo the ultimate 'readymade' anti-composition of Modernist painting, but as a whole, the work's organisation results from the kind of compositional activity that more traditional kinds of painting involve: Kiaer placed elements in juxtaposition with one another until each was in its correct and harmonious place. Kiaer also deploys his sensitivity to colour very deliberately. No matter how rough or stained the object that he uses, he lets colour join disparate elements of a composition.

In all three works I've looked at, Kiaer uses both the walls and floor of the gallery space (though it would be misguided to call his works juxtapositions of paintings and sculptures, for the 'wall works' are as materially powerful as the 'floor objects', and sometimes even lean against the floor, and the floor objects pick up the colours and shapes in the wall works). In the process of using the two planes of wall and floor, Kiaer always brings the architectural setting into play, treating seriously the colour of walls and floors, knowing they will be part of his compositions. Plug sockets, floor boards and in some cases, even wallpaper, begin to count. Since the artist lays bare the architectural context at the same time as showing his objects, he

reminds the viewer of the human scale – the relation of one's body to the walls, ceilings and windows of the room they have entered in order to see his work. He invokes this 'real' scale in other ways too. Some projects include found furniture, especially designed for the body. In all projects, rather than using plinths or vitrines to isolate models and objects in order to project them into an entirely imaginary space, he places objects by the viewer's feet. But at the very same time as he insists on real scale, Kiaer asks the viewer to approach his arrangements with another kind of scale in mind – the miniature scale of his models. The models tempt their viewer to imagine tiny inhabitants. Such inhabitants would see the objects around



Claude-Nicolas Ledoux:
Eye enclosing the theatre at Besançon

the models as gigantic landscapes. Because Kiaer lets two kinds of scale exist at once, any object in his arrangements will always have a double identity – as seen by the viewer, and as the viewer imagines the inhabitant would see it.¹¹

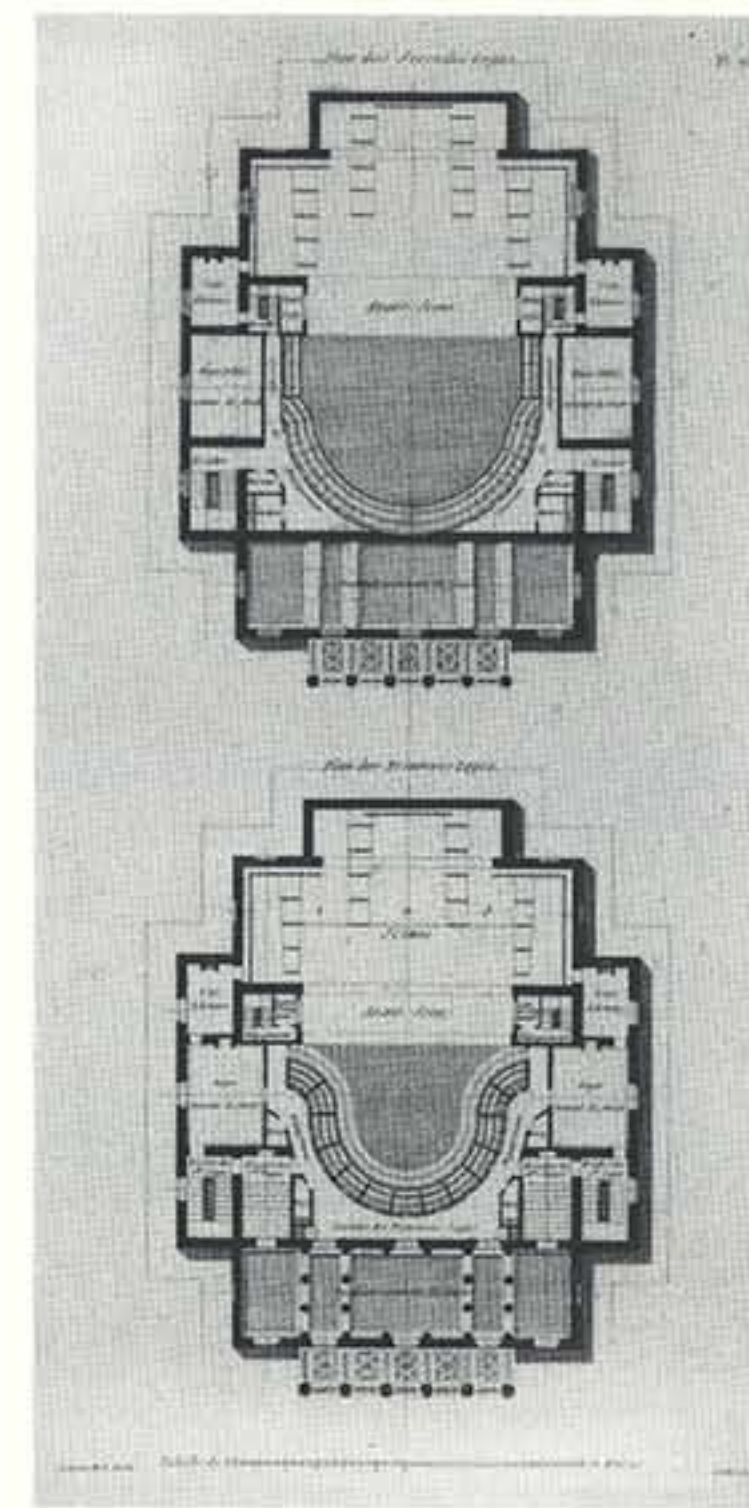
This section of my essay has concentrated on the second of the first two lists. Before re-introducing figures such as Kiesler and Malaparte, I want to be clear that Kiaer's works appear first and foremost as elegant arrangements of differently coloured materials, some found, some selected, and all subject to different degrees of transformation. The compositions work well both in their internal organisation and with the surrounding space. If they did not, then the projects as a whole would fail to sustain interest. Kiaer's material and chromatic sensitivities draw his viewers towards his work; once hooked, they might begin to connect the objects before them to the subjects of Kiaer's research.

Connections

Just as Kiaer arranges different materials in different ways, so he forges different kinds of connections in his projects. Once again, I want to take three works of his to give a sense of how he creates these connections. The works are *Bruegel project / Casa Malaparte* from 1999, *Endless Theatre project / Ledoux: Besançon (cello)* from 2003, and *Alexander Beer project: Waisenhaus* (2006).

Kiaer made the earliest of these three works after connecting two historically disparate figures: the Flemish 16th century painter Pieter Bruegel, and the Italian 20th century writer Curzio

Malaparte. Having made a number of earlier works based on exiled figures (Yang Paengson, Irina Ratushinskaya), he might have been attracted to Malaparte's story, for though initially connected to the Fascist party, the writer had been imprisoned by Mussolini in 1933, first on Lipari, and then later on Ischia in the Bay of Naples. Meanwhile, Kiaer had always appreciated the Flemish painter's cinematic landscapes, and the elevated, panoramic viewpoints that Bruegel offered to his beholders. Kiaer knew that he had travelled over the Alps in 1551 and south to Naples, and he supposed that the landscapes Bruegel had drawn then would have been seen some four hundred years later by Malaparte. Making this



Claude-Nicolas Ledoux:
Plan of the theatre at Besançon

biographical link, Kiaer came to notice a similarity in the situation of the Casa Malaparte and the windmill in Bruegel's *The Procession to Calvary*. The Casa Malaparte was built on a cliff top in a remote part of Capri after Malaparte's imprisonment, designed by the writer in collaboration with the architect Adalberto Libera. The 1564 painting shows a detailed windmill atop a rock pillar – a neat edifice whose occupant would enjoy a stunning view of the procession in the foreground of the painting, and of the crucifixion to which that procession was headed.

Kiaer went on to create a work of three main parts. One part was a watercolour painting after Bruegel showing the pillar with the windmill on top; another was an irregular lump of blue foam, and the

third part comprised a stool on which sat another lump of foam – this time, dirty mustard yellow. Perched on this was a tiny brown model house. This was in no way modelled after the Casa Malaparte (there was no rendering, for instance, of its distinctive steps or roof), but its situation recalled the Italian writers' residence. If someone staring from the windmill would look down onto the house, in turn a resident of the house would look across at the blue foam and see it as a massive sheer cliff.

Endless Theatre project / Ledoux: Besançon (cello) also began with research on disparate figures: Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Frederick Kiesler, and to a lesser extent, Jean-Antoine Watteau, but this time, the figures were not connected by any biographical or locational coincidence as was the case with Bruegel and Malaparte. Principally, Kiaer had become interested in the unconventional



A model of
Frederick Kiesler's Endless House

approaches both Ledoux and Kiesler took to theatre design. Ledoux built the Theatre of Besançon between 1778 and 1784 at a time when theatres were architected according to the class structures of *ancien régime* France. It was more important to provide spectators with visibly different boxes according to their societal rank, and to allow visitors to watch each other (and to hide in their boxes) than to offer the audience as a whole an uninterrupted and clear view of the stage. As Anthony Vidler writes, 'Carrying all the traces of its aristocratic and private origins, the eighteenth-century theatre provided for an audience more generally interested in being seen than in seeing.'¹¹¹ Ledoux challenged this orthodoxy at Besançon by looking back to ancient Vitruvian theatres, and building a curved amphitheatre for the audience's seats. Working 150 years later, Kiesler extended the implications of Ledoux's architecture, conceiving designs for 'endless' theatres in which the audience would occupy a circumference with the circular stage at its centre.

Kiaer directly evoked the Besançon theatre in many parts of the project. A model of the building's exterior nestled in the corner, and another model showed a section of tiered seating. These two parts responded to the built structure; a third element made from cut and layered sections of asphalt recalled Ledoux's plan drawings for the curved amphitheatre. Kiaer had imagined that Ledoux would have been familiar with the representations of entertainment current in 18th century France, and felt that there was a correspondence between his theatre designs and the open quality of the concert shown in Jean-Antoine Watteau's 1721 painting *Les charmes de la vie*. With this in mind, he painted a watercolour, and just as he cut Bruegel's windmill from the procession, so Kiaer excerpted all players and other instruments from Watteau's painting, copying only the motif of a faint cello leaning on a stool. Whilst Kiaer worked directly from the



Alexander Beer:
Jewish Elementary School for Girls,
Berlin

buildings, drawings, and paintings of Ledoux and Watteau, he did not make any such representation of Kiesler's designs for the Endless Theatre. Instead, he structured the entire piece in a way that recalled Kiesler's approach to theatre. Just as Kiesler's viewers would regard the action on stage from all vantage points, so Kiaer's viewer would circumnavigate his project.

In terms of his research methods, *Alexander Beer project: Waisenhaus* (2006) in some ways marked a new departure for

Kiaer, because it was only when he was invited to participate in the 4th Berlin Biennial that he discovered the architecture of Alexander Beer, who died in 1942 as a prisoner of the Nazis in Thereisenstadt. The Biennial organisers had decided to use Beer's former Jewish School for Girls on Auguststrasse as an exhibition venue, allocating each of the thirty or so artists a separate classroom. The school had been completed in 1928 and then shut down in 1942 when the Nazis finally closed down all Jewish schools. Though it re-opened in the 1950s, it had been closed for ten years before the Biennial. The classrooms were extremely evocative – not just because one could not enter without imagining the fate of the original pupils, but because the traces of more recent classroom activities could be seen all around. Many artists found the space to be too powerful and did their best to ignore its charge; others used the affective atmosphere to their advantage. Kiaer was the only artist to reflect very precisely on the history of the building in which his work would be exhibited. His research began when he was shown the room in which his work

would be placed, and when he discovered inside a curtain probably dating to the 1930s. The curtain was grey and had a detailed lattice pattern; when taken off the railing, and bunched on the floor, it resembled a kind of building with a regularly patterned framework structure. Thinking that this found object was itself architectural, Kiaer began to research the other work of the school's architect, and visited the other buildings that Alexander Beer had built during his time as chief architect for the Jewish community of Berlin. Though his two synagogues and his memorial to German Jewish World War I soldiers had been vandalised, Beer's 1916 Jüdische Waisenhaus (Jewish orphanage) in Pankow remained, now converted into a public library. Kiaer even managed to interview some former pupils of the institution.

Kiaer made a work in three parts, first arranging the elements in his studio, and then re-forming the arrangement once back in Berlin. In both installations of the piece, the central element was a wooden model of the Pankow orphanage. Its front was covered with paper, and on this Kiaer had made a detailed drawing of the building's facade. The roof was made of dyed paper, but the back of the building was uncovered, so the framework of the model was



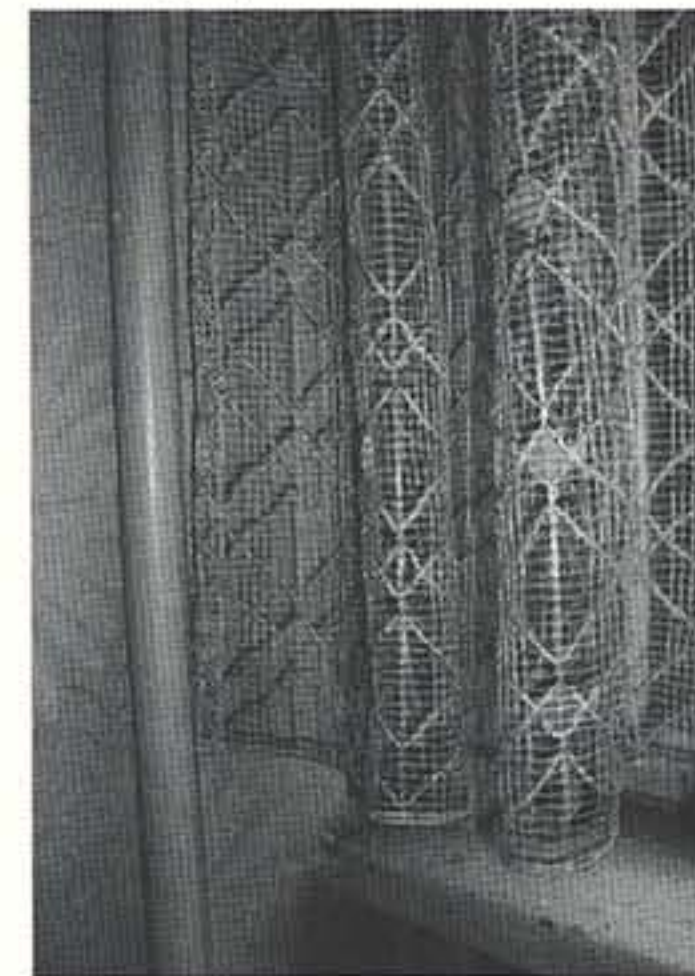
Alexander Beer project: Waisenhaus, 2006. Installation view
4th Berlin Biennial, 2006

exposed. This structure rhymed with the latticing on the curtain, which was initially placed on the floor beside the model, and then hung back on the railings when the work was moved from Kiaer's studio into the Auguststrasse classroom. The final element was a sheet of grey paper, picking up the colour of both curtain and model. This was tacked to the wall with two stubs of masking tape. When Kiaer installed the piece in Berlin, he added a petal-shaped smudge of pink watercolour to one corner, lightening the entire assemblage, and picking up the colours of the surrounding floral wallpaper of the Jewish Girls' School.

Once again, we are now in a position to make some general remarks about the kinds of research Kiaer undertakes, and the kinds of connections that he establishes in and through his pieces. We have seen that his research will begin in many places and that it can develop through longstanding, ongoing interests (Bruegel) and through specific unplanned circumstances (the invitation to show work in Beer's school). Whilst researching, Kiaer will connect disparate

figures, sometimes because he intuitively finds a narrative or biographical link (Bruegel and Malaparte), and sometimes because of a shared sensibility (Kiesler and Ledoux). On occasion, he will carry out research on one building, story, or figure alone.

The individual parts of a single project will then connect back to his research in different ways. Whereas some models or paintings will be based directly on a source building or image (the Beer orphanage, the Bruegel windmill), others will be more loosely connected to a source subject without in any way resembling it (the Casa Malaparte model). Some parts of a project will not be connected in any such manner, and contribute more formally to the composition of the entire project. Taken as a whole, the projects also connect in diverse



Alexander Beer project: Waisenhaus (detail), 2006

ways to the research. Sometimes, the spatial relationships between the different objects will represent the connections Kiaer made between different individuals (Bruegel's windmill overlooking Malaparte's residence). Elsewhere, the entire arrangement of a project will summon the spatial sensibility of a figure to whom Kiaer was drawn (the Kiesler works). Finally, a project as a whole might respond to a site. The Alexander Beer piece did this in two ways. Individual elements were taken from, and responded to, the room

of the Girls' School, whilst other elements recalled within the Girls' School the other achievements of the architect. By simultaneously focusing on the Auguststrasse site, and diverting thought outside to Beer's Pankow building, Kiaer managed to concentrate the viewer's attention on the building before them and to memorialise the architect's other work, thus avoiding the sentimentality that a project entirely focusing on the Girls' School would have risked.

Utopias

By now it is clear that Kiaer's interests are incredibly diverse. His works reflect his engagement with theatre design, with exiled intellectuals, with Renaissance as much as with Rococo painting. To some, it will seem that despite the formal appeal of his projects, his is an idiosyncratic world of obscure and disconnected passions to which a viewer has scant access. Kiaer's connections might disrupt the way in which the past is organised and represented in museums and in intellectual and art historical narratives, but they remain inscrutable, private and perverse.^{iv}

Yet his interests are not so random really – indeed, a prevailing and consistently evident concern has emerged: Kiaer's interest in utopian or visionary architecture, and often his references to paintings by figures such as Bosch or Piero di Cosimo follow from this prevailing concern. Various works have responded to buildings and proposals by Alison and Peter Smithson, Jozsef Fischer, Konstantin Melnikov, Moshe Safdie, Frederick Kiesler, and Kenzo Tange. In recent work, a particular focus has been the glass architecture and architectural theory of Paul Scheerbart and Bruno Taut, and to a slightly lesser extent, the inflatable architecture of Archigram. Previously, I noted that Kiaer's work is simultaneously provisional and deliberate, and one might detect a similar duality in his response to visionary architecture. His projects at once suggest the ruins of utopian schemes, and offer the possibilities for regenerated utopian thinking.

At first, it would seem that Kiaer is only interested in the failure of historical projects. Visionary architects hoped for efficiently organised cities with elegantly formed edifices, and Kiaer represents their dreams with stained and worn-out materials. Not only does he use base matter to show refined schemes; the very availability of this garbage on the doorstep of his studio proves the failure of earlier attempts to clean up city spaces. Whist this reading can account for Kiaer's general use of waste materials such as his lumps of foam and discarded furniture, a more precise argument for the pessimism of his work can be established when we think of his projects relating to Scheerbart and Taut. The former, best known for his 1914 treatise *Glass Architecture*, believed that glass buildings would 'completely transform mankind', bringing about societal openness and honesty because the substance would render interior spaces visible from the outside.^v Kiaer recalls Scheerbart's thoughts, but exchanges the clarity of transparent glass for the dim translucency of dirtied plastics – notably the beige plastic boxes that serve as models in both *Grey Cloth project: Scheerbart / Projector* (2005) [p.82] and *Erdrindenburg project: Building for Scheerbart* (2006). This exchange suggests in material terms the fate of Scheerbart's hopes for a transparent world, and a similar operation is at work in the drawings that respond to Bruno Taut's illustrations. *Erdrindenburg project: Alpine crystal building (pillow)* (2006) [p.100] includes a drawing based on 'The Crystal Mountain', one of the images that appeared in Taut's 1919 book *Alpine Architecture*. Taut's lithograph was delicately coloured, and its confident lines showed a mountainscape. One peak had been carved into a crystalline structure; behind it were snow domes covered, in Taut's words, 'with an architecture of glass arches'.^{vi} In Kiaer's rendition, most of Taut's imagined structures have disappeared, the colours have gone, the lines are much fainter, and the grey water-colour depiction of a pine forest is barely distinguishable from the pre-existing marks on the thin sheet of tatty cotton.

When this work was shown at Massimo di Carlo Gallery in Milan, there was beside it a huge plastic globe partially inflated by an electric fan. The globe recalled Taut's drawings of the earth in the section of *Alpine Architecture* called 'Erdrindenburg'. The term, which Kiaer used as a title for the entire show, means 'earth's crust building', and Taut had taken it from Scheerbart's 1901 novel *The Sea Serpent*. In the context of the Milan exhibition, Kiaer's plastic planet recalled Scheerbart's conviction that architecture needs to be in harmony with the earth's surface, but this globe can also be related to other near-spheres and inflated forms that have featured in Kiaer's work, such as the rubber football bladder in *Endless Theatre project / St John at Patmos*. As a structure, the inflated globe has long been associated with the idea of confidence and even with revolutionary potential. In his book *Citizens*, Simon Schama describes the first flights of



Bruno Taut: *Alpine Architektur*, 1919
Part 4: *Erdrindenburg*

the Montgolfier brother's hot-air balloons at Versailles in the years preceding the French Revolution. Whilst court spectacles were usually organised for the visual consumption of the monarchy and aristocracy, 'the balloon was necessarily the visual property of everyone in the crowd. On the ground it was still an aristocratic spectacle; in the air it became democratic.'^{vii} The inflated form has not ceased to be associated with utopian thought: in the 1960s, Michael Webb of Archigram proposed the

Cushicle – an inflatable living room – and in 2006, Rem Koolhaas designed his bubble pavilion for the Serpentine Gallery.^{viii} Whilst Kiaer has made a collage based on a print of the Montgolfier balloon floating free of the Versailles courtyard and recalling the initial dreams associated with inflated forms, for the most part, his three-dimensional globes are crinkled, squashy and loose, forming a stark contrast to the fully pumped pneumatic structures of Webb and Koolhaas. In sum, Kiaer takes a form associated with aspiration, and shows it as if after exhalation – thus within his projects, his deflating globes suggest the ruins of utopian schemes.

Thinking about Kiaer's work in these ways, we might recall the vision of Walter Benjamin's angel of history. Whilst the 'storm of progress' propels the angel into the future, he stares back at 'wreckage' hurled in front of his feet, 'a pile of debris' growing skyward.^{ix}

Just so, Kiaer takes the progressive dreams of architects and visionaries and renders them as wreckage at the feet of his viewers. Yet alongside this pessimism we can argue for an opposing, utopian sensibility in Kiaer's work, and we can locate it in exactly the same place – in his 'wreckage'. Look again at the street-found object: in becoming a substitute for a building, it releases long-forgotten historical hopes. There is something not only resourceful but remarkably hopeful about putting worn-out things to work in this way. If at one moment it seems that Kiaer reduces elegant edifices to grubby models, at another he seems to be taking whatever materials are found close to hand, and no matter their degradation, making them conjure utopian schemes.

Most of Kiaer's works on visionary architecture operate in this way, with garbage kindling dreams, and it is perhaps this operation that led him towards his particular focus in his projects around Paul Scheerbart and Bruno Taut. He discovered that both figures had worked in compromised circumstances, imagining utopian schemes in difficult situations: Scheerbart wrote his final novel, *The Grey Cloth*, in 1914, while he lay dying from a leg infection in Berlin, and Taut created his drawings for *Alpine Architecture* in the immediate aftermath of Germany's defeat in 1918, at a moment when a ruined economy threatened the livelihood of architects like himself. It was precisely these moments in the careers of the two figures that interested Kiaer, because in each situation, a reality of hardship proved generative. In his exhibition titled *The Grey Cloth*, some works recalled Scheerbart's sickroom and sickbed and included stained beds lying on the floor, an old radiator to heat up a room, even a drawing of legs referring to the disease that killed the writer. At the very same time, and through different devices, Kiaer imagined the sickroom as a place of work and forward thinking. *Grey Cloth project: Scheerbart / Projector* included a drawing of ink on grey paper, in which the novel's title appeared twice in serif and sans-serif typescripts, as if to suggest the moment when the author had designed the cover of his novel. The same work also included an overhead projector, sending out a square beam of light onto the wall to recall the very act of projection that occupied Scheerbart until his death. The works in the Milan exhibition titled *Erdrindenbau* did not reference Taut's situation after the war with the same degree of specificity, but one work included a tatty pillow on a polystyrene block below a version of Taut's alpine drawing, as if to indicate that even when resting on the most squalid materials, the architect was able to imagine crystalline buildings. Scheerbart's and Taut's situations in 1914 and 1918 respectively served Kiaer extremely well, for both encapsulated a paradox that his work has continued to explore – that the tatty object can explode impossible fantasies, and that fantastic dreams can be rooted in the grubby and everyday.

Projects and Prospects

The concept of projection is particularly vivid in the last works I have mentioned, where projection is either literal (projected light) or metaphoric (a dream as a projection), but in one way or another, all of Kiaer's works are projections. He terms each work a 'project', and it is important to register what he achieves through this word. The term – which appears in every title in lower case – dissuades us from approaching each work as a completely resolved response to a researched subject. Instead, 'project' suggests that the work constitutes a researched yet still open response to a historical figure or building, and also a starting place for ongoing activity and thought for projection⁵. Just as an architect's model might record a completed building, or articulate the initial thinking for a future structure, so Kiaer's 'projects' have a complex relation to tense – looking to the past and future at the same time. I have been thinking about the dynamic that animates Kiaer's response to visionary architecture his ability at once to acknowledge the ruins of utopia and to reinvigorate utopian thought, avoiding the dual pitfalls of indulgent melancholy and naive escapism. Calling each work a 'project' contributes to this dynamic, because each work becomes both a reflection on a collapsed scheme and a grounding for its reincarnation, but of course the dynamic is secured by the appearance of the works. Though work is taken from the studio to be displayed, a sense of the studio remains – and consequently, of the possibility of alteration.

This point recalls what I suggested earlier about Kiaer's arrangements – that whilst being intricately composed, they do not appear to be totally fixed. In concluding, I want to return to the points I made before about the visual and mobile experience of Kiaer's viewer, about the prospects his viewer is offered, but I want now to stress these points differently. Earlier, I suggested that Kiaer's projects appear first and foremost as elegant arrangements of diversely coloured materials, as installations that activate many kinds of scale at once. I suggested that their appearance and spatial complexity hook the viewer so they become interested in Kiaer's research. Now, I want to insist that the kind of viewing encounter that Kiaer sets in train operates not only as a hook, but as an articulation of the artist's dynamic attitude to utopia. This is a crucial point, for it means that Kiaer's work functions every bit as much through the viewing experience it invites as through its references.

To explain: in various aspects of his research, Kiaer has been concerned with different visual regimes. He has been interested in buildings that would offer panoramic views to their inhabitants, and in paintings that offer cinematic scopes to beholders. He has thought about aerial views enjoyed by solitary subjects and about upward views from the midst of a crowd. As far as the viewer of his projects is concerned though, Kiaer never offers them single kind of prospect,

but invites his viewer to look at the objects that constitute a project in many ways at the same time, because different kinds of scale are activated at once. As a result, the viewer's experience is multifaceted. On the one hand, it can seem as if everything is in fragments, and that an arrangement is disconnecting as a viewer walks around it. When the 'project' appears to disintegrate in this way, when things fall apart, Kiaer's pessimistic acknowledgment of the fate of utopian thinking is conveyed to a viewer no matter what they know of the figures or buildings that he references.

However, the very same arrangement of objects can be encountered in a totally different way. The project might well be fragmented, a coherent connection between all elements might be elusive, and a totalising singular viewpoint over everything might prove to be impossible. But rather than becoming frustrated by this fragmentation, this elusiveness, this impossibility, Kiaer's viewer might find that the complex visual prospect over the project provides an opportunity for an active, imaginative and creative engagement with it. Such a viewer will begin to connect objects and to link images. Looking out over the items before them, moving through their space, they will begin to think in a way that will correspond – whether they realise it or not – to the thinking of some of those architects and visionaries that set Kiaer's work in train. In this way, even if they are unsure as to the exact histories he has researched, the viewer will engage the utopian streak of thinking that fascinates Kiaer in his research, and which he has extended in such dynamic and unusual ways.

ⁱ See Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October* 110 (Fall 2004), pp.3-22. Foster writes that 'archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present'. Whilst Kiaer is concerned with revisiting the thinking of historical figures, information is never made present in any direct way, as is outlined in this essay.

ⁱⁱ It is this ability to activate two kinds of scale at once that separates Kiaer's practice from that of other recent artists known for making tiny models of fantastical buildings. Such work has a double appeal: first, viewers gawp at the intricate skill of the constructions. Second, they indulge in the fiction of imagining what it would be to inhabit the structures. These attractions can be facile, and Kiaer's work clearly refuses to provide them: neither do we marvel at his craft work, nor can we entirely sustain the fiction of treating his models as buildings. Examples of such work have been shown alongside Kiaer's. See Jessica Morgan, *Artists Imagine Architecture* (ICA Boston, 2002).

ⁱⁱⁱ Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux: Architecture and Social Reform at the End of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), p.168

^{iv} Foster has made the point that the 'private archives [of artists such as Tacita Dean and Thomas Hirschhorn] question public ones; they can be seen as perverse orders that aim to disturb the symbolic order at large'. Foster, op. cit., p.21

^v Paul Scheerbart, 'Glass culture' in *Glass Architecture* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p.74

^{vi} Bruno Taut, *Alpine Architecture* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p.123

^{vii} Simon Schama, *Citizens* (London: Penguin, 1989), p.125

^{viii} For more on Archigram's inflatable structures, see Simon Sadler, *Archigram: Architecture without Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), pp.113-117

^{ix} Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations* (Fontana: London, 1992), p.249

^x This idea – that a 'project' is a starting point for future work – is in part indebted to Liam Gillick's notion of a work of art as a 'scenario'. Gillick intends his *Screens* and *Platforms* to activate behaviour rather than be contemplated passively as sculptures. Despite the closeness of their thinking about the work of art as an initiator of activity, Kiaer seems more concerned than Gillick with drawing the attention of the viewer to the specific characteristics of each object in his projects. This means that his projects give a more direct access than Gillick's objects to the kind of thinking in which Kiaer is involved.