

Film
To Be
Projected
Every
Year

A proposal for art in public space, Zürich
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Kunst Öffentlichkeit Zürich

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Film To Be Projected Every Year

(working title)

Film To Be Projected Every Year is a perennial site-, date-, and time-specific public-art project addressing how public space has been, is, and will be defined in the city of Zürich. The central proposition of the project is to increase historical awareness of the relatively recent significant social changes that took place in Zürich and Switzerland in 1971 when women received the right to vote. An additional objective of the project is the consideration of issues currently facing Zürich and Switzerland which might bring about similarly important change and further transform the concept and role of public space.

Each year, for a period of three to ten days, a motion picture film photographed in Zürich is to be shown *in* the site of its making, a site with particular resonance to the events leading up to the 1971 women's vote, and to the "function" of public space in Zürich in general. With the passage of time, as the film is shown and re-shown each subsequent year at the place of its making the time and space recorded in the original will gradually drift apart from the site as it changes and is transformed by subtle and not so subtle forces. With each passing year the distance from and similarities to the physical, contemporary, urban place and its recorded image will provoke speculation among the film's audience as to its current and past function and use.

This project seeks to test the capacity of art in public space while attempting to increase awareness of the public space—in both its physical and social manifestations—for the viewer who encounters the work in the streets of Zürich.

Jurgen Habermas described the “public sphere” as a rational, democratic, social and political platform where “equals” could overcome their social differences, debate issues of common concern, and reach consensus. Against this formulation Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge have theorized the public sphere as a fragmented site of *unequal* exclusion and contestation where different communicative practices compete against each other.

As art historian and theorist Miwon Kwon has pointed out, by recasting the public sphere in terms of *communication* Negt and Kluge have shifted the metaphor away from *site* toward *mode*.¹ Miwon Kwon uses Raymond Williams’ four modes of communication—authoritarian, paternalistic, commercial, and democratic—to assess ways that art has been predominantly used in the public sphere. The authoritarian and paternalistic modes of communication, according to Kwon, correlate to “top-down” models of public art where the goal is control and instruction of the public. Reinforcing “high” and “low” positions for culture, authoritarian and paternalistic public art is seen as a “gift” to the masses. In the commercial mode, public art is used more clandestinely to literally enhance property values. For Kwon art experienced in Williams’ last category, the democratic mode, could be a means to facilitate social change, and at the very least would, on some level, imply participation and collaboration with an audience. According to Kwon art rarely achieves this democratic quality and if so, only temporarily.

Political theorist Chantal Mouffe believes along with Negt and Kluge, that public spaces are by definition places of conflict, conflict that may not reach consensus.² By attempting to avoid conflict, liberal democratic societies, according to Mouffe, see themselves as being somehow “post-political.”

¹ Kwon, Miwon. “Public Art as Publicity” in *In the Place of the Public Sphere*, Simon Sheikh (ed.), Berlin: b_books, 2005.

² Mouffe, Chantal. “Some Reflections on an Agonistic Approach to the Public,” in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Latour & Weibel (eds.) Boston: MIT, 2005.

These societies are therefore unable to adequately envisage public space because this requires the lost capacity to think in a *political* way. Instead an ever growing "culture-industry" replaces indeterminate social and urban space with cultural products, neutralizing its potential as a public platform. In addition the increased privatization of public property has meant the marked shrinking of public space. As Rosalyn Deutsche says, "...the prevailing categories that shape public art debates allow little interrogation of the nature of public space, let alone of democracy, with which, everyone says, public space is somehow intertwined ... The words 'public' and 'Art' are frequently put together to imply 'democracy' and 'accessability.' But this is often instead a cover for exclusionary practices of private control and power."³

This project asks "what constructions of public space might counter the compromise and de-politicization of democracy?" How can we see, as Mouffe suggests: "Public space [as] the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted without any possibility of final reconciliation?" In order to do so we must define "the people" as continuously changing and emerging from *within* that public space.

By the same measure public spaces cannot be "curated" in any permanent sense. This would return art to Raymond Williams' paternalistic (or worse, authoritarian) mode of communication. The project being proposed here for public space in Zürich aspires to recognize and reflect these conditions in its subject and methods. Contra to many models of art in public space, *Film To Be Projected Every Year* will exist in concept only between its annual screenings, leaving the space it refers to unmarked. During the daytime in periods of exhibition the blank white screen will serve as a sculptural reminder of the events connected to the site as well as of the evening screenings. In addition, and as a pre-condition, enough interest in the film (a referendum of sorts) must manifest each year in the form of support and organization to bring the project back again and ensure its future.

³ Deutsche, Rosalyn. "Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy" in *Art in Public Places: A Vancouver Casebook*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1993.

In 1971 women in Switzerland won the right to vote in national elections and referenda, 23 years after the women of France had won that right, and 51 years after the United States. This marked an enormous change in the public space in Zürich and Switzerland. About the women's movement of the early '70s, Isabel Morf writes that it has had

*...a more extensive, profound and abiding effect on women's lives than any other development or event of the twentieth century.*⁴

And yet, she also observes,

*Today there is no longer a women's movement per se...Young women often have trouble identifying with the concept of feminism...But they too lead their lives on the basis of the achievements of the women's movement, which they take for granted. Perhaps the very fact that they have come to expect these things gives them a different perspective.*⁵

Using the work of the Women's movement as a starting point, this project seeks to question the future that the citizens of Zürich will assign to the public space, both physical and political, while also marking the historical memory of the women's movement and the changes it brought about.

Through research and interviews with those involved in the women's movement as it was formed in 1968, a public site will be selected that has a particular, but perhaps not obvious connection to the events leading up to the women's vote. A color silent durational film will be made on the site, recording this public space today. An optimal length might be a twenty-minute seamless loop without text or credits, consisting of 10 two-minute shots; or a single 20-minute shot.

Each year for a period of a few days the film will be returned to the site for exhibition. The site and the record of the site will diverge or perhaps re-converge in some ways. This process of comparison of the present moment (2005-06) with the relatively recent past (1971) will implicitly question the roles being assigned to public space(s) in the future and at future moments when the film is re-played.

⁴ Morf, Isabel. *The Cultural Role of Women in Switzerland*, Zürich: Pro Helvetia, 2002.

⁵ Ibid

In November, 1968,

Zürich's women's suffrage league was celebrating its seventy-fifth anniversary with a dignifiedly festive event at the Schauspielhaus. Suddenly a number of young women from the student movement raucously interrupted the proceedings. One of them got hold of the microphone and fired off a tirade totally out of keeping with the rest of the programme: "We should be protesting and debating, not celebrating!"⁶

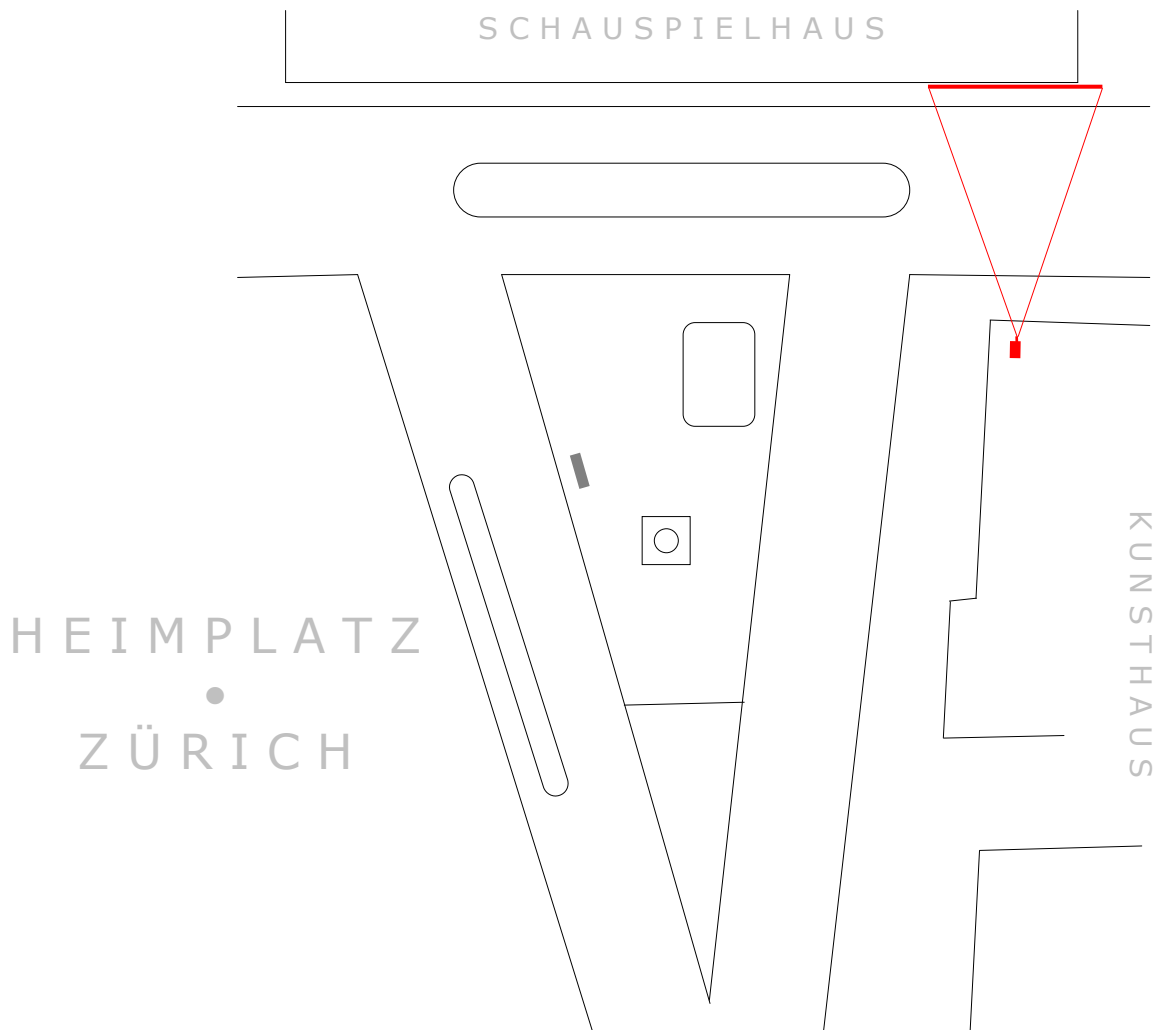
This event marks the beginning of the women's movement that soon resulted in the founding of the Frauenbefreiungsbewegung and, less than three years later, in full voting rights for the women of Switzerland.

Although the choice of the site for this project will be influenced by the interview process, the public space surrounding Zürich's Schauspielhaus, the Heimplatz, could be an ideal location for *Film To Be Projected Every Year*. The long history of the platz as a physical public space could be mined for meaning, especially in combination with the associations and social role of the Schauspielhaus. In addition, the proximity to the Kunsthaus could afford an opportunity for the Kunst Öffentlichkeit Zürich project to collaborate with an established arts institution. Therefore I will use the Schauspielhaus and Heimplatz as a model example for how the project could be realized and how it will resonate with the public. All specific details of the actual installation of the work will be agreed upon by all parties involved. The following images and plans are meant to convey the concept of the project—its use of space and visual impact.

⁶ Ibid

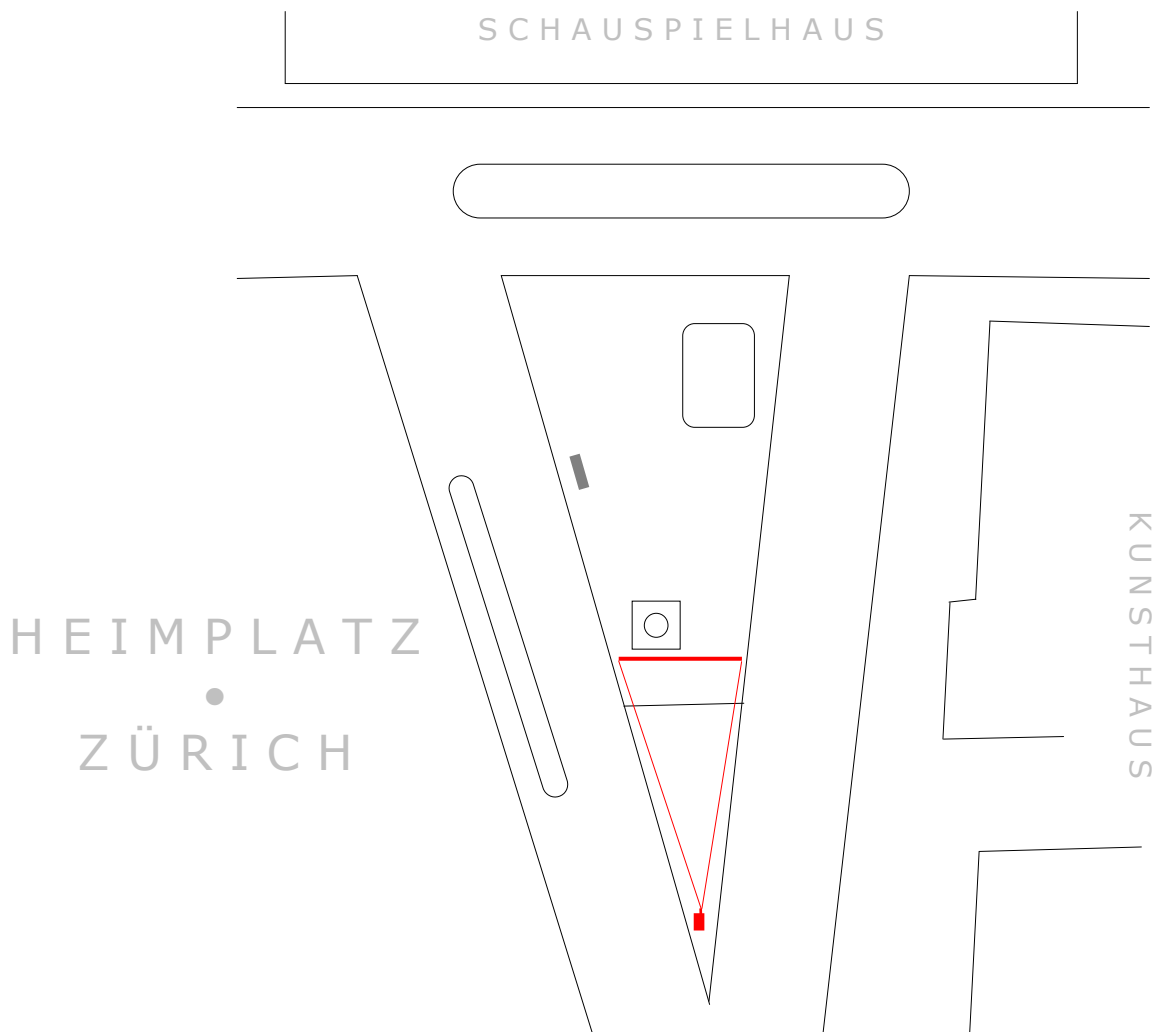


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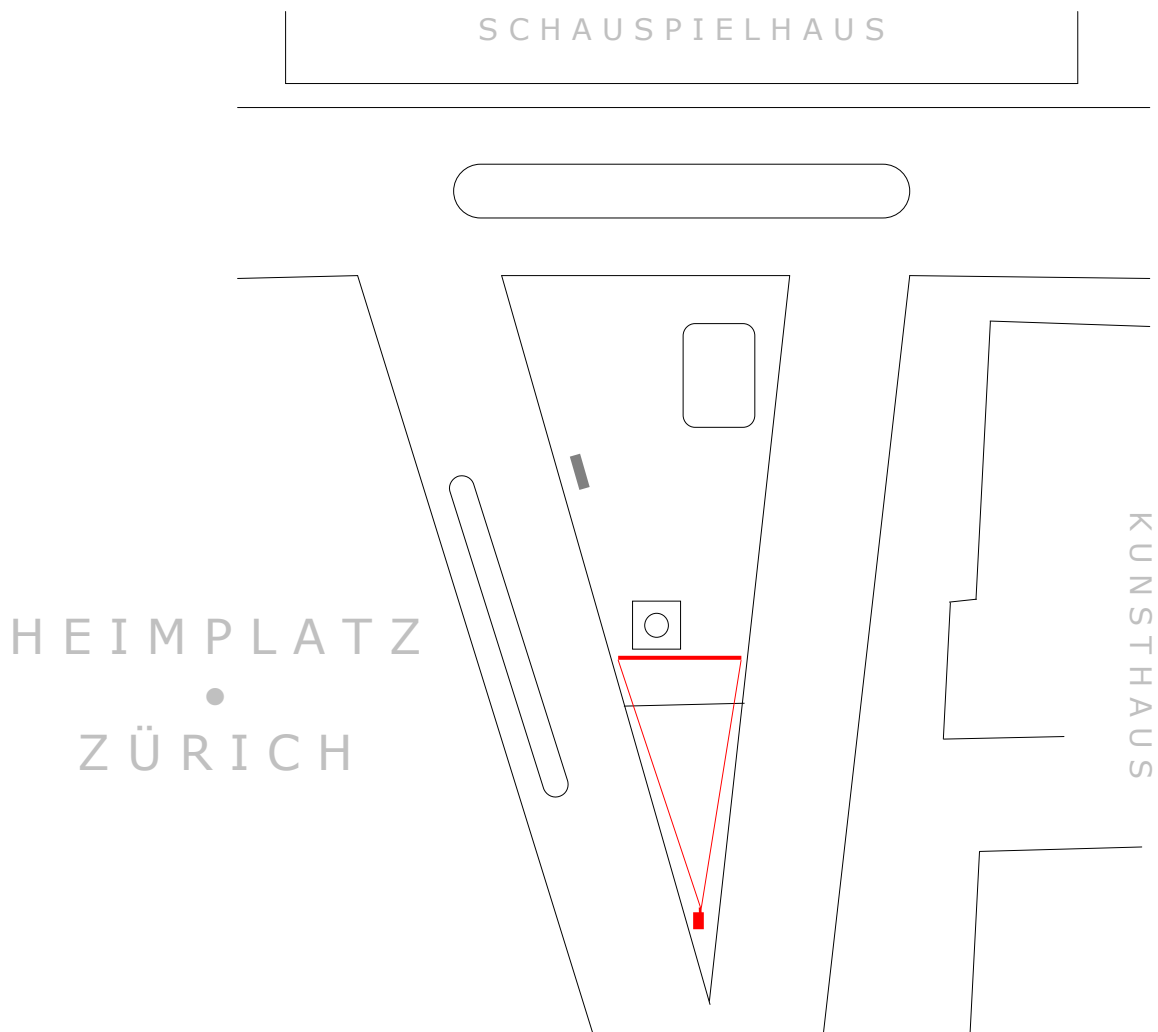


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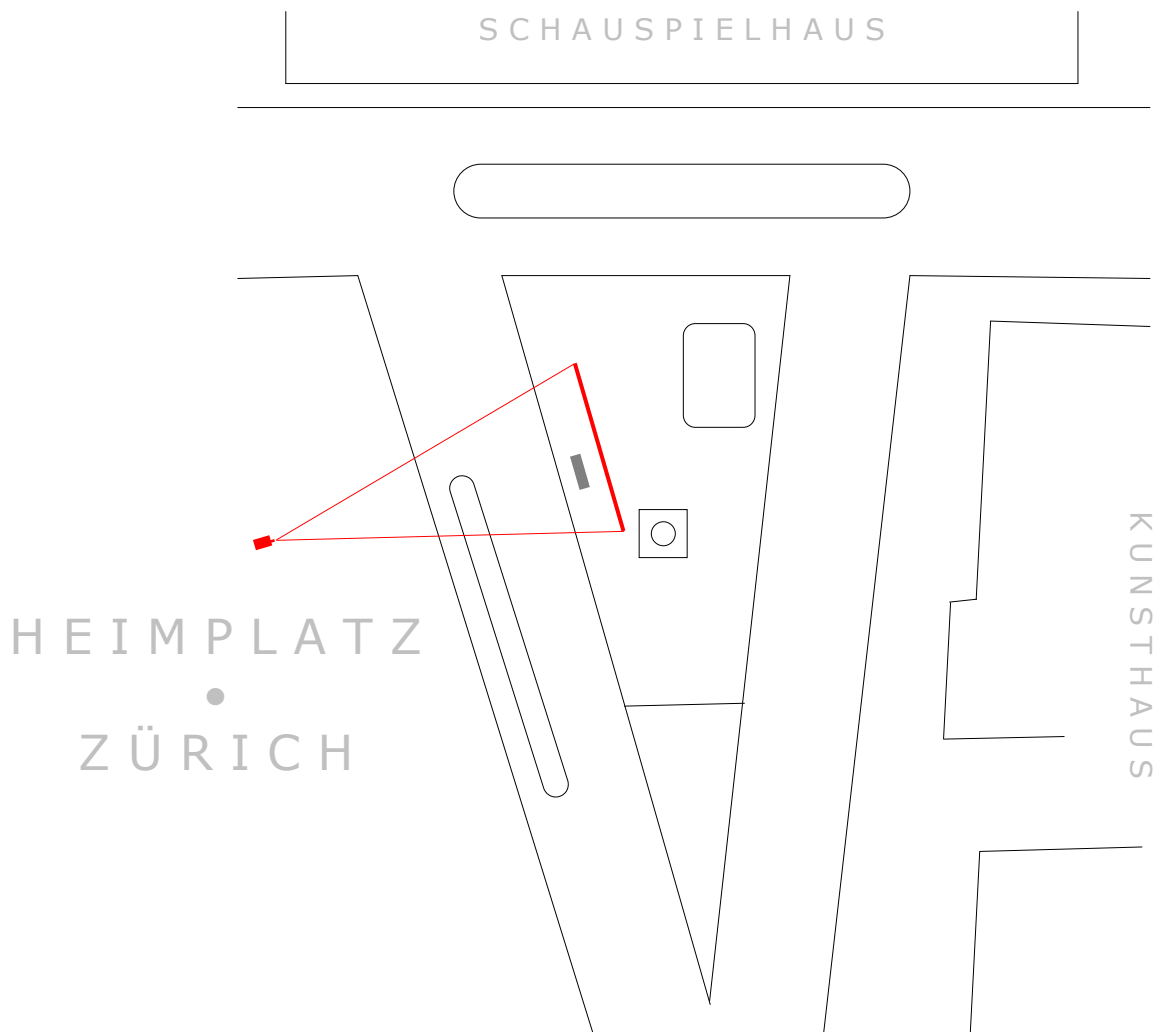


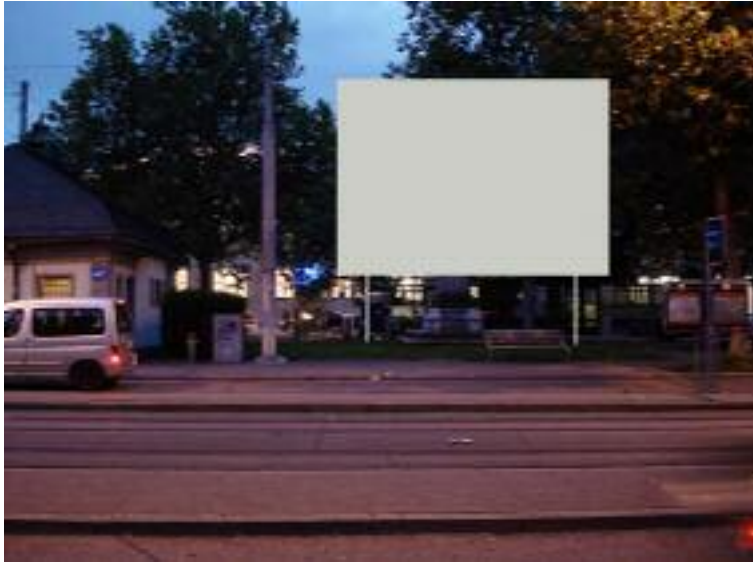
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PROJECTION PROPOSAL THREE



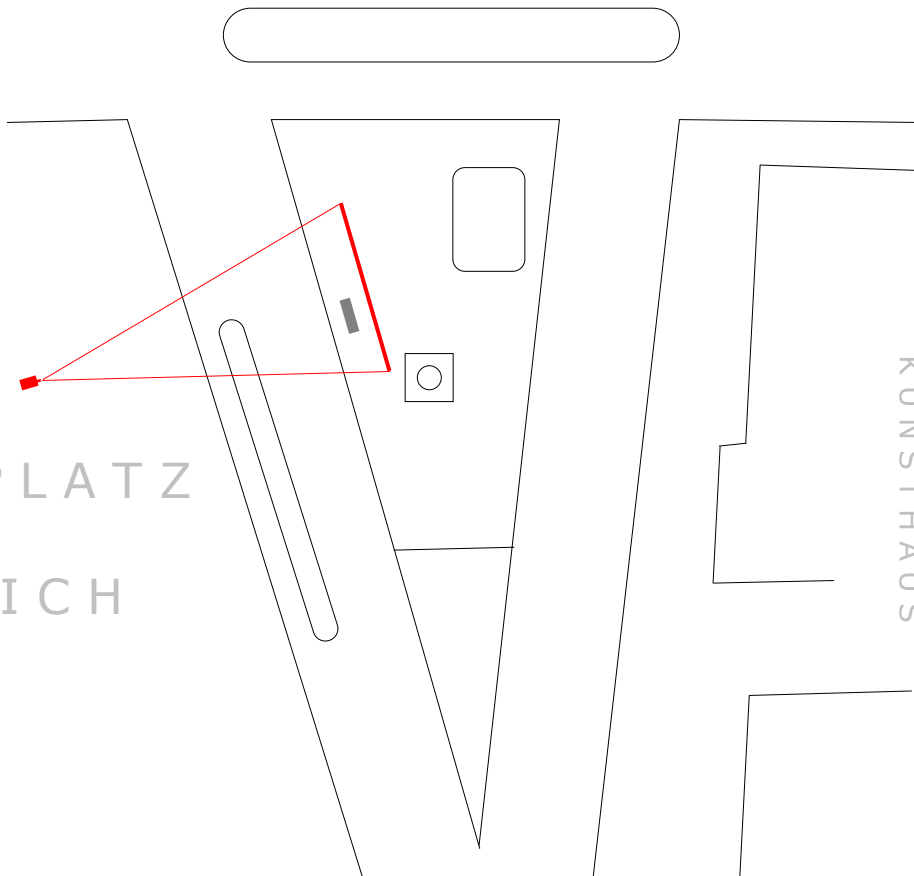


PROJECTION PROPOSAL THREE

SCHAUSPIELHAUS

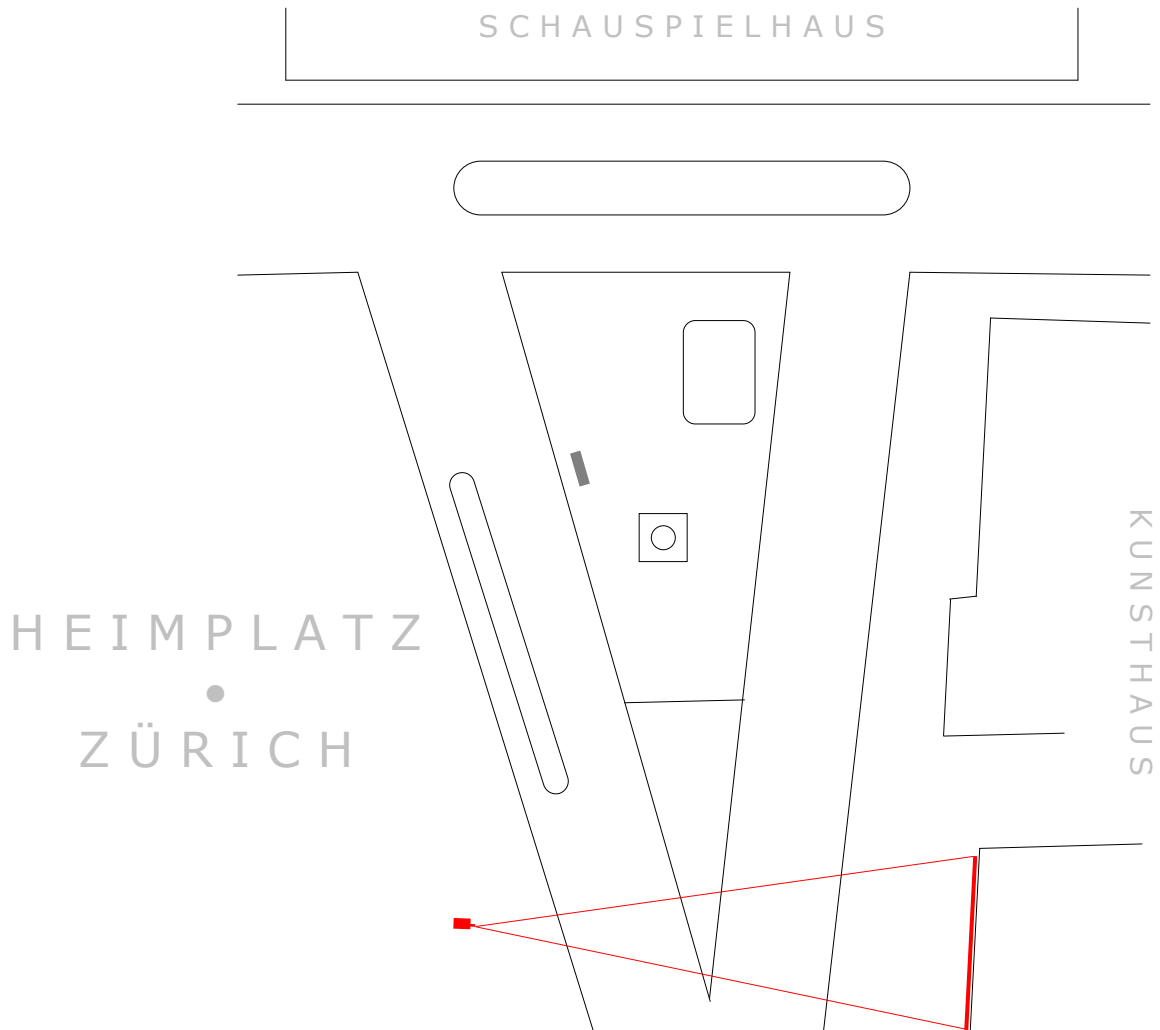
HEIMPLATZ
•
ZÜRICH

KUNSTHAUS





PROJECTION PROPOSAL FOUR



A German and English language publication of less than 100 pages in a portable size will accompany the installation of the project in public space. This book will be a repository for the research materials that bring the piece into being. These will include interview questions, excerpts from interviews, background information, newspaper articles, photographs and other documentation all related to the question of the women's movement and vote as it resonates with the broader questions of public space today. In addition an artist's statement will summarize the overall project.

A careful distribution plan for the publication would maximize its relation to the installation as well as increase interest and exposure to the projection work in public space. This could potentially happen in cooperation with the city of Zürich, an art distributor, an arts institution or a combination. If support is sufficient the publication could be distributed free of charges.

The project will unfold in three main phases: 1—research and interviews; 2—production of the film component and accompanying book; and 3—installation of the film and distribution of the book.

1.

In the research and interview phase the general trajectory of the women's movement in Switzerland and particularly Zürich will be mapped in order to guide the interview process. Persons who participated in the movement's beginnings in 1967-68, and in its later reformulations, especially the Frauenbefreiungsbewegung, will be sought out for personal interview. This will be initiated through a review of the primary sources, interviews with historians of c20 politics and culture. The interview questions will be formulated around the intersection of personal politics that was central to the campaign to gain the vote. Interview subjects will be asked about the relationship of the movement to public space, and specifically which public spaces in Zürich they associate with the struggles of the women's movement and why.

2.

These narratives and data will inform the shooting process of the film component. One or more of the spaces mentioned by interview subjects will be filmed in everyday use as they appear today in color film. One of these sites will be approached and negotiated as a long-term intermittent "home" for the public art project. Agreements will be made as to the physical manner and size of the work as it will be installed for three to ten days annually for a trial period of five years, with the intention of extending this annual installation indefinitely. Parallel to this the research material and interviews will be redacted into the final form of the book. Distribution will be planned to maximize the book's relation to the installation.

3.

Final details of the physical installation of the work will be resolved, including securing of any secondary agreements and permissions. A technical source will be engaged to provide the projection equipment and a separate team will prepare the outdoor projection screen and any other necessary construction. Again, parallel to this production work, the book will be printed and initiated into the planned channels for distribution.