Introduction

This chapter deals with the problem of how one can do research into and describe the power of architecture that unfurls notably in architectonic experiences. It thus addresses the problem of aesthetics, which has attracted little attention from a sociological point of view (Reckwitz 2008:259–80). Since the same holds true for architectonic experiences (Dangschat 2009), the present chapter takes a fundamental look at the correlations related to the act of experiencing architecture and its effectiveness. The notion of the effectiveness and power of architecture refers foremost to Foucault’s ([1975] 1994) understanding of power, in which he basically distinguishes two modes. He identifies how a specific function of a certain territory leads to in-respective exclusions of certain groups of people (Foucault [1975] 1994:148), and further he underlines how architecture is used as a tool to transform individuals, as he demonstrates in relation to the architecture of prisons (Foucault [1975] 1994:222). In contrast to that of Foucault, who focused less on the observers’ perspectives,¹ my approach implies, in relation to architectonic experiences, that one has to examine the perspective of those who experience architecture in order to indicate how that architecture unfurls its power.

In this regard, I propose that the sociology of space (Löw 2001) and actor-network-theory (ANT) (Latour 2005) provide a basis. The dilemma relating to the power of architecture, and thus to architectonic experiences, is thereby linked to an understanding of the social, which is based on relations that are essential components of both Löw’s concept
of space and Latour’s definition of artefacts as a mediator. In essence, I link parts of Löw’s arguments (spacing and synthesis) with those of Latour (artefacts and mediations).

In Chapter 1 of this volume, Anna-Lisa Müller and Werner Reichmann visualize a notion of the sociology of architecture by means of a fried-egg model in which they locate architecture, materiality and space within the social context. In other words, the social pervades space, materiality and architecture. The question concerning transformations of architecture that actualize in experiences is related to the egg yolk of the model, the architecture. In my opinion, it is therefore essential to demonstrate how the social reveals itself in architecture-transformations, and how the perspectives of the observers, their constitution of space and the corresponding modes of mediation are revealed (see Figure 4.1). In this respect, I argue that the social takes its point of departure from the relation between the observers and the material.

According to Löw (2001) the social is defined relative to the way people constitute spaces. They create spaces at the same moment as they perceive their environment, by linking, for example, an arrangement of buildings, building elements or living entities in a specific way. As in my research, the social is expressed in the manner in which spaces arise out of the architectonic experience.

Löw considers the question of perception in the context of the sociology of space in two ways. First, referring to Gernot Böhme, she understands atmosphere as a dimension of the constitution of space. That is to say, atmosphere is revealed as a notion within the corresponding spacing and synthesis. Second, on the topic of synthesis, she states that people’s perceptions differ in reference to types of milieu, gender and generation.

In my argumentation, I will not refer to the theory of structuration Löw’s sociology of space is based on, but only apply its basic analytical components’ arrangement and relations (Löw 2001:158). For the relations, I will refer to the concept of types of linkage Schatzki (1997, 2008) develops in his theory of social practices. He differentiates primarily between understanding and teleo-affective structures, which both express in relation to experiences in general ‘how things stand or are going for someone’ (Schatzki 1997:303). With respect to architectonic experiences, these linkages show how the architecture is for a certain observer. Understandings range between practical understanding, as in implicit daily routines and general understandings, in terms of shared values and, I add, particular ideas of space. Teleo-affective structures are related to a use, a purpose, an aim, a feeling or an atmosphere (Schatzki 1997, 2008).