

Beyond Normal and Pathological. Translating Experience
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This workshop on exhibition design was aimed at exploring architecture's capacity to communicate with all senses. The working thesis was that space becomes an activator translating and interpreting works of art in such a way that the phenomena and experiences aligned with the art pieces could be shared and discussed by all. Learning from the spatial experiences of our disabled / differently abled experts, the team wanted to challenge architecture beyond the normative established by the limited "normal" perception.

Taking into consideration the huge number of buildings and cultural institutions that are still lacking an alignment to what the emerging quest for accessibility already encompasses. Not only is architecture not accessible for all. It is the discourse of architecture that has been and still is exclusive. From the very start of architectural theory, architecture was defined as less concerned with housing the human body, but about transfiguring and making visible the contemporary concepts of the human body. Thus, the production of architecture and architectural theory was closely bound to those concepts stemming from philosophy, politics and medical science. The Italian Renaissance is a good example of how closely the concept of an ideal human body was linked to the concept of an ideal architectural body. Through techniques of measuring and proportioning, the building was meant to come as closely to a perfect order as possible.

Only superficially did architecture depart from this idealist model. In the late 19th and early 20th century, a strong process of modernization empowered architects to become major players in reformative processes of western societies. A criticism of the unhygienic and supposedly sickening living conditions in the growing European metropolises led to a close collaboration with politicians and medical doctors. The existing city and architecture were defined as both sickening and sick. Tuberculosis as a major health threat was diagnosed to be both caused by and infecting architecture. Following the medical quest of the time for light and air, architects were able to promote a new way to think and design architecture. With perfect simultaneity, the body of architecture was reformed as much as the modern human body was shaped with the invention of a new healthy lifestyle. This turn established the similarly exclusive normative of the "healthy body". As much as buildings and cities were healed, architecture became a healing machine for this efficient, fast, and healthy body of modern man. Siegfried Giedion's publication "Licht, Luft, Öffnung" illustrates this rhetoric. It puts forth the prison as the model for 19th century architecture and contrasts it with the hospital as the essence of 20th century architecture, showing exemplarily hospital and sanatorium projects and housing and domestic architecture following the new aesthetic guidelines of clean and sun-drenched interiors.

How quickly this bold argumentation had become part of the collective subconscious illustrates a scene from Jacques Tati's "Playtime" (1967). In the opening long-shot, the sterile interior waiting hall of a modern public building is introduced. Most of the hints offered, like two nuns and a woman in a white coat pushing along a roll-car with instruments, allude to a hospital interior. Only with time, loudspeaker announcements and a shift in visitors the space presented turns out to be an airport. But the normative quest for a healthy body of architecture turned out to be vicious already much earlier than Tati's ironic comment on the modern

condition. One of Giedion's examples presented in "Licht, Luft, Öffnung" was Alvar Aalto's sanatorium in Paimio, Finland (1929 – 1933), designed to catch each ray of sunlight and detailed down to handles and furniture to heal the body from pneumonia and tuberculosis. Featured in the book is the roof terrace with rows of couches for the popular air therapy. Shortly after this photograph was shot, the terrace was closed down due to the increasing number of suicide attempts of patients throwing themselves deliberately over the railing. Obviously, the healing forces of the healthy body of architecture turned out much weaker than the architects' rhetoric.

At the time of Jacques Tati's picture, the French philosopher and epistemologist George Canguilhem published "The Normal and the Pathological" (1966), a later edition of an essay already published in 1943. Here, Canguilhem argues that the popular dualism of the healthy versus sick body established by medical science has been contradicted by research findings of the very same and that a paradigm shift in the understanding of the human organism is due. Rather than differentiating two different states of a healthy or a sick body, he argues that health is not a condition without sickness, but the way that the organism establishes an order reacting to the diseases. Those diseases are an integral part of the organism, as the crises they provoke stimulate organic life. Along the same line of argument, he also overcomes the distinction between so-called "abnormal" and "normal" people, in as much as he is interested in how far a human body copes with disabilities in order to establish a new order.

The workshop "Beyond Normal and Pathological. Translating Experience" was intended to translate this paradigm shift into architecture design practice. Learning from the different experiences our experts have gained as people with different abilities / disabilities, the team wanted to apply their spatial knowledge and their perceptual practice to architecture and exhibition design in order to turn what society considers a crisis of communication and spatial orientation into a chance to generate challenging architecture for all. A space that makes a blind man "see" Mona Lisa potentially is a space in which we become aware of our own weak sight and establish a new, more active mode of perception. This very brief experiment in design is leading towards an architecture that actively integrates crises to establish new orders.

Each student group was handed out a work of art or an exhibit from one of the Parisian museums. They were asked to translate the various readings of these objects into a spatial installation accessible to all. The teams were strongly supported by our group of experts, Patrick Rööslü, Bernhard Rüdüsülü, Staphan Zappa, and Tristan Kobler.

Turning Spaces

Richard Serra: Railroad Bridge, 1976

Raluca Iulla Davidel , Tobias Klauser, Holger Pausch

How can the rotating space of Richard Serras „Railroad Turnbridge“ be accessible for all? How can a space be turned around the visitors of a museum? The spatial concept introduces mechanisms like airflow, heat radiation and vibration to achieve this goal. Visitors enter white, „neutral“ space but feel a constantly shifting breeze. Following the breeze, they describe a similar movement in space as the moving bridge in Richard Serra's video. The same effect can be reached by moving heat spots, which can be experienced on touching the walls. Thirdly, vibration elements in the floor will reach the same effect.

Richards Serra's „Railroad Turnbridge“ can be translated into spatial experience, without necessarily seeing or hearing the video itself.

The Sound of the Non-Walking Sculptures

Auguste Rodin, The Walking Man

Mireia Constantinescu, Marta Neic, Gerhard Dorninger

The fascination in Rodin's sculpture lies in its ambivalent expression of movement. While obviously putting a great force into moving forward, the sculpture's feet are solidly resting on the ground. This aspect is translated into a spatial installation that questions the normative condition of walking. The sculpture is exhibited in a context of similar pieces such as Alberto Giacometti's "The Walking Man" in a seemingly unspectacular exhibition space. As soon as a visitor enters, his speed of movement is registered and a sound of footsteps is played equivalently. Each visitor receives his/her individual sound. Wheelchair users have the fun hearing their own "footsteps" and being able to manipulate them with their mechanical movement in space. For walking visitors, the individual footstep sounds react to their speed becoming rather irritating, as they will often differ from their own rhythm. Their mode of walking is questioned and they are prompted to adapt to the space.

Feel Me[®]

Wolfgang Tillmans

Claudia Neuber, Sebastian Serban

Next to the photographs themselves, the hanging and installation of the artworks can be translated to be accessible for all. Each photograph is transformed into a three dimensional cube at different scales. The sizes range from a dice to a walkable box. The photographs themselves are placed on the faces of the cubes – not only visual, but also as a 3D translation. Therefore, visitors can feel the photographs with their fingertips or with their whole body, leaning against them, feeling the heat and the depth of the artwork. The cubes are placed in the public realm of the museum in order that everyone maybe be able to experience it. Here, "Access for All" is applied to the social barriers hindering those who cannot afford a ticket.

Flip Inside-Outside

Rolls Royce, Modell 101 EX

Manfred Sponseiler, Grzegorz Zietek

In order to make a car accessible to those that cannot or not yet drive, it seems appropriate to select a car that few of the visitors will ever have a chance to drive at all, the prototype study 101 EX by Rolls Royce. The concept of rendering accessibility to an exclusive space represents a turning inside - out. Entering the exhibition, visitors find themselves lulled into a space padded all around with sound absorbing materials of the car's interior and the smell of Connolly leather. (With small haptic details referring to the finishing of the actual Rolls Royce, like the leather trims.) On second glance, a box occupies the middle of the room. This box is a translation of the car's velocity, its engine propelling two tons into space. On entering, the wind blows into the visitor's face, the right wall glowing red radiates heat on one's chin as the floor vibrates. The more visitors that enter, the weaker the wind blows, the less the floor vibrates, but the glowing increases. In the middle of this dim interior, the visitor might scuff the "Spirit of Ecstasy", a small sculpture translating what he/she is about to experience.

Watching Mona Lisa Watching Me

Leonardo da Vinci, Mona Lisa

Léonard Kocan, Philipp Luy, Marco di Nallo

The project introduces a new spatial arrangement for contemplating Mona Lisa in five different ways. The first space is the “poetic introduction”. Visitors can choose to listen to subjective, very personal descriptions of the painting in different languages. Each description is a unique view of and approach to the artwork. The second space is the “confession room”. Here, Mona Lisa herself is describing her life in the past 400 years: Leonardo da Vinci, painting her, being displayed the first time at the Louvre, being stolen and becoming famous, etc. The following “decomposition room” is playing with the different layers of the painting. Each layer – the foreground, the middle ground and the background – are built three-dimensionally as well as set to audio. Visitors hear the forest, where the sound of wind and the noise of a saw can be distinguished. The river can be heard and finally the heartbeat and the breathing of Mona Lisa. Leaving this sequence behind, the visitors find a relief of the actual painting’s surface which can be touched. The cracks in the dried oil paint are translated in a horizontal surface, people can walk around and touch it. Areas of lighter colour have more cracks and are rough, where dark spots in the painting are smoother and softer. Finally, the visitor will reach the painting itself installed in a dim space. Only one person at a time is allowed to enter, slipping through a heavy curtain. Only a singular light is illuminating the painting. After the preceding experiences, even a blind visitor will be able to feel the special physical presence of Mona Lisa.

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