OFF/ SPACES & NON /PLACES

PHENOMENOLOGY of the GALLERY SPACE

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OFF-SPACES & NON PLACES
PHENOMENOLOGY OF
THE GALLERY SPACE

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ABSTRACT

KEY WORDS:
EXHIBITION DESIGN, SPACE, PLACE, THE WHITE CUBE, ART MUSEUM, ART GALLERY, EXPERIENCE, VIRTUAL REALITY

The present paper deals with the investigation of the gallery space and the white cube as phenomenological concepts. After providing a theoretical overview of relevant philosophical, anthropological, and architectural writings on space and place from the 70s to the 90s, the paper goes on to trace the history and development of exhibition design from the eighteenth century until today. It starts with the salon, the foundation of the first national galleries in Europe, and certain innovations from Germany, such as the period room and the designs of Bauhaus and Constructivism. The second part examines the white cube, as defined by Brian O'Doherty - how it came to be in the 30s with the opening of the Museum of Modern Art in New York; how it mutated in the late twentieth century, and what alternatives current artists and institutions see for it. The final part questions the new possibilities that virtual galleries and the metaverse present for the gallery to see how they can be applied in physical space.

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INTRODUCTION
WHY INQUIRE into the GALLERY SPACE?

DISCLAIMER:

THROUGHOUT THE PAPER, THE TERM EXHIBITION DESIGN IS USED TO REFER TO THE EXHIBITION OF ART EXCLUSIVELY.

THE TERMS MUSEUM, GALLERY AND INSTITUTION ARE USED INTERCHANGEABLY.

Space is the indispensable context of our lives; the manifestation of how we conceive and deal with the world. It is a fluid environment which is as dependent on our actions and perspective, as we are on its hostility, or the lack thereof. It is the medium in which human interactions take place. The gallery space one is a particular spatial phenomenon, as it combines the possibilities for a multitude of quotidian and transcendental experiences. It can be a medium for the consumption of spectacle and diversions; for human encounter and socialisation, but also for introverted contemplation, dissociation, and growth. More than any other, it is a liminal space on the borderline of the private and the public realm. The task at hand is to see what a spatial analyisis of its genealogy can tell us about the different modes of spectatorship and consumption throughout the centuries; the changing dynamics between public and private; the experiences that were sought after, and the current state of affairs. This knowledge can then be used to identify the best practices for the gallery space that is needed in the contemporary world.

The first part of the paper looks at how the topic of space and place has been investigated by thinkers of diverse disciplines such as philosophy, geography, anthropology and architecture. It outlines various conceptions and definitions of space and place, which set the framework for the evaluation of different exhibition design models according to how their spatial environment provokes feelings of presence and agency. The rest of the paper traces the history of the exhibition display. Part I *Before* refers to the period before the white cube model became commonplace and spans eighteen century displays, the foundation of the first national galleries in Europe, as well as particular innovations from Germany, such as the period room and the designs of Bauhaus and Constructivism. Part II examines the white cube, as defined by Brian O'Doherty – how it came to be in the 30s with the opening of the Museum of Modern Art in New York; how it mutated in the late twentieth centur, and what alternatives current artists and institutions see for it, using the example of Sarieva Gallery. Part 3 *After* summarises the new possibilities that virtual galleries and the metaverse present for the gallery to see how they can be applied in physical space.

1/ SMITH

2/ 150

3/ VERGNUST 1

4/ KOECK 56-7

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7/ 66

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9/ PALLASMAA QTD. IN 67

10/ GULDI

11/ AARSETH & GUNZEL 13

Phenomenology is a continental philosophical discipline that studies first-person, subjective experiences of phenomena /the appearance of things/[1]. The phenomenology of space and place is, therefore, the inquiry into the way people as conscious individuals relate to and experience the spaces and places that surround them. Although first developed by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, spatial phenomenology was later elaborated upon by architects, anthropologists, geographers and other social scientists in an attempt to enliven and humanise their fields of study.

Heidegger formulated the notion of *wohnen/dwelling* as the essence of *Dasein* - "being-in-the-world". To dwell is to linger; to take the time to preserve and nurture, but also to spare[2]. What is more, it is not intimate man-made places that are the pre-condition of the habit of dwelling; it is dwelling that prompted us to create places and build environments[3]. Not every place guarantees that dwelling automatically occurs there - it is an intentional product of both designer and inhabitant and what they decide to make room, or space for[4]. In that sense, he was especially critical of modernist architecture's over-reliance on Euclidean space and the resulting simplistic and pragmatic environments, which rarely amounted to more than a "meaningless shell that contains no spaces and no places"[5]. For Merleau-Ponty, *human space* was composed from the concrete and measurable *physical space* of direct sensory experience and the *geometrical space* of indirect intellectual processes, i.e. physical space as mentally conceived[6]. This implies that both sensory and intellectual engagement with space are mandatory for a complete, embodied experience. Such ideas were brought to the world of architecture by Christian Norberg-Schulz, who was inspired by psychologist Jean Piaget's theory that the true essence of space is not the one perceived by the senses, but the one we process intelligently out of sense perception, personal experiences, memories, and emotions[7]. He then went on to propose that architectural space should not be seen as an isolated aesthetic construct, but a as an experiential one[8], meaning that it is not merely its appearance that is makes a passive impression on people, but that their attitude towards it shapes it as what it is. If experiences of places depended on the inhabitant or visitor, then the architect's task became to philosophise "about the world and human existence through the embodied material act of construction"[9].

THE SPATIAL TURN

The "spatial turn" in social sciences describes the rapidly increased interest in the investigation of the man-made environment as a source of meaning in the 70s and 80s[10]. It was pioneered by existentialist philosopher Henri Lefebvre[11] and his opus *La Production de L'space* (1974) that aimed to provide professionals in the fields of architecture and urban planning with philosophical and

12/
SCHOLTE 78

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AARSETH &
GUNZEL 15
KOPECK 55
SCHIELDS 281
SCHOLTE 76,
82-6

14/
CRESSWELL
53

15/
TUAN 6

16/
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QTD. IN
CRAIG 108

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sociological alternatives for thinking about space[12]. He proposed a trialectical spatial model consisting of:

* the *perceptual social space* of everyday life as experienced through the senses by its inhabitants; the space where human life takes place;
* the *physical space* that is epistemologically conceived, conceptualised and designed by planners and architects and which borders on the realm of non-human Euclidean space;
* and the *lived* or *human* space that people engaged with mindfully and imaginatively; it which carries symbolical or representational potential and produces cultural meaning through the arts[13].

Any given space is therefore made up of one or more of these elements. A bare-walled gallery is only a physical space, but it becomes perceptual when an exhibition is arranged and people come to visit. Not all spaces pass above that stage, for even a gallery is no more than a physical space if no one lingers there to contemplate.

SPACE and **PLACE**

The plethora of different spaces was somewhat simplified in Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place* (1977). He is often credited with being the father of humanistic geography, which draws on phenomenology and existentialism, rather than logical positivism in its survey of space[14]. It is his definition of the two concepts that is usually implied when people talk about space and place today. Space is "abstract … undifferentiated" and unbound[16] and has the potential to be "transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning" through intimate experiences[16]. For Michel de Certau place too was practiced space[17] and one might also add situational. These intimate experiences require us to absent ourselves from reason in favour of emotion: "thought creates distance and destroys the immediacy of direct experience," but also to engage in intellectual reflection of said experiences to give them meaning and permanence[18]. Space is, therefore, not so much the characterless shell that encompasses said places, but rather place's primordial form, whose transformation depends on individual choice and individual agency.

NON-PLACES and **PLACELESSNESS**

A year before the publication of Tuan's book, Canadian geographer Edward Relph published his own reflection on space and place as more than abstract concepts. His book *Place and Placelesness* (1967) on the phenomenological basis of geography proposed spatiality as a meaningful element of human existence – a phenomenon of the "lived-world of everyday experience"[19]. He starts by outlining different categories of space, such as:

* *primitive* or *pragmatic space*, which is purely functional and serves biological needs;
* *perceptual space* of immediate needs, actions and emotions;
* constantly evolving *existential space* where members of a culture are socialised and share symbols and experiences;
* *geographical space*;

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31-3

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* the deliberately created *architectural space*;
* the *space of urban planning*, which is the similar to the architectural, but more functional and less focused on creativity;
* *cognitive space* of abstract constructs and;
* *abstract space* constructed in the logical mind[20].

These spaces exist in hybrid forms and create "the context" where places exist as complex phenomena, a network of settings, situations, people, and even other places[21]. The superficial *essence of a place*[22] consists of attributes like its location, appearance, and history, but its true essence is above all in the personal and communal experiences that people have had within it[23] – wether it is a public space shaping and being shaped by a community, or a private space, the relationship with which is as necessary and unavoidable as that with another person[24]. Setting, activity, and meaning make up the *identity of places*[25], which is experienced differently depending on the level of insideness or outsiderness[26] a person has in relation to it. The *existential outsider* is alienated. For him the place is no more than a passive background for his actions, which also goes for the incidental outsider, from whom that happens unconsciously. The *objective outsider* exercises a deliberate disinterest and pays attention only to its measurable attributes. *Insideness* can be experienced *vicariously* when we engage with places on our imagination through art, film, and literature, *behaviourally* when interacting with it, *empathetically* when we deliberately pay attention to its identity, and *existentially* whenever we are surrounded by a familiar environment, carrying the implicit knowledge of our belonging there[27]. These are all individual and subjective experiences, which make places distinctive from one another. This distinction is necessary for places to be authentically experienced, yet it is compromised by mass tourism, mass communication, mass media, and mass consumption. Instead of places, they create superficial and artificial ready-mades[28]. Here, Relph introduces the concept of *placelessness* as the main feature and plight of the postmodern "flatscape" and the mediocre experiences it provides[29]. It occurs whenever certain characteristics of place are exploited, overused, or overlooked; whenever governmental standardisation takes over urban planning; whenever insiders become complicit in the obliteration of place identity by acting as outsiders. The result is the global proliferation of places that look and feel alike, and offer equally boring experiences.

Echoing the way Relph conceptualised place and placelessness, the French anthropologist Marc Augé painted a similar portrait of supermodernity through its non-places. The first part of his book *Non-Lieux* (1995) begins with a description of the excesses of space[30], time[31] and ego[32], characteristic of the supermodern condition and caused by the decline of the grand narratives of human evolution and progress after the world wars. He claims that this has caused us to over-invest the present with meaning, turning it into history as soon as it has been lived. Simultaneously, the modern means of transport have shrunken space, creating symbolic universes of recognition, rather than knowledge, while the experiences of the remote have de-cen-

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34/ 94
35/ 96
36/ 2-3
37/ 4-8
38/ 3-4
39/ 7

tered our way of looking. The individual living through that age aspires to be a world in himself, producing his own meaning and experiencing the world through individualised references. Augé then opposes *anthropological place*, which he defines as "places of identity, of relations and of history"[33], to the *non-places* of passage, circulation and consumption, emptied out of the eventfulness characteristic of existential place. There solitudes, rather than individuals, exist. Places create the "organically social", while non-places create "solitary contractility"[34] by existing through their "instructions for use"[35], either in the form of written or iconographic signs or implicit social norms of behaviour. They enforce a shared identity of anonymity, creating a dissociative experience of a perpetual present in which the individual can be encountered only with another version of himself, becoming merely a gaze. In that sense, non-places can be termed dissociative places. Although at first it might seem that Augé is significantly neglecting a one's autonomy in negotiating his experience of places, as proposed by Norberg-Schulz, for the sake of the argument, what he is essentially trying to tell us is that supermodernity is deficient in spaces for lingering and time to do so, therefore allowing us barely any opportunity to pause somewhere and turn it into place.

Going back to 1967, French post-structuralist Michel Foucault proposed the term heterotopia, crediting the phenomenological ideas of space as a heterogeneous multitude of relations[36]. The heterotopic spaces:

- are present in all societies as sites of passage (primitive sacred and ritual spaces) or sites of deviation (detention centres, prisons, psychiatric wards), i.e. places that you enter to leave changed;
- change their function as society changes;
- encompass multiple representational spaces (stage sets on a theatre);
- have a temporal aspect (the eternity of the archive, the ephemerality of the festival);
- are not freely accessible public spaces, yet not in the realm of the private;
- are a function of perceived space[37].

If utopia is the imaginary version of real social space, then heterotopia lies at the intersection of the two – simultaneously physical, perceived, and symbolic, but existing beyond "all places"[38]. Something of an off-space. The art gallery belongs to precisely this spatial realm. Foucault even explicitly uses museums as an example to illustrate his third and fourth principles, since they collects multitudes of spaces and histories in the form of artworks or artefacts, and goes on to call them "heterotopias that are proper to western culture of the nineteenth century"[39]. Furthermore, in many cases neither the space of the gallery, nor the meaning of what's stored within are openly accessible. When they are, the impact they have made on the visitor is what determines the quality of the experience. It is a desirable outcome to exit it a different man. And, as it will be made evident in the following chapters, the art museum has gone through as many transformations as society has.

PART I / BEFORE

FIG.1
CABINET OF
CURIOSITIES

The TOPIC SPACES of EARLY ART EXHIBITIONS

1/
ALOI

2/
BRISTOW

3/
O'DOHERTY
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4/
AARSETH &
GUNZEL 23

5/
KLONK 32

6/
24, 46

7/
O'DOHERTY
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The cabinets of curiosities [fig.1] that began appearing in aristocratic homes during the Italian Renaissance can be considered the earliest precedent for the emergence of private art collections and exhibitions[1]. These mixed assortments of fine art and natural, exotic, artificial, and scientific rarities, served as a signifier for one's wealth and social status, an expression of one's taste and character, and were used to entertain guests. Paintings and sculpture were displayed side by side with antiques, taxidermies, fossils and relics in arrangements, the scale of which ranged from a single furniture cabinet to an entire room. The rational and scientific shift that came with the Enlightenment era in the seventeenth century[2] led to the compartmentalisation of the displayed objects according to their field of knowledge, which could be a factor that influenced the emergence of separate collections for fine art.

The private art collections of the eighteenth century reflected a similar view of art with paintings hung like trophies in massive multi-tiered arrangements, whose golden frames blended with the decorations of the room, covering the windows and the walls from floor to ceiling, and creating a space entirely constructed by images [fig.2]. The same went for the other main type of exhibitions at the time - those of art societies and art academies, the prime example being the Parisian Salons -"a place with a wall, covered by another wall of pictures"[3]. This resulted in somewhat of an Aristotelian topic space, rather than a Foucaultian heterotopia. This was antiquity's dominant spatial concept, according to which the divinity of the cosmos did not allow for the existence of empty (godless) space[4]. Just like topic space was a mere vessel of all things divine and mortal, so too were the early art galleries barely more than containers of objects. In terms of design, both kinds of exhibitions were usually top-lit and the walls were painted in grey or olive shades of green, considered to be the ultimate neutral colour of the time[5].

The sheer overabundance of displayed works and the resulting sensory overload, coupled with the distance imposed between the spectator and paintings made it impossible for the individual merit of each piece, artist, or national school, to be accented or even perceived. That was unnecessary according to Klonk, who suggests that such exhibitions served instead the socio-political purpose of imposing the cultural dominance of the aristocratic classes, clinging to their wavering political power, while simultaneously highlighting the superiority of the Italian masters and domestic examples that matched the most[6]. This hierarchy was partly realised through the picture's placement on the vertical axis and scale. Artworks near the ceiling and floor were in an underprivileged position, the latter at least being easier to see, while the first sometimes placed tilted to compensate for the distance[7].

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KLONK 21

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161

Paintings epitomising the classical ideal of art[8] were usually the largest and stood out like landmarks or monuments. In that sense, masterpieces benefited by this type of display, since their presence was in part highlighted within an array of less valued artworks for scale and comparison. O'Doherty points to perspective to propose an alternative justification for the crowded hang. The easel picture in its thick frame is a "self-contained entity … a portable window"[9], making any further separation between the paintings of display obsolete and allowing for "pictures to hang like sardines"[10]. If we look at the display as a landscape and the paintings as its constituents, the experience of the eighteenth century spectator parallels the place-creating experience described by Tuan:

… place is whatever stable object catches our attention. As we look at a panoramic scene our eyes pause at points of interest. Each pause is time enough to create an image of place that looms large momentarily in our view. The pause may be of such short duration and the interest so fleeting that we may not be fully aware of having focused on any particular object; we believe we have simply been looking at the general scene. Nonetheless these pauses have occurred. It is not possible to look at a scene in general; our eyes keep searching for points of rest.[11]

Therefore, in spite of the totalising, undifferentiated display, it was still singular works that unlocked the potential for a meaningful experience.
With time, collections grew and extended over multiple rooms, which brought the necessity for buildings dedicated entirely to the displaying of art. Those buildings eventually became the first national galleries.

FIG.2
TYPICAL 18th CENTURY DISPLAY

The NATIONAL GALLERIES and the PERFORMANCE of CITIZENSHIP

1/
KLONK 43

In 1793 the royal art collection of Revolutionary France was expropriated and the Louvre became the first national gallery in Europe[1]. The proliferation of such institutions, the modes of spectatorship they allowed for, and the evolution of exhibition design that followed were influenced by the ideals of the newly formed nation-states and Romanticism and coincided with the appearance of novel spaces for consumption.

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BEECH IN RUF & SLYCE 196

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CORRIGAN QTD IN MILES 102

5/
QTD IN KLONK 27-8

6/
TUAN 177

The art museum became more inclusive. While the private collections could seldom be visited by people outside of the owner's own social circle and the entry to the annual fairs was paid, the national galleries of the nineteenth century displayed the same works free of charge, making the experience and ideals housed within available to a much wider audience[2]. Furthermore, the resituating of paintings from the private to the public realm enhanced their importance[3]. Along these lines, the setting up of shopping arcades and department stores, too, led to a "democratisation of luxury"[4]. Both gallery and market allowed visitors to divert themselves by strolling leisurely, enjoying the pleasure of gazing at luxury, without the obligation to purchase. In *Das Passagen-Werk* Walter Benjamin assigns such spaces where utility is substituted for symbolic value (commodity fetishism) to the "realm of phantasmagoria" and compares the massed artworks in a museum to commodities in a market – enticing, yet elusive, arousing in the viewer the feeling that "a share in them must be his due"[5].

FIG.3
THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

Initially, the national galleries looked like the salons but major ideological differences between the two models come up at a closer look [fig.3]. First, the collections of the early national art museums fostered a sense of nationhood. Instead of demonstrating an aristocrat's wealth, the national collections of foreign art, a share of which the citizen was supposedly entitled to, visualised the state's wealth, which inspired a feeling of national pride and voluntary identification as a citizen. Domestic art, on the other hand, was like an encounter with the state itself. A country is a vast concept, but looking at painterly depictions of the natural landscape, historical scenes and folklore motifs, made it somewhat graspable. Thus, the relatively abstract idea of the state was transformed into a "place – and indeed a person"[6]through

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FOUCAULT 7

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KLONK 44

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BRITANNICA

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KLONK 37-40

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QTD IN
KLONK 29

15/
BENJAMIN 5

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19-22

17/
QTD IN
KLONK 31

the foundation of accessible national art museums. Finally, this "perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time" in the form of historical works from different regions in the "immobile place" of the national gallery, brought it closer to the realm of heterotopia[7].

With the emergence of this citizen consciousness, the national gallery acquired a new social role as a "public arena for the display of respectable citizenship"[8]. Romanticism, which was the dominant cultural movement at the time, acknowledged humans' potential to develop as unique and moral individuals, and art as the expression of such individuals' character[9]. The contemplation of art would likewise contribute to the refinement, education, and personal development of the citizen of the nation-state[10]. An aesthetically sophisticated member of society is a discriminating consumer, who challenges artisans and industrialists to produce goods of higher quality, which makes a country's exports more competitive on the international market[11]. The new emphasis on the importance of individuality also served to revise the art canon in favour of cultural and stylistic diversity[12]. Artworks were re-evaluated according to their contribution to the development of a nation's style and ability to tell the history of its progression.

This shift from a purely aesthetic to an educational and cultural museum experience was facilitated through a decluttering of the exhibition space and a reconsideration of the wall colour, light source and painting position. In England, architect William Wilkins and art historian John Ruskin advocated for bringing the pictures closer to the eye of the visitor and allowing enough space for them to be viewed on their own and in their entirety[13]. Charles Eastlake, keeper of the National Gallery in London, insisted that "Every specimen of art in a national collection should, perhaps, be assumed to be fit to challenge inspection, and to be worthy of being well displayed"[14]. This reflects another drastic change in the understanding of art, which anticipated what Benjamin called the loss of "the aura" in the age of mechanical reproduction[15]. The pieces brought closer were stripped of their divinity, and from objects of awe became objects of scrutiny. According to O'Doherty, the spreading out of the works was a natural consequence of Impressionism, whose blurry atmospheric landscapes [fig.4] and shallow diegetic space dissolve traditional perspective and suggest the presence of space beyond the edge of the frame, demanding additional area to stand out as self-sufficient objects[16].

FIG.4
IMPRESSION, SUNRISE
-
MONET

The reduction of the display revealed empty space, making the question of wall colour relevant. Eastlake, who had translated Goethe's work on colour perception *Zur Farbenlehre*, asserted on the importance of a complimentary wall colour – "brighter than its darks and darker than its lights (...) contrast well with its brighter colours"[17], in bring out the qualities of a painting. This ideal colour turned out to be deep-red, rather than olive-green. The paintings of the old masters, like Rubens and Caravaggio, had yellow high-

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19/ 36

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lights and blue shadows, which made red the mid-tone, while the golden frames harmonised with its the deeper shades [fig.5,6][18]. The rejection of multi-tiered displays uncovered the windows as well, which allowed for the paintings to be naturally lit from the side, mimicking the conditions of their creation in the artist's studio[19]. Cabinet paintings began to be displayed under such conditions, at an angle to the window, while big top-lit rooms were kept for large paintings[20]. However, the single-row hang did not become commonplace until the early twentieth century.

FIG.6 ->
RUBENS ON GREEN
VS RUBENS ON RED

FIG.5
RED WALLS AND SINGLE-ROW DISPLAY
AT AN OLD MASTERS' EXHIBITION, 1888

FIG.7
PERIOD ROOM BY
WILHELM VON BODE

STAGED DWELLING in the MUSEUMS of the WILHELMINE ERA

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KLONK 55

2/
60-63

Unlike their British counterparts, the two camps of museum directors in Germany ended up rejecting the ideas of the museum as an arena of respectable citizenship and the "representational character of public institutions"[1]. They sought to turn the exhibition spaces into private retreats from urban life, dedicated to the introverted and intimate contemplation of art. Following a new understanding of the aesthetic experience as a "projection of people's inner states onto objects", they experimented with the use of colour and the appropriation of interior design trends and the staging of domestic settings in order to convey the meaning of artworks in an immediate and emotional, rather than rational manner[2]. Such an approach anticipates Heidegger and Tuan's thesis that spending time in a space to make it a place of dwelling is the precondition for intimate experience.

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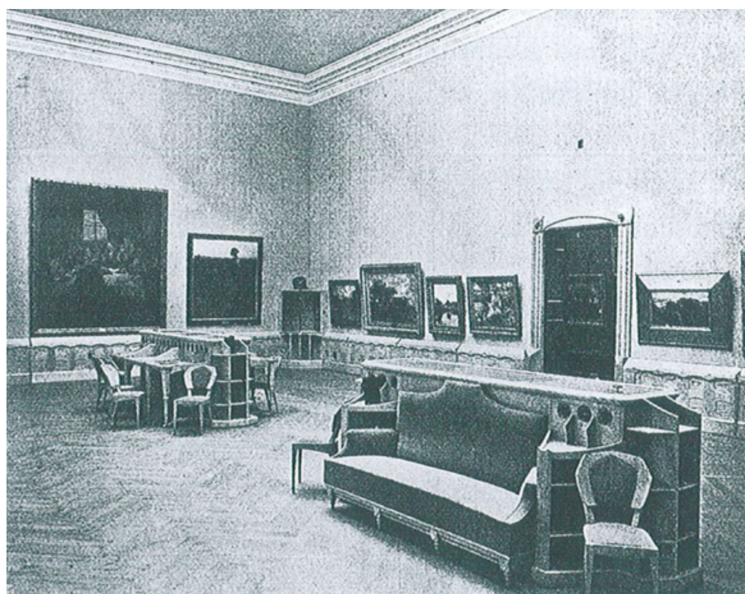
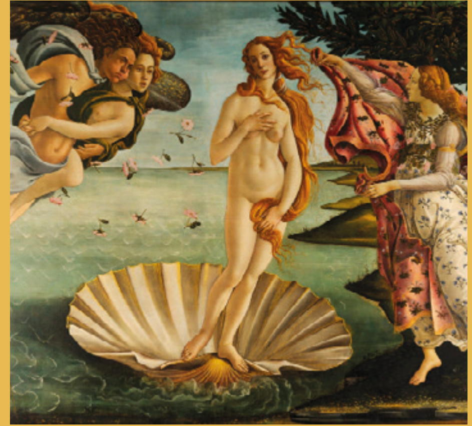
The Nationalgalerie was founded in Berlin in 1876 with dark-red walls and rich decoration[3]. The museum's director at the time, Wilhlem von Bode[4] was against the storage-space effect of the multi-tiered display and began experimenting with the integration of home decor and furnishings from the Renaissance and the eighteenth century, that were common in the interiors of art collector's houses. He later moved away from the period room" model [fig.7] and paid more attention to the use of colour and texture to bring out the formal qualities of paintings, turning the room itself into an artwork. He was succeeded by Hugo von Tschudi[5] in 1895, who continued to draw on contemporary tastes, rather than psychological theories. He introduced a single row hang and striped silk tapestries in pale yellow and green, that were already popular in interior design, and light or reddish wood panelling. As an advocate of Impressionism, he used colour to evoke associations with nature for an emotional effect. What was problematic about both's work was that it relied on visual codes decipherable by the upper classes only. Assuming that only the educated upper classes with purchasing power had the aesthetic sensibility required for appreciating art, their designs drew on subjective taste, rather than more objective and scientific theories of perception. In that sense, their designs failed to create a different experience for visitors from other classes, who felt no more at home than they would when visiting a private collection in a royal residence.

Directors on the opposite camp also treated the exhibition space as a private dwelling, but appealed instead to the bourgeoise to broaden the museum audience[6]. Alfred Lichtwark[7], who became director of the Hamburger Kunsthalle in 1886, emptied the corridors and confined the displays to rooms, where visitors could contemplate in peace. These rooms were decorated and furnished to match the historical period of the works, while the colour schemes represented the region of origin. To improve the lighting conditions, he used broad high-placed, instead of French, windows that lit the walls, but not the floor.

FIG.8
DISPLAY
BY LANGE
v

His work was built on by Konrad von Lange[8] in Stuttgart, who paid attention to the walls and played up the domestic scenes [fig.8] by commissioning interior designers. He preferred wallpaper to paint, since texture complemented the pictures, and used colour that evoked the cultural or thematic aspect of paintings, while. When working with classical works, he relied on intense backgrounds that either contrasted with the dominant colour, making it stand out, or complemented it, thus creating a sense of unity between multiple works. Modern art, which lacked a distinctive





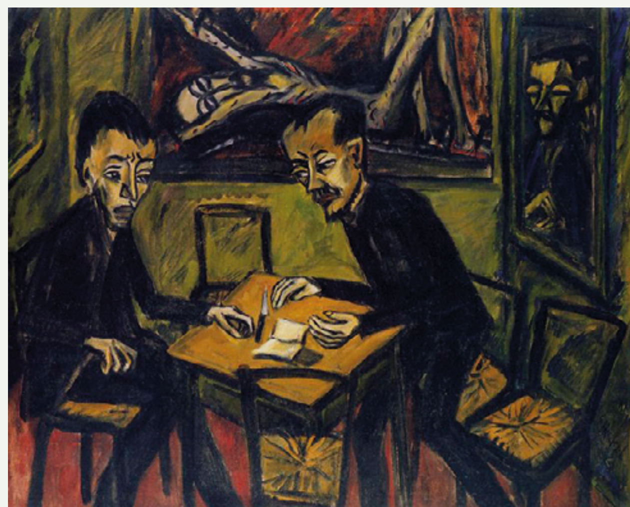


FIG.9
SAUERLANDT'S COLOUR CHOICES

colour, was instead shown in rooms with neutral walls and heavier decoration to compensate.

Ludwig Justi[9], on the other hand, criticised interior scenes for being distracting, but used rich decoration none the less. While directing the Städelschen Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt in the early 1900s, he went a step further than Lichtawark by separating the halls and hallways with drapes and decorating the rooms in various colours, turning each into a distinguishable experience. Most notably, he paired two-toned yellow wallpaper with Impressionist works and textured green with Renaissance and Classic ones. The display scheme was influenced by the Vienna Secession - paintings were hung low and aligned to the top or bottom, rather than the centre. Franz Xavier Baier describes something similar when defining what he calls "life-space" - a person's inner world, consisting of "fragmentary spaces, each with its own and different structures, systems of measurement, and orders of values"[10]. In that sense, Justi's approach might have been the most successful to produce a place, as it engages the human psyche by mimicking it.

FURTHER APPROACHES to COLOUR

The subsequent artistic movement of German Expressionism brought new uses and interpretations of colour in displays. Artists like Wassily Kandinsky associated blue with masculinity and spirituality; blue-black with sorrow and introspection, and preferred them as backgrounds for their works[11]. When refurbishing the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg, Max Sauerlandt colour-coded the exhibits according to historical context to convey best the Lebensgefühl /livelihood/ of the age - dark blue for the religious Middle Ages, golden-yellow for the joyous Renaissance , red-brown for the splendid Baroque, sea-green for the fragile Rococo, and white to counter the strong colours of Expressionism[12] [fig.9]. It is interesting to note Sauerland's intention of also adding smell and sound to create a truly immersive olfactory experience[13] Likewise, Bauhaus member Hinnerk Schepper at the Folkwang Museum in Essen, paired white or dark with Expressionist, but purple with Impressionist works[14].

ALEXANER DORNER and the LIVING MUSEUM

Dissatisfied with the storehouse feel of the art museum as a mausoleum of "eternal values and truths"[15], Dorner envisioned instead a sort of living, future-oriented institution that focused on cultural evolution and progress and the production of meaning[16]. To achieve this, he wanted to breathe in new life into the works of the classical cannon by displaying them in the Atmosphärenraum /atmosphere room/[17] [fig.10]. Somewhat echoing Bode's period room and Sauerlandt's practice, the objective of the atmosphere rooms was to educate the visitors implicitly by generating a strong emotional response, while at the same time explicitly informing them about the progressive history of artistic styles through reading materials like guide books and wall texts, that addressed them directly as individuals[18]. By combining colour, music, light and historically accurate represen-

9/ 67-70

10/ IN FEIREISS 87

11/ 91

12/ 94

13/ LOSCHKE 32

14/ KLONK 95

15/ UCHILL 65

16/ 54,64

17/ LOSCHKE 25

18/ 28,35

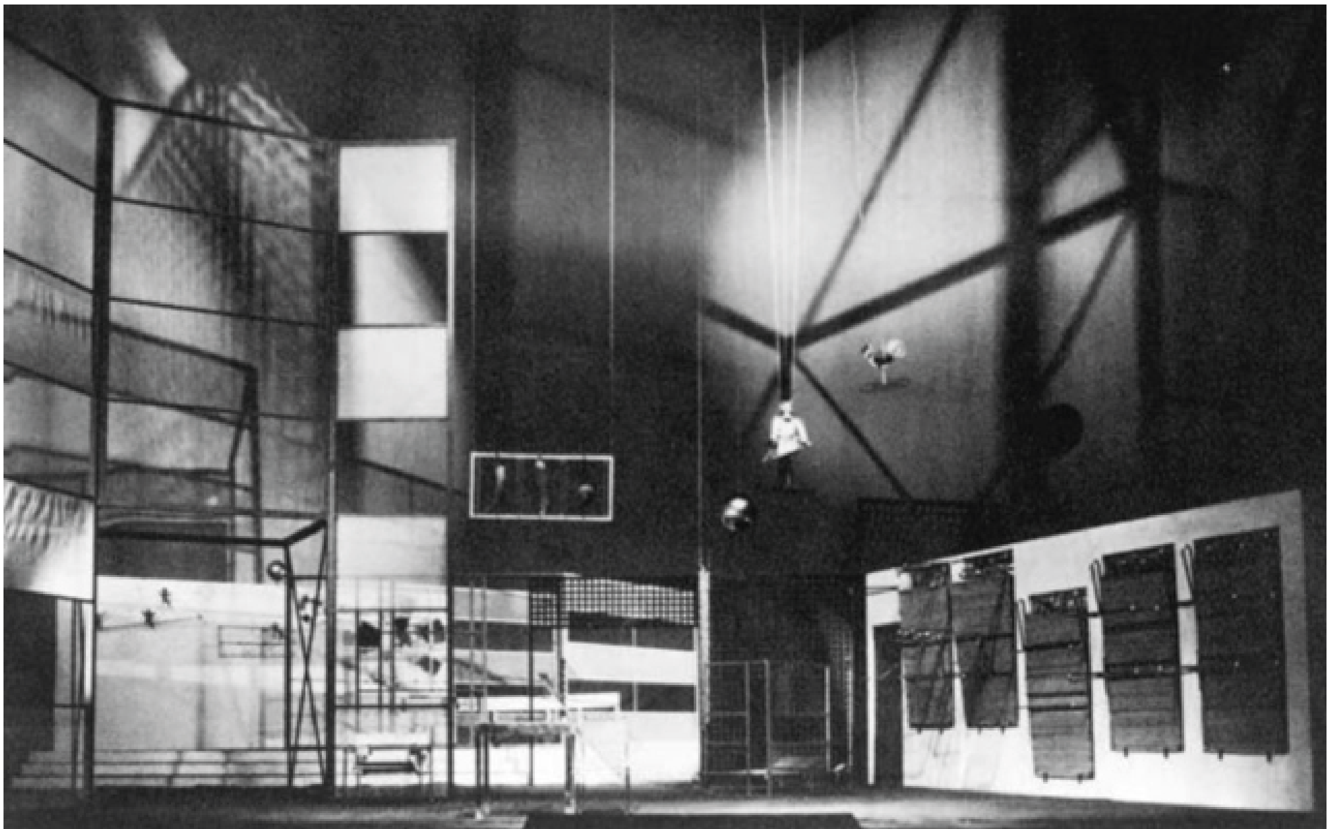


FIG.10
ALEXANDER DORNER AT THE LANDESMUSEUM HANNOVER, 1929

19/ UCHILL 54

20/ LOSCHKE 30

21/ 26

22/ RAJCHMAN

23/ QTD IN UCHILL 51

24/ LOSCHKE 29

25/ 28

26/ 35

27/ UCHILL 54

tations of exterior architecture[19], Dorner sought to simulate the Raumbild /spatial conception/ of the art period in question[20]. This emphasis on the space, rather than the object as carrier of culture[21] defined the active subject experiencing space, instead of the passive spectator onlooking at the object as the focus of his installations[22]:

You are no longer a member of an audience in a theatre,
seated before a stage, but are situated right in the middle,
urrounded on all sides by space[23].

His vision was partly realised in the Landesmuseum Hannover during the 1920s, where he hung the self-contained, deep-spaced worlds of the Renaissance works in window-like frames on white and grey walls, which reflected their geometrically sober spatiality[24]. Conversely, Dutch and Flemish works were almost de-framed by the choice of minimal brown and black frames, which appeared to extend the painting's diegetic space onto the dark brown wall. The colour scheme changed from room to room, where works were hung individually to grant the viewer a 1:1 encounter with each[25], while the door openings were covered with curtains in the colour of the coming room to create a sense of continuity and foreshadowing[26]. Unlike Bode, Dorner did not aim at historical, but conceptual accuracy, and instead of turning the museum into a simulated dwelling for its visitor, he tried to turn it into a place for art to live. Like other practitioners before and after him, though, his ambitions relied on the isolation and elimination of the external world[27].

MODERNISM and EXPERIENTIAL SPACE

1920s-1930s

1/
1

2/
SHERRY

Foucault suggested space was the "great obsession" of the twentieth century, as opposed to time /history/ in the nineteenth[1]. The disillusionment of the aftermath of the First World War was defined by the rejection of the values of the old world order and an escape from the pains and disappointments of history[2]. In exhibition design, this spatial shift was already observable in the German directors' engagement with the design of the display rather than its content; with the current environment, rather than the historical object. The next generation of exhibition designers, however, reversed the emphasis on introspective individual and placed society at the centre of the spectacle. Furthermore, galleries had to adapt to frequently changing temporary exhibitions and became more flexible and standardised. It also appears to be the last time interior design trends had a major influence on the gallery. What came out was the introduction of white walls and flexible floor-plans, which created less intimate and more collectively oriented experiences.

Modernist and Bauhaus architects' new conception of built space favoured functionality, minimalism and openness over personality, ornamentation and inwardness [fig.11]. One of the most vivid expressions of this was the widespread use of white, which quickly made its way from homes to galleries. It gained popularity because of its functional advantages and its symbolism. For Kasimir Malevich, white denoted the infinite spiritual space beyond reality[3]. El Lissitzky also saw it as a symbol of free-flow and dynamism, contrary to black, which he interpreted as static [4]. Architect Le Corbusier used it to create more fresh, simple and pleasant interiors[5]. In 1919 Ludwig Justi became the director of the expropriated Kronprinzenpalais and turned it into the first museum for contemporary art museum, i.e. for the works of living artists[6]. The floor dedicated to Modernism was redecorated with bare white walls, mimicking the conditions of the modern homes the artworks were meant to decorate. A couple of years later, the Neue Gemäldegalerie in Dresden was the first to display historical works on white, indicating on the one hand curators' fading concern with tailor-made environments for different styles and periods and the rejection of grouping works by such categories on the other[7].

FIG.11
BAUHAUS INTERIOR BY MARCEL BREUER

BAUHAUS and **HODOLOGICAL SPACE**

Starting in the late 20s Bauhaus members began designing "discursive"[8] spaces for temporary exhibitions, focusing on interactive elements and addressing the spectator as a member of a rational collective[9]. The space was organised in a way that certain pathways, viewpoints and lines of thought were encouraged, but not imposed, giving visitors the freedom to "negotiate the space"[10] and their position in it. An example is the 1927 Werkbund exhibition [fig.12] designed by Lilly Reich in 1927. There she used white, flexible walls, thus opening up space in which the audience drifted through, as instructed by signs and infographics[11]. The first gallery to work primarily with flexible screen walls was the Hamburg Kunstverein for temporary exhibitions, which opened in 1930 and was designed by Bauhaus architect Karl Schneider[12]. This abundance of paths is the condition for what psychologist Kurt Lewin called *hodological space*, as opposed to the mathematical Euclidean space of pure lines[13]. Philosopher Otto Friedrich Bollnow describes this version of life- or human-space as defined by the option to choose one "distinguished" path among other less desirable ones, and to alter its course, should circumstances change[14]. He believed that humans identify with the space they are surrounded and are not simply affected by it, but feel truly human and alive only when experiencing unity with it[15]. It is the room for personal agency provided by hodological spaces, which makes them experiential. Conversely, the spatial organisation of the exhibitions of the nineteenth century, which allowed for more or less a single

3/ KLONK 120

4/ 121

5/ 95

6/ 99

7/ 124

8/ 108

9/ 112

10/ 110

11/ 111

12/ 123

13/ AARSETH& GUNZEL 28

14/ BOLLNOW 185-6

15/ KOECK 58

path to be taken, brings them closer to the realm of mathematical space, making them a hostile ground for natural, embodied experiences, in spite of their cosy interiors.

EL LISSITZKY and **TÄTIGKEITSRAUM**

El Lissitzky, above other constructivists artists, conceived a holistic exhibition space as an arena for collective interaction. He frequently employed mobile structures, protruding elements and backgrounds whose colour depended on the position of the viewer. One of his most notable experiments was the Kabinett der Abstrakten [fig.13], commissioned by Alexander Dorner [16], first installed at the Landesmuseum in Hannover. In order to see the full display, visitors had to reveal paintings behind sliding frames, turn blind windows and get actively involved. Since revealing one item hid another, the viewer's experience relied also on the actions of the ones before him, reflecting Lissitzky's utopian views of sophisticated individuality through conscious interdependence[17]. The cabinets also borrowed formal elements like shapes and colours from the works displayed in them, fusing exhibit and exhibition in one. Although designed for the display of others' artworks, his installations can be seen as a precursor to the artist interventions and room-filling installations from the 60s onwards. O'Doherty speaks of Constructivism as an agent of the collaging of the gallery space[18] of which Lissitzky's rooms might be a most prominent example, as they are in a way collaged from the paintings inside. This broke open "the autonomous, sacred space of the artworks's organic material"[19] and likewise the gallery's. In phenomenological terms, the interactive display created a *Tätigkeitsraum* – a space of action[20], which occurs whenever man is engaged with meaningful activities within it. It is defined by the presence of what Heidegger calls 'ready-to-hand'[21] objects that belong in the given space both presentially and contextually, and are linked with other objects through meaning[22].

16/ KLONK 117

17/ 119

18/ 45

19/ BARRAGAN & STANISZEWSKI 71

20/ BOLLNOW 193

21/ QTD IN BOLLNOW 194

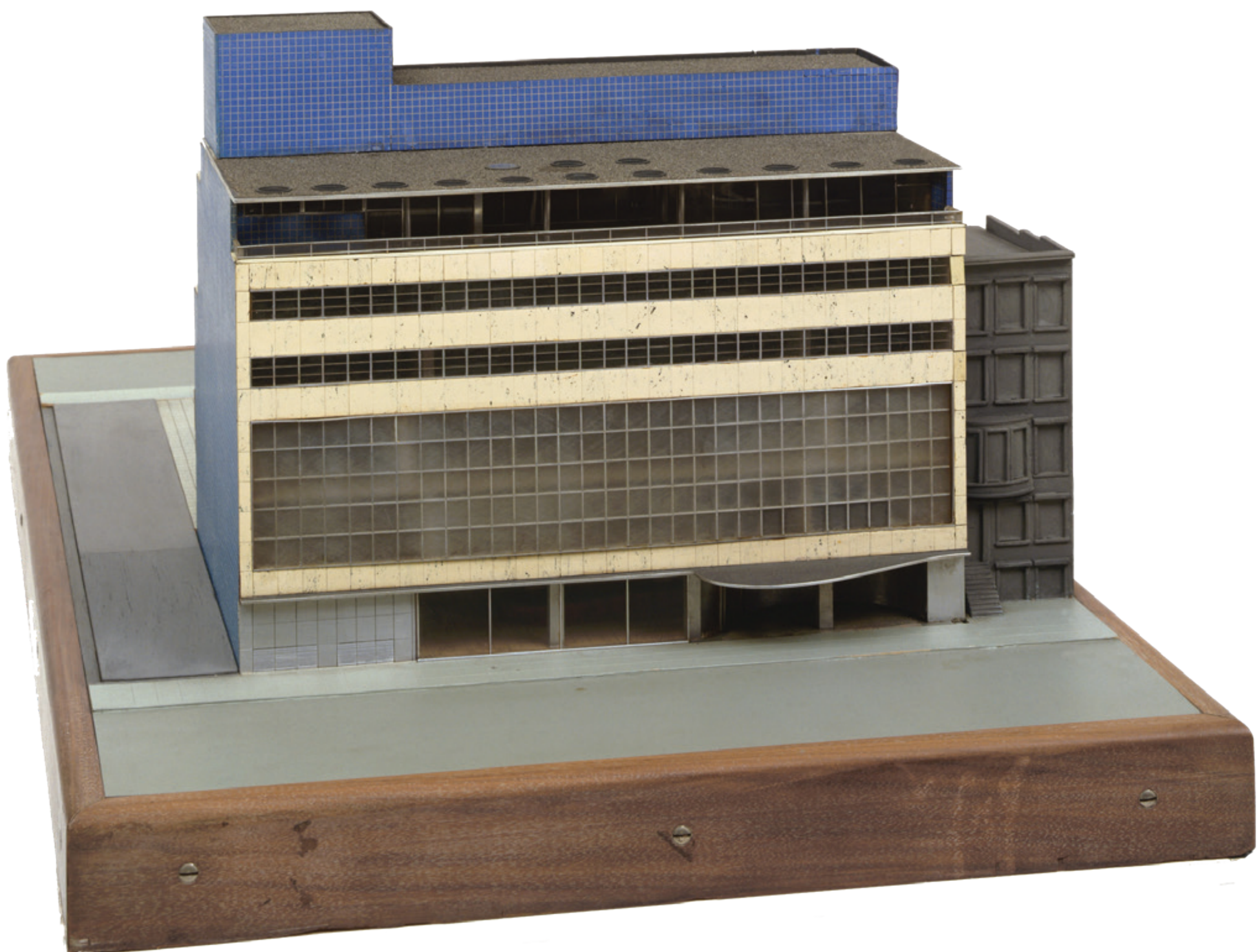
22/ 195

FIG.12 WERKBUND EXHIBITION BY LILLY REICH ↓

FIG.13 -> KABINETT DER ABSTRAKTEN

PART II / / THE WHITE CUBE

FIG.13
THE GOODWIN AND STONE BUILDING
SCALED MODEL



MoMA and the BEGINNING of the WHITE CUBE

1/ KLONK 135,137

2/ 136

3/ KLONK 150; OUROUSSOFF

4/ BARRAGAN & STANISZEWSKI 66

5/ KLONK 136

6/ BARRAGAN & STANISZEWSKI 67

7/ KLONK 138

8/ 144

9/ RICCIOTTI 50-2

10/ OUROUSSOFF

11/ KLONK 148

12/ KLONK 147; RICCIOTTI 55

13/ QTD IN RICCIOTTI 57

The Museum of Modern Art /MoMA/ was established as an educational institution in 1929, with Bauhaus-influenced Alfred H. Barr as its director[1]. Sponsored by businessmen and industrialists, fighting to re-enliven the consumer society of Depression-era New York City[2], it marked the fusion of the art world and the capitalist market. It also aimed to propel American art forward by educating artists and audience alike with the most innovative and sophisticated examples of Modernism[3]. Through his innovations in display and arrangement, Barr is credited with the introduction of the white cube model, which essentially still dominates the standardised contemporary gallery interiors[4].

The first exhibition of its collection opened in 1929 in an office space[5]. Works were hung individually on eye-level in front of light plaster walls and beige fabrics, which somewhat concealed the unfit space[6]. It was later moved to a townhouse with white walls, which was subsequently stripped of its decoration to become a mere container for an exhibition of Cubism and Abstract art, complemented with educational wall texts and charts[7].

MoMA moved to its permanent location in 1939[8]. Designed in the International Style by Philip L. Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone, the modernist building [fig.13] and its glass façade not only provided an immense area for storage, display, and human flow, but above all reflected the institution's ideals and goals of being at the forefront of modern art and culture and bringing them closer to people, in a manner privileging lightness and volume over mass[9]. This is apparent from the very entrance of the museum. Unlike the older museums modelled after palaces and accessible only from grand stairs, the MoMA building's revolving street-level doors[10] allow immediate entry, making its collection and values seem attainable. Next, visitors are welcomed at the reception [fig.14], providing information, merchandise, and tickets[11]. This element originating from office buildings interiors was a novelty at the time and anticipated the convergence of museum and store that arrived with the museum shop in later years. From then on the monotony of the multiple floors of purely-functional, undecorated, white rooms was broken up by full-height mobile partition walls that could be rearranged, creating different route options and sub-spaces within the narrative of the exhibition[12] [fig.15]. Interestingly, the ceilings were rather low, which kept an element of domesticity in the otherwise imposing institution. Director of Painting and Sculpture William Rubin ascribed that to the nature of modernist paintings, which were created with the collector's home rather than the museum's display in mind, and were consequently smaller in size than their classical counterparts[13].

14/
BARRAGAN &
STANISZEWSKI
66

15/
LOSCHKE 32

16/
O'DOHERTY
15

17/
BARRAGAN &
STANISZEWSKI
73

18/
MANN

19
"MACHINE ART"

According to art historian Mary Anne Staniszewski the spaced out display on light background relies on an idealised notion of the autonomy of the artwork to communicate without the aid of juxtapositions or emotional stimulus like colour and an idealised notion of the autonomy of the viewer to grasp it[14]. Dorner criticised this autonomy for being discernible to art specialists only and, therefore, unsuitable for the general public, that needed more input to understand the works[15]. The artificially clean and isolated environment is ahistorical and deceives the spectator into taking the eternality of the artwork for granted: "Art exists in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of "period", there is no time"[16]. The resulting apolitical and timeless space, or the illusion of it, becomes the condition for passive reception, Auge's pacified gaze; neutrality leaves no space for questioning.

You can hang whatever you want,
but I will depoliticise it straight away[17].

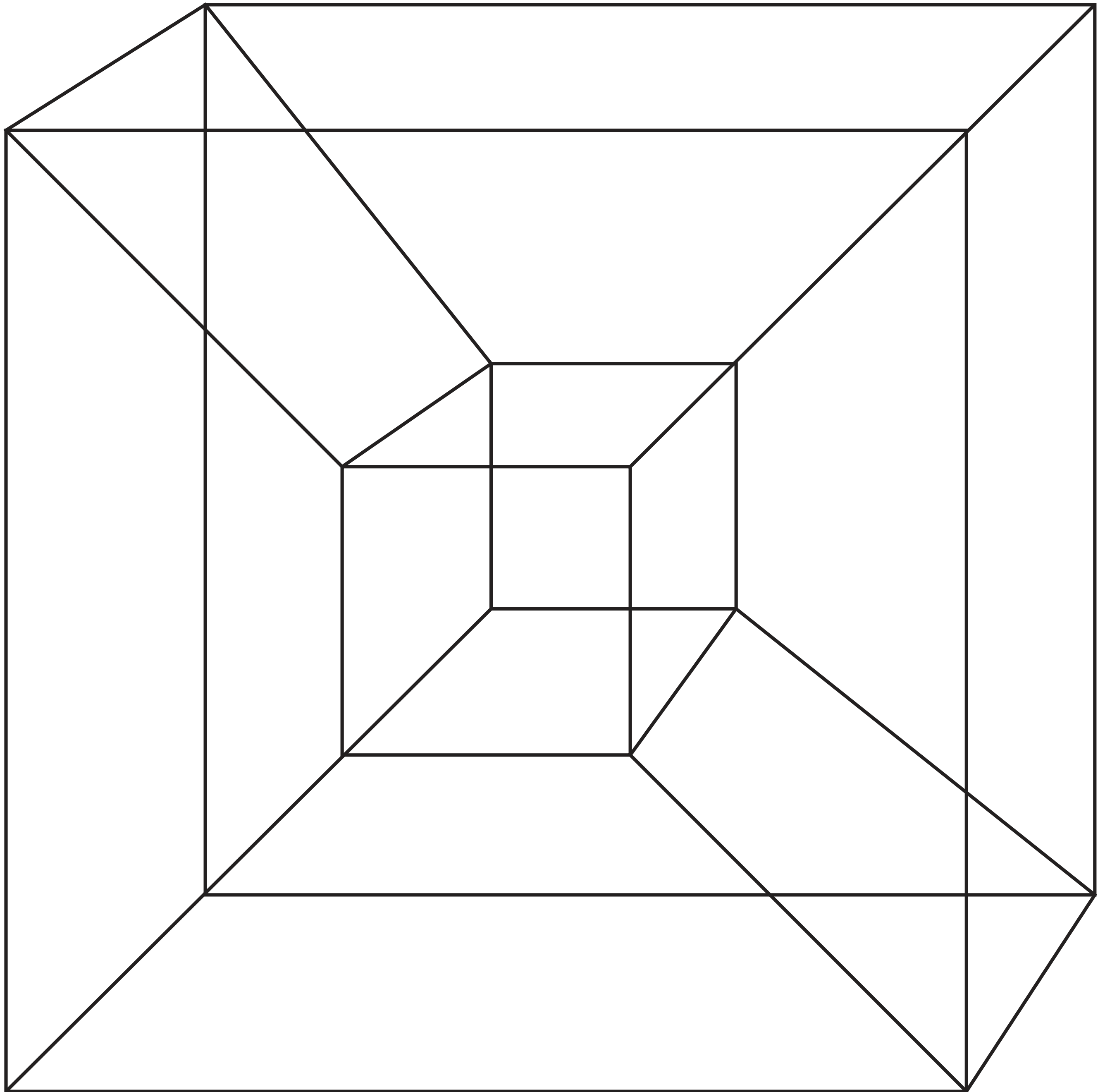
Moreover, such totalitarian, one-size-fits-all, manner of exhibition expels character and originality by pronouncing all as equal before the white wall, thus jeopardising the above-mentioned autonomy of the artwork's message, its unique voice. The standardisation of the white cube context and its universal implementation eventually turns it into the sine qua non and arbiter that legitimises and frames art as such. This is anticipated by Marcel Duchamp's readymades[18], exemplified in Philip Johnson's Machine Art exhibition that presented machinery and consumer products like sculptures in the MoMA[19], ironised by Warhol, and is still a important discourse in today's conceptual art scene.

FIG.14
MOMA
RECEPTION DESK

FIG.15
"ART IN OUR TIME"
EXHIBITION

STARCHITECTURE and the WHITE TESSARACT

FIG.16
TESSERACT



1/ GEOMETRY: 4D ANALOG OF A CUBE; MERRIAM-WEBSTER

With time museum buildings became radically ambitious in their exterior, at the expense of the already standardised and austere interiors - a collection of white cubes hidden behind a striking facade, resulting in what can be termed “the white tesseract”[1] [fig.16].

2/
BARRAGAN &
STANISZWSKI
73

3/
KOOLHAAS IN
RUF & SLYCE
120-1

4/
QTD IN
MILES 93

5/
SOKOL &
MAFI

6/
MOORE

7/
MOORE

8/
93

9/
103

10/
MOORE

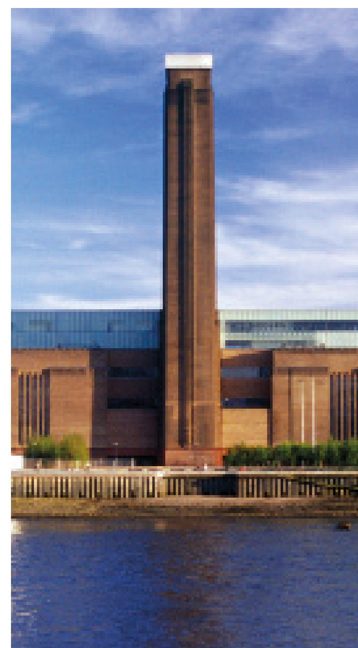
11/
"ABOUT"
12/
KLONK 196;
MILES 93;
MOORE
13/

These structures trump the white cube not only in size, but also in the brightness of the whites and the further physical separation and isolation of the art pieces[2]. Unlike the white cube, the white tesseract is more often than not driven by the values of the market economy[3] and its character is closer to that of a franchise or consumer attraction, rather than an educational or cultural institution. To borrow the definition of the perfect art museum given by businessman and former director the Guggenheim Thomas Krens, it is "a theme park with four attractions: good architecture, a good permanent collection, primary and secondary art exhibitions, and amenities such as shops and restaurants"[4].

It is therefore no coincidence that the extension of the Guggenheim in Bilbao [fig.17], designed by Frank Gehry in the late 90s[5], is the prime example of the boom in museum starchitecture. Established in an agreement between the Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation and the royal office of Spain, the erecting of a mesmerising museum under the renowned brand's name and curatorship was meant to improve the profile of the industrial Basque county[6]. The following boom in tourism, media coverage and global recognition came to be known as the "Bilbao effect" – the transformation and cultural commodification of a downtrodden town thanks to cultural investment and spectacular architecture[7].

It is also an example of what Relph called "other-directed architecture"[8] and "futurisation"[9], both of which are inauthentic attitudes to place-making. The stunning building is meant to be photogenic and appeal to tourists, rather than the local population, and even Gehry[10] admited how the spaceship exterior was in stark and unpleasant contrast with the surrounding industrial area. Yet the institution fell short of its goal of "unsurpassed … integration of art and architecture"[11]. The white interior appears even more sterile behind the overwhelming exterior, while the sheer size of the gallery rooms overshadows the art[12]. For architect Steen Elier Rasmussen "architecture means shapes formed around man, formed to be lived in, not

FIG.17
GUGGENHEIM
BILBAO



10

14/
FEIREISS
19,24

15/
KLONK 203

16/
OUROUSSOFF

17/
KIMMELMAN

18/
KLONK 206

19/
109

20/
200

merely to be seen from outside"[13], while the Gehry building achieves quite the opposite, demonstrating how the white tesseract fails in the basic architectural task of utility. In an attempt to reconcile the human dimension of the visitors with the inhuman dimension of its architecture, Andrea Fraser's video performance on the seductive nature of starchitecture's transcendental illusion Little Frank and His Carp (2001) [fig.18] engages directly with the museum environment, by caressing the atrium's curved walls as instructed by the official welcome audio, which culminates with a corporeal encounter that is equal parts ironic and erotic[14].

In 2004, MoMA was renovated and extended by Yoshio Taniguchi[15] as a "monument to 20th century values"[16]. The new display favoured a historically hierarchical approach, with works and styles going back in time as the visitor goes up the floors in a "Darwinian climb toward the canonical works of early Modernism"[16]. This in stark contrast with Barr's future-oriented educational mission and could even be considered regressive if it wasn't for the staircases and overpasses around the central atrium that allow the viewers to glimpse masterpieces from different sections simultaneously as they move through the building, drawing unexpected parallels[17]. Furthermore, the works take on a second role as landmarks and roadsigns according to which the visitor has to orient himself, which accents their individuality and truly puts them in the centre of the experience. Like in the Bilbao Guggenheim, the transitional areas, "as inviting as an airport concourse" [17], ended up being the most monumental and space-consuming parts of the whole building. This privileging of non-places, emphasised by the substitution of temporary enclosures of partition walls with empty rooms for room-filling, site specific installations[18], encourages a fast-paced viewing experience in which it is easier to grasp the overall triumph of modernism, rather than give individual qualities of the works that the visitor only rushes by.

Tate Modern's just as impressive building [fig.19] is housed in a former power station in central London, whose industrial brick façade was kept intact by architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron[19]. Thus, the gallery is entirely integrated into the surrounding area, preserving its historical character and sense of place, and avoiding the alienation of locals in the name of sensationalism and spectacle. The old turbine brick and steel hall traversing the entire building is used for unprecedented installations, that are truly site-specific due to the nature of the space. The otherwise remaining bland and white interior is broken up only by the irregular sizes of the rooms. This is partly compensated by the unconventional thematic arrangement of the artworks, which encourages multiple personal viewpoints, instead of tube-feeding the visitors with a single historical narrative[20].

FIG.19 <-
TATE
MODERN,
LONDON

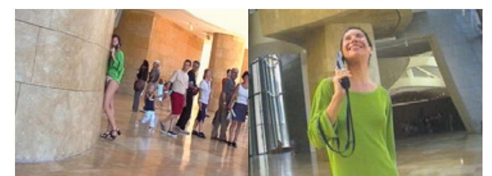


FIG.18
ANDREA FRASER
LITTLE FRANK AND HIS CARP

FIG.20
ANDY WARHOL
INSTALLATION AT
FERUS GALLERY
LOS ANGELES, 1962

1/ SCHOLTE 88

2/ IN RUF & SLYCE 120-1

3/ RUBIO QTD IN SCHOLTE 50

This exhibition context created a new relationship between art and the interior of the gallery housing it. The analysis of historical examples until the foundation of MoMA revealed how the dominant artistic style of the period was a decisive factor in the design of exhibition spaces. However, in the age of the white cube and its mutant brother the tesseract, it is the art that has to either conform to or overcome and subvert the boundaries and conditions of the predetermined environment of its display, turning it into a "lived environment"[1].
Fellow starchitect Rem Koolhaas has commented on this phenomenon by saying that the contemporary art museum "creates an art that needs to feel justified in the enormity of these spaces … overwhelming and … triumphalist, and on a scale that can only be appreciated, almost, from a kind of adoring position"[2]. It has also given rise to numerous "unruly objects"[3] that engage in institutional critique. One particular manifestation of this is installation art.

4/
SCHOLTE
41

5/
88

6/
KLONK 189

7/
190-1

8/
SCHOLTE
44

9/
45

10/
KLONK 194

11/
FEIREISS 107;
KLONK 194

12/
FEIREISS 110

The first wave of artists' installations in the late 60s and early 70s[4] emerged in a dissatisfied response to the commodifying and depersonalising neutrality of the white cube[5] and the way its curators displayed their works[6]. This, along with the advance of conceptual art, marked the shift in the curatorial role from designing to writing and the spectator's role from viewing to reading. In 1962, Andy Warhol opened his first solo show, which compared the meaninglessness of the gallery experience with that of a supermarket. He displayed his Campbell's Soup Cans on shelves like items for sale in a store [fig.20], while his retrospective at the Whitney Museum 10 years later criticised the spectator's absent gaze by covering the walls with the image of a cow's head that stared at the visitors just as dully and obnoxiously as they stared at the art[7].

Other site-specific interventions, much like Lissitzky's, employed the possibilities of the space as a "constituent for the artwork's meaning"[8] and encouraged visitors' active exploration of the space by not simply looking, but being surrounded by the art[9], sometimes even venturing into a phenomenological investigation of space and place. Artist Ilya Kabakov has coined the term "total installations" for such artist-created environments that absorb the spectator with their imaginative use of space while simultaneously alienating him with their overt artificiality[10]. Yet the commercial success of such works discloses a widespread need among the public for "a space of experience that is deeply sensual and immersive … but at the same time less real"[10]. One of these artists is Olafur Eliasson.

FIG.21A
LINERGING SPECTATORS
-
THE WEATHER PROJECT (2004),
OLAFUR ELIASSON,
TATE MODERN

For his site-specific installation *The Weather Project* (2004) [fig.21a,b] he constructed a massive sun at the Tirbine Hall of Tate Modern, that visitors lingered under for hours, in spite of the highlighted artificiality of the work[11]. Based on his vision that "Art does not only exist in reality, it creates reality" ("Future Nows") he later founded the Institut für Raumexperimente (2009) at the Universität der Künste in Berlin as an unconventional art school[12], demonstrating the value of the interaction with the spatial environment for artistic creation. His works emphasise on how important it is that people sensitise their spatial capacities, to nurture their sense of place

13/
126-7

14/
15-17

15/
BROWN

as Tuan would put it, in order to turn passive consumption, thinking, and reception into active engagement and creation of meaning in and of the world, while staying critical of the ways spatial structures like commodification and commercialisation can desensitise us and deprive us of a healthy relationship with how we practice space in our day-to-day lives[13]. He was also part of Lukas Feireiss' curated program of exhibitions and events under the slogan Space is the Place (2018–2019) at BNKR – current reflections on art and architecture in Munich, focusing on artistic practices that "turn spaces into places"[fig.22A,B][14]. For the 2021 edition of Art Basel, Eliasson flooded Foundation Beyeler's pond and removed the building's glass facade, allowing the water and wildelife inside[15]. The things we guard the strictest are usually the most fragile and in that sense his intervention exposed the fragility of the white cube and what it entails by stripping it of its protective structures and filing it not with objects of eternity, but wtih the ephemerality of nature instead. Although the methods and outcomes of such space-shaping and place-making works are as diverse as they are numerous, it is debatable wether the viewer experiences space or art in a novel way or they are better dismissed as just another form of passive entertainment and diversion for the society of the spectacle.

FIG.21B
THE WEATHER PROJECT (2004), OLAFUR ELIASSON, TATE MODERN

FIG.22A
LIFE (2021)
OLAFUR ELIASSON
FOUNDATION BEYELER
ART BASEL 2021

FIG.22B
LIFE (2021)
OLAFUR ELIASSON
FOUNDATION BEYELER
ART BASEL 2021

FIG.23
SARIEV
CONTEMPORARY

FIG.24
FUTURE
UNFORGETTABLE
PHASE I: IN DEFENSE
OF SOLID MATTER
/SARIEVA GALLERY

FIG.25
COOL S
CVETOMIRA BORISOVA
/SARIEVA GALLERY

1/ BARRAGAN & STANISZEWSKI 73

2/ "ABOUT"

3/ O'DOHERTY 8-9

4/ COOK

To remain contemporary, that is to say current, galleries and institutions are learning to dispose of the elitist rhetoric of the white cube by finding new ways to "permeate the social landscape"[1] in a less and less formal manner. While working on this thesis, I had the chance to witness one such transformation at Sarieva Gallery (formerly Sariev Contemporary), where I was doing a residency. Established by mother and daughter Katrin and Vesselina Sarieva in 2004, it is the most internationally reputable Bulgarian gallery, representing the likes of Nedko Solakov, Luchezar Boyadjiev, Pravdoliub Ivanov and Martina Vacheva[2].

Vesselina describes Sarieva as a "gallery situation". Until 2021, this situation was that of the white cube. The 3.80x3.80x3.80m space [fig.22] was strictly sealed off from the outside world with white plasterboards, that obstructed the view from its glass storefront. It started its radical metamorphosis with the *Future Unforgettable* (2021) cycle, during which the plasterboards were removed one by one, revealing the authentic colour and texture of the load-bearing walls [fig.23]. A few months later, the front panel was partially destroyed for an exhibition [fig.24] and will be completely removed in the context of another one. The final stage will be the removal of the glass façade, which will literally open the gallery up, allowing it to breathe the world in and fuse with the street [fig.25]. The juxtaposition of the battered walls with the otherwise clean floor and ceiling, and the organised chaos of the mixed display makes one feel like in an abandoned building and a construction site simultaneously. The word situation implies timeliness, which is incompatible with the white cube's claim to eternity[3].

Space + situation = place.

By allowing itself to openly disclose its ongoing process of constructive deconstruction, Sarieva becomes a living and breathing environment; its own site-specific installation, transcending the white cube model.

For a while now artists and art professionals have been repurposing or straight-up guerrilla taking over abandoned locales, making no attempt to conceal their signs of ruin, while others have deliberately included industrial and worn-out elements in their interior decorations[4]. The appeal of such spaces indicates the desire of people on both sides of the gallery experience for more authentic and informal exhibition settings. Perhaps for many these ageing, worn-out places that wear are a much needed refuge from the otherwise placeless urban environment, much like German museums from the early nineteenth century sheltered their visitors from the hectic industrial town.

5/ "TOGETHER AGAIN"

6/ "THE SKY"

7/ 6

Yet, Vesselina's motivation to gut out her gallery is more than a trendy aesthetic decision. Sarieva has always been committed to facilitating a dialogue between art, institutions and visitors with satellite activities extending beyond the gallery's container, as exemplified by the Phase V of the *Future Unforgettable* exhibition and event cycle, which questioned the role of the institution in light of the post-pandemic expansion and deconstruction of cultural space and "the desacralisation of the institutional establishment"[5]. A running metaphor throughout the symposium was the carpet as a place of gathering, later realised as an exhibition gesture in Phase VI[6] [fig.26]. Traditionally the carpet was a reproduction of the garden, and as Foucault points out when explaining the 3rd principle of heterotopia, gardens, especially in Persia, were once sacred spaces, symbolically containing places from all over the world in the form of plants[7]. It is a place for informal, barefoot, intimate encounters, and in the context of a gallery space becomes an invitation to dwell, meet, and exchange. The horizontality implied by the carpet is the antithesis to the obsession with growth for growth's sake and the example Sarieva Gallery is trying to set.

FIG.26
SARIEVA HUB:
CABINET ART ADVISOTY,
SARIEVA GALLERY
ARTNESCAFE

FIG.27
HAND-WOVEN KOZYAK,
RUDI NINOV
FUTURE UNFORGETTABLE
PHASE VI
/SARIEVA GALLERY

PART III / / AFTER

FIG.33
RADIOHEAD
THE KID A MNESIA EXHIBITION

VIRTUAL EXHIBITIONS and REAL WORLD POSSIBILITIES

1/
PAUL 7

The first wave of virtuality's intrusion of the art world came with the digital revolution and the arrival of the World Wide Web in the 90s[1]. The need for non-physical spaces during the lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic led to the second wave, when big and small players alike were prompted to seek alternatives.

PHYSICAL to DIGITAL

The majority of the virtual galleries can be roughly divided into two groups: those displaying digitalised physical art and those displaying purely digital art[2]. The first kind operates more or less following the same principle as the vanity gallery, whose conventionally attractive space can be rented for a substantial fee by anyone, regardless of the conceptual and formal qualities of the artworks. Websites like Artsteps, Ikonospace and Kunstmatrix provide customisable templates for web-based, 3D showrooms [fig.27] against a monthly subscription or a one-time purchase. Prices range between $180-1000 depending on the capacity (50 to 100 works) and design. Ikonospace also offers 3D recreations of real places and virtual reality experiences. A formal analysis of the interior design of these space might help reaffierm what artists and audience feel is lacking in the average gallery, like natural light for instance. But overall they present just an idealised image, freed from technical and financial limitations, and in themselves are not capable of suggeting what is needed for a truly novel experience of spatiality. Ikonospace's VR experiences, however, are noteworthy for their potential for exhibiting historical works. *At Liebermanns'* [fig.28] reconstructs impressionist Max Lieberman's destroyed home and atelier and shows how 3d modelling and VR can be used for the creation of truly immaculate and unrivalled period and atmosphere rooms.

FIG.28
ATLAS WEB GALLERY ON IKONOSPACE

FIG.29
AT LIEBERMANNS' IKONOSPACE VR EXPERIENCE

2/
VAZ IN
XR PANEL

3/
VAZ IN XR
PANEL

DIGITAL to DIGITAL

The second category is usually associated with the metaverse. Digital artist Dhiren Dasu describes the metaverse as a "consensual group hallucination," but in more simple terms it is a virtual world where users can purchase and exchange virtual goods like land, wearables and NFT art against virtual currencies[2] and communicate with others in real time through their avatars. One example is the Ethereum-powered, Minecraft-reminiscent, "user-owned" Cryptovoxels [fig.29], where users can purchase a plot of land and build it up as they please. As of May '22, users have created 490 galleries, 105 banks, 84 sandboxes, 82 theatres, 81 clubs, and 584 other spots. If the metaverse is a utopia where users project their ideal vision for the world, this reveals not only of the art world's interest in the possibilities of the metaverse, but also of the art spaces' significance for a fully fledged urban experience. Arium and Spatial are two other platforms for artist-created virtual exhibition spaces, but unlike the Cryptovoxels' cartoonish galleries, theirs fuse sleek architecture with dreamscapes [fig.30].

The above-mentioned examples are all deficient in the same respect. For all their beauty, virtual worlds that stick too close to the familiar one are

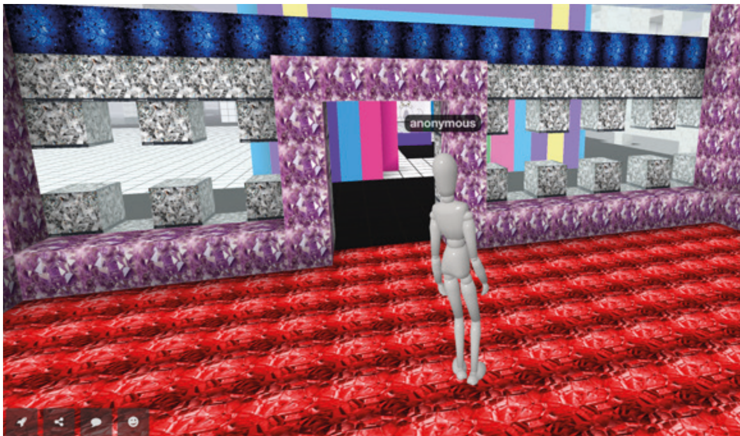


FIG.30
STOIC'S DISPENSARY
CRYPTOVOXELS

FIG.31
PIPILADILATADA
ARIUM
↓

FIG.32
CTM
CYBERIA

4/
"CYBERIA"

always underwhelming in their inability to match up to reality. Their relevance is that by addressing the structural and institutional barriers of the physical art world, metaspaces have the potential to improve them [3]. But not all virtual exhibitions take space so literally. Berlin's CTM festival made the most out of the lock-down by launching its exhibition as the immersive multiplayer virtual *Cyberia* (2021) [fig.31], "in search for the imaginative, expansive, and permeable possibilities of online spaces"[4]. The otherworldly environment by Lucas Gutierrez featured the works of 15 digital-based artists spread out into psychedelic rooms connected with portals, making it impossible to predict what comes next, which captivates the attention and intention of the player. Strikingly, it is the accompanying sonic environment by Elvin Brandhi that compensates for the non-presence of the player, making it easy to surrender to the digital experience. Likewise, Radiohead's digital museum, *The Kid A Mnesia Exhibition* [fig.32] is a spatially absorbing virtual experience, thanks to the music. Although its various rooms are analogous to reality, the ghostly soundtrack creates a sense of place that is often impossible to feel in an equivalent physical environment. The virtual space itself begins to feel like a living organism as one spends time there. This turns out to be inevitable, as the whole architecture is time-based. Instead of surrendering itself at once, the virtual exhibition space requires the player to linger until something happens, thus gradually making her identify herself with the space.

For now VR technologies and their availability remain a promise to be fullfilled, but the door for upgrading the gallery with what is already at hand, too, remains open. What would produce new modes of spectatorship is not the digitalisation of the physical (virtual equivalents of real galleries), but the physicalisation of the virtual. Looking towards the future is easy. The real challenge is engaging with the rpesent.

CONCLUSION
ART is the PLACE

1/
AUGE 35

A comparative analysis of the given historical examples reveals one constant trend, which is the going back and forth between modes of exhibition creating non-places for what seems to be private contemplation and passive reception, and approaches that aim at creating a social experience an active involvement. But that would be an oversimplification. The eighteenth century exhibition was above all a social space, but one focusing on public performance, rather than the communication of art. The Wilhelmine exhibitions on the other, hand imitated private space, where both setting and art create a meaningful experience without the active involvement of the spectator. The white cube offers a mixture of both, a non-place that most clealry communicates art to individuals through its "instructions of use"[1] in the form of wall-texts and handouts at the expense of its austere setting; yet this clear communication sometimes requires our passive reception. Participation there is active only in so far as it requires a fast-paced tour, since like any other non-place, what the white cube does best is rushes you onwards from one sampled experience to the next, at the cost of actual engagement, that would require one to linger. The white tessaract though, entails a social element, due to its main existence as a tourist attraction, but does not necessarily make the experience more meaningful, as the theory section might suggest. What they all have in common is the idea of shelter. One shelters art from the percivable passage of time; the other shelters man from the requirements of the chaotic external world, and the emptiness of everyday life. And although O'Doherty ascribes the expulsion of the external world to the white cube only, all shelters entail exactly that. If the outside world is a space of constant action, than perhaps the rigor with which spaces of supposed passive spectatorship are judged as necessarily bad should be reconsidered. The examination of the different spatial experiences outlined in the theory section proved that meaningful and existential expe-

riences of places are above all a matter of personal agency, while dissociative non-experiences are not forcefully imposed on anyone. Therefore, spaces that allow for a voluntary surrendering to a certain level of passivity are necessary for a healthy experience of twenty-first century urban life. As to the social element, if today's galleries focus too strongly on becoming a social arena, they risk devaluing the art within as a mere decoration to the gathering, like it was in the eighteenth century.

Going back to the topic of space, contemporary phenomenologist Franz Xavier Baier proposes his own definition of lived space as the immaterial “interior space”[2] of the inner world that a person is always bound to inhabit[3]. This space is produced by the act of selective perception in which we either admit and store a certain environment, or dismiss it as a mere part of the world around us[4]. It is attitude and perspective, therefore, that reveal space as a “living context”, as place, rather than a container “concealed by or own lifelessness”[5]. He goes on to say that in:

lived space, entire situations can become walls
... People can be keys. Texts become windows ...
Life-spaces have windows in which
‘the rest of the world appears.’[6]

And so artworks, too, can become extensions of the inner world, a subspace within as long as we actively engage by the simple act of perceiving creatively. With this proposition, the question of the spatial relationship between gallery and visitor, art and beholder is rendered in the most simple terms possible. Indeed, the gallery turns out to be an off-space, simultaneously of and out of this world, consisting of a multitude of places in the form of artworks. This realisation redirects the whole experience, putting the art at the centre as the place to be visited, not the gallery. This is the true meaning of an art piece’s autonomy, which strips away the gallery space, the white cube, of its omnipotence as the sole arbiter of what is art, and what is not. For art happens when our gaze recognises it as such, not when the gallery wall frames it.

2/
IN FEIREISS 91

3/
95

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APPENDIX
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