

THE ADVENTURE OF ARRIVING

Ausstellungskatalog APON ARRIVALS. SPATIAL EXPLORATIONS.
(curated by Margit Neuhold) | MCA – Malta Contemporary Art 2010

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The conscious perception of space is a basic prerequisite for engaging in one's fashioned and constructed surroundings. Yet, what is space? In his book *Der ästhetische Imperativ* Peter Sloterdijk discerns a pertinent notion of the world which also gains relevance as an apprehension of space:

'Being—in terms of being together—implies a quadripartite relation as it identifies someone's existence with someone else and with something within something. This formula describes the most basic mandatory complexity necessary to generate a concept of the world. As a matter of course, architects are strongly involved in this approach due to their conspicuous competence in expounding the overall context of being in the world. For the architect being in the world means being in a building. First of all, a house is indeed nothing but a three-dimensional answer to the question of how one can be together with someone else and something within something.' (Sloterdijk 2007: 260)

The conscious, active perception of space—which according to Sloterdijk proves to be a plexus of relations in which one can gain sensual and cognitive experiences—essentially encourages different approaches towards, and interpretations of, 'space'. An important element to consider is that one has to fathom, comprehend and consider space beyond prevailing conventions in order to extend models of thought and action.

Investigating and exploring space requires spatial perception. To arrive in a space requires actively taking possession of it. Arriving goes beyond being physically present in terms of geographic situatedness. Cognition implies more than recognising a momentary, obvious reality, a situation. Spatial appropriation implies more than being aware of and able to apply the mandatory codes.

Space either plainly exists, is made available or needs to be annexed, which, in fact, constitutes the most genuine form of spatial appropriation. To 'enspace' oneself presupposes continuously being within and beside oneself, an interplay of taking part and distancing oneself. An essential relation therein is that between intro- and extrospection, as taking up these alternating positions constitutes the essential method of spatial exploration. Spatial exploration entails pushing oneself to the limit, fathoming that limit or, otherwise, drawing lines that are, however, oftentimes blurred—borders one may touch upon quite unexpectedly by experiencing them, by making limit-experiences. We experience limits not only in concrete material terms but also in relation to our own bodies, our senses and our minds—outward and inward barriers. These experiences interface with our affiliation to space and hence in a way also with our affiliation to the notion of arriving.

Therefore, recognising a spatial scheme does not merely hinge on our mental faculties. We much rather have to reconnect factual knowledge to life as such, to our daily routines and to actions we perform in space. Factual knowledge has to be enriched with experience in order to be fathomed, spatially interlinked and comprehended. Spatial perception in particular is based upon this encounter of intellect and experience. Cognitive understanding of spaces incorporates a high degree of physical 'body' knowledge which can only be gained from experience as well as from touching upon and transgressing borders.

The perception of space is linked to one's immediate experience of space, for such a kind of involvement enables us to reexperience spaces, to perceive them anew and thereby rethink them or consider them differently. Our experiences arise from touching and striding through spaces; they originate from actively using space yonder of regulations and conventions as we are guided by sensations, sentiment, memories and an awareness of internal as well as external conditions. Perpetually assuming new and different positions within a space, which equals constantly changing perspectives, allows for us to re-examine spaces in terms of top and bottom, of rhythm, dimension and proportion, with regard to materiality, to the visible and the invisible as well as concerning openings and dead ends. Such a body-centred, perceptive coming to grips with space may be understood as an investigation into being in the world, which vitally contributes to forming identity as well as concepts of it.

Working with as much as on what we come upon by chance, in conjunction with what we bring along, causes for unforeseen yet nonetheless intimate moments of varying density to arise. Those moments—in the form of objects, actions, images, installations, words or sentences and things, all capable of shifting, abolishing or newly constructing spatial borders in places one would not have expected them—put a new complexion upon the space itself. Moments which present alternative readings of what is usual, ordinary and mundane. Moments of deciphering.

These moments are blueprinted by way of perpetual correlation between inside and outside, through establishing internal structures that are mirrored on the outside as well as through comprehending external relationships which at the same time support the internal structure. Despite the relation between subjective perception and objective fact not being clearly discernible, the apprehension of this interplay which at first appears rapt in chaos ultimately generates a superordinate matrix, a procreative rhythmical principle; a principle into which the forms that emerge inscribe themselves and where they evolve into a vibrant whole. The interface between action within space and space itself comes to be a system of identification and reality.

Spaces and identity are a pair of terms whose correlative components shape one another without an explanation of this interdependency being quite possible: how we understand space depends on the identity of the subject, while the space, in turn, has an effect upon what evolves to be 'identity'. "Being a subject at the same time always implies being within a space". (List 1999: 210 ff)

Identity in the sense of recognising affiliations of sorts ultimately always poses a question of being identical—however, what with? There must be something to explore in order to identify with it, as architects explore space. Their involvement with space, with how to design and model it in conjunction with spatial effects is in fact their profession. Exploring space in the context of arrivals, which have been delineated as a possible way to determine identity, may hence by all means be considered an architectural strategy (see Klug 2009).

In one way or another, every discipline concerned with identity construction employs a spatial idea that takes effect on various levels. This is not least due to space as a general concept being employed to help us understand our world. What is essential for such a spatial concept is the reciprocal effects between various different perspectives, and thus also attitudes, which allow for different readings of spatial as well as of identity concepts. It is especially a performative approach towards space, and towards a spatial notion as conceived by Peter Sloterdijk, which forms identity. Time is bound, stories are being told. That which is wanted and mundane is redesigned and enhanced in the true sense of *per formare*—i.e. to shape all around.

The performance establishes contact with social, spatial, temporal and personal conditions. It builds upon a comprehensive, attentive sensual perception of what we come upon, of a situation. It originates in reflecting on this perception in terms of space-time constellations. Performance is conditioned movement in a likewise conditioned space-time constellation. It is forming work which develops out of a crude sensuality into a conscious self determination. The performative act hence follows a generative principle of ordered improvisations, the analysis of a narrative structure which corresponds to the spatial syntax. It is a mixture of getting involved and interfering with space in which one takes an active part. That is a condition in which one starts evading velocity and hence in a way also the respective principle effectively inherent in the system—linear time. It is a condition in which deceleration takes place, which at the same time triggers a process of internalisation determined by space.

Such a performative, explorative way of working with space, with a place, with what we come upon encompasses a movement towards the fringes of a system, towards its boundaries, where the inscribed ordering principles start to oscillate and threaten to slip into chaos; failing every-day rules, so to speak; moments of wonder, of uncertainty, exceptional situations. Exploration of space. It is in these very spots, in these neutral points where nothing stirs any longer or as of yet; it is there that things may come into being, things that suggest directions, generate possibilities for motion, offer thought models. It is not until this realm has been reached that the actual process of arriving starts, the search for identity.

As for arrivals one will thus have to depart from a conventional idea of space based on definitions such as length times width times height, floor, walls and ceiling. Instead one will have to get involved in a spatial model of taking effect; a spatial model in which space is conceived as an intensity, in which space does no longer merely appear but can and does actually do something. Yet what questions do we pose to space when we get involved in it? Or does getting involved in space not much rather imply facing up to the questions posed by a space? We are most likely faced with a corresponding principle, a reciprocal attempt at giving respective answers in order to ultimately reach responsiveness. This corresponds to modelling one's own form as well as that of the space itself. The results are models of a no longer or yet unknown reality. A communicative exchange of such a kind goes far beyond the possibilities of verbal communication. It is a form of communication which engages our sensual intelligence, thus forcing us to reconsider the notion of consensus, aloof from laws, rules and regulations. One hence gains the competence to develop spatial concepts and in part also architectures which do not aim at *identifying things* and spaces, as is the case in rational, linear thinking, but at *de-identifying* them; spaces that imply a *distraction or abduction* of identity, a *distraction or abduction* of being (cf. Baudrillard 2002: 75). Spaces allowing us to step out of what we are used to, of the mundane, of what our own identity rests upon; spaces that challenge us and therefore give us the chance to scrutinise our actions and doings, to examine them and turn them upside down in order to resume a different or possibly even a similar position afterwards, to discover a new or forgotten reality.

However, in any case we have to let ourselves in for an adventure in order to even get a chance to arrive somewhere, as already implies the Latin root of the word itself— 'adventare', to arrive. It is a curious combination of childlike curiosity and actual addiction that has us embark on a journey of discovery into space as well as into ourselves. The adventure is a challenge that emanates from an enigmatic and mysterious attraction as well as relation between us and space, us and that which we chance upon; an attraction sustained by an unyielding tension.

In this fashion spatial exploration is inscribed into adventure with adventure per se being spatial exploration. From adventure emerges a space which does not prescribe a direction. The only thing we ought to expect in the space of adventure is the unforeseeable. That is what we have to brace ourselves for, what we focus all our concentration on; react, integrate and interact. In this ever adventurous correspondency between human being and space, the latter keeps reconfiguring itself over and over again. Depending on the level of liveliness and on how it is used, space obtains ever new settings and formations. Tightness, vastness, density and emptiness are essential parameters in defining the configurations that unfold as space is invigorated. People who move through a certain space, who structure, fill, section, articulate, stimulate and substantiate it, thereby also set free its ambiance and moods, which find expression through its atmosphere. Those parameters are decisive as to the how a place is being employed and takes effect.

Getting involved with and in a space means to acquaint oneself with the language of that place, that space, of that which we come upon. It implies that we develop a way of reading a space as well as familiarising ourselves with it; we have to interact with that space and comprehend it as a site of action and as an auxiliary structure of our real lives, our destiny. It is a groping gesture, a gesture of seeking and exploring. The potential of this gesture lies within its immediacy, its spontaneity, alertness and concentration. It intervenes with our perception in a vivid, eager and in any case elementary manner, sweeps us away and allows for us to enter our very own spaces. Those who arrive and explore space are those who set processes in motion and call motions into play.

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