

Paper presented at the *Time Forms* Conference, McGill University, Montreal, Saturday 21 September 2013

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Museum Intensities

Abstract:

What is the role of museum architecture in the light of participatory museum strategies? How does architecture involve processually and ontologically and how does museum architecture make you a co-creator on an experiential level? The paper approaches these questions from two perspectives of time that interact in museum architecture: clock-time and duration. Clock-time: the temporal conditions of opening hours, of minutes spent waiting to get your ticket and enter, of the orchestrating sequences of your visit. And duration, as we know from Henri Bergson is the flow of consciousness, of becoming, of creation. Duration is our inner sensing of time, the time of ourselves. The presentation discusses experiences of time from Louvre-Lens, Louvre, Palais de Tokyo and Moca Cleveland focusing on how a process like *entering* can be considered a matter of changing intensities.

Presentation:

Entering

Entering museums is usually considered to be a question of when and where spatial limits are crossed, within a time frame set by opening hours, and often at a certain specified cost. However, this paper suggests that entering is more significantly a process of engaging in activities and movements that tune the (coming) visitor's behavior and mood to the museum-visiting situation. In this respect, entering is a process in and of time, of going through changing intensities.

Recently, I was entering the Louvre in Paris. When lining up in front of the pyramid, I met a sign saying: "Your time waiting to enter the museum is estimated at: 0:30". Reassuring and warning at the same time. The message had the effect on me, that I prepared myself for spending the next 30 minutes waiting in a long line of visitors, where we together would move slowly across the court yard to the entrance.

A group, a line, mechanically. I expanded my patience – to 30 minutes. During the 30 minutes the line slowly passed by a number of smaller information signs on our way: "Entrance. Visitors without tickets."; "Beware of pickpockets"; "Priority entrance Pyramid. For visitors already bearing tickets". Passing by the signs confirmed to us all that entering was in progress and we were getting closer. Indirectly, these 'stations' on the way measured time by subtly suggesting a sequential structuring of the waiting. My half hour, waiting in line, was spent looking at the buildings surrounding the plaza, looking at the people next to me, listening to their conversations in german, english, spanish and japanese and enjoying an argument between some (other) tourists and the Louvre guards. I listened to the water fountains at the plaza, while absorbing information from the mini-billboards placed along the route.

The affective experience of entering the Louvre is guided by boundaries. Signs and statements accentuate the different steps of the entering, and so do the spatial boundaries and temporal limits. The difference experienced when getting into the queue concerns for instance a change in one's own mobility and potential behavior. Suddenly, people have a lot in common; they move in the same manner, waiting for the same thing to happen. A transition to becoming a Louvre-visitor clearly occurs, abruptly, by taking that defining step into the queue. It is experienced as a change in intensity, caused by physically structuring elements.

Two forms of time intersect in museum architecture: clock-time and duration. Clock-time can be the temporal conditions of opening hours, of minutes spent waiting to get a ticket and enter; of seconds or minutes you watch or listen to a work of art, and the orchestrating of sequences of your visit. Clock-time is time spatialised and numbered, time as extensity. Duration, Henri Bergson's concept of 'la durée', is an understanding of time as a becoming of continuous differentiation. It is a flow of consciousness and of emergence where *time forms*; creates. It is the potential of change and a continuity of shifting intensities. Duration is our inner sensing of time, the time of ourselves. Clock-time and duration interact as orderings and intensities of experience. Both approaches to understanding time are clearly present in the experience of museums and museum architecture. The potential correspondence between the two is, however, differently transmitted in the prepared experience of art and architecture at the individual museum or kunsthalle.



Entering the Louvre
Photo: Annette Svaneclink Jakobsen.

Whether the movement is strictly controlled, as in the example of waiting in line at the Louvre, or open and free, there will be an experience of shifting intensities. Intensity is an affection and an idea of that affection at the same time. It is an immediate feeling and awareness of a change in us that we experience as being caused by something outside of us; an intersection between the inner and outer. Henri Bergson distinguished between these two aspects of intensity as being representative and affective. The former of these describe an acquired perception, a perception representing an external cause, while the latter is a confused perception of affective states. The representational and the affective states of intensity co-exist:

*"[...] these two meanings of the word usually intermingle, because the simpler phenomena involved in an emotion or an effort are generally representative, and because the majority of representative states, being at the same time affective, themselves include a multiplicity of elementary psychic phenomena. The idea of intensity is thus situated at the junction of two streams, one of which brings us the idea of extensive magnitude from without, while the other brings us from within, in fact from the very depths of consciousness, the image of an inner multiplicity."*¹

Entering: a relational process

Entering the new Louvre in Lens has different possibilities of free movement, than what seems to be the case of its mother institution in Paris. At the Louvre-Lens, the architects SANAA have collaborated with the landscape architect Catherine Mosbach to create a museum in a museum park, which is intended to be socially and contextually relational in its approach to the city of Lens. The new museum physically adapts to the surroundings and opens up in many directions towards the setting. Literally, the park and the museum architecture make the institution connect to the site, for example by letting the entrances to the park reach out to the city in multiple directions. And the museum buildings architecture equally opens up different possibilities of entering.

Besides from orchestrating certain spatial points of physical entrance, the presence of the building is continuously in an ontological process of relating. This is expressed in the surface of the building, where a visual reflection of zones and people constantly enter into each other in new relations. The surface-material is aluminium and it is processed in a way that makes the reflectivity soft, though still maintaining the affective capacities for reflecting and mirroring. Entering the Louvre-Lens is dominated by these architectural expressions of change and continuous differentiation. The expressive changeability of the architecture captures the real life moments of adaptation and integration between the museum and this particular site: the traces still left after the mining industry, the site's topography and the visitors or passers-by. What, in a different material, could have been a demonstration of massive spatial delimitation, of an undisturbable wall or facade, is expressed and experienced as a living duration of intensities; of differing intensities of light, darkness, rain, fog, sun. The luminosity goes up and down, the transparency increases or decreases as an in-between of materiality, the green of the grass, the blue of the sky, and the nearness or distance of bodies. These are interacting and affecting forces that create continuous differentiations, i.e. intensities.

The exhibition in the Louvre-Lens' *Galerie du Temps* has a time span from 3000 BC. till 1800 AD. Within the frames of this time span, art from different parts of the world are exhibited side by side according to the position on the time line. The museological decision is based on an intention to give the museum visitor the opportunity of experiencing, for example, art objects from Mesopotamia next to art



Galerie du Temps, Louvre-Lens
Photo: Annette Svaneclink Jakobsen.

objects from Greece, from the same time period. This is the Louvre-Lens take on temporality in the Galerie du Temps. At the Louvre in Paris exhibits are characterised by clear spatial separations between the different collections, in specific spaces, parts of the museum, and often named after the place and period of origin. In Lens, however, a different understanding of time is activated through the architecture. The creative, forming time. The limits of the exhibition space dissolve into the visitor's own blurred mirror image, as is the case at the exterior of the building. In the exhibition space, the visitor might expect to encounter a wall with paintings hung on it; instead the visitor sees the reflection of her or his own movement, her or his own shape and colours. The art works stand freely in the space where the visitors can approach the exhibited works and findings from all sides. Visitors moving are attracted by a color, a sculptur's gesture, a motive, a position, a shape. How a route through the exhibition is configured will differ, because there is no specified order, only the frames of a disposition. Through this architectural decision time forms and creates, affording the becoming of relations between the space, the exhibited works and the visitors.

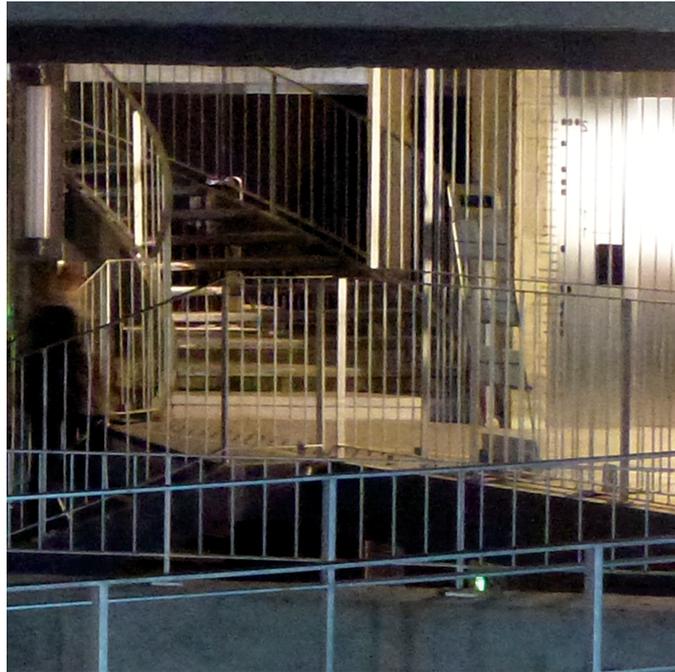
The becoming of relations is also given materiality, reflections and shape at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Cleveland, Ohio, design by Farshid Moussavi Architects. At the MOCA, the exhibition space is no more separated from the city life than the everyday spaces and functions of buildings are usually separated from the surroundings. Actually, this museum, which defines itself as a *kunsthalle*ⁱⁱ,

performs as a visual contact point belonging to the urban fabric. It is sited right next to the sidewalk of Euclid Avenue in the Cleveland University Circle area. The traffic is reflected in the building and the closer you get to the reflecting sides of the building, the more layers become visible and allow you to look into the interior space. The appearance of the building presents a simultaneity of art, architecture, the city reflected, the visitor and the passers-by reflected back on each other. Inside, the building naturally establishes views to the surrounding city. Daylight is let in, through the cuts in the building volume. It invites visitors to look out on to the neighbourhood, while looking at the exhibited art, situated in the gallery. Connecting situations and contexts. In the exhibition space, the relations between the artworks, the light and the architecture create changing intensities, paintings are immediately responding to the light by reflecting its luminosity.ⁱⁱⁱ The exhibition space and the architecture suggest new possibilities of bringing art and architecture into immediate enterings through actualising the affective capacities in the buildings materiality and the art works.

Enterings - or degrees of entering

The Louvre in Paris has almost 30.000 visitors every day. As a visitor there you have to stay alert, you have to watch out, or else there is a risk that you will be run over by a group of visitors in a hurry to keep up with their guide. The popularity of the museum makes it difficult to walk quietly and enjoy the art in peace; and the sizes of the collections and the buildings make it unlikely that you by simply improvising as a flaneur will be sure to see the art works that you wish to see. So, Louvre advices visitors to plan the visit in advance, to make a selection from a number of planned routes on their website, that will make sure to take the visitor through the subject-matter of interest, or, simply make sure to find the way to the works of art that interest the individual visitor.^{iv} For instance to the Mona Lisa or to the Venus of Milo. On site, many precautions have to be taken, and many other visitors, literally, stand between the individual visitor and the art.

In close proximity of the Louvre in Paris is the Palais de Tokyo, brought up-to-date as a contemporary art space by the architects Lacaton & Vassal. Here, one finds a different freedom to move and improvise. The entrances to the exhibitions are spread throughout the building, integrated in the spatial differentiations, almost hidden. This decision of distributing the entrance into many smaller entrance



The elevator at Palais de Tokyo.
Photo: Annette Svaneclink Jakobsen.

situations makes it possible to walk through large parts of the building without needing to have a ticket, in other words, without officially being a visitor. The transition between being one self and being (another) visitor, which is so clearly defined at the Louvre, is far more fluid and negotiable in this situation. The loose fit of the building around the exhibition spaces of Palais de Tokyo lets the visitor encounter the backsides, the not-so-pretty and perfect functionalities of the building becomes part of the exhibition spaces. The breaks between visiting the exhibitions are shaped by the 'backsides' to a degree that it becomes negotiable which is the more fascinating and exhibited part of the place: the official exhibitions or the accommodating spaces and activities that just happen to occur and encounter you on your way. For instance, the highly pragmatic elevator becomes an element of suspense. Who will come out next? And where can it actually take you? At Palais de Tokyo, entering the building does not necessarily mean entering the exhibition. Actually, the way one moves into the exhibition spaces of Palais de Tokyo is spread and distributed between several situations of entrance. So, where the Louvre-line entering is rather functional and spatial and determines a beginning to the visit, the Palais de Tokyo-entering experience is open and keeps the visitor on a transitional line between being inside and outside. Palais de Tokyo combines circulating and entering.

The aim of this paper is to suggest that time as an ontological aspect of museum architecture has creative and participatory potential. The presented examples show that processes belonging to the museum experience, for instance the process of entering can be developed to implicate more than a simple functional crossing of boundaries. Going from the emphasis on functionality to an emphasis on affective and relational aspects of the museum visit brings potential to work with the interactions between the museum architecture and the exhibited art as a relational field involving the visitor. The paper suggests that the examples of museum and exhibition spaces with lesser-defined boundaries between the insides and outsides of the exhibition situation have a potential of involving the visitor. The 'loose fit' and perceptual openness creates a virtual field of new possible relations that are not present when separations of functions and spaces are unambiguously determined. Turning unambiguous functions into processes that more openly involve the visitors in activities and movements is a process in and of time, of going through changing intensities. It can be useful to be aware that different modes of intensity can be made possible through the architecture and the built environment of museum experiences; and that the modes of intensity affect the ways visitors meet and perceive exhibitions. They tone the perception of the exhibited art works by attuning the visitor to a certain way of behaving and moving.

ⁱ Bergson, Henri (2008/1889): *Time and Free Will. An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. New York: Cosimo Classics: p 73.

ⁱⁱ In conversation with MOCA's curator David Norr in Cleveland, October 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ I visited the opening exhibiton *Inside Out and From the Ground Up* in October 2012. The paintings described here as reflecting the light are works by the American artist Jacqueline Humphries.

^{iv} <http://www.louvre.fr/en>