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Title:

Re-design: reclaiming the body in architectural space

From

On a wheelchair walk around the street, cobblestones, broken paving slabs and uneven level changes require your attention and concentration. You keep your eyes down as you walk, if you are not steady on your feet. You pay attention to the ground at every moment, in doing so, you do not look up to see trees and stars. Space can be closed down. Not only material environments but also reduced bodily functions can restrict our field of spatial engagements and transform the spatiality of our everyday practice such as walking. In contrast, tactile markings on the floor may increase the mobility of those who have visual impairment. The distant barking of dogs, kids chattering, or a sudden whiff of flower can indicate where you are and might even guide you to places. Sounds and smells can give shape or direction to spaces. The texture of materials might carry your thought away. The warmth around a fireplace or the rough textures of bricks might bring memories back stretching the space of persons; or provoke their imagination taking them to different time-spaces.

Design provides only one part of the possible solution towards a more inclusive world. And yet, design can support opening up the spatiality of individuals – increasing opportunities, motivating pleasure, and bringing us closer to a world that allows us all with different bodily ability and preference to coexists. Design can have positive effects on the closing spatiality of individuals. Such a speculative motivation for seeing inclusivity as a creative potential was the starting point of this project *Re-design: reclaiming the body in architectural space*. The project intends to further design ideas and processes that promote inclusion in various spatial conditions, and forms a part of the ongoing umbrella project *Every Bodies Home*. Focusing on the aspect of *use* and *user*, the *Every Bodies Home* aims to develop knowledge and tools which architects can make use of when designing inclusive architecture. As part of the investigations, in the *Every Bodies Home*, *Søholm I* – a series of 1950's terraced houses designed by Arne Jacobsen – were reimaged by applying two approaches that each engage with the human body differently.

The first approach applies the *Danish Building Regulations 2018* which set out requirements based upon the standardised body – with a wheelchair in regard to access provisions – that has average dimensions and ideal proportions. The second approach employs *people-centred methods* which focus on users' experience, where the situated body of an individual plays a central role. What would *Søholm I* look like if the houses were built in compliance with legal requirements relating to accessibility for residential buildings in BR18? Would these houses work better if they were designed to directly reflect the wishes of a person who uses a wheelchair? The realisation of inclusive architecture largely relies on codified rules and standards. With regard to the built environment, access requirements in building regulations as a backdrop, a number of rules and standards provide a point of reference through which inequalities in the built environment are undoubtedly being reduced. And yet, there have been critiques on those rules and guidelines as they standardise the body and simplify the complexity of bodily interactions with objects, buildings and their surrounding environments.

Now

The *Re-design: reclaiming the body in architectural space* questions how design of architecture and spatial elements can have positive effects on the closing spatiality of individuals. In other words, it questions how can we produce inclusive spaces that are more responsive to and sensitised with diverse bodily differences and situations? To approach this question, the project engages with noncompliant bodies¹, asking what starting from the situated body of individuals brings to design. The *Re-design: reclaiming the body in architectural space* explores the (re)production of space as bodily processes, and seeks ways to bring lived experience of persons into a vocabulary of space makings for architects and spatial designers. Materials presented in this exhibition are both outcomes of the house redesigned but also the process to bring it about. Different modes of representation are employed in

order to understand the makeup of a spatial experience through the body of a person in relation to materiality and spatiality of situations (not only of positions); and then applied in the redesigning of the houses.

On

In the space of architects – meaning when architects design buildings, the human body continues to be conceived of as the frictionless silhouette². For much of architectural history the body has been conceptualised as simply one biological object, often articulated by its external physical dimensions³. The standardised body without ontological value has come to represent the *user*⁴ in architecture, and design is being progressed as a choreography between those standardised users and the built environment. Human dimensions became the foundation for spatial planning. And yet, this practice does not only create an abstract space where users may not be able to recognise themselves within it, but also inhibit architects to engage with the diverse bodily differences and unique attributes of individuals. Correspondingly, many architectural theorists and practitioners have challenged functionalist and modernist notions of *users* of the built environment. They have started to look at more embodied ways of occupying and producing space⁵. Accordingly, their concern has shifted towards the experience and creation of space through bodily processes of subjective individual.

The abstraction of the body and space diminishes differences and reduces reality; accordingly, it alienates human subjects from the total experience of everyday life. However, rendered by quotidian and stable on one hand, and localised and transitory on the other, everyday life is real and continuously present, not rationalised reality or abstract truth⁶. Each individual brings their own histories and geographies as embodied knowledge to the moment that is situated in the particular spatial-temporal context but also in the routine of everyday conduct. This implies that the *sign* of impairment, for example, should be read as the difference in personal factors such as gender and habits. But more often than not, the impairment, in the mind of architects, becomes abnormal and special. Instead, the diversity in bodily process should provide designers opportunities to critically and creatively examine relationships between, the body, use and architecture. It suggests engaging with or even enjoying the complex reality of bodily processes as design generators, which may provide us alternative insight in the way differences, vulnerability and sensitivity in design lead to environments with more potentials.

What Borden calls *body-centric space*⁷, by employing skateboarding as a series of precise spatial-temporal actions, is the supplemental realm produced through bodily experiences: architecture is (re)produced as *body-centric space*. This architectural space, though the experience that people have of it, is one of the means through which social space is produced⁸. Body-centric space closely relates to the term *locale*. Locale is a matter of material context and possesses the properties of settings for those (could be a series of) precise spatial-temporal participations (actions and interactions) in the context of interpersonal networks of the everyday⁹. It implies that architectural space is to be understood in relation not only to the structural and organisational autonomy of architecture, but also to the spatial context of everyday networks. This phenomenological space includes functional and cultural purposes of architecture, but also belongs to stable and uncertain, yet enjoyable aspects of the everyday. Such a reading of architecture emphasises the importance of context and sensitivity to the locality: situatedness of architecture and our bodily experiences in place¹⁰.

Focusing on this space that the body produces dialectically with architecture, the project unfolds the spatial makeup of disabled persons' experiences in relation to: 1) architecture's physical quality – of its materiality, dimension, proportion and organisation; and 2) spatiality of situation concerning other mediating phenomena. The expertise of disabled persons holds the key to the effective investigation as they are essentially attentive to spatial contexts. This attentiveness is due to their reduced ability giving rise to a complementary increase in other bodily functions. The hypothesis is that the profound spatial understanding of disabled persons' experience provides a creative insight into the way that design of architecture and spatial elements positively effects on the closing spatiality of individuals. The study is, therefore, an opportunistic attempt to contextualise the space appropriation process of persons with diverse bodily differences into a systematic approach for designing inclusive architecture: increasing the overlap between conceived spaces and lived ones. Embracing the role of architecture as an active

participant in society and reassessing the logic of space making, the project invites us to appreciate the difficult unity of inclusion instead of the easy unity of exclusion¹¹.

¹ Boys, J. (2014). *Doing Disability Differently: an alternative handbook on architecture, dis/ability and designing for everyday life*. London; New York: Routledge

² Colomina, B. & Wigley, M. (2016). *Are we human?* Oosterbeek, the Netherlands: Lars Müller Publishers

³ Imrie, R. (2003). "Architects' Conceptions of the Human Body". *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21(1), 47–65.

⁴ Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers

⁵ Hill, J. (ed.). 1998. *Occupying Architecture*. London: Routledge

⁶ Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers

⁷ Borden, I. 2003. *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*. London: Berg Publishers

⁸ Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers

⁹ Giddnes, A. (1989). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press

¹⁰ Massey, D (2005). *For Space*. London; SAGE Publication

¹¹ Venturi, R. (1966). *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. New York; Boston: Museum of Modern Art