

ELIA BOSSHARD

ROOM STUDIES

“Contained space. Contained thinking”

Initially an empty form comprised of walls, floor, and ceiling; space begins to assume its particularity through introduction of doorways – architectural *extensions of space*. It is at this threshold that the decision to engage with space begins, but the mode or detail of this engagement is much too frequently a matter of design rather than that of choice.

Elia Bosshard’s *Room Studies* – an observational project that explores various configurations of doorways within a rectangular space – investigates the way their placement and quantity (the design) informs or conditions the way we inhabit spaces, by the way we navigate them. Blank canvases, spaces come to life when put in relation to bodies and it is through these bodily interactions that they can be studied; the potency of their design revealed. Somebody has choreographed our movements through these built environments; concretised them and ultimately embellished them into something given, revered, durable – a bronze-like monument. To expose this constructed relationship between body and space (the impact of design on our movements through spaces) is to alert and awaken the possibility of disruption and playfulness; the possibility of choice and agency within what disguises itself as predetermined and normative.

Bosshard’s drawings present a number of possible ways to travel through spaces; focusing on the most likely or average movement patterns. What causes these pathways, the narrative, remains unseen/unknown. Pared to mere minimum – pure line or trace – the drawings tease our curiosity so we begin to *wonder through* these spaces, embodying the possible scenarios and reasons behind the lines. What we imagine reveals our personal history of engagement with spaces – the projected memories of pathways we have taken through various spaces in our lives. The mental space that was left wide open through the simplicity and scarcity of Bosshard’s aesthetic, shrinks down as our imagination remains entrapped within the narrow parameter of personal memory – a limited and rigid form itself. Where are we coming from, what doorways are we passing through – mentally and imaginatively – when we contemplate the possibilities of engagement with spaces?

It is this parameter and the possibility of its extension that is the material of Bosshard’s work. How wide can we expand our mental space in order to imagine – and ultimately enact – different pathways through space? What new modes of inhabiting spaces can we invent? And what new sensibilities can we enable by stretching our mental spaces?

Bosshard’s works point to the profound effect a small tweak to the architecture of a space can have on the way we move and exist in it;^[2] including our very tempo or rhythm in this space. Architecture can slow us down or speed us up. A single doorway offers speed or directness of a loop; while four doorways create a confusion of choice. It is in this confusion that the space for disruption unravels. As Bosshard points out: *“there is less control when more choices are offered.”*^[3] And *“a room is instantly made more dynamic by having two or more entry/exits.”*^[4]

The complicity of architecture and the effect it imposes on our bodies, crumbles down when we begin to exercise our individuality within the space – the unique human potential for unpredictability. The kind that artificial intelligence isn’t able to phantom. Even though design and architecture predict (fairly accurately) the psychology of our interaction with space, there is always a slight portal of chance and surprise when space comes in contact with the human body.

However, body too is a structure (a cage of its own) that can easily limit the range of possibilities – not only because we are shaped into a particular form (so whether we are small or tall could affect the way we move through spaces) but also because our unique psychology determines the tempo of our spatial engagement (some people are naturally slower or faster). In other words, our psychology affects the pace of movement, and this pace has potential to change our trajectory. The choice to stretch beyond the architectural design, as well as the structure of our body and psychology, often depends on taking time to pause and slow down.

As transitional spaces, doors/doorways lend themselves to the possibility of a halt. They incite us to stop and consider: Who or what are we becoming when entering this space? Metaphorically if not literally, doors signify the unknown. Portals to the subconscious – the world of dreams (think surrealism) – they denote the extension of (mental) space beyond the firm and rigid structure of walls; a slippage or spillage toward the yet invisible (what is on the other side of the door).

One can recklessly rush through the doors, abruptly enter the space. But there is something about doorways that tends to inspire a change in tempo, slowing us down even if ever so slightly. And it is this slowing down – the transformational power of pause - that is the key. Rather than falling into a habitual and impulsive mode of movement, we are now more likely to exercise agency over the way we use and engage with the space. Impulse allows for spontaneity – not trying to outsmart the logic of design and the corresponding logic of the body. Time allows for choices, unpredictability, invention.

It is the function of design to speed things up, ease our trajectory and preserve our energy. Design thrives on numbing us down. It often does so with care – as a way to aid and simplify our existence – yet much is lost, risked, and shrunk when the whole spectrum of our perceptive selves goes to sleep and atrophy. Desensitised and disembodied we come to trust (or accept) that given is unshakable.

The logic of design produces the sense of ‘natural’ and to denaturalise what we have come to equate with the logic of our own bodies is to shake fundamentals of the way we are in the world. A task that requires much effort, and can appear quite unnecessary. Why disrupt that which aids us? What is the use of performing less obvious pathways, tricking the given?

For famous agitator Bertolt Brecht, this trickery is the beginning of a revolution, wider socio-political upheaval. The rebellion against the systems that begins in the body, including the ways we move through the world. Embodiment is Empowerment.

Moving recklessly by someone else’s design, we fail to notice the many things that are intended to pass unknown, dismissed, silently falling apart at far corners of our perception.^[5] Conscious movement opens us up to the hidden – that which is tucked away in the recesses of the space can be seen only if we turn the gaze from where it is readily directed.

Much can change in a room – a small contained space that exposes the larger social conditionings (if we choose to pay attention). To realise that we are orchestrated, or choreographed, shakes us back into the power of choice - or a sense that we have one. As Bosshard reminds us: “*The rectangle shape is not naturally occurring outside of the human mind.*”^[6]

Ira Ferris (May 2023)

^[1] From Elia Bosshard’s notes: Notes-2022-6.jpg

^[2] From Bosshard’s notes: “The rooms became a way to explore how even the slightest tweak to an average/normal/conventional space can shift our perception of it and ways of moving within it.”

^[3] Bosshard’s notes: Notes-2023-2.jpg

^[4] Bosshard’s notes: Notes-2023-3.jpg

^[5] Thinking here about climate change, environmental destructions, social exploitations and violence, corruptions and thievery, ...

^[6] Bosshard’s notes: Notes-2023-3.jpg