

# **Spaces of experience**

*Reflection Paper*

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## *How\_ about Specificity*

In my doing during the past year I've been dealing with two private art collections, and their collectors, to find them a place within the world.

I've tried to position the role of architecture, and myself, in a condition of nearness to the "art system"<sup>1</sup> to trace the encounters, or the specificities, which contribute to epistemologically define what an art space is. This last text about my work will be no more about my gestures and my decisions, but about the pure experience of the space and of an art collection, to establish the intensity of their encounter with each other. It has been about "measuring" a collection and the place I selected as attached to it simultaneously.

I've been doing it to ground my question within the contemporary art system, and the world, in order to be able to deal with all the degrees of specificity I could get to while trying to give a place to contemporary art in the world. I was intuitively responding to a spatial interested in the specificity of the dialogue between art and architecture with a need to understand the "subject-matter" I wanted to address.

The assemblage of these network relations, which starts with an assemblage in itself that is an art collection, defines the fiction of an art space as "total experience," which tries to give a kind of home to the narrative of a collection and to make one aware of his/her place and time "from which works of art enter one's consciousness"<sup>2</sup> since "difference is more easily accepted in reflections on work of art than elsewhere." And "this means that a self-awareness and awareness of the other can be achieved in the gallery that is otherwise often elusive."<sup>3</sup>

## *Why\_ Relevance*

Within the art system it is more and more significant the role of private collectors in investing in contemporary art and legitimating their collections and social role throughout the echoes of certain kind of art spaces' typologies. The consequence of this development within the art system made art collectors the "new" holders of the *cultural capital* - the private collectors, and no more the museum as Haacke wrote, are the accepted "managers of consciousness"<sup>4</sup> - and this is a typological problem around the definition of art space.

This shift is than related with the distortion in the value of art, and the private art collectors who are investing in art as commodity, they are then building art spaces which reflects this distortion. The distance which is used to exist between the collectors and the museums is confused. Collectors are effectively replacing the museum, and the museum academic capacity is being replaced at the same time. And these spaces pretend to have a role in the city which they have not. Here, the problem around how a private collection is presented to the world is particularly urgent within the art world and within the city.

Which one is the epistemological definition of art space in the contemporary art system and what is the role of architecture when displaying art?

## *How\_ about Awareness*

At the beginning of my research, my interest – meaning my interest in the main question - was mainly spatial, in order to situate the role of architecture between art and the city, the street, the building, the room and the viewer. But what I understood during my experience of this system, and while learning to look at art spaces, and at contemporary art, is that there are different levels of specificity which will

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1 L. Alloway, "Network: The Art World Described as a System", Artforum, September 1972

2 U. Mayer, *Conceptual Art*, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1972

3 C. Klonk, *Spaces of experience*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2009

4 Haacke, H., "Museums, Managers of Consciousness" (1983), *Art in America*, no. 72 - February 1984

influence the way these relations will take place, and all those levels are mainly non-spatial, and at the same time all able to influence strongly one's actual experience of art, and the space around it, and the one within it<sup>5</sup>.

“What the art gallery as a site does that “real life” does not is that it forces the issues of attention.” It is probably the one which can make one most aware of the space, the place, and the other. And to become conscious of this alertness, or “preparedness,” set me free for a certain period of time from a strict architectural realm. I've been able to construct within this new ground different kind of relationships with different actors of the art system, in order to map the different influences they could have in construct a specific experience of art. I became quickly aware that at the end all these encounters would have had a role within these spaces I wanted to construct, or more precisely to learn how to construct.

Especially within an art space, “considerations of ‘where’ implies more than an ontology of position.”<sup>6</sup>

### *Why\_ Agency*

Surrounded by this delicate system of relationship, the role of the architect in relation to the system needed to be defined simultaneously to the one of architecture in relation with art.

I think the reasons why my attitude developed towards this extreme carefulness and attention to the specificities of the existing ruins has to do with the process that lead me to the selection of the two places in the first place. I've been lucky enough to have the freedom to engage by myself the search for two places in the world able to respond to two specific collections I encountered, and I was doing it while trying to understand both the collections themselves and my intentions in displaying them, as well as the agency I believe architecture should have within art spaces in general. And this moment of choice got charged by all of these, and the two not neutral spaces were to me at that moment my way of grounding all the very specific relations of proximity which take place between someone else's story and my understanding of a particular place in the world which should host this story. I truly believe that the moment of my choice has been the most powerful within my agency in defining the way two specific art collection should relate to the world. What I tried to do then was no more than being honest and coherent with these choices, and dealing with the architectural implications of the two buildings for the two collections.

My attitude has then been projective in engaging with certain conditions to construct a precise experience within the space, its nearness and intimacy. The places I chose raised certain tensions in the relation between the artwork and the space that the viewer will have to confront, and engaging with certain spaces will request him/her another level of attention. And this is my understanding of a space which will not be neutral.

I situated the role of architecture as mediation between narratives, the one of the existing place which I found as connected to the specificity of the two collections I was dealing with, and the one of the artwork within the collection itself. And in “measuring the one with the other,” a certain ambiguity would lead to a certain awareness of the place one is in, and how does it relate with the collection itself. Architecture has been a negotiation between the two, in order to let the identity of the two collections and the one of the two places, the Palazzo and the Villa, happen at the same time.

### *Position\_ Values*

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5 L. Fabro, [interviews] “Sul Museo”, in R.Fuchs and J.Gachnang, *Overture II*, exhibition's catalogue Castello di Rivoli 1986, Torino, Allemandi, 1986

6 U. Mayer, *Conceptual Art*, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1972

With some distance from the extreme specificity of the place and of the collection my work responded to, certain values within my attitude are recognizable. I've been ultimately defining my position within the relation between art and architecture in the way art is displayed, in order to define how present architecture is in this condition, and then how present an architect should be in this condition.

**Directness/**

Physical and non-physical proximity to the artwork a certain space could offer. Staging a minimally controlled environment claims in space a certain "haptic proximity" which in the drastic lack of filters in space between art and the viewer will make one aware of all the filters that are instead usually there.

**Simultaneity of time and relationships/**

Ambiguity of the time of the intervention with the one of the building and the one of the collection. About dealing with one art object and many simultaneously.

**Uncertainty/**

Since all the factors which influence one's attention to art are constituting the actual experience of it, within every space, and especially within the ones with a specific narrative, there is a level of uncertainty in all the possible relationships which might happen that could set the viewer in a condition of alertness which will make more likely for them to happen, or to be noticed in their temporary or stable existence.

Engaging with this uncertainty with a *non-conclusive* approach has been a great interest within the two art spaces I designed.

With the definition of my attitude towards the construction of art spaces, also my understanding of the agency of the architect got refined. In dealing with the specificity of the two places selected and the tensions in "measuring" the realm of art and the one of architecture in relation with each other, I reflected about where the boundaries of the agency of the architect within this negotiation could and should be traced. In the specificity of the spaces I strongly admire by the architects which set the "revolution of staging"<sup>7</sup> after the second World War in Italy, there is an omnipresence of architecture on display. The tensions between the space for art and the one of the existing are all handled by the arbitrary of the architect, and his marvelous (in the case of Carlo Scarpa especially) sensibility. The experience of the viewer results as precisely staged by architecture, in the same way art is staged. My interest, in this sense, shifted towards a non-conclusive approach in dealing with the encounter of art with a place. A kind of uncertainty and ambiguity among the place, the specific space and art could leave room for a certain awareness by the viewer of the way the experience of art is proposed, and constructed. And a certain freedom in the way different artworks could relate in different times with the place, framed by the specificity of the storytelling of a collection.

Moreover, a contemporary art collection is unfinished and could still develop, and a contemporary art space should be able to deal with this potential, and let room for different kind of relationship to be established.

In the end, what I've been trying to do is to understand how the story of an art collection could be told.

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<sup>7</sup> P. Duboy, *Carlo Scarpa. L'arte di esporre*, trans. R. Rizzo, Johan and Levi, 2016

The way I did it has been through the mediation of architecture in staging the encounter of a specific collection with the world within a specific place and space. I do think that the role of architecture in relation with art it is not so different from the one of storytelling in “establishing the rights of intensity.”<sup>8</sup> While mediating the tensions of the encounter of art with a specific place in the world where it will become part of the public realm, the role of architecture is to establish and frame the rights of intensity of this encounter, since it is within the specificity of it that the experience of art will happen.

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8 *To tell a story*, Susan Sontag and John Berger, 1983