A Day at the Zoo: Everyday Life as an Extra-Ordinary Experience

Bart de Hartog
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Bart de Hartog

Salomon Frausto
Head of Education
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A day at the zoo is an important part of the good life, through which humanity has the possibility to come face to face with nature in the urban environment of the city, their own habitat. This makes the zoo a necessity for a city to truly be a city, with all its complexities and contradictions. The project makes a typological study of the components of the zoo, showing how they are analogous—formally or metaphorically—to the city in which the zoo resides.

As a starting point it reads the zoo as microcosm of our society, and analogous to the way it developed and operates. It studies it on three scales: the zoo in the city, architecture in the zoo, and animals in architecture. All of these are represented in the zoo as ideal versions of what we consider a humane place for nature on an urban, architectural and domestic scale. From the zoo’s meandering plan and the materiality of its buildings to the interior separations of the habitats: all are constructed to stage a pleasant sequence of how to perceive everyday life as an extraordinary experience.

Originally the zoological garden was intended as the instrument that allowed humanity to observe nature within a staged setting, making it possible to create a taxonomy of the animal world. The body of this project takes the same method and applies it on the zoo—drawing and classifying the different types as was done in the first taxonomies—disassembling the zoo into a collection of curious architectural objects built under the proposition of representing animal habitats.

The different fragments that have been classified are then viewed as analogous to pieces of city by referring to how they are present in the city itself, moving from Linneaus to Ungers methods. Every individual type in the zoo is paired with an urban counterpart through a formal or metaphorical analogy. In this way the construction of knowledge through analogies—like that present in the zoo—is challenged.

In employing the same architectural language for the animals that are put on display in the zoo, as for ourselves, it alludes to future scenarios of what the zoo can mean for a city to remain a relevant urban fragment. Since our views of nature are (or at least should be) rapidly changing yet again through an increased sensitivity to how our humanities behavior influences that of the planet we live on—with the city as our primary habitat—the zoo, (and perhaps the city?) could also do with a revision.

The structure of the zoo is based on the presentation of a figure placed in between a fore- and background. To support this argument a diorama is constructed that uses the same method, projecting a twenty-four-hour cycle that takes the viewer past some of the most characteristic moments of a day at the zoo, projecting the analogy into a miniaturized world of urban, architectural, and interior encounters of humanity and nature.

Here the complexity and contradictions of the zoo and the city, architecture and habitat, humans and animals, is pursued to question the coexistence of both within an urban environment. It constructs a day out in the city that shows everyday life as an extra-ordinary experience: A Day at the Zoo.
Taxonomy of the Zoo
**TAXONOMIA ZOOLOGICA ARCHITECTURALE**

### 1. MENSAHNE
- Reservatpark (1922, 2005)
- Dierenpark (1964)
- Vondelpark (1940)
- Deense Parken (1935)
- Mierlo-Houtspeeltuin (1938)
- Algemene Braamfontein (1930)
- Utopia Park (1950)
- Stadspark Ede (1949)
- Buitengoed Beekbergen (1945)
- ZooPark (1935)
- Buitengoed Heemstede (1931)
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- Zoo Park (1935)
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- Vondelpark (1940)
- Deense Parken (1935)
- Mierlo-Houtspeeltuin (1938)
- Algemene Braamfontein (1930)
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BELGRADE
Annual visitors: m²:
Animals: 1752 2,200,000
17 ha
730 species

BUDAPEST
Annual visitors: m²:
Animals: 1752 2,200,000
17 ha
730 species

ROTTERDAM
Annual visitors: m²:
Animals: 1752 2,200,000
17 ha
730 species

SARAJEVO
Annual visitors: m²:
Animals: 1752 2,200,000
17 ha
730 species

ANTWERP
Annual visitors: m²:
Animals: 1752 2,200,000
17 ha
730 species
BELGRADE
Annual visitors:
Animals:
1752
2,200,000
17 ha
730 species

BUDAPEST
Annual visitors:
Animals:
1752
2,200,000
17 ha
730 species

ROTTERDAM
Annual visitors:
Animals:
1752
2,200,000
17 ha
730 species

SARAJEVO
Annual visitors:
Animals:
1752
2,200,000
17 ha
730 species

ANTWERP
Annual visitors:
Animals:
1752
2,200,000
17 ha
730 species
Taxonomy of the Zoo: Sections
Taxonomy of the Zoo: Plans
Taxonomy of the Zoo: Facades
LEFT: Oswald Mathias Ungers animal analogies  
Source: Morphologie/City Metaphors,  
RIGHT: Bart de Hartog's animal analogies  
Source: Morphologie/Zoo Metaphors.
Bibliography:


Through the construction of the evolution of keeping animals in captivity for different forms of recreation, towards the modern zoological garden of today, a lot of the changes that occurred within our society become apparent in the relation between us and nature, more specifically animals.

First accounts of this luxury past-time were only accessible to rulers and the aristocracy, which would use the animals as objects that displayed their own power or wealth by either just displaying them or letting them fight each other. Whereas first this mainly happened in the space available, the rise of the landscape garden allowed for the construction of certain settings that would strengthen the experience of these animals within the orchestrated beauty of the park. After the bourgeoisie became able to also acquire small collections and have their own aviary or pen, later the zoo became a public project to emancipate the people by displaying –our power over- the wonderful creations of nature.

The zoo then became intrinsically linked to processes happening in the modernization of our society, creating new elements and scenes to mediate the experience of the natural and blur the boundaries between man and the animal. From large galleries displaying reconstructed habitats, to pavilions built as in interpretation of the architectural language where the animal originates from, to trying to reconstruct as realistically as possible the former habitat of the animal in the setting of a Western zoo, the development went parallel to how we relate ourselves to the world we live in.