

Dispositives of contagion

Infectious excitement, spreading ideas, feet tapping to the rhythm ... It is not only viruses that are infectious, so too are laughter and yawning, visions or emotions. The seminar examines metaphors of infection in resonance with medical discourses. Where do you get infected by what? What serves as the respective vehicle of contagion? How do certain dispositives foster or inhibit exchange and infection? How do societies immunize themselves against certain groups or ideas defamed as infectious? And: How do processes of social infection change under the conditions of a pandemic?

The basis for discussion is provided by ancient rhetoric teachings as well as concepts from discourse analysis, reception aesthetics, mimetic theory, medical history, and mass psychology. Modern writers, in reference to the assertion by Horace that only a speaker who has felt pain himself can move people to tears, transferred the principle from language to art. In the modern period, the tears produced via "method acting" find their preferred place at the cinema, and ear-worms crawl through the gramophone. Certain spaces and large groups seem to foster infection: In 1895, Gustave le Bone coined the term "contagion mentale" for this.

In the digital age, the dissemination of images has become an epidemic. "Influencers" function as "superspreaders", viral content and memes are spread with ever-increasing speed, mutating on their way through social media. In the pandemic, the virus, as Boris Groys puts it, becomes viral itself: More and more pictures, videos, and news deal with Covid-19.

Along with the use of metaphors, the seminar also examines figurations of infection: How did and do people try to visualize infection events? The students gather and annotate pictures of plague arrows and dances of death, dragon's breath and cholera water; analyze split screens, x-ray images, computer animations, maps, and diagrams: What turns out to be the icon of the corona pandemic is the exponential curve.

The seminar is right in the middle of the NOW but simultaneously exercises distance: First held on site, later via Webex, it offers room to reflect on current but also historical visual worlds and discourses. The discussion of theoretical and historiographical texts, pandemic movies, images, videos, and memes provides new perspectives on the present. The NOW is refracted through this kaleidoscope. While doing so, the university as a place of intellectual and emotional infection is sorely missed – yet small amounts of virus get through the pores of our screens.

Anne von der Heiden, Jasmin Mersmann,
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How do we want to live together NOW?

Prototypes for resilient design of public space in the pandemic present

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the present has become overpowering. The now has spread into infinity, so to speak, blocking our view of possible long-term goals, so that our speculations and dreams do not look into the future as usual, but remain stuck in considerations of the days and weeks to come. Against this backdrop, the design project „How do we want to live together NOW?“ focused on the

achievable – the immediate present – and redirected the speculative potential that currently echoes in an intangible future into the Now.

Urban Commons

The community, the common good, the „urban commons“ are valuable collective resources that are being put to the test by the ongoing pandemic. They are therefore slowly but steadily undergoing radical and permanent change. While people and communities are adapting to the new circumstances, spaces, goods and materials remain static, empty or separated by acrylic glass and barrier tape.

With this student project in the architecture department, *How do we want to live together NOW!* we wanted to open a debate. But where? Where are communication spaces created in the city when proximity is dangerous? How accessible are they, who can use them and what are they used for? What do spaces look like that correspond to our NOW! and how do they enable forms of expression that negotiate what we want to be as a community? How can the commons become visible and usable in the current circumstances?

Our thesis: We need to recontextualise the commons for the NOW! yet not reinvent it. Use what already exists! Spaces, infrastructures and circuits of our urban environment should be explored for their invisible potentials and activated by repurposing, overlaying, taking away, adding, or simply caring for them.

STRATEGY

Make do with the existing, with people, nature, climate, the economy, in order to reinvent, to do more with less.

Making do is about using what we already have. It is about considering the existing as a valuable resource, not as unsatisfactory or constraining.

Each existing situation is an opportunity consisting of elements, qualities, and capacities that can be integrated, reactivated, and reused. Each existing structure offers materials that can drastically reduce the need for new materials. Each site permits invention and imagination.

Anne Lacaton, Make Do.

In: Ilka & Andreas Ruby (eds.), *The Materials Book*. 2020 p. 58ff.

The students were encouraged to follow Anne Lacaton's view of the living environment and not only respond to given spatial situations in their concepts, but to productively integrate the qualities already offered by a site into their design. At the same time, the situations created by the students should relate to the urban space that has been changed by the pandemic. Thus, ephemeral reinterpretations occur in the students' works: The Pfarrplatz is equipped with hanging chairs at the necessary distance (Hängepartie), so that people can „hang out“ together alone or in small groups; the wall of the house becomes a screen (CC-Graph), since going to the cinema has become impossible; the engine noise of a busy street is reinterpreted as the sound of the sea (Submarine), because a holiday on the beach has to be cancelled; a public square becomes a symbolic place for coming together to bake bread (Brojekt), at a time when people prefer to avoid their fellow human beings in public space. The overall view of the „tools“ developed in the design project tells of the desires and shortcomings of our pandemic present and will one day be read in retrospect as a document of the times: What traces has the present NOW left in the urban spaces and their inhabitants?

Ludwig Engel, Katharina Weinberger-Lootsma and Clemens Bauder

A visual Now

Today I am a flâneur in my city, where I have lived for decades. Sauntering implies poetical, aesthetical, cultural and sociological aspects at the same time. I am ambling through the streets, becoming part of an emergent, complex communication – as a distanced observer, an agent influencing events herself, or as a being whose reactions and thoughts are in turn influenced by the aesthetic panorama that surrounds me.

Roland Barthes describes the city as a language, a discourse. He outlines the modern human being, a city dweller, as someone constantly reading signs. What is visible to read? Signs, symbols, texts, colors, shapes, images, gestures, and behavior patterns – it is noisy in visual public space. I am reading a lot of commercial communication. What I experience is dominated by information on goods, services and events fighting for my attention. I am surrounded by signs, posters, flyers and digital ads, produced by other visual designers, telling me stories and influencing my thoughts, moods, values and behavior patterns. What kinds of visual stories do we want to tell?

We as humans think a lot in images, and experience the world as a mental reconstruction of the environment. W. J. T. Mitchell distinguishes between material "pictures" and imagined "images". Pictures are "touched" by the eye who perceives them as objects, while images develop internally – a latent idea, a vague mood, mixed with our desires. As visual designers, we in turn are frequently asked to capture these memories in pictures. The repertoire of the visual language of forms provides us with a large spectrum of possibilities for emotional expression. Each design of visual artifacts and communication spaces within our everyday lives expresses time and again the question concerning human being's specificity. Using colors and shapes, we try to rematerialize abstract inner desires and feelings onto analogue or digital substrates without ever being able to be objective or precise. We become authors of new pictures that in turn generate new images and realities in the minds of our beholders. Into what new (emotional) realities do we invite our beholders? Does our design fulfil a purpose, do we offer solutions to problems? Do we prompt our beholders to ask questions about our lives?

Marianne Pührerfellner

