

Layer/Space: Museum Transitions

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Abstract

The significance of museums for social and cultural processes is unclear. The teaching mission of museums and its general educational role is often stated as its main *raison d'être*, though it is not empirically provable.

To clarify what museums do for societies, a research approach has to be developed that refrains from the common focus on education, exhibits, museological areas of knowledge, modes of operation, or visitors. The teaching mission is a common but questionable statement, the other aspects are each heterogeneous themselves and vary between museum types and regions. They do not lead to a valid approach if studying the museum on a global scale.

Space however is a category that forms a condition for each museum no matter where it stands or what it exhibits. Space constitutes the day-to-day business of the museum, be it curatorial, conservational, pedagogical, or in terms of exhibition design. Thinking the museum from the objects it conserves and exhibits means to see it also in its spatial dimension, as museum objects take up space, whether being stored away or being part of an exhibition. Thinking the museum from society, from their mission as a public institution, means also to see it as a spatial category, as the museum audience can only constitute itself as a social group within the museum space.



urban space

mathematic space ≠ space of everyday experience, the space in which and through which we move

a specific spatial phenomenon is its simultaneity of cognitive and emotional qualities

Definition of Space

»Is space indeed a medium? A milieu? An intermediary? It is doubtless all of these, but its role is less and less neutral, more and more active, both as instrument and as goal, as means and as end. Confining it to so narrow a category as that of "medium" is consequently woefully inadequate.« (Henri Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space*)



museum building

space is a frame of reference of and for interaction – with people and with things (Goffman, Giddens)

space is substantially defined by our movement through it and our actions in it

Definition of the Museum

»A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.« (ICOM)

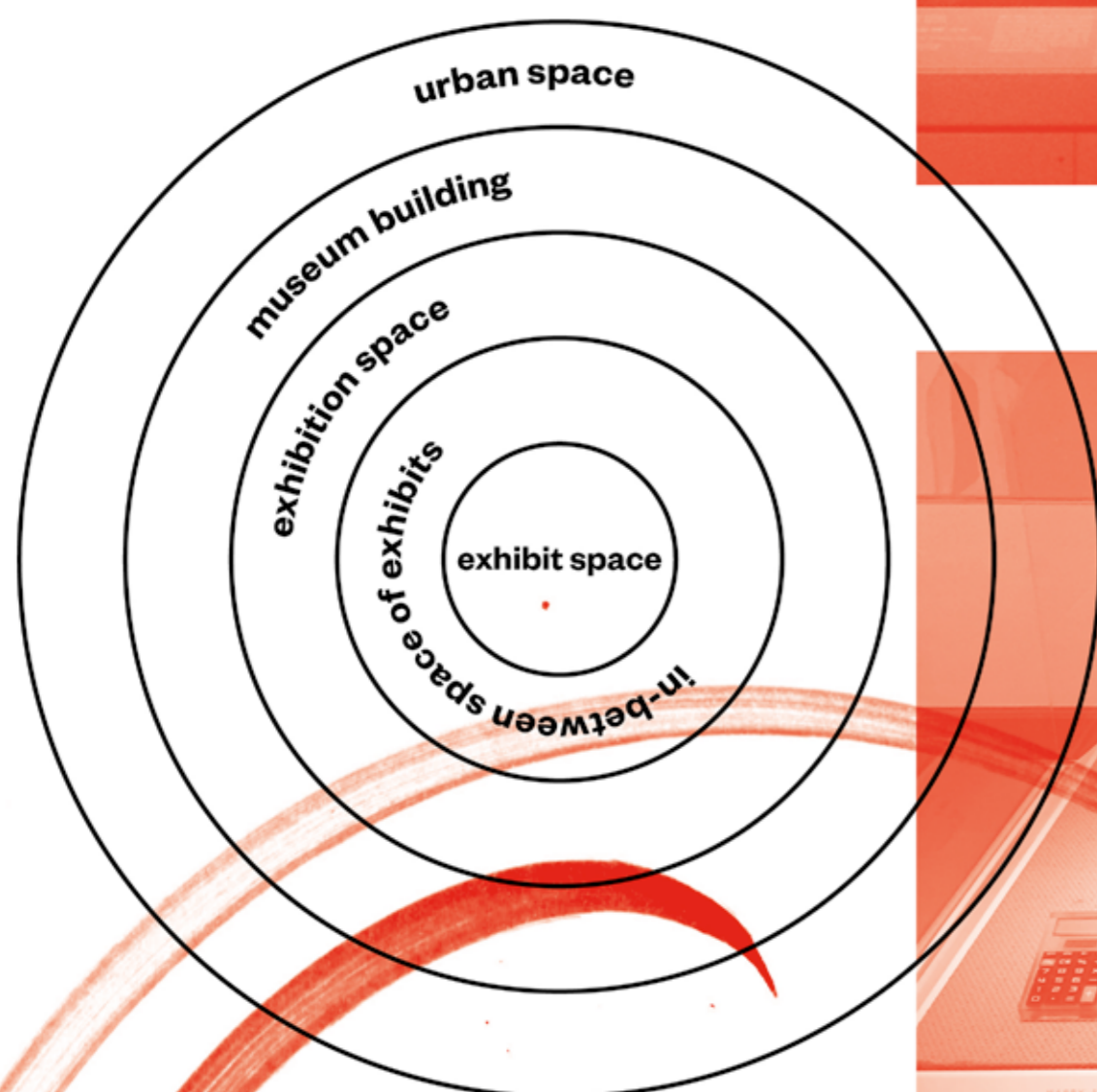


exhibition space

how can such an institution be a global success?

purposes: functionally open, transformable, interpretable

other ascribed functions/purposes: locational factor for tourism and economy, solution for urban planning issues, image booster etc.



Layers: Hypotheses

- Between the two extremes or outer ends of the museum – the exhibit and the public – different spatial layers unfold.
- It is assumed that the museum space is not defined or delimited by the four walls of the actual exhibition space
- The museum space can be better interpreted as the totality all of these layers
- There are specific processes of negotiation that takes place within totality of all of these layers and that have a major role in creating these transitional spaces



in-between space of exhibits

duration of stay in front of a work of art: < 3 sec. (before selfie age) => other spaces except that in front of the exhibit might be more important

space as unconscious condition of museum work + visit

museum as a spatial category is a broader context than that for collecting and exhibiting objects

Transitions: Research Program

What happens at the transition areas of museum spaces? What kind of negotiation processes take place in between the great focal points (exhibit, image of the building etc.)?

The museum works with different forms of spatial knowledge and spatial/visual communication. Heterogeneous semantic layers of space are the result of this *modus operandi*. Given these facts, which kind of effects do (transitional) spaces have on visitor's/curator's action/perception/understanding?

How can findings about these transitions be used in terms of urban planning, community building, education, perceiving of objects/contexts?

Methodologically, this research program has to integrate different fields of knowledge: urban planning, architecture, design research, cultural studies, sociology, history, and museology.



exhibit space

simultaneity of layers has to be heuristically opened out to make it comprehensible