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JOKES MACHINES MAKE ABOUT HUMANS: 1ST INFUSION 13. 11. 2015-9. 1. 2016

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IN CONVERSATION

"There are two possible methods of approach to the problem of zoo design; the first, which may be called the 'naturalistic' method, is typified in the Hamburg and Paris zoos, where an attempt is made, as far as possible to reproduce the natural habitat of each animal; the second approach, which, for want of a better word we may call the 'geometric', consists of designing architectural settings for the animals in such a way as to resent them dramatically to the public, in an atmosphere comparable to that of a circus."

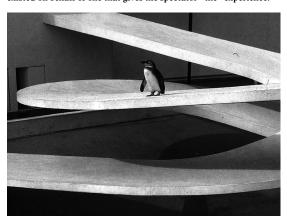
To transfer knowledge about the animals was not just a sport for the members of the league. It was a part of their identity. They made scientific claims quite early to give the zoo some agency. During the late 1850s they made it public, making it even more urgent to present the animals in a educational manner. However, one could see the disappointment in the eyes of the adventurers that caught the beasts. That time of bounty and bragging was over. They were now educational tools. As the zoo has gone through this reductive process it has morphed and specialized. Some into highly scientific preservationist institutions, grappling with animal extinction and becoming reproduction facilities. Other turned into leisure parks. But the Disney-type orca entertainment had run its course, and the cabinet type zoos are going out of order. Just a few last standers, like BIG architects still try to bring it. Still working on futuristic modernist projects as if the critique of that era's architecture never occured.



Architectural maneuvers like BIG's removal of cages in their Zootopia project, are being put in place to gloss over how the zoo creates the exotic other. In Zootopia, the barrier between spectator and animal is removed to let the spectator have that "Christian the lion"-experience. However, they are falling into the trap of not understanding that the cage represents the platform for connection, and a removal of it represents total subordination and instrumentalisation of the animal. The double purpose of the cage is to present the animal in a "naturalistic" environment, but also to entice the spectator. We do want them to perform for us.

"This conception has two main faults: it allowed the very shy animals to hide themselves from the public gaze, almost indefinitely, while those with a taste for publicity were not able to indulge it to the best advantage"

The London zoo architect Berthold Lubetkin felt that a humane cage existed on behalf of one that gives the spectator "the" experience.



The drama disapered when the animal could hide or feel comfortable to mostly just sleep and eat. He felt his role as an architect was to bring the drama for the public. The spectators don't want a chill penguin, they want it to slide for them. What has changed from Lubetkin to BIG Architects is just the crude modernist ramps, as means of behavior modification. But the idea is still there. To enhance it further he felt that there should be a rich contrast between the animal cages and the zoo environment. A sort of cabinet effect that will entice the audience and isolate the object animal. Letting the public also feel safe as the system echoes dominance in the architectural frame.

"Nature tamed - not with a fist, but with a smile."3

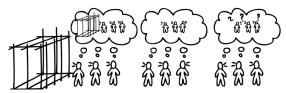
All the animals gave the impression of being isolated from each other, creating a tension similar to one in an gallery space. Wall power and spatial presence makes for a successful exhibition. In this environment the spectator feels a heightened level of performance and choreography.

The architects job becomes hiding the stern directorial qualities of the frame, spectators want that "Christian the lion"-experience, not some depressing Sea World orca.





Observation and experience are the key elements of the cage. What spectators see and how that makes them feel.



"Historically speaking, the cage lies at the intersection of several customs and cultures that placed great importance on observing, collecting and then exhibiting other people and other things, meaning foreign people and animals. Human history shows us that there is only a very small gap between seeing, the 'scientific' observation of other people, and domination, even appropriation and exhibition." ⁴

A cage works as a barricade, separating two adversary sides. It enables them to communicate. It's a base for conversations to take place. A cage designer creates consensus between the animal, the cage and the observer. The animal must feel happy with the cage or the equilibrium breaks. Either on behalf of the animal dying or escaping, or on the side of the human freeing it from its captors. The cage should not be constructed in a way that it lures the spectator into zootopian thinking, that will be the end of the animal. And the observer should not feel as a part of the bigger spectacle of the zoo.

Cage as a barricade — making room for novelty, communication.

The cage wall is transformed from a line between animal and human, to a space and a stage for enactment. In proportion to the subordination, the cage wall exponentially becomes a space. In the zootopia there are no walls, total subordination and no conversation.

Zoo, unpublished manuscript, ca 1938 p. 9

2. The New Penguin Pool in the Zoological Gardens, London'.

CITATIONS:

1. Berthold Lubetkin, Dudley

Zoological Gardens, London', Architect and Building News, 1 June 1934, p. 254

3. Allan, John Berthold Lubetkin: Architecture and the tradition of progress, RIBA Publications, 1992 p. 201

4. Michel Dewilde, The Caged Gaze, www.wesleymeuris.be/ wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ Michel-Dewilde_The-Caged-Gaze-engels.pdf, 2014, p. 2

EXHIBITED ARTWORKS: Dear Muell, 2015 Audio recording with the impersonator Roland Meijer Drees reading an original text in the voice of Sir David Attemborough.

Fallout Original Soundtrack, 2015 Series of cages with crickets.

Bugsession, 2015 Video, no sound.

In Conversation, 2015 Text by Filip Mayer.

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