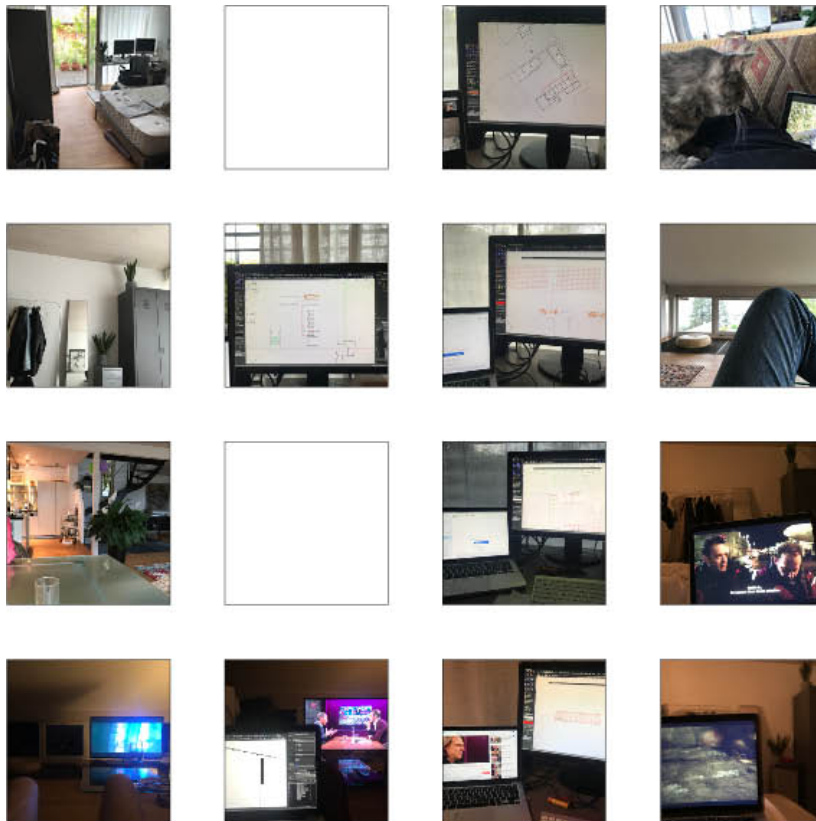


Ethnographies in Times of Corona Virus

Raphael Blain

Juxtaposition and Thresholds during COVID-19 lockdown



Collision of Space during COVID-19

about thresholds and juxtaposition

Raphael Blain
Memories of Zurich West
FS2020

Abstract

Studying architecture during a time where a virus caused global effect on our freedom, uses of and in space provides incentive to question the ways this affects our daily lives. A visual journal presents the start of this experiment and gives insight into a personal view on the effects of this crisis. The infiltration of public sphere is penetrating into our private space has resulted in a strong shift in our perception of space.

Introduction

On Friday March 13th the Dean of the Department of Architecture of ETH Zürich informed us that starting from March 16th until the end of the semester, the facilities of the school would no longer be accessible for students. The title of the Email: D-ARCH: THE SCHOOL GOES ON – ONLINE. Soon after, the Federal Council announced the lockdown of schools, shops, restaurants, sports facilities and even certain public places. The physical interaction with people had to be reduced to a minimum and new rules for personal contact were introduced.

The effects of these drastic measures on my personal life seemed quite unspectacular at the beginning. After the information that ETH would physically shut down, I decided to pack my bags and spend the weekend at my parents' house. I was happy to spend some time at the place where I grew up - a place that since the beginning of my studies at ETH became a place of rest and relaxation. The COVID-19 virus had however a totally different effect on my stay and situation. Instead of tearing families apart it led to a small family reunion in our case. I was returning to a place that recalls many nice memories, a place that I had left behind, where I would come back a couple of times a year.

This meant that all of a sudden, my parent's home transformed all at once into my home, my place to work and my place for leisure activities. The desk in my old room which usually only serves my father as a place to work became the studio space that we usually occupy to work on our architectural projects.

The following weeks, the change from face-to-face teaching to remote online courses, the replacement of physical contact by video calls became the ethnographical experiment presented in this work.

How does this transformation of our relatively clearly structured everyday life change our perception of space?





















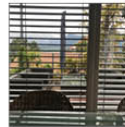


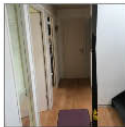









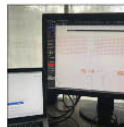

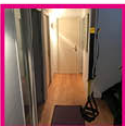
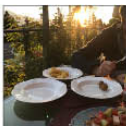





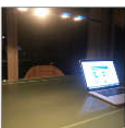
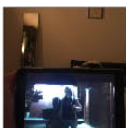





How does the reduction and densification of our habitat and the juxtaposition of private, working and public space affect the way we live?

How do we feel about the quality of the thresholds that, from one moment to another, do not exist anymore in the way they used to?

A visual journal presents the start of this experiment which gives insight into a personal view on the effects of this crisis. Through this work I tried to get an insight into the ways the public sphere is penetrating into our private space and how this collision of different spaces, some virtual and some others physical, leads to a re-arrangement of space.

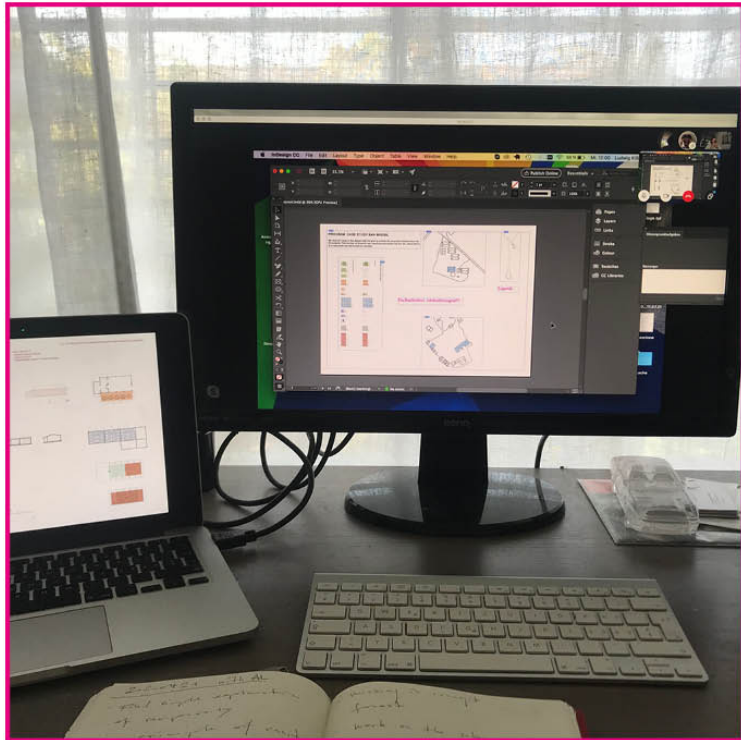
The visual journal is structured as follows:

7 pictures everyday
1 picture every 2 hours
Starting time: 10:00 am
End: 10:00 pm

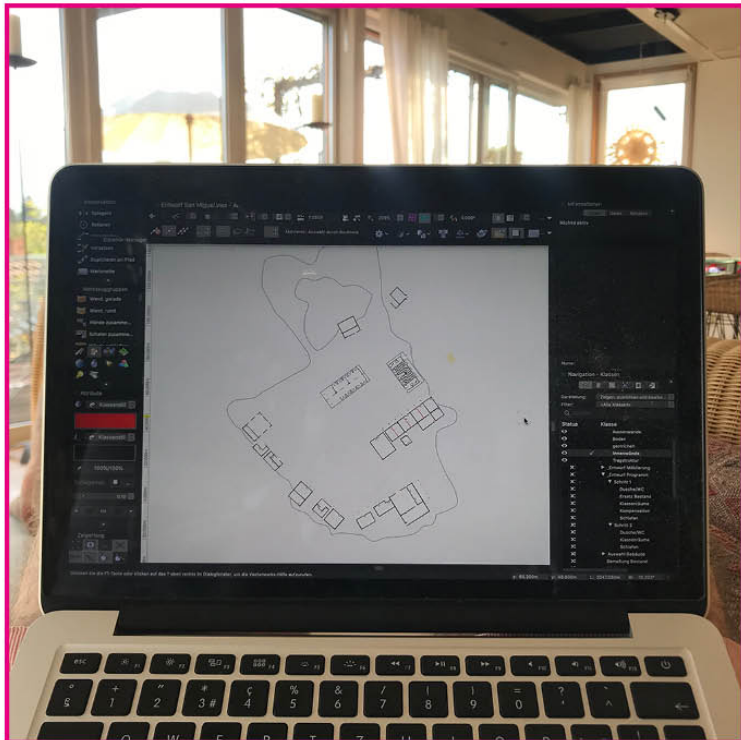
	20200422	20200423	20200424	20200425	20200426	20200427	20200428
10:00							
12:00							
14:00							
16:00							
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10:00							
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20:00							
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20200422
10:00
collision of studio space and
private room



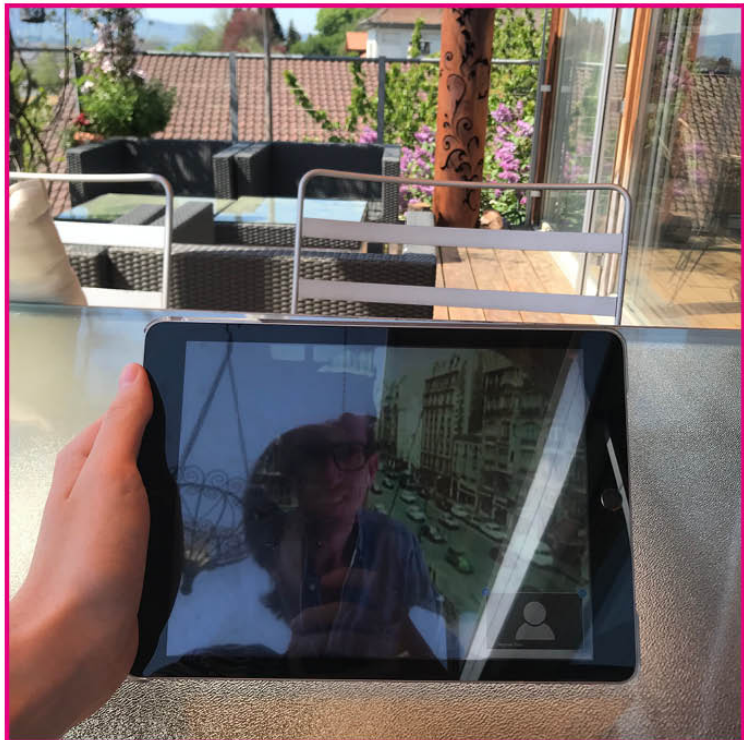
20200422
18:00
collision of individual working
space and living room at my
parents' house



20200422
20:00
collision of gym and private
hallway



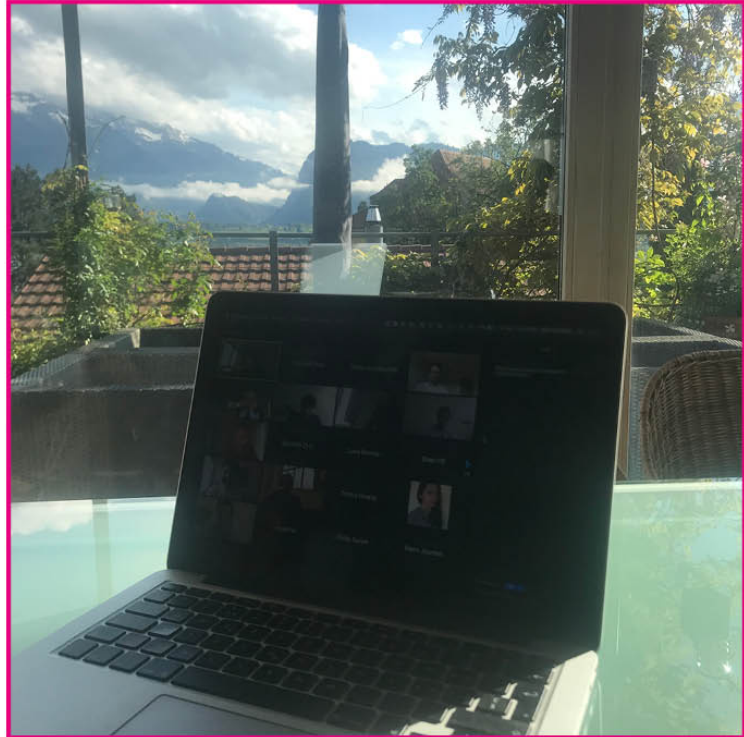
20200423
14:00
collision of lecture room and
balcony



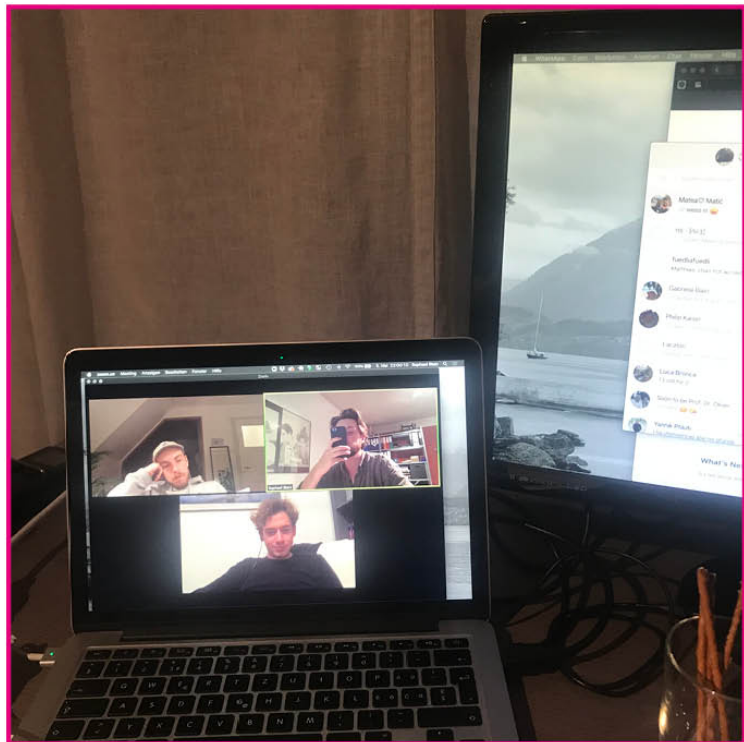


20200425
14:00
collision of my private sphere
and my parent's private sphere
after moving back in

20200505
18:00
collision of mid-term reviews
and living room



20200505
22:00
collision of apéro after mid-term
reviews and private room



The gate to virtual spaces

One thing that becomes very obvious in my visual journal is the importance of the computer screen. This flat surface which is only a couple of millimetres thin really became the gate to all the talks and exchanges linked to my education at ETH. Furthermore, most of the contacts with my friends were only made possible through to this little piece of technology.

Whereas one is able to join the virtual space, it is also clear that by doing so, the personal space that we find ourselves in during such a meeting becomes part of the space that is created virtually. In my experience this resulted in some tensions regarding the way I used and moved through my personal space. During meetings, I more or less consciously chose a place that did not reveal to much of my private sphere. As soon as I felt the need to move to a different room, I would switch off the camera. This behaviour resulted in a different understanding of my personal home and I started to understand, that there are clear distinctions and borders within different areas in our house.

On the other hand, this gate was something very interesting for my relatives. It allowed them to gain access to lectures, discussions, reviews and other parts of my studies in which, up to this point, they didn't have the possibility to take part in. Nevertheless, they mentioned that it was important to them that they could attend these events anonymously. This meant that during these times the camera had always stayed switched off.

Memories, Feelings and Space

As mentioned before, the way our studio worked was completely changed. All of a sudden, we had to work on our projects from home and we did not have the possibility to meet each other in our studio space. This meant that the surroundings in which we had to proceed a creative process were totally different than before.

As an architecture student one quickly learns that a creative process is like riding a roller coaster - sometimes there is a long and slow ascent of progress followed by a steep and very quick fall and some unexpected twists and curves without knowing clearly where you are. All in all, one could say that it is a constant change of emotions.

During the last few months I realised that the given circumstances led to totally new constellations between my personal feelings and their links to the space I was finding myself in. It was really strange to experience moments of very high levels of stress within the home of my parents. The fact that this place had developed to a place of rest and relaxation suddenly changed. The contrast between the way I had memorised it to the way the place felt during these stressful moments was irritating. It made me questioned the ways that we perceive space. I think that the way we feel in a certain moment is projected on the space we find ourselves in and thus influences the way we perceive it. Furthermore, the memories and the positive feelings associated with space did not have a recognisable effect on me during these stressful moments.

Additionally, these circumstances also heavily affected the personal interactions between my parents and me. The dinner table, where we would usually have a lively conversation after our meal, transformed into a very functional place to have a quick bite without real social value or exchange.

The ways that this sphere of working and studying infiltrated our private space and our interactions between each other really changed my understanding of the values of certain thresholds.

The value of distance

My experiences during the COVID-19 crisis made me realise and understand the value of spatial distance. Of course, I did appreciate the possibility to wake up only 15 minutes before a Skype-meeting with my colleagues or the qualities of being able to follow a lecture from the balcony during a beautiful spring day. But on the other hand, I missed the moments of packing my bag after a long day of work in the studio space and having this time where I would be able to get a bit of a distance from my work. Now, I visualise the walk through the long corridor, down the stairs and through the door of the ONA building followed by a 15 minutes walk to my apartment in Oerlikon very clearly and I believe that this routine allows me to leave some of the stress behind and allows for a more relaxed routine after a intensive day of work.

These in-between spaces that usually don't even get any attention and are forgotten as soon as we passed through them are something that we should not underestimate as being spaces that structure and enhance our daily routine.

Conclusion

The effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the way I perceived my personal surroundings were very impressive. They made me understand that the structures and the ways our society separates certain parts of our daily routine spatially result in a very distinct understanding and perception of spatial relations. As soon as these structures become unstable and start to change, everything starts to shift, which then could lead to a state of discomfort.

Not only the spatial perception is affected but also the way we move and interact within space starts to change. The collision, juxtaposition and re-arrangement of spaces many of us have experienced during the last months really ask for a lot of tolerance and understanding within households and communities.

As architects we have to be aware of the values and the importance of thresholds. Thinking of our contributions in spatial interactions, let us be generous in the way we act and give the people the space they need. Generosity should become a key value.