

An Organized
System of
Instructions

Martin
Beck

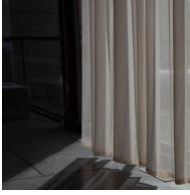
Seven Contemplations on *Program*

Keller Easterling

relationships of the human figure. Just as
project applied geometric shapes to his stu
The Renaissance when the rationalization d
demand for scientific exactness; Alberti's
subject, and we are familiar with Burges's
effect appeared 100 years later. Proportion
'right measure' is a concept as relevant ton
le by the Babylonians and the Greeks.
so an analysis of the spatial structure of t
in the compass and rule, it necessarily
partial relations. In the 20th century, the
er's canon of the Modulor represent two of
of these rational patterns in art and arch

Episode 1 *Removed and Applied*

Gradually you begin to apprehend the space in the same way that a canine might do so. A dog has great interest in the smell of the coffee spilled on the stationery, and has less attention for the tiny words printed on it. In the same way, all the messages that appear on all the surfaces of the space are less important than their color, temperature, smell, timbre and texture. It is easier to see the way things behave, and the sounds of disposition or tone overwhelm the sentences of language. This ability to perceive extends into time, so that finally what is detected is an accumulation of years and years of happy or unhappy activities. Smells of cleaning fluids, floor wax, spilled wine, metal surfaces, perfume—even details of the 1976 retirement party for the person who wore the perfume—are all available. Beyond the bombast of hard design elements, are softer surfaces and contours that have been stroked and petted over time. These together with the movements and respiration of people begin to give the space palpable atmosphere and chemistry. The space has something like a voice that is trying to praise or soothe or energize. Or it has something like a face that is only interesting for how it changes. Without more and more marks and exchanges, it becomes stiff. You can't paint on a smile or a cloying wink. You can only try to prompt the space to change its face again in its own way with its own plastic components. You look at it from the side, like a dog, and try to do one or two things that set up potentials between the parts or start a chain reaction. You probably won't offer a fixed instruction for how it will always look. There are architects for that kind of tedium. You can only give an instruction for what the space might be *doing*—for some event that might cue another event in an unfolding series. You can't orchestrate a balanced homeostasis but you can prompt an interplay that keeps things productively imbalanced.



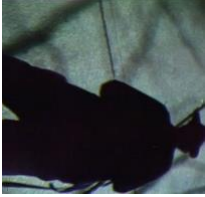
Episode 4 *A Report of the Committee*

Learning to adjust the temperament of spaces benefits from experiments with cubage, airborne particles, light, and materials. An enologist uses both precise measurements and subjective comparisons to assess the chemical potentials of wine. In the same way, some spatial markers will always be meaningful and precise while some will be fluid and indeterminate. Manipulating these factors is often treated as a soft, mystical or unknowable, and then, ironically, given a strict set of rules. But fixed rules only exacerbate tensions. A mother with squabbling children knows not what will work but what to try. Just as there is a clear moment when wine becomes vinegar, a space of over 250,000 cubic feet can dilute many tensions and generate special aural properties. But tiny and persistent adjustments are staples of the art. You can open the window and push chairs into the light or the view. You can change the air and the temperature of the space. Or it should be possible to influence the space with subtly tinted gels or paints or fabrics that alter perceptions or block selected wavelengths of light. You can modulate surface textures, surface areas and ratios of hard surface to penetrable surface. You can introduce giant technological networks or you can pry apart microscopic synapses with edible chemicals. The stories of these “magic” adjustments are really examples of a simple practical art. There was the design studio building that was about to sign a multi-million dollar contract to dampen the accumulated noise from each designer’s loud and clashing music. But just at that moment, the Walkman was invented, and administrators, with their hands poised over the dotted line, were suddenly enveloped in silence. There were the several prisons with identical floor plans. But only the ones orientated toward the south and west were plagued with troubling unrest and violence. There was the wildly successful shop that had previously always failed no matter what was being sold inside, until the train scheduled more stops at the end of the street and someone changed the position of a light on the interior.



Episode 5 *Photography and the City*

The spatial markers are something like hobo code—the signs that Depression era hobos left for each other to indicate conditions along the road. A picture of a cat meant a kind-hearted woman. A circle with an x inside meant a handout. A circle with no x meant nothing to be gained. Two interconnected “w”s or three upside down “u”s meant a vicious dog. There were scores of these signs that communicated everything from the presence of a doctor to the best style of hustling in a particular place. So, the spatial markers, like hobo code, do not represent things like emojis represent a face or an object. Instead they are expressions of spatial disposition—something less about mood or affect and more about how a space is wired or what a space is doing—how it concentrates authority, how information circulates within it or whether it holds a potential for violence. The markers easily diagram the differences between a throne room, a theater, a boxing ring, or an assembly line. But more nuanced signals are needed to convey spaces that are exclusive, inclusive, resistant, in denial, or ossified. They can’t really be part of a fixed set of signs because they need to gather information as they travel. Ideally they become part of the most familiar colloquial expressions that people convey to each other about where they have been. As daily exercises in space they would have the privilege of slang, and they would be indeterminate to be precise.



Episode 6 *Reality is Invisible*

There is nothing magical about it. It is a noisy dinner table. Everyone is shouting over music and talking over each other. They are anxious to tell each other things that they know or anxious to correct someone on a point of information because they believe they have the right answer. But something happens that might be regarded as unusual, even though it is actually strangely familiar or comforting. There are moments when the loud sound of voices and music is quickly but gently turned down, and you would have to acknowledge that the surrounding air is somehow communicating. Of course, it is nothing like words forming a sentence. But the message is easy to understand. And it is substantive. It is simple and clear. If you stop listening, the volume of the shouted conversation is turned back up, and you can laugh and try to jump in with the right answer to a question that is posed. But by being so engaging, the air more and more reliably mutes the sound of people hammering things into other people's heads. Somehow it is what you have been wanting not because it provides the right information or the correct answers that the loud conversation seeks, but because it satisfies a curiosity about the information that is on the flip side of that spoken information. Not unlike tasting or smelling, the information that is absorbed is about mixtures and the underlying chemistry between things. It is enthralling because it leads on like a puzzle, and it is very informative about the mechanics of relationships. For the louder conversation, these sorts of expressions are marginal, inadmissible and daft. But, as the air so convincingly argues, they are really ordinary workhorses of gracious behavior that can be used every day to modulate the interplay between many things in the world. More and more encounters with different regimes of air make this knowledge easier and easier to use.



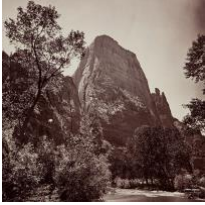
Episode 7 *The Limit of a Function*

Spaces are mixtures—either solutions, colloids, or suspensions. When a space is a solution like water and sugar, it dissolves everything into one kind of invisible molecule. The furniture and accessories are built up from an elementary particle in a universal order made up by architects who are really numerologists. The HVAC system recirculates forced air that moves aerodynamically across the surfaces leaving behind a single odor-cancelling scent. When you introduce a nonconforming element into the room, eddies of air around this indigestible foreign matter create great tensions and violent urges to expel and cleanse. When the space is a colloid like water and milk, large compound molecules are visible but evenly distributed and impossible to separate. The window can be opened, other molecules of dust or pollen can stay afloat, and a limitless number of aromas can be introduced that quickly spread throughout the entire room. Since everything is a reagent to something else, the space exercises skills for creating complement or compatibility, and undissolved particles are noticeable but tolerable. When the space is a suspension like water and sand, there are many sorts of visible lumps that refuse to dissolve and settle. Lots of different things with different sizes, textures and consistencies lie side by side. Some are reactive and some inert. The abundance of difference softens the tensions of the room so that when you introduce any new particle of any color or texture, it causes no distress.



Episode 8 *The Social Question*

Consistent with the custom of using flowers, herbs and trees to communicate in the absence of words, you can give someone Zinnias to convey thoughts of friendship. A red Tulip or a red Rose means love, and Ambrosia or Jonquil means that love is reciprocated. But a striped Carnation indicates refusal. There are many flowers that indicate purity (White Rose, Iris or Lily), joy (Bird of Paradise, Gardenia, Lilac), and cheerfulness (Crocus, Daisy, Gerbera). But within a single type of flower, color can change meaning, sometimes drastically. Yellow flowers are particularly treacherous in the spectrum of meanings. A red chrysanthemum can mean love while a yellow one means slighted love. Hyacinths in general signal games, sports, even rashness because they are the flower of Apollo, and in blue, purple, pink, white or yellow, they can mean everything from constancy, a request for forgiveness, play, loveliness and jealousy. The variants of the lily from Calla, Day, Fucharis, Orange and Tiger can mean beauty, coquetry, maiden charms, hatred and pride respectively. A hydrangea of any color might mean everything from gratitude for understanding to frigidity and heartlessness. And a geranium might mean either true friendship or stupidity and folly. And then there also seems to be disagreements about meaning. Some say the anemone suggests fading hope and anticipation while others say it suggests fragility. Does the Bachelor's Button suggest anticipation or "single blessedness" (whatever that means)? And is it possible that the Candytuft, a pretty little flower that looks lovely all year, is capable of indifference? So many things about flowers resist a fixed code. Their multiple associations become even more complex when in groups and broadcasting scents that mingle in the air. They mix loose symbolic traces with immediate sensory encounters in spaces that surround the body. So you may be able to smell Freesias (innocence and thoughtfulness) that you cannot see while walking on grass (submission) under a canopy of pines (humility), brushing your hand against Asters (patience and daintiness) and sipping mint (virtue) tea. Or you may look straight into the eyes of a 6 foot tall blue Delphinium (big hearted, fun) with Begonias (beware) at their feet while smelling Lilacs (youthful joy) and eating a dill (powerful against evil) pickle. More than many other objects, people have been moved to make of these plants a wonderfully mixed up pantheon of strong and delicate feelings. But you can train to perceive suggestions from a wider array of surfaces, objects, colors and aromas in space, whether or not they have anything to do with vegetation.



Episode 10 *Fifty Photographs*

Then there are the stories about people who seem to single-handedly change organizational disposition. They are stories that are hard to remember because they don't have a conventional narrative arc. And no one has ever heard of the people who are the subject of the stories. No one remembers their name, although they are reliably listed as present in the minutes of institutional proceedings. They were usually advisors or aids in complicated administrations: a union, a university, a legislative body and even a presidency. If they were even the slightest bit mean spirited, they probably sowed seeds of ill feeling that multiplied and cause an organization of otherwise cooperative people to collapse. But the most mysterious ones were the ones who could move through divisive and completely dysfunctional organizations and cause them to productively move forward. These were people who rolled problems between their warm hands and made them into something. Problems were raw material to be patiently harvested each day. Often a batch of problems needed even a few more problems to act as a thickener or reagent in order to make a constructive path forward. They were the person with the very still face tilted to one side listening carefully or the person with a quiet pliable body loosely strung with muscles and bones who was always padding around absorbing trouble. They knew how to position sharp loud mouths and oily whisperers next to the other in such a way that transferred a charge and neutralized their spin. Or they knew how to let each one exhaust themselves without the necessity of engagement. Some people describe a presidency or a course of history entirely changed by the presence or absence of such a person. These extremely rare individuals were not the usual architects of compromise or the yes men who tried to make everyone feel good. These were not cheerful optimistic people offering the motivation aphorisms of management. They did not create deadening consensus. But in response to a binary fight, they knew created a third thing—to change the air or the focal length and shift to a different horizon. In response to a set of knotted forces, they created something outside the set. These were people who just happened to know how to convert a rancid petty tangle of dangerous pointy objects into something else all together. Or they were so still that they caused things to settle. It is just what they knew how to do. And anyone can know how to do it.

