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For Everyone

Text: Louis-Pierre Grosbois
Summary: Benedikt Loderer

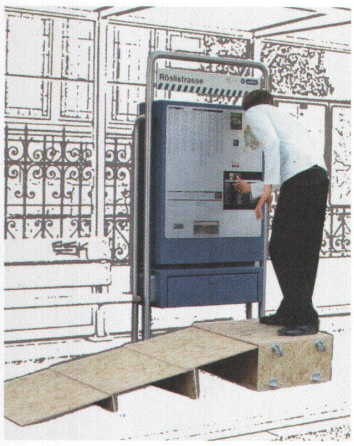
These three projects turn the design process upside down. Instead of designing a building as the first step and then equipping it with facilities for people with disabilities, the authors started with the disability and designed an environment fit for disabled people.

: "Architecture is not just a profession, it is a mental attitude" (Le Corbusier). What does this mean in terms of "Access for All"? The usual procedure progresses from the large to the small. First of all comes the design of the building, and the elements that make it fit for disabled people are subsequently added. The result is buildings that, although better equipped, are indistinguishable from others. But when the design process is turned upside down and proceeds from the smaller to the larger elements, the result is solutions that are not merely fit for the disabled, but fit for human beings. To put it another way: we need to change our mental attitude.

This is exactly what the three projects of the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, which were developed during a research semester, propose: not the addition of auxiliary aids but the creation of an environment. The designed space gets its meaning only through its users. How they live in it, how they perceive it, whether they are disabled or not. For this reason, the design begins with the disability and asks: What can we learn from it? To regard disability not as a deficit but as a perception of the world. For this, we must build new, different spaces.

With the turning upside down of the design process, the Zurich students are way ahead of their colleagues. The schools of architecture should follow their example and learn to teach not how to construct "buildings fit for disabled people," but to take the teachings of perceptual psychology to heart: learning from dementia. •

--> Students: Tobias Klauser, Léonard Koçan, Silvan Oesterle
--> Professor: Marc Angélil, (Dirk Hebel, Jörg Stollmann)
--> School: Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich CH



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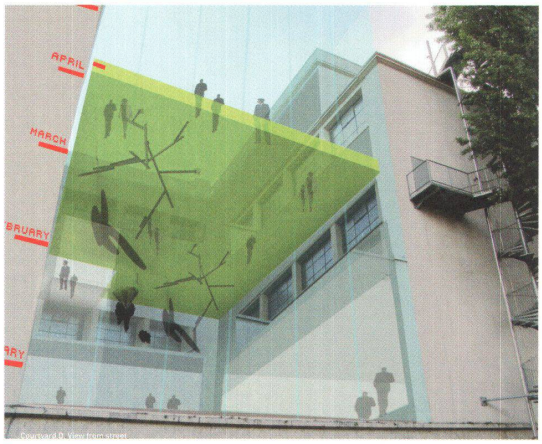

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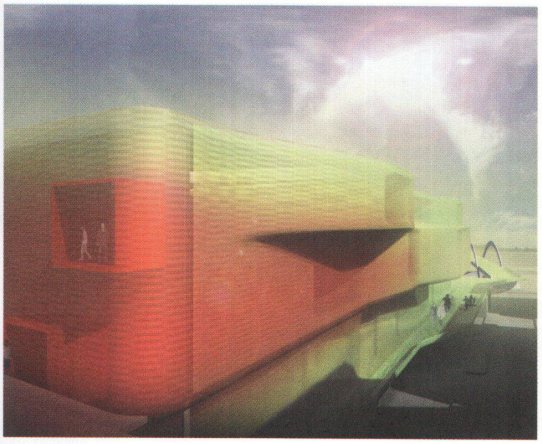
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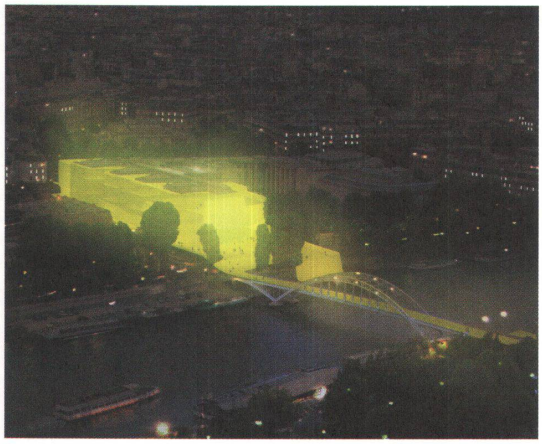
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1 Where ticket vending machines are not adapted to the needs of the disabled, the portable, mobile ramp comes to the rescue.

2-3 A lift is not only a closed-in box, it can just as well be a vertically moving slab.

4-5 If things gets embarrassing in the lift, the museum blushes; if other museums have more visitors, it is yellow with envy.