

Some propositions for museum's security systems

Four works for an empty room

Laser maze / false alarm: a symphony for a museum

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I.

This set of four works for an empty room should be preferably installed in a “white cube” space of no less than eight by eight meters with a way in and out in opposite sides of the room. High ceiling is preferred, around four meters tall (at least). Ideally the lights should be neutral-to-cold (6500K) and dimmerable.

The room is almost empty. Just a few elements disturb the quietness of the space. In this minimal configuration, a voice — at first low and muffled — is coming from the inside of a light switch on the wall. This small object repeats, with a certain variation, the phrase “turn me off”. Whispering from the wall, and then crying for help, screaming, and seducing. If someone tries to help, the switch will laugh at you.

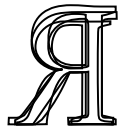
The program that controls the reactions is designed to break expectations. Trying to switch constantly in a short period of time will result in a pause. By the end of every interaction the device will go back to the main track. At first it is a shy invitation, the bipolar mechanism then shifts aggressively, demanding your attention. And retreats. It moans. It fills the space. And goes back into the wall.

Still on an infrastructural level, the lights of the space don't seem to be working properly. They have a life of their own. They blink. They communicate with each other. There is an encrypted signal message and a response. In morse code. Or they play games of imitation, repeating patterns of “on and off” that one or the other proposes.

Matching the other rooms of the space, the lights should remain the same. The hardware interference should not be visible. There are moments where the lights are functioning as they should. Moments of slow orchestrated fades. Flickering. Blinking. Verysubtle. ¹

At the center of the room, the most visible intervention, there is a camera that spins on its vertical axis. Hanging from the ceiling with a

stainless-steel structure, the CCTV security camera transmits the live image of the room to a TV in the space. As the camera is spinning, the image never stabilizes, and informs little about what is happening. It is a dysfunctional vigilant.



With a similar structure, the TV is also hanging from the ceiling with two stainless-steel tubes. The height of the TV should be the same of the camera, about 160 centimeters above the floor. Cables should be fitted inside the metallic tubes.

On their way out, when one is trying to leave the room, they will trigger the alarm. With one of those laser sensors normally used in museums and exhibition spaces to control the proximity of the visitor in relation to the works, this intervention will be installed on the way out of the room. In this way, every time that one crosses the invisible line to leave the room the buzz of the alarm will be heard.

II.

Two other propositions.

In another empty room there is an invisible maze. Its path is created by the intersection of different laser sensors that capture the trespassing of the lines. The sensors are positioned about sixty centimeters from the floor, in the walls. Across the room, receptors will be placed to create a complex but possible design for the maze. Stainless-steel cylindrical supports will hold the receptors at the same height of sixty centimeters, aligned to the other counterparts of the sensors. Every time one crosses one of these invisible lines an alarm is heard. With that, people could either try to find a way inside the maze that triggers less alarms or they could start to orchestrate a choreography of movements and sound in space, “playing” the security infrastructure.²

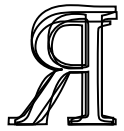
These propositions might cause security problems.

The other project, “false alarm: a symphony for a museum” consists in conducting different alarms and electronical devices as a musical composition. In this situation, the work goes as if all the security devices were denouncing their positions in a hullabaloo of electronic objects. The best scenario for this to happen is in gallery spaces of traditional museums, surrounding Rembrandt, Goya and others. Ideally, this could be installed in the light and camera racks of *Room 9* at the National Gallery, in London. [other options of suitable rooms in the same museum include *Room 30* (Velázquez and the Suffragettes); *Room 45* (for Goya’s famous “Duke of Wellington”, stolen in 1961); and *Room 12* (with The Ambassadors) for a smaller and more intimate symphony.] With all these hypothesis, *Room 9* would be fitting for its amplitude (with approximately 10 × 30 meters and high ceilings) and the surrounding masterpieces by Leonardo and Michelangelo, among others. Small speakers would be placed amidst other security infrastructure, not being visible or distinguishable.



The symphony would first start as if an alarm went off, disturbing the normal experience for the visitor. From there, different “voices” and layers would gather to create this complex arrangement of sounds in a *crescendo*, creating different movements and compositional dynamics. And, just as it started, it would come to an end and everything back to the regular functioning of things.

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Notas

1. It is interesting to note that some museums have automated light systems. In one of my many visits to “The Ambassadors” painting in Room 12 of the National Gallery, in London, I noticed a sudden change in the light. When I asked the security man, he revealed that sensors capture the brightness of the room and if the light coming from the glass ceiling is sufficiently strong, the artificial lights are automatically turned off. Shutters also protect the UV incidence inside the rooms. The security man said that people often come and ask about this light issue. ↵
2. Although laser sensors are not the best security system in general, they are solidified in the common imagination of museums heists due to its visual appeal in cinematographic representations. Thus, the work evokes museum heists such as the very improbable laser dance scene in “Ocean’s Twelve” (2004) or the no less exaggerated sequence in “The Thomas Crown Affair” (1999). ↵



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