

8^e communication | 8. Vortrag

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From Page to Wall: Material Structures and Immaterial Circulations in Late Medieval Visual Culture

This paper examines how the material structures of the medieval manuscript page generate spatial forms that circulate across media, and reflects on how digital immateriality reshapes our understanding of these processes. Far from being a neutral support, the page operates as a structured visual field, organising perception through frames, thresholds and sequences. These features can be understood as forms of "micro-architecture", a category developed largely through ivories, metalwork, seals and stone canopies. The page is considered here for a property those supports do not share: an order that unfolds continuously, under the reader's hand.

Building on a corpus of late medieval and early modern manuscripts, examined alongside panel paintings, carved altarpieces and painted façades in Switzerland and Northern Italy, the study investigates the transfer of such spatial logics from page to wall. These supports are ordered not chronologically but by the status each gives the spatial device, which the page simulates, the carved object builds, and the painted façade simulates again at the scale of the street. Rather than focusing on iconographic parallels alone, the paper argues for deeper structural continuities: what travels is not a repertoire of motifs but a system of organisation.

It further addresses the implications of working with mediated sources. Painted façades such as the Haus zum Tanz survive only through drawn copies, and digitised manuscripts flatten the material and sequential dimensions of the codex. Drawing, engraving, photograph and digital file form a single series of surrogates, each preserving certain dimensions of the spatial device while dissolving others. The paper thus proposes a renewed framework for understanding the manuscript not only as an object, but as a generative model for spatial thinking in late medieval visual culture.

It ends by looking beyond the trajectory its title announces. The Japanese illustrated handscroll has no page, no opening and no turn, yet it generates its own architectural devices, and its history of copying, survival and digital display is as mediated as that of the codex. It is raised here for discussion, as a test of whether the framework holds beyond the objects that produced it.
