

# ON THE VERGE OF NORMALITY

The invisible systems we live in. The orders and the structures that society is built of — that we all belong to — and which we often take for granted. These have always been a fascination of mine. What are the purposes of differing spaces? And what effect do these purposes of spaces have on us?

In previous series, I have dealt with classrooms (*In the Realm of the Possible*, 2003), I have explored conference rooms in municipal administrations in Berlin (*Potential Areas for Projection*, 2010). And for these new projects (*On the Verge of Normality*, 2022 and *Parallel World*, 2022), I have researched the purposes of communal ward spaces within psychiatric hospitals — both active and historic hospitals.

From my research, felt and academic, the communal ward spaces and rooms within psychiatric hospitals are often set up to feel like a 'home' — a 'normal home'; and aim to mimic the staging of a 'normal life'. Lounging in these spaces, patients can, and are purportedly able to, re-acclimatise to the normal flows of life outside the hospital, following a period of treatment.

Investigating the background purposes of these spaces, *On the Verge of Normality* and *Parallel World*, pay attention to the structural details of these rooms and how they can make visible differing states of life. In active hospitals, like those projected in *On the Verge of Normality*, these spaces convey a kind of normality; a state of normal affairs adapted from an idea of what it means to be a functional human being in a society. In the photographic prints that create the series *Parallel World*, these spaces for normality have been debased of their function, becoming places verging on a kind of harrow real; an erry mirror to the normality projected.

With their soft chairs and strong tables, their flecking paint and sparse objects, my interest across these two series lies in the tones that distinguishes these 'rooms for living' from living rooms. Sitting with the small details of each site, *On the Verge of Normality* and *Parallel World* questions the consistency of normality and how this is conveyed.

The series of photographic images included in the exhibition, *Carla Åhlander & Camilla Løw* (Belmacz 2022), come from my time researching in the communal ward spaces in three English psychiatric hospitals: one in South London, another in Norwich, and one in Kent. A special thanks needs to be given to the London-based charity Hospital Rooms for their support facilitating my access to these hospitals, as well as to those whom I encountered at each.

► Carla Åhlander, 2022