

***“Live at Epidemin”*– a cinematic investigation of architectonic space and artistic practice within a public institution of contemporary art**

This investigative research at its very beginning aims to develop deeper and wider understanding of, from an architectural point of view, the fuzzy relations between architectonic space, exhibitions and exhibited art.

The first part is about my subject: “the spatial practices within the architectures of contemporary art” and dictates a background pointing out current spatial tendencies within the field. I will discuss different modes of utilizing architectonic space within the institutions, with focus on the appropriation of given spaces and the performance of process- and new media-oriented art.

In part two, I will introduce a set of borrowed questions/concepts, which I hope will serve me as tools during the investigation.

The third part will contain arguments for my choice of film as my investigative medium and eventually present a film-project in progress. In this part I will also discuss in cinematic media as a research tool.

Henric Benesch, Architect SAR/MSA
HDK, Gothenburg
henric.benesch@hdk.gu.se



Image 1. Installing “Självporträtt”, H. Benesch 2005

1. INTRODUCTION

1:1 Architectures of contemporary art

The practices within the public art institutions as well as their needs has hanged during the last two or three decades. A contemporary art utilizing new media as well as societal processes differs radically in its spatial performance in comparison to “old” media like sculpture or painting. The notion of “interaction” also implies a shift of focus from the actual art object towards its recipient or reader, something that consequently also changes the relation to architectonic space.

But the shift is not only interior and related to viscous forms of contemporary art, the institutions themselves has become strategic pieces on the game-board of global enterprises as well as regional economies. Cultural capital in shape of architecture, art and design easily converts into added value in the branding and identity operations undertaken on different levels within the societal body.

In doing so you can separate between institutions situating themselves within given architectures (Kunstwerke, PS1, Palais de Tokio, Röda Sten and a wide range of galleries) having a what-can-we-make-out-of-things attitude and institutions commissioning architecture to suit and manifest their needs (Guggenheim, MOMA etc.) having a “what do we want”-attitude. In both cases architecture and architectonic space becomes a signifier of art.

1:2 Architecture, exhibitions and art

You can distinguish between three main actors/agents within the public institutions of contemporary art. First of all there is the architecture and its spaces that either can be commissioned or appropriated. This choice has not necessarily to do with funds or resources but can just as well have to do with an overall aesthetic or context, as with the case of Tate Modern. On the other hand if there is a lack of funds, abandoned industrial space offers a lot of space for a fair price.

Secondly, there are the curators editing the contents of the spaces utilized. The curator has to mediate and articulate the possibilities and limitations supplied by the architectonic space and the content and form of the art-works situated within it. The exhibition becomes the link between the art-works and the architectonic space, creating a spatial narrative, making it possible for an audience to make their own interpretation.

Thirdly there are the artists and their art that in the end need some kind of space to enter a dialogue, a space that can be virtual as well as real. The character of this space can be very different depending on the techniques and forms of the established dialogue. For instance the space required to experience a painting

are only to certain degree similar to the space required for experiencing an art-video.

The single exhibition is constituted by the interplay between architectonic space, exhibition narrative and artistic form and content. The exhibition becomes a negotiation where the different parameters at best enhance each other, something which unfortunately not always is the case. For instance the spatial requirements for art within the field of new media or process-oriented art are in many cases opposed to the requirement of traditional art forms. The possibilities shut out light as well as sound are in many cases critical in the context of the contemporary art. This is a kind of paradox since contemporary art in other end ops for inclusiveness and availability.

1:3 Spatial practices

Today many public art institutions are hybridizations of a set of socio-economics activities like, restaurants, cafes, bookshops, giftshops, lecture-halls, seminar-series, concerts, and clubs making trade offs on the cultural capital fostered by core activities taking place within the gallery space. In fact even in the smallest gallery, you can find similar socio-economic activities, although miniaturized. Here you are offered a possibility to buy objects related to the exhibition, eat or drink something etc. As a consequence the gallery space, which in these cases can be the only space, becomes a space shared by a range of activities related to art, where the displaying of art is only one.

If you look at the gallery space itself, it's not only the spatial platform for artists and curators or a space of experience for visitors. It is also a construction site for those building the exhibition as well as a space for calibrating and installing technique for those responsible for the performance of different technological systems (computers, projectors etc). Usually the exhibition is monitored (by guards) as well presented (by guides). On top of this you have basic maintenance performed by janitors and cleaners.

In comparison to many other spatial practices, like walking or cleaning, many of the spatial practices within the architectures of contemporary art are highly reflexive and self-conscious. For instance the curators and artists are well-articulated spatial practices with extensive knowledge of the relations between piece, audience and space. This is what they do, situating art, over and over, in order to promote artistic experiences to an audience.

The reflexive mode also goes for the visitors, eager to express their likings as well as their dis-likings, not only about singular pieces or bodies of work but also whole exhibitions. Ideally the gallery space promotes this reflexive mode at all levels within the ecology of the particular system, mirroring the societal body as a whole.



Image 2. Installing "Jag hade som tidsfördriv att...", H Benesch 2005

2. PERSPECTIVES

2:1 Theory as tools – a beginning

In taking on the investigation of architectonic space and spatial practices within the public institutions of contemporary art as a subject I have undertaken a series of readings as possible entry-points. The readings conducted and presented in this paper does not have the ambition to draw out an extensive and consistent map of the area investigated, but should rather be regarded as generative readings, as the first stepping stones. As such, the readings, at least at this point, do not utilize the full potential of the discourse engaged. Still, I have found scraps and pieces that I at this point have found useful and possible to develop further. At this early stage I regard the readings as tools in a Deleuzian sense. At best these tools will prove consistent with my discourse, at worst (which is not bad at all), they may prove themselves useful only within this initial and temporal context, pointing towards other directions.

I will discuss readings conducted of Michel deCerteau's "The practice of everyday life", Hal Fosters "Design and Crime", Lev Manovich's "The Language of new media" and finally Nicholas Bourriauds "Post-production". These writings are well situated within contemporary discourse regarding design in a wider perspective, and as such I hope they make out some kind position from which I can back-track as well as envision. As writings which have had an impact on contemporary discourse, and as something "in the air" I know their discourse from before, as domesticized in different design magazines and projects, but not in their articulated form. In working with concepts of strategic and tactic practices, the relation between design and the utilization of design, interactivity as well as the notion of postproduction they give depth to current phenomena's. To which degree they articulate line of thoughts already suggested but not articulated and inter-related or actually have some kind of cutting-edge status dictating the general discourse may be discussed. In the end these readings opens up new ways of interpreting space and the use of space in a contemporary context. I will introduce a line of thoughts, first of all regarding the inter-relations between practices within public architectures of contemporary art (deCerteau). Secondly I will discuss the relation between utilizer and utilized in a design perspective (Foster). Thirdly I will bring to focus questions of different modes of interactivity and how we can regard architecture in this sense (Manovich). Finally I will try to use the notion of postproduction to introduce an alternate reading of the architectures of contemporary art (Bourriaud). Altogether I hope the readings can come together as something in between overlapping wholes and separate trajectories suggesting issues to be further developed.

2:2 Michel deCerteau and the practices of everyday life

First I would like to discuss Michel deCerteau and his toolbox of theories and concepts that deals with everyday practices such as walking. In his work you find distinctions between strategic practices and tactical practices. In his words a strategy is "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power...can be isolated from the environment"¹, which he puts in comparison with a tactic which "constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities".

But where deCerteau discusses the dual relation between the everyday practice of the ordinary man and his environment I would like to discuss the strategic-tactic relation between uneven agents within public institutions of contemporary art.

For instance in the case of the re-use of the building you could describe the relation between the building and institution as a strategic-tactic relation, where the institution has to adopt its practice to the building. This relation you also find between the

space/institution/exhibition and the artist adopting his piece and in the end between the piece and the audience interpreting and interacting with the piece.

In this perspective the institution as whole consists of a range of intertwined (spatial) practices, which in an unevenly way, in strategic-tactic relations, are related to each other.

Thus the institutions become gameboards, where ranges of pawns have different possibilities as well as responsibilities. These pawns of functions within the institutions are idealized states, where the curator only does the curating and the cleaner only does the cleaning. In reality the curator may very well do some cleaning, although the cleaner may not do some curating (that is if it is not explicitly stated), all according to the inscribed hierarchy. Thus you find, within and in between the official practices, a range of un-official practices, as a secondary protocol ensuring the performance of the institution.

2:3 Hal Foster, Adolf Loos and the *spielraum* of culture

Secondly I will make use of Hal Fosters collection of essays in "Design and Crime". More specifically I will use his perspective on the work and writings of the Viennese architect Adolf Loos, most noted for his essay "Ornament and Crime", from 1908, and his concept of "Raumplan" or space as stage. Loos was a fierce critic of architects like Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich who advocated design as a "gesamtkunstwerk". For Loos modern life was signified by differences, such as the difference between the private and the public, between exterior expression and inner life. He called for a design and architecture that distinguished and acknowledged these differences. The architects and designers role was to contribute with architecture and design that would work as a platform or background for life rather than being its centrepiece. In Loos mind, architecture and design was not about style, it was about use. Style was a personal issue or as stated by his fellow critic Karl Kraus: "there is a distinction between an urn and a chamber pot and that distinction above all provides culture with a running-room [Spielraum]".

You could describe the concept of *spielraum* as "that" (running-room) which is in between the artefact and the utilizer of the artefact which makes it possible for the utilizer to contextualize him or herself as well situate the artefact according to his or her needs. The *spielraum* is ultimately a void that has to be trespassed in order to become operational, an absence of design, a space, which calls for a practice. Here the mediating between the design and the utilizer becomes a creative act and at best an articulated reflexive practice.

It is easy to recognize architects like Frank Gehry and Rem Koolhaas as the Hoffmans and the Olbrichs of contemporary architecture. But where do we find Loos and Kraus? Is it possible that we have to look for the notion of *spielraum* within the critical dialogue conducted by utilizers of architecture rather than within the practices conducted by architects, as in the examples of PS1 and Kunstwerke?

2:4 Lev Manovich and open and closed interactivity

I also would like to introduce some definitions stated by Lev Manovich in "The Language of New Media" (2002) in order to put yet another perspective on the relation between design and utilizers of designs. In talking about different kinds of media Manovich separates between open interactivity and closed interactivity. Closed interactivity represents the kind of interactivity we find in a traditional novel, a linear computer-game or a high fashion restaurant design. Here our interaction is severely limited and ultimately pre-programmed. We can read a novel randomly or backwards but the logic, construct and essence of the novel will be lost if we do. The same goes for the linear computer-game or high fashion restaurant design, which of

course can be used in the wrong way but in doing it will lose what it is all about as computer-game or restaurant design.

Open interactivity on the other we find in Linux, Lego as well as empty warehouses. Here the interaction itself is the content provider. There is no pre-programmed outcome, expected result or end, anything can happen, at least within certain limits. At least you can sense, illusionary or not, the freedom of choice.

The notions of open and closed interactivity articulate the differences between the design and the utilizer of the design as negotiable. It states that a book, still being a book has a multitude of different ways to interact with its reader, the same goes for softwares and computer-games, as well as architecture and space. In this perspective tailored architectures like Guggenheim Bilbao and New MOMA where a strong link between design and utilizer is established, states a closed interactivity. They already have what they want (although you should be careful what you wish for). Architectures like the warehouse appropriated by Kunstwerke or the school appropriated by PS1, where the utilizers supply the architecture with content as well as they make it accessible, oppositely states an open interactivity (What can we make out of things?).



Image 3. Installing "Tänk om det verkligen är så...", H Benesch 2005

2:5 Nicholas Bourriaud and the notion of postproduction

A new hero and cultural icon of the new millennium is the Dj. The art of Dj-ing has little to do with acoustic music performances or studio production of music. First of all a Dj does not produce any music of his own that is as a composer or artist although he or she may very well produce tracks to be used while Dj-ing. Instead the Dj fuses or mixes tracks, produced by other artists, in live performances or sets, a continuous, temporal and dynamic entity constituted by the interplay between the Dj, his choice of records and the audience.

In his book Postproduction, Nicholas Bourriaud discusses notions like sampling, mixing, editing as the common denominators of contemporary cultural production. The notion of postproduction is about how things, new as well as old are utilized in different ways in accordance to specific context, situations and events. It also suggests the act of re-interpretation, re-instating and re-combining as something more than a simple repetition or mechanic procedure, that is as an act of meaning-creation by it's own right.

In perspective of the utilization of architecture, the notion of postproduction, shifts the balance between the notions of function and use. In the best of worlds architecture are rendered specific functions which are supposed to correspond to specific uses. But in most cases we are forced to re-utilize architecture according to our needs (when its already there). Chronologically architecture is altered through the change of use. Beginning from the date the building is ready to inhabit or occupy the building is engaged in

an on-going process or metamorphosis, a series of smaller or larger alterations, which correspond to the temporal needs of a long line of utilizers.

Functions and uses are not rigid states by rather dynamic ambitions that aim to establish a correspondence between the built and the lived in a give-and-take process. Not only may a use alter a building but a building may also alter a use. In many cases both things are true. The most dramatic examples of this kind mutation of the function/use issues we find within the architectures of contemporary art. For instance during the 70's and 80's the artist and exhibitors moved to downtown industrial loft-spaces on Manhattan as first step of cultural re-appropriation. During the 90's many larger, public as well as private, art institutions moved out to old industrial areas and into old industrial buildings like warehouses and powerplants as well as old institutional buildings (PS1, Kunstwerke, Tate Modern etc). This shift, or return to the real to use the words of Hal Foster, of location and space have given access to a new range of exhibition spaces (large scale and dramatic), to which a new range of pieces has been created as a response (for instance *Marsyas* by Anish Kapoor in Tate Modern). This way left-over areas and buildings have been re-instated in contemporary life and thought, brought back by acts of re-interpretation, re-programming as well as re-utilization.



Image 4. Tools, H Benesch 2005

3. INVESTIGATIONS

3:1 Background

There are many ways to approach this project. One way could be to study that which has been built and developed within the field. These kind of typological studies have to some degree already been made (Newhouse 1998, Sachs, ed. 2000). In my perspective this kind of study becomes a meta-narrative, telling the story about how architects and institutions respond to the task of giving shape to the institutions to which artists should contribute with their practice. The strong relation between architects, directors and to some degree curators (Sabbagh, 2000) puts its mark on the institutions, where the artists in many cases are absent at this stage of the process, thus putting an emphasis on architectural branding and identity together with curatorial possibilities. In the best of worlds this would have no negative influence on the actual performance of specific artistic works, but in most cases negotiations and compromises will dictate the conditions, which of course not always is a bad case. In many cases this kind of "resistance" can operate as a generative force within the process. In this project I will try move to a position closer to the source, namely the artistic practices who are supposed to perform in these spaces. What kind of spaces do they opt for? What kind of spaces do their practices require? What ideas do they have about

the architectures of contemporary art? Is there some kind of generative resistance and if so how do we avoid being too smooth? This kind of projects have been done from an artistic point of view, mainly with a focus on relation to public space and the role of the art community within contemporary society (Bode, Schmidt 2004), as well from theoretical points of view.

This architectural re-reading that I am proposing, suggests an updated reading of the spatial practices of contemporary artists when it comes to the utilization of architectonic space. The artistic spatial practices as defined within the modernistic movement are still very dominant, at least within the architectural community, being valid for many artistic practices, but not all (mainly those working within new media and process-oriented art). This shift that I am proposing, from the architectures of contemporary art to the utilization of the architectures of contemporary art, including those architectures appropriated by artists as well as institutions, calls for a different investigative approach than the typological study described before.

3:2 Strategies

To choose an approach or more specifically to choose tools and methods is also by consequence a way of choosing in what way the tools and methods in themselves should guide the process. The use of tools and methods suggests some kind of pre-understanding of what these tools and methods does, both in order to use them properly but also in order to get what you desire out of them. To a certain degree they constitute predictable paths and thus operate as a kind of shortcut, that is, if you know what you are searching for.

As an architect there is a simple way of learning about the architectures of contemporary art. By means of referential projects and projective drawings and models an architect can engage artists as well as curators in a discussion about how the architectures of contemporary art ought to be. Here the architectural drawings and models constitute a generative space, a meeting place for the different actor/agents within the project. Drawings and models are developed and articulated through a series of negotiations until a reasonable agreement is reached. Thoughts are expressed in a what-and-how-to-build language and translated into representations of built matter. Even more, since the initial program and problems stated usually are vague, the solutions developed through drawings and models, are tools for creating a better understanding of the actual problems and how to solve them (the project as a process where you learn what you want and can do). In perspective of my research, this approach has a disadvantage, since it in the end has a focus on how the spaces ought to correspond with a fictional use, rather than how space is utilized in actual practices.

In an architectural practice you engage in the process of the actual in a fictional and projective way, with different kinds of representations. The architect's commitment ends where the actual begins (the construction site), although he may have to negotiate continuously between the fictional and actual on site. In cinema it is the other way around. The crew and directors etc begin in the actual (if you don't count the script) and brings it into the fictional (the film), through a process of editing and postproduction.

By working with film within an architectural practice (as a process where the tools operate to give you better understanding of the actual problem), I will try to reverse the relation between the actual and fictional. That is, to start out in the actual and to bring it into the fictional. This way I can approach the spatial practices as they are, in context and in dialogue. Further more; I will also be able to develop a material to promote discussion, questions and inquiries, as the project moves on.

3:4 A cinematic investigation

Since contemporary art exhibitions are limited in time as well as space they are well suited for investigative cinematic projects. The exhibition does not only offer a physical setting but also provides a cast (artists, visitors, critics etc), script (a making, an expression and reception as well as an un-making) and a range of exhibition related themes.

In this first cinematic investigation I have chosen to follow an artist and friend while installing his exhibition in a gallery in central Gothenburg. Being my first film-project, it felt important to have to possibility to improvise and try things out. Thus, working with someone I knew well, felt more experimental in a relaxed sense. A failure wouldn't be a disaster, but something, which could be pondered in dialogue with friends and colleagues later on. Further on his artistic practice was very much about process and spatiality, which meant that he would actually work with the gallery space as a tool. Also he was acquainted with the project and had no problem with me sticking around for four days while he was preparing and installing his exhibition. Further on, the gallery space itself had specific qualities interesting for my line of research, being an old epidemic hospital.

Entering the gallery I became Peters (the artist) helping hand as well as a cinematic investigator. Working with both a digital camera and a DV-camera I shot around 300 pictures and 3 hours of film. The shots captured the work performed and the discussions that took place where very much of a problem-solving kind of dialogue, a how-to-do and what-to-do discussion. Working with the editing of the film I soon realised that the reflective material acquired weren't enough. The shots showed the actual work performed very well but had a hard time putting a perspective on the actions performed. As a consequence I meet Peter in his office for yet another session (only two hours) where he gave his perspective on the exhibition as well as his thoughts about exhibition spaces in a contemporary perspective.



Image 5. Image from "Live at Epidemin", H Benesch 2005

3:5 Perspectives on a cinematic investigation

The first film I called "Live on Epidemin" with the Swedish subtitle "en liten film om arkitektur" or "a short movie about architecture". The aim of the film is two-folded, that is on cinematic level. First of all, showing how space can be utilized and how the preparation work required for it to be utilized can ask questions about in what way art and architecture or piece and space can correspond and enter a dialogue. Here the actual work performed is the key issue, as a mediating force aiming for a qualitative coherence. Secondly, the case also serves as a point of departure, for a generic discussion about exhibition spaces.

Working with a cinematic investigation is about asking you in what way the actual shooting of the film can be generative? How

can a material that can contribute to discourse be acquired? First of all, since everything is live, you won't get a second chance. Either you're there or you are not. Shooting thus becomes a gamble, which you have to put your faith into. Even though you can manipulate the shots by pushing the cast or actually perform yourself, in the end it is really hard to tell what will come out of the material. This is also the reason why the editing becomes at least as educating, since it in the end is here, that the multiple shots are put into one continuous entity. While editing you one way or another have to go through all of the material. In doing so, the position established and the direction suggested by the material becomes clear. You can follow your own discourse and more importantly your own hidden agenda that if nothing else, becomes evident overlooking the material as a whole. Whether you like it or not, the way you do things and think about things puts a mark on the material. Even if you not in the film, you are in the film. From a research point of view, this could be regarded as problematic, or oppositely, as an actual resource. Although the cinematic tools are very manipulative you can, from an outside perspective when editing the film, get a sense of initial intentions, hidden agendas as well as new openings. Working ones way through the material presents new patterns on the subject as well as your position as a researcher in the project. Editing becomes a reflexive mode as well as an interpretative mode aiming for a cinematic articulation contributing to discourse like this.

3:6 Backtracking

The material gathered is an open book, which you can read in many ways, but it was gathered with an aim as well as a set of pre-notions. In what way did notions such as postproduction, open interactivity, spielraum as well as spatial practices come in to use? First of all the notions rendered a framing; a what-to-look-for and a where-to-look-for as well as a how-to-look-for. Having the notions in mind when entering the gallery, gave directions being a counterforce to the real, a resistance.

After having left the session, and gallery, going through the material, the material became two-folded. On one hand actual chronological events emerging from a situation, which you somehow feel a responsibility to make proper interpretations. On the other hand the material also emerges as examples, as individual parts which you can arrange according to an intention, or as in this case, a cinematic form. As such, there are a multitude of shots from which you could discuss notions of postproduction, interactivity etc. But you could just as well discuss other issues, like spatial proportions or configurations. The correspondence between the notions and the actual events is purely intentional (read my intention) in the sense that it is there as an interpretation and a reading. The shift which occurs when re-interpreting the events in perspective of notions such as postproduction etc, is rhetorical, but it serves a purpose. The new notions, although somewhat alien in relation to architectonic discourse, suggests an alternate reading of architecture as process and media rather than object and manifestation, as becoming rather than being.

In this kind of project, putting something called theory at one place and things called practice on another is of little use, since they operate simultaneously on the same level, within a line of action, as a trajectory and an ambition. Planning shots as well as conducting interviews/dialogues or editing, forces you to scrutinize the key concepts over and over in a continuous process of articulation. Experience, hunches and readings forces you through the actual. Thus the notions or concepts are not used in order to provide answers but rather as guiding lights and referential complexes, as opposed to traditional concepts and notions within discourse (architectural) granting a safe passage within the known. Instead they offer possible detours (hopefully generative) to an area less articulated, stated and closed.

REFERENCES

1. Foster, H. Return of the real 1996
2. Foster, H. Design and Crime 2002
3. Bourriaud, N. Relational Aesthetics 1998
4. Bourriaud, N. Postproduction 2001
5. Deleuze, G. A thousand plateaus 1987
6. Deleuze, G. Cinema 1: Movement-Image 1983
7. deCerteau, H. The practices of everyday life 1989
8. Colomina, B. Privacy and Publicity 1994
9. Manovich, L. The language of new media 2002
11. Newhouse, V. Towards a new museum 1998
12. Sachs A. Museums for a new millennium 1998
13. Sabbagh, K. Power into art 2000
14. Bode M. Schmidt S. Spaces of Conflict 2004