Reflection

Urban Caring: finding creative strategies for care-full architectural practices in Norra Sorgenfri, Malmö.

Formulating a good thesis question is probably one of the most important parts of succeeding in making a thesis project. For me, this has become clear during the process of the project. I started my thesis with questions and reflections that I have been working with during my two years at the master program Critical studies design studio. A common denominator for these questions are the role of the architect and how it can be altered to be more socially involved and more active in societal change. Furthermore, as all the projects in my studio, projects I have been involved in have been aiming towards redefining and expanding the borders of architecture itself. These questions are though quite wide, and serve more as a framework for the whole of the project.

In order to narrow down my subject I looked towards how the role of the architect can be informed in a more specific way, namely by the feminist ethics of care. How the concept of care can inspire architects, is something I and Sara Brolund de Carvalho started investigating in the semester prior to my thesis project, in spring 2012. The following quote by Kim Trogal served as a starting point for me and inspired me to more deeply explore care in relation to architecture: "...in other professions such as nursing, or roles like parenting, the caretaker is looking after by: nourishing; stimulating; healing, loving; teaching and so on. What is it that the "urban caretaker" do when looking after public space?"

Applying feminist ethics of care to an architectural project means using real life practices and focusing on values such as compassion, empathy and solidarity. In the 1980:s feminist ethicist and psychologist Carol Gilligan introduced care as an attached way of human connection, requiring listening and understanding differences and needs, in contrast to what is perceived as male ethics of justice and hierarchies. The concept of care points towards networks of and relationships between people (and non-human actors). In this light, I have tried to define a design practice where sustainability is understood in relation to responsibility and actions oriented towards other people. My thesis was influenced in this manner by practices such as Atelier d'Architecture Autogéré, Paris, and muf architecture and art, London.

My interest in speculating and critically imagining other ways of developing cities and making space led me to look at a current and celebrated urban regeneration project: Norra Sorgenfri in Malmö. The concept of urban care-taking applied to this site, let me explore and develop several care-full methods of engaging with the site and the people who are active there today. It let me experiment and work with several levels of Norra Sorgenfri in a complex way, something I was hoping to do before I started the project. In this way the process became part of the final result, not something that only led up to it, since the project avoided to look for one pre-determined answer or a before-and-after scenario, but ways in how you can work with urban caring.