URBAN CARING
Finding creative strategies for care-full architectural practices in Norra Sorgenfri, Malmö

Master thesis booklet by Anja Linna

Critical Studies Design Studio
Advisors: Hélène Frichot and Meike Schalk
Studio teachers: Brady Burroughs and Katja Grillner
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INTRODUCTION

How can we make visible practices of caring in architecture?

I am interested in the social spaces where people come together in their everyday life, the spaces that we have in common and that are made common through use and activities. They are small-scale common and public spaces that take care of people’s social needs and social spaces for groups of different kinds, as different associations. As Kim Trogal, Sheffield University, points towards, we need a radical re-imagining of ‘public’ space as a basis for transformations, both physical, social, individual and collective.

During the spring 2012 I and Sara Brolund de Carvalho, fellow student in Critical Studies Design Studio, have been working with a project that explore the basement spaces in the 1950’s built fabric of Bagarmossen as important common spaces. The mapping resulted in the film “Underground Urban Care-taking” which use close-ups of working hands together with voices from dialogue to convey women’s practices in these basement spaces. Through an exhibition proposal we then wanted to promote the need for spaces where social, non-commercial (or micro-commercial) activities can take care of people’s collective, political and creative needs, longings and desires.

I am interested in and find a big importance in these spaces of solidarity, everyday life, shared struggle and communal production, that also take care of the most vulnerable in our society. I believe that the ethics of care in feminism can help architects form a socially and politically aware practice.

I understand architecture as a process of making space. To use the term spatial practice (see Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 1991) suggests an expansion of architectural practice to include spaces and practices that would otherwise have been excluded. This is important in a feminist practice since it includes spaces for women and marginal groups in architectural history and today. My aim is to work with the empowering aspects of social practices, giving importance to dialogue, participation and citizen action.

This booklet is an outcome of a collective work drawing from the CSDC studio, and more specifically from the collective ‘modus operandi’ of the work together with Jenny Andreasson and Anna Ingebrigtsen during the thesis semester of fall 2012. The collaborative practice of sharing ideas and knowledge to enable discussion and design is an important aspect of our thesis projects.
STATEMENT OF INTENT

CARING AS A SPATIAL PRACTICE

How can feminist ethics of care inform a critical, feminist spatial practice that is empowering and inclusive?
How can I use ‘caring’ as a critical tool to create architectural proposals?
How can I formulate a strategy for an alternative urban development, that critically imagines another way of making space, social and common, than the commercial and conventional? How can this thesis project be inspired by and participatory through people’s everyday practices as acts of urban care-taking?

RESEARCH QUESTION

ACTIVITIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

The thesis projects has a focus on everyday activities for coming together and creating belonging. By using everyday practices as an architectural approach, I want to critique the dichotomy private and public, where the historically feminine activities of the home are devalued.

I believe that activities such as gardening, cooking, doing laundry, building, repairing, handicraft etc are important factors in a community.

In “Open Kitchen or ‘cookery architecture’” Kim Trogal describes how the everyday practice of cooking can be used as a design tool. (in Doina Petrescu (ed), Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space. 2007). There is a potential in everyday practices to restore a space for play and freedom.

In Spring 2011 I examined the collective and social potentials of courtyards in inner city Stockholm. The aim with ‘The Garden House’-project was to provide a new self-built housing typology for newly arrived immigrant teenagers as part of a social recreation of the courtyards in Stockholm, with a focus on social, everyday activities that the inhabitants could gather around.

References:
Michel de Certeau
Kim Trogal

Collage that shows the social and collective potential of a courtyard in Södermalm, Stockholm

Kem Trogal: ‘Cookery architecture’
‘SOCIAL SPACES’

One aspect of caring is to give room for free time, for leisure, for play, for hobbies, for odd and space requiring activities, for meetings, for planning parties and revolutions, for joy and sorrow and for all of the diversified activities that constitute people’s social needs.

I would like to incorporate parts of ‘The Social Space’ project that me and Sara Brolund de Carvalho worked with during the Spring 2012, since we here started investigating urban care-taking and social, common space.

Our exhibition proposal has as its aim to spread awareness of the importance of social spaces, in particular those that are used for handicraft, handwork activities and several group activities that create social bonds. Or that can be be read as an act of “commoning”.

The questions that we’ve worked with is why these spaces and the activities that take place there are important…Social spaces is a term we’ve chosen that incorporates both public and private spaces. The private here are the affordable and easy to access rent spaces within a community.

The exhibition uses Bagarmossen as a case study but refers to swedish urbanism in general. It combines both information about different types of social spaces, a brief history of public and common spaces and a display of handicraft activities. The importance of not-reducing, of including complexity, and to tell about as many aspects possible … (refer to the exhibition Social Fabric?). The role of the archive for further exploration, a network of different stories.

The device, talk through the work of the hands, is incorporated in the function of the exhibition, giving importance to material aspects of dialogue. Our ambition is that the aesthetics of the exhibition, through its playfulness, will invite people to take part of it.

In new housing this typology is absent. This is a worrying trend and there is a need to shift policy!
Building-collectives (“baugruppen” in German and “byggemenskaper” in Swedish) and self-built projects can make physical, non-conventional and new forms of living. They are also a potential critique on how our cities are build, giving room for alternative economies and non-profit building. They could therefore possibly be a way of providing for cheap housing, enabling people with low income or social status to build a housing for themselves. The process of self-building can give power to the user/inhabitant.

As Meike Schalk acknowledges, problems with “baugruppen” are that the groups involved are often quite homogenous in age and income, usually including young middle class families in creative professions with small children. They could be reluctant to build-in shops/services/public spaces in the ground floors of their house, which has an impact on street life.

A part of the thesis might be to investigate the social and collective functions of housing and self-building, as a form of urban care-taking?

How can you give more importance and focus to the activities people gather around (for example collective gardening) in a building-collective or self-built project? Is there a way to start with everyday, social and common activities and let them form and lead on to housing? Can the activities be part of a premature gratification as Katherine Schonfield states in the muf manual?

Urbana villor, Malmö, a multi-family housing built by a collective of architects.

Mad housers, Atlanta, build simple and cheap ‘huts’ for and together with homeless people.

Egnahemsrörelsen, self-built movement in early 1900s Sweden.
DESIGN RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

detail + strategy = DETAIL

“How do you develop a city-wide strategy when you are fascinated by the detail of things? And how can you make something small-scale in the here and now if you are driven by the urge to formulate strategic proposals for the future?”

Katherine Schonfield, “Premature Gratification and Other Pleasures” in *This is What We Do*, muf, 2001, p 14.

“I want to apply muf’s method of from the particular to the general and then back to the particular, to move from the close-up to the bigger picture and then back to the detail.

‘Premature gratification’, or to start with the social

“They secured a lease on a run-down building because they were going to create an advice, leisure centre and social club for themselves and others with similar experiences. Their first architectural act was not to secure the roof or the structure, but to install a sauna. The idea here is that the gratification of the whole completed project is experienced prematurely: up-close and personal in the well-being of the body relaxing in the heat. It’s like starting your meal with the best bit.”

Katherine Schonfield, 2001, p 17

Katherine Schonfield, “Premature Gratification and Other Pleasures” in *This is What We Do*, muf, 2001, p 14.
TACTICS AND STRATEGIES. APPROPRIATION

“...strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces.”


“Although they remain dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances, these transverse tactics do not obey the law of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it.”

Michel de Certeau. 1984, p 29

In her dissertation *Den självorganiserade staden: appropriation av offentliga rum i Rinkeby*. (2008) Lina Olsson examines the importance of public space for self-organisation and spatial change through appropriation. She studies actions of self-organisation in the Swedish suburb Rinkeby. Self-organisation has a potential to render social and cultural identities in public space visible. (Lina Olsson, 2008, p 243) Olsson uses Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau’s notions of space as a theoretical framework for her analysis.

Strategies and tactics are actions that make use of space in different ways, they are different possibilities for inhabitants to create and remould space. If the strategies refers to a steady power, tactics express potential through mobility. The subjects in the city have possibilities to modify or manipulate the existing, to stretch its boundaries. Tactics are not a question of what is created, but how something is done.

Olsson study the small shops and associations that are located in former collective space such as laundry rooms, storage rooms, garages, hobby rooms in Rinkeby. She sees these spaces as acts of appropriation by the inhabitants. (Olsson, 2008, p 176)

Basement spaces in Bagarmossen with potentials for common and social activities, also sites for appropriation? Part of the ‘Underground Urban Care-taking’ project.
FEMINIST DESIGN TOOLS

NARRATIVES

“My interest in architecture and in history is embedded in my fascination with the politics of sexual difference. My position as a feminist makes a difference to the way in which I know. Negotiating a meaningful relation between the personal and the theoretical is central to much feminist work. With myriad feminisms, there can be no single way of knowing the city. But who I am raises important questions about the ways I proceed, about my methodology. Who I am makes a difference to how I read and what I write. It makes a difference to the way I do things, to what and how I can know.”


To use the personal story as a feminist method to position myself. Using the personal as a critical tool to avoid a normative generalization.

Critical thinking aims at understanding core, underlying meanings which are not always the most visible ones. It is about questioning superficial truths, unpacking them and moving beneath the surface; it can mean being specific and clear at the same time as being poetical and political. bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking. Practical Wisdom* (2010)

FICTO-CRITICISM

In “Buried Narratives”, *Urban Wildscapes*, Catherine Heatherington writes that stories connect individuals and communities with their history and environment. Stories can be formalised as rituals. Other stories are more personal, like a family walk in the park. Narratives are embedded in our understanding of place and they contribute to local distinctiveness and community.

To write a place / architecture:

References: Katarina Bonnevier *Behind Straight Curtains*
Katja Grillner

In *Teaching Critical Thinking. Practical Wisdom* (2010) bell hooks write that stories can help us deal with the complexities of the world, they include a when, when and where. “Stories enchant and seduce because of their magical multidimensionality.” bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking. Practical Wisdom* (2010), p 50.

‘THE PERSONAL’ AS A FEMINIST (DESIGN) TOOL

Decolonizing Architecture

The power of imagination

Utopian qualities - what kind of society do we want to have.

To show other possible futures

Create scenarios and tools for change

A playful critique on current situations and norms.

Use of fiction - a wild boar amulet that also is a map of a walk in the woods, from the project “Knitting Myths”, CSDS fall 2011
A big part of the thesis is to further investigate and explore how a feminist ethics of care can be used as a critical urban category and spatial practice.

Kim Trogal, Sheffield School of Architecture, is exploring this topic in her PhD research, and I would like to use her research as a reference and influence for the thesis. Through her writings on what a care-taking architectural practice can be, I will use her examples and find other architectural examples of care-taking, to formulate a caring spatial practice.

Readings:


Writings on feminist “ethics” of care (from Trogal’s essay):


The ethics of care in an African-American tradition:


Care work as an “affective labour” within the contemporary capitalist condition:

1 TO SEE THE SITE AS A ‘FIELD’

“Typically, site – an area of control, an area of influence, an area of effect... – is understood within an architectural frame of reference as a place with potential. Students learn on fieldtrips to look for sites, to frame and limit sites, to project potential onto sites. Field suggests more fluid qualities, and unfixed conditions suggestive of contemporary networked conditions....’field’ describes a place to learn from, to research, to draw from.”


2 AN ‘ARCHAEOLOGICAL’ APPROACH

“They deny the lot’s emptiness, revealing clues to its past and present through a plethora of found objects. Beneath the muddy grass is a set of old letter blocks; against the brick wall an armchair; hidden in the bushes a pair of headphones. A surprising richness is discovered. This site that initially seemed blighted is revealed as a record of memories and objects.”


3 INTERSTITIAL SPACE

“Interstices represent what is left of resistance in big cities – resistance to normativity and regulation, to homogenization and appropriation. They embody, in a sense, what is still ‘available’ in the city. Their provisional and uncertain status allows for hint, a glimpse of other ways of creating a city that are open and collaborative, responsive and cooperative. The importance of the interstitial experiment is borne out in this very register, in methodological, formative, political, as well as heuristic terms.”


Although in-between spaces, interstices or left-over space can be seen as a potential for resistance, I think it is important to try to not romantizise these spaces, and to not see them as ‘blank sheets’ for the architect to project her visions on, but to study the activities and actions that already take place there.
SITE / CONTEXT

AIM:

To make the project a tool within the transformation of social, political and economic conditions

Use common, social space as an alternative catalyst for urban development

To look at existing actions, appropriation and traces of desire

AREA: NORRA SORGENFRI, Malmö

Norra Sorgenfri is an industrial area, with a ‘desirable’, central location in Malmö. The city of Malmö has developed an extensive plan for regeneration of the area, with a focus on mixed use, small scale building companies and incorporation of the old industrial buildings in the newly built fabric. The housing include rentals and cooperative private building.

Documents from Malmö city:


Norra Sorgenfri has a quite central location, connecting different parts of the city with different socio-economical groups
The aerial view reveals old industrial buildings and the big scale of streets and buildings in the area compared to the surroundings.
METHOD AND PROCESS

MAPPING OF ACTIVITIES, GROUPS AND ACTIONS IN THE AREA

TO FIND TRACES OF DESIRES

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT - WALK, TALK, VISIT, ENGAGE

LOOK AT THE DETAIL, UP-CLOSE AND PERSONAL, AND THE EVERYDAY.

A personal map that I made in Tensta in Spring 2011, as part of a studio project led by Meike Schalk.
Throughout my individual thesis project, I aim to collaborate with Anna Ingebrigtsen and Jenny Andreasson. We will collectively work with feminist design methodologies and practices to envision a critical architectural practice.

The main goal is to challenge and expand the profession of architecture and the idea of what architecture is. One way to do so is to investigate and try out the roles we take on as architects. Who produces architecture? What is the profession of architecture interested in? …. We are interested in investigating the power relations at work in the practice and use of architecture. By working together, we resist the hierarchical structures and ideas connected to the single genius that exist in the discipline.

We want to name and claim our own precedents and to create a history for ourselves in architecture. This is also a way to include other voices in the conventional stories and histories we know. To re-read, re-write, re-draw and mess with them.

One of the ways in how we will operate is by having a weekly assignment that we share. This could be a question, a theme with responses ranging between words, narratives, diagrams, images, drawings, sketches, models, performances, sounds, music, dance...

The aim is that the assignments will work as a catalysts for our individual projects and for our collective work. The culmination of the assignments will form a assemblage of research knowledge, ideas and visions as a contribution to the architectural practice of large. One of our first assignments is to write a manifesto with statements and definitions. Such as, what our understanding and application of architecture throughout our practice is.

We will create a collective library as a resource to draw inspiration from and develop shared methodologies.

Our ambition is that our three projects will share methodologies and aims, and continuously inform each other. We want the projects to together create a context for one another. This could be done through creating a common ground, an imaginative or figurative site where the projects co-exist.

The aim is to make a contribution to a feminist practice in architecture.
An activation of an un-used or under-used (leftover, urban void, wasteland) space in the La Chapelle area in Paris.

aaa uses the term ‘micro’ to describe a modus operandi that is more effective and closer to the user. They are trans-local, since only using the term local can be isolating. (“Reflections on Practice, an interview with Doina Petrescu by Ramia Mazé”, Design Act: Socially and politically engaged design today - critical roles and emerging tactics, Magnus Ericson and Ramia Mazé ed, Iaspis, Sternberg Press, Stockholm, 2011.)

“A series of self-managed projects in the La Chapelle area of northern Paris which encourage residents to get access to and critically transform temporary misused or underused spaces. These projects initiated in 2001 valorise a flexible and reversible use of space and aim to preserve urban ‘biodiversity’ by encouraging the co-existence of a wide range of life-styles and living practices.

We began this process by establishing a temporary garden constructed out of recycled materials. The garden, called ECObox, has been progressively extended into a platform for urban criticism and creativity, which is curated by the aaa members, residents and external collaborators and which catalyses activities at a local and trans-local level.”

In the work of artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles feminist strategies and care-focused values are clearly present. The piece “Hartford wash” consists of the artist cleaning a museum during opening hours. It deals with questions of the everyday and low-paid labour, the invisibility of maintenance work, the body and the personal. By using her daily work at home as a mother and wife, Laderman Ukeles transforms the low paid maintenance work into an activity that symbolically deserves an audience and, above all, recognition.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

READINGS AND PLANNED READINGS


Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics. Social relations as a site of practice.*


Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects.*


Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space.*


Based on her extensive experience in the urban communities of Los Angeles, historian and architect Dolores Hayden proposes new perspectives on gender, race, and ethnicity to broaden the practice of public history and public art, enlarge urban preservation, and reorient the writing of urban history to spatial struggles.


