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Reflecting Spaces/Deflecting Spaces

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“In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. (...) The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.”

Michel Foucault: Of Other Spaces

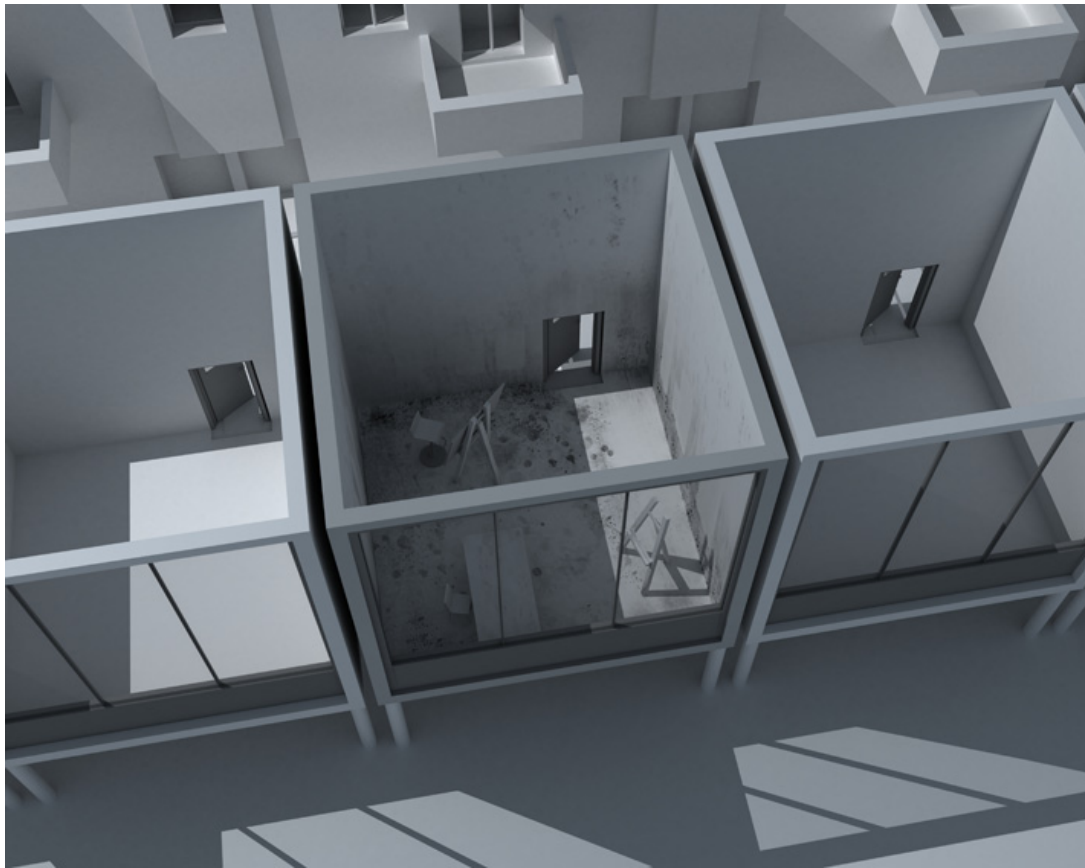
Spatial constructions are not static. They are persistently transformed and re-defined by the people that “practice” the space they live in, as the French philosopher Michel de Certeau writes. He also defines space as a “tangle of mobile elements“, considering peoples’ practices as the dynamic element in the creation of space. Regarding space as a geographical and social structure made up by personal contributions and active participation introduces the political dimension of each person’s responsibilities.

My artistic approach of spatial and medial constructions is starting from these dynamic personal linkages and is based on possible dialogues of people with places. By considering cultural diversity and individual practices as motor of transformation, I create portraitures of spaces by deflecting the edges of geographical defined areas. For my works, I am using different media that dislocate and recreate the formal and intrinsic qualities of the given elements, thus proposing new accesses.

In my projects, a specific locality is confronted with other spatial ideas such as the homeland or social and cultural backgrounds. This doubled dispositive acts as a platform for further heterogeneous discourses inside my work. Questions such as: How do people use and thus create spaces? Which spaces appear by concentrating on their ascriptions and personal implications? How does the interaction of given geographical and social places and personal and political contributions open up new spaces? arise by working with people instead of working on them.

In my last project *The Place of Art*, 2006, a video-installation presented in two different places, I focussed on the relation between art and context as it shows up in everyday life of people living in Bergsjön, a suburb of Gothenburg in Sweden. The work is based on the contributions of 38 artists living in this district who have responded to the questions: how would you define art, and where would you locate the place where it happens? The starting point for the project has been to consider the heterogeneous places of art in different traditions, seen through the eyes of people with various cultural backgrounds, and to deflect the question into the private sphere.





Through the participation of the artists in Bergsjön the project invokes personal visions about the various aspects of possible art spaces, linking actual situations with fictional ideas, and own experiences with imagined circumstances. Memories and thoughts as to where art takes place in the participants' culture are connected to their present lives and spaces, therefore forming a basis for possible continuous renegotiation. The project intertwines utopia, realities and abstract reflections and thus opens up new possible spaces.

The exhibition of *The Place of Art* took place in two separate but complementary spaces, the Bergsjön Centrum (Rymdtorget's shopping, the only existing common meeting place in this suburb) and the Konsthall of Gothenburg as the official institution representing contemporary art. In Bergsjön Centrum, the installation includes a silent movie that shows the artists while listening to their own answers to the questions just after having been interviewed, in the intimacy of their homes. This moment of one's confrontation with the own voice and what it just said a few minutes ago constitutes a silent, very solitary space where a person is alone with an external bodily element of him- or herself. In the film, this state is accentuated by the visual transformation of the apartment through the integration of their written art definitions becoming a physical component of the domestic interiors. Between the sequences, quotes about art by artists from all over the world - renowned as well as less known - are inserted. The quotes are taken from the catalogue of the Parisian exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre*, which in 1989 sparked both praise and controversy for its postcolonial approach. In the Konsthall of Gothenburg, the installation is composed by four projections pointing the darkness of the museum space and the participants' voices talking about their personal proposals for the place of art. The visual propositions for those imagined spaces are based on their contributions: I developed models in 3d that transform themselves in a perpetual movement into more detailed images. These video-projections that by their constitution are instable, moving images were presented on flat screens in different angles, referring to the chosen perspective for the views on the utopic spaces.

As part of *The Place of Art* I involved local culture workers and art institutions as well as housing companies and municipal departments in the organisation. In common, they have the goal of increasing inclusion, contamination and stimulating conditions for new meetings and experiences of art.

Another artwork, a permanent one in public space I realized for the Multicultural Centre of Botkyrka in Sweden in 2003, is *First Generation*. For this project, I invited both foreigners and Swedes who moved to Botkyrka to engage in a reflection about their identity within multiple spatial and cultural references. The image of the self is never fixed, and in the context of immigration, the dynamic movement of self-identification becomes even more evident. It is in constant evolution: in a creative mode, people with multicultural backgrounds permanently negotiate and (re)create their identity by deflecting their “practices” of different spaces.



First generation questions the notion of a « portrait », in artistic terms referring to the pictorial tradition of portraiture and in identifying terms, suggesting a certain idea of the self. Thirty-four local people agreed to contribute to the project and replied to a set of questions posed by the artist: « On your coming to Botkyrka, what did you find? What did you lose? What did you get? What did you give? ». The four questions were subsequently engraved in the steps of the centre's staircase. Only when it becomes dark, a silent movie appeared on the centre's windows showing close-ups of the people's faces while listening to themselves answering these questions. To hear these replies, one has to enter the building. By separating sound and visuals, I accent the space that opens up in between the story and the image, the listening and the speaking. The project's conception springs from the interaction with people involved in it as well as the architectural specificity of the place and thus engages the spectator, opening up a space for the consideration of the Other.

For *Daedal(us)*, I realized a different device for visualizing altering constructions of space and self. Composed of approximately twenty large-format slide projections, the project invited for a night-time labyrinthine journey through Dublin's North East Inner City during the month of November 2003. The particularity of this district of Dublin, which combines the old and the new, the past, the present and the potential future, was captured by the camera and re-presented in giant projected photographic images. Bringing normally unseen details of the vicinity to light, *Daedal(us)* looks at the district's architectural features and its populace, making them reappear – unexpectedly – within Dublin's North East Inner City. Using night-time projected light to illuminate mural-like images that convey the substance and texture of the area – depicting its inhabitants and shedding light on their lives – *Daedal(us)* accentuates the space they live in.



The project's participatory aspects are integral to it. Both its meaning and creative processes rely on the active participation of individuals within the community, facilitated by the negotiations with the householders who agreed to host the project's slide projectors, those

who agreed to host the projected images, and those who agreed to having their homes or business premises photographed for projection. The project offers additional opportunities for locals and visitors to recognize neighbourhood sites, reclaim them, and be confronted with their image.

Memory becomes an obviously significant element of the project when, over a period of some weeks and for a number of hours each night, the local environment is visibly transformed. Projected images of the front walls of stores and houses will reappear unexpectedly, in proximity to their original site but slightly relocated. These displacements call for re-identification of the buildings and treated sites, and reclamation of them in their new locations. □

With its labyrinthine network of projection points inserting photographs of the cityscape onto the city's very walls, Daedal(us) proposes a new routing through the Inner City zone. By interrupting the continuity of the common places and thus the destabilisation of one's orientation points, the project devises a reinvention of this urban space, which the viewer must actively translate and reconstruct.

A Thread is a project I accomplished for the Castlemilk Park area in Glasgow, Scotland in 2003-2006. The trees and park-landscape there are a witness to both historical changes and the recent transformations. Having survived the past's bureaucratic enactment, they are the only remaining evidence of local history and culture. Castlemilk is a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Glasgow that historically has been labelled as a challenging area. Simultaneously, the citizens of Castlemilk have been valued as a self-determined community that has invested in the management of its own change. *A Thread* is supposed to become a complicit element in this process by involving and engaging the inhabitants to actively contribute to their environment.

For the project, I invited different local organized groups to participate in a research process in order to find a visual articulation for their issues in the public space of the park in collaboration with art and architecture students. Together, we discussed the image that would represent them as a public statement of their group. By operating as a conduit that has supported citizens not only to design images that are printed on individual canopies but to actively select the site for each shelter, I accented our capacity to choose actively in terms of how public spaces are managed and controlled. Deciding about the specific location of the shelters and thus proposing visibly a viewpoint is a way to re-appropriate public space and to manifest the own decision in community. The imaginary line throughout the entire park area created by the positions of the Roof-Shelters forms a thread that redefines the space.

Another approach to public that was chosen by the city of Hamburg after having been proposed in a contest in 1986 with Jochen Gerz is in the *Hamburg/Harburg Monument against Fascism*. We installed a lead-covered column in the Town Square and invited passers-by to sign their name on its surface. Next to it a panel conveyed the following text, translated in seven languages (French, English, German, Russian, Turkish, Arabic and Hebrew):

We invite the citizens of Harburg, and visitors to the town, to add their names here to ours. In doing so we commit ourselves to remain vigilant. As more and more names cover this 12-meter high lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the ground. One day it will have disappeared completely and the site of the Harburg monument against fascism will be empty. In the long run, it is only we ourselves who can stand up against injustice.

With the *Hamburg/Harburg Monument against Fascism* we simultaneously evoked the past and the present of this place, installing "forgetting" in a place meant for "remembering" and thus establishing, in the memory of each participant, through the act of public participation, a fleeting, subjective and fragmented memory.



As the accessible part of the column was covered with signatures, it was lowered little by little into the ground, making a new space available for inscriptions. There were seven lowering in all and the column vanished from sight completely in 1993. Now, only a plaque remains on the ground. What people engraved on the metal – whether signature, tribute, insult, graffiti - was also printed in their own memory. During the public existence of the column above the surface, history also altered the situation in Germany: the fall of the Berlin Wall, reunification and the resurgence of neo-nazis, had an effect on political awareness which transformed people's relationship and responses to the column. As a foreign object, perceived by some as an almost aggressive element, the status of the monument changed, becoming a kind of public forum.

In each of my projects, the production actualization process relies on disturbing the conventional relationship between the producer and spectator, between the geographical and social space and the people that practice it, on the utterance of words, and on a memory constructed and transformed through participation. My approach invites an enactment of agency, creating a memory, a remembrance (the "I was there") signifying the commitment of people to the(ir) world. In my works in the public realm, a space is constructed for memories activated by participation, that is to say, the moment when the supposed spectator becomes a participant by contributing, writing his name, using his voice or sending in his photo. Thanks to the traces left during these acts, these participants keep the memory of their own participation in the work's procedure, which also bears witness to their responsibility to their own times. By capturing existing and forming new utopic and heteroptic moments in between the people's discourses and heterogeneous places, I propose new dynamic visions of space and the being within it.