

Negotiations: Exterior, interior and the spaces between.

Crisis, what crisis?

For quite some time, we have heard that architecture is struggling with severe problems. But is there one crisis or several? Needless to say the situation looks different and have different meanings in different countries. The collapse of the Spanish building boom in 2008 brings a more severe idea of crisis than the still on-going building boom in Sweden, where architects employment wise are doing better than most groups. The unemployment rate for architects 2012 was, according to the union, as low as 1%, while the unemployment rate for the entire nation during the same period was as high as 8,6%.

However, looking beyond crude numbers of employment and building rates, one finds another crisis that has more to do with influence. Whether the building machine is running or not, the role of the architect is diminishing in relation to the building process as well as socially; from having a big say on city planning during the decades after the WWII, the architect is no longer the person to consult when it comes to overall urban environments.

While architect firms tends to grow larger and larger they also tend to comprise of much more than merely architecture – at the cost of the architect and his/her skills. RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architecture) has launched the project Building Our Future. In the foreword to their report *The Future for Architects* (2010) states the chair Dickon Robinson that there is a “continuing erosion of traditional architectural skills to other players”. In here, one can also read that while building has increased, there has been a 40% reduction in demands for architect services in the UK since 2008.

Again, here one needs to differ between two levels of the problem. First, one can conclude that the skill of traditional architects is less and less required for constructing buildings; other occupations (and machines) can provide this knowledge instead. Secondly, the remaining architects are turning into but one cogwheel among many when it comes to architecture. According to the Farrell Review, the influence on construction process and the actual resulting building is today as low as 15%. Indeed, seen from this perspective negotiations, between architects, engineers, designers, economists, project managers and building component constructors, seem to be the core reason for the contemporary crisis of architecture. At least, this was one of the things that Aaron Betsky, the director of the 11th exhibition of the Venice Biennale of Architecture (2008), took as a starting point for what he called *Architecture Beyond Building* (co-curated with Emiliano Gandolfi). In the first volume of this five-part catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Betsky introduces a difference between “the building” and “architecture”. According to Betsky, the problem with the former, that is, most of what is actually built, is not that it by necessity produces unattractive buildings or that you cannot find a career as an architect, but that the “manner in which architecture is produced today is a kind of slow suicide”. By which Betsky refers to the production forces: “The codes that define the construction and assembly of buildings are so complex that it is almost impossible for an architect to be anything but the coordinator of the coordination of life and safety codes, economic and financial considerations, zoning codes and site regulations, and the even more complex demands to create a completely efficient building.”

Taking the common into private hands

In this respect, nothing much has happened since the Venice biennale 2008. However, looking back 40 years, at the peak of the large enterprise of socially motivated city planning, everything has changed. Looking again to *The Future of Architects* we find statistics that tells us that in

1970, 50% of the architects were employed by the public sector, a number that had decreased to 9% in 2010. And although numbers might vary from country to country, the pattern is the same. The constructions of new buildings are increasingly in the hands of private enterprises. At the same time the municipality is selling out its stock of dwelling quarters.

According to statistics, provided by the municipality of Stockholm, in 1985 the total multi-unit dwelling came to 335 682 apartments, of which 33% was public housing, 45 % other tenancy rights and 21% tenant ownership. In 2013 the total amount of apartments had increased to 394 705, but now only 16 % was public housing, 28 % other tenancy rights while tenant ownership had increased to 56 %. Interestingly, the total amount of public housing apartments are now back to the same amount as it was in 1965, the years before the constructions of the large suburbs in Stockholm. This does not, however, mean that some order is restored, if we by this mean that we are back to how the situation was before social democrats seized power in the –60s. When much of the other tenancy rights turned in to public housing during the years 1965–1985, the total balance between rental apartments and tenant ownership remained more or less the same, with a small increase to the former (17% in 1965, 21 in 1985). But as we saw, in 2013, tenant ownership had increased to 56 %, leaving the amount of rental apartments cut down to almost half (from 79% in 1985 to 44 % in 2013). And if we look to the more attractive areas in the city center, the numbers are even more remarkable. In the traditionally expensive neighborhood of Östermalm, the amount of public housing has decreased from 10 % in 2000 to the modest figure of 3% in 2013. During the same period other tenancy rights has decreased from 41% to 30%, which leaves 77% of the apartments in the hands of tenant ownership. In the suburbs, the picture is different. In the relatively poor neighborhood of Skärholmen public housing has decreased from 55% to 31% during the same period, but the shift has been more in favor for other tenancy rights that has increased from 32% to 48%. Here, tenant ownership has increased less than in the city, from 13% to 21%.

These figures clearly tell the tale of privatization of the multi-unit dwellings in Stockholm. But it should not be mistaken for a battle between municipal and private ownership. While the city of Stockholm did take possession of many privately owned buildings during the 70's, we saw that the tenant owned stock increased at the same time. Not by much, but still an increase. However, from the mid 90's onward tenant ownership increases on behalf of both privately and municipally owned. The agenda here is not about if the buildings should be publically or privately owned, but about whether the apartments should be owned by those who live in them or not. Here we encounter a shift in what privately owned might mean. And as the stock of apartments that are privately owned increases, this becomes the normal option for those who look for a place to live. In 1985, the most likely way to get an apartment was to be sure to take place in the municipal housing queue as soon as possible. Today, the normal way to get an apartment is to buy one and to be sure to establish good relations with a bank.

In political terms, this shift to the privately owned apartment, rather than privately owned rental flats is labeled neo-liberalism. The old struggle between social democracy and classic capitalism, where either the municipal or the land-lord had the power, has been side-stepped for a distributed power, leaving the risk taking to the individual. This also means that the apartment becomes something else than but a living quarter; it becomes an investment. As such, it plays an important role in a broader economy. Where dwellers in rental apartment rarely changes the kitchen equipment or refurbishes the rooms (after all, this is what you pay rent for – let the land lord do it), buyers of apartments often redo as much as possible when getting access to their new flats, seeing it as a way the protect their investment. In Sweden this has also been encouraged on a political level, where hiring carpenters and other handymen since twenty years are tax-deductible.

Society of discipline and society of control

In our research project, we have found describing the crisis of architecture as a question of different political and economic models as the most fruitful way of addressing the problem. Following Michel Foucault, we conceive of two different models of controlling a population, the one called the society of discipline and the other known as the society of control. The advantage of this is that we can see resemblances between “models” in politically separated parties; the mechanisms used by classical capitalism (fordistic industrialism) are not so different from the ones used in socialist countries. The strategies used by so-called alternative architects today are not so different from the consumer culture it tries to break away from. This does not, of course, make them the same thing. Nor does it imply that one system replaces the other. As Foucault has described it in *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, the two systems rather run in parallel. On the one hand, the mechanism that treats the body as a machine, which tries to gain as much power from it as possible. On the other hand the mechanisms that focuses on the life of that very body, which cater for and controls nativity and death, health etc. Still, today the mechanism of the society of control are dominate, whereas modernism was more structured as a society of discipline. “In the disciplinary society one was always starting again,” writes Gilles Deleuze in his postscript to Foucault’s thoughts, and continues, “...while in the society of control one is never finished with anything.” In the society of control, everything is in a state of flux and should be able to be reworked so that it can adjust to new demands. Any structure that is constructed for a sole purpose is a liability; in every kindergarten that is being constructed, there should also be plans for easy reconstruction into shops or apartments. Or as Deleuze puts it “Control is short-term and of rapid rates of turnover, but also continuous and without limit... Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt”. Indeed an image accurate for our times, where municipal owned apartment for rent changes into private apartments for sale.

In an era of the simultaneously short-termed and limitless, negotiations become a key factor: Everything is open for change and thus nothing is ever completed. Already in 2001 Rem Koolhaas pondered upon the ever-changing nature of the shopping mall, bringing a plethora of “under construction” signs into the, as it were, junk space. But negotiation also concerns the way discipline and control relate to each other, it is in these meetings we can see what and who gains and loses control over economy; over spatial orders, over bodies. We have tried to understand this by first formulate certain dichotomies, the political vs. the private subject, public space vs. private interests, exterior vs. interior etc. But these dichotomies are not meant to express an either-or situation, they are rather poles in an ongoing struggle of space and definition – of negotiations if you like. The result of these negotiations might be thought of as what Edward Soya called “thirdspaces”, the lived experience of all agents. “In short,” writes Soya, “there was a shift from *equality* to a *difference* model, and along with it a shift from an emphasis on material spatial forms to a more real-and-imagined urban spatiality.”

To think in “trialectics” has been a way of trying to avoid getting stuck in nostalgic longing of days past, which often is how the crisis of architecture is addressed when understood as for instance the loss of public space. In fact, what is sometimes labeled, as “the crisis” might not be a question of “building or architecture” at all, but rather a longing for an obsolete political system. This system would guarantee the architects influence since they were the chief designers of the political will that sought for a new environment for the modern (democratic) man, a subject that was produced by, among other things, the rationally constructed environment that we today identifies as modernist architecture. Indeed, if modernist architecture was one of the corner pieces of a system that also included the factory, the military and the (fostering) school, to name a few of the instances that Michel Foucault described as the mechanisms of the society of discipline, calling the new “building” system a crises in architecture is to confuse a change in architectural production with a change of

production at large. The crisis is perhaps, to play the devils advocate, no more than a phantom pain, an itch you cannot scratch but that will go away with generations to come. It might even be so that the current crisis was brought about by the very political system that we now are longing for. Arjan Oosterman argues along this line in his editorial for the *Volume* issue on “Unsolicited Architecture”. Oosterman places the shift from small to enormous, from architecture firms to enterprises already at the end of the World War II and the global building of the post-war suburbia. But then the architect was still somewhat in charge and also a person who was often socially engaged, but as the enterprises turned private, the “architects social position slipped away, was forfeited by, and evaporated before his eyes.” A bit further down Oosterman ponders upon a future, quite similar to the one Betsky offered: “...there will be roles for architects as suppliers of design and assemblers of materials in a spatial configuration with certain aesthetic qualities. Yet what it will take to create that design, what it will be about, what it will produce – about these things they then have no more say.” Indeed, the shaping of the modernist satellite cities has more to do with the current situation than one perhaps would think. As one can learn from their web page, Skanska is today one of the largest building companies in the world with a 55 000 employees (11 000 in Sweden). Much of its current success was founded while the company was contracted by the Swedish government for building both infrastructure and housing stock during late modernism.

Originally, our research project departed from the quite recent trend among young architects to formulate an alternative practice involving more direct action on site, both from the architect and the participants, often temporary executed in more or less abandoned sites and/or in connection to public art institutions and festivals. But recently our interest has been directed towards the much-loathed mainstream architecture – the “buildings” – to speak with Aaron Betsky. However, we didn’t want to conclude what has already been stated so many times before about the effects of privatization. Not because we like either this

development or the architecture it has brought, but because we wanted to discuss the mechanisms of its relative triumph: in Stockholm, for instance, the newly built area of Nordvästra Kungsholmen is the greatest selling successes in the history of the city (or so the developers claim, anyhow). Architects and art historian might not like the present development at all. At the same time it does seem to function rather well. Crisis, what crisis?

### Exterior vs interior

How does mainstream architecture relate to aspects such as attractions and desire? On the surface, most of these newly built environments look rather familiar; where some extended early-modernist style seem to be predominant. But as an urban environment, these neighborhoods are everything but modernism. Traditional modernist city-planning, and the idea of the community centre, revolves around a public space where one find public institutions such as the library, cinema, civic centre, shops together with means of public transport that will facilitate swift conveyance to the working areas, in short all things that will help keeping the structure of the society of discipline. But in the contemporary successful neighborhoods, such as Nordvästra Kungsholmen, there exists little to none of this. The public space obviously has lost its position as the natural hub to which everything is connected. But if the public space of the public, modern man isn't the main attraction, what then is? What spatial milieu of contemporary architecture plays the same role as did public space during modernism? Our suggestion is the living room, aided by its trusty companion, the kitchen and its sidekick, the bathroom.

The roles played by both the living room and the kitchen has of course changed over time. With modernity one finds two quite different approaches. The more radical one opted for collective dwellings, where the private quarter would be more of a sleeping area surrounded by collective rooms for consorting and cooking and even collective caretaking

of the kids. As a consequence, family life would transform into something different. In the early days of the Soviet Union one even imagined that with this kind of dwelling, the family would dissolve altogether; these ideas were however abandoned during the 30's. More or less radical forms of collective buildings can be found all over Europe. In the tract called *acceptera* published in 1931, written by some of the then leading radical architects in Sweden, collective dwellings (sometimes called family hotels) was described as one possible development. However, *acceptera* did also suggest a more conservative line, following the rational line that was at core for many of modernist projects. Here, the nuclear family structure is intact, but the (woman's) burden of household work would be alleviated by smaller and more rational kitchens, since new machines and semi-prepared food would facilitate swift cooking.

In the great suburban housing projects of the 60's and 70's, the latter line was preferred. As Dick Urban Vestbro has shown, many of the arguments against collective buildings were based in a reluctance against women's liberation from the household work; based in assumptions such as it was better for the kids with the mother at home, and while she is there she might as well cook, to actual fear of what would happen with employments with such an increased competition. In the general lay of any apartment, we find that the living room has turned into a family room, here the family should interact and get activated. Parents and kids play along each other. The kitchen gained its position as a rational working space, facilitated by research and design, in line with the Frankfurter kitchen that Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky constructed in 1926. The rational and scientific approach helped to evaluate domestic work and did minimize the working time in the kitchen.

To describe this alleviation as "liberating" women is perhaps to stretching it. As we can see, much of the program behind modernist architecture has the nuclear family as its intended dweller. And as Foucault and Deleuze points out, in the society of discipline, the functions are clearly separated.

The home is the environment for the family; outside is place for kids to play and for the adults to act as public citizens on their way to the store, to the library or to the subway, taking them to the work that in its turn also is clearly separated from the dwelling quarters. Private exists inside, public exists outside. The telephone, which is a device that mediates between these two spheres, is often placed in the hallway, close to the outer door.

Neither the living room nor the kitchen of contemporary architecture follows such strict programs. The kitchen is often open to the living room. It is not sold as a space for the mother to cook and the family to eat. It is rather exactly “open”, open to the rest of the architecture and thus open for interpretations. It operates as an invitation for celebrating good times with friends, perhaps cooking and drinking, while enjoying the scenic view through the panoramic window in the living room. No one knows what kind of family structures that will dwell there and no one cares. In the society of control, all stable structures are problematic, as they don't allow for rapid change.

By being open for fantasies, the living room becomes the engine of the desiring machine that constructs the demand essential for the financial apparatus. It is by placing yourself in that very sofa in that very apartment that you will accept borrowing money you know you can never pay back, but who cares: as long as the demand for the very same apartment is continuous it will let you sell again with profit. The living room and the spacious kitchen equipped with the most recent appliances, stove, marble, zinc, wooden floor and expensive cupboards tells the tale of your successful living. Interesting enough, while our kitchens tend to become more and more advanced, statistics say that we cook less and less. According to the reports *Time for everyday life: Women's and men's time use 1990/91 and 2000/01* (2003) and *Swedish Time Use Survey 2010/11* (2012) from SCB the time women used for cooking from 1991 to 2001 decreased with an average of seven minutes to ca 46 min per day. In

2011 women living in a family construction used 30 min per day for cooking, which still is considerably more than what the men does. Thus, we consume the kitchen, rather than the food.

If modernist architecture was built on clear distinctive areas with certain transits between the private and the public, between work and home – everything today is transit space, everything is a negotiation. The cell phone knows no restricted areas, and as economy moves from fabrication to services it is all the easier to “work from home” via the laptop. And as meeting with friends takes place in social media the distinction between outside and inside becomes obsolete.

This destabilization of private and public has consequences for the public sphere. Today, the classic public sphere of the agora hardly exists in physical form. There are squares, but they are smaller than before and they are often motivated by a need for separating buildings from each other. A dwelling area cannot be too densely built, never mind the land prices. When the living room becomes the most important space, everybody wants to have a room with a view. To facilitate this, one has to leave space between buildings. If the public square once was the space *for* negotiations, it is today a result *of* negotiations. It is least of all a space for public life; running kids and dogs disturbs the tranquility in the privately owned apartments. The private view dominates the environment, not the panoptic gaze of the central power.

The public sphere also changes in a more general way. When modernist rational plans could guarantee facilities such as schools, day-care and the alike, there is no immediate need for the same structures in present building complexes. If one does not know for sure that the area will be inhabited with families, why then build expensive schools that can serve no other purpose? Since 1990's at least five larger residential areas, in or in the vicinity of the city of Stockholm, are under construction. All of them have a lack of services such as day-care and schools. At the same time

almost every existing school has been equipped with temporary barracks on their schoolyards. After fifteen years they have turned into a strange hybrid of temporary-permanent structures, in the same way as some trailer park housing estates familiar in the US.

As architecture turns into images for a desire driven economy, the methods for planning and selling dwellings change accordingly. Already in 1988 Kevin Robins and Frank Webster wrote about a change in economy towards what they called cybernetic capitalism. Here, demand is not created only by a need, but on what is already desired, that is, that what already sells is going to be multiplied. As Robins and Webster observed, and, supposedly, what we all already know by now: “...daily patterns of work and recreation; contacts friends, associates; tastes, preferences, desires. Such information, when accumulated and processed, becomes an invaluable asset to a plurality of corporate and political interests.” Obviously, this is even more so with the current capacity to interpret “big data”, providing for possibilities to rework and redo.

The change in ownership in the multi-dwelling houses does not only mark a shift from the common to the privately owned, supported by neo-liberalism. It also reflects and contributes to a totally different perspective on what public and private means, one fundamental aspect being the unprecedented blurring between public and private. Crisis, what crisis? When a building’s supposedly success builds on a consumer perspective and desire, the economist, the analyst and the marketing man become as important player as the architect. Needless to say, this has an enormous impact on not only what is built, but also for whom something is built. But that will have to be dealt with in another text.