The tool, the practice and the spatial experience. Methods for exploring space.

Matilda Emricson

Peer readers: Sanna Trotsman, Sanrong Tian

Date: 170320
introduction
At the beginning of this project I wanted to explore how an object can generate different experience of a space. At the beginning I was mostly focusing on the impression of the spaces generated through the tool. As the project progressed, the space created by the practice of the tool became more and more interesting. But the interest have through the whole project been moving around the tools.

I started to build a set of tools, a toolbox, that generates different spatial practices. In this text I will start by presenting my different tools, why I made them and the qualities they have. I will continue with what I learnt from them and examples of what practices they can lead to and what learnings about a space that can bring.

In this project there is also the development of a drawing practice as a method for documentation, reflecting and tie my findings together. In this text they work as a layer of information to communicate my project. It is also interesting to discuss them in relation to sequentially image narrative and architectural representation.

play
I am putting this project in relation to the notion of play as a practice. The notion of play is something that is also addressed by the Situationists, they were influenced by the book Homo Ludens of Johan Huizinga. Homo Ludens is a book describing how play have formed the human as a cultural being.

For me in this project, play is the kind of mood you get to when you trying something out. It is about not having a particular goal, but an open mind, and a which to understand something. In this case understand the tool, your body and the space you see.

Another part of it is the terms of play and game in relation to my project. I am trying to think of it as that my tools create a game, set some rules, which trigger the play that is a practice. The game also legitimate the play, and legitimate the player to behave in other ways than is expected in that setting or space. In that way play can also illustrate what is expected behaviours and norms.

Towards the end I will bringing up some references. Alberto Altes, also works with objects to generate spatial practices, Haus-Rucker-Co that made mind confusing appartus and The Situationists International and their work with drifting.

my toolbox
The periscope was my starting point for this project, it came to the world when I was working on the border between public and private as a way to push that border. While using it new questions raised recording the approach to a space and experience a space, that lead to this project.
The periscope

Description.
The periscope is 1300 x 120 x 120 mm, made out of cardboard. It is quite light. It is a one persons object and has a shoulder strap so one can wear it on their back. When you look through it offsets your site 1000 mm, it works both outdoors and indoors.
The pipe and the mirror have both made me frame spaces and blur them. This made me focus on small sections of the space and the layer of blurriness that the mirror brings made me feel a distance to what I saw. I kind of saw it as it was the first time. I experienced it as I created spaces. The periscope made me work the space with a crop and a filter tool.

After the first periscope I tried to grasp what I was doing through separating this project to different parts: The tool, that becomes both a starting point for the practice and a carrier of what happened. The practice of using it, and the experience of the practice. The experience of using it, and how to reflect over that, and what to do with that information.

After doing this I first wanted to explore the practice in relation to the context I was in. With the periscope I experienced my practice so clearly as an artwork, and art practice. So now I wanted to explore how I could put myself in another context, and explore how that would change my practice. This time I decided to focus on the urban space.

I used the aesthetic to link myself to the road workers, another already existing spatial practice in the urban space. I also connected my body through wearing a reflecting vest. I customised the tower to fit to the subway system, so I could move longer distances.

I also wanted to explore what happened if I took away the pipe and the mirror, if I brought my whole body up 1 meter, how will the experience of the space be?
The observation tower is a moveable tower. Via three steps you come up on a 980 mm high platform, surrounded by a low railing. It’s made out of pine wood, put together with hidden screws and some carriage bolts. It is painted in red, yellow and black. The colours are taken from the Swedish Transport Agencies graphic guide palette, and its measurements customized to fit into the Stockholm subway system.

It is easy to move and manoeuvre by tilting it up on the wheels and push it.
the practice of the Observation Tower

4 February: Stockholm, Konstfack - Liljeholmen - Konstfack, moving in an urban space.

The tower puts us in another position, we are not here as private people, we are working here. Doing something important. We move with confidence through subway gates, a man approaches us, asks for the way to the buses.

Throughout the practice with the Observation Tower I have got access to an other part of the urban space, I was a part of the system, the infrastructure and the maintaining of the city. The spatial experience of stepping up one meter did not give me so much, but the friend joining me said she really saw the spaces for the first time with it. For our practice I think it was important, it affected the rhythm of our movements, gave us a reason for stopping, watching. It is also made us look for things we could and could not access, explore our limits.
After the Observation tower when I compared the two tools I realised that the less you see the more you see in some way. I wanted to go back and further explore the cropping that I found in the periscope. This time though I brought with me the moving through spaces.

In the Observation tower I could see everything.
The impressions were overwhelmingly.

The periscope made me see less,
The less I saw, the more I saw.
the Floor Telescope
Description: The Floor Telescope is still a sketch. It consists of a four leg undercarriage of wood, put on rotatable wheels. Through the undercarriage goes a tube of cardboard with a mirror in a 45 degree angle which makes you see the floor through the peephole.

One of the qualities the floor-telescope has is how it enables you to capture the space as in a movie compared to the periscope which makes it more become like shots. The size of the Floor Telescope and how you manoeuvre it almost makes you interlink/merge your body together with it, you kind of embrace it. This might be a quality I could develop further through the design.

The embracing quality together with the peep-hole almost makes you lose yourself into the spatial movie.
The drawings have many roles, as a part of my process. They help me stop for a moment and not rush away without taking care of my findings. As a person that feels the best about oneself and have the clearest thoughts while doing something with my hands, the activity of drawing gives me a needed space for reflection.

So far I have been focusing on building up a body of drawings, but now I need to see what I want them to become. One way I work with them is as illustrations and drawings describing sizes and how to manage the tools. But the main idea of them has been to use as a way to take care of my findings. At this stage I am not sure yet how the operation should go about. One way is to arrange practices with different people on different sites, and be very specific in time, site, name and duration on the drawing together with an illustration that describes the experience. This would lead to bring together both very specific and clear information, together with the drawing that can describe a more subjective experience.
Alberto Altes

An other architect that has a practice of exploring spaces with an object is the work described in Intervention, Durations, Effects by Alberto Altes and Oren Lieberman. They have developed a method which he uses with his students in Lilia called “taking an object for a walk.”

I think this is a very interesting approach. One thing we have in common is that we use the objects to generate a practice. The objects are not problem solvers instead a complexity maker.

He uses ready-made which then is misread or reread to spatial practice instructions. My tools are giving a suggested way to be used, through the handles, materials and design. In that way I have a more control over what actions there will be. But one of the qualities my tools hold is that the object legitimize the practice, through its physical presence. The size and the aesthetic bring more authorized to the practitioner because it becomes an adding or accessory to the person.
haus-rucker-co
It was a group from Vienna active 1967 – 1992. The members (from the start Laurids Ortner, Günther Zamp Kelp, and Klaus Pinter) were architects.
I am mostly interested in their early work where they dealt with the spatial expansion of consciousness. Their piece *Mind Expander/Fly-head Helmet* (1967) was part of a series of mind expanding conceptual devices, meant to give the users new experiences of the space by affecting the sight and the hearing in different ways. For example, one that was constructed with two bubble shields put on a distance both with foil patterns on, which made the pattern change depending if the person wearing the helmet focuses on the first or the second bubble shield.

Haus-Rucker-Co and their mind expanding helmets has been a reference to me from the beginning of this project. I have struggled to understand their project, as there is not much literature about their work. But as I understand it they kind of turned to sci-fi and ideas of utopias to expand the spatial experience. My tools attempt to put the focus on what is here and now. They are made out of easily accessible materials as mdf, metal pipes and mirrors. The stripped down material helps bring out the silhouette and characters that connects back to the comics.

the situationists international
The situationist International was an art/political movement active under 1957-1972. They were left wing, and critical about capitalism. In drifting one or more, under a certain time try to disconnect with their regular reasons for movement in the world, such as work or interests. And instead of letting themselves be drawn by what attracted them in the city, following what they found interesting and conversation on how different spaces made them feel.

Maybe my project could be interesting to put in relation with the situationists and their dérive, or drifting. But when in drifting you are supposed to let go of all your reasons for moving and acting in a space, my tools are an adding operation. Sometimes like in the observation tower the adding of colours, reflective vest and accessories give you an other access, and reply to the urban space, and in that way an other space.
The spring exhibition

For the spring exhibition I wanted to make a combination of sharing my own experiences from the tools and to let the visitors test them and get their own spatial experiences. The challenge was to get the visitors to interact with the tools. In earlier experiments, the interaction with the tools has been more formal, where I asked people to test them, and sometimes even been given instructions on what to think of. I picked and revised the tools that I thought could be most interesting, three periscopes, four small viewfinders, an improved version of the mirror umbrella, one big viewfinder and the observation tower. And I built a tool carrier, to expose them on and to connect them to each other.

As I looked at other tools that is offered in an exhibition situation, like stools or headphones. Those kind of exhibition tools are usually sober in their colours, and seems to try to blend in to the background of the setting. I wanted my tools to add something playful, and maybe make the visitors not just see the exhibited pieces but the space itself.

I thought it could work to pick the red/yellow colour scheme that I used before in the observation tower. I read that colour and pattern as a code for "work in progress" and stands for a active spatial practice.
I chose to work with my exhibition space as a storeroom or base-camp for the tools. Together with the small instruction books and the big drawings, as reports from earlier explorations.

The plan was also to have open workshops during the exhibition, where the tools on the carrier, together with a self instruction sign, should be moving around the exhibition and offer people try the them out. I tried it the first days of the exhibition, but I soon realised that when I moved them away from the base camp they got more unclear. In this setting, the spring exhibition which is a cacophony of impressions and voices, they disappeared. I think the best place to have them is in the base camp.

During the exhibition people have been using them. It is very fun to observe, how the visitors explore the tools and find new things in the space.
Reflections

tools for seeing
To address the question of how this project is relevant to the profession and the world in a broader sense one way is to put the focus on one of the seeing. We use it everyday, all day and maybe without paying much attention on that we do it in different ways.

In recent years everyone has start to carry a tool for seeing, the smartphone. This does not only lead to a new way of consuming pictures, but also to a new way to performer the action of taking a photo. How does this effect our spatial experience?

Through my project I learned that it makes you a more active observer. To search around with a viewfinder can almost have meditating effect. It helps you find new things, details, light phenomena or materials, in your search for compositions.

Relevance to the profession
As an interior architecture project I found it very interesting to have studied what happens between the space, the object and the humans. How the tools activates or invites to new behaviours. With the observationtower it becomes clear, how it gives physical access to new things, but also how the small viewfinder, even if it is almost hidden in your hand gives you permission to stand and look at a screw, or a detail in the wallpaper. The tool as a temporary visitor indirect shift the space and change the behaviour. I think that illustrates the constant flux in a space.

And how the object with its culturally loaded colours and size gives you new rights to the space. And how you can drag yourself to be someone else in the space through the built objects, tools or clothes or furniture.

how this can be used in a future interior architecture practice
In this project I have, in an artistic way, tried to explore how I as an interior architect approaching a space, both how I am seeing it, and what kind of space that is created around me.

I think it is important for us to be aware that when we step into a space in the role of an architect, one space is created. Like when I used the viewfinder in the subway, I meet the room from an outsiders view, observing with focus. And people around saw that I was observing, they also got aware of themselves, of the act of observing going on.

If I compare to going into the space with the observationtower, in another role, busy manoeuvring a rolling tower, I will get another experience.

In a future interior architect practise, when I get the mission of understanding a space, i will more carefully pick a way of approaching it. Maybe to bring a tool that gives me a more active practice, and playful approach. A tool that will makes me complex the space and interact more with the people and object that are occupying it.
the word
From the beginning I was not sure of what to call my objects. *Tools, devices, objects?* I know that the word I would come to use would affect how I worked with them, how it was approached and developed. After a time of reflection I had to go on, and without feeling satisfied with my choice I picked the word “tool”.

During my last critic the question came up again, and I think it is interesting to reflect over how the choice affected the project. The word tool has a technical ton, and in one definition it is described that it should facilitate work. That rimes badly with my findings that to complexify a space is a way to learn more about it.

One proposal was to call it a “thing” but I feel that it is too vague and does not reflect the project in a strong way. Then I prefer the word device, that according to one definition is “a plan, method, or trick with a particular aim”, but also could be “a thing made or adapted for a particular purpose”. That word describe better both the physical object and its practice, and I think that is better describing what I did.

exploring space or making space.
Earlier in my project I have described my practice as an exploration of space. But I have seen it as a practice of making of space, most clearly with the observation tower. I see them two as going together. As you are exploring a space you are also making a space, and one way to explore a place is to make space there.

I can see how these tools have been spaces making in a couple of different ways. Broadly, first you make spaces when you crop the room with a viewfinder. The composition you make, the components interrelations or exclusive conversation would never stand out without shouting out the rest of the room. The same is created with the mirror and the periscope. Temporary small spaces arouse from the big space.

You are also making spaces when you bring an object into a room. The new object creates a new setting that generates new behaviours from the people in the room. Both suggesting moments, and change the content and the politics of the space. As when we brought the tower to the subway, through the presence of our object in the space we creates another story.

And when I now start to get a distance to the project I can see that the space-making aspect has been the most interesting for me the whole time, but also the thing that has been hardest to grasp.