

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the M.A. Degree Ms. Annika Enqvist has successfully completed her oral examination, and thesis project.

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The New Beauty Council Investigates – When Form Becomes Behaviour

The New Beauty Council (NBC) project, in its different forms and shapes, is about the multiple perceptions of urban space and design. NBC's work includes performances, public projects, speaker series, urban curating and collaborations that engage innovative strategies of production as well as dialogues. NBC investigates how concepts of the public are constituted and how beauty and ugliness can be (re-)defined. Using the idea of the carnivalesque as a method, NBC engages with organizations and institutions, which shape and interpret cities through public conversations and staged situations. The founding members are Annika Enqvist, Anna Kharkina, Thérèse Kristiansson and Kristoffer Svenberg.

A recent project is *Changed Perspectives c/o Stockholm City Museum* – comprising four public talks about living in and making use of Stockholm as a city. These conversations were curated and performed by Annika Enqvist and Thérèse Kristiansson.¹ The research and subjects of the series in general, and one of the talks; *Whatever Blows Our Trumpet* in particular, are the basis of this paper. Lounging the NBC as a collaborative initiative, building the website, producing the public talks and curating other works have been a part of the practical part of my MA project.

How to navigate – a map to the reader

This study is undertaken within the context of our (Annika Enqvist and Thérèse Kristianssons) collaborative MA thesis project – The New Beauty Council (NBC) into creative and spatial practices aimed to be empowering and the collective spaces that they engender.

The paper does not follow one single theory, but is inspired by several theories and practices which are described later in this thesis. In presenting our work we have decided to consider a feminist perspective and have described different practices, of which participation, conversations and staged situations are considered important. In the context of the thesis two perspectives are developed. The first refers to the reception of the city as a stage – a performative structure, the second reacts to how institutions, authorities and people in power positions over the urban development make use of their roles and methods. The thesis mainly follows the structure of an academic paper, even though it defers slightly from the format since it is made within the tradition of practice-based research and includes a report from the practical project.

¹ *Changed Perspectives* or *Ändrade Perspektiv* was organized by NBC through Thérèse Kristiansson and Annika Enqvist on the 22nd and 29th of January and the 5th and 19th of February c/o The Stockholm City Museum. How this series of public talks was executed and some of the content of them will be discussed later in this paper.

The introduction of the thesis commences with a description of how the NBC works, the context of the project – its theoretical background. It introduces some concepts that are reoccurring and a selection of more contemporary sources of inspiration. This part is also consisting of the aims of the project as a whole and what questions are posed both within the practice of the NBC and in the written thesis.

Part 1: *The “old” Beauty Council* begins with giving a background of the organisation from which we became motivated to commence this project is discussed here, since this information must be considered essential to the understanding of our work.

Part 2: *Neat and Safe or Beauty as a Curse* gives a short historical background to the ideas and constitution behind concepts of beauty and ugliness. This part can also be seen as a discussion on why certain phenomena in the urban landscape is perceived the way they are and possibly provide some tools to understanding what lies behind these values.

Part 3: *Changed Perspectives – The Performed Conversations* gives an insight to this series of public talks – how they were executed and what subjects were introduced. Short reports from the three sessions are presented as well as an introduction to the overall theme of the *Changed Perspectives* series of conversations².

Part 4: *Whatever Blows Our Trumpets* entails a case study of one of the public talks within the series *Changed Perspectives*. This section gives an in dept account of the presentations and discussion on this occasion. The subject matter of this particular talk correlates most to the investigation of the entire NBC project, why it was chosen for a closer review. This part is not purely an encapsulation or report from the conversations, but an extended reasoning of the current subjects including some analyses, ideas and conclusions which either couldn't fit within the given time frame of the talk or which I've drawn while writing the text.

Part 5: *The Idea of the Carnavalesque as a Method* suggests a new method for the NBC to use to reinterpret urban landscapes, both within our own projects and in further collaborations with institutions and authorities within the field.

Part 6: *Conclusions* contains the outlines and results of the written thesis and the practical project.

The Bibliography and other references are found on the last pages of the thesis.

² The four public talks within the series *Changed Perspectives* c/o *Stockholm City Museum* are available online in full lengths format at: www.newbeautycouncil.org.

How we work

The New Beauty Council (NBC) is in itself investigating how “place” is generated, transformed and developed within political, economic, cultural and social aspects. NBC focuses upon theoretical and practical problems facing artists, curators, theorists, architects, urban planners and the users of cities, in order to rethink the design of the public sphere in terms of the challenges of city-space and urban condition; to evaluate processes of social collaboration, participation, and performativity.

Questions posed within the NBC are how social and performative aspects of the city can be recognised – what impact form has on behaviour.

The NBC has searched for a methodology and a metaphorical framework through which we can communicate, through this MA project. The intention is to bring into consideration new perspectives on how public space can be used and look, not through promoting one single point of view, but by opening up alternative ways of experiencing the public sphere and concepts of beauty. We study ideas and realities of community-based practice to suggest other ways of communicating and participatory actions than the common practice for more innovative production strategies.

The project does this by studying and negotiating the validity of institutions and authorities, which form and have the privilege to interpret cities’ appearance and functions. However, the NBC does not aim at only working in opposition with the institution but to re-vitalise it, and work on how to re-use it in a participatory way.

Concerning the structure of our work, Jane Rendell explains how she looks on interdisciplinarity in a way that we feel is close to our practice:

In both academic and in art-based contexts, the term interdisciplinarity is often used interchangeable with multidisciplinary and collaboration, but I understand the terms to mean quite different things. In my view, multidisciplinary implies that a number of disciplines are present, but that each maintains its own distinct identity and way of doing things, whereas in interdisciplinarity individuals move between and across disciplines and in doing so question the ways in which they work. In collaboration, the emphasis is less on disciplinary distinctions and more on how individuals work together towards end points decided through mutual consent”.³

For me, the NBC project has hence been a way to investigate and re-imagine the role of the curator and curatorial practice. When working together, members of the NBC move from one position to another, certainly having greater knowledge in some fields than in others, but still, often addressing the different parts that form a project. Although challenging, efforts are made

³ Rendell, Jane. *Art and Architecture A Place Between*. (I.B. Taurus, New York, 2006) page 11.

to stay critical and to be open to change at all times.

In the performed conversations we have been working with at The Stockholm City Museum, as well as in the ongoing production of projects of “social sculptures”⁴ and city walks and other “spoken and staged situations”; in the form of dialogues; conversations with larger groups, on stage or more informally, filmed or documented through text transcription – the NBC uses speech as a tool and medium to produce and negotiate meaning, both within the field of art and other areas such as politics, education and business.

What we are searching for

The NBC raises inquiries on how architecture and urban design can be seen in different ways in terms of form and representation. How re-appropriation of space can be used as way of urban curating.

The NBC is hence a study of design and built environment as cultural phenomena, as a cultural carrier and a creator of meaning in society. The project can be described as an investigation on the way people relate to the built environment surrounding them and how it affects the way we behave towards each other. Perhaps this could lead to finding and revealing structures of ideas and relations of power that specific forms are created by and which they generate in their contexts, defined by site and time. The focus is on social and performative aspects of the contemporary, critical field of urban design.

The aim is that the work will negotiate how the city can be read, identified and classified by providing new surfaces of contact between people and professions which don't meet so often in their everyday practice. In doing so we and NBC aim to identify new strategies of location-driven, site-specific, and situational engagement.

Examples of NBC Projects

Ongoing

- *Alte tante, ananas eller ängel?* self-interview/dialogue, Tidningen Stad, publication by Ulrika Sparre, Maria Andersson, Karin Lindh and Pernilla Glaser, *Beyond Desire: Los Angeles*, The Royal University College of Fine Arts, Stockholm, June 2009.⁵

⁴ Rendell, Jane. *Art and Architecture A Place Between*. (I.B.Taurus, New York, 2006), chapter 2 “Social Sculptures”, page: 163 – 178. “Walking” chapter 3, page: 181 – 190.

⁵ *Tidningen STAD* (The City Magazine) is an initiative by the author Pernilla Glaser and the artists Karin Lindh, Maria Andersson and Ulrika Sparre. The project sprung from discussions and lecture at the postgraduate course *Resources 08 (Beyond Desire: Los Angeles)* at The Royal University College (Kungliga Konsthögskolan) of Fine Arts in Stockholm, 2008 – 2009. The editorial board also includes the architects Jakob Ingemansson and

- *Safe Slut*, performance, Stockholm, April 2009.⁶
- *NBCTV*, video work, screening at Konstfack Spring Exhibition/WIRE and Utube.
- *The Carnavalesque Party*, staged situation, Telefonplan, May 23rd 2009.⁷
- *How Should a City Look?* Performed presentation and debate with Martin Rörby, The Council for Protection of Ecological and Aesthetic Matters, The Environmental Party Congress, Hotel Hilton, Stockholm, April 2009.⁸
- *NBC Website*⁹ gallery, texts, projects and dialogues etc, May 2008 –

Completed

- *Changed Perspectives four public talks c/o Stockholm City Museum*, performed conversations. Stockholm, January – February 2009.¹⁰
- *The Carnavalesque as Method*, lecture and performance, White Arkitekter, Stockholm, March 2009.¹¹
- *The Launch*, performance in public seminar on cultural planning and public art, at Gävle Konstcentrum, May 2008.¹²

Magnus Stenmark as well as Anna Barosen, Master of Engineering with a focus on architecture and environments.

The first edition of *STAD* focuses on the poetics and politics of Stockholm and Los Angeles, while searching for traces in the surface, marks of belonging and cracks in the image. In addition to The New Beauty Council, the invited contributors include poet Bob Hanson, artists Catti Brandelius, Katarina Elvén and Victoria Brännström, photographer Elisabeth Olsson Wallin, urban development researcher Karolina Isacson, singer Anna Järvinen, artist, architect and activist James Rojas, professor in architecture Fredrik Bedoire and the architect Mia Hägg. The first free edition is distributed at the exhibition *Beyond Desire: Los Angeles*, Galleri Mejan 28 May – 7 June, and through *Wanderlust* – a choreographed walk through the city of Stockholm on 6 June 2009 A strolling release party with the contributors of *STAD* and others.

⁶ As part of the Konstfack Spring Exhibition, NBC presents the documentation of the staged public performance *Safe Slut*, a participative investigation and action dealing with ideas of safety, danger, rape, the body, gender and space.

⁷ As part of the Konstfack Spring Exhibition, NBC creates a carnivalesque happening – a staged party with invited guests who have the power to decide over the aesthetics and functions of Stockholm.

⁸ NBC was invited to present NBC's work and ideas and debating with Martin Rörby, The Council for Protection of Ecological and Aesthetic Matters on the subject matter *How should a city look?* at the Environmental Party's congress (Miljöpartiet de Gröna, MP) at Hotel Hilton Stockholm on April 18th 2009. The theme of the congress was *Rebuild the Stockholm Region*. Some of the other speakers were Maria Wetterstrand, MP's mouthpiece, Alice Bah Kuhnke, Sektor 3, Karin Bradley, researcher KTH, Kristina Sundquist, professor Karolinska Institute and Mårten Wallberg, The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, SSNC, (Naturskyddsföreningen).

⁹ We launched the website in May 2008, since then we continuously invite other artists, designers, architects and theoreticians to contribute to the content the NBC website where we also exhibit our own work.

www.newbeautycouncil.org

¹⁰ For more information, pictures and pod casts please visit www.newbeautycouncil.org

For an in-depth analysis of the content, please read the following chapters of this paper. The first talk was called: *The Power of Space – What Can You Do in Public?* The second talk had the title: *Whatever blows our trumpet – Pretty and ugly as the base for urban development decisions*. The third talk was named: *In-between Spaces – Farming on Abandoned Railways or Empty Car Parks as Moonlight Cinemas*. The last talk's title was: *How values are built in to our walls – Does everyone want to stay the same way?*

¹¹ NBC was invited to present our work and to give a lecture about using the carnivalesque as a method to reinterpret the city, at the largest architecture office in Sweden, White Arkitekter in Stockholm on March 17th 2009. The event was part of the White Arkitekter series of open lectures of the reoccurring event *Tisdagsträff* organised by architect Mikael Stenqvist. The theme of the evening was *Gestaltning* (Form giving, formation, interpretation) in a broad sense of the word.

¹² NBC was invited to make a public performance at Gävle Konstcentrum when they organized a seminar on cultural planning and art in the public realm on the 14 – 15 May 2008. NBC talked about a critical approach to the prevailing norms concerning beauty and city planning. We raised questions including if art creates certain behaviour, what stories it tells and who it represents and is it the responsibility of the artist to create hidden

Coming

- *Invisible Places – Space Forming Bodies and Bodies Forming Space*, performed and staged city walk as social sculpture, Stockholm's Culture Festival and The Stockholm City Museum, August 2009.¹³
- *The New Beauty Council – Exploring the City through Stockholm Green Map*, city walk, Stockholm's Culture Festival and The Stockholm City Museum, August 2009.¹⁴
- *After the Fall* panel discussion, Goethe Institute and Färgfabriken, August 2009¹⁵
- *After the Fall*, staged situation, Goethe Institute and Moderna Museet, November 2009¹⁶
- *NBC in The Swedish Museum of Architecture's Yearbook 2009*, Castles in the Air/Buildings of Our Dreams/Mindscapes, Stockholm, December 2009.¹⁷
- *A Project on Public Art and Space: Part two*. Seminar, workshop and exhibition in collaboration with Johan Wingestad, initiator, ceramic artist and friend of NBC and Rackstad Museum, Värmland, autumn 2010.¹⁸ The project is a visionary exploration on what public art can be(come). With a foundation in the fields of Arts & Crafts and the history of the Swedish region of Värmland, the NBC engages in a collaborative and comparative investigation of the neighbouring country Norway and its practices of developing the views of what public art is and how built public spaces can be developed.

Aims and inquiries of the written thesis

The performed conversation series *Changed Perspectives c/o The Stockholm City Museum* form the basis of this written thesis – the research and the inquiries of the paper have been

meanings and values in the art. We also showed a filmed conversation we had made about how one can reinterpret public art. Other participants in the two day seminar were: Claes Eriksson, chief secretary of the Swedish National Council of Architecture, Form and Design, the artist Catti Brandelius, Mikael Adsenius Managing Director of the National Public Art Council Sweden, Lia Ghilardi, founder and director of Noema Research and Planning Ltd in London. www.gavlekonstcentrum.se

¹³ As a direct result of our public talk series *Changed Perspectives*, NBC got commissioned to create two concepts for city walks for the Culture Festival in Stockholm (Kulturfestivalen) and The Stockholm City Museum in August – September 2009. www.kulturfestivalen.stockholm.se and www.stadsmuseum.stockholm.se

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The Goethe Institute in Stockholm has invited us to attend a panel discussion on public art and attitudes to risk taking and authorities' attitudes towards citizen participation and initiatives in the city, at Färgfabriken in August 2009. The event is part of the project *After the Fall* within the series *Public Space/Right to the City/Art in the Public Realm* produced in conjunction with the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall.

¹⁶ NBC is asked to participate creatively in the project *After the Fall* organized by The Goethe Institute, possibly with a staged situation or a site-specific installation later on in the autumn, the project runs until November 2009.

¹⁷ NBC is invited to contribute in The Swedish Museum of Architecture's Yearbook 2009 (Arkitekturmuseets årsbok). The publication's theme this year is *Castles in the Air/Buildings of Our Dreams/Mindscapes*, and focuses on gender issues. The editorial committee includes Annelie Kurttila from the museum, and the architects and theoreticians Katarina Bonnevier, Ana Betancour, Ylva Åborg, Lars Fridén and the museum- and gender lecturer Anne-Christine Norlén.

¹⁸ The project is a continuation of the successfully accomplished *Christian Eriksson and the Public Art*, "part one", by Johan Wingestad and the Rackstad Museum's director Richard Sangwill in collaboration with NBC. This project included a seminar and workshop at the Rackstad Museum, Arvika on February 9th 2009. Inger Höjer Aspemyr, The National Public Art Council (Statens Konstråd). Päivi Ernkvist, ceramic artist and former project manager Crafts in Dialogue/IASPIS, Astrid Göransson, artist and students at Solbergagymnasiet, Arvika participated. www.rackstadmuseet.se and www.newbeautycouncil.org.

developed when formulating the practical project. I will look closer into the second public talk within the series, *Whatever Blows Our Trumpets– Pretty and ugly as the base for urban development decisions*, since this session best encapsulates the questions posed within the entire NBC project. The paper takes the course as a case study of how form shape behaviour and how one can change the experience and meaning of design through the movement of bodies within spaces. The paper uses these conversations to critically examine some of the tools and languages of the traditional practice of urban development in Stockholm.

In this thesis the performativity of architecture and in which ways it correlates with how people invent ways of changing their physical situation is investigated. That is asking if one can reinterpret the meaning of the design and change the experience of built environments by using it unexpectedly and differently, perhaps just by moving in a new way, taking place and creating space with our bodies.

By reflecting on my recent experiences of working with the NBC in general and the curated public conversations in particular, my aim with this paper is to question established processes in practice. I want to use the opportunity this written thesis provides to think about the theory and practice of control, authorship and creativity in urban design and architecture differently.

The thesis will possibly suggest a new understanding of built environment that focuses more on the immaterial aspects of design, through its relation to urban and social life than on the actual shapes. How temporal aspects play a role in the experience of the city are investigated, as well as how activities including the human body can change the meaning of spaces.

Context and Theoretical Concepts

Theoretical ideas have suggested the conceptual framework for our work within the NBC. The subject of the thesis is touching upon four different disciplines: critical theory, urban design, art and architecture.

My background and working experience prior to enrolling in Konstfack's MA group in Critical Writing and Curatorial Practice is in these related areas, with prior studies in theory of art, cultural science, and history of architecture and urban planning. I have also worked as a curator and producer of contemporary art, crafts and design. This is a key reason why I find it particularly inspiring to work in these interrelated, increasingly overlapping and sometimes merged fields. Whilst it on occasions can be difficult attempting to define or compartmentalise the various components, it is seldom rewarding to do so.

However the theoretical concepts do indeed still vary between the disciplines and even when they look the same, they can differ in meaning, why I want to clarify that my opening position and perspective originates from the field of design – the area of my primary experience to date.

Many other writers and curators have touched upon the subject of design and art moving closer together. Most of these writers have done so from an art perspective, as art with an interest in design, rather than the other way around.¹⁹ I don't want to underestimate the influence of art on critical or conceptual design, on the contrary, I think it is relevant and a very important reference for many designers and architects. For example the Minimalist and post-Minimalist where concerned with how their work related to a performing body in a specific site.²⁰

Attitudes Became Form, Now Form Becomes Behaviour?

To recognise the connection to conceptual art, the title *When Form Becomes Behaviour* does in fact paraphrase the title of the conceptual art exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*.²¹ The title of the thesis is chosen to propose, that possibly, there is a dialectic situation. Could these built forms be able to affect us, just as our ideas can materialise into forms? Both these titles imply that some action is taken place: attitudes do not become form and forms do not become behaviour without anyone doing anything. The two titles therefore comprise performative aspects in relation to form and this is what this project is aiming to consider.

The exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* changed the way people perceived the nature of works of art – making the ideas and the process behind them the main subject of interest. Naturally, this thesis project does not have the aspiration nor the expectations of the

¹⁹ To give a few recent examples: the exhibitions *What if?* curated by Maria Lind at Moderna Museet, 2000, *Design Does Not Equal Art* curated by Barbara Bloemink and Joseph Cunningham at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York, 2004, The book *Design and Art* edited by Alex Coles for Whitechapel, 2007.

²⁰ *Design ≠ Art, Design Is Not Art: Functional Objects from Donald Judd to Rachel Whiteread*. Bloemink, Barbara, Joseph Cunningham and Paul Warwick Thompson eds. (Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum exhibition catalogue, New York, 2005).

See also: Labelle, Brandon: *Profile: Ronald Jones*, http://www.contemporary.magazine.com/profile64_5.htm, ISSUE 64, (2008-05-06), where following quote is found: "As Robert Morris summed up in 1970: 'a certain strain of modern art has been involved in uncovering a more direct experience and it has not achieved this through static images, but through the experience of an interaction between the perceiving body and the world that fully admits that the terms of this interaction are temporal as well as spatial, that existence is process, that the art itself is a form of behavior...' The ethos of Minimalism sought the viewing individual as interlocutor. (...) Bernard Tschumi suggests, 'the built environment is only an organism engaged in constant intercourse with users'."

²¹ The full title of this groundbreaking exhibition, which introduced conceptual art in Europe, is *Live In Your Head. When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information*. It was curated by Harald Szeemann at the Berne Kunsthalle in March – April 1969.

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same penetrating power as the 40-year-old reference, but the aim for change of perspective is the same. *When Form Becomes Behaviour* draws attention to the communicative foundations in contemporary urban design and architecture, thus trying to interpret the message the forms send out and the situations they create, rather than the practical aspects of the objects.

The Performativity in Architecture

The work of NBC and this thesis is based around theories and practices chosen from the principles that they are preoccupied with social aspects concerning the user. That they have a reflective or critical approach and that they are concerned with some aspects of performativity. Performativity can be explained as *doing* and *creating* instead of essentially *being*.

The idea of the construction of the subject and the concept of performativity and the queer, in the way that Judith Butler uses it, discusses how the spatial organisation of functions constitutes gender performativity²². For example, when choosing one of two alternatives before entering a public toilet, architecture creates two distinct genders. It is the walking through one of those two doors that tells what gender you are belonging to. But the performativity of architecture doesn't only create gender – it determines many different ways of behaving. Some areas that affect us are quite obvious, for example how people can't move as they want in the city because of the lack of public transportation, or because it's private property eg in a mall. Other more physical aspects include – inaccessible staircases, sidewalks or entrances, impossible for children and disabled people to use – or in the field of architecture where relatively few cooperative housing projects are being built etc. However, it can also be about a sense of being represented or not and thus recognising yourself in aesthetics that you identify with and which reflects your lifestyle.

Outside the cultural and creative industries, the subject of urbanity is pressing as well and the discussion of our ever growing and emerging urban landscapes of today is occupying more than artists and architects. Many professions are trying to solve the prerequisites of our megacities of the future. Facing huge economical, social and environmental problems the physical public space plays a significant role in shaping the quality of people's lives. By 2050, it is estimated 75 percent of the world's population will live in cities²³, something that challenges our idea of tolerance and co-existence and respect

²² Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), (London & New York: Routledge, 1999).

²³ Berdett, Rick and Sudjic, Deyan (ed.). *The Endless City*, Phaidon Press Ltd., London, 2007, page 8.

for all different kinds of wishes and ways to live your life.

Within the context of our field there are several inspiring art practices that work in ways that are valuable and have had [greatly influenced current](#) practice, including Raqs Media Collective²⁴, Situations²⁵, Stealth²⁶, Meike Schalk's and Apolonia Susteric's project *Garden Service* and *Alienation*²⁷. The [above](#) groups all work with collaborative or collective methods, engaging in critical urban practice through different media and forms. Certainly, we are inspired by feminist art practitioners such as Sharon Hays, The High Heeled Sisters and The Guerilla Girls, for their direct democracy actions or participatory works; also by the Fluxus movement including Allan Kaprow and Yoko Ono, blurring the boundaries between everyday life, art, the artist and the audience. [The](#) playfulness of the Situationist movement: Guy Debord, Henri Lefebvre and the artist and architect Constant Nieuwenhuys with their introduction of concepts like *derivé*, psychogeography and Unitary Urbanism with a critique of function separated cities, is a departing point for our work, although we are not using their ideals as they were suggested when they were launched.

Jane Rendell's writings have also [significantly influenced](#) our work. In the third part of the book *Art and Architecture – A Place Between* she turns the emphasis to the social to look at the relationships people create in the production and occupation of art and architecture, and where she looks at practices that consider work less as a set of “things” and “objects” and more as a series of exchanges taking place between people through such processes as collaboration, social sculpture and walking²⁸. This coincides with the way we believe our ideas and practice is best represented within NBC.

The field of city planning and architecture can be seen as a carrier of culture and a creator of meaning in society since they creates norms to a much greater extent than recognised by politicians and urban planners. As architect Leslie Kanes Weisman puts it in her definition of architecture in the *Encyclopaedia of Women*:

Even though built spaces shape the experiences of people's daily lives and the cultural assumptions in which they are immersed, it is easy to accept the physical landscape as a neutral background. But the spatial arrangement of buildings and communities are

²⁴ See www.raqsmediacollective.net

²⁵ See www.situations.org.uk

²⁶ www.stealth.ultd.net/stealth

²⁷ Both projects can be read about in the publication *Urban Act – a handbook for alternative practice* put together by Atelier D'Architecture Autogérée (AAA), 2007. The book is also available at www.prepav.net and www.urbantactics.org.

²⁸ Rendell, Jane. *Art and Architecture A Place Between*. I.B.Taurus, New York, 2006, page 11.

neither value-free nor neutral; they reflect and reinforce the nature of each society's gender, race and class relations²⁹

This means that architecture is part of constructing and reproducing subjectivating norms that constitute gender, race and class performativity. Coming from different backgrounds and having diverse opinions on what is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, tiring or exciting, functional or not the citizen's of a city have one thing in common – shared public space.

As Catharina Gabrielsson states in her dissertation *Att göra skillnad – Det offentliga rummet som medium för konst, arkitektur och politiska föreställningar*³⁰ (To make a Difference – The public Realm as a medium for art, architecture and political ideas)³¹ public space is both the entire field of the social and the political, and the physical realm in which we live, express opinions, perform ourselves and become what we are through the meeting of the other, where the public space is a stage, a meeting place, and a place for battle, as also debated by Hannah Arendt³². The definition of public space as agreed upon within a democracy is the area or place that is open and accessible to all citizens, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age or class. A public space should be free of cost and there should not be any coercion to consume. At odds or finding a consensus, the public realm is a stage for constant negotiation. We must ask ourselves what roles do ideas about cleanness, dirt, the body, control, class, gender, taste and race play when forming our societies and public space?

In some ways the theoretical background of this study relates to the so-called relational aesthetics within the field of art, when the concept was first used in the mid-1990's when it was founded by the French curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud. But when one use the concept within the field of design and architecture it tend to mean something slightly different from when it is used within the fine arts. There are still conditions of art that differ from the ones of architecture and design. The role for art with relational aesthetics in the arts was according to Bourriaud that "the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever scale chosen by the artist."³³

Design and architecture have another connection than art to the “existing real”

²⁹ *International Encyclopaedia of Women, Global Women's Issues and Knowledge*, Routledge, New York, 2000.

³⁰ Gabrielsson, Catharina. *Att göra skillnad – Det offentliga rummet som medium för konst, arkitektur och politiska föreställningar*. Axl Books, Stockholm. 2006.

³¹ My translation of the title.

³² *Ibid*, page 46

³³ Bourriaud, Nicholas: *Relational Aesthetics*, English edition translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, (France: les presse du réel, 2002.)

since it has a tradition of relating to users rather than to audiences. There are at the same time striking resemblances between the vocabulary of the relational aesthetics, which were borrowed from web based activities that emerges strongly in the nineties, and the design language still in use today. Terminology such as “user-friendliness”, “interactivity” and “do-it-yourself” has been of much wider use within the field of design, than art, but it became popular within the art sprung from the relational aesthetics as well.

Even though the contemporary critical design and architecture as we know it today, grew and rose into public awareness almost parallel with Bourriaud's relational aesthetics in the 1990's the concept can't be said to have been adapted from the realm of art straight away. Droog design launched a first humorous and conceptual collection of design in 1993, which is said to have the aim to create an emotional connection to the user/audience.³⁴ In Sweden the labelling of a more critical design started about the same time as Droog first collection in the mid 1990s. In the exhibition called *Konceptdesign* by The National Museum in Stockholm for example³⁵, the curator named what she experience as a new phenomenon, *Conceptual Design* (which also was the English title of the exhibition). This phenomenon is not an expression but an approach or attitude Robach points out – a questioning approach, which identifies and investigates problems.³⁶ The conclusion must be a design, still called design, which in some ways has redefined its own role that traditionally has been seen as problem solving rather than posing questions.³⁷

³⁴ Droog design exhibition was shown during Milan Furniture Fair, Italy 1993-04-20 to 1993-04-25. Location: Via Cerva 14, Milan. Curators: Renny Ramakers, design historian and Gijs Bakker, designer and professor at Design Academy Eindhoven. Exhibition design: Ed Annink. Participating designer: Gijs Bakker, Jan Konings, Jurgen Bey, Marcel Wanders, Tejo Remy, Piet Hein Eek. Fourteen objects, including: Chest of Drawers, Sloophouten kast, Wardrobe, Hanging bookcase, Lamp Set up Shapes, Milk bottle lamp, Ragchair. Droog design is based in Amsterdam working with design as a statement, concepts that change perspectives, objects that have meaning and tell stories. The products and projects connect with the individual, the user. They deal with slowness, memories, nostalgia, re-use, craftsmanship and nature. The objects usually generate: experience, interaction, participation and innovation.

³⁵ The exhibition was the first large-scale, comprehensive take on this critical field within the Swedish design scene. The museum's curator Cilla Robach, who was also the editor of the catalogue for the exhibition, with the same title, produced it.

³⁶ Robach, Cilla, (ed): *Konceptdesign*. The National Museum Exhibition Catalogue no 643. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, (Printografen, Halmstad, 2005), p. 7.

³⁷ Ibid p. 7 – 8. Robach means that this changed approach results in a redefinition of the concept of design, if, as she puts it, we still want to call these conceptual objects design. She continues to propose that this conceptual design doesn't fit in to the most common conceptions of design. The critics of conceptual design don't think it can be seen as “real” design, in doing so, most of them seem to be stuck in a traditional and very common way of defining design. The two, maybe most common notions of design in a way are, as Robach also points out, very far from each other. On the one hand the problem solving, solutions oriented notion of design. Design as a mean to improve everyday life. On the other hand, the widely spread view upon design as a style, as representing a certain kind of aesthetics. Design as surface.

The catalogue's essays by Cilla Robach and Anders Emilson are trying to explain where the phenomenon of critical design comes from. Emilson is supporting the subject of this thesis when he more than once is pointing out the role of the contemporary, critical design to be about changing attitudes and behaviour.³⁸

Another example of how this field of critical design and the ideas around this field have developed over the last few years is *Social Perspectives on Architecture and Design*³⁹, a publication from year 2006 from NIFCA; Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art's residency program and platform for professionals working on the border of art/design and art/architecture. Markus Degerman, artist in the Swedish Uglycute design, art and architecture collective, wrote the introduction where he explains the creators of this critical and creative production as having a reflective intellectual approach and the work to have inter-personal function and potential and to circumscribe cultural values.

Other important contributors to the discipline of Design Studies are for example Victor Margolin's *Design discourse. History, Theory, Criticism* from 1989⁴⁰, which gives a good introduction to the field of design research and critical studies in the field of design. So does John A Walker's *Design History and the History of Design*, from the same year⁴¹. Both of them have a comprehensive, historical and theoretical aim to frame the field and explain how design can be more than just a customer pleasing answer to a client's commission. More recent literature touching upon this subject is Alex Coles *Design and Art* from last year and the publication from the exhibition *Strangely Familiar. Design and Everyday Life* from the Walker Art Center and curated by Andrew Blauvelt, who is also contributing in the book.

PART 1

The "old" Beauty Council

The full Swedish name of the organisation, which we are both inspired and provoked by, is: *Rådet till skydd för Stockholms skönhet*. The formal English name is, according to the City of Stockholm's official website, *The Council for Protection of Ecological and Aesthetic Matters*. However, in a direct translation of the Swedish name it simply becomes *The Council for*

³⁸ Ibid. Emilson, A. *Design =förändring*, p. 33 and 37.

³⁹ *Social Perspectives on Architecture and Design*, (2006, NIFCA, Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art's residency program and platform for professionals working on the border of art/design and art/architecture.)

⁴⁰ Margolin, Victor, ed.: *Design Discourse. History, theory, criticism*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁴¹ Walker, John A: *Design History and the History of Design*, (Pluto Press, 1st edition 1989).

Protection of the Beauty of Stockholm. And the informal Swedish name is *Skönhetsrådet*, which quite simply translates to *The Beauty Council*.⁴² The name somehow indicates that there is a threat and that something that needs protection. But what that is, why or what the council considered being beautiful or what aesthetic and environmental values of the city can be is never defined. The “old” Beauty Council is an advisory group in questions concerning the built environment for Stockholm and their opinion is supposed to protect the beauty of Stockholm. They don’t have any formal power, but they are the only lobby group, which is formally supported (financed) by the City of Stockholm. *The Council for Protection of Ecological and Aesthetic Matters* was founded in 1919. The rationale behind creating a council concerned with these questions was to protect the interests of people living in Stockholm at a time when the city grew and changed rapidly.⁴³

According to their website *The Council for the Protection of the Beauty of Stockholm* states, that their current agenda is to work with urban environment issues – questions concerning the townscape – in a broad sense. Their objective today is to develop the construction of the city. Mainly their work is connected to building permits and the detail plans of specific areas. However, it can still also have cultural-historical concerns, the public realm, decorations or what they themselves call “remaining values of beauty and the environment”.⁴⁴

The organisation and representation

The council don’t have any formal power to reinforce decisions on the city authorities. It is an advisory board and as this its significance is depending on the qualifications of its members.

⁴² The information one gets on the website is that their objective is:

“... to protect the city and its important features; its artistically or culture-historically important townscape, new buildings or areas planned for development as well as the aesthetic and environmental values of the city and its surroundings.” My translation from the Swedish text at www.stockholm.se/skonhetsradet (visited 08-11-26).

⁴³ In the information the council gives today, on their website they state that: “(...) The antiquarian values that directed the Council’s work in the early days turned out to be a costly task. The Stockholm City Museum was founded in 1931 and took over the culture-historical inventorying. But the task of decorating the city’s public spaces was the responsibility of the Council up until the 1960’s. Today, this task is performed by the Stockholm Arts Council. (...)” www.stockholm.se/skonhetsradet, (visited 08-11-26).

⁴⁴ My translation from the Swedish text at www.stockholm.se/skonhetsradet, (visited 08-11-26). This means that the council works as a body considering proposals for city authorities and institutions, but also owns the right to initiate matters and deliver expert opinions without being prompted. The council itself is of the opinion that this possibility gives them an independent position in the municipal organisation. But although the council can raise errands on their own initiative, it has a primarily advisory function to the city of Stockholm’s authorities, committees and delegations. The work mainly concerns inspecting submitted detail plans and building permit matters from the Stockholm City Planning Committee. Motions, questions concerning the listing of historical buildings and matters from the Stockholm City Real Estate Street and Traffic Administrations or other administrations are submitted to the Council, but the Council also answers questions from private citizens concerning the townscape.

Its current steering document was formulated by the Stockholm municipality constituting committee (Kommunal författningssamling för Stockholm) and decided by the City Council (Kommunfullmäktige) on the 11 December 2006.⁴⁵

The council consists of thirteen commissioners or members, which all have to be residents of Stockholm. Of them, the Stockholm City Council (AKA the municipality board) elects twelve representatives, after certain authorities, groups and institutions have nominated them. The thirteenth is chosen by these twelve.⁴⁶ Other than the political parties there are also representatives from the areas of architecture, art and Stockholm.⁴⁷

In addition to this thirteenth member elected by the council, it also chose its chairman, deputy chairman and its secretary itself. The meetings do have additional participants as well as the regular members, such as the City Architect, building permit directors, planning directors, parks superintendents, the City Conservation Director and one representative of the Royal Djurgården Administration are summoned. The chief secretary Martin Rörby, an architectural historian, leads *The Council for Protection of Ecological and Aesthetic Matters*' secretariat. Two art historians also work in the office. Monica Hector and Cecilia Skog currently hold these positions.

More Beautiful Everyday Architecture For Whom?

The "old" Beauty Council convenes once a month. The regular meetings are usually held the first Monday of each month. However, the council also convenes additionally once a month for a more informal "delegation meeting" where matters are prepared or discussed in more

⁴⁵ *Reglemente och delegationsordning för Rådet till skydd för Stockholms skönhet*. Published by KF/KS kansli 2006:23, Utl 2006:193. (Replacing: Kfs 1997:25). Downloaded as PDF "Reglemente för Skönhetsrådet" from <http://www.stockholm.se/OmStockholm/Forvaltningar-och-bolag/Andra-verksamheter-/Skonhetsradet/Dokument-och-rapporter/> (visited 2008-12-08).

⁴⁶ Traditionally this thirteenth member has been a Stockholm connoisseur. Within the council each member represents the authorities, groups or organisations they have been nominated from. The political parties represented in the Stockholm City Council are also found within the council's commissioners, since four of the members are politically elected.

⁴⁷ Two architects are representing The Swedish Association of Architects (*Sveriges Arkitekter* a professional organization for architects, interior architects, landscape architects and spatial planners with some 10.000 members including 2.100 students (www.arkitekt.se visited 2008-12-05) and The National Property Board (*Statens Fastighetsverk*), two expert advisors questions on the environment who respectively represents The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences' environmental committee (*Vetenskapsakademien*) and The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (*Svenska Naturskyddsföreningen/SSNC*), two artists are appointed by the The Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts (*Kungliga konstakademien*), two cultural historians from The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities (*Vitterhetsakademien*) and The St. Erik Association (*Samfundet S:t Erik* is a non-profit organisation named after the patron saint of Stockholm with the stated mission to promote knowledge of the history of Stockholm and support the preservation and development of the city's culture and aesthetics. St. Erik is a friend organisation of the Stockholm City Museum. (www.samfundetsterik.se visited 2008-12-05).

detail. The meetings are not open to the public. The council's protocols are made public when published on the web, but this is usually done with a few months delay. Frequently used words are *quality* and *value* but they are never defined and it sure poses questions such as; what quality is and for whom?

In the council's annual report from 2007 one can find summaries of what direction and opinions their meetings had over the last year.⁴⁸ During 2007 the council emitted six missives of self-initiated errands to be responded to by other administrations and institutions.

The "old" Beauty Council states in their annual report from 2007 that they want to contribute with a constructive and forward-looking discussion about the development of Stockholm. The council initiated a seminar for the civil servants of the administrations of city planning in Stockholm to stimulate this discussion. The theme was *Landmark buildings or more beautiful everyday architecture*. The council draws the conclusion that "the city both needs landmark buildings of high architectonic standard and less striking buildings, but nevertheless buildings of high/good quality."⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that none of these value charged concepts of quality, aesthetics, style and taste are defined or reflected upon.

To somehow comment on these facts, that might look neutral at a first glance, it is interesting to state that the "old" Beauty Council in the year 2008 consists to 84,6 percent of men (11 out of 13 members are men, only two are women), the middle age being some 65 years, and none of the members are even second generation immigrants. It makes you wonder how this homogenous group could actually make decisions that will suit others than the well-educated, retired, down to the bone, Swedish middle class. I would like to make a few comparisons between "old" Beauty Council and the city of Stockholm in general. It is interesting even though the representative democracy of the city might not be meant to be reflected in its organisation from the beginning, but it certainly points out a pressing need of change of routines if one would want to work against segregation and take action so that more of the city's citizens feel represented. The city's largest population group has steadily been between 20 and 25 years old over a very long time. And 22 percent of Stockholm's

⁴⁸ The annual report informs on how many errands they initiated themselves, what character the questions the public arose, private persons asking the council to look into certain issues, but also what the council main occupation was during the year, namely commenting on the city authorities errands concerning building permits and plans. www.stockholm.se/skonhetsradet (visited 08-11-26).

⁴⁹ The Council for Protection of Ecological and Aesthetic Matters' annual report 2007, as PDF file: "Verksamhetsberättelse 2007", dated 2008.01.07 registered as Dnr 2007-0395, (downloaded 2008-12-08) from: <http://www.stockholm.se/OmStockholm/Forvaltningar-och-bolag/Andra-verksamheter-/Skonhetsradet/Dokument-och-rapporter/> (visited 2008-12-08).

inhabitants are either born abroad or have parents who were. The population generally consists of approximately 51 percent women, a figure, which also stays quite steady over the years.⁵⁰

The only two female members of the council both represent environmental organisations, The Environmental Committee of The Royal Swedish Academy of Science (Kungl. Vetenskapsakademiens miljökommitté) and The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (Naturskyddsföreningen). According to the council's annual report they have less environmental inquiries in their own right since these questions either are integrated within other errands or are taken over by other organisations specialised in this. Since its foundation in 1919 the council has had a mandate to inspect and review errands concerned with the conservation of natural resources. Today, however, these errands tend to create fewer and fewer cases in their own right since these concerns are brought up integrated within other ones.⁵¹ In fact, the only exemplified environmental errand in 2007's annual report was the one of increased noise within the city as a result of a denser built environment.⁵²

The conclusion for this could be that, not only are there few women who is at all given a role within the "old" Beauty Council (15,3 percent or 2 of 13 members, 2008), they are also representing "nature" whereas the men are representatives of "culture" – given the roles of experts over areas such as Fine Art, Architecture, Aesthetics, Politics etc. This is a very traditional role given to women through history where they have been said to be closer to nature, less suitable to develop higher cultural aspects.

The French feminist and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex*, that male and female have been represented by a dualistic order, where the temporal, chaotic and irrational are prescribed the idea of the female, and the constant, ordered and essential characteristics, associated with the male. When Beauvoir speaks of woman as the *other*, she is talking about the way culture has constructed the feminine and leads back to the

⁵⁰ *Official Statistics of Sweden (SOS), Statistics Sweden/Statistiska Centralbyrån (SCB), Women and Men in Sweden, Facts and Figures/På tal om kvinnor och män, Lathund om jämställdhet 2008, Örebro 10th edition (2008), (1st edition 1984).*

⁵¹ The Council for Protection of Ecological and Aesthetic Matters' annual report 2007, as PDF file: *Verksamhetsberättelse 2007*, dated 2008.01.07 registered as Dnr 2007-0395, (downloaded 2008-12-08) from: <http://www.stockholm.se/OmStockholm/Forvaltningar-och-bolag/Andra-verksamheter-/Skönhetsradet/Dokument-och-rapporter/> (visited 2008-12-08).

⁵² *Ibid.* This was an example where the council had commented on an action program in accordance of a decree for surrounding noise from the city's environmental administration. The noise referred to are sounds from roads, railways, flight traffic and some industrial activities. The council draws the conclusion that the noise level increases with a larger population. However, the planning strategy is to make the city denser, which, according to the council could imply less noise related to travelling since it will result in short distances and that already existing public transportation could be used.

Pythagorean table of opposites⁵³. This way of creating the idea of the feminine not as something which has its own definition, but only exists through negation is very similar to the oppositional relationship describing beauty and ugly.

PART 2

Neat and Safe or Beauty as a Curse

Since the year 2006 Stockholm has been led under the slogan *Snyggt och tryggt*, which perhaps could be translated into *Neat (nice looking/tidy) and Safe*. These words were even made a policy statement and a campaign for how the city should be run. Along with this campaign came a zero-tolerance policy, not just towards graffiti and any other street-art, but also against any one putting up posters or other printed information in the city on unpaid spots – this has hit hard against small cultural producers who were not able to advertise their events anymore, due both to the cost to pay for legal wall space, the threat of losing supportive means and the high penalty fines. To make the use of posters in the city illegal has also been seen as a threat against the free right of speech, by some groups. The new law is only allowing larger commercial actors visual space. It can be interpreted as a move against anything that departs from the norm or what is considered mainstream. The irregularities and varieties of expressions are cut away and the mantra of *Neat and Safe* is used as if it was an obvious wish for us all. And it is of course a very easy and efficient rhetoric to use. Who does not want to be good looking and safe? Or have beautiful and secure surroundings?

Stockholm's unique beauty is often said to need protection, "she" is so beautiful that you are not allowed to touch her. The beauty of the city is thus often said to be the reason why it is difficult to get changes and new solutions approved in Stockholm. Put on a pedestal this unimpeachably, delicate lady is out of reach.

From a feminist perspective this is not only an oppressive way of describing women – objectifying them as being passive and only good to look at. It is also placing the city on the same level, comparing it to this passé idea of the "weaker sex". What would happen if one instead re-thought the possibilities of this fair lady? She could be just as beautiful, but in another way, if she put up a fight, developed, matured and surprised us from time to time!

⁵³ De Beauvoir, Simone *The Second Sex*. Edition Gallimard, (Paris, 1st Edition 1949)

Sick, Filthy and Scattered

Just like Mary Douglas pointed out a long time ago in her theories on taboo objects in *Purity and danger, an analysis of concepts of Pollution and Taboo*⁵⁴ things that end up in unexpected places are often experienced as threatening. Out of place and out of context often translates as ugly. Hair on the head and blood in your veins is perfectly normal and okay, although the same blood or hair in the shower becomes disgusting.

This fear of untidiness, which is obvious amongst the authorities in Stockholm, is possibly explainable with a fear of the diverging – a fear of whatever falls out of the given frame. It is disturbing to think of what could happen if this policy were applied on people rather than on places.

Along the *Neat & Safe* guidelines the city is being “cleaned up”, and the urban landscape is turned in to a quite sterile environment. Stockholm is not just lacking visible recycling stations, posters of smaller cultural events, street art, bum-friendly sofas, but also missing places with a democratic, non-shopping purpose. The city has been emptied of undefined spaces for spontaneous use and non-commercial squares or plazas for anyone to use and perhaps express ideas or just being without getting surveiled. These atmospheres as well as the physical reality of the built environment affect the experience and how we behave – what we feel is allowed. The feeling of getting seized by stage fear is not far away. Living in a time where freedom of choice pervades western capitalist everyday life, one easily forgets that taste and values have been built up through history and are continually being reinforced through institutions such as art and architecture schools. During the end of the 19th century the British movement of hygiene grew strong as they reclaimed bacteria to be the source of all-evil. Cleanliness and purity became the symbol for a good society.

The later half of the eighteen hundreds is also when the Swedish design history is said to have been born. Its birthday is often set to 1866 when some of the new technical solutions were shown in the Scandinavian Art and Industry exhibition in Stockholm, which were inspired by the World exhibition held in London in 1851. Some people claim that the actual birth didn't take place until some 30 years later, at the next Stockholm Art and Industrial Exhibition of 1897. This exhibition presented a space of illusory and fantastic images, a space designed to manufacture all consuming desires, a landscape marked by an almost 'postmodern' pastiche of architectural styles in this pre-modernist era.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Douglas, Mary, *Purity and danger, an analysis of concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), New York, 1995

⁵⁵ *Form genom tiden, 100 år av designhistoria*, Svensk Form, Värnamo, 1997

The British ideas strongly influenced Sweden. The end of the 19th century was filled with economical development and new ideas, and so were the fields of crafts and design. However, at the same time there were movements in the other direction, who wanted to keep the old traditions and protect the crafts and the knowledge strongly connected to the older society and techniques. The Arts and Crafts Movement demanded truthfulness in the use of materials, as a reaction to the use of the commonly used cheaper materials as imitations of more expensive ones such as, plaster, papier-mâché, metallic and simple wood etc. The unrestrained use and mix of historical styles of the late 19th century was something that annoyed the Arts and Crafts movement.⁵⁶

If one would read it from a queer perspective you would say that the Arts and Crafts movement were essentialists, trying to connect “realness” and quality to the natural.

What is also worth remembering though, is that Sweden at this time was the second poorest country in Europe when it came to living standards (after Finland). Stockholm had big problems with overcrowded housing and lack of apartments as a result of urbanisation in the aftermaths of early industrialisation.

So this movement of hygiene, can at least partly be explained by acute poverty when its Swedish followers picked up the British ideas. The social program it resulted in aimed at improving the living conditions and was linked to the Arts and Crafts movement. Ellen Key published the text *Skönhet för alla* (Beauty to All), and believed and promoted ideas that more beautiful homes would result in happier and healthier people. But it was still a long way to go before the dream of more beautiful everyday objects affordable to everyone was to become a reality, instead the early initiatives were actually criticised for being too exclusive despite the social aim.⁵⁷ In its most explicit forms the movement’s spokesmen and women connected the standard of hygiene to the level of morality within the households.

To some extent the change of styles was also related to a change of generations. The older generation’s furniture was often made in a homogeneous historic style, a so called garniture of Victorian, or in Sweden they were rather called Gustavian or Oscarian, but just as well connected to the king and the Royal style of lost times. These historical imitations were often very expensive and people dedicated one of their very few rooms to make an installation of these groups of furniture, which were rarely used.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Pevsner Nikolaus, *Pioneers of Modern Design, From William Morris to Walter Gropius*, Penguin Books, London 1975 (1st edition, 1936).

⁵⁷ Key Ellen, *Skönhet för Alla*, Rekolid, Stockholm, 1996, facsimile ed, (5th ed, 1913) Stockholm

⁵⁸ Svensson Per, *Svenska Hem. En bok om hur vi bor och varför*, Bonnier Fakta, 2002.

This is also reminding of today's middle class furnishing ideals. If you look at real estate adverts in the newspaper and in the booming interior design and home styling magazines, the rooms that are shown have more and more taken the ideals of modernism and the urban plan with fresh, white, bright and calm being the selling words. In combination with the huge windows of new built apartments the private home is again gradually turned into a stage for representation⁵⁹.

More on Ugliness

The NBC also discusses concepts of beauty and ugliness from a more philosophical perspective – dissecting what they are constituted by for people, institutions and organisations with an interest in the development of urban environments as well as everyday users of the city. When the NBC has been looking into these concepts we have found that they are not as easily defined as you might think. And not many philosophers or theoreticians agree on a definition. Over centuries, there has been a steady supply of definitions of beauty from thinkers and art practitioners, which has formed histories of aesthetic ideas over time. But this has not been the case with ugliness. Often ugliness has been defined as the opposite of beauty, if defined at all. So the Stockholm Beauty Council is not alone in refusing to look ugliness in the eye. Even though we are convinced that they would make more conscious decisions if they knew what the key concepts that they are working with, stands for.

In recent times there have been a few attempts to fill in the gaps on how ugliness could be defined.

Umberto Eco published an anthology last year with the title *On Ugliness*. And Tom Sandqvist published the book *Det Fula* (The Ugly) a few years ago in Sweden. One conclusion that can be drawn from these two books is that attributions of beauty or ugliness are not always due not to aesthetic but to socio-political criteria. The relationships between ugliness and evil, physical deformity and moral decline often seem to be blurred or mixed up. Eco mentions that synonyms for ugly frequently contain a reaction of disgust, if not of violent repulsion, horror or fear.⁶⁰ However this very quality of ugliness seems to have attracted a long line of rebels, anti-movements and alternative groups through history. To deliberately embrace distortion and using ugliness has been a way of violated norms. To push for something undefined but undoubtedly new – and to force the mainstream representatives of

⁵⁹ Alves, Mariana, *Borta bra men hemma bäst... Arkitekturen som verktyg för disciplinering av kroppen*, skriven inom ramen för kursen Jalousi med Katarina Bonnevier på Arkitekurskolan, KTH, Stockholm, 2007.

⁶⁰ *On Ugliness*, ed. Umberto Eco, translation Alastair McEwen, Rizzoli, 2007.

the ruling zeitgeist out of their comfort zones.

An example of this is the punk movement, which according to Dick Hebdidge borrowed from all previous subcultures and only homology was chaos.⁶¹ but it can also be seen in parts of the modernist movement, which proclaimed a cult of ugliness as part of their program. And the title of the Italian and Russian Futurist manifesto was "Let Us Be Courageously Ugly". Also the gay notions of "camp" are related to other forms of ironic and kitsch concepts, which can be seen as a conscious way of bringing forward alternatives to the normative concepts of beauty.

Tom Sandqvist brings up Mark Cousins' thoughts and attempts to define ugliness, being one of few that don't end up with a negating definition of ugly as dependent of beauty as merely being it's opposite. Instead Cousins turns the concepts around when saying that ugly is the very cause of beauty.⁶² Another aspect of ugliness that Mark Cousins also brings up, which is interesting in this context, is when he says that the ugly belongs to the realm of the temporary as a contrary to the necessary and essential. Of course it is connected to Mary Douglas famous theories from the 1960's of how dirt is experienced as well, and maybe these theories can shed some light on why activities like graffiti, carnivals and other temporal, un-structured and spontaneous actions can be so provocative and powerful. Douglas means that what we experience as dirt (and dirt falls in the definition of ugliness) is connected to things we can't really put in a category and hence is hard to define. Sometimes she argues this means things that just happen to have ended up in the "wrong" place, like shoes on a table. Or for that matter why we think of bodily products which has left our bodies, like menstruation and hair balls, as dirty/ugly.⁶³

No "natural" taste in "cultural" urbanity

Whilst what is considered "good" taste and the ruling norm in aesthetics often is treated as somewhat "natural" (as an opposite to "cultural" or culturally depending and changing with the contexts) and not anything that is being discussed in the formal practice of urban development in Stockholm, we believe (among many others) that what is experienced as ugly or beautiful, good taste, quality or kitsch, is very personal and differs with our backgrounds, class, personality, sexuality – and most likely – education. And since our taste is depending on who we are and where we come from, we believe it interesting to talk about how a

⁶¹ Hebdidge, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Routledge, 1st Edition (16 Aug 1979)

⁶² Sandqvist, Tom, *Det fula*, Raster, Stockholm, 1998.

⁶³ Douglas, Mary, *Purity and danger, an analysis of concepts of Pollution and Taboo (1966)*, New York, 1995

particular taste rules the decisions and pose questions to why.

Pierre Bourdieu's critical theories pointed out how taste can be used as a tool of power and used to control people socially, already some forty years ago.⁶⁴ After Bourdieu's theories were introduced people in power positions over the ruling aesthetic values started to avoid using concepts of beauty and ugliness. They even refused mentioning words like aesthetics in the same sentence as what criteria they used to make decisions for the built environment or other areas of design. However, taste still matters. Even when the concepts of beauty and ugly are swapped for seemingly more neutral ones, like quality, there are still soft values and personal tastes determining what is to be defined as good quality, just like it always has been. To make it look like it has disappeared only makes it more suspicious.

A Swedish Example with Historical References

There has been a small revolution in Sweden over the last ten years against the consensus of what has been considered "good taste" in Swedish design. It has mainly been a reaction against prevailing norms within the Modernism tradition and a critique against its evaluation of materials. A consequence has been that some designers chose to work with the simplest of all materials in their furniture production – cardboard.⁶⁵ Cardboard furniture was a relevant concept to the new use-and-throw society. The furniture was cheap, and for young people it was accepted as being "cool". The furniture came as a flat-pack, it was light and if it broke, it could simply be thrown away.

The Swedish design, art and architecture collective Uglycute has continued this protest using the "The materials' history of ideas" as a way of criticising and making hidden value systems visible. Uglycute aim is also to focus on what design means rather than making what they call "design-design", which is why they often has been described as a Swedish "anti-design" group. Uglycute claims to have economical efficiency as a driving force – a radical spirit of D.I.Y. – cutting out the producers and manufacturers as middlemen as well as the unnecessary decorations designed to increase the desire for objects.⁶⁶ It is conscious

⁶⁴ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2002. (*La Distinction*, Bourdieu Pierre, 1979). "...[i]t must never be forgotten that the working-class 'aesthetic' is a dominated 'aesthetic' which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics...", page 41.

⁶⁵ Look for example at Peter Murdoch children's furniture from cardboard by International Paper in 1964 – 65, USA.

⁶⁶ To cut out the middlemen was one of the objectives of the relational aesthetics movement within *The New Genre Public Art* in the early 1990's. Lacy, Suzanne: *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, (Bay Press 1994).

decisions through the design process that makes them not wanting to hide the materials behind layers of polished surfaces. To have a more audience-specific focus rather than site-specific has been common within the relational aesthetics in the arts, and is something that has stuck also within some designers' practice, like Uglycute for example.⁶⁷

Uglycute's work is both a critique of Modernism and a form of extreme minimalism – a primordial and simple functionality, and borderline asceticism emerging from a conviction that materials shouldn't be hidden under glossy surfaces. Like the Japanese Gutai group⁶⁸, Uglycute think that it's the “inside that counts”. But whilst the Gutai group cherished the beauty of decay, believing that the damaged surfaces revealed the object's inner life, Uglycute think the inner, raw materials are good enough to begin with. Gutai is more focused on the process of freeing the inside from superficial layers when Uglycute wants to get rid of the hiding altogether. In both cases, paint is looked upon as unnecessary.⁶⁹ However Uglycute embraces a positive and allowing view on additions and changes through compromises, time and user-needs. Some of the ideas show resembles with the Italian movement Arte Povera.⁷⁰, another historical example of an alternative way of experiencing beauty.

Panta Rei or Planning for the Unexpected

To plan a fixed solution that suites everyone is probably impossible to realize, even the alternatives such as intentional utopias, fail, since they never function the way they are intended to; examples being the well-meaning designs of functionalism and modernism, [from](#) le Corbusier, Paolo Soleri etc. The success of a built environment [does not](#) depend on the

⁶⁷ Artists asking community members to participate in the creative process and art making in public spaces rather than just framing it conceptually and then letting a designer or architect execute the forming of the space or the object. Kwon, Miwon: *One Place After Another Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, (MIT Press 2002). Chapter 4: *From Site To Community in New Genre Public Art*, p 100 –137 and Jacob M, Jane, Brenson M, Olson M Eva eds.: *Culture in Action*, (Bay Press Seattle 2005.)

⁶⁸ The Gutai group was active from the 1950's to the 1970's in Japan.

⁶⁹ This is described as the beauty of decay, but is it not perhaps that beauty which material assumes when it is freed from artificial make-up and reveals its original characteristics? The fact that the ruins receive us warmly and kindly after all, and that they attract us with their cracks and flaking surfaces, could this not really be a sign of the material taking revenge, having recaptured its original life? (Yoshihara, Jiro: *Manifesto*, Geijutsu Shincho art journal, December 1956. Retrieved at URL: http://www.ashiyaweb.or.jp/museum/10us/103education/nyumon_us/manifest_us.htm) 2008 May 9.

⁷⁰ The term Arte Povera was introduced by the Italian art critic and curator, Germano Celant, in 1967. (...) The name means literally 'poor art' but the word poor here refers to the movement's signature exploration of a wide range of materials (...) Arte Povera therefore denotes not an impoverished art, but an art made without restraints, a laboratory situation in which any theoretical basis was rejected in favour of a complete openness towards materials and processes. (...) (www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary). 2008 May 9. Arte Povera worked with unlikely combinations of materials, exploring the relation of the natural and the artificial, the urban and the rural and giving the most banal and simple materials a metaphysical dimension. Mario Merz's igloo works reveal prehistoric and tribal features but set in his time and space with neon words like "rock 'n' roll," on them. Merz was interested in architecture and the unity of space and the humans using it. He made big spaces feel human and intimate. (Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn, Ed.: *Arte Povera*, (London, 2005).

static structure per se, it most certainly depends on its ability to house different wishes of how to live one's life.⁷¹ I suggest it is a lot more interesting to think in terms of *Taking Place*, a feminist spatial practice of architects and writers. In *Altering Practices* the group explains that they suggest a fundamental shift from previous feminist architectural work.

(...) we were writing from an architectural perspective that can be read from other perspectives as well, including art or performance. The group has moved away from the aim of representation (as seen in many public art projects), and from an understanding of the architectural space as space formed by objects in relation to one another, to a more political understanding of the time-space relationship. The notion of participation has shifted from a participation in the production of objects to a spatial participation. The aims are no longer to be 'included' or 'represented' but to participate directly from a different position. This is the legacy of *Alterities*: 'difference becoming a tool for' taking⁷².

In this perspective, architecture and space is never static, it becomes what its users want it to be, which is something far more interesting than the essential building in itself and with what intention it was built. This makes the flexibility and allowing of change in existing structures and architecture much more important than the primary design. So it could be suggested that temporary, flexible or redefined spatial structures are a kind of architecture that make possible different engagements for people with different ethnicity, gender and sexuality to perform comfortably and not to remain "out of place".

In this context the NBC attempts to – through conversations, our web site and curatorial methods, additions in the public space, walks, and staged performances – show what is not included in the "mainstream" or norm, investigate perspectives on how public space can be used and looked at. This is a subject of current of interest also outside our own practice, and there have been biennales, exhibitions and art forums recently with a similar theme, including the 4th International Architecture Biennale in Rotterdam *Open City: Designing Coexistence*, the Biennale in Venice 2008 *Beyond Architecture*, and *Of Other Spaces*⁷³ to mention only three. They are addressing the same areas of interests as the NBC –

⁷¹ For e.g. at the intentional community of Arcosanti, outside Phoenix, Arizona, USA, built as an experimental alternative prototype city to suburban sprawl, there are regulations on how the design may be changed. As an answer to that, there exists a small "suburb" of Arcosanti about 500-1000 metres from the official area. The suburb is called "Camp" and around 5-50 people live down there. In the "Camp" there are no regulations on how the structures are rebuilt or redecorated- people mainly live in small concrete cubes, tents, trailers, teepees, tree-houses etc. The area has a temporary feeling to it, being that it changes all the time for different purposes (cowgirl exhibitions, harvest parties, veggieoil converting workshops, robotic carnivals...) but actually it is older than the "real" Arcosanti. The cubes were once built to house the people working on the master construction.

⁷² *Altering practices*, Edited by Doina Petescu, (Routledge, London, 2007).

⁷³ The exhibition *Of Other Spaces* was curated by James Voorhies at Bureau for Open Culture, Columbus College of Art & Design, 107 N. Ninth St. Columbus, OH 43215, USA, February 25 – April 25, 2009. The exhibition included the artists Mary Jo Bole, Michael Brown, Alain Bublex, Robert Buck, Gregory Crewdson,

how artists, curators, architects and urbanists can stimulate social, cultural and economic coexistence and how spaces affect human behaviour and experience. The curator of *Of Other Spaces* describes the exhibitions like this, which is close to The New Beauty Councils interest and investigations as well:

Of Other Spaces explores how space affects human behavior and experience. The exhibition asks us to consider the ways in which spaces are charged with authority, and both serve and suppress our actions and ways of relating. The concept of "other spaces" is drawn from the philosophy of Michel Foucault, especially his thoughts on social relations and cultural practices expressed in the intersection of space, architecture, and history. In a rarely cited 1967 text by Foucault, entitled "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias," he introduces what he calls heterotopias—different or other spaces.⁷⁴

However, creating an intentionally "un-coded" built environment is not always a formula for success since even architects, city dwellers and artists, who has had an explicit strive to create flexible structures and opening up for diverse lifestyles often failed. A classic example is the theories of urban development and social interaction by Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys. In Constant's New Babylon, which was created to match unknown future citizens' needs and their possible nomadic lifestyles. Although the attempt was to provide the users with optimised freedom and never-ending options, the result is still somewhat dogmatic. In a recent interview with Mark Wigley, a Constant connoisseur, Wigley is being asked about this aspect of Constant's work.⁷⁵ The interview is interesting since it brings new light on the understanding of New Babylon. It has until now often been described as open and liberationist, as an interpretation of some of the Situationist ideas it was based on. However, at the same time Mark Wigley has written about New Babylon in a way that more resembles of modernist, or even the aesthetics and ideologies from fascist eras, drawing parallels to the city as a fully automated mechanism that repeats itself.⁷⁶ Although the role model for New Babylon was utopian – a children's playground and, according to Wigley began with the quite Situationist thought: what if you never had to work? Which meant to be playful, it is also very limiting and in some ways frightening. In the interview Wigley replies that:

Dan Graham, Candida Höfer, Guillaume Leblon, Laura Lisbon, Gordon Matta-Clark, Eva Meyer and Eran Schaerf, Laurent Montaron, Marylène Negro, TJ Norris and Scott Wayne Indiana, Sarah Schönfeld, Maya Schweizer, Suzanne Silver, Christian Tomaszewski, Clemens von Wedemeyer, Jane and Louise Wilson. <http://www.bureauforopenculture.org> (visited 2009-04-15).

⁷⁴ <http://www.bureauforopenculture.org> and

<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html> (both visited 2009-04-15).

⁷⁵ <http://bldgblog.blogspot.com>

⁷⁶ Wigley Mark, *Constant's New Babylon*, Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, 1998.

What I think you're saying is: that's all very well, if you think that a playground is really a space of free movement. Because, of course, a playground is also a space of total control – it has an inside and an outside; there are only so many things you can do inside it; and there is always somebody watching. So the playground is also a space of surveillance and so on. You could say that the nightmare of Constant's project is that you never get out of the playground. So you're absolutely right to stress the extent to which a supposed society of liberation is actually a control society.⁷⁷

Later Wigley also brings up Constant's own critique of the project, saying that he by the end of the 20 years he worked on New Babylon started to show images to show how horrible life would be within this city of his. At the end of the day Constant blamed these consequences on the freedom of choice offered within the structure.

This question, which is brought up in Wigley's quote, on what can be defined as inside or outside something is interesting not only from the aspect of being free or controlled, but also from the perspective of what is experienced as private and public. And as a result of that – how you are expected to act in out of those places, what is accepted and what is not. The definition of inclusion and exclusion through architecture has of course been discussed before. Rem Koolhaas brought it up in his study *Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture*, which has its departure point in the Berlin Wall, but explored the conditions of creating a desire for the exclusiveness on the “inside”.

...this new architecture is neither authoritarian nor hysterical: it is he hedonic science of designing collective facilities that fully accommodate individual desire.⁷⁸

The topic is sadly relevant again with the Gaza wall, even though some of these issues of architectural warfare must be said to have been strongly connected to the cold war era. Maybe the construction of megastructures or even the mere attempt of utopias is in itself problematic, especially utopian visions for post-revolutionary societies like Constant's. Today's conflicts often seem more unlimited than before, since it is not so much a war between nation states with clear borders any longer. Or as Beatriz Colomina states in an interview with Homi K. Bahabha in Art Forum's summer edition 2007:

The collapse of inside and outside is a historical process. Each war throughout the twentieth century can be identified with different forms of media – an evolution from newspapers and television to computers and cell phones – that redefine our sense of public and private, inside and outside.(...) Walls are not protecting you any longer. I was very struck by an object for sale in the catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art's store; it's called Final Home Jacket, and it is designed by Kosuke Tsumura and

⁷⁷ *Architectural Weaponry*: An interview with Mark Wigley, BLDGBlog <http://bldgblog.blogspot.com/2007/04/architectural-weaponry-interview-with.html>, (visited 2008-09-20).

⁷⁸ Koolhaas Rem and Mau Bruce, *S,M,L,XL: OMA*, The Monacelli Press, New York, 2nd ed, 1998, p 7.

marketed as clothing to be used as a portable "home" in the event of a catastrophe. It has pockets that can be stuffed with newspapers for warmth, and spaces for everything you need to survive: mask, windup radio, maps, food, tape, flashlight, and cell phone. Protection is no longer a house. It's these lightweight accessories.⁷⁹

PART 3

Changed Perspectives – The Performed Conversations

To reinterpret the city and its opportunities we have been working with the idea of the dialogue and conversations as a tool and method to approach and rethink spaces. I applied this method to the project of four curated public talks, which simultaneously took the politics of gender, space and architecture as a subject for discussion, and therefore created a specific forum for collective knowledge.

At the public talks (from which this text has been developed) my aim was to encourage our invited guests and the audience to consider what the topic of the seminar series and each of the talks might mean for them as user and shapers of the city, in diverse roles – informal and formal.

The NBC comes from a curiosity in understanding how architecture can be understood as a stage and its users as performers, where the built situations are a way of activating spaces and relations, and these situations can be altered when the set design is changed. With this perspective in mind we curated and performed the four public talks c/o The Stockholm City Museum. We called the series *Changed Perspectives*. Each talk had a different theme although they all had one general aim – to investigate how new perspectives of how Stockholm can be used and look can be brought in to the development of the city. The seminars were questioning what is considered pretty and ugly and who has got the interpretative prerogative to judge, how dirt and concepts like abjection plays a role in the decision making and how these decisions are always made based on personal taste.

During these four sessions the NBC introduced themes offering diverse approaches to how the city and its public realm could be used. The talks were open to the public and staged as informal conversations about urgent subject among invited guests. Each talk introduced guests with a personal engagement in concrete projects with diverse perspectives on factors that influence urban development. They ranged from grass root

⁷⁹ *Domesticity at War*: Beatriz Colomina and Homi K. Bhabha in conversation, Tim Griffin, ArtForum, summer 2007. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_ai_n27500362 (visited 2008-09-20)

initiatives and international examples to the formal practice and official policies presented by the city of Stockholm's administration. The NBC was hosting the talks that were held within the Stockholm City Museum.

Through these performed public conversations, The New Beauty Council wanted to emphasise that the topics brought up and the works presented in the public talks, should be understood as something that can transform our way of thinking and working with the built environment. We wanted the talks to result in possible new ways of experiencing everyday places and that the users of the city would discover the opportunities that critical studies and reinterpretations of urban design carry for taking places and making spaces.

We were asking if it is possible to find new ways of re-thinking and opening up the city, without letting certain interests dominate over others? And if a city is planned with the lowest common denominator as a strategy – does anyone at all then become satisfied? Doesn't this "neutral" strategy become a style that equally suppresses other expressions? Would it instead be possible to create a city that allows parallel worlds, where people from time to time both are confronted with diversity and still are enjoying themselves? Could the city become even more attractive to a larger number of people if the strategies and planning were more flexible? The talks' invited guests were meant to bring in new perspectives and offer unexpected meetings, among the guests as well as between them and the audience. In the role of seminar hostesses we acted within a feminist tradition⁸⁰, aiming to create an atmosphere of inclusion, reorganizing the typical institutional lecture space into a horseshoe shaped seating area with colourful buckets turned upside down with pillows on top to sit on, and fruit trays that we encouraged people to pass around and eat from. Our guests and we sat either directly on a little stage or on the floor amongst the audience. We moved around in the room during the talks to try to have make the possibility to make a comment or speak less intimidating to those who usually wouldn't go and even lesser actually say something during a public talk. We wanted to create an atmosphere that was allowing and blurred out the traditional hierarchies of speakers and listeners, encouraging people to participate in the discussion and not being shy to ask questions. We started every seminar with a presentation of NBC, Thérèse and myself positioning ourselves and our intentions, and when introducing our guests clarifying our interest of a particular angle in their work, meaning, trying to be transparent with our intentions in the way we would like the institutions and authorities we

⁸⁰ My co-worker in NBC, Thérèse Kristiansson, has some experience of this through her participation in the FATALE studio at KTH. FATALE is a group of researchers and educators at the School of Architecture, KTH, pursuing research and education within, and through, feminist architecture theory. See www.xakt.nu/fatale

examine to be clear with theirs.

The seminars were intended as a way to create a platform for discussion to take place and at the same time working on how to re-use the institution, not only working against them, creating a constructive dialogue with and within them, where they understood the value of inviting outside practices to discuss the content of their work.

Summaries of the Performed Conversations

This part sums up three of four public talks within the series *Changed Perspectives*. The second talk *Whatever Blows Our Trumpet* is given an in dept analyses in a separate section following this summary, why it is not included here.

The Power of Space – What Can You Do in Public? Changed Perspectives #1

The invited guests to this first public talk on theory and practice of control, authorship and creativity in architecture were:

Jonah Nylund, chairperson of the board of Stockholm Pride Festival

Anna Ulfstrand, ethnologist and head of documentation at The Stockholm City Museum.

Lars Orrskog, senior lecturer in Urban Planning and Environment, KTH School of Architecture and The Built Environment in Stockholm.

Meike Schalk, School of Architecture, FATALE – feminist architectural theory research and education, KTH in Stockholm and co-editor of SITE Magazine.

This session brought up questions on how tolerance of the somewhat repressive pragmatism amongst the majority of formal practitioners and politicians within urban development in Stockholm, which creates a contagious atmosphere of stage fright. The conversations dwelt upon the hard to reached balance between separate interests within the shared public space. How possible solutions for coexistence could look and how urban life also comes with a certain amount of dependency on each other, since it means living together. Different aspects of accessibility from political, physical and economic perspectives were discussed since diverse perspectives shape the urban landscape very differently. Questions on how to decide between more communal transportation and more roads for private cars, or how parking lots and roads could have an alternative use were just a few examples that were mentioned.

Jonah Nylund talked about how Pride uses the festival and party in a political way to address issues of tolerance, freedom of speech and human rights for gay, transgender and queer within the mainstream society. He described how Pride temporarily take over the

streets and put these questions on the official agenda as well as literarily making them more visible in the city.

Anna Ulfstrand described how she worked with finding narratives and histories within the city and its surroundings, but also how commercial interests create their own stories and what they chose to put forward in a time when branding is crucial to reach out and create a unique trademark and every company, commune, region or nation with self-respect use storytelling in their advertising.

Lars Orrskog talked about how the unexpected and unusual can open up new ways of experiencing and making use of the city. In Stockholm for example you could even be tolerated moving along on a toboggan down the slope in front of the Royal Palace after an unusually heavy snowfall.

Meike Schalk described how she together with other architects and artists have investigated the role of public places within a variety of spaces, like the museum as an agora, the function of collaborative garden projects and participatory actions as a way of opening up otherwise private and closed parts of the city. Meike Schalk has also worked with participation on site with people helping creating the concepts of projects, taking over places and enabling volunteers to take over the care of parks and playgrounds.

The audience participated in the open discussion, which followed the individual presentations. Some issues brought forward were: the design by fear; how urban planning following the fears of people rather than providing a possible other reality. Great Britain was put forward as a warning since children today are not allowed to move freely at all any longer, but where it used to be okay for them to play out of sight on a 500 metres distance from there parents. We see the same tendency when it comes to the planning of parks, where bushes are used restrictively so that rapers can not hide in them, playgrounds are designed with cushioned soft rubber floors for children not to fall and get hurt. Design by failure was put forward as a possibility; it can open up for more innovative solutions when buildings or areas fail in their intentional use and are redesigned to become something else.

In-between Spaces – Farming on Abandoned Railways or Empty Car Parks as Moonlight Cinemas Changed Perspectives #3

Five invited guests were sharing their ideas on how one can make room for creativity and innovation within a city. The guests were:

Victor Marx, architect, initiator of Cyklopen Independent Social Centre & House of Culture

John Higson and Marie Eriksson, initiators of Wasted Space and 100 Houses
Carolina Eslon, architect and co-worker at Quartiermanagement in Berlin
Ann-Charlotte Backlund, Museum director, The Stockholm City Museum

This session looked into how it can be made possible to make leftover places and in-between spaces of the city accessible for participatory actions and grass-root initiatives. The talk touched upon how the city of Stockholm authorities can be made start seeing these initiatives from the citizens as possibilities rather than threats, and how one could work to encourage people to make their own initiatives happen. To mention two examples: First, how one can start processes to make use of courtyards and informal roads, tracks and paths as public places. Second, how can one change the formal structure so that citizens can be actively involved in creating these meeting places and decide on how to use these rooms.

Victor Marx talked about his work within the campaign Kulturkampanjen, which was created in 2003 after an occupation of the old SVT (Swedish Television) house on Östermalm in Stockholm. This action was a way of pointing out the need for buildings for independent, non-commercial cultural agents. Some years later the action resulted in the house Cyklopen, built on a neglected site in a Stockholm suburb. The house was built in true DIY spirit, was approximately 300 square meters and 9 meters high. Last autumn it was burnt down by opponents to Cyklopen's anti-racist activities.

Carolina Eslon described her work within Quartiermanagement in Berlin, and their participatory methods to make areas better for the ones who actually live there, how grass-root initiatives are encouraged and developed. She explained how leftover spaces are made a strategy which allows a flexible refinement of areas in Berlin whereas these sites are hunted and planned away as soon as possible by the Stockholm Town Building Office (Stadsbyggnadskontoret).

John Higson and Marie Eriksson presented their projects Wasted Space and 100 Houses, which both are encouraging participatory actions from the persons who live in a certain area. Within Wasted Space they are mapping unused spots in the city with the help of members of public and in collaboration with the City of Stockholm to exploit and develop these sites. In 100 Houses the residents of the houses are decorating their facades in collaboration with artists and designers.

Ann-Charlotte Backlund, showed some examples of consciously well-planned in-between spaces from different suburbs of Stockholm. She described Stockholm as full of good examples of so-called natural parks, with planned unexploited lots of land between the buildings. Traneberg, west of the city is one example. Backlund said that many of these

spaces are currently threatened due to further exploitation and condensation tendencies in the development of these areas.

In the open discussion the guests answered the NBC's and the audience's questions on how one can leave space for spontaneous actions in the development and actual planning of the urban environment. In the conversation the question was asked if total solutions counteracts flexibility and the diverse needs and desires of the users of the city. If and how people's relations to sites, their own surroundings and to each other are affected when creating something together was also discussed.

How values are built in to our walls – Does everyone want to stay the same way?

Changed Perspectives #4

This last talk had following invited guests:

Karin Bradley, doctorate researcher in Urban and Regional Studies, KTH School of Architecture and The Built Environment and co-editor of the book *Bor vi samma stad?* (Do we live in the same city?).

Dick Urban Vestbro, chairman, Cohousing Now and professor emeritus of Built Environment Analysis at KTH, the Royal Institute of Technology.

Rolf Nilsson, chairman The Association for Homeless People in Stockholm)

Elsa Reimerson, I Want Somewhere to Live Now Association (jagvillhabostad.nu).

Piamaria Hallberg, Stockholm City Museum, antiquarian, the satellite branch of the museum: apartments located around the city and its surroundings.

The subjects discussed where how identities are shaped through the place one lives in, how ideas about the nuclear family shape normative standards within housing policies? If there are different ways of living and having a family and what happens if you do not fit in to the prepared template housing. How does the normative standards shape our everyday, what consequences do they have on how we lead our lives?

Karin Bradley stated that in today's housing market the future proprietor are only building for relatively wealthy buyers who are supposed to be attracted by individual choices and customised living in her presentation. In doing so they are leaving behind half the population, a large target group of potential buyers. Bradley explained however that today the problem is in fact not the suppressing norms of the Modernism, but the excessiveness that these customized luxury enclaves has led to. She promoted a new freedom of choice; to actively give up this customization and to chose a more environmentally friendly and socially and economically sustainable solution.

Dick Urban Vestbro talked about how cohousing can be a sustainable alternative living, from a equality perspective as well as ecologically and economically.

Rolf Nilsson talked about the right to have somewhere to live and the reluctance amongst politicians to find solutions to the challenges of the thousands of homeless persons in Stockholm. Even if it is both possible, cheap and easy to put up temporary housing for persons who already have somewhere to live. However, the willingness to find solutions ends with people who are already in the market of properties. As an example Rolf Nilsson showed inexpensive evacuation barracks that people get offered to move in to while their apartments are renovated, whereas if you do not already own anything finding an inexpensive living solution becomes a mission impossible. He also described an action with homeless persons he organised some years ago to point out the absurd roles that people who want to buy tickets to commercial events are tolerated tenting while waiting for the sale to start, whereas homeless people are never allowed this kind of presence in a public square.

Elsa Reimerson also described different ways of affecting the planning and constructing processes for cheaper housing. She talked about UngBoHuset, which is a concrete example of this kind of housing that Jagvillhabostad.nu developed in collaboration with the constructing company. The focus in Elsa Reimersons work is to provide young people with their first own apartment.

Piamaria Hallberg described the development of standards and different housing projects in Stockholm from a historical perspective. She showed three of the museum's apartments, which are part of the museum, but spread around Stockholm. Stichelbergsvägen was one example of housing built as an inexpensive alternative for families with many children and small means.

In the open discussion there was questions posed weather it is amiable to build in a lower standard to provide cheaper housing. The opinion that no one wants to buy or live in buildings that look cheap was brought forward. But the aesthetics and evaluation of materials and if they look "inexpensive" or luxurious is not always connected to the actual value, but to different ideals and styles, which vary between cultures and periods.

PART 4

Whatever Blows Our Trumpet

Pretty and ugly as the base for urban development decisions

Changed Perspectives #2

In this second public talk within the series *Changed Perspectives c/o The Stockholm City Museum*, The New Beauty Council (NBC) conversed with four, invited guest and together with an audience about how aesthetical matters influence the urban development. The conversation posed questions including how one can discover which norms and social structures are (re-)presented in the built environment – in the details and in its expressions as well as in the functions of the city. How one can create or even shape dissonances in the otherwise expected and mainstream. The subject matter problematised whose ideals are allowed becoming the norm, what values are ruling and whose security and beauty are we protecting.

To be aware of who decides and why they decide how our built environment should look and function is important to decrease segregation, and increase the representation. It could possibly be done by a larger participation in the processes.⁸¹

The invited guests brought diverse perspectives, experiences and ideas into the conversation, such as who has got the interpretative prerogatives in aesthetics, how filths and abjection play a role in the decision making and how these decisions are made based on personal taste. The invited guests were: Amra Heco, filmmaker, radio producer and project developer, The Millioncultural Youth Association.

Catharina Gabrielsson, architect, researcher and PhD, currently a Visiting Fellow at The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Cities Programme.

Martin Rörby, architectural historian and director of The Council for Protection of Ecological and Aesthetic Matters.

⁸¹ *Open City: Designing Coexistence*, the 4th International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (24 Sep 2009 – 10 Jan 2010).

http://www.iabr.nl/en/news/42/Open_City_Designing_Coexistence (visited 2009 March 30).

“The Open City is an urban condition that enables diverse groups to interact peacefully, creatively, and productively (...) Open City (...) is a finely tuned integration machine that encourages distinct communities and groups to settle and establish the dynamic relationships that we call urbanity. Today, the very diversity that once activated our cities threatens to dissolve them: cities are turning into archipelagos; public infrastructures are splintering; and public spaces are being left to wither. Differences between rich and poor, conflicts among ethnic groups, and the proliferation of gated communities and security zones are some of the symptoms that point to the urgent need to re-address the idea of Open City.” and translate it into concrete intervention strategies. In order to be sustained in the face of today's urban challenges, the Open City must be researched and (re)designed. (...)” <http://www.e-flux.com/shows/view/6549> (visited 2009 March 30).

Ann-Charlotte Backlund, The City of Stockholm Antiquarian and the director of The Stockholm City Museum.

In this public talk our position in NBC was hence to claim that values of what is considered fine and beautiful or ugly and offensive steer the urban development, but how and why this is actually affecting us is talked about too rarely. In our presentation we introduced thoughts on how ideas on filth and disorder matters to what and why certain things are regarded as beautiful, ugly, neat and safe.

Amra Heco

Amra Heco from the Millioncultural Youth Association (Miljonkulturell Ungdom) presented her views on why it is important for citizens of a city to express themselves and leave traces of their personal stories. She meant this being necessary to create a feeling of belonging. A vital part of this is making it possible for individuals to communicate with the city, to engage with your surroundings based off your own needs. Heco mentioned Ernesto Guerra ⁸² as an example of a street artist that the Millioncultural Youth Association had worked with through the magazine Gringo, which published some of his works. He has based his artistry around personal stories, expressing his frustration. Guerra's art works with his many glued papers holding his poetry, printed name and recipes are easily recognised and very repetitive. Occurring as visual traces in the urban landscape, they form a noticeable presence – taking place. Heco draw a parallel to the posters with portrait photos of celebrities that welcome travellers arriving at Arlanda airport in Stockholm. Whilst the meaning of Guerra's work is both open to interpretation and creating a personal sign in the public realm, seeming almost therapeutic, the huge, printed greetings at Stockholm Arlanda Airport feel shallow and empty of all personality in comparison.

The re-design of satellite dishes for home use was another project mentioned by Amra Heco. The satellite dishes, a well-known element especially in the suburbs, has been burdened with an undeservedly bad reputation for a long time in Sweden. Millioncultural Youth Association and the design collaborative 02 Nordic has developed a new look for them to possibly open up a dialogue around this subject.

Ann-Charlotte Backlund

The Director of The Stockholm City Museum told the audience more about the museum's

⁸² Ernesto Guerra is well known in for his wall works glued on the city's public walls in Stockholm. <http://www.interbib.se/default.asp?refid=3898&id=36813&ptid=5077> and <http://www.immi.se/kultur/authors/latin/guerra.htm> (both visited 090329)

practice when evaluating houses. She immediately stated that it had nothing to do with what is beautiful or ugly, and that the museum as an institution is very careful to point this out. Instead Backlund wanted to enhance the theories behind the selection of certain houses and what is valued to be worth keeping for future generations as a part of our cultural heritage. She showed slides of buildings she thought were worth keeping for different reasons. The first one was Sveriges Riksbank, the head office of Bank of Sweden designed by Peter Celsing at Brunkebergstorg, which has been elected the most ugly building in Stockholm on numerous occasions. The second image was a house by Sune Malmqvist from the 1980's at David Bagares gata. And the third one was Parkaden, a big common garage building in the central parts of Stockholm designed by Hans Asplund in 1962. This building has also been called "the ugliest in Stockholm". It has got a very characteristic façade – a decorative pattern made of cut out figures, where the numbers indicates the floors. Ann-Charlotte Backlund carefully stressed that the process of selecting buildings worth keeping and treating as part of our common cultural heritage is based on if they something about the time and the people when it was built. To explain the theory behind this "neutral tools" Backlund showed a grid with the criteria, which the museum uses to classify and select the cultural heritage; the value of documentation, when something is worth keeping due to a special technique, a well-known architect etc, or the value of experience, for example patina (but not beauty, Backlund clarifies).

The head office of Bank of Sweden was put forward by Ann-Charlotte Backlund as one of the most interesting buildings in Stockholm since it alludes to a typical "architecture of banks" with a long continuity and many historical references but combining it with a modern expression and form. Backlund said the bank clearly states its purpose and function (being a bank) since it is following a tradition of genuine bank buildings with thick, solid walls seen continuously from its birth in 15's century Florence. This architecture, Backlund said contains a great deal of information, (if you know how to read it and she admitted that it takes a lot of knowledge to understand the building).

Whilst director Backlund said aesthetics, taste and personal fancy wasn't criteria in the museum's selection process, since they only use "neutral tools" and that she wasn't going to bring up taste in her presentation, she was not able to avoid mentioning them anyway. When commenting on architect Malmqvist's building it was referred to as "hisklig", which translates as being horrible, terrible, offensive or even frightful. The style she describes the house as is so-called pastiche architecture and that it is typical for its time since the 1980's architecture often was ambivalent towards historical expressions, but for that sake not

beautiful. Backlund rounds up her presentation saying that “But I wasn’t supposed to talk about appreciation of beauty.”

Martin Rörby

Martin Rörby is the chief secretary of The Council for Protection of Ecological and Aesthetic Matters in Stockholm, or in short The Beauty Council (a direct translation of the less formal Swedish name, from which NBC obviously took its name.) The Beauty Council is an advisory group in questions concerning the built environment for Stockholm and their opinion is supposed to protect the beauty of Stockholm. Rörby commenced his presentation with saying that The Beauty Council never talks about what is beautiful or ugly, this was, according to him, nothing that they are concerned with. Instead he said they deal with completely different things, which got to do with the city’s qualities, and how buildings and their surroundings can become good and functional environments for the citizens of Stockholm. However, Martin Rörby nevertheless chose to talk about beauty and ugliness when presenting his images for the evening. His first image was of Klara Norra Kyrkogata, a quite narrow street in central Stockholm, which he put forward as a dynamic example of a complex and pluralistic street, muddled and showing signs and traces of different ages. In connection to this Rörby mentioned that it is important to let the city develop and change “so that different times meet in what some beholders would claim to be uncomfortable for the eyes”. This is according to Rörby what makes a city exiting urban landscape. Although he also claimed it important to let our own time be manifested. “Not through pastiche architecture, or in a pastiche-kind of way, but through expressing our time in some way”. Martin Rörby’s second image showed a new built office building next to Kungsbron, a bridge in down town Stockholm, which he meant, stood for these features and represented, according to him, good, contemporary architecture and make an interesting addition. A third picture was from the 1950’s of the Stockholm suburb Bredäng, showing what Rörby called Stockholm’s most elegant hot dog kiosk, with details of copper and blasted glass. The Beauty Council’s director wanted to prove his point that different parts of the city have different basic conditions, and different cities have different natural prerequisites, which determine the shape of the cityscape. He was convinced that the council should question the political consensus about the dense inner city acting the role model for the suburbs in Stockholm. Rörby meant that the city like built-up areas does not equal good quality, especially not for these suburbs.

Rörby’s last image was of Sergels torg, a public square in the absolute centre of Stockholm. The square has a characteristic black and white triangular pattern. The architect

David Helldén, who also designed Hötorgshuset, next to the square, also developed Sergels torg. The Danish artist Piet Hein suggested the super ellipse shape of the big fountain at Sergels Torg to Helldén.

Catharina Gabriellsson

Catharina began with giving her perspective of what's happening with Sergels torg, the so called decontamination of it and that she had argued for keeping what is left of the square a non commercial public realm in *Dagens Nyheter*, a daily paper in Sweden. She meant this being one of few public places where one still have the opportunity to negotiate and discuss and make ones voice heard – all important ingredients in a democracy. However Catharina's presentation focused on how the definitions of beauty, or how one can understand a concept as "Beauty". Historically, she said, beauty has equalled something whole and harmonious. The classic conception of beauty is strongly connected with the order between units and the whole. As an example of this classical concept of beauty Catharina Gabriellsson showed an images from Place de Vosges in Paris, a square surrounded by buildings on all four sides, developed in the 1500 and 1600 hundreds. Place de Vosges was an expression of the absolute royal power at the time – the autocracy. The open space in the middle is completely surrounded, sealed by buildings directed by strict rules of construction. You could only enter and leave through narrow passageways.

Gabriellsson mentioned that Le Corbusier call Place de Vosges the most prominent example in architecture in his book *Vers une Architecture* 1929. As an example of what has traditionally been seen as ugly Gabriellsson showed pictures from the corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street in London. Unlike Paris, London has developed trough small villages growing and merging, Great Britain was never an as strong unified royal power as France. In that sense, she claimed, London can be seen as a more democratic city than Paris. But as a result it is also more scattered, divided and fragmented – and in the classical sense – more ugly. It is not a city with one story, but with many incoherent ones, whereas Paris is more homogeneous and expressing a centralised order. But London still has a strong schedule with its repeated small houses and brick buildings.

As her last example Gabriellsson brought up Robin Hood Gardens by the well-known English architects Alison and Peter Smithson. This example was brought up to problematise the concepts of beauty and ugliness. In some ways this building have features that could be described as criteria of classical beauty, as the sense of continuity, en coherency and the location was carefully picked in a lush green area of eastern London. It was built in

the 1960's to 1970's as so called social housing for people of less means. The architecture has a very detailed design with an explicit aim of consideration for the living environment. But in spite of the architects' good intentions, the Robin Hood Gardens has been and still is, controversial. As Catharina Gabrielsson mentioned, public opinions has been raised to tear it down and the neighbourhood has been in decline for a long time. Maybe due to its large scale and social stigma this project housing is considered ugly in the eyes of many beholders. The Robin Hood Gardens estate has got many similarities with Swedish suburban and sometimes utopian projects, as Gabrielsson pointed out. She concluded her presentation with comparing this project with the nearby Docklands area. But whilst the Robin Hood Gardens is struggling the Docklands is an area with sky-high property values, even though the architecture there has got an architecture, which is both higher and less worked on, and in Gabrielsson's mind also louder, indifferent and insignificant.

The Open Discussion

Some interesting remarks were made during the open discussion. Amra Heco suggested a "squad team" with an organic connection to the area, to create bridges between these suburban areas in the need of redevelopment. This team has to work like an expert group, a subject and not be turned into objects in this process, hence not being marginalised into just a "target group" but actually actively be involved as collaborators. A crucial step in working like this is creating platforms for everyone to feel like "shareholders" in the development process.

Catharina Gabrielsson asked Martin Rörby how he could choose such an ugly and bad architectural example, as the office building at Kungsbron, as an example of good contemporary architecture. She also pointed out that these issues are all about power, the power of making pretty or ugly decisions, and thereafter asked him how the old Beauty Council could make "prettier" decisions.

Rörby stated that he didn't feel the responsibility for how the Beauty Council's decisions are made, since the politicians in the City Hall (representing the Stockholm municipality), which also gives the Council its mandate in the first place, set the regulations for how they work. Some members of the council are nominated from the City Hall while others are selected by the academies within the fine arts and the like to provide an expert knowledge.

NBC raised the question if he felt that Martin Rörby experienced the Beauty Council's taste as better or more refined than the average Stockholmer, since consist of these

experts and how he felt about the fact that the average age of the members of the council is 65 years and that 85% of them are men.

Rörby replied that the council shouldn't be a cross section of the population of Stockholm and its taste does not have to be representative, since the mandate is to be experts. Moreover, he disclaimed the council's taste as being necessarily better than the rest of us. Rörby did agree though that decision's made by the council are affected by who the members are.

Another opinion brought forward by Ann-Charlotte Backlund in the discussion was that the Beauty Council could have their meetings made public, in front of an audience and as a result act more generous with their expertise. This could be an injection to the discussions about the city and shed light on the subject matter rather than being an internal gathering of geniuses.

Catharina Gabrielsson stated that it was difficult to keep to the purely visual aspects, since what creates a beautiful and pleasant city is due to a number of things. Sound is another factor and to experience that there are plenty of opportunities to live in somewhere is maybe the most important. Another is the right to use the public realm and to do so these places have to be built and protected from commercial interests.

But when asked by NBC if she could name some actual public places where this was applicable, she had a difficult time coming up with an example. Instead Gabrielsson talked about these "dynamic room which provides opportunities of temporality, spontaneous actions and the unplanned"⁸³ as something more of a suggestion, an attempt to think about the public realm as an opportunity, which is continuously ongoing and indefinite.

This answer provoked Peder Alton, architectural critic at Dagens Nyheter, one of the biggest daily papers in Sweden, who prompted that Gabrielsson should be able to point out and exemplify such a site since this it is a leading thesis within her argumentation.

Obviously upset by this attack Gabrielsson gave Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* as a reference of how one can have numerous possible readings of what a city could be. For example, she said, one could claim that it should provide a radical accessibility instead of the system of surveillance and control that we see developing now. An ideal image would be a city based of interlinked and coherent public spaces which could be used differently by different people at different times of the day (and night).

⁸³ Gabrielsson discusses these "dynamic spaces as a kind of public places, which are undergoing a continuous production" in her dissertation *Det offentliga rummet som medium för konst, arkitektur och politiska föreställningar*, Axl Books, Stockholm 2006.

In the audience Karin Winter, former co-worker at the Swedish Museum of Architecture, commented that what determines the urban development most are economical interests. In her opinion the most pressing point is to preserve public space.

Reflections on Whatever Blows Our Trumpet – Pretty and ugly as the base for urban development decisions

Some reflections on the issues raised in the second public talk are brought forward in this section. Starting with Amra Heco and her presentation of the satellite dish project, which pointed out how values play an important role in creating regulations and steering urban development and how this affects how people are live, down to the very details, like what TV channels they are allowed to watch. In this case, as in many others, the decisions are made in the name of safety and neatness, although it seems to be attitudes and values rather than real safety issues that form the base of these decisions. And these values seem to be everything but pretty, not nice and tidy at all. An article called *Arquitectura parabólica – ett jämförelseobjekt* (Architecture for satellite dishes – a comparative object⁸⁴) in the Swedish periodical *Glänta* expounds on the subject, giving both a clear picture of the current situation and suggesting a solution:

There are instances where people have not been evicted in spite of putting up satellite dishes on the façade to their residential buildings. A few families in the suburb Rinkeby in Stockholm escaped a decision of eviction recently since the freedom of information was assessed as more pressing than the violation of the law for the right of tenancies' remarks and regulations on "soundness, order, behaviour and good conditions" in the estate.

– You are threatening to hurt others, yes your neighbours, the satellite dishes are not only ugly, but they can also fall down and thwart the access for the rescue services agency in case of an emergency!⁸⁵

What became clear in this public session was that the persons with power over the creation and writing of the city's future and history refuse to admit that taste and style have input on judgements and decision-making. Instead the parameters used are called "architectonic qualities" and "historical values". To confess that these seemingly more neutral words also

⁸⁴ My translation from Swedish to English.

⁸⁵ Pilar Zaratigui Gómez & Alexander Motturi, *Arquitectura parabólica – ett jämförelseobjekt. Glänta #2*, 2004, p 23. My translation from the originally Swedish quote:

"Det har hänt att människor inte blivit vräkta trots att de satt upp paraboler på fasaden till sina bostäder. I Rinkeby klarade nyligen några familjer sig undan ett vräkningsbeslut eftersom rätten till informationsfrihet bedömdes vara viktigare än hyreslagens anmärkningar om "sundhet, ordning och gott skick" i fastigheten. – Ni hotar att skada andra människor, ja era grannar, parabolerna är inte bara fula, utan de kan också ramla ner och förhindra räddningstjänsten att komma till uttryckning!"

carry values was carefully avoided, as was the discussions on why a building or an area would be considered to carry these qualities, which make them either worth keeping or constructing. It is worth remembering that these values steering the urban development is not set in stone since taste differs so much with who you are and where you come from (class, gender, sexuality, education, ethnicity, religion etc). It is not eternal values that govern the policies and practices; they change from time to time, from place to place and from person to person. It sounds obvious, although, evidently it is not, since the authorities don't even recognise the role that taste and aesthetics play, it is still relevant to put these issues on the agenda. This is also why the stubborn dream about the neutral, natural or objective tool has to be replaced by a not so anxious subjective conscious that admits what actually constitutes concepts like quality. It is neither possible nor desirable to find one definition, it is the continuous open discussion, which I believe is crucial as well as the uncomfortable question "why".

A couple of years ago The National Council of Architecture, Form and Design (RAFD), which works for the Swedish government published an investigation of the concept of quality since it had been appointed to all state authorities in Sweden by the government to consider quality for public procurement for everything from design, services, air planes, roads etc when purchased for the public sector.⁸⁶

Perhaps it is not always possible to produce safe figure based data for decision-making to secure a high and steady quality (...) Emotions, subtle preferences and aesthetical considerations impacts almost all decisions and the chapters of this book show that matters of quality is no less impregnated by such factors. It might be the case that we after all have to have confidence in persons in flesh and blood and become less hypnotized by marks, certificates, ranking charts and opinions of supposed objectivity.⁸⁷

Today the concept of quality seem to be threatened all together. In Kulturutredningen 2009 (The Swedish Government's investigation and report of Cultural Affairs 2009), which was launched only a few weeks ago earlier this spring, the concept of quality is no longer to be found as a desirable criteria in cultural production. It has been erased as one of the goals for

⁸⁶ Strannegård, Lars (ed) *Den omätbara kvaliteten* Norstedts akademiska förlag and The National Council for Architecture, Form and Design/ Rådet för arkitektur, form och design, WS Bookwell, Finland (2007) p 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p 11. My translation to English from the originally Swedish quote:

"Kanske går det inte att alltid ta fram siffermässigt trygga beslutsunderlag för att säkerställa att kvaliteten blir hög och jämn. (...) Känslor, subtila preferenser och estetiska överväganden spelar roll i nästan alla beslut, och kapitlen i denna bok visar att kvalitetsfrågor inte är mindre impregnerade av sådana faktorer. Kanske är det så att vi trots allt måste sätta vår tilltro till människor av kött och blod och stirra oss mindre blinda på betyg, rankinglistor och förment objektiva utlåtanden."

culture in Sweden. There is a need to find new strategies and methods to create a more tolerant and interesting city. This can of course be done in many different ways. It is not always necessary to rebuild, often the floor and walls could be left just like they are if only a different common attitude towards how you can use them is adopted. However, it is also necessary to change the actual process for urban development, since the current practice in Stockholm is old fashioned, inflexible, and how the decisions are made is opaque.

The NBC is working to find ways for a more “Open City” and to develop innovative production strategies for the design of “coexistence”⁸⁸, both for this change of attitudes using “soft powers” and for an actual change within the structures. To do so the processes have to be opened up to larger groups. Not to dismiss the professionalism of the designer or architect, but to find ways to improve the briefs or programmes given to them.⁸⁹

It is not about defining or locking down of single definition of beauty, but to make people in charge assume their responsibility for the decisions they make, and to admit that the development would look different with someone else at the wheels. But most important of all, the NBC wants to find alternatives to the process, to open up for new methods. Democratic processes often gain from the friction and “impurity” of broader experiences. It needs the conflicts, the negotiations, compromises and politics to stay relevant and democratic, just as the public realm also needs to be open and a space for negotiation.⁹⁰

Neutralising tools are commonly used to exercise power; it is critical to make subjective views look neutral or “natural” (instead of “cultural”) or even universal to secure the trustworthiness and to make the decisions seem to fit everyone and hence be less likely to get questioned. However, political decisions are just as affected by personal taste and opinions as any other decision, especially the ones over aesthetical matters.⁹¹

The so-called neutral method, the “theory” behind the practice, which the museum and the “old” Beauty Council applies when making their selection; judging what

⁸⁸ *Open City: Designing Coexistence*, the 4th International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam, (24 September 2009 – 10 January 2010), is exploring, documenting, and designing strategies for coexistence in today's cities.

⁸⁹ *joinedupdesignforschools* is one example how this has been done by former advertiser Johan Sorrell who started the Sorrell foundation to work with school children as the commissioners of designers, formulating the problem for the designer to solve. It is a form of shareholder and empowerment project where the students feel that they own the projects and grow with the task. <http://www.thesorrellfoundation.com/judfs.html> (visited 2009-03-31)

⁹⁰ Gabriellsson, Catharina. *Att göra skillnad – Det offentliga rummet som medium för konst, arkitektur och politiska förställningar*. Axl Books, Stockholm. 2006.

⁹¹ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2002. (La Distinction, Bourdieu Pierre, 1979.)

is significant enough to keep and make more objective what is strictly personal. It becomes a tool to hide the subjectivity and sometimes quite arbitrary character of the decisions forming the ground of the formal practice. Refusing to acknowledge what lies behind each decision and that it is constituted of taste and style is in a way an attempt (sometimes unconscious, sometimes not) to disguise the power and to shirk responsibility.

What would be another “method” is to acknowledge the subjectivity of the practice and stand up for the consequences. To openly show the calculations behind this normative taste and decisions and to make them public is worth striving for to make the process more transparent and possible to criticise. This of course, takes courage and includes risk taking, since you can’t blame the “tools” if you are being blamed for making the “wrong” decisions. However personal taste are both necessary and very valid criteria, even when the processes are changed and new tools are used for more participative practices, which can be done to become more including and democratic.

PART 5

Ideas of the Carnavalesque

The notion of Carnival can serve as an interesting frame or structure of relations for the NBC to work with and through, providing a metaphorical language and an image, which can clarify relations and conditions. One idea developed from the research of the NBC project and writing this thesis is a wish to try to use the carnivalesque structure as a method when creating and staging situations. This does not mean organizing a carnival or try to resemble one, but to use the idea of the carnivalesque temporary reversed order, and the masking and letting go of one’s identity, as a model of thought in different situations. The Russian philosopher and literature critic Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was the first to use the expression *carnavalesque*. According to Bakhtin:

[A]ll were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age⁹².

⁹² Clark, Katerina, and Michael Holquist. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge. 1984. Page 302-303

The carnival atmosphere holds the lower parts of life most important, as opposed to higher functions (thought, speech, soul), which were usually held dear.

At carnival time, the unique sense of time and space causes individuals to feel they are a part of the collective, at which point they cease to be themselves. It is at this point that, through costume and mask, an individual exchanges bodies and is renewed. At the same time there arises a heightened awareness of one's sensual, material, bodily unity and community".⁹³

The grotesque, argues Bakhtin:

discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life. It leads man out of the confines of the apparent (false) unity, of the indisputable and stable".⁹⁴

The carnival is hence both interesting because of what it is, but even more for what it is not. Through the carnivalesque it becomes clear what is usually not accepted and what otherwise constitutes the norm, who usually is the dominant or oppressed. It makes power relations very clear through being exactly what it pretends to be, another world order.

In their early stages many carnivals are forbidden by the state because of their non-normative expressions (for example playing the forbidden samba music or people cross-dressing) but in many cases the carnivals have successfully been turned into a popular commodity, making it a tourist attraction or charging people to participate although it's a public space. This has in a lot of cases successfully taken the edge of the political manifestations that the carnivals once were.

camilla wasserman 5/7/09 3:12 PM

Kommentar: Or feigns or aims to be.

Pineapple, Pimp or Dancing Diva?

A dialogue on the idea of the carnival by Annika Enqvist and Thérèse Kristiansson

Thérèse Kristiansson:

NBC uses the carnivalesque idea as a metaphor for how one temporarily can let go of one's official opinion and try out a different one, to mentally cross-dress and change the costume of your brain. To stage a situation in a carnivalesque way is making clear what otherwise constitutes norms and the mainstream.

Annika Enqvist:

During carnival the streets of the city are transformed into catwalks and the stairs become balconies for viewers of the spectacle. The facades are decorated and building "cross-cladd"⁹⁵, so that we might be in the jungle of the Amazon or in the Middle Ages of Basel.

⁹³ Bakhtin, Mikael. [1941, 1965] *Rabelais and His World*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 1993. Page 10

⁹⁴ Bakhtin, Mikael. [1941, 1965] *Rabelais and His World*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 1993. Page 48

⁹⁵ Bonnevier, Katarina, *Behind Straight Curtains: Towards a Queer*

Bank clerks dress as old ladies, fruit trays or in thongs and women as pineapples, pimps or bulls, kids as divas or police, and dogs arise as angels.

Thérèse Kristiansson:

Neighbourhoods attract others than their typical users and the actual inhabitants might not even be there, or everyone is there together. Usual codes and hierarchies no longer count to some extent, instead others are created and new temporary groups of belonging are formed by which music we dance to, what fruit we are disguised as or what food we eat⁹⁶.

Annika Enqvist:

During carnival it becomes evident that the space is performed through a certain scenography, whose users are active performers, dressed to fit into the play. The play of the everyday is harder to detect. The carnival can serve as a rich world of metaphors for thought in trying to make values, norms, hierarchies and structures visible.

Thérèse Kristiansson:

The carnival elucidates the conditions of the everyday stage. We think that one through art, as an independent tool for inquiry and investigation, can open up the discussion for how one thinks and talks about architecture or the staging of space – and put on a different pair of specs and allow ourselves to think radical!

The Deviant and the Carnival

It is also interesting to connect the Carnival to other temporary communities, such as what used to be Lugnet to the context of how definitions of beauty and ugliness can be traced back ideas of dirt and deviance, which was brought up earlier in this thesis. Lugnet was formerly Stockholm's only in-official neighbourhood, with temporary dwellings, located in an old industrial part of town, over the last ten years it has been torn down and replaced with a middle and upper-class residency area. These actions can be interpreted as a move against anything that departs from the norm or what is considered mainstream. Irregularities and varieties of expressions are cut off.

During Carnival, either it's in Rio de Janeiro or Notting Hill, rules of social engagement are suspended. In Rio that means that black people mostly situated in the shanty towns of Rio are welcomed in the for the carnival redecorated downtown areas predominately inhabited by white people, and that white bank clerks dress as fruit trays and black women as white swans. The clothing and the setting create a stage for a different social behaviour, although there of course are all kinds of social distinctions⁹⁷.

Feminist Theory of Architecture, Stockholm: Axl Books, 2007, p. 216.

⁹⁶ Bakhtin, Mikael. [1941, 1965] *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

⁹⁷ Da Matta, Roberto, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma*, Paris: Notre Dame Press, 1991

Mary Douglas purity rule can be applied to this situation; the society wanting to control informal structures and events, where in this case black naked bodies cross-dress and dance to samba music, a very political act in itself considering the marginalization of the non-white body and skin in Brazil. Mary Douglas describes society's longing for order and discipline, not only for oneself but also for and over others. It's a part of a puritan process where nature is to be mastered by culture and the body by the brain. Mary Douglas' purity rule describes how people, depending on how high they stand on the social ladder, to a larger extent feel to be in the grip of the state and society, or also as being part of, or actually being society. And the higher up and more part of it they are, the more they feel the need to control their body and other peoples too⁹⁸. In history and through colonialisation the black body has consequently been turned into a sexual object of desire, seen through the white male colonial gaze. If this object takes control over its own body without shame it becomes a threat. Though when turned into a commodity, like the carnival has, it again becomes fearless. In a similar manner the shantytowns of Rio called Favelas, where a large part of the black population lives, is made invisible and powerless. Because it is built up by informal structures it is not considered being a proper part of Rio, although it's estimated that around a third of Rios' inhabitants live there. Some streets make the city map, others not, meaning some get to be represented, others not.

Applying the Carnavalesque Method

The method of the carnivalesque suggests that one through rethinking spaces and act differently, in fact can re-appropriate places and in doing so also give the design a new meaning. As an actor you can affect the temporal and spatial experience of rooms through the mere use of your own body. This method comes from an understanding that the pressing point is that citizens of a city should have the possibility to redefine places, the function and looks of buildings over time, and that the structure and practice would provide flexibility, more open stagings which allow additions and changes.

The Konstfack Spring Exhibition

As part of the Konstfack Spring Exhibition the NBC is trying out this methodological framework for two events. One of them being *Safe Slut*, the documentation of a staged midnight carnival performed by a group of women, challenging the values and social rules maintained by society with their own bodies as a tool and the masquerade as a strategy to

⁹⁸ Douglas, Mary, *Purity and danger, an analysis of concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), New York, 1995

move between different identities. It is a participative investigation and action dealing with ideas of safety, danger, rape, the body, gender and space. The group had met at several occasions before hand to plan the performance and discussing the potentiality of appropriating space with ones' own body – if this experience on a very personal level could change the meaning of the space and values given to it? The project consisted both of the actual experience of preparing and performing “the carnival”, as well as the fiction that the action staged.

The other event is *The Carnavalesque Party*, with invited guests who have the power to decide over the aesthetics and functions of Stockholm. *The Carnavalesque Party* encourages people to mentally cross-dress, swapping values and opinions and allowing themselves to leave their official costume and trying on a different one. The specific issues addressed are such as in *Safe Slut*, which also will be shown at the party.

PART 6

Conclusions

This thesis has used the performed conversations within the public talk series *Changed Perspectives* to critically examine some of the tools and languages of the traditional practice of urban development in Stockholm. As mentioned in the introduction, two perspectives have been developed through the context of this thesis. The first perspective refers to the reception of the city as a stage – a performative structure, concepts which have been discussed within the earlier chapters of the thesis. The conclusions are that this way of relating to the city has led to a new understanding of how to think of the urban landscape and how this can be used. With this as starting point the NBC has created a tool – the carnivalesque view, which can be used as a method to reinterpret the urban landscape.

The second perspective has reacted to how institutions, authorities and people in power positions over the urban development make use of their roles and methods. This has been made very clear both through the actual conversations we organized and within the extended discussion in the earlier chapters of this thesis. The aim of the paper to question established processes in practice have been fulfilled through the critical reflection of the performed conversations at The Stockholm City Museum. The series *Changed Perspectives* and the knowledge, ideas and opinions brought forward by guests, audience and ourselves within these public talks aimed at thinking about the theory and practice of control, authorship and creativity in urban design and architecture differently. In this respect the project has been successful.

Interestingly, it became clear during the course of the NBC series *Changed Perspectives* that both the members of the institutions and authorities invited to the discussions had a hard time talking about the definitions of beauty and ugly and the power of being in the position to define quality.

This was made very obvious in the results of the case study and in dept analyses of the public talk *Whatever Blows Our Trumpet*. The results show that whilst it is significant to keep in mind that aesthetics and needs of users are very different from time to time and from place to place, that taste is both personal and political and that it is crucial that we keep the process of urban development open, sensitive and flexible, so that the people who actually get affected by the decisions are represented and can have an impact. It is also clear that the definitions and experiences of Beauty still have strong traditional connection to the perception of order in general, including law and order, kept in order, social order etc. These relations are often subconscious, however they are still affecting decisions on how the city of Stockholm should look and function.

This is also why it is possible to explain some of the fear of untidiness that is obvious amongst the authorities in Stockholm with a fear of the diverging, with whatever falls out of the given frame. To some extent this policy is also applied on people rather than on places –anything or anyone falling out of the given frame is threatened to be removed.

The current city planning mantra of Stockholm *Neat and Safe* is actively reducing the liberty of usage of the public space, by setting up rules concerning certain aesthetics that they claim to be inherently bad and dangerous – like graffiti – or by forbidding small cultural producers to advertise for their events, or by chasing away homeless people from their eye of sight. Things that end up in unexpected places are often experienced as threatening, out of place and out of context often means ugly.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this is that it does not take much to change the entire meaning of built situations. The bricks do not always have to be moved, they can lie were they were once placed, since architecture and space is not static, it can become what its users want it to be. Form might shape behaviour, but what is more interesting than the building itself and its intentional design is that one can change the experience and meaning of the built environment through the movement of bodies within these spaces. This can also be made through small, flexible additions, which can be seen on public art, cityscapes and on signs and symbols used in the public space. These additions can be seen as suggestions and temporary solutions to a customized space, a space where the place has been “taken”. And just as the architecture and art shape behaviour and constitutes norms, so do

these alternative acts and additions, but in a more flexible way. This allowing of change in existing structures and architecture is hence much more important than the primary design. So it could be suggested that temporary, flexible or redefined spatial structures are a kind of architecture that make possible for people with different ethnicity, gender and sexuality to perform.

The prevailing political and commercial reality of Stockholm's urban development is however very far away from this practice. The only possible conclusions from analysing the conversations within the *Changed Perspective* series are that the formal practice have a hard time to talk about and recognize their own subjectivity and position in society, and which power position it gives them to set the rules of aesthetic values without explaining how and why. The questioning of the methods used is crucial; since the field of city planning and architecture is a carrier of culture and a creator of meaning in society and determines whether or not people can live the lives they need and want to, without harassment being able to perform their gender, religion, race or socio-economical status. To be able to get updated and meet current and future challenges of the city the member's of its authorities needs to problematize their working methods and start looking at the use of the urban environment in another way.

In the thesis the "old" Beauty Council has been used as an example since it is the city's advisory group in questions concerning the built environment for Stockholm and their proclaimed mission is to protect the beauty of Stockholm. Since the council consists of 85 percent men, the average age being 65 years, all ethnic Swedes, this certainly poses the questions what quality is, and for whom. The "old" Beauty Council's protocols frequently use words like *quality* and *value*. However, these words are never defined, nor are concepts of beauty or ugliness, which are also used often in their protocols as motivations to whether or not development and constructions should be approved. The "old" Beauty Council does not question its working methods, it does not see the need for it, even after being confronted with these facts, they do however welcome more alternative groups to join the discussion about the city. In this way they swear themselves free from the responsibilities. It is not likely that this homogenous group could actually make decisions that will suit others than the well-educated, retired, down to the bone, Swedish middle class. Stockholm's biggest population group is steadily between 20 and 25 years old and 22 percent of Stockholm's inhabitants are either born abroad or have parents who were.

Results of the Project

The performed conversations were well attended and proved to serve as a platform for different actors of the city. We had before hand worked hard to get media attention to able to reach a different kind of audience than the one that usually attends art or city planning seminars and the crowd ranged from people of 15 to 80 years of age. The intention to encourage invited guests and the audience at the public talks, to consider what the topic of the seminar series and each of the talks might mean for them as user and shapers of the city, in diverse roles (informal as well as formal) has hence been accomplished. Each seminar was full to the brim and had a mixed audience of young and old, with participating representatives from grass root initiatives, the formal practices, as well as common citizens, students, lobby groups, retired persons and researchers. Although despite our efforts, the audience and specially invited participants consisted to a large part of academics. Our overall goal with the seminars was to make people come together around the subject, not because of their identities, and the seminars and the web page have become a platform for everyone involved to continue further collaborations.

The aim to investigate how to re-use institutions, not only working against them, creating a constructive dialogue with and within them, where they understood the value of inviting outside practices to discuss the content of their work was reached in the way the NBC worked with the City of Stockholm Museum. The content of these conversations could be understood as something that can transform our way of thinking and working with the built environment.

The Future

The NBC's current aim is to continue to work within the field of critical urban art and design projects. One way of doing so is to find innovative production strategies and add alternative perspectives and knowledge from other disciplines and experiences than the formal urban development practice. I believe this can be done in a similar tradition as other consultants are brought in to these projects: engineers, environmental experts and other advisors. The NBC will form creative ways of communicating and critically study, and questioning existing norms – leaving the habitual angles of approach behind and opening up for a radical thinking to find alternative ways of experiencing the urban environment.

As a result of the thesis project a model for the NBC practice has been developed. The carnival as tool and model of thinking of the built environment has come out of the research on how to apply a carnivalesque methodology to my practice. Instead of thinking of

architecture and urban design as designed shapes or form giving, the NBC like to talk and think about the built environment as staging urban acts and the use of spaces and places as altering practices of these designed surroundings.

The NBC is offering unorthodox approaches to, and experiences of the use of urban landscapes and built environments. With a focus on the ideas of the carnivalesque in relation to the city, the NBC is departing from investigations into the live moment and of the inheritances and potentials of feminism in contemporary art practice. The NBC engages art practices as an investigation of the social power of appropriation, the transformation of gesture and the spoken word into the medium for the inauguration of spaces through different social practices. From these perspectives, the NBC project uses the notion of the carnivalesque as a strategy that establishes new and alternative ways of experience space, to temporarily take places using your body and identity as a complex potentiality and relationality. NBC therefore functions as a hub for critically rethinking the role of art, architecture and design in the public sphere and public space.

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