



synaptic site model – Christian Tonko, ADP design studio, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

The Productive Landscape and Its Descriptions

Report of the design studio at the Platform for Analogue and Digital Production at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna on site-sensitive architecture and spatial programming

abstract

In fall 2007, the Platform for Analogue and Digital Production was installed at the Academy of Fine Arts with the purpose to analyze and redefine working- and production methods in the realms of architecture, design, engineering and sculpting. A key role is located in the potential of enabling an interaction of digital and analogue practices, especially the interaction of analogue and digital models. The possibilities within the process of design have been vastly expanded by hybridizing digital and analogue procedures. Method of the platform is a landscape-oriented capturing of the urban realm, understood as a continuum of distinct intensities and qualities. Current research is focusing on the exploration of experimental measuring and mapping techniques on a given territory. The so produced territorial models are aimed to be deployed and become operative in the articulation of (urban) building strategies. Understanding the responsibility of the building lying as much in the sheltering of the inhabitants as the sheltering of the site, the challenge is set in identifying, modeling and simulating ecological processes on the site and to adaptively insert an intervention that could be defined as trans-active architecture into the ecological continuum of the site. This will also determine what architecture is or can be, become once sited.

Imagine a site without monuments. Imagine a project without preconceptions. Imagine a zone free of ideology. Imagine a city of free exchange. Imagine a landscape in transience. Imagine a place that you don't know.

Of course first you have to free yourself, allow your perception to advance. Allow your body to be part of the site. Thus we constructed interfaces, machines and devices that would allow for to engage with the site, that would reveal the nature of the place beyond an urban epistemology: geological conditions, geographical, climatic, dynamic, elastic, transactional. In the end our aim is to propose an architecture that would harmonically embed itself into its environment; to propose strategies for our cities that would liberate the potential of an intensified exchange, an architecture being in transaction with the ecosystem, the earth, the place, the humans: all that is there. Long enough cities have been devised to fulfill first the needs and then the desires of its citizens. The error committed by modern city planning was to aspire to rationalize and quantify these desires. Since this illusion is to fail, a new paradigm in territorial programming has to emerge. Lately the focus of attention shifted on the transactional property of capital, of goods, bodies and ideas. This view on the mechanics of cities still remains disjunct from the also emerging view on the cycles and transformations in nature. Nature as an ecosystem, an evolutionary process, stands in conflict with civilization as an accelerated apparatus based on mutation and change. Can we bridge the gap? architecture is *Umweltbelastung*.

In order to act within the unstable field of the landscape the architect as a spatially organizing authority has to develop models with seismic, calculating and prognostic abilities. Binding the model space with the territory and transferring precedents through sampling, the architect planner becomes a part of a sensorial assemblage, his practice oscillates between embodied sensuality and scientific rigor. The scientific model is a system of hermetic reasoning, projecting objective data, (or rather engaging in objectifying operations, dislocating any trace of the subject from the domain of the model) following a strict separation of plan and action, of dependencies on other (scientific) models in the reasoning of its mechanism, systemic transparencies in the making. The scientific model works as a tool with a clear delimited scope of action, exceeding the demonstrational characteristics of the architectural model. Architectural models serve to the testing of an assumption, for evaluation of a set of decisions, at the end they stand as demonstrative justifications of a result of an exploration.

cartography

If cartography is a set of scripted operations with the aim to perform a systematic description of a specific aspect of a territory – condensing in the recording and encoding of qualitative differences in documents, every intervention that seeks an accountable insertion into the site catalyzes the production of charts and maps.¹

First aspiration of the studio procedure was to rid of deterministic procedures of conventional site analysis geared toward the quantification of a spatial program to be. Foregrounding a technical method of observation developed in the studio space, the devised techniques should deliver landscape descriptions that would become catalytic in the generation of an intervention. This procedure inserts the architect as a critical element, engaged in the construction of methods of observation leading to the construction of new measured qualities and in the interpretation of the observed, condensing in new meaningful categories and qualities (emerging from the observation and the observed). On the field of architectonic intervention two biographies collide: designating the datum of the site. Biography of nature, embedded in geological time, and the biography of the architect embedded in historical time. Due to the constructive responsibility towards the site, the architect can not withdraw and sublimate his subject in a scientific fashion. He needs to transform, not only to describe, and thus finds himself in a field of tension between empirical subjectivity and deterministic objectified reason. Only through the synthesis of new charts can new qualities be incorporated into the envisioning and ratification of new architectures that aspire to overcome predominant conventional programmatic planning ideologies. Reformation of a site restrained by political and cultural anachronisms requires new modes of observation leading to explorative documents and site descriptions. In this case the authority of the architect, supported by scientific systems of recording (observation) procures for the validity and reality of the emerging local topography of the site. Understanding a site through the events, processes and transactions on its domain, exploring its potentials within a larger whole, the task is to formulate a locally valid descriptions of development, growth and evolution by exploring constitution and nature of local and traversing transactions.

¹ On the other hand, charts and maps contain and convey an intentionality: becoming purposeful justifications of action. The best example is the mapping of oilfields prior to extraction procedures.

modeling

The landscape is a territory on which man maps his own actions and extracts his intricate relation to it. All our actions are grounded, in some cases rooted – there is a datum on which we all confer. Thus landscape is a territorial medium carrying and recording the discourse on the state of collective society. The accessible subset of this datum is designated as a territory. The territory is the field of actions yielding relevance in their capacity to result in transaction and distribution. Actions unfold on the ground, concurring descriptive and inscribing operations. Later as a consequence of the division of planning and action, the datum of the ground is duplicated in maps carrying a catalog of prescriptive operations. Ideologies are constructed claiming authority to prognosis as a base of prescriptive deeds. Monopolies on the theorization of time, on the construction of history and projections had to designate their license through the establishment of valid (acceptable) models. The role of precedent is a persuasive one, as our cognition works through metaphoric transference. All concepts point to an original model that works as a precedent. Models are distilled from an observed entity, are made portable through systematic generalization and abstraction. Transplanting a model is to transfer a logical apparatus onto a new domain, similar to a metaphoric transference of meaning. Yet here operational assets are foregrounded and meaning is emerging through the process of transplantation². Comparative investigations, the method of observation and abstraction of models lead to a model based thinking, which has become the predominant mode of conduct in science. Scientific models are precise operative abstractions constituting and designating the phenomenon in question. (The object of science is the phenomenon, its objective the production of models that amount to the legitimization of a phenomenon.) A phenomenon in general is an isolated subset of the entirety of universal becoming. Once distilled, phenomena are exercised in an abstract temporality, partially reacting onto, distorting the concept of time.

² Thus the transference of models always triggers the production of theory: the manuals of transference, conceptualizing and legitimizing at once.

territory – landscape – site

The territory is next to its geometric and tectonic existence, a dynamic, rhythmic process. Aim is to find a language (*Sprachlichkeit*), a means of concern and description for this emerging aspect of the territory. The model of a territory has to be a model in motion. Next to the coordinates of a place, a valid model of a territory needs to account for the evolving and dynamic aspects of a site. It describes and reacts simultaneously. One could also speak of performative models, of models which are able to contribute a certain productive and diagnostic work (*Eigenleistung*) in respect to a given load (*Anforderung*).

The investigation departs from inquiring into the subtle differences between site, territory and zone, activating generative concepts triggered by the tension between the cultural and mechanic qualities of these spatial categories. The urban space is fragmented by administrative, legislative and other cultural and functional boundaries, most of which have a persuasive character in designating boundaries to sites of an intervention. As opposed to these constitutional boundaries, the city is carrying a multiplicity and simultaneity of operational (ecological, systematic, infrastructural) zones such as watersheds, which remain unreflected in the formation of intervention zones, thus neglecting to react to the organic needs of the city. In the method of the studio the site was designated by one point coordinate that by definition is part of the site. Researching and revealing boundaries of the site went simultaneously with identifying the active (performing) characteristics of the site and envisioning its potential. In the specification of the research studio program, the classical demand of incorporating a given program on the site has been dropped, presenting a territory with initially no need for intervention (*Handlungsbedarf*). Programmatic demand and need for intervention had to arise from identifying constraints, potentials and capacities diagnosed in situ. Architecture as an extension or prosthesis of a constructed local ecology, had to insert itself into the existing continuum of the zone.

Historically any site bears a condition of the existing, its reality. Reality comes to being through all the extrapolations that have to be discarded as such, proving unviable to transgress. Thus reality at first exhibits a set of constraining markers, which solidify the territory, immobilizing its substance. Immobilizations leading to accumulation build up an arrested inert mass which comes to being as a potential. Search for and recognition of historically arrested potentials becomes an act of revealing and constructing. Landscape viewed as a meta-organism foregrounds

categories of becoming as opposed to being. Abilities to achieve, to transact, to process, to produce and distribute and capacities to contain, become of prime interest in dealing with a site. In searching to expose the intricacies in the relationship between practice (as action, production), society (as an emergent system) and nature in the framework of unfolding time one finds

*the fact that the forms of social production, like those of desiring-production, involve an unengendered nonproductive attitude, an element of antiproduction coupled with the process, a full body that functions as a socius. This socius may be the body of the earth, that of the tyrant, or capital. (...) In a word, the socius as a full body forms a surface where all production is recorded, whereupon the entire surface seems to emanate from this recording surface. Society constructs its own delirium by recording the process of production; but it is not a conscious delirium, or rather is a true consciousness of a false movement, a true perception of an apparent objective movement, a true perception of the movement that is produced on the recording surface.*³

Aim is to stress the relationship between body, building and site and to learn of possible new strategies to accommodate and negotiate the vital needs of site and inhabitants, both of a heightened exigency. The task emerging is the conceptualization the ecological integrity on the site, to envision the ecology of the site and to work with scenarios and hypotheses. Questioning preconceived ideas of nature, landscape, purpose, ecological integrity and not least conservation, a productive definition of a local sustainability has to follow. Models of territories seek to explore ways in which spatial interventions can mitigate adjacent processes. The productive landscape as a technique of modeling and description serves as a method of inquiry towards how to position mankind in its environment, how to coexist with in sustenance by taking the immediate reality of the environment into account. Utopias are not invented, but deducted and constructed. They can only work within confines and grow out of the present. Landscape becomes the totality of all that is in flux. ...⁴

³ Deleuze, Guattari – The Desiring Machines, Anti Oedipus, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993

⁴ ...emitters emit, consumers consume, transformers transform, instances commission, events trigger, faces look, cars park, attractors attract, controllers dispense, planners devise, ears hear, curves bend, inflation and entropy increase, schedules delimit and activate, conductors conduct, coils induce, funnels funnel, wheels turn, water flows, objects deteriorate, tools bland, ideas transmute, records cross-fade, power forces and persuades, history records, science explains, simulations predict, man intervenes...