



Perspective

get involved

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Sequencing Architecture and Building Film



The collective search for space and form is a sensitive and lively meeting between architecture and film, where interaction becomes a medium for space and its inhabitants. Real-life examples demonstrate the possibilities of empowerment when building, no matter the age group, and offer a glimpse of the spectrum of potential materials, techniques and approaches in architecture and filming. Poetic film sequences describe the many faces of dynamic and temporary youth architecture. It is about the broad comprehension and experience of different parallel existing spatial realities, and the interrelation of film and architecture in architectural communication.

Renate STUEFER

(Source: Stuefer/ PhD in progress - der Raum – mein Spielgefährte 2013)

Building rooms in focus:

An interdisciplinary lecture about the perception, appropriation and composition of space.

Space Influences. - We adapt to our spatial environment. We surrender ourselves, mostly unreflected and without objection, to the permanent presence of space. It occupies our lives and forms to a great degree, imperceptibly and unconsciously, our personalities and the development of our brain structures. We think of space as a passive vessel, although it affects our actions, enabling some and preventing others. It arranges and orders our lives. It intervenes in our lives. We allow planners to choreograph our movements and allow our feelings to be moulded by political spatial structures. Who will be excluded if districts are connected by bridges that are too low for the public busses? Who is affected by park benches on which one is unable to lie down? Who is served by a news presenter looking down onto a globe of the world? Why are schools stuck in a spatial corset when pedagogy has to contort to fit inside. Why is it important for a 6-month-old baby to have more space to play in than just its cot? How much space to you claim for yourself in a meeting? First you have to recognise space for what it is, before you can yourself change it constructively in a mature or opposing way.

Play Space! - The smallest modifications can turn a room upside-down. We try to prepare a space for children that is open for interpretation - which gives them the opportunity to make it their own. This enables playful interaction to become a sensitive and lively meeting of architecture and medium film searching for common ground and form. Actions become means of communication for the space and its users. Self-empowerment is possible at all ages.

Does the thought process start when actions are observed on film? What happens to physically constructed space when seen through the eye of a camera? How can one play cautiously with the power of a camera? The presence of both filmic and architectural interaction does not yet ensure a successful collaboration. There are no preconceived roles to be played, rather in each project new scopes for the participants, the camera and the space as a personality are negotiated. Experiences of collective process-bound creativity result. It's always about a concentrated observation of the space, how it changes and influences us. The filmed material opens our eyes to the processes and events which would otherwise be ephemeral, would pass unheard, and for which there may even be no words.

The camera, when being used as a visual research medium for perception, does not have to interview the children, rather it can just play an observing role – especially with early infantile actions in space. In the film „der Raum im Baum“, we can see a five-year old girl who dares to climb a tree house and observe how her look of concentration turns into pride when she reaches the top. A completely different situation occurs in the project „raumSchläuche“, when Karim picks up the camera. He is interested in filming, but can also hide behind the camera, just as he prefers to disappear when his class does group activities. With the camera in his hand, he feels protected and at the same time, he knows he is playing an important role. In this way, he manages to remain relaxed in the middle of the group. He crawls into the „raumschlauch“ and shows us his perspective. Also, when Lara films Florine in the white „raumschlauch“, we experience touching intimacy. In the film Pappstadt, we are invited by a girl in the opening scene to come down to the end of the street, where she has built a house on the water. Her immense enthusiasm is contagious, even on screen, and deserves estimation.

Time is an important material, when working with children. If you accompany a child during its activities, you need time to become acquainted, time to learn to see and understand each other. This is true for the camera work and the spatial work, and simply true when being with children.

We often intervene too quickly in a child's play. Ute Strub told the following story during an Emmi Pickler Conference in Salzburg 2012: *„When I visited Max and his mother Evelin, the 18 month old started crying bitterly for a reason unknown to us. We decided to go to the playground, and there he began to fill Evelin's hand with sand. As the sand began to overflow, Evelin wanted to pat it firm. I said, „Wait a minute“. When Max noticed her hand was overflowing, he turned it upside down and started filling it again. I began to count to myself how many times he repeated this. What do you think? 13 times! Then he turned around, spied a small board lying there, and started using it as a shovel to fill his mother's hand another five times. I said to her quietly: „You know – that is stamina training“. „Yes“, she answered, „for me too“.*

Let's ask ourselves how often we unintentionally disturb the concentrated play of a child and thereby impede the development of such stamina. On a visit to the Zoom Children's Museum indoor playground „Ozean“, there were cloth fish lying on the floor. These were discovered, along with the fishing rods hanging from the upper deck. Children who didn't know each other and who were on different floors started to play with each other. Emlynn (2 years old) was having difficulty fitting the hook through the hole in the fish's belly. An employee from Zoom came over, took the fish out of his hand and said: „This is a fishing game“ and hung the fish on the hook. She was very friendly, but took the fish without warning. She hadn't taken the time to observe what the children were doing. If she had, she would have seen that the game had long begun – without any instruction concerning what the children were 'meant' to do. Her job description must be to animate the children. In this case, she baffled him. In our work, we aim to offer the children a space, to accompany them, yet stay as far back as possible, in order to let them have room to build. We try to take the children's autonomous activity as the basis for our work, and make it visible in both the architectural and the cinematic areas. Understanding the multifaceted sensual languages and responding to the specific social and cultural background is essential. We endeavour to listen to the children's questions and offer them assistance in finding solutions.

The central question in the projects remains: to what extent should a room be prepared - what is the common concept and framework – in order to offer young people adequate spatial and conceptual possibilities, as well as enough boundaries against which to push. Do there need to be rules? How do you deal with fragility? How do you manage to provide material that is free of meaning? How should power relations be dealt with? It is always a balancing act between openness and requirements.

Film can densify the architectural process, and intensify and direct the viewpoint. The resulting images develop further perspectives and can lead to controversial discussions. The space on film creates a place for feedback effects and new impulses in the childlike process of spatial education through self-discover and the current discourse about building culture.

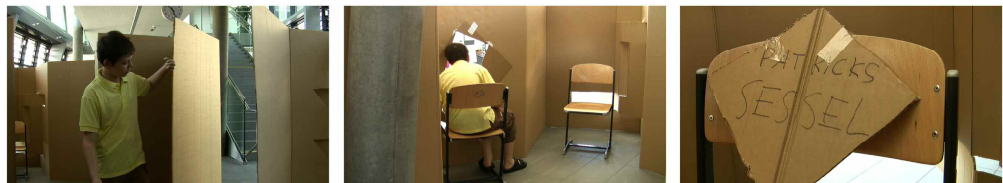
My Own Walls

Scenes from the DVD „eigene Wände“ (setting^up, Macher/Stuefer 2012)

In the Corridor: Whilst editing the film, it was noticeable, that hands would often appear in the images, reaching for walls in order to pull and change them. Grinning boys can be seen collectively and actively exploring the space they created – a labyrinth of corridors. Whilst filming, I was pushed to the limit by the noise and wild energy let loose by these boys. Only whilst editing, I realized that this is exactly what they had created - their own space in which they could act just like that.



Assembly Hall: Patrick wasn't one of those boys. Patrick is a quiet and thoughtful boy. He used this project to create space for himself – lots of space. He built huge rooms in the middle of the hall - rooms that couldn't be missed. Hordes of school children had to modify their normal routes and walk around his buildings. His pride becomes obvious as he invites us into his building. Later he just sits there, looking out of his window. The chair, labelled „Patrick's Chair“, bears witness of his need to make something of his own in this standardized school building.



Consulting Room: The room with doors like windows and the initials of the girls who built it is an evidence of the appropriation of space that took place. The unmissable sign „Do Not Open!“ underlines how important this protected space of exclusion and inclusion is for communication.



The school building was new, clean and impersonal. The children built themselves the rooms that they were missing. The children made their way to the headmistress' office to invite her to come and visit. To the disappointment of the children, she sadly did not find the time. She did, however, voice her concern about the possibility of marks on the floor from cutting the cardboard. The teacher who had invited me to do the project in the school had disappeared with the bell. What was left were the children – disappointed – who withdrew into their rooms to discuss all that had happened. The extent of their bewilderment was unexpected for us.

I found it difficult, leaving those children there; first giving them a tool and method to make their needs visible, and then let them run into a wall of ignorance.

While editing the film, we asked ourselves if we should give voice to the atmosphere described above. After much emotional discussion, we decided not to, since it would have distracted from the children's spatial achievements. We let the camera and the editing work in service of the children – documenting their search for their own walls. You have to go into the process with an open mind, focussing on the events in the moment. The camera's angle of view is not documentary, rather it takes notes, like an observer or even participant; it is an ethnographic journey. The observational competence and the ability to combine, compress and shape views through the camera and at the editing table plays a crucial role in the result. A cinematic visual language that interweaves the mostly non-verbal aspects and themes; the courage and ability to improvise, the wishes of the children, and the interests of the architect and filmmaker. In this way, social interaction, gestures and glances capture the activities of clearing away and building. The search for their own walls remains alive in this DVD. A dialogue about space in the school can begin.