

Intervention or The Need For a New Cultural Critique

Catharina Thörn

“Democracy is, by definition, very noisy.”

Adam Phillips



Banksy

Intervention or The issue of The Useful idiot

What is an intervention? According to the dictionary an intervention is the act or fact of intervening. An intervention may “occur incidentally so as to modify or hinder” an event. Yet it also describes an intentional act of coming between, to intercede in a situation. And further, to interfere with force or threat of force, so it can also describe the challenge of power and acts of violence, injustice, and violations made from a position of power.

What type of interventions can we see today in the urban context? When reading through recent texts of urban studies, two scenarios often recur describing the contemporary development of cities: The city as a stage and the public space as a battlefield. The city is described as a stage for global capitalism; it is where you find the main players, large investments and where the main global events take place. For an event such as the Olympic Games in Beijing, large parts of the city were re-planned and redesigned, leading to the evictions of people in order to create space for the gigantic arena for the Olympic Games. The use of the city as a stage for global capitalism does not however take place without resistance. Cities are also described as battlefields, places of conflict and resistance.

The Tale of an Intervention

Prologue

It is a barren and dark February evening in Gothenburg, Sweden in 2006. I am at the City Museum, together with the other members of the ‘Crew Ord & Bild’. We are here to present and discuss, as a part of the dialogue process, Dialogue Södra Älvstranden (Southern Riverbank), our ideas for the development of Södra Älvstranden, an area on the Southern side of the river that runs through Gothenburg. ‘Dialogue Södra Älvstranden’ is a large-scale participatory planning experiment in Gothenburg that started in the beginning of 2003.

The background was that a new tunnel was being built to divert traffic from the embankment surface and free a huge space close to the river in the centre of the city. The big question was how this space should be utilised. How could this space be made attractive and accessible to the people of Gothenburg? And not least, how could the kind of criticisms of the planning process that had previously been achieved at Norra Älvstranden (Northern Riverbank) be avoided here on the Southern side, criticisms focusing on hidden procedures of decision making, local elites sharing power and incomes et cetera. The answer was to democratise city planning, and let the people of Gothenburg participate in the process.

One of the biggest projects within the Dialogue process was the so-called parallel city analyses, during the autumn of 2005 six crews worked to create six different visions of how Södra Älvstranden in Gothenburg could be developed. The interest in the project was enormous and when the crews presented their ideas at a theatre hall in the centre of the city, in December the same year, the venue was full –

In 1994 Manuel Castells wrote that:

[We] will be witnessing a constant struggle over the occupation of meaningful space in the main European cities, with business corporations trying to appropriate the beauty and tradition for their noble quarters, and urban countercultures making a stand on the use value of the city (Castells 1994:23-25)

The struggle that Castells and others write about, is the struggle for power to influence and (re)form the city space. It is a struggle that is both visual and cultural – how the city should look and be represented.

This essay deals with different kinds of interventions in urban planning processes and it discusses the possibilities and difficulties encountered by citizens who try to participate and influence urban change. It looks at the types of interventions used in the contemporary struggles for city space and the part art plays in that struggle.

This place of contention within this essay is based on a witness' story of an experiment in popular participation within city planning, called Dialog Södra Älvstranden (Dialogue Southern Riverbank) that took place in Gothenburg, Sweden, between 2005 and 2006. An area of the city was going to be redesigned and rebuilt, and citizen groups were invited to participate in the process. The main questions asked were:

approximately 600 people turned up on a weekday evening. What was unique with the commission was that it was not framed as a competition for architects. The stated aim was not to conceive new buildings at the Södra Älvstranden, but to create a "vision of how a good and living city could be shaped". This meant that the constitution of the crews differed from usual consultancy groups – they were composed of a mix of so-called experts and interested citizens. Within three and half months we had to get to know each other and agree on a common vision, which according to the commission should be both "visionary and viable".

So there we were at the City Museum. (As the presentations at the Theatre Hall were limited to twenty minutes for each team, we were given the further opportunity to present our propositions to the public in more detail for two hours at the City Museum.) We had explained the basis of our proposition: that Södra Älvstranden should have an everyday character and be spatially and socially integrated in order to fulfil the ideal of the 'good and living city'. We had many discussions on this issue within our group, and decided to base our vision on the importance of acting against the severe segregation that distinguishes Gothenburg. We had studied the statistics that outlined the patterns of moving within the city and we could see that from the suburbs Biskopsgården, Lärjedalen, Gunnared and Bergsjön next-to-no people were moving directly to the city centre. Therefore we argued in our proposition, that for social integration to happen, the municipally-owned housing companies should build cheap apartments to let, and that for half of these apartments, applicants from certain areas of the city would be given priority. This was perhaps not the best strategy to face the problem with, but we wanted to create a debate on the segregation and discrimination in the housing market in

- What are the difficulties that arise when new groups of citizens are invited to take part in planning processes?
- Into which kind of processes are citizens invited to intervene?
- What are the consequences of their interventions?
- How do you avoid the risk of becoming a useful idiot, an alibi, becoming a part of the power structures that you initially wanted to intervene in?

The City as a Stage

Cities have changed over the last few decades. Old industrial and harbour cities have gone through a transition; they have been renovated, redesigned, and given new identities. In many cities the motor of the economy has shifted from heavy industry to service and hospitality. Often this transition is motivated by, and motivates in turn, a need to market the city in order to attract investments, companies and tourism, usually with an exciting and appealing inner city (Short & Kim 1999). This has resulted in a global renaissance for cafés, museums, shopping centres and exciting architecture. The city space is becoming a platform that is “decorated, designed like the stage for the theatre” (Tunström 2005:65). This form of development has been called ‘entrepreneurial urbanism’; recognised by its spectacular, not seldom financially risky investments in physical infrastructure, industrial villages, tourist attractions and expanded arenas of consumption (Harvey 1989). Another version of this development is

Gothenburg. We had hardly finished our presentation when the debate erupted. A woman in the front row spoke out. She lived in an apartment in an area next to Södra Älvstranden:

-As a person living in the area, she explained, you get a minor heart attack when you hear your proposition. Do you mean that they are going to live here!

A man a few rows down filled in:

-But they have a different ethnic background. Then you will have to build really big apartments. There are so many of them...

March 2008

This is a tale about an intervention that did not turn out as expected. The story begins in Gothenburg, Sweden’s second city with a population of approximately half a million. Like many other harbour cities, Gothenburg was hit by the dock crisis during the 1980’s, and during recent decades has gone through a transition - from an important harbour and industrial city to post-industrial information and event city. Huge areas on the waterfront have been exploited and become attractive housing and office areas. A special model for this exploitation was developed, the so-called ‘Riverside model’, whose motto is ‘the exploitation should not cost the taxpayers a single penny’. To succeed in this ambition, the municipality started a company in the 1990’s, Älvstranden AB, to lead the development of the harbour area.

In collaboration with building companies, Älvstranden AB divided and sold the municipality’s land to the highest bidder. The income from selling the land in turn

the turn towards what is called cultural strategies (Zukin 1997). These strategies have several expressions– from cultural gentrification to different ”lifestyle projects”. However, what they have in common, is the importance placed on visual symbols. In the urban sociologist Sharon Zukin’s words:

[...] urban landscapes have slowly been reclaimed by vision – the power to frame spaces as aesthetic objects. The progressive democratization of vision enables all groups, in all areas of the city, to challenge each other over the power to frame public space with their own visual symbols (Zukin 1997:206).

The emphasis on the visual and beautification of the city space is encouraged by the need to create and strengthen the city’s brand. Attempts to create a brand for the city can entail everything from upgrading the city centre, changing an industrial and/or harbour area into attractive tourist places, to investments in so-called landmarks. One of the most well-known city landmarks in this sense is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. The commission to build the museum was given to the architect Frank Gehry who created a spectacular building that has become famous across the world. As a result many other cities have tried to create their own ‘Guggenheim Museums’, built according to the equation:

“spectacular architecture – culture attraction = more tourists”.
(Hannigan 2003).

financed investments in infrastructure. The model has been praised since it has enabled the development of large areas of land with no major drain to the municipality’s budget, but it has also been criticised for basing decisions about the development of the city on economic interests alone. Critics argue that the Norra Älvstranden, developed according to this model, has a sterile character and that the exploitation was undemocratic since all decisions were taken behind closed doors where only financially strong actors were given access. At the beginning of the 2000’s the criticism was given heavy media coverage through the so-called ‘Järntorgs Group’ that mobilised against the consequences the exploitation had on small actors.

When the time came to plan for the exploitation of Södra Älvstranden, in the centre of the city, the politicians chose to try an alternative planning strategy: Dialogue Södra Älvstranden. The idea was to involve the citizens of Gothenburg in the development process. The first step was the creation of an exhibition, and seminars took place at the City Museum of Gothenburg where the public were invited to come and give suggestions and propose ideas concerning how they wanted the area to look in the future. In the second step, Parallel City Analyses were created. Architect offices, cultural organisations, and other groups were encouraged to apply, to create a team, that during the autumn of 2005 would work together to create a vision for Södra Älvstranden. At the same time the public were encouraged to apply to become a part of a crew. Twenty-five crews applied and five were chosen. Three hundred citizens applied and thirty were selected and divided to the five crews. Each crew was given the commission to create their vision for Södra Älvstranden. I was the project leader for the crew Ord&Bild (the name

With this kind of development we can also see a change in the political governance of cities; with increased partnerships between private and public institutions/companies, networks of politicians, housing companies, businessmen and sometimes civil society organisations which together take decisions about the development of the city. Partnerships of this kind have been common in harbour cities. The exploitation of harbour areas is a new form of developing the city space, and is beneficial in creating an alternative identity for the post-industrialist city. In his study of the development of Melbourne's harbour areas Kim Dovey (2005) claims that the exploitation of the harbour is symbolically important to create a new iconography and identity for the city. The border between the city and the water constitutes a newly discovered theatre-set, with the water as stage and city skyline as backdrop. The former industrial and harbour areas are more easily exploited than other parts of the city, and the possibilities for development are immense. The deserted industrial landscapes easily become a 'dream landscape' for politicians, architects and builders.

Dovey uses the concept "Fluid City" to analyse the transformation of Melbourne's harbour area. Fluid here contains several meanings; the urge to open up the city to the water, to mark the border between the city's concrete and the water's fluid character. But more important are the references to what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman refers to as 'fluid modernity'. A time when economies are going through a transition from local economies that are relatively fixed in places, to a more "fluid" and temporary economy.

originates from Sweden's oldest cultural journal where I am a part of the editorial board). The crew consisted of, apart from others of the editorial board, the editors of two other radical magazines: Glänta and Fronesis.

August 2005

The atmosphere is one of expectation. The different crews have assembled at the City Museum to meet each other for the first time. We greet each other, programmes are handed out, and we take a boat ride to see the waterfront from the river. We are told that we have three months to prepare our vision. The men from the company Älvstranden AB and the City Planning Office enthusiastically say "you can present your work in any way you like! You can even create a dance from your vision if you want to". The project will end in December, with a meeting at the Opera House, with politicians and open to the public. Three researchers will lead the project from Chalmers University of Technology, led by Professor of Urbanism, Knut Strömberg. The project will also have a website where reports from the dialogue process, interviews, and information will be published.

Excerpts from the program

(Södra Älvstranden Parallel city analysis Program 050818 page 5)

Assignment:

Your assignment is to analyse, value and create a vision based on the prerequisites and possibilities of the area. This includes presenting ideas that reflect both 'hard' and 'soft' values, for example:

One dimension of the fluid city is a realisation that the concept of "place" is itself inherently fluid: while it is reified as a stable ground of everyday life, it is also formed from a confluence of flows – of water, geology, histories, events, memories, colonies, industries and designs. Urban development is necessarily a place-making activity in the sense that urban experience is transformed – new places are created and old ones disappear, for better or worse. The ungrounding comes from a realization of the fluidities of place; places are not a stable ground that are simply subject to flows of ideas, people, information and money; the experience of place is produced by such flows (Dovey 2005:3).

Exclusiveness is a common theme for most of the new development projects. Whether it is housing, offices or shopping complexes, they are marketed as unique, planned and built for an upper middle class. In Sweden harbour areas such as Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm and Norra Älvstranden (Northern Riverbank) in Gothenburg are examples of this type of development projects. In Malmö the municipality built exclusive apartments, arguing that it was necessary for integration purposes. If more well-off people moved to the city the municipality would achieve "balance and diversity" (Sandstedt & Öst 2003:170). However, studies show that a major risk with this kind of political choice, is that the investments in these areas mainly serve those who are already the 'winners' in the new economy. At the same time, other parts of the city are being drained of finances, and abandoned by capital investors.

- how can 'the good life in the city' be obtained?
- how can Södra Älvstranden become 'safe and humane'?
- how can diversity in all its aspects become reality?
- how can this part of Gothenburg become attractive to everyone, to be and be live in (young and old, Swedish and immigrants, residents and workers, residents of the city and visitors...)?
- how can the area's future architecture and identity be merged with the rest of the city?

September 2005

We have presented a mid-term report on our work so far. We have chosen to be provocative. Our vision is to build cheap housing for rent, and if this is not possible, no housing should be built at all. The atmosphere at the meeting that followed was bitter. Our statement is interpreted as a critique that the development of Norra Älvstranden will consist mainly of expensive tenant-owner apartments. A speech is made in defence of that area.

November 2005

Have been to a meeting for the project leaders at Älvstranden AB's offices.

The following was said:

- *The big meeting at the opera house has been called off.*
- *Presentations will be held on two different occasions:*
- *The first presentation will be for the politicians in the building committee, two weeks prior to the presentation for the public.*

The instructions for presentation are:

The City as The Playground of The Creative Class

City planning is not only about housing, shopping centres and communications; culture also plays a major role. In the beginning of the 2000's Richard Florida became internationally renowned for his book *The Rise of the Creative Class*. The main idea he presented is that a city should have an interesting cultural scene in order to attract the creative class – meaning the part of the population that contributes to the city's economic growth by creating new ideas and technological innovations. To analyse cities, Florida devised a creative index to measure the relationship between a city's economic growth and cultural activities and he argues that a high concentration of high-tech workers, artists, musicians as well as homosexuals correlate with a high economic development. Not surprisingly, in the United States, harbour cities such as San Francisco and New York are ranked high on the list whereas Houston and Memphis are listed at the bottom.

The importance of Richard Florida's theory for city planning should not be measured by his contribution to a field of research, but rather by the impact it has had on city planning in practice. Wherever he goes, he is expected to give the city a locally adjusted recipe for a 'creative fix'. That he highlighted the importance of culture was welcomed by representatives of the culture industry, and in some cases it has resulted in increased resources to both large and smaller actors working with culture. However, another consequence is that culture has

- *Each presentation should take maximum 15 minutes; an egg timer will be set and when it rings you have to finish speaking.*
 - *The presentation should be a PowerPoint presentation. We are not allowed to be present when the other crews present their vision.*
 - *There will be no questions.*
 - *Each crew should make six posters presenting their vision – three of the posters have a fixed content – the first should be a presentation of the crew, the second is an aerial image of the waterfront where the crew should show an image of their vision and the third should describe how each crew has worked with ideas that came from the public.*
- *For the second presentation we get 20 minutes: Five minutes extra so that we can 'spice up the presentation', as they expressed it.*

When I report back to the others in the crew there is silence.

End of November 2005: At the local Building Committee

It's a bit like going to the dentist. The crews are waiting outside the door of the Building Committee waiting their turn. The atmosphere is tense. Three people from each crew are to present the crew's vision. We are the third crew in line, and after us there is a coffee break. It is dark in the room when we enter, and the egg timer is ticking. Afraid that time will run out, we speak quickly, and hurry through our presentation. But we manage, and after we go and celebrate. Later we find out that the Chairman of the City Executive Board left during the break.

been reduced to an issue of economic growth, and the limit of tolerance for cultural expression is drawn where they contribute to the growth of the economy (Lovink & Rossiter 2007).

An interesting case is the development of Love Park in Philadelphia's city centre, studied by Ocean Howell. The park or plaza was completed in 1965, was publicly funded and aesthetically created for the broad public (Howell 2005). For the first two decades it was a lunch spot for local office workers but also a place for demonstrations and street games. In the 1980s the plaza started to attract a homeless population, as well as groups of skateboarding teenagers. Howell argues that in the 1980s, both the homeless and the skateboarders were defined as intruders. In the beginning of the 2000s, the image of skateboarders changed and they were praised for their contribution to the 'hip image' of the city. This transformation of the skateboarders, from stigma to cool, needs to be understood in relation to the transition of the political economy of the city from industrial to cultural/symbolic economy. Howell describes how the park, during the 1980s and 1990s, was portrayed as a plaza stolen from "the average person" by dangerous and anti-social behaviour. In 2000 the city banned skateboarding, and in Love Park the ban was enforced by police sweeps. In 2002 the ESPN Games of Skateboarding were held in Philadelphia and the city government was asked to let the games take place in Love Park; the city refused.

14 December 2005: Theatre Hall

The Theatre Hall is packed, and the atmosphere is high while all the crews present their visions. "We will report back in January with questions concerning your visions" is the last thing we hear from the men from Älvstranden AB and the City Planning Office.

Beginning of April 2006

We haven't heard anything since December. The only thing that we have heard is that they will, quote: 'pick the raisins out of the cake', an expression that annoys me. The crews have spent a lot of time carefully creating a comprehensive idea for the development of the waterfront area. What will happen to the plans if they are pulled to pieces and put together again? And how is that process planned? By whom? And who will be involved? At a seminar at the City Museum the researchers from Chalmers present their first preliminary evaluation of the dialogue process. It is obvious that they do not know what is going on either. Which leaves me wondering - if even the evaluators are excluded from the process, what exactly are they going to evaluate?

13 April 2006

Two cuttings from the daily newspaper Göteborgs-Posten:

An artificial lake with a fountain.

"An artificial lake' will be created in the centre of the city – Johansson (the chairman of the city executive board) wants a water mirror between the Opera House

Shortly before the games started the city closed the park in order to redesign it. The skateboarding event generated eighty million dollars for the city and a public debate started on the presence of the skateboarders. In 2002 Richard Florida visited Philadelphia and made a comment on the debate regarding Love Park:

Skate parks are very important to young people, an intrinsic part of their creative culture, part of their identity. We should be expanding skate parks. To take the park away is to tell them that they are not valid. Big mistake. (Richard Florida quoted from Howell 2005, 35)

After Florida's statement, the public debate changed and the skateboarders were rapidly transformed from intruders of the public space to indicators of whether Philadelphia would be able to handle the transition from an industrial city to a creative one. The skateboarders' right to the city was reclaimed within the framework of economic development. But the homeless were expelled from the park and so called bum-free benches were placed in the park. In this case it was obvious that the right to the city coincided with what was economically beneficial for the city. In certain contexts the presence of skateboarders as well as graffiti artists will not only be defended with economic terms, but will also be institutionalised as instruments of urban development.

and the shopping mall, Nordstaden.

This autumn we will see the first sign that Södra Älvstranden will come back to life again after the building of the tunnel - Götatunneln. Between the Opera and the street Östra Hamngatan an/./ artificial water mirror 40x40 meter will be created. The road administration will build it and the city is placing the order. Everything that will happen in this area is guided by a bill from the chairman of the city executive board, Göran Johansson."

Rise in the housing segregation in Gothenburg.

The economic divide has grown, and housing segregation has become worse in Gothenburg during recent years. These are the conclusions made in a report from the Immigration council that will be presented next week.

A walk to the area confirms what the newspaper wrote. There is a hole in the area between the Opera and Nordstaden. None of the crews had suggested a lake. In this space we had suggested a covered marketplace.

March 2008

When I look back at the process I get a sense of the unreal. After the seminar at the City Museum I was furiously active. A glance at my mailbox confirms this. I contacted some of the other crews, the reference group for the dialogue, the journalists for the website, and the evaluators from Chalmers Technical University. It is important to try and understand what is going on, but nobody knows. I call for a meeting with the idea that if we get together as many as possible we can demand an open process. After the article in the newspaper about the artificial lake many

Resistance as (Sponsored) Acting (Theatre)

Sorry, but I don't know how to make a revolution anymore. Everything has been done. Everything that is supposed to be revolutionary today is sponsored by Coca-Cola.

M.I.A.

In August 2006, 22 graffiti artists from all over the world invaded the German town of Wuppertal. During two weeks art actions took place day and night on the streets of the town, and all the actions were illegal. It was a major intervention in the town, no permission was given and nobody knew why the artists were there. But the news soon leaked out, it was Red Bull, the energy drink company that was behind the event. For months they had planned the intervention together with some of the worlds leading graffiti artists. Red Bull financed the project and signed a contract taking full responsibility for the project and would pay any fines issued and provide legal support for the artists if needed. It was the first time a large company signed a contact concerning illegal activities (Ahmemuic 2007). The company has the means to finance and implement an event like this legally but that would not have been in line with their "rebel" brand. To purchase advertising space is not a solution for companies such as Red Bull, instead they prefer creating spectacular events. The intervention

are disillusioned. Was the dialogue just a scam? Twenty of us turn up for the meeting. What can we do? We discuss organising seminars, writing an article for the newspaper. After a few meetings we decide to start a network called the Network for a Critical Public in Gothenburg - in short NOG (Enough). During this period Mattias Hagberg, a freelance journalist, is given the assignment to write about the process for the culture pages of the daily newspaper Göteborgs Posten. The articles will be published to coincide with the opening of the tunnel. At the end of April the first sign of life comes from Älvstranden AB.

E-mail: Fri, 28 Apr 2006 16:29:18 +0200

To: geza.n@bredband.net, matilda.lindvall@rhizom.nu, catharina.thorn@sociology.gu.se, ake.johansson@white.se, leif.blomkvist@liljewall-arkitekter.se, mie.svennberg@kultur.goteborg.se

Cc: sofia@dockhouse.se, Johan.Ekman@alvstranden.goteborg.se, sten.imberg@telia.com

Subject: Filmtajm, From: sten.imberg@alvstranden.goteborg.se

Hello, Älvstranden AB is in the process of making a film about the company, and about the project Södra Älvstranden, that we intend to show at the opening of the tunnel. We have commissioned Dockhouse to make the film. Somebody from Dockhouse, perhaps Sofia, will contact you during the coming week to tell you more. Personally I will be travelling and will be back the 8/5. If you have questions before that I request that you contact Johan Ekman, telephone 95 96 10. Greetings from Sten

created debates and attracted a lot of attention, and for Red Bull this signified a successful project. The city of Wuppertal has not claimed any compensation for the actions, rather the opposite; they are pleased with the extra attention, which seems to have strengthened the town's brand. Therefore, commercially it was a successful intervention. But what happens if you examine the event from the perspective of an interaction in public space, or art? Meira Ahmemulic writes:

How can one interpret Zevs attacks on advertising in Wuppertal when he does them in Red Bulls name? And what happens to the street when the so-called illegal art is curated and commissioned by companies? (Ahmemulic 2007:127).

Red Bulls strategy can be interpreted as an inverted version of what Umberto Eco describes as semiotic guerrilla warfare. During the 1980's it was popular to take symbols of power, play with them and distort their messages by placing them in alternative contexts. Artists and movements that were critical of advertising such as Adbusters successfully used these methods to make fun of, and criticise commercialisation and privatisation. Today we can see the opposite; the companies "steal" the symbols and expressions of resistance and make them their own. You find the contemporary avant-garde in coalition with creative artists and subversive marketing strategists, that together create exciting interventions. This strategy has been called cultural camouflage:

Email: Thu, 04 May 2006 16:21:57 +0200

From: Sofia Johansson <sofia@dockhouse.se>

CC: geza.n@bredband.net, matilda.lindvall@rhizom.nu, catharina.thorn@sociology.gu.se, ake.johansson@white.se, leif.blomkvist@liljewall-arkitekter.se, mie.svennberg@kultur.goteborg.se, Johan.Ekman@alvstranden.goteborg.se, sten.imberg@telia.com, Benny Frick <benny@dockhouse.se>, condor@dockhouse.se, Hans Ekelund <hans@dockhouse.se>

Subject: Re: Filmtajm

To all Project leaders/Södra Älvstrands project

This is Sofia Johansson from Dockhouse Film & Television that is writing to you concerning the film that we have been commissioned to produce for Älvstranden AB. We need to include you in the production process for interviews and as contactpersons/sources of information.

We have planed the following:

Interview

we would like to interview each project leader together with ONE 'citizen', of your choice, from each crew. The purpose will be to give a short and condensed version, i.e. the essence of your project. What is the profile of your vision? You (the project leader + 1 citizen) will get 20 seconds to formulate this in the film. We will however need you together during 1 hour of recording time. The site for the shoot has not been decided yet but you will be informed during next week. The dates for the film shoot have been scheduled for:

Brand strategists use cultural camouflage in an attempt to hack into a subculture. Through its use, a brand undergoes status enhancement by appearing as a reference – among the many others that have already been accepted by the target group – for scene-specific individuality collages, thus giving the impression of being already-accepted code. In others words: they fake credibility (von Borries & Böttger 2008:132).

The distinctions between marketing, subversive art, and cultural critique has become blurred. Artists risk becoming, whether they like it or not, a part of the system that they potentially want to criticise. The graffiti artist Banksy is an example of this contradiction. He started doing graffiti at an early age and now works with provocative and thoughtful stencil graffiti that can be seen in many places all over the world. His work is recognisable by its style, even though he does not always sign it with his signature 'Banksy'. Still there are few people who really know who he is, or if Banksy is a name of a graffiti crew. Examples of 'his' work are, a policeman doing graffiti, sprayed poetry on a wall, or the text "this is not a photo opportunity" beside tourist attractions. Lately he has moved from doing graffiti to installations or 'interventions' in public space, such as putting birds with a pirate flag on a CCTV camera. From being an underground rebel, unknown to a wide audience, he has become more or less a cult figure. Recently a debate has come up concerning the work of Banksy, the main issue being whether the artworks can still be described as interventions in public

*Wednesday 16 May KL. 10.00-16.00, Thursday 17 May KL 10.00-16.00
Reply as soon as possible regarding the time for the interview so that we can create a recording schedule that suits everybody.*

Photography

we would also like to take separate still photos of all the 'citizens' that are in the each crew. Here we would need the project leaders to help to share this information.

We will have an open house for photography during next week:

Wednesday 10 May 9.00-17.00, Thursday 11 May 9.00-17.00

Friday 12 May 9.00-12.00

PLACE: Dockhouse Film & Television, Sjöporten 4, (4 vån) Eriksberg Hisingen.

To avoid waiting and double bookings it is necessary that everybody reports approximately what time they will come to have their photo taken. Contact me, Sofia by email: sofia@dockhouse.se or telephone 031-651616 alt 0703-94 16 16 so that we can agree on a time.

I would be grateful if Mie Svennberg, project leader for the crew children and youth, could contact me directly so that we can find a special solution for this crew.

Please acknowledge that you have received this email by answering by email, where you can also write your telephone numbers so that I can have direct contact with each project leader.

Greetings,

Sofia Johansson, Project leader

space, or whether they are simply becoming decorations. The Space Hijackers network in particular started to question Banksy's politics when original prints were sold for £25,000, and according to a rumour Banksy had entered into a collaboration with PUMA, the shoe company. A letter to the Banksy website further reveals contradictions:

I don't know who you are or how many of you there are but I am writing to ask you to stop painting your things where we live. In particular xxxxx road in Hackney. My brother and me were born here and have lived here all our lives but these days so many yuppies and students are moving here neither of us can afford to buy a house where we grew up anymore. Your graffiti are undoubtedly part of what makes these wankers think our area is cool. You're obviously not from round here and after you've driven up the house prices you'll probably just move on. Do us all a favour and go do your stuff somewhere else, like Brixton. (Banksy 2005:20)

In her book *Evictions*, Rosalyn Deutsche analyses the relationship between urban redevelopment and art. She argues that art should make visible the complex relations between urban regeneration, gentrification, and homelessness, instead of naturalising them. She studied the redesigning of Battery Park, New York, a park celebrated for the strong link between art, architecture and design. According to Deutsche, the consequences of redesigning the park included not

Email: Fri, 05 May 2006 14:24:25 +0200

To: Sofia Johansson <sofia@dockhouse.se>

From: Catharina Thörn <Catharina.Thorn@sociology.gu.se>

Subject: Re: Filmtajm

Hello, I missed some information in your email. What is your commission from Älvstranden, what is the purpose of the film and how long is it?

Greetings Catharina Thörn

Email: Fri, 05 May 2006 15:08:54 +0200

From: Sofia Johansson <sofia@dockhouse.se>

To: Catharina Thörn <Catharina.Thorn@sociology.gu.se>

Subject: Re: Filmtajm

Hello Catharina,

Here is some further information about the film project Södra Älvstranden. I hope that this will give a clearer image of what we are producing.

The purpose of the film could be described as:

- + the film should describe how the S:a Älvstrands-project has been a public discussion, an attempt to create a democratic model, to collect ideas.
- + the film should show that the project is "city development" (not traffic planning...).
- + the film should describe and clarify the Älvstrands-model: Älvstranden

only evictions of former residents, but also displacement of the homeless. The art projects in the park, Deutsche argues, failed to consider the social and urban context for the development, and therefore recreated a hierarchized space. As a practice within the built environment, public art participates in the productions of meanings, uses, and forms for the city. In this capacity, it can help secure consent to redevelopment and to the restructuring that make up the historical form of late capitalist urbanization. But like other institutions it can also question and resist those operations, revealing the supposed contradictions of the urban process (Deutsche 1991:164).

Two artists that try to resist this kind of development are the collective Hewitt+Jordan who produced a billboard text in 2004 for a site in Sheffield that stated “The economic function of public art is to increase the value of private property”. The billboard was one out of four in the art project “The functions of public art”. They argued that the aim of the project:

Is to examine the tensions and contradictions that exist[s] within public art practice; to explore how public art is integral to our culture and therefore how it functions in support of the dominant ideology. In order to reveal the hegemony within culture, we chose to describe how public art functions in the broadest of cultural contexts: economic, social and aesthetic. (<http://www.hewittandjordan.com/work/vitrine.html> 080822)

Utveckling first constructs and develops properties. Suitable objects are then sold, thus generating the resources to develop new projects.

+ the film has to address the high expectations, and therefore inform, and gain approval for the continued process so that nobody feels run over.

+ it should also be able to be used as a PR film for Älvstranden Utveckling AB (ÄUAB).

+ the film's length is calculated to appr. 7 min.

+ screening situation: the film will be shown on a large screen (appr. 20 m2) at Stenpiren in connection to the opening of the tunnel. And also later on the internet in different contexts.

+ the film is part of a loop that will roll in repeat (appr. 30 mins loop).

The other parts of the loop can be 'a slide show with value words' (as was shown at Bo Gothenburg) and historical films/images.

Greetings, Sofia Johansson

Beginning of may 2006

I sent a copy of the emails from Dockhouse to the journalists at the website, the evaluators, the other project leader,s and the City Museum. I try to spread all the information that I have. I also talk to the other members of my crew. What do they think? I get a reply from D. "I am not some damn extra in an advertisement film." I contact the other crews, what are they going to do? It turns out we are not the only ones that are critical of this project, others are too, including the City Museum.

Hewitt+Jordan's project is based on slogans, and its purpose is to take sides, to question and interfere with the function of public art. But they are also aware of the difficulties and contradictions inherent in art. The artist working in public spaces, who does not want to display their art in galleries risks being marginalised. And where, given the cultural boom in many cities, there is a demand for artists working in public spaces, these reluctant artists risk being reduced to a cultural resource of creative thinking.

Concluding Discussion

The polis is dead. Long live the creative city! While the city is alive and thriving – at least in some of its space – the polis, conceived in the idealized Greek sense as the site for public political encounter and democratic negotiation, the space of (often radical) dissent and disagreement and the place where political subjectivation literally takes place, seems moribund (Swyngedouw 2008:59).

In the article, *The Post-political City*, Erik Swyngedouw points out the thorough political changes many cities have been through since 1980. Starting with Baltimore and Barcelona, large-scale urban transition projects have been the solution for cities in crisis. Today, small cities are also trying to compete on the global market for attention and inward investment. To succeed in this quest,

Middle of May 2006

We have been called for a meeting at Älvstranden AB. It is the first meeting since the different visions were presented and the project formally ended. It is only the project leaders that have been invited not the journalists of the website or the evaluators. I forward the invitation to them and call Knut Strömberg. "You have to come," I say. "How else will you be able to do an evaluation?" The meeting is odd. It seems that the only reason why we have been called for the meeting is to receive information about the festivities surrounding the opening of the tunnel. As nobody else is saying anything I present my crew's critique:

1. The process should continue to be open. That even the evaluators do not know what is happening is serious. We want to know how the proposals are being analysed and evaluated.

2. We consider that our crew has fulfilled the commission that was given us and are worried that we have heard that our crew's proposal is too political, and therefore cannot be considered in total. Our mission was to have visions, and as such they will be political. To try and address segregation is as political as leaving things as they are.

3. We consider that Dialogue Älvstranden, as a democratic experiment, is ongoing. All parties in the process have a responsibility for how the process continues. Consequently, one cannot say that from this point, normal planning procedures will take over the process

purposeful planning and governance of the city's development is needed. Entrepreneurial urbanism has therefore been seen as a particular kind of political culture as:

[. . .] one where key interest groups in the public, private and voluntary sector develop a commitment to realising a broadly consensus vision of urban development, devise the appropriate structures for implementing this vision and mobilise both local and non-local resources to pursue it.
(Parkinson & Harding 1995, 66 – 67).

The problem with these kinds of partnerships and agreements is that they tend to be formulated, agreed upon, and decided, behind closed doors, by powerful elites and in a context where politics has been replaced with administrative expertise. Political debates, conflicts of interest, and questions concerning allocation of resources are forced off the agenda and replaced with a vague formulated vision of the creative and good city (Swyngedouw 2007). So let us conclude by looking at the Dialogue Södra Älvstranden in Gothenburg, Sweden (which despite its local character) says something about the context becoming so common in city planning of today. Södra Älvstranden is in the centre of Gothenburg, and interest in what is going to happen in the area is high among the general public. Encouraging participation in the development process and

It is quiet a long while. Then I am told that if I go public with my critique similar processes will never again take place. The responsibility is ours. The dialogue should not be presented as a failure.

End of May

I inform Dockhouse that we will not participate in the film. We are the only crew that does not participate. Dockhouse leaves a message on my answering machine, wondering whether they can use pictures of us that have been taken at other occasions. I answer that they cannot use pictures of me, or of anyone else in our crew, in the film. I also write a statement from our crew that I send to the website for publishing:

When we were invited to participate we were also informed that we should describe the essence of our vision in twenty seconds. To condense an integrated plan and vision in such a way does not contribute to any knowledge about the different plans, or facilitate further discussions on the different proposals.

We also wondered what had happened to the filmmakers that followed the whole process, from the work in the different crews to the presentations? Such a film would give a better and more factual description of the work that has been carried out during the autumn of 2005.

Since we, in the first invitation to participate in the film, lacked key information about the film, its content, length, and purpose, we asked for further information from Dockhouse. From the commission given to Dockhouse that was presented to us (and is with this letter published on this website), it became clear to us that for several reasons we could not participate in this process.

re-designing of the area was important to the municipality to create legitimacy for the planning process; particularly since there had been strong criticisms of the developments on the northern side of the river (Norra Älvstranden). The criticisms centered on the way the developments had been planned and implemented, pointing out that decisions were made by an elite taking no other considerations into account than economic factors.

The planning process for the Södra Älvstranden aimed to be different, but the process failed to utilise the existing public engagement. In hindsight one can ascertain that the democratic experiment has had little impact on the planning and development of the area. The development is proceeding today according to the model used for the North side, by selling plots of land to the highest bidder. And if the development continues to follow the same course, office spaces will be given priority before planned housing; exclusive apartments will be given priority before low-cost housing. And despite the commitment given to us that the intention was to create a plan for the 'good city', we realise now that it was never expected that we would try to give the concept definition or content. This clarification is too problematic as it results in a politicisation of the process that is not possible to handle within the framework of the political-administrative discourse.

I was a member of one of the Citizens' Crews selected by the city administration to produce the first planning documents. My group was created by a radical Swedish cultural magazine, Ord&Bild, with the intention of intervening

***First:** the film is to be used for the PR purposes of Älvstranden AB. Dockhouse AB is a company that, according to their own website, works for big companies with marketing and branding. We consider that the democratic aspect of Dialogue Södra Älvstranden is still ongoing even if the crew's official commission has finished. To, at this stage, use democracy as a way for marketing Älvstranden AB is, according to us, a wrong decision.*

***Second:** according to the commission: "The film has to address the high expectations and therefore inform and gain approval for the continued process so that nobody feels run over." You cannot inform and gain approval for a democratic process with a seven-minute advertisement film. You can achieve this through an open and transparent process where different perspectives meet.*

***Third:** the film should describe and clarify the Älvstrands-model: Älvstranden Utveckling first constructs and develops properties. Suitable objects are then sold, thus generating the resources to develop new projects. In our assignment there was no mention of Älvstrands' model as one of the premises. To use the same model for the development of Södra Älvstranden, as was used for the North side, should be an open question which can be discussed, and not a fact that we are informed of through an advertisement film.*

***Finally,** democracy is not a PR gimmick but a process that should be taken seriously and show respect for the citizens. The short term gains of using democracy for PR purposes for a municipality company can have the long term effect of undermining the legitimacy that the Dialogue process was aimed to give.*

in the debate about city development and urban politics in Gothenburg. We wanted to focus on a problem that is seldom or never seriously discussed, namely that the city centre of Gothenburg mainly consists of a white upper middle-class. Our proposal was never discussed and will never be realised. As such it was a complete failure. However, the fact that the proposal was dismissed because it was too political laid bare the conditions related to the discourse of city politics, and the unquestioned values they contain. Slavoj Žižek says:

The political act (intervention) proper is not simply something that works well within the framework of existing relations, but something that changes the very framework that determines how things work (Žižek 1999:199).

In the essay, *The Flexible Personality: For a New Cultural Critique*, Brian Holmes points to the need to bridge the academic critique and the artistic practice in a kind of ‘communicative activism’ that does not let itself be co-opted by multinational companies.

At a time where the city’s public space is staged and where visual expression is more important in design and planning, such interventions could reveal the very preconditions that the creative economy is based upon but suppressed.

June 2006

In time for the inauguration of the tunnel, the newspaper Göteborgs-Posten’s culture section published a critical article on the dialogue, written by Mattias Hagberg. He wrote:

”Regretfully it seems that the municipality of Gothenburg has a rather one-dimensional view on democracy; if you listen a little extra to the citizens then you are a little more democratic; if you cross the ordinary limits you are almost radical. When you speak to a civil servant at the city planning office and at Älvstranden AB, and when you listen to the politicians that have spoken most about the dialogue, you realise quickly that their view on democracy differs from the view that many of the members of the different crews express. Dialogue Södra Älvstranden is primarily a democratic experiment and not a way to find interesting ideas and solutions to make the waterfront attractive. If it is going to be a successful experiment it requires more from the politicians and the civil servants. It requires a deeper understanding of conflicts of interests and democracy. It requires more than 15 minutes. You cannot plan Södra Älvstranden without talking about power, segregation and marginalisation. It is impossible to get around these questions, and it is impossible to create a city plan that realises ‘peoples’ will – because there is not one but several interests and these interests are not seldom in conflict with each other.” (GP 060611)

**The aesthetic function
of public art is to codify
social distinctions as
natural ones.**

**The economic function
of public art is to
increase the value of
private property.**

**The social function
of public art is to subject
us to civic behaviour.**

Posters by Hewitt & Jordan with Dave Beech
curated by Gavin Wade as part of his
Strategic Questions projects
Venice Biennale,
8 June - 6 November 2005
A part of the project *Three Functions*

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