

HANDBOOK

HOW TO LOVE A PLACE

an approach to existential urban planning

FOREWORD

We have wandered around in the winter fog in post-industrial areas of Østfold and Budapest and wondered about our possibilities as artists to transform public space. This little book is a reaction to the positions and reflections with which we have been confronted during this research project. A little handbook for various possible, perhaps impossible, strategies, methods, and recipes from different traditions, philosophies, and perspectives for how to transform a place.

I

**THE CYNICAL METHOD:
ENSURE THAT NOTHING BLOCKS THE SUN**

I stand with my face to the sun, pressing it against the warm window. It is October. During a pause in raking leaves, alone in the living room, fourteen years old, pressing my face against the warm afternoon sun. Everything becomes light. No thoughts, no pain. Pure stillness, pure warmth.





II

ENABLE AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

*A Father says to his son:
"You look like an idiot."
"You're a waste of space."*

From *My Struggle* of Karl Ove Knausgaard.

Karl Ove Knausgaard explains that after he read James Joyce he understood that the true essence of all art and literature is that which belongs to the individual alone – that which is unique and characteristic. And that which for Joyce's mind was unique, would be unique for us as well. Art has no centre. The centre can be anywhere that art is present. Wherever we are can be unique if occupied by the human soul. Every place can be unique, a place to love, where authentic experiences may be expressed and shared.



III

PIMP MY CITY WITH CREATIVITY!

i

By inviting artists to work with subversive aesthetic strategies for artistic interventions in the public realm:

The task of art is to counter society's expectations. For example, by enlarging something unpleasant in the public realm, such that the perception of place is transformed. Thereby the place may also be transformed. In such a way a place may be loved anew.

ii

By inviting artists to work with relational aesthetics and use participation-based strategies to create artistic interventions in the public realm:

Through their endeavours artists may activate a place. A method can be to introduce elements and/or activities into a problematic area. Through sensitisation, artists can enable a place's inhabitants to gain new perspectives about their context, enable them to gain new perspectives about each other. We may conceive of artists as empathy-workers who can enlighten people to better care for the community and their shared places.

It is worth noting that this form for art may be difficult to recognize as art.

iii

By inviting foreign artists to create interventions in the public realm:

An advantage to being an outsider is that one can see a place with new eyes. Artist can identify potentials where others perhaps see only problems. In this way inhabitants, through art, can gain new perspectives of their surroundings, and perhaps love them anew.

IV

BE ATTENTIVE

"Every time we are attentive, we destroy some of the evil in us."¹

Try to be one with the place by offering a gift of your presence. Find a flower. Try to imagine the inside of the flower. In this manner you can find sacred remains in the world. Morality is not just the ability to act, "but to see reality and one another." If we can manifest this selfless imagination, by being still, empty, not in pursuit of anything, but prepared to receive.

Fill the place with boundless sensitivity, vigil, expectation, and attention, and the place will transform.



1.: From *The Power of the Word* by Simone Weil

ENGAGE AN URBAN PLANNER

An urban planner may impassively explain his plans for a place while pointing at a large map. We are allowed to ask questions even though we know that the answers will not make any difference. The plans are already formed. All places will be developed in the same way: the seaside will be developed; nodes of transportation developed; old factories converted to studios for graphic designers and architects; organic street food will be served from small carts; the poor will not be seen anymore. The place will be cleaned up and become popular.

VI

BROADEN PERSEPECTIVES

The world does not begin with you. If you broaden your perspective, toward the horizon, and perceive in this order: the universe, the planet, the global, the national, the local, your self. By this shift in perspective one is able to discover that what does not appear to be the place, is most definitely the place.



VII

RECOGNIZE ANXIETY AS AN EXPERIENCE OF FREEDOM

The unpleasant, *das Unheimliche*, can be transformed to our home if we have the courage to meet our life's conditions, our finiteness, and be prepared to experience anxiety as freedom.



VIII

THE METHOD OF LESLIE KAPLAN

To define a place where you live without allowing yourself to be directed by a rhythm that is not your own.



IX

FOCUS ON THAT WHICH IS FOUND IN THE IN-BETWEEN

The in-between can be the authentic place. By creating a new mosaic in our perception of a place comprised of in-betweens, pauses in the landscape, gaps in the earth's crust, elbowroom, room to stretch, unexpected breaks, bumps, dips, valleys, unexpected drops, furrows, large gaps, graves, holes, strange intervals, craters, leaks, pockets, niches, eye needles, passages, pauses, pores, punctures, tears, cuts, wrinkles, shafts, folds, tracks, cracks, black holes, vents, vacuums, windows, portals, thresholds, gates.



X

FOCUS ON THE PLACE'S EMPTINESS

Emptiness may be thought of as its own aesthetic and existential category. Yet there is something problematic with the very term emptiness – that it is perceived as a lack, rather than a quality.

Emptiness is unknowable is freedom is the only true condition for transformation.



XI

CREATE A FICTIONAL NARRATIVE FOR A PLACE



XII

ENCOUNTER A SITE

a mental connection between things

first encounter on site

sky sand weed straws gravel pebbles stone stairs concrete rusted iron
grease pulp paper dust dirt standing water pigeons feathers metal col-
umns switches meters ellipse green

a fire

re-encountering (the) materials (lying down) (seeing how the) light falls
through the openings both day and night deciphering understanding ap-
pearing symbols obelisk gravestone ritual circle cult portal gate threshold
paper ornaments cave well blue sky dark twilight

contemplation

believing it all matters

open association



EPILOGUE



“The great riddle of human existence is not suffering, but the yearning for belonging. There is nothing strange about the fact that innocent people are murdered, tortured, forced to flee, degraded in need or in slavery, imprisoned or detained or concentration camps – as long as there exist criminals to perform these deeds. Neither is it strange that sickness can cause long-term suffering that paralyzes one’s existence and reduces them to an image of death – since nature is subject to the blind game of mechanical laws. But it is strange that God has given a yearning for belonging the power to grip the innocent in depth of their soul and possess it as a sovereign lord. In the best case those who are marked by this yearning are only able to retain half of their soul.”¹

Capitalism is a totalitarian order. But as with all other systems, every order produces also a disorder – abjection, residues, secretions that leak out. Cities have a power that sucks in people, money, goods, and so forth and spits out that which is unnecessary – the unemployed, immigrants, criminals, artists – the neoliberal society’s slag. What happens if a person affirms that which does not belong, that which falls outside of the order, the rootless, stateless, and embodies the periphery?

We were invited into this research project, financed by an EEA Grant, to “investigate how one may contribute to redefine and rehabilitate industrial environments in Østfold and Budapest.” But for whom shall we fulfil this assignment? What kind of values do we create? Who is it that we serve?

2.: Translated from *The Power of the Word* by Simone Weil, Solum Forlag A/S, Oslo 1990

The Place is the New Factory

The factory is an imaginary ruin. We continue to live in a machinery – an invisible machinery where we are docile workers. In Europe we produce less and less coal, metal, and paper. Today we produce space, atmosphere, and room. In this project artists are invited to fill the post-industrial vacuum. The factory, the proletariat's grave, is empty and shall be filled with cultural industry. We shall cast imaginary magical powder over the old factories such that they are enshrouded by an aura of creativity. Thus are places bestowed with an image, an identity, a profile. Perhaps the place will become a magnet for tourists, an attractive urban space, a centre for innovation that attracts the creative class and wealthy tourists. The place may be filled with the immaterial, creativity's aura where we ourselves are part of the atmosphere we shall consume. It is our very fellowship, *our lebensraum*, which today is for sale.

Eternity's Blue Colour

Rather than producing an artistic event, performance, or sound installation we are inviting the public to share a moment of uselessness. We wish to create a space in the post-industrial, linked the cycle of the sun, where we may critically examine our own prejudices regarding the field of art in the public realm and qualms over the neoliberal society's fetishizing of creativity. For what, actually, are the possibilities for artists in relation to the transformation of public space? Are not greater societal and existential transformations required, in order to preserve that which we are in the process of rendering meaningless?

The transition between day and night, the bridge between action and sleep, *the blue hour*, is the framework in which we have chosen to wonder and to share our wonder. To produce a space dedicated to the useless. The in-between, the emptiness, will be expanded to provide room for Simone Weil, for George Bataille, to all the outcasts, secretions, residues, to the homeless, to all the homeless – for who isn't? A place for wasting time and space, where we place gentrification's advance guard – the artists – around our table and ask them to be still. We offer a meditation over resolutelessness, attentiveness, and the absence of labour, where we can acknowledge that the utilitarian economy, to its furthest extent, has the valueless, the wasteful, and excess as its goal.

In addition to this waiting room in the post-industrial landscape, we have created this room that you now occupy – this book in your hands, to incorporate our thoughts, doubts, and reflections. This attempt at a guidebook, as a kind of strange compass with which to navigate this complex and multifarious field art in *public space*, may also be understood as a metaphor for an artistic viewpoint. For how one might love a place – how is this related to art?

For art in its deepest expression is a utopian endeavour to transform the world to a place where we belong.

Liv Kristin Holmberg and Camilla Wexels Riser

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