

PUNK. ARCHITECTURE. TECHNOLOGY

- On punk and the work of Brendeland & Kristoffersen Arkitekter

Can punk be related to architecture and how? At first sight, any relation between the Norwegian architects Brendeland and Kristoffersens (BKA) work and the punk movement of the 70s seems far-fetched. By studying the material finesse, careful detailing and delicate spatial articulation, any formal connections to a disheveled punk chic would be rejected. But instead of adopting purely the infant expression, the ideological punk strategies of detournement, participation and polemical practice have been reworked and taken into BKAs work.

The Svartlamoen project presented in the gallery of PROJEKT 0047 is built in a city area in Trondheim, Norway, formerly occupied by squatters. After years of struggle between the inhabitants and the local municipality, the neighborhood was in 1998 preserved and given its formal acknowledgment of existence. Such peace settlements have in many cases turned out to be repressive in function, either as a subtle beginning of a gentrification process or as a drainage of force from a culture formerly based on opposition, effectively transforming areas into nostalgic cultural monuments or institutionalized freak shows. To avoid these mechanisms, the tenants of Svartlamoen took immediate control over the area by preparing a new development plan. In this way their own interests were secured, and they could set their own premises for future development. One of the key projects of this plan was a competition for a new housing project, won by BKA in 2001.

The punk movement was based on polemics, not only in a social discourse in its anarchistic statements, but also in a music disciplinary discourse in their practice. At the same time they explicitly attacked governmental politics and criticized the ruling ways of making, producing and distributing music through their practice. Through its slogan, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," commenting on the realist and to the point focus of their interventions, the Svartlamoen project addresses both political and disciplinary discourses in a similar way. First of all the project is a clear, almost banal polemic on the Norwegian governmental housing policy: Cheaper dwellings give its users more free time, time to use on more creative doings than earning money for living. By not only arguing, but showing that the combination of high quality housing, progressive building techniques and low rent is possible, BKA makes a clear argument against the recent governmental strategy of leaving the housing development to the market.

When it comes to the professional discourse, the polemical practice of BKA is just as evident. Where the punks opposed to the elitism and self-sufficiency of the progressive rock, which by the mid 70s had grown extremely overdetailed and overproduced, the Svartlamoen project has two main ideologies of aesthetisation to oppose. One is the Norwegian regionalism represented by Sverre Fehn and his many successors, where the architect-as-genius interprets the Norwegian landscape into isolated single family houses. In its search for authenticity in the preferred "natural" surroundings, complex topography and "true" materiality, this practice have neglected the Norwegian cities with its complex challenges of non-aesthetic character. The Svartlamoen project is a strongly desired turn to political and social issues in Norwegian architectural discourse, addressing the city and its need for re-examination of urban dwelling and alternative social structures.

The second opponent can be seen in the last decade's strong interest in architecture as Designed environment. Since the 90s, a superficial architecture of neo-modernist staged

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tableaus, designed for magazines and coffee table books, has grown strong in Norway as in the rest of Europe at large. In this overproduced architecture, the users actions are all directed by, or subordinated to the Master Builders plan. In strong opposition to this reduction of the user to interior ornament, BKA has let the last finish go to the future tenants to inhabit. This does not by any means refer to a fear or reluctance of designing, but in a clear policy of dividing fields of responsibility and intervention: the architects provide the backdrop, the users interpret it in their own way.

The architects have succeeded in bringing their thorough polemical practice, the showing-instead-of-telling-strategy, into this exhibition. Instead of representing the project through mere technical drawings and self-sufficient photos, the erection of the extract replica gives the visitors a real insight in the materiality, detailing and spatial qualities of the buildings. The photos presented in the exhibition mediates the atmosphere of the context, participation processes and actual use of the buildings rather than abstract, autonomous building details. The video presented is giving insights in the unique building process of the massive wooden elements, which never earlier has been accomplished in Norway.

By their uncompromising polemical practice, by rejecting standard procedures, developing new technical solutions and not least by an obvious concern for real, social challenges, BKA manage to go beyond a self-referential and autonomous architecture. Where the punk movement in the end turned out to be mere representations of opposition - to visually look more oppositional than actually opposing, and to shout louder than they acted - the exhibition on show demonstrates clearly how BKA by showing, instead of telling both have gone beyond their musical predecessors and the majority of their Norwegian contemporaries.

Martin Braathen
Architectural Curator

BRENDELAND & KRISTOFFERSEN:
PUNK. ARCHITECTURE. TECHNOLOGY
05.05.-16.05. 12-18h

Opening Party: Friday 06.05. 19h

Lecture with Geir Brendeland and Olav Kristoffersen: Sunday 08.05. 15h

Location:
PROJEKT 0047
Tieckstrasse 10
10115 Berlin

DESIGNMAI FORUM
Edison-Höfe
Invalidenstrasse 116-118
10115 Berlin

The exhibition is supported by:
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