

# POCKET PLACEMENT LINE<sup>1</sup>

URBAN CHANGE. THE PROSPECT OF TRANSFORMATION

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*In Europe, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is characterised by a dialectic movement for the conquest of participation. The dissolution of ‘non-democratic authorities’ shows up in political, artistic and scientific processes equally. A wrestle for de-hierarchisation, equal treatment and participation, for transparency and democratically legitimised sets of rules takes place in order to open the free access to sources of knowledge and for its production to be mediated on all social levels. The foundations of a democratic understanding must be sensitised continuously, to be actualised in vivid and contemporary structures. Transparent, open, artistic and design processes might serve as strategy to balance particular and collective interests, subject to a concern for individuality and freedom. Self-will and individual freedom are the causal engine of social renewal. This is particularly valid for aesthetic and collective oriented processes in creative disciplines like design, architecture, urban planning and art.*

## **METHODICALLY TIGHTENING THE RULES IN COLLECTIVE PROCESSES**

- > Before you can tighten a rule, you must first have a rule. Usually rejected in the visual arts as unseemly restrictive, rules are in fact accepted in architecture or music, nestled amongst standards, laws, notations, and systems of order. Every artistic activity is accompanied by necessary limitations. Tools like a pencil, brush, camera or computer programs are characterised by specific characteristics that impose rules on their use. Every artistic strategy, such as a sketch, collage or assembly, is subject to empirically influenced procedures that subsequently lead to conventions of use and decipherment to be read and understood. Drawings, plans, sheet music or dance choreographies are instructions, whose legibility require a regulated syntax to be translatable for the interpreter. Tightening of the rules is used by artist collectives or individuals to get the creative juices flowing and to encourage contact with the unconscious, to overcome habits and promote discovery, surprise, or participation<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of the article was first published in 1/2009 ‘Generalist’, Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany.

## **RED BAG, NO. 94**

In the so called Viales Archiv, a Berlin based artistic group project initiated by the artist Sandra Kuhne, remainders from the industrial production of the GDR have been collected, archived, and classified since the beginning of the 1990s<sup>3</sup>. In the digital archive, the material is scientifically categorised by appearance into glass, plastic, textile, paper, writing, and imagery. It is made available to those who want to work with it and who, through their engagement, want to convey a bit of the past to the present by transforming something that has been discarded. The objects can be borrowed for a period of one year. The only condition is that the work must be documented for the Viales Archiv. In PLAN, the artist and curator Sandra Kuhne described her programme: *‘safekeeping, documentation, loan, ongoing process, cooperation, exchange, networking, ideal added value, and the transformation of memories’* are the catchwords of her careful and succinct rules.

‘100 Taschen’ (100 Bags) is an action started by the archive some years ago. The hundred bags have been in circulation for over two years. Unlike test tubes, carbon paper or a lime green textile ribbon, the red Smalcalda (tool)bag is an everyday object for artistic transformation that has a prescribed use. In the borrower’s possession, the red bag mutates into an integrated object. In dance performances and readings, it is transformed, destroyed, packed, and taken apart (gladly by men). It finds its way back to the archive in photomontages, as text or sometimes not at all. By submitting ‘documentation,’ the borrower becomes a participant. The operator S. Kuhne stays in contact with her collaborators, who meanwhile number more than four hundred. Through yearly inquiries; she is the cause of a ‘bad conscience’ (in the case of inaction) and requests the return of the bag, encourages its continued use or asks for it to be passed along. Whatever each participant has sent back is stored and exhibited in an archive folder<sup>4</sup>. The curator’s simple rules are accepted and interpreted, misunderstood and broken.

<sup>2</sup> In the TV show ‘Verstehen Sie Spaß?’ from March 27, 1980, a passer-by in Stuttgart is asked for directions. Disguised as a tourist, the host Kurt Felix shows the passer-by his ‘map,’ which is really a sewing pattern. The abstract plan is used as an aid for explaining the way. The sewing pattern’s features, such as ‘pocket placement line’ or the corner of ‘119, fabric fold, thread path’ hardly disrupt the conversation. Cf. the author’s design doctrine: ‘Schnittmuster-Strategie: Eine dialogische Entwurfslehre’ (Sewing Pattern Strategy: Teaching Design in Dialogue), Reimer Verlag 2008.



<sup>7</sup> The composers Asmus Trautsch, Arne Sanders, and Sebastian Elikowski Winkler from Klangnetz Kollektiv were guests in the lecture series 'Schaffensprozesse im Dialog' (Creative Processes in Dialogue) in May, 2008, at the University of Fine Arts in Berlin. In an interdisciplinary dialogue, the artistic genesis of works and teaching at the UdK are examined in conversation with G. Mattenklott and D. Jäger.

<sup>8</sup> 'Architektur muss brennen' (Architecture must burn).

away from the artifact (see also Breton, 1996). For individuals, art consumers or recipients, they open up new possibilities of participation in exploring levels of perception at the moment of doing. The constraints of 'controlled thinking' – the processes of idealisation and perception bound to convention through language – are returned to a new 'innocence and creative virtue'. André Breton writes of the '*Dada recipe*', which serves the systematic exploration of the collective unconscious, in order to reach the outermost limits of states of consciousness (Breton, 1996).

> Strategies that follow self-imposed, mathematically inspired rules are disseminated throughout the world of literature and art in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by e.g. the FLUXUS or also the *Oulipian* movement (Mattenklott, Weltzien, 2003). John Cage inspires the artistic avant-garde of the 1960s with his musical instructions, such as four minutes, thirty-three seconds and revolutionises hearing based on new rules. The onlookers, or listeners, as the case may be, are involved in the game using open possibilities for interpretation within fixed structural organisations. They participate in the aesthetic process (see also Weibel, 2008). Artist groups like DOGMA 95 or *StillePost!* see collective, intuitive, and scientific experiments as part of their aesthetic practice – the meaning behind the pseudonyms of both reflects their mission. Eleven rules serve as a strict organisation for an aesthetic dialogue between eleven disciplines in the *StillePost!* project in 2005 (*StillePost!*, 2006). Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, the two signatories of the DOGMA 95 manifesto, succeed in establishing a methodical repositioning of filmic strategies. Ten instructions focus on the moment by reducing the technical means and foregoing tricks and interventions. The reduction of personal preference increases the space to manoeuvre for those involved ('*to refrain from personal taste*'), (Hallberg, Wewerka, 2001). Stories are told anew, artistic practice is reflected upon, purged, and translated into political action. Art and its author are annulled – in the process or the collective.

In artistic doctrine, one finds varied forms of a moderating didactic based on rules in concepts for musical education, in architectural teachings and in educational processes aimed at children (Mattenklott, Rora, 2009).

*Blütenweiss Anonyme Zeichner* or the *Vitales Archiv* < are run by individuals to initiate collective, aesthetic processes with other artists. Strategies customary in the art market and role models are undercut, everyone can take part. Group compositions like those from Klangnetz Kollektiv combine and link twenty-one composers and musicians on a virtual 'platform for experimentation' in order to develop new music in dialogue and without hierarchy. According to literary paradigms like the Japanese *Renga chain poem* or the *Oulipo* rules, individual scores from several members are inserted at random, instruments are assigned to the group members by lottery or formal constructions are fixed as final compositions. The constraints establish the framework for the group improvisation. The compositions originate between Moscow and Berlin, then they are digitally transmitted and made public<sup>7</sup>.

From architecture groups like Archigram, Haus-Rucker-Co, Coop Himmelb(l)au, Future System or raumlaborberlin, programmes and magazines are used to radically revise old truths about cities and space (see projects like *Living City*, *Wohnkapsel*, *Mindexpander* to *Kolorado Neustadt*). Visions are drawn, made public or installed as prototypes within public space in order to subsequently influence the creation of space. Manifestos take poetic form as an expressive challenge, in order to take a position and initiate new design paths as well as political and democratic appropriation of processes to develop urban space – as in the seismographic drawings of Coop Himmelb(l)au from 1983<sup>8</sup>.

< Production processes are de-hierarchised, collectivised, and politicised, limits are slackened, and new spatial experiences are initiated. In architecture, self-organised transformation processes lead to a new relationship between city

dwellers and their appropriation of space (see also Fezer, Heyden, 2004 or [www.experimentcity.net](http://www.experimentcity.net)). The surrender of design sovereignty on the part of architects in favour of giving more latitude to future residents can be found in scores of projects, like the residential worker ariá in Italy, of Gian Carlo de Carlo (realised in dense communication with the future users, 1969-75 in Terni); the *Wohnregal* ('Living Shelf', 1984-1986) in Berlin's Admiralstraße; the *Öko-house* of the architect Frei Otto (built 1984-1990, with 18 owners and 10 architecture offices in the context of the New IBA in Berlin); the *Zirl* house in Austria of the architects the Next ENTERprise (1992-97, arch. Ernst J. Fuchs, today The Next ENTERprise, Vienna); or the actual living reform projects like the *Ökodorf Sieben Linden* in Sachsen Anhalt (founded in 1997) of the author's office jp3 collective housing project, *Stapelvilla*® ('Stacked Villa'), 11 different spatial housing ideas, linked in one vertical collage (Fig. 2).

### WHERE IS BAG NO. 94 TODAY?

- > For the past year, the red bag is being carried through London by the pianist, hoping – maybe in vain – for a conclusion to the game. Sandra Kuhne from the Vitales Archiv expects nothing from the borrowers. They are to incorporate the GDR objects into their everyday life and, through the act of documentation, examine their individual artistic intentions, to be urged towards reflection, with a search of evidence that is aimed ahead. After a few years of passionate collecting in the middle of the 1990s, the artist saw, above all, the collectivisation process for reuse (*'I cannot tackle it alone'*) in the opening of the archive. Her approach is a thoroughly unpretentious stroke of genius, in

that, by using processes of discovery in dealing with historic material and by opening up this process to a collective game, attention is no longer paid to the myth of the artist or even art itself.

Maybe game no. 94 will be played differently than expected. The breaking of rules is as much a part of the game as are delight, aggravation, misunderstanding or even the temptation of playing over and over, or despite oneself. He, who plays is played, is the gist of what hermeneutist Hans-Georg Gadamer (1990) wrote in play, *'it is precisely the opposition of ... conflicting tendencies toward clarity that cause ambivalence and with it, a field of tension in which no subsequent moment can be entirely predicted from that which precedes'*

(Scheuerl, 1975). Tension regarding the unknown in the next step and curiosity form the main spring of action that brings with it greater pleasure. Rules liberate creative activity in the design process. They enable collective action in dialogue, in the friction with the established rules and the competition that emerges as soon as several people submit themselves to a common rule, as well to the artistic game.

The consequence for the participants is loss of control to a degree, an increase in the need to concentrate and fix upon a given moment, an increase in the suspense and lack thereof, an increase in the openness for that which is near – which is needed to discover the known and unknown, and a focus on the moment because of uncertainty about the outcome of the game. Group processes that, in the search for increased knowledge, make knowledge or material from an individual available to all members, form the counterpart to a romantic character of genius who seeks to take that which is generated creatively and transmit it back to individuals (Adorno, 2004). The methodical approach becomes an opportunity for a learning process as a dialogue – in which everyday life, the past, and the present are perceived, reflected, and immediately commented upon, and in which they are transformed along the way.



2. *Stapelvilla Manifest*

source:  
jp3 architekten



3.

source:  
jp3 architekten



4. *Schnittmuster-strategie*

source:  
jp3 architekten



5. *Alice weint*

source:  
jp3 architekten