Reflection

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The study plan proposed at P2

In my study plan I offered to formulate an answer to what the role of the architect is/can be in the design of festival spaces by a.) investigating the value of festival spaces and appropriation of the everyday b). how spatial relationships work through Lefebvre's theory on the production of space. c.) How the (built) environment and people interact with each other to produce space d.) how this functions in the microcosm of the festival environment. e.) How architecture can embody the values that allow festival spaces to appropriate spaces of the everyday (slightly hinting towards my preferred role of the architect)

The methods used were a combination of literature review on public life studies and theories – to extract existing data and theory on the spatial relationship between the planned environment, its people and unplanned outcomes – and observational studies at festivals and public spaces, testing the extracted data and theory in the lived experience.

A theoretical framework was applied to position the literary review. The framework used is Lefebvre's theory on the production of space – which offers a perspective on the dynamics between actors in spatial production, including the architect and the built environment. Based on the retrieved literary data of public life studies, the role of elements that have been found to have a big contribution in this spatial production and their interaction with the other actors, will be reviewed.

The observational studies have been conducted through photography, behaviour-mapping (mapping the movement of people at certain times on maps), journalling and interviews. The design brief is located in Australia and it was therefore important to gain knowledge on site-specific context like culture, social relations and ecology. The comparison of spatial production in everyday spaces compared to spatial production in festival spaces has led to conclusions about the what role the architect can play in these spaces and how they can act as dialogues for questioning spatial relationships in spaces of the everyday, which resulted in a blueprint for implementation and experimentation with this blueprint – as it is an open-ended answer. In this reflection I'll offer a reflection on this proposed plan through a set of questions.

I. What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme?

My initial passion was to position the architect within the festival/event industry because I'd like to work in these environments as I'm fascinated by the high energy, fast-paced-ness, collectiveness, excitement, novelty and possibilities that they bring. However, the event industry is a fairly new and contemporary but growing field of industry and study. Because of its newness, it has a broad range of research in some fields (economics, business, leisure, and sociology for instance) but a limited scope of research in other fields, like the field of architecture and the built environment. I think investigating how architecture relates to this field and how it can be of valuable contribution to this industry is meaningful and in return the field of architecture can learn a lot from these fast-paced and disruptive spaces opposed to a more permanent view of architecture.

II. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

I was trying to find common ground between the values and opportunities I see in both these industries, which resulted in finding overlapping conditions in terms of questioning spatial relationships in these environments and how architecture can facilitate the experience and unfolding of these environments. This part of my research worked to some extend: I investigated lots of public life studies and how people relate to- and create their environment and applied a notable theoretical framework for investigating spatial relationships including the architect's position to these 'festival spaces'.
This gave me answers to: **a,** how spatiality affects us and influences our behaviour and how the three aspects that 'produce' space according to Lefebvre's theory relate to each other
and **b,** how this happens in the microcosm of the fast-developing festival space, leading to design principles to spatially design a festival terrain. If the research would've been done by then, I would've formulated a limited response to the question – for me to formulate a proper answer, I had to touch base with the current management, build up and organisation of festival spaces and implement this into the design project.

III. How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/ recommendations influence your research?

After having 'finished' the research I could quickly implemented spatial elements that indicated certain actions and behaviours on site, but to understand what these spatial elements could actually become in a festival scenario I had to go through the process of designing a terrain like this with its broad range of knowledge and industries all playing a part. I noticed that designing a contained society that needs to facilitate buildings and structures but also water, equipment, energy, safety, entertainment management in general, etcetera etcetera, is far beyond the scope of just the architect. To deal with the broadness of the case, I created a design brief from my theoretical employer: the municipality of Melbourne (solving the organisational, logistical and financial issues of festival organisers) to start the design off. To gain an understanding of what the terrain should look like I delved into scenario thinking and tried to gain some (limited) information from my theoretical clients: festival organisers. All these questions regarding how to deal with all theoretical actors on site and what part of their expertise I should account for made me deepdive into their fields of expertise. I found myself reading many documents about safety at big events and delved into the world of theatre and stage rigging and have found many elements that can be designed by the architect to make the whole logistical process of festival set up, operation and break down easier, but there are also many aspects that can be appointed to other fields involved in the industry, as it is a major project.

Gaining knowledge on specific aspects like event design, scenography and dramaturgy helped me gain an understanding of how a festival is experienced and how it can be implemented in the design for my found value of performativity. Having touched upon a lot of aspects of the industry by reading and having tried to incorporate their needs in some way with my design, but definitely having learned that it is too big of a project so that it's best to outsource some aspects as well. The architect can have 'festival sites' as their expertise and can have a mediating role in delegating all parties involved by designing spaces that facilitate certain implementation (Appointing places for power or bases for columns and rigging etc.) or having an understanding of crowd movement.

Going back to the design, I decided to create structure in the midst of all of this chaos and trying to shove so many aspects of the festival industry in to one person's hands, I decided to structure the terrain in layers of intervention and what my role as an architect can be on that specific layer (The permanent interventions, the fluid interventions, the communicated values, the invitation). However, in having done so I still created most of the festival terrain to reinforce the concept, even though a lot of infrastructural or landscape aspects could have been done by civil engineers or landscape architects.

This layering of the role of the architect per layer gave me many insights into how open-ended processes can be analysed. As my terrain is a plan and guideline for the unplanned to take place, structuring the open-endedness in terms of times, rhythms and values helped me to materialise and shape these durations into form, material and expression and how you communicate values through architectural embodiment. However, dealing with open-endedness, vagueness and the 'limitless' atmosphere of a festival space, it also made me realise how hard it can be to translate these characteristics into physicality. Some materials naturally express these values but cannot be made structural or demountable (or it is very costly to do so).

The feedback given by my mentors was often about the broadness of the project and not having to rationalise or put everything in boxes, which doesn't happen with open-ended and 'anarchistic' projects like this. I found this very hard as the task of the architect usually is to come up with a response to a brief or problem, whilst in this project I'm proposing others to come up with a response to the potential brief. I tried to incorporate this feedback in creating a generic terrain and formulating a design brief by both employer and potential client to fill in a response to my potential brief – I had to set boundaries in this limitlessness, but wasn't sure if these were the right boundaries to set. As the festival industry is an interdisciplinary field and boundaries are set by a lot of fields around the same table at the same time (in terms of expertise, time, money etc.) I had to decide what boundaries for which industry where set where, without expertise, and also all at a different time, which I could have prevented in some ways.

The conclusions from my research, both in the field of architecture and urbanism as well as in the field of event studies helped me design the 'anticipated experience' and the initial layout of the terrain and what might take place. In my conclusion I have positioned the architect in the field of the festival industry as a facilitating agent of the festival space: pointing towards its active role in the unfolding and guiding of these spaces, but also in its more reserved role as an invitation for co-creation – doing so by trying to embody the values present in festival spaces.

IV. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

As the field of event industry is currently expanding and the role of the architect has not been defined in this industry yet I hope to have formulated a first response and direction that people can build on. Festival architecture deals with another rhythm than other fields of architecture. It's about temporariness and this opens up the discussion about the rigidness, the duration of architecture, spatial relationships in general and what its use might be. It's a reflection of the status quo and an invitation to reimagine it. This reflection of the status quo also positions architecture as a cultural mediator. An architecture that facilitates democratic expression, collective authorship, and care for the environment. The ethical aspects are already embedded in the value that festival spaces offer – fostering social cohesion, giving space to a range of (marginalised) voices, offering a space for equality, stimulating collectivity and understanding the other etc. But are hopefully embodied through the project by creating the right environment for this to come into existence through stimulation of co-creation (and of course giving the opportunity to experiment and imagine new futures!).

V. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

By offering a prototype/blueprint which integrates both the found influence of architecture on spatial relationships and how architecture can facilitate and organise festival spaces I feel like the transferability of my results – or the prototype – can be tested on other sites. As it is a site for experimentation as well, it can only result in more questions, issues and answers to arise.
I hope that designing through these festival values of temporality, agency and performativity can also extend to projects reaching beyond the scope of the festival terrain and can maybe also be implemented in more permanent projects.
The same goes for the four layers of implementation of the architects' knowledge.

I hope that offering a prototype embodying these values and layers of implementation is a clear starting point for the investigation of the profession of architecture (in the event industry). I hope to broaden the discourse towards a more participatory and interdisciplinary practice.

VI. What role did interdisciplinarity play in your project and what has it taught you about the boundaries of the architectural discipline?

Implementing different fields of discipline was something I was aware of from the start, I realised that designing a permanent festival terrain meant working within a broad range of field that extended far beyond architecture. Things like logistics, event design, cultural studies, crowd management, scenography, sociology etc.—all of which have specific expertise and needs that influence the use of space. It was tough trying to incorporate these fields, especially because of all the years of education I've had in the field of architecture. I see things through this lens and want to tackle certain issues through this lens as well. Having to delve into other fields of knowledge to position architecture was thus quite a hard task and maybe also a response to the position of our field in the event industry and has thus been useful in establishing our field in the conversation of event studies. It has taught me that by working with knowledge from other fields it can push the boundaries of what architecture does or can become but also introduced me to touching these boundaries. Architecture alone cannot account for the full complexity of festival terrain design. And thus now formulating our role as facilitator of these spaces.

How did you navigate uncertainty and open-endedness in both your research and design, and what does this reveal about architectural authorship (co-creation - planned/unplanned etc.) ?

Open-endedness was a big challenge I had to work with. Festivals are inherently unpredictable and that is also part of the magic of the event. It is shaped by temporary communities, immediacy, audience/participant engagement, and collective appropriation of space. This process-basedness is what also was central to my exploration of how architecture can facilitate spaces that are designed to be incomplete and to remain open to redefinition. This reframing of the architect as creating a finished building to a facilitator of dialogue was part of the formulated response. Open-endedness doesn't mean a lack of clarity in itself, and open-endedness can be guided and predicted in a way as I've seen in designing through expression of a value-system. It does make it hard to conclude if my proposal would work at all.To tackle the vagueness of open-endedness I had to design for ambiguity and scenarios.

Endnote,

Reflecting on the research conducted, I learned that the values that create these festival environments are temporality, agency, and performativity that result in this open-endedness and a great amount of potential possibilities are what guided me towards questioning the role of the architect in these environments in the first place - It's a good feeling being able to pinpoint what values I wish to design for in the future and have learned what good implementation of these values can do for the world.