

Critical Theory in Architecture – Research programme

Critical Theory in Architecture examines histories, theories and critical discourses of architecture. From a critical study of architecture as a cultural phenomenon there follow investigations into issues of meaning and representation; of the operations of ideological and power structures affecting specific architectures; and of how specific architectures effect ideological and power structures. Critical Theory in Architecture uses spatially and materially specific critical and creative analytical research tools developed in architectural theory, in combination with research methodologies developed within cultural studies such as discourse analysis, hermeneutics, and constructivism. Since January 2002, the research group xakt, coordinated by Katja Grillner, has gathered PhD-students and researchers in this field within the KTH School of Architecture, arranging research seminars and an annual open symposium. Several post-doc members of the group (Grillner, Arrhenius, Mattson, Johansson) began their PhD-studies in the mid-nineties in either Professor Jerker Lundequist's or Professor Jan Henriksson's respective programmes. xakt's ambition is to contribute to a research environment that not only provides the knowledge produced through each research project, but also builds an essential foundation for a qualified debate in the architectural press and other media of importance for architectural education, the architectural profession and society at large. This section presents the current largest research projects *Architecture and its mythologies*, directed by Docent Katja Grillner, *Architecture and Consumption in Sweden between 1930 and 1970*, directed by Dr Helena Mattson (based at the Swedish Architecture Museum), as well as the on-going PhD-projects that are supervised within the research programme: Katarina Bonnevier (supervised by Katja Grillner), Catharina Gabrielsson (supervised by Katja Grillner and Fredrika Spindler), Lars Raattamaa (supervised by Thordis Arrhenius, Katja Grillner and Stefan Jonsson), and Malin Zimm (supervised by Katja Grillner and Rolf Hughes). These are presented briefly under a separate heading. The research project *Auto-poiesis and Design*, directed by Dr Rolf Hughes, is described under the Research by Design programme.

Relevant websites

www.xakt.nu, www.auctor.se

1. Projects and funding

All funding for the research in this field is currently either external (from the Swedish Research Council) or, for PhD-student-positions, centrally allocated university funding (excellenstjänster). No internal funding from the architecture school other than PhD-supervision (Katja Grillner 15%).

1.1 Externally funded projects (see further details in separate reports below)

Architecture and its Mythologies – Authorship, Judgement and Representation

Project leader: Docent Katja Grillner
Funding body: The Swedish Research Council (VR)
Time-period: 2003-2006
Size of grant: 4007 kkr

Researchers employed by the project at KTH

Katja Grillner 50% 3 years 2003-2006 (Lecturer, Docent, Dr.)
Architects in the Landscape Garden

Rolf Hughes 50% 3 years 2003-2005 (Researcher, Dr.)
Hybrid Theory: The Poetics of Design

Tim Anstey 50% 3 years 2003-2005 (Lecturer, Dr.)
Fifteenth century origins for modern architectural discourse

1.2 Externally funded projects involving researchers from the xakt-group but based in a different research group or institution

AKAD – The Academy for Practice-based Research in Architecture and Design
Based at KTH-Architecture, described in this report in the Research by Design programme.
Project-leader: Katja Grillner
Funded by: The Swedish Research Council (VR), 2003-2007.

Autopoiesis and Design: Authorship and generative strategies
Based at KTH-Architecture, described in this report in the Research by Design programme.
Project-leader: Dr. Rolf Hughes
Funded by: The Swedish Research Council (VR), 2005-2007.

Architecture and Consumption in Sweden from 1930 to 1970
Based at the Museum of Architecture, Stockholm. Mattson is a member of xakt and is teaching Architecture Theory at KTH. Described briefly in this report as part of this programme (xakt).
Project-leader: Dr. Helena Mattson
Funded by: The Swedish Research Council (VR), 2005-2006.

1.3 Non- or partially funded projects – related to Architecture and its Mythologies; and Auto-piesis and design respectively.

Tim Anstey, Katja Grillner, Rolf Hughes: *Architecture and Authorship: Studies in Interdisciplinary Remediation*. On-going international anthology project including 17 essays selected in high competition. Scheduled publication date: November 2006.

Rolf Hughes in collaboration with Dr Jenny Sundén, Dept of Media Technology, KTH: *Second Nature: Reproduction and the Artificial in Art, Science and New Media*. On-going international anthology project – call for essays currently posted.

1.4 PhD-projects

Katarina Bonnevier *Enactments of Architecture – Gendered and queer-theoretical interpretations moving within the scenes of the salon, the boudoir, and the exhibition*
Advisors: Main-advisor – Docent Katja Grillner; External advisor Professor Jennifer Bloomer.
Funding: Excellenstjänst (university funded position)
Time-period: 2002-2006
Size of grant: ca 1400 kkr
Dissertation scheduled for Nov 2006.

Catharina Gabrielsson: *Public space as medium – Art and architecture in collaboration*
Advisors: Main-advisor – Docent Katja Grillner; External advisor Dr. Fredrika Spindler.
Funding: Excellenstjänst (university funded position)
Time-period: 2002-2006
Size of grant: ca 1400 kkr
Dissertation scheduled for Sept 2006.

Ulrika Karlsson *Arkitektur och radiokommunikation i efterkrigstidens Sverige 1955-1970*. Currently interrupted, un-funded PhD-project.

Lars Raattamaa: *Fanon – Våld – Arkitektur (Le Corbusier Plan Obus, Alger; and Kahn's Assembly Building, Dacca)*

Advisors: Main-advisor – Dr. Thordis Arrhenius, Co-advisor Docent Katja Grillner; External advisor Dr. Stefan Jonsson.

Funding: Excellenstjänst (university funded position)

Time-period: 2002-2006

Size of grant: ca 1400 kkr

Dissertation scheduled for Sept 2006.

Malin Zimm: *Losing the Plot – Architecture and Narrativity in Fin de Siecle Media Cultures*

Advisors: Main-advisor – Docent Katja Grillner; Co-advisors Dr Rolf Hughes and Professor Jerker Lundequist.

Funding: Excellenstjänst (university funded position)

Time-period: 2000-2005

Size of grant: ca 1400 kkr

Dissertation date: Nov 25th 2005.

2. Descriptions of Research Projects

2.1 Architecture and its Mythologies – Authorship, Judgement and Representation

Project-leader: Docent Katja Grillner

Researchers: Dr. Tim Anstey, Docent Katja Grillner, Dr. Rolf Hughes

Funding body: The Swedish Research Council (VR)

Time-period: 2003-2006

Size of grant: 4007 kkr

2.1.1 History – Background – Preliminary results

The research project *Architecture and its mythologies* was initiated in 2003. It is a collaborative project examining three critical concepts in architecture and its relation to other artistic and professional disciplines. The project aims at providing a deeper understanding of the different features which make up our contemporary idea of the architect, thereby initiating a critical discourse on our assumptions about the architectural profession and our corresponding expectations and demands of the architect. The team members have extensive research experience in architectural theory and history as well as critical theory, and are additionally practicing architects and writers. The project combines historical case studies in the field of architectural theory and history (Tim Anstey and Katja Grillner) with critical theoretical analyses of the key-concepts and their role in the design profession (Rolf Hughes).

2.1.2 Research methods, questions and relevance

Three factors have developed and sustained the discipline of architecture from its modern beginnings: the idea of *authorship*, the faculty of *judgment*, and the techniques of *representation*. Since the 15th century, architects have staked their claims, defended their territories and maintained their status through appeals to the logic of authorship. The professional identity of the architect, articulated through journals, publications and reviews, is still dominated by the pervasive idea of the architect as solitary author, creator of inspired and useful artefacts. At the same time, conceptual uncertainties surround the role of the architect and of the designer. Such uncertainties are articulated in architectural practice and in the texts of architectural theorists at critical points in the history of the discipline.

This research project surveys the development of architecture as a discipline through its relationship to ideas of authorship, judgment and representation. The project provides a historical account of the origin of these concepts, establishes their centrality in the evolution of critical discourses around architecture and creates a platform from which to address the contemporary

challenges to which the discipline is subject. The project has two main ambitions. First, it creates a framework for three core studies, which test the use of the chosen concepts on detailed historical, epistemological and philosophical levels. Second, by inviting international scholars to contribute with complementary studies, through seminars, conference sessions, and an international anthology project, it creates a forum for the application of these themes to a broad range of research studies within architecture history and design theory.

2.1.3 Individual studies and preliminary results 2003-2005

The three core studies create a research framework that investigates the “mythologies” of architectural theory and practice by creating a rigorous dialogue between the findings and methodologies of architectural historical ‘case studies’ and critical theoretical analyses of the three “essentially contested” concepts in the project (authorship, judgment, representation).

Timothy Anstey and Katja Grillner, architects and researchers within the field of architectural history and theory, pursue separate studies into two critical moments in the history of the architectural profession: the construction of the modern architect in the renaissance, and the challenges posed in the 18th century by the formation of an alternative architectural practice in the landscape garden. Leon Battista Alberti’s construction of the modern architect in *De re aedificatoria* (c. 1452) and the emergence of the landscape architect as a distinctly ‘other’ designer figure through particular theories and practices of the 18th century landscape garden each illustrate the theme of authorship in relation to the traditions of architectural design. Alberti identified the architect as a semi-divine figure, suggesting that a meaningful authorial relation can be established between architect and building; yet he denied the architect any final control over the act of building. Negotiating this ambiguity in relation to authorship becomes critical in Alberti’s definition of the architect. The emergence of the landscape architect in the 18th century challenged and transformed inherited architectural thinking about authorship in particular ways: for example, original authorship is now attributed to nature, and the designer is understood to *interpret* and *enhance* the existing on-site effects - a mode of operation that demands a new set of conceptual tools. These projects aim at investigating historical situations, as well as examining, within the overall framework of the project, the applicability of the selected critical concepts for understanding historical and contemporary mythologies of architecture and its creator, the architect.

Rolf Gullström-Hughes, a writer and researcher within the field of design methodology, examines the notion of authorship within design theory, tracing its evolution from the origins of critical concepts in Aristotle and Plato, through the emergence of aesthetics, to contemporary concerns. Today, at a time of rapid technological change, definitions (affirmations, dislocations, translations, dissolutions) of authorship that arise in architectural and design discourse frequently question established conventions of authorship through adopting collaborative, cybernetic, hybrid, open source, transgenic or “emergence” paradigms. Hughes work investigate’s the critical concepts of authorship, judgement, and representation in historically-contingent contexts, explore their application within design theory and practice, and provide a philosophical and critical commentary for the accompanying case studies.

The members of the research team have published articles with results from their core-studies and presented individual papers at conferences such as *Theorising History* (AHO, Oslo, April 2003), *Architecture and Philosophy* (July 2004, Centre CATH University of Leeds), *Critical Architecture* (Nov 2004, Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL), and *Experience in the 18th Century Landscape Garden* (March 2004, Institute of Romance Studies, London) (see further in the publication list). One of the team members, Katja Grillner, has also had the opportunity to pursue extended periods of research at Columbia University and University of Pennsylvania (six months 2003) as well as the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal (2 months 2004) establishing a strong international research network for the project. The research team has given post-graduate seminars on the scope and preliminary results of the project at the Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, Columbia University (Dec 2003), the Department of Architecture, University of Pennsylvania (Dec 2003), and the School of Architecture, McGill University, Montreal (May 2004). In Sweden the project has been presented in lectures by Anstey and Grillner at the Museum of Architecture, for the Stockholm Architect’s association in 2004, and presented by Grillner at the Science Festival in Gothenburg

(2005). It was also presented in the publication 'Designmedvetenskap' from the Swedish Research Council (2004). The project will conclude its first phase with a research report in June 2006.

The international interest for the issues raised by the project has been confirmed both in our arrangement of the session 'Terms of Engagement – Changing definitions for the architect' which our research project had the opportunity to run at the Society of Architectural Historians in Vancouver April 6-10th 2005, and our project for a scholarly anthology on 'Architecture and authorship – Studies in disciplinary remediation'. We received twenty responses to our call for papers for SAH, among which we had to select four, and received over 40 abstracts for the anthology, of which 17 has been selected. The SAH-session played a key-role in initiating our anthology-project. The SAH-conferences are, on an international scale, among the most prestigious in the field, and the organization gathers 3500 members (see www.sah.org). The project will be seeking additional funding for the anthology project as well as for organising an international conference in Stockholm.

2.1.4 Contacts – national and international network

Through their different research and educational backgrounds, the members of the research team have developed strong international networks in the fields of architectural theory and history, creative and critical writing, design methodology, and interdisciplinary research, as well as strong professional networks in architecture, landscape architecture and planning in Sweden, England, and the USA. For the project these contacts are employed both to form international networks for the individual studies and for the project as a whole. Contributions to the project's session at SAH and to the book-anthology come from many different locations: Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, UK, and the USA. Particularly tight connections exist with the Bartlett School of Architecture in London, and Columbia University School of Architecture, in New York. The international dimension of the project contributes directly to the local research environment in Sweden and facilitates the establishment of further academic networks.

2.2 Architecture and Consumption in Sweden between 1930 to 1970

Based at the Museum of Architecture, Stockholm.

Project-leader: Dr. Helena Mattson

Researchers: Helena Mattson, Sven-Olov Wallenstein

Funded by: The Swedish Research Council (VR)

Time-period: 2005-2006.

Size of grant: 1603 kkr

While this project is not based at the KTH School of Architecture it is described here for two reasons: The research is directly linked to Mattson's PhD-dissertation "Arkitektur och Konsumtion – Reyner Banham och utbyttbarhetens estetik" which she completed in 2003 at KTH. She is a member of the xakt research group and teaches Architecture Theory at KTH. Mattson's project is thus an important resource for both institutions involved.

The project investigates the formation of architecture and politics in relation to the increasing role of consumption in the Swedish welfare state [folkhemmet / people's home]. This perspective involves the development of a conceptual apparatus that allows the respective critical theories of consumption and architecture to meet. As in most other western cultures, consumption was in Sweden, in the early the 20th century, a central driving force behind the development of a capitalist economy and the organisation of its society. What is different, however, in Sweden, compared to many other countries, is the idea in Swedish politics, of consumption as a normative mechanism. The research project applies a notion of aesthetics (in relation to images, architecture, text etc), and of taste, as positioned in the point of intersection between personal desire and the production apparatus. This approach discloses the potential capacity of aesthetics and taste to act as disciplinary technologies, to 'position' the individual in the social system of society. The role of architectural aesthetics, as the link between individual and state, appears particularly interesting in a Swedish context where the 'people's' 'home' and 'house' may be regarded as sites of 'controlled consumption'. Between the 1920's and the 1930's

the social democratic idea of a 'moderate economic planning' is developed. This 'moderate' path focuses on consumption instead of production, and Ernst Wigfors politics for the 1930's economical crisis asked the citizens to 'consume their way out of the crisis'. This shift from production to consumption will also be studied from a gender perspective. The project points to an important aspect of the development and the criticism of the Swedish functionalism which has not previously been studied. The research will be presented in two research reports and a publication. Two public conferences will be organised.

2.3 Current book-projects

2.3.1 Architecture and Authorship: Studies in Interdisciplinary Remediation

Tim Anstey, Katja Grillner, Rolf Hughes: On-going international anthology project including 17 essays selected in high competition. Scheduled publication date: November 2006.

This anthology of scholarly essays, emanating from the research project *Architecture and its Mythologies* (described above), will explore how architects operate historically and in contemporary contexts in relation to changing paradigms of authorship. Contributions will be between 3500 and 5000 words in length, and include case studies, historiographical investigations or critical-theoretical analyses which examine how the concept of authorship has historically informed the architectural profession, or explore related concepts such as origin, intention, the ethics of signature, contract, authority, intellectual property or oeuvre. The anthology is structured around four themed sections - affirmation, dislocation, translation, and dissolution. *Affirmation* includes essays that bring forth and critically discuss different kinds of affirmative discourses and practices of authorship in architecture. *Dislocation* includes essays that bring forth and critically discuss different kinds of dislocating discourses and practices of authorship in architecture. *Translation* includes essays that bring forth and critically discuss moments of translation, or transference, between architecture and other forms of creative and critical discourse that affect ideas of architectural authorship. *Dissolution* includes essays that bring forth and critically discuss architectural and design discourses that actively promote a creative dissolution, or rejection, of authorship in architecture.

2.3.2 Second Nature: Reproduction and the Artificial in Art, Science and New Media.

Rolf Hughes in collaboration with Dr Jenny Sundén, Dept of Media Technology, KTH: On-going international anthology project. Call for essays currently posted. First deadline January 9th 2006.

This anthology of essays seeks to explore technologies of reproduction in a time when concepts like 'original' and 'origin' are profoundly unsettled by notions of 'copy' and 'reiteration'. One key aim is to investigate the many parallels and intersections between digital reproduction and human reproduction, curiously neglected in most discussions of reproductive technologies. The anthology will also investigate our continuing attraction to both innovation and the copy, the virus, the sample, and the clone, exploring the dialectic between design intentionality and randomising systems of chance, and the challenge these pose to interpretation and evaluation in contemporary art and design, aesthetic criticism and cultural theory. The anthology will be structured around three themed sections - origins, originals and originality. *Origins*: this section focuses on the ways in which cultural significations of kinship, family, body, sexuality, and 'life itself' are altered in a society increasingly shaped around the notion that everything can be reduced to code/information. *Originals*: this section focuses on questions of identity, authenticity, aura, and reproductive technologies. *Originality*: this section focuses on creative practices as material processes that make possible new kinds of alignments and affinities between the creator/s, creative technologies, and the resulting artefacts.

2.4 On-going PhD-projects

Brief summary - topics and methodological concerns

On-going PhD-research in Critical Theory in Architecture: Malin Zimm, whose dissertation will be presented Nov 25th 2005, investigates the role of architectural space as a plotting device in the late 19th century media culture and puts it in relation to contemporary notions of virtuality and experience in architecture and the world of computer games. During 2006 three PhD-theses will be presented: Catharina Gabrielsson examines and discloses ideas and practices of public space, considered as a spatial and material medium. For whom and by whom is it produced and how might artists and architects collaborate towards critical aims in the design of public spaces? Applying a feminist and queer-theoretical perspective, and using notions from the theatre and the masquerade, Katarina Bonnevier investigates the role of architecture in constructing particular identities and programs, as well as the effect of particular uses on architectural space and organization. Reading closely the writings of Franz Fanon, Lars Raattamaa, examines, from a post-colonial perspective, the critical role of architectural design and planning in instigating and preserving power-structures. All PhD-projects are based on specific historical or contemporary source material: For example the novels by Huysmans, Goncourt and Stephenson, and Thomas Edison's Film-studio Black-Maria (Zimm); the renewal and renovation project for the Kalmar Main Square (Gabrielsson); Nathalie Barney's Parisian salon around the 1920's, Eileen Gray's E1027, and Selma Lagerlöf's Mårbacka (Bonnevier); the writings of Franz Fanon, Le Corbusier's Plan Obus and Louis Kahn's National Assembly Building in Dhaka (Raattamaa).

Contacts with teaching, professional practice and the public.

All PhD-students have extensive experience from teaching both before initiating the PhD-studies and while pursuing them. Bonnevier taught in 2004/05 a 5cr elective course on queer-feminist perspectives on architecture which attracted a lot of students both from within the architecture program and externally. Zimm has taught very popular courses in architectural communication, in 2004 challenging the students to consider realations between fashion, photography and architecture. Raattamaa and Gabrielsson have both been teaching architectural theory, lecturing and giving seminars. All PhD-students are also very active outside of the academic environment, in relation to the profession and to other public activities. Gabrielsson was, until October 2005, the government appointed chair of the National Advisory Board of Architecture and Design. Raattamaa is a highly regarded poet and an active participant in the cultural debates of the daily press. The international network is also very strong for these students. They participate frequently in International conferences and have already received international attention through publications and presentations. Both Zimm and Bonnevier write their dissertations in English and have had several readers (opponents at thesis seminars) throughout their research process coming from highly qualified international research environments.

3. Theses (PhD, Licentiate)

Thordis Arrhenius: *The fragile monument – On conservation and modernity*, KTH (PhD-Diss), Stockholm 2003.

Katja Grillner: *Ramble, linger and gaze – Dialogues from the landscape garden*, KTH (PhD-Diss), Stockholm 2000.

Anders Johansson: *The architectural metaphor – textual models in spatial construction*, KTH (PhD-Diss), Stockholm 2003.

Helena Mattson: *Arkitektur och konsumtion: Reyner Banham och utbyttbarhetens estetik*, KTH (PhD-Diss), Symposion förlag, Stehag 2004.

Malin Zimm *The Dying Dreamer – Architecture of Parallel Realities* KTH (Licentiate-Diss), Stockholm 2003.

Malin Zimm *Losing the Plot – Architecture and Narrativity in Fin de Siècle Media Cultures* KTH (PhD-Diss), Axl Books, Stockholm 2005.