

INTRODUCTION

Based in Berlin, Peanutz Architekten takes a multi-faceted approach to design. As well as the design of public space and of housing in urban and rural contexts, they engage in museum and exhibition spatial design with a view to creating interactive experiences. In addition, their practice includes workshops, lectures and teaching seminars. The name Peanutz means to act upon space with a variety of 'nutz' which means 'use' in German. Many Peanutz projects deal with the re-using (umnutzen) of space. In their own words they: '... deal with every kind of architecture and space. Our theory relates to several 'design-performative' projects, where we create laboratory conditions in which we can test the "space of action". In this space we simulate particular interventions, functions or services that feed our experiments. From there we have developed the strategy of TUNING for enhancing the use of a structure'.

CORRESPONDENCE

Q1 Vagabond Reviews: Your project Balcony Tuning which was part of the Hotel-Neustadt festival in Halle in the summer of 2003 is a particularly vivid example of the strategy you have developed for re-activating public space and for enhancing the use of existing structures, which you call tuning. Can you elaborate on the notion of tuning in the context of that project?

Peanutz-Architekten: Our first tuning was in 1998. It took the form of a kind of live performance entitled the 'SR-Furniture-Tuning' held at the Urban Issue gallery in Berlin ('SR' stands for Semantic Reloading.) With the help of flyers, we recruited people to bring along old furniture with semantic deficits to the gallery. Umberto Eco said: Objects are semantically worn out long before the materials they are made of. Our method of tuning always concerns endowing semantically exhausted places, un-useable objects or worn-out structures with new content and possibilities for use. The aim is to make the use more multi-faceted by strengthening existing potential or implanting new inventions. The origins of tuning go back to methods of performance. During the performance at the Urban Issue gallery old furniture that people brought was 'tuned live'.



Furniture Tuning, Peanutz Architekten

Using the experience gained in the area of furniture tuning we declared the principle of tuning to be part of our program for many projects. We widened our field of action to include residential buildings and parts of the city. One example is the balcony tuning that we carried out during the Hotel-Neustadt festival in Germany. In Halle Neustadt in the summer 2003 the Hotel-Neustadt was a temporary hotel in an otherwise empty 'Plattenbau' (a building made of prefabricated concrete panels built in the former GDR at low cost). We decided not to restrict balcony tuning to the hotel but rather to extend it to cover the whole of Halle-Neustadt. As was the case with furniture tuning, most of our work involved the provision of advice. We carried out over one hundred balcony consultations with residents of the locality. We dealt with light concepts, cats, swimming pools and folding tables, box seats and sun blinds, forbidden nails in renovated houses that interfered with the heat insulation and terraces on the ground floor. In some cases, the advice-giving process led to the formulation of a financial schedule along with a detailed plan and a parts list for the building market. Within the scope of a theater festival we performed diverse balcony tunings in the Hotel-Neustadt. One balcony became the Triathlon Balcony, on which twenty three enthusiastic competitors took part in the first international 'Plattenman / Women' competition. Another example here was the 'Wedding Balcony'. This was created for a couple that got married during the festival. In addition, we offered a balcony tour through Halle-Neustadt, taking in examples of the tuned balconies of residents including the 'Balcony Bar', the 'Balcony Gallery' and many others.



Triathlon Balcony, Peanutz Architekten



Wedding Balcony, Peanutz Architekten

Q2. Vagabond Reviews: In your description of Peanutz Architekten you identify a number of spaces in which you operate. You have divided those spaces into territories such as private space, public space, exhibition space, performative space, academic space and possible space. We can see how public space might be treated separately from private and academic space but how do you distinguish public space from your notion of exhibition, performative and possible space? In short what is your concept of public space?

Peanutz-Architekten: We deal with the appropriation of public space. We do not believe solely in the sufficiency of the built structure. We rather develop urban software to increase the activity of public space. One example here is a project called 'Non Swimmers Club' which concerned a temporary bath at the little river Mühlgang, in Graz, Austria. 'Non Swimmers Club' was a project delivered by Peanutz Architekten / Wolfgang Grillitsch,

Benny Foerster-Baldenius and Peter Arlt in 2003. The project took place on a fallow site at the river as part of the Real Utopia art festival when Graz was Cultural Capital of Europe. Although the river water was fine, it was forbidden to swim there because the embankments are private properties. The owners of those sites were liable for any accident so they fenced-off the embankments. In order to get around this problem so that the bath could be used for swimming, we founded an Association. Every member in the Association had to sign an agreement that they will not swim in the river and received a number code to enter the Non Swimmers Club. This meant that legally, if they went swimming it was their own responsibility.



Non-Swimmers Club. Peanutz Architekten

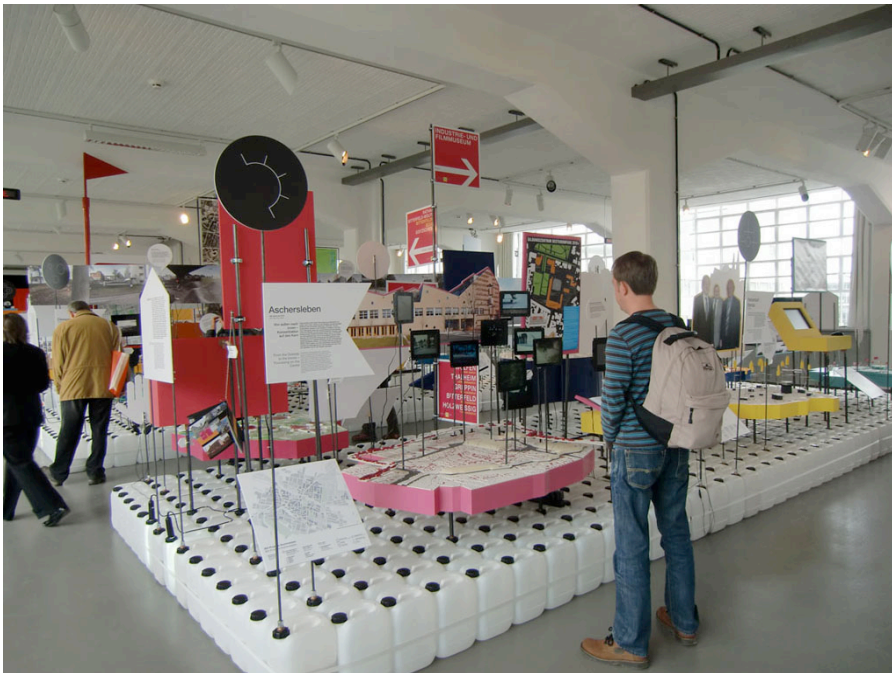
We often work in a 1:1 scale. Architects are usually trained to plan in scales other than 1:1. Our models and site plans allow for an overview of a specific site and show an abstract of a city. We were trained to plan from top to bottom. When the point of view is shifted to street level we can experience the everyday urban routine. This standpoint causes the loss of the overview but reveals details and allows an involved and active relationship to the city. To act in a city in a 1:1 scale establishes an immediate relation to the urban space: you can participate not as an architect but as a person. But 1:1 offers much of what you cannot try at other scales. The formula for this is 1:1 = test. You can test architecture in use and experience how other people perceive the constructed space.

Q3. Vagabond Reviews: A number of your exhibition projects explore notions of place, history and memory using devices from archaeology and interactive media. For example the historical traces and contemporary effects of mining in Forst (Lusatia), in the Archive of Disappeared Places (2006) or the archaeology of the city of Lübben in Museum Schloss Lübben (2001). How do these projects connect with your idea of public art since they both cross the boundaries of exhibition and civic space?

Peanutz-Architekten: The city of Lübben was destroyed during the Second World War. The region of Lusatia has lost and continues to lose many villages through mining. So for the city model in the museum of Lübben and in the Archive of Disappeared Places we set up models with a database, which can be completed with more information or documents provided by the residents. Visitors can experience the lost space and identify with the place. For both exhibition design and projects in public space we create models in various scales or laboratory conditions in which one can test and appropriate space.

Q4.Vagabond Reviews: Can you tell us about your most recent project, the exhibition design of IBA Urban Redevelopment 2010 in Saxony-Anhalt?

Peanutz-Architekten: The temporary exhibition Less is future in the Bauhaus Dessau (see client list below) deals with urban redevelopment in an area with a shrinking population and a weakened economy. We tried to give the exhibition design a unique language. The atmosphere of the exhibition space has the character of a laboratory. We worked without conventional exhibition furniture, renouncing the waste of material that would later fill containers of bulk rubbish. Instead, we placed 'laboratories of urban redevelopment' on five big platforms made up of almost 2000 industrial canisters. We stuck rods in the caps of the canisters to attach the exhibits. When the exhibition ends the canisters will be sold.



IBA-Stadtumbau exhibition, Peanutz Architekten

The central idea for the exhibition design of Less is future was to present a laboratory for new models of life which explore the possibilities for replacing conventional planning tools with experimental, process orientated urban redevelopment measures. These measures have an open outcome and hope for a sustainable, promising future even without economic growth.

Client List: IBA Urban Redevelopment 2010, General Survey Exhibition in the Bauhaus Dessau building, exhibition design by Peanutz Architekten Berlin, Bauhaus Dessau Foundation p.p. of the Federal State of Saxony-Anhalt, Germany

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