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Short Paper

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077 – Spatial Distributions

Concepts for a methodology of performative meaning in architecture

That architecture carries meaning is hardly a contested issue. Neither that this is largely through representing or implying social relations or structures. How is a more discussed issue. The plethora of theories around this is rich, including Foucault, Lefebvre and Bourdieu.¹ Thomas Markus has, convincingly shown how space syntax theories can contribute to this discussion, especially concerning social relations.²

He does, however, not go to the depths of the implications of the main strength of space syntax – the found correlation between a building's spatial system and the following use, something he shares with many others working with space syntax and meaning.

This paper introduces concepts for a methodology for such an understanding based on the hermeneutic theories of Ricoeur, in its base stating that if the building – as any work – is given meaning through the construction of a *world in front of the work*, and this world is built up around an order as interpreted from the work *and its internal logic and structure*,³ then the perceived spatial system and its performance to a large degree is what serves as this 'logic' of the world. This would mean that the perception of the spatial system and how it orders space, people and artefacts works on a structural and narrative level in the production of meaning. It does so in the configuration in itself – in how structure of social relations is presented by the system – but also in how this configuration performs, what social situations are produced by it.

On this topic, this paper presents a methodology for analysis of such a social or performed meaning in architecture, based on the concept of three distributions.⁴ These three modes of distribution correspond to fundamental ways in which space exists and people and things in space interact with each other and with space itself,⁵ and they also cut across the traditional ways of seeing architecture – as form, function and, in rare cases, use. They serve to clarify a few difficulties that sometimes impede our understanding of space, or our possibility of analysing it properly. They further serve to evolve the understanding of space and spatial systems, both through the new questions or models of understanding they bring and through how they clarify and define a few key modes in which space works as a social entity.⁶ For analysing space, they are better versed than the form-function-use triad as they are focused on space rather than object or program.⁷

¹ See e.g. Foucault (2003a, 2003b), Lefebvre (1991) and Bourdieu (1990)

² Markus (1993)

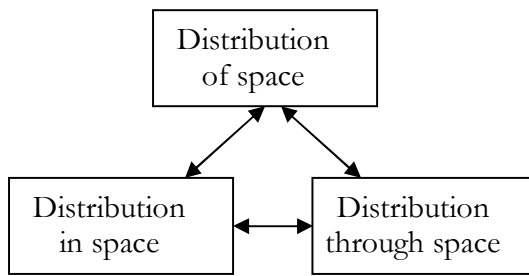
³ Ricoeur (1982), pp. 165-273.

⁴ Koch (2004)

⁵ See e.g. Markus (1993) and relations of self-to-self, self-to-others and self-to-the other.

⁶ Further, the distribution of and through space are in many cases obscured by distribution in space, and often analysis and planning of both cities and buildings are focused on the latter. This partly because

⁷ Koch (2004) pp. 20-23



- First, the distribution of space – how space is distributed in itself, e.g. the configurative system. This is one of the key issues for Thomas Markus, as it is for Foucault and Lefebvre. How space is distributed in itself presents, in Ricoeur's terms, a logic of the world – a logic of the society or inhabitants which it is to house.
- Second, the distribution in space – the location of people, things and functions in space. Though fairly common an approach, it is often confused with the former or the following, impeding our understanding of space. By locating objects, subjects and functions in space, we assign status and relations to them, both in general and between one another.
- Third, the distribution through space - social relations and norms, social meaning, is, as shown by e.g. Butler, to their nature largely performative, they exist in performing them and are reproduced through enaction.⁸ Here, space syntax can make its perhaps greatest contribution – studying space as it is used, or in Lefebvre's terms lived space.

As a final note, using a set of three concepts, as shown by e.g. Derrida and Kipnis, has a liberating or at least dynamic effect. Compared to the usual western dichotomies, triads (or larger sets) has a more dynamic character where thoughts and concepts are set in motion rather than shifting into opposites as produced by dichotomies. Thus they have a more dynamic potential than the normal form-function or form-meaning relationships.⁹ None of the three concepts here used are results of the and none of the concepts is the opposite of another. They form a dynamic set of concepts, overlapping each other and interdependent in their relation.

In the coming, the discussion will focus on how this analysis presents a means to analyse what is at times called abstract space, or even a-spatial, and as a case will be used the three city libraries of Stockholm, Malmö and Växjö.¹⁰

Spatial systems, however, exists in a context or a society, and to what serve to produce the meaning is partly defined by the society and culture in which the system lies. Hence, the *type* library sets boundaries for what each individual instance of library can mean. Libraries have long served as 'temples of knowledge', manifestations of the idea of knowledge of their time,¹¹ and thus, in the coming, the question will revolve around knowledge.

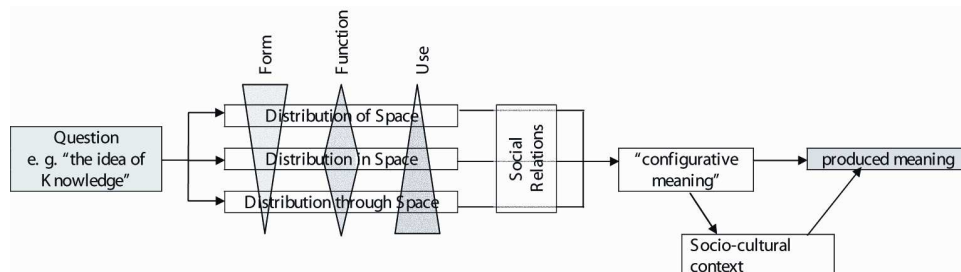


Figure - A model of the methodology proposed in the thesis, including its relation to the more traditional terminology of form, function and use.

⁸ Butler (1997). See also Giddens (1984).

⁹ See e.g. Derrida (1997) and Kipnis (in Hays, 1998).

¹⁰ Koch (2004)

¹¹ For discussions on the type and role of libraries, see e.g. Markus (1993) or Koch (2004).

So, studying the libraries chronologically, a first evolution found is knowledge transforming from something concrete found *in* the books, through something found through the books *and social interaction*, towards a situation where the books serve as a backdrop for its production. Knowledge has grown from something material, possible to set in stone or at least print, into something far less tangible, and the role of the books in themselves as materialisations of this knowledge has lessened. Not only in the strengthening of social functions such as cafés and the form of the places of study but also in the distribution of the bookcases, in the emphasis of places of social interaction and in the performance of spatial systems the libraries have moved from a place for private seeking of knowledge in books to places where knowledge is developed by socialising with other visitors.¹²

The books in themselves have grown less important for the idea of knowledge, but in the context of the libraries they serve an even stronger symbolic role. The artefacts have turned from being *the source of knowledge* to being *representations* thereof. As such, they are exchangeable symbols, and one can wonder if, thus, libraries and museums have grown closer.¹³ Parallel to this, libraries as public spaces have grown closer to public squares, parks, cafés and other social spaces.



Figure - The City Library of Malmö - exterior photography and plans, presented in ascending order from the bottom up. Greyed areas are not accessible by the public.

Further, the morphology of knowledge have changed, where the well defined and easily identifiable structure with branches and depths presented in Stockholm has been deconstructed into a more diverse and complex network or field of intricately interconnected relations and positions, where what relations are of importance is more up to the visitor, or 'the subject', to decide.¹⁴ In Växjö we find the struggle to again gather knowledge into a comprehensible and cohesive form, yet as something which any coherent and simple picture of always will be problematic.¹⁵

¹² Koch (2004)

¹³ As a complementary tendency, many of the museums (at least in the Stockholm area) have grown more interactive in their character, strengthening this sense of 'growing together'.

¹⁴ It might be worth to stress, however, that this does not mean that relations and connections are presented as arbitrary, there is still a strongly present idea of what is related to what, and which relations are of most importance as well as how the structure in general is built up. (Koch 2004)

¹⁵ Knowledge is no longer, since the end of the 19th century, one, or an entity – if indeed it ever was – but a disperse field of different epistèmes and ontologies. See e.g. Foucault (2003a) or Foucault (2003b).

Abstract space and the mode of control

Lastly, the modes of control and freedom have changed. Any spatial system allows for a certain degree of either control or freedom, be it ‘control for those in power’ or ‘social control’ from one to the other (a collective form of mutual social control).¹⁶ This suggests a structure of power and choice, both in the building in itself, in society as represented by the building and – in the case of libraries – in knowledge and *knowledge-sharing*.¹⁷ Thus, relations of power and bonds are present in different forms in a spatial configuration, both as *representation of intent* and *producers of relations and meaning*.¹⁸ For one, how *distributed* the system is,¹⁹ as another, the extent of control, as a third, how the control is distributed throughout the system, and to what degree everything you do can be observed or controlled by others.

The need for control, to have control over what happens to the artefacts of the library, is in many ways self-explanatory. A system of controlled loans makes it necessary to maintain control over who borrows what books when. The growing amount of literature in the libraries produced different needs and possibilities in the patterns of surveillance and control. As Thomas Markus puts it; “*Sweeping consequences followed from the acceptance that books would have to be stored in stacks, that readers needed reading rooms, and staff their own space. [...] Surveillance could concentrate on the readers and the books they were using rather than on the stored items.*”²⁰ This is visible in spatial analysis, in the forms of spatial control (control of bodily encounters)²¹ and visual control (surveillance).

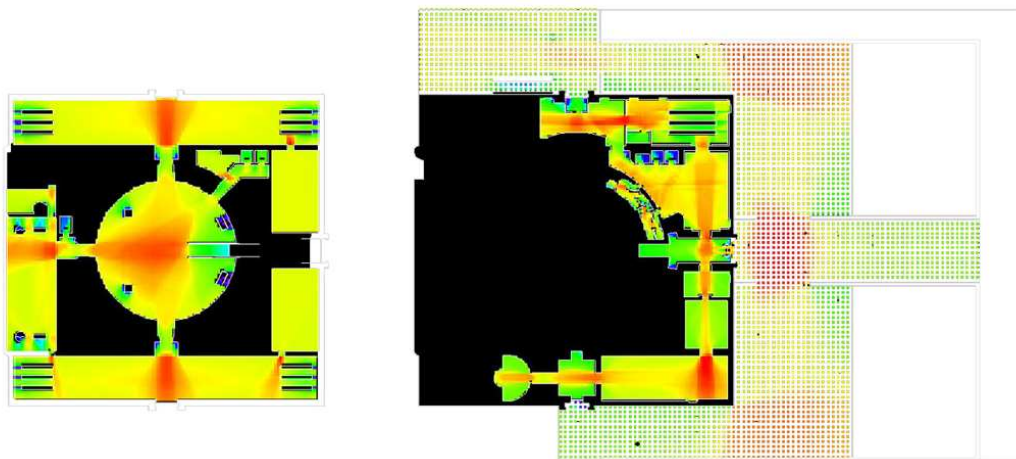


Figure - The Control Pattern in the two first floors of the City Library of Stockholm - control is centered around a few entrances and exits between spaces, making control primarily being about movement between spaces.

¹⁶ See Bourdieu (1990) or Bennett (1995).

¹⁷ “Spaces can be so linked that communication is free and frequent, making possible dense encounters between classes, groups and individuals. These are the basis for community, friendship and solidarity. The alternative is controlled movement, under surveillance, for narrowly defined purposes of production, or for only for such basic biological needs as eating, sanitation or escaping from the fire.” Markus (1993), p. 25 (See further Markus, 1993, p. 21-25).

¹⁸ Markus (1993), Huang (2001).

¹⁹ Hillier/Hanson (1984), pp. 147-155.

²⁰ Markus (1993).

²¹ Spatial control is here used as a term of control of who passes by a space to other spaces in the system, as different from visual control. Typically, in a true tree structure, the spatial control is extremely high – from each space there is control of every movement to or from a deeper space in the same branch.

Spatial control – control of movement

As a first observation the three libraries are remarkably different aside from one phenomenon – the reduction of entrances and exits to one. While Stockholm continues a pattern of spatial control Malmö and Växjö show different degrees of permeability and ringiness.

Stockholm is a hierarchical system, a tree with branches of space reaching out in deep structures, where there are set relations of hierarchical order. This system has an emphasis on discipline and power. Exploratory behaviour is not promoted, neither is it presumed.²² Växjö, on the other hand, have both tree-like and network-like tendencies interwoven and sometimes even disguised by superficial expression of openness and freedom. There are several places where secondary and tertiary routes are *possible* but not *plausible*.

Malmö, finally, has an emphasis on freedom of movement, where every space (principally, if not in fact) have more than one route to and from them. The system of Malmö speaks of freedom of choice and freedom from control, and as such, also tells of relations of bonds and friendship rather than of hierarchy and power.²³

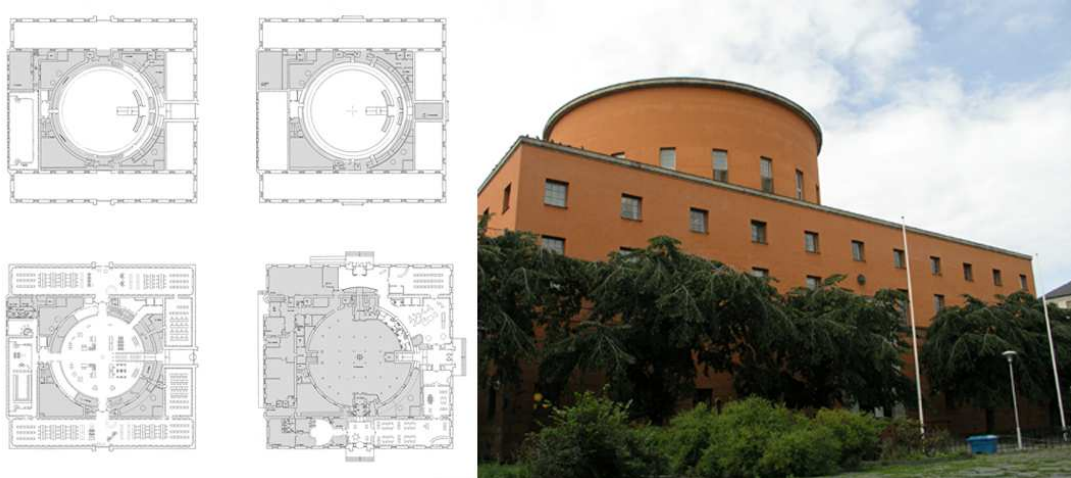


Figure - The City Library of Stockholm, exterior and plans, presented from bottom to top floor counter-clockwise, beginning at the lower right. Greyed areas are not accessible by the public.

Visual control – control of conduct

An analysis of control could stop here, but control is not only based on control of bodily encounters. To a large extent, control is performed through visibility – through the act of seeing or being seen. Bennett argues that the open-plan structures of modern museums has one primary purpose – that of disciplining the working class by putting them in the visual surveillance of the cultural *élite* and the *bourgeoisie*, constantly reminding them they are out of place and does not belong, transferring the behavioural patterns and values of those in power to those not.²⁴ Such a pattern of ‘visual’ control does not necessarily conform to the pattern of ‘spatial’ control, and to some extent has other properties.

As a case in point, in the rotunda of Stockholm, there is the interesting and problematic mix of the *spatially deep* spaces of the balconies on the second and, especially, third floor which, at the same time, are under *high visual control from the most integrated space*, the main floor of the rotunda, making them both hard to reach and easy to survey.²⁵ The ordering of the

²² One of the characteristics of people’s movement is that people tend to avoid walking into ‘dead ends’. Penn (2001).

²³ Markus (1993).

²⁴ Bennett (1995), pp. 25-55, See also Bourdieu (1990).

²⁵ This, as a design decision, can very well be as a result of what kind of literature was intended to be placed there, what supposed social class its readers where of and the need to keep these under

books further strengthens this pattern of control, turning the persons on the upper floors, who are often few, towards the books and thus away from those at the entrance floor, who are often many. Any behaviour, and any interest in the literature on these floors, hence, is under the surveillance of those on the ground floor, and thus the realm of possible action is restrained by a high degree social control.²⁶



Figure - The City Library of Växjö - exterior photography and plans, presented in ascending order from the bottom up, entrance on middle floor. Greyed areas are not accessible by the public.

A perhaps even more clarifying example is the complex relation of *providing service* and *exercising control*. In all libraries, information desks are spread in the spatial system in strategic points, allowing easy and quick access to them. Paradoxically, this service to the public also produces a control of the public, most significantly in Växjö, where information desks are distributed in space in a continuous pattern, constructing a pattern of 'intervisibility' between personnel from the entrance up to the deepest part of the library proper. Further, encounters are here promoted most in highly controlled areas, where what you do and how you do it is easily monitored by both personnel and other visitors.

Thus, beginning in a pattern where control was important, performed through physical control of artefacts and people through bottlenecks in the spatial system, replaced by a freedom of sorts in the City Library of Malmö, control has been reintroduced in the disguise of openness. Less tangible, yet still decidedly spatial, means of control has been introduced. In a sense *abstract space* has moved in at the expense of *physical space*, and the mode of control has shifted from physical, tangible, into social and abstract, fleeting.²⁷ The concrete and empirical spatial and social analysis beginning to unearth the properties of what is claimed by e.g. Foucault and Lefebvre on the evolution of social space and modes of control, making it analysable and discursive. By spatial properties of integration, control and controllability, the spatial pattern of the open-space library in Växjö could be characterised as a well controlled *series* of spaces disguised as an open field.²⁸

observation. Koch (2004) "Surveillance could concentrate on the readers and the books they were using rather than on the stored items." Markus (1993), p. 177.

²⁶ Once again we encounter the problem with the space syntax tools of analysis in being purely two-dimensional. There is no doubt that the situation in the rotunda in the City Library of Stockholm is a result of the spatial system, and that this relation is of a configurative nature. Koch (2004)

²⁷ Foucault (in Leach, 1997), Lefebvre (2001)

²⁸ Foucault presents relations as existing either as *trees*, *series* or *networks*. Foucault (In Leach, 1997)

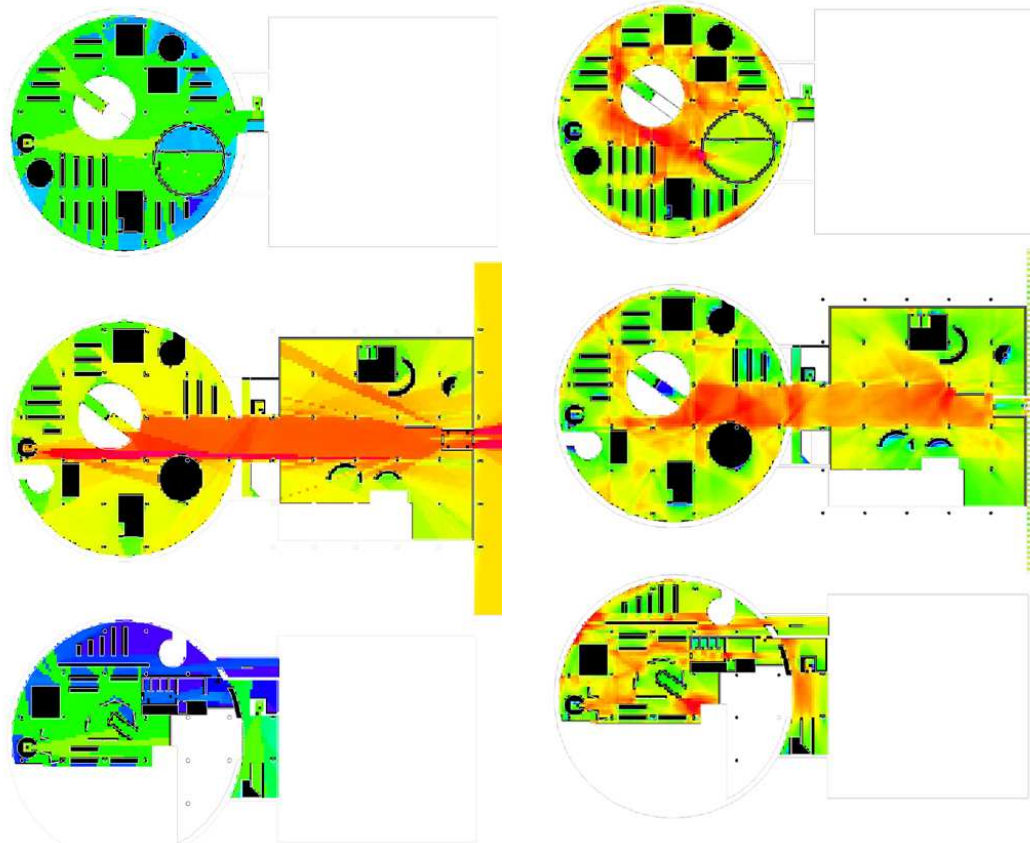


Figure - The City Library of Växjö - Integration (left) and Control (right) patterns, showing the intricate system of integration and control creating the problematic situation of surveillance.

Conclusions

What is shown in the analyses of the libraries, is that by applying the methodology, based on the three concepts, a number of aspects of how the library works to produce meaning is disclosed, and made discursive as spatial performance. By understanding the libraries as social performance in spatial system, the visual illusions of openness or closedness are replaced by systems promoting interaction or privacy, choice or set route, control and freedom, and difference or similarities. All these having actual effects on social behaviour and perception in and of the libraries, presenting different ideas of the literature housed within – both of how knowledge is structured in itself, how different fields of knowledge are related, and in what way it is accessed or produced.²⁹

In short, by taking the results from analysis with space syntax methods a step further, discussing the social and cultural implications of the configurative properties in and of space, and the resulting distribution through space, our understanding of the way in which these libraries participate in the reproduction of the idea of knowledge is made much clearer and deeper, lifting it to a discursive level. Thus, we begin to build a theory of spatial performance, or even spatial systems as producer of performative meaning and structures, and the questions and discussions of space presented by e.g. Lefebvre and Foucault as abstract or intangible becomes tangible and analysable on a concrete level.

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