---+++ Open Source Architecture Performance Documentation

On a crisp Finnish Saturday in early November, guests and participants of the RAM4 workshop on Suomenlinna Island awaited the last in a series of lectures. At 15:30, a little later than planned, they entered the same hall that had housed most of the week's talks, but somehow found themselves - or were directed - into a different space altogether. The following is a collaborative account of the Open Source Architecture workshop and the ideas the led up to and grew out of it.

(OphraWolf)

Traditionally, architecture has been thought of as hardware: the static walls, roofs and floors that enclose us. An alternative approach is to think of architecture as software: the ephemeral sounds, smells, temperatures even radio waves that surround us. Pushing this analogy even further, we can think of architecture as a whole as an "operating system", within which people write their own programmes for spatial interaction. One model of operating system that is particularly relevant to architecture (since the design of space is always a collaborative process) is an open source system.

An open source architecture requires a framework in which the distinction between "those who design" and "those who use" is replaced by participatory system that encourages a constructed project to be constantly "patched" or "performed". As technological developments (for example ubiquitous/embedded computing and user-responsive systems) become more prevalent in the buildings of tomorrow, users/participants take prime position in the configuration (that is, design) of their own spaces.

Technological developments conflate distinctions between audiences and performers; users and designers; occupants and architects and open up creative possibilities for designed space, designed events and designed situations. They also raise challenges for the social role of designers in providing meta-systems that foster individual creativity and encourage people to choreograph their own spatial programs, design their own spaces and invent their own logics. The quandary is to design operating systems that promote creativity without adding further layers of prescriptive meta-program.

Open source architecture needs to be a performance, a conversation, a bodystorm that goes on throughout the life of the architectural system. If we assume that such systems could deal with the practical and functional requirements of constructed spaces then the beauty in design comes from the poetries of those who use/implement/remake it. A system that allows people themselves to create their own spaces and collectively build a social space -- that would be more conceptually "open".

The role of architecture undergoes considerable change because it is people themselves who interpret, appropriate, design and reuse a space within their own frames of logic. A truly open source architecture does not exist without people to inhabit, occupy, perceive, interact or converse with it. The resulting spaces don't merely enable people to develop their own ways of responding, they are actually enriched by them doing so.

As people become architects of their own spaces (through their use) or developers of their own interfaces, the words "architecture" and "interface" cease to be nouns: instead they become verbs. Such an architecture is explicitly dynamic, a shift that opens up a wealth of poetic possibilities for designers of "open source" space.

We know that architecture is political. And we know that people themselves make architecture by using it. Now, how do we balance the differences in technical skill, technology access and self-sufficiency desire that different people have, in order to produce a viably democratic space (in all senses)? Is an architecture operating system just another meta-system of control?

(UsmanHaque)
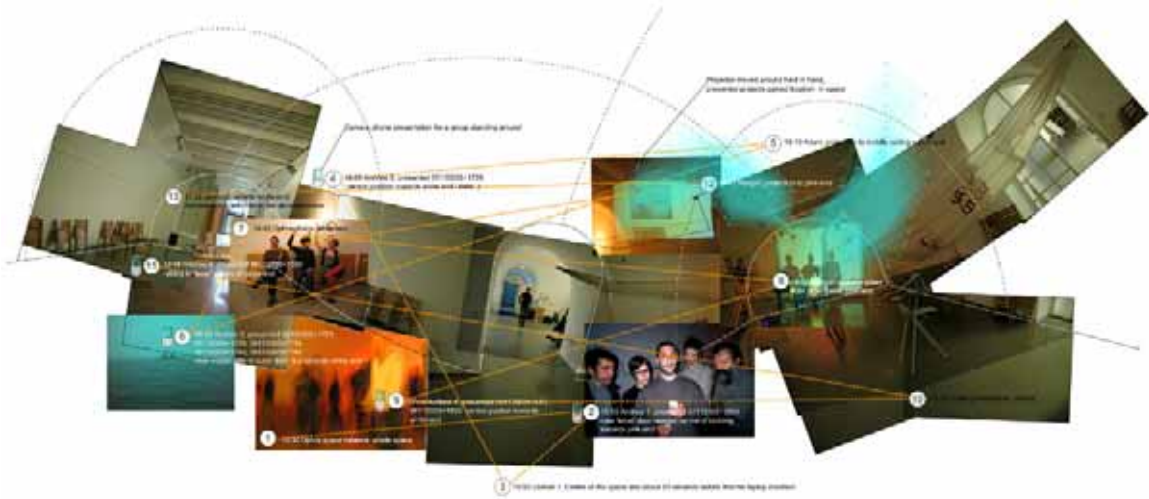
15:30 Ophra space balance, whole space

15:50 Andrew 1, presented 04112003+0904
where: near 'inner' door nearest centre of building, towards pink-end

15:52 Usman 1, Centre of the space and about 30 seconds before
that his laptop crashed!

16:05 Andrew 2, presented 05112003+1729
where: central position towards white end i think ;)

16:19 Adam, projection to middle ceiling + pink-end

16:35 Andrew 3, presented 05112003+1724, 05112003+1729, 05112003+1739, 05112003+1740,
05112003+1746
where: near middle,little to outer door, but towards white-end

16:40 Ophra chairs, white end

16:50 Margot+Usman+Adam start chair game, pink-end

17:00 Andrew 4, presented 05112003+1410, 06112003+1803
where: central postion towards white-end

17:05 Ophra presentation, middle.

17:15 Andrew 5, presented 08112003+1030
where: sitting in 'inner' alcove of white-end

17:17 Margot, projection to pink-end

17:32 Usman2, where: white-end, Andrew
sitting with him in the alcove/window…

(AdamSomlaiFischer)

So we created a framework for our presentation and regardless of how open it seemed, there were rules to the system, there were boundaries, even if those boundaries were merely a starting point and an end. What intrigued me about our 'experiment' was not the information dissemination and work/share/exchange elements, nor the bodystorming and spatial understanding exercises, but the struggle for control between "those who design" and "those who use." I quickly relinquished all conscious control of the situation and I deemed myself the observer, watching with glee how everyone, designers and users alike, chose to accept or reject the system. How quickly the rules were broken and built upon!

We passed out 2 types of stickers to all of the participants coupled with the following rules: one sticker was for delineating subjective space and the other sticker was for the objective demarcation of space. Our original intention or vision as a group was that participants would place these stickers on the ground leaving a physical mapping of peoples' relationship to the space both physically and emotionally.

I smiled when I felt the first sticker placed upon my neck, the subjective heart sticker, then again, another heart was placed on my left shoulder. I looked around, other peoples' bodies were being marked and mapped out, stars placed on foreheads, hearts on girls' hands. Within the first 2 minutes of our open source game rules were broken… stickers weren't placed merely on the floor but on bodies and walls and my will to just stand back and observe was completely blown apart, I became an actor.

I followed suit placing a heart on the sleeve of the participant that initiated the interaction. He peeled back the heart and placed it on my sleeve over the first sticker. Again I placed another heart on his sleeve. He peeled this heart off and placed it on top of what was now two hearts on my sleeve. Five hearts (and a lot of back and forth) later, and I had five hearts neatly placed one on top of the other on my sleeve. Together we reinterpreted the system and time allotted for us to place objective stickers on the floor. We stole the chance to communicate something else, to interact one on one, to make our own space and leave the rest behind.

It is difficult to create completely open systems devoid of any prescriptive interaction procedures. Our attempt was open enough ie. place the stickers wherever you want, however, the task or rule set was still there: to place the stickers somewhere. Our best bet is to design a space of possibilities for interactions to take place within and for meaningful, embodied use to emerge. Through the exploration of this space, we can derive informed design implications for open enough? systems, enabling the communication of personal experience and expression, with a little room for breaking the rules.

(Margot Jacobs)

In trying to tackle the question of open-source architecture, we encountered a profound paradox: how do you choreograph, that is, predetermine, a structure that is not predetermined but rather emergent from the interaction of unpredictable variables? Can we even talk about such a thing as an open-source choreography?

Our collaboration reinforced for me a discovery that I am constantly making in my own work: that we rely on limits to give form and meaning to everything we do. In our search for a creative and 'open' format for our presentation, we observed that limits are necessary for creativity and communication, that unless certain boundaries are defined, ideas can't take root and expand. And yet I am convinced that we are neither communicating nor being creative if we are not seeking to transcend limits.

Open-source architecture, we discovered, is not completely 'open' - it has strong elements of control and predetermined limits, just as all architecture necessarily establishes and is suggestive of certain limits (i.e. skyscraper = the sky's the limit). I think what we tried to do was to create a structure for our presentation that would redefine the nature of interaction within the workshop. So we did not create an architecture with less limits, but we did create a format that questioned the conventional structure of a presentation, and in doing so 'opened' up the process of defining conventional limits of interaction.

Now as a slight abstraction, perhaps we could refer to the term architecture as a framework for interaction (skyscraper = vertical hierarchy!), and observe that as subjects, we are bound to be defined by our interactions. In other words, how we interact with our natural and social environments is in a large sense what defines who we are. Perhaps we can say that the limits of our world are synonymous with the architecture of our interactions? In any case, what united us as a group was the observation that our interactions are an emergent property of the physical and cognitive architectures in which they take place.

This is the starting point of Locative Art: a conviction that the space we inhabit at any one point is an active element in structuring our experience, and that alternatively, the way in which we experience a space at any given point is actively contributing to the structure of that space. We know that we can take

a preexisting space, and recreate it simply be redesigning the manner in which our movement, our gaze, and especially our attention is directed within it. We can open up dimensions in a given space by creating points that call up memories and temporarily transport us to other time-spaces. We can, and persistently do, architect attention in order to locate ourselves within one reality, and again to relocate ourselves outside of it. Now what is it we are asking by trying to make this process 'open-source'?

One day, Usman and I had a good laugh. We were struggling with this demon 'open-source' architecture, trying with all our might to find a way to make it happen, when the thought came up: but it already exists! Isn't that, perhaps, what our collective reality is? An open-source architecture, permanently under construction?

(OphraWolf)

Some thoughts:

0. Was it a performance, an event or an experiment? I think the point is that the whole process was an experiment -- even designing the event was part of the experiment.

1. Open source as a tactic was applied at two particular levels: first during the experiment's design process and second during the event itself where relationships between performers and participants varied according to the control and openness of the choreographies.

2. As an architectural process, we concentrated on exploring how people related to each other and how they related to their spaces (including objects in their spaces like chairs).

3. The idea of control systems emerged as central to the experiment -- eventually our aspiration was to create a choreography that allowed for 'diversion' (in many senses of the word). Creativity often needs boundaries against which to push and there may be control systems that we choose to participate in, in order to encourage creativity.

4. There was a clear distinction between the five of us as 'performers' and everyone else as 'participants', though at various points when we were not actively 'performing' each of us also became 'participants'. Similarly, at various points 'participants' took centre stage, further probing the limitations of openness within control.

5. The reaction of participants to the event itself and the propositions behind the event varied from those actively participating to those amused by it, even to those bored or annoyed by it. In a real-world implementation we might expect a similar range of reactions. It should be possible to consider a system that deals proactively with antagonism; but how would one deal with boredom?

6. At the end, an unscientific polling of the participants suggested that between 50 and 70% of them thought we were pursuing an interesting line of inquiry….

(UsmanHaque)

10112003+1515

We will start soon, just give us another 5 minutes.. almost ready.

10112003+1530

At approximately 1530, the entry of persons into the presentation space is controlled with
access through one door. We handed out both objective and subjective stickers to the audience while
they entered the space.

13112003

Ophra started her 'balancing the space' exercise with the audience, and soon the presentation
room was a flow of individuals moving in collective synergy.. And gently slowy all coming to a
stop at the same time, in complete awareness of others.

We introduced the purpose of the stickers towards the end of this exercise. Asking the audience to
participate in marking their location on the floor in two ways: at a regular sound chime/tick of 5 minutes,
to put a objective sticker on the ground where they stood; and a subjective sticker where they were
located, whenever they liked.

10112003

I will start this process, drawing attention to myself by raising my hand so that the audience notices my
action, placing a subjective sticker on the floor.. Pulling the mobile device out of my pocket.. Opening the
movie-player application.. Pressing play, and raising my voice not too loud.. Speaking out to whoever is
listening.

04112003+0904

Each morning on the ferry I would stand at the front of the boat, bring out the mobile from my pocket and
record a movie of the sea. due to the daily fog, and high visual compression rate the clip could be
extended beyond the 9 second limit allowed.. I felt like I was falling off the edge of the map.

13112003

The 04112003+0904 file was the opening fragment of mnemonic media in my presentation - actually i am
not sure and cannot remember now - but maybe that doesnt matter..

All of the text below that refers to such fragments has been re-presented according to what I think I said
as a spoken-word performance; another iteration of memory and process, and so should be interpreted as
such.

My role in the open source architecture presentation on the 10th of november 2003 was as follows:

I am a performer presenting the contextual experiences which i had captured earlier that week with the
Nokia 3650 mobile-phone either as images or movies. The aim of this activity is to focus upon re-
contextualisation and presentation of memory using the device itself to play back the media in
performance. Hence also, the re-experience of it myself.

I responded to this re-experience of media by improvising anecdotal, documentary or poetic spoken-
words. Some of the fragments were chosen at random, some - pictures due to their preview feature on
the device - were chosen in advance, while others were part of an ongoing sequence. It also included, on
the last occasion of presentation, a reflective selection according to the situation of the event as it
enfolded.

10112003

Someone put all their stickers down on the floor all at once, using all of the objective white rectangular stickers to make an arrow pointing, defining a spot on the floor in front of me. Either this person or someone else, has also placed 4 subjective red hearts stickers at the arrow head. I notice this configuration, and move to stand where the loci is made, and add my own sticker there also. I decide this place will be the next postion to perform a memory recall.

05112003+1251

The date is 05 11 2003. It is 1251. Can you see? We are in the Asian food shop, adding items into the basket. I am orientating Qi-Feng, showing the place where he can get his Chinese food from. The basket is rather full and holds a 5 kg sack of rice, 2 packs of noodles, soy sauce, frozen fish balls, coriander.. Now what else?

13112003

I also acted as a 'distraction' and counterpoint of change between the different sections of the collective presentation whole. Sensing the balance of space, reconfiguring the focus of attention elsewhere. This was particulary useful at certain points.

05112003+1724

Come here, have a look.. It is five twenty four in the afternoon, on the 5th of november, I took a photograph. It is completely black. You can't see anything.

10112003

The fragment 05112003+1724 of memory started a sequence of a story. I think on this occasion I asked people to come and see and listen. Anyway, the space for presentation, and the people in it, rearranged itself according to their raised interest. Some people gathered around, listening to me speak out what was on the small mobile screen in a documentary fashion. A few caught glimpse what was going on on the screen, others listened to the retelling.

05112003+1729

It is ok. We found the lights not long after by the Beach.

10112003

When I am presenting, the other people who were also walking in the dark on the 5th are also listening. I wonder what they are thinking when I mention it? Maybe they recall the time, the experience of darkness, or only later when the story is elaborated..

05112003+1739

So we were on the island survival tour. We were given a map, with numbers [1] to [6] on it - places to find, and a torch. Aleksandar was our "jolly good leader" for the group. He is holding the torch. Do you hear? We were at point [5], next stop - Kings Gate - that was where we wanted to go.

05112003+1740

n60.18990 e24.98908 ?

05112003+1746

Because we decided to go the wrong way round - visiting first point [4], [5], then here [6],
when we got to kings gate, We were really lucky as the viking ferry to Stockholm passed right by us. "We
will see" I said apparently.

06112003+1257

Some of the Ram workshop Participants are working on computers, sending emails, browsing, doing work,
otherwise engaged in another space-time. At this point i document the schism as a picture. Note the
time-stamp now as you read this, and it's subsequent archival into personal and collective memory.

10112003

During the chair 'code' exercise, I get an unexpected kiss on the cheek, making me blush a bit and smile a
lot.

05112003+1410

Let me share something with you.. at 1410 on the 5th of November 2003, there was a notice which was
significant to me - the nickname of my hometown in the window of the ferry ticket-office to Suomenlinna -
"Tilly". aka Tillicoultry.

06112003+1803

At 1803 on the 6th of November 2003, I saw the reflection of a newborn baby in the window of the
Kiasma Museum. I do not even know the baby's name.

10112003

It is enjoyable the poetic combination of these two above together: the name of a place which I knew and
could identify with, in contrast to the newborn baby who I did not. This combination arrives improvised,
scrolling through the images on the screen. It is a pleasure for me when Dorinel laughs and claps in
appreciation. Also it is one of the first occasions I feel conscious of inciting a response such as that, as a
result of poesy and performance.

07112003+1259

Three days after the first movie of the sea, the fog lifted. It was beautiful and sunny. While the rocks were
recorded as being black, surrounded by an aqua-blue haze, a large shimmering rectangle of white formed
as an artifact to the right of the clip.

10112003

I think it was the white artifact which I made reference to as an attractor for the audience. What was
interesting to me, in its presentation as a memory fragment, was the abstract shape, unidentifiable, only
existing at that moment.

08112003+1030

Excuse me.. Can I ask a question? Who took my picture? It is half-past ten and I am standing in
Kauppatori, It is sunny, there is an orange tent behind me but my mouth hangs slightly.. It doesnt look so
good. Who took my picture?

(AndrewPaterson)

---+++Performance Photographs

http://mlab.uiah.fi/~apaterso/ram4/performance_photos.html

these are the ones we use unless someone has others or opinions: speak up

http://mlab.uiah.fi/~apaterso/ram4/mobilemedia

it maybe is appropriate as this is supposedly open source media also. note the file names refer to the text fragments above..