

A call for unrealized projects

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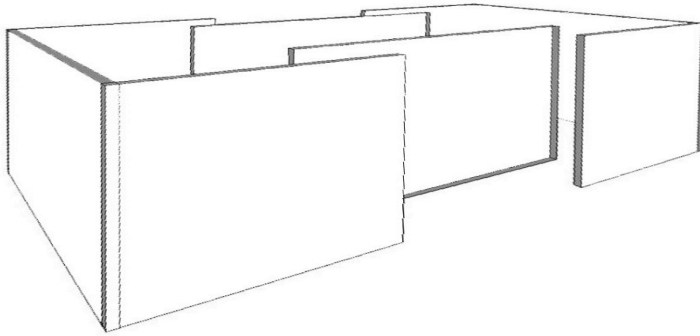
Unrealized project
concept 2007

FOOD SLUICE

The literal reference of the Food Sluice is to a way of channelling food. Following the principle of a sluice, the flow of food between two spaces is regulated, without there ever being a direct, open connection between these spaces.

The total area consists of three sections: dining-room, kitchen and a central space in between the two. The dining-room is accessible to the public, the kitchen is accessible to staff, and the central, linking space is used for the conveyance of meals.

The Food Sluice symbolises diverse, irreconcilable sections of society within a particular community.



[SKETCH, LUCAS LENGLET]

A sluzice divides a space in two, in this case separating the dining-room off from the kitchen. It is a compact space, divided into illuminated cells with entrances on both sides that can be closed off. The cell doors bear codes corresponding to those issued to the diner with his or her order. As usual with a sluzice, the doors open temporarily in one direction only.

The restaurant is furnished in contemporary style and is perfectly equipped for a superior location. There are no staff in the dining-room. Clients order and pay for their meals electronically; they do so using a machine installed in the restaurant, entering specific codes and collecting the corresponding meals from the sluzice. The dining-room is transparent, so that passers-by can see the diners from the street. The range and quality of the meals on the menu are excellent, while prices are significantly lower than those in other comparable catering establishments.

The rear area is divided into an operating system and a kitchen. The operating system mediates between clients and their host; this is where orders are received and processed.

The staff cannot be seen from the dining-room; the space is constructed such as to prevent any contact between clients and staff. The personnel consists of a rotating team of chefs and an auxiliary staff.

Access to the kitchen is solely through a separate staff entrance. The dining-room is unlike more traditional restaurants in that the usual code of conduct within the culture of dining does not apply; the usual identification of clients with their host, and vice versa, is entirely absent. In spite of this, the style and ambience of the dining-room meet the demands and

expectations of a broad, culturally savvy, section of the European population.

The visitors to the Food Sluice are restaurant clients with an interest in the prevailing culture of dining out, who like to combine social and business engagements with having an enjoyable meal in pleasant surroundings.

The 'host' in the Food Sluice is a section of the population that is generally excluded from mainstream society. Groups of detainees and ex-detainees, addicts and former addicts, prepare the meals under the supervision of a team of chefs.

SIMULATION

In an open letter responding to Heidegger's definition of humanism, the German thinker Peter Sloterdijk narrows down the question of human existence to one of place: what counts is not what a human being is, but *where* he is: namely, *in the world*, or more precisely, in a 'people's park'.¹ That each and every person must necessarily be located somewhere implies that existence is bound up with real estate.

At first sight, the Food Sluice seems to resemble the principle of coin-operated fast food walls that dispense sausages day and night beside Formule 1 hotels along the French highways, or the sleeping-compartments in overcrowded Japanese cities, where people obtain bed and breakfast by credit card payment, without meeting any staff. Staying at a Formule1 hotel and eating a meal dispensed by a machine are based on the idea of providing programmed anonymity in lieu of personal care.

In this theatrical setting, the fast food machine, once invented to release people from jobs that involved demeaning drudgery, plays the role of interlocutor; like the imaginary opponent in an online/computer game, it supplies the dialogue, as it were, between service provider and recipient.

PEOPLE'S PARK

The temptation to confirm the world of one's experience by drawing comparisons with oneself is seen as generally acceptable. That explains why, however large the 'people's park' may be, those inhabiting the sunny flowerbeds will always maintain, when approached by an unequal specimen of fellow humanity, that there is unfortunately no room left in their bit of the park.

Sloterdijk blames this rejection on the rules attached to Western 'people's parks'; on life in a comfort zone. Although the comfort zone is surrounded by a turbulent sea of poverty, the turbulence that is perceived lies beyond our borders. In the tamed world of society's consumers, calm conditions prevail – so calm, in fact, as to generate both stress and boredom. These two underlying tones of existence produce a mood of chronic ambivalence, in which alarm alternates with reassurance.

The state of stress and alarm is smoothed out with methods derived from psychology and psychiatry, which explains the enormous growth in its general prevalence and acceptance. Boredom is fended off using various forms of Excitement, ranging from jumping from cranes while attached to strong rubber bands to journeys to exotic destinations. An ill-defined urge to break out of a cocooned bourgeois existence underlies the large-scale demand to see the strange and unfamiliar, the wild and exotic: to stare at the bearded lady, at negroes, animals, exotic individuals or creatures, gypsies, gays, junkies, teenage mothers and undocumented aliens, to stare at suffering, at poverty. The aim is not actually to see or experience *what these exotic beings are*, since that would give rise to a connection, a sense of shared community. The aim is rather to find affirmation of *what you are yourself*. To achieve this, people are willing to go to specific places such as the circus or the zoo, slums, remote islands, the red-light district. They can indulge in a collective shudder and then return home, reassured by the knowledge that they do not have to be or live like *that*.

Conversely, there is the desire of the outsider. Whether or not one someone has chosen to live as an outsider, there is a longing to be admitted to the comfort zone. Some people go so far as to place their lives in jeopardy by putting out to sea in rickety old boats, and accept the prospect of being branded 'undocumented'. Or in the case of junkies, there is a clash between a person's actual life as 'trash' and a desire for an unknown, bourgeois existence. Impelled by a vision of this other life, junkies sometimes fantasise about what their lives will look like when they have finally finished therapy, or after their release from prison built in the style of a Vinex estate [a reference to the newly developed residential areas built at greenfield locations since 1990–transl.], which is intended to help inmates practise living in the community within secure surroundings. Past experience has demonstrated that imitation and artificially imposed bourgeois life-styles lead neither to a normal life nor to a self-confidence based on independence. The effort of following the standards of 'normal life' makes a stark contrast with their life experience and realistic expectations.

For instance, the attempt in Amsterdam to start up a café run by heroin prostitutes who wanted to leave the business was doomed to failure, because the one-sided revelation of personal injury led to the kind of morbid curiosity that has been described above. Hannah Arendt believes, on the other hand, that it is possible, through openness and potential connection, to make the essence of human action amenable to experience. She asserts that the juxtaposition of equality and diversity – whatever the difference of positioning and disparate attitudes – points to a shared world. [We possess] the ability to see ourselves while we see the world, in a remarkable, cross-linked pattern of inside and outside, and thus to experience a sense of unity in spite of our isolated lives.² Perhaps it is precisely public invisibility that holds out the potential of connection with someone or something. You might compare it to the need to *tell* fairy-tales instead of seeing them: Snow White remains the most beautiful in the land for all eternity, as long as no one suddenly comes upon her when she has grown old, and finds out that she is actually quite fat.

The food sluice is *par excellence* the place where human desires are represented while individual differences and status remain ‘out of sight’. People are neatly separated by a buffer, in the form of a sluice. One group can take their places at an exquisitely laid table (though they lay it themselves, for a change), just as they are accustomed to doing, while the other group remains hidden in the kitchen. The desires of both groups, voyeurism and imitation, are fulfilled: the clients are satisfied by being able to eat in luxury, while the workers are satisfied by having the luxury of legitimate presence as members of staff. In the food sluice, people ‘knock on two doors’ and both are opened selectively, since it is clear who has to be where.

What is the advantage of a Food Sluice? None at all. The space constructed for the Food Sluice is a staged setting, a simulation of present-day social structures and ideas. Simulation is precisely that irresistible process in which things are interwoven such as to create an impression of meaningfulness, while in fact they are organised only by artificial montage and non-sense.³

The Food Sluice is a hyper-realisation of reality, which resists all meaningful interpretation or solution.

¹ Peter Sloterdijk: *Regeln für den Menschenpark. Ein Antwortschreiben zu Heideggers Brief über den Humanismus*, 1999

² Hannah Arendt: e.g. *Politiek in donkere tijden. Essays over vrijheid en vriendschap*. Essays about freedom and friendship.

³ Jean Baudrillard: *Simulationsmodell / Die Illusion des Endes oder der Streik der Ergebnisse*, Berlin 1994.