

Notes from the Field
Summer 2013

A close-up photograph of a person's hand, dusted with flour, shaping a piece of dough on a wooden surface. The hand is positioned in the center-left of the frame. In the foreground, a broom with a wooden handle and a head of dried reeds or straw is visible. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the wooden work surface and some other objects. A large black circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text 'SLOW SPACE BJØRVIK' in white, serif, all-caps font.

SLOW
SPACE
BJØRVIK

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Over the past two decades, Bjørvika, Oslo's former container port, has been the site of many artistic interventions, residencies and performances. As the site undergoes fundamental transformation as part of the city's regeneration of its waterfront, a new programme of artist projects has emerged, which challenges preconceptions about the forms and timespan of conventional public artworks and how artists might contribute to the life of this place.

In 2010, UK-based producers Situations were asked to devise a new curatorial vision for a permanent public art programme. Claire Doherty, Situations Director recalls, "We were struck by how Snøhetta's white marble roof at the Opera House had quickly become a new gathering place in the city—a space free from commercial activity in which to think, to slow down, to congregate, to self-organise. We gathered together artists, architects, planners and curators from all over the world in Oslo to help us think about alternative approaches to public time as well as public space."

Slow Space is conceived as a programme that will unfold over time through collective activity, annual events and interventions, often in close collaboration with existing organisations and artist-run and activist initiatives across the city.

I løpet av de siste to tiårene har Oslos tidligere containerhavn, Bjørvika, vært åstedet for mange kunstneriske inngrep, gjestekunstneropphold og forestillinger. Ettersom stedet gjennomgår fundamentale forandring som en del av byens fornyelse av kystlinjen, har et nytt program med kunstnerprosjekter blitt opprettet. Det utfordrer forutinntattheten om form og tid i konvensjonelle offentlige kunstverk, og hvordan kunstnere kan bidra til livet på dette stedet.

I 2010 ble de britisk-baserte produsentene, Situations, bedt om å utarbeide en ny kuratorisk visjon for et permanent offentlig kunstprogram. Claire Doherty, leder for Situations, minnes: «Vi ble slått av hvordan Snøhettas hvite marmortak på Operahuset raskt hadde blitt et nytt møtested i byen. Et sted uten kommersiell aktivitet, hvor man kan tenke, slappe av, samles og selvorganisere. Vi samlet kunstnere, arkitekter, planleggere og kuratorer fra hele verden, i Oslo, for å hjelpe oss med å tenke ut alternative tilnærminger til offentlig tid samt offentlig rom».

Slow Space er tenkt som et program som vil utfolde seg over tid, gjennom kollektiv aktivitet, årlige arrangementer og tiltak, ofte i tett samarbeid med eksisterende organisasjoner og kunster- og aktivistdrevne initiativer på tvers av byen.



The first of the four projects launched this summer is with the San Francisco-based artist Amy Franceschini and Futurefarmers establishing Flatbread Society. Using the compelling proposition of a permanent Bakehouse for Bjørvika, Futurefarmers have sought out the hidden networks of bakeries and urban food production, the environmental activists and farmers across Oslo, listening and researching, delighting in the divergent forms of and facilities for making flatbread.

During the months of May and June 2013, Flatbread Society established a temporary presence to test out the function, form and community of the Bakehouse. Its provisional aesthetic contrasted starkly with the surrounding construction site: the hand-made meeting tables and tools, its radio station Ramona, the tandoor and flatbread ovens, a canoe oven a telescope rolling pin and shelter structure—which served to insert make-shift production into the highly planned and controlled public space of the new Bjørvika. This is a field station operating through a spirit of readiness. Through Flatbread Society, Futurefarmers offer an alternative approach to the design and builds methodology of urban design by creating a space in which we might actively contribute to the life of our public spaces through a captivating idea.

This is the first of a series of Notes from the Field – in which we hope to reflect on the process of challenging the way in which artists might contribute to Bjørvika in the long-term.

Det første av fire prosjekter ble igangsatt denne sommeren, da den San Francisco-baserte kunstneren Amy Franceschinis og Futurefarmers etablerte Flatbread Society. Ved å bruke det overbevisende forslaget om et permanent Bakehouse i Bjørvika, oppsøkte Futurefarmers de skjulte nettverkene for bakerier og urban matproduksjon, miljøaktivister og bønder i hele Oslo, lyttet til, forsket og gledet seg over de sprikende formene og utstyret for å lage flatbrød.

Fra mai til juni i 2013 etablerte Flatbread Society et midlertidig nærvær for å teste ut funksjonen, formen og fellesskapet til Bakehouse. Den foreløpig estetikken står i sterk kontrast med den omkringliggende byggeplassen: de håndlagde møtebordene og verktøyene, radiokanalen Ramona, tandoor- og flatbrødovn, kanoovn (ovenfor), teleskopkjeve og ly-struktur – alt for å tjene til en provisorisk produksjon til det svært planlagte og kontrollerte offentlige området i nye Bjørvika. Dette er en feltstasjon som drives gjennom ånden av beredskap. Gjennom Flatbread Society tilbyr Futurefarmers en alternativ tilnærming til design- og byggermetodikken innen urban design, ved å opprette et rom hvor vi kanskje kan bidra aktivt til livet i de offentlige områdene, gjennom en fengslende ide.

Dette er den første i en serie av Notater fra feltet, hvor vi håper å reflektere over prosessen med å utfordre hvordan kunstnere kanskje kan bidra til Bjørvika i det lange løp.

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Flatbread Society's temporary waterfront location in the shadows of 'The Barcode', June 2013



The Sun Gives Without Receiving¹

Tara McDowell

I. On Site

The sky above Oslo on May 31, 2013 was mercurial. A diffuse northern sun warmed the slightly humid seaside air, only to cede to billowing clouds heavy with early summer rain. At the water's edge of Bjørvika, students from the Sofienberg School assembled at half past ten in the morning to mix, knead, roll, adorn, bake and taste flatbreads at a newly erected temporary shelter. A public art project by the Flatbread Society - a shifting alliance of artists, farmers, bakers, scientists and builders whose protagonists in Oslo include Amy Franceschini, Stijn Schiffeleers, Lode Vranken, and Marthe Van Dessel is a temporary bakehouse and a provisional shelter used for one month. It has two main components: a sloped and angular raw wooden platform that transitions, into a roof as it rises, and three linked wood-fired ovens made from bricks and clay on ground-level. In the centre of this sprawling clay form, designed by oven master Sten Sjöstrand and built on site by

many hands, is a dome oven, dissimilar to a pizza oven, from which a skinny chimney runs up and through the roof. On either side are two additional ovens, a tandoor on the left and a griddle on the right. Between the dome and the griddle runs a block of clay for seating, warmed by the radiant heat of the ovens. The bakehouse has no walls. There is no signage either. The space is open and indeterminate; functional and strange.

The workshop on this particular day was part of a wide-ranging calendar of events that began on May 22nd 2013 and ran through until June 23rd. The students at Sofienberg high school have collaborated for roughly a year with Tenthaus Oslo, a collective formed by artists Helen Eriksen, Ebba Moi and Stefan Schröder.

At the bakehouse the students set about making flatbreads from their respective cultures: muufo from Somalia (usually made at home with corn), bani (which simply means loaf) from Eritrea, and a semi-sweet khobz from Iraq.

¹ This essay is titled for a line by Georges Bataille that was picked up and elaborated by anthropologist Michael Taussig in his 1995 article, "The Sun Gives Without Receiving: An Old Story," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37 (April 1995): 368-398. In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille writes, "Solar energy is the source of life's exuberant development. The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy—wealth—without return. The sun gives without receiving."

To make roghni naan from Afghanistan, one of the young women used a textured rolling pin to roll the dough into a flat circle the size of a medium pizza, patted it with corn oil, sprinkled on some black cumin seeds and carefully placed walnut halves across the surface. Once in the wood-fired oven, it quickly puffed up and turned caramel-coloured: it tasted... delicious. The mood that day was relaxed and informal. Some students worked assiduously and adroitly, making multiple breads over the course of several hours in all three ovens, while others snapped photos on smartphones or chatted in the sun. In the early evening, long after the students and the Tenthaus organizers had left, two separate groups arrived unannounced to use the ovens. A mother with three small children who lived in the nearby waterfront apartment complex came to make pizza for dinner, and a group of twenty-somethings celebrating a birthday brought champagne, made blinis with caviar, and played music and danced. There were other passersby, but not many.

Bjørsvika is the site of a massive redevelopment of a central portion of the Oslofjord from active port into a cultural and residential district. The bakehouse sits squarely within a construction site – Sørenga – surrounded by apartment buildings in various stages of completion. The area is crisscrossed by heavy machinery and pockmarked by piles of raw material, chain link fences, and temporary structures. Finding the bakehouse may involve some trial and error: crossing highways on pedestrian bridges, stumbling across concrete jetties, circling back past various harbour side buildings. Once seen, however, the bakehouse's otherness within this industrial wilderness is unmistakable. This is partly because the aesthetic of the structure differs so emphatically from

that of its surroundings. The palette of the Bjørsvika development is mostly slate grey (grey stone, grey concrete) and its geometry (at least for now) is almost all cubes. In the midst of this grey, boxy panorama, whose backdrop is the lush green forests across the fjord, the raw blonde wood of the bakehouse's 2x4s and its angular, trapezoidal shape stand out like a sore thumb. The temporary structure (designed by Vranken, an architect) signals its difference even as it inscribes the provisional character of a construction site into its very form. This is purposeful (the structure is only a prototype for a permanent bakehouse), just as the architectural nod to the nearby Oslo Opera House, with its sloping white granite and marble plaza dotted with pedestrians and skateboarders, is also surely purposeful, if a bit tongue-in-cheek. The Opera House, which was designed by celebrated Norwegian architects, Snøhetta, is one of the most visible and spectacular components of the Bjørsvika redevelopment project. It has quickly become a tourist destination and prominent image of the city's branding since opening in 2008. In terms of visual impact, the Opera House is matched only by the Barcode Project: a highly contentious development, also located in Bjørsvika and clearly seen from the vantage point of the bakehouse. Incredibly, 'Barcode' was the name of a winning concept (now OperaKvarteret) given to a handful of high-rise buildings mostly comprising corporate offices and luxury apartments.

This is all to say that Bakehouse Bjørsvika has landed smack in the middle of a thicket of controversy. The Flatbread Society's decision to accept the invitation to work in Bjørsvika complicates the endeavour's willful utopia in important



The bakehouse design workshop, June 2013



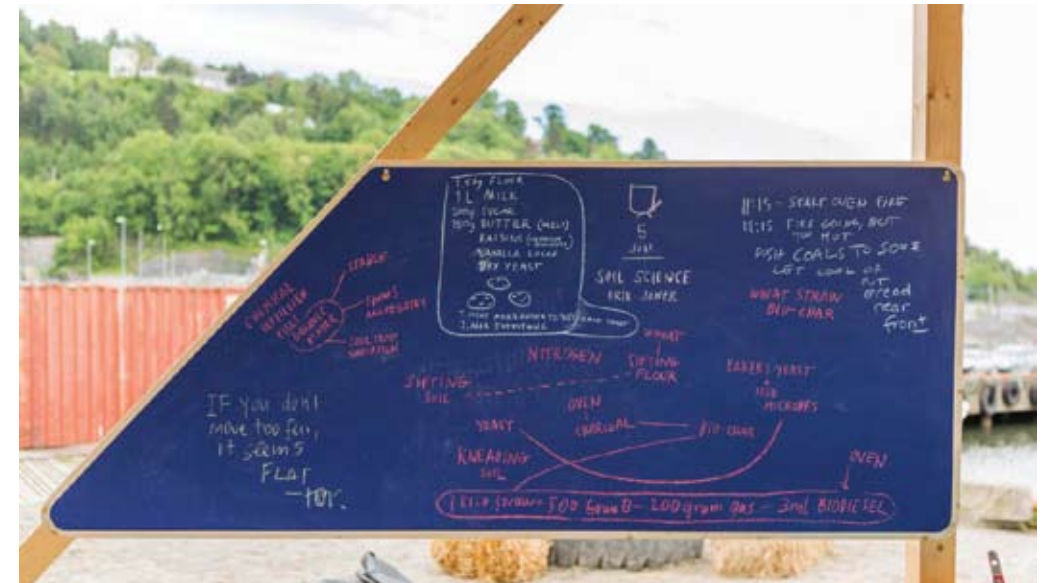
ways. Grist for the mill, so to speak. In Bjørsvika, the bakehouse stands for both uneasy compromise and a fine point of resistance. Its uncertain future—whether a more permanent structure will be built on the site is not at all settled—is set against copious amounts of urban planning at the highest level of capital and government administration. It insists on the handmade in the face of the machine made. It gives its infrastructure and its product—breads—away freely in the shadow of a development that shares its name with a supermarket checkout system. It wants to slow down amidst pressures to speed up. It is an anachronism that models ways of coming together for the future.

II. The World Is Flat

The Flatbread Society is an offshoot of Futurefarmers, a design studio founded by Franceschini in 1995 that has undertaken a range of projects with an evolving set of collaborators. Futurefarmers' origins lie in the technological savvy of late 1990s graphic design and online networking (social media *avant la lettre*) but has since moved to a more insistently analogue position that privileges real life interactions and even pre-industrial forms and methods. Flatbread, for example, is the most ancient food produced by humans after beer (to which it was intimately linked through shared yeasts). Projects by Futurefarmers are situational and site-responsive, and therefore take

diverse forms, but some red threads can be teased out. First, though the projects involve scientists, farmers, astronomers, botanists, and so on, they are located in and supported by institutions of art. Although the Flatbread Society bakes in the public space of Oslo's harbour, they were invited there by the UK-based producer Situations, who are the curators of Slow Space, the overarching public art programme in which Bakehouse Bjørvika is commissioned.

Futurefarmers' undertakings revolve around intimate gathering places such as a picnic blanket (*A Variation on the Powers of Ten*, 2012); a retractable table (*Land, Use: Blueprint for a New Pastoralism*, 2012); a cobbler's bench (*Shoemaker's Dialogues*, 2011); a roving wooden horse (*This Is Not a Trojan Horse*, 2010); and a backyard garden (*Victory Gardens*, 2007).² These spaces open out onto constellations of questions vaster than their modest physical parameters would first suggest. The picnic blanket, after all, rests on a field. This dialectic is crucial, and we might say the microcosm of such spaces allows an engagement with the oceanic and daunting macrocosms of science, agriculture, labour, systems of exchange, and environmentalism to be anchored, and made more manageable. Additionally, these projects often involve the manufacture and display of what Franceschini names props, in a nod to the origins of the term in theatre as things to be picked up and used. But the props are rarely truly functional. They are more like surrealist marvelous objects, absurdist mash-ups of common things in the world made over into sculpture and displayed in galleries. Or, maybe not sculpture; but rather propositions for alternative use. To this end, many of these projects perform a purposeful revaluing of a central



term. Thus the Trojan horse, as Vranken explains, "is not a symbol of war, but rather community."³

Instead of concealing soldiers, its belly becomes a transparent place to gather. Victory Gardens are no longer in pursuit of a United States victory in World War II, but victory over big agriculture. Such reversals are in the service of imagining a world that values uncertainty over certainty, unlearning over learning, questions over answers, beginnings over endings and slowness over speed.⁴ It is a utopian vision, certainly, but one that is circumscribed (a blanket, a table, an oven) and always temporary. Prototypes and propositions are offered, projects are completed and archived. Macrocosms of use and change may be dreamed of, even suggested, but are never prescribed.

This is all true for the Flatbread Society, too. Here the concrete gathering place is the oven, which is a cultural construction as much as a physical one. This is what Futurefarmers seek in every cultural object

to which they turn their attention. It must be an object or inhabited space in the world with concrete parameters, but it must also be an expanding structure. The oven is a natural choice in this regard. It expands, as Jean François Blanchette makes it do in a single sentence, from an object into a "whole way of life."⁵ The Flatbread Society is interested in the oven as an object, but also in the technology that it represents, the history that stands behind it, the social and physical environment that it creates, and, certainly, in its whole way of life. This way of life is a mode of sociability—gathering around ovens to bake and speak about local life and politics over time, since baking bread takes time. It is also clearly bound up in timescales and forms of labour, as well as the knowledge gained from labour. While rethinking our relationship to time, labor, and social forms is crucial in contemporary life, which is so often witness to their impoverishment and manipulation, there is a danger here of a slide into nostalgia. Marx's description of the baker's workday in *Capital* vividly shows just how thoroughly the baker

² For more about *A Variation on the Powers of Ten*, see Elizabeth Thomas, "Into the Atmosphere," in *A Variation on the Powers of Ten* (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press: 8-15).

³ Lode Vranken, "Incarnating Nomadic Resistance Against Biopolitics [The Discourse of Traditional Power]," <http://www.futurefarmers.com/thisisnotatrojanhorse/about.html>

⁴ Perhaps it is not surprising that Futurefarmers' next project involves a temporary school, since the utopic and propositional are often located within education. As activist Angela Davis once said in a commencement speech to Grinnell College, "To reveal these hidden ways of thinking, to suggest alternate frameworks, to imagine better ways of living in evolving worlds, to imagine new human relations that are freed from persisting hierarchies, whether they be racial or sexual or geopolitical - yes, I think this is the work of educated beings. I might then ask you to think about education as the practice of freedom."

⁵ Lise Boily and Jean-Francois Blanchette, *The Bread Ovens of Quebec* (Ottawa: the National Museums of Canada, 1979): 3.

⁶ While Marx is writing about a deeply dysfunctional industrialising London, he notes that "no branch of industry in England...has preserved up to the present day a method of production so archaic, so...pre-christian, as baking." <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm>

was tied to the oven all day, every day.⁶ The bakehouse's temporary status alleviates this problem, however, as does society's willingness to share responsibility for its care and maintenance with a community of users.

The Flatbread Society made several props to accompany the bakehouse and its programming. A wooden rolling pin that also functions as a telescope is especially dreamy. It plays on both devices' cylindrical form to propose a two-in-one modification, but it also gives material form to a historical development, namely that people appointed to guard grain storage in Mesopotamia and Mesoamerica became the first astronomers. By far the most ambitious prop is a mobile oven made from a modified red canoe equipped with a small, but functioning wood-fired bread oven. Two rowers (or bakers) step into rubber waders attached to holes at the fore and aft of the canoe, so that the oven is mobile enough to move from sea, to land, and back again. Schiffeleers and Vranken have taken the oven on several field trips in Oslo. Photographs show them standing in the canoe, which is strapped to their shoulders and sits waist-high, with goofy grins on their faces, fully aware how curious and funny this object and their use of it is.

The aesthetic of the Flatbread Society (like that of Futurefarmers) is notably clear and consistent, so much so that the look of the project provides a point of tension with its goals of openness and indeterminacy. The aesthetic is clean and simple, but not rough. Materials are naked but used in the service of well-made, hand-made objects. Colour appears sparingly but pointedly, and is often primary: the red canoe or bright yellow hood and t-shirt donned by Franceschini and Schiffeleers respectively

during the Sofienberg School workshop. It's an image-savvy, photogenic aesthetic informed by a deep knowledge of graphic design and awareness that documentation is the primary mode by which such temporary, site-specific endeavors are apprehended. It is the aesthetic of the model and the prototype, and as such is legible and user-friendly, almost childlike, which subtly influences how participants engage with the project—openly and without predetermination.

Like the aforementioned projects, the Flatbread Society aims to revalue certain terms. One of these words is *flat*. In Oslo that May day, Franceschini asked the students to imagine that the world is flat. It is a curious request, one that, on the face of it, is patently naïve, displacing beliefs in a spherical earth dating from antiquity. But to claim the world is flat is to insist on locating your body, your gaze, and your labour on the ground, rather than in a fictive exterior position.⁷

This is politics that is implicated rather than disembodied, local rather than global. Recently the theorist Gayatri Spivak has also rejected the global in favour of an alternate term. "Globalisation is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere," she writes. "The globe is on our computers. No one lives there."⁸ Instead she prefers the term *planet* for its admittance of alterity and the sense that we inhabit the planet, but only on loan. Franceschini's insistence on flatness, or a flat earth rather than a globe, puts our feet firmly on the ground, where soil is felt, where seeds are sown, and where fields of wheat are grown and harvested.⁹

Society is another word worth paying some attention to here. Naming the project the Flatbread Society calls to

mind the professional societies that sprung up during the Enlightenment, such as the Society of Artists of Great Britain, founded in London in 1761. These societies were organised around a common interest or trade, whether esoteric or scientific. The Flatbread Society, then, conjures a group of people invested in cultivating and socialising around an ancient, yet distinctly basic and everyday object: flatbread. The Flatbread Society, like Futurefarmers, also implies collectivism, which as a mode of working is on the rise amongst artists today. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette call for a collectivism that describes well the Flatbread Society and its placement within Bjørnø. This collectivism, they write, is aimed at "engaging with social life as production, engaging with social life itself as the medium of expression. This new collectivism carries with it the spectral power of collectivisms past just as it is realised fully within the hegemonic power of global capitalism."¹⁰

III. The Story of Grain

Grain is the currency of currencies, Lenin is rumoured to have said, and indeed, grain availed the beginning of civilisation, leading to new power structures and social hierarchies.¹¹

The entire history of human development, technology and civilisation from prehistory to the present can be told through the story of grain. The Flatbread Society is well aware of this narrative, but asks us to reconsider its equivalence to progress and to think differently about our current relationship to grain. It models the possibilities of scaling down food production and keeping distribution local, and proposes farming practices that allow farmers to remain connected to, rather than cut off from, their craft and knowledge of production. What could be gained from slowing down to the point of milling our own flour? Could it shift social thought and practice? How would it change the course of our day?

7 On the embodied versus disembodied view, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 92.

8 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003): 72.

9 For art historians flatness cannot help but evoke a certain modernist belief in the flatness of a two-dimensional surface as the defining characteristic of painting, as argued by Clement Greenberg in his 1960 essay "Modernist Painting."

10 Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination After 1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): 13.

11 William J. Brown, *American Colossus: The Grain Elevator, 1843 to 1943* (Colossal Books, 2013): 18.

Futurefarmer, Stijn Schiffeleers, preparing dough, June 2013





Conversation between Amy Franceschini and Claire Doherty

Monday 27th May 2013

Claire Doherty (CD): Amy, we came together here in Oslo almost two years ago for Slow Days - a series of discussions between artists, architects, curators and activists away from the formal surroundings of a conference room to think about how artists are contributing to particular places over time. What journey has Futurefarmers taken since then as part of this programme?

Amy Franceschini (AF): First of all, landing here I was surprised by the diversity of Grønland, as opposed to other Scandinavian city centres I had visited. Bjørvika Infrastruktur mentioned that they didn't want Bjørvika to be exclusive and so how do you create a bridge between new residents of Bjørvika and Grønland and "the city behind". I don't know if you can make that happen, but it was certainly a question in the back of my mind - how do you reach different cultures and subcultures in the city? What's the medium of engagement? Initially, Futurefarmers were invited to consider urban food production here, but after spending some time in the area, combined with a trip to Trondheim in Northern Norway with Stefan Ericsson, a Swedish botanist, a new trajectory was formed.

While accompanying Stefan in his field research, we visited a few villages that had community ovens. One was a combination of an oven, kitchen, slaughter-facility, freezer and fish-fryer station in Skylstad. It was really remote, but there was a magnetic energy radiating from the building, that drew us in. A group of men inside the building who were making fiskekake (fish cakes) said the space was a utility, but it also functioned as a church creating social cohesion and a gathering space. Coming back to Oslo, it became clear that an urban garden project had to come from the city or from a local constituency. So an interesting starting point for our presence in this situation was to think about a gathering point. The allotments at Herligheten have been successful in planting the seed of what might happen here, but every garden I've been involved with needs a shelter, an oven, a space to synthesize the ecology of acts in the gardening process to share with a larger constituency.

Futurefarmers
embark their
mobile oven
at Oslo Opera
House, June
2013.

CD: At Slow Days, gathering points emerged as one of the key artistic concepts about public space. The artists commissioned have come at this idea from very different points of view. Almost all the artists are outsiders, if not international then certainly outsiders to Oslo, so how do you produce those gathering points as an outsider? Do you think your outsider status is important here?

AF: I think the idea of a visitor or stranger might resonate with this situation. There is an openness associated with the visitor or stranger. In this openness is a loss of judgement that can make conversation within a diverse population possible: how to invite local people to be strangers to themselves, getting out of their own logic, is the challenge.

We have experienced a lot of resistance to this site from many different communities in Oslo and beyond. Our position is that it is more interesting to participate within this contention: to find gaps within the plans where we can 'knead' it. For example, when we took the Boat Oven on the water and disembarked at the Opera House, the security guards flocked to the scene to tell us boats were not allowed in this area, but when Lode and Stijn walked the boat out of the water, the boat was no longer a boat, but two men walking with a boat around their waists. Since walking on the Opera House roof is allowed, the situation immediately shifted, the security guards were confused for a moment and then shrugged, laughed and dropped their pursuit.

When I imagine a similar situation in San Francisco, for instance the Embarcadero redevelopment, I would approach it with even more criticality as a local, but here as a "visitor", I feel more open. What we do not know of this situation can be quite useful. For instance, we did not know what a "resident" might mean in this area of Sørenga – part of the harbour development. And in this 'not knowing', we enter the situation without pretence or judgement.

CD: There's certainly a great deal of assumptions about who lives here. A key question for Slow Space is who is this programme for. What is exciting about Futurefarmers' proposition for the Bakehouse in Sørenga is the emergence of a project that is critically informed and engaged but not cynical – productive through a genuinely inclusive proposition.

AF: The location plays a really important part in this process. At the moment, it is a construction site with mounds of various sizes of rock and sand. The landscape is shifting daily. It feels like you've landed on a different planet here – it's removed from the city centre and the Oslo Opera House. But perhaps the Bakehouse can operate as a periscope in some way – where you look into it but it gives you a view into somewhere else. What excites us is the way in which this temporary structure – this temporary Bakehouse – is already acting as a site for meetings: such as the People's Harbour group who are actively seeking to challenge the privatisation of this part of the harbour. On 14th June 2013, 110 boats will occupy the area of water in front of the Opera House for four hours and will have a gathering at the Bakehouse afterwards. The Network of GMO-free food held a Seed Action on the Bakehouse grain field and gathered at the Bakehouse to host statements by a wide range of organisations. Our question is can the Bakehouse be open enough to facilitate a wide range of guests and become a community resource? The starting point for Bakehouse should not be a place of critical agitation, but rather a "strange" place where convictions disappear because it is such a strange

place. This is where the arts come in: the magic and the amazement that stops the discussion and starts the dialogue in a Socratic dialectic manner.

The starting point for Bakehouse should not be a place of critical agitation, but rather a "strange" place where convictions disappear because it is such a strange place.

...what does it mean to be slow in this environment that is seemingly about progress and speed and convenience and innovation?

CD: Do you think in this kind of context an artist provides something that no one will have dreamt of? No one planned for a Bakehouse, after all.

AF: Anyone can dream of what to do here in Bjørvika, but enacting those dreams is another thing. There is a beautiful Brazilian folk song that says, "If we dream alone, our dreams remain a dream, if we dream together our dreams become a reality". Maybe there just has not been the time or place for people to dream together. What we hope to do with this temporary Bakehouse is to facilitate moments

where people can dream and imagine, where we can act as a mirror. In the design 'charette' we held on 18th June, it became quickly evident that there were many shared dreams, but that they were not aware of their shared dreams and interests. To see the connections emerge and become articulated through a participatory design workshop, our presence became peripheral and the collective imagination of the guests became the guiding light. Now the question is how to reflect this in the final artwork.

What became interesting in the 'charette' was the group's relation to the ovens. When asked to imagine the form, function and economy of the future Bakehouse, the oven served as an unspoken magnet for people. It was like a staple that grounded a site, such that people could imagine many variations of use around the oven. Jean Francois Blanchette expresses this beautifully,

"Far from being simply an object, the bread oven reflects a technique, a physical environment, a standard of living, a spatial organization, indeed a whole a way of life. It reveals a great deal about the perceptual and conceptual schemes of the people using it. The oven may therefore be considered a total cultural fact."

CD: Is the work informed by a sense of alienation, a sense that we have lost something?

AF: Our response to the Slow Space programme has certainly been informed by those questions of what does it mean to be slow in this environment that is seemingly about progress and speed and convenience and innovation. This is a space in which we can question the speed in which we make decisions or plan, or the relationships that are formed to make those decisions.

Maybe Bakehouse is not a search for lost community in a time of increasing speed or high stress without time tables and cell phones: maybe it is rather a search for a new way of community. In an urban, contemporary context Bakehouse is a pro-active site that can host an ecology of specialised communities - farmers, boat people, gamers, beekeepers - looking for new community in times of more diversified practice where there is room for the unsuspected, wondering and wandering, coincidence meetings rather than a stable old-fashioned community. Bakehouse is not where like communities meet, but more where difference can meet. It is not a de-programmed or deregulated place, but a non-decision, non-habit place.

Temporary bakehouse mid-build, May 2013



CD: Considering the urban planning going on in our cities, perhaps the kind of ‘magic’ has been evacuated from our public spaces, that sense of reverie, play and discovery? Futurefarmers began as a design studio, how did that story unfold to where you are now?

AF: ...For Victory Gardens I created a series of sculptural ‘props’ – pogo-stick shovel, bike-barrow – that served as invitations to imagine a fantastical gardening experience, but I also included another step of activating the tools and inviting people to participate in a new gardening experience – not only to imagine. Within the Flatbread Society there is a Rolling Pin Telescope, a Fire Bellow Flute and a Boat Oven. They all combine notions of function and fantasy that excite the imagination.

Speaking to your idea that the magic has been evacuated from our public spaces, this is what we are doing with the temporary site to allow for situations where people can design experiences with the provisional tools we have supplied. Rudolf Steiner’s idea of Situational Intelligence is relevant here: If you give two children a log and ask them to move it to the top of the stairs, they will figure it out through a collaborative ‘situational intelligence’. There is an air of trust that is lost in many contemporary public spaces. How can we regain this trust? We need spaces in cities where things are not pre-planned and heavily coded...

With Bakehouse, we have a pretty specific idea of a possible ‘ending’ but we are trying to stay true to the process to see if the form needs to change in response to what’s going on here.



Above: The dome oven affectionately known as ‘The Mothership’, May 2013. Opposite page: Right: Marthe Van Dessel recording for Radio Ramona, June 2013. Left: Mapping the grain field using sociometry, June 2013

CD: How can culture grow within a site that is so pre-planned?

AF: I learned a lot from Victory Gardens. Jared Blumenfeld, Director of the Department of the Environment, San Francisco, was instrumental in our decision to plant 15 gardens rather than the 500 the city wanted us to plant. What that did was enable us to work on a smaller scale, with individual families and to respond to their needs over a long period of time. Working in stages, on a smaller scale, over a longer period of time, can be a frustrating process for people because they want to know what the Bakehouse is going to look like. For us, working in this temporary mode in the early stage of the project allows for an intuitive process to unfold. It allows us to respond to the site and see where the project needs to go physically and conceptually.

We are very fortunate to be involved at such an early stage of the development of Loallmenningen. Many things are still in flux, for example, the ground we are working on this spring will disappear and become something very different in two years time. This sliding physicality is interesting: temporarily to appear and disappear like the mounds of dirt and rocks that move around each day is exciting. And in this moment of construction a garden community, a Bakehouse and a Flatbread society has emerged.

Slow Space, a new programme of public art projects, events and publications, is set to unfold in Bjørvika, Oslo's former container port, over the next four years. Challenging preconceptions about the forms and timespan of conventional public artworks, the programme promises a new approach to working with artists in sites of regeneration. Conceived as a programme that will unfold over time, through collective activity, annual events and interventions, often in close collaboration with existing organisations and artist-run and activist initiatives across the city.

Slow Space is supported by Bjørvika Utvikling.

About Situations

Situations is an award-winning visual arts organisation which commissions and produces projects by contemporary artists for public sites and situations. Established in 2002 and based in Bristol, UK, Situations has achieved international recognition for its programme of projects, publications and events which challenge preconceptions about where, how and when public art takes place. Situations is supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. www.situations.org.uk.

All photography Max McClure

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