Geir Svaba Birkeland
Abstract - Diploma of Architecture, Spring 2020
The Oslo School of Architecture and Design

Guide to the project; Content of the project: The box of architectures:

The moth trap of architectures (special designed light trap made for the project)
The Pre-Diploma Report (PROGRAM, diploma hand-in)
The two books of the pre-diploma/master course, “Where Eagles Die” - Catharsis VIII +
Lista Field Studio I (PROGRAM, diploma hand-in)
Abstract of architectures (ABSTARCT, diploma hand-in)
The posters of architectures (POSTERS, diploma hand-in)
“The book of architectures - Activism as a way to practice” (DIPLOMA PROJECT)
The portfolio of architectures (included in “the book of architectures”)
The next book of architectures (included in “the book of architectures”)
Visuals of box and content, posters and exhibition (diploma hand-in)
The music of architectures (CD, included in “the box of architectures”)
The stuff that documents this process of architectures (included in “the box of architectures”)
The link to the home site of the architectural practice of my architectures:
arkitekturbyggeriet-no.webnode.com/

Foundation:
“Life on life’s own terms”.

Topic of research:
“Personal inventory of hard-earned experiences and learning from all the shades of life I have lived”

Outcome:
Insight in myself in the new role as an architect, where to start a practice and what to work with, what to do, how to argument for the necessity of these projects, philosophy and ideology behind them, and also to please my ambition, egocentric needs and hope and dreams.

“The book of architectures - activism as a way to practice”
A diploma in architecture, by Geir Svaba Birkeland

The book contains a collective - a collection, of many of the topics I have gained experiences and knowledge about in my life, which is over fifty years by now. The objects or the fields of interest, or hobbies, or passions, or professions or else, are divided in smaller books, chapters, essays, poems, short or long comments, sayings and others; like song texts or statements. Visually there are numerous photos or polaroid of my own collections, new illustrations, drawings, maps, collages, diagrams and more. It also contains essays of “stream of consciousness” and “conspiracy theories”, which give me a free way of expressing the accurate atmosphere or mood I am in at that particular moment regarding the issue of the matter. (Like “When Leeds loses” - describes the thoughts that flying through my mind, just after my favourite football team loses).
Nothing in this book is meant to offend or harassing anyone, but I do write about anger, hate, pain, hurt, sorrow and loneliness, on the personal and self-experienced terms. And I have a hot temper and consider myself as a honest guy, so the book is “straight in your face” and could therefore be sensed or recognized as offending or hurtful to someone. I apologize for that in advance, and will advise one who feels hurt to consider the one who writes the lot and not “Judge a man until one have walked a mile in his shoes” as the poem “Judge softly” goes. This quote is on the first page in the book. Maybe not as a warning. Or not even as an advice. Or to try to prevent somebody from criticizing the content or me or the book or my diploma. Just as a manual to keep in mind, if the reader’s aim is to hang on and follow the amazing journey that this book, in fact, is about.

The work is a project of research, a personal inventory, into my own catalogue of experiences and knowledge. It is seen in the light of the new experiences learned at our school and especially to the new learning of my teacher and advisor on this diploma; Professor Rolf Gerstlauer and his master course “Body and Space Morphologies: Catharsis VIII - Acting and the Collective VIII + Lista Field Studio I” - and how I can use this in the upcoming practice as an architect, standing on my own feet.

I must practice activism on myself. Because I won’t have any job after graduating. And even if I got one, I probably wouldn’t take it, because I have this background as I’m telling about in the book, and that is also making me, as architect, as a colleague, as a human - a person, that have certain needs that maybe not be well matched with a busy lifestyle as an employee in any busy architectural office in the area around Oslo. Maybe it would have been better in North-Norway, or in a rural area somewhere else. I don’t know anymore, maybe time will tell. The way I see it now is that the need I have for freedom is more important than ever. I will not act politically correct or in proper manners just to please anybody, even if the pay is good. I need the freedom to breathe on my own. And to create on my own. And to act on my own. And to practice on my own. Preferably as I preach: “Walk the talk” not “talk the walk” - Even if I am now are writing, I am doing something. It is not talk. It is doing. It is walking. Not talking. Ta-da.

Activism. To see things in new light, with the new learning in mind. My background enriches me in many ways, and gives me knowledge that is self-experienced, knowledge that is valuable if I learn to use it right. I have to learn it because I have to balance the bad consequences my choices and way of life have created, they are horrible if I don’t find out how to use the experiences in a good way, too. Therefore I believe I have knowledge that is quite unique compared to others that have lived the common way, and stayed out of unnecessary trouble. Even if common people also have different experiences and challenges they have to deal with. And some even have a history even worse than mine. People live with various challenges and conditions that they either hide or have adapted to without making a big deal out of it. But the way I see my personal experiences is that they provide a potential to make different stuff, think differently and make a difference.

Could architecture for me be defined as making of books or music? Not conventional buildings? Do I have to do as all other architects do? But of course, as and old bricklayer, if
some client will have me to draw something to build for her or him, I have no problems with doing so. I would have loved it. But by now I have learned that architecture is defined by the architect, not necessarily by anyone else, or the past, the history, the conventional or the present trends. Not for me. Because I cherish the freedom over money and material things, and have done that all my life. I see no point in changing that now. In fact now it is even more important to be free than ever, I believe. No political party, no authority, no person, nobody owns me. Or my opinion, my honesty is one hundred percent from the deep of my soul. And I share it from a position which is critical and extremely important - my diploma in architecture - even if my honesty will cost me a failed attempt. Which I of course hope will not happen but, I have to be free and honest to express my work also here in the diploma work. Artistic freedom, also while passing through “the eye of the needle”.

I have never made a book before I started the pre-diploma, last semester, and I never thought I would do so either, consider my dyslexia. But here we are. Thanks to the teachers and my fellow students at our school who has provided me with self esteem, inspiration, knowledge, great company, feedback and comments and interesting and inspiring conversations and discussions. And thanks to ambition, dreams, anger, narcissism, pain, addiction, loneliness, dropping out, all the fields of interests in the content of the book, and all the love between humans, and to the animals, and the flowers, the birds, the butterflies and the fishes, the planet, and everything else there is to care for - they all are taking care of me in return and make it possible for this project to happen.

During the work of making this book, I have re-activated traumas and had some painful experiences during the four months it took to produce the writings. I have had dark hours while working with this. And it has been cold, dark and winter. And then the covid-19 restrictions arrived when the spring was supposed to bring light and positive thoughts back. To be honest the “home office” and isolation have been easy to handle for me, it is not very different from the way I usually live my life as the lonely person I have become. So despite the pain, I have believed in my project from day one. And I know it has been worth it. I have made the dream of writing a book come true, now it will not be that difficult to continue after graduating.

The songs I have created in the semesters of studying, are the songs I want to hear, no one else than me can make them. These are the songs I hear and sing and work on developing in parallel to the architectural projects at school. These songs have been recorded, just as unfinished demos, or just riffs, or parts of unfinished songs that are put together. But they are an important part of the architecture I present and I’m not sure if there would have been any architecture at all if I had not had this music - which I see as architecture. Therefore this music has to be on a CD. It could have been an album - a LP - but that is something closer to a finished product that belongs to the project called “The next book of architectures”. Which again is part of “The box of architecture” - the whole collective of different architectures I have developed over the last six years at school (“The portfolio of architectures” included). But most comes from the last year, participating in Rolf’s studio.

There are also some things I have left out because they are either too similar to something I have already described; like guns are similar in many ways to guitars, and like hunting is
similar to trapping and collecting and fishing. I am also an experienced gambler. And quite successful too. I used to earn to my living that way for some years. Therefore I could have written chapters titled “the architecture of the gun” and “the hunting in architecture,” and one about “the poker of architectures” or “the architectures of poker,” or both. Or even a chapter titled “the architecture of fighting” - but again, these chapters belong to “the next book of architectures,” the way I see them now. Because they look more interesting now, compared to when I last time considered to write them for the diploma book.

And so, my practice will be able to be an ongoing process, with projects going on all the time. Some are done at the moment, some are put in “The next book” and are ready to be worked on later. Some are in the pre-diploma, which is “The last book”. And all this could be collected analogue in “The box of architectures”. And it can be downloaded digitally from my homepage of my practice, that also has links to social media, a presentation of my business and all my pre-, ongoing- and next projects and the lot I define as architecture; music, books, birds, moth trapping and fishing, local traditional food, Leeds United, buildings in the archipelago of South-Norway, bricklaying and local craftsmanship and local materials, the idea to a local well functional and diverse society, that takes care of everyone in it, even the ones that do not fit in.

One of my life’s greatest passions is birdwatching. Over the first five years of my studies I have made all kind of architectures for them and the people, to live together in our society. I have made bird boxes, brick walls for the birds, bird towers for people and the birds, bird observatories for rich and poor people. I’ve designed them from a bigger local and national or even worldwide scale, down to detail in 1:5. And I’m not going to stop helping the birds, because they have helped me. But I got so bored of it – the designing for a proposal part - that I had to invent something different. Therefore, I’m happy for the last years work, which has been unpredictable and surprising. I have been able to work with the things that interest me the most. The work and the process are all about the journey, the excitement of creating a project that is living its own life. My job is to keep it alive and then sit on top and decide, compose, divide, choose, gestalt and curate. I imagine it’s like riding a horse or a motorbike. The outcome may always become something a lot more exciting than it was possible to imagine, when the first ideas started to develop, and all just was in the beginning.

And after all this is said, Norske Arkitekters Landsforbund (NAL), has today (20.05.2020) published a common political stand/statement for our profession, a list of demands to the government, which goes hand in hand, with much of the content in my project. I’m happy for that, looks like I’m not alone after all...¹

¹ NAL 20.05.2020; “God arkitektur for et bedre samfunn”
https://www.arkitektur.no/god-arkitektur-for-et-bedre-samfunn