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PRODUCTION OF ABSTRACT AND DIFFERENTIAL SPACE AT THE EKEBERG PARK IN OSLO

LIV BENTE BELSNES

Abstract

The Ekeberg Park is a sculpture and heritage park situated on a green hill close to Oslo city centre. It was financed by the CLRS Foundation established by the real estate developer and art collector Christian Ringnes. Since opening on September 26th, 2013, the park has sparked a heated debate concerning the way private capital has been allowed to influence a publicly-owned area, thus challenging the paradigm of Nordic planning as democratic and as paying attention to nature and human beings. The debate has focused on the alleged neglect of the natural landscape and cultural heritage, and the feminine conceptual theme of the art. The topics highlighted represent aspects of a common critique of strategic urban policy influenced by neoliberalism, questioning the public consensus on this. I investigate some of the discussion's many layers, using Lefebvre's concepts of abstract versus differential space (1991), and asking if the development process of the Ekeberg park involved a transformation from abstract space to differential space. Examining the park's relation to politics and aesthetics (Rancière, 2004), I conclude that although the park is aesthetically and ideologically part of an urban landscape of abstraction, steps have been taken towards creating a more differential space.

Keywords:

abstract space, differential space,
park, art, sculpture, neoliberalism,
public-private cooperation,
urban development

Camp Ringnes as memory loss. A sculpture park will devastate the Ekeberg forest as cultural heritage. Should private fixations in the mind of a very rich man dictate what Oslo and Norway are associated with? (...) In this parasitical time of age things repeat like never before. One of the most parasitical achievements is Christian Ringnes' project which revolves around copying Vigeland's success – and thereby make himself immortal. By using a smart strategy, which seems to have avoided democratic rules, he has seduced the better part of the City Council into accepting his "generous gift" of 80 titillating female sculptures in the Ekeberg forest (...) Soon foreign tourists will be able to first admire Vigeland's Proto-Germanic, big-thighed bridge acrobats and then take a gondola ride to the Ringnes-park where they will be hypnotised by Kate Moss' open crotch (Translation by author) (Witoszek, 2013). (See figure 7.)

The above quotation from the Polish Professor of Cultural Science Nina Witoszek serves as an illustration of the heated debate concerning the development of the Ekeberg park in Oslo. It also points toward the main reasons for which the project has been criticised; the way private capital has been allowed to influence a publicly-owned area; the alleged neglect of the natural landscape and cultural heritage; and the character of the conceptual theme of the art selection, which involves a dominant aesthetic of femininity. This paper takes its point of departure from the topics highlighted in the public debate, applying the notions of "consensus" and "dissensus" as presented in the theory of Jacques Rancière (2004). They represent aspects of a common critique of the kind of strategic urban policy that is influenced by neoliberalism, and which has often been accused of resulting in homogeneous processes and designs, leading to the similarity of urban environments on an international scale. I apply the concepts of "abstract space" (connected to the consensus of neoliberal urban policy) and "differential space" (based on dissensus expressed through self-management), which are useful when studying resistance to private capital in urban development (Lefebvre, 1991). In this paper, the following questions are investigated: *has the development process of the Ekeberg park engendered a transformation from abstract space to differential space, and if so, how?*

The Ekeberg area

In total, 25,5 hectares¹ of the Ekeberg area have been made available for development. The park is situated on a green hill south-east of Oslo city centre, as part of the districts of Old Oslo and Nordstrand (figure 1). The Norwegian landscape architects Bjørnbekk & Lindheim have designed a park where places of historical significance are presented next to renowned artworks in a publicly-owned area. This transformation was financed by the C. Ludens Ringnes Foundation (CLRS), established by the real estate developer and art collector Christian Ringnes.² The park

1 25,5 hectares = 255,000 square meters (255 mål).

2 Ringnes was awarded the title Oslo citizen of the year 2013 by the readers of Oslo's main newspaper, Aftenposten (Løken, 2013).



opened on September 26th 2013, and has subsequently been criticised by neighbours, activists, and scholars, who have raised their voices on the subject in the Norwegian media. The activist group for the preservation of the Ekeberg forest has been the most consistent protester. Yet only The Radical Socialist Party and The Liberal Party voted against the zoning plan when the framework for the future of the area was decided (City of Oslo, 2011b).³

Ekeberg can be accessed from the city centre on foot, or by tram, bus, or car. In the main entrance area, we find two Swiss chalets restored by CLRS for use as an exhibition venue, shop, café, and a house for children. The Ekeberg restaurant⁴ is situated close by, and is one of the most important Norwegian functionalist buildings to be preserved, also owned and renovated by Ringnes. The Ekeberg area holds signs of cultivation over a period of more than ten thousand years. The oldest investigated prehistoric settlement close to Oslo's stone-age shoreline dates 10,400 years back, and lies 130 metres above today's sea level (figure 2).⁵ The area also contains several traces of Iron Age farming, and around the year 1000 AD, Ekeberg played an important part in the establishment of Oslo as a city by providing the main access route from the south. The

Figure 1
Overview. The Ekeberg park is situated south-east of the city centre of Oslo, and is part of both district Gamle Oslo and district Nordstrand, on the border between inner-city east, and outer-city south.

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- 3 These parties belong to different sides of the left-right political spectrum, but they both attach importance to environmental issues.
- 4 Designed by the Norwegian architect Lars Backer and built 1927–1929.
- 5 Archaeological findings made due to the park project showed that human activity in Oslo went 2000 years further back than previously documented.



area was reserved for public use in 1889. The Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863–1944) also had connections to the area, and during WW2, the Nazi Party established an honorary cemetery there (Malmanger, Mikelsen and Geelmuyden, 2013, pp.37–104).

Now, thirty-six artworks are installed in the park (August 2017). In the villa garden, we find a group of sculptures portraying the female body by artists including Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Aristide Maillol, and Auguste Rodin. The rest of the park is a varying landscape of forest and open fields. Pathways connect the various parts of the area, and offer several access points from its surroundings. This is where we find recent and contemporary artworks by artists such as Sean Henry, Richard Hudson, Louise Bourgeois and Damien Hirst.

Theoretical framework

Keynesian discourse is still potent in Nordic political thinking (Bergsli, 2015, p.31). Yet over the past 30 years or so, urban policy has been increasingly subjected to the logic of neoliberalism: free markets, competitive relations, and minimal state regulation of capital. The result for Nordic cities has been an intensification of competition between cities for capital investment. Economic growth has become the dominant imperative for urban policy and planning. Public-private networking has developed into a well-established practice in Norwegian planning policy, and private developers are given a prominent role (Hanssen, 2010). These partnerships are particularly common in urban settings, and have been established to carry out projects replacing the overarching municipal planning regime in Oslo.

To date, perspectives on competitive policies and aesthetics have for the most part been treated separately. The former has been mostly discussed from a political economic perspective within the discipline of geography. The latter is mostly represented in art history and the philosophy of aesthetics. This study is motivated by the aim to create a more integrative conceptual understanding. To combine these perspectives, I apply the theories of two French philosophers in two key works: *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre (1991), and *The Politics of Aesthetics* by Jaques Rancière (2004). These theories offer frameworks where economic and aesthetic explanations can be combined to gain knowledge about the nature of the production of space for art in urban settings.

Figure 2
Section. The present sea level compared to the stone age sea level. The oldest investigated prehistoric settlement close to the stone-age shoreline in Oslo dates 10,400 years back, and lies 130 metres above today's sea level.

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From abstract space to differential space

Lefebvre's critique of modernist capitalism has also provided tools for the critique of postmodern neoliberal capitalism; his theory can contribute to shedding light on the consequences capital has on the people and society of today. Lefebvre describes an evolution, over a number of forms of social organisation, from "absolute space" to "abstract space". During this process, representations of space have tended to displace and dominate lived experience (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.48–52). The Australian scholar Chris Butler analyses Lefebvre's theory with regard to legal studies (2014), and highlights that the tendency towards the abstraction of space has increased since the advent of capitalism (*ibid.*, pp.48–49). Abstract space is defined here as the fragmentary, pulverised space created by the imperatives of a capitalist economy, and by the state's involvement in the management and domination of space (*ibid.*).

In this view, the totalising tendencies of abstract space have the inevitable effect of generating and intensifying internal contradictions (Lefebvre, 1991, p.39). They are mostly hidden within the flat visual field of currently conceived representations of space, and hence the conflicts they create often go unacknowledged. However, the fact that they are realised spatially means that they become, in effect, "contradictions of space" (*ibid.*, p.365). For example, the pursuit of capital accumulation and perpetual "growth" clashes with attempts to organise space for ecologically benign uses (Butler, 2014, p.53).

Lefebvre's analysis is always attuned to the potential for resistance to established forms of power, and the transformation of existing socio-spatial relations, and he promotes the goal of a differential space as a form of resistance to abstract space (1991, p.52). He bases the definition of differential space on the concept of "concrete utopia", the anticipatory striving towards possibilities that are latent within the present, through spatial practices, aesthetic forms, imaginary symbols, and political action (Butler, 2014, p.133). Differential space derives from the contradictions inherent within abstract space, and Lefebvre presents it as the outcome of a politics of *autogestion* (self-management), pursued through the assertion of two spatial demands: the right to the city, and the right to difference (*ibid.*). *Autogestion* describes a situation where a social group refuses to passively accept its conditions of existence, but rather attempts to master it (Gilbert and Dikec, 2008, p.260).

Lefebvre places great emphasis on the prohibitions associated with the juridical form of private property that spatially inscribes the boundaries and limits of everyday life (Butler, 2014, p.73). These forms of prohibition are instances of a more general "violence intrinsic to abstraction" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.289). In this account, abstract space gains a repressive efficiency that hides deceptively behind the pretence of "civic peace" and "consensus", while institutional power is exercised in the most coercive ways to preserve a "non-violent" social order (Lefebvre, 1991, p.358).

Art as a promoter of dissensus

The notion of consensus is also central to the French philosopher Jaques Rancière, as outlined in his book *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004). As with Lefebvre's criticism of abstract space partially on account of the consensus that prohibits disturbance, Rancière opposes what he terms the "police" or the prevailing order, and the consensus that characterises it. While Lefebvre suggests differential space as a replacement for abstract space, Rancière seeks a condition that he describes as politics as opposed to the police. He is critical of the consensus of contemporary politics because it excludes those who cannot inhabit political discourse and become a part of the political landscape. Only through dissensus is it possible to open space for equality and a different world, according to Rancière. Politics is thus concerned with revealing dissensus, and thereby exists in constant tension with the prevailing order of consensus (Rancière, 2004, p.37). Where this becomes relevant for my argument is that the prevailing order surrounding the development of the Ekeberg park is influenced by neoliberalism through the application of strategies for urban attractiveness.

It is through "the distribution of the sensible", where the sensible denotes what is perceivable by the senses, that Rancière connects politics and aesthetics (2004, p.12). Politics is aesthetic to the extent that it opens new ways of seeing, hearing, sensing, and perceiving. Art is therefore profoundly political, because it confronts our habitual perceptions and creates space for dissensus. In the realm of aesthetics, Rancière has analysed three different distributions of the sensible; the ethical regime of images, the representative regime of art, and the aesthetic regime of art. By arranging images according to their origin and their end or purpose, the ethical regime separates artistic simulacra from the true arts (Rancière, 2004, p.86). The representative regime liberates the arts from the moral, religious, and social criteria of the ethical regime of images, and separates the fine arts (imitations), from other techniques and modes of production (Rancière, 2004, p.91). The aesthetic regime abolishes the hierarchical distribution of the sensible characteristic of the representative regime of art. By promoting the equality of represented subjects, the indifference of style regarding content, and the immanence of meaning in things themselves, the aesthetic regime destroys the system of genres and isolates "art" in the singular (Rancière, 2004, p.81). The aesthetic regime is further connected to the notion of the emancipated spectator, whereby the spectator takes part in a mutual and equal relation (Rancière, 2011). Although the aesthetic regime has come to play a dominant role over last two centuries, aspects of the ethic and the representative regimes can still be observed today.

In sum, Lefebvre and Rancière are both critical of the limitations to social space caused by political consensus. Rancière offers a view of art as a promoter of dissensus, and thereby proposes its possible role in the

opposition of abstract space, to use Lefebvre's term. The Ekeberg case actualises these theories, since here dissensus is caused by the implementation of art in urban space. The Ekeberg park contributes to the formation of new urban space, inhabiting a conflict between political consensus and public dissensus. As such, it may challenge the neoliberal ethos as part of abstract space. In the following, I will investigate whether the dissensus caused by the art project has contributed to the emergence of differential space.

Public-private cooperation in the production process of the Ekeberg Park

The park development process took place within a context of public planning. The project was organised through a set of networks attending to different subjects in the process, as for example the artwork committee. This committee consists of two members from the CLRS, two members from the Oslo Municipality Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), and two members representing the Norwegian Sculptors Association. The entire process was overseen by a co-ordinating committee. It is worth noting that the protesters were not involved in the formal democratic processes.

Ringnes engaged the landscape architects in 2004. He wanted to exhibit his collection of sculptures portraying the female body, which he described as "the most beautiful thing we've got" (Blom, 2011). In 2006 he presented this idea to The City of Oslo, offering to cover the costs of the landscaping, operation and maintenance of the park, through CLRS, within a limit of NOK 300 million. Oslo City Council decided to authorise an assessment of the proposal the same year.

About ten percent of Oslo's protected heritage sites are found in the Ekeberg area (Slettholm, 2011). For this reason, most of the area is protected by the Cultural Heritage Act, which has itself been a cause of conflict. Still, the foundation was permitted to continue the planning process, provided that the concept included the heritage sites. The authorities required protection of landscape qualities, cultural heritage, and biological diversity. The protesters have since questioned the developers' ability to provide this protection, since the park is intended to increase the recreational value of the area.

Certain incidents that occurred during the preparation phase indicate that Ringnes accelerated the planning process by flexing his economic muscles. On January 8th 2009, Oslo City Council agreed on a sponsorship deal between The City of Oslo represented by DCA and the CLRS. The deal involved a commitment by the foundation to cover the costs of an introductory project to examine the possibility of a park. As a result, the municipality's impartiality has been questioned due to CLRS' financing of case management and material (Brække, 2011). Under the agreement,

Ringnes covers the salaries of DCA executive officers and operating costs up to NOK 1.8 million. This example does not represent illegal activity, but it reflects how citizens have different opportunities when in need of public services, depending on their financial strength.

The major gift as such is of course another example of Ringnes' economic muscles. The agreement states that the gift of NOK 300 million involves: NOK 100 million for a maximum of 80 artworks to be situated in the Ekeberg forest for 50 years, a NOK 100 million fund, where 2% of the annual returns will provide for the operation of the park for the same period, and NOK 100 million for the placement of sculptures, a pond, viewing platforms, and sales and hospitality venues (City of Oslo, Department of Cultural Affairs, 2011a). It is worth noting that the sculptures and the operation fund will remain under CLRS' ownership. In the agreement between the foundation and the municipality the following is stated:

It is important to maintain the impression that this concerns a gift to avoid the municipality's own regulations on tender obtainment when renting out the area. The negotiations with the foundation have been led with the aim of preserving the agreement as a gift. It is considered that the agreement will be encompassed by neither the law nor the regulations on public procurement. As a consequence, neither the municipality nor the foundation will be bound by the procurement regulations (Translation by author) (City of Oslo, 2011c).⁶

This document reflects how politicians and governmental administration might weaken their democratic mandate to create room for private investment. The Council represents an urban policy oriented towards strategic urban planning directed at inter-urban competition. In Norway, developers are given a proactive, constructive role, while local community agents have few institutionalised arenas for their voices in the early phases of any development, as mandatory involvement (such as public hearings, complaints) is to be found only in later phases (Hanssen, 2010). From the protesters' point of view, the Ekeberg park has an exclusionary character in environmental, cultural, and social terms. The public consultation resulted in 37 consultative statements, where several of these came from environmental organisations.⁷ During the political consideration on August 24th 2011, the majority of the City Council voted in favour of the project (City of Oslo, 2011b).⁸

The theme of The World in Denmark Conference 2014, at which this paper's argument was first presented, was "Nordic Encounters". Ringnes' project could be seen as one of several strategies to create a more attractive city, and as part of a new gift-oriented economy emerging in the Nordic countries. This phenomenon is exemplified by the gifts of The Copenhagen Opera (Haase and Nørgaard, 2006) and The Sven-Harrys Art Museum in Stockholm (Gudmundson, 2011), which both generated

6 The activist group reported the municipality to the police for corruption. They were investigated, but not prosecuted (Holen, 2012).

7 The Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature meant that the zoning plan proposal was not in line with the Diversity Act, the law that protects biodiversity. The Norwegian Ornithological Society called for a broader mapping of natural values, pointing out that the area is situated next to the Ekeberg hill nature reserve. The Outdoor Recreation Council for Oslo and Surrounding Areas stated that the zoning plan area is of regional, and partly national, natural value, and suggests that it be defined as an area of special consideration, in accordance with The Planning- and Building Act § 11-8 c. Further, The Heritage Site Society argued that the entire area ought to be listed as a heritage site.

8 The Radical Socialist Party, The Liberal Party, and one member of the Socialist Party voted against the zoning plan proposal, while the majority of the City Council, led by The Conservative Party and The Progress Party, voted in favour of it.

debates about private influence on public space. The trend of art as urban attraction is also seen in smaller Nordic cities. Borås Sculpture City is a public-private co-operation, where the implementation of sculptures transforms public urban space (Borås Stad, n.d.). The Circle of Art is a similar project in the town of Kankaanpää (Anttila, 2002).

On one hand, the Ekeberg conflict could serve as an example of Lefebvre's notion of contradictions in space, exemplified by the clash between capital accumulation and the ecologically-motivated benign use of space. On the other hand, this is not a typical example of financial growth, since the developer is not actually making money on the project. Although some of the protesters have been eager to point out Ringnes' financial interests, the park itself has actually run a NOK 34 million deficit during its first year (Tjersland, 2014).

Physical and symbolic connections with Oslo's waterfront

Lefebvre outlines three characteristic tendencies that simultaneously attach to abstract space – the orientations towards fragmentation, homogeneity, and hierarchy (1991). The latter concerns the tendency towards the hierarchical (centre-periphery) ordering of space; most relevant to this case are the seemingly contradictory tendencies of fragmentation and homogenisation. Fragmentation is manifested in the breaking down of space into discrete units that can be privatised and traded as commodities (Butler, 2014, p.49). Oslo's waterfront is currently undergoing a transformation process through which offices, dwellings, and leisure activities are replacing industrial purposes (figure 3). This reflects well-known aspects of the contemporary city, where image construction becomes important due to inter-urban competition (Harvey, 1989). Oslo is characterised by a trend of market deregulation and competition over attractive businesses, tourists, and tax payers. Globalisation and neo-liberalisation materialise through urbanisation processes and are expressed in the production of space, symbols, and architecture.

While the development of central transformation areas in Norwegian cities (Bjørsvika) can be seen as a response to the structural change from an industrial to a knowledge based economy, the focus on distinct urban qualities and city branding (Ekeberg) can be seen as the cities' strategic response to the emergence of the knowledge economy (Farsund and Leknes, 2010, p.15). The transformed areas are often the location for the city's modern image (ibid., p.19). Waterfronts are typical forms of the urban landscape where industrial business and ports have left attractive areas behind. Signature architecture is often erected in these spaces, such as The Oslo Opera House in Bjørsvika.⁹ The Opera will be accompanied by the central library and The Munch Museum. This area could be described as a packaged landscape designed for consumption (Bergsli, 2005). It could thereby be a result of what Lefebvre terms the tendency toward fragmentation.

9 By the Norwegian architectural office Snøhetta (2009).



For Lefebvre, “abstract space is not homogeneous; it simply has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its ‘lens’” (1991, p.287). This means that abstract space represents a homogenising tendency in contemporary cities, and that as a result they share an increasing number of common features. The application of the criteria of pure exchange value to space is a homogenising force that has the power to flatten out spatial diversity on a global scale (Butler, 2014, p.49). Bjørvika shares common features with waterfront projects internationally, owing to widespread entrepreneurial strategies (Bergsli, 2005). This trend is also visible in other Nordic cities, like Malmö, where the waterfront has undergone a similar transformation to achieve increased attractiveness (Dannestam, 2009). In contrast to the longstanding plan-led regulatory mechanisms that have historically characterised Denmark, the redevelopment of Copenhagen’s inner harbour was largely the result of a process influenced by informal governance mechanisms (Desfor and Jørgensen, 2004).¹⁰ Bjørvika thereby seems to participate in a homogenising tendency.

In 1933, the Oslo city gardener suggested a gondola to connect Ekeberg to the poor inner city eastern districts (Lindheim, 2014a, p.54). Now Ringnes has picked up this idea to connect Ekeberg instead to an affluent Bjørvika. Some of the municipality’s intentions concerning the relationship between these areas are described in the case for the city council:

The development of Bjørvika will cause the Ekeberg hill to be a natural nearby outdoor recreational area for new neighbours. The gift from the foundation helps to ensure versatile use of the area while it is also preserved as a recreational area. The donation contributes to the goal that Oslo will be a diverse, innovative and accessible cultural centre with art and culture for all (Translation by author) (City of Oslo, 2011c, p.11).

Figure 3
View. Bjørvika seen from Ekeberg (2015). Oslo’s waterfront is currently undergoing a transformation process, where offices, dwellings, and leisure activities are replacing industrial functions. This reflects well-known aspects of the contemporary city, where image construction is important due to interurban competition.

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¹⁰ Oslo is currently the Nordic capital allowing most high-rises, although the interest is strong in Stockholm as well (Iglebaek, 2009). Private property companies are the driving forces behind the development in both cities (ibid.)

This statement demonstrates that the park plays a part in a city-branding process. By connecting the two areas both physically and ideologically, Ekeberg relates to Bjørvika's tendency toward homogenisation. With the gondola scheme, Ringnes wishes to establish an "art triangle", tying the park to The Oslo Opera and The Munch Museum (Haram, 2010), thus representing a symbolic connection to cultural institutions of national and international importance. Although the park area continues to be publicly owned, it has undergone a process of privatisation through private capital for development and maintenance, and the privately-owned artworks. It could thereby be said to take part in the tendency toward

Bjørvika and Ekeberg seem to be charged with different natural and cultural values. Bjørvika is a clear example of how architects and planners shape the contemporary capital, while Ekeberg tends to be viewed rather retrospectively due to its historical depth. Still, Bjørvika contains well-documented archaeological traces of Oslo's urban origins as a medieval city.¹¹ Today's park may actualise Ekeberg as landscape in a new way where a link between the "native" and the "new" could appear. Ekeberg can thereby be said to receive fashionable features from today's waterfront. Bjørvika and Ekeberg seem to be developing a symbiotic relationship, where Bjørvika draws Ekeberg closer to the city centre, while Ekeberg offers a green alibi. There is a danger here of constructing an idea of Ekeberg as natural and native, and Bjørvika as cultivated and innovative. Such oppositions can be created to add a particular value to an area, but both areas could be described as landscapes, and both landscapes are cultivated. Ekeberg comprises forest, while Bjørvika is situated by the sea, both of which qualify as urban nature.

Scandinavia is often highlighted for its focus on, and respect for nature. Oslo was ranked third of thirty European capitals in the European Green City Index 2009, behind Copenhagen and Stockholm (Grundt, 2012, p.215).¹² Still, there has been a change in the Nordic view concerning urban development; nature should no longer just be preserved, but used for different purposes, and should be something the city has to offer (Kielgast, 2014). The woodland acts as a container for the art at Ekeberg, and the maritime milieu plays the same role in Bjørvika. Natural conditions might then take part as extras in the drama of other interests. The artworks seemingly play a similar part when Ekeberg is involved in these processes. Nature becomes a more aestheticised landscape element, and thereby ends up in the same division as the artworks themselves. This could alter perceptions of both landscape and art. The two areas could thereby be brought closer together as two aestheticised environments. At the same time, they could both be described as heterogeneous, natural as well as cultural spaces, and parts of one continuous landscape containing certain characteristics of abstract space.

11 This will become even more visible once the Medieval Park is completed

12 Two-thirds of the area within Oslo's municipal boundaries is designated forest, parks, lakes and rivers (Grundt, 2012, p.217).

Landscape shaped by use

Traditionally, landscapes have been defined by geographers as the products of interactions between sets of natural conditions and cultural practices (Antrop, 2013). Nature and culture both shape and are shaped by one another (Wylie, 2013). Oslo municipality clearly had the everyday use of the inhabitants in mind when it planned the transformation of the Ekeberg landscape:

The agreement provides a very generous gift to the city of Oslo. It makes it possible to preserve the Ekeberg hill as a green, widely available recreational area for a long time, while high quality art and cultural heritage is made available and free to the public. The donation represents a significant upgrade of the area and ensure versatility, while the area is preserved as a recreational area for current and future generations (Translation by author) (City of Oslo, 2011c).

This mode of thought is in line with the recent history of the area. In 1889, Ekeberg was politically assigned by the municipality as a public park, and thereby became part of an international and Nordic trend that is particularly well represented in Sweden (Lindheim, 2014a, p.52). It was claimed that access to fresh air would help to enhance the spiritual, moral and social well-being of the working class (Lindheim, 2014a, pp.50–51);¹³ the landscape could hence be said to have been shaped by the everyday life of local residents. What has happened now is that Ringnes (as a member of the economic elite), through CLRS and in cooperation with the municipality, has changed the appearance, as well as the use, of the area.

According to the municipality, the park had an annual visitor number of around 60,000 before the upgrade, but after a year the number had exceeded 1,000,000 (Tjersland, 2014). A poll taken by Aftenposten in 2011 showed that 52 percent of Oslo's population felt positively and only 27 percent negatively toward the park. Even so, people were the most positive in the western part of the city, with 60 percent positive and 21 percent negative, while the result for the local area was 45 percent positive and 40 percent negative (Vedeler, 2011). The combination of recreation, nature, and art increases attractiveness through a specific production of space, targeting the consumption of both place and landscape (Zukin, 1991). In the case of Ekeberg, this combination is supported by politicians, investors, and visitors alike, who agree on a shared vision of urban attractiveness. This may, then, underline the consensus characterising abstract space (Lefebvre, 1991) or the prevailing order (Rancière, 2004). Competitive policies can result in a reduced focus on the needs and wants of residents, because external capital is favoured (Amin, 1997). They occasionally result in conflict, and a politics of resistance (Harvey, 2000). This is the case at Ekeberg, where the most dominant group of protesters consists mostly of local residents. There are several examples of the inhabitants' reactions: demonstrations have been held, groups

¹³ This represented a wider social movement and was a bold priority at a time when the economy was tight (Lindheim, 2014a, pp.50–51).

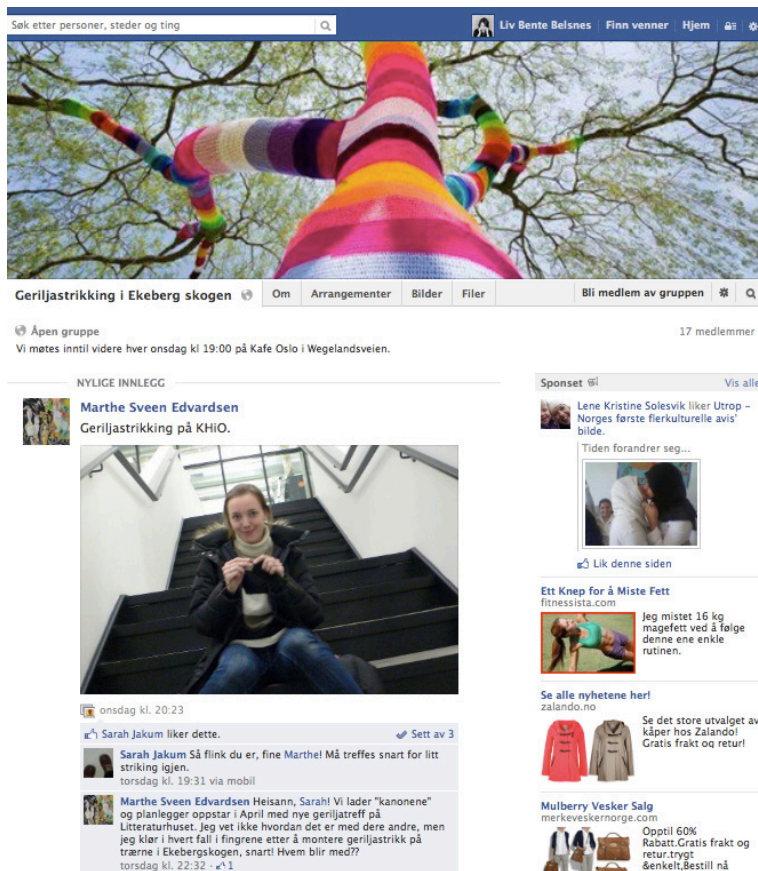


Figure 4
Guerrilla knitters. The Facebook site of the activist group for preservation of the Ekeberg forest 23.03.13, showing examples of the guerrilla knitters' production.
SCREENSHOT FROM FACEBOOK.

of guerrilla knitters have knitted clothes for the trees (figure 4), and some people have completely stopped using the area. The activists who fought to stop the park project claim that “this is the last natural forest we’ve got”. The most eager protesters lived in the woodland to protect it during the summer seasons of the building process, and they accused the politicians of trying to save “the rich guy” instead of the woods (figure 5) (Svendsen, 2012). The activist group, along with three other organizations, arranged a demonstration against the park on May 14th 2011. The internet has also been an important arena for protesters. One example is the satirical video made by the heavy rock band Black Debbath called No to the Wanking Path at Ekeberg (figure 6). The activist group also ran a Facebook site that helped in informing and gathering people quickly when needed. These forms of practice serve as examples of the self-management or autogestion proposed by Lefebvre as essential in resistance to abstract space and to the promotion of differential space.

Aesthetic cohesion has replaced concerns with social cohesion in urban planning (Sæter, 2005). Still, the Ekeberg protesters do not represent the suppressed groups often referred to in the literature concerning the right to the city (such as Sæter, Aure and Bergaust, 2013). Nordstrand is among the Oslo districts with the highest average gross income, not far from the average of the inner city western district Frogner.¹⁴

14 Statistikkbanken: <http://statistikkbanken.oslo.kommune.no>.



Figure 5
Protest. Activists camping in the forest. The activists who fought to stop the park project claimed that "this is the last natural forest we've got". The most eager protesters lived in the woodland to protect it during the summer seasons of the building process, and they accused the politicians of trying to save "the rich guy".

BY: LIV BENTE BELSNES

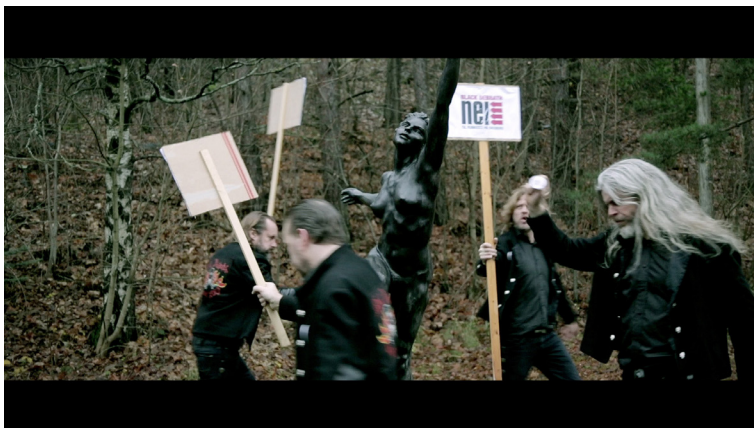


Figure 6
Satire. Still frame from the heavy rock band Black Debath's video for the satirical protest song No to the Wanking Path at Ekeberg (2012).

BY: L.P. LORENTZEN

This underlines the notion of Ekeberg as a part of the "west in the east" in a city which is historically and socio-economically divided along the Akerselva river, with the west as the most prosperous part. It would thus seem wrong to term this a process of gentrification. However, because of aesthetisation, surveillance, and increased number of visitors, the area has become less attractive to the drug-addicts who used to reside in the park. The "upgrade" mentioned in the quote above could thus be said to exclude segments of "the public". These are examples of how this landscape transformation has triggered the engagement of a heterogeneous group of people, while the group who now shape the area by its practice has actually become more homogeneous. The area has gained a more public character in terms of visitor numbers, but this underlines some of the contradictions inherent in increased cultivation.

Nonetheless, this resistance has had an influence on the result. Fewer trees have been felled, the maximum sculpture height and the extension of areas available for art have been reduced. In this sense, the practices

of the protesters could be said to take part in the production of the park, and by making use of the contradictions inherent in the abstract space of capital accumulation, they have suggested the contours of a concrete utopia, or differential space.

The conceptual themes of the park

Ringnes originally wanted the park to pay tribute to the concept of femininity through its art selection. He chose the theme in part to differentiate Ekeberg from the Vigeland park, but also because Oslo is home to the Nobel Peace Prize, and “many see peace to be a feminine trait” (Fabrikant, 2014). An information brochure reads as follows:

The feminine will be the basic idea and starting point for the selection of sculptures. The feminine will be expressed in various ways – with numerous aspects of the feminine character – portrayed through both concrete female depictions and abstractions of the feminine as idea. This theme will give the facility a special identity compared to other sculpture parks (Translation by author) (Balas, 2010).

Although the founders of the park aimed for a feminine theme, only ten of thirty-five artworks were actually made by female artists¹⁵ Further, the Ekeberg area has no obvious connection to femininity.¹⁶ This idea derived from Ringnes’ personal taste in art, as reflected in his collection of sculptures portraying the female body.¹⁷ The heated debate concerning the feminine theme could be said to reflect aspects of Rancière’s ethical regime: scholars and feminists have pointed out the paradox of opening a park with such a theme in the same year that Norway celebrates its 100 year anniversary for women’s right to vote. Art historian Ina Blom accused the politicians of promoting gender ideology from a time before women gained political rights (Blom, 2011). The psychiatrist Torunn Grønvik feared trauma for abuse victims (Hustadnes, 2011). In 2013, Nina Witoszek worried that Norway would portray itself as “the sex-addict’s nirvana” and classified the park as “Camp”.¹⁸ The Norwegian conceptualist Christopher Nielsen drew a parallel with Ringnes’ mini-bottle gallery, which has been designed as a brothel (Nielsen, 2013).

In tune with Rancière’s representational regime, the artwork committee discarded the better part of Ringnes’ collection due to its level of artistic quality, and new works were purchased. Following this, the park planners had curbed their emphasis on femininity by 2011:

The vision is that the park’s art, cultural heritage and nature shall form a unity that offers many experiences. The feminine is the sculpture park’s basic idea, and will form the basis for the selection of sculptures with varied expressions from different eras. The works shall be of high quality and adaption to the landscape is an important part of the expression (Translation by author) (City of Oslo, 2011c).

15 By August 2016.

16 The activist group revealed that DCA actually had been opposed to the idea in 2006, but that this had been exempted from public disclosure (Sunde 2011).

17 Two-thirds of Ringnes’ personal art collection was discarded by the art committee during the selection process. New artworks were bought and added to the park’s collection.

18 Camp is a politically or sexually provocative genre based on kitsch and vulgarity (Witoszek, 2013). See the introductory quotation.



Figure 7
Sphinx. The sculpture Sphinx portraying Kate Moss doing yoga, by the British artist Marc Quinn (2005) is an example of a controversial artwork. This sculpture is owned by Christian Ringnes, and sits in one of his buildings, Folketeateret in Oslo. It was originally intended by Ringnes to be part of the park's collection, but after a heated debate it was not included.

BY: LIV BENTE BELSNES

The strong focus on the feminine clearly decreased during the development process (figure 7). In 2011 the vision of the park was that art, cultural heritage, and nature should form a unity with respect for the “genius loci” (Lindheim, 2014b, p.64). This is reflected in the park today. The classical sculptures are placed in the villa gardens (figure 8). The rest of the artworks are mainly contemporary, and only half of the total number of artworks depicts the female body (figure 9). The project could be read as an expression of a societal cultural turn, where contemporary art plays the part of the communicator of Western values such as “liberal”, “open”, “experimental”, “innovative”, and “creative” (Holm, 2014, p.76). It seems that Ringnes has been rendered a collector of contemporary art by the artwork committee; a patron deprived of his vision of femininity. Now the area's history and biological conditions are included in the concept and presented in one of the villas.¹⁹ The overall attempt to unify several themes creates a complexity or heterogeneity.

One example of how history plays an important part here, is the re-establishment of the WW2 ceremonial site. This mainly consists of a double

19 The villas were not included in the initial plan, they became a part of the project after the municipality (Byantikvaren) suggested the inclusion of them.



Figure 8
Nue Sans Draperie. The sculpture Nue Sans Draperie by the French artist Aristide Maillol (1921) is situated by the villas.

BY: LIV BENTE BELSNES



Figure 9
Walking Woman. The sculpture Walking Woman by the British artist Sean Henry (2010) is situated along the main trail of the park, and is intended by the artwork committee to evoke associations of the strength of the Asian women of today.

BY: LIV BENTE BELSNES

set of stairs adapted to the landscape at the site of the former facility, though not a true copy. The landscape architects wanted a single stairway, but the Oslo Cultural Heritage Management Office (CHMO) insisted on a solution closer to the original design (Lindheim, 2014b, p.62). In tune with Rancière's representational regime, the actual shape of the design was considered important. This has further sparked a debate concerning cultural policy. The Norwegian history professor Øystein Sørensen²⁰ was critical, and underlined that refurbishing a Nazi memorial is a touchy subject, and that this is mainly a part of German, not Norwegian, history. Contrariwise, head of the CHMO Janne Wilberg claimed that this is an important part of Norwegian history, and that history that is kept silent is the most dangerous. She actually regards this as a site for freedom (Lorentzen, 2013). This is another example of how Rancière's ethical regime still is relevant today. The ideological connotations of the site are strong, and the potentially offensive aspects of the design came to dominate the debate, particularly those concerning the Jewish community and the fear of creating a meeting place for Neo-Nazis.

The emphasis on history is also enhanced by several site-specific artworks.²¹ The main attraction of the park, the combination of *Ganzfeld: Double Vision and Skyspace: The Color Beneath*, by the American artist James Turrell, is one example. Turrell has applied the hidden space inside a former water reservoir. In *Ganzfeldt* he experiments with the perception of light and colour. Sitting inside Skyspace, spectators have a visual connection to the sky through an open roof construction which appears in a pond placed on top of the reservoir (figure 10). The water offers connotations of the former function of the site. The protesters considered it unethical to prioritise the pond at the expense of trees, which constituted an important habitat for birds, a concern that actualises the ethical regime.

The Ekeberg Pavilion (2013) by American artist Dan Graham is yet another site-specific artwork (figure 11). It promotes the idea of heterogeneity through its double nature as both architecture and sculpture. The pavilion is erected in semi-reflective glass structured by a metal skeleton resting on the remains of a dancing pavilion built in 1907. These reflecting surfaces literally figure the fact that we are excluded, for they only reflect our own mirror image and reveal nothing of themselves, Graham argues (Alteveer and Wagstaff, 2014, p.11). This artwork underlines aspects of Rancière's aesthetic regime, such as the notion of the emancipated spectator (Rancière, 2011). This represents a shift from viewing meaning as inherent in the piece to seeing it as something which is created by the spectator while confronted with it. The pavilion could further be viewed as a materialisation of the problem of the state of consensus in urbanisation processes, through its oscillation between conditions of inclusion and exclusion.

20 Along with 21 other professors from various fields.

21 A form of art that emphasises the art-site relationship (Kwon, 2004, p.2).



Figure 10

Water. Pond on top of former water reservoir. The main attraction of the park, the combination of *Ganzfeld: Double Vision* and *Skyspace: The Color Beneath*, by the American artist James Turrell, is one example of site-specific artworks in the park. Turrell has applied the hidden space inside a former water reservoir. Sitting inside *Skyspace* the spectators have a visual connection to the sky through an open roof construction which appears in a pond placed on top of the reservoir. The water offers connotations of the former function of the site. The protesters considered it unethical to prioritise the pond at the expense of trees, which constituted an important habitat for birds.

BY: RAGNAR BENDIKSEN



Ekeberg allegedly inspired Munch's famous *Scream* (1893). The park therefore contains a viewing platform to commemorate the artist and the painting. In a piece of performance art, the Serbian artist Marina Abramovic invited 270 Oslo citizens to perform their individual screams through a frame placed at the platform (2013) (figure 12). An art film and a documentary were then created. Abramovic's goal was to allow the participants their own personal experience in connection with the site, something which accentuates the role of the emancipated spectator in a far more explicit way than does *The Ekeberg Pavilion*. The artworks related to Munch also seem to touch on other issues of the ethical and the aesthetic regimes. This can be illustrated by employing the American geographer Edward Soja's concept of spatial reductionism (1996). He poses the question as to whether we can and must re-interpret history and not take it for granted when we redesign our built environment (Soja, 1996, p.192), and he asks whether memory and historic preservation can reduce "the real-and-imagined power of lived spaces" (Soja, 1996, p.193). The material space is added value through contact with historical space in all three examples of site-specific art, even though the Munch platform and performance differs from the other two on one important point. There is no way of knowing that this was the actual spot where Munch gained inspiration for *Scream*. Even though all the sites contain several histories, this is a particularly good example of selective history.

Figure 11
Pavilion. The Ekeberg Pavilion (2013) by American artist Dan Graham is yet another site-specific artwork. It promotes the idea of heterogeneity through its double nature as both architecture and sculpture. The pavilion is erected in semi-reflective glass structured by a metal skeleton resting on the remains of a dancing pavilion built in 1907.

BY: RAGNAR BENDIKSEN



Soja sees the need for “a deeper understanding of contemporary dynamics and political economies” (1996, p.192). Perhaps that is exactly what is happening here. Spatial reductionism might be occurring not entirely due to historical space, but just as much as a result of creating an attraction based on the ideological construct surrounding Munch’s work. When it comes to the real-and-imagined-power of lived space, the imaginary suffers when the real is locked at this particular site.

Conclusion

Initially I posed the following question: has the development process of the Ekeberg park engendered a transformation from abstract space to differential space, and if so, how?

The expansion of the conceptual theme described above has materialised in spatial and aesthetic heterogeneity. It is helpful to question how this relates to a neoliberal planning regime. The neoliberal influence on this process is mainly reflected in the power granted to private capital by the municipality and the public-private cooperation. The park might, on one hand, have contributed to making Oslo a city with an increasingly homogeneous tourist-and middle class-friendly aesthetic, in line with neoliberal urban policy. On the other hand, the internally heterogeneous character of the park seems to have increased during the development process. If the aesthetics of the park had been left to the private devel-

Figure 12
Scream. Ekeberg allegedly inspired Munch’s famous painting *Scream* (1893). The park therefore contains a viewing platform to commemorate the artist and the painting. In a performance act the Serbian artist Marina Abramovic invited 270 Oslo citizens to perform their individual scream through a frame placed at the platform (2013). Here she performs her own scream. An art film and a documentary were created. Abramovic’s goal was to allow the participants their own personal experience in connection with the site.

SCREENSHOT FROM [HTTP://EKEBERGPARKEN.COM](http://EKEBERGPARKEN.COM)

oper, the spatial result would have been quite different. Competent people have influenced the end result through co-operative organs like the artwork committee, and have contributed to a more complex aesthetic.

This can be seen to exemplify some consequences of strategic urban planning caused by neoliberal influence. The Ekeberg park was clearly in need of maintenance prior to the recent alterations, but like many cities, Oslo operates with a tight maintenance budget. Private capital was therefore a welcome contribution to solving various public problems. In this case the public authorities have invited private capital into the planning process by accepting a gift. However, the consequences sparked a loud controversy concerning the developer's influence. The authorities then tried to make private actors adjust to the situation by making

In the Ekeberg park process, the political landscape seems to have emptied itself through consensus, which is characteristic of abstract space. However, the contradictions inherent in the way that art alters the material and ideological landscape have not remained hidden in representations. Dissensus has been voiced through processes of autogestion. This suggests movement from a state of "police" to a state of "politics", in Rancière's terms. These contradictions might thereby have constituted the basis for a concrete utopia of new possibilities for social interaction and commitment. Fractures have formed in the surface of abstract space, while steps have been taken towards differential space.

Perhaps this is a new form of urban policy, where protesters can influence the process and create adjustments in design, while democratically elected politicians side with private capital. This might indicate the contours of new democratic processes within the scope of neoliberalism, but it is important to consider the different agendas. Here the gain of the various actors is structured into formal processes and stands in opposition to the interests of segments of the general public. Recreation and adventure are attractive commodities, and the Ekeberg Park could be described as a new aestheticised recreational space in the city – a crystallisation of the recreational economy at the city's original waterfront.

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The Ph.D. project involves an investigation of the production processes of the Ekeberg sculpture and heritage park in Oslo.

