Article

Living Behind Glass Facades: Surveillance Culture and New Architecture

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Abstract

Transparent glass facades dominate much contemporary high- to mid-rise urban residential architecture. This article takes a closer look at life behind glass facades in contemporary surveillance culture. The aim is to illuminate how the material culture of contemporary architecture together with surveillance practices and technologies contribute to a remodelling our notions of the visible and the invisible. Whereas the architecture is determined by conditions and possibilities of what it means to be living behind glass facades, the novel *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* by the German author Lukas Hammerstein explores the complexities that this mode of living cause on a socio-psychological level. Through this dual track analytical strategy a complex set of connotations governing our understanding of visibility and invisibility will be uncovered.

Imagine yourself in any larger European city. You are in the touristic centre with quaint old buildings, shops and cafes on street level, the odd museum tucked into the dense urban fabric. You gradually move away from the throngs of tourists and shoppers and reach, often without having to walk all that far, one of the city's most recently developed districts, an area filled with new buildings, typically a mix of high-end dwellings and offices. These areas are, more often than not, built on sites that have been left over from the industrial period. They leave you with a very uniform impression caused by the predominance of one architectural aesthetic: tall, potent, freestanding buildings and an almost omnipresent use of glass and steel.

One of the main characteristics of this architecture is the tendency towards extensive openings into the interior spaces through large windows or even glass facades. It is an aesthetic which makes one think of the modernist architecture of the early twentieth century. It does so by simultaneously drawing on two apparently contradictory aesthetic expressions. On the one hand, the buildings evoke the utopian glass architecture which can be found in the drawings of the expressionists and in modernist icons by architects such as Mies van der Rohe. It is an architecture which is elitist and radical and has mainly been realised in office buildings in high-rise areas. On the other hand, they call on the general modernist reform credo of *air, light and sun* for a new residential architecture in direct opposition to the dense block structure of the traditional urban core. During the last two decades, this double aesthetic paradigm has become more and

more apparent and it is possible to talk of a new aesthetic trend in contemporary urban residential architecture, one which can be called an aesthetic paradigm of perceived visibility.

This article investigates the cultural effects of this aesthetic paradigm of perceived visibility. It aims to uncover the way in which the material culture of contemporary architecture takes part in a remodelling of our notions of the visible and the invisible as cultural categories. This ties together architectural discourse with concomitant theories of contemporary surveillance culture, the research topic with respect to which issues of the visible and the invisible are currently receiving most requisite and advanced attention. The main hypothesis of this article is that the observed changes at the aesthetic and material level take part in much wider current cultural processes of cultural re-orientation, and that, by investigating how the categories of the invisible and the visible are negotiated and represented with respect to recent architecture, deeply seated cultural processes can be illuminated. Three different modes of perception and engagement with the surroundings will be covered: the visual, the auditory and the tactile. The visual is of course the obvious entry point into issues of visibility and invisibility. Yet, we will show that the categories of the visible and the invisible should be understood synaesthetically. Other senses, in particular, auditory and tactile understandings of the environment, are thus equally vital components.

Architecture constitutes the ideal research vehicle for studying negotiations of the visible and the invisible in contemporary culture. As a cultural product, the architectural context envelops our entire body and engages our entire sensory apparatus at the same time as it brings to our attention spatialities ranging from the most private to the collective dimensions of the city. Buildings are places in which our shared cultural conceptions of such terms as the visible and the invisible are negotiated and lived. This also makes them places in which we are given the opportunity to adapt to and assimilate ourselves to the spaces generated by new technologies—for example, those of surveillance. When changes take place with respect to architectural aesthetics, they concern our entire lifeworld. One attempt to investigate the cultural effects of the new use of glass in much of recent architecture can be found in anthropological fieldwork like those conducted by the Danish anthropologist Marie Stender. Stender has explored the mode of living among the inhabitants of six different housing and office buildings in Copenhagen, all characterised by having highly transparent facades (Stender 2006a; 2006b). We shall return repeatedly to her findings, which convey important insights into contemporary urban life when it comes to the way in which people live in and with the architectures in question.

Despite the depth of reflection of social scientific methods involved in anthropological fieldwork, such qualitative studies are naturally tied to the local context in which they are carried out. The kind of silent cultural processes of reorientation that Stender helps to uncover do, however, concern an architectural phenomenon that is much more widespread than the Copenhagen material. It thus needs to be investigated with a larger, possibly global, context in mind. When it comes to the negotiation of visibility and invisibility in contemporary architectural culture, we have to work with processes that are difficult to grasp. They are nevertheless often brought to the fore and their complexities articulated in cultural products such as art, film, and literature. For this article, a methodology which interpolates the theoretical discourses from the humanities and the social sciences on visibility, transparency, and surveillance with literary analysis has been chosen in order to achieve a more general level of reflection.

The article will trace how life in a setting of an architecture of perceived visibility is portrayed in the novel *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* (2003) by the German writer Lukas Hammerstein. The main setting of this novel is a so-called *Glashaus* erected near Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, the completely bombed out district in the centre of the city and an area which used to constitute a dead zone dividing East and West Berlin. The novel explores the socio-psychological consequences of what it means to inhabit an architectural setting characterised by an extreme level of transparency. As a literary fiction the novel portrays not empirical facts but an elaborate fantasy about the living conditions in such an environment. Precisely due to its fictitious qualities it brings to light the depth of the fears and hopes that are implied by Stender's

informants. By cross-reading the actual experience of the architectural habitat with the in-depth literary exploration we thus arrive at a fuller understanding of the way in which living behind glass facades are engrained in the cultural imagination of contemporary surveillance societies and how this informs the way in which they become contemporary living spaces.

Figure 1. The old and the new urbanity meet at the edge of the medieval city of Copenhagen.

Visuality, Visibility and New Urban Architecture

In recent years, residential architecture in mid- to high-density urban areas has increasingly been influenced by an aesthetic paradigm that borrows from the modernist tradition in new ways. It is characterised by rather large-scale building complexes and an enhanced aesthetic sensitisation towards visible constructive elements and materials such as glass, steel and concrete. Another important characteristic is the particular use of glass, which often provides new, unexpected and extensive openings into the private sphere of the dwellings.¹ The development of this aesthetic trend can be located in most

¹ See Tschanz (2007).

European cities since the 1990s predominantly in areas that seek to attract new urban dwellers.² It thus is a development that has social, aesthetic and political implications. When it comes to the use of glass in these buildings it is possible to say that the symbolic and ideological underpinnings of this material rest on a double-sided and somewhat irreconcilable architectural heritage.

Much modernist residential architecture was informed by an ideological discourse of reform where the use of a particular constructional aesthetic, materials and planning was supposed to give rise to a new kind of human being and a new life dominated by *light, air and openness*.³ This symbolic investment in architecture was coupled with political aspirations of the twentieth century, where a given housing policy was seen as a concrete vehicle to ensure better living conditions for modern, urban citizens. These ideas underpinned much of mid- to high-density housing construction from the 1930s onwards.⁴ In this context the material of glass played an important role. It was seen as a key vehicle to create an appropriate frame for this new modern life, and by providing openings to the flats, glass allowed the modern human being visual contact with the surrounding environment. An environment, which was most often conceived of as a kind of ideal virgin nature, in particular in the Corbusian tradition.⁵ Even in social democratic housing schemes for the masses, glass was thus imbued with a symbolic and ideologically informed meaning, one which in principle exceeded the functionality of a given architectural feature as giving access to daylight and fresh air.⁶

The reference to the radical thinking of Le Corbusier emphasises another strand of modernist thinking on which the current development draws. That this is a tradition which is elitist yet carries universal aspirations can be seen not only in the work of Le Corbusier but also in the well known example of early skyscraper drawings by Mies van der Rohe. It is a tradition which has been realised in modernist icons and radical high-rise architecture, often with pure glass facades—an important realised example being the curtain wall of the Seagram building in New York. This brings us to the long history of notion of transparency in modern architectural culture (Rowe and Slutzky 1997), where transparency is most often seen as an uplifting concept, pointing to ideas of equality, openness and contact with nature. In early modernist architecture culture, the most extreme versions of a glass architecture are found in the expressionists' visions of a crystal architecture as manifested in radical drawings and with Bruno Taut's *Glashauss* from 1914 providing the most famous example of built work.⁷ The visions of the expressionists still find resonances in the work of contemporary figures such as Daniel Libeskind. However, in all of these examples, the issue of the use of glass in order to reach a high level of transparency rather concerns an ideological level. It has to do with how the architecture is envisioned and discussed rather than the actual appearance of the buildings.

² The sociologist Christian Schmid calls this paradigm the *new metropolitan mainstream*. It is one reflection of the efforts of the last decades to make urban centres more attractive to the middle class (Schmid 2004). That this is a theme which is considered significant also to the general public can be seen in a recent, polemical article in the Swiss edition of *Die Zeit*, entitled 'Land der Klotze'. The deck reads: 'Die neuen Gebäude in der Schweiz sehen inzwischen alle gleich aus: viel Glas, viel Platz, glatte Formen, flache Dächer. Die Richtung wies das Zürcher Architektenduo Gigon/Guyer. Aber ist das gut fürs Land?'. Teuwsen (2010). For the Danish case, see Christensen (2007).

³ Overy (2007), p. 9. See also Corrodi and Spechtenhauser (2008); Isenstadt (2007), p. 298; Colomina (1996), p. 234; Schivelbusch (1992), p. 126-7.

⁴ To a large extent, this understanding hinges on a Bauhaus logic and is coupled to the political statement of the Weimar republic of the 1920s: 'Jedem Deutschen eine menschenwürdige Wohnung'. See Lane (2007), pp. 260-262, Overy (2007). These aspirations are, of course, embedded in larger movements of the time, ranging from the simultaneous development of the industrialised European welfare states to cultural expressions of vitalism and more general changing conceptions of the body as well as architectural space. Corrodi and Spechtenhauser (2008), pp. 49-78; Giedion (1929; 2007); Pollak (2004), p. 171; Bek 1990.

⁵ See for example Le Corbusier (1986).

⁶ See Corrodi and Spechtenhauser (2008) and Lane (2007).

⁷ A literal manifesto of the expressionist thinking can be found in Scheerbart (1914). See also Bletter (1975).

Figure 2. The new city unfolds as an aesthetic manifesto—no people, no cars—as if they would distract from the monumental architecture of uniformity. Everything that disturbs the large surfaces and cubic forms is done away with.

When it comes to the material qualities of glass, it is an important fact that even a glass box will only appear completely transparent at particular weather and light conditions, and mainly at night time. In other circumstances, glass displays reflective qualities, which may rather make it look like a screen or even an impenetrable surface. Also when it comes to the current architectural tendency to use large amounts of glass, the negotiation of transparency mainly concern an ideological and discursive level.⁸ Following Anthony Vidler, the love affair of modern architecture with the idea of transparency has, however, always worked mainly on this immaterial level. As he writes:

Modernity has been haunted, as we know very well, by a myth of transparency: transparency of the self to nature, of the self to the other, of all selves to society, and all this represented, if not constructed from Jeremy Bentham to Le Corbusier, by a universal transparency of building materials, spatial penetration, and the ubiquitous flow of air, light and physical movement. [...] On another level, transparency opened up machine architecture to inspection—its functions displayed like anatomical models, its walls hiding no secrets; the very epitome of social morality.⁹

Also in the case of recent examples of glass architecture, the actual appearance of transparent surfaces is

⁸ Inquiries into the theme of transparency ties into a large interdisciplinary field, the precise boundaries of which it is not possible to draw up here. Key text are: Barnstone (2005), Fierro (2006), Mertins (1996), Ersoy (2007) and Oechslin (1997).

⁹ Vidler (1999, 217-218).

rarely an issue of complete revelation of a private interior or a direct connection between the interior and a natural landscape. At the same time, however, a perceived extreme transparency appears to be voiced over and over again by the people who live in these buildings and in the way this architecture is represented in cultural products and representations.¹⁰

A recent anthropological study includes a survey of recent residential buildings all characterised by having unusually extensive glass openings of the interiors. Among the reasons people list as advantages of this form of living is the way *transparency* provides a sense of *sociability*. The exposure of the interior of the house breaks the isolation of your home or office. You know that you are not the only one who has to get up early or work late (Stender 2006a, 12). A sense of community based on visibility seems to arise. As one of the informants says, 'It gives a feeling of being part of a larger whole, i.e. society' (Stender 2006b, 42). As a community, however, this does not develop through from direct, personal relationships with people on the other side of the glass pane. Being visible is nevertheless dominated by positive connotations, and we are as far away as we could possibly be from fears of being watched. The potential exposure to the gaze of others is even presented as something which the informants are proud of and value. When it comes to office buildings, these are, furthermore, discursively constructed as reflecting the transparency, openness and accessibility of a given corporation. It is a corporate version of the old surveillance dictum 'If you've got nothing to hide, you've got nothing to fear', and for corporations today it is vital *not* to look like you have something to hide.

To the informants in Stender's study, the visual openness provided by the new uses of glass in the design schemes reflects a set of values. The statements by the inhabitants indicate that they regard living behind glass facades as a conscious choice, which they feel sends signals about open-mindedness and tolerance. They place themselves in contrast to those who ensconce themselves behind curtains or plants, people they regard as being less accessible, old-fashioned, limited in their perspective on the world and even suspicious. One of the informants states explicitly that living this way signifies 'that you have nothing to hide' (Stender 2006a, 13). Living behind large glass windows and not closing your curtains is experienced as a reflection of one's own social skills, a progressive and open attitude which the informants use to position themselves in contrast to what they perceive as a more narrow-minded way of living in the detached houses of typical suburban areas (Stender 2006b, 22). They see their way of living as particularly urban—urban, in this context, becoming synonymous with being progressive and avant-garde. They regard themselves not only as a sub-culture, but also as an urban frontier, exploring new modes of inhabiting for the new millennium.¹¹

The depiction of the inhabitants of the *Glashaus* in Lukas Hammerstein's *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* eloquently captures this intricate play between the old living modes, from which the inhabitants want to distinguish themselves, and the attempts at finding new ways of inhabiting space. Hammerstein's book builds up a scenario that may very well have become reality in the present time of widespread recession. In the novel, the owner of a new high-rise building—in this case, an office building in the centre of Berlin—is finding it very hard to fill the building with tenants. As part of an innovative and rather curious marketing strategy, the owner has invited a group of people to live in the building for three months. The idea is that their presence in the building will attract real tenants. They would make it look like the building constitutes a sought-after work environment, thus avoiding the uncanny feelings evoked by thousands of unoccupied square metres.

¹⁰ Another example than the works mentions throughout this article can be found in the work of the German artist Isa Genzken. See Ekardt (2009).

¹¹ See also Garvey (2005) and Jacobs (2008).

Figure 3. The glasshouse looks like a solid surface in an empty space, even though we are close to the urban core.

The new relations between visibility and invisibility are radically evident in the description of the inhabitant Maria:

Maria has moved into the display window, in a way she lives publicly, to harden herself. [...] I was taken aback, she was impenetrable, clean surface, casually closed, everything pointed to the question of whether there was any activity inside. She considered herself to be open, radically open. She actually moved into one of the window displays, which are almost like enclosed spaces. She sleeps virtually in public, only nobody cares about it. (56)¹²

The description exposes the way in which Maria regards her public living as a conscious choice that embodies her so-called openness. However, the narrator's depiction questions this openness in a way that is interesting also in relation to the statements given by the actual inhabitants in Stender's study, whose claim for openness and tolerance also has to be contrasted with the way in which they behave behind their glass windows.

¹² 'Maria ist ins Schaufenster gezogen, sie lebt gewissermaßen öffentlich, um sich abzuhärten. [...] Ich war konsterniert, sie war undurchdringlich, reine Oberfläche, lässig verschlossen, alles zu der Frage treibend, geht da drinnen etwas vor? Sie selbst hält sich für offen, radikal offen. Sie ist tatsächlich in eines der Schaufenster gezogen, die fast wie abgeschlossene Räume sind. Sie schläft praktisch in aller Öffentlichkeit, nur daß sich niemand dafür interessiert'.

Figure 4. This is so despite the fact that we have to do with a potentially completely see-through architecture.

Whereas the passers-by do not disturb the informants in Stender's study, they describe how discomfort occurs if someone stands still and looks directly into the living room of the inhabitants—worse still, if eye contact is made. This transforms the sense of unison with the surroundings into a sensation of being a trapped animal on display (Stender 2006a, 14). It seems that being looked at is only perceived as desirable if it is not done for an extended period of time and if the observer and the observed do not confront each other in any literal way involving explicit social contact. This might seem surprising when taking into account that the inhabitants describe themselves as being particularly social because of the constant visual presence of other people in their daily lives. However, it seems likely that the narrator in Hammerstein's novel have captured an important point and is on to an explanation for this apparent contradiction when he describes how Maria's openness take the form of a performance—a role play which leaves the narrator to doubt whether he really knows her at all. Her habitat in the display window is described as a way of hardening herself; she becomes a sleek surface phenomenon, but not a possible interlocutor for human interaction.

Performance seems indeed to be a key term when trying to understand the mode of living taking place in an architecture dominated by an aesthetic paradigm of perceived invisibility. Stender documents how the inhabitants take great pleasure in commenting on the interior design of their neighbours. When the space, which is available for public scrutiny, is extended, these areas become display windows and part of public life in a way, which emphasises the performative aspects of interior decoration. These aspects are obviously at play in most households, but they become accentuated when your home is available to the public gaze even when you have not invited people into your home as your guests. It follows from the use of large glass panes allowing people from the outside to look into the building and observe the people

living here—and even if no one is looking, or if, in fact, the glass does not allow a great level of transparency, the *feeling* of being visible clings to the ways the inhabitants talk about their domestic situation.

Figure 5. In certain cases, the buildings reveals itself as part of a layered urbanity. There is no facade—no front and back—only stratified zones with different rules as to who occupies which space and in which the relation between who sees what constantly changes. This repeats itself inside the building in which the private conference rooms are visibly exposed—they are designed as large boxes that hang in the large atrium space—at the same time as they remove the participants from the possibility of being ‘listened in on’ which is the case in the ubiquitous open-plan office spaces in the building. However, the executives on the 9th floor can look down into all of the floors below from a narrow crack although they are not visible themselves and their floor is not accessible without permission.

Die 120 Tage von Berlin explores the issues of performativity¹³ and experimentation as modes of living insofar as the inhabitants’ lives in and with the building during the 120 days of their occupancy constitutes a very self-conscious kind of dwelling. The literary construction of the limited time frame creates an intertextual reference to Marquis de Sade’s *120 Days of Sodom* (1785) in which four wealthy men seal themselves off from the world in a castle for 120 days with a group of young women and men, who they expose to sexual abuse and torture. In *Die 120 Tage von Berlin*, the building the people inhabit is highly accessible, and the role-playing and experimentation is not of a sexual nature but circles around modes of

¹³ One might say that it plays with Goffman’s categories of *frontstage* and a *backstage* insofar as that which is performed to maintain a certain appearance in a given situation (frontstage) comes to dominate to a degree where it becomes questionable whether a backstage really exists (i.e. that which contradicts the frontstage and therefore is held back) (1971, 32-114).

living.¹⁴ In *Die 120 von Berlin* the people in the house take on the roles for which they are hired, yet these roles only pertain to a visual reference frame—as cultural acts they are empty. The *Glashaus* has to *look like* someone is working in it, and the inhabitants are careful, for example, to turn the lights on and off at realistic rhythms, day and night. They thus present the building to the city, in the first instance, as a screen that communicates through patterns of light and darkness. Only secondly does the communication work with the spatial depth of the building—when the inhabitants can be watched inside the building.

A pseudo tenant was willing to stand by the window, holding a pair of glasses, a telephone or a Dictaphone, without doing anything with it. He was able to receive a delivery every other day, a delivery which rarely contained anything, to receive and dispatch couriers, who transported nothing. (28)¹⁵

When it comes to visual surveillance, the experience of the people in the *Glashaus* thus seems to be a highly performative one. Yet, the self-consciousness in the way the inhabitants present themselves to the urban reality outside may also indicate another level of dealing with notions of the visible and the invisible. ‘They leave the house and return to their private lives, which is sobering enough. Warning. You are leaving the public sector’ (8).¹⁶ Thus describes the protagonist of *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* at the end of the 120 days as a transition from a public zone (the *Glashaus*) to the private lives to which the inhabitants are meant to return. The informants in Stender’s study do not have a limited timeframe and a so-called normality to return to, yet they ascribe to the same logic of seeing their mode of living as a state of exception, an experiment, and they measure themselves against a normality, which is defined by suburban living in detached houses. The novel articulates the questioning of the meaning of a category such as private life, which seems implicit in the mode of living of Stender’s informants by portraying domesticity as a public endeavour, a performance. The constant potential exposure to the gaze of others is a condition embraced by the inhabitants. At the same time, though, this total exposure leads to new impenetrable zones, new invisibilities. This was evident in the case of the character Maria in the novel and in the case of the uncomfortableness that arises for Stender’s informants when someone stares for too long into their home. However, what becomes apparent is also how transparency does not only have to do with the visual faculty, but becomes a phenomenon that involves the entire body and should also be considered with regard to other senses. A vehicle for understanding what kind of visibility—and what kind of invisibility—these kinds of transparencies in fact allow can be found by exploring the debates surrounding surveillance strategies and techniques in contemporary culture; what might be called surveillance society.

Sensing Transparency – Performance in the Panopticon

As an Enlightenment philosopher, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) worked from the assumption that visibility would reform the criminal. His infamous panopticon prison structure featured prison cells filled with light and placed along the inner curvature of a circular building. These cells could be seen by the warden at any time from his position in a watchtower in the centre of the building complex. While the prisoners would not know when they were being watched, they were forced to act constantly as if they were being observed at any given point in time. The idea was that they would, eventually, internalise the *panoptic gaze* and become able to re-enter society in a reformed state. The dictum: ‘if you’ve got nothing to hide, you’ve got nothing to fear’, repeated by the inhabitants of the buildings in Stender’s study, can

¹⁴ The reference thus emphasises the state of exception as a narrative fuel for the story, placing it in a literary tradition going back to Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (1350–53).

¹⁵ ‘Ein Pseudomieter war bereit, am Fenster zu stehen, mit der Brille oder dem Telefon oder dem Diktaphon in der Hand, ohne etwas damit anzufangen. Er war imstande, alle paar Tage eine Lieferung anzunehmen, die selten irgend etwas enthielt, Kuriere zu empfangen und auszusenden, die nichts transportierten’.

¹⁶ ‘Sie verlassen das Haus und kehren in ihr privates Leben zurück, das ist ernüchternd genug. Achtung. Sie verlassen den öffentlichen Sektor’.

thus be taken as the ultimate internalisation of the disciplinary capabilities of visibility in a given architecture. By implication, potential exposure equals security, sociality and a morally superior position.

However, in contrast to the panopticon prison where visibility is one way, because the warden can observe the inmates at any given time, while he remains invisible to them, the habitants in the *Glashaus* can observe the observers, and the self-disciplinary potential goes both ways. Equally in the anthropological material, many of the inhabitants express that they feel it is those who are looking into their flats who should feel embarrassed (2006b, 29). The power relation is constantly interchangeable, and one informant describes how she waves at people who she perceives as staring into her living room for too long (2006a, 14). The exposure of the interior of one's flat may also result in attempts to standardise appearance. Stender documents how many inhabitants of these types of dwellings feel entitled to have an opinion about the interior decorating of other people in the apartment block, particularly when this is an obvious part of the external appearance of the house. An example is curtain design, particularly if this detracts from the overall aesthetic appeal of the façade (2006b, 31).

Figure 6. Everything is potentially visible, but it seems as if the inside is as empty and abandoned as the space which surrounds it.

The disciplinary effects of the panopticon are thus not totally abandoned in favour of the feeling of pleasure involved in the opportunity to constantly display yourself and the interior of your house to a perceived audience. However, as described above, being looked at is only perceived as desirable if it is not done for an extended period of time and if the observer and the observed do not confront each other in any literal way involving explicit social contact. This might seem surprising when taking into account that the inhabitants describe themselves as being particularly social because of the constant visual presence of other people in their daily lives. This indicates the development of a new set of social boundaries and

rules, causing even those outside the glass windows to modify their behaviour and take precautions so as not to be considered invasive. As an informant describes, she tends to walk in a large circle around her neighbours' windows, in order not to feel 'that she is walking directly into their living room' (2006a, 15).

A domestic setting does not, of course, correspond to a confined prison cell where the delinquent has been deprived of his rights to privacy and a room of his own. When it comes to the recent architectural paradigm of visibility, the scene is the living rooms of well-functioning citizens, deliberately embracing a way of living publicly—by means of visibility—even when they are within the four walls of their own home.¹⁷ The sociologist Thomas Mathiesen revisited the panopticon from a theoretical point of view in 1997, emphasising in his analysis the development of mass media. He suggested that the panopticon should be regarded alongside the *synopticon*, in which it is not the few who watch the many, but the many who watch the few. These tendencies have only increased since 1997 with the present media situation, where we find a plethora of reality TV shows and docusoaps in which ordinary people expose themselves in the hope of being seen and becoming famous. Artist, curator and theorist Peter Weibel interprets these developments as the panoptic principle's transformation into 'a pleasure principle' (2002, 218). His argument is that 'new forms of exhibitionism and voyeurism have formed under the new conditions of the gaze in the technical age' (ibid.). Moreover, media cultures such as those mentioned here make the population less likely to oppose surveillance measures installed in their lives for political or security reasons. As he writes, 'instead of punishment, surveillance becomes pleasure' (219). It is in this development the new transparent architecture in domestic areas can be seen as taking part. Looking at the phenomenon of webcams, Hille Koskela finds that:

In most cultures it is considered 'normal' that you do obscuring gestures in order to protect your private life. You close the curtains when it's dark outside and light inside. You don't appear publicly if naked or in underwear. You don't allow anyone to see your sex life, unless you want to make pornography. In this respect, it is a radical act to install a camera that shows your private life to an unknown audience. (Koskela 2004, 206)

She interprets the webcam—now an inbuilt feature in most laptops—as a device useful for acts of 'empowering exhibitionism' (207). With webcams, people take charge over the way in which their lives are represented—turning (daily) living into an identity project. Although the obvious differences that exist between the mediated representation of a webcam and life behind a glass window need to be taken into consideration, there are apparent similarities.¹⁸

Reading the aesthetics of the recent architectural culture of visibility in conjunction with the current Web 2.0 situation of the many watching the many, we can begin to see the ways in which visibilities and invisibilities are negotiated in new ways, which brings about new modes of relating to a given material context, also in our physical engagement with the environment that calls on other senses than the visual. Interestingly the experience of transparency in *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* is portrayed as a highly physical engagement with the surroundings:

He fell in love at first sight with the house with the endless office suites, with the vast rooms not yet divided by partitions, the cool stone, the smooth glass, the tidy corridors, the grandiose emptiness. It happened to everybody who lives here. We pay homage to

¹⁷ This is a development, which Deleuze has pointed to in his revision of Foucault's conceptualisation of disciplinary societies. He explains that in contemporary, digitally wired 'societies of control' (Deleuze 1992), control is no longer confined to clearly demarcated institutions like the prison, the school and the hospital, but spread pervasively throughout our lives.

¹⁸ See also Fausing (2006).

the void, we go in and out without briefcases, serve no time–punch machine, undergo no inspection, everything is very different from what the architects envision. (20–21) ¹⁹

Figure 7. The building exposes its depth at night.

The stone and glass are ascribed qualities, which are tangible and tactile—they are ‘cool’ and ‘smooth’. These people’s lives in and with the building during the 120 days of their occupancy constitutes a very self-conscious kind of dwelling. This is so, both in terms of their consciousness that they are potentially being watched, but, as the narrator points out in the quotation above, the make-believe situation of the kind of dwelling we encounter in *120 Tage von Berlin* also involves a certain subversive potential in terms of the physical dimensions of the building. Life here is significantly different from what was intended when the building was conceived at the drawing table. We are dealing with a form of dwelling that is explicitly defined as a playful endeavour associated with the pleasures and the feeling of being at home, as sought after by any urban dweller. Hammerstein describes people who use the building primarily as a dwelling and not as an office—even though it was not conceptualised as domestic architecture from the outset. This makes the situation a sharpened version of what takes place in so many settings today such as

¹⁹ This and the following translations from *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* are our own. ‘Er hat sich auf den ersten Blick in das Haus mit den endlosen Bürofluchten verliebt, in die riesigen durchgesteckten Räume noch ohne Zwischenwand, den kühlen Stein, das glatte Glas, die aufgeräumten Flure, die grandiose Leere. Allen, die hier wohnen, ist es so gegangen. Wir huldigen der Leere, wir gehen ohne Aktentasche ein und aus, bedienen keine Stechuhr, sehen keine Revision, alles ist ganz anders als es die Architekten träumen’.

the new neighbourhoods which Stender has explored, where the steel-and-glass aesthetics also dominate housing construction and where the inhabitants regard themselves as belonging to an *avant garde*. Even in the negative formulation of the above quotation ('we go in and out without briefcases, serve no time-punch machine, undergo no inspection'), it is clear that the inhabitants are simultaneously abiding by the rules of the house and extremely conscious of the fact that they are performing a part.

The inhabitant Spur incarnates the kind of dwelling taking place in the house. She is introduced as a somewhat peculiar figure, a kind of archetypal tomboy hacker, working mainly during the night and with super hero-esque qualities. Despite these qualities, which lend a strange fictitious feeling to her character, she certainly makes her concrete mark on life as it takes place in the building.

Spur landed in the Glasshouse, because she is curious, neither on the run, nor in search of something, just like that, one of many to be attracted to the glorious nonsense radiating from the house. Already after one day, moved through the corridors as if she had been born in this place. No one is born here, we are only pretending this to be the case. Tonight Spur will get up and play her role, like everyone else here. (11) ²⁰

The character Spur is not only taking part in the general, somewhat exhibitionist, self-presentation to potential surveillers. As a consequence of her sometimes dubious transactions over the internet, Spur is subject to a much more traditional kind of surveillance. As a story-in-the-story, we are reminded of the golden days of espionage during the Cold War, events for which Berlin was, of course, the very epicentre. As we learn, Spur is careful in the way she allows herself to be viewed by the authorities: 'The Berlin police received, by request for administrative assistance, the task to put her under strict observation, only the poor guys did not know what to look for' (180–81).²¹

The surveillance under which Spur is placed is not merely visual, but activates other categories such as the auditive. This is particularly so when the intelligence agency of the German government, the 'Bundesnachrichtendienst' (BND), begins tapping her on their 'tapping machine' (180), a practice typical of the surveillance culture of the Cold War period and above all characteristic of the GDR, where the state would literally listen in on the lives of ordinary people.²² Eventually the surveillance even becomes tactile: 'One day they forced their entrance with hard knuckles' (181).²³ The auditory faculty and the concrete physical presence of police officers who go through Spur's things manifest themselves in the text in a way that casts a shadow over the playful embrace of surveillance embedded in the housing experiment. It points to the more serious implications of the movement between states of visibility and invisibility in terms of security and crime prevention, and situates the fictional *Glashaus* in a larger societal framework.

The novel portrays a type of domesticity which plays with visibility and invisibility, but—as the case of Spur shows—concerns issues of much wider relevance. The utterances by Stender's informants provide evidence that part of the appeal of life behind the glass façades is the feeling of community and sociability, which is brought about by being able to see and be seen by other people at all times. The

²⁰ 'Spur ist im Glashaus gelandet, weil sie neugierig ist, weder auf der Flucht, noch auf der Suche nach was, einfach so, eine unter vielen, die von dem herrlichen Unsinn, den das Haus ausstrahlte, angezogen wurde, die sich schon nach einem Tag auf den Fluren bewegte, als wäre sie an diesem Ort geboren. Niemand ist hier geboren, wir tun nur so. Heute nacht wird Spur aufstehen und ihre Rolle spielen, wie jeder andere hier' (11).

²¹ 'Die Berliner Polizei bekam, per Amtshilfeersuchen, den Auftrag, sie unter strengste Beobachtung zu nehmen, nur wussten die armen Kerle nicht, wonach sie suchen sollte'.

²² This has recently been depicted in the film *The Lives of Others*, which features auditory surveillance prominently in the narrative construction.

²³ 'Eines Tages fordern sie mit harten Fingerknöcheln Einlaß'.

housing experiment in *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* also links the inhabitants to the rest of society. What takes place inside the house has effects and resonances outside the house.

In fact, Spur's understanding of how people, on an abstract, almost metaphysical level, find their place in the world has to do with the way she sees herself as situated in a larger network. This network is very concrete, it is marked by the tactile qualities that appear at different points of contact: 'It does not depend on education, but on practice and experience and concrete life, contacts and network, and Eros and flexibility, on the power of the good old instincts' (46).²⁴ This very concrete, material production of human quality in and through networks can also be traced in the way in which the overall project of living in the *Glashaus* produces a concrete sociocultural effect: 'For one hundred and twenty days we have produced the false glory of success, the smell of work, the aura of added value, efficiency and safety, the precious breath of normality' (95).²⁵ Surveillance is, in this case, not conducted with an eye for abnormalities, but constitutes a search for normality, a quality which Hammerstein suggests can be sensed and smelled—despite the fact that it is, peculiarly enough, merely pretence. On the surface, therefore, everything is the way it is supposed to be—and *thus* worthy of notice. In this way, the disciplinary effect of the panopticon and the empowered exhibitionism intermingle.

This intermingling of discipline and exhibitionism is perhaps best embodied in the integration of ubiquitous computing in the physical environments: the intercom system that provides means of communication with those outside the building wanting to enter as well as with the other inhabitants of the housing complex, the motion sensors which switches on and off the light depending on whether it detects activity, or the cat flap that reads the microchip embedded in your pet's neck and keeps unwanted cats out of your home. In the meeting with digital technology the synaesthetic experience of the built environment opens itself to being traced and documented, which adds to the panoptic as well as the exhibitionist effect.

In *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* the character Spur is always leaving concrete markers in time and space for her followers to pick up on:

In any case, she left behind traces. 768 phone calls with the tri-band mobile phone. Faxes from around the world at any time of day in any world at all times of night. Credit card usage created a network of its own beauty on the world map and on the wall in the office of the federal investigators. (155)²⁶

As Hammerstein writes, digital data is a reality of today's society from which no one can escape.

The biggest danger is that the human being no longer is in control of his or her personal data. Companies gain a lot of power through the knowledge that they collect about people. Get a new phone number, take out a loan, and you will not be able to fend yourself from flighty offers. If you cancel your mobile phone contract you will not receive them anymore [...]. This is not paranoia, but a healthy fear. (194)²⁷

²⁴ 'Es kommt nicht auf Bildung an, sondern auf Praxis und Erfahrung und konkretes Leben, auf Kontakte und Netzwerk und Eros und Flexibilität, auf die Kraft der guten alten Instinkte'.

²⁵ 'Hundertzwanzig Tage haben wir den falschen Glanz des Erfolgs produziert, den Geruch der Arbeit, die Aura von Mehrwert, Tüchtigkeit und Sicherheit, den kostbaren Atem der Normalität' (95).

²⁶ 'In jedem fall hinterließ sie Spuren. 768 Telefonate mit dem 3-Band-Mobiltelefon. Faxe aus aller Welt zu jeder Tageszeit in alle Welt zu allen Nachtzeiten. Kreditkartennutzungen legten ein Netz von eigener Schönheit über die Weltkarte and der Wand im Büro der Bundesfahnder'.

²⁷ 'Die größte Gefahr ist, dass der Mensch nicht mehr Herr seiner persönlichen Daten ist. Unternehmen gewinnen sehr viel Macht durch das Wissen, das sie über Menschen sammeln. Besorgen Sie sich nur einmal eine neue Telefonnummer, nehmen Sie einmal einen Kredit auf, und Sie werden sich nicht retten können vor windigen Angeboten. Kündigen sie mal Ihren Handyvertrag, Sie werden keine mehr kriegen [...] Das ist keine Paranoia, sondern die gesunde Angst'.

In particular, through the character Spur, it is shown how the digital traces we leave behind become part of the way in which other people make notice of us. They expose her and provide evidence against her for the police. But in *data space*, new types of invisibilities and new ways of subverting the exposure and creating fake personas may also arise: ‘credit card payments, mobile phone calls, ATM withdrawals could create a wonderfully chaotic tracer on the maps of the investigators, a movement profile of dense quality, an existence of a luminous mediocrity’ (212).²⁸

This suggests that not only can no one escape the *Glashaus*, but also that even in this environment new invisibilities are born. We leave traces and expose ourselves consciously or unconsciously, even when we are not behind a glass window.

Figure 8. The blurred communication with light is used as a conscious strategy. But how does it feel to be at work on a dark November afternoon behind the blue light? Are we dealing with a new understanding of urbanity—how connections and cohesion can be understood and communicated—not symbolically as in previous power structures, but as a concrete light polluting manifestation that says nothing more than: we are here!

Conclusion and Perspectives: Living in the *Glashaus*

We know the high-rise as a backdrop for exploring the relation between visibility and invisibility from films such as Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) and, more recently, as a site for surveillance in the film *Red Road* (2006), which features the rundown 1960s Glaswegian high-rise complex Red Road as its

²⁸ ‘so konnten Kreditkartenzahlungen, mobile Telefonate, Bankomatabhebungen eine wunderbar chaotische Leuchtspur auf den Karten der Fahnder erzeugen, ein Bewegungsprofil von dichter Qualität, eine Existenz von leuchtender Durchschnittlichkeit’.

primary setting. The easy access to monitoring our neighbours through the glass facades of contemporary housing architecture calls for a reconsideration of life in these settings. Working from the assumption that aesthetic renditions such as the ones we find in film, art and literature provide a productive approach to understanding the types of domesticity at work in contemporary architecture employing the material glass in extended ways, we have turned to Lukas Hammerstein's *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* (2003).

In this novel surveillance is allowed on multiple levels—ranging from invisible and unnoticeable surveillance to performative behaviour and threatening acts of surveillance; conditions which the individual cannot avoid when relating to and dealing with living in an urban environment. However, as indicated by the title, the novel *Die 120 Tage von Berlin* is also a story that goes beyond the house itself. It is a story about the city of Berlin, about the kind of urbanity that is today's reality and with which the new architectural culture of visibility is intimately interconnected.

The novel thus pierces right through the questions raised by Stender's anthropological fieldwork and indicates a series of issues of wider, contemporary relevance. The aim of this article has been to try to tie this marriage between a particular domesticity and a particular architectural aesthetic to changing conceptions of how we inhabit everyday architecture in a culture pervaded by surveillance. Whereas the architecture buildings reveal conditions and possibilities as given by the buildings themselves, Hammerstein's novel explores the complexities that these modes of living cause on a socio-psychological level, complexities which places the responses that Stender collects in her anthropological fieldwork in a wider context.

Through a dual track analytical strategy we have uncovered a complex set of connotations governing our understanding of visibility and invisibility when it comes to the consideration of how we materially inhabit new domestic, see-through architecture. Our approach itself thus cover new inter-disciplinary terrain. We have shown how visibility carries a spectrum of connotations—from the disciplinary potential of the panopticon to the conscious embrace of visibility as an empowering and normatively desirable quality. Furthermore, the state of being invisible is evaluated in new ways, ranging from being deemed utterly suspicious (you have something to hide) to the subversive empowering potential we find in Spur's performative games with the intelligence service and even in Maria's elusiveness.

These seemingly contradictory conceptions of visibility and invisibility exist side by side and are not mutually exclusive. They point to what is going on in the changing architectural manifestations of our built environment, which are given articulation by the people inhabiting them and writers using them as fictive environments. They can thus be seen as a reflection of the contemporary cultural conditions of what it means to be an inhabitant of a surveillance society, a situation we embrace with ambiguous feelings.

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