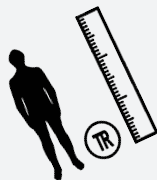


Tiny Research 02: EPA Tractors and The Model Mindset



What the EPA-Owner Always Knew About Architecture
but Never Got To Tell Because You Were Too Busy
Making Plans



17 year old Wilma Lundin being handed gift-
bucket for winning "Northeastern Skånes
Nicest EPA-Tractor". Photo by Sofia Åström
(2023)

Who?

Architects will and should aim their curiosity at fields that are seemingly disconnected with the building industry. This could be natural sciences, urban cultures, the entertainment industry, or even science fiction. This architectural curiosity relates to the architect-as-anthropologist, but more importantly so it entails an element of identifying with all different kinds of builders, actors, owners, or processes. In the following essay the builder we will be identifying with, is a Swedish teenager in a downtuned hyperslow vehicle referred to as an “EPA tractor”.

Why?

The question that we need to keep in mind, to take this investigation beyond merely wikipediaic pursuits, is not what EPA culture is or how the EPA tractor developed through history. Nor is it how the EPA vehicles are used or how they are downtuned to follow the Swedish legislations. When we investigate EPA culture in the framework of “CAR TUNING FOR ARCHITECTS”, the central question that we should constantly return to is simply; why is this for architects? The car tuners don't care about us. Why should they? We are the ones who worry and care about them, and urgently want to near us their approach to the material world. The architectural fascination with car-tuning has some similarities with the architectural fascination with art; through investigating we hope to gain a more playful relation to the built environment, and maybe gain an excuse to get a vacation from being an architect.

When we look at EPA culture, the EPA tractor itself and its development from the early postwar years up until today, there are two central themes that have relevancy for the architect: 1. Exploiting loopholes in the law and 2. The limited time of ownership. Both of these aspects are inherent in the EPA culture.

In the following essay, we are going to take a closer look at these themes, mainly focusing on how temporality reveals itself as a built-in component of the car, and how this inherent time-limit of ownership, is something we can implement into architectural thinking. But before we dive into the limited time of the temporary car, and the model-mindset of the EPA owner, we shall first look at the legal history of the EPA culture.

WIP: EPA Culture and Loophole Opportunism

[WRITE SECTION ABOUT THE HISTORY AND LEGAL ISSUES SORROUNDING EPA CULTURE]

Limited Time Ownership

Since we now have developed a common understanding of the history of the EPA culture, let us now try to understand how the mindset of the EPA owner must conform to the limited time car ownership.

Since an EPA tractor is a type of car that teenagers are allowed to drive before the legal age to drive fully featured vehicles, and since the maximum allowed speed of EPA tractors is so limited, that no one would voluntarily choose to stay in this slowness once faster options are available, the ownership and use of an EPA tractor occupy a very limited timespan in the life of the EPA owner. Once the owner turns 18 the EPA tractor is suddenly a vehicle that can be left in the past, commonly sold off to an eager 15-year-old, ready to explore the Swedish roads in 30km an hour. The 18-year-old will naturally move on to a “real car”, and the days of EPA enthusiasm will remain a nostalgic part of adolescence along with parental restrictions, fake ID's, and weekly team sports activities.

The EPA car is the training wheels for adulthood, and can thus be understood as a substitute, a model or even a simulation of grown-up life. This simulation has a beauty to it, since it is car-ownership stripped of practicality, responsibility and even the most fundamental aspect of car-culture: speed. The EPA thus becomes a model of the car, a fantasy about speed and a dream about adulthood. The temporality of ownership makes the car an ideal expression of both an immediate life-state and simultaneously of a dream of something to come. This is the beauty and the ambiguity of the EPA; it is both eternal and temporary.

EPA-Thinking or “Driving the Model” The architectural model has much in common with the EPA-tractor: The model is also an expression of a current ideal, and simultaneously an image of something to come. A dream. The architect can know this about the model, and dive into the theoretical implications of the model's relation to the habitable building, or the architect can simply shy away from such humanistic endeavors and use the model as a tool for planning “the real thing”. Where the EPA-owner sets themselves out from the architect is in the simple act of driving for a while. Taking ownership over the model, the dream, the imagined future. Cruising.

So how can the architect “drive the model”? To get closer to this question we are now to take a leap of faith away from this theoretical armchair approach and ask the retired model makers of buildings and cars, if they can tell how they once drove slowly around in an idea, before leaving the ideal behind to steer into the realms of the adult world.

WIP: Questions for Previous EPA-Owners and Previous Model Makers

- What is your name?
- When did you last see your model/EPA?
- When did you first get your first car/build your first model?
- Are you still interested in building and driving?
- Do you know where your first build is now?
- Do you remember driving your first car/model?
- What did it feel like? What does it feel like to drive now? (If you still drive cars/drive models)
- Do you think there is a connection between your first car and the life you live now? And if so, can you describe some of these similarities? If not, can you describe some of these dissimilarities?
- Is there anything you want to add?

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