

Where the Salmon walks up the Staircase



Reflection

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Before starting my graduation studio I was already working on my honours programme, in which I investigated aesthetic agencies and object-related practices in allotment gardens in my home town in Karlsruhe, Germany. This topic stemmed from an overall fascination of mine towards the world of objects and how we relate to the constitution of our surroundings to these non-human actors. Throughout the process of this project, I started venturing deeper into the realm of ontology as a lens for perceiving these practices. As this project is part of the landscape track I was motivated to investigate the architectural implication of these thoughts further in my graduation project.

My aim from the beginning was to create a very personal approach, my choice for a studio thus fell on the Explore Lab, which allowed me to create my own brief through an open-minded exploration of a field. From the start, I was very interested in theoretical research, stemming from the previous experience of texts raising my awareness of this topic and in consequence revealing many intricate processes around me.

The starting point for my graduation was for me a personal reconsideration of architecture as a practice. My interest moved towards rendering it as an ontological assemblage of bodies, constituted by a wide range of actors. By doing so I aimed to reveal certain notions of liveliness in the field of architecture, moving beyond the picture of built objects. My aim was to examine certain concepts, how they would relate to specific places and what a materialisation of the found connection could then be. Coming from the field of crafts it was certainly an important factor for me to work with various materials and methods throughout the process of graduation, from writing to model making, drawing, photography and more.

With this in my mind, I went on my field study trip around the area of the Upper Rhine plain, reaching from Karlsruhe to Basel and into the Alsace region in France. In this period I was heavily drawn towards the rural and the forest. The visit allowed me to reflect on the conceptual notions I was working with and relate them to actual places and practices. I was particularly interested in the entangled modes of being to be found, where landscape, other-than-human and human actors co-constitute their conditions of existence. One place fascinated me the most and it became the site I would then link my following project: An abandoned paper factory in the Black Forest.

My further research was entirely connected to this site. From here I started a conglomerate of mappings, to investigate the space further. These spaces were not necessarily meant as an empirical analysis, but more of a practice-theoretical foray. What struck me the most in this period was how the engagement with the method itself and the matter I worked with (which was gathered materials from the factory) allowed again for another perspective on my topic. This bricolaged and tactile way of working on my project in return changed my thinking about my site and what I would want to do there.

At this stage of my project, I finalised my theoretical approach and worked with three notions, with which I aimed to reach a new holistic understanding of architecture. The first notion I am working with is Cosmos, which mainly describes how life itself needs to be seen as a channelling of cosmic potentials. This allows for the perception of inanimate entities or objects as lively, sharing the same ontological footing as us humans. This was an important step to understand how the notion of lively architecture needs to be understood. Secondly, The notion of Bodies allowed me to leave the distinction of human or other-than-human behind and take the actors more equally into account. Here it became even more important to me how the concept showed me how bodies constantly are extended through other entities and how the notion of the individual needs to be questioned. It is the exchange of affects between entities that are crucial to their becoming, which would ventrally lead to a reconsideration of architecture as less as a morphological whole and dissolve into a net-

work of affects, how these are gathered, complicated and expressed. Lastly, the notion of Memories investigates how memories are surpassed between entities, reaching from the genetic code and ontogenesis to information that is stored in the environment as epigenetic memories and finally to the question of how we relate ourselves to our environments through technicities which leads to a consequential change in our mode of being. This allowed me to reflect differently on technological aspects of my project. It first blurred any distinction between technology and nature and additionally showed me how to keep in mind how technicities might affect other species.

With these notions in mind, I approach my design with the aim to form a radical and holistic project that would relate these three fields to each other. To relate my theory part to my design I thought of the actors to be found on my site and looked for internal connections and relations between these that might lead to certain events to include in my project. During this period I then explored my project on three levels of scale: a route, the site and the characters. By jumping back and forth between these levels of scale I aimed to weave my narrative stronger together. As my site is very big, the danger of getting lost in it with the work was high. To remain focused I thus worked smaller moments along the site. By doing so it became easier for me to form this wholesome unit of cosmological forces, various bodies and their affects and memories inscribed into environment and technicities. Although I aimed to limit myself, the notions allowed for a wide realm of thought to roam around in. It also made me question of inside and outside differences or what the affects of water could be and how to integrate them into my project. These two fields became thus the main motor for the architectural translation of the theory.

In my design project, I thus aimed to combine three functions that all relate to my approach in different ways: a garden of discard, a laboratory of knowledge and a home of many. In this programme, I wanted to form an inclusive way of making architecture and also challenge each of the notions of the programme as such. With the garden of discard, I wanted to question the notion of what we perceive as a garden and conceptualise a garden as a space that emerges from the discard. The laboratory of knowledge is meant to highlight the importance of how engaging with matter also directly leads to the emergence of meaning, more concretely meaning that I aimed to question the notion of a laboratory itself and if this could be implemented in a more public sense. Lastly, the home for many is meant to create inhabitable spaces that allow for unpredicted changes and a large number of different users, furthermore working on the notion of what we perceive as comfort in architecture.

Coming from the practice of working with practical means in the theoretical part of my project, I also included this way of working into the design strategy by going from collaging prints and gathered materials to literally cutting buildings in my design, opening the up and inverting inside and outside. But also the literal gathering of materials then found its expression in the design, in the form of a harvest of building materials and their reuse in crafty and affective ways.

In conclusion, I would say that the main challenge during this project was mainly to find an appropriate way of working that allow for a fragmented approach, but also allows me firstly not to get lost in the expanse of the project and secondly to present my project in a clear and consistent way. Nevertheless this semester, I have surely found an approach to the architectural practice that I would consider personal and that allows me to implement my interests and preferred way of working such as crafts.