



Furtivity as a Counter-Narrative to Neoliberalism

Elodie Fabre - Research Plan

«I understand that fleeing, pure freedom, the invisibility that would arise at the heart of the panopticon, are the most powerful fantasies that our prison-liberal society can produce as an antidote for our imaginations.»

Alain Damasio, Les furtifs

Research plan - Explore Lab 2022
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PROBLEM STATEMENT

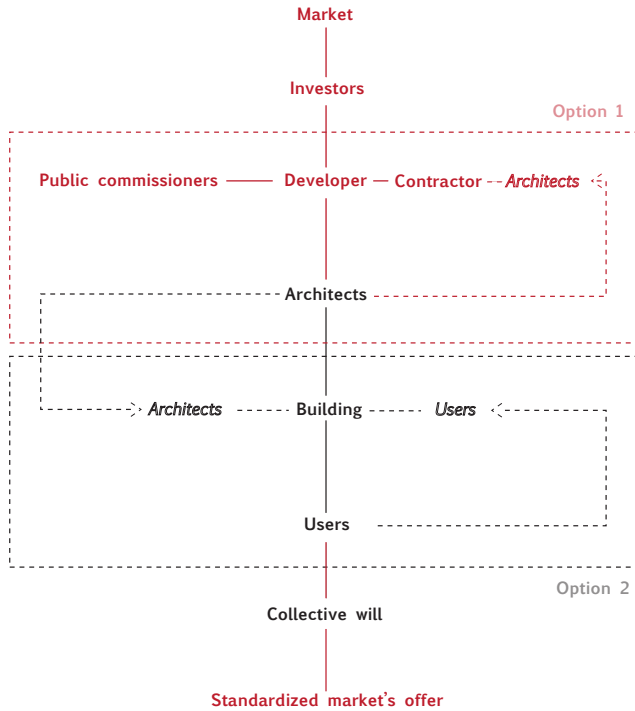
My fascination for this project lies in locating the cracks and failures of the neoliberal system, to develop a new, empowering way of living, furtivity.

Last year, I wrote my thesis on the architect confronting neoliberal processes, through the study of « d'architecture » magazine articles, from 1980 to nowadays.

My objective through this thesis was to understand the schemes of actors involved in the building industry since 1980 and the rise of neoliberalism (in France), and what was the fate of the architect within these networks. During this period, it seemed like the work of the architect went from mainly public projects to a privatizing real estate sector. For the public eye, the architect is still responsible for the quality of our built environment, but its practice evolved through neoliberal prerequisites like competitiveness and speculation. The architect seemed then divided between producing architecture as a commodity and designing for the « public good ».

I tried to understand why it didn't seem like the practising architect had the social responsibility that we get taught in university for instance. Using actor-network theory, I was interested in the « organisational backstage » of architecture production. I believed that through mapping the actors of the building industry, we could regain some awareness of the systems creating our built environment. The thesis concludes with either a way to embrace or disrupt the system, as an architect, to regain some social responsibility.

A. Scheme, transformation of the role of the architect, becoming a developer or through citizen-based processes.



¹ Foucault, M. (2010). The birth of biopolitics, lectures at the collège de France 1978-1979. Picador.

² Gilles, D. (1992). Postscript on the Societies of Control. October, 59, 3-7.

³ Damasio, A. (2019). Les furtifs.

Ever since I am interested in the empowerment of the architect's profession and the question of our « social responsibility ». As the research went along, I came across notions like biopolitics², society of control³ or behavioural economics and I became fascinated with these overarching power structures that appeared to be « ruling our lives ». If I can make the naive statement that architecture reflects society, what is then the involvement of architecture within these control systems? If it is involved, how can architecture transform the narrative towards the empowerment of the population?

«We can no longer take a step without being traced. There is like a parliament of machines that decides behind our backs. We are ruled by algorithms. But we never decide on their criteria! We do not discuss the program, nor the trade-offs they will make for us. These are black boxes. It makes us dependent. The system manages us.»³

First, I focused on the notion of neoliberalism as the ideology that the free-market system, as a self-regulating, spontaneous order, is best suited to allow « individuals » to flourish in other social and political realms⁴. As Dardot and Laval stated in: *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society*, «At stake in neoliberalism is nothing more, nor less, than the form of our existence - the way in which we are led to conduct ourselves, to relate to others and to ourselves. »⁵ This system has the surprising capacity to create and transform its own participants, that follow the game without knowing its rules. As neoliberalism stands on the idea that the complexity of the world today does not allow individuals to understand or apprehend the system. Studying topics like surveillance capitalism⁶, I realized how a huge part of the neoliberal system lies in controlling and foreseeing our behaviours.

Understanding these aspects made me wonder, how and where can I act as an architect to disrupt the neoliberal control system. But also, what kind of productive intervention can be designed to empower citizens to take their response-ability on their surroundings? And simply, what kind of way of life could that be?

Cynthia Fleury and Antoine Fenoglio in « *La Charte du verstholen* »⁷, develop the concept of furtivity, as a way to live « a good life » hidden from the radars of our surveillance systems, whether they are technological or social, compared to a panopticon. The alienated subject is then empowered through furtive tactics of living, to act with response-ability but also to live a more qualitative life through his or her environment. Furtive living use cracks and weaknesses within the system as spaces to transform our vision of the world, as places of generativity of a new future.

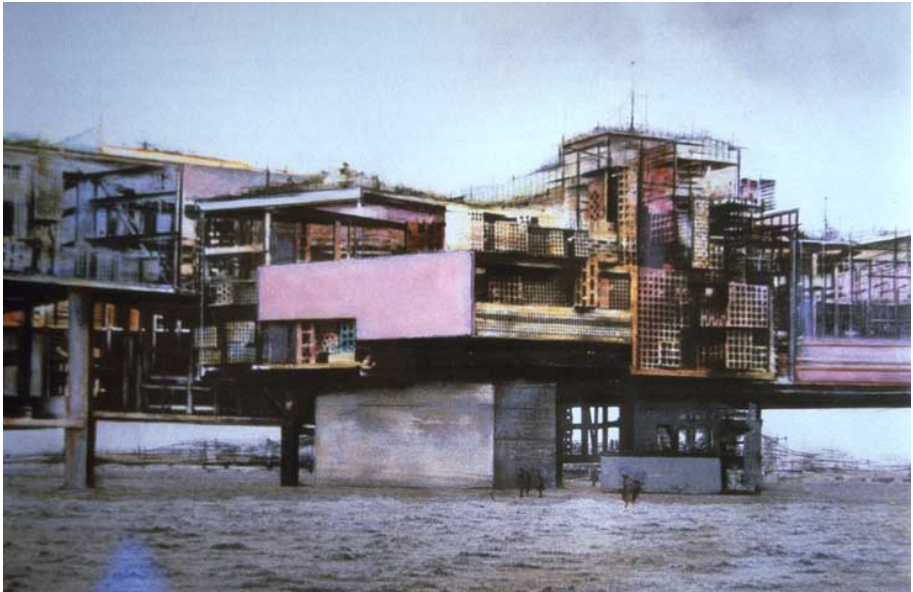
4. Gilbert, J. (n.d.). 'Neoliberalism' and 'Capitalism'—What's the difference ? <https://jeremygilbertwriting.wordpress.com>.

5. Dardot, P., & Laval, C. (n.d.). *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society* (Verso Books).

6. Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism, the fight for a human future at the new frontier of power* (Profile book Ltd).

7. Fleury, C., & Fenoglio, A. (2022). *Ce qui ne peut être volé, charte du verstholen* (Gallimard).

Furtivity, as an architectural concept, would enable me to create a citizen-empowerment infrastructure.



B.
Nieuwenhuys,
C. (1959).
New Babylon.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

FURTIVITY AS AN EMPOWERMENT TACTIC

Furtivity, camouflage, care and response-ability

Alain Damasio in *Les furtifs*, a science fiction novel, develops a concept of furtive beings, living on the edge of a highly controlled technological system. This concept was taken over by the philosopher Cynthia Fleury and the designer Antoine Fenoglio in « *La Charte du Verstohlen* » (what cannot be stolen), developing ten « *design* » points to live furtively in the alienating society, compared to a panopticon. « *with its ten points coming to pose without hierarchy all that cannot be stolen from us: silence, the horizon, the care of the dead, the freedom of use, the quality of life, the physical and psychic health, the long time, the possibility of remaining and becoming; but also the methods that prevent this theft from taking place: proof of care, the climate of care, investigation, the right to experiment, the generativity of the vulnerable and, more generally, furtivity.*»⁸

⁸. Fleury, C., & Fenoglio, A. (2022). *Ce qui ne peut être volé, charte du verstohlen* (Gallimard).

The chart has the ambition to show us how to inhabit the world, to defend the « *good life* » but also how to remain in the collapsing world in which people keep being displaced. Nevertheless, considering the power structures in which we are and the overwhelming surveillance systems in place (technological or social), people wanting to live differently are threatened, it is then necessary, if we wanna live differently, to become furtive. This furtivity has then the goal to empower the inhabitants and to take response-ability in the world around them that keeps dispossessing us of our political decisions. Furtivity works on the blind spot of our institutions, camouflaged but active, ensuring the impact we have on the things we care about.

Furtive conception considers the generativity of weakness as a political clinic, a space for innovation and transformations, carried by the individuals through their empowerment. Cynthia Fleury developed a map of « vulnerability hotspots », whether they are social, environmental, democratic, political or systemic, as spaces of action. These spaces become the places where we think about the world differently, spaces of experimentation. Furtivity is embedded in Care ethics, making visible the people and dysfunctions that society intend to hide.

C. SISMO.
(n.d.). Métropole de Lille
- L'expérimentation au service de la transformation sociale.



Minor architecture

Parallel to the question of furtivity, the notion of minor architecture also feeds my topic. The minor practices, usually coming from marginal groups, provide disruptive answers from the dominant narrative and create new potentials.⁹ Minor architecture could be a response to neoliberal growth, already implanted in the failures of economic growth and the deserted landscapes of suburbia for instance.

« A minor architecture is becoming space rather than being form. It hums along restlessly, turning away from the stale orders of commodity, originality, permanence, and perfection, and towards incompleteness and immanence. 'Minor architectures are, in fact, opportunistic events in response to latent but powerful desires to undo structures of power.' They are intentionally 'improvised, fractional, stripped of decoration and even of grammar. »¹⁰

⁹. Havik, K., Pint, K., & Riesto, S. (2020). Vademecum 77 minor terms for writing urban places. nai010publishers.

¹⁰. Stoner, J. (2012). Toward A Minor Architecture. MIT Press.

D. Raum-labor. (n.d.). Holy Temple of Siegen.



EMPOWERING OUR MINDS

The Neoliberal governmentality, complexity and the control of our subjectivity

¹¹. Foucault, M. (2010). *The birth of biopolitics, lectures at the collège de France 1978-1979*. Picador.

Michel Foucault considers neoliberalism as a form of governmentality, transforming the individual/self to fit the always-transforming forces of the market. Michel Foucault analysed the self-acclaimed legitimacy of neoliberalism through its « truth games »¹¹. These truth games rely on the idea that the artificial nature of this truth is unknown to the « players ». This system has the surprising capacity to create and transform its own participants, that follow the game without knowing its rules.

¹². Smith, A. (1977). *The wealth of nations*. The University of Chicago Press.

Indeed neoliberalism stands on the idea that the complexity of the world today does not allow individuals to understand or apprehend the system. The organization of society is then an impossible task for an individual and the « invisible hand of the market »¹² is the only force able to create an order. Neoliberal notions like « complexity » or « order » come from the realm of system theory and cybernetics, the free market is then compared to natural complex systems. Hayek in *The Constitution of Liberty*, states that these complex systems cannot be controlled, but only maintained through the interactions of its elements, following its rules.¹³ The competition between individuals through an entrepreneur-like spirit, facing an equally accessible market, is the guarantee for liberty.

¹³. Hayek, F. A. (2011). *Constitution of liberty*. The University of Chicago Press.

¹⁴. Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism, the fight for a human future at the new frontier of power* (Profile book Ltd).

Nevertheless, this so-called freedom seems to be troubled by the insatiable thirst of the market for the control of our own minds. In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*¹⁴, Shoshanna Zuboff reveals how a huge part of the neoliberal system lies in controlling and foreseeing our behaviours, orienting our consumption or our docility facing the overarching systems. The ambition of the free market to offer us the freedom of entrepreneurship is transformed towards the control of its subjects.

The first ambition of the project would be to challenge our response-ability through a furtive way of thinking. The empowerment infrastructure would allow citizens to regain knowledge of these complex systems but also dodge the control infrastructure.



E. Tati, J.
(1967). Play-
time

EMPOWERING ARCHITECTURE

Architecture, real estate and aesthetics

¹⁵. Soules, M. (2021). *Icebergs, Zombies, and the Ultra Thin, Architecture and Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton Architectural Press.

¹⁶. Martin, R. (n.d.). *Utopia's ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (University of Minnesota Press). 2010.

¹⁷. Jameson, F. (1997). *Culture and finance capital*. *Critical Inquiry*, 24(1).

¹⁸. Soules, M. (2021). *Icebergs, Zombies, and the Ultra Thin, Architecture and Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton Architectural Press.

Architecture and its shadow identity, real estate, is a key participant in the neoliberal system. As real estate is nowadays the main vector of wealth through investments, architecture is embedded in worldwide financial fluxes, challenging its autonomy as a cultural sphere.¹⁵ As Reinhold martin wrote,

*« architecture does not represent or « mirror » late capitalism as its cultural equivalent. It belongs to late capitalism. Asserting this might seem like attributing or conceding architecture a near absolute immanence. But seen from another direction, it also extends the dialectal model that both Harvey and Jameson deploy, perhaps to a point of no return, a point at which what is culture and what is capital cannot be distinguished in any useful ways ».*¹⁶

Architecture as an « *an aesthetic space of symbols, analogies, illustrations and expressions* »¹⁷ becomes a functional component integral to the workings of finance capitalism.

The architectural typologies of neoliberalism

According to Matthew Soules, the characteristics of financial capitalistic architecture and urbanism are: *« inherently unstable and creates spaces of crisis, increasingly functions as speculative wealth storage, it is the means of uneven development and heightened inequality, has a simultaneous propensity for highly iconic and extremely standardized spaces and it increases liquidity. »*¹⁸ These characters then find themselves translated into two types of crisis spaces, zombie urbanism and ghost urbanism, and five types of architecture: iceberg homes, exurban investment mats, superpodiums, ultra-thin pencil towers and financial icons.

What kind of architectural typologies can an infrastructure of empowerment take the form of? What codes are behind the aesthetics of neoliberal architecture?



F. Erasmus
bridge,
Rotterdam.
(n.d.).

EMPOWERING OUR NARRATIVE

Fictitious capital and speculation: Finance fiction

¹⁹. Soules, M. (2021). *Icebergs, Zombies, and the Ultra Thin, Architecture and Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton Architectural Press.

According to Matthew Soules, Marx wrote that the capital used and produced through the financial channel is fictitious as the money is acquired through the exchange and manipulation of financial instruments and not by the production or acquisition of real capital.¹⁹ By this sort of auto-production, the financial realm acquires a semi-autonomy, where its money is fictitious and the financial realm becomes fictional.

²⁰. Davies, W. (2017). 'Elites without hierarchies: intermediaries, "Agency" and the Super-rich' in *Cities and the Super-rich: Real Estate, Elites Practices and Urban politics* (Palgrave Macmillan).

Architecture, through real estate, is part of these exchanges. The speculative aspect of the market, so foreseeing future events, as well as the use of digital renderings for instance to sell properties, enhances the fictional character of neoliberal architecture. Architecture then as « real estate », integrated to finance capitalism, becomes finance fiction and its value is based on representation and its speculative realization. As William David writes « the only resource on which financialization is necessarily dependent... is the future ».²⁰

²¹. La Berge, L. C. (2014). *The Rules of Abstraction: Methods and Discourses of Finance*. *Radical History Review*, 2014(118).

« the architecture of finance capitalism is a real obstruction real virtuality. It functions as a device at the liminal space between material concrete existence and the seemingly mystical abstract complex and immaterial realm of finance. (...) By continuing to inhabit this relatively abstract in the materialized yet real city of finance the human subject becomes a fictional character in its own financial reality. »²¹

Through the project, I would like to conceive an architecture perpetuating a new citizen-empowered narrative, challenging the codes of Finance fiction and re-interpreting them.



G. NEOM.
(n.d.).The line.

DEMATERIALIZATION OF ARCHITECTURE

Speculative architecture

The question of this finance-fiction future, accessible through speculation, questions the transformation of architecture through this phenomenon. Frederic Jameson compares it to planned obsolescence, « *as the building doesn't bare any need for permanence, but in its raw materials, only bare its future destruction* ».²² In that sense, the presales market is postmaterial, relying on digital visualizations and finance instruments to obtain its value. Matthew Soules states that this effect reaches its extreme with the development of virtual investment on internet platforms. Nevertheless, this « dematerialization » phenomenon and the role of architecture within it can also be read through the fee of the architect, which depends on the construction cost compared to the fee of the marketing office for instance, which makes money out of the selling price.

²². Jameson, F. (1998). *The Brick and the balloon: Architecture, Idealism and Land Speculation*. New Left Review, 228.

Spiritual capitalism

« *in the late 20th century, something approximating the Hegelian Absolute appears in global networks of exchange where money is virtually immaterial. When read through Hegel's logical analysis of Spirit, it becomes clear that money is God in more than a trivial sense.* »²³ Mark.C.Taylor

²³. Taylor, Mark. C. (1999). *About Religion Economies of Faith in Virtual Culture*. The University of Chicago Press.

Linked to the transhumanist movement, whose ambition is to attain immortality through digital technologies, financial architecture becomes a monument to spiritual capitalism.²⁴ The unoccupied housing towers in major cities, bought and used for investment purposes only, transcend the corporeal function of architecture. Financial capitalism reaches a state of cult-like expression, as the « invisible hand of the market » of Adam Smith, a spontaneous self-regulating order un-understandable for the individual, is in charge of controlling our lives. Architecture becomes

²⁴. Soules, M. (2021). *Icebergs, Zombies, and the Ultra Thin, Architecture and Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton Architectural Press.

the totem of a financial religion, a machine between immaterial and material. The architecture of « zombie urbanism » becomes a tomb for the immortals and a cemetery for the living.



H. 432 Park
avenue, New-
York, Raphael
Vinoly Archi-
tects (n.d.).

RELEVANCE

So, the importance of the economical actors in the production of architecture and its embedment in speculative processes through real estate makes it relevant to me to tackle the question of architecture through the neoliberal issue. The speculative aspect of the real estate market also causes the gradual dispossession of inhabitants of their built environment. Neoliberal governmentality dispossesses the citizen of their political decision-making ability. In that sense, I want to tackle the question of the empowerment of the population through architecture.

As architecture is embedded in the neoliberal system of control of our subjectivity, I want to challenge the empowerment of the population through an architectural act of disruption, furtivity.



HOW CAN ARCHITECTURE EMPOWER CITIZENS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH A FUTURE OF NEOLIBERAL FINANCE FICTION?

How can we de-commodify architecture?

As architects, what tactics can we develop to disrupt the systems in place?

CITIZENS TO REGAIN THEIR RTIVE COUNTER-NARRATIVE TO THE

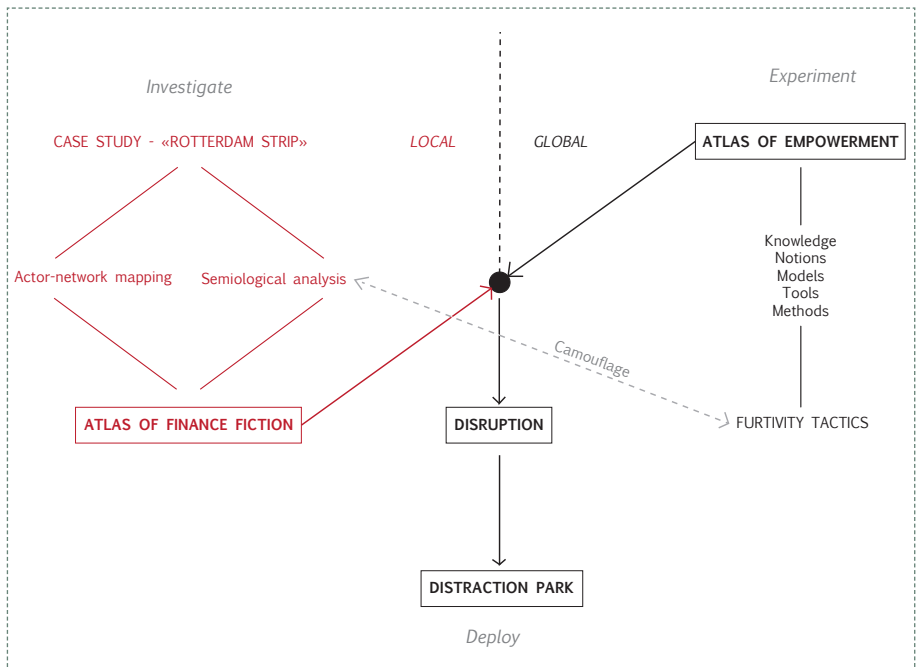
How do past counter-culture experimentations relate to nowadays situations?

How can we decode the different narratives, whether they are dominant or minor?

RESEARCH METHOD

The research is three-fold. First, through a case study of Rotterdam centre, I want to understand and map the actors and networks of the neoliberal order expressed in this part of the city as well as their aesthetic form, this analysis becomes the Atlas of finance fiction. Secondly, the Atlas of empowerment regroups all the references and methods used as counter-narrative of the neoliberal narrative. In the third part, both these atlases come together to form a disruption tool.

I. Research method scheme

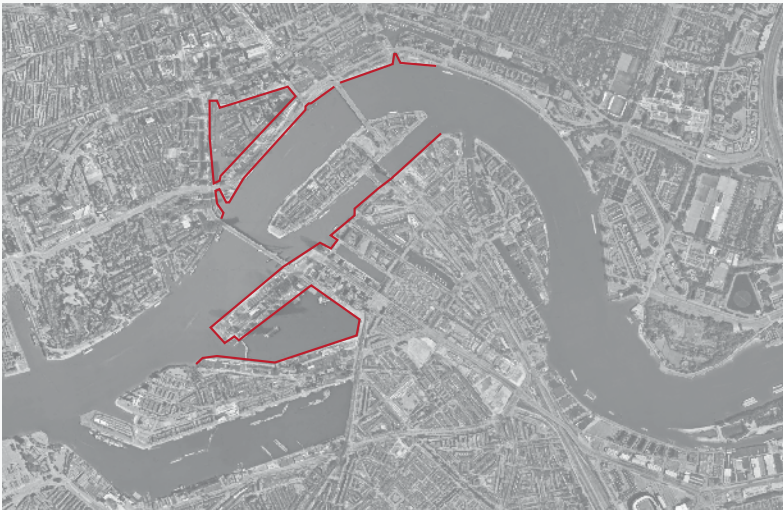


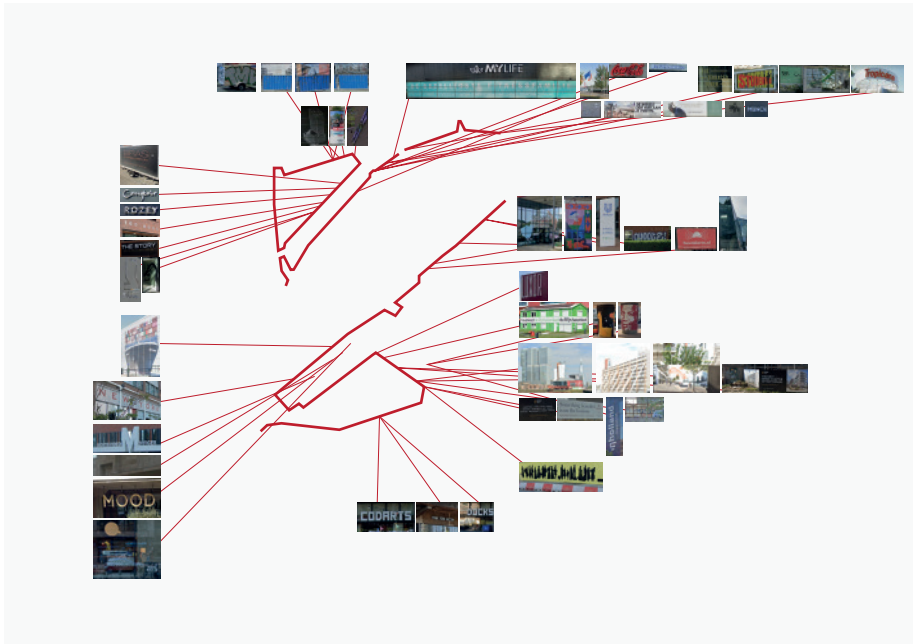
THE ATLAS OF ROTTERDAM'S FINANCE FICTION

²⁵. Scott-Brown, D., & Venturi, R. (1972). *Learning from Las Vegas*. MIT Press.

Rotterdam centre is used as a case study, revealing the actors and networks of the financial infrastructure in the space, inspired by *Learning from Las Vegas*²⁵, I am finding out what my « strip » of Rotterdam could be. The actor-network mapping allows me to express the hidden mechanisms I am interested in and how to disrupt them. I will also conduct a semiological analysis of the site. The speculative city is then an array of characteristics, mediums, governances, signs and concepts, which finally produces neoliberal architectural typologies analyzed from the context of Rotterdam.

J.Rotterdam
„strip“





K. Signs

L. Building typologies



THE ATLAS OF EMPOWERMENT

26. Stewart, B. (1968). Whole Earth Catalog access to tools.

The atlas of empowerment is a tool to cumulate and map sources of empowering practices across different scales and ambitions. Inspired by the Whole Earth Catalogue²⁶, this atlas dives into practices that have the ambition to regain some of our power over our environment. Through the different categories of the Atlas, my goal is to figure out furtive strategies. The different sections lead to different knowledge sources, projects, tools, methods and notions important for disrupting practices.

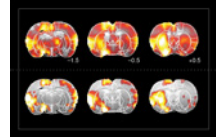
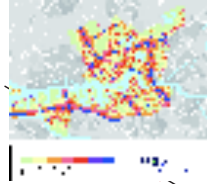
M.Furtive tactics, Atlas of empowerment



INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM



Knowledge



Projects



Notions

Glitch
Freedom in decision-making

Tools

Objects

SPATIAL QUALITY

Notions

Substraction
Furtivity
Subversion

Projects



Knowledge



Tools

Shared
governance
ownership

Notions

Terrain v
Agency
Liminal s

Knowledge



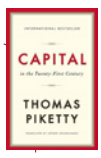
Projects



COOPERATIVE

UNDERSTANDING

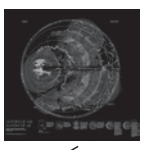
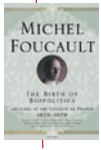
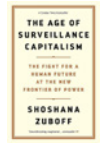
Knowledge



Projects



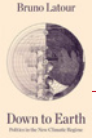
Mark Lombardi



Notions

System theory

Knowledge



Projects



Frei Otto

Methods

Mapping Actor-network theory

Tools

Archive Open Data - GIS

Notions

Wasteland



Knowledge



Projects



Tools

Public space Utopia/dystopia

Notions

Infra-space for confrontation

CARE

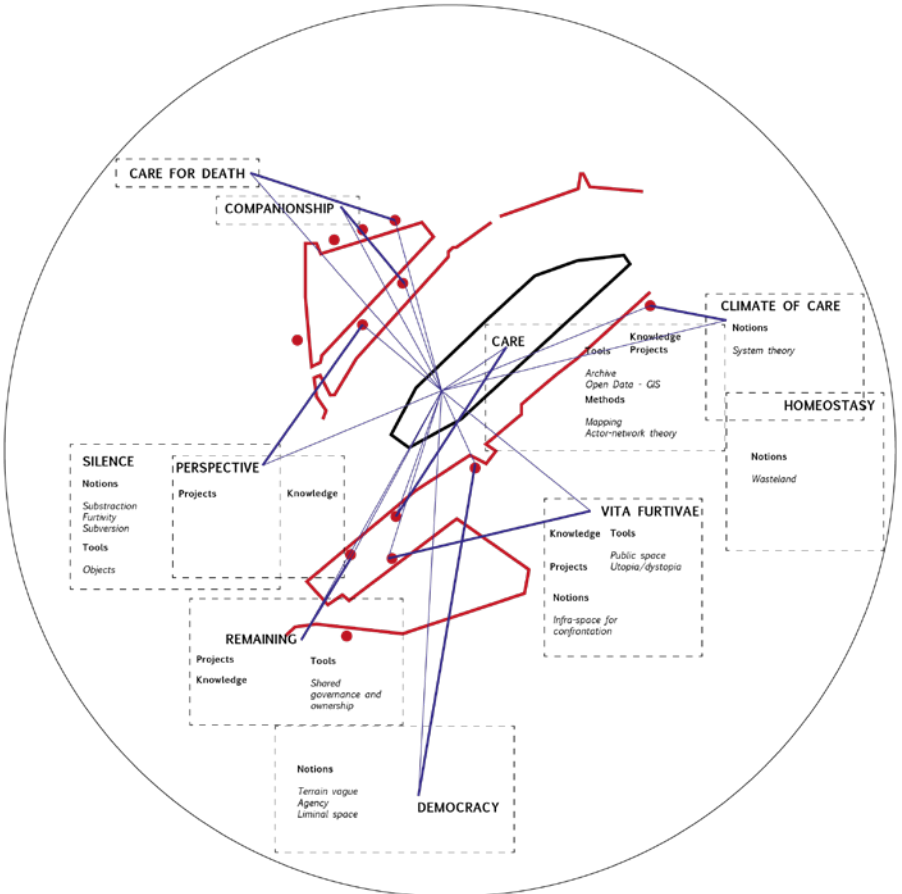
POLITICAL

be and
ague
space

THE DISRUPTION TOOL

Both Atlases become my « thinking machine », by superimposing the two you produce potential scenarios, creating disruptive narratives. I would like to work with the idea of camouflage, by superimposing the two systems and using the codes of the neoliberal system to cover up the furtive one.

N.Superposition



DESIGN PROPOSAL

The distraction park

The distraction park is a citizen-empowerment infrastructure, offering a counter-narrative to the neoliberal, growth-oriented and speculative one, located on an island on the Maas, each permanent structure responds to a specific empowerment need of the population in relation to the neoliberal control system (such as knowledge of overarching structures, agency, making, repairing or response-ability), gathered in a « distraction park », camouflaged by the same codes as the neoliberal attraction park, each structure provides a productive answer, even if absurd, to issues perpetuated by the neoliberal system.

P.Collage



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«Any legend, is born of a subconscious desire, shared by entire communities. Ours is to be able to disappear, to become invisible, to be able to flee when our whole society is dying of being under control!»

Alain Damasio, Les furtifs

