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ELECTRIC DELIGHT

TOWARDS A POLITICS OF
TRANSINDIVIDUATION

REFLECTION

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Throughout my studies I have developed a strong interest in the political implications, potentials and responsibilities of architecture. How can architecture, as opposed to being a mere object and space for people to agglomerate, be of political value – not in its imagery but of true political value to assist the transindividuation of its users?

After having completed a predominantly theoretical education during the MSc1 and MSc2, Explore Lab allowed for me to dive deeper into the specific applications and implications of politics on and of my own context of Rotterdam and to synthesize a designerly response that problematises architecture and politics as a unity.

Thinking architecture and politics (or any other domain in fact) as separate became, throughout my graduation process, not only inhibitory to the design process and the development of the architectural profession in general but fundamentally problematic (in a non-productive sense) for transdisciplinary and ecological concerns. As architecture, alongside other technologies, is an essential constituent of the environments and technicities that allow for our individual and collective becoming, its role in negotiating, mediating and assisting the coming together of the two is central to my approach.

The major question became this: If the environments through and by which we (trans)individuate are so central to how not only our social and ecological relations emerge, but how we affect our ecosphere and the planet as a whole, how can architecture become assisting in the proliferation of potentials, rather than the reproduction of social, spatial, or even digital echo-chambers that result in our decaying capacity for togetherness? And more specifically: How would an individual become literate of its truly personal intentions and potential role in a collective, why would someone care?

The moment of understanding exactly this, the capacity to care, as central to the discussion around the exchange-value-oriented, anthropocentric, micro-fascist and partially oppressive and non-democratic organisation of our togetherness became a first turning point in my research. Care as an axiological (and material) engagement with one's milieu opens up potentials for deproletarianisation and becoming literate of the intricate networks we are entangled with.

During my research, I applied a personal reading of Deleuzian and Guattarian Schizoanalysis: Instead of taking a set of constraints at face value, I questioned the relations between individual and collective via technology, flows, values and territories. Analysing current paradigms (Representative Democracy, Algorithmic Determinacy, Alienation of the Self) through their relations and schizophranising these, opened my eyes to the immanent potentials of

material and social conditions and the multiple realisability of the constraints they express and impose.

Framing these tasks and technicities as automations – as the outsourcing of energetic investments – allowed for me to problematise the degrees of automations in our daily lives as alienation from individual and collective problems. The distance we gain from problems on a daily basis is what makes us “forget” how to formulate and overcome these problems, leading to a general proletarianisation, passivity, and reactivity of individuals.

Furthermore, the degree of these automations bares the answer to why someone would care: they care if they have to. Problems that demand care, will be cared for. The idea of intervening with the How these automations take place and affect us was born, an idea that I took as a pivotal concern for my design. On a final note, my research took me to questioning the specificity (concretisation) of contextual automations: How do they allow for us to be creative, produce, intervene, appropriate, and participate in them? As an efficiency-based socio-economic framework primes us to perpetually automate more efficiently, I hypothesised that an automating differently via the participatory re-organisation of relations (flows) could be a potential answer to my problem. To learn how to care for these and do them otherwise, problems, relations, effects, and malleability must become sensible. The research led me to design the participatory schizophrenisation of spaces of automation.

Specifically, I focused on a dominant, alienating (and physically extremely secluded) automation that serves as the basis of further automations: The electricity network of Rotterdam. Opening up the energy network to collective maintenance – and hence collective re-iteration – for me to test my theories, lead to my site being the transformer station at the Putselaan 91 in Rotterdam Zuid.

Originally falling back into what could be considered the trap of the Architectural Profession – to logically, systematically, and efficiently solve a problem – I found myself struggling to adequately tackle my design brief. As my theory focused on the affectivity of environments and how they produce collectivity, my design approach changed towards focusing on a multitude of moments within and outside the site that alter relations and our understanding of energy, how we perceive it, and what it means to us. These fragments were related on a larger scale by the social, material, and energetic network that they are produced by. As sensibility, maintenance, and care were central to my aim, I engaged with the design on small scales: Writing about atmospheres and routines, testing 1:1 mock-ups and process models, and experimenting with materials that could become available by the un-doing and re-doing of the ar-

chitecture(s) of the network. This approach mixed hands-on experiments with fabrication and helped me in defining sensible interventions. The feedback that I received from my tutors was both challenging and reaffirming. As I have internalised a problem-solving attitude during my earlier architectural education and professional experience, the process of unlearning accompanied me in every phase of my graduation year. I constantly had to remind myself of this, but ultimately also will remember this unlearning as a core value to have gained over the year.

The positive feedback loop of theory and design provoked me to constantly relate the architectural detail to the global concern I started out with. It led me to formulate a very personal design ambition and approach: With respect to the materials and constraints that are given, decisive, humble, and affective interventions that allow for and demand caring have immense potential for our becoming through and with each other. Sparing architectural design from grand, flashy gestures that demand specialised machinery and outsourced production lines to facilitate them makes it possible to open up space making to a collective endeavour and to treat it as what it is: a collective, and therefore political, act. The “how” architecture (or anything, in fact) is produced thus becomes more important than what it is seen as.

I see this as a general methodology that is applicable to not only other spatial practices but our engagement with technological, political, social and even knowledge-making practices, turning it into an onto-epistemological approach. A response-able approach to design is a response-able approach to any-thing; The question of how we affect and are affected is one, that is not dedicated to nor detachable from any profession or segment.

The political potential of architecture for me, ultimately, lies in this: The dichotomy that is widely reproduced between planner and user, architect and other professional, profession and leisure, this or that, are artificially introducing thresholds within a continuous togetherness. It demands a shift from dialectic thinking, towards a process oriented and relational mode, towards a trans-individuative onto-epistemology. Architecture’s affectivity, on a non-abstracted, 1:1 scale, that incorporates an understanding for its users and the processes that can unfold within it, is what is relevant to my position as a designer.

