

from actual to virtual

an ecological understanding of Laguna Vere

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Introduction:

totalities

This research starts as a critique towards the tendency of conceiving reality through totalities, a *“rejection of deep structural categories embodied in the dualities”* [1] of inside-outside, me-other, subject-object, matter-form, local-global, east-west, state-market, private-public, etc.

Such nominal identities could be considered as simplistic obscuring devices coming from whatever agent (even ourselves) could benefit from a polarization of dialectics that prevents the creation of possible relations, opposing, in such a way, a true unfolding of difference, of *multiplicity*. Recognizing that multiplicity is the condition of existence -from the molecular level to the most complex and layered assemblages- is a change of mind-set that embraces the idea that nothing in reality could be regarded as substantial, but rather, it is the result of a complex ecological processes.

To conceive such a substantial, structured understanding of reality denies the projection of the actual into the virtual, the other, the future, of any *form of becoming*.

In other words, totalities represent a *reductionist mechanism* producing ideologies and shaping the perception of reality through static images that ambient mediocrity, habits of opinion and cliches. They allows to only envision one possible mode of being with which to side, preventing the possibility of external encounters and unexpected events producing variation and invention.

Concretely and at a global level, this mechanism lately generated new forms of ethnocentric authoritarianism, nationalism, identity, populism, mythologies, rituals and cults functional to the production of systems and social entities that oppose one another and never seek for a productive integration. This tendency ultimately generates static conditions, preventing any kind of dynamism and evolution.

Evidences of this tendency affect every of the many systems (concentric *skins* [2]) composing reality; they are detectable in the the shaping of our bodies, technics, arts and habits; altogether composing a culture.

modulation by disparation

This phenomenon is to be resisted by proposing an alternative that strives to reconcile opposites rather than create conflicts, dismantling dual classes by regarding them in their full ecology. Such an approach focuses on multiplicity and difference, not opposition of totalities. It is to be resolved through construction (the creation of a new dimension, an inclusive disjunction), through affirmation and not negation: *“not a reductive abstraction, but an integration, an amplifying operation”* [3].

To talk about “opening up” a closed system to difference means to allow the exterior other to affect and modulate habits, arts, technics and bodies, as well as allowing them to co-mold one another and, in return, the exterior.

In such a way, a continuously dynamic becoming is enhanced; relations are created. In such a way, no transition is a total revolution, but rather, the blurring of a threshold producing an effective change, an evolution.

technicities

That is to say: neither the one side nor the other side, no side is the right side as long as it is regarded as a totality and not as the coming together of peculiarities (singularities).

An alternative approach would rather tackle questions such as: what in particular is captured in the one “side” and what in the other, which specific *technicities* are involved?

This allows us to step out of the general problem, to respond to a generality precisely by means of an existence that is always local, specific, in situ. Recognizing a macro-scalar problem (a violence, a constraint), and envisioning a response not by means of a general tactic but settling it into the micro-scalar specificities of the situation, avoiding to respond to it “*on the same general level on which it seems to operate*” [4].

The center of action (for the grounded outline of the problem’s genesis and eventual response) is therefore the human body, the primary and most specific technicity, expanded and shaped back by means of technics (tools), expressing and expressed into the arts.

architecture

Architecture is a capture of bodies, techniques and arts (see the “*house as the place in which human bodies project themselves in taste and values*” [5]) as well as of the political types of power; it is shaped by them (by the *mode of individuation* of a specific society), and, in return, once it is concretized and has assumed a certain degree of freedom and unpredictability, it shapes society back.

Problem statement:

Often, architectural objects or public spaces oversaturated by historic-political-symbolic-propagandistic signification tend to fall into polarized dialectics that affect and limit their perception, thus, their *becomings*. Forms of reductionism, implemented by power structures as control tools, that create, at a first level, a sense of nostalgia (or else, condemn), while producing, at a deeper level, public apathy, political pessimism and nihilism due to the experience of violence, impotency and passivity that the conflict causes. This manifests in a general unproductive approach towards existing (valuable) architectural objects, trapped in their *being* but filled with potential for new forms of appropriation and re-activation, *new forms of becoming*.

The condition of creation and invention is therefore to be found precisely in this supersaturated environment. Challenging the sublime state that stems from violence, impotency and passivity via the promotion of unexpected encounters and events able to operate on and “open” the system’s thresholds to mobilize new determinations and avoid a *reactive death* [6].

To do so a situated look at such architectural spaces’ current condition and transformative process is needed in order to spot out the critical points of their evolution (what is their actual status and how was it produced). Such an approach allows to speculate on specific modes of action, to respond intuitively, via improvisation and out of intentionality; out of a desire that is collectively produced and therefore political.

ruins

The aim is to reconnect the “ruined object” to its milieu by opening it up to new relations: new bodies, objects and habits, to make it permeable and mobilize new fluid determinations, to project it into the virtual.

Moreover, it is precisely the aesthetic dimension of an abandoned and ruined building that stems in human beings a proper *aesthetic thinking*, understanding aesthetic as something that “pertains to qualities of experience [7]”, a sensorial experience to be directly felt, actively engaged.

The “ruin” calls for possibilities of action. The body, just like it engages a technical tool that opens up the possibility to modulate an envisioned object, finds itself called to action, the “pleasure of action [8]”, the practice.

It happened to the pre-historic man in the cave, it happens to the artisan with technic tools and matter, to the artist with its medium and media, and (most evidently) to the athlete that performs in the space.

“Laguna Vere”

Following the above mentioned “localized” approach involving the analysis of site-specific technicities as a tool to subsequently address a more general (global) condition, I will focus my research on the case of “Laguna Vere”, a late Soviet aquatic complex located in Tbilisi, Georgia, currently in a state of abandonment and neglect.

Starting from the hypothesis that Laguna Vere could be considered as a space filled with peculiarities but reduced to successive identities, I will highlight some key points within its evolution (events) as well as within its physical formalization (architectural details) proving how the architectural object has been molded by its milieu and how it could mold the milieu back in a full ecological manner.

The space is to be read through its past and present technicities, looking at the human body (and its image) as a primary technicity, a tool of investigation and eventual speculative response to the current criticalities. Indeed my pivotal point of interest would be the present moment; a moment in which the architectural object, within its transformative process, looks static, impermeable to the exterior, deprived of any relation and on the way towards the system’s reactive death.

Research question:

The question follows: how could the bodily experience, as a tool of perception and method of analysis, problematize the condition of an abandoned space, and anticipate a possible future? What I am looking after, would ultimately respond to the question: how could this space be rehabilitated and how could people benefit from it?

Method:

To answer the question **theoretical and philosophical concepts** will be regarded **as tools of analysis and interpretation (I)**. These will be the means to both address the broader critique of the current tendency towards a polar conception of reality and to provide a theoretical possible solution (namely, a theory of systems’ opening and modulation to dismantle obscuring polar categorization). An ecological and relational understanding of the environment will support my “in situ” analysis and ultimately it will enforce a speculative response envisioning a re-activation of the architectural object through actions aiming at new vital relations.

By virtue of this positioning, the outcome of the “localized” analysis will also provide possible, concrete answers informing back the more “general” issue.

The capture of past and current technicities will be supported by **direct observation (II)** of the close environment (within the boundaries of Laguna Vere’s complex), by the grasping of **information in an anecdotal and eventful form (III)** from the broader context and by **archival research (IV)**.

Direct observation (meaning direct, “bodily” engagement with the architectural object and the dynamics currently taking place within its boundaries) will imply a **collaboration (V)** with a local photographer and visual artist. We will use the photographic media to quite literally frame our perceptions of the place at the current state and lately challenge it via the introduction of our bodies, external bodies and external habits, ultimately reporting the environment’s response. Framing the actual to express the potential (looking at the camera as an extended bodily organ, the eye of the virtual, enhancing the power of mind and of the body). Photographic production will be combined with graphic production (likely drawings of possible scenarios), concerning again the actual space in relation with the potential that the above mentioned staged external events will provoke in our imagination.

Expected results:

In order to capture Laguna Vere’s evolutive process to the present day through key points of change, a set of diagrammatic maps capturing my movement and experience will be produced. The involvement of the human body as a center of action and primary technicity will be especially highlighted.

Photographic material will also be collected as a result of the above mentioned “bodily” engagement with the architectural space, its present dynamics and the ephemeral, “experimental” introduction of new dynamics, together with speculative drawings. The outcome of the collaboration with the Georgian artist Gio Sumbadze is planned to result in an exhibition addressing the theme of the transition from public to private space and other socio-political issues affecting both the broader context of Tbilisi and the specific architectural object.

Relation to design ideas:

This whole collection of analytical and experimental material will inform my position on *virtual* [9] future scenarios for the swimming pool.

It will outline a possible strategy to intervene on the threshold of the “concentric” systems, to open fractures allowing unexpected encounters to take place, new habits, abolishing the primary dichotomy inside-outside (followed by private-public, local-global, east-west etc.. as a consequence) so as to create something novel and enhance new transitions for the architectural space (not polar revolutions); mutating from a reactive to an active system.

What I am envisioning as a possible design translation of this theoretical position could be concretized in an agenda of ephemeral interventions to be regarded as **events / temporary actions** able to catalyze encounters and produce new determinations. Neither a public nor a private space but rather a common one.

N.B. the abstract speculative position I am embracing and will try to actualize, whether materially whether on paper, does not aim to provide an absolute solution to the real problematic condition of the place, and could as well clash, in the end, with the *impossibility of action*, per se a valid conclusion if supported by solid attempts of virtual anticipation.

Notes:

[1] Sohn, Heidi, Kousoulas, Stavros, Bruyns ,Gerhard. *Commoning as Differentiated Publicness*. Footprint 16 vol. 9, n. 1 (2015). p.1.

[2] Reference to the “Men’s Five Skins” by Friedensreich Hundertwasser. He conceived this drawing for the book “The Power of Art, Hundertwasser - The Painter-King with the five skins”. The pictogram represents the five spheres around which Hundertwasser's concerns revolve, and thus the five chapters of the book.

The first skin: The epidermis
 The second skin: The clothes
 The third skin: Man's house
 The fourth skin: The social environment and the identity
 The fifth skin: The global environment - ecology and mankind

A drawing that I will reference in a personal, critical re-elaboration to support my theoretical framework.

[3] Sauvagnargues, Anne, Suzanne Verderber, and Eugene W. Holland. *Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon*. Edinburgh University Press, 2016. p.63.

[4] Progressive Geographies, Progressive Geographies, 2017, <https://progressivegeographies.com/2017/11/14/brad-evans-interviews-brian-massumi-on-affect-power-and-violence/>.

[5] Dalmaso, Anna, Caterina. *Techno-aesthetic Thinking. Technicity and Symbolism in the Body*. Aisthesis 12(1), 2019. pp. 69-84.

[6] Meillassoux, Quentin. *Subtraction and contraction: Deleuze, immanence, and Matter and Memory*. Collapse, Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2007. p. 99.

[7] Progressive Geographies, Progressive Geographies, 2017, <https://progressivegeographies.com/2017/11/14/brad-evans-interviews-brian-massumi-on-affect-power-and-violence/>.

[8] Simondon, Gilbert. *Sur la technique*. Paris: PUF, 2014. p.383.

[9] The “virtual”, here regarded as, according to Meillassoux, “*the ontological condition of authentic becoming [...] the unforeseeable creation of novelty*”.

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