

North Sea: Landscapes of Coexistence  
*Transitional Territories Studio 2019-2020*

P4 Reflection paper

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*Gizmo. The Theatre of Automation in  
the post-labour society of Hammerfest.*

The P4 presentation offers the possibility to display the full spatial manifestation of the project, as ultimate outcome of research and design exploration. In addition to that, the discussion represents a moment of reflection on the entire process of the graduation thesis, looking back at the crucial passages in order to treasure the discoveries for my future career.

### 01. *The relationship between research and design*

The project departs from a broad investigation on the working territories of the North Sea, that bridges different countries and account of various shapes of activities (from offshore extraction, to port logistics and industrial manufacturing). The main research question relates with the possibilities of full automation, investigating the role of machines in substituting human labour, and its strong impact on both societal and individual spheres.

From the analysis, the city of Hammerfest – in the Norwegian region of Finnmark – emerged as a highly relevant point of future perspectives, especially in light of the growing importance of these regions due to the opening of the Arctic routes. The remoteness of the place and yet the strong presence of automated infrastructure in the landscape make Hammerfest a territory in rapid transition, where the realisation of a full-automation scenario is increasingly presumed.

From this conception of merely analytical nature, my research has benefit of a more speculative aspect, where the implications of such a scenario are investigated by means of theoretical reflections and visual representation. On that note, as opposite of automation and labour, it seemed to me that the dimension of play – and leisure – could cover a role of primary importance in the post-labour society. The social nature of playing, as interaction between individuals under a certain set of rules, is key to avoid an individualistic turn of our work-based community, when work can no longer express each individual contribution to society.

At the nuanced turning point between research and design exploration, the island of Hammerfest has been re-thought as a landscape of play, enabled by the overpowering presence of automation. Island of Utopia, Hammerfest prefigures the realisation of a possible scenario where the city, as productive space, loses its meaning and starts decaying, and where humans are free to return to the dimension of the *homo ludens* in the landscape, while machines perform the essential activities.

Therefore, the first aim of the project is to intervene in such a changing landscape, designing arenas of possible interaction, that could serve as fundamental elements of the future ludic society. Around these elements, people can cluster and find a new way of living in community with the machine.

Among these interventions, imagined as “playgrounds” of the island, I focused my attention on the Theatre of Automation, as in the highest form of play.

The design started by the conceptual definition of what a theatre can mean in such conditions where the disruption of work allows anyone to be both actor, interacting with the others, and possible spectator of such play.

At this stage, the project was continuously nourished with reflection. In particular, great inspiration was taken from Jacques Rancière’s considerations in *The Emancipated Spectator*, in which the idea of spectatorship itself is questioned. First, I defined the space of the theatre as consisting of two main values: the space of the stage – the physical enclosed area in which actors move and speak – and the space of the representation (or play) – abstracted from reality throughout the narration, so that, at one time, the theatre comprises both a tangible and an imaginative dimension where the scene is located. This helped me elevating the role of the Theatre as symbolic act of the new society in which the condition of play is manifesting.

Then, I realised that in the conditions I set the project the tacit compromise between actors and spectators – the “narrative agreement” under which they all pretend to believe in what is represented – had to be reconsidered. Automation takes *agency* away from individuals. The Machine of the Theatre has to provide them with the possibility to act.

Therefore, I was looking for a theatre where the notion of spectatorship could be different, where the natures of actors and spectators could fluidly merge into a different way of using the stage; a theatre in which the optical relation of the *theatron* (Ancient Greek for *see*) could give space to another relation, suggested by the word *drama* (action). As claimed by Rancière, in order to emancipate the individual and society from their passive roles, theatre has to be brought to the level of a collective performance, in accordance with the natural environment.

For this reason, searching for a way to realise the research in a spatial manifestation, I imagined my theatre to be a bridge on a peculiar waterscape of the island, moved by the ever-changing yet cyclical tidal activity. Composed by four floating and rotating platforms, the performance of the theatre reflects the specific conditions of the site, following the level of the sea and always providing different configuration. It is in the making of otherness that it is possible to identify and produce spaces of action.

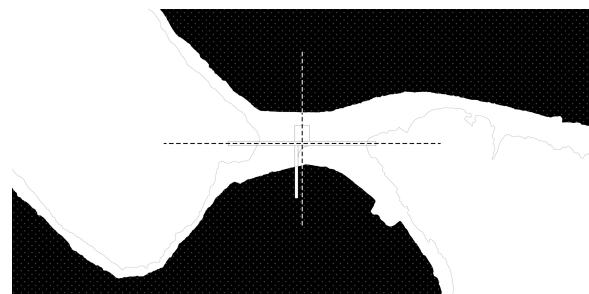


Fig. 1 Site conditions: landscape and waterscape (by author)

02. *The relationship between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic, your master track and your master program*

Interfacing with the system of the island, the territorial stance of my project reflects the main orientation of the studio that intends the architectural project in its broad impact in the context. The Transitional Territories studio is, indeed, a multidisciplinary studio that focuses on the linkage between design and the multifaceted conditions of the territory, that can be unfolded only by connecting scales. In particular, the case of my project rises the issues of social impacts in relation with large-scale technological changes, such as the growth of automation and new definitions of labour.

The link between humans and technology, and its direct response to the production of society, emerges as a relevant issue that can be explored through the lens of Architecture, as the interest of my master track. It is my belief that, in the current period, architecture should take a position in either stopping, mitigating or adapting to the social, environmental and cultural changes coming from technological innovation.

Finally, the realisation of the theatre, in its special relation with the waterscape, attempts to reflect on the typological aspects of the Theatre itself. In my view, the progress of Architecture also stands on the establishment of the elements that change under the thrusts of externalities and of those that, remaining untouched, represent the permanence of our culture.

03. *Elaboration on research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, reflecting thereby upon the scientific relevance of the work*

It is possible to retrospectively divide my research work and method in four main phases, the first part of which consisted of a collective analysis on the North Sea. After that, my personal research developed around three main focal points. *Automation* represented the leading topic of territorial-scale investigation. A more theoretical reflection guided me to the notion of *play* in a possible scenario, while a typological research on the architecture of the *theatre* helped me defining the spatial needs of my project. The concomitance of data-based analysis and interpretative reflection highlights the scientific relevance of the project.

First of all, the collective research phase of the studio provided us with a general view on the given field of investigation. Together with my peers, I analysed the “Dual Nature of Externalities”, dealing with issues of pollution and salinization of water due to processes of extraction, production and consumption over the sea. The entire process of cartographic mapping was led with the understanding of the territory as a project, where different flows and dynamics converge to determine our essential living conditions.

Deconstructing the outcomes of extensive collective research, and relating such Externalities with the human environment, I started narrowing my personal interest on what I defined *Territories of Labour*, looking at the social impacts of work dynamics in the North Sea, with special interest with future developments.

Automation emerged as the main concern for the subject matter, given its relevance in the field of labour. By mapping of currents trends and activities, such as port logistics, offshore extraction and fishery, I got to the city of Hammerfest, in the North of Norway, as a nodal point of current and future tensions.

Based on the outcomes of the territorial analysis, during the third phase of my research I build up a possible scenario for Hammerfest. Projecting the trends in fifty years, I could investigate a condition of full automation in the given context, with the consequent change in social arrangement and work-life balance.

The formulation of the scenario, that could be seen as a first act of the project, was possible thanks to two components of opposite nature: the site visit and the reference to a great body of literature.

During the field trip to Hammerfest, I was given the opportunity to perceive the tangible condition of such changes, and to have a close insight on this Arctic community. The visit to the Polar Base, as main node of logistic in the region, helped me realise the difficulties of living in such a harsh environment and the necessity of infrastructure as means of territorialisation.

At the same time, great theoretical support was given me by the work of the Situationist International and Constant Nieuwenhuys, that envisioned a society beyond work and scarcity.

Finally, a typological analysis helped me defining the permanent characters of the Theatre and testing its resilience in front of automation. In that sense, Fabrizio Cruciani’s famous book, *Lo Spazio del Teatro* (the Space of the Theatre) broadened my understanding of the machine of the theatre, seen as a *dispositif* that regulates natural, cultural and social processes and provided a fundamental link towards the design. The *spectacle* of Debord was thus investigated through the architectural notion of the typology.

04. *Elaboration on the relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework, touching upon the transferability of the project results.*

Within the context of the post-labour society, my project represents an attempt to contribute to a wider investigation on the social impacts of such changing conditions, designing a possible way to react.

First of all, the rather individualistic conception of our society considers work as the only way to contribute to the social dimension. The demise of labour could thus mean the end of a fundamental cultural basis. Therefore, the project responds to the even more individualistic turn in the post-labour world, where,

without a job, individuals have no means to form a community. The key is found in the element of play as an alternative to the role of labour. Stressing the importance of engaging in a constructive activity, the Theatre of Automation prefigures the limits within which the changed community of Hammerfest could find a different occupation and establish the foundation of a different society.

In addition to that, at a wider level, the cultural crisis originating from a new form of living, is merely a crisis of the public space, as already being witnessed in our contemporary cities. Through the idea of the playgrounds, the project highlights the necessity of a discourse on the nature of the public space, considering its importance in the generation of sense of community. It is crucial, in my view, to think about these spaces as stages of active life, arenas of interaction where individuals found themselves in an act of co-creation rather than passive consumption.

05. *Discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered in (i) doing the research, (ii) elaborating the design and (iii) potential application of the results in practice*

During both the research and design phase of the project, I encountered mainly two ethical issues that requested my personal interpretation. With regards to the premises of my project – the implementation of full automation – I considered such conditions as given, not questioning the quality of their nature, but trying to envision their implications and thus taking a position on whether stopping, adapting or mitigating them.

The first main ethical dilemma pertained to the “ontological” role of automation. In the making of the Theatre, automation had a strong role shaping the architectural machine and thus liberating *acting* from its working dimension. That would make anyone possible actor or spectator of the Theatre. However, the ethical issue regarded the level of enforcement given to automation, whether it should be intended as an actor in itself within the theatre, or only as a means for interaction between individuals. At force, I started designing with the conception of automation as one of the main actors in my theatre, with large degree of influence in the physical conditions of the building. Nevertheless, its acting role implied the presence of a third party that had control over the play between individuals and that would have led towards a rather totalitarian or technocratic connotation of architecture. On the other hand, automation should be intended as a means for interaction between individuals among them and between individuals and their living conditions. In such a manner, individuals have control of their space and can only confront with and consequentially adapt to the ever-changing power of nature. For this reason, the automation of the theatre results in a series of floating platforms that interface the ephemeral character of natural processes.

Second, the project has to deal with issues of sea level rise. Moving according to the periodical cycles of the tides, the theatre accommodates a level of uncertainty and ephemerality proper of the natural phenomena. Floating and turning in circles, the platforms of the stage compose a multitude of arrangements and settings for the interaction of individuals and the landscape. The perfect shape of a circular arena, or even the creation of two amphitheatres looking at the sea, are only two ephemeral conditions of the many configurations freely creating due to the movement of water.

However, such a strong relation with the body of water has to face the substantial conditions of climate change. Moving vertically underneath the fly tower, the platform of the stage will one day reach a maximum level, at which the two structures will clash. And this limit will be given by the sea level rise that, in doing so, will establish the point in which the architectural machine can no longer function.

Under those circumstances, just as they were constructed, the connections enabled by the machine will be dismantled. The floating stage will accommodate the steel structure of the tower on top of its deck. The theatre will close itself, detach from the element of the bridge and start floating towards new destinations. End of the Theatre. Or beginning of new directions again in relation with the new centrality of the region, the Machine that allowed humans to dance naked in the Arctic, will have finally taught them how to reconquer the temporal rhythms of nature and, liberating them, will end its activity.

#### *Final note*

Approaching the conclusive phase of the project, I had the chance to reflect on what this final year of Masters at TU Delft has given me.

First, it reminded me of the beauty of the sea, of the extreme importance it has in the survival of our communities and the equal attention it must be given in the project of the territory.

Second, the graduation studio has instructed me on how to tackle the project at every scale, starting from its wide significance at global scale, down to the definition of the minimal detail. The contribution of the analysis was fundamental to materialize an idea that was coming directly from the site, and to integrate it with the multiple stances of architecture. In that sense, design and technological aspects were meant to be crucially kept together in the liberating act of the machine. The investigations on the peculiar climatic aspects of the project, for instance, allowed the experience of the landscape. Altogether, the different elements of the project concur to build up the project and to transform play and leisure into an organised and recognized form of living.