

Abstract :

Facing the neo-liberalisation of the city, the furtive « monument » is a path across the city, combining programs of the body, the mind and the politics, in order to reach a state of empowerment. Based on a situationist drift, architectural interventions transform the way the city of Rotterdam is experienced, not based on profit but based on programmatic activations. If the city is a generic cadaver, the project has the ambition to revive its soul from the carcass, extracting its qualities, disrupting the systems in place and re-assembling its components. The city, seen as programmatic intensities, states that architecture doesn't have to be built.

Introduction :

Last year, I wrote my thesis on the **architect confronting neoliberal processes**, from 1980 to nowadays. 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. 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 biopolitics and **societies of control** 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, I wondered what is the **involvement of architecture within these control systems** and how we could **transform the architectural narrative** towards the empowerment of the population.

The presentation consists in an intro and 4 acts.

Act I - Don't get rid of that old junk !

TXT TO READ : Don't "get rid of that old junk"! they were shouting.

We all woke up that one morning.

It was the day the building had to die.

As I turn behind the market hall, I am welcomed by a specific character of the city, not the one you would see all the time, actually one that you would barely notice, until you couldn't be able to look away.

The anonymous, concrete-sealed, enigmatic bloc was planned to disappear today. Even if perfectly healthy, the building had to die as part of the liberal murder of all that isn't an absurdly-named, highly profitable, opacely gentrifying, built matter of the city.

I was never really introduced to this block. There was an offensiveness about it. It was shut off and opaque, in complete opposition with the transparent tower that was planned to replace it in its own grave. The block, metaphorically enough, was occupied by a medical centre. As it cared for us, should we care for it?

As the first hit of the wrecking ball hit, we reacted. It felt as if the physical hit of the building resonated in our bodies. The inhabitants took over themselves to save the building. But the building wasn't a building, it was our livelihood, our proposal to inhabit a city that was our own. So we took it back.

We disobeyed.

There is something in an underdog that has the capacity to rally. This time, it was the a simple concrete block that took on itself, the power of action. The Monster, became a space of resistance, a counter-power.

Indeed, the major narrative that I am criticizing in this project is the one of the generic, neoliberal city. It is the one of the commodification of architecture, becoming a financial asset, while the architect, becomes a common object producer. The city then becomes an accumulation of glass towers, where the wealthiest can live or worst, invest in while staying empty.

Inspired by the situationists drift, I tried during this process to uncover the soul of the city through its existing conditions, within the generic city. From within the site condition, I will then extract spatial and poetic qualities of the site.

Architecture then becomes a series of events, or intensities and the project is an attempt to reanimate the corpse of the neoliberal murder of the metropolitan ideal. My ambition through this process is to challenge our notion of architecture as built matter, as I understand the city as relationships between actors. For me, these relationships are key to enter a critical relationship to our environment and stimulate our imaginaries.

Then I myself took part in a drift, I crossed the city in a random line, letting in the way, the left-over generic spaces find me. This is not the line it's a line, and the spaces I am looking for are the common ones, the generic parking lots and city monsters. Indeed I have always been inspired by these « ugly », « discarded » sites.

My presentation takes the form of a working board, as I used mixed media design research to conceive the project and understand the poetic of the sites.

Through the first part of the board, I will present my research.

At first, I chose to tackle neoliberalism is the ideology stating that the free-market system, as a self-regulating, spontaneous order, is best suited to allow « individuals » to flourish in other social and political realms. This system has the surprising capacity to create and transform its own participants, that follow the game without knowing its rules. Neoliberalism stands on the idea that the complexity of the world today doesn't allow for individuals to apprehend it or rule, and that only a complex system like « the invisible hand of the market » can order society in its whole. The competition between individuals through an entrepreneur-like spirit, facing an equally accessible market, would be the guarantee for liberty.

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, Shoshanna Zuboff reveals how a huge part of the neoliberal system lies on controlling and foreseeing our behaviors, to oriente our consumption for instance, or our docility facing the overarching systems.

Interest in the notion of finance fiction. 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. According to Marx, 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 produce or acquisition of *real* capital. By this sort of auto-production, the financial realm acquires a semi-autonomy, where its money is fictitious and the financial realm becomes fictional. The speculative aspect of the market, so foreseeing the futur events enhances the the fictional character of neoliberal architecture. Architecture then as « real estate » becomes finance fiction.

The main vector for this project was to counter the market force coming for our subjectivity, our capacity to invent our future and affect our present. Inspired by the society of the spectacle by Guy Debord, I would like to conceive a project allowing the population of Rotterdam to build an alternative narrative for its future, in contradiction with the mono-vision imposed by the neoliberal ideology. As he said : "The spectacle is not a set of images, but a social relationship between people, mediated by images", it is on these realtionships that I want to act.

In that reality, in which the major narrative is constructed by the « truths » of the market, what becomes of our subjective relation to the reality ? **How can we empower citizens to regain their response-ability through a counter narrative to the neoliberal finance fiction? How can architecture be a motor to the conception of new imaginaries for the city ?**

Envisioning a tool for the empowerment of the population and the creation of counter-power networks of relationships, I designed an Atlas of empowerment, a curation of projects whose objective, is the guide designers towards empowerment-oriented design. This heuristic design database creates of a strategic structure to centre the design around empowerment, heuristics because of curation and numbers of projects.

Because empowerment and relational systems aren't only at the architectural scale Bringing social and political concerns into the project, it was necessary that the research method reached beyond the architectural discipline. I saw it as a guide to employ multi-scalar empowering strategies in design processes. **If we then consider architecture as an infrastructure for empowerment, how can we define a framework for empowering design strategies?**

Inspired by « pattern language », I analyzed 26 project across a series of characteristics and I accumulated 20 strategies, across different scales, offering a specific strategy to respond to a situation, then applicable to different contexts. Each project is analysed according to different lenses and scales: Instigator, Plannificator, Perpetuator, Time, Opinions, Politics, Institution, Maintenance system, Urban, Local, Surface, Architectural, Ecosystem, Non-humans, and Subterranean. This results in a matrix of project characteristics, allowing their comparison and the determination of an « empowerment factor », a specific empowering design strategy. From each case study in the atlas, I deduced: a situation in which the project is anchored and a main empowering strategy. Each situation and strategy are linked to an ambition of the project. I then extracted this information to create the project: a multi-scalar structure of empowering strategies, applicable to specific recognisable situations in different contexts. This model is the structure for empowerment-oriented design.

See « pattern language cards »

In all these strategies, we can see a main pattern: transforming relationships between things, actors and functions in space and time. Comes back to my vision of the urban space as a set of relationships and actors.

I noticed that empowerment comes from crossing limits and colliding actors, spaces and functions. In order to create a counter-power, limits must be crossed, actors that weren't in contact, for instance, must finally collide. In order to regain our subjectivity and a sense of freedom of thought in the city, the project must collide elements, functions and programs, through a method that I chose: hybridisation.

With the same ambition, in space, I am choosing to drift across Rotterdam. Drawing a random line across the city, a transect allows me to encounter situations and in that case, left-over spaces. Indeed, I am not looking for the space of usual value, but the common ones. Similar to the process of drift by the situationists, I let the site surprise me, fighting the predestined order of the major narrative by the randomness of the path I chose. I consider left-out spaces as reflective spaces, where we can witness the city processes from in and out, as it's the posture that I am trying to have as an architect.

As we can see the strategy from the atlas is systemically facing the left-out spaces, indeed what I am going to propose is a system.

Indeed, I consider architecture not as a built matter, but as a series of programmatic intensities in the city, that I conceived as this programmatic scheme, the project comes to transform and emphasise existing potentials, as we can see in this section, I chose 3 main vectors, body, mind, politics, it's also my standpoint to not work with usual classifications.

System to hybrid them in plan, and section.

Each intervention takes inspiration from its location and takes on different architectural forms, depending on its specific site conditions. Most of my references for empowering projects are 60s utopian theoretical projects, from super studio megastructures to Cedric price systems for education, the other part of my references tend to be hyper-local interventions, based on site and socially carried, the ambition of the project is to bind these two extremes into a re-invented form of a virtual megastructure that appears in space broken down into several parts, in landing points, all serving a specific site in the city. The architectural form of which differs.

In time, I produced a user manual, a guide revealing also my belief that architecture isn't only created by the designers, but also by all the actors interacting with it through time. The user manual has six steps: extraction, disturbance, collision, re-assembling, revendicating, and caring. These steps are encountered by the project and multiple actors share a role in the construction of the city. This is a good time to explain that I use writing as a project tool.

> Model first layer, strip and bridging space and time.

My approach is embedded in the reality of it, the roughness, the dirtyness of existing spaces, from these I **extract** the quality of the space, the surprises of the program and the poetic potential. In order to understand the quality of the space I did a taxonomy of the elements found on site, which I divided into four categories: ground, anthropocentric, atmospheric and alien. It was an attempt to justify of my fascination for them and understand the qualities of play or minor aesthetics of them for instance.

If the generic city is only a left-over carcass, I want to reanimate its flesh, through actors that enter into the plot, challenging the urban construction, you can find here the cast of the show. I wrote a play as a method to design. These actors are sometimes stable, inherited from the site and the taxonomy, and sometimes mobile, they **disturb** the power relationships existing on site, entering into a critical conversation with the existing fabric of the city. I also classify the types of disturbances I can create - read.

Programmatically, in order to produce new imaginaries, I **collide** programs and functions together, that aren't usually associated, the outcome of which is a network of empowering interventions across the city of Rotterdam, enlighting the site conditions of the left-over spaces they are set in. The programs are divided into three categories: body, mind, politics, and these programmatic functions come hybridizing in the project.

I located five sites on the line that I transformed: the monster of Mordor, the parking lot that wanted to be a beach, the re-invented commercial strip, the railway dune and the swallowed river.

In this first example, I will present the second act: the parking lot that wanted to be a beach.

TXT TO READ :

*Under, over and through. If we want to be furtive, do we need to be hidden?
It takes just a bit of curiosity to go down a maze of passageways in Rotterdam.*

After walking against the Maas, and hearing the roaring of the cars passing by, I let myself be swallowed by a strange passageway. Populated by motorised, metallic animals, I can barely hear myself until I arrive on a path on the edge of the canal. Closer to the water, I catch my senses back again. From the water drops to the smell of moisture.

There is satisfaction in being hidden. In the city of urban exhibitionism, the dark and mysterious nature of this path appeals to me. The other side of the passage is closed off by a veil of translucent material, letting the

colours and lights come through, without the clarity and explanation of form. We can only guess what this choreography of red lights can mean.

The volume appears in front of me, like a baroque convex curve, estrangling the space. The monolith seems of stone and the one opening it carries gives a view of a whole universe to see inside of it.

As the mysterious beast opens up his mouth, it reveals its entrails.

The water sounds louder and louder, by looking down from the passerelle I see the source of the atmosphere, a rain pipe fleeing the wall of the building to give back, drop by drop, the water into the canal. The steel tube, now tainted green, serves a whole scenery of a river made of stones on the shore, against which the water comes hitting.

The small scenery gives a view to the car passing by, it is across the two worlds, the highway and the river bed.

I couldn't help to go and explore. There is a playfulness, an adventure in charting spaces that seems to not follow our rules. I then make my way into this playground for my senses. The visitor can walk freely, in any direction, while observing the light falling down from five stories higher. The ramp openings on the sides create windows to the outside world, which seems to be of another dimension from here. The wholes in the carcass of the beast give way to the water, through hidden beaches made of rubbles. Under concrete bridges, over the soil, and in between.

The spatial quality that I saw in this space is its burriedness, but also the playfulness of the space not conceived for men. The intervention conserves the playful character of the space, which seeks to stir up our imaginaries. The qualities of moisture, moss and greening of the material are considered as qualities while the beast opens up to a broader beach. A public space transforms the meaning of the parking ramps, but the furtive nature of being hidden and not-allowed stays.

The architectural act consists of breaking open the concrete wall, **bursting**, and filling up the ground floor with sand, Inspired by the inner quality of the building, **in close relationship to the river, creating a public beach** and public space borrowing the ground element of sand from the swallowed river space on the other side of the city. All of this is camouflaged under the carcass of the building.

Nevertheless, in time, many actors contribute to the constitution of the space. The cranes and floating pool come into play, creating a bodily experience of swimming in the canal. **The space transforms over time, first during the day and the night, into a floating theatre, where the projection space can be reversed.**

I used writing again, as a way to give a voice to the cast of the project, as you can see the actors are represented as a play across the board, I also used this method to conceive the project and interventions, where each element interact with the other. I am trying to testify through this method the fact that architecture doesn't belong to the architect's voice.

In a long time, the whole canal can be invaded by the actors, blocking the way and protesting, and the system can evolve into a bridge across the city, invading the whole line. I use collages to express these programmatic collisions.

I used the sand from the island, and the pillars from the monsters, I try to rewrite the aesthetics code from minor to major.

Text to read :

THE PARKING LOT

Has been empty for a couple of weeks now, especially its ramp, stuck between the water and the roads. Before the terrain, so valuable, gets bought and transformed into a new housing tower, as the rest of the shore has, we have a few moments to act.

THE KNOCK-OUT BARGE

Shows up, its bowl locked in position, it's the trickiest part of this operation.

For now, the site looks like a construction site floating on water. The pontoons attach to each other before the start of the construction show.

THE KNOCKOUT BOWL

Hit the concrete wall three times, enough to make three cylindrical holes in the carcass of the parking lot's first floor.

THE CRANE

Carries the sand.

THE SAND

Fills the whole ground floor, enough to create a covered beach, giving now access to the water.

THE CRANE

Rotates again. Now focuses on the roof of the ramp, carrying elements of the scaffolding, pillars, surfaces and a textile roof to attach to them. The structure is made in such a way that you can accumulate as many elements as needed and create as many « floors » as you want.

THE STRUCTURE

Expands on the ramp, extend in the form of an amphitheatre, expanding on the side, delimitating a half-circle stage in front.

THE JOINTS

Take the room they need, and adjust the air in between the elements.

THE AIR INFRASTRUCTURE

Is plugged into the structure.

AIR

Come wrapping the structure, insulating the space. The whole construction appears to be a blur.

FABRIC

In the form of tensile surfaces or curtains, separate the spaces. The spaces are layered from public to intimate, but their borders are confused.

THE WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Goes through the structure, as pipes coming from a reservoir, plugged in directly into the program.

AIR

Is pumped in the structure once all is ready.

WATER

Starts flowing.

THE PARASITE

Takes its first breath.

FOLLOWERS

Like a procession, the crowd degrows towards the ramp and slowly walks down towards the ground.

ADVENTURERS

Some visitors decide to escape the crowd to join the balcony on the first floor, by navigating the carpark. They realize when arriving outside that the sky now reveals its constellations. They will realize that the stars shine through a lighting layer on cables in front of the tensile fabric. Looking down, a new architectural element has come to join the parking ramp during the show.

DIVERS

Arriving downstairs, the water now ripples in different colours. A floating shadow is waiting on the other side of the suspended bicycle path, the same vertical oscillations can be found in the aquatic animal that seems to be grasping at the concrete.

CAUTIOUS

We went around the bloc to find the suspended path and walk along the river. Like a wedding procession, a few curious cyclists watch us go next to them.

Act III: the re-invented commercial bridge

The system then develops into the re-invented commercial bridge, a camouflaged intervention, **re-assembling** programs of theatre and entertainment, body, mind, and politics into a bridge taking place on the grave of the old Rotterdam bridge. Indeed, the system can take many different architectural forms and languages. The space is ever-changing and adaptable to the city's evolution and programs.

The intervention plays on the two sides that the architecture can have, playing on the duality of the old bridge relic.

Act VI: the trash palace

The line also becomes a floating entertainment palace, a scaffolding system on water but on water, on floating elements that can combine. They work together at certain spots in the network, to collide functions together. Going towards the other side of the city by travelling on water, it lands on the swallowed riverfront beach, where people can freely access its program, unless the water rises, and the floating palace then cannot be accessed, enlightening the site conditions of a tidal situation.

Conclusion :

The project and research that I conducted this year was an experiment to challenge the definition of architecture as a building.

I believe that the role of the architect in society cannot be to follow a brief and built an architectural object, from my research to the design I chose on purpose to work on different scales, mostly on an urban scale, almost a policy scale, because I don't think the architectural piece can work independently of the whole.

I perceive the city as a network of actors and flows, and the architecture then deconstructs into several layers of meaning, and I think we cannot think of architecture as independent buildings on plots. When seeing the climatic but also a political crisis that we live in, it is very clear that architecture isn't an independent sphere.

I then challenge the differentiation of programs that usually fits a profit-based construction of the city. I think the urban space should be challenged to emulsify our imaginaries and not reduce them.