

# Rewilding potential

## Architectural potentials for countering the economization of value

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## Introduction

It is increasingly difficult to differentiate the time we spend on labour and on leisure. Firstly in employment, technology has made us accessible to our employers at any time and place, often with the expectation to switch between productive time and leisure at a moments notice. The ensuing dissolution of conventional daily rhythms is one many of us have come to experience in the face of the on-going pandemic, but which is unlikely to recede even when returning to offices and schools is deemed safe again. After all it now appears that most white-collar employees can function just as well without the expenses of renting buildings or long commutes. As a result the building-type of the office as the we know it seems almost redundant.

At the same time and more perplexingly, our leisurely activities increasingly bear resemblance to the exploitation recognized in labour. The collection of personal data for targeted marketing that is at the core of the business models of the largest internet companies has proved incredibly lucrative. Software and entertainment industries are obvious examples, but even companies seemingly based on retail upon closer look turn out to deal primarily with information. When purchasing goods one pays as much with the information the exchange generates, as one does with currency. There seems to be a whole additional level of value creation overlaid on conventional wage labour. Yet the process by which these acts of spare time become valuable is not entirely clear even to their operators and beneficiaries. How exactly does watching a movie on a free streaming service produce value? Or seeing an advertisement on social media? Although they undeniably do, hardly anyone would consider them labour. This makes it difficult to understand their operation or estimate a rate of exploitation. The often touted rule – if you get something for free, you are the product – does not hint as to what kind of product can this consumption possibly produce, and how.

In *Capital is dead*, McKenzie Wark (2019) argues that information is qualitatively such an anomalous commodity, that since its becoming a dominant force of production it is misleading to talk of capitalism in its conventional sense anymore. The emerging new ruling class is then characterised by controlling the means of information, or its vector, rather than the means of production. The glaring contradiction here is that while the commodity form is based on scarcity, information is by its nature abundant and free. (39) The precondition of the vectorialist class is then its ability to make information scarce again, through intellectual property legislation.

Accordingly, Wark (2019, p. 42) defines the vector of information as primarily a proprietary relation that produces and maintains hierarchy, whether the technology itself is capable of participation or not: ‘the legal and technical protocols for making otherwise abundant information scarce’. As such, owning a vector is not limited to owning any particular technology, – computers, cables, or even a flows of data – but defines their organization in a way that leads to an asymmetry of information between its participants. While for example a typewriter is a technology, the postal service that makes it possible to expect a letter to reach its destination in time is a vector, even if a primitive one; the constraints of letter size and weight hardly limit the inherent participatory potential of the technics of writing, giving the owner of the service has relatively little control over its users. With digital technology however, almost any situation can be made into a vector.

Like any ruling class and mode of production, the vectorialist class comes with its associated subordinate, the hacker class. Consisting of a heterogeneous array of creative workers, Wark defines the hacker class by its paradoxical role in creating novelty. Where labourers and farmers produce commodities of equal kind and value to each other, hackers are tasked with the production of difference: engineers invent new technics, philosophers invent new concepts (Wark, 2019, p. 40). Yet this novelty comes to exist only to the degree it can be recognised as intellectual property. A kind of parody of the artist’s creativity, ultimately the difference of the hacker is instrumentalized to produce sameness in the form of exchange value. This is familiar also to architects, who sometimes find their profession reduced to drawing disguises on floor plans calculated to maximize rent per square-foot.

In the resulting diagram the role of information is twofold. On one hand consumers generate information that is valuable in aggregate as index of their behaviour, and on the other hand hackers employed by vectorialists produce the means to collect this information.

In thinking of the future of labour (or the lack thereof), the concepts of information and value require an urgent reassessment: How does information become valuable? How should we think of information to begin with? How should we think of value to begin with? These questions serve to help speculate what new forms might the production of value take, and the potentials of architecture in relation to them.

## Information

Although Wark shows how information is made scarce again through its commodification as intellectual property, the definition of exactly what constitutes information or how it moves is left fairly open. Wark also perhaps intentionally does not take part in the question of whether the profit realized by vectoralists originates from the activity of users or strictly from the labour of the hacker class. Much of the recent debate on the process of valorisation in social media platforms revolves around whether user activity should be seen as labour, or as equivalent to a natural resource which is only appropriated through technology (Andrejevic, 2014; Arvidsson & Colleoni, 2012). A social network for example cannot make profit if people are not actively using it. It therefore seems to require the user's labour-like activities in order to produce a commodity that generates profit, and thereby exploits the users (Fuchs, 2015).

Most explanations use variations of transmission schemas, where information (or data, or attention, or knowledge) is seen to be transmitted between senders and receivers. However in this understanding information would appear to be already valuable when it is captured by an enterprise, making its accumulation an expropriation of existing wealth, or fixed capital (Stevens, 2011). Yet the value of information cannot be separated from its transmission. Attention provides a slightly more promising concept in tying the value of information to its potential to reach and affect individuals, but no transmission schema offers an entirely satisfying account for how and when this mysterious commodity becomes valuable.

For Gilbert Simondon the concept of information is inseparable from the material medium being informed. Rather than a constituted substance, information itself is not even a term of the process, but marks the signification emerging from revealing how its participants can further individuate (Scott, 2017). The individuation of any being involves the resolution of an inherent tension present in all individuals: the incompatibility between what is individuated and what remains as a preindividual potential yet to become. Information too, can be understood as partial individuation, which serves to bring the disparate realities to a degree that they can become a system in order to further individualize (Scott, 2017, p.573).

In Simondon's example of casting a brick, a mould does not inform clay as if coming from its outside, but the clay itself has a preindividual potential for deformation on which the mould imposes a limit. The clay matter and the mould are the 'end-points of two technological half-trajectories' whose joining constitutes the individuation of the brick (Combes, 2013, p. 72). Similarly a user of a social network does not transmit information to a data-centre as if handing something in their possession, but imposes constraints on a potential already designed into technology. The end points here are the network's potential to change according to its user's behaviour, and the user's drive to solve a problem. What is valuable is not any piece of constituted information or even the process, but the ability to modulate the process according to the changing demands of the buyers of information. This ability to control what metrics are reinforced through the use of a service, and thus the kind of individuation they produce is also what Wark describes in the vector.

Accordingly some (Stevens, 2011) have proposed that instead of information, we should think of the commodity in question here as the capacity to inform, or *information-power*. Much like Marx's (1993) concept of labour-power that replaces labour, information-power is generative in its relation to a particular informer/labourer and informed/consumer. There are no senders or receivers distinct from message, but participants who become the very medium of its productive process. It is important to clarify that this participation is not in relation to a simple act of transmission, but participation in common psychosocial problematics. A commodity even more peculiar than labour-power, information-power reposes not only in human flesh but the whole individuation complex.

The exchange of information-power, is equally inseparable from the pre-individual problematic at hand. To buy or employ information power, the exchanged commodity needs to use and enforce the same system of measure that any act of information produces (Stevens, 2011). This means that the price of information-power cannot be money, but an intermediary that facilitates particular individuation. This medium nonetheless also has a monetary price, which then expresses indirectly the exchange-value of its informativity.

If information is what only prepares the individuation of pre-existing tensions, how is it that we perceive it as complete and transmissible facts in our every day life, on timetables and numbers? For Simondon it is only through an insertion into a larger psychosocial problematic that any of these facts make sense to begin with. While information brings together the realities of a previously incompatible tension, it never resolves into a fully individualized piece. Its resolution does not result in a crystallized being, a piece of knowledge, but the production of a tension that demands a more nuanced resolution. The assertion that the process of information carries on as individuation holds true even if we accept a transmission schema of information: it still functions to affect and individuate the actions of those that it informs. Numbers or data never exist for their own sake, but to inform us on efforts to resolve more qualitative problems. The readings of a thermometer are meaningful only insofar as they help us determine which coat we should wear outside, or if the ice of a lake is strong enough to walk on. These are qualitative problems, and even after consulting the numbers of the thermometer we act based on a myriad of other affective factors: our mood, appearance, health. Equally, the view-durations and clicks recorded by social media do not exist for their own sake, but to give a monetary price to the qualitative actions that inform them. With a social network, the resolution of the metastability of the user – their desire to contact a friend for example – might begin with a decision to make a profile on a social media. This does not exhaust the problem, but only reveals additional actions needed for its resolution; finding a computer terminal, access to internet, and so on. They inform the user of further means to resolve their issue. At the same time they inform the operator of the network about a different problematic; that of surplus-value.

## Value

To determine how transindividual relations become deployed to produce economic value it is necessary to reassess the concept of value. This is the task Brian Massumi (2018) undertakes in his *99 Thesis for the revaluation of value*, which aims to altogether uncouple the concept from its economic use.

Massumi begins his project by addressing the dominant economic use of value, conceived through the notion of money as the medium of exchange and store of value. The principle is immediately undermined by the logic of a 'good deal', where it is possible to receive more than money's worth of value in an exchange. Because the advantage is subjective and involves relative use-value, it cannot be rationally calculated into a price and remains inherently qualitative. Massumi (p. 7) posits that this excess of value over its originating terms, essentially surplus value, is the true engine of the economy that should be studied instead of any its measures.

Most palpable in the labour market, without an excess of qualitative value on the side of the employer there could be no profit (Figure 1a). As Marxian labour theory of value asserts, profit is the added amount of value that a worker produces over the value of what they receive in compensation. Massumi (p. 16) stresses however that the wage relation is only one way of generating economic surplus value, and increasingly out-dated. Indeed, Wark's (2019, p. 41) hacker class is characterised by a diminishing relation between quantity of labour-time and the quantity of produced value. Long hours of tedious work often amount to no value, while sudden revelations prove very valuable. The significance of recognizing exploitation in labour is then not in deciphering any quantified price of exploited value, but the implication of value originating from processually qualitative life activity, of which labour is but one example.

Where Marx posits that labour-time is congealed in its product as a quantity, Massumi insists that value remains originally qualitative. In fact, value is best defined by its incommensurability into anything else, or as life lived for its own sake. It is an emergent effect, meaning that it has a quality that cannot be fully attributed to the elements or conditions that produce it. Rather than elements, it is the differential between these elements and their manner of coming together that has intensity, the potential for producing an excess of effect. Surplus value owes its quality to this intensive difference, but does not replicate it.

If the value measured by money or labour-time is so uncompromisingly qualitative, how does it enter into the economic system as precise quantity? To explain this passage Massumi (p. 27) makes a crucial distinction between the economic system proper, the economizing process, and the field of life out of which this process draws value (Figure 1b). Although the factors contributing to price volatility are usually categorised as either endogenous or external to the market, neither can be separated from subjective experiences of fear, hope, and confidence, which condition the market's fundamental rules. Instead, these factors belong to a third, in-between category that Massumi (p. 9) calls the immanent outside. Neither interior nor exterior of a system, the immanent outside defines the possibility of its coupling with other systems. The example Massumi (p. 17) gives here is of the steam engine and the econo-

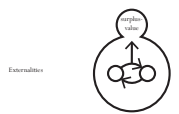


Figure 1a

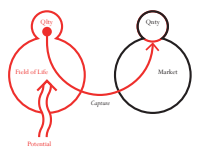


Figure 1b

my, two systems external to each other that nonetheless became reciprocally coupled in the industrial revolution. The steam engine, by separating its source of energy from the worker furthered the transformation of labour into an abstract commodity, while at the same time its competitive advantage became a driving force for its own evolution as an individual technical object (Pasquinelli, 2017). The processual coupling of the two systems belongs to neither one alone, but constitutes an immanent outside to both. Affect constitutes the immanent outside of the market.

Although itself emergent, quantity cannot retain the singularity of its underlying immanent intensity. Massumi (p. 42) gives the example of two identical measures of temperature taken during different times of the year. Although shown as equal by a thermometer, any particular weather is produced by a unique combination of differentials between their contributing factors. Unlike the thermometer, we register those differentials in our feeling. The same conditions that produce the weather resonate with our affective state. But in addition we contribute our own factors into the mix, – our state of mind and health, our expectation based of previous days' weather – all of which combine into a singular, incommensurable feeling. Both the affective experience and the thermometer's quantification are surplus values of the weather. But where affect remains a qualitative life-value, the quantified measure is inherently reductive.

This reductivity does not mean that quantity cannot reconnect onto the intensive field. When we check the temperature to decide which clothes to wear outside, the already once derived surplus of the weather's intensity returns in the immanent field of our affect, producing new surplus-value: a surplus value of information. However, the intensity of this second-order experience is always lesser than the original immanent field it emerged from, because the underlying conditions are fewer in number and have lesser contributing differentials (Figure 1c). This is the existential threat Massumi (p. 57) recognises in economic quantification. The relentless repriming of metrics associated with profit into the immanent field of life constitutes an exercise of power, analogous to a manipulation of the weather on the basis of making it easier to register by a thermometer. The aim of economic repriming to produce ever more repetitive affect consecutively decreases the intensive potential of our affective life.

The major exception Massumi (p. 48) finds to the degenerating tendency is the financial markets, particularly financial derivatives. In principle derivatives are designed to render any conceivable differentials comparable, by forming pricing relationships between the present and future, or combining qualitatively different types of assets. But because equations for pricing these instruments are methodologically so flawed, they require the supplementation of human intuition. This means that in determining the price of a contract financial traders ultimately employ their own feeling, that is their affective resonance to the intensity of the fluctuating market price (Figure 1e). A curious reversal occurs. Measurement is no longer carried out as a way to inform action, but human action is carried out to inform measurement. Its affective resonance converges with the process of quantification, and quantification threatens to become immanent to itself. Yet this convergence can never be fully realized, because the service of finance in the capitalist economy still requires periodic actualization of profit and fixing of prices (Figure 1f).

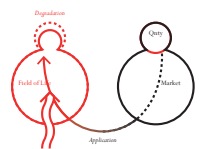


Figure 1c

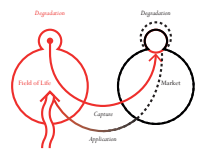


Figure 1d

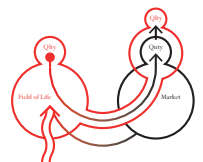


Figure 1e

The solution Massumi (2018, p. 24) points to in combatting degeneration is to then ‘reverse-engineer’ derivatives’ capacity to return economization into life-value. The ensuing alternative economic model would be able to realize in full the convergence of quantification with its immanent field, and to do away with the degeneration of life value by its economization. Massumi (p. 87) speculates that such a scheme could take the form of an ‘autonomous zone’, where qualitative differentials would be able to play off without being captured into the economy (Figure 1g). The trial of such a project would be to prevent its values from being immediately recaptured as profit, as happens with finance. In order to survive, Massumi (p. 88) asserts that the zone would need to be able to interface and contribute to the existing economy, while maintaining a relational autonomy from it. Like Wark, here Massumi (p. 66) recognises an emerging class relation above that of labour and capital: ‘The antagonism between the rewilding of potential through its escape in the immanent outside and pre-emptive capture as human capital’. To facilitate this rewilding of potential should be the underlying goal of any architectural project.

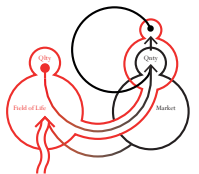


Figure 1f

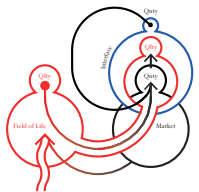


Figure 1g



## Stages of the economization of information-power

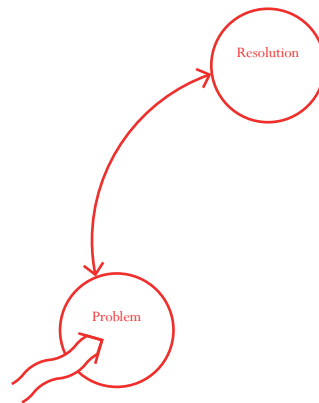


Figure 2a

*Transindividual*

A transindividual relation where the surplus-value of life contributes to its intensity. The two terms present individuals collectively resolving their preindividual tension, consuming each other's information-power.

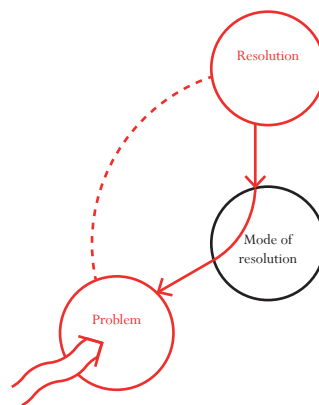


Figure 2b

*Transindividual scheme*

A transindividual relation organized into a scheme where individuals participate to resolve a particular tension. Here the quantification of the immanent field through metrics produced by the scheme does not yet systematically fold back to reprime it. In Massumi's example of weather, the thermometer quantifies weather and produces a second-order affect through us being influenced by it, but does not affect the intensity of the weather itself. The three terms show individuals with a particular psychosocial problem seeking its resolution through the scheme.

## Stages of the economization of information-power

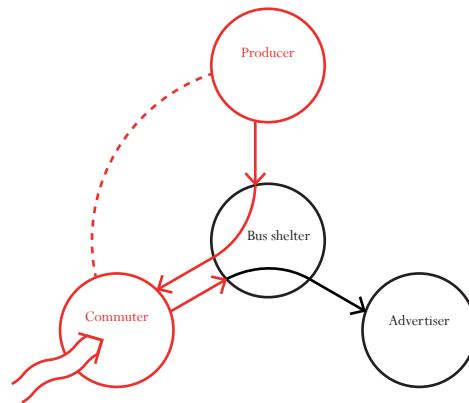


Figure 2c

### *Quantification*

The quantification of the immanent field through metrics produced by the scheme does not yet systematically fold back to reprime it. In Massumi's example of weather, the thermometer quantifies weather and produces a second-order affect through us being influenced by it, but does not affect the intensity of the weather itself. The three terms present individuals with a particular psychosocial problem seeking its resolution through the scheme.

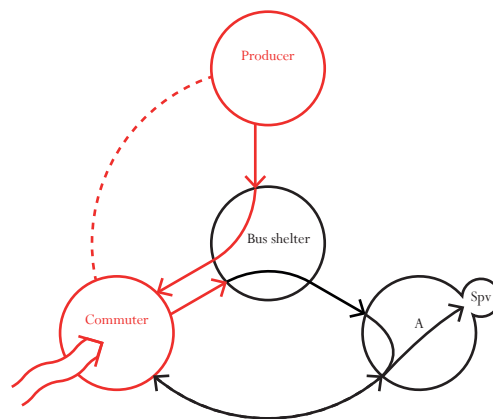


Figure 2d

### *Reductive mode of quantification*

When quantified life-value becomes accumulated into economic profit, it does not return to the intensive field. For example in wage-labour individuals participate in wage labour to resolve lack of sustenance, and at the same time produce the metric of labour-time. However the production of this metric alone does not figure as profit yet. The third term presents the need of economic quantification to realize immanent surplus as profit. Colour red indicates qualitative value emerging from intensive life, while black marks quantitative, economic value realised as the profits of the buyers and the vector.

## Stages of the economization of information-power

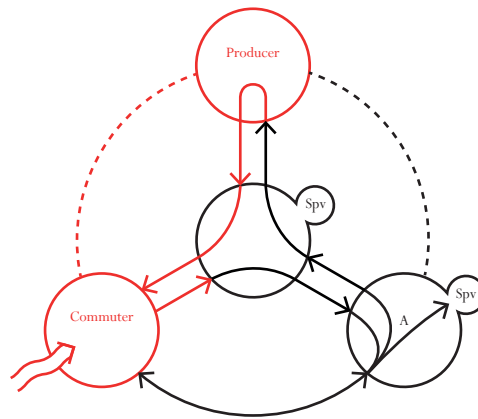


Figure 2e

*Repriming and degeneration of life*

After life-value is quantified as profit it becomes reapplied into the original intensive field to produce second-order event derivatives. The ability to manipulate the produced metrics, and reapply them to the intensive field amounts to Wark's vector; for example a digital social network selling user's information-power in the form of advertising space. The life-value resulting of this repriming is degenerate, meaning it has less intensity than the original field. Profit is realized both in this company's return of investment as relative surplus, and the network's profit from selling its user's information power.

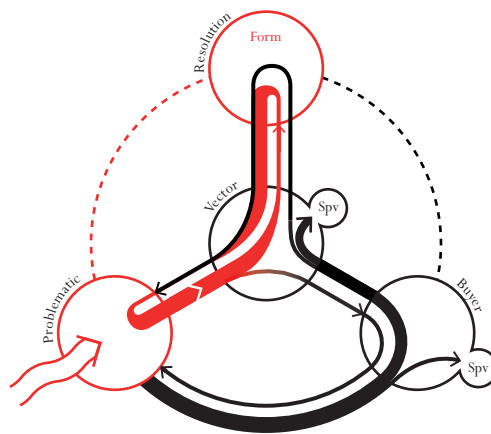


Figure 2f

*Current situation*

The same full scheme with line thickness indicating the relative magnitude of value in the exchange between each participant. Quantification occurs where the flow turns from red to black. This is the surplus value of information, which the vector siphons and realizes as profits.

## Speculation

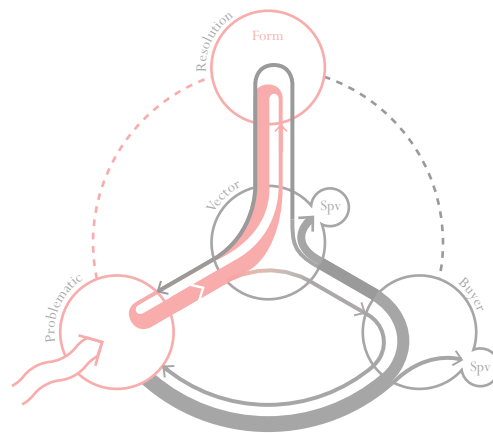


Figure 2f

*Current situation*

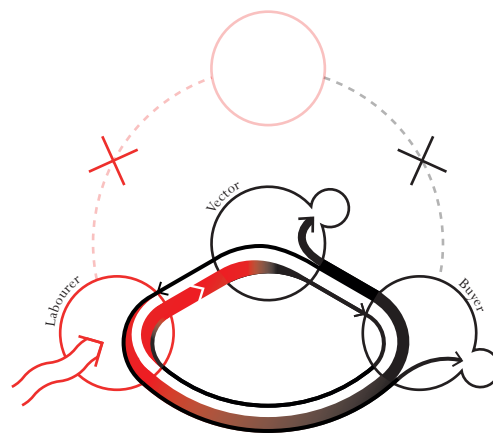


Figure 2g

*Speculation; direct exchange of information-power*

Without the transindividual relation between the consumer and the hacker, information appears as an already valuable product to be accumulated. This is why the exchange of information-power cannot be organised on the terms of wage-labour. Information is dependant on the affectivity of its participants. Reapplication of economization requires the production of second-order affect, which cannot be achieved with a quantified wage. People participate in wage labour to resolve a very specific problem, their lack of sustenance. The information-power bought with a wage would have little value, since it would have been motivated by this very limited problematic.

## Speculation

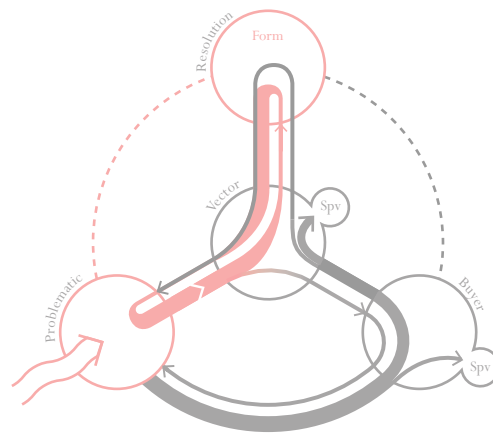


Figure 2f

*Current situation*

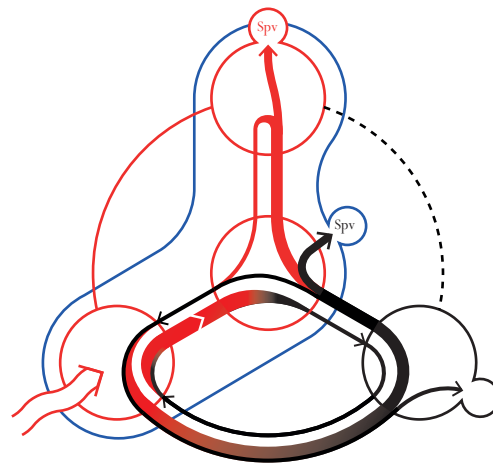


Figure 2h

*Speculation; Autonomous zone*

Massumi models his speculative remedy to degeneration on the tendency of financial instruments to converge quantification with their own the immanent field. To allow qualitative differentials to fully play out without being captured, he proposes a an autonomous economic zone to counter the imperative of profit realization in normative economy. In order to survive, the zone would require an interface between the qualitative autonomous zone and the normative economy. Marked in blue, this barrier would allow the zone to contribute quantitatively to the economy, while maintaining a relative autonomy. qualitative proliferation within it.

## Habitat

How to prevent the economization of life through the exploitation of information-power from becoming a default underlying condition in all transindividual relations? Even without losing sight of information's materiality, digital technologies seem to push its exploitation ever further out of the scope of architectural intervention. In considering a site, we should remember the particularity of information to specific psychosocial problematics. As a part of all technics and the transindividuals that they accommodate, its exploitation too goes beyond digital technologies.

An interesting precedent could be found in conventional out-door advertising, especially in street furniture funded by advertising. JCDecaux, the world's largest outdoor advertising company provides and maintains street furniture free of charge in exchange for a monopoly on their incorporated advertising space. Although advertising had been associated with city street furniture for long, the company claims to be the first to incorporate it as a function in the designs of their bus stops, kiosks, and public toilets. That is to say, their street furniture is designed primarily as vehicles of advertising, and only secondly for the function that people use them for. They modify transindividual relations to generate the kind of information-power that suits better for exchange. Instead of paying for a bus shelter with taxes, commuters pay with their information-power that using the shelters generates, their capacity for individuation. This is far more valuable than the actual infrastructure, and the main criteria both in the design of the shelter as well as in determining new bus stop locations (Gaffney 2009). Such a bus shelter functions as a vector of information on the same principle as digital social networks do. Only here the psycho-social problematic has a far stronger extensive, spatial dimension: commuting from home to an office for example.

Although today most passengers check departure times on their mobile phones, this does not mean that the phone has eclipsed the bus shelter as a vector. The time a commuter spends browsing their phone waiting for a bus still occurs within the cycle conditioned by the bus schedule, and exploited by the bus shelter manufacturer. To catch a bus requires an alertness that is necessarily directed in the surrounding landscape. By interrupting this alertness the shelter manages to tap into a kind of information-power that is still difficult for a digital social network to capture. As long as people move about on their errands, the information-power directed to transportation can ultimately only be captured by means that directly cater to its resolution, like the shelter. This is perhaps why outdoor advertising still persists as such a large market.

The value lost to looking at advertising seems trivial because there's not much else to do while waiting at a bus stop anyway. The event of waiting for a bus is not very intense. Its resolution doesn't require sophisticated constraints – like managing crowds or up keeping climate conditions – which is why there is little specific quality to the event. But this more tangible expression of information-power at the junctures of transport systems also hints at better opportunities for intervention. There are many sites where the same factors are much higher in number and can potentially combine in ways that has more life-value worth redeeming.

Here Massumi's (2018) notion of intensive magnitude is helpful. For Massumi the ability of derivatives to index the qualitative differences of quantifying operations shows that the opposition of latter as reductive and the former as singular is too dire. Intensity has always both a conditioning quantitative dimension and a self-sufficing qualitative dimension, which overlap inseparably. This means that events experienced as pure affective life-quality should be still understood in reference to the quantity in their conditioning factors, even when the conditioning elements are always qualitative 'sub-events' themselves. The example Massumi (p. 92) gives is of starling flocks that sometimes swell to contain tens of thousands of birds. Although these formations can be measured by the number of birds or the volume of formations, to do so would miss the awe-inspiring quality of their eventness. The movement of the flock has an aesthetic quality which cannot be measured through the elements which contribute to it. Yet compared to a quantitatively smaller group of ten starlings, the flock of ten thousand has an obviously a greater presence. It is important to note that the quantity of the conditioning factors does not carry on to the event as greater quantity, but as a greater degree of the same quality. This degree of intensity cannot be measured through its elements, but registers only in reference to itself as a greater insistence of its own singular quality. The greater number of participating birds corresponds to a greater affective intensity – or zest, as Massumi (p. 94) calls it after Whitehead – without reducing its incommensurable quality.

This correlation of intensity with the number of same kind of contributory factor is not always the case. For a different event a smaller number of elements might just as well produce a greater intensity than a larger would. This is because the individual elements and conditions of an event are equally laden with the dimensions of intensity and magnitude as the event that emerges out of their interplay. As Massumi (p. 93) writes, the contributing elements '[...] *insist on themselves*, as well as their integral expression insisting on itself, and the quality of the global expression is modulated as a function of that.' Certain participating elements might insist on themselves in a manner that weakens the global event as they grow in number after a certain tipping point. The increasing or decreasing intensity of an event also reflects back into the intensity of its own elements – even when that change is caused or conditioned by the quantity of those very same elements.

This applies particularly to human gatherings. The zest of a crowded street is not the same as the zest of a starling flock, or indeed of different crowd on a different street. The elements that condition its grace are more complex than the number of people present. If the sense of adventure present at a train terminal is higher than at a regional halt or a bus station, it is not solely because of the number of participating people. Rather at the terminal there is a need for a much more nuanced mode of resolution for the problem, necessary for the connection of multiple modes of transport with their respective rhythms. This nuance is present both in the individual experience of passengers as well as the layout of the site. The coming together of these factors offer ample material for their recombination to produce new value.

## Case study: Helsinki Central Station

The Helsinki central station has several conditions that make it an interesting site for seeking this kind of intensity. Geographically Helsinki is built on a peninsula facing the Baltic sea (Figure 3). The railway effectively divides the city in two and forms a bottleneck for all of transport at the terminal. Partly for this reason the city has grown close to the terminal and the building has a strong public presence, neighbouring museums, the parliament, as well as important squares (Figure 4). The relatively old age of the terminal and the neighbourhood also creates particular tensions of scale in having had to adapt to new modes of travel by car, tram and metro over years. These factors make it the most frequented building in Finland, with daily number of visitors at around 200 000 before the on-going pandemic. Although it doesn't compare to the megacities of the world, this stands out as a strong focal point in the context of the city and country. Particularly in the winter the railway is a crucial component of thousands of daily commuters offers reliable transportation protected from the elements.

The station has been repeatedly lauded as one of the most beautiful of its building type in Europe, and enjoys uncontroversial popular appreciation among locals. Intended as a comprehensive work of art, the building has contributions by several prominent sculptors, painters, and textile designers, many of whom represent what is thought of as the golden age of Finnish art. The grandeur of its massive vaulted ceilings brings to mind more the sacral and concert architecture of churches than the more typical steel architecture of other station of the time, and indeed the ticket hall seems to routinely become a site for music performances ranging from buskers to professional choirs. The inauguration ceremony itself featured the Helsinki philharmonic Orchestra playing in the luggage reception (Högström, 1996).

The history of Finnish railroad is relatively short in the European context. The first line, from Helsinki to Hämeenlinna, was constructed under an initiative for economic improvement of Alexander II of Russia only in 1856. The terminal was set on the north of the Helsinki peninsula, just south of the Töölönlahti bay. The first terminal building designed by Carl Edefelt was a manor-like three story building, with a decorative neo-gothic façade. Although carefully crafted and by a prominent architect, the volume of traffic soon outgrew the small building, and in 1902 the railroad board organised an open competition for a new station. This time the massing of the new building was set to be in a U-shape around the platform yard, similar to the Frankfurt Hauptbahnhof designed by Hermann Eggert in 1888 (Tuomi, 2007). The centre wing of the station was to have a large vestibule hall with a main entrance to Kaivokatu street immediately south of the station, as well as secondary entrances to a square in east and west. Eliel Saarinen won the competition with a national romantic proposal that was nonetheless criticized for its heavy resemblance to the national museum Saarinen had built only a few years earlier. In the following years Saarinen radically revised his design towards the more rational and grandiloquent designs of central Europe (Högström, 1996). The resulting eclectic design was not strictly jugend-style or modern, but praised by contemporaries and remains Saarinen's best known work.





Figure 3 Helsinki Peninsula



Figure 4 Töölönlahti bay

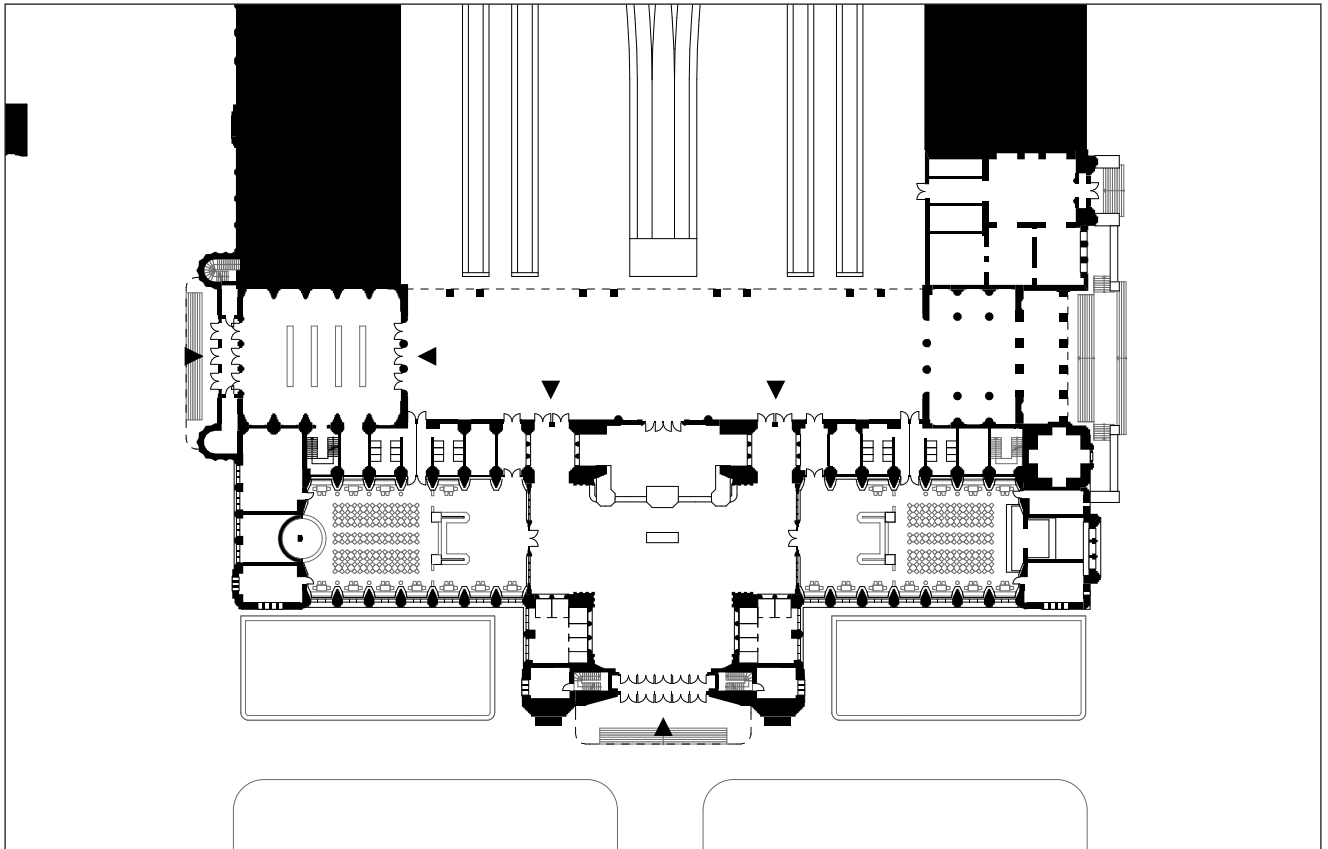


Figure 5 1922

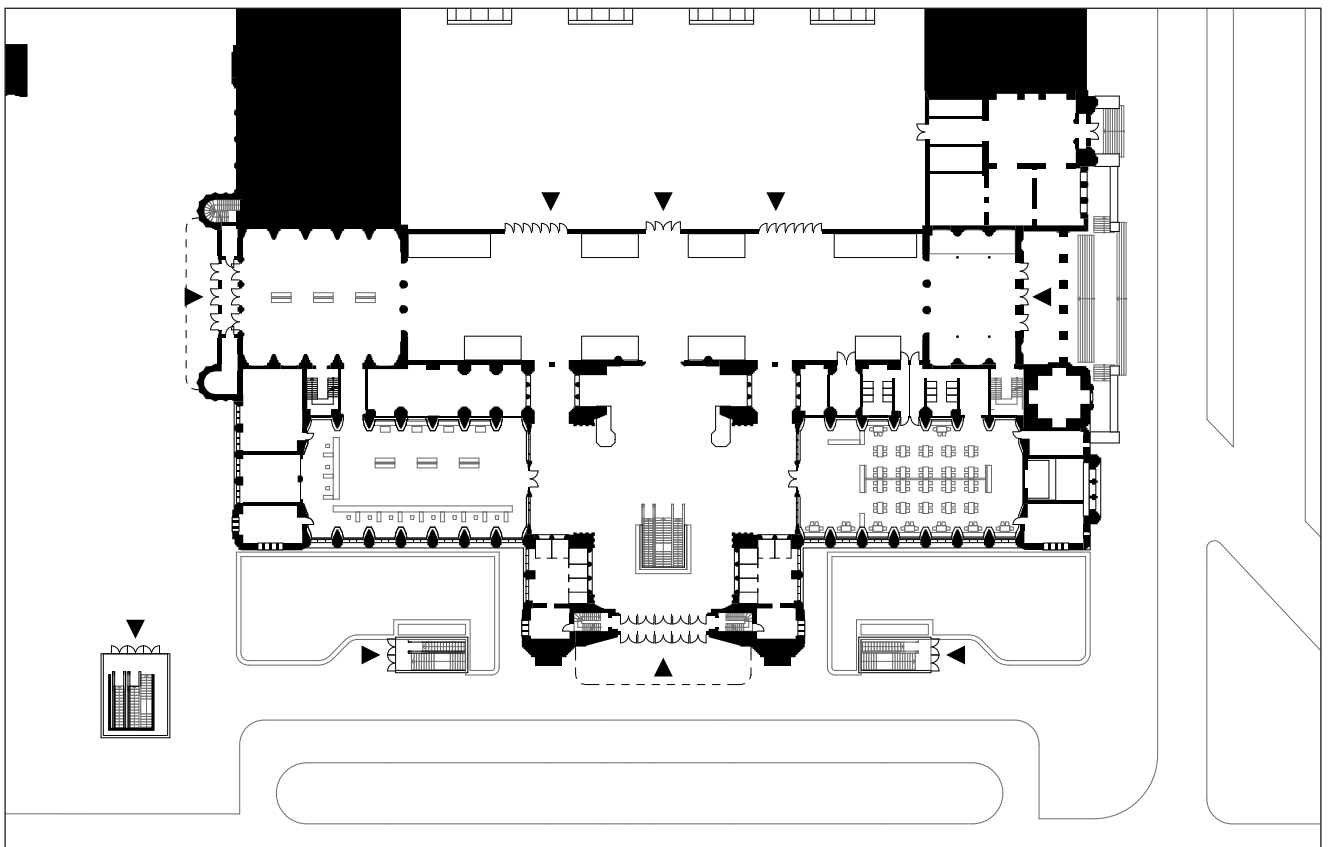


Figure 6 1985

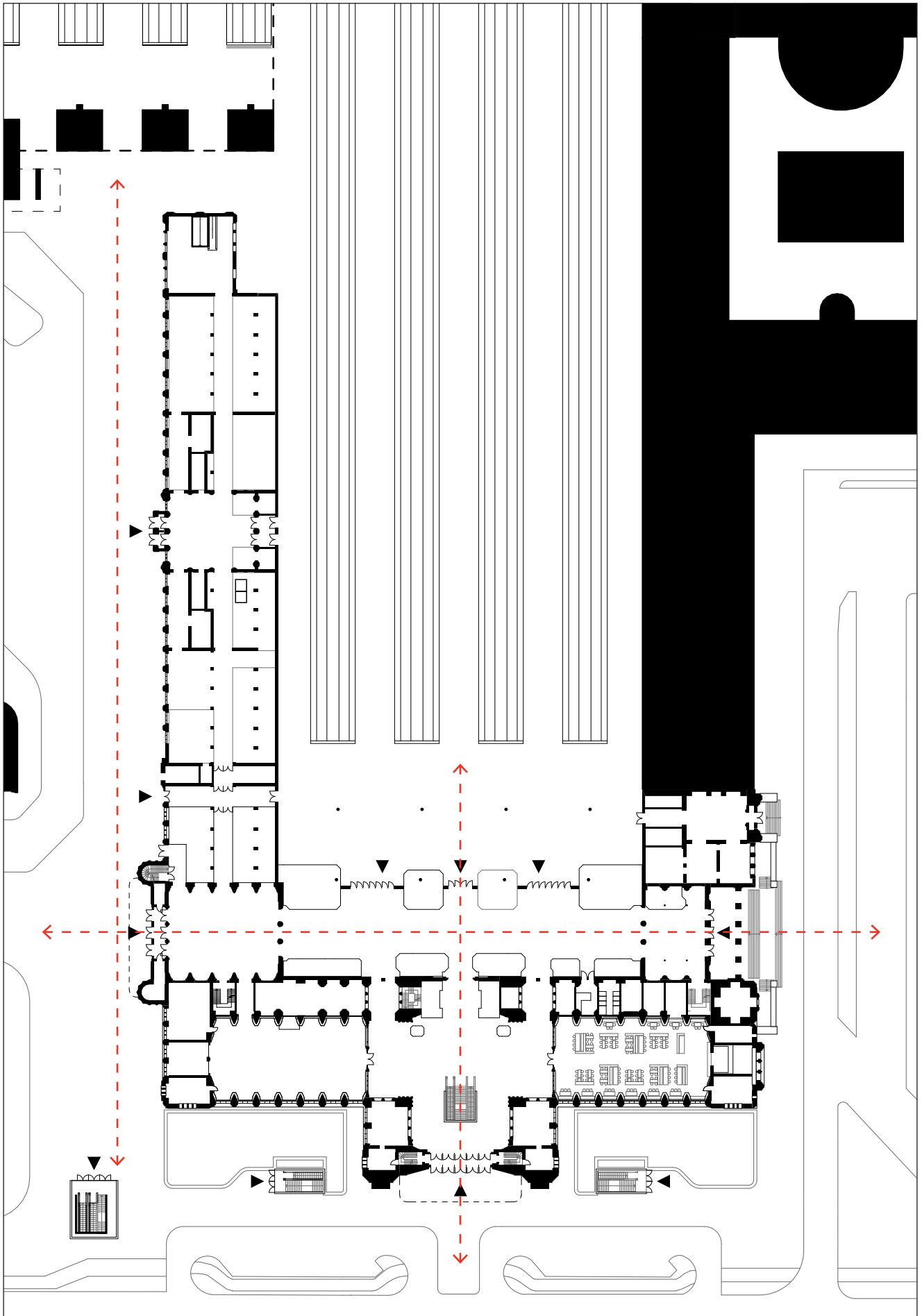


Figure 7 2020

The station's eventful period of construction began in 1905 from the administrative east wing, only to be interrupted just before completion by the first world war. Inaugurated in 1919 (Figure 5), the station never remained in a very defined state for long. Several partial construction projects carried on until 1938, and in 1950 a destructive fire saw the reconstruction of the previously open kiosk hall as an enclosed interior. Through the next decades the interior of the station saw several smaller renovations such as the addition of a new restaurant above the east entrance hall. In 1982 (Figure 6) the metro was opened with an entrance to the great hall. The platforms were only covered with a glass shelter in 2001 after a separate competition. In 2003 the west wing originally built for express cargo was renovated and rented as commercial space. At the same time the railroad pension trust constructed a hotel north of the Eliel-square on the west of the station.

Now for some years the dominating factor in the design of the station has been the increasing volume traffic. Where possible, old partitions and doorways have been removed to allow unobstructed flow of crowds through the building. The flow is divided between several main axes (Figure 7). A north-south axis runs through the main entrance from Kaivokatu street to the ticket hall with a metro entrance, cuts into the kiosk hall and the platforms of the courtyard. An east-west axis runs between the entrances to railway square and the station square, with their respective vestibules and the long kiosk hall between. Since commuter train platforms were moved out of the closed yard of the station to the west, the path of most daily commuters goes along the exterior wall of the west wing, without entering the building. This somewhat relieves the stress inside the ticket hall, except in harsher weather when many opt to take a slightly longer route within the station walls. The stream of crowds, intensifying and dwindling in sync with the train and metro arrivals reaches its highest intensity during the peak hours of morning and evening.

Accommodating these new crowds has not been frictionless. The experience of passing by the station is markedly tense with a feeling of crowdedness and lack of space. On one hand the rushing commuters contributes to an impassive squalidness on the ground floor. On the other hand space left without clear occupants is claimed by less selective characters. Especially in the colder months of the year the heated interiors and accessibility from around the city make for a vibrant meeting place of people who either don't have other warm place to stay, or are attracted to crowds: youths, homeless, street fundraisers, drug pushers. Unlike in shopping malls, it is harder to drive people away from the semi-public space. In reaction the station has by now rid most of its fixed furniture, a recent case in point being the removal of the last popular benches of the ticket hall for having attracted regular unwanted guests.

Although most palpable as crowdedness, the tension cannot be only attributed to the higher number of people present. Rather the changed rhythms of their movement and relation to one another as determined by the new mode of resolution to travelling has become incompatible with the architecture. The original layout was designed for a very specific sequence of operations with intervals of walking, queuing, and waiting. After purchasing a ticket, passengers would hand their luggage to a reception counter dominating the centre of the hall, and retire to either one of the adjacent restaurant halls depending on their travel class. To board their train, people would exit the vestibule through alcoves on either side of the luggage reception with a ticket

office, to an open air loggia with access to the platforms. Each of these necessary procedures required rooms closed off from each other to not be disrupted. Each of the separations and interval guides passengers smoothly to the next stop.

The placement of the ticket office at the narrowest crossing point between the great hall and the platform yard serves to make its consultation appear as the most obvious next step even to fare dodgers or people who might have never travelled by rail before. By reaching that point in the interior any passenger would already see that to board a train one would have to cross over to the platform yard. To cross over in turn one needs to then come to contact with the ticket seller. In Simondon's understanding of information as the signification of revealing a mode of resolution of incompatible fields, the station then has informativity with respect to this very specific mode of resolving travelling. It creates conditions in which a certain scheme appears as a resolution – in this case the scheme of ticket sales – contributing to producing metrics such as traffic volume and journey prices.

Even though the original operations have gone extinct long since, the informative potential of the ticket office's location still remains, if only to mark the unobstructed path between the street and the trains. The relation between the scheme and the location of is one of exteriority, meaning that either component could, and indeed have entered into assemblage with other components (DeLanda, 2006). The ticket sale has migrated into our mobile phones, while the information-power of the booth's location has been appropriated to the service of selling food or advertising, that likely bring more revenue than ticket sales. This makes the station essentially a vector of information, in principle similar to a digital social network or a purpose-made bus shelter. Only instead of our sociability or efforts to catch a bus, it economizes the value of revealing a mode of moving through the building.

The informativity of the ticket office's location is also redeemable – not only in the loose sense as its appropriation by fast food kiosks, but with the same intensity as the original ticket booth demanded. Its underlying elements retain the same original intensity as the intense juncture of equally informative strangers and their rhythmic movement in relation to each other that is unique to the station. Only in re-appropriating this quality is not possible to resort anymore to the original problem of travelling because its resolution, like that of the bus-shelter has become too undemanding. Instead it is necessary to invent ways of intensifying the existing elements in a way that re-intensify the event of passing through the station.

## Public life

In his satire *Refugee conversations*, Bertold Brecht (2019) transcribes the imagined meetings of two haphazard visitors at the Helsinki railway station during the second world war. Sitting in a crowded restaurant over a coffee and a beer, the characters Ziffel and Kalle bounce from topic to topic until one or the other finishes their beverage and unceremoniously leaves. Although the setting of the station has little relevance to the content of conversations, it has the effect of placing the event on the path of one's daily commute, as if the reader was eavesdropping on the characters from a neighbouring table. This effect plays well because most people are familiar with the kind of surprise pleasure that comes from witnessing such unlikely meeting bear fruit. One may even hope to take part in it while visiting the station. It is an event with undeniable intensity, inseparable from the context of the station. Without downplaying its irreducible life-quality, we can evaluate its value based on several criteria.

The feeling of pleasure and expectation constitutes what Massumi (2018) proposes as an aesthetic criteria for evaluating the intensity of events. It is an awe that indexes qualitatively the peak of an event's culmination. The meeting of Brecht's characters has zest. Not despite its arbitrary quality, but because of it: its intensity is both the intensity of the individual trajectories of its participants along their journey, as well as an intensity in the global rhythm of the station. Like a particularly impressive gust in the formation of starlings cannot be attributed to the agility of individual birds, the wonder that witnessing such conversation inspires cannot be located only in the characters speaking. Its indexing, although a felt quality, is not subjective but thoroughly transindividual. It comprehends more than the individuated actual movements carried out, and is inseparably linked to potential. The wonder of overhearing Brecht's refugees is supplemented by the potential of all the conversations that did not take place. These potentials are in turn themselves conditioned by the overall event, as well as their own quantifiable dimension.

If the station's intensity doesn't simply correlate to the number of people, we can find other metrics from speculating on the factors that led Brecht's refugees together. For example, one can imagine the characters ended up sharing a table because there were no empty ones left available. Had there been fully empty tables at the restaurant, each character would have sat down their own and continued their journey on a predictable trajectory. On the other hand if the restaurant was so full as to have no seats left, both characters would have left without a chance to encounter. The ratio of available seats to occupied tables provides then a quantifiable dimension to the intensity of the station restaurant. The event only reaches its greatest intensity when the restaurant is just crowded enough for all the available seats to be in occupied tables, so that each new visitor has to sit with a stranger. In this situation all of the participating individuals must prepare for a highest amount of potential motions to carry out: those already occupying a table must prepare the greeting motions in case someone joins them, while the person looking for a seat must be prepared to either join a table or retreat in response to the gestures of its occupant. Even though only one of the possible encounters comes to be, the unactualized potential of those that did not still insists on the event. Their potentials contribute to the expression of the event's intensity, registered as the wonder seemingly directed at the one actualised meeting. When



a full table becomes available, the intensity of not only the whole event decreases, but also the individual intensity of each present participant.

The two criteria serve to help recognise life-value and determine ways to propagate it by architectural means. The value of the station is the fortuitous collision of strangers in a certain speed and rhythmic movement that is unique its site. Its aesthetic index is the felt wonder and excitement, which varies according to its intensity. In any specific situation an aesthetic excitement arises, it also correlates to factors which can be quantitatively measured and manipulated. If that criteria is the ratio of available seats to tables, a new design should aim to increase the likelihood of all tables having at least one occupant and one available seat.

However, the restaurant's intensity cannot be attributed only to the conditions confined to the restaurant. The restaurant is only the culmination of a series of operations that together prepare the ground for its intensity. Queuing among same travel class, or arguing with the same ticket office creates an affinity that allows strangers to engage in a way that they otherwise would not dare. This affinity reaches its highest point in the restaurant, where it is also most likely to bear fruit. The actual beverages of Brecht's characters have little to do with this built up intensity that their ritual consumption allows to emerge.

This is why in the current condition of the station such productive encounter is difficult to imagine. Even with more opportunity for eating and drinking than ever, there is little intensity comparable to the old station restaurant – both when considering individual diners and the overall informativity of consumption to the problematic of travelling. Since the public operations of queuing and dining are no longer necessary, their surplus-event is not allowed to emerge either. There is no pretext for striking conversation, nor trust in fellow strangers to inspire desire to do so. The seclusion inflicted by lack of common projects goes much beyond the station, and is more endemic to public life in general.

In *The fall of public man*, sociologist Richard Sennet (1975) argues that contemporary public life suffers increasingly from a confused relation to private life. The valuation of personal feeling over impersonal rituals has led to the prevalence of what he calls an intimate view of society, where all life is judged based on how it might benefit the character development of the individual. As a result previously crucial impersonal relations now appear as unworthy of engagement, because they do not yield intimate psychological benefits.

Sennet (p. 30) traces the roots of the development to late 18<sup>th</sup> century industrial and political revolution. In the unprecedented upheavals of the city's population demographics and economic structure, the will to control the public domain began to shift emphasis to protecting oneself from its chaos. This withdrawal found a safe haven in the family, which was consequently elevated from a particular non-public domain into an idealised model for all social relations. Although the public retained a certain importance, it was one increasingly granted by a perceived inferiority; a necessary evil where one could indulge in otherwise immoral activities, and an experience beneficial for the development of personal character.

Sennet (p. 37) recognises the legacy of these changes in several ideas that still guide our daily public experience. Perhaps the most central is the notion of involuntary disclosure of emotion: the belief that the inner state of a person is expressed as gestures or appearances beyond one's control. As exemplified by the practices of phrenology and early psychoanalysis, personality came to appear as a state that cannot be controlled or hidden, leading to an inevitable superimposition of psychological on public imagery. When public figures are judged by the perceived authenticity of their representation of personal feelings, any gesture of public expression becomes reduced to a representation or a personal state. Indeed it becomes impossible to communicate on anything except the personal: one can only either expose or hide their interiority.

The only defence against being detrimentally exposed in public then appears as an effort to stop feeling altogether. Among strangers one withdraws to attract as little attention as possible – on one hand to avoid self from becoming exposed to others, and on the other to protect it from undesired influences of the chaotic public. For strangers to coexist under such scrutiny it becomes necessary to uphold a right to be silent. To break this silence means to make not only oneself vulnerable, but any other approached stranger as well. The awareness of the repercussions of such transgression creates an uneasiness that is hard to overcome.

Paradoxically the public abandonment leads to a symmetrical impoverishment of the private. When public is defined by a struggle against accidental self-disclosure, private relations appear as a matter of voluntary self-revelation. The two drives complement each other in a vicious cycle where neither finds satisfactory resolution. In public one seems to never be able to fully conceal their character, while in private one never seems to have enough self to reveal.

The process that institutes the personal, particularly emotion, as a proprietary domain of an individual subject is of particular interest to Massumi (2018), too. Because affect is inherently extra-personal, its becoming personal emotion requires a reductive capture that Massumi calls personalization. Although the personalization of affect bears analogy to the economization of value and could not exist outside of it, the two are not synonymous. Rather the former constitutes a mode of normative power to the latter, meaning that it serves to produce the kind of subjectivity that perpetuates to the economic capture of new fields of life. It does not directly capture life-value itself, but encourages narratives in which quantification as profit appears as a deferred surplus-value of life. Economization is endured under a promise of a greater life-value it might bring in the future.

Because personalization posits the pre-individual tension as something contained to the individual, it is inherently counterproductive to transindividual relations and intensity. Massumi describes the inhibitive effect through the experience of wearing a name badge in an academic convention. Rather than simply registering ones presence as a participant, the badge limits ones actions to represent an already constituted body of work and reputation: 'Your [...] angle of entry into the situation is personalized in this way. This assumes that your identity coincides with your potential, and that when we express ourselves, it's in this individualized mode of potential.' (Mas-



sumi 2013, p. 148) The name badge mistakes the potential field of individuation for something that a subject carries within them, as opposed to an inherently collective domain. This severely limits the potential gestures one could prepare for, which in turn lowers the overall intensity of the event. The event becomes more predictable.

Sennet finds that the decline of public life corresponds to several key tendencies in the design of public space. As knowledge of the public becomes practice of passive observation, its milieus become defined by an imperative of visual permeability. At the same time solitary public experience is to a degree directly induced by visibility to others, as the open-plan office demonstrates most violently. There is a paradox of social isolation in midst of visibility; the more free contact between strangers, the less sociable they become. Yet to block this permeability amounts to betrayal of notions of transparency and authenticity, and thus seen as inherently suspicious.

The personalization of Massumi's name badge also coincides to a certain visibility and belief in disclosure. One believes the badge reveals to others an interiority and feels pressure to act faithfully to it. The visibility of the badge limits their actions to what they imagine it to represent, whether it is a fixed body of work or an established personhood.

Another tendency in public architecture is the valuation of motion over any other activity. When space is not designed with any intrinsic value worth staying for, it serves only to pass-through. The faster people are able to travel through the public space, the less meaning this space seems to bear as anything other than an obstacle to their forward motion. Although exemplified by the private car, the same applies to pedestrian space. Without the mandatory rituals of queuing and waiting enforced by slower, more discrete technologies, there seems to be no reason to encourage staying in the spaces once designated for them. The street loses its experiential quality, and is only a derivative on motion.

Both developments are very much present at the train station, which is especially striking considering how opposed to them its original design is. Rooms were purposefully designated to prevent the mixing of different travel classes, staff, and the street; the massive and ornamental construction that invites commuters to linger, seems the very antithesis of international-school immediate permeability. Yet with the dissolution of the old technical functions, its rooms have merged into an fundamentally open-plan interior, streamlined of any furniture. Only unlike in the office, most travellers are free to quickly escape its oppressing visibility. Those unlucky to have to wait hide in the corner of a kiosk for the price of a coffee. Here the two tendencies amplify each other in a destructive way. As people are able to move through the station faster and circulate freely its rooms, they also become more visible to each other. As they feel more exposed, their urge to withdraw and move away further increases.

Based on an understanding of the station's quality as a singular amalgamation of strangers, and a more general view of the inhibitions of public life, we can outline several constraints required to counter personalization and to encourage more intense events at the station. Each constraint corresponds to an inhibiting feature of intimate view of society, as well as hints towards a possible architectural solution.

Firstly, to allow strangers to socialize without risking exposure to outside observers there is a need for a barrier between participating and passive individuals. This barrier addresses the simple visual permeability as outlined by Sennet. At the same time it allows strangers to register as willing participants to an event.

Secondly, another barrier is needed between the participating individuals, so that each participant feels safe from the scrutiny by others, and of themselves. This barrier functions to create a necessary distance between expression and individual, to ease differentiation between the two and nurture more impersonal behaviour.

Thirdly, there is a need for an impersonal, common project to allow strangers to invest their energy without regressing to Sennet's caricature of market exchange of self-revelatory intimacies. In other words, a device to stabilize a transindividual relation between strangers, that does not cater to personalizing narratives of human capital. This is the focal point of the station's intensity, equivalent to Brecht's restaurant, where the quantifiable dimension of intensity is most relevant. However the resulting event needs not to be a repetition of Brecht's conversations, or any other currently existing event at the station. Its only criteria is to intensify the life value of the station: to enable personalized strangers to indulge in an impersonal relation. In practice such a device could employ any process to which participants understand the rules, for example a game.

Although these constraints apply to an extent to all public space, their fruitful deployment very much depends on how they come to inform any particular psychosocial problematic, and the quality of the available elements. The intensity of strangers at the station differs greatly from strangers at a market, both in its aesthetic criteria as well as its corresponding quantifiable dimensions.

## Conclusion

Sennet (p. 64) defines the city as the milieu where strangers are likely to meet. As the busiest site in Helsinki, the train station could be seen as the place where the quality of the city reaches its highest intensity: it is where one is most likely to run into strangers and be a stranger. As such it has also the most dire need and highest potential life-value to be gained for countering personalization, and cultivating public life. The question of intensifying its value is the same as in Massumi's example of a conference: How to enter a situation in a way that doesn't limit one's behaviour to a performance of a constituted self? How to encourage individuals to judge behaviour based not on its authenticity or truthfulness, but by the affective contribution it brings to a transindividual, impersonal event?

As the economization of life moves from wage labour towards more direct means of capture, it becomes increasingly important to address value where it originally emerges: the immanent field of life. While it might seem like the dissolution of formal places of labour and leisure decreases the potential of architecture, this reckoning also presents an opportunity to deploy a wider understanding of value. Because life value is no longer under threat only in the office or the factory, it is necessary to understand the place-specific threats of its dwindling and the potentials for its proliferation. The elements that contribute to intensity cover a wide array of qualitatively different elements, and architecture is one of the few professional fields in position to consider their overall implications. In countering the degenerating tendencies of economization and its modes of power, it is crucial to use this position to speculate alternative visions of their coming together. As the overall effect escapes further the control of any single employer or institution, the importance of this position only becomes more emphasized.

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