

**Zach Mellas**

## **P5 / REFLECTION**

### **Aims**

For this project, it is difficult to pinpoint one particular intention – instead, a number of different fields of engagement with the process have taken place, interacting together in a number of ways and at different moments in time, all having converging but separate aims. The primary, and stated aim, was to reframe architecture as a technology, as a process and as an embedded system.

Secondary to this it is a part of an, as yet unfinished, critique of architecture's role in contemporary processes of power and control that started developing at an earlier time during the MSc program.

Lastly, on the level of personal fascinations, it is intended to explore an architecture beyond the logic imposed by private property and market mechanisms.

### **Approach**

Through a review of contemporary and historical theory on the development of technology, theories on abstract systems and control processes, the argument presented is that for a creative field such as architecture the value of computational technologies lies in the fact that they allow us to consciously fashion structures and operations that are conducive to emancipatory outcomes, through both the capacity for interaction with the complexity of living beings and the ability to reconceptualize architectural processes as ecological processes, without a final, determinate outcome, instead allowing change over time. This stands in opposition to the approach that I critique – where this change is enabled but locked into the regulation toward a status quo. This is the key concept for this project – an open system. The architectural design project is an attempt at formulating one way of going about this – focusing on the design of constraints and conditions that

incentivize certain outcomes over others but that avoid excluding occupants' desires. This design is premised on designing a minimum environment to enable a process of occupancy.

The point of departure for this project is the experience of the way computational technology is regarded in this faculty – either through a utopian lens where technical solutions are portrayed as apolitical and 'across-the-board-improvements' of a generic 'life', or, perhaps even more common, as a kind of hubris — a danger to the core activities of the profession. In part, this is an attempt at having a nuanced view of how one might adapt technologies built to maintain a certain order to create alternative orders, beyond the status quo of their creation – it is about enlisting system technology into a purpose it was ostensibly not developed to serve, that of invention.

## **Process**

What has become clear over the course of the design process is that it can be immensely difficult to translate these types of abstract understandings of particular aspects that deal with design logic (as opposed to the physical design directly) into concrete building proposals – especially when combined with an ever-present self-criticism regarding the way these technologies should and should not be deployed. In the end, the result has been the design of a material landscape – a structure that allows for a maximized degree of control for occupants over its organization over a very long lifetime – with a possibility for quite drastic changes. Crucially, and somewhat tellingly perhaps, this control lies fundamentally with a non-architectural component of the design – the organizational structure between residents.

Throughout the process, I was reminded by tutors that in designing a process like this it is important to choose your battles – due the added complexity that comes with designing both in space and time one cannot fully elaborate each detailed outcome – it is much more important to focus on the systems that influence those outcomes and refining those to reach a desired process, the key variables in the system. What became increasingly clear during the second semester was that the act of outlining the design assignment itself and pinpointing these key variables was already an exercise that hugely influences the design process and one that takes a significant portion of time – further emphasizing the need to be very specific about the scope of the design project.

However, I would argue that while formulating one's own design brief is quite an unusual process for an architect, it does fit the conclusions of this research in that it underscores the importance of

pre-conditions for particular outcomes – demonstrating that engaging very seriously (and critically) with a design brief can lead one to a more precise understanding of what is going on in the background of an assignment, creating a space for influencing that process.

## **Practical application**

While the more theoretical components of this project feel like they might be transferred as knowledge quite readily in the format of the paper – it is more difficult to say the same for the design project. In terms of its method, it connects with the conclusions of the research in emphasizing the study of a situation in terms of conditions and processes over time – an ecological view that I will certainly continue applying and refining. In terms of design content, the situation is different: the choice for a site with unique characteristics (namely the presence of a disused harbor crane) makes for a project that is quite specifically adapted to its site. The principle, however, might be adapted and generalized into its own model of design.

While part of the design project deals with a number of technical limitations, the fundamental limitations to this project are political and economic in nature. In the end, the project presupposes a form of housing that is not premised on private property and rent-seeking. As such, it is fundamentally a speculative design exercise, intended to explore what an alternative future might look like.