

TITLE:

A Lethargic Sovereignty of Quiet

AUTHORS:

TH =
Tung-Hui
Hu

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DUE is a publication by
the Architectural Association.
due.aaschool.ac.uk



For submission
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DUE BAR



10:02:50

TRANSMEDIALE 2019 (NO TITLE)
BERLIN
HKW

DUE =
I am curious about your research on lethargy as a possible form of resistance to contemporary surveillance.

TH =
I don't think it's exactly about resistance. Resistance is something very deep in our understanding of action, as in the act of exerting your own individuality against something else. Against a norm, against something that society is throwing at you, against a rule.

To imagine forms of agency that are separate from resistance is strangely difficult. Lethargy, as I want to define it, is a way of adding something to the conversation that isn't about how one fights back against the digital, or how one undermines, subverts or intervenes. Instead lethargy describes what life is like within a system. For most people, it's not black and white.

I've been studying click farms and their farmers. These factories cater to aspiring artists, musicians and companies promoting their work, who want more followers, even if they are fake. Almost everybody I've talked to in Europe and North America says, 'Look at all the ways in which these people are being exploited - it's like a digital sweatshop.' There's some truth to that, but talking to the workers they actually think of themselves as part of a sophisticated marketing operation and see their job as a way to get their foot inside the IT sector.

One could say they're just being naïve, that they don't quite understand the economic organisation they're in. But there's a problem when you have well-intentioned scholars in the US and in Europe mansplaining to them, 'You're being exploited!' The dynamic is more complex. They are being exploited and they're also doing something else.

Here in Berlin everybody knows that Google, Apple and Facebook are doing bad things but there are a lot more options than simply saying, 'This is bad and we're gonna fight it somehow.' Lethargy tries to account for that ambivalent relationship: maybe you're caught within a system and don't have the means to throw your cell phone away in protest. Protest, fighting: all these ways of expressing political views are tied to how scholarship thinks

about agency. But they don't necessarily address its complexities.

DUE =
Would you think of your research as both a form of observation and critique of how we live with digital surveillance or do you see it as offering ways to sustain ourselves within this condition?

TH =
Both. Sustain is a good way to put it, and how to survive, too. I would also say that lethargy is an interesting word because it doesn't just mean tiredness.

Lethargy used to be associated with one of the deadly sins, acedia. With acedia, you weren't necessarily tired. You were also sometimes hyperactive.

During the 19th century they used to call it 'busy idleness.' Lethargy better captures the fact that often, when you're beaten down, you're still scrolling busily on your phone. You're tapping things, you're not just idle or passive.

Lethargy both critiques the ways in which we currently envision what counts as political and works as an attempt to find other means of being political. I'll give you an example. In the US there is a famous photograph of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, where two black men, John Carlos and Tommie Smith, are standing on the podium with their fists raised. Kevin Quashie explains this image by saying (I paraphrase): 'We always see this image as a symbol of struggle, but what we fail to see - because we're so busy seeing the resistance - is also the fact that they're quiet.'



LETHARGY BOTH CRITIQUES THE WAYS IN WHICH WE CURRENTLY ENVISION WHAT COUNTS AS POLITICAL AND WORKS AS AN ATTEMPT TO FIND OTHER MEANS OF BEING POLITICAL.

Their bodies are composed and withheld. There's a suppleness to their being, to their muscles. He calls that the 'Sovereignty of Quiet.' I don't know if we can get there in the digital age, but it's important to acknowledge because moments of quiet, rather than times of yelling, are just as important in understanding a picture of the social and political.

DUE =

Would you say that the concept of 'Sovereignty of Quiet' is analogous to how one can become anonymous and thus autonomous within a contemporary surveillance regime?

THE

To be anonymous in this age is a bit of a privilege. Your Uber driver doesn't have the privilege of being anonymous. They have to always be rated and they have to have some sort of presence.

Finn Brunton and Helen Nissenbaum wrote a book called *Obfuscation* about being anonymous by hiding oneself inside a data trail. These techniques – it's something people are interested in. For my own project, though, I'm doing something else. The closest that I get to anonymity is the first half of lethargy, 'lethe-', stemming from the notion of forgetting or self-forgetting. That's why lethargy was a sin.

I think that algorithms try very hard to stabilise each of us into an authentic self. We're asked to constantly verify ourselves. I've just had to upload my passport and five proofs of identity, to prove I am actually me, to take control of myself on Google, in order to correct some information.

Algorithms would like to have that one-on-one mapping between our online user accounts and ourselves. In my work I am considering what it would mean to forget oneself. What does it mean to somehow become less than a person?

Let's say you're a person of colour and have never attained full personhood in the first place. I think of it less from the perspective of a wealthy person from the Global North trying to become anonymous and more from the point of view of those who have never had access to full personhood.

DUE =

Can you elaborate more on the image of quiet or silence in this respect?

THE

I don't think that quiet exists today because we are constantly being asked to express ourselves. Even not doing things on the internet is a form of doing something. Even being silent, as it were, is a form of data for algorithms. It's seen as a weak signal if you don't click on a movie that Netflix recommends. They have a thing called scroll tracking which both tracks what you scroll to but also what you don't look at.

So I don't think that there is such a thing as silence today. Instead I have been reading Kate Lacey's book, *Listening Publics*. Maybe the closest thing is to say, who does the work of listening? Where listening is itself a kind of public and what would it mean to bring people together on the basis of listening? What would it mean also in terms of care and about building networks of solidarity? People talk

about recognising that you're precarious together with other people, which is fantastic, but I'm interested in that neutral, reticent thing that I've been calling lethargy. Wendy Chun asks, 'What would it mean to build networks of mutual indifference?' Arguably, that's more important than reconfiguring the political situation by rewiring the internet.

That's a more global action. Lots of people deeply believe that capitalism is bad. Rather than assembling more groups of people like this, who tend to agree with one another, how do we connect people who are generally indifferent to each other? What does that do for the form of collectivity?

DUE = Indifference in what sense?

Wendy Chun is thinking about indifference in a very specific way. She's thinking about the way that digital networks are built through homophily. She's thinking about how gated neighborhoods in the 50s in the US were built as a way to match people with similar interests and of course to segregate people. Strangely the same algorithms for measuring homophily have been used to create gated network communities on the internet.

No one ever talks about what happens if you connect people based on their mutual indifference to one another. Personally, I don't know if indifference is the word I would use, but I've been thinking about a set of similar ideas, such as disengagement, reticence or blocked affect.

Christine Ross, who is an art historian, wrote a wonderful book about depressive aesthetics. The concept of depression is a serious challenge to mainstream notions of community. For example, there are many art pieces that are meant to connect people by bringing them together in a public space.

Undergirding all of this is the sense that you'll get a more genuine dialog. This is a Habermasian idea of a public sphere.

Ross points out, however, that in the case of depression, talking with other people can be very difficult. Maybe, for a depressed person, their idea of hell is going out in public and engaging in a "genuine" moment of conversation. Similarly I've been thinking about how race and gender are involved. There are certain norms about how lively and how engaged we should be. For instance, I put a lot more exclamation marks in my emails now, because people have said this is friendlier. There's an artist who made a plug-in to

automatically add exclamation marks to an email. It references the emotional labour that women do in order to make men feel comfortable and not threatened at work.

People stereotype Asian Americans as having less expression, or, less personality than other people. There's a long history that describes Asians and Asian Americans as being more robotic. I have to work to seem warmer, smiley and more engaged in order to fit into a norm of what people perceive as a genuine conversation. The playing field is not level.

I'm interested in why we have such an attachment to that ideal of emotional engagement. 'The political' is a broken system, as the last few years make clear. Rather than to keep rehearsing its framework, perhaps we need to rethink it altogether. To start again - and I borrow here from Tiziana Terranova's book on network culture - from a 'zero degree' of the political. For me, that means starting without a lot of the assumptions we currently have: that politics involves subjects, for example. The lethargic user is reticent, disengaged, anti-social, lazy, robotic. To many, they are not subjects, any more than a robot would be considered a political subject. But that position of lethargy is where we ought to begin. How can we think about disengagement and a zero degree of the political? An alternative understanding of a public sphere than the Habermasian one? One that does not start from the assumptions of care, agency, resistance and so on? That's a really long answer to why I've been trying to start from different starting points.

**THE LETHARGIC
USER IS RETICENT,
DISENGAGED,
ANTI-SOCIAL, LAZY,
ROBOTIC.**

TITLE:

Affective Infra-structures

AUTHORS:

MBJ= Marija Bozinovska Jones

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DUE BAR



11:01:05

TRANSMEDIALE 2019 (NO TITLE) BERLIN
HKW

MBJ: =

The festival is organised around two study group which we've been developing since November. This is what initially brought us to Berlin, curating a conversation around the topic of affective infrastructure which is now published in a journal.

DUE: =

Can you elaborate a bit on the idea of affective infrastructure?

MBJ: =

Yes, I can speak about how I relate to it. Will you be coming to the ...

DUE: =

Definitely.

MBJ: =

To I'm thinking about the best way to speak about the subject as it is quite broad, even *Fascia* goes with it, so ...

DUE: =

Can you tell a bit about your AV laser performance at the Transmediale, *Fascia*, and how

MBJ: =

Basically my interest revolves around the construction of selfhood, in both the individual and collective sense, and contemporary existence. How we relate, how we function within these techno-capitalist infrastructures. I view different tendencies, starting from FinTech industries, such as non-human organisation models, to a perspective of, for example, different tendencies on more personal, micro-levels, from self-improvement to self-care, artificial intelligence devices, mimicking of biological systems, through algorithmic processes [inaudible].

DUE: =

So that also relates to your exhibition in London a little while ago where you were taking back ownership of your data and eventually selling it off again at the -

MBJ: =

For de-leb/ New gradients of measure at Banner Repeater, I exhibited three elements showing various quantified biometrics. One was a docking station which captures and visualises emotional arousal via physiological measurements: galvanic skin response and breath - the latter as a

fundamental derivative of life and as something continuously to come back to. The quantified breathing patterns were also read by my voice simulator trained via machine learning. The third element in the show was a collection of Instagram images with published breathing metrics from $C_{22}H_{37}NO_2$; the title denotes a chemical formula for Anandamide, a fatty acid neurotransmitter correlated to anxiety and depression levels, which are often byproducts of social media use. Embracing the Quantified Self movement, with a motto of 'self-knowledge through numbers,' I probe the biopolitics of self-improvement.

DUE: =

How does this relate to your *Treebour* exhibition?

MBJ: =

The *Treebour* project developed out of a workshop organised at Furtherfield called *Playbour* and the work I developed together with Rob Gallagher who is a post-doc researcher in gaming and identity at King's College in London. We developed these tree monologues as a sound installation. We wanted to incorporate the location of Furtherfield, which is quite unusual, in the piece somehow. The gallery is in the middle of Finsbury park which is surrounded by demographics that differ from a usual art audience. We tried to show some quite complex processes in an approachable way via personifying - or Disneyfying - tree characters, which showed this idea of affective labour, working around gamifying labour, we were anthropomorphising the trees. We chose three trees that are most common in the park and we mapped a set of different human characteristics onto each one.



DUE=

Can you speak a little bit more about 'affective labour' in relation to your work?

MBJ=

I'm interested in the change in interpersonal relationships via incentivising. For example, in the gig economy with Uber or from social media via the subtle incentives such as likes, tweets and followers. How relationships pretty much adopt a corporate, transactional character.

Tied into *Treebour* is the notion that trees do a lot of labour for us, such as the most obvious - purifying the air, yet as humans we act ungratefully. We tried to show this in a similar manner and at the same time as an idea that could be more relatable to the particular audience at the gallery. The beech character for example was leading an ASMR meditation. Related to Transmediale's 'Affective Infrastructure' study group, with Tung Hui, we were talking about how 'affect is in the air,' and about 'breathing infrastructures.'

DUE=

How are our relationship with the trees and maybe with each other altered or impacted when experiencing the *Treebour* installation?

MBJ=

Trees collaborate with other species, believe it or not, and with each other. So they are near each other. The terminology Wood Wide Web is quite popular. Trees communicate with each other via the roots by sending electronic signals so that what one tree, or one part of a tree, lacks the other one nourishes. This happens with species too. With animals and plants. The project is simultaneously making us aware of how we work and how trees work on our behalf.

DUE=

Would you explain how you worked with this idea of interconnectivity in *Fascia*?

MBJ=

Fascia is multi-faceted and contains several chapters. Interconnectedness and cooperation come up in a chapter named "Multitude", which looks at ways we define ourselves, specifically through cooperation found in various living systems. We construct a sense of self that is (dis)connecting us from ourselves and from each other through technologies, initially we created to emancipate us but which have ended up ruling us. *Fascia* describes contemporary existence enmeshed with technologies, as the connective tissue itself enveloping our anatomy.

Together with Tung Hui earlier, we lead a group in the workshop. I had a somewhat different approach from his. Rather than relating to boredom I consider apathy from feeling overwhelmed. We are overpowered with influx of information,

yet locked in an endless productivity strive.

Meditation as a breathing exercise and pause in this context is interesting. It is an attempt at self-empowerment, taking back control. I'm not proposing a change as a reformative practice, but rather as Audre Lorde considers self-care 'as an act of self-preservation.'

DUE=

Does that alter one's perception of time? Going from a cinematic experience to one of breathing?

MBJ=

This is my favorite part, especially since we are dealing with so much knowledge of debatable accuracy these days, there is so much cognitive input. Rather than an act of resistance, I'm proposing to get out of the cognitive and more into the felt experience to access that which transcends the capacities and limitations of thoughts and language. So it's the felt experience and the breath. Breath as an anchor, a constant that doesn't stop.

DUE=

That's something that doesn't exist in digital space either. It's secular?

MBJ=

Exactly. I also observed breathing in a very different way through the quantified self movement. It's one of my favourite research topics because it's a culture of self-tracking, analysing and sharing data.

DUE=

Are you allowing people in the workshop to both focus on the felt sensation of breathing as well as the tracking and analysis of breathing?

MBJ=

We are going to lead a guided breathing exercise and then I will talk again about observing one's breath via two different approaches. One through the quantified self movement, as statistical information and data. The other through the felt experience such as meditation, mindfulness and how these practices are appropriated by corporations. Google for example invites mindfulness and Buddhist practitioners as a gesture of 'care' for its workers and customers; many tech companies organise such events with a motive to increase productivity.

**TREES COLLABORATE
WITH OTHER SPECIES
(...)
AND WITH
EACH OTHER.**

TITLE:

Archipelago 2092 .xyz

AUTHORS:

KG =
Kyriaki
Goni

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DUE BAR



12:58:36

TRANSMEDIALE 2019 (NO TITLE) BERLIN HKW

DUE=

I'm curious about your Networks of Trust.

KG=

Actually, my practice focuses on the intersection of technology and society. I'm investigating things that are primarily connected with data, privacy and networks. Recently, I'm moving towards artificial intelligence and its relationship to humans, specifically in the terms of the encounter. I'm sort of playing two different fields, one being data and networks, the other being machine-human encounters.

At Transmediale, I presented Networks of Trust and the Aegean Datahaven. The Aegean Datahaven is a near future fiction work set in the Aegean Archipelago in Greece. The Aegean Datahaven is a series of islands which host data havens. You can imagine data havens as more secure data centers. This platform draws from local traditions of cooperation among the islands. They made this cooperative in order to protect their data and their memory from bigger corporations. It is a fictional story and is presented through an interactive website with the island hosts coloured blue on the map of the Aegean sea. Viewers enter each island, read the specs of each datahaven, a mix of fiction and reality regarding the island's history and view a series of sketches about that location. There is also a manifesto which one can listen to on the website, in both Greek and in English. A series of drawings complete the installation. These drawings are attributed to an unknown traveller of the period and actually pay a tribute to the travellers of the 17th-18th century.

The other work, Networks of Trust, is a new work commissioned by Transmediale and the Abandon Normal Devices festival, in England. While working on the Aegean Datahaven I was really surprised by the dominance of networks in this area and by the fact that these networks have been present since antiquity, connecting each island of the Archipelago but also the Archipelago with the entire Mediterranean Sea, creating a very interesting dynamic system. I started focusing on that, from three different time aspects, past, present and future. I investigated the past connections in the networks and produced an oral piece which I performed yesterday for the first

time at Transmediale, it's called, 'An oral story about the origins of networks in the archipelago.'

DUE=

Can you describe the way that these networks work?

KG=

It depends on the era. They can be boats moving from one island to another transferring weapons, materials, people or slaves but the interesting thing in the Aegean Archipelago, and the Mediterranean at large, is that these networks date back many centuries.

Of course, they are very dynamic. They alter their structure or the materials they are transmitting. This is part of the past but there's also a continued presence. This is how I tried to produce a fictional story. I tried to construct a story about the origin and the beginning of the networks in this specific area.

Coming to the present I wanted to set up my own network. I went to a tiny island in the southeast Aegean called Tilos. After visiting the island and talking to the people there for three years, the location drew my attention for two reasons.

Tilos was in the news in 2017 for being the first Mediterranean island to be fully sustainable by 2020, using both solar and wind energy. The second reason it drew my attention was the different way they tried to integrate Syrian refugees. Most of the islands in Greece, as you know, are accepting many people, they often have hotspots (camps) where the conditions are really tough. On Tilos they actually tried to bring the refugees into their network, into their community.



They offered jobs, proper housing and opportunities to become members of these community networks. For these two reasons I wanted to set up this type of network with the first node on Tilos. So I set up a offline node, called the Networks of Trust. People could connect and leave stories. The island's mayor agreed to host the node in the town hall To extend the network I hosted a second node in my studio in the historic center of Athens. There is a third node which is the nomadic one, which I bring with me when I exhibit the work. I'm going to exhibit this work again next week in Manchester where the nomadic node will be part of the exhibition. I am also working on the production of a big drawing, a diagram of this network. This network is offline, as I said. But at every now and then it goes online using the IPFS, are you familiar with that?

DUE=

I have read a bit about it.

KG=

It is a protocol similar to blockchain but possibly better in some ways, I use it to resiliently store the data on the nodes. In a way it is resilient to censorship, because of course you cannot really alter the content.

It protects the anonymity of the user. Once uploaded to the node everything just gets a hash and you cannot know who uploaded what. It's completely anonymous.

DUE=

What is the physical form of these nodes?

KG=

They are Raspberry Pis - micro computers.

DUE=

What role do different forms of communication play, it's a different way of thinking about... language, I guess. How do people interact with them?

KG=

Good question. This is the third aspect I mentioned before. The aspect of the future. I am asking people to contribute a story, a picture, a short thought about imaginary futures in the Aegean sea or the Mediterranean sea to the node.

The one way to contribute is by writing something on your mobile phone and storing it in a .PDF or .TXT file. Afterwards, scan your WiFi networks, find the Networks of Trust, connect, and you are directed to a page where you can upload files directly from your device to the node.

If you have something handwritten, you can just take a photo and upload it. So far I found two drawings made by refugee children whose teacher uploaded as photos for them. I have some extremely interesting views and stories on the node right now, among them by fellow artists and friends, like for example Marina Gioti, Navine G. Khan Dossos and James Bridle. This is how it works, but of course some people have also sent texts to me, after I made the open call, which I uploaded it to the node for them. There is also a website which is called Archipelago2092.xyz, you can enter and see in real time the new hashes that are produced each time someone uploads a story. I wanted it to be local so you can see these things by proximity, and have the knowledge of the procedure online,

but you cannot see the full content of the stories.

DUE=

How does placing a node on the island impact the community there?

KG=

It's rather difficult to have explicit results with this community. First, I was there in August, which is quite high season for tourism. Secondly, the community was open in hosting the node, but not so open in contributing with stories - it mostly happened through interviews I made. Introducing an offline network is something new for them. It might take more time to get used to something like that and to see it as a time capsule for the community. I think it needs time. It's not that easy to -

DUE=

...Implement suddenly?

KG=

Yes, exactly. You have to imagine that it's not easy to live on an island. It's rather disconnected in a way, especially during winter. I heard stories about being disconnected from electricity for days in a row. I heard stories about being disconnected from other islands because the weather was so bad that boats could not circulate which meant they didn't have enough food or fresh water for days

It's harsh to live on an island under these conditions, and this fact makes it difficult to engage with things outside of one's daily routine. Therefore I think, it might take time for the nodes to become part of the community.

SO I SET UP AN OFFLINE NODE, CALLED THE NETWORKS OF TRUST.

TITLE:

Counting Architecture

AUTHORS:

AR = Andreas Rumpfhuber

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DUE BAR



14:06:22

TRANSMEDIALE 2019 (NO TITLE) BERLIN HKW

AR =
Shall we sit down?

DUE =
Let's sit.

DUE =
Would you like to tell us about your work here at the Transmediale?

AR =
I'm here for a discussion called 'How to Disrupt Yourself: Life in the Entrepreneurial Home.' The conversation is chaired by the artists, Marta Dauliūtė and Viktorija Šiaulytė, and takes their research and film, 'Good Life,' about, let's call them startups, as a point of departure. These startups try to expand the notion of co-working towards co-living. Their research, as I understand it, is about how co-working spaces are now also starting to facilitate apartments, aiming to provide amenities for precarious workers.

DUE =
Like WeWork?

AR =
I think WeWork is one of their examples, with Bjarke [Ingels] as their corporate architect. They invited me to give input, because I have been doing research on new forms of labour for 15 years. My PhD, later published as *Architektur der immateriellen Arbeit [The Architecture of Immaterial Labour]* (Vienna: 2013), focused on projects from the 1960s. There I looked at projects like the very first Bürolandschaft *Buch und Ton* (1959/60) by Quickborner Team, Joan Littlewood, Gordon Pask and Cedric Price's *Fun Palace* (1962-66), Herman Hertzberger's *Centraal Beheer* (1967-72), but also Hans Hollein's *Mobile Office* (1969), or John Lennon and Yoko Ono's *Bed-In* (1969) in order to point towards an alteration of the concept of labour that after World War II became dominant in Western Industrial Societies - namely immaterial labour. A form of work that processes information, that implies the interaction with digital, cybernetic machines and in which labour needs to be performed 'on a stage.'

Tomorrow I will be focusing on aspects of a changing governance that is implied in the alteration of the labour paradigm of the Post-War

years, which I argue, we experience now in an intensified way.

DUE =
I'm curious about dependency, reciprocity and care as they relate to these future working spaces you're describing.

AR =
Well, the concept of governance the new labour paradigm is based on, follows the logic of dependency and reciprocity. After all its logic is based on cybernetic principles - it is based on team work, feedback loops and so on. Gilles Deleuze would critically describe that later on as 'Society of Control'. While the people involved in implementing the new forms of labour organisations that I speak of, like Quickborner Team, inventing Bürolandschaft [office landscape], still understood that form of governance as an emancipatory and political project towards a more fair workers' society with a flat hierarchy, and participatory processes. The workers suddenly would get addressed in a different way. No longer as subordinates of someone in the organisation, but as experts, and creatives, and scientists.

Yet we need to be aware, when comparing projects from the 1960s to today's business models. The economic and societal framing radically has changed since, let's say the early 1970s. When people like Quickborner Team would speak about automation of administrative work and their goal to send off all workers into an everlasting spare time, the welfare state was in place, businesses would pay taxes and a huge portion of the industry was still state-owned. So the idea, back then, was of course that the machines taking over our work would contribute to



the welfare of all. And this is certainly no longer the case.

But the principles of how Quickborner Team aimed to implement calculating machines, today known as computers, back then still punch-card machines, and with that to automatise administrative work are still the same. Of course, today, much more sophisticated and much more complex. I think the imperative of today's labour organisation to work in teams is a good example that was first implemented in office landscapes' labour organisation.

Through, well, let's call it 'participatory observation', counting the information flow within a given organisation, Quickborner Team was able to identify repetitive work that digital machines could take over. More complex labour processes and decision making was then organised in teams. Especially because a single human worker is somehow an opaque black-box for an organisation. S/he also can decide in a way that would not comply to the company's goal (for example to sell books, or to have the idea that selling mainstream books does not make sense). Hence the idea was to group human workers into teams that had to follow a strictly formalised decision making process, in order to secure a decision that is in line with a given goal. In this sense the aim was also to prevent any revolutionary or extreme decision. At the same time the idea was that this formalised decision making process could then, in some near future, be coded into a digital machine.

In order to implement such an organisation, in which digital, calculating machines are literally placed on the same hierarchical plane as human workers, but also to help the organisation to become more effective, the humans were addressed as experts, as creatives and as scientists. Humans got appealed to actively participate. One could say that employees gradually became entrepreneurs for an organisation. In this very same logic the boss, and even the foreman, is disappearing. And with that, the given goal, that in a Fordist organisation would still be issued by the boss, becomes something that is inherent within an organisation. The goal, for example to sell a lot of books, is something that is no longer questioned.

And you can very clearly see this in the organisation, the layout, of an office landscape. It is no longer the open office with strict rows of tables that can be observed from a central point. Office landscapes look chaotic. Patrick Schumacher - in total incomprehension of an office landscape's organisation - even would speak of Bürolandschaft as an anarchic space. Yet this 'chaos' is only an intended visual effect and the arrangements of the tables and plants and the room-dividers are actually calculated with utmost precision in order to create 'subjective spaces', as Quickborner Team would call it.

Today these principles are of course much more refined. And a lot of criticism, understood as feedback-loops, has been incorporated. I think the tragedy is, that contemporary management does not see alternatives, and is not willing to experiment as the Quickborner Team together with Reinhard Mohn of Bertelsmann would experiment in the 1950s and introduce indeed something that was emancipatory in the moment of implementation. Counting all information flows - or big 'big data' as we call it today - seems to be the only way for 'innovation'. But this innovation is limited at aiming to intensify or just 'update' an existing business model. I think it is telling how proud, for example, the German automotive industry is about their 'server farms' collecting information - like peer-reviewed articles published based on certain keywords - that then feed into their strategy for e-mobility. Data and information have become synonymous to innovation. Yet nobody is asking or reflecting on the quality of information. It is only the quantity that counts, it seems. And the solutions that the automotive industry then presents are collages of repetitions of best-practices with no innovative content: for example an e-mobility point adjacent to a shopping mall or entertainment center.

At the same time they're not understanding that with all the money they have, maybe instead they ought to think of changing their business model, to change their given goal to 'sell cars', but instead really innovate mobility for the future. I think this same trend is present in so many aspects in our economy and the business models that are successful for the moment.

DUE=

That suggests some sort of agency that everybody has within an organisation. Would you say that participation is basically just a guise for people to feel that they are participating in a process while not making much of a difference since the underlying mechanisms are not really questioned? What does this kind of expert or team participation really amount to in your opinion?

AR=

I have to laugh, because I come to think of Copenhagen and the society there. Everybody is asking you to participate and tell your opinion. You sit around and it's this non-hierarchical organisation... But the real decisions are done somewhere else.

DUE=

It's friendly but then in the end ...

AR=

I think it's a very good question. I don't have a precise answer. When you speak about participation, we always have to be very careful with what kind of participation we are talking about.

DUE=

What kind of participation are you interested in?

AR=

I'm not interested in an understanding of participation that amounts to counting. Let's put it the other way around, I think that counting, as in making something quantifiable, is something to be critical of. When we look at our democracy it's exactly the same, we all have one voice and we are counting.

Maybe there is something in there. But maybe it's not about counting, as qualitative aspects are increasingly disappearing. In terms of architecture, we have Excel sheets and that's basically what counts.

DUE=

And BIM.

AR=

BIM, for example. It's basically just Excel. There is a different representation of the Excel sheet, but at the same time a gradual disappearance of qualitative value. The expertise of the architect is no longer valid in such a scheme.

DUE=

Is part of the idea that cybernetics are defining the way we think about work?

AR=

It's difficult to speak about cybernetics. You have to split it. There are people working in cybernetics that are interesting and fantastic. On the other hand there is the office landscape and how a - let's call it - popular cybernetic logic is being implemented there, where it comes down to making everything within an organisation quantifiable. Then, of course, cybernetics gets weird ...

DUE=

... Financialising or quantifying all the work processes within an organisation?

AR=

Or making it calculable. It doesn't need to be about money at first, but of course it comes down to that later. The first thing Quickborner Team was obsessed with was information flows.

PS=

I remember the word number punching from parametrics. You punch as much as possible, and the result is design. Which is not a design, it's numbers.

ARE:

We shouldn't forget that cybernetics isn't something that has radically changed capitalism. I think it's implementing an altered logic. A similar, but altered logic. When you look at the assembly line, Fordist management, or hierarchies it's only a subtle shift that happens. It's still old fashioned capitalism. Reading Marx, when you speak about labour issues, the same concepts apply when starting a discussion on labour rights or rights for people. It's a succession. It's a constant development of a dominant economic model.

DUE:

Would you think of your research as a critique of how cybernetics have impacted the way we work?

ARE:

I'm trying to look at things without ideology. I initially started to be interested in Bürolandschaft because I was, and still am, fascinated with these layouts. And, as I said in the beginning, looking at Bürolandschaft (or any other project, for that matter), you always need to consider its wider societal context in order to understand what happens there and what kind of discourse it is mirroring.

So in this sense it is first and foremost a curious stance that I take when researching in general. I try to look at my research subjects from many different perspectives. I always refer to 'circling around a symptom', like in psychoanalysis. And while circling around, aiming to analyse and understand a given research subject, the way one understands and verbalises it already changes a lot. So in this respect it is not a straightforward ideological critique but an analysis that takes reality into account. And in doing so I of course point towards issues that I think are alarming.

For example the issue of content production that starts to become redundant. Well, not redundant, but no longer paid, producing a new form of precarity. Today it is more about the infrastructure - be it the internet, the code for e-books, and so on - as a business model. The content production is basically no longer being paid.

So, I think who is being exploited today is very, very clear. This new form of capitalism, if you want to call it that, has been very intelligent these last 20 years, by affirming technology and the logic of cybernetics, but also in capturing the state as such.

At one point, you still had the state, and we could discuss about its problems, like the concept of the 'nation', but one also could discuss the issuing of a new law, or debating existing laws. So there was - let's call it - a container that could house all of us as a society. And we were all - more-or-less, and with all its problems of inequality - able to discuss the container's organisation. Yet everybody would pay a contribution to this meta-entity. If you made money by selling books you would make a contribution, but you would also get your more-or-less equal share for

writing the content. And if you had no job, the meta-entity would provide you with the necessary means to survive.

However, today, there are globally acting companies that don't pay taxes and in fact subverting the container's right to exist. At the same time these corporations donate money to the 'public'. And the media and the public discuss this in high praise instead of insisting that these corporations pay their share in taxes which we, as a society, can decide how and for what it is distributed.



**THE EXPERTISE OF
THE ARCHITECT IS NO
LONGER VALID IN SUCH
A SCHEME.**

TITLE:

Making Space Again

AUTHORS:

JS = Julian Schubert

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DUE =

Tell us about your current work and the cross-disciplinary workshops you are part of?

JS =

The group is called Formations. The first workshops were about discussing or explaining methods of working between participants from different disciplines such as anthropologists, DJs or computer scientists. Since then, the workshops have been more open. They are just meetings and discussions. We sometimes do residencies, in Essen for example, working with students or with dancers. We would actually like to test it by bringing it to a different format.

We're considering to do a book on listening, on the role of listening in our practices and how we engage with this idea: how do we listen? What are the techniques of listening? How do we engage with the practice of listening? That's our current theme but the project has halted a bit since one of our core members moved to Australia.

DUE =

What kind of techniques are you discovering or exploring right now?

JS =

Actually I'm not so interested in sound as a technical aspect of building design. I was more interested in listening as a form of knowledge transfer, for example in terms of teaching and listening to lectures, or discussing a project with builders who will execute ideas. I am more curious about that.

DUE =

Are you also thinking about listening in the context of urban planning and policies?

JS =

Yes. Sometimes I'm involved in participatory processes where listening is especially significant. The big question is, who do you listen to? Usually, if you talk about participation, you listen to those who are affected, who know that they will be affected. We do not listen to those who only might become affected. That's why it's always a bit one-sided, which is always the problem with participatory planning processes.

You engage with or listen to people who already

know that they will be affected rather than those who might be. The other problem is, in these workshops, that you listen to those who are loud. To those who speak out. Many people don't speak out. There's always a few who are loud. In the end, those are the people who are listened to. I try to bring the focus back to the basic question of what listening actually is. It's not the same as hearing. Back to Formations, the yoga teacher in our group brings a totally different understanding of listening - listening to the Earth or listening to your body.

DUE =

How do authorship and ownership relate to speaking and listening within a diverse group of professionals?

JS =

Authorship is very tricky these days. There are so many images passed around and reworked that you never really know who to attribute authorship to. There is a quote which is sometimes attributed to Coco Chanel and other times to someone else, 'Only those with no memory insist on their originality.' I like it, and I like that it is attributed to various people.

In the end it doesn't matter because everything has been done, especially in architecture. It's about making space *again*. Even with the exact same form it won't be the same because it's a different time. It's very tricky, especially in architecture, to always look for original authorship or originality. However, I think if you would try to establish an architectural practice today you may have to think more about originality and authorship than we do, actually. I guess you should establish a personality, especially online, and get some



EVEN IF ONLY ONE OF US DID A PROJECT, LIKE DESIGNING A BOOK, WE ALL CLAIM AUTHORSHIP.

followers. The internet is very person-oriented. We don't work like that. I have the feeling it would be a trap you could get, well, trapped in: to always look for the new, and try to always produce the new.

DUE=

How would you approach authorship within your workshops or form of collective?

JS=

We would never call ourselves a collective, we consider ourselves an office just not a regular office. We never said we were a collective. There is a saying, 'Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan.' Our office mentality is similar, when you work with people and achieve something you share the victory. Even if only one of us did a project, like designing a book, we all claim authorship.

DUE=

That is a nice way to think about it. When authorship is not a zero-sum game, but amounts to a kind of sharing does it give space for everyone to both listen, contribute and ultimately collaborate?

JS=

I think one of the main challenges of our time is that theoretically we all know we should change, but we don't. I think we don't because we are in another trap. We work in professional formats and follow the respective economic logics. I think it's important to get out of this trap and find alternative models of practicing. For example, architectural offices make money based on an agreed percentage of the overall investment. So of course it is in the offices' financial interest for a lot of buildings to be built. However you're not free to think and do something about space within that system of working because you will always try to build a building. Collaborating with other professionals is crucial in order to break away from our current financial logics. We hope the workshops and the formations of professionally diverse groups will help us overcome that.



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LETHARGIC
USERS

COLLABO-
RATING

SPECIES

NETWORKS

OF TRUST

BUROCRAND-

SCHAET

SHARED

VICTORY

