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Awareness and acceptance

“But I don’t want comfort, I want poetry, I want danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want sin.”

Aldous Huxley

“Can architecture be thought, no longer as a whole, a complex unity, but as a set of and site for becomings of all kind?”¹

Elizabeth Grosz

Initiating innovations and stimulating developments that touch upon the core of society tends to run the risk of limited acceptance if not properly – ethically – shared and discussed with civil society. Recently, a report by the UK-based think-tank ‘National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts’ (NESTA) questioned: “how can civil society be more than a bystander in the 4th industrial revolution?”². A few years before, in 2013, the EC, in fact, questioned the same issue via another, primarily more broad, philosophical approach. It commissioned an international group of 12 scholars from various disciplines, chaired by philosopher Luciano Floridi to research the EC’s Digital Agenda and write an updated/adapted version to be based on human values. Next to this, an accompanying actual reason for this request was the upcoming election for a

¹Grosz, E. (2008). *Chaos, Territory, Art*. Columbia University Press.

²https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/civil-society-and-fourth-industrial-revolution/?utm_source=e-mailnieuwsbrief&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=AWTI+e-mail+alert

new EC-Board that needed to be philosophically and theoretically prepared for its four years' board-period to come.

This "collective thought exercise" was meant "in order to explore the extent to which the digital transition and the hyperconnected era we are entering into call for rethinking the concepts and referential frameworks on which policies are built." On February 8th 2013, the "Onlife Initiative (OI)" first outcome was presented in Brussels; six months later, on July 9th 2013, its summary, the "Onlife Manifesto"³, was discussed to discover the "blind spots," "make it more accessible for a wider audience," and to "draw concrete policy consequences." The report started by clearly summarizing the transformations that "shake established reference frameworks":

- a. the blurring of the distinction between reality and virtuality;
- b. the blurring of the distinctions between human, machine, and nature;
- c. the reversal from information scarcity to information abundance;
- d. the shift from the primacy of entities to the primacy of interactions.

It further concluded that "the current conceptual toolbox is not fitted to address new challenges and leads to negative projections about the future: we fear and reject what we fail to make sense of and give meaning to" (OI, preface, p.4).

The OI reports subtitle: "Being Human in a hyperconnected world" originated, to a large extent, in the works of Hannah Arendt who also emphasized the timeless value of the dichotomy between public space and private space. Floridi, in his entry, remarked that "*the distinction between public and private will probably need to be re-conceptualized, because frameworks based on physical boundaries are outdated conceptual models, insofar as they are linked to a modern or "Newtonian" metaphysics based on inert things and mechanical interactions*" (OI, p.12-13).

During the – sometimes intense - discussions on July 9th 2013, it became obvious that, since it is architecture (as in built environment) that frames and articulates space by creating "physical boundaries," it is also architecture that – so far – to a large extent, determines the traditional dichotomy between public

³Floridi, L. et al. (2013). *the Onlife Initiative*.

space and private space. Assuming we concur to the conclusion that this dichotomy has by now become more similar to a tangled web of diffuse relations between physical and digital environments, it may be necessary to rethink this complete environment and renegotiate our private space. This rethinking, I believe, should include the more abstract, playful, and other less rational issues that threaten to be forgotten when projected on a built environment based on control, surveillance, and data since our life is more than the sum-total of behavior and data. We should not strive for Max Weber's "Disenchantment" (orig. "*Entzauberung*,") we do need more dreams, imagination, play, and most certainly leave some enigma.

The OI concluded and paraphrased that when the concept on which we built our life changes due to, e.g., technological developments, we can turn a blind eye and dismiss the consequences or we can raise awareness and rethink the concept for a more adequate and contemporary edition. With a focus on the built environment, Alberto Pérez-Gómez emphasizes that "*conceptualization can only happen through the body, and since the body is the mind engaged in its environment, the qualities of this external reality matters immensely for cognition*"⁴

This concept, image or construct is for some years now subject to a series of creative innovative developments that cross the familiar borders of what once was defined rather easy and comfortably. E.g., 'the blurring of the distinction between human, machine and nature' (OI-b) is - in this context - most relevant; if we try to (re)define what constitutes our (built) environment we can no longer ignore wide-spread digital developments, in particular the rise of the Internet of Things/People. Although the OI does not specifically refer to the IoT/P it is the environment as an interface that blurs the distinction; i.e. where we once could rely on our understanding of the world and could 'dwell' we are now forced to rethink this world since 'being at peace' requires that we experience and - try to - understand the various complex worlds around us and accept the fact that its representations often do not run parallel.

When McLuhan, back in 1964, argued that "*Housing as shelter is an extension of our bodily heat-control mechanisms – a collective skin or garment*,"⁵ he could not define the technological developments that would facilitate a house as skin or garment. What he did envision was that both housing and clothing are "media of communication," together with adaptable spatial infill "*tending to the organic*." Nowadays, we are most certainly capable of creating a garment – think of, e.g., spacesuits – that serve as a full protection against

⁴Perez-Gomez, A. (2016). *Attunement, architectural meaning after the crisis of modern science*. MIT. (p.230)

⁵McLuhan, M. (1994). *Understanding Media*. MIT Press. (p.123)

the elements. At the same time, we can build exo-skeletons as an extension of our body, which allow us to perform tasks that are impossible without such an innovation. Think again of the OI's second item: 'the blurring of the distinctions between human, machine and nature'.

The physical space we call our home is considered a refuge, the place to retreat, the place to feel safe and unseen; in other words, a protective cell that is increasingly "developing" into its opposite. It forces us to contemplate its function, to reconsider its goals and redefine its ontology. "*If the house is no longer a concept, there remain only the complex relations between the attributes of dwelling, not 'dwelling' itself, or at least no dwelling as purely existential or natural category*"⁶, according to Meuwissen back in 1993.

Remembering the OI's background and as is also argued by the IoT-think tank Council while illustrating the digital transition: "There is no positive socio-cultural meme driving the potential of the Digital Transition"⁷. Unnecessary to add: our housing, as the familiar and traditional place to dwell, cannot escape this same transformative process; some 'socio-cultural meme' has to originate, preferably the constructive kind. As previously outlined (in Chapter 6), we have outsourced the development of our housing – and therefore most of our possibilities for dwelling – to third parties; we have reduced or abandoned our role as "builders" and the influence we should have on a topic so vital in our life. At the same time, we experience an increasing synthesis of built environment, digital (infra)structure, and the shift from a primarily analog to a more hybrid environment; a sphere as an interface. It implies that – in the framing of the OI – the concept of our lived space destabilizes, together with our attitude and behavior within. In previous times, we could rely on the fact that our home was a solitary, secluded and private sphere, a space to be free and unwatched. However, we still cannot discuss/decide based on much adequate research on our place/role within a hybrid world, despite what Dorien Pessers questioned already 20 years ago: "*What happens to man and his inner condition when the symbolism of privacy is lost in a transparent house*"⁸. Once more, this urges us to rethink the 'house' as we know it as the basic framework for our home.

Our dwelling and, therefore, our housing basically have little or nothing to do with technology in the sense of comforting functionality. Technology first functioned as a helpful and comforting domestic help, ready to act when necessary. When that same technology developed, it also articulated its role, i.e., from functioning

⁶Meuwissen, J. (1993). Houses of desire. *Archis*, 8, 65 t/m 80.

⁷<https://www.theinternetofthings.eu/what-is-the-internet-of-things>

⁸Pessers, D. (1997). House of the future, symbolism of the past. *Archis*, 8, 68–73.

in the background – see, e.g., Weiser – to a more prominent position that required motivated decisions from its users. In this: decisions related to functionality, privacy protection, to data collection; summarized: to its role and position in our life. The consequence of these choices so far also includes the unconscious choice for rationality, for less ambiguity, and less imagination. From a deterministic view, we accept the fact that technologies monitor – or even control – our actions and choices based on our lack of awareness and a desired sense of convenience or comfort, together with the traditional way of building housing, i.e., bereft of a sense of joy, imagination, and possible freedom. What remains is a framework that limits its inhabitant in fully experiencing a lived space that is part of our life. Instead, in the words of Juhani Pallasmaa: *“the task of art and architecture in general is to reconstruct the experience of an undifferentiated world, in which we are not mere spectators, but to which we inseparably belong”*⁹.

Art and architecture

Since, however, we began to realize that these choices are only the rational part of what can be chosen, we also become increasingly aware that the more abstract part cannot be ignored. The quality of our life is not measured in quantified data only; it is experienced through imagination, awareness, feelings, and actions. Architecture, in that sense, has the complicated mediating task of providing and facilitating the framework for an enhanced life. More in general, as argued by Elizabeth Grosz, *“At its most elementary, architecture, the most primordial and animal of all arts, does little other than design and construct frames; these are its basic forms of expression”*¹⁰.

While architecture, besides “primordial”, is considered “the mother of all arts,” it is – see chapter 5. – a constrained art, i.e., it needs a user/inhabitant – be it owner or tenant - who has a program of often rather rational and practical demands, latent desires, and abstract wishes. Every (interior)architect involved in the design and realization of private houses will recognize the sometimes complicated communication and confusing discussions that precedes the actual project since these wishes are not just some rationalized lists of practical items; envisioning the future house is not just the sum-total of construction, doors, windows, and a roof. With or without the assistance of an (interior)architect; we try to achieve a synthesis between ratio

⁹Pallasmaa, J. (2005). *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Academy Press. (p.25)

¹⁰Grosz, E. (2008). *Chaos, Territory, Art*. Columbia University Press.

and emotion and between practical needs and desirable options for full experience and joy. What is needed, however, is the awareness that it is while living in a networked world it remains vital to recognize that its hybrid built environment with its accompanying ubiquitous technology is a possible synthesizer. One that requires an adapted attitude and, above all, participative action to ensure that it is the citizen/inhabitant that is empowered, facilitated by all means possible to control what determines and influences his/her private space.

The close link between architecture and art is also illustrated by Christian Norberg-Schulz; in his 'Genius Loci' (1st. engl.ed. 1980) he argues: "Works of art concretize what remains "between" the pure objects of science. Our everyday life-world *consists* of intermediary objects, and we understand that the fundamental function of art is to gather the contradictions and complexities of the life-world. Being an *imago mundi*, the work of art helps man to dwell."¹¹ (ital.orig.) Art, in a general sense can be considered one vital path to creating a more intense, other or even deeper understanding of (the concept of) our world by researching and showing what is 'in between'. E.g., the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (aiming to built a future through the framework of a circular economy) 'recognizes the importance of art in the creation of a future that is more inclusive, diverse and distributed'. In their recent article¹² 'Without creativity no future' (transl.mp) in the Dutch daily NRC Marleen Stikker and George Brugmans argue that '*technology is not going to save the world, we need help of artists en designers*'. (...) '*the cultural sector should play an active role in exploring and guiding the future.*'"

Art, in a general sense, can be considered a way of creating a more intense, better, or other understanding of our world. A few years ago, the S-T-ARTS-project was initiated by the EC; on their website¹³, EU-Commissioner Oettinger states that "*In the digital age, art and engineering are no longer contradictory modes of thinking.*" Its project goals seek to:

- > support collaborations between artists, scientists, engineers, and researchers to develop more creative, inclusive, and sustainable technologies;

¹¹Norberg-Schulz, C. (n.d.). *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. (1980th ed.). London: Academy Editions. (p.23)

¹²<https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/06/14/zonder-creativiteit-geen-toekomst-a3963768>

¹³<https://www.starts.eu/about-starts/>

- > profit from the creativity and the critical thinking of artists to reflect on novel uses of technology and allow technology to be more seamlessly integrated into society.

It is tempting, given the current process of building and marketing housing, to exclude the realization of housing from the intentions mentioned above; after all, it would imply that part of the process should be delegated to the less rational disciplines/parties that so far have been excluded. On the larger scale – I will exclude here the few individual privately built houses – the entire process has no structural, incorporated place for the skilled and devoted craftsman, the deregulating artist and/or the concerned inhabitant. I consider this an anomaly; we do not build housing just to provide a roof over our head and/or keep the sector at work; the greater part of our life is lived within a space/place that serves the senses, the intimacy, the memories, the options to interact with – and not just in - that environment.

Art projects tend to follow an often less linear or articulate course compared to primarily technological projects, and scientists tend to act on more rational and pragmatic paths compared to artists. Art, in general, is much less “hindered or guided” by such limitations and can address and fulfill other, less pragmatic desires and questions and is capable of presenting the more overall, imaginative or even utopian plans. However, innovative technologies in materials, (bio)chemicals, and their digital counterpart lift that barrier and increasingly cause cross-disciplinary cooperation and results. If we look into some actual innovative technologies, we witness a series of developments – see, e.g., the EC.LIAR-project that deals with waste and energy management – that originate in biotechnology and nanotechnology which could be incorporated in or synthesized with our built environment. The result is not only a synthesis there but also a – possible – integration with the “arts,” facilitating other enhancing experiences. Consequence however is that the built environment - or more precisely the provided frame (see Grosz) - has no other role than to serve as such, i.e. besides its systemic structural function also facilitate functions and processes other than the pragmatic and practical demands only.

Constant’s New Babylon project was created on the basis of Huizinga’s “*Homo Ludens*,” man who could devote time to art, play, and creativity due to increasing technology and automation. (Extrapolated; 2013-research¹⁴ by Oxford’s Carl Frey and Michael Osborne conclude that 40% of jobs will be lost will be lost to computers in the next two decades) Many other projects (see Chapter 4) originated in broadly the same

¹⁴https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf

expectation and sought to translate those into a synthesis of art and architecture, of the analog and the digital, and of the real and the virtual. While many of us are often occupied in making their lives into a work of art, we are in our private space limited by created/provided borders to ensure we – need to – adapt, making us restrain of living the spaces we wish or need. Providing the framework for an environment devoted around experience requires an infrastructure that facilitates instead of dictates, one that leaves opportunity and space for individual participation and action as well as the technological and digital requirements to adapt/connect. In the words of Michael Fox: *“If an environment could adapt to our desires, it would have the ability to shape our experience”*¹⁵.

It is this requirement of a basic environment as an interface including infrastructure that is now - in part - in progress. Hence, the next chapter will deal with technology and the home.

¹⁵Fox, Mi. (Ed.). (2016). *Interactive Architecture* (p. 176). Princeton Architectural Press.