

From material to form: Questioning the body

« *I feel in my body the way people drive their car* ». Laurie Anderson.

Context

The 2000s have been the decade of digital architecture along with so-called blobs, unexpected shapes and geometries and a kind of splendour.

The early 2010s has been the years of an aesthetic shift favouring minimal white drawings, architectural rigour and 1:1 scale building experiments. It followed the tracks of a paradigm shift in economic theories with people like David Harvey and Thomas Piketty, for example.

The second half of the 2010s, we are living in, slips a little more towards some kind of awareness of the society's urgent needs: housing for the poor, alternative answers to refugees camps, etc. All this with the hidden ideology of what would be a genuine architecture, dealing with "true", raw materials, sometimes even low tech systems. In art, this tendency related to a state of immediacy is reflected by the increasing of performative art as well as a resurgence of interest in painting, a technique seen as "authentic" compare to video and photography which can be manipulated.

Might it be in art or architecture, it seems that people are in search of a supposedly truth, of the Here and the Now. They feel in a state of emergency and do not believe anymore in future and progress.

Concept

Choosing one side or another, talking about right and wrong is not the point. It would be an endless and useless argument.

The issue is about questioning the body. How an ideological, aesthetic and technical design process deals with architecture and the body? What strategy can be elaborated, from material to form, to consider the body? Moreover, what body do we want to take into account?

The usual trilogy animal body / social body / political body could be further developed to new dimensions like the hybrid.

Project

Our world is not one of black and white, good and bad, 1 and 0. It is about approximation, mix, transmutation.

Therefore, the unit's agenda will be to work on hybrid architecture as an alternative to theoretical and aesthetic radicalism. An architecture as a prosthesis to heal as well as offer new possibilities.

The year will be devised in three phases:

1. After each students defines his research area, a first prototype will be developed at the scale of the body. Drawings and models will be required. A critical analysis of this first prototype will help define more precisely the student topic.
2. In the second phase, new prototypes will be designed as part of the student's

project, dealing with the scale of the domestic space and the one of the building. The process will be iterative, each scale interacting with the other.

3. The last phase will emphasize on the city scale. The prototypes will be adapted to fit different urban situations and act like autonomous urban prosthesis. Scenarios and narratives will be fully developed.

Just as science-fiction is anticipating a new world with new possibilities from the existing world, the issue of the unit will be to start from existing materials in order to produce new contexts of living out of the predictable and the forecasted.

Prior to these three phases, a comprehensive work on the definition of the body is required.

What body are we talking about? The animal body, the social body, the political body? Are we considering the physical corpse made of organs and bones or the inhabited body part of the cosmos?

Each understanding of the notion of the body induces a set of social, cultural and political relations. These relations are made of norms, regulations, implicit and explicit expectations. They might even have an impact on architecture design and city planning.

Below are some investigation directions suggested to the students. However, it is expected that the students define their own understanding of the notion of body.

1. The beautiful and seductive body

What is a beautiful body? Through ages, criteria have evolved and have been shaping human bodies in different ways: from generous lines to skinny body, from very thin corset waist to tonic physiognomy, from pale face to tanned skin... Men as well as women are concerned by the fashion diktats. But the latter are only the tree hiding the forest. With a fit body goes a healthy life for example, with sports and healthy food. No excess, sound control on everything. Public policies might enhance cycling and walking with impacts on urban planning.

A beautiful body might induce seductive relationships between people. Focus on appearance and representation, rather than content –at first sight at least.

Comprehension of the body as a sexed body with codes and rules.

2. The performative body

Harder, better, faster, stronger. The body as a source of performance.

—> Performance through physical effort, constraints, pain in order to enhance scores. The body as a symbol of performance. Representation of this performative body needs to be questioned. It never refers for example to the expression of effort in the body: sweat, wounds, deformity. Neither on the set of rules and norms attached to this body might it be in terms of diet, life hygiene, mental pressure... This induces a competitive environment with emphasis on results rather than means (that can be translated as well in the working environment and the social relations).

—> Performance through technology: the connected body as well as the augmented body. The range of devices is wide: from transplanted organs to nanotechnology, prosthetics or exoskeleton. The focus here is rather on efficiency than score itself. The purpose of the upgraded body is to live longer, resist in extreme and hostile environment, go beyond its natural capacity. It raises the question of nature vs technology. What is human and what is machine? The body as a machine? If the « mind » can make the difference between a human body and a machine, what

about AI, sensitive robots?...

What is the meaning of performance when recent example shows for instance that handicapped athletes can do better performance than non handicapped athletes (cf. men's 1500 meters paralympic run in Rio).

3. The biomedical body

« *Cogito ergo sum* » – « *I think, therefore I am* » (René Descartes, 1637).

The body does not define the person. It is made of flesh and bones. The person is beyond the body, detached to it. It is a component of a society, but it can live freely, autonomously. The focus is on individuality and social relations. Entrepreneurship, leadership, initiative and creativity can be acknowledged as well as autonomy.

When dysfunction or malfunction arise, things are fixed. Symptoms are solved rather than causes. The what rather than the why.

4. The body as part of a larger whole

The body and the mind are one and are elements of a wider system (ecosystem, sociological system, political system...). Energy passes through the body. Healing the body can heal the mind and vice versa. People are members of a community which is at the center. There is no room for individuality. All the relations are set up through the needs of the community which can lead in extreme systems to uniformity, minimalist aesthetic, undifferentiated spaces, totalitarian policies.

References

TEXTS

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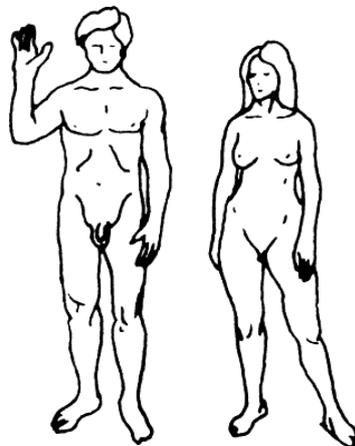
Don Shewey. "The performing artistry of Laurie Anderson", New York Times. Feb. 6th 1983 (<http://www.nytimes.com/1983/02/06/magazine/the-performing-artistry-of-laurie-anderson.html?pagewanted=all>)

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OCTOBER

Song for the Night Driver #3

I . . . I AM I AM IN MY BODY I AM IN MY BODY THE WAY I
AM IN MY BODY THE WAY MOST PEOPLE DRIVE I AM IN MY
BODY THE WAY MOST PEOPLE DRIVE IN THEIR CARS.



Say Hello

(In this piece, a violin bow is initially moved like a windshield wiper. The text in italics is harmonized, dropping the pitch of the voice at octave.)

Look at all that traffic! You know when you're driving at night like this it can suddenly occur to you that maybe you're going in completely the wrong direction. That turn you took back there . . . you were really tired and it was dark and raining and you took the turn and you just started going that way and then the rain stops and it starts to get light and you look around and absolutely everything is completely unfamiliar. You know you've never been here before and

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> Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Social Contract*. Wordsworth Editions, 1998 (new edition). (The original text was written in 1762)

VIDEOS

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The walking dead. Frank Darabont et Robert Kirkman. 2010 - 2017.