

*The machine is a slave which serves to make other slaves. Such a domineering and enslaving drive may go together with the quest for human freedom. But it is difficult to liberate oneself by transferring slavery to other beings, men, animals, or machines; to rule over a population of machines subjecting the whole world means still to rule, and all rule implies acceptance of schemata of subjection.*

Gilbert Simondon,  
*Du Mode d'existence des objets techniques.*

You can think of me as a social worker whose practice takes place in an organization that provides help to immigrants and homeless coming from all over Europe. Five days per week we engage with a different group of people constituted of around a hundred individuals who seek out help.

In this professional context help is understood as the administrative, legal, educative and coaching support necessary in order to facilitate the integration of our clients into the Dutch society. However, not all of the people that arrive to our organization can have access or maintain that option, nor even desire to do so. That being the case, there are two options at hand. If a client is still able and willing to return to his or her country of origin we initiate the necessary procedures for repatriation.

In case this possibility is not feasible, we support them on inhabiting the nooks and cracks of the Dutch society.

Having this as our work it is not by chance that frequently at the end of the shifts the debates surrounding our practice are articulated around power relations and ideological positions. Working within the frame of the social services forces you to consider your own personal agency within the system in which you work and question your potential role as an element of control in an already existing logic of sociability.

Regardless which of the three options we are working on, how individualized and personalized we treat the needs of our clients or how much we acknowledge their agencies in the process, on a daily basis both the community of workers and clients deal with an homogenous, unitarian and authoritarian logic that articulates the interactions between us and the context that surround us. At the end of the day a change in their lives has to happen. That's what they come for and that's what we are paid and accountable for. Social spaces, social relations and change are the concepts that sit at the heart of our practice.

However, change in most cases is translated as the implementation and development of a diversity of already existing models of social live that in different degrees fit in the general scheme of the constituted society that supports and articulates our work. The life of our clients is controlled, supported and manipulated in an attempt to structure it with the potential for self-regulation and self-improvement and endow it with the capacity to become a source of value, of production and consumption, in the society that directs the operations of their improvement.

During the years in which I've been working in this organization my source of motivation has been always to research a methodology of work with the capacity to allow our clients to develop their own form of living. And this has demanded from me and my colleagues a constant reassessment of the ways in which we work within the frame of the organization as a tactic to avoid reproducing the logic that we are expected to. An attempt to create a space in which change can happen, but doesn't need to happen.

You also can also regard me as well as an student of Interaction Design and Unstable Media of this Academy. My initial motivation was to develop my artistic practice, a fundamental part of my life. However, during the study years I unlocked the door that kept separated both practices and year by year my work and my studies started to intertwine more and more.

Out of this conjunction I found the motivation, or even the determination to discover and research the possible spaces beyond the already existing social territories in which we are assigned. The art university became the place in which I could freely approach social change from a different logic than the one I was confronted with my day job. It was the terrain in which I could experiment and generate processes directed towards the creation of social forms.

However, soon enough I was confronted with the very same limits that I was facing as social worker. 'Art' and 'Design' were another instance of institutionalized practices that engaged in already existing forms of social production. An institutionalized creation of sensations, affects and subjectivities.

The problem to tackle was clear. I needed to be able to connect to an "outside" from which to construct a new dimension of being, to find a way to operate directly in "life". Or put in a different way, I started to question myself on how to explore that which is lying beneath our already constructed cultures.

These questions brought me to start researching on games and play. Considered to be out of the ordinary or real life and connected with no material interest, the space in which they operate felt rich enough for investigating the production and instrumentalization of affects, subjectivities and social relations. Games proved to be a nod between disciplines that could allow me to gain knowledge on rule based processes and systems and potentially help me trace a transversal relation between my artistic practice, my theoretical interests and my social work experience.

The experiments brought many insights. And many difficulties as well. Games provided the perfect terrain for studying engagement, motiva-

tion, emergent behaviors and opened the door to create interesting social structures that unfortunately in some cases only lasted as long as they games were running or in others cases were only reconized as such within the game space. However, these games connected me with an understanding of the material and human world as an operation of a myriad of microforces of self-organization that had no need for myself to bring into play the notions of form, purpose or value, nor to create novel orders, meanings or contexts.

The question for my thesis and graduation project was clear. I needed to research on a method that allowed me to approach social change without imposing a model or an already existing structure, regardless on how well intentioned it could be. The aim would be to create an space that could potentially allow people to develop their own cartographies, their own reference points and their own methodologies of analysis.

What you have on your hands is my research on this topic. Let me introduce you to the elements that compose it.

The first part is an essay in which I explore how the rules governing the contemporary production of the self are articulated. For that purpose I analyze gamification as a phenomenon that benefits from the systemic nature of games in a double attempt to intervene in the production of subjectivity. On one hand a gamified system singularizes the subjectivities in an a-signifying way by ordering the connections and successions of yet unformed bodies within the technological space of the game. And on the other hand it allows the creation and modification of stable symbolic structures that shape both the lives and worlds of their players. After elaborating on how these processes that occur within the technological space of the system mirrors the very same logic that operates in the social spaces in which they are articulated, I propose a way out of this vicious circle by claiming back the morphogenetic capacities of play for becoming a force for self-affectation, self-affirmation and self-positioning beyond the imposed power structures.

The second part of the thesis explores the repercussions that such a proposition has in the development of my research. If language and knowledge seem to be not only insufficient to understand the processes by which creation and change occur, but also one of the strategies

for its control, what are the possibilities of movement from and within an absolut non-narrative, non-cultural and non-knowledge space?

My proposition is to explore diagrams as a tactic that provides the means for self-positioning ourselves in an unformed metastable equilibrium of de-territorialized concepts, magnitudes and vectors. Always in flux, set out in motion and ordering and disordering with respect to the network that they map, diagrams connect us with a transductive force that cuts across different strata and dimensions and generates momentary alignments that structure these elements. It is by this condition that we can locate ourselves in-between the virtual and the actual, across the realms of matter and meaning and before the object to be known and the subject of knowledge.

The last element in this work is the bibliography of the researched material arranged along a coordinate system with two axis: one organises alphabetically the different sources following the academic conventions, and the other one articulates these elements using Caillois terms *ludus* and *paida*. A terrain of both mapped and uncharted positions appears exploring different degrees between high structured, rule based, closed environment, order imposing systems and open-ended, self-structuring systems.

This manoeuvre has a double purpose. On one hand it allows me to continue elaborating my research on a different scale, and on the other hand it grants the bibliography the possibility to function independently from the rest of the elements of the thesis.

I invite you to consider the relationship of the elements of this thesis as non-hierarchical, and to navigate them in no specific order, regardless of the impression that it might have caused you to have in response to their orderly presentation in this introduction. Moreover, I hope you find yourself interacting with them as an element more in a temporary assemblage with the capacity for generating knowledge. This work does not aim to pose a closed and definitive answer, since such an attempt would work against the very nature of my intentions.

This thesis as been envisioned as a machine, as technical body with a center of indetermination and abstraction that grants itself the autono-

my for co-evolving with its environment, with you, with me and with the yet unimaginable actualizations in which it will continue flourishing. An attempt to research on opening up new ways of understanding identity, transformation and creation.

I would like to close this introduction by acknowledging all of the people that contributed during this adventure.

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