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Diploma 14

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Towards Edufactory:

Architecture and the Production of Subjectivity

Extended Brief

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1. Introduction

In 1967 Cedric Price proposed to transform the ruined industrial region of North Staffordshire into a mobile university campus. The resulting Potteries Thinkbelt became the first large-scale project to anticipate the passage from material to immaterial production as the driving force of an advanced capitalist economy. Shortly afterwards, in 1969, the Open University was established as a new model of education, open to both country and city beyond the insularity of the campus. Both initiatives made clear that higher education was no longer an Ivory Tower of knowledge reserved for the ruling elite, but was becoming a mass phenomenon directly linked to economic production.

Today, when knowledge and information are bought and sold as if they were

commodities, universities are at the centre of this production. The vehicles for this exchange, however, are not the various academic departments and a body of knowledge, whether artistic or scientific, but the students themselves – subjects controlled through the manipulation of their desires, feelings, affections and perspectives. Unlike material production (for example, manufacturing) in which commodities are objects detachable from the subject who produced them, within knowledge production it is not possible to detach the commodity from life itself. Bios, dynamis and experience become both means and product. And so rather than absorbing specific forms of knowledge, university students learn how to live, how to network, how to compete. In this way the university becomes an Edufactory empowered with the mass production of subjects ready to be implemented into the increasingly precarious conditions of work.

This year Diploma 14 will explore, question and reimagine this scenario. The goal will be to define new forms of welfare that can counter the increasing precariousness of life and offer alternatives to neo-liberal education policies. We will focus on London as a case study and propose welfare interventions in the form of specific architectural projects. Housing and new kinds of learning centres will be at the core of these interventions while other programmes and institutions will be decided according to the adopted interventions and strategies. A critical link between form and subjectivity will be the testing ground for the assessment of the proposed projects. These will be introduced and constantly complemented by theoretical reflections in the form of writing and research. In everything, Diploma 14 encourages a radical approach in which drawing and writing are reclaimed as the most essential means to produce architecture.

2. Labour

In her book *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt distinguishes the sphere of labour from the sphere of work and that of action, which together constitute the *vita activa*.¹ While work designates “the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice,”² labour is the process of biological survival of the species and thus never creates anything permanent [a finished product]. Labour refers to

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

² Ibid. 85

activities such as eating, sleeping, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the household, which are required to support the mere existence of human beings. For this reason, the sphere of labour designates the private sphere, the silent realm of the *oikos*, or household.

Arendt's distinction between labour and work also designates two kinds of subjects, respectively: *animal laborans*, and *homo faber*. Animal laborans works with his or her body and thus does not leave anything behind, while homo faber produces human constructs of semi-permanence. Arendt notes that with the rise of modernity and its emphasis on productivity as the fundamental task of society, the boundaries between labour and work dissolved. The increasing division of labour through which society was organized and managed for greater productivity caused work to become further divided in specialized activities with no possibility of controlling any finished product. Unlike artisanal production, where the homo faber could see his or her finished work, the worker of industrial production is part of a vaster productive organization in which work has been reduced to a generic process of labour. In this condition products are the outcome of larger social process and as such they do not come out of individual craft.

For Arendt such condition was caused by the rise of the *social*: the organizational framework in which the lives of people was systematically linked with the imperative of production. For Arendt the rise of the social imposed on people the law of ever increasing productivity and the consequent accumulation of surplus value. Increase of productivity implied increase of consumption: most of the products of work were not meant to last, but were rather targeted to the immediate fulfilling of the labour force needs. This condition provoked consumption to be the ultimate goal for production and progressively blurred the dividing line between work and labour.

The consequences of the expanding domain of labour within contemporary civilization were the subject of a seminal article by Kenneth Frampton in which the critic and historian of architecture applied Arendt's analysis of the human condition to the status of architecture within modernity³. For Frampton, Arendt's distinction between work and labour was already contained in the ambivalence of term architecture, which designates at the same time "the art or science of constructing edifices for human use"

³ See: Kenneth Frampton "The Status of Man and the Status of His Object: A Reading of Hannah Arendt" in: Melvyn A. Hill (edited by) *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1979), reprinted in K. Michael Hays, *Architectural Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, Ma.: Mit Press, 1998), 362-367.

and “ the action or process of building”. For Frampton the first definition addressed architecture as a work which finds its *raison d’être* in the creation of a lasting human world, while the second definition addresses architecture as labouring process “comparable to the never ending process of biological labour”. When architecture is thus an edifice it is so not simply because it is an object, but because its appearance within the physical world is charged with the intention to build something whose meaning goes beyond mere instrumentality. With the rise of the social, architecture loses its relationship with public space and becomes an instrument for the *fungibility* of the world in the form of viaducts, bridges, and systems of universal distribution. For Frampton such artefacts constitute the wordlessness of the animal laborans in which “architecture has been as much affected as urbanism by the substitution of productive or processal norms, for the more traditional criteria of wordliness and use”⁴. Frampton writes:

*Increasingly buildings come to be designed in response to mechanics of their own erection or, alternatively, processal elements such as towers cranes, elevators, escalators, stairs, refuse chutes, gangways, service cores, and automobiles determine the configuration of built form to a far greater extent than the hierarchic and more public criteria of place. And while the space of public appearance comes to be over-run by circulation, or inundated at the urban scale by restricted high-speed access, the freestanding, high-rise megaliths of modern city maintain their potential status as “consumer goods”.*⁵

Frampton’s analysis remains one of the fundamental critiques of the way the dissolution of work into labour and the consequent rise of the social has fundamentally undermined the existence of a veritable public sphere. Following Arendt, Frampton’s critique addressed especially what he saw as the realm of the modern suburbia in which “an urbanized populace has paradoxically lost the object of their urbanization”⁶. From the parade of unrelated monuments to the Ringstrasse criticized by Camillo Sitte, to non-places of *communities without propinquity* celebrated by Melvin Webber, Frampton defined the manifestation of a production-oriented society into the phenomena of unlimited consumption. Frampton writes:

⁴ Ibid. 370

⁵ Ibid. 370

⁶ Ibid. 364

Even the wordly category of use is to be absorbed by consumption inasmuch as use objects – in this instance, tools – become transformed by abundance into disposable “throwaway” goods; a subtle shift whose real significance resides in the intrinsic destructiveness of consumption as opposed to use.⁷

In our approach at Diploma 14 we would like to go beyond both Arendt’s and Frampton’s critique not by negating them but by showing to what extent labour has become a totality that involves all aspects of human subjectivity from political action to what Arendt defined as the most contemplative dimension of life, that is the “life of the mind”. For both Arendt and Frampton the problem with labour it is the fact that it concerns the “necessity of subsisting” of the human species; for this reason, the animal laborans can’t produce a *world*, but only *life*, that is to say existence for the sake of his or her own reproduction. But what happens when, within late capitalism, labour invests all human faculties and goes beyond the mere necessity of subsisting? What happens when production is not just the repetitive labouring process in the factory or in the office, but takes the form of all cognitive, creative, and even political faculties of human beings? What happens when even public space becomes instrumental to economic production in the form of cultural and social interaction? And finally, what are the consequences of the ubiquity of labour on architectural form beyond the most visible design emblems of consumerist culture? It is by attempting to answer to these questions that Marx’s approach to labour becomes again important.

3. Labour Power

In formulating her definition of labour Arendt criticized Marx not simply for blurring the distinction between labour and work, but also for addressing labour as the very core of human subjectivity. As we have seen, for Arendt labour concerns the realm of necessity. Arendt acknowledged how decisive was Marx’s identification of labour as the source of capital wealth and power, but she interpreted Marx’s category of labour strictly in her terms – labour as simple process of reproduction of one’s own life. Indeed, for Marx there is no distinction between labour and work. In an age that made productivity the fundamental goal of society, Marx saw productivity not in the finished products but in the capacity for labour, in the human power “whose strength is not

⁷ *ibid.* 371

exhausted when it has produced the means of its own subsistence and survival but is capable of producing a ‘surplus,’ that is, more than necessary for its own ‘reproduction.’”⁸ Yet, Marx saw labour as the very anthropological portrait of human nature, which revealed not only what man had already achieved, but also its *potential* for production. His great discovery was the understanding of labor as “labor power,” which he defined as “the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind.”⁹ What is remarkable in this definition is that Marx understands labour not only as a physical potential but also as mental or intellectual capability. Long before mass labour would shift from the realm of the factory, in which labouring efforts are mostly physical, to the realm of tertiary and creative labour, in which labour power consists mostly of mental and intellectual capabilities, Marx included the latter as a fundamental asset of the productive power of society. Labour power is, above all, *potential*, of which Paolo Virno writes: “Potential, that is to say, aptitude, capacity, dynamis. Generic, undetermined potential: where one particular type of labour or another has not been designated, but any kind of labour is taking place, be it the manufacturing of a car door, or the harvesting of pears, the babble of someone calling in to a phone ‘party-line,’ or the work of a proofreader.”¹⁰ Unlike Arendt, who went back to the traditional understanding of labour as just one sphere of the human condition, Marx saw in labour the very core of human subjectivity, its totality, and thus what generates value in a capitalist society. The importance of labour giving value to the goods it produces was already assumed by the great theorists of bourgeois economy, Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Yet these theorists measured the value of labour in terms of abstract duration of labouring process, as a pure quantity of time without any qualitative or sensible connotation. Marx noted that it was impossible to talk in such terms of the value of labour when labour itself was understood as the sum of physical and intellectual capabilities. Thus, embodied in the *life* and in the *world* of the workers, and not in time, labour is the origin of the value of commodities.

As Marx understood, in a capitalist system labour power is a fundamental commodity. The paradoxical nature of this commodity is that it does not exist as a thing

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 88

⁹ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (1867). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, translated by Ben Fowkes and David Fernbach (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 270.

¹⁰ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (New York, Cambridge Massachusetts: Semiotext(e), Mit Press, 2004), 81.

or as a specific, recognizable activity. Labour power exists only as the potential embodied in the generic faculties of human nature. This dimension of labour and its importance in a capitalist system is at the origin of biopolitical techniques of government. Between the 1960's and the 1990's Operaist and Post-Operaist movements rediscovered the Marxian definition of labour power by analyzing the transformations of capital when confronted by class struggle. In his book *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Virno remarks on the equivocal nature of the now fashionable Foucauldian concept of biopolitics when it is disconnected from its true goal, which is not simply control for the sake of control, but rather the governance of human life as the potential for production. As he explains:

Capitalists are interested in the life of the worker, in the body of the worker, only for an indirect reason: this life, this body, are what contains the faculty, the potential, the dynamis. The living body becomes an object to be governed not for its intrinsic value, but because it is the substratum of what really matters: labor-power as the aggregate of the most diverse human faculties (the potential for speaking, for thinking, for remembering, for acting, etc.). Life lies at the center of politics when the prize to be won is immaterial (and in itself non-present) labor-power. The living body, which is a concern of the administrative apparatus of the State, is the tangible sign of a yet unrealized potential, the semblance of labor not yet objectified; as Marx says eloquently, of "labor as subjectivity." The potential for working, bought and sold just like another commodity, is labor not yet objectified, "labor as subjectivity." One could say that while money is the universal representation of the value of exchange — or rather of the exchangeability itself of products — life, instead, takes the place of the productive potential, of the invisible dynamis.¹¹

Unlike Arendt's partition of the human condition into three separate spheres such as labour, work, and action, the condition of labour within late capitalism has dissolved these boundaries. If as Marx maintains labour power coincides with the generic faculties of life of workers, with their physical and mental capabilities, then all the spheres of the human condition are absorbed and dissolved within the totalizing sphere of labour. This condition was radicalized with the advent of post-Fordism, in which labouring activities are no longer confined to the factory and the office but coincide with the full spectrum of social relationships. Even those spheres that Arendt viewed as antithetical to the sphere of labour, such as political action or thinking, are absorbed by labour power. Language, cooperation, and social exchange become crucial forms of production. Moreover political action which for Arendt breaks any life routine and unfolds in

¹¹ Ibid. 83-84.

unpredictable terms is today the very phenomenology of contemporary forms of immaterial labour. This is especially true in creative work.

4. Towards Edufactory: University After the Bologna Process

While in the past creative work addressed only a small minority, today, in economically advanced countries, it constitutes the larger sector of production. Mass creativity has a profound impact on economy and its social scope goes beyond its traditional human milieu. Creative people are no longer only artists, writers, or musicians, but students, researchers, editors, workers in the service industry, entrepreneurs... In short creativity involves all aspects of work. A fundamental incubator of this type of work is the university.

During the 1990s it became clear that education is a fundamental economic factor in advanced capitalism. As such it could no longer be sustained as a publicly funded educational system, but was susceptible of being traded as a commodity. In Europe, where until the 1980s the policies inspired by the Welfare State agenda were highly influential, the increasing privatization and commodification of the educational system introduced a number of conflicts with, and resistance from, students¹². In order to ease the conflicts and find a more politically and economically legitimate reason for these market-oriented changes, at the end of the '90s the European Union adopted the so-called Bologna Declaration.¹³ The official aim of the declaration is to standardize higher education curricula in the member countries of the EU. Yet, by doing so the Bologna Process has drastically reformed the very objective of higher education. If in the 1960s' education was linked to economy within the framework of the welfare state, the Bologna process is reforming the university according to the parameters of neo-liberal economy in which flexibility plays a fundamental role as managerial paradigm.

No longer dedicated to forming "the good citizen," the Bologna Process seeks to define the student as an *entrepreneur* whose educational curricula is immediately fine-tuned to market demands. Universities are thus encouraged to offer much more flexible curricula, which students can easily adapt according to the best opportunities available on

¹² A seminal protest against the privatization of the University happened in Italy in 1990 with the so-called "Movimento della Pantera". This protest was the first resurgence of mass-political struggle after the political apathy of the 1980's.

the market. Given the progressive withdrawal of the state from supporting higher education, the Bologna Process encourages universities to be much more collaborative with the private sector and to rely on private funding. While departments and universities of applied research, especially in the fields of engineering and science, are well-funded because of their immediate usefulness in the market, humanities suffer from lack of investment, and thus are seen as increasingly irrelevant in the face of market pressures. In short, the Bologna Process recognizes how learning time is an integral part of economic production, and as such must be reorganized. It sees higher education as the fundamental industry of Europe for the years to come, and the only economic sector that will be competitive in the global market, especially vis-à-vis the aggressive Asian economy.

Oversimplifying, we can say that the university prefigured by the Bologna process is a factory that produces immaterial commodities in the form of knowledge. Yet such production cannot be separated from its producers. As we have seen before, when what is bought and sold is something inseparable from its producers – in this case, students, teachers, and researchers – the object of production becomes not just the commodity itself as a separable object, but the very subjectivity of the producers. In short, universities are factories that produce subjectivity which is addressed to the precarious student-workers: socially mobile, able to cope with all sorts of unstable conditions, and ready to jump from one knowledge domain to the other according to opportunities. In constantly self-customizing their course of study, students are encouraged to exploit their personal skills rather than what they might learn in a class. The Bologna Process acknowledges that the interactive experience of students – how they live, how they cope with any given situation, how they socialize – is a great source for their formation, and thus promotes mobility as a fundamental factor for learning. This seems in a way to confirm the subjectivity that Price envisioned with the Thinkbelt project. Yet, in his social-democratic, reformist approach, Price did not understand the role of education and the production of knowledge in the terms of political economy. In other words, he did not understand that the design philosophy behind his idea of education, and more generally of the merging of work with other activities such as learning and leisure, was “instrumental” to an economy that at that time was already moving from material to immaterial production. Indeed, we can say that Price’s project is today fully realized by the neoliberal policies of the EU, except for one fundamental issue. Price imagined that in a society where education directly serves the needs and

demands of the labour market, students should be hired as workers and not simply be supported by grants. But the reality of the Bologna Process implies quite the opposite. Since knowledge is now a marketable commodity, students have to pay to have access to it. Because the rise in tuition accentuates an entrepreneurial approach to education, students must be all the more farsighted, since their investment is significant. But the rise in tuition also transforms how education is lived and experienced. The lack of support provided by universities to help students in their daily life encourage them to be more individually concern and not interested in a communitarian life. For instance, student housing on campus has become rare. Most students live alone rather than with other students on campus. Some have no choice but to live with their parents. Because of the disappearance of welfare state university “The liminal moment of the university that made the subject position of the college student anomalous, neither child nor adult, is being eradicated. College life is caught between the double pinchers of childhood and adulthood.”¹⁴ As in Price’s Potteries Thinkbelt educational scenario, under the Bologna Process students are encouraged to enter society from the beginning of their studies. If before they were isolated from its expectations and rules during their studies, they must now learn to live within it. The gap between university and the city that allowed students to embody social rebellion no longer exists. They are less focused on the critical assessment of ongoing economic, political and industrial developments and more interested in learning how to deal with these conditions in the most effective way. It is precisely this precarious environment in which students are forced to evolve, developing their entrepreneurial abilities. They learn how to produce in an unstable environment in which freedom of choice is constantly conditioned by an increasingly precarious life. They learn how to develop their creativity and their inventiveness in order to face uncertain conditions. Moreover, struggles between those who use knowledge to make a profit and those who use it for its own sake force students and teachers to self-organization. Autonomous, self-organized courses, for example, show the need for students to rely on their own initiatives and abilities to support themselves.

¹⁴ Jason Read, *University Experience: Neoliberalism against the Commons* in The Edufactory Collective, *Towards a Global Autonomous University*, 152.

5. New forms of Welfare: Social Housing beyond Social Housing

In the previous years Diploma Unit 14 has approached the theme of labour by advancing at the beginning of the year predefined architectural frameworks such as the Immeuble Cité and the generic unit for one or two persons. This year Diploma Unit 14 will not put forward any predefined design assignment. Instead the first month we'll engage in an intense research session focused the theoretical premises of the project. This research session will be combined with the Theory and History writing assignment in which each student will deepen the historical and programmatic context for the project.

The topic of this year's Diploma 14 project will be social housing for students and researchers. We will assume student life not as a specific lifestyle, but as paradigmatic example of the most extreme tendencies of post-fordist production. In this sense social housing for students will be proposed as a new form of welfare for those who work and produce in precarious conditions.

Each student will work on a project, which will articulate in original and inventive ways an idea of community that is radically different from those communities that we already know from the past. Diploma 14 encourages especially the investigation of new ways of sharing and collectively managing space.

Diploma 14's project aims to be critical to both the tradition of the university campus as a separated micro-cosmos from the city, and to the dissolution of the university within the urban condition. We believe that the city itself, with its social, cultural, and demographic density should be the site for the university if not *the* university itself.

We'll assume that free access to housing, public transport, and cultural and social services such as libraries and museums should be fully granted to students and researchers involved in higher education. Moreover we believe that university housing should be in the city centre. This means that the city centre needs to be populated and densified with new typologies that include both living and working facilities.

The crux will be how to propose a project that inevitably will pursue the ultimate goal of the university that is to produce subjectivity – and how to transgress this premises as well.

6. The Project Site: London

The site for the project will be the center of London. With its neo-colonial past, and cosmopolitan present, London is a contested city between the power of global financial interests and an increasing multitude of precarious workers. Students, artists, architects, writers, poets, graphic designers, musicians, editors, proofreaders forms an army of hyperproductive stakanovist workers whose labor is often little or not compensated at all. The paradox of this situation is that these people are far from being unemployed. Instead they work even more when they are searching for a “job”. Preparing a portfolio, networking with people, building a website, founding a one-person company ends up being a hyper-productive form of work which involves a wide spectrum of social relationships. Moreover, this form of labour is used by the art of rent of market economy which parasites creative work in order to gentrify entire districts of the city and exploits its social and economic wealth.

Against such a scenario it makes little sense to invoke more public space, since it is precisely the ubiquity of public space that fuels the market’s “art of rent”. Diploma 14 will address a scenario in which precarious workers are given a “citizen-wage” that is a wage for living in the form of free housing.

Instead we ask to invent new typologies of living and working in which cooperation and co-sharing between people is not only possible but becomes desirable.

7. Technical Studies: *The Aesthetic of the Collective*

Technical studies is an important part in the work at Diploma 14. Technical studies is not just a complementing course but an integral part in the Unit’s research. We will involve technical studies tutors from the very beginning of the research in order to make the “technical” and the “theoretical” as one project. The main topic of our technical studies program will be the investigation of innovative ways to prefabricate and assemble architectural elements. We aim at projects that are technically and economically feasible but also bold and daring in their capacity to establish an aesthetic of the collective. The Unit will engage with the issues of prefabrication, its history, and its relevance today.

The aesthetic of architectural form will be an important part of the research. At first students will research examples and precedents in which communitarian life was expressed through a specific architectural materiality. This research will be complemented by an investigation on the “banal” and “generic” materiality of the city. After this research students will sample materials and techniques of assembling them according to the specific strategy of their project.

We are interested in a technically conscious and precise sublimation of the banal materiality of the city towards a sublime language of technical construction. Each student will present his or her technical studies work not only through “technical drawings” but also through images that convey the sense and the form of materials and construction.

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