REAL VIRTUALITY –
ARCHITECTING WITH THE COMPLIMENTARY PRINCIPLE

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Under the pressure of capitalism, we have come to acknowledge new agents and forces in the making of our built environment. Private players have taken over public space, such as infrastructure, as a means of economic investment, shifting the responsibility away from the state. These new private agents have come into power by involving themselves in our everyday lives, giving into the desires of us — the consumers that were formerly called citizens.

Public vs. Private

Technology, as an accelerating tool, plays an important role in this shift from the public to the private. (New) technologies make us consume every moment of the day, affirming the dominance of private agents as our suppliers. This moment of popular consumption leads to new socio-technological phenomena that are characteristic for our time.

Examples are countless: Instagram visualizes the lives of others, making us desire them as our own. Bike sharing gives us mobility at the cost of x cents per kilometer, littering our streets with chaos. Google offers us information in exchange for our personal data.

Consumption of any kind has become seamless. But no service is without aim, no company without an agenda. In turn, private agents have capitalized on this behavior, inserting themselves in our daily lives. This involvement not only effects the way we live but also produces new infrastructures and spaces, somewhere between public and private.

Homogeneity vs. Heterogeneity

The omnipresence of consumable technologies and their related socio-technological phenomena has created a more homogenous environment. These environments appear on local scales, resulting in the same objects, the same contents, and the same contexts produced globally. Interesting enough, this homogenization can be read in parallel to numerous other disciplines such as anthropology, biology, ecology, etc. but also in parallel to what media theorists refer to as the filter bubble: the current state of our individual perception, directed by the other, only (re)creating the ever same.

Global vs. Local

Capitalism's production of homogeneous space can be traced everywhere, thus selecting a site becomes both crucial and naive at the same time. In the context of interconnected networks, invisible clouds of data, and ungraspable corporate-tech speak, we will temporarily leave the metropolis behind, shifting our focus to a smaller and more graspable scale.

This year, the CCA (Canadian Center for Architecture) premiered its film series "Islands and Villages" highlighting villages as microcosms of cities, aimed at describing their condition as a "post-urban phenomenon." Our studio will follow this approach, using the village of Lech as our test site for researching different agents / agencies, in the production of capitalist-driven space, as found in every global city. With a population of 1.500 in the summer and 10.000 in the winter, Lech oscillates between local village and small city. This scale allows us to understand the different systems at play, extracting information about privately owned public spaces, the production of homogeneity through value engineering, and the agency of non-architects in the making of our built environment.

And vs. Either or

We will produce new visions for Lech, introducing technology as an accelarating component. Taking place in the near future (2027) the design projects should envision realities that implement architecture and technology alternatively, producing a pseudo-realistic vision for a near-future society.

Our goal is to identify the new (private and public) agents behind the homogenization process we are facing today. Only if we understand who owns, runs and builds our cities, can we —as architects—engage.

To address and communicate this vision, students will select a specific character from the future. This character will be the lens through which the architecture is designed, and will play a central role in the student's TV format.

Using the complimentary principle as a tool for approaching the wide topic, we will build arguments and design concrete proposals and visions for our built environment. This dialogic approach, of looking into the complementary, allows us to simultaneously discuss and re-think the role of the architect as a mere service-provider, suggesting new collaborations with today's and tomorrow's new actors.