

Summary

The thesis investigates the encounter between emergent architectural practices and institutions and explores the transformative power and the critical potential of the architectural project. It does so by looking at architectural practices that strongly claim to be ‘alternative to’ the given institutional system and at how they negotiate their positions, focusing on the effects of their actions. Indeed, to realise their projects, these collectives have to enter in relation with the institution they claim to be alternative to. Hence, they are considered non-institutionalised actors who manage to intervene in the urban space and actually transform it, getting, at the same time, through what could be defined as a process of institutionalisation. As stated by Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito, this process generates a constant tension between the inside and the outside of institutions. It shapes what it encounters: what is outside, before institutionalising itself, modifies the previous institutional set-up by challenging, expanding and deforming it (Esposito, 2021). Therefore, the research presents and discusses possible architectural practices that create this deformation as a project. The practices that are the object of the study happen in spaces across the spatial and architectural realms. Through the inquiry, the research places them in a spectrum of references where the gradient of possibilities shifts between the performative arts, different temporary and ephemeral uses, and more formalised architectural projects. Methodologically wise, it observes ethnographically the various strategies and tactics used by the architects to make their projects happen, as the complex assemblages of documents, emails, drawings and messages they produce. It considers the politics of the observed practices by proposing a study of the networks and the concerns involved in the production of their projects. Hence, it positions itself among the broader debate around the political effects of artefacts and, more generally, within the exploration of the relationships between society, politics and technology, looking at infrastructures, artefacts or any (material) spatial intervention being considered *a medium of politics* (Easterling, 2014).

Architecture exists in the world, and when it is enacted, it has effects on it. The research explores ontological questions regarding what an architectural project is and whether it has transformative power or critical potential. Possible trajectories for architectural and spatial practices would be suggested by considering where the effects of different analysed projects happen and if the projects have altered and modified the dynamics in the space or, rather, the space of the dynamics. Drawing

on the work of feminist scholars such as Donna Haraway (1988,1990,1991, 2003, 2018), Isabelle Stengers (2010, 2011, 2013), Hélène Frichot (2017,2018,2019), Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) and AnneMarie Mol (2003), the research is based on the crossing of science and technology studies, feminist theories and environmental humanities connecting feminist materialist tradition of critical thinking with more than human ontologies and ecological practices. Thus, the inquiry positions itself within a relational ontology that sees the architectural project as affected by the word and explores spaces of possibility to affect it. It starts acknowledging this double movement, which is always relational, affecting and being affected by, yet happens with different intensities. The possibilities of one of the directions of this movement have been called transformative power and critical potential because they are exercised by the analysed practices in different ways - shifting within a spectrum of actions which encompasses ephemeral interventions as material and physical transformations. All the analysed practices share a solid drive to change the given institutional system, and the research observes and discusses their actions and their effects. It looks at ordinary actors who can snick into vacancies - on a normative, physical, administrative layer. What happens in the faults created when those architectural collectives, defining themselves as dissenting, enter in relation with institutions? Those moments have been recognised as the picks of tension where exceptions and norms meet each other in a constant negotiation between the practices' positions and institutional stances.

The research explores the complex ecologies of these practices and proposes a reflection on their intervention possibilities. These practices differ in ontology, scale and politics (Yaneva, 2017). They have been chosen because they have a secure narration of their being "alternative to", and they are considered to have a solid irruptive potential and transformative will. The research shows how some of them may go beyond the habitual by contesting and modifying the given institutional set-up, while others reproduce prevailing logics and regulations. *Are these actors in or outside the institutions? What does proposing a project with a strong will to transform space from a specific dissenting position mean? How are the actors able to realise their projects? What happens in their process of institutionalisation?* In answering these questions, the research positions itself with a pragmatical take and follows ethnographic methods applied to the study of architectural projects. Indeed, neither reality itself proceeds the practices nor knowledge, but both are incorporated into daily events and activities (Mol, 2002). The consequences of embracing such a position touch both the methodology of inquiry and the ontology behind it: these mutually create a relationship with each other and ask for the research to be radicalised in practice.

On the one hand, there is the aim to understand possibilities of how not embrace the *status quo* but rather to engage with architectural practices that may transform the institutional system they operate in; on the other, there is the will not to put distance between the object of study and the knowledge behind it, and not to create a level of separation between the analysed practices and the discourses around them.

Four practices have been observed in-depth, and a conceptual diagram places them within a possible spectrum of interventions according to the project they have enacted. On the horizontal axis, these interventions could span from being performative, ephemeral and temporal towards more permanent and stabilised architectural projects. The analysed practices and their projects also move on a vertical axis according to their level of institutionalisation, which both considers the mandate which let the project be initiated (whether it has been a direct call, a competition or an open call, or, on the opposite side, a self-initiated mandate, which left more level of freedom). This movement helps in detecting the level of irruption within the institutional order. All the selected examples of *praxis instituites* differ from one another in their relationship with the institutions and the manifestation of dissent.

Moreover, their realised projects diverge in the scales and the temporalities of interventions; consequently, they constantly negotiate with the institutions from their specific position, which is always relative and never absolute. The transformative potential is thus found both in the engagement of the subject exercising the practice and in the theoretical work that observes and traces it in a network of concepts which could contaminate both the practices themselves and the conventional world surrounding them. The observed architectural practices suggest transformative power within given methods and tools to explore the critical potential of the architectural project.