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## THE HUMAN CONDITION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: BODY AND ARCHITECTURAL SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY ART\*

araştırma makalesi|research article

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### ABSTRACT

Architectural practices that sustain economic power structures often overlook the complexity of place, prioritizing rationality and utility for funding while perpetuating issues like climate crises and income inequality. In contrast, art offers critical perspectives unconstrained by immediate practicality. This research examines how contemporary artists understand and create space to reach a spatial design approach that activates subjects and fosters new connections between humans and non-humans. In the scope of this research, seven contemporary artists who produce artworks related to either the body or space have been chosen. The discourses of artists exploring the body-space relationships serve as primary sources. Two methods are employed: logical argumentation and analysis by analogy. The latter involves visualizing the analysis of textual discourses through messy word maps to extract insights from artists' concepts and tactics. "Artist topographies" contribute to a collective "cognitive topography," revealing commonalities around themes of exploitation, oppression, profit, borders, otherness, agency, and complexity. The conclusion presents suggestions for an alternative spatial design approach based on the discourses and cognitive topography.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Art, Theory of Architecture, Body, Deconstruction, Posthumanism

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# INTRODUCTION

In Stelarc's (2017) performance *Remixed and Rewired*, in which he looks like a cyborg, all of the artist's senses are split; his eyes see other cities, his ears hear other places; prosthetic arm attached to his body is moved by visitors of the museum via a digital interface (Figure 1a). While electronic and digital prosthetics continue to transform the human condition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; behind the scenes, maintaining the system requires the continuous exploitation of human labor and natural resources. Crawford and Joler (2018) present the entire life cycle of a small electronic device called Amazon Echo in the anatomical map: *Anatomy of an AI System* (Figure 1b). All human labor, data and planetary resources used for each stage from the device's production to its end of life as a waste are shown in a comprehensive graph. The infographic is accompanied by an explanatory text consisting of 21 chapters. Just as Echo transcends its physical existence in terms of its impact, an architectural production does too; setting a domino effect with each event and actor participating. The exchange value in the economic sense does not account for all the resources or participants. The climate crisis and other challenges have made it unsustainable to think about architecture from an anthropocentric perspective, as with other disciplines.

*Anatomy of an AI System* and Stelarc's performance draws a framework where both the micro and macro scales are relevant and related to each other. Staying with a similar sense of scale, it's evident that the body and space share a similarity and imply a continuum as they are both subject to the impact of political dynamics, social structures, economic forces, cultural norms and emotional experiences. There's an immediate and tangible contact between these factors and the body-space continuum which makes it possible to read the systematic and thematic effects and changes from the embodied perspectives in art rather than a top-down analysis. The main character of Murata's (2019) novel *Cashier* cannot adapt to the static rules of society but becomes almost an inseparable part of the market which functions day and night without a break, where she's quickly adapted to its clearly outlined rules and worked for many years. She cannot think of her own life apart from the rhythm and order of the market, her body becomes an integral part of it, and she finds happiness there. The character "chooses" to become part of the grocery machine instead of the social order which permeates all parts of life.



Figure 1a. Stelarc, *Re-Wired / Re-Mixed: Event for Dismembered Body*, 2016, Performance, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth

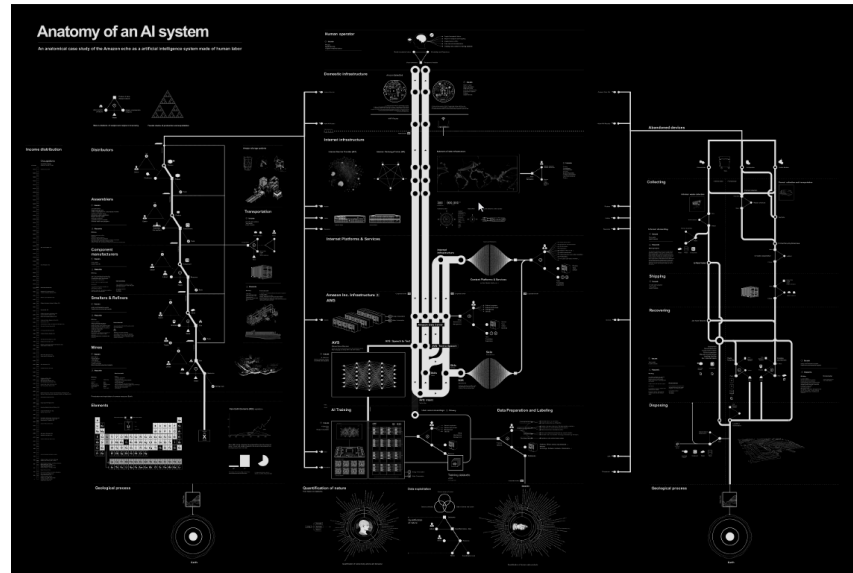


Figure 1b. Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler, *Anatomy of an AI System: The Amazon Echo as an Anatomical Map of Human Labor, Data and Planetary Resources*, 2018, Digital image file, AI Now Institute and Share Lab.

The disruption brought about by the specialization and division of labor and the disintegration in the perception of space is added to the urban experience. Sennett (2014: 13) argues that the technological advancements of the 19th century transformed bodily movement into a passive encounter. In other words, the acceleration of machines and means of transport reduce the need for attention and sensory engagement. The logistics of speed detaches the person from the places in which they move, so the bodily experience also influences the perception of space.

While the pressure of the system weighs on the body and space, architectural design processes often conform to the establishment. Architectural designs are expected to be rational, functional, and aligned with the values of the economic system to be realized. Spencer (2018) highlights that some of the key actors within architectural culture serve the aims of the neoliberal agenda, intentional or otherwise, which has a big impact on architectural practices, pedagogy and theory. These key actors view aesthetics as something that needs to be completely stripped of knowledge and critical thinking. Dale and Burrell (2003) define the encouragement of substance use in Huxley's novel *Brave New World* as an ironic manifesto for anesthesia. Similarly, they also suggest that buildings that seek to create a captivating effect often numb the person who comes into contact with them. Existing power relations and rules are continuously reproduced by all sign systems and normalized. In other words, they become transparent (Baudrillard, 2010). This process desensitizes the subject while emotions and conditions outside of the system are disregarded. In an architectural space constructed in this way, the agency of the subject diminishes. Vassaf (2020: 67) describes this phenomenon as "what a barrack is to a soldier, an apartment is to a citizen". Spaces in close contact with the subjects conceal this condition from them. It becomes the plane of existence for the aimless production-consumption cycle. The architecture of neoliberalism helps in making and remaking the sameness culture. The research looks for a spatial design approach that doesn't limit the potential of the space to neoliberalist and capitalist aims, ways and values.

In contrast to the pressures within architecture, art is not bound by the need for quick, practical solutions or the exclusion of negative emotions. It possesses the ability to be critical and authentic, offering a space for the existence of otherness and enabling its exploration and discussion through a unique language (Guattari, 1995: 106). Within this context, the research aims to uncover how contemporary artists conceive and shape space in their own works, with the ultimate goal of developing an ethical design approach that emancipates the subject and fosters new modes of connection while remaining adaptable. Haraway's (1987) *Cyborg Manifesto* explores the notions of body, production, and consumption as embodiments of change, representing both the present and the future. The research's methodology aligns with the comprehensive approach employed by Haraway.

Emergencies like income disparity and climate crisis indicate that the emancipation of the subject cannot be limited to the human subject because the limitation of the liberation to only the human is the framework that perpetuates the said emergencies. "During the long adventure of Western metaphysics, the huge responsibility that has been placed on the human subject and its failure to fulfill the requirements of this responsibility in a way that adequately embraces the entire cosmos has gradually led to doubts about the unshakable privilege of the human subject" (Balanuye, 2008). According to Braidotti the human subject in this context excludes positions such as women, animals and nature (Harvard GSD, 2019).

As the ecological crises caused by human activity challenge the notion of human superiority over nature, the blurred boundaries between humans, machines, and organisms profoundly disrupt established philosophical frameworks, rendering them increasingly fragile. The human body transforms its existence into an augmented reality with its extensions. These extensions cause human beings to exist on a plane that transcends their biological body, both in the mechanical, virtual or digital sense. Taken literally, this can equate to the advances in biotechnology such as organ transplantation, vaccines, psychiatric drugs; less obviously instant feeds on the internet, on-demand music and video, financial tools can also be considered inseparable extensions of people's emotional and

intellectual bodies. According to Haraway (1987) at the end of the 20th century, everybody is a cyborg that is the hybrid of machine and organism. According to her, technology is two-pronged, the first is a conventionally masculine, war-loving perspective, and the other is the social and bodily reality in which we are not afraid to be kin to animals and machines. In her recent work, the writer invites humans to a compost partnership with non-humans (Haraway, 2016). Random and even bizarre collaborations that are not rational or predefined create new meanings for the body. In a similar context, Braidotti defines the posthuman as a meeting point between anthropocentric critique and the critique of the humanist tradition (Harvard GSD, 2019). With the help of feminist theory, new materialist philosophies and environmental social sciences; a new vocabulary criticizing the anthropocentric perspective is emerging.

Although technology has a liberating potential, its use for the goal of reinforcing the existing power structures has a big impact on the planet. This usage begins to define a paradigm that forces everybody who wants to survive to reproduce itself. Haraway (1987) draws attention to the translation of the world into a coding problem. Morton (2020: 31) makes it clear why this is problematic: "An algorithm is an automated past". More precisely, the precision, stability, and predictability required by sequential operations mean that the algorithm is restricted to controlled operations, or "the future is barred," according to Morton. If it is presumed that the future is at least as important as the past, imagining new fictional architectures is critical.

### **Methodology**

Artistic creations offer a different field of expression than architectural works in terms of temporality, scale, and concepts; yet they both operate within the capitalist mode of production and consumption. Therefore, the study examines contemporary artworks related to body and space to understand how artists create spatial fictions and realities. Works from seven artists have been selected and analyzed. Discourses through various sources such as lectures, interviews, statements of the artists and reviews about the artworks were examined. The discourses as a whole are being opened to discussion with the method of logical argumentation that Groat and Wang (2013: 379) define. Instead of a design-polemical theory based on architectural designs, the study searches for a design-polemical theory based on contemporary artworks.

In addition, words and phrases that fit to "concept, tactic, tool, link, and descriptor" categories are marked and drawn from the discourse texts: After the sources were selected and saved in the reference manager, the texts were transferred to a transcript file for each artist. This file allows searching through all sources at once. Parameters are then marked in the transcript file (Figure 2a). The concept parameter drawn from the source texts are related to which subjects the artist says they are interested in. The concepts that the artist uses in more than one source help to understand their focus. The second parameter, tactics, refers to the methods by which the artist relates to concepts or how they both understand and respond to the problems they see in the dominant narrative and the methods they use while constructing their works. Tactics can also be thought of as the methods used by the artist to create new meanings or methods to present fictional alternative realities. Thus, tactics are essential parameters for architectural design, as they can be used flexibly in different contexts. Other than two main parameters, the other three; tools, links and descriptors put everything in context and help to have a clearer picture. These layers overlap in the cognitive topography, which is the visualization of the research (Figure 2b). The topography map of artist discourses that belong to the same era and economic context points out the commonality and differences in the conceptual (what) and tactical (how) layers, which constitute a critical part of the research.

In addition to producing videos that blend **utopian and dystopian** modes of **speculation**, Neil Beloufa also establishes, through **architectonic structures**, specific conditions for viewing those videos—and for being viewed in turn. In “The Colonies,” on view at New York’s Museum of Modern Art through June 12, these conditions are defined by a group of **clunky metal, epoxy resin, and Plexiglas fixtures**, occasionally adorned with **crushed aluminum cans and cigarette butts as well as speakers, cameras, and other electronic components**. A wall text informs visitors that some of these pieces can be used as benches and seats. But it’s not always apparent what’s sculpture and what’s furniture, and the **invitation to touch** runs counter to ingrained habits of polite museum behavior. The **awkwardness** of deciding how to engage the installation—whether to sit on or look at it—is heightened by the eventual realization that everyone in the space is also being recorded on **closed-circuit video**.

Positioned throughout the installation are **Plexiglas cylinders and spheres with small cameras on rotating arms** inside them. On the interior surfaces of these structures, Beloufa has affixed an assortment of **banal images: stock photos** of women jogging, a snapshot of a funny-looking dog, a printout of some attractive partygoers. The moving cameras’ output runs on two monitors hung on one side of the gallery. The result is a live video **collage**, where images of museum visitors—captured at extreme angles, **distorted** by the **plastic’s sheen, obscured** by the scrapbook array of feel-good pictures—appear in real time.

Being surveilled is supposed to make us feel tense, but there’s a **funhouse** quality to Beloufa’s work that renders the experience **pleasant and goofy**. (It might even make visitors temporarily forget that MoMA’s “real” security cameras aren’t missing a thing.) It’s hard to feel threatened while sitting on one of his benches, which include seats made of **repurposed bicycle saddles**. The visual language of “The Colonies” is **familiar and inviting**. There’s even a “Friends” DVD positioned in one the Plexi vitrines.

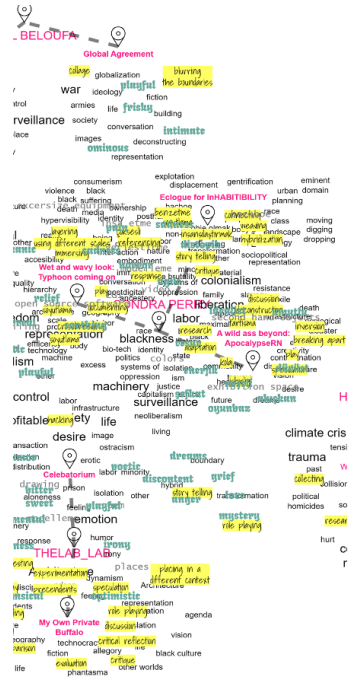


Figure 2a. Marking the parameters on an artist’s transcription file

Figure 2b. A part of the Cognitive Topography, consisting of superimposed layers of the marked parameters from the transcription file

### BODY-SPACE-INSTALLATION

The study identifies the concepts and tactics employed by the artists using source texts like interviews and presentations. After introducing each artist’s background, their concepts and tactics are explained. The research explores their understanding of the body-space continuum and its construction by focusing on two of each artist’s works and referencing several others.

TheLab-lab is an architectural office that produces scenarios about society, people’s desires, needs, habits, rules, beliefs, problems, futures, and traditions; in short, about life (n.d.). The office then creates spaces suitable for these scenarios. It brings back emotions to architecture with both content and narrative techniques. The *Celebatorium* project spatializes society’s desire to exclude the loners and is an isolated final waiting place, a final housing for unwanted, unloved singles (MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2020) (Figure 3). The project depicts a seamless communication between society and marginalized bodies maintained by technological tools based on a circular economy. Sentimental photographs are transmitted to residents through a channel in an urban space. Alcohol and sad photos provoke residents to cry and produce tears. Tears are collected through mechanical tools and then used to make fire extinguishing water, unlacing water and producing hot pepper. The designer’s non-judgmental approach reveals the dystopian results of the flawless communication between technology and society’s desire to ostracize. The project reveals the ironic consequences of a market-driven architecture while critical thinking is out of the equation. According to the architect, even though the scenario is fictional, technical drawings are realistic architectural work (Faruki, 2018c). His Buffalo course offers a tactically rich example that can be seen as the behind-the-scenes of his architectural practice (Faruki, 2018b). The course brings together a diverse set of precedents. It opens a space for designerly dialog between them and students by following provided works of precedents with a response to them by students (Faruki, 2018a). The diversity of inspiring examples implies the multilayered and dynamic quality of space. Reconstructing the space with transdisciplinary inspirations and handling the context in a way that includes culture and subcultures bring a rich design approach. Tactics such as play, experiment, speculation, critique are highlighted throughout the course. Emotional qualities are revealed with the inspiring works of precedents.

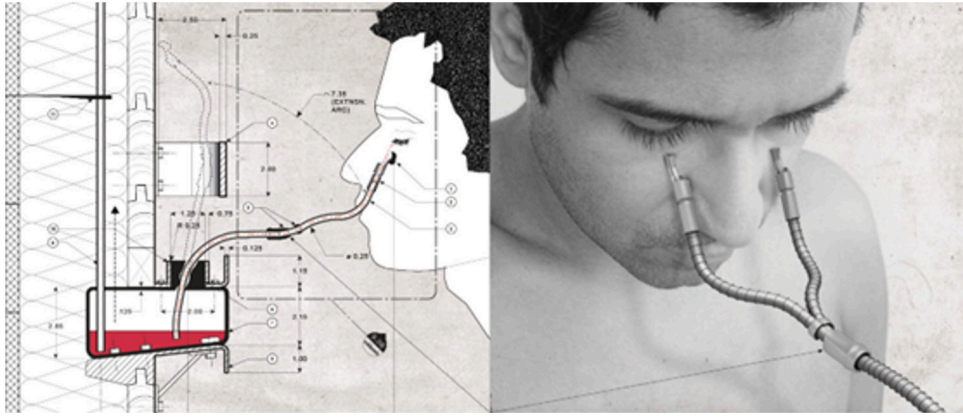


Figure 3. TheLab-lab for architecture, *Celebatorium: Tear droplet collection unit*, 2014, Digital image file

Similar to Faruki, Sondra Perry tackles the way culture and politics damage the human body and others. "I talk about blackness and technology, or blackness as technological a lot because our bodies, our flesh (I'll say our flesh) is technologically connected to these things that I'm talking about. Our coming over here was related to our object associations. We were machinery. We were chattel. We were production spaces." Perry (2018) says in an interview. She is interested in blackness, oppression of black people, racism, collective trauma, labor, capitalism, being in the minority and the relationship all of these with technology.

She creates a complete spatial reality by using multiple monitors, mechanical parts, sounds and speech. She explains the reason for making installation art as creating a space where a group of people can co-exist and this space enables a kind of "cosmic commingling of minds" (Seattle Art Museum, 2018). In *Wet and Wavy Looks for Triple Monitor* two videos follow each other on a monitor which is connected to a workstation (Perry, 2016). One of them is the modified animated image of Turner's painting describing the Zong massacre. Black bodies and water mingle in the painting, which depicts the murder of slave workers for insurance money. In the gallery space, the screens connected to the rowing machine draw attention to the instrumentalization of the body of the office worker, who works and exercises to stay healthy to keep working. In *Eclogue for Inhabitability*, the story of Central Park built on black bodies is told by a modified backhoe (Pothast, 2022). The human body, body of nature, metal mechanical bodies are all objectified to keep the capitalistic system working.

Unlike the documenting approach in *Eclogue and Wet and Wavy Looks*, Perry and her collaborators American Artist, Caitlin Cherry, Nora N. Khan; imagine a home beyond the capitalist system with the installation *A Wild Ass Beyond: ApocalypseRN* (Figure 4). The zine accompanying the installation contains the manifesto of the artists (Perry et al., 2018). It calls for a future where everyone contaminates each other in a baroque maximalist world different from war-loving exclusionary apocalyptic culture. The zine emphasizes the concepts of "metabolic adaptation, modularity, breakable and castable icons" which is in line with the fragmentary approach of the installation. The zine also contains an interview with media theorist Fred Turner by artist Nora Khan in which Turner draws attention to the absence of a critical field in science and technology.



Figure 4. American Artist, Caitlin Cherry, Nora N. Khan, and Sondra Perry, *A Wild Ass Beyond: ApocalypseRN*, 2018, Installation, Performance Space New York, NY.

For this exact reason, artist and quantum physicist Libby Heaney shows how capitalism-driven science and technology perpetuate existing inequalities and prejudices in her work *FIGURES, figure\$, go figure?* (Somerset House, 2020). In this video essay, she shows how human bodies are reduced and ignored by algorithms. Throughout the video, the artist deconstructs the ideal body with many different references. The notion of an ideal human body in Western art is maintained by contemporary algorithms. Classification of the human body for economic circulation means the destruction of its subjectivity. She uses quantum computing, complexity and ambiguity as an antidote to standardization and categorization as well as to open up new modes of artistic expression. With the installation work *CLOUD* utilizing computation, randomness and metaphors related to quantum physics, Heaney (2019) constructs a new spatiality, open to play and experimentation (Figure 5). "Heaney's practice uses humor, surrealism and nonsense to subvert the capitalist appropriation of technology, the endless categorizations and control of humans and non-humans alike" (Heaney, n.d.). She has made her works accessible through numerous instructional videos and interviews she has provided. Additionally, the sensitivity of her art contributes to accessibility. *touch is response-ability* presented as an Instagram story, requires the touch of the viewer (Libby Heaney, 2020). As the title of the work implies, Heaney draws a link between responsibility and the act of touching, hence between ethics and aesthetics, quoting the concept of response-ability from Barad here. According to Barad (2012), response-ability is about agency. In the context of Heaney's art, the body transcends being a mere figure and becomes an active participant, experiencing and responding. By foregrounding active participation, the artist counters the diminishing agency caused by surveillance capitalism. Through the utilization of technical tools like quantum computing, Heaney constructs an ethical and critical framework that operates outside the confines of existing power structures. *CLOUD* installation exemplifies how the critical use of technology expands the expressive possibilities within spatial design.



Figure 5. Libby Heaney, *CLOUD*, 2015, Interactive installation

Known for her hyper-realistic sculptures Patricia Piccinini invites visitors to empathy and activates them by drawing attention to the relationship between humans and non-humans. She often explores themes such as human-animal relationships, motherhood, the bond between mother and child, birth, and the experiences of womanhood (QAGOMA, 2018). Specifically, her focus lies in the ethical obligations associated with the emergence of new life through biotechnology, gene technologies, and other interventions to nature. "Empathy is at the heart of my practice. I don't think that you really can - or indeed should - try to understand the ethics of something without emotions" (Piccinini, 2007). By using facial expressions, postures and spatial possibilities, she creates an emotional space similar to literature or cinema. Hybrid bodies or chimeras establish affinity between species by pointing to the boundary disruptions that Haraway (1987) refers to in the *Cyborg Manifesto*. Within her artistic practice, the body is not merely a symbol.

In the artwork *Pneutopia*, after entering the cabin, visitors find themselves under a huge, inflated balloon instead of a roof. The significance of this idea becomes more profound when juxtaposed with the artist's recurring exploration of themes like motherhood and fertility (e.g. *The Young Family*, *Big Mother*, *Kindred*, *The Bond*). In the context of motherhood, the body is the first place the baby meets. The genuine convergence of body and space offers a fresh perspective on the environment, as it is no longer an external entity to be disregarded. This convergence becomes the starting point for contemplating space as a subject/object capable of evoking emotions of care and compassion. Noting that it takes a few months for the baby to realize that it is a different being from his mother, the artist says, "So we all understand what it's like to have no boundaries, we've experienced it" (Cairns Art Gallery, 2019).



Figure 6. Patricia Piccinini, *Pneutopia*, 2018, Installation, Curious Affection at GOMA, Brisbane, Australia

*Alone with the Gods* is a collaborative artwork that uses the narrative possibilities of a literary story and installation (Piccinini & Hennessey, 2016). The story is about a closed society working towards becoming self-sufficient. The cult-like society is led by the big guy whose "skills and his systems – while impressive – just didn't seem to keep to up with our needs – with us. So we had to reduce those needs: reduce ourselves." Then everything is radically transformed when the big guy gives birth to a daughter and she eventually takes his place. Unlike the big guy, the daughter is associated with "Excrescence, diversity, unnecessary, useless abundance, bizarre variation for its own sake". If the rational man is associated with the failed dreams of modernism, the existence and tactics of the girl reflect the dreams of artists for the future.



The artists discussed so far have tried different ways to activate the person who encounters the artwork. Piccinini uses empathy, Heaney creates an installation open to play with *CLOUD*, with *touch is response-ability*, she chooses Instagram story as her medium and transfers art to the outside of institutionalized spaces. Neil Beloufa, on the other hand, reveals the irony in the system with a process-oriented performative and playful approach that reduces the symbolic value of the final product. He was sent with the school as a class to Mali to make a documentary. Being aware of the assumptions and burdens of making a documentary in Africa as a Westerner, in his documentary film *Kempinski*; the artist transforms the problematic situation in the project description of the lesson with a grammatical error, breaking the rule and then re-constructing it (The Museum of Modern Art, 2016). "I don't like authority. I'm interested in creating an authoritarian system, and then breaking it. I like displaying my authority in order to challenge it." Beloufa (2015) states in an interview. The authority he is interested in breaking are the rules that are taken for granted in the system: "My enemy is efficient, is industrial, is communicative, is designed. It's something that you don't think about when you use it—that's my enemy. My way of fighting is to fail, or to play with it."



Figure 7. Neil Beloufa, *Global Agreement*, 2018, Installation, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

In the *Global Agreement* exhibition, the gallery space engages visitors and soldiers in a dialogue about their everyday situations, opening a new kind of public space that cannot exist elsewhere. He states that every representation of the army includes either praise or criticism, and he wants to make a sincere representation where the people in the army can be seen (Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 2018). The exercise device-like structure makes the visitor feel as if they are in dialogue with the soldier in the video. The form of the instrument does not allow the visitor to sit back and watch passively and comfortably (Draganova, 2018).

The film in the *Colonies* exhibition depicts the dystopian life of a closed community, which Beloufa defines as a neoliberal utopia (Goethe-Institut Schweden, 2020). Transparency is idealized, while the "freedom" of residents consists of well-defined options. What makes this utopia safe and secure is the control through surveillance. In the exhibition space, visitors are watched by cameras and watch themselves on monitors, just like the people in the movie. According to Thomas Lax (2016), curator of the exhibition at MoMA, "Rather than representing surveillance as a total threat out there, Beloufa renders it as something specific that is mediated by people and thus, perhaps, more susceptible to critique or even dismantling". In this context, the body is revealed both as an accomplice and as a spectacle. the body must be tamed and controlled like nature. According to the artist, the installations that he customized for different exhibition spaces along with the film are derivatives of each other which mimic the way the system hides standardization (The Museum of Modern Art, 2016). Apart from imitating

the system and juxtaposing different elements, Beloufa uses tactics such as distorting, blocking, dramatizing, and parodying.

Hale Tenger creates dialogue and confrontation spaces similar to Beloufa's *Global Agreement*. In addition to readymade ones, she brings various mediums and objects into the gallery space such as projection, mechanical tools to provide movement, photographs and sound. The artist doesn't limit herself in terms of tools or medium and uses whatever is available to create a strong spatial narrative. In the work *Decent Deathwatch: Bosnia-Herzegovia*, Tenger juxtaposes the audio recordings of the interviews she did with the victims of war who came to Turkey; with the news reflected in the media: "During my visit to the camp, I experienced the terrible gap between media coverage and direct contact with the victims, and I wanted to reflect this aspect of the work in the exhibition" (Tenger, 2019). With her work *The Closet*, similar to *Decent Deathwatch*, she keeps the memory of the aftermath of a crisis by transforming them into tangible spaces that facilitate open discussions.



Figure 8. Hale Tenger, *Decent Deathwatch: Bosnia-Herzegovia*, 1993, Installation, Kunst Werke, Berlin

Through the utilization of various forms of expression, she creates an immersive experience that facilitates a deeper understanding and accessibility to these complex issues. In this context, space exists as a medium of discussion, emotion, experience and even collective memory, the meaning of which is constructed by the artist with a critical and questioning approach. Similarly, *We didn't go outside; We were always on the outside/We didn't go inside; We were always on the inside* depicts a politically tense time in recent Turkish history. "To fully comprehend the artwork it was not enough to step into this isolated area from a narrow corner of the barbed wire closest to the wall. it was necessary to open the door of the guardhouse and enter. The first contact of the audience with the work was this moment of decision" (Antmen, 2007: 71). Thus, the tense political climate in question unfolds in the gallery space as the visitor comes face to face with their reflex against authority. The installation *Where the Winds Rest* is based on Edip Cansever's poem of the same name. On the one hand, Tenger relates the installation to social traumas that concern Turkey such as political murders, repression and acts of violence; on the other hand, she associates it with the "climate disaster caused by human-nature collision", which she describes as the most vital issue of our time (Tenger, 2020).

Sarah Sze, an artist with a background in painting and architecture, was chosen to represent the US at Venice Art Biennale in 2013. Instead of adhering to the original building plan, Sze created a new route for the visitors. She intended to subvert the principles of the structure, such as hierarchy, centrality, and

symmetry, which had already been disrupted due to the loss of all but one tree in the garden (Sze, 2016). "It's a very filmic idea: the meaning happens in the edit" she states in the same interview. In line with her other artwork, Sze employed a multitude of objects to construct intricate installations as her focus lies not on the individual states of the objects, but rather on the meanings that emerge from their interconnected relationships (Nasher Sculpture Center, 2016). The participants follow the choreography created by the artist while witnessing the formation process of the work and the objects that transform space by colonizing it in various ways. The use of mass-produced, ordinary materials makes installation accessible and intimate, unlike classical painting and sculpture, which require technical expertise. "The other thing that's interesting is, I've never had things taken from my work, but what I have had often is people leaving things—they add." (Sze, 2016); the use of easy-to-find, small objects make it possible to erode the border between artist and visitor which leaves space for the visitor's own imagination rather than dominating it. Instead of defining the space externally with a structure, objects create meaning by starting a new dialogue with the space.



Figure 9. Sarah Sze, *Centrifuge*, 2017, Installation, Haus der Kunst, Munich

She places mass-produced, easy-to-find objects in scaffolding and thus tries to spatialize the abundance of objects that is a defining feature of our age. Her installation *Centrifuge* adds projected images and videos to the mix. Digital images are embodied by torn paper and visible projectors. Based on its name, it can be said that the artist aimed to separate and sort out the multiplicities. Writer Zadie Smith mentions her children likened *Centrifuge* to an exploded iPhone (Hessel, 2023). As the artist constructs a space through the arrangement of selected elements within the artwork, the visitor, in turn, creates a new meaning through their bodily movements and gaze, shaping a fresh montage of experience.

#### COGNITIVE TOPOGRAPHY

Artists and their works constitute the "cognitive topography" of the research (Figure 10). Discussion of common concepts in the artworks, points to the current affairs of the beginning of the 21st century. While examining the concepts emphasized by the artists, it becomes evident that the focal points revolve around the themes of "capitalism, exploitation, oppression, surveillance, control, injustice, classification, profit, labor, hierarchy and value". Heaney openly states that the classification that surveillance capitalism maintains over the ideal body image is unfair (Somerset House, 2020). Perry similarly draws attention to the parallel between the bodies of slave workers and the bodies of office workers, who must keep their health to keep working. In the *Celebatorium* project of Thelab-lab, benefits are obtained from the bodies of lonely people through the provocation and collection steps, similar to farm animals. In all of these examples, space and the body, like technology, are a means of exploitation.

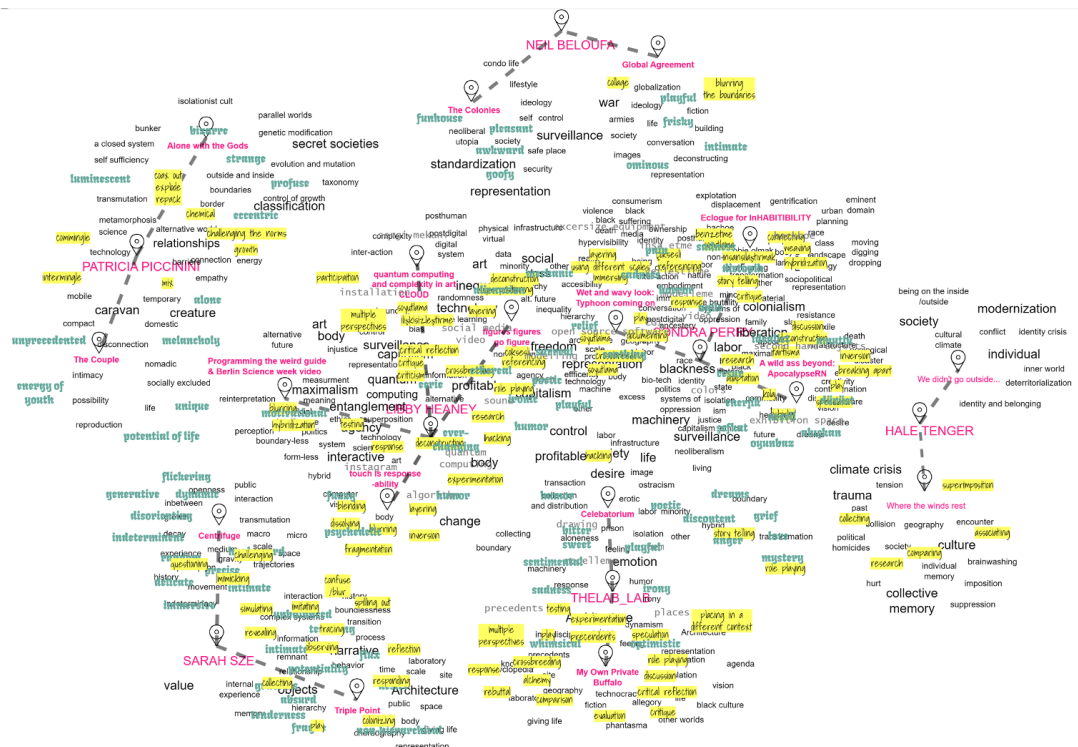


Figure 10. Cognitive Topography of the research

In relation to the first set of concepts, the act of classifying for exploitation necessitates the marginalization and exclusion of a particular group. In other words; the intellectual framework of categorizing diverse entities and their socially constructed labels serves to uphold the hierarchical structure of exploitation. The concept of boundary becomes important here. Gated community is a common theme addressed by the artists. Beloufa's film part of the Colonies exhibition shows that the exploitation of the outside is not sufficient to ensure security, it's also necessary to establish a controlled society inside. Tenger's artwork *we didn't go outside; we were always on the outside/we didn't go inside; we were always on the inside* underscores the futility of drawing a clear line between inside and outside, revealing that there exists no space untouched by the prevailing dominance of established order. In the artwork *Alone with the Gods*, Piccinini and Hennessey illustrate how ensuring the cult's continued existence necessitates control and brute force. However, as the narrative unfolds, a new era starts with a pivotal birth event that ultimately shatters the rigid boundaries and opens exciting possibilities. Similarly, Sondra Perry and fellow artists imagine a new world with the installation *A Wild Ass Beyond: ApocalypseRN* where people contaminate each other to become new. It's a place to heal and an alternative past for Afro-American people whose labor was exploited through enslavement. At the end of Heaney's video essay *Figures*, another realm beyond the status quo is portrayed. This alternate reality, reminiscent of the baroque maximalism found in *ApocalypseRN*, is a space where amorphous shapes intertwine and coexist without outside control.

Technology plays a critical role in this system of exploitation. While Piccinini primarily focuses on biotechnology; theorist Fred Turner draws attention to the absence of critical discourse within science in an interview in the *ApocalypseRN* zine. Heaney, who is also a quantum physicist, agrees. The anthropocentric perspective perpetuated by technology and science exacerbates urgent problems such as the climate crisis and social inequality. These phenomena arise from the artificial boundary drawn between the privileged human species and the environment, as well as marginalized communities. Perry's installation, titled *Eclogue for InHabitability* addresses these issues by highlighting the

interconnectedness of the exploitation of land, human bodies and technology. The spatial reality created by the artwork is the place where all these phenomena are opened for discussion. Tenger constructs places for collective memory through their practice. Similarly, Beloufa utilizes the gallery space as a site of confrontation and encounter. In the practices of both artists, the space is a medium for intersubjective play, capable of facilitating dialogue, as seen in *Global Agreement*, or provoking confrontation, as seen in *Where the Winds Rest*. Likewise, the spatial realities of Piccinini's are a site of play that provides a platform for the artist to address critical discussions.

For Sze, space is much more introspective. *Portable Planetarium* is about entering the model instead of seeing it from the outside according to Sze (The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2021). The inner spheres are big enough to allow only one or two persons to be present at the same time. The scale evokes a sense of sincerity. In an email to Sze, Bruno Latour interprets this change of perspective regarding the scientific model of the earth as an emphasis on the fragility of the planet. Piccinini's analogy between the maternal body and the planet is also relevant here. The additions Sze makes to vitalize the space can be viewed as a means of emancipating the subject. In *Triple Point*, the artist arrays each step of production for an artwork, showcasing a creative approach free from technical expertise thereby normalizing the act of artistic making. The cognitive topography of the research shows that artists draw attention to concepts such as emancipation and agency which are linked to the aim of disrupting the status quo. Likewise, with the *CLOUD* installation, Heaney regards space as a realm where the visitor can actively engage through playful exploration. As Piccinini highlights the inseparability of ethics and emotions, the interactive spaces crafted by Heaney and Sze align with principles of ethics and responsibility. The tactical layer of the cognitive topography offers insights into how artists relate and respond to the elements of the conceptual layer. Accordingly; "playing, experimenting, deconstructing, documenting" are the most used tactics.

## CONCLUSION

The artists reveal that the existing power relations molded by neoliberal aims exert pressure on the body and space, resulting in the pacification of the subject. Therefore, there is a need for architectural practices that empower the subject and restore its agency. In the context of architecture, the existence of a transdisciplinary experimental space outside the market is vital for agency because challenging the existing dynamics can be possible only outside of the status quo. As demonstrated by the artists, the utilization of technology for profit purposes exacerbates pre-existing inequalities. Experimental use of technological tools has exciting potential for both theory and practice. If negation draws a boundary between humans and others, thinking about affinity is a start to building an environment that is habitable for everyone. In the same vein, breaking the boundary between architect and non-architect will be the beginning of a better built environment. Expanding the definition of architectural production will make the discipline more inclusive.

When the spatial design is based on a single conceptual idea, it becomes more rational and rigid; closed to any questioning and ultimately pacifies the subject. For this reason, it is crucial to embrace spatial design approaches that are unafraid of fragmentation and inconsistencies. This will erode the authority of the architect and the boundary between them and the person who experiences the building. If the prerequisite for a quality-built environment is the presence of people who are interested in architecture and love to talk about it, these oddities in the building will attract a mass that is numbed by the monotony of overused templates. Similarly, instead of going through cycles of demolish-forget-build new, re-use and re-vitalize will increase its questionability. Instead of a consistent and rational space, a fragmented and inconsistent space will be open to criticism and criticism will build the new.

Space is not just a medium that serves social, economic and political order; it also contains the traumas of society, preserves collective memory, embodies

expectations about the future and is an inter-subjective field of emotion. The spatial context encompasses more than just historical and formal relations. It is a multifaceted and expansive concept that encompasses the hopes and wounds of society. In this context, the responsibility of spatial production is not only about physical comfort. Both the potential it holds for fostering diverse relationships and the meanings it produces or fails to produce are also part of the responsibilities it entails. Hence, it is crucial for architects and other actors in the spatial production process to comprehend the contextual dynamics. Culture, as both the source and catalyst of this context, is continually reproduced by a diverse set of subjects and plays a primary role in these processes. Therefore, architecture that activates the subject establishes a symbiotic relationship with culture. In order to realize the dream of an accessible, breakable, moldable architecture; it is not enough to use transparent materials and visual designs. It is essential to bring the forces of the system into visibility and nudge them collectively. This responsibility also liberates architecture because architects no longer have to think of the discipline as something solid that can only be done with walls and structural elements.

In the context of architecture, the designer can only respond to the issues if they are aware of them. Perhaps what separates the architect from the product designer is that, despite the currents of the systems of oppression, they can create a resilient field of agency for the subject. Hence, the necessity of the architect's role for the built environment can be related to not technical proficiency, but rather ensuring ethical agency. If we acknowledge that the complex and ambiguous nature of life and reality inevitably permeate processes of spatial production and the space itself; the lack of tactics required to construct non-positive emotions and worlds of feeling in an architect's toolbox means that a critical transfer of information about the production processes and the material reality of the space itself is out of the question.

If the goal is to create a space that is adaptable, changeable, breakable, moldable by all, it requires new modes of contemplating material processes and, more importantly, collective local movements. The role of architectural design and architects should involve employing nuanced tactics that resist certain forms of use (such as the tendencies of capital) while remaining open to the public. To accomplish this, architects must embody an understanding of the ecological, economic, political, and social contexts. Given that space is a multifaceted and layered phenomenon, it necessitates a broad range of references.

The potential of technology can be described with the ethical-aesthetic quality related to its capacity to create sensible spaces. In other words, its capacity to make the continuity of body-space sensible. Thus, it can be possible to erode the arbitrary border between things that paints nature as an externality. The different qualities of technology other than function have the potential to provide a new aesthetic that will enable the space to develop a more participatory and, as a result, a more ethical approach by increasing the agency of the subject.

#### Authors' Contributions

The authors contributed equally to the study.

#### Competing Interests

There is no potential conflict of interest.

#### Ethics Committee Declaration

The study does not require ethics committee approval.

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