

Cyclical tales, chapter 1:

INCREASING THE LEAK

"Central Services.
We do the work, you do the pleasure.

Hi, there.
I want to talk to you about ducts.
Do your ducts seem old-fashioned,
out-of-date?

Central Services' new duct designs are now available
in hundreds of different colors to suit your individual tastes.

Hurry now, while stocks last,
to your nearest Central Services showroom.
Designer colors to suit your demanding taste".

Gilliam, T. (1985). *Brazil*. Universal Pictures.



ATELIER FOR CONTINUOUS RESEARCH

In Western architecture, buildings have been considered primarily as rigid objects. However, in today's unpredictable environment, where even our immediate future has become uncertain, we believe this idea is obsolete and can no longer be used to address our contemporary situation, namely a complex urban, political, social and ecological structure where boundaries between fields are no longer clearly defined.

Uncertainty is the only certainty.

If we instead shift our attention to a valley, and the water running through and recognize its ability to meander, adapt to changing geological formation, we can begin to see the potential of these changing conditions. The question then arises whether architecture, like nature, can be conducive to transformation over time.

Instead of resisting uncertainty, we embrace it as the driving force of our research project. Within the studio, we propose to continue this investigation under the title of Proposal for Uncertain Conditions. In times where the necessity of every new build form must be questioned, the reinterpretation of the existing becomes crucial. Rather than trying to come up with overly simplistic solutions to "wicked problems," we will explore with the students how to work with, interpret, transform, subtract the existing context we work within.



INCREASING THE LEAK

"It is important to note that any perceived advantages of water leakage are very limited. In most cases, water leakage in buildings or infrastructure leads to a host of problems, such as structural damage, mold growth, decreased indoor air quality, and increased utility bills due to wasted water. Preventing water leakage is crucial to ensure a safe and functional living or working environment." (Chatgpt on 02.08.2023)

Leaks happen, leaks are everywhere and inevitable. The Swiss Gas and Water Industry Association estimates that pipelines lose an average of 12% of the water they carry, due to leaks caused by construction work or corrosion. So, we find ourselves looking for methods to repair leaks, inventing countless building materials and construction techniques to create more water-resistant structures, improved plumbing systems and waterproofing materials.

There is, of course, something fascinating about those impermeable materials. About latex, rubber, and silicone joints. About the yellow foam shot from the insulating-gun, that slowly expands to seal our windows. About applying roofing with a torch to keep rainwater outside our buildings.

This desire to create watertight environments has been driven by various factors related to health, technology, or the pursuit for social status. We live in a kind of hermetic zone, where all our resources are enclosed in narrow private compartments, isolated from the outer atmosphere by tight boundaries designed to prevent any infiltration or leak. Consequently, our domestic space has gradually been transformed into an ultra-clean, ultra-hygienic and ultra-efficient vessel.

Watertight environments are also an economic and political issue, a matter of efficiency, to increase the productivity of our territories through irrigation, to secure access to water as a resource, to capture, channel and store it like capital in a bank.

But as the tightness of our water supply network seems to be essential to our economic system and desirable from an ecological point of view, it remains a challenge as our distribution system is widely deployed throughout our territory. A web of aqueducts, canals, and pipes surrounds us, and paradoxically they are not allowed in our rooms. They remain hidden and inaccessible, sunk underground, meandering through our concrete slabs, behind the false ceilings, or in central shafts.

In the movie "Brazil", Terry Gilliam envisions a stylized world of an alternative future with ductworks touted on television by a slick salesman and his sales pitch: "Central Services. We do the work, you do the pleasure. Hi, there. I want to talk to you about ducts. Do your ducts seem old-fashioned, out-of-date? Central Services' new duct designs are now available in hundreds of different colors to suit your individual tastes. Hurry now, while stocks last, to your nearest Central Services showroom. Designer colors to suit your demanding taste". Behind the smooth walls of a flat is a well-hidden "ducts soup" that promises better control of the indoor climate, maintains comfort and a constant temperature, protecting inhabitants from moisture and humidity in their homes. Until things get out of hand and a small malfunction, an insignificant leak, causes the system to collapse.

There is something intriguing about a glitch in the infrastructure, a defect in a material, a rupture in a joint, a break in a connection, a miscalculation of pressure, a leak. The failure of the hermetical sealed pipe causes a new potential and creates an uncontrolled space where new tales can be imagined. Suddenly a bit of water escapes the system and finds a new path.

We cannot deny that a leak in a garden hose lying on the ground is exciting because it is the birth of a new pond. Or when we track the slow appearance of moss in a humid corner. It's an opportunity, like our skin perspires or an invention like drip irrigation or Gore-Tex membranes. It is pressure escaping in the "wrong place" that becomes a shower or a small new ecosystem. A sheet of plasterboard that becomes impregnated with moisture and tarnished with mold, unhealthy for humans but also new micro-organisms to share our home with. A flood that becomes a wetland triggering biodiversity and acting as a natural water filter.

So, instead of resisting, can we increase the leak? Can a leak become a new proposal to the wicked problem of an impossible hermetic environment? This could be an opportunity to create new ecosystems, a source of energy, or to make our domestic space permeable and porous. Water could flow from our walls back into our homes. Our domestic space could dissolve.



AQUATIC TALES PAV, GENEVA

The founding of the hydraulic power network in Geneva (aka Compagnie Genevoise des Eaux), in the mid 19th century, played a crucial role in the city's industrial development. The network generated hydraulic mechanical power through the diversion of the water from the Rhone through a system of pipes and canals. The availability of hydraulic power revolutionized various industries in Geneva. It provided a reliable and cost-effective source of energy, enabling the growth of factories, workshops, and mills. Industries such as watchmaking, textile manufacturing, printing, and metalworking greatly benefited from the hydraulic power network. In 1886, a safety valve for the hydraulic power network was installed to release excess pressure from the network through a gigantic jet of water next to the Hôtel des Eaux-Vives

But as technology advanced, the hydraulic power network became less reliable and less efficient than electricity, and after gradual decline, it became obsolete for Geneva's further industrial development. Only the symbol the safety valve remained as the famous and landmark and the iconic the "Jet d'Eau."

After the construction of the freight station, La Praille in 1949, the area Praille Acacias Vernets (PAV) developed into one of the most important industrial districts in southern Geneva. The Drize river, which flows through the middle of the PAV, had been exploited for its hydraulic power since the 14th century. Over time, the river was diverted several times until it was vaulted to provide space for the Praille station, thus disappearing from collective memory.

Since 2000 the PAV district became one of the major sites for development because of its proximity to the city. Just as the industry erased the former open landscape, a new masterplan proposes a tabula rasa of its industrial past, forcing the Drize into again a new path, drawn by the pressure and logic of real estate.



PROPOSALS FOR UNCERTAIN CONDITIONS

What if we start to look at what we have. What if we try to capture the layered past of this site, it's complex ecology, and build upon that. What if we let the water draw itself, on top and through the existing architecture, following it's own logic.

Like cyclical tales, buildings take on the role of alchemists cultivating a new understanding of the fragility of water. Here, water flows not only from taps but also from the very walls that surround it.



INFO

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