VIRTUAL PARLIAMENT
RETHINKING THE ARCHITECTURE OF DEMOCRACY
On December 11, 2020, the Swiss Parliament in Berne urgently accepted an initiative to allow congress members (Nationalrat/Conseil national) to vote remotely due to COVID-19, and a few days later, Sophie Michaud Gigon, the Green Party Representative from the Canton Vaud, became the first parliament member in Swiss history to cast a vote virtually, without being physically present in the parliament.

This significant break with a long tradition – the requirement of physical presence in the Swiss parliament dates back to the Landsgemeinde of the Middle ages where the physical assembly of citizens in one public space was of primordial importance for debates and voting – prompted the Swiss parliament to start a reflection on the possible consequences of the virtualization of parliament.

In this studio, we will help the Swiss parliament with this task. We will explore the opportunities and threats of virtualizing the parliament, and design a new type of political infrastructure for “res publica,” ie., for civic engagement, accountability, personhood and direct democracy, that integrates virtual and physical architectures.

Our site will be a combination of virtual reality (VR) and physical interventions (acupunctural or pop-up architectures) in rural/suburban towns in Zurich Vorort.

Inevitable questions we will address in this studio include: What are the essential elements of existing parliaments in the world? What role does the typology of parliament play in the process of decision-making? What is the value of physical presence in politics? What is the agency of physical architecture in shaping a direct democracy? What happens to the informal spaces - the break out rooms, the stairs, the corridors, the cafeteria, etc. where most encounters and debates are happening - when the parliament gets virtualized? What kind of novel interfaces can be envisaged, for individuals and smaller, distributed groups at the peripheries? How can we design a virtual parliament that is empowering, yet just and civic? Is there an opportunity for rethinking and improving the architecture of democracy?

The studio will be organized in three interconnected phases. Phase one will analyze existing typologies of parliament in the world and focus on the relationship between geometric form and political power.
Phase two will tackle the notion of virtualization, and examine the translation of political relations into cyberspace. Ordinarily this phase will be conducted entirely in virtual reality using VR headsets.

Phase three will involve the design of a political infrastructure as an interface for citizens in distributed communes to authenticate, access the virtual parliament and participate in the res publica.

The studio will culminate in a final project that combines results from the three phases to develop an updated, architectural expression for future democratic processes: a personal interpretation of the virtual parliament and the design of a political infrastructure on a precise site in the Zurich Vorstadt; a temporary social space to empower citizens at the periphery and enable political engagement, accountability and direct democracy.

Due to the circumstances caused by COVID-19, the studio may be conducted, non-presentially, over zoom, if the situation does not improve, however, we will actively seek to challenge the constraints of video-based collaboration by introducing and experimenting with novel immersive virtual reality (VR) technologies, such as Oculus, Iris VR, etc., and avatars, not only to "walk the talk" and get familiar with the virtual content of the studio, but also for collaboration and presentations of projects. We will also continue to use decentralized 3D digital printing to evoke the tangible dimension of design, which we deem especially important in a virtual studio.

This Spring studio 2021 "Virtual Parliament" is related to the topics of our Fall studio 2020 "Deep Zurich," however, the studio is conceived as a separate, autonomous studio and can be taken independently. (In contrast to the fall studio, where we investigated the potential of artificial intelligence and deep learning to generate urban housing in the Zurich Altstadt, this studio will expand upon and shift the focus: from machine intelligence to collective intelligence, from Zurich Altstadt to Zurich Vorstadt, and from private housing (res private) to public infrastructure (res publica).

No prior programming or digital knowledge is required, but willingness to learn is expected.
Christian Kühn & Harald Trapp
Plenum - Places of Power, Venice Biennale Austria Pavilion, 2014
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Charles Barry & Augustus Pugin
Hans Auer
Federal Palace of Switzerland, Bern, 1902
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Federal Palace of Switzerland, Bern, 1902
Hans Heinrich Holzhalb
Rathaus Town Hall, Zürich, 1698
Fabrice Coffrini
Election of the members of the Federal Courts in Swiss Parliament, Bern, 2015
Remco Livain
Direct democracy, Landsgemeinde, Glarus, 2017
Harold Cunningham
Direct democracy, Landsgemeinde, Appenzell, 2012
Foster + Partners
Reichstag, New German Parliament, Berlin, 1999
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Reichstag, New German Parliament, Berlin, 1999
Andrea Branzi
Residential Park, Non-stop City, 1969
Ed Davey
Zoom framed by two geometric artworks, 2020
Ed Davey
Setting up Zoom, 2020
Niccolò Machiavelli
Diagrammatic plans of Warfare. The Art of War, 1521
Herbert Bayer
Diagram of the Field of Vision, 1930
J.R. Wharton Eyerman
First 3D motion picture at Paramount Theater, Los Angeles, 1952
Philippe Ramette
Object for seeing the world in detail, 2007
Matthew Lloyd
VR at World Economic Forum, Davos, 2016
Vincent Capman
Google Cardboard VR headsets in the outdoors, Mont Blanc, 2015
Walter Bieri
Women’s strike in Helvetiaplatz, Zürich, 1991
José Moscardi
Demonstration at the FAU USP building designed by Vilanova Artigas, São Paulo, 1996
David Grandorge
Vertical protest at London Metropolitan University, London, 2015
Bob Adelman
People’s Wall, World’s Fair, New York, 1965
Tayfun Coskun
Storming of the United States Capitol, Washington DC, 2021
Win McNamee
Storming of the United States Capitol, Washington DC, 2021
Saul Loeb
Facial recognition system for law enforcement, NVIDIA GPU Technology Conference, Silicon Valley, 2017
David McNew
Facial recognition and video surveillance in the French government, Paris, 2020
Thomas Hirschhorn
Robert Walser-Sculpture, Biel, 2019
Jonas Staal
New World Embassy, Rojava, 2016
Jonas Staal
New World Summit, Rojava, 2018
raumlabor
Dialogue as Form, Tel-Aviv, 2019
MVRDV & The Why Factory
The Elevated Plaza, Manifesta 13, Marseille, 2020
raumlabor
Popup Monument, Frankfurt am Main, 2017
raumlabor
Tempelhof Workshop, Berlin, 2016
raumlabor

Kitchen Monument, Venice, 2010
Studio Tom Emerson
Pavilion of Reflections, Zürich, 2016
NEVER DISCUSS POLITICS AT HOME

THE DOMESTIC SET:
LOCATION: WAREHOUSE, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA.

INGREDIENTS:
DOOR, WINDOW, COUCH, FRIDGE, MICROWAVE, TABLE, KITCHEN, DESK, BOOKSHELVES, LAMPS, CARPET, COATRACK, BIN, DOORMAT, MIRROR, PLANT, DOG, VACUUM, FAN, SCALE, KETTLE, TOASTER, CLOCK, FLOWERS, CHAIRS, ETC...

THE DOMESTIC DEVICES:
TELEVISION, COMPUTER, SMARTPHONE, TABLET, NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, RADIO.

PICTURES, MAPS, LISTS, TABLES, CATALOGUES, GUIDES, DICTIONARIES, CONTRACTS, INSTRUCTIONS, RULES.

EXTERNAL TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS INTO THE DOMESTIC LIFE.
Angela and Anita, New York, USA, power couple for an innovative green city that will integrate seamlessly with nature.

Ken and Peter from Hong Kong are building the art and culture capital of the world. Their Instant Nation will be the first global cultural precinct for exploring creative human power in a free society of artists and entrepreneurs.

John and Michelle, from Toronto, Canada, competing to fund their IVF treatment, so they too can raise a family. Children are the future and this couple want plenty of them.

ANGELA Y ANITA, DE NUEVA YORK, USA, SON UNA PODEROSA PAREJA

TOMA!
Never Discuss Politics at Home, Melbourne, 2017
Vanessa Grossman & Ciro Miguel
Tour of political spaces in Zürich, *Megalomania*, 2020
The studio theme spans the entire academic year of 2020/21.

Accordingly, there will be continuity between the fall and spring semester, but each semester can be followed independently.

Dates are subject to change.

Prior programming experience is not required.

**Team**

Media x Design Laboratory
Prof. Jeffrey Huang
Christina Doumpioti, Christoph Holz, Mikhael Johanes, Frederick Kim, Gianna Ledermann