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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TECHNOLOGIES, MEMORIES AND AFFECTIONS: IMPROVING OUR ETHICAL APPROACH TO THINGS

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability, understood in its beginnings as a common horizon for multiple practices and fields of study, has gradually given way to the development of increasingly sophisticated tools, with distinct dominant meanings established for each discipline. Within the field of material technologies for architectural production, sustainability seems to have found its most fertile ground in topics such as recycling, the use of "bio" materials, or energetic efficiency. However, to improve the understanding of the impact of technology on our ways of living, it appears increasingly necessary to move from the deterministic logic of sustainability into the relational domain of ecology, where the use and deployment of technologies can be observed through the multiplicity of its effects and the diversity of actors involved. In this paper we will address the case of the rehabilitation of several traditional houses located in the Murcian town of Blanca to host the "Espacio Doméstico" VideoArt Center (EDOM). In this action the selection and implementation of technologies have been aimed at impacting on diverse aspects including local communities, ethics, digital manufacturing, recycling, and policies regarding the rehabilitation of heritage buildings. While the initial approach was to address housing recovery as a heterogeneous accumulation of stories, technologies or material deployments of the domestic, our intervention strategies ascribed to the different technologies the role of mediating with existing elements through the incorporation of the very different visions of sustainability and the role of affects in producing human and non-human entanglements. Thus, we displayed artifacts produced by digitally manufactured methacrylate assembled on IKEA structures, fluorescent power lines supported by insulators on the wall, fluorescent tattoos on walls and ceilings that guide and extend the configuration of existing flooring, esparto furniture and fabrics produced by the esparto women workers' and village women's associations, re-appropriations of old furniture through the implementation of new media technologies, etc. If we can see seduction as the process of converting affinities and disagreements into affirmative communication, then the EDOM proposal can be seen as an active seduction process between technologies and users who approach this kind of cultural artifacts. Through these permanently active processes, art technologies will refer the viewer to complex sensory experiences, where a combination of parody, memory and sound pushes the user to the limit of mere comprehension of works of art. This more relational approach to the issue of heritage rehabilitation, technology or art institutions is offered as an area of controversy and debate on the scope of political ecology and its potential impact on the architect's professional practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Our interest in the impact of human actions on the environment was seen in the 1980s as a common horizon for multiple areas of study. Progressively, this common concern has led to the development of increasingly specific tools, establishing for each discipline certain distinct dominant

meanings, sometimes leaving behind the original dimension. In the field of material technologies for architectural production, sustainability seems to have found its most fertile ground in topics such as recycling, the use of "bio" materials, and programmatic or energetic efficiency. In any case, it can be said that, in terms of architectural design processes, current technologies today have assumed the role of ensuring compliance with standards, forgetting their possible involvement in other debates that could take place in our material surroundings. To improve our understanding of the

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impact of technology on our ways of living, it seems increasingly necessary to move from the deterministic logic of sustainability toward the more relational domains of ecology, where the use and deployment of technologies can be observed through the multiplicity of effects and the diversity of actors involved. New disciplines such as Science and Technology Studies (STS) have focused their attention on the relationship between scientific knowledge, technological systems and society, demanding greater attention to the discourses, practices and effects associated with technologies. Theories and concepts such as Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2001), Jane Bennet's vitalist materialism (Bennet, 2010), Annemarie Moll's relational materialism (LawandMoll, 1993), and Isabelle Stengers's Object Oriented Ontology and Cosmopolitical proposal (Stengers, 2014), constitute some of the theoretical basis of this work, but the research will focus on the case of the rehabilitation of several houses located in a town called Blanca to house the "Espacio Doméstico" VideoArt Center (EDOM). In this intervention the selection and modes of implementation of technologies sought to impact diverse aspects including local communities, digital manufacturing, recycling, and heritage rehabilitation policies.



memory, play and sound pushes the user to the limits of clear understanding of works of art. This more relational approach to the issue of rehabilitation of heritage, technology or art institutions is provided as an area of controversy and debate on the scope of political ecology and its potential impact on the professional practices of the architect.

From Sustainability to (political) Ecology

In 1983, the United Nations launched a commission led by Norwegian Prime Minister G.H. Brundtland whose role was to draw up report analyzing the growing concerns about environmental issues, and to propose different strategies to achieve durable human development. The report, called Our Common Future, proposed for the very first time the concept of sustainable development, defined as development that meets the needs of current human communities without compromising the needs of future generations. This report fixed certain operational approaches of what has become known as the anthropocentric perspective, characterized by a conservative vision of the idea of unlimited progress that confronts human beings and nature, where the latter would



Figure 1. Interior views of the "Espacio Doméstico" VideoArt Center

While the initial approach of the intervention was to address the heterogeneous accumulation of stories, dwelling technologies or material displays if domesticity, subsequent intervention strategies assigned to different technologies the role of mediating with the existing traces, though incorporating divergent approaches to sustainability. Thus we displayed methacrylate artifacts produced by digital manufacturing and assembled on IKEA structures, electrical wires mounted on fluorescent insulators, fluorescent tattoos painted on walls and ceilings that extend the configuration of existing flooring, esparto furniture produced by the esparto women workers' associations, reappropriations of old furniture as support structures for new technologies, etc. If we can understand seduction as the conversion of affinities and disagreements into affirmative communication, the EDOM proposal can be understood as the construction of active processes of seduction between technologies, video art and the users who attend these centers. As a result, the works of art are inserted in spaces mediated by technologies that refer the viewer to complex sensory experiences, where the combination of parody,

only have instrumental value. Ensuring human needs for human generations left the environment out of the discussion as a political subject, and remains relevant to the role of non-human biotic communities, and of course communities of non-biotic beings. In the field of architecture, this protectionist view of human needs, which in practice has been equated to the preservation of a certain way of life, has established a vision of sustainability organized around minimizing the environmental impacts of architecture as an industry. Technology has emerged as a crucial factor in the process of improving architecture, and at the same time as a guarantor of the guidelines and standards raised to protect a particular state of affairs. However, soon after the Brundtland Report, there appeared several essays that criticized the possibility of approaching certain environmental problems separately, dissociated from other general problems, finding a less polarized relationship between humans and nature. Some texts such as Felix Guattari's *The three ecologies* (Guattari, 1990) or Michel Serres's *The Natural Contract* (Serres, 1991) addressed the relationship of human beings from a perspective

mixing ethics and philosophy, or from a legal point of view. Meanwhile, primarily in the North American context, the various environmental activists were specifying their different viewpoints, creating a great multiplicity of movements, organizations and theoretical developments forming tiny parts of a relationship that became inevitably complex, multiple and relational. It is precisely within that context that the theoretical and methodological bases of ecology, especially political ecology, came to the forefront of environmental approaches, to describe the complexity of these relationships. If we assume that ecology focuses on the study of the interactions between different living beings and between them and their natural environment, we can conclude that environmental problems, from an ecological point of view, cannot not be reduced to an instrumental consideration of nature at the service of human beings, but must be approached with due regard to their intrinsic multiplicity. Hence, any proposal for improving ecological levels should aim especially to modify the state of affairs and the political role played by each of the participants in the designing and building process. For the purposes of this work, we could say that a sustainable approach to architecture would focus exclusively on ensuring, through technology, the reduction of energy consumption and resources and expanding a shared set of standards, whereas an ecological approach would address the issue of design as a laboratory or a testing facility which would contemplate other forms of cohabitation, other ways of being together between participants. A process where technology does not take a pre-assigned and unquestioned place, playing instead a changing role, constantly questioned in the search for long-term durable solutions.

Seduction Strategies

Blanca is a town of less than 10,000 inhabitants located in the Region of Murcia, on the banks of the Segura River. It stands in the middle of the Ricote Valley, known for its high level of environmental preservation, and enjoying a friendly characteristic physiognomy. Like many other locations inland of the Mediterranean coast, it suffers a gradual aging of its population, due to the difficulty of engaging in new productive activities. However, recent experiences show that its socio-material peculiarities should not be disregarded when imagining an exciting future, in the light of the latest contributions of social sciences, architecture and contemporary art practices. Run by a stable municipal corporation, Blanca embarked a few years ago on a path of redescription of its identity through the implementation of different institutions devoted to contemporary artistic creation, some of which began using urban heritage as a primal material against which to set artistic actions. At present, institutions already established in the town include the Negra Center artists' residence, the EDOM VideoArt Center, the Blanca Museum and Art Center, and the Pedro Cano Foundation, along with a number of activities and events such as the Route of Art, Blanca Book Town or Blanca Innocents, all of which bear witness to a consolidated vocation in the cultural landscape of Murcia.

The EDOM VideoArt Center arose from a municipal initiative to transform two popular houses without particular heritage value into a new cultural facility. Involved from the outset in this project was Pedro Alberto Cruz, curator and contemporary art critic, who focused on the field of Videoart as a privileged place from which to observe the transformations of

contemporary culture. The team was later joined by architect Enrique Nieto, author of this paper. Together they designed the set of materials and exhibition strategies that allowed EDOM to be inaugurated in November 2014. Currently it is the only center in Spain exclusively dedicated to the exhibition of Videoart. The origin of EDOM is not linked to any specific strategy for the neighborhood where it is inserted, but rather stems, as already mentioned, from a sustained interest on the part of the municipal corporation in assigning a special place to culture. The aim of the project is not just to give life to a new museum, seen as an activity detached from Blanca's daily routines, and acting from the logic of the creative industries, almost like an alien. On the contrary, the arrival of video art in Blanca must be understood as an opportunity to alter and interact with the already existing socio-material networks. We therefore proposed equipment that could easily be integrated both visually and programmatically into the city, also allowing the possibility of rethinking issues such as equity and the role of art institutions in rural contexts.

To achieve these outstanding goals, two initial design strategies were proposed

Dignify> Heritage is not just monuments. It can be any material construction that incorporates a particular ecology using buildings, people, objects and video art pieces to build a careful differential experience. In order to achieve this goal, it was important that the interventions should be geared to dignifying what we found there, and to maintaining a certain symmetry between preservation and modification. A set of aspects that take advantage of the local opportunities offered by houses to intensify the global dimension of art.

Seduce> The intervention consists of small gestures that overlap with the existing atmosphere, activating a desirable complicity and persuasion between the visitor, the building and the works of video art. We started with small material changes resulting from the new program to alter usual meanings, generate ambiguity and destabilize the predictable. We mapped all kinds of possible material elements and we linked them together, using them as design elements. Colors, cracks, odors, damage, facilities... all are possibilities that act in a positive and affirmative way. We tried to think of seduction as a break in the foreseeable logic to generate attraction, complicity and acceptance.

Laboratorizing Technologies

When we visited the two houses for the first time, we found buildings with scant historical value. In fact there was no general *logic* calling for their preservation, but a small set of inconsiderable contingencies. There was no fixed budget that *logically* oriented our decision-making, our priorities, but we were supposed to spend as little as possible. Nor did it seem that we would have a proper building contractor suitable for the renovation purposes, who would *logically* organize the course of the work; instead we intended primarily to use the human resources of the municipality. The art project itself, belonging to a global trend, did not fit into the *logic* of a town of 7,500 inhabitants unused to contemporary art consumption. In short, the intervention did not seem to require a standard methodological set of tools, *logical* tools, but the deployment of a range of strategies that would take advantage of the original fragility of each of the participating agents to operate

in a way that would alter any of the inherent orders of the construction processes. This precariousness seemed to operate primarily in the field of technology, as the technologies involved in the rehabilitation of heritage are usually geared toward the enhancement of the assets involved and ensuring the proper functioning of the programs that will be run at the new facility. However, in this project we wanted to challenge the distribution of roles that is to be found in technology, and to a certain extent laboratorize its participation in such a unique process. We therefore decided to uproot technologies from their infrastructural and almost transparent condition in order to incorporate them into all the design strategies required to accommodate the new programs. We considered that, in order to transform this precariousness into a design opportunity, we needed to operate precisely on the technologies, diverting them from their authoritarian and apparently neutral role and enhancing their visibility by redefining certain pragmatic and neutral figurations associated with their uncritical effectiveness. Thus, technologies became the only depositories of the intervention, assuming all the movements in the meanings we wanted to produce:



scale and domesticity. Only the jambs were painted black, and there is a small sign on the door with information on the opening hours.

Electrical wiring: Cartographies and domestic figurations

EDOM does not need too much. Only an electrical installation to ensure its adaptation to the new programs. Upon entering the houses, we discovered the ancient wiring drawing figures on the walls, evidencing their logical implementation and functioning with minimal invasion. It seemed a suitable strategy: We suggested making use of the ancient wiring frameworks. We emphasized existing lines and added new exposed wiring according to the new requirements. A recognizable and closed landscape that guides the visitor around the houses. An opportunity for design also became evident. Cotton braided cables take on different colors according to the circuit to which they belong, enhancing the visibility of the facility. Traditional porcelain insulators are now made of colored methacrylate with overlapping flower motifs to enhance their presence on the dirty white walls.



Figure 2. Façade of the “restored” building. Wiring figurations and methacrylate cages

The framework: guests and negotiations

As already mentioned, EDOM inhabits two houses in the historic district of Blanca. They are fit for human habitation too. In addition to walls, doors and floors, the houses retain familiar smells, cracks, warped floors and peeling paint. Wounds of time and material heterogeneities inflicted by the overlapping domesticities over different ages. As a whole, they make up a contingent history with which EDOM must negotiate as if it were a guest. It is a way of recognizing their brittle nature, of exposing and conferring them their own artistic institutional body. This is part of the idea of accepting things as they are, while adding some basic technological and programmatic implementation, of accessing the house as if we were guests. Making do with what there is. Minor gaps and imperfections were solved as we went along, with the resources of the City Council, reducing initial investment to a minimum, managing within the existing limits. The facades were left untouched. We found them fine. With multi-family housing blocks beside them, we preferred to preserve their

We thus adapted our domestic environment by incorporating the art of technological advances and the impact of technology on the built environment.

The audiovisual devices: bird cages and cat kennels

EDOM shuns clear and static elements. The nature of domestic space is fragile. Any excessively direct meddling of technology could break the balance. Projection devices are housed in methacrylate cages to integrate them in as domestic a way as possible into this new space. These cages are easily movable and reusable in the different spaces making up the intervention. There were once singing birds in the cages. Now the cages emit light and other sounds. The works of video art are supported by projection devices (projectors and screens) and by a catalog of visual scenes with which we studied the different ways of integrating these systems into our spaces. We sought to reconcile video art pieces with different spaces and specific display systems (projections on walls but also on

television screens integrated into a reconstructed lounge, microprojections in bathroom areas, large format projections on the interior partitions, etc).

The signposting: Tattoos

EDOM does not need graphics to stabilize its future identity. It prefers a slight and unexpected approach to accompany it all the way, providing heterogeneous information. We are interested in the concept of the tattoo as an identity strategy. Tattooing is not autonomous from the body it is part of. We made use of manual drawing to incorporate precariousness. The graphic origin of the material elements of housing. Lipsticks and colors that are activated by the light of the screens would be used. The whitewashed walls against black or dark colored wood and railings offer a unique picture of the inside of the houses. The aim is to highlight the black and white potential generating new tattoos on the walls to reproduce some of the details and existing ornaments.

Lighting: Inhabiting the dark

EDOM does not need light. It lives well in the dark. That way the mystery and the faults found in the homes are not extinguished. It is better that way. We lightly signposted the rooms, providing the only presence of color and white against the black of darkness in two ways: Using luminescent lime paint activated in the dark with neon light, and manufacturing flat pieces of fluorine methacrylate illuminated at the edges.

identifying both its historical moment and its economy. It was a feature that virtually marked the identity of domestic spaces. However, on the ground floor a black stoneware tile had been laid, probably for better protection against ground damp. On this floor, the magic of time seems to disappear. We were in a suddenly disqualified and somewhat inhospitable space, also due to changes in the original partition layout. We therefore decided to have a proliferation of geometric motifs saturating the atmosphere with basic drawings. But we used luminescent paint to make them appear in the dark. In addition, these geometries also invade the vertical walls, escaping from their predictable locations.

Furniture: domesticities, anthropologies and candy

EDOM did not need a large investment: Given the strategy of distributing intervention resources across the entire area of the site, we preferred to focus on small parcels of reality, with the aim of producing material value in singular points. An important part of the consumer experience of video art is produced through the furniture that complements the space and supports the viewer's body, constructing a mixed experience in which the occupation of physical space by the body and the production of virtual space by technologies produce the final experience. We proposed incorporating certain domesticities into this process: the nature of the place encouraged us to refurbish it with what might have been the original furniture, readapting it to its new programmatic conditions.

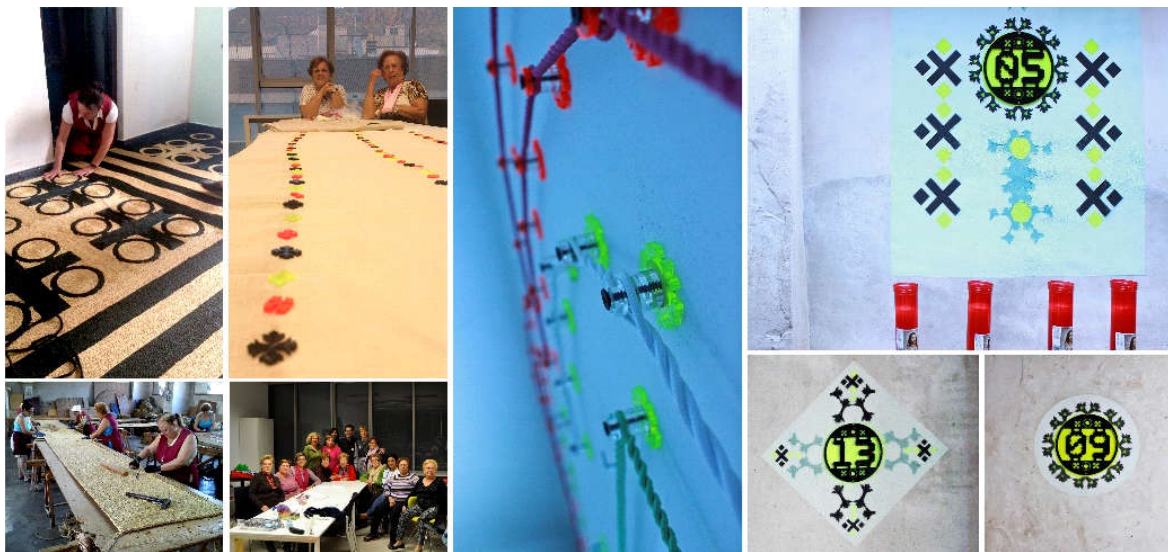


Figure 3. Pictures of the local building process. Pictures of tattoos and insulations

These pieces mimicking household wall objects such as paintings, clocks and hanging plates are punched with directions. The gloominess of the abandoned house was one of the values to maintain and enhance, an effort also motivated by the nature of the exhibited work – videos that require special low-light conditions. A suggestive line of action would intensify this darkness, broken only by light signaling to mark the routes and crossing sites, also seeking to ensure proper safety conditions.

Paving: Identities and proliferation of geometries

The top floor of the existing houses retained its original flooring: Hydraulic tile with simple geometric motifs

We thought of three ways to do this: 1) a collection of furniture that could be provided by the neighbors; 2) a strategy involving the rehabilitation of furniture specifically for the institution, transforming it with prostheses to break away from the traditional idea of furniture, bringing it in line with the technological nature of EDOM; and 3) upholstering foam blocks, wrapping them candy colors as if adapted to a new scale.

The scenery: The sinister and the grotesque

EDOM links video art with the spaces where it is displayed. The works of art are wrapped around and engulfed by some material installations that enhance certain aspects of the

uncanny associated with the domestic. If the domestic space is the place for founding family privacy, within this radical intimacy there also looms the grotesque and the most extreme forms of gore. We wanted to transform this strange and altered dimension of reality to rebuild a desirable symmetry with works of art. The space, the viewer and technologies form a symmetrical and permanent dual relationship.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to present an approach to technologies in the field of architecture where its role can be destabilized outside and away from its role of preserving programmatic standards and energetic efficiency. On the contrary, as we have observed in the EDOM VideoArt Center, considered a study case for this paper, the technologies have been radically laboratorized precisely in their material dimension. Through specific design processes, technologies have been used as the support medium for critical discourses incorporating local communities, the relationship between the new and the old, the local and the global, the intimate and the public. Our intervention was aimed at transform the enjoyment of video art into an event located in a context of heterogeneous presences that restore a certain measure of symmetry between the local-domestic and the global-cultural. For that reason EDOM operates from a voluntary anthropocentrism that recognizes the foundational intensity of domestic environments to become institutions for fragile material disputes between neighborhoods and proposes itself as a seductive alternative to institutional normative discourses. In addition, a number of reappropriations of the existing elements, overlapping tattoos, cable networks and small ambiguous decorations are found to establish a dignifying presence. These are strategies aimed at the redistribution of symbolic value and to improving the flow of subjectification of the casual inhabitants, the usual video art consumers. The intervention focuses exclusively on certain devices – domestic wiring, projections, lights, etc. – that are made visible in an effort to open the black box of the technologies that build our everyday experiences. In this sense EDOM offers the coexistence of deterioration, stains and cracks with the glamour of fluorine and methacrylates.

As a whole, EDOM can be seen as an episode that tries to test the role of contemporary art by inserting it into specialized socio-technical and domestic networks at the same time, in a fragile balance that ensures their desirable resilience. To carry out this project we have relied on local women's and craftswomen's associations, as a means of empowering local economies. It is also a way of claiming from cultural institutions a necessary vocation of solidarity. Watching videos lying on a bed, locked in a low cupboard, or installed in a bathroom where the sound of water is always present, or sitting in a crib, EDOM offers a unique experience that incorporates the visitor into the game of contemporary art: The light is gone as we enter the house. Almost nothing is recognizable. We are invading a private space. We miss a robe and slippers. We are suddenly invaded by strange lights coming from screens and projections. The building is so activated and transformed. We too are transformed. Now we are inhabitants of the house and we consume video art.

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