The Architecture of Democracy

When considering the foundation and implementation of democracy and its many variants, we turn to the forms and vernacular of architecture. This can be understood simply as a technique of analogy—as a means of relating the historical context of these systems of governance to their contemporary manifestations. The 'pillars of democracy' evoke Ancient Grecian architecture constructed to house the initial formulations of early democratic processes. It becomes apparent that this is more than mere analogy. As with 'the political', architecture concerns the relationship between the human subject, or subjects, and the external systems and structures which foster and govern their interactions. Such structures are crucial for the development of humanity—beyond the basic requirements of shelter—they are vital as facilitators of all forms of inter-human organisation, as in the case of housing the mechanisms of the political process.

One could even go as far as to suggest that architectural structures are intrinsically linked to the formation of political systems, in particular democracies. There could be no seriously organised forms of politics, governing the needs of even a relatively small populous, without the designed spaces for it to exist and function within. It therefore makes complete sense that manifestations of democratic governance have relied on parliaments, assemblies, councils and senate buildings throughout history. Physical architectural spaces have been the sole environments which facilitated this, up until now.

The technological revolution we are experiencing is fundamentally transforming the methods and models of communication and organisation that have previously existed, profoundly altering social relations and as a consequence the political systems that have developed to accommodate them. Space has—quite literally—taken on another dimension, one in which ever increasing amounts of inter-human affairs exist and are emerging. Architectural practices are themselves developing concurrently to this new digital dimension, using it firstly as a space in which to realise physical architectural projects, but now also creating solely digital spaces, unencumbered by the constraints of the physical world.

These new architectural structures—the term, which in this context, applies synonymously to the systems and processes of machines, and thus 'the online' and the digital—must also, by necessity, develop to accommodate contemporary society, individual perception and political existence. During the latter part of the twentieth century, into the early twenty-first, it has become acutely apparent that the ailing democratic structures of many countries are in dire need of reappraisal. Contemporaneous to this, the political figures chosen to represent their

societies as a whole—ministers, presidents, prime ministers—seem increasingly unable to fulfil their duties. Occurring on a multitude of levels and in many ways, the human representatives of the democratic process appear to be increasingly redundant. This ranges from the spectacle of the election process, breeding superficial celebrities as opposed to heads of state, to the inherent weaknesses, flaws, deficiencies and scandals that human political figures are liable to have or accrue. This is occurring whilst many other cultural, social and economic systems are happily conferring elements of responsibility and control to near-infallible machine systems, which in their very nature are built to specifically deal with the complexities of the given situation. A machine is never led astray by the concerns of the human individual: self-obsession, greed, limited computational ability, biases of all kinds, and subjective perception, which blinds the individual's ability to truly govern any populous—these are to name but a few examples, however it is most emblematically evident in that, suffice it to say, you cannot bribe a machine.

Complex algorithmic networks, machine-learning and artificial intelligence are all emerging as viable solutions to many problems in the organisation and maintenance of a now globally perceived humanity, however they often seem misapplied. Attempts are made to wastefully assert these programs and processes into instances wherein it is well within a human's capacity to fulfil the task at hand. The application of such computational machines in cultural and artistic affairs, for example, is morally bankrupt. We do not want—in fact we cannot—be given what we want through data computation. The 'creative imitation' of a Rembrandt painting by means of AI and 3D printing processes does nothing but undermine the value of culture. We must instead be given something new, which may be a possibility through computational means, however at this moment in time such machinery is squandered on such tasks. With regards to computational application within the economic sphere, it is undeniably a necessity and provides the strongest articulation of the necessary power of advanced computation in maintaining an essential structure. The problem with this however, is that we have allowed this market-oriented advance to become the governing principle of almost all forms of contemporary existence. In the political and democratic environment though, such systems will do exactly what such foundations were intended to do, give us precisely what each and every one of us not only wants, but needs.

No longer will there be a reliance on the problematic nature of physical or postal participation—or lack of—but instead each and every citizen will be directly connected to the democratic process on a daily, minute to minute basis, yet without the time consuming aspects of unnecessary decision and active voting—as it is currently understood. Democracy by data computation will occur constantly and without impeding the daily actions with which we are all already consumed by, in a sense enacting our political positions for us. No longer must we compromise our time, strain our bodies and have to over-exert our vocal chords in order to be heard as part of the multitude. Direct democracy can, and must be enacted in this manner.

This is not speculation—this is necessity.