Notion of ‘Making’

case of BC Architects

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INTRODUCTION: In the work *Making* by *Tim Ingold* a critique of the predominantly applied *hylomorphic* model is expressed. These arguments find their counterpart in the field of architecture under the concept of *new materialism*, which as a movement has produced a variety of new and meaningful approaches in the disciplines of conceptual, intentional, constructive, and theoretical architecture. One of these disciples is the office *BC Architects*, which is worth a closer look.

QUESTION: Could BC Architect's brick architecture be considered a *making process* and what does this imply in architectural terms?

GROWTH PROCESS: For a formshaping act to be considered a *making process*, as opposed to the *hylomorphic* model, the form generating procedure must be a sensible mediation of multiple forces joint together to bring the matter into the desired condition[1]. Furthermore, there is no contradiction in the designer having a specific form in mind, as long as possible unexpected environmental conditions acting on the various materials are not considered a flaw in the process. In fact, the usual process in the Western world, which aims at a hylomorphic way of creating, called *material culture*, consists of a culturally or traditionally imagined objectified form combined with an accordingly treated raw material provided by nature[2]. This is countered by perceiving objects not only through the bias of our own cultural baggage, but by broadening the view to include the past and future of the materials that make up the specific artifact. *BC Architects* approaches this broader relationship through a particular attention to the process of manufacture and construction. Indeed, the basis of their work lies in a phenomenal investigation of the components of a pressed clay brick. However, they does not limit themself to the materials, but also examine the various formative processes with different interactions of forces and, on a larger scale[3], the life cycle of these material flows before the brick manufacturing process and after the end of their life as an architectural element.

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1 SIMONDON, Gilbert, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, Grenoble, Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2005, p.42

2 INGOLD, Tim, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, London, Routledge, 2013, p.7

3 HAVIK, K, M,; LENDERS, L, « Interview with BC Architects. », In: *Crossing boundaries: Transcultural practices in architecture and urbanism*, Rotterdam, OASE Foundation & NAi Publishers, 2015, p.5

MATERIALITY: The bricks, made of an elaborated mixture of clay and sand, formed by the force of a machine or human hands, and then dried in the sun or in a special kiln, might at first glance convey an image of *materiality*, the physical nature of matter combined with the human imagination creating a design that is then imposed on the material to form the desired brick. However, this does not take into account the flexibility in *BC Architects* work to adapt to the material as much as the material adapt's to the form. Thus the voluntary engagement of making bricks from compressed earth is what becomes in itself the art. Important questions like: Where are the various ingredients to be found? What is the best way to mix them? How can they be stored and dried? are what distinguishes their work from a *chaîne opératoire* model[4]. These considerations include a reflection about the impact of the bricks, once they find their place in a wall of the project, on the inhabitants, as well as environmental and economic consequences that are not limited to the construction process[5]. It is not unusual to think of a building as an artifact whose main purpose is to make the space appropriable and secure. However with their approach, this view is shifting towards a consideration of constructions as growing organisms that will evolve and eventually cease to be buildings.

PROPERTIES AND QUALITIES: Ingold's call for a 'return to alchemy' is reflected in the work of *BC Materials* through a sophisticated process of experimentation with the different materials that make up the bricks[6]. Questions such as: What additives affect color, strength, weight, and performance in the drying process demonstrate the sensible approach. Although the investigation for material properties is well documented, the search for their qualities is less obvious, since these are by definition objective characteristics. Nonetheless, *BC Architect*'s projects leave observers free to perceive these qualities in their individual non-deterministic way. These considerations become relevant in the phases before and after the building's completion. To what extent is the form-giving process reversible, so that the material can be returned to its raw form and integrated into a future cycle?

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4 INGOLD, Tim, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, London, Routledge, 2013, p.13

5 BC STUDIES VZW, *Circular Economy,* Antwerp, Pixii - Onafhankelijk Kennisplatform Energieneutraal Bouwen, 2018, p.35 - 38

6 *Ibid*., p.11 – 16

ONGOING HISTORICITY: When viewing materials, organisms, or artifacts, there is always continuous variation and growth. The composition has an inherent tendency to change its state, which is perceived both through its use and physically. In architectural terms, this describes the life cycle of a building, which *BC Architects* address by considering how the bricks can be reused when the building reaches the end of its life[7]. The bricks could be broken down back into their original components, or the bricks themselves could find a new use in another project. This implies, not to think of sand and clay as components for the future bricks, but as materials with a life and history. *BC Architects* approach could be a good alternative with a circular flow from material to object and back[8].

CONCLUSION: *BC Architects* work, in its sensitivity to experimentation, fabrication and construction, is in fact an interplay of different forces engaging with the material and the imaginary concept of the designer to create an edifice that is not fixed in time, but actually has a past and an future that integrates it in this way in the flow of continuous variation of matter. The significance of applying the concept of *making* in architectural practice, shows clear advantages at the environmental, economic and social levels. Nevertheless, there are still various problems[9][10] to overcome in order for it to become a more widely applied practice.

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7 BC STUDIES VZW, *Circular Economy*, Antwerp, Pixii - Onafhankelijk Kennisplatform Energieneutraal Bouwen, 2018, p.38

8 PELICAEN, E,; JANSSENS, B,; KNAPEN, E, « Circular building with raw earth: a qualitative assessment of two cases in Belgium. », In: *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, Bristol, IOP Publishing, 2021, p.8

9 *Ibid*., p.11

10 VAN DER LINDEN, Jasper; JANSSENS, B.; KNAPEN, E, « Potential of contemporary earth architecture for low impact building in Belgium. », In: *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, Bristol, IOP Publishing, 2019, p.8

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