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ELEMENTS

This exhibition is part of the ELEMENTS partnership in which contemporary art and cultural institutions in Dutch Limburg, Belgian Limburg and Liège program around an 'element' associated with the region.

Visit www.elements2021.eu to check the complete program.



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STUDIO PLASTIQUE
(THERESA BASTEK
& ARCHIBALD GODTS)

CURATOR
ANNELIES THOELLEN

HOUSE FOR
CONTEMPORARY ART
DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE



With the support of:



CURRENT AGE

The (in)visible
networks

INTRODUCTION

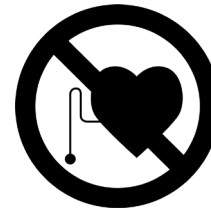
A network of cables – like veins in a human body – entangle our entire planet. They transport a commodity of unparalleled importance to human civilization: electricity.

Without electricity, elements of communication, food preparation, festivities, production, traffic management, data storage, etc. would all take on very different forms. Electricity shapes our Western society as we know it today.

For most of us the impact of our electricity addiction is hard to grasp. Electricity itself, and also its infrastructure, is mostly intangible and invisible for common users. The Brussels design duo Studio Plastique maps the challenges by critically questioning the current scenario's and by researching the possibilities to reshape our relationship with the electric current.

The exhibition develops in three chapters, each exploring current and future visions for electric use, distribution, generation, beauty and magic of electricity. What do we want electricity to be? How do we want it to look like?

The last room of the exhibition visualizes electricity again in a different manner. A large gas filled glass object reveals electricity sparking around. When touching the lamp, you experience and see the magic of the energy source.



Beware of electromagnetic radiation: people with medical devices on the body, such as pacemakers, should not enter this room.

ABOUT STUDIO PLASTIQUE

Theresa Bastek (1990) and Archibald Godts (1990) founded Studio Plastique in 2017 in Brussels after graduating from Design Academy Eindhoven. Their work combines imaginative scenarios and critical reflections with in-depth investigations of complex material supply chains and technological infrastructures, thus pushing the boundaries of what design aims to achieve. Studio Plastique builds up networks of collaboration around significant themes for contemporary society, strategically positioning the role of the designer in an evolving landscape of industry, culture, and human experience.

Plastique's work has received international recognition and their work has been shown at the Design Museum Ghent, Design Museum Holon, Van Abbe Museum Eindhoven, as well as international fairs and platforms. They recently received the Henry van de Velde Young Talent Gold Award in Belgium and the SYN Award in Germany.

Studio Plastique will continue their research and field trips into the electric current, follow them on Instagram on [@studioplastique](https://www.instagram.com/studioplastique) to stay updated.

THIRD CHAPTER: GENERATION

The infrastructure we use to transmit electricity nearly exists for 150 years. All this time we have been rebuilding, expanding and maintaining that old grid. Not only is the very thought of building this extensive grid outdated, also the environmental and social costs that come with the mining of the needed rare earth materials is becoming very high.

Moreover, we currently face an energy transition: transitioning from a carbonized to a decarbonized society, in which electricity is playing a mayor role. But the omnipresence of the grid impedes us to fully break with the past and innovatively reconsider the future scenario's for powering our lives.

Lastly, economic structures (energy companies and governments) are not willing to share or lose their market if more people would produce their own electricity. The independence of the grid is not researched on a larger scale, as many powers profit from its very existence.

Studio Plastique proposes therefore to reconsider our dependence from this grid. Can we redesign a world in which we live more independently, and more self-sufficiently?

By designing and building five small *Explorers*, self-sufficiency is both researched and questioned.

They use alternative powers like solar and wind energy, chemical or hydrogen driven, or are powered by human energy. Except for the *Grid Explorer*, all explorers are generating their power on the spot and use it immediately, independently from the grid.

The explorers represent a section of the electricity universe, showing potentials of various technologies, energy (in)dependencies and (re) considerations.

FIRST CHAPTER: CONSUMPTION

Studio Plastique takes a close look at our unconscious electricity consumption. In this room we are confronted with heat pictures of household appliances at work. We do not see the electricity they consume. But when turned on, our domestic objects generate warmth as a byproduct of their operations.

By choosing to visualise the heat production Studio Plastique wants to place an emphasis on the electricity consumption process which often escapes our attention. On top of that, by showing the pictures on electricity consuming screens, Studio Plastique creates an art piece which refers both to the world as is happening currently around us, yet also to itself as the screens are producing heat while being used in the exhibition.

This first chapter is very characteristic about the work of Studio Plastique, which often starts with mapping and documenting the case in original ways.

SECOND CHAPTER: DISTRIBUTION

We know about the cables in our homes, and the big high voltage lines crossing the fields. Electricity as a mainly intangible, immaterial and invisible resource namely needs a vast material infrastructure to be conducted. No matter how ephemeral electricity in itself can be, there is an omnipresent mega-structure of cables in precious materials influencing our landscapes and build environments. Studio Plastique lays bare these structures and systems in several ways.

THROUGH BOTANICAL MAPS

The design duo uses here the visual language of a classical herbarium. The specimen used here however are not plants, yet samples of cables highlighting different typologies of the grid. By creating these collections, they also critique our vast collection of cables and accessories in the landscape. Making up a vast and systemic grid that acts as an irrefutable inheritance from the past.

Credit: Cables - DSG Industrial Energy, Elia, Nexans

VIA VEIN MAP

In the electricity grid, supporting infrastructures such as poles, tubes and batteries allow energy to flow.

Like an alternative highway, it connects our major cities. Studio Plastique maps the 'veins' of our society and thus dissects the system of above and below ground layers of different tensions. Like a medical drawing, they show the lifeline of our Western lifestyle.

Credit: Vein Map - Source data by 123map, OpenStreetMap

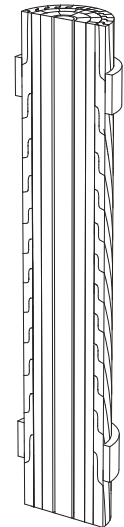
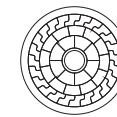
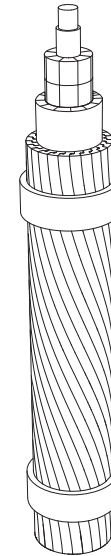
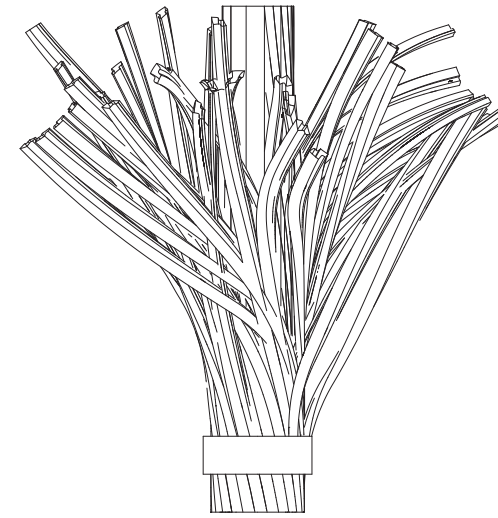
THROUGH A NIGHT MAP

This night map visualizes the sparse parts of the world that are actually connected to a grid. It makes one wonder that a constant flow of electricity is a privileged commodity, mainly reserved for the so-called developed world.

This work by Studio Plastique ponders on alternative scenarios. Should we as Westerners want to develop the rest of the world modelled to our own experiences? Or should we not rather skip this step, and rely on more modern and advance technologies to implement a systemic design that is more fit for the 21st century?

Credit: Electrified Black Marble - Source image by NASA

220 kV High Voltage Cable



Type Overhead Line
Length (BE) 300 km

Use Power Transmission
Materials Aluminium, Carbon