Reflection

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1. *What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?*

My topic revolves around contemporary architectural production, its shortcomings, and ways to broaden its scope by implementing a performative approach that can accommodate the various processes and agents systemically omitted in traditional, representational modes of production, hence the relation to my master programme and master track (Architecture).

2. *How did your research influence your design and how did the design influence your research?*

Overall, my research defined my outlook on contemporary architectural practice and led me to assess the processes that shape it, the limitations that those impose, and the wider consequences of said practice. Throughout the course of my research, and partly due to my growing disillusionment with the reality of architectural production, I developed feelings of resentment and rejection of traditional practices. On the one hand, this pushed me to explore ways to do architecture differently, which I find inspirational and has motivated me throughout the past months. It gave me the courage to explore the theoretical framework of performativity and put it into practice, which was invaluable. On the other hand, it was often a burden as I struggled to communicate my ideas, motivations, and reasoning to my tutors, as well as to a larger audience. My rejection of traditional representational methods certainly made things harder and put off some people due to my inability to communicate everything that was going on in my head in a succinct manner. Although not all positive, my research approach has led me to a point in which I could design from a different perspective which is aligned with how I want to present myself as a furniture practitioner. This is reflected in my design which explores how performative action can work with complex systems from within, rather than reduce them from without.

3. *How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?*

I am incredibly happy that I had the opportunity to use the mixture of non-representational, post-humanist, and performative methods that allowed me to experiment and push myself (and many others) out of my comfort zone. The emphasis this approach puts on processes and doings required me to perform on a 1:1 scale, facing real challenges, and generating knowledge through experience. It is a time-consuming and

path-dependent approach which makes it unsuitable for an academic environment, however, it puts you in a situation which requires action and involvement with actual places and people. It allows you to embed yourself in the environment, get your hands dirty, start from the middle, feel, and understand your position as an architect in this network in which you plan to intervene. Most of all, pursuing alternative methods of production and archiving was motivational for me because, at this point in the educational cycle, everything looks like a cliche. Following this unbeaten path that came with a lot of risk and unpredictability made this journey worth the time and effort. I am glad that I will remember it by more than just a few files and papers.

4. *How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?*

What I find fun about this project is the fact that it does not fit the educational framework at all. In its essence, it criticises the obsession with the architectural object, final results, "finished" products, and the apparent linearity and certainty of projective architecture, which also lay the basis of any form of assessment within TU Delft. An approach which focuses on processes developing throughout time, with a large amount of uncertainty, does not fit in the given time frame or evaluation criteria. That is why such projects are valuable in an academic setting, they serve as a reminder to reconsider the frameworks which we accept as a given.

At the same time, my project tackles a very "hot topic" - energetic renewal, which makes it socially relative. It proposes an alternative way to look at this challenge in an Eastern European setting which is significantly different from the Western. This allows me to approach it in a manner that takes into account these differences and uses them as fundamental elements of the design proposal, rather than simply copying and pasting "Western" solutions in the "Eastern" context. The potential of my approach lies precisely in its capacity to develop a design proposal based on local specificities that can work in its given setting.

Throughout the experiment I carried out on-site, I understood my position as an architect in the network of human and non-human elements that co-habit there. The intervention I did felt somewhat invasive, provocative, and disconnected from reality. At that moment it became evident to me what are the drawbacks of working from afar, without interacting with the people and spaces I plan to affect from behind my computer screen. My plan required the physical and visual alteration of the courtyard space nested between the blocks, which made me realise the consequences of my actions and the

responsibilities I have. The ethical dilemma of carrying out an unsolicited intervention in a space and community which I am not even a part of was hanging over my head constantly. This led to lots of self-doubt and uncertainty which I could only manage thanks to the people who supported me and helped me with the project.

5. *How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?*

Throughout the entirety of the project, my goal has been to showcase how I want to position myself as a future practitioner. I believe this project highlights the processes that I want to be involved with, it shows my willingness to work with my hands, to engage with people, materials, and spaces first-hand. The fact that I managed to organise an actual event, carry out the process from beginning to end, and factor in budgeting and management of resources and people on-site demonstrates the abilities I find valuable about myself. Most importantly I feel that I have defined through my work the approach that I want to have as an architect, which becomes evident in my actions and design proposal.

My focus was never on the final results of my project, in fact, I made sure that they wouldn't matter at all. I managed to distance myself from the educational framework and requirements by physically carrying out parts of my project. This has given me some autonomy and a feeling of accomplishment, not because I masterminded the perfect design, but because I made sure to be active, to push myself beyond what I thought I could, and to have something to show for it. I believe this will distinguish me from the flashy and grandiose avalanche of portfolios and work applications that flood an already oversaturated market.

6. What were the unexpected turns in the project that caught you by surprise and left an important mark on the design?

The turning point of the project was the "gridding" I organised on-site. From the very beginning, I felt unequipped to deal with the massive scale of the site. After only four people that live in the blocks showed up on the day of the event it quickly became clear that this intervention, which consisted of parcelling the courtyard in 144 squares was not going to serve its intended purpose of enabling people to take action into their squares. The lack of involvement was a result of many factors, some directly related to my inability to incentivise the residents, some completely outside of my control. As we were spilling lime on the ground, I realised that perhaps the function of this intervention is not to provoke action, but discussion. Communicating my ideas to a wider audience, convincing them of

their potential, and dragging them into production was certainly the hardest part of the project. I felt like I lacked the necessary tools, knowledge, authority, and qualities to do all of this. Throughout my education, I was always interested in projects with social involvement and I've always imagined myself as a practitioner who follows that line of work. However, it turned out that working with people required an entirely different set of skills, none of which fits into the classical traits of the "master architect". It required a levelling down from the clouds to the ground, stepping off your pedestal and engaging, being vulnerable, and embracing the flaws of your ideas.

This experience had an impact on my design thinking as I started to design performative structures that not only host action but can also present potential and act as communicational devices.

7. How does the diploma project fit into your educational journey? Is it everything you hoped for?

Here is the opening paragraph of my motivational letter that I was sending out to universities when I was applying for my bachelor's back in 2018:

Grey... light grey, dark grey, silver, slate grey, dim grey and rare pieces of faded orange establish the panorama, which resembles an incorrectly assembled puzzle. This is the palette of colours you observe in a concrete panel building. Unfortunately, this landscape has taken over Bulgaria. I like to think of it as an old painting, a canvas in need of restoration. Throughout my life, I have been surrounded by this scenery and my motivation to become an architect springs from a desire to change the world that surrounds me.

Now that I have a little bit more experience under my belt, looking back at what I expected at the beginning of my educational journey and reading the rest of the text feels funny. However, I did make a full circle, getting to the point where I started from, and addressing the motivations that made me pursue such a career. It might seem banal or cliched, but something in this whole situation makes me feel good about it, perhaps because I don't see this as a "full circle" where the end meets the beginning. I see it as two points that reach towards each other and right before they do, they explode in a multitude of new lines of exploration. That is how I see this diploma project. For many, this is a struggle, something that they have to do to get a piece of paper, a final stop, an ending. Me on the other hand... I never saw this diploma project as an ending, which is why I believe that I should not be presenting a polished, finished product, followed by a shake, a signature, and a farewell.

The past year and a half has opened new lines of interest for me and this project contains them all, so I really hope it will explode and leave new paths that I wish to follow in the future.