

ESCAPING

rense kerkvliet
p5 reflection
chair of methods
and analysis

CASABLANCA

resorting to inversions of everyday life

CONSTRUCTION OF DESIRE

reading la corniche, casablanca's other

TOWARDS SANCTUARIES OF PLAY

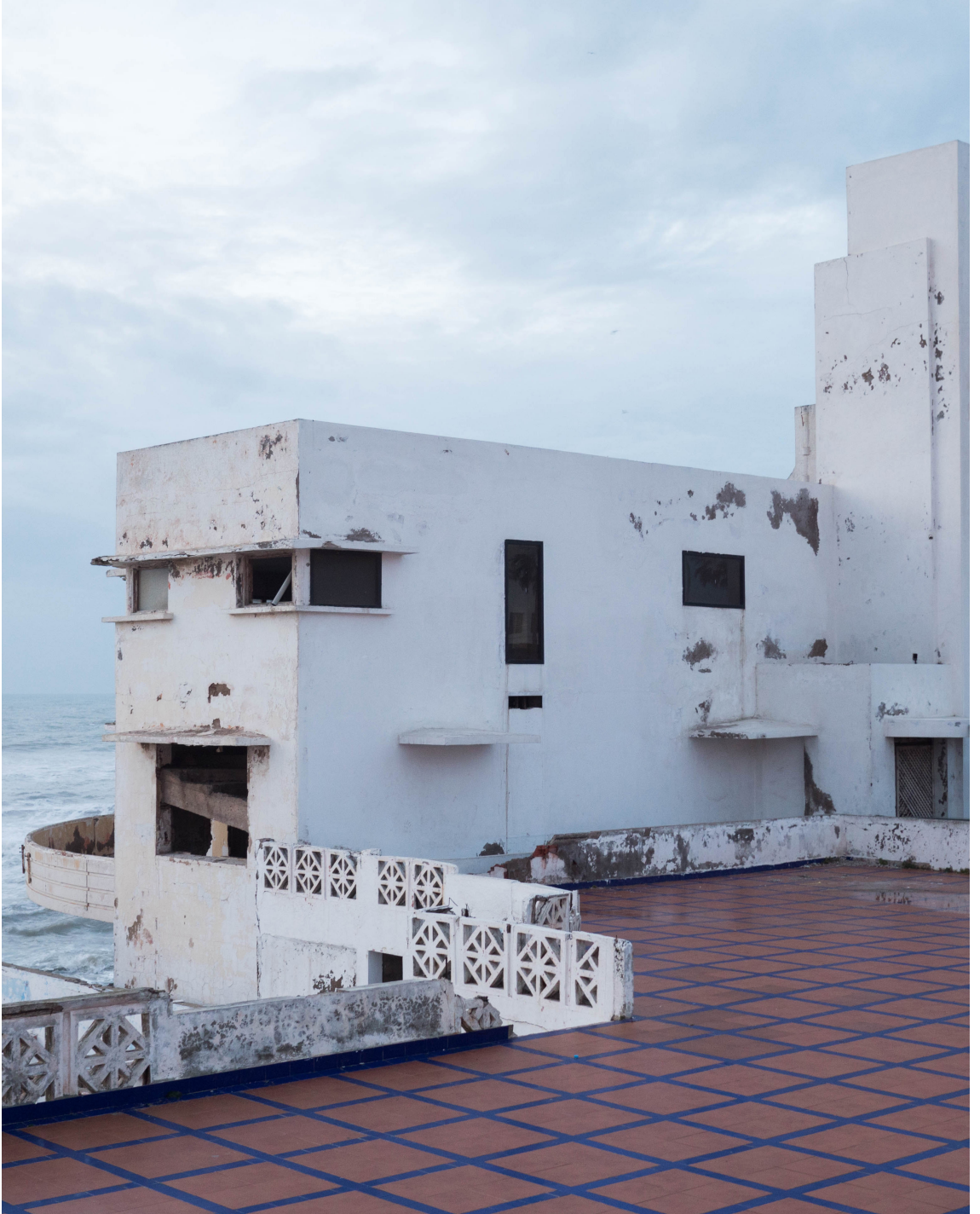
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INTRODUCTION

on methodology and fascination

METHODOLOGY

The graduation studio of the chair of Methods and Analysis 'Positions in Practice: Analysis and Intervention in the Afropolis' understands the master programme of architecture, and the graduation process specifically, as a formative process for the student. Therefore, the student is challenged to position himself in practice. The studio only provides a particular urban condition (the city of Casablanca) and a topical focus (constructing the commons) wherein the student chooses his own research and design theme to develop a project. The project is considered as a continuous interaction between an in-depth study of both the field & discipline and a concise architectural intervention. Thus, presenting the project as an intervention loop between the present and the abstract, between research and design. A continuous cycle rather than the more commonly used division between research and design.

PERSONAL FASCINATION

Before starting the graduation studio, I have personally always been interested in the phenomenon of privatization of public space, which can be observed in most urban conditions. Cities are being densified completely, either eradicating public space by construction or interiorizing it in the built environment. Thus, the spaces that make a city livable are slowly decreasing in number and size. Herein I am intrigued by how architecture creates borders between these valuable spaces, how the many are excluded from them, making enjoying public space a privilege for the few. The graduation studio and its urban condition of Casablanca offered a fruitful basis on exploring this theme further. The fieldwork in the highly privatized leisure boulevard of la Corniche was the beginning of a further development of my personal fascination. Elaborating on how the everyday and the holiday are related, and how this relationship is mediated by architectural means.

CONSTRUCTION OF DESIRE

through comparative analysis of the escapes

Through an intense study of Casablanca's coast, and more specifically the boulevard of La Corniche, it became clear that the relation between the everyday and the holiday is very segregated at three different scales; 1. the scale of the city, 2. the scale of the boulevard and 3. the scale of the club.

1.) SCALE OF THE CITY

Through the rapid growth of the city of Casablanca and therewith its continuing problem of capacity for new inhabitants, spaces for the holiday seem to be absent in the dense urban city, almost forgotten. In the historical development of the city, these spaces have been driven out from the city towards the periphery. Whereas these recreational spaces once were located near the city, they had to make place for dwelling and heavy harbor industry. For this reason, further down the west coast, the boulevard of La Corniche was created, a strip along the ocean. A site dedicated to the holiday, firstly for the French/European colonists, now for the privileged wealthy. This separation of La Corniche and the city has only been made possible through the presence of the car (for those who could afford it). Because of this topological location, the holiday becomes inaccessible to many citizens and thus separated from the everyday, due to the cost and time to get there. Although the introduction of a new tram line (8Dh a ride) in 2012 improved the situation for selected parts of the city, there are too discriminatory measures at the scale of the boulevard itself.

2.) SCALE OF THE BOULEVARD

By doing a reading of the boulevard, inspired by methods designed by Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard in 'A View from the Road', the conclusion arose that the strip could be roughly divided in four sections or characters, each performing differently. The one that stands out from the others is la Corniche itself, where beach clubs structurally close off the boulevard from the ocean. Although it has been made for pedestrians and slow traffic, through the multiplicity of advertisement signs, it becomes clear that one can only enjoy the beach if one pays. In comparison, the other sections of boulevards are poorly materialized and are mainly made for the car, thus making the possession of a car again an excluding instrument. Therefore, also at the scale of the boulevard the relation between the everyday and the holiday has become exclusive and segregated. For us, this poses for a strange

dichotomy, where the newly introduced tram line might result in an increased demand for open leisure space, the opposite is happening; an increased enclosure and separation of holiday spaces along the coast. This lead us to questioning how the club spaces operate, which architectural strategies and tactics are used to exploit their privileged position?

3.) SCALE OF THE CLUB

The research investigates twelve clubs along the boulevard through applied and edited methods of both the great works; 'the Concise Townscape' and 'Learning from Las Vegas'. In the study of these clubs, focus was put both on the perception of these clubs and the conception of them. Recurring patterns were found in all these clubs; 1. each had a space of attraction, communicating with the boulevard, 2. a space of separation, isolating from the boulevard and 3. a space of transaction, the transition between boulevard and interior where one needs to (trans)act. Although the intentions of these spaces are always the same, the architectural configuration can be varied. Together the three kinds of spaces mediate between the exterior and the interior of the club. Constructing desire from the everyday of the boulevard to the holiday in the club.

Through this research we figured out that something valuable, such as a celebration of the holiday at the ocean, a natural common resource, was locked for many citizens. Although firstly introduced by French colonists in 1912, creating a new relationship with the ocean, it is now completely privatized. Locked away with very effective mechanisms at different scales. In terms of transferability of the multi-method research methodology, we believe that it could also be applied on how other valuable common resources are (un) intentionally locked, widening the possibilities of such a research methodology.

The collaboration in-between the three of us was very fluent and enjoyable, because we all had our own strengths and approaches to the research, complementing each other. Although sometimes disagreeing in discussions, the multi-method approach towards the research subject derived from it, proved to offer a fruitful basis for further development. After P1, Joris and I decided to join forces, to develop a theoretical framework of ideas for the next phase. We chose to do so, because we were very much interested in similar motives and key themes.

TOWARDS SANCTUARIES OF PLAY

introducing the 'holy' day in casablanca

Although we then understood how these clubs created this exclusivity, for us the question of why emerged. Why would one go to a club? The answer lied in what the clubs offered, an elevated experience of reality, offering something extraordinary, paradisaical. Something to be desired, something 'other', outside of the everyday. In that sense, the boulevard of la Corniche could be described as such, being a space for the holiday outside of the everyday of Casablanca.

SPACE OF PLAY

Through an inquiry in appropriate theoretical literature, we understood that the idea of holiday had deeper roots, starting in texts of antiquity, wherein hiéromènia (holy day) is a holy festive period when the everyday is suspended. A period where the main activity is not work, labor or action as described in Arendt's 'Human Condition', which would only occur in the everyday. Instead, Dehaene and De Cauter argue that the activity of play is prominent in the holiday, being non-economical and non-political. Spatially, the holiday occurs thus in the space of play.

When reading about play, we learned that both Aldo van Eyck and Constant Nieuwenhuys were both involved with this concept. Eyck intended to evoke play with his playful compositions in urban playgrounds in Amsterdam, where his structures were never revealing a prescribed function or use. Allowing for a certain free form of play. Nieuwenhuys saw his 'New Babylon' as a landscape of exploration, freed from the necessities of the everyday. Herein one would cross borders, never knowing what to expect in the new spaces. Introducing risk in play, a liminality in space, wherein the other is unexpected.

HETEROTOPIA AND SANCTUARY

It could then be pointed out that both Huizinga's 'Homo Ludens' (playing man) and the concept of Heterotopia, introduced by Foucault could be considered as relatable, as they turn out to exist on the same principles. The concept of heterotopia can be divided in roughly two categories, both suspending the everyday; the sanctuary and the camp. Whereas the sanctuary suspends it voluntarily and temporarily, the camp suspends it forcefully and permanently. We started to understand that the figure of the sanctuary could help us in creating a suspension from Casablanca's

obtrusive everyday, since it offers not only a temporary suspension of the everyday, like the holiday, but it also spatially suspends it. Establishing an architectural form for the 'holy' day.

When speaking of sanctuary, the question arose on how to create sacred space. What elements make something sacred. Through readings on sacred buildings and hands on experimentation, we learned that sacred space is not always linked to religion. Strategies to create an otherworldly experience, using light, acoustics, materials and proportion can all be employed. Sacredness is not something that can be defined, but only evoked as experience in someone. The notion of otherworldliness through architectural effects was one of the most important lesson in reading about sacredness.

The accumulation of this theoretical reading together with the fieldwork helped in formulating the thesis research question; 'how can the figure of the club be transformed into a more inclusive form, creating a sanctuary of play for the 'commons'? To offer an alternative to the exclusive figure of the club and la Corniche.

The development of the idea of sanctuaries of play and its theoretical framework around it, allowed us to formulate a clearer intervention strategy in the next phase. Although our collaboration was healthy, we found that we differed in design approach and aesthetic. For this reason, we decided to keep our constructive discussions about the theoretical framework, but to continue the design process individually. This in order to develop our own design methods and position, while still learning from each other during the process. Finally, I personally found it intriguing how certain ideas derived from the site were similar to the ideas studied in literature. Making the study of theoretical literature part of the entire process.

TACTICS FOR INTERVENTION

exploiting casablanca's collective memory of 'holiday'

Since Casablanca's current space of play, La Corniche, is such a privileged, exclusive site, almost a fortress of play, the project instead intends to infiltrate the everyday of Casablanca, creating moments of holiday in the city; sanctuaries of play. Through a series of trial and error attempts, we started to understand what these sanctuaries of play should be and we defined them as; 'distinctly other than its surroundings (in proportion, nature and position), providing a holy (day) space protected from the everyday, while still relating to it, through a porous border. We understood these as spatial suspensions of Casablanca's obtrusive everyday, offering citizens to escape and enjoy a pleasant space and time.

SITUATING THE INTERVENTION

These sanctuaries are then carefully and strategically positioned on the newly introduced tram line tram stops, since these will be part of many daily routines. Intervening in these conditions thus allows to create a moment of holiday for all the passengers and citizens that use them. Furthermore, just like the mosque, the market, the hammam, the tram stops have the potential to become important primary elements, derived from Aldo Rossi, in the city (architecture of the city). Thus operating as a 'common' resource to the neighborhood, moreover, since it always is situated in the in-between, it is a resource to multiple neighborhoods.

Three sites are selected for this graduation project, as proof of concept. It must be noted however, that the project must be understood as a set of architectural rules and ideas, which can generate an appropriate intervention on any other 'relatively similar' site adjacent to a tram station. Becoming a project that is transferable to others. For this reason, the three testing sites are selected to be in very different morphological and infrastructural contexts to reveal the flexibility of the scheme.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY

With the intention in mind of making a sanctuary of play, it becomes important to think on how to evoke this idea of play. Rather than prescribing play such as is done in la Corniche, where the playing activity is fixed, I intend to divide the site spatially in different conditions. Therefore, inviting people to find their own way to enjoy it. To evoke play however, and therewith the

idea of holiday, the intervention aims to exploit the collective memory of the citizens of Casablanca. The project utilizes the common collective memory of a day out, which most of the times is done at Casablanca's coast. Be it at the rocky cliffs, at the beach or at the boulevard of la Corniche. Therefore, the intervention introduces abstracted elements of Casablanca's coast in architectural form. I learned that a similar translation of an atmosphere was done by Luis Barragan, wherein he translates the atmosphere of Mediterraneanism of his early work into a more abstracted interpretation. Introducing subtle architectural measures to generate a rich sensation of space.

The initial beginning of this phase, after the summer holidays, was quite challenging for me personally. The design attempts till then at the tram stops had always resulted in a sort of UFO-like structures, landed in Casablanca. I was thinking too much in a building, too large, trying to put everything I had learned in Delft in one building. Furthermore, I was struggling with the attempt of designing without function. I realized that I was very much stuck in a rationalist way of thinking. An attitude which does not relate well to a project that revolves around the holiday and play. This attitude has halted me for quite a bit. Through Jorge's tutoring and reflection on expectations of an architectural object I learned to see that great beauty and satisfaction can be obtained from a minimal intervention. I believe this has been one of the most formative moments in the entire graduation for me personally. It has made me look differently to architecture as a profession.

THREE INSTANCES OF BEACH

materializing the architectural oasis

Through a series of testing to comply to the rule of isolating the sites from the everyday, while still relating to it, the intervention started to consist out of two elements; a pliant surface and a series of five autonomous architectures. Together the two create different zonings within in the site, creating a gradation between the everyday of Casablanca and the interior holiday quality of the sanctuary. This was done by obscuring the view with both folding the surface and strategically positioning the architectures. The challenge herein lied in defining these gradations in atmosphere subtly, with the intention in mind of using the least architectural elements to create an idea of sanctuary. Thus rather than filling this site up with architectural material (solids), like the rest of Casablanca does due to its problem of capacity, the project aims to be providing urban voids. And although it can perhaps be easier for a developer to sell an architectural solid, I believe that these voids are essential to keep a city livable. Casablanca especially.

In order to bring back the atmosphere of Casablanca's coast into these new voids in the city, I use three tools all based around the central theme of water; 1.) using light, shadow and reflections 2.) using acoustics of water 3.) using materiality.

1.) LIGHT, SHADOWS AND REFLECTIONS

The intention is to create a pleasant space to escape the everyday. Casablanca's sun is very intense, thus providing enough shade and a cool condition is of great importance. At the other side, I use light and its reflections on the water to evoke memories and awareness of the water, catching the reflections on various surfaces. These surfaces can be treated in different manners, creating a variation of reflections and shadows on rougher or smoother finishings.

During nighttime, artificial lighting will take over the role of the sun, creating a different lighting condition and thereby creating a different sanctuary. The artificial lights will be incorporated in the pliant surface, highlighting the main fountains and creating new surface reflections from below. Keeping the main routes and gathering hubs pleasantly lit, while also allowing for darker zones to isolate oneself from the rest.

2.) ACOUSTICS OF WATER

Although the surrounding noises of traffic will be largely blocked by architectural interventions at the perimeter of the site, a sound absorbing floor and adjacent acoustic blind walls, there will always remain traces of noises of the everyday. By making fountains drop water with force a new sound is introduced, more calming, but also masking these remaining noises. A strong fountain is a focused high intensity sound producer, by placing it at the interior it makes a gradation in intensity of the experience of the sanctuary. From exterior to interior.

3.) MATERIALITY

In materiality lies the opportunity to directly mimic the coast, evoking memories. However, Casablanca's coast is everything but a perfect tropical paradise. Its beaches being of dark sand in-between dark rocky cliffs. Something the beach club owners realized, importing white sand to their own private beaches. I realized in order to make interventions which are distinctly other from their surroundings, a dark surface would not suffice. Instead I decided to use the same strategy as the clubs, introducing bright white surfaces in the city, introducing a certain artificiality to the pliant surface. The interventions; white gardens, aspire to offer an paradisical experience, referring to the Arabic meaning of garden (paradise on earth). The white materials are extracted from France, where Casablanca is now extruding French resources in contrast to colonial times. In order to not create a blinding white surface, red mortar is introduced between the tiles, referring to the red sand of Morocco, but also relating to many Moorish sacred architecture.

In la Corniche, the beach clubs form artificial architectures on a from origin natural landscape. This project intends to invert reality when one enters, the surface being artificial and therefore the architectural elements which are inserted referring to nature. Casablanca's natural coast is translated literally in the architectural elements. Sand of the beach is used in a concrete mixture, together with aggregates from the cliffs, creating the roof. Furthermore, the sand is used to make glass panels, together laminated in beams and columns for the colonnade. In the circular amphitheater/stage, an outer ring is made of rammed concrete/sand mixture, while the interior

is filled with loose seashell mixture. Finally, the two main walls will represent the cobalt blue color of the sky, forming a vividly colored element. All architectural elements hold great mass, appropriate for the climate concept described further down. Lastly, this massiveness of materials allows for a different treatment of the material at different sides.

CATALOG OF ELEMENTS

The architectural elements inserted in the sites are in a sense standardized in a catalog of options, every option with its own intention. The amphitheater/stage is always positioned so that it overlooks the entire sanctuary, allowing for observing or performing the spectacle of play. The massive walls are always positioned at the periphery of the site, becoming gateways to the sanctuary. In their bright cobalt colors communicating the presence of the sanctuary. Furthermore, when perforated, they create strong framing views over the sanctuary. The colonnade is used as both a filtering device as a way to frame the water. Finally, the roof creates the most sheltered space, being at the heart of the sanctuary.

TACTICS OF THE OASIS

Besides using the water to introduce a new acoustic and light condition, it is also used to create a truly cool space. The main fountain, due to its force will create mists over the water, which is blown with the northern wind over the rest of the site. High pressure fog installations are embedded in some determined surfaces. Lastly, the architectural elements are cooled from the core with water from the water buffer underground.

Water is a scarce product in Casablanca, perhaps later also a privileged commodity, something to be dealt with carefully. The interventions are organized in such a way that they can operate independently, only depending on precipitation and condensation during the year. Learning from the oasis in the desert, strategies are employed to conserve as much water as possible while deploying water efficient cooling techniques. The water is conserved in an underground buffer, infiltrating the soil, like in the desert. Energy which is used to operate the fountains and lighting is gathered by PV-panels on the roof element. Kinetic energy from falling water is used to reduce power consumption.

When starting to develop the concrete architectural intervention, an entire set of separate ideas were present, forming a challenging proposition. How to communicate and integrate all these ideas on the three selected sites was the most challenging part of this phase. I believe that working on all these things at the same time, between scales, between design and research, between image and technology, between sites etc. is what helped me most. It feels truly satisfying to see how each idea becomes carefully positioned within the intervention. Different layers are integrated; holiday/everyday, artificial/nature, oasis/desert, colonial past, play, escape, sanctuary. Reflecting on the research question posed before: 'how can the figure of the club be transformed into a more inclusive form, creating a sanctuary of play for the 'commons'?', I believe a lot of this quite large question is touched upon. The walls of the figure of the club, an elevated, inverted experience of reality, are made porous and accessible. While still making it a distinctly other, protected space for play. Positioning the interventions at tram stops made it accessible for the many, becoming part of many daily routines. All together, becoming a new typology of commons in the city of Casablanca.

LOOKING BACKWARD

a final reflection

A FORMATIVE PROCESS

One of the aspects I appreciate the most during this process is how the project can be read as a continuity, where the next chapter links directly and fluently to the previous. A line of thoughts continuing from the present condition in Casablanca, translated in a set of abstracted theoretical ideas, which are then transformed in an architectural strategy of rules and ideas, resulting in an elaboration of three present, concrete architectural interventions. While not claiming this project has been a perfect circle throughout, it now feels as a flowing process. Therefore, I never see the project as a finished, answering figure for a particular urban condition. Instead, I learned the architectural project should be considered as a particular set of coherent ideas which, when confronted with a site, can generate an architectural intervention. A set of ideas which can be developed even beyond the interventions proposed here.

Within this process I cannot stress enough on how important it was for me to use different approaches and methods to the subject. When stuck with one approach, introducing a new method helped freeing up further development. The most memorable ones were the combination of methods of Lynch, Venturi and Cullen in reading la Corniche, or perhaps the application of theoretical ideas from De Caeter and Dehaene on the urban condition of Casablanca.

Furthermore, I can now see how this project has widened my ideas of what can be architecture and what architecture can be. I cannot stop but notice that in everyday life I started to enjoy smaller details in architecture, in a sense creating my own moments of holiday. I believe this is extremely helpful in enjoying the making of architecture yourself, where the scale or prestige of a project is not so important anymore as first.

Although architecture is often associated with creating walls, being one of its core activities. This project searches for new ways to enclose and protect spaces while still remaining 'inclusive'. Not with the intention to be for everyone, but at least open to anyone. Creating pleasant spaces as valuable common resources. I believe it is the architects task to guarantee a certain level of voids in an ever densifying city as Casablanca.

'architecture is an extremely slow profession ... our task is to slow down things.'

- Kersten Geers