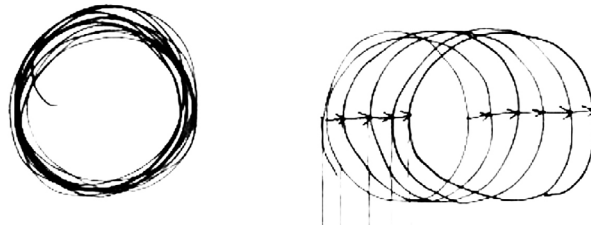


NARRATION

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Kasia Piekarczyk



ARCHITECTURE AND WAR ABOLITION

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Kasia Piekarczyk

4513290

Tutors:

Tom Avermaete | Research

Armina Pilav | Design

Jan van de Voort | Building Technology

Editing

Kasia Piekarczyk

Chair Explore Lab

Robert Nottrott

Department of Architecture

Delft University of Technology

2017

ARCHITECTURE AND WAR ABOLITION

*ARCHITECTURE AS A MEDIUM: HOW TO PRESENT AND REPRESENT THE
CONCEPT OF ABOLITION OF WAR?*

Architecture and War Abolition
Master Thesis: Position Paper | Explore Lab



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| Abstract

The concept of war abolition introduced by Krzysztof Wodiczko has attracted the attention of different scholars, and generated various reactions. Despite the affirmation of anthropologists, such as Margaret Mead and Douglas P. Fry, the project has not met with widespread acclaim from other areas, and not for lack of discussion. There are many voices that recognise the essence of the subject, however a substantial response beyond experimenting on paper has yet to emerge. This paper re-examines the original assumptions of the concept of war abolition through the analysis of its reception and raises the subject of architecture in relation to war abolition.

Wodiczko supports his work with the theories that indicate the potential to abolish war within the human psyche. The analysis of the critical voices allows to expose the fundamental ambiguities regarding this approach, as well as to formulate new methodology for application. This study considers the issue of representation noted by the artist, and links it with the notions of semantics and semiotics, thus relevant to the interpretation of war abolition.

This document, among others, includes the voice of British academic Mary Kaldor in defining the modern warfare. The investigation displays the untapped potential of war abolition, which it is presented as a macro-scale solution while playing down the complicated nature of modern warfare. Wodiczko directs his appeal to state leaders, while expecting changes in the value systems of the individual. Concept revision based on that critique follows the introduction of micro-shifts idea by sociologist Marek Krajewski.

In the final part, referring to Marshall McLuhan and his understanding of the medium, this paper discusses the potential of architecture to become a platform for dissemination of war abolition concept and its application in Sarajevo.

Architecture and War Abolition | Architecture as a Medium

How to present and represent the concept of abolition of war?

| *The culture of war*

It is difficult to imagine the world free of warfare. The phenomenon of wars is an integral part of human history to such an extent that it rarely comes to mind to question their inevitability in conflict resolution. However, assuming that the fate of people is intertwined with wars, all the attempts to subvert this view present an opportunity to understand the mechanisms and the medium of warfare, as well as our inestimable role in it.

As a basis for such a subversion I introduce the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko, Polish audio-visual artist based in the USA. In 2011 Wodiczko issued the project *Abolition of war*. The proposal broadly determines the intentions of his artistic program as an effort toward ending wars. In doing so, he highlights an important issue which is the starting point for all the following work and thoughts.

War has generated a distinctive culture. Processes of preparing for, waging, and commemorating war are seen as “essential elements of history, rooted in psychology.” The Culture of War makes men and women face death willingly, even enthusiastically.¹

The artist makes a diagnosis that modern culture is a *culture of war* that has long been operating with heavily militarised aesthetic. This is visible in appearance of monuments and war artefacts which legitimise the pro-war discourse of state authorities. Considering that the government sanctions social reactions to conflicts precisely through the medium of culture — as evidenced by Wodiczko — any efforts to abolish war must go hand in hand with the deconstruction of and changes in dominant ways of representation.²

An alternative stance to the current culture of war should be one that actively contributes to the abolition of war, by promoting and working toward the active attitude in maintaining peace, or *unwar*.

The strategy of the artist is biphasic. Wodiczko proposes deconstructing ideological undertones contained in the monuments through immersing them in a series of projections recording narrations by the war victims. The artist thus introduces new voices into a public debate using the prestige of the public space they occupy. The second stage of the project is to create a network of installations fixed in the most emblematic spaces to continually affect human consciousness.

Here lies the anchor point for architecture: to be considered a platform for dissemination of the concept of war abolition. Such designed confrontation could inspire other members of society to a more critical reflection on the nature of war and the fate of the people involved in it, and at the same time those giving testimony would acquire the tools they need to create their own cultural representation and full-fledged participation in the public debate.

The concept of war abolition is supported by the theories of anthropologists Margaret Mead and Douglas P. Fry. They both offer a theoretical framework in which the project can be realised from the point of view of psychology and social anthropology. However, I examine the accuracy of the Wodiczko's postulates and feasibility of the project in view of sociology and design. The examination begins with a critical analysis of the concept reception.

¹ Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Obalenie Wojen*, trans. P. Łopatka, Mocak, Kraków, 2012

² *Ibidem*

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| Ambiguities of war abolition

Despite the affirmation of anthropologists, the concept of war abolition has not met with widespread acclaim from other areas. Although there are many voices that recognise the essence of the subject, no substantial response has yet emerged beyond the theoretical discourse. To analyse this reception I will first identify the obstacles to the success of war abolition.

As previously mentioned, the fundamental difficulty when approaching the concept of war abolition is the common assumption that it is simply impossible. This opinion seems to be second to none, regardless of the presence of counter argumentation. It is due to the widespread belief in the animal instincts rooted in men which we ascribe, among others, to Thomas Hobbes and Sigmund Freud. We tend to consider the repeatable and vicious cycle of wars as an inevitable evil rooted in our humanity.

Another, and no less important, obstacle is that there seems to be no unified understanding of what *abolition of war* really means.

Warfare exists if the conflict is organised, and socially sanctioned and the killing is not regarded as murder. Warfare will be regarded as a cultural invention consequent upon group identification, the existence of shared taboos against intra-group killing [...] and the equally culturally defined social sanctioning of killing members of the opposing group.

If people have, as part of their cultural repertoire of behaviour, a set of articulated rules, which distinguish intra-group killing from organised extra-group killing, they will be said to have the institution of warfare, whether it occurs frequently or infrequently in practice.³

Margaret Mead points out the implantation of war in societies by means of cultural invention. This suggests that the common perception of war is a result of certain circumstances, and therefore subject to change. If we individually realise that war is rooted in culture as opposed to human nature, we should be able to recognise and influence its mechanisms, and consequently invent alternatives to it.

Here lies the source of the fundamental confusion. Wodiczko supports his work with theories that stress the human capacity to abolish war within their psyche. While this is an important point to make, it does not offer any wide-ranging strategies of implementation. On the one hand, the artist focuses on the individual, on the other he calls for action in a very broad scope, thus making it unclear what the scale of intended actions should be.

Another example of this type of turmoil is contained in Fry's argumentation. Apart from the angle already discussed, that war is not inherent to human beings, Fry argues that the determinant of building world peace is to find a common interest that would be an indisputable priority for everybody involved. Motivation for such compromise would be, for example, the fear of "the hecatomb of the human species" resulting from environmental crisis or a potential nuclear war. Common aims would then have to be reinforced by rituals and cultural narrations developed from scratch by members of the alliance.

All this is based on the belief that people are able to reach agreement and cooperation on a scale allowing for such a huge undertaking.

Even if it were possible, it is important to realise that these assumptions seamlessly bypass the facts that are inconvenient to Fry's theory. Fry, and with him Wodiczko, omits asking questions about whether a common interest can actually overcome cultural differences and conflicts on the

³ Margaret Mead, *Alternatives to War in The World Ahead: An Anthropologist Anticipates the Future*, Berghahn, New York, 2005

economical level. He also avoids the uncomfortable topic of peace that is built at the expense of war in other regions.

Critical voices outside of Wodiczko's canon reaffirm my concern and point toward other problems with interpretation and application of the concept of war abolition.

| *Critical voices*

To define modern warfare, I refer to the writings of British academic Mary Kaldor, who advanced the term “new wars” to characterise warfare in the post-Cold War era. She defines them as armed conflicts motivated by economic and identity issues, mainly carried out using method of guerrilla warfare by a complex web of political and private actors only rarely associated with specific countries⁴.

The project of Wodiczko stresses the relationship between national identity of an individual or group and the war and, in this context, has little to none chance of success.

When it comes to social obstacles, Małgorzata Jacyno offers a significant voice in the discussion. Jacyno is a sociologist interested in the therapeutic aspects of culture. To assume the change of supra-ethical resolutions due to individuals who have taken responsibility for their own aggression is to have fairly utopic expectations — Jacyno argues — but is not yet reason to ignore such a notion entirely. It indicates a manifestation of what she defines as “therapeuticism of culture”⁵, namely transferring the responsibility on an individual for the independent from him/her circumstances.

Wodiczko supposes that the success of war abolition depends on the willingness of people to establish groups with common purpose. However, based on the argumentation of Jacyno, and in the context of war abolition, the organisation of individuals into interest groups seems to be unnecessary, therefore it doesn't provoke any policy actions.

Nevertheless, what would happen if one disagrees with Jacyno and considers the political potential of the concept of war abolition? In an interview with Anna Wandzel, Adam Ostolski, sociologist specialising in the field of contemporary collective memory, raises an interesting point of implementing the concept by means of policy of the state institution⁶. Such a venture would have to be preceded by the political process and it would then have political consequences. However, Ostolski considers, paradoxically it would not find substantial support from any of parties on the contemporary political scene. The sociologist indicates two reasons that contribute to this setback, namely that the ideas of the artist are not suitable for an effective electoral postulate and, in its present shape, the concept of war abolition has little in common with the real face of modern warfare.

Here lies the greatest ambiguity and the untapped potential of the concept of abolition of war: it is presented as a macro-scale solution while playing down the complicated nature of modern warfare. Wodiczko directs his appeal to state leaders, while expecting changes in the value systems of the individual.

The radical tone of these statements raises a question: Does the initiative of *Abolition of wars* offer space to work with people whose views Wodiczko wants to transform? The tendency to lessen particular issues along with criticism seems to be undermining such an agreement.

⁴ Mary Kaldor, “In Defence of New Wars”, *International Stability Journal of Security & Development* (2013)

⁵ Małgorzata Jacyno, *Kultura indywidualizmu*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa, 2007

⁶ Anna Wandzel, “Likwidacja kultury wojny?”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 6, Warszawa, 2014

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| *Serendipity of mistranslation*

Based on the above analysis of the literature, on the one hand it seems utopian to abolish wars merely within the human psyche, and on the other the concept does not appear to be suitable for an effective policy. This dissonance causes a gap between theory and practice, thus urging for the revision. How should the *abolition of war* be presented in order to extract its potential and enable it to succeed in practice?

My proposal relates to two aspects in particular. First is the reflection on the possible new ways of understanding and interpreting abolition of war. The second facet regards a change of scale: despite the macro-scale ambitions of the project, can it be implemented through micro-scale means?

I consider the vagueness of this concept to be partially contained in the nuances of its semantic layers.

In the Polish edition of *Abolition of war*, the original verb used in place of “to abolish” is “obalać” which I choose as an indicator of how the concept should be revised. “Obalać” means “to debunk” in the sense of debunking a myth. Depending on the context, this versatile verb also translates to “dispel”, “topple” or “uncover”.

Due to all these meanings, I consider the potential of war abolition to be contained in the *process of debunking*: dispelling the doubts, toppling the idea and uncovering its mechanisms.

The mistranslation becomes a precise research strategy for each semantic layer.

Such methodology allows for a separate reasoning on the semantic and semiotic level, as well as on the level of policy.

Words alter, words add, words subtract ⁷.

When considering the issues related to war and architecture it is particularly important to pay attention to the use of language. It is a medium that is necessary to describe the concept of war abolition, therefore it is responsible for how war abolition is presented. However, words can be deceptive.

Emotionally loaded vocabulary is often present in the literature regarding this subject. Examples supporting this statement can be found in the works of Italian architectural theorist and critic Teresa Stoppani.⁸ She is a professor, Head of Architecture and PhD director at Leeds Beckett University in the UK. In her articles, Stoppani coined many intricate phrases regarding architecture and warfare. When referring to destruction she uses expressions like *designed destructive event*, *work of disaster* or *architecture of disaster*.

I consider such inflated vocabulary to carry the risk to of cloaking trivial ideas, while obscuring the essence of meaning. The accuracy of language is relevant especially due to its connection with representation. Pompous vocabulary and representations may result in the fascination with aesthetics of war and condition the reaction to it. Grandiose language gets translated into projects and vice versa, therefore it is a liability that should be carefully crafted. Interestingly, Teresa Stoppani herself draws attention to the issues of portrayal.

Wood's project embraces and inhabits the disaster as one of its tools, in translation of its effects. Architecture here becomes the formal language for the concretion of the disaster, thus reducing any tension and stifling any possibility of change. Woods project "writes" the disaster too literally, without constructing any distance from it. This is an architecture that solidifies the explosions, constructs the crater, fills in the gap using as mould the formal effects produced by the act of war ⁹.

⁷ Susan Sontag, “Regarding the Torture of Others”, *New York Times Magazine*, 2004

⁸ Teresa Stoppani, “The Architecture of Disaster”, *SAGE Journals: Space and Culture* 15, 2012

⁹ Ibidem

It is hard to disagree with that opinion. Lebbeus Woods operates with seductive representation that is far more distinctive than the proclaimed authorless process for dynamic design, thus making it an example of dubious fascination with the aesthetics of war. Issues related to aesthetics and regimes of representation refer directly to the culture of war — as introduced by Wodiczko — and must be problematised. In order to remain unbiased, it is important to take this into account when approaching the concept of war abolition.

Contrary to popular opinion, architectural manifesto is not the best suited answer in relation to war topics. Instead of proposing solutions, one must first devote himself/herself to understanding and asking the right questions.

| *Micro-shifts*

The issues of semantics, semiotics and their influence on representation should be taken into account at every stage of the revision of the concept of war abolition. The next matter is the question of policy, which relates back to scale.

Due to the great ambitions and macro-directives emerging from the idea, the next step is to search for the most effective method of application.

However, because the project is aimed at spreading awareness and has so-called “soft” objectives which cannot be quantified, there is a need for deeper reflection on what will truly be effective in this context. Marek Krajewski, a sociologist who runs the Laboratory of Visual Sociology, offers a relevant angle on this subject. In his works he considers the excess of justifications that accompany public art. When it comes to impact assessment, there is a discrepancy — as discussed by Krajewski — between the general expectations and the goals of public art. He raises the point that the effectiveness of public art is not measurable in simple terms, and therefore it is often underestimated.

The excess of justifications does not allow to notice and appreciate real effects that an artistic action carries with it: micro-shifts in individual systems of values, fixing certain images or experiences in the memory of their viewer which can activate some day and impact his/her action, creating a pretext — even short-lasting — for being together, minimal but experienceable, expanding the scope of choices we can face, etc.¹⁰

That the method of micro-shifts is more effective than corporate measures in relation to art is an argument well-reasoned. The same is applicable to architecture and the concept of war abolition. The intangible impact of art is immeasurable, and so is the impact of architecture. Considering that macro-scale changes carry less potential when carried out through macro-measures, they should instead be implemented by means of micro-shift. The sum of numerous small shifts is much more abundant than one fragmented policy.

This nuance is adequate for all social projects of art or architecture which aim to change human attitudes. Moreover, the micro-shifts approach offers the possibility of releasing the concept of war abolition from the claws of the state, instead putting it into the hands of non-governmental institutions. Such bottom-up rather than top-down education would condition the cultural saturation of the project.

Having already defined the methodology, the last thing to ask before applying the revised concept is about the timing. *When* should wars be abolished?

¹⁰ Marek Krajewski, “Public Art: From Densifying the Discussion to Densifying Individuals”, *Collaboratorium. On participatory Social Change*, ed. Frąckowiak, M, Olszewski, L, Rosińska M, Fundacja SPOT, Poznań, 2012

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The analysis of semantic layers points to the process of demystification, uncovering and examination of war mechanisms as a means of discarding it. Such studies require careful investigation, which can only be granted with access to sufficient unbiased data. Thus, distance in time is necessary to gain information and perspective on a catastrophe. The concept of war abolition is realised through the process of reaching cultural and social capacity, and its success depends on the scope of human resilience to war. For this reason, the best moment to take action is in times of peace.

Finally, I refer to the themes raised by Wodiczko which I consider substantial and worth-preserving. The artist puts a justifiable emphasis on the issues of representation and ideological undertones carried by war monuments. Wodiczko also recognises the prestige of the public space and its potential to become the platform for introducing new voices to public debate. These notions are necessary to maintain and expand on.

| *Architecture as a medium*

My previous considerations and the analysis of the selected literature led me to formulate a new framework for the concept of war abolition. The revision consists of two main aspects: distinguishing the semantic layers and addressing them in a micro-shifts strategy. This methodology allows me to test the assumptions and application of the concept in the field of architecture and, thus, focus on the issue of representation.

Due to the fact that the project's success depends on the cultural and social capacity and resilience of the people involved, it is vital to address the aspects related precisely to them — like collective memory — and only then refer to architecture.

Since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle ... if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles.¹¹

The architectural collective memory is literally carved or erected in stone. The repertoire of traditional architectural buildings that have to do with memory is very broad. It includes monuments, museums, memorials, archives, libraries, and others. Together they constitute the institutes of knowledge, with function to remain guardians of particular type of memory, to record history, to be *truth-tellers*. With the loss the records of history we fear the loss of identity. For precisely that reason, these buildings are often primary targets during the outbreak of war, and it is that loss we mourn the most.

If the collective memory is under siege in the twenty first century, what then does the architectural collective memory actually signify?¹²

An attack on these buildings is an attack on memory itself. Through its destruction, architecture is used as a medium to establish terror. Based on the revised concept of war abolition I examine the potential of architecture as a medium to dismantle war. It will be considered as a platform for transformation.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, "Film and Popular Memory", in *Foucault Live*, Manchester University Press, 2003

¹² Christine Boyer, "Collective Memory Under Siege: The Case of 'Heritage Terrorism'", in *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory*, SAGE, 2008

*If one can contribute by creating the plane, which others can use to transmit their ideas, share experiences and speak about what is unspeakable, it should be considered an obligation to do so.*¹³

In such attempt, I refer to the definition of medium, as well as to the connotative aspects of architecture. Marshall McLuhan determines that *medium is socially the message*¹⁴. It means that in an operational and practical sense it is the medium that *shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action*¹⁵. Any medium affects people in a direct way, not just through its content. Moreover — as demonstrated by McLuhan — the content of any medium is another medium.

In this regard one can analyse architecture's potential as a medium, especially one that is rooted in culture and has connotative meaning to the people affected by it. Since that connotation is related precisely to the forms of buildings, in this context the medium is directly linked to its representation.

That is why, to ensure the success of the concept of war abolition, it needs to be linked to the culturally relevant buildings that enhance memory and identity.

According to this key notion, I chose the building of the Historical Museum of Bosnia i Herzegovina for my intervention in Sarajevo.

| *War abolition in context of Sarajevo*

The museum was originally founded in 1945 as the Museum of National Liberation, to later change its name and location a couple of times, before moving to its current location in 1963¹⁶. After the war, in 2012, the building was given the status of a national monument remaining active. Nonetheless, the museum is neglected and ignored. It exists in very poor physical condition, which is a result of the lack of political decisiveness regarding maintenance of the heritage of modernist architecture. This is an important issue, as it applies to many modernist legacy buildings in ex-Yugoslavia.

This museum is not only an important landmark in the city and a showcase of Yugoslavian design, it also holds a crucial location in the city and a significance for its inhabitants. The museum sits meters away from where the siege line used to be, in the place where the enemy penetrated the city deepest, entering Marijn Dvor along the riverfront.

To propose an intervention at the museum offers a challenge to address the momentous history of the site. It also allows to take advantage of the positive features of the building to ensure the success of the project, such as its connotative meaning in the minds of residents, cultural relevance, and meaningful location.

The museum's collection and archive are of significance, and they are a key element for its transformation. At present, the museum has two permanent exhibitions — *Siege of Sarajevo* and *Bosnia and Herzegovina for centuries* — which due to financial shortages are not subject to curatorial activity. Exhibitions are organised around photographs and objects of everyday use collected after the siege.

These items contain the stories of their owners and the heavy fate they had to endure during the war. As such, they are proof of the collective resistance and resilience of Sarajevans. The objects in the

¹³ "CAFKA Big Ideas in Art and Culture: Krzysztof Wodiczko", last modified December 31, 2013, <http://www.cafka.org/cafka-tv/big-ideas-art-and-culture-krzysztof-wodiczko>

¹⁴ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1964

¹⁵ Ibidem

¹⁶ "Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina", last modified June 3, 2014, <http://architectuul.com/architecture/historical-museum-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina>

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museum's collection are a medium that needs to be enhanced, for the message is already present, yet it lacks proper representation.

| *Medium is the message*

How can we extract the essence from these objects and capitalise on it? Following the statement “medium is the message,” adding another layer to uncover the narrative is the right thing to do. This layer is the medium of film and projection.

Any movie offers a subjective point of view, and because it is so explicit it can be used to create a contrast and tension with the objects in the museum. To present several points of view at the same time is to raise questions without providing the answers.

The film would be used for screening coverage from the times of siege in Sarajevo, presenting various aspects of the barricade and juxtaposing it with compatible materials from other wars of different times from all over the world. In combination with the physical objects, each man or woman alone can decide what he or she deems to be true.

The quality of the concept of war abolition is contained in a dissonance that hides many paths — for each their own narrative. Therefore there is strength in working with commonalities and discrepancies.

For the “message” of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs. The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions.¹⁷

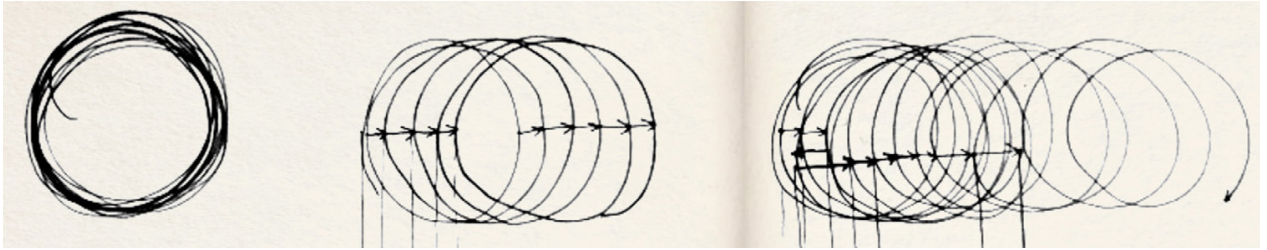
The Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina building remains a symbol of unceasing resistance of the Sarajevans. The silhouette of the museum holds a primary connotation to the siege line — its content: war artefacts; its message: defiance of the enemy. On a closer look, there is an archive in the museum which represents life under the siege — its content: photography, everyday objects; its message: collective and individual resilience through micro-practices of the people.

In the process of war abolition I capitalise upon the qualities contained in the architecture and its artefacts. Introducing the medium of film allows me to change the scale — extend the impact of the collection outside the local framework.

The assumptions of the revised concept of war abolition are implemented in the project on many levels. The methodology of the separate semantic layers is stressed within the film medium, as every clip presents an individual — and therefore unique — understanding of the war. At the same time, the visitor at the museum is presented with all possible interpretations, thus urged to form a personal opinion.

Subsequent singular changes in the value systems of museum guests constitute the strategy of micro-shifts and realise the potential of war abolition outside of government structures and macro-scaled policies.

¹⁷ Ibidem



| *Broader relevance*

Shifting the scale is a very important issue in the concept of war abolition. My proposal is based on the cultural matrix of Sarajevo in which the museum (an architectural medium) functions, as it is the basis for its content and message. However, the change of scale eliminates the time and space factors in human association, because it refers to the universal experience of war, allowing to engage a larger audience. Therefore, the concept of war abolition is likely to be tested elsewhere and with the use of different medium. Due to common connotations there is a possibility to heal war trauma in the process.

The topic of wars has not and will not disappear, that is why it is important to be aware of how wars evolve. In many respects it is possible to say that nowadays there is always an ongoing war that we are unaware of. Often it is based on an ideological conflict and very ambiguous to bystanders. Gone are the days in which no tanks on the streets meant no war. Modern warfare in particular cannot be abolished without understanding what it really is. Therefore, in the process of overthrowing wars, instead of writing manifestos, one must read between the lines.

Theoretical considerations are an important clue that can be addressed in the fields of politics, art, culture, sociology, psychology, and so on. The concept of war abolition can be tested in many ways which would generate experimentation and a feedback loop. One of the goals of this thesis is an invitation to further inquiry.

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Tutors

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Armina Pilav | Design

Jan van de Voort | Building Technology

Chair Explore Lab

Robert Nottrott

Department of Architecture

Delft University of Technology

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