Heterotopias of pause, Emblems of nature

A manifesto towards counter-brusselization and an architecture of onlooking

Research Plan

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(Somewhere in Japan, upon a hill at the edge of a city) : a short story about an abandoned theme park

In Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away (2001),* Chihiro and her parents encounter an abandoned theme park on the outskirts of the city as they are trying to find their way home. The entrance to the park is marked by a tunnel with strange allure. The tunnel is dark, and they cannot gauge where it may go, the thought of which is both terrifying and exciting at once. They decide, with great resistance from Chihiro, to nonetheless enter. Beyond the pitch black of the tunnel is an enormous field - boundless and extensive, and at the fringe of the field is a glimpse of the abandoned theme park, a seemingly uninteresting arrangement of derelict structures by day but a mystical bath house for spirits, by the onset of dusk. The field turns into a river, the dilapidated structures are now illuminated by numerous lamps and a train runs along the moss covered tracks to a place unknown. The *forgotten* theme park therefore, simultaneously narrates a story of a past life and invokes the phantasmagoria of an after/alter life.

(Delhi, India) A poem about a secret garden near my home

Two labyrinthian passages lead to a garden,
Paths less traveled,
Grasses less traversed.
Once a play zone, it is now forgotten.
Here is a list of all that is found :
Walls, on all four sides.
A long wall of stone with barbed wire
And three short walls of brick
A banyan tree,
An idol of Buddha,
A small well,
A hand pump,
Thickets of bougainvillea that engulf the barbed wire
Wrought iron gates of backyards - rusted.
A single lamppost at the entrance of one of the passages
Relics of flowers that once bloomed and swayed with the wind,
Short mango trees planted at the edges of the grass,
Steps that lead up to the well,
Silence
The occasional chirping of sparrows
The smell of a hearty meal
The sizzling of a pan from a distant backyard kitchen.
Nothing much, nothing important,
Just silence,

A break,
And me.

An invitation to imagine:

There is a derelict piece of land that is contested by humans. The derelict void in the city no longer waits to be colonized and put to use, but rather embraces its condition of stasis. In the burgeoning backdrop of urbanization, nature and the emergent landscape thus becomes exalted and sublime - a **heterotopic monument** *in its own right. The city's tapestry remains unwoven for a change. Buildings cannot rush in to fill the vaccuum. There are gaps, holes, pauses, halts, discontinuities. These are places of rest, counter sites of nothingness as opposed to the hyper-mediated continuity of the city.*

Thus, can derelict, post industrial plots of land such as La Friche Josephat become sites of counter-brusselisation and de-densification? Can they become breathers in the urban fabric? Can nature stay pristine? Can for once, architecture become a fortification for it, rather than the fortified? Can there be an architecture of onlooking, where the built is a mere fringe and border to this last green in town?

Theoretical discourse and argumentation:

The research themes come to fruition through 4 interconnected lenses and theoretical frameworks which i intend to develop and substantiate in greater depth:

1. Heterotopias of derelicts and abandons
2. Site of counter Brusselization
3. The urban static
4. Nature as emblematic - exalted and sublime
5. Urge for a new status quo - The manifesto

1. Heterotopias of derelicts and abandons

As Foucault elucidates, the city constitutes two kinds of spaces - spaces of banality, where regular life unfolds and spaces which are "other" or lay outside the realm of time-space regularity. These other spaces are Heterotopias[1]. They can be charted and mapped physically[2] as they are knitted in the urban tapestry of the city, yet, they appear as allegorical gaps in this tapestry - Holes, empties, voids and *terrain vagues*[3]. The city's fabric is continuous, ever-moving, dynamic - layer upon layer. Then there are these heterotopias as breaks in this continuity, where time holds a different meaning to one who ventures into them. These spaces become pauses and halts in the

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[1] Dehaene, M., & De Cauter, L. (Eds.). (2008). *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*. Taylor & Francis.

[2] Armstrong, P. J. (1996). *Critical urbanism: Heterotopia and the Neo-Traditional City*. Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture. https://www.acsa-arch.org/chapter/critical-urbanism-heterotopia-and-the-neo-traditional-city

[3] Mariani, M., & Barron, P. (Eds.). (2014). *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale*. Routledge.

regular functioning of urban life, and within them is a certain strangeness and charm - of an unknown, unwitnessed and unventured world. Heterotopia could be of varied kinds and typologies as per Foucault, but here, I gather focus on the heterotopia of the abandoned and derelict.

What is an abandon? A space which previously hosted a function, yet now is empty or devoid of it. A space which may or may not wait for occupation. Just as the abandoned theme park in Spirited away, these heterotopias of post-use are spaces which conjure up imaginations. They are sublime and fantastical. Perhaps, due to a distance from usual life.

The friche as an imaginary desert, Dune inspired (image by author)

2. Counter Brusselization

Context matters. These heterotopias gain virtue by relativity. The secret garden contrasts the otherwise public parks around my home. Similarly, these heterotopias gain a new meaning in the context of a city such as Brussels, as opposed to, say, the context of an already decaying industrial town . Brusselization as a phenomenon has and continues to gentrify vacant plots. The city is hyper-mediated[4]. Buildings crop up everywhere, beyond where the eye can see and there is barely a sliver of green in the background, but rather a horizon of glass and steel buildings.

In such a case, do not these heterotopias of dereliction become precious and rare occurrences? Do they not become monuments to be preserved and embalmed? Post-industrial spaces such as the friche sometimes do not leave remnants behind in a physical sense. Instead, the only relic of its ended use is the nature that thrives upon its palimpsest. *This nature is rare*. It is rare and undiscovered because such spaces are veiled from the public eye and because such spaces stop the continuous grind of the city in its tracks. This is where the magic happens, where one finds that rest from traditional time and a hyper-mediated cityscape.

3. The Urban static / Nature as emblematic & monumental[5]

In such a circumstance where spaces such as La friche defy the status quo of continuous use, the derelict plot with its myriad flora and fauna suddenly becomes exalted and sublime, just as the garden of eden or the persian walled garden[6]. Their charm is in their secrecy, their being unappropriated and their selective borders[7]. Unlike parks known and open to public attention, these places are cast away due to their border conditions - sometimes tucked away with strong fencing, tall trees, and small entry points. The remains of orangeries and winter gardens of the Van Eetvelde house[8] in Brussels are reminiscent of such places. Little gardens with tea houses and coffee shops, courtyard gardens of hospices that one stumbles upon become places of rest and pause. They are meditative, reflective and beautiful in their own surprising qualities.

4. A manifesto

Thus, this project is a manifesto and urge to look at a new narrative of derelict plot development in the city. Shifting the narrative from looking at derelict sites as always preparing for human appropriation to being a state of stasis, nature *is* the monument to be left to its own devices. We (Architects, planners, citizens, people) are spectators, watchers, onlookers. Can architecture become its protector, its fortification? The wall of the enclosed garden?

Is architecture as a discipline only meant to inhabit, obtain and colonize spaces of emptiness? Can one break free from this status quo of urban development and regeneration where architecture and the built environment take a step back, stand at the periphery and aid natural

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[4] Andreotti, L., & Lahiji, N. (2016). *The Architecture of Phantasmagoria: Specters of the City*. Taylor & Francis.

[5] Aben, R., & Wit, S. d. (1999). *The Enclosed Garden: History and Development of the Hortus Conclusus and Its Reintroduction Into the Present-day Urban Landscape*. 010 Publishers.

[6] Khansari, M., Moghtader, M. R., & Yavari, M. (2004). *The Persian Garden: Echoes of Paradise*. Mage Publishers.

[7] Foucault, M., & Miskowiec, J. (1986). Of other spaces. *Diacritics*, *16*(1), 22. https://doi.org/10.2307/464648

[8] Aubry, F. (2023). *The Brussels of Horta* (D. Pistolesi, Trans.). Ludion.

processes of decay and regeneration? Can citizens become the gardeners of counter-brusselization?

Post industrial site rejuvenation schemes are plenty. The tour et taxis and Tempelhof are fine examples of such interventions. But I argue, where is the breathing space of the city? spaces of reflection, pause, surprise? Where is this hidden, discontinuous city looming amidst the frenzy of buildings and asphalt? This project is an urge to look for it, to find it and to let it stay.

III) Research Methodology:

(A flowchart with timelines is attached as a separate document to this plan which can be scrolled from left to right while reading the texts below)

"Thus, can derelict, post industrial plots of land such as La Friche Josephat become sites of counter-brusselisation and de-densification? Can they become breathers in the urban fabric? Can nature stay pristine? Can for once, architecture become a fortification for it, rather than the fortified? Can there be an architecture of onlooking, where the built is a mere fringe and border to this last green in town?"

At the core of the research methodology is a three fold approach -

a) an argumentation of a larger **theoretical discourse**, where I have found the beginnings of my fascinations and questions. These constitute an already focussed lens of key terms, theories and discussions which will augment and enrich the project time and again. These therefore form the basis of my own theoretical framework towards taking a position and arguing for it.

b) **Case and precedent studies** to be able to apply these theoretical and historical understandings in given contexts - personal, global, city as well as site specific. The case studies will be an effective tool in tackling my three main questions of post use and industrial sites, nature and its sublime place in an urban context, and architecture as a border condition. The case studies are in the following sets:

1. Nature as an emblem, as sublime and ritualistic
   - The Persian garden/ Mughal Garden
   - Temple/ Monastery gardens - to be decided
2. Nature in post-industrial and derelict plots
   - Tempelhof, Berlin/ Tour et Taxis, Brussels
   - ABB factory landscapes , Hesse, Germany [9]
3. Architecture as a fringe and border, nature within
   - Grand Hospice, Brussels
   - Fortifications of Vauban, France
   - Villages at Kargil, No man's land between India and Pakistan
4. An architecture of finding, pause and rest (Personal precedents)
   - The secret garden in Delhi, India

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[9] Kingsbury, N., & Takacs, C. (2022). *Wild: The Naturalistic Garden*. Phaidon

- A hidden spot in Brussels which i must find without prior knowledge

However, at this point it becomes crucial to articulate what becomes the very center of my research questions. Perhaps, my interests and research are embedded in an idea of place and time - Place as a means of rest, of pause, of onlooking and experience, time as stretched in contrast to the remainder of the city. Therefore, my lens must become more limited when i study cases, to be distilled to a few parameters:

1. *Time : Hourly, daily, seasonal, cyclical*
2. *Passage : its rites and rituals*
3. *Context : as contrasting to the inside*
4. *The "nature" of nature : Wild, tamed, manicured and everything in between*

c) **Field study/ On ground findings at La Friche** where the above parameters stay common as tools of study, but La friche is looked at in all its dimensionalities and perspectives from -

-Outside   **Methods include walking, observing, sketching, photography, note taking**
-Inside
-About (the border)[10]

-Above   Source : Top down narratives, archival plans / master plans
-Below   Source: Archival maps of former use

Finally, I aim to bring together my precedent and field studies together in a coherent format and booklet at the end of P2, with the aim of finding points of convergence and divergence and to enrich the field work with findings from these precedents. The booklet will become a glossary or atlas of time-space-event where I will use the specific medium of event scripting, time slices and miniature drawings to draw both observations and conclusions.
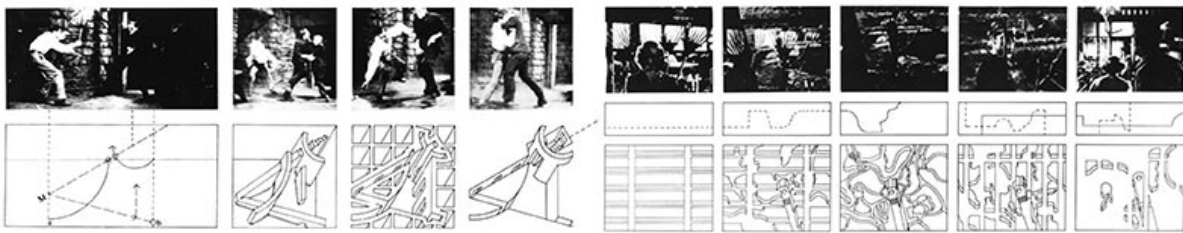
IV) Media

Event Scripting and time slices as notation : The use of this method comes from a place of personal fascination for film and theater, but also ties in coherently with my research themes of pause, rest and the unfolding of experience within these heterotopias. Tshumi's Manhattan transcripts and event cities, Kon Wajiro's Archaeology of present times, Francis Galton's methods of mapping the weather and scripts by Laszlo Moholy Nagy are key references which are also illustrated below.

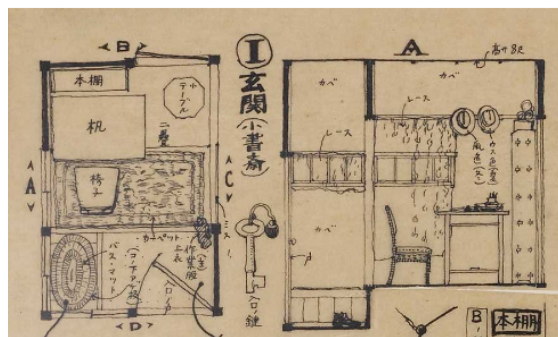[10] These three perspectives are more crucial than the latter two in my research

Miniature drawings/ paintings:
Next to the event slice diagrams or perhaps in conjunction with, I seek to use the technique of the montage, similar to miniature paintings. Miniature paintings originated as a means of storytelling and documenting important moments in history. They possess the unique quality of representing space and its narrative, through a non-perspective and flattened drawing which often lacked spatial depth. In doing so, sometimes the plan, section and elevation of the space converged within the framework of a singular representative image, highlighting each detail in equal measure. The lack of spatial depth worked in favor of the painter, who could now depict even the most distant objects as distinctly as objects in the foreground.
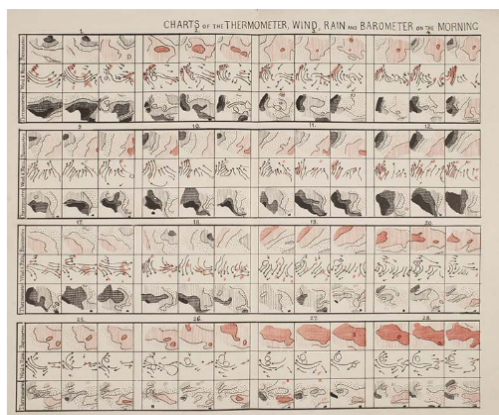
References for media:

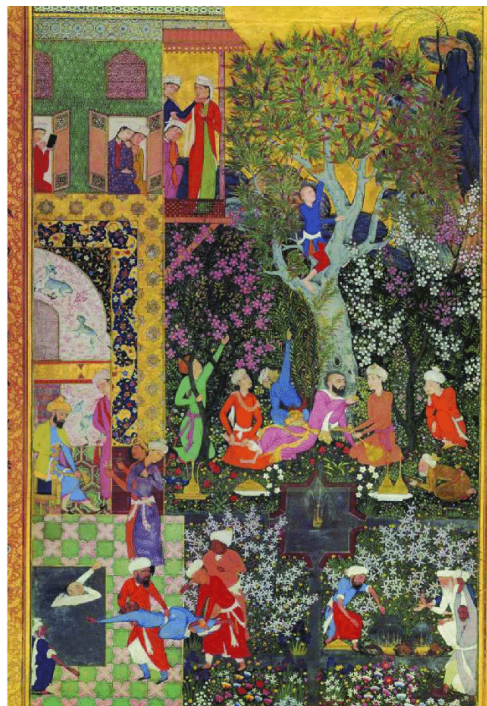Manhattan Transcripts, Bernard Tschumi (1981) - *Object, event, set & script (via socks)*

Kon Wajiro's documentations as a means of scripting trends and ways of living

Galton's first meteorographical charts as weather scripts (event, time, place)

L. Moholy Nagy's scripting (1921)

Persian miniature painting depicting recreation and excursion in the Persian garden[11]

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[11] *Morghae Golshan, 15th Ac. Persian miniature painting depicting. . .* (n.d.). ResearchGate.
https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Morghae-Golshan-15th-Ac-Persian-miniature-painting-depicting-recreation-and-excursion_fig5_33
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