

Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences

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Explore Lab 2020 / 2021

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Existence in Liminality

From Liminal Politics to Intimate Spaces

An investigation of undocumented immigrants in Amsterdam

What graduating in architecture at the TU Delft means to me is questioning the boundaries we set to what architecture is; as a university, but especially in practice. I think Explore Lab facilitates exactly this fascination, allowing projects to occupy the periphery of architecture.

Location:	Sarphatistraat 62, Amsterdam
The posed problem,	<i>Undocumented immigrants or rightless displaced people</i> live an inhumane life in the margins of society; social, cultural and legal forms of exclusion, deprivation and dehumanization create a collection of liminal spaces which control and oppress human lives.
research questions and	<p>Main question: <i>How does the architect contribute to overcome spatial forms of exclusion rightless displaced people face?</i></p> <p>Sub question 1: <i>How are liminal politics manifested in spatial forms of exclusion?</i></p> <p>Sub question 2: <i>How is the rightless displaced person affected by exclusionary practices?</i></p>
design assignment in which these result.	Designing to allow the rightless displaced person build a relationship with a form of 'settlement' in a volatile yet long lasting world of liminality (liminality = temporality without perspective). By doing so, starting a conversation about the agency of architectural practice regarding marginalized groups in the social structure of contemporary society.

Process

Method description

The research consists of two written essays, three visual essays, a case study and a series of maps. The design, then, embodies and synthesizes the arguments on spatiality in the form of thought provoking spatial speculations.

P1 (11.2020) Literary research + visual research + interviews + newspaper research.

P2 (01.2021) Draft of two written essays + three visual essays + case study + written introduction and lay-out of the booklet, which is intended to become a comprehensive, publishable journal.

P3 (03.2021) Final version of the above + series of maps + preliminary design proposal.

P4 (05.2021) Integral design proposal which builds upon the research and qualifies to bring about the intended provocations/conversations.

P5 (07.2021) Final presentation. Booklet publishable and presentable design.

Literature and general practical preference

Given the socially- and politically complex nature of a rightless displaced population, and aiming to create a rich understanding of a relatively underexposed theme, the research consults various theoretical realms and modes of practice. The questions posed enforce upon themselves the convergence of the material and the immaterial, as they reflect on the juxtaposition of the inner world of man with a dominant, political context. Therefore, the work approaches these questions in a transdisciplinary way, reflecting on the 'shadow world' of a rightless population in an attempt to breach the relative invisibility of societal margins and start a conversation with architectural practice. To set a theoretical frame, the research will consult political theory (Arendt, 1962; Foucault, 1986; Agamben, 1998) as well as existential theory (Heidegger, 1957; Bachelard, 1994) combined with poetry (resulting in two separate essays). In order to develop a set of maps which document the spatial implications of this theoretical frame, the research will use a set of interviews, newspaper articles and other online data sources. The case study of a group of undocumented immigrants and their informal settlements in Amsterdam relies on interviews, documentaries, academic reports and newspaper articles.

Reflection

In the political atmosphere of this debate, what noble form of provision imposes itself between law and life? When the verdict calls to expel this shadow population from a position in society and must leave the country - a statement which implies that these people in fact no longer exist in the eyes of the national government - then what is the task of the architect regarding the inhumane living conditions of displaced persons? Some will argue that without political control, without a client, an architectural 'intervention' which focuses entirely on this shadow population is not possible and, therefore, the agency of the architect within the presented problem is non-existent. The architect will have to conform to the established program and - would the architect consider to contribute to the humanization of the legal vacuum of a rightless population of displaced people - contribute to, say, a 'more humane' design of a detention center. Others may turn to the role of the architect as an actor in shaping policy itself, with specialist knowledge of the influence of the environment on people; a plea that reduces the role of architectural practice in the presented debate to an advisor. In addition, this will most probably still direct the built environment towards a cold, unwelcome expression which tries to discourage the 'illegal' population. In both cases, the hope for possible contributions of the architect in humanizing this legal vacuum is largely absent and the agency seems to be mostly on the side of politics. However, an Arendtian perspective provides a horizon for architectural practice - arguing that 'making' precedes political life; that 'the common world of things,' the way man makes the earth inhabitable, is a precondition for a meaningful political domain - namely, the responsibility to interfere with the civil society that precedes the production of a 'common world.' Based on the conviction that architecture is more than building according to market forces and restrictive policy, this thesis argues that architecture functions as a mirror of society which always reflects, and moves forward at the same time. More than building: the awareness of its influence on a common world positions architectural practice in society as a critical instrument. In line with this conviction, the design succeeding this research attempts to enforce itself between law and life; a design for a non-normative space which approaches the legal vacuum of rightless displaced people in a constructive way, and evokes a conversation about the societal challenges raised.