GRADUATION PLAN

Title: Space for Disorientation
Research focus: a theoretical framework for countering the Smooth City's violence

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P2
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Delft University of Technology
Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment

STUDIO
MSc 3/4 Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences
AR3EX115 Explore Lab Graduation Studio

Supervisor	Name	Academic field involved
Main mentor	Roel van de Pas	History, Form and Aesthetics; Explore Lab coordinator
Second mentor	Rufus van de Ban	Architectural Engineering & Technology
Third mentor	Victor Muñoz Sanz	Urban Design
External examiner	Claudiu Forgaci	Delegate of the Board of Examiners

Argumentation of choice of the studio
Being fascinated with design practices that involve the lived experience of queer people and marginalised communities at large, I wanted to pursue a graduation project that centralises alternative ways of being, thinking and doing. After reading the book *Smooth City: Against Urban Perfection, Towards Collective Alternatives* by René Boer (2023), which could be seen as a materialisation of my fascination, I was certain that I wanted to graduate in a studio that lets me question how we design and develop (public) space and how it relates to phenomenology. Explore Lab can provide a breeding ground for exploration that values asking questions and theorising so that it does not prioritise (architectural) solutions. In turn, it lets me develop myself as a queer[1] practitioner.

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[1] In this case, queer should be understood in at least two senses; 1) describing non-straight sexual practices as a form of social and sexual contact; and, more generally 2) that what is "oblique or off-line or even just plain wonky."referencing Sarah Ahmed's framework for *Queer Phenomenology* (2006a).

GRADUATION PROJECT

GOAL

Posed problem

Urban design has often become a façade of an all-inclusive environment shaped by universal needs and values which does not recognise the historical and hegemonic system of influence that has determined its development and perpetuation. René Boer has analysed this (re)production of space through the lens of the *Smooth City*, a term symbolising the homogenised urban environment of sanitised aesthetics, social and cultural uniformity and the systemic erasure of irregularities and otherness to prioritise efficiency, security and control. Recently, public space interventions, such as anti-homeless spikes, have sparked uproar as they can lay bare embedded and longstanding humanitarian ambivalence towards everyday images of hardship and vulnerability. It evokes the potential for urban design to perform as an immanent critique of public space, albeit temporarily. Similar to how Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) sees the often invisible hegemonic order of public space as an existing orientation, this project aims to explore the significance and potential manifestations of these *disorientation* moments.

Research questions

Therefore the research part of the project invites a critical examination of how an intersectional perspective can be integrated to explore how spaces of disorientation might provide the possibility of exposing hegemonic norms and amplifying voices that are increasingly ostracised. This approach enables a more inclusive frame for understanding and addressing complexities of identity, power and belonging and how they relate to the spaces we use and design. The scope of the research is summarised in the following question: **In what ways could space for disorientation contribute to countering the (re)production of the Smooth City?**

Several sub questions are defined to reply to various aspects that make up the main question. Considering the available practical and theoretical knowledge, this set of questions should provide an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach to disorientation.

1. In what ways could disorientation contribute to countering the (re)production of the Smooth City?
    1.1. What is the Smooth City?
    1.2. How is the Smooth City (re)produced?
    1.3. What challenges arise from the (re)production of the Smooth City?
2. In what ways could disorientation be an important value in countering the Smooth City?
    2.1. What is disorientation?
    2.2. How does disorientation relate to the Smooth City?
3. How could space for disorientation counter the (re)production of the Smooth City?
    3.1. How could disorientation be spatially practised and/or experienced?
    3.2. What spatial conditions does disorientation need to manifest?
    3.3. In what spatial conditions could disorientation counter the Smooth City?

Design assignment

The design assignment is a research-by-design approach providing insights into the last two sub questions. As the paper will analyse, among other things, historical architectural precedents that are consciously or subconsciously related to disorientation, it will serve as inspiration for a design project. During the design process, I will explore how we could actively design space for disorientation, considering the socio-political context of an urban environment. There are still several pathways to render the design project which can be summarised as the following three briefs;

- <u>The case for a total blackout</u>: As modern urban dwellers are increasingly dependent on electrified appliances for navigation, entertainment and luxury, what happens when the lights go out? This design project should explore how we can potentially learn from regions in the Global South or urban neighbourhoods that are more frequently affected by large-scale power outages. What role can architecture play in a new dialogue that challenges our dependence on electricity in, the City of Lights, Paris?
- <u>Architecture: the stage or the play?</u>: As Shakespeare famously wrote "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women, merely Players", theatre and other productions of culture could emerge in public space as an alternative representation of the world around us. How could architecture facilitate theatre that centres the issue of spatial agency and serves as an immanent critique of the Smooth City? To what extent can architecture be designed as a performance?
- <u>Public space "under construction"</u>: Urban guerilla practitioners such as Santiago Cirugeda have subverted public space rules by trying to find loopholes, for example using a scaffolding construction as a temporary balcony or a construction waste container as the foundation of an open-air podium. On the topic of construction, Dries Verhoeven synthesised an installation that spoke to the notion of contemporary development, related to the fall of Western hegemony. The envisaged statue was seemingly in construction, but the goal of the installation was merely to study the crowd's reaction to unknown developments. How can we find loopholes in or harness intrinsic qualities of construction and development for the sake of disorientation?

All three briefs serve as foundations for exploring the contingent nature of disorientation's temporality and the permanence of architecture, and the relationship between them.

PROCESS

METHOD DESCRIPTION

This project builds upon existing pieces of knowledge and practices related to notions of disorientation. Primarily, the research will feature **theories and literature** either related to the concept of the Smooth City, its precedents and potential elaboration and criticising its definition, or to disorientation, its phenomenological implications, ties to spatial theory and potential architectural applications. Three disciplines give direction to the theoretical exploration, which are feminist, queer and decolonial theories. the research questions will be answered through literature reviews, theoretical analyses and a handful of case studies. The product of this research will be a research paper, of which a full draft will be handed in at P2. After P2, the research paper will be finalised.

The design will use this research as internalised knowledge from which observational and later experimental design practices could put this knowledge to use. A design method which could serve this project adequately is action research. Moreover, writing and drawing will be the main techniques used to observe, grasp and synthesise the design project further.

LITERATURE AND GENERAL PRACTICAL REFERENCES

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REFLECTION

When I started my bachelor's in Architecture, I was not sure if I wanted to become an architect. During my studies, I have found joys and obstacles that have complicated my position within the field of architecture. Currently, while writing my master's thesis, I am finally sure to say that I would not like to be a 'traditional' architect, that is to say, a designer working at an architecture firm for the sake of developing projects to acquire the tender of a to-be-built or -renovated project. For me, the motivation to become a designer, or a practitioner in general, lies within the process of (re)thinking why we do what we do, to take a step back and reconsider the way we approach our projects. In this process, getting lost is seen as an often forgotten value, although it is ubiquitous for practically every designer. To be able to take time and evaluate these moments of disorientation; losing and re-orienting oneself holds endless possibilities for design, and more specifically, I have found, for the field of architecture and the built environment. Therefore, the idea of disorientation is not only a value that could counteract violent developments such as the reproduction of the Smooth City, but also change how we think about our role as designers and practitioners of the built environment.