

Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences



Graduation Plan: All tracks

Submit your Graduation Plan to the Board of Examiners (Examencommissie-BK@tudelft.nl), Mentors and Delegate of the Board of Examiners one week before P2 at the latest.

The graduation plan consists of at least the following data/segments:

Personal information		
Name	Christopher Clarkson	
Student number	4850106	

Studio		
Name / Theme	Borders and Territories / Transient Liquidities along the New Silk Road	
Main mentor	Negar Sanaan Bensi	Architecture
Second mentor	Pierre Jennen	Building Technology
Third mentor	Oscar Rommens	Architecture
Argumentation of choice of the studio	Having worked for architectural office, The Department, in the past which engaged with graphical representations of global, urban, and architectural scales through maps and collation of data, I was keen to see what this context might enable me to design, and how the B&T group might expand on my understandings of global political situations (sites) and their impact on design decisions.	

Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	Surfaces at Large, and the Meanness of Measure

Goal	
Location:	Panama City
The posed problem,	<p>Panama's function as a key point of movement of goods on the global market is dependent on water (both of the ocean and the canal), and our ability to navigate that water. The surface level of the water, as well as the surface of the ground beneath that water is vital information which is difficult to define given the fact that they are always in motion.</p> <p>Our reliance on the surface as a means of measure (for distance, depth, light, time) is founded on an incorrect supposition that the surface (or</p>

	anything) is stagnant. As a result, our means of measure are fallible, and misguide us into a sense of false security as to the position of anything.
research questions and	How do boats navigate the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, and the Panama canal? What technology is lost and gained over the years of this development? How is a sufficient water depth maintained both at the entrances of the oceans and the canal itself? How do these measurements misguide, or misdirect us along the surface?
design assignment in which these result.	Follies in the Pacific
<p>A lighthouse is typically created as a navigational tool for ships attempting to traverse an otherwise unreadable ocean current, avoid unseen cliffs and rocks, and safely make their way to shore/ harbor. In the case of the Panama Canal, the lighthouse was an essential means to allow cargo to safely enter the canal from the oceans, and navigate the canal's winding passage. It is common that different lighthouses have their own illumination patterns, either occulting (on for longer than off) or flashing (off for longer than on). This gives a signature to each lighthouse, a means of communication that can be cross referenced with a map to confirm relative boat location. This signature of time is not exclusive to the lighthouses but also to the tidal movements of the oceans, and the orbital patterns of the moon, the earth around the sun, and our solar system around the galaxy. None of these movements are perfectly regular, nor is any recurring event the exactly same, but rather, similar.</p> <p>The lighthouse is a building with a highly specialized function that was once crucial to the safe passage of international trade. They are however becoming obsolete, with older lighthouses being retired, and replaced by new, radio and gps electronic navigational systems that are seemingly more accurate and require less maintenance. These new media are also more detached from local reality as we experience it. Captains no longer need look for the light along dark shores and black-mirror waters, but instead gaze at the blue LCD display in a windowless cabin. The abstract and average measure becomes more real than the shallow waters themselves as captains no longer need to experience their presence in the physical world. At the same time, the former design of the lighthouse has become liberated from its function, and they stand as ornaments along the coast and the Panama canal.</p> <p>As such, the project aims to create a folly (the pun of folly as a mistake is intentional and noted) at the intersection of multiple lighthouse projection fields to further emphasize and acknowledge the functions that emerge from shifting waters, the impossibility of a completely true measure of anything, and the beauty that lies within that slippage. The project will create its own system of measure that is 'hyper-localised' to its own place – not applicable as a generalized system, but one that subverts the generic measure of this global colonial navigational system.</p>	

Process

Method description

My project makes use of mostly analog technologies in order to make its analyses and draw conclusions about the site, as well as in its presentation of the project itself. As a result, analog photography and darkroom printing are an essential tool in the steps leading to the design proposal. This is because digital media have redundant precision that also results in work which is too clinical, too clean, and without the slippage of the measure that occurs during material encounters that my project aims to embrace. This means that a lot of my research is informed through photography made on site, and the processes that these images go through in order to be made visible.

Working in the darkroom, there is a lot of opportunity for chance operations to take place – altering paper before its exposure or before its chemical processing – the image reveals itself onto a set of conditions that are unknown. From this a series of material explorations will emerge that will inform choices of the design proposal itself. The intention is to make use of experiments carried out in the dark(room) to generate new understandings of site. As such they could be considered intentional misreadings and the error becomes increasingly present and important given my relation to the production of the work. The design will make use of these errors to produce rules for the architectural production, or spatialization.

Besides this a historical investigation into the technology of lighthouses, as well as the lighthouses of the Panamanian Isthmus and Canal will be carried out in order to specify site. Additionally, theoretical texts on the blind, error, slippage, crystallization, and entropy are being consulted. These theoretical texts allow the project to comment on a larger framework of the architectural practice and spatial understandings in general. Additionally, artworks and works of literary fiction are of great asset in the production of my work, as they offer an escape from clinical exactitude: in the words of Leonard Cohen, (Anthem 1992) "There is a crack, a crack in everything; That's how the light gets in."

Artists and literary works that are being consulted include:

Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad
Naked Lunch, William Burroughs
Collection of short stories, Kafka
Youth, J.M. Coetzee
Boyhood, Coetzee
Rings of Saturn, Max Sebald
The Emmigrants, Max Sebald
Anne Veronica Janssens
James Turrel
Gerhard Richter
Anselm Kiefer
Lucio Fontana
Felix Gonzales Torres
Rachel Whiteread

Alberto Burri
William Kentridge

Literature and general practical references

Specific literature includes:

Author as Producer, Walter Benjamin
Memoirs of the Blind, Jacques Derrida
Parergon, J. Derrida
The Architecture of Error, Francesca Hughes
Non-site, Robert Smithson
Difference and Repetition, Deleuze and Guattari
Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari
Artmachines, Anne Savaughnargues
Grace and Gravity, Lars Spuybroek

General practical experience/ precedents include:

Site visit of 12 days in November 2023.
Poems written during site visit,
Analog photographs taken during site visit and developed in the Netherlands
The procedure or process used to generate these works.
My own fear of the ocean – the ability to get lost vertically.
Personal Fascination with the textured surface, previous essays on the topic
Work experience on construction site (Flachau, Die Kapelle – The Department)

Reflection

1. What is the relation between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A,U,BT,LA,MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

My graduation project and topic engage with the studio topic of the New Silk Road as a result of its situated nature in Panama, dealing directly with the infrastructure of navigation that is used to course this section of the New Silk Road (Lighthouses of the Panama canal). Architecturally (master track A) my project engages with the archetype of the lighthouse, which has a long history of architectural design, but furthermore, theoretically my project aims to underpin a better understanding of the surface of matter and the (beautiful) errors that occur in the materialisation of any project. Relating to my master programme, while one might say I'm operating across scales from the global to the minute doorhandle. There is a mistake in that logic: in fact, the doorhandle and the trans-Atlantic shipping routes are all happening at the same scale, namely, 1:1. The only thing that changes is the distance and size of the objects involved. In any case, I see my graduation project as a continuation of my coursework in the first year, engaging with material concerns developed in Methods of Analysis and Imagination, as well as the theoretical frameworks which I've enjoyed grappling with in Agential Materialisms, offered by the theory chair in the 2nd semester.

2. What is the relevance of your graduation work in the larger social, professional and scientific framework.

The social programme of my project is still to be more strictly defined, but I expect that through its generation of form (informed by the darkroom experiments and understanding the lighthouse) and the behaviour that it generates an experience will emerge based on an individual perception of the shifting surfaces (water level, floors, walls, the shadows that emerge on these surfaces). As such it is an extension of the public realm in Panama city and does not aim to save anyone from drug addiction, prostitution, or the crises of migration – not because I don't consider these to be important issues, but because I don't believe architecture will be the thing that fixes those issues, and I couldn't claim to be able to solve them as a South African studying in the Netherlands. Rather, the project aims to facilitate the processes that are already inherent in Panama, however affording its inhabitants an escape from measures which are generated from a colonial and global system, offering them in turn a means to measure their environment from localised positions that are highly specific.

Professionally my topic is dealing with a number of things which I consider highly relevant: the question of the surface in relation to space has been ignored since the modernist era; the architectural practice of digital production ignores the material question of actual buildings; we have engineered a false sense of security in believing that architecture and building exist in separate domains while they do not; and lastly, I am engaging with a forgotten and abandoned typology of the lighthouse as a folly and exploring what opportunities it may provide when approached from a new understanding of the surface.

Scientifically I am bringing philosophies of deconstruction back to the table as a crucial element to understanding the relationship between disparate entities. Within architecture this has great potential that has not yet been realised (deconstructivism as an architectural project was an unsuccessful (in so far as it does not execute or engage properly with the philosophical problems of deconstruction philosophy), formal exercise – be it through tectonics or as my project is more interested in, the relationship between matter and space, formation and the affordances that this provides along the surface.