ON THE SINGULARITY OF VALUE

REFLECTION

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Explore Lab 31
Reflection on the Graduation Process

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On the Singularity of Value

What Drives Us?

Designing an Unexpected Opportunity to Decelerate

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INTRODUCTION

The following text is reflecting upon my graduation process, regarding both research and design and their degree of interpendence.

The choice of topic and initial application to the Explore Lab Studio derived from a life-long concern about the future of our species. While believing to accumulate more and more value, we are causing events which are very much unvaluable for us in the long term. Having addressed this issue in many projects before by the means of building techniques and program, I decided to explore the philosophical crisis of humankind through a deep excursion into literature.

Firstly, value has to be understood here as a driver for decision-taking. Our societies became too comfortable simplifying and rationalizing such driver for decision, neglecting their singularity and relationality. This issue is especially important for the architectural discipline, it being at risk to distance itself from the process of emergence or real-life interactions - the result of taken decisions. *How can architectural design decisions be driven by the singularity and specificness of their value?*

The agenda of this design project throughout the past semester proved to be very much based on becoming aware of specificities, tuning in with the more sensitive factors on site and basing design decisions on the relational aspect of architecture.
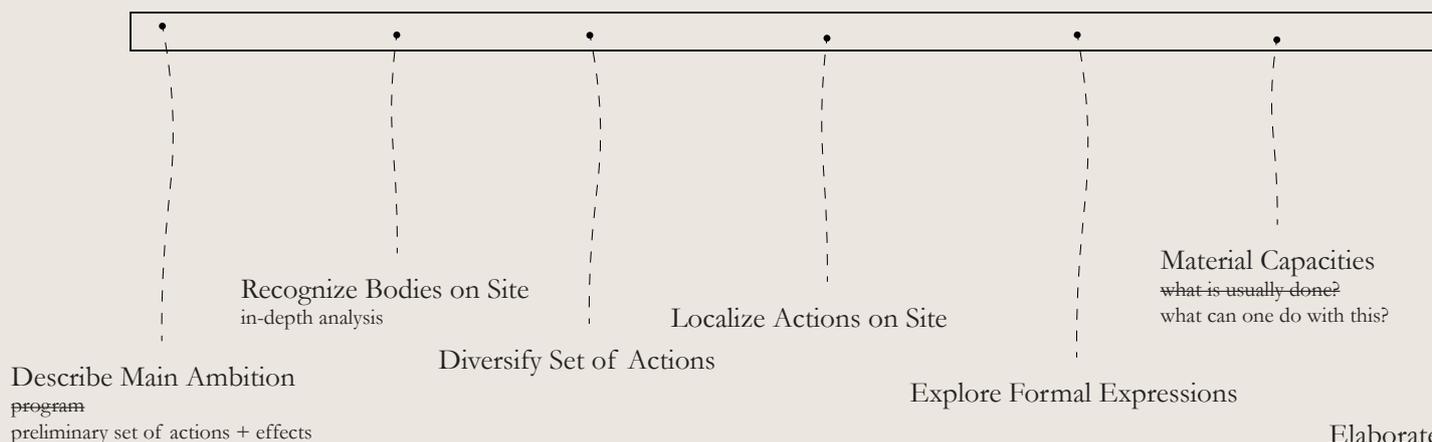
RELATIONSHIP RESEARCH AND DESIGN

The choice of method applied for exploring this issue and problem has been firstly the reading of philosophical literature, concerning primarily the idea of value and evaluation, the Anthropocene and Affect theory. In my understanding, the employment of this method has been imperative to form a sufficient theoretical foundation, however it did not suffice in binding the philosophical problem to the discipline of architecture. Therefore, after the P2 examination in January 2021, I sought to find means to explore and represent better the architectural problem that I wanted to address. A tool of assessment and evaluation of situation- and site-specific relationalities sharpened the 'singularity' that was the goal of this project. By the means of a taxonomy (figure 01, booklet sent in the Email as an additional appendix), I investigated multiple existing projects, which I found to be uniquely tailored to the interactions that they are providing or the material processes employed; in some cases, even both. These case studies allowed for an understanding of the constellation of important actors in each project (here: bodies), and how their relationalities determine the action that an architectural body ought to provide. The taxonomy and its employment must necessarily be understood as a simplification of the situation, yet is it aiming to reveal an important attitude: The consideration that drives our design decisions must ask *what actions a constructed body ought to provide in which specific context and situation, to whom, and what material availabilities and processes can afford to provide such action.*
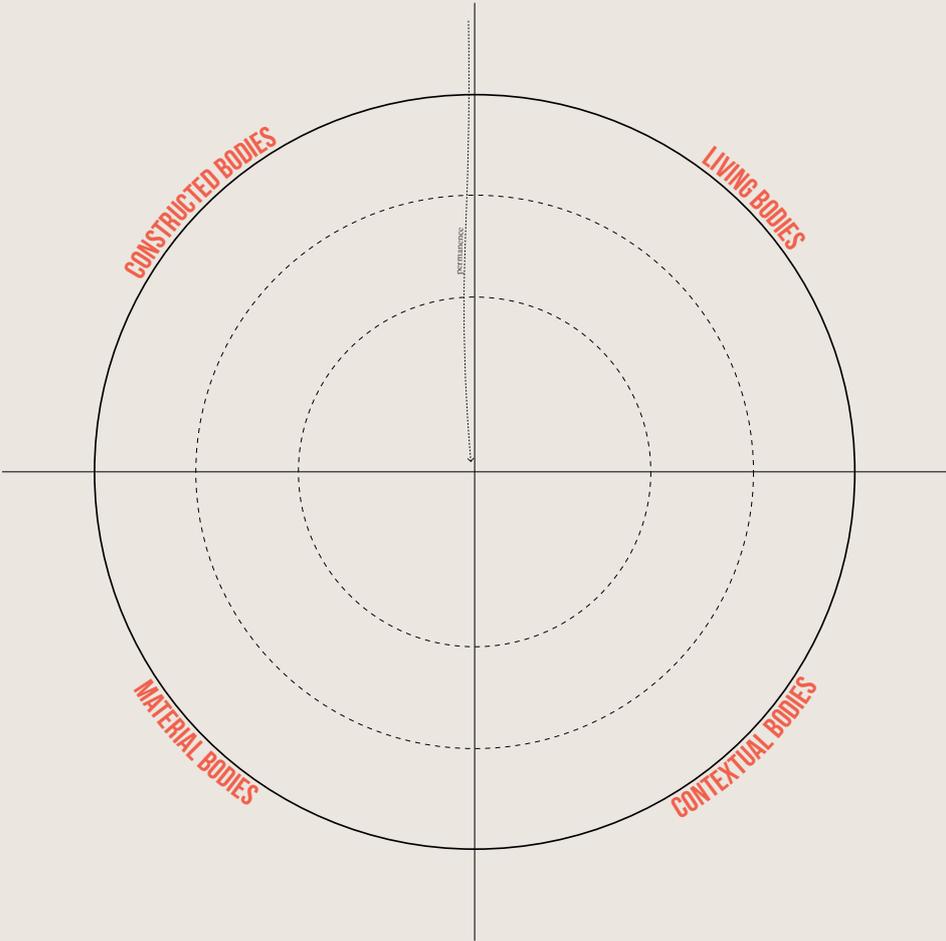
The employment of this method was therefore a necessary and helpful means to sufficiently link the theoretical foundation of literature to a specific issue of architecture. The resulting awareness and focus gave important direction to the project. To sum up the outcome of this research, a sequence of consideration has been developed (figure 02). It is describing an important reflection during the process of taking design decisions: Only after having recorded important actors at play in context and situation, one can observe their interrelations. This allows to define and localize specific actions in relation to those actors, that the architecture ought to provide. The process of decision taking has to be based on this repetitive pattern of consideration.

This research result was not the invention of a program – although the main ambition of the place is indeed rather unconventional – but a method and sequence of consideration during designing. The choice of 'program' for the project - the activation of a left-over traffic island in the midst of the rush in Rotterdam, as an unexpected place to slow down, reflect and decelerate - has derived from the amount of sensitivity needed to design such a confrontational place. Through such an ambition and task, the method explained above (figure 02) could really be explored and utilized. The focus of this graduation is therefore not the design as an outcome, but much more the process of its emergence.
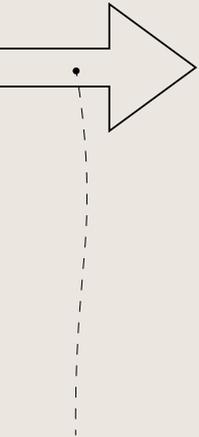
The Place to Decelerate ought to create a contrast to the city rush in order for one to become aware of its artificiality. It is aiming to challenge the accelerating state of the city and the human-centered paradigm of the Anthropocene, by its mere emergence as a careful construct in this place, but also by more intricate design decisions that allow for pedestrians to relate to other species in a not-dominating way. The landscaped intervention is built of a massive topography out of construction waste, which is reactive and allows for different degrees of seclusion, exposure and collectiveness. Out of this topography are poking six light-weight steel follies as points of attraction that allow for a change of perspective on this place. Each moment has been designed with special attention to their experience, including less obvious and less easy to represent actors like wind, rain, sun, noise, traffic, flows, any many more. They are framed and manipulated through this architecture in a way which allows for a singularity of experience.

02 Sequence of Consideration as Tool for Decision Taking

Recognize Bodies on Site
in-depth analysis

Localize Actions on Site

Material Capacities
~~what is usually done?~~
what can one do with this?

Describe Main Ambition
~~program~~
preliminary set of actions + effects

Diversify Set of Actions

Explore Formal Expressions

Elaborate

09

CONSTRUCTED BODIES

LIVING BODIES

MATERIAL BODIES

CONTEXTUAL BODIES

Permanence

● Bodies: What is it?

Affordances: What can it do?

● What Body ——— provides what action ———→ ● for whom?

Formal Expression

PROJECT IN A WIDER CONTEXT

SOCIAL, PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC FRAMEWORKS

This project is relatable to a wider context in two ways. The first one being its main ambition and cause in a social context: Utilizing what is 'left-over' and neglected in the city in order to invite for an unexpected pause, which has the power to break the mind-set of the rush in such a way that one can change the perspective on it. I believe that it is important to create places for reflection by the means of contrast and friction. Especially after our lives in the pandemic, the boundaries of space and time have blurred in such a way that work and rest merged and pause does not have a predetermined spatio-temporal framework anymore. Therefore, this project is aiming at introducing pause and the change of perspective into our built environment as an unexpected and not (necessarily) intentional encounter.

The second context where one can localize the entirety of this project is the architectural field and its means of designing. I understand our discipline to be at risk to distance itself too much from its result, the architect in most cases being neither user nor maker of a place. Therefore, one is rarely ever confronted with the effects of a decision and might tend to base it on repetitive and general ideas. The sequence of consideration as a result of the research (figure 02) can be a great tool for designers to tune in more with less obvious and more specific actors in context and situation. It can be of great help to understand the driver for a design decision to be its relationality, namely *what an architectural decision can provide, for whom, and in which specific context and situation.*

RELATION TO STUDIO, TRACK, PROGRAM

RESEARCH METHOD AND SCIENTIFIC RELVEVANCE

The Msc AUBS Program at TU Delft offers a multi-disciplinary approach and the possibility for a diversity of directions. Within this graduation, a holistic approach was imperative. Scientific and technical aspects had to be integrated into design considerations, as material processes and availabilities have been an important point very early on in the process. Again, it was important to not think in generally applied methods, but to recognize specificities of situation and context. In the case of this graduation process, the material aspects are almost exclusively concerning the repurposing of Rotterdam's abundent construction demolition waste, which outlines the Program's focus on sustainability.

The Architecture Track at this University is known to be extremely free and allow for a wide range of possibilities. Students can chose based on their individual preferences, and go down more abstract, conceptual, or more technical and practical paths. Within this project, I aimed to combine the conceptual with the concrete and the theoretical with the practical. In my understanding, an architectural project is a process which is embedded in all those fields. An architectural design can neither neglect its specific experience and affect of its form, nor the material processes and technical elaborations for its emergence. Therefore, this graduation tried to focus on both points similarly and to the same extent.

Additionally, this graduation aims at a different interpretation of the concept of affect and affordances – taught extensively on the chair of Theory. Its conclusion is to not understand them as affective in their own right, but registering them as being materialized and embedded in their singular context.

In the studio of Explore Lab it is a tradition that students find their own methods, depending on their specific and individual research problem. In this context, it was possible for this research to take the form of an initial in-depth exploration of philosophical literature. This later on led to the development of a unique architectural technique, combining both Affect Theory and material processes embedded in specificities of site and situation. Only in the context of this studio, the graduation could develop freely and reactively to the current issues, and an additional complementary link in the form of case studies could be employed. This allowed the emergence of a unique, but very much universally applicable approach for architects.

ETHICAL ISSUES

RESEARCH, DESIGN, FUTURE APPLICATION

To really apply the method that has been the result of the research, one must genuinely engage with the main ambition of the place and its present actors. That requires a high degree of presence at the place in order to absorb its intensities. This intruding of a site, context or situation may be disturbing to some people. In the case of this project, there have not been any semi-private thresholds to trespass, since it is located in a very public area in the center of Rotterdam. However, during the many hours and visits spent on site, observing and engaging in different ways, I have gotten the impression that different people have been quite puzzled. One could imagine that this might become a problematic but necessary conflict in the further employment of the design method.

TUTORING

UTILIZING OF FEEDBACK

Overall, the tutoring from all three mentors within their own field of expertise has been to a very satisfactory degree. With each mentor, I could discuss sufficiently the precise issues and technicalities that addressed their fields. I had the impression that they understood my concerns and ambitions and did advise me regarding those. When showing the current state of design, each of them evaluated the products under the lens of their own expertise and I could develop the design and research further based on their comments and the emerging discussions.

However, I do believe that during the first semester of research in the Explore Lab studio, it would be beneficial to support better the link to a design in the MSc4 semester. In the case of this extremely free studio, there is the risk for students to not find a desired path.

CONCLUSIONS

HOW HAVE I LEARNED FROM MY OWN WORK?

Reflecting on my academic career up to the start of this graduation project, I realized that I have established a clear goal-oriented pattern in approaching architectural assignments. I used to seek rational and technical restrictions that would drive my decisions logically, and predetermine design to a certain extent. On the one hand, this allowed me to justify the outcome successfully in front of audience and not leave any doubts within a tight-knit logical narration. On the other hand, I became aware of the lack of focus on the more sensitive spatial qualities that are not so easy to explain. To sum up, I had learned to be a good advocate of my work, but had not necessarily learned to be confident with my designs.

Hence, I consciously decided to not allow for any predetermined logical reasoning to be the driver for this graduation. For this final year of education, it would be most productive to challenge my usual, easy-to-explain and by-default-successful approach. I wanted to benefit to the greatest possible extent from this last chance and take advantage of the great educational offer at this University, in order to accompany me throughout this experimental and challenging personal journey.

The sequence of consideration (figure 02) as a method applied within this project may at first sight seem trivial, however proved to be the most challenging process within my academic career. Becoming aware of less obvious drivers of design decisions revealed the range of possibilities and abundance of different paths to take. Hence, staying confident with taken decisions was exactly that demanding challenge that I had sought, confronted with their intricateness as well as their many effects and implications. Informing and tailoring design to such site- and situation-specific actors in an affective way allowed me to become more sensitive to such small-scale and less representable effects of architecture. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to still explore these tendencies within this educational program, knowing that applying this method will allow me to become more confident with design decisions in future projects.