

## **Personal Reflection – An Ode to Excess**

### **I- Design Intention & Conceptual Approach**

The research conducted at the beginning of the graduation year revolved around the indeterminate forces that shape the built environment, resulting in the formation of many ‘ephemeral’ cities along the new silk road. As such, the main outcomes from the research stage resided in the definition of the leftover spaces of intensive industrial exploitation: ‘dead’ landscapes are understood as the results – and eventual symptoms – of indeterminacy surrounding both the natural state of the site under study (an open-air coal mine), coupled with intensive anthropogenic exploitation of its resources. These dead landscapes dictate the conceptual approach adopted to deal with the territory both as a constructed industrial whole, in addition to many fragmented instances of indeterminacy.

The culmination of the research and design conducted during the graduation year materialized in a series of interventions around the coal mine. Dead landscapes – the main sites under investigation – are coded into a ritualistic progression through the territory. These interventions shall each reflect a different stage of grief of the landscape: each successive stage of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) shall be translated into a specific architectural program and expression in different areas around the mine, freezing the state of impermanence of each site. It is important here to note that the nature of the site (location, program, natural composition, amongst other factors) are the main actors dictating both the specific stage of grief, in addition to the adequate intervention fitting the landscape. The primary design intention was to tweak and isolate the indeterminate forces that shape the coal mine, and transform them into material, determinate architectural expressions. As such, the state of vulnerability of the landscape is translated into a permanent gesture, suggesting an enduring expression that captures the states of impermanence dictated by specific instances of the site under study.

### **II- Design Scope, Considerations & Narrative**

The materialization of the adopted architectural concept, as it deals with the physically intangible realm of grief in its different stages, was preceded by a clear definition of the understanding of that concept through architectural notions, adjectives, and techniques. Through this anthropomorphism of the landscape, it was possible to imagine clear tangible physical relationships that uncover underlying processes, systems, and phenomena. Each different site under investigation dictates, according to its construction, the specific corresponding stage of grief that is unraveling through it. This enabled the construction of a clear and direct narrative that guided the exercise.

The main design considerations were firstly the establishment of a clear and convincing relationship with the landscape and the site. Working with topography, hydrology, atmosphere, and other significant natural processes, each intervention suggests a different state of tension through its expression. The main concern was the coding and translation of the ritual of grief through a territorial whole, articulating the landscape into a series of reflective instances. Secondly, it was important to consider local, ethical, and sociological components through the reasoning of each intervention. Ethnographic practices, climate, and materiality are all key concepts that were translated into design tools placed at the center of the design process. As such, each intervention is characterized by its precision and specificity in relation to its context. It is important here to

note that, while they vary in scale, the five interventions attempt to contrast with the landscape that surrounds them, acting through different temporalities to blend in – or not! – with their surroundings. The direct architectural manifestation of this statement is the element of monumentality and presence at the heart of each intervention, giving the series a distinct architectural expression. Lastly, it is important here to note that certain issues pertaining to the anthropogenic nature of architectural ‘programs’ have been substituted with merely programmable architectural interventions that serve a specific purpose. While some are infrastructural interventions, others put natural processes and events at the center of their programming and logic. It is quite clear that, for the sake of this project, the ‘client’ becomes the landscape, rendering nature and the built environment the main stakeholders in this design approach.

### **III- Methodology & Study Plan**

To experiment with the previous hypothesis, the first challenge resided in the establishment of a clear methodology that would guide the research and design process. It was essentially important to develop the five different interventions simultaneously at a comprehensible level of detail, focusing every time on three core concepts: the establishment of a clear architectural program and language, developing a clear and precise relationship with the site and context, and making clear elements of tension pertaining to both the state of the landscape and its adequate grief counterpart through the architectural intervention. This threefold approach proved challenging in terms of complexity of the different elements combined. Case studies, previous examples, and theoretical backing were essential to situate the interventions within contemporary social and ethical discourses and provide references for the architectural language and construction.

As such, a cycle was established with the three mentors, as each week was dedicated to the conception and development of each of the five interventions. Each stage of grief was then developed in two weeks, one dedicated to the establishment of form, concept, expression, and relevance, and the other to construction processes, detailing, and feasibility. This proved quite stimulating as feedback with tutors was constantly shifting from a topic to another as the weeks progressed, but also slightly overwhelming as it was difficult to juggle five different interventions at once. I believe that this is where my approach could have been improved: perhaps taking the time to develop one intervention expansively at the start would have provided a certain template and standard to the development of the others and would have paced the project in a more regular manner. Feedback from the tutors was then ingested and taken into consideration in the conception of the following interventions, providing moments of reflection on the produced material. One especially memorable conversation was about the imagination and conception of the interventions’ structures and construction in a manner that mirrors their design intent and gesture. This provided an alternate approach to design, and serious moments of self-reflection on the general process guiding the initial conception phase.

### **IV- Personal Reflections**

- a. What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (Arch), and your master program (MSc AUBS)?

The proposed graduation project takes inspiration from the Borders & Territories conceptual, practical, and theoretical frameworks as a base for research and design. The studio topic “Transient Liquidities along the New Silk Road” is heavily in line with the proposed graduation topic, as it investigates conditions of formation of postindustrial landscapes in Turkey, a result of varying demands and rich natural resources along the new silk road. Turkey is then at the forefront of

rapid transformations, made possible by its complex infrastructural landscape and abundance of natural resources.

The whole urban fabric is observed as an ephemeral entity, due to the instances of impermanence and indeterminacy that were fundamental to its conception. The city and its surrounding infrastructural systems and nodes then become a system of independent conditions, forming the ephemeral landscape. As such, the graduation project builds on the initial promise of the Architecture Master track, by exploring a project from its conceptual phase to an actual physical site intervention. The scale of investigation starts from the observation of the region, then decreases in scale to the actual structure and built edifice on site. It is then a multiscale, multifaceted investigation into a specific concept, and eventually formalizing and spatializing it into a critical design project. This graduation project is then heavily concerned with concept, theory, and scientific research, and their essential and fundamental implementation within practical, technical, and concrete urban contexts.

Lastly, the graduation project's main fascination is with the forces that shape urban contexts. It is important then to consider the built environment in its different scales and impacts, using Indeterminacy as a design method. Architecture and spatial planning strategies are thus the focus of research and design, centered around a novel phenomenon, acting as a lens to observe these urban contexts. The master track's diversity and its constitution of multiple design practices and sciences was of help for this graduation project. The multi-disciplinary research environment enabled rich discussions about the topic of interest, allowing the questioning of the state of the built environment, and the systems that form its whole. It is then as an investigation into the many forces that shape our contexts. The main guiding force behind this project is then an independent, critical academic approach to education and Architecture.

- b. How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?

The primary research phase centered the interest scope around a specific phenomenon (indeterminacy) that was investigated in the first semester. As such, spatial and temporal implications of this phenomenon were investigated, putting forth the processes and forces that are at play around them. This enabled a more specific study of the area under investigation, centering both the scope and scale of the design approach. It was thus important to transition from the phenomenon under investigation to the immediate symptoms it leaves behind on the territory, exemplified here under the form of extreme landscape alterations.

The primary site of investigation and eventual design interventions becomes the condition of 'dead landscapes': they are instances of extreme land exploitation, characterized by the removal of their topsoil, the infiltration of toxins and chemicals into the aquifers, and the severe manipulation of the underground resources. This led to the instigation of a reaction towards this phenomenon, residing in orchestrating and materializing the stages of grief that follow this landscape death. Further research was needed in order to further understand key aspects essential to the design process. Firstly, the psychology and natural response to grief. Secondly, the architectural programs and infrastructures capable of manipulating and shaping both landscape and natural resources. Lastly, relevant practical and theoretical precedents, case studies, and examples that support the design process and conceptual frameworks. This then re-informed the design process by adopting specific landscape strategies, spatial manipulations, and scale references in order to introduce the architectural intervention to the site.

- c. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

The adopted approach and methodology have enabled an interdependent relationship between research and design, as they were both symbiotically involved in a constant back and forth throughout the project. Taking different strategies for each intervention, the entry point utilized for the design strategy varied from landscape territorial interventions to building details. Additionally, following the B&T studio's framework allowed a balanced combination of experimentation, research, and 'realism', as the transition between scales and mediums was in constant shift. Reflecting on the proposed methodology, it would have been perhaps more insightful to make more resolute decisions in the transitional period between research and design, in addition to using more physical models for experimentation and form-finding.

- d. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope, and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

This graduation project takes inspiration from existing theoretical and practical references dealing with the multiple scales of landscapes and territories. It is an investigation into socio-political actors, factors, and forces that constitute the built environment. The particularity of this graduation proposal is the use of an abstract theoretical concept and employing the logic behind its formation in dissecting the contemporary built environment. Indeed, a certain landscape is not only observed as an amalgamation of objects, but rather as indeterminate forces, events, and systems that are in constant state of transformation. This project is thus an investigation into the specific conditions that give birth to impermanence, more particularly the condition of formation of ephemeral cities emerging along the new silk road. The thesis project contributes to the ongoing discussion about cities and urban fabrics, investigating a particular spatiotemporal phenomenon through its different stages and transformations. Additionally, the topic of grief is a largely common human aspect that all humans are bound to experience, and the reflection and interpretation of this emotion through architectural interventions attempts to introduce a reflection on critique on how this emotion could be experienced spatially.

- e. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

The proposed architectural interventions extend an invitation to follow an abstract theoretical concept into a materialized physical expression, relying heavily on research, interpretation, and spatial manipulations to construct an evolving ritual through the landscape. As such, this provides an opportunity to look at Architecture through the lens of hypothetical, speculative arrangements of space, that are in turn capable of providing opportunities to reflect on the state of impermanence surrounding the built environment. Architecture is thus perceived as a medium through which indeterminacy is transcribed into permanent spatial gestures, suggesting the freezing of a phenomenon in space.

## **V- Further Challenges and Considerations**

Question 1: How did the fieldwork inform the design process, and what were the main takeaways from the site visit?

The trip to Istanbul allowed a more centered and specific outlook on the topic under investigation. While it did not allow clear and definite answers about the eventual site to be investigated, it instead focused the research on a series of repetitive phenomenon happening across a small area, thus exemplifying instances of spatial indeterminacy. It would have been perhaps a great help to revisit

the more specific site under investigation after its selection was 'finalized', as it would have allowed a smaller and more particular outlook on specific site formations, water bodies, survey and mining instruments, in addition to site-specific anomalies.

QUESTION 2: What are the conceptual limits of the design approach, and is grief materializing through the design interventions?

The interpretation of grief is observed through the eyes of human perception and understanding of the phenomenon. While they attempt to grasp the essence behind their formations, the design interventions are somehow incapable of transcending beyond human perceptions of a subjective phenomenon. Supposing one was to observe grief through the eyes of the landscape, how would it then materialize? Further investigations into the topic would suggest proposing an alternate understanding of grief, one that is observed through temporal and scalar properties relative to the landscape, and the more general territory that contains it. As such, processes, principles, and intervention scales would greatly vary, proposing a novel interpretation for how landscapes grieve.