



Reflection Paper

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Explorelab 37

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May 2024

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Banal Dreamscape began with a genuine curiosity about the interplay between the bizarre and the banal. The term bizarre might seem ambiguous, as it initially did for me. However, my graduation project became a domain for me to delicately define and refine this fascination over the course of almost a year, framing it as part of a longer journey. I believe the bizarre loses its meaning and becomes mere fiction without the context of banality. The conflict and coexistence of the two give depth to both. In the absence of the extraordinary, the banal seems dull, and without banality, the extraordinary becomes kitsch.

The process of refining, researching, and exploring this fascination, seems impossible in any other context than Explorelab, and without the help of my mentors, friends, and the environment. The essence of this project is the act of exploring itself before predetermining any desired outcomes. Almost like a search in a void, and in appraise of the subtle, bizarre, surreal, and even sinister found and made possible within the everyday, familiar situations. Inevitably, the investigation started with a search for familiar everyday spaces and situations, in the Dutch landscape, as it was and is the lived, tangible, yet still rich in extraordinary context that shapes my daily exploration.

The banal character of the project arises from the uncomfortable situation the project is put in. It avoids the extremes of the architectural spectrum: one end being the monumental, masterpiece: Architecture with a capital A. On the other, the ruin, which is now a post-modern object of desire, for preservation, restoration, or recreation by the Architect. Although both of the mentioned ends are drastically different in aesthetic values, they are both extreme situations in my opinion. Banal Dreamscape, however, situates itself in the grey zones, at the lost, unimportant segments of this spectrum. Here neither Architecture, nor Ruin gives value, but a mere bicycle shed, exists as a building, in spaces ignored by many architects, within the banality of suburbia. In their least designed and used spaces: garages and backyard sheds.

This investigation of the banality of suburbia in the Dutch Vinex neighborhoods, in the mass-produced houses, and among their least used space, is what I believe gives meaning to the subtle bizarre situation I aim for. Understanding that the most profound extraordinary, lies subtly beneath everyday situations and this is the reason behind its power was not possible without the process of research until P2 presentation. Research of Lynchian phenomena, shed light on the importance of the banal in this composition. Bergson's theory of laughter emphasized the importance of out-of-context-ness or what he better coins as "incongruous juxtaposition theory", uncanny by Freud through Antony Vidler's lens, paved the way for slight distortions in the design.

Crucial steps before the P2 presentation included exploring the cinema of David Lynch and thoroughly discussing a list of readings in the research paper, which clarified the project's direction. Although defining the problem and a reason for the architecture within the situation was challenging, the desired direction was found before P2, allowing the research outcomes to be integrated into the design process. Starting the design process earlier than usual for Explorelab helped reflect on the design, the relationship between research and design, and the presentation values of the project.

The first design phase made before P1 was to define the location of the project. The Vinex neighborhood in Enschede municipality called Eschmarke was chosen among 78 possibilities within 56 municipalities, with the sole intention of going for the most unnoticeable, of these already mundane locations. The second least noticeable location

was chosen, to take away the only extraordinary potential of being the last in the list. The next step was the search and creation of the extraordinary. The chosen 150 houses, containing mainly 4 designs, in the Parelmoervlinder, Uilvlinder, Kolibrievlinder, Kuifvlinder streets became the home for the project. With a statement not to threaten and deny the already functioning although banal situation in the neighborhood, but to add extra value, and a sublayer to it.

The biggest shortcoming found within the neighborhood was the monotony of architecture, activity, and inhabitants. Using Stanford Anderson's theories on the sympatric territories and domain of potential within the built environment, the defined mosaic of protected blocks for modern orthodox, middle-class families in this neighborhood was questioned. A call for sympatric, multilayered relations, vitalizing the conflicts and not only cooperation within this environment was aimed for. A conflict visible in a comparison between the center of a historic city and the suburban environment, highlighting the importance of the multi-layered, rich-in-activity, and inclusive environment, something lacking in the swiftly developed suburban settings. In this particular case, then an investigation was conducted to see what conflicts and otherness can be unearthed from the context. The answer was found behind the Dutch-German border situation of the site, and the conflict between the main users of space, and German drug tourists or as they were causing a so-called "nuisance" to the neighborhood.

The term nuisance drew my attention to this conflict, soft drug nuisance in the Netherlands being a relatively solved problem was again problematic due to special circumstances in the Enschede. The decriminalization of selling Cannabis since 1976 through coffeeshops being an important step in controlling the illegal drug networks was able to reduce the underground trade of soft drugs merely by breaking the link between the soft drug customers and hard drug dealers. However, the conflict in Eschmarke and Glanerbrug is intensified due to the illegalization of cannabis selling to foreigners, and the creation of illegal networks of drugs creating conflicts.

The Eschmarke train station, initially designed for suburbia residents' public transport access, is now the least-used train station in the Netherlands, mainly by drug tourists. Concerns have been raised in the neighborhood which led the government to implement strict rules regarding the drug trade and its public use. This in the case of my project, turned into a plan to introduce spaces for this other activity, considered a "nuisance". The idea is that the often hated and looked down groups of people in this space can be in more official contact with the neighbors to make a more sympatric territory. I do believe that this conflict and relation is solved in the center of Dutch cities and can be solved in any other region, although the characteristics and monotony of a defined space like Vinex neighborhoods is against any form of change, or more generally otherness. With this the intention is to create a more resilient, and robust neighborhood, by the added value of a sub-layer juxtaposed to the main core of it, to make both parties officially care for, or at first tolerate one another.

According to Dutch law, the growth and production of cannabis, is still illegal to this day. A phenomena that lead to the further creation of uncontrolled, undefined drug networks of backdoor drop-offs, while the front doors work legally using a permit. The sole legal, or better put tolerated method to grow the substance is the possibility of growing up to 5 plants in a domestic environment. Thus, repurposing small portions of these houses could create an ideal situation for a new soft drug trade network. The

garage spaces and backyard sheds of the dwelling units were chosen for this purpose, with an investigation of the growing methods, and the calculations done, approximately half of the mortgage of the volunteers can be compensated solely for the rent of an often-unused part of their house, the garages and backyard sheds, separately accessed, contained in a defined boundary, yet still a part of the house, facilitating the needs of the former enemy.

The Bicycle shed, often not considered architecture thus became the limit of my most important project ever, the master's final project, and made it the biggest challenge I faced in the graduation process and most probably the least and at the same time most ambitious decision for the project. A network of spaces from 8 square meters to a maximum of 40 square meters now became the platform for the extraordinary and bizarre to happen. The decision was to keep the surreal and sinister within the boundaries of this space, merely visible to the curious enough, leaving the entirety of the region intact. However, making an impact from inside the tiny spaces to let the conflict change the face of the blandness in the neighborhood.

The material and light then started to play a role in showing these slight adjustments, in also a subtle, refined way with a focus on the curvature of the light on the slight curve of the wall, in phases of the day, practical yet poetic. The early start of design

and the aim to finish the design by P3 gave me enough time to further reflect on the work and experiment with what was its strengths and weaknesses, and what was most important to manifest with this project. Thus, the remaining time until P4 was dedicated to the reflection and creation of detailed thorough products, alongside adding to the character of the space. I believe the early start of the design was a very helpful requirement that made me rethink and evaluate my work and refine it to an honest, dedicated investigation of the initial fascination I had, especially in a studio with the freedom level of Explorelab. From the design of a superstructure to the atomized final version of the project, towards different programs, to the investigation of the tangible conflict between the drug tourist and users, and from collage experiments to spatial explorations of lights and moods and atmospheres are all on the same level important and a result of the excess time in this process, being impossible without the clear, sharp and thoughtful guidance and mentorship of my mentors. I believe the choice of the right mentors in Explorelab is a difficult process yet is the most important factor in the creation of a meaningful and strong project.

Finally, the final stage towards P5 will be a great opportunity thus to dive even one layer deeper into the presentation and manifestation of this idea, in every mentioned aspect, and develop it fully until the whole aspects of it can show themselves as they deserve. Also, to reflect one last time before the closure of the project to see how the process was formed and how can I gain more insight into my progress. To be continued as a series of practices exploring the duality of banal and extraordinary, in each case with a unique problem found in the context. Hoping to see dreamscapes within the banality of something as mundane as a suburban bicycle shed.

