

# REFLECTION

## **Waiting | Learning from the everyday**

To see and design space from the perspective of bodily practice has been an anchor for my architecture study in TU Delft throughout the last two years. It has become a subject that I explored not only intuitively but also critically. When writing my theory thesis in MSc 2 semester, I took 'the toilet', an everyday architectural element, as a lens into problems of boundaries, materiality and (dis)embodiment. This graduation project could be seen as a continuation of my earlier 'bodily' fascination in both theory and practice. For this time, the everyday act of waiting is the vehicle for my new architectural inquiry.

I believe that one great ability that I should strive for is to be able to see and learn from the everyday. To truly see is to carefully observe with sensitivity, and to wonder with curiosity. Everyday could be an extraordinary experience of learning and becoming. My fascination on waiting started from my own daily experience, a banal practice shared by everyone. We strive now more than ever for a life of productivity in highly specific spaces of utility, waiting, as a consequence of commuting in between these spaces, is implicated as a waste, something to be diminished by any means. Still we are constantly waiting. In waiting, and towards waiting, bodies are repeatedly captured and reproduced by contemporary architecture. The tension between waiting bodies and architectural spaces generates a theatrical force shaping living experience and public life. As architects structures the place where bodies perform, I feel the urgency to understand the spatiality of waiting, and further to understand how we are actually influencing the everyday life through architectural practice.

## **Research Process | Bridging the conceptual and the physical**

The first half of making this project is a process of searching and re-searching. This process reflects my own struggling on the professional dilemma - where, to whom and how, am I an architect? As architects are expected to shuffle around a vague boundary between a creative maker and a criti-

cal thinker, where is my position? What would be my method, medium and expression, if not detached from the core of the profession, yet coming from my own fascination? What could be the source to any of my creation? It seems too ambitious of me to even want to solve all these existential crisis in making one project. However, they did all come forward as minor processes in my research phase. Inevitably, I learnt how to live and let these concerns contributes to one unique personal experience.

To approach this seemingly mundane yet difficult subject, the path I took on was not straightforward at all. One of my intuitive act in the beginning was to pose waiting as a fundamental problem to architecture, for I felt that there is inherent value of waiting that could be discovered - it might the way how we might perceive waiting in architecture. So instead of asking how do people wait, I questioned how is waiting conditioned in architecture. This conceptual step of abstraction from the everyday phenomenon, has put me into a continuous process of conciliation between a philosophical quest on the ontology of waiting, and an architectural examination of seemingly unusual waiting spaces.

Up until P1, my curiosity on the fundamentals of waiting has broaden my eyes on other fields outside of already produced waiting spaces. It was dangerous for a period, as the boundary of my search has come to the extend that I could not filter properly what is needed, in order to reach depth. Shortly after realizing the shortcoming of my boundless wanderings, I anchored my studies around several figures in theory. Based on these theories, I proposed a hypothesis of my final thesis, and further established conceptual models of architectural elements in order to open up case studies of physical spaces. This framework has guided me to set two lines of my research, the philosophical and the architectural, and intertwining them in the future. The hypothesis, made from primary conclusion of the research has also implicated that waiting is a crucial problem to be investigated as it echoes the problem of Modernity. As I argue in my preliminary hypothesis, waiting manifests an ambiguous void where desires are chased and refilled in an era of mass commodity culture and digital devices, when utility negates our experience of time. The way we value time influence how we structure

the physical living realm, in which waiting is intentionally diminished, and becomes self-imposed. The phenomenon of waiting in (semi-) public spaces reflects an extreme self-inwardness in physical public realm. We become passive bodies who disengage with our physical environment, as spectators and consumers. After this more than pessimistic critic, I propose that waiting, as a moment of immobilization of the body in constant flows, can be a spatial singularity opportunity where a new form of bound to place and time can be established, as singularities that allow us to escape the flows of control. As Heidegger regards 'waiting time' as the 'existential time', architecture of waiting is essential to frame out daily experience of being. We, as architects, are the ones to take on that responsibility.

After setting up the framework, my research consists of in-depth readings on two aspects. Firstly, I studied various philosophical texts on concepts of body, time and force, in order to reshape how I think on both waiting, and in general, the relation between space and body, and hope to apply those concepts in analysing specific cases. Looking back, the metaphysical study has helped me tremendously to think in a critical, precise, and concrete way. Yet, this approach to the fundamentals leaves me the challenge towards specificity in the architectural relation between space and waiting. To compensate that, I searched and analysed how the idea or act of waiting relates to space in a diverse range of architecture projects. In doing so, I tried to bridge gap between the abstract and the literal. Besides conducting literature research on architecture case studies, I also applied empirical methods, such as photographing and narrative drawings, to document human activities in one case – Rotterdam Central Station, which also became the site of the design project. In the end, my eclectic readings on these two directions met each other, and provided me principles and tools for my design project.

### **From Research to Design | Critical analysis to frame a creative process**

A key aim for my research is to understand the fundamental, architectural problems of waiting space. One important conclusion drawn from my quest is that architectural form, that follows and creates various desires of consum-

ing time, can influence intensively with the experience of waiting. In some situations, it increases the power of the body to actively engage with time and place. In other situations, it diminishes the power of the body by accelerating the flow of information and erasing the gap among places and time. The joint readings on waiting from philosophy and architectural cases also shows how critics could contribute to our understanding of spatial experience. In other words, my research not only help me re-evaluate waiting, and but also redefine its relation to architecture, through conceptualizing waiting spaces. Waiting space is not a matter of decorative rigor motis, as Huxstable claims, but an essential configuration problem in space, bodies and movements. Moreover, my case studies also provide me schematic tools to create different architectural conditions of waiting in my design project. In my architectural case studies of waiting, I identified spatial strategies applied in different situations of waiting, from waiting in the closed, the transitional to the open. I also analysed their influence on the experience of waiting. Lessons of architectural movement-images vary from the use of materials, the building of basic architectural thresholds, to forms that stimulates interactive relations among users. As explained in the epilogue of the research part, design principals drawn in this essay may be transformed and re-assembled into different contexts of waiting. In my design proposal, I try to learn from those models, assemble and translate them to applicable forms on site.

Based on theoretical research, I built my design assignment on one of my case study, Rotterdam Central Station, a site extremely relevant to the context I am situated in. The overarching goal of the design project is to set an example in the site of Rotterdam Central Station, to create a new architectural condition that allows for more strategic and active experience of waiting to occur, in an existing network of transition spaces, as form of resistance to constant flows and repetition of arcade's affects.

### **Design Project | A new condition for space of transit**

The design project, then, has three layers of significance for the choice of the site. Firstly, it provides a new architectural condition of waiting in space of transit, for experience of deceleration in the age of acceleration. Therefore,

the project addresses the problem of space of transit by addressing waiting, which means the problem of the station is not only stimulating the mobilized, but also accommodating 'the immobilized'. Secondly, it is a counter project that resists the repetition of arcade's affects - creating desires of consumption and reproducing the mass. The projects proposes a new typology of train station, where different spatial practices of waiting can be accommodated simultaneously, in a set of public interiors for alternative practice other than distraction. Thirdly, the design emphasizes architecture as a force that bonds the body with time – place through experience. By programming spatial experience of different segments, rather than utility, the continuous interior invites different forms of being while waiting. Characters of spaces would be brought back through materiality, rather than as images of spectacles. A former no-place, where traces can not be left and time to be erased, to a new lived place, where rethinking the practice of public space could be stimulated.

The design proposal accounts for a radical response to the general vision of public space in the current political climate, where fear of dirt, otherness, and terror is advocated, and massive surveillance is prevailing. The project shall stimulate a shift on how we imagine the station as a highly political space. It should be thought politically, not of an absolute and controlled space, but of a space where encountering and diversity are encouraged, where agency is given to the becoming bodies.

During discussion with my tutors, various interpretations on different fragments came forward. I am pleased in a way for these thoughts were not any references for the design. It might be a hidden process which I came to understand better and only afterwards what had been put on the paper. Yet, I believe that these unexpected readings are to recognize the side effects of the design itself, for the design creates even more ideas, without referring to the original idea of waiting. In this sense, the design would speak for itself, not as a definitive representation of one, but as a center of experiential pluralities.

## The Role of Waiting | The value of thinking space from a concept

I have been asked these questions many times since the beginning of my graduation: are you studying waiting rooms? Do you think waiting is valuable? Do you want to change or solve waiting? My answers to all these remain a sharp 'No', even after all the struggles I had in my monologue on what waiting is to my project. In the end, I am able to finally recognize the true value of waiting, in this project, as an engine for thinking and designing.

Waiting, as I presented here, is a problem. However, it is not a problem that needs to be solved. Rather, it needs to be questioned and interrogated, as an idea itself, with arguably tangible architectural consequences. To approach waiting, I went beyond the norm judgment of waiting as good or bad, and into waiting as a pure concept and intriguing idea, which can relate back to specific spaces. In my exploration, the problematized waiting provoked new readings of various cases, and new thoughts to re-imagine an everyday space that is close to me.

As the design project developed, waiting becomes only a vehicle to investigate issues enveloped around it. Therefore, it is more of a driving machine for my thinking process as a critical, but also creative one.<sup>1</sup> I imagine a similar role of my design project in a broader context. It does not claim itself to be a better 'station', that tries to compete with the existing one. It might seem so since the project, in the end, developed in taking care of various real, practical issues, including comfort, economic building methods, efficiency of travelling, physical need for diverse activities. However, they all came after ideas that are much speculative and beyond everyday necessities. Fundamentally, the design concerns the idea and practice of waiting as an intrinsic drive for

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1 See Foucault. *Theatrum Philosophicum*. 'As Deleuze has said to me, however, this metaphor is misleading: there is no heart, but only problem-that is, a distribution of notable points; there is no center but always decenterings, series, from one to another, with the limp of a presence and an absence of an excess, of a deficiency. Abandon the circle, a faulty principle of return; abandon our tendency to organize everything into a sphere. All things return on the straight and narrow, by way of a straight and labyrinthine line.'

new ideas of forming spaces. Therefore, it is equally important for me that the project could provoke different thoughts in many other everyday space other than being static to this topic or site. It is of its real value, when thinking and design process from a concept, as a way of doing, could be applied to many other concepts and places for new architecture.

It is in my wish that the project does not end, or conclude on the problem of 'waiting', or of 'space'. Rather, it opens up and fuels into my future critical creation as an architect.