

Mountainscapes - towards another interpretation of design

Overview research

War is not confined to this city, to the burning towers of Sarajevo, marking the end of an age of reasons, if not of reason itself, beyond which lies a domain of almost incomprehensible darkness. Nor is it confined to the culturally complex Balkan Peninsula for which Sarajevo was a symbol of tolerance and hope, and is now a signal of despair, and a warning. Armed conflict in one form or another continues to rage around the world, in Syria, Iraq. Though no one in their right mind would wish it, there is certainly more to come. Only by facing the insanity of wilful destruction can reason begin to believe again in itself.

Actually, war is carried on all the time. Whenever established ideas are under attack by new ones, there is war. Wherever landscapes are rapidly transformed by new technologies or ideologies, there is war. And let no one forget the eternal war of 'man against nature'.

By naming destruction an inescapable beginning of all construction, a necessary yet effectively repressed platform of the ideology of progress, one has to realize that what is of interest are not the objects destroyed, but the inability or impossibility to see the world differently without destroying them. In a slippery zone of common sense, all destructions that define the site are 'natural' outcomes – whether produced by humans and their political violence, or by divine nature itself, which still functions in ways that are far beyond human mastery. What else but destruction can arise from war? What is the role of the architect in this process? What are the right tools to use?

In my *research atlas*, I start giving a short introduction in the methods of the landscape architect, in order to obtain a new perspective in the reading and writing of the city, as I believe that the old and traditional ways of doing of the architect seem increasingly insufficient. In the second chapter, I frame the different time periods the city of Sarajevo has undergone to sketch a city profile of the palimpsest that it is today. In this process, I considered not only the urban development over time, but also the (non) relation between the city and its territory, especially its mountain, Mt. Trebevic. When sketching this profile, I give extra attention to the urbanity under siege and the art of survival, as this time has had such a big impact on the city of today, not only on a physical scale, but on a social, economic, cultural and psychological level as well.

I continue to discuss the ever changing role of the architect, during the war, the post-war and the city in transition, and the position of architecture and how it is related to memory. In the architecture of memory, ruins and monuments play an interesting role. I show my specific location, Mt. Trebevic, which is the embodiment of the status quo the city currently experiences. The architectural element that I chose to work with on this location is the old bobsleigh track. Lastly, I introduce a new approach towards design which I believe is suitable for the architect to use in the situation, namely a narrative approach. As a method, I will focus on the cinematic

narrative and the possibility of film as a design tool. Through applying the narrative method, my aim is to *communicate* and *give meaning*, but also to provide a model for thinking about the future, opening a *dialogue* to reconnect the city with its mountain, and reintegrate the mountain in the larger urban fabric.

Research // design

I wish not to make a distinction between research and design, because I believe the two are inseparable. The elements of the research above were represented in my research atlas, but the process did not end at that point. I continued my research into the use of film as a design tool, which ultimately became my design.

The decision to explore the cinematic narrative came out of my research. The architect is not only a designer of buildings. Since the origin of the trade, the architect must master many disciplines and act as a link between parties. The architect is part of a larger whole in which, over and over again, he must try to define his role - he has to take a *stance*. The design process is a continuous search, not only for the right design, but also for the right methodology, the right approach, the right tool. We should take an open attitude to each design task. It is impossible to use exactly the same approach for each design task, or come to the same solution every time. Sometimes, old and traditional ways of working seem increasingly insufficient to reflect the new questions that arise. What new roles can architects assume today? How do they position themselves in societies in transition? What position do they take in the relation between their role as architect and the urban landscape and its actors? How should they approach ruins, war damage and the process of reconstruction? And what can be the role of using cross-media practices in this process?

Taking this into account, the architect needs to find a new way to approach a site and its unique specificity, to look at it more deeply and more creatively. We can learn a lot from landscape architects, who take as their starting point the '*reading and writing*' of the site itself, instead of prioritizing the *building on the landscape*. We have to recognise that every place is a complex and layered phenomenon, a physical platform of lived space. Complex locations like Sarajevo and its mountain, its bobsleigh track, with a particular geological, political, social and cultural history, demand analysis and design approaches that take into account the experience on the ground, the lived space, the different layers and meanings of a site, the experience of movement and time. Furthermore, the central position of the designer in the transformation process needs to be questioned by demands for participation and even co-creation with the different urban actors, which require specific tools that take into account the multiple stories embodied in a place. Top-down design and planning has increasingly made way for a complex process that involves many actors, creating a need to redefine the question of what design is. Rather than a linear, rational character of traditional planning, a shift towards more open design approaches should be made, which take into account experiential responses to the sites at hand, and which allow more relational ways of doing. Design should be seen as a *process* rather than a *product*.

My hypothesis was that a *narrative approach* can play an important role in the design process, and bring together spatial, social and experiential questions. My aim was to explore the use of the cinematic narrative method to address the questions of reading and writing the urban landscape of the Sarajevo of today. Through this method, I did not want to generate a static depiction of the future, but rather trigger the start of a *dialogue* between the leftover space, Mt. Trebevic, and the urban actors, among them citizens, architects, urban planners and the governmental body. Thus applying the narrative methods as a tool to *communicate* and give *meaning*, but also to provide a model for thinking about the future. Through the framing process and the subsequent screening, the location will be transformed from an unconsciously recorded space – or naïve space – to a consciously recorded space that becomes an expressive space. In this way, the film can be seen as a design tool, as a facility, as it enhances the accessibility of the location.

Ambiguity

The narrative constructed can be called ambiguous. The approach interweaves reading and writing, design analysis and analytical design, using narrative as a tool to understand and create (urban) landscapes. To do so, one needs to develop an awareness of (inter-) subjectivity and explore the balance between the perceiver – the subject – and the perceived landscape – the object. As Klaske Havik and Saskia de Wit describe: ‘It is here that resides the vulnerability of such an approach as well, as it includes a tacit assumption that people will somehow perceive like the designer does, that our understanding equals the understanding of others, and that designs can determine perception and behaviour. Acknowledging that they cannot (and should not) prescribe the uncertain affective capacities and propensities of human emotional interactions with designed landscapes, their designs are rather catalysts for the transaction between people and space, creating possibilities for engaging and disclosing qualities of a location that would otherwise remain hidden. The use of narrative tools helps to structure and in a way make experiential aspects objective, explore the perspectives of other possible users, inhabitants or passers-by, and base fictional projections on in-depth readings of the existing physical reality of the site.’

Explore Lab

My graduation project has been conducted along the track of Explore Lab, an independent graduation laboratory. Explore Lab gives students the possibility to follow their thematic and spatial interests through intersection of self-designed research methods that further on will inform their graduation projects. Its open structure gave me the possibility of exploring the cross-disciplinary field between architecture and film with the aim to employ film as a design tool. It enabled me to combine all my main interests in the architecture field in one project: research, society, the role of the architect, border conditions, people, history, cross-media, transcultural studies, film and photography.

Position in the wider framework

Every day our senses take in a complex set of parameters by moving; we perceive and experience a broad range of acoustic, tactile, visible and kinetic characteristics of the landscape. What we smell, touch, taste, see and hear with and without realizing defines best how we feel in a space. Space is a construct of perception and evaluation, of physiology and psychology, of possibilities, experiences and knowledge. It is not only defined by the tangible elements of the material reality, but also from the intangible sensitivities and unseen stories behind them, brought together by our mind and senses.

Modern architecture has evolved into a rational system stripped of any connection with the reality of human perception and the spatial experience. Nonetheless, 'soft' factors such as experience of place, atmosphere, diversity and the public domain are becoming increasingly significant in the debate about the city and architecture. Architecture should focus more on the aspect of experience, a combination of the factors place, time and life. I think the 21st society asks for a new approach, a new architectural toolbox that focuses more on *lived* space. My project has been an experiment within this and proposes *another approach towards design*, thus informing the current debate on the use of digital moving images in architectural and urban design issues, cross-media practices, as well as the role of the architect and open new possibilities to reading and writing the city in all its layers.

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