

Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences



Graduation Plan: All tracks

Personal information	
Name	Zoe Holiday
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Studio		
Name / Theme	Explore Lab	
Main mentor	Suzana Milinović	Architecture/Urbanism
Second mentor	Georgios Karvelas	Building Technology
Argumentation of choice of the studio	<p>The Explore Lab studio was selected to foster this project as it provides an open framework for unconventional research and design approaches for subjects that do not fit within the other Graduation Studios. The freedom to select the boundaries and context of the graduation project aligns perfectly with the theoretical and practical exploration of anarchispheric spaces conducted within this thesis. The ability to use interdisciplinary research and design methods in the Explore Lab studio will facilitate a product that blurs the lines between architecture, urbanism, and art installation.</p>	

Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	Imagining the Anarchisphere: Where City and Wild Collide
Goal	
Location:	Several Sites in Rotterdam
The posed problem,	[Problem Statement]
research questions and	[Research Question]
design assignment in which this result.	[Design Assignment]

Problem Statement:

Urban public spaces are often dominated by hierarchical power structures and transactional logics, leaving little room for autonomy, freedom, and community-driven interaction. These spaces are commodified, surveilled, and restricted, failing to function as truly public realms. This project addresses the need for alternative spaces—anarchispheric spaces—that challenge these constructs and foster collective autonomy and ecological reciprocity within what we can define as the public.

Research Questions:

The research question that guides the exploration aims to touch upon the three main themes. Anarchy, Nature, and Wild.

How can the anarchisphere challenge and disrupt power structures in urban public spaces through spatial interventions inspired by wild ecologies, to provoke awareness of consumer capitalist constructs of conformity while fostering freedom and autonomy?

Sub-Research Questions:

1. How can the anarchisphere challenge and disrupt power structures in urban public spaces?
2. How might principles of wild ecologies and ecological reciprocity inform the design of anarchispheric spaces?
3. What insights can be gained from observing how individuals currently navigate and utilize public spaces to subvert existing power structures?

Design Assignment:

The design brief will begin as an extension of the research. The set goal is to design and prototype interventions within selected urban sites in Rotterdam that embody the principles of the anarchisphere. These designs will range from small objects in the start of the research, aimed to make people curious and critical. The interventions will explore the creation of autonomous, non-transactional spaces that provoke critical awareness of societal norms and inspire collective action. By integrating ecological themes, emphasizing reciprocity and the blending of urban and wild elements the design will propose a radical alternative to a top-down urban planning.

The reactions and interactions with the public from the research-oriented smaller scale interventions will be used as the starting point for the final designs, attempting to engage in circular research, thus prompting the future interventions and development of the anarchisphere. More architecturally significant interventions will be designed then to act as more permanent urban installations. These final designs will be placed on the sites selected in the research phase of the project, and the goal is to have one of these interventions realized and placed on site as a full scale prototype.

Process

Method description

Theoretical Toolkit:

- **Literature Review & Discourse Analysis:** A comprehensive review of relevant literature, including anarchist, ecological, and urban theories, will form the theoretical foundation for the project. This review will guide the development of a conceptual framework for anarchispheric spaces, emphasizing autonomy, ecological reciprocity, and the disruption of traditional power structures.
- **Thematic Mapping:** Key concepts from anarchist thought, wild ecologies, and ecological reciprocity will be mapped to identify potential connections that inform the design process. This theoretical toolkit will help shape the design of interventions that challenge societal norms and empower individuals.

Site Selection:

The research begins with *derive*—wandering walks through Rotterdam—where the researcher intuitively explores and identifies underused or neglected spaces. Through informal explorations of the city, areas are selected based on a set of criteria and perceived potential for intervention. Photographic documentation is used to capture elements of these spaces that may be overlooked or undervalued. This method allows for a deeper, experiential connection with potential sites.

1. **Derive Walks:** From a set starting point the researcher walks with the flow of people cars and curiosity. With no input other than the 5 senses they act like a leaf in a river being pulled by the current of intrigue.
2. **Photographic Documentation:** Capturing spatial qualities, unutilized areas, and architectural or natural features that suggest potential for change.
3. **Field Notes:** once some areas of interest are identified, notes and sketches are done of the sites, to see how their use changes over periods of time.

Spatial Analysis- Zones and Microzones:

Following the derive process, the selected sites are divided into a sort of grid, then categorized into **zones** and **microzones** to better understand its spatial dynamics. These categories allow for a more precise analysis of the site's uses, limitations, and potential areas for intervention.

- **Zones:** Larger areas of the site, such as main pathways or open fields, that may be repurposed for collective or individual use.

- **Microzones:** Smaller, distinct areas such as corners, hidden pockets, or spaces near infrastructure (e.g., benches or lampposts) that require more focused attention for potential interventions.

Intervention Categories and Examples:

Once the spatial analysis is completed, interventions are either selected from an index of pre-existing interventions or designed to address specific categories, each aimed at transforming the space to encourage autonomy, interaction, and ecological reciprocity. They at the start are designed to be small-scale, low-cost, and quick to implement to focus the research on how people use and interact with these interventions. These interventions all into 8 categories and range from seating to disruption.

- **Seating:** Movable or unconventional seating to foster interaction and engagement.
- **Lighting:** Playful, dynamic lighting that alters the space's atmosphere and invites use in the evening.
- **Shelter:** Temporary or small shelters to create intimate spaces for rest or social interaction.
- **Nature:** Ecological interventions such as green walls, wildflower seed bombs, or planting initiatives.
- **Disruption:** Unexpected, playful interventions that challenge conventional use of space.
- **Play:** Interactive installations or features that encourage joy and spontaneous engagement.
- **Art:** Guerrilla art, participatory installations, or message boards that invite creativity and reflection.
- **Community:** Interventions that foster local engagement, such as pop-up workshops or collaborative installations.

Each category is designed to create a specific type of experience that shifts the perception of the space, encourages new ways of use, and empowers the community.

Literature and general practical references

The theoretical framework consists of literature and case studies that are organized along three themes, Anarchist Theory, Ecology, and Urban Design. These three themes provide a broad scope of knowledge that can be applied to the elaboration of the anarchisphere, one as a theoretical concept and two as a physical manifestation within the public.

The main sources used for Anarchist theory are *Anarchy in Action* by Colin Ward, *The Ecology of Freedom* by Murray Bookchin, *On Anarchism* by Noam Chomsky, T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone by Hakim Bey, and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's interviews on indigenous perspectives and anarchism. These sources provide the foundation for how anarchy is defined within the project not as a Molotov cocktail throwing radical revolt, but as a political philosophy that denounces the state power and authority in favour of community driven mutual aid-based systems of organization.

For Ecology the main sources used are *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer (reciprocity and interconnectedness in nature), *Vibrant Matter* by Jane Bennett (environmental philosophy and agency of nonhuman actors), *Ecology as Politics* by André Gorz (ecological principles in design), *Ecologies Design* by Maibritt Zari (ecological design strategies). These texts showcase a perspective and approach to ecology that goes beyond binaries of urban and natural and invites a holistic view on the integrated systems and natural processes that humans can have with their surroundings.

In researching existing urban design sources and literature, the following texts became foundational in the development of the project: *Theory of the Dérive* by Guy Debord (dérive as a spatial practice), *Tactical Urbanism: Short-term Action for Long-term Change* by Lydon and Garcia (tactical urbanism strategies), *Designing Disorder* by Pablo Sendra and Richard Sennett (disruptive design and urban planning), and *The Temporary City* by Bishop and Williams (case studies in temporary public space projects). These laid the groundwork for how researchers, architects, and anthropologists alike have approached the glaring issues that have presented themselves in public space.

Through these references, and the influence of many others, the research and development of this thesis has grown into an anarchist understanding and cross disciplinary approach to the commodification, privatisation, and underuse of public space for free and autonomous activities.

Reflection

Relation to Studio Topic and Programme:

This project aligns with the Explore Lab's emphasis on unconventional methodologies and interdisciplinary exploration. As Explore Lab is a free studio that seeks to investigate projects outside the scope of other studios, this project blurs boundaries and boldly attempts to call out the problems with our public space. It integrates the Master of Architecture program's focus on societal relevance and sustainable design by addressing urgent issues of urban space commodification, ecological disconnection, and societal alienation.

Relevance:

This project is blatantly relevant. It's in your face, every day. The problem is embedded within our very commutes and daily activities. It would be harder to argue why it isn't relevant. However, for the purposes of this document here it is all laid out.

Academically this project and research introduces the anarchisphere as a new concept into a theoretical spatial practice and public design discourse, connecting anarchist philosophies, urban design, and grounded ecological thought. It challenges traditional conceptions of the public, nature, and how the user should be involved in their city and contributes to ongoing discussions about resisting commodification and fostering community and action within the urban public.

Professionally this project highlights how small-scale interventions, thought of in a temporal landscape can have a great effect of how a space has the potential of being used. How small tactical interventions can empower communities and disrupt entrenched societal norms. It provides practical ideas for urban designers and public citizens alike to create participatory, ecological, and community engaged anarchispheric spaces.

On a social scale this project responds to a need for change, and not just in physical public space, but also in the way that people conceive their right to the public. By rethinking how our shared spaces can be used, this research promoted autonomy, mutual aid, and ecological care. It hopes to encourage a shift towards collective actions, self-organizations, and environmental stewardship addressing the large-scale problems we see as a result of our consumerist and capitalist society.

This project is relevant. For all the reasons stated above and more. It bridges theory, practice, and hope, endeavoring for a bold new vision of public space. It provokes and empowers communities, challenges conventional urban norms, and advocates for design that breaks the barriers between design, designer, and client, making it a timely and impactful contribution to urban research and practice.