

/Reflection

Sanne Sophie Hoogkamer

© Sanne Sophie Hoogkamer

Technical University Delft
Department of Architecture (Explore Lab)
MSc of Science

Design mentor Roel van de Pas
Building Technology mentor Pierre Jennen
Research mentor Martijn Stellingwerf

Thinking the transition

Public space for the encounter

Walking in the drizzling rain, accompanied.
Unconsciously searching for that moment of arriving,
surrounded by compositions of architectural elements,
some distracting, some attracting.
Played by the displacement.

/The beginning of the journey

09-10-2019

Stating that this small poem is the start of this graduation project, is an understatement. The obsessive interest in my subject, has grown over years, developed further into a fascination. In 2011 I started at the art academy, which stimulated me to think beyond the ordinary and has triggered my mind. Since then I was involved in different projects at the faculty and outside, I got motivated through writing my Architectural Theory Thesis on Affordances and its potential. This phenomenon let me realize the effect of space and form on people's behaviour and their involvement in architecture. Entering an area, open space or building, I wonder again and again and even more increasingly why not more has been done with the available space and the stimulation of people's imagination and positively influencing their behaviours. I have touched upon this phenomenon in different projects during my studies, taken different angles to stimulate people's perception in their lives.

In all of these different projects there was always a specific goal or function to relate to. All of this led me to start wondering about our contemporary world, where almost everything is based on familiarization and as well influenced or perception and conception of space. The unawareness of moving from one place to the other, surrounded by environmental cues, objects that trigger certain thoughts,



Playtime | Jacques Tati | 1967

movements and desires are used to let people behave in certain ways, certain systems. Due to the orientation to the function or destination, the surrounded spaces are mostly forgotten spaces and not seen as functional spaces, or spaces of potential, while this play a major role in our daily experience and trigger the imagination and thereby have lots of potential.

All of this energized me even more to dive deeper and look broader in the potential relation and interaction of the human with architecture. Could architecture contribute to the dynamic and importance aspects of transition spaces and bodies, to create more appreciation for the elements, spaces and their surroundings? How could I — as a future architect — adopt a critical approach to the formalized assumptions within the architectural discipline, to make sure that I'll become more attentive and sensitive towards the surroundings that I will intervening in the near future? How could I participate in designing in/with/through architecture?

This aspiration, to look critically at what knowledge I gained about architecture, the important perspectives and the way of designing, as a student at the Art academy and here at the TU in Delft, led me to the Studio Explore-lab. The studio enables me as a future architect to position myself and encourages me to think about the future of the environment. Starting the continuation of this journey in Explore-lab, it felt unsure without knowing what the outcome would be. I first wanted to develop the theory of Affordance and specify my position and then act accordingly in the project. By the

ability to choosing my own mentors, searching for different applicable methods of research and designing, contributed strongly to the process, the quality of the project and my personal growth.

At the beginning of this year I aimed to do a project which would be critical of current design strategies and the use of space in architecture. I wanted to go beyond simply making a “de-formalized” project and keen to find out how we and our environment became such formalized, repeating the same system. For me this meant to experience and research the ordinary in architecture, things we take for granted, and finding out how architecture could play a role to strengthen this relationship and excite the perception and conception of the human. Specifically the contribution of transitional spaces in urban, building and interior scale that may help to frame this threshold. The critical research approach, therefore, has been about finding out how we are deprived by the valuable moments of temporal interpretations, dimensions and possibilities of daily experience. This by doing literary research, writing, drawing and doing inquiries to broaden the perspective.

Architecture is nowadays mainly used to serve but has the potential to be a tool to regulate and influence behavior. As said before architecture is often used and related to certain events of repression. Specifically, in the urban spaces we try by defining spaces to regulate the urban system and thereby the behavior, which doesn't allow the open interpretation of spaces.



Playground | Aldo van Eyck | Amsterdam

The potential of these spaces and specifically the spaces we pass by fast, is the transition space and its “thresholds”.

In architecture it fascinates me to think about the relation we as human have with the surroundings and the role of architecture. Nonetheless, this raises some more specific question, to wit: What is our relation with architecture, and how can architecture in these transition spaces mediate towards a more imaginative and experimental transition?

During my studies I realized that architectural approaches are often based on defining spaces, functions and relations. We became accustomed to regard surrounding objects and environments as a function. Due to this orientation to the function, the surrounded spaces are mostly forgotten and not seen as functional or useful. During the experience I gained and the different research and design projects it made me realize that these surrounded spaces play a major role in the experience and have lots of potential to learn and expand our perception and conception. Nowadays as a student, we learn how to create certain spaces for defined functions and have lots of references to lean on. But how do we use several spaces, how is our body reacting and can we strengthen this relationship? We are provided with information, but what are the potential relationships with these basic architectural elements and could they stimulate the use?

I realize that we became deaf of our surroundings, and we as architects should be more aware of this during the design process. To design a project which is focusing on the relation and the experimentation, may sound like a neutral position to take, but these definitions and possibilities are not neutral. As we all know, everyone experience space differently and will be triggered or repelled by different forms and situations, to make clear there is no average, as well for the proportion of the human.

I Also realized during this journey that this research and design project will be a never ending or always ongoing process. Which reflects what was stated in the beginning; by finding out what it could afford us in daily life and how it could be implemented in architecture. By using the phenomenon of Liminal space, I tried to limit myself to the extent of the transition space, which provided new insights



Olafur Eliasson | the sun | Tate modern

*Where laying on the floor becomes the most appropriate
place for seeing art*

and ensured that we all move, feel attract and remember differently. A space or transition will never be experienced the same. This made me aware of the strong sensitivity that is needed in architecture to perform.

However, the solution does not simply come by redefining the transition space and make new relations. Another result of designing based on possible relations of the human and its surroundings during their transition, created places and space to wonder and realize the ordinary behaviours. This interventions in the design, will not perform and be the same for everybody, but stimulates and sometimes limits behaviour, to expand, perceive and conceive the spaces around us.

The all-round designer Ollafur Eliasson (2008) have shown through his installations that it can be possible to let people wonder and experience spaces and places by using basic elements and compositions. Instead of start thinking how things could be, to express them and use this situation to let people realize the beauty of the existing by giving breaks in the current systems. This was also the case by the architects Pezo von Ellrichausse, who shown and created appreciation for the basic elements and its composition in architecture and thereby let people wonder.

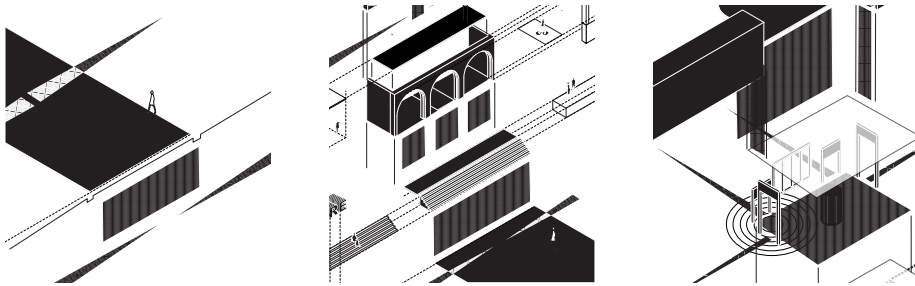
These different approaches and the research on the ordinary elements and its role in the transition space, learned me the importance of letting go the subject-object division, as is often used in the practice of architecture. Where the space or place is seen as an object and the user as subject. Questionable in this case is the dependence of the human and its division, it disregards the potential of the body. We as human, the body, is always in a surrounding and this relation is always in alteration. Some of these surroundings, stimulate the body and could be seen as an extension. Therefore, it is difficult to define the beginning and end of these surroundings, while we really like to define these moments, we can't really determine. That said, the transition space can be a multiplicity of things and can perform in lots of different ways. Often they are experienced as being static or even formalized. When thinking of them related to the body they are also dynamic. In its formalized form, space will be experienced and delimits the body and different environments spatially. Its delimitation, in the form of architecture, influences the behavioural domain, it becomes ordinary. Here these formalized spaces are used to limit, affect and have control over our behaviour, physically and mentally. This researched basic architectural elements, separately or in composition, creates these enclosed spaces.

The disposition of these architectural elements can change our behaviour and possibly our lives. New structures and compositions could change our frame of reference and make spaces for a more dynamic, complex and relational architecture. These changes could open up instabilities, create and afford possible new interpretations of place and space. Besides looking at the elements or compositions, the influence of haptic conditions in this situation could add information and change the physical and mental experience. Those conditions are strongly related in the sense that they encourage new relations and unconscious behaviour. Each of these changes or additions give extra meaning to a more perceptible and conceptual transitional architecture opposed the current formalized state. A transition space is space we forget and take for granted over time. This space could be the first step towards more relation and could act as a mediator between static functions, relations and situations.

The acknowledgment of our formalized world and the potential of this transition spaces, we could switch from thinking in systems, relations and situations, to thinking about them as “thinking the transition”, which doesn’t relate to moment of being, but a moment of becoming and the potential. The collaboration and inspiring meetings with my mentors, have broadened the knowledge by their expertise and experiences on thinking of architecture in a different approach .

The gained and expansion of the knowledge in the research, I continued to expanding this findings and applying the position, by defining several moments of exploration. These different methods of inquiry, drawing and writing helped me to learn the importance of the sensitivity for the surroundings. I realized even more that we are surrounded by fixed environments with hidden potential. It can be difficult to find them in the everyday, because of its different conditions they are exposed. The explorations and drawing helped me to find a method of exploration and express these findings. These gained insights let me realize the importance of the material conditions and its physical and mental relations. By using different methods of capturing the information, it created an interesting field of possibilities. As Walter Benjamin mentioned in his book ‘One way street’, the theatrical nature of the street, reflects the need of the experience, engagement and social interaction in daily life. Related to Walter Benjamin, the street and the common space has the potential to be a connector and at the same time create stage for the individual. I realized during this research that behaviour and relation has an open-ending. This, because of the endlessness of perception and conception. Building on this I used a list of clarifications of different terms used in the research, to narrow and frame the field of working. Not to exclude any topic but to have a back core to rely on.

The different methods of researching supported me to make this phenomenon understood in the environment, and it helped to imagine even better the potential of the relation. Especially the outcome of the inquiry, which resulted in an over-viewed drawing which explained the potential, the thresholds and their conditions.

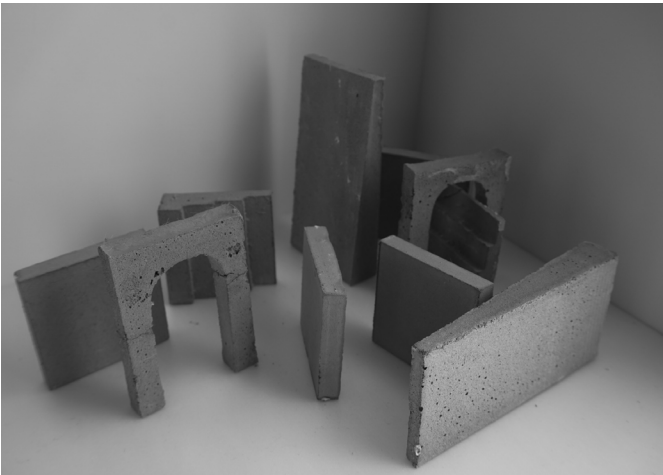


Notation system of the Threshold | Drawings by Author

Such a drawing and annotating created an overview of the amounts of thresholds we pass (conscious and unconscious) and different perceptions of the participants. This thinking the transition proved to be very productive, in many different situations and surroundings, to understand the environment and their potential for use and intervention. However, after the research on the different transitions, methods and literature, I pre-casted the transition elements in small concrete models, to use and create new relations. This last step enabled me to communicate even better to my colleagues, by making the potential and possible relations visible, by letting them play with those.

Besides the different useful methodologies of the research, I spoke with a lot of people during and outside the study hours of what they perceive in comparison with my personal observation. These talks and the reflection sessions with my mentors helped me to develop the findings and to stay attentive and accurate. These were also the moments where I realized, that we as human are always “in situation” and are in that sense always “in relation”. As I was sensitive for the surroundings before, during this graduation I sharpened this and did see increasingly new relations and potential. Using your body to explore the environment and thinking of new relations, sharpens everyone’s perception and conception of space, on a more meditative way.

Building on the passion for architecture and the possibility to explore this topic, gave me even more energy to strengthen and deepen my knowledge in this area. The broad research, the interactions and involvement with other students, the mentor sessions, the explorations, the drawings, own experience at the location and keeping on developing and testing new possibilities supported me to develop and progress this successfully. This journey of research made me realize the importance of the discipline on the life and behaviour of the people, but also on the static status of architecture and how to think strategically.



Exploring the form | By Author

The site of this project is chosen for its transitional function in the city center of Rotterdam. It is also chosen for its close proximity to my own surroundings (Rotterdam central district). During my study, I lived five of the eight years in Rotterdam, where I was able to see the whole transition of this area. A perfect place to apply the research, as I see this project as a case study, which will be applicable on and in different places. The factor of being able to visit this place and go through it physically to understand and research it with the possibility of being and becoming. This resulted in many site visits on different days during the year, to experience the different conditions. As well the particular moment during the Corona crisis, where this place, normally full of people, now empty and abandoned felt, reinforced the results of the loss of human scale in this area.

This area, also named “the red carpet”, is intersecting three different neighbourhoods and is mainly used as transition area. This meant that the findings and methodologies of the research could be applied to discover the current systems and create a strategy towards a more paused environment which enables the user to wonder and discover the area. I formulated the site as a tapestry, which deluge into the adjacent neighbourhoods. The current situation allows the user to vastly speed enter the city, where they are led by the formalized forms of the urban and architectural forms.

The goal is to create a project which shows that the threshold can mediate between the individual and their surroundings, to be critical of architecture based on perception and behavior, in today worlds based on formalization. Hereby using the knowledge gained throughout the research, to create punctuations in the city, which will function as a mediator during transition.

Firstly, I wanted to create awareness and attract and distract the user from the current fastness of the location by creating unbalanced moments, by using the ground as method; The ground undulation. Secondly and very personally, it was important to take into consideration that when affecting our surroundings, the changes that we make will be subjected to the regulations that are currently present. The existing system of movement and its function of being the entrance

of Rotterdam is important. As I stated, to create a more paused environment by adding several elements, the system of movement will stay intact as well as all the surrounded functions. Thirdly, the implementation has the goal to smoothly arise curiosity and contribute towards being a more porous, social and experimental transition. Lastly, the role of the body and its possible new relations with the new tapestry and punctuations, by having precision for form, detail, the potentials relations and its material strength. Therefore I did several test on materials, colour and structures, which helped me to understand the potential of the small details and precession in architecture



Considering all of this, the design consists of a tapestry; the ground undulation, which will complement the mediated functions of the punctuations. These punctuations have the intention to create new relations and interaction to contribute differently towards a more porous transition and at the same time create awareness of the surroundings and sometimes give new insights. The punctuations are interlinked with their physical appearance of form and material.

Being in the midst of the last phase of graduation, still full of energy and curiosity, I am working on this project with a focus of the potentials today as well as the (architectural) world of tomorrow. It is a topic with lots of potential for a more intense experience, perception and conception in transition spaces, where-ever we are in the world. At the same time, it creates options for the discipline of architecture (strategy), using different methodologies in the research and interpretation of architecture. A journey with no ending and lots of potential, where I think these new methodologies and notation systems could contribute to future architecture and it is great to be and take part of this.

As my father always says; “Rust Roest” (rest rust)

Sanne Sophie Hoogkamer