

Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences



Graduation Plan: All tracks

Submit your Graduation Plan to the Board of Examiners (Examencommissie-BK@tudelft.nl), Mentors and Delegate of the Board of Examiners one week before P2 at the latest.

The graduation plan consists of at least the following data/segments:

Personal information	
Name	Jesse Verdoes
Student number	4448375

Studio		
Name / Theme	Borders & Territories Graduation Studio	
Main mentor	Negar Sanaan Bensi	Architecture and the Built Environment
Second mentor	Gilbert Koskamp	Building Technology
Third mentor	Filip Geerts	Architecture and the Built Environment
Argumentation of choice of the studio	One of the main reasons for choosing this studio, is the experimental approach to architecture and the freedom to reach out to other disciplines in the process. Moreover, as this studio operates in between the fields of art and architecture, it could lead to innovative ways of thinking about the discipline. Lastly, by getting engaged with the importance of developing a theoretical thinking I hope to be able to properly position myself within the discourse before going into practice.	

Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	Dealing with death at the urban fringes of Mashhad Experimental architecture in search for a mediation between the territory of life and death
Goal	
Location:	Area around the Mashhad – Baghcheh Highway, from the city border until Tapeh Salam
The posed problem,	The city of Mashhad, which translates to 'the place where one is buried', originated around the burial place of Imam Reza. What started as a simple grave in between two villages, developed into a massive pilgrim destination that materialized as the Holy Shrine. Due to the importance of this event - i.e. the martyrdom of Imam Reza - in Shia's believe, the structure became the main driving force for the city and its larger territory. One could say that death is embedded in the history of the city. But other than its physical presence, the theme of death takes on a

significant role in the consciousness of Mashhad's residents. Due to its geographical location close to a fault line in the valley of the Kashaf-Rud river, there is a constant looming risk of flooding or earthquakes: The city has lived its life between the constant threat of destruction and the necessity of accessing water to make inhabitation in the desert possible. Moreover, and this goes for the whole of Iran, the contemporary society is centered around death as a result from the political reformation after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Following Ghorbani, this is reflected by the fact that 'the most religious centers, religious themes and forms, calendar plans and religious symbols are related to death.' (2018). Adding to that, Mirdamadi argues the existence of a death-conscious culture that emerged from the implications of the Iran-Iraq war, the prevalence of death in Iranian literature and the Shia teachings and rituals (2019). Part of the literature is a genre of historical texts called 'Ziarat-nameh', in which the customs related to visitations of the dead, or pilgrimage, are described. Particularly the notion of pilgrimage and the religious rituals like the mourning of Muharram are extremely prominent in Mashhad due to the presence of the Imam.

The importance of Imam Reza's grave in Shia culture, made Mashhad a preferable burial place for many people. This not only resulted in various tombs around the city, but also in the presence of grand graveyards around the shrine that largely exceeded the need of the population of the city itself (Darwent, 1965). The traditional cemeteries were integrated in the morphology of the city and part of the daily life of its residents. Moreover, the numerous villages around Mashhad each had their own cemetery where locals collectively carried out funeral rituals.

However, as the city modernized and the population rose rapidly, the city grew upon the territory of the dead. Almost all of the former burial spaces that were situated around the shrine or belonged to the villages which became part of the city, are now completely erased. One big centralized cemetery named Behesht-e Reza took over their role. As it is situated just outside of the city due to hygienic reasons, this modern burial place has become an isolated fragment situated next to one of the main highways leading out of the city. In this cemetery, that is almost set up like a city itself, the burying process

	<p>is standardized and bodies are efficiently 'dealt with'. Compared to the traditional processes, the funeral ritual has become dehumanized, streamlined and bureaucratized. In the context of Iran, this is referred to as the sequestration death (Bayatrizi & Ghorbani, 2019): a trend which can be considered to be part of a world-wide problematic tendency of distancing from death (Ariès, 1976; Mellor & Shilling, 1993; UIA, 2020).</p> <p>While the theme of death plays a significant role in the culture and history of Mashhad, the relation between the dead and living has now become increasingly severed. Due to the disappearance of burial grounds inside of the city and their displacement to the urban fringes, the formerly entangled territories of the dead and living are now completely separated. This contemporary situation results in a city that is 'burying' its past and is literally and figuratively taking distance from the dead. This project intends to research how architecture can deal with this changed relationship and how it could potentially be deployed to mediate new relations between life and death.</p>
research questions and	<p>What is the relation between our changed view on death and architecture?</p> <p>How is death manifested in the contemporary city of Mashhad?</p> <p>What is the relation between territories of the living and territories of the dead? How did they change?</p> <p>How can the current border conditions of Mashhad be described in relation to the territory of the living and the dead?</p> <p>How can architecture mediate a relationship between life and death?</p>
design assignment in which these result.	<p>The design of several architectural interventions around the Baghcheh Highway that mediate the relation between the territory of life and death, making use of the potential that comes forth from the isolated or decontextualized fragments of which this territory consists.</p>
Process	
Method description	
<p>In order to answer these research questions, a twofold research method is used. On one hand there is the theoretical approach and at the other side there are the acts of mapping. The seminars provided by the course are used to bridge the two. First of all, they determine the scope of the studio, introducing several selected architectural theories. After the readings for each seminar, a presentation is prepared to actively relate the readings to the act of mapping by the conceptualization of the respective</p>	

topic. The totality of the seminars serves the purpose of setting the frame of reference in the context of the studio.

Within this frame of reference, an individual scope is to be constructed. This is done by selecting certain themes related to the research questions. The essay is subsequently used to take a specific position, which elaborates on the theoretical underpinning of the architectural design. The relation between death and the city is explored through an anthropomorphological lens. Our bodies are subject to processes of decay and our lives are limited by death. Our constantly changing bodies and organs transcribe certain territories, borders and relations between them. By perceiving the city as a body, a specific understanding of the contemporary border conditions is shaped.

Next to this, the act of mapping serves a multitude of purposes. First of all, 2 maps of 1,8x1,8m are created of the city in order to get to know the intricacies of Mashhad. The creation of these maps, as a group effort, does not only form a base of knowledge that is needed for the formulation of the individual theme and the later formulated project, but also introduces different ways of mapping in relation to the production of knowledge. It should however be noted that, due to the current conditions, one is only able to have a distanced perspective on the city. The fact that our gaze on the city is shaped by the perception through other mediums or people should be taken into account in the process.

Subsequently, individual mappings are created around the selected theme. The theme of death in relation to the city has been broadly explored. By looking at literal manifestations of death in the city of Mashhad, like cemeteries, rituals, processions, tombs, etc., specific themes are to be extracted in order to transcend the literal manifestation and to formulate a theoretical position towards an architectural project. Other mappings will deal more specifically with the site. By focusing at the notion of terrain, which is especially relevant in the context of burial grounds, a specific but profound understanding of the site will be developed. Furthermore, during the Modi Operandi workshop, the method of modelling is used to spatialize the mappings. The dimensionalisation and materialisation of theoretical constructs serves the purpose of the translation to architectural constructs/principles. These can subsequently be used to form the architectural project.

Literature and general practical preference

Ariès, P. (1974). *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the middle ages to the present*. London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd.

Drake, S. (2002). *A Well-Composed Body: Anthropomorphism in Architecture*. [Doctoral thesis, University of Canberra].

Finkelstein, C. C. (2019). Architectures of Excarnation: Ecstatic Being, or an Ontology of Defleshing. In Ghidoni, M. (Ed.), *Muerte*. (pp. 52–60). San Rocco.

Gins, M., & Arakawa, S. (2002). *Architectural Body*. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press.

Kellehear, A. (2007). *A Social History of Dying*. USA, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mellor, P. A., & Shilling, C. (1993). Modernity, Self-Identity and the Sequestration of Death. *Sociology*, 27(3), 411–431.

Connelly, L., M. (2017). *Life, Death, and Design*. The Pennsylvania State University.

Loos, A. (1910). *Someone is buried here: Adolf Loos on architecture and death*. Vienna: Neue Freie Presse.

Pepperell, R. (2003). *The Posthuman Condition*. UK, Bristol: Intellect Books.

Vidler, A. (1990). *The building in pain: The Body and Architecture in the Post-Modern Culture*. 19, 3–10.

Worpole, K. (2003). *Last Landscapes: The architecture of the cemetery in the West*. UK, London: Reaktion books.

San Cataldo Cemetery by Aldo Rossi

Igualada Cemetery by Enric Miralles

'Der Prophet' and 'Final' by Gert Jan Willemse

The work of Walter Pichler

Reflection

Firstly, the project deals with the contemporary border conditions of Mashhad regarding territories of life and death, which fits the focus of this studio as it also refers to the investigation of specific characteristics of these conditions. Furthermore, the studio concentrates on complex urban territories that are hardly analysed and discussed within the discourse. It deals with sites where 'other' spatial conditions have emerged and which are, according to the studio, teeming with suggestive meaning and unexpected potential. The project deals with a site at the urban fringes of Mashhad which has a congested territory as it contains several sacred places: burial grounds and shrines and at the same time other programs that are exiled to the fringes of the city like agriculture and waste dumps. The pressured co-existences of the site ask for an experimental and speculative approach to architecture. An

approach that fits the studio as it sees the urban territory as a site for experimentation. As the research focuses on the design of several architectural interventions it finds itself within the field of the Master Track Architecture but also relates to the tracks of Urban Architecture and Building Technology.

Socially, this project is highly relevant as it deals with the contemporary changed perspective on death, which is largely discussed in the sociological field. Although the project is architectural, by attending this issue it relates to a larger scientific context. As architectural research does not only deal with objective findings, but subsequently with the interpretation of these findings into an experimental project, I believe it could potentially lead to new insights concerning this issue. The design then, does not necessarily focus on providing a solution, but also works as a tool for investigation and speculation in further research.