

P4 Reflection

Esmeralda Bierma – 4141288

First mentor: Mark Pimlott & Leontine de Wit

Second mentor: Gilbert Koskamp

Third mentor: Leeke Reinders

External examiner: Willemijn Wilms Floet

I. The relationship between my graduation project and the master architecture/ the studio Explore Lab

Starting my graduation in Explore Lab would mean I finally could combine my personal fascinations and interests into all aspects of the process. Being able to formulate my own graduation research and project from scratch was the most challenging, confronting and rewarding experience of my study period. It liberated me from the categorized study tracks where you are supposed to graduate with a given theme, site or program. Architects are often working with given design briefs of clients. For me being an architect means you are not merely working with given problems/questions from clients but being able to formulate your own as well. Explore Lab is one of the only places in the master track of TU Delft Architecture which allows students to bring their own topics without any predetermined frame. Therefore, Explore Lab was the ideal challenge for my final year of my master (and in mine opinion it should be like this for all master students).

Furthermore, I have always been interested as much in the unbuilt environment as the built environment. For most architects this could sound counterintuitive because we are the designers of the built environment. Although master students of architecture are incorporating both, the unbuilt environment and the built environment, the main focus is -to my dissatisfaction- always more on the built environment. As I see them as equal potential and importance I think research and design should have a broader focus which allows both being present. But to take a bit more extreme, I could state that my research therefore has a focus on the unbuilt environment. However, my main fascination is more specific than just the unbuilt environment. After living in Chicago for three months (for my master) I became highly interested in unfinished landscapes, wastelands, in-between landscapes. As most people see them as negative sites I do saw value in them as important free places, breathing places of the city for experience of being. The opposite of what cities are about nowadays: dominated by productivity and efficiency. Because this hidden, overlooked places, do not expose themselves easily, are more mysterious, not often by first hand legible, I felt extremely attracted to them and I wanted to explore them even more for my graduation. To understand them better, knowing how to read them and making it legible for others so they could also start appreciating these landscapes and understanding their potential and possibility for growing and increasing cities.

II. Research method and approach

Although we are a scientific study, I do not see architecture just being scientific. For me it is the combination of intuition and science, of imagination and logic... And sometimes it even appears to me to be more about intuition and imagination than science and logic. Therefore, architecture is a highly personal and subjective matter too. In my research I wanted to embrace this subjective approach. My approach/strategy for exploring these hidden, overlooked landscapes of Rotterdam

was **the act of walking**: the merit of wandering. I started to walk and wander in the city myself, from where I live (city center) to the periphery of Rotterdam. The literature study around this topic is called **psychogeography**: an exploration of urban environments that emphasizes playfulness and "drifting" which would unfold a new awareness of the urban landscapes/new perspectives of the city.

By **slowing down**, going in another pace than you are used to, you will be able to **perceive differently**. One has time to process what one encounters: the observation of the physical attributes will become more detailed and nuanced. Not only the visible things, but also the invisible layers of a place, such as sensory experiences of place, memories and associations have time to manifest. I would state that only through slowing down the unfinished landscapes can become legible in all its facets. Other methods I used to engage with these unfinished landscapes are **photographing, drawing and writing**. Photographing is an instantly recording of the visible. The moment is trapped in the photo and therefore represent the moment lost. Because these landscapes are temporal and every time I would visit them something would be changed photographing was a relevant tool for catching these moments. On the other hand, the drawing is a slower form of looking. A drawing is a synthesized image. By the slowing down and accurate looking, you will get a very detailed observation of the landscapes and are you able to see the beautiful elements of such a place, like the rhythm of the grass, the various wild flowers inside them, the smell and sounds of this natural place versus the sounds of the ordered city a bit further away, etc. Writing is form of abstracting of what you experienced and saw, the invisible layers, the associations, the imagination, the memories and social encounters can be all part of the narrative of a place. The non-place becomes a real place, a lived place.

III. The relationship between research and design

Through my research and my fieldwork - the close reading of those landscapes - I was able to see the qualities of those places. Whereas with my architecture intervention (the design) I want to expose these found qualities.

The research gave me among other things insights in being able to recognize the differences between the landscapes I found. As I started to get to know them specifically and get a close relationship with them, I also start seeing the similarities and differences. Although they had common characteristics, each place had its own story and experience. The research allowed me to make the things I found and experienced visible (through photographs, drawings and writings) but it did not allow the experience itself. Therefore, I concluded that if I want people to have a similar experience as I did I should make/create moments inside them which allow the experience itself. These interventions should attract people's attention when walking in the city, they should be more accessible, and the design should reveal the experience of the specific place (as a mediator).

I identified and selected three places in Rotterdam:

- The Wasteland in the City
- The In-between Landscape
- The Industrial Landscape
-

For each of them I had specific observations/experiences which I wanted to show through my designs.

As these places have a temporal character they ask for a more dynamic architecture than one is used to. An architecture that incorporates **time**; time in the sense that it allows **change, growth and decay**. The building should be subject to changes with seasons, the experience of the moment, minutes, hours, day, night. But they also could be beginnings for new futures.

As the unfinished landscapes are characterized by being unplanned, the designs should also carry out a certain **openness**. The design should offer a place for encounter and leisure activities, but the essence is that they are places for experience and being in time

I will provide an example of the wasteland in the city with my observations and how that has led to this particular design

The wasteland in the city – THE BIRD-HOUSE:

Urban character: *This landscape is one of the types that is not on the periphery of the city but more in the city center or close by. It is surrounded by people living and working, housing, offices and restaurant and shops close by and therefore has a more urban character than the other types I found. The spacy area is located next to the waterside with a southward's orientation. The intention therefore was to express the design through verticality and to fit the design in the surrounding of 4 to 6 story high buildings. Furthermore, the vertical expression of the intervention attracts the attention when walking/passing by or being on the other side of the water.*

As I was walking and climbing on the hill which is on the side of the plot, I saw the landscape from above, which was a beautiful view on the landscape itself, but also provided views of the city and to the waterfront. I noticed that the area was not only being used by children and grown-ups, but also by all kinds of other inhabitants like insects and other animals. Being there at several different moments I saw that the most frequent visitor of the place was the bird and therefore I named my design: The bird-house.

Isolated elements found on the place during the research and have been incorporated in the design, so that they became a part in the design and people can experience these:

- *Olifanten paadje, there are two "olifanten paadjes" on the site. They are unplanned paths made by people who simply want to take the shortest route. The path that leads to the design starts from the "olifanten paadje".*
- *The effect of the hill (the view, the climbing, should be part of the experience of the design)*
- *The birds, most frequent visitor of the place (design should incorporate a place for the birds)*
- *Local communities, people living next to the place. A collaboration with Theater Walhalla, bottom up initiatives on Katendrecht. The program could be a small theater in the summer*
- *Time: the continuous changing of the landscape, the design should also go along with the seasons and it should be able to change the structure and configuration similar like a tree. The design exists of a core (the tree trunk) which will stand there in winter and summer. During spring the design grows (like the tree getting leaves) and an additional structure can be added for activities and encounters.*

IV. The relationship between the graduation project and the wider, social, professional and scientific framework

In a wider context my graduation project exposes the potential of urban places in Rotterdam that people would see, in first instance, as negative sites. The relation between the project and the social context is to revise these unfinished landscapes and to offer semi temporal places inside them that allow people to access and to look from a different perspective towards the city.

Nowadays cities are becoming more and more hectic in the sense that they are dominated by productivity and efficiency. The places that I offer with my graduation project are opposing this trend. They are free places that go in a slower rhythm than the surrounding. I offer places to be

outside within the city, for people to inhabit or not, to get closer to our natural environment, the potential to create activities for leisure but most important places to be in. I think it is very important to encourage this kind of places in cities, as a break for people in their hectic and dynamic city life.

These unfinished landscapes are often temporal and waiting for developers to build new office buildings or housing on it. For the time being, the moment that the landscapes are still not under construction I show with my graduation project how to interfere with them. The project shows their value as being not programmed and being an important landscape/place for the city. To legitimate them instead of treating them as not important part of our city.

My project is about offering an experience of such place, so people can close read it and start appreciating them for time being. When looking at a wider framework, the graduation project contributes to create a more positive image of city by having people appreciating these places through the interventions.

As we live in a high capitalistic society, everything is money driven. My graduation project is of another kind. The temporal structures are designed such that people and local communities can build them themselves. The research and approach of design in the professional context integrates a more relational way of doing: involving local actors in the design process, instead of the more conventional top down approach of a project, makes space for a bottom up project.

I would definitely encourage architects to break with their conventional way of doing. To challenge yourself with new approaches towards design. To be the subject moving through the city and from the first-hand perspective being able to observe and come with ambitions for a place or the city.