

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	Iris M.I. Muis
Student number	5716012

Studio		
Name / Theme	Explore Lab 37	
Main mentor	Ir. Roel van de Pas	Architectural Design
Second mentor	Ir. Erik Hehenkamp	Building Technology
Third mentor	Dr. ir. Heidi Sohn	Research
Argumentation of choice of the studio	To be able to explore/experiment with a transdisciplinary approach to architectural practice, grounded in a philosophical and theoretical research following Félix Guattari's concepts of ecosophy, ethico-aesthetic practices and schizoanalytic cartographies.	

Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	Main title: Underground Riddles: Subtitle research: Falling In Love With Wildflowers Subtitle design: Blooming-Together In The Haven
Goal	
Location:	Rotterdam-Zuid, Maashaven
The posed problem,	<p>The statement that our times are troubled should by no means come as a surprise anymore. In the light of the Digital Turn, Sixth Extinction and climate change, architects, and architecture students, seem to be drowning in the pressure of coping with all the complexities that they bring. Yet too many of us seem to be stuck in the transcendental anthropocentric approach of the modernist star-architects. But where does that bring us? I would argue that it only leaves us with more depressing architectures that fail to grasp and express the <i>underground riddles</i> of lived experience and subsequently, as I will come to argue alongside other scholars in this graduation project, fail to care for the human and nonhuman (from organisms to objects) becomings of Earth. How can architects fall in love with thinking the unknown instead of hiding away from the chaos in rationalized habits?</p> <p>Growing up as a female with a neurodivergent mind, I've often felt, and still often feel, quite alienated from society. However, by alienated, I do not mean the feeling of</p>

being outside of this world. On the contrary, I feel most at ease surrounded by nature with all her creatures and processes of life. Part of this can be situated in the fact that I grew up around a lot of farmland, river and forest landscapes, but also in my fascination with the richness and becoming of Nature's creations. The human has never been the superior species to me, just a different one, a very diverse, social and complex animal. In other words, by alienated I mean having trouble finding/making sense in/of the constructed social constellations and their egocentric values; trouble with getting across how I experience my world in great detail and so rich in relations. Why do I struggle? Well, it is not only because in general I had difficulty with the development of linguistics and in particular *verbalizing* my lived experience. This often gets put aside as a dis-ability, a lacking in the ability to function 'well' in our society, putting me – and too many others that face similar and/or different forms of oppression – aside as 'less' human. Rather, I want to problematize in particular the fact that these experiences cannot be expressed in how the anthropocentric Western (literal white) men have shaped our linguistics and knowledge production, and the lack of lively expression in general. It baffles, and frustrates, me to see how current capitalist flows and their representational values are systematically rejecting any other modes of existence that differ from their transcendental rationalized concept of the human.

A good three decades ago, Félix Guattari, a French psychoanalyst, activist and social philosopher, opened his essay *The Three Ecologies* (2000) by sharing his concerns on the techno-scientification of the Earth. He problematizes the affects of mass-media consumption, machinic labor and generalized modes of living caused by the capitalist flows and 'their' ways of making sure that all sorts of otherness are kept out of our daily lives. Now keep in mind that when Guattari wrote this, it was not yet as intense as we know nowadays, however, that makes his thinking even more relevant. Guattari introduces his concept of ecosophy, which he explains to be the ethico-political articulation between the social, mental and environmental ecologies, actual and virtual. What draws me towards Guattari is his attention to the arts and aesthetic practices, as he argues them to reach before the signifying semiotics of our era that are trapped in linguistics and calculations. He therefore not only argues for new social practices but also new (ethico-)aesthetic practices. In his book *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* he further elaborates on the ecological crisis and the need for a change in thought and practice to break with ego-centric

ways of producing knowledge:

'[Thus] the issue returns with insistence: how do we change mentalities, how do we reinvent social [and aesthetic] practices that would give back to humanity - if it ever had it - a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of cosmos?'

- Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, 1995, p.119-120

But then what does that mean for the architect? Even if Guattari was not an architect, he was concerned with the practice of architecture. He finds it the architect who finds herself at the heart of the social, mental and environmental ecologies and their ethico-political articulation. In his text *Architectural Enunciation*, he was rather clear on the need for a change in architectural mentalities:

'It is henceforth impossible to take refuge behind art for art's sake or pure science in good faith. Reinventing architecture can no longer signify the relaunching of a style, a school, a theory with hegemonic vocation, but the recomposition of architectural enunciation, and, in a sense, the trade of the architect under today's conditions.'

- Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, 2013, p.232

The architect's goal should not be to be the artist of built forms, but Guattari argues her to be an artisan of sensible and relational lived experience; an artist able to take responsibility to produce contemporary subjectivity and the capacity to compose the affects of spatialized enunciation.

The aim of this research is thus not to find a solution or ready-made approach to the architectural project that claims to solve our ecological crises. Rather a curiosity as to how we can do things otherwise; What questions are we to ask ourselves when working on a new project? How do we unravel collective desires? What thoughts are to be thought to feel and act otherwise? What if we replace the study of aesthetics with the practice of ethico-aesthetics in architecture? In other words, the aim is to, quite literally, grasp the underground riddles of the relationality between architecture and the lived experience.

<p>research questions and</p>	<p>Main question: What can the architect adopt from ethico-aesthetic practices to act/have response-ability towards the human-non-human social, mental and environmental ecologies that she intervenes with and composes novel modes of existence in daily life?</p> <p>Sub-questions:</p> <p><i>Architectural Territories:</i> How are we to position ourselves as architects in these crisis times? What position can/should the architect take from a posthuman point of view? How do architects adopt a more humble and caring approach towards projects? What if we replace (generalized) aesthetics with ethico-aesthetics?</p> <p><i>Human-non-Human Flows:</i> Who and what do we talk about when we say 'we'? What/who is the posthuman? With whom and what do we share our environment and how do they affect us? What nonhuman matter matters?</p> <p><i>Artistic Phyla:</i> What/how is posthuman/new materialistic art/aesthetics? What are the values of artistic research to diffract an environment? Where in the work of architects/how can the use of art/artistic research be of value?</p> <p><i>Philosophical Universes:</i> In what ways can we actively make meaningful sense? What thoughts are to be thought? What are posthuman ethics? How do we think-with nonhuman agencies?</p>
<p>design assignment in which these result.</p>	<p>With the design assignment I will be taking on the area of Maashaven metro station in Rotterdam-Zuid. By taking this location, I want to highlight four problematic entities that I can see happening in the Dutch urban landscape, arguably also in other Western countries, that are often approached as separate 'problems', however I hope to show that they deeply entangled and to blame to the troubled ecological relations.</p> <p>First, as most Dutch cities, Rotterdam evolved into a city (anno 1344) by locating itself alongside a river to eventually grow out into a port city. Fast forward, around 1900 they expanded with the Maashaven, aiming at creating a new city around it, with the area around the Maassilo as a flourishing transportation point including the tram and eventually the metro station. However, in our current days the function of the harbour has been placed outside the city and our ideas of e.g. transportation and living in the city are rapidly changing</p>

(again and hopefully always). What leads to the questions: What to do with old harbour areas? And how do deal with the immense infrastructures that have been created over the years? How do we care for these places?

What brings me to the second notion, the *niche construction* of the Anthropocene: the city, literally *sold* as *the 'safe' haven*, behind the walls where the harbours and city gates allowed people in, creating a supposedly 'good' life inside and 'bad' life outside of the walls. Gradually this changed from harbour/roads and city gates to trains, trams, metros and stations, not to forget enormous infrastructures for the cars. Are the RET metro gates the great new 'city gates' of Maashaven? How depressing. Welcome to Maashaven, did you check out? Or; welcome *home*, do you feel the warmth of the concrete and greeted by the green traffic lights? The *man-made* city is hostile. Again: In what ways can we care for these places?

The hostility doesn't stop there. The neighbourhoods around Maashaven are rather known for their high rates in violence, bad (mental) health and lots of people with no stable home situation. We tend to think of architectures of care only for people who are already hospitalised/in clinics for either physical, or more recently, mental health reasons. But what about all those people that are seeking for a place of belonging on the streets? Our streets repel their existence, treat them as *noise* that needs to be removed by responding with hostile architecture. How do we as architects think-with them instead of against? Again: how do we care for them through architectures?

Fourth and final, to put it short: how do we stop the greenwashing of cities? How do we step out of the idea of 'sustainability' as an engineered addition to designs and ecologies as simulations of 'nature' – that are somehow happening in a different environment than that we are part of – and into the mentality of ecological thought 'as' the very act of becoming, the meta-stability of existence, or in terms of evolution. There is no nature to fix, we do not dominate 'nature', we do however affect *our* Earth (problematically) and, surprise, it is now getting to us that that might not only put other species to extinction, the habitat of the human-animal is in danger too! We share the Earth as a home, lets act/design like it. So finally, again: how do we construct the city environment in ways that care for not only human-animals, but all human-non-human life?

With the eventual design I hope to showcase that shifting the focus from form and function to posthuman affordances and the lived experience does not result in useless or formless architecture – if one were to believe there

are such things. On the contrary, I hope to show that, with the help of small architectural interventions within an environment, architectures have the capacity to recompose the underground riddles of the entangled ecological relations and thereby have a big affect on our daily lives in the here-and-now. But then what will these 'architectural interventions' be? I want to change the naming of a Program of Requirements towards a Program of Desires, in other words, I do not know yet what the program will be or what the interventions may look like, but I will be *responding* with architectures that aim at a recomposition of the daily life encounters of humans and non-humans based on the findings out of the proposed methods (see *methods design* under method description). My aim is to propose an architectural assemblage that, in a sense, spreads like fungi in an environment by transversing the planes of architecture-urbanism-landscape-furniture (see also, practical references).

Taken from the research, the domains of architectural territories and philosophical universes prove actions on how to position myself with a response-ability towards the design assignment, whereas the domains of artistic phyla and human-non-human flows provide actions on what ways/with what tools I can diffract an environment and what human-non-human matters there are to shine a light upon and diffract. Together these actions are what will assist me in unravelling the *underground riddles* of the Maashaven area and *respond* with a design that does not focus on representational form and function, but on the architectural encounters within the daily lives of human-non-human agencies.

Process

Method description

Transdisciplinary framework:

Critical Posthumanities and New Materialism

The positioning of the architect through the work of Guattari, already introduces a schizoanalytic and ecosophical framework – where the planes of art, science and philosophy are transversed – that sets the ground for the research. However, the scope of this research will not stay within the realm of post-structuralist thinking. There has been an increasing number of scholars over the past decade that have concerned themselves with the work of Guattari (and his work together with Gilles Deleuze). Curious about the potential values of Guattari's ecosophy and ethico-aesthetic practices in our current times, this research will take on a transdisciplinary framework of more recent scholars, ranging from architectural theorists to philosophers of science, who have also found value in Guattari's concepts and/or are concerned with the entangled relations of human-non-human life. In this research, the focus will thereby be on the concepts, methods and theories from the (feminist/queer) Critical Posthumanities/New Materialism. Within the set timeframe for this research, it is by no means possible or the goal to go through everything that is written in these fields. Therefore, the scope of this research will be staying within a critical selection of leading scholars that are relational to either architecture and/or arts/ethico-aesthetics. This will mainly be publications by, but not entirely limited to, leading voices in these fields such as Rosi Braidotti, Iris van Tuinen and Rick Dolphijn, Donna Haraway, Andrej Radman, Stavros Kousoulas, Heidi Sohn and H el ene Frichot who have been actively, and still are, shaping these frameworks, see also References.

Methods Research:

I - Assemblage of the Four Functional Domains

Instead of merely studying the concepts and theories of Guattari, with this research, I want to actively use his proposed methodology on how to approach the Assemblage of Enunciation. The first method introduced for this research can be found throughout his work but is most detailed in his book, Schizoanalytic Cartographies. Guattari introduces a diagrammatic approach, see Figure 1, to construct a meta-modelling of the four functional domains that together form the Assemblage of Enunciation. Aware of the fact that this is at the limits of more traditional forms of architectural research methods, such as a standard literature review, archival research, interviews and/or case studies, that is precisely the point of choosing this method and why Guattari set it up. It allows for all domains to be studied within their heterogeneous becoming, cancelling out the possibility of hierarchical oppositions and reduction of subjective knowledge. The four functional domains as proposed by Guattari will function as the main structure of this research. The research will thus consist of four parts (domains) that each have a different theme (universe) while all are connected through their relationality towards architecture and the lived experience. To bind the findings together, there will be four refrains that lay on the axis of the domains, functioning as a relay that (dis)connects the research to a wider context though a non-discursive approach; riddles graphically expressed in actions. See also Figure 2.

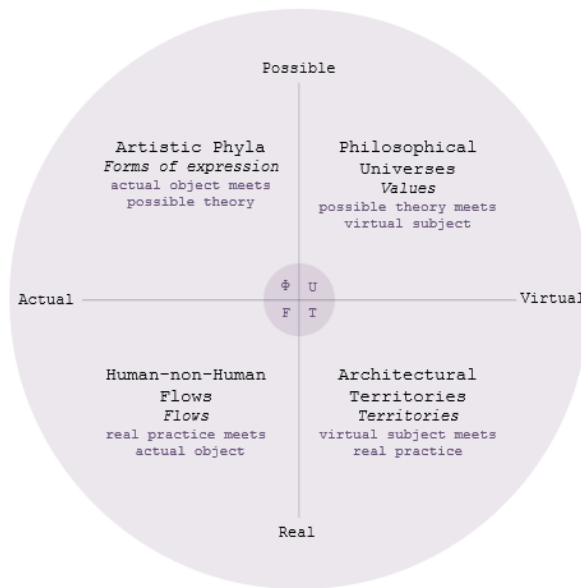


Figure 1 – Diagram of research domains following the Assemblage of Enunciation as proposed by Guattari (1989; 2000), combined with Assemblage of Architectural Enunciation by Radman and Kousoulas (2018) Source: Author

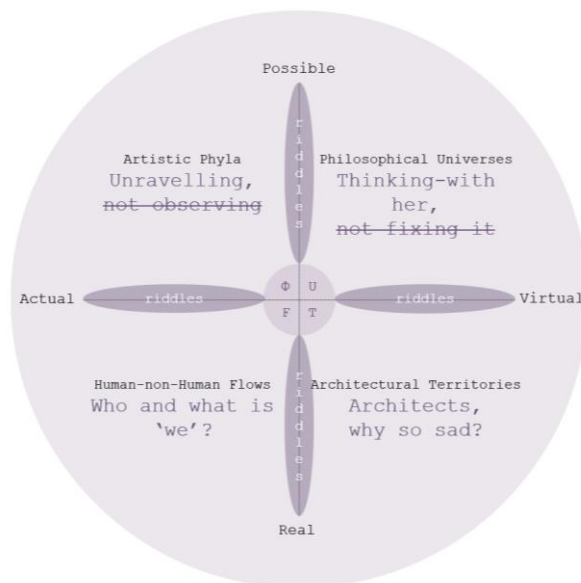


Figure 2 – Diagram of research domains with titles and visualization of the relays that will be formed by non-discursive riddles. Source: Author

II – Critical and Creative Assemblages: Dialogue writing

Whereas the first method primarily structures the research, we need a second method to compose the content of the four domains. Writing in this research will not merely be a structuring of reviewed literature. Rather, following the framework set by Rosi Braidotti, the writing of essays is approached as an assemblage:

'[..], I hope the readers will take my over-crowded article as an attempt to compose a missing community of posthuman scholars: the essay as an assemblage. To sum up: a cartography is a theoretically-based and politically-informed account of the present that aims at tracking the production of knowledge and subjectivity and to expose power both as entrapment (potestas) and as empowerment (potentia).'

- Braidotti, 'A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities', 2019, p. 33

The methodology proposed in the critical posthumanism/new materialism frameworks, that of critical and creative writing, allows me to add a layer of asignifying expression to signifying semiotics. However, academic essays already ask for a certain style of academic writing, length, hierarchy and conclusion. As said before, the aim of this research is not to find some sort of solution, nor a close ended conclusion. Therefore, for this research I will not be making use of the writing of the essay. To emphasize the diffractive thinking, thinking-with and the need for a change in mentalities, I will be introducing *dialogue writing* as a second method for this research – some may say a very philosophical method - through a theoretically-based and political-informed account. The goal of this method is to encourage actually real conversations/trigger thoughts by scripting virtually real conversations (thinking-with). Each dialogue/act consists of three main characters being Siri (me), Tari (Guattari) and Archi (the architect as a Body without Organs), where Siri and Tari attempt to change Archi's ways of thinking and educate them by introducing Archi to other scholars that come along as side-characters within each act. Each domain consists of 2 dialogues (titled after songs, see also soundtracks) that take on the different sub-questions and all border to a riddle, together forming *the wildflower* (see Figure 3).

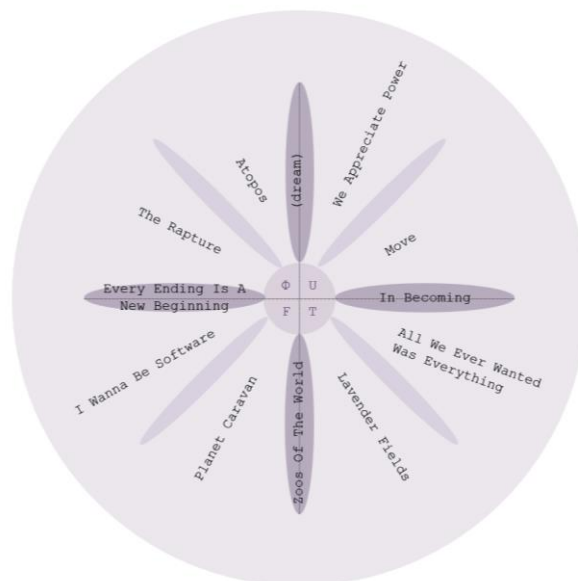


Figure 3 – Wildflower diagram: research domains with titles of dialogues and riddles.
Source: Author

Methods Design:

I – Polyphonic Architectural Enunciations

Guattari's argument on the recomposition of architectural enunciations will not only be of use within the writing of this graduation plan but will continue into the design methods. To structure the underground riddles within the chosen architectural assemblage of Maashaven, I will be constructing a dossier (taken from the keeping track of patients in medical care through dossiers) of eight – out of a continuous virtual spectrum – architectural enunciations that Guattari proposed in his book *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* (2013, p. 233-6). First the ones that might sound familiar, a *geopolitical* enunciation, an *urbanistic* enunciation and an *economic* enunciation. The content of these enunciations will be composed out of information that will be gathered from various sources such as archives, municipality documents, social media, arts and my own photography/sketches. Second, a *functional* enunciation and *technical* enunciation that, in short, apply mostly to the architectural engineering and building technology of the design. Bringing us to the last three, a *signifying* enunciation, an enunciation of *existential territorialization*, for which I have set-up two more methods/tools (see below Methods II and III) and finally, a *scriptural* enunciation that articulates the ensemble of other enunciative components (read: an architectural design).

II – Colourscapes: Ecological Compositions (signifying)

How do we assign a significant content to a design separate from its functionalities? I would argue that if one were to make a worthy contribution, one would have to attempt to capture the ecological composition to apprehend the subjective informational capacities. To do so I want to make use of the capacity of art as a material-discursive practice with what I call (for now) *colourscapes* or in other words: *ecological compositions*. Through (abstract) painting and colour-coding, this is an experimental attempt to find a notation system which allows me to study the entanglement of what there, virtually and actually, is and what then can become. The aim is to produce a series of paintings that capture the signifying content of transversing scales. Not as a passive addition to the design, but as an active way of diffracting the processes of differentiation in order to unravel the underground riddles, or desires, of Maashaven and add a signifying layer to the design.

III – Habitation: 1:20-ish niche fractals (existential territorialization)

Taken from the writing (research), the focus will not be on form and function, but on the production of novel affordances approached through an ethological study of affects and percepts. But then how can one capture the habits and habitat, or taken together as habitation, within an architectural assemblage to unravel the experience of the users and carefully intervene? Within the average design process, architects tend to put the 1:20 fragment last as a purely representational, engineering-based drawing and/or model. However, I would like to approach the 1:20 as a valuable tool through what I would like to call *the study of 1:20-ish niche fractals*. Studies that allow for an approach to designing from the middle ground: 'big' and 'small' enough to capture urbanistic/landscape relations *and* structural/climatic information *and* intra-actions between human-non-human entities (ethnology-affordances-architecture-furniture). The -ish comes from the fact that these studies will also contain information such as (sensorial) percepts/affects of human-non-human

matters and behavioural observations/speculations. Thereby these niche fractals will not be your typical clean 1:20 fragment focused on explaining the engineering of a building fragment, but an experiment on how to bring ethnology into the architectural design process.

Soundtracks:

Dialogues:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4DTkg7dUQ0sAW3bajESM65?si=80db721c40a14b9d>

Design (in making):

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7xzyfGps8EbgfHNDkc84xk?si=b8b6994334274e18>

Literature and general practical references

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Practical references

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<https://naturezaurbana.net/en/projects/florianopolis-marine/>

Reflection

1. *What is the relation between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A,U,BT,LA,MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?*

The Explore Lab studio allowed me to take on a theoretical-philosophical rooted project to question both the position of the architect in our current times and what architecture can do to create worthy contribution to our ecological crises. During my education I've often been told, in various ways, to not worry about the other tracks (U,BT,LA,MBE) and had some interesting discussions on the role of theory/philosophy. An architect, for me, is someone that works from a theory as an intellectual way of thought, not as separate from the design process, as a passive vision or rooted in personal preferences, but deeply intertwined with how one approaches the design in relation and response to the ecologies of an environment that the project intervenes with. How could one design the environment we live in, without having any knowledge on what it means to – virtually and actually – live and die? With this project I hope to show that the Architecture track should not be limited to studying the forms and functions of buildings but shift focus to what it means to manipulate matter and the affects of those manipulations on the lived experience. It is thereby also the intension to showcase the relationality of the MSc AUBS by not saying *A or U or BT or LA or MBE*, but *A and U and BT and LA and MBE* seen from an architectural perspective.

2. *What is the relevance of your graduation work in the larger social, professional and scientific framework.*

Taking on a transdisciplinary framework I hope to show that the empowerment and potential of (subjective and objective) knowledge is not in closed disciplinary systems, but in the fact that *all* fields of knowledge contribute to our – as humans-animals – making-sense of *our* existence on Earth/in this universe. In that sense, my graduation work is not merely of relevance to the architect, but only takes on the position/cut-out of the architect. By transversing the planes of science-philosophy-art the aim is to show the entanglements of the production of knowledge as social-mental-environmental processual events, making it an open-system and therefore not only scientific, but aesthetical, nature-cultural, ethical and (geo)political, or all at once: ecological. We need to critically and creatively think-with each other, human and non-human, to evolve.