Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences
01. PERSONAL INFORMATION
Name
Fathima Nafeesa Hamza

Student number
4617142

Telephone number
0649120893

Private e-mail address
nafeesahamza@gmail.com

02. STUDIO
Name / Theme
Delta Interventions

Teachers / tutors
Hamed Khosravi, Stefano Milani

Argumentation of choice of the studio
The studio’s focus on the North Sea as a ‘transnational ground’ appealed to me as a way of exploring the spatial tensions that political decisions create. Considering its historically contested position and contemporary phenomena such as Brexit, this specific body of water has clearly been the subject of many territorial conflicts. It has acted as both a conduit for power under the Vikings and a territorial barricade under the British at the height of their empire. This duality of the sea presents a constant challenge to those who it surrounds, and I would like to investigate how this can potentially be addressed through architectural means. Furthermore, the working method of analysis across a breadth of scales and the inter-disciplinary nature of the graduation studio were additional factors which influenced my choice.

03. GRADUATION PROJECT
Title
Taking Back Control

Location
Thames Estuary, North Sea

Problem Statement
The Eastern seaboard of the United Kingdom has long been where it meets the world - its largest trading ports both historical and contemporary such as Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Felixstowe and London are located along this stretch. Despite this position as its public face, however, data from the Brexit referendum shows that seaside communities along this coast - Boston, South Holland, Castle Point, Thurrock, Great Yarmouth - were the most unequivocal in voting to leave the European Union.
The irony lies in the fact that just as Theresa May’s rallying cry was about “taking back control,” the decision to leave the EU will result in policies which restrict the movement of European nationals and therefore give rise to an even worse irregular migration problem than that which already exists. Albanians are currently the number one national group seeking entry through illegal means, but once Eastern Europeans workers are excluded from the British labour market, the UK Coastguard and seaside towns which sought to leave behind the problem of unwanted immigrants will find them landing ashore right at their doorstep.

Despite the water surrounding it, for much of its history the British Isles have been firmly rooted within the larger context of the European continent. The sea was an enabler, providing a space to project territorial lines already found on land and create a contiguous area of control as seen with the Roman, Viking, Norman, and Angevin empires. It can be argued that the notion of being separate, an island unto its own, began to be more pronounced due to Henry VIII’s schism with the Pope and the subsequent break from Rome in 1534. With all of Catholic Europe actively scheming against it by plotting an invasion, the isolated island had to become increasingly self-reliant. It is no coincidence then that its greatest act of defending its sovereignty was at sea when the Royal Navy defeated the disproportionately larger Spanish Armada in 1588.

Despite its separation, however, England welcomed thousands of Protestant refugees from the European continent until well into the 16th century. In contrast, the contemporary government’s reaction to the influx of migrants has been to launch Project Kraken - a program encouraging residents near waterways to moonlight as vigilantes for the state. As a nation which was born of melting ice and therefore has no claim to any notion of a truly native population, this seems to be a self-defeating solution. The lack of historical awareness has therefore led to the divergence between Britain’s traditional position as an integrated extension of the European continent versus its current political reality.

**Research Questions**

1. How can traces in the sea be used to reveal the history of the relationship between the UK and the continent?
   - a) How can this history be manifested in a physical form?
   - b) What architectural techniques can be employed to bridge the perceived gap between the two coasts?

2. How can people in a state of transit be provided with a spatial anchor in a highly dynamic environment?

**Design assignment in which these result**

The project seeks to highlight the role that the flow of people has had on forming what is now known as the UK. To bridge the separation between its historic position welcoming migrants and the insular approach found today, a series of posthouses are proposed in the Thames Estuary. This typology was used by the Romans to consolidate Britannia into their empire, and fittingly will be intended to create both a place of pause and a means of marking the territory of those in transit.
According to international law the territorial waters of the UK extends to 12 nautical miles from the mean low-water line. By positioning itself at the edge of this zone within the Thames Estuary the intervention automatically becomes a contested territory - while the plight of refugees is easy enough to forget, an uninvited physical structure generates more attention than an uninvited human because it will not disappear as easily.

Siting the posthouse on the fluctuating ground of the intertidal mudflats found in the estuary emphasises its position as a permanent object which is necessitated by movement. Challenges to be addressed include how tidal flows, soil conditions, juridical regimes, and navigational routes affect and inform the buildings individually, as well as the overall cohesion of the intervention.

04. PROCESS
Method description
Mapping - The map as a research tool is useful in three ways. Firstly, it provides a spatial understanding of otherwise abstract flows and information, making it easier to identify trends and geographic linkages. Secondly, the specificity of the map at a moment in time provides crucial reference points which can be compared with each other to reveal changes over centuries. As my intended goal for my design project is to find a way to reconstruct traces of the past this is a very useful means to move fluidly through time. Lastly, moving beyond the actual information represented to the provenance of the drawing reveals implicit attitudes and biases which are not always conveyed in other types of documentation.

Site Visit – Observations made during our fieldwork trip across the North Sea in October contributed to the conceptual basis of the project, which were later cross-referenced with factual research. For example, the site visit revealed first-hand the vast difference in the economic fate of London versus the more rural parts of the English coast. Such factors are best experienced in person as literature and statistics do not effectively convey the scale of the issue. Lastly, the breadth of our site visit across three different countries provided a comprehensive overview of many different coastal conditions, building up a useful catalogue of precedent projects for potential design interventions.

Typological study – Having chosen the specific typology of the posthouse, case studies of historical precedents will be carefully analyzed and deconstructed. Appropriate strategies will then be modified and contextualized for the very specific conditions of the Estuary. These studies will inform the design process in terms of programmatic organization, circulation, and spatial composition.

Modeling – In the design phase, the use of physical models will be used to explore spatial relationships and materiality as appropriate.

Literature and general practical preference
NORTH SEA
05. REFLECTION

Relevance

Recent elections across the world have revealed an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the left-leaning liberal world view in general and globalization in particular. This dissent often stems from economic disenfranchisement but results in rising intolerance and divisive rhetoric which does nothing to solve the problem at hand. Within this context, the issue of migration has become a major political issue, especially in the UK where policy is defined by public opinion.

At a time when exponentially more people are on the move, how the world reacts to this issue now will affect how everybody lives in the future. For example, the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean Sea into southern Europe still does not have an adequate answer. As climate change alters the environment, many more will be displaced due to drought and famine in Africa and their route of choice will continue to be northwards to Europe. Countries like the UK try hard to distinguish between asylum seekers and economic migrants but the line between the two is become blurrier. Similarly, rising sea levels in other parts of the world will lead to displacement of coastal populations, from wealthier cities like Miami to those with fewer resources like Mumbai.

As global leaders struggle to come to a consensus on how to deal with these flows of people, thousands continue to die through negligence or willful inaction as the Left To Die Boat case depicts. By bringing attention to this issue, this thesis focuses on a problem which is present at a global scale while focusing on the specific local context of the interface between the Thames Estuary and the North Sea. Uncovering the history of spatial occupancy in this territory reveals how interconnected the world has always been, rejecting the belief that outsiders are inherently bad.
06. TIME PLANNING

P2
Completed literature study
Completed Position Paper AR3A160
Proposal for an intervention based on provisional research:
- Site selection
- Study of programmatic organisation
- Initial concept design - plan, sections, elevations (1:500)

P3
Further study on:
- Typological analysis of posthouses
- Material choices, given the constant exposure to the elements
- Structural concepts, given the soil condition and tidal changes in the Estuary
Adjusting and elaborating plan, sections, and elevations (1:200, 1:100)
Finalisation of masterplan (1:1000 or larger)

P4
Further adjustment and elaboration of plans, sections, and elevations (1:200, 1:100, 1:50 segments)
Articulation of interior spaces (models, perspectives, collages)
Further integration of building technology, structural details (1:5)

P5
Finalized design, based on feedback from P4
Finalized presentation deliverables including drawings, models