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Because my suitcase is always ready for the next journey, and no town...is the right town, no town has work to offer, no town would be good enough even if you did find work. Because there is always another and better town where you hope to go to work one day.

Italo Calvino,
“Love Far From Home”, 1946
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Skopje is the capital city of North Macedonia with a population of 630,000, covers the ground of 570km². This small city however accommodates many different ethnicities, religions and ideologies. The city is divided into areas according to these cultural categories. The city went through traumatic earthquake in 1963, and is still dealing with its aftermath.
North Macedonia experienced devastating earthquake in 1963. The clock on the train station forever freezes at the time the earthquake strucked. However, the disaster united the world. In the middle of Cold War, countries including Soviet Union and America came together to rebuild Skopje. They city was know as the international city of solidarity. However, the ethnic divides and tension is ever increasing. A city that united the world but is divided itself.
In 2019, North Macedonia held its first gay pride parade. There are a few twists in this event. While it looks like a progressive move, activists claim that this was not done out of the interest of human rights, but merely as a gesture to please the West as MK wants to be part of the EU. Additionally, at the same time of the gay pride parade, there is a parallel parade for traditional family values, advocating oppositions towards "Western values".
Since the facelifting project Skopje 2014 changed the look of the centre from brutalist concrete to neoclassical-like gypsum, reactions vary. Some people are proud of the nationalist architecture, restating the identity of North Macedonia. However, some people regard this project as urban devastation.
This was inside the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts designed by Boris Cipan in 1976, where the archive manager showed us around. He seemed rather cynical towards capitalism. He asked us to take a photo of these two chairs, where the original nice leather chairs (on the right) were replaced by mass-produced fake leather chairs (on the left). He said this is what capitalism brought, crap chairs.
In the Old Bazaar, you can see everywhere men sitting down drinking Turkish coffee and tea. Sometimes a group of them play cards together. It gives chill vibes. Women are not usually in the crowd. You see them either shopping or sitting in front of Mosques.
This was inside the University designed by Slovenian architect Marko Mušic in 1974. The design is interesting as the interior is treated as a neighbourhood, where there is internal street, different houses and pedestrian bridges. The intention can be read clearly. However, it is rather dark and unpleasant to be inside. Most professors and students do not like it because of this. They hangout just in front of the building where there are plateforms and seatings. They know the building is somehow related to Japan.
This was the train station designed by Kenzo Tange in 1970s following his masterplan for the city of Skopje. We were there at 12pm on a weekday, and there was no one. On the information screen, it says the next train is at 4pm. The train station seems obsolete, in idle or just have been latent for the past 50 years. The infrastructure including a raised pedestrian walkway was planned along with the train station which allows direct access from the station to the city’s cultural centre. However, never realised.
Intrigued by the multifaced situation in Skopje. In an environment packed with distinct ideologies, we wondered how people express themselves in relations to these distinct positions. The following is investigatation of how these social, political changes have manifested themselves architecturally. The understanding of this situation architecturally.

La presence d'esprit, Rene magritte, 1960
This site is where the Macedonian area and the Albanian area meets. In this small area, architecture that carries different ideologies coexist. There is a orthodox church, a nationalist monument, a Turkish hammam turned into a gallery, Albanian Turkish Old Bazaar and Albanian Skanderberg Square. In theory, it is charged and full of tension. However, it is vibrantly populated. This is the result of territorial negotiation, which we analysed how such negotiation is manifested architecturally.
When the sun hits the horizon, I am already up on the scaffolding with my coffee. The depth of the mountain makes the sunlight seems even more invincible and all-pervading. For some reason I don’t notice them anymore, there is plenty that keeps me distracted in the city. I don’t mind them really, at least now I don’t have time to stare at the emptiness of my room and be reminded that my stomach is of the same void. The head of the project came this morning, after three cups of coffees, gave us an enthusiastic speech about his fantastic dinner with the mayor, telling us that what we are doing will make history. The architect sitting next to him looks a bit cynical, unnecessary I thought, get over yourself. This building that I am renovating right now is next to a busy square, it gets chaotic sometimes but it keeps me alive. There is a lot of protests recently, I don’t have as much energy as them, as long as I get through my day, have my plaster right, food on my table, I am content. My life now is a lot easier than when I had to learn bee keeping with my grandma. We had to walk 4 hours to the city to sell our honey. She wouldn’t be so happy if she knew I am in the city now building for the Macedonians. She would say its not right, but I just don’t want to live the solitude life like she did in the mountains. I know its tradition, I know I know, but we need to move on. Every evening when I get home, I hear my neighbours, Sandra and Marco seem to be much more occupied than me, the sound of kids crying, the chatters on the table. After all these years, I even feel like I am part of their family. I know that Sandra never liked to visit Marco’s family in the mountains up north. She told the kids that side of the city is dangerous and that they will disappear in the small allies.

Bogdan
Liminality

**our definition;**

liminality is an inbetween state of transition.

**our hypothesis;**

liminality emphasises by transition the sense of place.

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<tr>
<th>Use</th>
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<tr>
<td>We inhabit space that do not fit our shape</td>
<td>Portal that brings us into the parallel worlds</td>
<td>Forever adding new layers in vain, neglecting the historical events that shapes the current issues</td>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stay with the trouble</td>
<td>The layers of time and experience that form the idea of a place</td>
<td>History and Future</td>
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<th>Strategy</th>
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<td>Using as queering</td>
<td>In the midst of, but invisible to the real world</td>
<td>Understanding yourself Going back to the root problems</td>
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**Railway workers’ lodge built around 1970**
Liminality in Space

We have identified multiple liminal space in Skopje and attempted to examine the affect of each space and what contributes to place making effect of the space.

1. City Wall Void I occupied by multiple users
2. City Wall Void II occupied by a kebab restaurant
3. Hydrometeorological building Front Entrance
Repetition

It is through constant repetitions that variation appear, in

2. Muslim praying ritual
EXPLORATION

Latency

The theme of latency manifests itself in many aspects of Skopje. Architecturally, the city was inscribed with great visions of much bigger scale. However, due to the partial execution of each master plans, the realised structures without its supporting infrastructure were left alone, like a foreign species left behind in a land it does not belong to.

Socially, the city on the one hand appears to be eager to progress towards the direction of Western Europe, with its progressive gay liberation movements. On the other hands, diverse groups of people have conflicting needs which prevents the city to progress rapidly in one direction.

Economically, the unemployment rate of North Macedonia has been decreasing in recent years, which looks promising on paper. However, a large amount of employment rate is occupied by informal employment including temporary work without contract and unregulated self employment of low-educated population. In the long run, the lack of social security and low retirement benefits for these people could results in high risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Additionally, MK has one of the highest NEET rate in the Balkens, more than one fifth of the youth (15-24 years) population was not in employment, education or training. There is little opportunity for high educated and high skilled young adults in Skopje. Talking with the university students of Skopje, they feel unsatisfied with living in Skopje.

According to a Gallup survey done from 2015-2017, 52% of young people from North Macedonia wanted to emigrate. However, emigration is difficult as MK is not part of the EU. As a result, the multitude of latency exists in Skopje that troubles the young adults is what I would like to problematise.

Rebecca Horn, Body fantasi, 1972
Materiality

Object of self conflict, embodiment of both binary.

Video Screenshots of Emphemeral Liminality
Form

Something of a heavy materiality, something stable that can collapse in perception and in movement.

To what limit can I amplify the affordance of an object until it looses itself?

In the thought and act of leaving, you are already becoming something else

Something of a heavy materiality, something stable that can collapse in perception and in movement.
Organisation

1. St Jerome in his study, Antonello de Antonio, 1430
2. Saint Jerome in the Desert by Bernardino Pinturicchio (c. 1475-1480)

Analytical drawing of Convent of San Marco in Florence. The monastery is a unity of both collective and solitude.
Spatial quality

- 60 resident rooms (900m²)
- Post office run by residents, including local delivery service
- 1,000
- 10,300
- 14,300
- 21,000
- +0
- 6,000
- residence bath
- dining/activity hall (100m²)
- kitchen (40m²)
- laundrette (40m²)

Public Amphitheatre
Spatial quality

Exploration of latency in different spatial quality.
The use of ramp in 2 OMA buildings. connecting two different urban fabric while dividing space in a three dimensional way, allowing collection to grow organically.
THE SITE

Screenshots from google maps Skopje
The site sits at a boundary in between typologies developed at different times. On the south side, housing is quite organised, rows of apartment buildings, with a few elaborated single houses. The neighbourhood I’m heading towards north seems old, informal with newly erected apartment buildings in between bungalows dressed in plants, socks, patterned fences, exposed old bricks. It’s not trying to be consistent.
The city was envisioned with a bigger, more unified reality than what it is now. In a small city packed with architecture carrying distinct ideologies, individuals negotiate and position themselves in relation to these strong statements. Embedded in the fabric of the city, manifested in social events and economic status, and reflected in the architecture, there is an inescapable atmosphere of latency, unrealised potential in the present. The young adults see no hope in a life they cannot leave. 27% of young people (15-24) are not in education, training nor employment. Highly educated young adults are longing to leave the country and live in a place where their potentials can be realised. However, the difficulties to leave due to the state of the country results in young adults passing their dissatisfaction to the city of Skopje. The project intend to deal with this inescapable sense of latency, I attempt to design a built environment that activates the negotiation between past, present and future in order to not to further produce latency in the latent moments, but to actively work ways out of it.

My nightclub as seen through the eyes of my character, a journalist transiting in Skopje for 2 days.
stopping by Skopje was the easiest way to get to Kosvos for my small travel writing assignment. I don’t know much about the city of Skopje, so I was flipping through the news headlines on the train. Global solidarity after 1963 earthquake, raising ethnic tension, first pride parade, march for traditional family values, Brutalist utopia, neo-classist reality. It seems rather conflicted with diverse parties negotiating their existence in the city that is still dealing with the aftermath of a destructive earthquake.
I arrived in the morning, the station is very empty. It's a weekday I thought. On the screen, it says the next train is at 4pm. It looked like a promising site in Tange's masterplan, with raised pedestrian walkways, a portal, a gateway to the city, but the reality didn't really follow through I guess, like a lot of things.
The road led me to the metallic structure. It has a light and open quality to it, free to pass through on the ground floor from multiple directions. Sometimes you get a peak inside but never really able to grasp it.

I dropped my luggage at the accommodation with still hours to kill before checking in. I wandered back to the metallic structure as the hotel receptionist has suggested me so. "It's a shaded public space with a hidden night club, you might not even realise it" she said.

Following the hills and ramps, I found myself walking up the city.
There are people coming out of the building, must be the people coming out of the club in the morning. I thought. How did they get there, there must be a parallel ramp to the nightclub.

"I go there sometimes after my day shift," I remember the young hotel receptionist says. "It's a portal, for a split second, in the darkness, you could be anywhere"
“Where do you wanna go”, I asked “I don’t know, just not here” she said
“what are you escaping from?” I asked “is it the fact that you cannot leave, makes the idea of leaving even more attractive.” she looked at me and grinned

“It is not an escape, it is acceptance with love, love for the world. It is to be joyfully anarchic and wonderfully mischievous. Life is nonetheless meaningless, all you can do is to liberate yourself from the endless dissatisfaction and enjoy!”
green lights on, the listening bar is just opened. I'm waiting at the counter, for the man to pour the coffee, "there is live performance at night" says the man behind the counter. I'm turning to what looks like a stage when I feel someone is watching me. "that's the cloakroom of the club" the man says. "how do you get there?" I asked "There is a door on your way up that takes you to another reality, anywhere door, it writes."
“Lots of people coming in and out of this place you know. They don’t come at the same hour, and this is the last point you see each other. Everyone lives in their own parallel reality. Some come here for free theatre shows on summer nights, others come to get lost in the club, and some like you wandering around while waiting for the train and bus to the next destination.”
“what do you think of skopje? the hotel receptionist asked me as I checked out. “I like it, its interesting, patchy and complex.” she smiled and said, you like it because you know you are leaving. take my love, you beautiful passerby.”
Thank you to mentors and friends who have supported me along the way. The exploration to be continued...