Graduation Reflection

Charging walls: The weaving city
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Msc4 Analysis and Intervention in the Afropolis
Chair of Methods and analysis

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The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)

The graduation studio of the analysis and intervention in the Afropolis studio under chair of Methods and Analysis aims to engage with pressing issues in developing territories, as well as with the increasing cross-cultural character of contemporary architectural practice. Therefore, finding a balance between local cultures and techniques on the one hand and global developments seems to be an important challenge.

While, the Charging Walls project deals with an increasing pressure of an unbalanced growing between the infrastructure and the urban fabric has been going on in various developing countries including Casablanca. This prospect is one of the important issues that require a thorough analysis in order to deliberately negotiate the local cultures and the globalized development with an intervention. This leads to the specific problematic area situated around the Le Oasis train station and a Le Oasis tram line T1 stop. The area is situated on the southern part of Casablanca, where the only train that runs between Casaport and Casablanca’s airport always pass. Not only that, it is also an area where people can switch from one mode of transportation to the other; both tram and train pass the place (fig. 1). Looking at its existing urban morphology, it is clearly seen that the neighborhoods turn their back on the infrastructural seam by constructing walls completely around their private allotment.

fig. 1 - Le Oasis
The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

Since the aim of the studio is to investigate a set of pressing issues in the rapidly developing country and through plans and projects in order to offer a rich set of viewpoints on how to intervene in this urban territory. The methodological approach is by experimenting with the key architectural elements in a different point of views. In this graduation project chooses the elementary architectural component of a wall as a tool for articulating the informal urban and act as main elements for binding between the segregated urban fabric. As stated, the complete opposite character between the city and infrastructure is the situation that needs to be carefully dealt with; the spatial-formal realm of infrastructure and the relational realm of human society. How to weave the separated urban carpet, keeping in mind that both realms must also be held distinct if one is to relate to one another. And how can this connection be brought about by the help of deliberate architectural design?

“The method readiest to hand for reconciling spatial polarities is to establish an ‘in-between’, a place where they can be made to interact. It is the place where a meeting between two realms take shape, the place where two regions that retain their full individual integrity overlap, where they are simultaneously present.”

As van Eyck previously stated. It is a quest of finding architectural articulations where dualities which must not be split apart are mutually reconciled. He did so by exploring in a preliminary architectural elements which is a wall. The Sonsbeek pavilion is an example, the pavilion is a series of six parallel walls gallery. By using basic geometric forms of straight line, circle and half circle, he created a maze of straight and round, convex and concave, intersected by bends and diagonal venues. The visitors having entered between these walls would found themselves in an entirely different space, a space that unfolded inwards in to a swirl of streets, open spaces, corners, alleys, gateways and towers. The wall’s traditional definition as a dividing tool is now evolved in a tools to articulate.

While van Eyck is experimenting with the form, Louis Kahn on the other hand interested more in the depth. He was known for his interest in Scottish Castles, by which he elaborated the distinction between ‘served’ and ‘servant spaces’, with great central living halls and supplementary spaces hidden in thick outside walls. The castles studies were a strong inspiration for his later works such as the Unitarian Church in Rochester and the Fisher house project. The most practical aspect of the wall niches is a sense of privacy and humanity they provide, creating variations along the facades that cast shadows and give a texture to the form. Not only do they break the planarity of the facade and bring the exterior inside, but they allow for an open window during a heavy rainstorm, as their form naturally protects against water infiltration. According to Kahn’s exploration, the wall is now a mediating layers between the public and private realm.
“The wall understood as the interface layer with an outer face touching the exterior and an inner one related to the main space. Between these two faces, it is where the highest density of human activity takes place.”

Based from the studies of van Eyck and Kahn, the Charging Walls aim to explore more into the capacity of walls in reweaving its urban fabric created by the urban canyon effect in several scales. The in-between city which act as a cushion between hardness of infrastructure and softness of people with the help of three wall typologies; the Bone, Joint and Tendon. Each one has its own scale, form and character which intended to encourage different interaction between people and infrastructure.

The Charging Wall is a new city located above the line that not only would help improving the surrounding neighborhoods with its existence but also generate more questions on what extent can a single wall be. The role of a fundamental architectural elements; the wall that is once considered solely as a dividing tool could also take parts in connecting between the two opposite realms.

**The relationship between research and design**

The project started with a two weeks individual in-situ research of Casablanca, Morocco. After that, the investigations later leads to the research subject of Infrastructural paths: the segregated city seams, which later on investigated through series of site analysis and case studies of related preceded projects around the world. While at the same time experimenting in using the wall as an architectural element for articulating and creating public spaces by changing dimensions and shapes. The results of the research are being tested out in a master plan. It is a back and forth process of an autonomous experiment of wall variations and assembling on actual site, creating different qualities according to the urban context.

**The relationship between the project and the wider social context**
The infrastructure systems, which include highways, rails and tram have always been a major artery of every urban carpet, it moves economic, culture and other resources to where they are needed or where they wanted to be. From point A to point B, they moves through network of roads and rails. Cities depend on the infrastructures.

However, as Lambert (2015) stated that the infrastructures have the double contradictory role of maximizing the movement of a selected population — one that uses a vehicle — between the city and its suburb while simultaneously being an obstacle to all movement perpendicular to its own, thus acting as a form of wall dividing the urban carpet. The urban populations, in particular the lowest social classes that do not necessarily own a car, find themselves detached from the the city they live in, trapped by these axes of segregation cutting the urban fabric like canyons. The speed of vehicles, its rigid and cold materials are also contribute to hardiness feels of the urban canyons. Therefore, cities are divided physically and mentally by these lines.

The urban canyon effect in several developing country is currently being dealt with a constant urban transformation project. Even more effective than a newly constructed building, the renewing urban infrastructure project intervenes strategically with the existing urban structure while at the same time opening up enough spaces for previously unthought of opportunities for creating new uses, meeting places and social interactions. A central issue of every project is how the new functional claims and conversions can bring about a successful reintegration of these structures into the urban environment.

Notes
