

# Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building

## Graduation Plan: All tracks

Submit your Graduation Plan to the Board of Examiners ([Examencommissie-BK@tudelft.nl](mailto: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	Borui Xiong
Student number	5559537

Studio		
Name / Theme	Place and Memory	
Main mentor	Saskia De Wit	[Landscape Architecture]
Second mentor	Aleksandar Staničić	[Architecture]
Argumentation of choice of the studio	<p>Personally, I think a good landscape design project is based on a comprehensive understanding of the site, which comes from continuous interaction and exposure with it. Therefore, the initial motivation is that I want to do a project with an easily accessible site so that I can immerse myself in the landscape by visiting the site repeatedly during the whole process.</p> <p>Besides, after learning landscape architecture for a few years, I realize that the essential beauty and meaning of landscape is often ignored when utilizing landscape as a tool to meet human demands in the modern context. Landscapes and humans mutually shape each other. The beauty of landscape lies exactly in these endless interactions. Place &amp; Memory is a suitable topic for me to dive into this field and have a reflection on my personal position as a landscape student/architect.</p> <p>During my study at TU Delft, topics like Landscape Phenomenology and Landscape Palimpsest really fascinated me. This is also a precious opportunity for me to understand these theories better.</p>	

Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	Atlantic Wall Ruins in Den Helder: the reverie before oblivion.
Goal	
Location:	Den Helder, Netherlands
The posed problem,	Den Helder is located in the northern part of the North Holland province. Surrounded by sea, it has a rich history, especially the war history due to its special location. It was once one of the major sites of the Atlantic Wall during WWII, resulting in a lot of bunker ruins left by then scattered throughout the city.

	<p>Den Helder has been expanding since the war ended, leaving less space for these “useless” ruins. How these ruins will exist in the increasingly diverse urban context is a thorny question. These bunkers possess an internal location to the current city yet external to everyday use. Their complex historical background makes them a heterogeneous, controversial, or even traumatic element in the gradually crowded city. On the one hand, the Atlantic wall reveals something about the history of Den Helder, which, whether glorious or traumatic, is always an undeniable part of the place. On the other hand, Atlantic Wall ruins are becoming physical remnants of the controversial history and inaccessible memory. Because the generation that experienced war is aging, memories of this distant past are fading away. For the new generation, who do not obtain direct experience with the historical events, the ruins therefore no longer represent pain or guilt, but curiosity or excitement. This situation prevents them from reflecting further on the past conflict, thus ignoring the importance of ruins to the contemporary city.</p> <p>Besides, after these historical conflicts, an increasing number of memorial projects appeared, such as museums, monuments, parks, ‘Gedenksteine’, etc. All these memorial projects show the effort to preserve and archive the past events. However, the overloaded memorial landscape does not seem to succeed in eliciting public empathy for the past events. Especially for people who have never been through war, these memorial approaches seem to be in vain (Schofield). Memories of the historical events seem to have lapsed with people who had actually been through it. The neglect of the intrinsic value of such heterogeneous spaces like ruins can further lead to oblivion and disappearance of Den Helder's layered history and landscape context.</p> <p>From a more long-term perspective, as interactions between people and cities constantly evolve, palimpsest layers keep growing with it, generating new ruins as well. Many valuable places are perceived as ugly and something that should be replaced, such as post-war ruins. Meanwhile, another group of people are obsessed with archiving, resulting in a meaningless storage of overloaded information (Nora, 13). This phenomenon only fosters a meaningless quest for something new and beautiful and produces an endless succession of ruins. Without a wise and sustainable way of dealing with these continually accumulating ruins, could it mean that the past has been completely forgotten by the time the ruins are completely gone; or does it mean a mindless storage of ruins as an illusion of rendering disappeared memories traceable.</p> <p>Furthermore, not being able to deal with the decaying processes of landscape also means that people and landscape fail to empathize, and this state of segregation will not provide a fertile basis for future human-landscape interaction.</p>
<p>research questions and</p>	<p>RQ: How to bring heterogeneous post-war ruins into contemporary urban context while maintaining the ruinous qualities?</p>

	<p>SRQ1: What is post-war ruin? Why are decaying ruins important to modern cities? What is the relationship between ruin, history and memory?</p> <p>SRQ2: How has the relationship between the Atlantic Wall and Den Helder changed? What does this reveal?</p> <p>SRQ3: What contemporary values can be ascribed to the (Atlantic wall) ruins? What kind of ruinous qualities can contain these values? How do these values deal with the disappearance of history and memory?</p> <p>SRQ4: What are the potential interventions for ruins to embody their value? What happens when ruins are attached with new functions and roles?</p>
<p>design assignment in which these result.</p>	<p>A series of intervention strategies will be used to reveal the value of the Atlantic Wall ruins as sites of memory and to further explore the impact of new interventions on the quality of the ruins through design.</p> <p>Based on the study of the contemporary value of ruins and the interventions, a transformation-oriented design approach is proposed, which consists of protective transformation interventions and creative design interventions. By dealing with both time and space, the decaying process of the ruins becomes managed, thus making time visible in space. By generating new connections and memories between ruins and the future city, a continuous cycle between ruins and new interventions will be activated, in which a decaying ruin becomes the living ruin. People also gain experiential memory, achieving better understanding towards the Atlantic wall ruins and the history they represent.</p> <p>The strategy is structured through time. The first step being to achieve preservation by "destroying" the ruins. A soft intervention, such as vegetation, will be used to gradually open up the Atlantic Wall ruins as an urban heterotopia. Together with public participation, the contemporary value of the ruins will be recognized and accepted by the public. The second step is to introduce a contemporary narrative. Through the creative reinterpretation of the ruins and translation of the historical events, the contrast between the old and the new spatial atmosphere is heightened. This contrast dislocates the sense of time in the space and triggers the imagination of the past. The third step is to consider the Atlantic Wall ruins and the dune landscape as a coherent system. The design site is brought together with the nearby fortress museums and monuments, creating a coherent historical touring experience. The archival memory developed in the museum will be further reinforced and enhanced by the direct experience within the ruins.</p> <p>The design outcome will be to bring the ruins back into the urban public space, allowing ruins to become a medium that reminds people to look forward or reflect on the past. Ruin is a platform for open communication, inspiration, and reconciliation,</p>

	<p>promoting mutual understanding between people with different expectations towards ruins.</p> <p>Ruins may all physically disappear eventually. However, with the managed decaying mechanism, we can always find a trace of the physically disappeared past. History will be well-maintained with this ever-lasting cycle. Memories will take its root in people's mind as they are involved in this circular process.</p>
--	--

## Process

### Method description

#### 1. landscape palimpsest as a guiding method

Landscape as palimpsest is the guiding method through the project to visualize this continual deposition resulting from the interaction between people and landscape through time. This process of landscape deposition is one in which, as new things emerge, existing objects decay into ruins. In other words, ruins are interspersed between these landscape deposits. Therefore, this notion matches the characteristics of the ruins, respectively showing in several aspects: layered properties of space and time; mutual influence between human and landscape; process property and the open-ended objectives.

Firstly, landscape palimpsest indicates successive landscape intervention based on the understanding of previous layers and motivations in context (Bobbink, I. and de Wit, S. 136). With the layered approach, the rich history and diverse landscape context in Den Helder can be further investigated with a good depth in time and space.

Secondly, landscape as palimpsest emphasizes the mutual influence between human and landscape. Every human intervention in the landscape is influenced by the traces of the previous landscape. The decaying process of the Atlantic Wall in Den Helder exactly indicates this mutual influence. These ruins, as visible physical objects, reveal some past changes. Meanwhile it reflects human thought, societal background in different time periods.

Thirdly, by regarding landscape as a dynamic process, landscape palimpsest provides a wise attitude towards the decaying ruins, which might be regarded as ugly, embarrassing, or traumatic. According to Graham Fairclough, heritage, which includes the ruins, is not only an object, but also a process of looking after and exploiting these objects (Graham Fairclough, 2009). Considering ruins as a process also enables a connection between ruins as dispersed objects and the landscape context.

Lastly, landscape palimpsest advocates that landscape architectural design is to add successive chapters to an ongoing story, which means an open-ended design goal (Bobbink, I. and de Wit, S.136). This attitude well explains the research desire to achieve a coupling of new intervention and decaying ruins, which will keep evolving as a new whole and lead to a reconciliation between past and present, human and landscape.

#### 2. Landscape biography of Atlantic Wall

The preliminary study focuses on the process of the Atlantic Wall from birth to decay. With a landscape biography, this part also illustrates the social transformation of post-war Den Helder and the phenomenon of the fading historical events and memories during recent years.

##### 1) literature review

Literature review will be applied to collect background knowledge and basic theoretical materials. Firstly, background information about the Atlantic Wall, Den Helder and World War II will be

collected to form the base of the multi-layered structure of Atlantic Wall ruin biography in Den Helder. Secondly, theories about the value of ruins in its buried memory or history will be elaborated.

- Den Helder societal development
- Atlantic Wall construction process and historical events
- the surrounding urban context development after the World War II
- the contemporary relationship between Atlantic Wall ruins and Den Helder
- the memory/history embodied in Atlantic Wall ruins.

#### 2) mapping analysis

Besides text material, mapping analysis and layer approach will selectively process the related information that can show the dynamic interaction between people, society, ruins and landscape context. For example, the construction of the Atlantic Wall destroyed the previous urban structure and influenced the dune ecosystem. After the war, the existence of these ruins was controversial due to the fear and traumatic emotions of the war. These different attitudes have in turn influenced the existence of the Atlantic Wall in Den Helder as well as the subsequent urban expansion.

#### 3) photography

A series of old photographs can further complement the literature and mappings. Besides, photographs of the Atlantic Wall ruins taken on site can also verify the results of the analysis on the map and in the literature.

#### 4) typology study

With a comprehensive understanding of the previous layers, a typology study on Atlantic Wall ruins in Den Helder's contemporary urban context will be carried out. It matches the Atlantic Wall remnants with different layers of the ruin landscape palimpsest depending on the type of landscape intervention, like building a museum on top of the remnants or leaving the remnants in the dune.

### **3. Literature review**

The first part of the literature review will provide a theoretical framework that elaborates the correlation between history, (true)memory and sites of memory. According to Pierre Nora, Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things (Nora, 8). Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative. (Figure. 1)

Nowadays, memory is no longer the true memory, which originated from direct experience, but comes from indirect sources. Therefore, modern memory can be regarded as history, which relies on material records and external support (Nora, 13). The modern memory is the same as history, that can also be reconstructed and reproduced. Pierre therefore proposes three forms of modern memory:

- Archival-memory: the collective memory that is preserved and documented in archival records, such as documents, photographs, and audio and video recordings (Nora, 13).
- Duty-memory: the moral obligation to remember and honor the victims of historical events (Nora, 15).
- Distance-memory: the modern understanding of the past as something that is fundamentally discontinuous and separate from the present (Nora, 16).

These three forms are the results of how memory is transformed into history due to the development of modern technology. This leads to the discussion of the relationship between modern memory and history, and further promotes the concept of sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*). The sites of memory are material, symbolic, and functional sites that are invested with a symbolic aura by the imagination (Nora, 19). These sites are created by a play of memory and

history, and they exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis. Examples of lieux de mémoire include monuments, historical sites, museums, and cultural traditions.

TRUE MEMORY	HISTORY
perpetually actual phenomenon	representation of the past
affective and magical	analysis and criticism
subjective, absolute, spontaneous	objective, relative, collective
limited to specific group	open to everyone

(Figure. 1)

This theoretical background enables the analysis of memory forms addressed by Den Helder's current Atlantic Wall bunkers, while opening a discussion about whether existing interventions are effective in dealing with overloaded memories. Further, it suggests the challenge of how to reshape modern memories in the partial absence of the immediate experience, and which modern memory should we deal with in these new interventions?

The second part of literature review will provide theoretical support for the significance and value of the ruins under contemporary urban contexts.

Ruins can be regarded as an unintentional monument, which is initially erected for purposes other than commemoration. According to Alois Riegl, unintentional monuments have two categories of value, one absolute and the other relative. (Alois Riegl, 2-3)

- This first category is Absolute value, consisting of commemorative value, historical value and age value.
- The second category is relative value, intended for the contemporary, and consists of utilitarian value (use value) and art value.

These theoretical frameworks provide a valid basis for exploring the value of ruins in a modern context, dealing with the embarrassing situation in which ruins still exist as a physical object, but the history they symbolize, the people who witnessed these events and the associated memories have almost completely gone. Absolute value emphasizes the significance of ruins as symbols of historical events and memories, while relative value offers the possibility of transforming ruins into a new urban space.

#### 4. Case study

The existing layered structure of the ruins already slightly reflects the tendency to merge with the contemporary urban context, but it also raises the challenge that, while both historical events and individual memories are far distant from the present and even future city, the ruins still exist as a tangible remnant of the past. What do we do with these fading memories? How do we deal with the fear of the rapid and final disappearance of the past?

##### 1) Contemporary value of ruins revealed by precedents

The first topic of case study is the contemporary values of ruins revealed by precedents. These include projects such as the landscape heritage project of bunker599 from RAAAF; the destroyed Kolumba church in Cologne, Berlin wall, Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin. These projects provide a sight into the correspondence between modern context and ruins. They also provide guidance on how these ruinous qualities can be used to show the absolute and relative value of ruins as monuments.

## 2) Possible interventions on ruins

The second topic of the case study is the intervention approach to ruins and further explores the relationship between transformation and design (Figure 2). The precedents are divided based on the intervention approaches. One is transformation, which is based on the idea of conservation, the other is design, which strives for innovation. Transformation includes preservation, restoration and reuse, and is often found in the form of museums and exhibitions, such as the Berlin Wall Museum, Yuanmingyuan, etc. After transformation, most of the ruins have been well maintained. Therefore, their historical and time value is well represented. In contrast, design always means starting from scratch and involves not only the ruins themselves, but also the re-creation of the historical events behind the ruins. As a result, these works have a broader use value and a more comprehensible art value, such as the Berlin Wall graffiti, the Vietnam War memorial and the Jewish memorial.

TRANSFORMATION	DESIGN
protection	innovation
time-dynamic	future-oriented
projection	production
old context	new context
absolute value	relative value
isolated	interactive

miro (Figure. 2)

## 5.Design exploration as spatial research tool

The design itself will be used to investigate the impact of the post-production of this intervention on the historical value, space and meaning of the site itself. This will lead to a further study of how the unique qualities of the ruins can be preserved and create experiential memory for the public.

## Literature and general practical reference

Alois Riegl, 'Der Moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung' (Vienna: Braumüller, 1903). Republished in Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. K. Swoboda and H. Sedlmayr (Vienna-Augsburg: Filser, 1929). Translated as 'The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin', trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions* 25 (1982): 21–51.

Bobbink, I. and de Wit, S. (2020) "Landscape architectural perspectives as an agent for generous design", *Research in Urbanism Series*, 6, pp. 129–150. doi: 10.7480/rius.6.97.

Braae E. *Beauty Redeemed: Recycling Post-Industrial Landscapes*. Risskov Basel: IKAROS Press; Birkhäuser; 2015.

Council of Europe. *Heritage and Beyond*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing; 2009.



Carolyn Ahmer (2020) Riegl's 'Modern Cult of Monuments' as a theory underpinning practical conservation and restoration work, *Journal of Architectural Conservation*, 26:2, 150-165, DOI: 10.1080/13556207.2020.1738727

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations*, no. 26, 1989, pp. 7–24. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>. Accessed 13 Dec. 2022.

Schofield, Hugh. "Hitler's Atlantic Wall: Should France Preserve It?" *BBC News*, BBC, 13 Sept. 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-10632543>.

Treib, M. (2009) *Spatial recall: Memory in architecture and Landscape*.

## 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)?

My graduation topic is mainly focused on uncovering the value of Atlantic Wall ruins within the contemporary urban context of Den Helder. The landscape palimpsest leads me to regard ruins and urban contexts as a layered structure, thus illustrating the interaction through time and space, people and landscape.

Place and memory, as the studio topic, emphasize identifying the original skeleton of the landscape and represent its value and meaning through design. This goal inspired me to look for valuable but neglected elements in the city, which led to Atlantic Wall ruins as a research object. Regarding ruin decay and urban regeneration as two contradictory processes helps me to understand the intertwined relationship between ruins and societal phenomena such as fading historical events, memory loss or regeneration, thus ascribing values to ruins with current understandings. This process responds to the objectives of the lab.

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

The project provides a new transformation paradigm for the controversial post-war ruins, emphasizing their importance as part of the city's cultural heritage. By giving new value, function and meaning to the ruins in the context of a rapidly developing contemporary city, the unique qualities of the ruined spaces are preserved while integrating them into the generated urban fabric. From the human-experience perspective, by promoting empathy between people and landscape, the ruins also serve as a reminder of respect and understanding of the city's past development, more or less laying the foundation for future mutual interventions between humans and the landscape.

On a broader scale, the project also promotes a new perception and definition of the city's cultural heritage: the ruins are understood as a process of development in synergy with the city rather than merely as an object. This way of perception offers a more sustainable development model for the increasingly overloaded cultural heritage.