

Name: Marina Fetter Brucker Liserre
Student Number: 5076129
Studio: Borders and Territories

ARCHITECTURAL NOMADISM

Abstract

This research concerns with the approach of architecture through a nomadic theory as opposed to the long-practiced sedentarist one. It intends to propose an architectural practice beyond the sedentarist conventions of settlements, of cities of permanence. A practice that doesn't draw conclusions from society through its settlement, but rather its mobility. It seeks for a practice of ephemerality, occupation and mobility in order to challenge sedentarist conceptions of culture, identity and belonging independent of a territory. In order to do so, it draws understanding from a theoretical point of view –nomadic theory- and its repercussion in society and the built environment. And additionally, from an analysis of original nomadic cultures of the South of Kazakhstan and a type of contemporary nomad, people in transit through Almaty for the transportation of goods or passengers.

Problem Statement

Today's societies and cities have been built upon ideals of sedentarism. This fixed, deeply rooted, conceptions of culture, identity and belonging reaffirms the organization of the world into pieces like nations, states, countries or other specific places. This may not sound alarming simply because sedentarism is so ingrained within the organization of our societies that it is readily accepted, rather invisible. But in fact, these conceptions actively territorialize cultures and belongings into physical and static spaces such as property, region and nation leading instead to questioning and frowning upon the misfits of sedentarized societies: the migrants, the nomads, those that do not belong to one place.

A nomadic theory, as opposed to sedentarist theory, pushes thoughts to transgress borders, expand to new territories and occupy them. Architecture's understanding of societies through its settlement within the built environment is in itself a sedentarist practice (what Deleuze and Guattari would define as "reproduction science") which only reproduces sedentarist forms of living and denies a nomadic expansion of the practice. It has maybe come to a time when architecture should incorporate nomadic theory to its practice by considering other ways of looking into society. It should "nomadize" its practice by placing itself in other territories of architectural thought, but also "nomadize" its way of perceiving society by looking at it through its moments of mobility, temporary occupations and ephemerality rather than settlement, permanence and monumentality.

Research Questions

How can nomadic theory and the understanding of society (and its built environment) through its moments of mobility, temporal occupation and ephemerality influence the practice of architecture?

How does it challenge current sedentarist perspectives of cultures, identities and belonging?

How can this challenge ideas of occupation of the (urban) space?

How does it take accountability for more mobile lives (occupying instead of settling)?

How can it expand ideals of citizenship beyond those attached to territory?

Methodology

The research starts with a case study: the city of Almaty in Kazakhstan. In fact, the choice of the case study happened prior to the establishment of the problem statement.

This first step consists of discovering the case study and defining its qualities that make it unique. The approach used to do such thing is an analysis and sub-sequent definition of the city's territory and borders. The goal is to develop an understanding of the area beyond that defined by its administrative borders and territory. What are the elements that actually constitute the territory of Almaty, what kind of borders exist, how are they materialized (or not) and what do they separate or define differently between them. These things are then jointly expressed in two maps: one that defines the unique characteristics of the city in terms of its territory and another that defines its unique border conditions.

The second step consists of a 2-component simultaneous research within the theme of the topics addressed by the problem statement: one results in a written paper and the other in analytical maps and drawings.

In order to practice architecture with the understandings of nomadic theory it is deemed helpful to dive into the topic by the writing of a theoretical paper in order to develop a personal understanding and positioning towards the topic. The paper addresses the dichotomy of sedentarist and nomadic theories and how they translate into the built environment through the permanence and settlement of sedentarist societies as opposed to the ephemeral and resilience of a more nomadic society.

In this other component of the research, a more specific topic within the problem statement's theme is researched within Almaty in order to address the problem statement within its specific context. Informed by the concepts developed in the theory paper, but also reciprocally informing the theory paper, this part of the research focuses on looking at the mobility of nomadic groups to gain an understanding about mobile life and occupation of different territories. It starts with a research about the original nomadic groups of Kazakhstan, most specifically the South of Kazakhstan (where Almaty is located). A parallel is then drawn to contemporary cases of nomadism in Almaty, of which the specific case chosen to be addressed are goods and passenger drivers in international transit through the territory of Almaty. In this analysis, the topics studied are the mobility of the drivers and their temporary occupations of the territories along the road. The road starts being perceived as a nomadic

space – the asphalted piece of land is the axis of mobility and its extensions beyond the asphalt, places that allow temporary occupations.

Finally, the last step is the formalization of the previous part of the research into physical models. The research's conclusions and understandings are translated into 3 different models: one that conceptualizes ideas of the site (or ground), another for the form and a last one for the program. The goal with this step is to enrich the findings of the previous parts of the research as well as instigate a transition between the research phase and design phase.

Bibliographical References

Boyer, Christine. *The City of Collective Memory*. MIT Press, 1996.

Braidotti, Rosi. "Nomadism: Against Methodological Nationalism." *Policy Futures in Education*, vol. 8, no. 3–4, June 2010, pp. 408–418, doi:10.2304/pfie.2010.8.3.408.

Cresswell, Tim. *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. Routledge, 2006.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Nomadology: The War Machine*. New York, NY, USA: Semiotext 1986. Print.

"Dimensionsof Citizenship." *Dimensions of Citizenship*, 19 Mar. 2018, dimensionsofcitizenship.org/index.html. Accessed on 29 October 2020.

Malkki, Liisa. "National Geographic The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees." *Cultural Anthropology*, Feb., 1992, Vol. 7, No. 1, *Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference* (Feb., 1992), pp. 24-44

Rossi, A., Eisenman, P., Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts,, & Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies,. (1982). *The architecture of the city*.