

# BACKSTAGE

A REFLECTION

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## PROLOGUE.

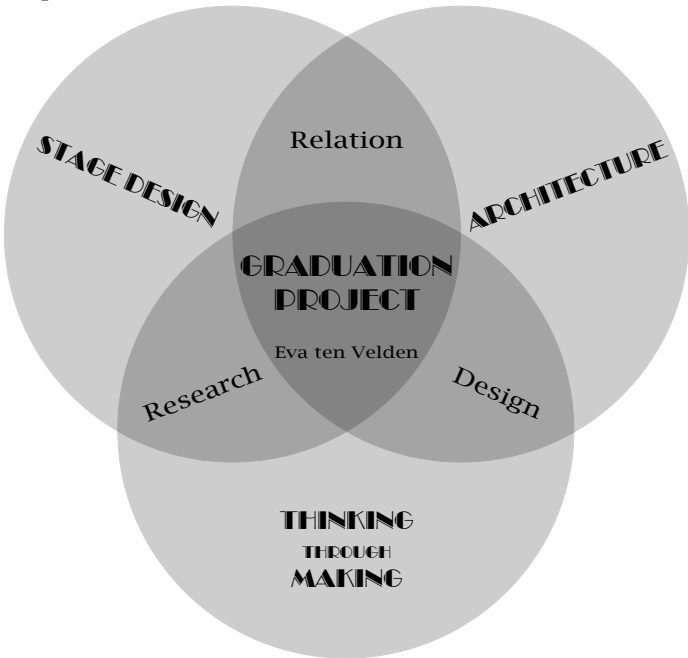
*“Long, long ago, in a world no more seen as our current reality, there lived a girl. A girl who sought out the help of five friends, with the hope that they could teach her all she needed to know about theatricality and wonderment. She wanted to discover their secrets in such a way that she herself would one day create her own special place that incorporated all she had learned from her friends.*

*But how did she experienced the road she had to take in order to succeed? What happened Backstage of the HomeStage?*

1. **Beginning - Middle - End**  
**or in other words**  
**Research - Relation - Design**

Before this graduation project was well and truly defined, long before the research question was formulated and even before the choice of tutors was made, there were three main aspects that I wanted to combine within the project. This combination would always illustrate the core of my graduation.


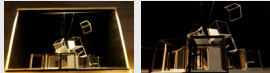


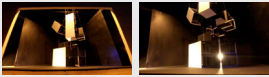
First of all my fascination for stage design, secondly of course the topic of architecture, and lastly the method of thinking through making. Each separate combination of two aspects is one important part of my graduation project, and, as shown in the diagram below, together they make the project complete.



Even though the method of thinking through making is essential in both research and design, and can therefore be seen as a practical relation between the both. It is actually the translation from the stage design guidelines found in my research towards architectural principles for the design that truly shows the relation.

Simultaneously, it is exactly this translation from research guidelines to design principles that was one of the bigger challenges during this project. Mostly because the research was based on abstract forms and shapes, captured in a philosophical and theoretical framework, whereas the design asked for a practical and tangible outcome in the form of small domestic spaces.

Halfway through the design process I finally managed to extract five design principles that benefited from the most impactful research guidelines.

<p>Mystery of Atmospheres</p> 	<p>Object in Space &amp; Object as Space</p> 	<p>Same Object Different Context</p> 
<p><b>Theatrcal Guidelines</b></p> <p>System of Modular Shapes</p> 	<p><b>Design Principles</b></p> <p><b>Shelter of Dreams</b> Architectural experience of Wonderment</p> <p><b>Script of Life</b> Actor in residence</p> <p><b>Scenarios of Context</b> Location tour</p> <p><b>Out of the Ordinary</b> Functional program: "nothing seems to be what it seems to be"</p> <p><b>Structural Shell of Permeability</b> Fysical boundaries and Visual boundaries</p>	
<p>Dynamic Viewing Angle</p> 		

This halfway point within the design process was also the moment in which I knew I needed to change from the interior installation concept for an existing room towards a design concept with a little less spatial limitations. Especially since this so called 'one room' concept was directly related to my own current living area and within the confinements of the whole covid pandemic and its extensive lock downs, I found myself more and more demotivated.

All in all, it was not an ideal situation for a creative process. Something that my tutors had warned me about during their feedback of P2, so I'm glad I did change my design focus when I did, with the above shown translation from research to design as a result.

## 2.

### Why I choose Explore Lab as a graduation studio

My fascination for theatricality and stage design originates from an honours course I took in the bachelor 'Bouwkunde'. In this course me and my fellow students were asked to design and build a stage design for a play that would be performed in the Aula of the TU Delft. I enjoyed it very much and kept in contact with the director of the play, who in his turn asked me for a second stage design during my master.

In my master track Architecture itself I chose studios that touched the topics related to what I had experienced in the theatre. My Msc1 studio thought me how to design from the inside out by starting with the design of a staircase instead of an urban plan, while both my Msc2 studios evolved around the method of Thinking through Making, resulting in the 1:1 building of both a pavilion and a sauna.

While starting the master programme at the TU Delft I imagined a graduation project that would combine all that I learned during my studies as well as that what I learned in the theatre outside of the faculty, and the Explore Lab studio is the perfect place to do so.

### 3. How I implemented the Explore Lab methodical line of inquiry

Quote course description: *“Explore Lab is a student driven graduation laboratory. The educational method is therefore to be developed by the students in conversation with each other and the Explore Lab coordinators. The assumption is that studio instruction will be the primary teaching method. Students will guide their own studies and determine their own learning styles.”*

As stated above, the methodical line of inquiry for the Explore Lab graduation studio is not defined by the studio itself but by the students that participate. It is an open graduation studio in which the students are welcome and stimulated to explore their own methodology in research as well as design. I dare say, that my method of working is even more explorative than most colleague students, since I worked with models as large as myself.

From start to finish I was determined to use the method of thinking through making as much as possible throughout the whole project. During the research part of my graduation I combined this method of thinking through making with a theoretical literary study and moviemaking. While during the design part of my graduation the more conventional way of drawing, on paper as well as digital, was added in the mix.

The outcome of both research and design will, in the first place, be multiple movies of the main models made during the project. For the research this movie shows the build theatre model and its most impactful stage designs, complemented by a literary study on atmospheres and a thorough analysis of the movie images.

The movies made during the design phase of the project will show the whole design in a 1:5 model, the possible spatial and atmospheric changes translated from the theatrical guidelines, as well as the building process of the model itself. All movies, hopefully, bring a better bodily experience regarding the outcome of the research as well as the design.



The scientific relevance of the work, and in this case especially the methodology during the working process, is shown in the comprehension of the 'make-ability'. Not all minds work the same, and I'm not saying that my work method is the only holy grail in sea of worthless methodologies, but for me this method of thinking through making makes me understand how we as architects can design something that is actually possible to be constructed in real life a whole lot better than any drawing can teach me.

I've been privileged to experience this method in other courses during my master as well, but I know for a fact that there are a lot of students that wished to have had that opportunity, but couldn't simply because there were not enough courses that could offer this experience.

I'm grateful I got the possibility to implement this method of thinking through making in the whole of my graduation as much as I did. Especially since it where exactly the moments when I wasn't able to do so, mostly due to the Covid pandemic, that I struggled way more with my process. I simply learn faster and can make (design) decisions easier when I've had the opportunity to create something in a 3D way that I can touch and look at in real life.

#### 4. **How the project relates to wider social, professional and scientific framework**

In a larger social framework it is the topic of dynamic atmospheres that shows the relevance of my graduation work. In times like the ones we experience right now during the Covid pandemic, we encounter new demands on the limited spaces we are only suddenly able to use.

The black box theatre stage is a limited space on its own. It has certain rules and boundaries, but within these restrictions lie entire worlds that changes within seconds and make you believe that anything is possible.

Whenever I watch a show I feel free, and what is better than to experience this freedom within the confinements of a lock down.

In a larger professional and scientific framework it isn't as much the topic of my graduation work, but my experimental research method that shows its relevance.

Like I've said before, as architects we design spaces and to some extent we try to direct the people inhabiting these spaces. We promise to design certain atmospheres, spaces with character and different moods and we do so by means of drawings and relatively small models. However, it is only when projects are realized that we can experience their atmospheres and know if we kept our promise.

With my graduation work I try to incorporate this experience of atmosphere earlier in the design stage by introducing a 1:5 model. In my opinion, a small scale building project provides an extra dimension towards the understanding of atmosphere simply because you can actually poke your head in the model, and, if that's not enough to encourage this working method, it also provides a more realistic knowledge on how to actually make technical architectural details.

In relation to the transferability of the project results there are actually two main things I would like to point out. The first requires us to take a step back and rethink the, for now, dismissed 'one room' concept. During this graduation project the 'one room' concept was dismissed because it became unfeasible, as it would have taken over my entire living situation.

However, the idea of designing multiple architectural tools that can be implemented in existing spaces to actively change atmospheres according to the user's needs is still a great way to implement wonderment in otherwise static spaces.

The guidelines forming the research outcomes can still be translated in a way that we can reinvent basic architectural elements such as windows, doors, walls, floors and ceilings in a totally different way than I've done with my current design.

The second notion refers to my future plans of building the design outcome of my graduation 1:1. This time next year I aim for myself to live in the little HomeStage, truly experiencing what it means to live in a space that is totally adaptable in function, its physical appearance as well as its mood. The lessons learned during the 1:5 model build will be of great influence for the actual 1:1 building process.

## 5.

## How to deal with dilemmas

On a whole, the biggest dilemma I have encountered during my project in the research stage as well as the design stage was the uncertainty of the next step. However, to be honest, this was maybe more problematic for some of my tutors than it was for myself, since my work methodology required a step by step approach.

When I started my research I had no idea where every step would lead me and what next step I was supposed to take in order to eventually reach a suitable outcome.

Since the result of my research isn't conclusive with one right answer, the uncertainty of the next step wasn't as much of a dilemma as it was an exciting search driven by curiosity. Even though one is usually required to have at least an outline in academic research.

Using the same approach for my design process showed a few more bumps in the road however. Mostly because in order to communicate your design ideas you need more defined visuals and practical solutions instead of a collection of theoretical guidelines.

So even though my design outcome is supposed to be multi-interpretable, equivalent to the fact that every member in the same audience experiences a theatre play in their own way, my design language should be interpreted the way I intent it to be interpreted.

My design tutor once commented on my work that it felt for him as if he had turned up in the middle of the story, without any clue regarding the plotline. I thought this a great way to define the goal of the design, but it wasn't very practical during tutoring.

That is also the reason why we decided that my P4 should be a practical architectural story on how to make the HomeStage, whilst my P5 will be all about the multiple theatrical experiences within the HomeStage. Two stories with both their own suitable way of communicating that what I want to convey to others.

The same issue is currently accurate in the process of acquiring a building permit. I would love to be able to elongate my thinking through making method during the real building process.

For example in the search for reusable building materials that fit the design as it is with a few tiny adaptations, this allows me to be more sustainable and circular. However, once I get the building permit for my current design I cannot adapt it anymore, leaving me with the necessity to build a lot more with custom made and new materials.

The step by step approach will no longer be a suitable approach since I don't want to reapply for a building permit over and over again.

Finally, the matter of uncertainty will also be present during the last part of this graduation project between P4 and P5. This is the moment in which the 1:5 model will be finished and the dynamic atmospheric movie will be made by recapturing the theatrical techniques and guidelines within the architectural design.

Looking at the model as it is now, I can sincerely say that I'm very excited to start filming and I truly have faith in the outcome of that movie, but it will only be until the very end of the project that we will know if the design will actually be able to show it's story without telling it explicitly.



## EPILOGUE.

*So, the girl from the beginning of this story is nearing the final part on the road to graduation, but she knows it's not the end of her path. Skipping alongside her five friends on the beat of life she sings:*

*“And though I may not see the path ahead  
I am confident  
I'm taking one step at a time  
I put my heart out on the line  
And it will be one hell of a roller coaster ride  
But I am ready  
I am ready to shine”*

*- lyrics 'Shine' by Fia*

# BACKSTAGE

A REFLECTION

EXPLORE LAB GRADUATION

by  
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September 2019 - April 2022

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Angeliki Sioli	- Research
Geert Coumans	- Design
Jan van de Voort	- Building Technology