

Jacob Morris

Working Title: Encounters of Place in Rotterdam

I. What do you want to make?

I plan to create a photo-book featuring images of people and buildings encountered on my walks around Rotterdam which would focus on themes of people and place. My desire to explore people and place has led me to find some curious looking structures in the South-Eastern part of Rotterdam called the *Zonnewoningen*. These are houses which were designed as energy efficient homes by Jacob Van Ringen (seen in Figure 1), and completed in 1984. These structures are not traditional looking Dutch homes, and create a lot of questions for myself (see 'Why do you want to make it' below) which I intend to explore visually. The photographs I intend to take will be predominately architectural landscape images with some portraiture, providing I find willing models who I can converse with. I believe this will be a challenge due to COVID-19, as many people are preferring less contact, particularly with strangers so I may not be able to capture as many portraits as I intend to but this is an ongoing issue that I will have to work around. It could perhaps even become part of the project, as I try to develop ways to interact with possible subjects encountered on my walks.

Although this project is in its early stages, I have begun photographing an area called the *Zonnewoningen*, "solar homes" (Figure 1 & 2). In 1982, the Municipality of Rotterdam organised a competition for energy-efficient homes in the two former clean water cellars. The winning design came from Architect, Jacob van Ringen and consisted of single-family houses in timber frame construction, which were completed in 1984. I plan to continue to photograph this neighbourhood of 66 homes, targeting not only the architecture, but the neighbourhood as a whole. Living in a post-war city like Rotterdam, it is hard not to notice the variety of architecture which spans through the city, and has left me infatuated with the buildings which look like they do not belong there.

II. How do you plan to make it?

I plan to capture this series on my Hasselblad 503cx, on Portra 400 medium format colour film. I plan on shooting this project progressively as an ongoing process, attempting to find other curious landscapes and structures which evoke interest in me. Whilst taking these photographs I will research the relationship between Psycho-geography, Place and Placelessness and photography, this will also be the main topic of my thesis. After each shoot, I will have to develop a new way to take the photographs, in an effort to provide a variety and potentially incorporate some of the people who live in these structures (Figure 1).



Figure 1: A photograph I have taken of the *Zonnewoningen*..

III. What is your timetable?

This series will be an ongoing process and will lead up to when I graduate from this masters, but I would like to leave it open ended so that if we get past the restrictions of COVID-19, I could continue this project post-graduation. Until then, I will be periodically photographing my found locations, which will be an exploration of people and place. Obviously all of this could be subject to change due to the restrictions in the Netherlands surrounding COVID-19, particularly as street portraiture may become a significant issue due to this. To combat this issue I will address the lack of people on the streets in landscapes, yet obviously attempt any portrait I can with caution and consideration for others.

IV. Why do you want to make it?

I would like to create an ongoing photo series which forms itself as a visual investigation of Psycho-geography, Place and Placelessness. I would like to photograph these buildings and the people who live there. I became interested in visually investigating Schiermonnikoog, an island in the north of the Netherlands. Just around 946 people permanently reside on the island, making the municipality both the least populated and the least densely populated in the Netherlands. The youth were what inspired me to explore this project and the island through the lens, with the intended output being many portraits which would eventually be made into a photo-book and a short documentary film. However, the unforeseen difficulty of COVID-19 has made it near impossible from to engage on this photo project, due to not being able to travel directly to the island as it still has 0 cases of the virus. From this I had to review my options so I began exploring Rotterdam, the city I am inhabiting, and what Rotterdam has, is a plethora of different types of architecture. Originally, I come from Coventry, which is another war-city but it took a different approach to rebuilding, with its stark grey buildings and abundance of council housing. The questions which I would like to explore visually would be;

1. What is it like to live in these places?
2. What do the interiors look like?
3. How do the residents feel about the architecture?

V. Who can help you and how?

I am planning on asking some of the MIARD students and lecturers to help, as I am sure they are incredibly knowledgeable about the architecture in Rotterdam. As MIARD is focussed on interior architecture, I will also approach other schools of architecture around Rotterdam for advice. From MIARD, I will contact Dr. Ephraim Joris as his research focuses on “architectural phenomenology recasting history as the experiential content of speculative architecture, which could be very insightful in relation to my project. I will also contact the architect, Jacob van Ringen, Van Ringen Architecten is located in Groningen. I intend to ask Ringen about the inspiration around these buildings and potentially if he may be able to help me in any way with this project, such as an interview or conversation about the structure.



Figure 2: *Zonnewoningen*, from the right

VI. Relation to previous practice?

Previously I have engaged in investigating the concepts of identity and attachment, cultural narratives and traditions, environmental challenges, as well as extremes of social realities, and psychological theory. The main body of work I produced that relates to this, would be a photo series I created in Lockerbie, Scotland. The project began with photographing the youth of Lockerbie, a town where in 1988, Pan Am Flight 103, a regularly scheduled Pan Am transatlantic flight from Frankfurt to Detroit via London and New York was targeted by terrorist activity. The aircraft operating the transatlantic leg of the route was destroyed by explosion, killing all 243 passengers and 16 crew, before landing on the small unsuspecting town of Lockerbie, killing the eleven residents below. The photographs taken in this series were both portraits of some who grew up after the bombing, and landscapes of the small Scottish town and the crash site, concentrating in on the new homes built after the crash.

VII. Relation to a larger context?

As my project will be centered around people and place, I would like my project to touch upon themes of Edward Relph's theory of *Placelessness*, the photographs of Chloe Dewe Mathews series, *Caspian*. The industrial landscapes taken in Chris Killip's *In Flagrante* and the Tate's description of psychogeography; "How do different places make us feel and behave? The term psychogeography was invented by the Marxist theorist Guy Debord in 1955 in order to explore this. Inspired by the French nineteenth century poet and writer Charles Baudelaire's concept of the flâneur – an urban wanderer – Debord suggested playful and inventive ways of navigating the urban environment in order to examine its architecture and spaces." Being able to explore any city is a luxury in contrast to those affected by war or countries with a complex and controlling political landscape, this is something I could explore throughout the photo-book.

COVID-19 currently restricts the freedom of every individual, life at the moment seems to confine more and more people, many of us are in a lockdown and also now lack the freedom to travel, with some people unexpectedly stuck in cities. In recent years there has been more global movement than ever before, due to war, availability to travel, ecological disaster and the

destruction or destitution caused by capitalism which I believe can add the feeling of Placelessness to more people each day.

VIII. References & Bibliography:

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