

INSTITUTIONAL THRESHOLDS AS DESIGN ENGAGEMENT

A UNIVERSITY CAMPUS AS CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATIVE DESIGN

WANDA VERSTER

ABSTRACT

As part of a larger PhD study on Transformative Thresholds and the emplacement of art, Post-graduate students of architecture were engaged with an assignment linked to understanding the institutional thresholds of the University of the Free State Bloemfontein campus. The exploration of renditions of threshold in contemporary photography as well as the physical edges of museum space forms the larger focus of the PhD study. The reading of these thresholds may contribute to the understanding of gallery and exhibition space in South Africa. There are various nuanced aspects to threshold: The physical embodied experience of crossing from inside to outside through a door (Pallasmaa 1995, Merleau-Ponty), the projection of the imagination through elements such as windows, or depictions thereof; the mental understanding of place as defined by edges, (Casey 2008). The physical and depicted boundaries of political maps; as well as the boundaries experienced daily both culturally and socially.

The question of how the depth of meaning related to the threshold discovered or claimed by architects formed the driving factor behind the student project of the first semester of 2018. Students were asked to design small exhibition spaces that focused on the question: How are institutional frames {gallery & campus demarcations} created {planned and executed} and what is the physical and abstract effect of frames on the legitimisation of things {artefacts & beings}?

The main outcomes of the project as part of the module was that students had to explore, analyse, understand, explain, interpret and imagine a specific urban fragment of the urban morphology, (the campus in this case); and had to present and defend the findings of the research in two creative expressions. Students reflected on the process in journals and these reflections and designs were analysed in order to highlight how architecture students engage with thresholds in their immediate surroundings. The results are presented here.