

Research Plan: A Liminal Odyssey

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Public Building: Music Marvel | Research Plan | Theory Research

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Delft University of Technology | 2021-2022

Keywords: liminality, escapism, music building, architectural route, perception, transitional space

Problem

In the design of public buildings, there's always a degree of transposition in the experience of a visitor, a passage between the public realm and the specific main function of the building. In anthropological terms this can be referred to as liminality, a state of transition between two stages. Throughout the past, designers have established different architectural philosophies that intentionally or unintentionally influenced this notion. An early key development appeared in the 19th century, when squares and boulevards emerged around theatres. They became extensions to the ritual of attending a concert / play since they were arranged with cafés and restaurants. The wide sidewalks were also intended for big crowds to stroll around as flâneurs. On the interior side, majestic designs of lobbies and theatres were packed with detail and made the visitor feel in a totally different world detached from the city life (NOS, 2021).

Today in architecture, spatial accessibility appears to be a key design philosophy concerning liminality (Andrade, Dorneles, & Ely, 2012). Public buildings and master plans are frequently about making the shortest and most economical connections. Easy access, not only into the building but also into the main function, stimulates participation, and thus regenerates the urban surroundings (Smith & von Krogh Strand, 2011). This is an ideology that emerges out of practical thinking.

However in the design of a music building, an experience is not only part of the practical, it is also part of the pleasure. People visit a music building to emerge in the art, yet they are thrown right into a concert hall without consciously making a transition. This is not necessarily unacceptable, but it gives insight into a missed opportunity.

Escapism is the tendency to leave or

mask an unsuitable condition, and enter a pleasing situation (Tuan, 2000). If one can mentally let go of the daily routine and its corresponding senses within the liminality of an architectural route, how will this increase their experience of exploring new senses towards and within the music hall? A journey that can best be described as an odyssey: *"a long wandering or voyage usually marked by many changes of fortune"* (Merriam Webster, n.d.).

The research will focus on the following question: *How can an architectural route based on theories of liminality enhance the sense of escaping?*

Relevance (Why is it important?)

As described in the problem statement, it's a missed opportunity not to focus on the design of transition, since practical thinking momentarily dominates the architecture of entertainment. Architecture rarely reaches a state of pleasure without seduction, or seduction without illusion (Tschumi, 1977). A building is a seducer, constantly disguised behind a mask. Hence, it generates tension to discover what kind of reality it hides on the inside. Tuan describes a disguise in his definition of escapism in the opposite way (2000). He states that the feeling of escapism masks the perception towards the unwanted reality. Therefore, the architecture of escapism should be achieved as an intermediate of concealing and seducing. When translated to a music venue, the transition between the public realm and the music hall can be considered as a liminal space in the middle of the 'profane' and the 'sacred' (van Gennep, 1960).

Selecting the research themes of liminality and escapism does not mean that the connection to the larger city scale, and urban regeneration

should be neglected. These themes can also be influenced by other aspects, such as quality of public space and monumentality (Smith & von Krogh Strand, 2011). As a matter of fact, there is particular relevance to these two aspects. Considering the journey to the music building, it already begins in the mind of the visitor whilst travelling towards the venue (R. Brouwer, personal communication, October 7, 2021). This creates a certain anticipation towards the experience. Therefore, the movement and the visual connection to the building from a distance are already key elements to trigger the sensation.

Position in graduation

For the following points, see Figure 1. This is a relations scheme on research topics and their

influence on the design process. Each number has an explanation of what is being researched or designed.

I. Group abstract

There is a big difference in identity and perception between out- and inside the Binckhorst, defined and preserved by physical- and noise barriers surrounding the site (see Attachment 3).

II. Design: connection

In the future, however, Binckhorst will become a living environment. Hence, the barriers shall be transformed in the design phase by selecting and designing the music venue at a border location, so it can connect the Binckhorst to The Hague (influence of a public condenser at a border, PD case study conclusion).

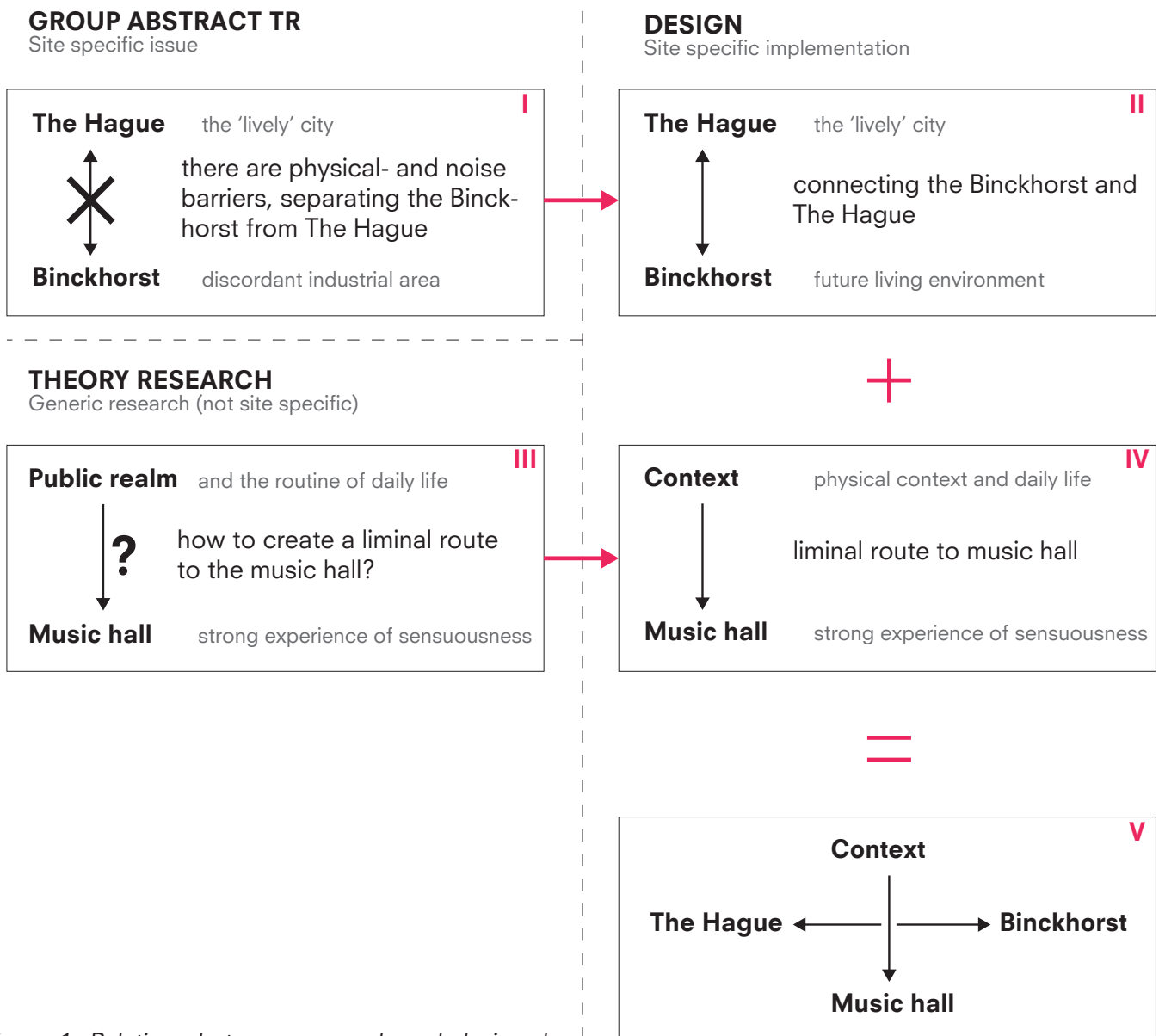


Figure 1: Relations between research and design, by author

III. Theory research

See main research question in the problem statement. Transitioning from the public realm to the music hall through liminal spaces.

IV. Design: route

The research gives a guide for the steps one has to undertake. This will be implemented in this part of the design.

V. Design: conclusion

On the one hand, the project will be about connecting the Binckhorst to the rest of the city as a public space. While on the other hand, the individual research provides a separate internal route to the music function.

Method (How do you plan to approach the problem?)

In short, methods for this research will be based on literature, case studies and the formation of a catalogue. The methods will be discussed in depth according to the division of the following themes.

1. Understanding escapism, breaking down the daily routine

Why does one want to escape from their daily life? Mental disengagement of the subject, causes stress levels to reduce (Bostan, 2020). So, why would one escape to music? In Western civilization visual senses are overloaded with more energy than the other senses, which indirectly tends people to think in terms of cause or purpose. This generates a mindset where one constantly makes decisions on the future and past, whereas societies that are not exposed to this manner, live in a state of timelessness (Cox & Warner, 2017). This will be a literature based analysis mostly. Nevertheless, it can also incorporate an anthropological analysis on a 24 hour and weekly cycle of a person to gain insights into the human condition during daily life.

2. Liminality

Literature based analysis on the concept of liminality. Liminality refers to being at an intermediary state, or sensory threshold. French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, distinguishes three phases within the liminal stage of an

individual's "life-crises" (rites of passage): separation, transition and incorporation (1960). How these stages can be translated but also elaborated for architecture will be the main focus in this part. Some of the most important buildings in architectural history took liminality already into account. Van Gennep's recognition of three different stages of liminality can be found in the Propylaea entrance of the Athenian Acropolis (Attachment 4) and the Pantheon in Rome (Zimmerman, 2008). It is a change between the profane and the sacred through a threshold. To understand these terms in the correct context of a music building, the city / surroundings can be seen as the profane component. This forms the base situation of departure. On the other hand, the sacred is formed by the music hall itself. It is the main function where the performance takes place. Liminality is not merely a change of space, but also a change of being. Hence the threshold of liminal space has the capability to change one's consciousness (Zimmerman, 2008).

3. Journey of sequence

How do existing buildings organise a cinematographic sequence of spaces? A thorough case study analysis on public buildings will be made, focussing only on the routing. From all these case studies a catalogue will be assembled based on perspectives along the internal (and perhaps external) architectural route.

“Time is a canvas for everything. Like in music, it is about going from moment to moment.” - Nahre Sol

(personal communication, October 28, 2021)

The cases will be analysed on aspects like duration of event / space, speed of movement, light, materiality and focus. The elements are largely derived from factors captured in photography, which are crucial to our understanding of perception. Besides, elements for analysis can be added later on, depending on the findings from the previous chapters.

The focus won't be only on music buildings, since the problem statement revealed the issue of lacking the cinematography of the route. Hence, chosen case studies will mostly be other types of

public buildings, for example museums. The architecture of museums is more often based on a specific architectural route. This makes the building type a good case study to discover the practice of route design. An example is the Abu Dhabi Louvre. With its long route before entering the main square, it creates anticipation and spreads the three steps of the rite of passage along the entire route. For example, incorporation into the main square is already built up throughout the route by semi-transparent windows, or by creating vague perspectives to the dome over the square only partially. This will be explored further in the research. Other case study proposals are Casa de Musica, Elbphilharmonie, National Museum of Qatar, Guggenheim New York and the Serpentine Pavilion by Peter Zumthor.

Aim / Objective (What to get out of it?)

The aim of this research is to discover how a route through the perspective of liminality can influence the experience of music venues. The objective is to determine a sequence of stages with a set of spatial and temporal requirements in order to acquire a standard which can be used for future route design in buildings for audio (and visual) entertainment.

Contribution (What the research adds to the discipline / city / site?)

Especially for the discipline of architecture, exploring the field of liminality and escapism to understand what the possibilities are to get the most out of the experience for its visitors is key. Therefore, the result of the research and even the design itself can become a reference.

There is also a psychological importance to the theme of escapism. Understanding human behaviour and designing buildings accordingly can contribute to human well-being. As earlier mentioned, escapism can have stress-reducing effects. Notably in the case of leisure, like a music building, a visitor would look forward to the experience months in advance when buying a ticket, and perhaps even remember

forever. Because of this, leisure should be seen as a form of escapism. Hence, now the liminal spaces still need to be designed accordingly to complete the journey.

There is a discussion in the field of psychology if escapism is to be acknowledged as a bad habit. Nevertheless, according to Bostan, the negative effects (addiction, problematic or excessive use) are considered for easily reachable mediums like gaming (2020). To clarify, this research will be about escapism in the form of a unique spatial construct for a music building that will be visited occasionally and not on a regular basis in the form of a bad habit. Hence, the unfavorable effects will not occur and could not counteract the design statement.

This paragraph on the contribution to the city and site will be viewed through the lens of the group abstract.

The Hague and the rest of the Randstad are facing a major housing crisis. While the number of residents in the big cities are rising, new dwellings may practically only be built within the current borders of the cities. This means that The Hague will have to use the available land it has, which is mostly in the Binckhorst industrial area. For the P1 group abstract (Attachment 2 & 3) we, group 4, created a notational system which illustrates that entering the Binckhorst has many obstacles along the borders. This has resulted in a discordance with the rest of The Hague. Without development the detachment will maintain, and therefore it will exclude the future residents of the Binckhorst from the rest of the city network. The P1 Project Design case study analysis concluded that a music marvel has the potential to connect different places by condensing public activity on the border of the areas. Implementing this effect in the design can change the situation for the Binckhorst (see Figure 1, II).

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Appendix

Attachment 1: Short personal fascination

Since I was young, I always loved watching movies. The build up of a context, following a narrative, generating tension, leading to something, but also unpredictability. Music in movies elevates the experience by also triggering the sense of hearing. Especially composers like John Williams whose compositions are custom made to fit the shots and their meaning. My interest in these topics is also reflected by the fact that I enjoy doing photography for over five years.

In terms of architecture, I was always able to explain the development of my projects very clearly through step by step diagrams. However, I never really learned how to create a narrative in the design itself for the users to experience. Through this research topic, I'm hoping to find that out.

Abstract version 3 (12-10-2021), Group 4
Introduction & Main Problem

The Binckhorst is considered the urban dump of the Hague. It is the place where the unwanted programmes of the city are "disposed"; car dealers, industrial warehouses, scrap yards, dismantling companies, cement factory, an asphalt plant, abandoned offices, a cemetery and ironically a waste disposal facility. The identity of the Binckhorst and the programs present are in contrast with the surrounding areas of the city.

On a smaller scale, within the Binckhorst, the combination of all these diverse "disposed" programmes creates a disjunction. Characters of the site mark their territory not only with fences and gates, but by improvising their positions through the appropriation of public space.

Hence, a state of discordance in two dimensions can be identified. First, there is a physical discordance of elements in and around the site. Secondly, an intuitively felt state of discordance is experienced by human perception. Related issues and concepts are mapped in the following system of branches.

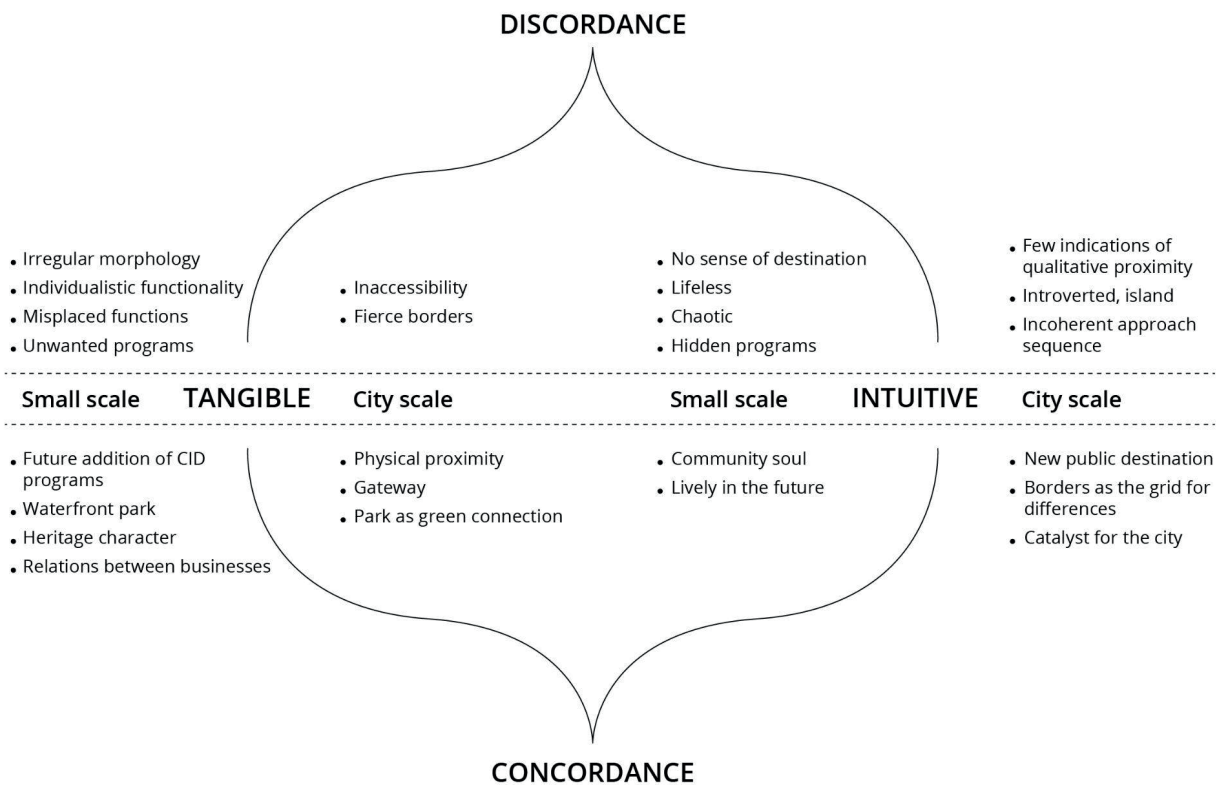


Figure 1: Branches of discordance and concordance

On the other hand, several opportunities for the development of a cultural function were spotted. In contrast to the discordance, they were mapped in the field of concordance. This refers to a state of agreement within the urban system of the Binckhorst and The Hague.

There is a main focus on the following two questions:

1. *What defines the perception of discordance on the different scales?*
2. *What opportunities or methods can be used to address the discordance?*

These two questions will help us to position our individual research while keeping the discordant state of the system of the Binckhorst in mind.

Method

The research aims to dismantle different architectural and cultural elements to reach insight into which aspects are problematic to the cohesion of the site, by analyzing it both on the city scale and within the scale of the site.

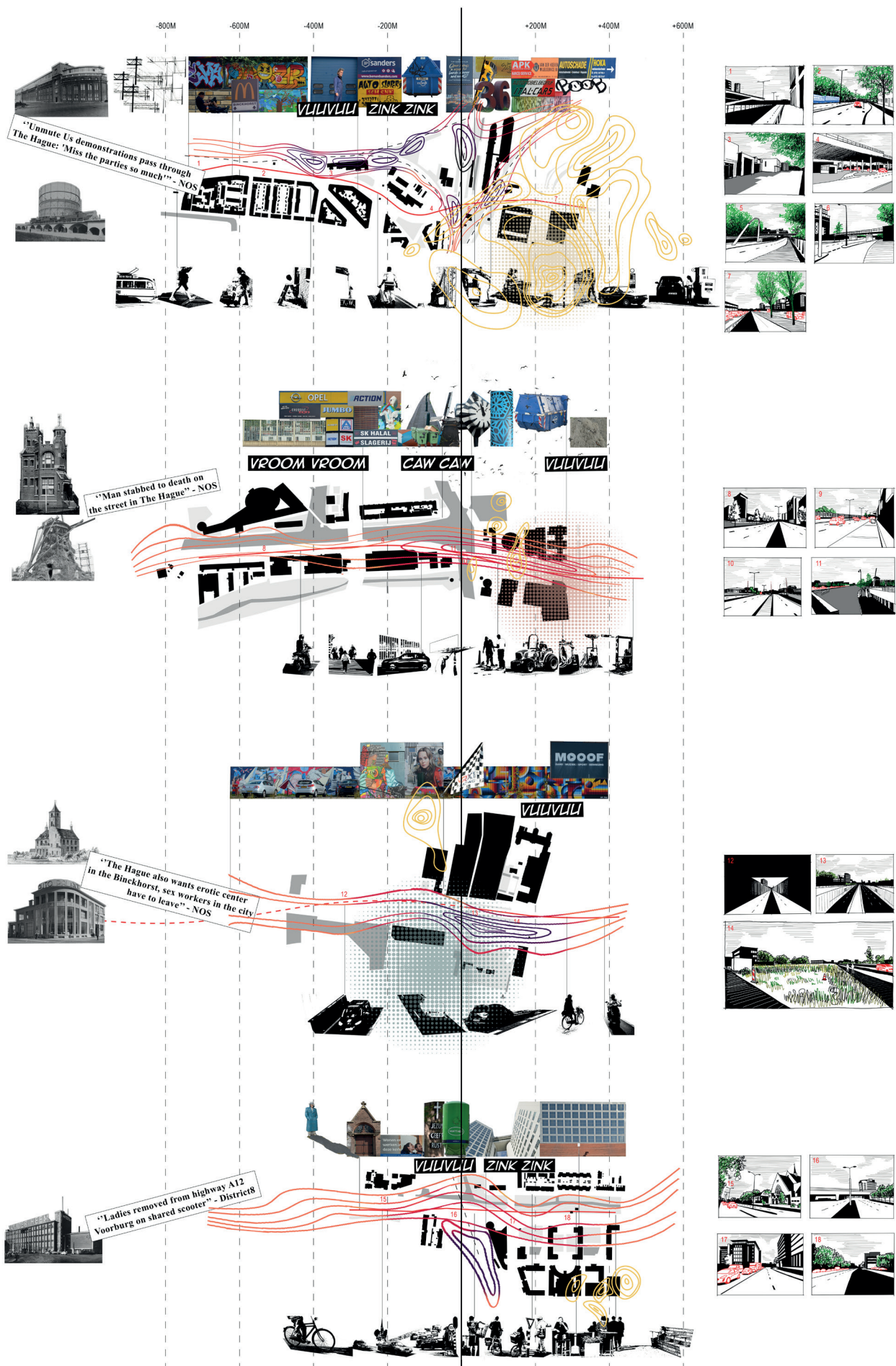
To define the aspects that make the site discordant with the rest of the city, we started by having predetermined routes that transition from the city into the site. Furthermore, we defined different aspects that compose the Binckhorst on the scale of the site itself and mapped them into their own layer. We chose to use different approaches to each layer of the site to map both qualitative and quantitative data. We aim to create our own notational system, based on psychogeography, that will dismantle the different layers and investigate interrelations that cause the Binckhorst to be perceived as discordant. (See: Appendix)

This system provides a comparative transitional framework between the city and site on the horizontal axis, marks the relations between the findings on the vertical axis, and reveals the interrelations between different layers through the overlapping on the Z-axis (in the printed version). This will become the guide to create the collective medium to bring people together through music as a public event.

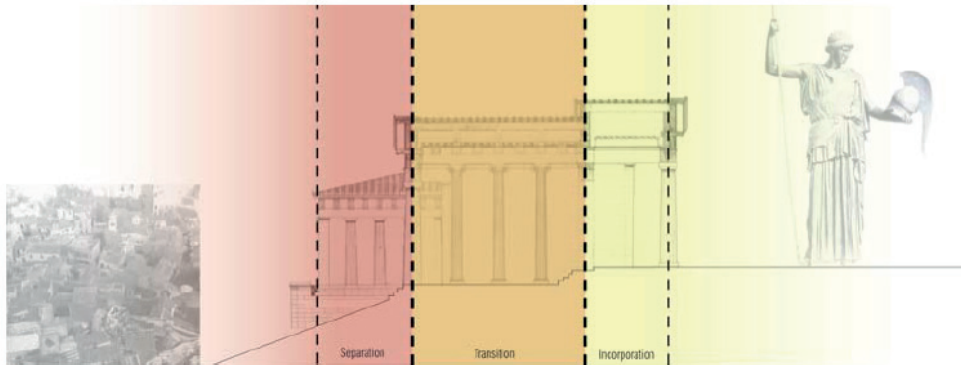
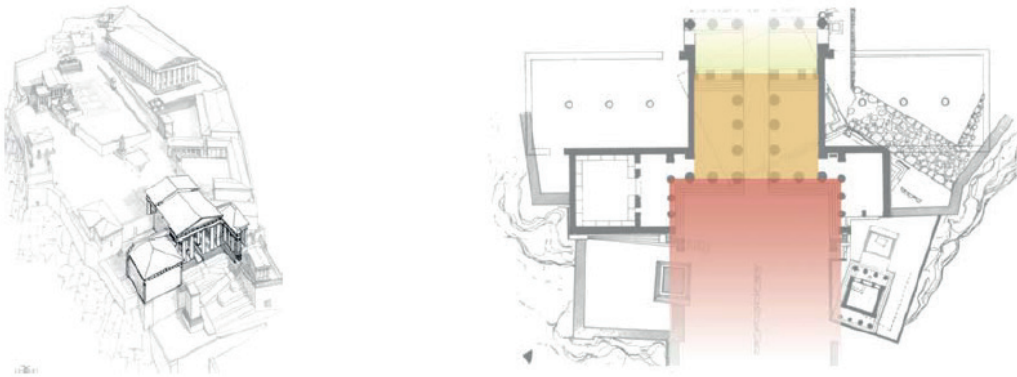
Relevancy

Since the design of a music building is about culture and bringing people together, understanding the aspects causing the specific perception of discordance in and around the Binckhorst will give us a relevant base to position ourselves individually in relation to the discordance. The positions can stand at any point in the spectrum ranging from resolving to embracing this problem.

Attachment 3: Notational system (psychogeography). By G4: Alara Külekci, Dimitri Nalmbantis, Ghassan Mosto & Stephan Nieuwesteeg



Attachment 4: Separation - Transition - Incorporation (Propylea, Athens), by Zimmerman, 2009



Attachment 5: Human body, space and time, by Tuan, 2001

Tuan, in addition, acknowledges a relation between the position of the human body in time and space, with the components of the profane and the sacred.

