Appropriative Potential in the Latent City

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1. A Problem Formulation

The problem discussed in this research plan is an architectural problem. That is, a specific site with specific conditions, simultaneously positioned in an open ended field of possibilities and perspectives. I don't think that it is completely possible to translate the problem of the site into a written set of questions that adequately represent the architectural problem that is in fact at hand. This plan will therefore set out a set of directions of inquiry that will serve as a guide on the design trajectory ahead. The research plan asks a series of questions that are opening new perspectives onto the architectural problem, enriching it and its eventual solution.

I am writing this research plan after already having conducted research on the site and on related topics in a number of ways. At this moment, there is no longer a blank slate, certain points of departure have been established. There is simultaneously uncertainty over the future directions that the investigation will take. I hope to be surprised on the way by new discoveries, that will undoubtably push the work in new and unexpected directions.

The studio theme of gleaning stems from the ancient practice of picking up leftovers from the fields after the harvest. In the context of the studio, I will however make use of a wider understanding of the term. Remnants, both material, spatial and theoretical will be considered gleanable, and up for reinterpretation and reuse.

1.1 Collective identity as a creative force.

The first point of departure is one that stems from the work I did for my architectural history thesis. It is concerned with the city of Basel and its border condition. Basel is in many ways similar to Maastricht: it is a very international city on the border with two other countries. There is a strong industrial heritage which dominates the edges of the centre, specifically along the river. From the thesis stems the idea of urban structures as results of long historical power struggles between ideas, nations, natural conditions and technological developments. [1] It became apparent to me that the identity that a planner affiliates him or herself with was crucial to the shape that buildings and urban structures would eventually take. One clear example of this type of process is of the French fishing village of Huningue at the Rhine border, which moved inland and was replaced by fortifications when animosity towards Germany was high. Now that the idea of a united Europe is gaining traction, the village once again approaches the border at the river, culminating in a footbridge across the Rhine.

Similarly to Basel, Maastricht and the site specifically have a conflicted history where affiliations have changed many times. Is the site in the centre or in the periphery of Maastricht? Is Maastricht at the edge of Limburg, in the corner of the Netherlands or at the centre of the European Union? [2] This all depends on who you ask and what frame of reference they have.

A set of research questions springs from this discussion.

- What historical identity affiliations have led to the current architecture of the site?
- What spatial opportunities can be gleaned from these latent structures?
- What is a current valid frame of reference for an architectural project in the Sphinx quarter?

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[1] de Vries, 'The Architecture Of The Border An Investigation Of The Trinational Metropolis Of Basel'.

[2] Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier*; Peverelli, *De stad als vaderland : Brugge, Leeuwarden en Maastricht in de eeuw van de natiestaat, 1815-1914*.
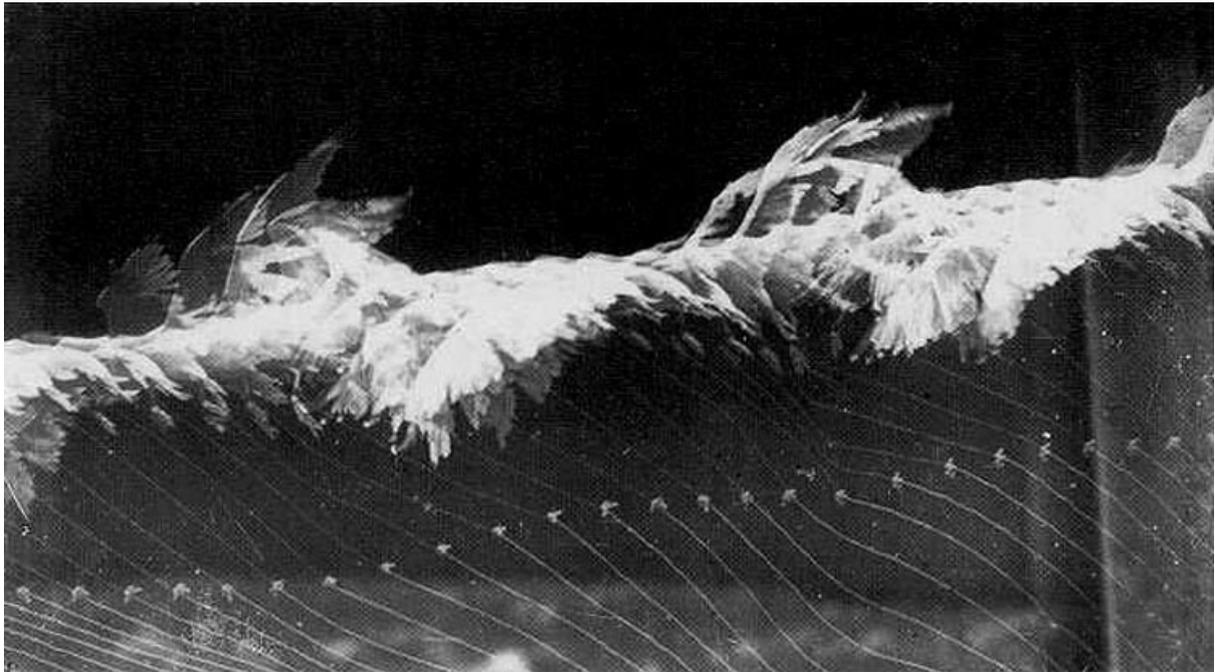
FIG [1]
The movement of the architecture of the city is very slow. It is too slow for the human eye to register. Bruno Latour and Albena Yaneva address this issue in their text Give me a gun and I will make buildings move. They reference the work of photographer E.G. Marey who captured fast movement and made them freeze in time so that the movement could be better understood. Latour and Yaneva speak of the need to do the opposite for buildings that seemingly are permanent and that need to be sped up so that their movement may be understood.

Bruno Latour and Albena Yaneva, 'Give Me a Gun and I Will Make All Buildings Move', Ardeth, 2017, 103–11.

1.2 The city as a series of spaces for appropriation

A second point of departure is the research plan that was done in the context of the migrant city theme. In this study of the city of Maastricht, different ways of inhabitation were explored. There was a special focus on the intimate spaces that are the stage of everyday life.

"As a response to our inquiry, the city presented itself to us as an assembly of appropriated spaces, where communities and individuals express themselves in the everyday. Every door could be a gateway to another microcosm. Acts of home-making and appropriation extend in networks across the city, often overlapping but also occasionally distinguishing themselves with uniqueness and diversity. Each individual in the city has a series of doors that open to them while many others remain closed, making the experience of the city unique to each individual and community." [3]

The project site is an in-between site, that has not yet been appropriated by the citizens of Maastricht. Cognitive maps drawn by people in the city show that it lies outside the frame of reference of people that I met in the city. It is a transition zone that is not present as a space for opportunity in the minds of people yet. The opaque and fenced-off characteristics of the Sappi paper factory that dominates the site make this fact easy to understand. The relatively central location and fading industrial function of the site make it an interesting site for more intense use, and up for gleaning by the people of Maastricht, as has been done at the Landbouwbelang already.

This discussion again leads to a set of research questions.

- What spaces can be gleaned on the site by new users?
- How can an architectural project help make the site accessible for appropriation?
- How can an architectural intervention create spaces that are still accessible for further appropriation?

1.3 The architectural project

I believe that the essence of my project will exist in the force field between these two ways of seeing the city. Firstly as a slowly moving structure that is created by the understanding of its own identity. Secondly as a structure that is inhabited by a diverse flora of people and communities that each paint their tile of a larger mosaic.

Crucially these forces are not separate, they are two ways of viewing the interaction between users and architecture. It is at the intersection of the long immovable processes of the developments of buildings through time and the volatile inhabitation that occurs within these walls that the memory and the life of the city is created. The ambition of my project is to find how the latent structures of the site can resonate with the appropriative force that exists within the city of Maastricht and its region.

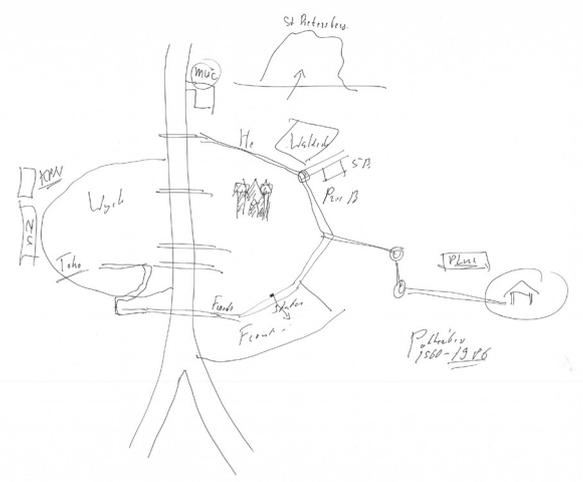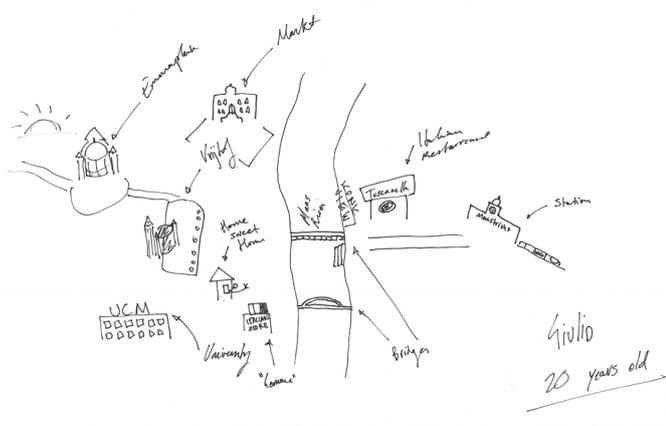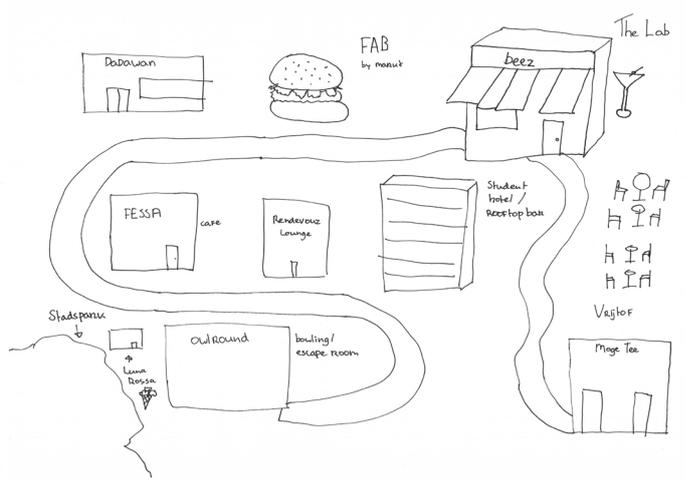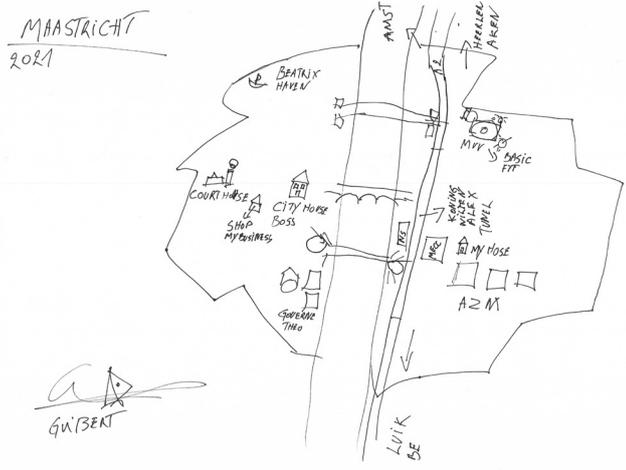[3] de Vries et al., 'The Migrant City'.

FIG [2]
Cognitive maps gathered in the Migrant city project.

Diederik de Vries et al., 'The Migrant City' (Exhibition, Glaneurs et Glaneuses - 6 perspectives on Maastricht, Delft, 211027), https://www.instagram.com/p/CVk3A4EMu2V/.

2. Methods and References

2.1 Gleaning from latent structures

A central term for my understanding of the identity of the city is the notion of *locus* as used by Aldo Rossi in *The Architecture of the City*. [4] According to Rossi the *locus* is "a relationship between a specific location and the buildings that are in it". [5] He later asserts that "the city is the locus of the collective memory". [6] Urban artifacts are thus containers of the memory of the city. Whenever a new addition is made to the city, the maker positions themselves vis-à-vis this assemblage of memory. The process is similar to the one that Ernest Renan described in the context of nation-forming. [7] A story needs to grow out of the overcomplicated and entangled context that is reality. We therefore purposefully forget, pick and choose so that a clear raison d'être emerges. The awareness of these choices will be key to the way that I will approach the problem of the site.

In their analysis and design proposals for the city of Basel, Herzog & de Meuron used an approach in which they were very aware the spatial frameworks that shape the city. In their own words they aimed at "differentiating existing structures, emphasising and intensifying them", focusing on the "city along the river", "the city along the railroads", and "the city along the valleys". They also found systems in place that they sought to break away from, namely the "fortress along the border". [8]

One similar point of departure could be Rem Koolhaas' *Delirious New York*. In the introduction to the book he labels it a retroactive manifesto for Manhattan in which he aims to take concepts that were key to the development of the urban structures of the city and extrapolate them to their extremes to find new architectural possibilities that lie hidden in this ideology. [9]

In a similar way to Herzog & de Meuron and Rem Koolhaas I will seek to identify principals of urban form over time in Maastricht and choose to intensify them or break away from them. These shall be found by the means of desk research of historical maps and photographs. Historiographical analysis's of the identity of Maastricht and the greater Rhineland such as Tymen Peverelli's *De stad als Vaderland* and Michael Loriaux's *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier* will also be important for my understanding of the logic behind historical urban planning.

2.2 Allowing the site to be gleaned

As described int the previous chapter, the site represents an unexplored gap in the cognitive maps of Maastricht. It is a space that is ready to be appropriated by the city. Using the methods that were established in the migrant city project, I will seek to create an understanding of the gleanable spaces. [10] These methods include cognitive mapping of the site and conversations with locals on its potential, which will give a perspective on how the citizens see possibilities for gleaning. Secondly, the different spaces of the site will be catalogued according to their organisation and spatial properties. This catalogue will then be compared with the three case studies from the Migrant city project as well as with other relevant case studies in order to understand how they could function when appropriated.

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[4] Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*.
[5] Rossi. 103
[6] Rossi. 130
[7] Renan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?'
[8] Herzog et al., 'Ein Stadt im werden? / A Nascent City?'
[9] Koolhaas, *Delirious New York : A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*. 9-11
[10] de Vries et al., 'The Migrant City'.

FIG [3]
Appropriated space in Maastricht. An italian familly has opened an italian grosery store that has become a focal point for a local community.

Diederik de Vries et al., 'The Migrant City' (Exhibition, Glaneurs et Glaneuses - 6 perspectives on Maastricht, Delft, 211027), https://www.instagram.com/p/CVk3A4EMu2V/.

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