Welcome
to the
Urban Catharsis
Please take a dump

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Reflection

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Welcome

I would like to introduce my project called the 'Urban Catharsis,' where taking a dump is welcomed. This concept is derived from the emotional release induced by music and refers to the character of the project area, The Binckhorst. The Binckhorst, located in The Hague, is the epitome of post-industrial lands of European cities. It is also known as the urban dump of The Hague (hence the inspiration). Despite its very central location, it is where unwanted programmes of the city are disposed of. Other than literal waste disposal facilities, there are several car dealers, industrial warehouses, scrap yards, waste dismantling companies, a cement factory, an asphalt plant, abandoned offices, and a cemetery. People usually pay a visit and leave only to take care of their business, such as getting their car repaired or using it as a free parking space.

On the other hand, the area has several qualities to become a vibrant location with cultural facilities that attract people, such as a musical space. The intriguing story of the Binckhorst and its inhabitants led me to a design heavily driven by site analysis and its translation into spatial elements. This reflection will explain those steps that helped me achieve my Music Marvel.

Role of the Analysis

In the first phase, we were assigned by our Theory tutor to collect 'samples' from the research location as a group. These samples could be anything from sound, objects, pictures, and interviews. My group had the area of the old Gas factory on Trekvlietplein, a location with multiple architecturally characteristic buildings and Monuments. I, later on, took the 'sampling' activity further as the primary indicator of the design process because of how fascinated I was with the things I discovered on site.

My methods involved quantitative and qualitative fieldwork (sample collection and recording activity, performance of dérive and psychogeographical mapping), case study of significant music venues, case study of typologies that embody co-existing spatial and sensual contrasts (for example, public baths), literature review of problematization methods (such as Henri Bergson's immanent approach), literature review of urban manifestoes, literature review of embodied cognition and music cognition, specifically the emotional response to music, literature review of new materials and technology in music and performance arts. My personal fascination for the creation of a Music Marvel revolved around: the enjoyment of contrasts and extremes that co-exist in music; deviations in frequency, pitch, and rhythm; tension and release; build up and drop that trigger exhilarated emotions; expectations that give pleasure; pleasant surprises in music such as the disruption of regular rhythms (levels of discordance). In addition, the research looked into sensations aroused by music / musical space; effects of individual preference versus the socio-cultural background of a person on music perception; listening to music as a public event and its impact on interpersonal closeness; the pleasure received from listening to music, and its relation to deviation & contrast in musical features; the correspondence of these elements in the architectural space.

Several visits to the site revealed a state of discordance with the rest of the city and within the Binckhorst itself. This state is targeted as the reason why Binckhorst has not been able to achieve its full potential as a central district with attractive features. The individual study started by dismantling the elements that cause the perception of discordance.
Psychogeographical mapping was chosen because traditional mapping (birdseye view and footprints of the buildings etc.) was not enough to

reflect the strong character of the area. (Fig.1) As can be seen, the heritage value, the materials, the noise, the smells, the textures and colors, the people, and their movement tells much more and gives a better picture of the chaos going on. There is no denying that the Binckhorst is a place with many disturbing sounds caused by machinery, irritating smell of trash, and a vast number of chaotic advertisement signs.

Site Selection

I decided to stick with this location and extend my analysis to place my Music Marvel here because;
- It is the most' discordant'
- It is where everything started (the rest of the Binckhorst came after the gas factory settled here in 1907 and ignited change), so it is where it should start changing
- It is an entryway to the Binckhorst, which allows it to function as a catalyzer
- It is very well connected, which also eases the transportation of materials
- It is the only zone with such rich heritage value.
- Involves architecturally characteristic buildings which I aimed to incorporate in my design (the Escher Bridge expanded for access, old factory hall building as a music library, the porters' lodge which welcomes the users and also works as the box office for the school of music and Performance Arts that continues the historical brick wall from the gasworks into its interior configuration, the recycling facility building that provides recycled material to the school and stage design
- It has some "foundations" to take advantage of (like the two gasholders which work very well as stages for performances)
- It is included in the future park zone project of the municipality - so it is going to be an attractive place to be
- It is at the junction of everything - all users and functions local to the Binckhorst (trash facility, recycling facility, monuments from the gas factory, workers, graffiti art, car repairs, birds...)
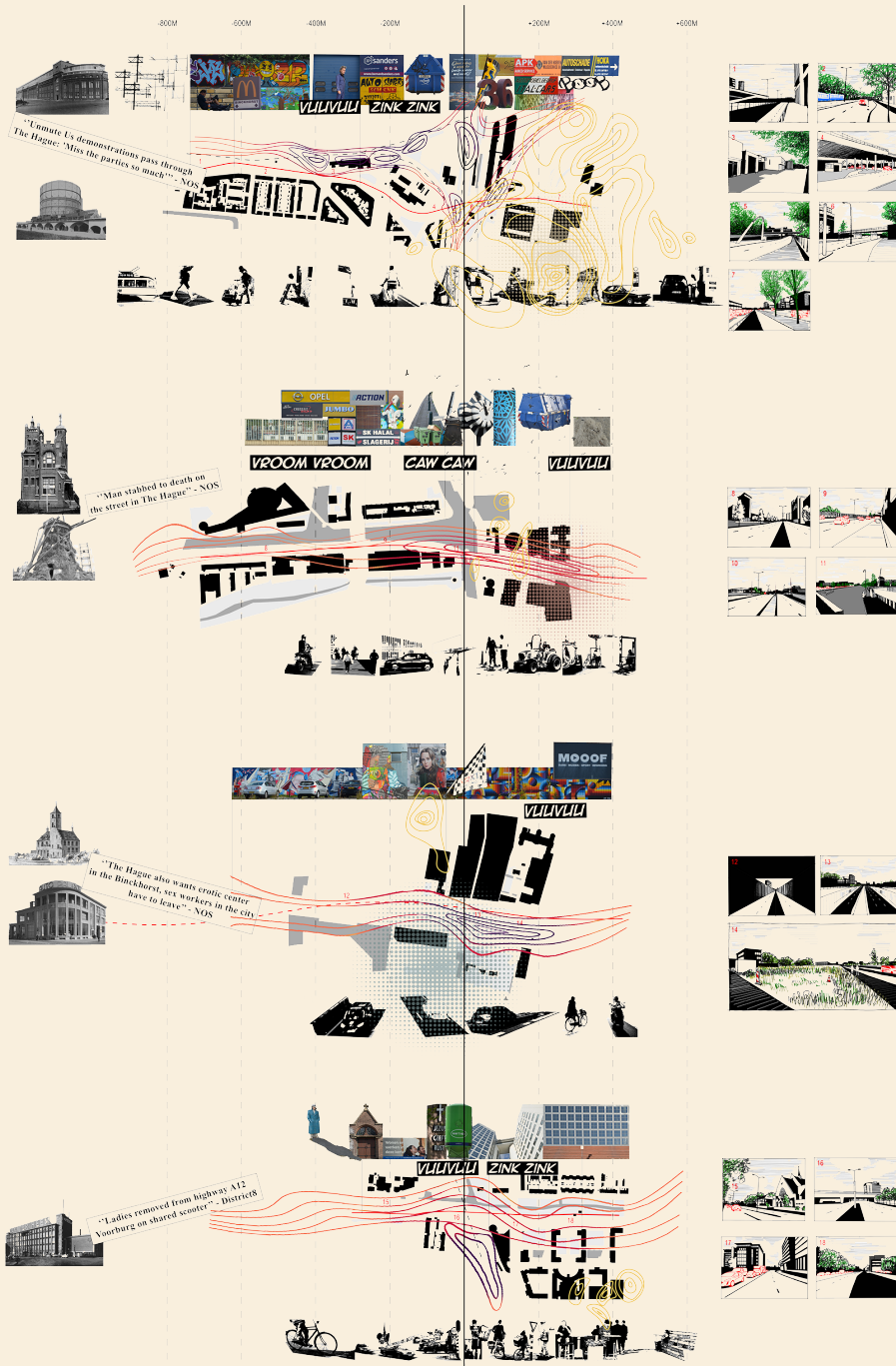- There is local and recycled material availability.

Fig.1 Psychogeographical mapping in search for a notational system

Problem Solving

I would like to briefly explain how I approached 'problem-solving' moving into my design. This scheme is a reinterpretation of Henri Bergson's methodology, which claims that the solution already exists in the problem but to solve it means to properly state to reinvent the problem. (Fig.2) "For a speculative problem is solved as soon as it is properly stated. By that, I mean that its solution exists then, although it may remain hidden and, so to speak, covered up: the only thing left to do is to uncover it. But stating the problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing." (Bergson, 1934, p.89)[1]

I created this scheme to structure my approach, which follows; there is an urban dump in the Binckhorst, which creates chaos and has the effect of discordance, and the intentions towards the Binckhorst are transcendental. I would like to turn this around by adopting an immanent approach by listening to it and by revealing intrinsic forms and functions to have an effect of a musical piece that creates movement-social interaction, and there could be a Music Marvel. The primary strategy was to reveal and reformat to see how can industrial leftovers be reused in my design and - just like in electronic music - how can the sounds of the industry be reformatted to achieve a musical piece. (Fig.3)
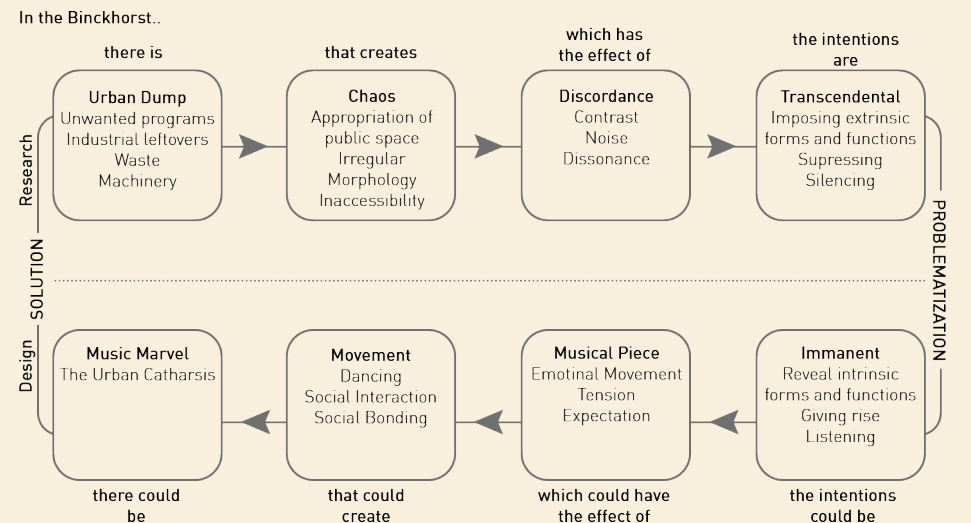

Fig.2 Bergson's Method of problematization for research & design (Adapted from Kousoulas, S. (2021)). Lecture Problematization. TU Delft AR3A010 Research Plan.

Fig.3 Conceptual Collage

Questions

Questions arose from my analysis as:
- How can the framework of embodied (music) cognition be used to construct (musical) environments?
- Just like in music, how can the discordance of the Binckhorst be embraced to design an architectural space?
- Can the Binckhorst be placed back on the map through the creation of a space for the musical experience?
- Can the Binckhorst become an urban dump for emotions where people come to attend musical events and how can architecture respond to a desire driven, emotive collective?
- What if the Binckhorst was designed according to elements such as movement, sensory perception and emotions instead of regulations, program and structure?

Designing the Urban Catharsis

I searched through the archives of the municipality to discover the historical situation of the area and reveal the 'foundations' of my design. Given the feedback from my tutor team, I looked into corporeal aspects of musical elements -which induce catharsis- that can be translated into architectural elements. To produce a purposeful system, theories from architects, landscape designers, dancers, and choreographers and how they used movement and notation to guide the construction of space were looked into. These can be listed as Bernard Tschumi[2], Lawrence Halprin, Rudolf Laban, William Forsythe, and Frederic Flamand.

The notion of catharsis was also elaborated in the sense of releasing the immanent properties of the site and preserving the industry and local-sub culture. Additionally, listening and moving to the music as a public event creates an opportunity to strip off individuality and become a part of something bigger and realign the socio-cultural space. (Fig.4)

In the next step, I extended my research into the emotional response to music- and the experience of music, which is an embodied cognition. According to this framework, the cognitive system is fundamentally linked to the body and its interaction with the environment. Just like architecture, it is an immersive experience. Many people feel the need to move when they hear the music because the formation of meaning happens through this movement. Multidimensionality of embodied cognition - the strata of mind, body, culture, and environment - based on the cycle of perception and action is explained in the following schemes. (Fig.5,6)
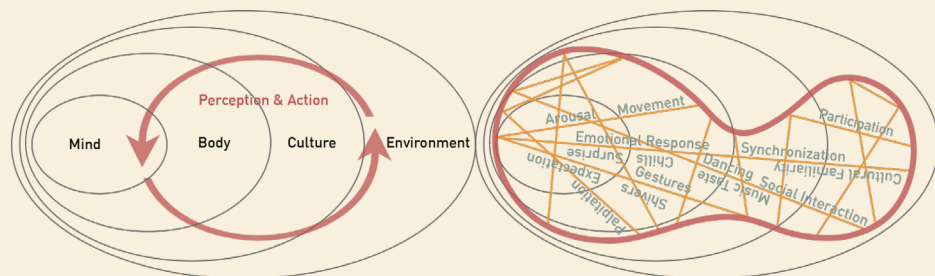

Fig.4 Moving to Music Together

Fig.5,6 Embodied music cognition scheme including relational values such as psychological mechanisms, bodily responses and socio-cultural processes. (Adapted from Raymond et al. (2017))[3]

I looked into ways of catching the musical elements hidden in the project area and reflected that into the choice of forms and programs and how to combine the existing with new features introduced. Such as the sound of the trains and the movement of the birds that periodically collect trash and the characteristic facade elements of the monuments in the area, and the tension and release feeling. (Fig.7) Then I looked into the elements necessary for a music venue and how I could create a musical journey on an urban scale. I envisioned ways to place the programs and their hierarchy to create a build-up and drop effect. The functions and users were also envisioned to be in a state of contrast, being amateur and professional and activities day and night, formal, informal, temporary, and permanent. However, they are all pieces of an organism that function together, and the lines between pro and amateur and street and stage and performance and real life are blurred.
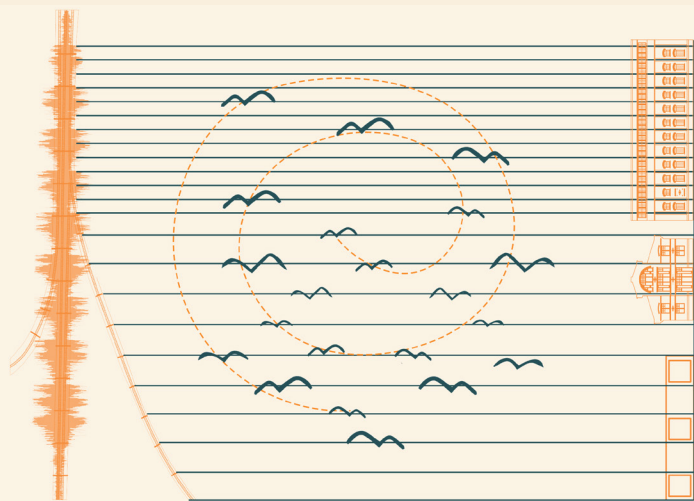

Fig.7

Conclusion

Departing from the proposals for the Binckhorst - impositions of extrinsic forms - so far, the granules of the context's matter were revealed to give rise to the design. Immanent properties of a place are inherent, although making them apparent requires particular methods. The design process exhausted these methods, which led to the desired outcome. Each time a cultural, material, sensory, or any new layer was discovered, a question was asked: What is the score of this (cultural, material, sensory) rhythm? This activity resulted in a site-specific notational system where the interrelations gave rise to spatial arrangements. Without any preconceived architectural program or concept, elements of discordance in the Binckhorst were be reformatted similar to a musical arrangement, and now it can be played back to the crowds. After the cathartic release of immanent properties of the site, local sub-culture and industry were preserved. Industrial leftovers were integrated into the design not solely as containers but with proper theoretical and acoustic care where music and performances that incorporate new media and technology can occur. Finally, this concept was carried to the building technology aspects regarding purification and cleansing since the area was placed on contaminated soil.

The project elaborated on architecture and music as domains of immersive experience. Designing a Music Marvel created the possibility to explore how architecture can borrow from other disciplines and how can a public building become inclusive, resilient, as well as future-proof. The design strives to bridge the gap between theory and practice and across disciplines such as neuroscience, architecture, urbanism, site-specific performance, music, and dance. This walk of architecture is expected to achieve multiplicity in design, deviate from the traditional role of a master architect/composer, and instead engage cognitively as well as emotionally with the users through a dynamic and participatory approach to the surrounding environment. The Binckhorst holds power to become a dance floor where the context and contrasts are appreciated, a place where people come stripping off their identity to become a part of something bigger. It can be a place where people dump not just their trash but emotions, an attractive urban catharsis. The Binckhorst is envisionedto become both a place of relief from strong emotions, and a place causing strong emotions through musical experience where borders between performance and real life are blurred.

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