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Reflection paper

PRODUCT. PROCESS. PLANNING

Veronique Le

Reflecting

Elderly these days cope with a lot of self-reliance and loneliness. This is something I have found out very early during my research. Together with the thesis that I have written about the history of elderly housing in the Netherlands made me realize that the problem of elderly in the Netherlands can be put in a wider scope and that historic events have led to the current problems elderly are facing. My interest for the thesis came out of an article I have read about generations. This made me realize that personality can be shaped by historical events, the results of the research were shocking to me because I didn't know how much influence other factors could have on people and architecture.

To summarize the research;
The results of the historical research have given a short walk through the changes in the perception of the elderly and their social position, the relationship between politics and economics and influences on architecture. The study was examined on the basis of four macro factors: demographics, social, economic and political. After a short century of developments, it is clear that these factors are closely intertwined. The four factors have a significant impact influenced the trends and changes in architecture for elderly housing. One thing that didn't change over time was the need for care for elderly. My research has shown that housing for the elderly in the past was hugely driven by politics with influences from demographics and economy. From housing for the elderly that originated from social justice and the responsibility for the care and well-being of residents of the Netherlands to a total decentralized health care system in which the elderly is encouraged to take control of one's own life and self-reliance. The typologies were not formed from the desire for the elderly itself or from research into the elderly. Concluding that housing for elderly was formed by the circumstances around it and human centred design

The fieldwork week
Leading to my personal interest within architecture and the choice for the graduation studio "Designing for Care" – towards an inclusive living environment. The unique aspect of the studio is that is very much human centred and requires an anthropological research. During the first weeks of the studio we were taught to explore the visual anthropological method that developed from the idea of the daily life of elderly. This type of research is used to form an understanding of the people we are designing for. After that we were given the chance to do research in the form of a fieldworkweek, where I have closely lived together with elderly in an elderly house for a week. During this week I have gathered most of my research to construct a guiding theme for my graduation project. The full week gave me the chance to build a relationship and trust with the elderly. Therefore I gained a very deep understanding of the problems they were facing by close interaction and interviews. The interviews were done in a form in-depth interview where the wording and questions were not predetermined. During the interview I consciously gave them the lead in the interview to have the interviewee to be at ease and tell the stories and problems they wanted to talk about. This led to a very interesting set of data with complex information and a higher proportion of opinion-based information. With this I made my own version of coding a qualitative transcript. After reading the transcript I arranged the underlying problems and statements into different categories. Besides using interview techniques another tool used for this research was observations. The observations were used to collect data such as drawings, photo series, and soft mapping. The use of photograph series is that they can be objective as subjective. The camera is a critical tool to gather visual information. An image can give a very focused view and data which can be organized and analysed later on. As Collier stated about the benefits of using photographs as data: "any number of analysts can read the same elements in exactly the same manner." (Collier & Collier, 1990, p. 10). Therefore images can be used as a research tool and in my process it helped me with refining all the data and experiences. Collecting the images, observing and analysing them and translating this into a conclusion. Overall the fieldwork week made me develop a position within the debate of elderly and

the human centred approach and anthropological research helped me with having a deeper understanding of elderly. What I have learned from this is that anthropological research can give difficulties when looking at data subjectively. As a person tells a story about for example how lonely they are, doesn't mean that this counts for every elderly. As a researcher I had to be critical with the use of the data I have gained. After the fieldworkweek I had some time to reflect on all the interviews and observations that I had collected and it struck me that a lot of elderly I have talked to were lacking interaction with friends, family but also neighbors and just people around the neighborhood. I found out that their way of connecting to people was by observing people by looking outside and a lot of encounters they had were from their window or balcony. Seeing neighbors walk by and talking to them led to the most memorable interactions. Also, the people that walked passed their window of balcony were often the only people they knew closely from all the neighbors. To look at it from an architectural view, the threshold space was the space where all the connections took place. From visual connections to physical connections. To prove this conclusion, I added additional literature research.

Photograph observations
(own image)

Photograph observations
(own image)

Dinner observations
(own image)

Literature research

The research booklet is divided by several chapters, going from the wider problem of how the problem of elderly are not included in society, the psychological perception of elderly to aging, the aging body and how to live with a healthier lifestyle and better well-being. This includes interaction and building a social network. Coming out of the fieldwork research, I could see that the interaction was a very important aspect for elderly and that this space is most likely in the threshold zone. As a younger person it was sometimes still hard to put yourself in the position of an elder person. How they are experiencing the world around them, how a smaller sidewalk can form a barrier for them to walk and how people are treating the elderly. This made it so important for me to include the part of ageism and the problem of elderly not being included into society in my research. The psychological part of elderly came up when I was researching about ageism, that we are seeing elderly as helpless, but they don't experience it in that way. With aging comes a certain satisfaction with life and growing old isn't as negative as society is placing it. I started understanding the psychological aspect of aging and was now more interested in how the aging body works within the topics of visual and physical participation.

I started to do research about the visual participation, elderly can benefit from looking outside. The window view is for elders a way to participate in the world without literally being in it. It is a way of storytelling and being engaged with what is happening around their house. Storytelling is also a way of multitasking and keeping the mind sharp. In the following chapter I investigated the physical participation. What the benefits are of encounters and where these can take place. Having a social network close by can have a positive effect on the well being and creating a network of people that could give informal care.

What my literature research taught me is, that it was very psychological and literature oriented. The design guidelines that came out of the conclusions were still very broad. Such as places must contain a some connectivity and participation of the inhabitants. Or outdoor views should contain motion and different flows. This made it harder for me to start with designing after the P2. It was clear that my concept would evolve around the subject of encounters and views, but my research was also about the societal aspect of aging and elderly and the healthy eating habits in the blue zones. This made it harder for me to start with the first design step because I felt that I had to incorporate everything I had researched into the design. With the help of my tutors, I made my first step starting with a form study and finding a housing typology. The choice led to a courtyard typology because this typology has a gradient of threshold spaces. Courtyards contribute to feelings of safety, shelter, and social contact among the elderly residents. Which would make it easier for elderly to interact with each other. The first design were 3 courtyards that raised a lot of questions with the tutors. The idea was to integrate elderly within society, where the courtyard typology would contribute to shelter, safety, and social contact it would be closed off from the surrounding neighborhood. This was against my criteria for a neighborhood for elderly. I took the feedback very seriously and made changes in the urban mass model. Resulting in changing the whole masterplan and typology I had before. Opening the courtyard and rearranging the urban mass model where it would open to the existing buildings around it made it a much more integrated project. The courtyard would be a space where interaction and encounters would take place and therefore the circulation spaces were placed at the courtyard side.

very closed off

1 paath → strict

more flow

playful

too open
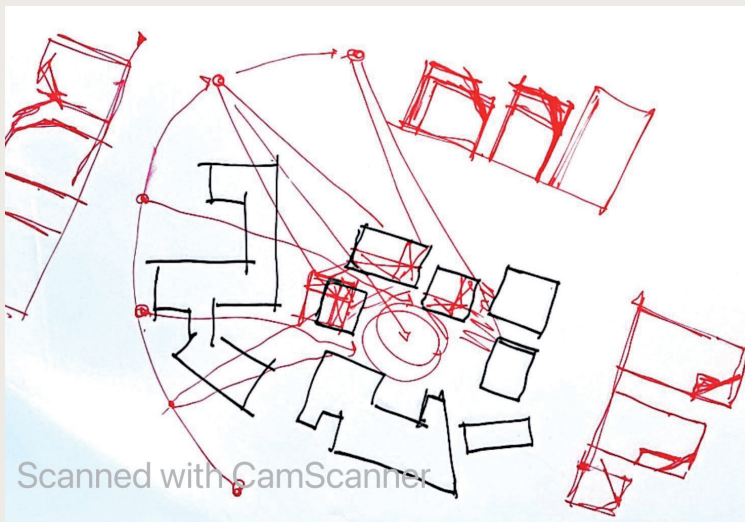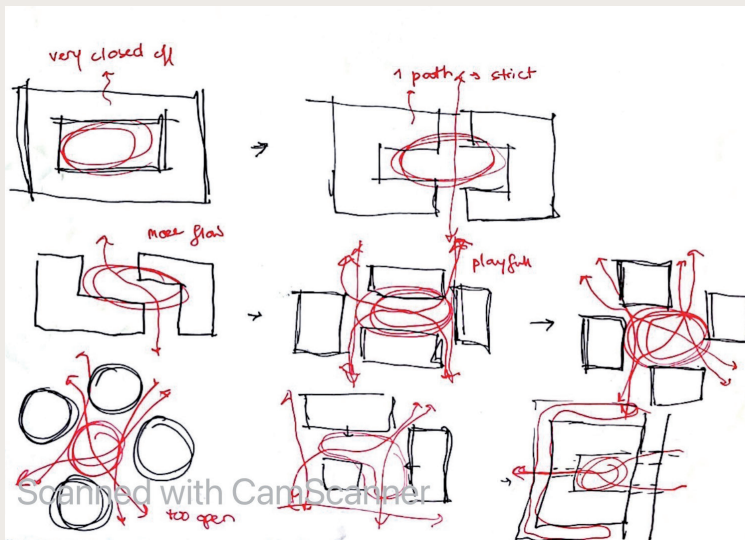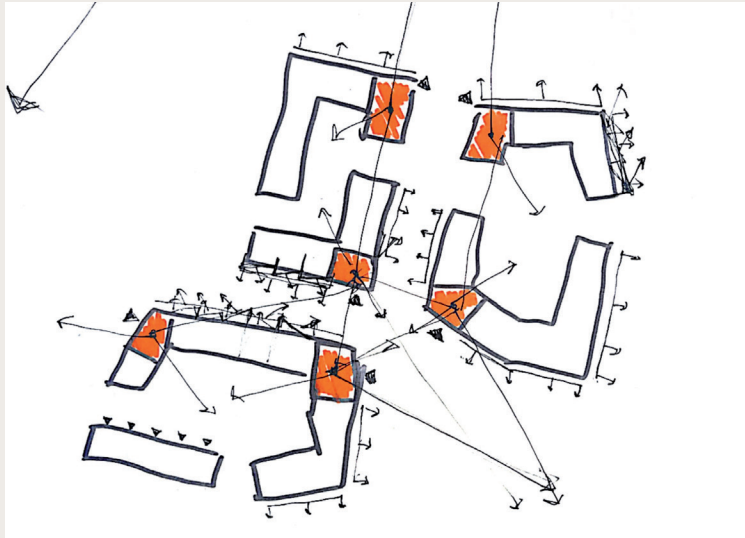
During the beginning of the design phase I was still inspired by the threshold spaces and relation between the private and public space. I was constantly looking for examples in the built environment which led to a photograph series of threshold spaces. Not knowing what I would do with these photos, because it was not a part of my original research. In the end of my design phase, it felt in place. When I was designing the floorplans I was unconsciously looking for a relationship between "rust" and "reuring". An active side and passive side of the floorplan. Because during the interviews, some inhabitants told me they appreciated their private space and don't always seek for interaction. Because of this I created a passive and active side of the floorplan. With on the passive side the bay windows I was so inspired by during the photo series I made. The bay window provides an intimate space to sit and a panorama view to look outside, it provides extra room in the floorplan and direct more sunlight in. Coming to the part of the detailed scale of the project the materiality choices were also based on the active and passive side of the building. Which made it easier to make choices within the details.
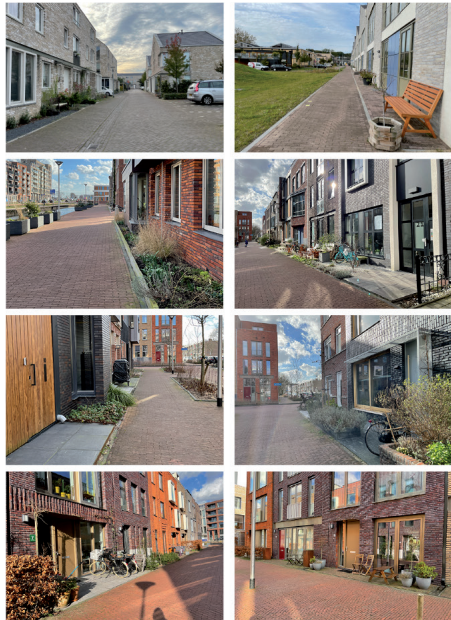
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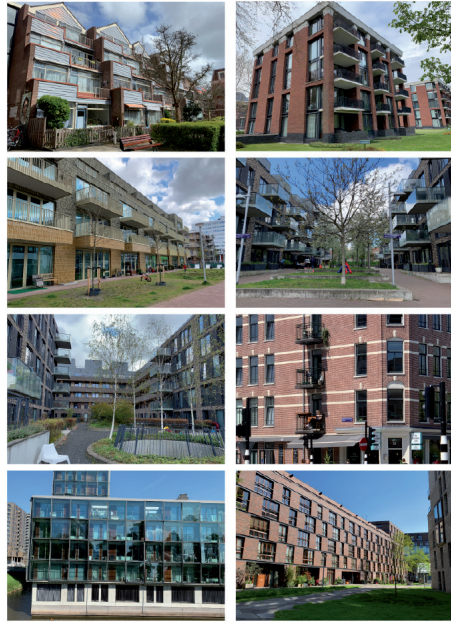
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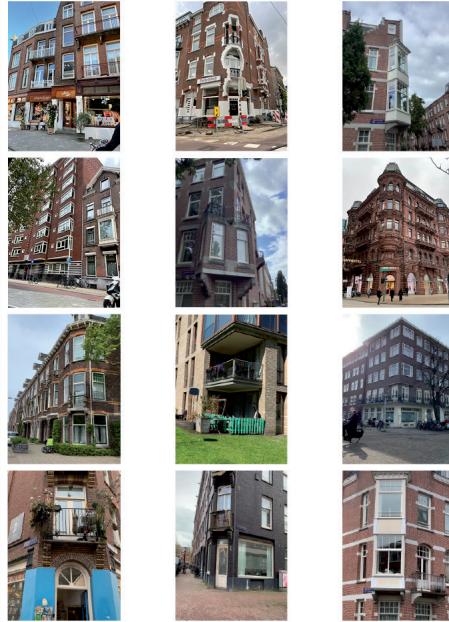
THRESHOLDSPACE

THRESHOLDSPACE

What I have learned from my own work:
I wanted to make a bridge between architecture and psychology and findings on aging body, well-being to the daily practice of people living in a care home. The research on history of elderly housing gave me an insight in the decisions that were made in history leading to the elderly feeling lonely and left alone. With the use of psychology, I got a deeper understanding of how elderly think and behave.

Personally, it wasn't an easy progress for me to graduate. While I was confident in the first part of the graduation: the research I lost that confident in the second part where you must apply the research into design. The knowledge about designing and drawings and how to further develop a building. It was a miniature version of a project while reflecting on my own work and positioning yourself as a future architect within the scope. To provide a cohesive project from research to development it is required to have a clear narrative and red line through the whole process. The scope must be narrowed down and that is the biggest thing I have learned during the graduation. There will be a lot of information available, interesting topics I stumbled up on, but disscisions must be made to keep the scope small. To have a clear overview on what the narrative is I had to filter a lot of research and extra work out. Because every project has its complexity and as a master student I have learned to research and analyze thoroughly. How architects work is by communicating their ideas by drawings and design. To do this we need to filter all the information and convert these into communicative diagrams and drawings.

What I have learned for the future:
What I have learned about myself is that I am a person that will find interest in a lot of subjects and wanting to incorporate all of those in the design. But within the time frame of a year that was not possible. The research on the history of elderly housing was a very academical research where I would debate the influences of other disciplines on architecture. Seeing how multidisciplinary architecture could be, I still had to concise the research decisions in what would be relevant within the field of architecture. The very broad research about elderly gave me insights on the group I would be designing for but made it more difficult to make design decisions. With the help of my tutors, for example as pushing me to go from sketches to digital drawing to see what problems would be created by the design and solving these on a detailed scale. It helped me realize that digital drawings give a better impression on scale and dimensions. However not every week was the same, I got a few comments on adding too much into my design that wasn't relevant to my narrative and within the scope. This was because of my personal goal to design an innovative building, I learned that adding to much outside of my scope wasn't going to make the project better. It is making it more chaotic, and the clear line is gone. At first the comments made me feel dishearten and tough but after thinking about why I received certain comments I started to understand they were worthy additions to my project. It reminds me that during research it is normal to keep on adding more information and narrowing it down at the end while when you do this to a design it is not adding more value to the project. I'm interested to develop my organization skills more in the future, and learning to organize thoughts, topics and filtering them.