

REFLECTIVE REPORT

**ATMOSPHERES & ART INSTITUTE
MAASTRICHT**

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Reflective report Msc3/4

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As an architect or designer, the user requirements and wishes are your most important leitmotif. These wishes together form not only a new building but also a new environment. We create that new environment. This environment is everywhere, inside or outside and in the spaces in between. When we find something about the built environment, mostly its visual and aesthetic aspects are considered. What do we see and do we like it? But rarely we find something about our experience of space. How does the space interact with you? How do you feel about it? Do you feel happy? Do you feel safe?

INTRODUCTION

Each year the location of the design assignment changes. This year, Maastricht was chosen. Maastricht has a rich history since Roman times. The city has grown considerably during the Middle Ages and experienced a second major growth during the industrial revolution. Therefore, a lot of industrial heritage can be found in Maastricht. There is still a lot of industry in and around Maastricht but the scale has been significantly reduced. Many industrial areas have been redeveloped or are still desolate. Some industrial areas are located nearby the city center. This leads to an interesting challenge: what to do with these areas when it loses its original function?

SAPPI, formerly the Dutch Royal Paper Factory, has been located in the northwestern part of Maastricht in the Sphinxkwartier since 1850. The factory has a rich history in which they have been producing paper for about 150 years. In addition to producing paper, the factory has its own combined heating and power plant, which also provides electricity for a large part of the city and also residual heat for district heating.

The demand for paper is currently decreasing, and for making paper, the product pulp is needed. But at the moment pulp prices are historically very high. In December 2021, the decision was taken to sell the factory.

The site has several factory buildings of which the northern part, above the Fransensingel, is currently still in use. The southern buildings are empty and some are used as storage. So, the question is what is the future of the paper factory and the factory site? This question is central to the design brief for the graduation project. What are the development possibilities of this area? What position does it have within the urban fabric of the city of Maastricht? And what should be preserved from this site?

METHOD AND APPROACH

During the P1, as a group of six, we did research on the factory and its history. We were given the opportunity to visit the factory site. The old factory halls turned out to be pearls in an abandoned area. Each with their own quality and charm. But their vacancy and its consequences are visible. The condition of many buildings is poor and impoverished. This is not only due to the vacancy of the buildings. During the growth of the factory, and due to a lack of space, the buildings were built very closely together. Due to the high situated openings or even none, the halls are dark and do not meet any current requirements. It is clearly visible that the halls functioned as a factory and supported the industrial machinery. It has, as we have called it, 'a mechanical scale'. This was the reason to study the machine scale and the human scale. How do you make such a large scale industrial area accessible for people?

At the end of the nineteenth century, attention to the human body and the relation with architecture was initiated by various art historians. For example, Heinrich Wölfflin (1897) argues that spatial experience has nothing to do with what we see, but mainly how it is experienced physically. Being and movement - of human in space - became in scope of architecture.¹ In the first instance these thoughts became visible in Art Nouveau.² Architect August Endell described in his book *Die Schönheit der grossen Stadt*: "Whosoever thinks of architecture initially always thinks of the elements of the building, the facades, the columns, the ornaments, and yet all of that is of second rank. What us to most effect is not the shape, but its inversion, the space, the emptiness that spreads out rhythmically between the walls, is delimited by them, and that vibrancy is more important than walls".³

1 Heinrich Wölfflin, *Die klassische Kunst* (Basel: Schwabe, 8th edition 1968).

2 Art movement (1890-1914)

3 August Endell, 'Die Schönheit der grossen Stadt', reprinted in: *Vom Sehen. Texte, 1896-1925, über Architektur und "Die Schönheit der grossen Stad"* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1995), 199.

The experience of space and its qualities is difficult to capture. It is something personal, elusive and difficult to represent in text or design. Like poetry, the atmosphere of a space is hard to define, but it is recognizable, it generates emotions and feelings. And when we know something really well, we can remember it, recognize it and also define it.⁴ But the experience of a space also arises from a shared common feeling. Architecture is connected with the everyday use. Spaces and places are experienced, and become memories that you keep in mind.⁵ The German philosopher and theorist Gernot Böhme argues that the spatial experience, the atmosphere, is an interplay of personal and emotional impressions of the space, but which arise from a collection of materials, spatial relationship, details, rhythm, light, etcetera. The atmosphere is a total experience.⁶

During my study I became more and more interested in not only designing buildings and spaces but also in the creation of attractive 'atmospheres'. So, I got interested in phenomenology and phenomenological architecture and decided to make it part of my graduation project.

So, the first research questions were;

1. What is phenomenology?
2. How does this philosophical approach relate to architecture? And what is phenomenological architecture?

It is possible to answer these questions by means of a literary study. During this research I read many articles. Peter Zumthor and Juhani Pallasmaa shares the critical attitude towards modernism, which emphasizes rational design and industrial construction, in which there seems to be only a particular focus on the visual. Both plead for attention to the other senses, in addition to only seeing. In addition, the requirements of the user must be considered. The architect has to identify with the wishes and expectations of the user.

⁴ Mark Wigley, 'Architecture of Atmosphere', in: *Constructing Atmospheres*, Daidalos, no. 68 (1998).

⁵ Compare with Gerard Visser, *De druk van de beleving: Filosofie en kunst in een domein van overgang en ondergang*

⁶ Zumthor, op. cit. (note 1), 13

Pallasmaa and Zumthor also recommend that the profession of architecture is about craft, in which the architect himself also works in a traditional way with handmade drawings, models, e.o. Here the skeptical attitude towards computer design becomes clear.⁷ Zumthor focuses not only on form, but also on sound, odor, materiality, light/shadow, constructions et cetera. He also uses models in his design process. The models are placed on high standing tables to create a horizontal perspective. It is the same view that the user will also experience. The model become a piece for the interplay between light, space, emptiness and views. Renders are not made. He uses his models and takes pictures of them. Consequently, he creates a direct experience with the space.⁸

In order to get a better understanding of the concept of 'phenomenological architecture', I have chosen to also work in the same way as Zumthor and Pallasmaa. It's an intuitive way of designing. In addition to this, I chose to carry out the research in the same way. The literature review has been replaced by a practical study consisting of analogue photographs, drawings, stories and models. For this I perceived Maastricht as a case study, in which research was done into the atmospheres of different neighborhoods. By making these explicit and comparing these with each other, I was able to catch the 'keynote/signature' of Maastricht and develop a first 'recipe' for the project.

⁷ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand. Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2009).

⁸ Peter Zumthor, 'Six projects', lecture at Centre Pompidou, Paris, 19 May 2011

RESEARCH AND DESIGN

The concept of atmosphere is difficult to grasp. It involves different senses, where emphatically not only vision is important. It is about personal feelings and experiences. Everyone interprets things in his or her own way. And how can you imagine a feeling? Or is it better to describe that? How do you make that transparent? These were questions that I did not have answered for a long time. I am a sensitive person, but imagining those feelings into a specific architectural product turned out not to be so easy. To get some first insights, I started with a series of photos, stories and models. Without a plan, I started, hoping for more hunches during this process. Through the study of atmosphere I learned a lot about the urban landscape of Maastricht. The atmosphere is described on the basis of sequences, streets, facades and details. These topics are relevant at the urban level, but certainly also at the architectural level.

What is the atmosphere of Fransenkwartier? If there is one, is that atmosphere desirable for the new future of this area? How do you approach the building? In what way does the façade contribute to the atmosphere of the area? What is the level of detail of the façade, but also of the building as a whole? How do you experience old and new? And how can sequences within play a role in the desired atmosphere? These are important questions that raised in my mind after the first part of the research. And this makes the relationship between research and design strong. The outcomes of the research have been translated to a different scale level of the project but with the same essences. It has been a guide for many design decisions. With every choice I have wondered; 'how does someone experience this?'. Everyone experiences something in his or her own way. That's why it's difficult to determine what impact design choices may have on users. During the research it became clear that looking to/studying different images improves your vision, starts a thinking process, and creates better understanding.

The notion and reflection of what is happening in space around you has also been the guideline in creating a relationship between the existing buildings and the new architecture to be added. For the visitor of the new building ensemble it is clearly visible what is old and what is new. But the architecture of the old buildings is shown in a new and different context. For example, certain walls, which used to be the ground floor, are now a wall where you look from a lower point. These new perspectives are intended to amaze the visitor. In other parts, existing walls have been broken open for new openings to provide more daylight or sight lines. These openings are on the new grid and do not consider existing openings. The existing grid and the new grid cross each other. This also creates an awareness of the old and new.

The new grid and the 'old/new' combinations have been a guideline for the choices I have made. It is a clear concept that you can apply in different ways.

During the P3, the design of the project was positively received. I got the feedback to make clear choices. And also to not determine everything according to the rules but sometimes also to look at what is there and what fits in that situation. I learned a lot from that. Before the Master Architecture I did an HBO Bachelor Architecture in Amsterdam. That study is much more technical and the choices to be made are expected to be practical. During the minor Architecture at the Academy of Architecture in Amsterdam and the Master in Delft, I discovered that I find it extremely interesting to think conceptually. By translating your own ideas into a product and imagining that in a certain way. And I have learned to drop some 'big ideas' in order to create a consistent design in which attention is paid to the things that wonder but not in a 'too overwhelming' way.

RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT

Already before COVID-19 elements like well-being, health, social interaction and safety became more and more important in the design of buildings. COVID-19 has firmly underlines the importance of these elements. I believe that designing attractive 'atmospheres' responds to these demands of users and also contributes to a sustainable future of buildings.

Furthermore, my ambition was to add a function to this old industrial area which attracts people to come to this redeveloped part of the inner city. The art center, as a platform where art is to be viewed, experienced, studied, and discussed attracts different groups of users and contributes to the policy goal of the municipality to create a cultural cluster (with the Cinema Lumiere, the Timmerfabriek, the Landbouwbelang) in this part of the city center.

ETHICAL ISSUES AND DILEMMAS

I underestimated the choice for a phenomenological design process in which drawing programs in the computer are limited in certain areas. Many ideas developed in my head and were later translated into hand sketches and drawings. But I should have realized that the translation of these models and sketches takes time to eventually convert that into full-fledged architectural drawings, in the computer. The method of designing in this way was a challenge that I really wanted to take on, but during coaching I was very unsure about the quality of the work I could show.

During Msc2 Form Studies I feel like I have 'walked on my gums'. The pleasure with which I have studied in recent years decreased and I did not recognize myself in it. But I experienced the run-up to the P2 as very pleasant. The collaborations and projects went well and I got the feeling that things were going well again. But the P2 presentation was unfortunately a moment that showed that it wasn't. I found it difficult to present the research on atmospheres. It is a very personal approach, something very different compared to a literature study based on facts. The uncertainty and fear of failure took over, so that the presentation did not go as hoped. After the P2 I noticed that I was insecure during coaching because I no longer knew whether everything was going well and whether I had a grip on the design assignment. It's been a wake-up call in which I've been working on that uncertainty. With perseverance, a lot is possible. This also applies to a university master's degree and a graduation year. The fun I've always had has come back. I showed myself more and really started to see the coaching as a moment when a 'professional' advises you, making your project much stronger. If I look back on it afterwards and I could have done it again, I would have liked to get more out of the coaching in the beginning. But I am very happy and proud with the result so far, in which I have been able to attend many inspiring guidance and workshops. The last year has been a learning process in many ways. I assume that this is reflected in the last two presentations and in the next steps in the field.

