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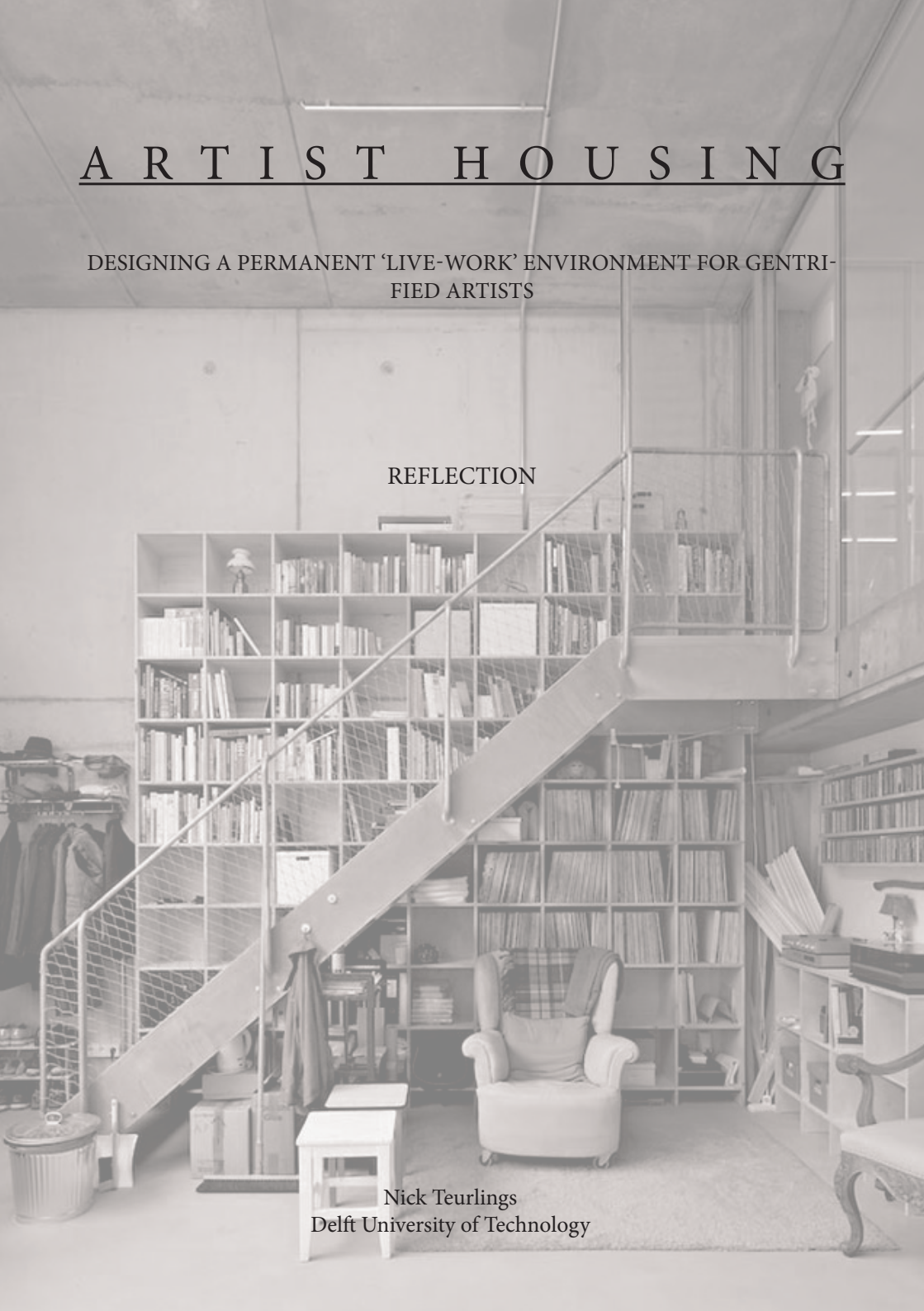
DESIGNING A PERMANENT 'LIVE-WORK' ENVIRONMENT FOR GENTRI-
FIED ARTISTS

REFLECTION

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Reflection report

Dutch Housing Graduation Studio
Between Standard and Ideals
The future of metropolitan housing in the Netherlands
Minervahaven, Amsterdam

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PREFACE

This document is as a reflection on the Dutch Housing Graduation Studio *Between Standard and Ideals: The future of housing in the Netherlands.* The central question of the studio was "how do we want to live and what kind of buildings do we need to allow for that?"

With the delivered project 'Factory 020', a building design in which artists can live and work in the city centre of Amsterdam, I sought to answer this question. The purpose of this report is to reflect on the relationship between research and design, specifically on the methods I have used for doing research to be able to draw conclusions on their effectiveness and value for final outcomes of the project.

RESEARCH & DESIGN-INTRODUCTION

The TU Delft is a scientific institute, meaning that its research and education program is mostly based on scientific research. Research in general is a rather broad term and therefore hard to define. In the article *Methoden en Technieken van Onderzoek* researcher and professor at the faculty of architecture of the TU Delft, Theo van der Voordt (1998, p. 1) simply defines research as collecting, processing and analysing of information in order gain knowledge. In order to render this research as scientific, Van der Voordt (1998, p. 2, 3) states that it has to meet the following criteria:

- The research has to be done in a methodical way
- The research has to be objective
- The research has to be verifiable
- The used measurement instruments have to be valid and reliable
- The research has to have a certain scientific relevance

Hence, according to Van der Voordt (1998, p. 3) the definition of scientific research is the 'methodical, verifiable, objective, valid and reliable way of collecting, processing and analysing data in order to better understand and explain reality and make it more manageable.'

Within the field of architecture, there is often the discussion whether a degree can be certified as 'Master of Science'. This is understandable considering the criteria of objectivity in scientific research, which is quite ambiguous in architectural research, especially during the design process. As noted by Van der Voordt (1998, p. 2), full objectivity is hard to accomplish since for instance architectural quality is difficult to measure, especially when this concerns valuing certain aesthetic qualities. When in scientific research, different researchers use the same methodology, this should lead to similar outcomes.

Scientific research is certainly possible in the field of architecture, but depends on its goal. When the goal is producing knowledge, for instance by writing a thesis based on architectural history or theory, scientificity is certainly viable. But in the architectural practice in general, the design is regarded at the final outcome of the overall research. Considering this, a design assignment which has to respond to a clear defined problem, based on the same data, with a strict list of requirements, using the same references etc., will always result in a unique design proposal, even when exactly the same tools and methods are used during

the entire process.

Hence, reflecting on the linkage between research and design in architecture, research serves more as a foundation and a starting point upon which the design can be built. In the particular case of a design assignment, conducting research is a valuable tool to make informed choices during the design process.

During the lecture series 'Research Methods' I realized that I was not consciously aware of the research methods I used during previous research and design assignments. The awareness of research methods allows to systematically set up a targeted research approach which will lead to more consistent design choices and in turn a coherent design results.

In the following chapters I will eleborate on the research methods I have used during the graduation process and reflect on how they influenced my design process.

SITE RESEARCH

During the first visit to Minervahaven I immediately started questioning myself: How is this environment characterized by newly built high end office buildings going to be transformed into a mixed use environment dominated by a residential function? And if so, who would like to live here considering the industrial character of the whole area that will be Haven-Stad in the future? Due to building regulations, the industrial character with its noise and pollution will be there for a considerable amount of time.

The heavy industry across the water also reminded me of the several visits I brought to the NDSM wharf, a former abandoned industrial site which is now transformed in a creative hotspots where festivals are held and where artists started to shape their own community according to their own ideals since the city centre doesn't provide enough affordable places to live and work. This together with the discovery of the located creative commercial businesses, artists as target group for the design assignment at this particular location sounded as a relevant one and became even more grounded while doing research about this target group, which will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

Hence the first visit was very valuable to feel the atmosphere which also had a major role in defining the topic and target group of my graduation project. The methods I used to grasp the atmosphere where making pictures of the most striking views and make a sound recording of the background noise of the heavy industry. Looking back at the picture I used for the 'pars pro toto' assignment [1], in which we were all asked to make an image which defined our first impression best, I realize that this picture is iconic for the final design. Basically I used the aesthetics of the heavy industry in my design of a building that should provide a vibrant city life, opposed to the rather death atmosphere of the present office environment, as the photo shows.

The site research was the first step in developing the urban plan. The morphological analysis of the existing buildings in form of a Nolli Map confirmed that the site was rather filled with buildings and many buildings weren't even mapped because the site is still under construction. Google Maps is normally a great tool to map buildings, but was in this case also not up to date. The pictures taken at the site visit were therefore valuable to complete the Nolli Map. Moreover, they helped to determine which

[1] first impression (own photo)

buildings should be demolished, or maybe could be transformed into dwellings, based on roughly analysing their structure.

Generally it can be concluded that although the site research was not very scientific, mainly because the greatest value I got out of it was mostly based on my personal experience and frame of reference, hence rather subjective. In addition, considering the limited amount of time we had to analyse the site we also did not make use of valid and reliable tools to measure for instance the amount

of people on the streets, or the exact building structures to be able to draw legitimate conclusions for the demolishing or transforming existing buildings. But although not entirely scientific, the site research done by several groups led to rather similar outcomes of which buildings should be demolished and which should stay. Unfortunately the conclusion was that demolishing a large part of the buildings was inevitable to be able to achieve the housing density the Municipality of Amsterdem has envisioned for Minervahaven.

LITERATURE STUDY & OTHER READINGS

As stated in the previous chapter my graduation topic already started to develop during the first visit of the site. In addition to the described personal frame of reference I have with northern part of Amsterdam, my Master Thesis, which I was finishing during that time, also played a major role. The assignment of The Dutch Housing Graduation Studio in a sense builds upon my preceding research done for writing my Architectural Theory Thesis @Home: Towards Appropriate Housing Models for the Network Society (2019). Here I explored historical shifts around the concepts of housing and home that have taken place since the Industrial Revolution. Why since the Industrial Revolution? During this period of immense change, the principles of the modern distinction between public and private spheres were laid out. For the first time in history the space of work had been excluded from the domestic space we now call home.

While the Industrial Revolution separated working and life at home, the patterns of our social activities are increasingly changing since the Digital Revolution and the technological advances which came along with it. Todays connected devices make it possible to operate and socially connect from anywhere we want. It changes the way we live and how we think about work, identity and privacy. New forms of production transcend these boundaries of the late modern period and are questioned more than ever and fully put to the test during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

By studying one hand the historical shifts in ideals around dwelling and on the other hand theory on how everyday life is influenced by technological advances, I searched for answers to the question the Dutch housing Graduation Studio also proposes: "how do we want to live and what kind of buildings do we need to allow for that?" (Van der Putt & Kupers, 2019, p. 6).

The biggest problem around housing in global cities is affordability. Promising market developments that occurred during the last decades in which sharing and not privately owning things seems to become a trend, shows a promising way of living. Inspired by for instance the online platform Airbnb, which on the one hand makes possible to rent a cheap accommodation worldwide but on the other hand is often used by inhabitants of global cites to be able to pay the skyrocketing rents, it started me thinking of how sharing spaces at home can be a luxury

instead of a compromise. One of the conclusions of the thesis was therefore that collective living, in which less space is privately occupied, functions are shared and therefore less money is paid for a dwelling and our daily necessities could be a promising model for urban living. I saw the studio as an opportunity to transform this ideal into a design. However, The Netherlands is in general characterised by a rather individualistic society in which privacy is praised, hence not many people are ready to live this way. By thinking of who does like to live like this, and where living together, working together and sharing things together could be of great value, artists seemed to be a perfect target group which could also serve as a role model in showing the value of living according to this ideal.

The study of literature, newspapers, essays, reports, policy documents and other written forms of information around my graduation topic was one of the primary research methods I used during the graduation process, especially in the research phase prior to the P2 presentation. Within the general approach of the studio, the aim of this part of the research process was to frame a relevant problem in society related to a specific target group for who we felt the urge to design new homes. Given the fact that the assignment is commissioned by the municipality of Amsterdam, it was equally important to explain why the envisioned project could be valuable for the entire city. Therefore my research question was:

Why is it valuable for the city of Amsterdam to develop a live-work environment for artists in Minervahaven?

To awnser the research question, I obtained the the following types of information:

-Newspaper articles which clearly highlighted that there is indeed a problem. As the newspaper headlines on the next page show, gentrification and the housing law "Woningwet 2015" cause a lack of affordable places for artists to live and work [2].

-A literature study to investigate the underlying theoretical framework. Central in this where the books The Rise of the Creative Class (2004) and The New Urban Crisis (2017) of Richard Florida. This was important to understand core of the problem and why artists as part of the 'Creative Class' are often brought in relation to gentrification.

-The examination of public discussions between artists, the municipality and developers as well as the related documents about the Amsterdam 'Arts and Culture' policy and. Amsterdam "broedplaatsenbeleid" a special policy created to help artists with affordable accommodations to be able to better develop their creative talent. According to these readings it became clear that the municipality of Amsterdam acknowledges the value of attracting and retaining creative talent like artists, but which is difficult because of the housing market and lack of affordable places to carry out their practices.

-Collecting data from reports on artists, ateliers and artist housing

These readings also gave me valuable information for setting up the list of requirements for the building design, which is hence based on the organisations that facilitate artist housing and the so called "broedplaatsen" as well as the voices of the artists themselves.

[2] newspaper headlines highlighting the problem.

CASE STUDIES & REFERENCES

In order to move from the studio's assignment, the problem statement and research question towards eventually an actual design, it helped to formulate a more specific design question:

How can the architectural design of the envisioned work/live environment for artists contribute in enhancing the success of the artists as well as in the constitution of a lively, open, diverse and tolerant neighborhood?

The method of studying literature and other forms written information around the topic already gave me some knowledge to answer this question. To further investigate the question, the use of case-studies and the analysis of precedents where essential methods to investigate the more physical and practical aspects needed to lift the research process closer towards the actual part of designing the building.

Within the general research approach of the studio, the plan analysis was a mandatory method to investigate residential buildings related to the topic. By analysing each precedent in the same methodical way, using similar drawing techniques to investigate the aspects relevant to the topic, the results could be consistently compared to draw verifiable conclusions out of it. As such, this research method can be qualified as scientific.

For my plan analysis I analysed three artist housing complexes on two aspects. The first aspect that I found important to investigate was the circulation system. As pointed out in my research, a well-designed circulation system can enhance connectivity which has positive effects on the sense of a tight community. By highlighting the vertical circulation shafts, the horizontal galleries and the entries to the dwellings in clear and simple axonometric diagrams [3], the circulation systems could be easily compared and valued on how much they enhanced the interaction between the residents. I extracted the positive aspects, combined these with the missing aspects according to my findings in the literature study and transformed it so it would fit into my design. In summary this meant that I used the width and dual function of the galleries and corridor of the IBEB in Berlin as well as the limitation of only two vertical circulation shafts and the repetitive and clustered gallery structure of Cité Montmatre Aux Paris. I transformed these aspects into a generously designed gallery system fitting the form of the perimeter block
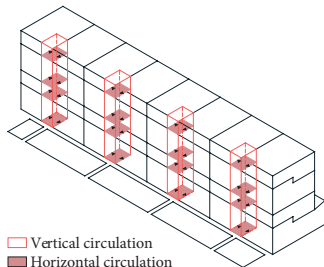
of the Cerda grid. Combined with the findings in my literature research, I centered the gallery systems around a central collective courtyard to fully enhance the connectivity between the residents.
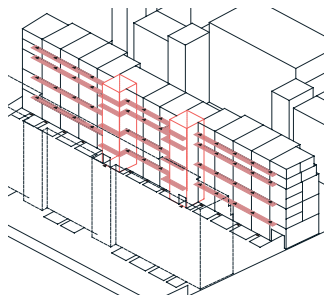

Vertical circulation
Horizontal circulation
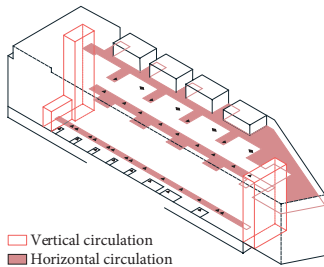
Vertical circulation
Horizontal circulation

Vertical circulation
Horizontal circulation

[3] Analysis circulation systems of Monmartre, IBEB and the Zomerdijkstraat respectively (own ill.)

The second aspect I analysed was the type of 'workhomes' and how the ateliers related to the living functions. The aspects of the dwelling typologies of all three precedents can be traced back in my final design. One interesting example is how I transformed the Amsterdam atelier dwelling type of the Zomerdijkstraat in order to solve a problem with the gallery system that on a certain moment in the process wasn't on the same level at the northern atelier dwellings. Because my building has to facilitate many different types of artists at different stages of their lives and careers, this transformation also created an atelier dwelling with a high and light atelier facing the North and all the living function on one level, hence serving the needs of elderly artists [4].
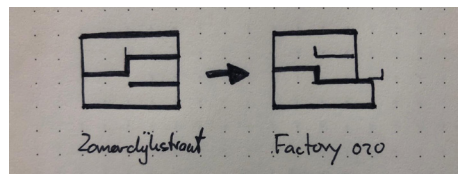

[4] Transformation Zomerdijkstraat type (own sketch)

In architecture, everything is in a sense already built. Especially in the field of dwelling, it would be rather stupid to try to reinvent the wheel while there are so many good examples types and typologies you

could use. This does not mean that you are not creative. Creativity is not something you simply have or have not by nature. Creativity is based on a mix of everything we have experienced through our lives. The only thing needed is a bit of talent and experience to be able to use elements out of this personal frame of reference and make the ideas which flow out of it applicable for your own design. Ideas can come from the smallest details I see and experience in the everyday life. In today's information society we overloaded with information. Online platforms make possible to follow many developments around the world from which we can get inspired and extract ideas. Therefore I follow several architecture platforms like for instance Archdaily and Dezeen, as well as the feed of architecture firms themselves on social media platforms like Instagram. Another helpful online tool to search for topic specific references without having to go through the many book titles and its pages in the library is Pinterest. This method of collecting images, which can be arranged under topic specific 'boards' and has smart logarithms that also offers suggestions on these topics, makes it very easy to enlarge your personal frame of reference and allows to quickly refer to earlier pinned ideas. Some topics I searched

for were for instance "old industrial buildings", "brick architecture" and "galleries". Pinterest was therefore a tool that helped a lot in shaping the form of the façade, defining the materialisation and the colour scheme [5].
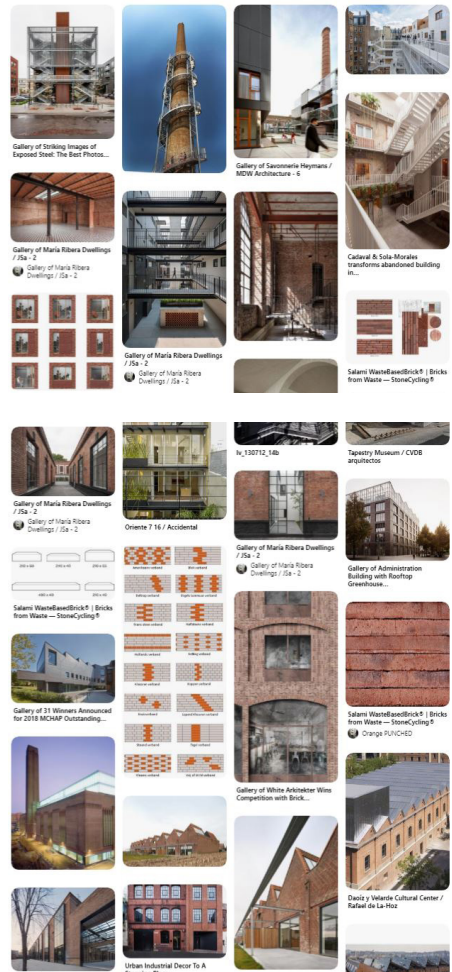

[5] Screenshots of images 'pinned' on pinterest inspiration board for the studio

DRAWING AND MODELLING

As said before, inspiration can come from every little detail I see in everyday life. Therefore I almost always carry my little sketchbook with me to make notes and small conceptual drawings. When using more precise drawing methods like SketchUp and Autocad on my laptop, my sketchbook is also always in front of me in order to switch quickly between these drawing methods. Sometimes I get lost in drawing details with exact measurements and it is then good to switch to my sketchbook again to clarify with a rough sketch what I actually want to achieve. In this, Autocad is used to draw floor plans, sections and details in 2D. Because this method allows drawing with very precise measurements, the design can be checked according to building regulations like ceiling heights. When things become too complicated to imagine in 3D, SketchUp is an easy tool to check if the 2D drawings also work in all directions. In the end I also use SketchUp to draw the whole building in 3D to also have an appropriate 3D layer on which impressions for the final visualisation of the building can be made.

Switching between the different drawing methods help to quickly investigate the outcomes on different scales and is less time consuming than when only using one drawing method. The sketchbook gives a nice overview of the switching between different scales and elements [6].
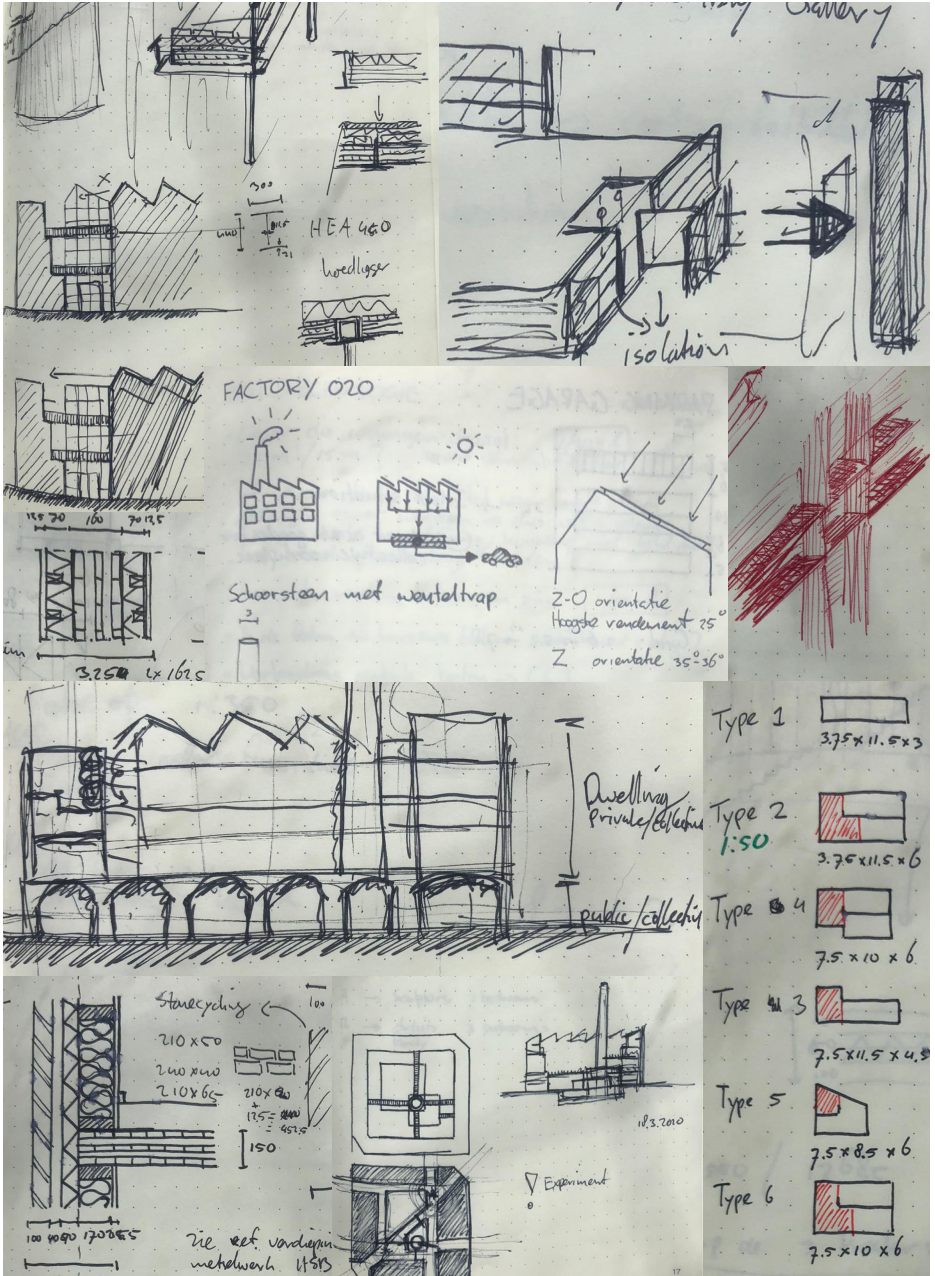
[6] collage of sketches from sketchbook

After the P2 presentation I made a 1:200 mass model of the entire building. Although I thought that I was already pretty satisfied with the overall building shape as it was modelled in SketchUp, the physical model had a rather colossal appearance and looked a bit clumsy to me. This led to a revision of the block of dwellings above the plinth, with the result of splitting it op in six elements instead of only two. With this intervention the building got a much airier character, both from street level and from within the collective courtyard. It allowed to get more light into the courtyard and simultaneously created collective outdoor spaces on the upper floors. These kind of spaces created along the circulation system where interesting elements of the visited reference projects in Berlin and Montmartre. In Montmatre they used the vertical circulation shafts to exhibit art [7]. The artists living in the building in Berlin used the spaces in between the ateliers on the roof to discuss their work [8].

Normally I would probably have made more physical models to get a better grasp on the dimensions and proportions of the building or certain elements of the building. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused that the faculty had to close, which made it more difficult for me to make use of the materials and facilities I normally use to print, cut, glue etc. I even didn't have the chance to get my model to work on and make pictures of it. Making models is of course always possible, even at home. However, because of the limitations at home, it would have taken too much of my time considering the laborious workflow compared to the normal workflow on the faculty where all facilities and materials are within easy reach.

[6] Art exhibition in staircase Montmartre (own photo)
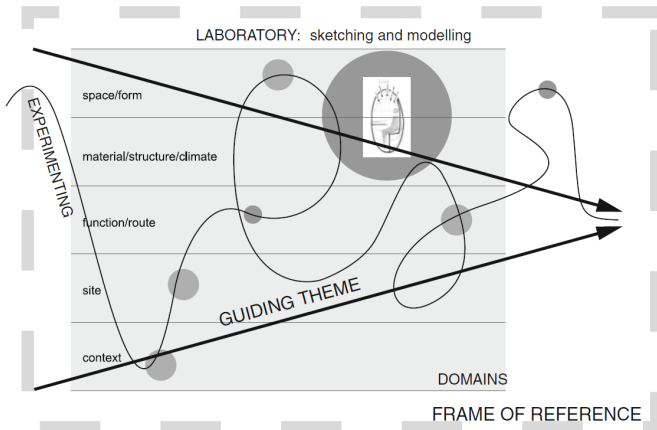

[8] collective outdoor space IBEB

RETROSPECT

The rather strict structure of the studio up till the P2 presentation turned out to be very effective. The reference projects I analysed were very interesting and well-designed buildings. They served as a good starting point for the design, especially the dwelling floor plans. Although the "super impose" exercises initially sounded a bit doubtful, however I now acknowledge the value of these methods of inquiry.

The analysed reference projects lacked some important aspects I wanted to achieve with the project. This mainly concerned the collective facilities and the sense of community which I did not experience while visiting the projects. The research into literature and especially the other writings closer related to voices of the artists, gave valuable information on how the design could help to achieve this sense of community. Hence these different types of research methods complemented each other very well.

After P2 we were free to use our own set of research methods to bring the developed conceptual design to a more detailed level. As shown in the previous chapter, the design process was an iterative process in which experiments were carried out within different scales using several drawing methods. During the MSc2 studio "Van Gezel tot Meester" I became consciously aware of how a design process actually works. As explained in the article Making explicit in design education: generic elements in the design process (Van Dooren et al., 2013), designing is a 'complex, personal, creative and open-ended skill', which I learned by simply doing it many times along my study and working career. Being consciously aware of the main aspects of the design process really helps to structure the rather unstructured and complex nature of a design process. Therefore Van Dooren et al. offer certain guidelines to hold on to and make the process more explicit. They call it 'the five generic elements' of the design process which are 'experimenting or exploring and deciding', guiding theme or qualities, domains, frame of reference or library and laboratory or (visual) language [9].

In the previous chapters I reflected on the methods I used during the design process and it is clear that my personal design proces has a lot in common with the scheme of Van Dooren et al. (2013). It helped me to somethimes take a step back from the design when got stuck to think of this scheme and just start experimentsing within other domains. Also when

I had difficulties in making design choices, again take a step back in order to think of the main guiding themes to be able to exclude options which werent consistent with these guiding principles.

Because the design process is such a personal and open ended skill, it is also hard to label the research as scientific. After obtaining my bachelor's degree, which is classified as a Bachelor of Science, it didn't feel like I really had done any scientific research to develop justified designs. In retrospect, this probably had to do with that I was still discovering who I where, especially in relation to where I would position myself as a future architect. Therefore I'm glad that I started the Master Architecture. Especially the MSc studio 'Van Gezel tot Meester' was an important turning point that gave me a bit more confidence in my design skills. Another important period was the writing of a theory thesis, of which the writing itself was a hell, but I never thought that I would get so much satisfaction out of reading and hence gaining knowledge, again a real turning point in my study. Finishing the thesis took a long time, and I couldn't wait to start designing again and actually use the gained knowledge. But also to have fun in doing research again, and develop a justified design based on a relevant topic of which I had an affinity with. In conclusion, I think a master's degree in architecture, although the research during the design process is theoretically not always entirely scientific, still deserves to be certified as Master of Science.

OTHER ASPECTS

• Aspect 1: The relationship between research and design.
This reflection can be found in the previous chapters.

• Aspect 2 the relationship between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A,U,BT,LA,MBE), and your master program (MSc AUBS).

The master track Architecture aims at challenging students to develop creative and innovative building projects reflecting on socio-spatial, politico-economic and technical challenges within the built environment. Related to these challenges, the Dutch Housing Graduation Studio focuses on the problems around housing. Considering the title of the studio Between Standard and Ideals: The future of housing in the Netherlands and its central question "how do we want to live and what kind of buildings do we need to allow for that?", the assignment is to translate these ideals into a realistic and viable housing scheme within standards and regulations of Dutch housing design. Additionally, considering the mandatory reading of Richard Sennet's book Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City (2019), the context

of the studio is within the ideal of the 'open city'. This comes down to creating a built environment that is tolerant, diverse and open towards all people, no matter what backgrounds, ethnicity or class. As pointed out in my research report, artists can contribute in creating such open environments.
The addressed issues around for instance gentrification within global cities, proves that my graduation project is relevant and asks for innovative solutions.
In conclusion it can be stated that my project fits both the topic and context of the studio as well as the master program in general.

• Aspect 3 Elaboration on research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, reflecting thereby upon the scientific relevance of the work.

Up till the P2 presentation, the studio has a rigid structure to which students should comply to. This structure of proving the relevance of the topic through doing research into literature and other types of writings combined with a plan analysis of residential buildings that are relevant for this topic is a logical one. Firstly the research into literature and for instance recent newspaper articles is

needed to find out and demonstrate that there is indeed a relevant problem. Secondly since dwelling design is confined with for instance strict measurements, regulations, affordability but also very practical things as efficiency floor plans, it is very informative to investigate existing plans.

As already stated in the previous chapter, this methodical line of inquiry worked very well for me. Considering the scientific relevance of the work, the building concept is largely based on scientific research which is explained in the delivered research report. This report is scientifically written with all sources in a reference list, hence always useful for other students interested in the topic. The scientific relevance of the final design is a bit ambiguous since the subjective character of the design process.

• Aspect 4 Elaboration on the relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework, touching upon the transferability of the project results.

The buildng design should facilitate an artist community and is a response to the gentrification monster, which not only affects artists, but many lower and middle income groups living in global city centres. The beauty of art is that is that the power to connect people. Art is open for interpretation and appeals to the imagination which can offer new perspective on for instance societal problems and hence may bring people closer together. Therefore it is important to have artists in cities. They deserve a fixed and stable place without the constant anxiety of eviction to be able to fully focus on creating beautiful and meaningful things. By creating an 'open' building in which artists and the people of Amsterdam can connect and collaborate, they in turn will be of great value in making Amsterdam, or at least the neighbourhood open and diverse.

• Aspect 5 Discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered in (i) doing the research, (ii, if applicable) elaborating the design and (iii) potential applications of the results in practice.

The financial viability of the project continues to be challenging. Although I have found some interesting strategies and reference projects that show that the project could be feasible, it requires a lot of dedication, trust, collaboration and perseverance.

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