THE CITY IS A PROMISE

Labour, Work and Action

Private and Public

The workplace, therefore, is a social place, it is not entirely a private, personal, individual sanctuary. The natural, social and personal dimensions of work belong together.

Spatial Patterns of Maastricht

Workspaces

The film *Mon garage, mon paradiso* shows how a garage can offer a space for personal retreat but also a space that promotes social cohesion and can therefore be meaningful place on a wider scale. The men and women work and sometimes live in their self-built garages, which become imaginative interior spaces. In the evenings, they meet to drink together, talk about their concerns and worries or go to the sauna (in a garage, of course). Here, the extraordinary poetic potential of the industrious uses becomes evident.

In an interview, director Natalja Yefimkina emphasises the garage's potential as a place for a broad diversity of individuals:

[...] "we were there once before with a feature film, I was not by a welfare organisation and therefore much more institutional than the self-managed garages mentioned previously. The AK Werk in Enrchen is a company where people with mental and intellectual disabilities work who are unable to find a job on the primary labour market. In this way, they are able to participate socially, increase their self-esteem and have a structured daily routine. From an economic viewpoint, the company is able to cover its costs by assembling cable chains and distributing them to local manufacturers. The staff hierarchy is very horizontal, most of the employees work independently can organise their task themselves. This leads to an increased sense of responsibility and ownership, which is the reason many employees rearrange and redesign their workplaces themselves to better fulfil their tasks. A sense of appropriation can also be seen in a great amount of small details that decorate the individual workspaces, such as photos and banners from rival football teams. The rooms are equipped with the most basic furniture, much of it seems improvised, some of the furniture is built by the employees themselves in order to adapt it to the demands of the job but that's why I was able to tell a story of Russia from the bottom up through the garages [...]. The garages become personal refuge where meaningful work and employment can be carried out, acting as the bonding device between the users, creating social relationships and give optimism in an otherwise harsh environment. This is especially illustrated by the example of a protagonist who does metalwork for his neighbours and family. I recognise certain meanings, what his garage means to him since he has been suffering from Parkinson's disease. The garage is our saviour, I spend half my life in the garage, if it wasn't for the garage I would have shot myself long ago if I had anything to do it with."

(Yefimkina, 2019)

I visited a similar space of confidence myself, although it was run by a welfare organisation and therefore much more institutional than the self-managed garages mentioned previously. The AK Werk in Enrchen is a company where people with mental and intellectual disabilities work who are unable to find a job on the primary labour market. In this way, they are able to participate socially, increase their self-esteem and have a structured daily routine. From an economic viewpoint, the company is able to cover its costs by assembling cable chains and distributing them to local manufacturers. The staff hierarchy is very horizontal, most of the employees work independently can organise their task themselves. This leads to an increased sense of responsibility and ownership, which is the reason many employees rearrange and redesign their workplaces themselves to better fulfil their tasks. A sense of appropriation can also be seen in a great amount of small details that decorate the individual workspaces, such as photos and banners from rival football teams. The rooms are equipped with the most basic furniture, much of it seems improvised, some of the furniture is built by the employees themselves in order to adapt it to the demands of the job but also to their personal needs. In addition to workplaces, places of retreat and gathering are an important element of the everyday working life and have been established within the help of simple means such as canopies. Under the canopy of the distribution area, employees from different departments meet for short breaks with a smoke and a coffee. If a staff member needs some silence or privacy, again a canopy sheltering an emergency exit at the back of the building serves as a place of retreat. In my perception, a societal ambition could be here not only accommodate people with disabilities, such as the employees of AK Werk, in their own system, but to promote greater inclusion and mixing with other parts of society. This would lead to a improved visibility of this group of people, and make workplaces more heterogeneous and meaningful, although it has to be taken into account that such a system also assures the employees that their special needs and requirements can be met.

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We are not a highly qualified hell with high-tech equipment everywhere. We work with basic, let's say say craftsmanship standards, and organise a lot ourselves. The tables are all self-built. They just identify with it.

Another interesting example that offers workspaces, a community as well as an interesting double meaning is located in the south of Maastricht, near the city park. Het Werkgebouw is collective of small businesses, artists and designers. It is a former military building in the Tapijnkazerne that was previously used as a warehouse and was renovated and transformed in 2013 with the aim of creating workspaces as well as forming a community that uses and operates these spaces. Behind them, there is another façade made up of a bricolage of window formats and colours that invite you to look in or even enter through the often open doors and creates an inbetween space. Surprisingly, the interior does not reveal the individual units, but rather a large space with individual object-like room constructions at the back of the building and an accumulation of tools and materials such as wooden boards or steel barrels. Occupational units, if separated at all, are divided by movable partitions such as cuttable shelves. A shared kitchen serves as a meeting point for coffee or collective lunches, but also during working hours the members support each other to make Het Werkgebouw also a social construct. "We all have our own workshop, but we share our knowledge and benefit from each other's network. We regularly visit each other, drink a cup of coffee together and ask each other's opinion. Occasionally we use each other's tools or machines. More and more often surprising collaborations arise between disciplines and with materials that at first sight have nothing to do with each other." In addition to the workshop rooms, there is also the Toonzaal, a showroom that is used by each member for two months of the year and in which the products made here are exhibited or workshops are set up and organised. Just off the public access and the impact achieved is very important for the community, as is the activation of the surrounding urban space. "We want to positively change the public space in our immediate vicinity. For example,

at the Tapijnkazerne we turned a dilapidated gas station into a swing station and we made a special urban furniture. In short, where we are, it becomes more fun." Het Werkgebouw, the adjacent buildings of the university, the in between situated square with an old petrol station and the city park create interesting relationships in the public space and for Maastricht untypical and multilayered urban qualities emerge. In the afternoons, students linger here or children play and swing, the workspaces expand outwards, saws are being rolled out of Het Werkgebouw, wooden slats are sorted and cut while walkers stroll along the ruins of the old city wall just a few metres away. (Het Werkgebouw)

For my project, anthropological philosophy offers interesting principles and insights that contribute to comprehending work as a human activity and recognising and cultivating meaningful work. Work can become meaningful on different levels, whereby the individual level forms the basis, with a possibility to develop further impact in a collective way. That this is not just a philosophical intellectual exercise is shown by concrete examples, even if these situations are often more complex than theoretical ideas. If these or other ways of meaningful workspaces find their way more often into an urban context, they also increase the diversity within a city, promoting exchange and interaction between different residents, activities and social strata. This heterogeneity ultimately contributes to social coexistence and thus unfolds its society-shaping effect that is much needed for an inclusive and just city.

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Photos & Illustrations

p. Heath, A. (2005), Fuel glasses.
1. new illustration
2. Yefimkina, N. (2019). *Still from garage mon paradiso*
3. new illustration
4. new illustration
5. Huppertz, B. (2019). *Deduktion und other in an urban context.* Architectural practice redesign photo
6. new illustration
7. Huppertz, B. (2019). *Deduktion und other in an urban context.* Architectural practice redesign
8. new illustration
9. Photo by Elliott Curget
10. new illustration

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