



P4 REFLECTION
the self-observatory

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*“A workable understanding of how our
psychosomatic organism ticks, **information on sensory clues** which wind its gorgeous clockwork or switch it
this way or that,
undoubtedly will someday belong in the designer’s mental tool chest”*

- Richard Neutra

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Citizens in 2050 will face a scale of mental health problems. Future unemployment caused by automation of jobs will evoke the lack of feeling a purpose or feeling useful for society. This will especially be the case for the lower-educated and less wealthy part of the population. Living in a city that will get denser and denser, the population needs to be presented with an environment that will stimulate them to come up with new strategies to adapt themselves to an exponentially developing society.

My graduation project has tried to address these issues by researching the possible positive effects of the environment on mental health. In my opinion, architects and urban planners need to take responsibility in designing restorative and healing environments. This is the case for houses and offices but not any less for public spaces and the overall urban environment. Especially for an era in which people will have more free time to spend. Instead of spending the largest part of their days in an office, they will spend more time in the public realm.

By setting up a basic set of rules based on literature, neuro-scientific and typological research on scale, material, colours and light, architects and urbanist could create implement brain restorative environments in the people's daily life and try to prevent serious stress-related problems.

This leads to the ambition of my project:

a public space that provides an optimal, stress reducing environment, to stimulate forming new strategies in able to adapt to a new society

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND DESIGN

During my research into environmental psychology I distilled architectural elements and typologies that appear to have a restorative effect on the stressed human brain.

Architects would make a wise choice if they would involve nature's beneficial influence on people's mental health as well. The fact that nature can work healing has been proven a lot throughout the last centuries and researches have proved the calming effects of contemplative architecture on mental health. But, maybe more surprising, observing images of contemplative architecture of an aesthetic value like cathedrals and museums has proved to almost have the same effects on the brain as self-directed meditation.

During the first phase of my design I only referred to my project as 'an experience', which is a goal that I always wanted to work towards. Later in the process a more specific typology or program was needed. Based on my research into typologies and the restorative effects of architecture I chose to design a 2050 - proof museum, an typology that according to my research would have restorative effects, since

its function is contemplative and contemplative buildings like churches, libraries and museums proved to have this effect. This museum would then entail all the envisioned experiences.

During P3 one of the comments was, rightfully, that a museum might not be the most logical considering my ambition. This made me go back to really think about 'experience' and the use of architecture and the senses. My new plan was to create an environment with a double gradient. A horizontal gradient that would consist of an axis with pavilions, going from extravert to introvert. The first pavilion would be a social place with a kitchen, barbecues and other food related activities, the next pavilion would be a chapel, this would lead to meditation spaces and the last pavilion would be an isolated active route through a 3D maze.

The second gradient can be found in the tower. This gradient is more about going from human-made strategies for healing mental health issues, to more uncurated healing, by making use of the senses, isolation and nature.

Considering having to design an environment for Amsterdam Zuidooost, one of the most multicultural areas of the entire world, it is very important to think strategically about social inclusion. Not every typology or architecture will speak to just everyone. Different cultural backgrounds, religions and traditions feel attracted to different environments and I strongly felt like I could not ignore this. So I added a new layer of research to my

project, on how to design in a way that would result in social inclusion.

During my research for the course New Urban Questions I dove into literature about the subconscious and the *sentient*. Architect Pallasmaa is a fervent advocate of 'looking' at architecture with our entire body. According to Pallasmaa, our mind and body should be seen as one whole, and not as separate. He states that earlier experiences and memories play an important role at this encounter, the user completes the work of the architect, and we make it our own to feel at home. In other words, users settle into the space and somehow become part of it. Uekxull's *umwelt* offers a different perspective from which you can draw a similar conclusion. His idea about *umwelt* and simply said, just looking at the objects that have a meaning for an organism (in this case, the human users) is relevant because, it can be imaginable that different rituals, need different objects. This is only a part of the conclusions I drew in that paper, but the ones most relevant to my project.

I tried to implement this newly gained knowledge into my project, but I found it hard to translate something extremely theoretical and almost philosophical into physical spaces. So the next step was to think more practical; what are the culture-specific hobbies, traditions and needs of a very multicultural society? What can be seen in my design is for example the chapel, that can be rented by multiple religions. Spaces like this are in great need in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Currently industrial

buildings and cellars are being used for religious ceremonies. The pavilions also try to use shapes and materials that are borrowed from for example arabic and oriental vernaculars.

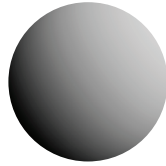
The kitchen pavillion refers to the very strong cultura around food in for example the Surinamese culture. Walking around parks in Zuidoost during summer you will find many groups and families picknicking and enjoying food together. It's one of the most important social activities. You can also find this tradition in the Kwaku festival, once football/ sport event, that has grown into one of the largest food- sport- and music festivals of Amsterdam. Also the 'world of food' building, located elsewhere in Zuidoost uses the great interest for this tradition, by providing a large foodcourt with many different traditional foods that can be consumed in a public area, with all cultures right next to each other.

CONCLUSIONS

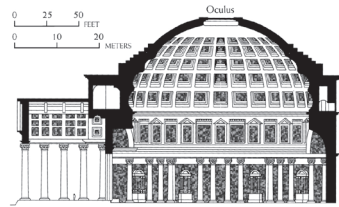
Overall I am quite happy with how I was able to implement my research into my architectural and urban design. I used a great deal of the location's specific characteristics, like the green, the water and the open character of the Gaasperplas to create a beneficial environment in which a person can wander along a route, hypothetically going from reality (the Zuid-Oost environment), stepping into a social environment (the food pavilion), where anything can happen, to slowly proceeding through more curated experiences like the

meditation spaces. Once in the tower, one can go from the mind seen from a cultural and scientific perspective, towards the mind, approached through the senses and isolation.

DIAGRAMMATIC DISPLAY OF THE CONCEPTS



NO DIRECT LIGHT
*Indirect
Shaded
Diffuse*



LARGE SCALE



FEW COLOURS
Emptiness



NATURAL VIEWS



1. Reflection through social activity

food/cooking pavilion



2. Reflection through silence and contemplation

*religious pavilion
meditation towers*



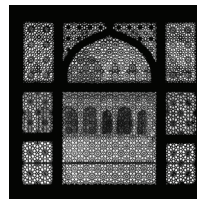
3. Reflection through isolation and observation

*isolated maze
elevation through tower*

DIAGRAMMATIC DISPLAY OF STRATEGY



PAVILIONS WITH LOW THRESHOLD AND COMMUNITY FUNCTIONS



ARCHITECTURAL REFERENCES TO COUNTRIES OF INHABITANTS



LANDMARK TO ATTRACT VISITORS



CONSTRUCTION BY COMMUNITY