



Graduation Plan

An innovative theatre as cultural catalyst
for the urban regeneration of the
Marineterrein in Amsterdam

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aE Graduation Studio '16

Graduation Plan for AE students

Personal Information

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Studio

Name of studio	Architectural Engineering
Architectural teacher	Job Schroën
Research teacher	Marcel Bilow

Argumentations of choice of the studio

During my internship I was confronted with a current development in the building industry in the Netherlands: the technical elaboration of a project is less and less done by the architect who made the architectural design. Other firms, more experienced with producing technical drawings in a relatively short time, are taking over this part of the design which should stay with the architectural firm. The only way to keep this technical part of the designing job as the architect, is by being really good at it. That is one of the main reasons why I chose this studio: to be able to not only design, but also to elaborate it really well in a technical way. This goes hand in hand and is not something you can see separate. I really believe that this combination will lift a project to a higher level. Combining the creatational side (art/design) with the technical side is the essence of creating architectural art. It is also the essence of the aE Studio: the integration architecture and technology. Furthermore, the freedom in choosing what kind of project you want to do and being encouraged by the studio to find your own way, is really a plus for this studio.

Title

An innovative theatre as cultural catalyst for the urban regeneration of the Marineterrein in Amsterdam.

Keywords: theatre typology, innovation, cultural catalyst, connecting, Marineterrein, Amsterdam, place of performance, audience, meeting place, identity, urban regeneration.

Graduation Project

This graduation project is about innovating in the theatre typology. Experimenting with this in an architectural way is perfect for the Marineterrein in Amsterdam, which has a temporary-use plan for the next ten years. In this period, the area can be used for innovative start-ups to create an innovation island in the middle of Amsterdam. It also works the other way around: theatre and other cultural activities will help to put the area back on the map of the city again, creating not only an attraction for the broader public, but also creating a meeting point where experiences can be shared and ideas can be exchanged.

Problem Statement

Theatre has always been more than just entertainment. The entertaining aspect is the main reason for visiting a theatre, but it has always added something extra to the cultural environment. Throughout history, the role of theatre in our daily lives has changed a lot. In ancient Greece, theatre was part of the religion and festivals were organized to honour the gods. In more recent history, in the 19th/20th century, visiting the theatre was a part of social life: the phenomenon of “seeing and being seen” was extremely important to display one’s status and wealth. The fact that the lights often stayed on in the auditorium during performances, is proof that this phenomenon was as important as the performance itself, or maybe even more important (Albach, 1965). Nowadays, people come for the performing arts, it’s the main reason for visiting a theatre or performance. But a lot of theatres in the Netherlands are in financial trouble: the audience is aging, the number of visitors is declining and subsidies are cut because of budget deficits of the government. It is time for theatres to reinvent themselves and give the audience something extra again in addition to the performances (Gardner, 2015).

Objective

What can architecture mean for this sector? The idea of building the same type of theatre in every city is outdated and not always profitable, so the objective is to experiment with the typology of theatre and innovate, to explore the architectural means in order to reach a broader audience.

To take the objective of “attracting an audience” further, it is an interesting fact that these kind of cultural/creative activities are often used for urban regeneration of abandoned areas (Feireiss & Hamm, 2015). These activities give an impulse to other functions, such as commercial companies and (better quality of) housing, which can be reasons for financial investments, upgrading the neighbourhood. Performances of all sorts give people a reason to come there, creating a meeting place for sharing experiences and exchanging ideas (Oswalt, Overmeyer, & Misselwitz, 2013). This is the power that a place of performance can have, whatever form or genre it may be, going further than selling tickets and getting an audience in a theatre, going further than the performance itself: it has the power to really change the identity of an area, which makes this project very valuable for the Marineterrein.

The development of this isolated and soon-to-be abandoned area to a vibrant and interactive innovation island can be speeded up with the use of a cultural catalyst, connecting the Marineterrein to the city and its residents again. This leads to the following overall design question.

Overall design question

"How can an innovative theatre function as a cultural catalyst in the temporary experimental character of the Marineterrein in Amsterdam, in order to develop the isolated area into a vibrant innovation island?"

Thematic Research Question

The thematic research is about innovating in the typology of theatre and other entertaining genres. A personal fascination for theatre has been the starting point of this research. It is an exciting way of story-telling, transformation and creating a different world for the audience to experience. The stage design, scenography and architecture of the theatre contribute to the art of communicating a story and a certain feeling. This "place of performance" also has a social function: theatre is an activity that brings people together, creating a cultural community.

The thematic research aims to find the current developments of theatres or performances that do something different than the typical theatre/performance and thus stand out. Often, these innovative projects attract a lot of people. The question is, how do they do it?

When talking about the "place of performance", it concerns not only the performing arts, but everything that has to do with the entertainment of an audience. This means that it will always need two things: the performance and the audience. Without spectators, a performance has no meaning and the performer will just be a person on a stage. The reason for not only looking at the performing arts – genres such as theatre, musical, opera, dance and music (concerts) – is to widen the scope: if you truly want to innovate the typical theatre and experiment with the typology, it is interesting to see what other cultural/entertaining genres do, such as film, art, fashion, and circus. Even lectures and sports are studied, as well as events that combine multiple performances, such as festivals.

Research Question

The base of the research question is: *"How do you create a place of performance?"* To find the answer to this question, it is necessary to describe what basic elements you need to create a place that can facilitate performances, or in other words: the typical theatre. This description of the basics of the "place" has no meaning without a description of the "performance". What are the different genres that form the performing arts? And: Are there more genres that do not belong to the performing arts, but also need a stage and an audience?

When you have the ingredients for the "place" and the "performance", you need an audience. Without an audience, there's no performance. This relationship is defined by the spatial structure of the place of performance, the stage-audience configuration. What does this spatial relationship do for the experience of the performance? Is the configuration different per genre or is that of no importance?

All of the above could be answered by studying "regular" places of performance across the world, but the point of this research is to find something new within this realm of knowledge and innovate. So instead of analysing these typical theatres, it is interesting to analyse the projects that stand out. What makes them special and attractive for the audience, compared to the regular theatre? What does this do to the experience of the performances that are being performed there? And how does

this “added value” relate to the performed genre and the stage-audience configuration?

This means that the main research question changes to:

*“How do you create an **innovative** place of performance with **added value** to the cultural environment, that reaches a **broader audience**?”*

To summarize all of the above, these are the subquestions that have to be answered in order to be able to answer the main research question:

- What is a typical theatre and how does it work? Or in other words: how do you create a typical place of performance?
- What is the relation between the function (genre) and the spatial layout (stage-audience configuration) of innovative places of performance?
- What is the relation between the performed genre, the stage-audience configuration and the added value in innovative places of performance?
- What specific tools are used in innovative places of performance to add value and thus make them stand out?

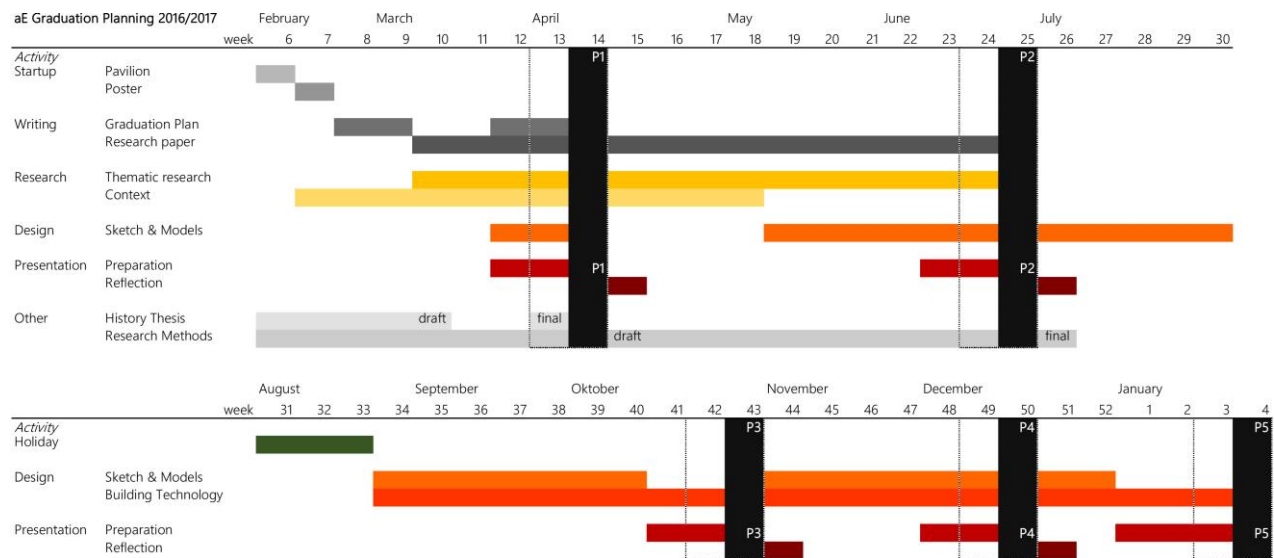
Methodologies

The chosen methods for the research are literature studies and case studies. The research question will be answered by creating a database of places of performance that differ from the typical theatre, categorizing them and finding patterns that will provide the tools to create an innovative place of performance(s).

Other methodologies for the rest of the graduation project are:

- Studying reference projects of transformation of urban areas
- Analysis of the site
- Research by design: sketches, models

Planning



Relevance

This graduation project is a specific design for the urban regeneration of the Marineterrein, it aims to function as a cultural catalyst to attract people to the now isolated island. The research on innovation of the theatre typology, however, can be used and extended by others in the future, which makes it generic. It's an addition to the knowledge on theatre architecture by studying and categorizing projects that are innovative. The information of the research may not only be valuable to architects – or architecture students –, but it can also be interesting for creators of theatre performances. This combination of specific and generic element will result in a design that can be seen as an experiment within the typology of theatre.

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