

# Public Condenser

## Chair of Public Building

### P4 Graduation Report

By

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\* Documents will be submitted on the 12th May 2020 two days prior the P4 presentation (14th May 2020)

## BRIEF

*« The Public Condenser provides a framework for interesting meetings between culture and movement and between people. It will be a place where people of different ages, exercise habits, cultural consumption and lifestyles encounter each other. It should be a place where there is room to be with friends and family, but also a place where you meet new people. The physical form of the Public Condenser must support these meetings, so there is opportunity to follow many of the ongoing activities and be inspired by what others are doing. External facilities must provide interactive cultural experiences and encourage people to play and exercise, contributing to the dynamic city life in the area. »*

Public Condenser Brief 2019-20, Chair of Public Building

## CONCEPT INSPIRATION

Firstly it appears important to define what the approach was towards designing the Public Condenser before analysing whether it was indeed a successful one or not. In order to appreciate what that could be, the reflection began by analysing existing buildings that aimed to perform along similar lines as the Public Condenser. One of which was the Aalto's Säynätsalo Town Hall, which made a particularly strong case for the ability to combine different functions in a clear and remarkable ensemble, and as such became a driving influence on the Public Condenser's design. It is relevant at this point to highlight the intentions, configuration and materiality concept of the Säynätsalo Town Hall to appreciate the importance it later had on the project.

### Intentions:

- . Not just a meeting area for council members; it also houses a library, a bank, a pharmacy, and guest rooms
- . Aalto wanted the town hall to serve as a gathering point for everyone, not just those elected, thereby furthering his democratic ideals

### Configuration:

- . Elevated courtyard plan with two main entrances up to the interior : a formal series of steps made of granite to the east (city entrance), and another set of grass terraces on the western end (forest entrance)
- . Site slopes upward to the north
- . Ground Floor : Parts of the library and other various municipalities for use by the town residents
- . Courtyard Level : Grass courtyard punctuated by various brick or clay tube patios, as well as a sunken pool of water / Most of the circulation for the above-ground offices is done behind the glass areas around the courtyard, avoiding the need for dark corridors.
- . Top Level : Council chamber and spider-like wooden roof trusses in the ceiling.

### Materiality concept:

- . Un-plastered red brick
- . Harshness of the Finnish climate
- . Longevity; building made to last as a monument for the town
- . Bricks laid slightly off-line to create a dynamic and enlivened surface condition
- . Brick inside the council chambers and floor surrounding the courtyard to blur boundaries between inside and outside/residents and council members
- . The massive brick envelope is punctuated by periods of vertical striation in the form of timber columns (heavily forested context)
- . Wood screens and white plastered walls

Ultimately, the Säynätsalo Town Hall's architectural feat is linked to its ability to convey an impression of unity towards the visitor when approaching through the use of bricks as the unique material of the external facades. The monolithic impressions of the external facade distort a sense of scale for the building. It is clear that Aalto intended this effect because of the clear trajectory he imposed on the visitor in the landscape-produced route towards the central courtyard. The Säynätsalo Town Hall's central courtyard has played an immensely important role in influencing the design of the Public Condenser. Through a drastic change in materiality and a raised topography, the previously imposed monolithically-induced distortion in scale is suddenly broken, leaving a central stage as a welcomed haven reminiscent of monastic cloisters. In a truly Aalto-manner, the Säynätsalo Town Hall shows how architecture can be considered as a sequencing of spaces. Aalto storyboarded his architecture in such a way that the singular-materiality of the facades should be understood as the skin of the building, and therefore the outer layer of the body of functions - the internal functions can, by proxy, be identified as the organs of the Säynätsalo body - finally, leaving the courtyard to essentially act as the lungs, allowing a breath of fresh air and life into the monolithic mass of the design.

## THEORY

The development of a concept will be using the ongoing design process of a design project aiming to fulfil the qualities of a 'Public Condenser' in The Hague to practically test a backbone of theory based on Bruno Latour's theory on materialism. The relationship of the matter's 'primary' and 'secondary' qualities can arguably benefit the architectural domain with a new awareness on the potential of a design as a shift away from the singular functionality of buildings, and instead proposes the more fluid and adaptable approach of 'multiplicity' as an alternative. Although the term 'multiplicity' was a prerequisite investigation within the studio brief, it is further dissected in this research through the scope of Deleuze and Guattari to depict the qualitative abilities of a design's performance in respect to the physical context. Within the relatively wide scope of 'multiplicity', the focus will be on the duality of objects as they physically appear alone and as a whole when combined, based on an organ / body dialogue. By approaching the project from a conceptual interpretation, the aim is to integrate a lasting ideotechnic relationship between the context and the design, as well as within the Public Condenser itself. Based on the project's theoretical 'primary' and 'secondary' qualities in regards to its context, the design would ideally engage the public into a spatial awareness of their surroundings in a pragmatic way.

Involving a constructive relationship between the iconic aesthetic and the more pragmatic context-based functionality offers a system in the realm of Multiplicity. By strategically positioning the project on an unused site located on the 'Green Cross', the project has the dual opportunity of highlighting itself as well as the surrounding green spaces by contrast to its build form. Mimicking this approach, and as an attempt to carry an ethic of multiplicity throughout the design, the buildings are formed around a central courtyard, thereby creating a void in between the functions. If one is to consider the project as a machine then the void would play the essential role of an organ in the functioning of its multiplicitous nature. Deleuze and Guattari explore the subject of 'machine-organ' in *Anti-Oedipus : Capitalism And Schizophrenia* (1972) in which they develop the topic of the grafting process. Their work focuses on the ability for the body to integrate the alien organ without interrupting the body's ability to function. By suggesting that the body's functionality is the goal, their argument inevitably hints at a hierarchy placing the organ's role as purely functional to the body's overall wellbeing. William Gibson revisits this image in his science-fiction novel *Neuromancer* (1984), in which he explores the equal dependency between machines and their organs, which would arguably cancel out Deleuze and Guattari's hierarchy. Through this alternative perspective, the design of a void (organ) amongst functions (body/machine) becomes an essential piece of the Public Condenser's anatomy. The central void of the design embodies the necessary silence in between two heartbeats, and similarly to

Gibson's discourse, «calls for a non-material space of representation [...] enabling you to explore the void that separates the physical presence and the consciousness of a 'spirit', a ghost who hauntingly will navigate the expanses of such a consensual illusion ». The consensual illusion is an image which influences the design of the Public Condenser in more ways than the interior void alone, this concept is carried out to the exterior of the project's ensemble. By routing four distinct paths towards the design, the user is forced to witness the separate aesthetics of the individual functions which compose the Public Condenser. This conscious design decision illustrates the importance of the multi- functionality of the building before displaying its unity within its central courtyard; in doing so, the conceptual aim is to expose a reversal of the body / organ dynamic by presenting the organs first, to later expose the body as a whole once within the central courtyard.

## REFLECTION

The reflection on the project's approach and development can broadly be divided as follows:

- *if your approach worked*
  - The translation from design inspiration to the formulation of a concept based on existing architectural theory was, in my opinion, a successful one.
  - The importance of expressing the body/organ as a representation of the multi functional whole / individual event
  - Appreciating the Aalto approach to reverse it
  - The Public Condenser is first viewed from the perspective of the individual functions and fully appreciated as a whole body once within the central courtyard
- *your understanding on the "how and why"*
  - The urban research of the Hague for the city planning demographic justifies the green cross with a reason for the placement of the design - it is a place of notice and increasing importance in the forthcoming densification and diversification efforts of the neighbourhood
  - The four views of the design based on different functions are positioned to relate to a majority of the relevant and specific users using these routes
  - Creating different impressions because it hosts different functions
  - Multiplicity of perception to engage the visitors
  - The approach made from a variety of points including a sunken approach at -5m to forced a unique view onto the 'education centre' and impose a dwarfing effect on the visitor, thereby exaggerating its dimensions / iconic shape
  - The routes towards the central space is either made through a forced change in the site's topography or by first witnessing the individual aesthetic of the functions before revealing the common aesthetic of the whole from within the courtyard
- *your reflection upon the feedback that was given by your mentors*
  - Treating the central courtyard as a mean of circulation around the different functions and giving it a unifying language
  - The central courtyard should be shaped in a similar fashion to the build form surrounding / forming it
  - Structural systems of the functions should be fully implemented, complementary and a play a functional role in the function itself

- Designing the approach and circulation around the site to make it accessible to all and across a range of transport systems
- What are the environmental systems at work in the circularity of the project ?
  - *how you have translated the feedback into your work*
- In an effort to combine both the cross-functional circulation around the Public Condenser and giving it a unifying language to the body of the courtyard, the offset brick facade was developed to house a series of stairs to vertically connect the users and their functions
- By treating the massive brick wall as a functional and structural system, the functions it facades can be freed up of structural obstacles in floor plan for both the 'business' and 'cultural' centres, as well as obtaining a thermal control by avoiding direct sunlight from flooding in
- The retaining wall contouring the sunken spaces is equipped with drainage system in the event of heavy rainfall, it is also reinforced enough to cope with an subterranean hydraulic pressure
- In answer to the need for the structural systems to play a functional role too, the retaining wall is also a navigation route for the bike park located at -5m by the sports centre
- The structural system of the 'education' centre is a system of its own which aims to optimise the flexibility of functions. It can house a series of standard dimensioned classrooms as well as an open play area which encourages the playfulness of the space in a controlled and safe manner
  
- *how you've learned from your own work.*
- By attempting to dive into the intended meaning(s) of an architectural precedent, I developed an appreciation for the struggles of combining functions together without necessarily forcing them to be housed under the same roof
- Appreciating the existing concept of Aalto's architecture does not mean it should be accepted blindly. Reversing his practical theory of sequencing and approach towards the buildings is not necessarily a form of challenge. Instead, I would argue that it furthers the notion and reinforces the argument that the approach and vision of a project is able to play and interchange its theoretical 'primary' and 'secondary' qualities to its advantage. Therefore it took a series of iterations to come up with a version of the design and landscape that most allowed the fluctuations between the user's appreciation and understanding of the space one is occupying.

## FINAL REFLECTION

### Aspect 1 the relationship between research and design.

The role of the research in the design process of the Public Condenser has evolved over the project, but has remained relevant as guiding principles into the design intentions. To begin with, the first guiding thread of research was synthesised during the P1, during which, the studio combined together a wide range of research topics to obtain an informed and rounded position on the site. Out of this exercise, a distinct narrative emerged which heavily suggested Morgenstond's incoming changes in terms of densification and diversification of its population and built environment.

A second research-based narrative emerged from the case study analysis which the studio undertook in parallel with the P1 urban investigations. By investigating the project's context alongside examples of existing public architecture, it broadened the potential and expectations of the design exercise. During this parallel, I particularly focused on the relevance of Aalto's Säynätsalo Town Hall within the studio's framework. With further readings to develop a conceptual position, the idea of applying (by reversing) Alto's approach of his project into my own enabled a manifesto of image-consciousness based on the concept of organ/body (single aesthetic courtyard / multi-aesthetic external facades). By following this method to develop a manifesto, the results materialised as a concept and an aesthetic which heavily streamlined the transition from the idea to design and materialisation.

### Aspect 2 the relationship between your graduation topic, the studio topic, your master track, and your master program.

My project is based on the multiplicity and multi-functionality of a public building. The project in its concept and aesthetic is rooted in showcasing the co-habitation and functioning of different public activities. This position was developed out of the Chair of Public Building Graduation Studio Brief which required « *a framework for interesting meetings between culture and movement and between people. It will be a place where people of different ages, exercise habits, cultural consumption and lifestyles encounter each other.* [...] *The physical form of the Public Condenser must support these meetings, so there is opportunity to follow many of the ongoing activities and be inspired by what others are doing* ». The studio titled this research a 'Public Condenser', and as such were the guiding principles of both the research and the design process.

As a MSc Architecture graduation project, it enabled a sufficient amount of time over a year to develop this notion of multiplicity more thoroughly. The combination of the design studio with seminars on complimentary issues allowed a theoretical, as a well as practical, platform onto which one could develop a design manifesto. In the greater context of architecture as a discipline, this knowledge will prove to be a valuable asset. The creation of public functions in architecture is a fast-moving platform which aims to drive efficiency and openness towards a wide range of users. The research I have worked on this year is specifically aimed towards the latter, which, in an increasingly populated and gentrified population, will surely become a rising concern in the years to come.

### 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.

As stated previously, the design studio was supported by seminar studies of complimentary subjects to help us further develop the concept and manifesto of the project around the P2 stage of the year. By consciously researching the topic of the studio through other means which the seminars offered, more than one investigation format was used. For example, within the framework of the studio, we were asked to

conduct a case study research on an existing public building. The seminars were in parallel teaching new and innovative ways of not only understanding this architecture but also new means of communicating it (models, essays, drawings and a manifesto). Besides the analysis of existing architecture and art, the seminars also delved into academic papers and philosophical notions which greatly enriched the formulation, in turn, of our own positions towards the final manifesto and design of the project. For instance, I was interested from the beginning to showcase and challenge the notion of multi-functionality in my project. I was able to gain further understanding of key terms in texts of Deleuze & Guattari, which in turn put me on tracks to the organ vs body notion. The design studio, in parallel, allowed for the practical investigation of the Aalto Säynätsalo Town Hall, in which Alto similarly investigated the issue of whole and functions within (in this case the body and organs). In combining the two sources of knowledge together as well as applying them to the context of this project, the reversal of these methods seemed an even more relevant exercise. In essence, it is unlikely that any of these steps could have been made had the studio's methodical line of enquiry not been in place to allow such parallel domain to work together.

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 Public Building studio in itself has a strong relevance with the wider social and professional context of architecture. The rising global population resulting in increasingly dense urban regions will more than ever turns towards public architecture to mediate between populations and social events. One of the many lessons to draw from the currently unique and dramatic scenario of COVID-19 is that social distancing is not innate to our behavioural patterns. The overwhelming struggle of the confined global population is a testament to our inherent need to interact with others, and I would add, to interact with others in the built fabric which houses the public functions we seem to miss so much. From museums, sports facilities, clubs, schools and offices, our society is currently put to the test, and so far we seem to be near-incapable to leave these public forums behind. In such a frame of mind, which considers Public Building architecture no longer as a luxury but rather as a civilised necessity, the current study of such a discipline seems more vital than ever.

The specific study of multi functionality within the realm of public architecture is a niche which has had to invent itself relatively recently to cope with increases in both demands and limitations of available space. I consider this discipline to have more potential than simply forcing functions together under the same roof. The Public Condenser offers a research platform into the investigation of what makes a cohabitation of functions into a 'single' project. This investigation has the aim to demonstrate that non-complimentary functions can co-habitate together if the element of multiplicity is showcased.

In doing so, my hope is to not only challenge the idea of a multi-functional building, but also use such an approach on other projects which could benefit from being a part of a whole rather than systematically kept apart. The single-use building is an increasingly unlikely scenario in an architectural context where rising demand requires increasingly complex solutions to meet rapidly changing contexts.

Aspect 5 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 ethical issues of the research process appeared when all the P1 research of the studio was combined. Together, this bank of knowledge on the site's context clearly highlighted that the area of Morgenstond is one of the poorest of the Hague and that its population will struggle from the incoming waves of gentrification and re-developments, which as the research demonstrated, are inevitable. In proposing such a project that would catalyse this change in the area's population already at risk, the issue of whether building such a project felt questionable in the first place. Secondly, whilst we were an entire studio to conduct the research across different and varied topics, the outcomes of said research were inevitably

rushed and could have benefited from a further span of documentation. Thirdly, and lastly, I felt the personal dilemma of not belonging to the Dutch culture and therefore imposing an external opinion and even judgment on some of the information I collected (or neglected) during the research process. This personal perspective, which I would argue does not see a high level of emigrant population in Morgenstond as an issue, felt like a moral and ethical dilemma but the grouped nature of the research by default minimised the amount of personal bias after all.

Upon elaborating the design, there was only one moral issue in the process which consisted in coming up with the different functions of the project. Whilst establishing the existing stock of functions which are already available to the population of Morgenstond was a methodical process, the selection of what should be included in the project was arguably biased. In making an informed decision, I created a list of relevant functions to combine together based on personal experience of what an urban environment should offer to its population, perhaps the end choice of functions would have differed otherwise.

Lastly, the potential applications of the results in practice would face the removal of the existing outdoor handball court which is currently on a corner of the site, although it would be replaced and improved with an indoor multi-sports court. Another issue which could come to light is that, as previously stated, such a project would contribute to the area's redevelopment and encourage a gentrification process of a more privileged population which will drive out the less fortunate populations currently living there. In return, it would also benefit those who can afford to stay and ideally improve the quality of life for the rest.

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