

# NARRATIVE BUILDINGS

## Self-Assessment on the use of narrating and materializing in the research on Hemburg

Student

Job van den Berg (4287762)

Chair of Heritage, "Revitalising Heritage"

Thesis "Hembrug Peninsula"

### I INTRODUCTION

Already at the start of the study in the bachelor research methods where provided by teachers and lecturers. Subconsciously the first methods like research by design were used in the form study courses, where the design was created by constantly reflecting on the models you made and use them as an input in the next model. Later, heuristic techniques like architectural mapping became part of the research. In most of the cases an architectural map, like for example a Nolli map, was made, which was analysed to find the essence. In my research and design process, I saw already at the end of my bachelor that my process not only a continuous interaction between analysing and designing was but also an interaction between concretizing and abstracting.

Some of the research methods provided by the lecturers were sometimes already subconsciously used in my research but because of the lectures I can now put those research methods in a framework. Especially the lectures of Klaske Havik on Spatial Narratives and Eireen Schreurs on Material Culture and Culture of Materials were interesting for my own research project. This has to do with the studio of Heritage where I am in. The studio differs itself from the others studio because there is already an existing situation, you are not only dealing with a location but also with its buildings. The location for this project is the former Artelerie Inrichtingen in the Hembrug area in Zaandam. Important for a heritage project is to address its cultural value and the elements, which ensure this value. As a tool to analyse this values the cultural value matrix is given to clarify all this values and to arrange all this values. One of the most important values for a heritage project is the historic value. In the lecture on Material Culture, Schreurs quoted Tim Ingold "An artefact is an materialisation of a thought" and in this quotation, two of the most important aspects of historic value are coughed.

The reason to grasp this cultural value of the site is to make an argued decision to preserve or demolished an element. What are the limitations of the design to preserve its cultural value? Important for this is to find the elements, which are containing the historic narrative, but this works also the other way around in a design. Not only in a way how a narrative can be materialist in a design but also in the way an investigated narrative can be materialized in a research. Because how do you show the value of a narrative? This interaction lead to the subject of this self-assessment on the research methods I used in the research on the Hembrug area in Zaandam. The main research question I asked myself is: *How is in the research on the Hembrug an interaction used between narrative and materialisation to address the historic value?* Tschumi already addresses this impotence, he says on this: "Architecture does not exist without drawing, in the same way that architecture does not exist without texts."<sup>1</sup>

In the first part the research methods will be discussed that are used in the research on Hembrug. The second part will be a reflecting on how other people used these methods in order to achieve their goal. In the last part my own research will be relate to this methods and how they are used.

### II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

It would not be peculiar that a Heritage related research mainly is focused on doing architectural historical research. Wang describes historical research as an interpretation of the historian's point of view and the output of this research is a narrative.<sup>2</sup> According to Lucas a historical precedent can be used to substantiate present practice of architects. By understanding the past we can argue our present day actions. Especially focused on the historic value, research can clarify a decision of maintain or demolish an building or element.<sup>3</sup> Because in heritage you are dealing with an existing context, this research is starting with this current situation so the base is a context led research. In this research we

as a researcher have an important roll in the research on the historic value. Because the historic value has to do with the way in communicating a narrative, we are the receiver of this narrative, making it an emic research.

The way of researching in heritage is a four-step process.<sup>4</sup> The first step is the chrono-mapping. In this phase the historical and current data is collected and mapped out in words, maps or diagrams. The reason behind it is to give insight in how the site evolved in its current state and what we can still see and trace back to the past. The second step is the value mapping. The goal of this value mapping is to give an overview and structure to organize all the values found during the chrono-mapping. As a tool you can use the cultural value matrix made by the department of Heritage and Architecture. There are more research tools like this one, for example the Burra Charter and the Nara Grid. The last one does have lot similarities with the cultural value matrix but is much more focused on conserving instead of designing.<sup>5</sup> The third step is the Mapping Levels of Significance. Where in the Value Mapping it is about the qualitative research to address the values, it is in the Levels of Significance about the quantitative research on how important the values are and how they are arranged in relation to each other. The last step is to Defining Dilemmas. Because of some values are conflicting with the modern requirements and contemporary visions.

A way to organize these values is the division according's to Riegl his values. In his assay on Cultural values he sees the values as different lenses in which way you can look at the monuments. He argues already the similarities and differences between a historical and an artistic value. The most important difference is that the narrative that is behind the monument is brought tot the viewer his conscious. This can be done with the use of the visual materialisation or a narrative inscription. Most of the time this is an interaction between both methods, which amplify each other.<sup>6</sup>

Value is an important aspect in the meaning of a building in its context. These landmarks, how Lynch is calling them, are determined for a major part by there historic value. He says: *"Once a history, a sign, or a meaning attaches to an object, its value as a landmark rises."*<sup>8</sup> It is even possible to give the building a not excising value, just by planting a narrative in the viewers conscious. An great example is the 'I am a monument' (fig 1) by Venturi in his Leaning from Las Vegas research.<sup>7</sup> People are seeing value where they want to see value.

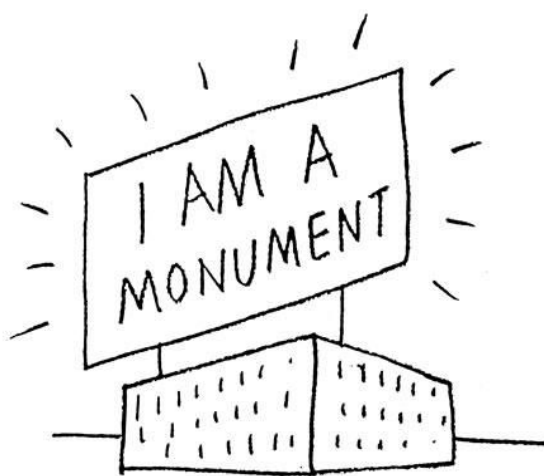


fig 1 diagram of I am a monument. In Learning from Las Vegas

## NARRATIVE BUILDINGS

In more recent publications is often searched for an explanation of this historic value and how it can be found, addressed and visualized. Most of the time there is an overlap between historical and age value but the main differences is that the age value just has to do with time and that historical value has to do with event. Paul Drury defines the historical value with: "Value deriving from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present".<sup>9</sup> This indicates that the place or element has a connecting roll in communicating this history to the present people.

### III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

One of the most challenging aspects is the method to show these historical values. Because how do you express values or even architecture in a narrative and how do you visualize a narrative? I focused on two different types of researcher and both have their own personal view on the use of a narrative and a material and the interaction between both.

Trachtenberg has written a book on architectural history and architectural monuments where he tries to reveal those historic buildings to the reader. He uses a combination of word and images. On the 'word' he says: "To describe the building a mastery of specialized vocabulary of architectural writing is needed." For a non-native speaker like me this is much harder then a native speaker because it requires a very high level of vocabulary to describe architecture because in architecture it is much more about experience and feeling. To understand a building the images is for most people much easier to understand, but how do you capture an architectural monument in illustrations? He divided the image in two types, photographs and diagrams. Photographs are the most common method to understand a building, but in most photographs you lose a lot of important information and details, which are essential to show a building his value. Trachtenberg says: "Traditionally, architects have been deeply involved in the design and crafting of detail, which was a major means of architectural expression." He even argues that a Greek temple or Renaissance facade can be seen as a giant intricate sculpture made entirely of detail. To show those details, which are the most important part to understand those values, he use a combination of detailed photographs and diagrams. In diagrams he shows the structure, space and proportions of the buildings. Tools he uses are the: plan, elevation, cross-section, the isometric projection and the perspective drawing.<sup>10</sup> A thing he don't address is the difference between the loss of information and the reduce of information. Because in most of the cases a picture or a sketch can also be seen as a lens or a filter which reduces the information to show the essence of a building and its value.

In words and buildings, Forty talks about the relationship between architecture and language and how words can be used to describe architecture. One of his aspects was the relationship between language and drawing. The conventional view of the process of architectures shows a chronological relation between drawing and language.

Idea → Drawing → Building → Experience → Language

In this case the language can be seen as a step in the process to evaluate the design but actually is language a tool tot use through the research and design process. Words are for example used to give the idea to the architect and are used to describe the plans to other stockholders. With the use of pictures and words you always have a kind of data loss of the original building, so the pictures and words could never replace the actual building. This problem you can also see in our research because we where not allowed to go in a building because of the asbestos. Despite that we had historical drawings, plans and pictures of the inside of the building we were missing a kind of experience and understanding of the building.

## NARRATIVE BUILDINGS

Because of the differences between using words or drawings an interaction of methods can help you in your design. A drawing is very exact; it can help you to be precise and concrete, and language is much more vague but this can help you to describe difficult elements like mood and atmosphere. To show differences a word can help much more than a drawing, because almost every word has its opposition, for example light and dark, and open and closed, but the opposite of a drawing is still a same expression of a drawing. Another feather of language is the use of metalanguage. We can use words to explain our words so we have the same interpretation of the word. Drawing on the other hand can have multiple interpretations by all the viewers. The effect of time and sequences does also differences in the methods, while the drawing is a one-moment shot, a sentences has a start and an end. Also experiencing a building it is not possible in one moment but it is a sequences of moving and looking. At last a drawing show much more than you can tell with words. To describe all the date of a plan in words you need much more than just one drawing.<sup>11</sup> If you relate this to historic values the way of defining this value depends on the degree of concreteness. Values that have to do with the surroundings, site and spirit of place are much easier to express in words than in drawings. On the other hand, concrete materialized values such as skin or structure related, could easier be addressed with the use of pictures or drawings.

### IV POSITIONING

At the start of my research I was mainly focussed on heuristic technics. Before we focused on the area we analysed case studies in order to create a toolbox of references for our own research. After the case studies we started with analysing he area. Because we didn't know what we where looking for heuristic methods where a good start to grasp the location. I stared by mapping the location in sections and plans like a Nolli map. (fig 2) With the chrono-mapping it was a lot about collection rough (historical) data.



*fig 2 Nollli map of campus north made in the research as a heuristic technique*

# NARRATIVE BUILDINGS

The lectures and the literature gave me a new interesting view on dealing with this data. The distinction between analysing a building with words and to give a narrative a materiality intrigued me. I used this in the research on the borders of the area. (fig 3) To use this method on the borders was really helpful because the borders have the problem that they are on the one hand very concrete, there is a line and that is the border, and on the other hand has the location of this line to do with the feeling and how you experience the border. This can be related on the differences Forty address between the use of words and drawings. After the borders were analysed in drawings, the use of words was used to show the differences and to connect all the elements in an annalistic drawing. (fig 4)

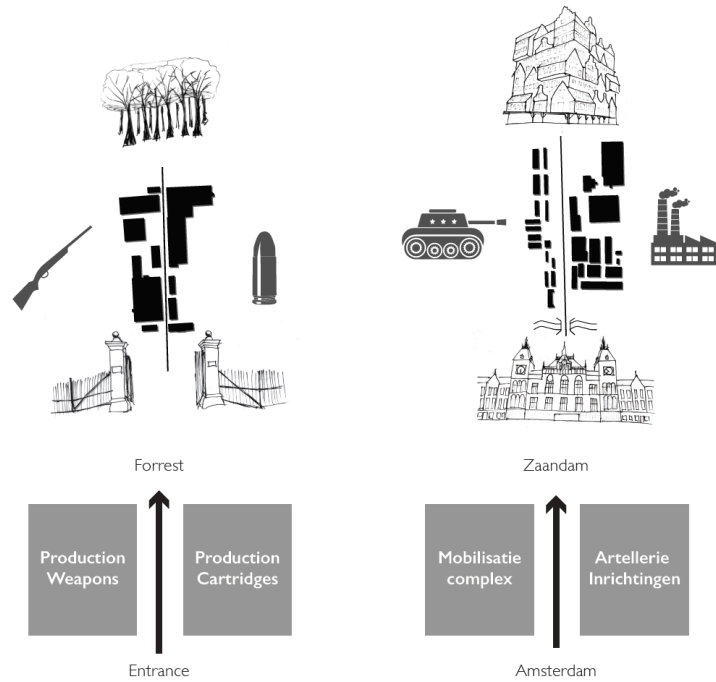


fig 3 A border research with the use of drawings and words

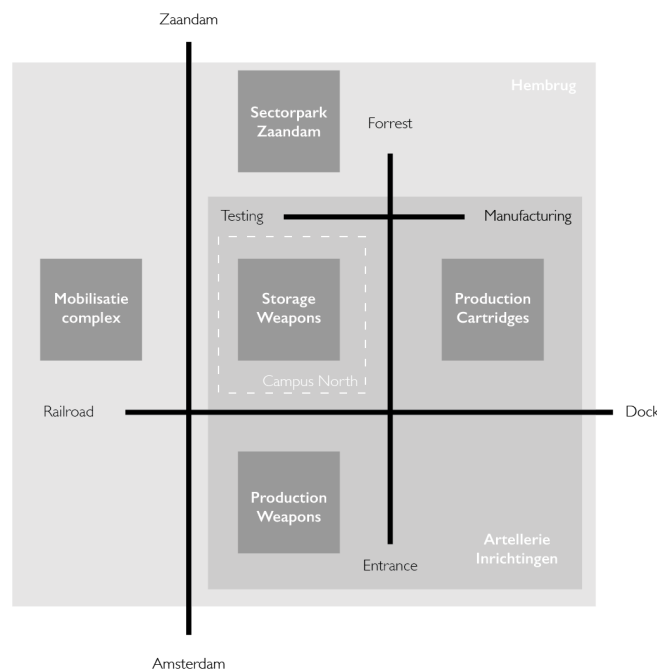


fig 4 Using words in a graphic way in a research on the borders

## NARRATIVE BUILDINGS

This way of analysing is also used in the way of presenting the research. Firstly my personal narrative based on the research is materialized in the form of a creative expression. (fig 5) I combined make-up and architecture to give a materialized expression of my thoughts with my own face as the canvas for the design. After this 'drawing' a play with words is used to describe this idea in a narrative way. It was interesting to see that the drawing, without saying anything, brought up different ideas and interpretation by each person. None of these interpretations was wrong but they addressed different elements of the same concept.



*For me it's about the two faces of the site, on one hand the open campus structure: the freestanding buildings in the public space, orientated towards all directions, the repetitive patterns alongside all facades and the mix of typologies, which together form an uniform unity. On the other hand the forest, with his history and roots deep inside the past, gives the area its curious atmosphere. A roof of leafs penetrates the area and is meeting the open shared space in its core. It's about the connection of those two worlds and how we as users are part in this. The forest was always a save haven, a place to shelter and to protect yourself when the sky was falling, but nowadays it can watch over you when you are escaping for modern society and find yourself peace and happiness. To see all of this your eyes are going troughs the buildings, light is falling on you, when you eyes are reaching trough the twigs. Sight lines are racing past you and disappear between the trees in the horizon. All of this is lying in different time layers on the area and now a new layer is painted over the area but we can still see his original soul trough his eyes, because they are the only things that never change.*

fig 5 Result of the etude in drawing and words

With the use of this method, values, which are normally hard to explain in heritage because they have to do with feeling and experience, can be pointed out quite exact. A narrative can help a building or element to show its historical value and a historic narrative can be materialized in a detail or expression of the building. In heritage one of the key

## NARRATIVE BUILDINGS

elements is to understand the meaning of a building or a place. If you can figure out what the story is behind the building you can trace this story back to the elements telling this story.

If I look back on the research question: *How is in the research on the Hembrug an interaction used between narrative and materialisation to address the historic value?* You can see that both methods are part of a heritage related research. Both are used as a complementary way and not supplementary. They are not telling both half of the story because, either the narrative is not understood or either the narrative has many interpretations. To understand the historic value a combination of word and the physical material is needed because the experience is an important part in the value determination. As I said in the beginning, for me research and design is a continuous process of concretizing and abstracting and with the use of narrative and materialisation you can contribute in this process.

### END NOTES:

- 1 Bernard Tschumi. *Architecture and Disjunction*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 102.
- 2 David Wang. *Architectural Research Methods*. 2nd ed. (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013), 173-179.
- 3 Ray Lucas. *Research Methods for Architecture*. (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016), 7-15.
- 4 Marieke Kuipers. *Designing from Heritage: Strategies for Conservation and Conversion*. (Delft: TU Delft, 2017) 73-97.
- 5 Koenraad van Balen. "The Nara Grid: An Evaluation Scheme Based on the Nara Document on Authenticity." *Apt Bulletin* 39, no. 2-3 (2008): 39-45.
- 6 Alois Riegl. "The modern cult of monuments: its character and its origin." *Oppositions* 25 (1982): 21-51.
- 7 Robert Venturi. *Learning from Las Vegas*. Facsimile ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017).
- 8 Kevin Lynch. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, (Mass: MIT Press, 1997), 81.
- 9 Paul Drury. *Conservation principles: policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment*. (London: English Heritage, 2008), 28.
- 10 Marvin Trachtenberg. *Architecture, from Prehistory to Post-Modernism*. 2nd ed. (Upper saddle river: Prentice Hall, 2003), 53.
- 11 Adrian Forty. *Words and Buildings : A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*. 1st ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 29-41.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Van Balen, Koenraad. "The Nara Grid: An Evaluation Scheme Based on the Nara Document on Authenticity." *Apt Bulletin* 39, no. 2-3 (2008): 39-45.
- Drury, Paul. *Conservation principles: policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment*. London: English Heritage, 2008.
- Forty, Adrian. *Words and Buildings : A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*. 1st ed. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004.
- Kuipers, Marieke. and Wessel de Jonge. *Designing from Heritage: Strategies for Conservation and Conversion*. Delft: TU Delft, 2017.
- Lucas, Ray. *Research Methods for Architecture*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016.
- Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997.
- Riegl, Alois. "The modern cult of monuments: its character and its origin." *Oppositions* 25 (1982): 21-51.
- Trachtenberg, Marvin, and Isabelle Hyman. *Architecture, from Prehistory to Post-Modernism*. 2nd ed. Upper saddle river: Prentice Hall, 2003.
- Tschumi, Bernard. *Architecture and Disjunction*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996.
- Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas*. Facsimile ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017.
- Wang, David, and Linda N Groat. *Architectural Research Methods*. 2nd ed. Hoboken: Wiley, 2013. 2013. Accessed Mei, 2019.