Cité Entrepôt Ney

The transformation of a modern logistics building into a Parisian neighbourhood through all scales.

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Graduation Plan (P2)

PRODUCT

Problem Statement
The north-east part of Paris has always had an socially subordinated position with respect to the rest of the city. Average household income is lower and the amount of social housing is higher, but this part of the city is also known for its large amount of industrial buildings combined with a rich railway history. There are many plans for redevelopment of this part, with a special attention to the most neglected parts of the city; the boulevard périphérique. This ringroad is the place where Paris stops, and the banlieues begin. With a renewed mentality and planning for one metropole, a Grand Paris, redevelopment plans are crossing the barrier of this highway. The intention is not only to create a better connection between Paris and the banlieues, but also to invest in the economy of this area by investing in new offices, new commercial centres. Housing projects are initiated which are meant for people with a higher income. But there is also a social investment for people who are already living there in education, sports and health. A lot of green projects are initiated for a healthier environment.

On the edge of Paris, in the 18th and 19th arrondissement, between the Boulevards des Maréchaux and the ring railway of the Petite Ceinture, two huge logistic facilities of the Calberson multinational are situated here. Both buildings were designed by Marcel Forest. The Entrepôt Macdonald, completed in 1967, is currently transformed into a commercial centre, combined with offices and dwellings by OMA, XDGA and FAA. The other building, the Entrepôt Ney, completed in 1976, is the subject for graduation. This building of over 180.000 m² is still in use as a logistics building, but it has come by in many plans for transformation. It is roughly 500 m long, 90 m wide and 30 m high, this huge scale can also be found in the dimensions of the concrete construction. Today, it is an industrial building that divides the neighbourhood of La Chapelle by its huge dimensions and function that doesn't connect, but repels of La Chapelle. This is the first problem. How can the barrier of Entrepôt Ney be broken to unite La Chapelle?

This answer is partially answered by the function which will be realized in this building, also in the light of the redevelopment of North-East Paris: dwellings. But here is the second problem. This building is not suitable for dwellings, partially because of its depth of 90 m and the fact that the building is designed for trucks. There need to be some demolishment and more human scale, but this will harm the massive character of the building. How do I create a neighbourhood in Entrepôt Ney with its huge dimensions, while maintaining the values of the building and a reference of its industrial past, but introduce a human scale?

Goal
The goal for this project is to produce a masterplan of the Cité Entrepôt Ney that accommodates a pleasant neighbourhood that unites La Chapelle, and shows at the same time the qualities of the Entrepôt and its past. This includes a plan for development of realization. This goal further explained will mean that unless the
A series of demolishments, the values of the building will be maintained, as much as possible. The second goal will be to develop a framework or structure to elaborate and realize this masterplan. This framework or structure needs to be designed to the smallest detail.

At the same time there needs to be a grip on the scale of this building towards a very detailed level. On a smaller scale a detailed design will reuse the Entrepôt into a residential environment where it is pleasant to live and shows the qualities of the building. There is a special attention to the detailing of the demolishments, and their technical and visual consequences of the building.

**PROCESS**

**Method description**
While writing this graduation plan, a P1 report is already completed. This contains an analysis on three levels of the Entrepôt Ney and its (direct) context: urbanism, architecture and building technology. All findings of this analysis will be later used in the design process.

Based on the contextual awareness gained by the analysis, and personal design ambitions and preferences, a function is chosen. Because the goal is to design a neighbourhood, there are multiple functions part of the assignment. Their size will be based on references. For the most extensive component of the neighbourhood, the dwellings, an extra analysis of the target groups needs to be made.

Due to the size of the building, the early design phase will have an exploring approach with separate smaller researches by designing that don’t need to relate to each other. The main purpose of this stage is to get a grip on the scale of the building and to discover the opportunities for the design. Most of this is done for the P2. A series of small models combined with plans will be of guidance in this process.

After the P2, the focus will be first on the residential level combined with the technical detailing of the demolishment combined with the additions on the smallest scale possible. Especially the effects of the demolishment define for a large part the visual appearance of the building. A precedent analysis will be needed to choose the right demolition techniques.

Further on in the design process a research by design approached will be continued, with the ambition to allow on a limited level an open exploring mind as used in the first phase of the design phase. Research in 2D and 3D, from sketches to models, will be used. Decisions in the design process should be grounded with references.

**Literature**

Building data:
- Drawings of Entrepôt Ney of the office of M. Forest; Archives departementales le Nord, 22 rue Saint-Bernard, 59000 Lille
- Pictures taken during visit (March and April 2014)
Information about the context:
- Bresler, H. (2014) Entrepot Macdonald, presentation on the University of Belleville, (12-03-14)
- Pictures taken during visit (March and April 2014)

Big buildings:

(Mega) Structures and Dwelling:

Dwelling:

Urbanism:

Heritage and Re-Use
- Kees Christiaanse, Martina Baum. (2013). City as Loft. Zürich: gta Verlag

Concrete:
- Centrum voor Cement en Beton http://www.cementenbeton.nl/

REFLECTION

Relevance
A lot of RMIT projects are dealing with monuments, not with generic or mediocre buildings, or even buildings that don’t have any value. This graduation projects deals with a mediocre building that doesn’t have outstanding architectural qualities and some might argue that there aren’t any. It is still not a generic building, it is unique in its size and typology, but its mediocrity in an area of expertise that focuses on the exceptional is relevant.

On a functional scale are their many industrial buildings and huge complexes within the city borders that are abandoned or will be abandoned in the future. Industrial activity with its pollution and other noise is not wanted in the city, and will move. Turning these buildings and complexes into lively long lasting neighborhoods is a challenge not only in Paris, but in the whole world.
Reflection paper (P4)

GENERAL REFLECTION

In my graduation plan I wrote that I would follow a research by design approach with a limited amount of space for an ‘open exploring mind’ and that decisions in the design process should be grounded with references. This suggests an academic way of designing. We do research to answer questions, and by designing we answer them. The answers should be justified by references that have proven themselves in practice, which could be either positive or negative. That was the plan. But how was this method used in the design process?

Research by design

In practice this meant that I have used design variants, to research the consequences of these variants on one or multiple architectural or technical themes or building components. The variants where sometimes the result of an ‘open exploring mind’ when the creative mind and time allowed this. Based on these variants a design decision was made. But I didn’t consistently worked with variants, because they weren’t always needed and took more time than simply making one design. As much as I worked with variant studies, there were definitely as much singular design objects that would alter moment by moment.

Although I have stated the ambition to ground the design decisions with references, this was often not the case. It felt often not relevant to come up with references, or sometimes a usable reference couldn’t be found. I did however a lot of research about the designs and theories of Herman Hertzberger. At first I was inspired by the office building of Centraal Beheer in Apeldoorn, in which a variable, small scale, fragment is repeated into one megastructure. This way of designing gave me the opportunity to control all scales of my own building, which is a megastructure, with a certain kindness for the human scale. But also theories of Hertzberger about public and private space, the living street and social spaces where very useful in transforming this building.

The RMIT method

Within the practice of RMIT, which focuses on transforming existing buildings which often have high architectural value, most used theories and references are about your position towards existing buildings. Hertzberger is in that way not a
common source of theory and practice. But I do believe that my approach towards the building is in line within the practices thought by RMIT. After the value assessment provided in the P1 report, I used the most important values as the main conditions for the intervention. The difference with a more 'conventional' RMIT project (e.g. canal house, old factory building etc.) is that this building doesn’t have high 'unquestionable' values and that the Entrepôt Ney could easily be perceived as a negative value in its context by others. This makes the values I identify in this building, and thereby the design process within the conditions of the value assessment very personal, and gives more freedom for intervention at the same time. These conditions were an important guidance in the design process.

An RMIT project is always related to its context, not only because we are dealing with existing buildings which makes them unavoidable, but these buildings have a relation with their surroundings and a history which relates to a wider context. These are different scales of context. Further on in the design process I didn’t look for any guidance in literature about how to deal with existing buildings and the context, I relied on my earlier RMIT courses and my own sense of what was right or wrong. I regret that I didn’t look into this literature in the earlier design phase, although I didn’t felt the need for this guidance, it could have provided me with another framework than my own.

But how do I relate my intervention to this context? In the context of the city of Paris, I researched how it is to live Paris and looked especially at the Parisian apartment: the home of the city. The design for the system of dwellings is partially formed by this typical way of living. The context of the building was for me the most present in the materialisation of the new additions.

**Social context**

The relevancy of this graduation project in the social context, and also perhaps in an RMIT context, is in my opinion the reuse of buildings that are mediocre or even perceived as ugly. This is a different kind of assignment than dealing with a monument or a loved building in a neighbourhood. Showing that reuse can be a better option than demolition, is relevant. It was my goal to break the social and physical barrier of Entrepot Ney, this was done by adding new centralizing functions and making new routes through the building. Making a new lively neighbourhood, in older and sometimes abandoned industrial buildings within the city, is not only a challenge in Paris, but in cities all over the world and especially in Europe. My redesign can be seen as a solution or reference in this context, but in order to know if it will really function or not it needs to be realized.
POINTWISE REFLECTION

P1
Besides a general reflection, I would like to reflect on several points in the overall process and design that were critical.

This design project started with the assembling of the P1 report; a bookwork of analysis on an urban, architectural and technical level of building and context conducted over several weeks. More than ever, I do believe this is a crucial part of the design process, and that a good analysis makes a better design. In the overall process the products in the P1 report were very useful not only because I used them in every presentation, but they reminded me clearly of the important values of this building, and why these values are so important.

Another part of the P1 phase was to design a masterplan. A fundamental condition in designing this masterplan was the principle that the tracks underneath Entrepôt Ney where not needed anymore with the realization of the Charles de Gaulle express. A railway connection between Gare de l’Est and the airport. It is also assumed that the wide track emplacement, that in this masterplan and the current masterplan of François Leclercq is transformed into an park, will become available for reuse. Within these conditions, the most important aspect of the masterplan is created; a slow traffic route that crosses over the new park and the new railway tracks of the Charles de Gaulle express, and penetrates through the building. This slow traffic route brings the Cité Charles Hermite closer with the rest of La Chapelle. But without these
fundamental conditions in the masterplan, it is not possible to create a viaduct across the railway tracks because the trains are simply too high to cross over with an acceptable slope. Because this is a fictional project, the fulfilment of these conditions in reality is not relevant, as long as they are realistic, it would however be better to fund my story with different scenarios that provided multiple solutions for connecting La Chapelle with the Cité Charles Hermite. Otherwise the design would be fragile towards reality.

This ‘reality check’ can be taken further if we look at the chosen program. The graduation project focuses on the dwellings, but the masterplan also contains several public functions and each of these functions can easily be a subject of graduation because of their size and complexity. Entrepôt Ney is situated in a subordinated part of Paris, which is currently redeveloped, these projects could help this redevelopment but are at the same time financially risky. Like the situation with the railway tracks, an answer to different design solutions could make the project less fragile and more realistic. What happens when the cultural centre will decrease half in size or is not funded by the municipality?

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<tr>
<th>Table 1: program of demands</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FUNCTION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dwellings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cinema</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture centre</td>
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<td>Offices</td>
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<td>Daycare</td>
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<td>Supermarket</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Shops/Cafe’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parking dwellings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parking offices/cinema</td>
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<td>Parking supermarket/culture centre</td>
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**P2**

The most crucial part in my design process, probably like most students, is the period between the P1 and the P2. Ideas arise, concepts are developed and the first sketches are made. In order to get a grip of the scale of the building, and to test ideas or to come up with ideas, I had a very free design phase in the beginning. I made models and drawings on a very large scale (1:2000 – 1:1000). Looking backwards, this was a very risky phase because there is a tendency to circulate on these scale levels and keep producing ideas, instead of choosing one idea and turning it into a graduation design. But I would do it again if I can do this project all over. For me this was the first time I dealt with such a huge and complex project, and by allowing myself time for exploration I got a hold on the building.
Final design

While I am writing this, the design is more or less finished. Time’s up, but the design isn’t finished; the project is simply too big to work out all components. There are several components I would like to elaborate further, like the south facade with its car route, and the park. But I have chosen to focus on other components. The research question that needed to be answered was; How do I create a neighbourhood in Entrepôt Ney with its huge dimensions, while maintaining the values of the building and a reference of its industrial past, but introduce a human scale? This was the research question I formulated. The answer the final design provides satisfies me. The design has a good balance between the needed human scale, and the experience of the authentic values of the building. And as even important, but not part of the research question, it exhibits the hidden beauty of the authentic building. Even though is there in the elaborated components still some room for improvement.

One thing I regret is that I didn’t dealt much with the social subordinated position of La Chapelle. This is also formulated in the problem statement, and until the P2 presentation it was my ambition to create dwellings which were affordable for people with a lower income who still wanted to buy a house. This income threshold was lowered by allowing people to built their own home within the structure. Afterwards this seemed not very plausible to realize in this building, but the ambition didn’t need to be abandoned. If I would have hold on to this ambition, and found another way to realize it in the final design, the project could have been better connected to its urban context in a socio-economic way.

On an architectural level there is still some room for improvement for the north side of the system, and especially the facade. As a guideline the transformation I
wanted to maintain and strengthen the strict horizontal lines in the facade. But at the same time this needed to be disturbed to make openings, and at the same time are these horizontal lines also applied to the south side of this building part. I’m not completely satisfied with the places in the building where these lines come together: in the openings. There is not a clear decision made between continuity and discontinuity, which makes the image more chaotic.

This graduation project focuses especially on most common dwellings in the building; in the heart. I designed a system of different dwelling sizes in which inhabitants could assemble their own facade to create more identity or personality in a huge building to distinguish yourself. This assemblage is only elaborated to the exterior part of the building; the facades and the balconies. With more time the collection of facade elements and balconies could have been expanded, but there misses another technical and architectural component that could improve this assemblage: the interior. Extra components could be different kinds of kitchens, bathrooms, presence and position of separation walls, (extra) durable installations etc. But then again; time’s up.

**ADVISE FOR OTHER STUDENTS**

The decision to make Entrepôt Ney the subject of my graduation was one made by intuition, not by reason. If the size of a building doesn’t scare you, don’t let scale hold you back, but be aware that it asks for a different approach than small(er) projects. If you’re inspired by a building, for whatever reason, use this fascination in your analysis and design. For me the way to cope with this assignment was with repetition limited by the value assessment, and most of all trial and error. Test your ideas, test your values.