01. Introduction

This paper contains the reflection of the graduation project of the master of Architecture within the studio of Heritage and Architecture. For this project, I pursued to develop an abandoned area into an attractive and functional environment for future use. The abandoned area, which is the subject of this studio, is called Hembrug and is located in the south of Zaandam and close to Amsterdam. Since 2014 the terrain was made accessible for public, but the municipality of Zaanstad is already working on the development of Hembrug since 2011. Since the opening of Hembrug the vacancy of the terrain and the buildings attracted creative entrepreneurs. My first impression of the Hembrug terrain itself could be described with the word ‘industrial’. The characteristics of the terrain made me feel that this space was originally designed for large industrial processes due to, among other things, lack of human-scale.

This project focuses mainly on a specific part of the Hembrug terrain, which is the ensemble by the name of Campus South. This ensemble is positioned on the west part of the terrain and possesses six various buildings in an open field. My first impression of the ensemble could be described as a village-like atmosphere within this industrial context. The building that attracted me in particular was the Harderij, which reminded me of a ruin. Through the layers of neglect and decay, I could see potential for this building to become a unique and attractive space in the heart of this ensemble. Because of its unique appearance like the different material layers affected in time, the multiple buildings parts, the incidence of daylight through the plastic roof, and the ornaments on the inside of the facades, a special experience is created. The Harderij has the power to make ‘time’ visible by showing its history. For creators like painters and photographers, buildings in decay are very attractive. They see them as a piece of art. I agree on that. Because the Harderij has lost its function, the remains could be seen as an art object. Though adding a contrasting volume the artistic characteristics are strengthen. To attract people to have this experience, a function is needed. A suitable function would be a museum which also focuses on the experience of art. Another interesting fact is that Zaanstad is focusing on the creative industry. For these reasons Campus South will be transformed into a creators district. In the future the Hembrug terrain around it will be transformed into an unique residential area with work spaces and recreation. The main focus of this terrain will be on the creative industry. For the adjustments of the ensemble and its buildings an approach is used to ensure that the interventions will meet the needs of the future as well as strengthening the qualities of the ensemble. The aim is to create a dialogue between the different time layers and hereby create a multidimensional experience for the spectators.

In this paper, the meaning this project has on different scales will be explained. From the scale of the studio of Heritage and Architecture till the scale of society.
The Harderij
Empty building with layers of neglect and decay

20 x 20 x 20
The harderij as a ruin, closed of by a glass dome. Shown the potential, the architect saw in this building, inside.
This graduation project, of the master of Architecture, is done within the studio of Heritage and Architecture. A studio that focuses on transformation of abandoned buildings and areas. In this case it is about the transformation of an ensemble with multiple buildings. There are different approaches for designing from heritage, like conservation, renovation, and interventions. For this project different approaches were used. The layout of the ensemble, meaning, the composition of the different building typologies within an open field, was valued very high because of the atmosphere it creates. In the masterplan of this design, the composition is preserved. Only one new building volume for artists housing is added within the ensemble. But this volume is located on the footprint of a former building. This building was partly demolished, leaving its foundation on the ensemble. In the design the Harderij is renovated by adding insulation in between the existing facades. Besides that the building has an intervention. A contrasting volume is added on top of the building. The reason for positioning the volume on top of the Harderij is because of the value given to the composition of the ensemble. Another building, the Waslokaal, will be renovated to be suitable for different visual art courses, like pottery and painting.

The overall theme for Campus South in the future is creativity. To find a suitable program the slogan ‘functions follows form’ was used. According to Wessel de Jonge, who presents his experience of the role of the architect in relation to heritage value assessment in the book ‘Designing from Heritage’: ‘redesign of existing buildings requires a two-sided approach by the architect. The familiar rational method, which takes the program as a starting point (form follows function), primarily addresses the functional and commercial aims of the client and will therefore answer to the viability of the project as a whole. The reversed approach, taking the qualities of the building as point of departure (function follows form), is driven by cultural, historical and architectural values. These approaches are not successive separate tracks, but should be intertwined into an integrated, iterative process.’ (p.114 Designing from Heritage). For the Harderij and the Waslokaal these slogan was used.

Besides the historical and cultural value, the architectural experience of the future users is of importance for this design project. During the pre-master I got interested in this topic. To learn more about the experience of architecture and space, I read a part about space in the reader of Adrian Forty by the title ‘words and buildings’. This chapter was about the different interpretations of ‘space’. I found out that the word ‘space’, which is a commonly used word, and in my belief, the main subject in architecture, had so many different definitions. For this reason, I questioned myself: ‘Which senses play a role in experiencing architecture and can architects determine how users experience a certain space? This also made me question what it was that I want future users to experience in this ensemble and in the buildings. I felt triggered by Groat and Wang’s reason for writing the book ‘Architectural Research Methods’. This book I read for the course research methods. Whereby the students were asked to analyze their own design and research approach. Groat is talking about people’s lives we influence by practicing our field and by the suggestion Wang makes about the multiple connections between human experience and build form. Architecture is everywhere around us. It is the house we live in, the streets we walk through and the faculty or library we spend most of our time in during the week. After realizing that architecture is a large part of our existing I felt motivated to gain more information about research methodologies I can use to understand more about people’s behavior and experience to increase the quality of the architecture I will design today and in the future. The approach in architecture is called phenomenology whereby a sensory perception of the human body is central to the design.
In the professional field of architecture there is a group of architects who seem also to attempt a phenomenological approach in their design projects. The way they design from the perspective of the body and its sentences, and how they, among other things, emphasize the qualities of materials, the experience of spaces, the structure of the surfaces, and the use of light. An example is August Schmarsow, who is known as the first architectural theorist to insist on a spatial approach in the study of architecture. The embodied human individual has a central position in Schmarsow’s historiographies. He described how the dimension of depth encourages humans to move through architectural space and both proposed that it is this movement that gives the individual the capability of not only experiencing but also forming architecture. According to Schmarsow “space exists because we have a body.” This sentence intrigued me. Another notable figure is the architect Juhani Pallasmaa who argues for a more sensual and multi-sensory experience. According to Pallasmaa, architecture is not experienced as a collection of isolated visual pictures, but in its fully embodied material and spiritual presence. For Pallasmaa, the atmosphere is a blistering physical sense that people can experience by connection with the world throughout the tactile sense. The ears, eyes, nose, and mouth as an extension of the sense of touch. He describes them as an extension to the enveloping skin tissue. For Pallasmaa, architecture is the primary way of relating of our humanity to space and time. Man is in space and time. Both are limitless, immeasurable and insignificant. Pallasmaa suggests there is ‘life quality enhancing’ architecture if all the senses are addressed simultaneously. This brings the human body together with the world. Pallasmaa has gone onto use narratives as a way of designing architecture with all senses in consideration, a notion shared by Peter Zumthor. Both architects, place the human at the epicenter of their design, in a Vitruvian analogy, with the intention to design a building that has the ability to ‘move someone’. In effect, creating spaces of corporeal presence. The work of contemporary architect Peter Zumthor pays close attention to the experiences and interactions of people in the places they create. The field of interior design is likewise concerned with the experiences of inhabitants and tends to emphasize the sensory qualities of materials and spaces. Through attention to the surfaces, details, and objects that people come into direct contact with, interior design remains attentive to the needs and experiences of inhabitants. Architecture has evolved from being just a built form that one inhabits, but to one where someone dwells.

Another architect that inspires me is Steven Holl, for whom the sensory perception of the human body is also central to the design. Times Magazine once wrote the following about his work: ‘Buildings that satisfy the spirit as well as the eye’. The main idea of Holl is that man perceives from the physical perspective of the world. For Holl, ‘the body in space’ is a starting point. Phenomenology is a recurring theme in Holl’s work. The phenomenological views of Holl are based on the theory of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty wrote two important works: la structure de comportement et phénoménologie de la perception. This shows, among other things, that ‘la perception’, which means the observation, must be seen as the starting point in philosophy, as a separate active dimension. In his conception of phenomenology, the body plays a central role in both observation and expression. Merleau-Ponty claims that a human is not only the world but also belongs to the world. Architecture not only allows people to be spectators, but also shows that we are part of the world and therefore inextricably belong to the world.
It can be stated that in today’s society, the old industry has taken a prominent place. But this was not always the case. At the end of the twentieth century, more and more industrial companies left their factory buildings in the Netherlands. A large amount of the production industry was relocated to low-wage countries. Because of the process of deindustrialization, these industrial buildings became silent witnesses of the industrial era. It was difficult to reuse these large industrial buildings, due to the specific design of their production process. These empty and useless buildings were not highly valued at that time, which resulted in the demolition of a lot of these industrial buildings. Nevertheless, a small group of people, like artists and squatters, did value these buildings highly. They resisted the demolition of buildings. The way people looked at these buildings changed. More people started to value the industrial heritage and wanted it to be preserved. More often, municipalities rented the buildings to artist or other creative entrepreneurs as a temporary solution. Sometimes these temporary functions became even definitive. For Zaanstad the deindustrialization had a great impact because of its large amount of industry. The municipality of Zaanstad formulated an active policy, to stimulate the creative industry, who are not able to find a place in the city of Amsterdam, by offering a cheaper business location in industrial heritage. Besides that, the municipality offers even a start-up subsidy for creative entrepreneurs who want to settle in Zaanstad.

1 Adrian Forty, Words and buildings (United Kingdom: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 256.
2 Johanna Gullberg, Voids and bodies: August Schmarsow, Bruno Zevi and space as a historiographical theme (Journal of Art Historiography, 2016), 1.
5 J. Pallasmaa, The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses (Chichester: Wiley, 2014), 44.