Graduation Plan

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Studio
Name of studio: Architectural Engineering
Teachers: Job Schroen & Stanley Kurvers
Argumentations of choice of the studio: The studio provides an opportunity to develop and elaborate on your own fascination and interest. The different approaches within the studio contribute to the freedom and definition of my own project.

Title
Architecture of the Senses
Graduation Project

Problem Statement
In the contemporary architectural discourse, architecture is expected to be reactive and adaptive considering changing climatic circumstances that elaborates on our senses and our comfort, for building smart. One can consider the reaction, adaption and experience within architecture in two ways. The first one is a more contemporary interpretation, which relies on technological developments that enables architecture or architectural elements to react on changing circumstances and provide stable or comfortable indoor climate. The second one considers architecture and the creation of atmosphere as an outcome of a collaboration of reaction, adaption and experience for a multi-sensory design. The second one - where tools for architecture are mastered by the designer seeks for interaction between the built environment and the senses of the body for appreciation - intersects with the urge to incorporate senses in architecture for a sophisticated experience of a building. The urge arises from the shift towards a ocular-centric code of culture that occurred in time, developing itself from classical Greek philosophy and Western culture on to Modernism (Kerr, 2013; Pallasmaa, 1996; Plato, 2011). The five sensory aspects were all of importance for the experience of architecture, but during the Renaissance the visual aspect became privileged, and this phenomenon got strengthened through time and the conditions of our contemporary society, where we live in such a rush that we almost forgot how we perceive occurrences and phenomena in our daily life.

The domination of the visual perception, additionally the division of tasks within the building process alienated the architect from the realization of the projects and final appearance. I believe that the distination from the project, by means of the architect is not necessarily a designer from that context mastering the local techniques or climate solutions, and subcontracting its specific parts especially the climate design diminishes the experience. The addition of multiple installations for a better or predictable indoor climate diminishes a more human, multi-sensory experience and whereas it could have additional value for the experience if it was a starting point.

In the context of Parkstad there are two separate historical layers which are not clearly visible and recognisable in its contemporary state. Those are the ‘Via Belgica’ and the mine industry, both are significant for the development of the city. Therefore an attempt will be made to incorporate those historical layers in the redevelopment projects of Parkstad.

The ‘Via Belgica’ was an ancient Roman road that connected the northern part of the Empire from Boulogne sur Mer to Koln. In its contemporary condition the road is divided among different countries: France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany and is mostly not recognizable. The route crosses Parkstad Limburg and dissects varying urban areas and landscapes (Limburg, 2005). The potential of this area as cultural heritage and link to the communal roman history is still to be explored. The increasing interest for ancient cultures and new visions for the restructuring of Parkstad Limburg provides us an opportunity to make the history of the area visible and accessible by incorporating the area to the restructuring. The municipality demands a visual connection between remnants and the route (Gerritsen et al., 2009; van der Valk, Delheij, Klinkers, Demandt, & Ouari, 2009). Nevertheless considering the excellent atmospheres of Roman architectural objects the restriction to visual aspects will remain inferior. The city Heerlen inhabits remnants of a Roman architecture, which is still exposed as the Roman Thermae of Corriovallum and oldest building of the Netherlands.

The most recent historical layer of Parkstad is related to the mine industry. The area is known for and has extensively benefitted from its fertile grounds and its rich substrate. The former arcadian landscape and agriculture transformed rapidly into an industrial landscape during 1900 and 1950. Infrastructural changes were necessary to achieve an effective management for coal mining. Simultaneously the demographics of the area changed with the first batch of mine workers from the Netherlands followed by foreign migrants. Even though the area flourished
rapidly, the expansion was regulated by a societal vision, incorporating the migration flow in mine colonies and absorbing into the social mainstream. Nonetheless the identity of the area became common with mining activities, and a strong social cohesion emerged in the working class. The closing of the mines from 1965 on strongly affected the socio-economic situation until nowadays, the migration excess made place for shrinkage in economic growth and demographic variety (Beckers et al., 2015; Gerritsen et al., 2009). The release of the mining industry and demolition of industrial heritage vanished the recent character of the area, and nowadays Parkstad is regretting the absence of the shared identity (Beckers et al., 2015). I think the representation and experience of both historical layers should be reconsidered or reinterpreted for the contemporary society. Since both phenomena drastically changed the structure and composition of the area and made it a centre point for trades and its further developments.

Objective

The objectives for the graduation project are to incorporate a research of the architecture of senses into the design and a reinterpretation of the landscape. Among the sensory perception, this project will address climatic issues that influence the human sensation of architectural environments. While aiming for multi-sensory architecture, its association with the local identity and its minimal use of energy.

Overall design question

“How can we facilitate a multi-sensory perception for an embodied experience of architecture?”

Thematic Research Questions

Towards a specific technical fascination
What inspired me firstly was how the indoor climate did affect our sensory experiences since I thought that this was the only physical but not visible aspect in architecture that is perceived without the eye. The quality of air, humidity, temperature and the light, its intensity and warmth, color. The sound, its reflection, silence, echo, disturbance, engagement and finally how the scale and applied material did affect our perception of the entire experience. Therefore I think the desired climates can be a starting point, or a toolbox for a desired atmosphere or architecture. Hence I have to start looking in particularly to the aspects of air, light and sound.

“How can architecture become an art of reconciliation between ourselves and the world through our senses?”

“How do we perceive indoor architectural environments?”

“What is the relationship between the scientific architectural method and the devices of technology as they have been applied to determine the atmosphere in buildings?”
Methodologies

Literature study: This component will use literature about phenomenology, experience, interpretation of architecture and reuse. Additionally some literature will provide information about the philosophy of production of space in an existing environment and the phenomenology on perception. This will be followed by a study of our sensory organs and the perception of indoor environments.

Literature


Study on site: Some sketches will me made for the general impression of the area, and some pictures.

Case study: By analyzing successful multi-sensory architecture, elements to achieve this goal will be derived from this.
Relevance

In our contemporary society we are overwhelmed with information and everything is made accessible for us. In order to achieve the tempo of the society we give away from our experience and do not divide our attention over the more inferior senses. The frontal 'image' in architecture and all other fields surrounding us receives the attention especially. Otherwise we would not be able to keep up the speed we are overwhelmed with information. This project has to remind us of the availability and qualities of all our senses and in order to achieve this it has to slow down tempo we are perceiving this. Moreover, the project will be a critique to our contemporary society, which alienates us from our own capabilities.

Planning

Drawing the thersms of Coriovalum in plan and section, different drawings with focus on particular aspects that resemble separately the perception by one sense.

Describe own architectural experiences, or plan architectural experiences to write

Read Merleau Ponty for phenomenology of perception and Gordon Matta Clark for use of existing architecture and his treat.
Bibliography