

Analysis Euregional Prize for Architecture 2014

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OFFICIUM NOVUM

Notions on crossing borders, “Der Himmel über Parkstad”... and beyond

*Als das Kind Kind war, wußte es nicht, daß es Kind war,
alles war ihm beseelt, und alle Seelen waren eins.ⁱ*

Dear (recently graduated) students, dear family and friends, and dear Euregionale Fachgemeinschaft in Architecture, gathered here today at the Fachhochschule Aachen.

This weekend, I had actually planned to visit the Crossing Border festival on literature and music in The Hague, the city where I live, in the Randstad region in the West of The Netherlands.

But, since my colleague Tom Avermaete, professor of the Chair of Methods and Analysis at the faculty of Architecture, TU Delft, was unable to rise to the occasion of the 24th Euregional Prize for *Architecture* and asked me to act as this year’s analyst in his stead, I knew I was sure to head for this other *Crossing Border* festival on *Architecture* in Aachen, in the *Meuse-Rhine* Euregion.

Thank you Tom, and thank you Andrea Croé and her team at SCHUNCK* in Heerlen, including some of my former colleagues, for providing me this stage to share my observations with you all.

Before I will elaborate on this year’s harvest of graduation projects of five schools of architecture in this region, I would like to share some notions with you.

I. The region. Euregio Maas-Rijn. Parkstad. Notropolis. Newtropolis. Zuid-Stad. Charlemagne. Just to mention a few (suggested) names that relate to this Euregion Meuse-Rhine, as found in NEWTROPOLIS, as attached to the November issue of Zuiderlucht cultural magazine.ⁱⁱ

This region belongs to one of the most densely populated regions in Europe,

it comes to the 3.9 million residents in this area. Yet, this is not a region with a high building density rate and the region is blessed with an array of unique green landscape structures. It is not for nothing that the greater Heerlen region presents itself with the name Parkstad. A fortnight ago, after watching *Der Himmel über Berlin* (or in English *Wings of Desire*), Wim Wenders’ magnificent classic film from 1987 on ARTE television, I fantasized about *Der Himmel über Parkstad*...and therefore I just quoted Peter Handke’s poem to commence my analysis speech...

To start, three cities in the Euregion Meuse-Rhine, Heerlen, Aachen and Hasselt served as research topics for SCHUNCK* in their NEWTROPOLIS research project, which claims to display cultural and spatial developments in this regions’ coherence for the first time.ⁱⁱⁱ Or we can observe the pitfall of recent ambitions (say the World Expo in Liège, intended for 2017, and VIA Maastricht, Cultural Capital of Europe, intended for 2018). 2014-2020 is the time span that Jo Coenen, recently appointed Director of IBA Parkstad (as you all know an abbreviation of the wonderful German term *Internationale Bauausstellung*) has set to re-establish Parkstad as a self-conscious region. On the long run, this might become a new catalyst for ten

cities in three countries, which may be located in the periphery in their respective Motherlands, but, crossing borders, make up one centrally located region: Aachen, Eupen, Liège, Tongeren, Sint-Truiden, Hasselt, Genk, Sittard-Geleen, Maastricht and Heerlen.

2. The students and their schools of architecture. Fachhochschule Aachen. Rheinisch- Westfälisch Technische Hochschule Aachen. Faculté d'Architecture, Université de Liège. Faculteit architectuur en kunst aan de Universiteit Hasselt. Maastricht Master of Architecture +, Hogeschool Zuyd. Although the educational programs of your five schools of architecture differ in length and their educational models, in the end it all comes down to the position that *you* – as a graduating architecture student - take by means of your thesis project. This project is your statement. These are your credentials. They can range from being very academic to a headstart into architectural practice. What positions do *you* take, as recently graduated students from these schools of architecture in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion by means of nothing more – or rather: nothing less – than your graduation project?

3. Officium Novum – EAP as a service to The New Architect? Societal circumstances have had a major effect on the employability of the 'classical' architect in the past decade. In Delft, *DNA [De Nieuwe Architect]* has been launched as a platform for bachelor students to research the architect's position in this age of transformation. According to them, "*The New Architect* is a versatile professional that, by means of a conscious positioning, can put his/her hand to today's societal problems." *Strategic entrepreneurship* is of the essence, either as a *generalist*, or as a *specialist*. The New Architect is rather a problem solver and consultant than an artist. ^{iv}

The word "officium", deriving from the Latin expression for "service", "duty" or "ceremony", is originally related to the catholic church and its rites. ^v But it also means "office", in the sense of post, job, function. With your positions taken by means of your work, we can see today's ceremony also as a prospect into the future of our profession. Therefore I consider it of relevance to trace this change of the profile of the architectural profession beyond its classical borders in this year's harvest of the Euregional Prize for Architecture, as derived from the educational profiles of your schools.

4. The EAP-class of 2014. In Wenders' Berlin, the angels Daniel and Cassiel had the ability to cross borders and listen into people's minds. Far from being an angel myself, I could not hear what was on each of your designer's minds, but – as for the jury members – I was enabled to read your drawings and writings. That should be sufficient though to see congruence and divergence, and red threads in this year's EAP offer to this region. I will consider the entries, organized by school:

I. Universiteit Hasselt, faculteit architectuur en kunst. If one reads their curriculum, U Hasselt aims to educate architects with a tripartite ability to design, research and manage. ^{vi} The *Masterproef* takes one year and consists of a *masterproject* and a *masterthesis*. The red thread in Hasselt is *sustainability* in a constantly changing landscape, on both urban and building scales. Especially the call to stop the fragmentation process caused by the so-called *nevelstad* (urban sprawl) leaving Flanders with virtually no more open landscapes was answered by three entries, of which I want to mention *RE3 to algae* by **Giel Theuwis**. His projects proposes to transform the acreage of Ford Genk into an intensive production landscape in the form of a vertically organized algae farm and express a *realistic utopia*, using an iconographic, monumental architectural language. **Rosalie Gielis** addresses the topic of environmental awareness by her

transition from oil dependency to local resilience, from traditional refinery to greenhouses, resulting in an aesthetic balance between wishes and needs of our changing society. The theme of sustainability is further examined by **Saskia Horions**. Her project *Recycle to Retail* combines the known concept of a shopping mall with a recycling company and claims to make the public aware of the need to halt our throwaway society. The question arises if one needs such a complex act of construction, imposed into the rural landscape in order to address this awareness. More fundamentally spoken: can we solve the problems raised by our throwaway society with architecture?

II. Université de Liège, Faculté d'Architecture. Since 2010, Lambert Lombard and Saint-Luc Wallonie (Liège) higher education institutes have united themselves in the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Liège. Open to numerous disciplines, this Faculty is fully inscribed in this university's policy of *transversality*, offering a good general education and developing the abilities to understand ever more diversified specific domains, and is *profession orientated*: offering access to the diverse jobs in the domain of architecture. ^{vii} The themes of ULg's three-months-thesis projects vary from mediation between architecture and public space between Place St. Lambert and Place du Marché in Liège by **Maud André** and **Nathan Quenon**, rurality and revitalization of the village of Xhoffrait by means of school buildings by **Justine Bande** and **Marie Collard**, and the concept of urban porosity by **Quentin Colas & Adeline Stals** in an urban (revitalization) context, addressing the highly relevant task that awaits the architectural profession: how to deal with the institutional scale monsters of the 1950's and '60's, here exemplified by doubling the section of the structure that was designed by Joseph Moutschen in 1931 in Liège Outre Meuse, as a reconversion into a Paramedical School. To conclude, urban transformation of former industrial sites by **Morgan Delvaux**, reworking Cheratte-Bas' mining past and **Charline Gautot**, reflecting on the coal-and-steel past of Sclessin by means of – again – a school building – elaborate the relation between man and environment by the act of building. Close reading of the (historical) context dominates these entries, posing their respective design themes by sometimes considerate, at other times questionable building volumes.

III. Hogeschool Zuyd, Maastricht Master of Architecture +. MAA+ claims to have adjusted the educational profile according to the changing role of the architect in society in the past decade. “*The architect of the future creates his/her own demand, writes his/her own assignment. This requires specific skills to observe and analyse*”, so their website: education as *research by design*. ^{viii}

A contextual and trans-disciplinary approach is of the essence and this requires *cultivated creativity*. The *concurrency*-based educational model embraces working in practice, an essential part of the curriculum. Using *poiësis – techné – praxis* as a method of creation, **Addo Frints** recalls Vitruvius (*utilitas – firmitas – venustas*), to explain what drives him as a creator. ^{ix} Is the premise of this educational model a realistic one in this day and age of ongoing economically bad weather conditions? *Supposing* that **Sarah Aussems** and **Addo Frints** have been able to work in architectural practice during their studies in Maastricht (to a maximum of two years on their thesis project), the quests they pose relate both to (re)searching ways to overcome distance to society, be it either by the case of an imprisoned mother and child (explorations of cloister and prison typologies by Sarah Aussems) in the Hasselt region, or – for quite another reading of ‘imprisonment’ – releasing works of art of the largest Dutch pension fund to a wider audience (Addo Frints), based on the fact that we – as citizens paying our pension duties – have the right to have access to the pension fund's art collection, acquired with our very pension payments, in a true (architectural) – in

ground – setting. In fact, both entries raise the same question: what is a *secure* world? Alas the architectural detailing was either not exposed (Sarah Aussems) or at least set apart from the spatial articulation of the designed *promenade architecturale* (Addo Frints).

IV. Fachhochschule Aachen, Fachbereich Architektur. FH Aachen aims for graduates in architecture who are capable of acting as *generalists* in the widest span of the profession, and are able to react on all sorts of requests from society, while defining their very own specialized requirements. ^X FH Aachen, similar to the aforementioned schools, claims to be a *practical* course at first hand. By these projects that take three months, with assignments given and no research attached, the entries by **Corinna Deister**, **Anna Killert** and **Marc Neyken** share their focus on designing well-organized and crafted buildings straight away, remaining the architect's core business. Nothing more, nothing less, that's what you get: well organized and well-crafted buildings. By her entry *Velotel - sustainable bicycle hotel*, **Corinna Deister** demonstrates her strong commitment to re- use of material and sustainability and her gesture to translate three distinctive landscape types – as found at one site – into three distinctive architectures of lawn, rock and wood pavilions. **Anna Killert** masters the public program of her Cultural Campus Spandau by reintroducing the Berlin perimeter block and uniting three mass components by an urban roof and a courtyard. **Marc Neyken** shows his fascination for handcrafted construction in brick, wood and concrete and his wish to create a 'silent' architecture for his *sports and meeting centre*.

V. Rheinisch-Westfälisch Technische Hochschule Aachen, Fakultät für Architektur. Traditionally, the architectural education of RWTH Aachen operates on the crossroads of aesthetics and technology. According to RWTH, *the architect is a socially and culturally responsive generalist*. ^{XI} Since RWTH is one of the oldest (and largest) universities in Germany, the largest collection of EAP-entries therefore stems from this origin. The RWTH thesis project takes three months to completion. Not all focussing on comparable topics, the harvest diverges from a poetic, coherent, theoretical iconographic micro-cosmos (*Prague. Hart and Brain* by **Michael Dolinski**, including a highly rewarding research book on the city of Prague), over the spatial exploration of the *fire / foyer / focus / centre* of the concrete cubical *Refugium Senne* by **Maximilian Knapp**, and a rationalist design attitude (*Congress Hotel Zürich* by **Katharina Kroth** and *Documenta Archiv Kassel* by **Philipp Maaß**), to an even more iconographic – and at the same time airy – architecture, very much inspired by – and in contrast to – the vast and overwhelming scale of the landscape of the Geirangerfjord in Norway (*Docking with Nature* by **Hans-Christoph Schultz**) on one end of the spectrum.

The aforementioned *architect as a socially and culturally responsive generalist* is in charge in *Forest kindergarten* by **Eva Fürstenwerth**, a well-crafted design proposal by the way it has been presented by (hand)drawing techniques and models. Prefabrication, do-it-yourself, and interactivity between the architect on the one hand, and the parents and their children on the other are at stake here. From there, the spectrum reaches out to rather 'colonial' global housing strategies (*Appolo - developpment collectif, Kananga (D.R. Congo)* by **Martin Schnitzler & Steffen Stupp** and *The Nile Project, Aswan (Égypt)*, being much more of a research project than an architectural proposal by **Alia Mortada**, which questions the effect of an infrastructural operation on a community.

Another project that – to me – stands out for its societal relevance and questions the role of the architect is *The Growing House* by **Golshan Majlessi**, based on the concept of modular building and in this respect referring to *Das wachsende Haus (The Growing House)* from 1931 by Martin Wagner: a return to nature

through economical housing, citing expansion as the growth of families. However, since growth as an increase in family numbers is insufficient for the present time, the project aims to address the ever-arising need for affordable living space. The perception of living as a process and the variability of living space suiting the user was the motivation to research the potential of forms of urban expansion in current housing. The concept is based on a co-operatively administrated building, in which members are allowed to lease a space within a large complex, a framework reacting to existing boundaries, in this case a *Baulücke* in Cologne.

5. Tracing tendencies. Being aware of the region-specific backgrounds that all of you carried along the way to EAP 2014, most projects find their expression from the characteristics of the site. Furthermore, I have noticed striking sustainability concepts in Hasselt, a close reading of the context in Liège with questionable outcomes in some of the presented projects, and cultivated creativity – yet not showing the craft as clear as one would expect according to the curriculum – in Maastricht. In Aachen, well-educated generalists with specialized requirements showed the craft of building in a more elaborate way (FH), and socially and culturally responsive generalists gave rise to thorough discussions in the jury (RWTH). The role of the architect in this time of societal transition seeks for a new definition, existing building stock and former industrial ground need revitalization, yet poetry and building craft, ‘classic’ features of architecture should be kept up at the same time, as a number of your entries have underlined.

You have taken your positions in your schools. Now’s the time to elaborate on them, look beyond borders, and manifest yourselves as a new generation of *spatial and societal creatives* by cross- fertilisation, elaborating on the strong points of your exhibited planning proposals, unique in each different context, and ranging from the scale of a well-crafted (small) building to a vision on the ever- arising need for affordable living space. This region is in need for both *generalist* and *specialist strategic entrepreneurs* with an architects’ *soul*. So, here you are!

6. Coda. Recalling the topics of music and poetry that started my speech, paying tribute to angel *Daniel* (Bruno Ganz), and hoping that your generation of *young creative entrepreneurs* in architecture and beyond will succeed in developing this region, I would like to conclude with a poem by Giorgos Seferis in the German translation (1996) by Christian Enzensberger:

Λίγο ἄκόμα / Nur ein Weniges noch ^{xii}

Nur ein Weniges noch
und wir werden die Mandeln blühen sehen
den Marmor in der Sonne leuchten
und das Meer sich wiegen

nur ein Weniges noch,
um ein Weniges laßt uns höher hinauf.

A little farther
we will see the almond trees blossoming the marble
gleaming in the sun
the sea breaking into waves

a little farther
let us rise a little higher.

Giorgos Seferis (1900-1971)

Thank you for your kind attention.

Analist: Paul Kuitenbrouwer,

Aachen, 15th November 2014

FOOTERS

- i From *Lied vom Kindsein of Desire*) by Wim Wenders, 1987
- ii NEWTROPOLIS. Dossier ZL_6, in: Zuiderlucht 11, November 2014
- iii <http://www.schunck.nl>
- iv Thijs Asselbergs en Alijd van Doorn, 2014. More info: _____
- v From the liner notes by Thomas Steinfeld to the music recording by Jan Garbarek and The Hilliard Ensemble: "Officium Novum", ECM New Series 2125
- vi <http://www.uhasselt.be/UH/Architectuur/Architectuur-Architectuur/Architectuur-Architectuur-Troeven.html>
- vii https://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_474607/en/architecture
- viii <http://maastricht.eu>
- ix <http://maastricht.eu/register/addo-frints/>
- x <http://www.fh-aachen.de/en/topnavi/downloads/bewerbungsunterlagen/studiengangbroschueren/>
- xi <http://arch.rwth-aachen.de/cms/Architektur/Studium/Studiengaenge/~ngc/M-Sc-Architektur/>
- xii *Nur ein Weniges noch*
New Series 1723