

TERRA RECOGNITA

RESEARCH DOCUMENT

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SPATIAL DESIGN x SOCIAL PRACTICE x POWERPLAY

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WILLEM DE KOONING ACADAMIE, ROTTERDAM.

LETTER TO THE READER

Date: 31.05.21

Dear Reader,

To ease you into reading this research paper, I invite you to feel, remember, and consider a few things with me before diving in.

I ask you to remember the last time you felt like you could engage your body to explore a space. To remember the last time you moved through a space in which you had to figure out on your own, making sense of it bit by bit, a spatial unknown. The delight of discovering new nooks and crannies in a space where serendipity and spontaneity are almost guaranteed. I want you to ask yourself, how would you describe this feeling?

I found it difficult to find the exact words for this feeling for a while, but I think for myself I would call it a sense of playful curiosity, and that is the 'definition' I have used in the coming paper. Consider my proposal to discuss the positive impact playfully curious spaces like this can have not only to the individual body and mind, but to communities as a whole.

I would like you to think about neighbourhoods changing. How areas you know begin to morph and change over time. Sometimes these changes are gradual, but nonetheless it can be felt. I would like you to think about the people there, maybe you yourself have experienced it or have friends that have. This experience of change could range anywhere from slight inconvenience due to construction to being flat out evicted. Wherever you, or someone else you know lie on this scale, I would like you to take a moment to think about it, them, the situation, the experience.

I hope that you enjoy going on this journey of discovery with me,

Best,



Alicia Rottke Fitzpatrick

ABSTRACT

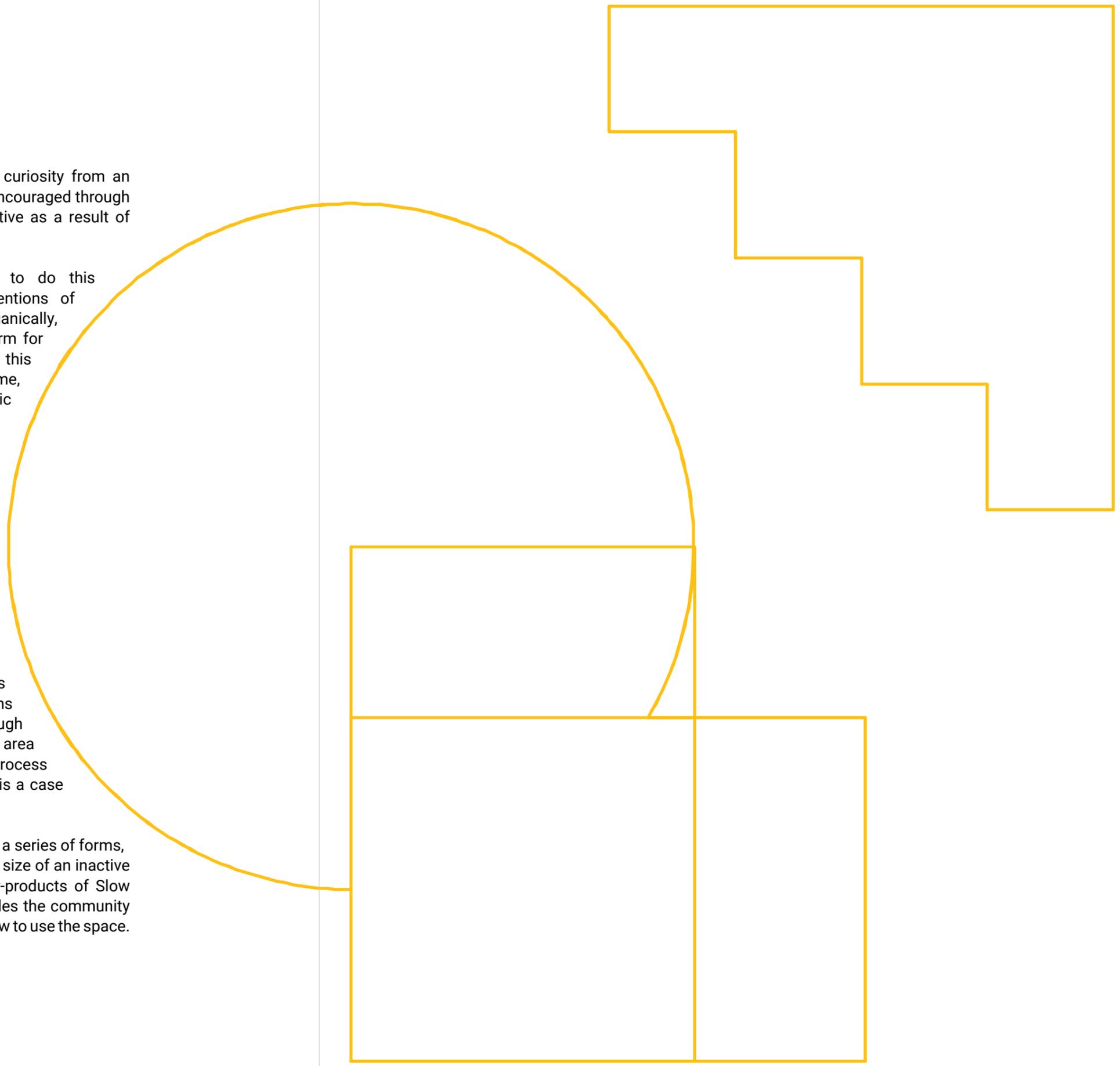
This research is an exploration into playful curiosity from an urban spatial perspective and how it can be encouraged through utilizing public space that has become inactive as a result of urban redevelopment.

'Slow Urbanism' is a method in which to do this redevelopment, and despite its good intentions of encouraging neighbourhoods to evolve organically, it has proven to be used as a decorative term for gentrification. One of the consequences of this method is that it evidently takes a long time, hence there is a surplus of this inactive public space.

The use of temporary structures in these inactive spaces, can encourage people to be in and make use of the space as they feel fit while their neighbourhood changes. Thus, this research asks, how can we activate unused public space, which is a result of urban development by spatial intervention while also enticing playful curiosity and thus activity?

Walking research inspired by Strollology led to the discovery of these inactive spaces along with a number of other observations which arose, in which I reflected upon through literary analysis. The ZoHo and Agniesebuurt area in Rotterdam is currently going through the process of this 'Slow Urbanism', and hence this area is a case study location.

Actively encouraging playful curiosity through a series of forms, that can be placed together depending on the size of an inactive public space not only utilises one of the by-products of Slow Urbanism in a playful manner, but also provides the community with a space in which each body can decide how to use the space.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can we activate unused public space, which is a result of urban redevelopment by spatial intervention while also enticing playful curiosity and thus activity?

To explore this main research question, I have decided to look at three topics; playful curiosity, walking and case study questions which are integrated throughout this paper.

Playful curiosity :

How can this feeling of playful curiosity be described, and thus be translated into a spatial design?
How can playful curiosity be activated by spatial intervention?
What can encouraging playful curiosity bring to a neighbourhood?

Walking :

How can walking prioritise the body and thus alter ones experience of the current urban environment?
How have these experiences affected the ability to engage in playful curiosity from a spatial perspective?

Case Study :

How can Slow Urbanism be looked at from a critical perspective?
How does the scale of Slow Urbanism ignore the scale of the body?
How can the activation of small areas of public space through spatial intervention result in a power shift from the large scale back to the body in terms of Slow Urbanism?

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01. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PERSONAL INTEREST

This research began with my love of playfully curious spaces. Spaces which you are invited to roam freely, touch, climb on, look through and discover new nooks and crannies. Spaces in which the user can decide how they want to use the space. Spaces that are fun, inviting and have a sense of adventure. Spaces that

bring out your inner child, encouraging you to use your body and mind. This sense of playful curiosity is not only beneficial to the individual, but I believe it can foster an environment in which people from various backgrounds, ages, and classes can come together and share this primal exciting trait.

1.2 SOCIO POLITICAL CONTEXT

This investigation began by using walking as a tool to understand the built environment around me. I came across a number of constraints to this sense of playful curiosity along with what initially appeared to be a random pattern of small areas of public space lying dormant. Upon closer examination these small areas of public space had become inactive, frequently due to construction blocking off a walkway or spaces between vacant buildings. I began to see a link between urban redevelopment and the emergence of these inactive places. It made me wonder what role these inactive spaces played in this redevelopment and how they may be overlooked during lengthy transition phases. As I came across more and more of these spaces, I began to see their potential, and how they could be used by communities for people to sit, meet and play.

straight broad streets. It's important to note that these design choices were made for a reason: our cities are growing in size, and there is a need to plan accordingly. But it makes me wonder, within this plan of big, can we make space for the small so that bodies can connect and interact with the space? To engage the body, this space requires a certain level of complexity, allowing people to discover with their hands, feet and eyes.

Continuing my walks through Rotterdam and considering the factors that hindered my own personal sense of playful curiosity, scale played a large role. Much of the city has been built in this enormous scale, with relatively flush facades and

This research has been put into context through a case study carried out in Agniesebuurt, which is a small neighbourhood in the north of Rotterdam. This area is home to the redevelopment of ZoHo or the Zomerhofkwartier. What is particularly intriguing about this redevelopment is that it is taking place through "Slow Urbanism" (zohorotterdam.nl), which can be seen as a decorative term for gentrification and, as its name suggests takes a long time. This slow redevelopment means that over time as the buildings change form, public space shrinks and grows with construction, there will regularly be a surplus of these inactive public spaces.

1.3 SHIFTING THE POSITION OF POWER

It made me think that this could be an opportunity to take advantage of this by-product of Slow Urbanism by temporarily taking control of these spaces while they lie inactive and using them to allow people to engage in playful curiosity by placing a structure that can temporarily accommodate a wide range of people for a wide range of purposes. By reactivating these spaces which are sandwiched between this larger inhuman plan, that is designated to prioritising the body, allowing people to use the space as they feel fit can create a shift in power. Handing back the power to the body, to the person to use the public space and

away from distant urban planners and municipalities. This can become a catalyst for rejoicing communities, particularly those which are suffering devastating consequences of this urban redevelopment. This research is related to PowerPlay because it examines some of the consequences of Slow Urbanism and seeks to find a way to move between the larger plan with the smaller scale, for the person, for the body and thus adding something for the community so they can reclaim space during the lengthened transition phase.

02. THE UNKNOWN

+ TERRA INCOGNITA



fig: 1 : REBECCA SOLNIT
source : NY TIMES

2.1 INITIAL TASTE OF THE UNKNOWN

While trying to figure out how to describe this deep feeling of playful curiosity, I came across the work of Rebecca Solnit (fig: 1), an American writer, historian, activist and feminist. In particular it was her book, "A Field Guide to Getting Lost" (2017), which is a collection intricate essays which are intellectually playful. In her very first essay she encapsulated exactly how I felt in the initial phases of this research. She stated, "Certainly, for artists of all stripes, the unknown, the idea or the form or the tale that has not yet arrived, is what must be found." (5). This description intrigued me to carry on with her work. As the book continues these essays weave in and out of personal experience, historic tales, moving between eclectic topics such as wildlife, death, loss, love and mapmaking. Her way of writing reminded me of that feeling of playful curiosity, the jumping from topic to topic but in this smooth, almost seamless manner.

It was not only her way of writing that helped me understand what playful curiosity is, but it was also her exploration into the unknown. The term 'Terra Incognita' is repeatedly brought up throughout the book and comes from historic maps during the age of exploration, when unconquered, 'undiscovered', unknown areas would be drawn out (fig: 2). She uses this term to describe a multitude of unknown aspects, but even more so the importance on having these unknown territories.

She expresses, "Never to get lost is not to live, not knowing how to get lost brings you to destruction and somewhere in the terra incognita in between lies a life of discovery" (14). She made me realise the body and the mind need to embrace the fact that there are unknowns in order to live a life of discovery beyond our own bubble.

In an interview with Jennie Rothenburg Girtz from TheAtlantic.com she said, "I think unknown territory is where the imagination gets stimulated." This idea of the unknown and terra incognita links to this feeling of playful curiosity as it allows spaces for spontaneity, serendipity and something new.



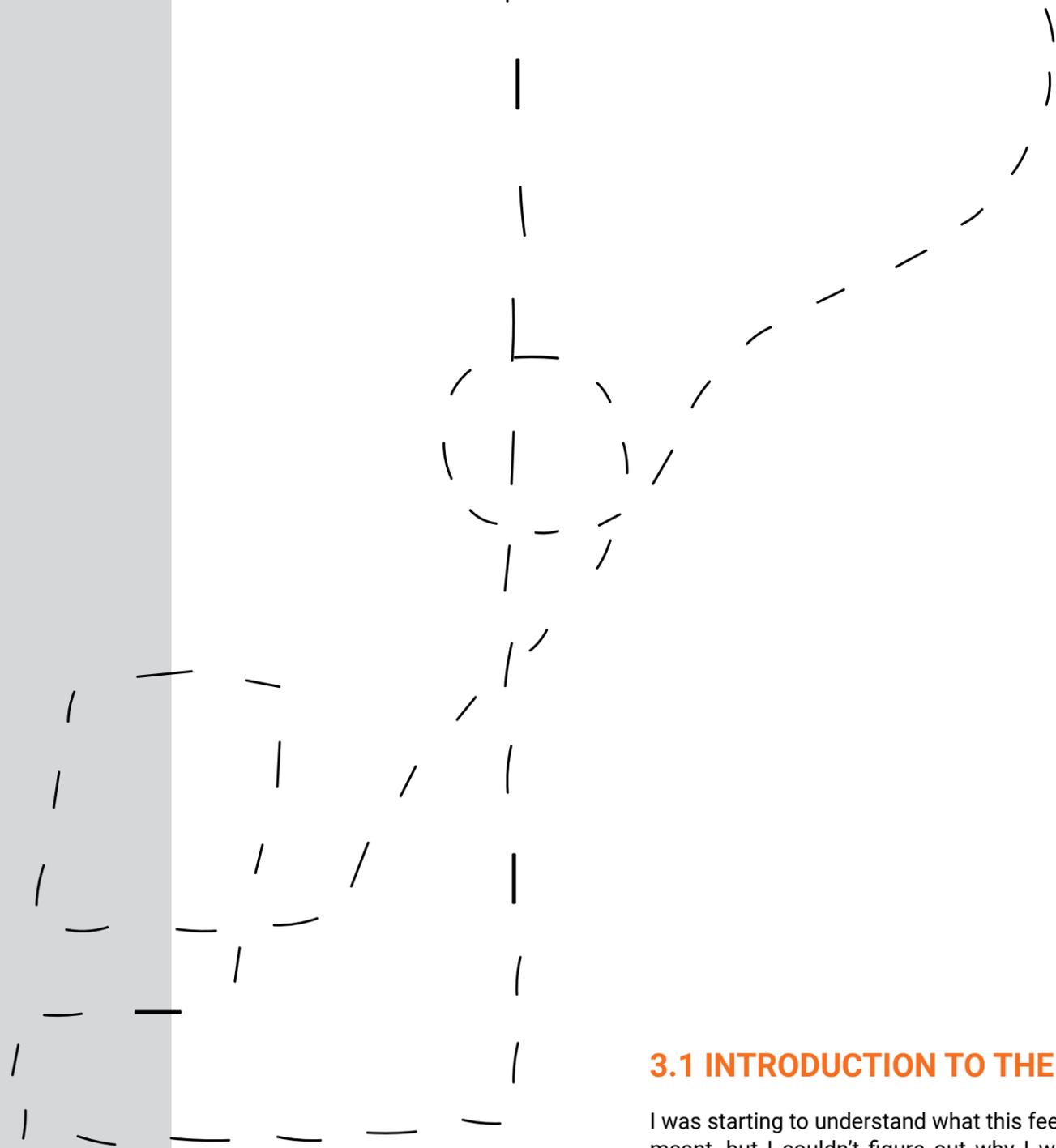
fig: 2 : MAP OF NORTH AMERICA 1566, TERRA INCOGNITA MARKED TOP RIGHT CORNER
source : LIBRARY ARCHIVES CANADA

2.2 CONTEXTUALISING THE TERRA INCOGNITA

Solnit encapsulated this feeling of drifting, moving, bouncing through the unknown for me and it became central to how I further approached this research. It also gave me ideas on how to translate this feeling into a spatial design, as I had seen her do it with words. When elements of the unknown are introduced to a space, people are more likely to use it in their own unique way. For example, not designing a space for a single purpose could allow people to make their own decisions, encouraging them to use their imagination. By not establishing a specific use an opportunity for serendipity arises, which can also lead to serendipitous meeting of different people. Perhaps this unknown space can support heterogeneous groups and can counter homogeneity. As a result, I envision a space as an eclectic mix of forms strung together in the same way that Solnit's writing is.

However, I was still in the early stages of this research process when I initially dove into Solnit's work. She inspired me to let go, and allow myself and my thoughts to drift, move, and get lost through both space and ideas.

03. WALKING



3.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOL

I was starting to understand what this feeling of playful curiosity meant, but I couldn't figure out why I wasn't experiencing this sense of playful curiosity in a more general urban setting.

I was inspired to use walking as a tool for myself to understand how our urban environment is built by the work of Lucius Burckhardt and his study of Strollology; the science of walking. Burckhardt was a sociologist, economist and theorist of architecture. In his book, "Why Is Landscape Beautiful?: The Science of Strollology" (2015) Burckhardt describes walking to be a tool "with which previously unseen parts of the environment can be made visible" (238). Walking around the city allowed me, like Burckhardt stated, to really see my everyday surroundings (284). Walking is a mode of transportation that is inherently peaceful. Walking, as opposed to cycling, taking the tram, or driving through a city, allows for more time to think, evaluate, and reflect due to the slower pace at which one moves when walking.

3.2 BEING OPEN TO THE UNKNOWN, WHILE WALKING

Keeping Solnit's idea of the unknown and Terra Incognita in mind, I began to wander. By acknowledging the presence of the unknown as Solnit expressed, the Terra Incognita became more visible to me (163). She inspired me to get lost, go beyond my normal routine to be able to investigate why this sense of playful curiosity was lacking in the general urban context.

However, I was looking for another tool to use to really open the Terra Incognita of our urban fabric to me. I came across practice of the Derive. The Derive is one of the basic practices of the Situationists. Guy Debord wrote about the Derive in the *Internationale Situationniste #2* (December 1958) describing it as a "technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances".

Similar to Strollology, it is an invitation to walk around the city, but it is distinctly different from an average stroll or journey, as to take part in the practice one is to be led by one's psyche. I found English author Will Self's, description of it to be very comprehensible. He says it is to allow yourself to "move through an environment, being drawn by inclination. What looks interesting, what leads you on." (7.20). The Derive is a state of mind, in which you allow yourself to be drawn by spatial attractors and use them to move around a city. For example, a colour of a doorway, the way the sunlight makes patterns, obscure reflections, the texture of something, the sound of people or an intriguing smell. These spatial attractors can be anything, all it must do is intrigue you, and invite you to find out more.

Participating in this practice took me to all corners of Rotterdam enabling me to discover new streets, routes, and areas of the city (fig: 3).

I was able to create a much larger mental image of what the city looked and felt like outside of my usual journey, spaces and neighbourhoods. This in turn, allowed me to notice aspects of the city that I had previously overlooked. I really liked the sensation of letting go and moving through space, discovering new things as I drifted towards them.

What I thoroughly enjoyed whilst participating in this practice was this feeling of being drawn to a space and the desire to figure out and understand what I had been drawn to. It usually began with a slight sense of confusion, followed by intrigue and then pleasure. This sequence of emotions not only allowed me to discover more of the city, but it also made me feel in touch with my playful curiosity. It got me thinking about how what I learned from the theory of the Derive, could this feeling be promoted in a particular object or form rather than only as a way to explore a city as a whole.



fig: 3 : COLLECTION OF IMAGES AND DRAWINGS I MADE DURING MY INITIAL WALKING RESEARCH

3.3 OUTCOMES OF WALKING

During this journey of conducting walking research, a few key observations stood out as both constraints to this playful curiosity and the general use of the urban space.

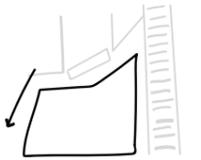
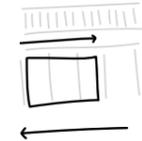
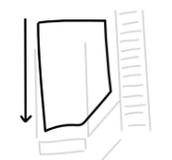
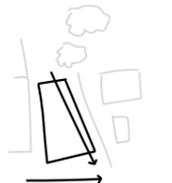
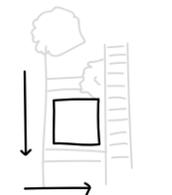
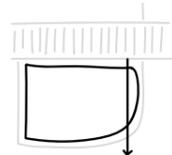
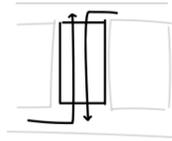


fig: 4 : EXAMPLES OF INACTIVE PUBLIC SPACE

INACTIVE SPACE

The first major observation which I made was the presence of inactive plots of public space. What I mean by inactive plots of public space are areas scattered throughout the city which I saw had potential places for people to sit, meet, eat or play in. They were bigger than just a place to pass through, but small enough to be considered potentially intimate. I saw them lie empty but could imagine endless combinations of activities that people could use these spaces for. Some examples of these inactive spaces include space between vacant buildings, colossal corners, construction blocking off pathways and unused car parking spaces (fig: 4).

I stumbled across a huge variety of these kinds of spaces, some more permanent as a result of awkward edges in larger urban plans and others clearly inactive temporarily because of urban redevelopment.

“Walkable City How Downtown Can Save America, One Step At a Time” (2013) by Jeff Speck was a tool which helped me reflect on what I was experiencing during my own walks. I associated my observation with his discussion of “missing teeth” and their negative effect on walkability in a city. Although the ‘missing teeth’ that Speck refers to, for example “vacant properties and parking lots” (154) are at a larger scale than the observations that I had made, I recognised a connection. I saw these inactive spaces as smaller missing teeth, rather than effecting the walkability of a city I saw them as spaces with potential for activity.

The pattern which I found most interesting was the inactive space that is a direct result of urban redevelopment: where either month-long roadworks create temporary pedestrian zones, or pieces of public space that happen to be located between vacant buildings which are scheduled for demolition and incomplete construction which leads to temporary

cul de sacs. Even the temporary storage of construction material lead to pockets of inactive space. I could see as the urban fabric begins to morph, these inactive spaces will appear and disappear between the changes. How can residents in these areas feel that their public space is useable as it continues to change? Is it possible to tenderly activate these spaces and contribute to the community?

Speck also discusses the steps in creating a more walkable city. Step 7: Shape the Spaces explores how the sense of enclosure can make people feel more comfortable. He also taps into the idea that we need to think smaller and that we are capable of including medium to small scale design details that engage people as they pass by (171). While reading his work, I could not help but see a correlation between his advice on walkability and missing teeth and my own thoughts on potentiality and these smaller inactive spaces. His words further convinced me that temporarily utilising these spaces by shaping them, while also activating them may be a viable option into adding space for playful curiosity, by allowing people to decide how the space should be used while the area around them changes.

SCALE

The second major observation that I made was to do with scale. As I walked and drifted through the city, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was merely this tiny entity moving through a sea of concrete blocks. Long broad streets, polished towers, coordinated mega junctions (fig: 6). I could feel that so much was happening around me, but none the less I was unable to interact with it. So much of the city just seemed too big, untouchable (fig: 5).

Of course, I recognise the need for the large scale to a certain extent, in a world where urban populations are rapidly increasing. Wider streets for more people, taller towers for more people and even more mega coordinated junctions for more people. They need to be designed like this to accommodate the demand. But, within this large scale I couldn't help but notice that the body had not been prioritised. I often feel that in these larger comprehensive plans and policies there is a general lack of human consideration. People, the body, become fragments of data, numbers on graphs and pie charts. In some ways, I understand this; turning the body into data allows us to gather the information we need to move forward; however, it irritates me that this lack of human consideration continues all the way to the end of an urban or architectural design to the point when it is completed it is alienating.

Jan Gehl, a Danish architect, is a strong advocate of prioritizing the body and the human scale in urban design. In a talk with TEDxKEA, Gehl discusses how this inhuman scale began when the Modernists took over urban planning in the 1960s (5.20). This shift is illustrated by Gehl, as a dismissal of the size of the body, the speed with which we move, and the distance that we can see. Cities were being built from the top down, making them more appealing from an airplane than from eye level. (9.35). He puts it nicely as a "city for dinosaurs" (11.26).

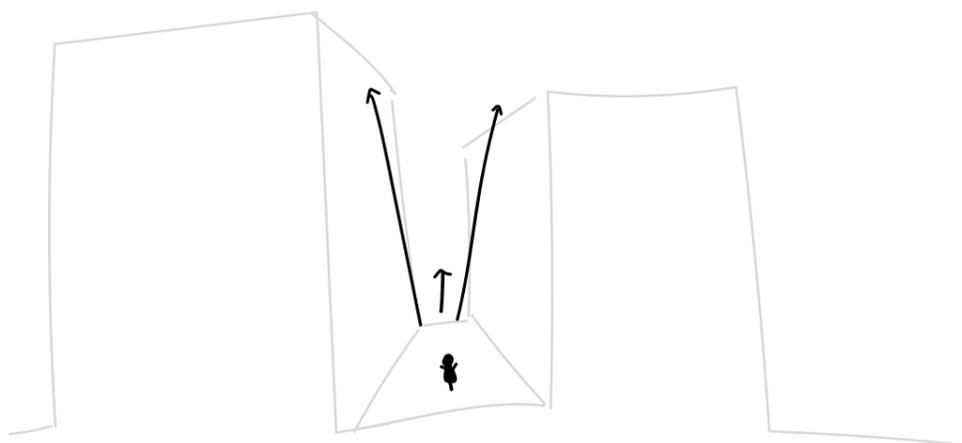


fig: 5 : SKETCH OF SCALE FEELING

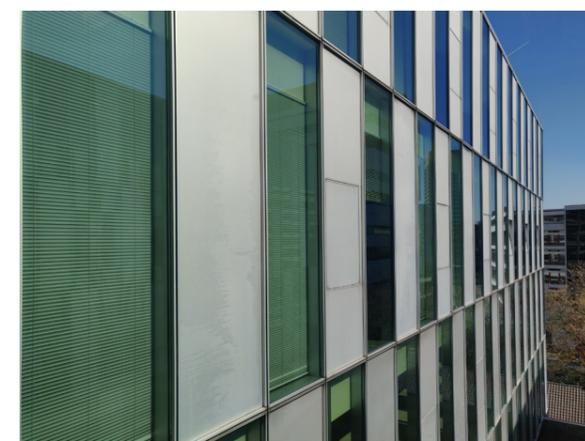
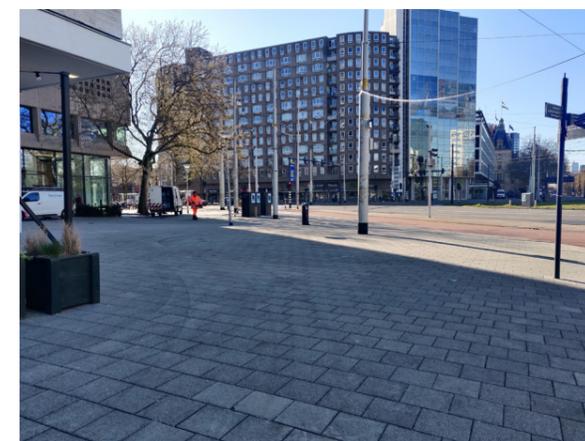
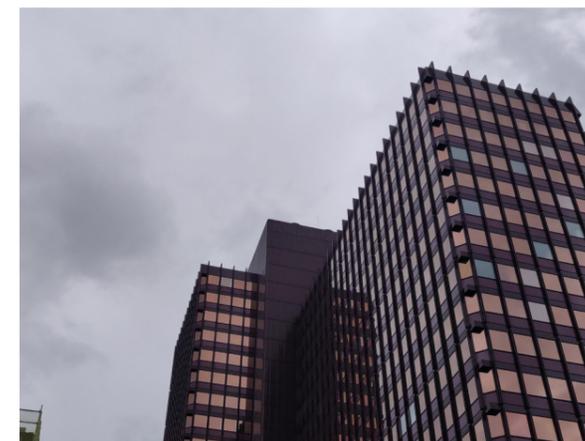
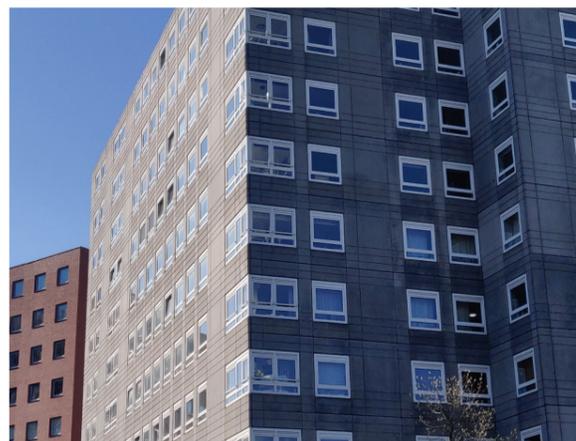


fig: 6 : SCALE OBSERVATIONS; FLAT, BROAD, MONOTONOUS

Gehl's book "Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space" (2011) dives deeper into elements that can contribute to the body's experience of public space. First published in the 1970's this book breaks down elements needed to create pleasant space for bodies in the city.

His work in general made me realise the strong link between the human scale, the body and this sense of playful curiosity. Our bodies need to be able to interact with the space around us, in order for this feeling to be activated. I was also inspired by his analysis of 'good public space', which he states has plenty of room for 'optional activities' which are defined by having the ability to participate if one has time or wishes to (fig: 7). He goes on to state "In a good environment, a completely different, broad spectrum of human activities is possible." (11).

	Quality of the physical environment	
	Poor	Good
Necessary activities	●	●
Optional activities	●	●
"Resultant" activities (Social activities)	●	●

Graphic representation of the relationship between the quality of outdoor spaces and the rate of occurrence of outdoor activities.

When the quality of outdoor areas is good, optional activities occur with increasing frequency. Furthermore, as levels of optional activity rise, the number of social activities usually increases substantially.

fig: 7 : QUALITY OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT
source : LIFE BETWEEN BUILDINGS PG. 11

NEED FOR COMPLEXITY

Walking through these stretches of long board streets with relatively flush facades, I noticed that large areas of the city were bland and monotonous with little for me and my body to interact with. It wasn't only scale that hindered the feeling of playful curiosity, it was also the need for complexity. The need for variety, surprise and spontaneity.

Jane Jacobs, an American author from the 1960's described a similar awareness to this grim monotony, dubbing it the "great blight of dullness" (41). In her case she was opposing a highway that would cut through New York City, breaking up the vibrant street life of Manhattan, but this quote still sticks with me. The situation in Rotterdam is of course different, but in some aspects Jacobs' description resonated with me while walking through Rotterdam.

This need for smaller scale complexities designed for the bodies of the city, is not only something I believe is required. Colin Ellard, a neuroscientist who explores the intersection between architecture, the built environment and psychology dives into this topic in his book "Places of the Heart: The Psychogeography of Everyday Life". Particularly in Chapter 4: Boring Places, Ellard explains how bland monotonous environments can have a negative impact on our health. He does this by both conducting his own experiments, as well as referring to the work of Daniel Berlyne, a British psychologist who researched "Curiosity and Exploration" (1966).

In his own experiment, he measured heart rate, skin conductor, a method used to measure someone's level of arousal as well as analysing saliva for cortisol levels of his participants as they moved through a variety of urban contrasts. This study concluded that at the mega block Whole Foods in New York City, heart rate and cortisol levels spiked, indicating stress, whereas on a lively street downtown with many small things happening people were relaxed and happy. According to this paper, chronically high cortisol levels can be associated with stroke, heart disease, and diabetes (104). In Berlyn's study 'Curiosity and Exploration', which he initially conducted with rats, then extended to people, indicated that more complex environments were preferred. He was referring to environments that were dynamic and varied. For example a. irregular arrangement b. amount of material c. heterogeneity of elements d. irregularity of shape e. incongruity f. incongruous juxtaposition (fig: 8 + 9).

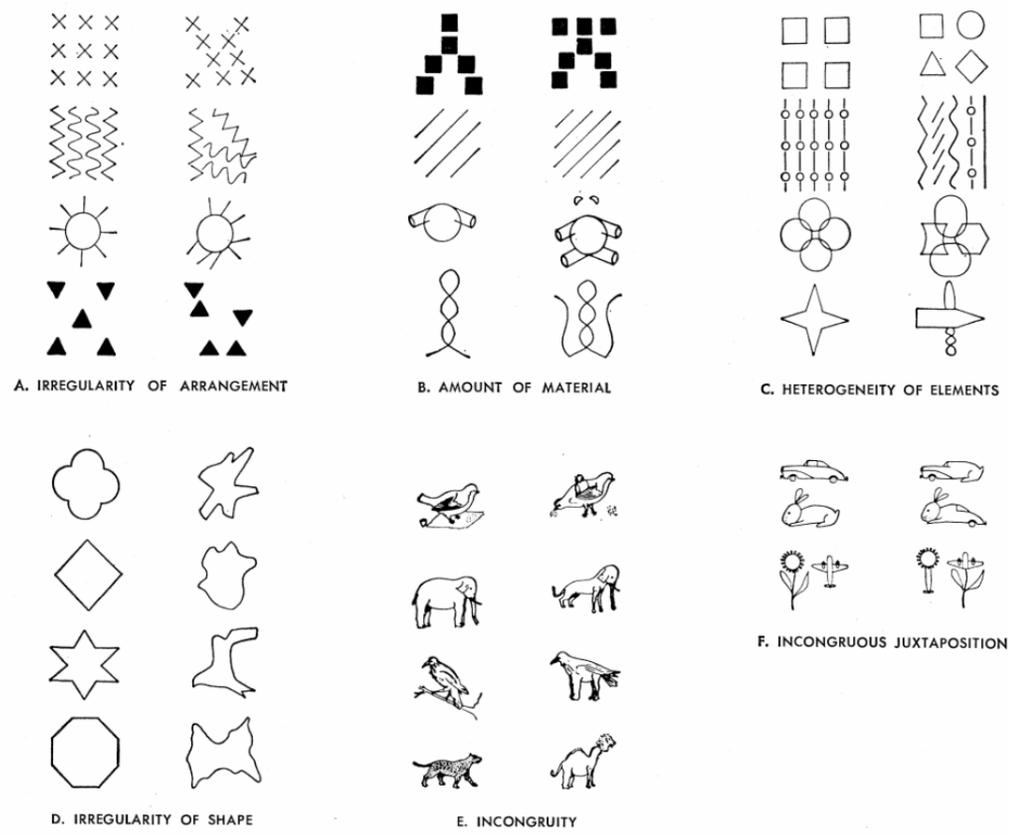


fig: 8 : EXAMPLES OF ADDING COMPLEXITY, BERYLENE
source : CURIOSITY AND EXPLORATION, PG 27

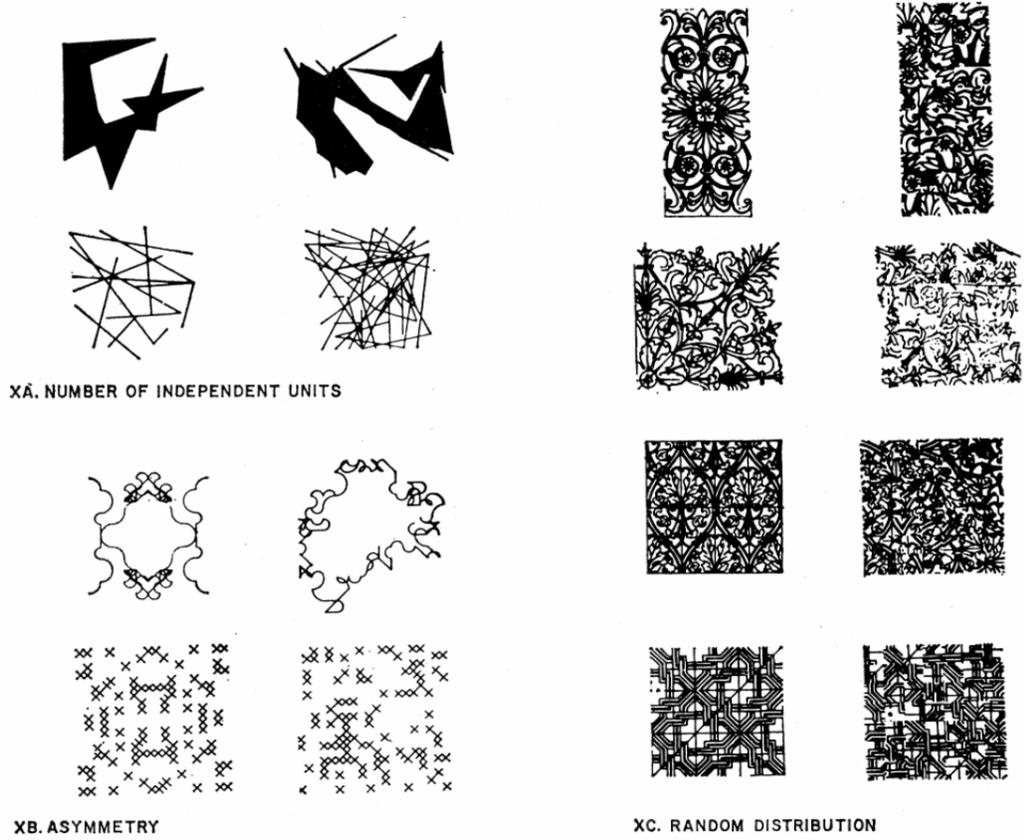


fig: 9 : EXAMPLES OF ADDING COMPLEXITY, BERYLENE
source : CURIOSITY AND EXPLORATION, PG 28

Ellard writes, "This finding alone lends some neuroscientific weight to the argument that designers of the built environment have reason to attend to factors that might contribute to boredom and that the influence of environmental complexity, as demonstrated decades ago in Berlyne's pioneering experiments with rats and people, might actually affect the organisation and function of our brains. It might seem extreme to suggest that a brief encounter with a boring building might engender serious hazards to one's health, but what about the cumulative effects of immersion, day after day, in the same oppressively dull surroundings?" (105).

This feeling that I had, the inability to touch, move, participate within certain spaces is not just a personal preference. Ellard closes the chapter by describing how "We seek out such settings with our eyes, our bodies, our hands, and our feet, and in turn, the design and appearance of those settings, by affecting our bodies, tap directly into ancient circuits meant to produce feelings and response and emotions that are adaptive" (111). Being able to engage with a space with our eyes, bodies, hands and feet makes a space less alienating. It creates a notion that your body is meant to be in this space.

3.4 REFLECTION ON OUTCOMES

Using walking as a research method was not only extremely enjoyable in activating my body but also fruitful. To allow this feeling of playful curiosity to be activated I learned that prioritising the body via scale within urban design is extremely important, along with a need for complexity. Discovering these areas of inactive space have allowed me to understand where there can be an opportunity to promote this sense of playful curiosity. The fact that so many of these inactive spaces were a result of urban redevelopment made me consider the effect they might have on the body who is experiencing this change.

04. CASE STUDY

4.1 WHY DO A CASE STUDY

Although I was beginning to see how and where playful curiosity could be added to an urban context, I felt like I needed to zoom in to truly understand these inactive spaces I had encountered. Since the most interesting form of inactive space I saw was because of urban redevelopment between vacancies, construction and change I have decided to do a case study on the Agniesebuurt area in Rotterdam (fig: 10).

Agniesebuurt is the smallest neighbourhood in Rotterdam Noord, with only 4,100 inhabitants (rotterdam.nl). This area has a relatively low average income, crime has been an issue. Preventative Searches (Preventief Fouilleren) are permitted in a bid to combat some of the crime. This area is diverse because it contains a mix of nationalities and has a large number of schools, signifying that a wide range of people spend time here.

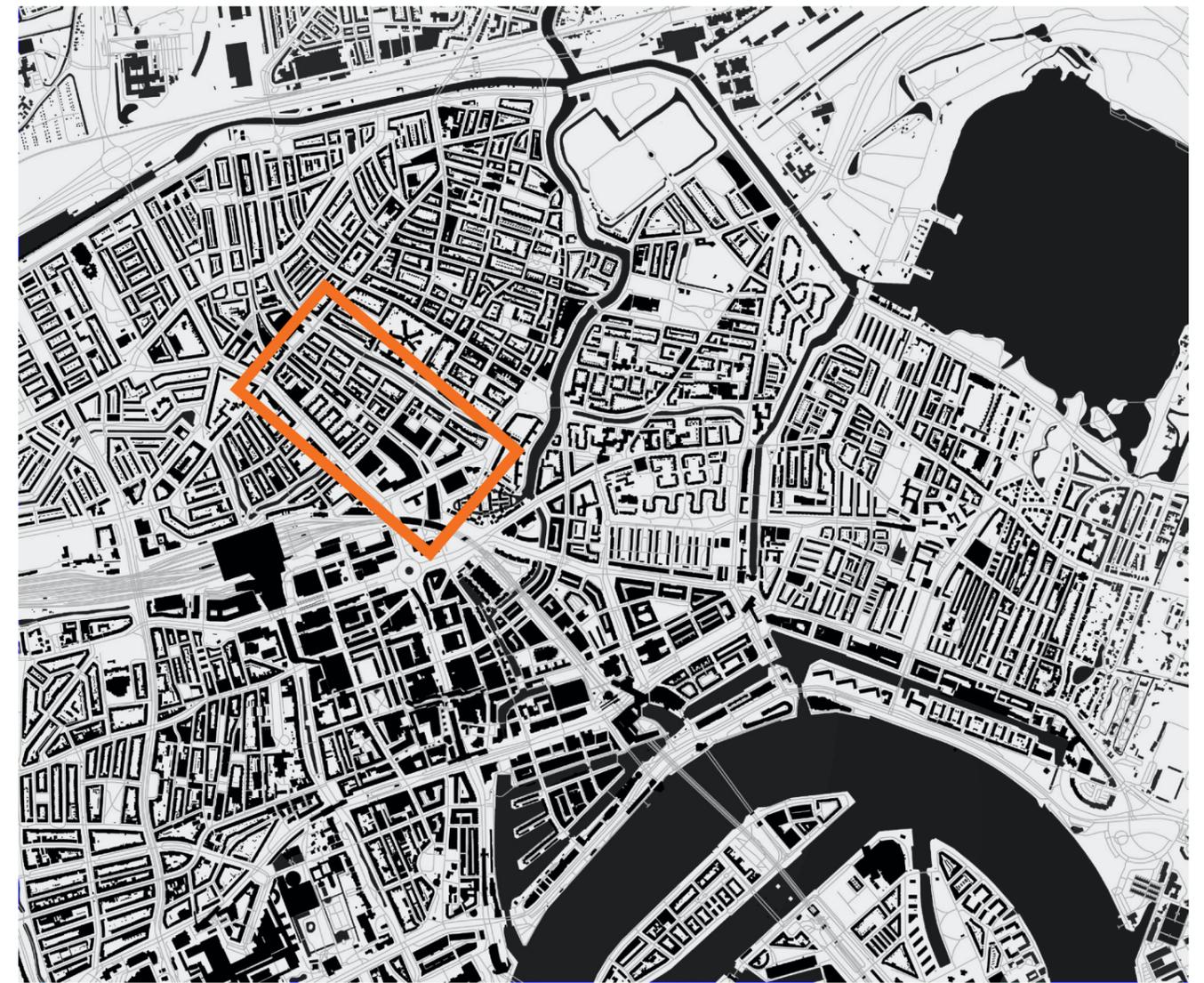


fig: 10 : AGNEISIEBUURT, ROTTERDAM
source : OPEN MAPS

I feel like I have a small connection to the neighbourhood, as my studio is located in Benthemstraat (fig: 11 + 13). The building where I work is being renovated into what seems like small flashy apartments called 'The New Benthem', which based on the published rendered images, bound to be expensive (fig: 12 + 14). We are yet to find out when the construction will begin, but we presume that it will be later this year. There has been little to no communication between the renters of the building, the

anti-squatting (anti kraak) company occupying the building and the developers. Along with other renters in the building I feel like I am in a state of limbo. We are certain that an end is near but with no definitive answers. I am aware that this is what happens with anti-squatted buildings, but this guessing and waiting game of imminent change is harder to deal with than I thought.

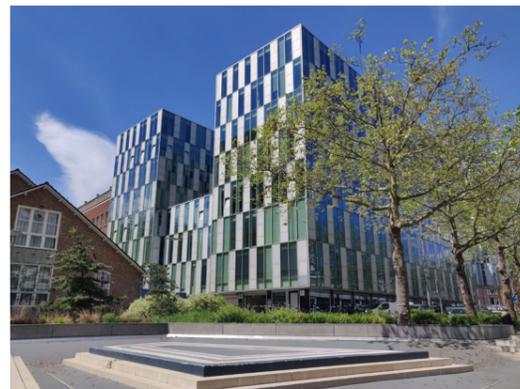


fig: 11 : THE BUILDING WITH MY STUDIO SOON TO BE 'NEW BENTHEM'



fig: 12 : FLOOR PLAN FOR THE 'NEW BENTHEM', CURRENT STUDIO MARKED
source : WOMO ARCHITECTS

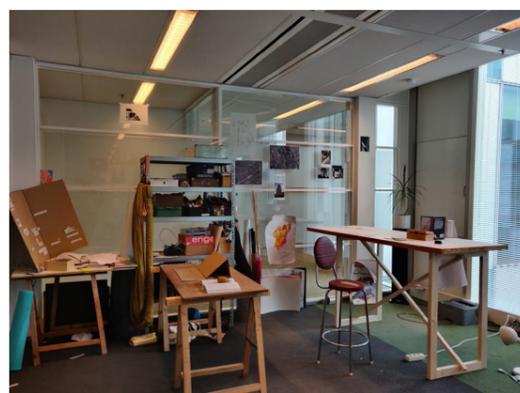


fig: 13 : MY CURRENT STUDIO AT THE BENTHEMSTRAAT



fig: 14 : RENDER OF POSSIBLE INTERIOR OF THE 'NEW BENTHEM'
source : WOMO ARCHITECTS

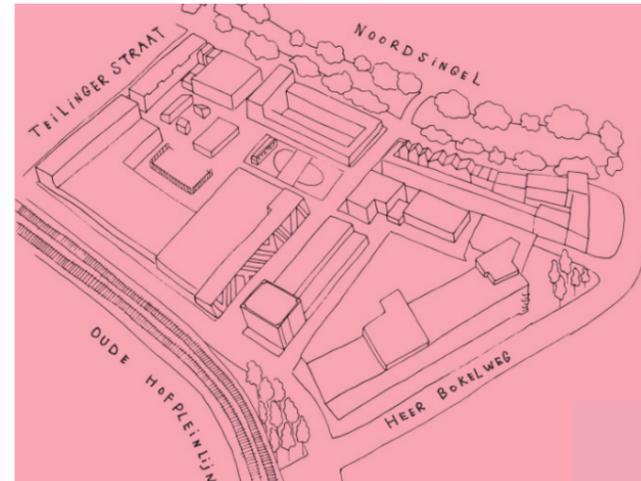


fig: 15 : FUTURE PLANS FOR THE ZOHO AREA
source : ECHO URBAN DESIGN + ZOHO.NL



Agniesebuurt is also where the major redevelopment of ZoHo (Zomerhofkwartier) is taking place. This is a small section within the area which was previously an industrial estate from the 1950's and is currently being rebranded into the Maakkwartier (Maker's quarter) (fig: 15).

4.2 WHAT IS THIS AREA GOING THROUGH?

This area is particularly interesting as it is currently going through redevelopment labelled as 'Slow Urbanism', from a municipality and developer's perspective. In 2013 it was announced that the ZoHo district would go through a ten-year period of redevelopment (zohorotterdam.nl). Given that it is currently 2021, and hence 2023 is only two years away, I am going to make an educated guess that the 'completion' will take longer than anticipated.

The premise of 'Slow Urbanism' has good intentions. According to slow-urbanism.org it is a "plea for contextual planning". The idea behind it is to allow neighbourhoods to evolve organically, so that changes can be adapted and be properly put in context. Allowing neighbourhoods to evolve naturally, rather than mass demolition and mass construction, can be extremely beneficial, as it allows time to reflect on changes and adapt accordingly. On paper, this method of urban redevelopment is much more gentle than mass demolition and construction, and it allows developers to collaborate with communities to decide on changes.

While speaking to Rotterdam based artist Eva Garibaldi (fig: 16), who has done extensive research into this neighbourhood for her own work, I learned that what is put down on paper does not always translate to practice. She had spoken to residents in the area and discovered that there is a huge disconnect between the residents and the developers, and that some of the developers had made it appear as if they had worked with and spoken to the community when in fact they had not. The community, she spoke to seemed not even aware that there was a line of communication between the two parties, let alone that it had been used in an effort to make collaborative changes to the area.



fig: 16 : INTERVIEW WITH EVA GARIBALDI AND MYSELF

During this redevelopment process people have already been pushed out of their homes, often social housing, in order to make room for new buildings. Within the masterplan for ZoHo there has been a promise to create a mix income housing. When looking at the Almondestraat, a street in which 53 social housing homes were evicted due to foundation issues, the housing corporation Havenstader who owns the buildings on the street gave temporary control of the street to Stadt in De Maak, who in turn transformed the street into a cultural hub in Rotterdam.

This cultural hub is Pension Almonde. It was a meeting place, temporary home, home to community initiatives filled with artists, migrants, Rotterdammers and anyone with a free spirit. The initiatives set up here were great for the community, and it was a nice experiment within the city. While speaking at a stream with the Independent School of the City, Piet Vollaard, who works for Stad in De Maak describes the Pension Almonde as a "boutique hotel with hostel prices" (2:27:51). As of writing this (26/04/21), the Pension Almonde have also been evicted indicating the demolition time is nearing.

However, my fear with this heightened attention and rejuvenating wave of added culture to a neighbourhood, does this simply drive up the value of land? When Havenstader are back in control, will this history of arts and culture be an excuse to implement more expensive homes into the area? The intentions and work of the Pension Almonde seem great to me, however I can not help but feel that the good work that they do will later be exploited by the corporation that owns the area.

It makes me wonder if this kind of 'Slow Urbanism' is a decorative term for gentrification. Although it may be less painful as the process is more gradual, it is none the less, still gentrification. This research paper does not intend to focus solely on the issue of gentrification itself, rather the spatial consequences of Slow Urbanism.



fig. 17 : THE EFFECT OF CONSTRUCTION IN THE AGNESEBUURT. EVICTED HOME + PORTALOO (DIXI)

4.4 SLOW URBANISM AND ACTIVATING SPACES

This process of Slow Urbanism means that gradually, bit by bit, the area will morph. Buildings will be demolished, and new structures will be erected within the ZoHo district. In the wider area they are also renewing the sewer system, developing the Hofbogen, an unused railway line into a roof park and revamping many streets (aanpak agnesebuurt.nl). With all of these changes occurring incrementally, the area is bound to become saturated with construction, path restrictions, and changes to the size of available public space (fig: 18). Taking into account that the aim of this process is to be gradual, and the fact that it is always slower than anticipated. These areas on inactive space can remain dormant for a long time. I spoke to Angelo Ciccaglione, a Rotterdam based designer who works with the Pension Almonde (fig: 19). I learned that the demolition of the Almondestraat had been postponed numerous times. One demolition date was in November, as of the end of May 2021, although evicted the street is still standing.

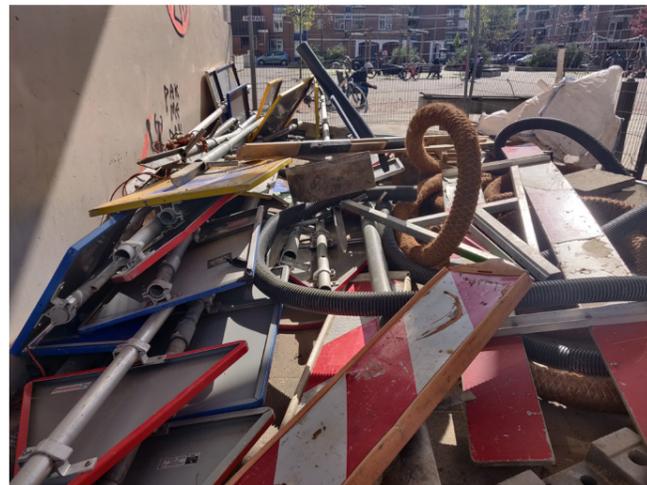


fig: 18 : THE EFFECT OF CONSTRUCTION IN THE AGNESEBUURT



fig: 19 : INTERVIEW WITH ANGELO CICCAGLIONE AND MYSELF

This further made me think, that while people are in this process of losing their homes, losing their neighbourhood, as they are a part of the lengthened but still painful period of transition, can we not utilize this inevitable by-product of this slow-paced change and allow the community to be in these spaces, and use them as they want? To allow this activation to be open, public and in the hands of the user? To create a space in not only artists can use, but also the elderly of the community, and the youths, and the new families. By shaping the space by spatial intervention as described by Speck, this can instigate the activation of these spaces.

Spatial structures can act as a catalyst for activity by giving people a sensory cue (fig: 20). For example, temporary spatial structures that do not have one determined function can aid people into realising that they can reclaim the space as it lies dormant. The goal here is to try to offset some of the homogeneity that gentrification brings by shaping a space for heterogeneous groups and activities.

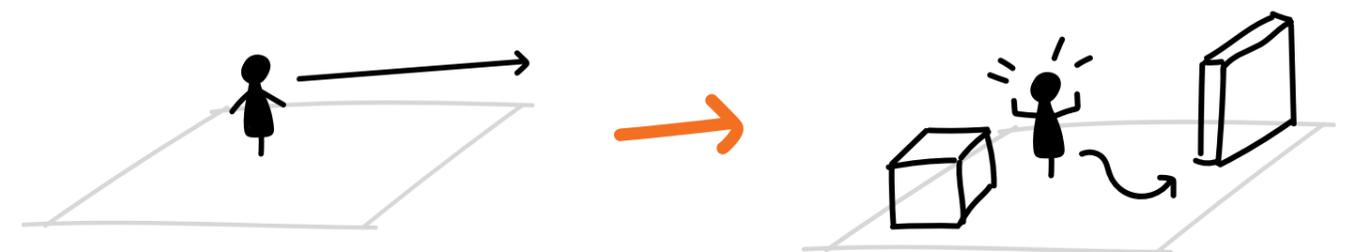


fig: 20 : SPATIAL STRUCTURES AS VISUAL CUE FOR ACTIVITY

05. FOCUSED FIELD STUDIES

FIELD STUDIES

5.1 SCOUTING LOCATIONS AND HAVING CONVERSATIONS

It was time for me to take a closer examination of these inactive spaces. Going outside with simply a pen, my notebook, measuring tape and phone to take pictures I began documenting the specifics of the spaces. I found, six areas of public space that were inactive. To gather context for each space, I mapped out the area and marked some details such as the sun pattern and nearby activities (fig: 21).

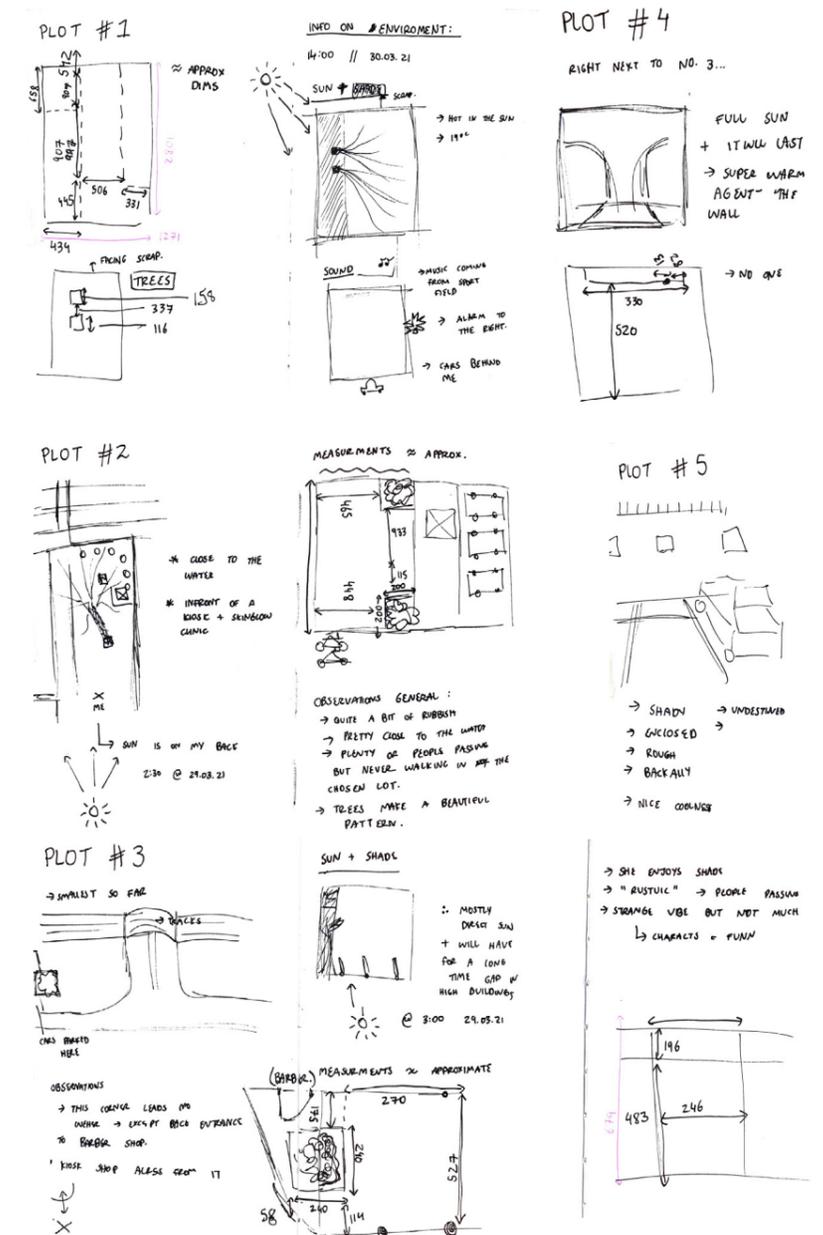


fig: 21 : FIELD STUDY NOTES OF INACTIVE SPACES IN AGNIESEBUURT

I decided to use three examples of inactive space for the design research. These spaces differed in a number of variables. Inactive space #1 (fig: 22) is the largest, and has sun for the majority of the day with some shadow from neighbouring buildings and greenery. The space currently acts as a passageway. Inactive space #2 (fig: 23) is the smallest, and gets all of the afternoon sun with no obstructions. Inactive space #3 (fig: 24) is in a shaded area in a quiet street. Although it is quiet, I have observed small groups of usually younger people hanging out there.

INACTIVE SPACE #1

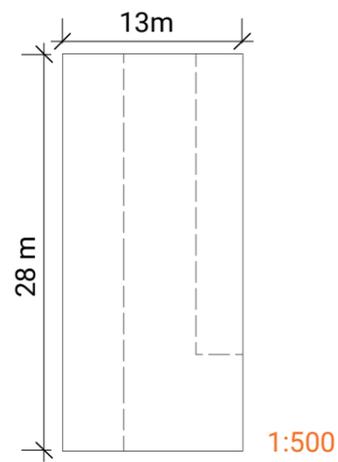


fig: 22 : INACTIVE SPACE #1 BETWEEN VACANT BUILDINGS

INACTIVE SPACE #2

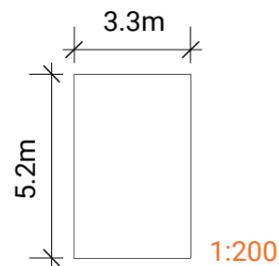


fig: 23 : INACTIVE SPACE #2 CONSTRUCTION BLOCKING PATHWAY

INACTIVE SPACE #3

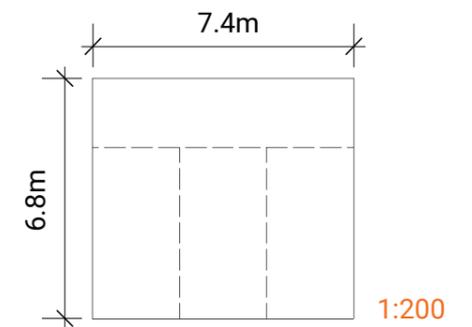


fig: 24 : INACTIVE SPACE #3 CAR PARKING SPACES, WHICH HAD BEEN TAKEN OVER BY CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL PREVIOUSLY

Not only was I able to gather hard data on the spaces, but I was also able to gather soft data from people in the neighbourhood by using participant observation. I found doing this almost performative action of being outside with a measuring tape and notebook, sparks people's interest in an area. This frequently resulted in people approaching me and asking what I was doing, which would then lead to a conversation. This shift in power, of me not initiating conversation with words I found to be much more useful in being able to have a more meaningful conversation.

I spoke to people in a range of age groups that were positive about activating the spaces with something. I learned that some people wanted more shade to sit in, while other enjoyed the sun. Some wanted more space to hang out with larger groups and some wanted more space to exercise outdoor. Some mention that there was too much concrete in the area, and that more greenery and brightness would be good.

Taking part in non-participant observation, I walked, watched and documented the various ways people in the area currently use the public space (fig: 25).



fig: 25 : OBSERVATIONS ON HOW PEOPLE CURRENTLY USE THE PUBLIC SPACE

Along with this I carried out a survey with my class group, asking them to draw and write how they wish to see the different spaces being used (fig: 26). I received a wide variety of answers here as well, ranging from adult playgrounds, hangout spaces, picnic areas and better lighting, so the space could be more inviting at night.

PLOT #4

NAME: Lucca

WHAT: Maybe an outpiece (made by Rotterdam based artist) with light

WHY: I always find this a nice place in the evenings not nice to pass

WHO: when students, Rotterdam based artists

HOW: Maybe during the day it's a nice set piece and in the night it lights

PLOT #3

NAME:

WHAT: bikes that can be borrowed/ comfy place to hang out

WHY: Just a nice place you can hang out / playground 4 adults

WHO: friends / STRANGERS

HOW: A place that accommodates forming new relationships

PLOT #1

NAME: KELA

WHAT: A HANGOUT SPACE FOR PLAYGROUND FOR TEENS!

WHY: OFTEN PEOPLE CAN COMPLAIN ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE HANGING OUT IN UNWANTED SPACES

WHO: TEENAGERS 12-24 ISH?

HOW: SHOULD PROVIDE SOME THINGS TO CLIMB ETC BUT I THINK IT SHOULD MAINLY INCLUDE VARIOUS PLACES YOU COULD COMFORTABLY SIT/LAY/BE WITH MULTIPLE PEOPLE.

PARTIALLY SHIEDED WOULD BE NICE FOR WIND/RAIN BUT NOT TOO MUCH OR IT BECOMES SHADY / UNSAFE

ALSO ALLOWING IT TO BE PAINTED / DRAW ON LIKE SKATEPARKS COULD FACILITATE A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

PLOT #2

NAME: M

WHAT: kinda lame answer but I always like more green in the city as well as places to just sit

WHY: I miss it from my hometown & Grass makes me happy

WHO: Friends

PLOT #2

NAME: Misk

WHAT: Streetpad

WHY: urban neighborhoods are often very private spaces this would create more of a community get together place

WHO: Everyone from the neighborhood

PLOT #4

NAME: Amie

WHAT: want to connect with other more interesting spaces and enjoy

WHY: you don't want to connect with cars

WHO: friend or strangers

HOW:

fig: 26 : SCANNED RESPONSES FROM CLASS GROUP, HOW WOULD THEY LIKE TO USE THE SPACE?

5.2 JOINING A COMMUNITY MEETING

I had the opportunity to join an online session, hosted by Havenstader and Open Kaart. The Municipality of Rotterdam (Gemeente Rotterdam) and Posad Maxwan the design team currently working on new plans for the area were also present. Here I moved through various 'breakout rooms' with different teams and listened to some of the members of the community speak about their wishes for the area and what they feel is missing (fig: 27).

Woman 1 (Annie) :

Annie had lived in this area or 40 years and felt like her street was a village in the city where almost all neighbours knew each other. She enjoys the added diversity to the neighbourhood, mixing both high- and lower-income people. She fears though that the new shops in the Hofbogen have become inaccessible to lower income residents which creates a rift. She wishes to see a future where lower income people can stay and where both sides of the community can mix.

Woman 2 (Edith) :

Edith was very enthusiastic about neighbourhood art projects, and she claimed that they help lower criminality in the area. She knows plenty of young people in the area interested in music and wished they had more space to practice and learn from each other. She also went into detail about how the community is full of different nationalities and how nice it would be if the different cultures had space to share food and music. This can also become a window for intergenerational meeting places.

Woman 3 (Kim) :

Kim spoke about cleaning up the streets from rubbish, and how she wanted more space to meet her friends. More green and little parks or areas. The representative of Posad Maxwan asked if she meant playgrounds, and Kim said she did not have kids so she did not really care for them although they are nice, she wanted more space for her and her friends to meet.

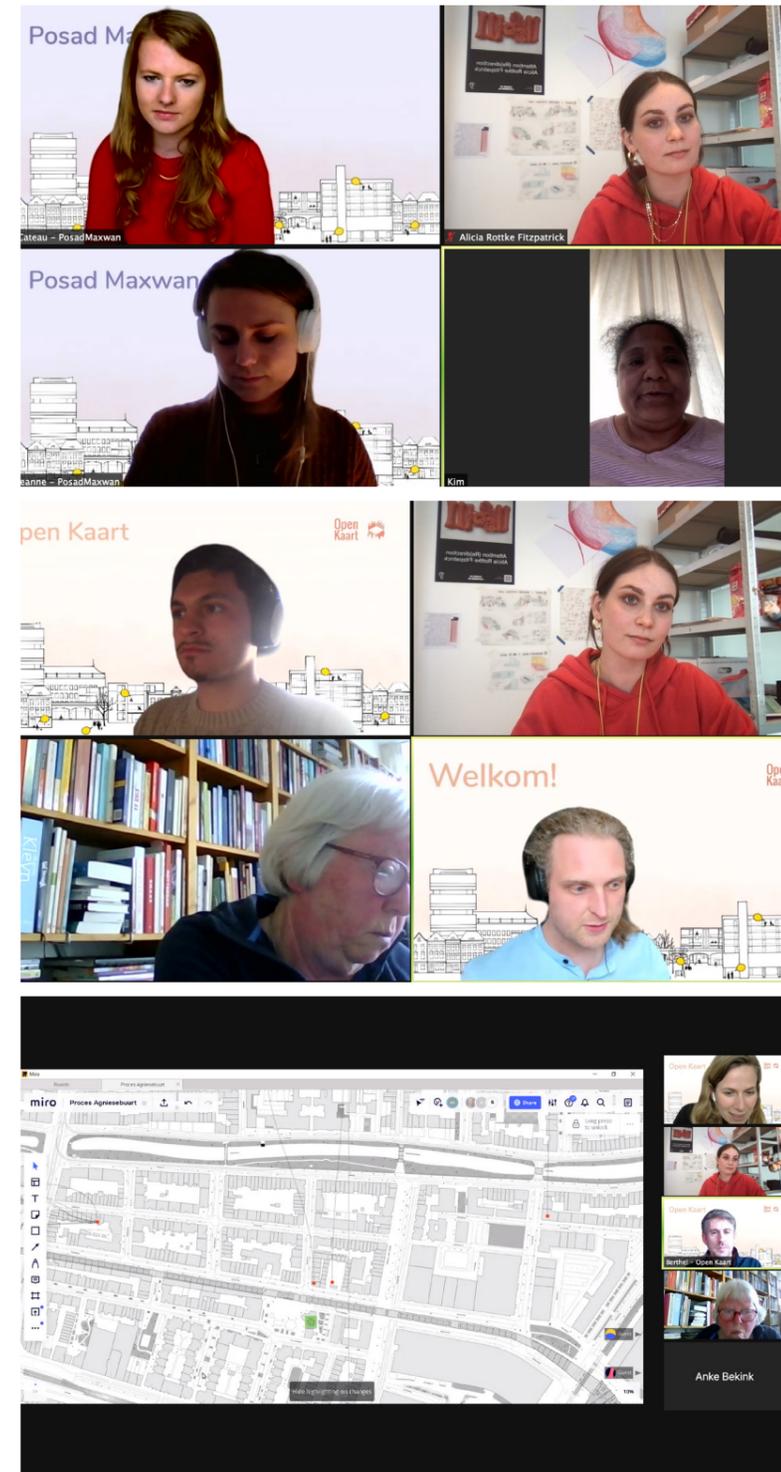


fig: 27 : SOME 'BREAKOUT ROOMS' FROM THE ONLINE WALK-IN SESSION

In conclusion, the members of the community I had the opportunity to listen to want different things for their neighbourhood and the people I spoke to on the streets would like to use their public space in different ways.

From these different answers, wishes, needs and wants from the community along with the vast array of uses for the inactive spaces I received through the survey with the class I came to a realisation. The space should be shaped for not only heterogeneous groups, but heterogeneous activities. Activating these spaces, to fulfil a wide variety of people's wants and needs can allow a wider group and type of person to be in and use the space. Doing this by spatial intervention, where the function or use is not completely clear this can act as a visual cue for people to use their imagination and rediscover these spaces in order to use them as they feel fit. The inactive spaces can become a Terra Recognita.

06. CONCLUSION

Brief Outline of my Practice Project – Terra Recognita :

The practice aspect of this project is going to be a series of forms or spatial structures that can be attached together and placed into these inactive spaces to act as a catalyst for activity. They have been designed with the human scale in mind, however they do not serve singular or clear functions. It will be up to the user to decide how to use them. When a space is no longer inactive, they are designed to be broken up small enough to be transported by bike or trolley to another inactive space in the city. These structures will be bright, durable and both heavy and light in weight when needed.

Conclusion :

The process of Slow Urbanism in practice has proven to be a disruptive act, that has spatial consequences which are often overlooked. The large scale of Slow Urbanism ignores the body and as a result these spaces lie inactive.

By activating these spaces, it can allow the communities going through slow, but still painful periods of transition the ability to reclaim their public space. By activating these public spaces, while also enticing playful curiosity through prioritising the human scale and complexity in environments, can allow people to figure out for themselves how the space is to be used. The Terra Incognita can bring heterogeneity to the space in not only user type but activity by making room for spontaneity and serendipity. By activating these spaces, we can facilitate people to engage with their hands, eyes feet and bodies in the midst of this large-scale urban redevelopment, squeezing the body back into the mega plan. These spaces can become a Terra Recognita.

Since these spaces are in the public realm, they are always accessible to anyone and are not subject to day to day third party control. Since the individual and the body is at the forefront, activities can occur here with no capital, and due to the scale of it I hope there is less of an opportunity for exploitation by larger corporations later on.

Although the proposal for this research is only temporary activation of space while it lies inactive, we have discovered that this can take a long time in the larger scale. However, I believe in the scale of the body the time the space lies inactive should not be ignored. While the activation of one space may only be temporary, there is always the possibility of activating another.

I propose that we utilize this by-product of Slow Urbanism in order to allow people to reclaim their space, in a manner which prioritises their body through engaging playful curiosity.

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08. REFLECTION + POST WRITING NOTES

Reflection

I found this research process to be a whirlwind of a journey. In the beginning I felt lost and confused but trusted the process and allowed myself to drift through topics. Using walking as a tool allowed me to embody this wandering feeling and proved to be extremely rewarding. It allowed me to understand the importance of the body within spatial design. As the process continued and I began being able to articulate my thoughts and ideas, putting the pieces together the excitement and fun came. Throughout this process I have learned a lot, not only about my research topic but also new ways of working.

Process website: <https://aliciasvisualdiary.hotglue.me/?HOME/>

Notes on Inactive Spaces in the Case Study :

As of writing this, May 2021 some of these spaces which I had earlier deemed inactive have become active. As Covid-19 restrictions have begun lifting, the Municipality of Rotterdam have allowed some dance and exercise schools to make use of these outdoor spaces while they cannot meet indoors. This made me extremely happy to see, and to find out that the Municipalities are aware of these inactive spaces and are giving them back to communities. Some of these 'inactive' spaces have also been converted into larger terraces for bars, cafes and restaurants.

Although this is a wonderful step in the right direction and I love to see people being able to use the spaces, I see this research as still relevant in terms of the body. As its aim to allow people use the space and meet on their own accord, without the need to third parties for example dance or exercise schools.

Notes on Collaborative Work with Communities :

Throughout this research I have learned the importance of working in collaboration with a community on changes in a neighbourhood. But what I think is even more important is that I have become aware of how much time, money, work, and effort it takes to not only appear to have achieved this but actually achieve this. As a spatial designer I am and will often be an outsider or have a somewhat external position on projects such as this and I am thankful to have learned the importance of co-collaboration.

I feel the need to make it clear that in this research project that although I have taken some residents ideas into consideration, I cannot claim to have developed this proposal with the community. This needs time and work to be done correctly, and since the scope of this became known to me during the process of the research, I unfortunately no longer had the time to carry out this aspect 'correctly.' I have simply dipped my toes in the water for this project and know for the future the time and space it needs.