MASTER

Off track
practising elasticity in Rotterdam Noord : an exploratory research towards a design strategy and architectonic proposal for the redevelopment and revitalization of the Hofplein overpass and neighbourhood

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In 1908 the first electrical train tracks in Holland operated from Rotterdam Hofplein to Scheveningen. The first 1950 meters were constructed out of solid reinforced concrete arches, elevating the track above street level.

The result was a unique overpass which in the following years rapidly got absorbed by the expanding residential neighbourhoods of Rotterdam Noord.

Now, almost a century later, the train stops.

For good.
"A community is not something you have, like a pizza. Nor is it something you can buy, as visitors to Disneyland or Williamsburg discover. It is a living organism based on a web of interdependencies [...]. It expresses itself physically as connectedness, as buildings actively relating to one another, and to whatever public space exists, be it the street, or the courthouse square, or the village green."

– James Howard Kunstler in *The Geography of Nowhere*
OFF TRACK
practicing elasticity in rotterdam noord
An exploratory research towards a design strategy and architectonic proposal for the redevelopment and revitalization of the Hofplein overpass and neighbourhood.

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May 2007

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There is no such thing as a *tabula rasa* and, however green a greenfield site, there are always edges to negotiate.
I have always been puzzled by the question: when do you call a house your home? In my total lifespan I have switched ‘homes’ seven times and I have mixed feelings about what I call truly my home. The house which I grew up in is no more, at least none of my relatives live there. The place I live in now is my first own house, though technically I do not own it, and for some reason I feel a disconnection with it, I do not call it my home. At least, not yet. As Mathijs Cremers pointed out in his graduation thesis, referring to Bachelard’s Poetics of Space, the container for memories we call home, sometimes can become a vault. Within this vault you unwillingly turn your back to the outside, become caught up in your own little world, slowly losing your ties with your surroundings. This negative trend inspires me on my personal quest for homing.

Toby Israel writes in her book ‘Some place like home’ about this phenomenon and relates our individual perception about home to all the places you have once lived, putting an emphasis on the house you have spent your childhood in. They built up your personal perception of the ideal house and gradually you can psychologically create your own perfect dwelling in your mind. It is comprised out of a multitude of small images and experiences which you have encountered in your personal journey travelling from one supposed home to another. Often these images are related to the surroundings, to the environment in which your past homes were located. To playgrounds, the front door, your backyard, the attic, and so on. They build up your memories, good or bad, and make you who you are today.

I always feel a bit awkward when I see large scale housing demolition going on. Not far from where I live now, hundreds of houses are being demolished. I witness these houses systematically being torn down, gradually ripped of their layers to finally be levelled of with the ground. A million memories have had their origin here and you
can see their inscriptions scarring the buildings. Soon these memories will only exist within people's minds, their physical testimony forever destroyed.

Now I do not plea for a total conservation of all things ever built. In contrary, new times call for new ideas. I would just like to underline that the qualities and emotional baggage existing structures can carry with them may have a greater impact on its surroundings than often is acknowledged. Their familiarity, their stories and their historical importance can sometimes have such an intrinsic value that they can become the roots of a family, a neighbourhood or even a civilization. So focussing my thesis on the aspect of revitalization will come to no surprise. Bringing back life into has-beens can bring back life in all that touches it.

To close off I would like to quote Katherine Shonfield regarding the practice of muf, a British collaboration of female architects and artists: In muf's work the fashionable mantra 'including the excluded' applies as much to the unloved, unregarded detritus of urban life as it does to the notion of a supervisor client. For them, in urban renewal, ..., the wholesale excision of the past only leads to uncritical nostalgia for it, the moment it has gone. ... Nostalgia's sentimental sense of loss is anathema to premature gratification and its seizure of pleasures for the here and now.

DUTCH DRESSING 3
The third generation of the graduation studio Dutch Dressing, lead by professor Jan Westra and Maarten Willems, carries on the never-ending theme of the dwelling. It focuses on new ideas on housing, facades and Dutch design. Within the studio there is great freedom on which aspect you want to focus yourself. It is at this time that I got involved into housing and homing, fear and flexibility. There existed a great fascination to translate my ideas on all these aspects into a new term which I call elasticity. First of all I related this term to the house itself, realizing that the there was a thin line between flexibility and elasticity. But I already acknowledged the fact that
building home, mastering homing, comes down to not just the structure itself, the arrangement of space, but to the complete settlement of life within its total context. This raises the importance of the surrounding environment and the mentality of the occupier. Elasticity should become the dressing over the house, gluing everything together, reaching further than just the front door.

It is at this time in the graduation process that the design of the actual dwelling became less important and that I tend to focus myself on the thing I call the elastic environment. I have to emphasize that most of the ideas generated in this period are based on ideas that I have developed during the theoretic quest for a place called home. Much of the aspects which are related to the home can be applied to the environment. As Aldo van Eyck states: make of every house a small city, and of every city a large house.

HOFPLEIN
Even before joining the graduation studio I already had set my eyes on the Hofplein overpass. For some reason this mega structure put an enormous spell on me captivating me with its charismatic appearance. To be honest, at first I didn’t find it very appealing, aesthetically; there are bigger arches, in bigger cities, crafted more ingeniously than the Hofplein overpass. They are far more detailed and materialized and embody a far greater ingenuity. But maybe that is also the reason why I got so attached to this structure. For it is Rotterdam, in all its essence. Not posh, but down to earth. Not larger than life, but scaled to fit. Practicality placed before beauty. I will most certainly not disagree with people who say that the overpass is a beautiful object, an icon of historical industrial change in Holland. But its beauty lies exactly in these aspects of subtleness, human scale and functionality.

The Hofplein overpass losing its transportation function is like an exhausted coal mine going out of business. Its original function has come to disappear, but with its remaining structure a certain aura of beauty stays behind. Its existing infrastructure radiates a sense of completeness; it has fulfilled its original purpose. There for it lends itself perfectly for a re-interpretation of its use. We are able to experience the object from a different perspective; it has been giving a second life. It will be creating new memories, all over again.
THEORETIC FRAMEWORK

Procrustes was a character from Greek mythology who had a bed that he claimed would fit anyone - no matter how tall or short you were. And he was right, in a way. If you were too long for the bed then your feet would be chopped off, and if you were too short for the bed, then you'd be stretched until you were the same length the bed was.

This was the ancient Greek equivalent of "one size fits all".

Procrustes' Bed
ESSAYS
Before diving into the sketchpen, one should exhaust himself in trying to get a grip on all the elements that fascinate him or her. Then there is the difficult task of selecting only a few of these elements to investigate further. Within this you develop a certain view on a specific subject and slowly you may be able to create a new theory, or at least a manifest. In this graduation project the focus came to lay on the subject of elasticity within housing. You will be able to witness the on going progress of exploring this not yet clearly defined theory of elasticity in the next three essays. We find out where its origin lays, how it is related to the house and what it can be in the bigger more real picture. It is preferred that the next three essays are read in the given order.

Following the essays we quickly dive into the architecture of sauerbruch hutton architects to see how the city, they refer to it as landscape, plays a major role in their work. We also see how we can take some of their ideas and use them for our project.

Finally we would like to present two competition entries which on some level have to do with the ideas of elasticity, of creating your own home.
Can you close the door please?

Opening doorways to the future

Waar mensen zijn, ontstaan labyrinten.

Soms lijkt er geen uitweg te zijn. Het is mogelijk dat je in het labyrint het enge monster tegenkomt, en er is niet altijd een Theseus bij de hand om het te doden. ¹

Where there are people, labyrinths are created.

Sometimes it looks like there is no way out. It is possible you encounter the scary monster in this labyrinth, and there isn't always a Theseus nearby to kill it.

¹Spema Weiland, De mens in de filosofie van de twintigste eeuw, Amsterdam, J.M. Meulenhoff bv, 1999
INTRODUCTION

"Behind cupboard doors there can be secrets ... concealed future pleasures.

Behind cupboard doors dangerous things can be hidden away."^2

Peter Smithson

If I would be in the awkward and precarious situation that I would have to choose between, let's say, three doors, and choosing one of these three doors would completely alter the course of my life, on what grounds would I make my decision? Would I choose a door that looks familiar, one that conforms to my own style, or would I look at the state of condition it is in? What if there is smoke coming through the gaps?

And once I have chosen, with what persistence and bravery would I cross this enormous threshold; will I be just terrified not knowing what it is that hides on the other side of the door? What if one of these doors miraculously resembles my own front door? The door that I have come to treasure as a symbol of my safe haven, a place which I created for myself, where I feel at home and secure. Though seeing this door in a line-up together with two strange doors, it completely changes this sense of a recognizable security. My door is ripped out of its context, it is degraded to a two-dimensional surface, a thin layer between good and who knows, evil?

The door, where there are at least a dozen of in each home, contains different qualities: physical, psychological, social, mythological and even mystical. Normally we engage in a pure functional relationship with the door, it helps us define and close off spaces, but foremost gives us access to a desired place. But then there are some occasions when this apparent marginal element of a design becomes so significant, that it creates an electrical charge and becomes so much more than just a door. We look through its keyhole and try to define shapes and forms that move behind it. We find it locked and the urge for entering becomes even greater: what is the person trying to hide behind this door?

Today its physical shape becomes more and more a social condensator. Architect Christopher Alexander: "Increasingly in our society, in cities and suburbs, we have lost intimate contact – the vital, close contact between two people in which they reveal themselves in all their weakness, without fear."^3 We hide behind our closed doors, be it afraid of or simply not entertained by the outdoors and withdrawal soon becomes a habit.

In this essay an attempt is tried to define the variety of aspects of the door, psychologically and socially, and put them in perspective to a design approach of housing.
A DOOR

A window to the past, a doorway to the future

Unknown

The Latin word for door is foris, which also means outside or situated outdoors. The stem of the word, for, means to speak or to speak of. So the door is a passage to the place where you can speak openly outdoors, the forum. The door can be seen as a distinctive apparatus between private and public domains. Catherine Slessor, author of Contemporary Doorways states: “Every door is at once a boundary, shutting off one area from another, yet it is also a connection between inside and outside. Part of the mystique of doorways is that they are in-between places – where the inside and outside worlds come together, where private and public meet, where the known and unknown conjoin.” This element of separating but also combining places, people and ideas makes the door an interesting architectural topic.

A door is a door, a usually swinging or sliding barrier by which an entry is closed and opened. It is this medium that physically separates two places from each other, but at the same time it is this exact same feature that connects the two. It can function as a threshold to keep unwanted wild animals or even persons outside. It can be the gateway for a time machine, or the walls of a teleporter similar to the ones in an elevator, in which the excitement of the unknown is maximized. Who knows what you will find behind the telescopic elevator doors of the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas? Is this why people are claustrophobic in elevators, not knowing what will happen, what you will find once the doors slide open? This thrill of the unknown, the surprise-element of entering something divine, or maybe even the fear of encountering something unwanted, are the elements that surround the magical thing called a door. It is no surprise that doors and doorways are used in science fiction stories and films to represent the gateways of time and space.

Mythologically the door represents hope, opportunity, opening and the entrance to a new life, initiation and shelter. It epitomizes passage from one state or world to another. In Roman mythology the God Janus represents the transition between primitive life and civilization, between rural and urban existence. He also maintains the balance between peace and war and youth and old age. Being burdened by these dualistic tasks he is fortunate enough to be two-headed, he can keep a close eye in both directions. This dualism is further symbolized in the fact that Janus is the Guardian of gates and doors, the physical elements that separate his enormous task of balancing contrasts. It shows the importance of the doorway in ancient times but also signifies its importance to contemporary life: the door as a no-man’s land, facing two sides, trying to find equilibrium between two worlds.
The primary reason for having a door is simply to cover up a physical opening in the wall. In history there have been many ways of doing so, be it either with animal-skins stretched over a mobile framework or boulders that are manually placed in front of the opening. Closing up of the opening keeps out the drafty wind and protects against unwanted ferocious animals. Through the centuries alterations have been made, locks have been added, mailboxes and doorknockers or bells placed. The door transformed from being a simple shutter into a safe keeper as well as an alarm, a communication medium and above all a way to depict status. From the highly decorated renaissance doors to the simplistic doors of the modernist movement, doors have always been an important element in the architectural composition. Adding a portico or a sweeping stairway signifies the entrance of a building as the most important part of the design. In modern movement this importance was simmered down following the idea of flowing space and functionality. New types were developed, like the revolving door, reducing pollution of inside air, noise and draft. As entrances of public buildings and corporate offices are still an important design issue, the doorways of housing are becoming more and more anonymous. Especially in dense urban shopping areas, the entrance to the apartment is no more than a simple door leading to a stairway up. It is a physical barrier between inside and outside, a boundary between public and private, completely disregarding the important relationship of the house with the street. We have to realize the impact of the door as it usually is the first thing people encounter of a building: to a postman, the Seagram Building is really only the plaza and the bronze mailbox doors.

We see the door as a physical barrier between two places, but in fact the door inhabits also its own space. Usually it is a very small space marked by the doorframe and doorstep, not wider that the width of the door itself, and only experienced, though often not recognized, when the door is open. Once the door is closed it completely absorbs this space. Rubber strips and bristles hermetically seal the door and separate the in- and outdoor air. Even the see-through keyhole, a creator of sexual exhilaration, is now a thing of the past. What if we could physically enter this space, make way through the door, and experience this in-between place. To actually feel the tension of this barrier when it is closed, but experience its insignificance when it is opened. As a physical space it could soften the transgressional phase of walking through the door, lowering the threshold. But how would you close of such a space? You cannot do it by placing doors, you will be back where you started and you are creating a Kafka's castle. What if we tried to shape this space not as if it were an element, a volume closing of another volume, but as a room on its own, a place of transition, of re-adjustment.

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8Caplan, Ralph, By design: why there are no locks on the bathroom doors in the Hotel Louis XIV and other object lessons, St. Martin's Press, 1982
9In Kafka's castle every room is followed up by another room, so one never knows if one has finally reached the desired door.
Who hasn’t experienced it: after a relieving disposure in the lavatory the door does not open. Instantly notions of fear disrupt the psyche: what if I am stuck here? Is the lock broken? Can anyone hear me here? Didn’t we just lock the door because we wanted to be left alone taking care of our private business? And now we pull and push the door in excitement, trying desperately to get out, damning all doors.

As we look at the psychological aspects of doorways, the mere thing we call a door becomes so much more. Its physical state becomes marginal, almost insignificant. As Catherine Sessor described “[doorways] are in-between places”. The door can be a thin line between good and evil, a transition place of feeling. In this in-between place the magical transition from hastiness to tranquility can be achieved in a single step. Fear can change into a sense of security in a split-second. As Bachelard so passionately describes in his Poetics of Space\textsuperscript{10}, stairways lead us to the dark realm of the cellar or the enlightened haven of the attic. The doors to these stairways are physically alike, but the one leads us to a place of dreams the other to a place of nightmares. Its impact on the psyche is entangled with our notion of what is behind it. Our memory of the door itself reflects our past experience with the room it beholds. The door represents the room it hides; our senses register its specific aspects: the creaking of a cellar door...

The paradox of the door connecting and at the same time separating two spaces questions its existence. For what then is the door? Is the door the physical separator, and the in-between place, the void that the door creates, the psychological connector? A space not clearly defined, but the notion of the space is felt as one walks through the opening, giving a sense of transition. Of course we experience a sensory change because we transfer rooms, or move from the outside to the inside. The décor changes, materials change. But even in the occasions where this isn’t so much the question, where it is simply an opening in the wall, the aura of the doorway radiates a sense of change.

Fortunately passing doorways isn’t always scary. It can be exciting, like with secret doorways, where the element of surprise makes the door the wrapping around a present. Where transparent doors completely reveal its inside, translucent doorways make the observer question and fantasize what’s behind the door, creating an enticing theatre of blurry shapes. With glass windows, or should we say see-through walls..., this desire is created, while with glass doors this mutual desire can become a reality...
In today’s world, where the fear of terrorist attacks and fast-spreading diseases infects our everyday life, the longing for a safe and secure place we can call home is bigger than ever. The need to create this safety results in fortified houses, where one locks himself up, but also out. Doors and windows, the weak parts of the massive wall, are barricated with hinges, locks and safety chains. We have successfully shut off the outside environment and are living in our own hermetically sealed capsule, safe from all danger.

It’s all an illusion.

We hear a sound we can not identify. A sound that pumps the blood through our veins in high speed and we realize that the only way out is that same door, leading to the place we so desperately tried to get away from. The door is the materialization of this transitional feeling; it symbolizes the contrast that exists between public and private, the street and the home. Closed, non-transparent doors aren’t an invitation for passersby to knock and ask to be invited in; contrarily glass doors are inviting and reflect the open mind of the inhabitant. The social environment has a huge impact on this topic of seclusion. In unsafe neighborhoods one is crazy not to lock his door and protect ones possessions. But locking up, fencing the yard, installing cameras, only enforces the idea of the unsafe and causes a further withdrawal. The door no longer is a passageway, an invitation to the house; it is merely a way to physically enter it.

It is very interesting to analyze these powers of inclusion and seclusion. As we already concluded, this act of secluding the outside world is not so much an act of trying to secure one’s material possessions; it is far more an act of disconnecting oneself socially, cutting off all possible disturbing factors. We fall more and more into a psychological state of laissez-faire and retreat in our own fort. Design professionals underestimated people’s need to live in places where they feel not only physically safe, but secure in their attachment to home. High-rise apartments satisfy basic housing needs, but completely rip apart the network of neighbours and community; the door opening up to the street. We do not realize that it is these social factors that create life and make life interesting. We should try to include the street into door design and force dislodgement with the current position. We should change the trend of defensive urbanism into one of an offensive urbanism, a living architecture, and bring back harmony to the street and the home. The door should be transformed into a social catalyst, emerging from the street as a proud symbol, creating a synergy between the outside and the inside, the good and the bad, between people and man. The door should mirror its inhabitant, carefully depicting his or her ideas about private and public, about security and social commitment. Only then the threshold of the doorway is not the door itself, but once again the doorstep.
The jack-knife doors of a Lamborghini are the design-pinnacle of this Italian sports car: unpractical but ever so stylish. The doors make you have to work your way into the car, feel the car, and hence experience the car. Using the body of the machine to support yourself, you balance your way into the seat. Once seated you feel enclosed by the space, you have entered it.

The impact of the door, and the entry, on an architectural project is enormous. The position, proportion, materials and decoration of openings give important clues to the building’s role, status and historical context. The entrance into a building, penetrating the orphous of the manmade, can generate multiple emotions. Frank Lloyd Wright intentionally designed his doorways just too small to walk through them upright, resulting in a surprising perception of space when one raise’s his head to view what’s behind the door. Alvaro Siza, in his Santa Maria Church in Portugal, designed two 10 meters-high doors which scales the man down to a minimum, forcing respect of the divine. The architects use this small in-between space, this narrow column of air as a tool to define spaces, but more over to define the relationship between spaces. The doorway is an intermediate between public and private spaces and therefore it needs to be designed in a way that satisfies these two spaces and its user.

We should not just look at exterior doors, doors which define the boundary between inside and outside. Internal doors are just as important, as they define the hierarchy of the indoor spaces, they label territories. Those of us who share a house with others face the issue: what is the place for me within these four walls versus the place for my roommate, spouse, sibling, partner, children? Of key importance may be that all of those sharing a house have the opportunity to establish private as well as shared and public spaces in a way that meets everyone’s needs equally. Doors represent these territories and make clear to others this existing desire for privacy and the existential wish to share with others.

OPENING DOORWAYS TO THE FUTURE

So much more can be said about the door, its psychological values have been merely touched. We should find a way to incorporate this element into the design of every home and try to exploit its obvious important qualities to the re-connection of the house to the street. And not just on a physical level, but on a psychological and social level as well. We should not try to make rid of all the fears and dreams that are associated with doors. Doors can be valuable as Peter Smithson already mentioned, they conceal future pleasures and hide dangerous things. They should not be locked forever, but opened, some day, because we should never forget, that the door is still our only way out.
INTRODUCTION

"Indeed, recent years have seen the emergence of a wholly new kind of city, a city without a place attached to it."

[Michael Sorkin, 1992]

Reading Martin Heidegger’s essay on dwelling and building makes me rethink the actual meaning of the word dwelling. For dwelling is not mere the physical form of let’s say a house, it is a psychological state of mind. Even more fascinating is trying to find out the meaning of a, or even, the place we call home. For when does a house transform into a home; when does it become not only a physical structure but a symbol as well (Israel, 2003). Heidegger refers to dwelling as “the basic character of human being.” “To be a human being means to be on earth as a mortal, it means to dwell.” (Heidegger, 1971) Dwelling is a natural part of our lives, of our being. It feeds our primordial need to seek shelter, to put a roof over our head. As different cultures dwell differently, be it always on the move or forever settled at one location, so does the physical appearance of the activity of dwelling, the dwelling itself. The dictionary (Meriam Webster Online Dictionary) refers to a dwelling as “a shelter (as a house) in which people live”. To dwell means to remain for a time, to live as a resident, but it is derived from the Old English dwellan which means to astray or to hinder. So to dwell actually means to wander of the right path. Are we meant to wander of the right path, according to Heidegger?

The dictionary clearly states a house as a building that serves as living quarters for one or a few families, but also states it as a shelter or refuge of a wild animal. We can hereby say that every dwelling is a house, but not every house is a dwelling per se. In this essay we will use the word house, although it refers to a refuge for a savage beast, as the physical realization of our longing for shelter. Housing in this terminology will be described as the need for a protective layer, the need to protect one’s vulnerability. As the housing of a computer, protecting its delicate interior, man’s urge for housing calls for a defensive skin to deal with the natural and social threats that forever surrounds him.

A home is a place of origin, a familiar or usual setting. It’s a social unit formed by a family living together. This last definition is questionable, foremost because the formation of a family in my point of view is not essential for creating a safe environment, be it physically and/or mentally. Calling something home has to do with social aspects, as well as the psychological state of mind, one’s existential connection to space. Home achieved in the fullest sense implies not only satisfying of physical needs but of deeper existential needs as well (Israel, 2003). The surrounding environment, be it public or private, our relation with our neighbours, the way we make use of the facilities in the neighbourhood, are all essential in the creation of a home and to finally achieve the act of
A HOUSE IS A rubber band
homing. The only definition the dictionary gives for the word homing is "to proceed or direct attention towards an objective". Thus, if housing is referred to as man's urge to protect one's self than homing is man's urge to realize one's existential needs and once attained to protect it.

Now that we have clearly defined the words house and home, we can start to look at the close connection between the two and define the relationship and furthermore clarify the title of this essay. Aspects like the post-modern man, the fear of architecture, territorial control and finally elasticity in housing will be discussed. Eventually we will end up at a contemporary look at the dynamic relationship between people and their surrounding environment, specifically the place we so dearly like to call home, and suggest a design approach towards homing.

MODERN MAN IN A POST-MODERN ERA

"The supposed model inhabitant was particularly basic: his needs were evidently primary. Above all he had no desires and certainly no fantasies."  
[Jean Guiheux, 1989]

Aldo van Eyck stated that "man is the subject as well as the object of architecture" (Jencks, 1997). Therefore architecture, building, housing and homing is fully concentrated around the human being as a central point in this universe. It is a downright humanistic approach to the built environment and clashes with the modernistic point of view. Modernity, and its unstoppable craving for universalising mankind, created an atmosphere where man was robbed of his home. Architects were designing for an ideal man rather than for people and were seeking to discover universal solutions (Ellin, 1997). Though masters, as they were, in creating new housing typologies, they lacked to fulfill man's desire to achieve a sense of homing, of fulfilling man's existential needs. In order for man to feel somehow connected to his house, to have a close relationship with the building itself, the idea of one house fits all is preposterous. Conclusion: by reducing mankind to homo economicus the aspiration for homing was lost. Modernism disconnected the people with their environment, their connection with the social street, disregarding the needs of the individual. Modernists were masters in housing, but failures in homing. It resulted in a dissatisfying explosion of mass housing and a growing sense of displacement. Nowadays, the shortages of modernism are evaluated and accepted. Post-modern architects have the difficult but interesting task to reconnect individual needs to architecture. Never have people been more involved in creating their own style, trying to express taste, wealth, security and uniqueness. Never has the situation been so plural, yet so difficult in the way that building costs have risen, there exists a gigantic mix of cultures and traditions, and the supply of a plethora of mind-boggling consumer goods is confusing the contemporary mind. Dutch comedian Yoop van 't Hek, in his 2005 cabaret-show tells about his 50th birthday: "I invited all my friend..."
and asked them to bring something with them back home. Just pick anything and take it with you. I want to start over.” Though the amazing supply, availability and variety of consumer goods enable people to express their style and taste, people are often poised in to think that certain products reflect their personality. As Alberto Moravia (1987) explains: “snobbery comes to stand as the fickle and arbitrary surrogate of good taste, which is based no longer on the canon of the beautiful but on that of fashion, of whatever is vogue.” The unstoppable craving for objects in a way defines what is to be thought of as beautiful, or at least what is desirable. People are being lived by the market and this market creates an illusion that happiness is achieved through consumption. But do we really like all the blingbling on our cars, do we really want a house that looks like an orange box, and do I like the taste of Crystal? Or am I to believe that I do? Mankind is still being shaped and moulded to fit the image of the universal man. Painstakingly we are still trying to create modern man in a post-modern era.

In building this craving for bigger, better and more is clearly visible. Programmes like MTV Cribs, "Het Blok" and Home Design shows, project the possibilities of housing today. They all try to emphasize that a house should reflect its owner, but essentially are no more than a big advertisement for expensive consumer goods. And nowadays the supply of goods in building is enormous. Never has the production of goods been so extensive and massive. One would think that the availability of so much choice would make the creation of a home a simple task. But we have to realize that building prices have skyrocketed and that only the well-set can afford to customize their house. The greater part of the people still relies on mass-housing. For this large demand in relatively inexpensive housing there have been interesting new ideas developed. Standardization, industrialization and flexibility have carried (social) housing through many different stages in the last decades. But the most interesting one is the transformation of mass production into mass customization (Kieran and Timberlake, 2004). The creation of building systems that allow people to have a say in how their house should look. A system that is set up out of modules instead of parts. We will discuss the matter of flexibility further in this essay.

ARCHITECTURE OF FEAR or FEAR OF ARCHITECTURE?

"People are not killed by the earthquake itself, most people are killed by the collapse of buildings.”

[Shigeru Ban]

Where post-modernism tries to bring back the humanistic aspect in architecture it faces the growing problem of fear. This is not the natural fear of the savage beast which is trying to raid your house, but the fear of uncertainty. It is the fear of fear. Nan Ellin, in her book Architecture of Fear (1997) explains that “…the fear factor has certainly grown, as indicated by the growth of locked car and house doors and security systems, the popularity of gated or secure communities for all age and income groups and the increasing surveillance of public spaces, not to
mention the unending reports of danger emitted by the mass media." She briefly sums up this evidence of the growing trend concerning the relationship between man and his man-made environment, in what she calls defensive urbanism. A trend that tends to the castlefication of the built environment. It is not just on a domestic level that this phenomenon occurs, it is happening all around. Gated business parks, increased (camera-) surveillance at public places and even security personnel at the local supermarket intensify this notion of fear. In the United States huge super-malls are erected to answer to the demand for a safe and pleasant shopping experience. In these malls everything imaginable is serviced: groceries, novelty goods, food, pleasure and exercise. And all this is combined and packaged in an introvert conditioned shopping mall. Though advertised and proclaimed to be "the heart of the new suburban downtown", successfully replacing local shop-streets and small shopping districts, it is as public as my own backyard. This repackaging of the city in a safe, clean, and controlled form gives the mall greater importance as a community and social centre than often is realized (Crawford, 1992). In the United States families spend hours a week in these new social hubs, avoiding the harsh and unpredictable downtown city street. All the specific neighbourhood activities, like shopping for groceries, getting a haircut and even children playing at a playground, are nowadays combined into one big theme park, meticulously ordered and directed by market-driv-
As already mentioned, people do not feel secure enough. Or they are made to believe, through extensive news-coverage of practically everything, that they should not feel secure enough. This feeding of our mental paranoia in believing that we are constantly under attack is a negative trend finding its origin in television, live 24-hour coverage on CNN, and the Internet. A trend that is constantly fed by the consumer market, which is eagerly providing us with home security systems, dead bolts and pepper spray. In fact we are dealing with a true economy of fear. What are the consequences of this trend for housing and homing? Man's basic need for shelter, a roof over one's head, doesn't change. Though the point when man can truly say he has accomplished a sense of homing, to call a place his home, is becoming more and more difficult to attain, especially in an urban environment. Developers and even the politicians have acknowledged this situation and are eager to offer safe and secure alternatives in the suburban areas of large cities. These areas are often being criticised for lacking public places and personal identity. Large-scale development, characterized by repetition and an over-designed public environment, creates an obtuse way of living, robbed of individual taste and personal involvement. Architects more often try to grab the past and create a fake décor of old times. This retro-architecture or traditionalism is understandable, for there are enough people who enjoy living in the past and prefer old typologies and styles. They feel a connection with these styles, which represent their childhood. Critics condemn these housing types for being fake and ignorant, for often they are not more than façade-architecture, disguising building systems which are cheap and uninspiring. There exists a genuine fear of architecture among critics and architects, but also among occupants. Critics fear the explosion of suburbs like Brandevoort and Haverleij. Architects fear the rise of building costs, condemning projects like Katendrecht on a road to failure. And home-owners fear their neighbours; what would you do if your neighbours decide to paint their house pink?

Going back to the architecture of fear: what is it that actually makes us feel unsafe in our home environment? The fear of outsiders trying to raid our fortress? The fear of being watched and tracked constantly? The world is becoming more open and attainable, while we tend to make our house smaller and unreachable. The advances in communication and mobility makes us able to discover and explore the world and its people, but from a safe environment. We like to be in charge of who and what we encounter, and able to disconnect with any unfamiliar or unwanted happening with the click of a button. Control is the main issue here. We like to have control over as much as possible, but also enjoy facilities that are controlled for us. In suburban America people move from one controlled environment to the other: from their work into their car, then to the shopping mall and finally to their house in the gated community. I call this phenomenon "air-conditioned living". As long as contact with the brutal reality can be avoided, we prefer the surreal life, which is moulded for us by commerce. By locking ourselves up we actually create vulnerability. We lose contact with our city, our neighbourhood and finally our neighbours.
This feeds our angst and makes us project our fear to outsiders by installing fences and cameras, adding up to the notion of fear. It is a downward spiral, not challenging the actual causes of this primal fear of uncertainty. How bold and daring we are in discovering the Internet, connecting to people around the globe, how uncertain we are when taking a walk around the block.

How can we escape this air-conditioned living? Or is this the way to the future, passing through territories of relative confinement, from one controlled hub to the other. One thing is for sure; we shouldn’t ignore the technological advancements, the new way of life. John Habraken (1998): ‘If in housing we wish to restore human relationships, but mean to exclude today’s technical possibilities, we are following a road to the past, a road we cannot follow.’ We can learn from it, pinpoint its possible fallacies and try to reintegrate the house into the street, but also the person into the neighbourhood. Strategies such as gating, policing and other surveillance systems, and defensive urbanism do provide certain people with a limited sense of security. But such settings do not, according to recent studies, always diminish actual danger. And they also contribute to accentuating a more general sense of fear by increasing paranoia and distrust (Ellin, 1997). Maybe the answers can be found by going back to the primary rules of territory and control, defining the basics of dwelling. Again, Habraken notes: “The very act of inhabitation – of occupying a space and selecting what comes in and what stays out – is fundamentally territorial.”

**THE TERRITORY OF CONTROL**

“Control of space denotes the ability to defend that space against unwanted intrusion. Space under control is territorial, and distinguishing such territory is fundamental to inhabiting the earth. Territorial control is the ability to close a space, to restrict entry. We are so conditioned to label every room by function, in conversations and floor plans alike, that it has become difficult to understand that people instinctively settle built space. Yet inhabitation remains fundamentally territorial, not functional.”

[John Habraken, 1998]

It is a joy to read John Habraken’s book The Structure of the Ordinary. He surgically explains the key issues regarding territory and control and its influence on the built environment. An interesting aspect is the two-way traffic of territorial depth. Basic-rule is the unrestricted freedom to exit. If this is not the case, than we are not talking about inhabitation, but of confinement. One has the ability to enter their own territory at wish, though one has to ask permission to enter other people’s territory. Once inside, the basic-rule counts: we are free to exit at any time. The relationship existing between spaces on opposite sides of a gate is therefore asymmetrical (Habraken, 1998). It is important to locate and define these territories; they are an essential part in creating a home. We are not merely talking about physical aspects...
here, but the notion of territory as a social and psychological definition of private space. This talking about territory sounds very primitive, but it stands at the basis of housing and homing. We have to identify the perimeter before we can shape and style it to our own desires. This perimeter is not always as clear as we would imagine. It doesn’t always have to be a wall or a door, a gate or a fence. The perimeter, and therefore the territory, is set by what Habraken calls an agent. Someone has to enforce territorial ruling over the built environment. This is all very dependent on vernacular rules of engagement. Tradition, customs, habits are all unspoken rules of territory. For example, we do not let our dog out in our neighbour’s garden. These familiar rules remain unquestioned and a breach of these rules can have a major impact on the social environment. Therefore defining and clarifying the territorial perimeters are an important aspect of attaining a safe home environment and creating a social consensus.

Important aspect in this discussion is the fast transformation of public spaces into private spaces. The rapid privatization of the built environment will lead to isolated communities and therefore the segregation of social groups, based on income, ethnicity or mere politics. Trying to find a balance between public and private spaces in an urban environment is difficult. The exodus of middle and high income households to the suburbs leaves large urban districts over to low-income groups. Adding up the disproportionate investments of local government into these areas, living quarters are created where the rules of the streets dominate and complete different standards of territory and control are adopted. Here too we can observe the disappearance of true public spaces. In these areas there hides an enormous potential of implementing basic rules of territory and control, starting at a domestic level. I do not believe in creating specific housing typologies for specific groups, but rather a total breathable concept, a basis on which people can form their home and create their neighbourhood. A neighbourhood where a balance can be obtained between privacy and community. A place where you can determine your own degree of interaction, where you are in control of your home (Knies, 2004).

What if the force fields of science fiction television and cinema would become a reality? We could keep unwanted persons at a distance without the proverbial gate or wall. A magnetic force field would keep trespassers out. Can you imagine a prison without walls? A zoo without fences? A gated community without gates? A bridge without a railing? If these force fields would denote territory, it would still need some kind of materialization. As the garden fence signifies the territory of the home-owner, there should always be some kind of demarcation of the territory in order for other people to identify and respect the territory. A world without boundaries is a no man’s land, not one of social cohesion (Habraken, 2004). This aspect opens doorways for new design approaches towards housing.
ELASTICITY

I often wonder how flexible we really are, or even how flexible we actually want to be. In the recent past, and continuing today, an ongoing topic in building is flexibility and the industrialization of the building process. We are developing building systems that are prefabricated off-site, creating an atmosphere of assembling instead of building on site. This with the obvious aims of reducing costs, the creation of better buildings and eventually the participation of consumers in the building process. The latter aim, although often introduced as the most important, usually falls behind of the other two. Although the systems often provide a higher degree of flexibility and customization, consumers are generally confronted with higher costs and restrictions. Catalogues provide consumers with a limited choice of products and options, though they pretend to offer freedom of choice. This freedom is of course apparent, but the actual outcome usually results into a monotonous building stock robbed of individuality and taste.

But how flexible are we? Architects are trying to create houses with open plans, advocating flowing space, which you can arrange and furnish to your own desires. This high form of flexibility seems to be a virtue, but I wonder how many people actually prefer this degree of flexibility. The flexibility of a house, the ability to alter its internal and external appearance, is highly dependent on the flexibility of its occupier. How many people desire the hassle of re-arranging the interior plan or deciding on which cladding to use on the façade? Is this adaptation of the house to personal desires essential for creating a home? I think it is very important that we can have a say in both the non-physical and physical aspects of creating our own home. The house itself, and the surroundings, should provide some breathing space in achieving man’s goal to fulfil his existential needs.

It would be wise not to talk about flexibility anymore; the word has been used for too many different things. Let’s introduce the term elasticity. Elasticity not just in the physical form, but in the psychological form as well. It is the ability to, temporarily, adapt to changing conditions in the environment with the option to return to the original state. Elasticity can stand at the basis of territorial control. It cries for a higher level of understanding and tolerance. This adaptation should happen on both a mental and a physical level. A certain degree of elasticity is desired between public and private spaces, or between territories of neighbouring houses. Somehow the building itself, the house, should reflect the elasticity of its owner. If we can achieve a design for a domestic building which can respond elastically on impulses...
of the environment as well as the owner, we may have created the starting point for homing.

A HOUSE IS A RUBBER BAND: CONCLUSIONS

If overall elasticity is the starting point of homing, than all it takes to create a home is time. After achieving the basics of housing, creating a secure and comfortable shelter, man can start with the process of homing. This involves more than just the physical aspects of the house, it’s about social aspects, the ability to express oneself and finally it comes down to the aesthetics. Often the architect tries to achieve all these aspects – shelter, security, comfort, socialization, self-expression and aesthetics – in one single design stage. The architect should provide the basis of housing, on which the occupier can start his own existential process of homing. This basis should consist out of a complete design that can adapt to social, physical and mental alterations of the occupier and his relationship with the environment surrounding him. It should play on a childlike level with public and private spaces, challenging forms of territory and control, but above all surpass the general notion of an architecture of fear. A house is a rubber band, pinned in between the built environment, always on a tense level with it's surroundings.
One of the most interesting elements of Rotterdam Noord is the Hofplein-overpass: an elevated railway structure, its construction dating back to the early 20th century. It is the first railway structure constructed out of reinforced concrete and for that reason the Hofplein-overpass is appointed a Dutch national monument. Its original charismatic end station, Hofplein, located only 700 meters from Central Station, was bombed in the Second World War. Its replacement, built in 1956, had a simple modernistic façade resembling Rotterdam Central Station. This structure was torn down in the beginning of the nineties to make way for the new Willemspoort tunnel. The Hofpleintrack leads to The Hague and it takes a little over 30 minutes to get there. In 2008 the new RandstadRail will be in use, and the part of the Hofpleintrack from Hofplein Station to the Noorderkanaal will be out of use. Now the big question arises: what to do with this interesting large structure, piercing through this old neighbourhood, which is bursting with potential but is desperately in search of a connection with its environment.

The 175 characteristic arches are the starting point of making a proposal for this massive urban structure. Local building-corporations have united themselves and acquired the Hofplein-overpass from the Dutch Railway Company. Owning a lot of real estate in the surrounding area, these corporations feared that closing down the Hofpleintrack in 2008, without plans about what to do with the overpass, would lead to a rundown of the structure resulting in a depreciation of the surrounding neighbourhoods. For this reason they are studying the area and trying to find a use for the overpass in the near future. Key elements of their plans are the realization of housing on top of the structure and organizing small business in the arches. This all in a close relationship with the neighbouring structures and existing public space. The difficult task of trying to get a grasp on this interesting piece of urban Rotterdam, and trying to create a scenario for the future of this neighbourhood is above all a very interesting one.

As I explained in a prior essay about housing, essential elements in the creation of successful living quarters is acknowledging the fact that for a greater part it comes down to the art of housing and homing. Very important is trying to understand the difference between these two. We have to find out who is responsible for achieving housing and who deals with the art of homing. A way to achieve this housing and homing is through elasticity. Elasticity in three ways: physically, socially and mentally. In this essay I will try to reflect my ideas about elasticity on this case, the Hofplein-overpass, and explain how these three degrees of elasticity will be the base of my proposal for revitalizing the Hofplein-neighbourhood.
Het Oude Noorden

If we take a look at Rotterdam Noord, the area north of central station we immediately acknowledge its obvious beauty. The area also referred to as the Old North (Het Oude Noorden) exists of multiple districts of which Bergpolder, Agniesebuurt, Zomerhof and Liskwartier are relevant for us. The Old North is pinned between the main railroad system, a highway and the river the Rotte, where Rotterdam owes its name to. This area of Rotterdam escaped the destruction of the Second World War and therefore still has a lot of characteristic dwellings, most of them organized in a block pattern. Streets are often narrow and lined with trees and unity is created through hierarchy among streets and long interesting views. On the east side the area is cut through by the Noordersingel, a beautiful green tranquil town canal of which parts are being revitalized at the moment. On the east the neighbourhood is adjacent to a nature park with large ponds, the beautiful Kralingen Plassen.

Taking a closer look at Rotterdam Noord, we pinpoint and analyze its problems and soon realize the enormous potential it possesses. As is often the case with urban areas in Rotterdam, they are being hopelessly neglected. The exodus of the higher income class to the suburbs leaves these areas in control of the lower income groups. For some reason a rapid decline of the quality of life is experienced but the local government fails to launch a counter-attack. Characteristic for Rotterdam is the high ethnic minority percentage, which in Noord is about 31%, slightly lower than the average in Rotterdam. An interesting aspect about Het Oude Noorden is the fact that it has a high percentage of single households, around 63% on average.

The north is not connected to the subway lines of Rotterdam, but three tram lines and a bus line will bring you in walking distance of your destination. The infrastructure is set up in a hierarchal way; two main arteries feed the neighbourhood, connecting to the freeway. Perpendicular to the arteries four busy streets cross the overpass: Heer Bokelweg, Bergweg, Bergselaan and Gordelweg. These streets are mainly used for through-traffic, while the streets perpendicular to these streets are more pedestrian orientated. The Hofplein-overpass parallels two of these perpendicular streets. The way the infrastructure is set up creates an interesting hierarchy among the streets, but also defines housing typologies. Housing
alongside the busy arteries is anonymous and hard, while in the side-streets a more neighbour- 
hood-like atmosphere is created. Interesting to point out is that housing alongside the 
Hofplein-overpass is also anonymous, lacking any social coherence. More and more, this 
cold and anonymous atmosphere is experienced in the side-streets where front doors are 
passageways to multiple dwellings, degrading the front door to nothing more than an extra 
barrier between street and home. With the disappearance of the Hofpleintrack, this main 
public transport artery suddenly becomes a lifeless object crossing busy streets in a depre­ 
ciating living quarter. Once a vivid noise-producing accepted neighbourhood-quality, it is 
now a potential barrier between the east and west. The balancing act between connector and 
separator will be disturbed and a new role should be found for the overpass.

Housing and homing

Important in creating housing for today’s man is to define the act first. If housing 
is the urge to protect oneself and find shelter, than homing is man’s urge to, once housing is 
achieved, preserve this shelter. After accomplishing these basic needs, the post-modern man 
has the unrestricted motive to try to fulfil his existential needs and to create home. Clearly 
formulating these needs and having a good basis to start from is the only way in which the 
lifelong dream to have a home of oneself can come to fruition. Existential needs involve com­ 
fort, socialization, aesthetics and self-expression. These needs, of which the latter is the most 
important, clearly define the way in which homing should be perceived. This act of homing 
is very individual, it deals with personal taste, beauty, character and desires. This is why, 
in large-scale housing projects, in my opinion, architects can only provide a high quality of 
housing, in which a near perfect base to start the process of homing is accomplished. The 
architect is responsible for creating security and shelter, and to some extent comfort. From 
that point on the homing process is started by the occupier and solely dependent on the 
aspirations and qualities of this occupier. Of course external factors can be of significant im­ 
portance. The environmental factor in homing can be influenced by creating a highly social 
structure and hierarchy among the dwellings. Or structure and hierarchy can be ignored and 
anarchy takes over. This also is to some extent a design skill of the architect or urban planner. 
This interaction of dwellings and occupants among each other can have a strong impact 
on the homing process. As stated in a prior essay, the basis of departure which the architect 
provides should play on a childlike level with public and private spaces, challenging degrees 
of territory and control, and above all surpass the growing notion of an architecture of fear.
All these aspects are taken into account in creating the design method of elasticity. “A house is a rubber band, pinned in between the built environment, always on a tense but harmonious level with its surroundings.”

It is this tension between the housing provided by the architect, and the follow-up phase of homing inspired by the occupier that I call elasticity. This matter of elasticity is a tough notion to get a good grip on, because it deals with psychological and social issues as well as the mere physical aspects of building flexible. The dictionary refers to elasticity as the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation. More specific and applicable to our situation would be to define elasticity as the quality of being adaptable, something capable of being readily changed. A synonym for elasticity is springiness, which the dictionary defines as something having or showing a lively and energetic movement. These are all interesting definitions and in more ways applicable to our case. They should be kept in mind while discussing the matter of elasticity in housing and homing. In the following chapters I will elaborate on the three aspects of elasticity, and also relate these definitions to the art movement known as Futurism.

**THE THREE ASPECTS OF ELASTICITY**

**Physical**

The physical aspect of elasticity is actually derived from the term flexibility. Because I realized that flexibility could never cover all the desired needs in achieving homing, I introduced the term elasticity. Flexibility defines the matter of which a building or structure is adjustable, demountable and/or recyclable. The way a plan can be re-designed to fit new needs, or maybe a wholly new function, but also how fast this transformation can be realized are all aspects of flexibility. What makes it different from elasticity is the fact that it doesn’t cover social or environmental aspects, the obvious tension existing between buildings and the built environment. The way the building or structure is flexible towards its surroundings and towards changes in the environment. This matter is discussed in the social aspects of elasticity.

So, if we take a look at the mere physical aspects of elasticity, the job is to create a building that is adaptable to changing conditions in the occupier or owner’s situation, on his quest for homing. In this case, the Hofplein-overpass, we
have to apply a building method, on this six meter wide structure, that will be flexible in a way that the dwelling can either widen or floors may be added. Families may grow, households may change, or maybe business will flourish. As for the arches, it has already been proven that the arches can be easily combined by making a passageway, connecting multiple spaces. For example, a cooking school connected five arches and thus created an interesting follow-up of rooms. Still we have to analyze these arches and their compatibility with different types of small business, foremost because of the small width and the massiveness of the structure. We have to investigate the elasticity of the space under the arches with the surrounding public space and street. How will the building react on changing conditions in the environment. Can we incorporate or occupy the sidewalk? And therefore re-design the landscape around the overpass? Maybe a similar situation can be created on top of the overpass, where adjacent dwellings can be connected to create larger dwellings.

Probably the most important aspect and one of the most challenging design problems will be the entrance of the dwelling. How will the occupier reach his home, how will he overcome this six meter high obstacle? This vertical transportation should be designed in a way that it is flexible and can easily be removed or adjusted. Because of the small width of the existing structure, this will create a specific housing typology. Interesting will be to look at the outdoor (private) space in relation to the public space. How do we prevent that the dwellings on top of the overpass will become isolated, cut-off from the ground floor. Or are we developing a private street on a higher level, a gated street, which connects with the buildings on the other side of the street through bridges and walkways? One of the main issues in revitalizing this area around the overpass, is trying to get life back into the streets, connecting homes to the sidewalk, personalizing the anonymous. By building dwellings on top of the overpass we encounter once more the dislocation of the home with the public street. In discussing these issues we are already looking at the social aspects of elasticity.

The use of new and light materials should have a priority in elastic housing. For Habraken (1998) said ‘If in housing we wish to restore human relationships, but mean to exclude today’s technical possibilities, we are following a road to the past, a road we cannot follow.’ Exploring on the field of technical possibilities will give us insight and new ideas how to physically build the elastic house.
Social

In pursuit of homing the social issues involving elasticity are very important. As already pointed out the influence of the environment on the flexibility of a building is an aspect often forgotten but which should never be ignored. The way a building interacts with public and private places, with neighbouring structures and simply the way the building and its surroundings are used by man cries for a certain level of elasticity. When a building changes physically it has an impact on the environment, on public and private spaces, and vice versa. In a way I am preaching for an elastic environment, an environment where the borders between public and private are transparent, moveable but above all in coherence with the flexibility of the structure and of the occupier. Especially in the Hofplein case, living elevated creates a different social structure than living on the same level. Also it is different from an apartment flat or skyscraper, because of its apparent relationship with the surroundings. Developing housing on top of the track should a priori pursue the goal of reuniting the two areas the track so brutally divides, but also to create new social hierarchies. A design rule may be to deliberately place all front doors on street level. This rule advocates a work@home typology of housing, where the business is located in the arches, doubling as front door. Or living is situated in the arches, and the businesses are grouped on top of the structure, enjoying their own private entrances.

The Hofplein overpass harbours different social structures alongside its two kilometres long track. There are busy intersections, quiet streets, noisy playgrounds, gatherings of students smoking a cigarette while waiting for the tram, trucks unloading goods, mothers with trolleys going to do groceries. These happenings create different atmospheres at different locations. They all have their qualities and annoyances, and depict a social hierarchy besides their programmatic value. They create social hubs embedded in social patterns which form the neighbourhood. If we travel along the overpass we are confronted and sometimes interact with these different hubs. They don’t always have harsh borderlines; one goes over in the other, unnoticed. Locating and acknowledging the specific qualities of each social pattern creates a starting point for elasticity in a social way. In creating housing on top of the overpass, we need not necessarily look at the house itself, which we eventually will do of course, but first at its surroundings. In fact when buying or building a house on top of the overpass you actually choose for
the environment it is located in. The social patterns, the social qualities, define your choice for trying to achieve homing at this location. In this way the qualities of the neighbourhood are amplified and a relationship is moulded between the new and existing inhabitants of the neighbourhood. The house itself is for the greater part the same, but adaptable to its surroundings. Changing conditions in the environment, in the social structure, can easily be accommodated due to the elastic nature of the design. Imagine a specific place along the track, where on one side there is a playground, and the other side looks out on a rustic apartment building. When building a dwelling on this spot one orientates his house to either side, whichever one prefers. You can choose on which side you will make your front door, and to which direction the private outdoor space is orientated. If conditions change in the near future, the dwelling can adapt to these changes and reorganization is imaginable.

It is hard to imagine an elastic environment. How should we perceive such an environment? Should we just accept every flimsy reaction on a change in the environment, or does an elastic environment in fact advocate a tense situation? If that is true, then it comes down to the way the occupier reacts to the situation, in how far the occupier is willing to accept certain conditions and is willing to co-operate in changing them. How much effort is he willing to put into his elastic house? We now have created a bridge to the final aspect of elasticity: mentality.

**Mental**

The third aspect of overall elasticity in housing is a pure psychological one. The only way in which physical and social elasticity can be a positive influence on homing is if they are backed-up by a positive mentality of the occupier. If the occupier of the dwelling is in no way open to the free transparent elasticity of the structure and its environment, which the architect and urban planner have provided, than the influence of these parties is nil. Elastic dwellings are meant for open-minded people who think that their home should reflect their personality and their social aspirations. In order for the neighbourhood to be reunited the new and existing inhabitants should be willing to let their home and its private and public surroundings be a part of this reunion. How elastic are you?
A futurist manifesto

"As if we who are accumulators and generators of movement, with all our added mechanical limbs, with all the noise and speed of our life, could live in streets built for the needs of men four, five or six centuries ago." ⁴

Looking from these 3 different angles to the matter of elasticity makes you ponder in what manner these aspects will come to realization. How will we conceive elasticity in a physical form, in built matter? How will we react, how will we behave in such an environment? How will this elasticity take shape?

Inspiring are Umberto Bocciioni’s futurist paintings. Bocciioni was a painter and sculptor around the turn of the 20th century. In a time when industrialization was reaching its peak, the art movement was typified as a retrospective dream of an antique and Renaissance past. Bocciioni was an advocate of the dynamic realities of the industrial present. In accomplishing his aims he developed a style which was as aggressive and contemporary as the new urban environment. In a way, this almost a century-old art-movement called futurism is a good expressionist of elasticity. No wonder one of Bocciioni’s most famous paintings is called ‘Elasticity’. The painting is a literal demonstration of horsepower, in which Bocciioni’s machinelike horse, with its virile, black-booted rider, thunders across an appropriately mechanized landscape of high-tension poles and factory chimneys.⁵

The most interesting aspect of futurist paintings is that it shows a fragment of a constantly changing visual experience; the spectator remains static while the objects rush across the field of vision. The uses of harsh and sour colours amplify these lines of force, as Bocciioni calls them.

Bocciioni was accompanied by his fellow-futurists Antonio Sant’Elia, F.T. Marinetti and others. They were advocates of the future, discarding all classical architecture and other classical art forms. They did not believe in straight lines, cubes, rhythm, etcetera. Modern life with its modern technology should be the new way for art to follow. "[…] an architecture whose reason for existence can be found solely in the unique conditions of modern life, and in its correspondence with the aesthetic values of our sensibilities. This architecture cannot be subjected to any law of historical continuity. It must be new, just as our state of mind is new." ⁶

The futurists had a strong sometimes fascist ideology. They hailed war and were anti-feminists. But if we look beyond that we see that their believes were clear and genuine: to free art, and architecture, from its oppressing ties.
One of the interesting aspects of Futurism, and strengthening the theory of elasticity, is the importance Futurism sees in the environment. “We declare that the environment must form part of the plastic whole, a world of its own...” \cite{Boccioni}, “[a Futurist sculpture...] whose basis will be architectural, not only as a construction of masses, but in such a way that the sculptural block itself will contain the architectural elements of the sculptural environment in which the object exists.” \cite{SanR} Architecture should reflect, incorporate and/or contain the environment. The Futurists are on an endeavour to harmonize the environment with Man and to transform the world of things into direct projection of the world of the spirit. \cite{SantElia} If we would only try to put all our efforts in making this happen, we will create better homes.

Futurists’ theory and ideals are enthralling to read but they should always be put in a historical timeframe. It is now more than a century later and technical development and progress on every level have boggled everybody’s mind. The speed at which technological advancements are introduced makes modern man loose grip on his own life. It is at this time that people tend to reach back to the past, grabbing on to what we know, when time felt like it was less complex and genuine. Futurists believe in the present day and even more in tomorrow. Studies of materials and building methods should be stimulated and applied to modern building, so the city of tomorrow can be created. As a Futurist would say: Every generation must build its own city.

In a way trying to introduce Futurist doctrine on this case is a paradox. Futurists believe in the future and discard the past, so basing elastic design on Futurism is a priori a crime. But the dynamic, environmental and force aspects of Futurism come close to the springiness and energetic qualities of elasticity which I would like to create and stimulate at Hofplein.

**Design Principles**

“We have lost our predilection for the monumental, the heavy, the static, and we have enriched our sensibility with a taste for the light, the practical, the ephemeral and the swift. We no longer feel ourselves to be the men of the cathedrals, the palaces and the podiums. We are the men of the great hotels, the railway stations, the immense streets, colossal ports, covered markets, luminous arcades, straight roads and beneficial demolitions.”

“The corporations want to improve the quality of life in the adjacent neighbourhoods through a visible change in usage... a lively use of the arches... and to give...
a strong impulse to the quality of life and safety in the districts Agniesebuurt, Bergpolder, Liskwartier and Zomerdorp.

"Design and plantings will make the High Line beautiful, but people will make it successful, welcome and safe."

If we apply this concept of elasticity to our case the Hofplein overpass, and employ the doctrine of futurism to the design what then will be the result?

In a project as big as this one, we first have to get a grip on the structure itself and foremost the surrounding area. In creating a mental map, both in image and in word, we will have a tool which will define the specific areas and will display important aspects of the neighbourhood. This will help us develop design principles which we then can apply to the case. By peeling off Old North’s layers we will discover its qualities and future potential.

To close off this essay I will portray the design principles that have created themselves during my observation and study on the Hofplein overpass. They will discuss different aspects that I feel are important for creating the design tools, based on the ideas of elasticity, which will re-shape the Hofplein neighbourhood.

UNIQUENESS: First of all the Hofplein overpass is unique. From its early day until the present day it has been a landmark of Rotterdam, transporting passengers to and from the city. Its distinct character, shape and setting make it an integral part of the neighbourhood, enjoying the same typological qualities as a church, a train station or a soccer stadium. For it is a one of a kind structure.

LINEAR IDENTITY AND DIMENSIONS: The Hofplein track is a linear structure cutting through a dense neighbourhood over a distance of two kilometres. The repetition of 175 arches amplifies this linearity. We have to interpret this structure as a line in order for it to correspond with its surroundings. This linearity, although one-dimensional in the mere sense of the word, will interact with the environment to create a second and third dimension. When incorporating time, speed and dynamism into the design, it will even extend this to the fourth dimension.
TRANSPORTATION: The Hofplein overpass was built as a transportation artery, connecting The Hague to Rotterdam. It will no longer serve this purpose. Trams, buses and bicycle paths are quite sufficient in transporting pedestrians and cyclists. Through elasticity in the design the speed and dynamism of the train will be kept alive in the neighbourhood. The only station still in tact, Bergwegstation, shall be kept in its original state and become a time capsule of almost a century of Hofplein transportation. The infrastructure alongside the Hofplein overpass will have to be adjusted to its new function, but for the most part will consist out of slow traffic accommodating the adjacent homes and businesses, while heavy traffic will be re-directed to the main arteries, crossing the overpass at multiple places.

MIXTURE: The Old North is a district where a lot of different cultures live closely together, in harmony. This mix of cultures, but also of housing typologies, should be reflected by the Hofplein overpass. On top of the overpass multiple layers of housing, private and (semi) public spaces and places will fluidly stream into a distinct coherence of dynamic architecture. It will seek contact with the adjacent structures and spaces and the overpass will nest in its environment.

SOCIAL GENERATOR: In order for the project to be a success, the Hofplein should forever settle itself in the Old North. It should link the east and west, promoting transparency. At strategic places arches should be opened, access to the overpass should be easy, friendly and open, housing on top of the overpass should interact with neighbouring structures. Altogether the overpass should become a social generator, a structure for the city. A true elasti-city.

SMALL BUSINESS: The more than 40% of the arches that are closed off at the moment, serving as depot, shall be opened up again to make place for small enterprises. Stimulation of small businesses in the field of design, architecture and the arts will enhance the business climate in the Old North and create a lively atmosphere at ground level. By stimulating activity in and around the overpass the streets facing the overpass will rejuvenate and houses will once again open themselves up to the street.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC: The many public spaces available in the Old North shall be categorized and linked to the overpass. Underneath and on top of the overpass new public spaces will be created, supporting existing spaces around the overpass. The borderline between public and private will be transparent following the idea of elasticity.
SAFETY: An important aspect of revitalizing the Hofplein neighbourhood is the aspect of safety. In softening the borders between public and private, the people have to feel secure and safe with this transformation. They have to open up their homes and invite their neighbours in. The Hofplein area for once should become a playground for children as well as for adults.

THE CITY AND THE CENTRE: The Willemspoort tunnel is an obvious barrier between parts of the Old North and downtown Rotterdam. On both sides where the train track enters the tunnel, there are urban wastelands. This is also the place where the former Hofplein Station was situated. The intention is to connect these two parts of the city. A little further up north we find Eudokia shopping centre, serving a large part of Rotterdam North. The overpass skims the centre and we should consider its role in extending and improving the facilities for the neighbourhood. Incorporating these two aspects in the design will enhance the appeal of the North, and hopefully we will then start speaking not of the Old North, but of the New North.
LEARNING FROM SAUERBRUCH HUTTON ARCHITECTS

In trying to find reference material and designs for this project we dive into the architectural philosophy of the Berlin-based firm of Sauerbruch Hutton architects. The reason in picking these architects is their devotion to the qualities of surrounding space. They deal with the specific, creating buildings which are specific to their program and specific to their place. In the ElCroquis 114 [Sauerbruch Hutton Architects, 1997-2003, against type] Aaron Betsky interviews the architects and talks to them about type, colour and space. Often referred to as ‘the architects who use colour’, their reason of using these sometimes very bold colours often finds its roots in the context. They see the built environment as something that is first of all to be experienced, it has to be enjoyable. Forms that give pleasure. You should be able to perceive this environment with all your senses, the visual included. This sensuality in design creates buildings which are from a distance experienced as stand-alone iconic structures, but once you get closer the subtlety and refinement of the façade is experienced. Once inside the spatial aspects take over. In the use of their buildings one thus gets involved in a dialogue between the surface, the visual image and the spatial experience which is more bodily. In this way the building becomes an active participant in the life of the city. Their approach is one of exhaustively trying and testing various colour ideas or colour schemes. The whole process is empirical and eventually based on the judgement of their eyes.

A building is to them more like an event that occurs continually, a collection of colours, shapes and perhaps other sensual phenomena that cohere only as one experiences them, not a priori.

-Aaron Betsky
It is interesting to read about their philosophy of regarding the city as a landscape. It comes down to the following 6 statements:

• In a landscape the architecture is a representation of its environment
• The architecture develops itself as a part of the whole, and this whole is defined as the sum of the individual elements.
• Landscape suggests a well functioning, idiosyncratic and beautiful environment, reproduced by numerous independent, not necessarily homogeneous systems;
• Landscape is open and inclusive; landscape contains a constant change;
• Landscape makes it possible to free ourselves from de order of the city (which, given the fact that the complexity of the whole which we call the city is still too simplistic to be relevant);
• Landscape gives the opportunity to react to an individual condition without denying the comprised principle.

A space, person or an object that somehow stands out is something you might engage with, something you react to – negatively, positively or whatever. But it’s not neutral.

Another aspect is the quality of sensuality. This always has to do with materiality and surfaces. It has a lot to do with colours obviously, and it has to do with spatial articulation. We tend to create forms which are reminiscent of bodily or natural forms that one feel comfortable with.
The ideas on elasticity have a striking resemblance with the vision of experiencing and understanding the city as a landscape. Its intense network and patterns make the city a rigid whole with countless interdependencies. An intervention in one of the elements has inevitable consequences for the landscape as a whole, besides of course its direct influence on the surroundings. These constant changes are what makes the landscape and thus the city an energetic and lively environment, an organism adapting and transforming to impulses generated by the existing [built] environment or through introduced interventions. Exemplary for elasticity is the first statement, that the architecture within a landscape is a representation of its environment. A city shapes itself around its various environments and the structures within this environment should be a harmonious reflection of this same environment. Only then are we able to create a strong and healthy public realm.

Experimental factory, Magdeburg, completed 2001

We test every group of particular colours for a space a long time and this becomes a quasi-scientific experiment as we continue with the iterations until we find something we like. The whole process is empirical and based on the judgement of our eyes. Having said that, the main impulse for the choice of colours in our urban projects often comes from the context.

Fire and police station, Berlin, completed 2004
An elastic landscape is a landscape which can react to an individual condition without losing the comprised principle, following the sixth statement. The interventions that are performed in a certain situation, whether they are developed with respect to the existing site or not, will have an apparent impact on the landscape, but its definitive outcome is dependent on the matter of elasticity of the existing environment. In what way can the existing landscape adapt, transform or reflect the proposed intervention and what will be the definitive outcome. The resilience of existing structures and social networks will create a certain tension between the existing and the introduced. The level of tension, either positive or negative, is often hard to predict. This is what makes elasticity a very trivial matter. But within this uncertainty lies its greatest power, because above all an elastic landscape should be ready to adapt to changes in the environment, at all times.

To quote muf: \textit{we create space for uncertainty.}
TWO COMPETITION ENTRIES
During the course of my final thesis I entered two design competitions.

The first one is for a building cooperation in the west of Holland, near The Hague. It calls for architects and designers to think of new concepts for sub-urban living. The design focuses itself on those who call themselves the pioneers of homing, people who would like to have a say in the way their house is arranged and its aesthetic appearance, but who also want a close and engaged social neighbourhood. It is based on the concept of an American motel combined with a collective courtyard. Its circular arrangement creates a compact urban block where everybody stays in visual contact with each other. The large gallery makes for accidental meetings to occur, as does the large courtyard.

The second entry is for the revitalization of an untenable office building located on a busy artery in Eindhoven. The design calls for innovative solutions for the growing number of empty office buildings and the growing shortage of student housing. In the design we once again focus on the individuality of the person and the collective wish of engaging in a strong social pattern of relationships. The internal wide staircase connects the person (myBox) to the family (floor) to the neighbourhood (building). It is a social void connecting all the inhabitants and creating space for possible exchange.

This second entry has been done in collaboration with Floris van de Biggelaar.
CASANOVA GROEIMOTEL

Het Groeimotel is een conceptwoonmodel welke gebaseerd is op het gebruik en de vormgeving van een typisch Amerikaanse motel. Deze motels bestaan meestal uit twee bouwlagen en worden gekenmerkt door de schakering van de motelkamers rondom een binnenplaats waar doorgaans het zwembad en de parkeerplaatsen gelegen zijn. Ook de galerijontsluiting van de eerste verdieping, het overhellende dak en het karakteristieke portiersgebouw zijn duidelijke vormgevingsaspecten. Het Groeimotel is ontworpen voor een suburbaan woonmilieu, hoewel het als concept in verschillende woonmilieus toepasbaar kan worden. Het wedstrijdprogramma vraagt om creatieve, vernieuwende en flexibele ideeën die resulteren in een variatie aan wonfuncties waar verschil, identiteit en eigenheid essentieel zijn; het Groeimotel gaat in deze behoefte voorzien.

Het Groeimotel als concept
Het Groeimotel is op zoek naar pioniers op het gebied van wonen. Mensen die graag het heft in eigen handen nemen en willen beslissen over hun eigen huis, grond en vooral het leven zelf. Het Groeimotel voorziet in een basiswoning, waar op verschillende manieren eigenwijs aan gesleuteld kan worden; zonder regels, smaakpolitie of andere interventie. Het Groeimotel is een gemeenschap waarin men experimenteert en durft, waarin levensfasen hun uitdrukking vinden in de architectuur.

Het Groeimotel als sociaal model
Een galerij op de eerste verdieping ontsluit de woningen en voorziet de bewoners van contact met de buren. Door deze sociale laag die verheven is van de begane grond, kan er op de binnenplaats soepeler omgesprongen worden met het openbare karakter van de binnenplaats. Hoewel de binnenplaats verscholen ligt achter de bebouwing zal er vooral in de beginfase, door het ontbreken van een onderbouw, een zeer open karakter waarnemenbaar zijn. Door een informeel netwerk van paden en straten kunnen meerdere Groeimotels met elkaar verbonden worden en kunnen de openbare functies op de binnenplaatsen elkaar completeren. Het plaatsen van wijkvoorzieningen aan de hoofdweg creëert een levendig straatbeeld en zorgt voor de functies. Parkeerplaatsen komen zowel aan de hoofdstraat als in de binnenplaatsen. Er zal gestreefd worden naar een sterk groen karakter en ingebedd worden op de constant verandering van bewoners in de Groeimotels.

Het Groeimotel als ontwerp
Het Groeimotel voorziet de bewoners in een basiswoning op de eerste verdieping welke genesteld zit in een structuur van kolommen en liggers. Het Groeimotel beschikt over een variatie aan wonfuncties, en woongrootte, gebaseerd op de standaardwoning op de eerste verdieping van circa 70 m² (exclusief
Er zijn enkele afwijkingen, zoals de hoek- en poortwoningen. Vanuit deze basisvorm kan de bewoner naar hartelust aan- en verbouwen. De volledige begane grondverdieping mag gebouwd worden; van garage tot extra slaapkamers of zelfs een tweede woning. De basiswoning wordt in dit voorbeeldmodel standaard geleverd met een laag schuin dak; dit is vanzelfsprekend afhankelijk van het ontwerp van het betreffende Groeimodel. Een eventueel lichte dakopbouw kan de oppervlakte van de woning dusdanig vergroten en er kan een groot dakterras worden gerealiseerd. Door de woningen gespiegeld aan elkaar geschakeld zijn, ontstaat er door de plaatsing van de kolommen een kern van 1,60 meter breed geschikt voor het verticale transport en de leidingen. Tevens ontstaat er een vrij overspanning in de woningruimte van 5,40 meter. Met al deze aanpassingen kan de oppervlakte van een basiswoning variëren tussen 70 en 220 m². Een volledig uitgebreide woning kan door zijn opzet (kern en plaatsing kolommen) eenvoudig verbouwd worden tot een splitlevel woning. Alle ontsluitingen vinden in principe via de galerij plaats, echter zullen splitlevel-woningen ook op de begane grond worden ontsloten. Bij de verbouwingen is de keuze van de architect volledig vrij en daarmee ook de materiaalkeuze en architectuurstijl. In de uitgangspositie heeft het Groeimotel 40 woningen/ha, echter kunnen er door het toepassen van splitlevelwoningen totaal 70 woningen/ha gerealiseerd worden.
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A STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN 2005
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De nieuwe Nederlandse samenleving wordt gekenmerkt door een overmaat aan intolerantie en disrespect. Ten opzichte van ouderen, docenten, tramp personeel en ga zo maar door. Het lijkt alsof de Nederlanders niet meer door één deur kunnen. Deze tendens dient doorbroken te worden en het wordt tijd om de idealen van de sociale maatschappij van zolder te halen.

Architecten en stedenbouwkundige hebben instrumenten in handen om deze negatieve tendens van individualisering en fragmentatie van de publieke moraal een halt toe roepen.

Het wordt tijd het sociale gevoel weer boven de individuele drijfveren en motieven te plaatsen, een gevoel van verantwoordelijkheid voor je medemens te creëren. Het versterken van de sociale banden staat hierin centraal.

Woningbouwvereniging Vestide vraagt in haar prijsvraag om een visie op de toekomst van jongerenhuisvesting. A stairway to heaven 2005 biedt Vestide de kans om via een pilotproject een statement neer
te zetten waarbij getracht wordt het aloude sociale concept van galerijflat met gezamenlijke sociale voorzieningen, van een nieuwe impuls te voorzien. Zodoende ontstaat er een moderne variant waarin contact tussen de bewoners centraal staat.

Het conceptueel model waar dit streven in getracht is vorm te geven bestaat uit een driedeling van de verblijfcrumten.

- Het privé-domein van de jongeren zelf bestaat uit een module van myBox.com. Deze myBox heeft hij geheel zelf ingericht/aangepast om zodoende een eigen identiteit te creëren.
- De familie waarin de jongeren opgroeit, is de verdieping waar de open ruimte als één gezamenlijke ruimte gaat fungeren. Elke verdieping beschikt over een unieke functie, zoals een pooltafel, Canal+-bios, etc. om de integratie tussen verdiepingen te bevorderen.
- De samenleving waarin de jongeren leeft is een veilige, geconditioneerde ruimte die de families met elkaar verbindt en waar interactie plaatsvindt tussen de 40 bewoners. Deze is vormgegeven in een 3-meter-brede trap, met verscheidene plateaus, die eindigt in een paviljoen op het dakterrass. Het schuine atrium wat daardoor gecreëerd wordt zorgt voor een visuele verbinding tussen de myBox's.
THE CASE: HOFPLEIN

Cognitive psychologists believe that we receive messages, clues, information about the meaning of our world from the people and places that surround us. Interpreting and understanding these messages can help us achieve healthy human growth.

Toby Israel
INTRODUCTION

Having developed the theory of elasticity we have to find a suitable location to try to apply the theory. Not really knowing on what scale the theory should be applied we choose a location which harbours a great future potential, deals with complex urban structures and a highly unique built environment, and also deals with interesting social networks and cultural patterns. We have chosen the Hofplein overpass in Rotterdam Noord.
THE STORY OF HOFPLEIN
THE STORY OF HOFPLEIN

The plans for the Hofpleinlijn date back to the end of the 19th century. A group of private investors, led by businessman P.J. van Ommeren, issued the task of designing a new railway connection between Rotterdam and The Hague. The board of Rotterdam was very enthusiastic, though they granted the building permit on one condition: the new track would have to be elevated from the ground to cause as little hinder as possible. To cross the sometimes large streets a construction out of brick masonry was unsuitable. The French firm Hennebique located in Paris was contacted, due to their renowned projects and experience with reinforced concrete. This resulted into the design of the first large infrastructural reinforced concrete construction in the Netherlands. Construction of the overpass started in 1904 and in 1908 the first train ran to Scheveningen.

Though at first the exploitation was not very successful, gradually the number of passengers increased, largely due to the rapid growth of Rotterdam and The Hague but foremost to the growing numbers of commuters. Ironically the original investors of the Hofpleinlijn more and more preferred the car above the train, but a large part of the middle class still used the track as their way to get to the city.
Already during construction eight arches were installed with facades. In the following years arches at the Voorburgstraat and Vijverhofstraat were used as a store, a warehouse, an office or garage. More and more arches were filled up; it was cheap storage space at a very good location. Remarkably the Hofpleinlijn was temporarily used as a street for hookers and hustlers; it was known as "het Parfumlijntje" (trans. The Perfumetrack). Hofplein Station was characterized by a beautiful half-round station building designed by architect J.P Stok. This building, housing the Grandcafé Loos, dominated its surroundings, standing at the head of the Hofplein square; a place where electric and horse trams, waterways and roadways all came together. It was the center of Rotterdam, infrastructural more important than Rotterdam Central. In 1940 during the bombardment of Rotterdam a large part of Hofplein Station was completely destroyed, though surprisingly the overpass itself stayed largely intact. In 1956 the commission was made to erect a new station building. This time it was architect S. van Ravensteijn, also the architect for Rotterdam Central Station, who designed the modernistic new Hofplein Station. Unfortunately this building wasn't granted a long lifespan; it was torn down in 1990 to make way for the underground Willemsoort tunnel.
During the end of the forties a new station was built at Bergweg. This small expressionist white building with its trapezoid windows was also designed by Ravensteijn. In 1959 a new wider pre-stressed reinforced concrete slab was added for the safety of the maintenance workers. The old cast-iron fences were replaced with simple iron balustrades. The overpass at Heer Bokelweg was replaced with a new concrete suspension. Most of the arches at the large platform building were filled in with bricks.

The larger part of the overpass was built in the meadows; the districts Bergpolder, Liskwartier and Agniesebuurt had not yet been built. Only three structures at the Bergweg and a couple buildings at the first 100 meters of the overpass had to be demolished. The last arch crosses the Noorderkanaal, a canal dug in the beginning of the 20th century, and from then on the track was continued on a steel bridge over another rail track.

A journalist reports on its maiden voyage:

"Twee kilometer lang over de viaduct, met overspanningen van 8 meter wijde over de vele Noordelijke straten reden wij naar den Bergweg en daar de stad uit. De viaduct staat dan nog ruim een kilometer verder, met open bogen voor de straten, die daar zullen worden aangelegd. Dan gaat de trein langs een plaatijzeren brug over de Ceintuurbaan — een zijlijn verbindt deze spoorlijn aan de Ceintuurlijn — en daarachter ligt nog een stuk viaduct, dan daalt de baan in den polder bij Schiebroek op een zanddijk, ongerept recht in Noordelijke richting, door prachtig wijd polderland, dat de reizigers vol innig-Hollandsche afwisseling zullen vinden."

"Two kilometers long crossing the overpass, with spans of 8 meters over the many Northern streets we traveled to the Bergweg and from then on out of the city. The overpass goes on for another kilometer, with open arches for streets which will be constructed in the future. Then the train crosses a iron bridge over the Ceintuurbaan — a side track connects this train track to the Ceintuurtrack — passes another small
overpass, then descends into the polder at Schiebroek on a sand dike, unspoiled straight in northern direction, through a beautiful wide polder landscape, which the travelers will admire with profound Dutch distinction."

With its almost 200 arches, with a width varying from 7.2 meters to 20 meters, this almost two kilometer long reinforced concrete twin track overpass is an important piece of infrastructural heritage for the city of Rotterdam. Being the first reinforced concrete structure on this scale and the first electric train track in the Netherlands, the Hofplein overpass deserves preservation. This is why the Hofplein overpass has been appointed a state monument.

**HET OUDE NOORDEN**

If we take a look at Rotterdam Noord, the area north of central station we immediately acknowledge its obvious beauty. The area also referred to as the Old North (Het Oude Noorden) exists of multiple districts of which Bergpolder, Agniesebuurt, Zomerhof and Liskwartier are relevant for us. The Old North is pinned between the main railroad system, a highway and the river the Rotte, where Rotterdam owes its name to. This area of Rotterdam escaped the destruction of the Second World War and therefore still has a lot of characteristic dwellings, most of them organized in a block pattern. Streets are often narrow and lined with trees and unity is created through hierarchy among streets and long interesting views. On the east side the area is cut through by the Noordersingel, a beautiful green tranquil town canal of which parts are being revitalized at the moment. Further east the neighbourhood meets the beautiful Kralingen Plassen, a nature park with large ponds.

Taking a closer look at Rotterdam Noord, we pinpoint and analyze its problems and soon realize the enormous potential it possesses. As is often the case with urban areas in Rotterdam, they are being hopelessly neglected. The exodus of the higher in-
come class to the suburbs leaves these areas in control of the lower income groups. For some reason a rapid decline of the quality of life is experienced but the local government fails to launch a counter-attack. Characteristic for Rotterdam is the high ethnic minority percentage, which in Noord is about 31%, slightly lower than the average in Rotterdam. An interesting aspect about Het Oude Noorden is the fact that it has a high percentage of single households, around 63% on average.

The north is not connected to the subway lines of Rotterdam, but three tram lines and a bus line will bring you in walking distance of your destination. The infrastructure is set up in a hierarchal way; two main arteries feed the neighbourhood, connecting to the freeway. Perpendicular to the arteries four busy streets cross the overpass: Heer Bokelweg, Bergweg, Bergselaan and Gordelweg. These streets are mainly used for through-traffic, while the streets perpendicular to these streets are more pedestrian orientated. The Hofplein-overpass parallels two of these perpendicular streets. The way the infrastructure is set up creates an interesting hierarchy among the streets, but also defines housing typologies. Housing alongside the busy arteries is anonymous and hard, while in the side-streets a more neighbourhood-like atmosphere is created. Interesting to point out is that housing alongside the Hofplein-overpass is also anonymous, lacking any social coherence. More and more, this cold and anonymous atmosphere is experienced in the side-streets where front doors are passageways to multiple dwellings, degrading the front door to nothing more than an extra barrier between street and home. With the disappearance of the Hofpleintrack, this main public transport artery suddenly becomes a lifeless object crossing busy streets in a depreciating living quarter. Once a vivid noise-producing accepted neighbourhood-quality, it is now a potential barrier between the east and west. The balancing act between connector and separator will be disturbed and a new role should be found for the overpass.
Weest Optimistisch!

www.halfvol.nu
WATER

A 16 meter wide town canal, parallel to the overpass, cuts the Noord district in two. The north of the area is flanked by the Noorderkanaal.

PARK

Greenery is concentrated around the town canals and the Bergselaan. Some sporadic parks include trees and large strips of grass. Many streets are lined with trees.
PUBLIC SPACE
True enjoyable public places, like squares and playgrounds, are scarce and fragmented over the various districts. The Tellingerstraat is experienced as a small public boulevard.

NON-SPACE
At both ends of the overpass we experience places which can be defined as non-spaces. We should interpret them as spaces with a high potential. Situated around the rail tunnel and the highway/Noorderkanaal, these areas lack program though their locations are very promising.
149 arches occupied
the overpass
on a total length of 1950 meters

thirteen places to cross
RE-UNITE AND AMPLIFY

The main objective of this proposal is to create a unified neighbourhood. The overpass has never really been a barrier, though neglecting it’s dividing impact on the built environment will possibly make this happen in the future. For that reason existing qualities should be acknowledged and amplified.

Large blocks are the main building type in this area. At specific areas a building block adjoins the overpass, but the block is not completed. On these spots the overpass should be integrated into the building block creating interesting townhouses with entrances on ground level.

LINEARITY AND DIMENSIONS

The overpass should be interpreted as a line. It is a section through the neighbourhood, building on top of the overpass will transform this one-dimensionality into a dynamic structure.

EUDOKIA SHOPPING CENTRE

Eudokia shopping centre is one of the main shopping areas in the old north. With the creation of a new parking garage at the site and the demolition of a large part of this block, a new extension of the shopping centre can be realised. Eudokia will function as the heart of the old north. Main focus should be the creation of a large public area with leisure function, making Eudokia more than just a shopping mall.

BERGWEG STATION

Bergweg Station, a characteristic modern building will be kept in tact and turned into a time capsule, harbouring all of Hofplein’s history and secrets.

SMALL BUSINESS

The stimulation of small starting businesses around the overpass should be a priority. The presence of the Zadkine College of Graphic Design will add potential on the field of design, architecture and the arts. The arches are housing these businesses.

AROUND BEEKERSTRAAT, in the Business District, an new office building is projected. It should be a progressive office building where transparency, identity and visibility are the key aspects. A dynamic breathing structure balancing the overpass, playing with the environment, public and private spaces.

THE CITY AND THE CENTRE

Hofplein Station the allure of Hofplein being an interesting and peculiar urban place, and endpoint also a starting point, should be re-introduced. A large sculpture I tower should mark the Old Town and embrace it in the urban network. A passageway across the Willemspoortunnel will physically and symbolically connect the arts to the city.
"We declare that the environment must form part of the plastic whole, a world of its own…", "[a Futurist sculpture…] whose basis will be architectural, not only as a construction of masses, but in such a way that the sculptural block itself will contain the architectural elements of the sculptural environment in which the object exists."

THE FUTURISTS
HYPOTHETICAL PROPOSALS... OR NOT?
To get a grip on the scale of the project we have issued a couple hypothetical universal design proposals which will give a good “discovery channel” representation of size and volume.

Parking
If we would completely change the use of the overpass from an active infrastructural element to a passive infrastructural element, in simple words from transportation to parking, we will be able to create an enormous amount of parking spaces. Within every arch two or three cars can be parked and by introducing parallel parking in the platform building we will be able to create an enormous amount of extra parking spaces, a total of 597. If we exchange existing parking spaces for these spaces in the overpass, meaning we will not ADD additional parking, all the streets around the overpass will be practically parking-free. This could create an enormous potential for the currently dieing streets. Creating car-free streets and in return provide covered parking spaces will be a welcome addition to the neighbourhood.

< Preliminary design study, June 2006
If we take it one step further and also explore the possibility of exploiting the deck as a parking lot we will be able to add an additional 866 parking spaces. This means that even more parking can be pulled out of the neighbourhood, making room for new healthy public space. Concentrating the neighbourhood parking in and on top of the overpass raises the questions about transportation and mobility and their relation to the home. Everybody wants to make the walk with groceries from the trunk to the kitchen as short as possible. This should still be possible, the streets will be accessible for motorized traffic, but the car should eventually be parked in the unique parking vein which runs through the district from north to south. Maybe then, when the car is parked further away from home, people will think twice before taking the car…
Park or Prison?
The total amount of deck surface exceeds 20,000 square meters. What if we project one of the most public perceived spaces and one of the most private perceived spaces onto this surface?

The deck space represents twice the surface area of the park in the Noord district, so it would surely be a welcome addition for the people. A great plus is the fact that it is elongated and actually accessible for everyone in the neighbourhood. Nobody would live more than a five-minute walk away from the park. Of course we already have the Noordersingel which runs parallel to the overpass. Creating a park this large, without having to demolish several building blocks sounds very appealing though.

If we project the footprint area of the Noorder prison we see that the deck surface is 1.5 times the size of the prison. We would be able to create the longest prison in history, negating all the standard theories on panopticon prisons. The structure itself is extremely solid and its sheer volume and appearance could well be suitable for a prison. By aligning the cells side by side we would be able to create an enormous string of inmates, who would have to travel along the overpass to the communal area at the platform building.
THE HIGHLINE VS. HOFPLEIN

The Highline in New York City is a two kilometre long overpass crossing the Meatpacking district in western Manhattan. Servicing the large meat processing industry in that part of Manhattan the track was mainly used for the transportation of goods. After being neglected for years a couple engaged citizens decided to save the structure from demolition. Today a park is being built on top of the track, connecting a large part of lower Manhattan with a public elevated park. Although one can see the obvious similarities between the Highline case and the Hofplein in Rotterdam, there are some major differences.

First of all the Highline crosses an industrial business district. There are some residential places but not on the same scale as Hofplein. The track crosses multiple buildings to give access to warehouses. With the meatpacking industry shrinking in size, this area of Manhattan is rapidly transforming. Small coffee shops, cocktail bars and trendy nightclubs are opening up in this area and the Meatpacking District is the new Soho of Lower Manhattan. Old complexes are being revitalized and turned into loft apartments. More and more residential homes are being created. Obviously the need for more, green, public space is apparent, especially in the high density of downtown Manhattan. So creating a park on top of the deck was a relatively obvious alterna-
The need for public space in Rotterdam Noord is present, but not on the same level as in Manhattan. At Hofplein, approximately 100 meters to the east, we find the tranquil Noordersingel forming a green lung through Rotterdam Noord. Besides that, most of the buildings in the Hofplein district are residential. Already a high density is achieved here, with some small business activity and a large school near the platform building. The building blocks, built after the construction of the overpass, follow the track line, sometimes connecting to it, creating an organic flow of buildings.

Secondly, the Highline is constructed out of steel beams, which results into a very open structure, tiptoeing its way through the urban tissue. We can not speak of actual arches as we can with an overpass constructed out of reinforced concrete as with the Hofplein. For this reason the impact of the two structures in their surroundings is very different. The steel overpass crosses the neighbourhood, ignoring existing structures, in a somewhat divine-like way having the highest order of autonomy. The concrete structure is more subtle, following lines of infrastructure, buildings and hierarchy. The arches at Hofplein, the ones not used as a passageway, are all occupied, either by business or as a warehouse. The overpass changes from an infrastructural arrangement into a building. At places it integrates with the surrounding build-
ings. In New York this phenomenon never occurred. The Highline kept its sovereignty by staying an elevated railway in the pure sense.

Building an elevated park on the Hofplein overpass of course still is a good option. The need for more green public places has already been acknowledged. In my opinion though, so much more can be achieved, the potential of the project is enormous. Strategically revitalizing the overpass could be the key element to getting this neighbourhood back on track. By systematically introducing small and large scale interventions the overpass can work as a generator for the whole area and slowly transform from its old function to its new and become an integrated stimulating element of the urban structure. Large-scale redevelopment of adjacent sites, incorporating existing urban elements with the revitalization of the overpass, and the adding of elements and volumes on top of the track will make the Hofplein overpass the lifeline of the neighbourhood.
The Vision

Friends of the High Line believes the historic High Line rail structure offers New Yorkers the opportunity to create a one-of-a-kind recreational amenity: a grand, public promenade that can be enjoyed by all residents and visitors in New York City.

When the High Line is converted to public open space, you will be able to rise up from the streets and step into a place apart, tranquil and green. You will see the Hudson River, the Manhattan skyline, and secret gardens inside city blocks as you’ve never seen them before. You will move between Penn Station and the Hudson River Park, from the convention center to the Gansevoort Market Historic District, without meeting a car or truck. The High Line will be a promenade—a linear public place where you will see and be seen. You will sense New York’s industrial past in the rivets and girders. You will perceive the future unrolling before you in an artfully designed environment of unprecedented innovation. It will be yours—public in the truest sense of the word. Public dollars helped build it in the 1930s. Public legislation empowers us to make it a place anyone can visit. It will be proof New York City no longer casts aside its priceless transportation infrastructure but instead creates bold new uses for these monuments to human power and ambition.

[Extract from http://www.thehighline.org/]

THE AUTONOMOUS OBJECT

With its enormous length of approximately two thousand meters, its height of 6 meters, its impressive almost repulsive wide head and its overall stony and massive look, the Hofplein overpass stands as an autonomous object, nestling intensively in the fabric of the neighbourhood. If one has had no prior knowledge of this structure, one would notice right away that a large part of the overpass was built before its adjacent buildings were erected. In contrast with the Highline in New York City, which diagonally crosses various buildings, the Hofplein overpass almost clinically finds its snake-like way through the north district. At a stretch of about 500 meters buildings attach themselves to the overpass, clinging on to the structure and parasitely integrate with it. Although one could say this harms the autonomy of the object, the Hofplein overpass can take it, with grace, maintaining a solid figure and impressive stature.

The original Hofplein Station had a remarkable look and was the epiphany of style and grandeur. No question was asked about the autonomy of the Hofplein then: it was the first electrical train track, the first large scale reinforced concrete construction, it was the future. Its rounded head building held Grand-café Loos, enjoying its prominent location in the centre of Rotterdam, where tramlines, waterways, roadways and train tracks all came together. At the beginning of the 20th century it was by far the busiest square in Rotterdam, it was the place to be.
During the precision bombing of Rotterdam in World War II, the station suffered badly. Loos was completely destroyed and the platform building burnt out completely. A raging fire crept its way up to the north, but luckily was stopped at the Teilingerstraat. This is known today as the fire-border. Surprisingly the rest of the structure was mildly damaged. Before the end of the war the train was up and running again.

Hofplein never got back its characteristic station building; instead a more modernistic station building was erected during the fifties, and again torn down in the nineties to make way for the Willemspoort rail tunnel. In the last ten years of exploitation of the Hofpleintrack we cannot actually speak of the mere existence of a station building anymore. The entrance to the platform was through an arch, hardly representative.

Without a representative head station, can the overpass remain its autonomous status? The overpass across the Heer Bokelweg was renewed during the eighties, replacing the relatively small arches with a concrete slab to make room for the intensifying traffic streams. Actually here, already a disconnection had been created between the long overpass and the platform structure. While the overpass with its array of arches maintained a level of autonomy, occupied by all kinds of businesses which adjusted to the strict conditions of the arch structure, the large platform building fell into decline, occupied by shady bars and casino's and partly by squatters. The once busy central location of Hofplein is now a desolate no-man's land. Its close connection to the city and the location among large schools and business districts gives it great potential for the near future. The question is if the old platform has a role in this future.

If we take a further look at the rest of the arches, compiling about 1.7 kilometres of overpass we see two types of arches. The standard arch, having a width of around
seven meters and a depth of around 5.5 meters depicts the rhythm of the neighbourhood. A steady pace, carefully beating a monotonous melody. But then, at certain locations, this melody is gracefully interrupted by larger arches, often at infrastructural crossings. At two specific locations the large overpass has an extra quality, at Zomerhofdwarstraat the passage is at an angle, creating an interesting slanted void. At Teilingenstraat the construction method is clearly visible. Only at this location we experience the way it is built; four main arches construct the overpass arch, one under each track line.

The main qualities of this large overpass structure are its sheer size and the rhythm of its arches. These two aspects help remain the structure to keep its strong autonomy. With the disappearance of the train, this autonomous object now has to settle within a high density urban neighbourhood. It has lost its function; it has lost its autonomy. In a way it has to prove that it can still serve a vital role in the development of this lively multi-cultural neighbourhood. With a clear vision on how the overpass can serve a new function for the neighbourhood, the overpass can regain its autonomy and stature and once again serve a social purpose.

**STRATEGIES AND PLACES**
A comprehensible and elemental strategy lies at the foundation of an architectural master plan. In developing a strategy for the Hofplein overpass we will make a basic proposal for the future use of the track. It is of vital importance that the proposed strategy is flexible and leaves room open for interpretation, especially on an architectural level. Every location, every area has its own aspects and one should be able to apply the strategy to any given situation. Keeping in mind the qualities of the genius
Langs de Vijverhofstraat nadert een Hofpleintrein de halte Bergweg. In de verte is de ingang aan de straat zichtbaar, met daarboven het perrongebouw voor de richting Den Haag.
loci, we can approach the design task from two angles: in what way can the re-use of the overpass play a major role in the re-developing of the Noord-district? From another angle: in what way can the large scale renewal projects of the Noord-district benefit from the existing built environment and public realm and their qualities? The issue here is not to discuss which approach is the right one or the most important, because within the strategy they are equally significant. We merely point out the importance of the two: the overpass and the surrounding space. It is vital that the role of the overpass as generator of the project should be put in close relation to the actual revitalization of the existing neighbourhood. We will then be able to create an architectural master plan which will incorporate all the aspects of the neighbourhood and the uniqueness of the overpass into a full blown urban and architectural master plan, worthy of this unique project.

The strategy will manifest itself on different scale levels: from a basic urban master plan, portraying potential interventions into the urban fabric and large-scale urban renewal projects, to a more architectonic proposal, focusing on rejuvenating the street and creating a bridge between the deck and the street level. With such a large project much depends on the refinement and detail of the interventions. The interventions can result into buildings, walkways, stairways, parks, playgrounds or a simple lighting element. Instead of constructing these things as singular objects we are going to look at the places they create and in what way these places stimulate the existing environment. The relation between these places is very important and the overpass can play a major role in connecting and amplifying the quality of these places. Once again both viewpoints should be kept in consideration.
DEFINITION OF A PROBLEM

The Hofplein neighbourhood is a district on the verge of large scale renewal. The large mix of different cultures, a growing number of dilapidated housing and insufficient attractive public space have resulted into a neighbourhood desperately in need of intervention. But there is one thing this area has that others do not: the overpass. Unique for this area is the presence of this former infrastructural apparatus: a structure which can help us regain all the qualities of the former neighbourhood, linking people and places together and above all create an intense healthy engaged neighbourhood.

The overpass will be used to create a new lifeline through the neighbourhood, crossing all the different places and influencing all districts. Eventually the goal is to design an intermediate which connects the built environment, the overpass and future structures together into one strong neighbourhood, but still leaves room for interpretation. It is important to acknowledge the qualities of the existing site and structures and guarantee a certain architectural freedom for future projects, either on top of or alongside the track. The strategy focuses itself on the relation between the overpass and the existing environment, trying to find different ways how the overpass can blend into the urban fabric, forming an integrated part of the public realm, but respecting the autonomy of the structure. In the next chapter we present the strategy.
THE STRATEGY

The strategy begins with a general concept proposal for the entire neighbourhood and followed by the dissection of the overpass and its environment into simple elements. Certain important aspects considering the relationships between elements and the environment are discussed and finally summed up in equations. Following the equations we will present the conceptual strategic approach of elasticity. The strategic interventions necessary for the architectural translation of the strategic approach will be presented at the end of the chapter.
hofplein boulevard and noordersingel
OVERALL CONCEPT
There are two main non infrastructural arteries running from north to south in our area. The Noordersingel and the overpass. They cut through the whole area, one creating a barrier, the other a green parkzone. In the larger picture the Noordersingel runs right through the middle of Het Oude Noorden. If we focus our attention to our specific area it is the overpass that cuts the district in two. When analyzing the urban elements we find out that the neighbourhood lacks sufficient quality public space, and the public space that does exist is scattered. Besides that we deal with some large pieces of non-space, located mainly at the edges. Programmatic, the area is organized in a very segregated way. We have a small business district, a shopping centre, a large education complex, and large residential districts.

To create a healthier public realm and to revive and rejuvenate the existing building stock we suggest that the deck of the overpass becomes a new public level connecting all the bits and elements of the existing urban environment and linking people, places and people to places. Together with the Noordersingel we will have two linear strips of public space, providing the whole neighbourhood with quality public space at walking distance. Programmatic they will be very different though. The Noordersingel will mainly be a park, while the Hofplein Boulevard will be an array of diverse public space, all connected through the deck. Also, the street level will be connected to this deck and form a part of this public realm. Adding new residential and commercial functions will boost the quality of life in the neighbourhood and create an intense diversified network of people and places. Before going in to the details we would like to discuss the elements that will make up this concept. We dissect the overpass and environment into recognizable chunks and discuss the relationships. We then will come back to the overall concept.
Genius Loci – The Roman patron of the site [of the house]
COMPACT AND ENGAGED.

AN ARRAY OF FRAGMENTS.

THE PAST. NOW THE OVERPASS HAS TO JUSTIFY ITS PRESENCE IN THE CURRENT SITUATION. IT HAS TO INTEGRATE WITH THE ESSENTIAL PART OF THE BUILDING BLOCKS FORMING THE OVERPASS.

THE CASE IS FOR THE STRONG POINTS OF THE EXISTING FABRIC TO JUSTIFY ITS PRESEVATION. BUT THAT IS A THING AS NEW. AUTONOMY IS ATTACKED IN THE FABRICATION OF THE OVERPASS AS A NEW GROUND LEVEL.

GENIUS LOC: WE HAVE EXTREMELY SITE-SPECIFIC QUALITIES AN THE BIGGER PICTURE. THE COHERENCE IS THING, WHICH HAPPENS AT EVERY SITUATION AND TRANSLATE THAT TO THE SPECIFIC QUALITIES.

THE TRACK EVERY FIFTEEN MINUTES. BUT THAT IS A THING AS NEW. AUTONOMY IS ATTACKED IN THE FABRICATION OF THE OVERPASS AS A NEW GROUND LEVEL.
THE OVERPASS DISSECTED

In developing the strategy for the revitalization of the overpass, we explore the elemental parts that build up this specific situation. In dissecting the project into clear identifiable chunks, we can formulate its aspects, analyse and understand its qualities and shortcomings, but foremost discover its potential possibilities. They will also have a major influence on the strategic interventions proposed at the end of this chapter.

In analysing the situation I discovered four basic elements which are related to the overpass. The four elements will be subjected to a fifth: the surrounding environment [space]. The relationships between these elements, combined with several fundamental principals, will be portrayed in equations. The elements are:

STRUCTURE
VOID
ADDITION
CONNECTOR
SPACE

THE STRUCTURE

When we talk about the structure we refer to the overpass in its purest form: a construction built up out of a series of arches with the original purpose to interfere as little as possible with the flow of existing and future traffic streams. The structure is solid, it is functional - for its original purpose - it has a representative look but its foremost quality is its unambiguous presence. It depicts a state of autonomy, comparable with important structures as city halls, railway stations and large stadiums. Regarding the physical structure, the proposed interventions should respect the overpass' original shape and design. The Hofplein overpass is noted as a state monument; this should be kept in mind when discussing the role of the structure in the future.
LENGTH 1950 M
REINFORCED CONCRETE
ELEVATED
AVERAGE HEIGHT 6 METERS
In the early stage of developing and designing the Hofplein track it was already decided that the track had to be constructed on top of an elevated overpass. In the near future Rotterdam would be expanding to the north and this large empty meadowland would soon make way for thousands of dwellings. Although the municipality only demanded the elevating the track up on to Bergweg, the constructors figured seeing that the track had to cross the Ceintuurbaan and Noorderkanaal, the best solution was to completely elevate the overpass all the way across the Ceintuurbaan. This resulted in the construction of series of continuous arches, imposing as little an obstacle as possible in the then still empty landscape.

Elevating such an enormous stretch of track was a costly task. Constructing it out of reinforced concrete was an even bigger and riskier task; nothing on this scale had ever been built in this revolutionary building method. A lot of doubts were raised during the development, not just of its growing costs, but also about the strength of the construction. Only after strict safety tests the track was released for public use. The construction is built on 20 meter long piles. The reinforcement is made out of re-bars and steel beams. After that a wooden mould is made around it and finally it is filled with concrete. The company responsible
for this building method, De Hollandsche Maatschappij tot het maken van werken in Gewapend Beton, is now one of the bigger players on the concrete market: Hollandse Beton Groep (HBG). In total there were 189 arches built with a width varying from 7.20 to 20 meters. The arch consists out of four separate reinforced concrete arches supporting each of the four track lines. Because of this, openings can be made in the walls and deck. Seeing it was the first large structure in concrete, the designers were not sure about the quality of the surface area of the concrete, especially after a few years. For that reason the columns were clad in stone and the top half of the arches were finished off with decorative sandstone. The whole overpass is decorated with stylistic figures and municipal emblems, images of animals, industry and trade. Also the initials of the ZHESM and the year of opening are portrayed on the overpass.

Within in the strategy we will acknowledge the qualities of the structure. We respect its uniformity and its linear dimensions. It is the structure that makes this cross-section through the district possible. Therefore we have to maintain its original shape and design, creating a solid base for the future revitalization. Due to its strong characteristics we are able to create a unique array of public space alongside an elevated urban boulevard.
ZHESM Overzicht Viaduct Rotterdam

Uitvoering Hollandsche Beton Mij. 1905-1907

Einde viaduct in gewapend beton KM 1,935
THE VOID

"The void" represents the space which is created through the construction of the arches. It is the space that is shaped by the overpass, captured by the structure. Today, most of the voids are occupied by small businesses or used as a warehouse. Often one side of the void is completely filled in with brick making the structure lose its characteristic shape. When multiple voids are closed off, the structure becomes even more solid and a true barrier is the result.

The arches were originally designed as voids: they were not considered as potential commercial spaces. Already in the early days complaints were filed arguing that shady figures and vagabonds kept themselves warm and sheltered underneath the overpass, resulting in the increase of harassment cases and rapes. A quick solution was closing up the voids; more and more arches were set up as stores, offices, warehouses, etc. After the First World War architect J.P. Oud proposed a plan for the development of 50 temporary houses in the small arches. The plan was never realized. However more and more small businesses settled in the arches. Gradually most of the voids were filled up and only at the infrastructural crossings the original shape remained. The structure, designed to be as little of an obstruction to the developing neighbourhood as possible, slowly lost its porosity and became a barrier.

The spaces we still refer to as the voids are of extreme importance to the redevelop-
ment of the neighbourhood. Directing the types of uses of the voids can stimulate commercial, residential and public spaces surrounding the overpass. There is a large public interest in occupying an arch and investors have acknowledged its potential. By varying the matter of open and closed arches the quality of the adjacent streets can be upgraded and a diverse façade can be generated. Right now, a lot of the arches are filled up with brick masonry, leaving stretches of blind facades giving the streets a gloomy atmosphere. By opening up the void, or at least making the infill more transparent, a more pleasant streetscape can be created. At some spaces re-introducing the original void is a plausible alternative, extending the public space and re-connecting “the east and the west”.

Within the strategy we acknowledge the importance of transparency in the voids. Also, to contrast the uniformity of the structure, a very diverse program should be located underneath the arches, generating an interesting façade. Craftsmen workshops, art galleries, design ateliers, they should all be represented. They will open up to the street creating an active program during the day. We will not place any residential program into the arches due to the fact that the voids are relatively narrow and on both sides open up to the public streets. Putting housing into the voids will automatically result into closed curtains and no occupancy during daytime hours. Also programming the voids dynamically, adding bars, kiosk, boutiques, galleries and restaurants, we will feed the public artery running over them. A stroll along Hofplein Boulevard will be an easy access to dozens of activities and leisure facilities.

THE ADDITION
The big question of course is: what will happen on top of the deck? This two kilometre long stretch represents a total deck surface well over 14000 square meters. As already mentioned a lot of people favour a public park on this level. Experiencing a neighbourhood on another level is definitely an extra quality, public or private. Either way, building on top of the overpass will create new views and new experiences. This level of the deck - approximately 6 meters above ground level - is of vital importance to the strategy. Adding volumes, public space, stairways, escalators, greenery, etcetera, should all be done in coherence with the structure, the surroundings and the overall strategy.

Roughly the additions can be divided into two types: public and private. With developing the deck of the overpass the issue of control and maintenance becomes a very important one. Creating a large public open space on top of the overpass automatically raises the question about who is going to supervise and maintain it. Also the problem of access points is a very interesting one.

At every fragment the main goal is to add a significant contribution to the existing public realm. Creating a diverse new program of public space will enhance the quality of the boulevard. To furthermore enhance the quality we also have to add private program, in the form of either commercial buildings or dwellings. In our opinion public space can only function when it is in close relationship to private space. This will create a certain tension between public and private space and enhance an exchange between people. Also we have to think about how any addition can contribute to existing structures, upgrading them and saving them from unnecessary demolition.
THE CONNECTOR

The connector will possibly be the most important of the primal elements, connecting both in the vertical as in the horizontal plane: structure with void, void with addition, addition with structure. The connector will stand at the centre of the strategy, directing and connecting space.

The connector is the element that challenges the boundaries and seeks the relationship between the autonomous object and the diverse environment. It manifests itself at those locations where the positive tension between public and private is at its highest.

What then will be the connector?
- A material?
- An element?
- A building?
- A staircase?
- A space?
- A place?
- A sculpture?
- An experience?
- An intervention?
- A ramp?
- A parasite?
- An organism?
So how do we define the connector? In order for us to frame this still abstract term, we have to decide what its boundaries are. First of all, the connector mainly operates on a public level. It is there to revive the public realm, connecting people, places and structures. We have to interpret public as spaces and buildings designed for the public, for the people living in the neighbourhood. So we are not just talking about parks, benches and squares, but indoor places as well. Secondly it deals with reconnecting east and west, but also connecting the ground level to the deck. These barriers are very important to take into account, as they also project and direct the relationship between public and private. Finally the connector should focus itself on the relationship between one front door and the other. That is its main field of operation, seeking the aura that exists between people’s houses, among buildings and space in general. It should be able to react with existing buildings, creating a better quality of life and eventually, better homes. The connector should enhance the public realm, balancing the tension that occurs between elements of the [built] environment and the interaction between people.

SPACE
The fifth element encompasses all four prior elements. Within the philosophy of elasticity, the built environment surrounding the project is of essential value to the development of the site. The tension created by developing the site should be a harmonious one, creating a positive atmosphere both in the public as in the private sense.

The Hofplein overpass crosses a large neighbourhood. This massive solid structure pierces through different urban fabrics, varying from low profile business parks, a school zone, a dense residential area, heavy traffic, and so on. The urban fabric dates back from the first half of the last century, excluding the part damaged by the air raid on Rotterdam in World War II. The neighbourhood moulded and adjusted itself to the overpass, which was constructed before the rest of the buildings. If we take a closer look, and divert our focus away from the overpass, we realize these districts have their own shortcomings: anonymous buildings, dilapidated public areas, rundown buildings, shabby businesses, and etcetera. Some locations are on the list for large scale redevelopment, buildings are scheduled to be demolished and some public spaces have already enjoyed a facelift. What if we can combine the enormous task of revitalizing the overpass with the large-scale restructuring of the entire district? This so-called symbiosis we already mentioned. Through the connection of the overpass with the surrounding (built) environment a coherent rigid fabric can be created, which will be mutual beneficial, embedding the overpass in the existing neighbourhood structures and patterns, letting people experience and enjoy every facet of the diverse and rich neighbourhood.

We will interpret the connector as the rubber band between the existing structures and the environment. It is flexible and ready to respond to the interventions proposed. By interpreting the environment as having elastic qualities as well, willingly taking an active role in the redevelopment, we can design the connector as an interactive element responding and reacting to this environment, playing on an intermediate level between all the different elements. We will then be able to amplify the existing qualities, dissolve local shortcomings and create a solid public realm. The connec-
tor will be interpreted as a layer of dynamic public space which liquidly connects the
neighbourhood, becoming the second spine of Noord. Visually it will manifest itself
on certain locations, where tensions reach peak moments.

One of the biggest problems with the existing residential structures is the large
amount of anonymous facades at street level. Doors are merely shutters of pas-
sageways to an internal hallway. This creates very introvert buildings with little or no
respect or attention for the street. It scars the public realm. This is also mainly due
to the fact that across the street a lot of the arches are filled in with masonry work
creating an unattractive lifeless street. These harsh anonymous facades should
benefit from the revitalization of the overpass. If we open up the arches, make them
more transparent, and provide a dynamic program, we set the standards for the
re-interpretation of the street. Hopefully the adjacent buildings will respond to the
potential 'new' street and will adjust itself, elastically, to the new situation, so the
vital and energetic street will have a reasonable chance to succeed.

The fragmentation of the existing public space and the poor quality of it are two of
the reasons for adding a lot more public program and amplifying the existing public
space. The overpass will serve as a connecting element, arraying all the spots,
making them all within reach of the inhabitants of the Noord. These inhabitants
will be very important for the success of the plan, as mentioned in a prior essay,
because it all comes done to the willingness and mentality of the people.
buildings

park

traffic

pedestrians

private

space

parking

shops

greens

public

schools
SYMBIOSIS
There is a lot going on in Rotterdam Noord. This very lively neighbourhood is slowly losing its characteristics and its grip on the quality of life. You can experience the same neighbourhood completely different on locations not that very far apart. Most striking is the difference between housing alongside the town canal and parallel to the overpass. Housing alongside the track is degraded to a low standard, mostly consisting out of cheap apartments. A lot of the middle class has moved out of the area and were replaced by low income families and a lot of single households. In order to get this neighbourhood back on track areas have to be redeveloped, buildings renovated and infrastructure and public grounds rejuvenated. Usually this is done in either a large scale urban renewal project or small acupunctural interventions. In our case we have something extra. An element that can be the guiding principle of revitalizing this neighbourhood. It can be the lifeline of the area connecting both people and places.

In a way this former barrier should form a symbiosis with the existing built environment. Until now it has been a line cutting through the north district barely connecting to the surroundings, remaining an autonomous object. This was mainly due of course to its use. Now, however, it will become a part of the built environment and therefore has to start to spread its roots into the neighbourhood and interweave with the urban fabric. It has to become an element of the built environment and create a symbiosis that will strengthen the social patterns in the neighbourhood. Within the strategy this symbiosis is very important.

LINEARITY AND DIMENSIONS
It is clear that the overpass is a linear structure, which in the bigger picture only deals with one dimension. If we zoom in we see that the arches work in the second dimension, perpendicular to the structure. Originally the arches were empty and connected both sides of the overpass. Gradually they were closed off, in a poor manner, often having a semi-open façade to the west and a fully closed façade to
the east. This had a negative outcome for the second dimension, reducing the qualities of the overpass back to its repetitive one-dimensional character. So we can conclude that the overpass in the bigger picture is a one-dimensional object cutting the neighbourhood in two, but on a smaller scale initially showed signs of a two-dimensional nature, making the overpass interact with the surroundings. Nowadays the overpass is even more seen as an autonomous object, cut loose from its surroundings.

This strong linearity can be seen as an interesting aspect within the strategy. Seeing that we are dealing with a very dynamic neighbourhood we have to realize that the overpass will have to extend to a third dimension, incorporating and responding to the environment, extending and connecting to existing structures, adding program and volumes to the neighbourhood. Its second dimension should be reintroduced to connect the two sides of the overpass which are so vital to the success of the revitalization. We have to realize we are dealing with very complex three-dimensional urban patterns which exist out of numerous various elements, fragments and structures and that this linear element which is the overpass is the main guiding element which can connect all these things together.

**UNIFORMITY AND DIVERSITY**

We interpret the structure as a uniform object, solid and firm. It is there to stay. It forms a genuine backbone through the district, stretching from Hofplein to the Noorderkanaal. If we complement this structure with a uniform addition, let's say one building from front to back, in a single uniform style we amplify the monotonous impact of the structure. It would be interesting to see how such a large addition would connect itself to the existing overpass and the existing environment. The unified expression of a singular addition does not complement the existing urban and social patterns. The district manifests itself as a very diverse and culturally mixed neighbourhood. This diversity should be represented in the additions as well as in the voids. This way we can take all the influences and aspects of the environment into account and create a lively energetic public realm.
So if we refer to the structure as being uniform and the additions as being diverse, an obvious tension appears when adding these two up. The idea is that by adding up these apparent opposites we are able to create a much more interesting and enjoyable place. Connecting these entities will generate more than just the sum of the two parts; its coherent design will enliven the neighbourhood exponentially, creating a positive harmonious tension. This is where the connector will play its major role. Working on an intermediate level it will balance uniformity and diversity into a singular plan. And if we zoom out we will see that the connector will play a major role in connecting this new overpass to the surrounding structures and embed it into the existing urban pattern.
ELASTICITY
As already mentioned, the overpass is a line. If we take a walk alongside the overpass we experience all the different districts it crosses and enjoy the mélange of atmospheres and energies. In fact by travelling along the overpass we are able to experience a cross-section through Rotterdam Noord. We interact with the people around us, let our children enjoy the public playgrounds and we do our shopping in the mall. Sometimes we walk under the overpass and encounter the "other side". We take the train on the overpass and quickly glide through the neighbourhood. We experience the environment from a different level, a unique encounter.

Unfortunately this is not always the case. The romantic scene portrayed here is not experienced in real life. The train makes a bundle of noise, closed off arches create narrow streetscapes and make them unpleasant to walk through; public grounds tend to be neglected.
What happens if we dynamically use the revitalization of the overpass to create this experience? The overpass can guide us through this neighbourhood, letting us enjoy the dynamic qualities of the neighbourhood, experiencing this three-dimensional cross-section. It has to absorb, articulate and connect the public realm and create a certain vigorous tension. This tension should be visible and experienced in a positive way. We have to create spaces that challenge the boundaries between public and private, connecting people and homes with the street. We have to upgrade the existing building stock but also add new dwellings. Elasticity should be the driving force behind the strategy. It has to incorporate all the physical, social and mental aspects of the surrounding [built] environment and display a harmonious tension between all the elements.
EQUATIONS
diversity = addition + void
uniformity = structure
(diversity + uniformity) \times \text{connector} = \text{strategy}
elasticity = \sum \text{physical, mental, social aspects of (built) environment}

\text{STRATEGY} + \text{ELASTIC SPACE} = \text{CONCEPT}
STRATEGIC CONNECTOR

We have extensively discussed all the different elements and aspects concerning the strategy, now it is time to present the strategic approach. As already mentioned the strategy is an important factor in the conceptual interventions. The strategy is based on a few simple equations which determine the relationship between the 4 basic elements: structure, void, addition and connector. It also dictates the way the elements ought to be perceived and which elements will be more elasitical than others, and therefore have greater influence than others. The elements are quite basic and not very exciting. Subjecting the elements to the idea of elastic space, letting the elements communicate with the physical, mental and social aspects of the [built] environment, is where the fun begins. Now the elements will have a far larger reach and can achieve much more. The connector will be a dynamic layer of public space which will flow through the neighbourhood, grabbing on to the overpass and existing structures, and where-ever it touches it creates. Or in some cases creates the opportunity for further creation. It will follow the aura of the overpass which reaches out to the neighbourhood. This results into a strategy of connecting.

To translate the strategy to a visual object, a model is made representing this aura which we just described. In this model the overpass is set off against the surrounding built environment, displaying the overpass as a solid structure and the built environment as transparent. The arches are all left unfilled, suggesting a reinterpretation of the function, quality and transparency of the arches. Any future additions are left out of the context. Within this urban scale model a red elastic band is placed on top of the deck of the overpass. With the use of pins an elastic band is stretched out and creates a dynamic representation of possible interventions. Its impact, and the impact of the built environment, is readily visible and one can see the aura of the overpass radiating into the neighbourhood. One can also feel the tension that builds up at certain specific locations. It is at these places that the connector will manifest itself, at places where public and private space coincide. Overall the model wishes to represent a unique coherent design strategy which through its elasticity will create diverse and exciting interventions.

Now that we have defined the elements that are part of the strategy, have presented it as a conceptual model, we start to translate it to an architectural intervention. A misinterpretation of the model would make one think that it represents a large roof which covers the overpass, or at least a singular large scale intervention. This is not the case. Reflecting and responding to the cultural diversity of the neighbourhood is one of the main goals and the connecting strategy is the guardian of the coherence in the design. The key here is that we should not over-design. A total-concept design would create overkill and choke the project. The idea is to let each of the interventions respond individually to the strategy, reacting elastically to the existing qualities of the genius loci. Within doing this we automatically take all the qualities of the structure and void into account, their autonomy, repetition, hierarchy, etcetera, and create a base for future additions. We create, amplify and upgrade the new public realm, letting the connector frame this realm with its presence.

Conceptual model of elasticity in Het Oude Noorden, scale 1:1000 >
Looking at the different fragments separately we start to analyze the barrier. We then look for the desired connections within the urban fabric, not forgetting the existing structures. We also pinpoint possible new unexplored territories which will create exiting playful public space. Once we have established the place for the strategic connection we define the new function of the overpass and the public realm. Through the use of one or more simple modifiers we create a site-specific intervention which will introduce the connector and dissolve the barrier. Keeping in mind the uniformity of the overpass and the desired diversity in the voids and additional program, the connector will form the essential element of the intervention.
STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONAL MODIFIERS

CONNECTING

The most important modifier is the connector. We can connect the steels, surrounding buildings to the deck or the deck to the street. Connecting is close related to subtracting, because often subtraction is necessary to create the connection.

FRAMING

When we intervene through framing we define the space surrounding the structure with an added element. We bound the area and by doing that amplify the autonomous nature of the overpass. We encapture the aura which the structure radiates and create a certain tension between the frame and the structure.

ABSORBING

In contrast to framing, absorbing lets the structure be integrated with the surrounding environment and makes it form an integrated part of an existing or new building. The structure forms a substantial element of a greater element.

ADDING

To add volume (and program) to the overpass we can add freestanding new elements engaging in a pure visual relationship with the overpass.

SUBTRACTING

To break the barrier in all three dimensions, a simple subtraction can create a passage from east to west (subtracting a void), or from ground level to the deck (subtracting part of the inner structure).
To add volume (and program) to the overpass we can either extrude the deck or the void. These extrusions can be seen as additions, either in the public or private atmosphere.

An intermediate between framing and absorbing is layering, where through the use of added layers we create a second landscape which will balance between deck and ground level. This landscape is ideal for public space.

Public space is extremely fragmented. The idea is to let the overpass connect all the fragments and introduce a new intertwined public realm creating a healthy balance with the Noordersingel.

Connecting the dots...

The existing quality public space projected against the potential new public realm >
EXISTING QUALITY vs PUBLIC SPACE
POTENTIAL [NEW] vs PUBLIC REALM
Hofplein Station Platform Building

+ distance to centre
+ large amount of students
+ large deck surface

- isolated area
- lousy connection to the city
- massive slab of concrete

Zomerhof

+ wide streets
+ Teilingerstraat
+ impressive school building

- run-down business park
- too much parking
- no public qualities

Ammersoisseplein

+ lots of activity
+ large open space

- anonymous apartment building
- poor quality playground

Vijverhofstraat

+ street lined with trees
+ location near playground and shopping centre

- large apartment blocks
- unfinished building blocks
- narrow private courtyard

Heliport district

elementary school
daycare
municipal archives
residential complex

bounded by tracks
heer bokelweg
schiekade

approx. area 6 ha.

Zomerhofkwartier

fitness centre
zadkine school of design
ROC school
local businesses
office complex (OMA)
housing alongside town canal

bounded by teilingerstraat
noordersingel
heer bokelweg
schiekade

approx. area 10 ha.

Agniesebuurt

elementary school
housing
small businesses

bounded by teilingerstraat
schiekade
bergweg
noordersingel

approx. area 13.5 ha.
Eudokia

+ good public transport
+ lots of activity
- heavy traffic
- mediocre shopping centre

Voorburgstraat apartments

+ close to Noordersingel
+ close to park
- narrow street
- huge overpass barrier
- very anonymous apartment building

Across the Noorderkanaal

Bergpolder/Liskwartier

elementary school
islamic university
church
housing
bounded by schiekade
gordelweg
noordersingel
approx. area 15 ha.
7 interventions

Now that we have defined all the aspects which will be applied to the interventions we once again go back to the overall concept. The Hofplein Boulevard will the lifeline of the neighbourhood, connecting an array of functions and space. Its linear quality is put into action by making the deck public. We are able to connect existing functions to this deck, extend current program, but also expand certain locations and introduce new functions. All the actions performed are done in coherence with the existing situation, trying to find a balance between the old, the new and the revived.

In the 7 interventions proposed in the next chapter, the main strategic approach is connecting the built environment and existing space to the overpass and its new function. It is all about breaking the barrier and interweaving the overpass into the existing urban fabric. The 7 interventions together should form a solid new public boulevard, connected together by means of the structure itself. Obviously this will result into places of tension, where public space transfers to private or collective space, also due to the addition of residential and commercial program. The new boulevard over the deck will encounter these tension spots various times, and this is where the connector will manifest itself. It is at these spots where a high level of interaction should take place and where people are likely to encounter one another and form a close and engaged neighbourhood.

All the interventions will have a programmatic function which will enhance the public realm, playing an important role in the revitalization of the entire neighbourhood.
Organizing and strengthening these new and existing public functions around and on top of the overpass will create an intense chain of connected public spaces which will echo through the district. Running parallel to the Noordersingel, which only has one programmatic public function [which is a park] we will have two main public arteries which will provide Het Oude Noorden with sufficient qualitative and most of all diversified public space and will for sure invigorate the current quality of life. Instead of the fragmented condition of the current public space, we interlock all the areas into one public realm, which reaches out far into the district. Everyone will live in walking distance of the boulevard, and once you are on the boulevard you will be in close reach of all the public functions.

The 7 fragments will have 7 different interventions resulting into 7 conceptual proposals. The interventions do not always originate from the qualities or shortcomings of the overpass, rather specific aspects of the site will dictate the desired concept. Obviously, the overpass is a part of the site. The proposals are basic, dealing with volumes and planes shaping the new public realm. They initiate a dialogue with the existing structures and spaces and obviously commence a discussion about their trivial realistic nature. The idea is to stimulate this discussion and think about ways the overpass can inspire people to rethink their neighbourhood and break through the linearity of the barrier.

In the next chapter we will present the 7 architectural interventions.
ARCHITECTURAL INTERVENTIONS

It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality.

Gaston Bachelard
ARCHITECTURAL INTERVENTIONS

The 7 interventions proposed are based on an analysis of the existing site. Due to the lack of sufficient quality public space, the gross part of the interventions deals with adding, amplifying and directing public program to create a strong and healthy new public realm. Although the 7 interventions may seem very trivial, due to their apparent diversity and appearance, they are well balanced, creating a public boulevard which surprises the pedestrian with a variety of public activities, architectural interventions and a sometimes visible tension between private and public spaces.

One of the main criteria of the 7 fragments is that, except for the Punt building at Insulindeplein, none of the existing buildings will be demolished. Instead, we have tried to find interventions that deal with the current situation, therefore creating an interesting field for elasticity. In order for the intervention to actively deal with the [built] environment there obviously should be one!

The interventions are very diverse. This is one of the main goals of the design. The reason is that the overpass itself, the structure, is such an autonomous object, that its linear quality and its endless repetition would be strong enough to maintain the unity within the diversity of the interventions. Returning the structure to its original shape and appearance will create a recognizable element which will be experienced over the full two kilometres. Also, because of its uniform appearance people will start to realize that public spaces and places are connected to this structure and will use it as a way to get there. It will be a mental map guiding the neighbourhood and organizing it in a linear way. It will also make people come together and exchanges will be possible throughout the whole neighbourhood, from the so-known “Kabouterdorp” at Hofplein to the apartment blocks all the way at the end of the track.
Another reason for this apparent diversity in the interventions is to create an alternative public experience for the Noordersingel park. This stretch of public space runs parallel to the overpass, about 100 meters to the east. Instead of competing with the Noordersingel, we decided to develop a whole different kind of public space. A strip of connected multi-faceted public spaces, each reacting to its specific location, but connected through the overpass, making it one long cross section through the district.

All the interventions proposed are to be perceived as possible schemes for organizing this large strip of public space. It deals with creating public space but also making space public. A whole new layer is added to the neighbourhood and with it a whole new system of networks and relations. Through the site-related interventions and their specific visual qualities we have made 7 proposals for 7 different locations, each having its own specific appearance and translation of the aura of the object. The predilection for colour and exuberant vegetation creates an image which wishes to radiate atmospheric qualities which are envisioned for the specific place, creating an intense sometimes banal connection between the existing and the proposed, interweaving public and private space.
PRESENTING HOFPLEIN

The platform building at Hofplein Station is perceived as a solid slab of concrete covering an area well over 5.5 thousand square meters. It has been amputated in the nineties to make way for the Willemspoortunnel which instantly disconnected the Zomerhofkwartier form the centre. Now, the platform lies in the middle of various non-spaces which have no specific function. Though the platform building itself, due to its lack of program and the still running Randstadrail track, forms a major barrier, the rail tunnel is the biggest barrier.

Over the past years the Hofplein station and surrounding area have lost in significance. In its heydays it was the centre of the city and an informal meeting place for all people. Gradually the city’s centre shifted more to the Maas and Hofplein became less and less important to the city. Eventually the operation of the track was not profitable anymore and it was decided to close it down. Because Hofplein station wasn’t connected to the main railroad system, and remained an (dead) end station, it couldn’t compete with Rotterdam Central Station.

In all aspects of the word, the platform building and surrounding spaces are not connected. Both in the horizontal and the vertical plane. Also in the sense of the connection with the city and the rest of the district, this site is completely isolated, bearing little or no public qualities.

We formulate four initial goals:
1. Make Hofplein once again an intersection for informal meeting
2. Connect the platform to the surroundings
3. Link Het Oude Noorden to the city
4. Add appropriate functions in the platform building
PROPOSAL: AT THE FORMER HOFPLEIN STATION PLATFORM BUILDING CONNECTEDNESS SHOULD BE ACHIEVED IN ALL ASPECTS OF THE WORD.

We expect this spot to be an important junction between the city and the Noord district, forming one of the major attractions and access points of the Hofplein Boulevard. To give this place a unique quality, making it one of the most beautiful and interesting public places in Rotterdam, an indoor botanical garden will be created on top of the deck. The public aspect associated with a botanical garden clearly fits in the desired program for this location. It will be a place where people can meet, rest and enjoy the qualities which such a place can offer. This garden will take up most of the deck space and will be largely indoors. Curved paths will guide visitors through the garden and a variety of flora will be exposed. In the voids we will program restaurants, bars, galleries and boutiques, servicing the stream of people crossing the park. Artists renting arch spaces can display their creations in the garden.

Connectedness is created by subtracting the inner core of the platform building, opening up the structure's intestines. The hole will visually and physically connect the park with the underlying program in the voids. It will truly be the heart of the intervention, a place of positive tension.

To furthermore connect the building to its surroundings we would like to introduce a clear architectural intervention which will turn non-space into enjoyable space taking advantage of the unique spatial qualities of the site. In order for the platform to be a functional area we would like to frame it, at least the greater part of it, creating an indoor space that can be used throughout the year. Because the platform has a somehow odd shape, 15 arches on the one side, 17 on the other, we introduce the box here. We align the box with the Heer Bokelweg, creating a façade in line with the current grid. The box then extends towards...
the rail tunnel, where it barely touches the tunnel wall. Now an interesting thing occurs; the box actually starts to direct the non-space surrounding the platform. The platform at its turn instinctively plays a major role in the creation of new space, reshaping the public realm. The angle between the platform and the box creates indoor and outdoor spaces on top of the deck but also on street level, providing us with different types of places which interact differently with the surroundings. These places are situated at spots with interesting views over the city and the tracks and can have a thematic program conform the qualities of a botanical garden.

The Hofplein Garden will be a welcome rest stop for pedestrians, taking a break from the walk into town or back home, enjoying the flora and art pieces displayed, or just drink a cappuccino at one of the indoor or outdoor terraces.

What's it all about? A green theme park? Eden is about connecting plants, people and places.

[Website of The Eden Project]
CREATIVE PLAZA

The site of this strip of overpass is in a small business district. Located at the edge of the fire border of World War II, the business district itself is not very appealing. Actually plans are in the make to revitalize this part of the Zomerhofkwartier. On the west side we find the large Technikon complex designed by architect Maaskant. It mimics the curve of the overpass, in a volume five times the size of the overpass. This is an interesting scale aspect. The anonymous façade of the Technikon building, with the first two stories significant wider than the rest, adds up to a very poor street quality. Nevertheless, the striking rigid almost monumental façade of this large building is something to respect and which might come in use with the design.

The part of the overpass reaching from the Heer Bokelweg to the Teilingerstraat, is comprised out of typical arches with all the typical dimensions. One interesting aspect is the small curve that the overpass makes, making sure that the Bokelweg and Teilingerstraat cross the overpass perpendicular. At the location of the curve the arch crosses the Zomerhofstraat on an angle; therefore the void is also angled and this is the only spot where we experience this. The voids are mainly used as warehouses, though they also occupy the occasional bar. They hardly connect with the adjoining streets and therefore add up to the barrier which is the overpass.

At this spot a lot can happen in the future. The revitalization of the Zomerhofkwartier can have a major impact on the existing structures and urban tissue. For example, the development of student housing could be an enormous boost for this neighbourhood. Located very close to the school, design students would be able to expose their work in, upon and around the overpass. Within this design we are going to anticipate on the development of student housing and small business at the Zomerhofkwartier. The overpass in this scenario will be the link between the school and the dwellings: a place of creation.
We formulate four initial goals:
1. Respect Technikon complex
2. Promote the design business
3. Enjoy the roofscapes
4. Boost street life

PROPOSAL: CREATE STUDIO SPACES FOR STUDENTS AND GRADUATES OF THE ZADKINE SCHOOL OF DESIGN BY PLACING BOXES ON TOP OF EXISTING STRUCTURES, LITERALLY FORMING A BRIDGE BETWEEN SCHOOL AND STUDIO.

The spacious streets on both sides of the overpass have little or no significant public quality. They are used mainly for parking and traffic. The businesses located here are not very representative and therefore the façades are not really maintained. Nevertheless this is the link between the Teilingerstraat and the Heer Bokelweg, and soon to be the link between the botanical garden and the new playdeck.
The idea is to connect the rooftops of the Technikon complex and the business park through adding volumes from the roofs to the deck. In the volumes we place studios and workshops for students and graduates to rent. They will have access to the deck, the rooftops and will be connected to the buildings. By placing the boxes perpendicular to the overpass and the large Technikon complex we create a bridge and connect the overpass with the surrounding structures. At various spots you will cross these skybridge buildings and thus the linear character of the overpass is interrupted. This will make it possible to create different atmospheres on the deck, stimulating the diversity in the neighborhood.

Street level will still be used for parking, though the area around the overpass will be re-designed to make more space for a pedestrian friendly sidewalk. Small representative businesses can settle in the arches, having transparent façades opening up to the street and boosting the street life. The existing business park should be given a facelift and contain studios as well.

Simple additions perpendicular to the overpass connects the rooftops of adjacent buildings to the overpass. An intense network is created linking education with business and housing.

Creative plaza manifests itself on two levels: the deck and rooftops, and the street level.
While analyzing this piece of the neighbourhood surrounding the Ammersooiseplein (square) we came to realize that this is an important part of the existing public realm. It bursts with activity, mainly kids, due to its central location in the residential district called Agniesebuurt. The main element here is the 8-storey apartment building, designed by a local firm called DKV and completed in 1988, erected to create more public space through the demolition of a building block. It houses 55 apartments and has two stairways, one for the second and third floor on the south side, and one for the higher floors and the north side facing the square. An obvious shortcoming here is the very introverted base of the building, supposedly housing commercial functions. Parking alongside the overpass makes the barrier even thicker. Through the arrangement of this apartment tower, it completely lacks a connection with the square, therefore adding little to the existing environment.

The arches alongside this strip (from the Teilingerstraat to the Ammersooiseplein) are mainly used for warehouse purposes and therefore all closed off with brick. Two arches are opened up to give access to the square. Here we experience the undisputed quality of opening up the voids and reconnecting the streets on both sides of the overpass.

An adjacent building block, on the other side of the overpass, harbours an elementary school within its courtyard. This school could do with some extra quality public space for the children to play. What we would like to do is amplify the playful atmosphere here, creating more public space for the large number of kids and therefore extending the facilities of the elementary school. We would like to create a more intense public realm for the dense Agniesebuurt.
We formulate four initial goals:
1. Amplify the playful atmosphere
2. Provide in a new day-care and youth centre
3. Open up the DKV building
4. Extend the use of the deck

PROPOSAL: CREATE A NEW DYNAMIC PLAYFUL ENVIRONMENT WHICH WILL AMPLIFY THE EXISTING PUBLIC REALM AND CREATES AN EXITING SYMBIOSIS WITH THE OVERPASS.

In order for us to create a solid healthy public atmosphere we introduce the layering modifier. Through the use of layers we bridge the height barrier between street and deck. Using these different decks to organize different playgrounds for specific age groups we will create a hierarchy among the public places. Secondly, by organizing this around the DKV apartment building, we will be able to re-interpret the stairwells of the building, connecting the galleries to the deck. In this way, certain apartments will have a connection to the deck and therefore the people will have a new way to reach their front door.
The first floor of the apartment building will be remodelled to fit a day-care and youth centre. Together with the space under the layers, this will be the new base of the building, extending outwards to the surrounding buildings. Also, some of the voids will be connected, giving access to the day-care.

An extension is proposed on the east side of the apartment building. This is done to furthermore challenge the idea of working with layers and connecting even the top floors of the building to the new public space. It also makes the addition wrap around the overpass, giving it a sense of transcending into a new place.

Making use of layers we dissolve the barrier between deck and street. Adding volumes and extruding planes gives us more space for program: a day-care and youth centre.

A tension spot of public and private space manifests itself between the overpass and the apartment building.
Characteristic for this part of the neighbourhood are the two building blocks which integrate with the overpass. The overpass forms one side of the block. The businesses in the arches have extended their floor space by adding volumes to the back of the arch. Thus, at this location, the overpass only has one true façade, facing the Vijverhofstraat. The activity in the arches is good and the façades are representative. But because we find parallel parking on both sides of the street, and the apartment building on the other side of the street is very anonymous, the street doesn't have a lot of quality.

The length of this part is 295 meters, in which 15 arches belong to the southern block and 17 arches belong to the northern block. A wider arch, bridging the Vijverhofdwarstraat, connects the two. The width of the block slims down when we get closer to the Bergweg, making the inner courtyard (gardens) smaller and smaller to almost obsolete. Not much private outdoor space is enjoyed here.

The southern block has to deal with the new playground, while the northern block faces the Bergweg and Eudokiaplein. Together they are the link between two major public attractions: playing and shopping. The blocks are situated right in the middle of the Agniesebuurt which consists mostly out of housing and lacks in sufficient green public space. Most of the residential buildings are apartments and streetscapes are hard. Parking is situated alongside the streets, and sidewalks are badly maintained.

We formulate three initial goals:
1. Upgrade the existing street
2. Introduce the new street
3. Challenge territories
PROPOSAL: CREATE A SITE-SPECIFIC HOUSING TYPOLOGY WHICH UTILIZES ALL THE EXISTING ELEMENTS, ENHANCES THE PUBLIC REALM AND IS BASED ON THE THEORY OF ELASTICITY.

When dealing with a design proposal for this part is in important to establish the level of public and private. Keeping the deck accessible and creating a continuous path from Eudokia to Hofplein Station is essential for maintaining the unique quality of the overpass. That is, creating an alternative walk through the neighbourhood. Initially it was thought to divert pedestrians off the deck and into the street, to enhance activity at street level. Also housing was proposed in the voids. Eventually, reviewing all the possibilities, it was chosen that the deck should remain open to the public and a second street would be made on top of the deck. Every fourth void is used as an entrance to a courtyard which is surrounded by four parking boxes. The other voids are used also for parking but mainly as commercial space. The opportunity to connect the workspace in the voids to the above lying apartments is still possible.

There are four courtyards in each block and they give access to stairs which lead to the back doors of the apartments. An escape alley runs along the back of the lot, connecting all the courtyards. The stairways wrap around the courtyard, which is clad in a bright coloured printed glass. Each courtyard will have its own print creating a very personal diversity within the unity of the building.

Because we create parking spaces within the building block we hope to reduce the amount of parking needed in the street. The street should be redesigned to become a more pedestrian orientated street, with a flattened pavement. This will create a more appealing street for the workspaces in the voids, but also for the

The front doors of the new apartments are all connected to the deck.
houses across the street. For the people who live around this part of the neighbourhood, we would like to make the existing street as appealing to walk through as the new street on the deck.

The deck itself remains public space. The front doors of the apartments are all orientated towards this new street. The top apartment cantilevers over the overpass, reshaping the block and absorbing the overpass. The whole block is clad in fibre grid panels, which will make the block look solid from a distance, but has great transparency when standing perpendicular to it. On the corner of Vijverhofstraat and Bergweg lies the opportunity to create a high rise apartment building, which can create a balance with the apartment tower at Eudokiaplein. The tower can be organized in the same way as the courtyard apartments, creating a hierarchy in private, public and communal. The biggest problem here is what to do with parking.

Within this design the connector manifests itself as the semi-public courtyards. They will be a bright element within the monotony of the entire block and will create an exiting array of colourful spaces. The apartment blocks between the courtyards will have a more reserved look. Within this diversity the courtyard with its colourful design will be the repeating element, gluing everything together and creating the hierarchy of territory.

First the overpass will be absorbed by the adjacent building block. The block will be finished. The volumes are subtracted to make space for courtyards, access to the courtyards and the new public street.

The courtyard is accessed through a void or from the deck. The back doors are arranged around the courtyard.
MULTI-CULTURAL MARKET

In the heart of the Noord district we arrive at Bergweg Station, the first, and only other stop on the overpass on the way to The Hague. It is located at Eudokia square, on the busy Bergweg. Adjacent to this street, at the location of the former Eudokia Hospital, a medium sized indoor shopping centre houses three supermarkets, a drugstore, a bakery and some other stores. It is topped with apartments and a high-rise residential building. The shopping centre itself is not very spectacular; it has one indoor passage connecting the Eudokia square to the Voorburgstraat, making a 90 degree angel inside.

On the other side of the overpass we find a series of run-down buildings organized on the plot called De Punt, referring to its pointy shape. The building at the tip has a very charismatic appearance, flanking the overpass. Due to the bad shape of the construction they are scheduled to be demolished. When this happens a large building lot will be vacant, adjacent to the overpass. Across the street, at Insulinde square an underground fully automatic parking garage is being developed at the moment.

The station itself has a very modernistic pure appearance. Its characteristic white volume is complementary to the square and we would emphasize preserving this structure; its internal stairway will be useful in the future. The overpass makes a second shallow curve, creating an array of irregular arches. Today, these arches have already been renovated and house different businesses, varying from a printer office, to an architectural firm, a bicycle mechanic and a singing-bird specialist. Also, the Hofbogen office is located here. This strip gives a good idea how a future renovation could manifest itself. A unified infill of the voids creates a solid base for future additions.

If we formulate the positive characteristics of this part we have to conclude that it is the station building and the curve in the overpass. For the surrounding environment we recognize the large vacant building plot which will be introduced in the near future. There exists a multitude of possibilities for this area.
We formulate four initial goals:
1. Intensify the multi-cultural shopping experience
2. Connect public spaces
3. Stimulate housing development
4. Respect the arches and Bergweg Station

PROPOSAL: DEVELOP A UNIQUE MIX BETWEEN HIGH DENSITY HOUSING AND ADVENTUROUS SHOPPING WHICH IS CARRIED BY THE PUBLIC OVERPASS AND ANTICIPATES ON THE RESTRUCTURING OF DE PUNT.

Living close to everyday facilities is often experienced as a plus. At the Eudokia shopping centre we already find supermarkets which provide in the daily necessities. To extend the facilities of the shopping centre we would like to introduce retail into the new development. We extend the shopping centre to the overpass and beyond. Integrating the overpass into this new shopping centre will create a new shopping experi-
ence, where visitors will enjoy all the aspects of this interesting structure. Combining this with a high-density new residential complex we provide in the demand for compact living. Taking in account the new public route over the deck, towards the city or the other way into the green Liskwartier, this new complex will be the centre of the Noord.

With regards to the housing typology we would propose a terraced housing scheme, orientated to the west. To connect to the green roofed underground parking garage, a green terrace sloping against the overpass would be preferable. Patios and atria's will provide sufficient light. Building right on top of the overpass, extruding the structure, will show the strength of the construction and will give the overpass a totally different look. In the voids small speciality shops will be located, extending the program of the current shopping centre. One void will give access to an indoor market hall, which is covered by the terraced housing. This market will give the opportunity for the multitude of cultures to exchange goods and information.

At the heart of the project the connector should have a central focus point within this new complex. It should connect the north en south part of the overpass. Including the Bergweg Station the connector will focus itself on the difficult task of connecting the public spaces and creating a dynamic and transparent public realm, including the large indoor market.
The last part of the overpass travels through the rustic Liskwartier. Housing is organised in large blocks, the streets are lined with trees and a large green park provides ample public space. A quality of the overpass at this part is its vast straight length, which results into a long view into the distance. This is especially experienced on top of the overpass, but also in the streets running alongside the track. We have to make sure that this view will be maintained. The path over the deck should be an easy stroll enjoying the tranquillity of the neighbourhood. Currently, the 52 arches are for the greater part occupied by warehouses, which not add to the quality of the neighbourhood. An exception occurs at the Insulindestraat 78-84, where a cooking school occupies five arches. Here the specific qualities, some may call it restrictions, of the overpass have been put to use. The owners have connected the five arches internally and have set up their business according to this hierarchy. One arch serves as an entrance, the other as a preparation room, another as dining room. The owners have successfully used the characteristics of the arches to organize their business. On a less brighter note, the cooking school opens up only to the Insulindestraat, leaving the Voorburgstraat a cold brick wall.

On this 670 meter long stretch we experience one of the hardest streetscapes in the neighbourhood. The apartment building on the Voorburgstraat is very anonymous and the gap between the overpass and the building is merely 10 meters. Adding up the sealed off arches, this street is in desperate need of revitalization. In a way the people living in these apartments should be able to benefit from the re-use of the overpass, it should give their home environment an extra impulse. Arranging the deck of the overpass as public place would be a good start. Also opening up the arches and finding a fit program for them is essential. Using the overpass to upgrade the building stock is what elasticity is all about. Also the other way around: the built environment will be validating the use and preservation of the overpass.

We formulate four initial goals:
1. Exploit the overpass’s length
2. Upgrade apartment building Voorburgstraat
3. Create and connect the three streets
4. Promote street-friendly businesses
PROPOSAL: INTRODUCE ONE OF THE MOST UNIQUE COLLECTIVE GARDENS IN HOLLAND AND LET THE NEIGHBOURHOOD BENEFIT FROM IT!

The deck will be public space. A gentle pedestrian path will guide you to the end of the overpass. A large colourful flower bed will be planted over this 670 meter stretch, contrasting exquisitely with the whiteness of the overpass. Ample integrated rest spaces and benches will be allocated on the route. The arches will all be opened, some of them will have program, with transparent façades, others will remain empty. The Voorburgstraat will be revitalized, pedestrian friendly and for designated traffic only.

The building block will be re-organized. Instead of a couple large stairwells, we will create dwellings with separate access. Two apartments will be entered through the original front door; the others will be connected to the deck through six separate walkways. This way the front door becomes more personal and we create a union between overpass and building block. The people will benefit from the new flower garden and will take pride in their new front garden.

The structure of the overpass is reduced to its original shape and width. The slab of concrete is removed and the sides are reshaped to create an integrated bench alongside the edge. With reducing the width of the overpass we will also widen the streets. With its narrow width strips of flower beds are arranged with resting spaces on intervals. The connector is merely seen as the path running alongside the flower beds and the occasional maintenance shed which will have a characteristic appearance. Above all, we do not want to over-design this part, it should be pure, simple and all about quality space. The people should take interest in maintaining the flower bed and the surrounding public space, as if it was their own front yard. Simple staircases connect to the street and craftsmen can rent spaces in the arches. To promote transparency at least every fourth arch should remain open.
The overpass is stripped of excess structures, dug out to create space for the vegetation deck. Holes are subtracted from the apartment building too. Walkways and stairs connect the deck to the new front doors of the apartments. Staircases connect the deck to the street.

Transparent facades connect both streets.
REMEMBERING HOFPLEIN

The track starts at Hofplein Station and used to end in The Hague/Scheveningen. The overpass as constructed in the beginning of last century ends once the track crosses the Noorderkanaal. This is where the arch count stops. The last arches are situated in a green area, with gardens, pedestrian paths and a gas station. Alongside the canal runs a sandy path. Once the Noorderkanaal has been crossed you will encounter the harsh reality of beltway traffic. The A20 freeway, six lanes wide, is always packed and creates a physical barrier closing off the north.

Characteristic for this specific piece of overpass with a length of approximately 120 meters is the fact that it does not compete with any other surrounding structures. It stands completely free with five arches crossing the bicycle paths and roads of the Gordelweg, another five occupied, one crossing the Gordelpad and a larger one crossing the Noorderkanaal. Surrounded by greenery it is a very tranquil area, right until you hit the freeway. Right now it is in poor condition, experienced as an unpleasant area to walk.

The proposal for the Hofplein platform at the beginning of the overpass suggests a bold gigantic block largely covering the platform. It should become a new place for people to meet and get connected and become a link between the city and the north. At the very other end of this line this presenting of the neighbourhood as it is called, should manifest itself on a slightly different manner. Here the Hofplein of a century ago, the aura of times past, should be remembered.

To quote James Howard Kunstler: If nothing is sacred, than everything is profane.

We formulate the initial goals:
1. Accumulate Hofplein History
2. Create a public attraction in balance with Hofplein Station
3. Exploit the peripheral location

PROPOSAL: LET PEOPLE REMEMBER THE HOFPLEIN TRACK AND ENJOY THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Inventory
Steel portal count: 33 pcs.
Total length of rail track: 4 times 1805 meters = approx. 7220 meters

Remembering Hofplein deals with the aura of the object. It tries to capture the essence of 100 years of operation of the Hofpleintrack. It is a construction made out of the steel portals and rail tracks of the Hofplein track. Salvaging these elements and
re-introducing them into a new design will give the history of Hofplein a place of its own. It will be a ‘watchtower’ giving people access to a view over the city from a different perspective, on the edge, looking back at the city.

We choose to build the watchtower at the end of the track, symbolizing the end of the functioning of ‘Het Hofpleintreintje’. This location used to be the first part of Rotterdam people saw when travelling from the north by train. They entered the city at Ceintuurbaan. We would like to remember this spot and use its green characteristics to build an enjoyable and relaxing watch-and-playtower. In using recycled elements from the whole track we will create a rustic and recognizable structure that is one of kind, similar to the proposal for the Hofplein platform, radiating a warm charm. The mainframe of the structure is constructed out of the steel portals which were used to guide the electricity cables. The stairways and guardrails will be manufactured out of the rails. The whole structure should be transparent and refer to the industrial character of Rotterdam, the city of the working man.

The connector should be freely interpreted by an expressive artist and moulded into a large structure which can be used as a watchtower. People can climb the tower and experience the skyline of Rotterdam and get a good view over the Noord, the city and the Hofplein overpass.

First we add a few layers to the overpass, hanging them in the steel portals. Parts of these layers will be extruded creating some sheltered spaces. Eventually all the layers will be connected to the public deck creating an open and public watchtower.
EPILOGUE

Americans wonder why their houses lack charm. The word charm may seem fussy, trivial, vague. I use it to mean explicitly that which makes our physical surroundings worth caring about. It is not a trivial matter, for we are presently suffering on a massive scale the social consequences of living in places that are not worth caring about. Charm is dependent on connectedness, on continuities, on the relation of one thing to another, often expressed as tension, like the tension between the private space and public space, or the sacred and the workaday, or the interplay of a space that is easily comprehensible, such as a street, with the mystery of openings that beckon, such as a doorway set deeply in a building. Of course, if the public space is degraded by cars and their special needs — as it always is in America, whether you live in Beverly Hills or Levittown — the equation is spoiled. If nothing is sacred, then everything is profane.

James Howard Kunstler
Two months before the final presentation I read the above paragraph in The Geography of Nowhere, a book by James Howard Kunstler, which deals with the rise and decline of America’s man-made landscape. In a few sentences the author summarizes the ideas and theories that have puzzled my mind during the course of my study. Although he focuses himself on the sub-urban sprawl of America, these words can be reflected on many different situations and locations.

In the course of the past year I have repeatedly asked myself why I chose the revitalization of the Hofplein overpass as my final project. Why is this piece of infrastructure so appealing to me and why do I feel the need to relate every aspect I encounter during the course of my study to this two kilometre long object? I intended my final project at the university to be a reflection of my studies, a discourse about the way I think and act about architecture but also about life. I wanted this, dare I call it, magnum opus to be represented into a building design. A building that would stir people, surprise people, touch people. Instead I got further and further entangled in the web that is called urban design and architectural theory. Whilst the faculty is trying to persuasively funnel students in preset directions, engineering, urbanism or theory, I foolishly decided that I would become an old school architect, thinking I could do all. What happened was a design process which would be best described as a teeter-totter, going from large-scale urban planning to small-scale design incentives. In this rollercoaster I developed my own theory on building and I desperately tried to apply this theory to my case. While doing that I encountered all the aspects that present themselves when dealing with such a large project. Creating a strategy that would be of use to a group of students that would carry on my project, and who would design the buildings, was a gratuitous but hard fought battle. Trying to convince them about my ideas about elasticity and the grand master plan I laid out for them wasn’t always that easy. Trying to clearly formulate the theory and the consequences for the design was a task which sometimes I rather hoped somebody else would do. The enthusiasm and belief in the project kept the train rolling though.

After dividing the case up into 7 chunks an ad hoc suggestion was proposed for the use of the track. During my observation of the district I pinpointed certain invisible bounded areas which contained various site-specific aspects. The existence of the overpass wasn’t always the main aspect of creating these specific fragments. Adjacent public and private spaces, the surrounding buildings or the harsh borders of infrastructure had an influence in the process of creating these fragments. Eventually often the infrastructural boundaries were decisive in dividing up the area. This is remarkable considering the fact that the level on top of the deck, six meter higher than ground level, is free of all these (rail) road barriers. Here a more free and impulsive subdivision could be imaginable. But if we apply this strategy, the surrounding built environment rises in importance and then again we experience the subdivision of the track according to building blocks and building heights. Surprisingly, or maybe not, these divisions are quite similar and for that reason site-specific.

In developing different uses of these fragments, supporting the idea of a diverse neighbourhood, often the general notion of one concept for the whole area was lost. The idea of developing these 7 chunks separately, without a clear
clear relational strategy, is preposterous. Through an analysis of the current situation I returned to the basic question: How do we deal with infrastructural heritage in a high density urban environment? In extracting similarities in all the 7 site-specific fragments a general strategy was developed which was used to create the interventions. In looking at the sites elastically, playing with its characteristics, I was able to develop ideas that were neither orientated solely at the overpass or at the surroundings, rather a consensus between the both was achieved. The aura of the object and the qualities and shortcomings of the site were decisive in the creation of a conceptual design proposal for the re-use of this two kilometre long stretch of urban infrastructural heritage and it was all done with respect of the past but with an eye to the future.

A window to the past, a doorway to the future!

Tim Aarsen, May 2007
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In reality, architecture is too important by now to be left to the architects.

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