

ART, MEET RESEARCH METHODS. RESEARCH METHODS, MEET ART.

06.06.2017 – 13.06.2017

A MULTISENSORY TRAJECTORY

Over the past decades, working with visual images has gained popularity within social science research. The use of visual imagery appears to be a powerful tool to convey meaning in qualitative research projects. However, **the visual is too often seen in isolation from the other senses**, such as the auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustative and kinetic. From 2014 to 2017, researchers from the Qualitative Inquiry Team of the Faculty of Social Sciences conducted several research projects in which multi-sensory research techniques were applied **to explore the relationship between people and their living environment**. With these projects they call for a **renewed attention for the sensorial dimension in research**. The results of one of these projects - **an arts-based project with four art students** - are displayed in this exhibition. The project addresses some of the limitations of previous sensory research projects and aims to **“move beyond written text** to a multisensory expression” (Tolia-Kelly, 2007).



The neighborhood

The research was conducted in the **Vaartkom** area (the ‘Canal Bowl’), which is the old industrial site in the city of Leuven. For centuries it has served as the economic heart of the city. The local brewery Stella Artois and related activities played an important role in the development of the area. With the disappearance and relocation of the traditional industry at the end of the 20th century, the district lost its original function and became a desolate post-industrial area.

Since 2007, the district is Belgium's largest urban renewal area, undergoing significant transformations resulting in new residential housing, shopping complexes and social housing. Consequently, both inhabitants and the material environment of this area are subject to profound changes (Missoten & Desmet, 2010).

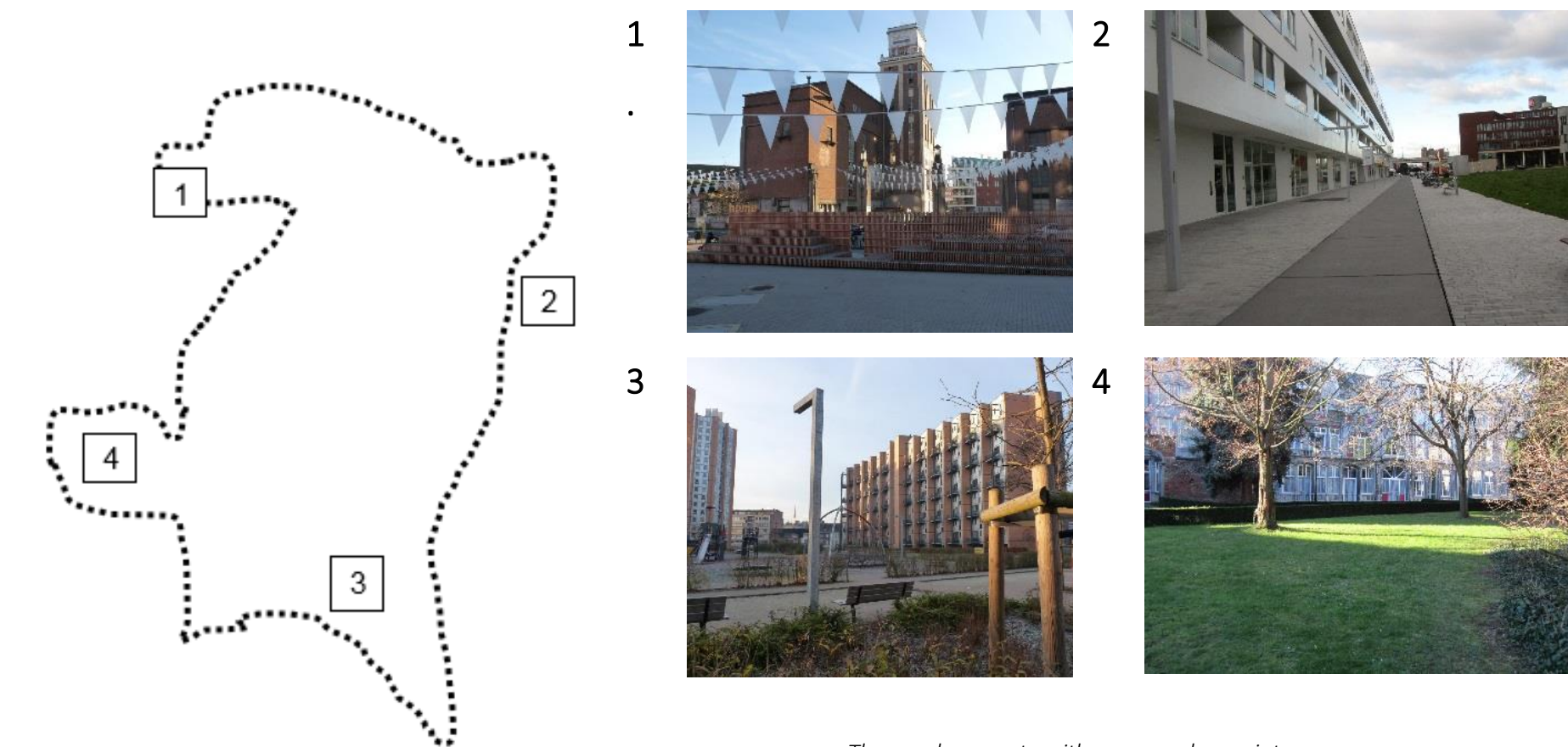
A COMBINED APPROACH OF WALKING, CREATING AND DISSEMINATING

WALKING

Walking is one of our most common daily activities. It is always an embodied and situated experience that takes place at some point in time (Pink, 2009). In this project **sensory go-along interviews**, or walking interviews, were conducted while exploring the changing neighborhood with the artists. This go-along method is a hybrid approach that entails participating in movement while conducting a qualitative interview (Kusenbach, 2003). The preference for this method was based on the belief that walking can lead to an entirely different interview experience. The go-along strategy addresses some of the limitations of traditional interviews. Research indicates for example that respondents are less likely to give a ‘correct’ answer and are more stimulated by the environment (Evan & Jones, 2011). By walking in the urban space, places become meaningful and they raise certain feelings. The active role of the researchers offered opportunities to actively engage in real-time with the artists while they answered questions and interacted with their surroundings.

There are several ways of conducting these go-along interviews. These can range from informal conversations between the researchers and the participants while walking through the landscape to (semi-)structured walks, explicitly intended to respond to (partially) predetermined places (Evans & Jones, 2011). In this project, a semi-structured interview guide was used. During the ‘go-alongs’, that followed a predetermined route, the artists were encouraged to give attention to what they saw, felt, touched, heard, smelled,... while walking through the area.

These journeys were audio recorded and transcribed afterwards.



The go-along route with some anchor points

CREATING

After the go-along interviews, the artists were invited to draw attention to their embodied experiences of these walks. This could only be done by giving attention to the world itself and to some characteristic features of the changing environment (such as particular smells, sounds or tactile sensations) (Ingold, 2000). After this, **artistic compositions** were made by the artists **based on their sensorial experiences** of the area.

In order to make these creations, the participating artists went back to the locations several times. During these post walks, most of them took photographs to visually document what had been seen, touched, smelled, heard,... Some of them also made use of a weblog to post links, notes, background information, photos of the neighborhood and photos of their creations.

Rather than a fixed representation, each of the art students’ creations is part of “an ongoing process, an improvisation, a response to a context inherent in the relations among people, places, materials and activities” (Ross & Mannion, 2012, p. 307).

DISSEMINATING

The arts-based study was part of a collaborative project between the University of Leuven and the fine arts department of SLAC (the art academy and music conservatory of the city of Leuven). It culminated in an **exhibition at STUK** (House for Dance, Image and Sound) from **17 to 28 May 2017** in the city of Leuven. Four art works named *‘Si(gh)tes of necessary trouble’*, that were made in the context of this particular study, were part of the STUK exhibition.

These four works of art are now displayed in the **Library of Social Sciences** (KU Leuven). This exhibition takes place from **6 to 13 June 2017**.

The project shows how the physical aspects as well as related inner processes (memories, associations, and emotions) played a role in how artists experienced the neighborhood. Interpretations from both artists and social researchers can enrich our understanding of ‘place’.

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THE RESEARCH TEAM



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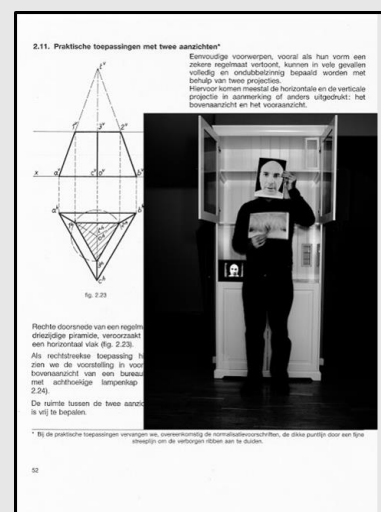
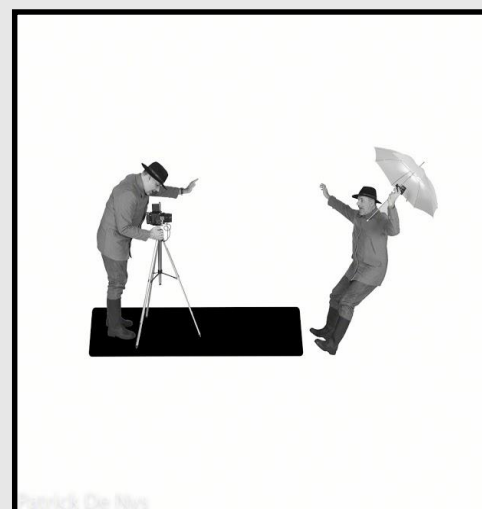
Qualitative Inquiry Team, Social Research Methodology Group, Faculty Social Sciences

THE ARTISTS

Patrick De Nys

Discipline: Photography

Patrick is a photographer who uses himself as the model in his artworks. His self portraits are by no means standard and straightforward. Patrick uses himself as a vehicle to convey his ideas and thoughts, it is up to the viewer to give meaning to it. In his work, he plays with lines, depth, movement, light and perspective.



Annemie Moriau

Discipline: Painting, drawing, sketching, graphics, design, photography.

Annemie is a versatile visual artist who works on several recurring themes (transitional spaces, vulnerability, the sea as a site for promise and despair, ...) that deal with the dynamic relationship between people and places and the distortion of layers of meaning. She uses a broad range of materials for her artworks such as pressed charcoal, photographic collages, Awagami Hosho (Japanese paper) paint, pencils and Chinese ink. She plays with the multiple definitions spaces and places can have for different people and adds these layers in her art work.



More info: <http://anniemoriau.com>

Monik Myle

Discipline: Painting, graphics, video

Monik explores existential subjects such as violence, conflict, repression or destruction, alternating with poetical moments on memory. She approaches these subjects by the use of different media such as painting, engraving or video. Since last year she is particularly interested in the idea of « territory », and urbanism. Amongst other things, she draws inspiration from developments around her home, such as the modification of a suburb village into a commuter town through invasive constructions and its consequences on the neighbourhood and its residents.



More info: <http://hurdy-gurdy.weebly.com/pilot-1>

Christiane Aerts

Discipline: painting, installations

Christiane is a long time student of SLAC, she has already enjoyed 7 years of painting lessons from many different teachers, making her a versatile painter with broad knowledge of her craft. At the Interdisciplinary Studio she is broadening her repertoire to installations, trying to find a personal angle for approaching art. Christiane is challenging herself to think out of the box, she now makes installations and combines the presentations of these installations with photography.



More info: <http://chrisgabrielle.weebly.com/>