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Architecture, MIT
Transformation; rhythm, ratio, scale & structure

Reflection: Transformation of the Schedeldoekshavencomplex

Schedeldoekshavencomplex just after its completion in the early eighties
In this reflection I will reflect upon three separate subjects. First I will reflect upon answering the main and sub (research) questions. Second on the process that I have gone through the last and third upon the method I have used, (or the lack of using a method). It covers a period of 15 months, from September 2013 till — November 2014, in which I did two P4-presentations. The first in May, I unfortunately failed, the second, in September I did pass. In this reflection, as in the project (and process) my first P4-presentation makes for a clear division into a before and an after. Up to my first P4-presentation, I was still in research mode. And at that presentation I could only present the outlines of my design. I did not pass it because there was not enough depth in the design and there was a lack of cohesion between architecture and building technique. From the failed presentation onwards I started working on these subjects. And because the outlines already were existent, the second part of my graduation went process-wise, much smoother.

Research question(s):
For this project I have used two main research questions. One more theoretical, following the Position Paper we had to write in the first half of our graduation project, the other more practical, resulting from the first analysis of the building, done at the start of the design project.

The research question for the Position Paper was: ‘How to create an architectural framework which will enhance the possibilities of modification and transformation within the existing building? In the Position Paper I have discussed the added value of having spaces within a building that easily can be transformed to fulfill the needs of new users or new functions. I therefore wanted to create framework that would enhance this process. This was also the goal for the infill of the high-rise of the Schedeldoekshavencomplex. This however turned out to be quite difficult to apply, because every different function has its own different needs.

In the design the functions are separated horizontally so to make sure every functions can have its own required common spaces. The spaces on the different floors, so called units, are all the same size and are interchangeable. On basis of demand, it will be determined how many floors will house a specific function. So in the end one can doubt if a framework that enhances flexibility has been created.

While the lay-out of the floors with the units are clear, the actual unites themselves are hard to design. I do like the concept of the units, but in a next project I would rather start with the design of the plans of the individual units rather than with the entire floor plan itself.

The research question resulting from the analysis was: ‘What needs to be done in order to make the Schedeldoekshavencomplex contribute to the livability of the Turfmarkt?’. In my opinion an answer has been given to this question. However at the cost of demolishing quite a lot of the existing building and changing its structure and appearance dramatically.

One of the main challenges of the design was to adept the complex to its ‘new’ surroundings. The complex has been built in the late seventies, without having a concrete context. Over the years, the context has changed dramatically, while the Schedeldoekshavencomplex has remained entirely the same. Because of this change in surrounding the building has no connection with it and does therefore not contribute to The Hague. Hence my research question. To make it a part of its surrounding and letting the building contribute to it.

The livability of the Turfmarkt can be explained in two ways: functional and esthetical. In both cases an answer is provided. Functionally the building has been given functions that suit and contribute to the Turfmarkt. A hotel and conference along the Schedeldoekshaven and a commercial plinth along the Turfmarkt. Also, a roof- and inner garden create a peaceful quietness along the busy Turfmarkt. These both also make sure there is a green, human scale place among the immensity of stony buildings in the Nieuwe Kern of The Hague. In an esthetic way the green roof- and inner garden also play a pivotal role. These, in combination with the new facades and the demolition that has taken place have given the Schedeldoekshaven an entirely different outlook. One which suits the twenty-first century, as well that it connects with its surroundings. The low-rise connects with the scale of the pedestrian at ground level, the high-rise with that of its enormous neighbours.

The most important questions that still need to be answered are: What will inhabit the commercial zone along the Turfmarkt and how they will function within the boundaries that are currently set. The same goes for lay-out of the ground and first floor of the hotel and the conference. Furthermore the functional design of the cornice needs to be dealt with. Normally a different typology is used on the top floor(s) of high-rise buildings.
From May onwards, the main attention of the design has been given towards answering these last questions. In general there has been given a proper answer to all of them. Although more attention could (should) have gone into the design of the floor plans of the cornice. With answering these specific question I am of the opinion that the main research question has been answered properly and the design is wrapped up.

**Process:**

Two important decisions have largely determined the process of my graduation project. Unfortunately not for the better. Both decisions where decisions which I believed were the right ones to take, but it took me quite some time to find new, suitable answers. They both have slowed me down severe and are the reason that my design was not advanced enough at the presentation in May.

The first one was stopping with the design I presented during the p2-presentation. This design assumed a large liberty in the design of the surrounding of the Schedeldoekshavencomplex. It was based on several severe interventions in its surrounding. However this as a starting point
gave me little context to base the design of the building on. This was eventually the reason why I left my original plans and started focusing on
the non-altered context. The second was the decision to align the Schedeldoekshavencomplex with the new to build Spuiforum. This decision
was taken right after the decision to the non-altered context. In order to avoid strange endings of the new Spui square and in order to fit in with
the surrounding of the Turfmarkt. However demolishing fifteen meters of the original building posed some internal issues that were hard to deal
with.

As said, from May onwards I have been working on answering the research questions I had not answered properly, as well as redesigning the
flaws that were present in the design I presented during my first P4 presentation. One of the main flaws of that design was that there was no
cohesion between architecture, building technique, material and colour. This has been a central theme in the design process from May
onwards. And to implement this properly into the design I have started learning and working in a new 3D-design computer program. In this
program all the different elements of the design come together and will able me to make a coherent design.

Next to this I also started drawing larger, (in smaller scale). My tutor encouraged me to do this, because until May I mostly draw my plans and
section on a scale of 1/200. At first I thought I was not ready to draw in smaller scales because the basics on a larger scale were not finished
yet. However I found out that drawing in smaller scales is very helpful, even to determine the larger scale of the entire plan. This is something I
hope to implement in future design projects as well. To go sooner into more detailed plans and sections because this method really helps to
make decisions and speed up the process.

An eye-opener for me was the work of Rem Koolhaas. The way he deals with large scale buildings has been of guidance for many of my
decisions regarding the high rise of the Schedeldoekshavencomplex. Both his building De Rotterdam (function and façade wise) as well as his
book A Delirious New York have been of great inspiration.

Regarding the architectural theory of RMIT I have followed a different course then much of the rest of the studio, as well as a different approach
compared to former RMIT projects I have done. In this case the preservation of the building was not really part of the challenge. Functional and
esthetic wise did the building not satisfy. Preservation of the building was mostly interesting from an economic viewpoint. I therefore have used
the structure of the building as a starting point for the redesign and the structure is also the only thing that is a reminiscent of the old building.
In the end the by me designed building has much more resemblance with Westraven (a recently transformed building, designed by the same
architect and built in the same building system as the Schedeldoekshavencomplex) than I would have anticipated at the start of the design.

Method:
A design for a building always starts with the analysis. In the faculty of architecture this is done threefold. Urban, architectural and building
technical. However when working with an existing building, the one thing I am most interested in is the structure of the original building. This
structure is usually connected to the main routing of a the building. With this structure the building can be understood and with this structure the
building makes sense.

However some buildings lack this structure. This can be through lack of good design, but mostly this is because, the function of the building, or
for example surrounding are changed. I therefore always try to bring back, or recreate a structure so the building can be understand once again.
In this specific case this is done by adding the inner- and roof garden, who both determine the lay-out of the building.

My method of acquiring this structure is by, mostly, making use of research by design. I simply , as phrased nicely by a fellow student, ‘draw
anything I think of’. I keep on drawing, and adjusting my drawings till I find something I am content with.
To make full use of this method, it should be accompanied with looking at and analyzing reference projects. Also talking with fellow students
and tutors is more than helpful. However, especially the former happens often too little too late. Too often I keep thinking I will be able to find
the answers on my own.
Analyzing more oft reference projects is something I have to add to my method of working, because it is something that again and again proofs
to be a suitable manner to find quicker, betters answers to the posed questions.

One thing I have implemented, during my graduation, (although one argue, still not enough) is designing with perspective drawings and by
making models. In former design projects I designed mostly by section and by plan. But you get a more accurate feeling of a space, a building
when you can see it in perspective, or when you can feel it. I also hope to use this method in future projects.
Last but not least, some advice that I would have liked to have given myself at the start of my graduation project. And with that, also for other future (RMIT) students. Make sure you choose a building, a subject where you are interested in. Within RMIT there is a large variety of buildings which can be chosen. Each building is different and therefore represents different task. If you choose a historical building which represents much value, your task will be much more about preservation and interior design. While if you choose a ‘modern’ office building from the late seventies the task will be completely different. The same goes for location. Is it highly urban or is it located in the city suburbs? You therefore have to think first about what you would like your design task to be and look for a building that can offer you this task, then the other way around. Where you end up with a building that is dictating your design task, a task where you might not be comfortable with.

The latter happened with my graduation. I chose a building that I like because of its facades. Facades which were always in my view from the train when I arrived in The Hague. The task for this building had however nothing to do with the facades, but so much the more with the connection with its surrounding. Something I discovered when there was no way back anymore. 

Having had problems with designing public space and the relation between buildings and public space in previous projects, this was not the task I would have set for myself.

This is the main reason why I have had much trouble with the design of the this building and why I could not finish my graduation project within one academic calendar year.

All in all I am pretty satisfied with the design as of yet. The research questions have been properly answered. The relation between the building and the public domain has improved hugely. The addition of the inner garden as well as the roof garden makes it truly a part of its surrounding. The ground floor, which was missing at the last P4 presentation has in the intermediate period been designed and does accompany the relation between building and public domain.