REFLECTION PAPER: THE PLACE OF WORK

Personal information

Name	Daan Floris Vulkers
Student number	4057058
Telephone number	+316 21 52 60 58
E-mail adress	dfvulkers@gmail.com | D.F.Vulkers@student.tudelft.nl

Studio

Name / Theme	Architecture of the Interior: "The Place of Work"
Teachers	Mark Pimlott, Mauro Parravicini and Laura Alvarez

Introduction	In our graduation studio *The Place of Work*, we're examining an office building designed by Jan Hoogstad (Image 1) in the center of The Hague. This office building was built in 1991 for the Ministry of VROM (Housing, Spatial planning and Environment) and has to be transformed to house the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment. This assignment has to be seen in light of the recent changes in government policy. As a result of large budget cuts the dutch government has implemented a number of measures to reduce its size and save costs. This new policy, that strives for a smaller governmental institution, is based on a flexible and multifunctional office that can facilitate any government institution at any time. The offices are developed without a user in mind: independent of individuals or organizations that will use them in the future.
Context	The trend of dehumanization in office design has been accelerated by the recent advancements in information technology. These advancements claim to make the office building redundant. Why built offices at all if we can work from home, in the library or at the coffee shop on the corner? In my graduation project I've tried to offer an alternative to the office typology that prevails to exist nowadays. Before I was able to do so the historical context, history of the office typology and a number or relevant reference projects were examined.
	The office can be seen as one of the greatest icons of our century. Although an increasing amount of people work in an office – fifty percent of the working population of the western world is working

1   Francis Duffy, 1997
The New Office. London:
Conran Octopus Limited.

2   www.pijet.com:
''Hoppers's concept of self-
representation reflected in
the metaphysical realism of
the space in his paintings."
by Andre Pijet on June 15th
2009.

3   Francis Duffy, 1997
The New Office. London:
Conran Octopus Limited.

in an office nowadays, as opposed to five percent at the beginning of the century (1), the atmosphere surrounding it seems to get grimmer and grimmer. An atmosphere captured by painter Edward Hopper in his painting Office in a Small City (Image 2) in 1953. With this image Hopper reflects upon the loneliness of working and living in a small American city. In the image you look from the exterior at a man sitting in a corner office, staring at the outside world, but yet alienated from its surroundings. It depicts the state of the American working space at that time. ''Everyone is assigned to his own cage. It is his space to act and perform". (2)

Today's image of the office is greatly influenced by Frederick Taylor (1856-1915). Taylor observed and analyzed working methods at the Bethlehem Steel Mills at the end of the nineteenth century and proposed to revolutionize these methods. His revolutionary theory - called 'Scientific management' – stated that people had to be thought of as units of production. Although it was successful in creating a more efficient workforce, it led to the dehumanization of the workers in factories and in offices. People were constantly watched and measured by management, who themselves were under pressure to find new opportunities on how to improve the efficiency. It was not the measuring itself that was the problem but the idea that lay behind it: ''people are managed best if they are treated as unthinking automatons". (3)

Although nowadays Taylorism is not taken seriously anymore, buildings that have been influenced by Taylorism are still being built and reproduced. At the time that the office as a building type emerged, Taylorism was the prevailing management ideology. Hierarchy, supervision, order and depersonalization instead of intelligence and inventiveness became values that were rooted in this new typology of the Northern American office building. Taylorism emerged at the same time as other mayor technological advancements – the elevator, steel construction, air-conditioning and electric lighting – and was able to lift of their success and get embedded into the thinking about office buildings.

If we go back to the recent policy changes in government office culture we find that it goes even a step further. Personalization is banned from the office and the sole objective is to create a smaller, cheaper and more efficient government. Office spaces are thought of as measurable units with a variety of sizes and the same character: Transparency and efficiency. Workers have to find a different place everyday in a building that might have been meant for another organization altogether. This solution does not provide

an answer to the question of how we can perceive a contemporary office building, it only provides a solution for an efficient office building.

Strategy

With my graduation project I have tried to provide an alternative to this method where the design of the office building does not start with quantifying but with characters of the various types of spaces you could provide to work in. An office building that is conceived as a collection of various different spaces and ways of working with different characters.

My perception is that the government office building should take a stand in this debate and open up to the public by providing a place of work for both civil servants and the public and in this way represent the transparency of their institution. The former VROM-building will work as the perfect example as it already combines two ministries in one building – thus in need for common ground – and is located in the center of The Hague along its primary pedestrian route.

The public program is distributed over the first five floors, sticking to the existing build-up of the building. The public program is divided into serving spaces: storage, bike parking and retail on the left side and public program: library with reading room, immigration offices, cafeteria/restaurant, exhibition space and conference center on the right side. The civil servants can work here when they have a quick job to do, want to work among the public or have a meeting.

The first space where only civil servants are allowed is on the fifth floor. This open office landscape gives the opportunity for informal meetings and encounters and distributes workers horizontally while providing them with an overview of the building.

The top part of the building leaves the existing atrium structure intact and provides an additional continuous perimeter around the building for circulation and organization. At the same time this space at the facade of the building gives the office ''its face back'' because workers can come to the edge and look into the city and simultaneously be seen from the ground. Balconies in four of the atria make the relationship between individual workspaces and the atrium possible.

Reflection

The hardest part of this assignment was the scale of the existing building. The concept of a building in a threefold section – three zones – helped structuring the process in parts and steps. The public part was mostly studied in model, while the meeting floor and office spaces were studied in plan, section and 3d. The ability to apply various ways of studying for these various types of spaces was discovered late in the process. By the detailing of the generic office space for the P3 I realized this was a quick way to link this space, which I only conceived in plan and section before, to a distinct character of its own. The same counts for the studies of the meeting floor by collage techniques, which allowed me to adjust the plan and structure of the building according to certain newly discovered objectives. In a building of this scale it was easy and tempting to keep on working in the plan, but when I switched to other design methods I was able to quickly give each space its own character. If I would've applied these methods earlier in the process, I could've better accomplished my goal of these distinct worlds – places of work.

A more concrete point of attention is the facade. From the beginning the focus was more on the interior spaces, their interior facades and properties. A lot of interventions are purposefully kept ''loose'' from the existing structure in order to keep them free. The intention was to focus all the interventions on the interior world only, but hereby you miss the opportunity of using the exterior facade in the composition of this interior world. Although this was a deliberate choice I decided in a later stadium that the public zone and the meeting zone would change so drastically that a different exterior representation was necessary.

The existing building is relatively young and very particular for its time. The structure is rigid and its mathematical scheme is strong. Dealing with this modern building was challenging when you're trying to find the balance between the existing structure and its additions. Beforehand I was mostly familiar with an approach that either adapted to historical typologies by fitting the existing structure or making a contrast with it. During the transformation of this building I realized that there are far more sensitive and nuanced ways of dealing with existing buildings. It became a careful play between the existing building and the new structure. At some points they form a new entity together and at other points the existing structure is clearly interrupted or altered. But overall i've sought to find a balance between both where the two form something new together and the lines between existing and new are blurred and open to interpretation.
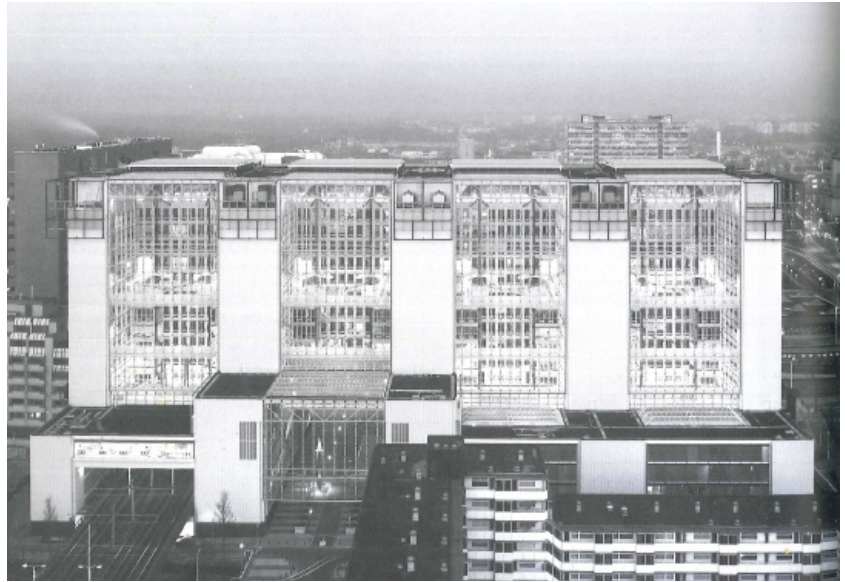
Image 1: VROM Building,
Jan Hoogstad, 1991

Image 2: Office in a small city,
Edward Hopper 1953

Image 3: Axonometric view of
the project.
A: Public
B: Meeting
C: Office