

Reflections

(Archi)ved – A Journey Past The Vault Doors

I ARCHITECTURALLY, THE ARCHIVE EXPRESSES ITS PHYSICAL DRIVE MORE STRONGLY THAN ITS PRIMARY GOAL, THAT MEANS THERE IS ARCHITECTURAL POTENTIAL IN MAKING THE RECORD MORE DISCOVERABLE. (UNHIDE THE ARCHIVE)

II THE "FINDING" METHODS USED IN THE ARCHIVE CAN FEEL QUITE RIGID AND SPECIFIED. HOW CAN SEARCHING THE ARCHIVE FEEL MORE LIKE A "SLIPSTICK THROUGH" PROCESS? WHAT DOES AN "OPEN SEARCH" ARCHIVE LOOKS LIKE?

III COULD THE STANDARDS FOR SPECIFYING THE LOCATION BE IMPROVED TO ALLOW FOR BETTER HANDLING OF THE MATERIAL BY THOSE WHO ARE NOT AN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVE

ARCHITECTURAL MOMENT (I.E. BUILDING ENTRANCE)

CHARACTER STATE (I.E. VISITOR BECOMES AWARE OF COLLECTION)

THE GRAPH ABOVE EVOKES A SENSE THAT THE NARRATIVE OF THIS ARCHIVAL EXPERIENCE IS TOLD THROUGH ARCHITECTURAL MOMENTS, WHICH INFORM AND ARE INFORMED BY CHANGES EXPRESSED BY THE CHARACTER AND STATE.

* OBSERVATION: I

I AM NOT ENTIRELY SURE IF THAT IS TRUE OR IF THAT IS A MORE STRUCTURED CHAIN OF EVENTS DRIVING THESE CHANGES. INTUITIVELY, IT APPEARS TO ME THAT CHANGES MAY BE INITIATED BY THE CHARACTER AND CASCADE DOWN IN THE FOLLOWING FASHION:

NEW CHARACTER STATE > NEW ARCHITECTURAL MOMENT > SPATIAL QUALITY CHANGE ***

** OBSERVATION: II

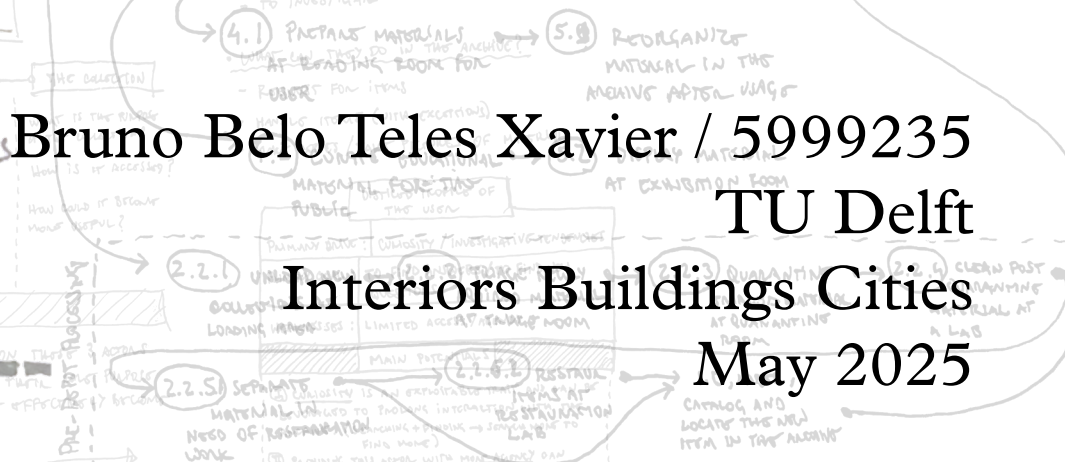
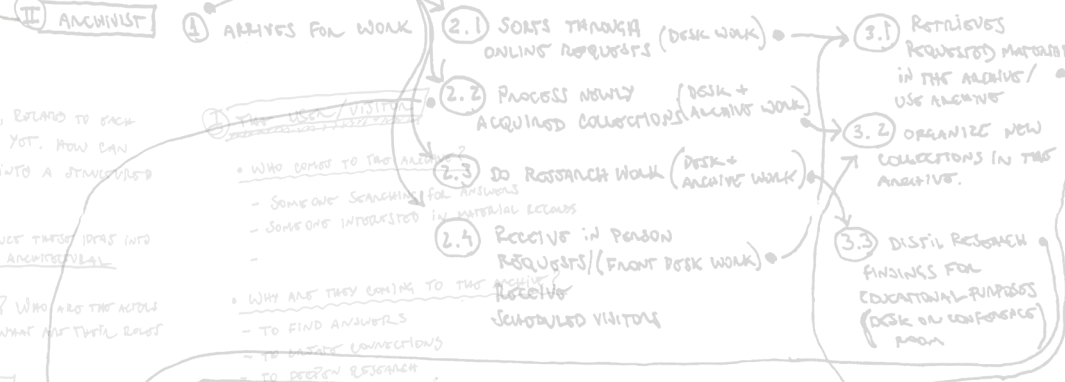
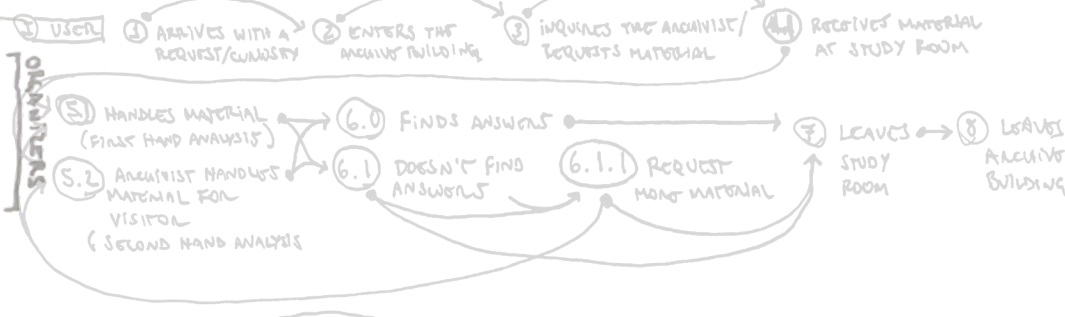
THE OBSERVATION ABOVE IS SIMILY. CHANGES CAN INDEED OCCUR IN BOTH DIRECTIONS, EMANATING EITHER FROM THE CHARACTER OR A SPATIAL QUALITY DEVELOPMENT.

TO SET THIS UP AS A COHESIVE WORKFLOW, A SOLID NARRATIVE (SEQUENCE OF EVENTS) MUST BE LAYED OUT AS A BASE, DESCRIBING A BASIC SEQUENCE OF ARCHITECTURAL MOMENTS.

THESE WILL PROMPT REACTIONS FROM EITHER SIDE OF THE AXIS, AND AN ARCHITECTURAL STORY WILL START BEING TOLD. MORE ARCHITECTURAL MOMENTS CAN THEN BE ADDED BASED ON NEW DESIGNED DEVELOPMENTS, REVERSING THE WORKFLOW.

BREAKING THINGS DOWN

THE TYPICAL ARCHIVE STORY:



Introduction:

Positioning and Scope

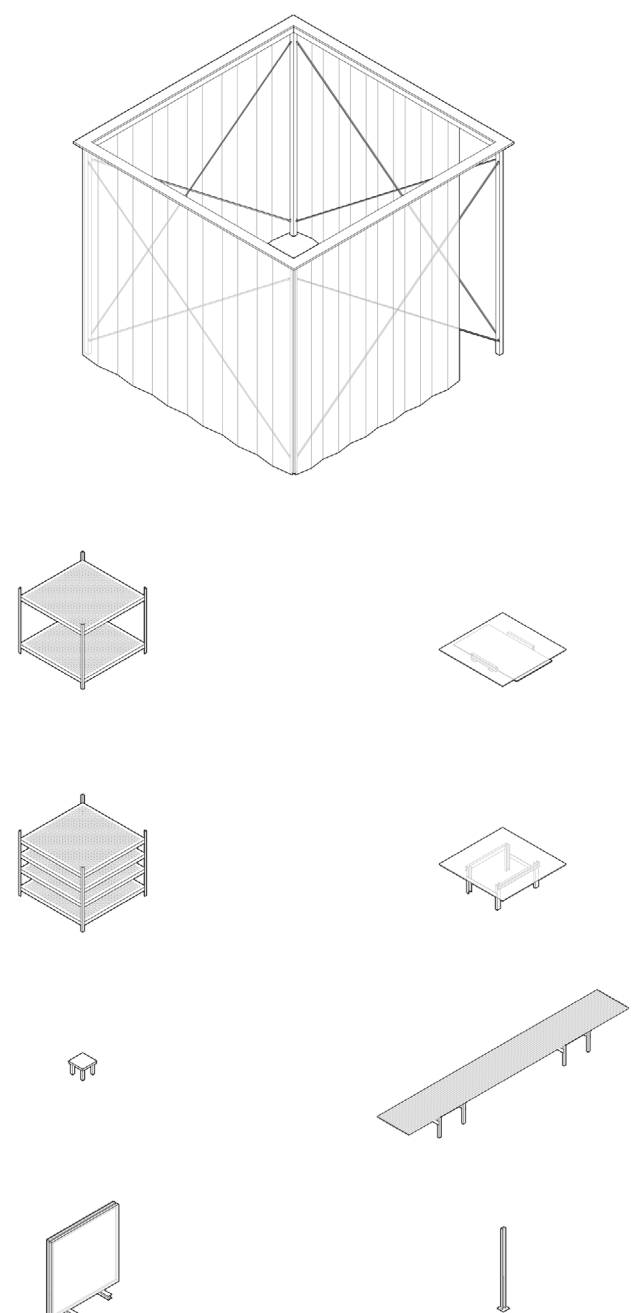
This graduation project was developed within the Interiors Building Cities Graduation Studio, where we were invited to approach our architectural projects not merely as the creation of form, but as vehicles for the spatial negotiation between body, memory and context. My project “Archived – A Journey Past The Vault Doors”, became my response to the challenge posed to us by the VAI (Flanders Architecture Institute) concerning its current detachment from the public it serves. The assignment was not just to redesign a building, but to interrogate a typology as a whole: the archive. From the very beginning, I aimed to explore how archival architecture can evolve into a more open, expressive, and educational institution, where the overlap between the preservation of the collection and public engagement are no longer incompatible but a necessary aspect of the archival experience.

Reflection on Research and Design Trajectory

The trajectory of the project has been iterative and exploratory, marked by a continuous back-and-forth between theoretical research, precedent analysis, and spatial experimentation. This process began with an extensive precedent analysis assignment entitled “Looking Carefully” where we were divided in groups to observe, scrutinize, and replicate in high fidelity, the approach used by other architects in similar design assignments. My group was assigned with the study of ArkDes in Stockholm, which became a catalyst for early thoughts on flexibility and modularity. That group work anchored my understanding of the archive as more than storage, but as a space where architecture becomes performative.

With the learnings from “Looking Carefully”, the next step in the research process was to become acquainted with the site and context we would be dealing with for the coming year. In our trip to Antwerp, we had the opportunity to visit the offices of the VAI and its archive, which allowed us to speak with the VAI staff and ground our abstract research in their lived spatial experience and personal views regarding the issues they encounter in their current situation. Furthermore, we got to visit and take part in the architectural experience of DeSingel, the large cultural campus we were to intervene in. This visit made the complexities of this project more tangible, as we were exposed to the shortcomings and many unrealized potentials lying dormant within the corridors of the complex. It was after this visit that my perspective towards

the assignment began to emerge more clearly, as I perceived DeSingel campus as a collage of uncoordinated stories, which overtime diverged significantly from the story Leon Stynen (its original architect) had for the building. This was when I started incorporating narrative thinking as a way to organize spatial programming.



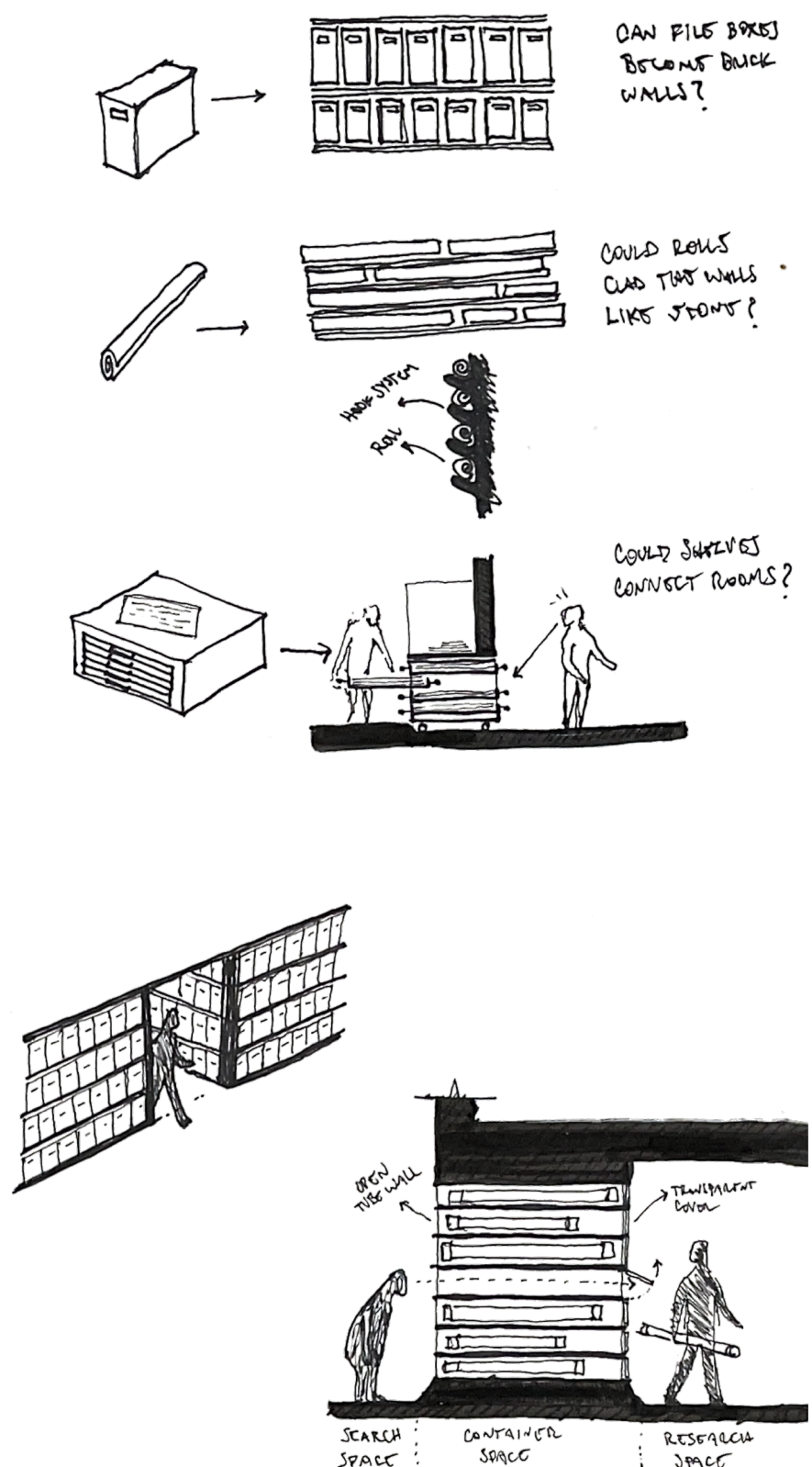
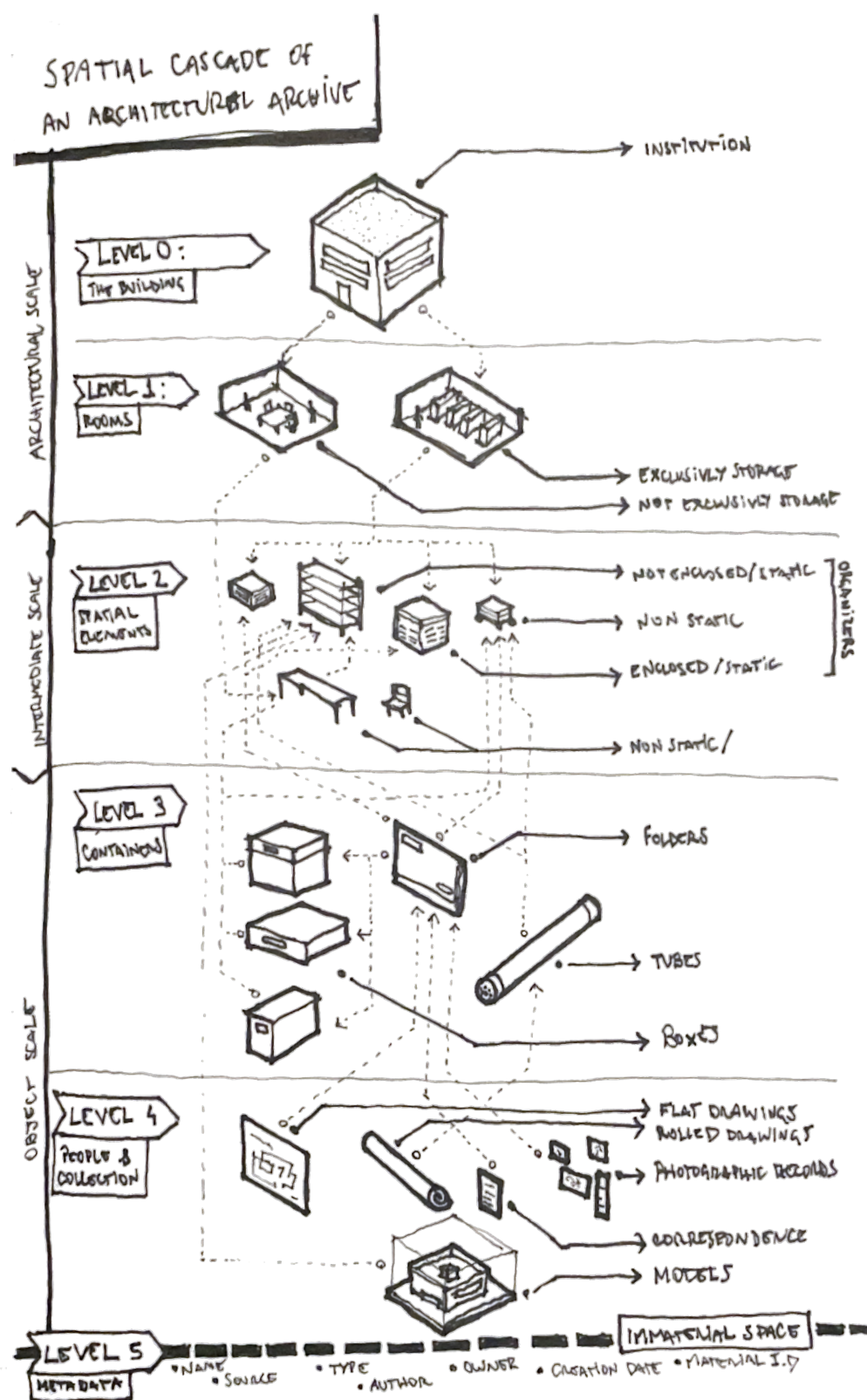


Evaluation of Method and Process

My approach was shaped by a combination of conceptual frameworks and material testing. I investigated how to convert narrative building and storytelling techniques as tools that could structure architectural thinking. This was done first by mapping the daily journeys of three key user groups, then by overlaying their interactions with the archival space over a single “narrative line”. This sequencing of “events” highlighted moments where the actions of different users would overlap and informed how the programming of the building could be organized in order to take advantage of those moments to foster interactions between different users and create a more dynamic space. This method also discriminated moments within the current archival typologies which could be reorganized to promote permeability for the public to interact with the contents of the collection.

Model making, both physical and digital, remained central to the design project throughout. The 1:20 Archival Ensemble was particularly productive, as it allowed me to abstract, subvert, and recompose technical archival requirements into spatial propositions that privileged user interaction and atmosphere. Similarly, the use of the fragment model before P3 further clarified what strategies to use (and avoid) in the tectonic and material language of the project, even if that process at times felt rushed or out of sync with the conceptual development.

In retrospect, the non-linear and at times conflicting nature of the studio’s methods taught me the value of dwelling in unresolved conditions. It was in the frictions of the iterative process that the project matured.



Reflection on Feedback and Translation into Work

Each major presentation brought feedback that pushed the project beyond the limits of my initial intentions. P1 exposed the inadequacy of relying too heavily on visual representation without a strong conceptual core. That led to a winter period of rigorous note-taking, mind-mapping, and methodological refinement. By P2, I had constructed a more defined narrative structure, but the scheme remained overly deferential to DeSingel. The rooftop extension was critiqued for its structural improbability and missed urban opportunity.

Critical Self-Evaluation and Learning

This has been a project of unlearning as much as learning. At various points, I found myself retreating into architectural conservatism, fearing that any deviation from the existing architectural language of the campus would signal a lack of contextual consideration, or a blatant disrespect to the original project by Stynen. It took a long time to realize that a meaningful addition to DeSingel could embody a unique architectural identity without being antagonistic.

Societal and Academic Value

Archives are often misunderstood as inert spaces, disconnected from contemporary civic life. Yet they hold the blueprints of collective memory and future possibility. This project contributes to the growing discourse on reimagining institutional architecture in ways that foreground public access, interaction, and adaptability.

From an academic perspective, the integration of narrative frameworks and embodied research methods (through performative mappings and sequential programming) offers a cross-disciplinary approach that could be relevant to other typologies. Ethically, the project insists on the archive's responsibility to engage the public, not just store history, a drive that is very much in line with the goals outlined by the VAI as an institution.

Taking that critique seriously, I shifted the intervention to the street-facing edge of the campus. This was not just a site move, but a conceptual one. The new position allowed for a rethinking of the archive's public interface. But the design still echoed DeSingel too closely. P3 brought this to light. I was urged to let the new addition breathe, to find its own identity without mimicking the past. This led to material and formal explorations that culminated in the reflective facade—a surface that responds to its context not through imitation but by framing it.

At certain points, the process became very taxing. The weeks after P2 were filled with uncertainty, dead ends, and frustration. But it was precisely in those periods that I became more attuned to the larger questions at stake. What is an archive after all if not a space in constant negotiation with what was and what can be? Shifting my thinking in that manner guided me in my final shifts in geometry, programming, and facade treatment.

Transferability of Outcomes

Though this project is deeply site-specific, its strategies are not. The use of narrative as spatial structure, the performance of programming through characters, and the careful negotiation between new and existing can be applied to any other civic or cultural buildings as a general framework. Moreover, the spatial strategies for access, visibility, and layering developed here could inform future interventions in closed institutional typologies.

Forward Outlook (Final Stretch)

As I approach P5, the focus will be on synthesis. With the basic drawing set developed, and a final physical model being worked on towards completion, creating more images that express the final building and its effects on the surroundings are a must. Those images would specifically refer to final perspectives, as well as any diagram deemed necessary to tighten up the points of the narrative. This process of synthesis would also include the refinement of any drawing that lagged behind due to time constraints.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. How can spatial storytelling serve as a functional design tool, not just a representational one, in complex institutional programs?
2. In what ways can architectural design resist typological inertia while remaining respectful of context and historical significance?