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An architect's thoughts on transformation

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Metamorphosis

The transformation of Dutch Museums

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1 – The museum as a catalyst: An architect's thoughts on transformation

Job Roos - TU Delft and Braaksma & Roos Architects

What shall we teach our future architects? We know and feel that times are changing. Harm Tilman, editor of the Dutch magazine *De Architect*, reflects on the fact that the pace of change and consequently the disruptions within the field of architecture, town planning and interior design have never been as extreme as they are now.³ According to Tilman, the broader shared opinion is that architecture can no longer be explained with reference to the Modern Movement. A new paradigm is needed. A search for (new) meaning in contemporary architecture is desired. It is no longer only studying history that will facilitate the future. As a matter of fact, it has become hard to maintain the image of the architect as the consummate visionary. Instead, architecture should focus more and more on what already exists instead of merely exploring the possible. Tilman further refers to broader contexts and argues that architectural approaches or methodologies are no longer fixed. (One could ask if they really ever were?) This has a great diversity as a consequence, but demands real and caring attention in order to discover appropriate architectural solutions in the future.

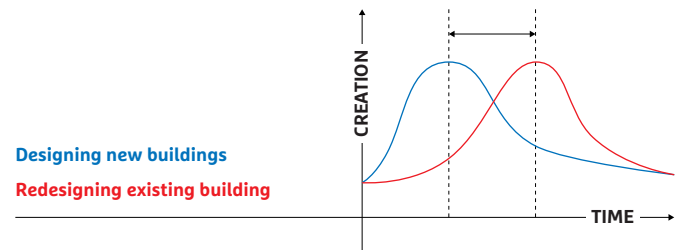


FIG. 1.1 De Jonge's comparison of the creative curve when designing new buildings (blue curve) and redesigning existing buildings (red curve) / De Jonge, 2017, p. 27

Architecture mediates between theory and practice. We are used to the fact that the design of a new building starts rather quickly (roughly) with drawing, but transformation should start with the exploration of the existing. More time is needed for analysis and research to get to the plot of the design when planning a building transformation than for a new building's design [FIG. 1.1].⁴

³ Tilman, H., *Zoeken naar architectuur*, 'De Architect', March 2019

⁴ De Jonge, W., *Sleeping Beauty*, in: Kuipers, M. & De Jonge, W., *Designing from Heritage. Strategies for Conservation and Conversion*, Delft: TUDelft – Heritage and Architecture, 2017, pp. 15–29

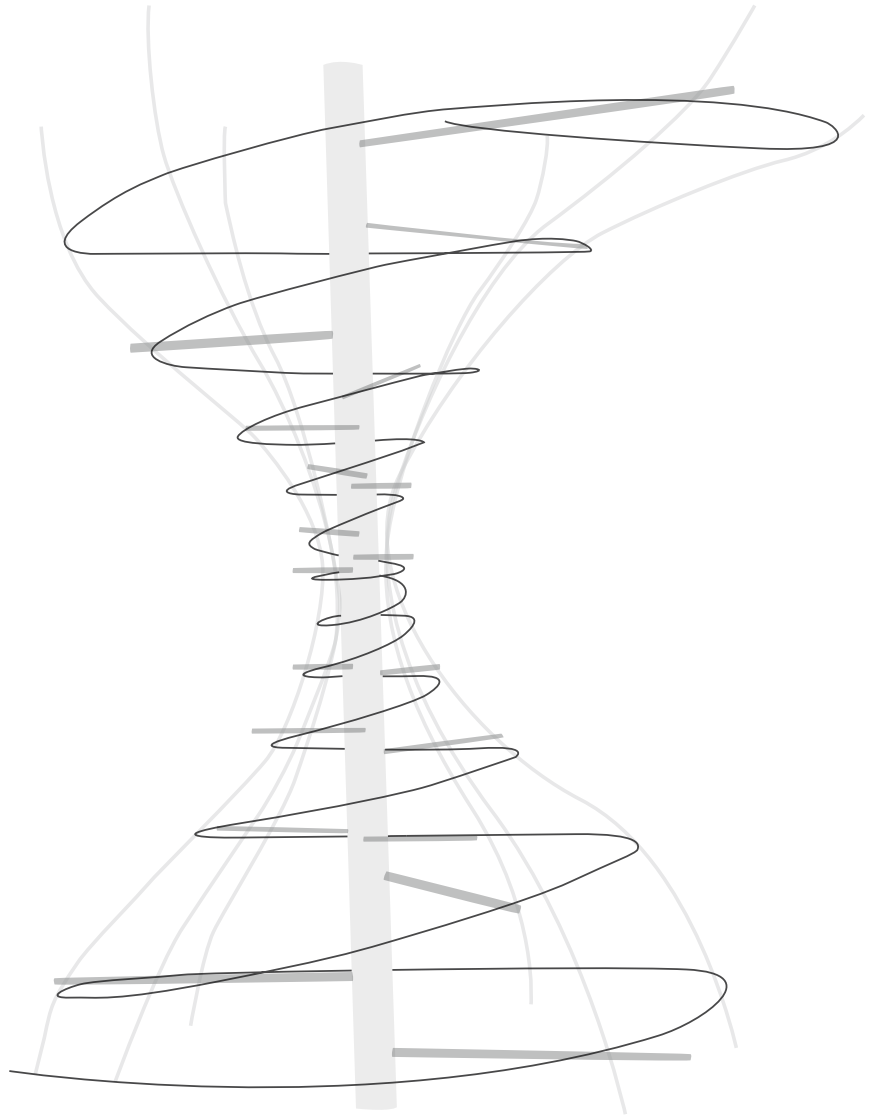


FIG. 1.2 The double-helix model illustrating the incremental narrowing down towards the essence of a design problem, before expanding the answer through design resolution / drawing Roy van N. from Roos, 2007

Something that is natural cannot be stopped and generates its future out of its genes through interaction with external factors.

This means we need to know more. The section of Heritage and Architecture of the Delft University of Technology has been focusing for more than a decade on shaping the attitude and the position of the future architect. An important focus is on analysis and research as an underpinning for the design. Understanding the broader context is essential and brings us close to the title of this publication. Our working title for this publication was 'Transformation of the Dutch Museum' and by gradually working on the subject, this title evolved into 'Metamorphosis', which stands for a gradual evolution or change.

So this book is not about fast architecture, quick wins or beautification as we often refer to architecture where new and old are mixed in an attractive dualism. The aim is to understand, to digest and understand the abundant architectural diversity that arose at an enormous pace over three decades. This abundant and fast transformation is a phenomenon we cannot ignore. Is there a theoretical framework to be discovered? **The transformed Dutch museum might be an interesting case illustrating the possible paradigm shift.**

Working with the existing (in analysis and design) is a complex task. In 'The Discovery of the Assignment',⁵ a framework is presented to help the architect find a sustainable method for design. This can be visualized as a helix, a searching and incremental screw-line, leading to an inclusive approach. This 'design through research' approach⁶ is cyclical, repetitive, and should protect the architect from blueprint design [FIG. 1.2].

The study of the transformation of Dutch museums no longer focused on the architect, but includes other actors. Important were: the client, the staff of the museum-organisation and the users. The question was whether a balance was reached between the different role-players in the transformation process. We were interested in the process of preparation, design and execution of the transformation. What happened after the transformations had been completed? Were they stable on one hand and flexible on the other? Are they durable or are new transformations already being planned? In other words, is/was there awareness about future new transformations? At what pace were they expected? Museum buildings nowadays strive to become appealing and open to everybody. Museums want to offer a special experience to people of different backgrounds and ages. What will be next?

Here we touch another interesting subject: the inevitable complexity of the scope of work. Apart from the helix mentioned above, which should help to master the unknown and the often surprising and pragmatic past (time), we unravel the helix of the unknown future: time, demands from society and programming that we have to deal with. Underlying the basic cyclical structure of these helixes are the paces of cyclical transformations as articulated by biologist and architectural writer Stewart Brand.⁷

And last not but least we can add another helix, a recurrent theme we often encounter in transformation of heritage as an interesting dilemma: design in opposition or in paradox, as for instance the dilemma of opening up existing sites and buildings while and at the same time keeping intimacy and closeness. Very often these dilemmas arise from (societal-) needs that should not be allowed to disturb the eco-systems of the existing. Instead dilemmas should be resolved to

⁵ Roos, J., *Discovering the assignment*, Delft, VSSD/R-MIT, 2007

⁶ De Jonge, W., *Sleeping Beauty*, in: Kuipers, M. & De Jonge, W., *Designing from Heritage. Strategies for Conservation and Conversion*, Delft: TUDelft – Heritage and Architecture, 2017, p. 27

⁷ Brand, S., *The clock of the long now: time and responsibility*, London, Phoenix, 1999

reinforce societal ambitions and bring new life to the existing. In this research project we have encountered new ways of dealing with heritage that might add to theory and possibly engender a paradigm shift.

The scope of this book reaches far beyond the analysis of buildings. The broader perspectives of traditional, albeit changing disciplines like museology and restoration are essential, as is the input of other disciplines like psychology and sociology. A multidisciplinary approach is nowadays of great importance for connecting the museum with the people. The architect should be able to face the complexity of the assignment, for which only an open attitude and the wish to listen to different actors in the museum world can guarantee a successful result. In the past the vision of the director or commissioner would merge with that of the architect in informing the transformation. Nowadays, the work of the architect should encompass much more. The imprint of the architect can no longer govern the design. The values of the existing – from form to materials and techniques, the place and its spirit – are surely fundamental for planning the intervention, but the building is also meant to house facilities and enable strategies to involve people. This surely influences the design. A museum is not a mere container of objects, facilities and activities. It needs to be a place that attracts visitors and makes people want to linger. The idea is that people should easily come to the museum not only for the collection or exhibition, but also to meet other people, to discuss and learn, to bringing and acquiring knowledge, but also just to be there. The architect of the future needs to have a broad interest beyond the field of architecture.

The assessment of the transformation in the research is a complex task. The templates contained in this book are focused on the transformation of a variety of museum buildings. Their designs express the vision behind the transformation and do not focus (as such) on the work of the architect. The transformation is a stratified process and

needs to be unravelled from different perspectives. The scale of applied interventions can have different effects. These effects can also be measured in the quality of the experience offered to the public and the user.

A sensitive and broad approach. In short, **the transformation of a museum can no longer be merely based on the historical and technical analysis of the existing.** Originality and continuity, a well-considered choice of materials and techniques, the site and the spirit of place all lie at the basis of the intervention, but the task of the architect is to go further. The architect needs to talk to the people involved, assess and solve dilemmas, consider critical points and thus direct the creation of a sound framework for both the museum construction and its policies. In fact, all actors should be able to recognize their contribution to the creation of the museum.

The building is the place where a condensation of needs and expectations occurs, a new equilibrium arises and is therefore the focus of the templates utilised and the entire book. The transformation of a museum is often an intervention in the urban context, contributing both in architectural and societal terms to the redefinition of the area in which it is located. A successful transformation can create a node of interest for the city and even a new line of expansion.

The architect in charge of the design of a museum building or its transformation can no longer work on his own, just as the building can no longer embody only an architect's vision. A museum building should meet the challenges concerning energy consumption, sustainability in general and durability, which leads to modifications in the architecture. However, what really matters is that a museum is capable of innovation and can keep answering to societal and psychological demands. The architect of the transformation should be a sort of conduit, able to embody and visualize with imagination the future of the past.



1939 Gallery of Honour - Rijksmuseum



1947 Gallery of Honour - Rijksmuseum

Colophon



Metamorphosis | The transformation of Dutch Museums

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