**P4 Reflection — Living Archives**

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## 1. Reflection on the chosen topic, master track, and programme

My graduation project explores the narrative potential of existing buildings, focusing on how space acquires meaning through people, their use, memory, and time. Within the Architecture track of the MSc AUBS, this project positions itself critically towards traditional design practices, which often begin with solving spatial "problem solving". Instead, my work starts from an existing building and it's inhabiting community, Bethel (Bagijnhof), a formerly squatted hospital of Delft, now inhabited for over 50 years by students (including myself), and investigates how design doesn't always come from the architect, but from informal, unintended appropriation from its users. This approach aligns with the broader ambitions of the AUBS programme to treat architecture as a cultural and societal discipline. By employing narrative and ethnographic methods, I introduce an alternative design practice and way of "reading" architecture that focuses on the relational, temporal, and human aspects of space. This project also resonates with architectural practices that see space not as an object to be solved, but as a field of relationships and readings.

## 2. Mutual influence of research and design

In this project, research and design are not two separate phases, they continuously influence each other. Or maybe even more so: I tried to treat them as the same thing!
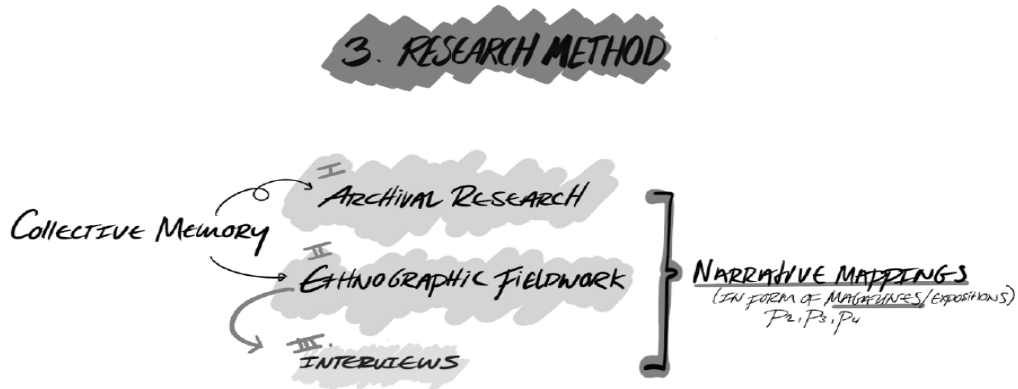
My fieldwork (archival research, interviews, observations) directly led to the development of a new architectural language, not through models or masterplans, but through scaled drawings, scripts and foldable maps that literally unfold space in time, use, and story.
At the same time, the act of making these complex foldable mappings, as a design activity became a way to spatialize the stories and frictions I encountered during my research.

The result is not a singular architectural object or intervention, but a spatial proposition made up of three scaled, tactile, narrative models, each a foldable drawing of architectural behaviour. Together, they form a layered design for how to engage with existing buildings not by replacing or fixing them, but by re-reading, re-valuing, and making their hidden structures legible.

### 3. Assessment of my approach and methodology

For P1, I wrote my presentation and research plan as a script because it allowed me to explore the building as a character, giving structure to my approach while staying open to multiple voices, perspectives, and interpretations.



By framing my research methods (archival research, ethnographic fieldwork and interviewing) through a set of roles, I created a structure that allowed me to observe, collect, and translate complex spatial realities without forcing them into a fixed system. This way, writing the script was not just a narrative tool, it was a method in itself.

The three characters: Observer, Listener, Memorizer.
Each role guided a different way of engaging with the building and its inhabitants, not through a fixed system, but through a shifting lens.

- **The Observer** interprets a space purely through visual perception and present interaction, revealing its true purpose without societal bias.

- **The Listener** understands a space through the voices and emotions of its inhabitants, valuing experience over structure.

- **The Memorizer** perceives a space through the lens of memory and time, seeing its significance as shaped by layered histories and past events.

This script allowed me to treat the building not as a fixed object, but as something multi-voiced and evolving. It gave room for ambiguity, contradiction, and layering, and helped me shift between research and design without losing continuity.

This method naturally led to the foldable bookwork I created for P2: a layered, open-ended archive of stories, memories, and traces:

*Exposition Fold-out research booklet, Studium Generale: "Language and Power"*

It didn't present a single truth, but invited the reader to move between fragments, reflecting the script's roles and shifting perspectives.

Now, for P5, that same logic unfolds further, both literally and conceptually. Instead of voices and stories, I now focus on three architectural fragments: the door, the stair, the roof. Each is treated with the same attentiveness as a character, and the design becomes a spatial translation of the earlier script, from narrative to detail, from human trace to architectural insight.

This method also produced what I now call a form of "social detailing": a way of drawing and designing not just material junctions, but the small frictions, delays, and habits that make space meaningful. In that sense, the detail becomes a social choreography.

The strength of this method lies in that openness: it allowed depth, overlap, and alternative readings. The challenge, however, was decisiveness: with so many fragments, perspectives, and interpretations, it was sometimes difficult to choose which elements to highlight, and which to leave out. There was a constant tension between completeness and clarity, between showing the richness of the archive, and building a coherent architectural story. However, that same difficulty in making choices, in navigating between completeness and clarity, is exactly what led me to develop the foldable map for P2, and now, in P5, to use unfolding as a design principle: allowing complexity to stay visible, while letting the reader guide themselves step by step through fragment, detail, and spatial rhythm.

**4. Reflection on academic and societal value**

Academically, this project contributes to broadening what is considered "design" within architecture. It demonstrates that spatial design can also emerge from the narrative translation of existing use, not just from intervention.
Societally, the project touches on how we deal with existing buildings, vacancy, and collective memory. It raises ethical questions about who determines what is valuable in space: the architect or the user? It repositions the building as a co-player rather than an object, a stance especially relevant today, when sustainability, transformation, and reuse are central themes.

It also raises a deeper question: can we treat space not as something to be solved, but as something to be read? This reframing opens architecture to slower, more observational forms of design that prioritise interpretation over invention.


**5. Reflection on the transferability of results**

While the project is closely tied to one building and community, I see the methodology and approach as highly transferable. The narrative atlas, the social interaction scales (1:1 – 1:100), and the concept of social detailing offer a universal way of uncovering and visualizing meaning in existing buildings.
Its strength lies in the fact that it doesn't aim for universal solutions, but provides a method to read and visualize space on a human scale.

This makes it relevant for designers, researchers, policymakers, and inhabitants seeking new ways to think about vacancy, reuse, and collective ownership — not by designing new buildings, but by designing new readings of the ones we already have.


**6. Reflection on feedback and learning outcomes**

Throughout the process, I received valuable feedback from my mentors, especially on balancing openness and clarity, and on how to translate my narrative approach into a spatial proposal without falling into abstraction. I addressed this by anchoring my design output, the three booklets, more clearly in architectural scales and tactile details, and by explicitly explaining how they should be read as spatial elements.
I also learned to position my methodology more clearly within the architectural discourse, and not merely as an artistic or anthropological experiment. This has made the project more grounded in an academic context.


**7. Looking ahead to the final graduation phase**

In the coming weeks, I will finalize the three fragment books (door, staircase, roof), each with accompanying sound fragments, scaled drawings, and narrative descriptions. I will also develop the physical installation for the final presentation, in which the theme of unfolding takes centre stage, not just as a format, but as a design philosophy.
On the final presentation day, all of these elements in the unfolding installation will come together in one coherent spatial narrative. It

will be the first and only moment where the full structure becomes legible: not as a static display, but as an experience that must be opened, read, walked through, and physically navigated, just like the building itself.

The installation will take the form of an unfolding landscape laid out on low tables or the ground, so the viewer must physically move around it. Ideally, an overhead camera will capture the unfolding from above, or an animation will show it step by step, reinforcing the project's spatial logic of gradual reveal, layering, and scale.

**Reflective Questions:**

**1. *If architecture is read as an archive rather than a design object, what does that mean for the role of the architect?***

> This question challenges the assumption that the architect is always the originator of form, and invites a rethinking of authorship, observation, and design as acts of listening, revealing, and revaluing.

**2. *Can architectural value be designed or does it have to emerge over time through use, memory, and friction?***

> This reflects my project's focus on "effective inefficiencies" and social detailing, asking whether truly meaningful architecture can be pre-planned, or whether it must grow out of imperfection and appropriation.