

P4 Reflection
Spaces of Collection
—an archive and an alumni center

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This is a reflection paper near the end of my graduation project right before P4, in the studio Interior, Buildings and Cities. As requested in the graduation manual, this paper focuses on 1) The relationship between research and design; 2) The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study that I choose; 3) The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method I take; 4) The relationship between the project and the wider social context.

The assignment is to design a building or collection of buildings and public spaces to store and exhibit the Delft University of Technology's highly varied collections, ranging from scientific instruments to chairs. It will contain spaces for public gathering, a set of 'rooms' open to the use of the public and students; a lecture hall, study rooms, galleries, archives and restoration studios. Meanwhile, another parallel program concerning the Alumni Center of TU Delft is added to the collection building. The research thus partly focus on the feasibility and effects of this proposal.

- **Relationship between the studio theme and chosen subject**

The theme of the year for the whole studio is City as an archive. In this case, the project concerns the complex, which is both a gathering of archives and an archive in itself, one of artefacts and spaces. Seated in the historical center of the city of Delft, it provides an elaborated place of social and intellectual contact between the university and the public, affected by objects and realised through students, citizens and visitors.

Historically, the university, by creating its own huge campus area on the outskirts and moving its facilities out of the city center, has become a separate entity isolated physically, socially and culturally. This bifurcation of the city has greatly weakened its cultural life. Meanwhile, the city center is not especially lively and attractive for the young, artistic, and intellectuals, hardly attract graduates to stay.

Coping with this situation, the chosen subject focus at exploring the relationship between a TU-institution with the city that accommodates it. This collection building as an urban institution, embeds Delft students and academics in the city and meanwhile proposes an invitation to the public and provides them the access to the treasures of the city, which are preserved by the university. We design its functions and events (its programme), the places the institution makes, its appearances, its social spaces, and its rooms. In all, the point lies on the connection and interaction between the city, the university, and collections, the varied user groups and the programmes that weave them together.

- **the relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework**

Within the design studio of Interior, there is a parallel focus on the several scales of the project: cities, buildings and interiors.

We started with the context and site research on the city level in the Research Workshop led by Willemijn Wilms Floet. The Research Workshop concerns the spatial and building typologies of Delft, and the material culture of the city as embodied in its spaces, buildings, rooms and their representations. We studied several buildings in the city within the frames of thought delivered by the typological and morphological episteme.

The Research Seminar led by Irene Cieraad concerns the core purposes of the project itself, the issue of such a project's situation in society, its place in the city, and its users. Through various forms of research, including work in the field, interviews, literature reviews, and writing, we conducted an extensive research within the frames of thought delivered by the anthropological episteme.

The research on the collections held by various faculties of TU Delft and the City of Delft familiarise us about the essential object in the whole programme. We learnt that each collection has its own spaces, its own means of storage, its own study rooms and its own conservation rooms, which provided me details and basis to form my own narratives concerning the artefacts.

The precedent research introduce us to buildings that are related, both directly and obliquely, to the matter of an archive that represents the themes of 'The Institution in the City', and 'Rooms for the city'. We studied them, analysed them, and then wrote about them. This cases together provided references for discussion and inspirations.

During the stage of medium research by architectural design, we also focused on the several scales of the project by making models (site model, volume model, and interior model), drawings (figure ground plan, space structures, forms and detailing) from 1:200 to 1:5, from urban-scale decision making to the design of interiors. The design process is based on a cycle-forward analysis method of design – testing – evaluation - modification – redesign.

All these researches are meant to complement and deepen my understanding of the urban, cultural and sociological contexts of the project.

- **Relationship between research and design**

Reflecting on the process of my graduation project I conclude the following:

- 1) I started with an analysis of the city, its buildings and spatial characters, which gives me an idea about the different layers of the urban circumstances. From the canals, streets, little lanes on the very "surface" to the yards, gardens behind wall and gates, to varied public interiors such as the museums, galleries, libraries and the churches, Delft is a city that you could always take a closer look at and find some interesting spaces behind the ordinary mask. This finding leads me to think of an institution which provides nice spaces and facilities behind an ordinary look,

which is more like a shared property by the local, instead of being obviously eye-catching.

- 2) Based on the research on the Delft collections and the research from users perspective (led by Irene), I find it essential to rebuild the connection between the artefacts and people who are going to use this building. A good programme can reveal the values of the objects to people and bring them back to life. By studying the composition of population in Delft and interviewing staff from the Alumni Office of TU, I could draw a conclusion on the urgent need and feasibility of an alumni center in the city center, where a wide range of user groups would be invited and encounter each other with the presence of beauty of the collections and spaces.

Out of the intention of a series of flexible spaces for public gathering (formally and informally), and different functions from catering, lecture room to exhibiting, preserving, working and studying, I came up with the notion of a shed. As an important prototype of public interior, the shed indicates homogeneous and democratic spaces, in which all contents and people within are visible and conceptually unified. By applying different proportions, materials and forms of structures and even the arrangement of furniture, a shed could also attain monumental appearance and spatial qualities.

The research question for me then implicitly became: "Is it possible to design a university archive as a shed?"

By designing within this specific field of research defined by the research question, it gradually became possible to answer that question. Not necessarily with a yes or no but with a scheme that I think answers the question with many positive arguments.

The unified structure, primarily the roof structures with load-bearing elements underneath (beam/column/wall) with slight differences between here and there indicates different characters of spaces. With a quite transparent plan, the building also tells its openness and hospitality to the public, not only providing access from outside to inside, but also the chance to cross through it as the way you experience in the public space of a city. The friendly gesture to its neighborhoods could be achieved by the disappearance and dissolve in the gardens. By following the orders and dimensions of the surrounding buildings (the synagogue, the zuster house and the hotel building) and design the spaces in between, a dialogue among them becomes possible.

- **the relationship between the project and the wider social context**

The institution will make its appearance through a building to be situated in Delft's historical center, suggesting the university's physical return to the city after a hiatus of some eighty years.

In this age, how do the archive/collection building of today play a role on the public educational field? How do this collection building meet with the expectations of generating social and intellectual contact between the university and the public?

The consideration concerning the first question indicates the shift from an educational archive of objects to a study center, where visitor could explore, put their hands on the objects, research on them and thus get a better understanding of its story and values. The way of treating the collections might be totally different from before. The new archive will need to respond to these new expectations. The second question is concerned about the role of an urban institution, especially from its social influence delivered by its programme and the architectural aspects such as physical representation of its importance and function, spatial qualities that meet the requirement raised by the programmes it accommodates. Thus, the project might provide a possible answer for reference to these questions concerning wider social context.