

P4 reflection paper
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Heritage and Architecture – Revitalising Maritime Heritage
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10-05-2024

In the early stages of my architectural education, I understood that each architectural design is embedded with the values, preferences, and intentions of its designers. These designs are not isolated entities but rather reflections of our cultural, social, and historical contexts, as well as specific aesthetic sensibilities, technological advancements, and social priorities of the time. Over time they cease to exist in isolation but rather become intertwined with our human experience, serving as important reminders of our history. Consequently, the preservation of architectural structures holds significant importance.

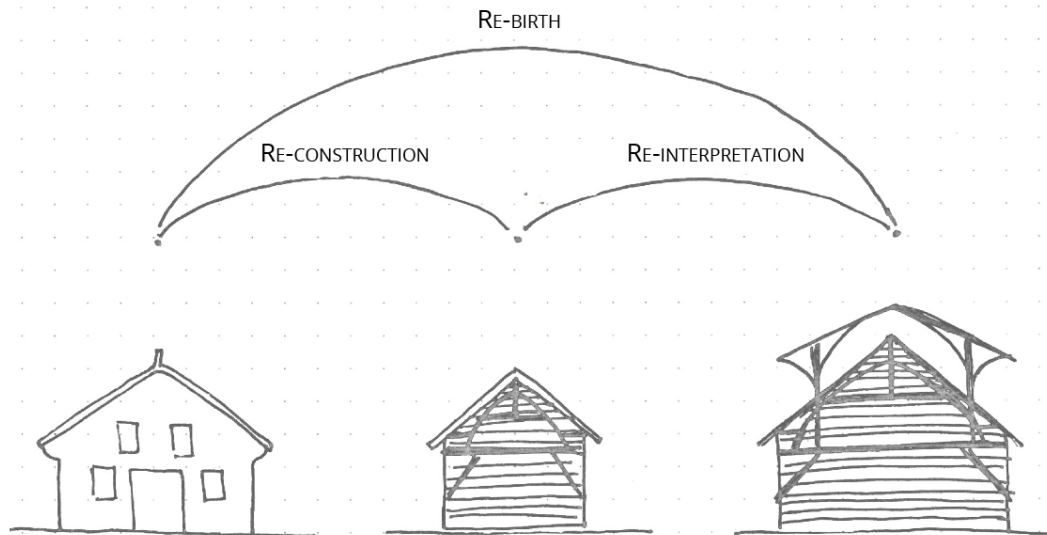
This realisation sparked my interest in heritage design. While I enrolled in the Heritage and Architecture Studio at the University of Delft with the expectation of working on projects involving existing structures, focusing on transformation, preservation, and renewal with a balance between the old and new, my graduation project took a different trajectory. I found myself engaged with a small site near the UNESCO World Heritage site of Kinderdijk, featuring a deteriorating barn and several residential houses. Through the introduction by SWEK, the organisation responsible for Kinderdijk, the historical significance of this site became apparent.

An examination of an old photograph revealed the former state of the site, which included three barns, once tasked with the production of iron blades for windmills across the Netherlands. However, only remnants of these barns remain. Recognising architecture as a means to anchor history, I was drawn to investigate methods of reconstructing this ensemble to commemorate its important historical role.

Consequently, my thematic research paper addressed the topic of reconstruction, aiming to find an authentic approach to reconstructing vanished buildings. I analysed the theoretical framework set by organisations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, developed a matrix to define the degree of authenticity, and tested various reconstruction approaches by filling out the matrix with various reconstruction approaches and comparing public opinions about them. The conclusion was that symbolic reconstruction better represents historical events than aesthetic reconstruction. This led to the formulation of a guideline for my project:

‘... in vanished matters, authenticity can be ensured when the architectural design represents the full historical narrative.’

My project aimed to reconstruct the vanished barns while improving the site's connection to Kinderdijk and enhancing circulation within the ensemble. The overall Masterplan included relocating arrival points and introducing a tunnel to connect the waterfront to Kinderdijk. To realise this, the remaining barn would be adapted to house a café, while two ‘ghost-like’ buildings would trace the outlines of the vanished barns. One functioning as an art piece that can be used for events and the other featuring an indoor museum, designed as a modern interpretation of the barns which is ‘reborn’ out of the ghost structure.



Despite the rather straightforward guideline, translating this into architectural design proved challenging. I was stubborn about representing true history and the 'ghosts' of the vanished barns, but practical limitations came up while trying to fit a functioning Café into a collapsing barn. Similarly, the design of a lifted museum within the ghost structure posed challenges. At times, I limited myself with sticking to the guideline.

Ironically, I had already reflected on those problems in the critical reflection at the end of my research paper, mentioning that every reconstruction project should be judged on a case-by-case basis, and nothing should be ruled out 'a priori'. Reconstruction should not be limited to one approach as the 'right' approach. While I initially projected that towards one project, it turns out that within a design there can be more than one approach to represent our history in the best way possible. Luckily, my tutor pointed out this limitation to me, and I was able to broaden my horizons to some degree before the P4. In the following weeks (also in the next week leading up to p4) I want to focus on creating the clearest storyline for my presentation that is supported by beautiful visualisations of the design aspects as well as creating a model which will represent the whole concept of the site.

This project, initially sparked by a fascination of a storyline behind a picture that is considering a rather innocent topic, has evolved to address the urgent matter of architectural heritage loss. As structures worldwide face destruction, whether through intended demolishing, natural disasters, or acts of war, the preservation of our collective cultural heritage is at risk. Reconstruction in this case, which is as far as I experienced it a lesser-covered topic in the heritage field provides a possible solution to the issues of heritage loss and should be addressed more. Rules and guidelines provided by official organisations like UNESCO or ICOMOS have always provided a sense of what is right or wrong within the heritage preservation field, but a crucial point about the development of these doctrines and even the development of the whole field of heritage preservation, is that historically, each generation has revised, added, supported or opposed the principles and guidelines. Similar to heritage, which would suffer from being completely frozen in time, the rules and guidelines should also not be frozen in time. Theoretical frameworks and practices should evolve with society and reflect changing values over time. This graduation project aims to contribute to this dialogue, reflecting on reconstruction practices and fostering a discussion on evolving approaches to heritage preservation.