Reflection

Name     CHM van den Meijdenberg
Student number    4247086
Address     Dirklangendwarsstraat 4
Postal code    2611JA
Place of residence   Delft
Telephone number   +31642421540
E-mail address    nvdmeijdenberg@icloud.com
Studio     Heritage & Architecture
Theme     Heritage & Housing
Teachers    Main mentor Architecture   Lidwine Spoormans
Mentor Building Technology  Wido Quist
Mentor Research   Nicholas Clarke
Guest architect   Janneke Bierman
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Figure front page
Kalverstraat in 1848
Stadsarchief Amsterdam Beeldbank, 010001000402
Introduction
This reflection is part of my graduation project. In this document I will reflect upon the results of the research and design of graduation project. This reflection will answer the question if my approach, stated in my study plan, did or did not work. This will be done by discussing the following 4 aspects:

1. The relationship between research and design
2. The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)
3. The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by me in this framework
4. The relationship between the project and the wider social context
aspect 1.
The relationship between research and design

The graduation project started with a research on the ‘elements of housing’. As students from the graduation studio Heritage and Housing we were given the following 9 topics; street, facade, entrance, floorplan, flexibility, structure, energy, house & shop and house & work. Each of us did research on one of these elements. I did research on the element of house & shop. In this research the I answered the following research question: Which changes occurred over time in the typology of the shophouse in the historic inner city of Amsterdam regarded to its spatial development? The conclusion of this research noted four major changes over time in the typology of the shophouse in the historic inner city of Amsterdam regarded to its spatial development. First of all the disappearing of the strong connection between the shop and the connected dwelling in the nineteenth century. In the beginning of the twentieth century this was reinvented by web shops which one could run from its own home, but the lack physicality of the shop this can not be stated as a shophouse anymore. Second of all the increase of size of the shop over four hundred years and a decrease over the last one hundred years. Third of all position of the shop changed over the last five hundred years from being almost completely outside to being completely inside. This stayed the same over the last hundred and fifty years until the web shop was introduced which is a type that is not outside or inside. The fourth and last major change was the connection of the shop with the street. From very vague boundaries between the shop and the street around fifteen hundred to hard boundaries in the beginning eighteenth century.

In the second phase of the project the conclusions of the research were used as starting points for a possible design. Nevertheless studies on shops at the Binnengasthuis area in general showed that the area is not suitable to house one or more shops, because of its closed character and the nearby shopping-streets. This made me change my main topic for the design assignment. The approach I took for my design assignment is based on fascination and historical value. The following problem statement together with the goals, which I stated in my graduation plan, will give a better understanding of my design assignment.

Problem statement
In an area where an ensemble of nineteenth century building form the standard, I was fascinated by a dwelling-block from the eighties. It fascinated me because of its architecture and its position in the area. The architecture of the building is completely different then the buildings around it, especially in the materialization it distinguishes itself from its surroundings(Fig. 1+2).

The creation of this dwelling-block was part of an intervention which was developed in the 1980’s. The plan was based on opening up the area to the city for which an opening was created at the Nieuwe Doelenstraat, a bicycle lane over the site was made and the dwelling-block was created. This 1980’s plan destroyed a huge part of the urban structure of the area.

Nowadays the Binnengasthuis area is valued by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands as followed: “Former Binnengasthuis complex is common good, because of its cultural and medical-historical value as an expression of the development of increase of scale and modernization of the original old hospitals at the end of the nineteenth century.”

For the realisation of 80’s plan a few buildings had to be demolished of which the Anatomy building was one. This Anatomy building was part of a collective of buildings which

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1 Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, 2014
represent the increase of scale of hospital buildings the best. This collective of five buildings which represent this “development of increase of scale” the best consist out of the Vrouwenverband, the Kraamkliniek, the Klinisch Ziekenhuis, the Tweede Chirurgische Kliniek and the former Anatomy building.

The hole at the Nieuwe Doelenstraat, which was created by the demolishing of Hotel des Pays Bas is also historically unwanted, because the area has always been closed of from its surroundings in previous times. The Advice Bureau of Monuments and Archaeology stated in 1999 the following about this hole in the street-facade: “The closed character of the area has to be maintained or the Binnengasthuis area should even be ‘taken away’ from the city again. Filling the hole which occurred by demolishing the Hotel des Pays Bas and removing the out of tune social dwelling block would be historical desirable.”

Goals

The two main goals are to reintroduce a volume which re-completes the collective of five and to close the street facade of the Nieuwe Doelenstraat again.

Themes and characteristics I would like to focus on while designing this are the contradiction in front and rear façades and the courtyard typology. An important quality of the area in the past were the amount of courtyards(Fig. 3). Especially when the area was still used as a monastery, plenty of courtyards formed the area. Important in this courtyard typology will be the connection between the several courtyards. The area has a rich collective of gates built in different moments in time all over the site.

Creating a courtyard typology with connecting gates will be a goal on the urban scale.

The contradiction in the front and rear façades form an important characteristic in terms of architecture and social qualities in the collective of five buildings which I want to re-complete. In terms of architecture the front façades are completely symmetrical designed and richly decorated. On the other side the rear sides are less decorated and do not have this symmetrical design. In terms of social qualities these front façades have a formal and hard appearance. The rear façades have a more informal and soft appearance. In the history of the area the places where the most social interaction and unexpected social moments occurred were at these rear sides of the buildings(Fig. 4).

Creating these rich architectural appearance at the front façades and these social mediators at rear sides are goals on the building scale.

This mix of elements will give the area/the painting back several of its best qualities from previous times and creates a unique and qualitatively high living environment based on the history of the area.

The design

To discuss the relation between the research and the design it is important to explain the final design briefly. In this explanation the focus will be especially on the elements which could connect with the conclusions of the research.

The final design consists out of two volumes suitable for catering industries on the ground floor with dwellings on top. One at the Nieuwe Doelenstraat and one at the central square of the Binnengasthuis area. In between these two volumes a third
volume is created with dwellings. The three volumes together with the Tweede Chirurgische Kliniek define a courtyard which functions as a communal garden for the residents of the dwellings and a pass-through from the Nieuwe Doelenstraat to the central square. The dwellings on the upper floors at the square have a communal main entrance with the two catering industries on the ground floor. The dwellings on top of the catering industry positioned at the Nieuwe Doelenstraat and in the courtyard do also have a communal entrance before in front of their own front door. (Fig. 5)

The catering industries all have their own outdoor terrace spaces (Fig. 5). The connection between inside and outside is best visible in figure 6. Here the section of the building at the central square is visible. Clear is the lifted up ground floor which makes this connection weaker, but by designing a window which reaches from ground level till 2500 mm above ground floor there is still a strong connection between inside and outside.
Reflection
First of all the start of the project with the research on elements was an interesting research, but was in my case (and of some other students as well I believe) not suitable to use as starting points for my designing project afterwards. I chose a direction in which I had to let go the biggest part of my research, because out of the analysis on the Binnengasthuis area the conclusion was that there is no need for shops in this area. The opposite direction was also a possibility. In that case I would have stated that designing shophouses was my main design assignment and the result of the analysis was a matter of minor concern.

In the end I believe this is a missed opportunity, because now I made two interesting parts without any connection. As visible in the previous part of this chapter elements which were mentioned in the conclusion of the research are also used, but there is no clear connection because these are certain necessary elements like a relation between inside and outside for a catering industry.

aspect 2.
The relationship between the theme of the studio and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)

The graduation studio is called Heritage and Architecture with the sub-studio Heritage and Housing. The graduation studio of Heritage and Architecture deals with the transformation of heritage in the inner city of Amsterdam. The sub-studio of Heritage and Housing deals specifically with housing on the Binnengasthuiscampus of the University of Amsterdam. The Binnengasthuiscampus is located at the Binnengasthuis area and it deals with the university needs, the pressure caused by tourism and the needs of the local residents.

My graduation projects consists out of an intervention which is based on the idea of reshaping part of this area and bringing back qualities which disappeared by interventions in the twentieth century. The consequence of this approach means that my graduation project consists of new buildings. The general approach of the studio is to transform singular existing buildings. This difference did not cause any difficulties, but it meant that my assignment was focused on completely different elements compared to a lot of my fellow students. The focus of my assignment was for example for a big part on designing the volumes and the façades, something which is a smaller issue when dealing with existing buildings. On the other side was my focus less on the individual dwellings, which probably would have been the case when I would have dealt with an existing building.
aspect 3.
The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by me in this framework

The ideal method used by the graduation lab is based on which in the beginning one starts with one hand a theoretical research and on the other hand making an inventory of the site, its urban context, the specific buildings and the building technology of its buildings. This inventory starts first of all with the situation of today and gets built out by research on the history of the different themes. After a complete overview of the different themes is gathered a value assessment follows, again on the urban level, the building level and the more detailed level. A SWOT analysis follows which marks the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Out of this SWOT analysis together with the conclusions of the research the design assignment can be formulated together with starting point for the design. The design process can be characterized as design by research. While designing one continuously gets back to the research.

I tried to follow the method of the graduation lab as good as possible nevertheless this did not work out as planned. The moment I concluded that the Binnengashuis area was not the right place to develop shophouses almost the complete research became unusable for the design process. My design process was, because of this much more based on the SWOT analysis and the value assessment.

aspect 4.
The relationship between the project and the wider social context

The project deals with the discussion how to deal with the heritage in historic inner cities and specific how to deal with heritage which is part of a bigger complex, in this case the Binnengasthuis area. The project deals with this discussion by creating new elements in an attempt to restore qualities which disappeared in the last century. The bigger problem of the Binnengasthuis area-case is the problem of old buildings/urban structures with a contemporary program.
Bibliography
