Reflection

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Introduction
In this document I will reflect on my graduation project concerning the redesign of the Armamentarium in Delft. I have ordered the questions by theme.

Studio
The department of RMIT focuses on the re-use and redevelopment of existing buildings. The focus is therefore on both the analysis of existing buildings and the design of new possibilities within these buildings. The goal of this is to preserve significant objects that have historical value. An important part of the analysis is therefore to find out if a building is valuable and what contributes to this. A conclusion might also be that a building has little historical value. The aim of RMIT is therefore not to preserve as many as possible, but to make a deliberate balance between preserving and demolishing.

The subject of my graduation is the Armamentarium, which is a vacant building in the center of Delft. The main goal of the project was to find a suitable new function for the building and design the necessary interventions. I followed the regular steps of an Rmit project (analysis, value assessment, design). Because the Armamentarium is a complex of buildings that was altered a lot since its first construction in 1602, the project was not only about adding something new to the existing building, but also about considering which parts of the building are most significant.

One of the most interesting aspects of this project was its direct relation with reality. The Armamentarium is at this moment an empty building in search for a function. Many organizations are currently working on a possible re-use of the building and therefore struggling with the same questions as I did. It was very interesting to attend some discussions where inhabitants, architects and the municipality discussed about the future of the building. Here the social importance of this building (and historical buildings in general) became very evident for me. An existing building, especially one with the age of 400 years, is often a building of the whole city, and everybody has a distinct opinion about it. The current situation of the Armamentarium made it clear to me what is important when working with an existing building other than just as a fictive project.
Research and Design

In the studio of RMIT, research is globally divided in two parts. First there is the regular research that would be done in every architectural project, about aspects such as light, routing, function etc. The second part is the analysis of the context, which is in the studio of RMIT more important and extensive than in other projects.

The different stages of the project were mainly characterized by the changing balance between research and design. In the first few months the focus was mainly on research and this gradually shifted to design. However, the focus was never only on one of the aspects. In the last months, the design clearly became more important, but was still aided by research. Research means mainly using literature and case studies. In the first quarter the research of the context was done very objectively and without a specific focus on one aspect. During the project, this research became more elaborate about certain aspects that appeared to be important in the design.

When I find an issue that needs a solution, I first try to analyze what the issue exactly is and what element or object is the cause. This results in a clear definition and makes it clear on what part I need to work. Then I try to find the right way of solving the issue. Especially in this project I found that some issues can only be investigated in a model, while others can be easily solved by drawing. Sometimes a reference project could give a solution for a problem, after which this solution needed to be adjusted to my own project. Also it is very important to choose the right scale in which an issue needs to be solved. Working in a wrong scale can make it harder to find the solution. However, sometimes a ‘wrong’ scale can also give very interesting views.

One fascinating aspect of the design process was the interaction between the concept and the design. When working on a certain topic, I often started with a clear singular concept that I wanted to use in each situation. But when applying this concept to the different parts of the design, I found out that this concept might not work for each part and therefore needed to be changed. Or in other cases I started without an overall concept and tried to create the best solution for each place in particular. This often results in a very chaotic design of singular interventions without a clear relation to each other. I found out that while working on these different parts there starts to emerge a collective idea about what these interventions should have in common (for instance the materiality of all interventions, or the design of the different offices and study areas in the building. Especially this moment where the big amount of information and ideas is compressed into a singular idea, which at the same time might include all the previous ideas or can alter them slightly, was very interesting and satisfying for me. I think this might be a regular process but it was the first time for me that I was totally aware of it.
Research Question
I will here explain how I answered the (sub) research questions that I formulated in the graduation plan.

Research question:
*How can the Armamentarium and a new function collaborate and create a new vivid and appropriate part of the city.*

I think I have answered this question by both the choice of function and the design. The function is chosen because of its direct relationship with the city. The institute will develop products and ideas that can change the life in the city, and vice versa will the city deliver problems for which the institute can create a solution. The design was based on retaining the isolated identity of the building, but at the same time the building had to open up to the city. The new entrance hall does this because it is located between the most important buildings. Because the building will have a mixture of different functions it will attract different people at different moments during the day. These different functions and interventions will create a new vivid and appropriate part of the city.

Sub-research question:
*How can the isolated nature of the building and its location be utilized for the new semi-public function?*

The water around the Armamentarium creates both distance and visibility between the viewer and the building. Because the building will partly become public, a better connection with the city was needed. This will only be the addition of one bridge at the east side of the building. This means that the place where the isolated nature is best visible, ‘in front’ of the building and at the west-side where the building is directly standing in the water, remains visible, and therefore that the building will not be just as connected to the city as every other building block in Delft.

*Which stories and/or historical happenings are most important for the public image/memory of this building, and how can these be incorporated in the new design?*

This question is not fully answered because my position in this has changed. The AMS institute is a function that should be focused on future possibilities, instead of on history. I think by putting too much focus on the history of the building, this will be predominant over the appearance of the institute. To show a little bit of the history in this building, the original atrium in 1602 will have some historical objects and will tell the story of the building.

*How can the different buildings of the Armamentarium complex work together in order to achieve a whole in which all buildings retain their own identity?*

I have chosen one overall theme, the AMS, under which different functions can operate. The restaurant, exposition, offices and temporary houses are positioned in different parts of the building which emphasizes the different buildings of the complex. At the same time the overall theme of these functions will make clear that it is one complex and not just separate buildings. The 1602 and 1692 buildings are clearly part of the same complex, this is less apparent at the OI warehouse.

*In what way can the Armamentarium become a new landmark and inspiring environment to boost the advanced metropolitan solutions?*

I think the contrast between the historical building and the innovative AMS center is a quite unusual one, but with the correct balance between the two it might work very well. This is the reason that in some parts of the complex I have chosen for quite rigorous interventions. Institutes like the AMS are often housed in very modern buildings, but I think that also a relation with history and with the current city in which their projects need to be realized is very important.
Position paper

I wrote in my position paper about the design processes that Carlo Scarpa uses in his buildings. Here especially the transition zones and different layers of a building where very important. I did not use this consciously in my design. I think the best way to learn a method (especially in a complex and subjective topic as architecture) is to absorb all possible information, digest it and then forget all of it. This is the only way to not literally copy the ideas of, in this case, Carlo Scarpa, but to really make it your own. Long time during my project I thought that the position paper had nothing to do with my design. But when I now look at my interventions I can see some similarities in the detailing of the connections between old and new. One example is the connection of the new roof in the entrance hall with the 1602 and 1692 building. Here I have tried to emphasize the existing buildings by making a gap between old and new, which creates the visual illusion that the new roof stops where the existing facade continues.
Decisions
Here I will name the three most important decisions that have defined my project. The most important decision was the position of the entrance hall and the way it was designed. Especially the choice to create a big staircase which would make a clear connection between the ground floor and first floor is, I think, the most important element in my design. The design of the entrance hall itself has changed many times. The difficulty was that in this area many parts of the building and all the different functions came together. The decision to give the new parts a clear own character was very important because due to this I had less trouble relating the new to the existing. Because a small change in one element of the entrance hall often also meant implications for other elements, the hall has been transformed completely many times. There were many darlings killed in this entrance hall. Some changes in this process are visible in the pictures below. The roof has had many transformations, from flat to diagonal to a stepped version. The diagonal line of the stairs remains visible in all versions, but has transformed from a disconnected line to a part of the system that connects all (facade, construction, roof, stairs) elements in the entrance hall.

It is interesting to see that throughout most of these different options, there have been some constant ideas that return in each option. This makes it clear that a single idea or concept can be executed in many different ways and the challenge is in both defining the concept and searching for the best way to execute this concept.
The second decision is the location of the lecture hall. This was first positioned in an existing building and created some difficulties concerning construction, and routing. By placing the lecture hall underneath the big staircase in the entrance hall, these problems were all solved.

The third decision was to come up with an overall idea for the use of material of the different interventions. Because the different buildings ask for different interventions, it is difficult to create a clear relation between them. My aim is to create clarity between the new interventions and the existing building. Therefore I have decided to choose modern materials such as concrete, steel and glass for the new interventions.

Contrast in general was a very important topic for me. When someone is always very wild and noisy, you won’t notice the difference whether he is enthusiastic or not, but if someone is very timid and silent it will be very meaningful that one time he goes wild. Contrast can be used to make things apparent. This is something that returns in many of my interventions. The new entrance is very transparent, in contrast to the closed facades of the existing building. The interior interventions are mainly focused on vertical connections, while the existing building is very horizontally oriented. And the material of the new interventions is very modern and smooth, while the existing materials are rough and heavy.
**Recommendation**

I would say (not specifically for RMIT or architecture) that it is very important to follow your own feelings. Make sure you like the building you are designing so if someone asks you why you chose this building you can easily answer it. This makes the project easier because it means that you have certain feelings about the building which you can defend and question. I think that architecture is not an objective field, so following your emotions is very important. Of course always try to rationalize your feelings and find out where they are coming from, so you can explain them to other people.

The AMS institute is an innovative and very modern function so to put this in an existing building can be very challenging and interesting. First I think that a fascination with the subject of the AMS institute is really important. My choice for this institute was because I am very interested in the new ways a city can be further developed. On the other hand there is also a risk in being too much imbedded in the institute, because it is not your goal to design the function itself, but to design a building in which the function has multiple possibilities. My problem was that I was trying to rethink the whole institute and imagine the exact projects that could be developed there, but in the end the graduation should be about architecture and not about an analysis of some function.

Because the program of my building is very diverse, it is good to look at the demands of the different functions and find a suitable location for it. This has not only to do with the character of the buildings itself, but also with the urban context and technological possibilities. Also I think that an attitude that is too conservative will not work because then the focus will be on the history, instead of the future. And because all future things are built upon the existing situation, the AMS institute is suited. There needs to be a balance between the existing building and the new interventions.

**What’s next?**

Obviously, the technical elaboration on all parts of the building would be a next step. Besides that, the parts that I didn’t focus on the last few months or-so can also be further developed. More specifically I would be very interested to really elaborate on the interiors of the building parts. For instance, I would decide what installations and products can be shown in the exhibition on the first and second floor of the 1602 building. This would mean that I return to the analysis of the program of the first months and get really specific information about the institute and its products.