P4 REFLECTION

IN-HABITER

INTERSECTION INHABITATION

Complex Projects
Amsterdam Mid City Studio

Wietse Elswijk - 4015541
Tutors: O. Caso, G. Koskamp
Delegate: L. Qu
Reflection on the graduation

This reflection is structured around the aspects listed in the Graduation Manual:

**P. 4 - 7 Relationship between research and design**

The Complex Projects graduation studio is organized in groups which prepare an exhibition for the municipality of Amsterdam as well as AMS. The group work was a big part of the studio so I will discuss the research and design in two parts:

**Part I  Group research**

**Part II  Individual research**

**P. 6 Relationship between the graduation project and the AMS MID-CITY studio topic, the Architecture Master track and the Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences as a study program**

Summary: The urban scale was stressed throughout the graduation, whereas I hadn’t encountered it much in the rest of the master track.

**P. 4 - 7 Elaboration on research method and approach chosen**

Summary: My method proved to be too much reading and listening and too little producing, this got me in trouble when communicating with tutors and inevitably running into deadlines.

**P. 6 - 7 Elaboration on the relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework, touching upon the transferability of the project results**

Summary: The project steers architecture in a direction towards less complex shapes and more awareness of materials. Look at the life cycle analysis of building materials and ask for producers to give you insurance on them. Build your buildings to last, make rooms a bit higher and provide leftover spaces which are able to be interpreted in multiple ways. More work needs to be done in mapping material streams in the city and in making more inclusive 3D models of our designs, which should be stored in a city model by the municipality.

**P. 7 Discussion of the ethical issues and dilemmas encountered in doing the research, elaborating the design and potential applications of the results in practice**

Summary: The current social housing in Amsterdam has every facility included. Moving to a house in the ‘free market’ isn’t worth the extra money. Furthermore homeownership is risky when incomes fluctuate, resulting in a stop of migration out of social housing. Once appointed to a social housing unit, people stay there while newcomers face long waiting lists.

Ethical questions arise out of this situation:
Will people who can pay more be forced to pay more or move out?
Can future social housing share basic facilities such as a kitchen, living room, bathroom and balcony?
How can personal safety be assured in shared social housing?
The group consisted of 6 members beside myself: Sjoerd Booms, Lisanne Rissik, Chenxi Dai, Rosa Steenkamp, Puck Vogelpoel and Agnieszka Borowska.

This group researched an area of 4x4 km in Amsterdam, in between the Amstel station and Duivendrecht. We placed this appointed ‘tile’ in such a way to get both sides of the A10 on the plot. The A10 ring road is central to our group strategy and also became the focus of my own project. Every group member found a characteristic of the Amstel area to be engaged with after some time.

The high amount of group work proved a difficult combination with the different courses and work schedules. It lead to some confrontations and frustrations within the group. Generally everybody has a different preference for lay-outs, colours and a different standard concerning amount of detail and how much should be communicated. Our group was lacking a clear leading figure and a clear structure for task division. There is software and there are methods for managing these complex projects but we never tried anything. After going through this frustrating process I would like to have a better communication about expectations, a clear schedule and a few points of renegotiation along the way. It seemed we were doing the same work again and again, because we lacked the leadership or the experience to organize the work. Everybody was ‘forgiving’ but this made it almost impossible to be critical of the products and hard to express an honest opinion of dissatisfaction.

After the P2 I hardly spoke with the group members, as I felt it embarrassing to discuss my problems. I became very stressed out during the summer break and felt as if I didn’t do enough research and had no idea where my project was going. This made me even more averse to communicating with the group and I sought different means of counseling at the TU Delft. Looking back I should have been a bit less worried about my image and should have asked for their help in sharing and testing our ideas. That was the reason I wanted to do Complex Projects in the first place, for the group, somehow it ended up a totally fractured. I stayed away from the University all together for a while. When I finally did come back to the group everybody was very welcoming.
However the finishing of the group-work was still a time sink and maintaining a clear schedule was impossible. This lead to some long nights and some teammates not pulling their weight. To me, the resulting exhibition is not worth the effort put into it, the process was simply not enjoyable at all.

These tensions in the group and the lack of clarity of expectations and appointed responsibility was not an approach I would recommend or like to try again.

In conclusion, the approach of the group lacked structure, lacked vision, lacked a clear goal and lacked responsible actors. The only reason a model was achieved was through the sheer force of will of some group members to finish it. The book which is part of the exhibition is an atrocity. The wallpaper which is part of the exhibition displays some of the difference in dedication and engagement of the group.

**Summer ‘18**

By extension of the graduation over the summer I found a new group of people in Architecture who were in the same boat as me. We held weekly meetings where we discussed our projects and how we could progress. This was very helpful for me as it was a different type of environment to the graduation studio, which was not tied up with any conflicting work schedules or motivational differences and levels of participation. The weekly sessions were a relieving type of meeting which helped me progress through the summer and understand the value of the progress I was making. These reflective meetings are essential to have for assessing the progress of the project. It’s something I didn’t find in the group during the graduation process at Complex Projects.
The graduation project took on the shape of a mixed-use, mixed-income building along the new, downgraded A10 highway and at the end of a diagonal park. That simple description of the project alone entails a few interventions. Those interventions, namely the downgrading of the A10 highway to a boulevard with lanes for electric bicycles, lanes for a smart us system and for self-driving cars and the diagonal activity park, both came out of the group research, carried out by the Amstel group. In such a way my project relates to the projects of the group and the overall vision we developed for the Amstel area through our research.

The research I did was mostly focused on four topics:

**Materials**
(energy, sustainability)

**Urban planning**
(density, road sizes, boulevards)

**Housing forms**
(related to income)

**Workspaces**
(the future of)

The studio asked for proposals for Amsterdam in 2050. They had to be based on current trends and realistic, not science fiction or apocalyptic. No city made of helium crystals floating in the sky.

**Materials**
I researched materials out of the curiosity which was sparked by the work of Wang Shu and Alejandro Aravena. Building with primitive tools and materials and building to last. The ideas of sustainability are fully ingrained on me as a student, but examples of modern ‘sustainable’ buildings are usually based on flimsy technological components rather then material usage. Their multi-layered skins with all conditions specifically doctored out to the capacity of the material. This layer resists the weather, the next resists the heat, the next keeps it cool. In the end this technical package makes for a very complicated industrial process, where all the energy you hope to prevent from leaking out of the building has already been used to produce that building. I’m convinced that a designer stands at the birth of such systems of production, drawing a set of lines that indicate what is to be desired. Therefore I think it is necessary for the architect to be aware of the possibilities of simpler constructions and of a material palette justifiable in a situation such as Amsterdam in 2050.

For research I went to lectures from Rotor, visiting professors for the chair of Dwelling. They champion design for deconstruction as well as the reuse of building parts stripped of disused buildings and showed the long history this practice of reuse has. I also attended events by the Buildings As Material Banks (BAMB) project and the Horizon2020 program dealing with the circular economy. Parallel to attending and discussing lectures I read articles and statistics on resource scarcity. The articles often became technical and removed from the field of architectural practice, but at lectures and talks it was stimulating to discuss opportunities of new ways to incorporate knowledge about materials into design of the built environment. I hope in the future the municipality of Amsterdam with the AMS Institute will be able to provide designers with an overview of the materials available for reuse. Developing this into a real model would interest me. Even if it’s not strictly in the domain of architecture, the consequences are emancipatory to the discipline and to the possibilities of a sustainable or circular economy of the city.

**Urban planning**
The Complex Projects graduation studio is where I’ve truly learned to appreciate the large scale. Research on a four by four kilometer plot was something I’ve never done before. To go from that scale to a building scale a lot of choices need to be made.

For analysis of the urban fabric we always used strict boundaries and sought to define qualities relevant on the scale of the city. That means research in a very banal categorical way, addressing the seemingly normal to see what patterns emerge and find the possible underlaying causes of the structure. Then asking how these are effected by ongoing technological progress in order to foresee a different pattern emerging.

**Reflection on personal research**
Reflection on personal research

Banal questions like: "what sizes makes a livable city?" are answered by looking at the great existing cities. I turned to Studio LAN's publication on the Haussmannian design for Paris, which was recommended to me by one of the tutors. This is a very exhaustive research done mostly in drawings trying to convey the beauty of the simple rigidity of the Haussmann plan. A summary of the Haussmannian block would be: The facade is made of one material, forms one constant exterior, with different ceiling heights, marking the hierarchy within and a strict hierarchy in the street network. This influenced the form of my design greatly. The height constrains of the different sides with their own characteristics of entry. The same material all around to give it a unified appearance while inside many different activities can take place.

A narrative needed to be created for the entire Amstel area and within that narrative the individual projects would take shape. My personal project’s location at the highway attests to an awareness of the ongoing changes in infrastructure and the constant need of new housing.

Housing forms
Living in the city is becoming increasingly expensive. The municipality of Amsterdam currently operates with a fixed rate of 40% social housing, 40% middle income and 20% more expensive per project in order to keep a mixed city and not create segregated neighbourhoods. The densification of the Amstel area then needs to happen in a way that caters to the 62% of Amsterdamers with an income under 44k. This can only be answered with a sensible and compact design, combining living with working in a friendly setting characteristic of Amsterdam.

The research regarding housing forms was done against the backdrop of the Amsterdam expansion plan (AUP) by Van Eesteren. Through the writings and research of the Dutch urban block by Susanne Komossa and by exploring the development of multifamily housing typologies in Amsterdam. In The Urban Villa publication by O.M. Ungers from the 70s I found a shared goal to provide an alternative to the Vinex developments expanding around the city. The research by the recent Amsterdam Academy of Architecture graduate Jerryt Krombeen also helped further my understanding on the different groups of tenants.
Reflection on personal research

Workspaces of 2050
The Amstel area has a clear separation of work and housing areas. I want to address the issue of spatial separation of work in my design. Which is why I reserve a floor between the public and commercial spaces on the ground floor and the housing floors above to create working spaces.

I started by trying to understand the current state of the art surrounding office lay-outs and came on the conclusion there is a lot of customization and little in the way of empirical research.

Recent studies show the detriment open offices cause to productivity, communication and overall work enjoyment of the people working in them. Still these types of offices are prevalent worldwide and more of them are built then any other type. This could be at least partially attributed to the outfitting costs of office spaces. Another factor could be the complexity of HVAC systems.

Through the years offices have been outfitted with more and more complex systems of heating, cooling and ventilation. At the same time the offices have become increasingly ‘open’ to maximize the usage of floorspace and make the usage of all those systems more efficient. But when our society needs increasingly cerebral work, these spaces of distractions become counter productive. Main distractions in the open floor plan are noises by phones and copiers, overheard conversations. Consequentially office workers switch from face-to-face to text based communication, which offers a lot less versatility and is easily misunderstood.

Offices should go back to being closed of spaces where one can focus and concentrate on the task at hand, or meet and talk to people face-to-face. With current technological progress the HVAC systems should become cheap enough to offer comfortable climates at the level of an individual.
Transferability of the project results

cell. Providing the opportunity to break away from large systems and create separate, small instances. Therefore I made the claim to have not just an in-between floor for office space, but have them be arranged vertically along the inner facade as well. This arrangement testifies the individual nature of the office spaces. These boxes provide workspace without distractions and noise, at the right temperature and desk height.

Societal and scientific framework
The ideas developed in my project are easily transfered to the problematic of Amsterdam with its aims to produce more housing and the consequences this has in terms of density. The scientific nature of these claims rests in the production of a reference frame, through which one possibility of housing, living and working is sketched out in detail.

1. Build with the life cycle of materials in mind
Take the embodied energy costs of materials. Build a building which can last, withstand the elements and provide high quality interior spaces. Those qualities make a building more sustainable, as the energy needed to build it is a one time cost and the longer it lasts, the more return on this investment is made. This means the upfront investment in material should be considerable, making sure a high quality standard is met which will last.

2. Lively cities have certain ratios
Adjusting the density of the urban tissue to the accessibility is a must. With accessibility the different forms of travel need to be taken into account. More variety in forms of travel is to be expected, as is the sharing of vehicles. The ratios of building to street however remains similar and depends on the hierarchy within the urban tissue. The ratios regarding forms of housing (i.e. social housing, free-market housing, etc.) should mirror those of the inhabitants. Inequality is the main resource for dissatisfaction, criminality and hatred. Cities should absolutely have different districts and neighbourhoods with their own characteristics. The mixture of distinct qualities is what makes the public realm interesting in the first place. However these differences should never be based on income.

3. Individuality is key to society
In an individual the different group dynamics come together. Being responsible for one’s actions and maneuvering between these social groups form the individual who has a stake in the larger picture. This is currently a hotly debated item, in which the common humanity needs to be stressed as the underlaying base foundation of society. It is a current topic because of the voice minority groups have gotten through information networks. These groups are demanding rights in society, which is positive as long as their argument is based on the common humanity. However when these groups feel under appreciated the common enemy approach is deemed more effective. This leads to a negative attitude towards identity altogether, where people deny the existence of difference in order not to offend anyone.

These three aspects are what I hope to convey with my project. Together they form the thesis of ‘Inhabiting the Intersection’, where the intersection demarcates both the physical space and social space in the city of Amsterdam.