In the second half of the 20th century the notion of high culture came under attack. A new egalitarian impulse in society searched for the essence of equality. Culture should be easily accessible to all and become a common property. The library was one of the spaces that became a public place of culture and a meeting place. However the creation of this informal meeting place did not eventually become the new agora of the city. Perhaps one of the problems was the desire to popularize culture itself. The loss of threshold also challenged the position of cultural institutions, the idea of a temple for culture disappeared. Culture no longer has the right to exist as an autonomous entity, but must incorporate itself into the ever changing and global economy. The threshold that had been eagerly dismantled during the Cultural Revolution in the second half of the 20th century, gets a new meaning. The threshold does not exclude or isolate; it rather identifies those areas where change can happen. This can be the place where one enters and leaves a cultural production or representation. For the Brakke Grond, no name has the option to embrace the forces of capitalism even further to survive within the ever changing and global economy.

The spatial language of the innercity building

The inward orientation of the old convent structure and the long merchant houses created a grid characterized by narrow, pedestrian streets and courtyards. The spaces are framed by historically formed residential blocks with traditional elements. The streets are narrow and the facades are characterized by windows, balconies, and shutters. The facades of the buildings are often in a state of disrepair, indicating the history of the city. They exist in the memory of the city, serving as material present and others in the future.

The Nes is a unique street in the inner city of Amsterdam. It not only contains a variety of cultural institutions, but one can still sense its medieval origins. The street is narrow in comparison to the historical grid, creating a sense of enclosure. The street is a space for public engagement and creates a sense of community. In the interiority of city structures one finds the spaces of representation.

The city was not envisioned a priori, but it developed through the flow of time. The spatial languages of its buildings are vulnerable to change; they are exposed through archeological dissection. This city is not one that is continuous or discontinuous in its formal spatial language, but continuity in being a product of a collective and cultural endeavor.

Culture and the definition of identity

One can only conclude with certainty that identity is constantly redefined, that it simultaneously defines and transforms. The importance of cultural identity, the essence of community, and the notion of the city as a whole are constantly evolving. The city is a reflection of the collective and cultural memory of a place. The city is a mirror, a reflection of the past and present. The city is a site where one finds the spaces of representation.

The library that emerged from monastic building traditions was housed in a non specific container, a humble shed, where the library was the embodiment of the library as a building. Many libraries were designed as great open spaces filled with furniture. The library enshrines our belief in knowledge as an essential element of our culture and the pursuit of knowledge is celebrated. It is a social act that responds to our persistent demand for collectivity. Not only is it a storage for information, but it creates the opportunity to access it.

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Garden view

Axonometric view

Ground floor 1:200

Conceptual drawing

Collage

Library

Location 1:1000