P4 Reflection

Spaces of Collection

Delft Archive
This is a reflection paper written at the end of my graduation project in the studio Interiors, Buildings and cities. It is now that the results of the research and design are available, I can reflect upon my approach leading to that. As requested in the graduation manual this paper focuses on 1) The relationship between the theme of the studio and the subject/case study chosen; 2) The relationship between the methodical approach of the studio and the method chosen by the student; 3) The relationship between research and design; and finally, 4) The relationship between the project and the wider social context.

1. The relationship between the theme of the studio and the subject/case study chosen

The graduation studio ‘Spaces of Collection’ seeks to explore the relationship an institution has with the host city. In this case, the institution is the Delft University of Technology and the city is Delft historical center. The central question in research during the process is how to make the university’s physical return by a building with ‘spaces of collection’ for the accommodation and display of artifacts in various university collections. The notion of ‘the City as an Archive’ explore what is the Urban Institution and what are their representative, spatial, social and political roles and their impact on the life and form of the city at each scale. The territories range from the extended interior to the intimate city.

The themes that both the studio and the project address are that of the city, culture, that of architecture itself, the perception of space, that of building culture, construction.

2. The relationship between the methodical approach of the studio and the method chosen by the student

The program starts with potential of designing a building or collection of buildings and public spaces to store and exhibit the Delft University of Technology’s highly varied collections, ranging from scientific instruments to chairs. An opportunity is seen to provide an elaborated place of social and intellectual contact between the university and the public, affected by objects and realized through students, citizens and visitor. It will contain spaces for public gathering, a set of ‘rooms’ open to the use of the public and students. In order to reinforce the foundation of the design studio are research projects, which consist of inventory of collections TU Delft and Delft, precedent and analogous research, typological research on buildings and spaces in Delft, and research seminar.

The purpose of Delft collections research is to get more knowledge about what we are having now. Each collection has its own spaces. The inventory of the collections should be potential useful information for our design proposal. The second research within the design studio is the typological research on analogous precedent. These examples are related both directly and obliquely to the matter of an archive that represents the themes of ‘The Institution in the City’. In general, the study cases
contain different typologies such as ‘Clubs’, ‘Museums’, ‘Library and Archive’, ‘Civic Palaces’ and ‘Multifunctional Centers’. They work as provocations and study reference for discussion and inspiration.

The research workshop with Willemijn Wilms Floet concerns the spatial and building typologies of Delft, and the material culture of the city as embodied in its spaces building, rooms and their representations. They are the Delft precedents for public buildings, collection buildings, TU Delft related buildings and innerblock figures.

The research seminar, led by Irene Cieraad, concerns the core purposes of the project itself, the issue of such a project’s situation in society, its place in the city and its users which conducted an extensive research within the frame of thought delivered by the anthropological episteme.

3. The relationship between research and design

All research contributes to the understanding of relationship between an urban institution and its city. Reflecting on the research process, I start my graduation project with different aspects.

The design project provides an opportunity to contemplate on the possibilities in the gesture of bringing back a university archive to the historical city center. The research on the various collections tells us what we have, where they are, and how they came into being. The information serves as the basic knowledge for project and build up my first idea to design a depot for all collections. In research seminar, I start to think about what a university means to its city and try to find my own program. From historical perspective, university used to be embedded in city center together with cultural, economic life and built environment there in medieval age. In 19th century, British universities support industrialization, medical care and public debate. In Delft context, I want to reintroduce the university to city center by learning from historical experience. By using the university collections for new archive, the new urban institution could be seen as the encounter place for public engagement. Students could face with residents and benefit each other by discovering, discussing and debating. It becomes solid for me that the spaces of collections should be connected with social activities.

Typological research of Delft precedents and analogous precedents give provocations for my project in architectural way. In typology, both the university campus and urban institution represent as a family of buildings with their shared representative, spatial, social and political roles and their impact on the life and form of the city at each scale, from the interior outwards. To explore the notion of the ‘City as an Archive’, the typological research on precedent case of Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library and Delft case of City Hall contribute to the identification. In Beinecke Library, it stands out as a quite elegant monument while responds to surrounding Neo-classical buildings for the choice of translucent façade material and creates unique interior and exterior experience. The center space as the
treasure house with modern transparent material, the Gothic-like façade as interpretation, and the complex urban context create three different layer and make the building like a ‘box in box’. It is the modern interpretation of ‘temple of knowledge’ and a clear urban strategy to design simple but powerful object in complicated urban context.

Combining the two aspects help me to find my research question whether it is possible to design a university archive in city center as a group of buildings and whether university collections could be an amazing treasure box for Delft. Through the process, it became gradually became possible for me to answer that question. Not necessarily with a simple yes or no answer in other field of academic researches, the beauty of architecture is, that it is up to the users to test and decide whether the project answered its research question positively and whether that resulted in a building where people can work, study, read and whether a building is added to the city that is convincingly used and situated within culture. As an architecture student, I try to explore representative and social meanings upon the reflection of urban institution, and test spatial configuration from the interior to exterior, from form to materialization by concepts, drawings and models.

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

Walter Benjamin described the city as ‘the interior of the collective’ establishing it as a deep and intricate space of threshold, which enfolds both the intimacies of individual experience and the mediating territories of collective public life. Working from critical understandings of existing situations, between inside and outside, architecture should be materialized through different scales from urban to detail. I believe that a good architecture should be a scenario that reacts on its social context. Architecture can be both a way to analyze the existing situation and a way to expose yet unknown worlds. The potential relevance lies in the fact that it will now only be an architectural translation of current cultural and academic transformations taking place, but also an impetus to new and unexpected connections between city and building, between public and private, between students and citizen.