Reflection

Abbey Roosenberg in Waasmunster Belgium was built in 1975 by Dom Hans van der Laan. The abbey in its current form is being closed. The religious creed of the region in Belgium is dropping, and the influx of new nuns to the abbey almost completely stopped. Whereas the abbey previously housed 60 nuns, now only four remain. Thus came the need of the architectural reuse of the abbey, making a home for 60 new residents which have Alzheimer dementia, giving the abbey a new life as an elderly care home.

Aspect 1 the relationship between research and design

During my research phase I deconstructed the formal entity of an elderly care home and laid this out versus the informal use and social interactions of its residents. By placing myself as an observer, as a new resident in an elderly care facility, what interested me about the care home is the interaction between residents. When a new resident arrives in an elderly care home, they arrive in a scripted space. The care facility is carefully designed to be most efficient and affordable. You arrive in a totally new environment, where other elderly residents already live, new residents have to try and fit in. Here starts the stage-craft. The sociologist analogies in this paper come from the book ‘The presentation of self in everyday life’ by Erving Goffman. In which he uses the imagery of the theatre in order to understand the importance of human social interaction. In his book, he explains multiple keywords to help him explain the analogy of the stagecraft of social interactions.

These social interactions have two main settings; the stage in front of an audience and the back region, where the actors can shake off their role and can be completely themselves. Each play consists of a setting, an appearance, a front stage, back stage and off-stage.

To begin deconstructing the elderly care facility to a formal entity and in its informal behaviour of the residents in a social setting you could have four different ‘scripted stages’:

• The main entrance hall,
• The restaurant,
• The different spots and corridors throughout the building,
• The cells or the back region.

In my design project I utilized the possibilities of a corridor as a liveable entity that connects the dwellings of its residents, and making it a comfortable place to stay. The same thing for the restaurant. In my case study it was an important meeting place, most of the actors met in this place, and most of the care givers and employees of the facility ate here, and had their lunch break, without having a break in a separate break room.

The movement in various activities that form the functional dimension of architectural space, will be crucial. The architectural space of the corridor has to be comfortable enough that people want to use it as an extension from the back-region. The way I see my design project is that the corridor has to be a ‘living room’ in itself. A space where people enjoy staying in, and making the whole building lively, instead of only certain parts that are being
used like in the case study. The residents will have a direct influence on the architectural space, and this space radiates their identity and utilizes this.

**Aspect 2 the relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen by the student within this framework (location/object)**

The main themes from the graduation lab and the abbey Roosenberg by Dom Hans van der Laan is healthcare, the subject of dementia and the consequences this brings to the design of a care facility, and the existing monument of van der Laan and its ‘style’, de Bossche school.

Regarding the design of my extension to the van der Laan abbey a crucial element is how does this extension relate to the existing abbey and in what form does old and new connect to one and another. At the beginning of the project I quickly became to the conclusion that I wanted to connect directly to the old monument. The form of my building quickly came to a form, that is pretty consistent in what became my final form. But the design approach towards old and new is something that was far more difficult. Do I use the same design language as van der Laan, or do I build a contrast as an extension to the abbey.

The design language I used in the end is one that is guided by the abbey, the dimensions of window openings, using similar columns and beams to create openings in the façade, and the transition of spaces. This transition of spaces is an element that comes back in my design in different ways. One is the connection of the corridor to the dwellings of its residents, the other is the connection between old and new. Van der Laan never connects his spaces directly to one another, there is always this transitional space in between. This is how I envisioned my entrance hall, being the key connection to the old and the new.

The design language I used is one of an important case study by Hans Dollgast in the reconstruction of the badly damaged Alte Pinakothek in Munich, which had already been released for demolition, Dollgast made the bomb crater readable using the simplest of means. The old structure of the building and the sparing supplements are starkly juxtaposed without any kind of aestheticising The war wound of the old edifice was patched up with roughand readily cleaned up bricks. Dollgast left the material unplastered, only retaining the structure and not the texture of the old in his repair work.

This is what I tried to do, retaining the structure, and not the texture in my design. To create a ‘modern’ adaptation of the design language of van der Laan, a soft transition from old to new.
Aspect 3 the relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student in this framework

The approach I chose within this framework is the research to the design language of van der Laan. The connection between old and new which I explained above is crucial to my design. Where other students don’t connect the building directly to the abbey, mine does connect directly, and thus asks for a different design approach, which has a more direct connection to the language that van der Laan speaks.

This in combination of the research I did in the first period of the graduation understanding how the residents use the building, and what could go wrong when this design approach is executed in different ways.

The building should feel like a home, and should by all means have possibilities for its residents to have their own private space, but with a thin line between the transitional spaces and the public ones. Creating a building that connects in all levels to the whole, including to the abbey by van der Laan.

Aspect 4 the relationship between the project and the wider social context

Healthcare is becoming an increasing relevant subject in the world. People become older, and with that, the subject of elderly care facilities will endure increasing demands of care. People have to stay at home longer, and with that people will come into care facilities with increasing health and mobility problems. The subject of elderly care in the architectural context still has room for improvement in a way that care is increasingly seen as an institutional form, and with that the typology of a hospital is still dominant. The architecture of the building and the effect it can have on its inhabitants are from relevant value. What I tried to do is create a elderly care home, that emphasizes on the aspect of home, it’s a protected environment, but feels like any other home.