

Reflection - P4
Spaces of Collection
Interiors, Buildings, Cities

Dingzhi Tang
4510135

The graduation project started from the question why the university needs to come back to the historical centre. This question is based on the existence of an already sufficient setting of the suburban campus. At first glance it seems that the university has everything it needs in the suburb, and the move of adding a building away from the family could be inconvenient and therefore unnecessary. But it turned out some aspects of both the academic activities and the diversity of Delft's social life could be enhanced by this move. The researches we did as a collective work provided many clues that points to this evaluation.

The first important discovery from the catalogue of our university's collections is the Research Exhibition. It is an event organised by Valorisation Centre TU Delft, and it happens once or twice in a year. The coming edition will be the largest in scale so far, to become one component as the celebration of the 175 lustrum of TU Delft. In a conference-like setting, selected researchers present their work to guests, who are usually representatives from companies and government, invited by the university through interactive object demonstration. It is a moment when the academic world brings what we do forward to the society and the first step of technology being implemented commercially. It provides important interaction between both worlds: representatives from the society get to know what innovation is available or on the way; the researchers understand what direction they should go in order to achieve an optimisation of their products. Therefore the Research Exhibition is an serious event that reveals the ultimate goal of the academic world: to help develop our society and living conditions, which could be never achieved by shutting out ourselves in an undisturbed piece of land. Although the Valorisation Centre invites guests from the companies and government to keep the audience and academic participants relevant to each other, potential audience well exist outside this circle. There are entrepreneurs living and working in Delft who needs new technology to develop business; and citizens who are enthusiastic about the history

and future or knowledge. In addition to the limiting invitation system, the suburban setting makes it difficult for these uninvited party to notice what the university is doing.

Therefore moving the event from the suburban campus to the city centre has its meaning in terms of greater exposure and easier access. It can remind us of the anatomy theatre of the medieval universities, which rings its bell, high above the city, to attract people living around to witness the scene. The facts of the Research Exhibition and other aspects of TU Delft's university collections that are gathered from the research, and a study of the plot, together with the sense of rituals and urban institution suggested by the anatomy theatre and other precedents, form the starting point of the first speculations of the graduation project and became a substantial theme that guides the design process.

Along this guiding line, the project is developed with experiments of form and scale, and an understanding of the location of Delft and immediate surroundings of Gasthuisplaats which is gained little by little throughout the process. The first problem I had, was that the experiments of typologies suggested by precedents were not always successful and the constant changes blur the image of what I wanted to achieve in stead of developing it to a depth. One reason why these experiments were not so successful could be that the architectural results produced were not loyal enough to what the precedents suggest. When a precedent was chosen and tried out, the concern of what is Delft always got into the way and compromises were always the case. In consequence what have been presented were not sharp enough as an architectural statement and not convincing. Furthermore, the labour of constantly making new proposals had become a barrier for more time of reflection.

Retrospectively speaking, what I needed after the stage of experimenting, was a more careful thought and selection on what precedent I should gain ideas from. I needed more time to think about what does the content in the precedents chosen mean to the project, in order to take a critical stance to it.

What is written above is a struggle between the attempt of making an outstanding urban figure and that of being a common one. It reveals a hesitation before the decision on how the buildings should appear in the plot. There was a period when I question myself if the two buildings are both palaces or both houses, or even one palace and one house. Fearing the last option will damage the coherence of the whole project, I have been testing the former two theories. However, the building to the west always looks underrepresented as a house for the area available and the one to the east is too small and narrow to ever become a decent palace. These operations turned out to limit the capacity of the architecture and articulation in

contrast to the sense of urban institution the primitive speculation offered. Only after a wider and deeper observation of other important precedents, both in Delft and elsewhere, did I become confident in reading the various street openings in the plot as a platform for representations of the dual faces of a university: a very public one with which the university engages itself with the development of the society; and a somehow introverted and undisturbed one that represents the intensive and serious engagement with knowledge. This duality allows a dual architectural representation, and makes me feel more certain about the palace-and-house theory.

This development was a decisive one, which further determined choices of materials and construction method. During the palace-house hesitation, a constant compromise was that the construction and materials used in the buildings were chosen to relate them to the immediately surrounding. Quite predictably, brick became the material of choice and the construction remained rather detached from the architectural ideas. The unsatisfactory images produced in this period also further blurred what the buildings could be. A serious stagnation happened shortly after this, until the final radical change after the P3.

The final palace-and-house motif demands clear precedents to be studied. As a result, for the palace building, the Ducal Palace in Venice was chosen, firstly because of its uncompromising urban figure that claims an importance of urban institution and a status of activities that happen inside the building, and secondly the clear communication of the two big important rooms it contains and the engagement to the broader urban setting through its arcades. The Sir John Soane's Museum was chosen for the house building, firstly for its similar scale and deep sequence of rooms which has the intimate sense of interiors that encourages contemplation as well as small assembly, which fits the building's role as a multifunctional reading room and office for the Trésor and Rally Peters Collection, and secondly its density and creativity of object and paintings exhibition. The small gallery in Sir John Soane's Museum with seemingly endless folding panels of painting serves as an inspiration for the display and storage especially of the Rally Peters Collection, which contains carefully produced maps.

To summarise, the design project is trying to capture the important moments when the university meets the public by an ensemble of representative architectural interiors and exteriors standing by the canal. The activities-Research Exhibition and other academic and public events-that happen in the buildings reflect the character of an urban institution, which in consequence marks the coming back of TU Delft to the historical centre of its home city from the well-established suburban campus. This representative move could have great potential in redefining the urban

character of the area at Gasthuisplaats and the surrounding canals, by both strengthening the existing pattern and making a dramatic turn from the constant and continuous canal houses combo. For these reasons the architecture claims a higher status than the other buildings next to it, and the experience of using the building is further lifted by a fantasy that the buildings suggest.