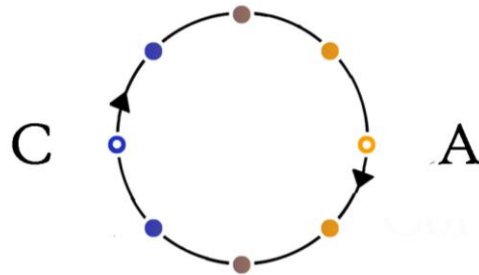
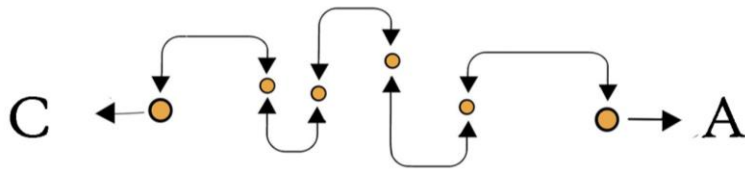
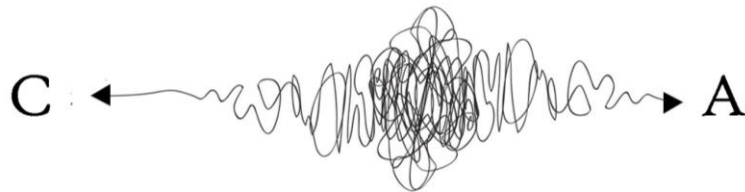


P4 Reflection

Demystifying Abstraction



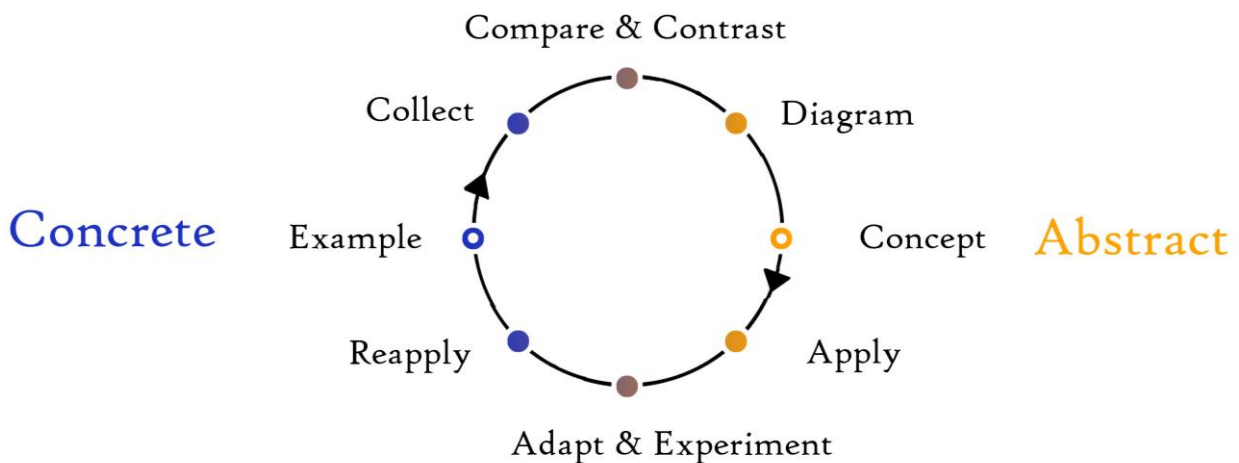
Between the concrete and the abstract

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AR3EX320

Introduction

Throughout this year I sought to make the subjective and seemingly random process of abstraction more easily understood, taught and applied in design. I expected that by carefully observing how others, and particularly myself, arrive at and develop abstract concepts, I would be able to identify the main phases that an architect goes through in his design process when coming up with creative solutions. From this experience I learned exactly how challenging it can be to isolate and study a general process such as abstraction, due to how integrated it is in every aspect of design (Very much a case of not being able to see the forest, because of the trees). However, the graduation year has also taught me that “good” abstract concepts or ideas are not the result of a single “aha” moment, or a sudden stroke of genius, nor can simply be directly obtained from another source. They are rather the outcome of a persistent mental process shaped and guided by abstraction that we can in fact learn to do better, through mindful practice and experiments.

Demystifying Abstraction: A model



The relationship Between Research and Design:

In order to find out how applicable or relevant to design of such a model for abstraction is I persistently sought to apply it to my own design process, while actively modifying and tweaking it along the way. The research acted as an additional instruction manual on how to design and to a large extent it was about a return to basics. Looking back, the research provided me with a hypothesis of what the abstraction process I go through should ideally look like, while the design project itself served as a ground for experiments of those ideas.

The results of this is that my research and design both follow a line of development very similar to the model for abstraction I propose, while being different in their subject and chosen topic of investigation.

On the one hand, this is good because it demonstrates how integrated design and research are in the thinking process, even if they vary greatly in their products. On the other hand, this also means that any problems, misconceptions and challenges in studying abstraction have also expressed themselves in the design project. For example, the sometimes chaotic nature of the design process due to the high number of case studies I referred to can be partially traced to some of the too general or shallow observations in the research. However, I was aware of this danger even at the start of the graduation and made a conscious attempt to counteract it by the number of “experiments” I was prepared to carry out.

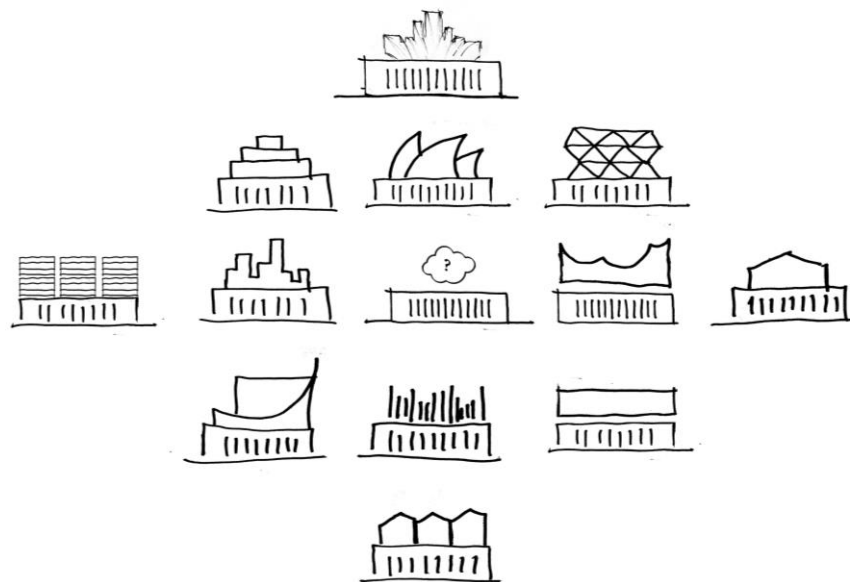
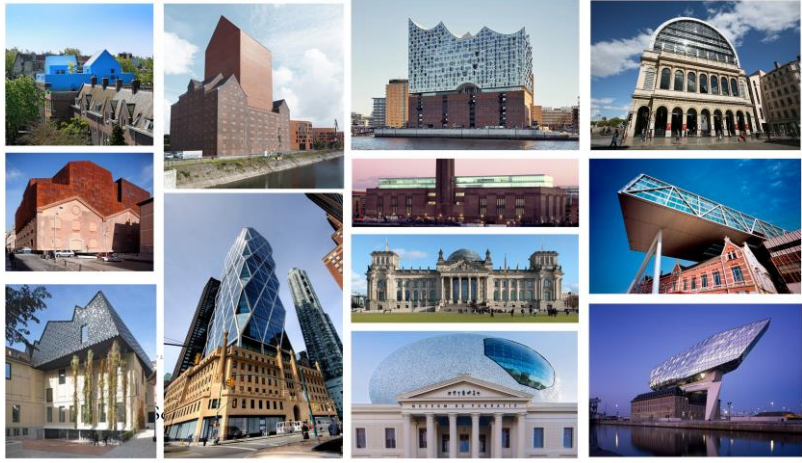


Diagram 2. The stages of "Collect" "Compare" & "Diagram"

The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study chosen within this framework (location/object)

As a studio ExploreLab was the ideal environment to study my fascination of education and the process of learning in architecture. The freedom provided by the course allowed me to very consciously choose the process through which to develop my project. This added a large degree of responsibility in all choice along the way but allowed for unique experimentation with and evaluation of what is important in design.

The choice of doing a project for a library in my home city of Sofia, on a real concrete (even if old) design brief gave striking realism and gravity to the decisions I was making. What was surprising is that this familiarity of with the context was in fact paralyzing for the design process at first. The large amount of information and variables that came from the detailed study of the existing context made any sensible intervention seem impossible. However this is where the nature of Explore Lab, and the fact I was doing research on abstraction provided me the much needed free ground for experiments.

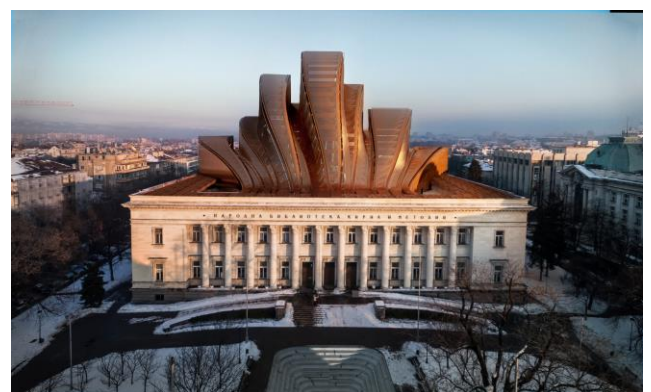


Diagram 3. Site / P2 Concept/ P4 Design

The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen in this framework.

The most noticeable characteristic of the method I chose to investigate the topic of abstraction and the question of what should be the extension of Bulgaria's national library was the persistent use of precedents throughout all stages in both design and research. Precedents have always been an important part of the design process. However in my case they were always the first step of any task or challenge. This was intentionally the case, in order to test the ideas of Concrete- before- Abstract learning which I investigated in my research.

In retrospect this method was in fact very effective when trying to understand, generate and explain concepts, from the study of precedents and examples. However, while this chosen method was successful for me, it is still unknown if this model of abstraction it is in fact useful, relevant or applicable to other students – which was my initial intent. The next step would be to test the validity of the model by studying how useful, relevant or applicable it can be to other students while seeking to adjust and maybe expand it further.

Conclusions

All and all this graduation year in Explore Lab has been about following abstract fascination and ideas and transforming them in to a concrete projects without necessarily knowing where they will go from the start.

This unknowability can sometimes cause a large degree of anxiety and uncertainty along the way, which while helpful can also be counterproductive to the design process. By attempting to demystify abstraction I aimed to prove how creative design is not so much about the mysterious act of creativity itself, but rather the combination of keen observation of concrete examples and reality and the playful experimentation with abstract ideas.

