

## reflection

P4

This appendix reflects on the past two semesters and outlines my intentions for the remaining period after P4.

In the first term of this graduation year, we conducted collective research on the site through seven thematic lenses. Alongside three fellow students, I worked on the theme *High Low Up Down*. Establishing a clear direction took considerable time. We struggled with interpreting the title, which encouraged us to zoom out and connect De Blikfabriek to the broader urban context of Antwerp. Tutor feedback helped move us forward, but also highlighted that we were not yet on the right track.

I noticed a division in the group's dynamic. I found it challenging that many discussions remained brief - focused on producing a final outcome - while I preferred a more exploratory approach. At the same time, the assignment to create an exhibition for P1 pushed us to consolidate our narrative into a tangible object, which proved highly instructive. In the end, we developed three detailed dioramas representing a condensed cycling route to De Blikfabriek. These led to key conclusions and questions I carried into the masterplan phase and my individual project - especially around the reciprocity between the journey and the destination. This was not only physical; we explored different routes via different modes of transport. The dioramas also sparked an important question for me: what do I choose to build upon, and what kind of perspective—or gaze - do I want to embed in the place?

During this phase, my first ideas for individual research emerged, based on a personal fascination. From the start, I held onto *play* as a theme. However, I found it difficult to develop a clear research plan or specific angle. I began reading and maintained an open mindset about what might define play, which led to a wide but somewhat undefined scope.

After P1, constructing a large-scale model brought enjoyment and practical focus. It provided structure and a welcome distraction at the outset of the masterplan phase, which required a shift in mindset. Research temporarily took a back seat as the emphasis moved to design. But where to begin, especially with the feeling of not fully understanding the site? Despite this, I never felt lost, largely thanks to a strong collaboration with my two team members. We took our time visiting the site twice, having in-depth discussions, forming ideas, sketching, and working on the model - without rushing toward results. Each of us contributed uniquely and complemented one another. My evolving sketches - such as deciding to retain one hall but not another - became the basis for quick physical builds that my teammate created in the model.

We did face challenges integrating our individual research topics into the masterplan. However, agreeing on several conceptual terms like starting with *form instead of function*, *horizontality*, *unfinished*, *rhythms*, and *void* helped us find alignment. There was mutual trust in the process. We developed a strong plan that provided a consistent base throughout the architectural project.

While much of my energy went into developing the masterplan, writing a research proposal helped clarify my thinking. Though writing amidst uncertainty was difficult, my research tutor encouraged me to approach play as a cross-scalar method. He supported my idea of exploring play through multiple architectural levels. Continuing to produce small drawings - something that comes naturally to me—remained a valuable way to communicate design observations and intentions.

For my P2 presentation, I attempted to link play theory to architectural scale using a diagrammatic approach. Due to time and experience limitations, I was unable to fully realize this structure. Instead, I related characteristics of play to cultural and architectural references. This proved helpful in building a project narrative, which developed into seven key themes later featured in my catalog.

For P2, we were also required to propose a program and location within the masterplan. I quickly selected a central site, but struggled with defining a program. My intention was to reflect the everyday rather than depict obvious play. A community health center emerged as a suitable choice. One piece of feedback was that I presented my theme too modestly - something I regret not addressing further afterward. I believe that showcasing such a theme requires space and time to unfold, and I often invest that time in detailed design to ensure quality.

After P2, I temporarily paused my focus on the play research and turned to a close study of the factory hall. I digitally modeled it, driven both by the need for realism and the desire to uncover embedded design opportunities - “rules to play with” within the existing structure. I collaborated with a peer working in the same building, which led to valuable discussions. Yet I struggled to identify a clear typological structure within the hall. I continued sketching floor plans and occasional sections, but by P3, the layout still lacked coherence. Building the 1:33 model for P3 felt premature (and remained unfinished), but ultimately it came at the right time: it forced me to make design decisions - something I continue to find difficult.

During P3, I was encouraged to extend a diagonal line I had introduced on the northeast side. Though initially hesitant, I grew more convinced over time. A 1:200 model helped me gain better control over how design choices across scales converged. In P4, I presented a community health center facing a public square - an ensemble of buildings with varying façades that engage in a dialogue with each other and the user. This is where the notion of play manifests.

#### \_Outlook Beyond P4

After P4, I aim to strengthen the architectural expression of the project. The formal language and material palette can be further refined. The 1:200 model made after P3 offered a strong start in demonstrating spatial structure. For the graduation presentation, I intend to work at a smaller scale to better convey the materiality and façade composition. Given the project’s emphasis on transitions between interior and exterior spaces, a 1:100 model of the ensemble would offer a comprehensive overview. I also plan to complete the 1:33 model to bring the digitally represented

fragment to life, complemented by revised perspective drawings if necessary. Lastly, I will complete the catalog, ensuring that even the cover - independent from the book content - communicates the project clearly at a glance.

#### A Final Note on Research

Exploring the meaning of play revealed that it does not follow a single, linear path. Play is not one thing or another - it is a movement. I chose not to focus on a singular characteristic of play to guide my research. While this open approach offered flexibility, it also introduced uncertainty, which ran parallel to my slower working method.

At times, research felt like an obligation - something to be scheduled - while in reality, a curious mindset is inherently part of the design process. I remain open to critique, as I view it as an ongoing dialogue about architecture. At the same time, I see research as a tool to build a narrative - something that anchors and communicates a project. That's always been a challenge for me. Design often evolves in response to what you see, sketch, erase, and refine. With the theme of play, I also wanted to convey what designing is. How does this translate into my project? On one hand, through elements that reflect the designer's play - such as exercising freedom within existing structures. On the other hand, it's visible in the space left for users: the imagination evoked by a view or object, or a detail that triggers curiosity. That's when play can begin.