

FROM FORM TO VENUE

Architectural form as an
amplifier for music venues

P5 REFLECTION

Public Building Graduation
Studio, MSC3/4 2021-2022

Delft University of Technology
Faculty of Architecture and the
Built Environment

AR3AP100

MUSIC MARVEL | Music &
Popular Culture Re-Wired
The Hague | Binckhorst

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REFLECTION

This year's topic of the Public Building graduation studio: "MUSIC MARVEL - music & popular culture re-wired" asked for research on and design of a music venue, located in the Binckhorst, The Hague. My project, titled "*From Form to Venue, architectural form as an amplifier for music venues*" explores the role of architectural form as a device for strengthening a visitor's experience of a building. This reflection describes and looks back at the process of my graduation project on the basis of a couple of relevant topics.

THEORY RESEARCH & DELINEATION RESEARCH

The structure of the graduation project consisted out of three parts: Project Design (PD), Theory Research (TR) and Delineation Research (DR). In the first semester, time was equally divided between these three topics. The second semester was almost completely dedicated to Project Design. The goal of the Theory Research and Delineation Research "subcourses" was to place the main project of creating a Music Marvel in a broader perspective. This was done by for example obtaining more knowledge about music theory and history (TR) and analysing and interpreting several manifestoes in the architectural discourse (DR). To connect these theoretical topics to the actual designing of a music venue in the Binckhorst, students were asked to research and map the design location in multiple ways.

The Theory Research part in itself was divided into two parts: lectures and readings about general information on music, and group research on sampling and mapping the site. The lectures and readings were helpful for the project in the sense that they provided a solid basis or frame of music theory which could easily be applied into the process of designing a music venue. With noticing the relevance of this rather non-architectural background information, it convinced me even more how important it is to obtain general information about a subject before even starting a design project. The second part of the Theory Research course, about analysing the site, was relevant because you were forced to look at the context in a different way than usual. Instead of mapping the larger elements of a site (like a road network, building blocks, etc.), the focus was put on obtaining small samples of the site, related to your senses. This meant that as a group, we mapped not only visible objects but also sounds and smells. Similar to the general information on music, this was helpful to get a better understanding of the possibilities the site and the project has to offer.

The Delineation Research course on the other hand had a direct relation to the field of architecture. Each two weeks, an (urban) manifesto was presented and projected on the design location. Similar to the sampling, this forced us to interpret and play with the site in unusual ways. Eventually, this artistic and abstract approach led to the creation of an own design manifesto about the Binckhorst. With this manifesto, I explained the current situation of a cluttered and not accessible site which is in need of restructuring. By mixing program and removing the borders, the idea of the Binckhorst as a festival terrain was presented. This fascination of a lively and multifunctional open space became one of the key aspects of my design.

PROJECT START

Simultaneously with the TR and DR courses, Project Design started from the first week with exploring the site, describing the ambitions for the project and doing group research on case studies. The case studies, in total 16 music venues of all sorts from all over the world, were analysed with the whole group of students on the topics City, Connection and Culture. The goal of this was to quickly get an understanding of how music venues work on all levels, from its relation to the urban context to detailed acoustical solutions. However, because of the group's ambition to analyse as many aspects as possible, the work load was quite high and this resulted in not so extensive conclusions as most time was consumed by producing analytical drawings of the venues.

After analysing the case studies as a group (which was completed around P1), focus shifted towards describing what fascinated you, what your project should be about and what it should contain. My ambition was to design a large, hybrid venue which feels like a festival: different stages, multiple genres and all within a large, open space. This was given shape using one of the most fundamental elements in architecture: form.

Form as a main topic for this project comes from a personal fascination on this aspect. With previous projects I have used form as a tool for architectural expression and I wanted to develop this more. The idea of creating a festival emerged from the research on the site, noticing its possibilities and making a design manifesto which proposed to turn the Binckhorst into a festival.

RESEARCH ON FORM

Initially the focus was put on researching form. What forms are present around the design location, what forms do music venues have and how can form contribute to the experience of a music venue? In the design description of my project the following was written:

“FORM is the main topic of research and will also be one of the main topics for the design itself. It is a festival of forms, distinct masses, each one of them with their very own characteristics, float around in a space where visitors can explore endlessly. Since concert halls (and theatre halls) usually have a strong focus inwards, they can be very sculptural, strengthening the experience of unique forms composed together in a large festival space.”

In line with this year's Public Building studio topic and together with group research done during the Theory Research course, the analogy of an amplifier was developed. An amplifier is a device for making weak signals audible by increasing the power of these signals. In architectural terms, this means that the word “amplifier” can be used to describe strengthening, making visible and adding (iconic) value. The notion of an amplifier was then combined with the topic of form: what if form is the amplifier? With this, the following research question was asked:

How can form amplify a building for music?

The research on form was structured as follows:

1. Form theory: what do physical forms do in the sense of perception and experience?
2. Music venue typology: what aspects of a building for music can and need to be amplified and how can form contribute to that?
3. Site: what qualities and forms are present on the site and can be amplified by a building for music?

The idea was to use several methods of research to find an answer to these questions: literature reviewing, additional case study analysis and design research. Looking back at the research aspects during my process, it becomes clear that mostly design research was conducted and literature and case studies not so much. I have the feeling that this was not so much a problem for the design progress but more a natural development of the whole process. The research that was done about forms on site and forms of other music venues did however give some clear conclusions about what to design with, as can be seen below.

After this, the idea of distinct concert halls “floating” in a festival area was continued. By researching the ideal form of different venue typologies (a shoe-box concert hall, a theatre hall and a hall for chamber music), together with defining the program for the music venue, analysing the design location and conceptualising the idea of the building as a festival terrain, the design process slowly became more concrete.

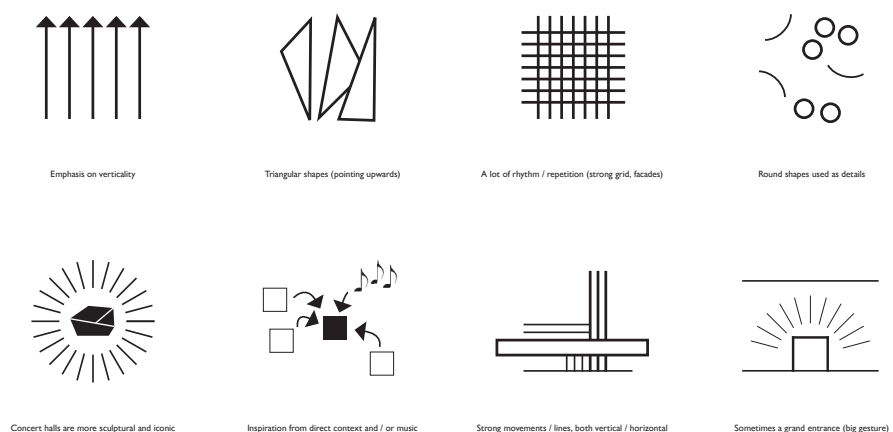


Figure 01.
Icons of form principles derived from site analysis (top row) and form principles derived from case studies analysis (bottom row).

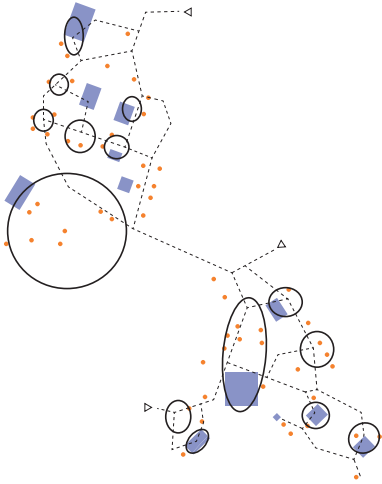


Figure 02.
Abstraction of the map of the Mysteryland festival, showing routes, stages (blue blocks), other activities (orange dots) and open spaces (circles).

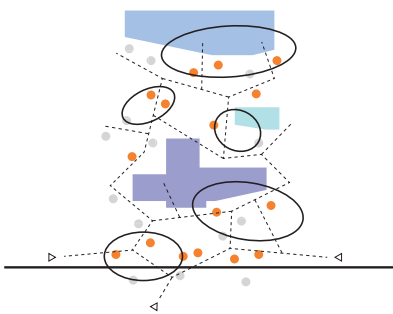


Figure 03.
Concept of the building translated into a festival space.

FROM FORM TO FESTIVAL

As the design project evolved, more and more focus was put on the development of the idea of creating a festival and less focus was put on form, as at a certain point the forms became somewhat fixed. To get an understanding of how to create a festival, extensive research was done on festival terrains, how they work, of what elements they consist and how they are spatially planned. Also the different atmospheres a visitor can experience at a festival were researched. This part was quite exciting, as research was done on a topic that is not necessarily related to architecture. By projecting the findings from this research on festival terrains onto the building concept for my design, the concept and spatial qualities of my design became much stronger.

The concept of a festival translated into a building became more profound as the project evolved. At first, only the space in between the concert halls was seen as “festival space”. Slowly, other aspects of the music venue were related to the concept of a festival as well, such as the program (place for activities like workshops for example) and the construction. At first, the idea of the construction was to create a specific construction for each concert hall, related to the atmosphere and typology of each hall. This however became extremely hard to work out and not realistic at all. The solution was found in the form of a superstructure, much like the scaffolding behind the stage decor at a festival. Because of its uniformity, it allowed for everything to take place within this structure.

CONCEPTS & IDEAS

A characteristic of my design process is that I tend to spend quite a lot of time on developing concepts and coming up with ideas of things that might or might not be integrated in the final design. The reason for this is that I like to approach architecture in a more abstract way (while always keeping realism in mind). This meant that, during tutoring, each week I produced conceptual schemes to explain my ideas. Because I would say I am quite ambitious, all sorts of ideas were explored, from adding swings, waterslides and a little passenger train to using reclaimed wind turbine masts for the construction. This of course helped with making the design more exciting but the downside was that the design options did not really narrow down, as I would continue to explore more and more.

A second reason that explains this conceptual approach, is that I wanted to experiment on purpose. Mainly because it helped me to get a better understanding of abstract architectural concepts but also because there is enough room for experimenting and creating more extreme designs during your study. For me this was valuable because it allowed me to follow my intuition and focus on aspects that deeply interest me.

Another aspect that cannot go unnoticed, is the concept of multiplicity. In the Public Building studio, multiplicity is treated as a tool that should be integrated in the whole design process, as it adds value and makes design choices more justified because single design solutions can have multiple purposes. In my design, multiplicity is manifested in different aspects of the building. At first,

within the program there is a lot of overlap and multiple use for single spaces and halls. The theatre hall for example can of course be used for theatre plays, but also for opera, musical, comedy, etc. The same goes for the festival terrain, which is an open space that can be used as a foyer, as terraces, as exposition space, as a market, as a workshop place, etc. Secondly, the construction is designed in such a way that it acts as a generic frame which is not only there for the structural stability, but it also provides all the services and possibilities for adding or removing. It is completely modular and demountable. In the third place, the facade has several purposes. It is a double glass facade which acts as a solar chimney. It is also a buffer zone between interior and exterior and it is completely transparent so the interior spaces get connected to the context and the festival terrain appears more open and visitors experience the space as endless.

IMPROVEMENTS

In general the process towards every deadline was very similar. Many time was spent on making concepts and creating more and more ideas and therefore relatively little time was spent on actually drawing the building. The reason of this is explained above, because of wanting to experiment. Because of this, I think the conceptual aspects of the project are quite extreme and elaborated but the concrete and technical elaboration is not as extensive as it could be. On the other hand, because so much time was spent on developing concepts, I think the argumentation behind my design choices is pretty strong. For a future project however, I would create a more detailed planning and encourage myself to spend more time on concretizing my ideas.

When reflecting on the progression of the course, in general I am quite satisfied with the arrangement of the studio. The general context provided and the research done in the first semester seemed a bit lengthy and not specifically relevant at some times but after a while it turned out quite useful for understanding music culture and developing the project.

Something else which I found a bit difficult at some times was the fact that at a certain point between P2 and P4, we only had tutoring once every two weeks. This meant that there was a lot to talk about during one tutoring session. It also meant that after a tutoring session, it felt that there was no urge to immediately continue as the next tutoring was still two weeks away. Because of this, I would prefer to have shorter tutoring sessions every week instead of longer ones every two weeks.

CONCLUSION & WHAT'S NEXT

When looking back at the products made and going through the whole process again, it made me realise that a lot has happened in one year. Of course this project taught me specific aspects of the architecture of public buildings and music venues and it broadened my view on music and architectural theory in general. But next to that, I believe this studio has really amplified my design skills. I discovered the importance of doing broader research on the topics relevant to the design assignment and more important, during the year I have become more

proficient in communicating my ideas and making design choices. With this, I am less stressed compared to before and I am more convinced of my capabilities, in other words: I know what I can achieve in a certain amount of time.

As mentioned before, a lot of emphasis was put on experimenting and exploring different ideas during the design development. This was done on purpose as I enjoy coming up with creative and unusual solutions a lot. Next to that, I think that this creative process and the ability of adding “something extra” to a design is what characterizes the work of an architect. It means that as an architect, you are able to spend time on experimental and daring design choices which will be justified because you are capable of translating concepts into a convincing and realistic design. And ultimately therewith, as an architect, you can contribute to a better living environment. Because of this I experimented, to become more proficient in the things that are of great importance of the profession of an architect.

In a broader, academic context, this project relates to the studio and the master programme in the way that the project explores the possibilities and contexts of creating a public space and that it integrates the idea of multiplicity. Put in a larger framework (of the architectural profession), this project can be an example of what happens when with the design of a public building topics like “form” and “festival” are elaborated in quite an extreme way.

At last, for the period after P4, I want to add the final touches to the design and I want to focus on creating convincing images. This means making drawings more presentable and producing several renders of a detailed digital model. Next to that, a physical model will be constructed to be able to truly see the spatial qualities of the music venue.

Addition: a month later, 1 week before the public presentation.

The last weeks were great as with the passing of the P4 presentation, it was certain I was going to graduate. Next to that, everything that still had to be done mainly was with the purpose of making the design prettier and more convincing. This was great fun as with every render or scheme you could see it all coming together more and more. At the moment of writing, everything is pretty much ready except for the physical model. The last week is completely reserved for making this model as well as preparing the talk for the public presentation on the 17th of June, 2022.

Finally, it might be interesting to briefly describe my ambition for the near future. After graduating (and of course after going on holidays), I am looking at two options to start my career in the architectural field. The first idea is that I have the ambition to join a medium to large sized, international oriented, architectural firm in The Netherlands to be able to rapidly gain experience and increase my knowledge. Another option is that I am starting for myself, finding some projects to work on and perhaps join forces with some others. What it is going to be and how exactly it is going to look like is still unclear but I am very much looking forward to it.

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