

Ar4Ar100

Reflection

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Besides this introduction and the 'graduation process ahead' my reflection on the graduation process remains unchanged. This because the process has only progressed and not altered. The progress made concerns mainly drawing up details for the design I had already depicted previously. Details do bring you closer to the reality of a project. The proximity, sequence and connection of materials constitute the experience of the beholder. This is also very much true for immaterial properties of the whole like its climate. Moreover though, they can be read and transferred into reality by an actual person manipulating and assembling fabricated materials. The aim of design can be said to be this simulation of reality. Nonetheless it has been challenging to incorporate the reality of building into the design process. The key to integral design therefor seems to be experience.

Many clichés can be found in books or conversations in architectural school on drawing reality on a two-dimensional plane. Even though I have suspected them to contain truth all along, they have only become meaningful again when being confronted with them.

By now, having changed method slightly and learned planning I felt it necessary to (re) write the explanatory part of this reflection. The aspects 1-3 however remain unchanged. The latest graduation manual suggests additional aspects which spark my imagination. But in line with recent developments in my graduation process I have chosen to focus on concrete developments in the architectural presentation of my design. To let lines tell tales instead of painting new castles of sand.

Looking back I see my design was based on theory (which I recognized on location and fascinates me). Using research into general knowledge to apply to my specific design assignment. Slightly different from the bachelor's method using analysis, starting points and design to develop general knowledge through the specific.

The product has been called a research instead of a design for that reason. But I realize now (besides the interchangeability of those terms) what I had to learn was design. Besides the actual making of design drawings (in which the tools of the architect reside) it is mainly about showing them. The product serves communication of an idea. That idea is only knowledge when it can be shared and tested. It was necessary as well as instructive to follow the rules that apply to the world of architecture. I do have something to say, I now learned the language; said it and drawn the line. Now I understand what I do not know, as does the reader.

The process deserves, seen its longevity, some explanation. It is however inextricably related to planning, which can indeed be called a result.

Planning I have had to learn. Key was asking for help. During the process I have learned to use planning to change my behavior. Instead of thinking something through, I learned just to begin. That doing is indeed a form of thinking. An open mind allows for change and ambiguity and prevents them from stalling progress. The result might not be what you imagined, but it is richer in meaning because the end has actually been reached. The road I have traveled step by step is about the education of an architect. Doing what has to be done has learned me what I can do and made me realize what I want to do.

The method with which I began was called an ill-defined phenomenological method. This to prioritize the experience of the user; a central concept (without defined starting points) to the themes in my project. Concretely I mentioned working with models to inform drawings instead of the other way around. Because I believe that way the experience really is more influential than, for example technical requirements on design decisions.

This method has worked well up until a certain point. The limit, for me, was P4. Because both models and drawings were made by hand and my skill and experience are limited I could not reach the desired production and precision. The main feedback was that I lingered in the abstract (story) and could not or did not dare to be concrete. It was necessary to refine the drawings as well as the model to show spatial coherency and quality. Because of this I let my story be and focused on the drawings, as requested in the graduation manual, with CAD. This phase coincides with learning how to plan and do what has to be done. The program I chose, REVIT, offers a grateful way to become both more precise and spatial. Moreover it forces the user to consciously single out precisely outlined aspects of the design at certain scales. The largest advantage over working manually is of course the ease and speed of adjustments and reproduction. Nevertheless the interaction, to me, is unnatural and laborious. It reaffirmed that the initial method was well chosen.

The method lies between theory and practice. Its force and mutual influence have become clear to me. It is that which brings knowledge beyond temporality.

The social relevance of the project, as reflected on in the graduation plan, has become the cornerstone of this project. As such it is worth reflecting on, but even more so because it has led to challenges in the design process as well as a reconsideration of the role of the architect.

The research was thematically focused on cultural value, public space, and vacancy. Vacancy has a negative impact on the social realm of the built environment and by (re) introducing cultural atop economical values this social issue could be addressed. Employing a new way of spatial development was proposed.

First of all referring to a practical issue in an academic project means guessing at a variety of parameters. Even more so in the case of proposing a strategy for spatial development (which includes many actors besides the architect). Second of all architecture is a discipline that intends to designate space whereas public space needs to remain open to be appropriated. Third of all architectural design decisions can be aimed towards a social effect or affordance but can only capture materiality. Thus giving priority to the social relevance of the project brings about some issues in the design phase. The project does have a shared program, does assign a considerable part of the building to the public, and does lay bare the cultural values for the public to see. The feasibility, use and effect however cannot be tested and therefor question its relevance.

The aim of the project (social relevance) has somewhat broadened and also includes sustainability. The strategy of spatial development, and the architectural design within, entails taking into account a large(r) span of time. Besides this a position paper paper was written on an actively engaged role of the architect in the process of spatial development. Clearly a position was taken declaring architecture a social act. In turn triggering the realization that this way of doing is not new nor incompatible with architecture that does not concern heritage. Architecture is always intervening in a social context and the architect has always had a social responsibility. Consciously prioritizing this does not necessarily mean the architecture remains more relevant. The architectural assignment leads to the formulation of an object, and the social environment in and around it alternates. Architecture envelops space that can house a multitude of uses through time. And even architecture that was not built to last can become heritage.

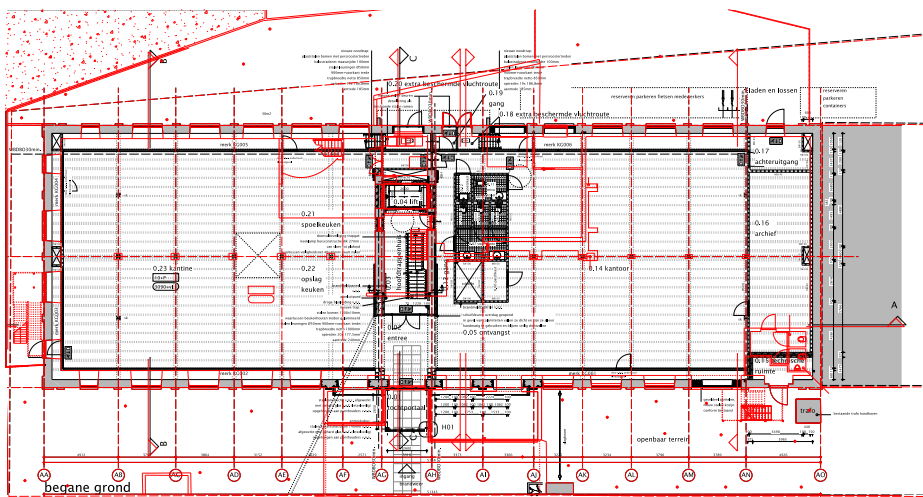
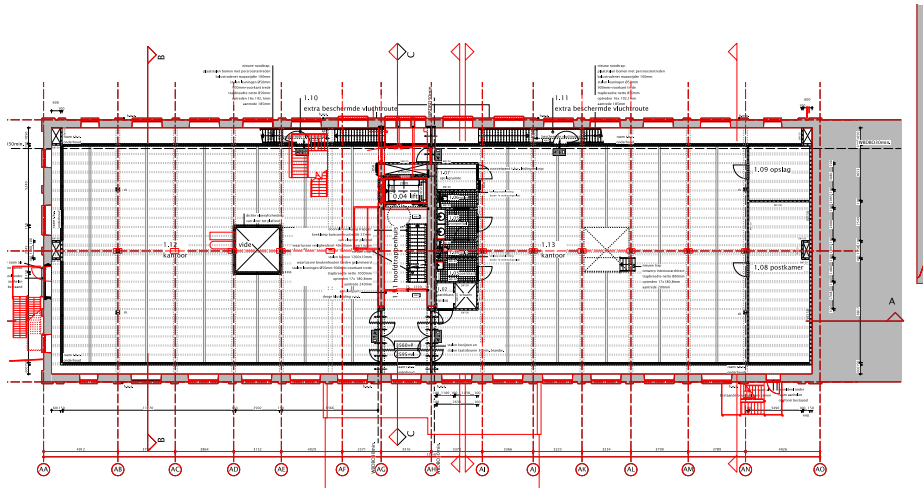
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The chosen method was described in the graduation manual as a somewhat ill defined phenomenological method using models that inform drawings on all scales. Ensuring the precedence of modeling an imagined reality over functional and technical requirements. This method combined well with the aim of a socially relevant project. Insofar as the physical models with scale figures evoked insight with every intervention. Spatial and functional issues were researched and set in one model. Structural and material issues were resolved in a more detailed model, only after finishing the former. Confronted with spatial, functional and especially technical and material issues the social relevance becomes less dominating. Decisions are researched by design and become more intuitive.

The methodical line of approach of the graduation lab complemented the chosen method in this phase. The interpretation of this line was based on the book *Heritage Based Design* by Paul Meurs and a lecture by Sara Stroux. The method or tool of design is often similar to that of the analysis therefor the value assessment is prominent. Tracing a clear method or strategy in a particular building by a particular architect proves a challenge. It is clear however that it revolves around the question how old and new relate to each other. One could compare examples or 'best practices' and categorize them according to that relation. Visiting and documenting similar projects on an appropriate scale provided argumentation for design decisions. Even though this approach proved to be an important aid it should perhaps have been developed further. An analysis and comparison of specific aspects or parts of the reference projects would have made a more solid case for design choices in this project.

The differing approaches of similar reference projects also shed a different light on the role of the value assessment. Albeit central to the design process it is clearly open to interpretation. Ideally this part of the process could be compared as well. A critical inquiry into the aspects of heritage in such an assessment - being beauty, scientific significance, and historical value – led to taking more freedom in transforming the existing building.



The research done up until the P2 served well to set the design brief. An important question remained how the themes cultural value, public space, and vacancy would combine in the actual design. The three share a social relevance and have become reasons to show, devote, and open up the building to the public by cutting into, disclosing, and sharing it.

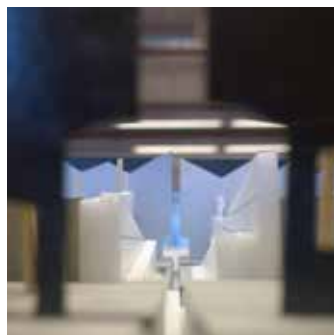
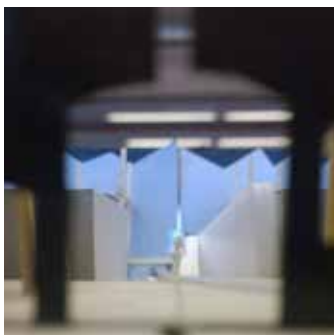
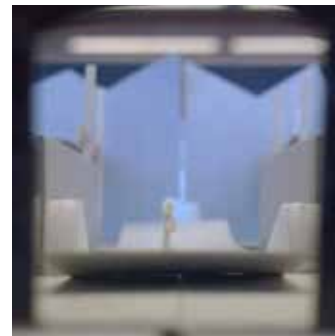
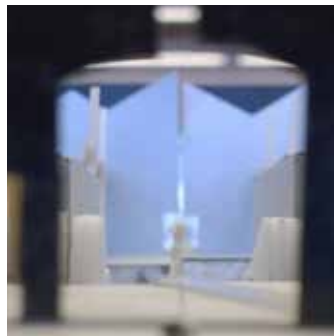
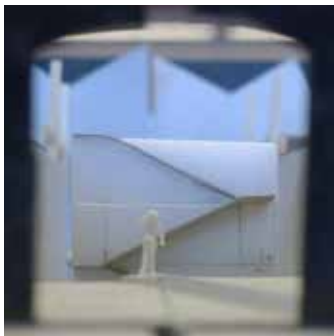
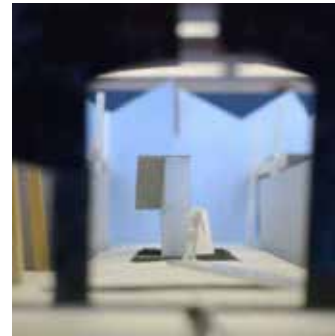
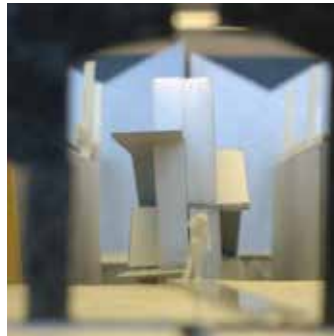
In the graduation plan and P2 presentation design research was proposed that has not been done as such. It concerned typological, structural, and especially climatological and material research. Traditionally, as taught in the bachelors, these inform design decisions. Instead of doing these analyses prior to the design the process was started in a research by design fashion. Thinking by doing might appear to be a less rational approach but suits the, arguably heuristic, architectural design process well.

This does however blur the lines between research and design. Therefore it is important to make a distinction between the design as such and the process of designing. This graduation project is meant to be a research rather than a design. Thus the result, a design, is not so much an instruction set to build but more of an exploration. It contains a multitude of representations (with less detail) instead of the single one. Examining the possibilities, difficulties, and achievability of a new way of spatial development. The experiment concerns a specific case within the discipline but could be evaluated and improved upon. Sharing the accumulated knowledge, as in the case of reference projects, is key.

The process of designing has brought about a different relationship between research and design. The design process, using a model, could be described as an iteration of divergence and convergence. Practically this means making variants within the model and choosing the appropriate one. Both the making of variants as the choice for one can be informed intuitively or by research. More often than not a concise research is done on the aspect of the building that is being designed before modeling and deciding. The selection of one is influenced predominantly by the effect it has on other aspects of the design (which itself could be considered research). It cannot be ruled out that previously discarded variants become options again as the design becomes more detailed. The variety of options, multiplicity and speed of turns taken however make it difficult to trace ones steps. Besides a few key decisions, of which the alternatives were photographed, the process and research are not clearly visible in the final model.

The extent to which a method is defined and its results repeatable says something about the executor. This method of trial and error is more familiar to a designer than a researcher. Understanding the consequences of developing the built environment differently in this project is more important than a satisfactory result or definitive plan however. Therefore it is made by a designing researcher rather than a researching designer.

Variants for central staircase design in model
own pictures



Despite my heart burning with desire to develop the story/research and its representation/dissemination I now realize with a rational mind that it is time to take the next step. That is why I will primarily work on refining and completing product list drawings until they abide to the rules of readability.

Besides this well-defined task I would like to take one more step in depicting the design. Making a presentation model would be obvious. Learning with and from CAD however I presume I could learn lots of rendering (realistically or not). The same would be true for printing or lasering a model. Luckily I have managed to learn planning.