

Reflection P5

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Introduction

With the P5 presentation approaching, it's a good time to reflect on the project's progress. Long-term individual projects can lead to tunnel vision, making it harder to spot patterns or assess decision effectiveness. Reviewing the process and original expectations offers useful insights into design methods and helps improve future architectural work.

This reflection is structured into three sections. Firstly, it examines the research undertaken, assessing its effectiveness and the manner in which it informed the design. Secondly, it reviews the design process over the past fourteen weeks, analysing what proved successful or challenging, and how feedback from tutors was integrated. It also evaluates the application of the methodology outlined in the Graduation Plan. Finally, it reflects on the academic and societal significance of this graduation project.

Research Reflection

The research was divided into two parts: the thematic research in the form of a research paper and the analysis of the existing building Bellevue.

The objective of the thematic research was to establish a definition of brutalism through the lens of its makeability. To explore this theme, I conducted a literature review, consulting architectural books and publications. I approached the subject from two distinct angles: one technical, the other more abstract. By combining insights from both perspectives, I aimed to formulate a comprehensive definition of brutalism that would serve as the basis for the subsequent design phase.

While working on this highly theoretical research, I found it difficult to determine which elements could inform my design. Even though I was able to clearly conclude that, in brutalism, architectural aesthetics and construction are intertwined rather than separate, I still faced challenges translating this insight into a concrete – to nicely play with words – design concept.

Alongside my thematic research, I conducted an analysis of the existing building, Bellevue. This process was much more straightforward, involving architectural studies of the context, materials, and other factors. I also visited The Hague's city archive several times to obtain historic drawings.

After weeks in the design phase, it became clear that the true value of the research lies in how the research paper interacts with the Bellevue analysis. I began to ask: Which technical aspects of brutalism are reflected in Bellevue? And how was that constructed? In what ways is materiality addressed?

Suddenly, I understood the core of my research: the foundation that could inform my design process lay in gaining a deeper insight into not just brutalism in general, but specifically

Bellevue's expression of it. Combining both theoretical perspectives and architectural analysis allowed me to thoroughly understand what the building stands for, providing a strong basis for how I approached the transformation of the existing, and the design of the new structure above it.

Design Reflection

Reflecting on the Graduation Plan I created before P2, I now see that my design methodology was overly broad. I included very general architectural approaches such as site analysis, massing studies, façade studies etc. However, I've realized that a project requiring a transformation and an addition responding directly to the brutalist aesthetic calls for a much more specific strategy.

With input from my architecture and building technology tutors, Anne and Lex, I spent the initial weeks of the design phase exploring what intrigued me about the building, examining research and plans for the new 180-meter towers, and creating reduction drawings to visualize these ideas (see figures 1 and 2).

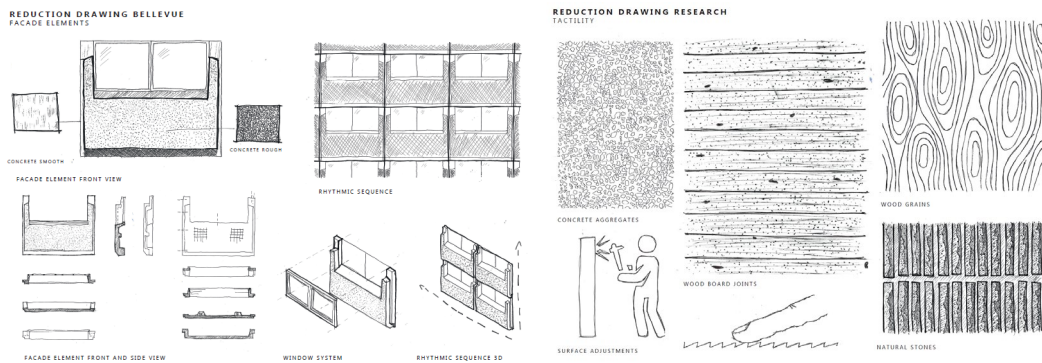


Figure 1: Reduction Drawing Bellevue. Own work.

Figure 2: Reduction Drawing Research. Own work.

These reduction drawings represent the conclusion of my research: an interplay of the fascinations coming from three different perspective. The reduction drawings ultimately established the basis for the primary concept: enhancing the Bellevue aesthetic by setting it against its inverse, thereby generating a clear yet contrasting dynamic between the two building masses.

Once I had established the main concept, I followed a well-structured design process over the subsequent weeks. My approach moved from large-scale considerations, such as massing studies, down to finer details, continually seeking to find a relation the main concept. As a participant in the Architectural Engineering design studio, I put strong emphasis on both structural design and the detailing of the new and existing façade elements. I found it striking that even small decisions made at the detail level could significantly influence the overall architectural expression.

Academic Value

This graduation project is closely connected to the 'Stock' domain in the Architectural Engineering studio, which investigates how existing buildings can be reimagined to suit present and future requirements. Specifically, it focuses on overlooked brutalist buildings that are planned for demolition. The project's goal is to highlight the possibilities these structures hold rather than dismiss them as obsolete or nonfunctional.

The project fits within the 'Architecture' master track by giving an example of a transformation of a rigid, single-use structure into a modern mixed-use building, maintaining its distinctive brutalist aesthetic. It also supports the program's goals by reimagining existing buildings and offering an alternative to the unsustainable cycle of demolition and new construction.

From an academic standpoint, this study advances architectural research by presenting a comprehensive analysis of brutalism's aesthetic characteristics. By applying these findings to an existing brutalist structure and consequently using this knowledge for transformation, the research effectively bridges subjective aesthetic considerations with technical architectural principles. This approach establishes a more robust theoretical framework for interpreting the unique attributes of brutalism and contributes meaningfully to the broader database of architectural theory.

I'm personally interested to see whether the approach I've used—theoretical research, building analysis, synthesising research conclusions, formulating a design approach, and designing—could also work for other brutalist structures. It might be even more intriguing to apply this method to buildings with different architectural styles with an emphasis on material expression and explore its effectiveness there.