

Reflection 3 May 2025

My graduation project 'From Fixation to Leftover Reconfiguration' is about the collection, curation and reconfiguration of leftover materials in the world of building and architecture. Through a thorough research into the existing reuse network of Opalis and the practice of reuse architect and builder Bruno Vermeersch I learned about the importance of reuse craftsmanship when working with reused materials. If we want to build with what's available in our reuse network we steer towards an architecture of improvisation. At P2 I documented a small scale improvised intervention on my site through the method of stop motion.

'How do you scale up this improvisation?' and 'Which principles will set the rules for your improvisation?', were two questions my design tutor Sam Stalker posed after the presentation. This upscaling is necessary to seriously incorporate the reuse cycle into the profession of architecture, urbanism and building sciences. In the current age of extraction and discarding, reuse craftsmanship is underdeveloped. There's a knowledge gap when architects want to build with reused materials. This results in superficial reuse, which fails to play a considerable role in limiting CO2 emissions.

Herbouwhuis

To bridge this gap, as a programme for my project I proposed Herbouwhuis, a reuse institute consisting of an architectural/building office, a reuse cycle school and ateliers for individual artists and small artistic collectives. The project is located in the centre of our masterplan and connects the material flows in the west with the neighbourhood in the east. Herbouwhuis will develop knowledge of reuse craftsmanship. The building itself will be developed according to the principles of the school. The ambitions of the institute are somewhat similar to the ambitions of Bauhaus 100 years ago. It doesn't just celebrate craftsmanship over industrialisation, but pleads for reuse over production.

Research and design in constant dialogue

During the process of my graduation project, research and design pretty much merged together. My preliminary research conclusions resulted in Herbouwhuis' PvE for example and insecurities about design choices led me back to the research. To design a proper reuse cycle school, I decided it was necessary to also design the curriculum. By tackling both spatiality and theoretical content of the programme, the overall project grew stronger.

Approach, methods and methodology

There's a big contrast between improvisation and a large scale architectural project. Sometimes it almost seemed that the two were incompatible. The architectural heritage drawing technique of colour coding helped me to substantiate my method, showing clearly what's existing, what I take away, what I add and whether these additions are reused, reconfigured in situ or new. With head of the chair Paul Vermeulen I had an interesting conversation about time layers. 'Which time layers do you respect and which ones you take away?' He asked me. We concluded that it should be the goal to respect all time layers, even when this results in very complex design challenges.

Model making fulfilled a key role in the process until now. By making a model, we can bring the two dimensional and often digital ideas into a three dimensional reality. It offered me a convincing and informing way of getting closer to my main research and design object, the reused material. Looking back, I could've been more drastic in my approach, eliminating almost completely the digital 2D drawing and building the project in a scaled, but physical reality. In this respect, I could've been more courageous, but also the structure of our curriculum demands certain products that ask for a 2D CAD model. The curriculum in my reuse cycle school doesn't. My first hand graduation experience and actual process really much informed the design of my project's curriculum.

Positioning Herbouwhuis in society and academics

My project proposes a new coexistence of material and human agents. Very much in line with the



aim of the Urban Architecture Graduation studio 'Low Town Down Town', I try to normalise the 'from waste to gift'-mentality. This mentality should be considered on different scales. Together with two fellow students I made a 300.000 m² masterplan that functioned as a combination of a demolition contractor, a 'kringloop' and a recycling station. On the other hand, I investigated a fragment of 10 to 12 metres to see how reuse dynamics could lead to a useful intervention. Moreover, the reuse cycle school offers education for both architects, project managers and building contractors. Thus, the project is transdisciplinary and plays on multiple scales, showing the importance of a paradigm shift to a more holistic building profession. This way, hopefully, the reuse mentality becomes more common in society in general, bringing materials closer to agents and developing reuse craftsmanship, accessible for professionals and amateurs.

I did not yet address an important tension field in my project. A tension between academy and society. In general, a reuse cycle institute is somewhat symbolic. While the reuse cycle should be about holistic, democratic dynamics, an institute has an elite connotation to it. In my project I try to bring materials closer to agents, but I'm designing and presenting in the academic realm of TU Delft. Is it a bubble, a heterotopia? At least it's an environment that connects to a very specific part of society, not reaching many others. To tackle this schism, as a studio group we tried to connect to the people from Hoboken, the neighbourhood our designs are situated in. We did this by presenting our P3 on site in Blikfabriek, setting up a public exhibition that was accessible for free. Residents of the neighbourhoods visited the exhibition and saw our work in progress. Their feedback we could implement in the rest of our design process. In May of next year I'm presenting my project together with three other projects at a public event organised by the archive of Hoboken. Although these are just small gestures, I'm sure that this shifting from academic to urban context hugely enriches our projects and architectural urban understanding. Furthermore, it informs residents and other agents of spatial plans and ideas that might once have an influence on their personal life.

Just like the architecture of my project this process is very much about transparency. Showing what alterations materials undergo before reuse and showing what happens inside of the walls of a 'design institute'. I am convinced that transparency is key in shaping a qualitative urban landscape and I'm motivated to develop this democratic communication strategy in my professional life. In the coming weeks, I see a beautiful challenge to merge the research findings and design into transferable project results, with the P5 as an ultimate transfer moment where I communicate the projects to friends, family and colleagues. The past few months I found out how fieldwork and a careful investigation of existing qualities and dynamics can be very overwhelming. It has been hard sometimes to funnel these elements into a clear design. My plan for example, took a while before showing functional clarity, because I was too busy reacting to existing structures. Sometimes I had to kill my darlings, but moreover it's about spending time on communication. To make complex findings understandable for others, but mainly for yourself. Now I'm at a point that the building seems to make sense, a bit too much sense. How does the improvisation and unpredictable stock of reuse material make its way back into the project? I think to show this, I have to make things move again.

To conclude, I'd like to pose two reflection questions that relate to the content of my work.

1. To what extent is reuse a feasible future for large scale architecture projects?
2. How does reuse craftsmanship relate to the conventional skill set of an architect?