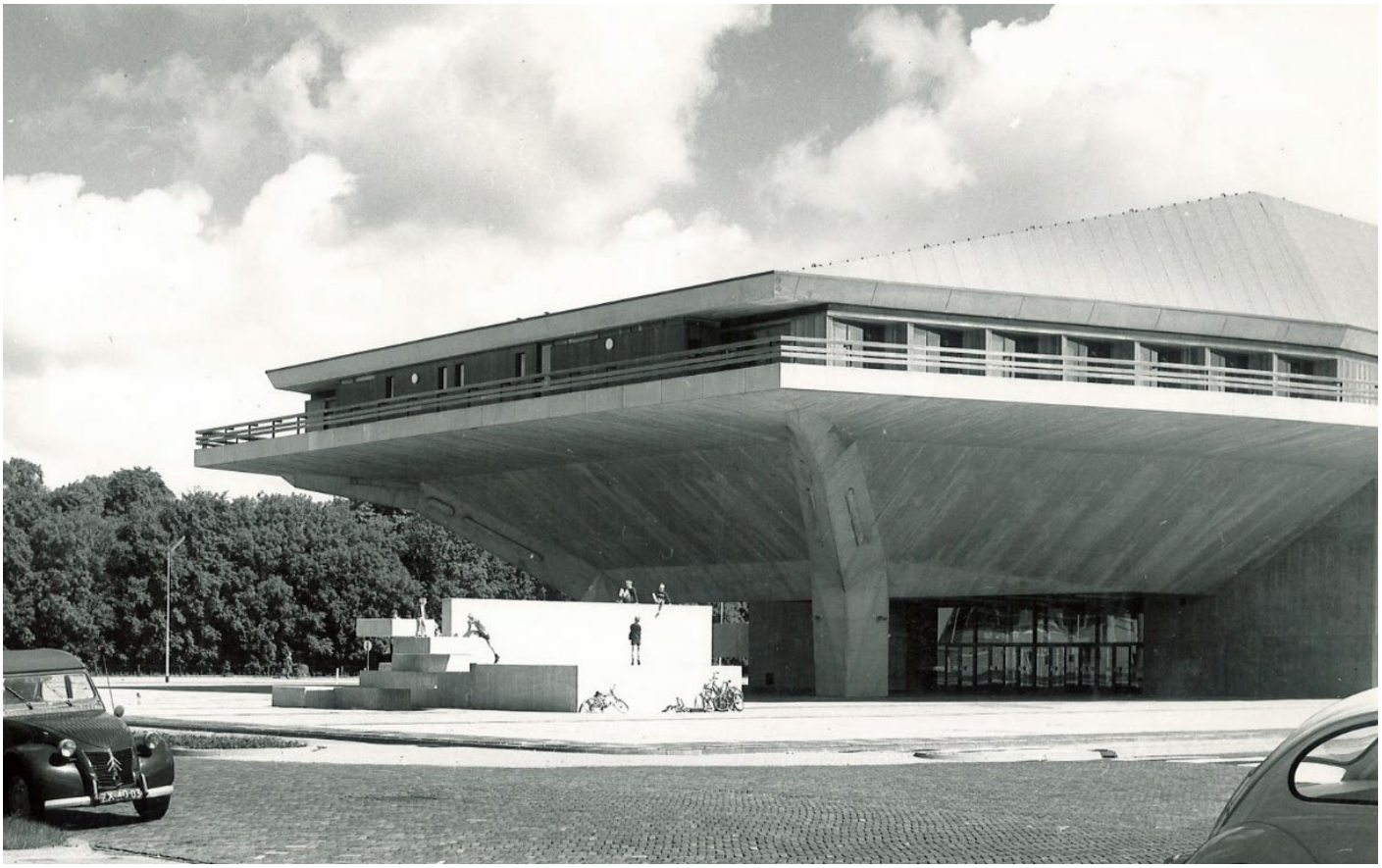

The Brutalist Revaluation

A research on the reception of the Dutch béton brut

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Abstract

Brutalism has once again become hot and booming. What has reignited the flame of this controversial building style for it to suddenly appear abundantly in pop-culture? Social media, films, perfume, or even Brutalist web design are just a few of the examples that Brutalism is not confined to architectural publications, the Dutch climate being no exception.

The research investigates the history of Brutalism and looks at explanations of academics on this Brutalist comeback. These theories are taken into account when investigating and analysing three Dutch concrete icons: the TU Delft auditorium by Van den Broek & Bakema (1966), the *provinciehuis* Noord-Brabant by Hugh Maaskant (1971), and the town hall of Terneuzen, also by Van den Broek & Bakema (1972). The reception history of the trio is compared by first looking at newspapers and architectural journals published shortly after their completion, before taking a look at current opinions on the Brutalist designs. Furthermore, this research analyses the phenomenological qualities of the exposed concrete, investigating whether or not this plays an important role in the architectural assessment and possible revaluation.

The research found that the public opinion on the architecture did not alter drastically. The TU Delft auditorium has consistently been regarded as 'good architecture'. The *provinciehuis* is a special case, since most biting commentaries of the seventies can be explained by the political and social tensions, which now seem a thing of the past. Here the public opinion seems to have shifted, but the complicated context makes it hard to objectively assess if the building would have met the same resilience, had it not been built many years after its planned construction. A questionnaire on the Terneuzen town hall indicates the phenomenological qualities of concrete can work repellent, yet when confronted with the architecture for a longer period, people recognise its architectural value. This is something of the past and the present. Nowadays, people do regard the building worthy of monument status, but 'ugly' is still the common denominator.

Although there is a revaluation going on, one must keep in mind that revaluation just means there is a regained interest and people start to assess the value of something again, be it positive or negative. There are multiple motives for this revaluation. In architecture and literature, it is common for outdated styles from fifty years ago to regain interest. Controversial styles also become subject of academic studies, hoping to shed new light on why they were valued that way. Brutalist architecture now also reaches a point that for many a decision needs to be made whether or not the expensive maintenance costs are worthwhile. With demolition as the alternative, a discussion on heritage listing is inevitable. Social media sees the debate reach the public, stimulating also the non-experts to join the conversation and give their opinion on the architectural values of the built environment.

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Introduction

There are few architectural styles as provocative as Brutalism. Ever since its beginning in the 1950s, Brutalist architecture has been a focal point for discussion, both on its aesthetical and ethical values (Van den Heuvel, 2017a). Now, long after its 'golden age' in the second half of the last century, Brutalism has once again become topic for debate. Social media accounts promoting the unforgiving designs, coffee table books on the former Soviet adaptations of the 'béton brut', databases such as #SOSBrutalism advocating for the preservation of the so-called 'concrete monsters' (Deutsches Architekturmuseum & Wüstenroth Foundation, 2017; Elser et al., 2017), government instances debating whether or not Brutalist architecture should be considered as heritage and placed under protection (Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, 2019; Scheurmann, 2017): they are all undeniable proof of a revaluation of the controversial building style.

This topic of revaluation is precisely what this thesis focuses on. Since some Brutalist buildings have been deemed ugly even right after being built (Mitchell, 2016) and are now adored by many, the question arises as to what the underlying motives are for this change in valuation. For this research, Brutalism is defined as: a direct architecture with an emphasis on image, functionality, clear exhibition of structure, and a valuation of materials as found, often mainly being béton brut.

Furthermore, the thesis will zoom in on Brutalist architecture in the Dutch urban landscape. Three public and iconic Brutalist buildings are investigated, built in the glory days of the architectural style. The three buildings are, respectively: the TU Delft auditorium by Van den Broek & Bakema in Delft (1966), the *provinciehuis* Noord-Brabant by Hugh Maaskant in 's-Hertogenbosch (1971), and the town hall by Van den Broek & Bakema in Terneuzen (1973).

The main question of the thesis reads: *What are the causes leading to the revaluation of Brutalism in the Dutch urban landscape?* The first part of the research aims to give a better understanding of Brutalism, its criticisms and its global comeback. The second half consists of an analysis of the three Dutch Brutalist buildings and reflecting the previous knowledge on their architecture and reception history. Subquestions the research aims to answer are: *What is the historical context of Brutalism in The Netherlands? What are current academic notions on the global Brutalist comeback? What is the pattern in revaluation for the TU Delft auditorium? What is the pattern in revaluation for the provinciehuis Noord-Brabant? What is the pattern in revaluation for the town hall in Terneuzen?*

The research has been conducted through: extensive literature studies on the topics of Brutalism, reception history, and phenomenology; studying older and recent architectural journals criticizing or promoting Brutalist architecture; studying (local) newspapers writing about the selected Dutch Brutalist trio; and finally through analysis of the buildings themselves.

Chapter 1: Brutalism in its historical context

Brutalism is so much of a controversial style, that there is not even a general consensus on its definition and terminology. This much becomes clear when looking at Brutalism's history. Looking at the origins of the movement is pivotal in order to understand, and to critically assess its later architecture.

1.1 Origins of the name

Brutalism was principally never called 'Brutalism', but was rather named 'New Brutalism' or 'Neo Brutalism'. Although it is not entirely without debate (Oechslin, 2017, pp. 56-57), the architect to first coin the term New Brutalism, was Swedish architect Hans Asplund. In a letter to Eric de Maré, Asplund mentions that, when viewing the drawings by his colleagues Bengt Edman and Lennart Holm for a house in Uppsala, he sarcastically called them Neo-Brutalists (De Maré, 1956; Frampton, 2017, p. 9). Supposedly the name stuck and made its way down to England.

As for the word 'Brutalist' itself, this does not derive from the word 'brutal'. It is actually a translation of the French 'béton brut', meaning 'raw concrete', as put forward by one of the godfathers of Brutalism: Le Corbusier (Oechslin, 2017, p. 50). Le Corbusier, well known for the use of concrete in his architecture, mentions the phrase when describing the materialisation of his Unité d'Habitation (1952) (one of the most famous buildings labelled 'Brutalist'). Le Corbusier later admitted that his invention of the term was actually incidental. 'Béton brut' came about when realising that with eighty contractors and an enormous amount of concrete, grouting became almost impossible, thus deciding to leave the concrete in the rough (Samuel, 2007).

Figure 1.1: Le Corbusier, Unité d'Habitation, Marseille (Phaidon Editors, 1952)

1.2 In search of a definition: The Smithsons vs. Banham

Although the name has its Scandinavian-French roots, the movement was largely considered a British one (Banham, 1966). (It should be noted though that Brutalism later on became a global phenomenon and cannot be pinpointed to one geological location (Elser, 2017; Legault, 2017; Phaidon Editors, 2020)). After World War II, the new dominant architectural style of the United Kingdom was that of lightweight, minimalist, prefabricated, Scandinavian

cottage architecture: the New Humanism (Calder, 2017; Frampton, 2017, p. 9). Inevitably, a reaction followed by architects that wanted to evade this 'dull' future, who strived to re-achieve the original integrity and strength of modern architecture (Banham, 1966; Boyd, 1967).

1.2.1 The architecture of Alison and Peter Smithson (1952-1954)

Architects Peter and Alison Smithson were the pioneers of a new movement with their design for the Hunstanton School in Norfolk, which had a mixed reception (Zimmerman, 2017). The tough building was made of steel and brick and tried to return to the theoretical basis of Modernism in the 1920s. Furthermore, the architects wanted a high level of architectural honesty, which was achieved namely by explicitly showing all cables and pipes instead of hiding them (Calder, 2017).

It was then also the Smithsons of whom we can find the earliest notion of 'New Brutalism' in print, when describing their design House in Soho (1952) in the journal Architectural Design (A. Smithson & Smithson, 1953): "In fact, had this been built it would have been the first exponent of the "new brutalism" in England, (…). It is our intention in this building to have the structure exposed entirely, without internal finishes wherever practicable. The Contractor should aim at a high standard of basic construction as in a small warehouse."

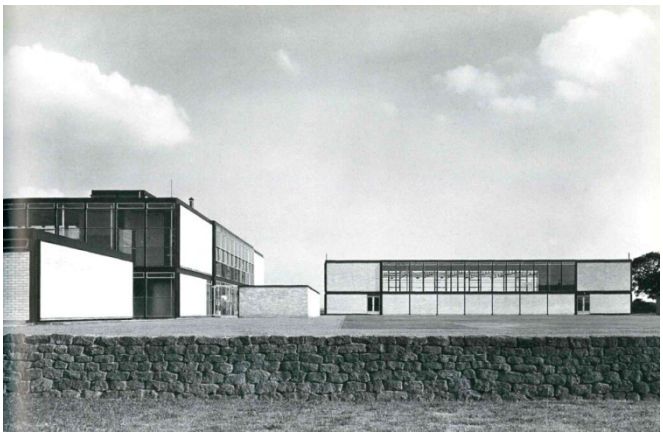

Figure 1.2 (top): Alison and Peter Smithson, The Hunstanton School, exterior (Henderson, 2001a)

Figure 1.3 (right): Alison and Peter Smithson, The Hunstanton School, interior (Henderson, 2001b)

1.2.2 Banham: The New Brutalism (1955)

Despite being the first to publish the term 'New Brutalism', the Smithsons were not the responsible party for popularising it. It was the article *The New Brutalism* of architecture critic Reyner Banham (1955) which let the notion catch on with the general public (Van den Heuvel, 2017a). A clear definition of New Brutalism was still missing up to that point, thus it was Banham's intention to lay out a theoretical framework for the movement. Through analysis of the Hunstanton School (and the Yale Art Centre by Louis Kahn) Banham came up

with a definition for a New Brutalist building: 1. Memorability as an Image, since this is what affects the emotions; 2. Clear exhibition of Structure, since it is the relationship of parts; 3. Valuation of Materials 'as found', meaning raw materials (Banham, 1955). Moreover, the 'memorability as an image' characteristic ties in with what Banham described as Brutalism's "*je-m'en-foutisme*": its bloody-mindedness (Banham, 1955, p. 357).

Although functionality is generally considered an important aspect of Brutalism, Banham excluded this from his definition. He was of opinion that current buildings were too easily considered good architecture when solely functionality and structure were provided. He found that the form-giving obligation, which made the building memorable, was too easily forgotten (Banham, 1955). As Banham later responds to a critical reader's letter on his article: "Beauty equals truth equals beauty, functionalism equals a glass box and nothing else, …" (Banham & Brown, 1956).

1.2.3 Discussions and Banham's swansong to Brutalism (1966)

Banham's 1955 article led to much discussion regarding a proper definition of New Brutalism. Particularly the Smithsons were against Banham's description of Brutalism. What ensued was a lifelong fight between the two protagonists (as well as other parties) on the true meaning of Brutalism (Legault, 2017). This is best demonstrated in a quote by Peter Smithson (2004), after Alison and Banham had already died: "Brutalism is not what Reyner Banham was talking about."

The post-1955 quarrelling eventually meant a Smithson Brutalism and a Banham Brutalism (Van den Heuvel, 2017a). Smithson Brutalism was about directness, truth to material and sensorial experience. It was not about roughness, crudeness, and oversized structure (A. Smithson & Smithson, 1966): Brutalism was ethical, not stylistic (A. Smithson & Smithson, 1957). Banham Brutalism revolved around his previously named pillars of Brutalism and are visual and technology-driven (Van den Heuvel, 2017a).

With his book *New Brutalism: Ethic or aesthetic?* Banham (1966) marked the end of the New Brutalist era and pronounced the movement 'dead'. New Brutalism started out as an ethical design attitude towards architecture, but over the years it had diluted into a mere architectural style. As Legault (2017, p. 24) summarises Banham: "… The movement had lost its ethical value and was now reduced to a limited and limiting aesthetic approach."

1.2.4 A third type of Brutalism and its downfall

By becoming a style, Brutalism was now officially dead. Yet it is interesting that most architecture that is nowadays deemed 'Brutalist', was actually built after its presumed death and is Brutalist neither in the way Banham nor the Smithsons meant (Elser et al., 2017). This architecture was largely funded by the British welfare state. For the later downfall of this 'non-Brutalist Brutalism' in the 1970s multiple theories arise: it could have been the fall of the welfare state (Elser, 2017, p. 19), general connotations with the shortcomings of modern architecture of that time (Ockman, 2017), connotations with a 'second destruction' of historic buildings after WWII to make room for Brutalist creations (Scheurmann, 2017, pp. 160-161), its association with totalitarianism (Stewart, 2022), or it may just have been its

alienating, unsentimental, and non-future proof aspects of Brutalism that were solely loved by architecture specialists and disfavoured by the general public (Filler, 2016).

1.3 Brutalism in The Netherlands

In the Netherlands Brutalism was not discussed as much as in Britain. Nonetheless, by becoming a global movement (Phaidon Editors, 2020, pp. 6-8), there are plenty examples of Dutch Brutalist architecture. Aldo van Eyck can be considered a proto-Brutalist. His raw concrete playgrounds from 1947 onwards show a valuation for the 'as found' materiality, as well as visual and sensory aspects of Banham and Smithson Brutalism, years before Asplund, Le Corbusier, or the Smithsons and Banham themselves knew what Brutalism was (Lefaivre, 2017).

Figure 1.4: A playground in Amsterdam by Aldo van Eyck (1954).

Van Eyck would go on to use exposed concrete throughout his career, but never referred to his work as Brutalist. In fact, this can also be said for other major Dutch Brutalists, such as Herman Hertzberger, Hugh Maaskant and Jacob Bakema. This is quite peculiar, considering all (except Maaskant) were part of Team X, a modern architectural organisation as a successor to CIAM, with other core members being the Smithsons. One can only assume that the Smithsons must have had a bit of influence on the Dutch entourage. Nevertheless, Bakema would go on to summarise his ideas as "architecturbanism" and "total space" instead of Brutalist (Lefaivre, 2017).

The golden age of Dutch Brutalism collapsed at the end of the 1980s, after Hertzberger's last concrete block designs were finished. Brutalism was taken over by lesser designers, taking a more dystopian turn and resulting in socially brutal buildings like the Bijlmermeer. In the mid-90s there was a short-lived Brutalist revival, but the Welfarist, adaptable Brutalist spirit that once was, was long gone (Lefaivre, 2017).

1.4 Conclusion

It is only fitting that Brutalism, next to its physical exponents, is highly controversial on theoretical and historical level as well. A Scandinavian-inspired name to an anti-Scandinavian architecture, an incidental hind-thought that gave birth to béton brut, an endless quarrel between protagonists about the definition of the movement, a Brutalist building-boom after

the movement is pronounced dead, the Dutch proto-Brutalist Van Eyck being a humanist, the contradictions do not stop (Legault, 2017).

This is the reason why, after seventy years of Brutalism, it is still difficult to give a proper definition on Brutalist architecture. Even contemporary academics do not use the same definition and simply use exposed concrete as the lowest common denominator (Lefaivre, 2017, p. 77). This leads to buildings being put in catalogues of Brutalist architecture while not even meeting any of the criteria (Filler, 2016). Therefore in this research Brutalism is defined as: a direct architecture with an emphasis on image, functionality, clear exhibition of structure, and a valuation of materials as found, often mainly being béton brut. This way Brutalism involves both Banham and Smithson Brutalism, as well as its Dutch counterparts.

Despite Dutch Brutalism not being discussed in journals as explicitly as in British media, the historical context of the movement in Great Britain is significant, since it shows the long way and extreme polarities that have always been part of the movement. These findings are pivotal if one is to look into the revaluation of Brutalism, regardless what country one is focussing on.

Chapter 2: Academic evaluations on Brutalism's comeback

Despite its double collapse (first after Banham pronounced it dead, and later on at the end of the last century), a major Brutalist comeback has been on the agenda for quite some time. Since the start of the millennium, there has been a steep increase in publications on Brutalism (Google Books Ngram Viewer, 2023), with significant examples being the 2012 symposium on Brutalism in Berlin (Wüstenroth Foundation et al., 2017) and SOS Brutalism (2017). Yet, one cannot stop asking themselves what *really* is the underlying origin of this revaluation. This chapter aims to answer this question by looking at contemporary examples of Brutalism in popular culture and by looking at possible motives for this increase in popularity.

2.1 Dystopian nostalgia

Even though the general public seems to strongly link Brutalism and dystopia (see chapter 1.2.3 to 1.4), Brutalism is surpassing its architectural embodiments. Having become a synonym for anything concrete related, the 21st century saw Brutalist web designs, concrete flower vases and candlesticks (Elser, 2017); it even went as far as 'concrete' perfume by Comme des Garçons (2017). For the launch CDG even created an immersive concrete experience in a Brooklyn warehouse, the perfume being a homage to the 'concrete jungle', revolving around the significant elements of concrete: destruction, construction, and creation (Estiler, 2017). An online version of The Concrete Experience is still available, where one can immerse themselves in an audio-visual concrete landscape (Comme des Garçons Parfums, Basaltes, & Neunau, 2017).

Figure 2.1: The Concrete Experience (Comme des Garçons Parfums et al., 2017)

Beyond the individual material, Brutalist architecture is also prevalent in popular culture through (coffee table) books, social media accounts, and television. Social media's pivotal role is evident through the popularity of accounts such as Fuck Yeah Brutalism (2010), Keep

Rotterdam Ugly (2017), and platforms such as #SOSBrutalism (Deutsches Architekturmuseum & Wüstenroth Foundation, 2017; Elser et al., 2017), contributing to Brutalism's revaluation and aestheticization (Lonergan, 2020; Phaidon Editors, 2020, p. 6).

Nevertheless, it must be noted that Brutalism is not solely celebrated all of a sudden. In television Brutalism often takes on an evil stereotype by the tendency to highlight Brutalist environments in dystopian films or as the villain's lair, still confirming its dystopian link and criticisms (Biber, 2022). The latest example being the Belgian-Dutch science fiction television series Arcadia (VRT & KRO-NCRV, 2023a), using radio Kootwijk and other concrete icons as their décor (Witman, 2023).

Figure 2.2: Radio Kootwijk in its original form (left) and after edit in Arcadia (right) (VRT & KRO-NCRV, 2023b).

Moreover, as a reaction to social media groups promoting Brutalism, accounts such as Society for the Nonpreservation of Brutalism (2018) have been created, illustrating that, although there is a revaluation going on, the public remains divided; social media comment sections, be it YouTube videos, fora, or any other medium, flourish with Brutalist adversaries and proponents (Quora, 2017). Once again, the abhorrence of Brutalism is more about the béton brut than that of the entire scope of Brutalism, with the main criticisms still seeing the buildings as drab, dehumanizing, unforgiving, apart from negative associations with unsentimental military bunkers (Elser, 2017; Filler, 2016; Mitchell, 2016). This supposed mundaneness also leads to opposition to the protection of the Brutalist buildings, with the lack of something extraordinary challenging its heritage preservation (Scheurmann, 2017, pp. 169-170).

2.2 Explanation of a revaluation

The motive behind the fundamental shift in the way we regard Brutalist architecture is not entirely clear yet. One of the theories on why Brutalism is regaining positive reception may partly lie in the appealing photographs that hide underneath the architectural qualities of the concrete behemoths (99% Invisible, 2015; Mitchell, 2016). As shown in the previous paragraph, social media and books played a crucial role in letting these photographs reach the public, stimulating the Brutalist discourse (Lonergan, 2020).

Another theory seeks to find the answer in social and political aspects. Since concrete buildings are expensive to maintain and difficult to modify or demolish, they tend to become permanent features in the built environment (Dunning, 2018). As Elser (2017, p. 19) put it: "they literally stand around." Dunning speculates that this level of permanence is exactly what makes the movement so appealing in our chaotic world which keeps on rapidly changing.

Architect Jean-Louis Cohen (2017, p. 339) figures it has to do with nostalgia for architecture that was not market-related, but derived from clear intentions: "Today we are experiencing a certain return to socially relevant architecture, (…) and Brutalism comes inevitably to the forefront of the reflection."

Moving away from the characteristics of Brutalism, time itself may prove the most important factor. Architecture critic Martin Filler (2016) notes how there has always been a collective "reawakened interest in the disdained buildings of two generations earlier", with the reviled Brutalism being no exception. As Nancy Mitchell (2016) states how the life cycle of design "circles around from new, (…) to dated, to retro cool".

"Architecture often attains new value when its existence is threatened," Filler (2016) continues, "whether one likes a currently démodé style or not." Projects like #SOSBrutalism confirm this statement, the goal of the latter being to close the gap between the experts and the public in an attempt to stimulate the revaluation and preservation of concrete monsters ready to be taken down (Elser, 2017, p. 15).

The existence is also threatened because most Brutalist buildings turn fifty years old now, a crucial turning point, since after fifty years they have reached their original end of life scenario. This then raises the question of whether or not to preserve the concrete structures (Hannema, 2021).

Postgraduate academicians are also key in the re-examination of Brutalism. By tending to steer students toward neglected or discounted, yet methodically advancing subjects that still require proper investigation, it was only a matter of time before Ph.D. supervisors put forward the topic of Brutalism. Often this is done with the aspiration that the new analysis provides valuable insights (Filler, 2016; Lonergan, 2020, p. 221).

His article concludes by saying the comeback is not surprising, given that today's computer-designed architecture is "strenuously exhibitionist" and in fact results in behemoths far stranger than the ones of "relatively low-tech concrete" (Filler, 2016).

2.3 Conclusion

The results of this chapter show that there undoubtedly is an ongoing revaluation of Brutalist architecture. However, one should keep in mind that 'revaluation' simply means that the subject is once again being assessed and does not necessarily have a positive meaning apart from highlighting this regained interest.

Nonetheless, the findings seem to indicate that most academics steer to a positive valuation of Brutalism. Yet, this could be somewhat of a bias, seeing one of the other criticisms on

Brutalism is that it is supposedly only loved by architecture fans and further despised by the public (Mitchell, 2016).

As for the underlying motives for this shift, probably all forementioned theories are elements of a larger truth: the nostalgia of the past; new research on largely unexplored movements; a new way of viewing Brutalism through widespread photography, in which social media, the internet, and books play a crucial role for reaching out to the public that cannot be overstated; the characteristics of modern-day society in which the permanence of the concrete giants contrasts the rapid change and chaos of our daily lives.

One element that should be further be explored and could well unify most of these theories, is the general perception of concrete. In other words, research on the phenomenological qualities of the béton brut could very well improve our understanding to a greater degree of why Brutalism today seems so appealing. Subsequently, the case studies in the following chapters are also analysed on a phenomenological level.

Chapter 3: The TU Delft auditorium (1966)

In the succeeding chapters three Dutch Brutalist buildings are analysed. The main focus of these analyses is on the valuation of the Brutalist architecture. Has there indeed been a positive shift in the reception history of these concrete structures? By taking into account the knowledge of the preceding chapters whilst researching the three cases, an assessment can be formed on whether or not the reception history of Brutalism took a change in its favour.

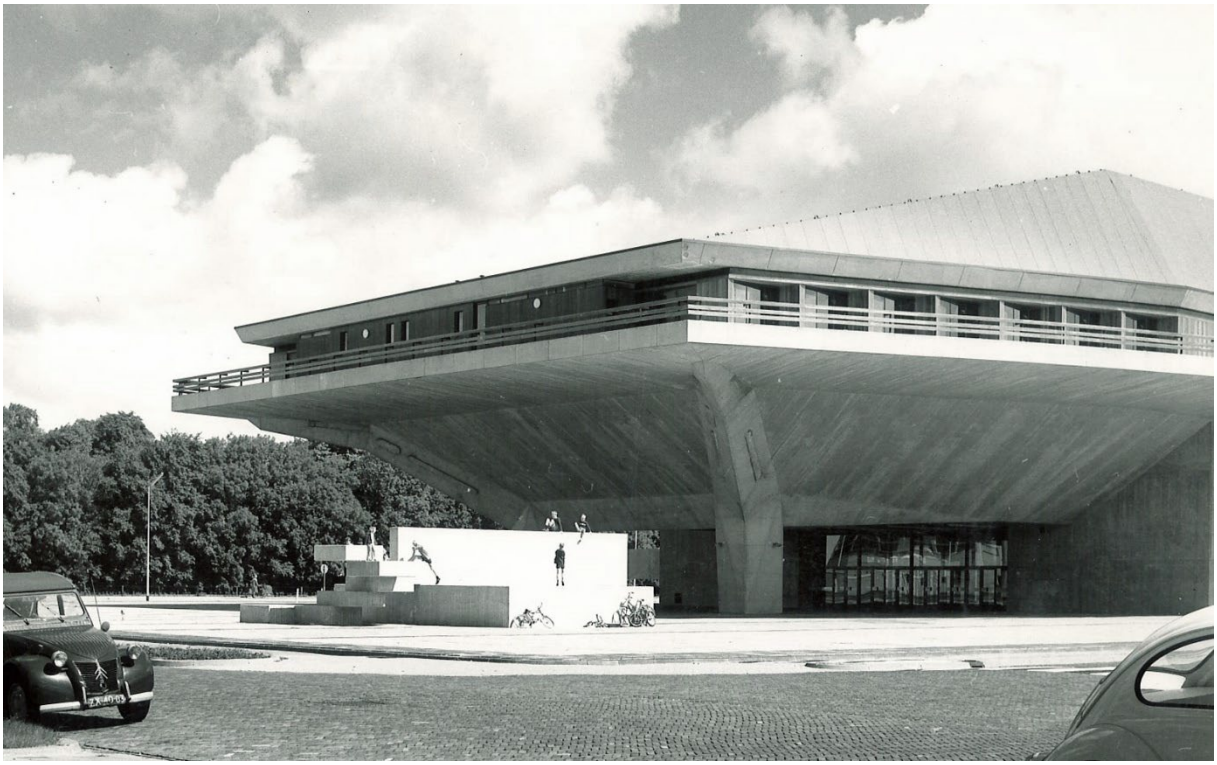

Figure 3.1: TU Delft auditorium (BroekBakema, 1966).

3.1 Architectural description

The TU Delft auditorium was designed by Dutch architecture firm Van den Broek & Bakema, and was built in 1966. The building is widely regarded as an iconic example of Brutalism, leading to it being listed in books, such as the *Atlas of Brutalist Architecture* (Phaidon Editors, 2020, p. 225). The building is situated on the Northern part of the Delft University of Technology campus, on the edge of the city centre (BOUW, 1966b; Thunissen, 1966).

The building's program consists of an auditorium with multiple lecture halls, a canteen, senate hall, and a bicycle garage (later turned restaurant). Initially, the design had a tower planned on top of the building as we know it, but this was later deemed too costly (Macel, Schutten, & Wegner, 1994, p. 114; Swart, 1966).

According to the architects, the dominating function of the building is the auditorium on the first floor. Two large columns carry the structure above and in doing so, a square is formed in front of the entrance underneath (BOUW, 1966b; Bouwkundig Weekblad, 1966). The circulation of all functions are merged together in a central atrium to reduce building costs (Macel et al., 1994, pp. 114-120).

The main materials used in the design are that of exposed concrete, wood and glass. With the use of concrete, the architects sought to make equal partners of form and function (BOUW, 1966b).

3.2 Reception

The reception of the building was predominantly positive. Articles about the auditorium appeared in architectural journals and national newspapers.

3.2.1 The grand opening

An article about the grand opening of the auditorium mentions how representative of the senate and curators L. Schepers happily called the building a valuable centre at the entrance of the university district. He went on by praising its original conception and form, as well as its functionality and unique structure, dubbing it the university's new showpiece (Algemeen Handelsblad, 1966; BOUW, 1966a).

Figure 3.2: Backside of the auditorium (Roelofsma, 1966).

3.2.2 Applause and criticisms in architectural journals

Architecture critic Thunissen (1966) condemns the building in its failure to become the new centre and meeting point of the university district. However, he recognises that the mundane surroundings in this 'painful empty desert' take most blame, the urban plan missing any relation with its pedestrians.

Thunissen does particularly like the interior, stating that upon entering one embarks on a spatial adventure. He compliments the creative artistry and intelligence of the architects for the way they made an organic, spatial totality and for the organisational arrangement of the challenging architectural task. All individual spaces are clearly part of the building's total

expanse, while being functional and pleasant to experience in their own right as well. This is partly done through the perception of materiality and detailing on several scales, for instance in the handrails, but also in the changing incidence of natural light. Thunissen explicitly deems the large second floor in the atrium an optimal space, where the focus is clearly on the community and not on a specific functional goal.

There are a few final criticisms on the building. For instance, the lecture halls are not really suitable for any other future use, the ceiling canvas for the acoustics of the auditorium looks strange, and there are too many different types of columns used. Nevertheless, Thunissen closes off by stating that the architects succeeded in evoking and showing emotion within the spaces of the building, thus capturing life between its walls.

Art critic Anne Buffinga (1966) dislikes the amateurism of the overall shape of the building, specifically in the missing relation between the bent planes of the roof and the bottom of the auditorium. Furthermore, he believes the folded roof structure harms the exterior perception of the building's form, concluding that expressive-constructive architecture is not the architects' greatest strength.

However, Buffinga admits the adventurous spatial qualities make up for the earlier criticisms. Upon approaching the building, the visitor is immersed by the eloquence of the spatial language in both form and detail. The walls illustrate an interplay of connections, ascending and descending, and guide the visitor inside the main hall, where one meets the inviting, large, double stairwells in the atrium.

Buffinga names the stairwell the most important place of the entire building and lauds Van den Broek en Bakema for their functionalistic architecture, saying: "They understood that function is not merely a pragmatic and materialistic approach of the problematic, but how it is also the divulging of the purpose of space and the relations between going somewhere and being somewhere, as well as entering a building and going to one's own place." Buffinga sees this unique architectural simplicity as the reason why the building is as grand as it is, yet he cannot help himself but end his article by stating the extreme ugliness of the acoustic ceiling canvas.

3.2.3 Newspapers

The national and local press dedicated many articles to the building, which celebrate the architects for their creation. The creativity of Van den Broek and Bakema is praised, as well as the created spatial play that surprises visitors from afar (Swart, 1966). The papers call the auditorium a remarkable asset for Dutch architecture.

W. Reuling (1966) lauds the auditorium, claiming Van den Broek Bakema was one of the few architecture firms that reach the hights of that of the 1930s, despising the *Delftsche School* that replaced the New Objectivity. He calls the auditorium a friendly, inert animal, of which the unusual shape conveys a certain logic, as if this really was the only way it could have been: "The artfulness of Van den Broek en Bakema is that they can make unusual things look usual and usual things unusual." Reuling adds the example of how a street lantern mounted to the side of the building fulfils the necessity of a large outdoor light: "Not only do you

slowly realise it is a regular street lantern standing askew on the roof, it ameliorates the street lanterns on the street."

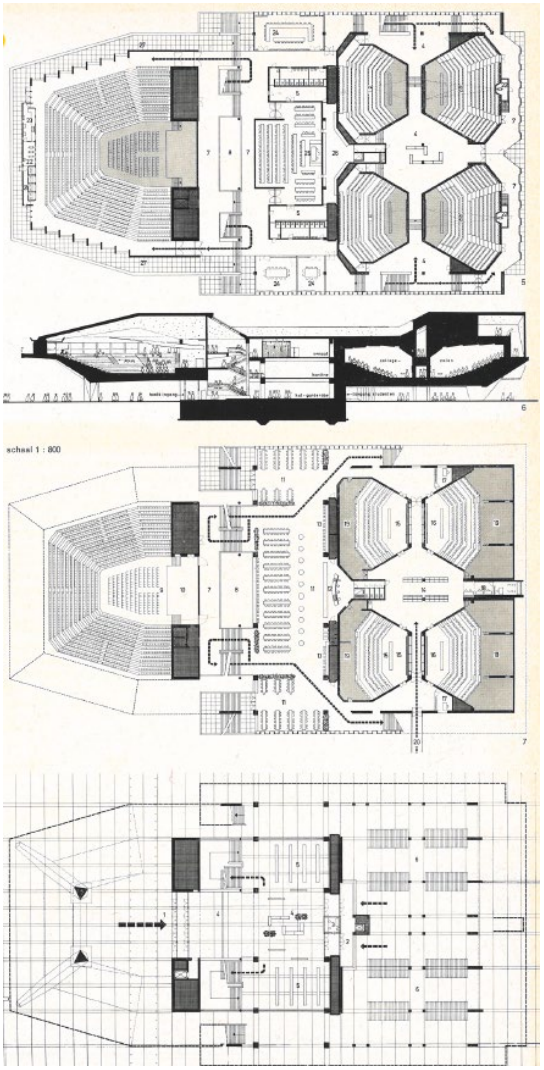

Figure 3.3: Floor plans of the auditorium (Bouwkundig Weekblad, 1966).

On the Brutalist character the papers write: "[The building] presents itself as a brutal giant. The building demonstrates a courageous, firm, muscular form language." (De Wit, 1966). De Wit maintains that the building breaks with the mundane, meaningless architecture of the surrounding campus and is justly regarded as an independent icon. Others conclude about the rough appearance of the raw concrete: "This definite, typical building style will take some getting used to, but no one shall escape the robustness dictated by the dimensions and material, which yet retains a frivolous vigour." (Algemeen Handelsblad, 1966).

Aforementioned and other articles highly commend Van den Broek and Bakema their creation, deeming it worthy of international recognition (Wiekart, 1976). There is recurring praise on the functionality and shape, but also on how the students seem to thoroughly enjoy the building. In particular, the building lends itself perfectly for various types of festivities (BOUW, 1966b; Reuling, 1966; Swart, 1966). The sole recurring criticism seems to be the acoustic canvas on the auditorium ceiling (Algemeen Handelsblad, 1966).

Numerous nicknames have emerged for the auditorium. Even the architects themselves prefer to speak of 'the thing' instead of a building (BOUW, 1966b). Students and citizens also refer to the auditorium as 'fish', 'frog', 'UFO', '*De bek van Bakema*' ('Bakema's beak'), 'mammoth', and even 'the monster' (Bouwkundig Weekblad, 1966; Buffinga, 1966; De Telegraaf, 1966; Leeuwarder Courant, 1966; Reuling, 1966). Although the term 'monster' may carry somewhat negative connotations, Reuling (1966) argues it is not one that instils fear; it is a friendly one, turned into stone, of which its timeless presence makes it look as if it has always been there.

3.2.4 Architectural reception of today

Current day, the building is still regarded as an icon of Dutch post-war architecture. In 2018, the Getty Foundation granted a total of €146.000 for restauration purposes (Getty, 2018; TU Delft, 2018). This subsidy, as well as its listing as a national monument in 2015 account for its positive valuation (TU Delft, 2020). Yet, professor Wessel de Jonge mentions that there is also a group of people who dislike the concrete structure (Flieger, 2018). Nevertheless, although this indicates there is some discussion surrounding the building, primary accounts of criticism are nowhere to be found.

3.3 Architectural analysis

As mentioned in chapter 2.3, an important element in the valuation of Brutalist architecture may lie in the way the building and material is perceived. The architectural analysis will therefore predominantly put an emphasis on the building its phenomenological components.

An individual approaching the building will first notice its enormous size and unusual. Especially the building's 'beak' reaching forward towards the Mekelpark, supported by the two huge, concrete columns, demands the spectator's attention. The main materialisation of concrete conveys a clear and honest language; when looking at the building one can immediately imagine what the texture of the façade will feel like when touched; one is tempted to undergo this haptic experience. Through touch, one can measure the qualities of the matter (Pallasmaa, 2005, pp. 9-13; 2006). The roughness of the concrete is further amplified by the clear marks of the timber formwork used to cast the concrete into place. The use of timber and glass in the rest of the façade, encircling the middle part of the terrace around the auditorium's amphitheatre, establishing both a visual and physical connection between floor and ceiling alongside the outer circulation and stairwells, complements the toughness of the concrete.

The importance of this material composition cannot be overstressed. They are all mediums with a distinct narrative, therefore evoking different emotions that add depth and meaning to the overall architectural configuration. Raw concrete displays clear traces of its material life. The scars from wear and tear, as well as markings from the timber cast during its creation, tell a story which can be sensed and has a rugged, sincere character. Timber also displays its material life traces, but in the case of the TU Delft auditorium the main message is that of lightness in contrast with the concrete. Finally, the glass distinguishes itself from the concrete and timber, since it is smooth and has no life traces; it has no tactility. When isolated from the rest, glass is an alienating material. Phenomenology expert Juhani

Pallasmaa names this as one of the reasons why contemporary glass skyscrapers (as well as buildings solely composed from other machine-made materials) lose their plasticity and make us feel disconnected with the world (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 31; 2006). Yet, as a consequence of its modest and delicate application, in this composition it complements the materiality of the entire building envelope.

This focus on exterior perception holds great significance in the case of Brutalism, seeing that most judge the building as seen from the outside, where the raw concrete is most visible (see also chapter 2.1).

Figure 3.4: Atrium of the TU Delft Auditorium (Keuzenkamp, 1966).

Before entering the building, the individual finds himself on the square below the auditorium, providing a more intimate experience even before setting foot inside. When stepping out of the protection of the overhang's shadow, the visitor walks in the atrium and is greeted with light from above. The large atrium, being the building's main circulation with the two concrete stairs travelling upwards, and the smoother concrete materialisation

welcome the user to embark on an adventure through the building its functional, yet enticing programming. For the first time, the timber materiality becomes tangible, seeing it is used in the handrails, sometimes transforming in furniture or walls even. The materialisation of timber and concrete still conveys a language about which elements are bearing and which not. The light, partition walls are timber, whilst the load bearing elements are still that of raw concrete, displaying its heaviness.

Apart from the sensory material experience, the abundance of natural light in the atrium must be regarded a key phenomenological aspect. Natural light is what dictates the intensity of a building and the built environment due to its changing nature, contrary to the paralysing homogeneity of artificial light (Holl, 2006, p. 34; Pallasmaa, 2006, p. 64).

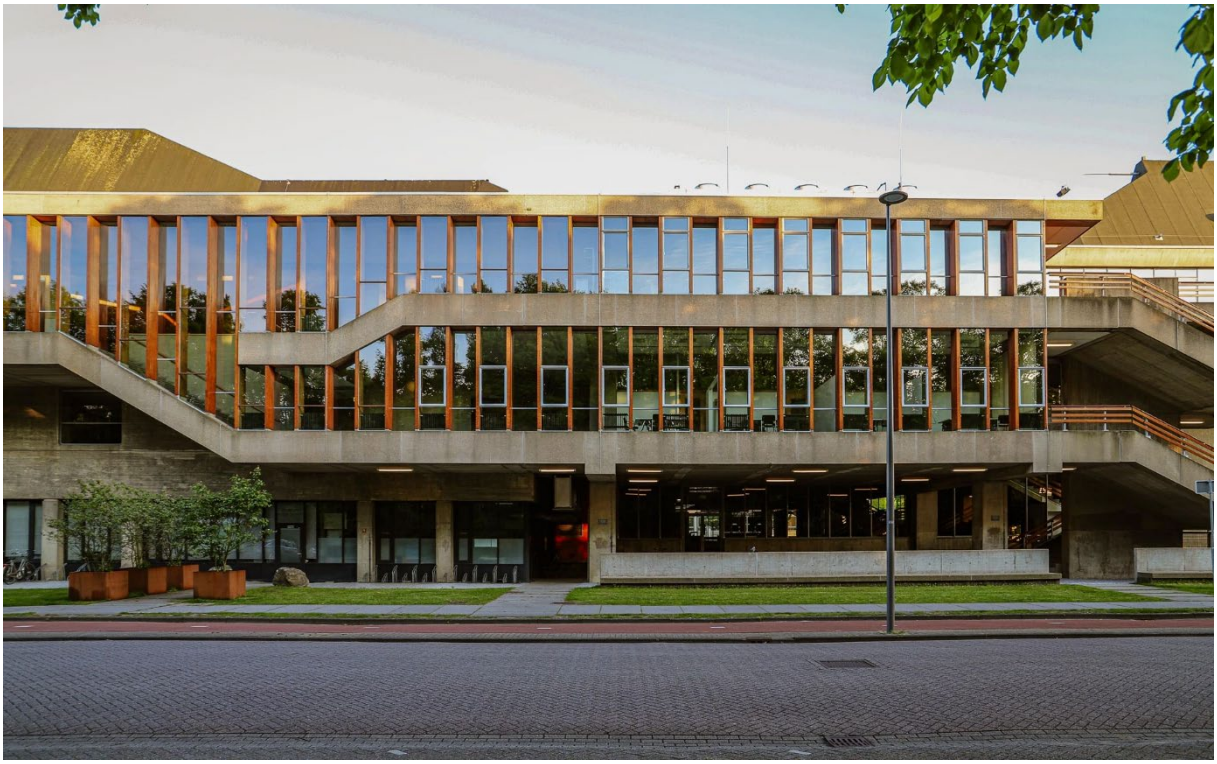

Figure 3.5: Northern façade of the TU Delft auditorium (Haan, 2020).

3.4 Conclusion

The reception of the TU Delft auditorium was, and still is, consistently positive. From its completion onwards, it is critically acclaimed for its great functionality and architectural philosophy, making it one of the top examples of Dutch and international Brutalism. Criticism mainly revolved around the impossible role it meant to fulfil in an already dreadful built environment, but this was not genuinely a flaw that should only be assigned to Van den Broek and Bakema their design. Even though currently some dislike the use of concrete, there are no explicit accounts of criticism on its materiality. It has to be concluded that there has not been a significant shift in valuation of the auditorium. This is best displayed by the review of Algemeen Handelsblad (1966), who recognised its beauty and functionality, yet concluding about the style that “it will take some getting used to”.

As for the architectural analysis, it clearly points out that the building fits Banham's New Brutalist criteria. Furthermore, the phenomenological qualities undoubtedly contribute to its positive reception. The combination of raw concrete with timber and glass make the composition more appealing and enhance the sensory experience. This proves especially evident when one imagines what the building would have looked like if all timber elements were replaced by concrete; the entire architectural language would have been different and the building would be nothing like the one we know. The architectural philosophy of Van den Broek on space make for a pleasant perception. We must take space, since building is the dispossessing and containment of space. It just needs to be done in a 'good' way, by being modest and only limiting open spaces if it improves the newly created one (Reuling, 1966).

Chapter 4: Provinciehuis Noord-Brabant (1971)

Figure 4.1: Protesters in front of the *provinciehuis* (Anefo, 1971).

4.1 Architectural description

The *provinciehuis* of Noord-Brabant was designed by Dutch architect Hugh Maaskant and was finally built in 1971. The *provinciehuis* is an administration building for the provincial governance. For the design, the province ought to add a recognisable governance centre to their portfolio, instead of an ordinary office building. To achieve this, Maaskant had several design pillars: a. the building should be sustainable and future-proof; b. the building must be a totality with a clear social pattern: there is one main entrance for everyone; c. the building's finish must be simple and without ornamentation, but with art that is integrated with architecture; d. the building should stand by itself in an open and public terrain; e. the terrain should not become a car-graveyard, therefore a parking solution is needed (De Ingenieur, Kortmann, Maaskant, & Meyaard, 1972; Maaskant, 1972).

The consequences of these design choices are apparent in the final product. The building is located on the periphery of the province capital 's-Hertogenbosch, alongside the highway. The building itself consists of a low-rise formation with an unusually shaped roof and a 103.5 meter tall tower, making it a landmark in the 's-Hertogenbosch skyline. The choice for a tower came from the idea that this would provide all floors with an abundance of natural light and a spectacular view over the city. In front of the building is a vast pond, while cars are parked below the structure. The main materialisation is that of raw concrete, whilst the interior is scattered with art, the major piece being a gigantic bronze door for one of the main conference halls (De Ingenieur et al., 1972; Maaskant, 1972).

4.2 Reception

Right from the start, the *Provinciehuis* Noord-Brabant was inadvertently linked with controversy. Criticisms started even before it was built, leading to multiple redesigns and changes of location, eventually taking up a total of nineteen years before the final design was realised.

4.2.1 Revolt against a tower

In 1952, the province chose Maaskant as architect for the building after an architecture competition (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2021). The provincial board showed an interest in non-conventional and modern architecture (Provoost, 2003a). Despite being aware that Maaskant his alternative architecture could set a precedent in the old city centre, the appointed advising commission found that Maaskant's contrasting architecture would lead to a more attractive and new cityscape (Commissie van Advies, 1953).

In hindsight, this awareness seems a foreshadowing of what was to come. The first design saw the building situated in the heart of the city (De Tijd, 1960; Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant, 1960), but this was never built (Janssens, 2021). The original design was adapted to fit more civil servants, yet it proved costly: this is where the real problems began.

The new tower proved a major stumbling block. An article depicting a model of the high-rise (Brabants Dagblad, 1960) lead to a revolt amongst citizens and as a consequence, the municipality and aesthetic committee needed to revise the plan (Janssens, 2021; Van der Linden, 2010). The main concern was that the tower would negatively impact the Den Bosch skyline, which was dominated by the seventy meter tall Saint John's Cathedral. Several architects were consulted to assess the impact of Maaskant's ambitions, but despite concluding the design would not harm the cityscape, the plan was still rejected (Berghoef & Van Embden, 1959; Oud, 1959; Provoost, 2003b, p. 391).


Ingrijpend vernieuwingsplan voor Bossche binnenstad

Nieuw provinciehuis wordt „torenflat"

Figure 4.2: Newspaper snippet depicting an early model (Brabants Dagblad, 1960).

Perhaps it was not the smartest move of Maaskant to then heighten his sixty meter tower by another twenty meters. Understandably, after all this riot the city council wanted to keep these plans a secret, but unfortunately for them the City Centre Preservation Committee (Comité Behoud Binnenstad) did not see eye to eye and released the plans to the public. Needless to say, they did not take it well (Janssens, 2021; Provoost, 2003b, p. 394).

Even though the new plans situated the building further south in the city centre, the debate was far from over. The turmoil reached the national news, with the most explicit account of criticism reaching the frontpage of De Volkskrant. Writer Godfried Bomans (1962) shames the government and involved committees for permitting this 'architectural disaster'. The government also did not score extra points in Bomans's book by having prematurely demolished the existing buidings on site of the first design location, which were now long off the table. At the newly assigned building site, other buildings are also present and therefore also needed to be destroyed. Bomans sarcastically suggests: "Maybe when that is also demolished, and another piece of old city has disappeared, we can look for yet another location for the building." Bomans' extensive vocabulary does not fall short in describing what he determines 'an extremely hideous colossus', nor on the architectural impact of the 'concrete shoe box': "No church can withstand this concrete violence."

4.2.2 Shifting locations and building upwards

The 's-Hertogenbosch municipality desperately needed to find a different plot if the building was to be realised any time soon. The province threatening to build the *provinciehuis* elsewhere in another city did the trick (Brouwers, 1970, p. 278). A final location was found in a meadow on the outskirts of the city, far away from the beloved cathedral (Nieuwe Eindhovense Krant, 1963; Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant, 1963). The impact on the 's-Hertogenbosch skyline was now minimal (De Volkskrant, 1962). Almost in ironic fashion, taking into account the debate about building height, for the final design Maaskant added another twenty meters to the tower, ultimately reaching a height of 103.5 meters.

Whatever joy the stakeholders had felt now they could finally start building, it did not mean the debate was over, it merely shifted its emphasis. The coming years the *provinciehuis* would keep making the papers, only now for its excessive price tag. Almost million guilders were spent on art (Van der Linden, 2010). Partly because of a law stating that one percent of the cost of a government building should be spent on art (De Tijd, 1970), but also because the commissioner of the queen, C.N.M. Kortmann, wanted to put the province on the map with the building and its art (Kortmann, 1971b; Nooteboom, 1983). The art piece causing the most fuss was the gigantic bronze door for the main conference hall, leading to protesting municipalities (De Tijd, 1968b; De Volkskrant, 1968).

4.2.3 Initial reception of the final design

In 1971 the building was festively opened by a visit of the queen. The less festive part of the opening though, were the protesters outside. According to them, the hefty sum of fifty-two million guilders (Smit, 1971) could well have been spent elsewhere, leading to protest banners claiming the money could have built 1000 houses (De Tijd, 1971; Trouw, 1971).

The *'Brabander'* did not recognise himself in such an immense and superior building. The ideological climate of the time did not help. The building was an icon of authority (Kortmann, 1971a), something the sixties were not particularly fond of (Woltjer, 1992). It was also a time in which society started to discuss architecture more (Provoost, 1999). During the nineteen years it took to go from first design to final product, a cultural shift had taken place; the building was outdated before it was built. The large dimensions were regarded as inhuman (Provoost, 2003b; Tummers, 1971), what was first seen as modern had now become traditional (Van der Linden, 2010).

The association with power proved pivotal in the negative reviews. Monumental buildings had the risk of being linked to the 1940's totalitarian regimes that used megalomaniac architecture to promote their power (Curtis, 1982, p. 306), leading to architecture critics deeming the building 'fascist colonel architecture' (Beerens, 1970a, 1970b; Provoost, 2003b). Other critics refer to the building as 'power-hungry office silo' (Brouwers, 1970; Tummers, 1971), 'a brutal gesture towards democracy', condemning the buildings introvert character that spots with societies values (Verwiel, 1970), and 'communistic violence' (Van der Straaten, 2019).

Although there were also positive accounts (Brabants Dagblad, 1971; Van Doorne, 1971), these were overshadowed by the negative criticisms. More specific architectural elements that were disliked were the apparent pillars on each corner of the tower, the uncomfortably large interior dimensions, as well as the building's materialisation, making some feel "as if I'm a caveman" (Tummers, 1971).

The most interesting aspect in valuation may well be that Maaskant (1971) was fully aware his building would probably not be well received by the public. In his opening speech he evaluates several architectural elements, concluding the public will likely determine the building's introvert character repulsive and the architecture strange. However, about this negative reception Maaskant adds: "The concepts of beautiful and ugly (…) are linked to the past. (…) People find beautiful what they are already familiar with (…). People are rather anxious about the new and only reluctantly come to appreciate it. People love the old. They only approach the new with difficulty."

4.2.4 Architectural reception of today

Remarkably, over time the reception of the *provinciehuis* gradually grew more positive (Janssens, 2021). For instance, on the forum SkyScraperCity 138 users assigned a grade to the building, of which 77 commented their reasoning and the average grade being a 6,91 ('Empersouf', 2004). Architect Winy Maas sees the building as 'one of the most beautiful Dutch buildings' (Steenbekkers, 2021). Even non-architects start to like the building, some arguing it should become a national monument (Andriessen et al., 2021; Nobel, 2021; Van der Straaten, 2019). They identify its grandness, monumentality, and uniqueness as what currently makes the building appealing. It should be noted however, that most non-architects acclaiming the *provinciehuis* are often connected with the building by having worked there for several years. Nonetheless, the functionalist *provinciehuis* has become of unmistakable cultural value (Van der Linden, 2010).

Figure 4.3: Maaskant, Provinciehuis (Haan, 2021b).

4.3 Architectural analysis

An individual approaching the building will undoubtedly be impressed by the grandeur of the large tower in such a large, free space. A tongue-like walkway reaches out of the low-rise and tries to invite the user in. The building is materialised of concrete, glass, and steel, considered modern materials at the time (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2021).

When entering the low-rise structure, the colour and materialisation of the softer interior architecture contrasts with the hard and sober geometry of the exterior (Provoost, 2003b, p. 395). The large dimensions and the abundance of art throughout the building, suggest the architecture of a palace. Maaskant used bright colours in combination with natural stone, wool and leather, while the indirect light and darkness give the building a warm, yet sinister character (Van Doorne, 1971). From the main hall, the conference halls can be reached. By taking the elevator, one accesses the high-rise office floors. Light comes in through an almost uninterrupted array of windows, while the interior walls of concrete create a core in the middle of the tower.

Compared to the TU Delft auditorium, the concrete tells less of a material journey. The sheer size of the composition, as well as the smoother concrete could make it harder for the user to connect with the building on a phenomenological level. This ties in with aforementioned critics on the materiality of the building. Where the auditorium had wood as a lighter and phenomenologically intriguing material (Pallasmaa, 2006), the *provinciehuis* seems more unforgiving from the outside with the dominant concrete and simplistic lines. These façade elements are a direct consequence of showcasing the building's structure.

Another phenomenological contrast between the architects, is Maaskant's traditional approach to monumentality. This leads to imposing and legible structures, coming from Maaskant's philosophy of seeing architecture as creating mass. BroekBakema approach architecture as creating space, connecting the individual more intensively to the dynamics of the total space (Provoost, 2003b, pp. 404-405).

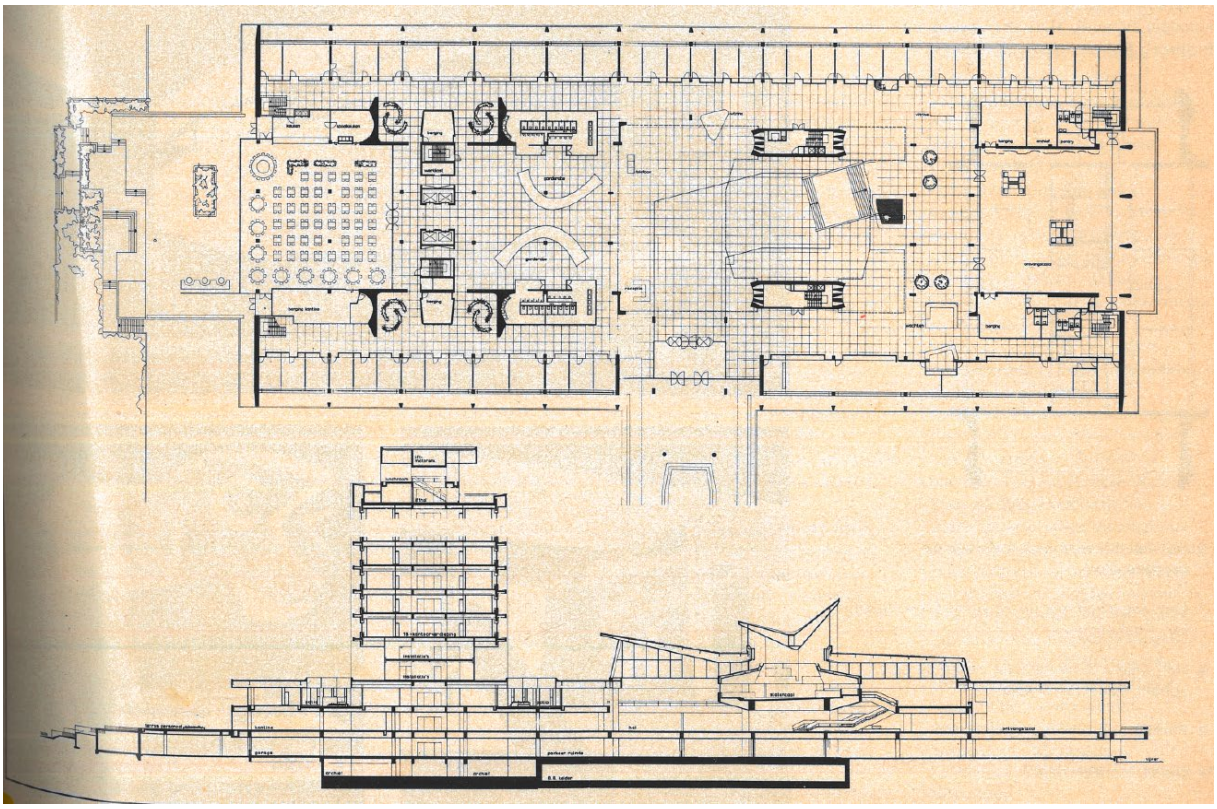

Figure 4.4: Architectural drawings of the *provinciehuis* (Maaskant, 1972).

4.4 Conclusion

During its design and right after completion, the *provinciehuis* was received with fierce opposition. The public did not recognise itself in the grand, outspoken architecture of Maaskant, nor in its link with authority. Newspapers and fora implicate this public opinion is now changing, but they still illustrate a certain bias; architectural fora are more likely to be visited by architecture enthusiasts, which is exactly the group that currently adores Brutalism, while in newspapers only civilians are interviewed who show a deep emotional connection with the building by having worked there for decades. It is therefore not clear if the shift in valuation is only prevalent in a smaller group, or representative for the larger public.

The outspoken critical commentary of critics in the seventies was highly emotional and was politicising architecture. Similar to the anti-authoritarian mindset of the seventies, this was a sign of the times. As Provoost (2003b, pp. 402-403) points out, most biting commentaries do not criticise architectural elements, but are confined to the surrounding social and societal problems. I therefore doubt the tone would have been the same, had the building been built several years earlier, and had the two designs in the city centre not existed, eliminating that part of the public outrage.

Limiting ourselves to commentary on the architectural elements and their phenomenological qualities, Maaskant's speech probably describes best what has caused the shift, assuming there is one: the style takes some getting used to. At first, comments such as 'concrete shoe box' defined the public opinion, but the few aforementioned contemporary accounts take on a positive tone.

Regardless of whether there actually is a common revaluation, the *provinciehuis* is a clear expression of its time, a monument for the twentieth century *Zeitgeist*.

Chapter 5: Town Hall Terneuzen (1972)

Figure 5.1: Town Hall Terneuzen (BroekBakema, 1972)

5.1 Architectural description

The Terneuzen town hall was designed by architecture firm BroekBakema. The building is situated on a dyke along the Westerschelde estuary (BOUW, 1973; Bouwwereld, 1972). The volume consists out of several cantilevering concrete blocks, spiralling upwards. In the design process, the main emphasis was put on building in the human scale (Gemeente Terneuzen, 2021). Furthermore, everyone is regarded as equal in the town hall; people should not be afraid to enter via a monumental staircase, as was often the case with town halls (Gemeente Terneuzen, 2021; Lagaaij, 1971). The building is considered one of the top examples of Dutch Brutalism (Ribbens, 2021; Van den Heuvel, 2017b).

5.2.1 Reception then

Apart from several short articles about the 'tough' design and international interest by architects (Algemeen Dagblad, 1968, 1972; De Tijd, 1968a), the national media coverage and that in architectural journals was limited. However, local papers extensively covered their new asset. To celebrate the building's completion, a week of festivities was announced (De Stem, 1972). Many considered the building beautiful, acclaiming the indestructible and unconventional character, as well as the technical feats displayed by the structure (Aschoff, 1972; PZC, 1972a; Van Berkel, 1972a, 1972b).

Notwithstanding, Terneuzen still needed some time to get used to this non-traditional and rugged architecture, as evidenced by criticisms referring to the building as a 'status symbol' and 'luxurious bunker' (Aschoff, 1972). Still, several people disliked the building at first, but started to recognise its architectural beauty after working in it for a while. The primary

criticism centred on the use of concrete, some stating they outright hate the material and experience it as ‘dull and lifeless’, others despise its gloomy and colourless appearance (PZC, 1972b). There are also indications that most of the generations born in the twenties and thirties never liked the building upon completion (Heres, 2023).

Despite these negative remarks, one person (perhaps inadvertently) acknowledged the attractive phenomenological qualities of wood and concrete. She described the structure and plasticity of concrete when the casting marks are still visible, as well as the connection with timber as a natural material (PZC, 1972b). Still, she does adds that a little more colour would do no harm.

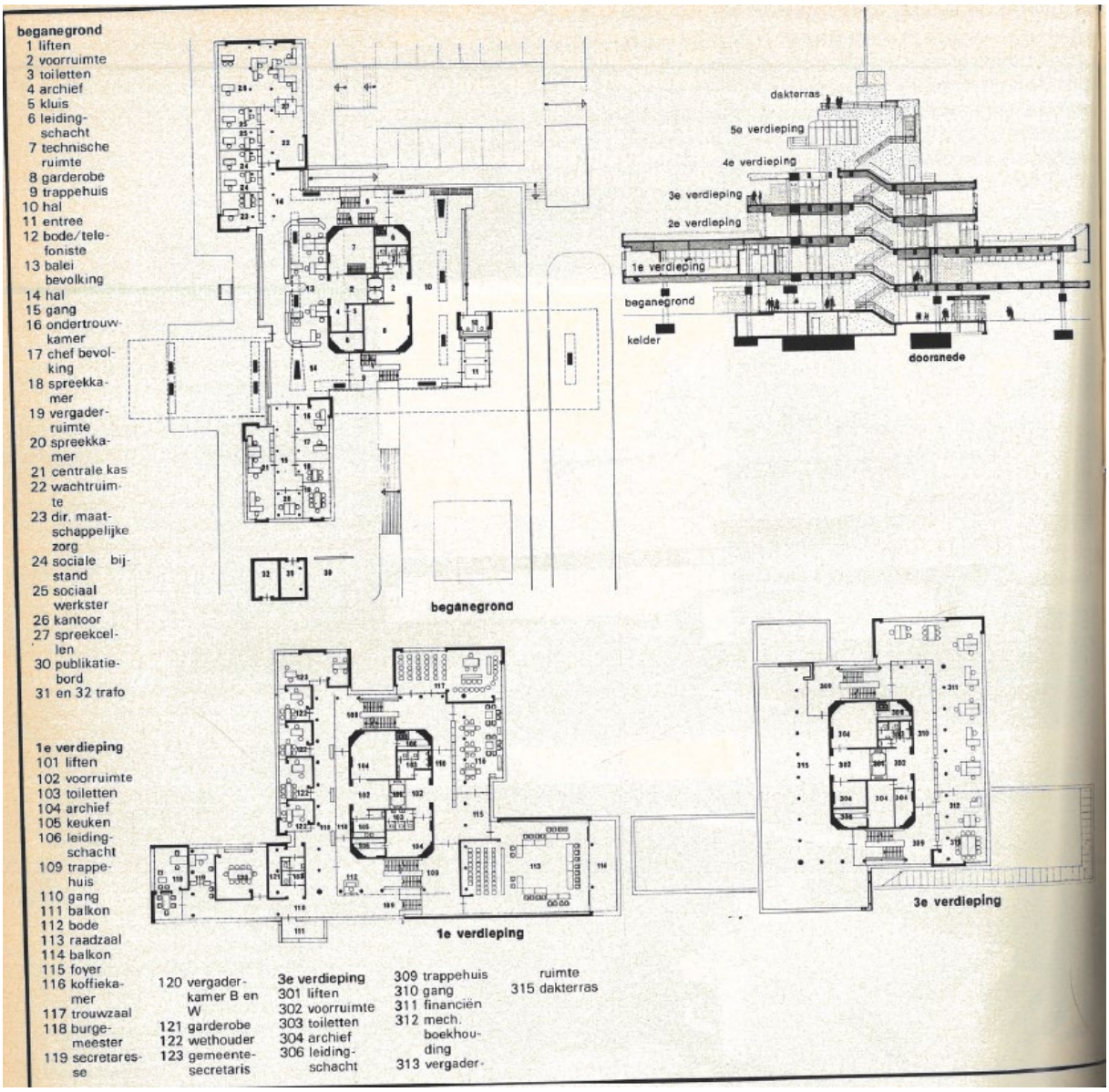

Figure 5.2: Architectural drawings of the town hall (Bouwwereld, 1972).

5.2.2 Reception now

The discussion on the valuation of the Terneuzen town hall is extremely relevant in today’s climate. The listing in Brutalist catalogues as an example of ‘good’ Brutalist architecture

(Haan, 2021a; Phaidon Editors, 2020, p. 232; Van den Heuvel, 2017b) is just a minor part of the evidence.

After fifty years, the people still seem divided on the building (De Frel, 2022a); some love it, some hate it. Street interviews from a podcast on the valuation of the town hall indicate most citizens seem to appreciate the architectural sculpture, but dislike the grey and dreary look of the concrete (Heres, 2023).

The podcast is part of the building's extensive media coverage of the past year, with voices arguing the building should be listed as a national monument. One of them, Martjan Kuit, even has his own clothing line with prints of controversial architecture, the town hall being his bestseller (Kuit, 2021; Maes, 2022). The municipality wanted to involve also the non-architectural experts in the debate, leading to a survey on what the people their thoughts are on the building and whether it should be preserved or not (De Frel, 2022b; Heres, 2023).

The results are intriguing, given that this is one of the few cases where the stage is not dominated by architecture critics in the Brutalist revaluation discussion. 1290 respondents lead to a 69% majority in favour of the listing as a national monument (Gemeente Terneuzen, 2022). When solely looking at respondents from within the municipality, this percentage drops to 56%. This increase in popularity outside the city walls (88% in favour) can be explained by considering Brutalism is hot and booming, meaning the survey undoubtedly did not go unnoticed by Brutalism fans elsewhere (Heres, 2023).

What illustrates the controversy and complexness of valuating Brutalism best, are the respondents' answers to the question to describe the building in one word. Even though the majority approves the monument status, the most used word is 'ugly' (81 votes), followed by pretty (51 votes) and others (Gemeente Terneuzen, 2022).

Anita Blom, specialist on post '65 heritage, links this to the phenomenological qualities of the building. The materialisation of exposed concrete is tough, but can also work repellent. The concrete first evokes these more hostile feelings, and only later, when looking at the entire building, its special character is recognised. This also falls in line with the stories told by Terneuzen citizens, who were surprised to learn architectural experts regarded their town hall as one of the best Brutalist buildings. From there, the citizens started to value the architectural beauty (Heres, 2023).

Blom points out that time also plays an important role, since things to close to the present often are not regarded as monuments. In combination with the architectural interest, most people now agree the building should be a national monument. However, ten years ago, the outcome would probably not be the same; people might even have voted in favour of its demolition (Heres, 2023).

Figure 5.3: Town hall entrance (Haan, 2021c).

5.3 Architectural analysis

Visiting the town hall, the composition of cantilevering concrete blocks with long files of glass dominates the scene. Part of the concrete was cast and proudly displays its marks alongside the concrete bricks and reddish-brown timber of the window frames. Similar to the TU Delft auditorium, the entrance is underneath an overhanging volume, creating a sheltered square.

The glass façade allows great quantities of light to enter the hall, yet the giant columns in the middle of the room contrast this (Bouwwereld, 1972). On the ground floor, natural stone is also introduced to the material palette. The split-level floors allow for an improved vertical connection in the design. The floors shift per story around a concrete core, while the stairs provide vertical continuity and connect the spaces (Bakema, 1972).

The detailing around the split-level program translates the human scale. The spaces are in no way unnecessarily large or alienating, but express a modest and pure architectural language. The non-hierarchical philosophy of the architects does somewhat contradict itself with the glass envelope at times splitting the programs of the civilians and the civil servants. Nevertheless, the authority does not hold a superior position over the civilians. This is evident through the civic hall placed as the composition's top volume, allowing the best view of the city and the Western Scheldt.

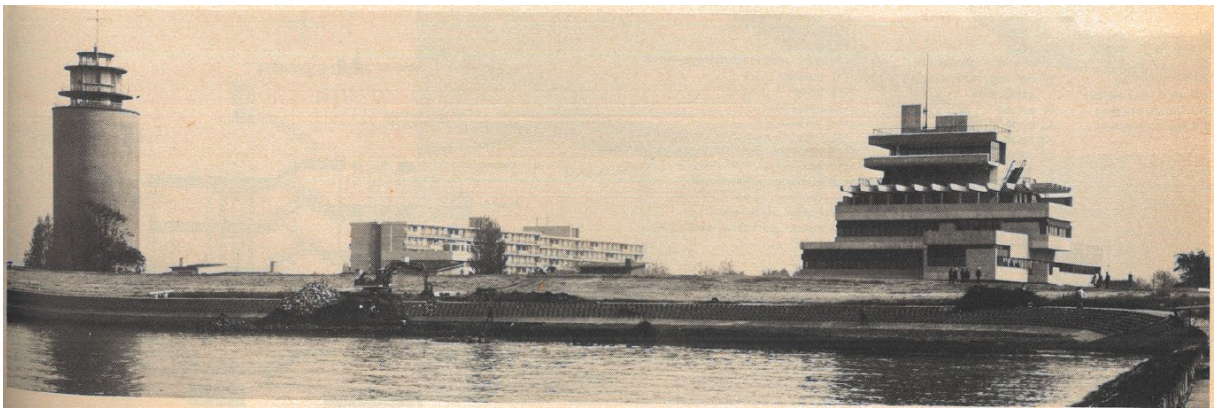

Figure 5.4: Town hall as seen from the Scheldt (Vrijhof, 1973).

5.4 Conclusion

The Terneuzen town hall is unique for its extensive documentation of the current public opinion. The highly Brutalist building was already met with mixed disdain and enthusiasm upon completion. Recent and old accounts on the material qualities of the building, clearly suggest the mixed reception is a consequence of the Brutalist béton brut. The survey was crucial in demonstrating a change in valuation. The questionnaire involved all layers of the Terneuzen society in the architectural discussion and showed that such a discussion proves fruitful. When taking a closer look at the building, peoples' opinions changed. The architectural value of the building is now recognised, and even though the sole phenomenological qualities of the raw concrete may still be regarded as 'ugly', the majority approves a future monument status (also sparking the debate on whether a building should be considered beautiful in order to be heritage protected). It goes to show that time, and bringing the discussion to the public, improve the architectural discourse.

Conclusion

I started this research with the assumption that there definitely was a revaluation of Brutalist architecture, assuming Brutalism was always countered with displeasure until now. However, the research showed that this has not always been the case. The TU Delft auditorium was never met with much disdain. The majority has always regarded it as outstanding architecture, irrespective of the béton brut. In the case of the *provinciehuis*, political and social factors took over the architectural debate, which was typical for the seventies. The discussion was never much about the Brutalist characteristics of the building, but instead revolved around the ruling power and the heavy sums of money invested.

Notwithstanding, Brutalism is definitely gaining interest worldwide. The findings of chapter two are the unmistakable proof that Brutalism is regaining popularity through books and symposia, and is reaching the general public through appearances in pop-culture. The phenomenological qualities of the concrete structures mean they do well in pictures and film, their unforgiving and permanent character providing a striking image.

Still, the main question of the research remains unanswered: what are the causes leading to the revaluation of Brutalism in the Dutch urban landscape? As Filler and Lonergan posed, important factors in Brutalism's popularity amongst architecture experts can be explained by the age of the Brutalist structures. There has always been some sort of nostalgia of the outmoded of a few generations before. Additionally, many Brutalist structures reach the crucial age of fifty years, meaning often a choice needs to be made between preservation, with expensive maintenance as a consequence, or that of demolition, inevitably initiating the debate on whether some should be placed under protection or not. Furthermore, universities research the controversial building style, resulting in numerous publications on the matter.

The phenomenological qualities of béton brut evoke emotions amongst people, and while the discussion on preservation leads to government research, symposia, and books, in our current day and age striking images of the Brutalist buildings also appear on social media. The larger public is reached and becomes gradually involved in the discussion on the architectural value of these structures.

However, in the case of widely regarded brilliant architecture, such as the TU Delft aula, there is not that much controversy. The debate surrounding other concrete giants simply means they are now also subject of the discussion on Brutalist architecture, leading to the call for monument listings among architectural experts. In my opinion, this is exactly what happened with our Dutch trio. Political and social views not taken into account, the architectural reception has not changed drastically over the years. Of course, in Terneuzen people now favour the building as a monument. Yet, taking away the expert bias by solely looking at the survey's results from inside the municipality, just a small majority agrees, while most still consider the building ugly.

In order for people to see past the 'ugly', they need to take a closer look and discuss the building and its qualities. As Terneuzen has shown, only then will they recognise the architectural value. Yet, this is not just happening now. The research showed that this was

already happening with employees working in the town hall and *provinciehuis*, who started to appreciate the architecture after a while. The main difference is that it is much more common today for anyone to openly discuss architecture, Brutalism not being an exception. With social media, this is simply the first case where the discussion spread so easily and infiltrated most layers of society.

So yes, a revaluation is ongoing, but that does not mean people drastically change their opinion. Revaluation just means there is a regaining interest and people start to assess the value of something once again, be it positive or negative. Nevertheless, I consider the improved involvement of society in the architectural debate a good thing. In the future, this will hopefully improve our understanding of why we value things the way we do.

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