

Reflection P4

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Dutch Housing Commons:

a stageplay on housing commons within and against the Dutch housing market

Note: my research and design project take the shape of a play script. In reaction to this form of writing, this reflection was written as a speech to ultimately integrate this reflection within act 5 of the play. Act 5 accounts as the final act of the play and took the shape of a reflective dinner in which the protagonists of the play gathered around a dinner table to reflect on the research and design project. The act will be concluded by a statement from the architect. That statement / speech became the following text.

[19:23 – The group of housing commons experts has gathered around the dinner table. They are enjoying a wonderful dinner prepared by some of the dwellers and meanwhile the discussion on housing commons continues. The architect starts its speech.]

Dear all,

First of all, I would like to thank you for joining our guided tour through the building today. It was an honour to explain and showcase the project in greater detail to you as housing commons experts. As the guided tour has come to an end, I have prepared some words in which I reflect on the design process and the design for the building itself.

Prior to the design phase and during my studies in Delft, I have researched Dutch housing commons (anti-speculative or cooperative housing) in greater depth. The research project was guided by the concept of spatial agency. The concept of spatial agency aims to put architectural knowledge in a much wider context and instigates to act transformatively inside and outside the system. As a result, I aimed to put my architectural knowledge in a much wider context by reimagining a transformed Dutch housing market. In the end, the aim of this research project was to acquire more knowledge and feeling regarding the development of housing commons in the Netherlands and to ultimately establish an integral conversation regarding this topic between the several stakeholders (academic, architect, bank, cooperative, critic, dweller, developer, municipality).

During this research project several precedents were brought to my attention and many design principles were identified which were used throughout other housing commons. The

lessons from my analysis on the precedents and the distilled design principles have informed the design process and the final design. On the other hand, during the design process I faced the challenge of designing a housing project within a rather conservative Dutch housing market at that time, during the 2020s. Fictocriticism gave me the opportunity to deal with the Dutch housing market in an experimental and powerful way. Through using fiction, I shaped a speculative reality to showcase other ways of housing within the Netherlands when we (as academics, architects, banks, cooperatives, critics, dwellers, developers, municipalities) act differently. Fictocriticism, fits the concept of spatial agency very well, since spatial agency opts for the use of other tools besides the act of building.

As part of the concept of spatial agency, I took the liberty to address other political and spatial concerns as well – besides reimagining the Dutch housing market. Back in the 2020s – during my architecture studies in Delft – demolition of existing buildings was depicted as the default instead of the exception. Existing buildings were relentlessly assessed by municipalities, developers and architects as objects restraining future growth. This accounted to many typologies, among them obsolete office towers. The transformation of office towers in the Netherlands was not flourishing during the 2020s and many transformed office towers were unsuccessful in my opinion. Consequently, the transformation of office towers was not depicted as “sexy” and therefore not attractive to architects, resulting in more unsuccessful examples. When the city of Nijmegen commissioned me in 2025 to start the process of transforming the former building of the tax authorities in Nijmegen, I was destined to use this building as an exemplary transformed office tower. By doing so, I aimed to establish a political tool to stir up the discourse on housing typologies within the Netherlands. The purpose of fictocriticism helped me in many ways throughout this process. Furthermore, by working on a project outside of the Randstad, I aimed to shift our relentless focus from the *Randstad* to the *Bandstad*. Back in the 2020s most developments were happening or were planned within the *Randstad*. However, around that same period many (semi-)governmental reports showed a general distrust from the people from the *Bandstad* towards the *Randstad* resulting in rising polarisation within the Netherlands.

Through reimagining the Dutch housing market and by the integration of topics such as the office tower transformation and a shift in thinking from the *Randstad* to the *Bandstad*, I aspired to encourage others (academics, architects, banks, cooperatives, critics, dwellers, developers, municipalities) to critically rethink these topics for themselves as well. The research project aimed to establish an imaginative reality in which the housing market would be transformed by the upheaval of housing commons. The design project on the other hand showcased my investigation towards a different way of doing architecture related to the concept of spatial agency. Combined, I hope to transfer these thoughts and findings to others and to continue this collective process.