

## **Reflection Paper draft:**

My graduation project topic centres around the field of architecture's role in shaping future societies, using technical design, programme, and architectural design to imagine an alternative for the specific domain of entertainment and culture in the city. Using the Friche Josaphat as a testbed, the intersection of sustainable design and new public architecture can be explored, responding to the challenges of larger urban scales contrasted with small and specific interventions. Given the city of Brussels' history of large and rapid demolition and reconstruction in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Friche Josaphat offers a chance for an alternative approach to large scale urban plans. With the fragmentation of the governing systems and urban fabric, sweeping urban design changes are rare in the 21st century, and the Friche is a rare exception for the city. It represents an opportunity to project new values and ideas onto a site whose value has come to be appreciated only in the last few years. My research focuses around the narrative of two improbable characters and neighbours - the Friche Josaphat and a travelling theatre group (Les Nouveaux Disparus) - and their improbable existence in the city, hidden behind fences, trees, and bushes. Through the story, their resemblances are revealed and their vulnerability to contemporary threats is shown to bring them together as a single threatened unit that, despite their initial differences.

The making of this short film has given me the chance to learn about a field I knew very little about, forcing me to be proactive in communicating with and understanding the travelling theatre group. I witnessed the Festival Mimouna on the Friche, watching the site suddenly turn into a loud and festive village, and understood the importance of such a space in the city, where culture and entertainment was accessible in an extremely democratic and open way, even with little means. Additionally, by attempting to open a formal dialogue with the theatre group, I learned about the informal nature of such an organisation, which is forced to balance between a polished and curated online public image, and the physical realities of being self-reliant and independent in the city. After many communication attempts through different means, it was only by visiting and interviewing the theatre group that I understood what it means to run such an operation, where a certain separation from the city and the media is necessary to remain independent and flexible. It was through this experience that I understood that keeping the Nouveaux Disparus free but also sheltered was crucial and maintaining their existence. I also had a similar experience with the bird watchers, who despite their love for the site and their public Facebook groups around it, were very apprehensive to speak publicly and invite a stranger onto their beloved Friche. It was the closed and hidden nature of the Friche that drew them to such a special space. By speaking to both of these stakeholders, I also understood the necessity but also joy behind the intersection of seemingly unrelated programmes. Even if they communicated very little, speaking to the two groups separately for the movie revealed similarities that I sought to explore in the design, where multiple groups can share a singular flexible space.

The design process also influenced the research, as I was able to appreciate and explore the nature of the tent as a space for culture more deeply, and have a specific subjective eye in the realisation of the shots for the movies. This also influenced by dialogues with the locals, who were immediately less apprehensive to talk to me when they understood my position and understanding of the site's history and value in the city.

I believe the act and process and planning, filming, and editing of a movie was highly valuable in understanding the site of the Friche Josaphat. It required many site visits, as well as a true local

and practical understanding and knowledge of the site, both with the locals and with the biodiversity that occupies it. Thanks to the filming process, I was able to speak to numerous locals, the theatre, and get a guided tour around the entire site, all through sheer luck by bumping into people who were keen to talk about their experiences of the Friche. The movie making process was also highly adaptable, with a very light filming rig and minimal equipment, I had to respond to the conditions of the site in order to get the shots I had in mind. By seeking different shots, I was able to visit the site at sunrise, sunset, during late summer, winter, and spring, through many different weather conditions which greatly improved my understanding of the environment for the design process. The making of a movie also forced me to continuously search for a narrative, constantly keeping an open mindset and journalistic approach to my research. I had to think about how the site could be presented to a viewer, how to bring across my understanding of the friche and the ideas I had in mind. This also brought along several challenges, as the medium also brings a degree of separation, where there is a risk of searching for a specific story and ignoring new findings that do not suit the presumed narrative. By pursuing a journalistic rather than academic research process, the sources of information also become less reliable and the story also risks becoming more subjective, which in some cases may be negative. Lastly, the act of filming and point a camera and microphone at people also has its own challenges, and communicating clearly and honestly with the subjects is always key.

I believe my research brings to light the sensitive and threatened nature of the Friche Josaphat and Nouveaux Disparus theatre group, bringing a degree of awareness to the viewer. I think the medium is widely accessible and so the subject has the potential for a wide reach, which is especially important for a site or topic such as this one which may not be well known by the public. This does bring into question the ethical aspects of making a movie about an unknown and fragile site in a city, as it may attract unwanted attention, but I have attempted to not show clear methods of entry in the movie, instead highlighting its value as an undisturbed space.