

## Reflection Daan Kok

In the P1 the neighbourhood of Doixhe and Bressoux was introduced to the studio. During this period I became aware of the radical transitions of the neighbourhood of Droixhe. This area had evolved from a wasteland to a prestigious site for the world exhibition, and later transformed into a modernist quarter, only to undergo partial demolition fifty years later. On a site visit to the neighbourhood in Liege, one of these demolished buildings left a peculiar imprint in the form of a concrete pit that sparked my interest. I wondered what had happened to the former building, and why was it demolished leading me to choose this site as the location for my design as well as an initiation for my research.

Collaborating closely with other students assigned to sites in Droixhe, particularly Inès, who was fluent in French, allowed us to gather a lot of archival data and insights into the neighbourhood. Together with Dave and Inès, we elaborated on the values of the neighbourhood and the heavy transitions it recently experienced. As our project sites were situated around “Parc de Droixhe” it consequently formed the focal point of our urban strategy. Hence the documentation of the trees in the “Abres de Droixhe” booklet.

At the start of the studio, I did not have a clear understanding of the research aspect. During the first tutoring sessions, I became aware of the freedom of methods and approaches for conducting research. In the first individual tutoring sessions, it became evident that my research would revolve around the pit and its ghostly presence in the neighbourhood. The memory of the demolished building of “Les Murlais” was one of the main themes. However, I struggled with finding direction as my definition of doing research was still limited. Not knowing, or rather accepting, what the outcome could be of researching the memory of “Les Murlais” made the beginning of the process rigid.

In the research plan, I posed a plan for a (tactile) archive for the city of Liege. During the following tutoring session, it became clear that I was not convinced by my posed plan

as it was not personal and lacked fantasy. Eireen pointed out reoccurring topics and themes we discussed throughout the studio. She illustrated this by drawing a spider in a web. “Les Murlais” was the spider. I continued by collecting and sorting the data our group had collected. Making a booklet with plans, drawings and archival pictures marked from the seventies, black and white to more recent colourful photos. These visuals depicted the spaces devoid of human presence but hinted at the activities and lives that once thrived within them. I could only imagine how the spaces and features worked. Following up on the tutoring, I introduced the concept of a ghost as the main theme, which became a reference point during research tutorials. Additionally, the presence and separation of layers in the palimpsest served as another prominent theme that influenced my work's structure. As it will do in de P4 and P5.

Focusing on unravelling the ghost of “Les Murlais” helped bring clarity to my research process and establish a stronger connection between my research and design. This inspired the formulation of the design program. My approach for the design was to appreciate the concrete foundation and keep it intact as it is the last physical trace of the ghost. But, what program would make sense here? How will the project relate or add to this urban environment? “Les Murlais” itself was designed as a facility for elderly and polio patients who could live their lives with their families in apartments designed for the polio live style. However, the elderly home is now situated a few buildings away and polio is eradicated.

Reading “X-ray Architecture” by Beatriz Colomina gave me a greater understanding of the historical context and spatial program of the building. In the book, Colomina exemplifies that a building was regarded as a doctor providing the patients (users) with a healthy environment with sufficient light air and sunlight. A similar narrative became visible in the design of “Les Murlais” when I drew the plans and facades of the building precisely, consequently creating a greater understanding of the spaces and the way the building worked. For example, the dimensions

of the balcony so the beds of the patient could access the balcony and take in the sunlight. As well as the terrace that function, according to plans, as a solarium. When I gradually became familiar with these parallels and qualities of "Les Murlais" it strengthened my affection towards the building and led me to question and argue the unknown reason why the building has been demolished.

The imprint left by the ghost of "Les Murlais" evoked a certain sense of direction and special hierarchy. Forming a transition between the Tours de Droixhe and the street. The context however has been changed radically and thus asks for a different orientation. The neighbouring, recently developed dwellings asked for a different configuration of shapes. In the design, a similar hierarchy is established by the horizontally spaced out wall and the central higher volume. This time not solely oriented towards the street but also included the parc the Droixhe by applying a similar sloping down in scale approach.

The difficult part of the research was to determine the outcome or rather the uncertainty to let my findings guide the process. Especially the question "What are you taking from the building" amplified the struggle to find my way in the research/design process. The tutoring session, however, helped me a lot to create a narrative around my project. Critically looking at the findings and drawings, and openly discussing them smoothed out the doubts I had during my process. After a few individual tutoring sessions of struggling with putting my thoughts and ideas into words, I started to open up more and also raised doubts I had about my project. I grew in confidence which allowed me to enjoy the research. This gave space to react during the tutorials which was beneficial for the process and discussions.

By modelling the facility of "Les Murlais" it exhibits the special qualities as well as a greater experience of the building itself. Parallel to the development of the research an array of architectural expressions of "Les Murlais" were implemented in the design. Dealing with the privacy of patients who are in a vulnerable state. The building, therefore, makes an embracing gesture that encapsulates these

vulnerable spaces around a courtyard. The soft transition of the courtyard by the walkway creates a desirable transition. Another type of border, a hedge marks the site of "Les Murlais", blocking the view from outside visitors. In the design of an exterior swimming pool, a certain vulnerability challenges the design. Using similar ways of creating privacy and using this embracing gesture helped me construct these spaces.

The research provided me with a way of looking which I later became aware of. This awareness was the result of discussing what I have learned or taken from the research during the tutorial. It led me to proceed with my research by imagining and interpreting the usage of spaces and architectural gestures, and how people interacted with them. In the last two tutoring sessions, we discussed the parallels between the project and "Les Murlais". At first, I felt uncomfortable because I was uncertain about my approach and how it influenced my design. However, studying the building and discussing the findings provided me with the ingredients to formulate my design. Putting the parallels into words and trying to seek similarities within the research and design helped shape the narrative of my design.

Overall, reflecting on the studio journey so far, I have come to appreciate the freedom of research methods. I have learned to navigate my uncertainty, let my findings guide the process, and open up to doubts and discussions. The research on "Les Murlais" has led me to explore its qualities and imagine how it functioned, ultimately inspiring the design program and narrative of my project.