

GRADUATION PLAN

PERSONAL INFORMATION

fabian wachter 2978300

STUDIO

urban architecture graduation studio / low town down town

MENTORS

rosie van der schans (architecture)

leeke reinders (research)

lex van deudekom (building technology)

ARGUMENTATION OF CHOICE OF THE STUDIO

As urbanization of society commences, the challenges brought upon the city itself get more pressing by the day. The design of this urbanity (as a product of many disciplines) is in my opinion the most relevant and interesting issue we face as architects today and thus concerns me ever since I started to think about what i want to involve myself within the field. The urban architecture studios site specific approach to these issues combined with the deep exploration of said specific place aligns with my ideas on how to read a site and understand its intricacies in order to eventually inform a designed intervention into the found urban fabric.

GRADUATION PROJECT

TITLE

dissecting urban fragments

LOCATION

belgium - antwerp - hoboken - lageweg The site along the Lageweg is situated within the tissue of Hoboken, a former standalone town, only becoming a district of Antwerp in 1983. It is surrounded by a diverse mix of industry, housing, education and few commercial spaces. Its majority is currently occupied by abandoned factory halls, parts of them being temporarily reused by urban pioneers in a loose arrangement called „Blikfabriek“ as a nod to the old can production facility.

POSED PROBLEM

The city of Antwerp plans to develop the site of the former can factory within the next 15 years. The plot was bought by a conglomerate of private, profit-based development companies which serve as a substitute for the city in advancing urban renewal of the site along the Lageweg. Capitalist motivation in urban development often times leads to short-term profit oriented design decisions resulting in run-of-the-mill urban quarters without character. How can the site of the old factory (and the factory itself) become part of the tissue of Hoboken? Can this externally placed urban development integrate itself into the found structure rather than just embedding itself and replacing what is there now?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

My research heavily revolves around the identity of the given site. What at first seemed like a homogenous, impenetrable mass of vacant factory halls occupying land in the district of Hoboken now emerges as a network of structures and actors including their inherent characters, making up the identity of what I found on site. My understanding of this identity increases with every visit and thus my methods rely on site specific fieldwork and presence on site, exploring the neighborhood and all it has to offer while spending time there. The more I immerse myself within the found structure the more I can dissect it into individual, graspable fragments of layered historical development which will serve as a starting point for a sensible intervention in the form of my architectural design project.

This lead me to my main research questions:

How can the identity of an urban site be captured by fragmenting and reassembling what is found? Can externally placed urban development pay regard to the identity of a place through incorporating found traces into a new design? Can user participation in the process of urban development help with integration of a new project into the existing fabric?

The methods I intend to apply in my design process are mainly being guided by the existing structure found on site. Through dissection along found seams in the historically layered fabric of the site and the resulting careful demolition inside the densely covered structure, a system of paths and spaces emerges which now becomes newly uncovered while inspired and guided by traces of the past. This approach enables me to intervene in the found environment while keeping true to the identity encountered on site.

RESULTING DESIGN ASSIGNMENT

The design project I aspire to create within the second half of my graduation project revolves around the adaptive reuse of multiple found buildings at the edge of the site, creating a new urban entrance situation in a spot which used to serve as a main gateway into the factory. The existing structures I intend to work with are being complemented by both demolition of formerly adjacent ones as well as the addition of new buildings. The program I envision on the plot should capture and represent the areas identity through a multitude of functions.

An arrangement of public and private spaces including commercial, residential, recreational and administrative typologies attempts to create a functioning microcosm while serving as a welcoming threshold into the whole site that we designed in a group of 3 in the prior „masterplan“ step of our studio.

LITERATURE AND PRACTICAL REFERENCES

My process of research revolved mostly around my fieldwork in Antwerp while the conceptual approach to the project developed from my findings. Writings from sources all throughout architectural history concerning spatial identities, placemaking and the theory of the city helped in making sense of the existing scientific framework. Contemporary architectural practices with a focus on adaptive reuse of existing structures and careful integration into existing urban situations serve as an inspiration when it comes to the design process.

REFLECTION

RELATION BETWEEN PROJECT, TOPIC, TRACK AND PROGRAM

My project relates to the urban architecture studio by way of careful urban analysis. This includes the surrounding landscape, the built environment, the resulting spatial condition and the different actors influencing it - human and nonhuman alike. The resulting medium sized urban architectural intervention I envision as a final product aligns with the studio's field of experimentation. As I stated in the argumentation for my choice of studio, my main interest in architecture revolves around urbanity on a human scale and especially residential structures as they reflect on the human aspect of architecture in the city. This topic has been subject of the majority of my personal, educational and professional endeavors and thus my graduation project continues to sharpen my individual focus inside the field of architecture.

RELEVANCE IN THE SOCIAL, PROFESSIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC FRAMEWORK

The project holds significant relevance within the framework of our profession as it tackles multiple pressing issues of our time. Nowadays sustainability in every sense of the word has to be at the forefront of consideration when creating architecture.

The adaptive reuse of existing structures helps in the pursuit of a considerate architectural practice. My focus on small scale locality promotes social coherence during times of big scale urban development while a sufficient approach to design with individual participation in mind enables high spatial quality with a reduced input in energy, material and financial means.