

RESEARCH & DESIGN BOOK

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Studio Bricolage / Urban Architecture

2020/21

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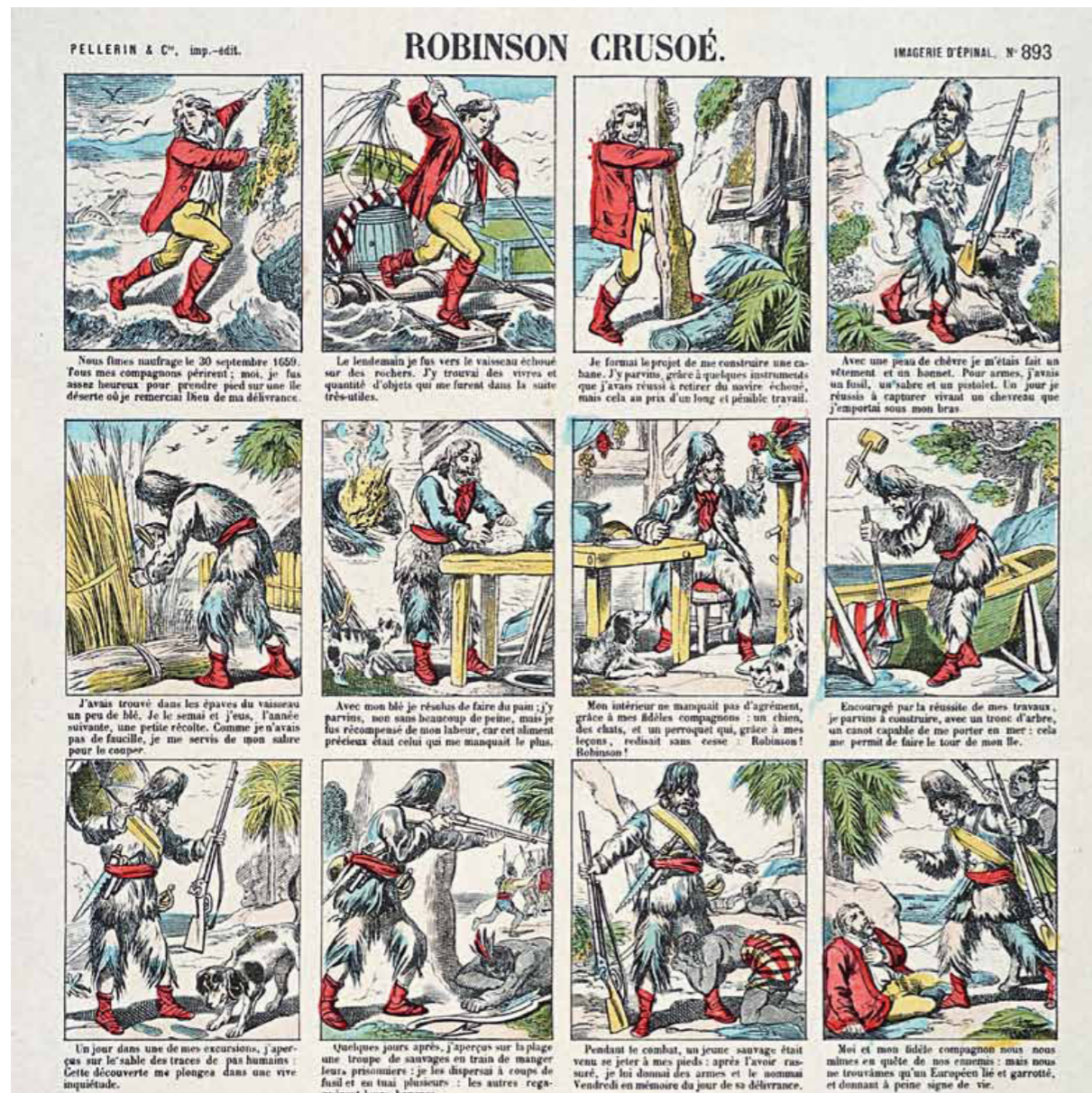
1.1

Two years ago, while working in the architecture practice I used to work for, I froze in front of my computer screen. One of my directors, who was sitting next to me, had taken notice and asked me what was happening. I was thinking about what was I doing there, in London, sitting comfortably in an office drafting beautiful drawings, while outside climate change and ecological catastrophe silently threaten our existence and people suffer as a consequence. I was questioning my role within the colossal effort that is required by us all and started questioning if architecture matters at all, if it has any importance within the “bigger picture”, if it is even feasible to keep building guided by economical growth, knowing how impacting the construction industry’s slice of the carbon emissions and natural resource consumption pie is. What my director replied when I explained to her the crisis I was undergoing, is possibly the reason why I am writing this today and why I am at this University studying to become an Architect. Her reply was: “It is exactly because you have this *awareness*, that you should continue in this field and become an architect”. By choosing Studio Bricolage and Urban Architecture, I aim to explore ways of designing which respond to the societal needs, but also those of the environment. I strongly believe it is the architect’s duty to raise awareness on that resources are finite and to promote circularity, in a material sense, but also socially and economically.

1. RESEARCH



Giuseppe Penone, 12 meter tree, 1970.



Throughout the year, I have been very inspired by a piece of reading I read at the beginning of the year, on the notion of Bricolage, related to architecture and ecology. The text associated Robinson Crusoe with the ultimate Bricoleur: someone who is able to look at their surroundings and use parts of things that are not useful anymore, or found around the island, to make something useful.

“It’s not the architecture that makes a statement for the public, it’s architects that make it when things are made a certain way”

Irénée Scalbert & 6a Architects, Never Modern, 2013

In a similar way, the Molenpoort shopping centre in Nijmegen, the site and the city chosen for the project, is the starting point of the project and the research. I associate the Molenpoort with the idea of the “wreck” of a previous “civilisation” (= need), similarly to the shipwreck in Robinson Crusoe’s narration, and Nijmegen as my island on which I am stranded.

The research started from looking at the Molenpoort shopping centre in Nijmegen with its current connotations, critically understanding its past and present use, therefore shopping. This activity is considered as the ultimate manifesto of immediate consumption and individuality. Moreover, it represents an outdated concept, and the mall’s shops are for the majority vacant with online shopping having become a commodity, and the culture of indoor shopping disappearing. Though being centrally located within the city, next to a heritage site (Peter Canisiuskerk) and at a pedestrian gateway to the city centre (Molenstraat), it is underused and hidden away. Even though its mass and urban footprint is vast, it serves one purpose only. The Molenpoort is so outdated that even the residents of Nijmegen see it as a blind spot in the city. On an urban scale, the two-floor building covers almost the whole area of the urban block, neglecting both its immediate and urban contexts, which are characterised by smaller-scale buildings connected by narrow, meandering streets and public squares. In both programme and scale, the Molenpoort feels disconnected to the city and the needs of its inhabitants.

When initiating a project on an urban scale, I see of great importance to analyse not only the site in architectural terms, but getting to know the communities and the socio-cultural aspects of a place. My very first interest lied in uncovering who are the people living in the city of Nijmegen, what they do and where they go. Our body of social research has developed organically by visiting the site and talking to locals about their stories, lives, and connections to the city. Together with other 7 students, I explored Nijmegen’s scenes, subcultures, turfs and territories by engaging with the residents, and uncovered and discovered the city from a very different perspective from how architecture students are accustomed. I firmly believe that good architecture stems from the understanding of its ultimate stakeholder, which are people. Architecture, especially in urban areas, is experienced by the whole community, not only the client or the immediate stakeholders, and therefore the brief I set for myself was to account and cater for a multitude of sensibilities. The richness of people’s stories, cultures, beliefs and needs are what I strive to always have in mind when I dive into a project.



Aerial view of the Molenpoort and feedback from the interviews with residents.

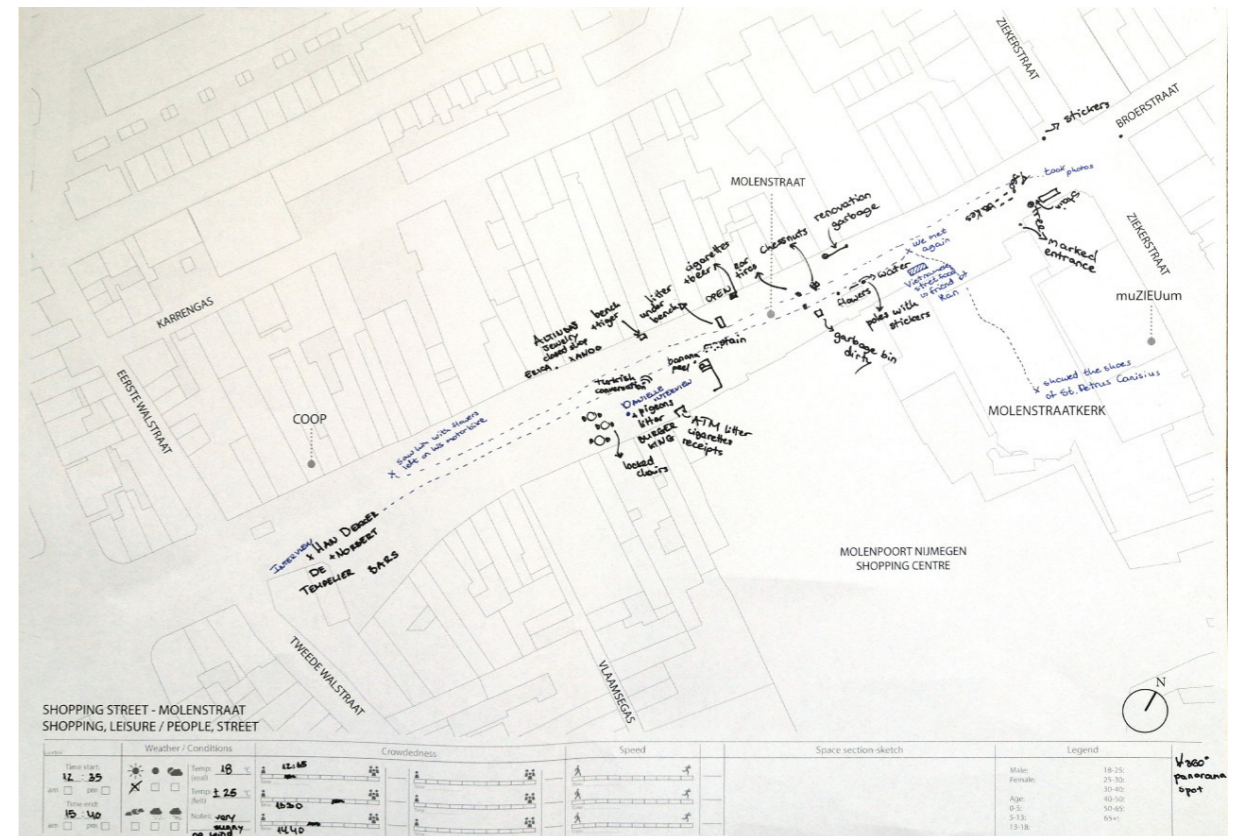
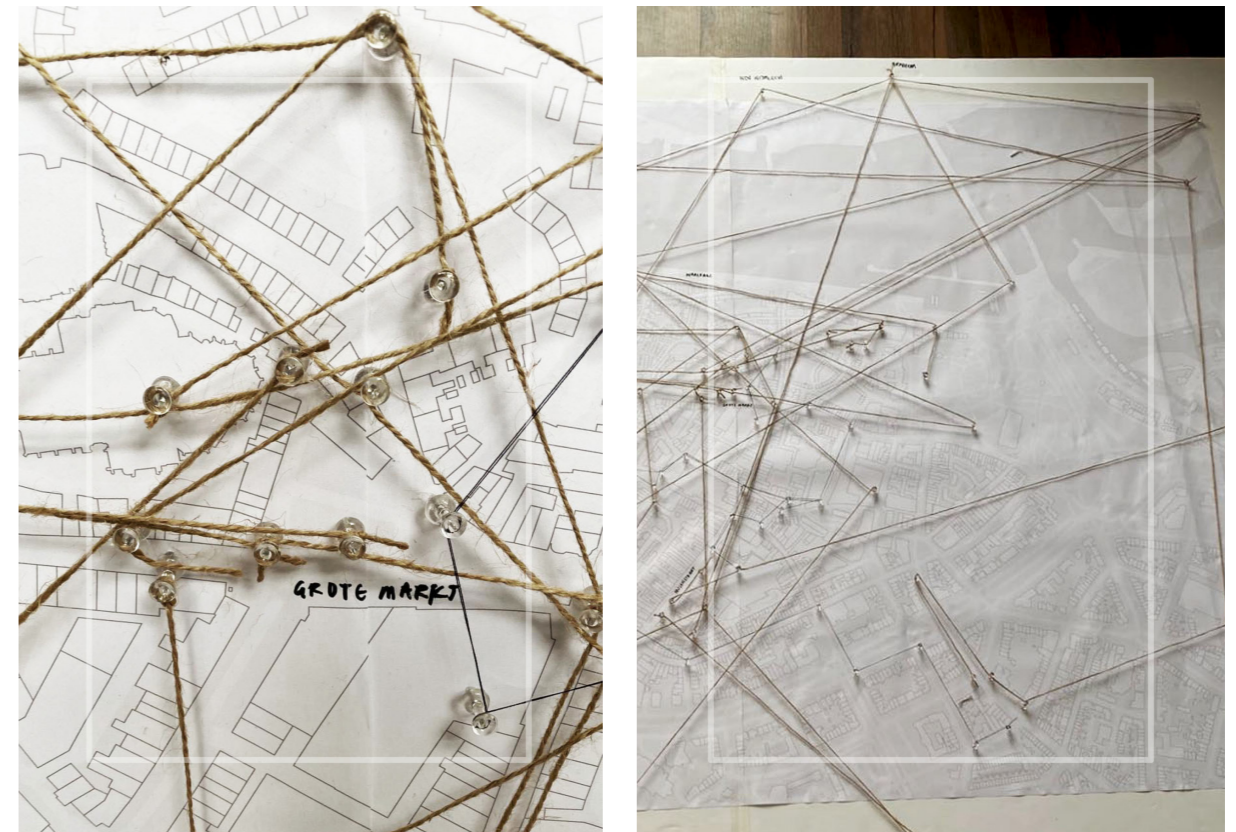
1.2



Interviewing people in Nijmegen. Photos by Author

The phenomenological methodology for the study of the socio-cultural sphere of the site started with visiting the site. After assessing the site, maps were created maps of the best locations within the centre of Nijmegen where to begin our study on the communities. Taking inspiration from William H Whyte’s “The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces” and Gehl’s theories on “How to Study Public Life”, we divided the group of eight people into pairs, and spread through these locations to start our qualitative research.

Although we had a carefully detailed plan in mind, we organically started conducting ipromptu interviews and engaging in casual conversations with passer-by’s. Studying people requires interviewing and subtle observing, many site visits, photographic documentation and films to show dynamism. The latter, in particular, allowed us to get a closer insight on the use of public space, and see how people were acting in the urban “stage”. To understand routines, we followed people on the streets without them realising, and mapped out their routes. Staying in Nijmegen overnight for an extended time, gave us an impression of the night scenes in the city, and in the space of only two days, we managed to interview 56 people of mixed age groups, ethnic background, gender and economic status. From those 56 people, we then selected nine to further interview and investigate, resulting in the movie presented at P1. These conversations built up an image of the city from a different perspective than the one we would have had if we were studying the built fabric directly, and allowed us to take a step back and appreciate the experiences and voices of ordinary people, storytelling of ordinary normality, rather than looking for the spectacular.



Mapping people's journeys (above) and qualities and activities happening on key streets around the site (below).

Spending such an extended amount of time in the public realm during site visits, and having acquired a certain sensibility to human activity due to the initial fieldwork analyses, naturally sparked in me the question of what people were doing around me, in the city, outside of their homes or workplaces. This interest brought me to the first research question: **as shopping malls become an outdated reflection of consumerism, and the web makes shopping online a commodity, what do people do in their free time?**



Snippet from the P1 movie "Beauty or a Monster?"

This question was the catalyst for the analysis of what acts represent leisure time, free time, the mundane in the city, questioning the status quo of the shopping mall and embracing the suggestion for a different type of leisure than shopping, one that best represents Nijmegen's cultural and public life and social engagement. To get an insider's view of what people get up to and what their daily perspectives are, two disposable cameras were handed to two Nijmegeners, and their task was to take them with them for one day only, and photograph whatever they felt. We stressed that these photos should be of their daily lives, and not necessarily related to special occasions.



Disposable camera photos taken by Henry and Eric

The collection above clearly show associations with leisure time. They are an expression of Leisure, some kind of Pleasure, walks in nature, views across the landscape and the river Waal, strolls in the city centre, the market, eating some fried fish. To me, it is a wonderful portrait of a city through the eyes of the architecturally untrained - refreshing. Unexpected. Imperfect. Ordinary.

The second research question stems from the above interest, at the intersection of the intimate scale between urban environment and human behaviour, and makes me question the role of the architect in the social realm: how can an architect design a “stage set” for life to unfold, giving the floor to the people, and taking a step back? If the aim is to showcase life with its unexpected, comedic, roughness and carnality, celebrating the improvised and tolerating human appropriation and adaptation then, perhaps, drawing scenarios for everyday activity, and showing human activity rather than a fixed architecture, seems more appropriate for the task.



The section model of Nijmegen made by myself and 7 other students, used for the P1 movie.
Photo by Author



Different scenarios happening on the Watchtower's rooftop.
Photo by Author

*bodily changes harm or heal
bricolage implies some sort of project
buildings-inhabitants-builders
Nijmegen is a lifestyle
very big village
we live like a family
everything is so close
squatting is a way to become active
the Waal
this is close to paradise
seeing and being seen
landscape
monuments are equalised in the personal experience
an extraordinary liveliness one cannot expect from architects
it's historical, small scale
passers-by are not buyers*

Extract from the P1 movie screening round up, “echo” by Paul Vermeulen.

From the fieldwork, the image of Nijmegen as a “big village” emerged, a place where people feel part of a community and they know their neighbours, expressing a great level of care and openness towards others. “Freedom”, “progressive”, “accepting” are terms that often were heard when in conversation with the residents, and people referred to these terms also in connection to the leftist political scenario Nijmegen is recognised for, and the anarchist and squatters movements of the ‘70s.

Investigating the local complexities and the juxtaposition of life and urban fabric, we studied that the “nooks and crannies” (Joliene, 2020), the parks, the corners, the meandering alleyways, the small scale of shops, cafés and streets are seen as valued configurations and elements of the urban texture. Conferring a feeling of both openness and human scale, which is also why the town is described as “a city of cafés, not a city of big discotheques”. (Wido, 2020)



Snips from our P1 movie “Nijmegen through your eyes”

Trough the fieldwork, I was fascinated by how the residents described the attitudes, scale and collective memory of Nijmegen. There seems to be an active desire to participate in life in the city: who through volunteering, who through political activism and who through culture, art and music: Nijmegen seems to be knit by a strong sense of community. A local example of this openness to entrepreneurship and self-expression is the Honigcomplex, where art, entrepreneurship, sport, music, food and culture come together to provide a common ground for the city.

Throughout the year, as I went on researching and discovering the site and the Molenpoort, certain terms and themes became recurrent. They are presented as a list below:

Leisure: This sphere of life is identified as a major aspect of public life in the town. Being Nijmegen a town of students, and as work becomes more flexible in general, what people do in their free time becomes a key element of analysis and an opportunity to rethink what other types of leisure can a space bring to the local communities. Generally, leisure is associated with some type of civic or physical activity (such as going to the museum, or doing sports), but my interest lies in the less obvious behaviours and actions outside the working and domestic life, the ones that are so *normal* that often are overlooked. If analysed closer, what people do in the city in their leisure time show a more subtly nuanced range of acts and habits: looking at other people, seeing and being seen, playing, strolling, looking into vitrines and windows, reading, getting a drink, speaking with someone, listening to music sat in a park, going to the market, eating, volunteering, looking at the Waal, smoking. All the actions above disagree with the ordered quality of top-down architecture. They instead suggest an approach which takes into consideration an improvised, accidental serendipity, also central to the bricoleur’s *modus operandi*.

Bricolage: i resonate with the idea of bricolage being a physical act, the “science of the concrete”. It represents an act of production and reuse, of investigation of the surrounding ecology as it is found, followed by the process of selection and of borrowing from the material culture to make something that serves a new purpose. Bricolage expresses a bottom-up approach to craft and the art of making. It requires a process, an inventory, the creation of a toolset from which the project stems. Bricolage also resonates with the idea of richness, the ad-hoc, the intuitive, seemingly disordered and with ingenuity, which contrasts to the clinical, polished, exact and tidy. In terms of the project, the studio theme of bricolage is taking me towards a discovery of the social complexities of Nijmegen, their effects on the built fabric, and the material culture of the site through a series of inventories. I am trying to put myself in the shoes of the architect-bricoleur by creating a tool-set for myself, which will be explained in the next chapter. The idea of bricolage also highlights the importance of resources. On the broader scheme, it is an opportunity to reflect on circularity, reuse and cycles of systems and materials, making the design proposal itself become, perhaps, a means of learning about cycles of systems and material reuse.

EDIT: Re-writing this at the end of the year, having walked through all the twists and turns of ideas that an academic architectural project involves, and having been able to share thoughts and opinions with other close students, as well as discussing the diversities in our projects, I have come to the realisation that I do not fully understand what Bricolage is. Through close collaboration with others, I have seen it used in many ways: a bricolage of society, typologies, actions, materials, functions.

The Ordinary: As previously mentioned, finding value in the every-day and the point of view of the architecturally untrained eye of the general public has become the base of the project, stemming from the fieldwork being carried out. From the film the group presented, an “extraordinary liveliness” shone through, a quality which “cannot be expected from architects” (Scalbert, 2020). This raises the fascinating question of how can architects design spaces with the grittiness and apparent “chaos” and unpredictability of everyday life in mind. This idea is the red thread that connects my methodology, and that I aim to translate in the final work, drawing scenarios of situations and including life in representation.

Stage: From the fieldwork, it became clear that the city and its architecture have the role of a stage set for everyday life. Public, everyday life should be entrenched in the urban tissue, and by providing a framework for life to unfold (which is the scope of my project), the architecture acts as a means to expose life, while allowing for a change of scenes, of actors, and accident. The understanding that actors and stage are actively in reciprocity: the city (the Stage) is shaped by the inhabitants (the Actors), and in turn, the inhabitants - and their cultural gestures (the Play) - are influenced by the city.

"A liveable habitat is one which the inhabitant actively co-evolves with and which does not constitute a ready-made condition to which the inhabitant would simply have to passively adapt."

Radman, Kousoulas; 2020

2. THE BRICOLEUR'S TOOLSET

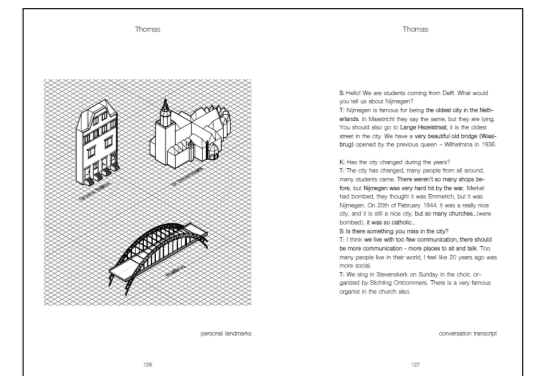
If I am to act as a bricoleur, I am to investigate the surroundings and make my own set of tools to carry out my project. As a means to achieve this, I am organising my research in catalogues, which have been printed into separate booklets:



A - Z
encyclopedia of the 'nijmegenaar'

Alessandro de Cadilhac, Jasmine Montina, Kamelia Marinkoyova, Louise Gilletti, Robert Bichlmaier, Sofia Pavlova, Tomi Akinyemi, Vittoria Poletto

2020/2021
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Catalogue of Beauty

2020/2021
Urban Architecture - Studio Bricolage

Jasmine Montina, Stanislaw Klajs, Kamelia Marinovyova

Informal urban furniture 15

11 Tappan of St. Peter's Cathedral
12 Stair in front of the Concrete Building
13 Krasovicki

Urban elements that are not necessarily designed for people to sit on them, provide unexpected settings for public life to unfold. Be it a step, a bench, a bike rack or a street light, people will use them as meeting points, places to rest, or even play.

Level changes 17

13 Benedikt
14 Garmisch
15 Strassacker

Steps, slopes, terraces and level changes in general, are characteristics of the unique morphology of Nijmegen. Compared to the flatness of the rest of the Netherlands, the city's configuration provides opportunities to explore the theme of heights in the urban fabric.

Structure 19

20 Roof structure
21 28 Street/roof structure

The Malapout shopping centre is seen of value in its structural and material sense. The structure offers an open and flexible plan with opportunities for adaptive reuse of the building. Some of the secondary elements and materials, such as steel structures and glass windows, may be valuable and possible to reuse too.

Catalogue of socio-spatial practices

2020/2021
Urban Architecture - Studio Bricolage

Jasmine Montina, Louise Gillett

Meeting

Meeting Point
Meeting Point

Meeting

Meeting

7 DAYS PER WEEK OPEN

Scale: Analytical
Credits: Tommaso, Malapout Centre, Rotterdam

Meeting

Meeting

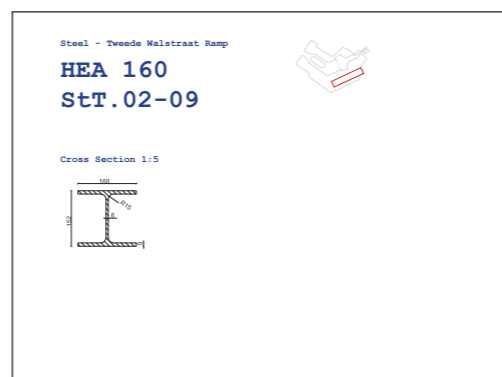
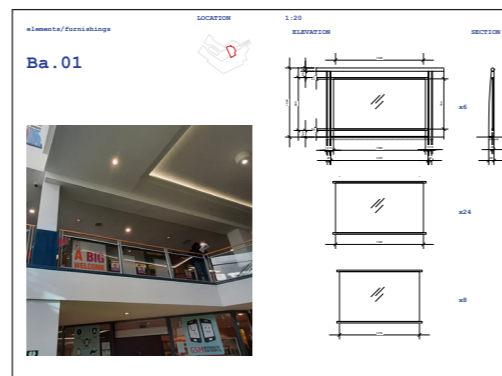
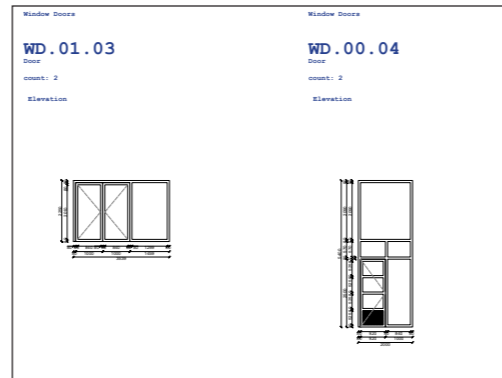
Architectural Diagram: Analytical
Scale: Conceptual (approx. 1:500)

Inventory

Material analysis of the Molenpoort

Alessandro de Caçilhac, Jasmine Montina, Kamelia Marinikova, Louise Gillett, Robert Bichmaier, Sofia Pavlova, Tomi Akinyemi, Vittoria Poletto, Stanislaw Klajs, Aleksandra Wróbel

2020/2021
Urban Architecture - Studio Bricolage



The act of Cataloguing offers an alternative way to read a city and a context through the lens of a bricoleur, someone who understands that it is necessary to start from what is at hand, that the need to look far away for solutions isn't the answer - or feasible anymore. A bricoleur is guided by a necessity, an urge to make, and therefore forced to look at their surroundings and collect valuable objects to make something which is useful at the this time. In the same way, the urgency of the Municipality plans to demolish the Molenpoort shopping centre is a call to act as a bricoleur, to find and propose an alternative which is more sustainable both in a social sense and in terms of energy consumption.

3.1

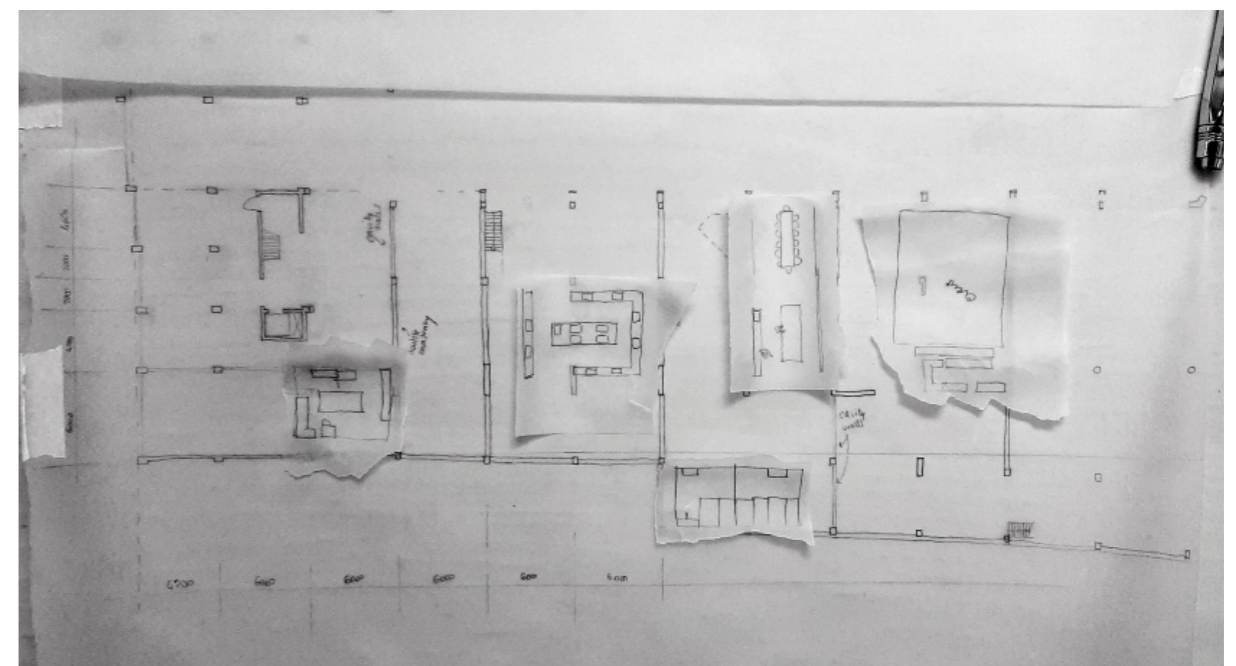
Something that I find important to talk about, is the continuous discovery that inevitably occurs when working with an existing building. Throughout all the second semester, I continued looking at Archive drawings of the Molenpoort, measuring the building by hand, taking new photographs and finding new quirks or changes in the building as part of my research.

This constant discovery made it extremely challenging to understand the more detailed programmatic distribution within the existing building. From the Catalogue of Beauty, I realised I wanted to house a function that would allow people to look through windows and not see products to buy, but look at processes of expression of passions and the art of making. After trying to fit a cooking school and a drama school, I looked at fitting a music centre, so that the students and the public could have a visual relation. To get an insight into what it meant to be a music student and teacher I contacted Eric, one of the Nijmegenars included into the A-Z Encyclopaedia.

This conversation resulted into further change in programme, after it became clear that music rooms need the privacy of an elevated floor, and a ceiling height that the Molenpoort could not provide. From here I learned that an existing building can not accept any programme the designer wishes to house: the shopping mall was itself rejecting my ideas. A further analysis into the materiality of the mall and its sunlight orientation, provided me with a suitable solution: the traces of the old shops, the opportunistically half-painted brickwork, the exposed concrete, took me to the decision of proposing an art centre, which by nature requires a space which is less polished, and would reflect the rawness of the mall's structure. The north facing nature of the building's facade was a clue for a programme that would involve art studios, where non-direct sunlight is more appropriate.

Used drawing as a way of discovery, the more I discovered, the more solutions I was getting.

3. DESIGN



Testing different programmes into the plan. Cooking school option.

Meeting with Eric, music student and music therapist / 17.03



Outcomes:

When practicing not much connection to outside

Moment of rehearsal SOMETIMES connected to outside

Performance connected to outside



rooms need to be able to be closed and opened

RELATIONSHIP TO THE SQUARE?

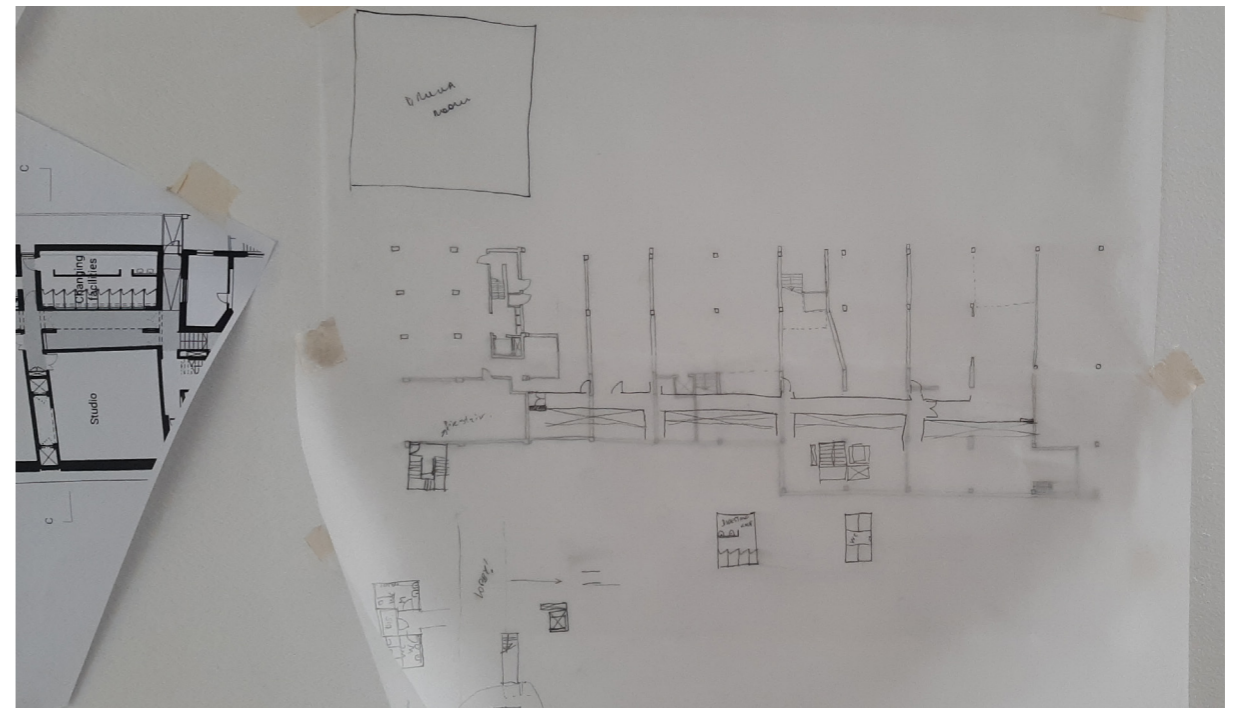
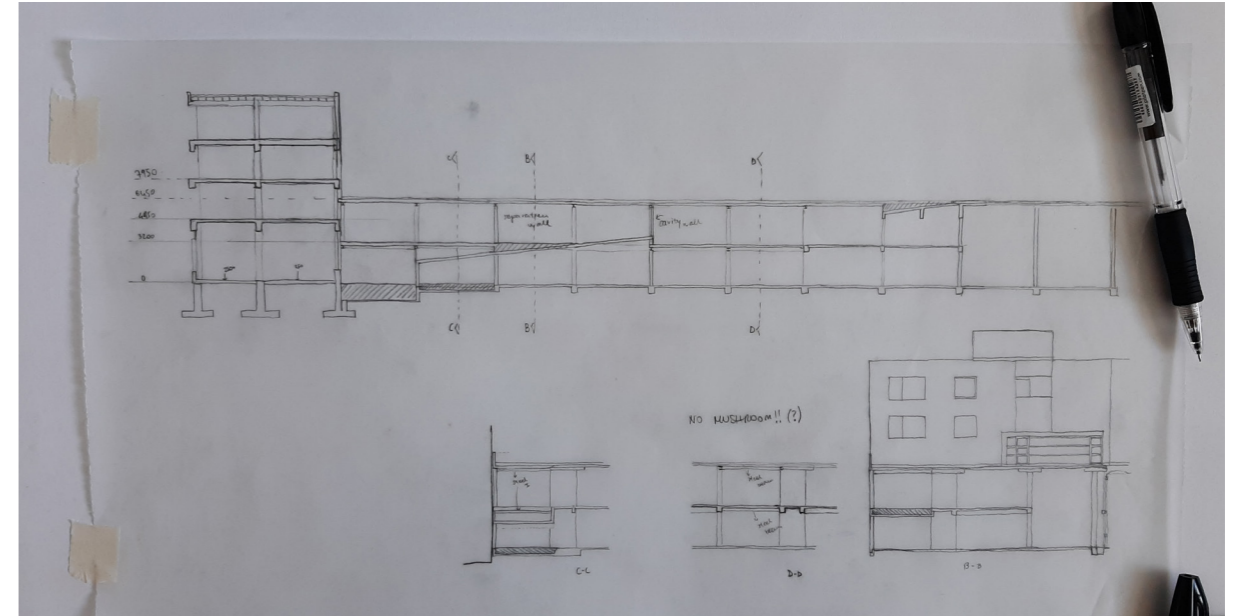
To eyes of the "public"

CONFLICT: story of act of looking and connection to the square in front? That has to happen only when students are ready...perhaps a buffer space closer to the edge to the square?

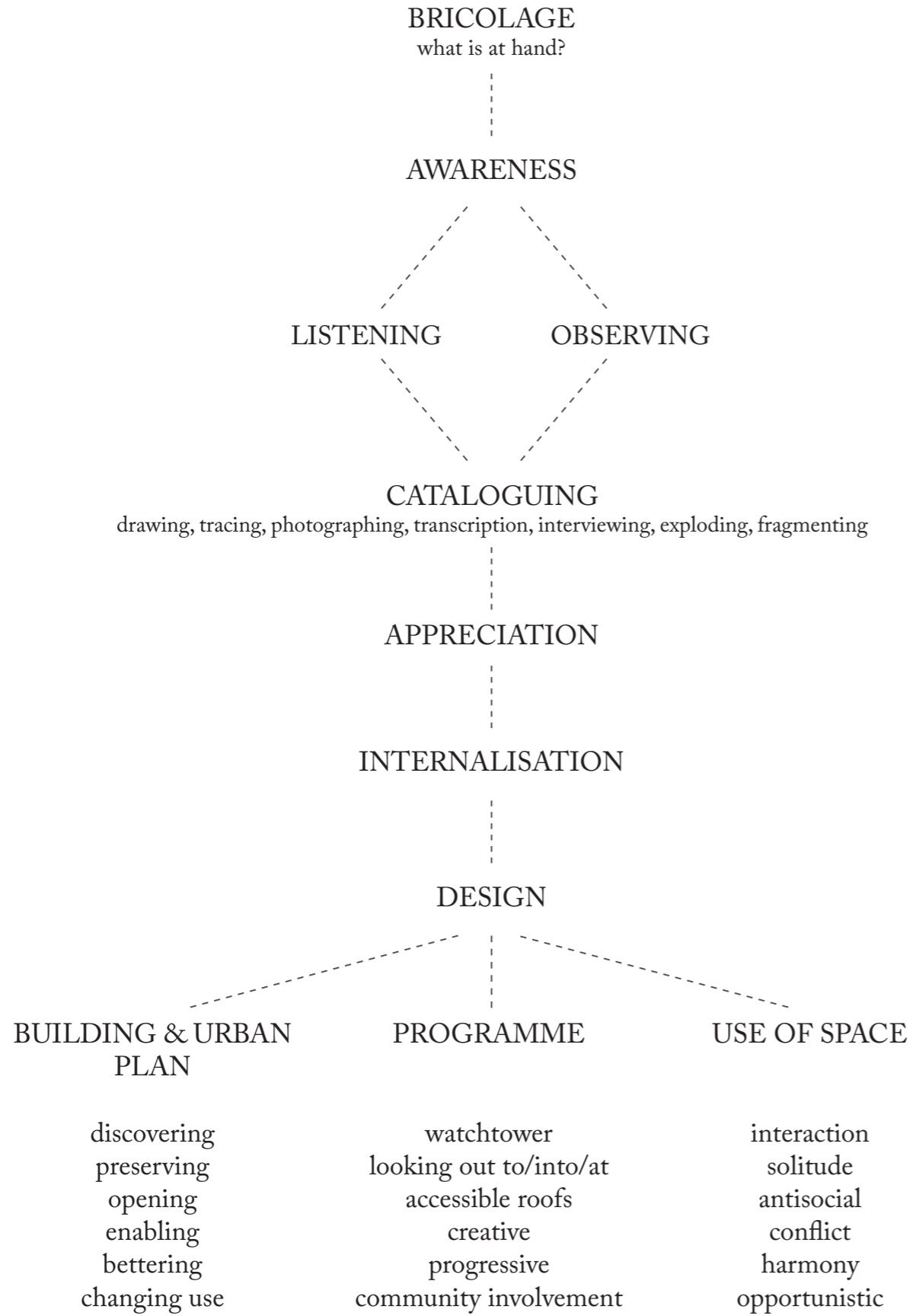
Maybe a moment of enticement?
Curtains?

WHAT TO SHOW TO THE OUTSIDE?

Outcomes from meeting with Eric

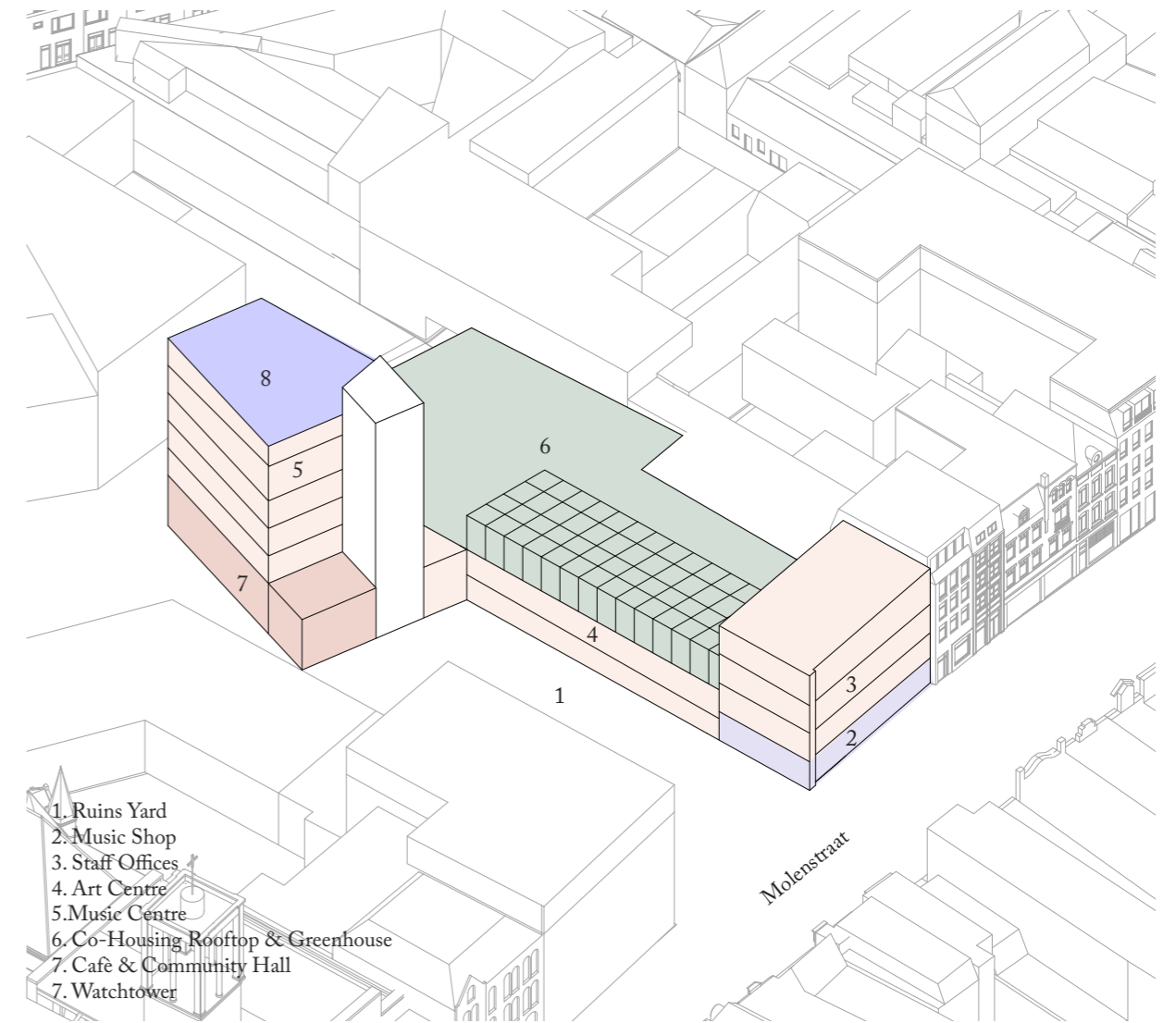


Drawing and (re-)tracing as an act of discovery of the existing building. Photos by Author.



A-Z Encyclopaedia of Nijmegenars

This catalogue gave me the understanding of the city as a stage set. The built fabric offers a backdrop to the life of a city and the daily routines and experiences of its people. Its influence can be most seen in the wider programmatic choices in the project, leaning towards a project that would reflect the energy, progressiveness and willingness to be involved and part of a community that we experienced during the initial fieldwork. This is translated into the design of a space in the heart of the city which would be reserved to the arts, where students and the community could express their passions and come together through making, composing, exhibiting and shared pleasure.



Eric



Age: 25 years old
Occupation: Music therapy student
What's missing in Nijmegen: More places to sit and talk

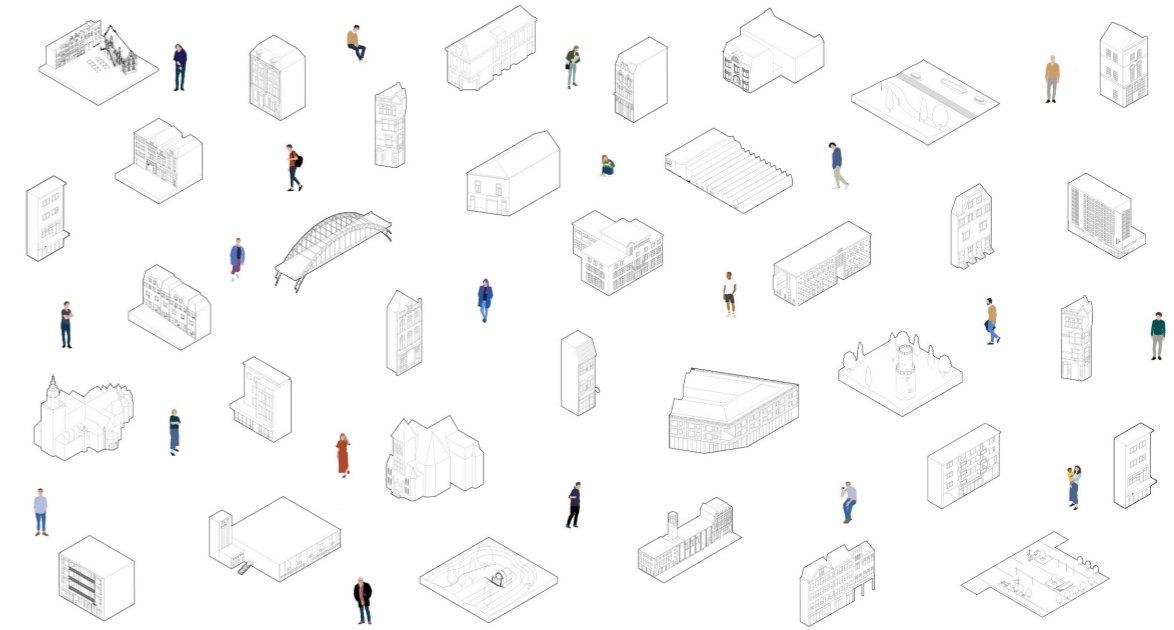


traces of everyday life



Nijmegen Highlight
De Kaaij Waalbrug at the background

The catalogue did not only work merely as giving clues for what the city may want or need, but having carried out many of those interviews myself, and having connected with some of the characters on a more personal level, I really had in mind exactly what they do, how their rooms looked, the messiness of the inside spaces where I met them, the different sensibilities that they have. This worked for me as a constant reminder that the architect ultimately designs a frame in which or around which life inevitably happens, and to restrain from hoping or wanting things to be finished and “polished”.



A reminder that the city and its inhabitants are interconnected and in symbiosis one cannot exist without the other

Fred



Age: 52 years old
Occupation: Record Store Owner
What's missing in Nijmegen: Nothing

T: What made you think that Nijmegen needed a record shop?
F: I use to work in Doormoosje, it's a club, lots of gigs, lots of shows. I use to work there as a non-paying job, you know, I was volunteering. So I was working there and then another record shop in town as a paid job. So I went to work there and after a couple years I thought I wanted to do something for myself. So I started the shop here.

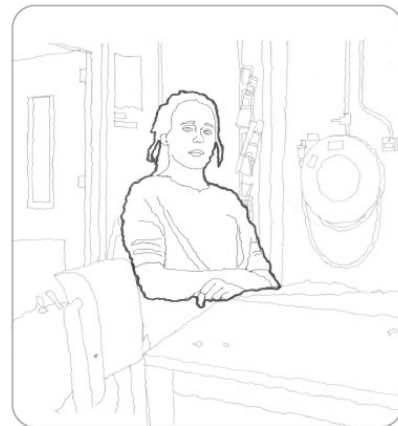
[...]

L: What would you add to the city that's not here at the moment?
F: Vaccine?
[HAHAHA]
L: Do you think the city needs more event space or cultural facilities?
F: No, Nijmegen maybe together with Groningen are culturally very sound. There is a good theatre, clubs for alternative film house. Nijmegen is a student town so there is a lot of alternatives and lots of people thinking of initiatives to start something. And also the city is very supportive of that so when there is like an empty building, somebody goes hey there is an empty building would you like to organise this or that everyone gets involved, so that's good for Nijmegen. I'm really happy in this town, really really happy.

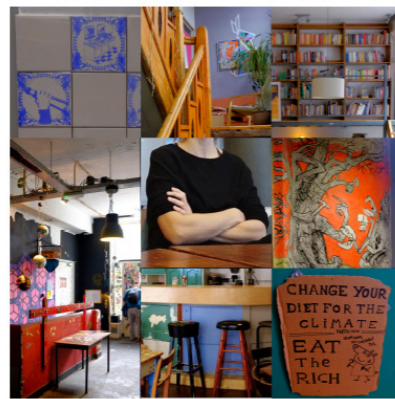
T: Do you live locally? Do you commute into the city?
F: I live the other side of the river, just across the river. Well, it's new so it's not as expensive as the inner city.

conversation transcript

Joliene



Age: 35 years old
Occupation: Phd Student
What's missing in Nijmegen: Green areas and public space



traces from the conversation



Nijmegen Highlight
De Klinker, Political Cafe / De Underbroek (Concert Space)

Catalogue of Beauty

This catalogue is the one which came into play in the stages of the urban plan and project definition the most. It is a collection of the peculiarities, both material and immaterial, of the site and of Nijmegen, which have value for me and are worth preserving or celebrating.

Level changes

17



13



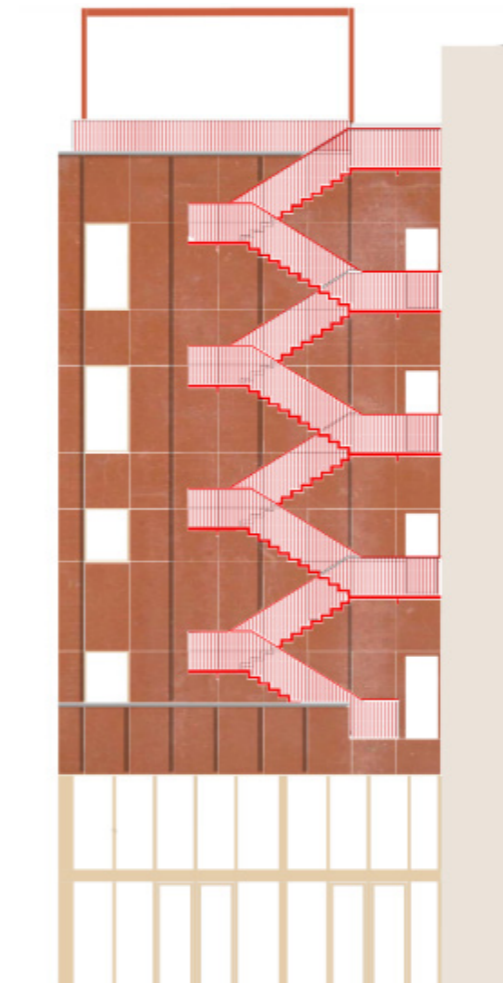
14



15

13 Benedenstad
14 Grotestraat
15 Stevenskerk

Steps, slopes, terraces and level changes in general, are characteristic of the unique morphology of Nijmegen. Compared to the flatness of the rest of the Netherlands, this city's conformation provides opportunities to explore the theme of heights in the urban fabric.



The public stair to the watchtower is a nod to Nijmegen's level changes.

Scale of the city



17



16

19

- 16 Van Broekhuysenstraat/ Mariënborg
- 17 Achter de Hoofdwacht
- 18 Korenmarkt
- 19 Benedenstad



18

The urban morphology of the city is characterised by an intimate scale of the urban fabric: the narrow, meandering streets lead to small squares and courtyards, where small cafés and familiar scenes relate the urban scale to the human proportions.



19



The urban plan reflects the fabric and scale of the city.

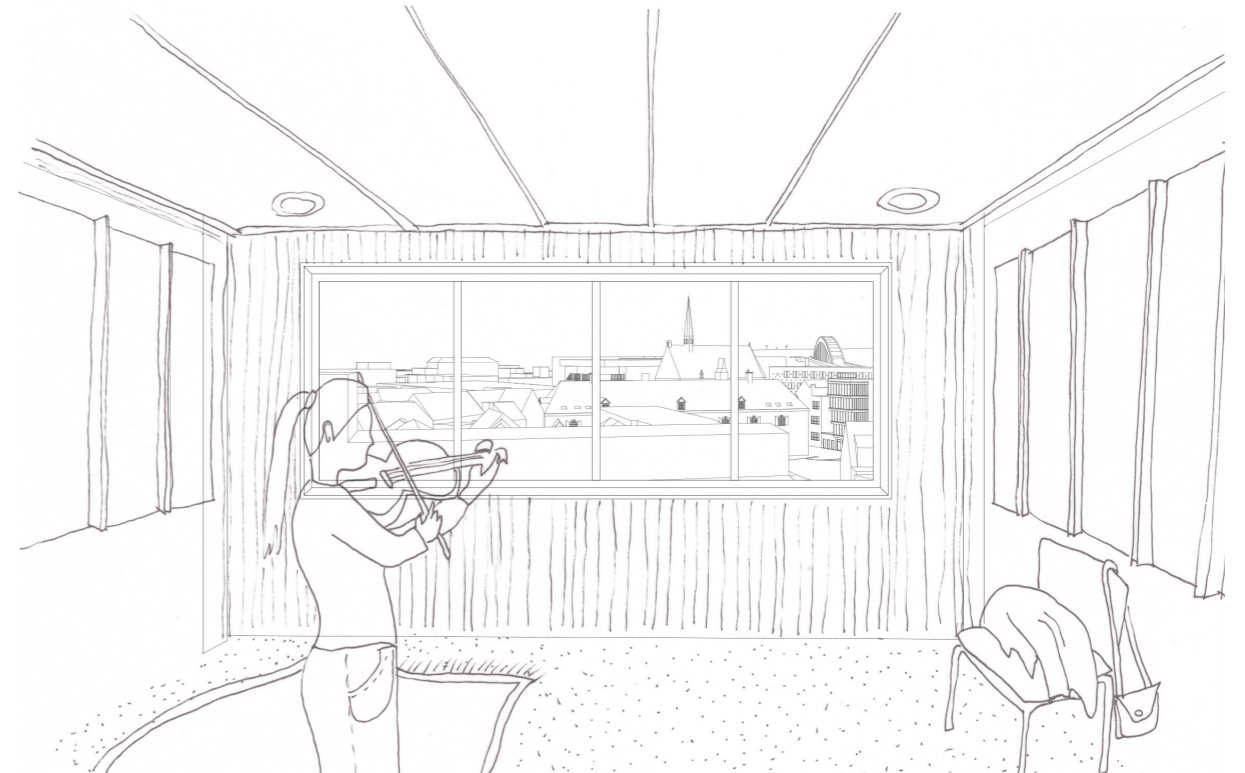
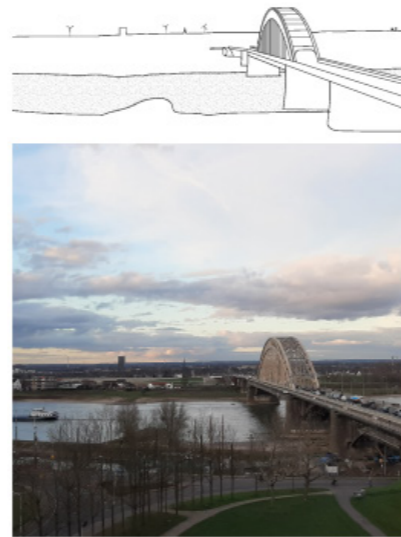
Looking out at



The particular topography of Nijmegen offers many beautiful views across the city and the natural landscape from the highest points of the hills. In the city of today, this natural advantage has been recreated in the many accessible roofs and higher buildings from which the cityscape and skyline of Nijmegen are visible.

33

32 Parking rooftop in Mariëburg
33 Hunnerpark



The height of the building celebrates the act of looking out at the landscape.

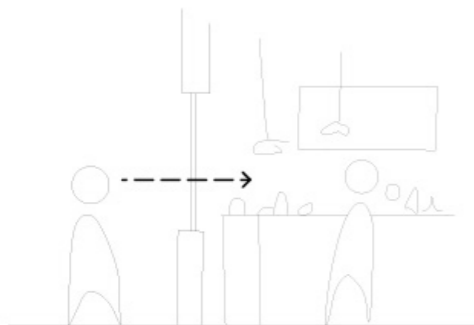


34



35

The act of looking is one of the primary actions that occur in public life in the city. Looking at other people (or simply looking at "life") is a common activity in public squares, for example.

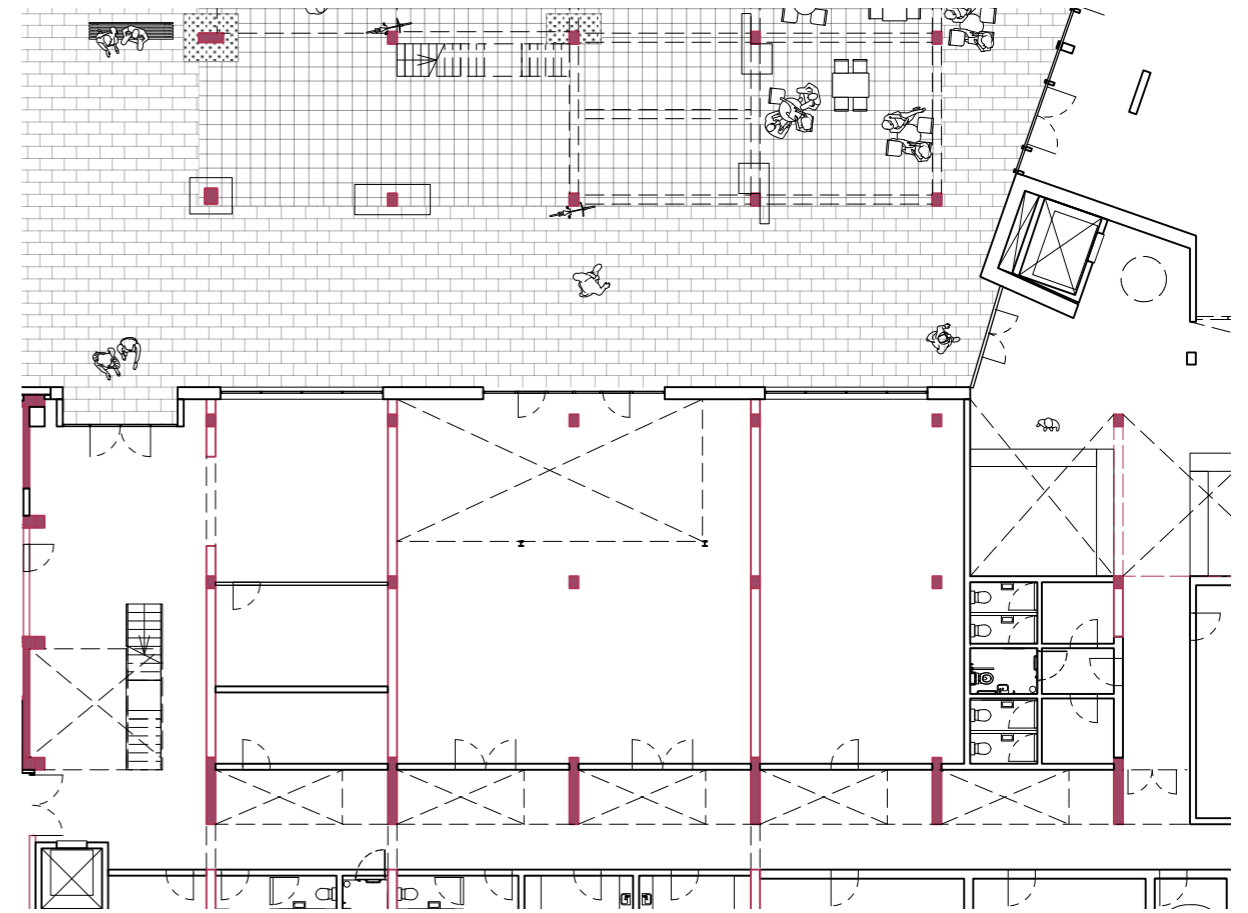


36

Looking into a building, be it a house, a shop, a laboratory, and satisfying the curiosity of the eye, is something that is usually allowed by glass vitrines. By exposing a process, produce atmosphere, the sense of vision (and enticement) is stimulated.



37



The art workshop are designed with large windows facing the Ruins Yard, allowing for visual exchange.

Structure

29



26

26 Roof structure
27, 28 Groundfloor structure

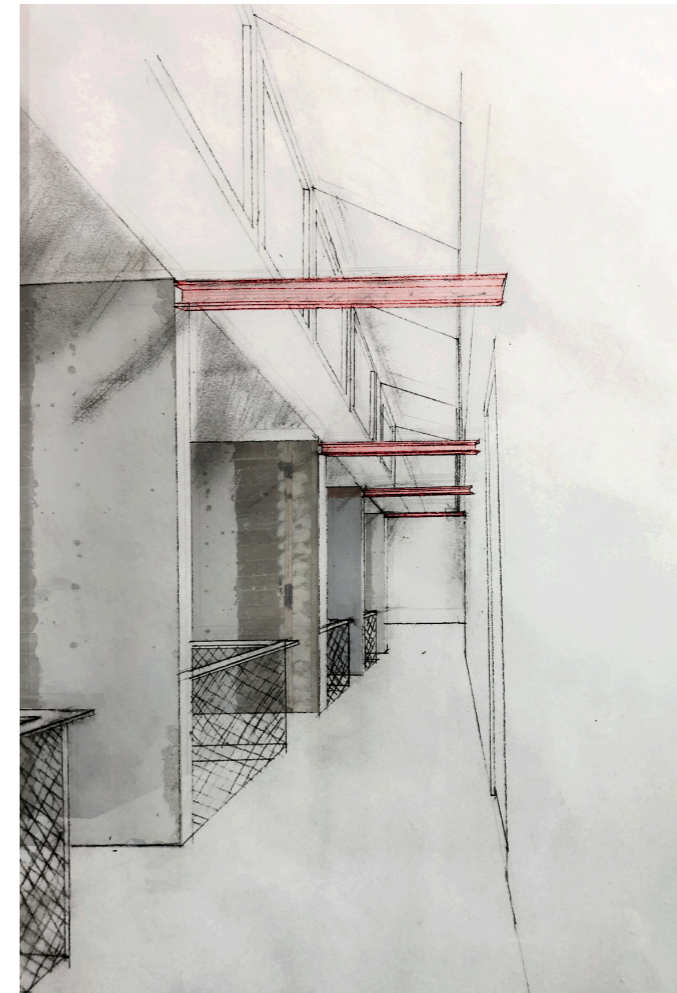


27

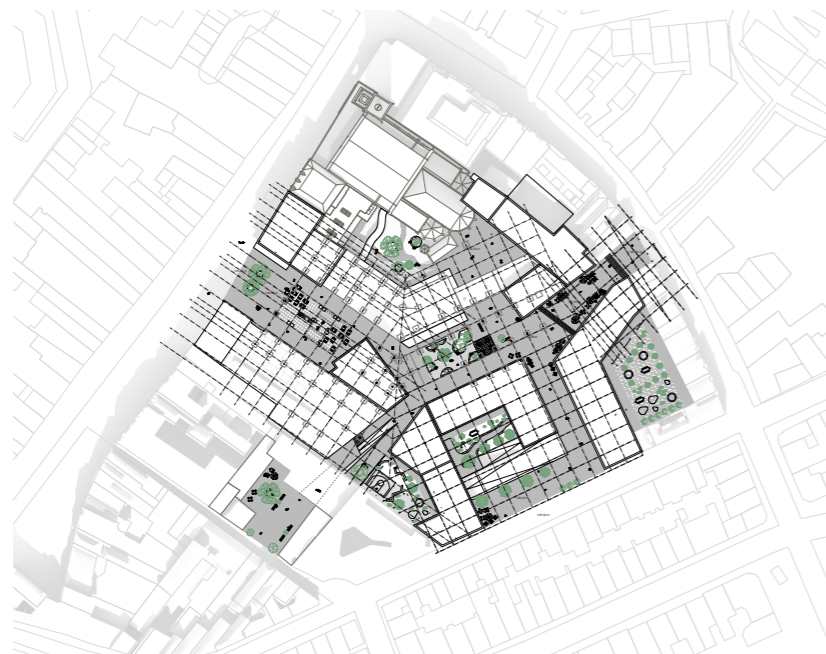


28

The Molenpoort shopping centre is seen of value in a structural and materials sense. The structure offers an open and flexible plan with opportunities for adaptive reuse of the building. Some of the secondary elements and materials - such as steel structures and glass windows - may be valuable and possible to reuse too.



The structure of the Molenpoort is exposed and integrated within the spaces, rather than concealed in between separating walls.

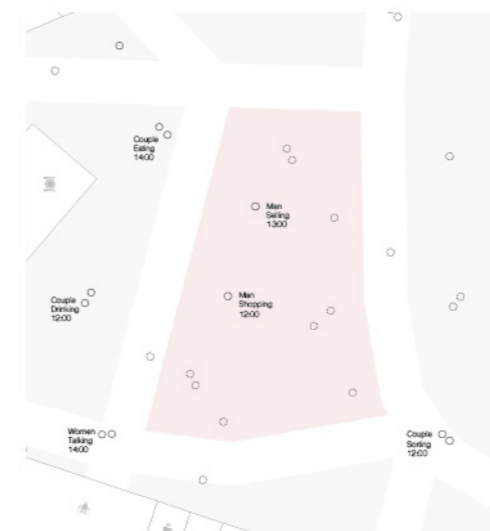


The Urban Plan is shaped according to the concrete column and slab grid of the mall in order to preserve it.

Catalogue of Socio-Spatial Relations

The method developed for this catalogue started by capturing photographs of ordinary moments and scenes within the city. When looking around, I was consciously not looking for the “unexpected”, but, on the contrary, I was striving to record the ordinary, the routine, the seemingly normal and unspectacular.

We discovered how a lamp post can become a focal point for life in a square...

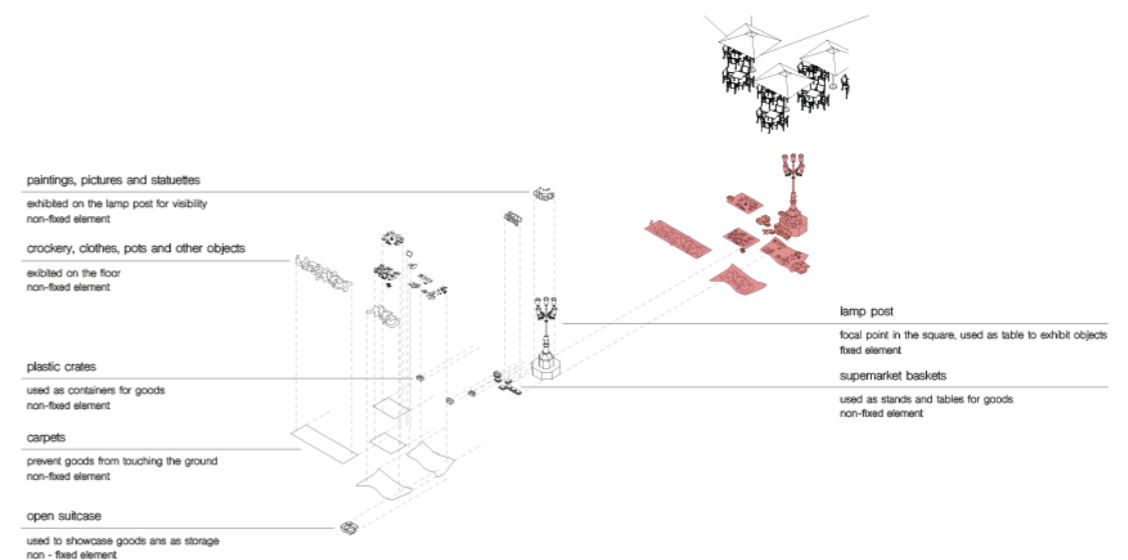


Grote Markt Plan
Ethnographic Observations



Grote Markt
Monday Market

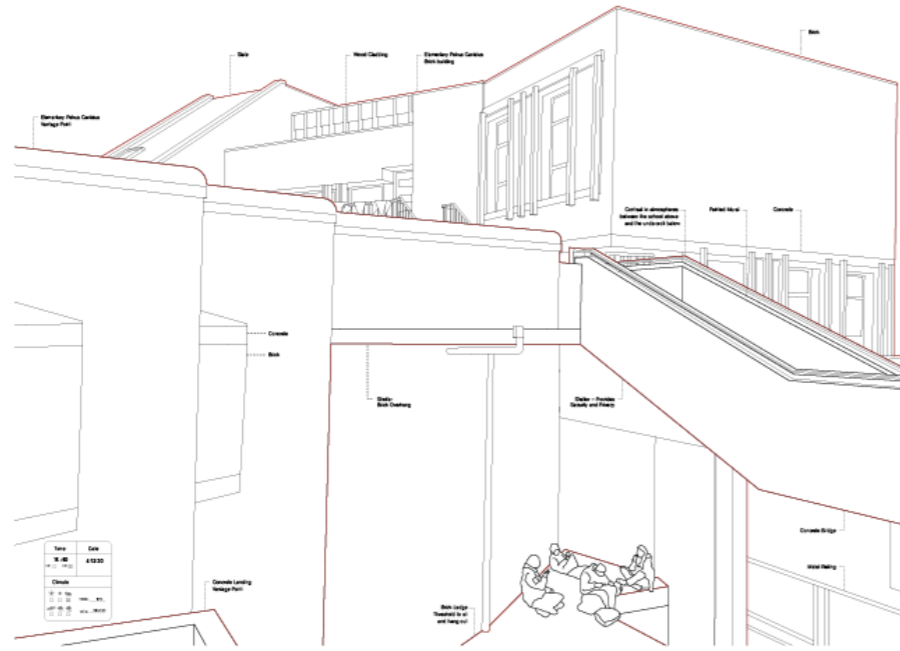
Selling



Architectural Elements Analysed
Platform, Exhibition, Flooring, Identity

We observed how a dark corner underneath a kindergarden can be enough for some teenagers to hide and gather to smoke together...

Smoking



Scene Analysed
Climate, Temporality, Material Culture, Behaviour

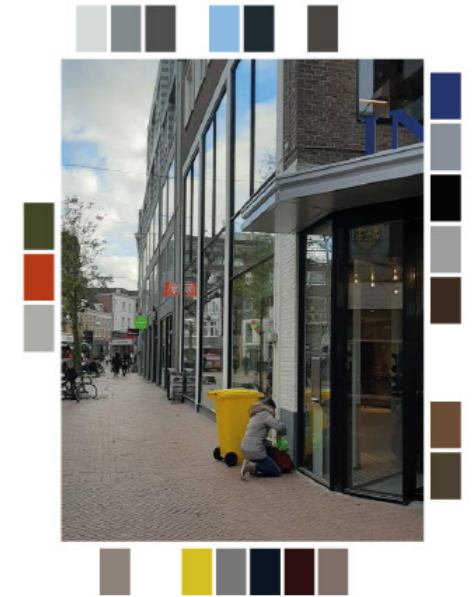
And learned that entrances have ledges and overhangs, or that would be beneficial to have some resting point at entrances to sit, sort or wait.

Sorting

Sorting

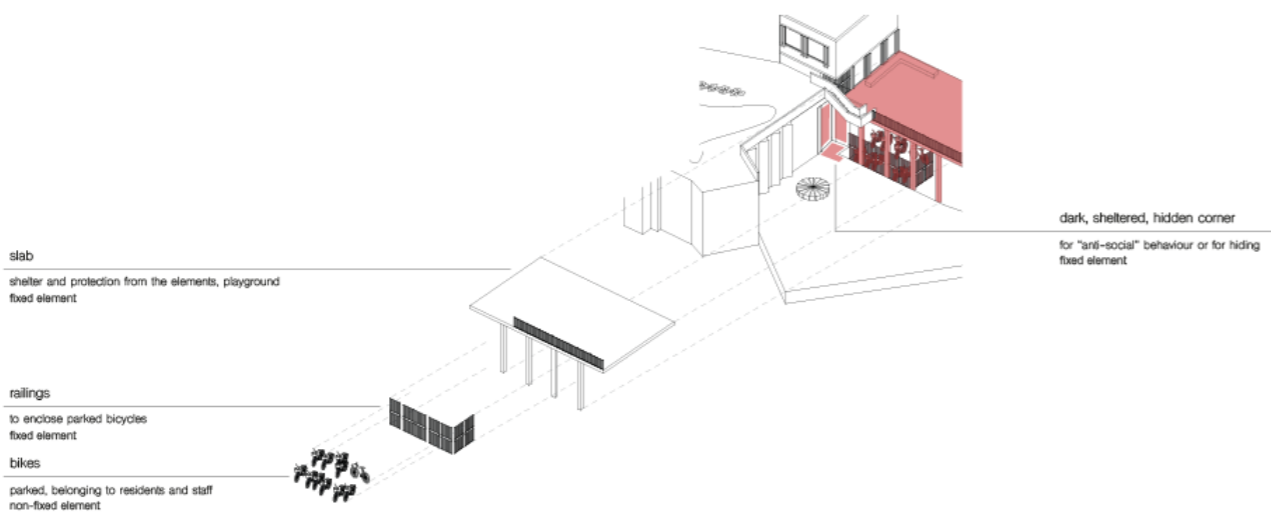


Molenstraat Plan
Ethnographic Observations



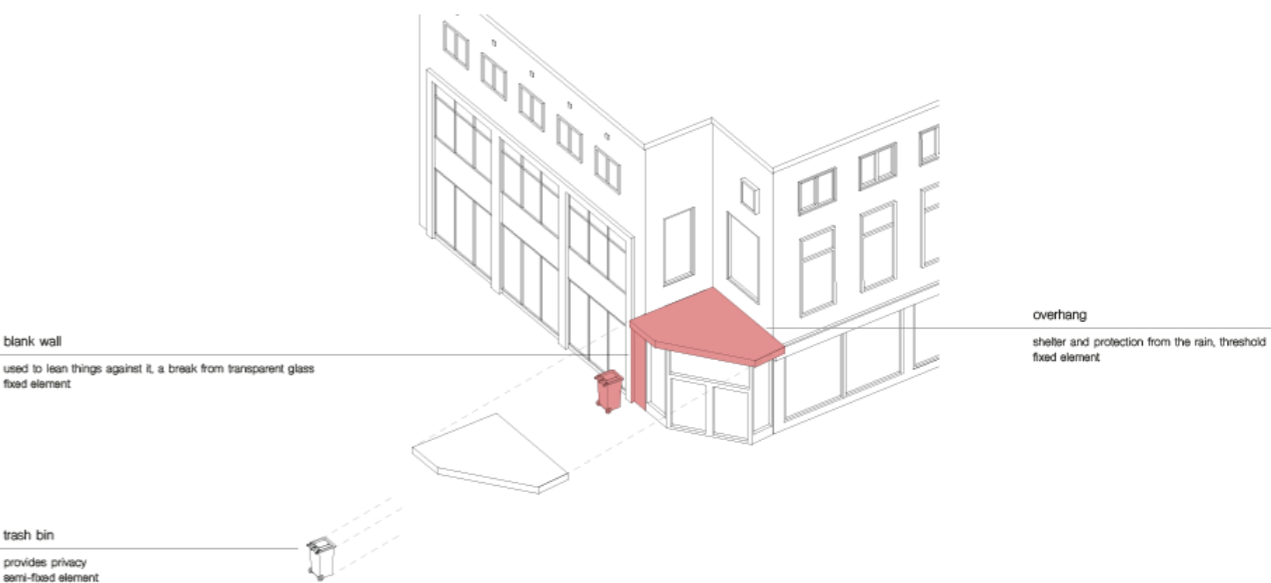
Molenstraat / Ziekerstraat Corner
ING

Smoking



Architectural Elements Analysed
Darkness, Shelter, Privacy

Sorting



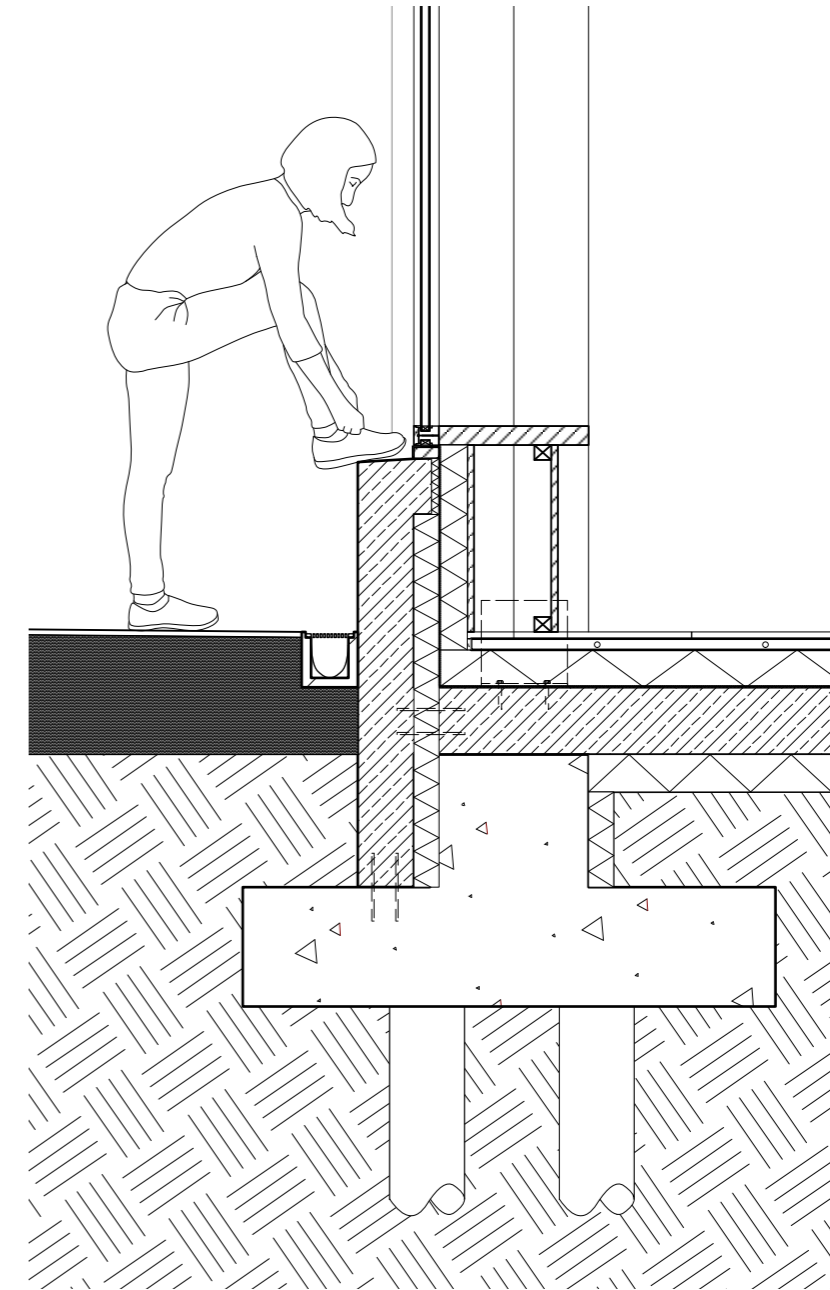
Architectural Elements Analysed
Shelter, Privacy

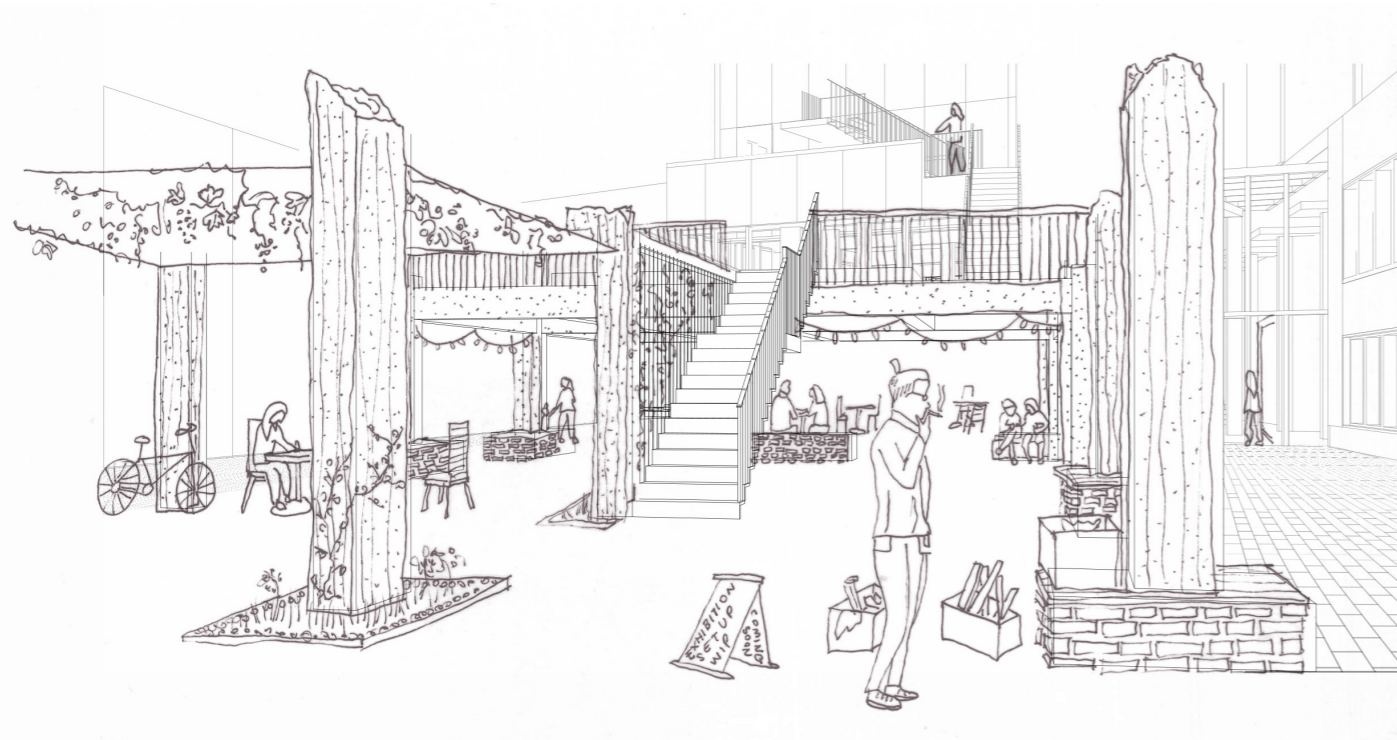
Overall, rather than trying too hard to predict what would happen in the design, I have come to believe it is more about acknowledging that these actions do happen, and the urban fabric should cater for the everyday. It is about acknowledging that people sometimes act as an untameable herd, which, in the words of Scalbert (2013) “use buildings in opportunistic ways”. Therefore, I found myself hesitant in trying to over-design public spaces and the interior collective spaces in too much detail.

However, by observing, drawing, analysing and breaking down the scenes, I was provided with the tools to have this sensibility, and to perhaps understand what cultural gestures and what elements of the urban fabric are allowing for that practice.

“(bricolage as ethics) of the architect attentive to the nuances of human occupation and its effects on the fabric of buildings.”

Irénée Scalbert & 6a Architects, Never Modern, 2013





Inventory of the Molenpoort

The catalogue stems from the interest in investigating the levels of reuse which are possible within the Molenpoort, which is seen as a valuable resource, and rejects the idea of an ex-novo approach to the built environment, where pre-existing elements and structures are mindlessly demolished and discarded. As the main concrete column and slab structure become the base onto which Kamelia, Stanislaw and I designed our urban plan and urban plans take form, my interest brought me deeper in the exploration of what are the other building elements which compose the shopping mall, and which can be extracted, treated and reused.

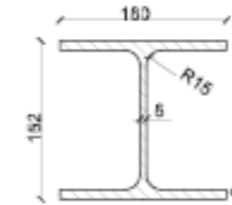
The interventions within the existing fabric are left minimal, just infill and separating walls are included inside the Molenpoort's retained structure, but in instances where a necessary portal had to be opened, or where the architecture required a transparent layer, the catalogue comes into play as a source from which to pick reusable structural elements or windows and doors to give new life to. In outdoor spaces, the steel beams in different profile and sizes provide structures to facilitate the new programme. The traces of the old building are present within the new spaces.

Steel - Tweede Walstraat Ramp

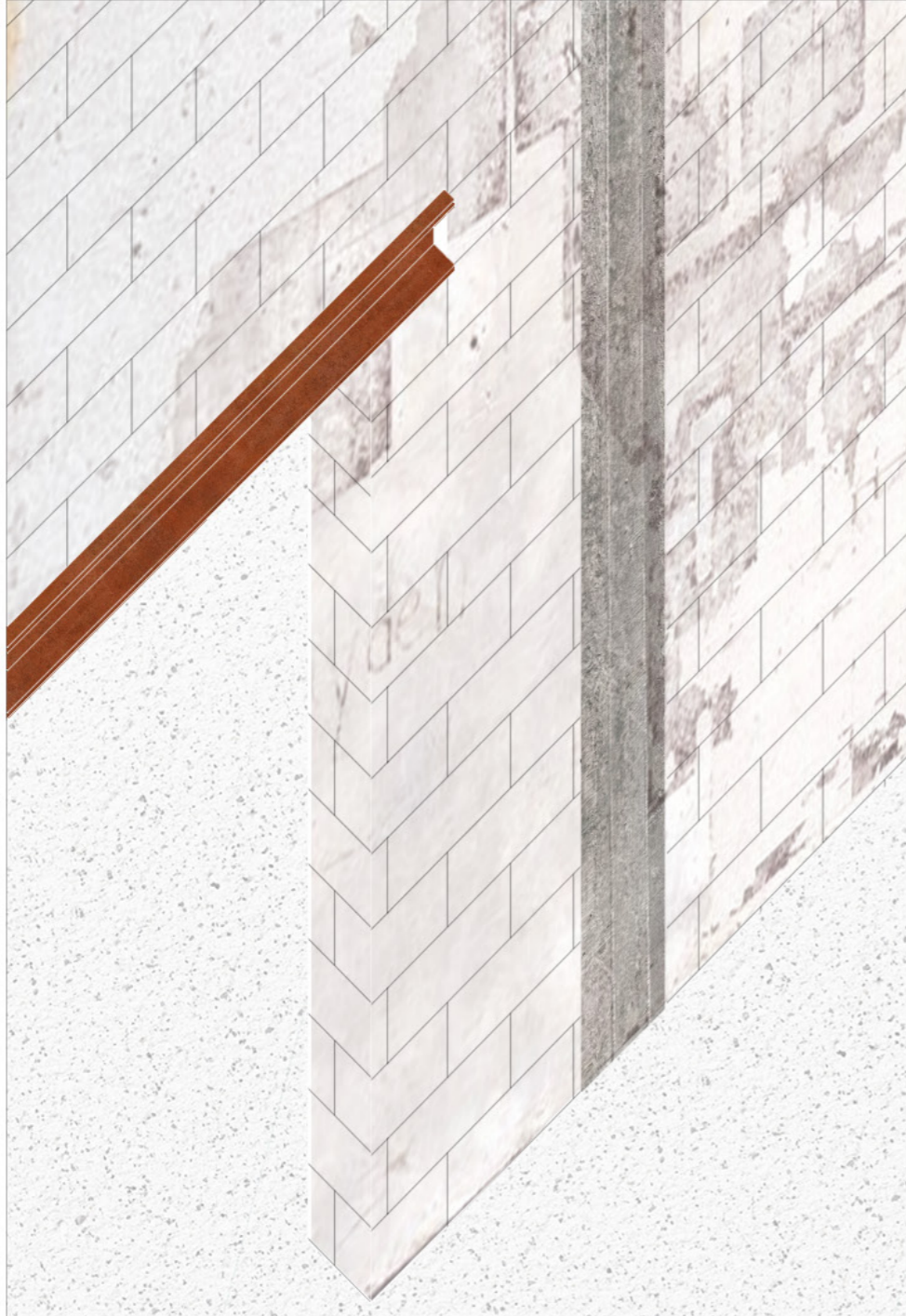
HEA 160
StT.02-09



Cross Section 1:5



Elevations 1:50



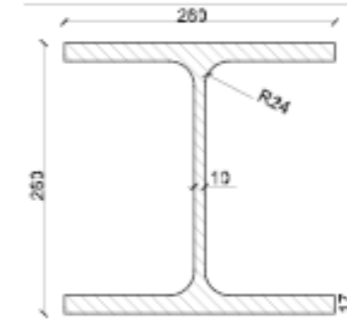
Steel - Tweede Walstraat Coop Extension

HEB 260

StT.98



Cross Section 1:5

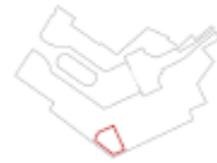


Elevation 1:50

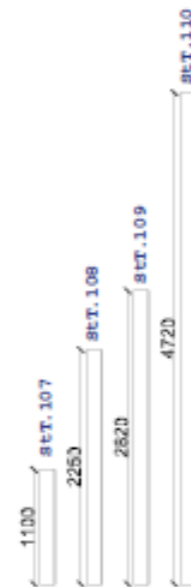
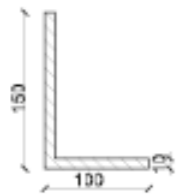
Reclaimed I beams help support the openings in the existing structural walls.

Steel - Tweede Walstraat Coop Extension

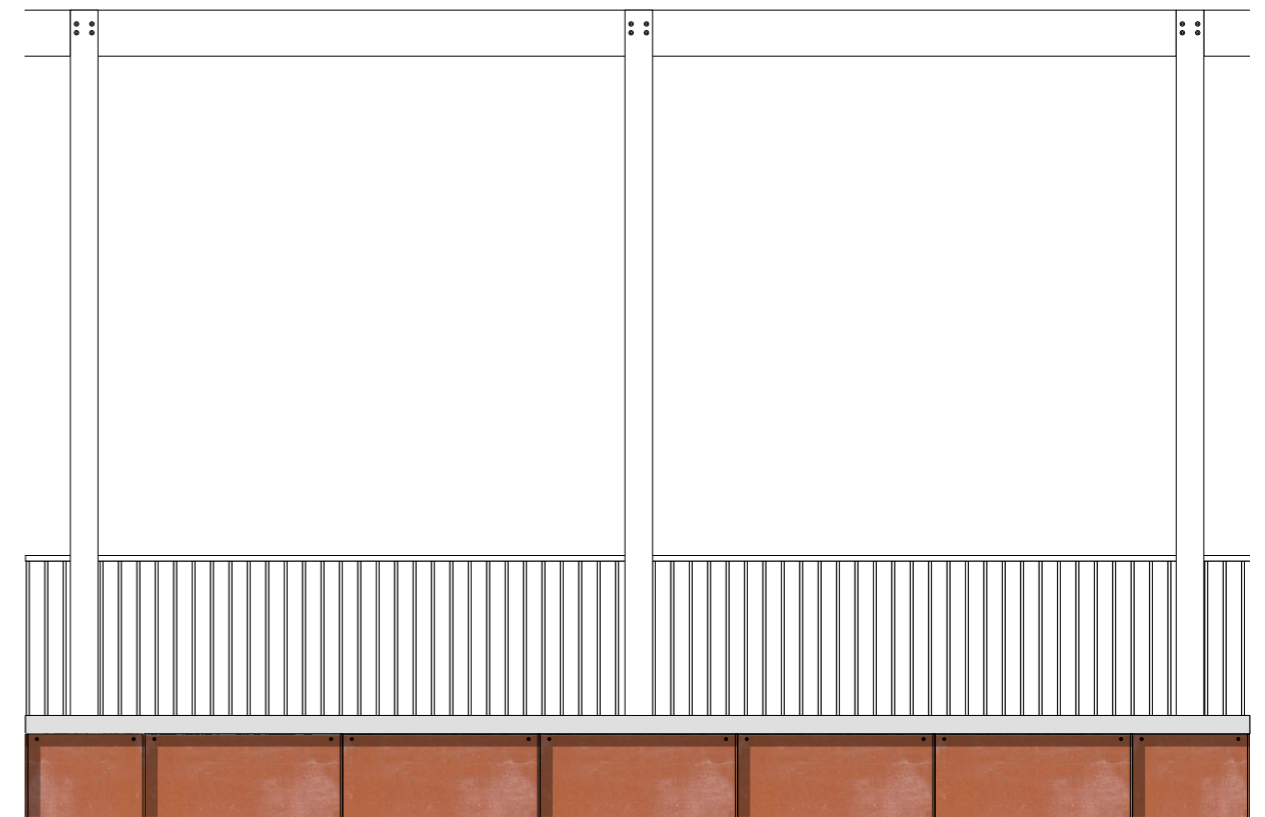
L 150x100x10
StT.107-110



Cross Section 1:5



Elevations 1:50



Reclaimed Iand L steel profiles become the roof pavilion at the watchtower.

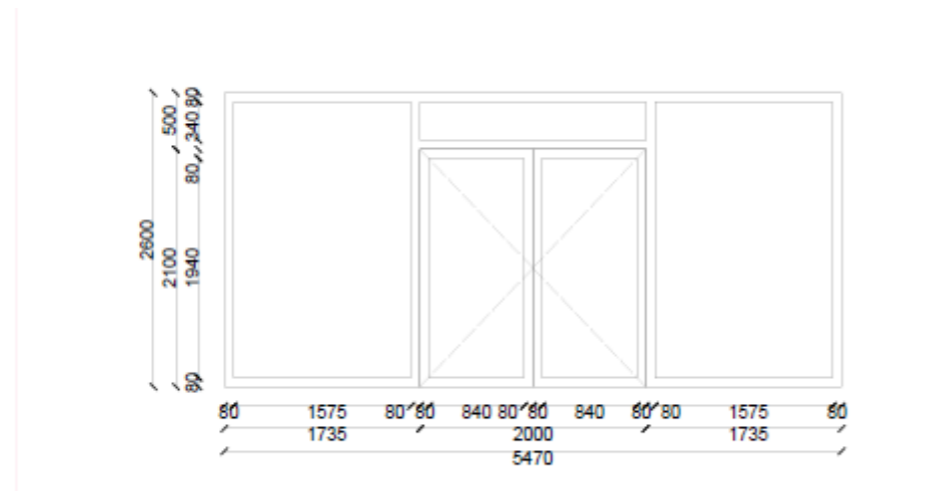
Window Doors

WD.00.05

Door

count: 11

Elevation

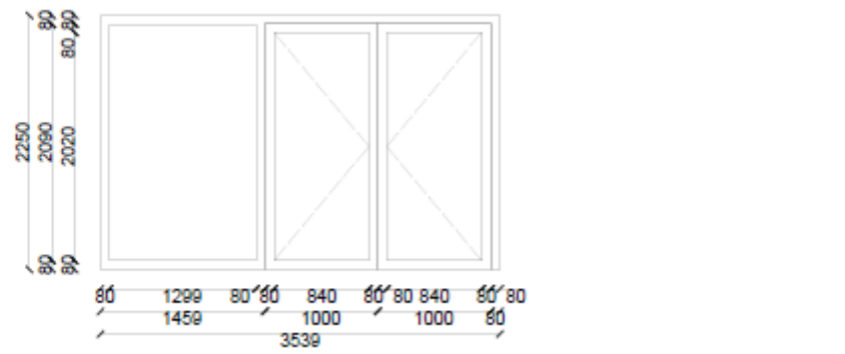


WD.01.06

Door

count: 2

Elevation



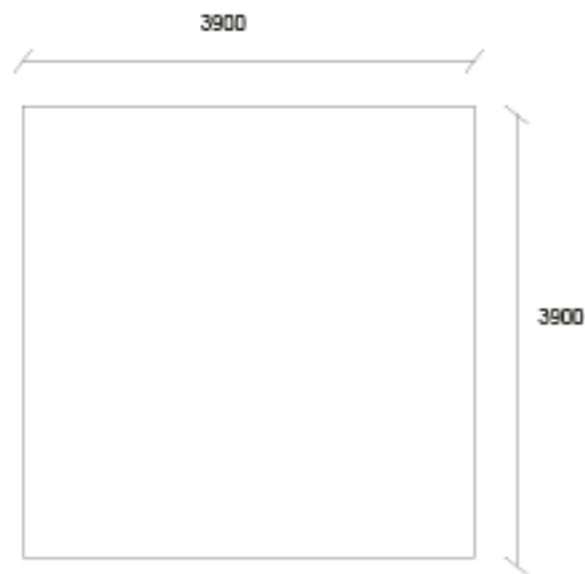
The previous shop's entrances and windows are integrated as internal glazed walls for the art workshops.

Floor tiles

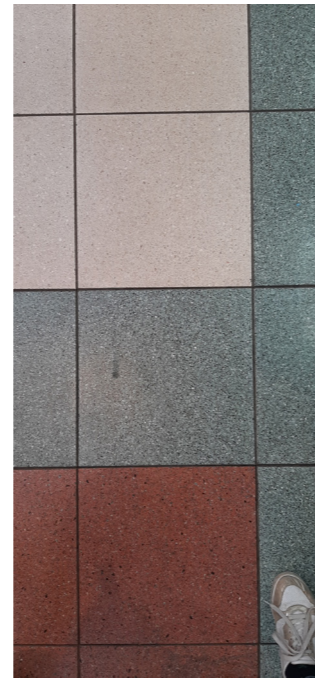
T.02

red tiles

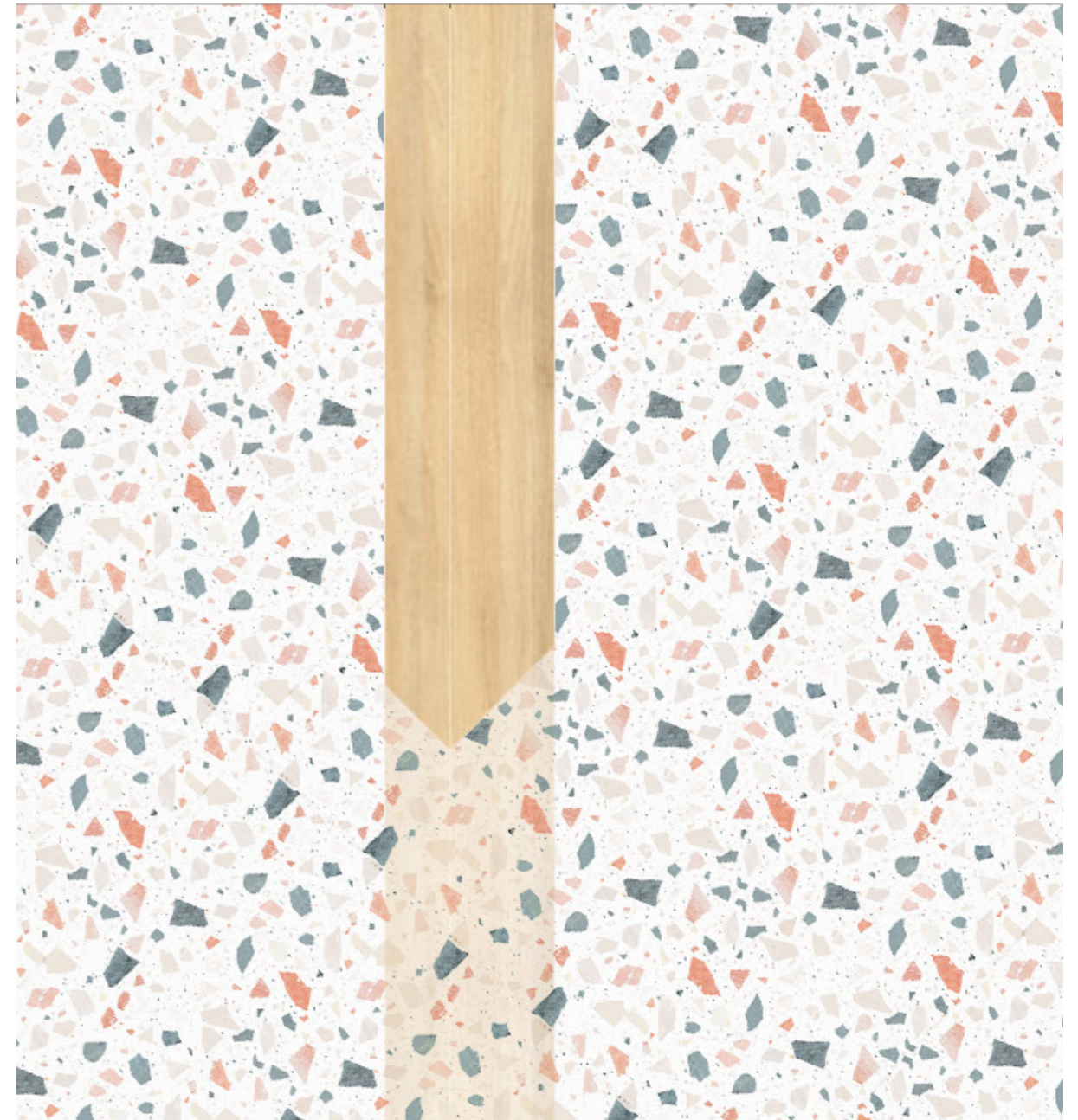
count: 1 835



Plan 1:5



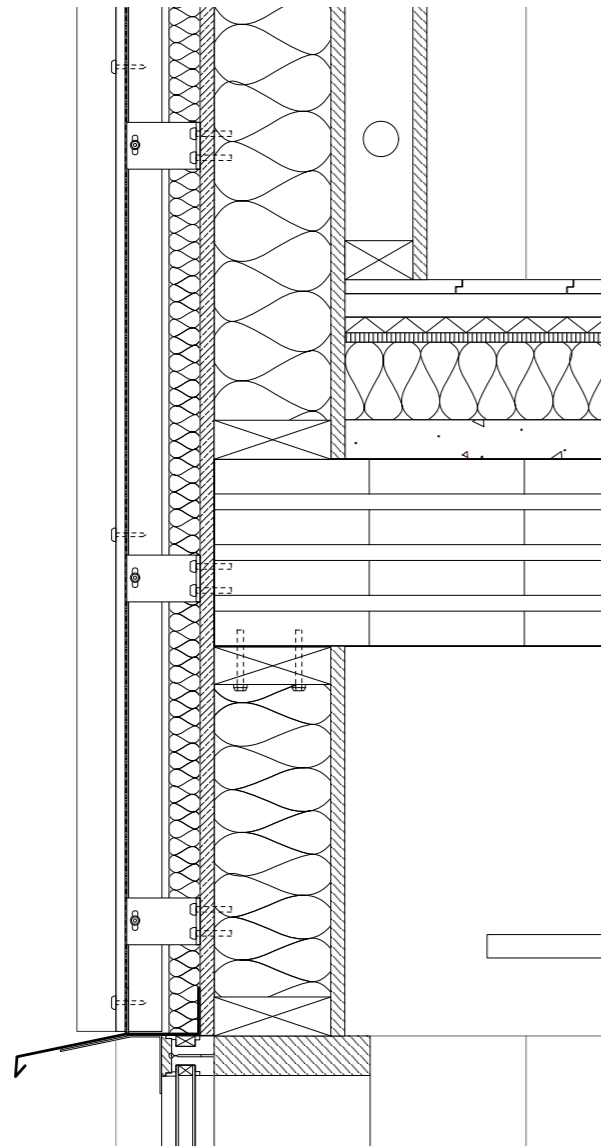
Plan 1:500



The cemented tiles of the Molenpoort have to be crushed to be removed. They are consequently composed into terrazzo tiles for the Community Hall.

Something which is worth mentioning, which we were not expecting when we started the catalogue, was that in reality, a lot of the physical materials of the mall cannot be removed intact from their location in order to be reused. This is a result of the construction techniques (and possibly economic constraints) used in the years it was first built (1972), and then renovated. The floor tiles, for example, are cemented into place and need to be broken to be removed, and the finishes on the interior are of scarce/poor quality. Personally, this was a sign that the building techniques needed to change: I made it a case that the new design and new elements would be detailed with the future in mind, meaning that all elements could be potentially disassembled and catalogued by a future bricoleur.

It goes without saying that in order to achieve these catalogues, it was essential that I spent as much possible time on site (dealing with travel restrictions and closures due to the pandemic) recording, photographing, observing, interviewing, following and measuring the city. What this approach gave me, is a sensibility to the context of the site which is deeper, an attachment to and relationships with the residents of Nijmegen and the everyday scenes within the city. The frequent site visits, interviews with the residents, ongoing conversations with them, brought me to an appreciation on being able to “think local”, it allowed me to design with a strong understanding of the context and to get under the skin of the city, hopefully drafting a project that carries the traits and collective memory of the place.



Glulam and CLT massive timber and a facade fixed with connectors and bolts allow for the new interventions to be demounted, to be intact for the next bricoleur's inventory.



4.1

Letter to the Municipality of Nijmegen.

The Case for Appreciation.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a young, future architect, graduating at the TU Delft in a couple of days, and this year, I have worked on a site you may be familiar with: the Molenpoort shopping centre, in Nijmegen. Our brief for the project was to imagine an alternative future for the mall, starting from an understanding of the city.

I have come to know that there are plans existing for the redevelopment of the area, and for the mall itself. The plans are very well described in the document You - as Geemente - set out, the "*Gebiedsvisie Vlaams Kwartier - Ruimte voor wonen, werken, ondernemen en ontmoeten*" (2019), which I have partly translated to better understand your intentions. A sense of urge transpires in the paper, and many of the point you make in regards to the isolation of Vlaamsegas, and the underuse of the Molenpoort's parking roof space, in conjunction with the more and more empty internal shopping passage, I have tried to address in my project too.

Before I continue, I would like to highlight that I am speaking from the standpoint of an architecture student, and I would not necessarily consider myself as very politically-minded or -driven, but rather, I like to think in terms of "soft" politics, the nuances which determine life within a determined society and culture. With this letter, I will try to make a case for new found appreciation and tolerance as drivers for a planning proposal, and aim to express how the redevelopment of the Molenpoort area can come from a place of humbleness, stemming from the idea that usually, what at first may seem to represent a problem, can be the very solution.

The Bricoleur's Attitude

My year started with an unexpected, eye-opening literature piece by Irénée Scalbert on the notion of Bricolage (which I myself thought as a recreational kid's activity, and didn't take seriously at first) and on Robinson Crusoe. Robinson is taken as a metaphorical representation of the essence of the bricoleur: stranded on a desert island, all he has at stake for his survival is the remains of his shipwreck and the resources the island can offer. That shipwreck, the small island and his ingenuity become his only tools to survive - and later on, the companionship of Friday. Through an act of collecting and selecting, a project, and making, he builds his boat, his solution.

My understanding of Bricolage is of it being a physical act. It represents an act of production and reuse, of investigation of the surrounding ecology (the site) as it is found, trying not to romanticise it, but seeing things for what they are. This investigation is followed by the process of selection and of borrowing from the existing material culture to make something that serves a new purpose. Bricolage to me expresses a bottom-up approach. It requires a process, a project, an inventory, the creation of a toolset from which the project stems. It also resonates with the idea of richness, the ad-hoc, the intuitive, seemingly disordered; and with ingenuity, which contrasts to the clinical, polished, exact and tidy. During the academic year (and having undergone an

4. MANIFESTO

academic project) the theme of bricolage took me towards an endeavour to discover the social complexities of Nijmegen, their effects on the built fabric, and the material culture of the site. The material, I then collected into four inventories. In a more lateral sense, the idea of bricolage critically highlights the importance of resources. On the broader scheme, it is an opportunity to reflect on circularity, reuse and cycles of systems and materials. I truly believe that we, as planners, future architects; and you, as authority and governmental entity, have the duty to create an awareness on the finite nature of (natural) resources.

It is true to say that it is an extremely faceted and layered concept, which is open to interpretation, and which I too struggle to come to terms with, at times. During the year, I have come to the realisation that I do not fully understand what Bricolage is. What I am sure about, however, is that it leads to an attitude which inevitably brings to notice ordinary things, which therefore are more easily appreciated and seen in new unexpected ways. The bricoleur's attitude is one which necessarily begins with what is at hand, around us, within our Ecology.

Within Nijmegen, its people, and the Molenpoort.

The Problem as the Solution and the Act of Cataloguing

From Robinson Crusoe's story and in many circumstances in life, what is evident is that the things that seem at first to be a problem, can be a great source of opportunities. Many times, in fact, the solution can be found underneath our eyes, if we look carefully enough. The attitude of searching for answers within what is at hand rather opposes to the top-down nature of planning, favouring the openness to the unexpected, a process of understanding a site, leading from a sense of acceptance to a form of appreciation, from which action is taken.

From the many site visits to the Molenpoort and its surroundings I have understood that the character of Nijmegen is not reflected within the mall and the limited amount of opportunities it offers. As you also understand, the area feels like a secluded mix of problematic alleyways and streets, of which at its centre is a vast shopping mall which is a blind spot right at the very gateway to the historic city centre. In the document for the plan for the development, you note that "The real focus of downtown shopping becomes less and less. Shopping itself is no longer important. The city centre is becoming more about the experience. City centres are moving from a place to buy to a place to meet. Small scale initiatives and innovative concepts are needed to stimulate the area", but within your plans you propose to "Create uncovered streets and squares for living and shopping" and again, "Van Welderenstraat is doing well with the number of visitors growing. The Tweede Walstraat, on the other hand, is a piece of no man's land between the attractive Van Welderenstraat and Molenstraat. There are hardly any shops and catering establishments and other companies are of inferior quality." Why does the solution have to be shopping, which the site already unsuccessfully caters for? And on the other hand, why only propose a mono-functional proposal of living, at the Molenpoort site, where already the mono-function of shopping has proved unsuccessful?

In the "Gebiedsvisie Vlaams Kwartier"(2019) you also address the coffeeshops, the dealers and the "junkies" of Vlaamseegas and Tweede Waalstraat, the backside streets of the Molenpoort. You mention that this is where "nuisance" is created, and that Vlaamseegas in particular is a place where people don't feel safe, where it is not pleasant to be due to the coffeeshops and people who are to be found there. You propose the relocation of the coffeeshops to other places within the city, or a more drastic removal of some. On the other hand, and rightly so, you also outline

the need to make Vlaamseegas part of a wider connection of streets, to allow for more circulation of people, but why does the solution have to be to eradicate these businesses, and the people that support them? Wouldn't their relocation in other parts of the city bring the same "nuisance" elsewhere?

Nijmegen's residents are fascinating. I, together with other 7 students, took the opportunity to interview 56 of them. They spoke highly of the city, many of them weren't able to tell us what is missing in Nijmegen. "Everything is so close" or "the city is open, progressive" were sentences we heard often, yet some residents were expressing the lack of social and ethnic diversity, and the need for more cross-contamination between people from different walks of life. However, Nijmegen's community seems to be knitted by a strong willingness to participate in life. The extraordinary number of associations and organisations that offer social help and betterment is proof of this willingness, and many of the people we interviewed, such as Henry, a young student who moved to Nijmegen a few years ago after falling in love with the relaxed yet vibrant atmosphere of the city, are actively volunteering and dedicating their time offering a helping hand to contrast social issues.

Your town has a rich history made of conflicts, starting from the squatters riots in the 60's and 70's. but from these conflicts there is a great energy that arises. Your community is ready to get involved, because they carry a deep love for Nijmegen, they feel a part of it. The "Small scale initiatives and innovative concepts" that you are in search of to tackle the redevelopment already exist within the city: De Klinker, the successful remains of the anarchic squatters movement, today using political activism as a way to involve and activate the community, The Honig Complex and its creative businesses, a cultural and entrepreneurial focal point just outside the city centre, the well-established Doornrosje and its newborn De Basis, and their impact on the music and cultural scenes of the city.

In the same way, the people you want to eradicate from the quarter, the Vlaamseegas coffee shops and homeless, may be seen as a solution for interaction between people from different backgrounds. Instead of trying to cleanse these actors of a city, their behaviours and businesses and move the "issue" elsewhere, it is worth perhaps acknowledging that they exist, appreciate them as part of life within a city, where not everything has to be "neat", and provide these people with a space to work, with a pleasant space to smoke, with a place to feel like they are part of a community through the support of the residents and the charities, and not made to feel like a rejection of society.

In regards to the architecture and urban planning for the new development, the document states that one of your aims is "Restoring the medieval street pattern with connections to Ziekerstraat, Molenstraat, Tweede Walstraat and Vlaamseegas". In fact, in your drawings shows the site of the Molenpoort being cut through, connecting the perimeter streets and creating a new square. I and my colleagues have proposed something quite similar to your plans, as we also think it would bring a positive quality to the urban block. Some keywords included within your intentions are "Redevelop, renovate, construct new buildings", but I cannot fail to notice that the pattern of the vast, enormous, concrete structure and grid of the Molenpoort is missing from the plan and the dreamy renders you include in the document. I can imagine that the dense, concrete, 6x6 grid of the mall, with its structural constraints may represent a problem to you, and to the outcome of the new plans. Even in this case, what you see as an issue, something that needs to be eradicated, is a resource, and even a solution.

My pledge for you, as municipality, to adopt the bricoleur's attitude of really understanding

what is at hand, what already exists, and look at it with ingenuity and creativity, becomes very strong in this instance. We are all aware of the extreme impact the construction industry has on our environment: the constant extraction of non-renewable natural resources, the energy used and CO2 emissions which are inevitable to “produce” buildings. Not only, but with our cities already heavily built, and the amount of context we as (future) architects and planners have to deal with, it is just no longer feasible to systematically ignore, demolish and discard the structures that already exist.

Throughout the year, myself and other 30-or-so students have developed architectural and urban proposals which all retain and enhance the concrete structure of the mall. In my case, I have come to very much appreciate it's quirks, it's incongruities, the strict grid and its mushroom columns, and made them an integral part of the proposal understanding them, drawing them, exposing them, celebrating them. Giving me solutions for the new programme and spatial qualities.

On this note, considering the totality of the context of the city of Nijmegen, its residents, and the Molenpoort itself, I want to introduce you to the Act of Cataloguing. A catalogue may sound like a mere record of things where one can pick and choose whatever suits the situation, however, when applied to research on a site, it offers an alternative way to read a city and a context through the lens of a bricoleur, someone who understands that it is necessary to start from what is at hand, that the need to look far away for solutions isn't the answer – or even feasible anymore.

A bricoleur is guided by a necessity, an urge to make, and therefore forced to look at their surroundings and collect valuable objects to make something which is useful at the this time. In the same way, the urgency of your plans to demolish the Molenpoort shopping centre is a call to act as like Robinson Crusoe, to find and propose an alternative which is more sustainable, in a social, economical sense, and in terms of energy consumption.

Conclusion – The Case for Appreciation

From the interviews, frequent site visits, spending time with the residents and understanding how they live, what they do in the city, analysing cultural gestures, measuring the Molenpoort and drawing what pieces of the mall could be reused, I discovered the material and immaterial beauty of Nijmegen, where “beauty” does not signify something that is necessarily socially accepted, but an awareness and appreciation of the existing conditions. The more I observed, the more I saw. The more I listened, the more I heard. The more time I spent in Nijmegen, on site, the more I could attempt to read the city and its inhabitants. In order to start a project, the context needs to be understood. To you, as a governmental body experienced in town re-development, this may seem like an obvious point to make, but what I am trying to stress here is that even though Nijmegen and its people may not be seen as “exotic” elements of study, there is a lot to be gained when the surroundings are explored from the bottom-up. The appreciation lies within the everyday, what seems to us normal and sometimes worth overlooking.

A quote that I am very fond of, is one by Marcel Proust in “La Prisonnière”, who wrote “the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes”. This is how I would like to think of the redevelopment you are undergoing, stemming from the practice of looking at what your city has to offer with new eyes and the humility this act carries with it. This is where the appreciation comes from, and having new eyes is at the heart of Bricolage.

Bricolage is liberating. It frees us from the preconception that the world has to be “neat”, and the processes we undergo “correct”. It gives space for the unexpected, the impromptu, to things that are not necessarily what the status quo defines as good, clean, ordered. It comes from a place of humbleness, which lead to the awareness and consequent appreciation of society's mess, people's mess, stuff and things and traces that are left behind by human activity within buildings and the passing of time, and, in a strange and unexplainable way, it grows within the bricoleur the willingness to preserve, to expose, to showcase and celebrate what goes from being a problem, to becoming a beautiful solution.

Yours Faithfully,

Jasmine Montana

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