

Final Reflection

P4

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Urban architecture Graduation Studio

THE STUDIO

This year's Urban Architecture graduation studio revolves around the study of the urban fabric of Bressoux, set in Liege, Belgium. With railways, roads, hills and the river Meuse intertwining within the landscape, Bressoux finds itself seen as a patchwork for various models of development. The patchwork represents different desires that were translated into the physical environment. A collage of urban spaces that are juxtaposed by the same elements that segregates them, Bressoux is a dynamic framework where centrality is a non-existent concept. With the help of these elements, one can essentially say that Bressoux is divided into three distinguishable fragments; Droixhe, Bressoux and "Up-town". These are distinguishable not only through examining its urban fabric, but also by its architectural language and its adjoining boundary. Initial phase of the research involved understanding the origins of these fragmented neighbourhoods which later translated into a deeper analysis of the spatial relationships between what is perceived as voids and solids on the map. Through the aforementioned lens, Bressoux was seen as a layered system; a city within itself; that transforms and appropriates to accommodate the people encumbered within its historic boundaries.

Right: Representative drawing of Bressoux and Uptown

Bt: Figure ground map segments of Uptown, Droixhe and Bressoux



THE INTRIGUE

Fragmentation is seen through the themes of spatial, visual and social. These themes were seen the most across the mile long Rue du Moulin. Being one of the oldest streets of Bressoux, Rue du Moulin has evolved from its industrial age. The street can be seen as constituting of three fragments. The initial start consisting of the traditional housing fronts inclusive of commercial and social plinths, the tail fragments creating a quiet corridor of impervious housing and industrial fronts and the mid-section composing of larger urban fabric constituting of parking lots and larger infrastructures. Hence the street takes its passengers through a journey of scenes along its route wherein the former is the sole agent that string them along.

The street is perhaps the most prosaic of the city's public realm, allowing us to view the very ordinary practices of life and livelihood – a space to move or pause, to meet friends, post a letter, to buy goods and is composed of an amalgamation of rooms along it. Due to the possibility of maneuvering, it tends to exhibit the external spatial reinforcements taken to mark a person's position. This makes a street not a linear study but a system of social and spatial labyrinths. Hence, the street gives a peek at not only what was and what is, but also the lived realities of allegiance and participation by understanding the social and cultural formations occurring within itself. This is observed by unfolding the street to understand the levels of interactions (or scenes) within the layers between the building and street.



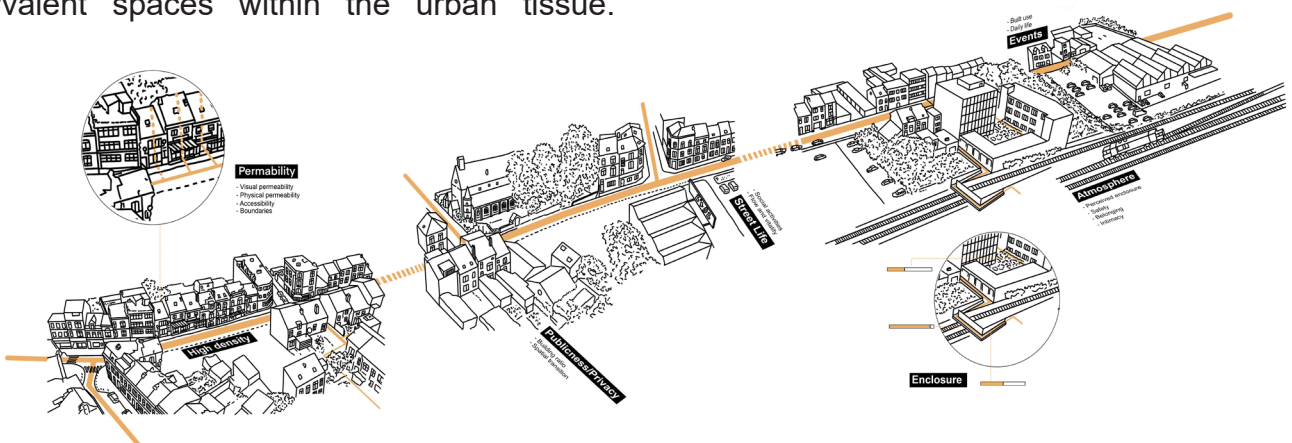
THE INTRIGUE

The thesis focuses on the field between architecture and urbanism, on the domain between public and private. It is an attempt to bring an interactive notion to 'street' and its role in the design of urban areas and smaller architecture projects. It aims to reinforce the quality of open space within and between the built structures and the existing corridors by blurring the borders of inside and outside. To me, urbanity is about the unexpected, about interactions that can become elevating experiences. Urbanity is, among other things, about the spatial qualities of the public space like scale, proportions, materiality, etc. and the possibility for people to claim this public space; to make it theirs. Bressoux is able to accomplish this due to its close knit urban fabric resulted due to the appropriation since the post industrial age. These spaces are seen within the privacy of backyards, shared courtyards formed behind the street front, collective front yards, and around the corners. However, the problem lies within the existing built framework that is composed of nearly impervious facades through which its inhabitants have created forced passageways to penetrate through. These scenes of informal or rather interactive urbanity are seen in the backdrop of the housing street façade. This project attempts to scale this urbanity down to an architectural scale. It aims to create a multitude of individual parts, within a collective whole through a combination existing and designed system of alleys, arcade, gardens and piazzas. These spaces are neither public nor private, but something in between where the private domain extends into the public and the public into the private. These intermediate spaces facilitate to accommodate different social patterns and connecting all fragmented units and additional, shared, polyvalent spaces within the urban tissue.

The fragmented parts of the site and the proposed housing modules are stitched using system of these intermediate spaces. Furthermore, these intermediate spaces serve as a means to tackle the problems associated with the distancing of 'density' and 'collectivity' in a housing model. Today, in Belgium and the Netherlands, there is a rise in the usage of collective models in the housing economy. In order to increase density, collectivity is used to achieve it; hence the concept of shared kitchen etc. is introduced in its program. The thesis aims to utilize these intermediate spaces to strengthen its human association by reinforcing the quality of the open spaces within and between the built structures.

From my tutors, I was further able to examine the quality of such spaces by looking into small details such as the position of the door opening to the built structure, evaluating the ways in which each intermediate spaces can be used thereby changing the typology of the built structure around these spaces etc. From those inputs, I began to look at these spaces from an active participant's perspective in order to increase the interactions. Hence, planning the organization is plays a pivot role in ensuring the quality of the intermediate spaces. In order to better integrate it into the existing fabric, inspiration was derived from the patchwork seen in planning and facades of the interior of the street.

Bt: Illustration of Rue du Moulin highlighting its fragmentation



THE RELEVANCE

Current graduation project aims to carefully examine the conditions of a specific site, resulting in the formulation of a strategy. Additionally it takes into consideration to go beyond the architecture and regard the socio-cultural, political and historical particularities. The strategy focuses on translating the existing language of the site and ultimately creating a more integrated collective enterprise. The underlying concept of the project has the potential to be used for larger or smaller scale of housing modules as it brings the banal yet elevating experiences of interactions that happen to the in-between spaces of the private and public domain. These elements can further accentuate the space and create a more vibrant environment.

The studio focuses on the exploration of traces of potential in a post-carbon landscape of Liege. Rue du Moulin is a street that currently possesses fragmentation through culture, morphology and history; from a multicultural commercial entrance to a dense residential/industrial end. The site, a mixed industrial complex, is located along the street and is a part of an elongated and delicate urban fabric that hosts a labyrinth of unassuming corridors. The design proposal involves not only reanimating these potential traces but also form a corridor through the usage of the city's industrial heritage such that it hosts a sense of the collective memory of Rue du Moulin. Combining both re-use of existing built structure and new buildings on a rich historically rooted site, the approach of 'scars in a city' comes into play: how can we work with the remains of what we find on site, and how do we incorporate the history of a built location with a specific function – thereby fitting the theme of the studio.