



Research plan

Benoît Marcou

Research Plan P2
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Benoît Marcou
5126134

MSc3/MSc4 Graduation Studio 20/21: Positions in Practice
Towards Inclusive Built Environments in Belgrade, Serbia
Chair of Methods of Analysis & Imagination

Mentors :
Jorge Mejía Hernández
Aleksandar Staničić
Pierre Jennen

Introduction

This research and design project focuses on the city of Belgrade and its territories of transit. Historically, its geographic situation has made it a strategic zone during armed conflicts and has also positioned the city as an important stop for migrants and travellers crossing the balkans. In recent years, and especially in 2015, Belgrade appeared to be located in the middle of the so-called ‘Balkan route’ connecting Africa and the Middle East to Western Europe. For many migrants, Belgrade is seen as a space of transit rather than a destination.

In addition to these large flows of people, movements of foreign investment have been made visible by recent large scale projects such as Belgrade Waterfront development and the construction of the new “central” station in the Prokop area. These controversial projects, the complexity of Serbian building policies and the extralegal construction culture are touching upon the question of land. The consideration of land as an exclusive territory or as a commodity rather than a common resource requires us to consider the consequences this has in terms of ownership, use and care.

According to Bruno Latour in his essay *Down to Earth*, our “ways of landing” are expressed physically but also philosophically and politically. For him, the act of landing and the development of a sense of belonging have become harder to articulate in an era of intersecting crises and increasing dematerialisation. He argues that “the ground is in the process of giving way” and that the challenge is to “discover in common what land is inhabitable and with whom to share it” (Latour, 2018, p. 9).



Migrants waiting in Park Kod Bas - Yusuf Selman Inanc
Rendering of the Belgrade Waterfront project - Eagle Hills

In 2000, Zygmunt Bauman was also concerned with the disappearance of solidity when he used the concept of fluidity as the “leading metaphor for the present stage of modern era”, arguing that “forms of modern life may differ in quite a few respects - but what unites them all is precisely their fragility, temporariness, vulnerability and inclination to constant change” (Bauman, 2000, p. 82).

Our initial group analysis, developed together with Andrea Bautil and Emiel van der Vlies, focused on a peculiar type of construction in Belgrade : the splav (in Serbian, the term refers to a raft or a floating object). These floating constructions spread along the Sava and Danube riverbanks and house a great diversity of activities (secondary residence, restaurant, club, gym, football field...). Our study mainly focused on the floating weekend houses (or vikendika) which appear to express a collective will to gain autonomy and temporarily exit the city, yet also remind us of the necessary relation between islands (in that case artificial ones) and other floating islands or with the solid land of the city, thus revealing sometimes unexpected instances of cooperation.

The study of splavovi through the concepts of fluidity, assembly and cooperation raised a number of concerns that coincide to a certain extent with issues I explored in my MSc2 theory thesis *Occupying the ground: Picnics and other nomadic stories* written under the guidance of Stavros Kousoulas. In this work, I looked at the picnic as an architecture of lightness, a temporary framing of a territory allowing for a maximum diversity of use while leaving a minimum amount of physical traces after its disassembly.



Splav on Ada Ciganlija - Belgrade August 2020
Still from *Powers of Ten* (1977) by Charles and Ray Eames

The research questions formulated during our splavovi research included the following:

Can architecture fulfil a desire for autonomy while fostering cooperation and encouraging individuals to contribute to a collective economy?

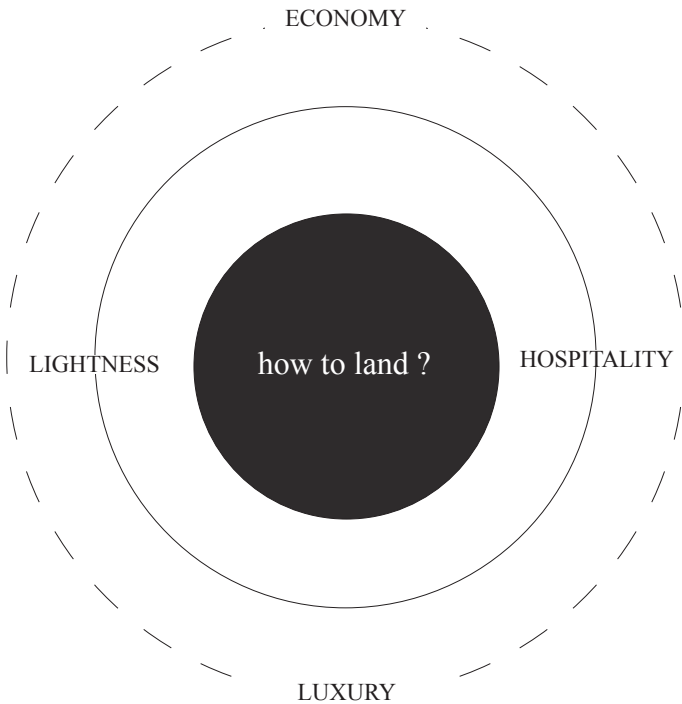
How can composite construction systems create more flexible and resilient architecture ?

Based on our collective research and on my personal work and fascinations, my graduation project will address the following research questions:

How can transitory hospitality suggest light ways for architecture and for its users to land, both physically and conceptually?

In a dense urban context, which qualities of openness and interiority can generate a sense of belonging while satisfying a desire for autonomy?

Can a material economy of means create new imaginaries of luxury ?



Economy:

From the Greek *oikos* “house” and *nemein* “manage”

1. Management of a household
2. Management of material resources

Luxury:

1. A state of great comfort or elegance, often involving great expense
2. Something that gives a lot of pleasure but cannot be done often

Lightness

The state of being light

Light can refer to perceptions of brightness, transparency, weight, subtlety, freedom

Hospitality:

From the Latin *hospes* meaning “host”, “guest”, “stranger” or even “ennemy”

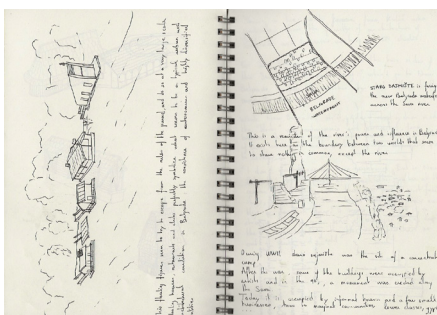
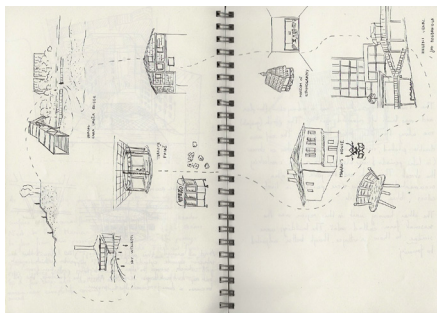
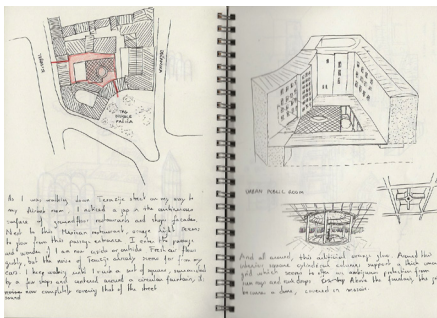
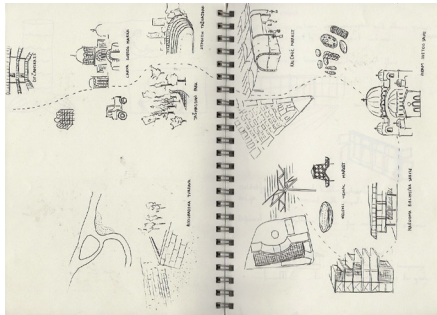
1. Friendly and generous behaviour towards guests
2. The group of businesses such as hotels, bars, and restaurants that provide food, drink, or a place to sleep

Research Framework

My work so far has focused on specific local issues such as the development of floating architecture in Belgrade, the complexity of migratory movements or the history of urban policies which nuanced my understanding of the usual formal/informal dichotomy. In relation to this contextual analysis, I am developing a conceptual framework in order to relate these local situations with theoretical and practical issues which I believe are topical in the contemporary practice of architecture such as fluidity, cooperation, hospitality, interiority and openness. This work was developed collectively through group work, studio discussions, seminars, and individually using a variety of methods from the discipline of architecture and from other fields. In the context of this project, I am mainly concerned with ethnographic, semiological, typological and morphological questions.

Throughout the development of my proposal, I hope to formulate a specific yet adaptable method to approach complex social, political and spatial issues. This way of doing, motivated by curiosity, tries to identify peculiar manifestations in the built environment and analyse them following clearly formulated hypothesis in order to extract meaning and abstract concepts from them. Such approach does not look for problems to solve but tries to understand the logics of existing situations and to propose, dwelling on the work of predecessors and contemporaries, concrete interventions that will complement, amplify, contradict or nuance these situations.

It is important for me to stress on the importance of chance and intuition in the scientific research process. In August 2020, prior to the start of our graduation studio and during what naively enough seemed to be a short moment of calm in the covid-19 pandemic, I decided in a hurry to book plane tickets to Belgrade.



In past projects I cherished fieldwork a lot as it usually allowed me for a more sensible understanding of the studied situations by doing live cartography, interviews, material sampling, photography. I knew that going to Belgrade on my own without an idea of what I was looking for would not be as productive for my future graduation project: I was not going there as a researcher, but as a skilled, yet uninformed, traveler.

A walk from the center of the city to the artificial lake of Savsko Jezero, a cycling trip through New Belgrade under the burning August sun, a rooftop drink on Trg Nikole Pasica with an architect I contacted through Instagram. While I cannot pretend that these moments and many others all have scientific value and were all instrumental in my research process, they did produce precious memories of a physical experience of the city, images, sounds, taste and atmospheres which I have attempted to record and describe through writings, sketches and photographs. Avoiding as much as possible to use public transports I have tried to use walking as my primary tool for discovering and mapping the city. On my last day in Belgrade, I decided to walk around the island of Ada Ciganlija, which is how I discovered by chance the multitude of floating houses occupying the river edge. This encounter and the pictures I took of these peculiar constructions, later motivated me and my group to focus our research on splavovi in Belgrade.

Despite our inability to go back to Belgrade during the first semester to interview users and makers of these constructions, Andrea, Emiel and I still managed to get in touch with a few experts who gave us their views on the matter. We interviewed Marina Višić on September 20th in The Hague. She is a recent



Distant exchange - Belgrade, August 2020

graduate from the TU Delft EMU post master in urbanism and her thesis is called *A Framework for Transition: Urban Planning Sustainability on Belgrade's Riverfront*. She told us that both of her parents owned splavovi and shared with us childhood memories of summer holidays on the Sava river as well as her more recent experiences of Belgrade's floating nightclubs.

Throughout the month of october, we exchanged emails with Dubravka Sekulić and Ivan Kucina who are both architects and researchers from Belgrade. Part of their research focuses on informal or “extralegal” construction in Belgrade and they encouraged us to look more closely at the complex evolution of urban policies.

The necessity to write rather concise emails or short questions prepared in advance forced us quite early on to formulate as clearly as possible our research interests and the ambition of our analysis. While these exchanges helped us a lot in refining our understanding of the various ways splavovi are used and of the complex social and legal mechanisms that produced them, we also recognise their subjectivity, considering that these stories were told by experts from our own discipline.

Following our group work, I proposed that my graduation project would shift the focus from the riverbanks to denser areas of the city, looking for expressions of fluidity on more solid grounds through architectures of hospitality. The various ways in which they accommodate momentary occupations of a territory by individuals forming a group that is constantly changing, seemed to complement the splavovi research and the latent nomadic properties they hold.



Still from *Hotel Jugoslavija* (2018) by Nicolas Wagnières

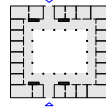
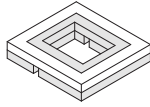
In her essay “Stay: The archetypal space of the hotel”, Jennifer Volland discusses Michel Foucault’s thinking on liberation and oppression in architecture and claims that the space of the hotel, “both physical and psychological, becomes an arena in which people can act out their internal desires and conflicts, whether these are inclinations toward escapism, hedonism or relaxation. The result is not repression and the subjects are not powerless, the hotel environment holds the potential to be productive and empowering” (Volland, 2013, p. 16).

By looking at the architecture of hotels in non-moralistic terms, I believe it is possible to reassess the imaginaries of luxury they are often associated with and their potential for being inclusive and allowing meaningful appropriations by guests and residents of the city.

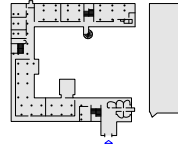
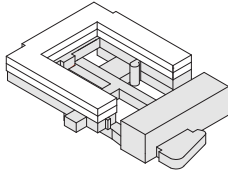
I started with a typological and morphological analysis of different hotels and monasteries and particularly focused on Hotel Jugoslavija in Belgrade and the socialist ideals that motivated its construction. This precedent study made clear the potential of the hotel type to radiate at a territorial scale and to claim a civic ambition in the city. Hotel Jugoslavija was for instance the theatre of important diplomatic events involving Yugoslav political figures, but also members of the Non-Aligned Movement. Opened in 1969, the hotel was initially conceived as part of a group of large public buildings, including the Palace of Serbia, built in the developing area of New Belgrade along the Danube river and that ambitioned to be a representation of socialist power and international influence.

Hotel Jugoslavija, a movie directed by Nicolas Wagnières was crucial in my understanding of the political role of the hotel. Throughout the first semester, I have watched and re-watched other movies,

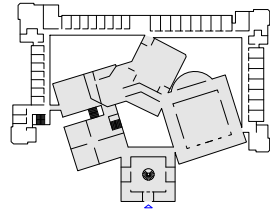
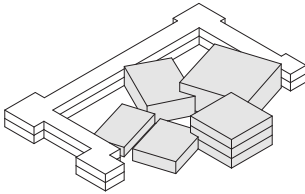
Caravanserai
Skopje



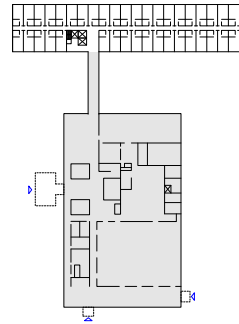
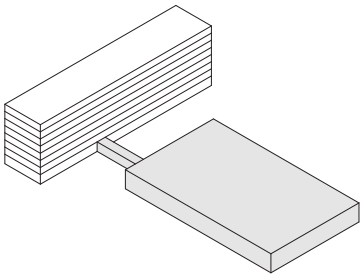
Couvent de la Tourette
Le Corbusier
Eveux



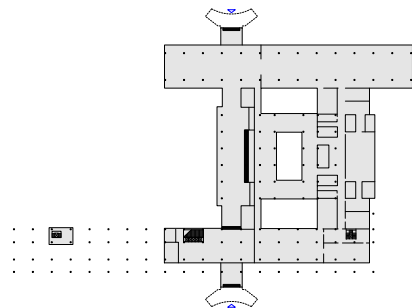
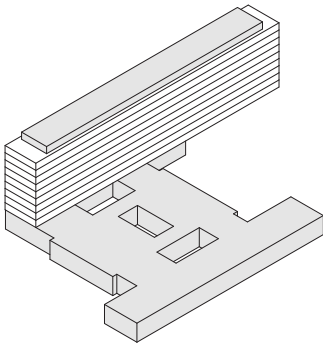
Dominican Motherhouse
Louis Kahn
Media



Hotel Intercontinental
William Tabler
Dublin



Hotel Jugoslavija (competition proposal)
M. Kauzlarić, L. Horvat, K. Ostrogović
Belgrade



this time unrelated to Belgrade, in which hotels served as a more or less grand decor, and sometimes even appeared as characters on their own. Specific spaces or architectural elements such as the lounge bar in *Lost in Translation* by Sofia Coppola or the elevator in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* by Wes Anderson sometimes reappear as motifs throughout the movie and become key in the unfolding of the narrative. Cinema as an art that frames images, sound and movement offers a rich time-based way of studying objects which mechanisms can vary greatly throughout the day or during specific events. Moreover, I also used these movies as tools for a more sensual and anthropological understanding of bodily practices in architectures of hospitality, realising that architectural configurations and cinematographic techniques participate in the creation of ambiances which influence characters behaviours and itineraries.

In most of these movies characters, when entering a hotel, tend to become other versions of themselves or to modify the way they interact with others. In later stages of the project's development I intend to use writing and model making in order develop specific narratives based on the story of fictional users of the hotel: guests, receptionist, neighbours, cleaning staff... I believe that the use of fiction in architecture can, and already does, produce knowledge. Our practice always relies on the collection of "verified" information and on speculations or deliberate distortions of a subjective perception of reality. Our studio is engaged in a process of constructing a fictional Belgrade made of both given and chosen restrictions. Our work on a city we are unable to visit today, is a great opportunity to reflect on the rich possibilities offered by such a restrictive framework.

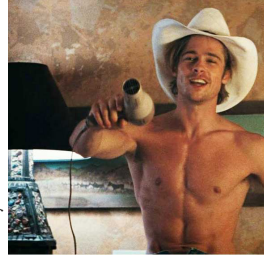
Lost in Translation
Sofia Coppola



The Shining
Stanley Kubrick



Thelma & Louise
Ridley Scott



Little Miss Sunshine
Jonathan Dayton, Valerie Faris



The Professional
Luc Besson



The Grand Budapest Hotel
Wes Anderson



Hotel by the river
Hong Sang-Soo



Million Dollar Hotel
Wim Wenders

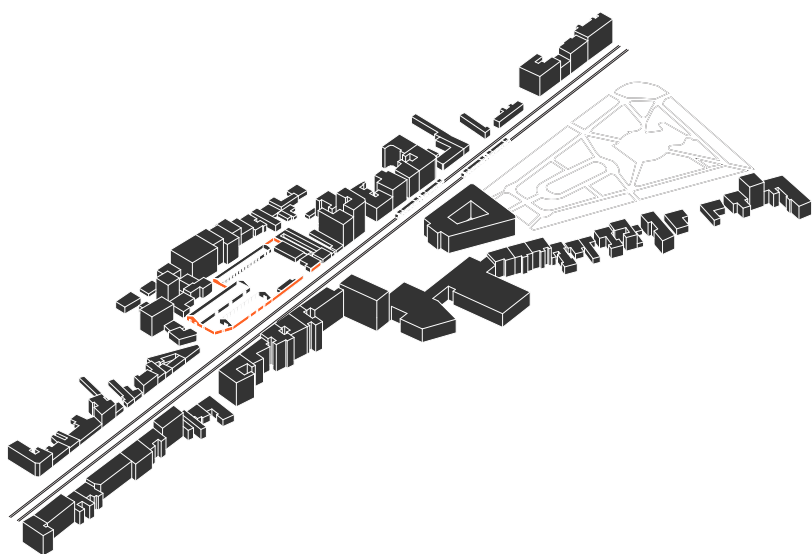


Shame
Steve McQueen





Integrated constellated campus along Bulevar Aleksandra



Existing condition of enclosure

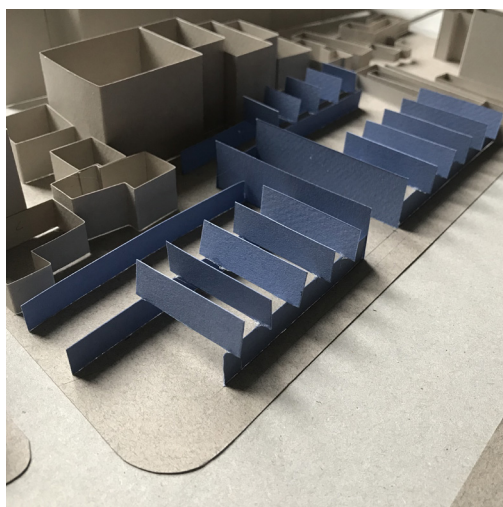
Design development

The project development has highlighted a dual ambition of the civic hotel. On the one hand, the will to make it more inclusive has pushed me to consider the lobby and other shared spaces as structures flexible enough to accommodate ordinary activities such as dining, working or making laundry but also ephemeral events such as movie nights, weddings or lectures. Establishing openness and porosity with the street have therefore become clear objectives.

On the other hand, the hotel's role is also to create conditions of interiority in both intimate and collective spaces. These interiorities are described by Mark Pimlott as “ideological realms of constructed narratives and imagery within which the individual subject is given illusory impressions of freedom” (Pimlott, 2018). The project seeks to investigate these qualities of openness and interiority through questions of use, form, technique and communication

Use: In transit

Hotels are the stage for a multitude of social and political events: escapades, work meetings, sexual affairs, weddings, criminal activities... These activities can be realised in the intimacy of individual rooms or in open collective ones. This diversity of uses and users necessarily calls for an architecture that is hybrid and open to change. The articulation of programs should facilitate appropriation by both guests of the hotels and residents of the city. For that reason, the collective spaces are voluntarily oversized and integrated in a dense and active urban fabric, on a site located at the junction between the neighbourhoods of Vračar and Zvezdara and where many faculties are located. While the hotel is not exclusive to a specific group of people, students and young



Series of rooms - study model

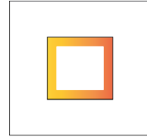
workers, because of their spatial proximity with the site ,would be more directly concerned by the spaces of rest, socialisation and work offered by the hotel. The economy of the hotel room is also made to accommodate migrants, travelers, workers from the countryside, visiting researchers, and anyone who is “travelling light” or who gave up on “holding tightly to things deemed attractive for their reliability and solidity” (Bauman, 2000, p. 13).

Form: The courtyard and the corridor

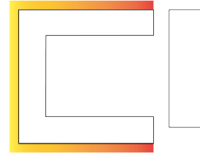
A comparative precedent study examined the way five buildings (hotels, monasteries and caravanserais) articulate intimate and communal spaces, and the way the latter connect or not with the street. Two of these examples motivated me to look closer at courtyard typologies. The caravanserai typical plan and the Couvent de la Tourette by Le Corbusier in Evieux (France) appeared as important manifestations of architectural interiority. A key difference between the two is that the caravanserai rooms look inwards, while La Tourette’s cells look out towards the landscape. La Tourette, despite its remote location, suggests ways in which a protective enclave can be porous and actively address its surroundings.

Circulation space is crucial in the functioning of a hotel, facilitating the movement of both guests and maintenance staff. In Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*, the double loaded corridor and its 1960s pattern become a spatial and conceptual maze from which characters are captive. The corridor is here much more than a circulation space, it challenges memory and imagination and becomes a space of encounter and even an escape from the rooms. Two precedents helped me reflect on the properties of the corridor.

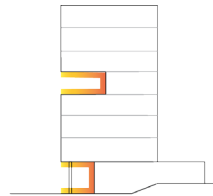
Kurşumli An (caravanserai)
Skopje



Couvent de la Tourette
Le Corbusier
Eveux



Weesperstraat dormitory
Herman Hertzberger
Amsterdam



Dormitory H
Shigeru Ban
Iwaki



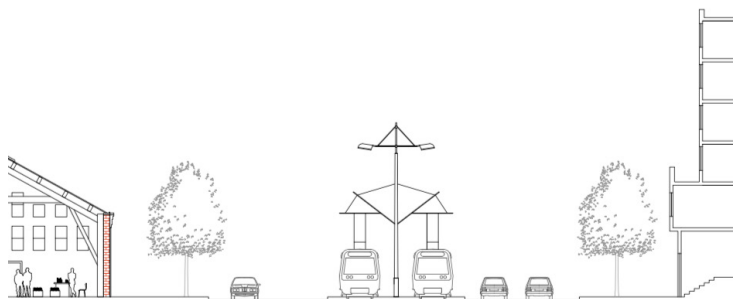
Shigeru Ban's dormitory H in Iwaki (Japan) combines a free plan ground floor with a series of bedrooms on the first floor, arranged around an asymmetrical double loaded corridor, open to the sky and large enough to accommodate tables and chairs, thus turning the corridor into an exterior room for encounter.

Herman Hertzberger's student dormitory in Amsterdam (Netherlands) has a typical plan arranged along a dark double loaded corridor, but its ground floor and 4th floor are exterior single loaded corridors opening towards the street. On the ground floor, this arcade creates a contact zone between the streets and the recessed collective programs.

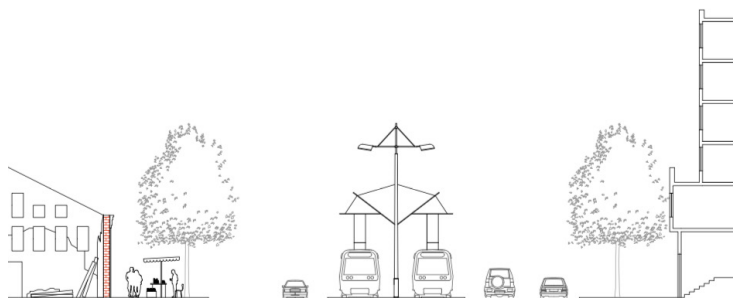
Technique: Lightness

The intervention is located on the site of the former tram depot on Bulevar Aleksandra. The brick and concrete warehouses which used to serve as maintenance facilities later housed a market which partially burned down in unclear circumstances in 2014. Conservation associations have argued for the preservation of the remaining structures and for the construction of a museum of public transports. This proposal was discarded and the site was sold to Israeli developers planning on building a shopping centre, office spaces, a hotel and high end residential buildings, thus completely erasing the traces of the old depot. My intervention proposal rejects a sacralisation of heritage that would neutralize space, but also refuses complete erasure of past traces. The proposal is to preserve existing qualities of enclosure created by the depot's high walls and when judged necessary, to take some of them down and re-use their bricks in other parts of the intervention.

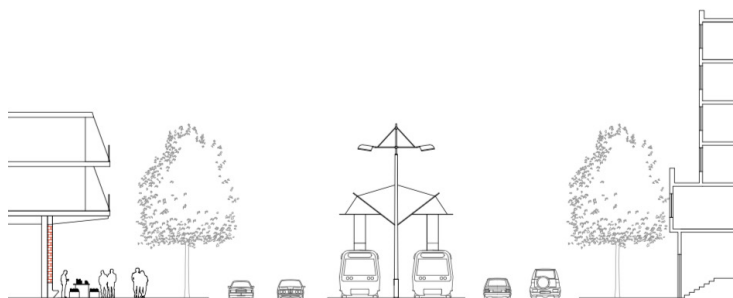
Before 2014 fire



Since 2014 fire



After intervention

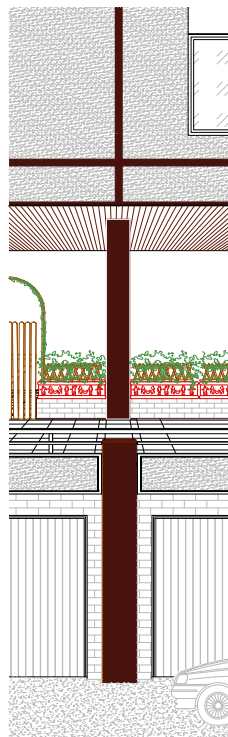
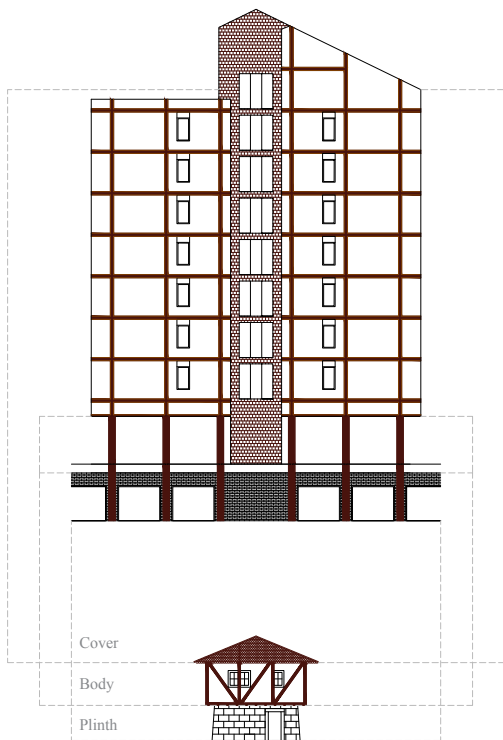


Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra
Evolution of the old depot's perimeter wall

How can lightness be technically materialized? It should not only be a matter of weight, but more importantly a consideration about the geographical availability of the utilized materials, about the articulation between architecture and ground and about constructive techniques which involve the assembly of a multitude of parts, easily allowing for their replacement, combination and potential dismantling. In that sense, traditional wood construction in the balkans, and timbered houses in particular, are a great example of how wood used to be locally sourced and used in architecture for structure, envelope and ornaments. The study of Block 19a in New Belgrade that we developed with Wesley Lijkendijk focused on constructive and ornamental patterns expressed in the assembly of prefabricated concrete panels and which also reference the envelope of vernacular houses. In a similar way, a technical development of my project could explore the tectonic expression of CLT panels, a material which could be locally sourced, easily transported and assembled and which has a light environmental and local impact.

Communication: Hospitality branding

On December 15th, our studio took part in a seminar on Belgrade Waterfront development. One of the speakers, Marija Marić did her phd research on what she calls “Real estate fictions” and presented the narratives developed by Belgrade Waterfront’s branding companies as “alternative discursive construction sites” (Marić, 2020). Her work aims at taking seriously communication methods which are often ignored or rejected by architects such as developers realistic renderings, real estate advertising websites, billboards...



Patterns of Block 19a

In a similar way, I believe that I could use my graduation project as an opportunity to question the codes of commercial communication and branding of hotels.

More than the sum of identical generic bedrooms, the hotel could be seen as a hybrid building combining collective and intimate activities with different levels of porosity. In *Non-Places*, Marc Augé describes zones of transition such as hotel chains, airports and shopping malls as a direct consequence of the “supermodern” condition, characterised by excess and homogenisation. He writes that “the space of non-places creates neither singular identity nor relations, only solitude and similitude” (Augé, 2009, p.103). For many developers, one of the main challenge today for commercial hotel is precisely the creation of a singular identity and “lifestyle experience”. The imaginaries of the hotel heavily depend on semiotics and especially on visual communication (neon signs, publication in decoration magazines, postcards...) yet a lot of effort is also invested in the creation of multi sensory experiences. The phenomenological branding of the hotel sometimes communicates through smell (free soap and shampoo samples), touch (labelled bathrobe and towel), hearing (lobby and elevator music).

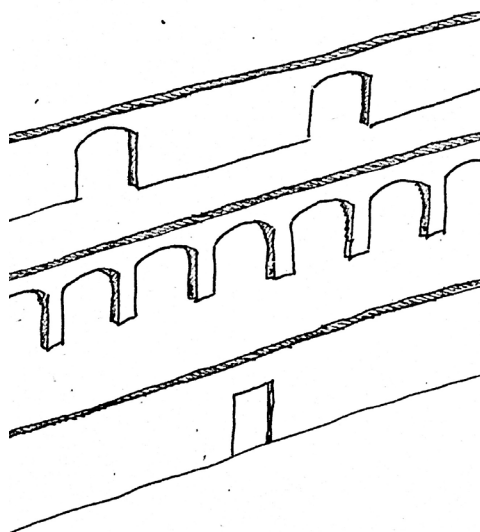


“North American hotels and motels in postcards” photo essay by Peter White
in *Grand Hotel: Redesigning Modern Life*

Preliminary Conclusions

The civic ambition of the hotel formulated in this research plan relies on accessible forms of interiority, and spaces that do not encourage movement but a more static reflexivity. In his conference “Interiors and interiority”, Richard Sennett says about interiority that it “is not a detachment from the world, it is a particular relationship with the world which is reflexive (...) and allows the work of memory to go on, in a more suspended and floating manner” (Sennett, 2016).

Belonging to the city would therefore not only depend on the approval from a larger community, but also on the right to experience solitude. Siegfried Kracauer’s description of the lobby gives a new potential to so called “non-places” and associates qualities of openness and emancipation to large non-domestic interior environments. He sees the lobby as the inverted image of the house of God : “In both places, people appear as guests. But whereas the house of God is dedicated to the service of the one whom people have gone there to encounter, the hotel lobby accommodates all who go there to meet no one. It is the setting for those who neither seek nor find the one who is always sought, and who are therefore guests in space as such- a space that encompasses them and has no function other than to encompass them” (Kracauer, 1963/2013).

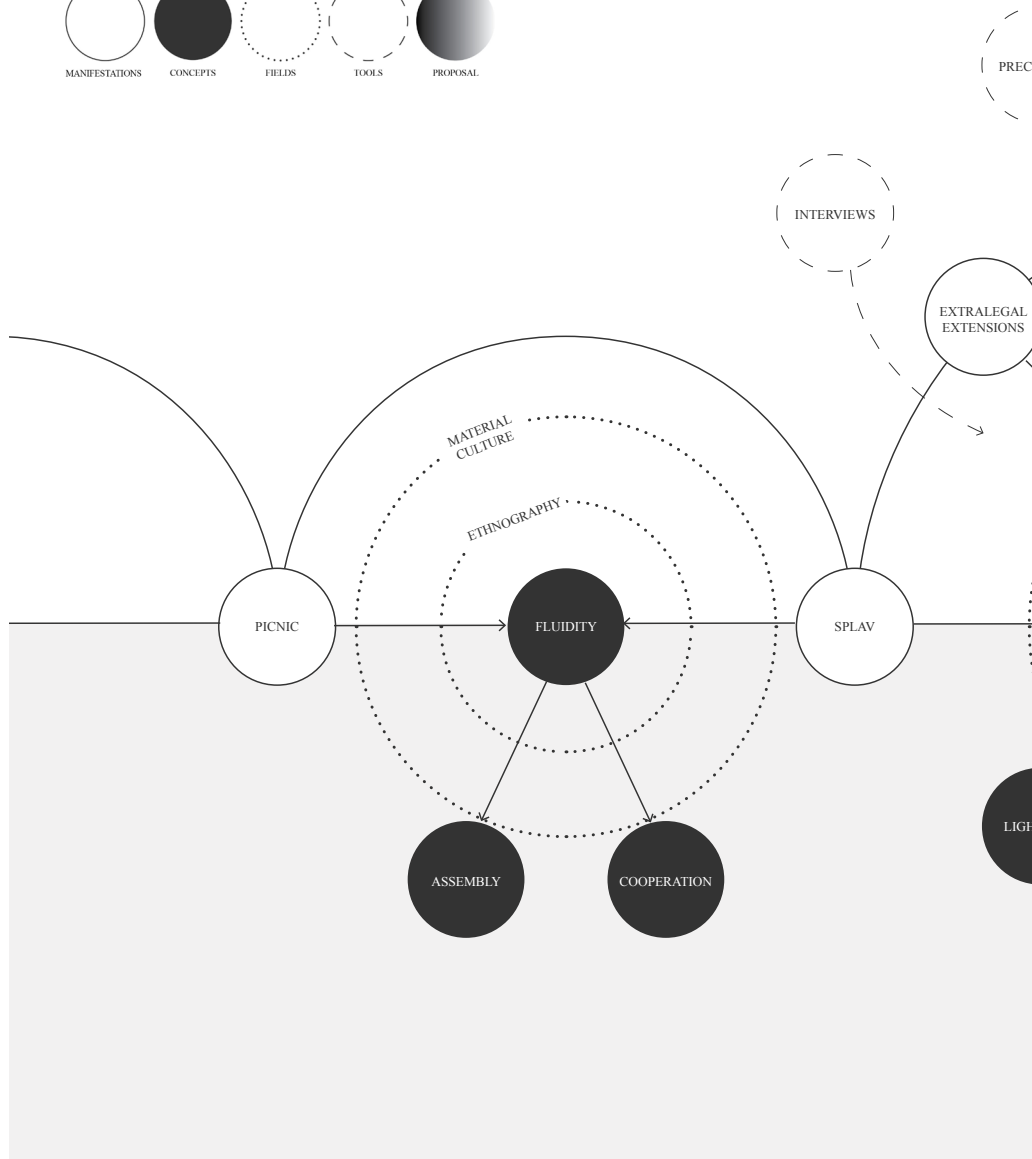


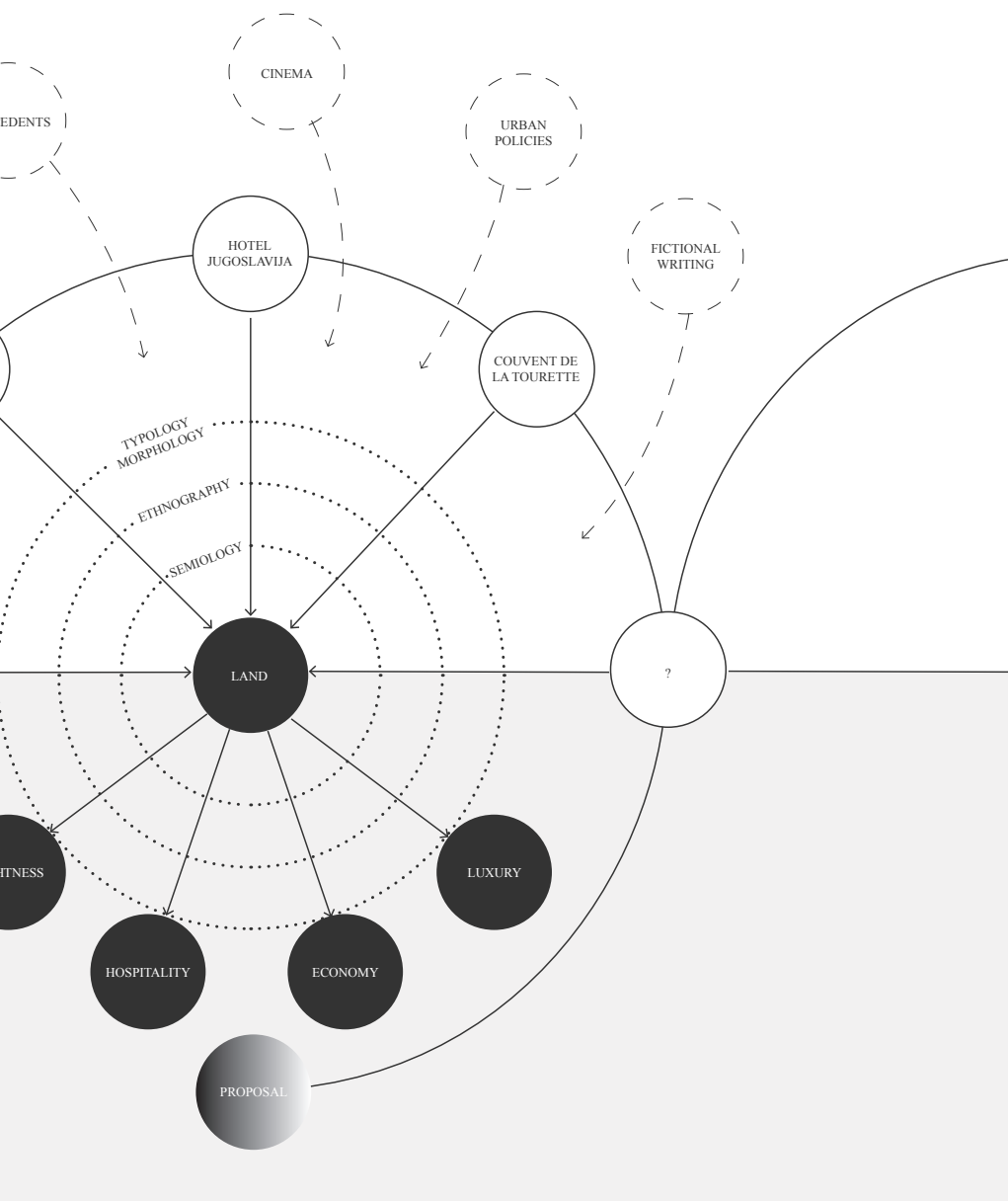
P.S.

Following the P2 presentation and the re-evaluation of the initial theoretical ambition of the project, I have decided to relocate the intervention to Ada Ciganlija. This peripheral area of the city studied during the group research on splavovi proved to be a fertile ground to develop an exploration on lightness and impermanence.

Research Diagram

Jumping, landing, infiltrating





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