The Common Ground

Towards the City of Coexistence

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Research Plan
Last Green in Town
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Figure 2: What is Nature?

Open city needs to provide equal access – spatial as well as non-spatial – to all the urban resources and opportunities available; and, consequently, it has to facilitate the coexistence of the diverse groups and individuals sharing it. [1]

1. Rieniets, T, Sigler J, Christaanse, K, Open City: Designing Coexistence, SUN, pg. 14

Content

Figure 3: La Friche

Research introduction
Actors in the City

Cities have never belonged only to humans, non-humans have always been city dwellers, too.[2] However, the ongoing urbanization and significant usage of natural resources have led to a major impact on climate change and species decay. In the world of the Anthropocene, it becomes essential to engage in a critical reevaluation of our position as spatial creators, wherein we contemplate the manner in which we design environments to be inherently accessible for all – humans and non-human actors. The increasing belief among city dwellers that humans and non-human entities share a mutually interconnected moral, physical, and spiritual realm indicates a novel aspect in our relationship with non-human beings and life in general.[3]

To engage other-than-humans in the city life, it requires not only spatial change, but a major shift in the way of thinking of to whom the space belongs to. It is a complex task that involve different individuals together by engaging in a dialog and interactive actions. Richard Sennett highlight the challenge that *togetherness* faces today, when modern politics emphasizes unity and similarity, which often leads to a preference for simple and easily identifiable groups, rather than embracing diversity and complexity.[4]

The Common Ground will call for a space in the city, where humans can reconnect with nature, where embracing diversity will be possible. Let's shift the purpose of architecture from beign a border for humans and non-human actors to connect them together. The research will try discover what we all have in *common*, how we can live *together* in a broader sense, how to create a city of *coexistence*.

In an abandoned field in Schaerbeek, where different species of plants and animals took over, La Friche stirs the imagination and opens up many possibilities for the future of this land. This vacant lot is a multispecies space, like a 'hetero-topia' as Foucault would say, a place that is extra-ordinary, outside the everyday, an 'other space' where things become possible.[5]

Keywords:
coexistence, common, Actor Network Theory, assemblage, nature, ecology, production

2. Project: *Cohabitation: A Manifesto for the Solidarity of Non-Humans and Humans in Urban Space* curated by ARCH+.. source: https://archplus.net/en/cohabitation-EN/#article-29891
3. Franklin, A. *Nature and Social Theory*, pg. 12
4. Sennett, R. *Together: Introduction*
5. De Cauter, L. *Ending the Anthropocene – Essays on Activism in the Age of Collapse*, pg. 149
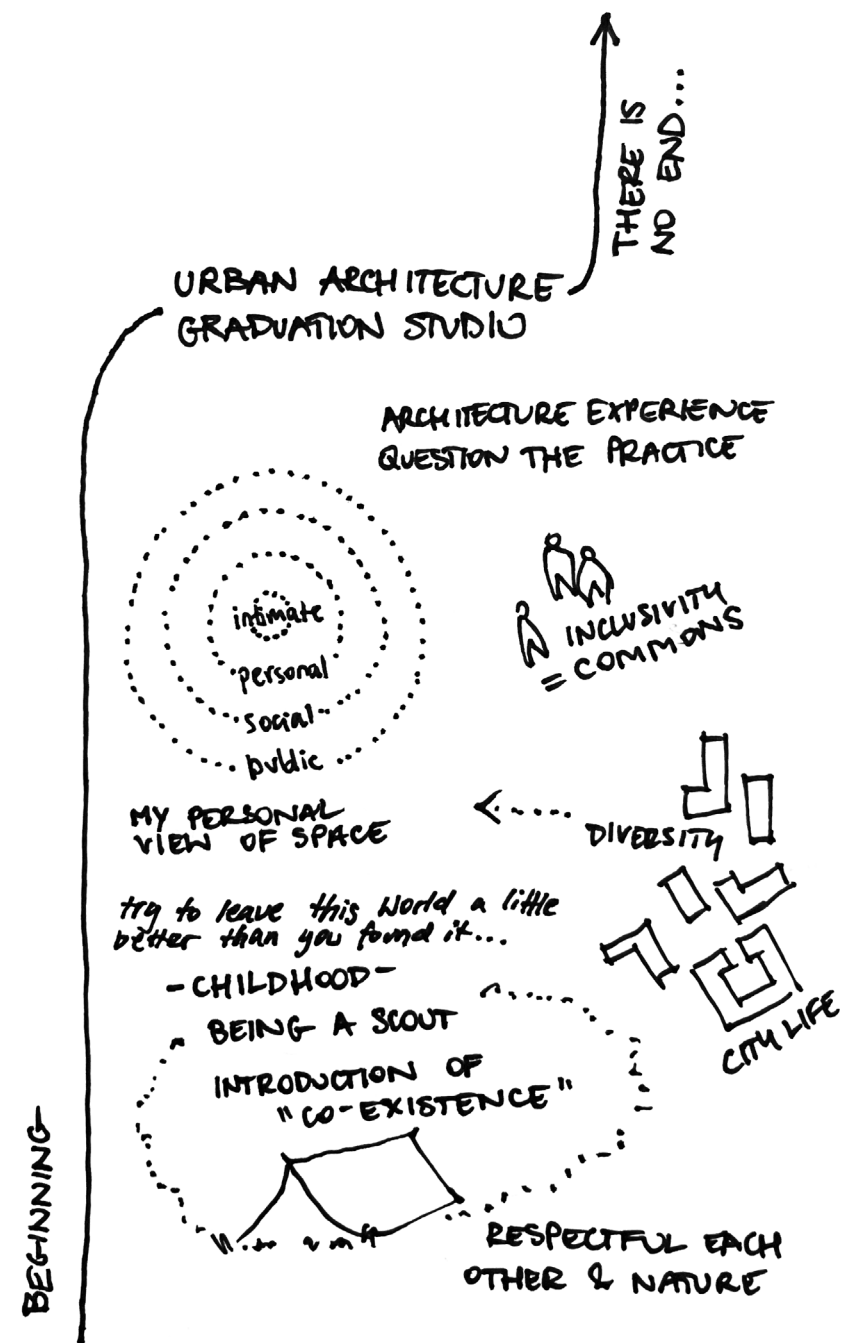
THERE IS NO END...

URBAN ARCHITECTURE GRADUATION STUDIO

ARCHITECTURE EXPERIENCE QUESTION THE PRACTICE

intimate
personal
social
public

MY PERSONAL VIEW OF SPACE

INCLUSIVITY = COMMONS

DIVERSITY

try to leave this World a little better than you found it...
-CHILDHOOD-
- BEING A SCOUT
INTRODUCTION OF "CO-EXISTENCE"

CITY LIFE

RESPECTFUL EACH OTHER & NATURE

BEGINNING

Figure 4. *Personal Line.* The result of conversation with Gianluca Angeli, Prajwal Gaikwad and Leeke Reinders

Position myself

Who am I?

Instead of drawing how I wanted to conduct the research towards the year, I started to relfect on *who am I*, and *how can I position myself as an architect* who can contribute to spatial change. Hence, the research will be a result of my personal experience and curiosities, and it will be a beginning for my future path as a professional.

Let's begin where the things started. A big part of my childhood was Scouting movement, which taught me how to respect the environment in which I live. The lesson 'try to leave this world a little better than you found it'[6] has accompanied me throughout my life where, in the field of architecture, I can pursue this objective. Scouting was an experience of connecting with nature, of sharing the skills and knowledge with other people, to teach and to learn from each other.

Besides, I have always been living in cities. Coming from Sopot and studying in Gdańsk, I was intrigued by the cities' complexity and diversity, which brought me into discovering the unknown. Being able to live in Paris, Copenhagen, Delft, and travelling to other European cities has shown me how each of these cities is unique, how they create space for spontaneous conversations and social encounters.

And now, here I am, questioning the role of architects today, noticing the tendency of working in a closed group of one profession, often destroying the environment and in a self-centred way forgetting about other actors. I want to bring into the research my personal view on our proffesion and how do I dream it to be like, how to be respectful within the city frame, how to combine both natural and urban environment into a shared ground with various species.

I believe that architects can play a valuable role in not only designing functional and aesthetically pleasing spaces but also in nurturing and preserving the commons within our cities. This means considering not only the built environment but also the ecological and social aspects, creating spaces that are inclusive and accessible to all, and striking a balance between urban development and the natural world.

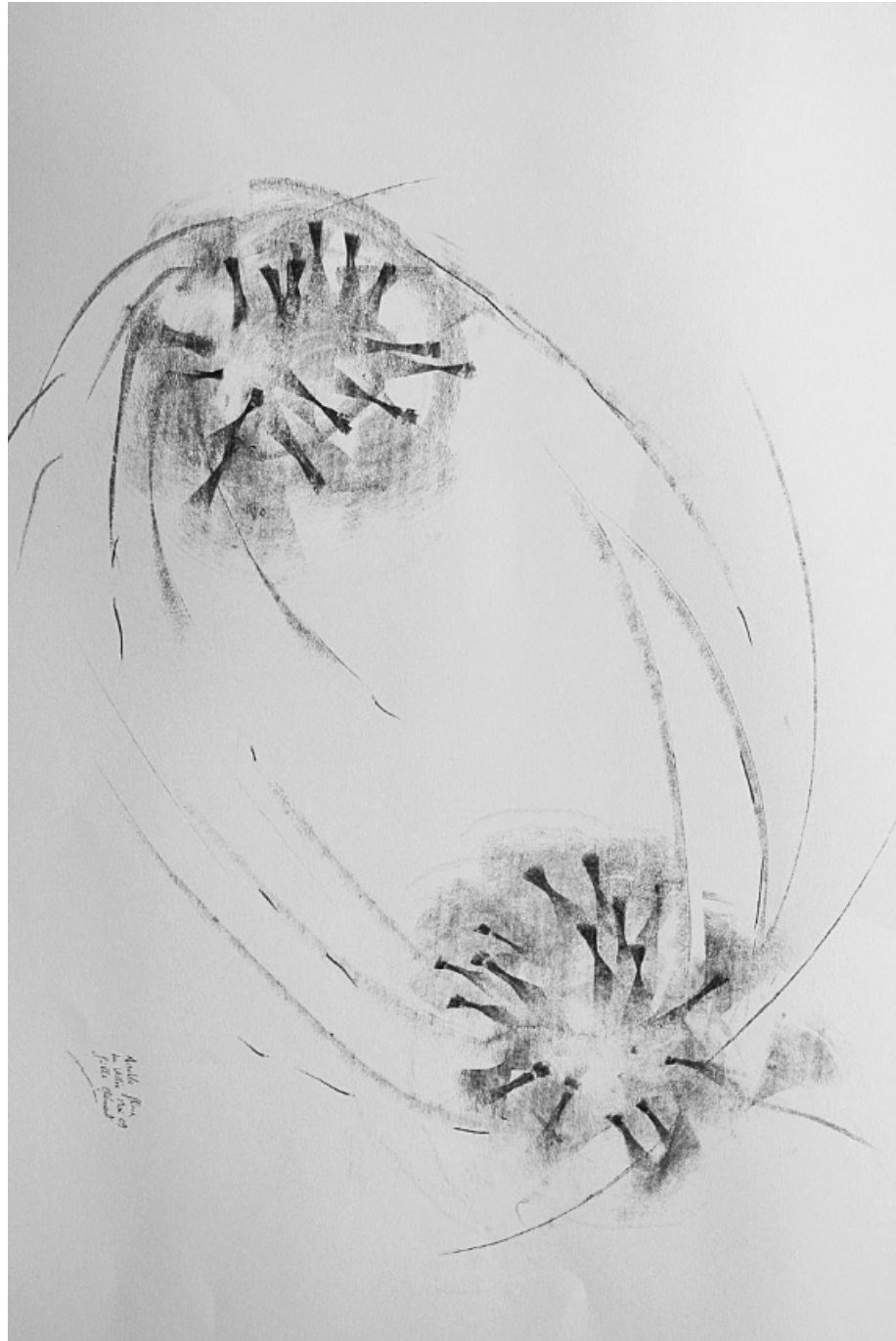6. Quote by Robert Boden-Powell, a founder of Scouting Movement

Figure 5: *Interchange.* Drawing by Gilles Clemens

Definitions

To clarify, I will provide definitions for a set of terms central to the research focus.

The notion of *coexistence* is defined as the fact of living or existing together at the same time or in the same place.[7] Here, I pay special attention to the term existing together, where people, architecture, and non-humans can share a space.

The world *common* is derived from the Old French *comun* – 'common, general, free, open, public' (that it dated around the ninth century, in modern French 'commun'). It comes from Latin communis 'in common, public, shared by all or many; general, not specific, familiar, not pretentious'.[8] An anthropologist David Harvey explains the notion of *commons*: "The recent revival of emphasis upon the supposed loss of urban commonalities reflects the seemingly profound impacts of the recent wave of privatizations, enclosures, spatial controls, policing, and surveillance upon the qualities of urban life in general, and in particular upon the potentiality to build or inhibit new forms of social relations (a new commons) within an urban process influenced if not dominated by capitalist class interests." [9]

The first common place, the commonplace of common places so to speak, would be that 'Nature' is common. Indeed nature is common by essence. It is the ultimate commons. It is that what we share, not only with humans, but with all living and inanimate creatures, organic or inorganic matter. This one vast and overwhelming wholeness in which the human species one day appeared in prehistory is now a fragile and awfully finite ecosystem. It is precisely this human species that has become so predominant and so all-encompassing that it has given its name to a new geological era: the Anthropocene. It is in the Anthropocene that the common is at the same time precious in a way and under stress, aquandered and appropriated. [10]

7. Cambridge Dictionary, source: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/coexistence
8. De Cauter, L. *Ending the Anthropocene – Essays on Activism in the Age of Collapse*, pg. 59
9. The Creation of the Urban Commons, by David Harvey, source: https://mappingthecommons.wordpress.com/2012/11/13/the-creation-of-the-urban-commons-by-david-harvey/
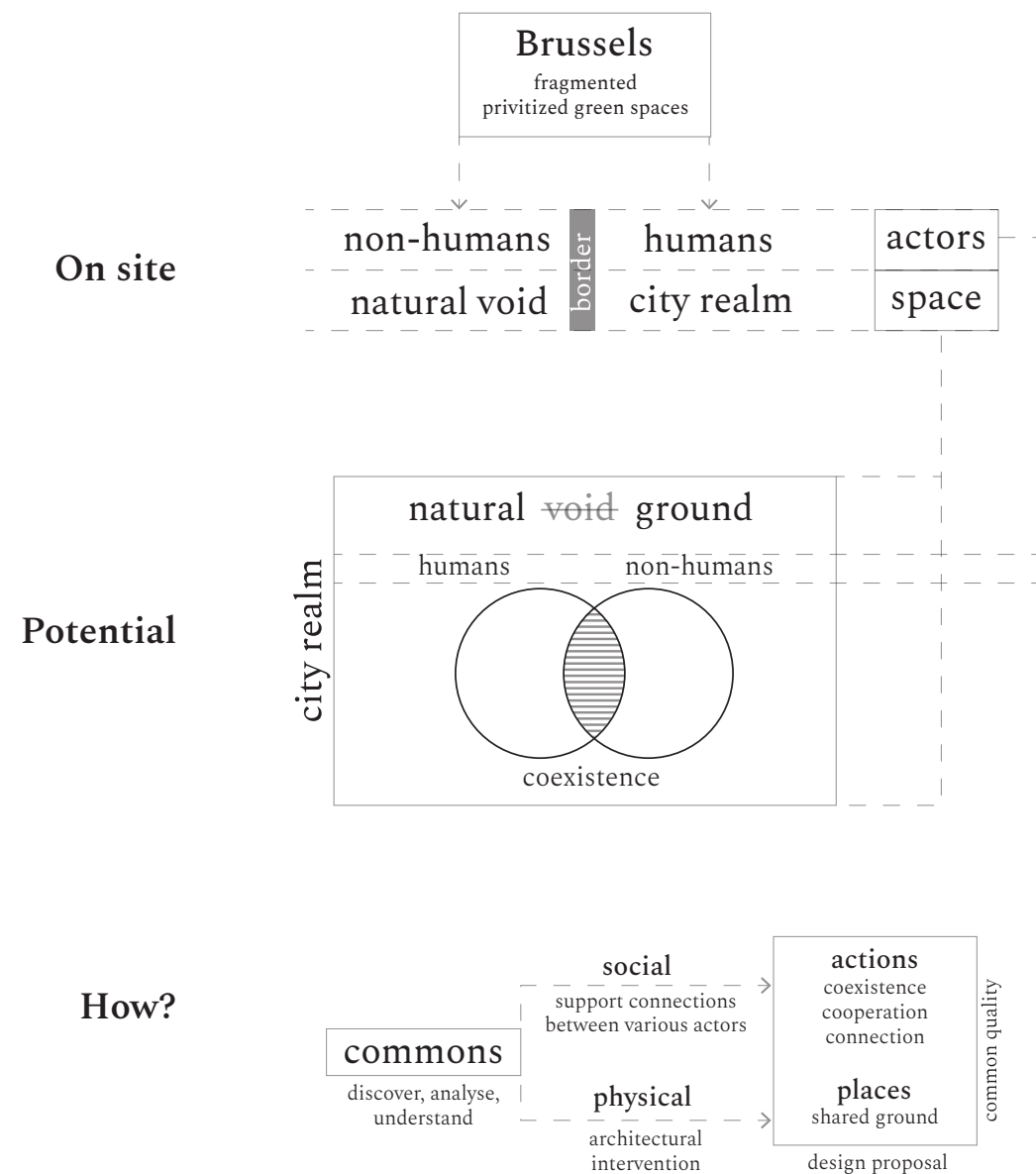10. De Cauter, L. *Ending the Anthropocene – Essays on Activism in the Age of Collapse*, pg. 59

Brussels
fragmented
privitized green spaces

On site

| non-humans | border | humans | actors |
| natural void | | city realm | space |

Potential

natural ~~void~~ ground

humans   non-humans

coexistence

city realm

How?

social
support connections
between various actors

commons
discover, analyse,
understand

physical
architectural
intervention

actions
coexistence
cooperation
connection

places
shared ground

common quality

design proposal

Figure 6: Research Diagram

Research question
Relevance of Common

Brussels is already a highly fragmented city. Being separated into nineteen municipalities, having two administrative languages in different territories, dealing with a full range of social classes, and with the admission of many immigrants, exclusive spaces are naturally created within the city. This also applies to nature in the city, where only a few communities share small gardens, and more and more green spaces are getting privatized and do not function as a *common* anymore. The city is moving away from nature by putting strong borders between what is urban and what is natural - we can also encounter it with the Friche which is highly protected from human intervention. The policy of ownership affects how spaces with potential for public use are shaped - through the housing crisis, more and more dwellings are planned, including on the Friche plot.

All this complexity calls to rethink how we shape our cities, and where within the urban realm we can find a space to live with nature. How to design inclusive environment, not only in the human-centered world but in with different actors that occur in the city - plants and animals. According to Bruno Latour, We are nature as well, and we tend to forget about this societal relevance.[11]

Thus, a main research question arises:

What architectural strategies, grounded in the principles of commoning, can transform a vacant lot in Brussels into shared spaces of coexistence that reconnect urban inhabitants with nature and facilitate collaboration among diverse urban agencies?

This will lead to a further understanding of my future potential role as an architect, and how I can invite different actors and create an inclusive space by architecture. Researching and designing a coexistence requires a broader understanding of the desires and needs of users. Inspired by the way how *commons* work, I aim to conduct the research with the support of different groups and/or proffesions.

11. Grusin, N. *The Non-human Turn.* University of Minnesota Press

Methodology

To understand how the space of coexistence can be created within the city, the research will be constructed in 3 parts:

01. **Understand the phenomenon of coexistence with nature and the power of commoning practice through a theoretical framework and literature review**
Various writers, activists, and theorists were investigating the role of humans within nature, the urge to reconnect with it, and the relevance of sharing the space with everyone through social, ecological, and theoretical lenses. To understand better the importance of my topic and its impact, I will dive into different literature positions explained further in the *Relevance in Literature* section.

02. **Find what is hidden: searching for different actors and their values in Brussels through fieldwork:**

a) Looking into different case studies of common spaces in Brussels
To undestand the power of cooperation, to be able to be a part of that during my research, I will analyse different case studies of existing commons in Brussels. It will give me insides on how to create a productive concept in a practical realm. Chosen examples are the results of a collaborative practice in Brussels:

- Parckfarm
- Community Land Trust
- City Mine(d) - Friche Eggevoort

Figure 7: Parckfarm   Figure 8: CLT   Figure 9: City Mine(d)

b) Searching for existing urban actors
When it comes to non-humans, a big research about flora and fauna has been conducted, and different species have been listed. I find relevant to discover what are the connections between different species, in which condition do they live and how they can co-existe with different agencies. Hence, an atlas of species' connection will be created. Inspired by the work of Irene Kopelman, an artist that collaborates with different scientists, I aim to create my own set of drawings that will illustrate my findings.

Figure 10: *The Exact Opposite of Distance.* Drawings by Irene Kopelman as a result of collaborative research with Manu Learning Centre

03. **Turning my findings into collaborative practice**

Despite an increase in pollution and the ongoing climate change crisis, Brussels is a city with many ecological and social activist groups. I believe that collaboration with different practices will enrich my research and have an impact on further design. As a last part of my research, I aim to contact, interview, and share the knowledge with different groups and/or proffesions, such biologists, environmentalists, or other commons organizations.

Relevance in Literature

"Open City: Designing Coexistence" by Tim Rieniets, Jennifer Sigler, Kees Christiaanse
The 4th International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam launched the theme Open City: Designing Coexistence to generate concrete answers to these questions. This book presents research and proposals by international experts who were asked to develop methods to facilitate access and promote coexistence in the contemporary city. This position can provide me with tools on what is and how to design coexistence in the city.

"The Rediscovery of Place and our Human Role within it" by Nicholas Stephen Mang
This paper researches a holistic understanding of place and our evolutionary role within it. This paper provides ideas on our ethical role as humans in co-creating and evolving with the places in which we live.

"Ending the Anthropocene – Essays on Activism in the Age of Collapse" by Lieven De Cauter
Belgian activist and philosopher investigates the idea that if we want to avoid collapse, we have to end the Anthropocene. The book provides a series of essays that inspire to shift from human-centered thinking and to take action for a better future.

"Together" by Richard Sennet
This position provides me a better understanding of cooperation, what are the challenges that it faces. By exploring the nature of cooperating, it shows a new way of seeing how humans can live together.

"The non-human Turn" by Richard Grusin
This book aims to identify, describe, and ultimately unify a broad range of contemporary and ongoing critical, theoretical, and philosophical perspectives within the fields of humanities and social sciences. Including ANT of Bruno Latour or Assemblage Theory by Gilles Deleuze, it helps me to position myself in the wider context.

"The creation of Urban Commons" by David Harvey
Here, I'm introduced to Urban Commons, what they are, how they work, and what are their strengths and weaknesses.

List of Figures

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