Pieces and Places

Infrastructure, perimeters, rooms

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foreword

“This work is a record of a search.”¹

There is no cleaning to force only valid conclusions in it.

It is a collection. It is not a catalogue or a list, moving away from the positivist idea of classification, it is a series of ideas about architecture and city.

The relations between the elements of the research are not pre-define, and they are unrevealed by the relation of the elements themselves. No judgment is implied in the selection of the elements nor in their definitions. The material is open for interpretation through its loose structure.

The studies fall naturally from the initial research about the city of Brussels into three groups:

Infrastructure
Perimeters
Rooms

This, of course, represents the content of the studies and an initial spatial description of contemporary architecture.

Introduction

The content of the research focuses upon fragments as a careful selection that tries to reduce the complexity without simplifying reality. They are selected as basic elements where all the other components of the city can be derivate, regarding their meaning.

This process of reduction was driven by the initial research of the city of Brussels. The variety of topics, approaches, and tools enlarged the scope of the individual research. The unstable city group defined an interesting framework where a condition of instability was recognized in the specific spatial situation of perimeters as the most active area at all scales. The Senne research allowed for a better understanding of the relations between infrastructure and the deep structure of the city, not only in the specific case of the lost river but also in its exemplification of memory through elements. Whose neighbourhood defined a different way to look at social connections and relations through the formal structure of the rooms, and in the specific case the *enfilade* as an urban condition.

The ability to identify elements implies also the process of definition. The character, thus, becomes the protagonist of the research and its formal constitution. It plays a key role in architectural production and perception. “The character is the coherence between what it is and what it represents.” Researching for a direct correspondence between the object of the project and the object of the evocation. This correspondence mainly implies a fundamental condition of the city: the idea of identity.

This is a free selection of material that can constitute one of the multiple stories. As Tschumi writes “looking at transcripts also means constructing them” and, I would add, give them a meaning. The multiplicity of these stories is in the end confronted with the complexity of a site-specific positioning in the city of Brussels, searching for a meaningful proposal where reality and reason are the protagonists.

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Fragments and Meaning

The research grew from the necessity of a deep understanding of a place, in line with the theme spolia of the studio. A theme that implies the idea of architecture as “positive creation inseparable from the life of society in which it occurs; and in large part as a collective practice” ⁴. Here two main ideas are key to fully understand this, only in appearance, simple statement: the architecture as a positive process and the idea of architecture as a collective practice.

The idea of architecture as a positivist process places this reflection of course in continuity with the classic experience recognizing that an autonomous alternative theoretical system has never been established afterwards. All the experiences that challenged this corpus of ideas resulted in either reinforcing the former or not being able to provide an autonomous theory detached from the subjectivity of the individual choice. This is the deep value of such theory unified by Leon Battista Alberti in De re aedificatoria, a discussion beyond time, a continuous reflection about the proposed themes. The use of the word themes is crucial here where it describes a point of reflection but neither its formal implication nor its spatial consequences.

Classic architecture intended as a collective practice follows from this point to clarify that to be truly collective some fixed points exist. The first one as identified by Antonio Monestiroli in his The metope and the triglyph: nine lessons on architecture, is the relation between architecture and reality. “Classic architecture is always realist” ⁵. This peculiarity is clarified by Hegel in his aesthetic “Architecture for Hegel is primary among the arts in expressing cognitive content generally—the Absolute Spirit— as an aspect of organizing the natural environment.” ⁶

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This condition of realism and collectivity grant to consider architecture as a way to develop knowledge and representation of reality, but also imply the second point that Monestiroli identifies as “the intelligibility of forms, assumed as distinctive character” 7. Classic architecture defines a system of rules because of this intelligibility. “the general objective is beauty, and beauty is, in this regard, what accords with reality and reason” 8

By understanding the city as this aspiration to reality and reason in a layered reality composed by previous stories and new conditions the architectural space becomes a complete body where the intervention is part of a historical and spatial pre-existence stratified over time. From this state of awareness and consciousness of a completed yet fragmented reality, multiple themes can be re-read under a different light without oversimplifying its complexity. With these “propositions” 9 the research begins.

The themes introduced as infrastructure, perimeters, rooms become lenses to look at the city of the present and the past, unexpected angles that re-opens the discussion on assumed fixed points or parts of the city that don’t belong to architecture anymore, someone would suggest, as such as the infrastructural network or the limits of the city limit. The Three fronts enlarge the understanding of the implication that a single piece of this ongoing composition, being the city, can shift drastically not only the perception of the space, but the generation of the space itself. This process of grinding reality to reveal its essence, bare, is strongly driven by the possibility of research meaning in architecture not as a consequence of its production but as a primary condition for architecture to appears.

So, what constitutes meaning in architecture? And where is the meaning in a fragmented reality? The answer is probably in the question. The fragments are the results of this ideological fall, parts that became after the post-modern period the most meaningful pieces, “able to resonate through its pars the feeling of toto, in its entirety”10.

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7 Monestiroli, Piccolo, and Naef, *The Metope and the Triglyph*.
8 Monestiroli, Piccolo, and Naef.
This powerful idea of resonance implies the necessity of correspondence between the object and its image. This idea derives from the Vitruvian’s *proprietas* (book II), the definition of character from Quatremère de Quincy in the *Methodique Encyclopédie* and form the eighth-century tradition as observed by Colin Rowe in his *Character and Composition* (1974). The character allows for an ontological understanding of the architecture against the phenomenological experience of its representation. This means that the idea of character is deeply embedded in the essence of the object, and it acts as the bridge between perception and significance. It is not the perception of an impression, but the sensible part is the tool to enter a deeper research of it.

The idea of character claim for a complete match between the object and its meaning.
Figure 1. Cesare Pietroiusti materia identica, 1978
Architecture and fiction

This reflection about perception and meaning is captured in Cesare Pietroiusti’s *materià identica*. It is a drawing discussing the utopia of identity by reproducing the setting of an old project of him and reflecting upon the spatial implication of the drawing as a medium against the actual spatial construction of it. This small difference in perspective is what differentiate architectural reality from its fictional staging. It is important to differentiate between architectural staging and architecture being stage for everyday life to take place. This peculiarity can be identified in the comparison between two iconic films when it comes to architecture: *Dogville* by Lars von Trier and *Playtime* by Jacques Tati.

The architecture in the two films plays a key role in the definition of the plot itself but also reveals architecture under two drastic different lights. In Dogville the architecture it is indeed the fixed scene where life occurs, and where all the plot unrolls. The spaces are generated by just a line on the floor and some meaningful fragments of the buildings: the bell tower for the church, the door for some houses, a few furniture to identify the internal rooms. The scene is clear, the reconstruction of the small town through this simple but strong elements elicit in everyone the understanding of the spatial condition without any confusion it is exactly what it represents distilled to its minimum.

In playtime instead, the prevailing feeling is confusion. And this confusion is specifically generated by the architectural ambiguity of the New Paris. The entirety of the film is a *crescendo* of this vagueness of the space until this staged condition falls apart in the final scene of the restaurant where the real Parisian condition brutally emerges with all its contradiction but in its most honest form: fascinating chaos.

The two films show clearly how architecture is part of everyday life and how strong its influence can be and that of course, its primary condition is to be inhabited by people, by stories and to be the backdrop of our lives. But to achieve this role architecture needs to be able to produce a meaningful space to create the understanding of that and its identity. This is accomplished by a certain level of autonomy and by a rigorous definition of the precondition of the space and its fundamental characteristics to be.
Moreover, this position is reinforced by the rationalist idea that architecture is a rigorous reflection upon the urban facts, where the principles are few and define but the answers the architect and society can develop for the everyday challenges are multiple and unpredicted. “The immutability of the elements is given by the rational and reductive character of the architectural statements” 11.

Figure 2_Dogville, Lars von Trier, 2003
Figure 3_Playtime, Jacques Tati, 1967

11 Rossi, Scritti scelti sull’architettura e la città.
Interesting in this regard is the Loos’s story about the saddler master:

The saddler masters

[...]

One fine day a singular movement spread in the city. It was called Secession. It required that only modern everyday objects be produced. When the master saddler became aware of it, he took his best saddle with him and went to the head of the Secession. And he said to him: "Mr. Professor [...] I heard about the rules you have established. I too am a modern man. I too would like to work in a modern way. Tell me: is this saddle modern?" The professor examined the saddle and gave the craftsman a long speech in which only the words ‘art of craftsmanship’, ‘individuality’, ‘modern’, ‘Hermann Bahr’, ‘Ruskin’, ‘applied art’ recurred continuously. etc. etc. The result, however, was no, this is not a modern saddle. The craftsman left all mortified. And he thought about it; he went to work and then began to think again. But no matter how hard he tried to stick to the professor’s rules, the result was always his old saddle. Saddened he returned to the professor. He confided his pain to him. The professor examined the craftsman’s attempts and said, "Dear craftsman, you have no imagination." [...] But the professor said, "Come back tomorrow. [...] The next day the master saddler returned. The professor was able to present him with 49 saddle designs. [...] The master saddler looked at the drawings for a long time and in his eyes, everything became clearer and clearer. Finally, he exclaimed: "Mister professor! If I understood so little about horse riding, horses, leather and manufacturing, I would also have your imagination." And since then he has lived happily ever after.

And makes saddles. Modern? He does not know. Saddles. 11

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This simple story allows to better understand why architecture cannot be the fictional staging of the architectural reality. And it is interesting to see a formalization of the same idea in Schelling Aesthetic idealism almost one hundred years before Loos’s book “Architecture is the representation of itself as construction responding to a purpose.”

For Schelling art, and architecture signify the identity between subject and object in the gnoseological process of reality: two words appear particularly interesting in his definition of architecture: construction and purpose.

The idea of purpose link this definition directly with the tradition of positivist architect as Viollet Le Duc that made a similar point a few years later “if unity has to exist in architecture, it cannot happen by applying several different forms to it, but only in the search for that form that is the expression of – and is prescribed by reason” and this specific reflection about the reasons behind a choice is what makes the entire process real, meaningful.

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14 Rossi, *Scritti scelti sull'architettura e la città. Architecture for the museums*.
**Meaning and relations**

The meaning of the parts is consequently not intrinsic but, in the process, in the way fragments relate within the project itself and in the relations that it is capable to generate with the intellectual and physical context.

In all the theories mentioned before, the object of the project was always the result as whole but as mentioned in the previous chapter and as Rossi mention in its *autobiografia scientifica* “the adamantine correspondence between sign and meaning is, in modern architecture, hard if not impossible […] Architecture should be characterized little, just as much as it is useful for imagination or action”1. It is important consequently to understand that the character is not the solution of meaning in architecture itself, and it is also the reason why this research aims to go beyond the dogmatic correspondence between the building and its character as necessity, looking at a smaller scale, questioning the assumed whole as the last reducible element by introducing the idea of fragment.

The character thus assumes the characteristics of the ideal in the platonic philosophy where the “real” object is a copy of some ideal, absolute that exist only in the realms of ideas. This ideal, of course, is never achieved in its perfection as a whole because of the multiple external agents present in the real world (i.e. the context, the materials, the technology etc.) but still, this character can be recognized as itself, projection of the ideal.

The character is what gives to space its meaning. And it is a direct consequence of the process of understanding and defining what is built.

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Elements

Identity

The idea of character in architecture is always co-present with the idea of type as pre-condition of it to be defined. The two terms exist in relation to the other. By recognising the role of the character within the typological studies it also suggests that every type of building owns an autonomous identity represented by fixed and consistent elements. This simple idea is extremely powerful. If we think about the idea of a house “a deep relation is established between the forms and the culture of inhabiting a place, one justifies itself in the other, one becomes evident in the other”\(^1\). This correspondence between reasons and stable elements is the foundation for the common ground around the idea of identity ad basic requirement for architecture.

All the elements of the city exist with a role and they are consciously or unconsciously expressing a character but “New construction often lacks identity as essential element for the wellbeing”\(^2\). This appears to be increasingly true because our practice is capable to develop spaces faster and faster by transforming architecture in an industrial process disregarding that the true limit is the ability to produce the understanding of such a space. It is more and more difficult to recognize the street as a street, a house as a house, or even just a room as a room. Specifically, because of this contemporary dichotomy of image and meaning, in which the visible appears to be more trustable than the idea, a strange situation appears where we trust our senses forgetting the fragile subjectivity we are limited in as sensible animals. Society forgot the value of the logic for the passion of the experience.

This concern is not only a matter of speculation for architects about architecture but reveals itself in every day of our cities where, this dualism, is the deep condition of Europeans cities character manifesting in the charm that these places reveal.

\(^1\) Monestiroli, Piccolo, and Naef, *The Metope and the Triglyph*.  
\(^2\) Smithson and Smithson, *Urban Structuring*. 
The concern is for the city of the past and of the future, to still be able to host the complexity of our time without the necessity of simplification that transforms architecture in a diagram. This idea is widely present in the contemporary practice of architecture driven by this need for immediacy, where complexity and contradiction are opposed by polished and falsely linear and simple reflection about the reasons and the consequences. From this point, a deep necessity become central of this investigation: the possibility to define this common ground through a series of contradictory, or rather, apparently contradictory terms.
Definitions

The apartment

“A bedroom is a room in which there is a bed; a dining-room is a room in which there are a table and chairs, and often a sideboard; a sitting-room is a room in which there are armchairs and a couch; a kitchen is a room in which there is a cooker and a water inlet; a bathroom is a room in which there is a water inlet above a bathtub; when there is only a shower, it is known as a shower-room; when there is only a wash-basin it is known as a cloakroom; an entrance-hall is a room in which at least one of the doors leads outside the apartment; in addition, you may find a coat-rack in there; a child’s bedroom is a room into which you put a child; a broom closet is a room into which you put brooms and the vacuum cleaner; a maid’s bedroom is a room that you let to a student. From this list, which might easily be extended, two elementary conclusions may be drawn that I offer by way of definitions:

1. Every apartment consists of a variable, but finite, number of rooms.
2. Each room has a particular function.

It would seem difficult, or rather it would seem derisory, to question these self-evident facts. Apartments are built by architects who have very precise ideas of what an entrance-hall, a sitting-room (living-room, reception room), a parents’ bedroom, a child’s room, a maid’s room, a box-room, a kitchen, and a bathroom ought to be like.”

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Figure 4. *Life of St. Ambrose*, Masolino, San Clemente Rome, 1425-31 (detail)
It is striking with which simplicity and clarity George Perec can define some of the basic components of architecture without being an architect himself. In his *Species of Spaces*, he concludes his description of the apartment by saying that architects have a very clear idea of how spaces are and which type they are, revealing to us architect a deep question about how to define these elements and what they mean.

This concern about the clarity of the space is not a new interest, in a painting from 1425-31 “in the story of St Ambrose’s death Masolino (the painter) distinguishes the space with the functions, the bedroom is put in communication with the study space through a narrow door, the rooms appear so separate. It is the first time that architecture alone, the empty room, becomes the subject of painting” 19 and is also clear how space itself plays a key role in the narration of the story, is not a pure consequence of the process of inhabiting the space but the primary condition of it.

This consciousness relief the pressure on the designer to be always new, there is no point in this continuous effort of extravaganza if we are conscious of this undefined certainty as Adam Caruso in an interview in 2017 has condensed “Novelty is a nonsense” 20 while talking about European cities as one of the greater human inventions. There is no novelty, but a continuous reflection of what architecture is and what does it means.

When this paper refers to the meaning of words, it is important to realise that the terms used are not to be taken as an element of reality but as the idea they represent. As such the definitions that are developed around them are more reflections and ways to investigate these ideas to all scale and time without the need for a final point. The definition in this regard absurdly undefined, it is an ongoing process of identification of points of interest and clarity.

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“In One and Three Chairs, Joseph Kosuth represents one chair three ways: as a manufactured chair, as a photograph, and as a copy of a dictionary entry for the word “chair.” The installation is thus composed of an object, an image, and words.

Kosuth didn’t make the chair, take the photograph, or write the definition; he selected and assembled them together. But is this art? And which representation of the chair is most “accurate”? These open-ended questions are exactly what Kosuth wanted us to think about when he said that “art is making meaning.” By assembling these three alternative representations, Kosuth turns a simple wooden chair into an object of debate and even consternation, a platform for exploring new meanings.”

Figure 5. One and Three Chairs, Joseph Kosuth, 1965

The Fragments

The idea of fragments as discussed, describe the contemporary condition in an economy of energy and words leaving space for interpretation and for unexpected relation to develop further. The acceptance of fragments does not imply the acceptance of the political and social forces of the post-period that generate this condition. The position is not an objective product built to reconstruct a story but an attitude towards the city.

The methodology defined until now become pro-active when confronted with the specific protagonists of the research: the threes fragments. The infrastructure, the perimeter, and the rooms are not an arbitrary selection of pieces but a rediscovery of fragments of a former whole. They exist only in the belief of the former unity and in its value as in the example, Matta-Clark’s work is a house only if you recognize the existence of the previous house.

Figure 6. Splitting, Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974
Infra-structure is what it does. And beyond. It is at the same time connection and confrontation. Often it is a line that can be mistaken for a river when looked from the space, it is indeed a geographical element.

It is characterised by what moves on, and along with it the life of the city take place. Sometimes the infrastructure is the city, but always it is the reason for the contemporary urban expansion ad definition.

The movement is pre-condition of our society, social and physical mobility. It is the act of confrontation between the one and its community.

It is efficient
Perimeters

*My book, my table*  Perimeters stops and separate, it is an act of foundation.

*My bed, my lamp, my plants*  You can move along it or cross them depending on your motivation. Sometimes it is a line, sometimes a wall, none of these characteristics make it easier to cross. It’s just a line, but what’s a line?

*My window, my view*  The clear division is the highest point of separation and proximity in the space. It’s behind a wall, just behind the wall.

*My memories*  The politics

*My photos*  The space

*My time*  There is always a perimeter, if you cannot see it, it’s just larger. But what’s behind? In the case of a new one tries to imagine what was there before.

Perimeters moves.  The others
The room is an elementary component of architecture yet completed in itself.

It is the basic requirement for architecture to be, it is a shelter that generates the condition of wellbeing for humans to stop surviving and start living.

It always has a use, sometime way too many.

To enter you need an entrance. Is it the entrance because of the room, because of what’s inside or because people enter it? If there wasn’t a room, there wouldn’t be an entrance. Am I entering or exiting the room?

The room is us in the space, it is the space of traces.
Reality

This reality is a stream of ideas and reflection that follows an unpredictable path yet logic.

Infrastructure

- Which one is the infrastructural scale?
- Street is not only a means of access but also an area for social expression. A relation between street and house exist.
- The street become the new space for identity where the infrastructure stops the street begins?
- Infrastructure is the combination of the street as space and the movement that is the reason of this space. what make and infrastructure a place? Is an infrastructure inhabitable? Integration is not always the answer, the juxtaposition of these elements of rooms and infrastructure can indeed create the spatial complexity that is required for identity and relation.
- The street is big enough to accommodate cars, street decks intended sometimes as ample spaces for two mother’s whit proms to stop and talk and leave enough space to pass.
- The street is mainly horizontal. Bivalence of the street as corridor.
- In the modernist idea Hilberseimer propose the division of infrastructure. Layering as the condition of the function moving from the side extension of the infrastructural element to the overlapping systems.
- Mobility is a characteristic of our period. Social and physical mobility. It is a feeling of freedom and endless expansion of the individual over the stable community.
- Roads are big. They are topographical elements, as the train line and the canal, as hills and rivers. They are social divisions. The infra-structure is a geographical element.
- The infrastructure shapes the space and the community organisation.
- The street and the motorway. The motorway is not fictional, there is not space for staging of everyday life. The street is the place where identity can act and be performed.
- The scale of the infrastructure needs to be mediate before reaching the traditional typology of the historical city.
- This structure lies in the space infra, or in between them: it is infrastructure. If the infra as defined by politics, is a trace of the impetus toward separation and confrontation within the city, the infra in the urbs is the space of connection and integration.  
- The infrastructure plays the role of in-between.
- It is what it does. And beyond. The infrastructure in the contemporary condition is the reason for the endless expansion of the city.
- none of the main infrastructure are in the city (airport etc)
- the infrastructure plays the role as a whole it is singular
- Infra-structure it is in the same time connection and confrontation.
- It is characterised by the idea of efficiency, it is its reason, movement. Linearity, rigidity, efficiency, layering. The infrastructure is often characterised by the objects that moves along.
- Is it Hilberseimer’s drawing the design of infrastructure of the design of the architecture?
- The invisible cities Pentesilea is the city that you cannot distinguish from the countryside, it is the contemporary condition of urbanism where the infrastructure is a continuous and the intensity is not appreciable.

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Figure 7. High rise city masterplan, Ludwig Hilberseimer, 1924
Perimeters

- Perimeter: it is archetypical, it is an act of foundation, a ritual gesture and an artefact. The wall divides the inside from the outside. It is associable with the limit, physical or conceptual, it is the space of contradiction where the state of the discipline is visible. “Questioning the limits define the discipline”

- the perimeter enhances where the real boundaries are.
- the Miesian courtyard houses are the clear example of the key role that the definition of the perimetral line of the space can play in the creation of the space itself
- the definition of a perimeter often implies an introvert character of the space behind the fence
- “The ancient aspiration for an unify reality of architecture and landscape, of humans being in nature, of indoor and outdoor space, was not only facilitate by modern techniques, but also more intensely demanded in the context of a progressively more urban and artificial life.”
- ‘Experienced nearness to nature is being lost’, and ‘Nature is truly affecting only when it begins to be dwelled in.’
- Protected by peripheral masonry walls, the house’s interior could be even more transparent without loss of privacy. This reconciliation of seclusion and openness permitted a stronger fusion of the house and its gardens within the city.
- A clear division allows for the maximum closeness to the other, it’s behind the wall, just behind.
- “I put a picture up on a wall. Then I forget there is a wall. I no longer know what there is behind this wall, I no longer know there is a wall, I no longer know this wall is a wall, I no longer know what a wall is. I no longer know that in my

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23 Tschumi, The Manhattan Transcripts.
apartment there are walls, and that if there weren't any walls, there would be no apartment.”

- “Not just a delimiter, the wall also connects.” (Holtrop writes) “As Dutch architect Wim van den Bergh puts it: ‘You need a border to be able to unite.’ ”

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Figure 8. Fundation of Rome, B. Pinelli, XIX cent.

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Perec and Sturrock, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. 
Rooms

- The origin of architecture is often found in the anthropological relation between man and nature as the fundamental condition of architectural production. The primitive hunt is a hypothesis theorised by Marc-Antoine Laugier, as an allegory of the basic human requirement of a shelter.

- Architecture is pointing to a new structural clarity found in nature, rather than the ironic ruins of the past.

- The room is the space where life happened.

- A room always have a use, sometimes too many.

- “A space without a function. Not ‘without any precise function’ but precisely without any function; not pluri-functional (everyone knows how to do that), but a-functional. It wouldn’t obviously be a space intended solely to ‘release’ the others (lumber-room, cupboard, hanging space, storage space, etc.) but a space, repeat, that would serve no purpose at all.”

- The room is an elementary component of architecture yet completed in itself. A room host the activities and the rest. It is built around the human scale to mediate the architectural scale to us.

- The room is the space of human traces. It is the space where previous activities last longer as traces, as proof that architecture is for people. It is the space for intimacy and appropriation.

- The room is always accessible, it must have a door.

- A window is often present, if the entrance is the window, the room can only create the tension.

- In the Medieval the individual room was not a thing. If pour the darkness was full of dangers, if rich even the bedroom was space for a performance of the status quo.

- Rooms can be defined by emphasis on the perimeters as in the Gaspar House by Alberto Capo Baeza

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\(^2\) Perec and Sturrock.
- The abolition of the idea of room has been a slow process started in the 30's walls transformed in panels, furniture integrated in the walls, transparency that opens the view between spaces.
- Macro-room is the scale where the room match the scale of the architecture. The room assumes the recognizable autonomy of architecture and the correspondence of interiors and exteriors.
- A series of rooms can be composed with completely different results, the element itself is no predetermination of the final composition.

Figure 9. The Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in his Painting Gallery in Brussels, David Teniers the Younger, 1647-1651.
Figure 10. Allegorical engraving of the Vitruvian primitive hut Charles Eisen, 1720-78.
The City

The city as a library

re-edited Jorge Luis Borges description of Babel’s Library

“(…) two widely acknowledged facts: One, that the library city is so huge that any reduction by human hands must be infinitesimal. And two, that each book building is unique and irreplaceable, but (since the library city is total) there are always several hundred thousand imperfect facsimiles - buildings books that differ by no more than a single letter brick, or a comma window.”

The idea of the city as a library is fascinating as it reveals some of the fundamental conditions of human production: the city as piece of cultural heritage and the aspiration to unique pieces yet subjected to general and unified rules. This idea somehow can be expanded as an example to understand whom the city looks always completed, yet it is in continuous transformation. Building going up and down over time without maybe changing that much the overall perception of the space. Some rules perhaps are shared, one for all the need for an understanding of the space to be able to navigate through it. “The city, conceived in the Albertian sense as a large house just like the house is a small city, can be understood – as a whole or in its components – as the antithesis of two poles: the solid and the void, articulated on one side by an indistinct mass or defined objects, on the other by an open space or delimited envelopes of air.”

From this understanding of the city as a complete piece generally already too dense, and what they need to still be recognized as places are points of intensity and distension. Metropolises have lost the sense of structure and the feeling for use. In this condition make clear the urban position is essential to take part in the discussion about architecture.

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8 Jorge Luis Borges et al., The Library of Babel (Boston: David R. Godine, 2000).
The wall, the city gate. The roads, the boulevard.

As extensively discussed in this research the elements selected are valuable for the understanding of their role because of their general, yet specific character and a deeper level of this understanding can be achieved when these categories are confronted with the reality of history and the awareness of city transformation. This process will reveal two main points: the necessity of historical consciousness and the transformative essence of these categories that are able to only to overlap but to become, one the other.

The condition in Brussels is similar to the deep transformation that major European cities went through over the nineteenth century when the bourgeois city took over, the close city, the old defensive system and city gates, to realise the dream of connection and fast movement for people and goods. The social tendency and ideals of that period are specifically what created the shift from a close and defensive idea of the city, designed and built to separate the countryside from the space of the city to the idea of urban space where the openness was not only seen as a value but primary condition for the city to expand physically and politically.

The more open, the more connected. The more connected the more influential.

Brussels is not dissimilar in this tendency and this transition is still visible on two different sets of walls. The first one built in the 13th century around the Belgian city with its 7 city gates was quickly insufficient for the growing city and already at the end of the 14th century built a second wall double the length (8km) along the line that now is known as the Petite ceinture. 30

Traces of these two lines of defences still visible nowadays appearing as free-standing elements isolated, in complete opposition with their original presence in the city. The towers of the internal wall are the elements that still exist mixed with the dense urban fabric, this is the case for the Tour Anneessens built in the area of the Steenpoort or the Tour Noire in correspondence with the former Porte Noire in the north-west of the city. Many of these traces still hidden in the internal courtyard as in the case of the Tour du

Pléban located behind the Cathedral of Saint Michael and Saint Gudula. The only major remain of the second wall is the Porte de Hal. It is an iconic punctual presence in the middle of the boulevard du Midi.

The fact that the larger wall is preserved in fewer points than the internal should not surprise. The two walls coexisted until the beginning of the 19th century when the municipality organized a competition to demolish the walls and replace them with roads and boulevards. This process involved two main elements the wall itself transformed in a rig road, icon of connection and movement and the city gates transformed into the main road of access and expansion of the city itself.

The idea that the limits of the cities are physical and dictated by the construction of a limit is misleading in the contemporary condition. There is a necessity to “recognize whether these limits are a product (and a camouflage) of economic exploitations (such as the enclaves determined by uneven economic redistribution) or whether they are the pattern of an ideological will to separation within the common space of the city” 31. This appears clearer when the idea of the street as a matter of connection is questioned in deep. The idea that a street is easier to cross than a wall is extremely false especially in the context of ideological and social mobility. It is physically easier, but this condition does not affect the significance of the act of crossing.

The perpendicular movement to a perimeter is always a political act in this regard.

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31 Aureli, The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture. P 45
Figure 12. Porte Noire, 2019
Settlement

Urban positioning

Quoting Rossi who in turn quotes Sitte: “The hypothesis of the city as a man-made object, as a work of architecture or engineering that grows over time [...] is one of the most substantial hypotheses from which to work. It seems that useful answers to many ambiguities are still provided by the work of Camillo Sitte, who in his search for laws of the construction of the city that were not limited to purely technical considerations took full account of the ‘beauty’ of the urban scheme, of its form: ‘We have at our disposal three major methods of city planning, and several subsidiary types. The major ones are the gridiron system, the radial system, and the triangular system. The sub-types are mostly hybrids of these three. Artistically speaking, not one of them is of any interest [...]. All three are concerned exclusively with the arrangement of street patterns, and hence their intention is from the start a purely technical one. A network of streets always serves only the purposes of communication, never of art, since it can never be comprehended sensorially, and can never be grasped as a whole except in a plan of it. [...] Only that which a spectator can hold in view, what can be seen, is of artistic importance: for instance, the single street or the individual plaza.” 31

Further aggression is carried out by gentrification in the settlements close to the richest urban areas, which on the one hand does not involve the demolition of entire neighbourhoods, but on the other, however, induces the removal of settled communities through dynamics of real estate speculation. Furthermore, urban renewal projects often involve the same previously built housing districts, in order to update building types and housing conditions, but also in this case upon the forced displacement of entire communities. These interventions, in addition to leading to the expulsion of the original inhabitants and often the destruction of the existing building patrimony, in any case, do not constitute a solution to the problems posed by the increasing urbanization dynamics, the latter happening at a much faster pace than the former.

The urban plan tries to investigate strategies that are no longer substitutive, but additive at discrete points: I am thinking of constellations of artefacts that can be stratified with

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respect to what is pre-existing, resulting in minimal demolition without the expulsion of inhabitants and looking to integrate public, civil, and collective functions often lacking in the settlements in question. The approach focuses on the disposition and characterization of “primary elements” in an already urbanized reality.

**Site structuring**

I believe the intentions and the location regarding programme and zoning both come from the understanding of the project in the broader scenario of the city. The intentions of the masterplan derive directly from the understanding of the place, its social and environmental nature. The first intention is the creation of intensity of intervention in specific points where the scale of the architecture is the protagonist. This variation in intensity allows triggering a larger sphere of activation and re-activation of the surrounding spaces with an economy of work. These punctual projects also contribute to keep as much as possible of the existing urban fabric and social network. This process encourages on the same scale both the small and the large-scale balance from the scale of the block to the city. The last key point is the attention mentioned already to the medium scale. The relation with the surrounding involves what’s in front, what’s around. It’s about elements, about rhythm, decoration, facades pavements, streets.

What is what

The understanding of the block as part of a larger system defined by the infrastructural web allows moving the identification of the original perimeter form the single block to the adjacent one. This recreate the consolidate courtyard typology without enclosing completely the block edge on the park side. The existing road still presents but cross ideally in the middle of a city block. This character of internality should be reflected on the road scale, the fronts and the pavement. The park is the real protagonist in the masterplan phase. It is completely re-design to allocate an open street edge, a terrain that is suitable for activities in the area and a new definition of the hierarchy of paths and internal areas. In this new block the space that usually is infill completely in the city of Brussels, here is a preserved emptiness, a space reserved for communal use, a part of the city. this emptiness is defined in the three corners that protect the fragile emptiness from the real estate speculation by allocating defined edges to the developments.
Which programmes?

The three corners relate with different conditions of edge and assume different hierarchy within the neighbourhood. The north corner is located along the main local road where most of the public institutions are located. For this reason and the presence of multiple educational institutions in the area a public function is suggested, in particular, a library is proposed. The library aims to incorporate both spaces for high education as secondary school or undergrad and spaces for the younger. This encourage the involvement of all the generation in the cultural environment inviting new people to participate in collective and cultural activities. Family activities are hoped, in particular by understanding the potential of the location between a protect small square and the park where the library activities can extend.

On the left side of the site by completing the street front a front and back buildings are defined. The front building re-shape the scale of the street by creating the traditional double front of a smaller neighbourhood street. Behind the front, a larger block is defined where the production soul of the block and area is confronted with the park as back edge. The programme proposed for this area is an educational centre with a vocation for craftsmanship and restoration. This both involve the existing reality of Rotor and the industrial vocation of the area just behind the train line.
Programme

The programme is a combination of events and a descriptive notice. “An architectural programme is a list of required utilities; it indicates their relations but suggests neither their combination nor their proportions.” From this clear definition the proposal tries to investigate specifically this ambiguity by defining the proportion of these spaces and their relations in space.

The proposed programme is a Sports Hall.
The idea of the programme comes directly from the understanding of the social condition of the neighbourhood and the complete lack of these types of services in an area of 30min by public transport.
Sport plays the double role of being a community service and a social catalyser for a wide range of people from the elders to the kids.

The sports hall includes the re-location of the football court existing on-site with a regular pitch for 5v5 football game. The size of the court allows for a subdivision in 2 smaller pitch. The smaller courts allow for 2 basket game in the same time or 1 basket and 2 volleyball game. This configuration as presented allows for flexibility and in the same to host small official game meaning more external investments and a large area of influence.

The second main programme is the swimming pool area. This includes a 25m pool with a trampoline and a smaller pool for kids. The main swimming pool is also conformed to the minimum requirement for water polo.

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33 Julien Gaudet, John Galen Howard, and École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts (France), The Elements and Theory of Architecture, a Course of Lectures given at the Ecole Nationale et Speciale Des Beaux Arts, France. ([Berkeley], 1907).
Total Area: 7050 m²
   Built: 4700 m²
   External areas: 2350 m²

Play area:
   1650 m² football court
   400 m² tribune (350 seats)

Swimming pool:
   990 m² swimming pool area
   250 m² Tribune (220 seats)

Entrance hall:
   50 m² offices
   100 m² café
   300 m² entrance + shop

Changing rooms
   450 m² changing room

Gym:
   100 m² free exercises
   100 m² dance room
   100 m² martial arts
   100 m² climbing
   50 m² entrance

Gardens:
   1160 m² internal garden
   1250 m² front courtyard
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