

Inhabiting the unhabitable

manifesto
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State of art.

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It's a rainy morning and we're walking down the streets of Anderlecht. The neighborhood slowly becomes familiar. As a former industrial area, Cureghem seems to have a fairly old and polluted built heritage. Even though it has succeeded as a district of production, it seems to lack some of the essential qualities in welcoming the enormous number of yearly newcomers. The infrastructures are poor, and there is hardly any green. However, the community seems vibrant and heterogeneous. Protestant churches, Halal butchers, African grocery stores, Syrian car garages, Moroccan cafes, wholesalers of Chinese clothing...

Within the same urban block, one can see all the different shades of the human color palette, mixing but never fully blending. There is a sense of marginality and fracture. Passing by vitrines and schools, you start to wonder what it means to live, work, and grow up here. When you talk to residents you realize how often, different generations spontaneously proclaim their love and sense of belonging to this periphery which, however, has become uninhabitable.

On the way home, we kept asking ourselves: can we paint a new picture with the architects' brushes? How can we amalgamate those colors?

The fragmentation that characterizes the site, be it physical or social is an existing quality that we do not intend to condemn through our work. On the contrary we perceive it as a feature that expresses the confrontation of different identities. From the physical domain, between living environments and production facilities, to the varied societal composition, contrasting characters are juxtaposed. While embracing the individuality and the boundaries of each fragment we believe in the value of a more porous and dialectic relationship between them. We envision a setting in which the different ingredients of the city-mix, coexist, interact and benefit from each other.

The urban square of our proposal encapsulates this objective in a symbolic way. Either seen as a passage or as a destination point, it is a place, accessible to all, which promotes a feeling of community and *togetherness*. An urban room surrounded by different programs of working and living, that expresses the inherent *productive character* of Brussels. In this framework, a *durable and flexible* architectural perimeter shows the value of the public realm as a melting pot which can help in creating a tolerant and vibrant district.

Togetherness is a notion we value highly, as a means of fostering neighborhoods with a strong feeling of community. In this square, individuals learn to accept, tolerate and respect each other, in a setting that closely resembles a theatre-on-the-round, that allows views all around the perimeter of the 'stage'. In this exposed and

shared setting, inhabitants of the area and passersby indulge in a variety of activities, including playing, socializing, shopping, relaxing etc. Once diversity is accepted the positive outcome of interactions is limitless.

The *productive character* is a quality we embrace and propose to celebrate through our project by allowing inhabitants to witness the industrial setting that supports the city itself. We believe that the interaction between living and production not only benefits both sides but also creates a vibrant city where monotony is absent.

Through the creation of a *robust and durable architectural framework*, the use of simple materials, efficient structural systems and good lifespans we believe that the uninhabitable can become a home. We are convinced that the tools of architecture and urban design can enable communities to grow. Just like bricoleurs, we do value the past and existing fragments, yet we see this value as being determined not by what it is but what it could be. Rather than establishing a definite design, the project therefore aims to generate a process for a viable future evolution, always keeping an eye on the past. For this reason, it wants to be flexible, adaptable to the modifications and limitations that could come out through its development and future needs. In this sense, embracing the archeological idea of spolia, the design is aiming to highlight the importance of a multitude of shared spaces as the best way for transforming peripheries into settings for urban opportunities.