

Reflection

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Studio: Interiors Buildings cities

Design and Research

The year theme of the studio Interiors Buildings cities is the "intimate city" which force the students to deeply explore the relationship between architecture and social experience. The graduation project deals with the city of Antwerp and we have been free of choosing our site and the architectural program according to our personal fascinations. The Research part started with a design exercise in which every student develop a city room without a function in which we had to project a spatial idea. The exercise allows me to translate in architecture a theme of the political power of spaces; that I always found fundamental for the architectural discussion. I start to look at a political space as a container of human traces, which describe the social dialogue of the human environment. Traces dialogue between them and produce abstracts moment of conscious transition. Consequently, at the end of the process, I started to be interested in the program of the Archive since it is a public or private institution, which catalyses specific group of traces; it is a recognizable container of memory in the city, but also a moment of interactions between the inorganic world of objects and the public realm.

When we start to research about the city of Antwerp I have immediately been interested in the area of Borgerhout since it is a multicultural high-density residential area that catalyses all the public actions along Turnhoutsebaan street. A sort of dense archive of human life that has a huge linear space to perform public moments. I have chosen a site along with at the end of the main street that deals with the end of the inner city of Antwerp; a moment of transition and fragmented variation of scale. The analysis of the urban grain, permeability and infrastructural transition lead me into the design of an archive of performing art with a series of public rooms. The research influenced my choices in defining the relationship between a big scale logistic system of the archive and the subtle and intimate public moments around it. The project is based on the morphological variation of the area, and it tries to propose a new syntax of its elements that celebrate and underline the transitional moment.

Theme

The project engages the theme of the intimate city first from a programmatic point of view. The archive is a heterotrophic space in the city, the world of the hidden objects. The relation with the public realm is a very layered system. Every public room deal with a different level of intimacy between the architecture and the subject. The sequence of rooms start with a strong relationship with the outside and it ends up in the core of the archive with the very specific functions. The building allows different users to explore the same space with a different layer of interaction. The users overlap in some crucial spaces even if they belong to different public rooms. The theme of the intimate city help to reflect about how small architectural gesture can make the difference in the overall experience of an architectural piece; little thought accents can install continuity between the past and the present or between the city and the building. I found the theme very inspiring especially because of its wide and open interpretation; it opens up a very intense debate between the students of the studio. I think that the overall theme of the project relates to the architecture truck of my study since it put together the theoretical aspects of the architectural study with the more pragmatic way of doing architecture.

Methodology

I used mainly model making and analytical drawing to develop the project from the research to the final stages. This two tool allows me to produces a series of artifacts that derive one from each other as the development of a language. The comparison between the produced objects allows me to elaborate conclusions at the end of the productive process. Sometimes the models reveal some implicit design gesture. During the design, looking back to analytical drawings remind me of the clear narrative that I

developed in the research part and allows to create continuity between analysis and design. The approach of thinking through making can be considered as continuous research that is implemented by the design test, a constant bridge between theory and practice. Especially, the volume testing has been a very interesting part since was the first moment in which I started to give continuity between a new object and the context. To merge the analytical understanding of the area with the production of a new piece of the city. Every different volume that I tested made me more conscious about my architectural intention according to the morphological research. Moreover, diagrams help me in being aware of the interior organization of the project and its interaction with the context. Looking local references lead me into the mentality of Belgium architecture. Especially, the State Archive in Ghent by Robbrecht and Daem gave me the guidelines for the architectural expression of a blind façade building.

Dilemmas and social context

The most difficult part of the research project has been diving into a new context, which is very different compared to the Italian cities with which I was used to working on. Dissecting new urban logic allows me to understand that the same analytical tools can be adapted to the different context in order to extract different information. The main dilemma during the analysis was to understand if the interpretation of the information was totally objective or if I was projecting on them a personal interpretation, and if so how much that was affecting the overall credibility of the analysis. That lead the ethical issues of how much the personal interpretation of an architect should affect the architecture and consequently the city; since as architects, we all have stylistic, social, cultural fascinations that transform a building into a piece of architecture. I understood that as architects we cannot assume information without rephrasing them but that we also need to be modest in the way of how we pragmatically transform them into architectural work. Architecture is part of the city and not a moment of glory for architects; this is something I learned from designing in the framework of the studio Interiors building cities and it should be a guideline for the architectural practice, which works in the European environment since the historical context is very fragile. Consequently, the project is developed in a way that tries not just to be an object in the city but it wants to be an inseparable piece of the city. I also thought about the urban volume in a way that can influence the development of future project around it thinking about continuity between present, past, and future.