

Manifesto

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During the last century, Brussels transformed into an international capital, a process in which the quality of life of Brussel's own residents was not the first priority. The community of the neighbourhood and the everyday life of the residents became overlooked with the city shining its spotlights on the international stage. The neighbourhoods of Brussels become audiences to the city, not the actors.

The neighbourhood is to be ignored no longer. Everyday life is a performance. As time passes people work, dwell, consume and express in an ongoing dialogue between the characters of the neighbourhood and the stage sets they perform on. Through staging everyday life value is given to these performances; a spontaneous discussion amongst neighbours, the captivation and amusement of a child, a moment of respite and relief from the city. The careful understanding of the relationship between stage and character puts the people of the neighbourhood in the limelight, their lives become the story to be told that the surrounding city audience should view.

Stage sets of public life are to be engrained into the urban blocks of the neighbourhood, anchoring their worth into the physical form of city and pronouncing their integrity with their embrace of local material and technique. An architecture of modesty is to be achieved, functioning as scenery to the performance, keeping the spotlight on people and their value in creating in the neighbourhood. Future development is going to happen. These stages of public life are fundamental to preserving the character of a place, to ensure the performance of everyday life can go on.

Derived from Latin "spolium" (plural: "spolia"), the term spolia is used in archaeology meaning "spoils" (as in "spoils of war"), booty or loot, typically seen in Greek or Roman architectural sculpture. It refers to the cut stones or decorative elements from older buildings that are re-used for new construction as an economical alternative to quarried stone which was more expensive.

The principle can surpass the re-appropriation of material to that of a defined approach to architecture. The spoils are found in the existing space and form of the built fabric, the traces of memory within evolved site and the everyday routines, use and occupation of the people in their neighbourhood. It's an approach of attentiveness, with concern for that which exists, with a passion for the task of making something from something. It is a technique of reaction.¹ With thorough observation the existing elements of the site are to be negotiated with, understanding their value and how they can be redefined to benefit the needs of the present.

The value of the neighbourhood needs to be reaffirmed. The stage needs to be set around the people that act immediately upon the city and that give life to its character. Through an architecture of modesty, stage sets of public life can be engrained into the urban blocks, ensuring their preservation. Through the principles of spolia, value can be discovered in everything and gifted back to the people.

As the film producer Karel Reisz has said, looking back on his work, "It is about wanting what you got, rather than going out and getting what you want."²

¹ Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schregenerberger, *As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary British Architecture and Art of the 1950s: Independent Group and New Brutalism* (Baden/Schw: Lars Muller Publishers, 2001), 10.

² Lichtenstein and Schregenerberger, *As Found*, 10.





