



Interior, Strandgate 30
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Spring 2020

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Introduction

My interest lies in the dwelling of the city. On the basis of own experiences, historical and contemporary references, I want to question what a dwelling can be today. Problematizing the condition of temporality that characterizes Oslo, and its later built environment.

Rather than looking outward to the city's periphery, I focus on the inner city, with the intention of learning about an existing urban condition and how to adapt to it, contrary to reinventing one.

A Life in the City

I grew up in the city, in the apartment my father grew up in. The apartment was on the ground floor, in a three story building, dating from 1897. It is a brick house, a typology that defines most of Oslo's city center today.

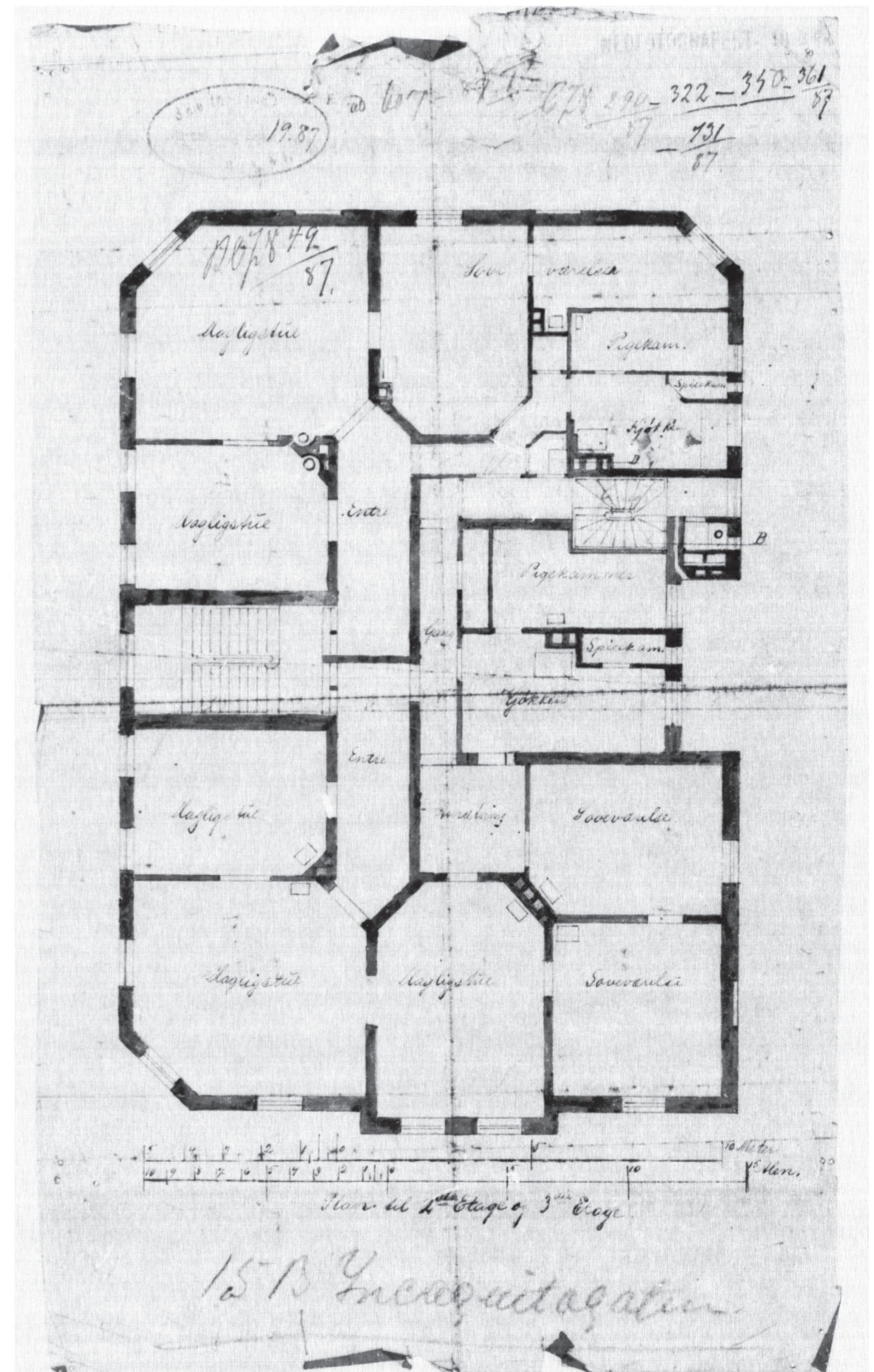
The plan consisted of larger rooms towards three sides of the facade, and smaller rooms towards the back. On the side facing south, it was a tiny garden. It lay in the shadows throughout the day, and had no grass, just green bushes and slate tiles. The garden functioned as an extension to the living room, which had a double door that stood open most of the summer, which gave the impression of the interior room being bigger than it actually was.

The larger rooms, except from one, had kept their original dimensions since construction, which allowed to a certain extent, free use of program. Only the smaller rooms in the back, kitchen and bathroom had been altered, accommodating modernizations.

During the 20 years I lived in the apartment, me and my three siblings changed bedrooms three times. At one point the larger room in the lower right corner were split in two, making two bedrooms instead of one. As my older brothers moved out, the rooms became one again. Our kitchen, which had been in the center of the plan, was extended

leftward, now having a facade and a window.

The load bearing walls stayed the same, and alterations in rooms, which had been brought back to the original, was unnoticeable. The plan functioned as a framework, rather than a straitjacket.



Memories of the City

I am going to tell you about my way to school as a small boy. It is a recollection rather than a contemplation, and I do this as an exercise, to help myself understand what we pay attention to in the city, and as basis of an architectural process. I like to think back on memories of the streets I grew up in, to recall what I thought of the city then, and of the things that left an expression.

Being an architecture student is strange, strange because whilst becoming consciously more observant of the built landscape and gaining a better understanding of architecture, interlectually, I cannot feel but losing touch with the elementary, and unconscious observations.

Between the age of six and sixteen, I lived three hundred meters from school. At the age of nine me and my twin sister walked alone, and it is from that age I remember more than just the hand of my father I couldn't let go.

Our apartment was in a quiet street. Old uneven reddish stones made up the edge of the pavement, and the asphalt was cracked. The first building I passed to school, had a white smooth render, I always thought of that as posch compared to our facade, which was a rough grey render it almost hurt to run the hand along. Opposite to the white building was a newer

building in yellow brick. My father hated that building, so off course, I also did. It always made me uneasy, the yellow brick building, it had sharp edges, the black visible roof was clumpy and crashed with the ugly yellow of the facade, it did not belong with the soft shapes of the buildings surrounding it. On two sides of it there were a big fence, and on the other two low concrete walls, which made it scary and unwelcoming. Me and my friends often challenged each other to climb over the fences and walls and run over to the other side. In the street on the outside of most of the other buildings was either trees or hedges, beautiful and fun, as I always picked a flower or leaf as I passed.

Our street went into a bigger street, where the tram went past every ten minutes. The noises the big blue thing made was part of the streets. On the second corner on my way to school, was at least once a week, a car parked too far out in the road, blocking the tram. I remember the chaos it made, the sound of the trams ringing bell, calling for the owner of the car. The asphalt of the corner was angled, in opposite direction to a curve on a racing track, which off course was a nuance to the adults during winter.

Past the corner was the longest straight stretch of the walk. I had two options of where to walk, both as long as the other. I always

chose the widest pavement, with the big windows of the furniture and fashion stores facing it. Then I also didn't have to think about stepping away from people coming my way. It was a big pointy hedge alongside the narrow pavement. It felt like it pushed you out in the road, and the facade behind with the hidden doorways gave an impression of privacy. On the wide pavement, the steps of the doorways came out, inviting customers in, and young boys to climb up and jump down from.

Halfway was a crossroads of five meeting streets. Crossing the second of three streets, I walked past a small kiosk, one of the old ones. It stood on an asphalt peninsula between two of the roads. It was dirty blue and messy inside, and looked like a box with a box on top.

Past the kiosk was a small park with an old bronze statue sitting in a bronze chair, with huge rhododendrons, which blossomed in late spring, behind and on the sides. On the right side of the park was a big chestnut tree, and beneath it layed hundreds of smashed chestnuts. Closest to the crossroad was a ventilation shaft, and it was always covered in graffiti

The schoolyard stretched out from behind the statue and bushes, on top a plinth of granite, now almost black of dirt. It was always sand on the pavement beside and beneath

the stone wall, which had been caught by the rain and brought down the gaps and sides of it. I remember thinking of the sand as alien to the pavement.

On the opposite side of the street and the black stone wall, was a shop, selling seafood, with big windows, showing the fresh fish laying on ice. Next to it was a kiosk where we bought our candy during lunch hour. It had signs and flags pointing out of the facade, and old film posters on the inside of the windows.

Adjacent to the kiosk was the entrance to the schoolyard. At the left of the entrance was the school building. A big white and yellow low building with the numbers 1886 written on it. To me, it resembled a castle.

Not being interested or consciously able enough to perceive the architecture in an analytical matter, the city is about relations in a human scale. Architecture is then experienced directly. I miss that aspect of the child's mind.

Condition of Oslos built environment today

As any capital, Oslo is a developing city, a constant changing organism. Since late nineties the growth has been dramatic, except for a short standstill following the financial crisis, and to answer the ensued housing demand, the municipalitys building and planning authorities invested huge resources in developing new strategies for future Oslo.

Former industrial territories were transformed to housing areas. Key sites were Nydalen, Løren, Ensjø, Kvernbyen and Fjordbyen. Fjordbyen is the most visible, and has become the new face of Oslo. Former shipyards and container docks were replaced with high end housing and an extensive cultural program, which partly has extracted the cultural offers of the inner city. Nydalen, Løren, Ensjø and Kvernbyen serves primarily the function as housing developments, but with certain inherent urban qualities.

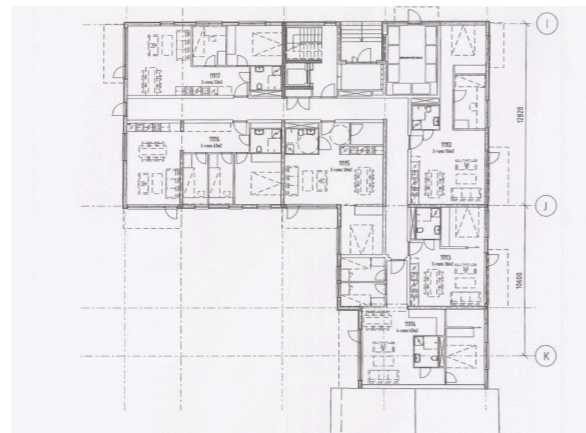
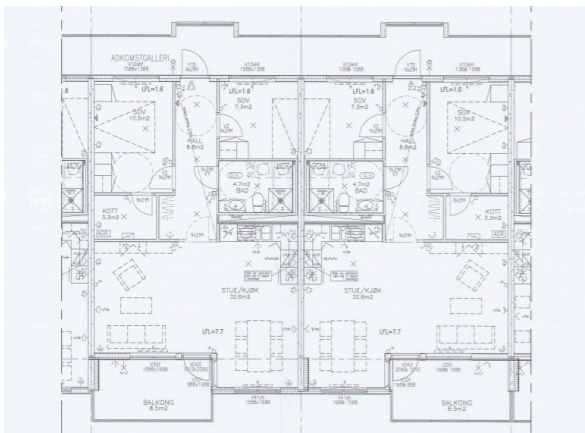
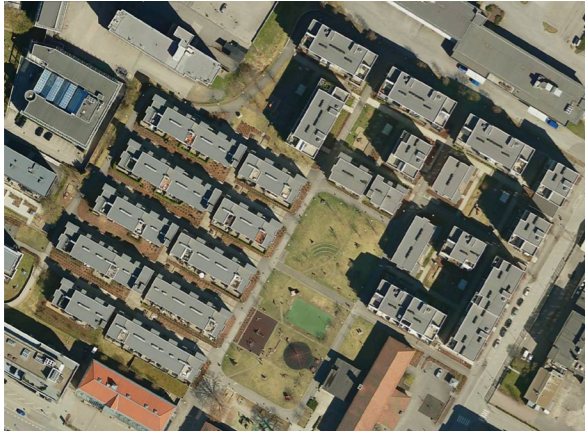
They are all, except from fjordbyen, developments characteristically on the fringe of the existing urban context, and considered developing urbanities. Complex plans designed on basis of diagrams and statistics, try to predict the demands of inhabitants. Promising a sense of community, and a safe place for kids to grow up.

The housing projects are primarily

owned by a few major contractors. Resulting in huge construction projects with homogenous architectural strategies. The lamella block is a recurring typology. Taken out from its intended context and arranged in semi dense configurations, to deal with light and fire regulations. The result is an urban typology we neither recognise from the modernist projects nor existing urban conditions.

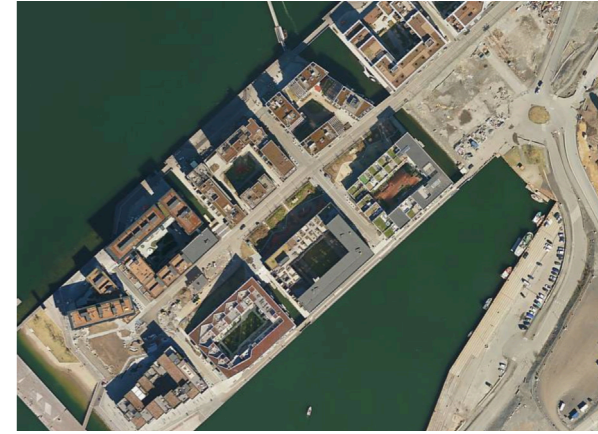
As architectural objects, the lamellas are much the same as they were in their inauguration, except obvious alterations such as bigger balconies and windows. Plans are still as, or more, specific. The lack of open-endedness defines its architecture, and ultimately their surrounding urban condition. Impossibility to alter, or inhabit a dwelling diversely, forces people to move frequently. Eliminating the sense of connection to place, which implies a lack of attention and caring.





Løren

Grønlandskvartalene



Tjuvholmen

Sørenga

Everything Has an Origin

Oslo was not recognised as a city of European scale until the late 19th century. By then the city had experienced a rapid growth generated by the industrial revolution, as Great Britain, half a century before. The majority of Oslos built environment still consisted of wooden houses and unpaved streets, with the exception of what we today know as the old town, behind the city fortress.

A growing population, implied a higher risk of devastating fires. Already in 1827 the municipality demanded all buildings within the city borders to be built in brick. During the next eighty years, most of the architecture we recognise as Oslos city center was erected. Three to five floors brick housing, built in carrée structures with rendered facades, as found in Berlin.

A bank crisis in the end of the 19th century, resulted in reduced building activity. During the next thirty years the municipality became the major contributor of housing developments, and projects such as Ullevål Hageby, Ila, Lindern and Torshov was completed. Qualities of air and spaciousness is defining in these projects, not surprising as they were designed by architect Harald Hals, a man highly influenced by Ebenezer Howards garden city.

Today these projects are highly sought after, and what was intended to be housing for the lower middle classes,

is some of the most expensive properties today, especially Ullevål Hageby.

The standstill during the war resulted in huge demand for housing. In order to accommodate the need, regulations were changed and new construction methods introduced. It resulted in a cheaper and faster built typology we had not seen alike.

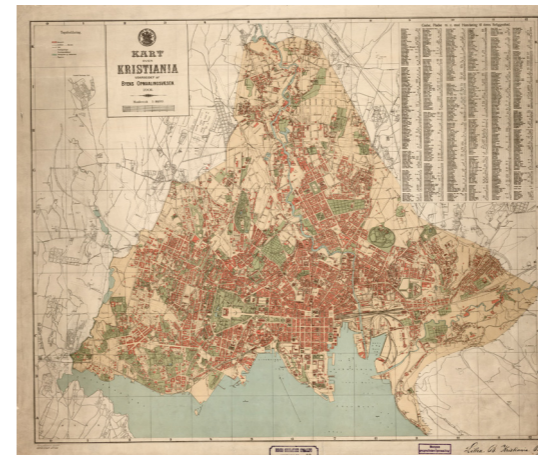
The municipality directed their attention outside the existing city borders. A cramped city did not have the capacity to house its population and ensure the living and hygienic conditions required. Former farmland was turned into satellite cities, and the lamella block was introduced.

Modernist ideals such as air, light and hygiene was introduced during the war, and a commission developed a new set of regulations that until this day influence our housing architecture. At first, the lamella born out of France, took the shape of three story blocks with gabled roofs, tiny square windows and small balconies. The only similarity to its ideals being their placement in the open landscape with adherent roads.

The limitations of the lamella had primarily been due to building technology. When the concrete slab was introduced in the latter half of the fifties, what we know as the typical modernist block made an entrance.



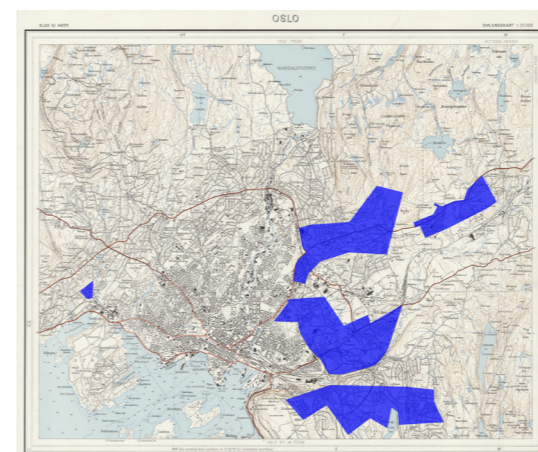
Oslo 1780



Oslo 1901



Oslo 1938



Oslo 1960



Kvadraturen (old town)



Murbyen



Garden city, Ullevål Hageby



Modernist Housing

Murbyen

Oslo was highly influenced by German, Danish, Swedish and in some cases British architecture in the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Until our first technical university was founded in Trondheim in 1910, architecture students studied abroad. Berlin was the main destination, which became evident in our housing architecture.

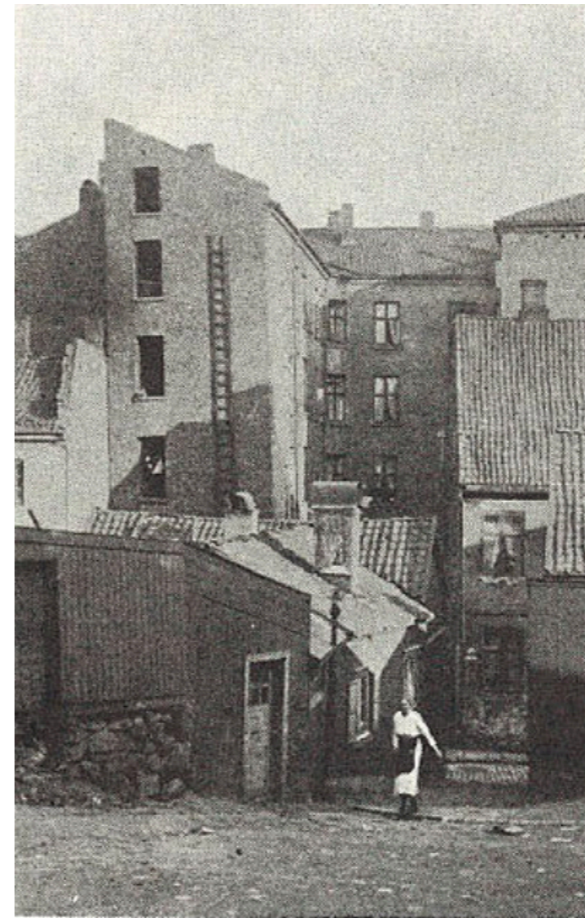
The first building regulations constituted in 1827, concerned principally what materials buildings were to be built with, number of floors, width of streets and water logistics. There where no ruling city plan, ownership, finance and references from Paris and Berlin became the regulative forces.

Housing was then, perhaps more than now, a speculative commodity. Buildings designs were a result of tectonic and financial restrictions. Their construction was in most cases load bearing facades, and a load bearing center wall of bricks. Bricks produced locally, and assembled with mortar of chalk sediment and mud from the fjord. Spanning between the brick walls where timber beams. Mud and straw where placed between the beams to insulate, and to function as constructive weight. Formally, the buildings are usually simple box volumes, with vertical window openings, dictated by the bricks tectonic properties.

Today the differences between the apartments of murbyen east and west of akerselva, is not as obvious as before. In 1978 the municipality initiated the city renewal. What had been 40 000 apartments, became between 25 000 and 30 000, and sanitary conditions were renewed.

In 1910, two thirds of the people living in Tøyen, Grünerløkka, Sofienberg and Grønland rented their apartments. Apartments in these areas was principally one room, and at a certain point, four people lived on average in each household.

Qualities we associate with murbyen today, is the diversly ornamented facades that functions as decorations in the streets, their generous ceiling height, multifunctional rooms and vertical windows. Qualities that makes housing a place of life instead of function, missing in contemporary housing.









Place

My sites are located in Herslebsgate, Tøyen, part of the Old City district. They are two sites, adjacent to one and other on each side of the street. Both of them are voids between existing housing blocks arranged in carré -structures. The site to the south was former home to a one story garage built in wood, but is today inhabited by a tree and a fence separating the pavement and inner courtyard. The site to the north has been vacant except for a brick wall with a dorway, since construction in the middle 1890s. It is a area chacterized by old Housing blocks, Oslo Botanical Garden, former home of the Munch Museum, Oslos biggest indoor swimming pool, Tøyen Torg, Hersleb high school, and Vahl primary school. It is an old and complex urban environment, and has been a place of architectural development since the erection of the housing blocks in the end of 19th century. Only being preceded by Tøyen Estate, established in 1679.

I am taking you on a walk, up and down the two streets that characterize the area and where the sites are located, Jens Bjelkes Street and Herslebsgate.

On the left side of Jens Bjelkes Street is the Botanical Garden, and on the right side, facing the bulging vegetations is an Old brick school and former workers dwellings, Gråbeingårdene. The street is

wide and trafficated, with no side roads leading away from it.

At the end of the Garden, I turn to right, alongside Gråbeingårdene. Their volumes are separated with a four meter gap. Here we get a sneak peak into a habitual oasis.

Turning the Carré structure, I am facing down Herslebsgate, and in the end is the sites. To my left is a Curch, built in 1906. The urban fabric in the street is complex, with buildings being built through a period from the beginning of murbyen and until the end of the nineties.

Passing the two terrain vagues, you are facing a park, and again the brick school. The park is named after a poet, who wrote for the workers. His work and name immortalized with one of his poems written in stone and a strong man as a statue, standing on top of it. Looking back to the sites, a big five stories yellow building stands, where 404 people lived in 100 rooms, during Oslos strongest industrialperiod. In the corner was the local store.

The sites cohering to each its carré, are viewing gaps into lush backyards. Benches and tables, bicycles and toys fills the space, evidence of the manifold city life.





Economy

A Housing debate is raging on our social medias and political arenas. It is an agreement that too few are capable to buy an apartment in today's housing market. Too few apartments are built, and too many are buying secondary apartments, pushing out those who do not have economical assurance in family or relations.

The demographic of Oslo is either young single people or, increasingly, pensioners. Couples with children move out of the city, due to economy and lack of appropriate housing. To answer demand, and in an attempt to ease the market, small apartments are built rather than bigger. Consequences is homogeneous demography and cities.

Flexible apartments and competitive locations for small businesses are lacking. Big apartments are too expensive, and small businesses pay to high rates on rent, and are driven to bankruptcy.

I want to seek contemporary housing, which enables the possibility to live the entire life in the city. Housing designed as flexible objects. Meaning a possibility to divide it if needed to generate an income.

Construction

Site and size of building projects can imply constructional methods and use of material. Being small sites and small projects, it is possible to look beyond the conventional materials of concrete and steel.

The buildings of murbyen imitated classical ornamentations done formerly in stone, with render and wood. Whilst being decorations, it also protected the bricks from water and ice. But as the bricks are protected, the render gets worn, and need to be renovated regularly.

A stone facade of granite or Larvikitt would not wither away. And if the stone not only functioned as a facade, but also as the load bearing construction, the question of costs could be challenged.

As the brick buildings had timber beams as floors, that spanned from one load bearing wall to another, in one direction, CLT would be today's option. With possibilities to span not only in one, but several directions, as a concrete slab, it creates a bigger freedom of design.



Program

- Housing
- Commercial spaces
- Collective spaces

References

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- Byboligen, Sven Erik Svendsen, Inge Willumsen
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- Lewerentz and Ansehlm in Skåne, Tony Fretton
- The Presence of Construction, Caruso & StJohn
- The Aura of Things, Stephen Bates
- On Continuity, Sergison & Bates
- Bolig og Bokvalitet, Kathrine Vigander, Ketil Moe, Hannah Gitmark, Gunnar Bøyum, Øystein Sundelin.