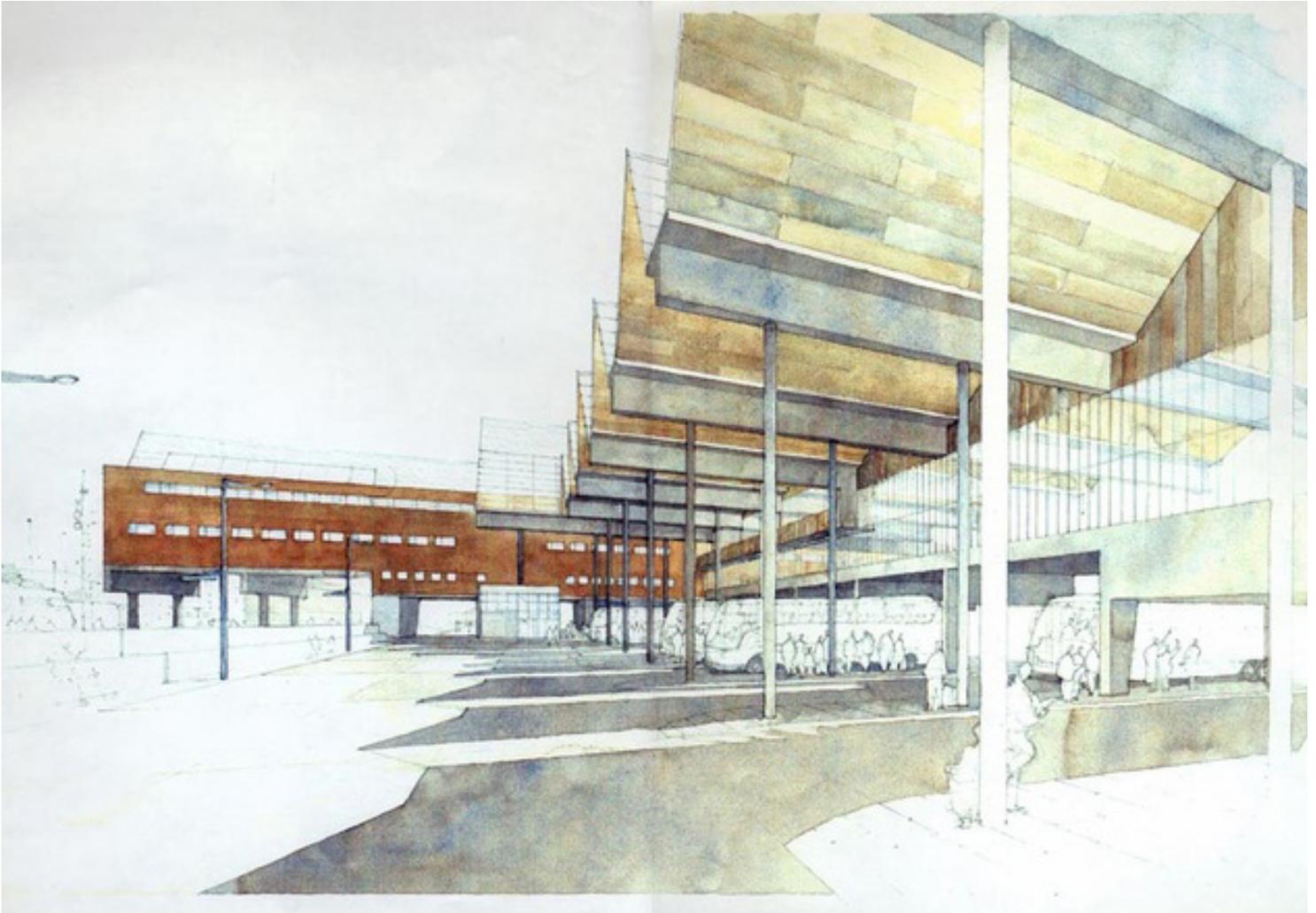


STATIONSPLEIN

MANUEL DE SOLÀ-MORALES



Location : Leuven

Year : 1996-2002

Budget : N/A

Area : N/A

Typology: Multimodal Node

Program : Transport Hub and Public Square

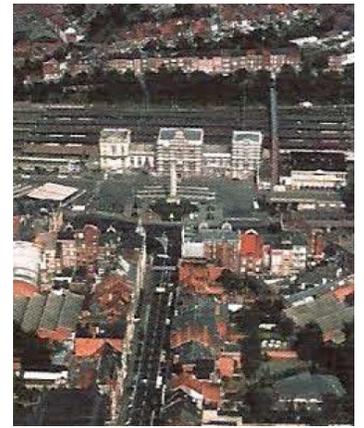
Additional utilities: Coffee shops, Public plaza, Parking, Tunnel, Pedestrian underpass, Bus terminal.

The station is located on the ring road of Leuven; even in a small city traffic can be a problem during peak hours. On this multimodal node, buses, taxis, pedestrians, bicycles, cars and trains have cohabitated in the same 1000 square meters space. Manuel de Solà-Morales, the architect, offers a very clear project, that resolves a lot of problems in its simplicity and logic. The main axis emanating from the station leads directly to the city center and serves as

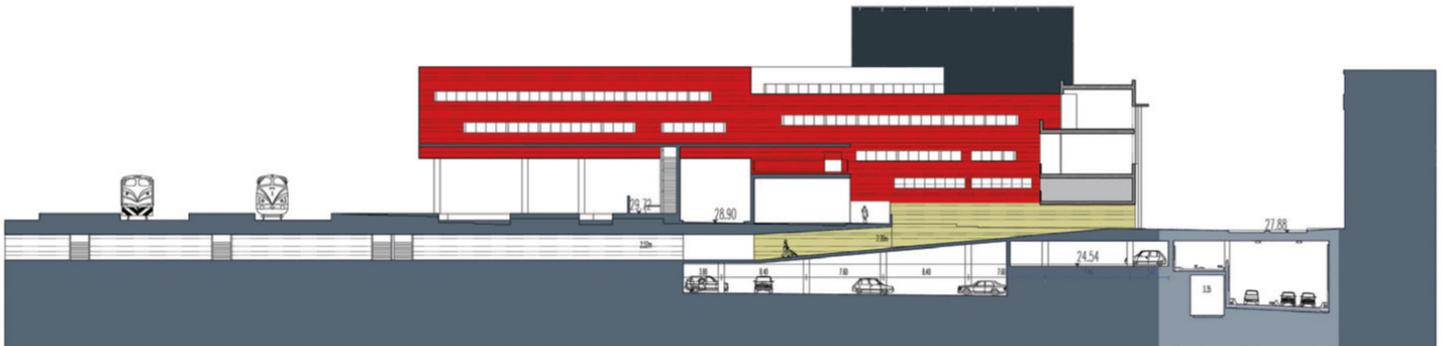
an immediate introduction to the city. The architect reinforces this aspect by clearly defining a square in place of the previous chaotic intersection. The traffic is redirected under the square by a tunnel (5). Liberated of most of its cars, the square has a different status impossible to conceive before the intervention. Under the square, a parking is built as well as a pedestrian underpass. The bus terminal implantation determines the overruling rectangular form of the station square; it also

distinguishes the civic quality of the station square from the dynamic nature of the bus movements. Manuel de Solà-Morales adds new leisure utilities in a very subtle way and in continuity with the existing infrastructure.

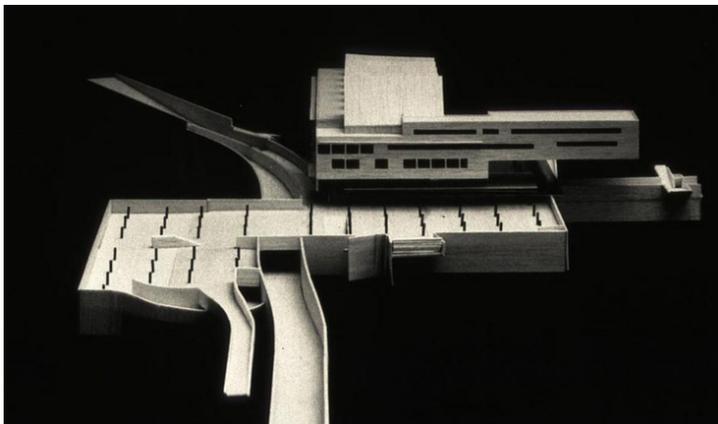
In this project, architecture and infrastructure unite, and all the elements spatially interconnect; the parking extends over and becomes part of the tunnel, the pedestrian underpass runs through and flows over in the parking, the parking opens up to



1 - The original station and square.



0 50m



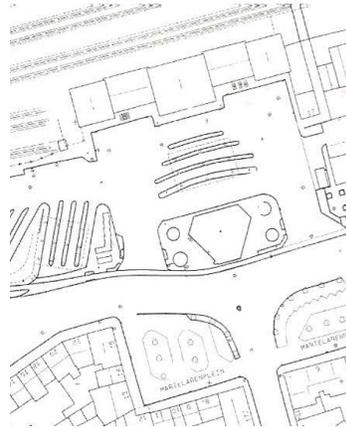
5 - Section model with the tunnel and parking clearly visible.



6 - Aerial shot of the new square.



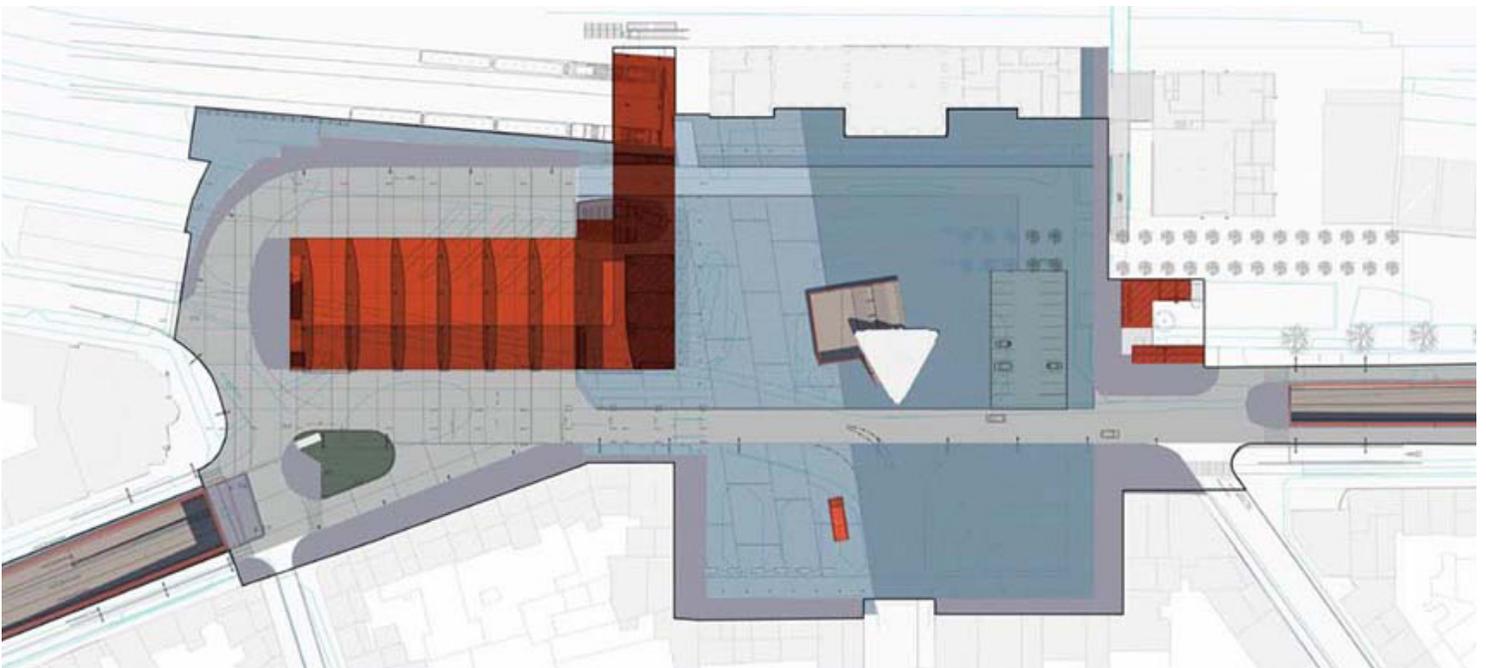
2 - Traffic used to be problematic with the old intersection.



3 - The square was less defined as it supported bus stops, and a clear division is visible.



4 - Lights accentuate the square form, and provide lighting to the numerous terraces.



7 - Different ground coverings.

the overlying square, the underpass directly links bus and train platforms, judiciously placed stairways unite parking and city and transform the underground into an alternative walkway.

The square is left mostly empty as to not hinder the passing people in this interconnected hub, and eases the flow of people in every direction. The entire square is treated as a pedestrian plaza; the sidewalks are full foot with the road and confer a very particular status to the location

(7). The few cars that go through the square know they are entering a pedestrian space and almost immediately slow down. In this intervention, Manuel de Solà-Morales projects his ideas of a project as an urban practice and not autonomous formality. On the south side of the square, small posts have been added in order to avoid the cars found of the other side (taxi pickup) and let the coffee terraces invade the square. The treatment is different due to the different status.

Benches punctuate the square, light poles accentuate the square form and illuminate the terraces (4).

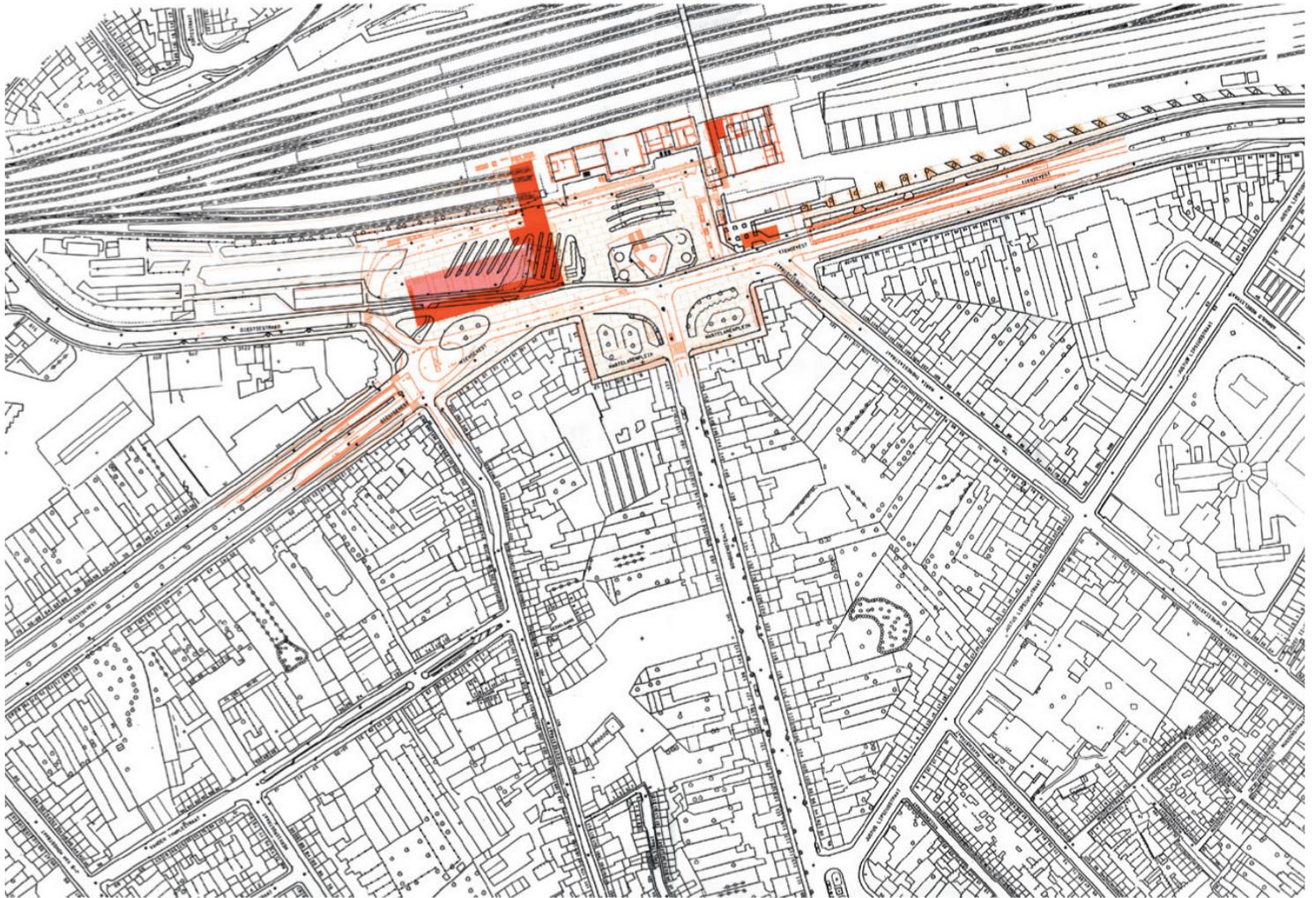
This project brings to light the qualities of Manuel de Solà-Morales as an urban planner. He intervenes in a very punctual way, always with subtlety and emphasis on the public domain. Changes are coherent and predict the future changes the city might go through. He defines the practice of urban acupuncture.

Manuel de Solà-Morales coined the term urban acupuncture. As Marcel Smets describes it; to act with punctures, pressures, injections, to distribute energy through the skin. It is the epidermis of the urban fabrics that enables us to transform internal metabolisms of its organism. And with this project it becomes clear what applied urban acupuncture is, and what it can offer. Everything about this project is well thought, subtle and yet incredibly efficient. To reconcile

so many different factors in one place isn't easy. This isn't architecture about aesthetic form, and yet it's still incredibly lyrical. The way the different elements overlap creating spectacular points of view, breakthroughs, light-wells, balconies, changing viewpoints and surprising perspectives are all but bland rationalism. They create an itinerary of architectural promenades that elevates the stroll through this traffic exchange to a beautiful urban experience. Everything here

is geared towards the public realm. The city is a place founded by the different activities of individuals, and city dwellers are considered as citizens worthy of consideration and respect. Everything he creates is part of city life, it all deserves equal care and attention, and the intricate relationship forms the complexity that makes our daily environment. When we first visited the node, everything seemed to fall into place. It was the logical solution to the place, every sin-

gle element knew exactly where to be, and it seemed to have always been there, proudly part of the city. The big is studied to establish the small, and in counterpart the small revitalizes the big. Different scales don't have to be separated, they *shouldn't* be separated. They work together as part of the same urban fabric. Manuel de Solà-Morales knows this perfectly, and it reflects on this project.



SOURCES

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