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# The Place to Be: Designing a City-Connected Honors Residence in Rotterdam

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*Hogeschool Rotterdam*

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## CHAPTER 24

# The Place to Be: Designing a City-Connected Honors Residence in Rotterdam

REMKO REMIJNSE  
HOGESCHOOL ROTTERDAM

Traditionally, university students in the Netherlands, even honors students, find accommodations on their own; they will rent a room in a house and live together with other students who have independently rented a room in that same building. The typical Dutch student residence is an old, centrally located house that will accommodate five to eight students. While these students would be complete strangers when they begin their time living together, they quickly become a cohesive community, deciding for themselves how their life in the space will be organized by setting up cooking schedules and other agreed-upon formats for using the communal space. The house itself is a dynamic entity in which the living room becomes the most important place; that is where the social activities take place. The students living in the house and their guests spend

little time alone in their private bedrooms. Therefore one of the main criteria for students looking for a student house is the quality of the social space. In that respect, Dutch student housing closely resembles student housing for honors students in the United States. The house is more than just a place to study; it is an opportunity to be part of a community of scholars. The main difference between a Dutch student house and U.S. honors housing is that honors housing is essentially defined as being occupied by honors students only. Living in honors housing opens the door to interacting with other honors students, participating in seminars and activities, and being actively involved in the honors program or honors college. The honors housing community provides a living-learning community for students where they can benefit from the attention their housemates give to academic excellence while maintaining a vibrant social life.

Because honors student housing is an emerging phenomenon in the Netherlands, a workshop was held to see what kind of residential space Dutch students would devise for themselves.\* One of its main goals was to create architectural space that would combine an active-learning environment with a strong social environment. Thus, on October 3, 2013, in the middle of the second International Honors Conference held in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 23 architectural students from the Hogeschool Rotterdam (University of Applied Sciences in Rotterdam) attended a “Housing for Honors Students” workshop. The students participating in this one-day workshop were charged with developing concepts and models for an honors residence, a facility projected as being located at a riverside site in the city. The students—most of whom were just beginning their architectural study—met first with Linda Frost, who shared her research on the honors housing situation in the U.S. Then, under my guidance as their architect instructor, they developed their designs

\*The students participating in this workshop include Ela Akkoyun, Greg Amidojo, Sewak Aramjan, Rick Bijlsma, Mathieu van den Bos, Nathanael Döri, Bart-Jan van der Gaag, Wim van Heeswijk, Maruli Heijman, Youri van den Heiligenberg, Michael van der Keur, Wessel Klootwijk, Clif Kuik, Riben Lewis, Emma de Nie, Mark van Os, Oscar Rosier, Mehran Samiyi, Thomas Slegtenhorst, Patrick Steenbergen, Abel Tschopp, Yusuf Tuncer, and Abel van Unen.

and spent a long night in the studio, building their models. The next day, they presented their projects to Frost and the celebrated Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger. After this architectural baptism by fire, the students spent the following weeks revising and refining their designs.

The efforts by these students were, in reality, more than an academic exercise: it was an opportunity to create Dutch honors housing by renovating two empty office buildings in downtown Rotterdam. The municipality of Rotterdam supported the possible transformation of these buildings into honors student housing but with the understanding that the post-war architecture of the buildings would be maintained. The location was ideal, providing an excellent connection with the downtown area via public transport, and in both shape and size, the buildings offered a great opportunity to be transformed into something that would not only benefit the honors students living there, but residents of the larger neighborhood as well. The students were given free rein with this project and were encouraged to develop creative proposals for the honors residential space and the living-learning community they wanted to create. Apart from the student rooms and the residence hall, each building had to have meeting spaces for studying, hosting guest speakers, relaxing, and gathering for social events.

Five main questions were posed of each design:

- Why would honors students want to live there?
- How is the honors program integrated in the design?
- What is the interaction between the building with the program and with the city?
- How is the program organized in a way that stimulates both study and social activities?
- How does the design respond to the existing structure and post-war architecture?

A six-week design studio gave the students the opportunity to work in groups of three and four on redesigning the ground floor of the building. The most interesting observation is that the students'

designs all included a public space on the ground floor where city life and student life could come together. Some designs proposed a student bar/restaurant run by the honors students but open to the public, creating a place within the residence where everyone was welcome. Other designs proposed space on the ground floor where companies and students could work together on innovative projects. Of course, placing a public or semi-public program on the ground floor turns the traditional gated student community into an open social and business environment. Students and city become more integrated, and the borders between different social classes become less rigid. Naturally, questions arose as to how to organize such a public space on the ground floor—whether students would be safe in that environment and who would be responsible for the space itself. The designs by the students attempted to respond to these and other interesting questions. A sample of their designs follows this essay and illustrates how they bring the honors students living in the space into real interaction with their block and neighborhood.

After the design studio ended, we presented the final projects to the municipality. The city leaders were enthusiastic but remained undecided whether they should renovate the pre-war apartment blocks or demolish them. In both cases, the understanding was that the site would be developed into student housing that would include honors and non-honors students.

In the end, city officials decided to build a new building in a place much less socially interactive than the initially proposed apartment block. Still, architectural students at the Hogeschool Rotterdam continued to explore the honors student housing project for two more years as a studio project. The conversation in Rotterdam about honors housing started with the students' vision, but it has continued, generating even more designs that stretch the boundaries of what honors housing can and may well be.

**ROTTERDAM STUDENT WORKSHOP DESIGNS FOR A  
RENOVATED HONORS RESIDENCE IN THE CITY**

**Workshop: Housing for Honors Students**  
**Rotterdam, October 3, 2013**



Results Workshop

NEEDS

Sleeping

Cooking (Dining Area))

Workspace

Relax Space — — —

Garden

Outdoor Space

Bicycle Storage

Individual Room	Outdoor Space
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Private Facilities for Individuals

Shared Space for Social Integration

Private

Sleeping

Studying

Shared

Cook

Study

Relax

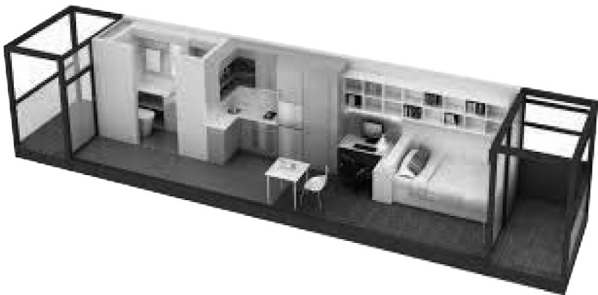
Storage

Outdoor Spaces

HONORS HOUSING

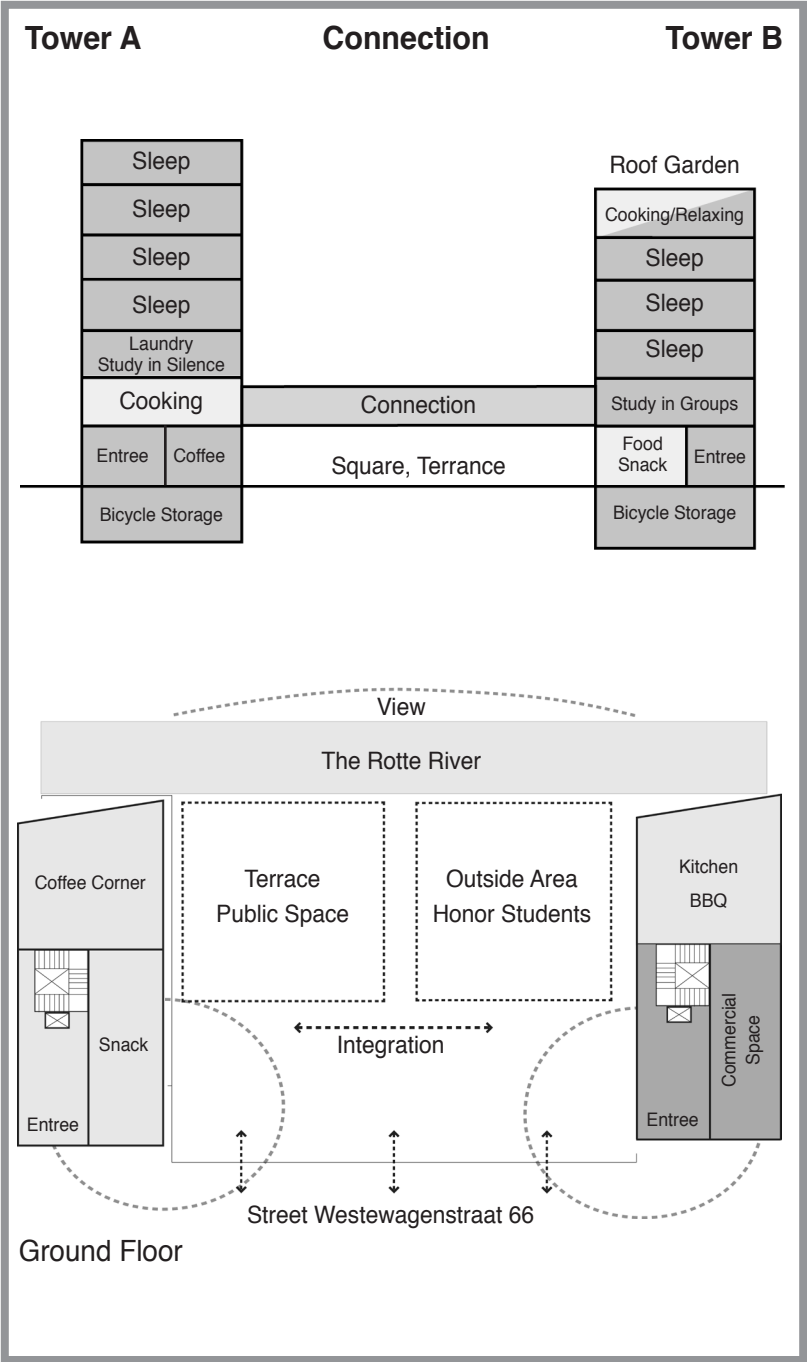
Studio Housing

No Interaction

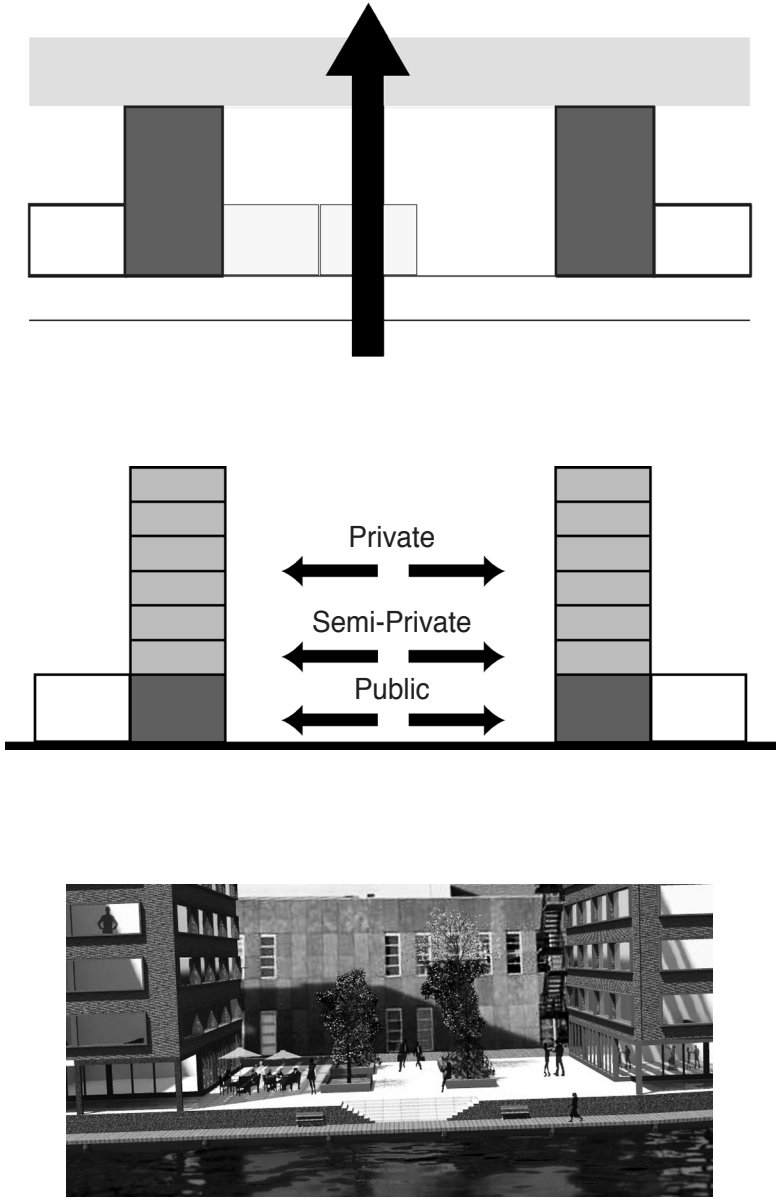


Depressed. Where are the other students?

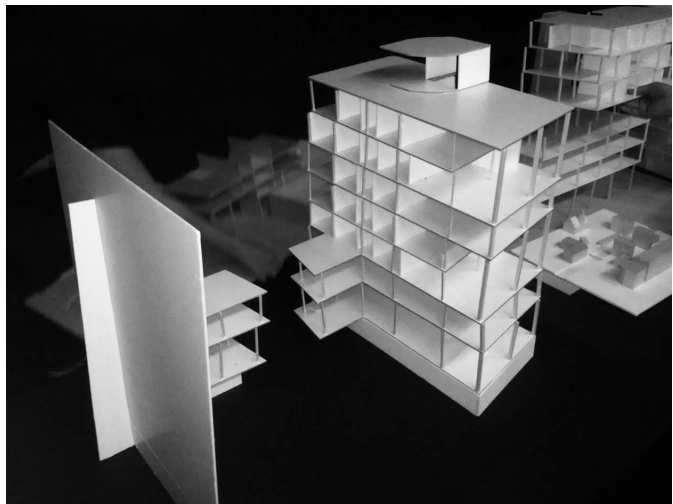
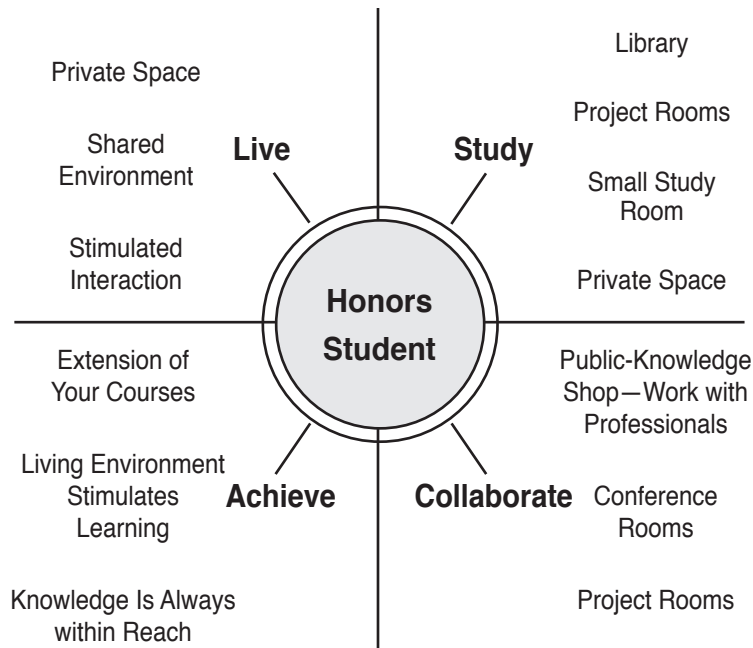




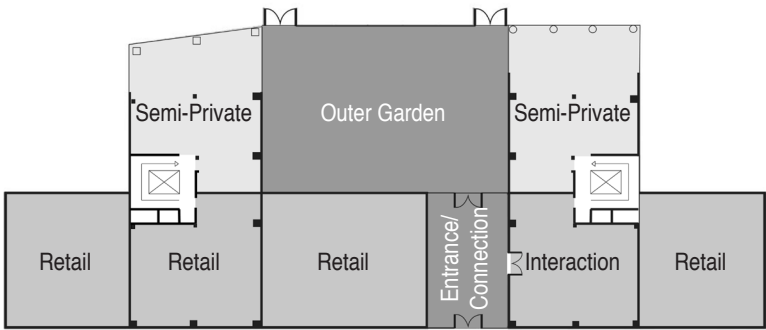
Concept



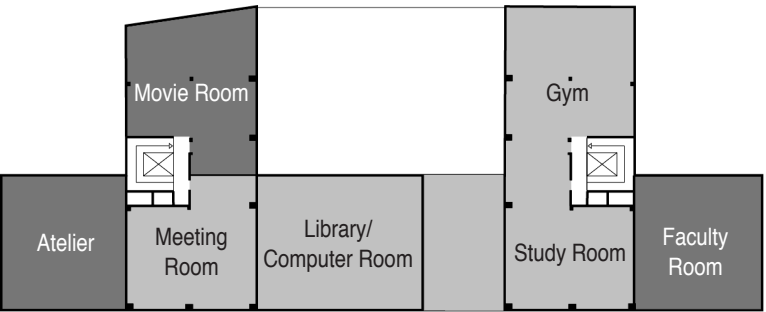
# Why Honors Students Should Live Here



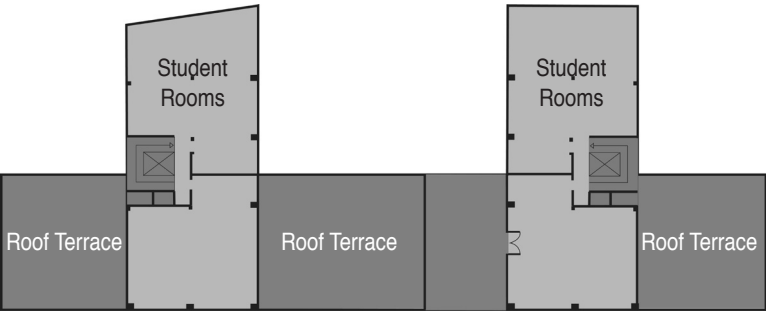
Ground Floor



First Floor



Second Floor



**Impressions**



**Results of Design Studio**



## Concept



### Assignment:

To optimize the first two levels of both towers at the Westewagenstraat at the center of Rotterdam.

### Target:

To get the Westewagenstraat back to its former glory by designing an explorative and adventurous oasis of small handcraft stores with space for cafes and restaurants.

### Target Group:

Young urban professionals, shoppers, students.



Using the different programs to shift the facade, which creates a characteristic and more adventurous street image. Each program keeps its original facade, which makes them individual blocks. The concept bends the traditional shopping streets into a small urban safari.



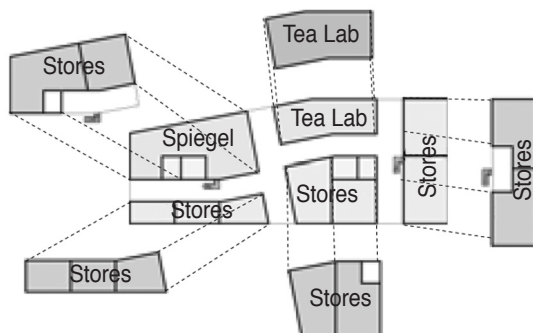
*Explorative—Adventurous—Characterizing*



Urban Scale Small and Narrow

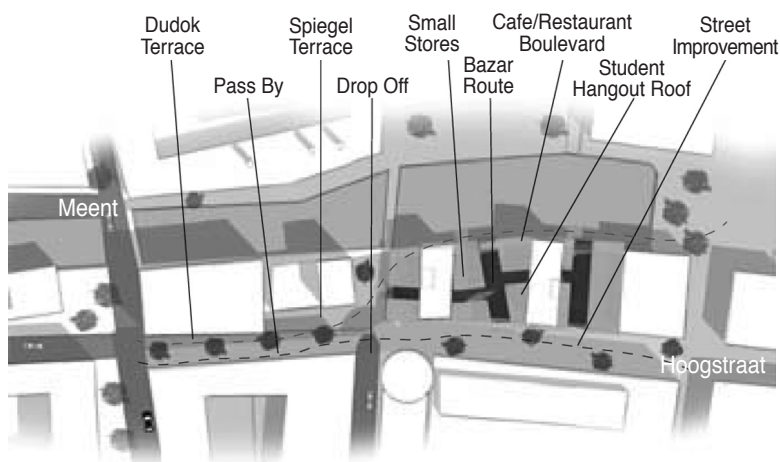
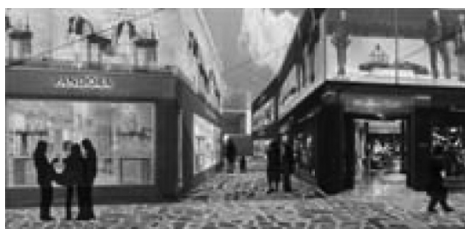
Large Scale Panoramic View

## Design

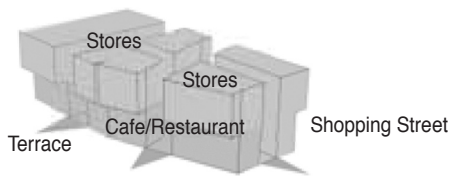
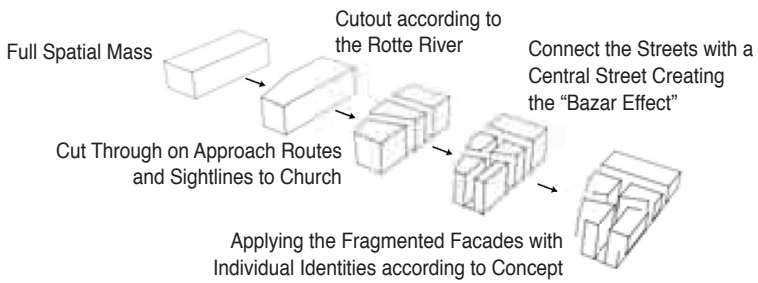


### Design Targets:

- Designing on a Small Scale
- First Levels Are Separated from the Towers
- First Levels' Facade Is in Contrast with the Towers
- Explorative and Adventurous Atmosphere
- Urban Scale Back to the Human Scale
- Creating a Contrast with Bigger Scales
- Connecting the Meent with the Hoogstraat
- Additional Program on the Existing Witte de Withstraat and Nieuwe Binnenweg



## Process





## Target Group



13,465 Residents    25,100 Workers    Shopping Center

## Young Urban Professionals and Entrepreneurs



## Program

### Face-to-Face Business Networking



## Design Principles

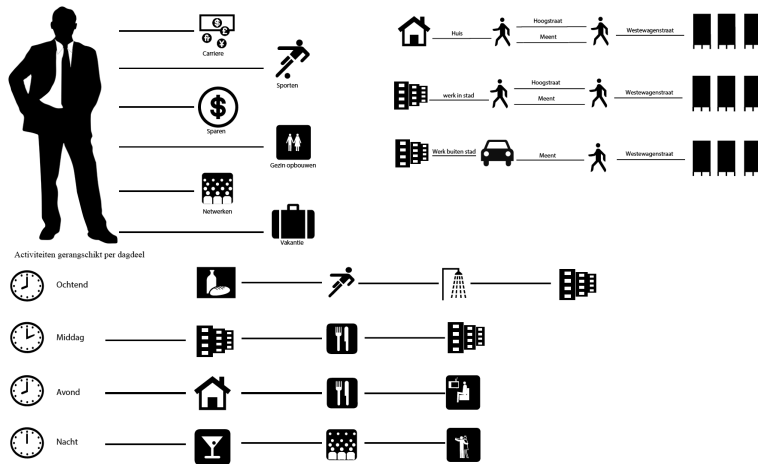
- Focus on the Target Group
- Encourage Them to Talk and Share
- Engage Beginners and Attract Experts
- Plan for Today's and Tomorrow's Business
- Create a Relaxed Atmosphere
- Flexibility in Exhibition Space
- Space for Gatherings
- Room for Food and Coffee
- Lounge Room
- Presentation Room
- Room for Training and Lessons
- Outside Semi-Private Space for Gatherings
- Entrance Visible from Surroundings



## Place 2 Be



### Target Group/Storyboard



### Design Principles

- Connection Back to the City Center
- Internal Relation
- Internal-External Relation (Students' Building and Surroundings)
- Contrast
- Orientation of the New Plan (Light, Wind, View, etc.)
- Relationship with Water (Rotte)
- Green
- Adventurous Route
- Daring Configurations of the Masses
- Interaction between Target Groups
- New Identity to the Street

