IN-BETWEEN TWO HOUSES

Another condition is the space between two houses, where there is a constant merging of private and public spaces. This space is elastic in terms of its outlines. It has multiple dimensions. The borderline between public and private is shifted and sometimes even erased.

A HOUSE AND ITS COURTYARD

There is a transition from the house to the space around it. Every house has a threshold although all thresholds are not created equal. The space around the house may or may not be made their own by the house dweller, hence this space could be intensely private or a place we can peep into and yet not be a part of.

THRESHOLDS WE KNOW

The space between the houses and the commercial establishments is assumed to be open to all people and is a threshold of another scale. This space is public, yet when it comes in contact to the houses, there is an overlapping condition of a window which peeps into a courtyard, or a house. The walls along such a space has a dual responsibility, sometimes turning spaces inside-out.

The link of a street with the houses and commercial establishments on a given block or neighborhood, constitutes a bleeding point into the fabric of the town or city which again is a threshold, but of a different scale.
The passage or *le passage* was a glass roofed arcade or entrance in between two buildings which was built largely in the 1820’s-30’s in parts of Europe. It connected two parallel streets. Acting like a covered walkway between buildings which were separate from the trafficked streets, the passage became a public interior for pedestrians outside their homes, an extension of the city street. The passages were built as pathways between the houses and public spaces. They were essentially an arcade with repetitive colonnades and a transparent roof with glass, to let the sun in.

Boutiques, restaurants and bookstores were established from the passages. The passage became the center of commercial activity and a public space which unified the rich and the middle class making it a covered social space. Evolving over time into a planned programmed space with mixed uses it proceeded to have a day & night quotient.

The passage has a unique “sense of place” by breaking the notions of space and circulation. It imbibes an idea of movement, evolvement and natural growth as part of the city. The success of the passage was due to the low speed of life at the time which lent itself to strolling and window shopping. It was a space for activities such as gazing and strolling. The Passage inscribes in the act of its naming the transitory nature of its existence. It was located within the architectural, economical, social and cultural sphere.

In time however it became a location for illicit activities, like prostitution, gambling etc in addition to commercial activity. This led to another change in the space. The passage was made accessible to the police in order to make it a safe place.

Thus, because of the control of pedestrian traffic in the passage, its imminent decline started. The growth of rapid transit, widening of roads and increase in the pace of life along with a decrease in density, increase in frontal space in front of departmental stores ultimately led to the passage finally dying out.

The passage is a good example of transitions and in-betweens which take on their own meaning. In this case, the city is almost turned inside out, a new system of accessibility is established with which the borderline between public and private is shifted and partially erased. The passage with its combination of programmed and unprogrammed spaces developed a sense of place on its own.
My thesis is an attempt to examine and study the *in-betweens* that occur between the buildings. With my design as a vehicle, taking an entire block of Blacksburg, I have tried to explore the idea by which one could offer a transitional moment, providing an opportunity to intervene and choreograph a space which re-engages the dweller through repetitive distractions. The spaces are a combination of the planned and the improvised in a constant state of flux forming a “passing place”. The spaces could create subtle interconnections which can be exploited, and temporal experiences could be defined through architectural interpretation of transitional spaces.

I also try to project the idea of mixing uses as parts of a strategy for retaining the vitality of these constantly changing thresholds leading to social contact and human activity.
THE SITE - THE RESPONSE
The site is located in Blacksburg-Virginia, a university town in which Virginia Tech is located. The site is on Main Street; falling in between South Main street and Draper street. Blacksburg is a university town, sustained by Virginia Tech. Main street is characterized by small 2-3 storied old buildings which have commercial on the street level and often residential on the 2nd and 3rd floor.
The site is perceived as a fabric, allowing passages thru it, acting as a porous surface.

The block does not act as a single solid entity or building. It is conceived like a small neighborhood, which allows through-ways, creating pedestrian streets running within the block, creating view corridors into it. The buildings run along the site, as narrow horizontal ribbons offering the internal streets to run along its edges. This creates several open and closed connectors.
The concept led to the development of the site. The buildings run like ribbons from Main street to Draper street creating the internal streets which run along its edges. The internal streets are formed or outlined by the buildings. The skin of the buildings responds to its function.

Several urban transitions occur and consequently there is a formation of a threshold. These thresholds span various urban scales. With residential and commercial uses combining and coinciding, there are several transitions and resultant thresholds which are naturally and artificially formed.

**THE STREETS**

The buildings run from main street to Draper street. The buildings edge the internal street. Covered planned walkthroughs cut the internal streets creating many transitional spaces.
SITE PLAN

The commercial establishments are along the street front, with arcades creating covered pathways, which become a part of Blacksburg’s main street. The houses are along the center, running from main street into Draper street, overhanging over Draper street.

The site breaks along Draper Street, it is cut into, and broadens out. The left edge of the block along Draper street acts like a possible extension of the farmer’s market.