

THE ESCH ARCHIVES: READING A CITY THROUGH FINANCE AESTHETICS, DOMESTIC THRESHOLDS, AND URBAN VACANCY

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Luxembourg is a country of quiet insanity. Beneath its orderly landscapes and discreet facades runs one of the densest infrastructural networks of global finance. Like plumbing, it operates out of sight, routing flows of capital, ownership, and speculation through shell entities, tax instruments, and holding structures. The country's primary industry is abstraction – but its consequences are spatially real, and nowhere more palpable than in Esch-sur-Alzette.

In Esch, the skeletal remains of industry coexist with the aspirational renderings of speculative urbanism. Old mill chimneys mark the skyline while digital campuses rise beside them, part of a vision for a city reborn through culture, innovation, and managed assets. Yet what remains in the gaps – between steel and software, between ownership and use – offers another kind of story, one less linear, less triumphant, but perhaps more grounded. The Esch Archives is an attempt to gather these fragments. Inspired by Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, we approach the city not as a coherent narrative to be told from start to finish, but as a field of accumulations – partial, overlapping, and carried¹. Like the gatherer's satchel, our project is a container for the overlooked, the ordinary, and the unheroic. Doors, shopfronts, fragments of finance-speak: these are our carriers, our clues.

Structured as a sequence of three parts, this work borrows from the logic of Ed Ruscha's book projects² – each section documenting a specific urban condition through accumulation and serial attention. Together, they orbit a common inquiry: how abstraction leaves its trace on the built environment, and how the physical world absorbs, distorts, or quietly pushes back.

Part I: Asset Management Opportunities

We begin with the language of finance as it appears in Esch as *Finance Aesthetics*³. These texts do not merely describe a city; they produce it. They script imagined futures into the fabric of the present, turning space into a medium of speculation.

Part II: Various Doors, Replaced

In the residential neighborhoods of Esch, we focus on the domestic threshold: the door. Many houses date back to the steel

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MARKANVÄNDNING (CSAM) is an
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intersection of art, public policy and
architecture. The aim is to challenge current
modes of urban development and the
narratives that support them through
community engagement and utilizing art as
an investigative tool. By engaging local
artists and artisans to problematize the
unjust allocation of urban resources CSAM
work to visualize the implications of big
geopolitical shifts on the local conditions in
a local context.

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mill expansions of the early 1900s, but have since been heavily renovated. These doors – misaligned, oddly adorned, or abruptly modern – don't speak of resistance so much as of ambivalence. Rather than preserving heritage, they reveal how it is selectively remembered, forgotten, or reassembled.

Part III: Twentysix Post-industrial Storefronts

We close with vacancy – not as absence, but as presence of a different kind. Twenty-six empty storefronts line Esch's main street. These vacancies do not simply reflect economic downturn; they unsettle the image of progress that the city would like to project.

Together, these three parts are intended to create a layered portrait of Esch as both a real and abstract space. The Esch Archives does not seek to clarify or resolve the Esch's contradictions. Instead, it carries them – lightly, in the spirit of Le Guin's carrier bag. By combining text and image, we question dominant narratives of urban development and propose an alternative: one that privileges observation over explanation, and ambiguity over closure. In doing so, The Esch Archives offers not a singular story, but a method – a way of reading the city that begins not with answers, but with attention.

1. Le Guin, Ursula K. The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction. In *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, Grove Press, 1989.

2. Ruscha, Ed. *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, National Excelsior Press, 1963.

3. Torsten Andreasen, Emma Sofie Brogaard, Mikkel Krause Frantzen, Nicholas Alan Huber, and Frederik Tygstrup, eds., *Finance Aesthetics: A Critical Glossary*, Goldsmiths Press, 2024.



Front doors in Esch. The ambivalent aesthetics of repairs and replacements. Photo: Karl Landin