A SLIGHTLY INSANE ATTE PT AT RE-A P P R O P R I A T I N G VACANT BUILDINGS THROUGH METHODS OF UNMITIGATED ABSURDI Y, DIOCY

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take a step back of what they take for granted. We want to draw thier attention to the built environment of today and challenge the passenger's point of view.

We are facilitators. We don't believe in a top-down planning of architects for others. We believe in the freedom to dwell, and the ability of people to choose for themselves. We prefer a bottom-up approach.

We state our point of view with our manifesto. Through a guide and our intervention, we look for possible alternatives of how change can be implemented in the city.

We are four architecture students, academics and piviliged citizens, questioning the roles we're going to have in our future

## **Focused Analysis**

Our starting point has been the book *Habiter contre la Métropole* (conseil nocturne, 2018) which translates to 'dwelling against the metropole'. It is an analysis of today's world and the issue of our relation to the built environment.

The book (conseil nocturne, 2018) introduces the idea of the metropolis as a global network of flows (such as materiels, energies, humans or capitals) that need to be channeled and organized by professions such as architects. More generally, the book (conseil nocturne, 2018) exposes some disfunctions in contemporary society through the lens of urban planning and architecture.

More concretely, *Habiter contre la Métropole* (conseil nocturne, 2018) looks at the implications of the act of planning for others. It postulates that today, everything is planned and organized in layers of administrative control down to the tiniest detail, leaving no room for informality and thus for personal freedom. This taking away of self determination and personal choices in everyday life leads to the dispossession of today's citizens' power to act. Most people are not used to interact with their surroundings anymore, they forgot it even was a possibility.

Addressing the idea of people's dispossession of the power to act in their direct living environnement, *Habiter contre la Métropole* (conseil nocturne, 2018) mentions the concept of dwelling, theoritized by Illich (Illich, 1992) that can be understood as the act of inhabiting fully. This presupposes an active interaction, a deep relationship between the inhabitant and the inhabited. Today's space in which people live is only a container, a garage for people to spend the time during which they are not productive in a capitalistic sense. The idea of dwelling goes against the idea of a finished building, it considers any inhabitable space as an entity in perpetual evolution, the new vernacular. Any space should be created and taken care of by its own inhabitants. This is the only way for people to be empowered.

ade by Fauve Van De Velde, March 2022



# DO YOU WANT TO LIVE IN A GARAGE?

# Take Action! Allow yourself to Dwell!

Ivan Illich, Dwelling, now available



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YOU ARE NOT GOD

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In light of all this, we as a group decided to question our role as architects. The job of architects nowadays consists only of planning for others: we decide upon the program, circulation and use. Once a building is built, it is considered finished, and unchangeable outside of the architect's choices and imagination. As a consequence, we, as architects, behave as if we are some sort of god that decides upon how people are to live their everyday lives, what they can and cannot do. It is a profession that seeks to educate people through the imposition of laws and norms, We just cast them in concrete. We are trained to do this throughout our whole cursus as students and this is never questioned. As such, we want to question that act of planning for others in our project, and look at what non-authoritarian architecture could be. What happens when architecture doesn't plan for others?

Another idea that Habiter contre la Métropole (conseil nocturne, 2018) brings forward, which is very much linked to the old court of appeal in Gothenburg, is the concept of museumification. Basically, the book (conseil nocturne, 2018) looks at the consequences of the act of planning and organizing the whole world in a controlled way, assigning a single purpose to every object. In the case of the courthouse, this is visible in the fact that as soon as the courthouse is not used as such anymore, it only becomes a 'former courthouse' that cannot be used anymore unless it were to be physically transformed. In that logic, the whole built environment becomes a collection of objects you can look at or use (only in their predetermined way), but that you can never change or interact with. A form of museum. The individual, in this context, is reduced to the rank of tourist of their own living environment. This being a subject of great relevance for the courthouse (it is considered a 'protected' building after all), this is something we want to look at in our project as well.

Made by Phileas Schulhof, March 2022

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In this light, we can regard a building as a cup. Today it is believed a building can only contain the function it was planned for, and needs to be changed in order to accommodate a new use. That would be equivalent to thinking that a cup can only ever be used for one particular liquid, and needs to be physically changed in order to be used for any other kind of drink. Furthermore, an empty cup has not 'failed' to fulfill its purpose, it is not broken. Yet we regard a vacant building as a single-use failed object that can either be kept as an historical artefact or has to be changed. We must adapt our attitude towards buildings, and understand that they are not a singleuse relics.

Concretely, in this project, we are facing a dilemma between the architectural project that we as students are expected to be conducting, and the reality of the situations we have mentioned this far. To address this, we have been moving towards a three-fold approach in the project. First, we have written a manifesto, that contains all the ideas and critics we want to address. Secondly, we provide a guide which gives people tools to re-appropriate an empty building, in this case the subject is the old courthouse of Gothenburg. Finally, we've imagened a 'strategic intervention' (RAAAF 2014), which could be one of many options to re-appropriate the old court of appeal.

For the third part, the intervention, we have been looking at several references from the realm of architecture, that exemplify the kind of intervention we are talking about. First, we have Lara Almarcequi, which through several interventions tried to illustrate the material reality of construction processes. Then we have Gordon Matta-Clark, who used to re-invest abandoned buildings and modified them through interventions which alienate the buildings for the people passing by, attracting attention to the built environment most of us don't even really see anymore. And finally, we have the dutch architecture office RAAAF, that through what they call 'strategic interventions' (RAAAF, 2014) are trying to conduct 'vacancy studies' (RAAAF, 2014) which reinvest empty spaces in an interrogative way.

# AN EMPTY CUP IS NOT A BROKEN CUP



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### References

### Lara Almarcegui

Lara Almarcegui (born 1972) is a Spanish artist. With her art she wants to make visible what tends to escape general notice. (Alunizar, 2022) Her interventions make people aware of the actions behind the construction industry. When faced with a huge pile of materials, which represent the building itself, passengers start to ask questions. She confronts people in a very direct and explicit way. It is a way to make them think and question the everyday habits in the building industry. Is this justifiable? Can we allow this to happen? Are there no other possibilities?

The way Almarcegui interacts with passengers is very inspring. She brings people to open their minds and reposition their point of view. In a world where architecture is almost only about material addition, it's important to dare to question. We aim to use the same technique, to allow people to ask questions about vacancies and about the act of planning.



Construction Materials: Secession's Main Hall, 2010 - Exhibition view, Secession, Vienna, 2010

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### Gordon Matta-Clark

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943 - 1978) was an American artist. His approach is to alter the built environment in order for people to take a step back and question their everyday surroundings. He does this by making things unfamiliar, he draws attention to what we as humans have grown so used to.

"Where Le Corbusier offered a mass-produced utopia, built on strictly functionalist foundations, Matta-Clark offered a model of what could be achieved by both individuals and at the level of the small collective, that through informal but intense discussion and shared experience could act as a hothouse for new ideas."

(James Atlee 2007)

"When I cut a building, I am standing against multiple aspects of social condition: I am opening closed spaces, built not only by physical necessity, but also against industry that produces "boxes" in cities and suburbs, making sure that customers stay passive and isolated. I am standing against a situation getting worst and worst, promoting inward-looking attitude, private property and isolation. I am standing against this distortion of values and morals hidden behind modernity, renewal, urban development, call it as you want."

(Gordon Matta-Clark, 1967)

The work on the next page, called '*Graffiti Photoglyph*' is a collection of black and white photographs of graffiti taken in the bronx. At the time graffiti was seen as pure vandalism and actually it still is for many people. Gordon Matta-Clark however, by printing those subway pictures and colorizing them by hand, exposes another point of view: Graffiti as a democratic artform, beautiful and vibrant. Gordon Matta-Clark's work is all about transformation but not in a physical sense. He is trying to transform our relation to the built environment. Which is a really interesting and inspiring take on transformation.



Gordon Matta-Clark, "Graffiti Photoglyph," 1973. (Courtesy of the estate of Gordon Matta-Clark and David Zwirner)

### References

### RAAAF

Rietveld Architecture-Art Affordances is a Dutch collective, they aim to make location-based artworks. The office consists of Ronald Rietveld, Erik Rietveld and Arna Mačkić.<sup>1</sup> They have backgrounds in design, philosophy and architecture.<sup>2</sup> They create interventions that allow people to think differently about their surroundings and about their everyday life. They invite people to question practises, conventions and habits.<sup>3</sup>

"Affordances are possibilities for action provided by the environment" (Gibson, 1979).

The collective RAAAF uses the idea of affordances. "Affordances are relations between aspects of the sociomaterial environment in flux and abilities available in an ecological niche" (Rietveld & Kiverstei, 2014; Van Dijk & Rietveld, 2017). Through their art, RAAAF wants to create affordances. They want to show people how we could live differently. (Rietveld, 2022). They also want to increase our openness to radically different possibilities. (Rietveld, 2022).

This idea of affordances and an architect as a facilitator for people to think differently about their surrounding world, is very inspiring to us and it is what we aim to do as well with our three-fold approach.



Photo by Allard Bovenberg, 2013 Bunker 599

# Design brief















Approach of the manifesto

Based on all these previous ideas, our group wrote a manifesto. The manifesto is the context, the existing world which we question.

We start from two base ideas. In the first part, we discuss the roles of architects. We question the profession of architects where they tend to act more like gods. Our built environmant of today is constructed by an overplanning done by architects. Architects tend to act like they know what's best for everyone and regulate every little detail, leaving no space for individual completion.

In the second part, we question how we deal with what's already built. Once something changes its function, two things can happen. Either the building needs a materialistic addition or transformation or it is seen as protected heritage, which denies any form of change, so it'll become a museum. This ends up in empty buildings all over the city, while these buildings are perfectly intact and could be used. These two aspects abstruct people to use vacant buildings in the middle of the city, an absurd idea.

After we explored and explained these ideas thoroughly in our manifesto, we conclude our core idea which is "We stand for the non-authoritarian architecture of facilitation, not planning." We are facilitators. We don't believe in a top-down planning of architects for others. We believe in the freedom to dwell, and the ability of people to choose for themselves. We prefer a bottom-up approach.

On the next pages, you'll find an extract from the written manifesto

### Buildup of the manifesto

### DWELING - PLANNING - HETEROTOPIA - DEHUMANIZATION

We condemn the cureent de-humanizing and infantilazing methods of practicing archiecture bereaving us of our power to act

We should not be restricted from dwelling in manners suitable for the needs and desires of our own

ARCHITECTS SHOULD NOT PLAY AT **BEING GODS** 

We believe in humanity's ability to thrive, appropriate and create within spaces of informality

We strive for occupant controlled dweling

We stand for the non-authoritarian architecture of facilitation, not planning

**AN EMPTY** CUP DOES NOT NEED TO **CHANGE TO BE FILLED UP** 

We reject the museumifcation of the city and its heritage as a result of the deed of planning

MUSEUMIFICATION - REAPPROPRIATION - PLANNING - VACANCIES



We seek a new approach of addressing vacancies through acts of re-appropriation

> We believe people are able to create architecture without the interference of architects

> > We should not focus on questioning material architecture, but our relation to the existing built environment



# WE SHOULD NOT BE RESTRICTED FROM **DWELLING IN MANNERS SUITABLE** FOR THE NEEDS AND DESIRES OF OUR **OWN!**

In a world where homelessness, unemployment and the power of capitalism increase rapidly and alarmingly, the liberty to dwell is needed more than ever. Paradoxically throughout history, we have continuously been bribed to renounce that ability and liberty. It has been morphed into laws and restrictions or a need fulfilled by the construction of 'shoe boxes'.

As residents of the world, we have been lead to believe the commodity of a shelter fulfills our needs. Consequently, we see we have lost much of our ability to dwell. The need for a roof over our heads has become cultural merchandise, a simple commodity. General society has given up on ideas of inhabiting our world in a more intricate way, because the concept is foreign. As Ivan Illich (1984) puts it: "For the resident the art of living is forfeited: he has no need for the art of dwelling because he needs an apartment; just as he has no need for the art of suffering and has probably never thought about the art of dying."

# Dwelling

Illich (1984) illustrates the way we, as a Western society, have bought into the commodity of 'living' as an oppose to 'dwelling'. As soon as neighborhoods were torn up for the cleanliness wanted by rulers and planners, people's ability to dwell was

"architects should not play at being gods".

taken away forcefully. We live in a world created by authorities and designers, anyone but ourselves. We think this 'otherness' or disconnection to our surroundings is tangible and the human's desire to appropriate is a natural response to it. Appropriating the world and thus acquiring a more intricate relation to it, is in essence a desire to dwell in some degree.

Concepts aligned with more radical forms of dwelling are alien to 'modern' Western society. We find they are often referred to as inferior ways of sheltering. Regularly they are associated with tribes, poverty or illegality. Such negative connotations are rooted within our society. There is no room for dwellers, or what Illich (1984) refers to as 'unpluggers', because they are guestioning the base of our living patterns and the value of ownership. The desire to dwell cannot be met, as regulations and restrictions do not allow for such a choice. Most 'dwelling activities', like squatting or self-building, are considered illegal or a violation of law. The resident today, has the lawful right to the commodity of a 'shelter' constructed

for the resident the art of living is forfeited: he has no need for the art of dwelling because he needs an apartment" - Illich. 1984

by an architect. Illich (1984) argues that the unplugger does not oppose this right. Rather they object to the ways it conflicts with the liberty to dwell. The unplugger has different, vernacular, values that are not fulfilled by the inhumane way in which architects construct shelters.

Governments have continuously failed to house the people of the world in 'shoeboxes', proven by the many failures of- and the need for social housing. This while simultaneously bereaving us of the liberty and ability to dwell through exerting more rules, restrictions and practicing dominating methods of architecture like the act of planning. The desire to dwell might not feel significant to all, but the choice to do so must not be obstructed. We must always argue for the right of choice, for options allowing liberty and for instruments that make this choice feasible. Vehicles for dwelling, such as occupant controlled inhabiting, should be established both legally and physically. Now more than ever.

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# We stand for the NON-AUTHORITARIAN ARCHITECTURE of FACILITATION, not planning



# Transformation approach

### Approach of the guide

With our suggestions for intervention, we want to embody the idea of a non-physical transformation. Rather, we want to transform the environment and the relation people have to the built environment.

We propose a somewhat provocative guide which allows people to re-appropriate the old court of appeal. This guide uses the courthouse as a case study to give a concrete example of the theory we exposed in the analysis and in the manifesto.

Our guide, which proposes illegal but working solutions, questions the system we are living in. As facilitators, we give people tools to re-appropriate the built environment. This approach follows the may 68 uprising by giving tools of resistance to citizens. With this guide people can allow themselves to re-use and reclaim the empty body which has become a part of the topography of the city. We facilitate people to dwell again.

### Buildup of the guide

Facing the issue of empty buildings the following guide will give six different re-appropriation techniques, allowing anyone to redeem absurd empty property. The following techniques are presented in an order of increasing complexity, the impossibility of one leads to the next technique.

For each step by step explained part of the guide, six labels will inform you about different necessities. These necessities are the price, the amount of people and the time needed for the execution, the accessibility for people with reduced mobility or blind people as well as the possibility to take those actions with children.

The guide has a format and can be enfolded like an architectural plan, which allows you to become the architect.

On the following pages, you'll find an extract of the guide.

# HOW TO DIG A TUNNEL?

Moving on to more energy intensive methods, you could also try to dig a tunnel to access an interior courtyard, if the building you are trying to enter has one of course.

This is a huge effort, but it can be really effective. For detailed considerations on how to go about the digging, read the article that the QR-code below links to.

This method also requires a lot of gear, and you need to be a team of at least 2 people to prepare this kind of intervention.













Scaffoldings are great for temporarily making accessible surfaces, as much horizontal as vertical one, thus it is a great tool for city appropriation. Moreover it blends in the cityscape.

They also offer very nice spaces within themselves, which can be great places that add diversity to the public urban fabric.

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If none of those solutions are possible

re-appropriation tool

On the backside of the written manifesto and the guide, we've foreseen a re-appropriation tool. It is the spraypainted word 'public'.

It is possible for people to cut out the letters, which will turn the guide and manifesto into a stencil. This stencil allows people to spraypaint the word 'public' wherever they would want & thus allows them to re-appropriate.

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# **Itervention Design**

The empty body of the old court of appeal has become so obsolete, we can see it as a part of the topography of the city. We want to reclaim this topography.

Following the guide, failing at every option we gave, the last step to re-appropriate the building is to build a bridge to get into the courtyard with scaffolding. This approach of scaffolding makes it possible for people to reclaim the roof and the courtyard, but it also makes it possible for people to appropriate the scaffolding itself.

As the building is protected heritage and it is closed off to the passengers, we want to draw attention to the absurdity of this empty unutilized building in the middle of a city that has a lack of space for a lot of the inhabitants.

With our intervention, the building will remain closed and it will not be ruined. With our design, we hope for two things to happen. First we hope that people will raise questions. We draw attention to an empty building which looks under construction due to the scaffolding. But actually, the scaffolding is temporary and only allows you to use the building in a non-destructive way. By raising questions, we believe that people will think about the built environment they live in, question it and take a standpoint.

The second thing that will happen is that people do in fact use the building again. Not in the way it is designed (which we question) but the scaffolding makes it possible to reuse the façade, the roof an the courtyard.

The timeline of the building is temporary. It'll exist untill people find a better solution for the empty building or when people have used it so much, the structure is worn-out and it's not safe anymore to be used. When one of those two things happens, our intervention will have succeeded in its purpose.







Section BB





Made by Phileas Schulhof, May 2022



Made by Margot Manca, May 2022









# Reflection

We have a different approach on the matter of sustainability than the majority of today's buildings. We aim to intervene without adding anything, but by using what is already there.

Today's main approach, when looking at the building industry, is a materialistic approach and often translates in physical additions. When a building needs a change of funciton, and the building was built fitting to one specific function, it needs a materialistic addition or an extension to be able to be reused. These buildings are planned all the way through, leaving no space for an individual interpretation by users. What needs to be changed is not the building, but our relation to it.

We're relying too much on a technocratic approach, stating that we need to do/add more in order to safe the planet. We're relying on others, such as scientists, to hope they will fix all the current problmens and we can just wait while continuing with our daily lives. That point of view implies that we could continue what we're doing, that we don't need to question the things happening around us and that technology will safe us.

Our environmental perspective is going against this idea of addition and relying on other people to save things for us. We believe we ourselves are a part of the change. That's why we go against the existing tendency of a materialistic and physical approach. We dare to ask questions. We don't need more, we need a change of perspective. We look for alternative ways to live as citizens, but also for alternative meanings for the profession of architecture as architecture students.

With our design, we want to raise questions. We want to emphasize how ridiculous it is to have empty bodies of buildings in the middle of the city which are just unused. This while there's a shortage in place. How can a city afford to keep a building like this empty?

We state our point of view with our manifesto and through the guide and our intervention, we look for possible alternatives of how change can be implemented in the city.

# 6











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