A SLIGHTLY INSANE ATTEMPT AT RE-APPROPRIATING VACANT BUILDINGS THROUGH METHODS OF UNMITIGATED ABSURDITY, IDIOCY AND EFFORT

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

We are observers of a changing world, but a changing world without enough reliability when it comes to ways of handling and reacting. Our aim is not to impose or dictate the solution. There is not one solution and if there were one, we're definately not the owner of it. We want to explore and rethink the questions, look for alternative ways of inhabiting, such as dwelling. We want to make people aware of their surroundings and let them 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 condemn the current DE-HUMANIZING and INFANTILIZING methods of practicing architecture.

We **should** not be restricted from DWELLING in manners suitable for the needs and desi**re**s of our own.

We believe in HUMANITY'S ABILITY to thrive, **appropriate** and create within **spaces** of INFORMALITY.

We strive for OCCUPANT CONTROLLED dwelling.

ISSUE   ALTERNATIVE

"traditional architects make the choices for us, using their expertise to design the ways in which we move, live and comply"

WE CONDEMN THE CURRENT DE-HUMANIZING AND INFANTILIZING METHODS OF PRACTICING ARCHITECTURE BEREAVING US OF OUR POWER TO ACT !

Contemporary architecture dispossesses us from the power to act by reducing us to mindless creatures wandering through spaces of flows and imposing a certain way of life upon us.

During the last few decades, we believe architecture has increasingly detached itself from humanity. This de-humanization has enthusiastically embraced the dominance of the concept of flows. Manuel Castell (2010) interprets this focus on flows as a replacement of the 'Space of Places' by the 'Space of Flows' in contemporary Postmodern architecture. Consequently such spaces defined by flows blur the meaningful relationship between architecture and society. It endorses the generalization of acultural, ahistorical and de-humanizing architecture (Castell, 2010), therefore establishing a progressively more derogatory view on us as humans. Accordingly, we are merely dots on an architect's screen, moving around at the efficiency level we were designed for.

Furthermore, we consider space constructed by flows does not allow for choice. It offers no escape from unwilling participation. Such an example can be found in Bofill's new Barcelona airport. The traveler cannot hide from the fact that they are implemented in a node of the space of flows. He gets sucked into a stream of commercial manipulation constructed by architecture. There is no way out of the network, no opportunity for a choice of their own.

Rather, contemporary architecture frequently feigns the possibility of choice or impairs us from having to make a choice at all, thus infantilizing us. One could state that traditional architects, in essence, make the choices for us. They use their expertise to design the ways in which we move, live and comply. Our hand is being held while we are shown where our toilet should be placed, or how we should enter our bedroom. Subtle stimulants guide us in the direction of what has been deemed 'the right way'. It deceives us in believing we have the possibility to go left or right, but in the end we will take a

turn either way. Fundamentally, we believe we are treated as children, lacking in worldly wisdom or informed judgment. We are trapped by the appeal of a nicely wrapped present that was chosen by someone else: infantilizing architecture. We are bereaved of the power to act upon our own lives.

In light of this Theo Deutinger (2018) describes the city as designed against humans, or against the freedom of movement, illustrating how controlling us is at the root. Barriers and regulators are brutally built into our environment. From roadblocks preventing bank robberies, natural elements restricting movement to benches discouraging the homeless from using them. We feel we are treated as mindless creatures that need to be put in line. Deutinger states: "as an architect, of course it's naive to think that everything we do is serving the better, but still from architecture or design I would not have imagined such cruelties."

We believe it is crucial to understand we are not inferior to choices of the architects of

our surroundings. Their expertise does not make them all-knowing nor allows them to claim a position in which they overpower our needs. The architect must not play at being god and should not be in charge of the way we live our lives. We must remember that it is only we, who know and understand our own needs the best.

Furthermore, we think that the architectural tendency of exuding control is inherently rooted in capitalist economy. The metropolitan citizen is inevitably a product of the flux and rhythms of economy (Conseil Nocturne, 2018). The theories of Henri Lefebvre (1968) assume the city, reigned by capital, is subjected to an increasing instrumentalization, which imposes a mobility regime on people that responds to two basic activities of capitalism: consumption and work. We believe this means that de-humanizing and infantilizing methods of practicing architecture are not just confined to extreme examples, traces can be found everywhere in our surroundings.

"architects
should not play
at being gods"

ISSUE   ALTERNATIVE

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

dwell·ing \ ˈdwe-liŋ \ | noun

Dwelling 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 in which they are not productive in a capitalistic sense. The idea of dwelling goes against the idea of a finished building, it consider any inhabitable space as an entity in perpetual evolution. Any space should be created and taken care of by its own inhabitants. Dwelling lies beyond the reach of an architect. (Illich, 1984)

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 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 questioning 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 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 'shoe-boxes', 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.

"for the resident the art
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- Illich, 1984

ISSUE   ALTERNATIVE

WE BELIEVE IN HUMANITY'S ABILITY TO THRIVE, APPROPRIATE AND CREATE WITHIN SPACES OF INFORMALITY!

As an oppose to current architectural practice we believe we, as part of humanity, are capable of catering to our own needs without interference of expertise.

Through the practice of de-humanizing and infantilizing architecture we, as humans, are often denied capability. It paints us in an inferior light. We believe the 'incapable human' of which this architecture derives is an infant with little skill to provide for his own needs. Illich (1984) promptly depicts it as a work-force that needs to be shelved for the night.

Heterotopia

het·ero·top·ia | \ *he-tə-rə-ˈtä-pik* \ | noun

Heterotopia is a concept elaborated by philosopher Michel Foucault to describe certain cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow 'other': disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory or transforming. Heterotopias are worlds within worlds, mirroring and yet upsetting what is outside. (Wikipedia, 2022)

Therefore, we argue for an affirmative perspective on humankind: 'the capable human'. We believe informality opens up possibilities for the creation of a sense of true heterotopia both in major and minor cases. When left space for informality, both purposefully and imposed upon us, we think humanity finds ways to thrive and not only survive. Informality is wiggle room in which we are positively able to become ourselves. When we are able to truly appropriate, make our own choices and cater to our own needs and will, we can recover our natural capabilities.

Thus far though, we believe true informality is mainly recognized within extreme circumstances. Informality is both forcefully imposed out of need as well as by choice. A fairly well-documented case is the Torre David in Venezuela, as demonstrated by the photographer Iwan Baan's and Urban Think-Tank's research (2017). The 45-story uncompleted skyscraper is noted as an 'informal vertical community' housing over 750 families (Baan, 2012). The impoverished inhabitants of the Torre were able to establish their own sense of society within the abandoned facility, appropriating

the building without the interference of authorities. Another example can be found in the Freetown Christiania in the heart of Copenhagen. The Freetown established an intentional community after squatting the military area in 1971 and has been capable of remaining a thriving micro-society ever since (Balbé, 2014). Whereas the dwellers of the Torre David were forced to survive in informality, the settlers in Christiania chose to.

Yet, smaller performances within spaces of informality, regularly go unnoticed. We think minor acts of ability are often perceived insignificant, for the planned environment does not allow for an informality in which we can truly acquire more meaningful relations to our dwellings. Yet, we must establish the importance of small occurrences: finding loopholes in legislation, from inventing ways to hang posters on walls in rental apartments to sheds in gardens that don't require building permits. These small acts show our desire to appropriate and the will to dwell is still alive somewhere in our bodies. We believe these occurrences subtly reveal that we, as humans, were not made to live inside 'shoe-boxes'.

It is thus paramount for us to discredit the prevailing degrading view on humanity and assert ourselves of our own capabilities. We believe we have often been conditioned to comply to derogatory beliefs and have become gullible to a certain degree of inertia. The first step to unplugging ourselves from such conditions is to find courage to believe in our own ability: we are capable of reclaiming our spaces and of catering to our own needs without the interference of architects. The second one is to recognize bubbles of informality, however hard to find within the de-humanizing systems we, as humans, are trapped in, and play an active part in the creation of such anomalies.

"informality opens up possibilities for the creation of a sense of true heterotopia"

ISSUE   ALTERNATIVE

WE STRIVE FOR OCCUPANT CONTROLLED DWELLING!

As brought up previously, to allow for 'dwelling' to take place certain vehicles for dwelling, such as occupant controlled dwelling, can be established. Taking back control can be realized using many different methods and resources, all with their own values and degree of radicality. Governments should make the choice to gain control over one's own dwelling feasible.

To reinforce the possibility of people to dwell, however big or small the gesture may be, one must be in control of their own dwelling in any case. Dwelling in the sense of inhabiting more closely, is simply not viable when we are not able to be the one in the saddle. As interpreted by Illich (1984): "Vernacular dwellers generate the axioms of the spaces they inhabit". It is only when architects and authoritarians are no longer interfering through the act of planning, that new and unconventional ways of living and/or dwelling can blossom. This does not necessarily mean there is no use for these players, it only questions their current practices. It argues for a redefinition of their function, transitioning from a planner to a facilitator.

We believe the creation of informality inhibits self-governing activities by using our able minds to appropriate and create dwellings. We thus advocate for an inhabitation which we ourselves, the occupant, controls, even if it was not created by us. We think occupant controlled dwelling can be embodied in many different ways, it does not necessarily imply a need for new buildings, only a new approach towards them where the architect is not in control of change. Occupant controlled dwelling assimilates a broad spectrum of opportunities ranging from self-building, self-managing, the creation of a new vernacular to house squatting. We find possibilities may differ in radicality, but each of them – including 'small occurrences' that are already happening – implies the creation of a closer bond and autonomy within our world as well as a rupture from top-down controlling mechanisms.

Occupant controlled dwelling is a practical consequence of the idea of dwelling. Simultaneously, acquiring more self-governance is the first step in achieving the concept of dwelling. It undermines the de-humanizing/infantilizing practitioners of architecture as it opposes the foundation of these practices: exuding top-down control. Therefore, we believe we should explore the opportunity to self-govern, self-build, self-manage and so on, whenever we can.

"vernacular dwellers generate the axioms of the spaces they inhabit"
- Illich, 1984

ARCHITECTS SHOULD NOT PLAY AT BEING GODS

We reject the MUSEUMIFICATION of the city and its heritage as a result of the deed of PLANNING.

We **should** not focus on **question**ing material architecture, but OUR RELATION to it.

We believe people are able to create architecture without the INTERFERENCE OF **ARCHITECTS**.

We seek a new approach of addressing VACANCIES through acts of RE-APPROPRIATION.

> "**C**loistered in our houses ,
> we end up finding ourselves
> with the same impossibility of
> experience that tourists buy"
> - Hernandez, 2021

ISSUE   ALTERNATIVE

WE REJECT THE MUSEUMIFICATION OF THE CITY AND ITS HERITAGE AS A RESULT OF THE DEED OF PLANNING!

The act of traditional planning petrifies the city into a museum. This process of museumification prevents authentic interaction with our surroundings, which is vital for the execution of dwelling.

Planning

plan·ning | \ ˈpla-niŋ \ | noun

Planning is the act or process of making or carrying out plans. Specifically : the establishment of goals, policies, and procedures for a social or economic unit (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In architecture this also resonates as making choices to impose a certain way of life on someone else.

We believe the inhumane top-down practice of architecture, a derivate from the planning practice, further prevents the possibility for a building to change without the action of architects. As a result, our cities petrify into a collection of fragmented objects we can see and use (only in a predetermined way), but cannot interact with or leave a trace on. These forms of interaction are vital to the concept of dwelling. Planning, fundamentally, assigns a single purpose to every object, consequently turning it to stone. At heart, assigning a single purpose mirrors the mechanisms of our economy: forces of division and separation. The ordering ('planning') of land to suit its deployment as we see today, exemplifies such separation in the case of urbanism (Debord, 2015). Using Nattahi Hernandez' (2021) portrayal: "Cloistered in our houses or condominiums, locked up in our hyper-insured subdivisions and clusters , we end up finding ourselves with the same poverty and impossibility of experience that tourists buy. Maybe that's why from time to time we also become tourists."

It is this loss of experience which according to Giorgio Agamben (1970) defines the museumification of our cities. The urban transforms into a Museum, a vendible exhibition of itself: a 'vetrification of urban space' (Hernandez, 2021). Agamben (1970) illustrates the entrance of the Museum as a threshold from which the vitality of the city or art ceases to be experienceable. The Museum detaches an object from its topological place and time. The process of heritage-making, an inherent part of museumification, consequently detaches a cultural site or practice from the world.

"an empty cup does not need to change to be filled up"

ISSUE   ALTERNATIVE

WE SHOULD NOT FOCUS ON QUESTIONING MATERIAL ARCHITECTURE, BUT OUR RELATION TO IT!

Heritage thus turns into a 'commercial good' (Yu & Zhu, 2014).

We believe we can easily recognize the commodification of the city in the phenomenon known as the 'tourist city'. Paris, Barcelona, Rome or Amsterdam have been transmuted into commercial brands that can be sold to tourists as well as people living there. In recent years, we truly see the impossibility of metropolitan citizens to experience their own cities. The latest outcries of Venetian citizens against mass-tourism serve as a suitable example.

However, we must not reduce museumification to tourist cities alone. The former courthouse of Gotenburg serves as an example: as soon as the courthouse was not used as such anymore, it only became a 'former courthouse' that cannot be used anymore unless it was to be physically transformed. In keeping with Agamben

philosophy, capitalistic values let nothing escape the capability of being captured in a Museum: "It is necessary not to forget that the museumification of works of art, through the regime of aesthetic apprehension, and cities, through the tourism industry, are but partial realizations of a much larger and all-encompassing project of museumification of the world."

We argue that the museumification of the city is a consequence of the deed of planning. Reducing objects to a state of single-use artifacts, we cannot interact we them in a true and intricate way. Through planning, de-humanizing architecture and a lack of informality we have perpetually been bereaved from our power to act upon this state of affairs without the interference of an architect. We perceive the impossibility to experience the city threatens our liberty to dwell.

At heart, material architecture is not at fault for its own shortcomings, we only perceive them as 'failing'. Rather, the act of planning and our own attitude towards the built environment are to blame for the increasing amount of vacant buildings.

The built architecture in itself is not inherently villainous. They are merely part of the inhumane systems that were designed around them, assigning them a certain negative connotation. We often perceive buildings or the built environment as 'failing' to do their job. Yet, we must comprehend their deficiency in light of the root cause. We think 'failure', resulting in the ever-growing amount of vacancies and museumification of the city, is a symptom of a much greater illness. We believe that by replacing or physically changing buildings (among other things) we are only executing quick-fixes.

The city is not continuous anymore but a succession of single-use artefacts, because we treat failure with material solutions. We see the endorsement of the same capitalistic values (efficiency, consumption,...) that lead to failure in the first place. "We cannot solve our problems," pointed out Albert Einstein (1946), "with the same thinking we used to

create them." This means the act of planning does cannot give us the tools to change 'failure'.

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. An authority or an architect is needed to implement these changes, as we ourselves have been rendered useless. We must adapt our attitude towards buildings, and understand that they are not a single-use relic. Much like a cup, they have not failed and can be filled with a new liquid, without needing big interventions. A building does not have to be physically changed to obtain a new function, we only have to change our attitude regarding that function.

"we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used to create them"

- Einstein, 1946

"If for planning efficiency is central, than playfulness is the main component of dwelling"

- Conseil Nocturne, 2018

ISSUE   ALTERNATIVE

WE SEEK A NEW APPROACH OF ADDRESSING VACANCIES THROUGH ACTS OF RE-APPROPRIATION!

Vacant buildings, seen through the eyes of non-planning, can be attended to by the means of re-appropriation. In this manner, they can reclaim their deep connection to the surroundings, forming a new sense of vernacular.

Following the previously addressed issue on our relation to the built-environment: in order to acquire a new approach towards addressing vacancies, we must oppose the core values of what lead to their vacant state: planning. If for architecture and town planning efficiency is central, than playfulness is the main component of dwelling (Conseil Nocturne, 2018). Furthermore, the planned city is characterized by homogeneity and aversion, thus we invert this by creating informality which allows true encounters and interaction. A resistance can thus only be defined by an affectionate relation our surroundings, rather disappearing within it than fighting against it (Conseil Nocturne, 2018).

Vernacular construction encompasses these aspects (playfulness, heterogeneity and affectionate interaction) as it is always singular, situated and irreplaceable (Conseil Nocturne, 2018). Therefore, the vernacular radically opposes the planned and defines space in a fundamentally different way. Ivan Illich (1984) depicts this as the following: "The Cartesian, three-dimensional, homogeneous space into which the architect builds, and the vernacular space which dwelling brings into existence, constitute different classes of space."

Re-appropriation

re·ap·pro·pri·a·tion | noun

Re-appropriation is the cultural process by which a group reclaims—re-appropriates—terms or artifacts that were previously used in a way disparaging of that group. The term re-appropriation can also extend to counter-hegemonic re-purposing, such as citizens with no formal authority seizing unused public or private land for community use. (Wikipedia, 2022)

Vernacular Architecture

ver·nac·u·lar ar·chi·tec·ture | noun

Vernacular architecture is building done outside any academic tradition, and without professional guidance. Vernacular architecture usually serves immediate, local needs; is constrained by the materials available in its particular region; and reflects local traditions and cultural practices. According to the distinguished historian Nikolaus Pevsner, not architecture. (Wikipedia, 2022)

Re-appropriation, at the hands of the dweller, is the most feasible tool which can embody the new vernacular. We believe through re-appropriation of the built environment (and vacant buildings in particular) there is room for playfulness and an intimate relation between the appropriator and the city. Moreover re-appropriation, in essence, takes place within bubbles of informality.

We argue for vacant buildings to re-obtain their ability to be experienced, we must establish a closer bond between us and the vacancy. We can achieve such a deep relation through the reclaiming of space.

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

"Collect information, historicizing problems, then inform and show paths that could be taken, exposing strategies, presenting what is possible in order to facilitate resistance"

- Deleuze, 1985 -

Facilitation

fa·cil·i·ta·tion | noun

Facilitation is about creating a structure and environment that makes it easy for people to collaborate. The term facilitate is derived from the Latin word "facilis", which means "to render less difficult" or "to make easy." A facilitator provides opportunities, resources, encouragement and support for the group to succeed in achieving its objectives and to do this through enabling the group to take control and responsibility for the way they proceed. (Vskills, 2021)

To accommodate the liberty to dwell and seize contributing to the museumification of the city, the profession of the architect needs to be redefined as the job of 'facilitator'.

We plead for architects to redefine their duty and believe they must redirect themselves as facilitators as a substitute to planners. To accustom the liberty to dwell and occupant controlled dwelling, the role of an architect as we define it today turns obsolete. The architect can no longer be seen as a superior power, because their expertise can never overpower our knowledge of our own needs. Furthermore, we believe, as explained previously, the architect as a planner actively contributes to the museumification of the city and its heritage. The architect as the 'facilitator' on the contrary, devotes himself intently to the re-appropriation of the city. The profession must reposition itself outside the conventional approach. As a facilitator, the architect can employ their knowledge and expertise, without being an all-knowing presence. They can create systems, actively contributing to empowerment of the people. Intellectuals have the role of 'cartographers', taking Deleuze's (1985) words: "Collect information, historicizing problems, then inform and show paths that could be taken, exposing strategies, presenting what is possible in order to facilitate resistance". Klaske Havik (2016) defines that the architect, through non-authoritarian facilitation, can become a crucial actor and mediator in a collaborative process. We believe facilitation is not about driving a project to an end-goal, instead it contributes knowledge to a collective process. The architect employs design methods that would enable people to participate actively and directly in the conception and building of their own homes and neighborhoods. (Turner, 1985)

We believe the re-configuration of the

Affordance

af·for·dance | noun

Affordances are relations between aspects of the sociomaterial environment in flux and abilities available in an ecological niche (Rietveld, 2014). Affordances are possibilities for action provided by the environment (Gibson, 1979).

architect's role can be further defined by the theory of affordances. The architect is an expert in the creation of affordance and possibilities for actions, not an experienced planner. Creating affordance, rather than planning, leaves room for much needed informality and the sovereignty of choice. In this sense the architect can facilitate the re-appropriation of our surroundings, actively supporting the empowerment of the people.

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