

TAKE SHAPE

Lofts—residential spaces created from former commercial and manufacturing space—provide affordable housing and often serve as a respite from the profit-driven real estate market. Simultaneously, they can be co-opted by property developers and local officials to justify rising rents and increased policing in newly “safe,” “artistic,” and desirable neighborhoods. In this issue, we present all of these factors side by side, seeing them not as contradictions, but as essential components of how such spaces function.

Features
essays by Jimmy Mezei, Simone Kaplan-Senchak, Julia Goodman, Jaime Omar Yassin, Bernd Upmeyer, Sam Winks, and Nolan Boomer. **Includes conversations with Ericka Beckman and Marguerite Horberg.**
Plus, proposals toward an egalitarian future by Palacit, MOS Architects, and William Powhida.

NO.1

LOFT

Take Shape is a matte ship charting the waters of architectural, legal, and political thinking, lifted by those spaces and ideas where distinctions blur. We are its crew, a group of editors circumnavigating the margins, seeking to articulate questions more than to provide answers. From this vantage point, we aim to imagine and fortify change without relying on a fleeting news cycle or the whims of advertisers.

Lofts—residential spaces created from former commercial and manufacturing space—serve as homes for artists and other low-income tenants; they also carry unique challenges that property owners and local governments are often ill-equipped to handle. In our first issue of *Take Shape*, we aim to pull apart the myths and generalizations that surround such living spaces, building a more nuanced picture of how lofts function, both for their residents and in the broader landscape of affordable housing.

Radical housing solutions don't exist in the gleaming, new structures of corporations, developers, and cultural institutions—a fact made more obvious in a time of rising income inequality. Industrial spaces offer an inexpensive shell for inhabitants to rearrange at will, forming homes where previously there were none. In such living situations, eked out of vacant factories and warehouses, landlords cease to be solutions, and a novel sense of ownership and community emerges. Existing buildings possess both history and a way forward. As Jane Jacobs writes in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, “Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings,” but “new ideas must come from old buildings.”

The downside to this autonomy is the reality that tenants of off-the-grid spaces can be caught between exploitative property owners and housing officials without adequate tools to address their needs. Editor *Julia Goodman* explores these tensions in her piece on a converted factory building in Williamsburg seeking rent-control coverage. Current housing law is often insufficient to protect tenants in low-rent, semi-legal dwellings, and a lack of official oversight allows landlords to neglect unsafe conditions and raise rent without warning. In a piece adapted from a crowdsourced document on DIY spaces, we provide a jumping-off point for tenants to enforce their own community safety standards when official channels are lacking.

This lack of formal intervention, as well as the corresponding work that loft residents put into building and maintaining their homes, means that lofts carry more emotional significance than their makeshift form might initially suggest. *Jimmy Mezei* explores this bitter-sweet emotion in watercolors that pay tribute to the memory of his wife's father and the loft space he created with his family. *Simone Kaplan-Senchak* also takes up the personal significance that self-created spaces can hold, in her piece on a woodworking shop that her father converted and built to precisely fit her family.

Lofts can be spaces of intense creative energy and collaboration, as artists *Ericka Beckman* and *Marguerite Horberg* discuss in interviews on their work. Converted commercial spaces have served as

havens for female artists and others whose work is outside the norms of high fashion and studio art. In cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, informal live-work spaces have allowed room for experimentation and provided a place outside of the standard gallery and concert scenes in which to share art with a wider audience.

For those able to overcome the dangers and difficulties, these living spaces can provide the means to pursue a lifestyle not wholly focused on profit. This concept is exemplified by *William Powhida*, whose work *The Yellow Building* documents a collective effort to create artistic space that chips away at capitalist property ownership, rather than reinforcing it. Design studio *Palacit* pushes this concept to its extreme in a satirical piece imagining the artistic reuse of foreclosed luxury homes. Architecture firm *MOS* presents a proposal for affordable live-work space that is not ideologically limited to artists.

Yet lofts also serve to reinforce the profit model of property ownership, often against their tenants' wishes. In a piece on the political and media response to the Ghost Ship fire, *Jaime Omar Yassin* explores how similar low-income event and living spaces were neglected in the response effort, which treated the tragedy as an isolated incident. The ability to push back against official crackdown on creative spaces is a luxury that other low-income residents—often people of color living in the very same neighborhoods—don't have. *Bernd Upmeyer* also considers how low-rent commercial space shuts out squatters and others at the margins of society, while reaching toward a vision of the benefits that widespread collective property ownership could provide.

Cultural narratives of loft living elucidate the creative class's often fraught relationship with these harsh realities. Editor *Nolan Boomer* examines these contradictions in an essay on *Chris Kraus's* short film *How to Shoot a Crime* (1987), a meditation on crime and sadomasochism that centers on a loft in the gentrifying neighborhood of the South Street Seaport. Finally, a booklist compiled by *Sam Winks* provides suggestions for further reading on both the history of loft living and the practical tools that go into building such spaces.

In 1982, sociologist Sharon Zukin asked of New York City lofts, “What social forces benefit from the rise of the loft market?” Zukin's concerns lay with the evolution of the loft: once serving local manufacturers, later converted cheaply by artists into live-work space, and in some cases further remodeled into luxury real estate. Lofts provide affordable housing and often serve as a respite from the profit-driven real estate market. Simultaneously, they can be co-opted by property developers and local officials to justify rising rents and increased policing in newly “safe,” “artistic,” and desirable neighborhoods. In this issue, we present all of these factors side by side, seeing them not as contradictions, but as essential components of how such spaces function.

—Julia Goodman & Nolan Boomer

Editors: *Nolan Boomer and Julia Goodman*
Art and Layout Editor: *Sean Suchara*
Editor-at-Large: *Cole Cataneo*
Proofreader: *Jenny Florence*
Fact-Checkers: *Julian Geltman and Alec Mapes-Frances*

Visit us online at takeshapemag.com

© 2017 Take Shape

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

Take Shape is distributed in partnership with:
Other Forms
330 West Diversey Parkway, #505
Chicago, IL 60657

Risograph printed and bound by:
Keegan Mills Cooke in New York, NY

Paper from:
French Paper Company in Niles, MI

Questions, comments, concerns, smut, collaboration opportunities, assistance offers, angry letters, and heartfelt praises should be addressed to: takeshapemag@gmail.com

Safety Tips for DIY Living

by the Editors

Pg. 4

RECONSTRUCTION:

Makeshift Place

by Jimmy Mezei

Pg. 8

Ode to the General Contractor

by Simone Kaplan-Senchak

Pg. 12

WAY, SHAPE, OR FORM:

Lutz — Proposal for a New Suburbanism

by Palacit

Pg. 18

Housing No. 07 (Affordable Artist Housing, Studios, and Maker Space)

by MOS Architects

Pg. 23

Revisiting William Powhida's *The Yellow Building*

by the Editors

Pg. 28

INTERVIEWS:

Chosen Collaborators: A Conversation with Ericka Beckman

by Cole Cataneo

Pg. 34

Fashion in the Streets: A Conversation with Marguerite Horberg

by Rebecca Zorach

Pg. 42

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE:

No Place For Artists: Housing Policy In the Wake of Ghost Ship

by Jaime Omar Yassin

Pg. 50

We're at War: Living Under the New York City Loft Law

by Julia Goodman

Pg. 58

Beyond Antikraak: The Limits of Urban Property Ownership

by Bernd Upmeyer

Pg. 65

Murder Play: Reading Pain in Chris Kraus's *How to Shoot a Crime*

by Nolan Boomer

Pg. 71

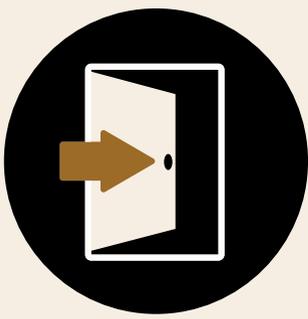
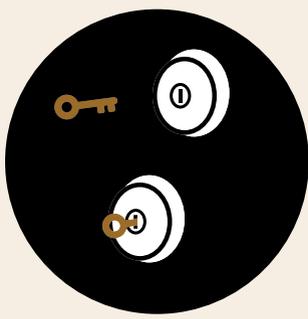
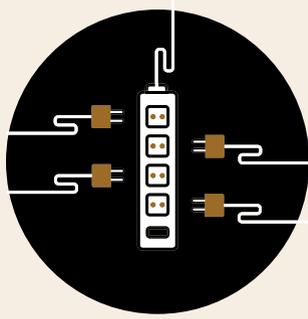
Self-Determination Bookshelf

by Sam Winks

Pg. 76

Safety Tips for DIY Living

by the Editors
Illustrations by Kayla E.

1.	2.	3.	4.		5.	6.	7.	8.
								
<p>Make sure doors swing freely away from you as you move toward the building exit. Reorient hinges as necessary. Doors need to move in the direction of egress, or total exit from both the building and any surrounding constraints such as exterior fences. For example, a door that opens to the outdoors, but into an enclosed courtyard, does not count as true egress. Remove objects and debris from doorways and exit pathways. Exit signs should also point in the direction of egress.</p>	<p>On interior non-exit doors, there should be no locks that require keys to unlock from both sides. These should be replaced with exit deadbolt locks, which require a key on the exterior or hall side, but can be unlocked by hand from inside the room with a latch. These cost approximately thirty dollars each.</p>	<p>Make sure your electrical wiring is properly grounded and attached to breakers, and connect your electronics to surge-protected power strips. Don't use unknown materials for construction, insulation, or soundproofing, as these are often flammable. When possible, consult with a building expert about which materials are safest to build with.</p>	<p>Obtain and install functional smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. These should be placed thirty feet apart in common areas, and there should be one in each enclosed room.</p>		<p>Obtain, install, and clearly label non-expired fire extinguishers, which should be placed seventy-five feet apart in common areas. If your space has enclosed studios or bedrooms, include a fire extinguisher in each. Check the fire extinguishers annually: verify pressure is in the green area on the dial, and make sure there are no obstructions in the nozzle. A multi-purpose fire extinguisher labeled for type A, B, and C fires will cover many types of fires (paper, oil, electric) and costs approximately fifty-five dollars. If you have specific risky conditions, such as flammable material or complex electrical wiring, place the appropriate extinguisher nearby. Have fire extinguishers professionally serviced annually, and replace them if they have been used or damaged.</p>	<p>Don't allow smoking, candles, or other open flames indoors. Suggest alternatives for smokers, such as outdoor smoking areas. Make visitors aware of these rules as efficiently as possible, especially during parties and other large gatherings—for example, by posting No Smoking signs in common areas.</p>	<p>Clearly mark wheelchair ramps and accessible exit routes. If your building lacks these accommodations and it's not possible to add them, have a plan for how to help wheelchair users and others with limited mobility, vision, or hearing in an emergency. Train building residents on safety techniques, such as the "fireman's carry," which allows them to carry someone heavier or larger than they are.</p>	<p>Seek out community support from contractors, electricians, plumbers, architects, and other professionals whom you can consult without involving city officials or others who may pose a legal threat to your space. Offer an exchange rate based on what you can afford and what they are willing to give. For example, you might organize a fundraiser to compensate community members for their expertise. If possible, have experts present when working on construction, but if this is not possible, make sure you understand how to build safely before starting any unsupervised projects.</p>

Following the fire at the artist collective Ghost Ship on December 2, 2016, architects S. Surface and Melissa J. Frost put out calls for information that would make DIY spaces safer. Frost developed the website *saferspac.es*, a resource compiling building assistance calls, legal advocacy, and news for DIY spaces around the US. Surface developed the Google Doc "DIY Venue Harm Reduction," a sprawling crowdsourced guide with pragmatic safety tips for DIY venues and housing.

The tips below are adapted from Surface's Google Doc, which were compiled by a variety of contributors. We've chosen tips that are relatively accessible and applicable to a wide range of industrial reuse living spaces. Ken Koense, a building professional in Minneapolis, fact-checked these suggestions, and he notes that there are many design professionals, himself included, who are willing to assist the DIY community with little to no fee.



RECON- STRUC- TION



Makeshift



Place

by Jimmy Mezei

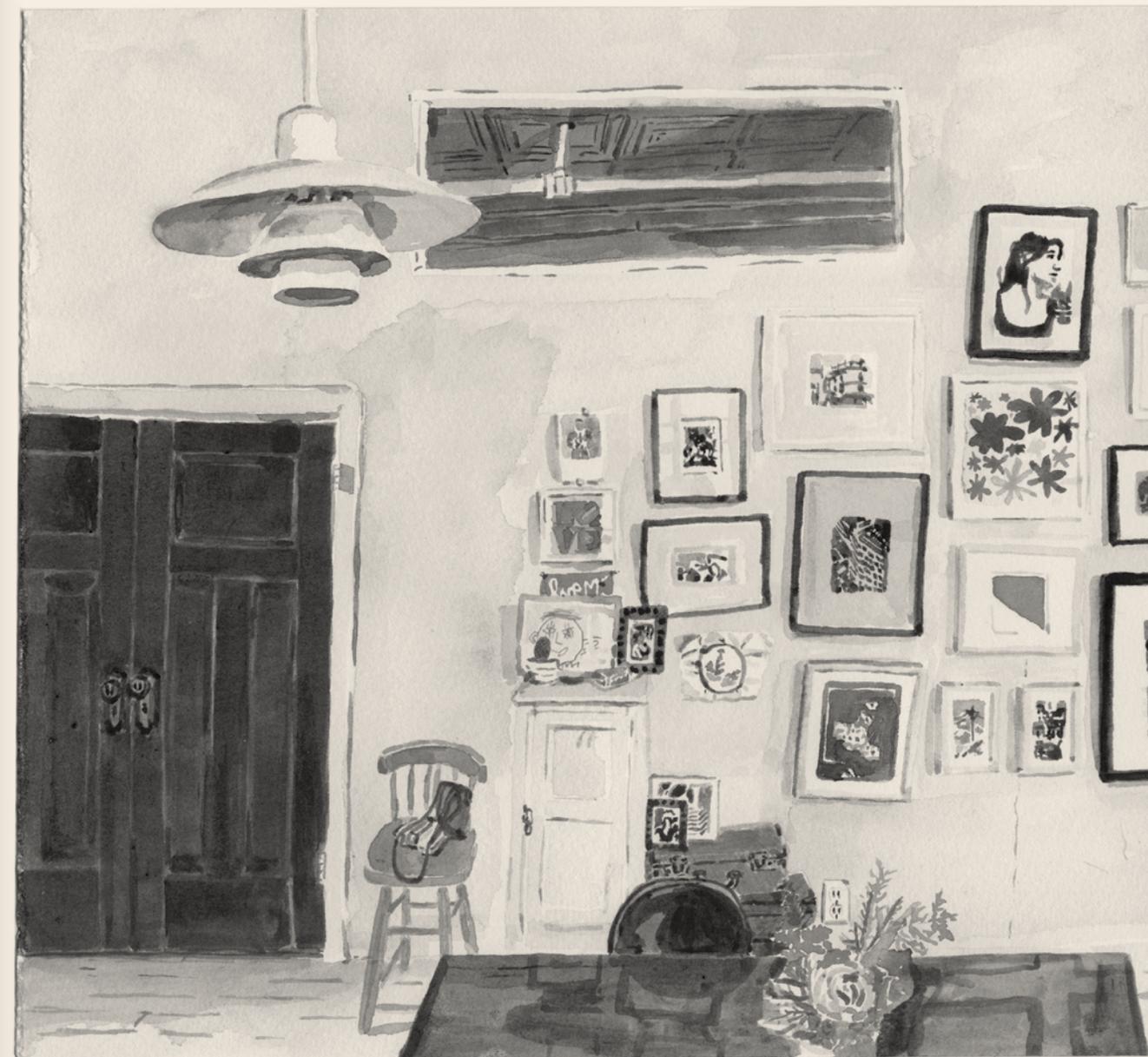
This series focuses on a loft that has become a big part of my life. It's the loft where my wife was raised, and where we cared for her ailing father, who was an artist and a mentor to me. He was first discovered by Henry Geldzahler and began showing his work in the late 1980s. He and his wife moved into the loft at a time when New York City was offering these spaces to artists at a reduced, rent-controlled rate. Up until his death, the loft served as the quintessential live-work space.

Early in our relationship, my wife and I would often visit her father there. Through his incredible library, he introduced me to countless influential artists and designers. When he developed a terminal form of brain cancer shortly after my wife and I were married, we moved in with him and the space became much more than a unique and beautiful apartment.

I can recall a lot of hard times there, peppered with a few lovely moments. Whenever we would spend time painting watercolors together, I would try to coerce him into regaling me with stories about his days as a painter in the '80s. He was hesitant to talk about the "glory days," and instead would direct me to his books as a way to pass on an appreciation for painting.

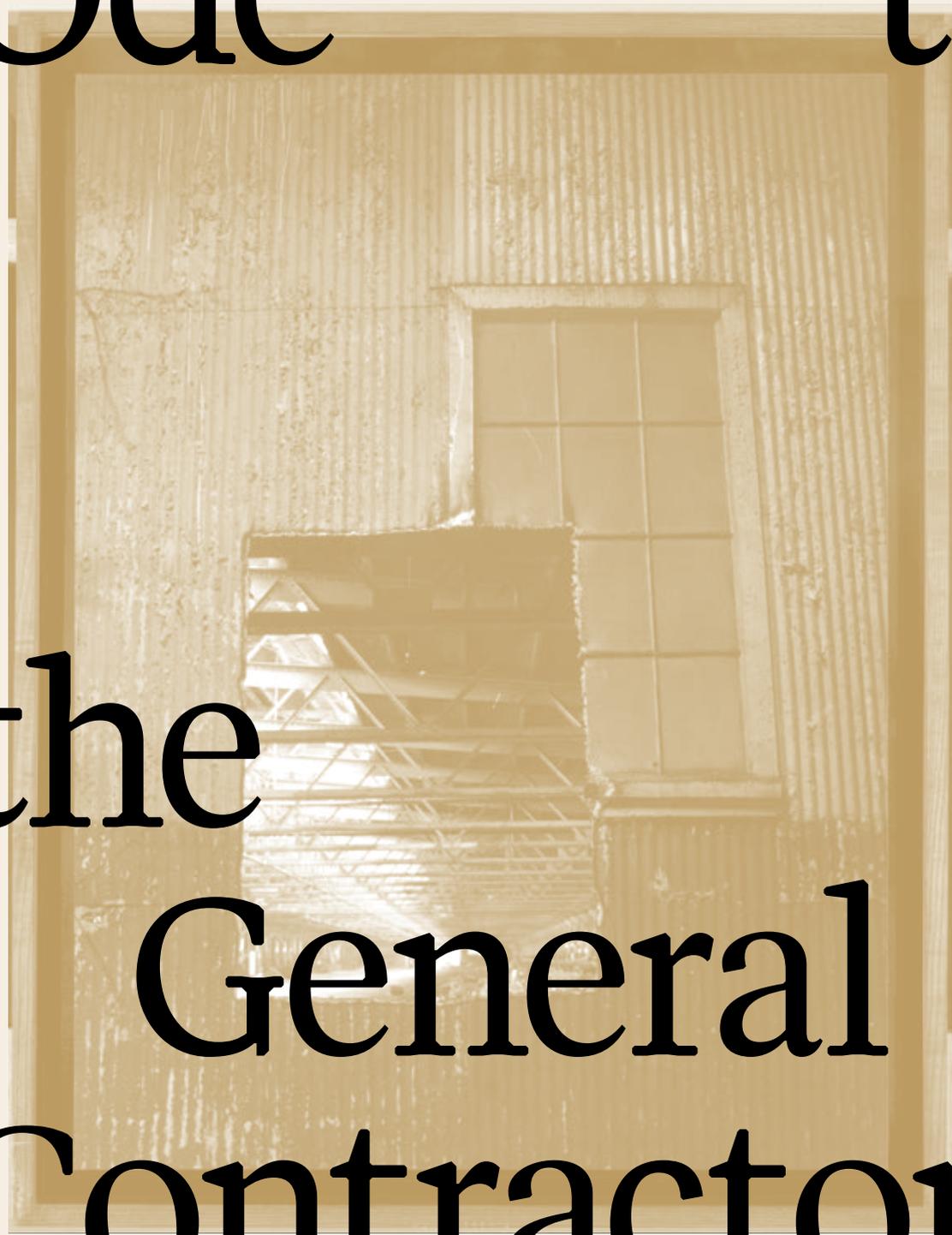
When I make pieces depicting this loft, I am hoping to capture the mood that comes over me when I'm back in the space, to represent all that it holds for me. It is bright and open, rare in that it has a skylight and windows on three sides of its thousand square feet. A soft roar of cars and crowds from Broadway comes up ceaselessly through the front windows. As is the case for most New York apartments, it is run down, but it has been cared for lovingly.

My father-in-law's handiwork is all over the loft: custom cabinets, hand-made lamps, shimmed floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, a charming salon wall of beautiful work both collected and created, a hand-tiled split bathroom (sink and toilet in one room, bathtub in the other), and only one closed-off room with walls that reach the ceiling. There are fewer and fewer spaces like this left in the city—spaces that are at once studio and home, battered and beloved. Painting this space allows me to treasure and preserve it.



Ode to the General Contractor

by Simone Kaplan-Senchak



Known for his site-specific and architecturally informed interventions into the urban landscape, Gordon Matta-Clark is discussed primarily as a visual artist, as well as an influential member of SoHo's artistic community in the 1970s. Pieces such as *Splitting* (1974), in which he bisected a house in Englewood, New Jersey, and *Pier In/Out* (1973), where he cut a large rectangular hole through Pier 14 in Manhattan, are examples of the literal way in which Matta-Clark investigated architectural space through extraction. With such pieces, Matta-Clark provoked attention to binary concepts of construction and destruction, architectural representation and ephemerality, and urban decay and renewal. The destructive quality of these pieces acted in part as an explicit attack on the field of architecture (his prior area of study), as well as a phenomenological exploration of the built environment and the right to city space. His larger conception of "anarchitecture," through which he rethought the potential of underutilized or forgotten structures, was in clear conversation with the community he had joined—a forgotten neighborhood in Manhattan, in which vacant space led to subversions of real estate, as well as meaningful and unexpected social growth.

SoHo was a near-abandoned light industrial area when Matta-Clark left his studies at Cornell University and moved from Ithaca to New York City in 1969.

Manufacturing had been declining since the end of WWII, as the textile industry moved overseas, and the neighborhood emptied out rapidly after that. The increasing obsolescence of the nineteenth-century cast-iron buildings for industrial purposes, the impending general depression of the city, white flight,

and the looming threat of Robert Moses's ten-lane expressway LOMEX, all helped lead to a situation that left SoHo virtually abandoned. As early as the 1950s, artists saw this new climate as an opportunity to take advantage of cheap rent and large spaces. With each coming decade, the community continued to grow organically, reaching a pinnacle during the late 1960s and 1970s, just as Matta-Clark arrived.

Matta-Clark was interested not only in the destabilization of architecture, but also in its interaction with his surrounding downtown community. The most explicit iteration of this impulse was *A Resource Center and Environmental Youth Program for Loisaida* (1977), a program organized by Matta-Clark to support young people on the Lower East Side. The project, not yet fully realized at the point of his untimely death in 1978, sought to create a "network of commu-

Opposite:
Gordon Matta-Clark, *Pier In/Out*, 1973,
chromogenic print in artist's frame.
Image courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery,
Gift of Nancy and Robinson Grover, B.A. 1958, M.S.L. 1975.

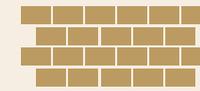
nity groups and individuals engaged in open space and rehab projects, sweat equity, community gardens, playlist, cultural events, alternative living structures, etc.,” according to a proposal draft. The program was pointedly practical—Matta-Clark wanted to teach building skills, such as carpentry, plumbing, and electricity, so that participants would gain renovation skills that could be used throughout the vacant lots and abandoned buildings that littered the neighborhood. *Loisaida* tested the potential of unused urban space as a stage for social programs and care, not only as a place for theoretical and aesthetic inquiry.

Loisaida presents a clear point of transition from destruction to construction in his work. As an extension of this idea, yet outside the conventional parameters of his oeuvre, Matta-Clark played an important, yet underexplored, dual role within his own SoHo neighborhood. As his art explored anarchitecture and deconstruction, he worked as a general contractor for fellow artists in his neighborhood. Indeed, it is through his background in architecture, construction, and renovation that he developed and honed many of the technical skills necessary for his artistic interventions. The most documented example of this is his role as designer and general contractor of FOOD, the restaurant he opened with Carol Goodden and Tina Girouard.

Yet, it is also the more mundane renovations of kitchens and bedrooms—in his own lofts on Chrystie Street, Wooster Street, and Fourth Street; his brother’s loft on Twelfth Street; work on Donald Judd’s now-memorialized building on Spring Street—that add to our understanding of Matta-Clark’s social role. In his role as contractor, he was responsible for much of the construction that made spaces livable, and that transformed vacancy into homes and studios. This was distinct from his artistic pursuits, which were not only less “practical,” but also uninterested in habitation.

From this view, his work may be seen more broadly may be seen not just as a geometric inquiry (intrusions in three-dimensional spaces), but also as a simpler algebraic equation between minus and plus: he added as many walls as he removed. It is a curious subversion of his artistic role, which questions the relationship between form and function, inquiry and utility, and the assessment of materiality: How does construction become art? This viewpoint requires us to consider how practical processes of renovation and quotidian gestures of placemaking through construction can fit into our understanding of his aesthetic practice—and of artistic processes more generally. Seen in this light, his collected work contains a fuller spectrum of the possibilities of empty space; it is a more thorough

reimagining of architecture and urban space than his artwork qua artwork immediately reveals. More broadly, it allows us to consider the ways in which the construction of SoHo cannot be untangled from the art that it allowed and witnessed, and that it itself represented.



Two decades later, and a couple blocks over, I grew up on Centre Street. When I was four and the rent became too high, we moved into a loft there from our apartment on Mulberry Street. My dad was a general contractor by profession. The new space was one half of the third floor in an old industrial building that once housed a sewing factory, which became his workshop and office. He first signed a lease in 1980, a time when the neighborhood, along with the city more widely, was poorer, emptier, and less patrolled. SoHo still held onto its last vestiges of industry alongside the developing artistic community, albeit his industry was the very one—renovation—that made the neighborhood more inhospitable to all industry. From our loft he organized countless renovations of downtown restaurants, uptown brownstones, luxury apartments, and other SoHo lofts.

I don’t recall when he began to renovate the space on Centre Street from a wood-

shop into our home. By the time we moved in, a complete transformation was in motion. Construction and renovation were constant throughout my childhood, and closely followed payments from completed jobs, the availability of friends and employees, and the appearance of leftover materials from worksites.

Every aspect of the apartment as it appears today was created for the unformed cavity of the space. No wall is flat, because every cabinet and door is built in, rendering the topography of each partition highly complex and unique. No wall repeats itself. Every cabinet is customized to the space it must fill. Each room has a sliding door in (still-unfinished) wood, most likely cut on site. Every shelf of every cabinet was measured to fit the space provided, each piece of wood individually cut, and each metal finish cut and glued afterward, then slid into position. There are hidden storage spaces that snake around the ceiling of each room, split into even sections that create new vertical vectors. My childhood bed, created to enclose a cut sheet of foam, is now too small for any adult to comfortably adapt to. It was carved out of a wall into a sheetrock cocoon made precisely for my small body. The fridge fits snugly into a cubicle that was constructed just for its form—a loving and protective touch for an appliance.

In the middle of the living room, a square, chunky depression remains—

a stubborn material reminder of where the table saw once had prominence, a tripping hazard that memorializes the past function of the apartment.

These small details abound, and seem to be persistently discoverable. The once open loft has become a complex material geometry, the blueprint of which twists and turns sharply and precisely. It's as if the space transcribes a chain of permutations of the functions of barriers—in how many ways can one utilize a floor, wall, or ceiling? It's a chain of permutations that exists only for this space, that would not and will not be replicated elsewhere.



Living room in the early '90s, shelves still in progress.



Main room before the conversion, with central table saw, sometime in the '80s.



When our lease is up in three years, the landlord has indicated that he will not renew. There were never more than three or four families living in the building, but now there are only two. The community that Matta-Clark helped to build has virtually disappeared, and the socioeconomic consequences of unregulated capitalism have washed over SoHo. The construction that provoked placemaking, in a child's home and in a neighborhood, allowed for another,

more insidious type of place to grow. But within an individual apartment, or even a building, a few strong, hidden traces can still be found. They are just quieter, away from view, living in walls and partitions, floating doorframes, and fridge cubicles. Renovation can hopefully function, from that view, as a sneakily hopeful motif—a way in which to remember the multiple methods by which space may be claimed, art may be allowed, and communities may rebuild. 

WAY,
,
SHAPE,

OR
FORM

Lutz— Proposal for a New Suburbanism

Lutz represents a new strategy of suburban development that reverses the prototypical urban gentrification pattern.

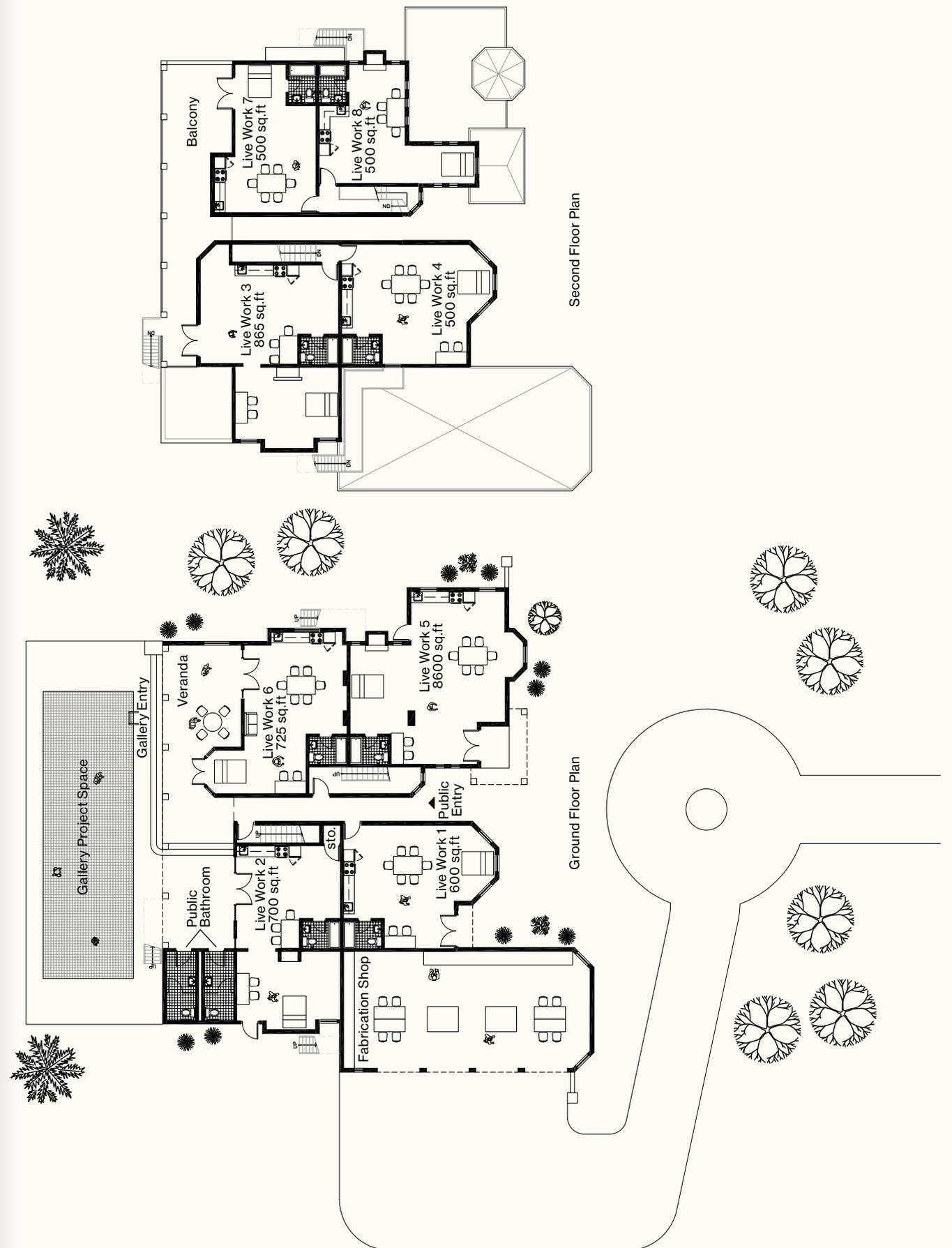
by Palacit

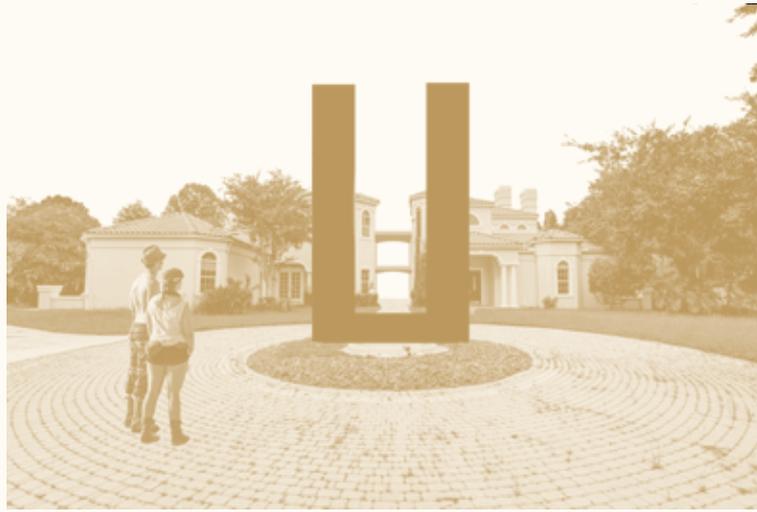


When luxury homes throughout the US were foreclosed following the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis, they became symbols of irresponsible market speculation and runaway consumerism. Because most of these homes are enormous, extravagant, and poorly built, the banks that now own them cannot resell them. Relics of misguided values, these homes were abandoned, adding to the cultural vacuum of low-density areas.

Lutz, a repurposed site of luxury homes located in Florida, cleaves the notion of the ideal suburban home in half. Located at the end of a cul-de-sac and surrounded by a golf course waterway, Lutz is an oasis of culture. Its lavish bedrooms, living rooms, kitchens, and dining spaces are converted into eight live-work spaces, each with a separate entrance. The four-car garage becomes an 850-square-foot fabrication shop. In front, a monolithic inverted archway replaces the typical ornamental fountain, framing the gap between the split sides of the house, which are connected by elevated walkways. Through this split is a multipurpose event space and exhibition venue, converted from a glass-enclosed swimming pool atrium. This entrance dramatically welcomes visitors to the public space, while also preserving the residents' privacy.

Lutz proposes the redevelopment of these properties by following the lead of artists who reuse industrial space. The palace is carved up and redistributed to a community of people who are free to modify it to their needs. In turn, they conduct maintenance, pay taxes for its infrastructural upkeep, and provide the community with an arts venue. What began as an abandoned community becomes a squat, eventually turning into a hub of thriving cultural production. This is not urban planning; it is a template for guerrilla development. Artists no longer oil the machine of speculation and consumption. Rather, they become agents of cultural production and community building.





**Housing No.07
(Affordable Artist
Housing, Studios,
and Maker Space)**

**by MOS
Architects**

This piece is only available in print.

Revisiting William Powhida's *The Yellow Building*

Originally conceived in 2013 out of William Powhida's conversations with artists, activists, developers, and academics, *The Yellow Building* proposes a collective property ownership model for live-work spaces. Powhida began to develop the idea after attending community meetings in Bushwick addressing rising rent and artists' displacement. He and others found these meetings to be lacking in context—they not only failed to focus on a broader structural critique of gentrification, but also lacked any engagement with other low-income members of the community who had been living in the neighborhood for even longer.

Powhida formed a group with artists Jules de Balincourt, Shawn Gallagher, Paddy Johnson, and Lynn Sullivan, along with several others who contributed at different points. This group aimed to address the lack of affordable housing in the area, while simultaneously taking a critical position against the ways in which mostly white, educated artists could be complicit in the displacement of low-income residents. *The Yellow Building* seeks to provide studio space to artists at a fixed price, use rent profits for building up keep and rent subsidies, and provide ground-floor retail and event space to community organizations. Powhida's information-packed drawing swiftly lays out the terms of the proposal, contextualizes itself, and mocks its critics.

—the Editors

THE FOLLOWING OPINIONS ARE MY OWN UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE. IT'S MY FAULT.

THE INSTIGATOR
wants to start an organization bringing Bushwick artists together to form a collective of sorts in which artists buy buildings together in order to prevent what happened in Williamsburg - sick of seeing my friends get kicked out of the Wick!

Jules de Balincourt
KICKED OFF A PUBLIC DISCUSSION ON HIS FACEBOOK PAGE
WHERE I SHARED A LINK TO A GOOGLE DOC ABOUT THIS IDEA
WHICH ART CITY COVERED...

THE STATUS QUO
IS FOR ARTISTS TO PAY WHAT THEY CAN FOR HOWEVER LONG THEY CAN'T AND MOVE ON LOOKING FOR SPACE WHEREVER THEY FIND IT.

THE BLOGGER
WHAT WAS INTERESTING IS THAT ONE OF THE THINGS THAT HE SAID WAS THAT HE'D HEARD ABOUT A PROBLEM THAT WAS ABOUT FOUR YEARS OUT OF A HUNDRED KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS? THERE'S A JOB WE CAN DO TO GO POWER UP OUR CITY.

Paddy Johnson
WHO GOT INVOLVED IN PLANNING A TOWN-HALL MEETING WITH US AND

THE ARTIST
The main focus of what we're doing here is the production of cultural workspace. We are trying to create a bit more security for people who live very precarious lives.

LYNN SULLIVAN
WHO IS DEVELOPING A PROPERTY RESOURCE AND A GOAL FOR THE PUBLIC AND WANT TO HELP THE BUILDING HELPING CO-ORGANIZE OUR GROUP

SMAWN
AND NEW PEOPLE AND MISSION FOR HELPING CO-ORGANIZE OUR GROUP

ILLUSTRATED
WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE? IT WON'T BE EASY, BUT HAD THAT TO SAY, IT'S IRONIC BECAUSE THAT'S ONE MAJOR F'N THING THIS IDEA IS TRYING TO

EXCEPT IT CAN ALL JUST BE REDUCED TO "GENTRIFYING ARTISTS WHINE ABOUT GENTRIFICATION" ANOTHER CRITIC

Art John
BUYING NOW IS A SMART MOVE FOR ARTISTS LOOKING FOR AFFORDABLE STUDIO SPACE, BUT TO ACT AS IF ARTISTS SPECIFICALLY, COLLEGE-EDUCATED, YOUNG ADULTS ARE VULNERABLE TO BEING DISPLACED BY THE PROBLEM IS DELUSION AND PEOPLE WHO ARE TRYING TO HELP THEM ALSO RESPOND WITH SLIGHTLY MORE NUANCE THAN THE HEADLINE.

FOOTNOTES: THERE ARE SOME FACTS HERE OR THERE
1. JULES DE BALINCOURT'S FACEBOOK PAGE JUNE 8, 2013 2. IT IS A SYSTEMIC PROBLEM VALUE OR EQUITY WILL BE USED TO BUY ANOTHER BUILDING AND EXPAND
3. JOURNALIST WHO BREATHES LIFE INTO GRITTY NEIGHBORHOODS
4. HALLER, VERA, IN BUSHWICK ARTISTS TRY TO REWRITE GENTRIFICATION'S USUAL STORY, AUG 17, 2013
5. POWHIDA, WILLIAM, THE YELLOW BUILDING, PUBLISHED MAY 19 2013 AND WRITTEN IN JUNE OF 2012.
6. PROPOSAL TO THE KNAN, INTERVIEW: PADDY JOHNSON, THE BARNHART BLOG, COM, SEP 2013 7. HALLER'S ARTICLE
8. VESLEY, KIM, CROWN HEIGHTS VS. BUSHWICK: WHOSE GENTRIFICATION FIRST IS MORE FUTILE? THE NEW YORK TIMES, AUG. 2ND, 2013
9. UNTIL ITS LEGAL AUTHORITY IS INVALIDATED LIKE THE BARNHART FOUNDATION OR NO ARTIST TYPES WANT TO RENT, THEN IT'S JUST OVER.

ENVISION NYC 2017

1

2

3

THE YELLOW BUILDING

IS AN IDEA WHERE ARTISTS TRY TO BECOME THEIR OWN LANDLORDS AND STEWARDS OF THE SPACE INSTEAD OF INDIVIDUAL OWNERS... IT'S NOT ABOUT CASHING OUT ON THE PROCESS OF GENTRIFICATION² "The problem is, it is mostly the new arrivals, and people who bought into the community early who reap the benefit of the change"³

PROPERTY OWNERS RAISING RENTS
BECAUSE IT'S IN THEIR SELF-INTEREST TO, CAPITALIS

start an
on bringing
tists together
lective of
ch artists
gs together
prevent
ened in
g... Sick of
rends get
of the Wick!¹

OR
LI
BU
CR
WO
"EIT
RES
US
WH
NE

THE STATUS QUO

BECAUSE IT'S IN THEIR SELF-INTEREST TO, CAPITALIS

IS FOR ARTISTS TO PAY WHAT THEY CAN FOR HOWEVER LONG THEY CAN UNTIL THEY CAN'T AND MOVE ON LOOKING FOR SPACE WHEREVER THEY FIND IT.

LOTS OF ARTISTS

START

PAY

PAY

GET PAID

NO MORE ARTISTS

END

INVEST

A LANDLORD SELL'S THE BUILDING TO CONDOS

SOME DEVELOPERS WHO MAKE fancy TO CONDOS

MAKE ART IN OLD SPACES AND LIVE SOMEWHERE ELSE

RICH PEOPLE MOVE IN- TO BRAND NEW APTS AND WORK SOMEWHERE ELSE TO PAY HIGHER RENTS AND MORTGAGES ... AND TAXES AND FEES

THEN THE NEIGHBORHOOD GETS FANCIER AND MORE POOR PEOPLE 'MOVE ON' TO AND ARE REPLACED BY WEALTHIER PEOPLE WHO CAN... BUY PROPERTY.

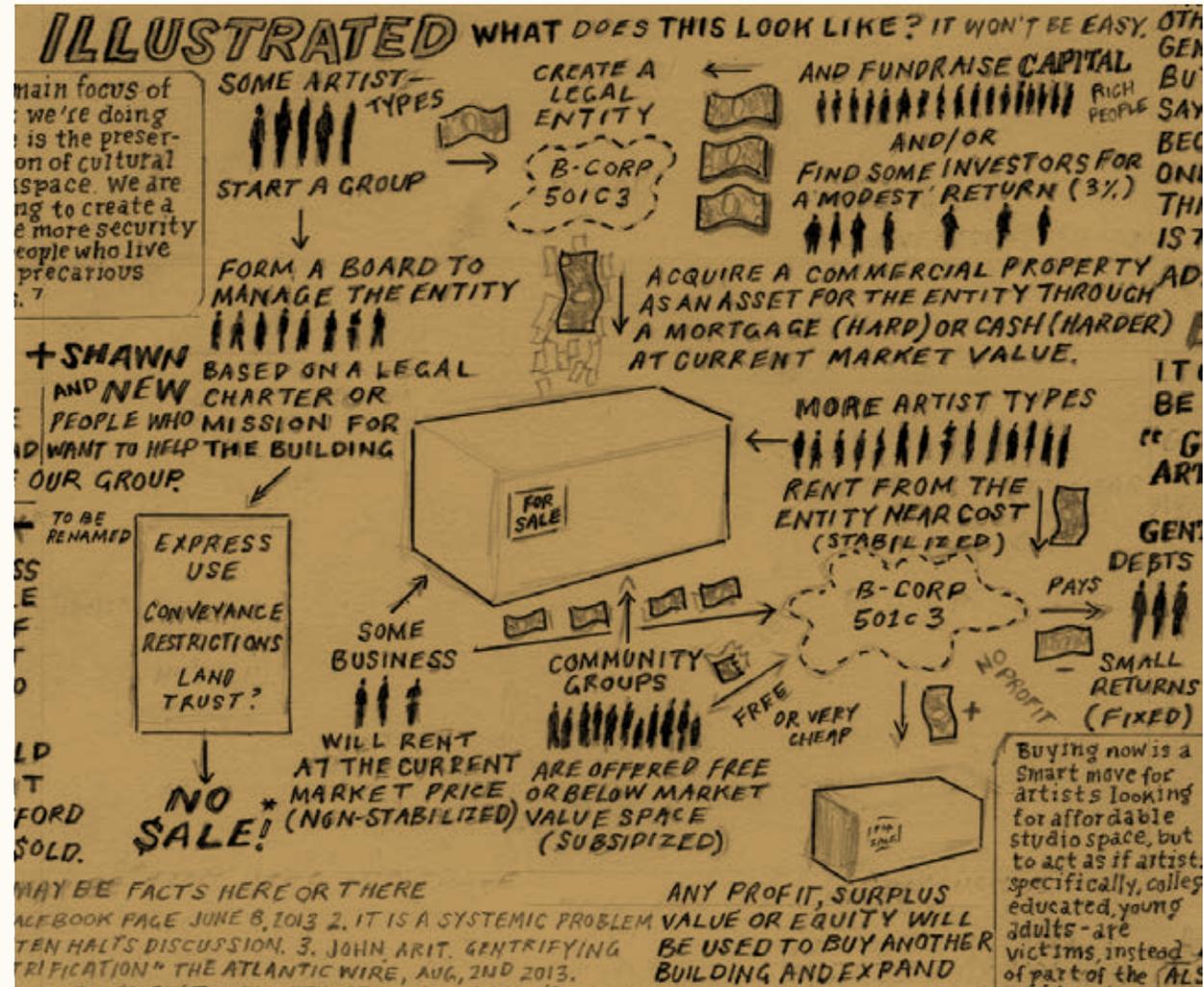
5000000000...

PROPOSAL

IS TO CREATE A PLAN FOR ARTISTS TO BUY A COMMERCIAL PROPERTY AS A TRUST OR CORPORATION THAT WOULD HOLD THE BUILDING IN PERPETUITY AS STUDIO SPACE.

THIS POSES A STEWARDSHIP MODEL BASED ON COLLECTIVE NEED WITHIN THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM. PRIVATE PROPERTY AND OWNERSHIP ARE NOT ABOLISHED, BUT... MODIFIED TO PROVIDE A WAY AROUND THE DECISIONS OF A SINGLE OWNER... THE BASIC PREMISE IS TO CREATE AN ENTITY THAT WOULD AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE ALLOW THE BUILDING TO OWN ITSELF TO ORIENT OWNERSHIP AWAY FROM THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE PROFIT MOTIVE.⁵

It is also unlikely to a long-term solution, given that there would be no way to stop the artists - or their descendants - from selling the studios at market rate in the future.⁸



INTER-



VIEWS

Chosen Collaborators

A Conversation with Ericka Beckman

by
Cole Cataneo

Ericka Beckman is a visual artist, media maker, and educator whose inventive filmmaking approach has been developed between St. Louis, Los Angeles, and New York City. Since 1990 she has served on the faculty at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. Known for her precise in-camera animations, Beckman creates analog and digital works that have been praised for their distinctive aesthetic, comprised of brightly colored geometries, playful costumes, and stark landscapes. In today's context, Beckman's films are more relevant than ever, as they address a wide array of topics ranging from game theory to global capitalism to St. Louis's historic low-income housing blight. After finishing her undergraduate education in the mid-1970s, Beckman has lived and worked on both coasts. In this conversation, Beckman discusses how her practice has been informed by her surroundings, and how her perspective has changed as one of the few artists who has managed to hold on to her space in Lower Manhattan.





Left:
Ericka Beckman, *Game Mechanics*, installation view, *You the Better Expanded Studies 1-3*, Secession 2017.
Photo: Iris Ranzinger.

Previous Page:
Ericka Beckman, *You the Better*, film installation, 1983/2015, Secession 2017. Photo: Iris Ranzinger.

Cole Cataneo:

After finishing your bachelor's degree at Washington University in 1974, what made you want to come to New York? What was going on at that time?

Ericka Beckman:

When I first moved to New York, I went to the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program and lived on the corner of Grand Street and Green Street in Jack Smith's old loft. It had electricity but no heat. I survived the winter with two former CalArts classmates in sleeping bags and with the help of space heaters. That lasted one winter, and then I sublet Michael Heizer's loft on West Broadway during the summer of the 1977 NYC blackout. Finally, I got enough money together to pay a "fixture fee" to someone who was getting out of their lease. They were leaving their loft on Thames Street and I bought it for a thousand dollars from the tenant. They claimed that the price was based on what it cost them to fix it up. It was formerly David Hykes's studio. Julia Heyward, William Wegman, and Philip Glass also lived there. It was a kind of downtown art scene—respectable, large brick building with lots of square footage. We all knew each other. I was there for one month and then it burned down to the ground in January of 1978. I was offered

a respite in an art lawyer's loft on Mercer Street. He was one of the first professional people to move into SoHo. A film crew came in the second week to make a movie with Richard Hell; Bianca Jagger was present. I thought this was a fitting symbol for me. I was trying to recover, from memory, the conceptual outline of a film that had just been destroyed in a fire, while this very well-financed indie film about punk music scenes was shot in the same space. At that point, I decided to move to Los Angeles where I was offered work and where I knew I could rent a cheap studio.

CC:

Can you talk about the differences working and living in LA versus New York in the late seventies? In LA, did most people live in apartments and have studio space elsewhere?

EB:

Most people lived in very cheap East Hollywood apartments near the city or the Los Feliz area. If they needed studio space, which a lot of people did, they would rent little garage or industrial spaces and convert them. Usually people didn't live in them because they were not outfitted that way. I made my first film in the Super-8 Trilogy

when I moved to Laurie Anderson's studio in LA. She had just left her teaching position there. It was a very typical, small retail space that had a kitchen and a bathroom. It was typical stucco Spanish architecture that looked like a tiny mall on the side of the street with about twelve units stacked in an architectural pattern. I rented one of those. Basically, many LA artists used these small retail or manufacturing units that faced the street, or had entrances from a parking lot in the rear. But to talk about lofts, you have to really talk about living in Downtown LA. When I was in graduate school before 1980, I rented a quadrant of a gigantic four-thousand-square-foot space for something like forty dollars a month. I literally had to drive my car through a gate into a back parking lot because you couldn't park on the street. You couldn't even walk on the street at night because it was too dangerous. That was pretty scary. Then when I moved back to teach in 1985, that whole scene had changed. It boomed in the 1990s, but there were very few artists before 1985.

CC:

As someone who has been practicing art for as long as you have, especially as a media maker, I'm wondering how integral these spaces have been to your practice. How have they been able to accommodate you as an artist?

EB:

Back then, to be able to live in a loft and work in it wasn't thought of as a luxury. The scale of my productions required me to build all of my own sets and props. I used the loft as a shop for production and shot my films and recorded audio there. I would pretty much do everything there, including publicity. I would house people overnight from the suburbs or Brooklyn who came to

help me. Without a loft there's no way I could have done what I've done, there is no way Julia Heyward could have done what she has done. She and I thought about sharing sound and lighting studios in the building, but we weren't connected by elevator or hallway, so it didn't work. It was really a practical solution. For me, I took the darkest and largest area in the building in order to have the most work space. Dark was important to me because I was working with multiple exposures on exposed film. I wanted to have as much control over lighting as I possibly could. It was integral. It's the same as saying that drawing is integral to animation. Having a space like that was necessary for my creative production because I was like an incubator, I was trying to work out ideas that didn't need much collaboration from other sources, and I didn't really need to leave the studio. I just needed to be in my studio to do the work. The economics allowed me to make film. The rent started at \$278 a month and I had a ten-year lease. There was no affordable equipment rental or lighting studio option at the time. It was economical; I wouldn't have been able to make media if I didn't have a home studio.

CC:

Often when I've heard you speak about your work, you refer to your process as one that involves "black space." Had you been making films utilizing that process before you moved into a loft, or was it born out of your environment?

EB:

I started making that work in graduate school, and when I went to the Whitney's Independent Study Program, I used black wallpaper and black curtains. There wasn't a moment that I thought of doing anything differently. I wanted to ani-

mate and do live action in the frame. I wanted to combine different time stamps in the same frame, things moving at different times and different rates, interacting. The collaging that everyone now does with Adobe After Effects, I had to do by hand. I had to have the black space. I figured that out in graduate school.



Ericka Beckman, *Tension Building*, 2016, Secession 2017. Photo: Iris Ranzinger.

EB: There weren't that many people that did shows out of their lofts. I know that Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine did. There was a whole sub-spectrum of the art world devoted solely to putting on shows in alternative non-profit spaces and short-term spaces. The city provided very reduced rents, something like a dollar a month for a floor, if you would hold cultural events in it. They would receive a write-off or tax incentive if they dedicated parts of abandoned buildings to cultural projects. You would always hear, "Oh, there is a show at 94 Reed Street, second floor loft," or this place, or that place. They were mostly organized by artists or curators who were trying to figure out how to produce art shows. Some of those became legitimate spaces that went on to have consistent programming. When you are talking about an era where everything was very DIY, you had a lot of support in the community for alternative work, but never got written about. Very seldom would you ever have a big gallerist come down and look at these shows, or come to the opening.

CC: It's interesting that the particular space you currently live in might have been the only one that enabled you to make that work. During the time when you and Julia started practicing in New York, instead of using storefronts, galleries, or other spaces that might not have been as open to female artists, was there something that felt radical or maybe even safe about practicing and performing in personal dwellings as opposed to more formalized locations?

CC: Do you think that your decision and the necessity to work and live in your loft had anything to do with your gender identity? Film studios or carpentry shops often have the reputation of being male-dominated, even today—is that something that you were taking into account at the time?

EB: Julia and I had these talks about making new media, and when I say "new media," it isn't digital or internet media. We wanted to be free enough to make our own productions the way that we wanted to make them. Again, this is some-

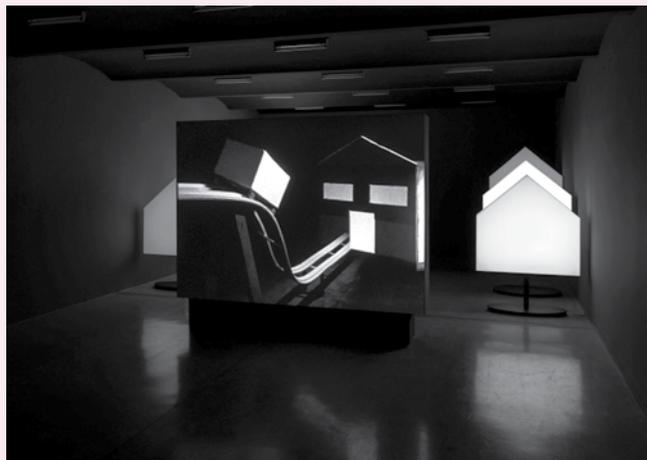


Ericka Beckman, *You the Better*, film installation, 1983/2015, Secession 2017. Photo: Iris Ranzinger.

thing that nearly everyone does now, at least those who are trying to make non-commercial content. Back then, if you had to pay for production facilities, you paid for a stream of production people who came with that space. If you rented a space to shoot in, you rented someone's lighting and that person had to be there. It wasn't that we were protecting ourselves from sexism or from the male-dominated world. We just didn't want to have any collaborators that weren't artistically chosen by us. That was pretty much it. It wasn't necessarily based on the fact that the art and production worlds were sexist; it was to keep a hold on my artistic control.

CC: It's interesting to hear that you saw it as a struggle to maintain your own artistic vision and voice.

EB: I really mean that. The feminist angle was more about realizing that the art world was hard to break into for women, especially for women of color. The possibility was so unheard of for someone like me, who made moving image work, that I never even thought about it. I shrugged it off, you know. I thought, forget about it, I'll do this other thing and see where it goes. Then the Lower East Side art market popped up and that brought a whole different



Ericka Beckman, *Tension Building*, 2016, Secession 2017. Photo: Iris Ranzinger.

range of new young curators on board. It opened a new wave of possibilities that a lot of people, including myself, took advantage of. In the first wave, the SoHo wave, we were all shut out.

CC:

I've noticed in your most recent work that the focus has shifted away from game theory or other themes you have addressed in the past, and that it has taken on a dystopic view of the built environment. I'm wondering if this transition is indicative of the fact that you are essentially being forced outside of the black box, or room, and into the city with your camera. To you, does this have anything to do with the fact that your living circumstances are in a state of turmoil, or have been?

EB:

It's a little bit of both. I feel the neighborhood has changed so much and that these structures are sort of bearing down on this sense of isolationism that I've spent so many years trying to protect. There is no way to be isolated anymore. The fact that our building's owner has filed a



Ericka Beckman, *You the Better Expanded Studies (3)*, 1984/2015, charcoal on paper, 42 x 58 inches.

demolition application makes it seem inevitable. The work that I do now responds to that sensation and the work that Julia does responds to it as well. She made a piece that played at MOMA for a week. It was an animated film that showed all of the movies that have been shot outside her window in Cortlandt Alley. I realize that the studio may not be here much longer; the past is gone and this is the present.

CC:

I know from working with you that some of your current projects are taking place outside of New York, and are addressing issues surrounding ephemerality in low-income housing, or more broadly, housing in general. Does part of you see it as a good thing that you're being forced to leave your space, and that most artists no longer have the ability to have a practice like the one you've been describing?

EB:

The difference is that the idea of community has changed drastically. It used to be so focused on neighborhoods. It used to be that I could easily tell you the difference between performance in the TriBeCa downtown area and performance in the Lower East Side. People pretty much figured out their identity based on the communities they practiced in, or what kind of community they were outside of. That conversation has become global, and even further, multi-generational. The idea of having a romantic loft to work in was something I realized was gone by 2000. It was gone in the minds of loft inhabitants. You couldn't think of it as permanent anymore. You have to respond to that in some way. If you don't own your own house, you can't feel very centered in that home. The Loft Law protected us in a way that made us feel a sense of ownership, because we could keep our studios with renewable leases at a controlled rent. If you look at what rent was in 1978 and consider inflation, it would still be considered livable. A lot of people thought that way and so did I. At this point, I have to rethink how I am going to live and make my work. How do I take the work that I incubated for a number of years and get it to perform in the world? That's what I am doing.

CC:

To end on a lighter note, is there any sort of experience, performance, or situation that sums up what the New York loft experience has been like for you?

EB:

I will tell you the quintessential loft story. I used to hang out with Paul McMahon at 135 Grand Street with an entourage of artists. We were a core group of people who are now referred to as the Pictures Generation. We would go to an art show on a Saturday, convene for a drink, and then on Sunday, Paul would have a "battle of the bands" at his loft, where we would all come over and have a cheap spaghetti dinner and wine or beer, and then perform. Bands would be made up of people who didn't know how to play, we would sing, we would play instruments, put on fake acts. For Paul, of course, it was a place for him to debut new songs he had written with his band called A Band. His loft with Nancy Chunn became a place where a lot of bands came together and would play with non-musicians, like me. For instance, I was in a band with Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, David Salle, and Eric Fischl. Eric sang, and Cindy, Barbara, and I were backup girls. That is the sort of thing that represents a gathering of people who would make work together and grow together. 🍷

Fashion in the Streets

A Conversation with Marguerite Horberg

by
Rebecca Zorach

Marguerite Horberg is best known in Chicago as the founder of HotHouse, a multicultural venue that hosted live music (especially avant-garde jazz and world music), exhibitions, cultural events, and activist meetings over the course of twenty years in Wicker Park and downtown Chicago, from 1987 to 2007. Before HotHouse, she was the proprietor of the Salon of Modalisque, a fashion boutique that sold vintage fashion and the work of young designers in a loft space in Wicker Park in the 1980s. There, Horberg hosted experimental work that broke down boundaries between fine art and craft and between the fashion runway and performance art, often spilling out into the streets. Most recently, Horberg has revived HotHouse and is planning to reopen it as a multidisciplinary campus serving as a “sanctuary for progressive culture.” In this interview with Rebecca Zorach, Horberg reflects on Modalisque, the relationships that made it possible, and the lost Chicago “outsider” cultures of hoboes, Rush Street bars, and the storied Maxwell Street Market.



Fashion Show in front of 616 West Adams, first annual Old St. Patrick's Block Party, 1984. Photograph by D. Shigley.

Rebecca Zorach:

How did Modalisque come about?

Marguerite Horberg:

In 1977, I decided to go around the world. I spent about three years mostly in Asia. It was a completely eye-opening experience. I was nineteen, and I found myself in Afghanistan about a month before the Soviets came into Afghanistan and in Iran about a month before the Shah was deposed. I drove from India to Paris with some Italian musicians. Being alone and being a woman and being nineteen, I sort of fashioned my own study of music, textiles, languages. When I came back to Chicago in 1979 or 1980, I had a huge culture shock.

I didn't really want to come back to the US. I came back just to see my family, and then I settled and got stuck a little bit. I was completely disoriented; I was wearing Afghan clothes, walking around Chicago barefoot. I got a job as a cocktail waitress at the jazz showcase in the basement of the Happy Medium club on Rush Street. And around that same time, I walked into a place called the Birdhouse on Lincoln Avenue, which was owned by the saxophone player Fred Anderson. When I walked in, Hamid Drake was there, so it was just the two of them and it was a night when no one else was in there, and I felt like I had met these kindred spirits. Hamid, especially, recognized me as being a disciple of their kind of music. We became very good friends, and then I ended up working at the jazz showcase for a other three years, and I got an incredible grounding in the music and became friends with a lot of jazz musicians. Around that

same time, I met a man named D. Shigley, who was an autodidact photographer, piano player, and had some other businesses that I won't say out loud...

RZ:

Oh, I remember this, yes.

MH:

He was seventeen years older than I was, but we really had a passionate affair. He had four kids and was married. He lived in a huge loft on Kinzie and Clark, and it was one hundred dollars a month. It was a building that John Mooney was in, and Pat Fisher, there were a bunch of artists in there, and at that time I think N.A.M.E. Gallery was there. We started living together, and then about six months later we moved to our own loft at 616 West Adams, which is no longer there; they tore the building down. But we had about an eleven-thousand-square-foot loft. We were both inveterate shoppers on Maxwell Street, and we liked to go into these abandoned buildings downtown and sort of strip them. There were these big empty lots on West Madison, which was still pretty much Skid Row. There used to

be guys sitting out there with bonfires and it was like a hobo encampment. It was the last vestiges of the 1930s, a lot of outsider culture that was still part of downtown Chicago.



RZ:

Tell me more about D.

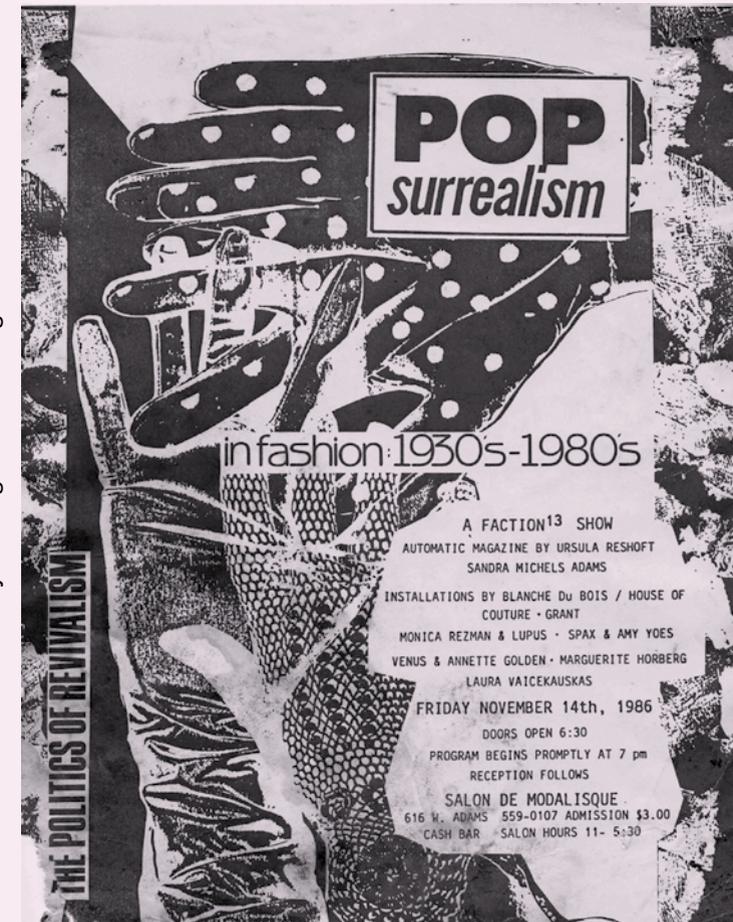
MH:

D. did a lot of work with musicians. He was a photojournalist, and he had a great eye. The image that you often see of Muddy Waters and Mick Jagger is his photograph from the Checkerboard Lounge. He had been photographing blues

where people would come hang out all day and night and play pool and get their photos taken and spend time with D. And then I opened a store in the front.

With two partners, I had opened a vintage clothing store called Studio V on Lincoln Avenue in 1981, and we used to have Blue Monday sales where we had blues musicians play in the store. After Studio V, I opened the Salon of Modalisque

Opposite Page & Right: Archival posters from Salon de Modalisque events, courtesy of Marguerite Horberg.



music and Maxwell Street and black culture since the '60s. He was very established, did a lot of record covers, and worked for *Down Beat*. Anyway, in this big loft, he and I built a living space and we built his photography business. He had a darkroom and we got pool tables from Eighteenth Street, which were regulation-size, slate, drop-pocket pool tables from the 1920s. We had two of those set up, so it was kind of a scene

in the loft—it probably took up about a thousand square feet, and it was on the third floor—selling vintage clothes. Then I started a business representing young Chicago designers, people who were at the Art Institute or self-taught. At a certain point there were probably eighteen fiber artists. It was also right around the time of a Judy Chicago exhibit, and there was a proto-feminist interest in nontraditional fine art,

Right:
Fashion Show in front of 616 West Adams,
first annual Old St. Patrick's Block Party, 1984. Photograph by D. Shigley.



emphasizing craft and fiber and insinuating this imaginary clothing as art. That's what I was personally interested in, elevating craftwork in a more exalted way. So I would organize exhibits and we would do guerrilla theater; we would dress all these Elite or Ford models (we were friends with all these models and stylists) and go on parades through the gallery district, and we would have street theater, barging into the gallery scene with the work of these designers. We did about four fashion shows. We created a collective called Faction 13, and some of the artists are now pretty famous. I don't know if you've ever heard of J. Morgan Puett.

RZ:

Yes!

MH:

So she was one of the first, and Amy Yoes, who's a sculptor, Jean Riordan, and Robin Richman, who now has a store on Damen Street. Two of the guys are big couture guys now, they make ten thousand dollar dresses. Some were punky and some were soulful. It was pretty fun. At the same time Limelight was in Chicago, this club that also had a London location, in the former Chicago Historical Society building on Dearborn Street. They had this thing with plate glass cages, where they paid people to be performance artists all night inside these cubicles. It was fun, way out baroque expression. I did a show at Limelight with Muntu Dance Theatre as models. We also did shows out on the street, because Old St. Patrick's Church had this block party. We built a stage out on Adams and Des Plaines, and we did a big runway show out on the street. Anyway, it was wild.

And, unfortunately, a lot of people who were around at that time died of AIDS. A lot of our friends who were stylists, some of the more

flamboyant characters who were a part of the group. That was a devastating moment.

In that loft, D. and I would host crazy parties that would go on for two days, and all the musicians that D. knew would play. Three hundred or four hundred people would come. That went on until about 1986, and then in '86 D. died, and I moved from that loft and started HotHouse. So that was kind of the end of that era. Around 1980-1986, that was when we had that loft.

RZ:

Can you say anything about that moment in Chicago that produced loft culture?

MH:

I think that moment is rapidly eclipsing in New York and Chicago. That has a big impact on startup and incubator kinds of projects. You know, I think that anyone who could live in these lofts—a lot of them didn't have heat, or they had very marginal heat, or the heat went off at five o'clock, so there were a lot of cold, cold nights in these lofts. But I think that the idea of a large space, high ceilings, heavy load bearing floors, and big freight elevators lent itself to making a certain kind of art that cannot really be reproduced, to a certain kind of spectacle. Even what we were doing, which were textile spectacles where we would make runways and have things hanging from the ceiling or whatever the conceit was, you wouldn't be able to really do that in a storefront. One time we did a jewelry exhibit of new jewelers and it was called *Objects of Adornment*, and I went to Thirty-first Street Beach with a friend of mine, and we took maybe five hundred pounds of boulders in my van. We built this installation in a loft that probably weighed about three thousand pounds.

RZ:

And can you say a little more about breaking down the distinction between fashion and fine art?

MH:

I think that the canon of Western art is about creation of a product, cultivating collectors, having shows and critics and being in a museum. All those reinforcing mechanisms and a replicative frame. Certain kinds of work, certain kinds of exhibits, certain kinds of critiques, certain kinds of media. We were interested in interrupting that framework. These were women who by and large produced multimedia work. Amy Yoes, for instance, created an installation inside Modalisque that had film projected on fabric, live action animation, moving sculptures, and integrated cloth and textiles. And Jean Riordan and her partner Sandra Soss had these collage garments that were found garments. Part of it is found objects, recycled things, sewing, appliqué, collage, personal objects, family photos, kitchen aprons, and that kind of stuff. So that was part of it. And part of it was having “other”-looking models, having normal people model clothes. Part of it was interrupting where these events would happen. Like we did one thing going up and down Oak Street Beach. Another one was going around to all the galleries for Friday night openings, dressed in all this stuff.

RZ:

When you opened HotHouse, I imagine that in some ways it was a continuation of what you had been doing, but was it also a break? Was there something distinctly different you decided to do when you opened HotHouse?

MH:

Yes, I realized at Modalisque that as much as I love fashion and I love textiles, at some point you’re mostly selling to wealthy people, because the amount of time it takes to make something by hand dictates who can really buy it. So then when D. died, there was probably another year before I moved, and we started having rent parties to be able to pay the rent. I started doing more and more non-fashion kinds of performances as a way to bring in money. I started working more with the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. The first thing we really did as HotHouse was in ’87, when Harold Washington died and we had an all-Chicago artists’ tribute. That was calling theater folks and musicians and sculptors and poets and graphic artists to honor him. We did an all-day, all-night thing, and that was the birth of HotHouse.

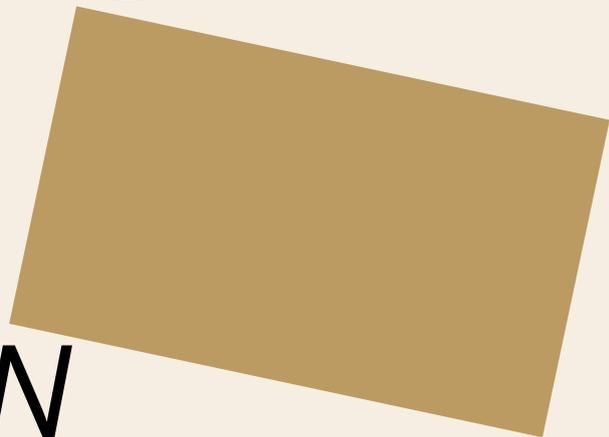
At that time there was also an influx of refugees fleeing the contra war in Nicaragua and the Salvadoran civil war. HotHouse really became the nucleus of all these kind of voices. Whether it was anti-apartheid, anti-contra, or providing space for people to raise money to send to El Salvador, or you know, just having people coming from different places, giving their testimonies, and building solidarity. HotHouse really located its work in a very multicultural community, so that we were sort of the go-to place for people who didn’t speak English and were newly arriving to the US.

SPHE- RES OF INFLU- ENCE

No Place FOR



*BY JAIME
OMAR YASSIN*



Art— ists

Housing
Policy in
the Wake of
Ghost Ship



Dozens of reporters, videographers, and photographers thronged around the yellow tape surrounding the block containing the Ghost Ship warehouse, the morning after the tragic fire that killed thirty-six people in the center of Fruitvale, California. As the hour approached noon, a group of thousands of Latinx Catholics began their scheduled annual procession for the Virgen de Guadalupe from St. Elizabeth's Church, one of the largest Latinx Catholic parishes in the Bay Area, located just three short blocks from the site of the fire. Their normal route from the church to the diocese headquarters in downtown Oakland is down the length of International Boulevard until it rebounds off of Lake Merritt.

But on that morning, the procession was forced to reroute to Twelfth Street, as the City of Oakland had shut down International Boulevard for the three blocks from Thirty-Fourth Avenue to International Boulevard around Fruitvale Avenue, past Derby Street. The procession seemed never-ending, and the street was teeming with people. They were all Latinx, as the Fruitvale and San Antonio districts have for generations been an eclectic mix of Central American, Mexican, and African-American communities. Sunday is a big community day around the church, where any scheduled service is standing room only, with even the vestibules full of parishioners.

That Sunday, the day after the fire, I watched as wave after wave of the procession curved around the yellow hazard tape and onto Twelfth Street, but journalists and photographers alike shrugged at the spectacle. Nothing about the procession—its existence, its character, its juxtaposition with the disaster, nor most importantly, the fact that thousands of community members were available for comment—attracted the attention of the media.

This same lack of interest in the community was reflected in the way the City of Oakland handled its official disaster and cleanup operations in the aftermath of the fire. For over a week after the fire, the city kept the section of International Boulevard around the wreck of the Ghost Ship closed off. In the first few days, as damage assessment and recovery operations occurred, this was an arguably reasonable decision, especially in view of how critical it was to provide information for the families involved. But after there was any legitimate excuse, city officials kept this portion of the street at the intersection of Fruitvale Avenue and International—a main artery for the busy neighborhood—closed, because they had transformed it into their public relations stage.

City, police, and fire administrators gave updates and press conferences from the small stage they had

constructed, so that the Ghost Ship ruin would be visible in the background as they gave speeches to the growing body of local and national media reporters. The rest of the blockaded area was reserved for mobile satellite-link trailers and news van parking. The official media pen became a fixture of the blockade for its duration of ten days, blocking off access to residences and businesses alike, as well as the local low-income clinic, Native American Health Center, which had to temporarily relocate some of its operations to a building outside of the media scrum, further down International.

Certainly, at first, it made sense that these inconveniences existed to provide information about the unfolding details of the disaster that had engulfed the off-the-books venue and residence at the Ghost Ship. But the early establishment of a disinterest in the neighborhood residents became the template for the subsequent politicization of the disaster that was not easily changed in the months that followed.

Some good local reporting in newspapers like the *East Bay Express* and the *East Bay Times*—the latter ultimately won a Pulitzer for its reporting on the city's response—focused on how other city services were gutted in order to provide more funding for the Oakland Police Department. Subsequent whistleblowing reports and city records revealed a Potemkin fire department facing a myriad of serious failures: absent and powerless chiefs and officials, flagrant bypassing of protocols, and questionable budgetary expenses that had hobbled the department for years. The Oakland Fire Department failed at its minimal fire-prevention due diligence—even in the wealthy Oakland Hills area—a fact made even more alarming by the city's hesitance and near-illegal attempts to keep the records from going public. However, most media focused on the personal life of Derick Almena—the master tenant and designated villain of the Ghost Ship fire media narrative. This made more complex reporting difficult to find, especially in national papers of record.

Substantive reporting on the politics of public safety surrounding the Ghost Ship was rare, and there was almost no coverage at all of the brick and mortar community where the disaster occurred. It was as if the Ghost Ship had existed on a floating island, connected to the affluent communities laying emotional and thematic claim to it by magical escalators placed around the city everywhere but Fruitvale and San Antonio. While the conspicuous absence of black and brown voices from the neighborhood should have been a sign of the ongoing displacement of Oakland's historic communities and their eclipse from the Oakland narrative, most in the media

failed to take notice. Discussions about gentrification and displacement appeared frequently in reporting about the fire's impact, in Mayor Schaaf's official statements, and in recorded commentary at city council meetings; yet they were focused not on the physical community where the fire occurred, but on fears of displacement of the self-proclaimed "warehouse and live-work" community.

Somewhere along the way, Oakland's artist community failed to engage with displacement, even though their own lifestyle and habitus often jump-started processes that displace historically low-income communities and people of color. Affluent newcomers had become the favored protagonists in the city's housing crisis. The indifference of mainstream media and government agencies toward the overwhelmingly black and brown population in the neighborhood around the Ghost Ship would negatively affect housing policy in the months that followed.



The transition of Oakland from a historically black and brown mecca to a new DIY art construct began over a decade ago, as a spillover effect from San Francisco's rampaging rents and increasing affluence. It was a logical process: artists who had colonized San Francisco's warehouses and industrial buildings naturally fled to Oakland with its then-cheap rents and nearly absent building-code enforcement. These spaces proliferated, and Oakland soon gained a reputation for being an off-the-grid urban playground, similar to places like Brooklyn and Portland, Oregon.

Oakland city officials fed into the narrative of the city as a reserve of housing for San Francisco rent refugees facing untenable costs. Plentiful live-work spaces were in large part responsible for the accelerated gentrification of the area just north of Oakland's downtown (rechristened "Uptown"), and the subsequently developed monthly art walk known as Oakland First Fridays. The city used the event as a major draw for investments from developers and the tourism industry.

None of this was lost on Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. As a city councilmember in 2012, she had helped high-profile developer American Steel gather political support and funding for the "Uptown Art Park" in the heart of downtown Oakland's former commercial district. The project was a stark example of how Oakland's political class worked with corporations to envision low-income neighborhoods as civic goods. Ten years earlier,

the block or so surrounding the lot had been a site of affordable housing.

Community activists, with the help of Occupy Oakland, staged a political action at the lot, seeking to highlight the displacement of the area's historically black community and the related problem of mounting homelessness. The action was short-lived, however, with the Oakland Police Department raiding and ejecting the camp within twenty-four hours.

Schaaf's new plans for the lot refocused the conversation around affordable housing, positing the real problem as space unused for the benefit of the arts community, as the city's rightful occupant. This was how the National Endowment for the Arts, a funder of the Art Park, described Oakland:

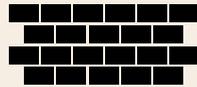
Economically less affluent than neighboring San Francisco, Oakland saw a surge of new artist residents when the dot-com boom brought skyrocketing housing costs to the region. Today the city boasts of having one of the highest populations of artists per capita in the nation. Already home to many artistic and industrial fabricators, Oakland became home to a burgeoning community of industrial artists, and today a high percentage of the large-scale interactive artworks shown at the annual Burning Man festival in the Nevada desert are fabricated in Oakland.

Schaaf's subsequent mayoral campaign advertised a full week of inaugural festivities, with "Made in Oakland" as its theme, and she held her inauguration party at American Steel. In 2015, Schaaf convened the Artist Housing and Workspace Taskforce, whose mandate was to explore methods of keeping Oakland affordable for artists. This included the city's purchase of a land trust to provide housing specifically for self-identified makers.

Oakland's reinvention as a city of artistic newcomers gilded the disappearance of 33,000 African-Americans from Oakland's geographic and cultural landscape—nearly 25 percent of its historic population. The city's long-standing reputation as a black political and cultural mecca began to fade. As Assata Olugbala, a retired educator and frequent commenter at Oakland City Council meetings, noted at a public forum following the Ghost Ship fire in January, black people, the true "heart and soul" of Oakland, were being erased with the encouragement of local government, overwritten by newly arrived artists eager to adopt and claim Oakland as their own construct.

As a conspicuous example, Olugbala lamented, local government had failed for fourteen years to hold the Oakland Police Department accountable for its violence

against black communities—but the outcry from black communities generated little concern in city hall. Yet when a crisis occurred in the whiter, wealthier artistic community, as she noted, the city council immediately tried to address their concerns. Olugbala also noted that the city had rarely recognized Oakland’s native art forms, which were the product of Oakland’s black culture. Indeed, it’s notable that as gentrification cascaded through North and West Oakland from the late 1990s onward, the City of Oakland rarely noted that there was any important cultural or artistic legacy to preserve.



It’s not surprising that artistic venues and spaces didn’t feel as threatened by the Oakland Fire Department and Oakland Police Department (OPD). In its four years of operation, the Ghost Ship venue was a typical, or perhaps even extreme, example of local law enforcement turning a blind eye toward normatively illegal activity. Police reports that emerged after the Ghost Ship fire revealed that the off-the-books nightclub operated with the full knowledge of the OPD. One report describes an OPD officer who responded to a neighbor’s noise complaint. The officer was turned away by the Ghost Ship’s doorman and simply left. Other reports by OPD describe it as a “24-hour art gallery,” a rave club, and an artists’ warehouse. OPD knew that the space was being used illegally in a myriad of ways, yet it did nothing.

OPD’s laissez-faire attitude toward the Ghost Ship stands in sharp relief to its approach toward other residents in Fruitvale and San Antonio, who also use warehouses as unpermitted culture and entertainment businesses. Several weeks after the Ghost Ship fire, the Alameda County Sheriff sent an armed SWAT team to arrest and evict a group living and working in a storefront a mile or so from the Ghost Ship fire. According to the sheriff, the group was running an undocumented party venue in East Oakland, where gambling and drug use allegedly occurred.

Sergeant Ray Kelly, the sheriff’s spokesperson, claimed that the SWAT team raided the space as a safety precaution after the Ghost Ship tragedy. But it’s clear that violent, carceral action has been the boilerplate law enforcement response for Oakland’s “other” live-work spaces for years. In 2015, for example, several blocks from the Ghost Ship in the “Dubs” area of International Boulevard, there was an underground storefront speakeasy. It was

shut down shortly after it began operating, and the police claimed that gambling, drug use, and drinking were occurring at the site. Another illegal gambling spot—described by law enforcement as a casino—was shut down not far from the Fruitvale BART station on a similar pretext around the same time, scant months after it began operating. The criminalization of off-the-grid venues run by black and brown Oakland residents is a regular part of life in East Oakland.

In terms of the potential for violence, even lethal violence, and harm to the surrounding community, the Ghost Ship posed no less of an ostensible threat than unsanctioned venues run by and for black and brown community residents. Public police records released after the fire show that the OPD was regularly called to the Ghost Ship with complaints of firearm threats, assaults, thefts, and open illegal drug sales. In hindsight, of course, the uncommonly high occupancy of the Ghost Ship made it a much graver threat to public safety than expected. The real difference in official response was not about public safety, but about public perception.



Not surprisingly, despite the fear of artists suddenly being evicted from their spaces by the Oakland Fire Department or other municipal officials after the Ghost Ship fire, there is no evidence that anything of the sort happened locally. Oakland media reported that there were only four red-tagged buildings citywide in the months following the Ghost Ship fire, somewhat less than in the same period a year earlier. But the narrative of a community of embattled warehouse residents facing stringent and unfair law enforcement became the dominant narrative of the arts community and its supporters around the Ghost Ship fire. In reality, the spaces that are most in danger of over-policing had already been facing that threat.

By June, Almena and his business partner were facing thirty-six counts of involuntary manslaughter for their role in the fire. The Alameda County District Attorney noted that the Ghost Ship was an atypical live-work space, crammed from “floor to ceiling” with extremely unsafe fixtures and decorations. Far from a simple arts and living space, Almena had turned the space into a functional nightclub with well-publicized shows that drew tourists and others from all around the Bay Area. As the indictment noted, given the space’s regular use as a

public venue, its lack of exits, the large amount of flammable material, and bad management, the Ghost Ship was a tragedy waiting to happen. The live-work space was uniquely dangerous in the context of Oakland’s off-the-books venue scene.

This doesn’t mean that more policing is the solution, but rather that the fear of the response to the Ghost Ship fire impacting other wealthy, white artistic spaces is misplaced. The popular arts-community narrative bypassed more obvious takeaways from the fire, such as the need and potential for DIY solutions and self-enforcement of building and fire safety.

The city’s response and media reports misidentified Oakland’s displaced population. The community affected by the fire, i.e., the surrounding community that consists largely of working-class people of color with long-standing cultural roots in the area, was rarely defined in geographic terms. Media references to “community” obscured issues at the heart of Oakland’s housing crisis, such as race, class, and historical residence. The generally whiter and wealthier artistic community that has only recently begun to enter Oakland’s most economically challenged neighborhoods became the focus of the media’s displacement narrative.

The prominent media narrative of publications like the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* insisted that the Ghost Ship’s community had been forced by the urgencies of the housing market to live in dangerous warehouses, and that instead of offering support, city agencies aided in their eviction and displacement. The aftermath of the fire included several fundraisers and benefits to increase safety in existing live-work spaces, and to bring sites up to code for the predicted storm of enforcement. Yet this effort was isolated—while it included other artistic communities, it didn’t extend to the neighborhood surrounding the Ghost Ship.

Over one million dollars was raised by independent crowd sourcing to support the victims of the fire and to fund DIY repairs and upgrades of other live-work spaces. But the welfare of similar spaces in the surrounding community never entered into the media discourse. The businesses in the adjacent building to the Ghost Ship venue were immediately closed in the aftermath of the fire, and within a week were yellow-tagged—shut down for business. One owner I spoke with, who wished to remain anonymous, told me that no one had ever approached her about fundraising for her shuttered business, and that she had, to date, received no funds from any source.

As I looked at the collapsing ceiling and the water-damaged furniture in her storefront, she told me the

city had offered her a loan, which she would have little hope of paying back, given the damage to her and her family’s livelihood. The last surviving business adjacent to the Ghost Ship, La Moda, a woman’s clothing shop with Spanish-language signs, was forced to liquidate its entire inventory via sidewalk sales in front of the shuttered business in April. There were no fundraisers to combat the closure of these businesses.

The narrative around the Ghost Ship community, though falsely, placelessly defined, generated a political movement that culminated in the creation of an artists’ coalition called the Oakland Warehouse Coalition. It garnered an extraordinary amount of attention from local officials, including Mayor Schaaf. As a testament to her focus on this constituency, within one month of the fire she issued an executive order—designed to give the appearance that enforcement of live-work fire codes would not result in displacement.



Some argued that any focus on housing reform was beneficial in the current wildfire of displacement and skyrocketing rents in Oakland. It’s true that the fire gave Councilmember At Large Kaplan an opportunity to revive a revamped red-tag relocation ordinance that had sat idly in the Community and Economic Development Committee for over a year. The ordinance increased the dollar amount of red-tag displacement payments and obligated the City of Oakland to provide the payments to displaced tenants when the owner hesitated and to recoup the payments later through legal means. But the quality and substance of the city’s responses were affected by its never-ending focus on the self-identified artist community in a way that warped Oakland’s long-standing issues around poverty, racism, displacement, and increasing gentrification.

Warehouses and industrial sites made into live-work spaces by newly arrived artists are, in Oakland’s vast terrain of off-the-books residences, a small minority. The disinterest in existing, struggling Oakland communities of color erased the reality of the vast numbers who live in hotwired and unofficial domiciles—garages, in-law units, sheds, basements, and unpermitted additions. In many cases, last-resort dwellings of this type may be the only way poor and working-class people have remained in their Oakland communities, where official units require capital, contracts, and established credit. Even housing legislation such as Kaplan’s relocation

ruling aren't enough to ameliorate these living situations—Oakland's poor and poorly housed hold onto bad living situations of their own accord, because there are few other options available.

Fire safety is by no means the only concern in such substandard housing. Fruitvale's epidemic proportion of building-sourced lead contamination—with up to 7.57 percent of children exposed—made national news for a day or two around the same time as the Ghost Ship fire, following a study by Reuters. With the exception of some busywork by city council members, it was soon forgotten. Demanding building safety remained the tenants' burden: without city action to force landlords into compliance, disproportionate responsibility is placed on those who have the most to lose. The city did little to focus the post-Ghost Ship energy into substantive changes in the city's degraded code-inspection regimes, and the toxic substandard housing that Oakland's dwindling black and brown populations were increasingly forced to live in—a reality that would soon become horrifyingly apparent.



Oakland government's ineffectual response to the Ghost Ship fire became clear during another serious fire a few months later. Four residents in a West Oakland transitional living situation perished in the fire on San Pablo Avenue, and at least eighty were displaced.

The city's newly revamped relocation legislation improved upon existing law that provided funds for displaced tenants to be reimbursed for damages via liens placed on the properties of the landlord. However, though the legislation was in place, the city hadn't allocated funding toward so many precariously housed renters in a city as large as Oakland. What should have been a loud call to prepare for the relocation of dozens, if not hundreds, of poor and working-class tenants in the event of another fire went unheeded.

Weeks after this San Pablo fire, it was revealed that the relocation fund only had about \$150,000 at the time of the disaster. Victims of the fire waited without answers, and some became homeless in the process. Relocation funds had not been a pressing issue for the few displaced tenants of the Ghost Ship months earlier, because they had personal resources and tens of thousands of dollars from various fundraisers. While the passage of the ordinance at the time was seen as a hard-won concession by the live-work community,

the San Pablo fire revealed it to be little more than a cosmetic solution.

Eventually, council members took \$600,000 from an unrelated housing program in a council session on April 18, 2017, to fill the fund for displaced San Pablo Avenue residents. The city had waited an astonishing three weeks before taking action, and it still has no ready source of funding for relocation for a future emergency of similar magnitude.

The Ghost Ship fire would also have been a perfect opportunity to revive policy proposals around proactive building code enforcement and rigorous renter protections. But such reforms were never brought up in public forums or city council meetings. Rather, the focus was on single-use solutions that required little real commitment from local politicians. Issues of poverty and racism rarely entered into the conversation, and the focus on live-work artists renovating their own spaces allowed the city to pass off responsibility for building safety to residents.

In contrast to the city's hasty response to the Ghost Ship disaster, the initial response to the San Pablo fire was ponderous. For most of the following day, Mayor Schaaf didn't mention the fire publicly. There was no on-site stage for round-the-clock press conferences, and there was no vast migration of the nation's news media. The surviving residents, numbering more than eighty, were crammed into a youth center, where they spent over a week sleeping on cots because there are so few low-income housing buildings left in Oakland for relocation. Despite the obvious implications of the Ghost Ship fire, Oakland had no designated emergency shelter put in place, and still does not.

Subsequently released public records show that Oakland Fire Department officials had called for closure of the San Pablo building as an imminent risk to the lives of the residents months before the fire, but nothing was done. It was also revealed that the owner of the building, Keith Kim, had cozy relationships with the city. In fact, one of Kim's occult business ventures was voted up by the city council just one day after the fire. The San Pablo fire became a metaphorical stage where Oakland's age-old institutional priorities, guided by institutional racism and the inescapable logic of gentrification, played out. The city's corrupt and incompetent code enforcement failed Oakland's most vulnerable. The San Pablo building's residents were nearly one hundred percent African-American, the same demographic that had experienced an almost complete loss of available low-income housing and forced exodus during Oakland's live-work renaissance.

Weeks later, the San Pablo fire has engendered no public forums, nor raucous city council meetings. While a handful of speakers appeared at the city council vote on the increase in relocation funds in April, most were victims of the fire or their family and friends. The fire survivors have moved to various other sites, and according to local reports, have dispersed throughout the city in precarious, often temporary housing. Some are homeless; some who had mental health needs are lost to the streets. Mayor Schaaf has stated that she will hire more inspectors, but no councilmember has introduced legislation to protect residents, nor to guarantee that there is a rigorous increase in inspections. The city has swept San Pablo under the carpet with another temporary solution.

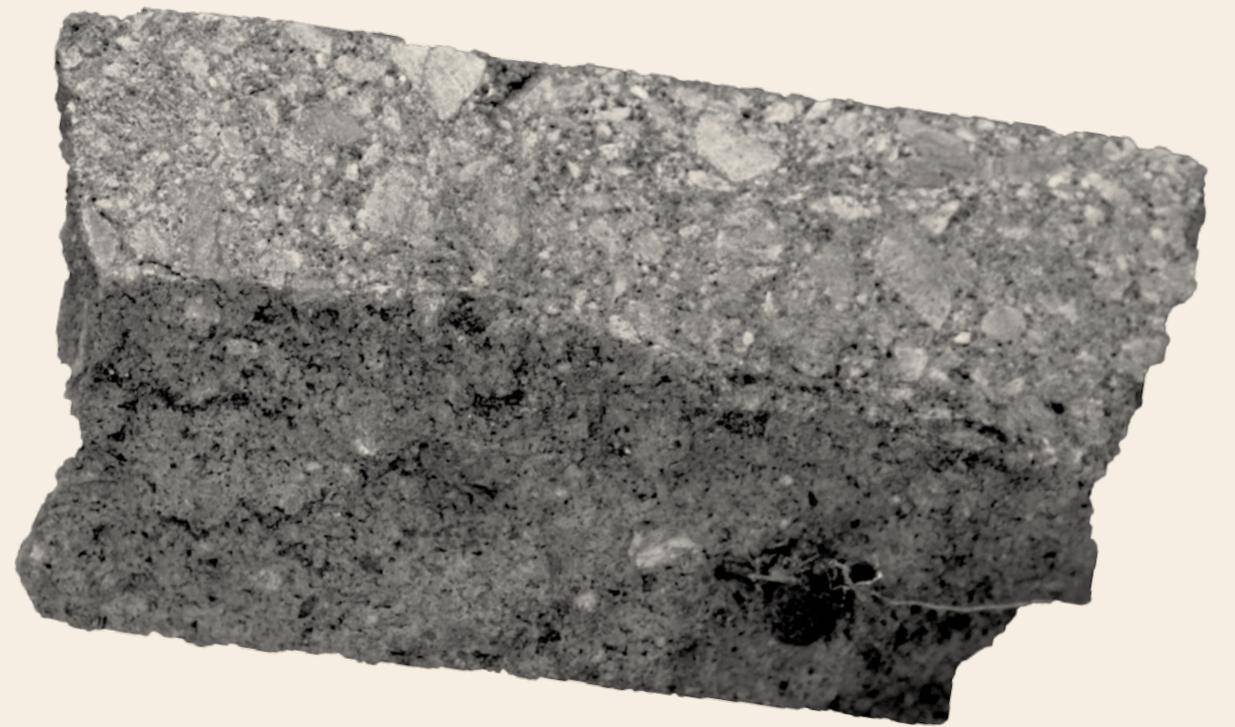
Meanwhile, the former site of the Ghost Ship has virtually become a tourist attraction, with small crowds regularly taking selfies. No one knows what will become of the nearly block-long series of structures, though they will probably be converted to market-rate housing as soon as it's feasible. The City of Oakland finally provided the relocation payments to survivors of the San Pablo fire, over a month after they had been displaced, but the fund has not been refreshed for future disasters. Fruitvale's decades-old toxic lead contamination continues. The city council failed to introduce legislation to address Fruitvale's lead problem when the issue made national headlines, and proposed policies seem to have died in committee. It makes no difference to Oakland's new heart and soul, which have moved on regardless.



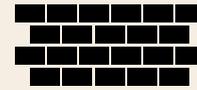
**we're
at
war**



*BY JULIA
GOODMAN*



**Living
Under
New York City
the
Loft Law**



Shortly after moving into the building in May of 2016, I found myself on the roof with my roommate Matt,* using a rope to haul a forty-pound bucket of tar up from the landing one floor below. Matt, who had lived in the apartment for more than ten years, needed to teach me how to tar the area around the skylight in case it ever leaked while he was away. The skylight, which was positioned directly above my bed, was the only window in my room. After a few heavy rains, it would often begin to leak, water dripping along the ceiling and pooling at the foot of my bed. The solution was to haul the bucket of tar up to the roof, scrape a new layer along the edge of the skylight, and hope that the job would last until the next rainy season.

This wasn't the only unusual thing about the building. At first glance, walking past it on a residential, tree-lined Williamsburg block, I thought it was abandoned. It had a sign above a service entrance reading "1F - Superman Cutting and Sewing Inc.," but no address marking—since I moved in, someone has used a piece of painter's tape to put up a sheet of paper with the number. I only realized it was the building I was looking for when Matt came down to meet me, leading me into an unfinished, dimly lit space. It had a service elevator that had to be operated by hand, and a staircase with steps of all different sizes.

On the day I moved in, I met a man named Michael, who strode up to me and asked loudly which apartment I was moving into. After I told him, he immediately walked away without offering any information about himself; I wasn't even sure if he lived in the building. The interaction was odd, bordering on rude, but I didn't think much of it until later that day, when another of my neighbors warned me not to trust a man named Michael who lived on the fifth floor, who was a friend of the new building owner.

In most buildings, a tenant who works for the property owner might be responsible for maintenance—things like fixing a leaking skylight. But that wasn't most building residents' impression of the reason Michael was there. Some thought Michael was keeping an eye on things for the property owner, gathering information about the other tenants. I don't know if that's really what Michael was doing there, but I soon learned that residents had good reason for mistrusting him, or anyone else associated with the property owner. In several apartments, tenants were currently suing the owner of the building for the right to continue living in their homes.

When I moved in, it had been about a year since the new owner purchased the building, but it's been a home for much longer—close to twenty years. It started out as two separate commercial spaces that have since been

conjoined. One of those spaces was a clothing factory owned by a company called Superman Plaza. Property records show that Superman Plaza purchased the building in 1995, and owned the space for about four years. In August of 1999, it sold the building to a new owner, Isaac Dahan. Dahan says that he did maintenance work on the structure when it was a clothing factory, and when the owner wanted to sell the building because the factory wasn't making enough money, he purchased it.

That same year, Dahan hired a group of three workers to build out two floors of the building into separate units, according to Ben,* a current resident who was part of the team. They added plumbing and built dividing walls to create individual spaces, but left each mostly open, with room for renters to divide the space as they saw fit. Dahan says that he originally intended to rent the space out to artists for their studios, and wasn't planning for people to move in. But as time went on, he was aware that people ended up living there.

Ben, a painter and visual artist, had prior construction experience from buildings he'd worked on in San Francisco and New York. He met Dahan through fellow residents in his previous apartment, a space at the western edge of Williamsburg known as the Gretsches Building that Ben describes as a "young person's flop house." There, Ben shared a space for about five years with a musician named Josh,* in which residents rigged their own electricity hookups, and all shared a single bathroom. They also had a commercial lease with the building's owner, and for the first nine months they lived there, the owner would turn off water and power on the weekends. Eventually, Josh says, they sued the building owner, leading to a settlement in which they could have weekend utilities but would eventually have to vacate the space.

Ben heard that Dahan was looking to build new units, and he needed a new place to live. After helping with construction, Ben says he moved into his current apartment in 2001, and has lived there ever since—longer than he's lived anywhere else. He told me that he moved to the building seeking a space similar to the Gretsches Building, where residents were mostly struggling artists seeking to collaborate. At first, as in the Gretsches Building, some apartments housed several young tenants who couldn't afford to pay much in rent. But more and more, the building developed into a place where individuals and friends were creating their own private living spaces. Ben came to value the space and autonomy that the new building allowed him.

Most of the building's new residents, like Ben, arrived because they were forced to leave prior homes. A filmmaker named Jessica* had vacated her prior apartment in Harlem because, she says, rats had started to eat through the walls of her closet. Others, too, arrived because they felt out of control in previous living situations—escaping factors from skyrocketing rent to roommates who left the stove on overnight. Many, like my roommate Matt, say they found the building completely by accident.

In 2005, Matt was looking for space to lease, build out into apartments, and rent to tenants—much like what Dahan had hired Ben and others to do at the building. However, after several potential deals fell through, he switched his focus to looking for a space where he could afford to live alone. That year, Matt walked into an apartment on the fourth floor of the building that was divided into five rooms by walls that reached only partway to the ceiling. "I took one look at that and did a U-turn," he says. He changed his mind when he learned that the other tenants were planning to move out at the end of the month, and the entire space could soon be his.

Over the next six weeks, he altered the space into a three-bedroom home with a large kitchen, living, and dining area. With guidance from a friend who was a building engineer, he built soundproof walls, rebuilt the ceiling to insulate the space from the cold, and altered the location of plumbing and electrical hookups. For much of the time, he was working on film sets during the day and renovating at night, barely sleeping. By the time he was finished, he had redesigned nearly every aspect of the space.

As the building filled with more residents who were making their spaces into long-term homes, it also developed into a strong community. Working together was necessary, because many residents felt that Dahan, the building owner, was lax about fixing problems. Ben's former roommate Josh, for instance, says he had a huge leak in his roof—when it rained, an entire wall of his apartment was deluged in water. Dahan neglected to fix this problem, so instead, Josh and his roommates developed a system to begin moving possessions out of the way as soon as it started raining.

Another roof leak caused the stairs to flood, which residents managed by placing buckets under major holes. Ben says that Dahan patched this leak occasionally, but the problem kept returning. According to Dahan, he never refused to fix any issues he was confronted about, and the

leak was only in the stairwell—not individual apartments like Josh's. He also says the leak started soon before he planned to sell the building, which is why he didn't fix it.

Some residents do remember Dahan as a landlord who responded to requests, though they also recall that he often seemed upset by them. Jessica says that when residents wanted something from Dahan, like a refrigerator or help with maintenance work, he would react with extreme anger, often yelling at them until they gave up. She says she eventually realized that if she waited until Dahan had worked himself down from these bursts of anger, he would give her whatever she wanted.

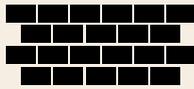
Many other aspects of the building required working with neighbors to live comfortably. For example, each floor had a locked gate in front of the stairwell that required a separate key, many of which were mislabeled. Traveling between floors of the building—or even getting onto your own floor, if you had forgotten your key—could require yelling in the hall until someone came by to let you in.

More than once, even the lock to the building's front door failed, and tenants set up a relay system of people to come downstairs and let others into the building. Dahan would usually get around to fixing the door in a day or two, residents say. "It sort of seems like it comes from the top," Jessica, the filmmaker, told me in explaining the structure's challenges. "Isaac was kind of crazy, and his building was, too. But he wasn't a bad person, and neither were we."

Residents have mixed views about Dahan's inaction as a landlord. His attitude allowed them a large degree of control over their space, especially when it came to rent. Dahan would often neglect to raise rent for years at a time, and residents felt they were paying much less than other renters in the neighborhood. Some, like Matt, didn't seek out Dahan's help much because they had construction experience and preferred to do maintenance work themselves. They welcomed the ability to build their homes exactly as they saw fit, without having to consult with anyone else. Others, like Ben, felt that residents had no choice about taking care of things themselves, because Dahan wouldn't do much maintenance work—even for issues that Ben felt would be very easy to fix.

Dahan says that this wasn't forgetfulness—he actively tried to be flexible with tenants because he liked artists, and wanted them to stay in the building. He says he doesn't remember many things about the building because it was so long ago, but his relationship with building residents is one thing that he recalls clearly. "I did everything possible so they'd be happy," he told me.

*Names of building residents have been changed to protect their privacy due to ongoing legal proceedings.



Still, there were larger structural issues that Dahan didn't fix, some of which drew the attention of the New York City Department of Buildings (DOB). The service elevator, which had to be operated by hand, was a source of constant citations by the DOB. There were also many apartments that lacked fire escapes, or had dangerous fixtures such as exposed heating units and untested electrical work. Ben, as one of the people who'd worked on building construction, knew there were safety issues and says he asked Dahan to take care of some of them, but Dahan refused.

Dahan remembers being notified of some of these issues by the DOB, and says that he was trying to fix them, but never had enough time or money to respond to all of the problems at once—especially because he owned another building that needed work done. In 2009, building residents would be the ones to pay the price for this. On September 10 of that year, Jessica walked downstairs to find an official from the DOB, which told residents that they had until that night to take whatever they could and move out.

At the time, Ben says, he didn't blame the city—he blamed Dahan. After years of Dahan collecting rent from tenants without making the space safe to live in, residents lost access to homes into which they had put immense physical and emotional labor. Others had more mixed feelings about Dahan's role in the situation. Jessica describes Dahan's reaction to the vacate order as something like a father figure's. He found places for some residents to live in other buildings he owned, and finally began fixing the more glaring issues with the space.

Additionally, Dahan's negligence wouldn't have been possible if the DOB had forced him to take action sooner. The issues it cited in 2009 included twenty-one individual apartments with their own electricity, gas, and plumbing hookups, which the building wasn't approved to handle safely. Yet the notes from a DOB plumbing inspection just eight years earlier found the building free of issues and recommended no further action—even though two floors of the building had been converted into apartments by that point. A spokesperson at the DOB told me that because the first inspection was only to test specific newly installed equipment, the building passed requirements. The DOB only schedules plumbing inspections when requested by a plumber hired by the building owner, or in response to complaints of illegal conditions—the case in 2009.

Other records show that between the time Dahan purchased the building in 1999, and the vacate order in 2009, the DOB cited the building for having an unsafe elevator at least ten times. All of these complaints are either still marked as unresolved, or say they were resolved after the vacate order. According to the DOB spokesperson, these violations can continue to be issued as long as an elevator fails to pass inspection, but the department would only issue an order to stop using the elevator if it posed “an immediate safety hazard to passengers.”

So while the city was aware of certain safety issues, and was constantly telling Dahan to fix them, it didn't force him to do anything until 2009. The DOB says that the vacate order was issued that year because inspectors observed fire safety issues such as an illegal sprinkler system, and other problems residents were aware of, like the lack of fire escapes. The department added that it only vacates buildings due to “unsafe conditions” or for “public safety reasons,” categories that seem not to include the violations the building had previously been cited for.

Another potential reason for the timing of the vacate order was that in 2009, the DOB faced a corruption scandal over building inspectors allegedly taking bribes to ignore safety issues in New York City buildings, most of them in the Bronx. Though corruption investigations are common at the DOB, this one was widely reported, and included alleged ties to a powerful crime family. There's no evidence that corruption played a role in the city not taking action at the building sooner, but the public revelations of corruption may have played a role in the DOB's decision to crack down in 2009. The *New York Post* reported the scandal just two days before building residents were vacated.

The DOB's approach to building safety, in theory, could work to protect tenants—if conditions are unsafe, its job is to force owners to fix issues before they can continue collecting rent. In practice, however, when the DOB actually chooses to crack down on safety issues, property owners can easily choose to stop renting out the space altogether.

In this case, though, Dahan chose to make the space legally safe for occupancy. According to him, he never considered doing anything else. He understood that the building had to be brought up to code, so that was what he did, hiring builders to add fire escapes and smoke detectors, replace heaters, and alter walls and doors to make the space more fire-resistant. During this time, Jessica was in contact with a construction worker at the building, who would update her on when work might be

finished so the DOB would allow people to move back in. Residents came up with a text messaging chain to spread this information as quickly as possible.

Finally, at the beginning of 2010, Dahan filed to change the building's use from commercial to residential, according to DOB records. With the new safety changes, the city issued a temporary certificate of occupancy in 2011, and residents could return to their homes.

When they talk about the years before the vacate order, residents remember a foreboding sense that stemmed from the fact that the city might take action on safety issues at any moment. They knew there were physical dangers in the building, Matt says, and “just figured we'd be out on the street at any moment.” After returning to the building in 2010, that fear was greatly alleviated, and the question of how much the DOB knew about the safety issues seemed resolved.

The building hadn't been given a permanent certificate of occupancy, but if Dahan had received final approval on some outstanding changes, it would have received one. There's no record that Dahan ever did this, and the DOB never issued a final certificate of occupancy for the building. The temporary one was renewed—most recently, earlier this year—and resident continued to live in the building without further vacate orders.



In 2015, Dahan began planning to sell the building. Matt says he was the first to find out about this, when he contacted Dahan about an unrelated issue in his apartment, and Dahan said—absentmindedly, almost to himself—“I'm going to have to sell that building.” Then Dahan hung up. Matt wasn't sure whether to take him seriously, but when he called Dahan again a few days later, he learned that the building had already been sold.

The sale closed on May 5, 2015, according to property records. Dahan says he doesn't remember why he chose to sell the building, although one consideration was likely the ability to buy other property. Vox Media's real estate website *Curbed* reported in 2015 that Dahan purchased a vacant lot in Williamsburg about two months after selling the building, and filed plans to construct a new residential building there later that year.

News that Dahan had sold the property soon spread through the building's informal communication network. The new owner, a company headed by Brooklyn real estate developer Israel Perlmutter, had begun calling

meetings with residents to discuss new rental terms, and no one knew what to expect.

When residents met with Perlmutter's company, it became clear he wasn't going to adopt Dahan's approach to rent. I didn't contact Perlmutter due to residents' concerns about potential retaliation, so I can't confirm the exact terms he was offering, but it's clear that residents felt his proposals were unacceptable. Dahan told me that the new building owners are “nasty,” and says he now feels that selling the building was a mistake.

For Jessica, that meeting was a decisive moment. She says she could imagine an offer she would have accepted, but when she heard the terms Perlmutter was suggesting, she decided: “We're at war.” She started calling building-wide meetings in her apartment, reasoning that the tenants would find a solution, as they always had, if they teamed up.

Residents identified one potential answer in the New York Loft Law, which was established in 1982 following a push by housing activists. I spoke with one of the activists behind that effort, Chuck DeLaney, who started this work after receiving a notice at his loft building in downtown Manhattan that the building had no certificate of occupancy and shouldn't have anyone living there. He and two friends who had received similar notices formed a group called the Lower Manhattan Loft Tenants (LMLT), which called a meeting to address concerns about loft residents' ability to remain in their homes.

DeLaney says they expected fewer than fifty people at that first meeting, but instead, several hundred showed up. He estimates that by the early 1980s, LMLT had about a thousand members, and city and state officials began to take notice. Eventually, New York State passed legislation allowing loft residents to seek the same rent protections available to tenants of legal apartments. The Loft Law allows some buildings that aren't certified for residential use to be brought up to code by landlords without residents having to leave their homes, and allows controlled rent increases to pay for that work. It also established the New York City Loft Board to handle loft cases; DeLaney has served as the tenants' representative on the board since 1982.

Jessica got in touch with DeLaney to find out whether the Loft Law applied to her building. DeLaney explained to me that though the building was eligible for Loft Law coverage, it wasn't clear when Jessica contacted him in 2015 if residents would be allowed to apply. When the law was first established in 1982, it covered buildings in which three or more separate units had been occupied between April 1, 1980, and December 1,

1981. In 2010, the law was amended to include buildings in which three or more units had been occupied between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2009—the window that applied to their building. But the new version of the law also included a time limit, meaning that residents only had until March of 2014 to apply for coverage.

In DeLaney's view, this time limit was "wrongheaded and mean-spirited," as it prevented tenants who technically should be covered by the law from seeking legal protection. He says New York legislators instituted this limit, in part, because manufacturers argued that too much commercial space was being converted to residential space. In reality, though, preventing tenants from applying for Loft Law coverage didn't insure that the space would no longer be residential—instead, it allowed landlords like Perlmutter to kick tenants out and rent the spaces for much higher prices.

But housing activists, including the LMLT kept pushing to revive the Loft Law, and by the end of June 2015, it was extended to allow applications until June of 2017. When DeLaney gave Jessica the news, she ran around the building banging on every door, telling people that the law had been reopened. She contacted the Loft Board immediately to apply, and the group of tenants seeking coverage got a lawyer to represent them in their case against Perlmutter's company.



Not everyone joined in the suit—some residents chose not to stay in the building, and others sought protection under rent stabilization laws, based on the temporary certificate of occupancy that the DOB granted after the 2009 vacate order. The rest are hoping that documentation and testimony about their years of residence in the building can convince the Loft Board that they are eligible for coverage, which is easier for some residents of the building than for others. Some have saved paperwork that can back up their case; others are relying more heavily on witness testimony.

While the case is in progress, the tenants involved in the suit can't be forced to pay more rent by Perlmutter's company. Now that residents have legal protection, they say some of those issues that Dahan didn't fix, like the flood in Josh's apartment every time it rained, have finally been taken care of. Other problems, though—like the roof leak that causes the stairs to flood, and a rat infestation on the first floor—remain unsolved.

As long as the lawsuit is ongoing, residents also have some power to stop Perlmutter from doing anything that would get the DOB to vacate the building again. When he wanted to redo the stairs, Matt says, residents contacted their lawyer and put an end to it. A project like that would have blocked the only means in and out of the space, and residents would have had to vacate the building during that time—something they want to avoid at all costs.

Cases like these can go on for years, and if a building is determined to fall under Loft Law coverage, there are further legal proceedings in which the Loft Board works with tenants and building owners to develop a plan to bring the building up to code. According to a 2013 report by the Loft Board, over 900 buildings came under Loft Board jurisdiction under the 1980–1981 coverage window, and by 2013, 74 more buildings had joined under the 2008–2009 coverage window.

DeLaney says that of the roughly 900 buildings that began seeking Loft Law coverage in 1982, about 200 are still in the system. He doesn't have exact numbers, but says that the law has preserved a lot of affordable housing. According to the 2013 Loft Board report, most of those 900 buildings have become rent-stabilized apartments.

Though the Loft Law doesn't add any new housing, and doesn't give loft residents ownership over the spaces they've built and maintained, it has the potential to allow thousands of apartments in hundreds of buildings to receive rent control protections and be brought up to code.

There are also buildings that won't be covered by the law because residents weren't living there, or can't prove they were living there, during either of the coverage windows. In addition, DeLaney says the city hasn't done a good job of outreach to tenants; due to both that and the application time limit, some tenants who are technically eligible for coverage may still never receive it.

For the residents of the building, the potential for Loft Law coverage, though an incremental change, is still a saving grace. When I spoke to Jessica, one of the first things she said about the building was, "Potentially we're all losing our homes right here, right now." But, she added later, "Miracles sometimes happen." 

Beyond Antikraak The Limits of



Urban

by
Bernd Upmeyer

Property Ownership

The first image that comes to mind for many when they hear the word “loft” is that of apartments on the upper floor of a building in some desirable neighborhood of a big city. But for me, what comes to mind is precarious living at odds with a building’s owners—that is, squatting. In the Netherlands, as in other places, squatting is one way to attain an affordable space to both live and work.

After graduating with an architecture degree in 2002, I began to work at an architecture studio in Amsterdam, one of Europe’s squatting capitals. Some of my colleagues, due to Amsterdam’s expensive housing market, were only able to find decent and affordable places to live by squatting in empty buildings or by a process known in the Netherlands as *antikraak*, which might be translated as “anti-squatting”, and is known in the UK as “property guardianship”. *Antikraak* works in this way: empty buildings that their owners can’t sell, renovate, or demolish are rented out cheaply as temporary live-work spaces. *Antikraak* is intended to provide affordable housing, but it also carries benefits for the owners—renters are expected to keep “real” squatters away from the building.

One of the *antikraak* spaces I visited was a former school with large empty classrooms to live in, sparse electricity supply, problems with the heating system, and an improvised shower that delivered water through a tube that residents found in the street from the sink into the toilet. Staying in the school cost about \$175 per month.

The Renovation Cycle

In 2005, I opened my own architecture office in the Delftsestraat 27 in Rotterdam, about an hour south of Amsterdam by car. The studio was also in an *antikraak* space, though this one was intended mainly for working. Some friends and I shared a space of around 120 square yards—about half the size of a tennis court—and paid only a few hundred dollars between us. However, after six years in the building, we left the space, as there were too many uncertainties, and we only had a temporary agreement with the owner of the building.

The reason the owner gave for this was that the building was going to be demolished soon to make space for new towers. But we heard rumors that the building was instead going to be rented out to a company called Codum. When we called company representatives and the owner of the building on the phone, they both confirmed that these rumors were true. Codum specialized in marketing empty buildings with the message that they would bring life, creativity, and culture into the empty center of Rotterdam. But our building wasn’t empty at all—it was full of life and art. When we confronted Codum and asked why they were interested in converting a building that was already full of creative people, they answered, “Because we can make money with you people.”

Ironically, around three months after we had left the building, Codum called us to offer to rent

us our former space at three times the price we’d paid previously, justifying the rise with the typical argument that they had extensively renovated it. But after visiting other Codum projects, we didn’t feel the price increase could be justified.

Squatting as a Housing Movement

Squatting is almost always, by definition, an illegal activity—squatters occupy abandoned or unused buildings that they don’t own, rent, or otherwise have permission to use. But *antikraak* also has its limits, and the system is misused far too often, as my experience with our office space demonstrated. When it comes to genuine stability, privacy, and control over one’s space, *antikraak* is still lacking. There I agree with Kesia Reeve’s position in the 2005 book *Housing and Social Policy* that squatting is largely absent from policy and academic debate and is rarely conceptualized as a problem, as a symptom, or as a social or housing movement.

In the Netherlands, squatting began gaining traction as a movement in the 1960s, according to squatting history documented by the Amsterdam-based International Institute of Social History. The first organized squatting activities took place as early as 1964. A crucial inciting event in these early

Previous Page:

Back facade of the Delftsestraat in Rotterdam, 2009. Photo by Beatriz Ramo, © Beatriz Ramo.

Entrance of the communal housing project “Walde” in Berlin. Photo by Kathrin Windhorst.



The coronation riot of April 30, 1980.



years was a plan by the municipality of Amsterdam to redevelop the district of Kattenburg, located on one of Amsterdam’s three eastern islands. This led to a lot of protests, especially among students from Amsterdam, who expressed their anger in the satirical student newspaper *Propria Cures* (Latin for “Mind your own business”).

According to researchers Pellenburg and Steen (2005), severe housing shortages occurred in the 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s as a result of wartime stagnation in construction on the one hand, and a post-war birth explosion on the other. Students and others complained that many houses in the district, in a time of a housing shortage, were unjustly declared “uninhabitable” by the municipality, despite the fact that renovating them would take years. They also objected to the fact that in and around the center of Amsterdam, well-preserved homes and buildings stood empty for years. Property owners would keep buildings empty for the purpose of driving up prices in the real estate market or let buildings decay on purpose to obtain permission from the municipality to demolish them.

In the second half of the 1960s, a Dutch counterculture movement called Provo called on people who were looking for housing to occupy vacant buildings. One strategy they used was painting the doorposts of vacant houses white, to indicate that anyone in need of housing could move in. This led to further squatting activities in the years to come, particularly in the area around the Nieuwmarkt, a square in the center of Amsterdam, which is in the so-called Bethaniënbuurt.

The Boom of Antikraak

Due to ongoing problems with the housing shortage, in 1971, the Dutch Supreme Court ruled that the concept of *huisvrede* (domestic peace) applied to squatters, just as to any other occupant of a home. *Huisvrede* is defined in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Dutch Constitution as the right of residents to prevent others from trespassing in their homes. It can only be broken with legal precedent, such as a search warrant, and property owners can only evict squatters through the legal system. Thus, squatting gained a degree of legal protection.

However, as the housing shortage and long-term vacancy of buildings continued during the 1970s, tensions between left-wing activists—especially young people without living space—and the Dutch establishment increased. A rapidly increasing number of squatting activities, which led to an ever-increasing number of legally sanctioned evictions, fueled these tensions.

In 1980, after the Dutch ministry renovated the royal palaces for the coronation ceremony of Queen Beatrix, instead of investing this money to create more affordable living spaces, squatters rioted under the slogan *Geen woning, geen kroning* (No home, no coronation).

Increasingly, the lack of government response to the housing shortage led the squatting movement to turn to more militant tactics such as riots, street fights, and barricades. Politicians cultivated a moral panic about illegal immigrants invading the country, blaming them for what officials saw as the growing violence of the squatting movement. In reality, there



were other factors at play, such as a law passed in 1994 that made it illegal to squat in a building that had been empty for less than one year. In 2010, politicians passed a new law banning squatting based on the argument that it would combat the vacancy problem by putting empty buildings back into use faster. The penalty is up to one year in prison.

Beginning in the 1990s, antikraak began to be used more and more as a business model, a trend that has continued to grow until today, with more than

fifty companies using it nationally. This was aided by the financial crisis of 2008, which made the reuse of unoccupied buildings once again an important political issue, as well as the recriminalization of squatting in 2010. In 2014, ARTE TV reported that there were 120,000 antikraakers in the Netherlands.

Teaming Up

In an ideal world, such antikraak landlords might indeed enter into fair contracts with tenants to make use of unoccupied buildings. Martin Abbott demonstrates in his essay “Learning to Live Together” in *MONU* #18 that such landlords exist (in exceptional cases) and use antikraak in a way that benefits tenants. His research focused on Walde, a communal housing project in Berlin. At Walde, the building owner was sympathetic to the tenants’ needs, allowing them to negotiate fair rental agreements. In 2000, the project was purchased by Luisenstadt eG, a nonprofit organization founded in 1986 as a cooperative by inhabitants of seven houses in Berlin, which is partly subsidized by the government of Berlin. They intended to prevent their homes from becoming speculative objects by owning them as communal property and renting them out at affordable rates, rather than inflating prices in order to profit financially from a growing demand for housing in the district.

Opposite Page:

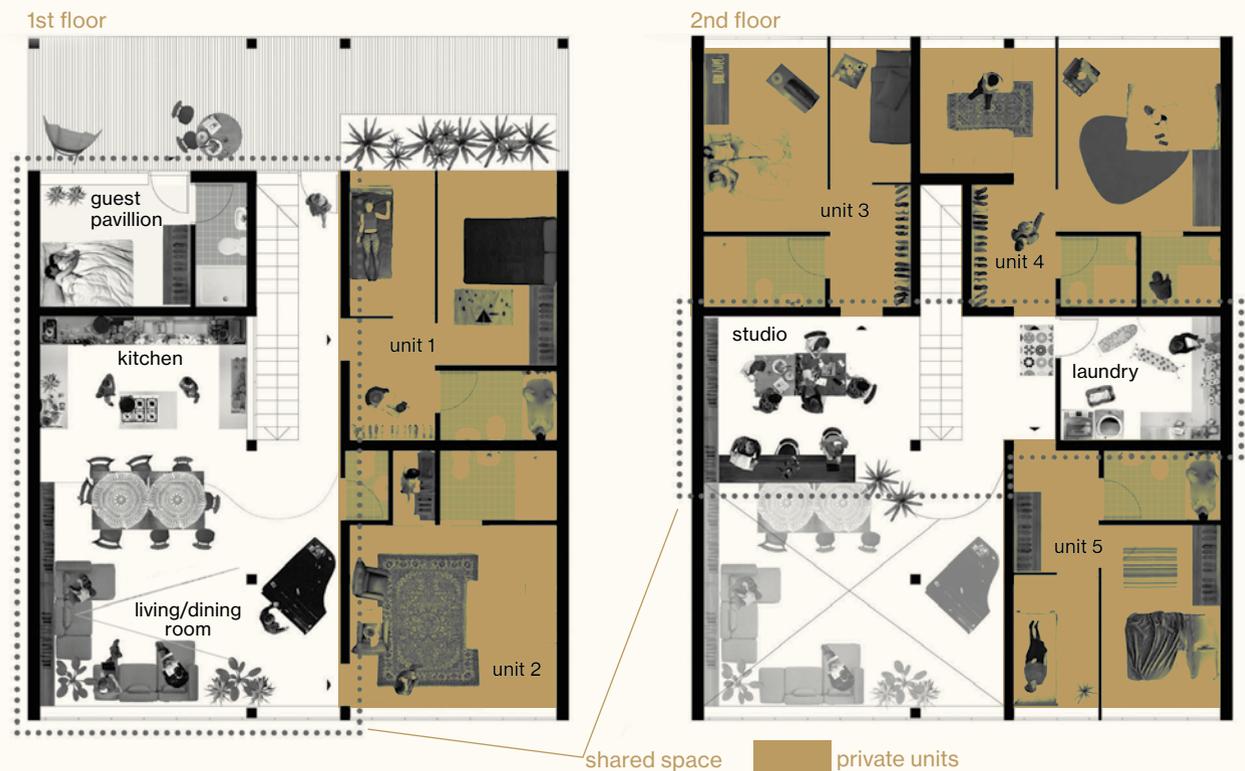
Campaign poster *Geen woning, geen kroning* (No home, no coronation) from 1980.

Below, from top:

Co-residence for a Haussmann building in Paris. © STAR/ BOARD;
Co-residence nr. 2: Villa © STAR/ BOARD.

Next Page:

Co-residence can be applied to every urban tissue, increasing the density of dwellings per hectare around 30–40 percent.
© STAR/ BOARD.





Nevertheless, this case is an exception, and there are no legal safeguards to prevent most landlords from abusing the system. It's unsustainable to rely on reasonable landlords—a better current solution lies in creative, active, and well-organized users. What people can immediately do to avoid experiencing what happened to us in our former architecture office, is to team up with other tenants and create tenants' associations.

In our case, that would have meant that we created an association of around ten different tenants in our building, who negotiate with the owner as a united front. We believe that with the creation of such an association, we could still be there today, as the owner was very interested in dealing with fewer parties to which he had to write invoices. This was part of the reason he considered renting to Codum. At the very least, such an organization would have provided us with a greater degree of control over the building we inhabited.

Co-residence

Using this concept, one solution developed by Beatriz Ramo in 2012, in collaboration with my office, BOARD, is "co-residence" (a term coined by Ramo). Currently, Ramo's office STAR strategies + architecture is developing a housing project in Paris of around 270 apartments, of which ten apartments are co-residences, scheduled for construction beginning in 2018.

A co-residence is an apartment in which some of the basic elements are shared by two or more "units"—a unit can refer to any type of household, from a single person to a family. Each unit has a private bedroom and bathroom, and common use of shared spaces, such as the living room and kitchen.

This leads to a 30–40 percent reduction in the total space used in an apartment, while doubling the space available to each inhabitant. Ideally, such a living style will also result in cost savings for tenants.

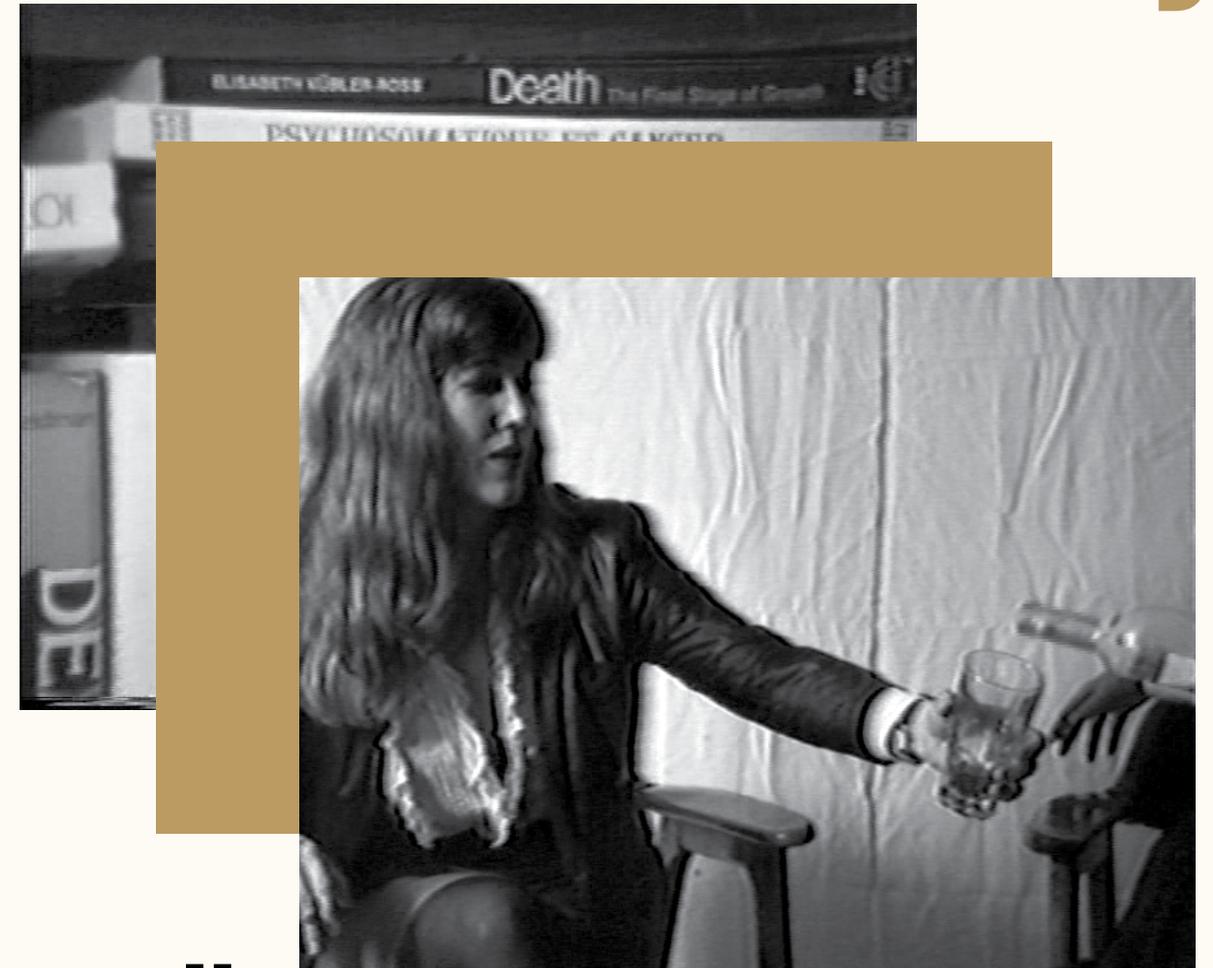
Co-residence is intended as a starting point to increased social cohesion among the residents, making it easier to establish tenants' associations and shared tenancies—a kind of "co-anti-squatting"—with an increased power over the building that is inhabited. Such groups commonly have sliding-scale payments based on income level, as well as other tactics to work around the profit-based landlord model.

The end goal of such a project is the creation of small tenants' associations or micro housing cooperatives that can rent or own properties collectively, providing them with even greater agency over their building. One prior successful example of such a model is the Zurich-based housing cooperative Kraftwerk 1, which has been operating since the late 1990s. One of its founders, the author Hans Widmer, wrote *bolo'bolo*, one of the major works on non-capitalist self-determined communities, in 1983.

There often remain legal and political obstacles, at varying degrees in different countries, to implementing this type of membership-based ownership model. Tenant organizations and housing models like co-residence provide a method through which fairer housing agreements can be negotiated, providing a bridge away from the profit-based housing model.

*Abbreviation of deciwatt per hectare

Murder Play



Reading

by Nolan Boomer

Pain in Chris Kraus's *How to Shoot a Crime*

The indentation of a body remains in a light-green bed. Who knows where the sleeper has gone. There's something scary about all this. The adult-sized, physical impression shows prior weight, heat, and the creasing of sheets. There's something sexy about all this. The onlooker intuits the dreams and nightmares that occur in this room nightly. But who records this scene?

Chris Kraus is the director of the short film *How to Shoot a Crime*, filmed in 1982, and completed in 1987. Shot by Marion Scemama, the video takes place mainly in a loft at 228 Front Street, near the developing South Street Seaport. The loft belonged to French literary critic Sylvère Lotringer, Kraus's longtime collaborator and lover, who was then teaching a course at Columbia University on death and dying. Throughout the film, two narratives bleed into one another: dominatrices discuss their relationship with pain; and George Diaz, an NYPD videographer, walks through the process of creating documentary evidence for homicide cases.

Chris Kraus, a self-proclaimed "failed filmmaker," accepted that her early videos would be appreciated mostly by friends and fellow artists. She is better known for her later work, especially her novel *I Love Dick*, which was recently adapted into an Amazon series. Upon the favorable reception of her books, the video art community began to reconsider her film work. Her writing, as well as her early film work, is driven by what Leslie Jamison describes in a recent *New Yorker* profile as "an abiding obsession with context" and the correlating desire to evade it.

Context, coincidentally, is the only part of Kraus's early video experiments that can be easily found. While it is difficult to find *How to Shoot a Crime* online, it's possible to find it described in essays and interviews with the director. The most thoughtful reflection on the film comes from her essay collection *Video Green*. She asserts that sadomasochism is "an enactment of urban displacement" because it represents "a desire to be someplace, to be locked in an intractable complicit transaction that takes place firmly in time." This argument, indicated especially by the word "enactment," suggests that sadomasochism is an actor in the play of urban displacement—a metaphor that is far-fetched, but perhaps valuable.

The roughly half-hour-long film opens with an isolated shot of leather boots and a young woman's voice. "When you're a control freak...when you're a control maniac..." Terence Sellers says, as the camera moves slowly up her body, clothed in dark colors. The camera pauses on her red lips, pronouncing that the worst problem is not being



An establishing shot, presumably from the roof of Sylvère Lotringer's loft, reveals apartment buildings and the Twin Towers.

Previous Page, left (partially hidden):

Mademoiselle Victoire tells Sylvère Lotringer that he cannot have a detached, clinical understanding of S&M. The camera pans across his morbid bookshelf.

Previous Page, right:

Sylvère Lotringer fills up Terence Sellers's glass of rosé in front of a sheet backdrop.

Opposite Page, Top:

Main title shot of Kraus's film uses a font similar to the date stamps of home movie cameras.

the edges of a white sheet hanging on the wall behind her. The half-hearted attempt at generic film backdrop falls away, revealing a casual home setting.

Why pretend in the first place? The false backdrop shows certain flexibility and lack of structure on the part of the filmmaker, evincing Kraus's obsession with simultaneously needing and avoiding context. A viewer might assume that the location of the interview isn't important, but Kraus goes out of her way to show that it isn't where it appears to be. It's surprising, then, how seriously she discusses the dominatrices' lack of connection with the outside environment in the *Video Green* essay collection:

Inside the loft on those long days in 1982, the two women on screen are intent on self-probing, not listening or looking around them. They are highly atomised single units, barely conscious that they are operating within an environment. And as such, they are emanating everything important about that environment. They are emanating anxiety, longing and fear.

That the women ignore their surroundings is true at face value; yet it makes sense, given that Lotringer asks questions that are largely philosophical in nature. Why would they talk about their surroundings when they're being asked about themselves? In fact, there are moments when the women assert control over other aspects of the interview. At one moment, the other dominatrix, Mademoiselle Victoire, refuses self-probing and flips the rote Q and A format. As Lotringer asks her about a movie he recently saw, she raises her eyebrows and declares that using a camera creates a detached, one-sided understanding of pain. "We need your dick out *here*," she asserts. A few vignettes later, and the camera moves across the spines of Lotringer's bookshelf. The title of each philosophical work indicates its content: pain and death. Lotringer asserts that a scholarly understanding of pain is necessary so that people don't lose control. Victoire doesn't argue with this, but she smiles knowingly. Despite his cool demeanor, the interviewer, who has no personal experience with sadomasochism, is the one being controlled.



Beyond the confines of the dimly lit loft, establishing shots provide a broader understanding of the film's time and place. In an early scene, Kraus delineates the Lower Manhattan skyline, presumably from the roof of Lotringer's apartment. As the camera skims over various high-rises, the voice of a dominatrix speaks over the images. She muses on how she feels when she views footage of a murder scene, and her shock at the pain that one human can impart on another. The buildings show the surrounding neighborhood more clearly—the construction of speculative finance, the new luncheonettes for stock traders, and the deteriorating facades one street over. Subtitles flash: "A Film, A Crime, A City."

The city is New York, specifically the area near the South Street Seaport. As the Reagan administration's deficit spending paved the way for a building boom, developers in this part of Manhattan began unveiling new multimillion-dollar structures on a regular basis. By late 1985, the indoor mall at Pier 17 was open for business, and the surrounding

area was slowly converted into a festival marketplace. Leadership at the local museum raised funds to partner with developers and historic preservationists to use the setting of a fishing port as an attraction for tourists and people who worked on Wall Street.

In one scene of the film, an apathetic Lotringer speaks with the perky financial manager of the South Street Seaport. She says that the fish market and the retailers operate on opposite schedules, allowing shoppers to feel that they're in an authentic environment without actually interacting with fishermen and women. "Prices have really skyrocketed... It's the hot new neighborhood in town," she concludes.

By the 1970s and '80s, decades of white flight and industrial sector job depletion had taken their toll on Lower Manhattan. Lack of demand from the wealthy caused banks to stop providing loans to landlords and property developers in the area. Many building owners stopped paying taxes on these properties or abandoned them altogether, leaving them to in-rem forfeiture, under which they eventually became property of the city. By 1987, 4,500 buildings in the area were in the city's possession, and squatters took control of many empty buildings. Until legally recognized through urban homesteading initiatives, many residents feared legal repercussions. This repossession occurred in tandem with a spike in the economy that increased rent in areas like the Seaport, which were of interest to developers. By the time *How to Shoot a Crime* was completed in 1987, some residents in the area were no longer squatters, but people paying relatively high rent.



A decrepit building appears multiple times to show the conditions around the corner from the developing South Street Seaport.



Kraus puts forth the thesis that a fascination with violent crime is a symptom of income inequality within close proximity. This idea is shown in the third major strand of the film: New York homicide videography. A bearded, forty-something man named George Diaz is shown for a brief moment, wearing a blue t-shirt and jeans that accidentally match. His presence beyond this moment takes the form of a voice that speaks over videos he creates for juries in homicide cases. Since most murders take place in the victim's own apartment, he says that he likes to first show the victim's circumstances—their spaces, memorabilia, etc.—before showing the dead body. He does it in this order so that the jury have "whet their appetite and they want to see the body." He mentions the entertainment of pain, but does not linger upon it. It becomes clear that, for the film, cathartic viewership is what links murder to sadomasochism.

These two forms of violence are linked provocatively when the dominatrix Sellers says that causing pain always comes from the same impulse. She says that she imparts pain at fifty percent, whereas a murderer imparts pain at one hundred percent. "It's the same thing, the same impulse," she intones, as the film cuts to a shot of a coroner lifting the sheet off of a murder victim's body. This would appear to be a serious conclusion,

yet in Kraus's *Video Green* essay collection, she describes Sellers in this scene as "stoned and wanting to be a philosopher." It points to the sense of apathy that pervades the video—from the poorly placed backdrop curtain to this apparent thesis of the film.

Rather than deeply connecting sadomasochism with gentrification, the film shows how removed loft living can be from issues of displacement and crime. During the 1970s and '80s, a crime-ridden New York was a popular trope of journalism, with headlines like the *London Sunday Times*' infamous 1973 front page story, "Thugs, Mugs, Drugs: City in Terror." Movies like *Taxi Driver* (1976) also depict New York as a homogeneously dangerous place. While it's true that violent crime was at an extreme high during that time, it's untrue that all New Yorkers were affected equally. People (mostly men) who paid for dominatrices and rented South Street Seaport lofts were not likely to be the same people most at risk of homicide. According to a 1986 homicide report published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, the vast majority of homicide victims in Manhattan during that time were young black men, a demographic that is never shown in *How to Shoot a Crime*. Lotringer's apathy and critical detachment pushes a philosophical understanding of violence that is disconnected from the realities of crime and displacement.



The "dead body" with its arm twisted backward.

The stakes of passive viewership of crime comes to a head in the final scene of the film. Diaz says that a murder has taken place at 228 Front Street, Lotringer's own building. He shows the scene outside—a red brick building with a restaurant on the street level. He climbs the stairs slowly, eventually entering the apartment. A kitchen is shown, with ample wine glasses on the drying rack, ready for hedonistic nights to come. When Diaz enters the bedroom, a bald man in a brown "North American 83" t-shirt is lying on a bed with his arm twisted backward, apparently dead. The camera pans over details in the room—half-full handles of alcohol, a knife, and some books. When the bed is shown again, the body is no longer there, but the indentation of a sleeping body remains. The camera turns toward the corner of the room, where the man who was supposedly just dead is now suddenly standing. He looks at the viewer, tongue-in-cheek; not resurrected, but quietly smirking.

When his acting tricks the viewer, it is a nauseating reminder: latent tropes hide within every narrative of murder, or really any story of pain. The actors on the stage of urban displacement, crime, and sadomasochism may vary widely, but they are united by the passive audience that watches with pleasure.

SELF-DETERMINATION BOON SHEW

by Sam Winks

Sometime late in my undergraduate education, I saw an online image of a beautiful, simple chair built out of common pine two-by-fours from a hardware store. The whole chair was constructed with eleven pieces of wood, cut to six standard lengths and assembled with a hammer and nails. At that time I had no idea what this chair design was, so I scoured blogs and Flickr accounts with conflicting information. Through this search I stumbled upon a low quality PDF of *Autoprogettazione?*, a book of furniture plans created by Italian designer Enzo Mari. The book offered a full suite of furnishing for the home that, in his words, sought to “teach anyone to look at present production with a critical eye.” The easy-to-assemble look of the first piece of furniture piqued my interest. In the short introduction to the publication, Mari hands over ownership to the user, and reframes the consumer as the maker.

Autoprogettazione? showed me that design could be much more than functional. It led me to start reading more about Enzo Mari, and the early days of DIY furniture. I found the work of Ken Isaacs, Victor Papanek, and others, collecting the writing of every related designer that I could find. The political aim of these books, empowering the reader, was exactly what I was trying to do with my own furniture design work.

I think about my collection as an incomplete, idiosyncratic compendium that empowers people to alter the built environment. Presently, my collection ranges from DIY manuals focused on user-built furniture to architectural theory and works on counterculture. Each book poses different solutions to design autonomy, but they all seek to help integrate the user into the reconstruction of their built reality. This integration is the central tenet behind my collecting habit, and has for some time been the main goal of my personal research.

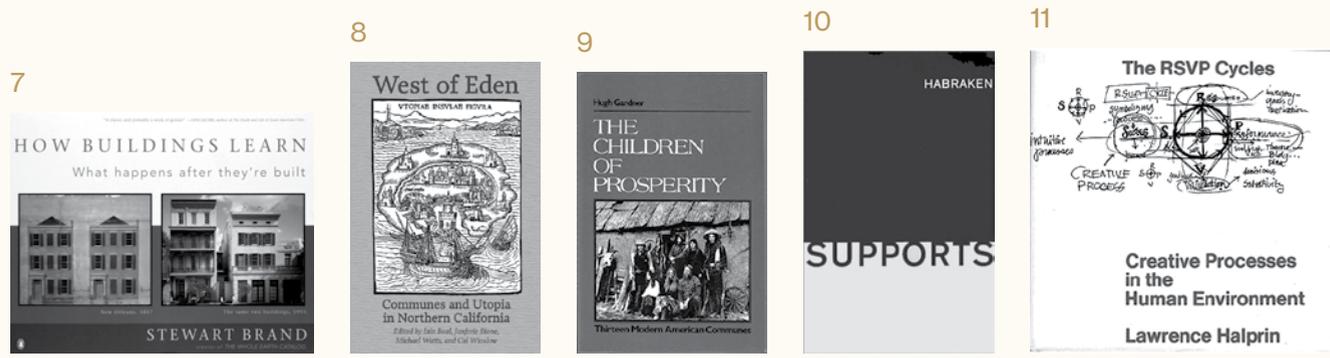
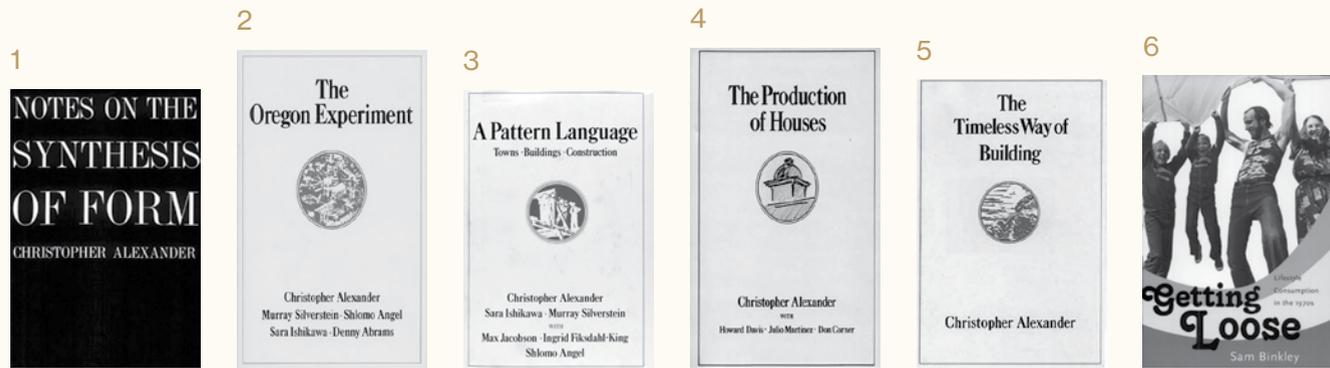
Here I have listed a bibliography of many of the books from my collection. They are not essential readings, but personal selections that offer the reader a path towards re-envisioning the built environment to better suit needs and desires.

HISTORY & THEORY:

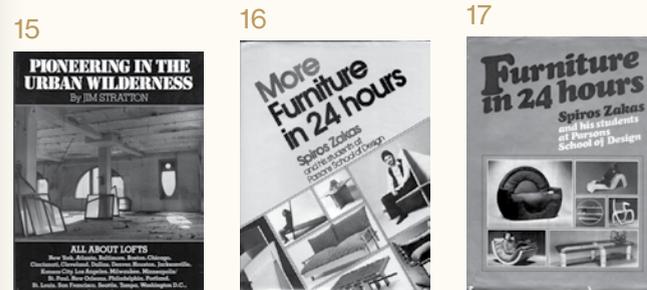
- 1 Alexander, Christopher. *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.
- 2 ———. *The Oregon Experiment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- 3 ———. *The Pattern Language*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- 4 ———. *The Production of Houses*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- 5 ———. *The Timeless Way of Building*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- 6 Blinkey, Sam. *Getting Loose*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- 7 Brand, Stewart. *How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They're Built*. New York: Penguin Books, 1994.
- 8 Boal, Iain, Janferie Stone, Michael Watts, and Cal Winslow, eds. *West of Eden: Communes and Utopia in Northern California*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012.
- 9 Gardener, Hugh. *The Children of Prosperity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978.
- 10 Habraken, John. *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing*. London: The Architecture Press, 1972.
- 11 Halprin, Lawrence. *The RSVP Cycles*. New York: Braziller, 1969.
- 12 Hamdi, Nabeel. *Housing without Houses*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991.
- 13 Hayden, Dolores. *Seven American Utopias*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976.
- 14 Kahn, Lloyd, and Bob Easton. *Shelter*. Bolinas, CA: Shelter Publications, 1973.
- 15 Oliver, Paul, ed. *Shelter and Society*. London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1969.
- 16 Papanek, Victor. *Design for The Real World*. New York: Bantam Books, 1973.
- 17 Soleri, Paolo. *Arcosanti: An Urban Laboratory?* Scottsdale, AZ: Cosanti Press, 1983.
- 18 Turner, John F. C. *Housing by People*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.

HOW-TO MANUALS:

- 1 Bruvere, Christian, and Robert Inwood. *In Harmony with Nature*. Philadelphia: Running Press, 1973.
- 2 EOOS. *Social Furniture*. London: Koenig Books, 2016.
- 3 Fineder, Martina, Thomas Geisler, and Sebastian Hackenschmidt. *Nomadic Furniture 3.0*. Zurich: Niggli Verlag, 2017.
- 4 Hennessey, James, and Victor Papanek. *Nomadic Furniture*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1973.
- 5 ———. *Nomadic Furniture 2*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.
- 6 Isaacs, Ken. *How to Build Your Own Living Structures*. New York: Harmony Books, 1974.
- 7 Kern, Ken, Ted Kogon, and Rob Thallon. *The Owner-Builder and the Code*. Oakhurst, CA: Owner-Builder Publications, 1976.
- 8 Kern, Ken. *The Owner Built Home*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972.
- 9 Mari, Enzo. *Autoprogettazione?* Milan, 1974.
- 10 Reynolds, Michael. *Earthship: Volume I*. Taos: Solar Survival Press, 1990.
- 11 Reynolds, Michael. *Earthship: Volume II*. Taos: Solar Survival Press, 1990.
- 12 Reynolds, Michael. *Earthship: Volume III*. Taos: Solar Survival Press, 1993.
- 13 Stamberg, Peter. *Instant Furniture*. New York: Litton Educational Publishing, 1976.
- 14 Stem, Seth. *Designing Furniture from Concept to Shop Drawing: A Practical Guide*. Newtown: Tauton Press, 1989.
- 15 Stratton, Jim. *Pioneering in the Urban Wilderness*. New York: Urizen Books, 1977.
- 16 Zakas, Spiros. *More Furniture in 24 Hours*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978.
- 17 Zakas, Spiros. *Furniture in 24 Hours*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1976.



HISTORY & THEORY



HOW-TO MANUALS

NOLAN BOOMER

is an art and architecture writer based in Hudson, NY. He is currently an editorial assistant at Princeton Architectural Press.
nolanboomer.com

COLE CATANEO

studied architecture at Hampshire College, and currently serves as an editorial assistant at Original Copy NYC.

KAYLA E.

is a queer Latina artist, editor, and designer. She is the editor-in-chief of Nat. Brut and lives in the Carolinas with her partner and their three animal daughters.
kaylaework.com & designaltar.org

JULIA GOODMAN

writes at the intersection of politics, law, and culture. She is currently an editorial assistant at *Jacobin*.

JIMMY MEZEI

is a graphic designer and painter based in Brooklyn, NY.
jimmezei.com

MOS ARCHITECTS

is an architecture firm conceived in 2003 by Michael Meredith and Hilary Sample. Their work straddles the boundaries of the conceptual, the digital, and the physical.
mos.nyc

PALACIT

is a multidisciplinary design studio that reconsiders the gap between theoretical architecture and the broader forces that shape our built world.
palacit.com

WILLIAM POWHIDA

is an artist, collaborator, and activist in New York. His work pokes fun at the elitism of the art world.
williampowhida.com

SIMONE KAPLAN-SENCHAK

is a writer and editor from New York, now based in London. She studies contemporary European philosophy at Kingston University.

SEAN SUCHARA

is a graphic designer based in Long Island and a recent graduate of the Fashion Institute of Technology. He has recently worked at Studio Lin and PlayLab, Inc.

BERND UPMEYER

is the founder of the Rotterdam-based Bureau of Architecture, Research, and Design (BOARD). He is also the editor-in-chief of *MONU Magazine*.
b-o-a-r-d.nl & monu-magazine.com

SAM WINKS

is an artist and designer working at the intersection of the functional and the fictional. He lives and works in Queens, NY.
samwinks.com

JAIME OMAR YASSIN

is a writer based in Oakland, CA. He is the co-founder of Biblioteca Popular, an open-air library and community garden in the Fruitvale neighborhood.
hyphenatedrepublic.wordpress.com

REBECCA ZORACH

is Mary Jane Crowe Professor in Art and Art History at Northwestern University.