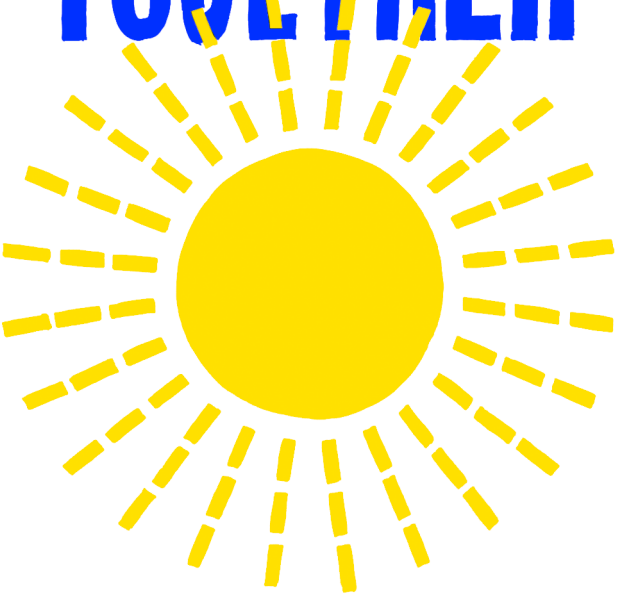
HOW TOGETHER



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NO SOLUTIONS PLEASE

Gathering is one very political act, maybe it is even the very essence of all political acts. Gathering happens at multiple scales, whether it is the gathering of oneself with one's own thoughts, the encounter of two friends, a family gathering, the gathering of a community or of an assembly. Gathering is the precondition for exchange and debate, a debate allowing conflict to occur in the search for a common understanding. For every scale of gathering a specific architectural form exists supporting a certain quality of debate.

At times of global socio-economic, political and ecological unrest, we need those debates to be constructive. We want them to be constructive. We want to do it together. We claim architecture as our mediator.

Under certain conditions, the gathering of individuals can lead to collaborative dynamics, productive ways of being together, transforming through action the urban and socio-political environment. So, how do we gather? Whether it is around content, ideas or actions, productive gatherings observe certain logics, rhythms and rules (or non-rules). Through past projects and experiences we have empirically implemented, explored and tested them. Several situations of/for togetherness are born from those experiences and are composed of a mix of people (ideas, skills, abilities, etc.) and actions (uses, activities, formats, etc.) in time (temporality, rhythms, intensity, permanence, etc.) supported by the suitable structure (resources, materials, space/place). Our projects are not made up of only one of these aspects. It's neither only space, nor only people or ideas.

We always start by inhabiting a space: our practice is based on the ground on which our projects are located. We are present, on site. We take time to develop ideas, relationships and networks. We gather resources, we involve local energies, we invite people to pass by, stay, appropriate, propose, act. Through our presence, we take time to build experiences and develop as many stories as there are possible interpretations of what we produce. Therefore, this invitation to the Chicago Architecture Biennial from afar represents a big challenge: how do we invite people to use and share a common ground if we are ourselves the guests? Can we still be there without being face-to-face? How do we connect towards a productive goal? How do we transform a common ground to a convivial ground?

We know what our questions are. But we don't yet know yours. Therefore, please allow us not to bring just one solution here. Instead, let us propose a mix of possibilities that you can adopt or refuse, adapt or transform, seize or build upon.

Through our intervention, we put forward fragments to compose and dispose, to use independently or to combine together, all at once or one with another. The present publication is one of those fragments. Surrounding the question of how we live together, the gathered texts, conversations and essays bring the multiple voices that constitute ConstructLab's community into the space of the Biennial. The publication is the bind that ties all fragments of our intervention together. It is intended as a collection of personal experiences on how we—as a group of individuals from different backgrounds, cultures and disciplines—foster togetherness through living and working together around projects. These experiences are not examples to be followed. These experiences are not solutions. They are just stories we would have shared with you, together, around a beer, a fire, a workshop, a dinner, a lecture, a nap, a coffee, a book, a... It's an invitation to fill the gaps and use all common grounds the way you wish, to live—at least for a moment—together, whether you wish to convey a message or to learn from someone else's, whether you wish to actively participate or to simply be present. It's not a "how to". It's not a manual. It's an anti-manual. In here you will not find what to do or how to act. It is an invitation to invent and implement your own way of writing your own common stories.

PRO-
LOGUE

THE CONVIVIAL GROUND

EMERGENCISM

Community is as old as humanity and the need for the other as important as the need for water and food. Within all communities, organizing survival has led to the invention of different forms of sharing in cultures, in order to distribute resources, roles and tasks. Naturally, the thought of a community in which every single individual was responsible for sustaining himself entirely would seem at best unfeasible, but maybe just rather vain. Nobody can know everything, and even if they could...

nobody can make everything. While the market based on common value managed to offer a solution to transcend the necessary conflicts and negotiations that come along with sharing, in a world of limited resources and limited growth, that system also increases inequality: when one gets more, another one loses big.

Nowadays, the dematerialization of the relation to the other, made possible through free trade and the rise of technologies, reaches a new level. But while individualism is doable in daily life, the current emergencies and contemporary challenges—ecological, social, political, economical—recall the necessity of global common action towards one possible future. It is up to us all to invent today the conditions of that action.

COMMON GROUND IS NOT ENOUGH
BEYOND COMMON: CONVIVIAL

On the opposite side of the extra-connected, extra-marketed society, the *craze* towards new (old) ways of life, whereby needs are reduced to a minimum in order to assume self-sustainability, represents a new marginal alternative for living a good life. But if reducing our needs seems like an appealing idea, it is only a partial solution. In one way, movements such as minimalism or survivalism contribute to the negation of the need for community and the acceptance of the failure of society to find common answers to the contemporary challenges together. While those challenges are commonly identified—we commonly call them *climate change*, *crises of capitalism*, etc.—commonly agreeing on the actions to implement to solve those issues together seems a utopian task. Working together implies acknowledging not only the common agreements, but also the individual discords. If community is only a

need, it is tempting to let conflict rule, which divides that community into smaller opposing units with a centralized power. But if community is a desire, then desire rules over conflict and the search for common solutions, aside from discord, becomes possible. In that sense, common ground is not enough. A convivial ground could be an answer.

Built upon the notion of 'conviviality'[1] the Manifesto for a Convivialist Society [2] draws the baselines for a legitimate politics based on four main principles: the principle of common humanity—beyond all differences, there is only one humanity that shall be respected by every single member of that one and only humanity; the principle of common sociality—humans are social beings and their largest asset lies in their social relationships; the principle of individuation—legitimate politics should allow every person to express their individual selves, by developing their abilities and empowering them to act without damaging somebody else's individuality, in search of equal freedom; the principle of handled opposition—opposition as the free expression of individual opinion is inevitable, but it shall not endanger the principle of common sociality that allows conflict to be fruitful rather than destructive.

In that sense, if what we need is a common ground, what we desire is a convivial ground. How does it translate in terms of design?

WELCOME CONFLICT!

While in a situation of constructive collaboration—or collaborative construction—conflicts often appear along the way, whether with the external actors of a project or within the community of the project itself. Conflict is then only the expression of different individual opinions that,

instead of creating divides, can become a constructive tool and sometimes even a creative activity. If within a community, conflict can be embraced by learning to oppose without colliding, then the conditions of that community shall be clear, defined and refined continuously throughout the project. That community starts with the gathering of individuals around a common aim, the definition of its mode of governance, its decision-making process, the nature of its collaborations, the roles of its members, and the rhythms and formats by which everything of the above can be changed.

In order to welcome conflict, the community therefore needs to develop a culture of assembly that acts as a democratic platform for the management of decentralized authority. Within an assembly of a community of designer-builders such as ConstructLab, the nature of the conflicts expressed can address at the same time issues of living together—who made noise yesterday at night? Who forgot to close the door?—as well as issues of working together—cleaning up and properly storing the tools, respecting shifts and basic security, etc. In fact, within this kind of community, the difference between living and working is hard to define. As in New Babylon[3], that designer-builder-philosopher-community-member is a *Homo Ludens*[4], subordinated neither to work nor to leisure; he is an active producer of his own experience and of his surrounding space, at any time.

VOLUNTARY COMMUNITY

Within ConstructLab's practice, every project starts with inhabitation. Whether the projects take place in derelict industrial landscapes, abandoned warehouses, forgotten infrastructures or urban wastelands, the first action

consists in building the support structure—the basic amenities that everyone needs for daily living—which will then accompany the community freshly made in charge of leading the project. As such, the first community that each project addresses is the community of designer-builders itself, the group of *Homo Ludens* performing a 24/7 action within a limited time and space. That community is able to mediate and pass over conflict, as it is constituted of voluntary members enrolled to live together in order to build their own experience and environment for a given time. As the French anthropologist Caillé puts it, "a voluntary association lies in two or more individuals pooling their material resources, their knowledge and their activity for a common end which is not primarily geared toward profit-making."[5] Whatever the individual goal or aim, every member of the community has a project—and that can be very different from one member to another. Monetary reward plays only a small role in the motivation of its members and is often limited to basic subsistence. While one should question the nature of the *entreprecariat* as being a recurring model within social community projects and associative work, economic equity within a project community allows decentralized and non-hierarchical authority and therefore annihilates all conflicts due to pay and investments gaps.

CONVIVIAL COMMUNITY

Parallel to the construction of the basic structures for collective living, the community builds its own identity and negotiates the functioning rules of the group, distributing roles and tasks, rhythms and functions, logistics and missions. The first mode of governance is based on the experience of the members, constituting a force of proposition, and is able to evolve within the time of the

projects. Members are empowered to make new propositions according to specific contextual issues encountered on site. In order to create the possibility of reinventing or improving itself, the community installs daily rituals to reflect collectively on individual needs or claims and to serve the project in the best way. The community builds up around convivial situations. Through their daily activities mixing, living and working, without prioritizing one or the other, the members of the community of designer-builders progressively becomes local residents of the context they are in for the time of the project. For the social and cultural anthropologist Tilmann Heil, conviviality occurs "where local residents engage in practices and discourses of living together, engaging with, confronting and embracing differences."[6] That community made of voluntary members is enriched by the diversity of its members, coming from different disciplines, cultural and personal backgrounds. Together they shape their own local culture, specific to that group, that time, that space. According to Adloff, "conviviality represents a form of minimal sociality and minimal consensus that functions as a competence of intracultural, daily negotiation."[7]

MAY SPACE BE A CONVIVIAL TOOL

Already in his 1973 essay 'Tools for Conviviality', Ivan Illich described his concerns by observing the rise of an individualist society in which beings are disconnected from one another by means of the development of non-convivial tools, whose design and apparatus are so complex that they are necessarily operated and imposed by a central authority. Nowadays, most of our technologies are based on the model Illich observed, from our daily so-called connected objects to our public institutions. In a way, the spaces we inhabit, from housing as speculative products

to monitored and controlled public spaces, suffer the same phenomenon. Nevertheless, by considering space as a tool, Illich's definition of convivial tools outlines possible and necessary convivial spaces; spaces that "foster conviviality to the extent to which they can be easily used, by anybody, as often or as seldom as desired, for the accomplishment of a purpose chosen by the user. The use of such [spaces] by one person does not restrain another from using them equally. They do not require previous certification of the user. Their existence does not impose any obligation to use them. They allow the user to express his meaning in action."[8]

According to this definition, any space that is easily comprehended, interpreted, in which anybody can project and implement any use, is a convivial space. The convivial spaces are the spatial answer to uses rather than functions: when you plan without use, people have the opportunity to propose one themselves.

As such, the table—being necessarily the first space around which the project community gathers to share the first of a long series of dinners—constitutes the first convivial tool/space. Whether it is used to prepare and share food, to work on, to sketch a design, to discuss a proposal, or to assemble, the table's design, shape and proportions convey many different possibilities and qualities of encounters and therefore different meanings. Nevertheless, the table—the line—often fails to gather bigger groups of people and triggers smaller groups of discussion according to their seating positions. In that case, another spatial typology is necessary—the circle—specifically thought of for assembly of the whole community. In many projects, as gathering is a basic need, another convivial space is implemented: the agora—a rounded theater where a larger

community can assemble. Space of representation, of discourse, of playfulness or of performance, the agora often becomes the central convivial space around which the community takes its place. The agora, like the table, is a space for invitation, where the project community mingles with the local inhabitants or the local actors by offering any kind of shared activities and by opening—finally—its convivial spaces to others.

CONCLUSION-FICTION

As in New Babylon, in a convivialist society, there is no leisure time, because all time there is active.[9] In order to experiment with creating that society, we have to rethink our systemic relation to working and living. If we know what tools and spaces trigger convivialist situations, the search for an absolute answer to the broader question of "How could we live together?" stays wide open. After almost twenty years of work on that question observing that the man of the 70s didn't embrace the radical potential of the 60s and the possible transformation of society towards a collaborative and playful future, Constant Nieuwenhuys surrendered his art to the inescapability of human violence. Though his faith in a New Babylonian society never faded. Maybe New Babylon is not the cause of its own failure. And maybe human violence is not the cause of its destruction. In the 60s, inheriting from modernists precepts, architectural radical utopias concentrated on seeking the one architectural form and spatial system adaptable to all environments as the response to the challenge of one global society. If the global answer has not yet been found, maybe we should instead look for partial ones. Maybe our wish for an architecture of conviviality is grounded in local solutions, encompassing all possible complexities and diversities of single, local contexts. Architecture, through

the essence of its mode of production—the so-called project—allows us to apply and implement now and for a given limited time the solutions we envision. How to live together? Let's start by trying. Maybe here and now, around that table or that agora. Maybe we will fail. But we might start again, as long as we have the same project.

1) According to the German sociologist Frank Adloff the term 'conviviality' "can be traced back to Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin and his book *Physiologie du goût* from 1825. The gastro-philosopher understood conviviality as the situation, commonly at the table, when different people come together over a good long meal and time passes swiftly in excited conversations." Beyond its common use in contemporary French today, and its adoption into English, the term 'convivial' in a philosophical sense has since been revisited by Ivan Illich in 1973 in *Tools for Conviviality* and more recently by Alain Caillé, Humbert, Latouche and Viveret in works surrounding *The Convivialist Manifesto*.

2) "The Convivialist Manifesto, a Declaration of Interdependence" https://dialoguesenhumanite.org/sites/dialoguesenhumanite.org/files/meetuppage/103/convivialist-manifesto.pdf, originally published in French in June 2013 under the title *Manifeste Convivialiste. Déclaration d'Interdépendance* aux éditions le Bord de L'eau http://www.lesconvivialistes.org/pdf/Manifeste-Convivialiste.pdf
The *convivialists* call on the failure of both religious and political doctrines to answer simultaneously all 4 main questions that urgently need to be addressed today: the moral, the political, the ecological and the economic questions. They tackle the fact that all political doctrine is based on the principle that resources are unlimited (either the resource itself or its technological counterpart as possible replacement) and that conflicts between humans are born from the difficulty in satisfying material needs. As such, they consider the human as a being of needs and not of desire. They therefore identified as the only possible solution the possibility of infinite resources and continuous growth.

3) *New Babylon* is the urban megastructure project developed by Dutch visual artist Constant Nieuwenhuys between 1956 and 1974. Founding member of the *Internationale Situationniste*, Constant imagined New Babylon as a realizable project for an architecture of situations that "envisages a society of total automation in which the need to work is replaced with a nomadic life of creative play, in which traditional architecture has disintegrated along with the social institutions that it propped up." In New Babylon, the built environment is flexible and transformable by its inhabitants as per wish and/or need on a daily basis. The inhabitants are the playful explorers of a constantly moving environment, calling for daily negotiations and collaborations through the reconfiguration of social life as an architectural play.

4) Constant borrowed the notion of *Homo Ludens* from the Dutch historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizinga from the eponymous book he published in 1938. The Latin word *Ludens* comes from the verb *ludere*, which itself is cognate of the noun *ludus*. *Ludus* has no direct equivalent in English, as it simultaneously refers to sport, play, school, and practice. In its distancing from the society of work and production through the potential of complete automation, Constant considers *Homo Ludens* not as a third category of humanity—close to *Homo Sapiens and Homo Faber*—but rather as the one category of human beings encompassing them all. Homo Ludens is a person who lives, makes and thinks through play. In his own words written in the exhibition catalogue published by the Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, 1974 : "As a way of life Homo Ludens will demand, firstly, that he responds to his need *for playing, for adventure, for mobility*, as well as all the conditions that facilitate the free creation of his own life. Until then, the principal activity of man had been the exploration of his natural surroundings. Homo Ludens himself will seek to transform, to recreate, those surroundings, that world, according to his new needs. The exploration and creation of the environment will then happen to coincide because, in creating his domain to explore, Homo Ludens will apply himself to exploring his own creation. Thus we will be present at *an uninterrupted process of creation and re-creation*, sustained by a generalized creativity that is manifested in all domains of activity."

5) Caillé, Alain. "Gift and Association", in: Vandevelde, Antoon (ed.). *Gifts and Interests*. Leuven: Peeters, 2000, pp.47- 55.

6) Heil, Tilmann. "Conviviality. (Re-)Negotiating Minimal Consensus", in: Vertovec, Steven (ed.). *Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies*. London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 317-24.

7) Adloff, Frank. «Practices of Conviviality and the Social and Political Theory of Convivialism.» *Novos estudos CEBRAP* 38.1 (2019): 35-47.

8) Illich, Ivan. *Tools for Conviviality*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973, pp. 22.

9) Nieuwenhuys, Constant. "New (sic !) Babylon", in: *Work Body, Leisure*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2018.

CONVER-
SATION

BUILDING 'TOGETHERNESS'

The idea behind ConstructLab is to work within a collaborative practice that combines design and construction, brought together by the carpenter-architect Alexander Römer in the early 2000s. Since its beginning, it has developed into a large network. Working on both ephemeral and permanent projects, ConstructLab gathers architects, designers, builders, social scientists, curators, graphic designers, photographers, gardeners and cooks around the idea of bringing sites to life and creating a sense of place. But beyond construction and design, what really binds those individuals is the notion of 'togetherness'.

The present conversation takes place in Berlin in April 2017. It is a sunny afternoon in the office that Alexander Römer and Joanne Pouzenc share with many others.

Joanne *"Together as in Building Together". Where does this idea come from?*

Alex Building together is not a new idea, it is rather a very old one. In the medieval times, in the villages, when a farmer needed a new barn, the farmer called the carpenter to realize the construction. But already, as a carpenter, you can't work alone. You always need a team of two or three people. For two or three weeks the skilled workers would prepare all the pieces for the construction—they would cut and assemble them on the ground. Hence, in order to build the structure up, they needed as many hands as possible. The farmer would ask all the villagers to come and help [erect] the future barn. And, well... to drag people in to help, what's [better] than partying?

After a couple of days of working they would celebrate together their collective and visible achievement. This is what we traditionally call *Richtfest* in Germany [in English, 'topping out']. This ritual is still celebrated on contemporary construction sites, but in most of the cases it has lost its voluntary aspect. The inauguration is another celebrated moment in the construction, marking the beginning of long years of inhabitation, but the real collaborative moment is very much related to the structure of a building. This is what we do, we gather for short times on a site and we call upon the local communities to help us to... celebrate and build together. It is always a nice moment.

I think it is essential to be and work in teams—even more for architects. In ConstructLab, we understand 'togetherness'

as a gathering of individuals around a collaborative situation. It does not mean that those individuals need to follow one individual; we really put the emphasis on the collaborative work at any phase of a project. For projects on a larger political level, reintroducing togetherness into public space becomes a strong political act. Very often, it seems that you are no longer allowed to do anything. In the public realm, the most common collaborative moment in public space nowadays is the act of protest. Instead, we should use public space to create social dynamics. 'Togetherness' guarantees the permanence of a project; it makes you stronger. It gives you force.

Joanne *When talking about 'togetherness' you refer to crafts, not to architecture. Isn't architecture enough to gather around?*

Alex The most important [thing] is that both crafts and architecture come together. How do we create this moment in a collaborative workshop? It is not only about the act of building, but also about the place where that act happens. I'm thinking here of the building shelter, the building lodge, the exchange of skills and knowledge. Even though you come with a certain competence, you still learn a lot by helping others in their tasks. The social aspect of making together is very central to us: eating together, cooking while making the building, investigating the neighborhood, or documenting the process and the project. In traditional architectural projects, it seems that only the final result is honored, when the building stands alone. Within a construction site, togetherness is omnipresent; the workers gather, eat, live, exchange, negotiate, and so on. In ConstructLab, we decide to celebrate the process, from the first time we have a discussion up until the construction is standing and being used.

Joanne *To join a collaborative process as you depict it, it seems that the nature of your skills or specialties doesn't really matter, as long as everybody gathers around the same aim and ideal. Is that right? How does that really work?*

Alex Yes. Exactly. The complementary skills are revealed and come together through the process. I think there is a technical—or maybe rational—aspect of making projects together. The question is rather how to join a group… and what is the keystone that holds this group together. In our projects, we use different narrative forms: for example, we often perform a role play within the team. Imagine you build a swimming pool and everybody becomes a lifeguard. Or you build a mill and some become the millers while others [become] the bakers. We also like to propose a sort of mad enterprise (Verrücktes Unternehmen) that we need to realize—a bit like the movie of Werner Herzog where they bring a boat over the mountain. It's a challenge: you are moved by the will to go and do something big together, and for that, you need to organize it collectively. We use those narratives to involve the local community. On the one hand, they are curious to see us act and perform and, on the other hand, it relates to something they know better than we do, as our narratives are often created out of their local culture, according to what we observe through our investigation or with the stories we borrow from the local storytellers. Participation is often related to curiosity and enthusiasm, triggered by what people can see. It is always better to create a situation in which people come and join you with their own time and will, instead of trying to bring them in.

In fact, if we already use narration in the building process, we repeat the same method in a place's activation process. The act of building gives a strong impulse, but the act of inhabiting generates togetherness. Inhabiting the place

that we design and build is very important to guarantee the liveliness of a space once we leave. Somehow, daily life allows you to articulate the projects. Going every morning to buy the bread for everybody, for example. Having these daily life rituals make you a real neighbor for the others in a local area. People get used to you, get used to the place and at some point, you can almost disappear as the locals also start to develop a new routine with that place. Our imagination sometimes transforms into reality.

Joanne *Beyond imagination and narration, how do you encourage 'togetherness' spatially?*

Alex The very first typology we use to gather is the circle. You are in a circle to discuss, and we need to do it a lot. We need to talk about what we are doing that day, who is doing what, what is missing, but also about who is not happy with a situation.

Discussing doesn't mean only liking or loving it is also about conflict, letting this conflict happen and getting it resolved. The round situation is where you can debate problems. As long as the middle of the circle is kept free, everybody is democratically on the same level. The circle can be generated without architecture, but architecture makes it more suitable, more comfortable somehow. If you start to build tribunes, it suddenly becomes an agora. If you make it steeper, it becomes denser. We tried a lot of different models, playing with modules, proportions and dimensions. For example, we had an agora without an exit. I just showed that one in a conference and I was asking the audience what was missing. They answered in consensus "the entrance", but it is not true: the entrance is there at first to invite people in, right when you need to enter. Conversely, once it's full and the entrance is closed, it suddenly disappears. It's an

interesting way to look at it: you were not allowed to escape if there were any problems. You were somehow stuck in democracy and what you needed to escape was to discuss and collaborate.

Another interesting model of an agora we realized is the one we made in Italy. At first, we started to paint circles on the ground. Simple lines. We then aligned chairs of different heights along those lines. It was the simplest and cheapest tribune one can actually make.

In Mons, in Belgium, for the European Capital of Culture in 2015, it was very different. We had a very large surface to play with. The circle became a big square, a large platform with only one or two rows to sit on. It was a very lively playground, and sometimes even a stage. We performed presentations, a banquet, a yoga class, a concert. Everything seemed to be possible there. Among the different activities, we thought of the Île des Réunions that we developed in collaboration with Les Commissaires Anonymes, evoking at the same time the sunny French island in the southern hemisphere—important when you are in rainy Europe—that could be translated literally as the "Island for Meetings". Every Sunday afternoon, we invited people to debate. It developed in a way that the neighbors would also propose themes to debate. It became again a ritual—the ritual to gather once a week and have this moment of exchange. If you had a problem during the week, you could say: "Hey, let's meet and talk about it in the Île des Réunions on Sunday." For our collective it was also very interesting. To present an issue in the Île des Réunions, you needed to think about how to present the problem and you had some time to do so. It was very different from a spontaneous one-to-one discussion; there, you needed to create a group situation and you almost needed to get people on your side.

32 Through the island and the regular meetings, we observed the movements and flows of power within the group. Even if we are independent individuals acting collaboratively with a common aim, there are naturally power struggles. I think it is essential to give those struggles a space and to build upon them. One could think of the Theater of the Oppressed of Augusto Boal in Brazil. As a theater director, he developed a performative format in order to tackle problems within communities. If problems appeared within a small neighborhood, he proposed performative situations where people play their issues on stage, as an active and engaging process to solve conflicting situations. I think it has a real learning value for communities. We actually use the typology of the agora in both ways: to host celebrations and as a spatial form for conflict resolution.

Joanne *ConstructLab projects always seem to be located somewhere between the visible—the built structures—and the invisible—the performative content. What are the other notions that are central to your practice?*

Alex Instead of the visible, [we] speak about "Support Structure"—in relation to the work of Céline Condorelli—meaning the infrastructure and the visible structures we build in order to get to the aim we announce. When we invest a place, there is nothing, so we first need to build the structures for our basic needs: we need shelter, to eat, to clean and to bathe. So we build a roof, a kitchen, a shower and toilets. This process always helps to create awareness about our basic needs, and to progressively regain a situation of acceptable comfort. Sometimes we also build a sauna as an extension of the basic amenities, for pleasure—and for the sake of the ritual, of course. Then comes the construction of the projects themselves, the bigger structures, and the first ones serve the other ones. This is all visible. It exists.

In Mons, we even called the project Mon(s) Invisible, because it was very much about the invisible relations we are now talking about. You can't really grab them, but you can try to describe the situation, you can recall the story. For instance, we had a one-week workshop with colleagues and friends of ours who work within the design field on questions of performance, relations, etc. We called it Mon(s) Diffusion (Blurry Mons), as the notion of blurriness is always a good entrance point. To talk about the invisible, you need to start to blur the visible, to trouble it. It's like fog, somewhere in between—you can't really say what it is. We also used that notion in Portugal in the Casa do Vapor (the Steam House). Steam is also blurry and not defined. It was very important to say that we made a house—an easily identifiable form. We built a structure without knowing exactly what would come in. When you plan without use, people have the possibility to propose one. We had an intuitive idea that the house should host a surf school but we never achieved that aim. We first found a surfer who was ready to participate in the project, but then he fell in love with a woman from our team, and no longer had the time to develop the school... unpredictable. I often emphasize the importance of the uncontrollable, or rather of planning 'out of control'. As you can imagine, it is very difficult to defend this idea when we talk to politicians about our methods. Why would they give money to make projects make out of control? Indeed, they are out-of-control, but still, within a framework and with a certain direction. It is never chaos. If a project is not unpredictable, you cannot invite people to take control, to feel responsible for it and unleash their potential. It is very satisfying to be surprised by what they become.

Sometimes it can be hard if the result does not fit your first intentions, but, in fact, the project appears to be more grounded and much stronger because it comes out of a

situation, a constructed idea, a collaborative mind and work. I don't yet have the answer on how to make this happen on a larger scale, on bigger projects. To deliver an adaptable structure? It is so complicated.

Joanne *Your collaborations sometimes take some unexpected turns, whether it is through the variety and the quality of your collaborators or the extent of your ambitions for a site. How do you see the future of the project?*

Alex For Mont Réel, our next project in Montreal, we proposed to work around three types of forms: the constructed form, the living form and the popular science form.

The constructed form is self-explanatory. The living form concerns also a construction, but rather the one of a performance: we invite artists, musicians and a choir to join us and perform while we build. They will accompany us throughout the construction and present the musical result for the opening event as well. Thanks to their music, the construction site will have the potential to being reproduced. Through the power of improvisation, the music will express a strong relation to the construction process. This idea allows us to gather other kinds of people—the ones who are not able to build or the ones who can't be there everyday but still want to engage in other ways.

The popular science form is directly related to the site. It is located on the future extension of the science campus of one of the biggest Montreal universities. In the next five years, the campus will be built and defined. Therefore, in the meantime, we proposed to displace the science and research laboratories into the public space we will inhabit, where those uses usually take place between closed walls. We think it is relevant to put this knowledge into a frontal

situation, where it has to deal not only with researchers and academics but also with people who are just walking their dogs. How to make such research [comprehensible] for the people? Local communities develop more and more interest for ecology and alternative energy, with which they could apply and experiment on site.

Once again, we engage with uncertainty. We know we can achieve the constructed form as we have the competence to produce it. For the living form, we know that by inviting the right people, the magic might happen. In contrast, the popular science form represents here the biggest challenge—while our team will stay for only three weeks, the out-of-the-walls scientific research residence will run over a one-year period. The permanence of our projects doesn't depend on us, but rather on the will of local actors and decision makers who see in it the local potential beyond our presence on-site. Who knows: maybe we will find some crazy scientist who gets involved and joins us for the three weeks of our intervention to present their first results for the inauguration. The future is definitely made of surprises.

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STORIES

ONCE UPON TODAY

She shivers when she hears his words. They are identical to hers—she put them down in the same order—now they are recalled, retold, in front of the camera, replayed in loops. Woland, the devil himself, tells the protagonist of Bulgakov's Master and Margarita that manuscripts don't burn. Stories can hardly be extinguished, despite all efforts to burn their pages in the fireplace, made by the so-called master and by the author alike. The history of narratives is a very curious journey of manifestations, materialisations, vaporizations

and reappearances. Traces of these stories cross political camps, national borders, generations and professions.

When an idea is sparked, it can be multiplied in the heads around it and persist through its storyline. It can grow, become uncensorable or unreasonable, radical and powerful, or imprecise, defamatory and oppressive, for that matter. It can become a common goal, shared fear, a mutual entertainment. Then the story takes one way or another: one rather speaks of a fiction, when she sees a value in the pursuit of this constructed or deconstructed alteration to the real. One more likely uses the word fake, when she perceives a distorted image of reality.

And yet, not only satirical masterpieces can hardly be silenced, but everyday narratives cannot be either. When he tells her, "Let me show you how to use this circular saw," he reproduces widespread narratives of roles with which most of us are deeply entangled. Fictions are frequent encounters that linger around in many corners. Given the amount of what we don't know and what we don't understand, fictions are among our most reliable friends. A fictional character for whom an additional plate was prepared around the lunch table can be called upon. Luckily, this person never shows up, because every once in a while somebody from the office next door asks to join for lunch instead. More than what is likely to happen, the people around that table wait for something unlikely to happen, something unexpected and astonishing.

The narrative is a simulation in a parallel universe: a dialogue between fiction and reality that throws suggestions back into our world of what should or could be tried. Some words have to be invented to complement a story, which functions as a common ground for the people that come together

for lunch. Its invention is a journey from everyday practices into the unreal, into a time beyond what can be planned, an exercise in changing one's perspective or an attempt to deconstruct what's given. It's debated, experienced and confusing.

At that moment, by going through the pages of that narrative anti-manual, she thinks, "Like, what do they mean by putting all these abstract associative bits and pieces together?—the goal is simply to involve some people and make something nice, no? Well, give a woman (or a man) something nice, and she will be hungry after an hour, give her a nice story and she can write the next chapter."

POURQUOI
CHASSER
LE
NATUREL ?

WHO DECIDES?

The doorbell rings every two minutes. Every time, the closest to the door opens it. Every time, the same surprise effect. Sometimes the door opener and the newcomer will meet each other for the first time. By exchanging their names, they hear their respective accent and locate each other on a mental map. Sometimes, the door opener and the newcomer have already shared memories. The encounter turns into loud hugs and laughs. This time of the year is the occasion to gather in one place people usually distant. Within the next few days, everybody will have met everybody. Everybody will discover colorful personalities.

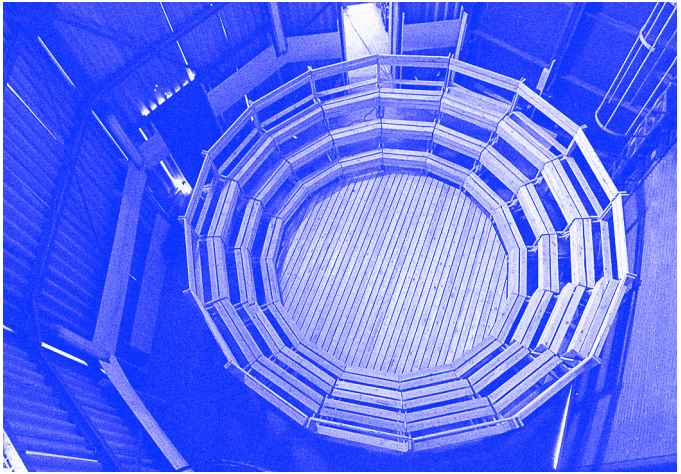
It is comfortable here; all know they have something in common. They are here because they want to be. They are here because they think what they do matters. They are here because they need to share. They are here for enjoyment. They are here to go on. They are curious to know in which direction.

They are all here. Amidst the general happy noise, a voice stands out : “Shall we start?” One by one, people move to the other room, caring to carry the right amount of chairs, pens, drinks while continuing the conversation in movement. The move is so smooth that it seems orchestrated. People simply look, exchange and dare to ask each other for what is missing. Every guest takes spontaneously responsibilities for the group. The seemingly organic meeting transforms slowly into an improvised assembly.

The group aligns itself with half a circle, facing what comes on the white wall or the free surface. The hosts of the session start presenting what they have planned: timeframe, format, questions, ambitions and celebrations. They know they are here to work, but in these conditions, work and fun are almost the same thing. One can feel the untold wishes and the sympathetic critics by discovering the yearly projects of the other members, they wish they were there to share time and work. Together. They see what they would have done differently. They bring the topic further. They compare it to their own actions. It makes them think. They are inspired. Today they discover the whole, that they all contribute to building in parts. They wish they had more time for such projects. Or maybe they wish they had more money for such projects. They wish they could do more, live it and live from it.

“By the way, can I ask something? Who decides who is paid or not? And how are projects distributed among the group?” asks a new member. “How do I know I am a member?” asks another one. Whispers rise from the assembly. One answer consists in explaining how it works. Practically speaking. From there, one can build a proposal. The question is not about who decides, but actually about how the decisions are made. It needs consent. It needs compromise.

44 If the group decides it is a group decision, then it is. If the group decides there should be a guideline, then there is. There, the group decides that no one decides. The project decides. A project can tell if it has the required qualities, ambitions and processes to become an interesting project for the group. Decision making is a product of design.



PIXELATED RELATION-SHIPS

It takes us a couple of calculations to understand our time difference, some hours before for one, some hours behind for the other, and I find myself in the middle. (Side thought: if we all meet at a specific time through the wonders of communication technology, does it mean that we are all momentary time travellers?) It seems that 16.00 Central European Time will work for everyone.

Endless ringing and some dropped lines after, pixels finally start forming familiar faces. Hello, how are you, where are you? I ask. On the other side of the line, my friend finds

himself surrounded by books. Hey, I am good and you? Just visiting my parents' house in the countryside for a couple of days. From afar, I feel in someway welcomed into his family home. Hi dears, ni...ce to fina...lly see y...ou! A third person attempts to join the conversation, but we lose her again before we get to say hello. Buzz buzz, my phone vibrates, the fourth person is running late but will join us shortly.

Fifteen minutes pass by before we can all sink into the call. Hello hello, where is everyone? (An essential question as I like to imagine the languages, weather differences and soils that seperate us). I am in the Swiss countryside, says the first friend. I am in Columbia and had to come into town to get some internet, says another one. I am at home in Valencia, and yourself? I am also looking for a good internet connection in the south of Italy! It has been a while since we all have seen each other in person.

I share the context of a new invitation, a potential project that could bring us together in a couple of months. The others listen carefully as the connection is still unreliable. What does it mean to build a kitchen in the middle of an agricultural field? The kitchen itself marks the passage from land to culture, from raw to cooked...We dive into the conversation, sharing questions, ideas and references from our surroundings or projects we are currently working on. A honk and some music playing interrupts our conversation, a small glimpse into the Colombian street life that is taking place behind our colleague. Celebrations start early, she mentions and proceeds to mute her microphone to stop the distractions.

A conversation guided by scratchy audio and diverse backgrounds brings us all around a fictional table. We work our patience and our ears for the pleasure of exchanging ideas

from a distance. A time span of five seconds separates the moment words leave our mouths to the moment they arrive at someone else's ears. This conversation lag makes a certain rhythm fall into place. One talks, the others listen. Someone repeats what has just been said to verify its accuracy, then they proceed to answer back. When inspiration strikes the speaker, driven by his enthusiasm to share, he can lose track of the state of his audience. Non-verbal cues get lost in the transmission process, our body language struggles to fill the cyberspace in between us.

Hey! Someone waves his arms finally catching the speaker's attention. Space to contribute to the conversation is once again made.

We trace possible project lines and divide tasks so that we can all advance separately before our next meeting. We look forward with enthusiasm to the moment in which we will all find ourselves in the same time zone, around a physical table.

After our call, I look up the machinery of modern telecommunications (on Google, of course). I learn that Skype converts my voice signals into data, sending it over the internet from my computer and then restoring the audio on the receiving ends. Maybe then, it is just my voice that time travels accompanied by some pixels that recreate my movements and my surroundings...

MEANS TO DISTRIBUTE IDEAS

Today is very beautiful, it's spring in the south of Italy. With every day passing the temperature rises. I've been here before. The same initiative, a different group of people, another 'moment of activation'. When I enter the enclosed courtyard I run into some familiar faces. One of the massive side-doors is opened. You can now directly walk into the neglected park next door. Someone has scribbled "open building site" on a piece of paper. An English note written in Italy, it must be a "note to self." I walk up the stairs and enter the kitchen. A group of people is preparing lunch. Most of them I don't know. We follow a familiar kind of routine; I say

hi and unsuccessfully try to describe my role as an observer and designer. I ask about the strange green leaves that are being prepared. I listen in on the conversation of how every local village has its own ideas on how to prepare this bitter delicacy. The moment I walk out on the big balcony I've embarrassingly forgotten everyone's name.

A couple of people are sitting outside. "How can we show local people what is going on inside these fortified walls? The bricks are overpowering our desire to communicate." Everyone is sharing ideas on how to solve this urgency. Last time I was here the collective aimed to "Start a dialogue with the neighborhood" and "initiate collaborations and activate processes so people could take the city into their own hands." Not much has changed, it is still the idea to co-create, educate, learn and re-appropriate. The intention is always genuine, but once again I ask myself if the gap between intent and interpretation is breachable?

I move back inside in search of some shade. I get comfortable on one of the couches and think about my position within the group. More unfamiliar faces start to occupy the space. Without much thought I open up my laptop and start designing a small questionnaire: Who are you? What are you doing here? What is your expertise? Just a clever little tool to surpass my own shortcomings. I start making pictures of everyone. What started as a fun little game has grown into a wall of who is who within a couple of hours. There is a lot of conversation about the results. The wall helps me to start some conversations.

The next couple of days I use to settle in. I bike around, observe, try to talk to locals and start to get acquainted with the group. On all levels I simply want to try and find the interstices. What is the core of a topic and what spatial and

linguistic aspects of visual imagery could be used to carry a message? A man in the street tells me about this local expression: "Manculicani! Not even the dogs!", It is used when you are treated badly. "The Puglian dialect goes straight to the hearts of the unprivileged." he tells me. I run into one of the radical farmers I met years earlier. This collective condemns European farming regulations because they think the standards are too low. We talk about the activation of the deserted park and how to grow vegetables in an urban environment. "To make a statement it is crucial to grow without a permit." the farmer tells me, "It's the only way to tease the ones in power and force them to speak out." Later I talk to one of the participants. She wants to "emancipate the local community" and "support others to take risks". I ask her how she wants to achieve this. Does she know what "emancipation" and "taking risks" means in the south of Italy? We talk some more and ask ourselves if one always need to understand the local ways or that a certain amount of ignorances and exoticism can sometimes lighten things up?

It's been a week now. I'm picking up pace. In my mind all ideas, observations, words and images are tumbling over each other. My aim is to try and connect the dots and create a wall of voices. A *dazibao*, as you encountered during China's Cultural Revolution, a wall filled with posters and slogans that changes and grows over time. Not do I only want to capture the essence of the project as a whole, I also want to capture all individual ideas and try to connect them to local visual and linguistic cues. Additionally, I want to impose observations and voices from the local community. Insights that support or counter the ideas that are developed within the project. I start making signs that essentially propose and counter-propose—bold statements, subversive imagery, contradictory messages, doubtful questions

and quiet observations. Am I spreading myself too thinly or is this part of the game?

My wall of ideas is finished. I don't know if I'm satisfied, it often takes some time to understand what I've actually made. Last time the end result was an urban campaign in the shape of a parade that marched through the suburbs. Only the flyers gave me instant gratification. It was melon season and instead of printing flyers I bought hundreds of melons from local farmers. I made a sticker and distributed them with wheelbarrows through the city. Only later did I understand what the value of the project as a whole. The role of music and food, the idea of people gathering derives from a different kind of mindset. In hindsight an amazing insight.

I look at the insane amount of signs I made within a day or two. I actually wasn't able to breach the wall with all thoughts and observations gathered, but this repelling place does suddenly broadcast a lot of energy. As always, the bold statements stand out, but that doesn't mean too much. I already knew that the local community was used to strong political rhetoric. The streets are always plastered with posters for political parties. And it is actually a small note with the recipe for Cicoria that eventually generates more power than all signs gathered. All of a sudden I understand that locally, this bitter leaf stands for so much more; it defines home. On the plane back to my newborn I stumble upon a line from a poem by William Wordsworth:
In common things that round us lie, Some random truths he can impart, the harvest of a quiet eye.

Comunita' che
imparano insieme
indagini conviviali
indagini solidali
indagini artistiche
indagini collettive
pedagogia radicale
(Free Home University)
NON
TEATRO
NECESSARIO
Questo
giardino si sta
facendo con:
UBER DALLA
SORVEGLIANZA
TWINS

Desiderio
Incontri
Dialoghi
Diversità
MANIFESTO ABUSIVO
COME PRENDERSI CURA?
Dare respiro
al desiderio
oxigenar
el deseo
Sonoe e chi
gli altri dove
collettività?

THE WALL THAT TURNS DECISIONS INTO SKILLS

It's a sunny morning again. It's luckily always sunny when a project starts. Sunny, but dusty. It is in the middle of a construction site. Participants have just met the day before. Just the time to share a name, a full background in ten words, a reason to be here. Maybe they had time to exchange on their vision, their ambition, before they go into the unknown. They certainly know what experience they want to have. At least, they have an idea of what to expect.

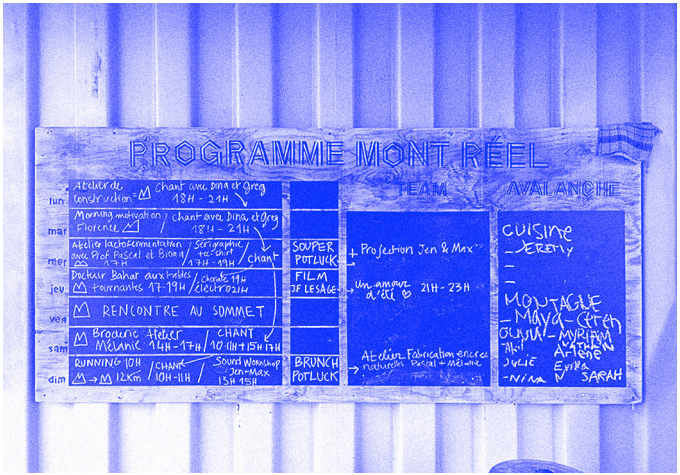
And that is revealed, while they are, on that very first morning, in front of the wall. It's time to choose. In front of them, a giant table drawn on a wall will become crucial for the rest of the week. Their choice, at that moment will turn them into cooks, carpenters, singers or designers, at least for the next couple of days. The first ones get served, the next ones negotiate.

Soon enough, that choice that was so hard to make—Shall I stay with the new friends I met yesterday or shall I stick to what I wanted before?—will no longer matter. Soon enough, participants understand that there is more than just one decision. The energy is common. All are part of a bigger project—whether it is to build a mountain, a mill, a swimming pool, a city island, a metavilla or an arch—with a bigger ambition than one's own, and all the pieces gathered here are essential for it to work. There the participants choose their level of engagement: some will choose to only help, others will choose to help and learn—and then maybe help and learn close to somebody else, by doing something else. Nobody needs to feel alone in his/her field. While exchanging, they get the help they want or need. It's only a couple of days, the task is clear, the goal is known, the engagement voluntary. Even when it is about building six hundred pieces of the same part, it never lasts very long.

Again that time of the choice on the wall. The groups were made. Today, they dissolve again, and mingle another way. So, what this time? Do they choose something they already know? Or do they try something new? As in the Bauhaus preliminary course, the collaborative workshops give a glimpse of it all and a lesson for life. Beyond each discipline —wood working, graphics, video, furniture making, cooking, performing, everything—a master is in charge of the new group. Sometimes a new workshop is made; sometimes a

participant becomes a master. Because sometimes, something is missing. The teaching starts again as an exquisite cadaver. One starts to work where somebody else's work ended. Meanwhile, in the cooking workshop, the one that sustains the group, everything starts afresh everyday.

They come willing to learn a skill and gain experience. In fact, what they learn is intangible. They learn to become part of a group, they learn to negotiate with others, they learn to position themselves in a micro-society, they learn they can do crazy things, together. They learn to exchange and they exchange through experimentation, through making. Sometimes they reenact what they learn by talking to each other, and for that they also have the evenings, the dinners, the nights or the breakfasts. It is practical and theoretical, empirical and poetical. It's special. Within the strong pedagogical methodology made up of rhythms, disciplines and missions, participants learn to negotiate freedom. There, they do not just experiment through collaborative work. They feel it. They get it. They come back again.


PROGRAMME MONT RÉEL
TEAM
AVALANCHE
lun
Atelier de construction = M
Chant avec Dina et Greg 18H - 21H
mar
Morning motivation Florence M
Chant avec Dina et Greg 18H - 21H
mer
Atelier lactofermentation avec Prof Pascal et Bioma 17H
Sérigraphie + ce-shirt 17H - 19H
Chant
SOUPER POTLUCK
+ Projection Jen & Max
jeu
Docteur Bahar aux tables M tournantes 17-19H
Chante 19H électro 21H
FILM JF LESAGE
Un amour d'été 21H - 23H
ven
M RENCONTRE AU SOMMET
sam
M Broderie Atelier Mélanie 14H - 17H
CHANT 10 11H + 15H 17H
dim
RUNNING 10H M → M 12Km
CHANT 10H - 11H
Sound Workshop Jen-Max 13H 15H
BRUNCH POTLUCK
Atelier Fabrication encres naturelles Pascal + Mélanie
CUISINE
- JEREMY
MONTAGNE
- Maya - Céren
OLIVIA - MYRIAM
Tati
Julie
Nina
Arlène
Eyrika
SARAH

TUNING IN

When working on site we all hear the sounds, the voices and the noises of everybody and everything involved. Verbal communication and noises transmitted by tools, materials or machines ... zieeeeew ... prrrrr prrrrrrrr .... tschok tschok tschok tschok ... ffffff ... eeeeeuuuuuuuwwwwwwww ... kriiii ... zieeeeew zieeeeew ... tack-tack-tack ... zieeeeew, tack ... tschok tschok ... shwuuuozzzzttttsch ... tack-tack-tack ... zieeeeewnnetschschikkktrrr ...

Through our ears we sense the common energy around us. We perceive the development of the project. We produce and add our own tones. We react when a noise sounds "wrong". We are connected in the atmosphere of a co-construction-work-noise. We tune into the melody of the process.

After all the time of planning and preparation, it is a special feeling when we pick up the tools and the first work-sounds are lively shrilling through the air. The start of growing

1:1 into reality is an elevating moment. We go on with the incorporated promise of the project, day by day becoming a more vivid character of its own. It's like witnessing a personality growing up, newly exploring its perception, in resonance with the world around it, with sounds and words and thoughts and situations and insights. And in the end there is a character, a common story.

At times we organize a tool-tune orchestra. We gather with tools and materials to perform a sequence of progressive construction-sound-scapes. Our instruments? Hammers, saws, wood, cutters, packs of nails, screws, axe, electric screwdrivers, angle grinders, meters, buckets, etc. Within the orchestra the connection with one other is denser, the reaction more direct. And at the same time it is more abstract. It is delightful and also a bit peculiar to experience the work-sounds as a conducted sound experience. The noises are lifted out of their productive context, out of the progression of the project—uprooted voices— an abstract deduction of the process—a polyphony of navigated rhythms. A moment of collective beats.

Every project has its own music. Every process has its tunes. And sub-tunes. And co-sub-tunes. And inter-sub-co-tunes. Not everybody is working with heavy machinery at the same time. We shift, we take turns. Everything is connected. Some are cutting carrots, preparing lunch. Some recycle waste. Some talk to neighbors. Some fire up the oven. Some write or sketch. Some day-dream. It all makes sense. Everybody takes self-responsibility. It works best when everybody follows his/her own tune while listening to what contributes to the melody of the project. Our orchestra doesn't have a conductor. The melody itself is the guide. The energy on site is joyfully unique, including dissonance ... and its resolution. It all merges—in tune.

WE SHOULD DESIGN OUR WASTE

Now that the design and the concept are cleared, we meet to discuss the materials. Our budget is tight. Very tight. We have enough to build the basics and make it fly. We have nothing to cover it. But mainly, it's not about money, it's about finding the best way to give the parasite its meaning. We need a skin. We start with an ideas ping-pong session. "It should disappear", "We need to work with what is there", "A skin is slick and continuous"... He comes back with a periodic table of materials. From car parts to washing machine facades, offset printer plates, office folders and old kitchen sinks, all possible materials are listed and categorized. Our skin shall be fireproof, waterproof, soundproof, durable,

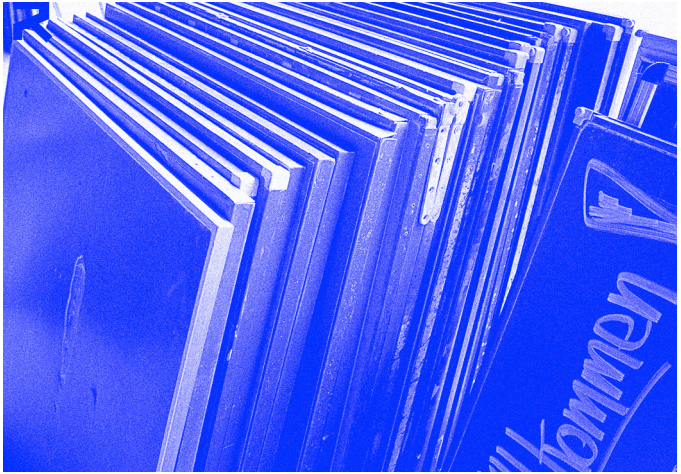
cheap, light, available locally, in big quantities. Most important, it shall be idiot-proof. Nothing is decided yet. All is open. We do not know what the skin will be like, but we know what the material shall do.

Between knowing what you need and finding the right resource, we need a long period of research and experimentation. So far, everything is only hypothetical. What we have are ideas, creativity and intuition. But intuition without experimentation does not make the job. We first have to gather knowledge, gather material resources, touch what we have, perforate, disassemble, reconnect and understand the material by playing with it, first in a rather curious way. So we understand properties, strength and weak points, specific connection points and more. Material exploration is only intended to explore. Not more. We need to go to the limit, to bring the material or the object as far as it tells us. We do it consciously but without aim. Even if it takes time, even if we explore a material we will not use this time, we gain knowledge and expertise that will be useful one day. Learning is never in vain.

Combination is the key. If it is difficult to give a new meaning to one object as one piece, it becomes rather easily something else, something new, when combined with other specimen of its own species. As if togetherness also applies to objects. Together, through the creation of new combinations, new relationships, new connections, we go beyond repetition. And strange enough, the new meaning we give to a series of objects through second life can sometimes last more than the first intended use: think about how long people walk around in car tire sandals. So were car tires made for being car tires? Or were they thought to become sandals? We believe everything is a resource. If it is possible to make a sandal from a car tire, we like to turn the

question around—sometimes absurdly—and be surprised by its answer. Is it possible to make a car tire from a sandal? We know it works when, by looking at a refunctionalized object, we forget what its primary function was. Or maybe its function was already to be refunctionalized? If we designed our waste products, all objects would be refunctionalized.

We finally find it. Black boards! The city has just updated its classrooms with brand new white ones. Giving them to us seems a relief; storing waste takes energy and space. For us it is a treasure. But there is no one black board model. There are many. They all look the same but are all different. Some are heavy and made from glass. Others are composites from paper and wood. They are very light but sensitive to humidity. Others are produced from massive chipwood boards. We love that idea: in its core, our skins are different. Put together, they look like one. Black boards are the perfect skin. Vandalizing black boards is art. The skin is alive, tattooed, showered, dirty, slick.



A COFFEE FOR ERIK

Waking up in the army tent at 07:30.
I am really thankful that the scouts of Hasselt lent us those tents, although having to move back and forth to the construction site is starting to wear me down. I take thirty seconds to visualize the day to come in my mind before I step out of the tent. From now on, it's action time. As with every day. Go.

Breakfast is being gathered by Eleonore on the way to the construction site at the museum. Everybody takes their own kind of transportation as long as we meet all there. I go another way and pick up some more screws at the opening of the hardware store, to feed the building team today.

The team flies into the kitchen of the museum, bikes, walkers, cars... it's difficult to have a big breakfast all together at the same time. Some of us look like we had a few more beers last night. Their hungover entrance makes us laugh.

The day will feel longer than it is for some of us. People from the museum arrive and make coffee in the kitchen. They come from home. Our home is there, where they work. We feel welcome. It is nice to interact with our project partners in these close kitchen encounters. While pushing an apple in our mouths Lucas and I quickly go over the remaining to-do list for the construction and prepare the morning meeting.

09:00. Morning meeting. Like every day. It's always an adventure to find and get everyone at the construction site on time. That's not different today. Our morning brief is filled with a variety of subjects. We are trying to keep it short and to the point. We are here to build, so let's talk about construction planning. But quite quickly questions are raised that create bigger discussions. "Who lost the key to the black museum bicycle? [...] Was it perhaps Léo who is by now already deep in the south of France? [...] Or did someone see it in the grass?" To be continued.

Sofie needs help. She needs to rebuild the scaffolding to reach the top of the five-meter high column. She is making beautiful process drawings. She wants them around the construction. I promise to help, after sitting together with Rien from the museum to take a look at the latest version of our contract.

In the meantime, Lucas is running around preparing the construction drawings and helping people set up their working spaces. We didn't get much chance to check with each other how we feel about the contract, and in general, how the project is evolving. Should we not focus more on the integration of De Serre? It would be nice to have more talks about how the scenography of the seating area could be designed.

Peter enters the room and asks Rien and me when and how it would suit us to make A0 prints.

Erik arrives in his van. He is so positive. Erik made the roof textile at such a short notice, he's paying us a visit to see the site as he mentioned before. I should welcome him and offer him a coffee. He's a very friendly man. He doesn't make a fuss about any of our last-minute requests. All he wants for the extra work is just a coffee and a moment together. He is very persistent in reminding me this, in a comical – but very clear – way.

We finally finish the contract. We are already 3 weeks into the project. It is finally time to sign!
Lucas and Gabriel are finishing the frames of the barn doors. It is still not clear what kind of hinges we will use. We've never built doors this heavy! We have one final talk about it, after having discussed it for four days now. Alex is joining. We decide on 40cm long horizontal hinges. Eleonore offers to help by looking for them in local stores, but we need to be sure. We choose certainty and I leave for the army depot shot, which soon closes for lunch.

As I leave I run into Sofie. She reminds she still needs help. Whoops! We gather two people around us and rebuild the thing in ten minutes.

Leontien is joining us for two days and helps where she can, filling in the gaps, helping the artists, talking with visitors. I'm very happy she joined. Filling those gaps sometimes feel like the most important job I do.

I am late. I rush to the army depot store. The store is closing. They keep it open for me anyway; such nice people. After half an hour of picking out custom hinges and bolts that

look like they have been sitting in the store for ten years or more, I arrive back on site just in time for lunch. Yousra is making lunch. She is very active socially and culturally within the local network. She makes the most wonderful lunch. At this moment all the rush and preoccupied minds free up and we talk about where we're going to swim in the evening, I lean back against a tree and close my eyes for a few minutes.

I hear Erik arriving back from the bike tour with Peter and rush over to offer him that coffee, finally!

These days it's challenging for us to be able to help everywhere while maintaining an overview for spontaneous moments of linking ideas with people. These projects are about creating a framework in which the public can connect and on which they can build. With ideas, but also by adding elements in the physical space. The trick is being able to combine a fully-packed construction day with the ability to see interest from passers-by. Only then, by keeping our eyes open can we create sparks with them and hopefully get them involved.

There's often an interesting tension between these two aspects: the conviviality happening around our on-site presence and the responsibility to build a qualitatively safe structure that hosts those social moments. This tension is already there in the first design talks: are we designing a structure that is structurally impressive and monumental? To attract a lot of people? To make it lively in the neighborhood? What is the limit? Maybe we are rather designing the togetherness, the interactions through workshops and programs. Maybe, in fact, it is about building the link between both the structure and the moments, so that the 'magic' happens. Maybe it's about all of it together.

BETON
STOP!
We'll Find Ways

ik heb
twee linker
handen mee
gebracht
HET

BEYOND THE COFFEE, AND THE MACHINE

It's a big machine like the ones you see on coffee shop counters. We don't really know how to use it. Two grinders are getting beans ready. There are special cups and tools. It is a gift from Peter. For him, coffee is a tool to meet, to enjoy a break, to develop spontaneity, to link words and thoughts. He shows us how to deal with the grinding, the different possibilities of coffee and the importance of cleaning.

As the team is always moving, we hand over what we have learned and each of us experiments with being a coffee maker.

One day, something is not running. The coffee machine causes trouble and it takes time to fill a cup. People are laughing, it is like an excuse to stay around longer. They almost forget about the coffee, talking about ideas they had, texts they are writing, the lock someone needs to fix, the benches others are building, the moving workplace, the meal someone wants to cook for dinner, the vegetables in need of water, the movements to relax the body and the movie to play at night.

Another day, the machine shines in all directions, the grinders coarsely chops the beans and the coffee is really bitter. People make some funny faces. We think that with a thermos full of coffee, we would be more confident. A neighbor brings his own coffee machine and we make the coffee faster. People ask what is happening. They regret the absence of the choreography of the gestures that come with the machine and they wait for this coffee machine to come back. At this moment, we start to understand what it represents for the community and we decide to use it again. Then the machine goes out, completely. Everybody is really embarrassed. Peter arrives fast with a new machine. He insists that we use it. We are afraid of breaking it again. We don't manage to say no. We don't really need this machine. We know we don't need the machine. But the coffee machine is Peter and Peter believes in the coffee machine. People here believe in it too. We definitively understand what is really important: we need what the machine does. It is the power of the good coffee in itself, it is the place where we say hello, where we connect to each other, it is everyone who is chatting, bringing stories of what is

happening all around. We have fun by drawing in the foamy milk, adding spices or chocolate. Meeting around the coffee machine is a specific moment to share what we did, what we do, what we will do, what we saw, what we see and how we feel.

Sometimes we spend weeks talking about the coffee and the machine, thinking about what we should really do with coffee. We think about the thermos again, that it would be easier, faster and more effective. Finally, people continue to come, enjoying the coffee machine. It is part of daily life here, it is part of what it is important to share, it is creativity. We don't need to do it faster. We need to take time for coffee. Here, this machine becomes important. When you listen to all the stories about this machine, when you observe what is moving around it, when you sit in the middle of the people having coffee, you can't imagine letting it go.

WHAT'S COOKING?

Reni doesn't want to cook the "moqueca de peixe" with us tonight. We don't understand why it's not possible, but we cannot convince him. He comes back to our construction workshop the next week with a large black clay pot, a "panela de barro", and a fish caught by his father in Bahia, his home town. Indeed, a good dish cannot be prepared without the right pot, ingredients, situation and care!

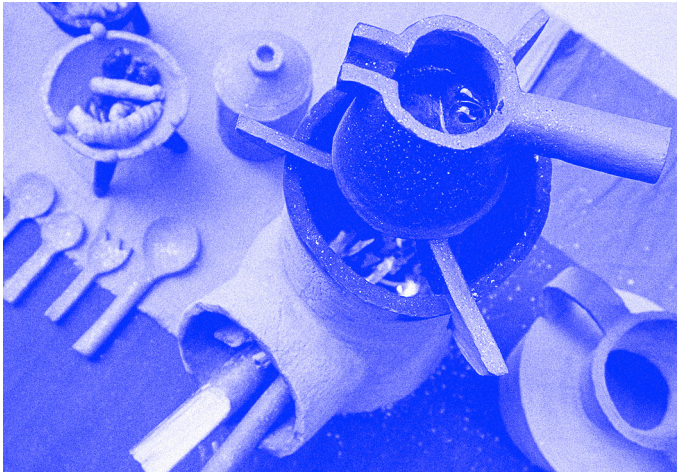
In different places and on different occasions, we come together to share and discuss. We follow our curiosity. We follow knowledge and experience. We want to create experiences together. We believe everybody carries wisdom in their hands and their memories. Maybe without even knowing it. We believe a meal has the capacity to bring us together. And so does a fireplace. It provides the energy to process materials such as food or clay. And conversations. As it always does.

The next days, I spend time in Sao Paolo's Kitchen-Streets. I want to find out more about these pots that everybody knows here. Nobody seems to know more about them than me. I become fascinated. And curious. I start an ongoing observation and experimentation on the relation between the physical specificity of clay-pots from different origins, the recipe and the ingredients for cooking a local dish, the people involved and the effect on the social situation in which the specific way of cooking, sharing and exchanging takes place. During the first "canteiro abierto" (The new Eden) we gather for three weeks with groups of neighbors and practitioners. We build the first movable and adaptable interior to facilitate a new cultural center in central Sao Paolo's culturally mixed neighborhoods. We call it Firekitchen. We make it an applied research project. Out of curiosity, and fascination.

Two years later, we come back to Vila Itororo with the Firekitchen. Again, it deals with several interconnected thematic layers. Cultures, processes and knowledges of food preparation, such as production and material cycles. Sharing and experiencing implicit knowledge. Cultivating conviviality, facilitating awareness. Facilitating transparency through an understanding of our everyday surroundings. Empowerment through the conduction of and participation in an exemplary process. In other words, the Firekitchen is a tool to incite curiosity for invisible processes and their interconnection. It makes them visible and experienceable.

Not just a tool. This is a methodology. With it, we are able to experience an exemplary production process. From raw material to a usable product. Though it deals with complexity, it is not complicated and can be understood without extensive knowledge or access. The sensual, archaic moment of putting the hands into the mud and cooking on fire

frees access to implicit knowledge. The fireplace constitutes the center of communication and cultural production, processing food or materials. We want to activate a process of revaluing and strengthening the local, the communal and the specific as a form of cultural update by experimenting with clay, fire and food between tradition and today.



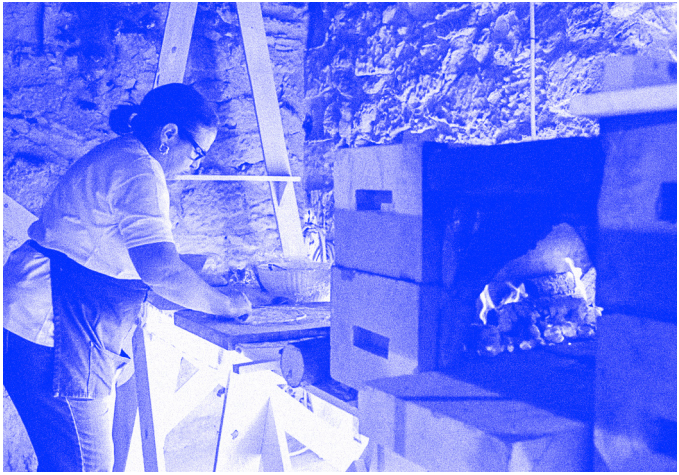
GIVE A MAN A BARBECUE

The teams are all concentrated. All together, they finish the longest bench. Everybody is there and everybody works hard to build something. Students looking like Stromae with well designed moustaches are popping up among the teams of builders. Strange. They might be coming from somewhere else. This is a popular neighborhood. Close to the bench, those designers and those students, lies a car park home of the homeless. We are here to cook for the teams, and this is what we do. We prepare a giant dish of couscous. As usual, I light up a barbecue. I grill some stuff on it: it is here, working, on fire, in the middle of it all. There is energy coming from it. It creates space. It creates attention. Suddenly, a homeless neighbor comes closer to the fire and asks, "Hey, can I grill something here?" Of course. Why not use what is there? The man comes back with two old fishes and starts to prepare them on the grill. Fast enough, he is joined by about twenty of his car park neighbors. At no moment one does feel any animosity. In that moment, they give us a moment of their lives. They tell

us stories of robberies within their community. After the fire, the robberies stopped. At least, for a little while. Maybe for longer. Maybe it was because of that moment. Maybe not. But I do think that moment was special.

Very often, a common idea to help people in need consists in making an open table and distributing a healthy soup. But there is a certain violence behind this idea, as well as in the choice of that soup. Why do we mix the ingredients until they lose their colors, textures and specific tastes? Until they are no longer recognizable? We often decide not to invite people to eat. We decide to invite them to share a moment in which eating is part of the story. It is very different. In the end, it is that man who invited us to share his fish. He is autonomous. He has his own food. And what we have are the tools and the material, ready to be used. Eventually, we then share the ingredients and prepare it together. Then, food is no longer the subject. The moment is. We prepare that moment together. And we enjoy it all throughout.

Indeed, the kitchen is not a place; it is a moment. What we call the kitchen in theater is the moment of reunion between people. It is neither the rehearsals, nor the end result. The kitchen is the moment of untold projects, the moment when everything starts to boil, where there are tension and fights. In the kitchen, we defend an idea, we discuss the ways that led us to that idea, what kind of thinking lies behind it, how does it come about. The kitchen is pure intimacy and every cook within it shares its most precious secrets. The kitchen is accessible to everybody as everybody sees, smells, touches, cuts, cooks, eats. There is no need to know how: everybody thinks, everybody eats. The kitchen is pure knowledge and know-how brought to the most intimate level and what it creates always ends up within the body and can stay forever in the mind.



BRAD PITT IS COOL

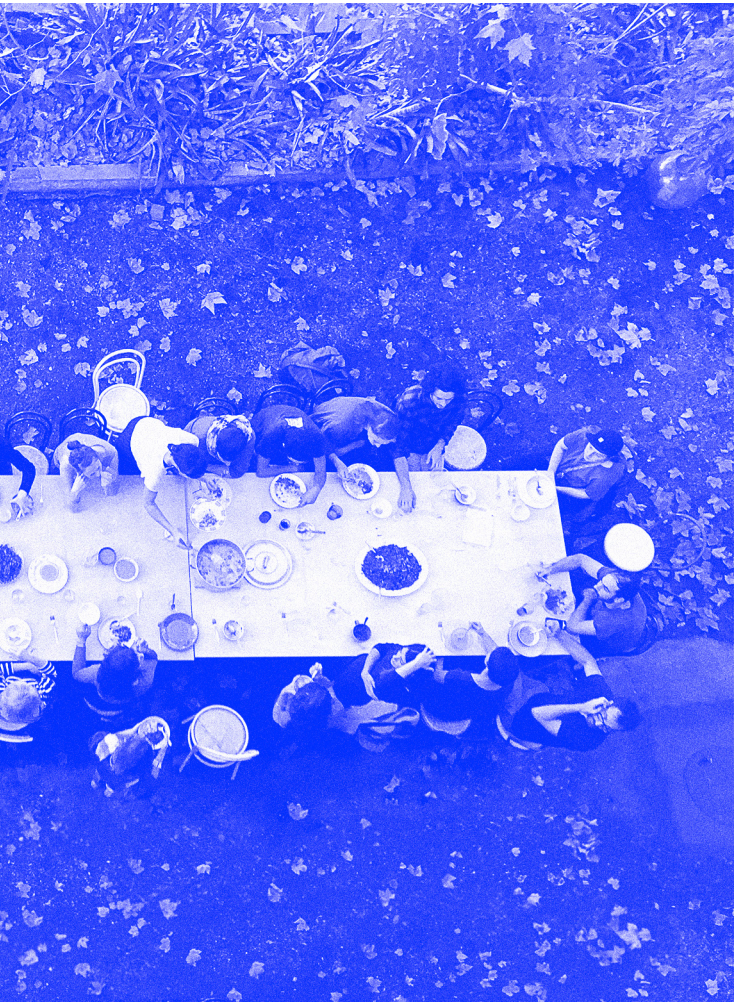
He grabs an apple in the kitchen, comes back and suddenly says: “Do you know Brad Pitt Syndrome?” She has no words and looks at him surprised. “Brad Pitt is cool because he is always eating something in his movies. In order to eat, you need to be in a secure place. Therefore, by eating, you evoke that sentiment of security and peacefulness to the others as well.” At that moment, he stops talking. He looks at his apple and bites it as if it was the first one after a very long time. Proof is made. He looks very cool.

Eating is not only about food. It is also about taking a break. It is time for being together. And sharing a moment. Eating alone is fast and functional. Eating together is long and dedicated. Eating together is also coming and going, taking and giving, sharing and caring.

The table says much more than what we eat. The shape of it. A circular table. A long table. A long table with two ends. How uncomfortable it is to eat at the end of the table. The one taking that position thinks he can reign. But it's not Jesus who sits at the end of the table. It's Judas. At a table there is no hierarchy if there is no end. Or no table. The picnic blanket. Its red and white squares, and the pleasure they reveal. The picnic evokes always a certain *déjeuner dans l'herbe*. As bodies are relaxing, everyone is free to come and go. Nobody looks at the other's plate. There is none.

Societies normalized the table. Codes are associated with eating. Codes and rituals. French service has several dishes presented one after another and served on plates. Nobody leaves the table in between. Moroccan service displays as many tablecloths as shared dishes that will come. To know how much to eat from one dish, one needs to count the cloths. African service positions a big dish in the middle and people pick directly from it. In Mexico, the moment of the table lasts a whole afternoon: people come, sit, eat and go. And then, as seats become free, new ones arrive. But beyond food and codes, modes of togetherness are at stake. Transform that moment into a moment that tells another story and just see how it ends. Find a way to gather vegans, vegetarians, the gluten intolerant and meat lovers around the same table. The table is for communion, not for division. The table is colorful and diverse. It has textures and colors. And all individuals have the right to eat what they like and how they like it, together.

"When is the kitchen open?" somebody asks, "Whenever you want, for the next 72 hours." he answers. "Where is the table?" somebody continues. "WHAT is a table?" he corrects.



DOUBT IS GOOD

It is obviously a construction site. Or, rather, it is some kind of construction site. Well, is it? It is certainly not a circus. Most probably, it is not. What exactly is this? We don't know yet! And yes, this is where the music came from last night. Was anyone disturbed by that?

While drinking coffee together, you cannot avoid hearing someone talk about being lovesick and hungover (what a miserable condition!). Others—in fact most of them—are planning the day, or they are beginning to do so. Who can pick up so-and-so in the afternoon? When will the slats be delivered? Apparently, some are leaving today. Breakfast is over, at any rate. Two of them discuss something quite technical about PVC, but then they agree to postpone that topic. Could you help us prepare some wooden boards?

I could have been a miner; maybe they think I am. I would then join the two, I would shake hands, I would go grab a saw, or, first, I might quickly go home and return, wearing my working clothes. I might even suggest using some different materials for this specific purpose, and they might agree. But I have never really used a saw, and so I join the lovesick and hungover, hoping that at least this person's physical condition has gotten somewhat better. Who are you?

We all have three pairs of hands. We have hands to exercise our very own skills and abilities. We have hands to help someone in doing something. We have hands to learn, in other words: hands that do not yet have a particular skill but might well be able to acquire it. My hands will be learning hands, then, when, later, I will decide to go saw those wooden boards. Those will probably be used, somehow, to complement some part of the second floor of this house or hut that everybody here is living in. Or should I call it a structure?

It is sort of a huge, lengthy arch. And not only is everybody living in here, it also contains the workshops and ateliers. In fact, this is a proper building lodge that might even appear to date from a former time, if it were not for its somewhat eccentric shape. We live here, work here, eat together, we disagree, experiment, develop ideas and materials, we make many steps forward, and some backward. Also, someone might sing a song, someone might not like someone else's food. Who are we? Asking this, I must have become a part of them.

You can join, you can come by and stay for a while. Eventually, there will be nothing left but a gate made out of recycled plastic, for which our building lodge's shape and stability will have worked as a living support structure. Will there be

nothing left but that modest gate? We are never quite sure about this. Should we expect the gate to stay connected to what has never been more than a mere building lodge, much less a mere support structure, but rather a social, artistic and community-shaping tool? Should we expect the gate to stay connected to what has happened in and around the arch, to what we have talked about, to what we have seen, to what we have learnt? Might it even work as a gate allowing a vision of the future? We don't know yet!

THE COMMUNITY FACTORY*

*unless it is the factory of the community?

He had already called four people this morning and talked directly to many more. His right thumb was feeling a little sore; he did not quite know why, who cares, really. A lot of wood, rather big pieces, had to be carried around. Also, he had spent some hours sawing. He had given some instructions on how to proceed, he had made suggestions, listened, asked questions, been surprised. On how to proceed with what? With what they had been building for weeks. Beyond that, as with most around here, he also had some ideas about their joint meals. Around here? In the factory of the community. At least, this had been his description of the place, or his name for it, the night before.

That night, after all, she had asked him to talk to her about what, from his perspective, they were doing here. "Tell me what we are doing here, essentially," we can imagine her saying, thus ignoring the fact that, on the face of it, the notion of an essence might sit rather ill with their multifarious project. The factory of the community: a place that belongs to the community but, more than that, a place where the community lives together, works and builds together, produces various objects together and, by doing so, establishes and reinforces, and maybe even in some sense produces, togetherness. It was a place where the process of living and working together became visible and somehow opened up the community. Also, the realm of this factory's products was not confined to concrete objects (all that wood around here would eventually be used) and to togetherness and the idea thereof. Rather, it also encompassed elements such as knowledge, skills, tools and memories. Maybe, he would have agreed that it also encompassed stances, feelings, impressions.

He suspected that yesterday's ideas and the way he had put them were indeed not quite clear but, surely, this would not make these ideas false either. Granted, she might have been right in that the notion of a factory and of a factory's production line could look incompatible with what they were really doing. It is all about efficiency! No, for sure, that was pretty much contrary to how they were thinking or wanted to think. But could one not somehow turn around these disconcerting notions, imbibe and then use them with a different tone? How to make sense of the nature of their very own production lines, e.g. if, actually, they had any such thing here? "Don't think, but look!"

As he was sitting here, watching all the others chatting, carrying around stuff, trying out new things, as laughter mixed

with the shrill noise of three power drills, he was feeling confident once again that he was actually on to something. This one guy apparently did not really know how to bring the material into the shape it would need to eventually have for it to be integrated into the bigger structure that the others were working on. But the fact that he was doing this job was no mistake, or was it? This guy was now leaving his spot, the result of his work somewhat scattered, left behind, and he was starting to discuss a range of colors and how they could be brought into different patterns somewhere else. It might have been a coincidence that, at the same time, the power drills had come to rest and that their three handlers were now gathering around those oddly-shaped left behind pieces, and at least one of the three seemed to discover something.

Was this to be described as a ruptured production line? Rather than as ruptured, he would have described its form as taking many turns. These turns were sometimes unexpected but they were expectedly unexpected. A lot of strategic planning (four phone calls only this morning!) had taken place so that this organic form had become possible in the first place. Also, to the extent that whether a process is to be seen as efficient or not depends on its desired outcome, it probably was not even clear anymore whether the factory of the community was an inefficient factory. For who around here was intending to define what exactly their common products needed to be and how exactly they needed to be and what they would look like to begin with?

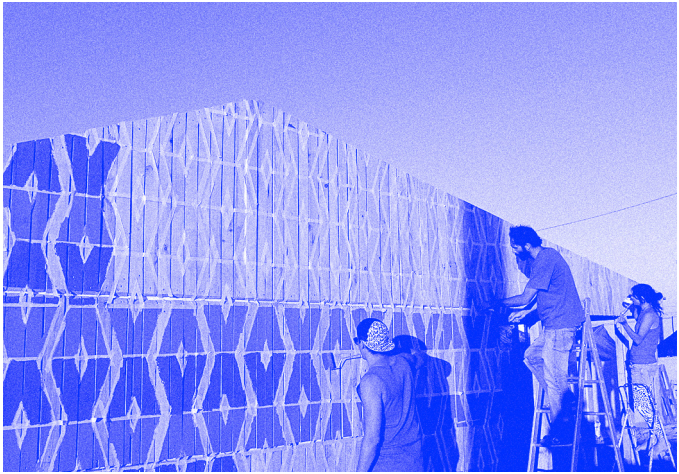
THE HOUSEKEEPER

As we arrive, everybody is at work. The construction site has its own logic we do not yet know. Who is who? Who is doing what? Where is what we need? Where can we put our stuff? Where do we sleep? Who can we ask? We don't have so much time to ask ourselves many questions. From the workers group, somebody stands up and comes directly to us. He knows we are coming. He is the housekeeper, the master of the keys, the caretaker of the site. He is easy to recognize. He is usually the one at whom everybody points a finger as an automatic gestural answer to all possible questions. He warmly introduces himself.

We feel welcomed. We don't have time to formulate our questions when he already starts showing us around. Strangely enough, we first pass by the storage. His keyring is impressive. We wonder how long it takes to know all those keys and what miraculous chambers they all open. From the storage, he gives us what will be our bedding for a couple of nights. He talks passionately about the place. He evokes and transmit community rules. He closes the door and invites us to follow him. As we discover the room's floors, we see how the place is inhabited. We put our bags and the bedding in our small bedroom. He continues and guides us smoothly through the kitchen to the coffee machine. On the way he introduces the machine, it seems as important as the bedroom. He teaches us how it works and asks us if we want to make our first coffee. We try it out together and continue our exchange. As he is about to take his first sip, somebody comes in. "The delivery is there. Where shall we store the material?". He excuses himself and disappears. We can hear him moving away by following the jingling of his keys.

So far, we no longer have questions. More importantly, we now know who to ask if some new ones come up. The housekeeper is the person who is here to be interrupted. He is here to be at the disposal of the people and things on site. He doesn't just keep the house; he takes care of it. Of opening the doors, of deliveries, of people, of questions, of security, of repeating the instructions, of passing on the important information, of turning off the lights, of closing the doors, of harmonizing all the different rhythms of life that are present on the site. He takes responsibility. By being there, he allows the others to keep the focus on their own tasks. He does not only transmit information; he also gives his time. And presence. Any time.

100 Some people come. They discover the place for the first time with curiosity. Apparently, they come from the neighborhood. Who knows how they have heard from the place, but what they did hear led them here. The group of worker-cook-inhabitants keep their eyes focused on what they do. The housekeeper looks at them, stops what he is doing and approaches. “Hello. Welcome. How can I help you? … En français?... Comment puis-je vous aider?”



A MOTIONLESS THEATER

It's good to be back. They have already been here to see the site when it was still empty. They have imagined how it would be to live in it. They have imagined the energy it would take to build it; the energy they would find there. This time, it is not the same site. This time, it is full of movement.

They have experience on similar projects. They know what they want to get. The image is clear. As for the project itself, it will be collaboratively built. The storyline is known. It will be a reproduction of that medieval image that first inspired the project. For one moment, they will transform the Arch into a motionless theater. The construction site is now a

backstage. We, designers-builders-cooks-researchers are now designers-builders-cooks-researchers-costume supervisors-prop man-stage manager-partners in crime and soon to be actors in a constructed opera.

As a ghost of a glorious past, the landscape has its own magic. The superstructure of the Arch is impressive. The building is already the main character of a permanent theater set. Traveling and zooming in. Looking closer, even more impressive are its inhabitants: how to capture who we are in one still image? How to understand what we do if we all do many things at once? How can one image translate the complexity of the place?

They start by looking around. They observe. That night, they present themselves to the group. They explain what they do, what they want to do, why they are here. They say what they need. Some of the Archers are willing to help. But first they want to know us better. They want to understand who we individually are. What they propose is rather simple: the next day, we all gather the objects and tools that characterize us the best, what we do and who we are. There can be many for each one as everybody seems to have six pairs of hands. Before picturing the group, they picture its members. They make a team portrait by addition of isolated pieces. It is the occasion for them to meet the whole group individually. And for us to meet them. We do not only meet each other; we also meet each other's tools. One after the other, we discover the studio. Some do not like to be photographed. But there, we can take time. We can ask questions. We can exchange roles. We can exchange tools. We prepare for what will come. Together we look at what we have done. We select the pictures. We discuss how we see ourselves. We get to know each other. Through the pictures, they want to respect the personality of each one so

that everybody recognizes him/herself in the final portrait. We do not only build an image, we are building trust.

Soon enough, it is time for the big construction. Over a series of different, successive sets, we build the image floor by floor. The small group in charge of the set today is having fun directing their friends: "Can you put your leg down? Yes, like this, yes... a bit less... don't move"—"Please give me flowers for the upper floor"—"Burn some paper on Pascal's barbecue, we need to smell it by looking!" Behind the camera. In front of the camera. Around the set. Everybody has a role to play. Nobody is only an actor in that scene. But we all act to make that scene happen. In many different ways. From the first screws to welcoming people; from shutting down at night to playing music; from preparing common food to sorting colorful plastic; from building the structure to portraying a dynamic process.

We gather again for the last time. Now the photographers are also Archers. Today we gather to show what the built image looks like. They share the different shots with the group, they show what they see, they show the image processing works, we laugh together, we discuss, we choose the right scene. We choose together to fix in an image the identity of our community. The photographers see from outside what we have been doing for the last few months. We look at the wide picture as a representation of the whole. We look at the details and recognize each other with all our paradoxes and complexities. All in one image. All in one set. That picture does not just represent the moment. That picture represents the time that has passed, the energies that were brought together, the richness of all those personalities and the diversity of skills and abilities, the capacity to bring all of it together and the space as the scene of something we will always remember.

In that picture, some see just an image. Some will hear the music, smell good food or burnt plastic, feel the weight of wood or the vertigo of the climber. Some will see the community. It is not just a picture. It is an anthropology of the construction site.

NOTHING PLANNED

June 22nd 2013, a sunny Saturday. Everyone is looking forward to the coming summer holidays. On weekends, the population of Cova do Vapor triples. The inhabitants of Casa do Vapor have already been living in Cova da Vapor since April, and therefore the arrival of summer causes them euphoria.

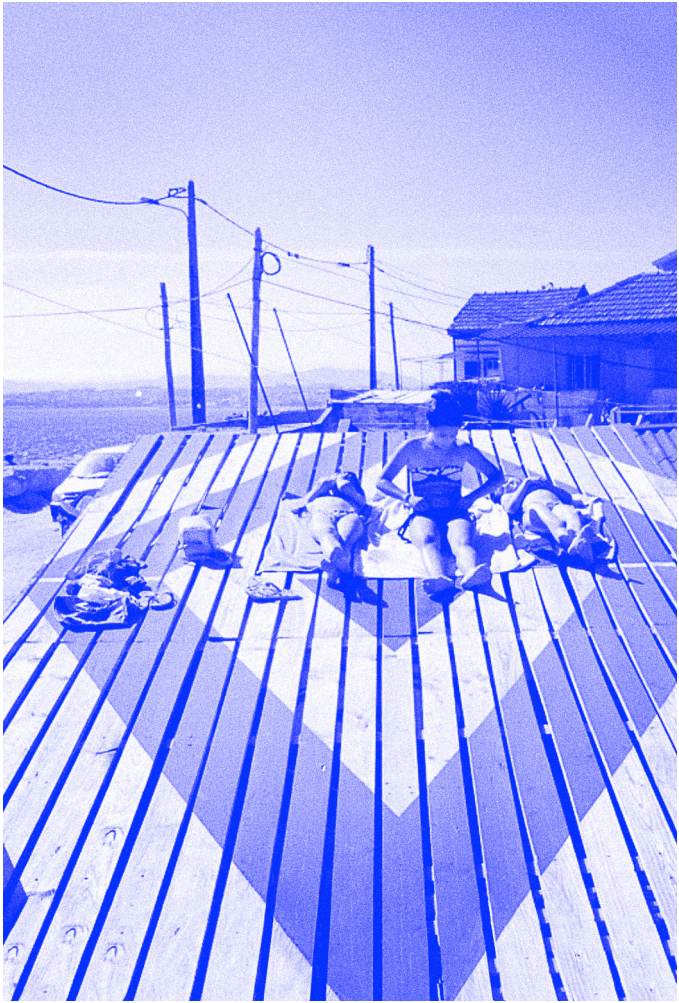
Ever since they arrived in Cova, they have organized an activity in the house every Saturday. Imaginary House, Photo Treasure Hunt, Watercolor Workshop, Fishing Net Workshop, Kizomba Classroom, etc. In fact, every Saturday the group tries to organize an activity in the house.

The horizontality of the structure and of the decision-making process often contributes to the chaos. They are overloaded by dealing with hundreds of things at the same time: the daily lunch, the collection of food at the local market, the stolen bicycle, the arrival of artists in residence, the empty gas tank, the volunteers willing to help, the child who brings books for donation, the resident who complains about the car parked in their space.

It is the day after the summer solstice and the day before the super moon. Not only it is the longest day of the year, but on that day, the moon offers a unique bright spectacle. Bianca, Iara and Tatiana, three of the nicest pre-adolescents residing in Cova, arrive in the kitchen and directly ask,"What is today's activity?" Sofia and Diana look at each other. They realize only then that it is Saturday. They have not prepared anything for any activity. Now it is too late. Even if they want to. It is already Saturday. They answer the girls with a desolate face: today there will be no activity. As soon as they finish the sentence, the girls turn around and leave the house. Okay. They all are a little upset, but soon another matter comes up on the agenda. Thirty minutes later the girls come back to the house, now in bathing suit, fitted with towels and sunscreen. They pass by Sofia and Diana and say, "We go to the roof." Sofia needs to solve a question in the Library on the opposite side of the building, upstairs. From there, Sofia sees Bianca, Iara and Tatiana; they have just transformed the roof of Casa do Vapor into a solarium.

There are different ways to see this situation. On the one hand, for those pre-adolescents, they have just found a way to have a nice and special Saturday. They formulated what they wanted. They evaluated what they could easily implement and they felt empowered to take action. On the other hand, by looking at them, Sofia sees the theories of

Guy Debord's *détournement*, Hannah Arendt's questions on public, private and social space and Hakin Bey's vision of tourism and the way we visit places. That's all there, in that simple action, some bikinis and towels: appropriation of spaces, a sense of belonging, spaces of resistance, improvisation, vernacular architecture, problem solving, alternative solutions. The roof is now an architecture that is capable. Capable to host use. Capable to inspire action.



WATCHING EACH OTHER IMPROVISE

What do you call gathering, anyway? The fact of the matter is that we are together, we have our usual dinners, we are all in the same apartment. We are in one big exhibition space, everyone is cutting and sawing, we stay here all day. But we are not in close contact. We are not talking to one another all the time.

Some people come and go. We are about ten. We do not make one big building but we make many small structures. And everyone has to do one part of the exhibition. Several small buildings and huts. It is like a city. We build a city and we work in this city that we build. We are all working on our own. Yet we are working together.

No classical, big architectural project. In such a project, people also work on their own, they are specialists. And they also work together, in some sense. Eventually, they will all have built that skyscraper together. But in such a project, hundreds of people do not make decisions or, rather, they just decide small things. One star architect has an idea, decides to do it like that, takes major responsibility for the whole thing.

We make decisions all the time. I have been working on this shape for a few days now because I like it. That is one reason. No one has told me to do it like that but I felt it might fit in. I have seen others try out similar things, and also things that are quite different. Yesterday, I took a walk and I went to some old local shop. It had some wooden ornaments and I talked to some people there. Maybe I will change that shape again. It is my responsibility whether I will or not. I do not follow any directives.

With that skyscraper, again, you have economical and geographical factors, you take them all into consideration, and then you calculate, you design a twenty year-business plan for the building. I prefer to plan short-term instead of building big things that become obsolete after some years, because they become units that are isolated from the world. I prefer to improvise.

The world is in constant change; there are countless factors that you cannot calculate but that you need to respond to. I met someone in that shop and that person might stop by later. And we might work on something. Or we might discuss something. Or I will learn something new that I will then decide to make room for. Maybe I will carve something totally different.

114 We have utopian ideas of working together, of improving the quality of daily life, of activating public spaces. But we get there by improvising. As, later, I might decide to make changes, someone else might see that and decide to react to it. This will be that person's responsibility.

We are all improvising. We are all making decisions. And we are all watching each other improvise.

Together, we are improvising. Decisions become shared ones. We will have built this city together.

#COSTRUIREINSIEME

CONVER-
SATION

THE UNPREDICTABLE DRIFT

Architecture is usually understood as the built result of complex planning. Drawings, descriptive texts, excel tabs and calendars describe precisely all elements of a construction, in an attempt to annihilate all unpredictable aspects that would lead to the harm of the project's partners or alteration in an architect's work. But when the construction site is the project itself and when the inhabitants are not the recipients of a finished structure but rather the active participants of their direct environments, unpredictability becomes one of the resources of the project.

The following conversation took place on Skype in June 2019 gathering Mathilde Sauzet, curator and author, member of Les Commissaires Anonymes, Malte Von Braun, organisation and strategy consultant for project development with Joanne Pouzenc and Alexander Römer around the place of unpredictability and uncertainty in collaborative projects.

Joanne I would like to ask you one question to start this conversation: how shall we as designers deal with the unpredictable? How do we set goals that encompass uncertainty? What is the true value of unpredictability?

Mathilde How to predict uncertainty? Is it possible to predict uncertainty? The paradox is in the question...

Alex We come from different backgrounds and I guess what is interesting are our different points of view. The designer's perspective projects an idea, outlines a better future. In this sense the designer gets quite easily into a situation of control because they have an idea of what is a "better future". As a designer I think a better future should be like this or like that. Because I planned it, I drew it, I just put it out there, I just built it up. In this sense, for a planner, there requires a shift to accept, allow or make space for uncertainty within controlled plans or ideas.

Joanne Yes. For example, if I'm curating or coordinating an event, I think it is important to plan some free time, whereas, as a planner, I don't really know what will happen, because this is where people start to meet and talk. In fact, one could feel it's a really unproductive time, but for the public it might be the most productive. In this sense, planning for the unknown becomes a part of the design. You can not control nor can you value it, at least in a system based on material value. But it helps to build stronger relationships that might

or might not be valuable in the future. In architecture, you need to show the end result before you even start to plan, you bring people into the construction site and the end result is the product itself. You do not give time or space for the unpredictable or the spontaneous. When we talk about a project where space or architecture is not an end result but rather a tool or a support structure, it is different. Because what we are trying to build is not the architecture itself but the moment or the community around it. Or are we building the conversation?

Mathilde I would make a distinction between "giving free time" and "accepting a non-designed zone". When a designer (or the architect, or the person who leads a project) starts to work on a topic, a site, it is important that he / she considers that some aspects won't enter the project, won't be treated by the project, otherwise it implies a too hegemonic position. To plan free time would mean, for me, to operate outside of the zone or the time dedicated to design. We have to limit the space of our action to protect things we cannot envisage to go on. It is not about allowing them to appear, it is allowing them to survive to the project. Because before we arrive, many things are already going on, many things are alive. So first, the question is: how not to disturb them too much?

Then we need to identify the zone of actions and the phases of transformation. The designer shouldn't transform the whole city, the whole neighborhood, the whole community. For example, in Cova, for *Casa do Vapor*, the project concerned a small part of the village. The architecture itself was also dedicated to certain activities: a kitchen, or a skate park. The agora in *Mons (In)visible* had been designed to seat people in a circle. Different uses were finally made possible because the analyses of the situations were very open.

But the propositions of ConstructLab were focused and limited - we are professional of analyses, not of solutions! Projects might point and plan one or two elements. Then, we all know that a sharp design proposition allows various uses, many attitudes: this is freedom. When the proposal is precise, the freedom is preserved, in a way.

Malte If I may add a thought for the distinction. From my perspective, I assume that either you think you can control everything and have full knowledge of the situation, of whatever you would encounter in the realization, or not. And I would say, you never have full knowledge over a situation. Especially in a social process, where it is as much about learning with or from each other. You cannot assume or predict beforehand every situation or every aspect that will occur. So by the inner logic of that, I always use a feedback loop process within a project or the situation I encounter. I base my planning on a preconception of a situation, but when I face the situation new things occur. So I need a space or a format or some room to be able to adapt to that; to re-observe what the situation is, because at a certain time within the process, I will see things in a way that I was not able to predict or to observe beforehand. So what I have to pre-plan is that I will need to deal with uncertainty, especially if it is a collaborative design or construction process.

Mathilde The feedback loop, for sure, and even a sort of necessary empiricism. But I see a big danger when we start to include uncertainty in a method. It makes me think of how uncertainty is used in finance. I'm thinking about this book by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. It describes how bankers or speculators give enough space for these types of accident to happen. The accidents become a productive process. It seems to me dangerous that a designer would use randomness and

wildness as a way to make transformation; there are already enough contingencies in projects! Then some designers would provoke these accidents because, as you said, Malte, since you cannot pre-plan them, provoking them is a way to control and therefore govern. We have to take care not to become this type of planner. Not to give space for crashing.

Alex

I would like to bring back the position of the designer in that whole discussion. We are speaking about complex scenarios. The complexity in itself is something we are really interested in. Often it comes to that situation of somebody asking, "Please describe the project in one sentence." Then I have two options... either I think, "Oh, I really have to try to find that one sentence." and I'll reduce the project to a one-sentence project only. Or "No, I don't want to describe it in one sentence, because I think that is not what it is about. It is about many things, this or that, or that or that..." First the person is totally lost. Then it's me. But somehow being lost does not matter, it's rather a question of taking a position. I can be precise on a specific aspect, on a specific skill that we have and we can develop. But then I have to step out of it and let it be, let it live its own way. And if I go into that moment with an idea of "It will be a catastrophe," then it might go in the direction Mathilde was warning us about, or it will go in the direction in which something marvelous would come out. The thing that comes out can create something new that we have never seen before. This is one part of the design process. The other part is the personal energy I need to design something. What do we call that energy? It comes from me, so it has to do with my ego.

Malte

And I think it's connected to a very clear idea, an inner image of what you want or desire. You know, you need to have a clear goal, something you want to reach as a future state

that is clear for your inner self and it gives you the energy for that.

Mathilde The real, important question is the politics of that goal. If you start alone, you are not obliged to formulate it, but from the moment that you start to engage with a community, you also have to send signs of what kinds of values you are going to put into play. Conviviality is just a word, many values, with no politics associated with it. In companies, the tools of conviviality lead to very different goals to yours, Alex. Words are too complex. We have to find other forms to express our intentions… We can't say conviviality anymore, for example.

Joanne I think there is something interesting within the *Convivialist Manifesto*—as far as I understood it—related to what you say, Mathilde: there, ideologies are not necessarily commonly shared among the authors; the writers come from different political backgrounds, and even though they come from the same socio-intellectual group, they are usually not vehicles of the same ideas. Nevertheless, they look at a problem from the same angle and they agree, not necessarily on the future aims, but rather on the status quo and on a need to act. They propose to go beyond conflict and to use conflict to seek understanding and propositions. Starting by defining a basic level of understanding of what we are looking together can be a way to engage, I think.

Malte And this is specifically the common ground. It is both psychosocial, and psycholinguistic, and it is one of the really basic things needed to somehow arrive at meaningful and productive ways of interaction and collaboration. On my way to designing, on my way to encountering crises or problems, I need to readapt and understand that my presumptions about how things work and what is important or not, could be not the right ones and that I might have to

change them in order to be able to find the right solutions within the process. I mean my task is always about helping people to find common understandings and solutions for whatever situations. Conviviality as a "convivial ground" is for me much too weak as a notion in order to capture that. I can be convivial without having to make any common decision or common point of action and I can still feel convivial just by the atmosphere.

Mathilde Using this manifesto from the point of view of a designer presents a challenge. The people who wrote it are all intellectuals. They wrote it after having studied this term in history, epistemology and so on. If we use this term as actors or makers, we leave out parts of the complexity of the topic and we risk to use, as you said Malte, the artificial layer of the term. That's why it's confusing. Before reading the manifesto, I was perplexed, but when I read the text, I realized the authors wrote it from a different background, in a common perspective. It's a strategic position. However, even if it's a manifesto, the form of expression is a deep text, addressed to the public sphere, for sure, but rather to politicized individuals and intellectuals. In the case of ConstructLab's projects, we address the users of urban space. So, how to translate the power of research, a text into a language of architecture, of physical forms, of images? For Mons, I had read a lot about invisibility, the texts of Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, Donna Haraway, *Le comité invisible*, and finally we decided to share first with all the actors of the project *Invisible Cities*, a narrative text with lots of images that lots of people know. It's not as physical as architecture, but it's an artwork. It's not theory. For urban space projects, it's very important to gather people who create forms, which present a certain aesthetic autonomy. ConstructLab installations work like that for me. We need a common ground to

start to make conviviality, rather than just thinking about it.

Alex It's a bit like what I talked about when we were talking about the situation of conviviality: we can create it when we do build together. That is a form of conviviality that we are able to generate out of our practice. We could also decide not to make out of the building site a convivial moment, in fact. It's a bit like Patrick Bouchain, always speaking about that moment of convivial construction.

Mathilde It reminds me of this freedom that we discussed at the beginning, this free time, this free zone, that we encounter by introducing Calvino: with his texts, we have a space for imagination. We don't design Italo Calvino nor a reading of *Invisible Cities*, we do architecture and art with Italo Calvino as a common ground. We use a piece of literature as a source of inspiration and a material of the imagination.

Joanne I think the distance I understand to exist between "common" and "convivial" is the same as that between "need" and "desire". Our society just starts to realize we are based on needs. We need to work. We need to make money. I think what we need is to start thinking and implementing a society based on desire. By starting to ask people what they want instead of what they need, they might have a different answer. They might want to "save the world". So how can they feel empowered to do so and in relation to the others?

Mathilde At the beginning of *Mons (In)visible*, I was dealing with the constraints of the project and the demands of the local actors and I remember, Alex, you explained to me the importance of proposing to the public something beyond or alternative to their current needs. That was a turning point for me, because in the method, I thought our task as designers was to propose a solution. Now in the participative

projects, I see how the authorship is necessary: it's a way to start from the desire of a creator or a group of creators. Then other actors will associate or confront their own desires. So first, we have to wonder what we do search for as the community of builders, of designers. If we imagine what the others would desire, or if we just realize basically what individuals or communities ask for, we have chances...

Alex ...To fail!

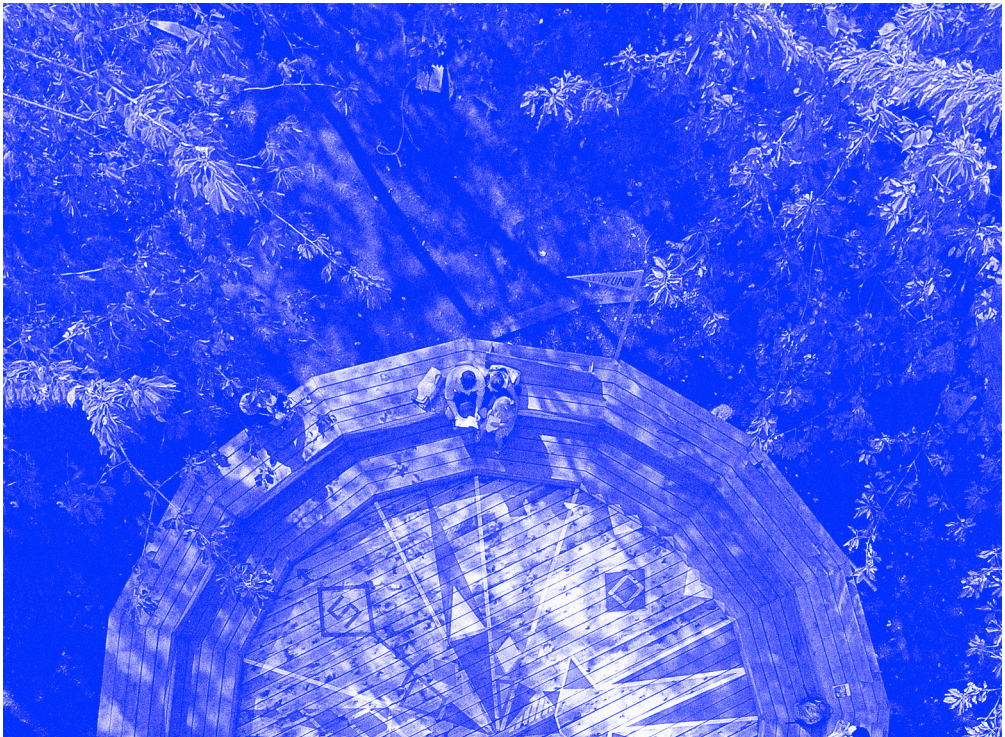
Malte Yes, because they don't know what they desire as you said, Joanne, so how could we? Perhaps they are not in contact with an inner desire or wish, so how could you, from the outside, just as an observer, articulate, claim or define for the other what he or she desires. I mean, it's a black box; you just can't know what the other desires or wants, you can only assume it, which always makes it a guess until you communicate.

Mathilde We can also assume that collaborative practices like ConstructLab are very different from a classical office of designers, mainly because the first users are the builders. It's something very important to address. First of all, we do something for ourselves, and because it works for us, we invite people. And that is directly linked to the conviviality we evoked earlier: if we make it for us, we'll be open to others.

Malte Some of what you said earlier, regarding Alex's proposition to go beyond current needs as a starting point for the collective design process in Mons, makes me think of a statement in Gregory Bateson's work. Coming from a cybernetic or an epistemological perspective, he studied how any communication can work as such and be viable as a system. The thought or statement in his work that resonated with what you said earlier concerning getting away from

providing a solution as a designer to provide a participative process that develops a solution, is: "Make a difference that makes a difference." Only that will allow for something new or something else to emerge. If you try to adapt to things that you think, that you presume, then you will just do the same as always and you will not find new or more viable solutions. But if you make a proposal that engages people to go into uncertainty, or allows them to keep going with a certain level of unclarity about what the end result is, for example—because you don't define or set it from the beginning—then you don't obtain what is expected. Meaning that, to shift presumptions allows for new, for different solutions. This enlarges your degree of freedom in action, in realizing something.

Even as they stop recording the conversation, they can't really stop talking. They continue developing on some ideas. The tone is more relaxed. More spontaneous. They would like to gather like that more often. They would like to exchange more. Most likely, they will.



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ABOUT CONSTRUCTLAB

ConstructLab takes a dynamic approach to uniting architectural concept and construction. Breaking with traditional divisions of labor, the organization engages a team of multitalented designer-builders—as well as sociologists, urban planners, graphic designers, curators, educators, and web developers—who carry the creative process from the drafting table into the field, enabling design to respond to the possibilities and restraints posed by materials, site, environment, and utilization. With emphasis on collaboration, both with one another and with members of the community, ConstructLab's practitioners take on a variety of projects, permanent and temporary, bringing their creative strategies to bear on solving problems and raising awareness of social, environmental, and practical issues. They favor recycled and upcycled materials, and they are mindful of resources available locally. At the heart of ConstructLab's work, which includes commissioned projects throughout the world, is a desire to enhance feelings of community and heighten the sense of place.

constructlab.net

CREDITS

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Carla Rangel
Alexander Römer

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"WE ARE ALL IMPROVISING. WE ARE ALL MAKING DECISIONS. AND WE ARE ALL WATCHING EACH OTHER IMPROVISE. TOGETHER, WE ARE IMPROVISING. DECISIONS BECOME SHARED ONES. WE WILL HAVE BUILT THIS CITY TOGETHER."

THIS PUBLICATION IS NOT A "HOW TO". IT'S NOT A MANUAL. IT'S AN ANTI-MANUAL. IN HERE YOU WILL NOT FIND WHAT TO DO OR HOW TO ACT IT IS AN INVITATION TO INVENT AND IMPLEMENT YOUR OWN WAY OF WRITING YOUR OWN COMMON STORIES.