



Commoning-Desiring Machine

Establishing the programme.

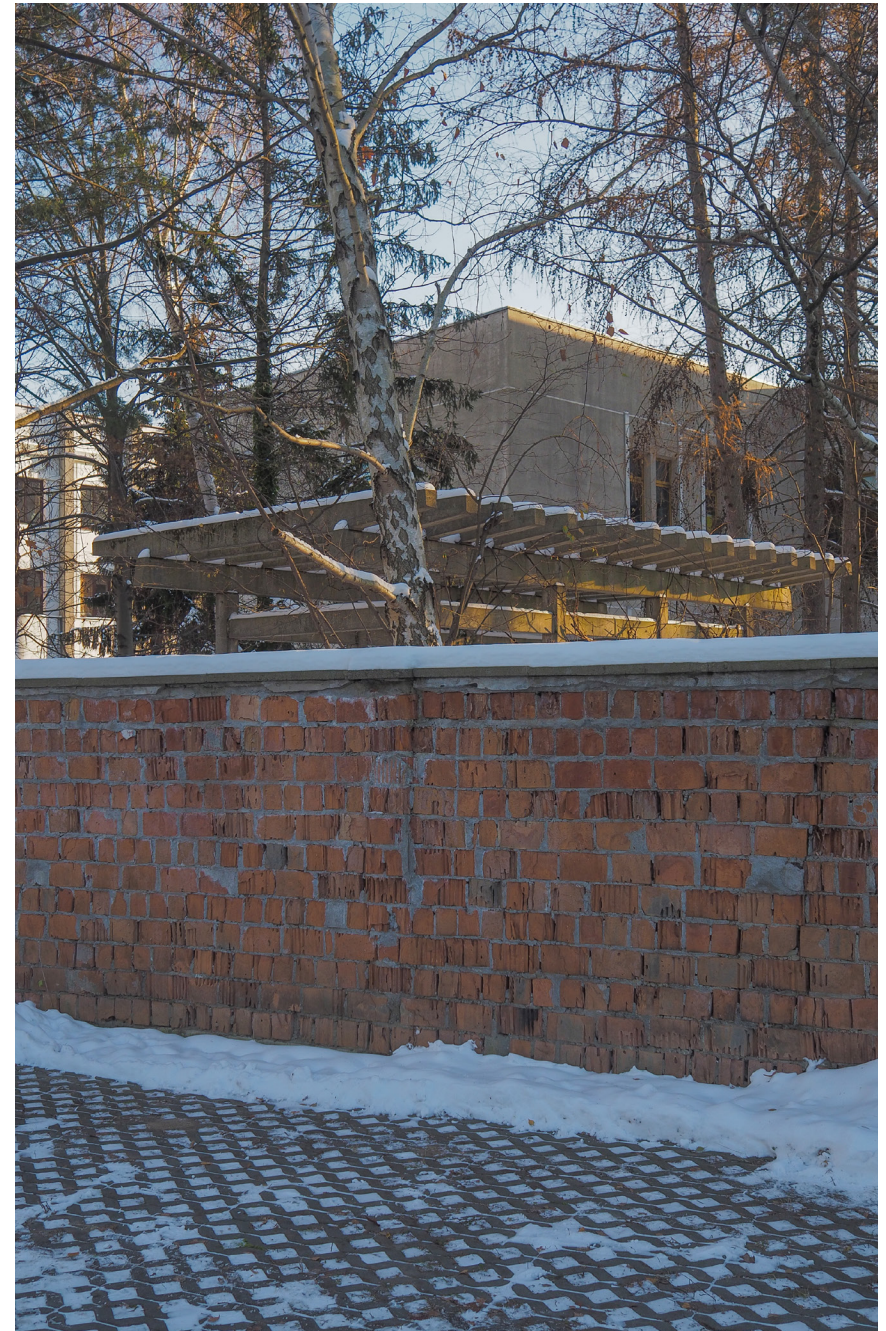
If there is anything incessantly human, it is the surplus-life, that really sticks out and derails our experience, from just mere reproduction of life. This excess lies in the immediate bodily perception, how we feel, or rather more importantly what we desire to feel, and what actions follow it. Then the strive for excess really lies in what Stiegler would call primary and secondary retention, that is, what is proper to the immediate perception and how this is informed by our past experiences. Thus, I want to take the reader through my site, present him a story that sprouts when I walk through those places, create analogies, imagine different fabulations, finally form connections between the site and my experience, and by this obtain a personal image, a one that goes beyond the site and is really a child of my surplus-life, a story generated by what really makes me human.

When we consider this with the hitherto developed theoretical apparatus, it is as if I was tracing the assemblages that each space is embedded in. How a certain image pops into my mind by relating it to some form of a greater narrative. Emphasizing those would be precisely strengthening those potential for strong images to form in the mind of any subject. Also, adopting a quasi-critical approach, those stories could position themselves dialectically to the site, enabling to synthesize critical responses to the problematic generated by the conditions of the site.



Everything starts at the North Korean embassy. The heavy brutalist edifice radiates its mysterious aura on the immediate surroundings. The aura made up of all those stories about chronic hunger, violent tortures of political enemies and rough-hewn populist propaganda. The last bastion of real-existing socialism is somehow present in the centre of Warsaw. Socialism which is cocooned, isolated from the outside, dramatically trying to escape the tentacles of the globalist deranged reality. The reality that could coerce the idyllic image of Korean propaganda. This is perhaps the most fascinating problematic side, of this intriguing, yet cartoonish country. The issue of disjunction between the image and reality. The issue of the grotesque, of trying to embellish what's immune to any embellishment.

The embassy fences itself off from Warsaw, similarly to how the Korean regime fences itself from Seoul and the rest of the world. The brutalist gate, which is to allude to some form of Asian spirituality, leads the way towards a bare wall. The openness of the gate is violently countered by a two-meter impermeable barrier. It is not only Embassy in its seek for solitude. All the buildings encompassing the square, whether it is a hospital or a residential block, are shrouded by fences. What's even more curious, is that a fence is even located in the middle of the square. The fence that divides the left part of the parking from the right. Instantly, somehow subconsciously, I felt the urge to hum the iconic Polish song from just before the fall of Berlin wall:



*My house that a wall divide
The staircase that a wall divide
Bathroom on the left side,
Stove on the right side*

*My body that a wall divide
Ten fingers on the left side
Another ten on the right side
Head's equal parts on each of the
sides*



Everybody divides themselves; it is hard to grasp who wants to escape from whom. Koreans fear the globalist world, the upper class fear the lower, and the hospital perhaps still seeks the reason for its isolation, while at the parking the fear is as if it was pro forma. Fear is embedded in the essence of the common experience of space. Maybe looking for those dichotomies, the infamous us-them, is futile. Maybe we need to accept that fear simply is, and as it is, we must somehow react to it. Then I suppose an appropriate reaction might be as simple as a fence.

It seems unnecessary to mention the second plague of this space, that is, the cars. The cars also simply are. The parking is a phantom quasi-gathering of its owners. Abandoned they provide a testament that someone really occupied the space. Who was it, remains unknown. The SUVs hint at upper-middle-class users, old diesels are rather signifying the pensioners visiting the hospital. Most of the connections though are rather elusive. All cars are rather bland, they are like tools abandoned somewhere in a field of the urban environment. Impossible to move, they just occupy space, like a piece of urban static furniture.



The Northern elevation of the square is closed off by another fence. Fence perhaps isn't a worthy description of it- it is a fully-fledged wall. Wall that spreads all the way to vanish where the field of vision ends. The wall seems a wall for itself, at first sight, there's nothing behind it. No embassy, no hospital, no housing, nothing, just a wall for its own sake, as it seems. It takes a fifty-meter walk to see the first gap in the wall. The mystery of the barrier seems to be solved. On the other side, there are garages. Free-standing garages, entities that seem to me exceptionally Polish. Hidden behind the wall, seldom however they do hide cars. In fact, seldom they are used. Detached spatially from their owners they are storage for "important, yet rarely used things", or "unimportant, yet things, so they should be stored". In the end isn't it the point of the wall, to stop enquiring about those things? None of my business I suppose. Let's move on.

The idea of the wall remains even after passing the garages. The idea is contagious, it spreads further and further, so that the wall is a peculiar constant. This time it hides terraced houses. It's a perfectly complementary situation to the one in the Netherlands, Dutch want to fully exhibit their life, not even using curtains, while Poles conceal it so thoroughly that even daylight can't enter the houses. The function of the wall seems the same, wall- conceals, yet the form is much more elaborate, perhaps even one might say nuanced. It begins as a regular plastered wall, then the wall itself is hidden in vines, then it's a red brick wall, then the plaster itself is unfinished, plaster is grey, plaster is white, plaster is covered in graffiti etc. the multitude of combinations give formal purists a headache, whilst they hastily try to get away from this corridor of wall-finishing chaos.



Unluckily the view axis leads them towards the busy Sobieskiego street. Then luckily, the road anticipates the general distaste for fumes and car traffic, whilst it swiftly turns to display a true architectural monster. Monster that keeps us in awe. It is huge- twelve floors, and abandoned- the window patterns are alternating, once it is a smashed window, once a wooden plank. It signifies, whatever was inside, now it is dead, it ebbed. This whole inner emptiness is cloaked in a brutalist package, it stands on a monumental concrete base while being encircled by a barbed-wire fence, constantly overwatched by the beady swirling gaze of the surveillance cameras.

It's a hollow fortress. Formerly occupied by soviet principals, today nationalized by the liberal president of Warsaw, the building haunts Varsovians as a trace of the not-so-long-gone previous era. The remnants of the utopian socialism, that were to flourish in the attire of brutalist architecture, are diligently warded on the edge of the lower Mokotów, as if the idea could escape to the city.

The building captivates with its spectacular form. The northern and southern towers touch in the sky, as if in an architectural kiss, creating a monumental notch for the sun, which once a day marks off a perfectly symmetrical axis between the two buildings. The small lake of the park creates an involuntary moat around the complex, completing its peculiar defence infrastructure. At the same time, its panel reflects the cascading arcades of the concrete structure.



Sielecki Park is extremely longitudinal. It is like a strip drawn with a thick marker on the map. There is just one path in the park. Around it there is little space, in the widest part it is only 60 meters, while the narrowest segments are mere 20 meters wide, which has to accommodate the lake spreading across most of the 600 meters of the park. Needless to say, everything is carefully fenced off from the surroundings, so one can only enter from either of the two entrances on the south and north of the park. The end of the park boasts the biggest number of attractions, let's call it then a corner of activity. Two ping pong tables, a hammock, swing, those are the proposed attractions. That's about it, that's the park. Albeit at first sight it might seem not too interesting, the park is a unique refuge in the district, so much needed in those hostile surroundings. Pavements are constantly filled with dog walkers, while the small activity facilities always host playing kids from the neighbouring school.

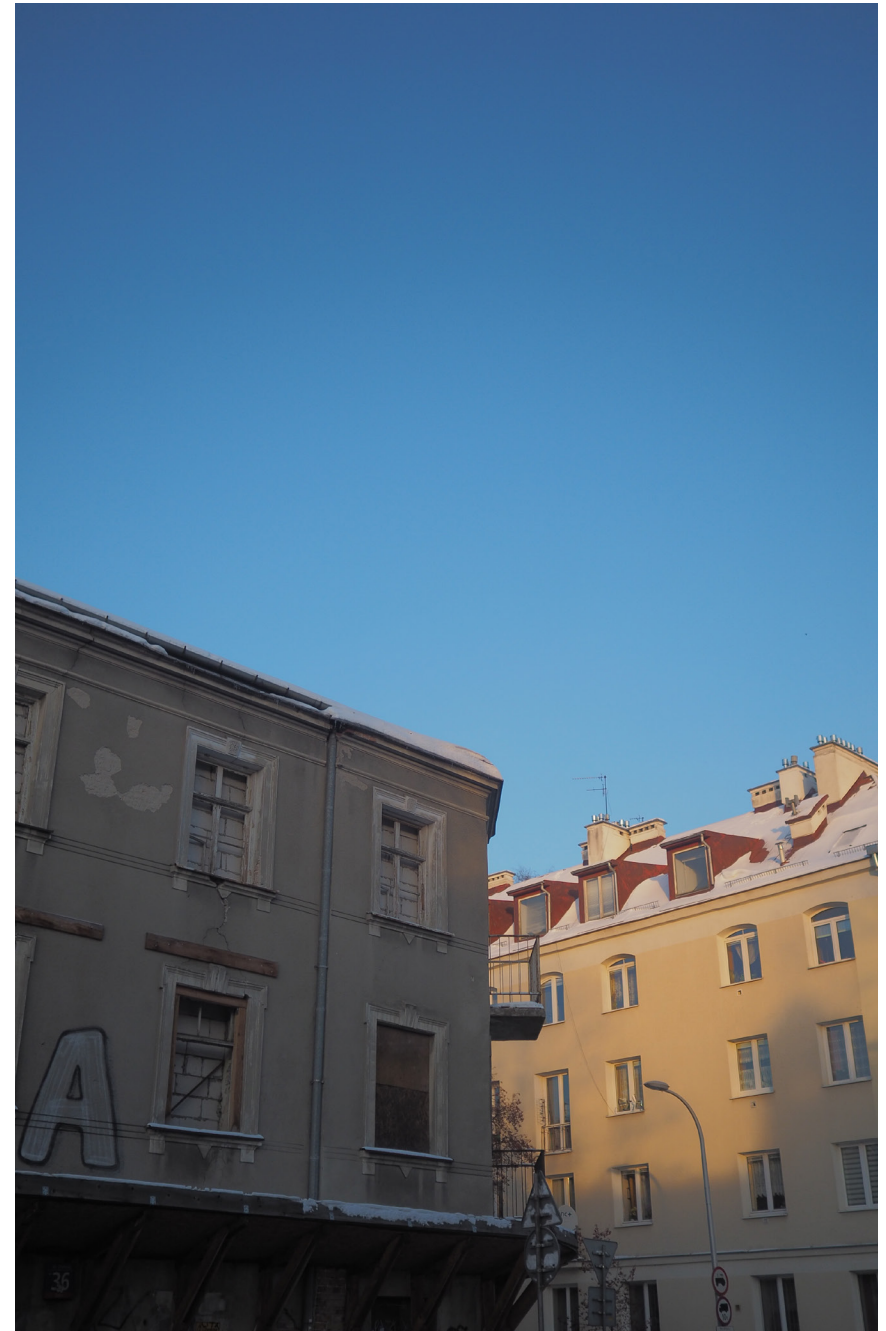
Despite its modest form, the park is also logistically important. It is the only passage connecting the north to the south between the Sobieskiego and Bobrowiecka streets. The two form the edges of what one might call longitudinal urbanism. The urban plan consists of fenced-off strips, each with a different function, each hostile to the neighbouring one. There is a housing strip, then the park strip, film strip, again housing, then there's Bobrowiecka, and finally the last vacant strip. All of them perversely fenced off, parallel with entrances from the north or no entrance at all, as in the vacant plot.



Perhaps the most fascinating strip is the movie strip. At first sight, it is even quite visitor-friendly, as it starts off with a popular café (unfortunately it was recently closed). It would suggest breaking this famous theatrical rule of the fourth wall and opening the world of actors and directors to the commoners. Yet don't be deceived. The movie strip is as alienated from the world as anything else nearby, when you ask passers-by what's inside, they wouldn't have a clue. There's this real sense of mystery of what's going on behind the scenes. Fortunately, thanks to google maps, I can reveal those small secrets. Inside there is a multitude of different functions. There are offices, magazines, studios, and anything that a filmmaker's soul could ask for. There is the most important Studio for documentaries and fabular films, this I suppose everyone knows, but not everyone knows about a wholesaler of electronics, a photography studio, a printshop, an actor agency, the national audiovisual producers' chamber, smaller and bigger warehouses, an art school and the headquarters of the Puls broadcaster. This is of course not all, but one can surely claim that it really is (or perhaps could be) a park of cinematic services, which makes it unique in the context of the whole Warsaw.



This longitudinal urbanism ends at Chelmska street. The street is a peculiar boundary between this chaotic fenced off entity and a new world, or rather an imaginary of how this world was to look like. This new world was to be the world of socialist realism. National in form, socialist in function, the new Sielce settlement was described in the 1949 weekly "Stolica" as follows: "The Sielce district was designed for the working man and this working man alone, or with the benignant help from the state, is building here his home and his dwelling". The district was to be "a tranquil island in the midst of the urban commotion". Did they succeed? I suppose that to some extent yes. The district really is tranquil, and it is really surrounded by a lot of commotion. Unfortunately, the commotion is mainly caused by the sound of cars, and soon will be further accompanied by trams. There is no real urbanity, it's safe to say. It is perhaps lacking its critical human factor, which separates what's urbane and what's only urbanized.



The biggest square of the neighbourhood is really a tranquil island. Old, magnificently tall trees encircle its urban interior. But again, this interior doesn't quite live up to the expectations, the square is simply crammed with all sorts of services. There is a shed with a greengrocer, a shed with Chinese food, and a shed with trash cans. One has to say that their functions are quite complementary. Buy, consume, dump, and all of this within the microcosmos of the square. How convenient. Unfortunately, this means that the square feels quite squashed, there's nowhere to relax for a moment, and if there was, I really don't think I would like to, certainly the square is not inviting in any sense. All sheds have different forms, they seemed to be produced impromptu, thanks to some leniency or simply laziness of planning officers. They could be anywhere else, though they certainly are important services for the users of the area, firmly engraved into their image of the square.

A similar, yet a bit smaller, urban interior is located just 20 meters north. At first sight, it seems similar, but at the same time it appears more welcoming. The scale is different, the function is defined, and one can really acknowledge the beautiful setting for this charming architecture of the 50s. The Sepińska street is a continuation of this classicist modernism, all embedded within a park-esque setting. When one travels north along the street he moves across small inner yards of the housing. They surreptitiously gaze at us, from behind the socialist realist edifices, with their elegant trees and small fruity shrubs. Maybe those really meant to be the so-called tranquil oases. On the right of Sepińska there is a long housing block, on the left, clustered together are terraced tenements, all with a slightly different formal expression. It is really a shame that so much of this could-have-been picturesque street is filled with space for cars- parallel parking, two-car lanes, and perpendicular parking, no wonder why there is little space for anyone else.



Walking further north one encounters a small park and a small passing behind a corner. It might seem a bit repelling, maybe even dangerous, but I like it. It's just, and as much, as a shortcut, which is so rare in the south of the district. The shortcut opens itself on another small urban interior. Under a blank side wall of a tenement, a blank square. Empty. It is as if the wall is somehow projecting its emptiness on the square. One small bench is to complete this scenography of serenity. It's the easefulness of this alienated detail, which somehow sparks in me this what Barthes described as the punctum effect. On the other side of the building, there is a complementary interior. One with the bench is empty, the other seems suffocated under its plants and small architecture. Here in the summer, there is a small embryo of urbanity, when people chat queuing for the craft ice cream in one of the buildings. It's a Ying and Yang situation, a square of serenity and commotion, or at least it could be...



There's not much any further, let's say the journey ends with an entrance and wraps back on itself, so that it never stops, it is to be continuous, one just needs to make sure he can captivate us for enough time, so we don't escape, don't get bored and simply leave.



