

Reflection

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The 'chemistry project' started out as a direct response to the investor's development that was prone to remove the building we at the time would still call home. The combination of the sense of home and the image of demolition fuelled a hearted approach to a doomed project that would never actually manage to change the scenario of the loss of our home nor the deflection of the demolition. Yet we were in an unusual, almost intimate proximity to the (financial and regulatory) forces at play: we were pushed and pulled around by these rules, but also gradually found our ways to navigate around them up to the point that we were approaching most of our own and even our friend's practical problems through the affordances of Chemistry. Always there was something in the building that could help, and I was getting skilled in finding those things. Simultaneously, in the ongoing cycle of urban redevelopment I, just as Théo, recognised the motor of the problem that is currently labelled 'sustainability'. That meant we could theorise a societal tendency from both a systemic and personal perspective. We could observe the effects and mechanics of the economic forces while we let ourselves in with the intricacies of the building, mobilising anything in our favour for all it could become is rubble, growing a conflicted idea that I was the last person to actually care about the building.

Over the many reflections during the course of the project (as it was the scenery in which our entire life took place the Chemistry building was the unavoidable topic of conversation) it was only towards the end that a friend remarked that 'no one would embark on a project like yours without a slight hope of influence'. Up to that point this ambition had not been spoken aloud for fear of loss of credibility. I needed the project to be more than just a 'dreamer's idea', it should not look like we are only trying to save the building. So her remark struck me: she recognised what was deliberately avoided. I did still feel like

the last person actually caring for that building everyone else had given up on, and yes, I would have more than sincerely loved to save the building.

This anecdote touches on the most profound dilemma that runs parallel throughout the project with its two-faced character of on the one side a fundamental societal critique on how market led 'sustainability' works (within the realm of architecture particular), and on the other the very intricate matter of our (domestic) living environment. In the different presentations there had been a struggle about where to position it, sometimes overemphasising the Creative Destruction process and turning the chemistry building into an emblem, and sometimes not getting beyond the representation of the dwelling habits in the building in plans and sections. Big claims against capitalism against not letting go of our home.

It seems to me now that this struggle with the project's ambition can be explained with the friend's remark about the hope for influence. That is because if the balance is set right, with those dwelling practices in architectural representation, we would escape the economic grip of progress, even leaving it unarmed against the common-sense arguments we derive from the act of dwelling. Hence taking architecture as a tool to influence a societal relevance within the undeniable realm of the dwelling human. That means that with the project we find a way of doing architecture with the traditional architectural means to actually change something fundamental: not the faith of Chemistry, but a practice of architecture! I am convinced that would really be possible by embracing the full immersion to a place, because then only you can really engage with its intricacies, as in internalising them for your own sustenance. It must be this closeness that grows the sincere affect able to fuel a motivation necessary to take it up against the grand forces of capital, giving me the rare feeling of actually having a chance against it.

So even if we would not have an influence on the chemistry building's development (which we, all things considered, will not), we have established anew our understand-

ing (and hopefully inspired someone or two along the way) of how we can employ an architectural practice to deal with the matter of our living environment, of how we with our particular skillset can make a significant contribution by immersing elsewhere again.

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