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TRiest PLEIN  
MONUMENTALITY, REPRESENTATION, AND DEMOCRACY

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A clever hospital director dared to ask: “What if?” As a result, the Psychiatric Centre Caritas got an urban, multi-story park plaza and experimental hall instead of a standard open square. [...] Exemplifying the power of architecture as an agent of change, this project serves as inspiration for future refurbishments and as a promoter of architectural experiments.<sup>1</sup>

- Mies van der Rohe Award, 2019

## **1 Introduction**

The Caritas Psychiatric Center (PC Caritas) in Melle, Belgium, is a clinic campus consisting of about a dozen buildings embedded into a park. Sint Jozef, named after the priest Petrus Jozef Triest from Gent, Belgium, is one of the remaining villas built in 1908 and centrally located on the campus. It was initially used as a treatment center for so-called “hysterical women” and has experienced multiple changes of functions over time. Like other buildings on the campus, it was considered not to meet today’s requirements anymore and therefore decided to be demolished. Thanks to the research collective BAVO, the demolition was halted midway, and competition to start a second life of the ruin was initiated. The experimental concept presented by architecten de vylder vinck taillieu was chosen and developed further together with multiple participants, including doctors and clinic staff, patients and visitors, and others. The project was then renamed Kanunnik Petrus Jozef Triest Plein, in short Triest Plein (Triest Square).

It is now a “ruin” that, through the project, experienced a multitude of deliberate changes of repairing, removing, and adding new elements. It was, in essence, kept in its current state of partial demolition. Perforating the walls and roof are new sightlines and accesses, both vertical and horizontal, making the space accessible from all sides. This forms a network of partly enclosed outdoor spaces, with scattered plants and trees in the interior, making the building almost seem to turn inside out. The general aim of the architect was to postpone the decay and keep track of the disintegration process<sup>2</sup>. This is why the Triest Plein is stripped of all organic material, leaving the brickwork naked. Wood decay is hindered by leaving it bare to be able to dry. The structure is kept intact as far as possible to avoid irreversible interventions. This is with the intention to keep the complex adaptable to changing needs of the psychiatric centre.

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<sup>1</sup>Mies van der Rohe Award Edition 2019.

<sup>2</sup>Boie, Gideon et al., “Unless Ever People”, 200.



Figure 1.0. Site Plan (Credit: A dvvt)

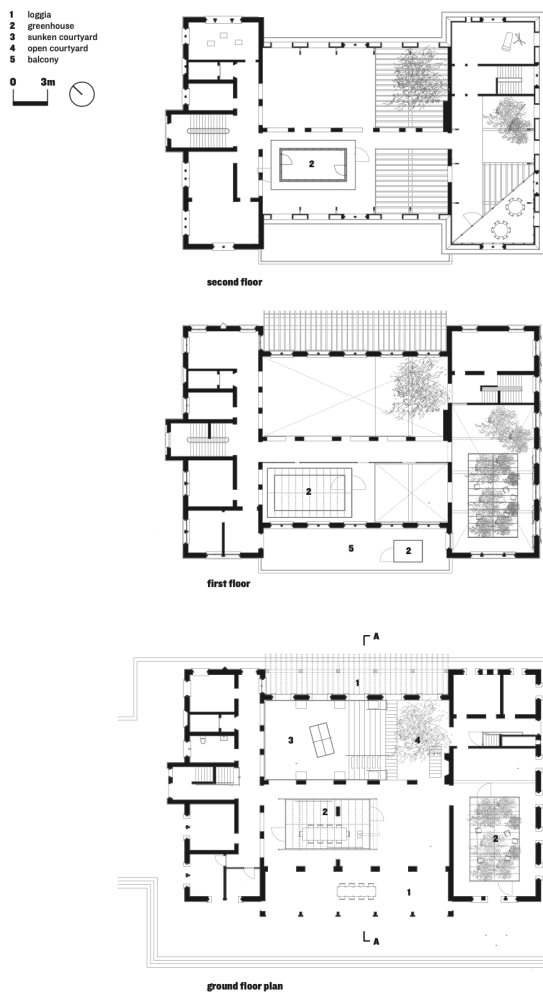


Figure 1.1. Floor plans (Credit: A dvvt)

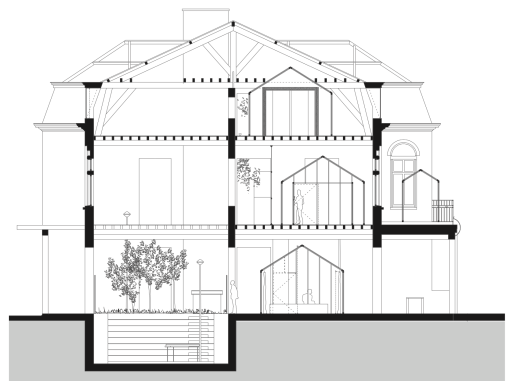


Figure 1.2. Section AA (Credit: A dvvt)



Figure 1.3. Exterior View of Triest Plein (Credit: Filip Dujardin)



Figure 1.4. Exterior View (Credit: Filip Dujardin)



Figure 1.5. Exterior – Interior (Credit: Filip Dujardin)



Figure 1.6. Interior View A (Credit: Filip Dujardin)



Figure 1.7. Interior View B (Credit: Filip Dujardin)



Figure 1.8. Interior View C (Credit: Filip Dujardin)

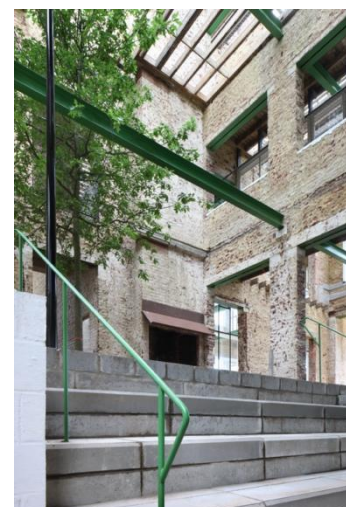


Figure 1.8. Interior View C (Credit: Filip Dujardin)



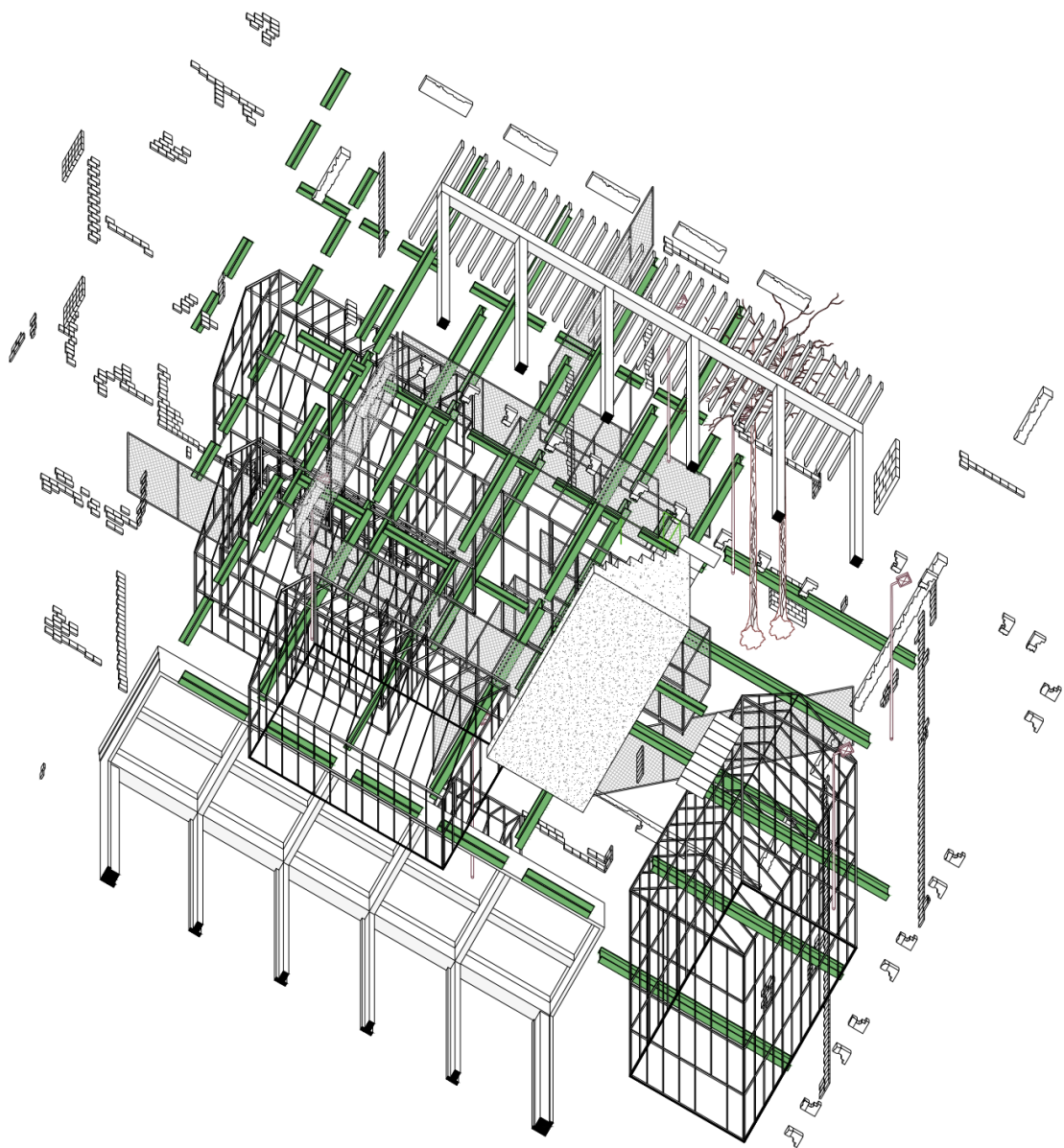


Figure 1.10. Axonometric Drawing of the added elements to Sint Jozef (Credit: A dvvt)

What is a monument? Oxford dictionary provides us with several definitions to help us dissect the meaning.<sup>3</sup>

A monument is

1. "a building, column, statue, etc. built to remind people of a famous person event
2. "a building that has special historical importance."
3. "a thing that remains as a good example of somebody's qualities or of what they did."

Triest Plein certainly comes close to some of these interpretations, but they seem to be a bit limited. Mid-1930s architects like Lewis Mumford already proposed to broaden the concept of monumentality towards the idea "of a building that is representative rather than utilitarian."<sup>4</sup> Defining the monument as a transcending function is also something that we can find in Siegfried Giedion's *Nine Points of Monumentality*. He sees "monumental architecture [as] something more than strictly functional"<sup>5</sup>. Adolf Loos even goes as far as negating the function of the monument: "Only a very small part of architecture belongs to art: the tomb and the monument. Everything else that fulfills a function is to be excluded from the domain of art."<sup>6</sup>

As the function of Triest Plein is hard to grasp and stays undefined, it will serve as a case study to discuss the relation between monument and function. The four articles have different approaches, and the angles vary from discussing everything from ruins to hospital beds and from destroying to healing. The texts show the variety in which it's possible to read this building. One could argue that one of the main characteristics of this building is just this, the ability to be open to interpretation. It reaches out to us a question. And it's a proud question. The architect, architecten de vylder vinck taillieu, is first to stand behind its ambiguity, often mentioning the ongoing process or the un-completed as a quality. In the book *unless ever people* (2018) end the beginning chapter, with the open phrase "We will see"<sup>7</sup>.

Our goal is to "see" and find answers to the questions Triest Plein raises in its very existence and interpret them. As a monument or a building with monumental qualities or something that is not a monument at all. To tap into Gideon Boies's words, describing Triest Plein as "a monumental outdoor structure which is an answer besides de question"<sup>8</sup>. These texts are our answers "beside" the question of monumentality in Triest Plein. All in the lens of its ambiguous function.

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<sup>3</sup>Oxford Learner's Dictionary, Definition of Monument Noun

<sup>4</sup>Teerds, Avermaete and Havik, *Architectural Positions*, 166.

<sup>5</sup>Giedion, *Nine Points of Monumentality*, 51.

<sup>6</sup>Loos, Adolf, *Architecture*, 15.

<sup>7</sup>Boie, Gideon et al., "Unless Ever People", 184.

<sup>8</sup>Boie, Gideon et al., "Unless Ever People", 188.

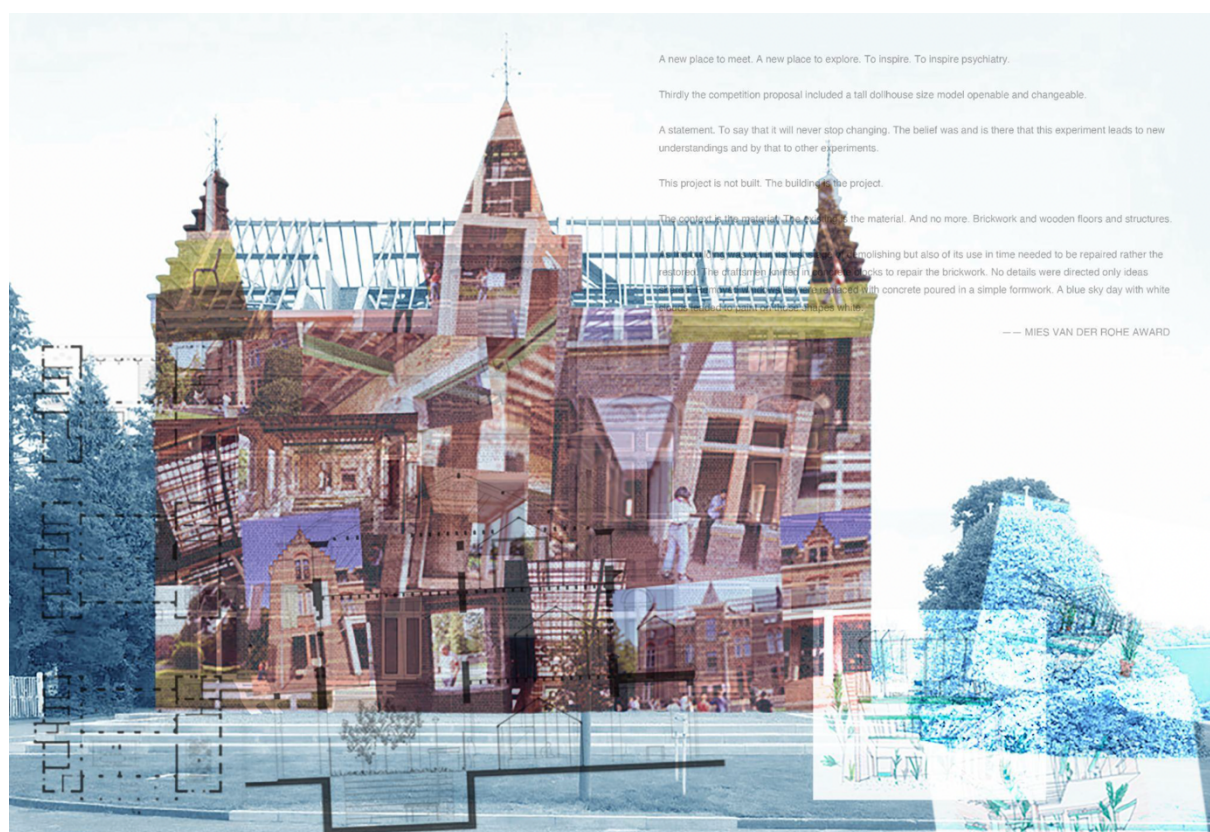


Figure 2.0. Visual experimentation from the site visit.

## 2 The Death of a Building is The Birth of a Ruin

Valentin Gies



Figure 2.0. The death of Sint Jozef - the birth of Triest Plein

The Sint Jozef building on the PC Caritas campus became a ruin because of human decisions. Obsolescence justified demolition<sup>9</sup>. “The old villas no longer met the new times<sup>10</sup>”, and so the destruction started. Its later interruption initiated by the research collective BAVO marked the starting point of the Triest Plein project. A ruin was brought back to life.

As pointed out in the introduction, it is quite hard to answer what exactly the function of Triest Plein is. This mystery is created by the openness of the concept, but also by the contradiction that Triest Plein is both a part of the clinic's campus program – and thereby one would expect it to have an assigned function – and at the same time a ruin. And by nature, a ruin does not serve a function; it is the shell of a building that has lost its function. Nevertheless, the character of the Sint Jozef ruin has changed significantly: from a dead ruin, it was turned into an intelligent ruin<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Abramson, *Obsolescence, An Architectural History*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Boie, “Unless Ever People”, 180.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 192.



Through the multiple spatial possibilities, the old structure combined with the project interventions offer, it became “a ruin [...] in a state of continual transition”<sup>12</sup> and able to react to changing circumstances. The “process of being destroyed or severely damaged”<sup>13</sup> is one way to define a ruin that also adapts to Triest Plein, as the natural forces of wind and weather are working on the exposed carcass of wooden roof beams that are expected to collapse at some point. But also, human decisions are causing a constant and unpredictable transition of Triest Plein, as regulations introduced by the clinic direction are occasionally shutting off parts of the building due to the fear of collapse or patient suicide<sup>14</sup>. The mission statement “We will see what happens”<sup>15</sup> accepts impermanence and the passage of time and is entirely different from conventional architectural interventions on ruins that would usually aim at preventing or at least decelerating decay in order to re-utilize. At Triest Plein, the transition continues mostly unhampered.

A building usually starts to turn into a ruin when it has been abandoned – an absence of users leads to a lack of maintenance, which again gives the green light for decay.

Every ruin has its very own history of how it became one. A multitude of factors, mostly combined, can initiate the transformation of an intact structure into a ruin:

- the passage of time
- violent destruction, caused by natural or human actions
- obsolescence
- artificial creation

There are different states a ruin can be in, and these might also change over time:

- the abandoned ruin
- the ruin as a monument
- the reused or converted ruin

Both ruins and monuments are human-made structures that “demand the work of imagination”<sup>16</sup> – they make us reflect upon past events, the passage of time, or even collective beliefs. “Ruins are a form of media”<sup>17</sup>, and so are monuments. Still, while the latter is often intended as such from the very beginning, a ruin is almost always an unintentional monument.

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<sup>12</sup> Zucker, *Fascination of decay*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, Definition of Ruin Noun.

<sup>14</sup> Gideon Boie, conversation at PC Caritas, 18 September 2021.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Martin, *Towards a political understanding of new ruins*, 1041.

<sup>17</sup> Martin, *Towards a political understanding of new ruins*, 1038.



Ruins used to have a specific function in their previous lives, but this function is lost with the death of the building – at first glance, ruins are useless shells. “Poets like ruins; politicians want monuments,”<sup>18</sup> states Paul Woodward, and thereby he locates the ruin in the realm of art. The monument on the other hand belongs to politics as it is rather representative than utilitarian<sup>19</sup>. Triest Plein is somewhere in between, both a poetic and melancholic ruin and at the same time a monument expressing a political statement. It promotes “sustainability [...]: to reuse, adapt and transform existing structures and materials into new objects and places of even greater value”<sup>20</sup> and is also a manifested statement against the present-day tendency to destroy anything that is not profitable anymore.

#### *the ruin as a piece of art*

Once Sint Jozef used to be a house, but now it is instead a piece of art. As such, and also as a ruin and a monument, it is not following utilitarian criteria. Its primary function became stimulating imagination and changing perspectives. The intervention completely changed the last character of the building. Inside was turned into outside, windows were turned into doors, and ceilings were removed. The result is a stimulating and confusing collage space, or, as architect-philosopher Gideon Boie has put it, “a beautiful joke”. The project is an example of dealing with the past in a more playful way that leaves room for personal thoughts.

#### *inside is outside*

Due to its ambiguity, Triest Plein is a mysterious space: inside and outside are interwoven by different means. Red-brown gravel is covering the floor both inside and outside the walls as a unifying layer. Streetlamps and greenhouses – elements usually only found in the open – are placed inside the ruin like in a surrealist painting. The feeling of being in the open even though one is inside a building is typical for ruins.

#### *permeability*

The ruin of Sint Jozef has been made rather more accessible than usable again since its use is not distinct. Some windows were extended to the floor by cutting the wall below them, there is a series of 24 points of entry or exit. The skin of the building is a diffusion layer out of stone. This ‘hyper-accessibility’ eliminates any hierarchy that might have previously existed and opens the possibility of meandering through the ruin.

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<sup>18</sup> Woodward, *Rooted in the Past: The Plants that Flourish in Ruins*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Teerds, Avermaete and Havik, *Architectural Positions*, 166.

<sup>20</sup> EU Mies Award, 2019.

### *ruin and plants*

The symbiotic connection of ruins and plants is a topic that has been elaborated on especially by romanticist painters such as Caspar David Friedrich. Plants overgrowing ruins reflect the “fragility and unexpected mutations of life”<sup>21</sup>, and even though the single tree planted inside the ruin of Sint Josef gives the impression of a more garden-like controlled growth, it can be seen as an element alluding to the romanticist perception of decay.

### *the fascination for the ruin environment*

In the Triest Plein project, it can be recognized what cultural scholar A. Schönle calls a “re-aestheticization of cataclysm”<sup>22</sup>. This notion of decay is also typical for romanticism. It “offers the relief of imperfection”<sup>23</sup> and reflects a “longing for the shadow side of modernity”<sup>24</sup>. The fascinating atmosphere of the ruin abstracts the visitors and especially the patients at Triest Plein from their daily life and initiates a healing change of perspective.

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<sup>21</sup> Woodward, *Rooted in the Past: The Plants that Flourish in Ruins*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Daryl Martin, „Introduction: Towards a Political Understanding of New Ruins,“ 1041.

<sup>23</sup> Failed Architecture, „Maybe Modern Ruins Are Just the Kind of Failure We Need“.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*



Figure 2.1. A stimulating space - The ruin as a therapist.

### 3 Diverse Activities: A New Taste For The Monument

Qiran Tao

#### Introduction

“We should actively start using Triest Plein to organize events—as one event naturally triggers other events, it will definitely set things in motion”, said a daring head nurse. Inspired by her words, a student from KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture decided to hold some experimental activities here.<sup>25</sup>

Activities make the building without any fixed functions a new and popular monument for the public. It is an interesting phenomenon that we are trying to find answers to. Since the new millennium, the design concept could be “free for all”,<sup>26</sup> which means that the space is more open to the public. Architecture is designed by people and also for people, so how we use it is crucial. More open space means more activities. So why are the activities different? How do designers consider the combination of the space and these activities? What is the significance of the new activities?

#### 1 Activity in conventional monument buildings

In Jan Gehl’s book *Life Between Buildings*, outdoor activities are divided into three types.<sup>27</sup> It can be seen that the occurrence of necessary activities has little to do with the external environment, and optional activities and social activities are the focus of research in architectural design.

Table 3.1. Three Kinds of Activities

Activity Type	Connotation	Example	Relation with Environment	Participant Willingness
Necessary activities	Activities that people have to participate into varying degrees	working, shopping, studying, washing	It occurs in a variety of environments	They have no choice
Optional activity	Activities that will take place as long as people are willing to participate, time and place permitting	chatting, walking, playing games, playing chess	It greatly affected by the environment	They have a Strong willing
Social activities	Activities that people will participate in when places are provided	sacrificing, folk custom, festival, religion, wedding	It greatly affected by the environment	They are somewhat passive

<sup>25</sup> Boie, Gideon, et al, “Unless Ever People”, 248.

<sup>26</sup> Tegkelidis, A, “Fever in Rotterdam: Timmerhuis”, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Gehl, Jan, “Life between buildings”, 27.

German art historian Alois RIEGL said that he distinguishes between two kinds of monuments: intentional and unintentional.<sup>28</sup> One is from top to bottom, coming from those in power, trying to teach people something, and the other is from bottom to top, coming from people's feelings. In conventional monument buildings, the projects usually refer to churches, temples, and palaces originally designed to educate people. Their space is highly scripted where the design and setup are very directive towards users. For instance, churches are often clearly structured for religious activities held by pastors and believers. One type of activity will only attract people who are keen on it and others will not pay any attention to the buildings.<sup>29</sup> There are few optional activities here, and most of these are social activities. Sometimes as this kind of social activity form is single, repetitive and boring, people are passively involved and show low interest.<sup>30</sup>

## 2 Different design strategies in Triest Plein

Triest Plein is different from conventional monuments. It holds various functions in history and they changed a lot with time. Patients, doctors, inhabitants, visitors, students and the homeless can be the role of the future stories here. Considering that many sorts of people can generate colorful activities afterward, designers reserve a lot of possibilities for the building.<sup>31</sup>

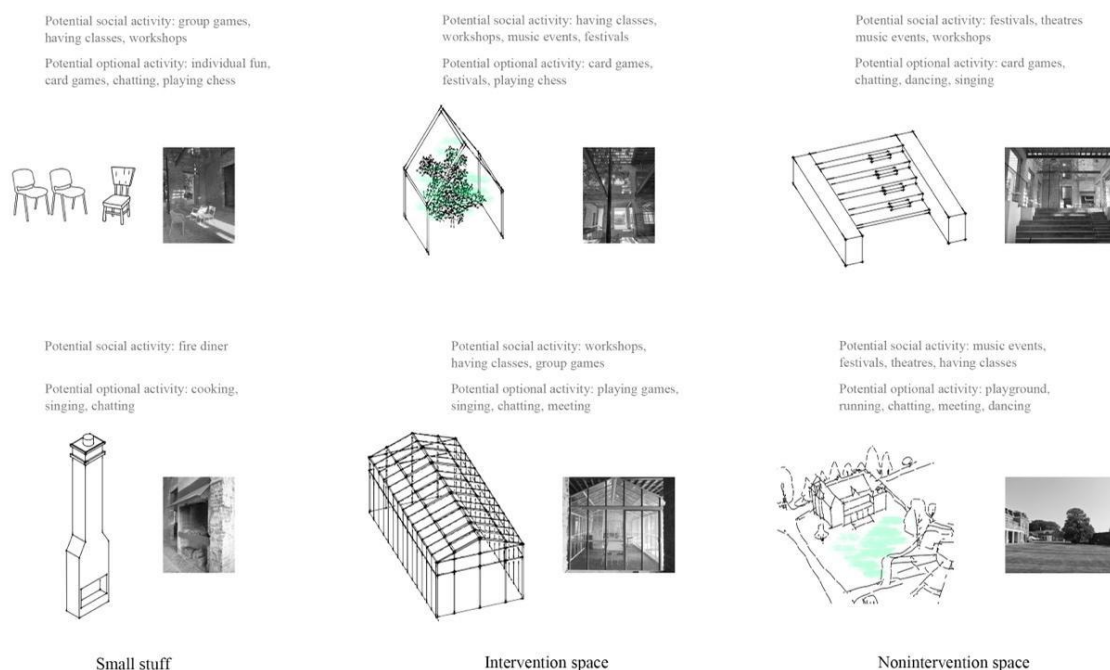


Figure 3.1. Three elements of the renovation

<sup>28</sup> Teerds, Hans, Tom Avermaete, and Klaske Havik, "Architectural Positions", 166.

<sup>29</sup> Gehl, Jan, "Life between buildings", 31.

<sup>30</sup> Leary, Mark R, "Boredom in interpersonal encounters: Antecedents and social implications", 8.

<sup>31</sup> Boie, Gideon, "La mente sociale/The social mind", 654.



After renovation, there are three interesting types of space. First of all, some small constructional details are kept, such as the chimney and old furniture, which can record history and would be funny for visitors. Moreover, moderate intervention makes uncertain things happen. The introduced trees and glasshouses are planted inside and wait for new events. Finally, many nonintervention spaces give this building more flexibility, such as the sinking steps and the vast outdoor lawn. To sum up, it seems that designers did nothing or lost control of the space, but in fact, more people will participate in these activities and create more possibilities.<sup>32</sup> (Figure.3.1)

### 3 New activities happening in Triest Plein

The new activities are held there from time to time. (Figure.3.2) Most of these belong to social activity held by an official group. They are interesting and change with the seasons. Some are optional activities organized by people coming here, full of enthusiasm.

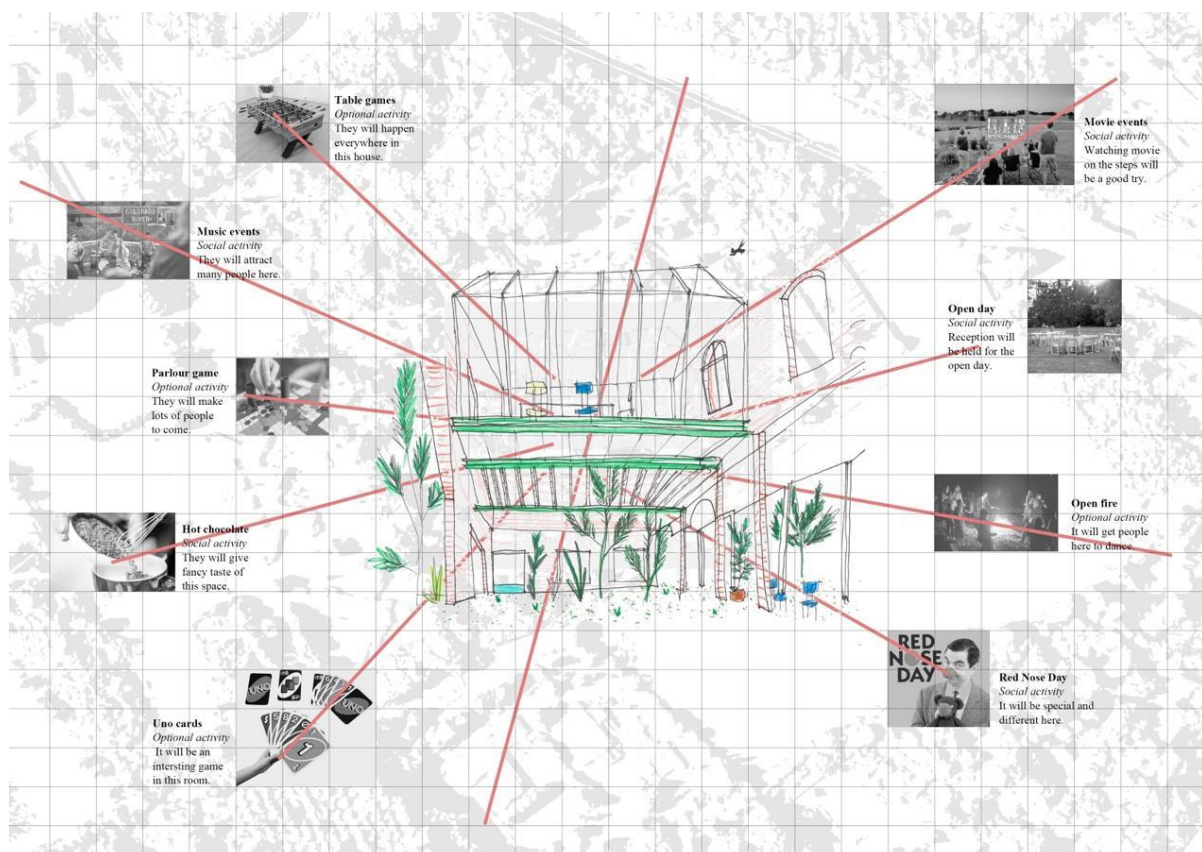


Figure 3.2. Activities that happened in Triest Plein

<sup>32</sup> Boie, Gideon, et al, "Unless Ever People", 236.

Diverse activities have brought a lot of impact to Triest Plein. Basically, new activities make use of the empty building so that it will not be abandoned. Moreover, more attractive activities have more charm than conventional social activities. It attracts more people and arouses their interest in history which makes it a living history museum.<sup>33</sup> Finally, with the influx of more people, people will use space in their own way, and the possibility of optional activities will be greater, making people have a higher willingness to participate.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the new optional activities can give architects new inspirations for further renovation.

## **Conclusion**

The activities held in Triest Plein now are richer than those in the conventional monuments. Superficially, they seem to have nothing to do with monumentality. But actually, the new form will stimulate people's enthusiasm for participation, increasing the attention of the monument and making people more interested in the historical story behind it. That is the reason why a monument without fixed functions is so attractive. However, whether the same methods can be adopted for the reconstruction of other monuments is still a question to be discussed.

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<sup>33</sup> Boie, Gideon, et al, "Unless Ever People", 250.

<sup>34</sup> Levine, Peter, "Collective action, civic engagement, and the knowledge commons", 247.

## 4 Notes On Uncontrollability of Care, Architecture, and Monuments

Jonatan Forsman

A building without a roof. The non-shelter. A building that doesn't provide the function of what Abraham Maslow<sup>35</sup> would call the most fundamental of our needs. Is a psychiatric clinic the place for such a building, where patients seek to reconnect with the fundamentals of a stable life? Or can architecture strive for something different than the pure function of effective, optimized, and controlled care? Is this building a relief from the pure functionality of the health care industry and architecture of today? Could it even serve as a monument to represent ideas to counter dominant narratives and trends?

This essay seeks to explore different views from the creators and users of Triest Plein that can highlight the qualities of uncontrollable, undefined spaces. Their experience will be related to the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa's theories about what he calls parametric optimization and resonance, concepts explained later in this text.

In the book *Unless ever people* Sofie de Caigny, director of the Flanders Architect Institute describes the Triest Plein as a dismantling of the psychiatric institute and that the building process itself showed generosity towards heritage and memory of the place, but most of all its residents.<sup>36</sup> By answering to the openness of the unclear functionality the residents and users were consulted in close relationship with the architect and the patients are seen not as a number of beds but closer in hierarchy to the directors and designers. This resulted in a building that does not do what is expected to vulnerable people as it offers no protection. She goes on to "Within this growing market-driven vision on care, architecture and even patients the Ka Triest Plein is an Oasis"<sup>37</sup>.

In the beginning statements of "Unless Ever People" the architecture office architecten de vylder vinck taillieu writes "Ordinary hospital buildings that hide behind rules and regulation. And have lost their humanity"<sup>38</sup> and compares the building to a moment in time that cannot be predicted and that it has a will of its own which should not, and want not, to be predicted.

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<sup>35</sup> Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation", 370.

<sup>36</sup> Boie, "Unless ever people", 174.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, 174.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, 180.



Gideon Boie, an architect and philosopher had a central role in the birth of the idea and is also the one who describes the building in the vaguest terms of functionality. Contrary to other clients/mothers of a building idea he describes himself not to know what's going on with the building. As a beautiful joke, we'll just wait and see what happens. He describes Triest Plein as a "monumental outdoor structure with an answer besides de question"<sup>39</sup> and an "impossible desire".

Wandering from the architect's perspective, with famous notes of Doina Petresco in mind that the virtue of participation for an architect is to lose control but to keep desire<sup>40</sup>, to the patient. Gideon explains the close process in which the caretakers and patients develop the Triest Plein and where the hospital blocks of the 80s to 00s pejoratively starts to be called bed houses linked to their focus around the measuring unit "bed" in which Belgian healthcare is strongly influential of the design.<sup>41</sup>

Something that makes Christine Bonte, an occupational therapist at the facility, interested in Triest Plein is the contrast it provides from the newer building blocks of the campus. She describes interactions with patients who feel like the existence of the ruin would be impossible. As something that should not be allowed because they could jump and commit suicide when the personnel are not watching. Christine means that this instead sparks a conversation about suicide that is otherwise hard to handle or initiate. That this ruin always leads to interesting conversations about its unusual nature. Conversations that are important in a facility like this.<sup>42</sup>

Emilie Momerency, a former patient at the psychiatric institute, has a similar perspective but from the other side of the relation of care. She understands the need for a sterile, structured, low stimulus environment but makes an important point, it doesn't need to be like that everywhere. The Triest Plein is an alternative to the structure. Emile states the main argument for this essay: "It's a relief that in this building they thought outside the box, allowing things to be different here. I read this a symbol that not everything needs to stay between the lines".<sup>43</sup>

Another argument for Triest Plein's importance as a monument, or in Emilie's words symbol, for an idea, comes from the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa. In his book, the uncontrollability of the world from 2020, Rosa means that the driving cultural force of today's modern life is the will to make the world controllable. But makes the claim that it's when we meet the uncontrollable, we really

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<sup>39</sup> Boie, "Unless ever people", 188.

<sup>40</sup> Petresco, "Losing Control, Keeping Desire", 43.

<sup>41</sup> Boie, "Unless ever people", 190.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, 270.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, 290.

experience the world and can feel touched, alive, and moved. A world where everything is known, mastered, and planned would be a “dead” world.<sup>44</sup>

Instead, Rosa argues, life is played out on the border between what we can control and what we cannot. But, in what he calls late modernity, our tendency and desire to control the world, we instead encounter it as a series of objects we need to master, exploit, and conquer. A parametric optimization to make things attainable, available, and accessible. And because of this, the feeling of being in contact, experiencing, and resonating with the world seems to slip away. For Rosa, to achieve resonance and truly encounter the world, we need to be open to what is not under our control, but at the same time not give in to chaos, which would hinder us from even the act of interaction.<sup>45</sup>

One who put the quality of uncontrol central to her practice is the Swedish French architect Anna Chavepayre. Even relating to healthcare, she draws parallels with artificial breathing machines for humans and the climate system of the house. If possible, it's naturally something we want to avoid, and that demand for it is not rooted in the human experience but in regulations and standards.<sup>46</sup> In one of her projects, a bathroom on the roof open to the elements, is a manifestation of her thoughts and could be related to the roofless Triest Plein.

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<sup>44</sup> Rosa, “Introduktion”, p.11.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>46</sup> Phillippa Stålhane, Interview with Anna Chavepayre, *Själens standard* 6.



Figure 4.0. (Left to right) The conventional function of a hospital bed - The function of a ruin at PC Caritas - The works of Anna Chavepayre.



Figure 4.1. (Left to right) The conventional function of a hospital bathroom - The function of a ruin at PC Caritas - The works of Anna Chavepayre.

In a psychiatric clinic, as well as in architecture, the feeling of being in contact with the world or experiencing resonance is fundamental. Is modern functional driven architecture stopping us from doing just that? Has the “machine for living”, or the machine for caring, gone too far? The machine is the symbol of ultimate control and the useful building is instead in Trieste Plain dissolved. The non-function becomes the function. Not a building, not a ruin, but a monument in-between uncontrolled and controlled. A monument for a new idea of care and architecture.

## 5 Triest Plein's Agents of Healing

Tuyen Le

The process of restoring the Sint Jozef building and turning it into its current state as an open-monumental space was a collaborative effort, marking the transitions in care architecture. Within this essay, the relationship between the physical space and the human experience at Triest Plein will be realized through the topic of healing. In specific, the non-invasive restorations done on the Sint Jozef building by Architecten de vylder vinck taillieu (A dvvt) can be seen as a physical healing process, while leaving room for new opportunities to flourish. The people experiencing the space can interpret the building's atmosphere and physical attributes as a healing process of their own mind, and ultimately find a safe passage to healing.



Figure 5.0. A blue flower is drawn around a hole.



Figure 5.1. Patching the corner with concrete.



Figure 5.2. Spiderweb is stitching the corners together.



Figure 5.3. New concrete blocks restructure the brick wall.



Figure 5.4. New entrance(s) by turning windows into entryways.

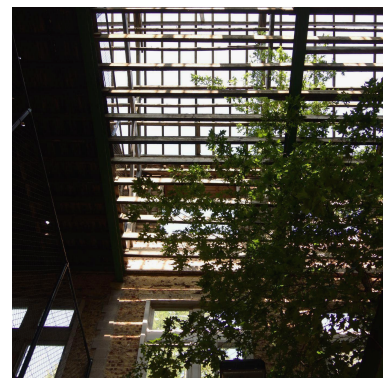


Figure 5.5. A growing tree and the exposed roof structure.

The goal of the restoration emphasizes the historical value of Sint Jozef and to ease its former identity into the new age of care architecture as Triest Plein. Like a grandfather clock, Sint Jozef rusts and decays as the clock ticks away, yet it imbues great cultural significance. It is crucial to accept its

condition and search for how the structure can stand the test of time. As far as the emotional rawness is concerned, the interventions are minimal yet poetic and stimulate many pure feelings from its inhabitants. The contrast in material shows clear distinctions where the works of patching, stitching, and healing were made throughout the structure.

“The restoration of the old brick walls with larger concrete blocks is felt as healing by the inhabitants ... The wooden floors are repaired as well by the introduction of new wooden planks. The rough restoration with concrete of the wonder windowsills that were removed follows the idea of a cloud in the blue sky by adding white paint to it. It makes the inhabitants dream.”<sup>47</sup>

- Architecten De Vylder Vinck Tailieu

The mental healthcare system in Belgium is curated to provide psychiatric care to inpatients, resulting in high hospitalization costs. All hospital beds are registered as units of government subsidy, in 2018, Belgium had the highest registered psychiatric hospital bed in the EU, with 22 beds per 10,000 inhabitants.<sup>48</sup> This strict guideline entices a dystopian effect on psychiatric care standards, where it is quantity over quality. Prolonged hospitalization disengages the patients from, thus, it dehumanizes those who seek professional psychiatric care in Belgium. Relating to the Caritas Psychiatric Center, the modern additions to its campus from afar looks modern, however, up close, they project unhomeliness and hostility with mirroring dead-end corridors, leaving no free space for the mind or the body of the occupants. This claustrophobic setting fuels the dystopian effect of healthcare facilities. Therefore, Triest Plein holds a unique position, being a place that used to house psychiatric patients, it now embodies no functions at all, it is quite revolutionary that the space chose to be so free and unhinged from the rest of the campus.

The readaptation of Sint Jozef to Triest Plein liberated the structure from its enclosure and opened a floodgate of new agents of healing that go beyond the traditional route of mental care. As an act of romanticizing Triest Plein, the healing process (stitching, patching) of the built space can reflect closely with how we should perceive the healing of the human mind. Ultimately, one can find moments within the space to sit, pause, and reflect. This practice of self-reflection activates the healing process for the human mind. According to "Design Your Symptom" essay by Gideon Boie, an annual welfare check to the decay of Triest Plein is to evaluate the structural stability and reflect upon

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<sup>47</sup> Boie, "Unless Ever People", 184.

<sup>48</sup> Øvreeide and Bervoets, "Psychiatric Intensive Care Units in Belgium: A New Mental Health Service Provision Meriting Research?", 43.



the new needs and desires that the place can evolve into.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, the practice of annual/daily welfare checks should be adapted to maintain the mental resilience of human minds. The interventions to slow down Triest Plein's deterioration can reflect a person adopting a healthier diet, regular exercise, and an adequate support system. Resonating with the concept of Psychogeography by Guy Debord, the people experiencing this space can be seen as drifting through the atmospheres in a non-linear way, blending in with the scene. Ultimately, the spatial functionality can endlessly morph the desires of the occupant.<sup>50</sup> This free-spirited environment reminds one to pause and immerse in the presence, almost like a meditation practice.



Figure 5.6. Provokes self-reflection in a nonbinary space that is Triest Plein.

<sup>49</sup> Boie, "Unless Ever People", 190.

<sup>50</sup> Constant, Koolhaas et al., "The Hyper Architecture of Desire", 25.

As an outlet for mental remedy, Triest Plein becomes a unique reflection per each individual's state of mind, echoing Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia. Foucault has two versions of heterotopia, heterotopia of crisis, and heterotopia of deviance. Heterotopia of crisis is where a heterotopia exists in the context of a psychiatric center as a means of mental refuge, reserved for individuals experiencing a state of crisis. However, Triest Plein broke through this notion. It is not a heterotopia of crisis, but rather a heterotopia of deviance, a place that is occupied by people whose actions/behaviours can be unexpected and out of the norms.<sup>51</sup> Considering its context with the other buildings on the KARUS psychiatric campus, people's behaviors here are unique and separated from the rest, kept safe within the monument between the psychiatric center and the outside world. It is a bridge of comfort for real emotions, humanity, and self-care. This interpretation visualizes how the psychiatric campus is seen as a heterotopia to society, while Triest Plein is seen as a heterotopia to the rest of the campus.

Since its opening in 1908, Sint Jozef/Triest Plein has been unraveling its purpose along with its occupants. It is a reminder that architectural space is capable of manifesting its destiny over a century with the cooperation of the users and the builders. Triest Plein portrays a new form of care architecture, where mental democracy overpowers the capitalist state of mind, challenging how we perceive ruins of the past. Connecting this idea to the human mind, we are capable of healing and adapting with a commitment to reinvent ourselves and strive for mental awareness.

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<sup>51</sup> Leach, Neal and Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias", p. 334.

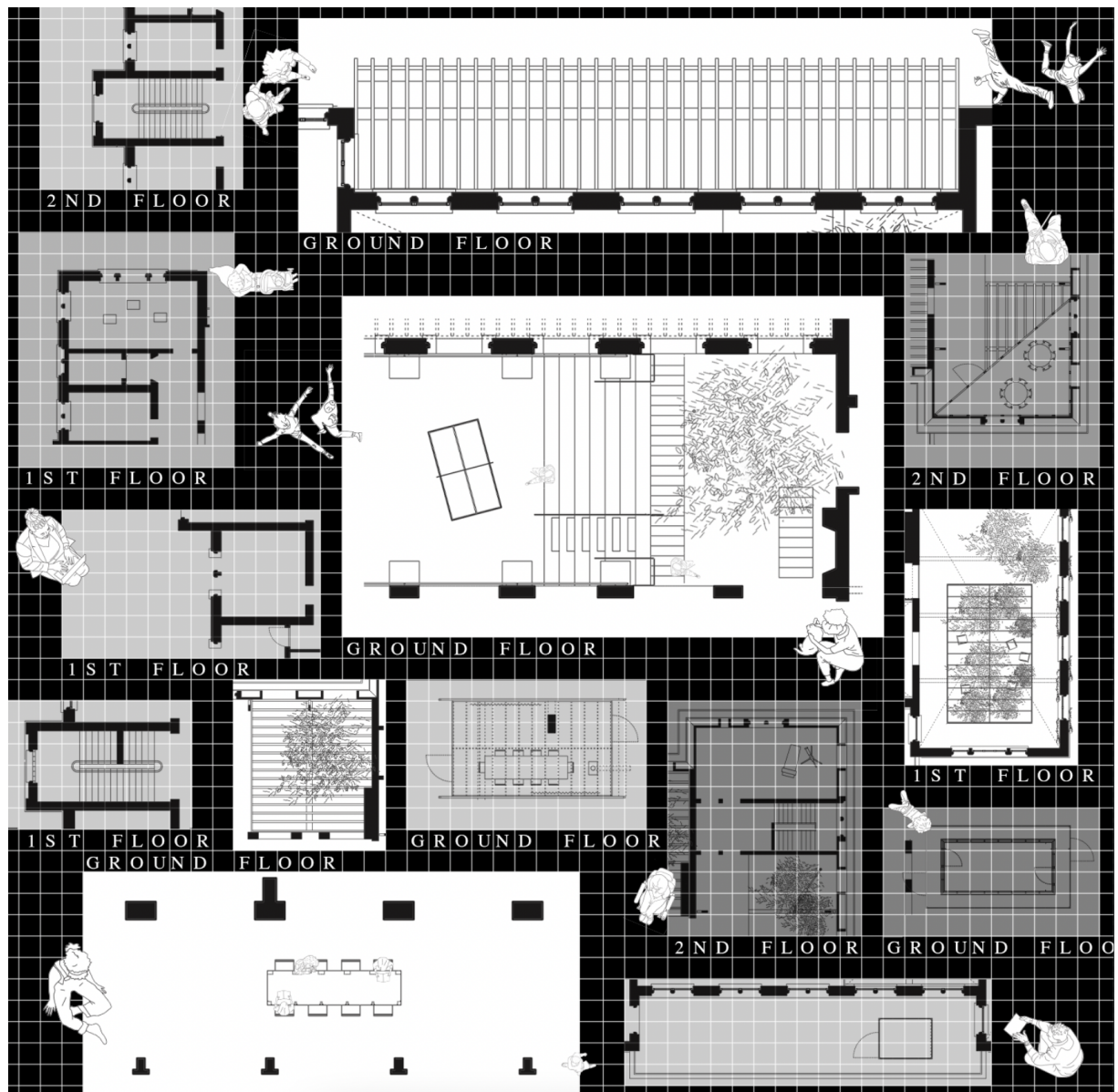


Figure 5.7. Current space usage in Triest Plein - With the current footprint of the building being so free-form, the hierarchical significance of these spaces can change over time.



## 6 Conclusion

Through this series of analyses on Triest Plein in our contemporary society, it is safe to say that the spectrum of monumental space will continue to skew towards the readaptation of historical artifacts. This idea is analyzed thoroughly through the following four perspectives on Triest Plein – ruins, activities, uncontrollability, and healing. Triest Plein is a ruin that was brought back to life through a very open concept that enables a lot of functions rather than determining them. It identifies and brings to the front different aspects of ruinosity that expose the monumental qualities of the ruin. The striking factor that this space imbues is its rawness and imperfection. The imperfections are encouraged by the designers, who have great knowledge of its history and cultural importance (doctors, patients, architects, building administrators, and philosophers). It creates a stark contrast with the other buildings that were erected at the same time as its restoration, one is hidden behind its white wall and long hallways, whereas one has no doors or roofs. Triest Plein holds the new diverse activities that stimulate people's enthusiasm for participation, so it increases the attention of the monument and makes people more interested in understanding the stories behind it. And through such experience, Triest Plein offers a safe haven for its inhabitants, with rooms for the minds to heal.

In relation to monumentality, it challenges our conventional idea of monuments, where monuments should no longer be meticulously maintained or put on a pedestal. Triest Plein is monumental for its uncontrolled condition, not hiding behind beautiful claddings/finishes. In specific, its raw appearance thrives through moisture, echoes, lights, shadows, decaying materials, and blooming vegetation. With its existence in the field of monuments, Triest Plein broadens the public perception of monumentality, where it is more human-centric, interactive, and approachable. As a monument, it is free from a clear function and becomes both a stimulation and a stage for the imagination of its users.

In terms of democracy, Triest Plein pioneers a revolutionary way of thinking about mental healthcare. This unbothered space lets visitors of all walks of life imagine, dream, and relieve themselves of their current state of mind, freeing themselves from ties of social hierarchy and mental strains. The old shell of the Sint Jozef building was restored and become an outdoor monumental space called Triest Plein, a playground, a conversational space, a wishing wall, a dining space, and many more<sup>52</sup>.

In the modern age of architecture, constructions are objectified as complicated webs of functions and formalities. In terms of representation to save architecture from this mentality, architects must try to

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<sup>52</sup> Boie, “Unless Ever People”, 209.

let go of control and allow the external elements (people, culture, temperature, natural forces) to shape the project through time. This means it is responsible to build with the intention of readapting and reconditioning, rather than crystallizing the architecture to one period of time. Its function embodies a constant negotiation, oscillating between chaos and calmness. This monumental outdoor space remains unfinished, in both its physical and metaphysical representation. The faith of Triest Plein is now up to its inhabitants, relative to its identity as well as its physical being.



Figure 6.0. Looking up to the exposed roof and looking at Triest Plein

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