

HACKING THE SYSTEM OF OPPRESSION



soft story of a fluidly housed persona in Brussels

toward a careful imagination for the
liveability of young fluidly housed
adults in Brussels

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Cover: building
in Rue de la Loi,
Brussels
Photograph by
Max Schuska
2023



this fold-out book was inspired by the beautiful work of a group in
the Architecture and Colonialism exhibition at the faculty in 2025

Fig. 2: photograph
of small booklet
showing socio-
spatial patterns
of young fluidly
housed adults in
Brussels, made by
author

patterns of fluid housing



Fig. 3: socio-spatial patterns of young fluidly housed adults in Brussels, made by author

Awa is 25. She came from Côte d'Ivoire to Brussels, searching for something better. A future. A place to live. A chance to work. Like so many others, she arrived without papers.

She stepped off the train at Brussels North, not knowing where to go. She asked strangers on the street how to find a shelter. Most did not know. Some looked away. Eventually, someone pointed her toward the city center. But without documents, she was not allowed in.



Fig. 4: photograph of small booklet showing socio-spatial patterns of young fluidly housed adults in Brussels, made by author

That first night, she slept outside, under the arcades of a building. It was cold. The stone was hard. The pavement was designed to be uneven—hostile to people like her. She wrapped her coat tightly around her body and kept one eye open. The wind tugged at her, as if trying to carry her somewhere else.



Fig. 5: photograph of small booklet showing socio-spatial patterns of young fluidly housed adults in Brussels, made by author

The next day, she spoke to people at the station.
“I live in a squat. There is still room. We just have to find you a mattress,” a young guy told her.
So she followed him. Dozens of mattresses lined the floor—people from different places, different languages, all waiting. The walls were cracked, but there was water, there was electricity.
“We have to pay for what we use,” someone explained.
“So try not to use too much.”
Still, it was a roof.

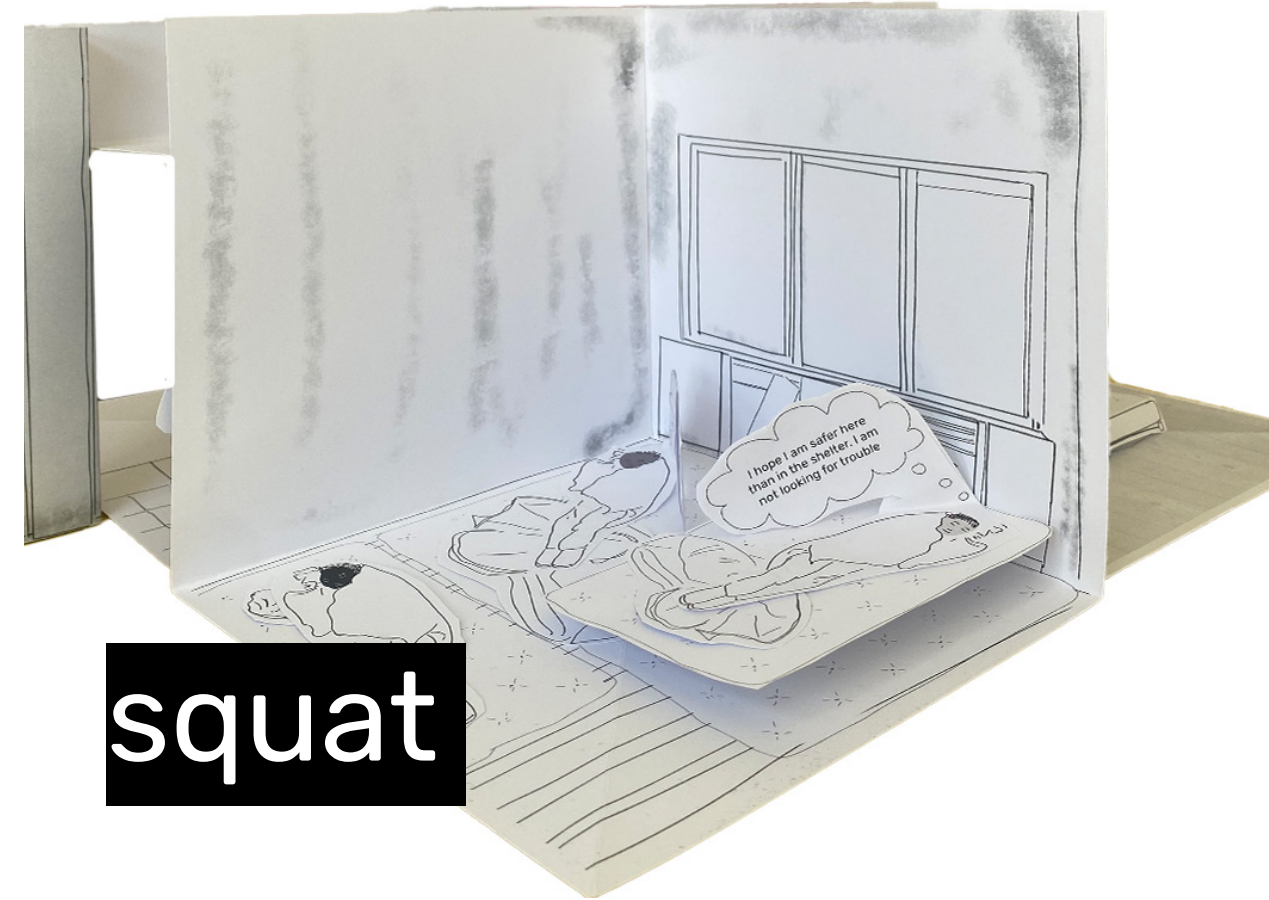


Fig. 6: photograph of small booklet showing socio-spatial patterns of young fluidly housed adults in Brussels, made by author

Months passed. She got a place in a solidarity housing project. She was told she could stay for six months. That was three years ago. The housing is free, but safety is never certain. She must follow community rules. No alcohol. Everyone contributes. She cannot register her name at the address, which means she cannot get a job. She cannot vote. She shares her room with strangers. The tenants who pay rent do not have to. Sometimes she wants to argue, but she stays silent—afraid she might lose her space.



solidary housing

Fig. 7: photograph of small booklet showing socio-spatial patterns of young fluidly housed adults in Brussels, made by author

patterns of care and resistance



Fig. 8: socio-spatial patterns of care and resistance for liveability of young fluidly housed adults in Brussels, made by author

Some days, the system feels impossible. But not everything stands still.

Recently, she heard about the postbox pavilions—tiny official addresses where people like her can register and gain the same civil rights as those with a fixed home. She signed up. Now she can receive mail. She even registered to vote.

It is a strange feeling—being allowed to vote in a country that still refuses you the right to work or stay.

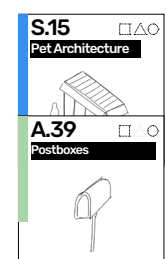
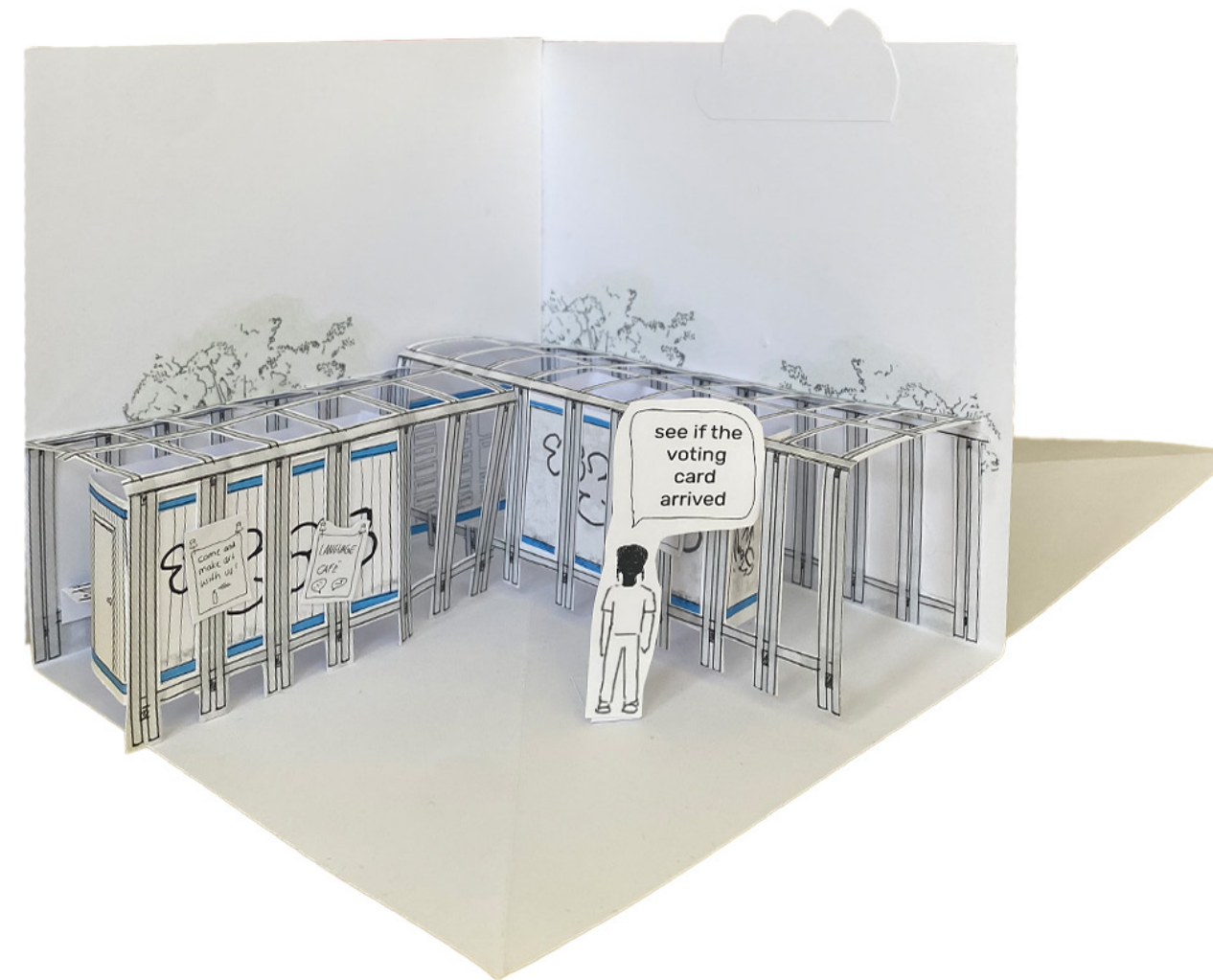


Fig. 9: socio-spatial patterns of care and resistance for liveability of young fluidly housed adults in Brussels, made by author

She also found a community garden project. Five days a week, people come together to cook. They use rescued vegetables and food from the market. She learns new recipes. The meals never taste the same, even when the ingredients are similar. People cook side by side. It is warm there. Safe. Human. When she helps out, she writes down her hours—volunteering counts toward her residency application, people say.

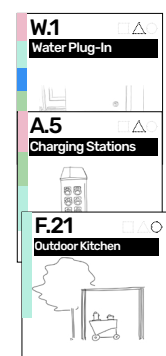


Fig. 10: socio-spatial patterns of care and resistance for liveability of young fluidly housed adults in Brussels, made by author

She loves being around children. That is her dream—to work with them, to teach care and joy. But without papers, she cannot. So she waits. On some days, she joins an art collective at Place de la Reine, transforming public spaces with color and expression. Children gather. School classes join. They paint benches, write poems, make posters, using shared brushes and tools from the tool library the collective manages. There are public showers—the ones she uses when the water in her flat is cut off. There is a toilet there too, which means she can stay outside longer—even when she has her period. Dignity, in fragments.



Fig. 11: socio-spatial patterns of care and resistance for liveability of young fluidly housed adults in Brussels, made by author

When she is tired during the day, she strings a hammock beneath the colonnades. It does not offer much, but it is something. She rests when she can. Watches the sky. Thinks about London. Wonders how long a person can be “temporary” before they disappear entirely.

Awa is still here. Still waiting. But she is not invisible. Her life is threaded through this city—its kitchens, its gardens, its art walls, its postboxes. She is not just surviving. She is part of something. A full citizen—but the policies that allow for registration and permanent housing need to catch up.

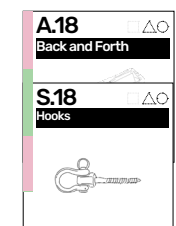


Fig. 12: socio-spatial patterns of care and resistance for liveability of young fluidly housed adults in Brussels, made by author