

SAFE SPACE



The right to housing

ZINE 4

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Illustration by Anders N. Kvammen (1/7)

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SAFE SPACE ZINE 4

Editor's Letter

Over the past decades, city administrations around the globe have relinquished governance over the housing market to the voracious forces of neoliberalism. Policies and politicians fail to address the problem of the increasing need for affordable living spaces and inclusive urban spaces. In the meantime, the architect's role is being reduced to that of a consultant for developers; but rather than standing up and reclaiming our role in serving the general interest, we sit silently behind our computers while copy-pasting Revit blocks. This silence is complicit. Today, there is a window of opportunity; it is time we all rally and voice our opinions, use our knowledge and skills to support radical political and activist agendas.

"Living space is a scarce resource in the twenty-first century - this has become increasingly clear over the past decade. More and more people are living in cities, yet urban living space is limited and property speculation has made it unaffordable for many."¹

In 2019 in Oslo, the movement *Boligopprøret* (Housing Rebellion) has shed the light on the precarious and unstable living conditions of the municipal housing system and the lack of social housing policies in Norway. The system acts as a poverty trap for minoritized and vulnerable population groups while widening the inequality gap between owners and renters. Activist groups such as *Reduser Husleia* (Reduce The Rent) ask for radical changes in the way we consider housing, demanding to take profit out of the housing sector. Other initiatives such as the social enterprise *Nedenfra* or *Tøyenboligbyggelag* offer alternatives, advocate for citizen-led urban planning, and explore the implementation of a not-for-profit housing sector in Oslo. Inspired by many international examples such as the co-operative housing model of Catalonia, Spain², *Tøyenboligbyggelag* demonstrates that an equitable solution to the housing question is simple, and that it has the potential to promote meaningful political and urban changes in Norway.

"Primarily defining housing as a profitable commodity is a fundamental trigger of the global housing crisis. ... Instead of promoting speculative operations for a minority, the micro-political agency of co-operative practice can transform housing into a matter of mutual necessities and a resource for the common good."³

"Co-operative housing production is aiming at the creation of social capital, which assembles tangible as well as intangible resources for shared interests while simultaneously including demands of minority groups."⁴

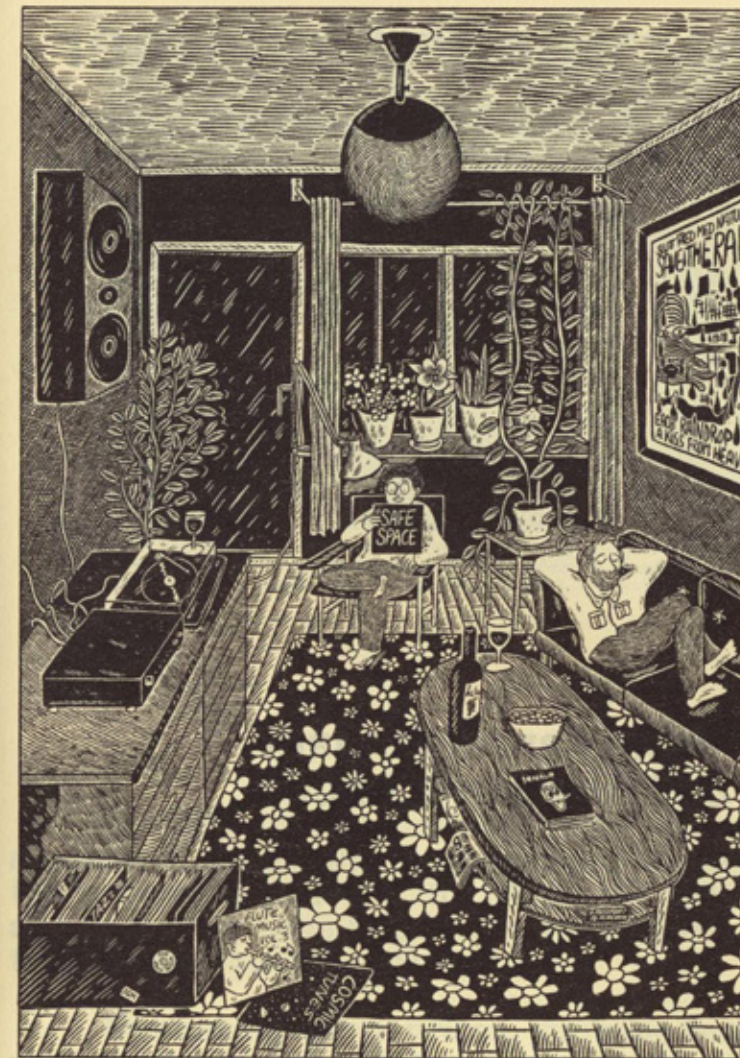


Illustration by Anders N. Kvammen (2/7)
"In my Safe Space", for Safe Space, 2021

The system that we have today in Norway is unsustainable, and we know the solution to it. This publication is here to not let us forget that housing should be considered a common good, and that the right to dignified housing is a basic human right.

— Safe Space Collective, 2021.

¹ Kries, Mateo, Mathias Müller, Daniel Niggli, Andreas Ruby, Ilka Ruby, Vitra Design Museum, and Centre d'innovation et de design (Hornu, Belgium), eds. 2017. *Together! The New Architecture of the Collective*. Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum; Ruby Press. pp.37-42

² See the article written by Clara Triviño Massó, "The right to housing: a right not guaranteed" in this zine, pp.16-24

³ Hehl, Rainer, Patricia Ventura, and Sascha Delz, eds. 2020. *Housing the Co-Op: A Micro-Political Manifesto*. Berlin: Ruby Press. p.7

⁴ Ibid. p.21

- We are stronger together

Social worker Nanna Broch and architect Carsten Boysen on housing activism in the 1920s and 1930s.

Ninthu Paramalingam
& Alf Jørgen Schnell

Ninthu Paramalingam & Alf Jørgen Schnell are members of the activist collective Reduser husleial (Reduce the rents!) that through the Instagram account @Min_drittleilighet (My shitty apartment) exposes the conditions in Norway's rental market and criticizes wealthy landlords. The information is provided by renters throughout the country who offer their experiences and photographs. Reduser husleial! campaigns for social regulation of the rental market and the construction of a new co-operative housing sector.

This "interview" was originally published in Norwegian in Voks tidsskrift, spring 2021.



Photo of warjournalist Karl Berggrav and architect Carsten Boysen in action with their cameras on their shoulders, talking with rental activist and syndicalist Einar Skaalbones. Berggrav and Boysen had the responsibility of photographing in their investigations at Vaterland, Grønland. Photo: courtesy of the Boysen family.

We asked the pioneers of the Norwegian housing movement about why and how they became engaged in the housing question in the 1920s and 1930s. Why did they document the appalling housing standards, and what did they do to organize renters?

Increasing house prices, low standards, and unscrupulous landlords have resulted in a heated housing debate lately. Statistics Norway recently reported that there are 90,000 more renters in Oslo now than in 2015. In the capital, 26.5 percent of the population are renters, and in the neighborhood of Grønland in the center of the city, the number is around 47 percent.

Tenants have always been part of the city. Today, they have started to organize themselves as a political force, like they did in the 1920s and 1930s. Back then, renters were in serious strife with landlords all over the city. Oslo has, in other words, a long history of tenant activism.

Documenting housing conditions

In 1920, 88 percent of Oslo's inhabitants were renters, and overcrowding was a serious problem. In 1919, the municipality established "the Agency for Female Supervision," and social worker Nanna Broch was one of four appointed to the agency. During the next couple of years, Broch and her colleagues investigated around 5,500 apartments in the city.

"In the same fashion as many today argue that there isn't a housing crisis to speak of, the conservative newspaper *Aftenposten* tried in the 1920s to use statistics to 'prove' that the problems were disappearing by themselves," says Nanna Broch. "It never fails, the reactionary right is always saying 'it's all going so much better now' [or 'nu går alt så meget bedre' as former prime minister Kåre Willoch is reported to have said]. If only they had had the courage or the interest in taking a walk around their city, they would have seen that the opposite was also true. The problem was also that the numbers *Aftenposten* used were wrong, for instance counting people living in cellars without a floor as not being homeless," Broch continues.

A home is not only a place to sleep but also an important arena for raising children and cooking food. Broch explains that, therefore, the physical form and furnishing of houses were important to her and her coworkers.

"The agency I worked for had as one of its goals to strengthen and support housewives struggling with poor living standards in the housing market. Therefore, we were eager to document living conditions and offer advice on hygiene, kitchen use, and furnishings. Thus, the agency was to a great extent established to analyze and address questions concerning hygiene."

Was the work the municipality did enough to solve the problems?

"One of the tasks we had was to ensure that landlords improved their buildings. This concerned children, women, people in general, and their health. It also concerned questions of justice; these landlords operated as parasites on the income of these working-class families, as they do today. Landlords rarely want to do anything that costs them money. Therefore, the work of the municipality was not enough; organizing was also important. It was a united struggle against landlords and their economic interests."

Social workers working for the revolution

In 1910, Nanna Broch traveled to Berlin in Germany to study social work. There, she befriended pioneers in the international women's movement. They formed a common goal of transforming what social work meant.

"We could no longer accept the bourgeoisie's patronizing behavior towards poverty. Instead, we wanted the working class to realize that it can change

society through organizing. The insights I was exposed to in Berlin followed me throughout my life," Broch says.

For the working class to demand the rights they deserved, raising awareness was necessary. Therefore, the work to organize was understood to be parallel to the work to document living and housing conditions and run information campaigns.

"It was clear to me that it was not enough to only work with information and knowledge; organizing was also essential. Or rather, they were intertwined. Therefore, I established the renters union "De husvildes forening" in 1924, with the goal of working for a better housing market, as well as the construction of new homes for workers and the poor," Broch explains.

Broch further tells us that her organization was having a tough time receiving enough funding from the municipality to start housing construction. But the organization's public meetings nonetheless put housing on the agenda. Unfortunately, the activity dissolved towards the end of the decade.



A renter and her children in one of Sven Braathens buildings in Vaterland, Grønland. Photo: Boysen/Berggrav, courtesy of the Boysen family.



Unknown hallway in a derelict building, Oslo 1930s. Photo: Nanna Broch/Oslo Museum.

Revolutionary architects

"It was at that time I contacted Nanna Broch," the architect and housing activist Carsten Boysen suddenly says. "I wanted to continue where Broch had left off. I had just arrived in Oslo straight from the architectural school in Trondheim and wanted to commit myself fully to the housing cause."

Was it usual for architects to participate in renters unions?

"When I was a student, we had a conflict with our school and its professors, but also, you could say, architects more generally. We, the young and radical, argued that the architect thus far had been a puppet of the rich. Instead of serving capitalism, we wanted architecture to be for the common good; we wanted the architect to serve the working class. Therefore, it made perfect sense to join Broch's organization."

The tenants union "De husvildes forening" changed its name to "Oslo leieboerforening". After a while, another union was established, "Leieboerforeningen i Oslo," which Boysen also joined. Shortly after that, Boysen found himself amid a large strike against the notorious landlord Sven Braathen, aka "the King of Vaterland." In the 1930s, the renters' organization did not just offer judicial advice as today but was a political entity fighting in the streets.

16 Platous Gate, Grønland

"After advice from Broch, some fellow architects and I started to visit the buildings Braathen owned in Grønland in Oslo," Boysen said.

Boysen and his comrades brought their cameras and notebooks in which they documented prices, apartment conditions, and the tenants' own experiences. Did the prices match the quality of the apartments? The architects were shocked by how poor the housing quality was. Braathen, the landlord, was not happy that the curious activists were photographing his buildings.

16 Platous Gate in Grønland was highlighted to raise awareness of the precarious situation in which Braathen's tenants were living. It wasn't just that the rent was too high, but the conditions were a direct health hazard.

"In the survey responses, the tenants told us that the rent for Braathen's apartments was irrational and expensive, and the conditions were terrible. In one of the surveys, we wrote that *'The basements in the whole neighborhood are humid, dark, and the floor is partly just mud. The basements crawl with cockroaches and bedbugs when the tenants don't disinfect regularly'*," Boysen continued.

The battle against the King of Vaterland

After conducting these surveys, it became apparent to Boysen and his comrades that they needed to act. The documentation became a foundation for the tenants union in Oslo's direct actions.

"In the late summer of 1935, Braathen gave notice that he would increase the rent in his buildings considerably, with as much as a 28 percent increase in 43 apartment buildings," says Boysen. "With poor standards and an already expensive rent, something had to be done," continues the architect and housing activist.

How did you become a group large enough to stand up against someone like Braathen?

"It was essential that the tenants didn't have to fear evictions or loss of money," says Boysen. "Braathen had been a power-hungry landlord, and he was feared by many. We spent a lot of time creating a safe atmosphere, showing that rent strikes aren't illegal - rent *cannot* be collected or increased before both parties agree. It was important to us that as many people as possible joined the cause, and the tenants signed a declaration of solidarity. Furthermore, we created a system where the tenants sent the rent to a bank account of the Renters Association instead of to Braathen during the strike. He was only to receive the money if a deal was made that ensured lower rents and higher standards."

How did the negotiations go?

"It was important to stand united. No one person could meet Braathen alone in negotiations. I was chosen as the negotiator in the meetings," says Boysen. "It is when you stand together you are strong, not as an individual. One of the important things we fought for was that the tenants should have a *right* to organize themselves; it should not be grounds for eviction. Further, Braathen was to withdraw the police reports he had filed on the strikers. We were also fighting for renovations of the run-down buildings. Finally, we wished for the rent to be renegotiated to avoid the sharp increase that was imminent. We succeeded with more or less all of our demands, even though we had to go through some court proceedings afterward," Boysen concludes.

Advice from the housing activists of the 1920s and 1930s to today's activists

"It is important always to keep a sense of humor," says Boysen. "I myself became dirt poor by being an activist, but that never stopped us from laughing. We did some serious documenting, renters' actions, and other political work, but in the journals and pamphlets we published, we kept making fun of the rich landlords and developers through satirical drawings."

"When life goes south, it's normal to blame oneself," Broch adds. "The result of this individualization is shame. The way I see it, it's important to turn this around, to turn social problems into exactly this, *social* problems – it's not *your* fault house prices and rent are through the roof. Through sharing our housing market experiences, either by documenting or talking about them, we grow aware that the problems are bigger than an individual person's," says Broch.

"Yes, when such an awakening, or consciousness-raising, happens, there are no limits as to what we can achieve," Boysen replies.

Nanna Broch and Carsten Boysen were agitators for the renters' fight by conducting comprehensive and structural research of the situation. The documentation was used in various actions, such as organizing the fight for health, dignified standards, and rental agreements and against the "housing hyenas" extraction of the working class's income. Their work is still visible today, but many of the problems are returning in some form or another.

Both Broch and Boysen encourage tenants never to stop fighting for justice and remind us that our rights today are primarily the result of battles fought by earlier social movements.

"Justice and dignity for the working class are thrown out the window as soon as landlords see a shot at a profit. So, it's important to continue the mobilization and actions to prevent development from being ruled by profit only, especially in times of crisis," Broch rounds up and underlines the importance of fighting together.

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Literature and acknowledgments

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FACTS/Boxes

Nanna Broch (1879–1971) was a radical social worker who was especially interested in the housing question. In 1919, she started working for the municipality of Oslo in order to investigate the housing conditions among the working class. Her research documented a terrible situation for renters. With these findings in mind, Broch started Østkantutstillingen, "The eastern Oslo exhibition," which brought up questions concerning hygiene and the efficient furnishing of homes. The exhibition also put pressure on the fact that many apartments lacked access to water. Broch primarily addressed women with children and worked to elevate the position of housewives in society. It became clear to Broch that political pressure was essential if the housing question was to be solved and, therefore, established the tenants union "De husvildes forening" in 1924. The union campaigned for the construction of cheaper apartments for the working class and improved existing housing stock. The union changed its name to "Oslo leieboer- og Husvildeforening" in 1932, "Oslo leieboerforening" for short.

Carsten Boysen (1906–1996) was an architect, communist, and housing activist. Boysen was eager to transform the practice of architecture into an instrument for the working class rather than the upper class. In 1932, as a newly educated architect, Boysen joined the renters union "Oslo leieboerforening" and later the renters union "Leieboerforeningen i Oslo." In 1932, it had been quite a long time since the housing condition had last been documented. After receiving advice from Nanna Broch, Boysen and his comrades started to investigate Grenland- og Vaterland in Oslo, more precisely, the apartments owned by the landlord Sven Braathen. The apartments were in terrible condition, and the rents were prohibitive. The results of the investigation were published in the architecture and planning magazine Boysen had started with fellow architects, *PLAN*, and provided a legitimate foundation for housing activism and renters' strikes. A decade later, during the Second World War, Boysen was the initiator of the legendary housing research program "Oslo byes vel." Approximately 100 architects and other professionals were involved in this investigation of the housing market. The study, which had specifically documented overcrowding, laid the foundation for an increase in housing standards with larger apartments in the time following the Second World War, primarily made possible by the new co-operative housing sector established by architects such as Boysen and the labor movement.

Documentation, tenant activism, and the dream of a co-operative housing sector

In the 1930s, the majority of the inhabitants of Oslo were renters. The housing situation was awful, and many lacked a proper home. In this historical period, the tenants' rights movement was on the rise, and renters started to challenge landlords' expensive rents and excessive profits. The laborious documenting of the housing condition of the working class went hand in hand with this activism, with research done by, among others, Nanna Broch and Carsten Boysen. Not only were the facts substantiated to make sound arguments, but the task also raised awareness of the housing question among tenants and society at large. In addition to a dream of a more just rental sector in the housing market, the housing activists on the left also dreamed of a new, co-operative housing sector, that is, a non-commercial combination of renting and owning a home in which anyone without a home can buy a cheap right to housing by a co-operative. With prices being regulated, housing cannot be sold for profit. Housing was, then, not understood as an object for private speculation but rather as a form of welfare for all. Following the Second World War, this model for housing became widespread in Norway, and a large, new housing sector was created through co-ops such as OBOS and USBL. However, in the 1980s, these co-operatives were deregulated and transformed into commercial buildings by Prime Minister Kåre Willoch and his Conservative party. As a result, no such co-operatives are left, and today OBOS and USBL are mere ghosts of what they once represented. Nonetheless, the dream of a more regulated rental housing market and a new non-commercial housing sector is on the rise again, and the fight against rich and selfish landlords has just begun. In addition, we are once more witnessing that documenting housing market conditions goes hand in hand with housing activism. Housing has, once again, been turned into a political question.



Illustration by Tale Hammere Ellingvåg (1/4)
Kragere 1, 2021



Illustration by Tale Hammere Ellingvåg (2/4)
Kragere 2, 2021

The Right to Housing

A right not guaranteed

Clara Triviño Massó

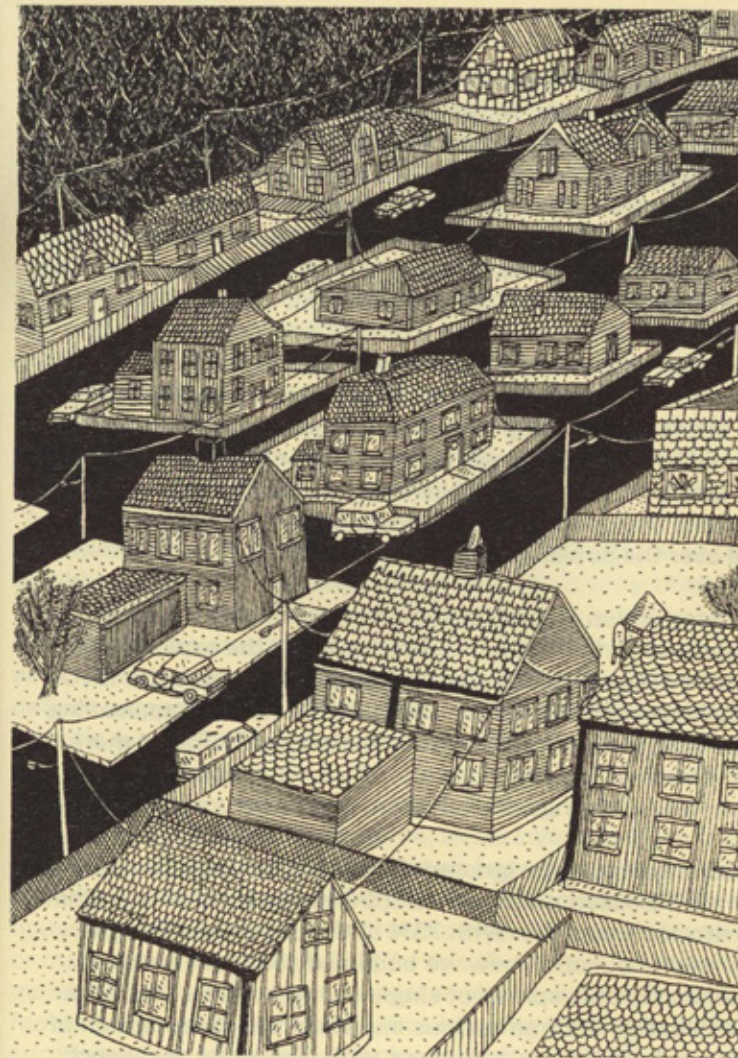


Illustration by Anders N. Kvammen (3/7)
"Villastrak", excerpt from *Ungdomskolen* (2016), No Comprendo Press

In these days of uncertainty and social unrest, when asked to write this article, I wanted to take a look at our recent history, to look back at the past in order to understand the present better and build up a narrative of how we, as architects, can work to ensure a more sustainable and fairer future for generations to come. This also meant deeply analyzing the current situation to envision a more equitable society upholding values that ensure nature's preservation and the respect of human rights.

Historical background

Over the past five centuries, the world has witnessed colonization, slavery, industrial revolutions, globalization, etc. A period that has led, among other things, to the world we know today: an unequal society that has emerged from a system based on the exploitation of natural resources and the constant violation of human rights. A society where a minority of the population decides for the majority and acts in its own interest, promoting a capitalist, heteropatriarchal, racist, and homophobic system of governance that ignores the diverse identities, cultures, and realities within the communities of this world.

If we take a look at the following sentence from *The Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1776): "Every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is perfectly free to pursue his own interest in the way he considers most opportune and to put all his industry and capital in competition with those of any other man."¹, we can clearly understand the ideals behind the establishment of the capitalist economy. A model based on the belief that individual freedom and the right to private property should prevail over the public interest.

Since the first industrial revolution, capitalism and its free-market economy has become the dominant model fed by an industry based on the exploitation of human labor and natural resources. The rise of neoliberalism since the 1970s has increased economic inequality and further widened the wealth gap, leading to a world where capital accumulation seems to be the only goal. Today, more and more people find themselves in precarious situations with unstable jobs, struggles to cover basic needs, feelings of alienation, and no future guaranteed.²

Nowadays, some facts can no longer be ignored. Firstly, the accelerated increase of the population from 1 to 10 billion people since 1800 needs to make us rethink the planning of our territories and cities. With 75% of the population living in urban areas today, we need to question how we build and condemn common practices such as the unsustainable spread of single-family houses. Secondly, we need to at first acknowledge the tremendous impact of the consumption of fossil fuel energy to run our factories, to provide us with electricity, transport, and heating, and then question the way we live and how it impacts resource countries³. And lastly, we must take into consideration increased migration flows, both internal and international, resulting from conflicts, precarity, and climate change.

At the end of 2019, according to IDMC⁴, around 45.7 million people were internally displaced due to armed conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. In 2017, 60% of the 30.6 million people displaced across 135 countries had been displaced as a direct consequence of natural disasters⁵. By July 2021, 6,477 people still remained trapped on Greek islands, living in poor conditions without any proper infrastructure or sanitary facilities. On the Canary Islands, 4,000 people live in informal settlements, and 16,000 are nowhere to be found⁶.

The right of housing

This whole time, the right to (dignified) housing has never been guaranteed for many, one of the realities that the current pandemic has shown. The most recent global estimation suggests that under one in three people in urban areas live in slum households. A slum is described as "a group of individuals living under the same roof lacking access to improved water, access to improved sanitation, sufficient living area, and durability of housing"⁷.

In Spain, for instance, the local population also struggles: 10% of the population suffers from energy poverty due to high energy prices, low income, and poor energy housing efficiency⁸, according to the Environmental Science Association. In Catalonia itself, around two million people are considered vulnerable and at risk of falling below the poverty line⁹. In Barcelona, in the first semester of 2021, almost 20 evictions took place every day, according to the Consell General del Poder Judicial (CGPJ)¹⁰.

The hierarchical and patriarchal structure of neoliberal society has over time established physical typologies that cultivate and highlight those inequalities. For example, within dwellings, the kitchen, a space commonly associated with the work of women, is a dark and hidden room often separated from the living room where men are supposed to gather. The hierarchy between rooms in a house defines a specific kind of family structure with large and small bedrooms and specific functions for every room that often prevents the flexibility required by time and life changes.

Looking at household composition, in Barcelona in 2011, the composition of households was quite varied: single households represented 28% of all households; traditional nuclear families 27%; couples 24%; single-parent households 11%; households of two people or more 6%; and households of two or more family units 2%¹¹. Despite this diversity in household composition, the general (European) housing model seems to cater only to the traditional nuclear family (very rare in the world), thus ignoring the needs of the majority. It is surprising how housing typologies haven't evolved in a society changing at an increasing speed.

Moreover, the introduction of certain electric and electronic appliances inside the house has also played an important role in our societies, leading to more individualist and selfish ways of living. For example, having one washing machine per household shows how people have ended up sharing less and consuming more. On a different scale, the same has happened when it comes to city planning, always placed in the hands of men. This has made public spaces unsafe for a large portion of the population by ignoring the diversity of the population and leaving activities typically carried out by women, excluded from the public sphere. The configuration and distribution of urban space have been conditioned by economic and speculative interests, leading to the gentrification and touristification of popular neighborhoods and the displacement of local communities to the margins of the city¹².

the role of the architect

So, at this point, many questions come up. What is the role of the architect in all this? What can architects do to make a positive change? How do we work toward achieving the architecture of social change? First, we need to acknowledge our duty and forget about the figure of the architect genius know-it-all created in the last century. Or, as formulated by Lacol in *Building Collectively*, "to destroy the image of the architect as the expert of everything in the surroundings."

Throughout history, architects have been the designers of temples, villas, castles, monasteries, cathedrals, and palaces. They have been designing for the privileged few while the majority of the population has lived in precarious conditions. Only at the beginning of the 19th century, with the first industrial revolution, did housing become a subject of concern for the architect. Indeed, the labor force coming to work in the factories was living in often unhealthy conditions, without running water and sanitation facilities in overcrowded housing precariously built.

But it was only later, at the beginning of the 20th century, that modern architecture became concerned with the health conditions of social housing. This period is marked by architectural experimentations that today have ended up being emblematic examples of the failure of architects. Indeed, most of these modernist housing complexes are often places where people do not want to live today, as they lack urban social life and are isolated from city centers. Ilka Ruby identified four main issues with modernist housing complexes during the seminar *habitar altramont* in Barcelona (March 2021)¹³. They are monofunctional and homogeneous, with minimum spaces accommodating a maximum number of people and lack connectivity. Unfortunately, over the past decades, a number of these buildings have been hastily torn down. Municipalities often deemed them "not-healthy," accusing those housing developments of being the source of violence and social unrest. The underlying problem that was often ignored was the lack of maintenance and the ghettoization of some of those developments. Those destructions often led to the loss of pre-existing social networks and destroyed communities in certain areas of the city that had taken years to establish. This phenomenon is clearly described in the work of Jane Jacobs, as shown in the documentary "Citizen Jane: Battle for the City" (2016). This film showcases the importance of understanding local communities and contexts in city planning.

In Barcelona, when the Catalan Republic was established in 1931, the idea of building a "functional city" that would accommodate the working class emerged and led to a collaboration between the government and architects. These projects brought forward the need for more diverse collective spaces in those neighborhoods inspired by Soviet urbanistic models. But, unfortunately, due to the period of dictatorship and the Civil War that touched Spain in 1936, only one project was implemented in the district of Sant Andreu¹⁴.

At the end of the 20th century, many residential buildings were constructed not

because of the population's need but for speculation. This caused, among other things, the economic crisis of 2008, which left thousands of abandoned and unfinished buildings and infrastructure across the territories and empty villages and town centers. In Catalonia, there are around 27,558 vacant apartments today, most of them owned by big landlords¹⁵.

As architects and urbanists, we need to acknowledge that we are citizens and that all these issues affect us too. As citizens, we have a duty to claim our rights and take a more active role in city development processes. So instead of thinking about who we are designing *for*, shouldn't we ask ourselves the question, "Who are we designing *with*?"

As professionals, we need to understand the challenges and complexities of our societies and their relationships. The more you know your neighbors, the more emphatic and knowledgeable you become about the importance of social networks and interactions when building communities and neighborhoods. We must also be observers, as Anne Lacaton points out: "Observe with positive eyes, do fieldwork from the interior, neighborhood to neighborhood, resident to resident (...) the greater generosity you put in thinking about the inhabited space, the more able people will be to establish relationships and translate it to public space" or follow Jane Jacobs' method, first understanding and addressing the small scale before extrapolating it to the bigger scale.

The role of the architect should always depend on the specific local situation in question. Are you in a driving group, simply an accompanying advisor, a participating actor, or are you all of them simultaneously? Nowadays, more and more architects work as collective groups, co-operating with others and creating multidisciplinary teams. It is changing the way the architect is perceived. The role of the client is shifting as well. The client is increasingly involved as part of the group. The possibilities of the profession are multiplying, welcoming other specialists, and inviting citizens to get involved. Projects and initiatives can also come from institutions like universities: "Arquitectes de Capçalera" (Architects Practitioners) was born in the School of Architecture of Barcelona (ETSAB) to work together with neighbors in order to improve their housing conditions. It is a way to claim the figure of the architect of the people, rooted in the territory and aware of the community's needs.

The co-operative housing model in Catalonia

In parallel, in Catalonia, new housing models such as co-operative housing have emerged and further redefined the potential role of architects and clients in Spain. Co-operative housing was born as an alternative way to give access to housing while responding to issues such as social exclusion, loneliness, individualism, climate change, etc. The co-operative housing model and the cession of use were created to adapt to the current housing issues in Catalonia. Inspired by similar models that emerged in the 20th century in Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, and Uruguay, it ensures its residents the right to housing.

It constitutes a fairer, non-speculative, and transformative way of thinking about housing. It is based on two main pillars: collective property (neither public nor private) and the right of use (neither owning nor renting).

With this system guaranteeing the right to long-term housing, co-operative housing model residents can live a more stable, debt-free life and are offered the flexibility they need to improve their circumstances. This model also ensures that no speculation is possible on the building and that individual interests are substituted by the collective interests of the co-operative. Residents can then build life projects connected to their community and neighborhood, fostering local social infrastructure that benefits the city at large. It promotes values such as solidarity, collective management, affordable and inclusive housing, co-operation between agents of the social market, and sustainability in terms of housing conditions, energy efficiency, and the use of local materials.¹⁶

One of its main characteristics is the collective spaces created within the building and how they connect the building to its surroundings. There also tends to be a spatial optimization in the organization of functions within the building. Spaces such as laundry facilities are removed from the living units to be shared by the collective. The private space is then reduced, leaving more space for the common: workshops, library, community kitchen, social spaces, spaces for children, care space, etc. This model claims a new approach to housing, allowing for experimentation and creativity for the community's benefit. This brings more flexibility and adaptability to the space over time, designed from a gender-neutral perspective in a non-hierarchical manner, promoting undefined same-size rooms. As the Collective Punt 6 sums it up, the gender perspective in housing configuration is taken into account based on simple principles: the similarity of the surface and quality of the rooms, the kitchen as a shared and visible space, the removal of the suite typology, the importance of the laundry and storage space, and the low maintenance of the building.¹⁷

The participatory process and the integration of people into the creative design and decision-making process are distinct characteristics of co-operative housing. Participation takes on different forms in every project. It is a complex part of the process and needs to be used thoughtfully in order to avoid frustration. In *Building Collectively* (Lacol, 2021), members of a co-operative of architects share their thoughts and experience on the process, stating that: "There is not only one way; it is a long learning process. But in the end, the aim of participation is to empower citizens to get involved in the design and planning of their cities, their private and public spaces, and the relation between them, centering them around collective values."

These types of projects have real potential to impact the transformation of our neighborhoods and cities in a meaningful way. These buildings are conceived to build strong neighborhood communities and act as a catalyst beyond their walls, connected to their surroundings. Capable of transforming neighborhoods in a positive way, projects of this kind have strong social impacts in their areas. But

how can these projects serve as examples for larger urban planning strategies? Are we capable of extrapolating the experience from the small scale and transposing it to a larger one? Are we able to build neighborhoods equipped with varied social infrastructure that ensures not only the right to housing but the right to the city?

At this point, it is also important to demand more involvement from public administrations. These institutions can make these projects more affordable and regulate them in order to protect them from future speculation. They need to start listening to their citizens and start collaborating on pilot projects. They could do so by granting more land leases and giving communities the right to use vacant buildings to settle new co-operatives, thus putting citizens in charge. Some successful examples such as La Borda in Barcelona, a project built on publicly owned land, and Princesa49 by Sostre Cívic, a restoration project of an abandoned public building, already serve as proof of concepts that democratize those ideas.

Citizen participation can occur in many places in different ways. Community initiatives can also go beyond being social movements or housing projects. In Lesbos, Greece, residents and the refugee population are working together to start new community centers such as the *Mosaik* center, the *Pipka* housing project¹⁸, and the *Home for All* community lunchroom. These types of lunchrooms can also be found in Mexico, Perú and Japan, spaces run by women created to fight poverty and loneliness¹⁹. Empty plots can become community spaces for local organizations to use and play an important role in strengthening the social infrastructure of a neighborhood, such as the examples of the collective *Sitio Eriazo* in Valparaíso using a vacant plot as a public event space, and *La Tabacalera* in Madrid, a formerly empty building now used for community activities and events. These kinds of co-operative housing, buildings, and community-led spaces are tools and infrastructure of resistance in our contemporary society. They constitute landscapes of care, proving that together, citizens can fight gentrification and speculation, allowing the city to be a refuge for those in need.

Architecture and urbanism are key in defining our way of life and can pave the way for building a more sustainable and equitable life for everyone. We, as architects, need to use the tools we have at our disposal for the benefit of our communities. We have a responsibility to get involved and become active participants. The climate crisis, economic precariousness, and mass migration are serious issues that need to be acknowledged. We need to encourage others to join our growing community of architects of social change.

Footnotes

- 1 Where we can see that the construction of these theories was done by men and its interests: "The individualism of all social theory comprised between Locke and John Stuart Mill was based less on logic than on its conformity to the interests of the class that primarily produced it." (Georges Sabine, 1988)
- 2 The malaise of globalization (Stiglitz, 2002) "The way in which globalization has been managed, through neoliberal economic policies, are responsible for the increase in poverty, inequalities, unemployment, social exclusion ..."
- 3 Source: Vaclav Smil (2017). *Energy Transitions: Global and National Perspectives*. & BP Statistical Review of World Energy. "Fossil fuel consumption has increased significantly over the past half-century, around eight-fold since 1950, and roughly doubling since 1980".
- 4 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. [internal-displacement.org/](https://www.internal-displacement.org/)
- 5 Source: <https://www.climate-refugees.org/whyhttps://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2018/>
- 6 Source: <https://elpais.com/espana/2021-05-06/el-gobierno-duplica-los-traslados-de-migrantes-desde-canarias-a-la-peninsula.html>
- 7 Ritchie, Hannah and Roser, Max (2018-2019). Urbanization. Article at Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization#urban-slum-populations>
- 8 Source: www.cienciasambientales.org.es. "Spain's housing stock is made up of nearly 25 million homes and is responsible for 17% of final energy consumption and 25% of the country's CO2 emissions. The lack of insulation and the energy inefficiency of many of the homes cause homes to demand more energy than they would need, among other things, to air-condition their home."
- 9 Source: <https://liniara.cat/opinio/306-david-fernandez/>
- 10 Source: <https://beteve.cat/societat/gairebe-20-desnonaments-dia-barcelona-primers-tres-mesos-2021/>
- 11 According to the 2011 Population and Housing census of "Instituto Nacional de Estadística" of Spain.
- 12 The case of Lavapiés neighbourhood in Madrid shown in the documentary *Compramos tu barrio* by Paola Rey (2019).
- 13 Ruby, Ilika (2021). From public housing to cooperatives. Conference part of the seminar *habitar al trament* organized by Lacol.
- 14 Casa Bloc (1933) by a group of Catalan young architects called GATPAC.
- 15 According to the Sustainability and Territory department of the Catalan government.
- 16 Source: Sostre Cívic cooperative. For more information: sostrecivic.coop.
- 17 Source: *La casa sense gènere*. Contribution to the exhibition *Piso Piloto: Barcelona, Ciudad de México, Córdoba*.
- 18 An accommodation camp for vulnerable people. Closed by the authorities in 2021.
- 19 Puigjaner, Anna (2021). *Kitchenless city*. Conference part of the seminar *habitar al trament* organized by Lacol.

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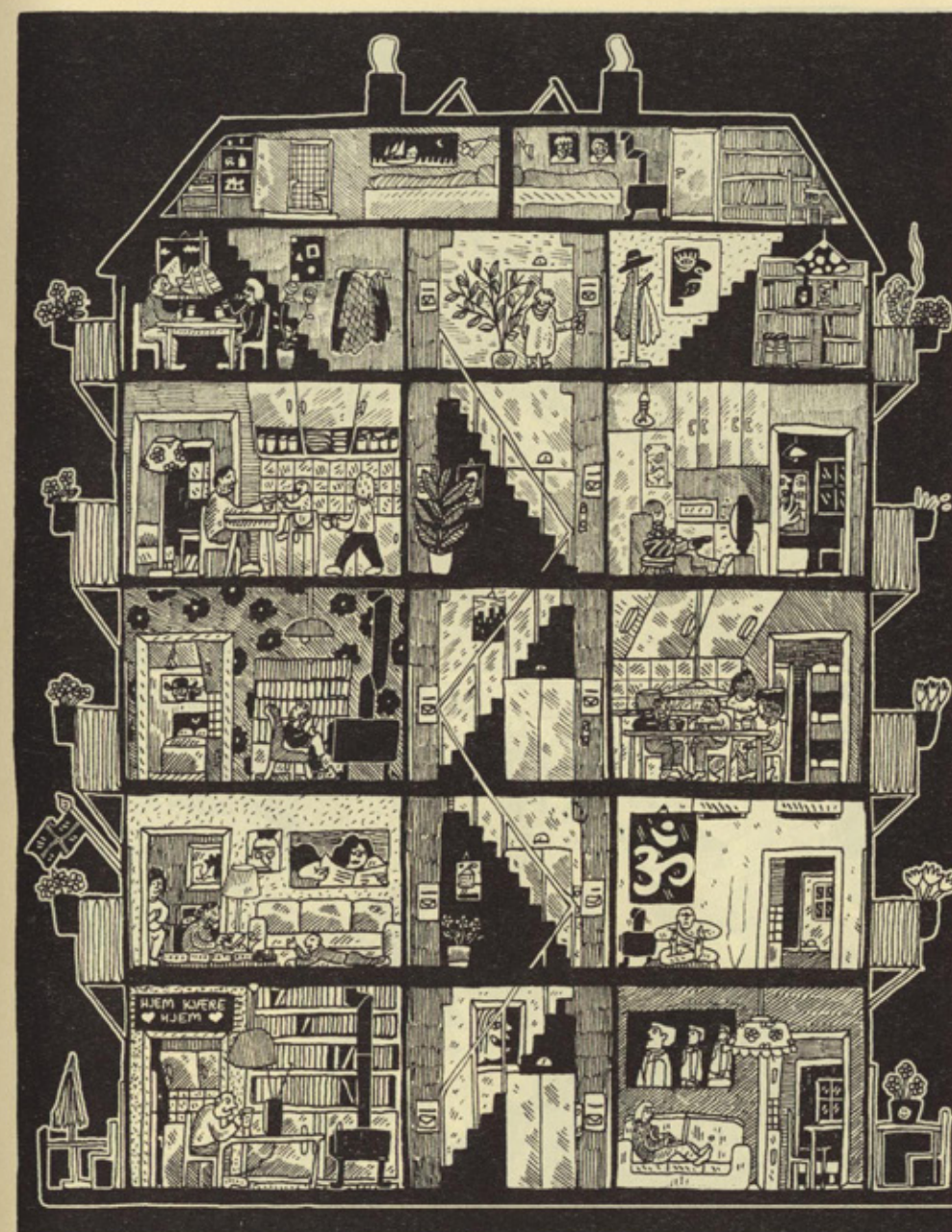


Illustration by Anders N. Kvammen (4/7)
"Uten tittel"

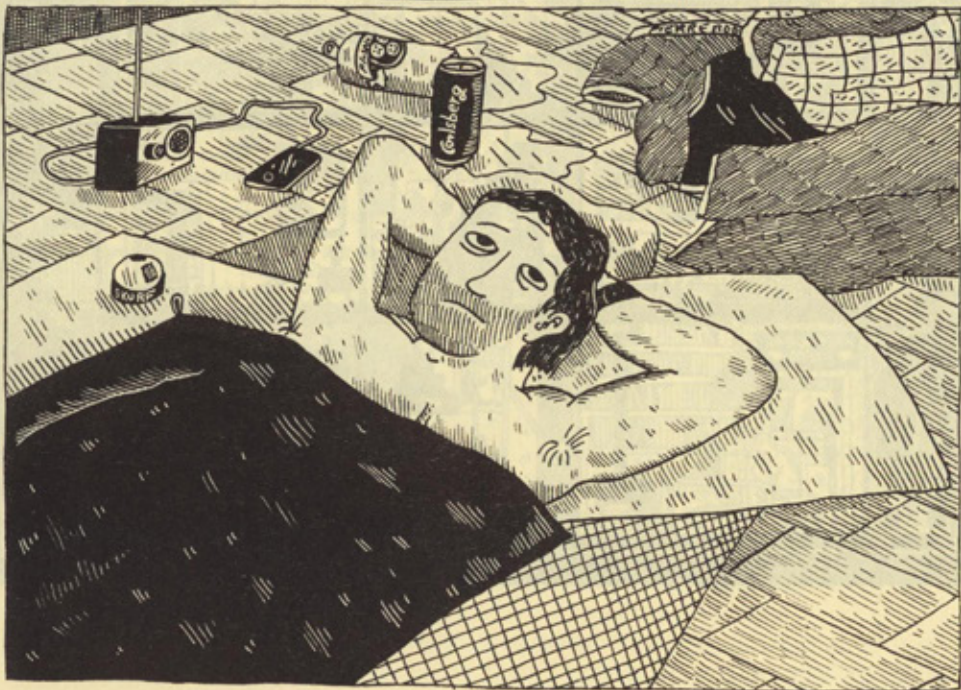
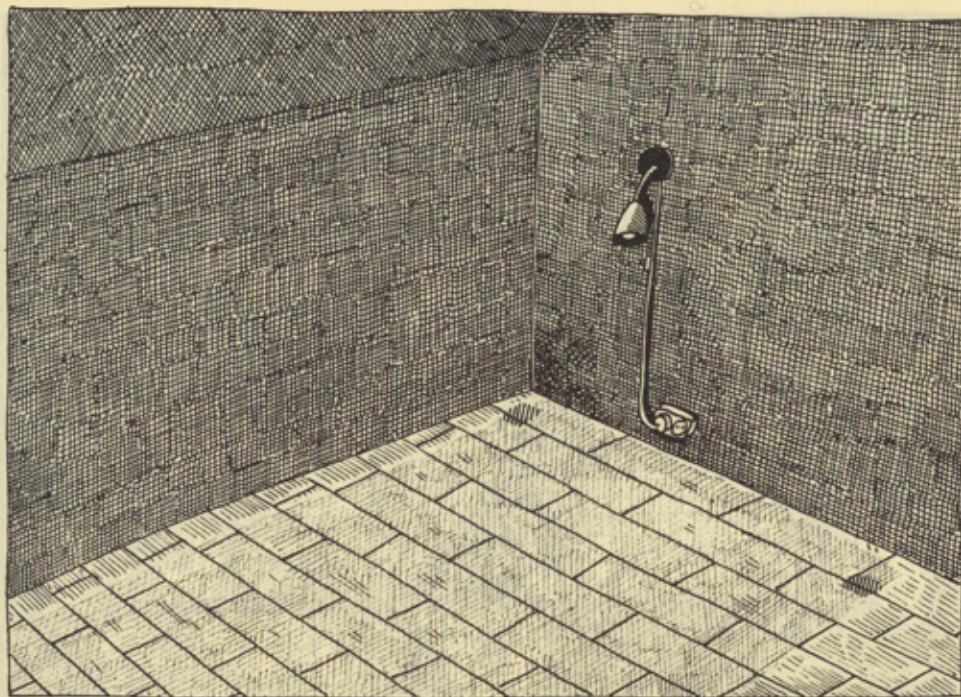


Illustration by Anders N. Kvammen (5/7)
 "Uten tittel", excerpt from Jobb (2020), No Comprendo Press

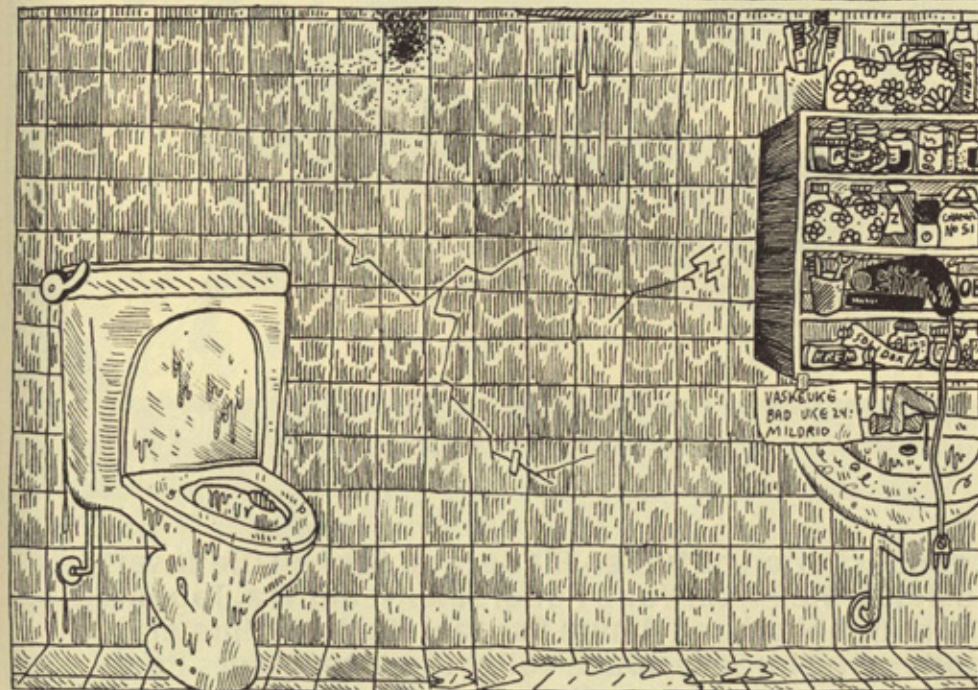
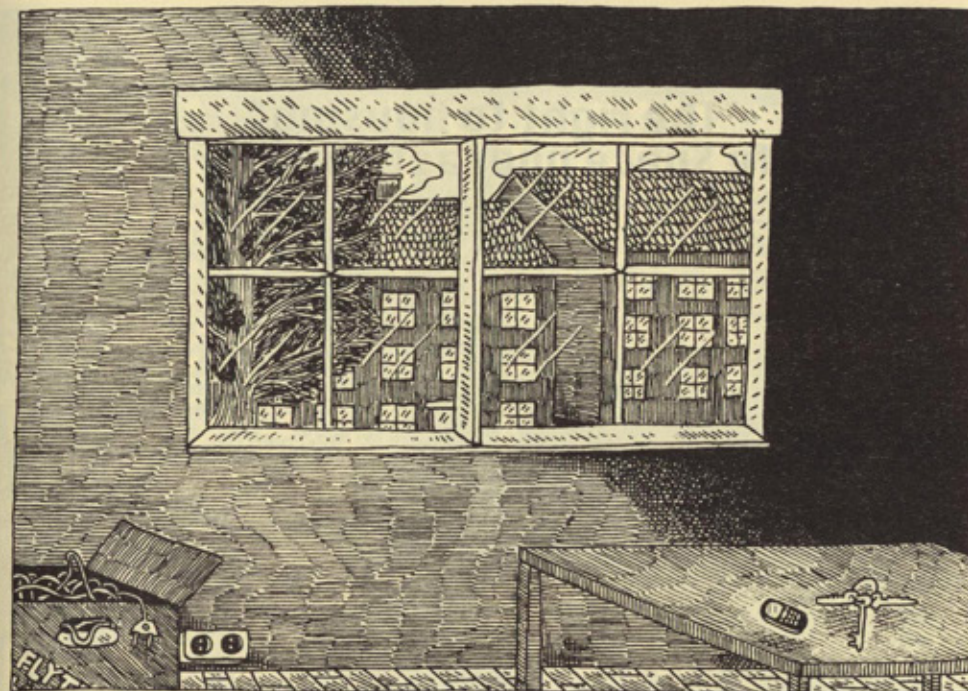


Illustration by Anders N. Kvammen (6/7)
 "Kollektiv", excerpt from Jobb (2020), No Comprendo Press

Transcript excerpts

"The right to housing"
Safe Space podcast episode 4

A conversation between Alf Jørgen Schnell (Reduser Husleia), Ole Mikal Yong Pedersen (Nedenfra, Tøyen-boligbyggelag) and Hanna Asefaw (Reduser Husleia) moderated by Safe Space collective's members Paul-Antoine Lucas and Armelle Breuil. The episode was recorded at ROM for kunst og arkitektur Friday May 31, 2021 - 18:00 CET

BOLIGMARKEDET



DAGEN FØR NASJONALDAGEN, FIKK JEG EN KJIP TELEFON. HUSEIER HAR SØLT LEILIGHETEN JEG BOR I FØR 3.2 MILL- KJØPEREN TOK DEN USETT FØR Å SIKRE SIN DATTER PÅ 19 ÅR INNPASS I BOLIGMARKEDET. "HUN TRENGER JO FØRUTSIGBARHET NÅ SOM HUN SKAL STUDERE I HOVEDSTADEN." HÅPER HUN FORSTÅR HVILKEN PERLE HUN HAR FÅTT SEG. DET HAR VÆRT EN SANN GLEDE Å BO HER I SNART ETT ÅR.

Illustration by Anders N. Kvammen (7/7)

"En bolig er et hjem" riso poster for Boligopprøret (2019), own initiative

Ole Tøyen Boligbyggelag's purpose is **to see how we as citizens, as a neighborhood, can initiate and take control over housing construction and through that also be part of shaping our urban environment.** When you talk about urban development, most people see it as something out of reach, not really something you can relate to. But we are human, we are a species that create our own habitat and it's quite important, because the habitat we create restricts how we can live our lives.

Hanna During the first lockdown in Norway in March 2020, I initiated a call for reducing the rent for people that just lost their jobs and students and people who suddenly found themselves in a difficult economic situation due to the pandemic. **That kickstarted a collective group of friends who want to change the way we view housing in Norway.**

Rolf Jørgen When I heard that Hanna was writing this manifesto for the reduction of the rent / Reduser Husleia, I just joined immediately. I guess because **I thought this should have happened years ago. I am paying way too much rent and something needs to be done.**

Reduser Husleia published a list of demands for new housing policies in August 2020¹, the first demand referred to the need of a third housing market in Norway. According to you, **what potential does this new housing sector represent?**

I seldom use third housing when we speak about this sector, actually, it's kind of like very internal language and we try to include as many people as possible, so **we also refer to it as nonprofit housing, and ikke kommersiell as a way we want the future to be like.**

That's the solution to the housing crisis, I guess, **simply just to take profit away from the housing sector and create a non-for-profit sector in which housing is a right, and not an investment ...** If Ole is presenting the solution, we are, I guess trying to help bring it forth.

¹ Read the list of demands of Reduser Husleia at reduserhusleia.no

Ole **It's quite obvious that the way we organize housing today is not really sustainable in any way.** For the last 10 years the housing prices have risen about 3 times the normal consumer price index and about twice as much as the average income in Oslo. ... We started with the housing cooperative in 2016, it was a crazy year for housing prices, they increased an average of 25% in Oslo. ... Most people in Oslo who were homeowners that year earned more by being in the housing market than they earned by going to work.

Hanna If you look at what happened in Grenfell when the tower burned down, **people were left homeless when there were so many empty apartments in their neighborhood.** But they could not live there because there were rich people from other countries that had bought out all the spaces around there as an investment.

Rif Jørgen When you introduced yourself (Ole), you said that you were part of an occupying movement, but actually **it's the rich who occupy the city.** When we say we want affordable housing and non-commercial housing in the city, **people say but it's not a human right to live in the city, but it's not a human right to invest in a city!** So I guess that's something we try to do, to turn the tables and say that something is wrong, not only with the housing market but also how we talk about it.

people say but it's not a human right to live in the city, but it's not a human right to invest in a city!

Rif Jørgen

Paul-Antoine

Many of the demands of Reduser Husleia aim at pushing for more protection for tenants and disadvantaged population groups in the current commercial markets. What is, according to you, the urgency today and **how do you think architects could and should contribute to that agenda?**

Hanna

The new buildings now often have small kitchens that are connected to the living room, which is also quite small, because **you're not supposed to have dinner parties at home, you're not supposed to make dinner at home, you're supposed to socialize outside of the home, you're supposed to be a consumer, you're supposed to use your money on the businesses outside your home.** Our wish would just be for architects to reflect on how their ideas might be somehow a bit resorted of the times we're living in, also ideologically. Architecture is always connected to politics in some kind of way.

Rolf Jørgen

But also, just to add, **you should use your time as an architect to fight against developers and their drive for profit and for reducing the standards of homes,** but also I would love to see architects giving us ideas. People don't necessarily know what they want, but the architect should be out there and say, you could have this and this, and we could do this, and not be just an assistant to the developer making things smaller and more "efficient". **They should give us dreams of what a good home is, and then maybe we can fight for that.**

What do you think can be done now? Do you see any low hanging fruits that we can all gather around as architects?

Paul-Antoine

I think we have the window of opportunity now, that can lead to a change in Oslo now that the city government has said they want to do a pilot for a third sector housing. ... It's quite exciting to see in this next year or two if all the pilots are really ready to go, if we manage to get them started. Then I think we can gain a lot of experience, both for housing policy, for urban development in general, but also for how architectural practice can be done.

Ole

Low hanging fruits, I think the rich are eating the fruits right now ... We know what to do, the only thing we lack currently is political power, but we're building it and we need everyone we can get to crush the kind of way the city is produced today. That's my take on it.

Rolf Jørgen



Illustration by Tale Hammere Ellingvåg (3/4)
Reduser Husleia, Oslo, 2021



Illustration by Tale Hammere Ellingvåg (4/4)
Reduser Husleia, Oslo, 2021

Acknowledgements

Safe Space would not exist without

Contributors to "Safe Space Zine 4"

Alf Jørgen Schnell (b. 1992) is a human geographer, housing activist and writes regularly on planning, architecture and social housing. His interests span a wide variety of topics, from modernist dreams of a better world to the cancellation of the future by (housing) finance.

Ninthu Paramalingam (b. 1997) is an activist part of Reduser Husleia and student currently based in Tromsø.

Clara Triviño Massó is an architect, graduate from Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura de Barcelona and The Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO). During her studies, her interest in housing and migration led her to work on a diploma project about shrinking cities as host infrastructures for refugees. Clara recently volunteered in Lesbos (Greece) for two NGO focused on

an architecture-based approach to the migration crisis. Later on, she worked on developing further planning solutions on the greek islands with municipalities and organizations. She currently works independently, collaborating with the housing cooperative Sostre Cívica and Open House Barcelona. Clara is investigating architecture as a catalyst for social change.

Anders N. Kvammen is a graphic novelist, illustrator and artist from and based in Oslo. He's publishes two graphic novels, and is currently working on his third. His first graphic novel "ungdomsskolen" had become a theater production with premiere in September at Oslo nyes "trikkestallen".

Tale Hammerø Ellingvåg is a human geographer and activist from Kragerø/ Oslo. She uses, among other methods, illustration as part of her activism as part of various struggles.

Participants to the "Safe Space" podcast, Episode 4: The right to housing

Alf Jørgen Schnell (see Contributors)

Ole Mikal Yong Pedersen is an social entrepreneur with his own social entrepreneurship Nedenfra / From below. He has also been part of the initiating group and is currently chair of the board for the aspiring housing construction cooperative Tøyen Boligbyggelag.

Hanna Asefaw (b. 1995) is an activist, human geographer and artist within literary and performing arts. She's one the initiators behind the anticapitalistic collective "Reduser husleia", which started during the first lockdown in Norway, March 2020.

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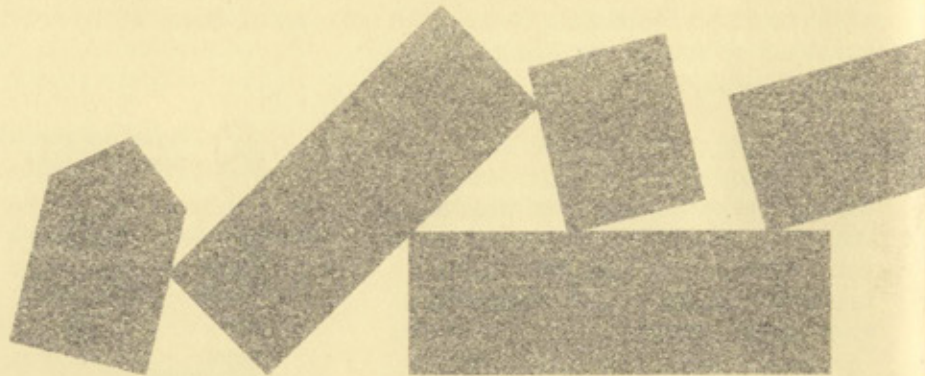


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