Spatial Agency:
Softening the Edges of the Architectural Apparatus

by

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kmaq'i,
the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.
We are all Treaty people.

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For mom and dad

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Abstract

Our whole lives play out in the built environment, yet its production is left in the hands of just a few. Recognition of inherent issues in architectural culture is not something necessarily new, and neither are efforts of its criticism, redefinition, and transformation. This thesis aims at extending these efforts further by expanding our notion of the architectural professional practice to spatial agency; a much more collaborative approach in which agents act with, and behalf of, others.

A study on spatial agency's theoretical underpinnings, followed by a case study analysis, will give rise to a proposed expanded fictional architectural practice, The Agency of Space, and the architecture its HQ. Due to the process-focused and ever-changing nature of spatial agency, the project will be presented primarily in the form of a graphic novel, allowing focus on a narrative, while the architecture serves as the place where it all occurs.

Acknowledgements

Thank you Ted Cavanagh, my supervisor, for your continuous support and guidance, my advisor, Sarah Bonnemaison, for your boundless wisdom, Suzanne Doucet for your contagious enthusiasm and your generosity of spirit with your work and experience, and Max for your loving support.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Motivation for Study

I am what they call a ‘third culture kid.’ I grew up to immigrant parents in a place far away from their home; a place that is considered to be part of the “developing world.” So being privy to the inequalities that exist in the world was imbedded in the way I understood myself and my life.

This has guided me towards processes of community development everywhere I have ever lived as an adult. My nearly constant association with these processes has shown me first hand the powers of collaboration, and has continually solidified in me the belief that this is a way forward, including the way that architecture is practiced.

With that comes the humble realization that architecture has much room to change in order to keep up with our ever-changing society and its perpetual demands of us to be and do better. As a student of architecture, it feels like my place in that is the simple inward reflection of my chosen career path, and not the approach perpetuated in the pedagogy that often sees architecture as the solution to an identified problem.

Thus, the following paper contains my explorations of attempts at not just redefining the practice of architecture, but its expansion.

Paper Structure

This paper is comprised of 9 chapters. Chapter 1 provides some preliminary information prefacing the study at hand. It includes motivations for the study and an overview of the paper and project. Chapter 2 is an introduction to the

project, contextualizing it in history and society. Chapter 3 highlights the theoretical underpinnings of spatial agency, both the historical backdrop that gave rise to our current understanding of spatial agency, as well as current relevant discourse. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of case studies from multiple sources as a concrete way of understanding spatial agency in action, as it is a relatively new and nebulous idea in the architectural practice. Chapter 5 highlights important conclusions from the case study analysis, giving way to introducing the graphic novel as a medium of choice in presenting the project. Chapter 6 describes the catalyst for the narrative contained in the graphic novel: the fictional expanded architectural practice dubbed The Agency of Space. Chapter 7 discusses the design methodology for this project, and some important architectural aspects of the building, as well as the program and site of the project. Chapter 8 contains the project's graphic novel, and Chapter 9, the paper's conclusion.

Limitations/Delimitations/Assumptions

Limitations

Limitations for the study due to the author include the author's own biases, value systems, blind spots, skill level, understanding of the research done, and experience in the architectural profession. Additionally, the depth and breadth of the research itself, as it was conducted within the context of an educational institution, was limited to time constraints, as well as available resources.

Delimitations

The literature selection for review and research was based on its relevancy to participatory and architectural theory.

The chosen medium of the graphic novel was selected due to its accessibility to non-architects in the understanding of space, the emphasis on architecture as a process and not a product, as well as a tool in spatial agency due to the ease of its physical and digital reproduction and distribution.

Assumptions

The research assumes that in every single human being lies the capacity to contribute positively to both their physical and social environments. Furthermore, the research presumes that existing hierarchical power dynamics at the levels of the individual, community, and institutions are currently evident. The approach to spatial agency is grounded in a society where a pluralistic model of power exists and citizens have access to space, resources, and leisure time.

Chapter 2: Backdrop for Thesis

Statement of the Problem

The standard and widely accepted definition of an architect is one who designs buildings, and the vast majority of architects do indeed spend most of their time designing buildings. Of course, there is nothing wrong with that, per se, however, it is a notion of the architect that has gone relatively unchallenged for more than 500 years. This streak began in the year 1452 when Italian Renaissance architect Leon Battista Alberti introduced the separation between the builder and the architect, effectively severing the process of production from the intellectual process (Till and Schneider 2012, 38).

Not only has this definition of an architect been left unchallenged for generations, remaining unchanged despite drastic transformation in society at large, it has had long-lasting implications on the ways in which architecture is both taught and practiced. These implications are very much still felt today.

Ecological

From a purely material and ecological standpoint, architectural production, above all else, is concerned with the addition of “more stuff to the world” (Till and Schneider 2012, 38). The design and creation of something completely new, previously non-existent physically, is the go-to way of working in the architectural profession. This is achieved by the extraction of raw materials from the earth, as well as utilizing its natural resources in the process, and then turning them into some of the largest objects on our planet (38). Design critics Jeremy Till and Tatjana Schneider warn:

> This material basis to architecture makes it peculiarly vulnerable to the condition of material scarcity. As things become increasingly scarce as humanity continues to extract stuff from the biosphere at an unsustainable rate, then not only is the scope of architectural creativity (if understood as the creation of buildings) severely limited, but the whole raison d'être of the profession as agents of making is called into question by the basic definition of scarcity as a lack of something. (38)

Cultural

Equally pressing, and inextricably linked to the material and ecological consequences of Alberti's separation, are its social implications on the architectural practice, felt in the dynamics at play in architectural culture. One of which is "the concentration on the building as the primary locus of architectural production" (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 27), prioritizing aspects that are "associated with the static properties of objects"—"the visual, the technical, and the atemporal"—rather than more variable and dynamic qualities of buildings—"processes of their production, their occupation, their temporality, and their relations to society and nature" (27). We see this manifested in architectural culture in its reviews, awards, and publications, emphasizing aesthetics, style, form, and technique, excluding just those aspects that cause architects discomfort (28),

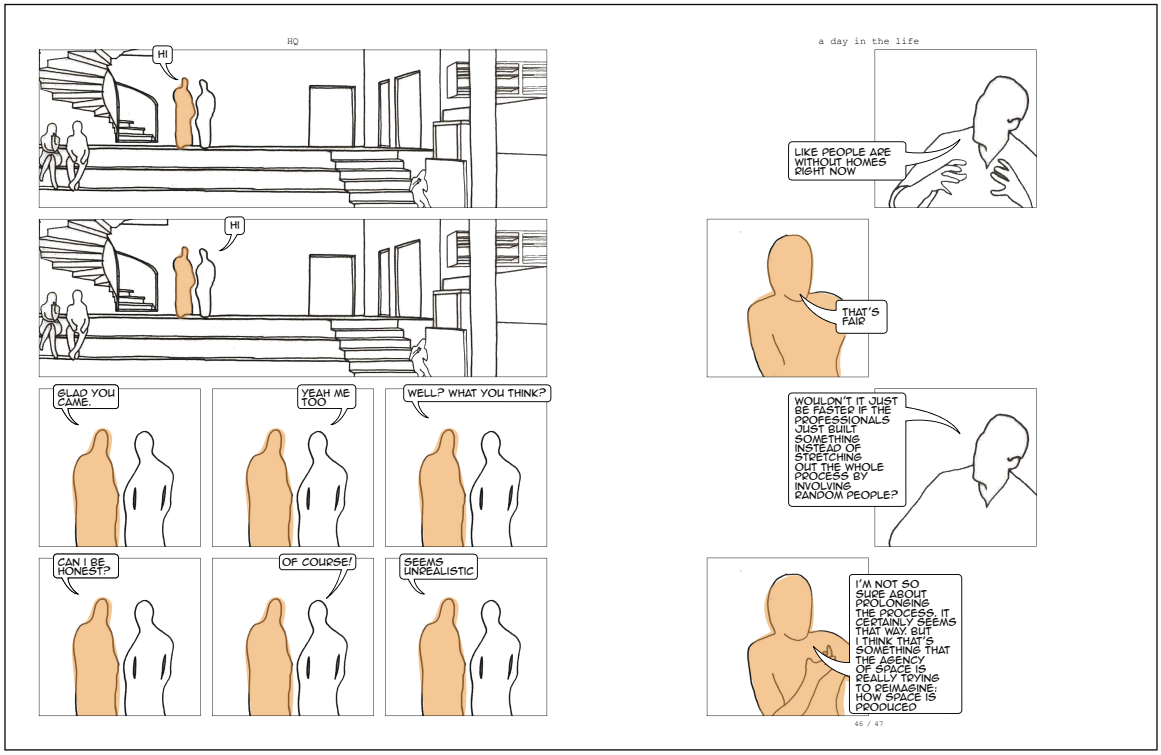
> because these often unpredictable and contingent aspects are those over which they have limited power, whereas the static aspects are those over which architects still retain nominal control, in terms of being able to manipulate form and technique. (28)

Social

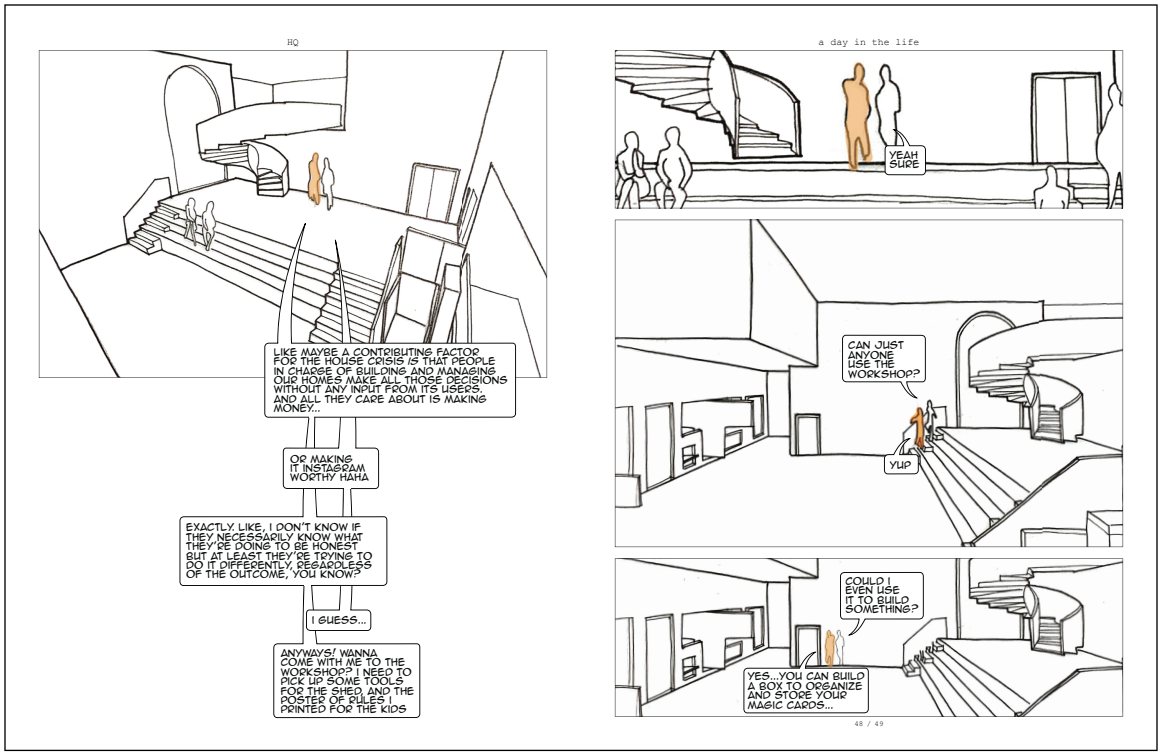
A third implication is the commodification of buildings, and consequently architecture itself. Although speaking to houses in particular, and not buildings in general, in *A Right to Build*, its authors state: "since the Industrial Revolution, it has been accepted as normal that houses, like many other

market commodities, are mass-produced by professionals and mass-consumed by citizens (Parvin et al. 2011, 7). As a consequence, “the signifiers of progress, innovation, efficiency and income generation have become the hallmarks of successful architects in times of fiscal growth” (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 28). The profit-driven nature behind the architectural practice and the production of space, not unlike other consequences of a capitalist society, is the divisions created between who can and cannot afford to benefit from architecture, and consequently, who is and is not involved in its production. Thus, a gap “opens up between the world as built and the world as needed and desired” (Blundell-Jones, Petrescu and Till 2005, xiv).

Of course, of the ‘professionals’ involved in architectural production, is the architect himself, bringing us to another social implication, which suggests that the word ‘architecture’



Spread from the graphic novel central to this thesis project in which the characters are discussing some of the problems that exist in the production of space, and inhabiting the space of the architectural project of this thesis.



Spread from the graphic novel central to this thesis project in which the characters are discussing some of the problems that exist in the production of space and inhabiting the space of the architectural project of this thesis (continued).

implies that “only architects are involved in the creative production of space” (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 28). It is this last implication that this project will predominantly and most directly address. However, the interconnected nature of all the above mentioned implications of Alberti’s far-reaching separation of architect and builder, the assumption and hope is that the following project will indirectly address them as well.

Our Current Challenge

The work cited so far is only a small fraction of current thinkers that have a desire to address these issues, and who happen to be active in this particularly relevant area of architectural discourse. Rigorous attempts to remedy and transform these issues have been occurring since the early 1960s. However, they have had limitations that might

have contributed to the prevention of real change in the practice. These historical underpinnings will be addressed at a greater depth in the next chapter. Additionally, it might be helpful to understand these limitations, both in its theory and in its vocabulary, as they give way to understanding the possible expansion of the architectural practice to not simply participatory design or alternative architectural practices, but rather to ‘spatial agency.’

Chapter 3: Theoretical Underpinnings

Expanding Beyond

Non-Plan

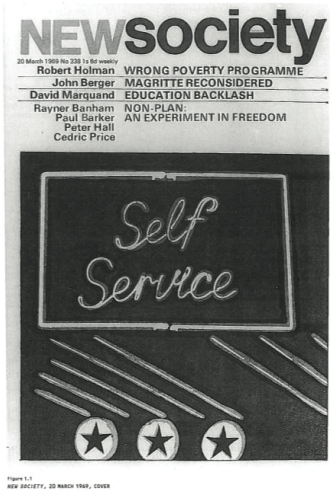


Figure 1.1
NEW SOCIETY, 20 MARCH 1969, COVER

The article in which 'non-plan' first appear, titled "New Society: An Experiment in Freedom" (Banham et al. 1969)

As the name 'non-plan' might suggest, it seeks to look at architecture, planning, design, and cultural history outside the bounds of what has been 'planned.' It started from the humble idea, on the part of planners and architects, that "it is very difficult to decide what is better for *other* people" (Barker 2000, 6), and that "what ordinary people [want]—rather than what planners, architects and other aesthetic judges said they ought to want—[is] the best guide" (2). In the article in which the term was first used (Banham et al. 1969), "'non-plan' was a plea for deregulation" (Hughes and Sadler 2000, ix) and was rooted in a desire for change (Barker 2000, 2). As the article describes, each of its four authors took a different segment of the English countryside and hypothesized "what might happen if Non-plan were applied there?" (5), "what would happen if there were no plan? What would people prefer to do, if their choice was untrammelled?" (11), "why don't we dare trust the choices that would evolve if we let them?" (12). Ultimately, as the authors themselves acknowledged, this experiment was not too difficult to set up, as all it required was "the desire to *know*, instead of *impose*" (12).

This radical idea of non-plan, accompanied by the article and other related experiments, helped the planning community and its constituents realize the inherently oppressive nature of their practice at the time. However, non-plan argued not necessarily for the complete erasure of all planning, but

rather that planning itself has been misused to also mean "the imposition of certain physical arrangements, based on value judgments or prejudices" (Banham et al. 1969, 442). Instead, "physical planning, like anything else, should consist *at most* of setting up frameworks for decision, within which as much objective information as possible can be fitted" (442), ultimately concluding that "if the Non-Plan experiments works really well, people should be allowed to build what they like" (443).

Participation

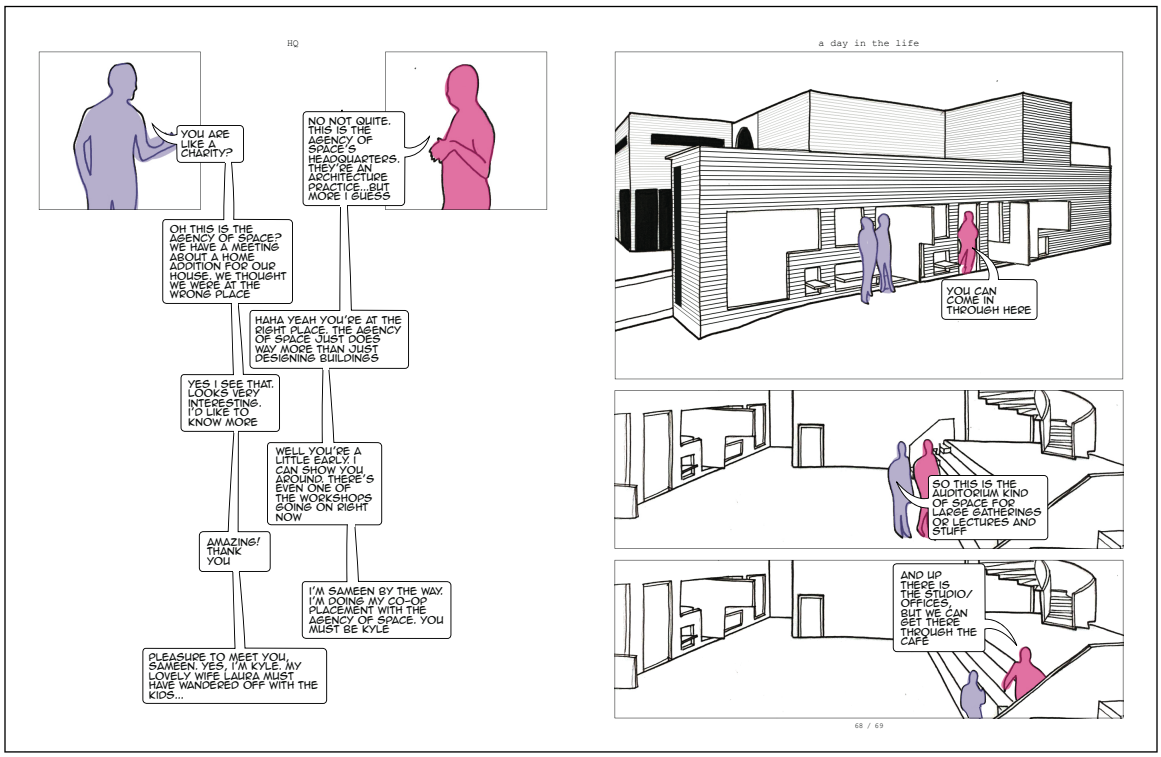
As acknowledged in the introduction of *Architecture and Participation*, 'participation' has become a buzzword with little investigation into what is actually meant by it (Blundell-Jones, Petrescu and Till 2005, xiii). As a result of compiling the collection of essays in *Architecture and Participation* on the meaning of participation and the implications of it in practice to the contributors, it became clear that there are a plethora of widely accepted approaches to participation (xiii). What unites them all, however, is that "at the level of the lowest common denominator, architectural participation can be defined as the involvement of the user at some stage of the design process" (xiii). However, without really questioning its meaning, participation has become token, "bringing a degree of worthiness to the architectural process without really transforming it" (xiii).

This is not much different than what is becoming of 'sustainability' in architecture and other related practices: as a result of government policies enforcing participation as a necessary part of public work,

> it has thus effectively been institutionalized, another box among many to tick in order to get approval or funding. Participation becomes an organised (and potentially manipulated) part

> of any regeneration project, in which users are meant to be given a voice, but the process stifles the sounds coming out. (Blundell-Jones, Petrescu and Till 2005, xiii - xiv)

This is the danger of the concept of ‘participation’ going unchallenged and accepted uncritically: “idealised notions which centre on concepts of consensus are implied” (Blundell-Jones, Petrescu and Till 2005, xiv) but not necessarily realized. What is being suggested as a result of ‘real’ participation of future users, and not just participation as a mere token, is that it is inherently risky and “does not guarantee sustainability within a project” (xiv), which is perhaps why it is not common practice. Additionally, it is a process that is inherently messy, as it can involve all sorts of people and personalities that have historically been excluded from these processes. It becomes clear then, that participation has its own value system, one that is different than the value system that



Spread from the graphic novel central to this thesis project in which one of the characters (purple) is grappling with the notion of an expanded architectural practice, while the other character (pink) is trying to explain as best they can, while also inhabiting the space of the architectural project of this thesis.

architects are taught and made to perpetuate, which is one that emphasizes image and surface (xvi).

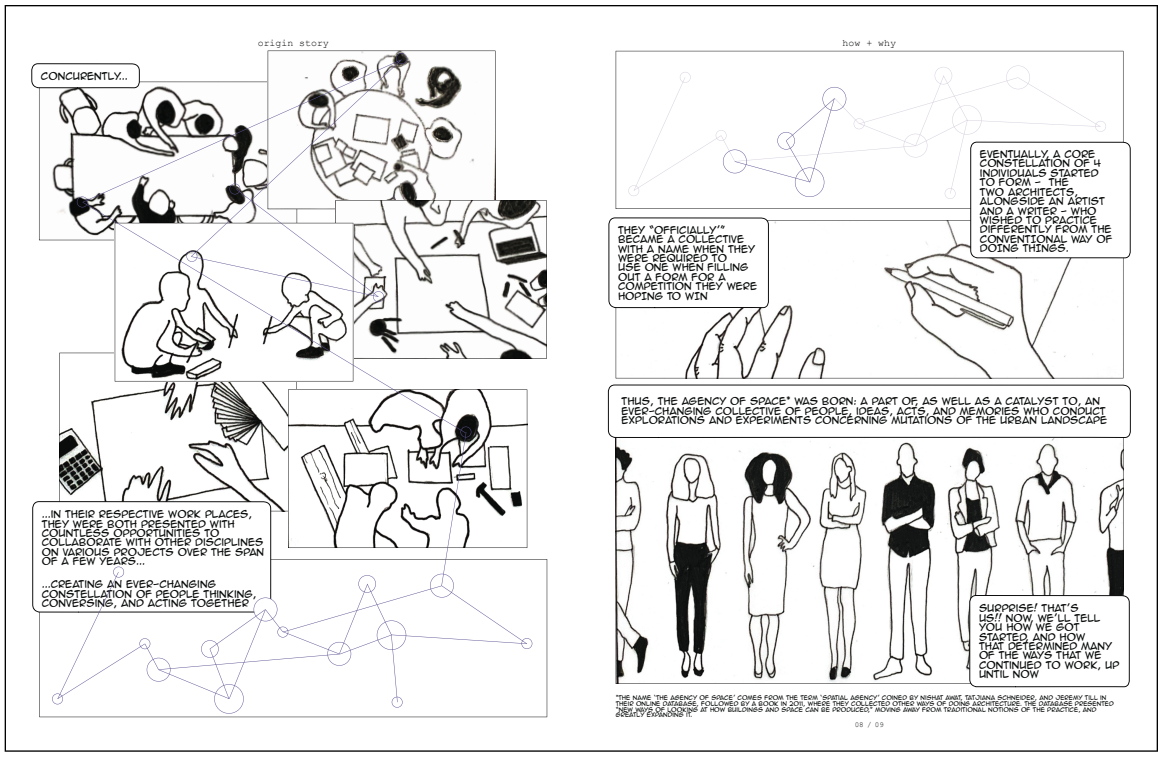
Thus, there may be no standard to participation, as its institutionalization may imply. “The danger with a normative technique is that it sees the user (once again) as standard, there to be subjected to common methods” (Blundell-Jones, Petrescu and Till 2005, xvi). “One has to accept that with multiple users, multiple desires and multiple contexts, multiple forms of participation are necessary” (xvi).

Alternative Practices

One might consider non-plan and participation as alternative ways of practicing architecture, distinct from the established or conventional ways of practicing it. Assuming that this is the case, there are a number of limitations to thinking about them in this way. Firstly, by labeling something as ‘alternative,’ then necessarily, there is something that it is alternative to, thereby remaining “in thrall to it” (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 26). Consequently, “as in any binary structure, the alternative becomes bound by exactly the terms of reference that it would wish to escape,” resulting in the alternative inevitably “defined by the norm” (26).

Secondly, ‘alternative’ implies that by accepting it, it is the rejection of the status quo; all or nothing (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 26). To this, it is explained in *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* regarding their database of projects and practices: “we wanted our project to be able to engage with projects and practices not through their overt alterity but through the possibilities they offered” (26).

In the same spirit, aaa, a Paris based practice warns: if “we limit ourselves to a criticism of the institutions, that of the state



Spread from the graphic novel central to this thesis project demonstrating the way in which the catalyst of the graphic novel—the fictitious expanded architectural practice dubbed 'The Agency of Space'—formed organically over time, going through a non-linear and ever-changing process that welcomed non-architects into the fold.

and of Capitalism, there is little hope for change" because there poses the constant threat of being either marginalized or absorbed by other dominant forces (aaa 2007, 321). And so, going beyond simply 'alternative' practices means that practices that are different than what is 'traditional' should not be seen as marginal, but rather that it "has its own terms and merits, presenting a new paradigm as to how to operate" (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 27).

A last limitation of deeming something as an 'alternative practice' highlighted in *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* is the term 'practice' itself, mostly due to its connotations of habit and lack of reflective action (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 28). "The reality of much architectural practice is circumscribed by much more instrumental demands, in which action is determined

in reaction to the short-term priorities of clients and the market" (28–29). It also implies repetition, by which stylistic or technical tropes are refined over time, "and applying them to any given context without real concern for the particular" (29). It is these very architects that are most famous, celebrated, and taught about in schools; those who have "developed, through practice, a defining character to their work" (29), while all the others are left unheard of and their work never valued nor celebrated by the profession at large.

Spatial Agency

The term 'spatial agency' is not meant to replace any term that already exists to describe other ways of architectural practice. By its very nature, it is meant to expand our notions of it. In this way, we need not reject revolutionary thinkers of the past that helped us see the limitations of our seemingly outdated practice, but rather build upon it, or at the very least, see it in a different light and recognize otherwise hidden possibilities.

Spatial

It is of great importance for this project to understand space, as French philosopher Henri Lefebvre understood space, captured in his 1974 book *The Production of Space*. "At a stroke, Lefebvre wrests the production of space from the clutches of specialists, most notably architects and planners, and places it in a much broad social context" (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 29). The implications of this are profound. Firstly, it takes away space being authored by a single (professional) person. Instead, space should be understood as "a shared enterprise" acknowledging "the contribution of others" (29). Secondly, space is understood as dynamic and not fixed to a single moment. "The dynamic,

and hence temporal, nature of space means that spatial production must be understood as part of an evolving sequence, with no fixed start or finish, and that multiple actors contribute to its various stages" (29). Third, and arguably most important to Lefebvre, is the notion of space as not only not neutral, but as inherently social, even political (29). We live out our whole lives in built environments, and have effect on it and vice versa. It reminds us that

> every line on an architectural drawing should be sensed as the anticipation of a future social relationship, and not merely as a harbinger of aesthetics or as an instruction to a contractor. They also point to the possibility of achieving transformation in manners beyond the drawing of lines. (30)

Agency

Alberti's separation more than 500 years ago between architect and builder pits two stereotypical images of the architect against each other, a dichotomy depicted in *The Fountainhead*, a 1943 novel by Ayn Rand that was later adapted to a movie with the same name in 1949. On one hand, the novel's protagonist is architect Howard Roark, depicted as "the individual genius who singlehandedly takes on the world" (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 31). Roark "battles against conventional standards and refuses to compromise with an architectural establishment unwilling to accept innovation" (Wikipedia n.d.a). On the other hand, there is Roark's former architecture school classmate, Peter Keating, who is depicted as a "lackey of commercial forces" (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 31). In contrast to the individualist Roark, Keating is "a conformist who bases his choices on what others want" (Wikipedia n.d.a).

American sociologist, Anthony Giddens, would argue that someone with agency would be neither Roark nor Keating; "neither completely free" nor "completely entrapped by

structure;" "neither impotent nor all powerful" (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 31). This is explained by his theory of structuration, otherwise known as the theory of the duality of structure. According to this theory, as best explained for its relevance to the project at hand, using the analogy of language by Israeli academic Elisheva Sadan,

> People speak a language that has a structure of rules and syntax, even if they don't know a thing about syntax and rules of grammar. While speaking, the speaker decides to speak differently, and then he activates two processes: he changes the language, and reaffirms and reconstructs the structure and rules of the language. In other words, human activity does not just happen - it is structured. People make use of what already exists in order to know what to say, what to do, and even how to begin acting in situations in their lives. (Sadan 2004, 67-68)

In other words, spatial agents "are negotiators of existing conditions in order to partially reform them," and they will be effective in transforming the structures in which they are bound by because they would be "alert to [both] the constraints and opportunities that the structure presents" (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 31). It "presumes the capability of acting otherwise" (Giddens 1986, 216).

This notion expands upon the conviction of an alternative architectural practice because the capability of acting otherwise undermines what it means to be 'a professional.' To be a professional is adhering to fixed knowledge and applying that knowledge in the form of predictable solutions by which professionals earn the trust of the public. "If agents are indeed to allow themselves to act otherwise, then the knowledge that they bring to the table must be negotiable, flexible and, above all, shared with others" (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 32), consequently undermining the notion of a 'practice' as a whole.

Architect as Spatial Agent

Admittedly, the term ‘spatial agency’ is quite new to the architectural discourse (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 30), and it might seem difficult to imagine what architecture could look like if the architect were acting as spatial agent in the processes of spatial production. This is made especially challenging due to the nature of spatial agency in its avoidance to prescribe a normative approach that can simply be adapted, with guaranteed results or even quantifiable measurements for success. It could be argued that the ‘only’ requirement to be considered a spatial agent is simply “a transformative intent to make the status quo better” (Spatial Agency n.d.), and considering there exists “multiple users, multiple desires and multiple contexts” (Blundell-Jones, Petrescu and Till 2005, xvi), there cannot be one way to be and act as spatial agent. In fact, “order is not the norm in planning,” but rather “disorder and confusion” (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 139) says architecture critic Jeremy Till, drawing our attention to the “invisible things and processes that make the production of space possible in the first place” (139). As best put by Doina Petrescu of aaa: “mess is the law” (Petrescu 2021, 107).

It also requires the architect to be present (Careri and Romito 2005, 232); “to observe sympathetically, to suspend judgement, to pay attention to the processes” (233). As best explained by Italian practice Stalker’s Francesco Careri and Lorenzo Romito:

> being present activates a unitary process that binds the observation of the world and the contribution to its transformation. According to this conception, the knowledge of a place is the coexistence with, and participation in, the transformation of the analysed realities, being part of the system of relations that are present in such realities, contributing to their development and evolution. This evolution

> is an unpredictable process: it cannot be foreseen. (233)

And in this way, Stalker continues: “Stalker can be anyone” (233).

This is different than what conventional practices might look like or what conventional architects feel comfortable with, because it takes away the architect from the comfort of their offices and studios, where their designs and ideas go relatively unchallenged, surrounded by other like-minded architects and professionals, and forces them to see *the* reality, which is multiple, overlapping, sometimes contradictory realities.

With all this said, however, the team behind *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, the main mentor for this project, used three criteria in order to catalogue what they considered to be spatial agency: spatial judgment, mutual knowledge, and critical awareness.

Spatial Judgment

“Spatial judgment refers to the ability to exercise spatial decisions,” which “prioritizes the social aspects of space, and the way that the formal affects them” (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 33). Spatial judgment is demonstrated when spatial agents initiate “empowering social relationships” rather than “formal sophistication, the latter of which has been for so long the paradigm of architectural excellence” (33).

Mutual Knowledge

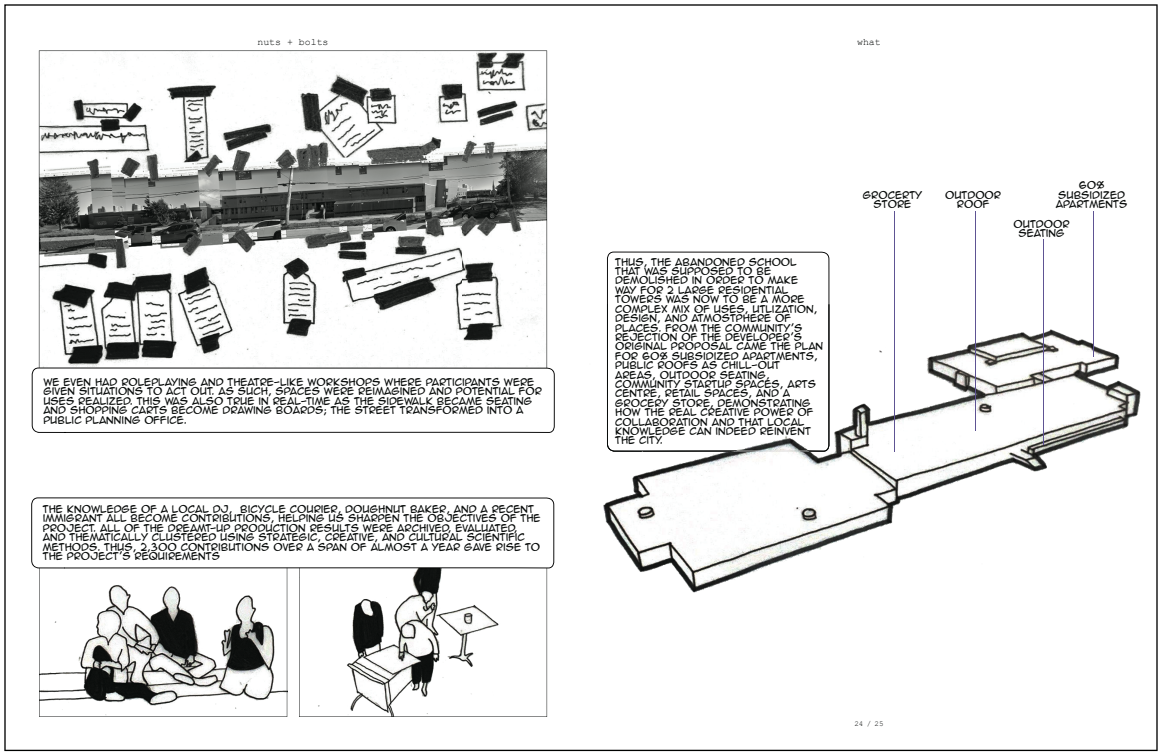
Mutual knowledge “indicates the willingness of spatial agents to both share their knowledge in an open manner, and also respect the knowledge of others” (Awan, Schneider

and Till 2011, 33). Mutual knowledge is demonstrated when there is an expansion of the means by which knowledge is "developed and displayed. Thus stories (which can be shared) are as productive as drawings (which often exclude the non-expert), and actions are privileged as much as things" (33).

Critical Awareness

Critical awareness refers to acting from an "evaluative stance" where "one is aware of the opportunities and challenges, freedoms and restrictions, of the given context"

Page from the graphic novel central to this thesis project demonstrating the way in which mutual knowledge and play is a central method of working for the catalyst of the graphic novel—the fictitious expanded architectural practice dubbed The Agency of Space.



Spread from the graphic novel central to this thesis project demonstrating the way in which mutual knowledge is a central method of working for the catalyst of the graphic novel—the fictitious expanded architectural practice dubbed 'The Agency of Space' (continued).

(Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 33). This also implies this attitude towards one's self, in order to "avoid imposing the same solutions onto different places, just playing out the old tropes in an unthinking manner" (33).

Empowerment Theory

Aside from collecting theoretical underpinnings that directly give shape to the architectural practice of the project, and as a consequence, the spaces that support its activity, another area of theoretical underpinnings that is part of the foundation of this project is theories of empowerment, almost exclusively borrowed from Elisheva Sadan. Empowerment, as defined by Sadan,

> includes mainly references to power that develops and is acquired. People are managing to gain more control over their lives, either by themselves or with the help of others. The form to be empowered related to what is both a process and an outcome—to the effort to obtain a relative degree of ability to

> influence the world. (Sadan 2004, 73)

This is not unlike the notion of agency.

Sadan's theories on empowerment, like that of spatial agency (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011), finds its roots in Gidden's theory of structuration. In relation to the notion of power, Giddens believes, on one hand, the idea of power "as a voluntary human activity," and on the other, that power is structural, "and hence is more a quality of the society than of particular people" (Sadan 2004, 68). Thus,

> power is indeed human activity: a person who exercises power could have behaved differently, and a person on whom power is exercised would have acted differently had it not be exercised. However, this occurrence cannot be fully understood without relating to the social structure in the context of which it occurs. (68)

Sadan then outlines a number of principles that derive from this notion. Of those relevant to the project is that "power is a basic component of human agency" (Sadan 2004, 68), that "inequality exists in different people's ability and access to resources" (69)—not only due to innate qualities that are predisposed in them as individuals—and lastly, that power is a *process,* where "power is a factor that intervenes between human agency and social structure" in relations that are inherently "dynamic and processual" (69).

This serves as a foundational element to the activity of the project's architectural practice, The Agency of Space, a spatial agent, because it creates a link between changes that happen at the micro scale (individual) and at the macro scale (environment). Which means that as it works with and empowering others, it will have an effect on the surrounding environment. "It reinforces the rationale for an integration between the individual and the collective" (Sadan 2004, 71).

Chapter 4: Case Studies

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is not a single way to practice spatial agency. It's very nature is resistant to a single normative technique, as it acknowledges simultaneous, and often contradictory, realities of lived experience, and acknowledges the impossibility of a single, fixed solution. Thus, this chapter serves to showcase people, practices, and projects that demonstrate spatial agency in a manner relevant to the project. From such an analysis, we can glean the existence of the desire in all corners of the globe, to positively transform the traditional processes of how built space comes to be, and that it is in fact possible, and infinitely diverse.

Thus, three additional criteria—from that of spatial judgment, mutual knowledge and critical awareness—is relevant to the project: in-situ, play, and metamorphosis. It will also become clear that all three criteria are inextricably connected and influence one another. In fact, none of the case studies presented cleanly sit in any of the three categories exclusively.

In-Situ

In situ is a Latin phrase that translates literally to "on site" (Wikipedia n.d.b). For The Agency of Space, this means intimate knowledge and familiarity with the place in which they are working. This is achieved by spending longer and going further "to study specific problems of each place or group" (Sadan and Churchman 1997, 5). This is also achieved by involving the "community members in the decision-making process," working alongside residents,

"helping them to define their needs and take action to meet them" (4).

Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée (aaa)

aaa's passage 56 community garden project; photograph by aaa (Spatial Agency n.d.)

aaa is a practice based in Paris, and acts mostly as "a platform for collaborative research and action on the city," creating networks around each project (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 105).

> It is through these networks of urban commons that communities can develop other relationships to the state, nature, and the planet. It is in these neighborhoods that we forge a sense of belonging, something that in metropolitan contexts has been eroded and replaced by alienation, atomisation and individualism. (Petrescu 2021, 109)

"This strategy valorises a flexible and reversible use of space and aims to preserve urban 'biodiversity' by providing for a wide range of life styles and practices to coexist" (Petrescu 2005, 43).

Patrick Bouchain

Patrick Bouchain is a French architect who is a designer of situations as much as he is a designer of buildings (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 111). Most of his projects

Collective meal at Patrick Bouchain's installation, the MetaVilla, French Pavilion of the Venice Architecture Biennale; photograph by Exyzt and Patrick Bouchain (Makery 2019).

begin with establishing strong relationships with community members and other interested people. Once this network is established, Bouchain creates a space, activating the area socially. This is done usually by opening up a small restaurant, connected to a site office and consultation area. By doing so, “passers-by and interested people can find out about the project, give their views, or simply watch a film” (111). Most importantly, “this initial phase creates relationships between the architects, builders and local people and creates uses for the site before anything permanent is built” (111). This way, Bouchain’s projects are sustainable in the truest sense of the word, “ensuring that what is finally constructed is appropriate and useful for the site and makes good use of resources” (111).

Jersey Devil

Jersey Devil is a design/build practice that is based around a loose-knit group of friends. They take being in-situ to the extreme as they often live on site for the duration of the construction of the project (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 160). This creates a relationship between architect and site that is impossible for someone that visits a site once or twice. This approach may not work for all architects, of course, but what makes it work for Jersey Devil in particular is that they not only design their projects, but they also construct them. They do this in collaboration with others (159).

Planbude/Crack the St. Pauli

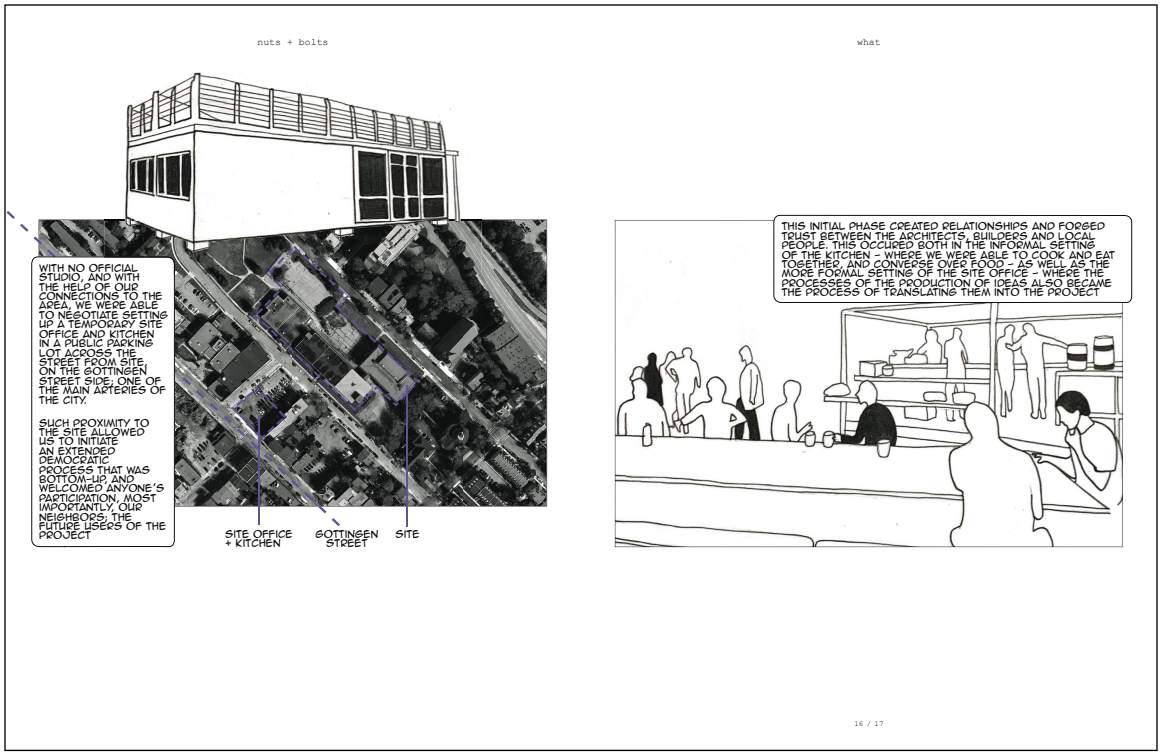
400 people gathered in February 2014, instigated by the over-night evacuation of all the residents of Reeperbahn’s Esso-Häuser so that a demolition of all the houses could ensue after a tremor shook the houses. The residents thus self-organized and started negotiations with those

“PlanBude is in the middle of everyday life, right next to the planning area. The glassed-in containers with a roof terrace are brimming with tools so that everyone can take part” (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 168); photograph by Frank Egel (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 168–169).

responsible for the demolition of their homes, and called it PlanBude. An interdisciplinary office was then established in the neighborhood in order to “develop the basis for an urban design competition and a new strategy for PlanBude on behalf of the city” (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 167).

Stadmensch

Stadmensch brings together four historically significant places in the city of Altenburg, Germany. There has been a growing pessimism in the town as the population rapidly declines and ages, and as the youth of every generation move out in waves. As discussions about the future of Altenburg started to be formalized and find support from external cultural institutions, the residents found themselves wanting to have a greater hand in the shaping of their town. As a result, “a think tank and several neighborhood offices



Spread from the graphic novel central to this thesis project demonstrating the way in which the mode of operation for the catalyst of the graphic novel—the fictitious expanded architectural practice dubbed 'The Agency of Space'—is directly inspired by both Patrick Bouchain and the PlanBude project. It also mentions one of the members of The Agency of Space lives in the area, predicating the project on intimate knowledge on the part of the practice about the place and its residents.

have been founded and organized" to support the diverse formats in which these discussions of the reshaping of the town are taking (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 77). "There is dancing. Proposals are developed in playful formats. Calls for ideas bring forth projects, the implementation and promotion of which are decided upon by the urban population through various procedures" (77).

Play

The notion of play for The Agency of Space is based on the recognition that processes of the production of the built environment does not always have to be so serious. This 'seriousness,' and the often bureaucratic nature of the professional practice, has left these processes in the

hands of the ‘educated’ few, and excluded many others who wish to partake. By recognizing the joy that can come out of collaborating with many different kinds of human beings, “it is possible to test things before they get ‘serious’” (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 219). “In playing, it is possible to discuss possibilities and bring together actors, who might not otherwise come together” (219).

Ant Farm

Their name was inspired by a conversation with a friend, when Ant Farm’s Doug Michels was describing their work as underground, to which the friend replied “Oh, you mean like an ant farm?” (Beischer 2005, 368). Ant Farm was established within a counter-cultural political landscape of 1968 in San Francisco. Their work is highly politicized working in several mediums, all with the goal to critique the North American culture of mass media and mass-consumerism (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 95). Famously, they designed a series of inflatable structures, recognizing that the usual architectural representations could not capture the project. This was a deliberate move

Chip Lord and Doug Michels with Clean Air Pod (Spatial Agency n.d.)

as it “promoted a type of architecture that moved away from a reliance on expert knowledge” (96).

Mobile Zebra Crossing

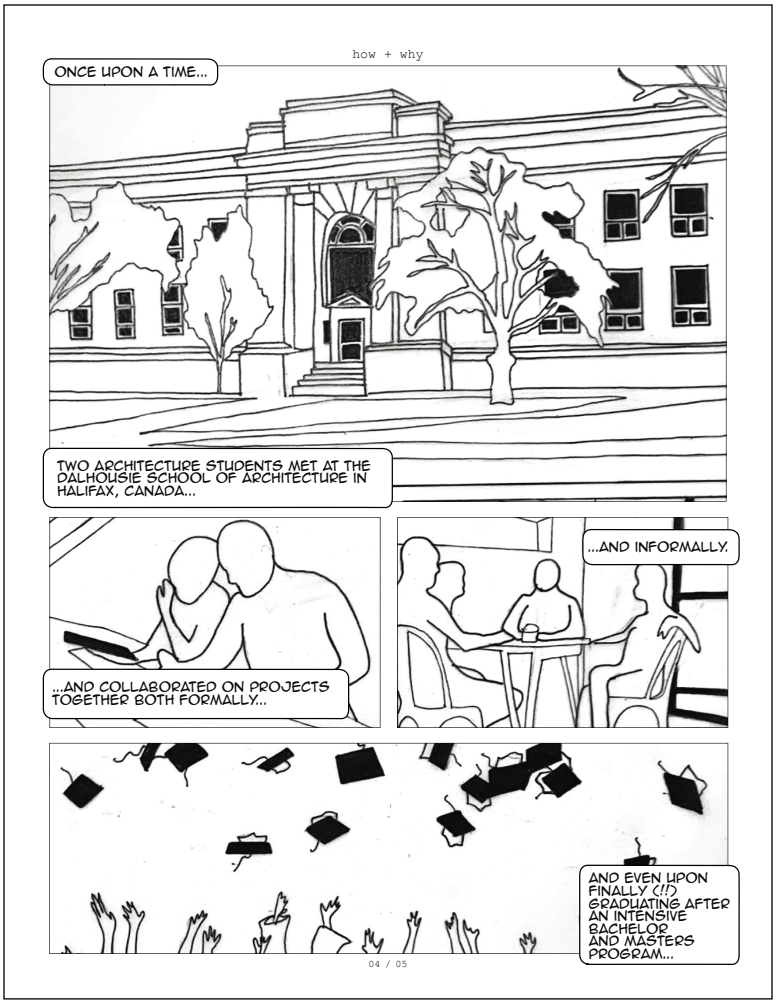
“The mobile Zebra Crossing is a portable instrument that can be deployed when encountering unwieldy street situations. Its purpose is to make it easy for pedestrians to cross in places where there are no legal crossing options” (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 226). It is meant for pedestrians to take back the street in a way that is fun and playful. Additionally, due to its size and weight, “it cannot be done alone,” (226) but rather a large group of people must unroll it together.

A procession of 600 people in Kassel, Germany’s city center; photograph by Angela Siever (Living the City n.d.a)

muf’s Roots and Wings (muf n.d.)

muf

muf was founded in London in 1994, and coins itself as “a collaborative practice of art and architecture committed to public realm projects” (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 175). Due to this blurring of lines between art and architecture, not only is their work rarely strictly only architecture, their work often “suggests frameworks for action rather than determining specific outcomes,” which is achieved via intuition and aspirations (175), and their art playful.

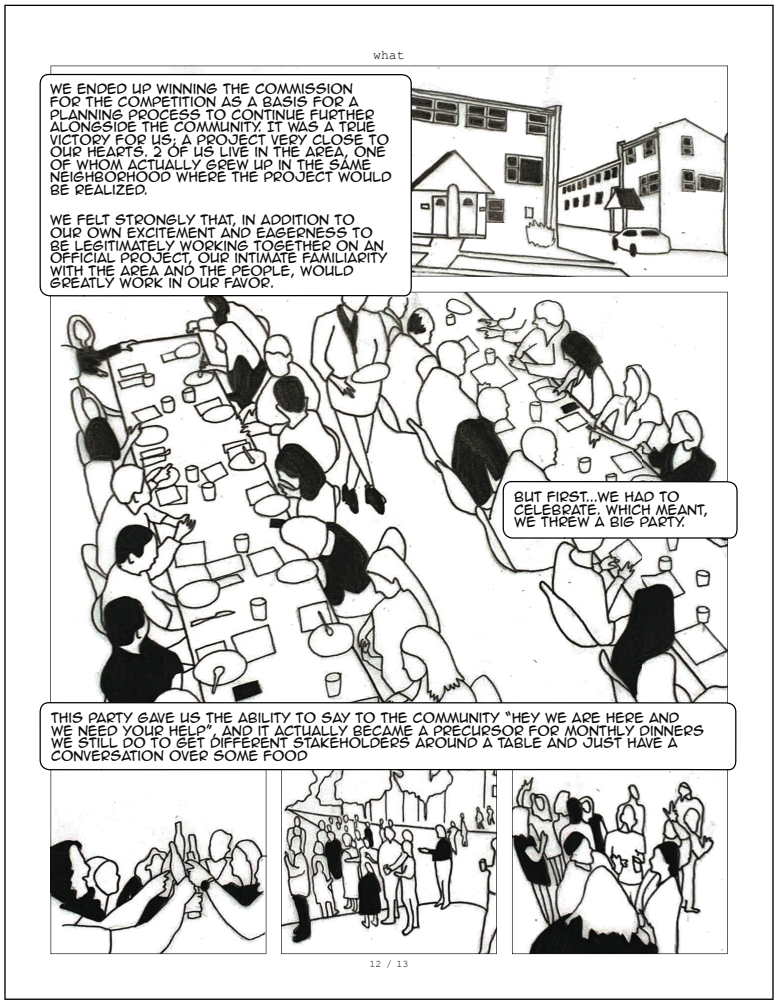


Page from the graphic novel central to this thesis project demonstrating how the catalyst of the graphic novel—the fictitious expanded architectural practice dubbed ‘The Agency of Space’—eventually formed, directly inspired by how muf was formed, originating from two women who became friends from teaching at the same architecture school.

Play the City

Play the City is an agency that was founded on the idea that games should only be won by successfully working with others instead of against. “Their games intend to bring various players of the city together in dialogue” (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 238). “Everyone has to meet at the table. [. . .] Everyone should partake in the discussion. Everyone should have a say in the decision” (239). During play, “gaming rounds are analyzed and recorded for the

client and subsequently translated into actionable proposals for the world outside the game" (239).



Page from the graphic novel central to this thesis project demonstrating how the catalyst of the graphic novel—the fictitious expanded architectural practice dubbed 'The Agency of Space'—is directly inspired by how muf, including their monthly dinner parties through which they get different stakeholders of a project together around food.

Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis is defined by "a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means" (*NOAD* 2010). For The Agency of Space, it borrows the ideas underlying the non-plan approach where a built space is left to transform into something completely different than what may have been

originally planned. It means accepting that the professionals or the educated and chosen few, may not always have the best or right solutions, and sometimes the best or right solution will eventually appear on its own.

ConstructLab

The Arch, Genk, 2017, an experimental laboratory dedicated to rethinking the urban history of a small Belgian town (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 142).

To describe constructLab, what they do, and how they do it is not so simple, and cannot be so easily compartmentalized. Mostly, however, they are an “architecture collective” who “actively [search] for opportunities to give form to the desires and hopes expressed in appropriations [of space]” (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 139). Their kiosk is “a symbol, a marker for this way of working, thinking, and creating,” and it stands for a specific way of looking at the city, which itself combines, collides “differing interests with different opportunities” (140). “It is never just one or the other. It is always a lot and everything at the same time. It is certainly not easy to navigate or understand. But it is messy and colorful” (14).

Fun Palace

Fun Palace is a project that was never built, designed by English architect Cedric Price. He was one of the team of four that took on the non-plan experiments in the English countryside, as he always worked to challenge oppressive ways of practice in planning and architecture. Fun Palace is no different. It was designed to test Price’s ideas of interactive architecture, putting the users in charge of their built environment (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011, 190). It was “conceived as an ever-changing learning environment” with its architecture “having the ability to be dismantled and reassembled” (190). In his non-plan diaries, he says about Fun Palace: “We are building a short-term plaything in

which all of us can realize the possibilities and delights that the twentieth-century city environment owes us. It must last no longer than we need it" (Price 2000, 23).

Platzprojekt

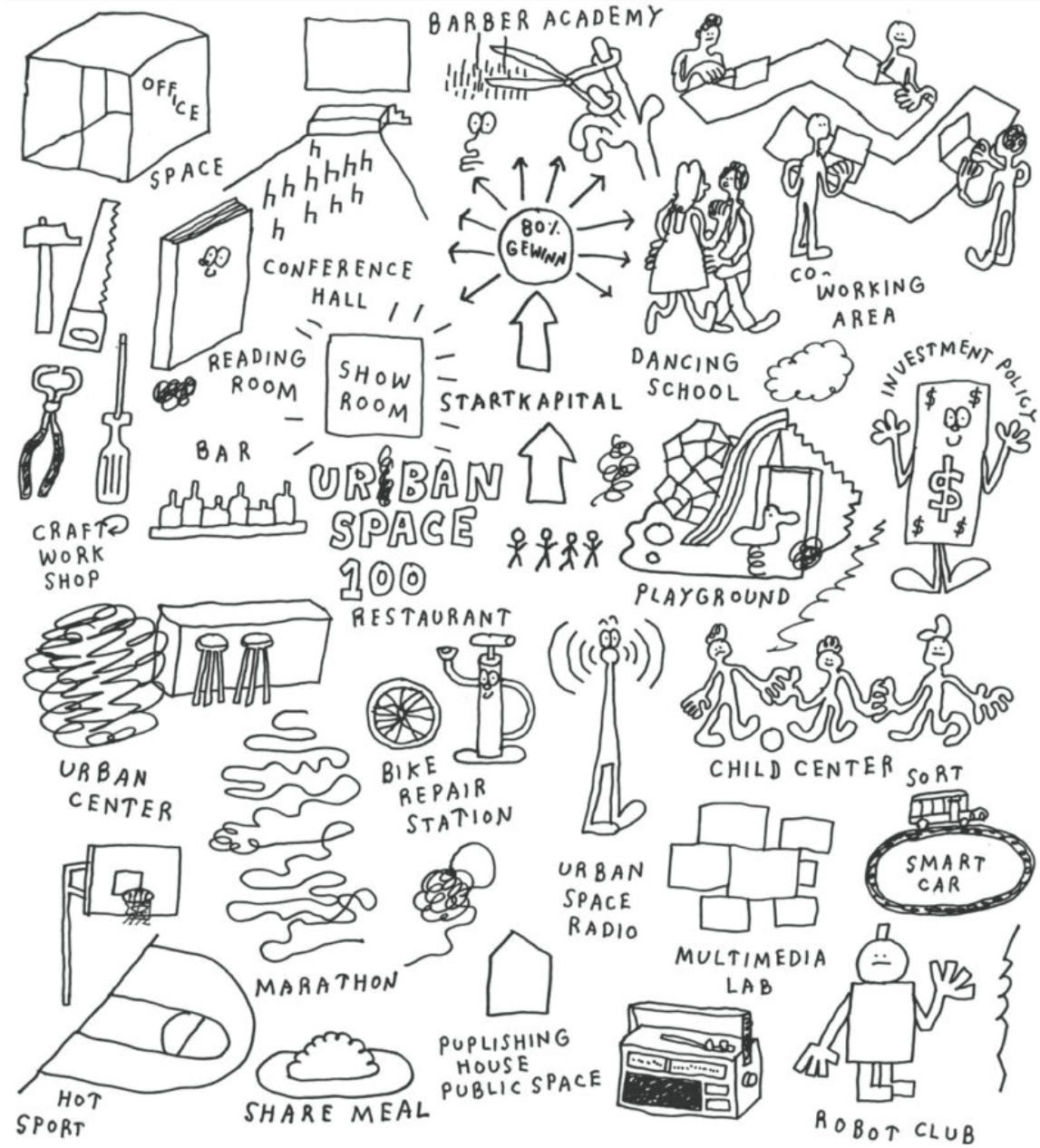
Platzprojekt started because two skateboarders found a large empty lot and started to build a small skate park on it. Eventually, they negotiated with the city to formalize the use of the skatepark, which allowed it to quickly gain recognition across the city. Over time, with many supporters and collaborators for the initiative, this endevour made way for Platzprojekt, originally conceived as a place for "self-help, for mutual support offering knowledge, tools, and craftsmanship" (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 272). Much is possible for the growth of the actual structure due to the programs that it hosts, but as they failed and learned to organize and consequently grow, more and more funds started to flow in order to support their endevours. "More than twenty initiatives and micro-enterprises are active on

Aerial view of origins of Platzprojekt. Skatepark, which eventually extended to support other activities of the community; photograph by Philip Robinson Crusius (Living the City n.d.b)

its grounds: from a massage salon, a café, and a community garden to a bicycle factory" (273). Additionally, most of those involved in the project are residents of the same neighborhood, allowing it to remain sustainable.

Urban Space 100

Urban Space 100 started when a group of friends found themselves in the small Ukrainian town of Ivano-Frankivsk and opened a small café. They eventually founded a network of local companies whose activities mostly operated out of the café that, in no time, started to garner much attention. Now, this café, named Urban Space 100, is much more than a restaurant and meeting place: "local products can be purchased here. There is an event room and a radio studio" (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 127). But it did not stop there. The founding members started to use the income of Urban Space 100 to support local initiatives. Eventually, these initial investments grew to support a network of historic building restorations, medical facilities, sporting events and festivals, a bike repair shop, radio station, center of informal education, several start-ups, and an online platform for a wide range of actors in urban development (127).



Illustrations of some of the many projects that are financially supported by Urban Space 100 (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 129).

Chapter 5: The Graphic Novel

Process > Product

It is of utmost importance for the project to recognize the significance of a process, as opposed to a product. As demonstrated by the collections compiled by thinkers of spatial agency, their peers and collaborators, and those that came previous (aaa 2007; Adaptive Actions 2013; Awan, Schneider and Till 2011; Blundell-Jones, Petrescu and Till 2005; Chase, Crawford and Kaliski 1999; Feireiss and Schneider, 2020; Harriss, Hyde and Marcaccion 2021; Hughes and Sadler 2000; Kossak et al. 2010), conventional drawings of an architectural product does not do justice to what is primary in social agency. In fact, it is contrary to elements of the architectural culture that spatial agency aims to outshine. This is not only demonstrated in the multiple essays by multiple contributors compiled in one place, and in acknowledgment of their innate differences, but many are explicit about the importance of a process. By thinking of architecture as a process, it does not necessitate a complete disregard for aesthetic value. It just means that other dimensions of architecture takes center stage, after it has been excluded for far too long: action, time, transformation, people, community, life, imperfections, setbacks, indeterminacy, open-endedness, simultaneity and contradiction.

Thus, in many ways, this project takes after French architect, Patrick Bouchain, in his approach to designing situations as much as designing space. Which is why, at the heart of this thesis project is a narrative that will be presented in the form of a graphic novel; the compatible pairing of representations of space and architecture, with the stories and interactions

of the people that both inhabit it and are involved in its production.

The Agency of Space: A Guide

As touched upon a few times previously, the very nature of spatial agency makes it difficult, nay, futile, to categorize, sometimes even describe, especially in its avoidance to prescribe a normative approach that can simply be adapted, with guaranteed results or even quantifiable measurements for success. In this spirit, British practice, muf, published a manual for their practice—their founding document—titled *This is What We Do: A Muf Manual,* putting into words their work and also systematizing their learning. It is “a mixture of manual and monograph that outlines the working practices and projects of ‘muf’” (Trockenbrot n.d.). Accordingly, this project’s graphic novel takes on the same role, serving as a guide to The Agency of Space. With the exception of the architecture of this project and the events that take place within, the story that the graphic novel illustrates is very much inspired but real people, practices, and projects around the world. As such, it is divided into the following three chapters:

muf’s manual to their practice (Trockenbrot n.d.)

Origin Story (how + why)

Just like many superheroes and supervillians in popular comic books, The Agency of Space has an origin story: how they came to be the way that they are. This chapter will showcase exactly that; how its members serendipitously crossed paths in their careers and how they eventually became a collective, which later on formally became known as The Agency of Space. This follows very closely the origin story of the practice muf architecture/art and how they came to be.

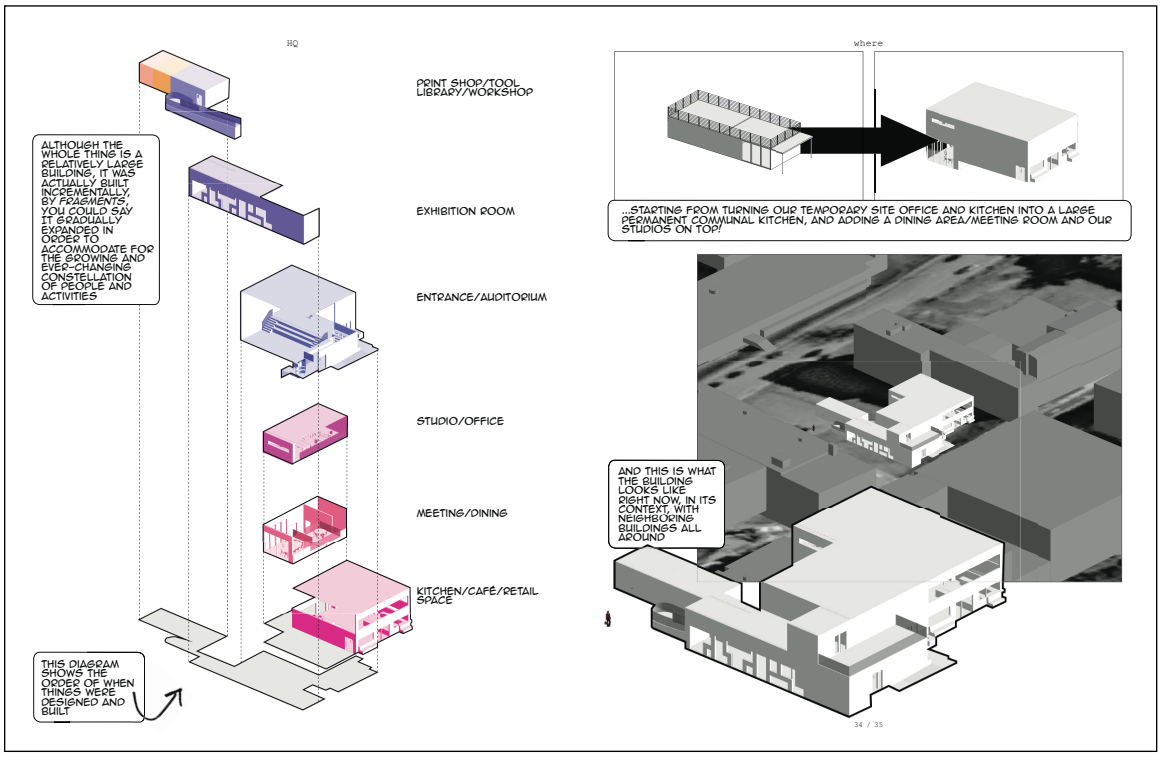
Nuts + Bolts (what)

This chapter, intimately connected to the first (and the third, for that matter), will tell the story of The Agency of Space's first official project as a collective. It will show the nuts and bolts of their operation: what they do, and why/how they do it, establishing a methodology of practice that will later come to define them as a practice, as well as inform the spaces of their future headquarters. The events in this chapter are informed, again, by muf architecture/art, as well as French architect Patrick Bouchain, projects Play the City and PlanBude/Crack the St. Pauli, and Halifax's JONO developments for the St. Joseph Alexadra's School.

HQ (where)

This chapter, as a consequence of an architectural thesis, will be the bulk of the graphic novel. In the timeline of the narrative, it will be a few years after their first official project that is showcased in chapter 2, and will show the permanent home of their practice and its corresponding activities: the architectural proposal of this thesis project. It is this specific chapter of the graphic novel that replaces the architectural

drawings of a conventional project, drawing focus on a process rather than an object, through the events that occur in the building and its spaces, and through the narrative.



Spread in the beginning of chapter 3 from the graphic novel giving a glimpse of the thesis' architectural project, emphasizing its construction as a process and highlighting the catalyst for its permanence.

Thus, an understanding of the space and the building becomes evident. This of course, will be complimented with actual architectural drawings in order to have a thorough grasp of the building itself.

Characters

There are four different characters or character groupings in the last chapter of the graphic nivel, each with their own storyline that all overlap in the events that unfold in the graphic novel. Each of the characters find themselves in the HQ of The Agency of Space for different reasons, and each of the characters are spatial agents in their own right, with desires and needs for their built environment and

are wanting ways to express it. These distinct desires and needs, in turn, define their relationship to The Agency of Space itself, which are made clear also through the events that unfold in the graphic novel.

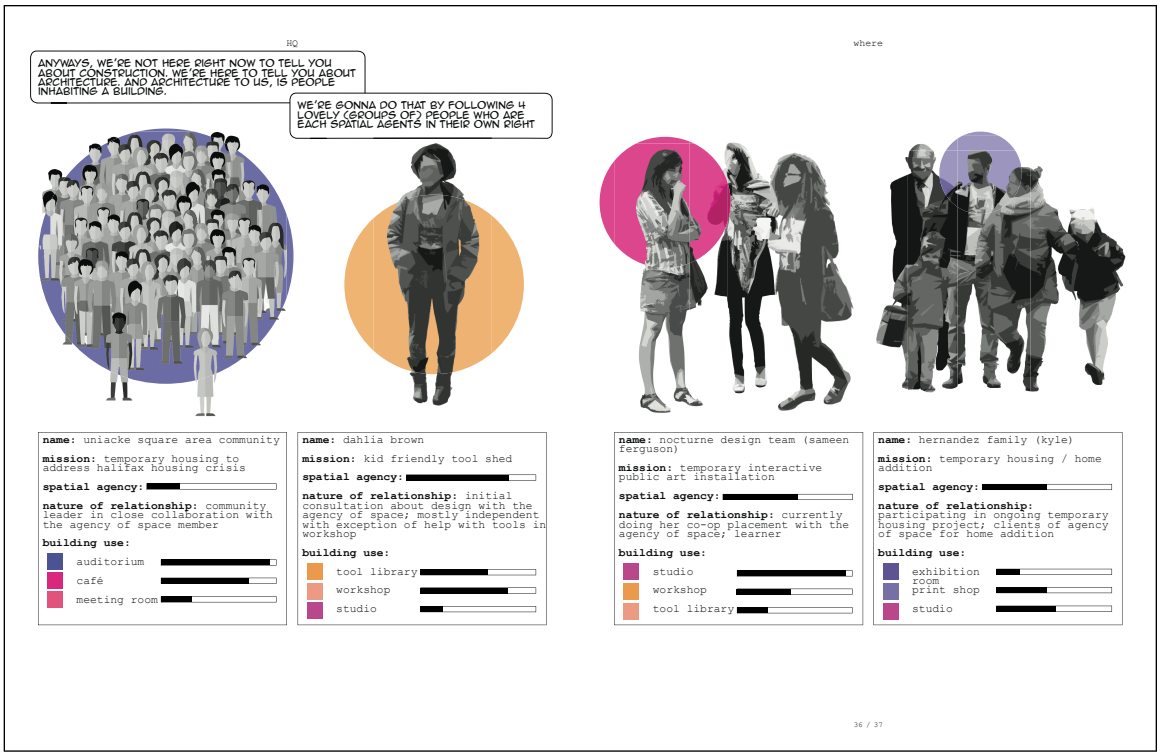
Although the entire background of each character is not made explicit in the graphic novel, the following are the four characters and a little bit of their backstory to situate them in the narrative.

Uniacke Square Community

The Uniacke Square Community is a tight-knit community, with a close partnership with The Agency of Space, who by now, have served as their advocate a number of times, giving voice to a community that has historically been voiceless. With the help of a community leader, the community of Uniacke Square come together once again, in close partnership with The Agency of space, once again, in order to see what they can do about the Halifax housing crisis. They would like to help in any way that they can, and with the help of The Agency of Space, they are provided with the infrastructure, language, space, and resources to come up with a plan.

Dahlia Brown

Dahlia is a long time resident of Uniacke Square. She has come to be somewhat familiar with The Agency of Space, their work, and their HQ through her participation in the meetings for the Halifax housing crisis project. She recognized the potential of the spaces the building provided as she grew to become more familiar with The Agency of Space. As a result, she approached The Agency of Space to inquire how she could go about building a simple tool shed



Spread from the graphic novel introducing the four character groupings with their respective profiles, preparing the reader with a bit of background to understand why the characters might find themselves in the Agency of Space's HQ and what their relationship with the Agency of Space might be that informs the program's they use the most.

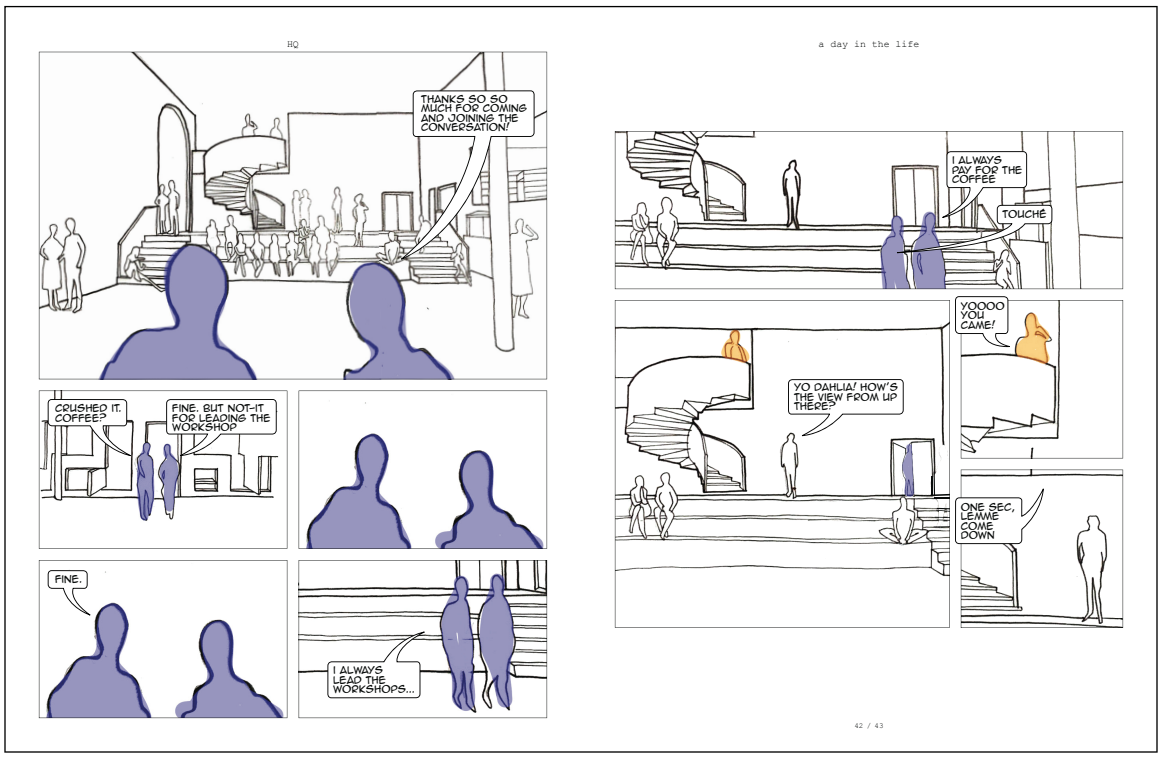
that is both safe and fun for the children in her gardening class to use.

Nocturne Design Team

Architecture student, Sameen, is doing her three-month co-op placement with The Agency of Space. She is left to manage many of the spaces of the HQ that are open to the community, and through this, gets to know many members of the community and helps them to understand what The Agency of Space even is and what they do. During her placement, she seizes the opportunity to participate in a city-wide art exhibition, along with her two friends from school. In the spirit of the work of The Agency of Space, Sameen opens up the process to everyone in her program at school, and all together, build an interactive installation that many of the city residents remember with awe.

Hernandez Family

Having just moved to the city, one day on a walk exploring their neighborhood, the Hernandez family happen upon

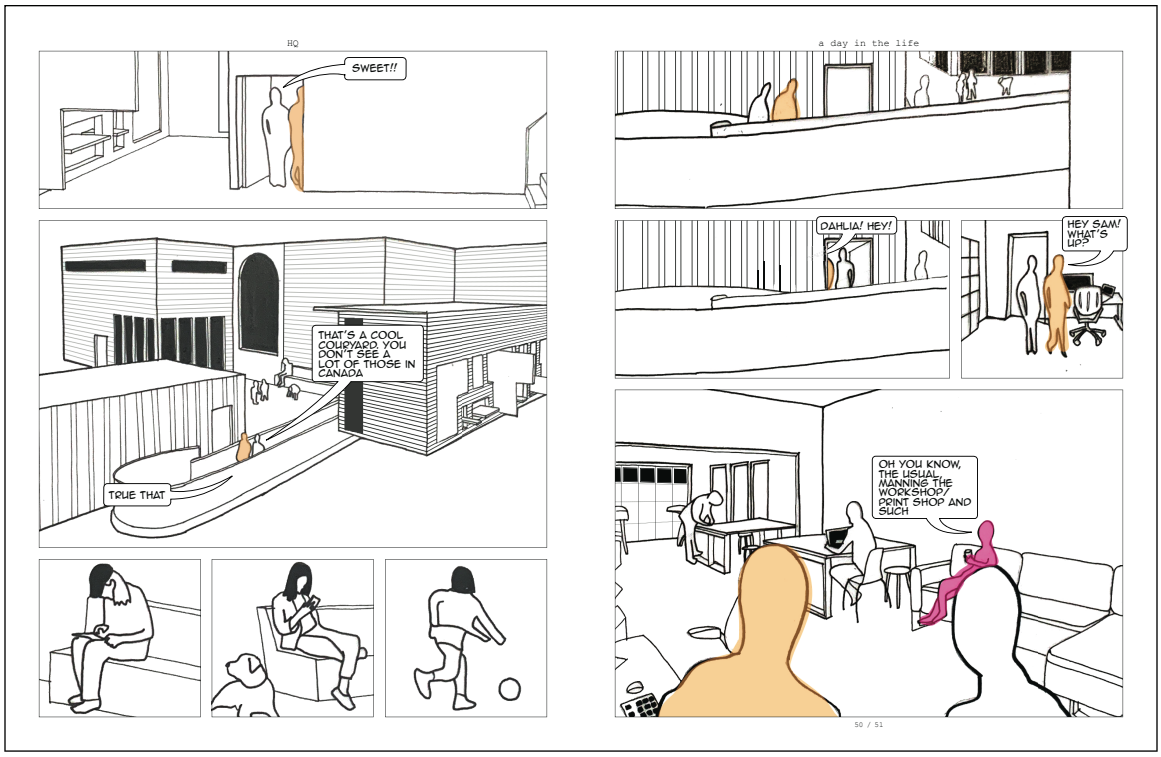


Spread from the graphic novel demonstrating the color coded characters: Uniacke Square Community (lead by a Uniacke Square resident and an Agency of Space member) in purple and Dahlia, in orange, as they inhabit the architectural project of the thesis.

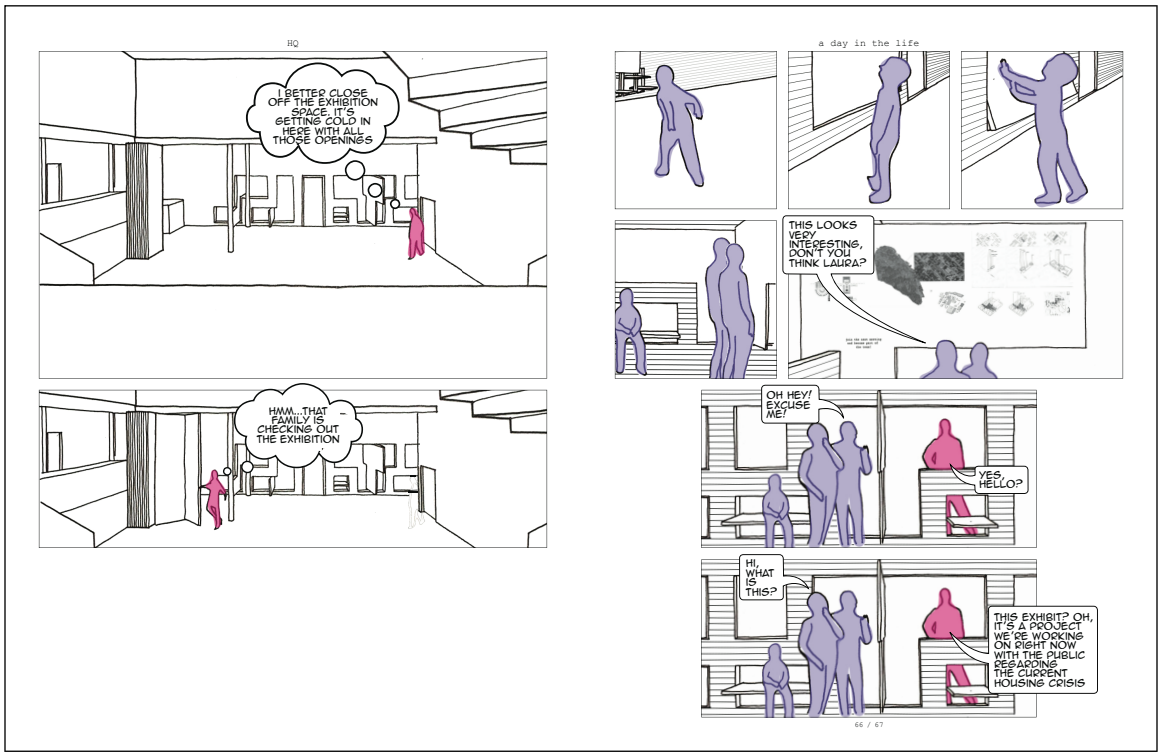
The Agency of Space's HQ and their public exhibition of the community's ongoing project for the Halifax housing crisis. They are invited to tour the space by Sameen, who eventually introduces them to members of The Agency of Space, to whom they express their desire to get involved.

Stages of Empowerment Processes

For an academic structure for the narrative itself, the project borrows from Elisheva Sadan, specifically her stages of the community empowerment process (Sadan and Churchman 1997, 7). She explains these stages as "a social change process of overcoming powerlessness, and achieving community empowerment" (8). For the purposes of this



Spread from the graphic novel demonstrating the color coded characters: Dahlia in orange and Sameen in pink, as they inhabit the architectural project of the thesis.



Spread from the graphic novel demonstrating the color coded characters: Sameen in pink and the Hernandez family in purple, as they inhabit the architectural project of the thesis.

project, this idea can be translated into: a community and the individuals in that community previously not having the knowledge, resources, or consciousness to have an effect on their surrounding built environment, changing into a community that does, in collaboration with or being advocated for by The Agency of Space.

Sadan explains that these stages act as “sign posts designed to assist professionals to identify the state of empowerment they achieved as a result of their effort, or the state of empowerment in which they are intervening” (Sadan and Churchman 1997, 8). She has a second set of stages that mirror this first set, but seen from the perspective of the professional, which in this case, is The Agency of Space. She calls this set of stages, stages of the empowerment facilitating practice (9). She explains this as such: “major sources of helplessness lie in disempowering professional practices and in disempowering social programs, so that the key to an empowering professional practice is to reverse the disempowerment process” (9). Part of this means that “the professional too may discover that the basis of her professional power is actually her growing understanding of her limitations as an expert and as a person” (9).

For its relevance to the events and characters of the graphic novel, this paper will only list these stages from the perspective of the community. They are described as follows (Sadan and Churchman 1997, 8–9):

Discovery

“People discover that they are not alone. [. . .] This is an individual stage, but it takes place within a group and is the beginning of an awareness of the strengths and abilities of the group members.”

Partnership + Togetherness

“People begin to relate to the common characteristic as a basis for a partnership with others. It becomes a basis for support and friendship.”

Self-Definition

“People begin to define their situation by themselves, rather than accepting the expert’s definition. Success in this stage is expressed in a lessening of their dependence on experts, and is critical for the development of independence.”

Self-Representation

“People discover that they can represent themselves. As the process progresses they develop confidence in themselves and in their understanding of their situation. Through the practical organizational skills that they learn, they develop political efficacy, and will be able eventually to run things themselves.”

Opposition to the Existing Situation

“This is not the first stage at which people may express opposition, but since this is a relatively advanced stage of the process, their opposition is more focused, and based on knowledge of specific plans or policies that enables rejection of them as inappropriate.”

Presentation of an Independent Alternative

“People begin to think about an alternative solution that they can formulate themselves, which represents their recognition that they are the real experts about their situation. This stage also reflects the acceptance of responsibility for the community: if we do not do things for ourselves, we will have

to continue to live with the inappropriate solutions developed by others."

Evaluation

"At this stage people evaluate their situation in terms of their empowerment. This time, though, the recognition of their weakness stems from a position of self-confidence and self-awareness and it is thus the most important sign of the success of the empowerment process. Recognition of one's limitations can lead to continuation of the empowerment process in new directions: by building coalitions with other communities, by consulting with professionals, and by supporting the continued development of individual members. The evaluation stage is the last, but not the final stage, in a cyclical and often chaotic process characterized by ups and downs, crises and upheavals."

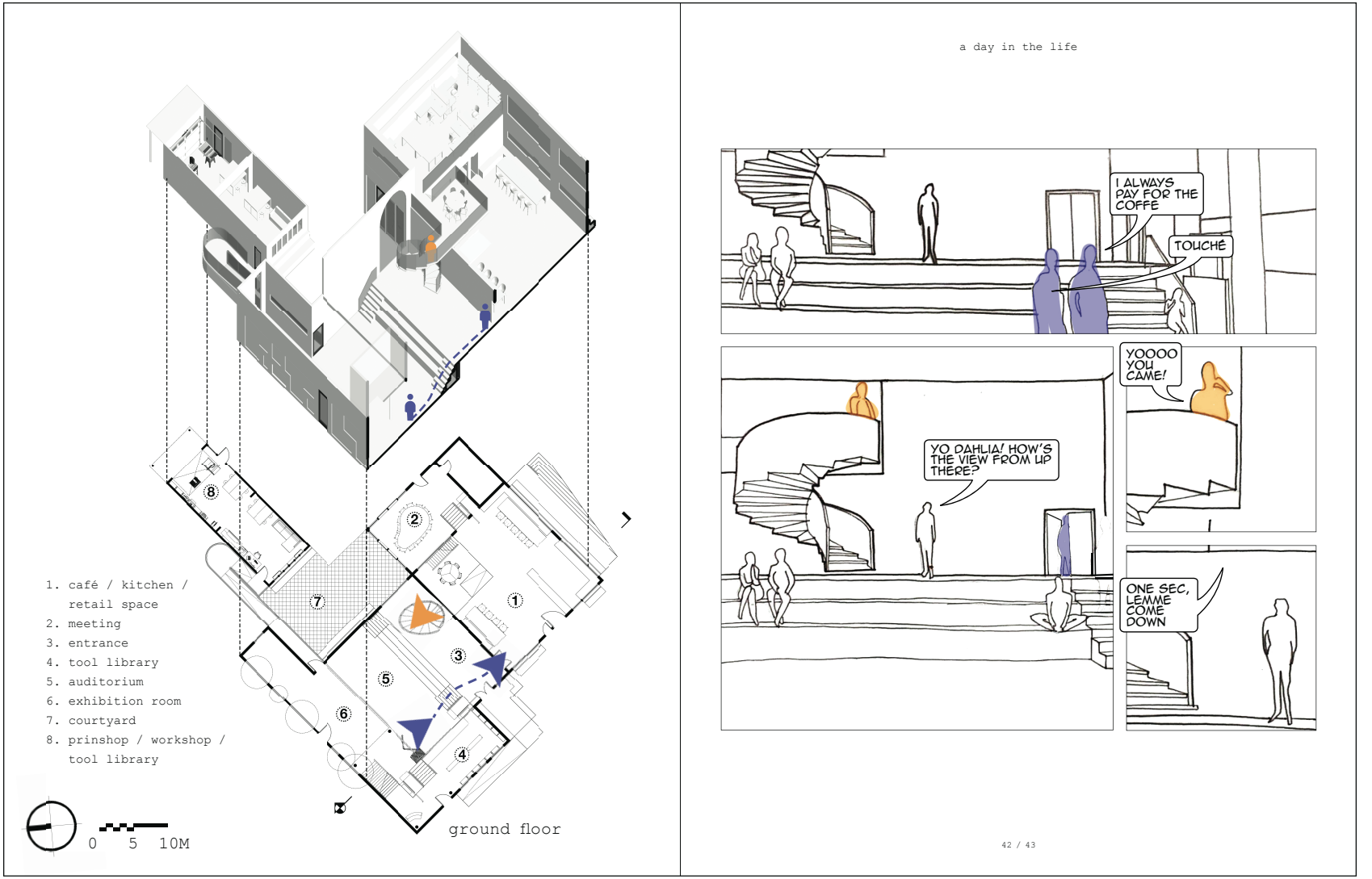
Graphic Novel Matrix

Thus, the four characters together with the seven stages, a matrix can be laid out that serves as the structure for the events in the narrative of the graphic novel. With the seven stages of the community empowerment process on one axis, and the characters on the other, every plot point on the matrix represents an event in the story. And each event is then identified by the program or space of The Agency of Space that best supports the event.

Although the graphic novel will not be able to capture every single plot point on the matrix, but rather a very small fraction of it, the matrix provides a structure within which the narrative of the graphic novel is situated.

	1 discovery	2 partnership and togetherness	3 self-definition	4 self-representation	5 opposition to existing situation	6 presentation of an independent alternative	7 evaluation
Uniacks Sq. Community	café/ restaurant	auditorium	meeting room	meeting room	auditorium	meeting room	exhibition room
Daliah Brown	meeting room	auditorium	workshop	workshop	tool library	[site]	auditorium
Nocturn Design Team	studios / offices	café/ restaurant	meeting room	workshop	[site]	meeting room	publication
Hernandez family	exhibition room	meeting room	tool library	studios / offices	meeting room	studios / offices	[site]

Narrative matrix: seven stages of empowerment processes x graphic novels' four characters/storylines



Presentation slide from thesis exam showcasing a page from the graphic novel, accompanied by floor plan and 3D model of the architectural project in order to orient audience where the story is taking place as it unfolds.

Chapter 6: The Agency of Space

The Catalyst

This project is not just any thesis, but is an architectural thesis. Which means that somehow, at some point, the research accrued will be translated into an architectural design. In the case of this project, the research that will be ultimately translated into a design project will really be to hypothesize what kind of spaces would support the activities of an architectural practice as spatial agent. Thus, for this project, a fictional architectural practice based in Halifax, Canada, is concocted, and consequently the design proposed is its headquarters. This fictional architectural practice is dubbed The Agency of Space.

Although perhaps comic books most famously tell the story of a protagonist who is usually portrayed as a superhero, providing a boundless source of material for Blockbuster films and TV shows, the graphic novel of this project will try to shy away from doing so. Instead, The Agency of Space will serve more as the catalyst of the narrative, rather than the 'hero' of the story, propelling the events of the story forward. In this way, the graphic novel will aim to expose processes of spatial production that have previously remained invisible (Feireiss and Schneider 2020, 139), and highlight how these processes are carried out by people who are themselves spatial agents.

Dimensions of Empowerment Processes

In order to shape the identity of The Agency of Space, Elisheva Sadan's six dimensions of empowering community processes is adapted. In her appropriately titled co-authored article "Process-Focused and Product-Focused Community

Planning: Two Variations of Empowering Professional Practice," Sadan lists six dimensions that she uses to define processes of community empowerment. She presents each of them as a continuum between two opposing states. This is distinct from Sadan's stages of empowerment, as these dimensions are used to describe planners and professionals, and not the process itself. These dimensions distinguish between two kinds of planners: "one, the planner whose focus is the product, and the other whose focus is the process" (Sadan and Churchman 1997, 5). This can also be adapted to identify between two different kinds of architects: a spatial agent, acting with and on behalf of others, and the traditional architect who might be inclined to impose his vision unto others.

Presenting these dimensions as continuums is helpful for our purposes, because firstly, it abandons a binary where architects might find themselves needing to choose one and abandoning the other. This is not unlike the dichotomy discussed in chapter 3 between two stereotypical images of the architect, where agency dismisses either notion.

Secondly, intimately connected to the first reason, is that seeing these dimensions as continuums is appropriate in the effort to grapple with the concept of agency, a relatively new one in the field of architectural practice and a rather shapeless notion in general. This is because it recognizes the grey area in which we may continually try to abandon old habits of the current architectural culture and replace them with new ones more aligned with spatial agency. It means that we need not achieve perfection immediately just because we agree with what spatial agency is advocating for, but rather we will try, and fail, and try again, and through this process, we learn to be better architects and people,

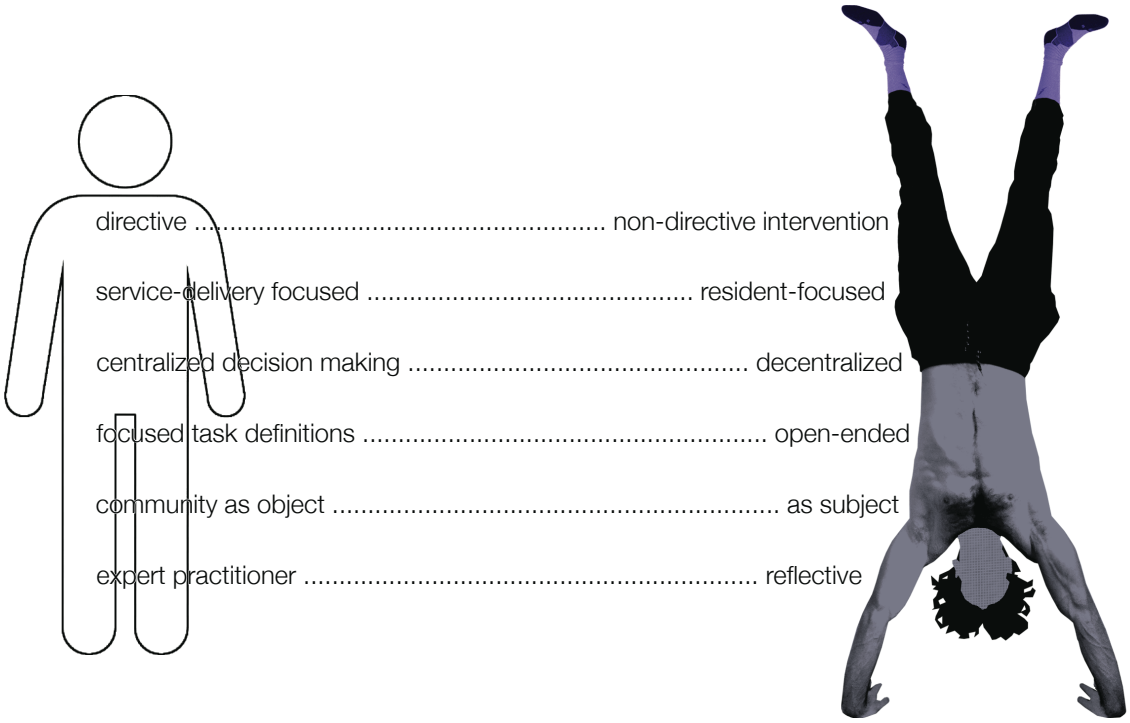


Diagram showing two ends of the continuum of dimensions of empowering processes between product-focused (left) and process-focused (right).

paving a completely new way of doing so. And thirdly, it allows the flexibility for differing contexts. Some architects will be called upon to design a specific project or complete a particular job, and the client will pay them to do just that, with no interest in participating in the process at all. A continuum allows us to see a diversity, a multiplicity of conditions, and as educated spatial agents, we can act accordingly.

Sadan explains each dimension as follows, all of which describe planners, but can be applicable to architects as professionals and spatial agents, working with and on behalf of other spatial agents (Sadan and Churchman 1997, 4–5):

Directive/Non Directive Intervention

“Directive planners define their goals and subject matter by themselves, whereas nondirective planners involved community members in the decision making process.”

Service-Delivery Focused/Resident-Focused Work

"The service-focused planner is concerned primarily with developing services and resources according to his/her organization's [or firm's] policy and priorities. The resident-focused planner works with residents in his/her area of intervention, helping them to define their needs and take action to meet them."

Centralized/Decentralized Decision Making

"At the centralized end of the continuum the goals and the solution are determined ahead of time, by some outside factor. At the other end, decisions are delegated to the field level, so that local considerations have a greater weight."

Focused/Open-Ended Task Definitions

"The planner may be sent into the community with a specific and defined task or s/he may have autonomy to make decisions on the spot regarding both the way s/he works and the task itself."

Community as Object/Subject

"Some planners see the community simply as the arena for performing a professional activity. Others see their task as the development of understanding between them and the community and the creation of a joint solution."

Expert/Reflective Practitioner

"Experts present themselves as the sole knowledge bearers and as those responsible for the results, and usually arrive with a ready-made plan. Reflective practitioners spend

longer and go further to study the specific problems of each place or group and then think through to a plan."

Planning/Making/Learning

Another structuring principle to give shape to the identity of The Agency of Space is a cyclical process of consultation / action / reflection. For the purpose of the project, this cyclical process has been adapted to planning / making / learning. This idea comes from the Baha'i international community who have been systematically learning about processes of social and economic development for several decades now, in almost every corner of the planet, specifically in neighborhood and village settings. In an effort to formalize, systematize, and proliferate this body of learning, the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Baha'i World Center in Israel authored a document in 2012 that spoke of a process of consultation, action, and reflection, pivotal to processes of community building (OSED 2012, 9). In relation to consultation (planning), the document states:

> whether concerned with analysing a specific problem, attaining higher degrees of understanding on a given issue, or exploring possible courses of action, consultation may be seen as collective search for truth. Participants in a consultative process see reality from different points of view, and as these views are examined and understood, clarity is achieved. In this conception of the collective investigation of reality, truth is not a compromise between opposing interest groups. Nor does the desire to exercise power over one another animate participants in the consultative process. What they seek, rather, is the power of unified thought and action. (13)

And in relation to action (making) and reflection (learning), it in turn states:

> at the heart of every development endeavour is consistent, systematic action. Action, however, needs to be accompanied by constant reflection to ensure that it continues to serve the aims of the endeavour. Development strategies that are formulated simply in terms of projects with well-stated goals, followed by evaluation of how and why they were or were

> not achieved, have limitations. An approach to development defined in terms of learning does, at times, admit formal evaluation. Yet, it depends far more on structured reflection woven into a pattern of action, through which questions can emerge and methods and approaches be adjusted. (14)

Although the document speaks directly to processes of community development, the principles of collaborating with others, testing and experimenting ideas, then learning about it just to repeat it again but better, is a systematic and cyclical process that can be adapted by an architectural practice as spatial agent, and inform the spaces that support its activity.

Thus, these spaces, more specifically architectural in nature, become spaces that either support or are imbued with the spirit of planning, making, and learning. The following diagram demonstrates such programmatic spaces, according for the cyclical process that define The Agency of Space's way of working.

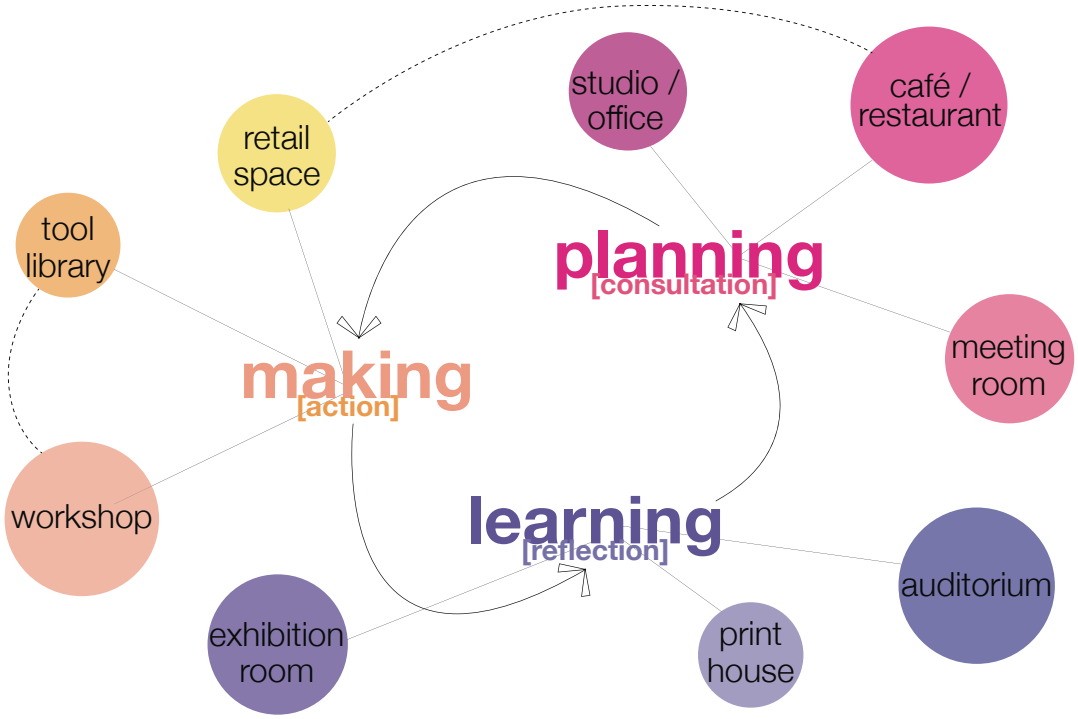


Diagram showing the three phases of the cyclical process and the programs of the architectural project that it informs.

Chapter 7: The Agency of Space's Headquarters

Program

As mentioned in the beginning of chapter 6, the architectural proposal for this project will be the headquarters of The Agency of Space. And as highlighted in the previous chapter, it's programs are according to the cyclical process of planning, making, and learning. It will become clear in the following sections that—similar to the categorization of in-site, play, and metamorphosis—the three phases of this cyclical process and its associated spaces do not always cleanly fall exclusively under a single phase, but rather its boundaries flexible.

Design Fragments

Designing using the matrix laid out in page 39 implies the designing in fragments, whose relationship and how they might come together to form a single whole is not known or made explicit at the beginning. Additionally, as will become clear in the events of the graphic novel, the narrative around the building of the headquarters occurs incrementally, over a longer period of time, according to the expanding and changing needs and desires of both The Agency of Space, and the community that surrounds it. For this, the design methodology looks to British-American architect and design theorist Christopher Alexander, who co-authored a two-part volume alongside Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein, the second of which is called *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*. In it, the co-authors develop a language for design, by which a space, when designed in a particular way, can support particular social interactions.

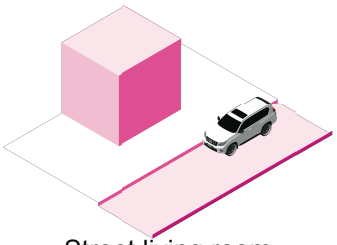
This is also true for Dutch structuralists. Herman Hertzberger wrote extensively about how architecture fragments at the scale of a person can allow for certain kinds of interactions.

Thus, in addition to the following list of programs for the proposal, design criteria is associated with each program, giving shape to its design.

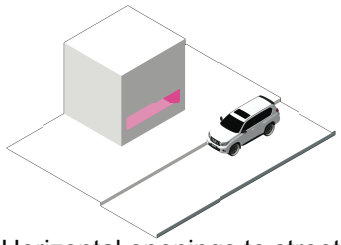
Planning

Kitchen/Café/Retail Space

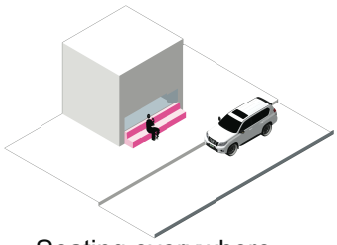
At the heart of the operations of The Agency of Space is the act of gathering together around food. It is how they are able to gather different stakeholders on neutral ground, both for formal meetings and informal gatherings (see Patrick Bouchain and Urban Space 100 in chapter 4). Thus, similarly, at the heart of their headquarters is a community kitchen where people can gather together to eat and cook. When the specific activity of eating and cooking together is not occurring, the space transforms either into a café that is run by the community as an informal setting for social interactions or a space where local vendors can exhibit and sell their things. This depends on the needs at any given time.



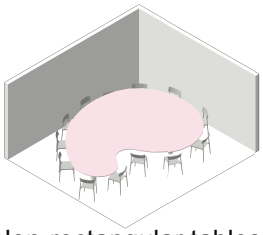
Street living room



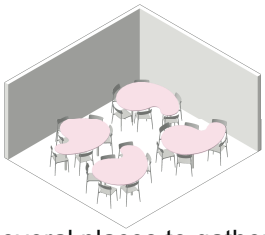
Horizontal openings to street



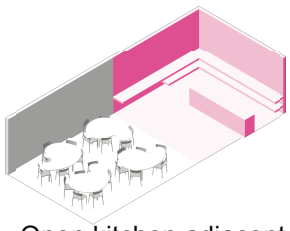
Seating everywhere



Non-rectangular tables



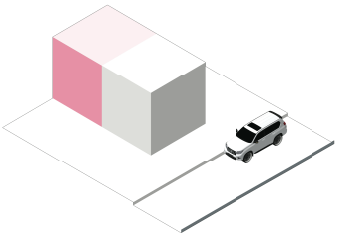
Several places to gather



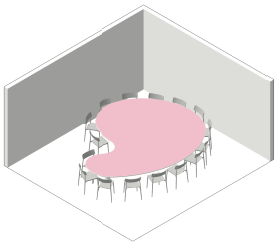
Open kitchen adjacent

Meeting Room/ Dining Room

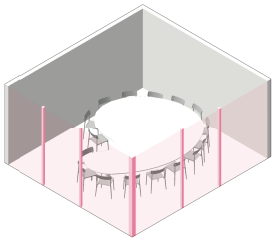
Closely connected to the main eating space is the formal meeting room. This can also be converted to a large dining room for larger, around-the-table type gatherings (See Patrick Bouchain in chapter 4).



Private vs. public



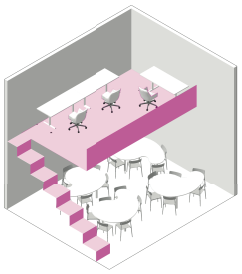
Non-rectangular table



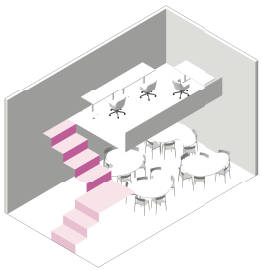
Transparent walls

Studios/Offices

Although not directly connected to the other planning spaces, but still close in proximity, are the spaces for the work of the ever-changing constellations of the members of The Agency of Space and their various collaborators: their studio and office spaces.



Visual encounters

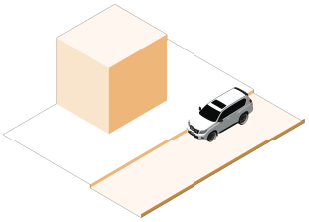


Stairs for multiple views

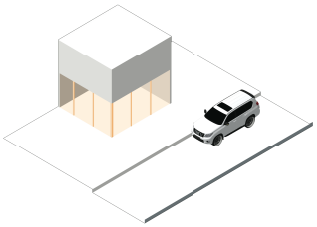
Making

Tool Library

In close connection to the workshop, there is a library of tools for the public to make use of either in the workshop or rent out in order to work on projects at home.



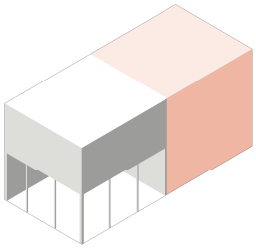
Pedestrian access



Pedestrian visibility

Workshop

A workshop, where people can make, build, and experiment, is the host for a wide variety of tools and materials.

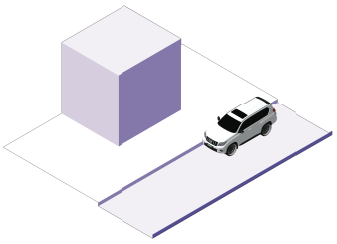


Tool library adjacent

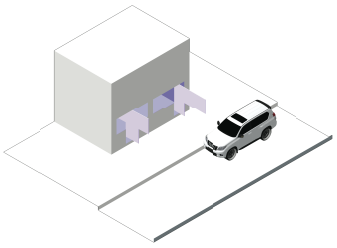
Learning

Exhibition Room

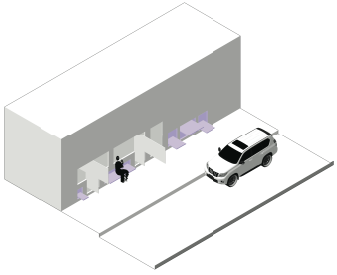
A place where ongoing projects can be exhibited, allowing the public to access and learn about what The Agency of Space is working on at any given time, calling for the participation of the community and the public.



Pedestrian access



Openings + pedestrian access

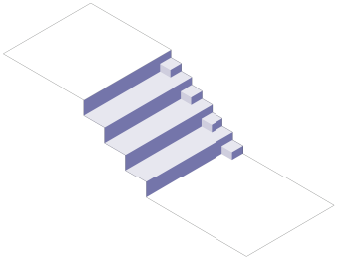


Seating everywhere

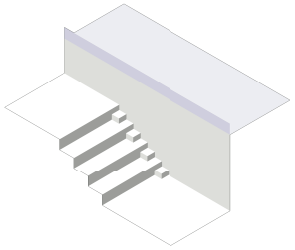
Auditorium

Having an auditorium allows for larger meetings and gatherings that cannot be hosted in the meeting room.

It could also allow for lectures and other educational programming.



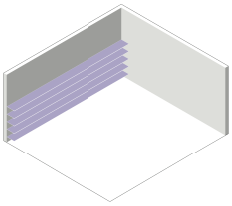
Casual + versatile setting



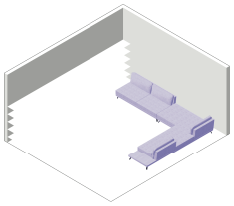
Central setting

Print Shop

A print house or similar space would be fitting for an architectural office for its essential printing purposes. It can also allow for further distribution of knowledge and material, such as posters or zines, casting an even wider net for potential participation of the public in the work of The Agency of Space.



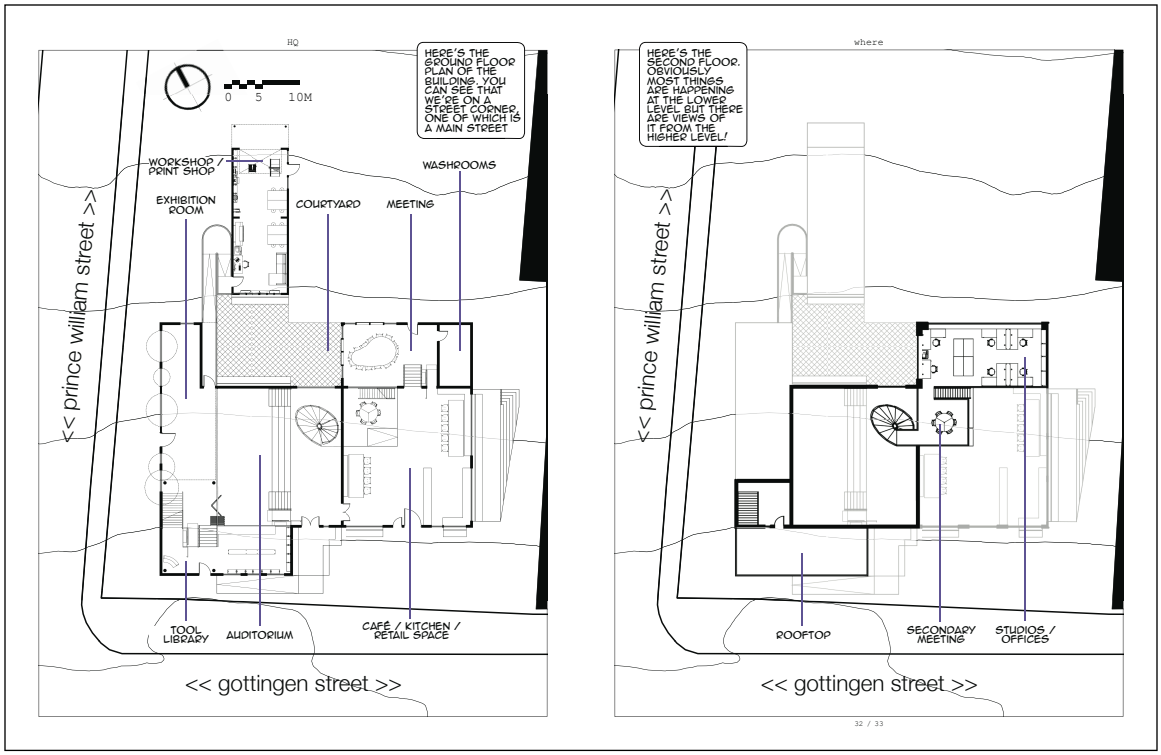
Shelving



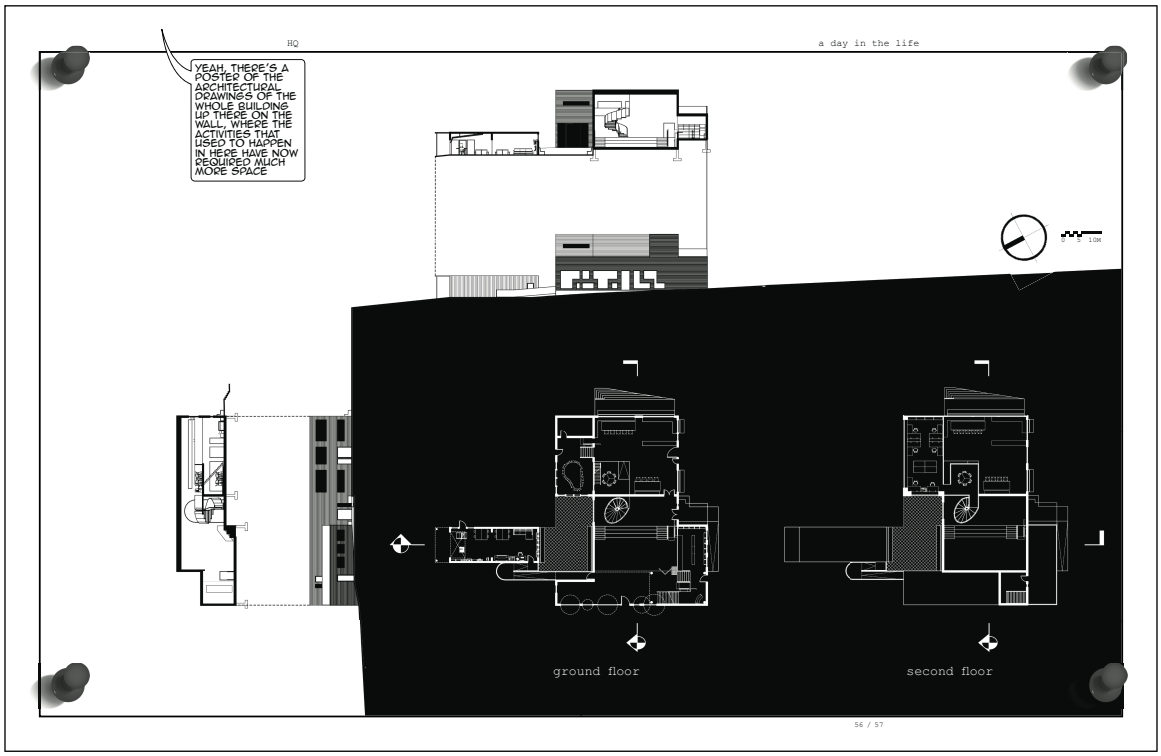
Comfy seating

Architecture

Even though the architecture of the project and its construction is not the focus of this thesis, there are some design intentions for the space that were deliberately made in order to support the activities that occur within it. These are explored in the graphic novel through the narrative and the characters, as is the understanding of the architectural project in general as the story unfolds and the dialogue between characters makes explicit.



Spread from the graphic novel showing the floor plans of architectural project.



Spread from the graphic novel showing the floor plans of architectural project, as well as sections and elevations of the project, as a poster on the wall in the workshop.

Temporary Site Office/Kitchen

The first is the conversion of the temporary site office of the Agency of Space—out of which they worked on their very first project together—into a more permanent fixture in the neighborhood.

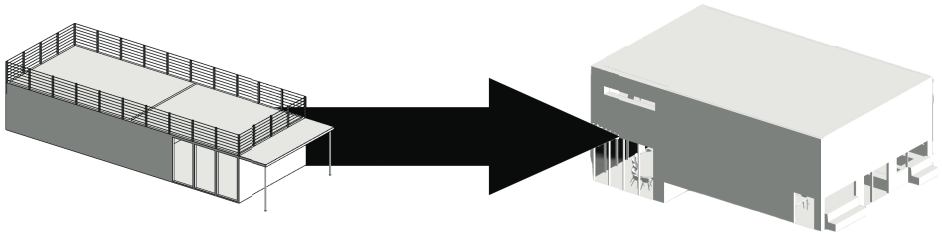
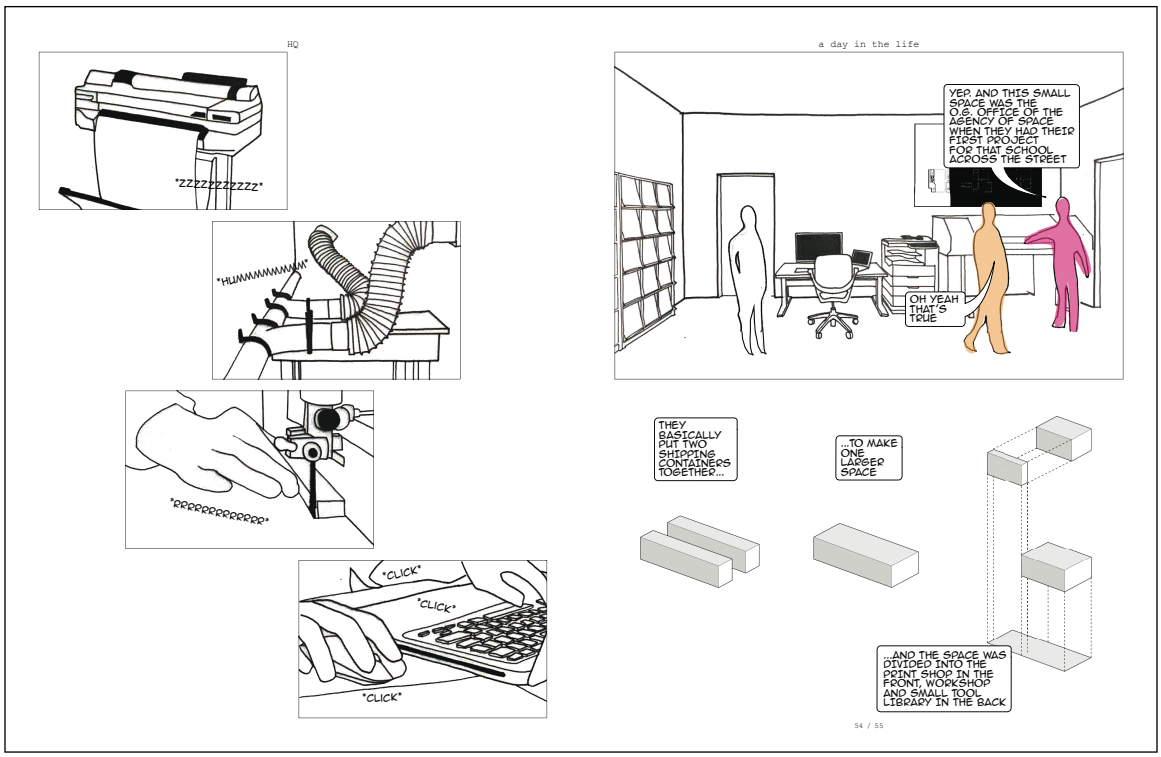


Diagram from the graphic novel to simply indicate that the permanent building of the Agency of Space's HQ started from the conversion of the temporary site office and kitchen into a permanent building.



Spread from the graphic novel showing the original place out of which the Agency of Space operated for its very first project, now functioning as a workshop and printshop. It also shows an explanation of the division of space that allowed what used to be two shipping containers placed together, to become the now workshop and printshop.

The original temporary site office and kitchen was kept, and it eventually became the home for the workshop and print shop, located at the back of the building.

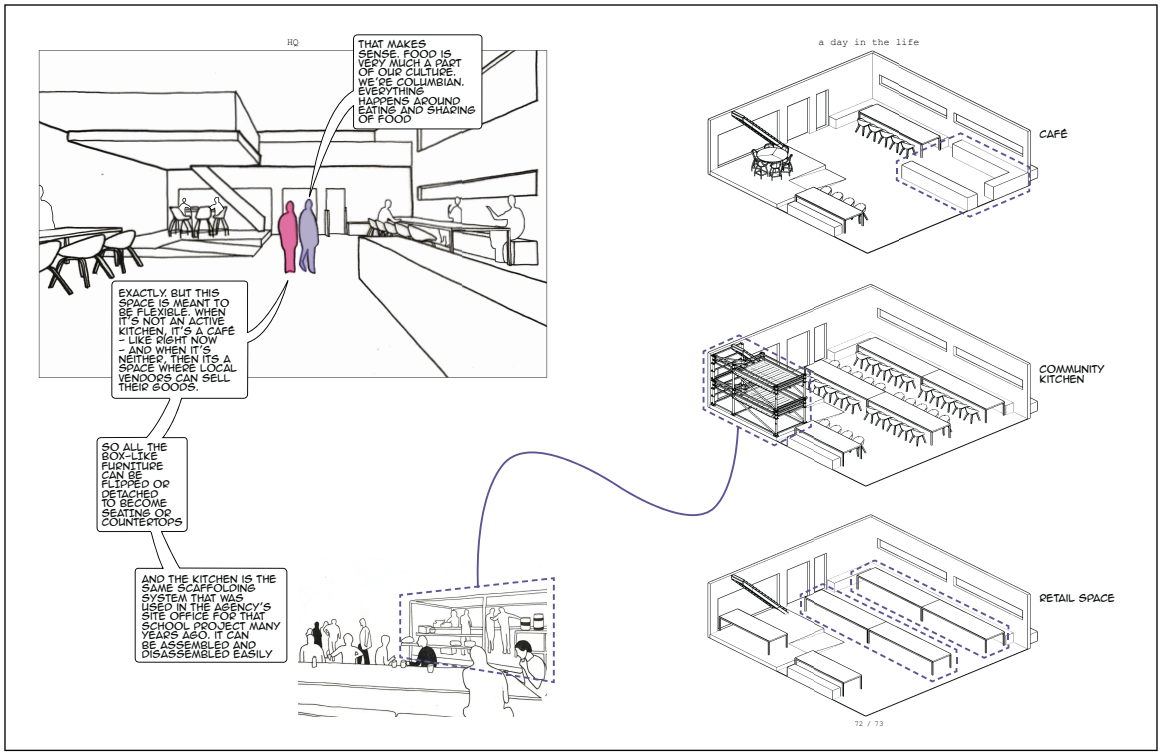
Café/Kitchen/Retail Space

Another architectural design intention for the project was the flexibility of the café/kitchen/retail space due to its large size and the possibilities for the surrounding community to alter it based on what it may need at any given time.

The default program of the space is the café for its possibilities of gathering, both informal and more formal. In this way, it is still flexible on its own.

The second program is the kitchen, in which the same scaffolding system used in the original temporary kitchen for the Agency of Space's first project is utilized. This system in itself is also flexible, with the possibility to construct it at various heights and lengths, even with the possibility of construction at multiple levels. Additionally, the block furniture can be turned over or moved around to become tables and benches. It is this configuration that holds the Agency of Space's regular and occasional dinner parties in which different stakeholders for various projects gather around a table, as well as a general venue for community gathering.

The third and last program is the retail space in which community members set up a kind of market where they can sell their home-made goods. This is done in partnership with the nearby non-profit organization, Hope Blooms, where they have several programs that help mostly young people to become entrepreneurs and more business-oriented. This



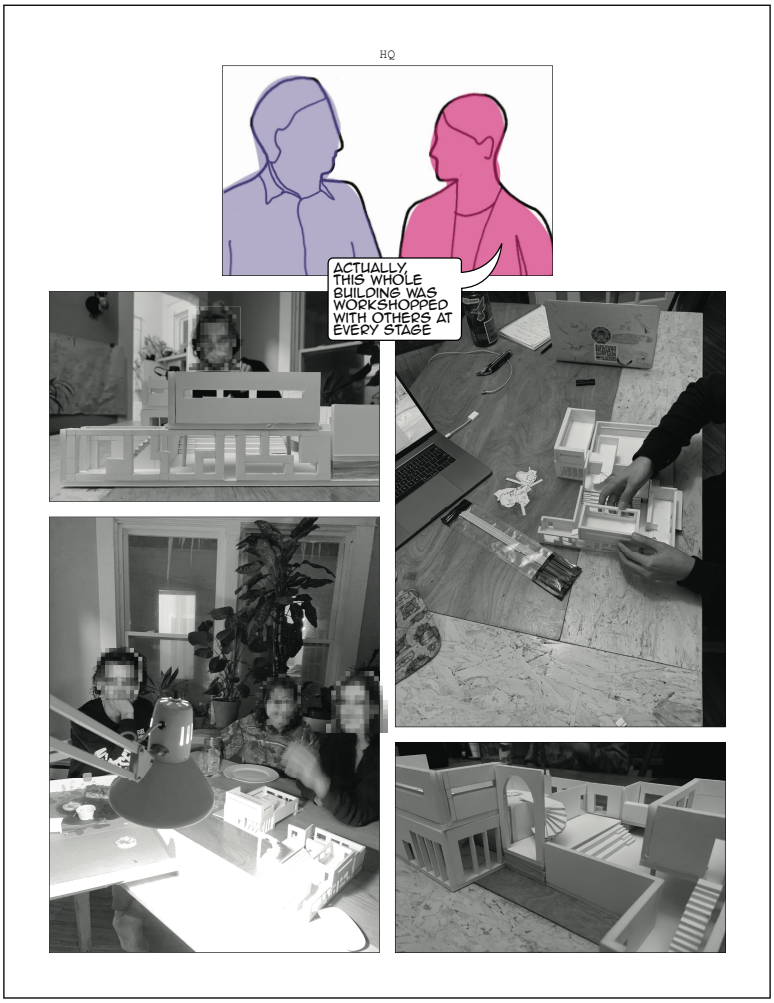
Spread from the graphic novel showing the different iterations for the café/kitchen/retail space of the building, as it is being explained by one character (Sameen) to another (Hernandez family dad, Kyle).

was a suggestion that came out of a workshop conducted as part of the design development process.

Workshops

It was the intention as part of the research for this project, and specifically for the development of the architectural component of this thesis, that the design go through a series of workshops. Its purpose, staying true to the ideas inherent in spatial agency, was for others to be brought into the process. However, due to time constraints, only one was conducted. This first and only workshop was conducted with friends, one of whom is an employee at Hope Blooms, the non-profit organization across the street from the site of the project. It was in this workshop that some aspects of the original design were tweaked, and several valuable suggestions were made, including the possibility

of converting the café space into a retail space for local vendors in the community. Although only a single workshop was conducted, the conception of the building's first iteration was slightly changed to become better suited to its context and community.



Page from the graphic novel with images from the workshop that was conducted for the design of the building. Sameen (pink) is explaining to Kyle (purple) that the workshop they are currently witnessing is the same process the building they are in was workshopped.

Site

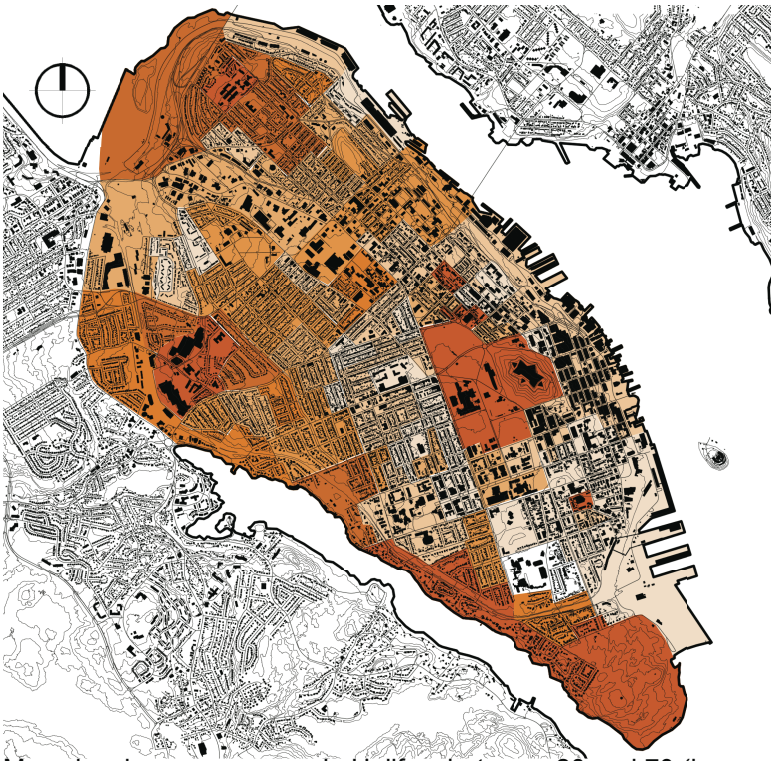
The nature of spatial agency is not specific to any one place. The process is aimed at changing dimensions of the architectural practice and the production of space, bringing about specific social conditions, particularly that of "people's

feelings and capacities; the life of the collective that they belong to; and the professional practice that gets involved in the situation" (Sadan 2004, 13). As Sadan explains regarding processes of empowerment, that can also be applied to processes of spatial agency: "empowerment is first and foremost an ideology and a world-view, and only someone who accepts its values can attain a deeper understanding of the details of its processes and the methods of its practical implementation" (13). More specifically, for the purposes of this thesis, it is how that manifests itself in processes of spatial production, and consequently the built environment, as well as where the architect and her expertise fits in it all.

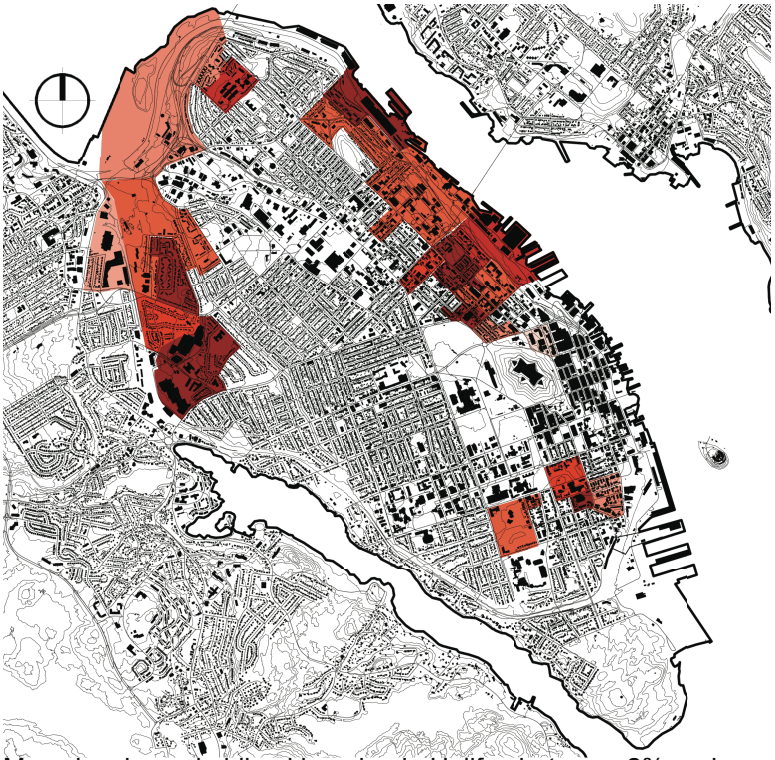
With that said, the chosen site serves as an example, demonstrating an instance of what this thesis is exploring, while specific conditions that are particular to the place will mold it and give it shape that best fit its context. However, in theory, remaining true to spatial agency and in the spirit of Italian practice Stalker, the Agency of Space can be anyone, operating anywhere (Careri and Romito 2005, 233).

In thinking about an appropriate site for The Agency of Space's HQ, it is important to consider Sadan's ideas on the reciprocal relationship between the empowerment of the individual and the empowerment of their community; that they are inseparable and strengthen or weaken one another (Sadan 2004, 132). Additionally, she says about community empowerment in the urban setting:

> solidarity can emerge in a residential area when the interests on which it is based stem from non-geographic sources, such as relations of race, religion, ethnicity and class that are expressed in residential neighborhoods. In other words, neighborhoods may serve as arenas in which races, religions, nations or classes are separated spatially and concentrated socially. (93)



Map showing average age in Halifax, between 20 and 70 (base map from HRM 2021a, 2021b; MapCruzin 2021a, 2021b; data from CensusMapper 2021a)

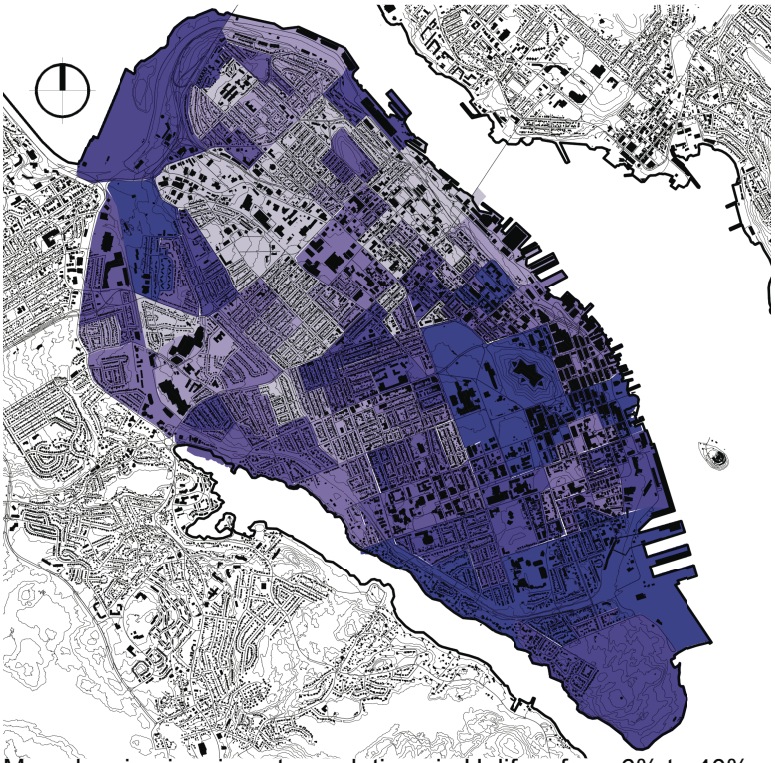


Map showing subsidized housing in Halifax between 2% and 55% (base map from HRM 2021a, 2021b; MapCruzin 2021a, 2021b; data from CensusMapper 2021d)

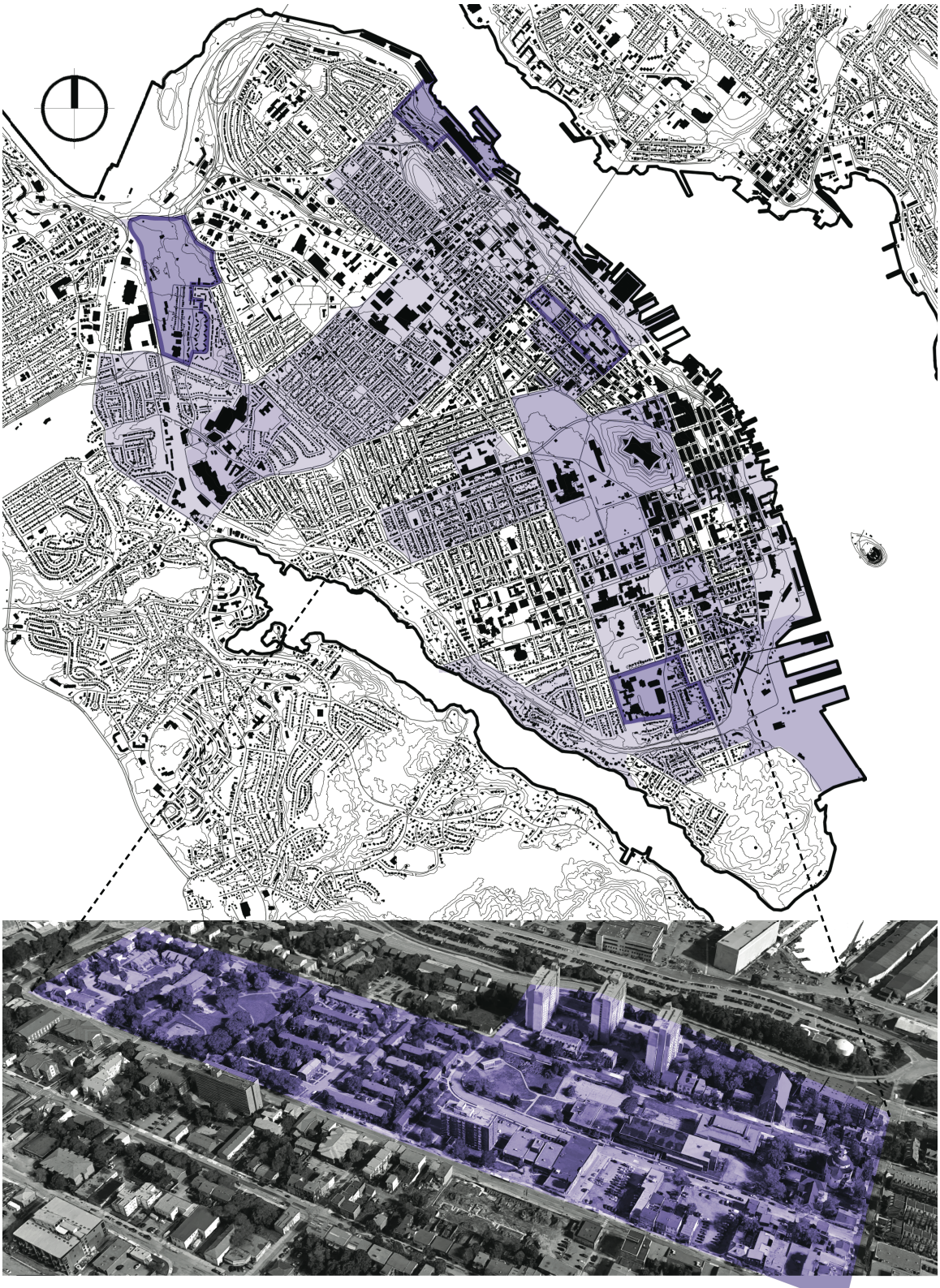
Map showing sex ration in Halifax, between more women to more men (base map from HRM 2021a, 2021b; MapCruzin 2021a, 2021b; data from CensusMapper 2021c)

Map showing average income in Halifax, between 0$ to 300k$ (base map from HRM 2021a, 2021b; MapCruzin 2021a, 2021b; data from CensusMapper 2021b)

Map showing visible minorities in Halifax, between 0% and 70% (base map from HRM 2021a, 2021b; MapCruzin 2021a, 2021b; data from CensusMapper 2021e)



Map showing immigrant populations in Halifax, from 6% to 40% (base map from HRM 2021a, 2021b; MapCruzin 2021a, 2021b; data from CensusMapper 2021f)



(top) Map showing all data superimposed, highlighting 4 areas of highest intersectionality (base map from HRM 2021a, 2021b; MapCruzin 2021a, 2021b; data from CensusMapper 2021a-f). (bottom) Aerial view highlighting Uniacke Square area (base map from Google Maps 2021)

Additionally, she speaks of specific groups of people that experience more directly “the hard social conditions of the United States” (Sadan 2004, 102), a reality that can also be extended to Canada. To this end, she lists the poor, the lower middle class, as well as elderly people, women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities as these groups of people (102), being mindful that

> the professional has to believe in people’s ability to learn and to change and, at the same time, to recognize that oppressed people are liable to possess a distorted consciousness due to their life circumstances. The consciousness of a person submerged in an oppressive reality may become distorted to the point of actual reconciliation with the oppression itself. (114)

So with Halifax, Canada as the chosen city for the HQ of The Agency of Space—simply due to author’s proximity and accessibility for research purposes—mapping average age, subsidized housing, average household income, ration of men to women, visible minorities, and immigrants (spectrum from lighter colors to darker) can make clear areas of interest where The Agency of Space can be most appropriate.

Upon superimposing areas of Halifax with: the most subsidized housing, lowest average household income, higher ration of women to men, most visible minorities, and most immigrants, four areas showed the most overlap, with Mulgrave Park and Bayers Park at the higher end of the spectrum and Uniacke Square and Gorsebrook Park on the lower end. As a result, Uniacke Square was chosen for the site due to familiarity of the author to the area, the history of its population, centrality of its location, existing institutions in the neighborhood, and its several areas for potential location of The Agency of Space’s HQ.

Uniacke Square

Uniacke Square is located in what is called the North End of Halifax. It was opened in 1966 as a 250-unit public housing project that was to house the displaced populations of the historic Africville (Kimber 2007), which was “once the location of a historic Black community” whose “houses were demolished in the 1960s and the land converted into municipally owned” for the purpose of urban developments (Canada’s Historic Place n.d.). Many of this historic Black community have direct connections to former slaves and Black Loyalists (Bresge 2018). The intentions for Uniacke Square on behalf of the city planners of the time was that

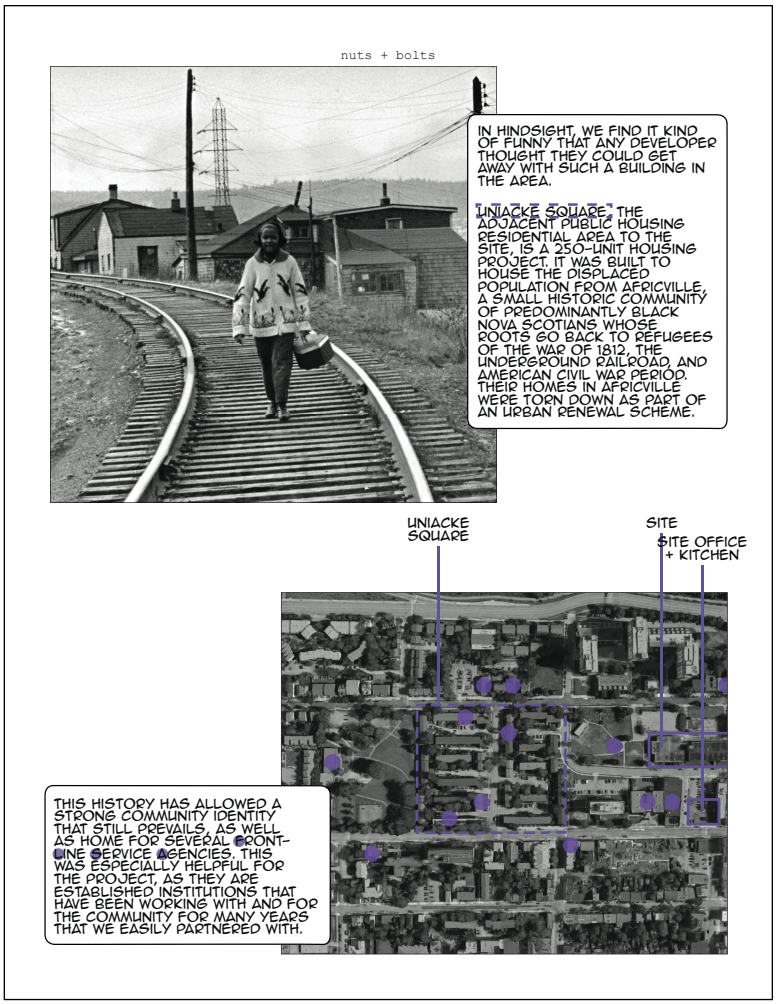
> the people whose homes, communities and histories were to be wiped out would [. . .] get the chance to live in modern, efficient, subsidized housing for a few years until they made their inevitable—if magical, mysterious—transition from former urban poverty to future suburban prosperity. (Kimber 2007)

However, in reality, Uniacke Square became “traps for low-income people” who couldn’t “afford to move on,” even if they wanted to (Kimber 2007). Furthermore,

> putting so many poor people together in one place helped turn the projects into breeding grounds for exactly the kinds of problems they were supposed to alleviate: poverty, family breakdown, high dropout rates, drugs, crime. (Kimber 2007)

As a result, Uniacke Square and its surrounding area has become “a favoured dumping ground for all the do-good service agencies no one else wants” (Kimber 2007), today there being upwards of 20.

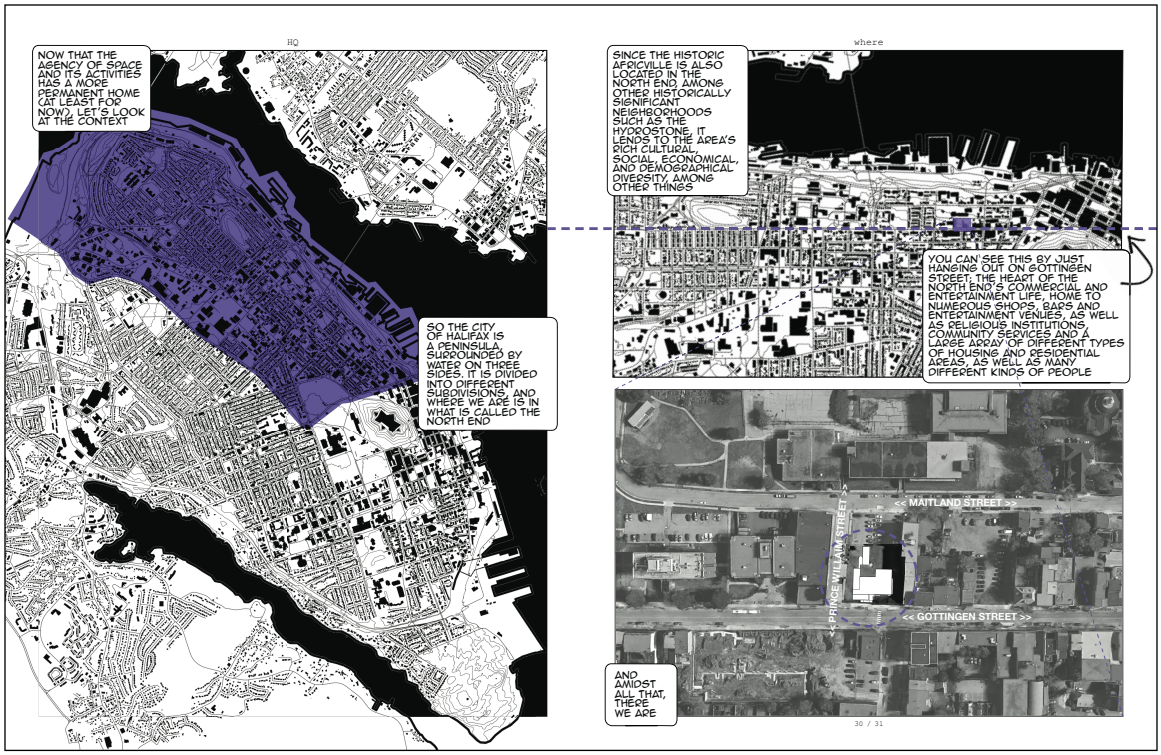
Thus, Halifax’s north end has historically been populated by black-owned businesses, however, today it “reckons with the forces of gentrification, which have transformed the neighbourhood in recent years with an influx of new business owners” (Bresge 2018). This is evident through



Page from the graphic novel explaining the context of the project of Uniacke Square, making it a plausible place for the story of The Agency of Space to take place.

one of Halifax's main arteries, Gottingen Street, which Uniacke Square is adjacent to, as well as Agricola Street, a smaller but bustling street a few blocks west of Uniacke Square.

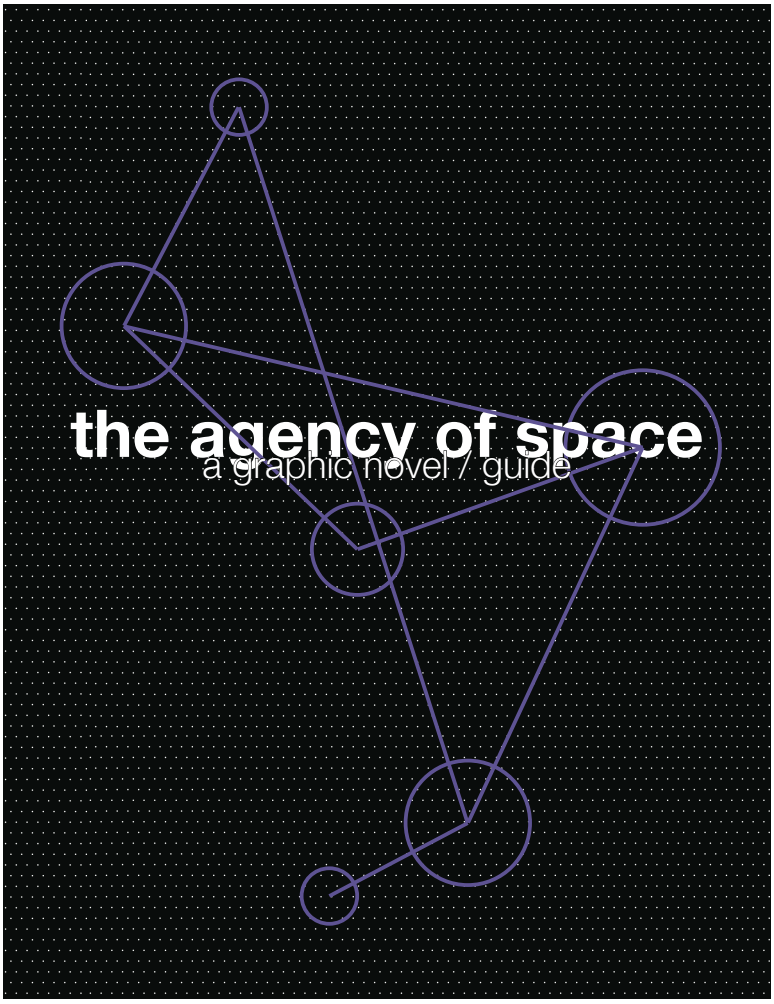
Such a rich history, albeit tumultuous, lending to an area with such a rich diversity, socially and economically, seems like matchless conditions for the placement of The Agency of Space and its headquarters, and fo its story to unfold. There lies potential for a large constellation of collaborators and collaborations that can take into account a large cross-section of its people and potential.

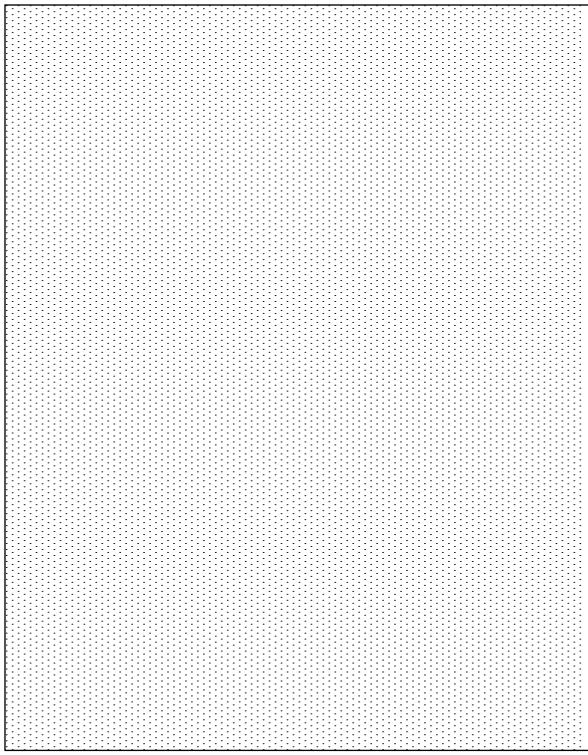


Spread from the graphic novel describing the context of the project of Uniacke Square, making it a plausible place for the story of The Agency of Space to take place.

Chapter 8: The Agency of Space: A Graphic Novel/Guide

In this chapter, the entire graphic novel of this thesis project is showcased.





the agency of space

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hello.

welcome to our graphic novel / guide.

we are the agency of space, a fictitious [expanded notion of an] architectural practice based in halifax, canada, concoted by the (sleepy) brain of architecture student, bahia burias, in her last semester of an architectural graduate degree.

although we are not really real, we are based on real people doing real things out there in the real world. they are making real change in the way that architecture is practiced (see acknowledgements!)

we're not so sure if it's because there are not many architects/architect-like people out there challenging the status quo, or if literally everything and everyone is going through some kind of reckoning right now that's demanding transformation, or if it's just the process-focused nature of our work, but what we do is kind of hard to pin down. it's ever-changing, open-ended, and messy.

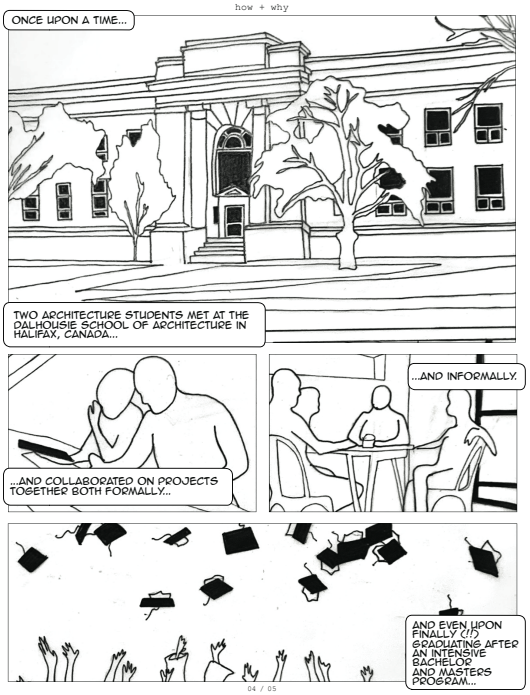
for that reason, we put together this guide that can hopefully explain: 1 how and why we came to be, 2 the nuts and bolts of our operation, and finally, 3 the home of where it all happens.

disclaimer: we aren't necessarily proposing that all architects should practice the way that we do. there is a beauty in the plurality of all the different ways we choose to practice. however, we do believe it is of utmost importance to understand a building as a network of processes, not a product, and be conscious of it, not as a solitary object, but as spaces where people live out their entire lives.

chapter 01
origin story / how + why

origin story

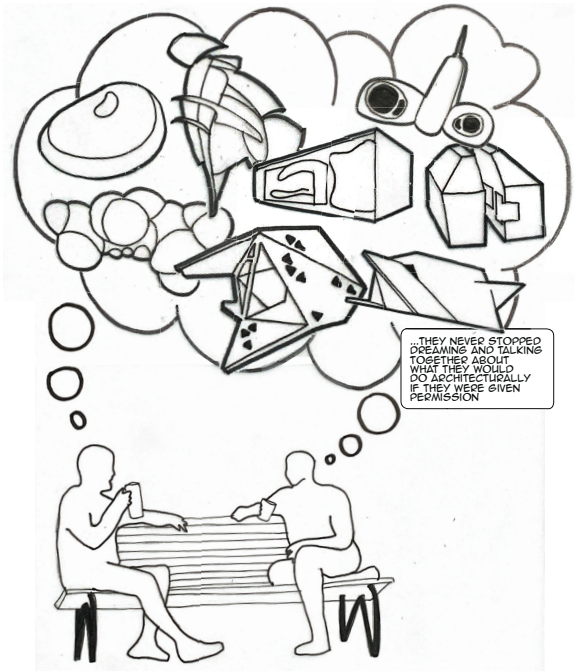
how + why



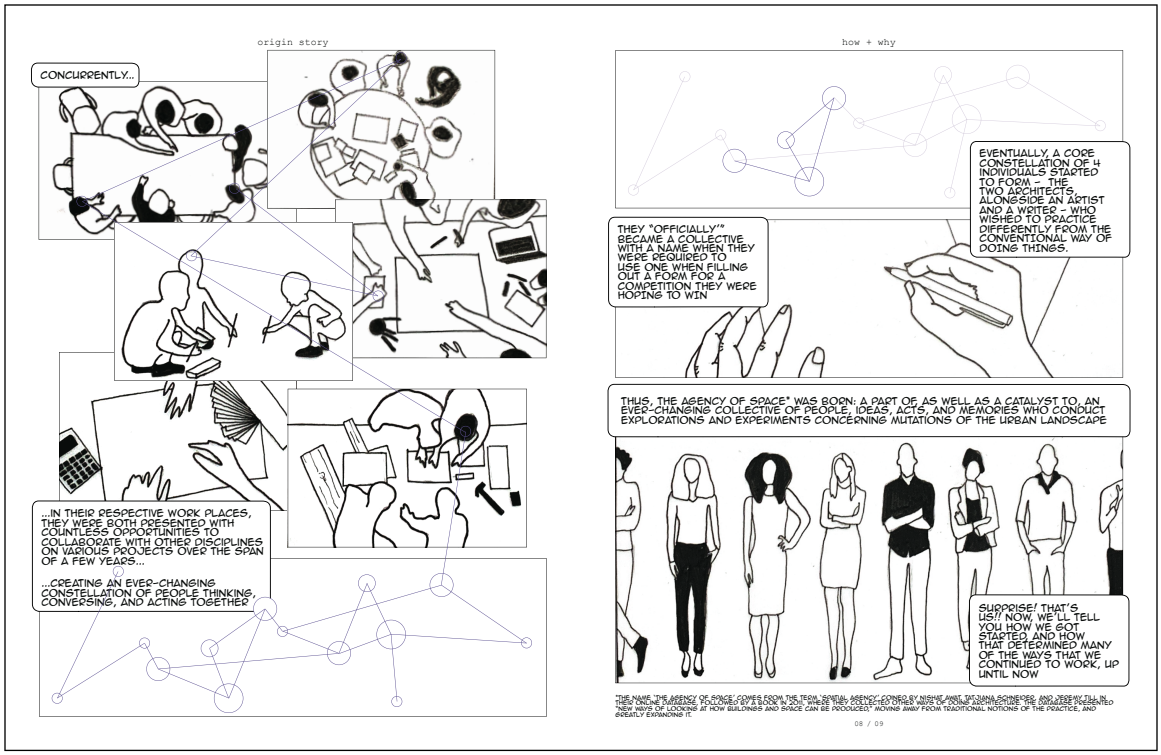
04 / 05

origin story

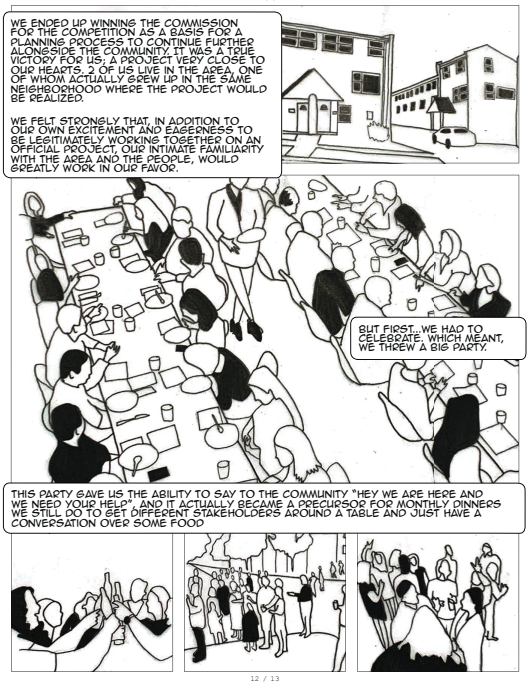
how + why



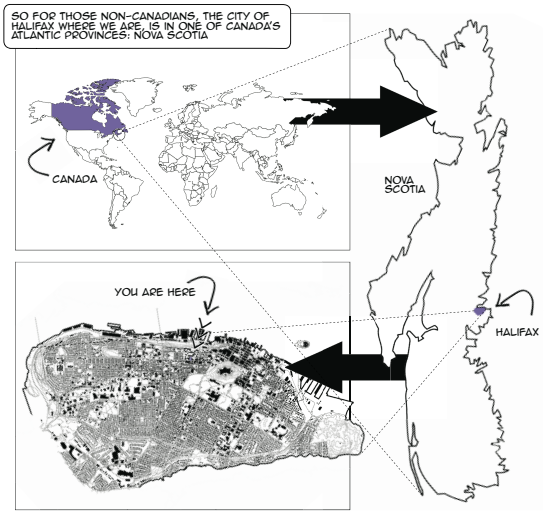
06 / 07



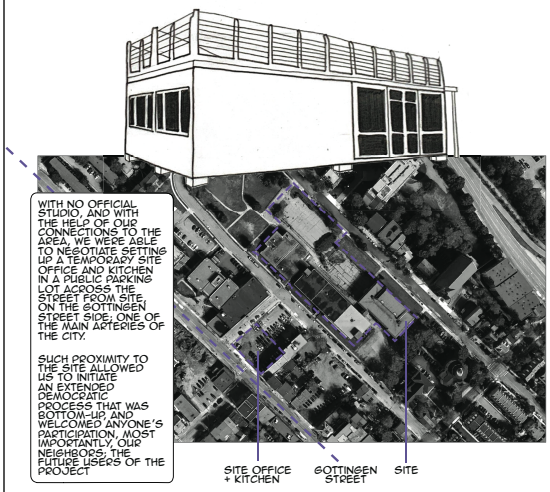
chapter 02
nuts + bolts / what


WE ENDED UP WINNING THE COMMISSION FOR THE COMPETITION AS A BASIS FOR A PLANNING PROCESS TO CONTINUE FURTHER ALONGSIDE THE COMMUNITY. IT WAS A TRUE VICTORY FOR US; A PROJECT VERY CLOSE TO OUR HEARTS. 2 OF US LIVE IN THE AREA, ONE OF WHOM ACTUALLY GREW UP IN THE SAME NEIGHBOURHOOD WHERE THE PROJECT WOULD BE REALIZED.
WE FELT STRONGLY THAT, IN ADDITION TO OUR OWN EXCITEMENT AND EAGERNESS TO BE LEGITIMATELY WORKING TOGETHER ON AN OFFICIAL PROJECT, OUR INTIMATE FAMILIARITY WITH THE AREA AND THE PEOPLE, WOULD GREATLY WORK IN OUR FAVOR.
BUT FIRST...WE HAD TO CELEBRATE. WHICH MEANT, WE THREW A BIG PARTY.
THIS PARTY GAVE US THE ABILITY TO SAY TO THE COMMUNITY "HEY WE ARE HERE AND WE NEED YOUR HELP", AND IT ACTUALLY BECAME A PRECURSOR FOR MONTHLY DINNERS WE STILL DO TO GET DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS AROUND A TABLE AND JUST HAVE A CONVERSATION OVER SOME FOOD

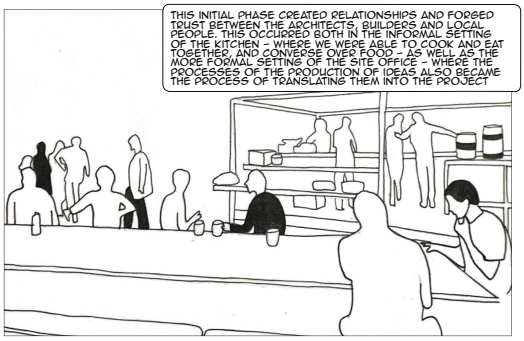
THE DAY AFTER WAS ADMITTEDLY PRETTY ROUGH. BUT WE HAD TO GET WORKING.


SO FOR THOSE NON-CANADIANS, THE CITY OF HALIFAX WHERE WE ARE, IS IN ONE OF CANADA'S ATLANTIC PROVINCES: NOVA SCOTIA
CANADA
NOVA SCOTIA
YOU ARE HERE
HALIFAX

nuts + bolts



what



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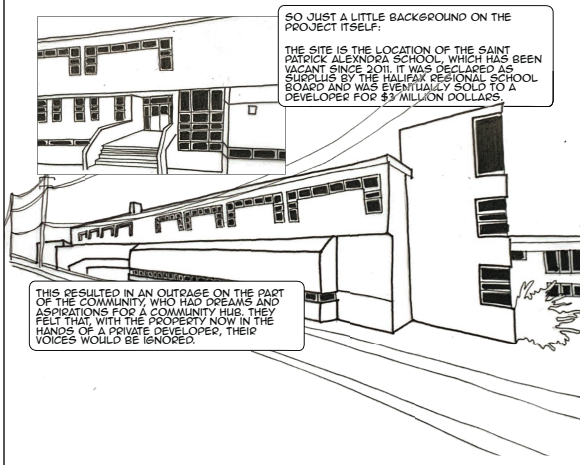
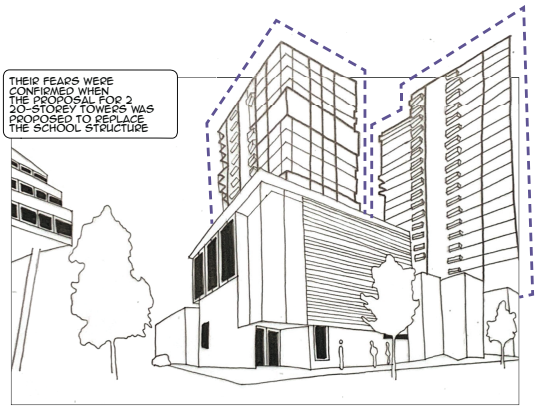
nuts + bolts



what



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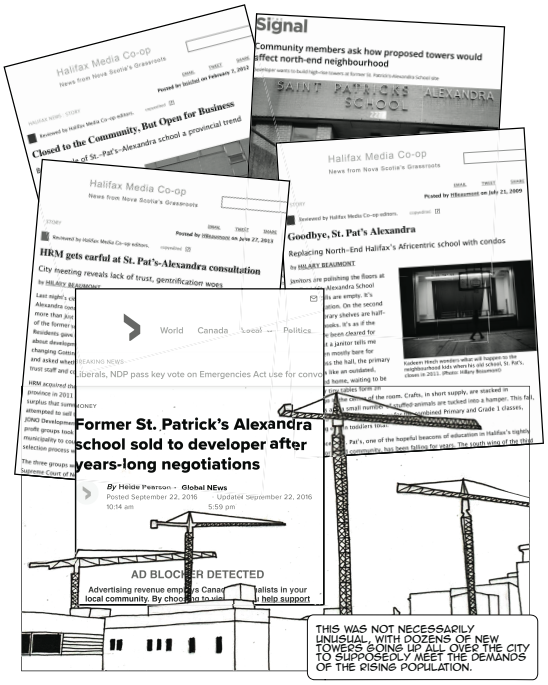
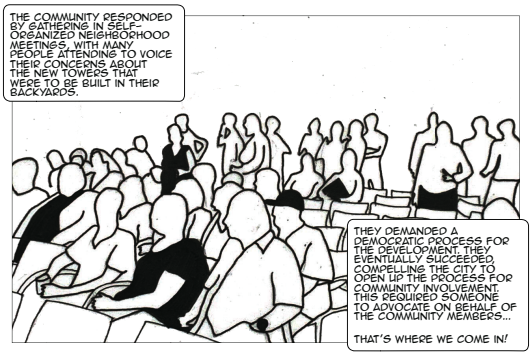
nuts + bolts



THIS WAS NOT NECESSARILY UNUSUAL, WITH DOZENS OF NEW TOWERS GOING UP ALL OVER THE CITY TO SUPPOSEDLY MEET THE DEMANDS OF THE RISING POPULATION.

what

THE COMMUNITY RESPONDED BY GATHERING IN SELF-ORGANIZED NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS, WITH MANY PEOPLE ATTENDING TO VOICE THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT THE NEW TOWERS THAT WERE TO BE BUILT IN THEIR BACKYARDS.



THEY DEMANDED A DEMOCRATIC PROCESS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT. THEY EVENTUALLY SUCCEEDED, COMPELLING THE CITY TO OPEN UP THE PROCESS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT. THIS REQUIRED SOMEONE TO ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS...

THAT'S WHERE WE COME IN!

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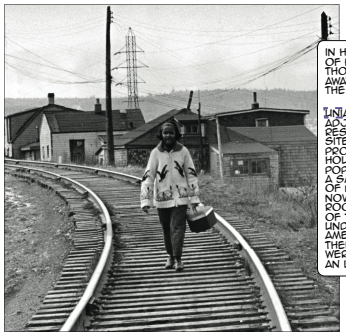
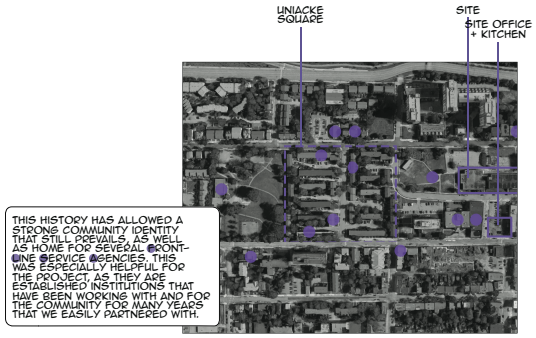
nuts + bolts



IN HINDSIGHT, WE FIND IT KIND OF FUNNY THAT ANY DEVELOPER THOUGHT THEY COULD GET AWAY WITH SUCH A BUILDING IN THE AREA.

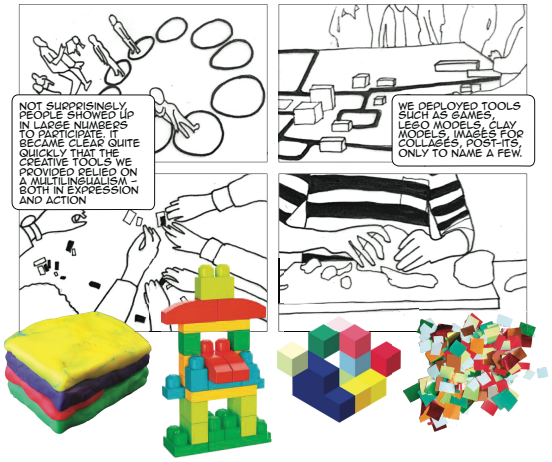
UNIACKE SQUARE, THE ADJACENT PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTIAL AREA TO THE SITE, IS A 250-UNIT HOUSING PROJECT. IT WAS BUILT TO HOUSE THE DISPLACED POPULATION FROM AFRICVILLE, A SMALL HISTORIC COMMUNITY OF PREDOMINANTLY BLACK NOVA SCOTIANS WHOSE ROOTS GO BACK TO REFUGEES OF THE WAR OF 1812, THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD, AND AMERICAN CIVIL WAR PERIOD. THEIR HOMES IN AFRICVILLE WERE TORN DOWN AS PART OF AN URBAN RENEWAL SCHEME.



THIS HISTORY HAS ALLOWED A STRONG COMMUNITY IDENTITY THAT STILL PREVAILS, AS WELL AS HOME FOR SEVERAL CONTINUE SERVICE AGENCIES. THIS WAS ESPECIALLY HELPFUL FOR THE PROJECT, AS THEY ARE ESTABLISHED INSTITUTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH AND FOR THE COMMUNITY FOR MANY YEARS THAT WE EASILY PARTNERED WITH.

what

NOT SURPRISINGLY, PEOPLE SHOWED UP IN LARGE NUMBERS TO PASTICIPATE. IT BECAME CLEAR QUITE QUICKLY THAT THE CREATIVE TOOLS WE PROVIDED RELIED ON A MULTILINGUALISM – BOTH IN EXPRESSION AND ACTION



WE DEPLOYED TOOLS SUCH AS GAMES, LEGO MODELS, CLAY MODELS, IMAGES FOR COLLAGES, POST-ITS, ONLY TO NAME A FEW.

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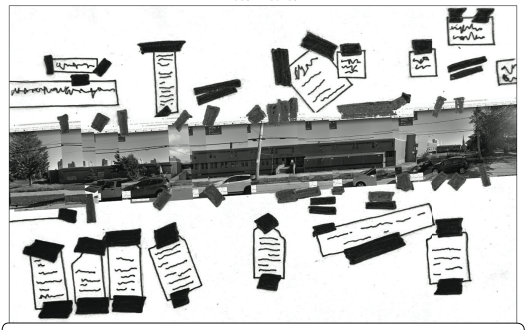
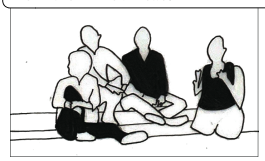
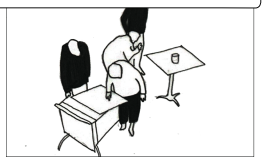


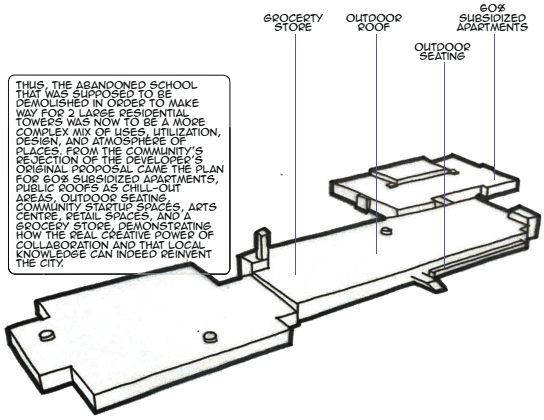
WE EVEN HAD ROLEPLAYING AND THEATRE-LIKE WORKSHOPS WHERE PARTICIPANTS WERE GIVEN SITUATIONS TO ACT OUT. AS SUCH, SPACES WERE REIMAGINED AND POTENTIAL FOR USES REALIZED. THIS WAS ALSO TRUE IN REAL-TIME AS THE SIDEWALK BECAME SEATING AND SHOPPING CARTS BECOME DRAWING BOARDS; THE STREET TRANSFORMED INTO A PUBLIC PLANNING OFFICE.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF A LOCAL DJ, BICYCLE COURIER, DOUGHNUT BAKER, AND A RECENT IMMIGRANT ALL BECOME CONTRIBUTIONS, HELPING US SHARPEN THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT. ALL OF THE DREAMT-UP PRODUCTION RESULTS WERE ARCHIVED, EVALUATED, AND THEMATICALLY CLUSTERED USING STRATEGIC, CREATIVE, AND CULTURAL SCIENTIFIC METHODS. THUS, 2,300 CONTRIBUTIONS OVER A SPAN OF ALMOST A YEAR GAVE RISE TO THE PROJECT'S REQUIREMENTS





THUS, THE ABANDONED SCHOOL THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE DEMOLISHED IN ORDER TO MAKE WAY FOR 2 LARGE RESIDENTIAL TOWERS WAS NOW TO BE A MORE COMPLEX MIX OF USES, UTILIZATION, DESIGN, AND ATMOSPHERE OF PLACES. FROM THE COMMUNITY'S REJECTION OF THE DEVELOPER'S ORIGINAL PROPOSAL CAME THE PLAN FOR 60% SUBSIDIZED APARTMENTS, PUBLIC ROOFS AS CHILL-OUT AREAS, OUTDOOR SEATING, COMMUNITY STARTUP SPACES, ARTS CENTRE, RETAIL SPACES, AND A GROCERY STORE, DEMONSTRATING HOW THE REAL CREATIVE POWER OF COLLABORATION AND THAT LOCAL KNOWLEDGE CAN INDEED REINVENT THE CITY.



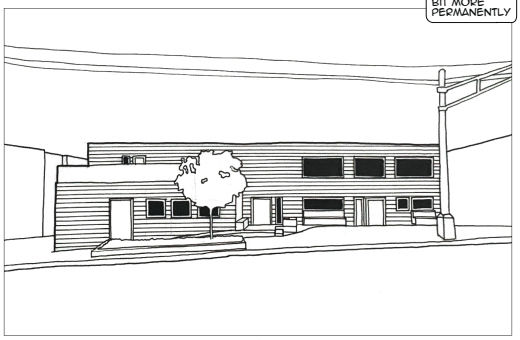
chapter 03.1
HQ / where

HQ

where

NOWADAYS, MANY YEARS LATER, WE'DE STILL HERE!

JUST A BIT MORE PERMANENTLY



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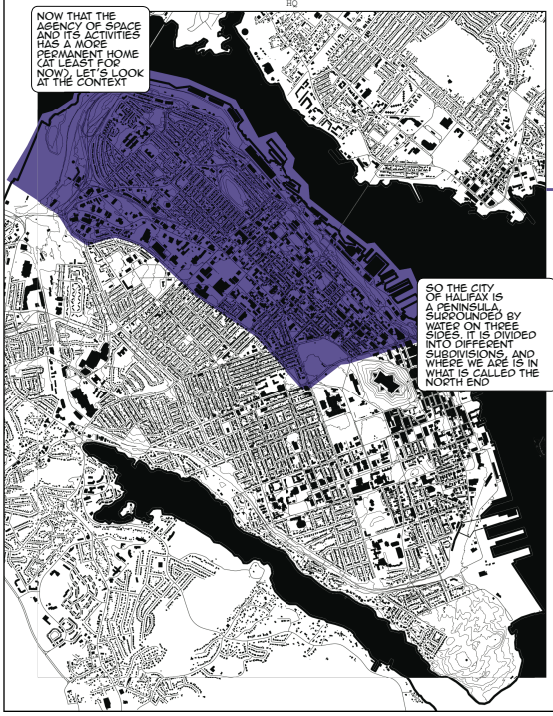
HQ

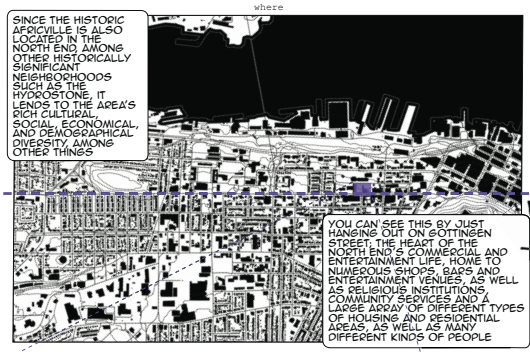
NOW THAT THE AGENCY OF SPACE AND ITS ACTIVITIES HAS A MORE PERMANENT HOME (AT LEAST FOR NOW), LET'S LOOK AT THE CONTEXT



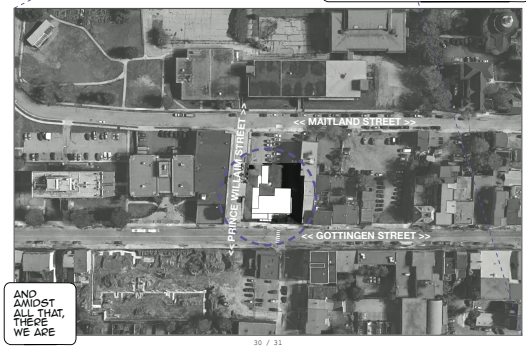
SO THE CITY OF HALIFAX IS A PENINSULA, SURROUNDED BY WATER ON THREE SIDES. IT IS DIVIDED INTO DIFFERENT SUBDIVISIONS, AND WHERE WE ARE IS IN WHAT IS CALLED THE NORTH END

where

SINCE THE HISTORIC AFRICVILLE IS ALSO LOCATED IN THE NORTH END, AMONG OTHER HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT NEIGHBORHOODS SUCH AS THE HYDOSTONE, IT LENDS TO THE AREA'S RICH CULTURAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMICAL, AND DEMOGRAPHICAL DIVERSITY, AMONG OTHER THINGS



YOU CAN SEE THIS BY JUST HANGING OUT ON GOTTINGEN STREET: THE HEART OF THE NORTH END'S COMMERCIAL AND ENTERTAINMENT LIFE, HOME TO NUMEROUS SHOPS, BARS AND ENTERTAINMENT VENUES, AS WELL AS RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND A LARGE ARRAY OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS, AS WELL AS MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEOPLE



AND AMIDST ALL THAT, THERE WE ARE

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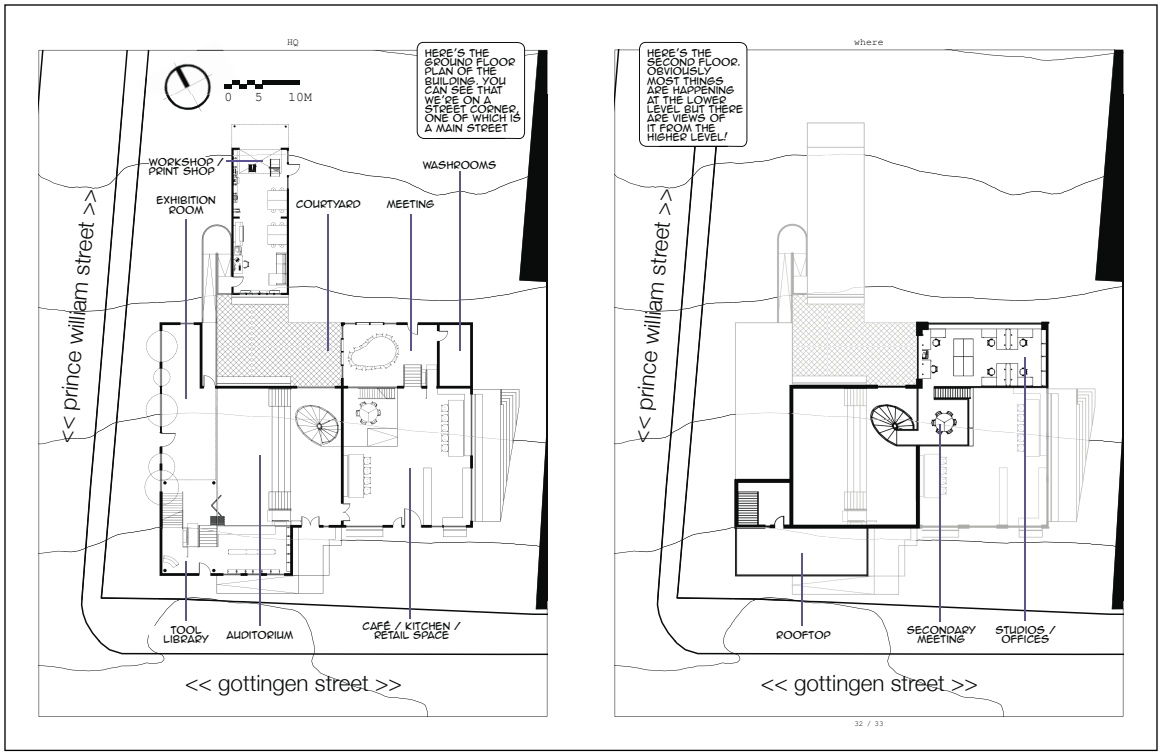
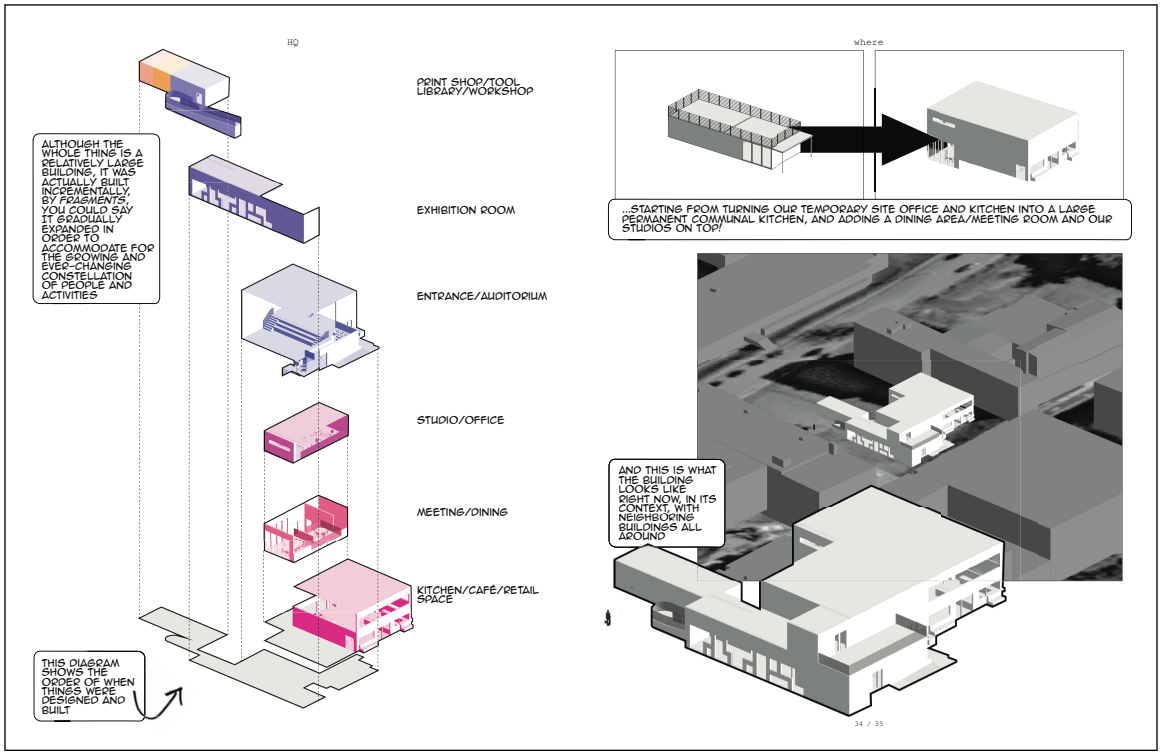

HQ
HERE'S THE GROUND FLOOR PLAN OF THE BUILDING. YOU CAN SEE THAT WE'RE ON A STREET CORNER ONE OF WHICH IS A MAIN STREET
0 5 10M
WORKSHOP / PRINT SHOP
EXHIBITION ROOM
COURTYARD
MEETING
WASHROOMS
<< prince william street >>
TOOL LIBRARY
AUDITORIUM
CAFÉ / KITCHEN / RETAIL SPACE
<< gottingen street >>
32 / 33
where
HERE'S THE SECOND FLOOR. OBVIOUSLY MOST THINGS ARE HAPPENING AT THE LOWER LEVEL BUT THERE ARE VIEWS OF IT FROM THE HIGHER LEVEL!
<< prince william street >>
ROOFTOP
SECONDARY MEETING
STUDIOS / OFFICES
<< gottingen street >>


HQ
ALTHOUGH THE WHOLE THING IS A RELATIVELY LARGE BUILDING, IT WAS ACTUALLY BUILT INCREMENTALLY, BY FRAGMENTS. YOU COULD SAY IT GRADUALLY EXPANDED IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE FOR THE GROWING AND EVER-CHANGING CONSTELLATION OF PEOPLE AND ACTIVITIES
PRINT SHOP/TOOL LIBRARY/WORKSHOP
EXHIBITION ROOM
ENTRANCE/AUDITORIUM
STUDIO/OFFICE
MEETING/DINING
KITCHEN/CAFÉ/RETAIL SPACE
THIS DIAGRAM SHOWS THE ORDER OF WHEN THINGS WERE DESIGNED AND BUILT
34 / 35
where
...STARTING FROM TURNING OUR TEMPORARY SITE OFFICE AND KITCHEN INTO A LARGE PERMANENT COMMUNAL KITCHEN, AND ADDING A DINING AREA/MEETING ROOM AND OUR STUDIOS ON TOP!
AND THIS IS WHAT THE BUILDING LOOKS LIKE RIGHT NOW, IN ITS CONTEXT, WITH NEIGHBORING BUILDINGS ALL AROUND

HQ

ANYWAYS, WE'RE NOT HERE RIGHT NOW TO TELL YOU ABOUT CONSTRUCTION. WE'RE HERE TO TELL YOU ABOUT ARCHITECTURE. AND ARCHITECTURE TO US, IS PEOPLE INHABITING A BUILDING.

WE'RE GONNA DO THAT BY FOLLOWING 4 LOVELY GROUPS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE EACH SPATIAL AGENTS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT

name: uniacke square area community

mission: temporary housing to address halifax housing crisis

spatial agency:

nature of relationship: community leader in close collaboration with the agency of space member

building use:

- auditorium
- café
- meeting room

name: dahlia brown

mission: kid friendly tool shed

spatial agency:

nature of relationship: initial consultation about design with the agency of space; mostly independent with exception of help with tools in workshop

building use:

- tool library
- workshop
- studio

where

name: nocturne design team (sameen ferguson)

mission: temporary interactive public art installation

spatial agency:

nature of relationship: currently doing her co-op placement with the agency of space; learner

building use:

- studio
- workshop
- tool library

name: hernandez family (kyle)

mission: temporary housing / home addition

spatial agency:

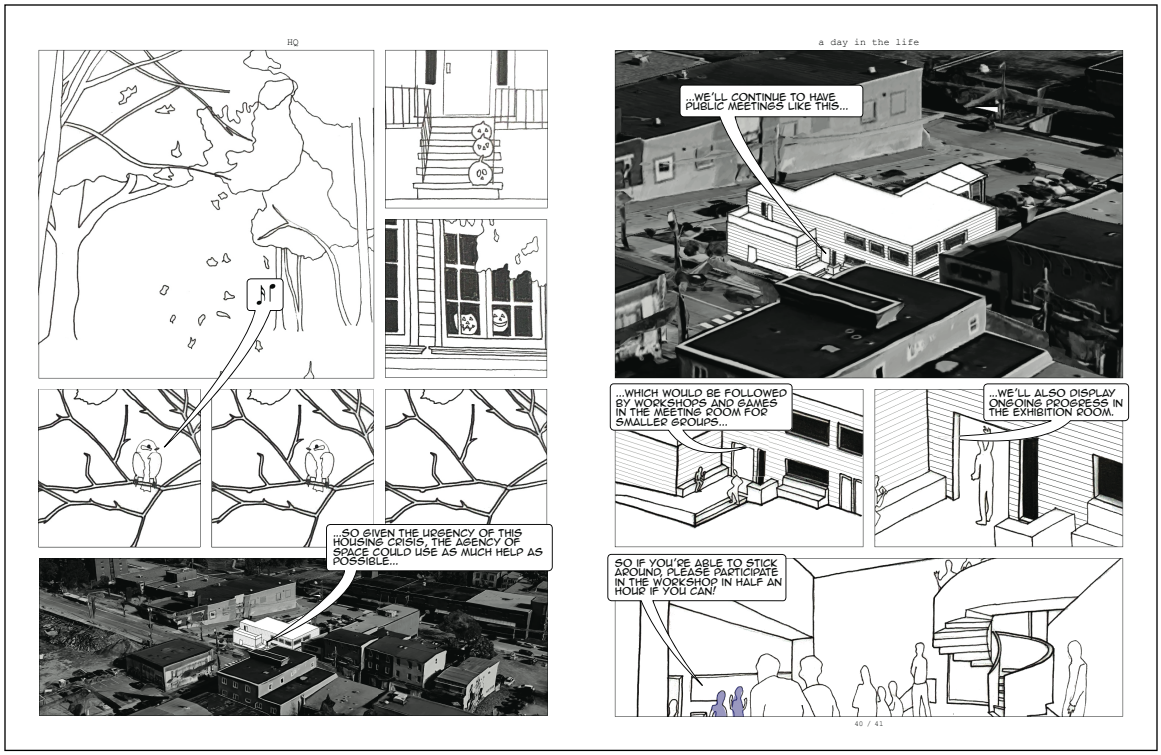
nature of relationship: participating in ongoing temporary housing project; clients of agency of space for home addition

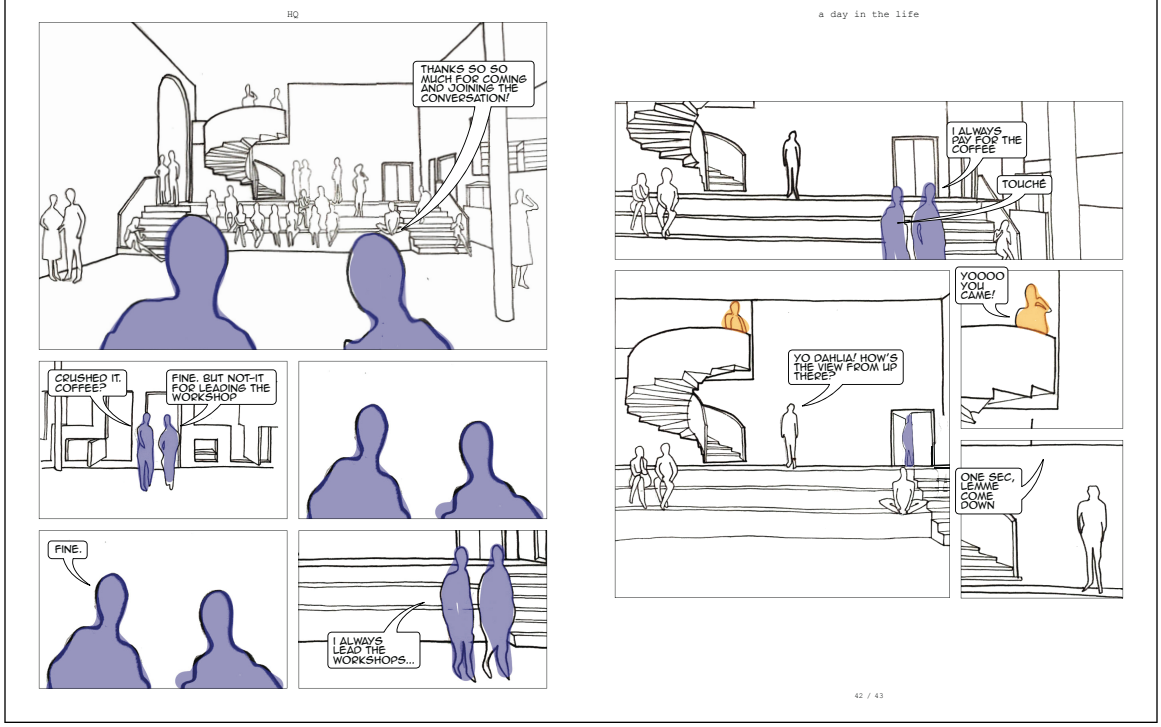
building use:

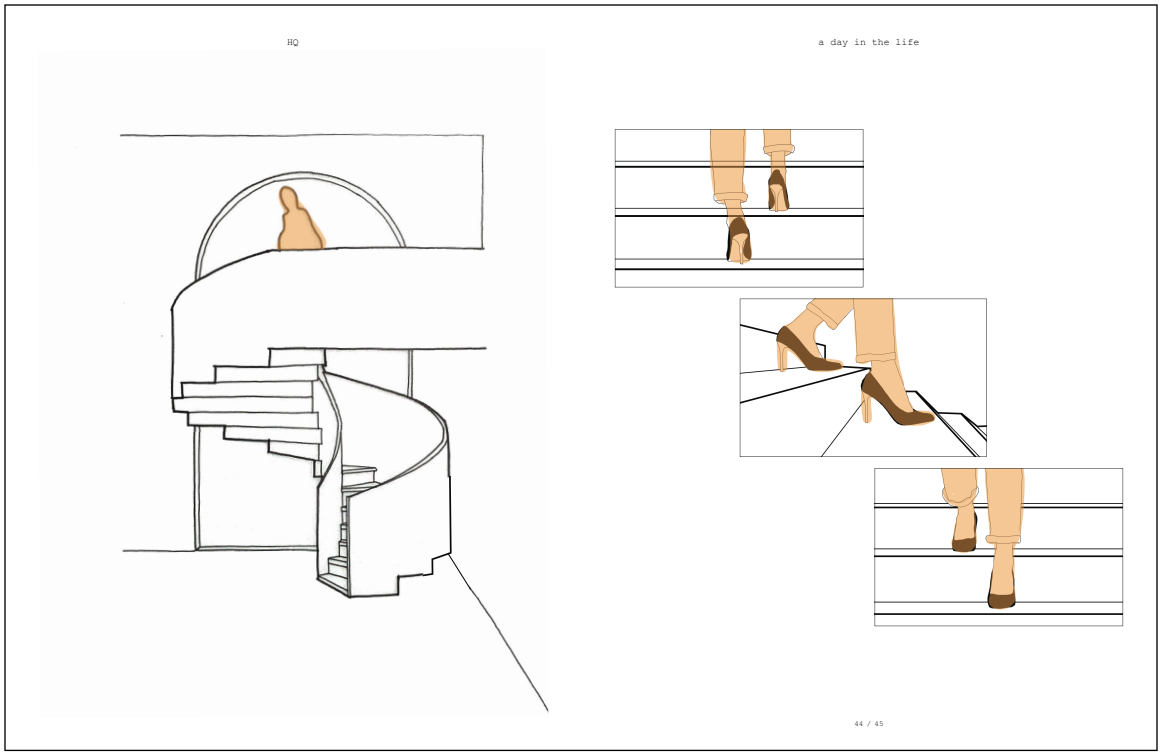
- exhibition room
- print shop
- studio

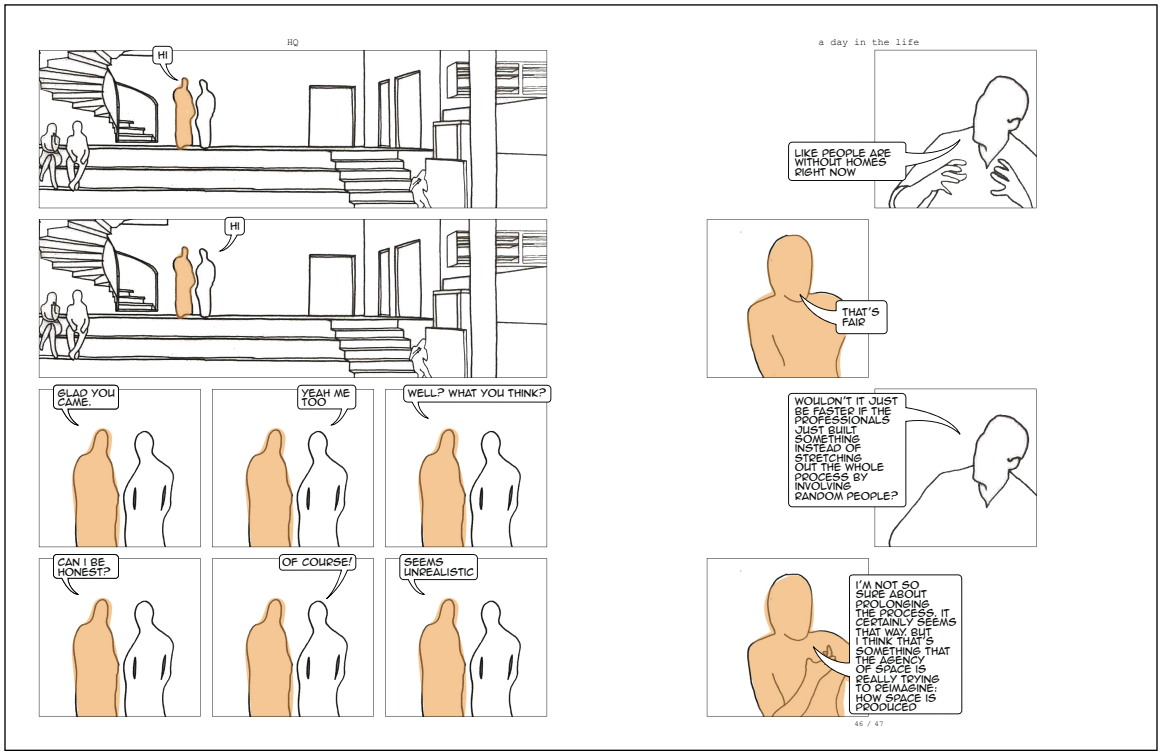
36 / 37

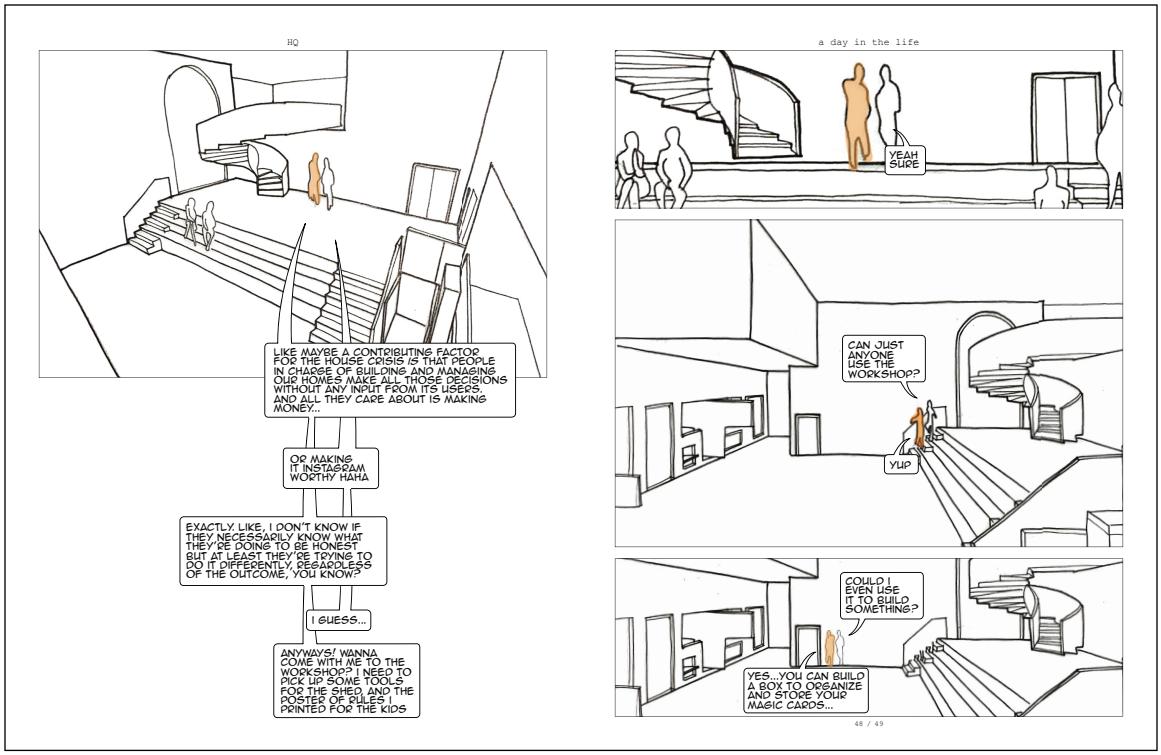
chapter 03.2
a day in the life

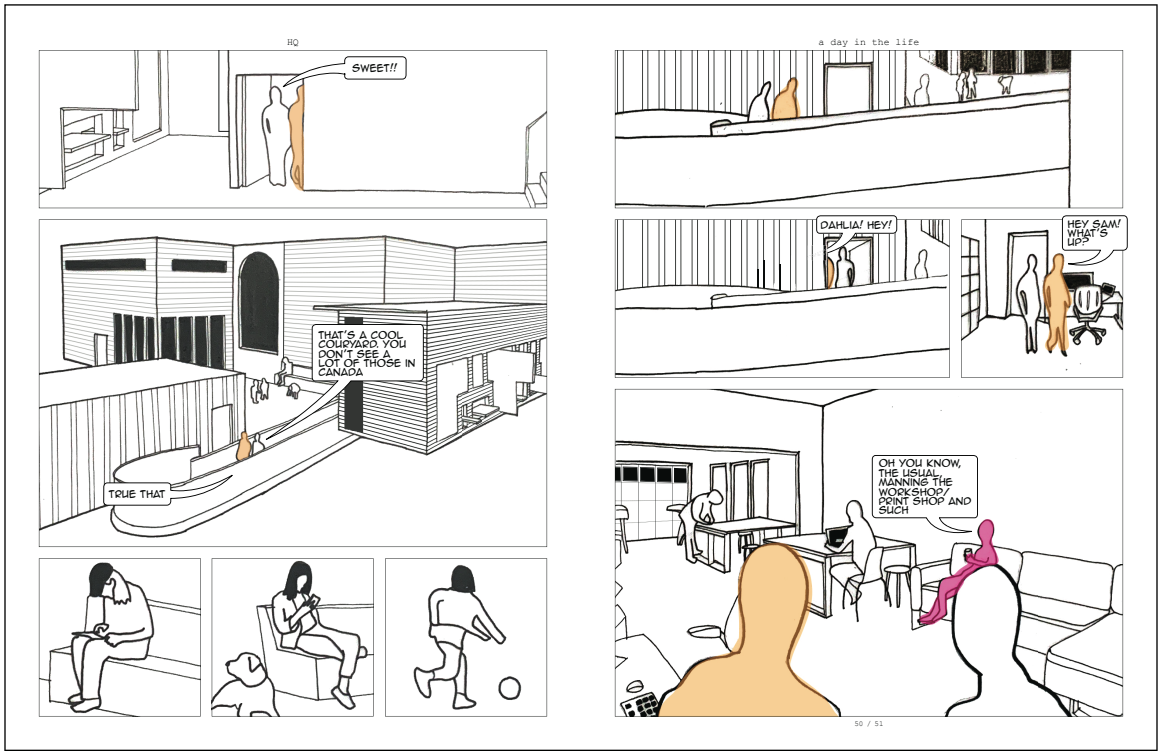

HQ
...SO GIVEN THE URGENCY OF THIS HOUSING CRISIS, THE AGENCY OF SPACE COULD USE AS MUCH HELP AS POSSIBLE...
a day in the life
...WE'LL CONTINUE TO HAVE PUBLIC MEETINGS LIKE THIS...
...WHICH WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY WORKSHOPS AND GAMES IN THE MEETING ROOM FOR SMALLER GROUPS...
...WE'LL ALSO DISPLAY ONGOING PROGRESS IN THE EXHIBITION ROOM.
SO IF YOU'RE ABLE TO STICK AROUND, PLEASE PARTICIPATE IN THE WORKSHOP IN HALF AN HOUR IF YOU CAN!
40 / 41


HQ
THANKS SO SO MUCH FOR COMING AND JOINING THE CONVERSATION!
CRUSHED IT. COFFEE?
FINE. BUT NOT-IT FOR LEADING THE WORKSHOP
FINE.
I ALWAYS LEAD THE WORKSHOPS...
a day in the life
I ALWAYS PAY FOR THE COFFEE
TOUCHÉ
YOOOO YOU CAME!
YO DAHLIA! HOW'S THE VIEW FROM UP THERE?
ONE SEC, LEMME COME DOWN
42 / 43

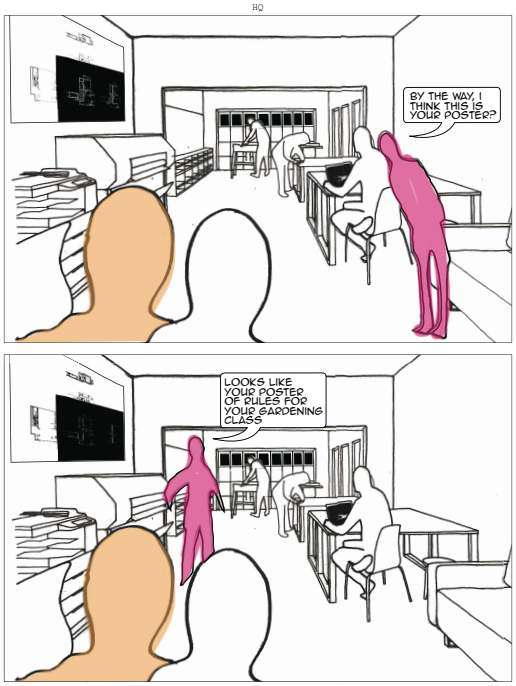

HQ
a day in the life
44 / 45


HQ
HI
HI
GLAD YOU CAME.
YEAH ME TOO
WELL? WHAT YOU THINK?
CAN I BE HONEST?
OF COURSE!
SEEMS UNREALISTIC
a day in the life
LIKE PEOPLE ARE WITHOUT HOMES RIGHT NOW
THAT'S FAIR
WOULDN'T IT JUST BE FASTER IF THE PROFESSIONALS JUST BUILT SOMETHING INSTEAD OF STRETCHING OUT THE WHOLE PROCESS BY INVOLVING RANDOM PEOPLE?
I'M NOT SO SURE ABOUT PROLONGING THE PROCESS. IT CERTAINLY SEEMS THAT WAY, BUT I THINK THAT'S SOMETHING THAT THE AGENCY OF SPACE IS REALLY TRYING TO REIMAGINE: HOW SPACE IS PRODUCED
46 / 47

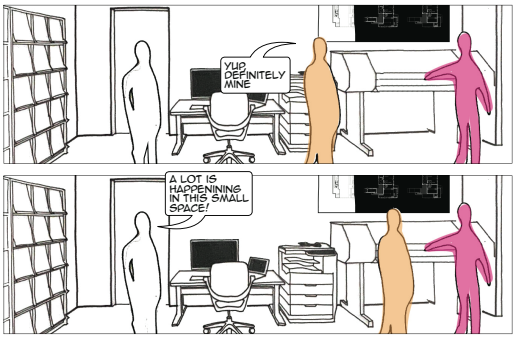

HQ
LIKE MAYBE A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR FOR THE HOUSE CRISIS IS THAT PEOPLE IN CHARGE OF BUILDING AND MANAGING OUR HOMES MAKE ALL THOSE DECISIONS WITHOUT ANY INPUT FROM ITS USERS. AND ALL THEY CARE ABOUT IS MAKING MONEY...
OR MAKING IT INSTAGRAM WORTHY HAHA
EXACTLY LIKE, I DON'T KNOW IF THEY NECESSARILY KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING TO BE HONEST BUT AT LEAST THEY'RE TRYING TO DO IT DIFFERENTLY, REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME, YOU KNOW?
I GUESS...
ANYWAYS! WANNA COME WITH ME TO THE WORKSHOP? I NEED TO PICK UP SOME TOOLS FOR THE SHED AND THE POSTER OF RULES I PRINTED FOR THE KIDS
a day in the life
YEAH SURE
CAN JUST ANYONE USE THE WORKSHOP?
YUP
COULD I EVEN USE IT TO BUILD SOMETHING?
YES...YOU CAN BUILD A BOX TO ORGANIZE AND STORE YOUR MAGIC CARDS...
48 / 49


HQ
SWEET!!
THAT'S A COOL COURTYARD. YOU DON'T SEE A LOT OF THOSE IN CANADA
TRUE THAT
a day in the life
DAHLIA! HEY!
HEY SAM! WHAT'S UP?
OH YOU KNOW, THE USUAL MANNING THE WORKSHOP/ PRINT SHOP AND SUCH
50 / 51

HQ

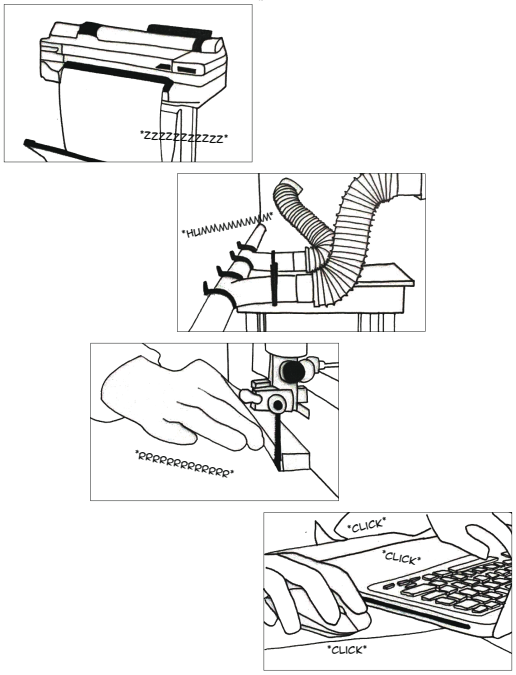


a day in the life

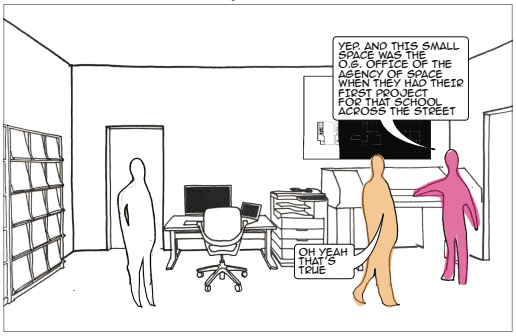


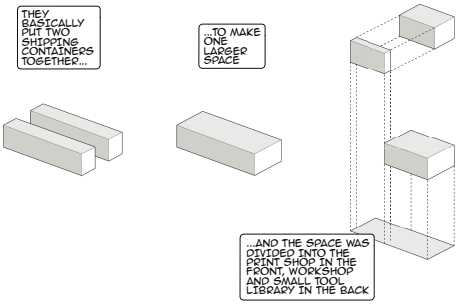
52 / 53

HQ

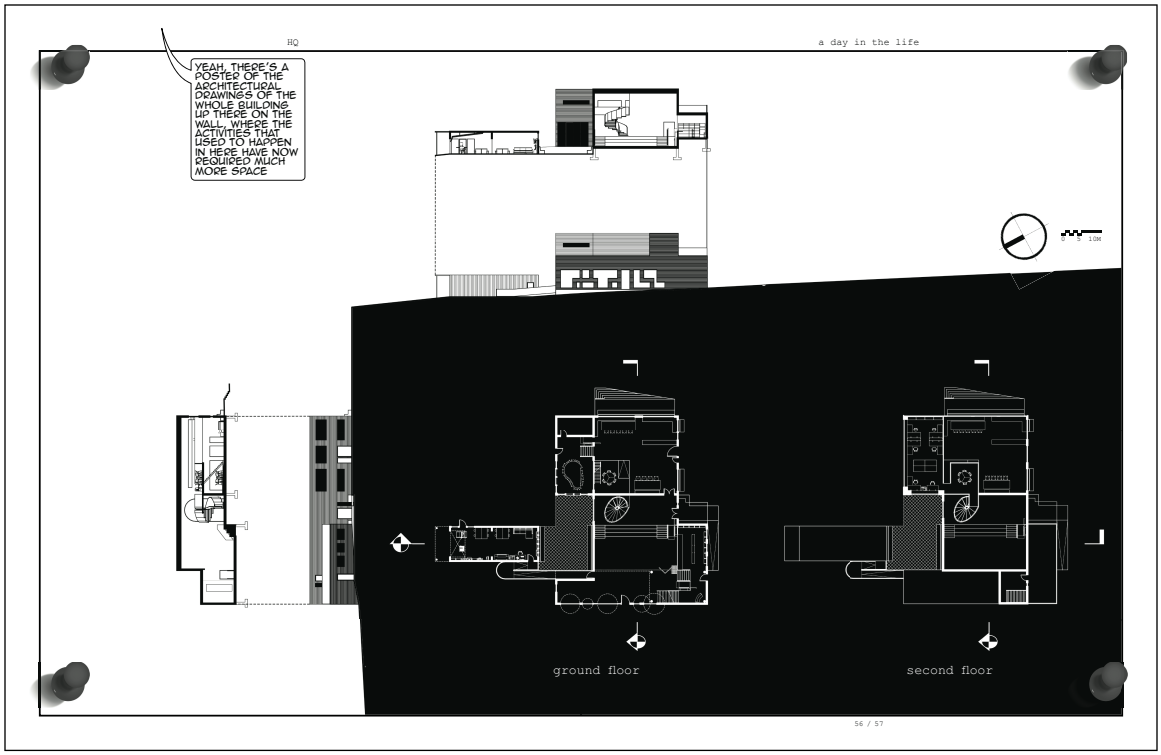


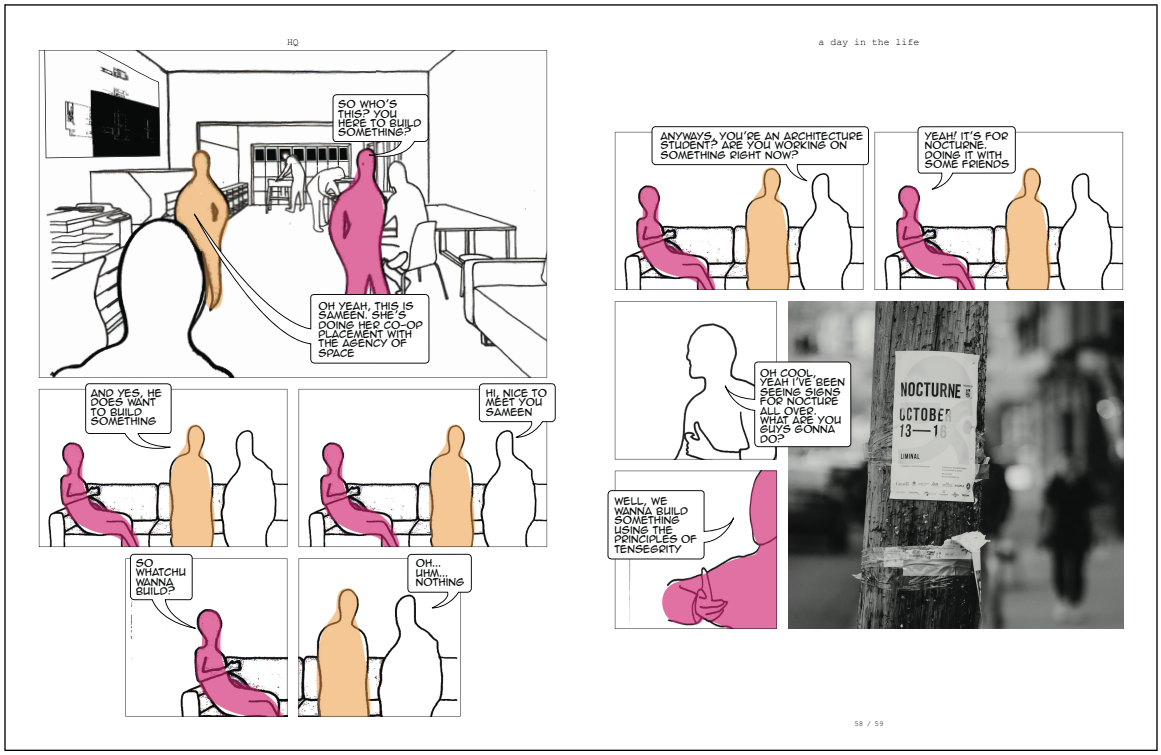
a day in the life

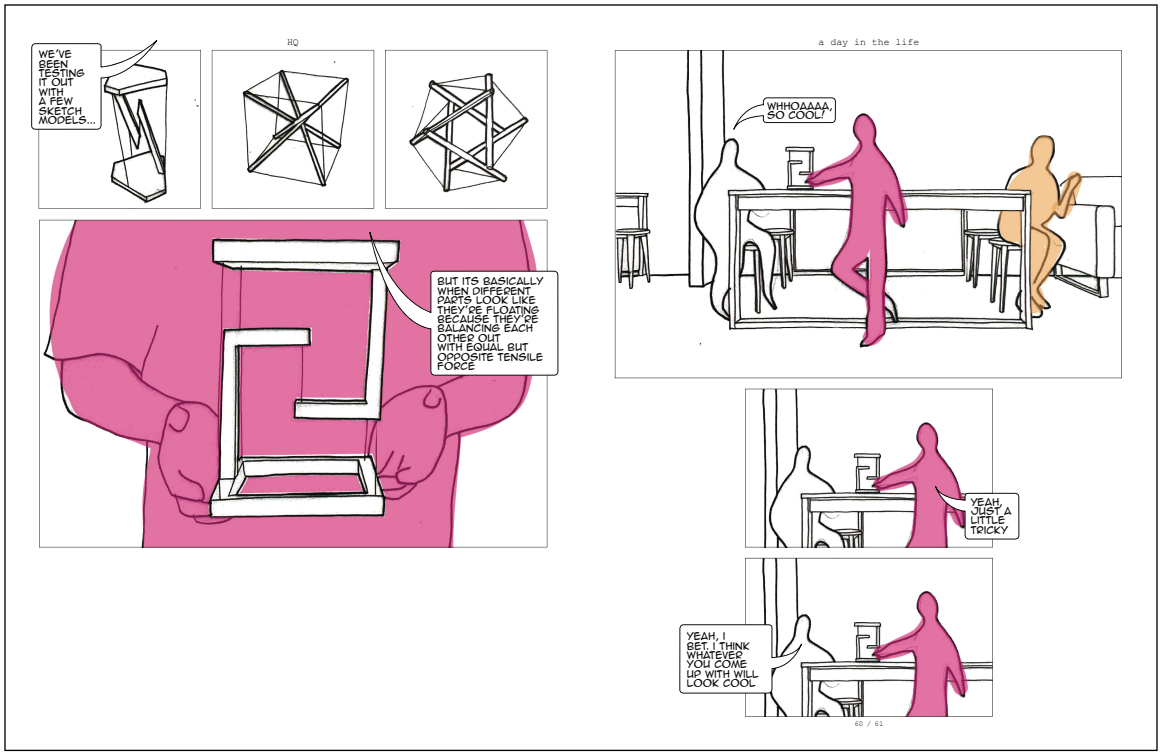


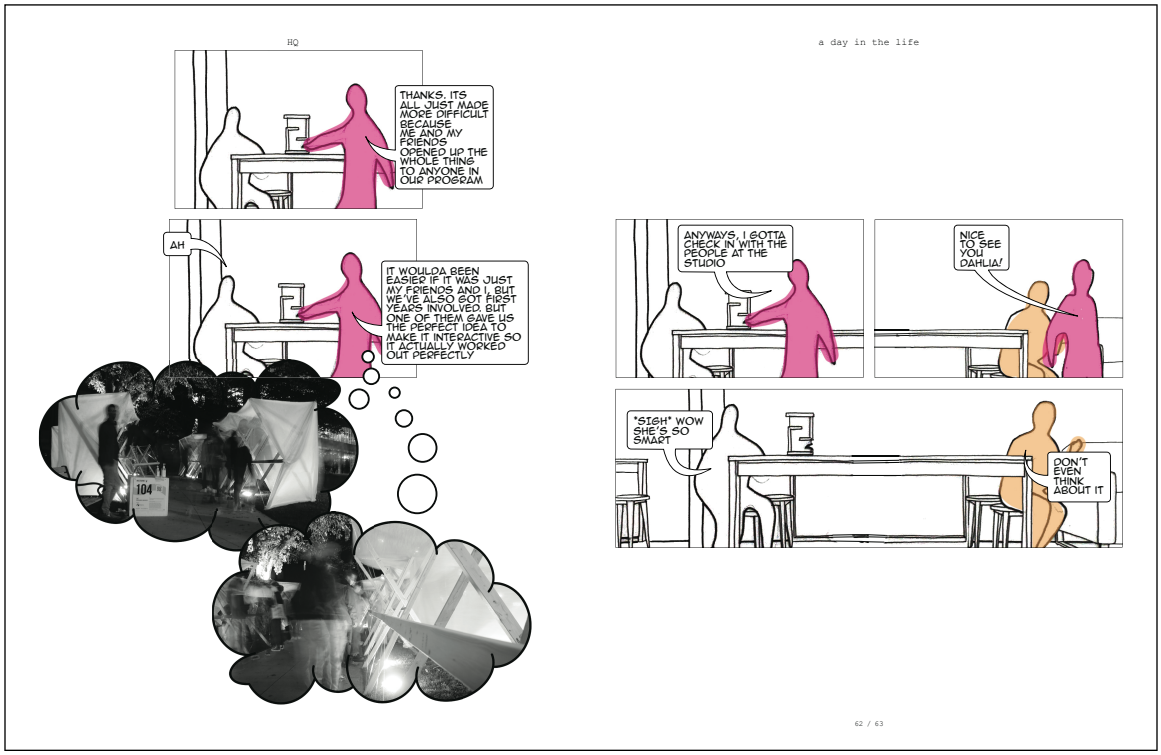


54 / 55

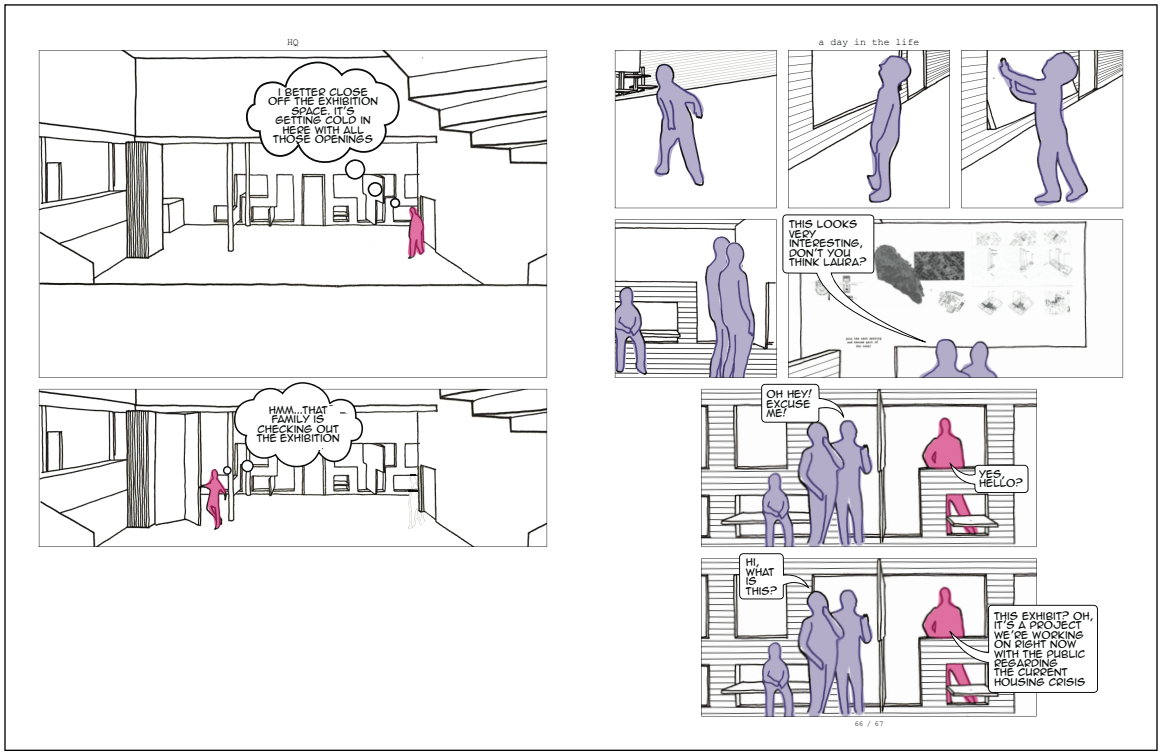

HQ
a day in the life
YEAH, THERE'S A POSTER OF THE ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS OF THE WHOLE BUILDING UP THERE ON THE WALL, WHERE THE ACTIVITIES THAT USED TO HAPPEN IN HERE HAVE NOW REQUIRED MUCH MORE SPACE
ground floor
second floor
56 / 57

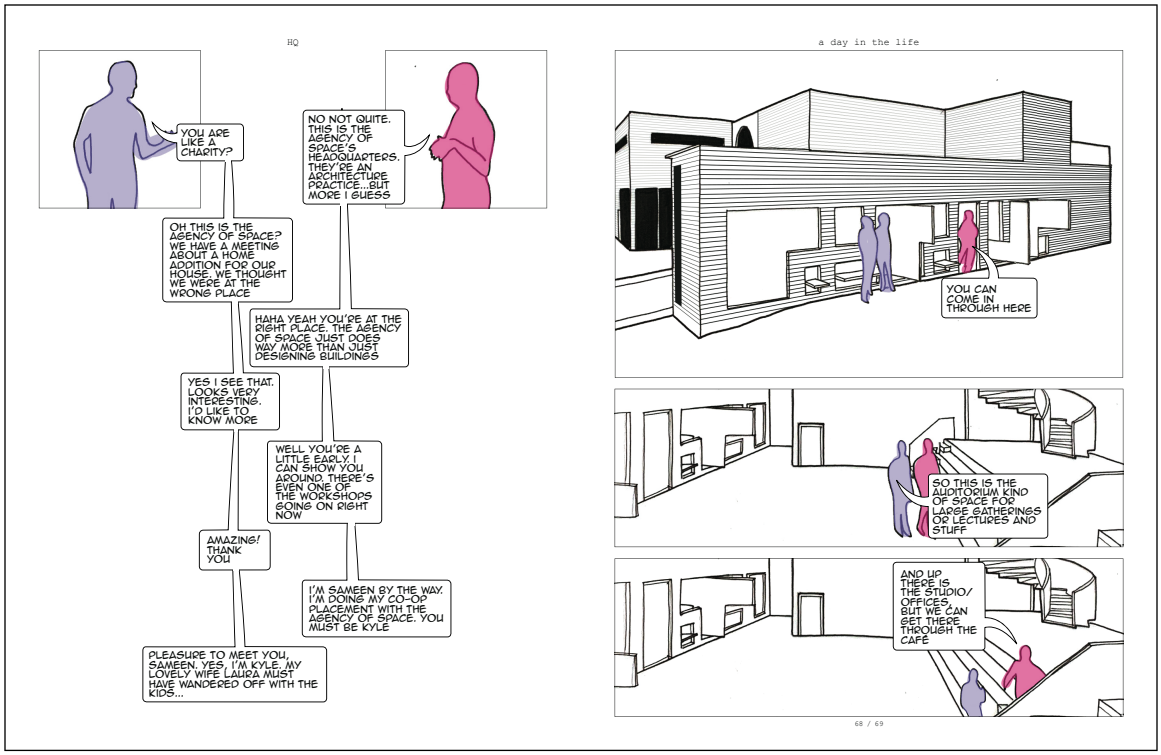

HQ
a day in the life
SO WHO'S THIS? YOU HERE TO BUILD SOMETHING?
OH YEAH, THIS IS SAMEEN, SHE'S DOING HER CO-OP PLACEMENT WITH THE AGENCY OF SPACE
AND YES, HE DOES WANT TO BUILD SOMETHING
HI, NICE TO MEET YOU SAMEEN
SO WHATCHU WANNA BUILD?
OH... UHM... NOTHING
ANYWAYS, YOU'RE AN ARCHITECTURE STUDENT? ARE YOU WORKING ON SOMETHING RIGHT NOW?
YEAH! IT'S FOR NOCTURNE. DOING IT WITH SOME FRIENDS
OH COOL, YEAH I'VE BEEN SEEING SIGNS FOR NOCTURE ALL OVER. WHAT ARE YOU GUYS GONNA DO?
NOCTURNE
WELL, WE WANNA BUILD SOMETHING USING THE PRINCIPLES OF TENSEGRITY
58 / 59

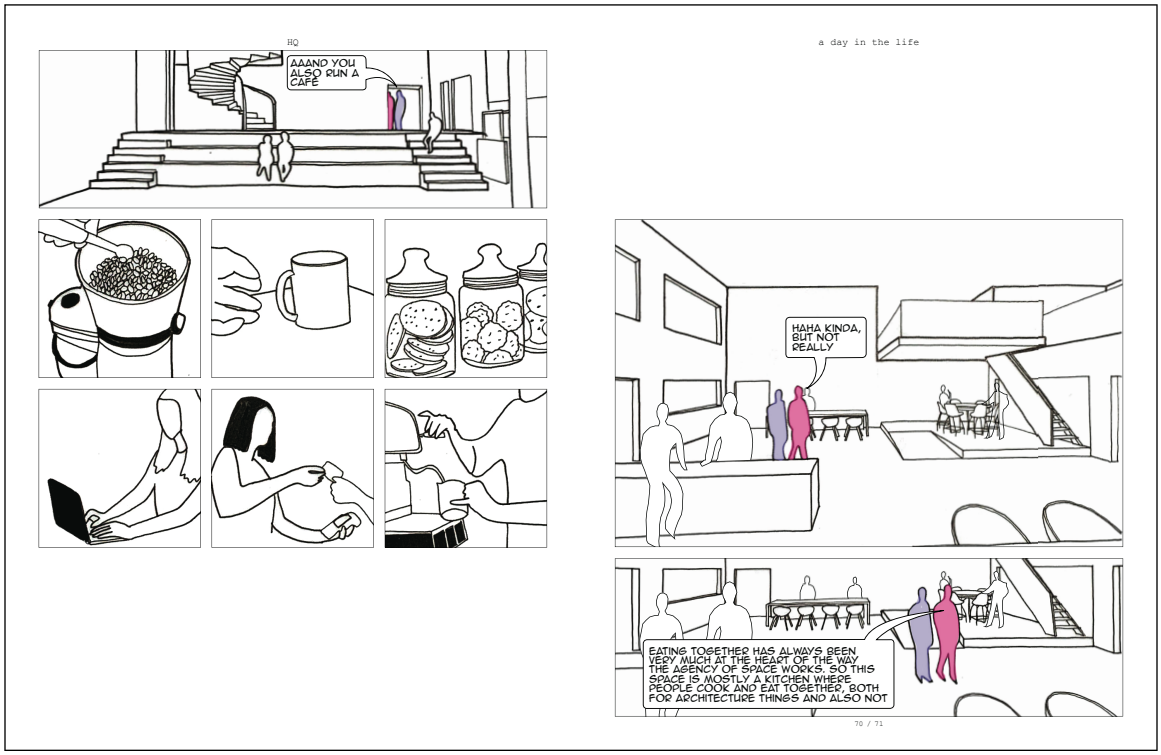

HQ
WE'VE BEEN TESTING IT OUT WITH A FEW SKETCH MODELS...
BUT ITS BASICALLY WHEN DIFFERENT PARTS LOOK LIKE THEY'RE FLOATING BECAUSE THEY'RE BALANCING EACH OTHER OUT WITH EQUAL BUT OPPOSITE TENSILE FORCE
a day in the life
WHHOAAAA, SO COOL!
YEAH, JUST A LITTLE TRICKY
YEAH, I BET. I THINK WHATEVER YOU COME UP WITH WILL LOOK COOL
60 / 61

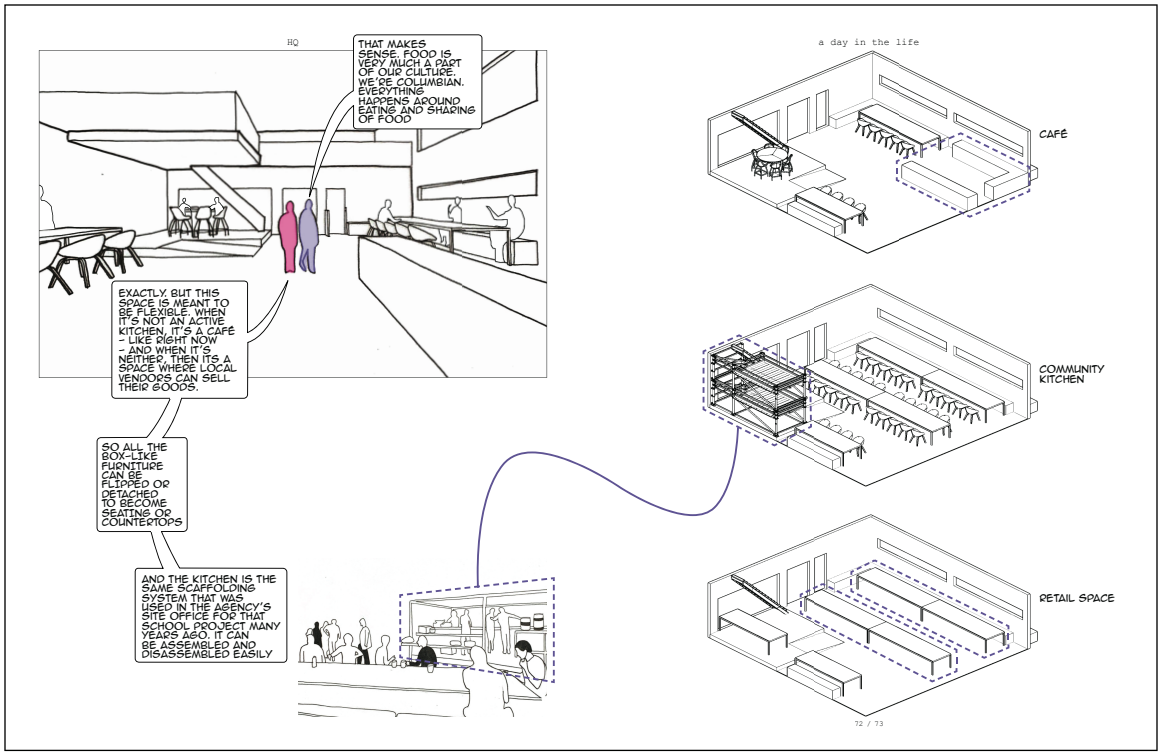

HQ
THANKS, ITS ALL JUST MADE MORE DIFFICULT BECAUSE ME AND MY FRIENDS OPENED UP THE WHOLE THING TO ANYONE IN OUR PROGRAM
AH
IT WOULDA BEEN EASIER IF IT WAS JUST MY FRIENDS AND I, BUT WE'VE ALSO GOT FIRST YEARS INVOLVED. BUT ONE OF THEM GAVE US THE PERFECT IDEA TO MAKE IT INTERACTIVE SO IT ACTUALLY WORKED OUT PERFECTLY
a day in the life
ANYWAYS, I GOTTA CHECK IN WITH THE PEOPLE AT THE STUDIO
NICE TO SEE YOU DAHLIA!
"SIGH" WOW SHE'S SO SMART
DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT
62 / 63

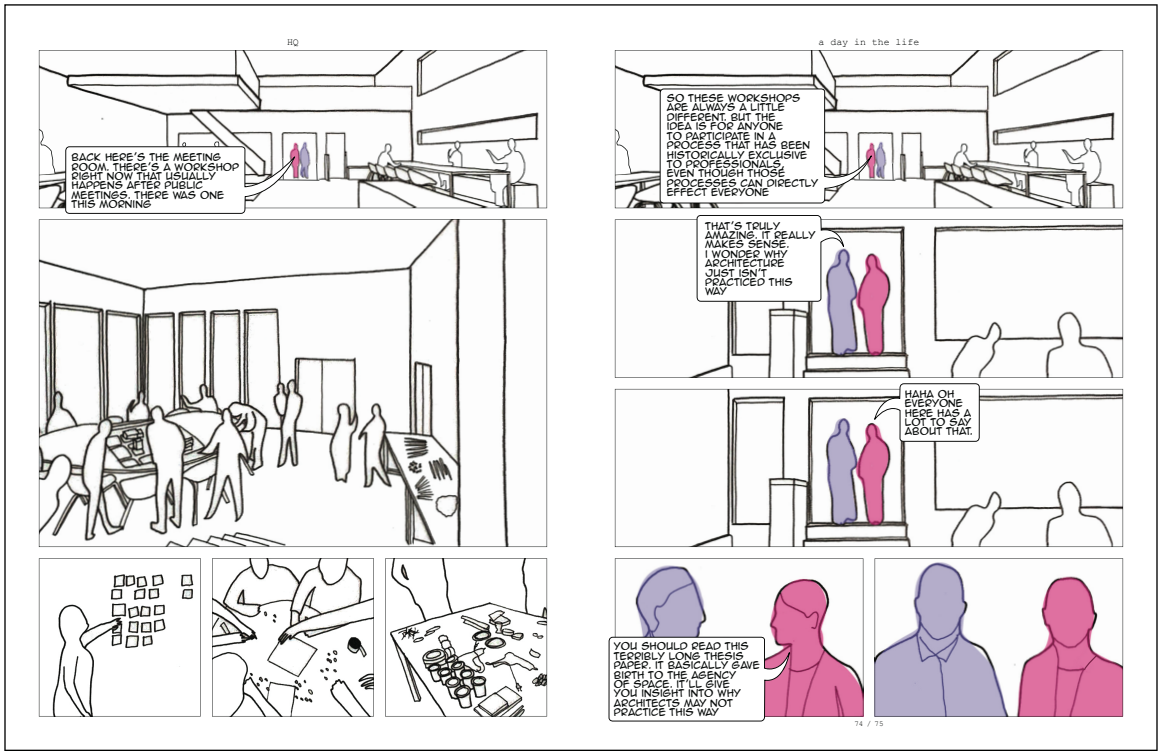
HQ
a day in the life
♪♫♩
64 / 65

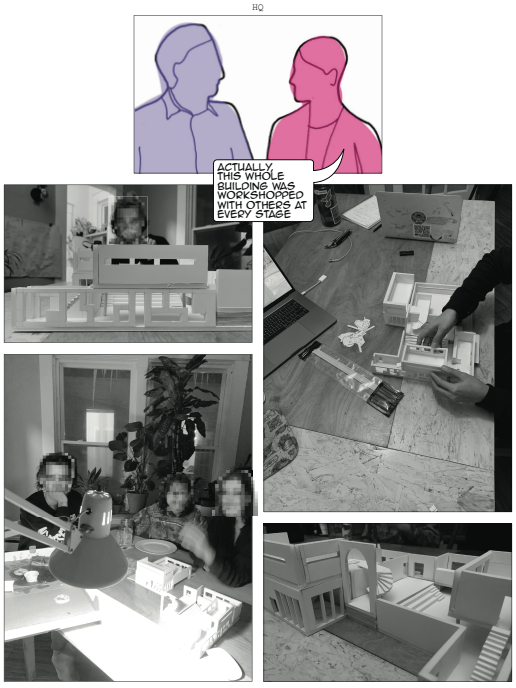

HQ
I BETTER CLOSE OFF THE EXHIBITION SPACE. IT'S GETTING COLD IN HERE WITH ALL THOSE OPENINGS
HMM...THAT FAMILY IS CHECKING OUT THE EXHIBITION
a day in the life
THIS LOOKS VERY INTERESTING, DON'T YOU THINK LAURA?
OH HEY! EXCUSE ME!
YES, HELLO?
HI, WHAT IS THIS?
THIS EXHIBIT? OH, IT'S A PROJECT WE'RE WORKING ON RIGHT NOW WITH THE PUBLIC REGARDING THE CURRENT HOUSING CRISIS
66 / 67

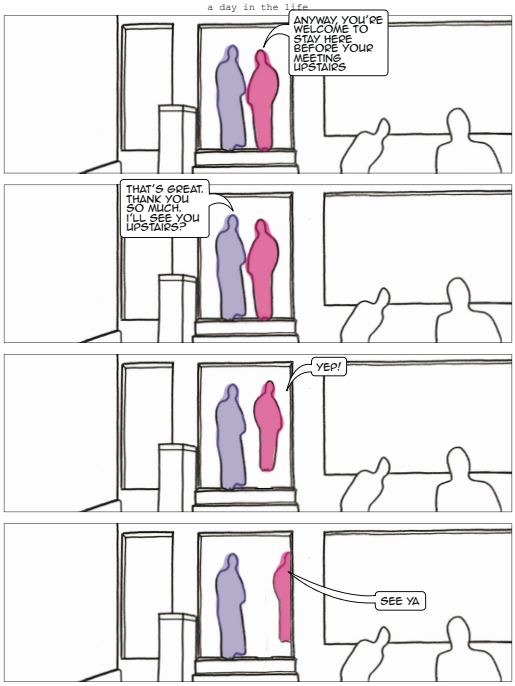

HQ
YOU ARE LIKE A CHARITY?
NO NOT QUITE. THIS IS THE AGENCY OF SPACE'S HEADQUARTERS. THEY'RE AN ARCHITECTURE PRACTICE...BUT MORE I GUESS
OH THIS IS THE AGENCY OF SPACE? WE HAVE A MEETING ABOUT A HOME ADDITION FOR OUR HOUSE. WE THOUGHT WE WERE AT THE WRONG PLACE
HAHA YEAH YOU'RE AT THE RIGHT PLACE. THE AGENCY OF SPACE JUST DOES WAY MORE THAN JUST DESIGNING BUILDINGS
YES I SEE THAT. LOOKS VERY INTERESTING. I'D LIKE TO KNOW MORE
WELL YOU'RE A LITTLE EARLY. I CAN SHOW YOU AROUND. THERE'S EVEN ONE OF THE WORKSHOPS GOING ON RIGHT NOW
AMAZING! THANK YOU
I'M SAMEEN BY THE WAY. I'M DOING MY CO-OP PLACEMENT WITH THE AGENCY OF SPACE. YOU MUST BE KYLE
PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, SAMEEN. YES, I'M KYLE. MY LOVELY WIFE LAURA MUST HAVE WANDERED OFF WITH THE KIDS...
a day in the life
YOU CAN COME IN THROUGH HERE
SO THIS IS THE AUDITORIUM KIND OF SPACE FOR LARGE GATHERINGS OR LECTURES AND STUFF
AND UP THERE IS THE STUDIO/ OFFICES. BUT WE CAN GET THERE THROUGH THE CAFE
68 / 69

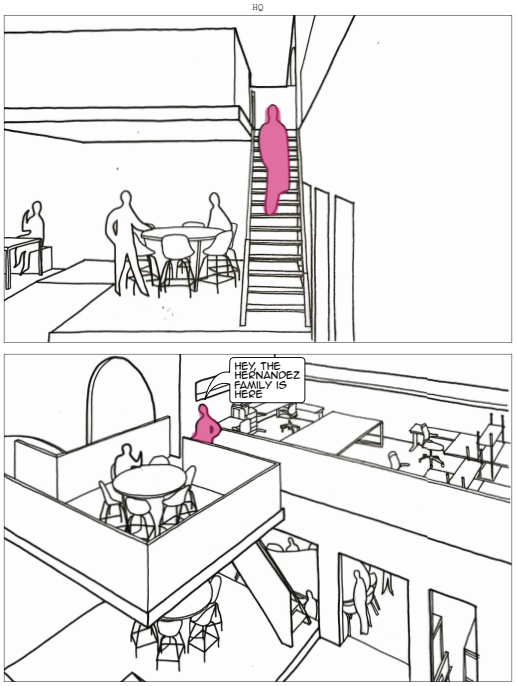

HQ
AAAND YOU ALSO RUN A CAFE
a day in the life
HAHA KINDA, BUT NOT REALLY
EATING TOGETHER HAS ALWAYS BEEN VERY MUCH AT THE HEART OF THE WAY THE AGENCY OF SPACE WORKS. SO THIS SPACE IS MOSTLY A KITCHEN WHERE PEOPLE COOK AND EAT TOGETHER, BOTH FOR ARCHITECTURE THINGS AND ALSO NOT
70 / 71

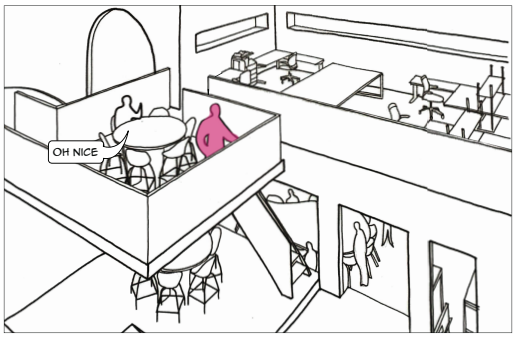

HQ
THAT MAKES SENSE. FOOD IS VERY MUCH A PART OF OUR CULTURE. WE'RE COLUMBIAN. EVERYTHING HAPPENS AROUND EATING AND SHARING OF FOOD
EXACTLY. BUT THIS SPACE IS MEANT TO BE FLEXIBLE. WHEN IT'S NOT AN ACTIVE KITCHEN, IT'S A CAFÉ - LIKE RIGHT NOW - AND WHEN IT'S NEITHER, THEN ITS A SPACE WHERE LOCAL VENDORS CAN SELL THEIR GOODS.
SO ALL THE BOX-LIKE FURNITURE CAN BE FLIPPED OR DETACHED TO BECOME SEATING OR COUNTERTOPS
AND THE KITCHEN IS THE SAME SCAFFOLDING SYSTEM THAT WAS USED IN THE AGENCY'S SITE OFFICE FOR THAT SCHOOL PROJECT MANY YEARS AGO. IT CAN BE ASSEMBLED AND DISASSEMBLED EASILY
a day in the life
CAFÉ
COMMUNITY KITCHEN
RETAIL SPACE
72 / 73

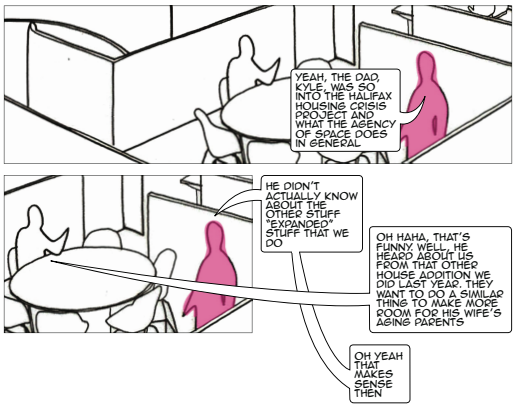

HQ
BACK HERE'S THE MEETING ROOM. THERE'S A WORKSHOP RIGHT NOW THAT USUALLY HAPPENS AFTER PUBLIC MEETINGS. THERE WAS ONE THIS MORNING
a day in the life
SO THESE WORKSHOPS ARE ALWAYS A LITTLE DIFFERENT, BUT THE IDEA IS FOR ANYONE TO PARTICIPATE IN A PROCESS THAT HAS BEEN HISTORICALLY EXCLUSIVE TO PROFESSIONALS. EVEN THOUGH THOSE PROCESSES CAN DIRECTLY EFFECT EVERYONE
THAT'S TRULY AMAZING. IT REALLY MAKES SENSE. I WONDER WHY ARCHITECTURE JUST ISN'T PRACTICED THIS WAY
HAHA OH EVERYONE HERE HAS A LOT TO SAY ABOUT THAT.
YOU SHOULD READ THIS TERRIBLY LONG THESIS PAPER. IT BASICALLY GAVE BIRTH TO THE AGENCY OF SPACE. IT'LL GIVE YOU INSIGHT INTO WHY ARCHITECTS MAY NOT PRACTICE THIS WAY
74 / 75

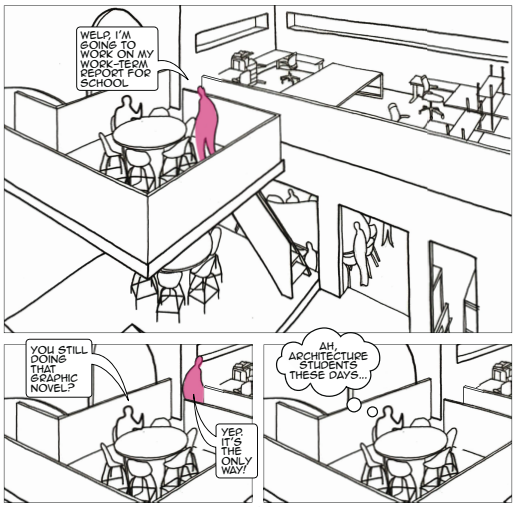

ACTUALLY, THIS WHOLE BUILDING WAS WORKSHOPPED WITH OTHERS AT EVERY STAGE

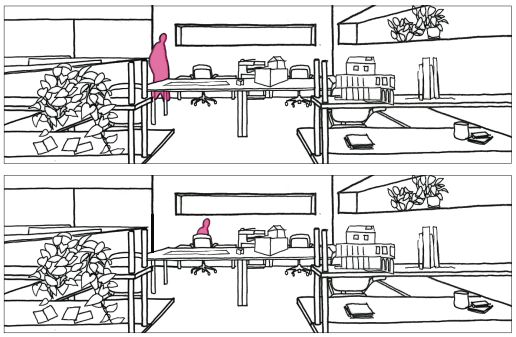

ANYWAY, YOU'RE WELCOME TO STAY HERE BEFORE YOUR MEETING UPSTAIRS
THAT'S GREAT. THANK YOU SO MUCH. I'LL SEE YOU UPSTAIRS?
YEP!
SEE YA

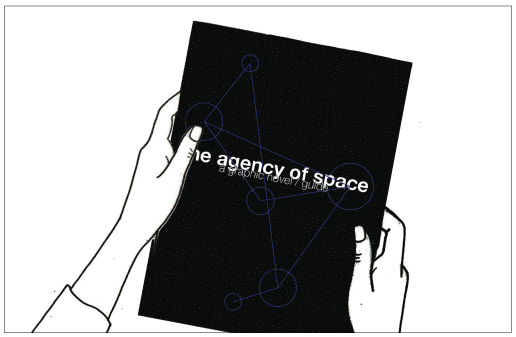

HEY, THE HERNANDEZ FAMILY IS HERE


OH NICE


YEAH, THE DAD, KYLE, WAS SO INTO THE HALIFAX HOUSING CRISIS PROJECT AND WHAT THE AGENCY OF SPACE DOES IN GENERAL
HE DIDN'T ACTUALLY KNOW ABOUT THE OTHER STUFF "EXPANDED" STUFF THAT WE DO
OH HAHA, THAT'S FUNNY WELL, HE HEARD ABOUT US FROM THAT OTHER HOUSE ADDITION WE DID LAST YEAR. THEY WANT TO DO A SIMILAR THING TO MAKE MORE ROOM FOR HIS WIFE'S AGING PARENTS
OH YEAH THAT MAKES SENSE THEN


WELP, I'M GOING TO WORK ON MY WORK-TERM REPORT FOR SCHOOL
YOU STILL DOING THAT GRAPHIC NOVEL?
YEP. IT'S THE ONLY WAY!
AH, ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS THESE DAYS...




the agency of space

acknowledgements

as this graphic novel is part of a M.Arch thesis project proposal, the following practices, projects, and real life events directly informed its content:

chapter 01

- muf architecture / art

chapter 02

- muf architecture / art
- patrick bouchain
- play the city
- planbude / crack the st. pauli
- JONO developments for St. Pat's-Alexandra School

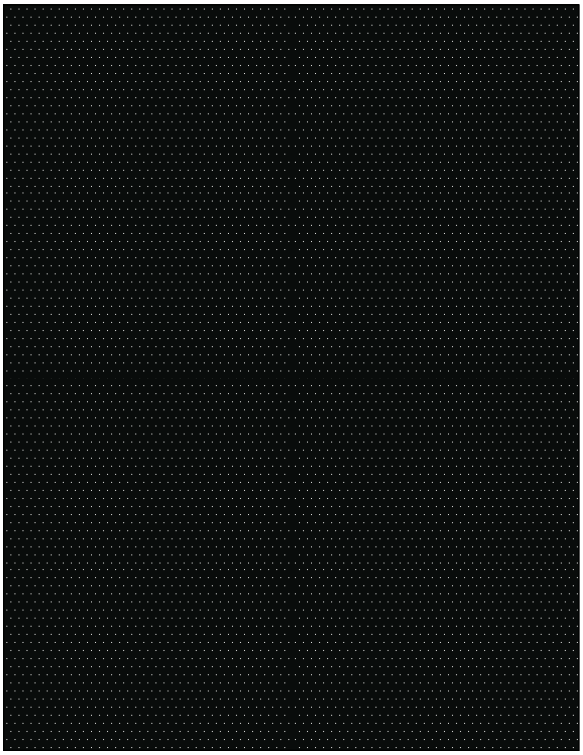
chapter 03

- author workshopping HQ design with friends
- nocture team for dalhousie architecture's 2021 installation: Peter Lombardi, Sam Beckley, Stefan Gagnier-Ruckert, Christina Chu, Natasha Juckes, Jonah Kurylowich, Ellas Roubos, Stefano Dodaro, Mark Drennon

as an owner of one of the few physical copies of this graphic novel, you are also entrusted with the sharing of its digital version, on the premise that you want / can talk about its contents and goals :

expanding the architectural practice

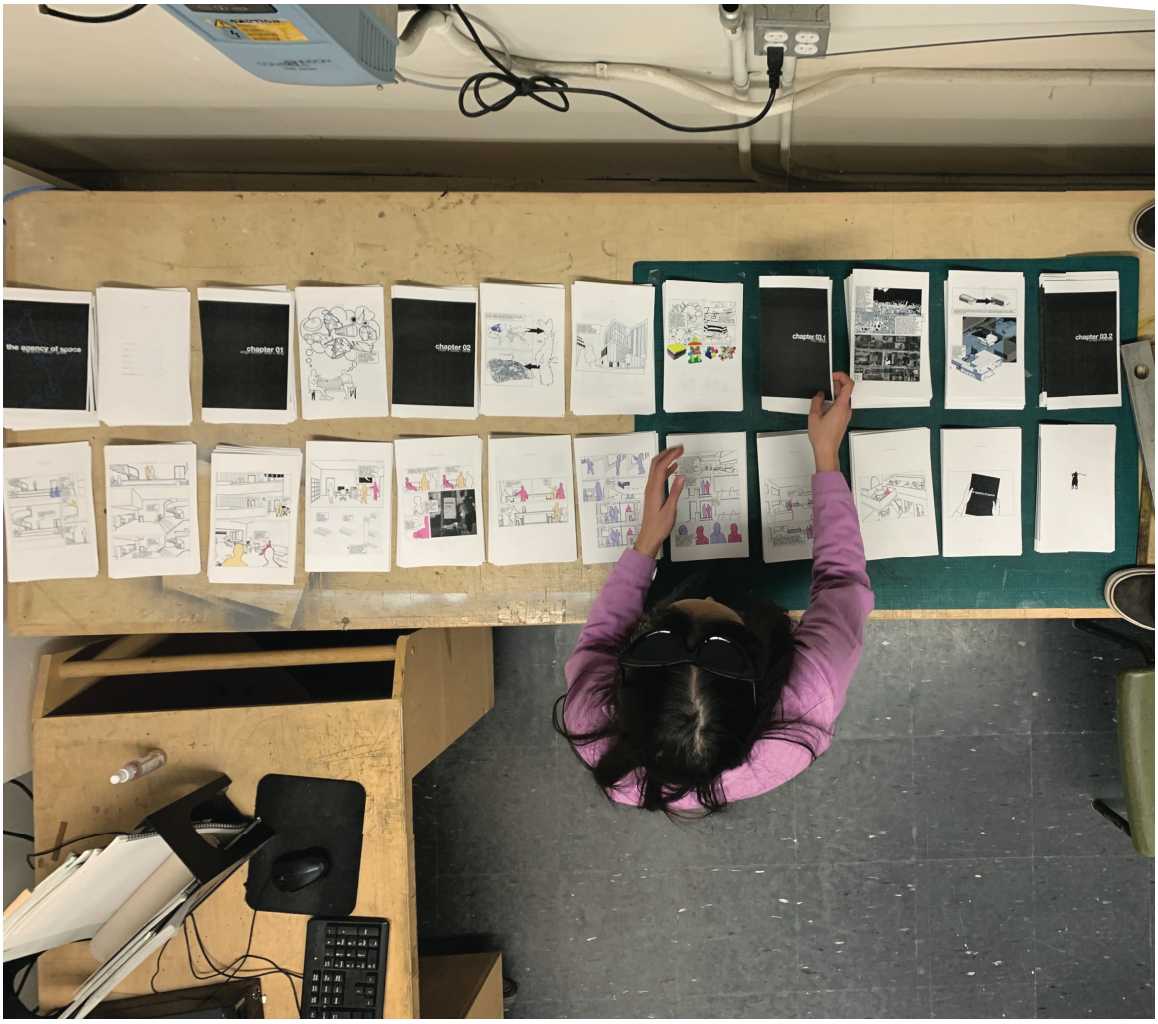
and that begins with a conversation



Chapter 9: Conclusion

As disclosed in the introduction of the graphic novel central to this thesis project, its purpose is not to propose a singular way to practice architecture—adding on to the pile of all the other singular ways the practice of architecture has been argued for as the end-all be-all blanket solution. In fact, there is an inherent beauty in the field of architecture characterized by a plurality of ways architects and architect-like practitioners choose to practice. The characters that were shaped for the graphic novel and their “missions” for their built environment were deliberately diverse and non-prescriptive, indicative that even a single practice can—and should—have a diversity of ways in which they engage in the creative production of space.

Rather, its purpose was quite simply to expand our notions of the narrow way in which we conventionally think about the architectural professional practice, and consequently the way it is practiced as well. Of course, the research intentions may have been simple, but it resulted in not only seeing it as expanded, but actually quite possibly a complex and multi-dimensional constellation of simultaneous, contradictory, overlapping and inextricably connected processes and stories. In this way, any architect or architect-like practitioner can cherry-pick the pieces that may suit them at any given moment, for any given project and allow themselves that flexibility of exploration. In the words of Paul Barker in his essay “Thinking the Unthinkable,” perhaps all is really required to expand the architectural practice so that it becomes better suited to serve mankind is to posses the genuine “desire to *know*, instead of *impose*” (Barker 2000, 12).



Manually printing and binding the graphic novel for family and friends that placed orders for a physical copy.

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