

ARCHITECTURE  
OF

IN-BETWEENS

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL  
OF URBAN RESIDUAL SPACES

CELIA FEOLE

Célia Feole  
Enoncé Théorique de Projet de Master  
EPFL - ENAC - SAR  
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Groupe de suivi:  
Jo Taillieu, Professeur / Directeur Pédagogique  
Mattia Pretolani, Mentor  
Anja Fröhlich, 2<sup>ème</sup> Professeur



2025 Célia Feole

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# 1, INTRODUCTION

Cities are already built. In today's saturated urban context, development has to happen within the existing. Architects and urbanists have to look for possibilities within what is already built and think between what is materialized.<sup>1</sup> A concern of densification arises. Starting to seek for interstices, gaps, faults, openings and going towards an architecture of in-betweens could be a pathway worth exploring.

Every city reveals many residual spaces: narrow or strangely shaped plots, remnants of overlapping layers of development or discontinuous planning are among the main instances. Often overlooked and forgotten, interstices hold great potential for internal urban development and raising awareness on them, an entire realm of opportunities and experiments lies ahead. Due to their smallness, awkwardness or even inadequateness, they do not meet the conditions to warrant traditional forms and uses. They call for alternatives and encourage both innovative projects and precise interventions. A careful and sensible reading of the existing is needed alongside increased consideration for details, every-day habits and ways of living. Infiltrating narrow gaps in-between what is already there is also a way to work with stories and aim for less demolition. As a real driving force for design, the interstice pushes towards creativity and opens up a wide range of approaches and typological explorations.

Suspended from ordinary flows and following its own rules, there is something both attractive and stimulating about the in-between. However, it also comes with lots of implications. What does it mean exactly to live in the interstice? And how can we address its particular condition?

The first part of this énoncé théorique proposes to explore the question on a theoretical basis. A complex notion oscillating between the dual concepts of inside/outside, private/public, legal/illegal or connection/disjunction, the

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<sup>1</sup> Paula Herrero, "Architecture of Interstices," Paula Herrero Arquitectura, 2021.

concept of interstice first needs defining. Seemingly the interstice can best be understood around the core notions that defines it: a small - void - in-between. Investigating these three properties and their architectural issues enables us to draw a good picture of this particular condition, synonym of both constraint and opening. Tackling the definition from an architectural perspective, this first part also seeks to identify the various types of gaps that can be found in the city. Appearing for diverse reasons, interstices exist in a multitude of forms, sizes and scales. They invite to be charted and generate all kinds of reactions that will be observed towards the end of this first chapter. If gaps and faults are often ignored, voluntarily or not, they can also become subject of contemplation. Many practices started to delve into them and, proposing to look at cities through their voids, they unveil an entire constellation of interstitial spaces full of potential.

The second part of this énoncé tackles the question through architectural examples. Filling in a gap, choosing to keep a void and leaving room for the unexpected or generating a breach and allowing change or appropriation, every project follows one of these three strategies regarding how to deal with the interstice. Insert a new building, opt for temporary or minimum intervention, program an open space, plan room for expansion or cut an opening, many approaches can be imagined. Twelve are explored here and presented in the form of an atlas of drawings. Every project is depicted in a similar way with very few lines: a single plan with yellow and white, intervention and existing. For each interstitial project, the defining limits are unfolded, emphasizing on the important role played by adjacent walls and surroundings. Sometimes untouched, sometimes perforated or sometimes built from scratch, boundaries can be dividing lines but they can also become thresholds and connecting interfaces. Closing this second part, a series of extra in-between projects brought together in a collection, aims to offer a broader perspective of the field of possibilities. All tackling everyday programs and coming up against constraints, the proposals develop interesting directions. They explore new ways of living, invite to rethink limits and dualities and ask to consider temporalities and change over time.

Finally, interstitial architecture also prompts to reflect on the scale and scope of intervention. In increasingly fragmented and densely built environments, maybe the future of architecture is towards a multitude of precise small-scale interventions. Bringing forward existing qualities, making the most of what is already there, prioritizing, doing more with less, to value the in-between is an attitude, a way of thinking and becoming conscious of what surrounds us.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Géraldine Borio, *Looking for the Voids: Learning from Asia's Liminal Urban Spaces as a Foundation to Expand an Architectural Practice* (Park Books, 2023), 62.

# II. DEFINITION

## A FASCINATING CONDITION

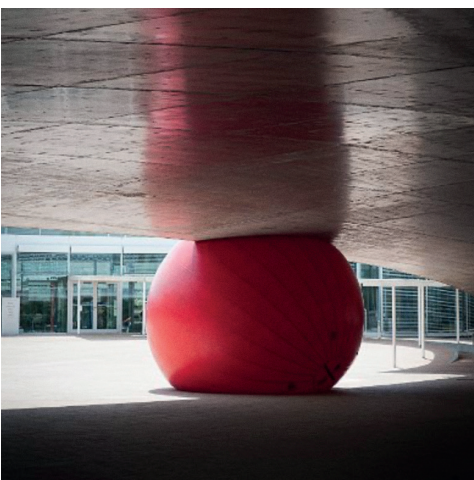
Perhaps it all starts as a fascination. No doubt, the interstice is an intriguing condition and probably always was. In 1861, the small house of Castel Meur in Bretagne was built, embedded between two giant rocks. The rather surprising location is merely a functional choice, intended to protect the construction from bad weather and violent storms. The house is of course erected at a time when building permits was not a thing and everyone could give free rein to their imagination. But the small construction already hints the compelling situation that the interstice can be. It may be a house wedged between giant rocks or conversely, a giant rock squeezed between two buildings as depicted by Belgian photographer Filip Dujardin. His digital collage raises awareness to the potential of in-between spaces and aims to unlock the possibilities of those often-forgotten spaces. Similarly, with his strange Red Ball lodging itself in the most improbable gaps around the world, Kurt Perschke enables citizens to pay attention to the space around them and tackles a current challenge of looking for opportunities within cities that are already built.



Castel Meur, Maison du gouffre de Plougrescant, Bretagne, France (1861)



Filip Dujardin – Fictions, Ghent, Belgium (2014)



Kurt Perschke – Red Ball Project, Lausanne Switzerland (2013)

## A COMPLEX NOTION

If the condition is a fascinating one, it also certainly is a complex one. What exactly is an interstice?

In need for definition, likely the first reflex is to open a dictionary. The interstice [in-tur-stis] will then appear as “an intervening space usually empty, especially a relatively small or narrow gap, between things or parts of a body”.<sup>3</sup> Associated with notions of chink, interval, slot, slit, crack, breach or opening, the interstice offers a long list of synonyms to read. Although it is essentially a spatial character that emerges, a temporal dimension can also be referred to with the interstice as an “interval of time”. The first recorded occurrence of the word, dates back to 1333 in the French language under “interstice de temps”, was actually referring to time and not space. Understood as a transitory period, the interstitial condition can then be linked with notions of process and event. Additionally, depending on the view point, interstices can be associated to absence, interruption, breaks and disjunctions or they can be seen as a connection, associated to an idea of link, relation, interaction, derived from the anatomical definition of “interstitial tissues”.<sup>4</sup>

Coming back to its roots, from the Latin “interstate” namely to stand between, the interstice is above all an in-between space, merely a small empty space between elements. Thus, the interstice can best be understood around the core notions that defines it: a small - void - in-between. It is worth taking a moment to look at them and the important role they play in architecture.

## A SMALL SPACE

What does small mean? Small compared to what? Small-ness is about proportions rather than dimensions. It is an idea of minority vis à vis of other spaces around it.<sup>5</sup> The relation to the encompassing is essential and the interstice cannot exist without something bigger encircling it. It could in fact be considered as an exception within normality.<sup>6</sup> To borrow the words of Michel Foucault, the interstice could be seen as a heterotopia, a different space by its ability to escape the dominant order and bring together contradictory and incompatible elements.<sup>7</sup>

Small also equals narrow. Tight, cramped, the interstice is wedged by its surroundings. But what does it mean to deal with a narrow condition? The concern is of course

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3 “Interstice, n. Meanings, Etymology and More,” in Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.

4 Luc Lévesque, “Trajectories of Interstitial Landscapeness: A Conceptual Framework for Territorial Imagination and Action,” in *Urban Interstices*, 23–24.

5 Andrea Mubi Brighenti, ed., *Urban Interstices: The Aesthetics and the Politics of the in-Between* (Ashgate, 2013), 24.

6 “Whose Space Is It? Interstices and Urban Commons” (Univertity of Tours, France, 2020), 2.

7 Ross King and Kim Dovey, “Active Interstices: Urban Informality, the Tourist Gaze and Metamorphosis in South-East Asia,” in *Urban Interstices*, 184.

not a recent one and coping with minimal dimensions was always a significant matter. In 1929, theorizing the Existenzminimum, the second CIAM put emphasis on quality rather than quantity. Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's Frankfurter Kitchen showcasing efficiency is certainly among the most comprehensive projects to illustrate the implications at stake when every square meter counted. Optimization, rationalization and maximization seem to be among the avenues explored. Still full of sense nowadays with population growth, scarcity of land, raise of prices, but also with a cultural shift valuing experiences over possessions, living small could become a sizeable challenge.<sup>8</sup> Many are exploring in the field leading to sometimes radical proposals such as STAR and BOARD's Cabanon in Rotterdam. Reference to Le Corbusier's cabin, the 7m<sup>2</sup> "machine for living", shapes itself as a true Swiss Army Knife home and through processes of sliding and folding, compacts all the essentials for living.

In many cases, narrowness is exactly what creates a possibility. With space getting scarce architecture becomes more complex, more sensible and projects need to be inventive. When constraints multiply, focusing on details and paying attention to everyday life and habits is called for and so is considering priorities. Going towards extreme conditions, inspiration is found in boats and caravans setting. Sliding doors, beds folding up, raised floors with storage underneath appear as solutions to allow a home to shift effortlessly between functions.<sup>9</sup> Maximizing the possible scenarios that choreograph over time within the given perimeter, multifunctionality, modularity and flexibility are among the driving principles for small-scale living.

## A VOID

Architecture often tends to consider solid, built matter over its negative. A strong opposition appears between built and void, full and empty or black and white in maps. A look at the poché technique used to represent cities is all it takes to become aware of the important role played by contrasts. Cities are often recognized through a superficial image constructed around their identifiable landmarks. Smaller elements, accidental gaps, liminal spaces, tend to be forgotten, but their accumulation is also what makes a city.<sup>10</sup> If the importance of the full is undeniable in architecture, what about the empty?

Many architects are fascinated by voids. The Smithsons talk about "charged void" and "magical emptiness". Giving air and space to breathe, the void, integral part of their design in The Economist Building for instance, also charges the spaces around it with connective possibilities. Peter Eisenman for his part suggests the existence of "essential

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<sup>8</sup> Leticia Wringley, *Pretty Small - Grand Living with Limited Space*, 2022, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Wringley, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Borio, *Looking for the Voids*, 31.

apartness" and "essential nothingness" and introduces ideas of fragmentation and fissuring.<sup>11</sup> Rem Koolhaas, also among the most fervent advocates of the need for emptiness, developed a "strategy of the void", based on "protected voids" as structuring elements, that leave architectural substance with a quasi-residual status. Maybe the most significant example is in the case of Berlin and its massive stretches left by the Wall after 1989. OMA talks about a "highly charged emptiness" left in the fractured territory. Advocating that the absence of architectural substance can be stronger than presence, they raise against reconstruction efforts that they accuse of erasing the traces and more importantly the potentials of the post-war scars. Raising up against patching up, filling in and restoring that "suffocate memory" Eisenman joins the cause and calls for awareness and activation of Berlin's faults, promoting an idea of "presence of absence". But perhaps the most telling words are those from Wim Wenders's character in *Der Himmel über Berlin*. Walking through the Postdamer Platz, he mourns, referring to the hidden cracks and gaps, the empty spaces full of possibilities, "why can't everybody see them?"<sup>12</sup>

Still in today's practice, the importance of voids in cities is beyond doubt. Within ever denser built environment, gaps become places to breathe as well as they stimulate imagination. Considering space as a resource to be saved is essential and so is to consider void as a driving force for design. Swiss-born and Hong-Kong-based architect, Géraldine Borio stresses on the value of looking for the void, of defining and protecting it. Keeping non-built areas allows freedom of interpretation and appropriation and giving back some space echoes letting some room for the unexpected to happen.<sup>13</sup>

## AN IN-BETWEEN

The in-between take place within what is already there. It implies dealing with an existing, with borders and context, and calls for careful reading of the context and precise intervention, perhaps only bringing forward existing qualities. In-betweenness refers to the fact of being surrounded by other spaces, to stand between things. But what does it mean to find oneself in that intermediary position?

In-betweens can be more enclave-like or more threshold like. Oscillating between connection and disjunction, sometimes a link and sometimes a rapture or an opening up, the in-between introduces notions of porosity and permeability: infiltration, passage, spacing, transition, are all relevant to talk about intermediate condition. Hovering

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<sup>11</sup> Luc Lévesque, Peter Eisenman *Entre Lieu et Non-Lieu : Vers Une Architecture de l'interstitiel* : 1963-1988 (MétisPresses, 2019), 89.

<sup>12</sup> Lévesque, 42-43.

<sup>13</sup> Borio, *Looking for the Voids*, 62.

between the classical duos of inside/outside, private/public, legal/illegal, a wide system of thresholds can characterize the in-between spaces found in cities.

Many architects expressed interest for the condition. Aldo van Eyck, sees the in-between as the place where antagonistic polarities are confronted but also where they are reconciled.<sup>14</sup> Fascinated by the idea of doorsteps and their dilatation, he aimed to give the in-between a tangible shape. Marking, articulating and facilitating transitions, intermediate spaces are also for the Dutch architect places for dialogue and encounter. For the Smithson, the theme of the between is expressed through the important need of intervals of voids between buildings. Detaching from the doorstep, their conception is rather one of a flow, introducing to the dialectic between fixed and moving, permanent and transitory.<sup>15</sup>

The articulation of transitions and the search for balance between contrasting notions such as the open and closed is still very relevant in contemporary projects. Creating an interface between inside and outside, Lacaton Vassal for example tackles the in-between by adding winter gardens and therefore depth to an existing façade in their transformation of a Grand Ensemble in Bordeaux. Encouraging shared spaces and addressing the individual/collective in-between, many projects are investigating the topic with cluster typology and communal living such as Mehr als Wohnen's in Zürich to name one. In-betweens thus appear as places to think about margins and relationship with the surroundings, to reinterpret limits and to reflect on the line between dualities, maybe separating inside and outside or private and public or maybe connecting them.

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<sup>14</sup> Nairi Arzoumanian and Daphné Bengoa, *Habiter l'entre-Deux* (Parenthèses, 2024), 29.

<sup>15</sup> Lévesque, Peter Eisenman *Entre Lieu et Non-Lieu : Vers Une Architecture de l'interstitiel* : 1963-1988, 89–90.



Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky – Frankfurter  
Kitchen, Frankfurt, Germany (1926)



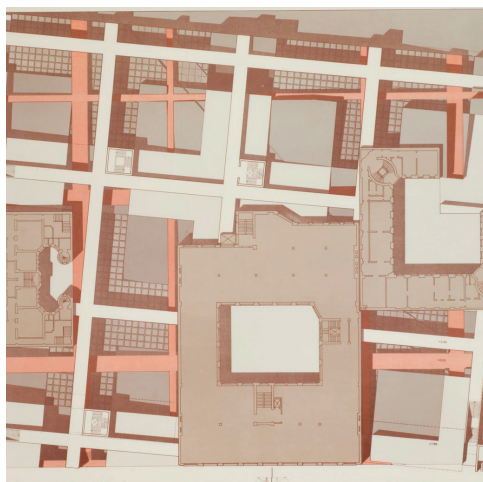
Alison and Peter Smithson – The Economist  
Building, London, England (1964)



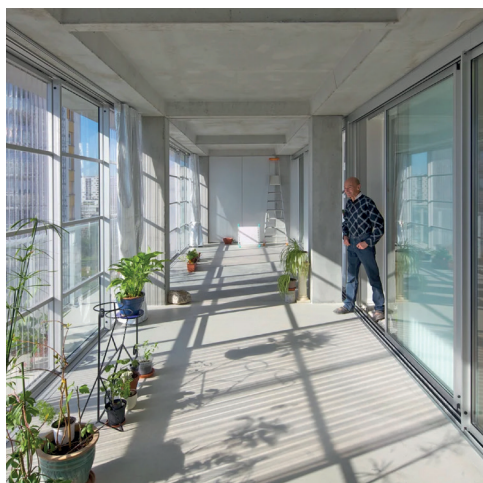
Aldo van Eyck – Amsterdam Orphanage,  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands (1960)



STAR, BOARD – The Cabanon, Rotterdam, The Netherlands (2023)



Peter Eisenman – City of Artificial Excavation, Berlin, Germany (1984)



Lacaton & Vassal – 530 logements, Grand Parc, Bordeaux, France (2017)

## A PLACE TO INFILTRATE

A small space, but narrowness is exactly what drives creativity, calling for invention and precision. A void, but emptiness also means possibilities and stimulate imagination and interpretation. An in-between, but in-betweenness is also an opportunity to rethink limits and reflect on relation between dualities of inside/outside or private/public. Each property defining the interstice is coming with both constraints and opening, both facing limitation and offering aperture. The interstice being a slit, a breach, an opening, it also is a place to infiltrate. Latitude, room for maneuver, the interstice can be understood through porosity and possibility of ways.<sup>16</sup>

Interstices are places of resistance, places proliferate for alternative ways of living. In a broader sociological aspect, they can be places of revolution. In his book *Crack Capitalism*, John Holloway invites to think of revolution as being necessarily interstitial. Infiltrating cracks or creating faults in the system, according to the Irish sociologist and philosopher, change should be achieved through barely visible transformations of daily activities of millions of ordinary people. Millions of refusals and other-doings that, openings rather than closures, become the thresholds to a counter-world.<sup>17</sup>

In-between spaces are often devoid of clearly claimed functions, programs or rules. Most of the time forgotten or ignored, they are characterized by the ambiguity of their legal status.<sup>18</sup> Not clearly belonging to the public, often used by individuals, they are places to invest. Not officially renting them, citizens tend to spontaneously occupy these spaces for example with urban vegetable gardens. Activities take place, sometimes they are legal sometimes not, often they are temporary, but mainly they are appropriations. In a similar way, interstices are also places for homeless people, for urban outcasts and for all marginalized people struggling to find a place in the city. To cite Italian sociologist Andrea Mubi Brighenti, just like it hosts interstitial spaces, the city also hosts interstitial subjects.<sup>19</sup> Less a single location than a nomadic but constant phenomenon, the interstitial condition, distributed within territory, can be seen in all the fissures and breaks infiltrating the urban fabric. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, through an analogy with a sponge, refers to them as places within the city that are not part of the city.<sup>20</sup> Just like the sponge contains holes that are not sponge matter, the city hosts interstices that escape

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<sup>16</sup> Mubi Brighenti, *Urban Interstices: The Aesthetics and the Politics of the in-Between*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (Pluto Press, 2010), 12, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Borio, *Looking for the Voids*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Mubi Brighenti, *Urban Interstices: The Aesthetics and the Politics of the in-Between*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Lévesque, "Trajectories of Interstitial Landscapeness: A Conceptual Framework for Territorial Imagination and Action," 26.

its structure and organization. Their marginal character is precisely what allows their inhabitants to survive. Visibility matters and, hidden away, kept out of sight, interstices appear under bridges, in back or dead-end alleys, behind abandoned buildings. Portrayed as socially disorganized environments, they embody the elusive concept of “public disorder”.<sup>21</sup> But they are also places of survival.

## A WIDE VARIETY OF TYPES

Seen as much as a constrained condition as a place to infiltrate, the interstice is not only a physical place, but very much a phenomenon, a happening or an encounter. More than a mere gap in the city, it is in fact an active component. Perforating the urban fabric from within and leaving wrecks, it appears for different reasons and exists in a multitude of forms, sizes and scales depending on where we direct our gaze.<sup>22</sup>

Sometimes deliberate and regulated, in-betweens can be planned. Voids, as seen by Koolhaas or the Smithson, hold great structuring potential. It is not about parks, roads or public spaces though, but about all the nameless places that can be found in the built fabric. All the “blank spaces” of city maps as expressed by Philippe Vasset, that goes exploring “white zones” deprived of any indication. Hoping to unveil mysteries and wonders, the French writer quickly realizes that the white in maps, rather hides the “shameful and unacceptable”.<sup>23</sup> But the fact remains and strolling through cities, many breaches appear. Most of the time unplanned and residual, interstices are leftovers. Accidental, resulting of other planning agendas, undefined, legally ambiguous, many aspects can characterize them.

The in-between condition exists at different scales. A constant movement from the large scale to the small scale, or from the city to the teaspoon, as expressed by Walter Gropius,<sup>24</sup> is needed to identify the many occurrences. Looking at the large scale of the territory, interstices appear between groups of bodies, between urbanizations, areas or settlements. Generated as by-products of urban planning, they are wild and abandoned open spaces that separate neighborhoods.<sup>25</sup> They are wastelands and terrain vague. Moving towards the small-scale, interstices appear between parts of a body, between apartments or rooms. Within a building or in its immediate vicinity, they are circulations, transitional zones or breathing spaces for

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21 Don Mitchell, “Tent Cities: Interstitial Spaces of Survival,” *Urban Interstices*, 67.

22 Andrea Di Giovanni, “Urban Voids as a Resource for the Design of Contemporary Public Spaces,” *Planum. The Journal of Urbanism* 37 (2018): 3.

23 Philippe Vasset, *Un Livre Blanc* (Fayard, 2007), 22–23.

24 Allen Pierce, “Blurred Lines: Reinvestigating the Design Possibilities of Architecturalized Furniture and Furniturized Architecture in Modern Housing,” 2014, 3.

25 Giovanni, “Urban Voids as a Resource for the Design of Contemporary Public Spaces,” 6.

users. They can open outwards and act as interfaces such as window places, balconies, loggias and patios. Structuring spatial arrangements, they are also corridors, entrances halls, staircases, landings or even courtyards and squares.<sup>26</sup> Or they can become support for social interaction, taking the form of common areas and shared spaces. Buffers, thresholds, they are the spatial response to the quest for balance between the closed and the open, the interior and the exterior, the public and the private, the intimate and the shared.<sup>27</sup>

In-between the two extremes, the scale of the city can be tackled and an entire range of interstices appear between bodies. Manifesting themselves between buildings or infrastructures, they can take lots of forms. Free-standing, leaned-to one face, shouldered between two faces, wedged between three or trapped between four, on top of something or under it, a void can face a wide variety of conditions depending on its defining limits. If it is impossible to give an exhaust list, some recurring types might be observed. Traces of layered development, they are narrow gaps wedged between buildings, vacant corners, dead-ends, voids left under elevated infrastructures, empty and strangely shaped parcels. Adding abandoned or fallen out of use plots and scars following destruction or demolition, the list of the many poorly-qualified, unassigned and forgotten spaces that cities host is endlessly extendable.

A few hours walk strolling through any city is enough to confirm it. When the mind prepared to look for them an abundance of gaps of all kinds can be found. One could imagine taking a map, maybe a camera and leave home to explore the surroundings. Alert attention is all that is needed to realize how much the places we visit daily are brimming with forgotten potential. The following pages intend to be an example of what it could look like to start chasing them.

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<sup>26</sup> Arzoumanian and Bengoa, *Habiter l'entre-Deux*, 20–21.

<sup>27</sup> Arzoumanian and Bengoa, 28–29.

Free-standing

Leaned to one face

Shouldered between two faces

Wedged between three faces

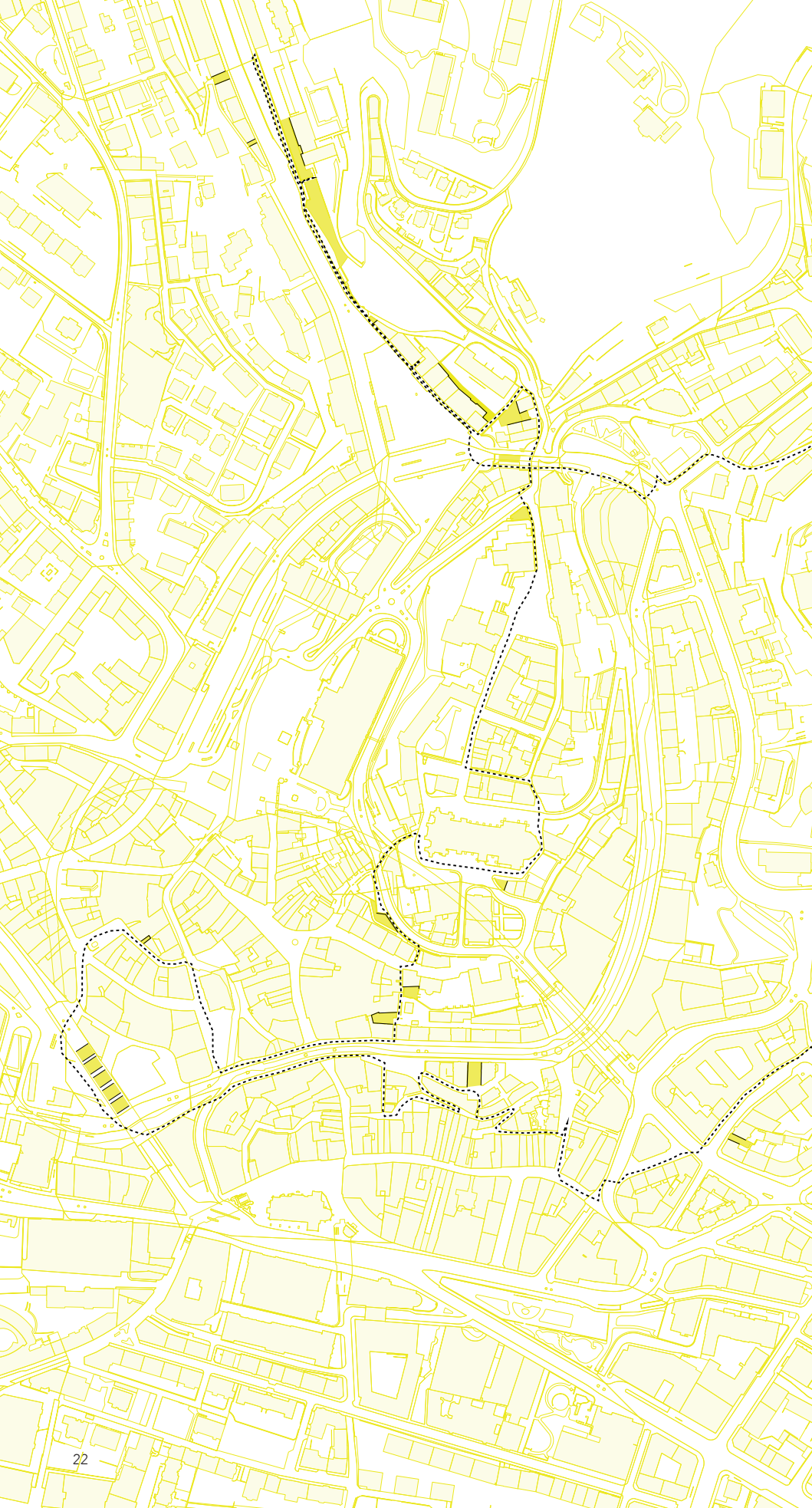
Trapped between four faces

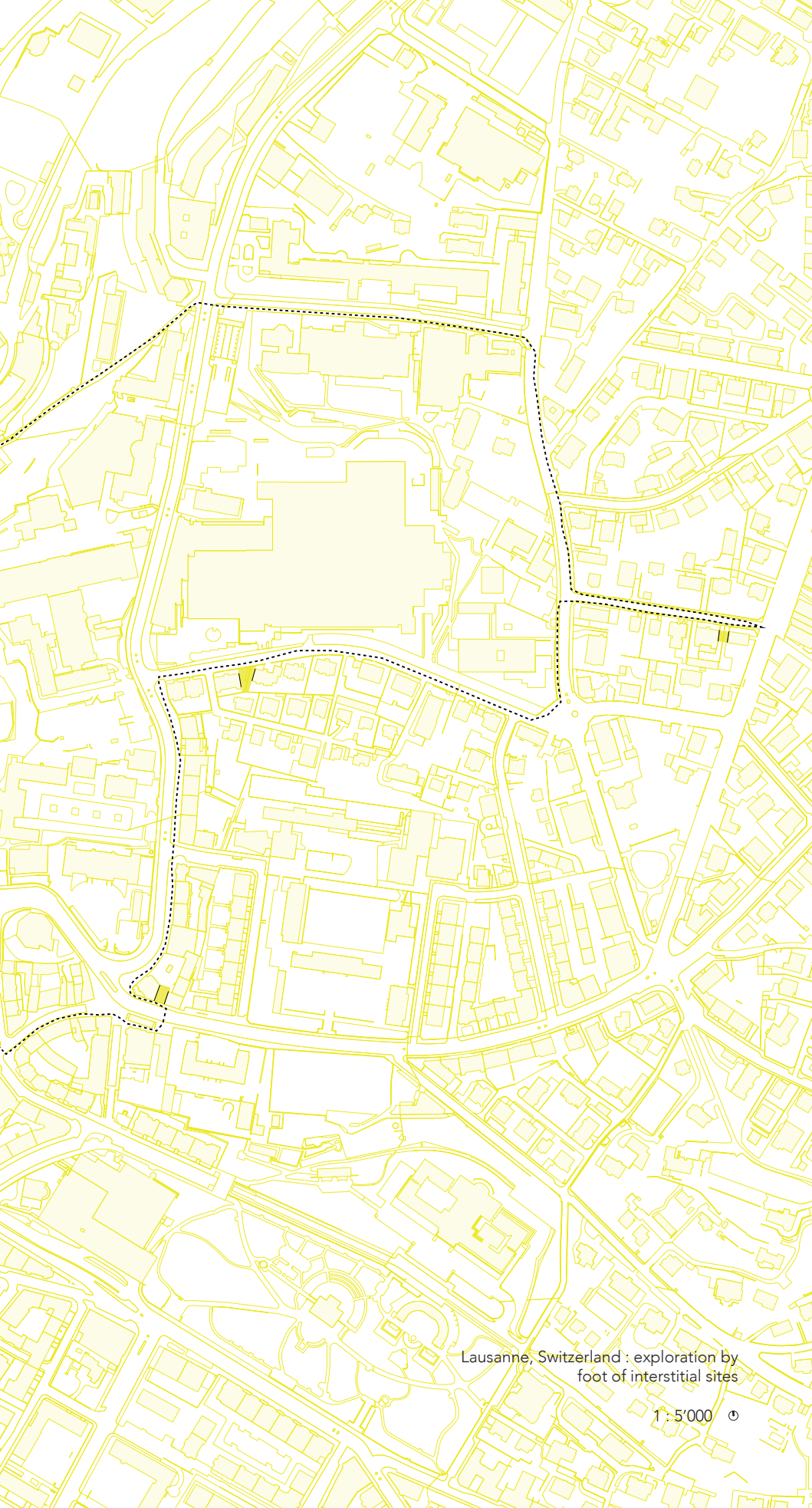
Between bodies

On top of a body

Under a body

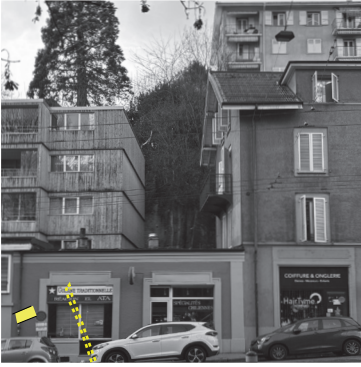






Lausanne, Switzerland : exploration by  
foot of interstitial sites

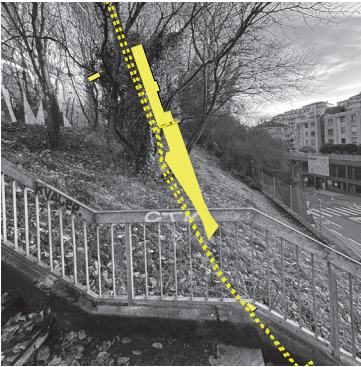
1 : 5'000 ©



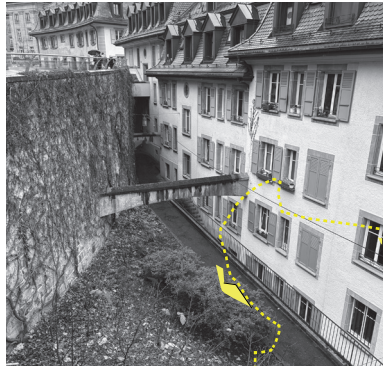
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Place du Tunnel - 46.525921, 6.635331



Rue de la Borde - 46.527523, 6.633423



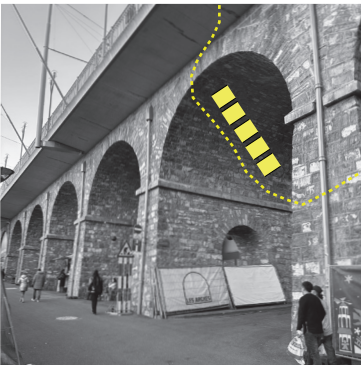
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Ruelle Grand-Saint-Jean 4-6  
46.521768, 6.631541



Escaliers des Petites-Roches  
46.521342, 6.634497



Place de l'Europe - 46.520464, 6.631226



Escaliers des Petites-Roches  
46,521217, 6,634393



Rue de la Barre - 46.525586, 6.635708



Chemin de Allières 6-8 - 46.524394, 6.646827



Avenue de l'Université - 46.525147, 46.525147



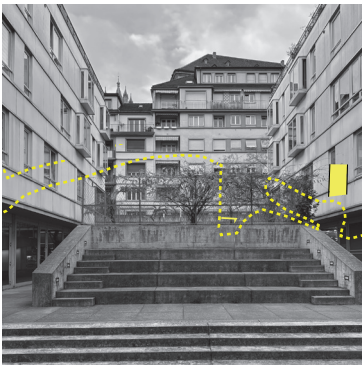
Avenue Montagibert 6 - 46.523949, 6.641773



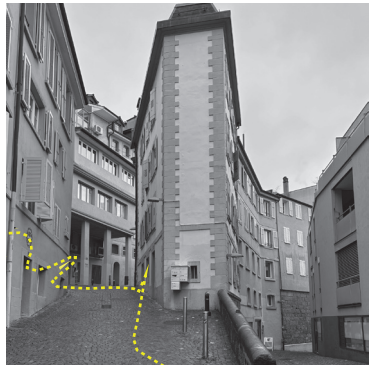
Place de la Cathédrale - 46.522275, 6.635577



Rue Marterey 26 - 46.520353, 6.638153



Rue du Flon 8 - 46.520659, 6.635290



Rue du Rotillon - 46.520480, 6.635644

## A LOCATION TO CHART

Ignored by some, subjects of contemplation for others, interstitial spaces generate all kind of reactions. Many architects and urbanists started to delve into them and, exploring cities through their gaps, they seek to chart but also activate those forgotten spaces.

Between 1973 and 1974, Gordon Matta-Clark bought fifteen micro-lots sold by the municipality of New York for 25 dollars each. Mostly unusable or even inaccessible, they could not be used in the traditional way. Documenting the irrationalities of urban fabric, the American artist aimed to highlight spaces that one cannot see and that therefore risk never being occupied, while also questioning the sense and value of property with spaces that, devoid of use value, only have a nominal exchange value.<sup>28</sup>

More recently, in the UNESCO-listed canal district of Amsterdam, added in 2010, the Tussen Ruimte project aims to stimulate new developments in the little space left within the highly regulated context. Rather than focusing on the built, architecture office HOH chose to focus on 56 spaces found between canal houses, seeking to reconnect them with public space. A manifestation was held and art installations and performances took place in the breaches showing that “despite their small size, or maybe even because of it, they provided the much-needed space for change”,<sup>29</sup> change that became challenging with the standstill threatening the city center.

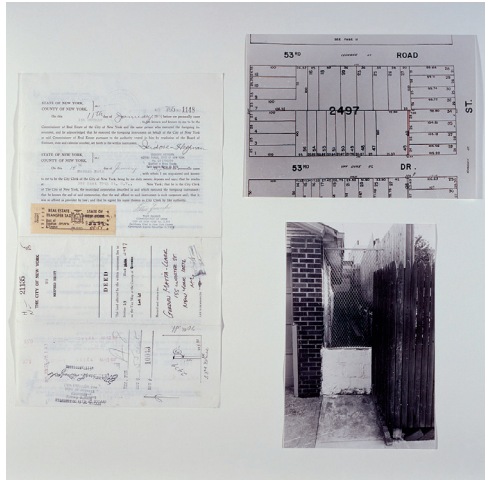
While those explorations lead to rather artistic actions, countless practices are rising, each proposing their own way of looking at left behind spaces. Through their census of possible enrichment plots of Rotterdam, Studio Hartzema aims to propose a new model of urban development. With densification of the city center as central focus, they are convinced that seemingly small interventions can make large and qualitative contributions. Parallel to the well implanted large-scale high-rise development, they want to point at the potential of small-scale initiatives and by extension small-scale densification. Their Klein&Fijn survey aimed to chart all left-over spaces. An abundant number of suitable locations were found and according to the Dutch architecture office, the inner city counts more than 3 million square meters that could enrich the urban structure. In other numbers, 30'000 homes could be added within the built fabric.<sup>30</sup> Following Studio Hartzema's research, the municipality of Rotterdam initiated a Klein&Fijn program

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28 Pamela Bianchi, “Cartographies Narratives d'espaces Marginaux,” *Les Chantiers de La Création*, no. 10 (2017): 2.

29 “Intervention: Tussen-Ruimte,” HOH Architecten, accessed December 23, 2024, <https://www.hoh-architecten.com/research/tussen-ruimte/>.

30 “Klein & Fijn,” Studio Hartzema, accessed December 23, 2024, <https://studio-hartzema.com/projecten/klein-fijn/>.



Gordon Matta-Clark – Reality Properties:  
Fake Estates, New York (1974)



HOH Architecten – Tussen-Ruimte,  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2013)



Studio Hartzema – Klein&Fijn, Rotterdam,  
The Netherlands (2012)

and developed a special permitting process for smaller design and urban planning, indicating also the important role played by urban politics.

Strongly resonating with the very first fascinations such as Perschke's Red Ball, looking at cities through their interstitial spaces and starting to chart and map them allows to unveil hundreds of potential sites to infiltrate. Opportunity for internal densification, they are attractive accommodations for small-scale interventions.

# III. ARCHITECTURAL EXAMPLES

As a driving force for creativity, the interstice initiates a large variety of architectural projects. How to inhabit the narrow space? How to act towards the void? How to treat the in-between condition? How to deal with limits and surroundings? All responding in their own way to these interrogations regarding how to live in such a constrained place, they shape the central question: how can the interstitial space be addressed?

12 interstices. 12 projects. 12 architectural answers. Appearing in different cities around the world, having various dimensions, shaped by different limits, with all their specificities, the 12 interstices however all present similar conditions in the beginning. All gaps in the urban fabric, all wedged between neighboring buildings, all surrounded with housing, they are all narrow empty in-betweens. What differs greatly is the way in which the architects chose to intervene. Fill in a gap and densify, choose to keep a void and leave room for the unexpected or generate a breach and allow appropriation and change, acting or choosing precisely not to act, 3 core approaches can be observed to tackle the situation.



YUUA – 1.8M House, Tokyo, Japan  
(2012)



Josep Ferrando – House E+M, Sant  
Cugat del Vallès, Spain (2014)



Biolley Pollini, M-AP architects – Risoux,  
Lausanne, Switzerland (2021)



BAST – M26, Toulouse, France (2020)



Parallel Lab – STAG, Hong Kong, China (2012)



Hideyuki Nakayama – House and Road, Tokyo, Japan (2019)



Hsieh Ying-Chun – Illegal Architecture, Taipei, Taiwan (2011)



Elemental – Quinta Monroy, Iquique, Chile (2004)



Borio Lab – Inverted Hong Kong, Seoul, South Korea (2019)



Butikofer de Oliveira – Victor-Ruffy, Lausanne, Switzerland (2016)

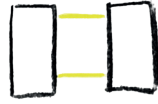


Aldo van Eyck – Playgrounds, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (1954)



De Vylder Vinck Taillieu – Kouter II, Melle, Belgium (2013)

- ONE - Insert between buildings
- TWO - Attach to adjacent walls
- THREE - Extend the existing
- FOUR - Bridge surroundings
- FIVE - Choose not to build
- SIX - Occupy temporarily
- SEVEN - Opt for minimum intervention
- EIGHT - Program
- NINE - Articulate through emptiness
- TEN - Plan room for extension
- ELEVEN - Create an in-between layer
- TWELVE - Cut an opening



## A. FILL IN A GAP

Maybe the most intuitive, or initial reaction in architecture, the first response is filling a gap. Build something. Fill a void. Identifying empty spaces, the 4 first projects propose to insert new buildings in them. Closing gaps in street facades, completing or extending an existing, infill architecture can follow many paths. Lots of variations can appear in the way boundaries and relation to the surroundings are treated. ONE stays totally independent and draw its own limits within existing ones. Doubling lines, it avoids touching the surroundings and seek for autonomy. TWO looks for contact. Allowed to touch its neighbors, it chooses not to repeat dividing walls and rather attach to existing ones. Not changing them, it is about benefiting from them. Going further, THREE starts intervening on the surrounding buildings. Interacting with them, penetrating them, it dares to make some cuts and openings. It creates links between new and old while extending the existing. FOUR brings its neighbors together and intends to connect or merge them. Starting from two houses it aims to end with a single one. 4 houses. 4 indoor spaces. All filling in a gap, the 4 first architectural projects propose enclosed volumes, going from introversion to merging with the context.



ONE



TWO



THREE



FOUR

# YUUA – 1.8M Width House

Tokyo, Japan (2012)

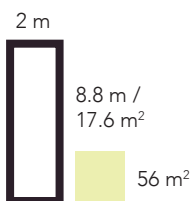
In the hyper condensed context of cities such as Tokyo, houses slotted into tiny gaps are becoming more and more frequent. Often referred to as eel's nests,<sup>31</sup> they simply insert like boxes in narrow strips of land. A typical example is the 1.8M Width House. On a plot of just 2.5 meters wide, the architecture office YUUA had to develop solutions that emphasized length but, above all, verticality, resulting in a structure soaring even higher than its neighbors. Defying the conventional divisions of living spaces, the Japanese house molds all rooms together and choreograph activities on cascading levels. Fluidity of the interior space is at core and the small but ever-changing house gives the freedom to reinvent each part of the house daily. If the typology has become a rather common one in Japan, probably the most radical of skinny houses is the Jakub Szczesny's Keret House in Warsaw, Poland. Inserted on a plot where defining walls can be touched with both arms extended, the extreme structure proves that no gap is too narrow.

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<sup>31</sup> Maria Francisca Gonzalez, "1.8M Width House / YUUA," ArchDaily, July 2018, <https://www.archdaily.com/897736/m-width-house-yuua-architects-and-associates>.







# Josep Ferrando Architecture – House E+M

Sant Cugat del Vallès, Spain  
(2014)

Rather than simply being inserted between them, some projects choose to make use of existing borders. Daring to touch the limits, they rely on them; maybe even use them structurally. By definition, infill architecture is imprisoned within its surroundings and, becoming aware of it, some projects try to benefit from it. Dividing walls become significant moments. They are the meeting point where new and existing touch. Conferring them a fundamental role in House E+M, Spanish architect Josep Ferrando choose to use party walls as a filter. Layering the organization of the house, their thickness increases and serving spaces appear in the depth. Squeezed between the imposing existing walls of the neighbors and the ones of the newly inserted house, promenade and storage spaces, respectively hosting stairs and shelves distribute the entire height. On the inside, the organization of the house is fragmented on overlapping levels. Connected by an internal atrium-like void that also brings in light, intermediate floors float through verticality, seemingly forgetting the narrow width and complex topographic situation.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Josep Ferrando Architecture, Adrià Goula, House E+M," Divisare, accessed December 23, 2024, <https://divisare.com/projects/321303-josep-ferrando-architecture-adria-goula-house-e-m>.





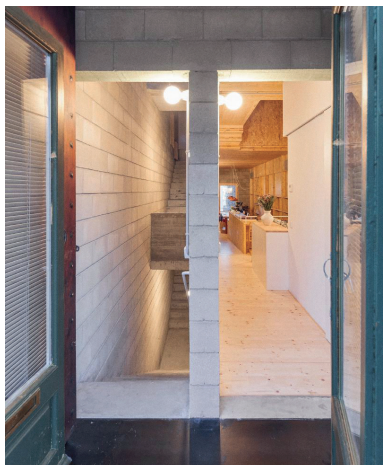
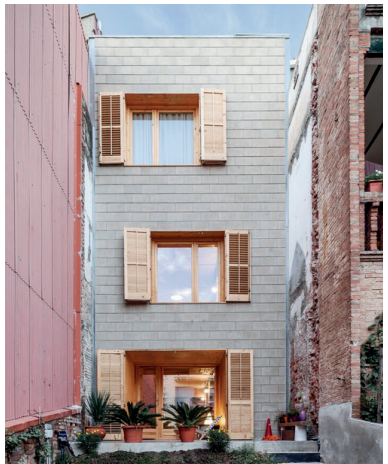
4.7 m



33 m /  
155 m<sup>2</sup>



195 m<sup>2</sup>



# Biolley Pollini and M-AP architectes – Risoux

Lausanne, Switzerland (2021)

Extension and top-up projects, also tackle the interstitial condition. Between existing and extension, the dividing line becomes fundamental and, not merely a boundary, it has to be a bridge connecting the two. Perforating limits, creating wholes, passages, links, old and new have to come together and work as an entity. If extending one house is pretty common, in Lausanne, Biolley Pollini and M-AP architects propose extending two at the time. Benefiting from a regulatory loophole in the city zoning, their project infills a gap between two free standing houses. Forming an ensemble with the adjacent buildings, the seemingly independent added volume brings the two neighbors touching, while keeping them separate. With limited intervention in the existing, houses on both sides are extended towards the middle. From the left, three stacked apartments are offered one extra room each. From the right, an entirely new apartment is introduced. Spread over two floors it leads to a third level that serves as connecting space with another apartment in the existing. A couple splitting up during construction site, architects had to come with a creative proposal and chose to connect the mother's apartment in the interstice and the father's one in the existing through an in-between floor accommodating the children rooms. Using one parent's door one week and the other's the next, children can navigate in-between the two, sketching out a solution to a contemporary sociological problem. Interestingly, it may be through these unforeseen events that new typological explorations are emerging.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Camille Claessens-Vallet, "La faille, mode d'emploi," Espazium, May 2022, <https://www.espazium.ch/fr/actualites/la-faille-mode-demploi>.

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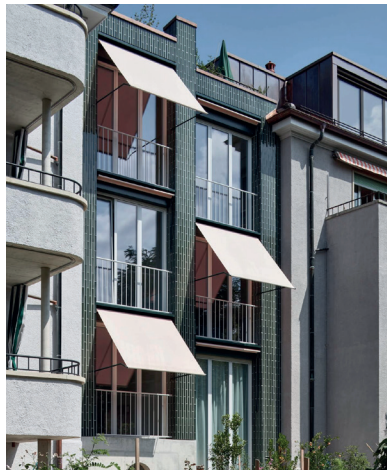
6.4 m



9.6 m /  
61.4 m<sup>2</sup>



171 m<sup>2</sup>



# BAST – M26

Toulouse, France (2020)

Rather than having two extensions touching like in the previous project, a proposal could be to merge them and create a shared in-between, widening the boundary. Toulouse architects BAST rise to the challenge in their House M26. Two formerly distinguished suburban houses, are combined into one unified family home through an added external layer. Ensuring the connection, a glazed timber-frame bridges the two entities together and allow passage from one to the other. On each side of the free in-between, entering the existing houses, the program appears more defined with bedrooms on one side and living rooms on the other. To accommodate the night rooms, matter is added. Walls, doors and bathrooms fill the first house. In the second one, on the other hand, matter is removed and the house is hollowed out to create one big day area. One volume filled and the other emptied, the interstice also finds itself between two opposing interventions.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "BAST · M26," Divisare, accessed December 11, 2024, <https://divisare.com/projects/434160-bast-m26>.





7.7 m



14.8 m /  
22 m<sup>2</sup>



22 m<sup>2</sup>



## B. KEEP A VOID

Resisting an architecture that tries to fill every space it encounters, a second strategy could be one of restraint. Refraining to build. Doing less. Giving back. The 4 next projects propose to keep some void. Instead of filling up gaps, they define them. Dealing with contours and limits, rather than creating enclosed spaces, they aim to offer possibilities. It is about keeping some room for appropriation, designing for occasions to occur and letting some space for the unexpected.<sup>35</sup> Choosing not to build, FIVE simply observes, becomes aware and avoids modifications. SIX decides to design a temporary project. Permanent but particularly small, SEVEN opts for minimal intervention. With minimal resources, EIGHT chooses to program and give a clear purpose to a place that would otherwise remain unused. 4 open spaces. 4 minimal interventions. Keeping and protecting a void, the 4 projects are reclaiming places and aim to activate their hidden qualities. Public spaces, places to meet, they all look for connection with the surroundings and interaction between different users.

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<sup>35</sup> Borio, *Looking for the Voids*, 62.



FIVE



SIX



SEVEN



EIGHT

# Parallel Lab – STAG

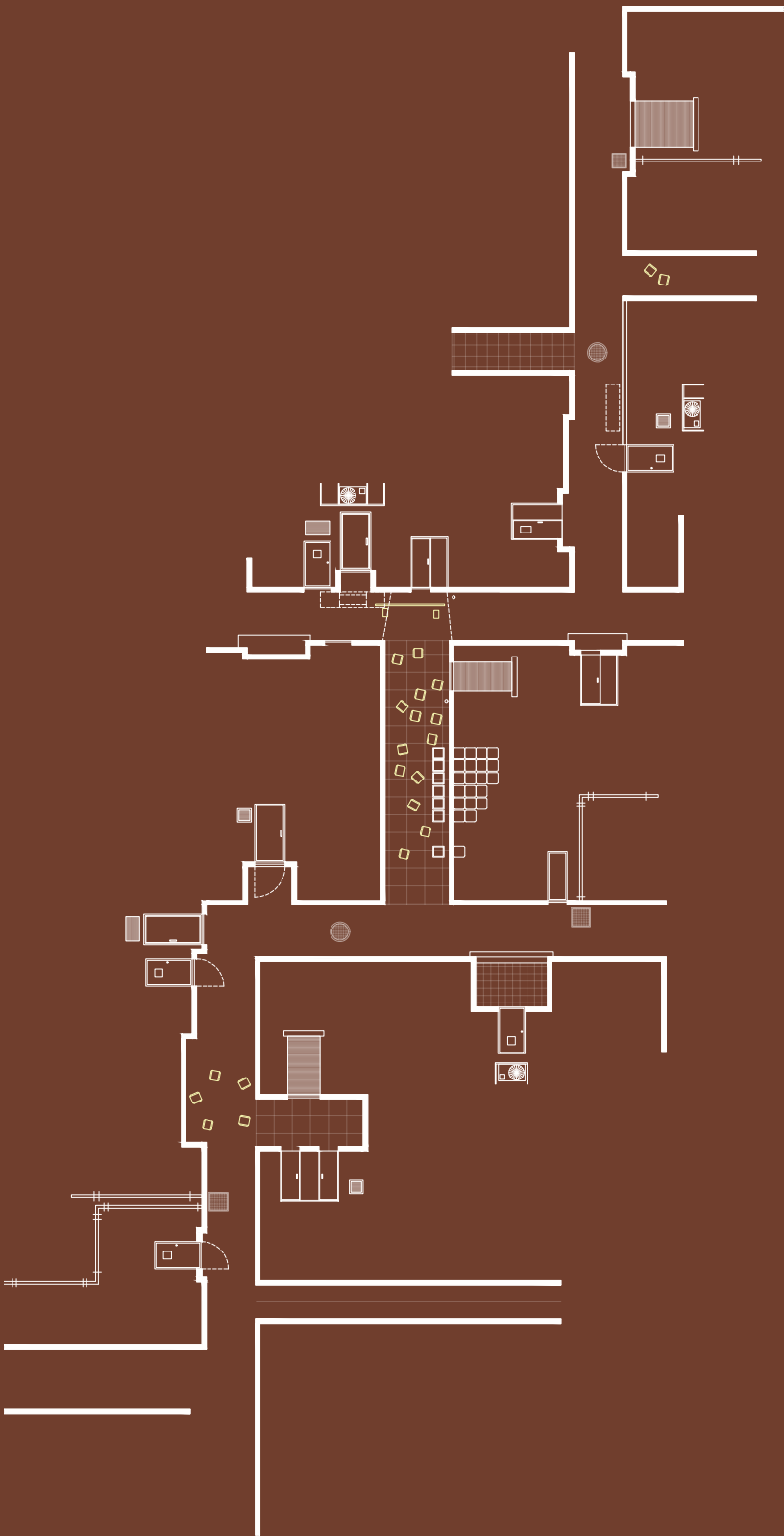
Hong Kong, China (2012)

Observe what is already there, understand the dynamics. Many, and rightly so, are fascinated with the idea of becoming aware of what surrounds them. Dadaist's visits, Situationist's derives or more recently Osservatorio Nomade's explorations all have that in common. Building and changing nothing, they simply notice. Observation is also core to Géraldine Borio's practice in Hong Kong. The Swiss-born architect initiates a research project investigating the lots of tiny gaps not recorded on official city maps. Due to a rather bad reputation, they tend to be ignored, but proposing to look at them, STAG lightens up an entire interstitial network slicing through the dense fabric. Far from being empty, back lanes are real supporting infrastructures. Allowing delivery to shops, serving of additional storage or offering workers a place for breaks, thanks to their small scale and connection with day to day living, they are vital for the city.<sup>36</sup> Collecting the overflow of life that does not fit into the tiny interiors, these interstices become a reservoir of space. Redefining spaces that were a priori not meant to be occupied, residents transform and inhabit them in order to meet their needs. A restaurant for example uses the interstice as an extension and only displaying foldable tables and chairs, the number of clients goes from 6 indoors to more than 30 outdoors. Learning from the local appropriation, Parallel Lab designs a foldable stool backpack as a mean to temporary occupy places. 120 are produced and used during a series of events. Their movable aspect unfolds many possible scenarios. Hosting an entire choreography of activities, back lanes see functions overlap or change over rhythm of day and night.

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<sup>36</sup> Borio, 89.





~2 m



illimited



illimited



# Hsieh Ying-Chun – Illegal architecture

Taipei, Taiwan (2011)

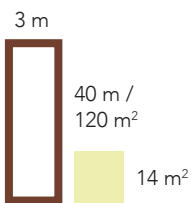
Artistic installations, lightweight or nomadic architectures, many can appear in city gaps, heralding the value of ephemeral architecture. Often not waiting for permission, these constructions, sorts of urban acupuncture, open legal questions. That is precisely what interests the Taiwan-based architect Hsieh Ying-Chun. Observing numerous citizens' spontaneously built architectures in Taipei, he notes that they use the official city as foundations and energy source where to attach and from where to leach electricity and water. Trying to achieve the maximum effect with minimum effort, illegal or parasitic architecture may be as sharp as it is lazy.<sup>37</sup> Based on periodic use, these occupations also show the ability to disappear as fast as they have appeared. Fascinated, Ying-Chun explores those exact characteristics in his creeper structures blossoming up in the air in-between buildings. Scaffolding-like, his Illegal architectures, comprised more of air than structure, slips into narrow back alleys and settle in until further notice.

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<sup>37</sup> Marco Casagrande, "Illegal Architecture," *World Architecture*, 2011, 2.







# Borio Lab – Inverted Hong Kong

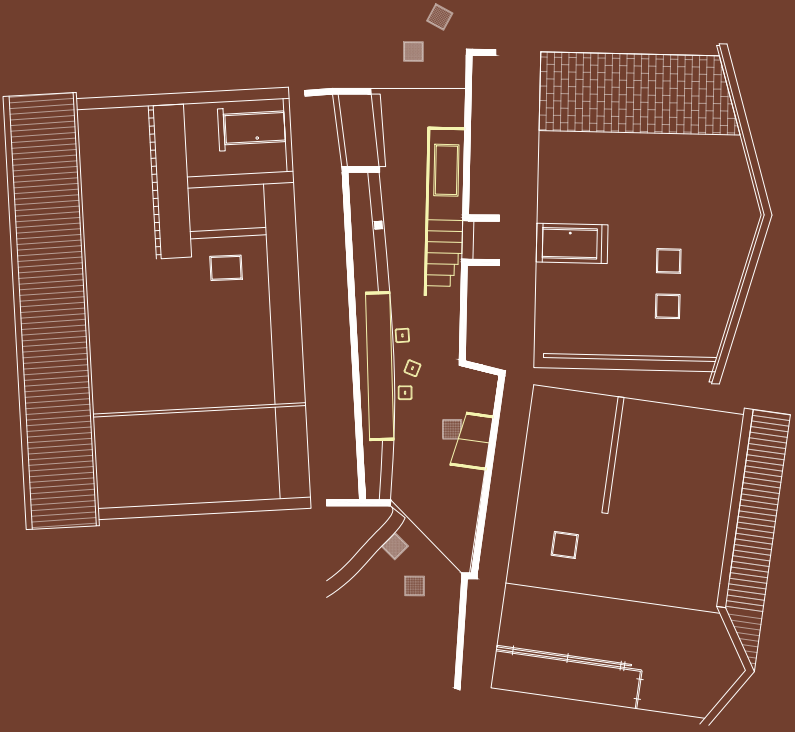
Seoul, South Korea (2019)

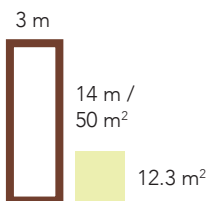
What is the minimum intervention needed to live in the interstice? When choosing to keep void, too much indecision can also be a threat to its quality. Projects require to evaluate what could be the minimal doing to transform an empty space into a habitable one. It is with this perspective in mind that Borio Lab displays three wooden volumes in a narrow lane of Seoul, letting a house grow within an open-air corridor. A homogenous grey coating covers the adjacent walls, defining the contours of the project, and three areas with readable functions are floating in a remaining empty space full of potential. A mini house with a bed, a window frame with a bar and a staircase with a bathtub settle in. Support for intimate rituals of daily life, respectively sleeping, relaxing and bathing, private activities juxtapose with the common ground of the street. Overlapping domestic and collective, the project brings back the ambiguous characteristic of the in-between. Is the place private or public? Are we in an interior or an exterior? The architects further developed the project in Peng Chau, China where two artists lived for three months. The line between private and public is shifted and the intimate activity of bathing is pushed towards public space, benefiting of a sport center located 100 meters away. Refusing to cram every function within the narrow plot, Borio Lab proposes to see the surrounding environment as a resource and, transgressing boundaries, the perceived limits of the space are expanded beyond the physical and legal perimeter of the site.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Borio, *Looking for the Voids*, 50–51.







# Aldo van Eyck – Playgrounds

Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
(1954)

Keep a void but give it a reason to be. Define the space and provide it with an identity. Program. Aware that dense cities also need breathing spaces, many urban strategies turn to the potential of interstices to become public spaces. Available to all citizens, they become places that foster dialogue, stimulate community life and encourage interaction. Turning leftovers and neglected urban voids into meaningful places, they are provided with an active role in city life and often answer local needs. Pointing at the poor playing conditions in Amsterdam at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Aldo van Eyck identifies a need for qualitative places for children in the city. Going against the private and fenced playgrounds dominant at the time, the Dutch architect imagines a network of about 700 open and welcoming play areas throughout the city. Merging with the surroundings, they become meeting places for the neighborhood and, encouraging imagination and curiosity, they want to be support for interpretation. With minimal resources, the playgrounds aim to stimulate without dictate and foster appropriation. Punctuating the post-war landscape, they appear in scars left by the bombs and create an entire constellation. Opposing the general planning of reconstruction after the Second World War, van Eyck proposes a more "situationist" or interstitial approach. Learning from particularities and irregularities, he also seeks to put human needs at heart.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Martijn de Geus, "Aldo van Eyck's 'Interstitiality': Turning Leftover Spaces into Meaningful Places," n.d., 5.







10 m



33 m /  
330 m<sup>2</sup>



330 m<sup>2</sup>

## C. GENERATE A BREACH

Convinced of the need for emptiness, a third approach is to generate a breach. Creating void. Planning some undefined space. The 4 last projects all include gaps in their designs. Returning freedom to users, they encourage appropriation and allow modification. Structuring through emptiness, NINE thinks of void as integral part of the house. Creating a house in two parts, it gives the choice between separation and connection. TEN decides to let room for adaptations. Voluntary planning space for extensions or future developments, it considers evolving needs and designs a house able to bear them. Transformation, adaptive reuse, maybe change is not planned ahead but it has to happen anyway and old structures have to alter. ELEVEN thus opts for extending an existing building. Doubling or creating a new house next to the old one, it has to articulate the connection between the two. Removing rather than adding, TWELVE introduces demolition. Making cuts or creating slits might be needed to bring in light or access and allow new occupation of a space. 4 planned gaps. 4 apertures. Generating a breach, the 4 projects remain porous and advocate adaptability above all.



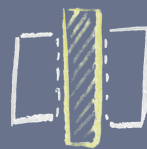
NINE



TEN



ELEVEN



TWELVE

# Hideyuki Nakayama Architecture – House and Road

Tokyo, Japan (2019)

Planning void as an integral part of the house, Japanese architects Hideyuki Nakayama do not hesitate to generate a gap crossing, while also structuring their housing project in Tokyo. Both separating and connecting, the created spacing, or road as they call it, runs between the two parts of the house and seek to articulate them. Residential building for daily life on one side and atelier space for painting or working on the other, the fragmented parts appear sometimes as pairs standing side by side and sometimes as a continuous body, depending on whether doors on both ends of the road are open or closed. Hovering between introversion and connection, the intermediate space is momentarily an enclosed courtyard or a street connecting with the surroundings. Resonating with the back lanes found in dense Asian cities, the created gap also acts as a buffer space. It gives freedom in occupying it and hosts all the activities that do not fit in the tiny indoor.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hideyuki Nakayama, 5 Films of 5 Architectures, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X73MGcvretM>.





2.9 m



13 m /  
37 m<sup>2</sup>



37 m<sup>2</sup>



# Elemental – Quinta Monroy

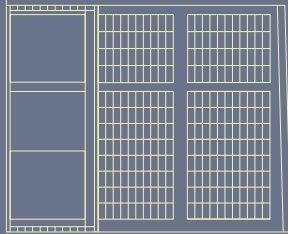
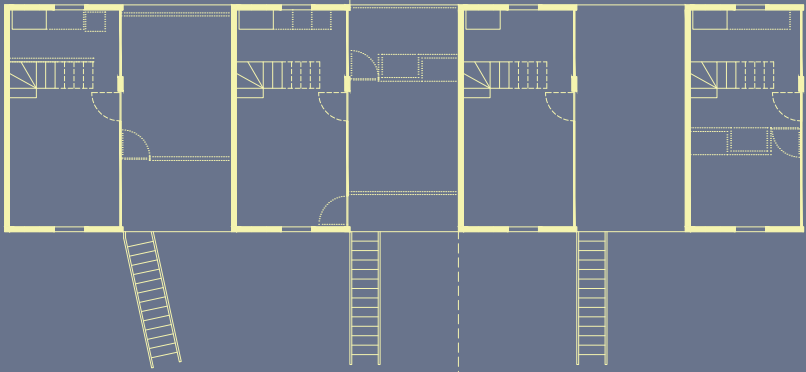
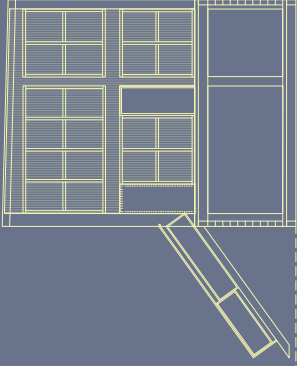
Iquique, Chile (2004)

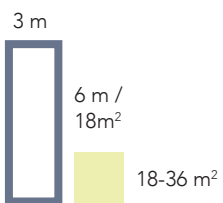
Asked to transform an illegal overcrowded cluster of self-constructed shelters into a safe settlement for the 100 families established in Iquique, the Chilean architecture office Elemental was tasked with quite a challenge. Social housing, a really tight budget, an expensive site...in this kind of situation the usual proposal would have been to build smaller, but in Quinta Monroy the architects decided on another path: build half a house. The series of half houses they plan aim to provide the core of a home. Consisting of the main structure and technics, they include all parts that are rather difficult in auto construction. Willing to become a supportive and safe framework, they can later be completed according to needs and means of every resident. Each built half alternates with an empty half that can be invested through self-built extensions. Slabs are reinforced, walls are thought to be easily removable, guidelines are provided and, allowing unknow outcomes, all apartments can be enlarged by filling the porous spaces. Adding a sense of pride and belonging for the residents, the project seeks for evolutive construction whose value will increase over time. Anticipating rather than undergoing it, the Chilean project tackles the, often failed to recognize, need for change and address the issue of longevity of architecture.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> "Quinta Monroy, ELEMENTAL," ArchDaily, December 2008, <https://www.archdaily.com/10775/quinta-monroy-elemental>.







# Serge Butikofer & Olivia Oliveria – Victor-Ruffy

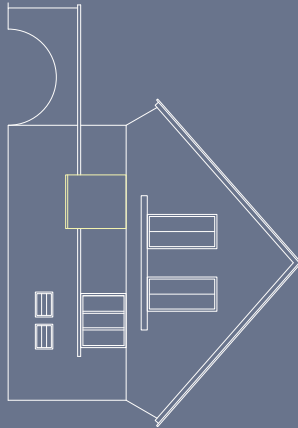
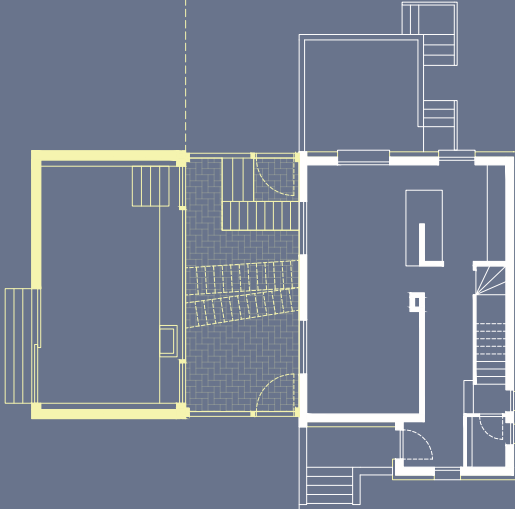
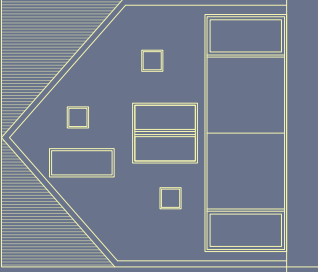
Lausanne, Switzerland (2016)

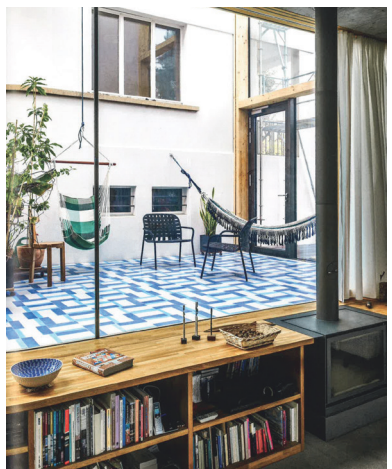
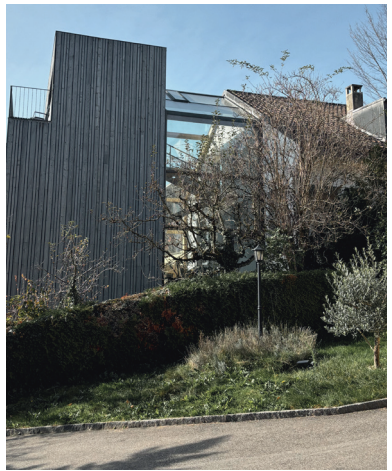
Extension, transformation, adaptive reuse, evolving needs are inevitable and in order to meet them existing buildings might have to change accordingly. Unlike the previous project, extensions are usually not planned ahead and they have to deal with the encounter between old and new in a second phase. Seeking to articulate existing and addition, many projects rely on the introduction of an in-between. Whether a void or a built volume, the interstice serves to both separating and connecting the two. Extending a house from the 1940s in Lausanne, Serge Butikofer and Olivia Oliveira opted for this approach. The old part is left almost untouched, only changing its inner organization and transforming an old window into a passageway. After generating a few meters spacing, a new part, hovering between subordination and independence, is built next to it. If Elemental provided half a house, here the tendency is more towards doubling it and offer almost two houses with a central glazed space linking them. Hosting intersecting staircases and a series of doors and openings on each side, the unheated intermediate space, gives access to the different living spaces. Also, a transitional place between indoors and outdoors, free and versatile, the new space has all the hallmarks of a true in-between.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Evelyne Malod-Dognin, "Construction&rénovation 2019-2020," *Espaces Contemporains*, 2020.







3.8 m



8.7 m /  
33m<sup>2</sup>



33 m<sup>2</sup>

# De Vylder Vinck Taillieu – Kouter II

Melle, Belgium (2013)

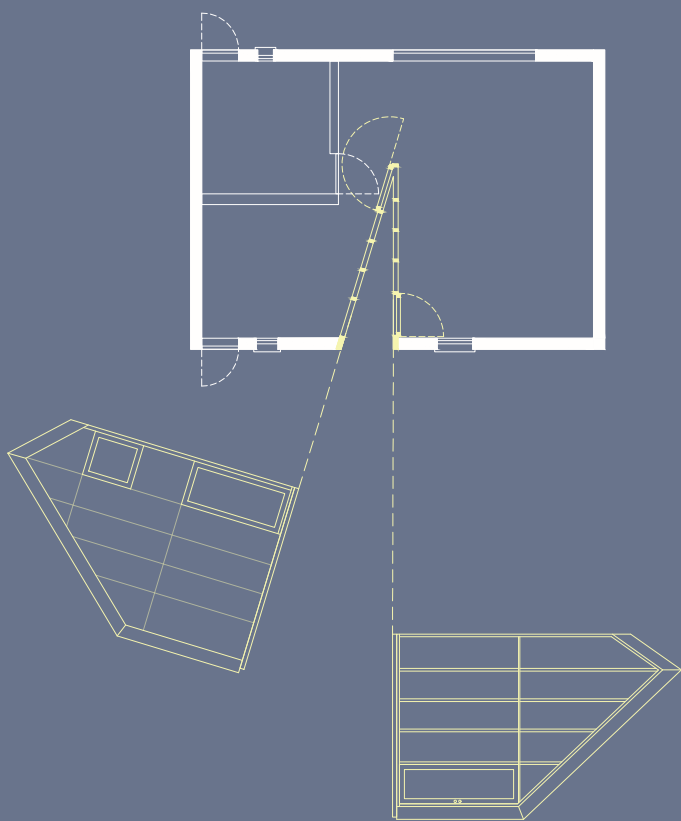
Rather than adding space or matter, removing some may as well prove to be a way. Sometimes it might be more about clarifying and reorganizing the existing, about making room and creating some holes than introducing more content.<sup>43</sup> American Artist Gordon-Matta Clark, does not hesitate to generate massive cuts through abandoned architectures to highlight their brimming potential. Whether radically or more timidly, demolition can reveal untapped opportunities and creating slits or interstices might be needed to enable a new occupation of space. This seems to perfectly define De Vylder Vinck Taillieu's project Kouter II in Melle, Belgium. Through a simple gesture, an incision emptying out a section of its volume, a small barn is converted into a livable space. On one side glass and on the other mirror, the crack permits access and allow light to enter. Organizing the floor plan, it also probably is a paradox and if nothing needed to be added, the cut still had to take place to let new occupation occur.<sup>44</sup>

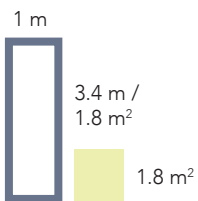
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<sup>43</sup> Borio, *Looking for the Voids*, 62.

<sup>44</sup> "De Vylder Vinck Taillieu - Kouter II," *afasia archzine*, accessed December 11, 2024, <https://afasiaarchzine.com/2023/02/de-vylder-vinck-taillieu>.







## INSIGHTS FROM 12 EXAMPLES

Be it houses that insert in existing interstices or lastly with the example of Kouter II, interstices that penetrate a house, be it filling or keeping empty found interstices or creation of new ones, addressing the in-between condition comes with its own set of implications. No matter the direction followed, all proposals were tasked to be creative due to the multiplication of constraints they had to face. Dealing with strong defining limits, they had to find ways to overcome them. Reflect on the margins, push the boundaries, inviting specific aspects of the context to become part of the interstice, projects, such as Borio Lab's ones, propose to transcend the perimeter imposed on them and activate adjacent sites.<sup>45</sup> Expanding boundaries in this manner invites to dialogue with the context and appropriate of some of its features. It also goes hand in hand with an idea of sharing resources. The social and spatial context becomes a crucial question and indicates that rather than the individual project it is the overall structure that matters. Often something small might actually open up into something bigger.<sup>46</sup> The relation to the surroundings thus takes on full importance. If some projects remain isolated and opt for introversion like 1.8M House, lots of them rather choose to go towards interaction with the environment. Not hesitating to cut a few openings and perforate adjacent walls, projects such

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<sup>45</sup> Borio, *Looking for the Voids*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Klanten, *Petite Places, Clever Interior for Humble Homes* (Gestalten, 2018), 3.

as Risoux and M26 really search for creating links with neighboring buildings, going so far as to join them. Directly related to the very definition of the interstice being both interruption or continuity, differentiation or transition, permeable or porous, projects can choose either way. Or as demonstrated by House and Road, they can tackle both at the time and alternate between enclosure and opening just by moving a door. Simultaneously bringing together and distancing, the interstice is an encounter moment. Much more than a simple limit, it is as a dilatation, a limit that became spatial. It is the thickness of the limit with its form and dimensions and even its own limits.<sup>47</sup>

Dealing with small and narrow conditions, projects have to rethink the typical organization of the house. Defying conventional internal divisions, E-M House opts for fragmentation on interconnected levels and arrange space through verticality. Similarly, blending all rooms together, 1.8M House proposes to overlap functions over the course of the day. In the ever-changing house, activities choreograph over time, maximizing the possible scenarios that can happen within the perimeter of the space. Temporality, also key in projects like STAG, can be accompanied by an idea of sharing. In the back lanes, activities but also occupants alternate and a constant negotiation between users is settled. Appropriating parts of the city that they do not officially own, users momentarily invest the space with installations that can vanish as far as they appeared. Illegal and temporary, the two concepts are also tackled by the Taiwanese parasitic and ephemeral project Illegal Architecture. If change over time can happen within hours or days, it can also be tackled over months or years, introducing a concern of longevity. Best understood through the ability to bear changing needs, longevity is a topic embraced by Quinta Monroy's houses planned to evolve with their inhabitants. No matter the strategy adopted, limitation of space truly is an invitation, an invitation to adapt and take on new challenges.

Addressing voids and empty spaces, projects choose to leave room for the undefined, the unknown and let the unexpected settles in. Less of a strict, rigid program, it is about offering room for maneuver and appropriation. With almost as much emptiness as fullness, Quinta Monroy is a significant example of introducing free space and inviting unknown future outcomes. In a different way, van Eyck's playgrounds also seek freedom and, stimulating rather than dictating, they encourage interpretation. Undefined, free, versatile, flexible, are all features that best characterize the interstice. Whether open like in House and Road or enclosed like in Victor-Ruffy, keeping some space empty truly allows a multiplication of possibilities.

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<sup>47</sup> Arzoumanian and Bengoa, *Habiter l'entre-Deux*, 28.

Tackling in-between situations, projects have to find ways to articulate dualities and manage their encounter. Relying on the in-between as transitional, buffer or threshold spaces, they might set about legal/illegal dualism like Illegal architecture, or about old/new like Victor-Ruffy, M26 or Kouter II, all also tackling the inside/outside relationship. Pushing the latter towards extreme, Inverted Hong Kong relies on the ambiguous status of the in-between and does not hesitate to blur inside and outside, questioning at the same time the distinction between private/public and domestic/collective with intimate rituals like bathing happening on the shared ground of the city. By nature relational, the in-between is a dynamic space that organizes the relationship between spaces and things. Fully addressing it, projects are tasked to reconsider the perception of dichotomy and come with spatial responses to the quest for balance between contrasting elements.<sup>48</sup>

Addressing the interstitial condition calls for a shift in habits and a rethinking of our ways of living. Maybe it is bathing outside, maybe it is negotiating with other user and share a same space or maybe it is constantly redesigning a space and modify its occupation over hours, days or years. Perhaps it is aiming for an unusual layout like in Risoux and its split-couple typology. In any case, creative and sensible proposals are needed to inhabit the interstice. Although carefully chosen to offer as exhaustive a panel as possible, the 12 projects crossed are just a few examples of ways to address the narrow empty in-between. Many other strategies can be imagined and the collection gathered in the following pages aims to broaden the perspective, inviting to lose oneself going through ever more captivating projects.

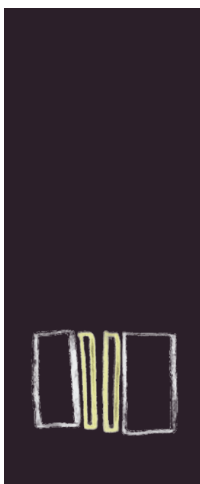
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48 Arzoumanian and Bengoa, 28–29.

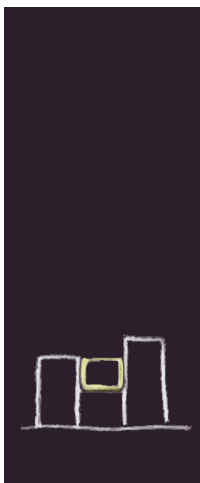
# IV. COLLECTION



Jakub Szczesny – Keret House, Warsaw, Poland  
(2012)



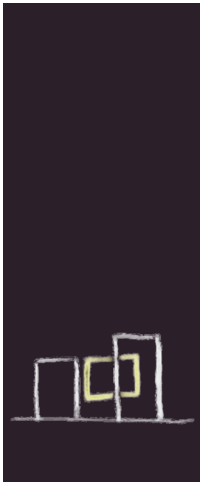
Osamu Nishida - Skinniest Houses, Tokyo, Japan  
(2014)



He Architectuur – Karper, Molenbeek, Belgium  
(2021)



De Base Associates – House SSK, Kortrijk, Belgium (2014)



Nem architects – Une chambre suspende, Gentilly, France (2012)



Mir architects – Heliotrope, Paris, France (2010)



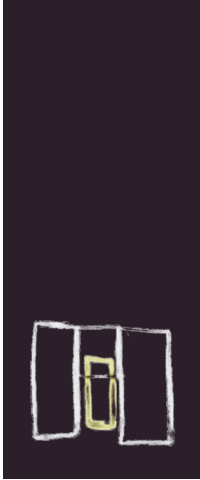
Ontwerpatelier Chambrang - Van spookhuis tot droomhuis, Antwerp, Belgium (2015)



Atelier Bow-Wow – Pet Architecture, Tokyo, Japan (2002)



Borio Lab – Wut Tung Sat, Peng Chau Island, China (2018)



I.S.M architecten – House for Alexander and Sara, Sint-Niklaas, Belgium (2014)



Yiie Arcitects – CACP “Designing?” in Yulin Second Alley, Chengdu City, China (2024)



Parallel Lab – Hong Kong Back Lanes, Hong Kong, China (2015)



III-Studio – Pigalle Duperé, Paris, France (2009)



Galli Rudolf Architekten – Erlenmatt Ost I, Basel, Switzerland (2017)



Aldo van Eyck – Amsterdam Orphanage, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (1960)



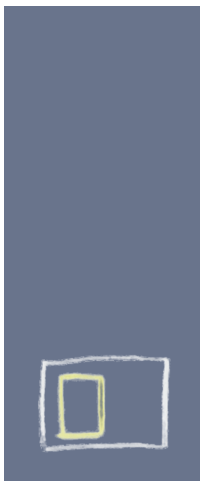
Aaa, atelier d'architecture autogéré – Passage 56, Paris, France (2006)



Atba architecture+énergie – Soubeyran, Geneva, Switzerland (2017)



Guidotti Architetti – La Casa ex parrocchiale, Monte Carasso, Switzerland (2018)



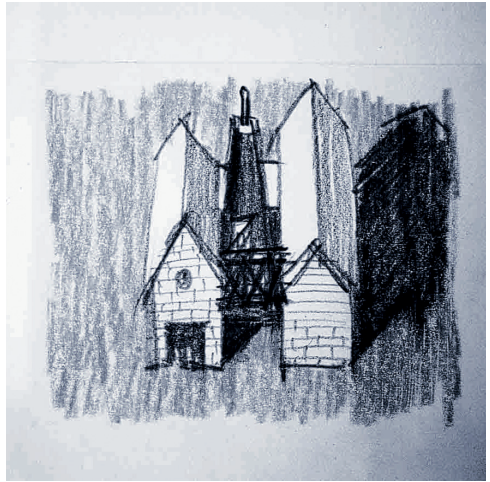
Caroline Lambrechts, Machteld D'Hollander – Patijn House, Ghent, Belgium (2017)



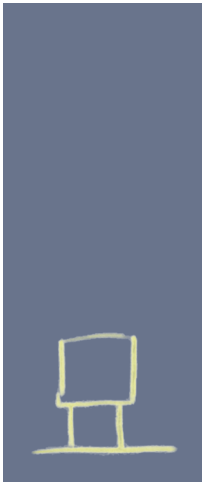
Suter+Suter – Siedlung Arche Nova, Uster, Switzerland (1992)



IR arquitectura – El Camarin, Chacarita, Argentina (2018)



Eugeen Liebaut – Woning voor fotograaf, Mere, The Netherlands (1984)



Atelier 5 - Flatmatt II, Flatmatt, Switzerland (1961)



Ryue Nishizawa, SANAA – Moriyama House, Tokyo Japan (2005)



# V. CONCLUSION

Finally, going towards an architecture of in-betweens enables to unlock the potential of the many voids that exist within our built landscapes. Gaps, residual spaces, interstices, looking at them as many opportunities and places for other-doings and thinking, reveals the value they carry for hosting innovative projects.

Inserting between what is already there, complete or extend an existing, merge surroundings, it might be filling a gap. Refraining to build, maybe it is about preserving a void: observe, thinking of temporary or minimal intervention or maybe only define, programing and protecting some space to let the unexpected happen. Or it might be generating a breach, planning undefined spaces, give freedom to users, consider and allow change. Regardless of the strategy adopted, living in the interstice means dealing with strong defining lines, with limits and existing contexts. It implies tackling smallness, emptiness and in-between-ness and asks to see constraints as driving forces. Addressing this particular condition invites to explore new paths and find ways to overcome limitations. Smallness is faced by thinking of temporalities, alternating activities over time, overlapping functions or sharing resources and space. The void is perceived as a flexible and versatile space, one left free for interpretation and appropriation, multiplying the possible. The in-between becomes a moment of encounter, of conciliation. It is momentarily a separation or a link, a differentiation or a transition or maybe it is both at the time. Dynamic space that articulates opposing notions such the open and close or the intimate and shared, it also dilates and ask to reconsider the line between them.<sup>49</sup>

Living in the interstice also means tackling minimalism. It asks to consider priorities and tend towards frugality. It is striking how important every centimeter and every small detail becomes when dealing with such confined spaces. Interstitial projects need to be careful, sensible and, advocating liberation from unnecessary weight, they are an invitation to do more with less.<sup>50</sup> Turning to an architecture of in-betweens asks to consider minimal intervention with

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49 Arzoumanian and Bengoa, 28–29.

50 Borio, *Looking for the Voids*, 145.

maximum effect. Prioritizing, maximizing, bringing forward existing qualities, thinking in-between really emerges as an attitude. It is a way of raising awareness on what is already there and becoming conscious of our surroundings. Aiming for internal densification and advocating against demolition, infiltrating and valuing forgotten gaps of the built fabric also invite to reflect on the scale and scope of intervention. Maybe the future of architecture in our increasingly dense and fragmented built environments is towards a multitude of precise and attentive small-scale interventions. Learning from particularities and irregularities, it prompts a more context-driven approach, one at the scale of the residual. As demonstrated by mapping practices, entire constellations of sporadic in-between sites may be revealed. Perhaps thanks to their multitude or the opportunity they offer to weave links between them, they hold great potential to breathe new life into our cities.

## MASTER PROJECT

Far from being a final point, the outcome of this énoncé théorique intends to be the beginning of a master project that will be undertaken in continuity. To lay the foundations, let's take a look at the city of Lausanne, seeking to map its residual spaces. Starting from the entire surface of the city, it is about removing the already defined: buildings and built matter, but also, some voids, those with names, with functions, such as main roads, parks or public places. To in the end remain only with the undetermined, the anonymous, the neglected. All the forgotten spaces come to light. The in-betweens pop to the surface, emanating with them a wide field of possibilities.



#### TOTAL AREA OF LAUSANNE

- forests (+10 m)
- water
- fields, meadows, pastures
- railways
- airfields
- main roads, paths
- buildings
- tunnels, underpasses, galleries
- bridges, footbridges
- major staircases
- walls, fountains, chimneys
- pavements, pedestrian squares
- gardens
- sports grounds
- swimming pools
- accesses to private plots with surface area > 300 m<sup>2</sup>
- private plots \*except when less than 5 m from a building on both sides
- all surfaces touching a public building (agricultural, industrial, ecclesiastical, educational or hospital building)
- all surfaces with surface area > 300 m<sup>2</sup>
- all surfaces with surface area < 10 m<sup>2</sup>
- all surfaces with length > 100 m

= RESIDUAL SPACES





Lausanne, Switzerland : digital mapping of interstitial sites

1 : 25'000 



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