Nonsolution: Disputed Closures in the Politics of Architecture

Gabu Heindl
Drehli Robnik

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Our book’s mottos, taken from song lyrics, express a train of thought that runs along nonsolution: first, there is criticism of the obsessive desire to solve problems (Sleater-Kinney) and a rejection of the pathos of answers in which the questions disappear (Dead Kennedys). But then there is also an insistence that you cannot do without answering questions, without solving problems (Gil Scott-Heron). And an insistence that defining problems and solutions, precisely as a problematic process, is a question of time, i.e. subject to a certain urgency, and that this definition is not something sober and scientific, but goes hand in hand with positioning, whose moment of decision in turn only makes sense in a collective horizon (MC5). The three song lyrics and the one live album intro say it better, but we mean roughly the same thing.

Let's begin this chapter, as we will the following ones, with a feature film scene: "Without much further ado, I give you: The Derek Zoolander Centre for Kids Who Can't Read Good!" In Ben Stiller's 2001 crazy comedy *Zoolander*, a fashion mogul unveils the design model of a philanthropic educational centre to be named after the film's titular protagonist, a prominent fashion model. With a grand gesture, he shows Zoolander the miniature model of the planned centre. Confronted for the first time with his charity project in model form, the noble benefactor Zoolander eyes the building, which is about the size of his head as he circles it, from close up. And then he angrily throws the model from its pedestal onto the floor, asking indignantly: "What is this? A centre for ants? How can we be expected to teach children to learn how to read if they can't even fit inside the building?" The model's presenter, who had hoped for enthusiasm from his client, wants to say something by way of explanation, but Zoolander interrupts him with the dramatically delivered demand: "I don't wanna hear your excuses! The centre has to be at least … three times bigger than this!"

Now, of course, it's clear that the joke here is based on the fact that the vain, simple-minded Zoolander doesn't understand the architectural code of the model representation on a smaller scale and is therefore wrongly indignant about a building that is too small. However, the consequences of this unlikely misunderstanding are played out so consistently for humour in this canonical comedy scene that the question of what we are actually laughing at inevitably arises. The joke means a little more than it initially seems, and the one who appears intellectually incapable and passive displays more mental activity than the self-assured application of standards and building size measurements would initially admit. For Zoolander makes an accusation, asks a question that is not so far-fetched at the beginning of the 21st century:

how can you squeeze people into buildings that are far too small? (Also: how can you put children in schools that are not suitable as buildings?) And the question is not: how can you achieve this technically? But rather: how dare you?

Cramming people into buildings that are as small as possible was already in vogue around 100 years ago. Giancarlo De Carlo's critical view of early architectural efforts to address the issue of "Minimum Dwelling" (*Existenzminimum*) as discussed at the CIAM Congress in Frankfurt in 1929 and translated into design parameters, is revealing and canonical. De Carlo's criticism is aimed at the extent to which innovative creativity and planning energy were focused entirely on squeezing as many small units as possible into new residential buildings – in the limited space that private appropriation leaves for public construction.[1] This was a case of instrumentalist, *solutionist* fixation on questions of *how* – imaginative solutions for further minimising the space that capital grants to the have-nots – at the expense of relevant questions of *why*, which could apply to what is actually being planned here, and who benefits or suffers as a result.

Criticism of planning for the minimum subsistence level is becoming increasingly urgent today in view of propagated demands for sufficiency and, while as it is called, 'creatively solved' forms of *tiny housing* – a way of living in small spaces, propagated as beautiful, that de facto gives real estate capital more profitable investment opportunities. Tiny houses are sold today as an achievement in reducing the ecological footprint of housing and as a hip lifestyle choice. Such individualisation obscures a number of issues – not least the exclusive restriction to small, 'adaptable' groups of users, mostly young people, and

1 Giancarlo De Carlo, "Architecture's Public," [1970] in: Peter Blundell-Jones, Doina Petrescu, Jeremy Till (eds.), *Architecture and Participation*, New York, London: Routledge 2005, p. 8.

the infrastructure problems associated with small houses built from scratch in greenfield sites (which are in any case mostly second homes for the wealthy). We are opposed to reducing solutions to existing patterns of exploitation, wealth distribution and prescribed scarcity. This also applies to shortages of space and other social resources. We criticise solutions that are based on established power and ownership structures, which in turn are presented as unavoidable and without alternative.

Our present is marked by crises (polycrises): the ecological crisis, i.e. the climate catastrophe; the social crisis, i.e. the exacerbation of inequality in the distribution of wealth and work; the crisis of democracy in the face of right-wing populist, national-authoritarian or techno-fascist disruptive mobilisations. However, some crises do not necessarily mean dysfunction, but rather the normal mode of systemic processes; for example, the housing crisis: the shortage of living space perfects some of the dynamics of capitalist marketing and financialisation.[2]

In this book, we want to focus less on crises and more on questions of justice and politics. The time pressure caused by crisis-related problems undoubtedly exists; but ideology and (self-)deception are at work when this time pressure is used to legitimise solutions that are presented as having no alternative – and which ignore who benefits from them and who does not. In this context, too, 'the crisis' functions as yet another option for maximising private profits (with any losses being 'socialised'). A notorious example of this is the transformation of a solution into a slogan, a catchphrase that makes it an unquestionable panacea. A prime example of this is the current demand to 'Build! Build! Build!' – namely, new housing – as a universal solution to the housing shortage, even though the problem itself has been

2 "Homelessness exists not because the system is failing to work as it should, but because the system *is* working as it must," Peter Marcuse, "Neutralising Homelessness", *Socialist Review* 88/1, 1988, p. 93.

misidentified. This solution gives investors and their supporters opportunities to pose as 'doers' at groundbreaking ceremonies; it brings its share of fetishised growth, and with it more ecological destruction, urban sprawl, soil sealing and motorised traffic; but it hardly ever reduces homelessness in conurbations as long as this new housing is built for profit and is therefore unaffordable for most users, let alone does it address vacancy as a structural problem of housing shortage.

How a problem is identified, how it is constituted as such, ultimately from the perspective of its solution, a solution that *must* result in "a visible kind of remedy, namely a building" – this was formulated by sociologist Lucius Burckhardt as early as 1980 as a social problem, and also as a problem of political perception. According to Burckhardt, housing construction subsidies – the German *Wohnbauförderung* – contribute to "buildings being destroyed", including habitable buildings, because "this is a state aid for the construction of housing, not for housing per se." In contrast to democratically complex strategies, "construction [...] is generally feasible" because "the chains of command become simpler."[3] Building something new is the simplest solution, but often the most problematic. This criticism is even more relevant in view of the climate catastrophe and under conditions of intensified neoliberal deregulation, which is seen as the silver bullet solution: in the current German housing crisis, which is described as a shortage of new buildings and thus misdiagnosed, many governments are seeking to accelerate new housing construction and make it more cost-effective, for example by means

3 Lucius Burckhardt, *The Minimal Intervention*, Basel: Birkhäuser 2022, pp. 30f, 53. Burckhardt's problem constitution is "linguistic in nature" (cf. today's emergency discourse on the 'backlog in new housing construction'): in the "designation" of "ills" as a "political issue" lies "already what is called the 'solution', namely the recipe for remedy. This process [...] tends [...] towards a specific, namely visible, type of remedy, namely construction." (p. 35)

of a "construction turbo clause" (*Bau-Turbo*). Such deregulatory solutions offer the construction industry an opportunity to throw ecological and social achievements overboard, such as public participation, requirements for mixed use and the creation of social facilities, requirements for ecological compensation measures, quotas for social housing and rent controls. Ultimately, since land is also subject to market logic, such deregulation turbo charging increases (land) speculation. And it contributes to the fact that the kind of degrading housing that was tried out during Europe's 2015 *summer of migration* in the form of mass-produced cheap refugee accommodation is becoming a model for the crisis housing construction that is being championed today: low-quality modular construction is becoming the preferred response to the housing shortage. These forms of problem-solving contribute not least to preventing vacant properties from being activated or large housing companies from being held accountable, and to preventing land tax, rent regulation and speculation restrictions from being publicly discussed as alternative courses of action.

Our book problematises the pathos, propagation and practice of solutions; and thus, also the discourse and applications that reduce solutions to the means that are already available to them. Above all, however, solutions are reduced to the maintenance of existing, predetermined property and power relations. The critical term *solutionism* refers to this, especially to technicist and neoliberal reductions. An unreflective obsession with solutions manifests itself in planning and construction, but it also determines how we talk and act when it comes to the climate crisis and the necessary socio-ecological transformation.[4]

4 For the technology-sceptical journalist Evgeny Morozov, solutionism (a word he rightly uses pejoratively) stems primarily from architectural discourse. In his study on social solutionism, he critically highlights the euphoric fixation on Internet applications and algorithm-based solutions as well as a libertarian, techno-escapist conception of freedom. Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything,*

The housing question is closely linked to *eco-solutionism*. Degrowth is an important concept in (post-)industrial countries that fundamentally questions growth. However, it is a case of eco-solutionism when educated circles in affluent areas prescribe negative growth as a global solution for climate protection, even for people and regions that are just beginning to enjoy some of the benefits that economic growth brings and are least responsible for the climate catastrophe. Even with proposed solutions that do not go as far as this demand, solutionism often replaces political debate (for example, the fight for climate justice, against extractivism and neocolonial exploitation). This happens not least in the form of "best practice urban solutionism," as supported by globally active philanthropic foundations and the World Bank – which for a good ten years now has defined itself not only as a "knowledge bank" but also as a "solutions bank" – within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This leads to the multiple global export of local solutions, including their financing models, to other cities or regions, usually without examining context-specific alternatives.[5]

Such an export of the "neat solution" as a "perfect solution" with "model character," going along with the belief in "exemplary and universally applicable solutions", has already been criticised by Burckhardt.[6] Eco-solutionism in today's green capitalism relies on quick fixes that supposedly turn everything around for the better, or on techno-fixes that allow everything to remain the same forever (such as CO_2 capture and storage, which are supposed to save endangered fossil-fuel lifestyles).[7] Or it relies on green investments that will increase property values: local climate solutions and ecological improvements may mean, not least, that certain land market values and property values will rise, that gentrification will occur, and that those who could already afford it will once again live a little more beautifully – now just greener. A similar picture of eco-solutionism, which ignores social distribution and power relations, is offered by photovoltaic systems installed on private land or roofs with public funding – even though land and solar energy should be subjected to collective sharing.

A case of blatant greenwashing or green labelling – nevertheless granted technophile and formal recognition in parts of the architectural scene – is The Line, a planned megacity in the Saudi Arabian desert for global elites investing in the project. Promoted through glossy imagery as 100 per cent ecological and entirely CO_2 emission-free, its early construction phases saw unprecedented exploitation and deaths among low-wage migrant workers. Not due to this, but because of missing investment, the project has come to an end.

Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism, New York: PublicAffairs 2013, pp. 5f., 16, 75, 129f.

5 For example, when Bogotá's expanded (and locally controversial) bus system is exported as a best-practice model without considering whether, for example, an underground railway system would make more sense for some cities. See Sergio Montero, "Leveraging Bogotá: Sustainable Development, Global Philanthropy and the Rise of Urban Solutionism," *Urban Studies* 57, 2020, p. 11.

6 See Burckhardt, *The Minimal Intervention*, pp. 127, 132.

7 Geographer and urban planning theorist Maria Kaika offers an apt critique of eco-solutionist discourse. Starting from a positive vote for policies of *dissensus* and commoning, she draws attention to how, especially in the context of smart city strategies, "greening", "resiliency", "safety", "inclusiveness" and "sustainability" function as buzzwords. According to Kaika, these discourses loudly proclaim improvements without changing anything about power relations and their harmful effects: they support "inclusion" in social systems in which people are placed in subordinate positions from the outset, often at the cost of hyper-exploitation in a postcolonial "elsewhere." Or eco-solutionism wants to make populations "more resilient" instead of fighting the conditions that demand resilience from a population in the first place in the face of social and ecological damage. Maria Kaika, "'*Don't call me resilient again!*': the New Urban Agenda as immunology ... or ... what happens when communities refuse to be vaccinated with 'smart cities' and indicators", *Environment & Urbanisation* 29, 1, 2017.

According to neoliberal discourse, nature itself is now the basis of green capitalist solutionism, at least in the trendsetting of the EU Commission.[8] However, solutionist proposals for solving problems present a dilemma: rejecting them outright or boycotting a Green New Deal as irrelevant always carries the risk of aligning oneself with those social and political positions that want to see this sovereignly decreed deal overturned for reactionary motives. The Green New Deal promptly became a Clean Industrial Deal, as the EU has been calling its economic agenda since July 2024: this is one of the ways in which the successful pressure, exerted by right-wing parties with their scaremongering about the "deindustrialisation of Europe", is becoming manifest. Denial of the ecological catastrophe, defence of the fundamental right to burn petrol in cars, hateful campaigns against "climate dictatorship", incitement against Greens and even against TV weather reporters who dare to mention global warming – these agendas of the conservative and nationalist right are, needless to say, not the positions from which we question eco-solutionism.

We reject the hostage situation in which solutionism often traps thinking and action, as if there were only either economically liberal predefined solutions – or a blanket denial of the overall problem. Meaningful action in problem contexts takes place against this false either/or and beyond it, and our book is devoted to forms of such action. We vote against solutionist reduction: against the reduction of socio-political questions – especially questions of justice – to technical how-tos (within the given unjust order); against reducing problems to solution routines and to 'practical constraints' in which the 'laws' of the market economy manifest themselves and at the same time conceal themselves (and increasingly also phobias based on 'national identity'). In contrast, we maintain that something new comes into play in the relationship between problems and solutions – in a strong sense: as something that cannot be derived from its preconditions, cannot be traced back to what is given (although this new thing has its history, but one that is different from the success story of the powers that be). This new element – unforeseen, unplanned – will be encountered in the course of this book, among other topics, in the concept of the mass as a not fully defined social agency and planning reference (see pp. 28ff.).

The irreducibly new (the *event*) that arises between problem and solution, or rather, the new that *consists* in this very relationship between problem and solution – this is what Gilles Deleuze speaks of in the context of his philosophy, which is devoted to the irreducible: to that which distinguishes, to difference. In the late 1960s, he used the same Marx quote twice in a tension (or difference) that is significant for our book. He writes about the social theory of structuralist Marxism: "'The economic' is never given properly speaking, but rather designates a differential virtuality to be interpreted, always covered over by its forms of actualisation; a theme or 'problematic' always covered over by its cases of solution. In short, the economic is [...] the totality of the problems posed to a given society, or the synthetic and problematising field of that society. [...] The famous phrase from *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 'mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve,' does not mean that the problems are only apparent or that they are already solved, but, on the contrary, that the economic conditions of a problem determine or give rise to the manner in which it finds a solution within the framework of the real relations of society." According to Deleuze, this is no reason for optimism, because these social "solutions" throughout history have been marked by stupidity and cruelty, even leading to wars and the Holocaust. "[T]he solution is always that which a

8 *Nature-based solutions* are, it is claimed, "actions which are inspired by, supported by or copied from nature". European Commission, *Towards an EU Research and Innovation policy agenda for Nature-Based Solutions & Re-Naturing Cities*, 2015.

society deserves or gives rise to as a consequence of the manner in which, given its real relations, it is able to pose the problems set within it and to it."[9]

In the following, we also assume that the economic dimension of society, the capital relationship, is something that is misrepresented as a problem in most approaches to solutions, especially in solutionism, namely that it is not addressed radically as a relationship of commodities, ownership and exploitation, and thus as unjust, but rather remains concealed and is reproduced by these solutions.[10] But are we not then adhering to an economism that says that capital relations are the universal key, the root problem, to which everything else is merely a derivative with no intrinsic value ("reflexes", "secondary contradictions" and whatever else the jargon calls them)? No. This is said with reference to the other – and more optimistic – passage by Deleuze on the problem and solution, which also refers to Marx: the new arises in the posing of problems that enable the actualisation of this virtuality as solutions. Deleuze writes it this way: the conventions established in the use of reason "'set up' [*donnent*] ready-made problems, as if they were drawn out of 'the city's administrative filing cabinets,' and force us to 'solve' them, leaving us only a thin margin of freedom. [...] It is the schoolteacher who 'poses' the problems; the pupil's task is to discover the solutions. In this way we are kept in a kind of slavery. True freedom lies in a

9 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [1968], New York: Columbia UP 1994, p. 186.

10 The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for example, addressed this point in terms of false solutions: in liberal societies, violence is "put outside the law and, in effect, suppressed in the commerce of ideas", but it is "maintained in daily life in the form of colonisation, unemployment, and wages". This maintenance and concealment of structural violence in the absence of open violence is what he called "the pseudo-solution of liberalism". Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror. An Essay on the Communist Problem* [1947], Boston: Beacon Press 1969, p. 103.

power to decide, to constitute problems themselves." This corresponds, Deleuze continues, to "Marx's formulation, which is valid for practice itself: 'Humanity only sets itself problems that it is capable of solving.'" And therefore "the problem always has the solution it deserves [...]."[11] In other words: you cannot escape the problems, because they do not disappear in the solutions; rather, the solutions themselves remain problematic: a persistent after-effect. But you also cannot escape the solutions, because they are always already contained within the problems: a case of the solution persistently preceding itself. In short, you get rid of problems less than you would like, but you are also always more involved in solving them than you think.

To put it in political terms: freedom lies in posing problems. This risky freedom is not a romantic or liberal idea but rather points to the fact that problematisation collides with prevailing orders, ideologies and vested interests. In Burckhardt's words, they collide, for example, with "master plan" thinking, which insists "that calculations work out and therefore problems can be solved with no loose ends."[12] These loose ends, this residue, that's what matters to us; it is the contentious matter and the gap in what wants to be closed and complete; it is what remains, what needs to be thought about, what needs to be continuously done when it is claimed that the problem has been solved.

We take this position under the name nonsolution. In short, a nonsolution is a solution that highlights an inherent contradiction. This inherent contradiction also refers to broader contexts of the respective solution, which haunt this solution and prevent it from becoming self-satisfied in its interiority. A nonsolution is a solution that highlights its own controversial nature. It is not simply no solution. We go beyond the purely negative dictionary

11 Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* [1966], New York: Zone Books 1988, p. 15f.

12 Burckhardt, *The Minimal Intervention*, p. 10.

definition of nonsolution as "a proposed solution to a problem that is deemed inadequate or not a real solution" (https://www.collinsdictionary.com). Nonsolution is indeed a solution, but one that challenges this very notion – hence the prefix non – and thus remains true to the problem. At the same time, nonsolution is a way of thinking, an intermediate form of paradox and dialectic.

The following concerns where nonsolution comes from and what it can mean. Let us start by saying that we use nonsolution as a *concept*; that is, not as a label to be correctly attached to an object, not as something whose definition belongs in a dictionary, but as a manoeuvring zone that opens up a space for argumentation, for conceptual operations with practical consequences in thinking and theoretical consequences for action. The term nonsolution is not about questions of cognition and knowledge as such, but rather in the context of perspectives and positions – of attitudes in society, of political orientation. Towards a politics in the sense of criticism of power and egalitarian demands for justice. Nonsolution definitely does not mean that solutions are not needed and that problems do not exist, but rather it means: objection to the prescribed solution, resumption of problematisation. As an attitude, nonsolution also encompasses learning not to give up, but to persevere – to persevere in working on solutions as well as in questioning them, to the point of rejecting them and criticising solutionism as an ideology. Formulated in reverse, this means not giving up on demanding more (even if it is utopian), but also not giving up on realising it (on 'solving').[13]

The term nonsolution is in motion because it – and therefore also our writing – is noticeably characterised by the constant addition of something; this has categorical status, not only in an additive sense, but also in a revising, contradictory sense: as an objection, as an added "That's not it (yet)!" an appended "nevertheless". The meanings and references of nonsolution gradually become clear here: in politicised scenarios, confrontations and contextualisations, also in contact with related concepts from (post-)Marxism and critical theory, from deconstruction, philosophy of action, radical democracy and hegemony theory. References from planning practice repeatedly come from *Gabu Heindl Architektur*; this is not intended as a demonstration of best practice models, but as an illustration of how concerns related to theory are articulated in the medium of planning and construction (and vice versa). We establish a comprehensive connection here with Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966): this is also a book about some facets of the thinking of this sociologist, journalist, film and history theorist, and trained architect.[14]

13 Thanks to Marie Neugebauer and Markus Bogensberger for their thoughts on this learning process.

14 Further reading with an emphasis on the radical democratic founding problem: Gabu Heindl, Drehli Robnik, "(Non)Building Alliances: Approaching Architectural Politics through Siegfried Kracauer's Concept of Nonsolution", in: Friederike Landau, Lucas Pohl, Nikolai Roskamm (eds.), *[Un]Grounding: Post-Foundational Geographies*, Bielefeld: transcript 2021; Heindl, Robnik, "Nonsolution. Approaching the politics of urban planning with Siegfried Kracauer", in: Heike Biechteler, Johannes Käferstein, Stefan Kurath, Jonathan Sergison, HSLU Technik & Architektur (eds.), *Lucerne Talks: Teaching Urbanism*, Zurich: Park Books 2025.

Composing and Decomposing a Whole: Nonsolution in Siegfried Kracauer´s Writings

A formed whole that, in the process of its unfolding, questions this very process: this is roughly what, in general and structural terms, nonsolution is about. Let us again consider a feature film example; this time less in terms of content than in terms of the simultaneity of, on the one hand, a formative impulse – in the case of a film: to convey something narratively, to show something – and, on the other hand, an impulse that counteracts this. Our example is Jessica Hausner's *Club Zero* from 2023, a thriller-like study of group dynamics that provides insights into social processes – and at the same time undermines its own practice of opening up insights. What is relevant about *Club Zero* is not only its subject matter, but also a gesture that constantly and subtly questions the possibility of pinning down and exhaustively portraying this very subject matter. The result is a film that is disturbing not only because of what it shows: the sinister goings-on of a secret cult at an elite British college. What is also disturbing is how the film shows this, namely by subjecting its own showing to *deconstruction*; the big word is appropriate here, because this happens *in the act* of showing. Not through the effect of a reflective intervention from outside (off-screen commentary, etc.), but rather in the following way: the scenes in which a charismatic teacher manipulates her students initiate the disturbing escalation of a nutrition class into the food-refusal cult that gives the film its title. At the same time, a gentler unease emanates from the design of these scenes – from the fact that, in a subtly anachronistic way, there are no TikTok videos or the like at play here, but instead a chair circle in which the teacher, as if out of nowhere, has cardboard display boards with children's book-like depictions of food at her disposal, which she presents. It is as if the film is set in the 1970s and not (as is the case) in our present day

of influencer discourse and platform-based hype, which play no role here whatsoever, which in turn is striking – like dogs that do not bark. The *mise-en-scène* is similar: penetrating camera zooms traverse clear shots, structured by strong colours and modernist sets, in which characters speak measured, formal English as if in a mockery of a language course. But do these zooms lead to a clarifying representation or rather into a void? A void to which our desire to clearly see nevertheless clings. Does this *mise-en-scène* make things clearer – or is it part of the very *denial* of the claim that a problematic issue (in this case, teenage cult behaviour and eating habits) can simply be isolated, clarified and resolved with the result of a satisfying "aha" effect? The dramatization of effects raises the question of how to define the causes. In short, *Club Zero* is a behavioural study undoing itself: a performance that allows itself to be haunted by the co-performance of its own limitations and counter-tendencies; a representational whole in the process of simultaneous composition and decomposition.

The term "nonsolution" can be found in the 1960s New York writings of Siegfried Kracauer, who as a left-wing Jewish critic had to flee Nazi Germany. Nonsolution becomes a condensed concept for a recurring theme in Kracauer's work: the possibility of dealing with reality in its contingency. Contingency, as we understand it, contains something of openness and unpredictability as well as of contradiction. Contingency does not only mean randomness but also being related to others. This creates moments of dissensus, and this is our entry point into the political character, especially the conflictual character, of nonsolution.

Kracauer explains nonsolution briefly (he uses the word in only three places in his entire oeuvre) but concisely. In his last book, *History*, published posthumously in 1969, he examines various forms of historiography and the conceptions of history that underlie them. One form that could do justice to the contingent,

contradictory character of history would be a historical narrative – a "history book" – that is repeatedly interrupted by insertions. Veritable close-ups illustrate or confirm not so much the overall course of the historical account as they counteract it.[15] For Kracauer, history is characterised in a specific way by breaks in that it encompasses both breaks and continuities. If it were characterised *only* by breaks, this would ultimately amount to a pure continuum – a continuum of breaks. Viewing history in this way already has something of a nonsolution perspective. What is at stake here, then, is a representation of history that does not deny the contradictions of social reality or misunderstand them as a defect but rather gives equal weight to the overall process and its counterforces without resolving this opposition. Such a representation, which encompasses contradictions in its form and keeps them in play, constitutes, according to Kracauer, an "admirable nonsolution".

Kracauer repeatedly points to parallels between history and film: both are forms of perception that are appropriate to a heterogeneous social reality, a reality that is not uniform (or can only be so through violence). This is true if history is not understood as a success story and film is not understood as a self-contained work of art. In his theory of history, Kracauer draws explicit comparisons between film and history, and quotes from his own film theory, in which he uses the same expression, "admirable nonsolution", to describe a type of filmmaking in which a comprehensive story does not reduce what it includes and exhibits to the function of illustration or dramatization: filmed realities can appear in their own right as a counterforce to the overall story, but *within* that story. So, on the one hand, there is a strongly structured overall narrative, i.e. the classic feature film plot,

15 Siegfried Kracauer, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, New York: Oxford UP 1969, p. 128f. Here, Kracauer takes up contemporary ideas from the left-wing US historian Sigmund Diamond.

which is normally easy to grasp; on the other hand, there is a tendency for parts of this overall narrative to present something else, something that is contrary to this narrative – this contradiction remains unresolved in many types of filmmaking. Such films – especially *realistic* films that convey reality in its instability and inconsistency – are not formless: they do indeed create a whole, but as a heterogeneous, precarious whole that is constantly called into question as it unfolds. "Compose and decompose a whole" – according to Kracauer, this happens simultaneously and as an unresolved contradiction in film and also in history. This is a veritable nonsolution and, as such, "admirable".

A specific example from film that he cites is the close-up of the clasped hands of the anxious heroine during a court scene in D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (US, 1916). "Isolated from the rest of the body and greatly enlarged, the hands we know will change into unknown organisms quivering with a life of their own."[16] To clear up any possible misunderstanding: nonsolution is by no means about playing off the 'small', the close-up, against 'the big', the overall context. In an analogy drawn from Kracauer's examples from film and historiography to the field of politics, one could get the wrong impression that nonsolution thinking is intended to assert the small individual against the large collective, against the masses that threaten to swallow the individual, as they say, and is, therefore, possibly intended to advocate planning, acting and building on a small scale against large standards.[17] This

16 Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960], Princeton: Princeton UP 1997, p. 47f. This sentence also appears as a self-quotation in History, p. 126. – We prefer Kracauer's spelling in one word, "nonsolution" (as in *Theory of Film*), to the hyphenated form, "non-solution" (as in his self-quotation in *History*).

17 In 1931 Kracauer aptly wrote to his friend, the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, referring to the latter's appreciation of the essay as a paradigmatic *small form*: "It is less important that it is small than that the investigation takes up the given reality, drives it dialectically forward and thus changes it." Theodor

would be a liberal-individualistic view, which we are sceptical about. Instead of a preference for all things small – but also *without any aversion* to small things, small scales, etc. – nonsolution is about the truth of heterogeneity and inner tension; and it is also about the relationships between parts and the whole, between focus and context – each as a dynamic, conflict-laden and changeable relationship that has an effect on the things it relates to each other.

Let us now pursue nonsolution thinking further in the field of politics, focusing on construction and planning policy. Kracauer constantly refers us to the political sphere; when writing about cinematic forms, he sometimes uses expressions that are tantamount to the logic of nonsolution and are borrowed from the vocabulary of politics: "The principles of composition and disintegration clash with each other on the screen." This clash is a "dialectical process between a potential whole and the elements of which it may consist". And he asks: "But how can the filmmaker both compose and decompose a whole without falling into plain anarchy?"[18]

W. Adorno, Siegfried Kracauer, *"Der Riß der Welt geht auch durch mich." Briefwechsel 1923–1966*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2008, p. 282 (transl.: G.H./D.R.).

18 Kracauer, "Tentative Outline of a Book on Film Aesthetics" [1949], in: *Siegfried Kracauer – Erwin Panofsky Briefwechsel 1941–1966*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1996, p. 89.

Housing Provisional Collectives

Helicopters in the sky, green hills below, through which a faint red line meanders. Accompanied by the soul-pop sounds of Minnie Riperton's "Les Fleur", the end of Jordan Peele's 2019 social thriller *Us* shows, in a wide shot of the landscape, something that many (horror) films with a political slant would portray as an apocalyptic revelation: a people that was previously invisible as such performs itself as a mass gathering, as the grotesque march of *the wretched of the earth* in all their presence and evidence. Peele's film is different in important aspects: *Us* uses a collective doppelgänger motif to present the underworld population as 'us', thus painting a picture of a divided society; and in its final shot, it also programmatically shows *the people*, by problematising the possibility of showing them. That is, we see an endless chain of people on hills in California, hand in hand, dressed in red overalls, who have risen from misery and subalternity in enormous numbers to show themselves to the world outside – partly violent, partly as a pure collective apparition. Above all, however, we see that this apparition is difficult to see – like a thread or a texture, it has to be read out of the landscape in the final shot. This panorama reinforces the film's gesture of positing various divergent interpretations of the identity and goals of this people; this literal *uprising* to the surface has aspects of class, caste, racialised and inclusion-related struggles. What we get is the overwhelming wholeness of "We the people" and, at the same time, the questioning of this wholeness. We are left with an astonished reflection on a popular uprising, but nonetheless *with an evocation of this uprising*. We get the revolutionary apocalypse, but as a picture puzzle. Critique of showing in showing. Mass ornament as cryptogram. Reflexive left-wing populism as a nonsolution.

A Kracauer-inspired nonsolution approach leads us straight to political perspectives on social conditions. In the years around 1930, still in Germany, Kracauer already formulated ideas for which he would use the word *nonsolution* at the end of his work. With other wordings (more on this in a moment) and drawing on questions of solidarity, he wrote about going along in partial opposition. What he had in mind was a *critical solidarity* with collectivist projects, with egalitarian justice and the dismantling of class rule – specifically with the agendas of the trade union movement and the Marxist parties. He emphasises his solidarity with these projects, but he combines this endorsement with an expression of scepticism: to him, these mass organisations "overstressed collectivity" so that it is "almost already posited as a content in itself", thus "making a virtue out of the need for standardisation" – his word is "Uniformierung", reminiscent of *uniforms* – and threatening "every deviation from it" to "be excommunicated".[19] In this context, too, he insists that a tension must be maintained between an overall process and a conflicting reality, i.e. between, if you will, the comprehensive story of the implementation of a collectivist idea on the one hand and the experiences of individuals on the other: "The human individual, who confronts death alone, is not submerged in the collectivity striving to elevate itself into a final purpose."[20] Kracauer thus problematises the – at that time rigid – organisation of the masses as a universal solution, but remains committed to egalitarian mass politics. What is at stake here is the kind of unresolved tension that he will later call nonsolution, referring to an individual experience that cannot be reduced to organisation.

Does this remark stem from a liberal phobia of collectives? No, because Kracauer does not portray the individual as a strong

19 Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses. Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany* [1930], London, New York: Verso 1998, p. 106.

20 Ibid.

bastion of private enterprise, nor as a fixed entity that, according to a common ideological scenario, is supposed to break down the walls of collectivism. Rather, Kracauer emphasises mortality in isolated experience, thus highlighting a being situated in what we would today call a *vulnerable* body; a being that, precisely because of its vulnerability, can never be completely absorbed into the forms of an organised collective. The situation is similar in Kracauer's explicit nonsolution film example, the court scene in *Intolerance*: here, too, an individual is alone with a despair that strangles her existence – in love with a man who is innocently condemned to death, surrounded by an audience that is convinced of his guilt and united as a collective, of one mind.

The solidarity-based inclusion of individuals in collective forms of concern must also carefully consider aspects of the irreducibility of these individual experiences to collective standards. However, in this nonsolution thinking, the individual is not to be understood as a self-identical monolith or as an inalienable private property of identity. Rather, it corresponds to what in Deleuze's terminology is called the "dividual".[21] As such, it is divisible – but never completely, never according to a scheme, never without remainder. We die alone, but we are many, each and every one of us. The collectivism to which Kracauer remains critically solidary has an effect on the individual; the latter experiences its death as indivisible and yet is itself divided into the many in whom it is (among whom it is, as one of many) and who

21 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* [1983], Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P 1986, pp. 99, 105. See also Gerald Raunig's book *Dividuum*, which, in the conceptual sound of Deleuzianism, deals in part with problems related to the (Kracauerian) nonsolutional mass, such as the concept of dispersal, as well as a mass "co-formity [...], without deriving it from the one or melting it into one", and thus without "abandoning the individual-one for the [communitarian] all-one", because this "also means losing the singular-one". Gerald Raunig, *Dividuum. Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution*. Vol. 1. [2015], Cambridge, Mass., London: Semiotext(e) 2016, pp. 15, 182.

are in it. In *History*, near the point where Kracauer arrives at his nonsolution, he expresses this as follows: for the historical view, the individual is only apparently an indivisible unit – in reality, it is itself an "inexhaustible macrocosm". A historical epoch, he continues, is usually a "mixture of inconsistent elements", but this is not surprising: "Is not the individual's mind incoherent also?"[22] Individuals who assemble societies within themselves already appear in Kracauer's novels *Ginster* and *Georg*, written around 1930. The individual is itself a kind of society. And this non-identical, fragile something that remains and cannot be reduced to a countable sum stands in the way of the standardisation, the uniformity, of collectives into a fulfilled identity; this, however, is based on solidarity with an egalitarian collective project. Standing in the way of identity fulfilment *is* the form of solidarity.

Kracauer also formulates this politicised nonsolution idea in terms of *mass* and *provisionality*: the political goal would be a form of justice that does not lump realities together under the umbrella of the general, but rather "decides circumstantially according to the circumstances". Such situationally sensitive justice would be more accurate and fairer than "primitive justice", whose generalisations correspond to the standardisation of ways of life and regulations in mass societies. However, the goal of a justice which would do justice to all individuals cannot be pursued by insisting directly on the individual as the central source of law. Politics committed to this goal must rather pass through the forms of the collective, the masses, and also through their generalised regulations: according to Kracauer, the *justice of the masses* is an institution that must be constantly questioned and improved, and it is "surrounded with mourning because of its provisional nature". It corresponds to a "good crudeness that

22 Kracauer, *History*, pp. 116, 147.

must neglect the individual" and at the same time is weighed down by the pressure of "bad individualism", i.e., ideologies and legal regulations that originate from the bourgeois individual and are tailored to his claims to private property and self-assertion. In contrast to this individualism, "primitive", "crude" mass justice is to be preferred unconditionally. Kracauer writes apodictically: "Only with the masses themselves can a justice that is truly just rise to the top."[23]

What does Kracauer mean here when he speaks of a "good crudeness"? On the one hand, he refers to the fact that public health and administrative institutions perceive the masses in concrete terms and tackle their needs, including their physical needs, in a "resolute" manner. These institutions are *the beginnings* of a welfare state; in all their crudeness and imprecision, and even with their constraints, they repeatedly contribute to mitigating the damage caused to life by capitalism. (Kracauer repeatedly emphasises this, for example with reference to the institution of the labour court, where it is not always the representatives of capital who obtain justice.) However, we should also understand this crudeness and primitiveness as an expression of the provisional nature of the pursuit of collective justice: in the sense of a rough draft that anticipates conditions that do not yet exist. Conditions that, if not good in themselves, are at least better than unbridled capitalist rule. Kracauer's other marker of provisionality is *mourning*: it is an awareness of crudeness, insofar as it means sketchiness; and at the same time it is a limitation of crudeness, insofar as it contains hardness, as this may accompany the provisional. Above all, however, mourning articulates the moment of nonsolution in the collectivist project of mass justice: mourning for

23 Kracauer, "Über Arbeitsnachweise. Konstruktion eines Raumes" [1930], in: Kracauer, *Straßen in Berlin und anderswo* [1964], Berlin: Arsenal 1987, p. 57 (transl.: G.H./D.R.).

more that could be possible.[24] This accompanies a positing that is made, marks its incompleteness, or keeps a counter-tendency to it in play. And it is precisely in its capacity as a positing that is necessarily incomplete, provisional, and controversial that it makes this positing possible in the first place.[25]

Mourning, crudeness, provisionality – this leads to nonsolution, and it means that a maximalist claim, a claim that rejects *everything* that is not *everything*, is not an option; nor, however, is endless postponement that prefers not to commit to or organise anything. These are two sides of the same coin of a purist ethic that shies away from politics. We, however, are concerned with politics, with critical solidarity with the formation of an egalitarian collective, but one that keeps this collective incomplete, in nonsolution. It is about keeping it separate from a solidified uniformity that often arises through collective organisation – for example, in the form of standardised, disciplined uniformity; or in organisations of a culturally, ethnically homogenised, identitarian people. In contrast, in the nonsolution approach, especially when applied to building and planning policy, the masses take on eminent importance – not as a monolith, but in a variable distribution and as an agency of justice.

24 This is not unrelated to the quasi-melancholic political concept of *mourning for lost futures*, especially futures of the administrative welfare state, in: Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life. Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, Winchester, Washington: Zer0 Books 2014.

25 Thus, nonsolution is implicitly also a formulation for the moment of desire in politics: in the sense of investing desire in an object, an objective as a goal that can never be the whole, which is therefore transcended in favour of a whole, but nevertheless undertaken as a cathexis or positioning. The psychoanalytical political theorist Alenka Zupančič emphasises this aspect of (Lacanian) desire in political projects: in its cathexes, desire marks an insufficiency, a "that's not it!" – not because desire is "picky", but because that is precisely its form: vehemently attaching itself to an object/goal and in doing so literally exposing the contingency of the structure that sustains the subject of desire. Alenka Zupančič, "Identity, Politics, Desire", in: Ivo Ritzer (ed.), *On the Critique of Identity*, Berlin: J.B. Metzler 2024, p. 195.

The masses correspond to the differentiated forms in which they present themselves. In his 1927 essay "The Mass Ornament", Kracauer wrote about how they see themselves in "kaleidoscopic" revue and stadium sports choreographies. The masses are also reflected in the kaleidoscopic forms in which they live or *could* soon live, as he wrote at the same time in his review of *Neues Bauen* (New Building).[26] Kracauer also sees the designs and prototypes of *Neues Bauen*, which oscillate between planning utopias and progressive partial implementations, as characterised by provisionality, in a perspective of "mourning over the loss caused by renunciation" that the "house skeletons", the functionalist, bare architectures, must perform. As a type, "the new house does not represent ultimate fulfilment"; it is definitely not yet the fulfilment of a social utopia of mass justice, but rather an indication and a passage in that direction. The plans on display (by Mies van der Rohe, Lihotzky, Le Corbusier) are rough drafts for such utopias. "Is the new house organisation limited to providing private individuals with a form of housing that is – finally – in harmony with their current functions? Or does it already contain the seeds of a changed social order [...]?" Does the housing concept of *Neues Bauen* therefore go beyond mere adaptation to the current given, specifically to the practical constraints of rationalisation and standardisation in a profit economy? Namely, in the direction of "new ways of life" that correspond to a different distribution of space and wealth than that defined by capitalism, for example insofar as they do not adhere to "rigid property boundaries". Kracauer writes the latter about Mies van der

26 Kracauer, "Das neue Bauen. Zur Stuttgarter Werkbund-Ausstellung 'Die Wohnung'" [1927], in: Kracauer, *Werke*, vol. 5.2, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2011. This is an applied companion text to his philosophy of the mass ornament, published at the same time also in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*: "The Mass Ornament" [1927], in: Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament. Weimar Essays* [1963], Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard UP 1995.

Rohe's development plan for the Weissenhof Estate (*Weissenhofsiedlung*) in Stuttgart.[27]

Utopian perfection must therefore be considered in conjunction with the abolition of private property, insofar as it is the basis of domination and injustice. The abolition of private *wealth* or *possessions* that arises through the expropriation of the many – not the abolition of *property* in the sense of being able to properly live one's own life, in the emphatic sense of dwelling in relation to places, spaces and objects. We say this with reference to a social anthropological distinction made by Hannah Arendt (and regardless of Arendt's reservations about masses), namely the distinction between property (*Eigentum*) as a counterweight and thus a prerequisite for the public sphere, and wealth (*Besitz*), with its tendency to dominate the public sphere; this distinction does not coincide with the meanings given to these terms by legal experts.[28]

The utopian nature of the abolition of dominating private wealth is hinted at by modernist housing plans, which recognise the masses as a horizon for planning. They hint at this indirectly – in "mourning" – but they maintain the reference insofar as they present the horizon of the masses as an *open one*. This is the moment of nonsolution that goes beyond a technical solution to the housing shortage. Just as mourning insists that something is fundamentally lacking in the present, the masses, as Kracauer understands them, are not determined by a compulsion towards homogenisation and block formation, as they appear in totalitarian formations as well as in in anti-collectivist phobias. Rather, mass means redivision and transformation (kaleidoscope). Mass

27 Kracauer, "Das neue Bauen", p. 637f. (transl. G.H./D.R.)

28 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [1958], Chicago, London: U of Chicago P 1998, chapter 8 "The Private Realm: Property"; German self-translation: Arendt, *Vita activa, oder Vom tätigen Leben* [1960], Munich, Zurich: Piper 2002, chapter 8 "Der private Bereich: Eigentum und Besitz", pp. 73ff.

is therefore that in which social divisions of property or class show themselves as precarious. As Kracauer writes, the masses are only complete when they are not "massive" but contain their "necessary gaps": the masses are thus completed by their incompleteness.[29] Adapting politics, planning and housing to the masses therefore means adapting to something that is only partially determined, leaving room for the unpredictable; not the completion of a task, but a nonsolution.

Politically, this idea can be taken further in the direction of a theory of *radical democracy* with its emphasis on contingent, contested foundations in society. These foundations are *impossible* as fulfilled, complete definitions of the identity of a society or group, but that is precisely what *makes them possible* as partial, precarious foundations – and always *unavoidable*.[30] This is a concept of *unfulfillment*, as opposed to an idea of fulfilment and completion that would claim the power to define a utopia. This means that the radical democratic conception of democracy is neither attached to the fetish of an ideal state in which all demands would be fulfilled, nor is it limited to accepting the existing order as the only guiding principle. This general theoretical aspect is one side of the connection between nonsolution and questions of democracy. The other side can be seen in the

29 Kracauer writes this inversely, referring to masses that have coagulated into a *Volk* and to German films that celebrate national greatness: he sees this *völkisch* culture as "a massive mass in which the necessary gaps are missing". Kracauer, "Gepflegte Zerstreuung. Eine grundsätzliche Erwägung" (1931), in: Kracauer, *Werke*, vol. 6.2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2004, p. 529.

30 The masses, as we understand them here with Kracauer, would be synonymous with society, which in a radical democratic conception represents an *impossible object*. "The social only exists as the vain attempt to institute that impossible object: society." Ernesto Laclau, "The Impossibility of Society" in: Laclau, *New Reflections on The Revolution of Our Time*, London, New York: Verso 1990, p. 92. This is then developed in terms of social theory by Oliver Marchart in: *Das unmögliche Objekt. Eine postfundamentalistische Theorie der Gesellschaft*, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2013.

historicisation of concrete political situations: around 1930, Kracauer's (and not only his) concern was whether the masses, when politically organised, would keep the gap in play, i.e. whether they would allow room for individual experiences as fragile embodiments of remnants and gaps – or whether the masses, as it was feared, would take on uniform fixed identities.

In our present day, in the 2020s, however, there seems to be no shortage of space for individuality, to put it bluntly: an intensified individualism reigns, from the pressures to optimise oneself to the way in which a strategic libertarian narcissism functions within the disruptive authoritarian right (Trump being only the most prominent example). Today, the concern from a radical democratic perspective is whether in groups formed around political projects a mass character can be installed and maintained. We already indicated that we understand the mass as a gathering of diverse groups in indeterminate anonymity. This anonymity is often misunderstood as cold and lifeless, but it means *not fixed on identity*. According to Kracauer's mass ornament concept, anonymity is part of a radical, truthful humanisation that is always yet to come; it means opening up to an outside, not concentration on an alleged inner core of being; and above all, this humanisation does not mean contempt for the masses (as in some forms of authenticity thinking), but is accomplished *through* the masses.

A dose of such anonymity and 'massness' would do good today where political initiatives are sometimes narrowed down for instance along 'age cohorts' (e.g. climate justice movements as predominantly youth movements) or along educational milieus (e.g. an academic-urban left). Or narrowed down by that uniform called individualism. Similarly, there is a lack of corrective anonymous 'massness' in architectural projects involving bubble-like, socially homogeneous *Baugruppen* (building cooperatives) composed of educated, high-income middle-class people and majority ethnic groups, which are exclusive clubs in this

respect. However, such housing projects are also a distant echo of progressive democratic politics in that they are part of a tradition of alternative housing communes of the 1970s and 1980s, and sometimes include additional spaces for charitable or public use in their plans today.

Insofar as 'massness' means that in a collective the gaps must not be missing, i.e. that there is an inhibition of the completion of group identities and their relationship to (built) space, one aspect of today's housing projects that pursue a *politicised* agenda seems particularly noteworthy to us. We are referring to building cooperatives that are part of the *Mietshäuser-Syndikat* ("Tenement Housing Syndicate") network in Germany – i.e. associations that aim to permanently remove urban living space and urban land from the market and from market-driven or capitalisable private ownership. This means that land and buildings should *remain* outside the market. They should not be allowed to be sold back into the market regime at a later date: to put it bluntly, when the members of an anti-capitalist group are older, when their attitudes may change and, for whatever reason, there is a need for profit from sales proceeds on the housing or building land market. To this end, such building cooperative umbrella organisations have given themselves complex, deliberately complicated ownership arrangements: it is virtually impossible for individual group members or even the entire group to turn the space they use as their property back into a commodity. In stark contrast to liberal discourse, which notoriously brands obstacles to market activity as overly complicated, complication is a good thing here: it serves as a veritable commitment to self-thwarting, blocking individual – market- and profit-oriented – access to urban space and land as much as possible.[31]

31 A similar perspective on "communal forms of ownership and other collective and complex bonds with land" is pursued by critical urban planners, in: Raquel Rolnik, Carolina Amadeo, Moniza Rizzini Ansari, "Despossessão Territorial sob

As far as architectural forms are concerned, it should be mentioned that in the 2000s and 2010s, work was done on the individualisation of units on various scales of architecture, from the design of a teapot to residential construction – on customising, on tailor-made solutions. The approaches gathered around research into *parametric design*, which aimed to create uniqueness and variation 'in the mass' (strongly supported by Greg Lynn, among others). This ultimately had an impact not on residential construction but more on product design. And this was mainly in the so-called 'luxury segment' exclusively for high-income groups. Furthermore, parametric design is usually a top-down process in which a programme generates variations.

In contrast, we advocate the integration of construction into social realities and mass-customised architecture from the perspective of a politicised nonsolution. Along Kracauer's lines, mass always involves a quantum of indeterminacy, as a potential for creating forms, including individualisations, that are not provided for in the given order. Mass as a measure of quality and democracy in planning begins with rejecting the pejorative use of the term (not only) in construction, i.e. rejecting the association of mass with standardised, formless, low-quality cheap production.

Our view also contrasts with the idea that paternalistic central authorities 'provide' a passive mass with living space: no, the masses are entitled to a proud claim to property, no less than individuals with a bourgeois habitus; an awareness of the collective property of those who do not own privately – of a communal claim to the city in the form of social housing (cooperative and municipal housing), municipal facilities, public space – and this in attractive forms. The masses, as we understand them, are

o capitalismo financeirizado: formas jurídicas e espacialidades insurgentes", *Revista Direito e Práxis*, 16, 2, 2025 (includes English language summary) https://www.e-publicacoes.uerj.br/revistaceaju/article/view/89576

the class whose property is the public sphere. And architectural customisation is not limited here to propertied classes and the middle class. Rather, mass-customised planning aims towards *luxury for all*, especially *luxury through all*, as made possible by the large number of building units and their users. And instead of using sophistication to creatively downsize social housing, mass-customised planning strives for as much diversification as possible for as many people as possible. The swimming pools on the roofs of some social housing buildings, such as the towers in Vienna's Alt-Erlaa residential park, are symbolic of this: the large number of tenants makes it possible for the large swimming pools to be shared, in contrast to a single-family home swimming pool (see p. 93).

Finally, Germany's current housing targets illustrate our concept of mass-customised planning. The political aim of 400,000 additional homes per year is often interpreted as requiring the construction of 400,000 *new* dwellings annually. Yet whether the government's so-called "construction turbo" (*Bau-Turbo*, or "Build! Build! Build!"-credo) leads to standardised low-cost mass production, or even if all new homes were to be individually tailored, neither approach is ecologically or socially sustainable. By contrast, a context-sensitive revitalisation through conversion, development, and repair of an estimated 2,000,000 vacant apartments – and numerous other underused or decaying buildings – could instead foster significant formal and functional diversity. This would require more aesthetic skills and creativity than building anew.[32] And it would increase the probability of bringing freedom of choice for the masses of residents – and not freedom of choice for investors in terms of optimal capital valorisation. More comprehensively: instead of solutionism, which

32 See Gabu Heindl, "Saying No with Nonsolutions", in: "Field Notes on Repair: 4", *Places*, November 2024: https://placesjournal.org

touts “Build! Build! Build!” as a blanket solution, nonsolution goes beyond current emergencies and functional definitions and sticks to the direction of an egalitarian redistribution of (not only) spatial wealth. (By the way: it is now a joke – perhaps not only in German-speaking countries – that in public statements on the housing crisis, the verb “build”, used as a keyword or call to action, is no longer used on its own, but only in an obsessive triple combination, as if this were a rule.)

Neither a Makeshift Solution nor a Renunciation of Solutions

Many of us know and appreciate Charlie Chaplin’s apt parody of Nazi language and propaganda in his portrayal of Hitler in his 1940 film *The Great Dictator*. Diametrically opposed to his Hitler speech, so full of violence, nationalism and anti-Semitism, there is the other speech given by Chaplin as the Jewish barber, Hitler’s double, at the end of the film, with words of freedom for all ethnic groups, solidarity and democracy. It is often said that Chaplin was brilliant in his characterisation of Nazi language, but naive and kitschy in his evocation of the beautiful words and gentle euphony that this democracy speech is supposed to convey. But that is not true: Chaplin is not only more enlightened in his view of democratic anti-fascism than this accusation of naivety suggests, but he has also integrated precisely this widespread naive position and its critique into the temporality, into the unfolding of the democracy speech. For it is not the case that the ugly noise of Nazi speech is countered by nothing but an idyll of gentleness in the democracy speech; rather, the humanistic Jewish barber also gives a loud, fiery speech, even talking himself into a rage until he ends with the battle cry, “In the name of democracy – let us all unite!” The German crowd in front of him, which had actually gathered in anticipation of a hate speech by Hitler – strictly speaking, the scene takes place in Vienna during the 1938 “Anschluss” of Austria to Nazi Germany – cheers this call for democracy just as automatically and fanatically as they had previously cheered the dictator. And the otherwise taciturn and good-hearted barber, from whom the words of deeply human propaganda for equality have just burst forth, looks at the cheering crowd, exhausted from his speech and with a dismayed expression, as if to say, “What have I done?” Well, he has exercised power – democratic power. Perhaps only at second glance does the end of this speech represent the recognition of

the fact that democracy cannot retreat to the noble stance of completely renouncing the exercise of power, renouncing the formation of forms through preliminary closure. Nazism, neofascism, authoritarian or disruptive strategies of violence, aggressive claims to urban and environmental space, also today, cannot simply be countered with an idyllic state of complete openness and unconditional indeterminacy. Nonsolution thinking agrees with Chaplin: planning and building take place in a political context, so ethically noble gestures of leaving everything open or refraining from imposing a form on a situation are not an option – especially when the goal is to radicalise democracy.

Let us explore the meaning of nonsolution further by asking: what does nonsolution not mean? It does not mean that "complex" solutions should be promoted over "simple" ones: this frequently heard dichotomy is a way of obscuring what is actually at stake. This is because so-called simple solutions are usually something else: either they are not simple, but hostile to minorities, in which case this should not be described politely or equidistantly, but named as such. Or simple solutions – e.g. higher taxes for the rich – are branded as being too simple because they would stand in the way of the oh-so-complicated blossoming processes of deregulated capital.

Nonsolution is also not about compromise solutions or making solutions that leave the existing power relations completely untouched – regardless of whether they arose from a truly acute emergency that cannot be postponed, or whether this emergency is only feigned in order to achieve compromises and not diminish current interests in profit and power. This becomes particularly virulent in the case of unhoused persons and the dilemma surrounding approaches to solving the problem of homelessness. There is no doubt that homelessness must be tackled structurally, i.e. in the long term (for example through housing-first

apartments). At the same time, however, unhoused people cannot be left to fend for themselves on the streets until then. Instead, food, sleeping bags and aid packages must be distributed, and sleeping quarters must be provided (while respecting the self-determination of those affected – some do not want this form of support). However, these short-term measures, these emergency solutions, which alleviate acute hardship and often even avert immediate danger to life, must not result in a lack of attention and resources for a comprehensive, fundamental structural solution. This dilemma, in which two approaches block each other, can be strategically shaped into a phase model. The sequence concerns, on the one hand, problem-solving phases and, on the other hand, a series of objections and demands criticising the paternalism of city administrations: if, for example, the city of Vienna provides a "winter package" for the unhoused, then it is necessary to go beyond this and demand a "summer package" and even more so, a "year-round package", because homelessness does not end with the end of the seasonal risk of freezing to death or dying from heat – and, beyond that, it is necessary to question the logic of the "package" itself, which also carries the connotation of a gift (parcel) from the authorities to those in need. Instead, housing is required as a universal right.

Let us return to the question: what does nonsolution *not* mean? We can take the German translations of the nonsolution passages from Siegfried Kracauer's US writings as a starting point, since both are mistranslations that can be used to point *ex negativo* to the actual meaning. One of the passages containing "nonsolutions" in *Theory of Film* was translated as "Nicht-Lösungen", which means that solutions are simply not provided. The meaning we are aiming at here is almost the opposite: for us, a solution always has to be seen in tension with what contradicts its self-sufficient completeness. But this does not at all mean that solutions are or should be not taking place. Moreover, nonsolu-

tion refers to conflicts between different approaches to solutions that remain unresolved in the work of solving them. With the *non*, beginnings are made and problem processes unfold: with the *non*, something starts.[33]

Even more revealing is the second mistranslation of Kracauer's nonsolution, namely as "Verzicht auf eine Lösung", "renunciation of a solution". This translation misses the point in favour of an exaggerated ethical stance, as if nonsolution were about renunciation, asceticism and humility.[34] However, we are not concerned with "renouncing solutions" or that one should do so. Nor do we want to end up with yet another variation on the (recently) fashionable theories of passivity or attitudes of refusal à la Herman Melville's Bartleby. An ethic of renunciation more often than not boils down to not disturbing anyone – especially not those with the most dominant voices and the greatest opportunities to pursue their interests undisturbed. And finally, the ethic of renunciation promotes self-aggrandising behaviour: better to stay on the safe side, keep your hands clean, and possibly even be pure of heart.

33 Other non-words in Siegfried Kracauer's work also indicate that it is with the *non* that things really get going. For example, his description of history as a "nonscience" and a "nonphilosophy" (*History*, pp. 32, 211) – the former is a synonym for history as "science with a difference", the latter is a quote from historian Jacob Burckhardt.

34 Landscape planner Rob Holmes argues humbly, using the term "non-solution" (with a hyphen, in a purely negative sense and without referring to Kracauer) when it comes to the ecology of landscape planning. Holmes criticises the planning obsession with "solving and fixing landscapes". In contrast, he calls for responsible design in the spirit of "gardeners and restoration ecologists". His criticism of a lack of context sensitivity is overformed by "openness" and by ennobling it to "epistemic humility". Rob Holmes, "The Problem with Solutions: We need to engage troubled landscapes without presuming to fix them. Notes toward a history of non-solutionist design", *Places*, July 2020: https://placesjournal.org

Instead of granting absolution in this way, a resolute approach to problem situations in the form of nonsolutions is required. If aspects of ethical self-conduct come into play here, it is precisely because refraining from solving problems is not an option. Precisely because one acts through planning, designing and (re)building – acting indirectly politically – it is necessary to criticise one's own role and one's own position of power as an expert in planning solutions. However, this self-criticism does not exempt one from using one's own expertise and authority for egalitarian political projects. What is called for here does not really correspond to the often-mentioned "critical self-reflection", because, firstly, the criticism in question takes place in an involved or immanent way, which is why adopting a reflective stance, which is typically a distanced one, would involve a considerable amount of self-deception. Secondly, the criticism does not merely concern oneself, but the power structure that distinguishes and hierarchises experts and laypeople; and the critical restraint of oneself and one's symbolic capital is always related to other actors in the respective problem situation of planning and construction.

We are all too familiar with the triumphant announcement that someone has found "the solution" and deserves gratitude and respect for it. If such a triumphant pose is not adopted, then that is good – but such self-restraint, such self-awareness that "I don't know everything", does not release one from the duty to act. This is equivalent to a *duty to exercise power*, which definitely does not mean to dominate. For, as Hannah Arendt said, power is something that – unlike domination, which is based on force – arises from the joint action of many, and not necessarily on the basis of comprehensive, secure knowledge.[35] And in this acting together, "acting in concert", it is important to make use of the

35 See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 200ff.

role of the expert (despite all criticism of paternalism), namely in representing democratic concerns that arise in the handling of a planning situation. In the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this means that listening to quasi-subaltern, voiceless people in a self-effacing manner cannot result in a de-problematised, ethically 'pure' situation.[36] This cannot remain free from any moments of representation, in which knowledge and expertise must also be weighted in strategic terms (without this resulting in an expertocratic hierarchy with its permanent exclusions… finding a balance here is, of course, a context-specific problem, one that we want to at least address as unavoidable). Even where an alliance of planners and those affected by planning takes place on an equal footing, the moment of representative 'speaking for' based on expertise, namely the advocacy of planners for those affected, cannot be dispensed with by the establishment of such equal footing, however laudable it may be.[37] Our proposal in the spirit of the nonsolution is as follows: these situations of action and representation are unavoidable; likewise, criticism of the different prerequisites of those involved, especially privileges, must remain in play.

Our reservation against an ethical stance of "renouncing a solution" also applies to the still widespread pose or phrase according to which someone wants to "only ask questions, never give answers". But what is so wrong with answers? And what is so enduringly attractive about a desire to leave things open and in limbo, a desire that has solidified into orthodoxy? Unsurprisingly, we find a radical critique of solutionism and of the effects

36 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" [1988], in: Cary Nelson, Larry Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana, Chicago: U of Illinois P 1998, pp. 74ff.

37 For a more in-depth examination of this planning issue, see: Heindl, "Agency und Dezentrierung der Expertin" (Agency and Decentralisation of the Expert), in: Gabu Heindl, *Stadtkonflikte. Radikale Demokratie in Architektur und Stadtplanung*, Vienna: Mandelbaum 2020.

of domination that can arise from answering questions or solving problems better than an aversion against solutions and answers per se. For such an aversion all too often encourages an anti-political attitude. This anti-politics, in turn, achieves political effects by fundamentally rejecting explicit answers/solutions that are recognisable as such – but in doing so it favours the continuity of all the assumptions and formations that are considered 'normal' because they conform to the prevailing conditions.

This is the moment to emphasise the *non* in nonsolution, both in its definiteness and in its scope of meaning. *Nonsolution is a solution with a non*. Let us start from this sentence and explore its meaning, as playfully as necessary to make what the sentence contains concise. One by one, we will illustrate the facets of this meaning with an increasing number of examples from architectural practice: the *non* as a contextual opening (see pp. 52ff.); as a marker of postponement and anonymity (see p. 57f.); as a call to active passivity (see pp. 68ff.); and, initially, the *non* as negation.

Firstly, in the matter just mentioned of the frequently expressed phobia of answers, nonsolution should consider an insistence on solutions, a demand for answers. It is very much about solution, but one preceded by a *non*; this *non*, in going along with the solution or answer, denies its totality. This ensures that the question does not disappear in the answer but continues to insist as a problem. Moreover, the *non* keeps the moment of conflict, the negation of one position by another, in play, namely in the play of possible solutions. The *non* also prevents problems from being positivised, namely the assertion that every problem contains an opportunity to be seized or even a 'challenge'. This assertion is modelled on the neoliberal slogan of "crisis as opportunity" – in line with market ideology: crises are opportunities in the sense of opportunities for enrichment for entrepreneurial private actors (and not, for example, an occasion to increase social benefits for the masses affected by the crisis, let alone a revolutionary

opportunity, as was once the case…). Nonsolution does not aim to gloss over problems by appealing to creativity ("Be creative, make something out of the problem!"). Nor is it about fetishising ambivalence as a state of salvation, but rather it is about a sense of opposites and counterforces. And about a sense that it is by no means fundamentally wrong for social problems to be partially resolved – as temporary solutions that have been fought for and remain contestable.

To put it in the words of philosopher Oliver Marchart's radical democratic theory of agonistic conflict and political hegemony: in political matters, i.e. in the conflict-laden formation of society, there can be neither *complete* closure/solution nor *no* closure/solution *at all*.[38] Where nothing is resolved, no openness is closed, where (to use a slightly different vocabulary) no foundation is laid, there is not simply openness in society but rather regimes of those agencies whose interests dominate anyway (i.e. mostly private profit interests) without these agencies identifying their solutions/closures/foundations as such, and thus without making them available for political negotiation and contestation. The solution – let us now take this word again as a good enough synonym for foundation and closure – is *both impossible and inevitable*. That is a paradoxical attribution which means, first of all, that a solution that is complete is impossible, which in turn makes an inevitable partial solution possible. For if a situation were completely resolved once and for all, this would prevent any dispute about other, perhaps divergent solutions; this would eliminate all politics and all history – it would ultimately eliminate what human society is about.

The founding paradox of *the impossible whole* can be de-paradoxed into *the possible partial*. But: the fact that we introduce

38 Cf. Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought. Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP 2007.

this constellation as a paradox and that we emphasise the nonsolution, which is just as paradoxical, rather than simply talking about partial solutions, acts as a negative marker. This marking denies that the matter would be 'settled' by limiting ourselves to partial solutions. To speak directly of partial solutions would be tantamount to a technocratic avoidance of political agendas or to modesty as a renunciation of a (complete) solution. In contrast, the *non* maintains the tension that goes beyond the partial – the demand for *more*: more dismantling of domination, more dismantling of unjust divisions of wealth and labour, and more distribution – or avoidance – of the consequences of the climate catastrophe. With this *more*, we are addressing something that comes close to utopia; we address it with restraint, but we also place it in the light of utopia – as befits the concept of nonsolution.

A final word on ambivalence and its overvaluation: to rely entirely on situations remaining open and undefined would correspond to a purist, ultimately aestheticist attitude. A vote for keeping things open, formulated in aesthetic terms, even if it is linked to a critique of solution-oriented thinking, cannot serve us as a model (and only to a limited extent as inspiration) for political debate about solutions. Politicised social realities and pressing problems would be misunderstood in a desire for pure openness (or even chic failure).

Deleuze himself, even though he is often seen as an apologist for pure indeterminacy, argues against indeterminacy and against an attitude that entirely refrains from demanding solutions. We quoted his thought at the beginning (see p. 16f.): "True freedom lies in a power to decide, to constitute problems themselves." Deleuze adds: "In neither example is it a case of saying that problems are like the shadow of pre-existing solutions […]. Nor is it a case of saying that only the problems count. On the contrary, it is the solution that counts, but the problem

always has the solution it deserves, in terms of the way in which it is stated (i.e., the conditions under which it is determined as a problem)." And that means: the problem itself is the problem.[39]

39 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 15f. – Urban geographer Iris Dzudzek contrasts the "solution of the problem" with the "problem of the solution". She pursues a concept of "problematisation" based on Michel Foucault: as a critical determination of urbanistic problems in terms of how they become effective in a power-knowledge connection. Dzudzek emphasises the unforeseen newness that is important in posing problems from a perspective of qualitative democratic expansion: it is a matter of making clear who benefits from solutions and who is harmed by them, and this problematisation of power relations is more important to her than the solution itself. Iris Dzudzek, "Die Lösung des 'Problems' oder das 'Problem der Lösung'? Eine kritische Betrachtung transdisziplinärer urbaner Labore und Experimente", *Geographische Zeitschrift* 112, 1/2024 (DOI 10.25162/gz-2024-0005).

Acting in a Dilemma, Buying Time: Space and Time of Nonsolution

The 2023 film *Killers of the Flower Moon* has no ending. Rather, it leads to an ending without an end. In the final scene of the linear plot about the conspiratorial murders of members of the Osage Nation around 1920, motivated by neo-colonial white claims to the tribe's profitable land rights, the white conspirator played by Leonardo DiCaprio refuses to confess to his Osage wife, played by Lily Gladstone, that he has been secretly administering lethal poison to her. This is followed abruptly by a coda set approximately 25 years later: it shows the end of a live performance of a radio play about the murders of the Osage; with verbal sound bites typical of radio plays and sound effects visibly created on stage, it is revealed that this series of murders was hardly investigated and that the perpetrators were either acquitted or soon released from prison. White men and women in formal attire read the radio play text from a script, which, in a sensationalist manner, nevertheless conveys the enormous injustice done to the Osage, an injustice perpetuated by the courts. It is a portrayal that gives the impression of being unable to convey any narrative or image adequate to this injustice; instead, it merely provides us with acoustic vignettes that emphasise rather than mitigate the absence of rightful representation. The closing words of the radio play report on the death of the Osage protagonist played by Gladstone and her newspaper obituary, which made no mention whatsoever of the murderous acts that had taken place 15 years earlier. This reaffirms the fact that racist violence and its victims became neither part of a story nor of public history. The film's director, Martin Scorsese, reads the obituary text himself in a cameo appearance, with sadness in his eyes and voice: "There was no mention of the murders." This is perhaps a moment of white saviourism at work, with a Hollywood directing legend celebrat-

ing the solemn commemoration of unpunished injustice against Native Americans while also celebrating himself for having countered this fateful silencing with his film. But there is also a reflection on precisely this problem at play here; an acknowledgement that the question of how to convey the history of the Osage and the Native Americans remains unresolved, in the context of an *ostentatiously* inadequate portrayal. No solution, no end, but a conclusion, nonetheless. The last word is not given to the settlers/murderers played by stars, nor to the star director, but to a bird's-eye camera shot. This shows several hundred Osage people in colourful traditional dress performing a dance that appears as the *mass ornament* (for lack of a better word) of a flower: thus, the titular motif of a time (a "moon") of flower killing, which stands for the demise of the Osage through the growth of the white population, is reappropriated – for the self-performance of a living collective, which, however, also performs its withdrawal from representation and the latter's profound insufficiency.

Design and planning theorist Horst Rittel addresses the *problem of problem definition*: "Learning what the problem is *is* the problem."[40] And, Rittel continues, together with Melvin M. Webber:

40 Horst W. J. Rittel, "The Reasoning of Designers", working paper for the International Congress on Planning and Design Theory, Boston 1987, https://mafiles.maxfrischknecht.ch/media/pages/documentation/problem-oriented-design/1854400224-1613052907/rittel_the_reasoning_of_designers_university_of_california_berkeley.pdf (The Science of Design), p. 2. – Berlin-based planner and architectural theorist Jesko Fezer has published extensively on Horst Rittel's design concept of self-perpetuating problems and, in this context, has come to use the term "non-solution" ("the non-solution of problems as practical and productive") in a cursory manner. See Jesko Fezer, "The Non-Solution of Problematic Problems in Reality", in: Jesko Fezer & Studio Experimentelles Design (eds.), *Öffentliche Gestaltungsberatung – Public Design Support 2011–2016*, Berlin: Sternberg Press 2016, p. 95. – Further reading on Rittel: Fezer, *Umstrittene Methoden. Architekturdiskurse der Verwissenschaftlichung, Politisierung und Partizipation im Umfeld des Design Methods Movement der 1960er Jahre*, Hamburg: adocs 2022, chapter 3.

While "problems in the natural sciences, are definable and separable and may have solutions that are findable, the problems of governmental planning – and especially those of social or policy planning – are ill-defined [...]."[41] A radical problem of definition results in a degree of insolubility for which Rittel (with Webber) coined various terms: issues that cannot be separated from *meta-issues* lurking in the background; problems that turn out to be symptoms of other problems; and, most prominently, the distinction between *wicked problems* in social and *tame problems* in scientifically defined areas.[42] Planning issues in social contexts do not confront us with mere unreliability or inadequacy according to scientific standards of accuracy, but with characteristics that are quite normal in politics. For Rittel, planning theory ultimately confronts the genuinely political realm of positionality and the conflictual nature of problems: the planner – "the designer" – "finds himself in a field of positions with competing arguments which he must assess in order to assume his own position".[43] It is important that Rittel does not short-circuit the positioning in a decisionist manner, i.e. he does not tie it back to a uniform authoritarian or artistic-authorial subject of will. Instead, he proceeds from the unforeseen heterogeneity and differentiation that emerges in society from the *masses*: from a mass

41 Horst W. Rittel, Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning", *Policy Sciences* 4, 1973, p. 160.

42 Rittel, "The Reasoning of Designers," p. 3; Rittel, Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," p. 160. – Lucius Burckhardt paraphrases this distinction between tame problems and wicked problems in his comparison of engineering and urban planning issues: "in engineering issues, the question is clear, so it is possible to devise the solution. In urban planning issues, devising the exact question and devising the solution boils down to one and the same thing; or, in other words: a question of urban planning is impossible to resolve, not because the solution is too difficult to calculate, but because the question itself can never be framed precisely enough." Lucius Burckhardt, *The Minimal Intervention*, p. 24.

43 Rittel, "The Reasoning of Designers", p. 3.

that is not homogeneous (as the 1950s sociology of mass society had assumed). And this heterogeneous mass is definitely not an object of observation by a stable subject of knowledge and decision-making, because, first of all, an omniscient theory for localising the socially good is not available; and secondly, for Rittel, the "expert" who supposedly sees and knows "everything" is right *in the middle* of it all – in society, in the differentiated mass; he is "the player in a political game".[44]

Rittel's considerations make it clear that the radically problematic – not merely the quantitatively difficult – concerns problems as well as their solutions. In the realm of the "political game", solutions do not simply fail to materialise if they do not occur (just as there is no neutral or zero position). This is the kind of wickedness that also rubs off on solutions that are not really solutions but nevertheless circulate; nonsolution conveys much of this wickedness. This means three things: first, the space of politics is a space of expansion, because – in the sense of "nonsolution is a solution with a non" – the *non* negates the self-sufficiency of a solution, it calls for the inclusion of its context, and this context is more than an accessory, it is not merely something to be taken into account 'if there is time'.

Secondly, it is a space of the *measureless*, in two senses: on the one hand, in politics demands are expressed that have something fundamentally presumptuous and excessive about them; they are 'unreasonable' demands that cannot be reduced to stable social positions that could, so to speak, provide proper foundations and guarantees for such demands. It is part of the essence of political demands that the ruling administrative and economic powers react to them with "What do *they* want now? Who are they anyway, that they think they can demand this?" On the other hand, there are measurement errors that are intrinsic, i.e. not merely due to vagueness or technical defects in the scale: politically charged wicked problems arise in the measurement and allocation of social space, which we will discuss in a moment.[45]

Thirdly, the space for working on solving problems that cause problems is a space of *resoluteness* in taking action: the problematic nature of the problem definition turns the solution of the problem into – no, not a nonsolution, but a *resolution*: "Not 'solution'. Social problems are never solved. At best they are only re-solved – over and over again."[46] The problem thus becomes wicked in a kind of self-reference through which the *problem of the problem* arises; and at the same time, the solution also refers to itself in a wicked way by preceding itself, like a double of itself, precisely as a *resolution*. (Rittel's resolution is rendered in the German translations of his writings, in a somewhat awkward but significant way, either as "Lösungsbeschluss", which is equivalent to a "resolution to a solution", or as "'resolution'" in quotation marks, i.e. as a solution that is not really one.)

No solution without resolution. We don't necessarily have to think of Heidegger's *resoluteness* here. Nor do we necessarily have to follow social philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy – in line with the latter school of thought – in his preference for resolution over revolution.[47] With this idea, Nancy advocates keeping an open mind towards the indeterminate, even a determination towards the

44 Rittel, Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning", p. 169. – For Burckhardt (*The Minimal Intervention*, p. 32f.), the quasi-omniscience of the "expert" is also due to a conformist attitude, because the expert prematurely adopts a "reduction of information" that limits the possible solutions, and s:he already knows "which solutions are possible under the prevailing circumstances, and which are not".

45 Further reading: Gabu Heindl, *Stadtkonflikte*, chap. 8.

46 Rittel, Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning", p. 160; see also Rittel, "The Reasoning of Designers", p. 2.

47 "Dans le désir, une décision, une détermination à se tenir prêt pour l'improviste. Mieux qu'une révolution: une résolution." This is the closing sentence of: Jean-Luc Nancy, *Que faire?* Paris: Galilée 2016, p. 119.

indeterminate, which, however, is detrimental to political action. But it is just such an orientation (and – why not? – an orientation towards the revolutionary) which is important to us. In the context of nonsolution thinking, what is important about resolution is a certain pathos: the pathos – to be limited, but unavoidable – of a vehemently manifested willingness to act, which, once again, leads from the field of scientification to the field of politics, its demands and goals. This places the crudeness of political justice versus the precision of scientific rationalisation (remember Kracauer's "good crudeness", see above, p. 29); this crudeness comes with resolutely tackling concrete events in the lives of the masses. And that means: the determined tackling of real-life problems of human beings, who are not ideal beings or ideal bodies (such as those of classical geometry), but heterogeneous, "dividual" masses in need of justice.

The impossibility of a solution that would be anything other than measureless is confronted in the architectural project *Outside in Prison*, implemented in 2011 by *Gabu Heindl Architektur* as part of *Kunst am Bau* (*art in architecture*) in the prison for "short-term inmates" in Krems, near Vienna.[48] (see p. 94) A football pitch was built in the narrow men's exercise yard of this prison. In solving this *art in architecture* competition task, the architectural firm faced a dilemma: on the one hand, art in the case of a prison could possibly embellish this system of confinement and its harshness, thus disarming criticism of it. On the other hand, art could also aim at refusal: refusal of any comfortable settling into the wrong system that legitimises it. Which is why it would ultimately be more honest not to improve the far too narrow courtyard, to do

48 See further: Heindl, "Out in Prison. Taking the case of spatial rights to a prison court(yard)", in: Doina Petrescu, Kim Trogal (eds.), *The Social (Re)Production of Architecture. Politics, Values and Actions in Contemporary Practice*, New York, London: Routledge 2017.

nothing than to do something that would betray the political utopia of a society without prisons.

However, improving an existing prison yard does not mean building a prison (something *Gabu Heindl Architektur* would not participate in). In addition to the initial dilemma – beautify or refuse – there is another problem that is more closely related to planning practice: faced with an extreme case of *minimal space* – a tiny courtyard for rare yard time 'outdoors' – should an attempt be made to adapt the improvements as creatively as possible to the limited space? Should the football pitch be as small as possible in order to conceal the lack of space? The answer, unsurprisingly, is no. Faced with this dilemma and determined to act architecturally but critically, the architectural firm decided to build a football pitch in the courtyard which was actually far too small for such a field, and to fold the pitch and the markings up against the courtyard walls. In the end, there was a football pitch (with soft flooring for various sports), but one that ostentatiously did not fit into the small courtyard. This planning and construction nonsolution – a solution that solves nothing *but somehow does* – exposed the internal contradictions of this building project. This is far less about self-reflection than about highlighting the injustice of the courtyard's narrowness. Of course, those who use the courtyard already know that it is too small; the architecture agrees with them, as it were, in this assessment and thus maintains the perspective of dissent to the penal space system. On the other hand, the aim is to achieve a quantum of improvement in terms of the prisoners' right to use the space, which has hardly been recognised by the local authorities (the prison management said there was no room for sports facilities in the courtyard, while prison guards said the project in the exercise yard was completely unnecessary). Ultimately, however – and this is also part of nonsolution thinking as an impetus for action – it is important not to harbour any illusions: this project of quasi-advocacy planning

in prison has neither given a voice to the unheard nor had any resounding effect – but it has not been entirely ineffective either, both in terms of the usability of the space and in terms of the criticism that remains. In any case, self-praise for the optimal nonsolution is inappropriate, and would also be a contradiction in terms (not a welcome one in this case). Nonsolution as a response to spaces that provide too little space: the football pitch of *Outside in Prison* is excessive in relation to the available space; it demands more of what is already urgently needed.

On the other hand, forms with features of nonsolution, such as Lucius Burckhardt's idea of the "space cushion" (*Raumpolster*), according to which a "purpose-free room" should be planned into houses and flats,[49] operate with excessiveness that is integrated into the planned space. This corresponds to the structural concept of planning for an extra without a (current) purpose, a space of possibility for future appropriation. The mass that embodies the indeterminate in the totality of a society is only complete when it contains "the necessary gaps" (as Kracauer wrote, see above, p. 33). This also means that everyone is more than the counted 100 per cent, which is why the spatial solution for their needs must necessarily include a nonsolutional going beyond – a "fourth third" for people and uses that are not present.[50] Now, people are of course not "gaps" that need to be filled. Nonsolution thinking demands that (architectural) action be vehemently oriented towards those who *do not count* in the distribution of power and wealth or who are yet to come – for example, through migration or as future generations (growing up in acute global warming).

49 See Burckhardt, "On Housing Needs" [1970], in: Burckhardt, *Who Plans the Planning? Architecture, Politics, and Mankind*, Basel: Birkhäuser 2020, pp. 236ff.

50 *The Fourth Third* was the name of an installation developed by Can Gülcü and Gabu Heindl in 2017 as part of the *Care + Repair* exhibition at the Architekturzentrum Wien (AzW). Its theme was the lack of living space and outdoor space, especially for gardening, for residents of the Vienna *Integrationshaus* (Integration House for Refugees). See Angelika Fitz, Elke Krasny (eds.), *Critical Care. Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet*, Vienna, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 2019 (see p. 95).

A space of inevitable expansions in action; these lead to contexts and demands that were not considered. If we now shift from this space into the dimension of time, we arrive at the temporality of nonsolution. Let us return to our condensed sentence: *Nonsolution is a solution with a non.* This also applies – especially as a saying, i.e. when spoken – in the sense of *Nonsolution is a solution with anon.* 'Anon' comes into play here as an obsolete English word meaning 'soon' and also as an abbreviation of 'anonymous'. Planning and construction solutions must (even if this is difficult) also include those who are not yet here but will soon arrive (future generations, migrant communities, new social groups); these have neither defined identities nor 'names' in the sense of symbolic weight, so in this sense they are anonymous.

It goes without saying, but it should be noted that our use of these words stands in stark contrast to the ideological phenomenon that has been prominently associated with the abbreviation 'anon' since the rise of Trumpism: right-wing QAnon networks and their conspiracy fantasies. The confused worldview of QAnon (and its relatives in right-wing bubbles) is one that, first, *always knows everything* to an excessive degree, instead of learning or diagnosing, and second, it is a view that notoriously knows *who* is to blame for the fact that a 'people' assumed by them to be a normal identity is separated from its wholeness and selfhood. So, scapegoats are found and attacked: ethnicised others, denormalised genders, and groups that demand a share of the unequally distributed wealth or measures to mitigate the effects of climate catastrophe.

We understand anonymity as being closely related to indeterminacy – an indeterminacy that must be included, not cele-

brated. What nonsolution thinking values about anonymity is in relation to the masses – to their emerging possibilities and truths (see above, p. 34). As a sign of imminent change, 'anon' calls for three things to be considered: firstly, the future in the emphatic sense of the temporality of the undefined; secondly, the future as something to come in the sense of utopian foresight of political demands; thirdly, however, something that is *really* supposed to come *soon*, i.e. a strategically targeted future that cannot be postponed indefinitely. (Of course, this politicised understanding of the future also contrasts with the post-humanist visions of *longtermism*, which is more than willing to sacrifice the dispossessed of today for the perfection of super-intelligences in a cosmically inflated sometime – a thoroughly capitalised future.) Our view of a future, which should not be closed off but urgently addressed, has a counterpart in Jacques Derrida's political thinking on deferral (which is not far removed from Kracauer's *waiting*, more on that in a moment), where he nevertheless maintains that "justice doesn't wait" but is always urgent.[51] The mark of deferral, the 'anon', insists that solutions remain provisional, that there is more to come, that there *must be* more to come. Solutions remain bound to a resolute focus on the fundamental, not merely makeshift or technical-administrative, handling of a problem. The political name for this focus on foundations is *radicalism*.

The radicalism we refer to encompasses both: a focus on foundations and the partial solutions that arise from it; both challenge each other without invalidating or negating each other. In this context, nonsolution thinking is critical of maximalism

51 "But justice, however unrepresentable it may be, doesn't wait. It is that which must not wait. […] a just decision is always required *immediately*, 'right away'." Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law. 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority'" [1990], in: Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, David Gray Carlson (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, New York, London: Routledge 1992, p. 26.

and purism: nonsolution is radical, not fundamentalist or pure; as mentioned before, it stands in opposition to a maximalist attitude that declares, "If I can't achieve *everything*, I don't want anything at all," or a purist attitude that distances itself from all solutions that could be compromised or contaminated. Furthermore, nonsolution is radical, but not extreme or rigorous, not 'hard' or ethically demanding: it does not call for heroic acts but rather small steps, albeit in a direction with an outspoken comprehensive perspective. This should certainly not be understood as a warning that we should be more willing to compromise in (planning) politics. Rather, nonsolution advocates a temporality in planning policy in the sense of *non-reformist reform*, which means that even a 'merely reformist' measure can maintain contact with a more radical goal, with more radical actions, and improve the conditions for their future realisation. This is what André Gorz's concept of *non-reformist reform*, coined in the mid-1960s, is all about: establishing effective counterforces within the capitalist system that point beyond it, but also delivering results that can be experienced as partial successes. Non-reformist reforms are "determined not in terms of what can be, but what should be".[52] This was taken up by Susan Fainstein, among others. As a planning theorist who aims for democratically diversified equal opportunities as a planning criterion, Fainstein sees an important achievement in non-reformist reforms, in that they, within given power relations, "set in motion a trajectory of change in which more radical reforms become practicable over time".[53]

In non-reformist reform, the goal is neither appeasement nor for a higher, well-meaning authority to bestow reforms on the non-propertied masses. Rather, this concept draws attention to the extent – however small – to which the struggle for reform

52 Mark Engler, Paul Engler, "André Gorz's Non-Reformist Reforms Show How We Can Transform the World Today", *Jacobin* 2021/07, https://jacobin.com

53 Susan Fainstein, *The Just City*, London, Ithaca: Cornell UP 2010, p. 17f.

by the people, and even joint engagement in a political project that initially fails, also gives rise to militant collective subjects: where previously there were only individuals and groups living and working in accordance with the rules, collectives are now forming that are developing (a little) taste for conflictual collective action. This is a process in which the conditions for future struggles with more far-reaching goals are improving (or in some cases emerging for the first time). The observation that correcting the worst effects of a system of domination always runs the risk of perfecting that system – this observation, which has become widespread in critical discourses on the *governmentality* of neoliberal post-Fordism, must certainly be considered, but it cannot and must not be a killer argument. This is the context in which the *non* in non-reformist reform unfolds its political meaning: closely related to the *non* in nonsolution, it prevents the reform in question from being viewed as entirely positive, thereby preventing revolution from being declared superfluous and radical politics from being ostracised.

Revolution is a common, emotionally charged name for radical social change. To put it more soberly, a policy of non-reformist reforms aims to elevate reform measures of a partial or technical nature to the fundamental level of the political whole that is at stake: these measures are thus situated in the light of this impossible whole, so that this question of wholeness and foundation shines through insistently, instead of leaving it at a partial solution. This reveals a connection to the theory of political hegemony and radical democracy, specifically to the idea of elevating a partial demand to the comprehensive status of a goal that can stand for the impossible whole and the unattainable foundation of society.[54] This concept, to which we feel connected,

54 See, for example, Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, London, New York: Verso 2005, pp. 112ff.

boils down to a certain extent to the idea that a process of politicisation involves the deliberate inflation of partial or technical solutions into a strategic collective goal. On the other hand, our thoughts intersect with the concept of revolution in the fusion of ecofeminism, critical theory, care revolution and property theory presented by Eva von Redecker. For example, in this statement: "The impossibility of a sudden turnaround does not have to lead to despair about the revolution. For it does not necessarily have to be imagined as [...] a grandiose tipping point at which heads suddenly roll [...], rather a slow but ubiquitous transformation of everyday life." – "A different relationship to one another [...] aims at the whole but can be started and practised on a very small scale."[55]

An (older) example of how non-reformist reform is decidedly political in nature is provided by the feminist struggle for *Wages Against Housework*, which Silvia Federici conceived in 1975 under this provocatively paradoxical title. When left-wing women's movements demand that female-gendered domestic and care work be paid on a wage basis, this should not be understood as a strategy for integrating women into capitalist wage labour relations. According to Federici, women have always been part of these relations, only as unpaid reproducers of male wage labourers. Moreover, the domestic work wage agenda should not be understood as part of the expansion of existing normal power relations; rather, this demand – a demand for reform that goes so far that it has hardly been implemented anywhere to date – is part of a *revolutionary perspective*. This is because remuneration for domestic work creates better conditions for the militant unity of the working classes; because it also liberates men (from their role as 'master of the house'); and because the demand for wages

55 Eva von Redecker, *Revolution für das Leben. Philosophie der neuen Protestformen*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer. 2020, pp. 147, 291 (transl.: G.H./D.R.).

is not aimed at the correct performance of housework but at its *refusal*, insofar as wages denaturalise the gender determination of care work and thus make it contestable ("It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins"[56]). Ultimately, wages for housework are intended as a first step towards the abolition of the entire wage labour system, in which most people own nothing but their labour power, which they sell. Not *wages for housework*, but *wages against housework*. This corresponds to a nonsolutional dialectic in the concept of non-reformist reform: demanding wages in order to abolish the wage system.

There is a comparable situation today with the (initially unintended) non-reformist reform aspect of the Berlin-based initiative *Deutsche Wohnen & Co enteignen* (*Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co*), which has been running since 2018 (https://dwenteignen.de). Schematically speaking, the political process here looks like this: first, there is the almost revolutionary demand for the compulsory sale of the entire housing stock of large private profit-oriented real estate companies to the public sector – not to the state, but by socialising it, transforming it into common social property. This is a sale in accordance with the German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) at a fixed price below market value, and it is for this (and not for any ideas of Bolshevik measures of violence) that the highly charged word "expropriation" is used. In the Berlin referendum on this issue in 2021, nearly 60 per cent of valid votes were in favour of this proposal.[57] However, following resistance from real estate capital and its political representatives, the only viable option appeared to be the slow and market-defined repurchase of individual properties. Nevertheless, the campaign is sustainable

56 Silvia Federici, "Wages against Housework" [1975], in: Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero. Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, Oakland: PM Press 2012, p. 18.

57 See further: Joanna Kusiak, *Radically Legal. Berlin Constitutes the Future*, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge UP 2024.

and more than a reformist compromise, as it remains committed to socialisation; it neither undermines nor disavows this aim. On the contrary, while socialisation gained legitimacy and visibility in the media and in everyday political debate, campaigners continued by appointing experts to draft a "socialisation law" based on Article 15 of the German Basic Law, aiming to transfer flats from profit-driven real estate companies with more than 3,000 units to common ownership through a future referendum.

This nonsolution-oriented temporal logic of non-reformist reforms has something in common with Antonio Gramsci's hegemonic political concept of *positional warfare*, with its slow shifts in terrain (the theoretical metaphor dates back to the First World War). Acting politically *radically* means not fixating on the pathos of sudden total rupture or definitive, all-encompassing solutions. And it means recognising and exploiting every small gain of ground – every reform achieved and every neutralisation of a discursive position of the opposition. But – and this is the nonsolutionist addition – not fixating on the big upheaval does not mean abandoning it altogether and resigning oneself to gradualism. Instead, the emphasis remains on the radical agenda, and what remains in sight are opportunities to temporarily shift from a struggle in the positional warfare mode to a struggle in the mode of mobile warfare. However, the war imagery should not mislead us: the hegemonic politics of non-reformist reforms is about conflicts in which something is fought for, but not about martial battlefields and thunderclaps.

If a nonsolution involves postponing what is yet to come, thereby making a solution more comprehensive, it maintains its insistence on continuing to work on the currently incomplete solution into the near future. In terms of planning and construction policy, this also applies to construction that anticipates further construction – not only in the sense of a work in progress but also in that the construction expresses a questioning of its merely

provisional current state. A historical example is provided by the discourse on housing policy published in *Das Neue Frankfurt* in the late 1920s: this was the magazine of the social democratic architectural project *New Frankfurt*. In 1928, an article in the magazine presented a specific design proposal commissioned by a municipal housing association for the cheapest and therefore smallest possible apartment for a working-class household. This was published but by no means celebrated. Rather, the article pointed out that this design for a 38-square-metre flat anticipated further construction and conversion from the outset: In "later, perhaps better times", when political changes had brought "wages into a reasonable relationship to housing prices", the two-room apartment could easily be expanded into "a three-room apartment that would now truly come close to the minimum standard of human dignity". The current state of affairs in terms of the distribution of spatial wealth and spatial poverty is thus implicitly characterised as fundamentally inhumane, and in relation to this state of affairs the design project not only functions as a temporary emergency solution but also has a demonstrative function, a critical truth function. The article ends with this remark: "No one will take much pleasure in this project, but it shows things as they are and is therefore commendable."[58] This demonstration is intended to help exert pressure and speed things up, because, like justice, decent living conditions *cannot wait*. This is the nonsolution moment that goes beyond mere provisionality.

Something similar, albeit on an aesthetic plane, took visible form in Vienna in the recent past: the residential development by architect Hermann Czech in Brunner Gasse on the outskirts of Vienna (1989–1994) presents a facade design that anticipates future expansion options – in the way of adding a *non* to the existing structural solution. The appearance of the houses is characterised by inscriptions for larger window openings in the façade plaster, which are visible around the actual windows. The ironic play with the double window outline appeals to a transcending of construction cost constraints through self-customising and further construction or conversion in a future that is presented here as an alternative, namely through the *dissolution* of the functional and formal closed nature of a solution (see p. 96).

The time of nonsolution is a time of delay, of action that also seeks to gain time. Initially, this is to keep options open, to form a shape that allows space for other shapes without falling apart. Without remaining in limbo, caution is nevertheless advised when making exclusions that involve action or planning. "Planners accept praise for being 'bold' when they make hasty decisions", Burckhardt rightly criticises. The symbolic and financial capital that can be accumulated through speed in 'doing' has increased since Burckhardt's time.[59] "[T]he best planning of all is the plan to postpone decisions," Burckhardt counters, because more information becomes available, but above all because "[d]elaying a decision means that more of the people it affects can have a say in it", and more people who were not initially involved can be brought into play: "To defer planning is to democratise planning."[60] Planning is action, and postponement is part of it (it is not procrastination or inaction).

An example from our own planning practice is the (unrealised) memorial project *The Monument May Be a Forest* by Eduard Freudmann and Gabu Heindl, which won first place in the international competition *From Those You Saved*, organised by the

58 Jacobus Göttel, "Vorschlag für eine billigste Wohnung", *Das Neue Frankfurt* 6, June 1928 (transl. G.H./D.R.).

59 A now historical example of this is the rapid demolition of residential buildings in cities in the former GDR (East Germany) after reunification in 1990; there is currently a lack of affordable housing in some of the affected neighbourhoods and regions. (Today's hasty demolitions will result in a similar shortage.)

60 Burckhardt, *The Minimal Intervention*, p. 43.

Warsaw-based *Remembrance and Future* Foundation in 2015 (see p. 98). The planning and construction task was to create a memorial for non-Jewish Poles who had helped Jews persecuted during the Holocaust. The main title of the first competition phase, *The Monument Is a Forest*, was split into five titles in the second phase, which are also manifestations of the project and illustrate its inherent temporalisation: *The Monument Is a Dilemma*, because, according to the initial situation, the monument could not wait, especially since the Jewish Holocaust survivor who had financed the project was already very old and wanted to see the monument as a token of gratitude to his rescuers. At the same time, however – and this is where the dilemma lies – a highly questionable location was chosen for the monument, namely the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto, a place that should be reserved for remembering Jewish suffering and not be used from now on to honour the – all too rare – rescue by non-Jewish Poles.

Hence the interim solution: *The Monument Is a Forest Nursery*, initially (only) a tree nursery, a small forest that could be erected immediately at this controversial location, but only *temporarily* (for approximately two years) until a location could be found for the main project idea of planting a forest together with young Polish people in memory of the rescuers. This is what *The Monument Is a Process* stands for: the process of democratic agreement on the final location of the permanent forest memorial. This postponement was not intended to avoid conflict over a problematic location and the attribution of roles – majority Polish rescuers, victims, accomplices – but rather to keep a necessary social conflict surrounding memory politics in the public sphere. A de-sedimentation of seemingly settled conflict material in the sense of Laclau's,[61] as well as in the full sense of the word: the aim was to dig up and replant the saplings – which was to be done by

61 See Heindl, *Stadtkonflikte*, p. 43ff.

the local civil society as an anonymous and heterogeneous mass subject – before the trees grew too large for the space allocated to the monument's tree nursery phase and thus threatened to 'implode' as an ensemble. In the event of such an implosion, *The Monument May Be a Failure* would be the result; in the event of replanting, *The Monument May Be a Forest* would become reality.[62]

62 See also Gabu Heindl, Eduard Freudmann, "The Monument is a Dilemma. Contemporary Commemoration and the Failing of Philanthropy in Public Space" (2016) on the closed website http://politicalcritique.org.

Active Passivity and Non-Fulfilment Policy

"What is the point of doing efficiently things that do not have to be done at all?"

Anupama Kundoo[63]

Successful passive resistance against eviction: this is what a remarkable scene in the essayistic documentary film *Misère au Borinage* from 1934 shows. This film by Joris Ivens and Henri Storck deals with housing misery and political struggles in the Belgian coal mining region of Borinage. It includes moments of solidarity and popular agency in resistance. For example, when the family of a striking worker is about to be evicted from their small factory housing as part of state reprisals during the general strike of 1932. When bailiffs and police arrive to collect the family's furniture, workers from the neighbourhood pass by and, in an act of solidarity, sit and lean on the furniture, blocking its removal until the officials leave in frustration.

What we are dealing with here is a highly active nonaction: mere inaction, just hanging around the house, becomes effective resistance. The fact that the film *Misère au Borinage* is able to highlight this unspectacular action, which culminates in a small victory for the have-nots, is due in part to the following: Although this film is very much agitational, functions as agitprop by showing demonstrations and discussion meetings of coal miners, as well as their Marx and Lenin posters, it also invests a lot of time and attention in the realistic observation of everyday life, its social and spatial configurations, its gestures and routines. Politics, the effects of an exploitative, repressive order and the rebellion against it, can be experienced in their situatedness

63 Anupama Kundoo, "Communal Material", lecture at the Institute for Art and Architecture, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, May 2024.

in this everyday life – and everyday life in its situatedness in a political context.

Siegfried Kracauer discusses *Misère au Borinage* in both his books *Theory of Film* and *History*.[64] He emphasises how much this film prioritises "self-restraint" over the impulse to create, thus making an everyday reality tangible. He does not mention the class struggle messages in the film, nor the demonstrations and strikes, nor even the eviction scene. This should not primarily be understood as an omission or failure to act. Rather, we are dealing here with a superimposition of processes of the kind we will discuss below from the nonsolution perspective, using Kracauer's concept of *active passivity*: firstly, there is the passive resistance in the worker's apartment, which proves to be active. Secondly, there is the film, which effectively highlights such moments in their casualness – you don't have to be a militant hero to show solidarity and resistance – by holding back its creative impulse. *Misère au Borinage* is an example of nonsolution as it remains in unresolved tension between documentary observation and propagandistic intent. And thirdly, there is the way in which Kracauer – this is the *effect* of his passage on the film – warmly recommends something to his readers that is *also* socialist agitation: he, too, does this with self-restraint, almost with understatement and a poker face, definitely not offending, but actually coherent in terms of hegemonic politics. In doing so, he gains a more interested audience for the film, one that may not have been ideologically aligned with it, but which, with a time lag, may come to a surprising political perception. (Not least for ourselves, it was astonishing to discover, when we first saw *Misère au Borinage*, what this film, which Kracauer cites as an example of restraint, so actively conveys in precisely this restraint.)

64 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 202; self-quotation in Kracauer, *History*, p. 91.

Let us expand the repertoire of nonsolution thinking with a few terms that we borrow again from Kracauer – before placing them in close relation to other architectural situations. These are: *politics of non-fulfilment; the strict logic* of ostentatious *nonsense*; *the power of the seemingly weak*; and initially active passivity.

In his book *History*, following on from his remarks on artistic self-restraint in the Borinage film, Kracauer terms as "active passivity" the attitude that is appropriate to an awareness of contingency: an attitude in which the subject does not act as a maker on a reality that has been degraded to an object.[65] Similar to nonsolution, active passivity combines contradictory tendencies: doing and not doing. This contradiction can be unfolded (rather than resolved) into a temporal relationship: in one temporal sense, active passivity imposes a restriction, namely passivity, on activity. Kracauer compares active passivity with waiting.[66] Let us take this meaning with us: do not rush into action, do not immediately continue with business as usual. With this pause, this moment of passivity, the moment of postponement in nonsolution thinking comes into play in the sense of a time lag, from which a second glance perceives the situation differently, reevaluates it. This also applies in the other temporal sense, in the opposite direction, namely to active passivity as a turn towards action: we have to look twice at this expression, because at first glance it seems to indicate *passivity*, but then, on closer inspection, an unexpected

65 See Kracauer, *History*, p. 92. Similarly, on p. 47: The subject of historical experience pursues "two tendencies", a "realistic tendency" and a "formative tendency", and in this respect, this subject is "both passive and active, a recorder and a creator".

66 "Waiting [...] amounts to a sort of active passivity." (Kracauer, *History*, p. 84) Already in 1922, back then in theological terms, Kracauer combined waiting with active passivity: in his social diagnosis "Those Who Wait" (in: *The Mass Ornament*, p. 138f), he advocates combining "tense activity and engaged self-preparation" with "hesitant openness" to form an attitude towards a crisis of meaning; therein lies an alternative to the pathos of despair as well as to the pathos of the ultimate.

active moment comes to light. Active passivity does not mean that nothing happens, but that *something else* happens, that other subjects, other strategies and capacities for action emerge than those envisaged by the current power relations.[67]

From a historical perspective, protest movements in the years around 2020 offer examples of this unexpected emergence of organised activity where passivity seemed to prevail: the global environmental movement Fridays for Future, driven primarily by a generation that had previously been considered largely abstinent from political engagement; or the 2020 demonstration in Vienna against racist police violence, which, with 50,000 participants, was one of the largest rallies in modern Austrian history and seemed to come out of nowhere insofar as this country has no larger tradition of institutionalised criticism of racism or people of colour organising on a mass scale. In conceptual terms, the focus on a becoming-active of the passive can be linked to Arendt's reflections on the specific power of action of "passive resistance". Commenting on "[p]opular revolt against materially

67 Our conception of active passivity, based on Kracauer, differs from Theodor W. Adorno's use of this phrase (in his 1958/59 lectures on aesthetics), namely from his postulate "that in a certain kind of active passivity, or of strenuous surrender to the thing, one gives it what it actually expects in its own right." Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetik (1958/59). Nachgelassene Schriften. Abteilung IV: Vorlesungen. Band 3*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2017, p. 190 (transl.: G.H./D.R.). The "thing" here refers to the work of art. Active passivity gains significance for Adorno (and Max Horkheimer) in a critique of the subject in the field of aesthetics on the one hand, and in a combination of epistemology, ethics and anthropology on the other, rather than in the fields of politics and (social) history, which we are heading towards with Kracauer. On the Adornian use of active passivity, see Max Horkheimer, Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments* [1944], Stanford: Stanford UP 2002, p. 167: The "blind subsumption" of reality under judgement schemata in post-liberal capitalism deprives perception of that "active passivity of recognition" through which it could happen in the first place that "justice is done to the perceived object". It should be added that active passivity, for us as for Kracauer, has nothing to do with how this diagnostic label functions in the psychological life counselling discourse of *dialectical behaviour therapy* (DBT).

strong rulers", Arendt notes: "To call this 'passive resistance' is certainly an ironic idea; it is one of the most active and efficient ways of action ever devised, because it cannot be countered by righting, where there may be defeat or victory, but only by mass slaughter in which even the victor is defeated, cheated of his prize, since nobody can rule over dead men."[68] This consideration implies that the respective rulers do not respond to passive resistance with mass slaughter, or that such mass violence would delegitimise those who use it and endanger the stability of their rule. In other words, Arendt's thesis emphasises moments of activation comparable to how 1960s Black civil rights activists endured local white police violence, thereby seeking to shame the white majority population nation-wide. Passive activity is structurally similar to sit-ins as a blockade practice of, for example, pacifist protest movements, and more recently in veritable die-ins as an extreme form of passive apparition in the ecology movement. Not to be forgotten are the controversially discussed road blockades of the *Last Generation* and *Extinction Rebellion* (especially from 2021 to 2024) as a practice of self-demobilisation, namely by gluing their hands to road surfaces. These forms of protest also rely on the hegemonic groups not resorting to "mass slaughter" (and maybe rely on the notion that angry motorists running over glue-using climate activists could generate public sympathy for this protest movement).

In any case, where only endurance seemed to prevail, an unfamiliar activity is perceived and brought to bear. This is the pattern of a process, and Kracauer directly refers to the meaning of this process, which points in the direction of politics, as a nonsolution. As discussed above (p. 22f.), with regard to film, he speaks of the "admirable nonsolution" that holds a whole and its counterforces in unresolved tension. In another explicit

68 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 200f.

reference to nonsolution, Kracauer uses this word, drawing on Charlie Chaplin and everyday explorations in Italian neorealist cinema, to describe a cinematic perception capable of conveying the power of those who are only seemingly weak. More precisely, it can be – and, from time to time, is – demonstrated that their weakness is only a widespread ideological illusion; which means that the weakness exists, but only based on, and as this illusion. "Behind many nonsolutions, including those of the old Chaplin comedies, there lurks, perhaps, a desire to exalt the power of resistance of the seemingly weak who time and again cheat destiny."[69] The ability to act, to assert themselves against the fate-like forces of matter, of money and labour discipline: the subjects Kracauer cites as examples of this are, significantly, an unhoused man, namely Charlie Chaplin's tramp character, and a minimum pensioner threatened with eviction from his one-room flat in Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D.* (a 1952 film that tells a nonstory and conveys social conditions almost exclusively through incidental details).

Nonsolution as a perception of the power of the *seemingly* weak: unhoused people, for example, are vulnerable and have little purchasing power, but they are not "socially weak", as mainstream discourse labels them. And when persons with disabilities who work in sheltered workshops protest that they receive only "pocket money" for their work rather than a wage, this raises the prospect of a wage – and thus ultimately (following Federici's line of argument, see p. 61f.) also a prospect of a right to collective wage negotiations and to industrial action such as strikes.

A second look is taken at the allocation of places to subjects and at power relations that initially seem immutable, a look that

69 Kracauer sees "tenacity, resiliency, and indeed adaptability" at work in these films: as "weapons in an unending fight". He uses the word *nonsolutions* here without further ado, as if it were a common or well-established term. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 270.

reevaluates, raises objections, and brings other truths to bear, especially the emergence of empowerment among those who "do not count" in the social hierarchy.[70] Kracauer's nonsolution film example *Intolerance* (see p. 23) also becomes more plausible as such in a perspective that captures the fragility of what appears immutable. Actually, his example is not intuitive, since this type of classical American film drama, and a staging such as that of the court scene, with its alternation between overall and detailed views represents the most conventional form of cinematic representation. So, how can Kracauer speak of nonsolution, and even of a paradoxical relationship between overall view and close-up, with respect to such a model example of cinematic classicism? We should bear in mind that with his argument he implicitly insists that even something determined by a highly stable, 'completely normal' order, something so classical that it appears to be natural, is in reality and in truth contingent. It is anything but normal: it is precarious, historically conditioned, and thus also a moment in the course of changing power relations that are by no means bound to remain as they are.

Definitions of action and the capacity to act are called into question. Kracauer writes about this again in 1932 in connection with the Berlin guest performance of the prominent Spanish Andreu-Rivel clown troupe. His essay is more a thought experiment than a review. The trio's repertoire includes the pantomimic construction of a small bridge made of human bodies; this bridge is built on stage with clown-like complications and comical counteractions to the purposeful construction activity. Kracauer interprets this along the lines of a nonsolution logic: the

70 On those who are not counted, as well as on the *miscounting* of parts of society, comparable to our understanding of *mismeasurement*, see the theory of unforeseen democratic activations in: Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy* [1995], Minneapolis, London: U of Minnesota P 1999.

clowns "feign a will to work, which they continually disavow".[71] This is not just about mocking industrious or productive activity. Rather, both impulses, *to compose and decompose a whole* (see p. 23f.), remain in play, which here is not just about playing, but a critique of constructive action that takes place in the execution of this action. To use the terminology of Arendt's *Human Condition*: the 'mere' *labour* of building a bridge becomes *productive work* when it is placed in the artistic context of a stage performance. However, it only becomes an *action* in the emphatic sense insofar as Kracauer's interpretation of this clown construction shifts it from the performing arts towards a political meaning and its public unfolding.

These clowns, he writes, engage in "practical dialectics", criticising the prevailing "hierarchy of values" in the assessment of work and action. But in doing so, they go beyond critical disavowal or even merely illogical behaviour and follow a "strict logic" that is "not the normal" logic, but ultimately a socially utopian logic that makes "sense audible in nonsense". This anticipates other social conditions of working, acting and building: "For them [the clowns, G.H./D.R.], funny nonsense is more than mere nonsense intended to break down wicked closed-mindedness and false seriousness." Thanks to its "strange logic", this nonsense "evokes the inkling of *a reality* that is not identical with ours". The critical, even dismissive, attitude toward prevailing standards of architectural practice results, in this performance, in a clownish non-building that nevertheless remains building. Ultimately, this building in the clown act results in a "dizzying bridge" that appeals to a different kind of being human – "people freed from closed-mindedness and seriousness".[72] Using a peculiar term that marks the political connotation of this con-

71 Kracauer, "Akrobat – schöön" [1932], in: Kracauer, *Straßen*, p. 101 (transl.: G.H./D.R.).

72 Kracauer, "Akrobat – schöön," pp. 101–104 (transl.: G.H./D.R.).

text and can be seen as a beautiful parallel motif to nonsolution, Kracauer refers here to the "persistent policy of non-fulfilment" of the building clowns. (The German word *Nichterfüllungspolitik*, "policy of non-fulfilment", is highly uncommon; however, it appears in political debates of 1920s Germany on the question of the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. In this respect, Kracauer's use of this word – which was probably more familiar to his time than it is to us today – could represent an appropriation, in the sense of a playful, unfriendly misappropriation, from a discourse that was mainly used by the political right around 1930.)

Interim summary of architectural points of reference in nonsolution thinking: active passivity; the emergence of power where only powerlessness seemed to reign; a strict logic in nonsense; building in the context of a *policy of non-fulfilment*. Let us consider a few planning and construction strategies that amount to active passivity, i.e. active non-building. At times, a tendency towards humour and even nonsense can be discerned as nonsolution strategies and tactics.[73]

Nonsense with "strict logic" as in Kracauer's clowns or a deliberately mismeasured football pitch in the prison yard (see above, p. 54f.): here, correspondences emerge with *seriously silly design*, a planning theory that combines opposition to technophile, expertocratic solutionism with a practice of "deliberately

73 Together with Claire Parnet, Deleuze interprets humour as a practice of *effects* which, unlike irony, does not judge an action according to its fundamental legitimations, but according to its consequences (Gilles Deleuze, Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* [1977], New York: Columbia UP 2007). And *nonsense* is for Deleuze a placeholder for sense: sense can neither be dispensed with nor reduced to regimes of meaning and expression; it is, so to speak, always there, insistent but not given as something defined; and it is precisely this, that sense is neither absent and comes out of nowhere when it comes, nor is it always already given and thus comes out of itself when it comes – this, according to Deleuze, is expressed by nonsense (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* [1969], New York: Columbia UP 1990). This nonsense is not far from nonsolution.

flawed partial solutions". Through practical testing of solutions that are deliberately silly and inadequate, unforeseen ideas and unintended actors are to be brought into the design. The proponents of this approach cite design processes for technology applications for senior citizens as an example; they refer to nonsense inventions ("un-useless objects") in the spirit of Japanese *chindogu* and the "anti-design" of *Superstudio* and *Archizoom*. And they write: "Social problems will not be solved by technology alone and must be considered as part of a wider struggle." Also, "the solution to solutionism would be social and political".[74] We strongly agree.

There are also parallels between such nonsolutions and the inaction of the *Solar Do-Nothing Machine*: under this title, Charles and Ray Eames presented a machine in 1957 whose play of colours and shapes *does nothing*, whose movements serve no purpose – except to move beautifully and, as a machine powered by solar energy, to raise awareness of the benefits of solar energy. From today's perspective, however, the promotion of renewable forms of energy would be a central activity, in addition to the nonsensically constructed questioning of the definition of purposeful machine use.

In light of the critical question of what building and 'making' mean, Lucius Burckhardt made a strong case for active nonaction in prominent statements, particularly evident in his concept of *the smallest possible intervention*. Around 1980, alluding to waste in construction, he wrote: "The greatest waste of public money, however, is building buildings we don't need", and continued: "Preventing unnecessary construction should [...] be counted among the great achievements of construction." And "a first step

74 Mark Blythe, Kristina Andersen, Rachel Clarke, Peter Wright, "Anti-Solutionist Strategies: Seriously Silly Design Fiction", 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301931154_Anti-Solutionist_Strategies_Seriously_Silly_Design_Fiction, esp. p. 4977.

towards minimal intervention might be either to open the viewer's eyes to the existent landscape or urban situation, or to hone his present awareness of it". – "This is no easy matter, because the idea of change so fascinates people that [they become] enthused by the concept of a 'newly created landscape'."[75]

"The most minimal intervention of all is to prevent construction" – "which, however, is by no means an exhortation to do nothing."[76] Rather, it should be understood as active passivity based on an awareness of the conditions and characteristics of a situation. An ultimately small intervention, close to paradox but based on such a perception of the planning situation, is the solution to the task of redesigning an urban square by leaving it as it is, as proposed by *Lacaton & Vassal*. In 1996, this architectural firm fulfilled the commission to redesign Place Léon Aucoc in Bordeaux by documenting its on-site research and recommending to the clients that nothing be changed on the square but that it be maintained with care in the future. This recommendation was invoiced in the usual manner – and implemented by the clients (see p. 97). *Lacaton & Vassal* also implemented the commission to demolish and rebuild the *Tour Bois le Prêtre* apartment block in Paris in 2011 with a moment of *non-fulfilment policy* by renovating the tower instead of demolishing and rebuilding it.

Let's move on from *non* as *not* to *non* as *no*.[77] A practice of *non-building* that stands in stark opposition to planning specifications is exemplified by the architectural firms that organised a boycott of the City of Vienna's competition for an educational

75 Lucius Burckhardt, *The Minimal Intervention*, pp. 58, 126.

76 According to editors Markus Ritter and Martin Schmitz in their preface to Burckhardt, *The Minimal Intervention*, p. 8. The sentence about preventing construction comes from Burckhardt (ibid., p. 123).

77 For a connection between some aspects of nonsolution thinking in planning and construction and the decisive saying no as a programmatic stance of an architecture firm, see: Gabu Heindl, "Saying No with Nonsolutions", in: "Field Notes on Repair: 4", *Places*, November 2024: https://placesjournal.org

campus in 2016. Of the 88 submissions, 55 were invalid: the firms in question had submitted elaborate protest statements in the form and language of competition submissions (with posters) against the school building being carried out as a public-private partnership, i.e. against the encroachment of the investment-driven construction industry into the public education sector. A refusal bordering on strike and dispute.

The *non* as *no* is linked to the *non* as *not* in the explicitly named *non-building plan*. We are talking about a long-term scenario with planning and movement policy facets located in Vienna, on the inner-city banks of the Danube Canal. (This scenario is also instructive for aspects of other struggles for rights to the city that today are being waged, not least over the use and against the capitalisation of urban waterfront areas, whether on the banks of the Elbe in Hamburg, on built-up lakes in Italy or on the waterfront of the Serbian capital, which were the focus of the grassroots movement *Don't Let Belgrade D[r]own* in the 2010s.) The Vienna Danube Canal is a popular recreational area that, since the turn of the millennium, has been transformed from an open-use public zone with a few low-key restaurants into a highly profitable large-scale catering location that private investors are exploiting to the full. When the City of Vienna awarded the planning contract to Gabu Heindl and Susan Kraupp in 2014, the public administrative institutions responsible for the Danube Canal had design guidelines in mind that would provide future investors with an attractive and uniformly designed field of activity. However, the commissioned architects presented something different, namely a *non-building plan* (see p. 100). This plan was delivered using the (visual) rhetoric of development plans but served the opposite purpose: to keep the still undeveloped waterfront areas as free as possible from catering and entertainment investment. This meant defending the openness of the Canal – i.e. its not yet commercialised spaces – against aggressive profit interests, while

improving the public infrastructure (access, rubbish bins, toilets). This inversely formulated development plan, with the aim of *not* building (here), was "noted" and then locked away by the City of Vienna, which had probably expected something different from the architects. Mission accomplished, in an act of non-fulfilment, through a nonsolution that reformulated the planning task and posed the problem differently: the question was not how to get more – and more beautiful – catering investments to the Danube Canal, but how to get fewer.

The non-building plan is a *solution with a non*, which does not build but negates; this is true insofar as the plan does not adhere to existing rights, drawing its provisions across property boundaries, in contrast to a standard building plan, which respects and reproduces these boundaries. This situation leads to a *solution with anon* – 'anon' for imminent and anonymous: in the habitual process of deregulated capitalisation of urban space, especially in the tendency of city administrations to optimise conditions for the exploitation of investment capital, the non-building plan inserts a small moment of blockade as a space of possibility for the unforeseen, which is still nameless.

Also, the non-building plan *preserves*. Not in the sense of protecting existing, culturally valuable buildings, of which there are hardly any on the Danube Canal banks. And yet there is not simply 'nothing' there. The view that there is 'nothing' there corresponds to the view of investors, including those on the Danube Canal, who often claim in a colonialist manner that in a non-commercialised area, everything is just waiting for profit-oriented development, which will finally bring 'something' there. Or, worse still, that an alleged, or rather, discursively constructed evil – an eyesore, a contamination of the city – is being eliminated.

The non-building plan preserves futures, possibilities for using space that arise from the unexpected, which masses of people are capable of. For example, if given the time, users of space

can develop ecologically sustainable forms of progress without growth. In this respect, there is hope for the actualisation of a potential that is inherent in the non-building plan but is not simply 'its' potential: it is not a surplus possession of characteristics, but an exterior that opens up within it through its relationship to others and their agency. (We say this echoing Deleuze's conception of the *actualisation of a virtuality*, which is precisely about intimate relationships to an outside and not about an already existing potential awakening from its slumber, quasi towards a full identity of being.)

The hope that is relevant here does not simply aim at good luck somewhere, but rather allies itself latently and anticipatorily with what emerges in the only seemingly stable order, in its gaps, *as* its gaps: where everything seemed to run smoothly and wait for investments, where, as usual, the gratitude of the population would go to the city fathers and city mothers who have always known what "our Viennese" need and what is good for them – in short, where there was nothing, where everything was quiet and lay fallow and seemed to wait for construction as the only solution, there was popular political action. In 2015–16, the grassroots movement *Donaucanale für alle* (*Danube Canal for All*) defended the last flat (not sloping) inner-city meadow plot on the canal as a public open space against a large restaurant project by occupying it. (The investor in question, in an all too familiar colonial manner, had described the uncapitalised piece of meadow as a mere "dogshit meadow" – *Hundstrümmerlwiese*.) The movement took up the non-building plan, which, after being acknowledged by the City of Vienna, had been lying dormant in a bureaucratic drawer for a year (see p. 101). As a codification of active passivity, it had been waiting for agency from outside, as it were.

Politicisation of a technical-administrative measure: the fact that the protest campaign to preserve a public space from capital investment was able to refer to the non-building plan and the

zones designated in it as free of restaurants, that it was able to actualise the conflictual political potential of this plan and constitute it to the same extent as it implemented it – this required, not least, that the non-building plan actually existed *as a plan*. At the heart of paternalistic planning, this plan refused to do business as so many other plans do; but this refusal was expressed in the technical language of planning (as in the "strict logic" of *non-fulfilment policy*). And so, a *solution with anon* began to emerge: this plan represented a docking point, an ally for a movement that soon came into play, precisely in the plan's assertion of expertise (and its modicum of authority). The non-building plan is a clearly formulated, resolute position; it is controversial, namely prone to conflict (as opposition) and, in turn, contestable.

In contrast to this, such declarations of intent and regulations that seek to compulsively flexibilise conditions tend towards rhetoric and gestures of *ambiguity*: in the field of political economy, these include neoliberal deregulation efforts that brand detailed plans and regulations as a far too restrictive straitjacket for the allegedly fragile "vitality" of capital. Despite our desire to reflexively take up the legacy of the critique of master plans in the 1970s, we must nevertheless maintain that the non-building plan as a nonsolution is certainly not a *non-plan*. "Non-Plan: an Experiment in Freedom" was the title of the early neoliberal proposition published in 1969 by Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall and Cedric Price. As part of their critique of the master plan and state planning, they called for deregulation and, ultimately, "free-market libertarianism" with maximum "freedom" (from public intervention) for architecture.

The regime of ambiguity also exists in the realm of state or movement-based politics, in practices of mobilisation and governance through deliberately unclear regulations, including the targeted destruction of capabilities and institutions that serve to assess and debate clearly formulated positions. Such rule by

erratic and diffuse measures today ranges from autocratic law – "deliberately unclear, ambiguous, and fluid", "unpredictable and maddeningly erratic for the citizens"[78] – to *politics of bullshit* or *flooding the zone with shit* (Trump advisor Steve Bannon, 2016) as deliberately created confusion. The destruction of the capacity to distinguish between true and false is more important to these strategies than propagating their own agenda, which would have to be fought for and would be contestable. Planning as a contentious, even strict set of rules versus neoliberal or new right imperatives to constantly shake everything up. Kracauer already emphasised in studies in the mid-1930s on Nazi politics and propaganda, which are illuminating for our present, that right-wing disruption politics aims to shake everything up, remove the constraints on aggressive ruling forces and destroy the public's ability to tell truths from lies.[79]

Determined planning is closely related to the freedom-granting function that Arendt attributes to positive laws as well as to references to shared but contingent realities. Arendt is concerned with positive laws as enclosures, fences, insofar as they do not serve predictability and intimidation but rather enclose a space for action in which "something entirely new and unpredictable", ultimately a new beginning, can enter the world.[80] This perspective on planning, emphasised in a radical democratic sense, as well as the example of the Danube Canal movement's appeal to the administratively locked away non-building plan, ultimately

78 Rajshree Chandra, "Rule by Law and the Making of Authoritarian Democracies", *IWM post* 130, 2022.

79 See Drehli Robnik, *Flexibler Faschismus. Siegfried Kracauers Analysen rechter Mobilisierungen damals und heute*, Bielefeld: transcript 2024, chapter 4. (For a short summary in English see Robnik, "Film versus Fascism, 100 Years On: What Siegfried Kracauer's Political Theory Says About Our Present", Jan. 2022, https://wochederkritik.de/en_US)

80 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951/1967], London: Penguin 2017, p. 611.

illustrate the following facet of political nonsolution thinking as an orientation for action: radicalism does not mean puristically staying away from institutions, but rather encourages moments of contact and collaboration between protests on the one hand and institutions on the other – between grassroots movements and what can be achieved within the framework of administrations, in this case to limit the profit-driven destruction of mass spaces and ecological livelihoods.

Just Architecture

At the end of this book, another feature film with an endless ending. Spike Lee's 2018 film *BlacKkKlansman* concludes its fact-based crime plot centred on Ron Stallworth, the first Black police detective in the white police force of Colorado Springs, who cleverly infiltrates the Ku Klux Klan in 1972, with a gesture of having to stop but not being able to, and it goes back and forth. After his investigative successes, Stallworth's small team expects more support from their superiors, but instead they are instructed to break off all contact with the KKK and keep all investigation results secret. A frustrating ending: Stallworth is on the verge of handing in his badge, as in a New Hollywood cop thriller, but he seizes the opportunity for one last undercover phone call with the previously duped KKK leader David Duke, to whom he reveals his true identity as a Black police officer and launches into a tirade of mocking insults. *BlacKkKlansman* could end here on a humorous note but instead continues with a night-time domestic dialogue between the disappointed cop and his girlfriend Patrice Dumas, a radical Black Power activist. She points out that their relationship is like sleeping with the enemy, but he insists, contrary to her advice, on continuing to work as a police officer, and that he is "still for the liberation of my people", when suddenly there is a knock at the door. Stallworth goes to the door with his revolver and is surprised when Dumas pulls out her own revolver and follows him. In the hallway the two appear in Lee's signature shot, a tracking shot in which they stand on the camera dolly and look like cut-outs, abstracted from their surroundings – like parts of the story, but also already icons of history. The two, side by side with their weapons at the ready, are drawn into the tunnel of history, towards the window in which a burning cross appears. From this ritual gathering of the KKK, which is anything but defeated, the film continues with archive footage of white supremacists

marching at the 2017 *Unite the Right* rally, with David Duke praising President Trump and Trump (in his first term) praising neo-Nazis. The ending continues with footage of the far-right car terror attack on a counter-demonstration to the rally, with a "Rest in power" dedication to the anti-racist activist Heather Heyer who was murdered in this attack, and an upside-down American flag fading to a black-and-white American flag.

It doesn't stop. Even the neo-Nazi praiser from 2017 is president again. No end, no solution. This is the lesson of the disturbing pull of Lee's dolly shot with the Black Power activist and the Black cop side by side: in the fight against right-wing aggression and authoritarian violence, radical movements from below and reform-oriented critical forces within institutions and administrations, including authorities, cannot afford to allow themselves to be divided and fail to act side by side. In nonsolution.

In the sense of nonsolution, only one thing is imperative: that one has a choice and must make a decision – in acting in public. And not in a decisionist or voluntaristic manner, but in the exercise of a choice that remains, but remains controversial. *TINA* is certainly not an option here; this ideology of no alternatives ("There Is No Alternative"), of technical or economic constraints, serves rather to avoid action. Jeremy Till, a politically argumentative architect and architecture theorist, says something similar about decisions and choices. For him, architecture is the contingent discipline par excellence. And contingency as the inherently precarious basis of decisions in political battles must be made visible. Contingency – i.e. conditionality and disputability – in planning decisions does not mean that we should abandon planning altogether. That would correspond to a purist, ultimately nihilistic attitude, as if to say: "Everything depends on external factors, nothing is guaranteed – so why bother making big decisions when planning, rather than simply following the most

obvious conventions or profit options?" For Till, contingency is not a weakness but a strength, an opening up of politicised social reality. He writes: "contingency and uncertainty open up [... and] demand to choose", and they result in "contingent choices [...] in concrete reality".[81] Insisting on the choice one always has also includes the reflexive decision not to make a choice, in the sense of a nonsolution as the keeping present of an alternative strategy. This means that more than one thing comes into play: the comprehensive form *and* the detail that cannot be reduced to it, or the reformist, improving impulse *and* the radical, changing impulse in non-reformist reform. And just as one must account for a choice made, one must also account for a choice not made.

Let us turn to our last Kracauer reference in this book to look at the close relationship between architecture and politics as a radically problematic relationship. This is Kracauer's oldest nonsolution formulation, published briefly after he left his professional practice in architecture for a career as a writer. In 1923, he wrote a daily newspaper article on architecture, which he conceptualised as a difficult task, implicitly as a veritable action that arises precisely from the problematic social positioning of architectural practice. He characterised this positioning as the "plight of the architectural profession", in a highly condensed, nonsolutional form, with the following words: architects "are not so much, like merchants, for example, mediators between things, but think within things themselves and strive to shape them; their activity does not directly create relationships between people, but extends to the creation of the spaces in which people live and establishes the relationships that prove necessary between space and space".[82] Working on spaces and on relation-

81 Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 2009, p. 55, 59f.

82 Siegfried Kracauer, "Die Notlage des Architektenstandes" [1923], in: Kracauer, *Werke*, vol. 5.1, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2011, p. 567 (transl.: G.H./D.R.).

ships between spaces – these are activities that Kracauer distinguishes here in two essential ways: firstly, from the commercial mediation between things, which become commodities through this mediation, in a society in which the market defines relationships; secondly, from a direct, formative intervention in society, in "relationships between people". Such direct shaping of societies took place around 100 years ago in the form of rationalised governance – Fordism as social engineering – and soon after also in the form of fascist rule.

However, Kracauer's description contains a latent paradox, comparable to nonsolution. Only at second glance does the following insight become acute: if you work on relationships between spaces in which people live, then you inevitably also work on relationships between people, i.e. on society. Architects think and act *in things*, in relations between spaces – and through this detour of spatialisation, of being in the midst of things, of being *in medias res*, they act politically in relation to society (comparable to the "thinking through things" with which Kracauer much later described the exemplary attitude towards and in history[83]). In his formulation, architecture seems to be first removed from the realm of social design known as politics, only to reenter this realm through the back door of the paradox. Politics cannot be gotten rid of. "Planning is a component of politics. There is no escaping that truism."[84] This sentence by Rittel and Webber touches on a moment of *truth* that goes beyond a commonly heard meaningless phrase such as "architecture is political". Truth comes to bear precisely through the assertion of inescapability: this assertion implies (similar to, but more openly than in Kracauer's 'politics out and then back in again' paradox) that many people *want to escape* the political character of their

83 Kracauer, *History*, p. 192.

84 Horst Rittel, Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning", p. 169.

actions – but this means fleeing into ideological self-deception, i.e. the opposite of truth.

We are talking about a politics of architecture that, after passing through the nonsolution argument, does not take entrepreneurship or social engineering as its model. The politics now emphasised is an indirect one that does not claim to be situated right at the site of 'society-making' and would thus be similar or close to institutions of governance. This indirect politics of architecture and planning, its *orientation* towards shaping society, exercising power not in the form of domination but in the form of agency, popular agency in particular, sometimes also in alliance with institutions – this is what we call *just architecture*. In the double sense of 'just': *only* architecture and *justice-oriented* architecture.

It's just architecture. Everything architecture can do is, for instance, a football pitch that's too small (to pick up on the prison yard example from p. 54f.). The realisation that you're just doing architecture, not reshaping society, not solving its problems once and for all, etc., this kind of self-restraint is something active – active passivity – when it is more than mere modesty; when it serves to establish dissent and points of contact for collaboration. Out of an awareness of what architecture cannot do and what it can nevertheless achieve, there should be a move towards *more*. This does not mean 'more architecture', 'more power for architecture', etc., but rather *just architecture* again, now oriented towards *justice* (more of it) in a politicised relationship to society. On the one hand, this means reflecting on unjust conditions of sociality: to perceive more reality, context and contingency. On the other hand, it means alliances with movements, but also selectively with (educational) institutions and administrations: more political scope for action and impact in these alliances. Just architecture in both senses: on the one hand, in the awareness that it cannot achieve too much on its own (even if architecture,

as everyone knows, can cause a great deal of damage) and, on the other hand, in the awareness of its necessary relatedness to society. This implies that architecture does not claim to know (like an authority on social ethics) what 'just' conditions are. Architecture does not therefore claim to be fundamentally knowledgeable – but neither is it modest when it comes to tackling noticeably and urgently *unjust* conditions, and that means situations in which an ethically noble "renunciation of a solution" will not do.

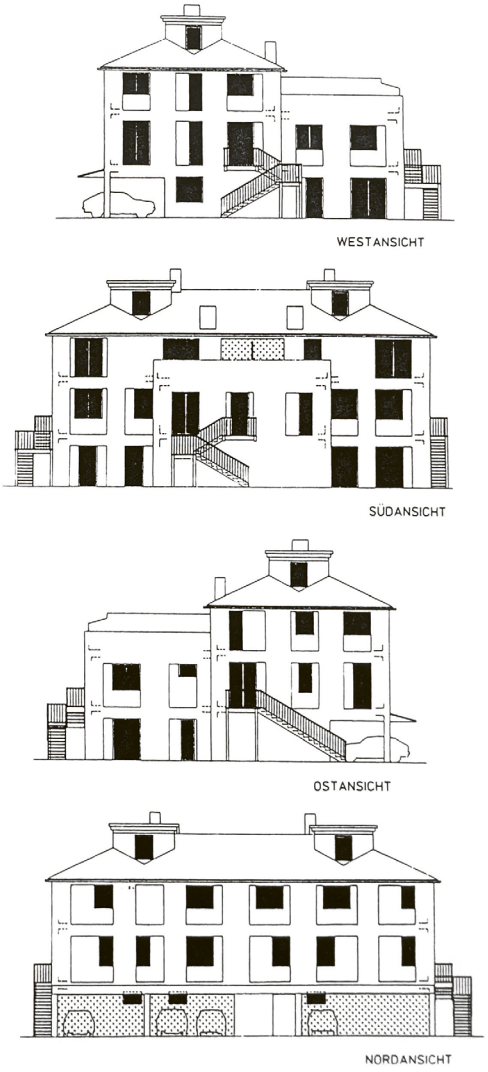
It is necessary that architecture (and, of course, other fields of activity) enters into alliances with democratic movements as well as with institutions in order to act – to act politically – and in doing so, demands and compromises must be weighed up against each other. Recognising this, architecture remains in a state of nonsolution – *unresolved*, not detached from others, not *absolute*, i.e. not defined in terms of an identity as a discipline. In its political claim, its claim to justice, architecture is outside itself, referred to an outside: *Architecture Depends*, as Till says in a highly condensed form in the title of his contingency-oriented book.

Architecture is not (re)solved. This is the last nonsolution in this book, and it too results from active doing and not doing, not from automatism. One can reject architecture's connection to politics and say, "I have nothing to do with politics." Or one can decide to consciously practise what is political about architecture. The choice is open. Like many others, we have made ours.

One of seven swimming pools on the roofs of Alt-Erlaa residential park, Vienna → p. 37
Photo: Gili Merin

Football pitch, *Out in Prison*, Krems near Vienna → p. 54f.
Photo: Gabu Heindl

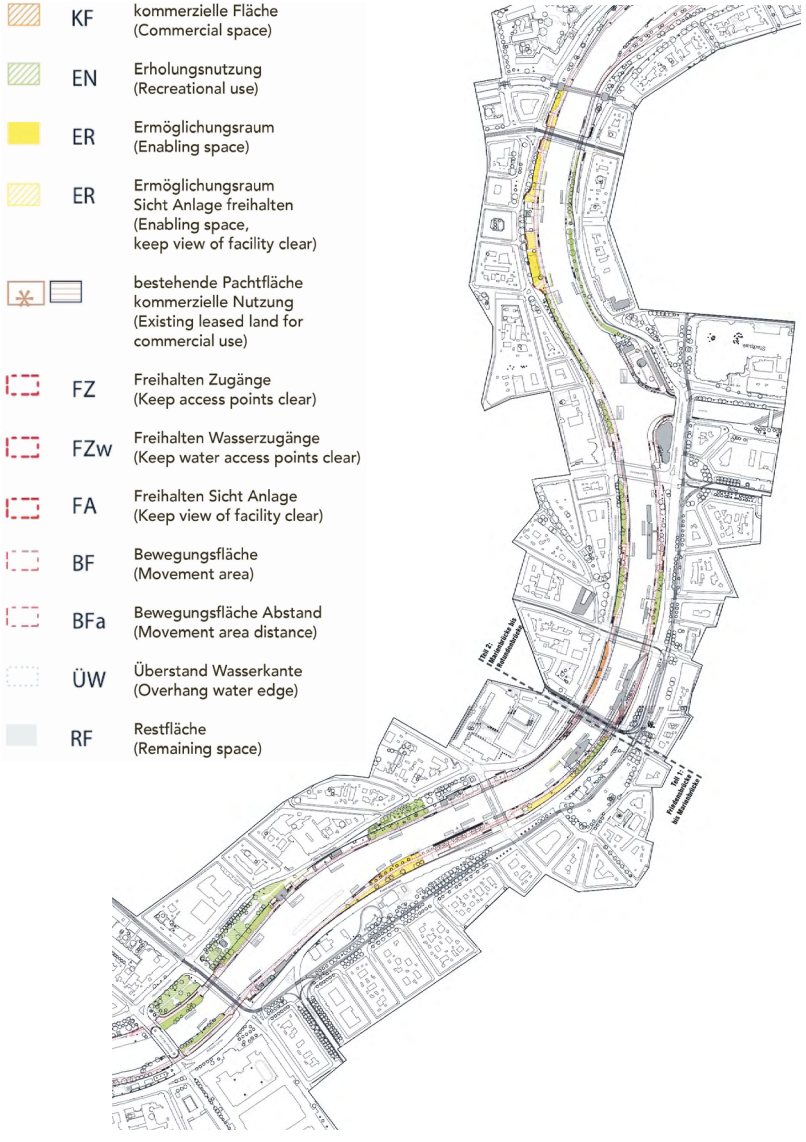
Das Vierte Drittel (*The Fourth Third*), Nordbahnhof, Vienna → p. 56
Photo: Michael Krebs, montage: Gabu Heindl, Can Gülcü



Elevations, residential development Brunner Gasse, Vienna → p. 64f.
Drawing: Hermann Czech, Architekturzentrum Vienna, collection

Place Léon Aucoc, Bordeaux → p. 78
Photo: Lacaton & Vassal

The Monument May Be a Forest, Warsaw → p. 66f.
Montage: Eduard Freudmann, Gabu Heindl



Non-building plan, Danube Canal, Vienna → p. 79f.
Drawing: Gabu Heindl, Susan Kraupp

Protest on the Danube Canal meadows, Vienna 2015 → p. 81
Photo: *Donaucanale für alle* (*Danube Canal for All*)

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About the Authors

Gabu Heindl is professor and chair of the Department Building Economy and Project Development | ARCHITECTURE CITIES ECONOMIES at the University of Kassel. She has taught at the AA in London, the University of Sheffield, and the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, where she received her PhD, and completed post-graduate studies at Princeton University. As an architect and planner, she runs *GABU Heindl Architektur* in Vienna, focusing on public space, common-ownership housing, and collaborations across history-politics, and critical artistic practice. Her recent publications include *Stadtkonflikte. Radikale Demokratie in Architektur und Stadtplanung* (2020) on democratic agency in urban conflicts; the research report *Gerechte Stadt muss sein!* (2022) on justice as a planning parameter; and (with Drehli Robnik) *Nonsolution: Zur Politik der aktiven Nichtlösung im Planen und Bauen* (2024).

Drehli Robnik is an essayist and free-lance theorist who works on matters of politics, film and history; he is also an edutainer and disk-jockey (Sonntag'sdisco, Vienna). He holds a PhD from Amsterdam University (2007) and has co-edited books on David Cronenberg, Siegfried Kracauer, X-Men, and male violence in domestic thrillers. He has written monographs on anti-nazi-resistance, on Jacques Rancière, on *Kontrollhorrorkino*, on power logics in pandemic-themed movies, on popular cinema and politics. His most recent monographs include: *Flexibler Faschismus* on Kracauer's analyses of right-wing mobilisation then and now (2024); and (with Gabu Heindl) *Nonsolution: Zur Politik der aktiven Nichtlösung im Planen und Bauen* (2024). He is currently completing a book on penultimate truths in politics.

Nonsolution: Disputed Closures in the Politics of Architecture
Gabu Heindl, Drehli Robnik

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info@adocs.de

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Nonsolution does not deny the existence of problems or the need for solutions. Rather, it objects to prescribed answers and insists on continuing to problematise them. As an attitude, nonsolution involves learning not to give up but to persevere – to keep working on solutions while questioning them, even to the point of rejecting them and criticising solutionism as an ideology.

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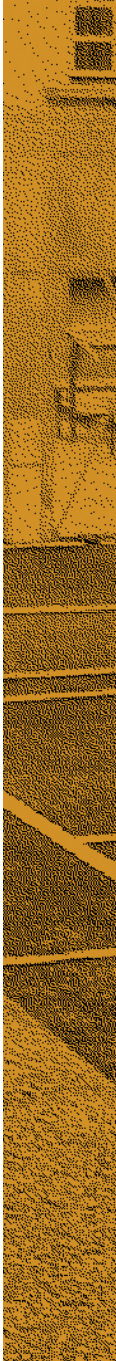

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