

Stasis articulated in the conflictual cooperative dwelling

by Sarah Rivière, Architect

Any given ambition for cooperative dwelling, whether on the architectural or urban scale, is bound to be faced sooner or later with the dilemma of conflictual confrontation between the parties involved. The inevitability of confrontation arising between parties dwelling under one “common roof” – either in the form of the physical common roof of the shared home, or under the metaphorical common roof of a shared ambition – is undeniable, but the range of severity of the exchange, from mild expression of difference to open conflict, and its consequence on the dwelling as a whole, is only revealed as each particular scenario plays out. However inevitable such precarious situations within the cooperative dwelling scenario may be, this inevitability is no assurance that the parties to the confrontation will be equipped to deal with these powerfully charged situations when they arise – and this makes the fear, frustration and helplessness of those parties even more poignant, as they experience escalating conflict threatening to topple and destroy what was once their mutual dream.

Stasis articulated faces up to the problem of how to design generative dwelling spaces that can accommodate and engage with these inevitable confrontations in the future: lively spaces where contest becomes opportunity, and resilient spaces of active kindred exchange that work towards productive reconciliation as the common aim of all the parties involved. This research project not only reintroduces the energy of located confrontation into the located space of dwelling as a generative aspect, but also reveals and addresses understandable concerns relating to trajectories of power and violence that can tip the situation into violence or destruction.

The *stasis articulated* project proceeds by setting up a constellation of forces between two separate and self-contained stances each located in very distinct historical contexts:

Stance A derives five aspects of the ancient Greek state of stasis as a generative space of confrontation between kindred elements, while Stance B uses archival research to derive the moments of crisis in the lived ambition for ‘cooperative dwelling’ performed at Rudolph Schindler’s King’s Road House in West Hollywood, Los Angeles in the early 20th Century.

Although located in very different spatial and chronological contexts, the two stances share a common goal: to reveal supporting and sabotaging structures with respect to conflictual confrontations in the space of cooperative dwelling. While the two separate stances are first developed through archival research and accompanying analytical texts, the project places them into a constellation of confrontation through the process of making a stop-motion animation – *stasis articulated* – that plays out characters and scenarios from each stance with respect to each other.

Stance A

This stance or position is derived from my research into the nuances of past understandings of the word *stasis* in the Athenian context of ancient Greece.¹ In contrast to the relatively impoverished range of meaning of the word *stasis* in common use today – it is mostly used in contemporary English as a pejorative term to describe conditions of unwanted stoppage or stagnation – this research shows *stasis* in ancient Greece as a rich and generative space of confrontation between kindred elements that contained the potential to enable a given system to adapt to change.

Existing discourse by scholars of classical history² on the role of *stasis* in ancient Greek politics and society describes the term in some depth but with emphasis primarily being laid on *stasis* as internicene strife between political factions, escalating into much-feared “civil war”³. With relevance to political discourse today, the philosopher and political theorist Giorgio Agamben has called for a new theory of civil war directly referencing *stasis* in antiquity as a source of knowledge⁴, while Nicole Loraux’s earlier work on *stasis* in the Athenian state also discussed *stasis* in a range of expressions such as between the family and the state.⁵

In the *stasis articulated* project I specifically concentrate on *stasis* in ancient Greece not as “civil war”, but in medicine, literature, and participatory politics. I call these the milder expressions of *stasis* but this is not to infer that they were necessarily comfortable or welcome, but rather that there was a milder level of cultural fear associated with the term in these contexts. Based on research into these more nuanced expressions of *stasis* I derive and present five aspects of the *stasis* confrontation: kindred relations; charged potentiality; inevitability; integration of change; and the demand for participation.⁶ These five aspects inform the scenarios of exchange to be played out by the characters in the stop-motion animation *stasis articulated*.

Stance B

This position or stance is developed through archival research into the Kings Road House in West Hollywood, Los Angeles, designed by Rudolph Schindler in 1921 and constructed by Clyde Chace in 1922 to fulfill the four initial residents’ ambition for a house for ‘cooperative dwelling’.⁷ As described in the Schindler Lab history:

¹ Riviere, S. (2016). *Stasis: Charging the Space of Change*. Footprint: Delft Architecture Theory Journal, special issue on Spaces of Conflict, 10(2), pp.79 - 94.

² Lintott, *Violence, Civil strife and Evolution in the Classical City* discusses the role of *stasis* in political revolutions in Archaic and Classical Greece from 750-330BC; M.I.Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, paperback revised edition, 1985), 43, outlines his view of the political meaning of the word *stasis*: “one of the most remarkable words to be found in any language”

³ The term „civil-war“ is, based on my understanding of *stasis* in ancient Greece, a misnomer, since *stasis* in ancient Greece by definition excludes the possibility of violence between kindred parties. See, for example, Plato, *The Republic* 471a

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*, (Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics, 2015)

⁵ Nicole Loraux, *La Tragédie d'Athènes, La Politique entre l'Ombre et l'Utopie* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2005); see also Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens* (New York: Zone Books, 2001); see also Loraux’s 1986 lecture, ‘La guerre dans la famille’, *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, 5(1997), published online 1 January 2005. <http://clio.revues.org/407>.

⁶ Riviere, S. (2016). p.84

⁷ Rudolph M. Schindler, “A Cooperative Dwelling,” in T-Square 2 (Feb 1932). Kathryn Smith, Schindler House, (NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2001) published the text of this article in Appendix B, p. 81-82

During the last two months of 1921, Schindler designed his “Cooperative Dwelling for Two Young Couples.” The layout was a low-slung pinwheel scheme comprised of three L shapes pivoting around a double fireplace, encompassing three private patios and four individual studios—one each for the Schindlers and the other two for their friends—Pauline Schindler’s college classmate Marian Da Camara Chace and her husband Clyde Burgess Chace, a trained engineer employed as a contractor/builder.⁸

While the construction concept for the house using the slab-tilt system was developed by Rudolph Schindler with Clyde Chace – an engineer who had previous experience of this construction method when working at the office of the LA architect Irving Gill, the social concept for the house for cooperative dwelling for four creative residents is said to have been formed during a camping holiday that Rudolph Schindler and Pauline Gibling took in Yosemite Park in 1921.⁹ But, once built, the Chaces’ and Schindlers’ dream lasted for only two years – in 1924 the Chaces moved away to Florida. Through research into the biographies of the four initial residents, and into the history of the house¹⁰ an insight is given into the lives of the residents and the chronology of tensions that were played out at Kings Road. This research is shown in a number of archive documents that reveal the forces impinging on the residents at that time: the initial contract between the four residents; the 1921 & 1922 design and construction drawings by Rudolph Schindler; and letters between Pauline Gibling’s psychiatrist and her husband Rudolph Schindler.

***Stasis articulated* – a stop-motion animation.**

Although located in very different spatial and chronological contexts, the confrontations researched in stance A & stance B both share a common goal: to facilitate the playing out of conflictual confrontations within the space of cooperative dwelling while resisting escalation into violence.

Informed by these two stances, *stasis articulated* describes the ongoing process of making a stop-motion animation whereby characters derived from each stance are placed in a space of confrontation. This film-making process is proposed as a lively located space of kindred exchange that demands the active engagement of all parties in productive reconciliation and the integration of ongoing change – as the space of *stasis articulated*.

⁸ <http://schindlerlab.org/history/> accessed 11-5-2016 at 14:22

⁹ McCoy, Esther, *Vienna to Los Angeles : Two Journeys : Letters between R. M. Schindler and Richard Neutra : Letters of Louis Sullivan to R. M. Schindler*. (Santa Monica, Calif.: Arts + Architecture Press, 1979), and Smith, *Schindler House*

¹⁰ R.M. Schindler Papers and the Pauline Gibling Schindler letters at the Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA