

OOO Estudio

*Decreto público no habitable*

Philip Ursprung

OOO Estudio—the three circles refer to the thought bubbles in comics, the “graphic expression for human thought,” as co-owner Javier Rioseco calls it—is a small architecture firm. Since its founding in 2008 it has devoted itself not only to actual building projects but also to architectural theory. Themes it has explored include “memory and social history,” “economics and culture,” “landscape architecture and advertising,” and “gender and morality.” For *Dislocación* the office has ventured into the field of art. The installation *Decreto público no habitable* shows one of the most urgent problems in Chile, indeed one of the greatest challenges of urbanization all over the world: namely, the provision of social housing. In contrast to the nineteen-twenties or the nineteen-fifties, leading architects these days tend to turn up their noses when they hear the word “social housing.” And if social housing is ever treated as a political issue, then usually only when it concerns the extreme case of the favelas. Yet the question of housing the poorest segment of society is relevant not only from a formal architectural perspective; it is also an indicator of how a society divides the private, the public, and the common, and how it administers each of these domains. Transforming slums into social housing settlements is one of the main issues Chile faces in fighting poverty and trying to narrow the gap between rich and poor. The state authorities, the churches, NGOs, and the foundation Un techo para Chile (A Roof for Chile) founded by the Jesuit priest Felipe Berríos in 1997 are all involved in constructing affordable housing. The installation *Decreto público no habitable* allows the exhibition visitor to step inside the

communal space—the living and dining room—of a social apartment. What from the outside looks like an elegant minimalist installation is revealed on closer inspection to be a claustrophobic interior. The twelve square meters officially allocated by urban planners to an average five-person family in Chile leads, in Rioseco's view, almost inevitably to overcrowding, stuffy air, and social and psychological disturbances, and hence to the wish to leave the house and go to the street.

The installation offers visitors the opportunity not only to experience what it feels like to be in the ridiculously small space offered by these apartments and how crowded it gets in this rudimentarily constructed hut if more than a handful of people are in it at the same time; they can also, on monitors, watch planners, assistants, architects, and functionaries deciding over the heads of those affected what is good for them. Rioseco demonstrates how exposed the inhabitants of these settlements are by having the deafening noise of airplanes sound every couple of minutes. He thus shows that not only are space, light, air, and water precious resources, but also a quiet environment, and that this is by no means apportioned evenly among all segments of society.

The installation by OOO Estudio challenges people to question traditional architectural and urban planning categories as well as the design of façades and the arrangement of open spaces. The bureau's architects ask how public space functions in what Rioseco calls a situation of "social fragility." They seek new solutions with which to overcome the lack of cultural, spatial, and economic options. They design scenarios that they call—borrowing a term from Joseph Beuys—"social sculpture" in other words, the actual spatial and aesthetic context in which this minority can live. Their design strategy is not to achieve formal reduction. Exclusivity, drawing boundaries, and the quest for the radical are the determining features of an architecture that takes an abstract approach to the problems and reduces people to predetermined functions. OOO Estudio seeks not to divide, but to participate.