HOW TO CAN A BUILDING: A MEMORYSCAPE IN ESCH

Ena Kukić

If memories could be canned, would they have an expiry date?

(Chungking Express, 1994)

How to Can a Building traces how collective memory settles into the infraordinary fabric of Esch-sur-Alzette, embedding itself in everyday architecture through lived experience and layers of function that mirror the sociopolitical conditions of their eras.

Focusing on the former Café Bernardo on Rue d'Audun, the project stages an inquiry into one specific site carrying multiple layers of collective memory. Once a gathering place for local dancing culture, immigrant presence, and forms of grassroots social life, the café exists today through dispersed traces, oral histories, material remains, and its changing afterlives. These fragments are documented and woven into a memoryscape that reflects on the instability of remembrance and its attachment to space.

Recognizing the memoryscape here as a spatial container of shared experiences of the past—whether an architectural fragment, street, or building that anchors the identity of a community—the project seeks to raise questions about what is remembered, what is erased, and who determines the lifespan of spatial memory at a time when Esch-sur-Alzette continues to transform and many such sites face disappearance, whether through demolition or entropic neglect.

The project proposes researching and collecting small fragments—both analogue and digital—that carry the building's lived history. These traces are then sealed inside a metal can produced under the guidance of the local steel workshop at FerroForum, run by descendants of the Café Bernardo community, transforming the can into a symbolic time capsule. The gesture questions the temporality of spatial memory: how it lingers, transforms, resists preservation, and exceeds archival and institutional frames. Through this act of canning, the project produces both a tangible artifact and a speculative archive, reflecting on the fragile relationship between architecture and memory.

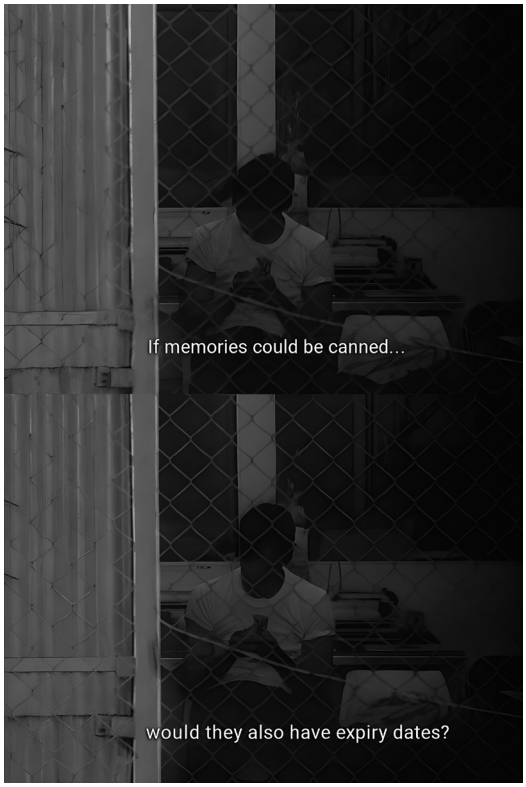
ENA KUKIĆ is an architect and postdoctoral researcher in Urban Regeneration at UniLu. Her work explores spatial frameworks of collectivity through design, research, and writing, with a particular focus on identifying and reinterpreting underrecognized architectural typologies as spaces of shared engagement and emancipation. Her recently completed PhD continues this line of inquiry through both theoretical and spatial investigations. Ena previously taught at TU Graz and has presented her work at Princeton University, Royal Danish Academy, ETH Zurich, Tallinn Architecture Biennale, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, Syracuse University, TU Wien, and Kosovo Architecture Festival, among others.

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Still from Chungking Express.



Photo of Café Bernardo on Rue d'Audun in Esch-sur-Alzette, early 1900s. Photographer unknown. Source: archival Facebook group Zäitrees duerch Lëtzebuerg.