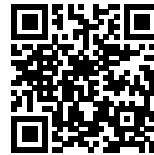


The Almost Building  
nARCHITECTS

## THE ALMOST BUILDING: STATE OF INDETERMINACY

*Posted on July 23, 2021 by martabuges*



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**Categories:** [BUILDINGS AND ALMOST BUILDINGS](#), [Essay](#), [nARCHITECTS](#), [No Density](#), [Territory and mobility](#), [Urban Paradigms](#)

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Is architecture necessarily complete? Or is it a state of incompleteness—a state of indeterminacy that incites us to engage with it?

These questions were on our minds as we stood inside Canopy, invisible to the crowd around us. Thousands of users—or mostly misusers, as we began calling them—had appropriated our intervention in MoMA PS1's courtyard as their own, turning us into passive spectators. We were no longer authors, but users and interlopers, anonymous witnesses moving through the scenes around us like ghosts. The music was dizzying; revelers were settling in to the thump of the DJ's beats; the Warm Up session was at its best. Lacking hard boundaries or overt function, Canopy's green bamboo arcs offered a flexible framework for microclimates and social exchanges. From our vantage point, it seemed as if the various human activities around us had been unleashed by the project's apparent limitations.

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**nARCHITECTS, CANOPY, MoMA PS1, Queens, NY, 2004. Photograph by Frank Oudeman.**

Our interest in an open-ended approach to architecture emerges from our desire for democratic and participatory spaces, and from a resistance to disciplinary definitions. Silos of expertise produce silos of experience. In all of our work—buildings, public spaces, installations— we find architecture's social

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and formal potential in projects that are incomplete, ambiguously perceived, and open to appropriation. To paraphrase Rosalind Krauss, we imagine architecture as a series of data points on a spectrum between building and not-building. We work within this nuanced gradient, open to either extreme yet drawn to the possibilities in between.

Soon after, we were once again in an ephemeral installation we had designed and built. More than 30 miles (50 kilometers) of string undulated around us, swaying and rippling in the wind. During the design of Windshape—a pair of dynamically changing pavilions in the South of France—we began thinking of incomplete or ambiguous buildings as almost buildings, buildings that invite transformation or interpretation by others as a result of their resistance to closure or completion. While on the surface a seemingly diminished ambition, the almost building was for us a provocation. In our minds, this idea destabilized our understanding of buildings as conceptually, physically, or environmentally delineated entities—a remnant of Vitruvian thinking still embedded in architectural culture.





**nARCHITECTS, WINDSHAPE, Lacoste, France, photograph, 2006.**

This interest set us up for a paradoxical inversion of priorities. On the one hand we resolved to make our installations as building-like as possible in terms of form, use, and identity. Conversely, we sought to embody qualities we attributed to the almost building in our designs for more permanent buildings and public spaces. Could they somehow remain incomplete in positive ways—open to the outdoors, landscape, or environment, for example? Could they embrace ambiguity, shed their typological characters, and produce shifting perceptions? And finally, perhaps as a consequence of appearing incomplete or ambiguous, could they provoke appropriation, by remaining open-ended in terms of their use?

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Without clear delineation or certain identity, an incomplete architecture offers us no single road map for action. Instead, a tantalizing multiplicity of outcomes invites us to imagine architecture as an armature for an ever-changing life.

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