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Prologue

There is a natural sound / that wild things make when they're bound.
–Merrill Garbus

Architecture is a civilization. To make a proper building these days, it takes the coordinated efforts of many disparate individuals. There are hierarchies, politics, common languages, rituals, and exchanges. And just like any civilization, you have to be civilized in order to participate.

As architecture students, we are skeptical of these civilities. What do they get us? It seems to us being a model citizen isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. Professional architects are growing impotent in our building culture. Their necessity is based on their expertise, but this seems to be worth less every day. On one hand, anyone with an internet connection can acquire the knowledge it takes to assemble their own building. On the other, high-profile architects have set an example of focusing on abstract pursuits at the expense of the built reality. No wonder so many potential clients choose to construct their buildings without an architectural agenda—or even an architect.

In our waning civilization, maybe we should find our precedents among the uncivilized. The amateurs, the savages, and the wild things. The untrained.

What does untrained architecture look like? Untrained is a survey of designers operating outside the standard practices of professional architecture. Represented here are ordinary people taking advantage of the growing influx of free information and cheap design software to make their own buildings; architectural sculptors channeling their creative energies through construction; environmental experts whose influence shapes buildings even more than the architects in charge; professional architects renouncing their accredited design training; and educators overhauling the way architectural students are taught.

The amateur building culture is a shared body of practical knowledge that is represented by an internet-connected community of do-it-yourself builders. In the past, this knowledge, in the form of vernacular building techniques, was passed on by tradition. Individual expression is an inherently human trait, but architecture is an uncommon medium because of its complexity and expense.

Here’s to the untrained.

The Staff