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A commentary on (V)ISUF COVID-19 crisis calls (V stands for virtual)

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The rapid emergence of COVID-19 brought incredible uncertainties, panic and lockdowns of cities. Many were constrained to remain in their homes. The authors of this report had just submitted a final version of a viewpoint on City Information Modelling (CIM), urban morphology and digitizing urban practices (Stojanovski *et al.*, forthcoming) when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. We made a pledge to meet online, and this was the birth of the (V)ISUF COVID-19 crisis calls. By the start of June 2020, we have organized seven meetings and the format has developed. We began with one Eurocentric meeting (12:00 UTC), but subsequently we introduced a second 'night owl' late-evening meeting (20:00 UTC) to allow urban morphologists in the Americas and Australia to join. The meetings were not time-friendly for the morphologists in Australia who had to wake up early in the morning (as 'early birds') or very late in the night ('night owls'), and we offer our apologies. Time zones are major problem with global virtual rooms.

(V)ISUF originated as an informal virtual space for urban morphologists to discuss ongoing projects, methodologies, schools or just say anything that can help to pass the time under lockdown. The topic of the meetings included analogies from cooking, Star Wars and 1980s movies memorabilia. The meetings are organised by a Cajun cuisine non-school of urban morphologists. Ivor

Samuels refers to them as 'eclectics'. Why Cajun cuisine? Sofie Kirt Strandbygaard posed a question about the use of typomorphological methodology (for urban design or research): do you stay within the 'borders' of a tradition (which may be called a 'morphological school'), or do you use the concepts as a 'Cajun cuisine' when you perform analyses outside your tradition? Cajun cuisine (*cuisine cadienne*) is an 'eclectic' style of cooking incorporating African, French and Spanish cooking techniques. The eclectics (also now informally known as the Cajun cuisine non-school of urban morphology) prefer to mix morphological traditions (or schools) in informing their urban design practices. There is a long tradition within ISUF advocacy for operational urban morphology and morphologically-informed urban design (Marshall and Çalışkan, 2011; McGlynn and Samuels, 2000; Samuels, 1990, 1999, 2009; Sanders and Baker, 2016; Sanders and Woodward, 2015).

There were requests to change to more formal ISUF meetings, but the participants kept the informal and spontaneous approach at (V)ISUF. The informal setting allows a special 'space' to flourish, where we are free of academic protocols, and can explore ideas with freedom, underpinned by our appetite for rigorous debate, all in the company of established friends and new acquaintances. We were very happy to escape detailed agendas and preserve anarchistic traditions of eccentric

academics. *Cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse) is a collaborative drawing approach used by surrealist artists to create bizarre collage drawings. In the spirit of the anarchistic non-school eclectic tradition, we present the exquisite corpse from the participants of (V)ISUF as a body of comments (using the online style of the originals) and finishing with a photograph (Figure 1, with acknowledgements to Benjamin Vis for suggesting the *cadavre exquis* term and sharing the lovely story of neighbourhood participation in creating townscapes):

Many thanks for organising such an enjoyable and informative (they don't always go together) event yesterday and giving some new faces an opportunity to contribute.

Also many thanks to those of you who were obliged to show your public face at an unearthly hour.

This has been a great idea and it gives us moment of the pure pleasure of meeting great people and listen to these wonderful conversations. Very much appreciated.

Even if I do not participate in your online meetings, I happily take part in this interesting conversation via email.

Really great meetings!

Thanks for this great initiative!

Thanks very much for your actions on this initiative!

Could you please remove me from this email thread? The information is overflowing and it is quite distracting.

Looks like I missed it. Slept in a bit today. Please keep me on the list.

I am so glad you morphologists are continuing to connect. Can you take me off this mailing list? I would love to connect with you all but on a less ongoing basis. Thank you and stay well.

Thank you very much for your efforts and sharing all the streaming!

It is a great idea to gather all the colleagues online! Unfortunately, I am overloaded at work, that is why I am unable to contribute to the meetings (even if I wanted to). However, I am really enjoying watching the recordings, they give me energy in this tough time.

Every house is now (under the COVID-19 pandemics) a shophouse. I hope to be there for the 'Amerocentric' session.

I am in for the evening session with a few slides about Cajun polarities and Jambalaya morphology. Return of the Jedi.

You're doing an amazing job to keep the spirits up. The impetus for suggesting a *cadavre exquis* resulted from a different participative COVID-19 inspired activity in the townscape. Originally intended to give the children something to do, chalking up a blind wall with colourful designs labelled *cadavre exquis* invited anyone passing the neighbourhood to participate while maintaining social distance (see the results on Figure 1).

On the virtual meetings of COVID-19 crisis calls we talked about schools of morphology and



Figure 1: A different participative COVID-19 inspired activity in the townscape. The chalk *cadavre exquis* started by Benjamin Vis and his children at Telford Street, Herne Bay, UK (photograph by Benjamin N. Vis).

eclectic morphology, Italian typomorphology and polarities, the French morphological school, making small (plot by plot urbanism, shophouses, half houses), urban sketching, and so on. The body of responses includes many positive comments. The enthusiasm of early (V)ISUF calls sprawled into email correspondence that led to the invitation to develop a viewpoint (Vis, forthcoming). Several participants found the passionate morphological debates and email correspondence to be information overload. On particular days, there were many meeting reminders and spamming emails. (V)ISUF started with the idea to bring urban morphologists together online during lockdowns. We are meeting virtually now every other Thursday as cities begin to open up. While there is an interest we are planning to continue with (V)ISUF.

Finally, we (the initiators of VISUF and authors of this report) would like to thank all the participants in the meetings, particularly those who contributed with comments for the *cadavre exquis*.

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