Antje Buchholz

Jack Burnett-Stuart

Shifting the View

Documentation of the Commonplace

Michael Matuschka

Jürgen Patzak-Poor

Chinese Wares

The power of a country road is different when one is walking along it from when one is flying over it by airplane. In the same way, the power of a text is different when it is read from when it is copied out. The airplane passenger sees only how the road pushes through the landscape, how it unfolds according to the same laws as the terrain surrounding it. Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands, and of how, from the very scenery that for the flyer is only the unfurled plain, it calls forth distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects at each of its turns like a commander deploying soldiers at a front. Only the copied text thus commands the soul of him who is occupied with it, whereas the mere reader never discovers the new aspects of his inner self that are opened by the text, that road cut through the interior jungle forever closing behind it: because the reader follows the movement of his mind in the free flight of daydreaming, whereas the copier submits it to command. The Chinese practice of copying books was thus an incomparable guarantee of literary culture, and the transcript a key to China's enigmas.

Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street*

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Contents

Preface by Margaret Crawford

This book addresses one of the most significant absences in the architectural discourse today: knowledge about ordinary human experiences. The authors' interests in understanding a broad range of activities, situations, and places led them to devise new modes of representation to document and analyze them. Without inventing anything, they adapted and manipulated the conventional techniques of architectural description—photographs, plans, sections, and axonometrics—to a new end. Their documentary techniques reveal a new world of experience—a reality that everyone knows intimately but that, in the absence of adequate representational tools, was conceptually invisible to architects. This underlines the centrality of representation to architectural thinking. These drawings provide information, grounded in sustained observation, to illuminate the multiple ways in which people utilize

ordinary spaces. The clarity and specificity of the documentation provides an almost ethnographic level of description of how ordinary interior and urban spaces function.

Although the authors have modestly limited their claims to the process of documentation, their work has, I think, more far reaching implications. It proposes not only new ways of looking and recording but also new objects of scrutiny and new ways of thinking about architecture and urban space. The drawings themselves, minimally expressing the objective physical realities of lived experience, are surprisingly suggestive, conjuring up limitless scenarios of human use and activities. Such acts of "disinterested scrutiny", almost inevitably, lead to a new attitude toward design, based on discovering and working with what's already there rather than imposing preexisting ideas. This knowledge creates an informed position from which to approach design, giving architects a different, and more appropriate form of authority than they currently possess.

This book adds important new voices to a growing discussion of the ordinary and everyday aspects of life as inspiration for architecture. It is also usable; for architects and students the techniques demonstrated will serve as entry points into a rich repository of physical and human meanings.

Shifting the View

Documentation of the Commonplace

The Everyday is rapidly emerging as the new field of interest among architects today. We believe that this interest could lead to a radical shift in the practice of architecture; but first of all there is fieldwork that needs to be done. As the director Robert Bresson writes: "Ideas gathered from reading will always be bookish ideas. Go to the persons and objects directly."[1] This book is a collection of the work we have done in the last ten years, in which we have done just that: gone to places and people directly, and documented what we have found—both the personal world we inhabit, and the observed habits of others. We have called this the documentation of the commonplace. It is a way of putting the facts of the particular—the nuts and bolts of the Everyday—onto the table. With these facts, we can talk about the Everyday not as theory, but with an insight that can actually change how we make architecture.

Toward the end of our studies, we became increasingly interested in the investigation and mapping of existing places and situations. This way of working brought up new questions about the relationship between documentation and design.[2] Convention dictated that these investigations be treated as the prelude to the real work of design, a gathering of raw material rather than creative work in its own right. However, the information gathered through the investigation had revealed a much more complex world, a world of people and things, full of contradictions. These could not be readily reconciled with the nature of design teaching, with its preference for form, rigor, and abstraction. The translation from investigation to design therefore became increasingly problematic: the complexity of the new understanding made it very difficult to formulate an "idea" for a design without jettisoning the very complexity that had been gathered through the investigation. For this reason, the value of such investigations is often questioned, being

1 Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (London, 1986), p.120.
2 These issues were addressed in detail by the seminar "Research in Architecture," organized by Jeanne Sillett and Chris Macdonald at the AA in 1989/90.
3 James Agee, preface to *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men* (Boston, 1941).

seen as a hindrance to the creativity of the architect. For us it was the opposite: although the design process seemed at first to become less focused, architecture had become important to us as part of the world we knew.

It was only after finishing our studies that we came to understand the potential that documentation offered for the practice of architecture, and to realize that this potential could only be realized if documentation could exist on its own terms, as the disinterested scrutiny of a place; disinterested in the sense that it was not necessarily motivated by an architect's intention to change it. Documented material did not need to be immediately used in design, but could become a fund of information about our surroundings. This opened up a new perspective in which documentation and design could be "co-equal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative."[3]

This change had much to do with the experience of living in Berlin in the unique period after the fall of the Wall, an experience that led us to continue the questioning of the roles of architect and planner that had begun during our studies. On the one hand there was the day-to-day experience of living in East Berlin; on the other hand there was the flood of urban and architectural planning—soon to be followed by the spectacle of its construction—which grafted a new urban vision onto the center of the city. The scale and thoroughness of the transformation forced us to confront the extent to which the planning and design process occupied a parallel world, detached from any personal experience of the city. What was the point of the demolition and the construction happening all over the city? Had the real focus of the planning become the logistical feat of getting it done, rather than the city that resulted? How much of the existing city structure had to be destroyed to get it done? The lack of common ground between this plan-

ning and our experience encouraged us to continue to search for an alternative way of working. We were interested in finding the potential for change within the existing city, a planning that could coexist with "the concrete diversity of a realistic order of things."[4] To this end we started to document everyday life as we experienced it.

Encountering the unfamiliar was perhaps a necessary part of this process. Certainly for us the initial encounter with East Berlin after the opening of the Wall was decisive; also important were the visits to England, Italy, and Russia that provoked several of the documents in this book. Yet for us the most powerful work of the architect is, in the end, the work of the insider, who works with an insight into the familiar that others lack. To learn to approach one's own surroundings with the openness and curiosity of a stranger, to detect richness within the familiar, and to find a way to act effectively as an architect within this everyday world: this was the challenge and the potential offered by documentation.

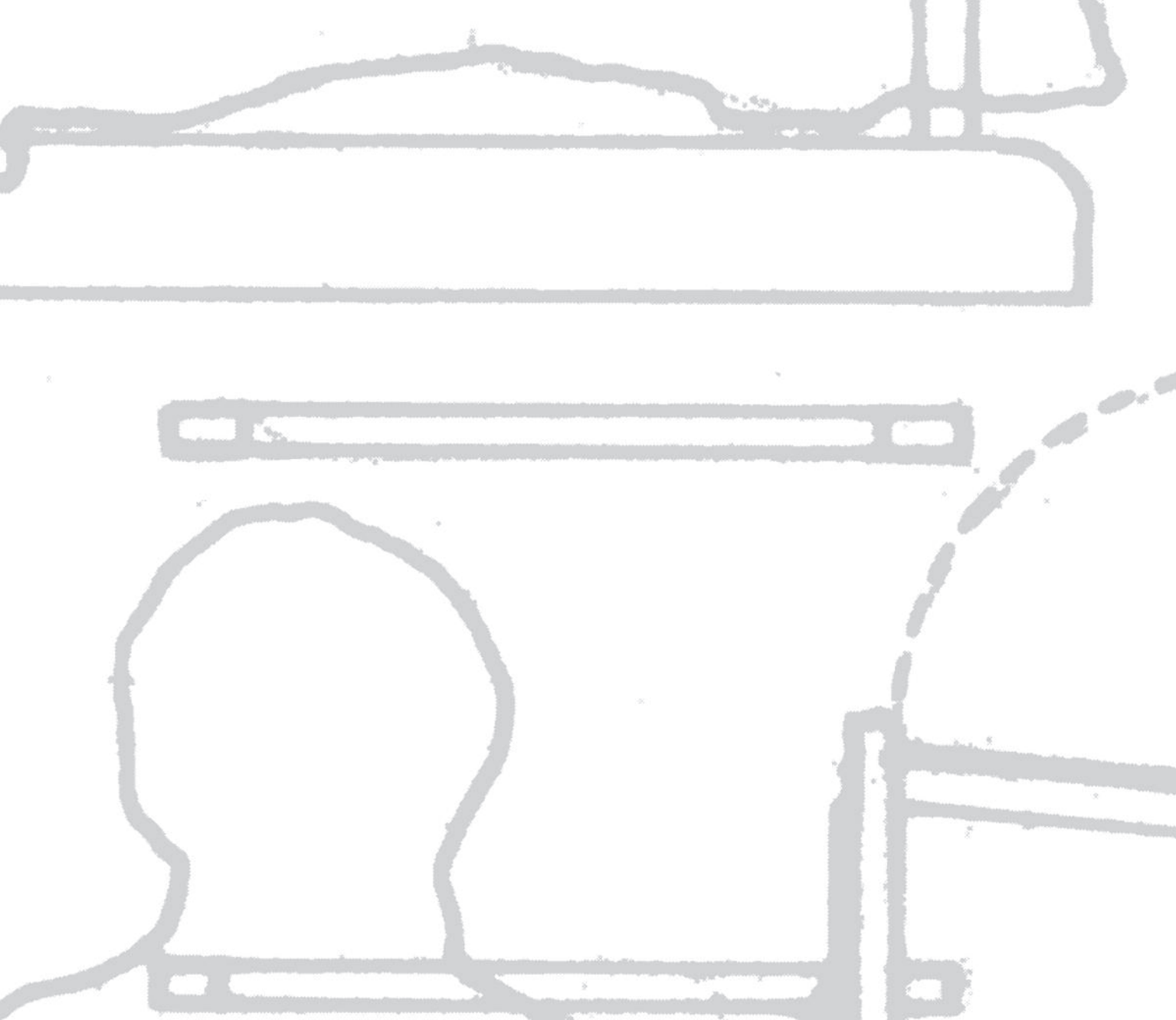
Early documents were literal records, measurements of commonplace situations that we had previously considered too banal to scrutinize. From these first investigations, we moved on to consider how events are linked or woven together within the city. Commonplace interested us both in its meaning of ordinariness and in its underlying sense of a place in the city held in common. As we did this, our focus moved away from form towards the way a place was used, which often turned out to be extremely complex. To understand the complete pattern of use, it was important to spend lengths of time in one place, "to dig oneself in." As a result, the temporal dimension, often given scant attention due to the architect's overriding interest in three-dimensional space, became increasingly significant to us, and called for experimentation with techniques such

4 Claude Levi-Strauss, "Pioneer Zone" in *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (London, 1974).

as film to document how a place or building is used over time. It is not so important whether the documented places are old or new; much more important is the question of an inherent modernity, found in the way they are able to accommodate a contemporary pattern of use. Documentation is a way to detect this.

The primary platform for this work was *Das Blatt*, a blueprinted sheet that we published periodically between 1993 and 1995. The putting together of the work into a finished document, like the cutting of a film, was a way to give a clearly communicable form to what we had observed; it was often at this point that we discovered underlying themes that had been hidden in the details of the work. Because of the importance to us of the finished document, we have included in this book, wherever possible, small scale reproductions of complete documents. Only in cases where too much information would have been lost through reduction have we reformatted the original documents.

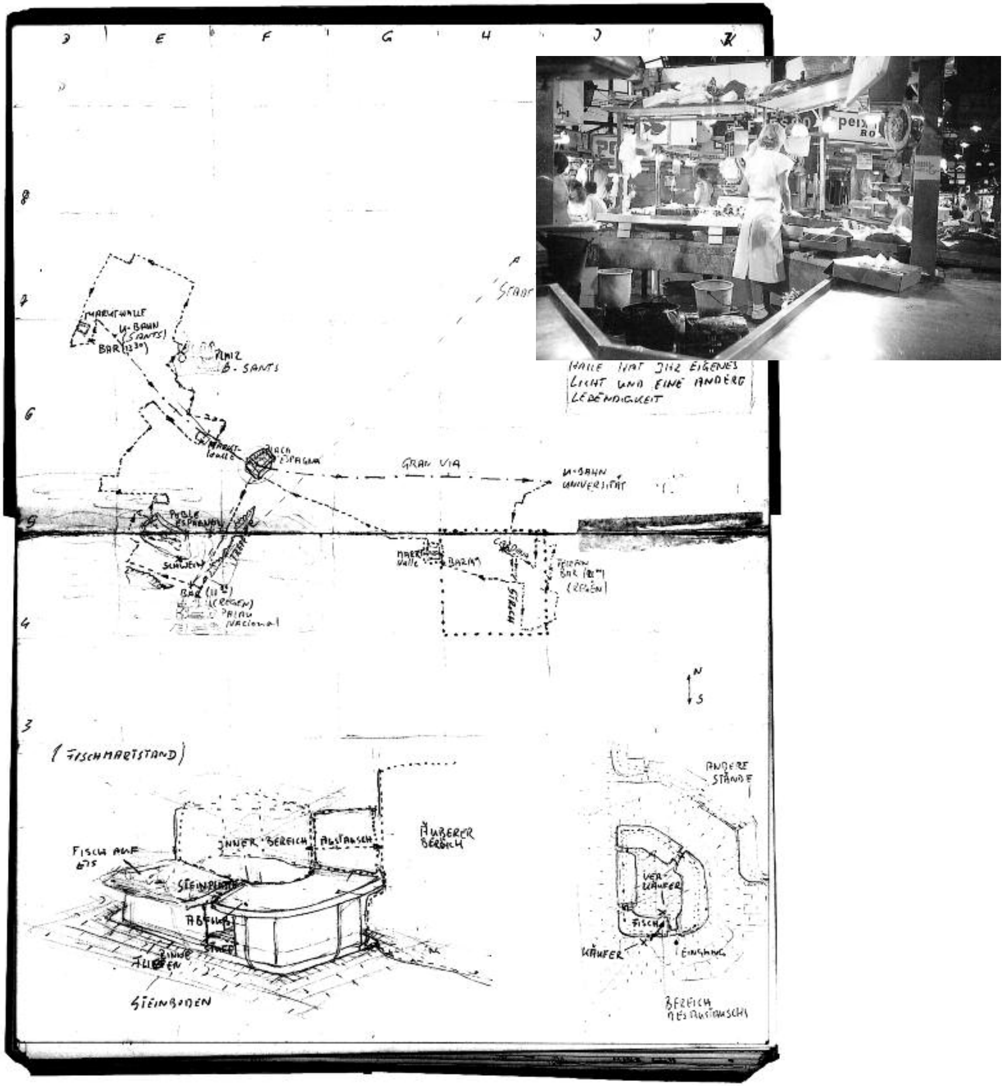
The value of documentation lies in both the collection of local knowledge and, at a more abstract level, in the themes and ideas that have emerged in the course of making the documents. We have introduced some of these themes into the second part of the book, in order to give a sense of this process. We are not trying to define a design method—the field is still too new and open for that—but rather to indicate how documentation can be much more than just the gathering of information. The shift of the view has the potential to shift the way that we practice architecture.



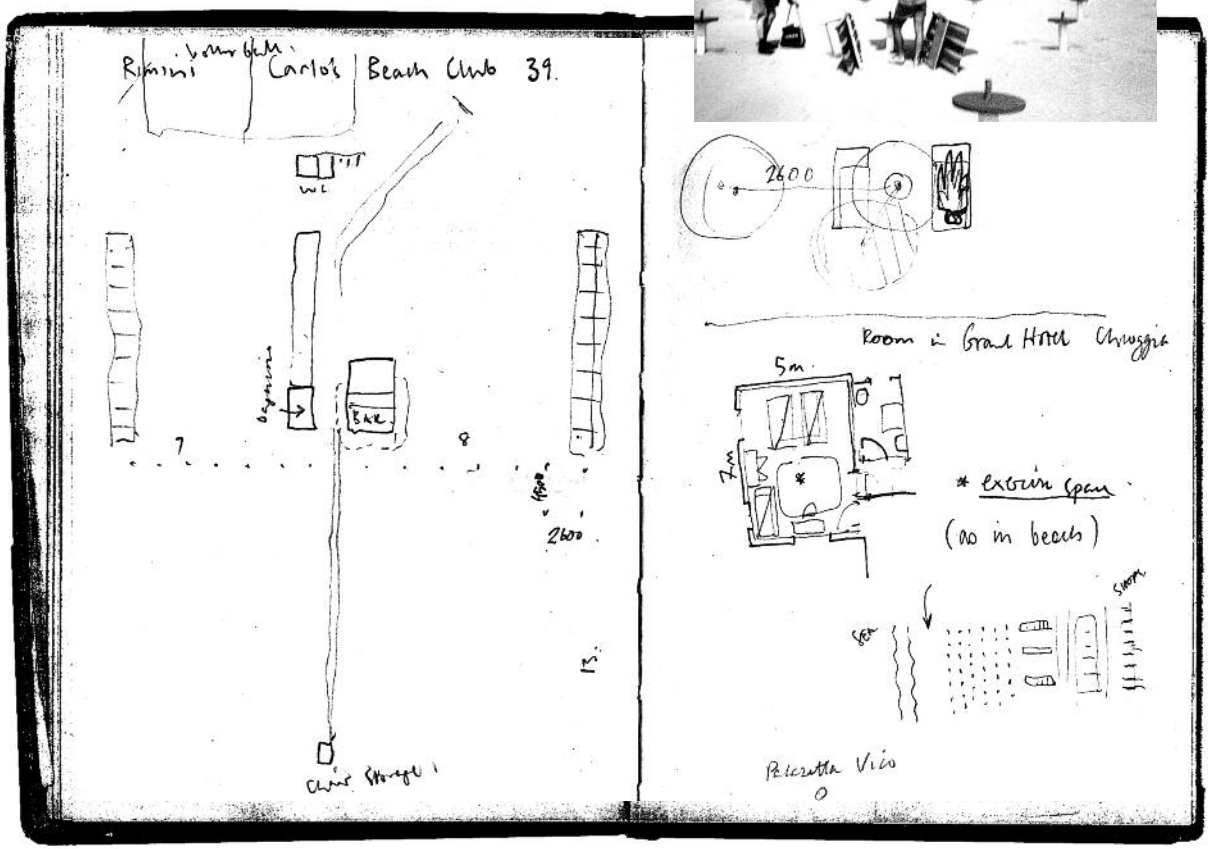
Part 1 Documenting Places

The material is commonplace. That is its point. Dickens appears to have just discovered…that everything he sees in London is his to write about, and that plot can wait.

V. S. Naipaul, *The Writer and India*


HALLE HAT IHR EIGENES
LICHT UND EINE ANDERE
LEBENDIGKEIT
MARKTHALLE
U-BAHN (SANTS)
GRAN VIA
U-BAHN UNIVERSITÄT
(FISCHMARTSTAND)
INNER BEREICH
AUSTAUSCH
ÄUßERER BEREICH
FISCH AUF EIS
STEINBODEN
ANDERE STÄNDE
VERKÄUFER
KÄUFER
EINGANG
BEREICH DES AUSTAUSCHS

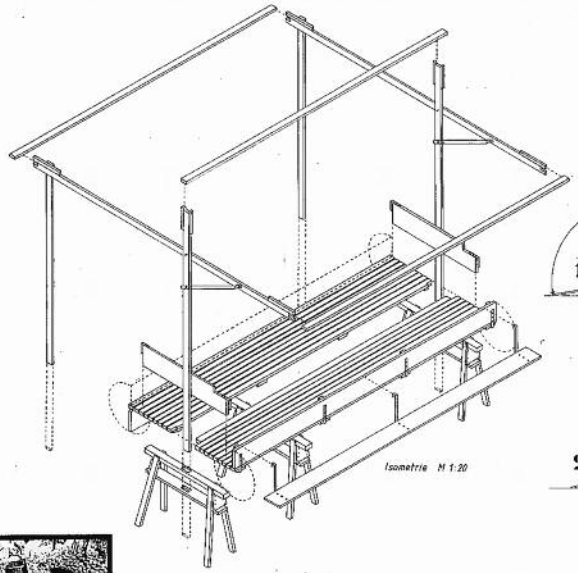
Pages from sketchbooks describing a fish stand in a Barcelona market and a beach club in Rimini. A personal short-hand for notating the commonplace is as important to our working method as the more elaborate documents that follow.



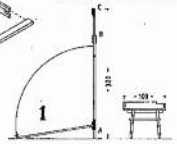
3. BLATT

KARTOFFELSTAND

Karl-August-Platz



Isometrie M 1:20



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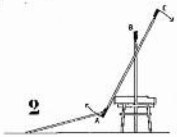

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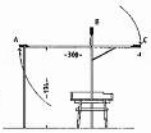


3

Aufstellen des Standes M 1:50

Einkauf der Kartoffeln

Der Weg durch die Marktstände

Eine Diplomaufgabe von Jack Bennett-Stuart, Jürgen Patzak - Paar

BAUEN UND RAUMWIRTSCHAFT c/o Patzak-Paar Christinenstr. 30 0-1054 BERLIN

The same basic wooden stand is used at every market in Berlin. Simple to put up and take down, it can be adjusted to different weather conditions as well as to the selling of different products. In this version a lattice allows earth from the potatoes to fall to the ground.

4. BLATT

JULI 93

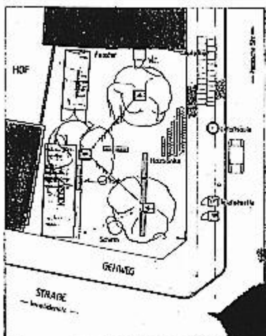
BAUEN UND RAUMWIRTSCHAFT

B E R L I N E R   E C K

Die Ecke Invaliden - Hessische Straße ist ein leeres Eck, das durch die Zerstörung im II. Weltkrieg entstanden ist. Der alte Gehweg aus kleinem Kopfsteinpflaster und Granitplatten markiert immer noch den Umriß einer ursprünglichen Eckhaussanze; die Rückseite der Ecke wird durch die Brandmauern der Nachbarhäuser begrenzt.
Nach dem Krieg wurde das Eckhaus nicht wieder aufgebaut. Drei Lindenbäume wurden gepflanzt, eine niedrige Mauer zwischen den Brandmauern errichtet, und der Boden mit Betonplatten ausgelegt: die Ecke wurde Teil des öffentlichen Raums. Die Nachbarn nutzten die Lage aus und setzten Fenster in die Brandmauern, um mehr Licht und einen neuen Blick auf die Ecke zu erhalten.

Foto der Ecke von der Invalidenstrasse

Die Betonplatten und der alte Gehweg



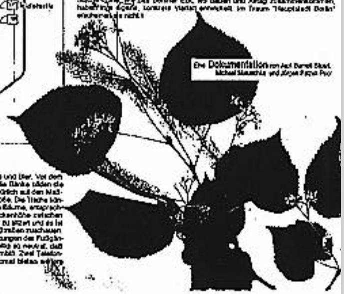
Eckwirtschaft
Im Schatten der Lindenbäume verkauft jetzt ein Kiosk Imbiße und Bier. Vor dem Kiosk sind zwei Stehtische und Holzbänke. Der Kiosk und die Bänke bilden die Begrenzung für eine Art informellen Eßraum, der sich unweigerlich auf den Maßstab des angrenzenden Miethauses bezieht: eine gewohnte Größe. Die Tische können im Raum verschoben werden: in die Sonne oder unter die Bäume, entsprechend der Witterung. Licht- und Fähnchenbänder sind auf Deckenhöhe zwischen den Bäumen und dem Kiosk gespannt. Es ist angenehm hier zu sitzen und es ist viel los. Man kann dem Geschehen am Kiosk oder auf den Straßen zuschauen. Die Bänke bilden eine ausreichende Barriere, sodaß Abkürzungen der Fußgänger durch den Eßbereich ausbleiben, aber sie sind gleichzeitig so neutral, daß sich hier jeder niederlassen kann, nicht nur die Kunden des Imbiß. Zwei Telefonzellen, eine Litfaßsäule, ein Zigaretten- und Süßigkeitenautomat bieten weitere Möglichkeiten für eine Pause.

Dieser Prozess der Stadtaneignung ist nicht ungewöhnlich im gegenwärtigen Berlin. Die neu erfahrene Offenheit der Stadtlandschaft erlaubt ein unvorhergesehenes, öffentliches Dasein: informell, offen für Veränderung, entsprechend den Wünschen seiner Bewohner. Hier ist der real existierende Alltag verkörpert. Es ist bezeichnend, daß Planung kaum eine oder gar keine Rolle in diesem Prozeß spielt.

Was können wir vom Berliner Eck lernen ?

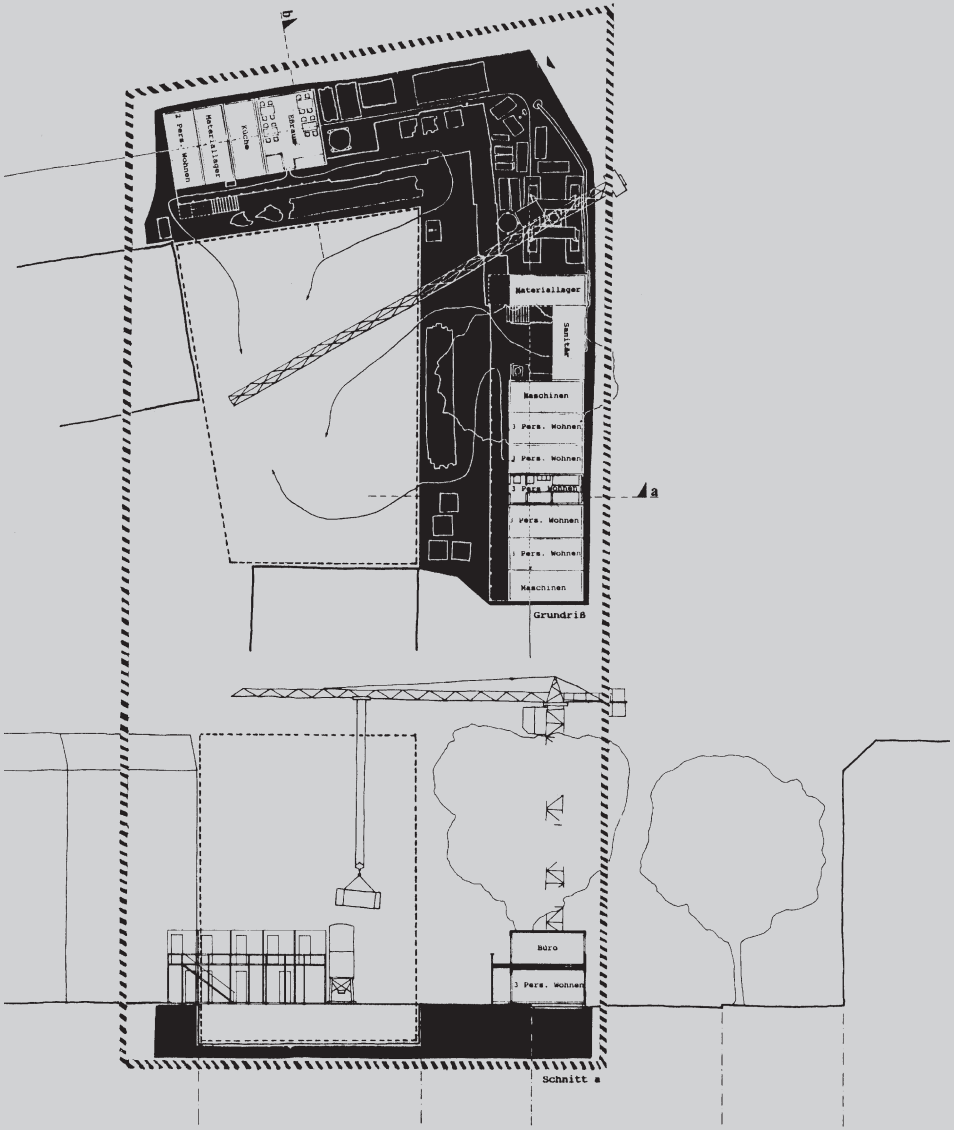
Die Handlungen des Alltags können Ereignisse werden und einen öffentlichen Raum schaffen.
1. Die Vorbedingung dafür ist ein neutraler Rahmen, z.B. die verwendeten Materialien sind einfach und gewöhnlich. Sie differenzieren den Ort, ohne seine Offenheit zu stören. Am Boden ist das Zusammenspiel der neuen Betonplatten mit dem alten Gehweg gerade richtig: wie ein Hinweis auf jene Bühnenrolle, ohne die Kontinuität des öffentlichen Raums zu unterbrechen. Es scheint, als ob Planung immer weniger in der Lage ist diese Neutralität zu erreichen.
2. Auf diesem Hintergrund kann sich etwas ereignen. Am Eck treffen die Menschen bei Essen und Trinken zusammen, und dadurch entsteht ein Raum. Wenn der Imbiß geschlossen wird, löst sich der Raum auf.
3. Die Kleinarchitektur bedient das Geschehen: beides ist genau aufeinander abgestimmt in Maßstab und Qualität. Wandelt sich das Geschehen, können die Leichtgewicht-Elemente einfach verändert werden.

Solche Orte, wie das Berliner Eck, wo Bauen und Alltag zusammenkommen, haben ihre eigene, konkrete Varianz entwickelt. Im Traum "Hauptstadt Berlin" erscheinen sie nicht !



Eine **Dokumentation** von Axel Barrett Stuart, Michael Stauschke und Jürgen Patzak Poor

The unbuilt corner lot of Invaliden and Hessische Straße was a vestige of the destruction of the second world war. After the war, the corner house was not rebuilt: lime trees were planted, and the ground was paved with concrete paving slabs. People gathered at a kiosk to eat and drink, and thereby made a room. When the kiosk closed, this "room" dissolved. Since the making of this document, a new building has been built on the site.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Schmiede
Maschinen
3 Pers. Wohnen
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3 Pers. Wohnen
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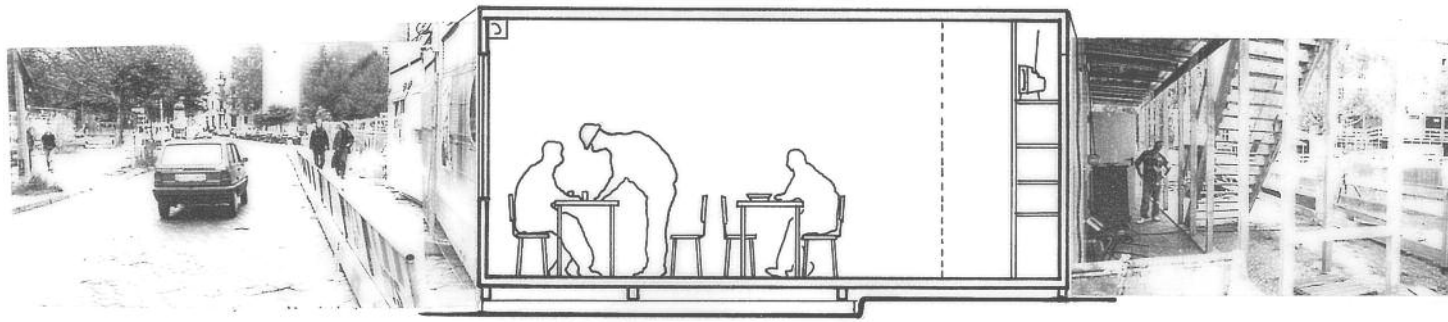
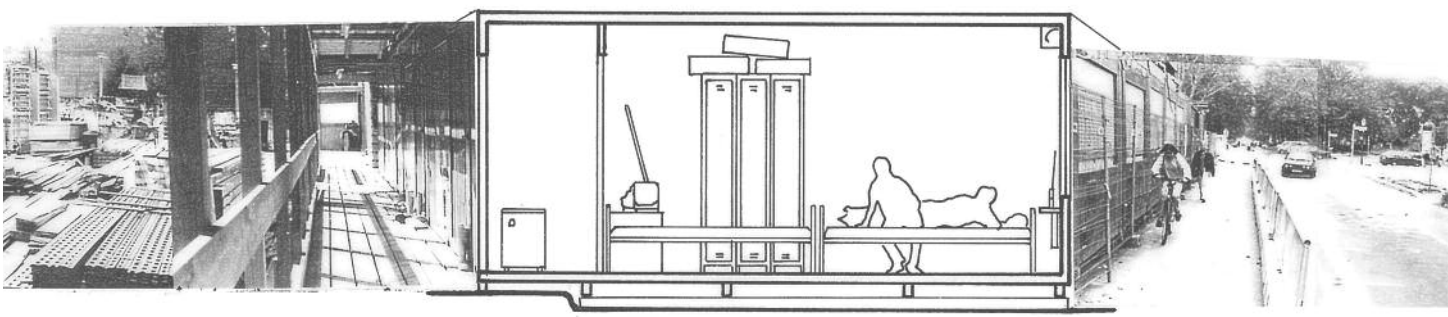
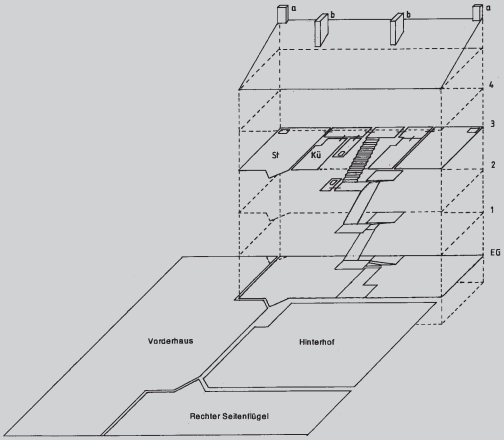
Maschinen
Grundriß
Büro
3 Pers. Wohnen
Schnitt a

The high cost of German labor means that it is increasingly common for buildings in Berlin to be built by construction crews brought in from other countries in the EU. This document describes a building site that also served as dwelling space for the workers, in this case from Portugal. A contract they had made with a Portuguese company regulated work, food and accommodation in containers stacked on the sidewalk around the building.



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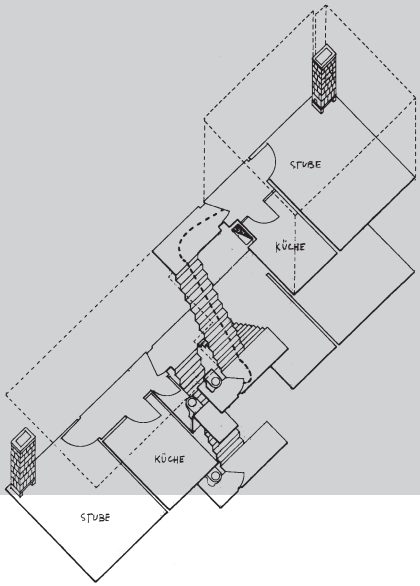
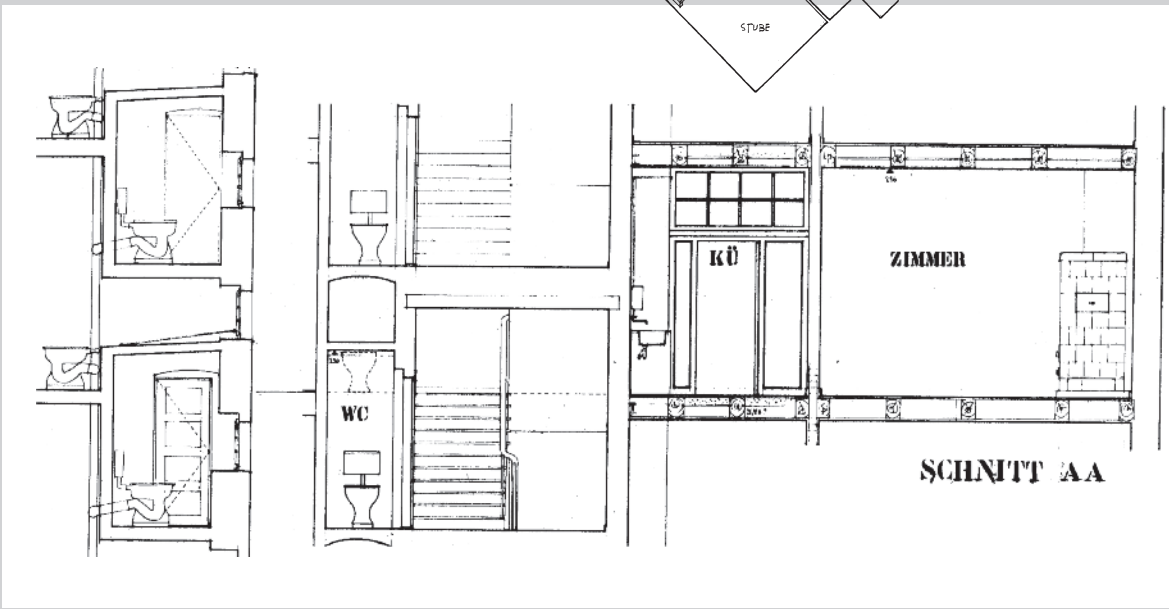
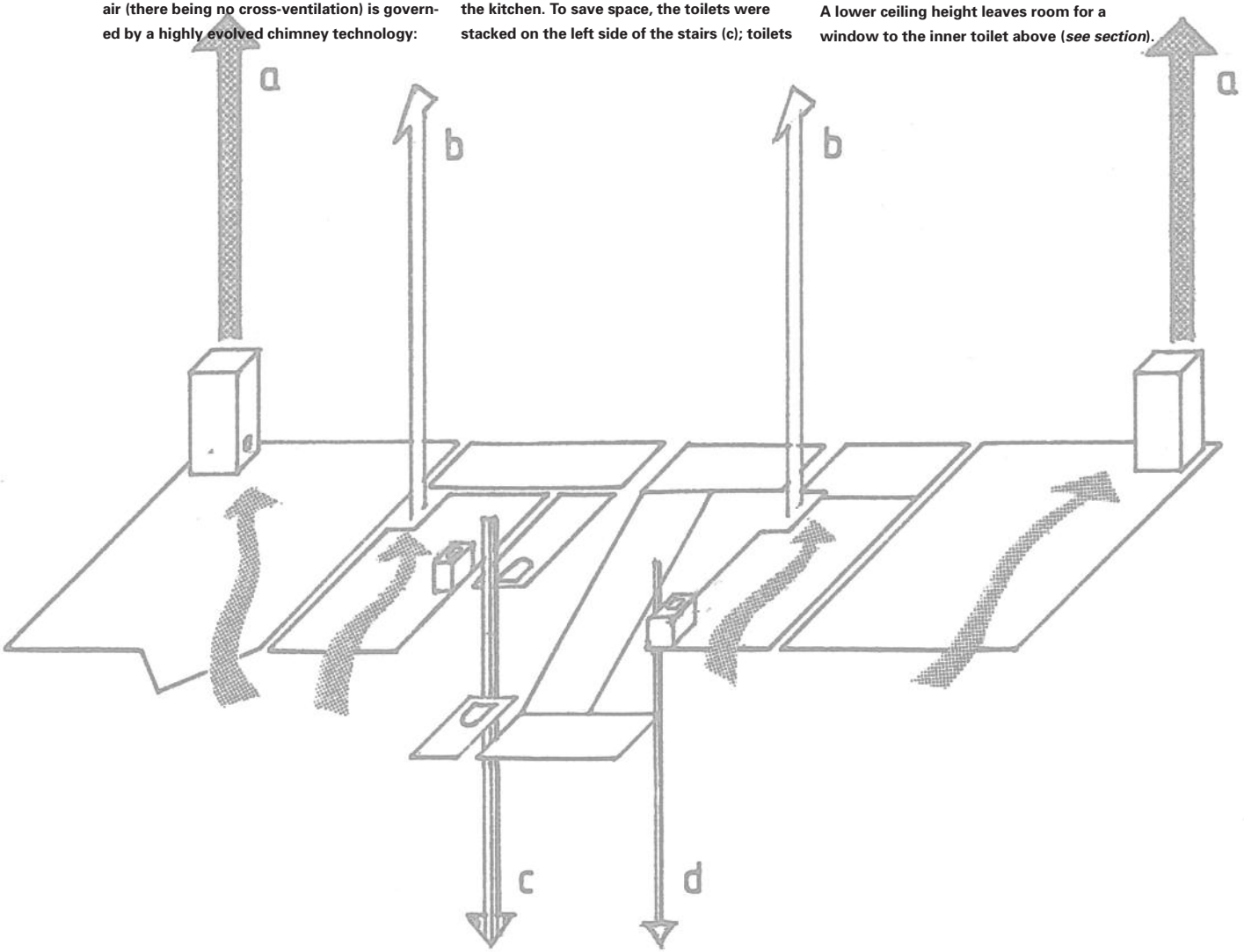
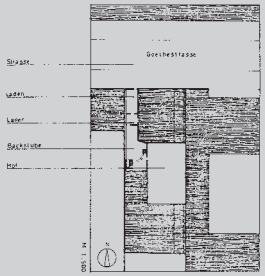
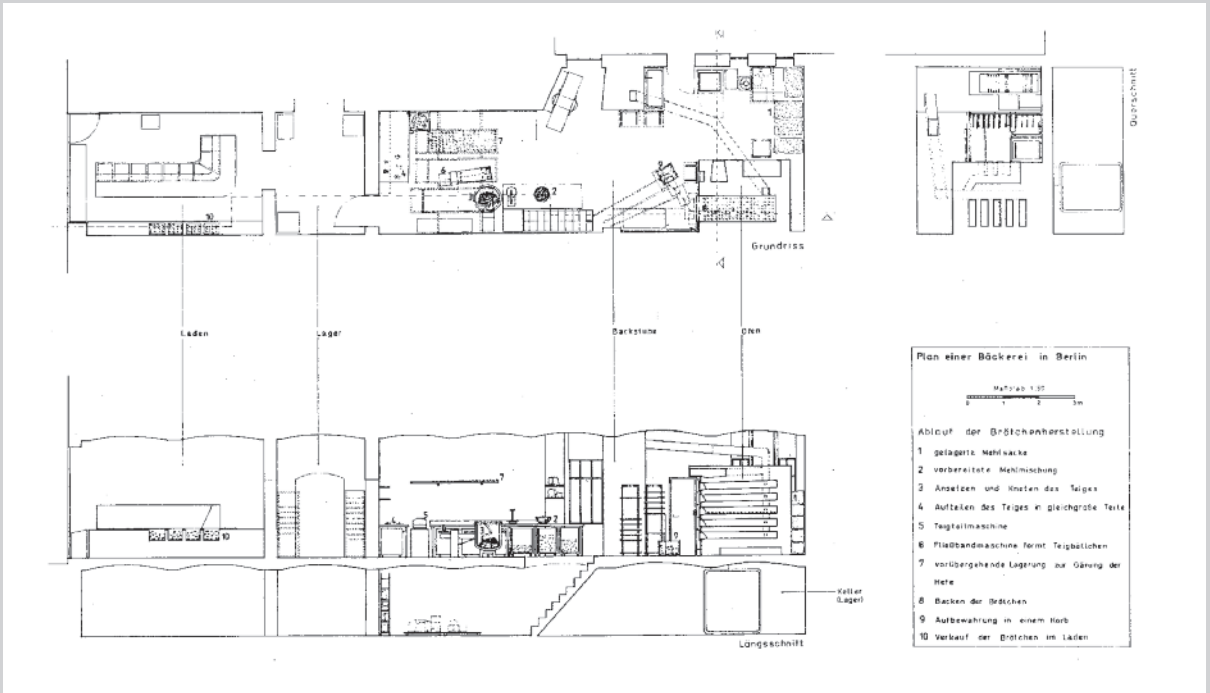

STUBE
KÜCHE
KÜCHE
STUBE


WC
KÜ
ZIMMER
SCHNITT AA

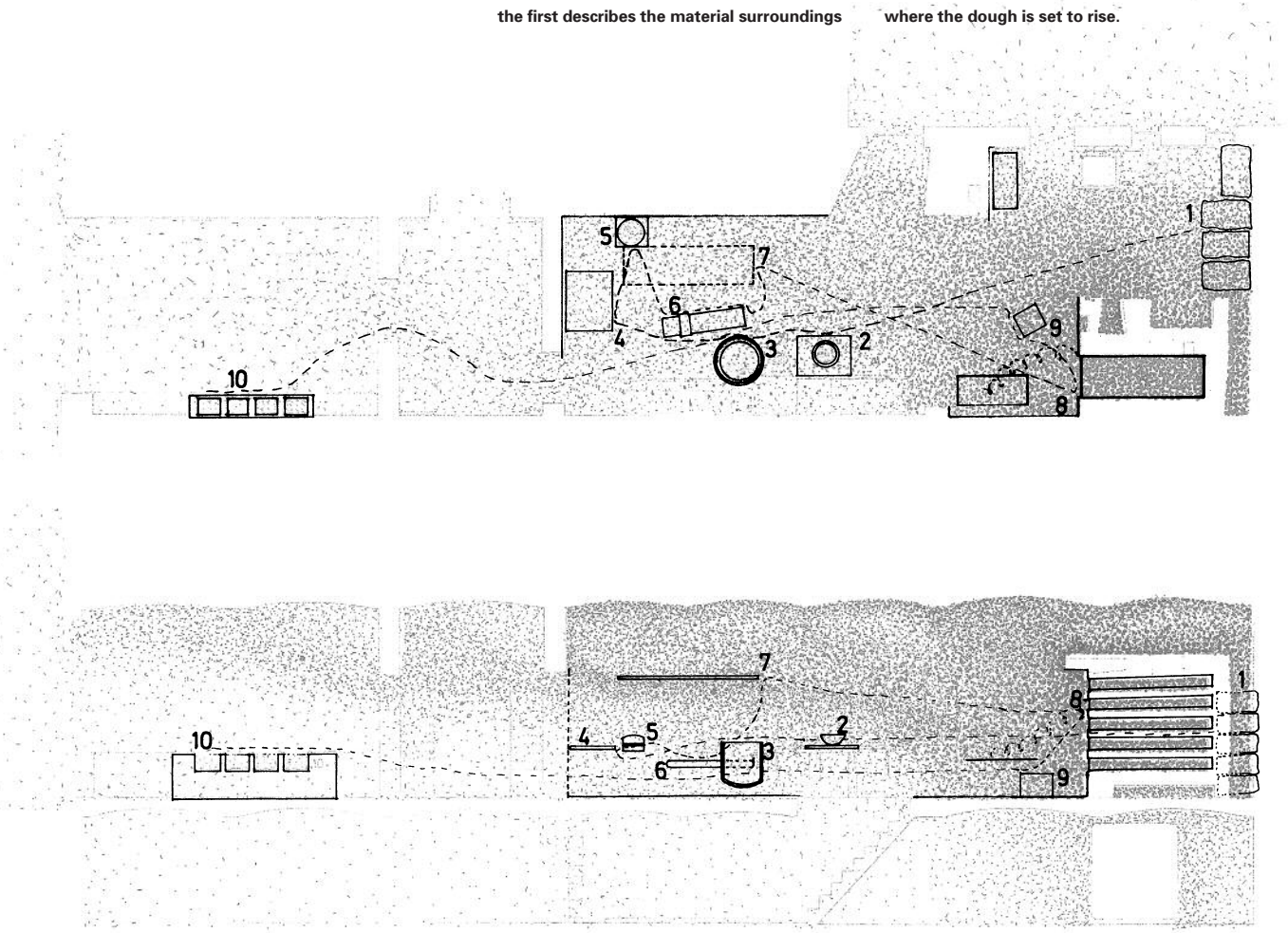
The flow of air and water in the side wing of a typical *Berliner Mietshaus*. The movement of air (there being no cross-ventilation) is governed by a highly evolved chimney technology: a regular chimney (a) vents the coal stoves, and a *Wrasenrohr* (b) draws damp air out of the kitchen. To save space, the toilets were stacked on the left side of the stairs (c); toilets for the right-hand apartments were inserted at the half-landing level, accessed from the stairs. A lower ceiling height leaves room for a window to the inner toilet above (*see section*).

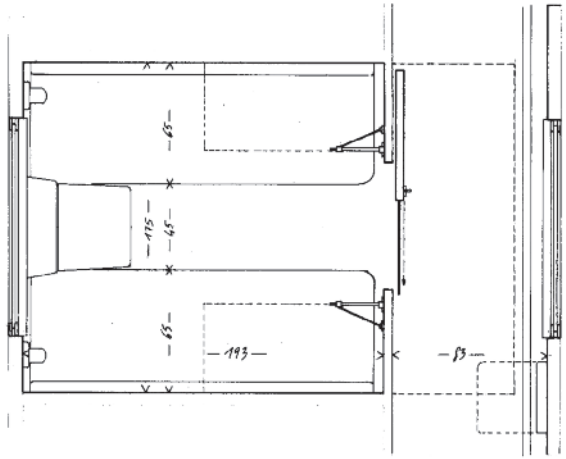


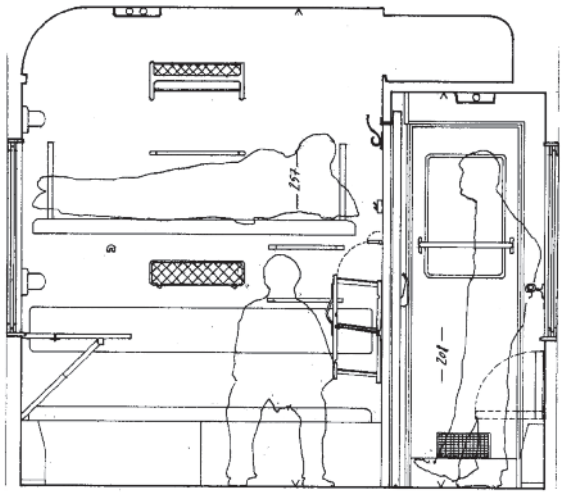

Goethestrasse
Strasse
Laden
Lager
Backstube
Hof


Grundriss
Querschnitt
Laden
Lager
Backstube
Ofen
Keller (Lager)
Längsschnitt
Plan einer Bäckerei in Berlin
Maßstab 1:50
0 1 2 3m
Ablauf der Brötchenherstellung
1 gelagerte Mehlsacke
2 vorbereitete Mehlmischung
3 Ansetzen und Kneten des Teiges
4 Auftaken des Teiges in gleichgroße Teile
5 Teigteilmaschine
6 Fließbandmaschine formt Teigbällchen
7 vorübergehende Lagerung zur Gärung der Hefe
8 Backen der Brötchen
9 Aufbewahrung in einem Korb
10 Verkauf der Brötchen im Laden

A bakery in a *Berliner Mietshaus*. The baking process is analyzed in two sets of drawings: the first describes the material surroundings (furniture, tools, and oven); the second, the movement of warm air, which determines where the dough is set to rise.

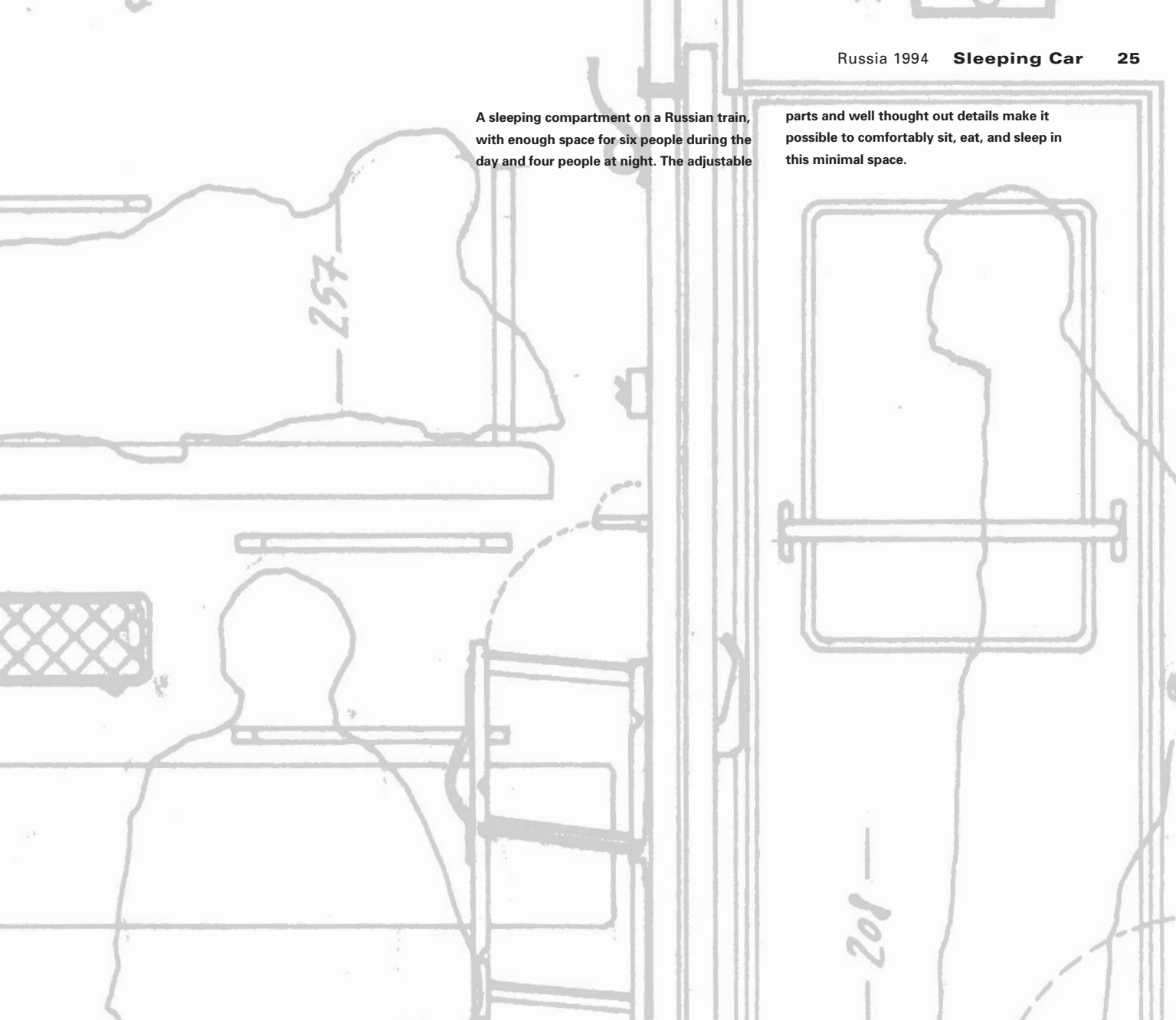


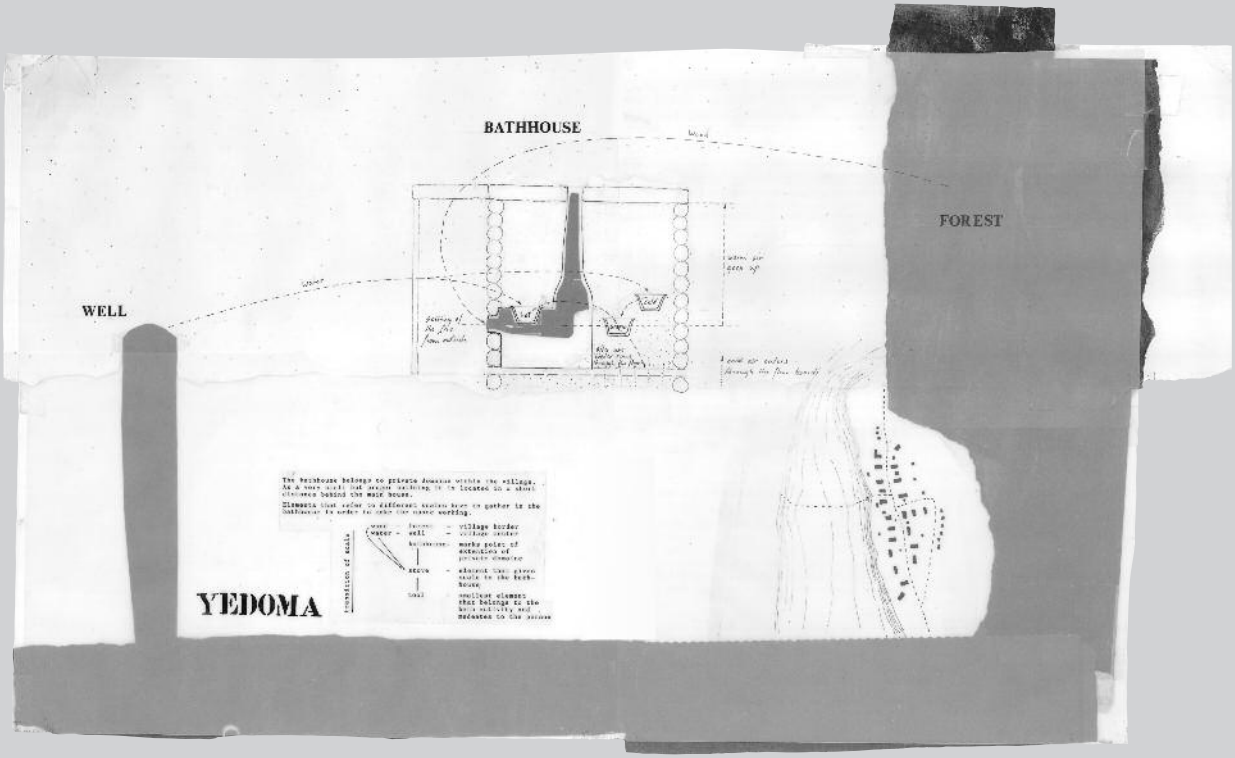




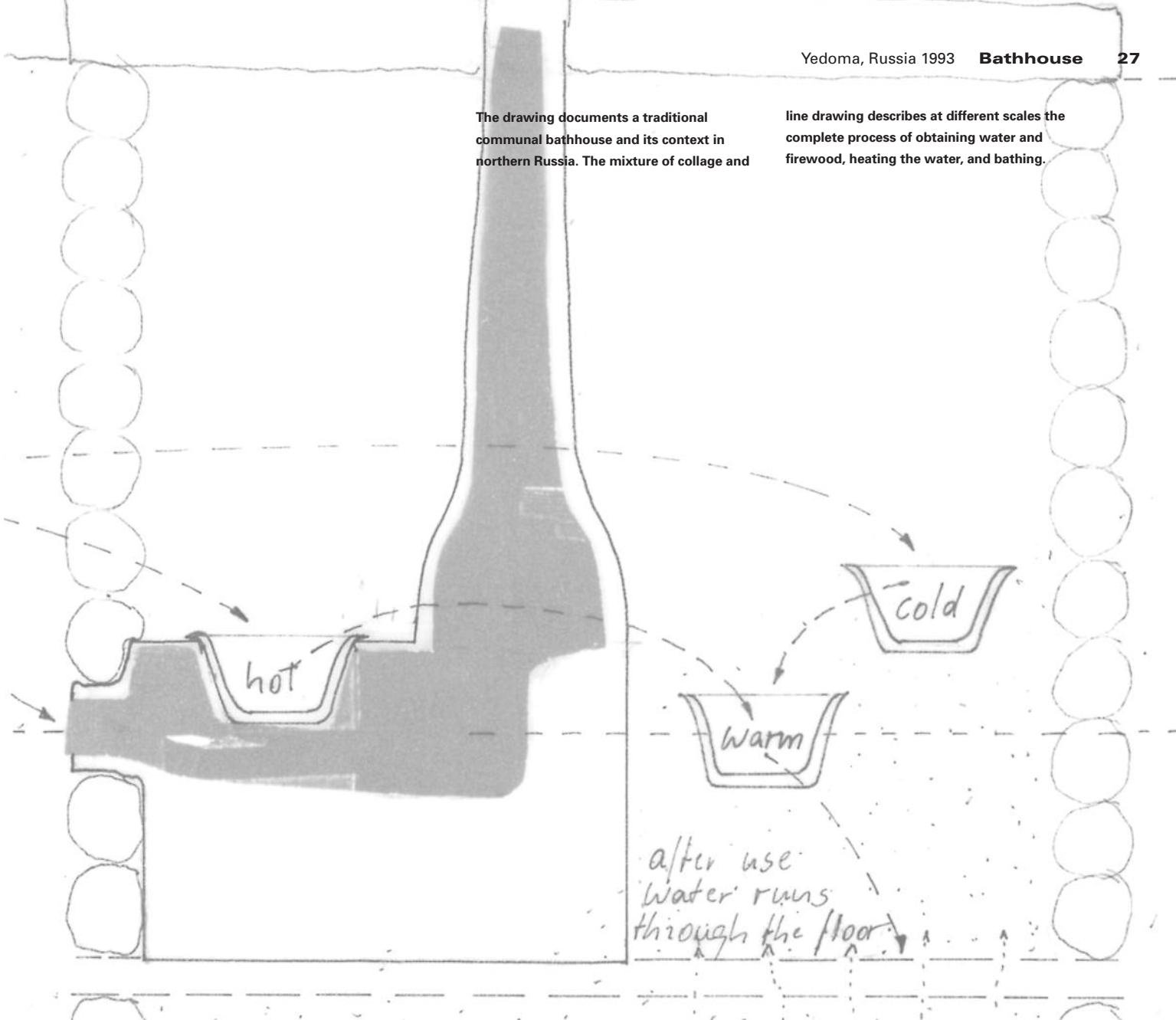
RUSSISCHES ZUGABTEIL GRUNDRISS/SCHNITT MASSTAB 1:20

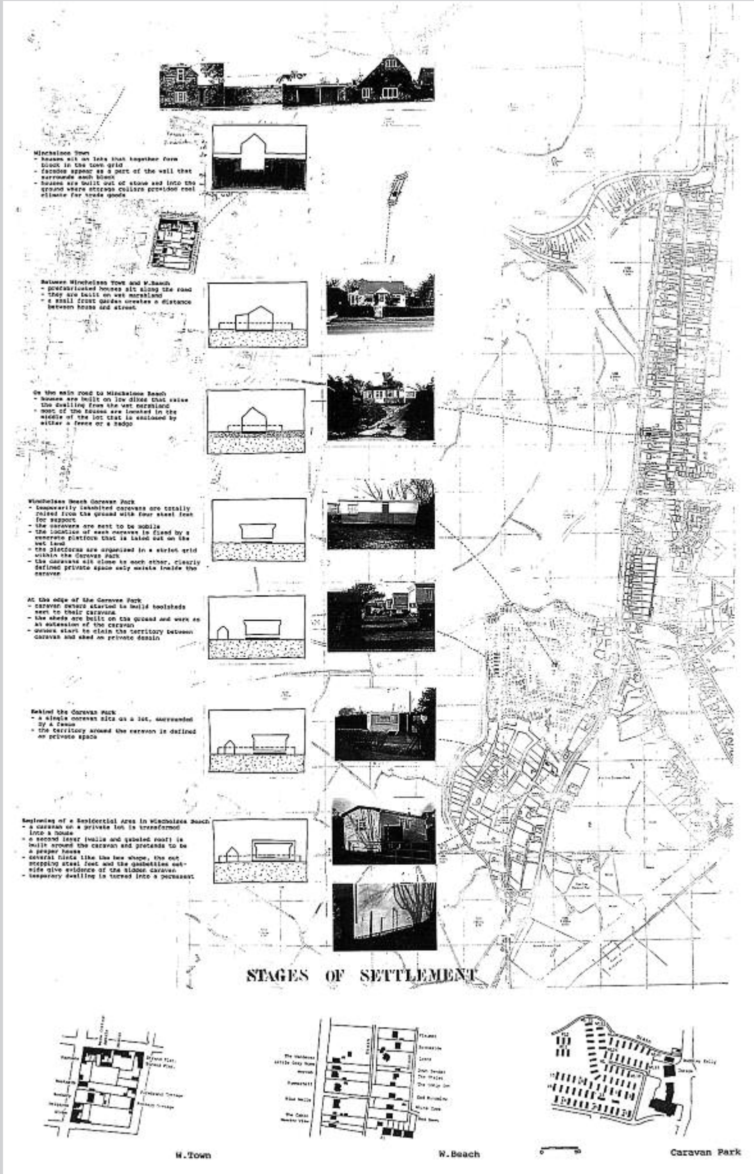
A sleeping compartment on a Russian train, with enough space for six people during the day and four people at night. The adjustable parts and well thought out details make it possible to comfortably sit, eat, and sleep in this minimal space.



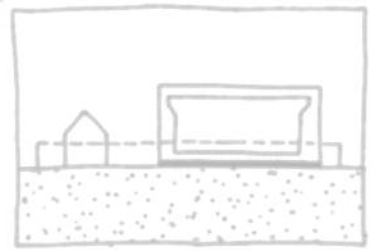

BATHHOUSE
FOREST
WELL
YEDOMA

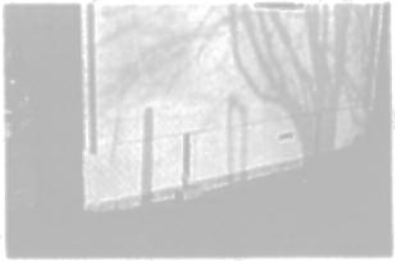
The drawing documents a traditional communal bathhouse and its context in northern Russia. The mixture of collage and line drawing describes at different scales the complete process of obtaining water and firewood, heating the water, and bathing.

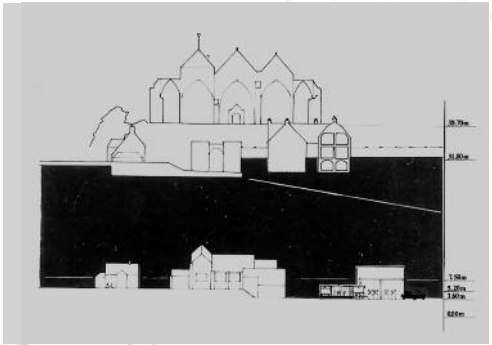



Winchelsea Town
- houses sit on lots that together form block in the town grid
- facades appear as a part of the wall that surrounds each block
- houses are built out of stone and into the ground where storage cellars provided cool climate for trade goods
Between Winchelsea Town and W.Beach
- prefabricated houses sit along the road
- they are built on wet marshland
- a small front garden creates a distance between house and street
On the main road to Winchelsea Beach
- houses are built on low dikes that raise the dwelling from the wet marshland
- most of the houses are located in the middle of the lot that is enclosed by either a fence or a hedge
Winchelsea Beach Caravan Park
- temporarily inhabited caravans are totally raised from the ground with four steel feet for support
- the caravans are ment to be mobile
- the location of each caravan is fixed by a concrete platform that is laied out on the wet land
- the platforms are organized in a strict grid within the Caravan Park
- the caravans sit close to each other, clearly defined private space only exists inside the caravan
At the edge of the Caravan Park
- caravan owners started to build toolsheds next to their caravans
- the sheds are built on the ground and work as an extension of the caravan
- owners start to claim the territory between caravan and shed as private domain
Behind the Caravan Park
- a single caravan sits on a lot, surrounded by a fence
- the territory around the caravan is defined as private space
Beginning of a Residential Area in Winchelsea Beach
- a caravan on a private lot is transformed into a house
- a second layer (walls and gabeled roof) is built around the caravan and pretends to be a proper house
- several hints like the box shape, the out stepping steel feet and the gasbottles outside give evidence of the hidden caravan
- temporary dwelling is turned into a permanent
STAGES OF SETTLEMENT
W.Town
W.Beach
Caravan Park

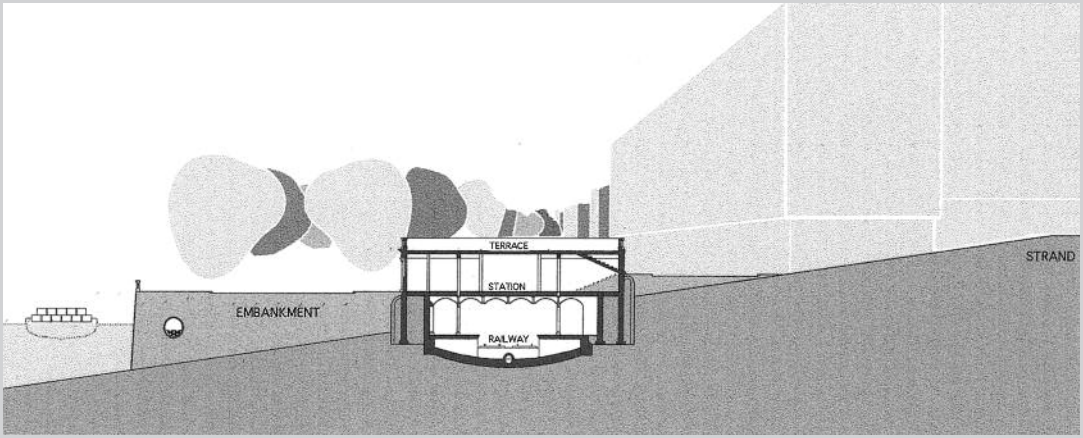
This drawing describes how different ways of building at Winchelsea correspond to the historical shift of the shoreline. The cellared houses of the medieval port were built on the cliff above the harbor. As the sea receded, houses without cellars were built on the new but wetter flatlands. The newest, most lightly founded pattern of settlement is that of the caravan parks along the present seashore. This way of looking at the landscape suggests a possible strategy for how to continue building there.

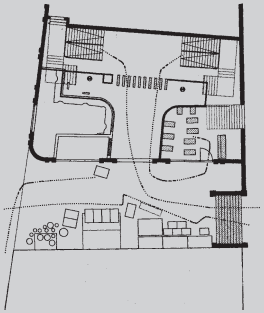


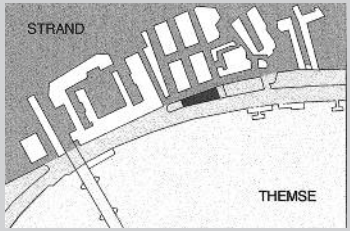




STAGES OF SETTLEMENT


TERRACE
STATION
RAILWAY
EMBANKMENT
STRAND



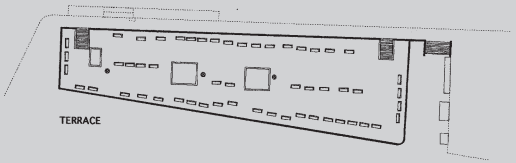

STRAND
THEMSE

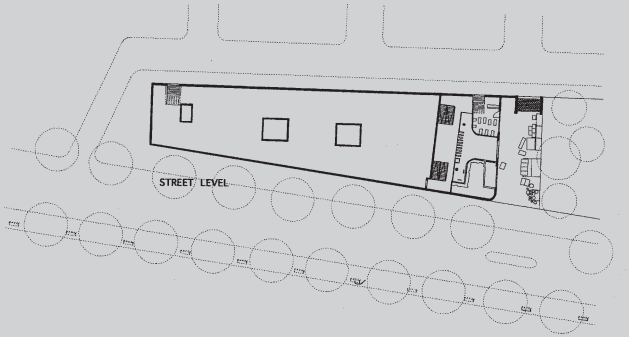
These notes and drawings were made to accompany a Super–8 film about the life in and around Temple Station. The layering and juxtaposition of different forms of use on the three levels (platforms, concourse, and roof terrace) were filmed during the course of a day: the hectic pace of the rush-hour, the waiting around during the day, the chance purchases of tourists… The role of the architecture that frames these events was thereby brought into focus.

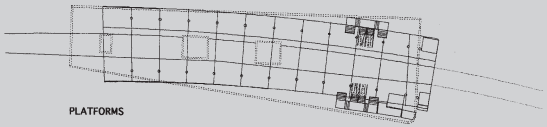
The Used City: Temple Station

Embankment The Victoria Embankment is part of the "second modernization" of the European city; the introduction of a new urban infrastructure as the consequence of industrialization. The north side of the Thames was embanked, to win space for a road, sewer, and underground railway. The ground was not built over, but laid out as public gardens and a river promenade. Temple Station is an element of this civic landscape, an architecture of terraces and stone balustrades.
The section shows how the station is integrated into the sloping topography between the Strand and the river. The streets run down from the Strand to the blank wall which is the back of the station. From here, stairs lead up to a terrace (fifteen steps), and down to the level of the Embankment (ten steps), where the station entrance is situated. The platforms are reached by a further set of stairs (about twenty-five steps).

Terrace The size of the station is determined by the length and breadth of the underlying platforms. On top of the building is a public terrace, with a view over the river. It is surfaced with paving stones, and bordered by the same stone balustrade as the edge of the Embankment below: it is sparsely furnished with two rows of dark benches and red waste paper bins. In the summer it is used in the early morning by homeless people, during the day by tourists and school parties, and at lunch time by office workers. Taxi drivers also come up to sit there from their green shelter on the street below.


TERRACE

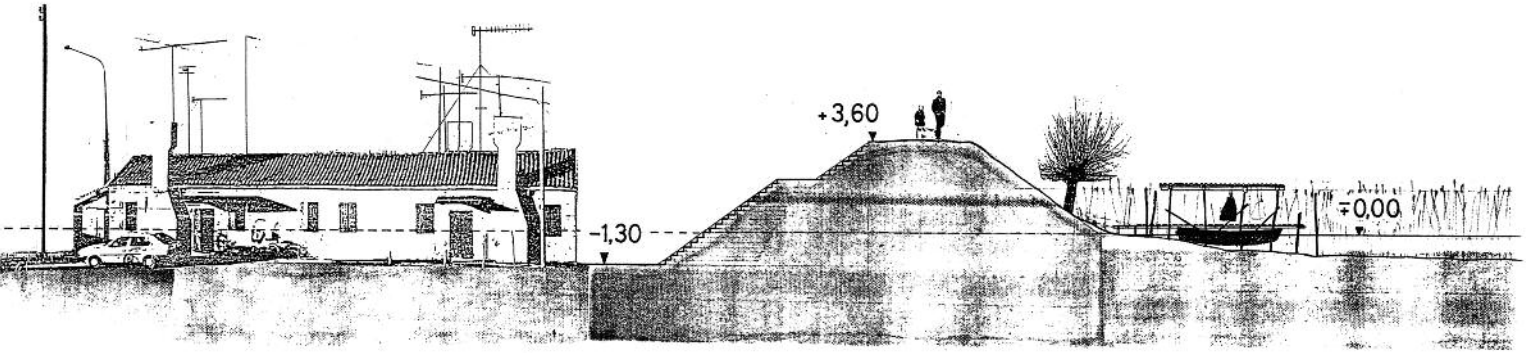

STREET LEVEL


PLATFORMS

Entrance Flanking the entrance are a dry cleaner's shop and a sandwich bar. The sandwich bar is separated from the ticket hall by a light wooden partition with large windows, through which one can see the coming and going of passengers. At five each morning, a newspaper kiosk and a vegetable stand are set up on the paved area (of approximately six-by-fifteen meters) in front of the entrance. They are open for the whole day, but during the rush hour additional tables are set up to cope with the extra business.

Platforms The technical space: the iron frame of the building is left bare at this level. Shafts bring daylight and air down to the railway lines, connecting the space with the outside world.

A Public Space Temple Station succeeds in integrating its technical function into the everyday of the city (shopping, eating, resting, etc.). This weaving together is very different in character to the contemporary concept of mixed-use, as represented by the common station cum shopping-mall hybrid. At Temple Station, the main architecture (an element of the larger civic landscape of the Embankment) is colonized by a distinct second architecture of lightweight adaptable elements. The two elements are both collaborative and independent: the generosity of the main architecture is not part of a calculated commercial strategy, but a more open invitation to use; the second architecture is attracted by the station, but retains a life and character of its own.



DRYLAND

WETLAND

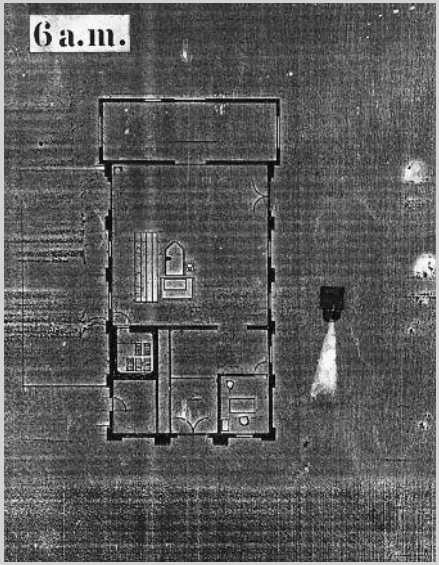
The documentation of one of the several fish auctions that take place each day in the Po Delta. The drawings were made after visits in 1989 and 1992. The text proposes a thematic relation between the space of the market and the surrounding landscape.

The Scardovari Fish Market

Spatial structure in the flatlands of the Po Delta

The Wet and the Dry The Po Delta, which juts into the Adriatic some 50 km south of the Venetian Lagoon, is in origin a depositional landscape, made up of the silt deposited by the River Po as it reaches the sea. The original inhabitants of the delta subsisted from fishing and fish farming on a small scale. Over the centuries, a system of dikes was built by the landowners in order to drain the marshland and exploit it on a large scale for farming. The resulting landscape is an artificial structure, with two principal levels: the wetland (±0.00 m) and the dry land (-1.30 m). The tops of the dikes (+3.60 m) form a third level. The dikes are as much a cultural as a physical break in the landscape, for they divide modern industrialized agribusiness from a now marginalized microfishery. Fishing is now mainly a part-time occupation or hobby for people living in villages on the dry land.

The landscape is maintained in its state of disequilibrium by a network of electric-powered pumping stations; it is said that if they were to stop working for just three hours, the delta would be flooded. The maintenance of the landscape thus depends on a highly developed industrial infrastructure of roads, bridges and power lines. This collision of the bare bones of an industrialized landscape with the apparent idyll of the wetlands is one of the most striking aspects of the delta.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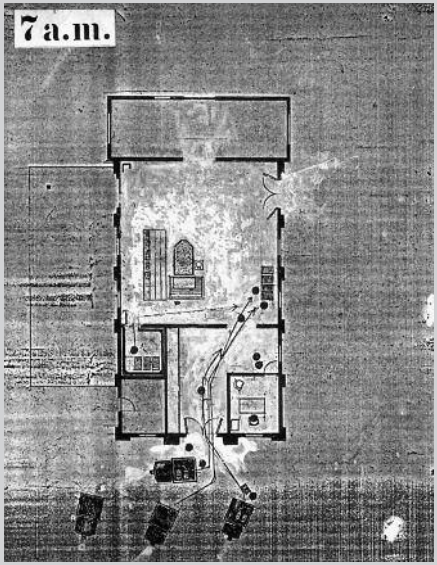
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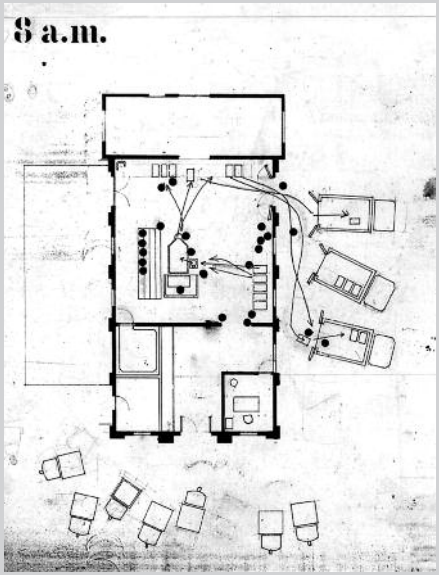
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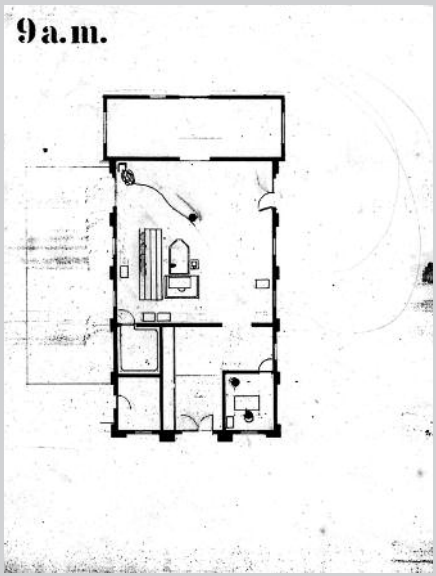
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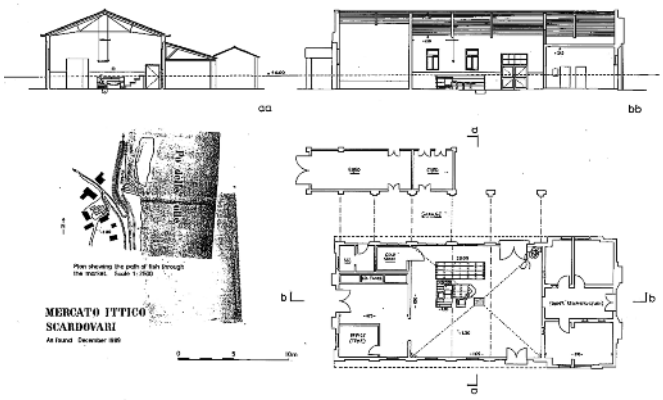
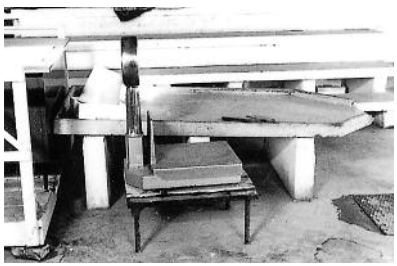
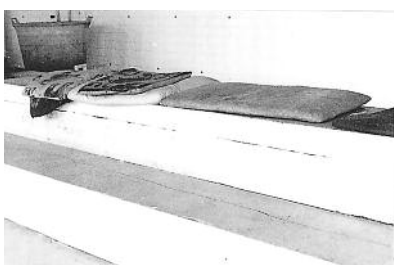
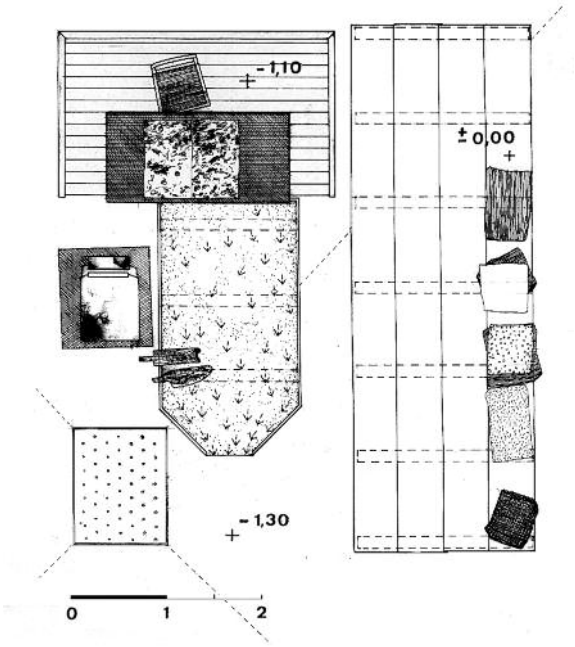






The Fish Market Scardovari is a village at the extremity of the delta. A small wholesale fish market takes place each morning at the market building, which stands across from the harbor on the dry side of the dike. The market building is a simple brick shed built in the 1930s.

The form of the fish auction is without doubt much older than the building itself. The auction at Pila, another village in the delta, shares the same basic form. The market event is focused around a sloping table. The fish or eels are weighed and then tipped onto the table. The auctioneer presents the fish to the bidders, who are sitting on the steps on the opposite side of the table, and asks for bids. When the fish have been sold, he sweeps them deftly with the two wooden paddles off the table and into a bucket. They are then put back into boxes and loaded into the trucks outside. The clerk sits at a desk set on a wooden platform behind the table, and records the results of the bidding. The fishermen stand around watching.



Levels in the Landscape It is worth examining the space of this event in more detail. The first point is that each person (or group) taking part has a clearly defined space, not just in relation to the table, but also in relation to the floor. The auctioneer and fishermen stand on the floor; the bidders sit on the top step; and the clerk sits at his desk on the podium. A second point is that while the table and steps are fixtures, built on concrete blocks, the podium is a wooden platform, raised off the floor on bricks.

It seems clear that this space is neither arbitrarily thrown together, nor just "functional" in the narrow sense of the word. There seem to be clues in the fishing culture of the wetlands, the constructions and artifacts along the side of the river: things on platforms, things hanging from roofs. That a similar language should be used for the wet environment of the market—where things also need to stay dry—may seem too obvious to mention, but it may point towards the market's real significance. If the structure of the delta is seen as a series of contrasts between wet and dry, nature and infrastructure, pre-modern and modern, the market is a meeting point of these contrasts. If the market ritual is seen as a survival from the pre-modern wetland culture, the market building is an artifact of the modern dry land, a provider of infrastructure (electricity and water). The significant point is that event and building remain identifiable entities. The resulting relationship expresses some of the contradictions of the delta, and perhaps by playing out these contradictions, allows the inhabitants to come to terms with them.

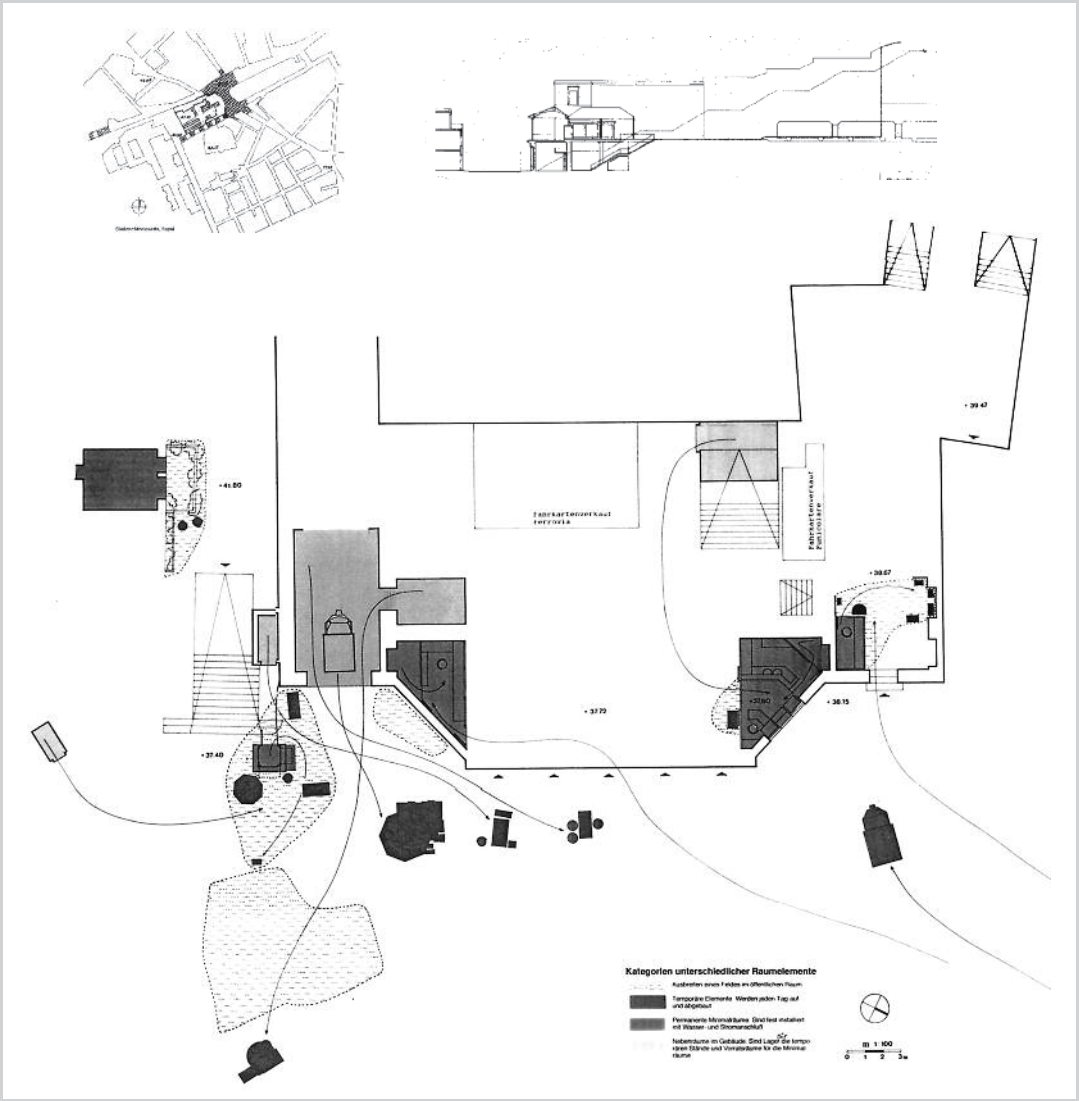
As porous as this stone [of which the city is built] *is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades and stairways....So the house is far less the refuge into which people retreat than the inexhaustible reservoir from which they flood out. Life bursts not only into front yards, where people on chairs do their work (for they have the ability to make their bodies into tables). From the balconies, house keeping utensils hang like potted plants. From the windows on the top floor come baskets on ropes, to fetch mail, fruit and cabbage. Just as the living room reappears on the street, with chairs, hearth, and altar, likewise—only much more loudly—the street migrates into the living room.*

Walter Benjamin, *Naples*, Frankfurter Zeitung, 1925

The project investigates the use of public space at the Stazione Monte Santo in Naples. The drawings describe the relation between the building and the vendors who occupy the square in front of the station, focusing in detail on a water vendor and his strategy for claiming the space around his stand. The drawings are accompanied by a Super–8 film about the water vendor.

Naples: Mobile City

"Flexibility of use and space" is increasingly proposed as a basic requirement of contemporary life. Naples seems to provide this quality in an impressive way, not as a result of modern planning, but as a cultural phenomenon that has emerged during the development of the city since antiquity. The following research does not explain how this quality has developed, but examines the contemporary practice of daily life in Naples and tries to discover a way to understand the public realm through the documentation of the relationship between a local train station and a street vendor.


+ 39.47
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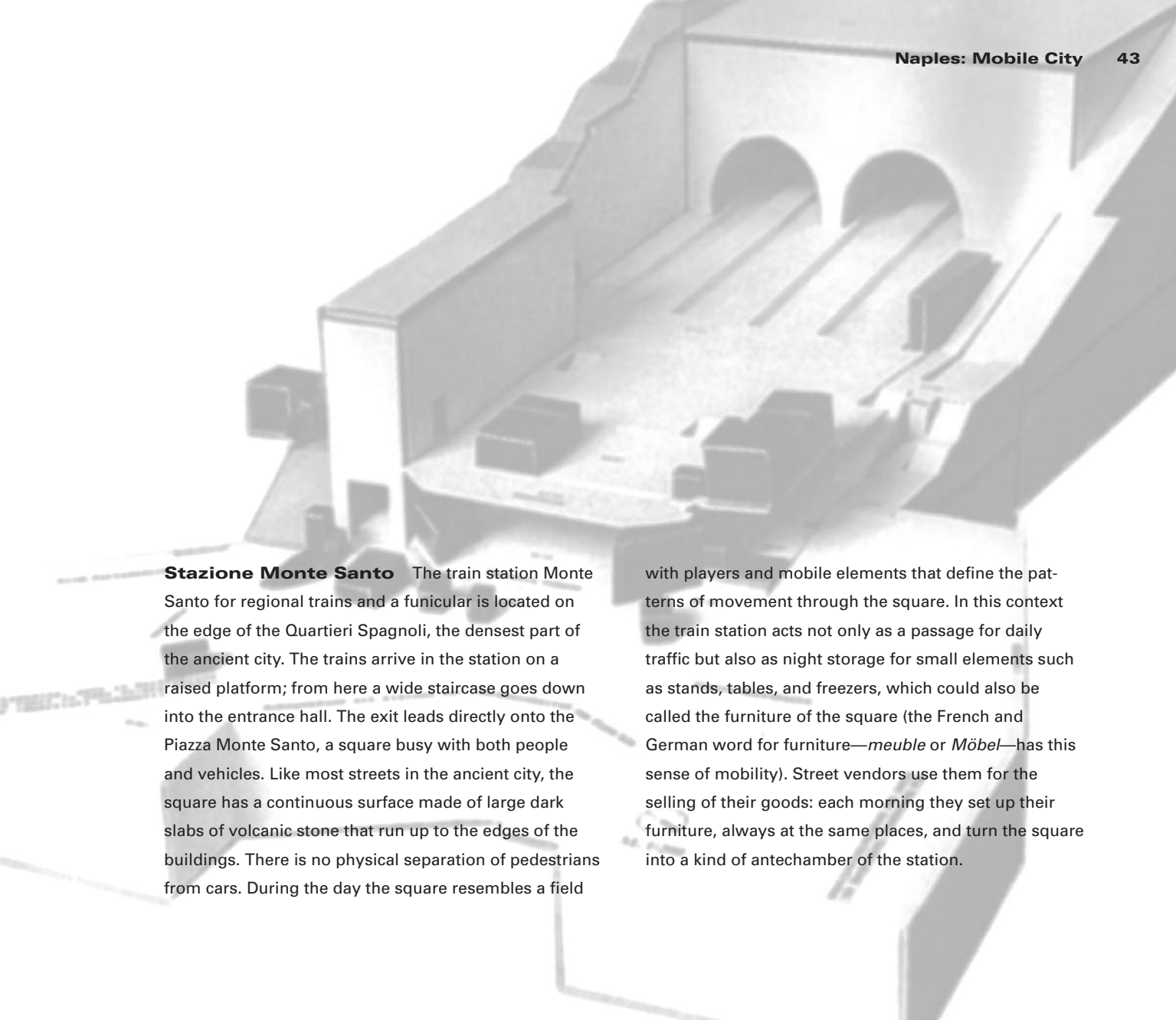
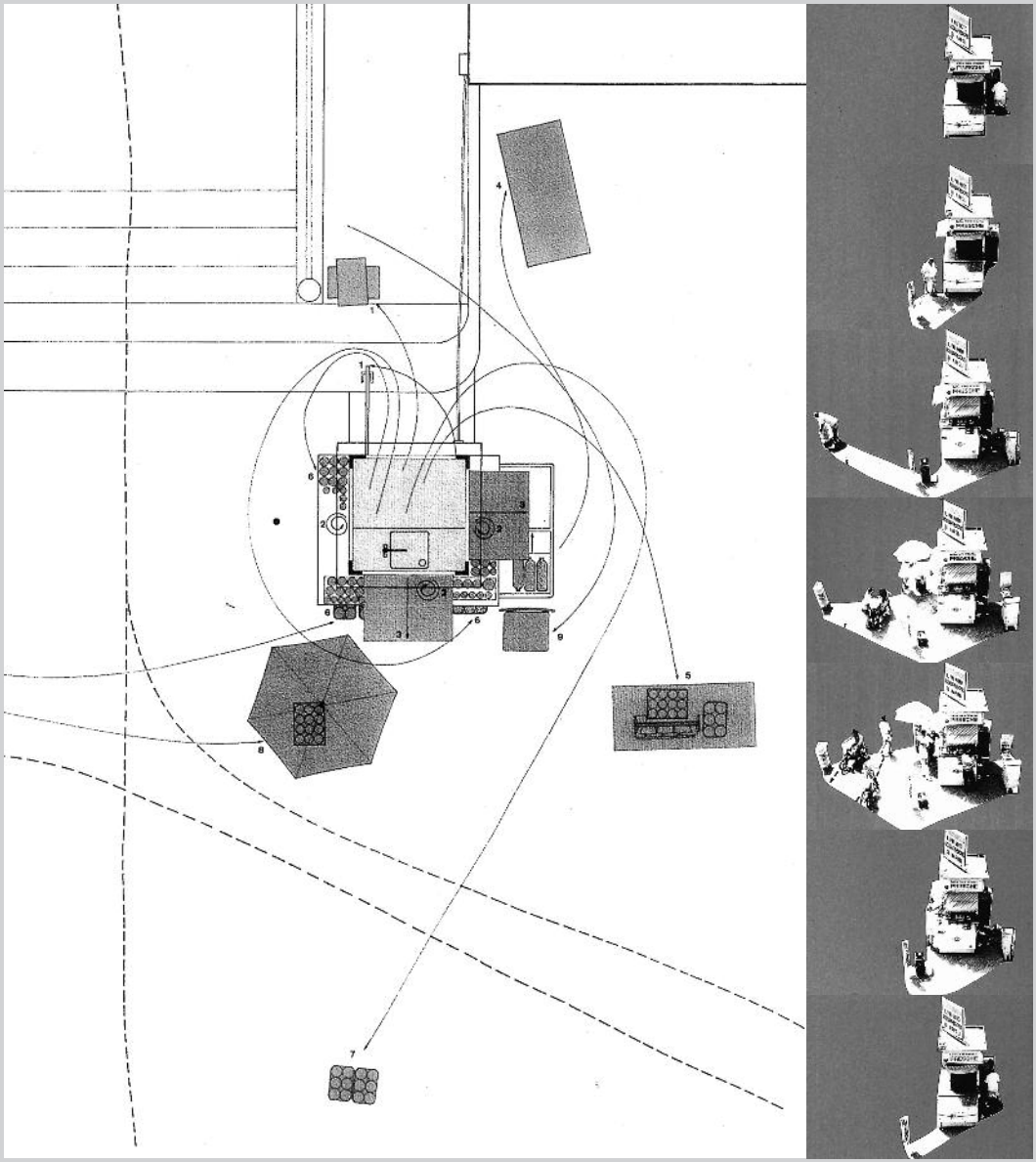


Stazione Monte Santo The train station Monte Santo for regional trains and a funicular is located on the edge of the Quartieri Spagnoli, the densest part of the ancient city. The trains arrive in the station on a raised platform; from here a wide staircase goes down into the entrance hall. The exit leads directly onto the Piazza Monte Santo, a square busy with both people and vehicles. Like most streets in the ancient city, the square has a continuous surface made of large dark slabs of volcanic stone that run up to the edges of the buildings. There is no physical separation of pedestrians from cars. During the day the square resembles a field with players and mobile elements that define the patterns of movement through the square. In this context the train station acts not only as a passage for daily traffic but also as night storage for small elements such as stands, tables, and freezers, which could also be called the furniture of the square (the French and German word for furniture—*meuble* or *Möbel*—has this sense of mobility). Street vendors use them for the selling of their goods: each morning they set up their furniture, always at the same places, and turn the square into a kind of antechamber of the station.



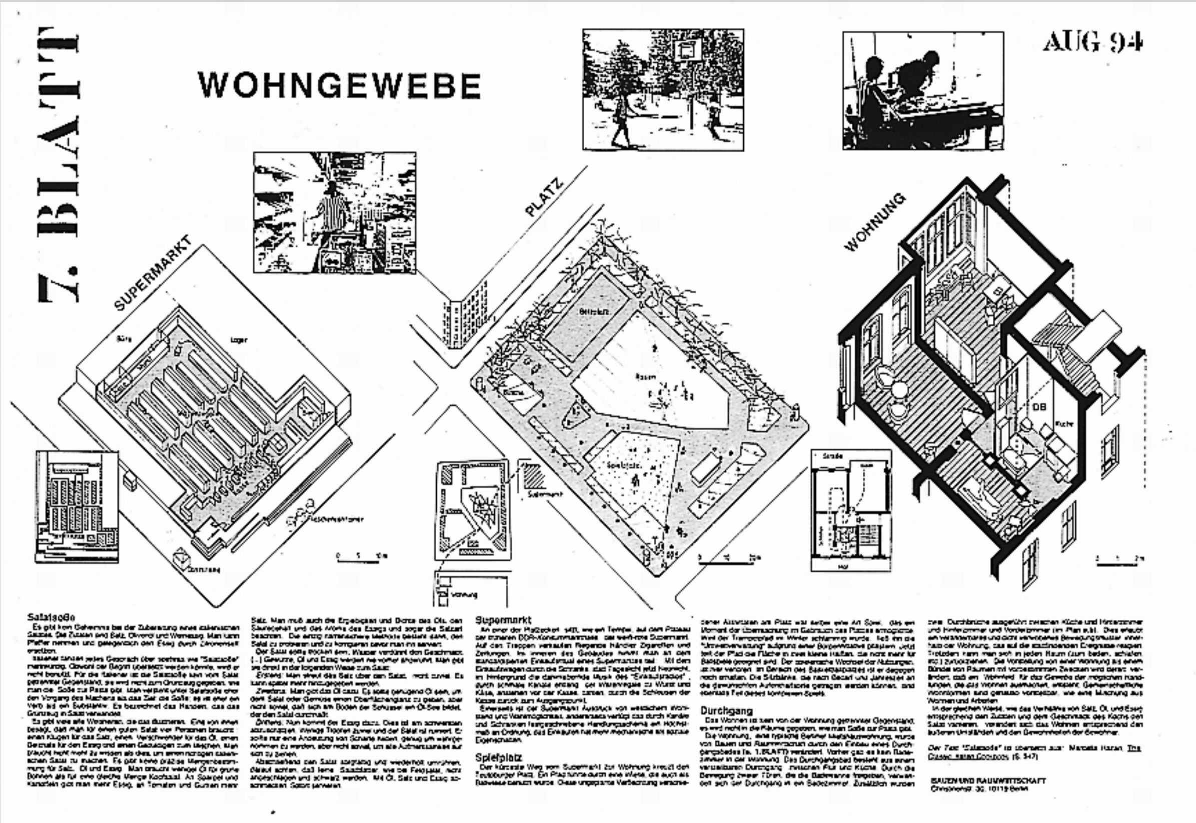
One Component: A Water Vendor A water vendor and his kiosk are part of the daily activity on the square. The kiosk is located at a corner of the square, where train passengers come down stairs from a side exit of the station at regular intervals and where cars pass before entering a narrow street leading into the Quartieri Spagnoli. In contrast to the mobile stands, the kiosk is permanent and occupies a minimal area of about 1.5 m^2. Like the station building, the kiosk serves as a container for goods during the night and as a base for the vendor to set out his field during the day. Water bottles, cans and crates—mainly elements that are part of his commercial activity—are placed at strategic points to mark out his field. His "salesroom" unfolds between these elements which simultaneously serve as his display. The outermost spot of his field marked by a stack of water bottle packs. It serves to make cars park at the right distance outside his field, while allowing just enough space for traffic to cross it.

These observations concerning the train station and the water vendor were made over a period of one month. The findings of the research refuted the initial impression of a game without rules, which is often described, especially in travel guides, as anarchistic. Instead they revealed a delicate system that follows an invisible set of rules built up through everyday use. They also show that Benjamin's observations more than seventy years ago remain valid for Naples today. Behind Benjamin's metaphor of porosity stands the mobility of people and objects, and the claiming of the street for the inhabitants' own use. A remarkable aspect of this behavior is that it does not separate fields and uses from each other, but overlays them. This overlaying allows fields and uses to respond to each other, forming a flexible but resilient structure that is the basis for the continuing vitality of the city.

Part 2 Documenting the City Fabric

So what constitutes the village is neither the site nor the huts, but a certain structural pattern…. It is therefore easy to understand why the missionaries, by interfering with the traditional layout of the villages, destroy everything.
Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*

The following documents are less concerned with the description of place and more concerned with the investigation of "structural pattern": the way in which the city weaves together place and happening. In these documents, salad dressing, returnable bottles, and playing-cards are used as models of city-structure.



7. BLATT

WOHNGEWEBE

AUG 94

Salatsoße

Es gibt kein Geheimnis bei der Zubereitung eines italienischen Salates. Die Zutaten sind Salz, Olivenöl und Weinessig.

Supermarkt

Spielplatz

Durchgang

In der gleichen Weise, wie das Verhältnis von Salz, Öl und Essig entsprechend den Zutaten und dem Geschmack des Kochs den Salat variieren, verändert sich das Wohnen entsprechend den äußeren Umständen und den Gewohnheiten der Bewohner.

Der Text "Salatsoße" ist übersetzt aus: Marcella Hazan, The Classic Italian Cookbook (S. 347)

BAUEN UND RAUMWIRTSCHAFT
Christinenstr. 30, 10119 Berlin

Italians would find any discussion of something called "salad dressing" very puzzling. Although the term could be translated, it would have very little currency. For Italians, salad dressing is not an element separate from the salad; it is not added to the greens as you might add a sauce to pasta. Dressing is a process rather than an object, a verb rather than a noun. It is the act that transforms vegetables into salad.

Marcella Hazan, *The Classic Italian Cookbook*

Salad Dressing

Supermarket The supermarket sits on the platform of the former GDR *Konsummarkthalle.* Inside, one takes part in a standardized supermarket ritual: collection of the cart in the front space, passing through the turnstile into the neon-lit interior with "shopping radio" playing in the background, wandering down the aisles, going up to the meat counter, queuing at the check-out, paying and returning to the front space. While the supermarket stands as an expression of western prosperity and choice, the space is highly ordered, with the sole aim of maximizing the flow of goods. Shopping there is more a mechanical than a social activity.

Playground The shortest way from the supermarket to the apartment cuts across Teutoburger Platz. The path used to cross a grass field which was sometimes used for ball games. This unplanned interweaving of activities was itself a form of play, introducing an element of unpredictability into the use of the space. Because the trampled path became muddy in winter, a community planning initiative paved the path in October 1992. Now divided by the path into two smaller areas, the field is no longer suitable for playing soccer

Apartment Dwelling is not separate from the space, to be added to it as you might add a sauce to pasta. By opening the two doors that conceal the bathtub, the corridor between the hallway and kitchen can be transformed into a bathroom. In addition, new doorways connect kitchen and back room, and back room and front room. This allows an adaptable and densely woven pattern of movement within the flat, which responds to activities as they take place. It is less a cluster of rooms with designated activities than a field for the possible actions which make up dwelling. This includes combinations of living and working or apartment sharing. In the same way that the proportions of salt, oil and vinegar for the salad vary according to the ingredients and taste of the cook, dwelling can vary according to the habits of the people who live there.

Leergut / Empty Good

A model for building in the city

Leeres Haus / Empty house *Leergut*—literally translated empty good—is a returnable container used in Germany for products such as water, beer, and yogurt. The idea that architecture could be, or even should be, an empty good may seem at first surprising. Many architects, after all, would claim the opposite, that it is their role to find meaning for the emptiness of modern building. A developer, on the other hand, can probably easily see a parallel between rentable space and the empty good; the creation of empty space is inseparable from the process of contemporary city production. What is needed now is a shift of view: for architects to stop pretending that this emptiness does not exist and see it rather as a "good," which is capable of containing the full complexity of the city. Once seen in this way, it will perhaps be possible to make the buildings better suited for this task.

Leihflasche / Returnable Bottle Our example of a *Leergut* is the bottle used by many water companies, not just for mineral water, but also for tonic water, lemonade, and juices. The label is the only distinguishing feature. The bottle has pleasing visual and tactile qualities. The constricted waist is inviting to the hand, and the bumps on the glass echo the effervescence of the contents. A slight thickening of the glass above and below the label acts as a buffer to protect the surface of the bottle and label from getting scratched; the surface wear is concentrated around these rings as a ground line. The returnable bottle is made with thicker glass than a throw-away bottle, particularly the base that must withstand being dropped into cases, and this heaviness lends it a certain quality that a throw-away bottle lacks.

These visual and tactile qualities, including the acceptance of signs of wear, are surprisingly close to those qualities which we may hope to find in a good building. The rational of the design, however, can only be understood within the context of the system of which it is a part. The design is a response to long life expectancy of the bottle; it anticipates the wear and tear that it will receive, which might break a less well-made bottle. Unlike the throw-away bottle, the cost of making the bottle is not related to the marketing of the contents. Its high quality is simply necessary for the system to work.

Stadtmodell / City Model The full potential of the model is only discovered when we put the object aside and recognize that there is a social component to the system: it is not only good business. Likewise the city, the system with which we are concerned as architects, is an interweaving of social and built form rather than the production of buildings alone. The principal of *Leergut*—to borrow the container against a deposit, rather than buying it along with the contents—is simple. This is one of the strengths of the system: it is transparent, understandable by everyone. It goes back in principle to a time when containers were not mass-produced and disposable, but valuable objects. That the system survives, in an age of cheap containers, is perhaps attributable to a memory of an earlier frugality, and the survival of small local breweries and water companies—overlaid by contemporary feelings of environmental responsibility. There is a will in society for the system to work: this common will is one of the

conditions for the successful functioning of such a system in the city. Is a similar will required if buildings are to work as empty goods?

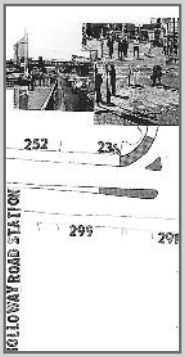
500 Sorten Bier / 500 Sorts of Beer Although the principle of *Leergut* is simple, the result is complex. The complexity of the system can be measured through the network of movements which it sets up within a local field, unlike the one way flow of the throw away system. With these movements comes social contact, the life and bustle of the city.

The crossing points of these movements become events in the city. Such a place is the sidewalk outside the shop *500 Sorten Bier* in Schillerstraße. As there is insufficient space within the shop for sorting out the empty bottles, it expands its business outside onto the sidewalk. A delivery truck parks at the curb, cases of empty bottles are stacked on the wide pavement, and the bottles are sorted: the space between shop-front and truck becomes an extension of the shop. Customers can leave their empty bottles there too, saving the trouble of taking them inside. In this modest and unspectacular pocket of activity we have a sense of how the whole matrix of the city could work.


FROM 2 FEET TO 20.000 SQM
ROYAL NORTHERN HOSPITAL
ODEON
CORONET

Holloway Road is a major route connecting the center of London to the M1 motorway. At the same time it remains a vital main street for that part of London, containing the University of North London, second-hand shops, pubs, a cinema, a supermarket, and night-clubs. The investigation maps the relationship between street life and the width of the sidewalk.


264
258
301


KILLOWAY ROAD STATION
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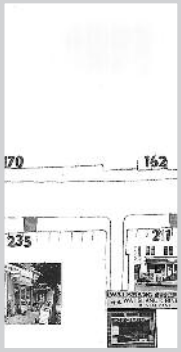
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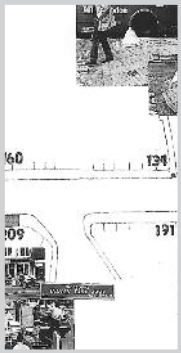
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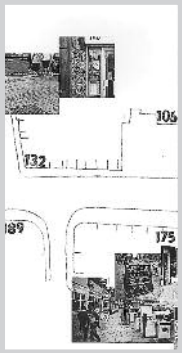
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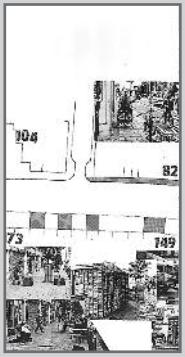
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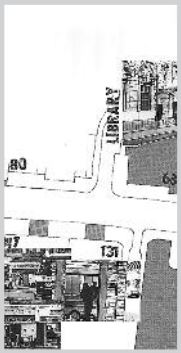
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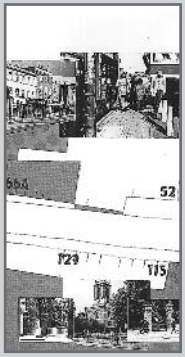
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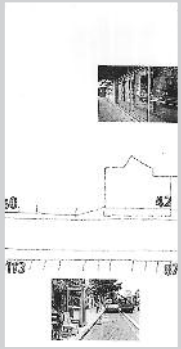
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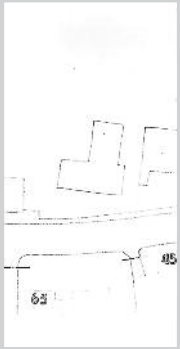
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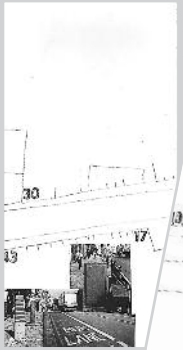
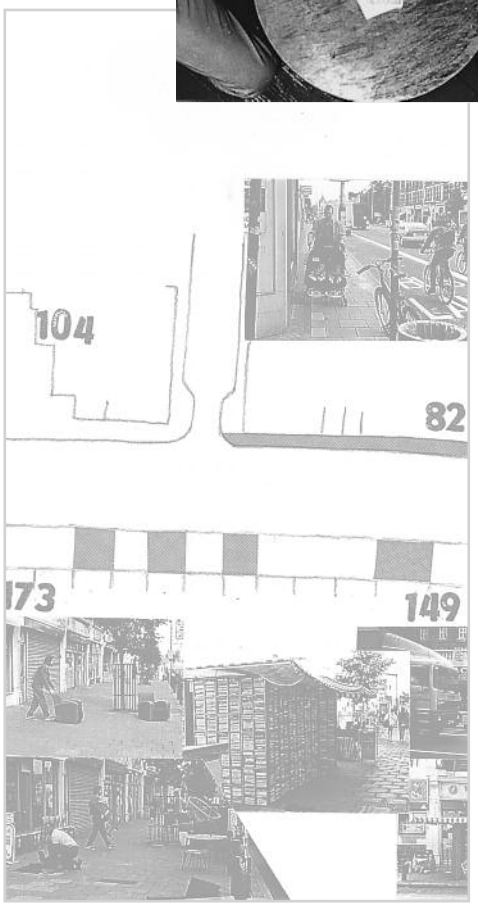
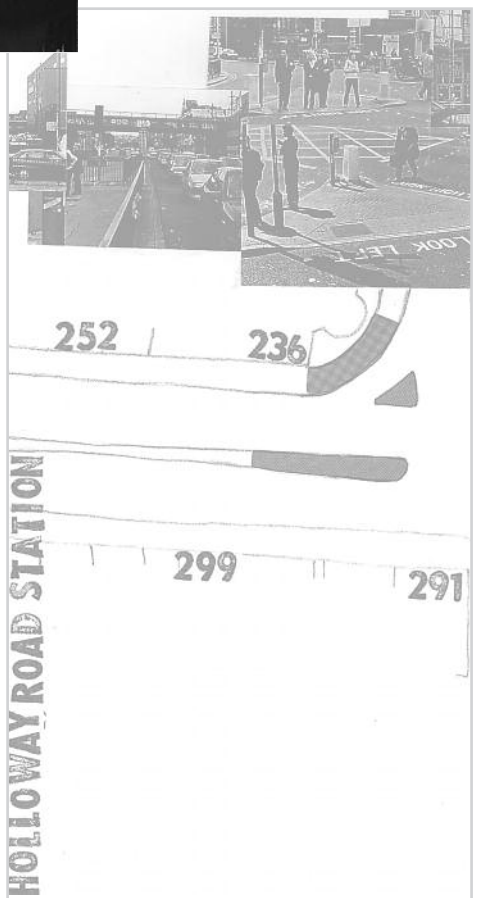
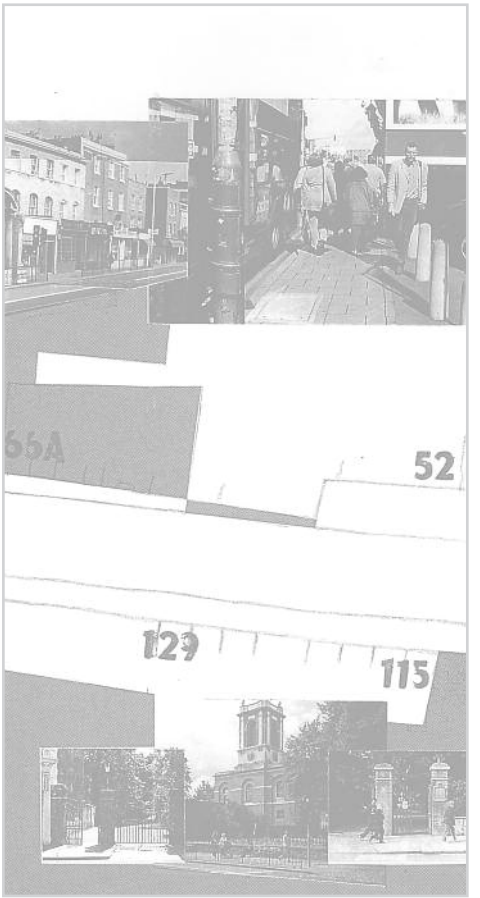

17


MORNEY AND ISLINGTON

A "working document" was developed as a set of cards that records the conflicts and qualities of points on the street. As in a game, the cards can be reshuffled and exchanged: new juxtapositions draw attention to significant, but otherwise overlooked changes in the structure of the street along its length. The document was conceived as a contribution to a public discussion about the future of the street.







Towards an Architecture of the Commonplace

In this book we wish to suggest that the first and most important step towards an architecture of the commonplace is the practice of documentation itself. As Benjamin writes, "only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power that it commands." Flying over a landscape is not the same thing. The assembled documents should therefore be seen as examples of the practice of documentation, not necessarily of what to document. The choice of what to document has been intuitive rather than scientific; looking back at what we have chosen, we could say that these places constitute for us part of the vitality and excitement of the city. However, we make no claims for our collection being more than one version of the commonplace.

With this caveat in mind, we wish to suggest a second step: that documentation changes our work as architects. The hand of an architect is not generally evident in what we have documented; one should therefore be wary of drawing too direct a relationship between such places and a work of architecture. We established, through the process of documentation, a fund of material and experience. We did not go to the place with a theme in mind: themes emerged as a result of the time spent at the place, and later in the making of the document. The drawings and sketches were initially more concrete than abstract; we did not want to represent an idea, or feeling about the place, but rather to record and communicate facts about the things we had observed. A general theme or motif of the

document emerged at a later point, after the facts were laid down—layers and passage at Temple Station; levels in the landscape at Scardovari; appropriation of public space in Naples, for example. The themes revealed to us hidden structures and relationships that are key to understanding the qualities and potential of a place. As we made more documents, the appearance of similar themes in different contexts and the gradually discovered relationships between themes began to map out the territory that we wished to occupy as practicing architects.

Although it is anchored in the precise observation of the world, documentation requires imaginative choices. This allows documentation to overlap with the creative process of designing in a provocative way. While the process of documentation is characterized by a shift from the very specific towards the more thematic, in design the process is reversed: an idea is gradually made concrete. At the level of themes there can be a cross-over, where documentation can inform design without resorting to over-simplistic formal relationships. As a way of moving toward an architecture of the commonplace, documentation could be part of learning to be an architect, and then become an unobtrusive part of architectural practice: a way to tune our existing design sense and to evaluate designs once they are in use. We assume, however, such a practice would be rather different than what is usual today: less subject to the influence of magazine images and borrowed ideas, and more skillful at exploiting the potential of an existing situation. An architecture of the commonplace could accept the competence and autonomy of the user, and provide a suggestive framework for the events of daily life.

About the authors Antje Buchholz, Jack Burnett-Stuart, Michael Matuschka and Jürgen Patzak-Poor met in the 1980s while studying at the HdK, Berlin and the AA, London. They founded the group BAR in Berlin in 1992. They have taught at the University of Queensland, Brisbane and SCI-Arc, Los Angeles, and have contributed to workshops in Prora, Germany and the Holloway Road, London. They currently live and work in Berlin and Los Angeles.

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Thanks to Stephan Fiedler, Margaret Reeve, and Julia Strickland.

Naples: Mobile City

Like the station building, the kiosk serves as a container for goods during the night and as a base for the vendor to set out his field during the day. Water bottles, cans and crates—mainly elements that are part of his commercial activity—are placed at strategic points to mark out his field. His "salesroom" unfolds between these elements which simultaneously serve as his display.