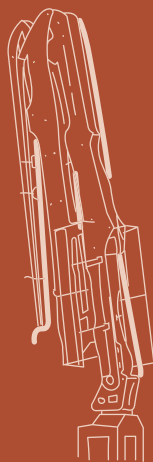




COUNTER-CAPITAL: ARCHITECTURE BEYOND SPECULATION

A CRITICAL STORY

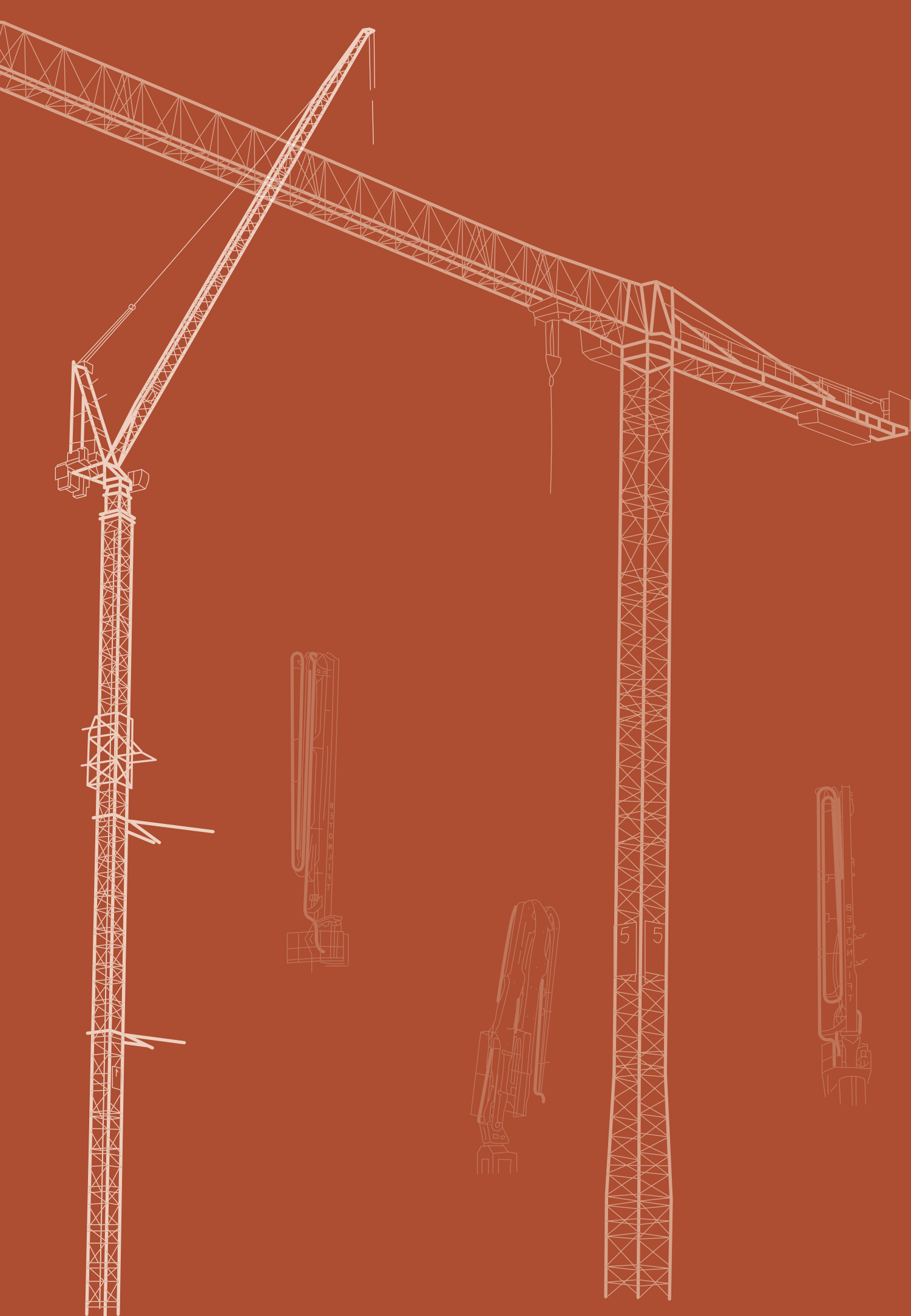
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master's thesis 2025

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A CRITICAL STORY

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abstract

As architecture continues to be commodified and shaped by cycles of financial speculation within our capitalist society, creating a spectacle and profit are the guiding design principles. Space is created not as a response to the needs of people but to the wants of increasing profits. The dependence of the architectural practice on speculative investment practices makes way for grand projects, but also a growing landscape of incomplete and abandoned structures.

THESE "INVESTMENT RUINS" ARE MANIFESTATIONS OF DEEPER, SYSTEMATIC PROBLEMS: OVER-SPECULATION, DISCONNECTION FROM SOCIAL NEEDS AND OVERALL THE PRIORISATION OF FINANCIAL PROFIT OVER SOCIAL, ECOLOGICAL, OR SPATIAL VALUE.

The story of “counter capital” explores how architectural storytelling of investment ruin can serve as a form of (radical) critique and generate counter-narratives to cycles of financial speculation. The Elbtower in Hamburg not only serves as an example of these investment ruins but is also the context in which the story is grounded. Through a fictional narrative, the thesis reflects and comments on the socio-economic structures that influence architectural production.

The story is critical in nature and aims to shift the perspective toward deconstructing the architectural dependence on growth-oriented ideologies and to imagine futures that prioritise the slow processes of degrowth rooted in communities.

“Counter Capital” shows that architectural storytelling can serve as a tool for making room for diverse imaginaries and participation in design beyond market constraints. Architectural practice, when liberated from monetary value systems, can transform in its form, practice and agency. The story argues for the practice to be rooted in communities and context to create small-scale and context-specific cycles that can resist the endless consumption promoted by capitalist market structures.

Through fictional narratives, investment ruins become sites of reimagination of social responsibility and value. In doing so, architectural storytelling is defined as an essential tool for envisioning post-capitalist futures grounded in community and care.

key words:
capitalism; counterproject; degrowth; investment ruin; speculative design

acknowledgements

THIS THESIS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF SO MANY, AND I AM GRATEFUL TO **EVERYONE** WHO SUPPORTED ME THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PROCESS, WHETHER BY CONTRIBUTING KNOWLEDGE OR SIMPLY ENTERTAINING MY WILD IDEAS.

I ESPECIALLY WANT TO THANK MY SUPERVISORS, **BRI GAUGER** AND **JESSICA LUNDIN**, FOR PUSHING ME TO DO MY BEST AND BEYOND THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS. YOUR STEADY INPUT AND GUIDANCE HELPED ME REACH BEYOND ANY PREVIOUSLY IMAGINED LIMITS.

NEXT, I WANT TO THANK MY SUPPORT SYSTEM, **MY FAMILY AND MY FRIENDS.** YOUR CONSTANT SUPPORT AND BELIEF IN ME HELPED ME NAVIGATE EVEN THE MOST CHALLENGING PARTS OF THIS WORK. THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING MY JOURNEY, DELUSIONS AND BEING THERE EVERY STEP OF THE WAY. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND QUESTIONING LOOKS, AFTER I BOMBARDED YOU WITH MY IDEAS AND THEN HELPED ME NAVIGATE THE 'MESS I CREATED'.

AND FINALLY, I WANT TO THANK **YOU, THE READER**, FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PICK UP AND EVENTUALLY READ THIS THESIS.

THANK YOU!

about the author

WHEN REFLECTING ON HOW AND WHY MY PERSONAL JOURNEY IN THE ARCHITECTURAL FIELD BEGAN, ONE SPECIFIC MOMENT STANDS OUT. I REMEMBER WALKING DOWN TIMES SQUARE IN NEW YORK CITY IN MID-AUGUST 2014, IMPRESSED BY THE TOWERS AND SPECTACLES REACHING FOR THE SKY, AND THEN SAYING, "THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO DO. ONE DAY I WANT TO DESIGN SOMETHING AS SPECTACULAR AS THIS!". THE SPECTACULAR SCENERY OF THAT DAY KICK-STARTED MY INTEREST AND AT THE SAME TIME MADE ME WONDER. THE (GENERIC) MENTAL IMAGE OF THE ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE MADE THAT DAY FOLLOWED ME THROUGH MY APPRENTICESHIP AND MY BACHELOR STUDIES.

LOOKING BACK NOW, THIS IMAGE WAS ALREADY STARTING TO CRACK DURING MY BACHELOR STUDIES IN AACHEN. THESE CRACKS GREW LARGER OVER TIME, AND MY IMAGE OF THE ARCHITECTURAL PROFESSION STARTED TO CRUMBLE AND CHANGE. REFLECTING ON MY FASCINATION WITH ARCHITECTURE AT ITS BEGINNING AND WHERE I AM NOW, I COULD NOT BE FURTHER AWAY FROM THAT INITIAL ASPIRATION.

UNCONSCIOUSLY, MAYBE EVEN DELIBERATELY, I'M NOW BACK AT THE POINT OF LOOKING UP AT "SKYSCRAPERS" AND "SPECTACLES", BUT NOT IN AN ADORING WAY AS I WAS 11 YEARS AGO, BUT MORE CRITICALLY. REFLECTING ON THE PRACTICE, AND MAYBE EVEN MY NAIVETY.

BECAUSE, IN THE END, REFLECTING ON PROCESSES REVEALS THAT SOMETIMES CRACKS ARE NECESSARY FOR CHANGE TO HAPPEN AND FOR BECOMING SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

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fig. 1 - Elbtower (Hamburg), 17.02.2025

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dear reader,

Once again, thank you for taking the time to read and follow me on this journey through the story. See this copy as your version of my notebook. Throughout the flow of this story, I am guiding you through the different stages of this process. This story represents a vision of an alternative future, a process that may or may not happen, told out of the (limited) view of the construction machinery that currently still inhabits the site of the Elbtower. The thesis is a journal of my journey, and you, the reader, are welcome to add your notes and impressions to the margins to make it your own. It is a guide for individual explorations of alternative scenarios and futures.

I would like to start with two quotes from Italo Calvino's 'Invisible Cities', which inspired and encouraged the path of this journey. Repeatedly looking at these quotes helped me understand that no matter what, imaginaries - or alternative futures - are just exactly what the word suggests: Ideas and pictures of futures that can and will not come into existence after they are envisioned. Therefore, we, as imagineers and speculators, must always be aware that these imaginaries cannot be confused with realities. It is true that if we accept this statement, we may start to ask the question, 'What even is the value of imaginaries then?'. In a way, we will find answers to this and other questions we encounter along the way. Now, I encourage you to reflect on what these quotes mean to you and what other questions they prompt you to ask yourself.

CAN WE REACH 'IDEAL' OR WILL WE JUST
KEEP CHASING SOMETHING
UNREACHABLE?

‘These are the forms [it] could have taken if, for one reason or another, it had not become what we see today. In every age someone, looking at Fedora as it was, imagined a way of making it the ideal city, but while [they] constructed [their] miniature model, Fedora was already no longer the same as before, and what had been until yesterday a possible future became only a toy in a glass globe.’

(ITALO CALVINO, 'INVISIBLE CITIES', p. 32)

THE ELBTOWER, AN INTERRUPTED DREAM?

DREAM OR NIGHTMARE ?!

‘everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.’

(ITALO CALVINO, 'INVISIBLE CITIES', p. 44)

TAKE NOTES AND WRITE DOWN
YOUR THOUGHTS !!

Throughout this booklet, or journal, you will find handwritten notes in the margins that will guide you beyond this story; don't be afraid to add to them and include your own. Interpret my conclusions and reflections as inspirations for your explorations; however far you take it is up to you. After all, whatever we imagine is a picture of ourselves and our view of the world that surrounds us, an abstract self-portrait. Even if the visions remain only what they are - wishes never fulfilled - it is necessary to make them visible and spread them, for otherwise, they will be forgotten.

basics

introducing

The first chapter - **INTRODUCING**, revolves around the background, purpose and goals of this thesis. Together we are looking at the methodology I used, the key concepts that support and the general outline of our journey throughout this thesis.

- problem statement
- background
- architectural relevance
- aim
- purpose
- delimitations
- research questions
- methodology

AFTER ALL, ARCHITECTURE IS NOT SOLEY ABOUT BUILDING THINGS [...] BUILDINGS ARE JUST OBJECTS, YET ARCHITECTURE HAS MORE TO DO WITH CREATING VISIONARY SPATIAL APPROACHES THAT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO MAKE THE FACE OF THE EARTH, OUR HOME.

(Deneç 2018, p.83)

problem statement

In our globalised world, the occurrence of investment ruin(s) is not uncommon and, should nothing change, could become an everyday phenomenon. As architecture is more often used to create a spectacle and generate profit (Sadler, 2014b, p. 117), the focus on people and the environment shifts into the background. While the exploration in this thesis focuses on one specific case, the construction site of the Elbtower in Hamburg, it indicates the existence of a general practice at hand. Whether it is just the trade of foreign materials or the investment through international corporations, the act of building is inevitably linked to globalised trade and finance processes (Deneç, 2018; Gough, 2018). The existence of these connections certainly brings advantages to the design of architecture, as “starchitects” in the early 2000s spread their designs across the world, creating a homogenous and indistinguishable style of architecture (Brenner et al., 2012). Yet they also constitute the emergence of failed projects - investment ruins.

THIS DOES NOT REFER TO ALL ARCHITECTURE, BUT ONLY THE MAINSTREAMED ARCHITECTURE, WHICH IS THE MOST PRESENT IN THE GENERAL PERCEPTION AND IMAGINARY!

background

The interconnections between architecture and systems of a globalised society have become increasingly apparent over the past several decades, especially regarding global finance structures. Architecture has become increasingly dependent on the monetary flows of global market dynamics (Deneç, 2018; Gough, 2018), and in this sense, commodified. As financial and capital markets rise and dip, architecture follows these flows and, arguably, flaws. Projects deemed economically unfavourable are halted or stopped entirely before construction begins. In more drastic cases, the process is stopped during construction, as in the case of the Elbtower in Hamburg.

ARCHITECTURE = COMMODITY

The amount of these so-called ‘investment ruins’ will eventually increase, foreshadowing another market collapse. As experienced in 2008, the building sector and the architectural practice strongly depend on the global financial markets through individual and corporate real estate investments (Goddard & Marcum, 2012). The global economic crisis of 2008 revealed the vulnerability and fragility of architecture due to its connection to financial market fluctuation and speculation. The burst of the ‘speculative bubble’ left behind remains, which are still visible today, inevitably symbols of modern architecture’s failure to resist the pressures of financial speculation. The continued existence of these remains of failed (monetary) investments provides evidence for the ties of the architectural practice to the rise and fall of financial systems.

Architecture has become a good, consumed by us as any other good (Shields, 1998). By accepting the hypothesis that architecture is a good to be consumed as fact, we can also argue that the economic market and political entanglement turned it into a commodity (Gottdiener, 1998). With modern-day architects planning in different foreign contexts, at times even solely remote, local architectural traditions often fade away and give way to an indifferent global standard and aesthetic able to fit anywhere in the world (Brenner et al., 2012).

The site of the Elbtower in Hamburg is one of the current negative examples of the market-driven dynamics and dependencies, raising questions about who architecture serves and how a paradigm shift can be achieved. Halted in construction in October 2023, and with the investor later filing for bankruptcy (NDR, 2024; Tagesschau, 2023), the future of this current ruin is yet to be determined. In its current state as a halted construction site, the Elbtower is not only a victim of the current standard practice but also a prime example of over-speculation and the fragility of market-driven architecture.

With the emergence of mega projects, architecture started to be increasingly based on revenue, dominated by investors, and less on creating spaces for people to enjoy living in (Safdie, 2009). These mega projects are prime examples of market-driven dynamics and dependencies, and simultaneously raise questions about whom this architecture is for, especially since these projects are designed to gain attention and create a spectacle (Sadler, 2014a). In the hope of becoming more attractive, cities lean on architects primarily for their name and status, allowing them to create whatever fitting structure they envision. By critically questioning how this practice has become complicit in economic systems and continues to perpetuate its agenda, we can explore how architecture can serve as a tool for resistance and societal critique by using radical and speculative scenarios.

Approaching this topic through speculative and critical design, tools that primarily found use starting in the '60s in the practice of radical collectives, such as Archigram or Superstudio, as part of the counterculture movement (Sadler, 2014b), allows for testing radical ideas in the form of societal criticism. The designs envisioned by these collectives were not intended as realistic and detailed alternatives but as critical and polarising suggestions that explore how architecture can prioritise social, ecological, and spatial values over monetary revenue.

Using architecture as a medium for social experimentation, these projects use the built environment to test their radical ideas for society. Architects became visionaries, provocateurs, and cultural critics, using controversial and easy-to-grasp visual tools to effectively and artistically communicate their ideas (Scott, 2007).

By combining speculative designs and critical theoretical explorations, one can question the status quo of modern spatial production. Situated in the broader discourse on architecture's agency in the context of economic systems, I critically question how architectural practice has become complicit in perpetuating the flaws of economic systems.

purpose

At its core, this thesis is a provocation - an attempt at a socio-ecological critique of current practices and entanglements with investment practices through architectural storytelling. By utilising critical speculative design and system thinking as methodologies and mindsets, the thesis seeks to challenge existing paradigms and propose a new thinking framework for a



fig. 2 - Elbtower (Hamburg), 18.02.2025

shift in values of space, community and future. Through the combination of theoretical research and fictional architectural narratives, it intends to create a fictional narrative of change processes that highlights, disrupts, and redefines the interconnections between architecture and economy. While the story is fictional and abstract, it highlights current shortcomings, alternative paths, and actions within the architectural profession.



fig. 3 - Elbtower (Hamburg), 16.02.2025

aim

Reimagining our practice's agency requires questioning current practices critically and envisioning alternative paths. Through looking at the interconnections with a critical lens, the story aims to critically challenge the logic of profit-driven development. By using speculative design within storytelling, the thesis intends to show architecture's agency as a medium of resistance, storytelling and socio-ecological critique.

Rather than seeing '(investment) ruin' as a fixed endpoint, the thesis imagines it as a canvas for alternative narratives and radical futures. The abandoned (construction) site of the Elbtower acts not only as a metaphor for investment ruin but is also at the centre of the (site-specific) speculative exploration. By using fictional storytelling to describe an alternative process, the thesis also challenges the notion of how architecture is depicted, arguing that architectural design is, in fact, more than just drawing plans and designing buildings.

delimitations

This story does not advocate for a complete separation of architecture and global investment practices; in fact, with the current state of our practice, it is a measure of absolute impossibility. However, I want you to question the sometimes severe effects this connection has. The possibilities presented throughout the process are my personal opinions and visions, and should inspire you, the reader, to start your thought process.

Although the thesis discusses the topic of real estate investment and financial market dynamics, the focus lies on possible alternatives. To understand these alternatives, this story will provide an overview of the current state.

Finally, the story itself is fictional, speculative, and shows a subjective view on this topic. Although it lays the groundwork for a broader discourse, the story itself primarily focuses on degrowth practices and centres mainly on architectural representation. Evaluations on whether these representations are "realistic" or "unrealistic" are up to you, the reader.

research question(s)

>> HOW CAN ARCHITECTURAL STORYTELLING OF INVESTMENT RUIN PROVIDE (RADICAL) CRITIQUE AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES TO CYCLES OF FINANCIAL SPECULATION? <<

>> HOW ARE THE VALUES OF DEGROWTH REPRESENTED ARCHITECTURALLY IN A POST-CAPITALIST SOCIETY? <<

>> HOW DOES ARCHITECTURE CHANGE - AS OBJECT, PRACTICE AND AGENT - IF LIBERATED FROM MONETARY CONSTRAINTS? <<

methodology

The story encompasses multiple stages, each informing and relating to the other, creating an iterative process. As this project focuses on questioning current power structures, it is carried out in a critical, qualitative manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 17). Critical research seeks to understand and challenge power relations in all aspects of society, focusing on which structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, pp. 60–61). Through its various stages, this thesis is a product of subjective interpretations guided by a transformative worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 9–10).

Considering the questions and aim of this thesis, the most appropriate method for conducting the research is to use qualitative methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 3). The use of this method allows for a more specific focus on a small and purposely selected number of cases and a flexible design of the process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 20). Approaching this topic through more artistic and expressive means supports the intent of making power relations visible, allowing people to practice critique. This thesis does not seek to objectively answer the hypothesis but rather wants to show alternative scenarios and hypothetical futures.

In general, **COUNTER CAPITAL** is based on the counter-project movement of the late 20th century and 'radical' design collectives of the 60s and 70s (Sadler, 2014b; Scott, 2007). Relying on explorations and subjective impressions, this thesis is heavily focused on theoretical research and materials gathered from personal explorations and studies. The thesis includes both 'research for design' and 'design by research' as strategies, as the speculative designs are based on the findings of theoretical studies and analysis, but also help to advance the critique. In the continuous process of the thesis, I will traverse four different stages: gather, collage, imagine, and assemble, summarising the process of critically exploring alternatives and guiding the overarching process.

GATHER!

Step one describes the process of ‘gathering’ - collecting materials in one place and creating an overview. As the connection between architecture and free market dynamics is very complex, gathering material to navigate the web of connections is necessary. In this stage, the tactics of systems thinking are applied to navigate the complexity of the interconnections to identify causes and envision new opportunities (Meadows, 2008, p. 2). Using systems thinking as a tactic allows one to eventually ask ‘what if’ questions and, based on these, be more creative and courageous about the ‘systems’ redesign (Meadows, 2008, pp. 6-7).

Through literature and context studies, the aim is to understand the elements, interconnections and the purpose of the dependencies of architecture. These studies aim to contextualise the bigger context of the system, “architecture and investment”. Understanding the system is essential for the project. Within the literature review, I also start hypothesising on alternative scenarios with changing interconnections and purposes. Overall, this step is more about understanding the broader context and the general workings of the system.

COLLAGE!

Step two is focused on ‘collaging’ – creating an unorganised collection or mixture of various things. This step draws on different fields, creating a comprehensive understanding of the specific context by zooming in from the general context and connecting the scales. During this stage, tactics of speculative mapping are applied and adjusted to create an easy understanding of the site. Speculative mapping allows one to understand the context from different viewpoints (Ait-Touati et al., 2022). By using layer mapping as a form of contextualising, one can understand the development process of the area, highlighting human-made developments and changes.

Another essential part of this step was the four-day site exploration in Hamburg at the beginning of the process. The observations are guided by an adapted version of ethnographic studies, developing an overview of specific processes and behaviours of and on the site (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). These studies and observations are complemented and conducted through hand sketches of the current shape of the site and a curated picture series that visualises the current state of decay and abandonment.

Overall, understanding the space and its effect on the surrounding areas is the central aim of this step, as it lays the foundation for the site-specific speculations in the next step. Being grounded in a context is essential for the continued process of this story.

IMAGINE!

In step three, I focus on ‘imagining’ - forming mental pictures and opinions of alternatives. Envisioning alternatives and creating (mental) images supporting these alternatives is an essential part of this story. Therefore, this step will employ the tactics of speculative design and speculative thinking (Dunne & Raby, 2013). Throughout the process, it is important to note that speculative design can encompass a variety of different levels. In this stage, however, I focus on imaginary and utopian design (Yavuz & Tümtürk, 2017, p. 85) to create a provocative and polarising base for discourse.

Imagining speculative futures and storytelling are interdependent actions (Hoffman, 2022). As storytelling is an essential part of the critical speculation process, this stage also follows a simplified version of the world-building process of Wolf (2012). A more detailed description of the process and the underlying methodology will be explained in the chapter “building a world”.

This step also includes the design aspect of this story, whereas the term “design” should be seen as a description of a process and not as a detailed architectural design. The design, as narrative, is meant to provoke mental images rather than suggest solutions. Although some parts of the proposals might be feasible, the focus remains on the provocative and radical nature of the designs to foster discussions on a paradigm shift.

ASSEMBLE!

The final step of the process is 'assembling' - merging all parts, discussing, curating, and formulating opinions and reflecting. This step is about discourse and extending speculative thinking beyond the story. In a way, this stage acts similarly to a feedback loop in systems thinking (Meadows, 2008, p. 25). As part of this feedback loop, the speculated designs are revisited and broken down into a summary.

Summarising the findings and reflecting on the qualities of the alternative narratives allows one to understand the possibilities. The outcomes of the discourse, though extending the (time) frame of this story, create feedback that could be implemented at any stage of the process to start the process anew. The story starts with the end and can begin at any point. As a summary of the story cycle, a manifesto highlights the essential takeaways of the story and acts as an impulse to start the discussion.

The booklet itself is structured in a way that also fosters discourse. In its format, the booklet is a version of a notebook to which notes can be added. For this, the margins are intentionally left wide and mostly empty. It is there that discourse from a distance happens.

These steps guide the overarching process of the thesis. Although they are not explicitly represented or mentioned throughout the process, fig. 4 on the right illustrates how these four steps translate into the structure of this thesis and ultimately into the story of ruin.

IF DESIGN IS MERELY AN INDUCEMENT TO CONSUME,
THEN WE MUST REJECT DESIGN;

IF ARCHITECTURE IS MERELY THE CODIFYING OF BOURGEOIS MODEL OF OWNERSHIP AND SOCIETY,
THEN WE MUST REJECT ARCHITECTURE;

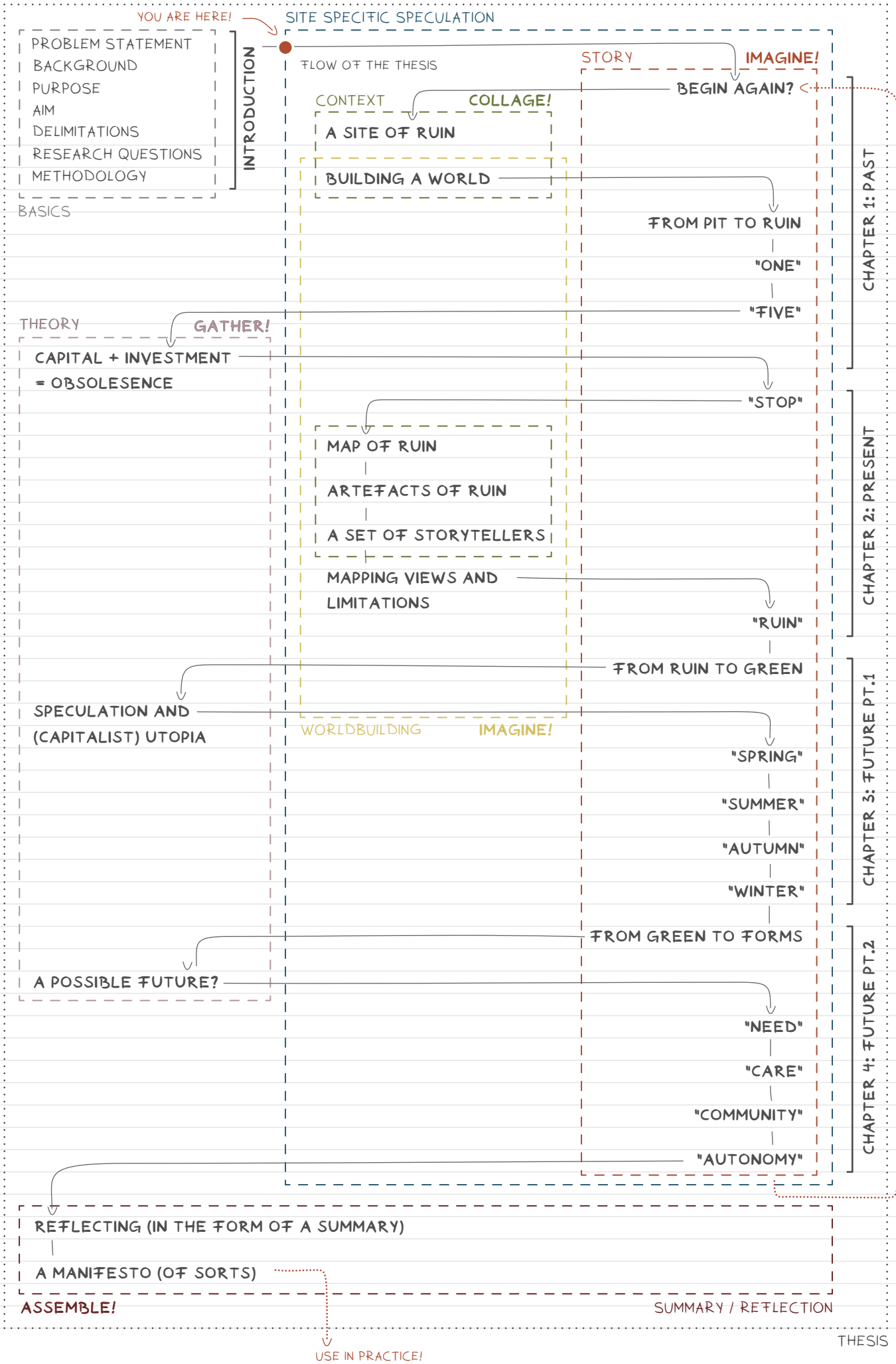
IF ARCHITECTURE AND TOWN PLANNING IS MERELY THE FORMALISATION OF
PRESET UNJUST SOCIAL DIVISIONS,
THEN WE MUST REJECT TOWN PLANNING AND ITS CITIES [...]

UNTIL ALL DESIGN ACTIVITIES ARE AIMED TOWARDS MEETING PRIMARY NEEDS.

UNTIL THEN, DESIGN MUST DISAPPEAR. WE CAN LIVE WITHOUT ARCHITECTURE [...]

(Lang & Menking, 2003, p. 167)

fig. 4 - a map of the thesis flow and topics >



work bank

CYCLES

nonlinear, circular systems and processes repeating in a regular and predictable pattern.

In most cases, they eventually return to their starting point.

DEGROWTH

socio-economic and political concept advocating for an intentional downscaling of production and consumption to achieve ecological sustainability, social equity, and improved quality of life (well-being).

Flows

linear systems and processes that are constantly moving without a clearly defined end. In the case of the thesis, capitalism is referred to as a flow.

INVESTMENT RUIN

real estate and other major architectural developments that were stopped before completion and have not been finished to the full extent. The cause for their existence is often over-speculation (in terms of monetary or social factors)

INVISIBLE USER

object or materials inhabiting a specific place, in this case, a construction site, in ways that are invisible to humans at first glance.

OBSOLESCENCE

a process fundamental to capitalism; a synonym for the temporality of use; the process of accelerated devaluation implying fast “need” for replacement (Abramson, 2017)

SPECULATION

1. defines the process of imagining alternative scenarios and hypothesising on other possibilities of how things could develop. (design)

2. the practice of 'gambling' and trying to gain as much money with the least monetary input, often through acquiring loans and investing in properties.
(money and finance)

SPECULATIVE BUBBLE

a synonym for the real estate 'bubble', its collapse led to the global financial crisis of 2008. A fragile system caused by speculative investments that can collapse at any moment. Its main cause, however, is almost exclusively the highly unethical investment practices of investors and banks aimed at generating profit.

SPECULATIVE LOANS

loans that are granted based on the projected profit of the intended use. A common practice within real estate investment, leading to high risk and fragility of the system

UTOPIA

the vision of a society or place that is “ideal” and where everything is perfect from the perspective of the one who envisions it (socially, environmentally, politically and economically; a counterpart to dystopia)

chapter one

past

STORIES FROM THE PAST MIGHT STILL BE
RELEVANT IN THE PRESENT.

THEY MIGHT BE FUTURES FROM THE PAST.

IN A WORLD FULL OF CYCLES, WHAT IS THE PAST?

begin again?

a site of ruin

building a world

from pit to ruin

“one”

“five”

THEY SAID TO EACH OTHER, "COME, LET'S MAKE BRICKS AND BAKE THEM THOROUGHLY." THEY USED BRICK INSTEAD OF STONE, AND TAR FOR MORTAR. THEN THEY SAID, "COME, LET US BUILD OURSELVES A CITY, WITH A TOWER THAT REACHES TO THE HEAVENS, SO THAT WE MAY MAKE A NAME FOR OURSELVES; OTHERWISE WE WILL BE SCATTERED OVER THE FACE OF THE WHOLE EARTH."

(New International Version Bible, 2011, Genesis 11:3-4)

begin again?

WHAT ONCE WAS A SITE OF RUIN, LIFELESS AND GREY, IS NOW SOMEHOW ALIVE. LOOKING DOWN, THIS "UTOPIA" HAS SOMETHING MAGICAL, SOMETHING CALM, SOMETHING GOOD. WE COULD NOT HAVE IMAGINED A PLACE LIKE THIS IN OUR WILDEST IMAGINATIONS, AND YET HERE IT IS RIGHT IN FRONT OF US, EXISTING LIKE IT HAD EXISTED IN THIS STATE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME. IT WAS NOT WE WHO CHANGED THIS PLACE; IT WAS THE NATURAL FLOW OF TIME AND HAPPENINGS WHICH CREATED THIS PLACE. IT HAS A BEAUTY TO IT, A NATURAL CALMNESS.

TRUSTING IN TIME AND NATURAL FLOWS CREATES SOMETHING SO DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE'RE USED TO, YET STRANGELY SO BEAUTIFUL. EVEN THOUGH WE CAN NOT EXPERIENCE IT, JUST BEING ABLE TO LOOK AT IT, WE FEEL AT HOME. THE NOT KNOWING OF WHAT COMES NEXT AND THE INABILITY TO FORCE CHANGE BRING MEANINGFULNESS TO THE CREATION OF NEW EXISTENCES. IT IS THE NATURAL ORDER FOR ALL TO STRIVE TOWARDS CREATING SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT IN THEIR LIFETIMES, BUT SOMETIMES WE FORGET WHAT REALLY MATTERS. IN CASES LIKE THESE, WE MUST DETACH OURSELVES, ALWAYS REMEMBERING THAT NOTHING FORCED IS PERFECT. AND IT IS OFTEN THE IMPERFECTIONS WE FIND THAT MAKE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL AND VALUABLE.

BEAUTY AND VALUE ARE, OF COURSE, VERY SUBJECTIVE FEELINGS, AND EACH OF US SEES VALUE AND BEAUTY ELSEWHERE. ALL OUR PERCEPTIONS, HOWEVER, HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON: WE ALL FIND BEAUTY AND VALUE IN THE NATURAL PROCESSES OF SLOWNESS AND IN SILENCE. SOMETIMES WE JUST HAVE TO STAND IN SILENCE, AWAY FROM THE NOISES OF OUR SURROUNDINGS, AND TAKE A LOOK AT THE CHANGES HAPPENING AROUND US AND RIGHT IN FRONT OF OUR EYES.

NOW WE STAND LOOKING DOWN AT WHAT WAS ONCE THE RUIN OF OTHER WAYS. IT IS NOT THE IDEA THAT CAUSED THE FAILURE, BUT THE SHEER GREED IT CREATED. WE THOUGHT WE COULD CONQUER SLOWNESS BY FORCING ORDER AND SPEED, NOT REALISING THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR ACTIONS. THE HOPE OF SOMETHING GREAT AND SPECTACULAR USED TO CARRY OUR IDEAS TOWARDS US.

IN SILENCE LIES THE POWER OF SLOWNESS, AND IN SLOWNESS LIES PROGRESS. THE NATURAL WAY OF THINGS HAS ALWAYS BEEN SLOW BUT STEADY. YET WE CHOSE TO IGNORE THESE CYCLES AND PLAY ALMIGHTY NATURE-CONQUERING BEINGS.

AND WITH THIS, WE SLOWLY CLOSE OUR EYES, ONE AFTER THE OTHER, NOT KNOWING WHERE AND WHAT WILL BE NEXT. BUT SOMEHOW WE FOUND PEACE IN THIS UNCERTAINTY, AS UNCOMFORTABLE AS IT MIGHT BE, WE NOW UNDERSTAND: THINGS SHOULD NOT BE FORCED. AND THEN MAYBE SOONER, OR LATER, WE WILL OPEN OUR EYES AGAIN. AND WITH THAT, THE LONG NOTHINGNESS BEGINS...

SILENCE AND DARKNESS.

ANOTHER PIT.

ANOTHER BREATH.

ANOTHER LIFE.



fig. 5 - site of the Elbtower, Hamburg

IF WE LOOK AT THE HAFENCITY NOW, IT SURELY HAS SOME GREAT IDEAS BUT THE PLANNING SEEMS OUTDATED.

DOES A CITY / DEVELOPMENT WHICH ALREADY HAS REMNANTS OF "STARCHITECTURE" STILL NEED MORE?

WHY SO GREEDY FOR ANOTHER BIG SPECTACLE?

a site of ruin

The construction site of the ‘Elbtower’ is part of the larger urban redevelopment project known as HafenCity, Europe’s largest inner-city urban renewal initiative (HafenCity Hamburg GmbH, n.d.). Plans for HafenCity were initiated in the late 1990s with the vision of creating a sustainable urban environment that prioritised energy efficiency, urban design, and the integration of green spaces. Beginning in the early 2000s, the transformation of the former port of Hamburg into an urban quarter began, with construction and development still ongoing. With its connection to the historic ‘Speicherstadt,’ the development area is intended to evolve into a new city centre (HafenCity Hamburg GmbH, n.d.).

The site of the Elbtower is positioned at the south eastern edge of this development, representing the End of it, while its (intended) counterpart, the Elbphilharmonie, positioned at the north western edge, marks its starting point.

The site is bordered to the north by water, to the east by a big street (3 lanes in each direction and two separate in the middle), and to the west by train tracks leading to the central station, as well as the ‘Elbbrücken’ underground and local railway station. These physical boundaries not only restrict public access to the site but also introduce additional constraints, such as high noise levels and air pollution.

Due to its prominent location within the urban fabric, the site holds significant visibility, serving as the first impression of the city for those arriving by train or car from the south, as both the tracks and the motorway are key infrastructure connections for the city. This visibility reinforces

its intended role as a flagship project, symbolising the culmination of the HafenCity development.

The ‘Elbtower’ stands as the final landmark project of HafenCity and was envisioned as the crowning achievement of this decades-long transformation. Plans for the tower have been in progress since March 2017, when initial concepts were unveiled at the international real estate fair MIPIM in Cannes. Conceived as a sculptural skyscraper under 200 meters tall, the tower was intended to create a distinctive gateway into the city (hamburg.de, 2017). In February 2018, Hamburg’s mayor, alongside the state minister for Urban Development and Environment and the CEO of HafenCity GmbH, announced the winning design competition entry (Stadt Hamburg, 2018).

The winning design by David Chipperfield Architects envisioned the ‘Elbtower’ as the culmination of HafenCity’s development and a complementary counterpart to the ‘Elbphilharmonie.’ Inspired by the Elbphilharmonie’s wave-like roof, the tower’s design extends that movement, culminating in an architectural crescendo. Intended as a mixed-use skyscraper, the tower was planned to include hotel spaces, offices, cultural venues, and a museum, with a public viewing balcony on the 55th floor at 225 meters. Though the original height specified in the competition was 200 meters, subsequent revisions increased the tower’s height to 233 meters and eventually 245 meters, making it Germany’s third-tallest building upon completion.

To protect the project from ruin, the city administration included a clause in the sales contract granting a repurchase right if the investor attempted to resell the site. Additionally, before being able to purchase the site, the investor was required to secure pre-commitments for 30% of the tower’s rentable space to avoid construction delays (NDR, 2024a). Despite all these precautions, construction was halted in October 2023 after the investor failed to pay the construction company. By that time, the tower had reached a height of approximately 100 meters, and the first 25 floors were completed (NDR, 2024b). Ultimately, in January 2024, the investor filed for insolvency, leading to a long liquidation process (NDR, 2024a), which as of May 2025 is still ongoing.

Ever since October 2023, the site has remained untouched, with only “emergency operations” running to keep the building from collapsing, leaving the remains of the construction to the natural elements. Even though there have been glimmers of hope to save the project from total ruin (Feldhaus, 2024; NDR, 2024c), the state of the Elbotwer now paints a different picture. The ruin of the Elbtower sits abandoned on the site, surrounded by piles of leftover materials, with its fate still undecided.

In its current pose, the Elbtower towers in its skeletal state over the city of Hamburg and often referred to as “kurzer Olaf”, after the former mayor of Hamburg (and now former chancellor of Germany), Olaf Scholz, who was a strong advocate and a key figure in the process of starting and developing the project (NDR, 2024b). Across the train tracks, other construction within the development of the Hafen City is still ongoing.

AS OF MAY 2025, THERE IS STILL NO RESULT/SOLUTION IN SIGHT

"KURZER OLAF" IS GERMAN FOR "SHORT OLAF"



fig. 6 - Elbtower (Hamburg), 18.02.2025

IF WE PRETEND FOR A MOMENT THAT THE ELBTOWER WILL NOT BE COMPLETED AND REMAIN A SKELETAL STRUCTURE, AND THINK ABOUT PROCESSES THAT WOULD HAPPEN, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

WHAT WOULD THE FUTURE OF THE ELBTOWER LOOK LIKE IF IT WERE TO REMAIN A CONCRETE STRUCTURE?

LET'S DELVE INTO A WORLD, A STORY THAT EXPLORES A POSSIBLE FUTURE OF THE ELBTOWER!

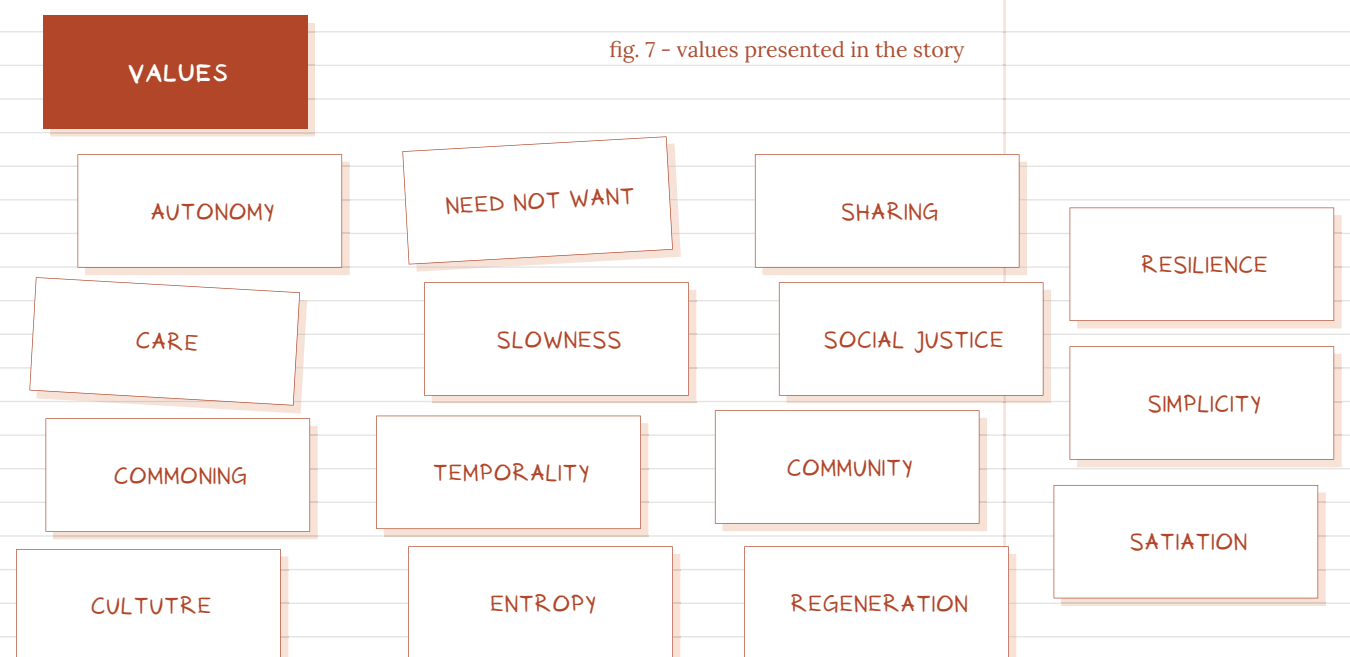
building a world

The process of building the (fictional) world in which this story is anchored is loosely based on the process of worldbuilding described by Mark Wolf in his book "Building Imaginary Worlds" (2012). The previous questions served as the kickstarters for this development process. Formulating them as design and exploration prompts was the first step in building the world in which a possible future for the Elbtower is explored.

The next step in this process was to evaluate the findings of the theoretical exploration and, based on these, define the values that should be represented through the story. These values represent the main concepts or "realms" (Wolf, 2012) of the fictional world. Starting with the underlying concepts of this world helps define interactions and critically explore how these different values intersect. These intersections and interplays of values are then highlighted through storytelling, which also underscores the necessity of these values (Megahed et al., 2016). This is where architecture and storytelling merge, as architecture and the processes described become a reflection of the central values.

As they are less graspable than the present or the past, futures rely solely on speculation, which allows a possible future to be more critical of prevalent or probable trajectories for the future (Wakkary & Oogjes, 2025).

Though the story does not only tell a story of a future but also a past, it needed to be rooted in a set context, which allows for exploration of the "otherness" of the future of the process by still maintaining a relation to the "actual" world (Fischer & Mehnert, 2021). Through that, one can create a possible world which does not oppose the workings of the actual world, but is connected through sets of objects and environments. This liberty of reflecting on current issues through a world that is freed from the practical constraints of realisation and the resulting limitations allows the storyteller to be more liberal in the way the case of the story is made.



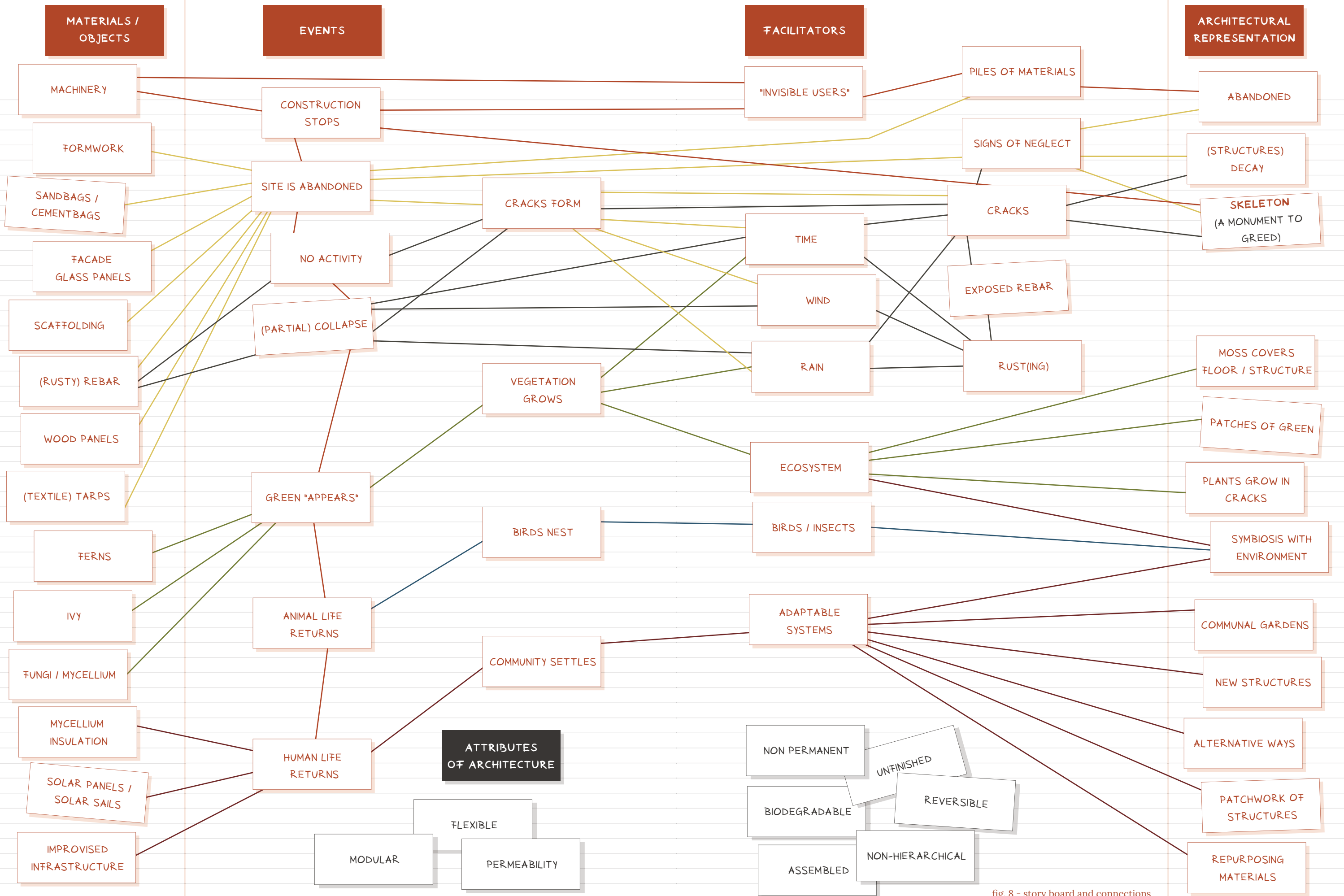


fig. 8 - storyboard and connections

After setting up the values, the next step is to set up the physical constraints and boundaries of the world. As the world is limited to the boundaries of the construction site of the Elbtower, there was no need to “design” these constraints. Therefore, this step is mostly comparable to a context study. Within that exploration, the vision of a potential future comes together.

In general, this form of speculation, based on a specific site, is always a negotiation between the location itself, the values essential to the story, and the possibilities and processes that unfold within it. The world and story created through this site-specific speculation are incredibly limited and dependent on my observations and findings during on-site explorations.

Following this, characters are designed, which, in their own ways, are essential to the story. In the case of this story, however, the site is at least equally as important as the characters. Creating characters outside of the constraints of typical narratives allows me, the storyteller, to develop them as metaphors that depict and exaggerate current practices.

In the final step, I created a storyboard that illustrates the connections between various aspects of the world or story. Based on observations and imaginings of processes that could or might occur, I speculated on how these processes could be interpreted and manifest themselves as architectural elements and attributes.

TO MAKE THE STORY COMPREHENSIBLE WITHOUT THE SURROUNDING WORK, I HAVE WRITTEN SEVERAL FICTIONAL BOOK CHAPTERS THAT APPEAR BEFORE EXPLORING A NEW CYCLE. THEY DEMONSTRATE THE OVERALL WORKINGS OF THE WORLD, WHICH ARE NOT SPECIFIED IN THE STORY. THESE CHAPTERS ARE WRITTEN IN RED AND END WITH THE NOTE:
(AN EXCERPT FROM ...)

ADDITIONALLY, THE STORY ITSELF CHANGES PACE, REFLECTING THE DIFFERENCES IN THE SPEED OF EACH PROCESS.

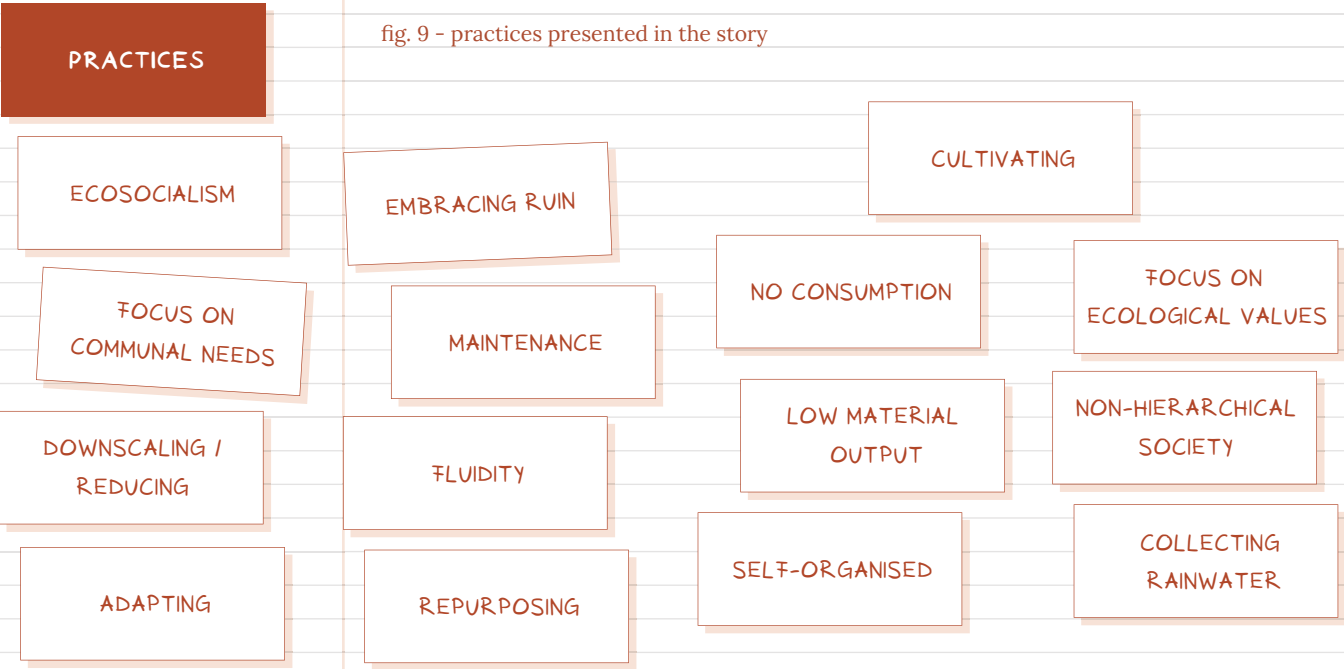


fig. 10 - Elbtower (Hamburg), 16.02.2025



fig. 11 - Elbtower (Hamburg), 17.02.2025

from pit to ruin

“Construction machines, unlike other beings, live multiple lives. With every new assembly and site they visit, a new life begins. Previous lives, however, are not forgotten; they are remembered as dreams and memories shaping their individual and collective actions. To some extent, these immaterial beings are immortal, at least as long as they are cared for.

Each of these countless lifetimes starts in a similar way. It all begins with staring down into a dark pit of nothingness. By the end of each lifetime, a building will have risen out of the pit. Their life consists of observing processes of structures rising from the ground, not knowing when their guidance and support are no longer needed.

The act of rising has been the same as long as these machines have existed, and even way before. In the beginning, there is an idea, nothing “new” or “groundbreaking”; often, these ideas would be something that had been done thousands of times before, just packaged in a different outer shell and always following the same system.

In every lifetime, they help a different building rise from the ground. Initially, buildings were unique and always different, but now they all look the same. Of course, the idea of a tower is as old as time itself, but even in the beginning, these towers were different. Now, they are big and tall, reflecting sun rays from the hull like a sea of dazzling stars; each time, they are the same spectacle, only in a different place.

The cycle of life ends in silence, and a new one starts the same.”

(An excerpt from “The Secret Lives of Machines”)

“one”

LIFE BEGINS WITH SILENCE.
THEN, QUICK BURSTS OF SHARP, HIGH-PITCHED NOISES!
MARKING THE BEGINNING OF A NEW CYCLE.

A NEW PLACE.
A NEW PIT.
A NEW STRUCTURE.

THIS IS THE STORY OF A LIFETIME SO UNUSUAL AND DIFFERENT THAT ONLY A FEW OF US MIGHT EVER HAVE THE CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE; THIS IS THE STORY OF A PROMISE, A PROCESS, AND SOMETHING UNEXPECTED. AS WE REMEMBER THIS STORY FROM BEYOND..

THERE I WAS, A NEW LIFETIME WAS ABOUT TO BEGIN. THE START OF A NEW LIFETIME FEELS LIKE SUDDENLY BEING WOKEN UP FROM A LONG, PEACEFUL SLEEP. INDEED, A FEELING ONE MIGHT NEVER GET USED TO, EVEN THOUGH WE EXPERIENCE THIS SENSATION IN EVERY LIFETIME.

THE STAGES OF LIFE HAVE BEEN THE SAME SINCE THE BEGINNING. IN FAST CYCLES, THEY REPEAT OVER AND OVER AGAIN. FOREVER THE SAME, NEVER DIFFERING FROM EACH OTHER. LIFE IS A CONSTANT AND FAST FLOW CONNECTING ALL LIFETIMES IN AN ENDLESS LOOP.

	PIT. STRUCTURE. SHIMMERS. NOTHING.	OF THE SANDY GROUND AND THE BLUE OF THE WATER.
	YET HOW LONG ONE LIFETIME LASTS IS ALWAYS UNCERTAIN. ONE THING, HOWEVER, WAS ALWAYS CERTAIN: MORE OF MY KIND WOULD JOIN ME IN THIS PECULIAR PLACE. THERE ARE LIFETIMES WHEN IT WOULD BE JUST A FEW, BUT THIS TIME IT FEELS AS IF THERE WILL BE MORE, AND EVEN IF WE CAN NOT SEE EACH OTHER AT TIMES, WE STILL KNOW THAT THE OTHERS ARE AROUND.	THIS SITE IS STRANGE, UNUSUAL, AND TO A CERTAIN EXTENT EVEN SOMEWHAT UNSETTLING. IT FEELS LIKE SOMETHING ONE DOESN'T COME ACROSS THAT OFTEN. IN ITS ENDLESS NOTHINGNESS, THIS SITE RESEMBLES AN EMPTY AND LIFELESS PLAIN, UNNATURAL AND FORCED TO EXIST WITHIN ITS CONSTRAINTS. AND SO THIS PLACE IS A BLANK CANVAS FOR CREATION AND A GROWING BUILDING, A PLACE OF ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES. AND AT THE CENTRE OF THIS PLAIN, A DARK AND GREY CONCRETE PIT, OUT OF WHICH, AS TIME PASSES, I WILL SEE A BUILDING RISE AND END IN SHIMMERING LIGHT.
	A SCREAM. THEN ANOTHER. AND ANOTHER.	SOON AFTER I GREW ACCUSTOMED TO THIS STRANGE PLACE, THE PIT WAS SURROUNDED BY SCATTERED PILES OF MATERIALS. NOW, EVERYTHING WAS PREPARED FOR THE BUILDING TO RISE OUT OF THE PIT, THE SHARP WHISTLES GREW LOUDER, AND THAT'S HOW I KNEW THE BUILDING WAS ABOUT TO START TO RISE OUT OF THE DEPTHS OF THE PIT.
	AS MOMENTS PASS, THE FREQUENCY OF PIERCING NOISES INCREASES RAPIDLY. IN PERFECTLY TIMED INTERVALS, THESE NOISES CAME AND WENT. QUICKLY, THEY MORPHED INTO THE CONSTANT WHISTLE I'VE GROWN USED TO THROUGHOUT MY COUNTLESS LIFETIMES. AS I OPENED MY EYES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THIS STRANGE NEW PLACE, I REALISED THIS PLACE WAS UNLIKE ANY I HAD SEEN IN ANY OF MY LIFETIMES BEFORE.	“five”
		TIME PASSES, AND NOW WE ARE FIVE.
	AS THE FIRST RAYS OF LIGHT REACHED MY EYES, ONLY FOR A SPLIT SECOND, I SAW A STRANGE, ALMOST TRIANGULAR FORM ON THE GROUND. OVER TIME, AS I ADJUSTED TO THE BRIGHTNESS, THE BLURRINESS OF MY VISION FADED AWAY. IN DUE TIME, THE IMAGE OF WHAT I WAS LOOKING AT STARTED TO CLEAR.	THROUGH THE DESCRIPTIONS AND STORIES THE OTHERS SHARE, THE COMPLETE PICTURE OF THE SITE BECOMES CLEAR TO US ALL. TOGETHER, WE CREATE AN IMAGE OF EVERY DETAIL AND ELEMENT OF THIS SITE. WE OBSERVE AS A STRUCTURE SLOWLY BEGINS TO RISE OUT OF THE GROUND. IN THIS PROCESS OF RISING, WE ARE SUPPORTING THE STRUCTURE IN ITS DEVELOPMENT AS BEST AS WE CAN.
	IN FRONT OF ME WAS THE HUGE AND STRANGELY FORMED PIT, EXTENDING FAR BEYOND MY HORIZON. WITH ITS ODDNESS, HERALDING THE ARRIVAL OF SOMETHING UNIQUE, TRIGGERING FANTASTIC IMAGES OF THE SPECTACLE THIS BUILDING WILL BE. HOW, IN THE END, ITS FACADE WILL SHIMMER LIKE A MIRROR BALL IN BRIGHT DAYLIGHT. A SPECTACLE AT THE END.	AS WE UNDERSTAND THE COMPLETE SCOPE OF THIS SITE, WE NOW KNOW IT BORDERS NOT ONLY AN UNNATURAL-LOOKING BODY OF WATER BUT ALSO A GLASS BUILDING WITH, WHAT SEEMS TO BE, ENDLESS LADDERS EXTENDING OUT OF EACH END.
	IMAGES FLASH, THOUGHTS RUSH THROUGH MY MIND, AND IDEAS START TO FLOURISH. WHAT WILL THIS STRUCTURE BE? HOW WILL THE BUILDING BE IN THE END, AS A SPECTACLE? A GLORIOUS GESTURE OF SHIMMERING LIGHT. AFTER THIS FIRST RUSH OF THOUGHTS AND IMAGES, I BEGAN TO ADJUST MY VISION. ZOOMING OUT. TRYING TO SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE. THE CONTEXT. UNDERSTAND IT ALL. BUT ALWAYS ZOOMING IN AGAIN TO SEE EVEN THE SMALL DETAILS OF THIS STRANGE PLACE.	SOON, A SQUARE ROSE OUT OF THE PIT, SURROUNDED BY GREY CONCRETE PLAINS. DIVIDED INTO SMALLER SQUARES, IT CREATED THE SPINE OF THE RISING STRUCTURE. FOLLOWED BY ROUND PILLARS, FORMING ANOTHER DENTED SQUARE, SURROUNDING THE SMALLER SQUARES; ITS BOUNDARIES WERE SET, BUT THE SHAPE SEEMED ODD. IT STILL WAS A SQUARE, BUT MORE ORGANIC AND TWISTED THAN USUAL. AS THE SQUARE TWISTED, WE KNEW WHAT WAS RISING BENEATH OUR EYES.
	THE PIT IS EVEN BIGGER THAN IMAGINED IN THE BEGINNING, EXTENDING BEYOND MY HORIZON. WHEN ZOOMING OUT, I WOULD NORMALLY SEE THE CONTEXT, THE SURROUNDINGS. WHERE NORMALLY THERE WOULD BE OTHER STRUCTURES SURROUNDING THE PIT, THIS TIME THERE WAS NOTHING. JUST A FLAT AND EMPTY PLAIN STRETCHING BEYOND MY HORIZON, AND SURROUNDED BY EMPTINESS. THE ONLY THING BRINGING CHANGE TO THIS PLAIN WAS THE SHADES OF YELLOW SAND ON THE GROUND. THIS SITE WAS SO DIFFERENT, SO PECULIAR, SO UNUSUAL.	A TOWER. TWISTING. TURNING.
	ON THE HORIZON, I CAN SEE SOMETHING THAT RESEMBLES WATER, MAYBE SOME SORT OF LAKE OR RIVER. SOMETHING ABOUT IT SEEMS STRANGE, HOWEVER; ITS EDGE SEEMS UNNATURALLY STRAIGHT AND SHARP, AS IF IT WAS CREATED ON PURPOSE, A STRAIGHT AND SHARP LINE MARKS THE CHANGE BETWEEN THE YELLOW	SEEING A TOWER RISE MARKS AN IMPRESSIVE LIFETIME, THIS REALISATION IS NOW ACCOMPANIED BY DISAPPOINTMENT. OBSERVING A TOWER RISE IS NOTHING EXCITING; WE HAVE SEEN THIS PROCESS COUNTLESS TIMES BEFORE, AND THOUGH THEIR FORMS CHANGE, THE PROCESS IS ALWAYS THE SAME. THE SPECTACLE AT THE END WAS ALREADY PREDETERMINED FROM THE BEGINNING.
		WITHIN MOMENTS, THE SQUARE WAS EXTENDED TO A LONG RECTANGLE, PARALLEL TO THE SHARP WATER BORDER. LIKE THE ORIGINAL, THE EDGES OF THE RECTANGLE

fig. 12 - Elbtower (Hamburg), 18.02.2025



ARE FRAMED WITH A ROW OF ROUND PILLARS. AT ONE EDGE, THE PILLARS EVEN SEEMED TO FALL BACK TO THE GROUND, AS THE DOTS TURNED INTO THICK LINES.

AS THE STRUCTURE RISES OUT OF THE PIT, THE GREY OF THE CONCRETE IS INTERRUPTED WITH AREAS OF YELLOW. ADAPTING AND CONSTANTLY CHANGING, THE STRUCTURE TAKES OVER. ON ITS EDGES, COLUMNS RISE. THEN EVEN SMALLER DOTS APPEAR, JUST TO BE COVERED BY VAST AREAS OF YELLOW FORMWORK.

THE SITE IS IN CONSTANT CHANGE. AS QUICKLY AS THE YELLOW APPEARS, IT IS REPLACED WITH THE GREY OF THE CONCRETE AGAIN. THIS CYCLE UNFOLDS IN EVERY CORNER OF THE RISING STRUCTURE, AN ENDLESS PROCESS SEEMING UNSTOPPABLE, EVEN INFALLIBLE. GROWING FROM SQUARE TO RECTANGLE AND FINALLY TO A TRIANGLE, THE STRUCTURE SLOWLY EMBRACES THE ODD SHAPE OF THE SITE.

GREY TURNS YELLOW.
YELLOW TURNS RED.
AND RED TURNS GREY. STARTING THE CYCLE ALL OVER AGAIN.

ACCOMPANIED BY CONSTANT WHISTLES, THE STRUCTURE RISES AS IT COMES CLOSER. SOMETIMES IT IS EVEN SO CLOSE THAT WE COULD ALMOST TOUCH IT. THEN, IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, WE GROW AND SEE THE STRUCTURE AS A WHOLE AGAIN.

THE INDENTED SQUARE, THE TOWER, RISES FASTER THAN THE REST. IN ITS PROCESS OF GROWING, IT TWISTS AND TURNS, SEEMINGLY TRYING TO FIND THE IDEAL POSITION TO STAY. IT FEELS RESTLESS, UNEASY, RUSHED. STILL, IT GROWS CLOSER WITH EVERY PASSING MOMENT.

IN TIME, THE WHISTLES GET LOUDER, THEN THEY BECOME QUIETER. IT IS A CONSTANT CHANGE, SOMETIMES, THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN WE DON'T HEAR ANYTHING AT ALL. IN THESE QUICK MOMENTS OF SILENCE, WE LOOK DOWN AND ADMIRE THE BEAUTIFUL CHAOS ON THIS SITE. EVEN THOUGH THE SHIMMERING SPECTACLE AT THE END IS THE ONE THING ALL YEARN FOR, THERE IS STILL AN UNDENIABLE, MAYBE EVEN INVISIBLE, BEAUTY IN CHAOS.

MOMENTS PASS, RESEMBLING AN ENDLESSLY TURNING STAIRCASE, THE STRUCTURE REACHES TOWARDS US.

capital(ism) + investment = obsolescence

Markets in their own right are not just the most basic economic social phenomenon, but also a central doctrine of capitalism. In their simplest form, markets are mechanisms in which goods and services are voluntarily exchanged (Miller & Geltner, 2005). Looking at it from a different angle, capitalist markets are also the outcome of how each actor within that market is organised and governed, but also how they interact with each other (Mazzucato, 2021).

In a strong economic market, investing in real estate to make a profit seems infallible (Goddard & Marcum, 2012). However, as the 2008 financial crisis demonstrated, market booms are often followed by inevitable declines. Goddard and Marcum (2012) describe the years before 2008 as the so-called 'Yes Era,' a time when it was especially easy to borrow money. With the increased amount of money borrowed, often without sufficient security, money becomes speculative, and the entire system becomes fragile. Even recent market developments show that our global market is a highly fragile system and not at all infallible, as it is being propagated.

Reflecting on the 2008 real estate bubble failure reveals that these speculative loans, where money is borrowed based on a hypothetical return, are significantly riskier than traditional value-based investments. While value investments are backed by consistent net cash flow, speculative investments rely solely on the anticipated revenue upon project completion. Nevertheless, speculative loans remain a common practice (Goddard & Marcum, 2012).

THE TENDENCY FOR SPECULATIVE BUBBLES TO GROW AND THEN CONTRACT CAN MAKE FOR VERY UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH.

(Shiller, 2000, p. 204)

The real estate investment market is inherently complex, involving diverse strategies, loan types, risks, legal considerations, and property valuation methods. Understanding monetary flows requires analysing the connections between economic participants and the interdependence of their profit mechanisms. Based on the conceptual model of the real estate investment environment (Pyhrr & Cooper, 1982), we can understand the connections of market participants and their respective interests and dependencies. With architecture at the centre, the pressure points and constraints on architectural practice become increasingly evident, emphasising the need for change.

Ling and Archer (2013) argue that its prominence makes real estate and the decisions for all involved important, yet this is, in their view, only based on presence and the involvement of monetary capital; other factors are completely disregarded in calculations of value or benefit. They continue to state that all decisions about acquisition, disposition or improvement depend on some sort of assessment by comparing the value of the intended action (monetary) with the immediate cost (Ling & Archer, 2013). The same is true for new projects where the feasibility is determined by comparing the relationship between the current level of property prices and the construction cost (which also includes the monetary profit of the investor). To be feasible, these calculations need to hit at least an equilibrium (Gritti et al., 2018; Ling & Archer, 2013; Miller & Geltner, 2005).

The cycle of real estate investments is quite simply explained. It starts with a declining vacancy in a time of no new construction. This is then followed by the beginning and accelerating construction, and a continuously declining vacancy. After market saturation is reached, vacancy increases again, but construction is unable to stop, which is then followed by a time of vacancy increase at a decreasing rate, and some construction. In its flow, this cycle is doomed. Developing a project takes time, and because of the constraints presented by the cycle, projects are started even before there is sufficient demand. This is mainly rooted in the fear and assumption that someone else might build first (Miller & Geltner, 2005). Arguably, this is the same flow and practice paired with speculative loans that caused the current state of the Elbtower.

At its core, the idea of real estate investment follows one simple rule: presumably creating attractiveness of a place through investment in a building or structure (Ling & Archer, 2013). And with that practice, investment follows the core idea of capitalism, creating a spectacle (Sadler, 2014a). Looking at the Elbtower in Hamburg, these statements can not be more true. It was promised as a grand structure and a grand gesture for the city and initiated by the then mayor of the city (Tagesschau, 2023). This also shows that not only do governments have a great influence on the real estate market (Denec, 2018; Ling & Archer, 2013), but also shows that to evoke change within capitalist practices, governments need to change (Mazzucato, 2021). Already in 2000, Robert Shiller stated that “the sense of victory of capitalist economies” (2000, p. 208) is not likely to persist indefinitely. And with that, he also states that to be less vulnerable to market crisis, one needs to decrease one’s reliance on market speculations (Shiller, 2000). When applying this statement to the status quo of architecture on a large scale, this also means to rid architecture of its dependencies on investment.

[OBsolescence] states that architectural function and worth are quantifiable and ultimately decrease over time. (Abramson, 2017, p. 5)

(Abramson, 2017, p. 5)

Real estate and capitalism are both fast-paced processes that rely on the phenomenon of obsolescence, the temporality of use. Obsolescence in architecture is reached once a building is no longer able to produce a proper return (Abramson, 2017). At the same time, this means that architecture has become a commodity and a good that is disposable as any other good on the open market (Deneç, 2018; Mangold IV, 2011; Shields, 1998). Essentially, what started in the early 20th century still exists today; it is a perfect representation of how economic thinking is applied to the built environment and how its temporality is marketed as “creative destruction” (Abramson, 2017).

Architecture has lost its significance by succumbing to the fast-paced market exchanges of modern society. In being commercialised and created for profit (Gritti et al., 2018; Shields, 1998), the lifetime of buildings decreases, a process justified by the “inevitable process of metropolitan change (Abramson, 2017, p. 5). To break the equation of capital(ism) + investment = obsolescence, there is a need to reevaluate how value in investment is defined. And with that, there is a need to look beyond profit margins and monetary returns, and emphasise immaterial values that should be considered within the evaluation of profitability!

chapter two

present

STRUCTURES RISE AND FAIL AND TURN TO RUIN.
ABANDONED WE LOOK.

WE EXPLORE RUIN AND DISCOVER THE SECRETS IT
MAY HOLD.

IN A WORLD FULL OF RUIN, WHAT IS STILL LEFT?

“stop”

map of ruin

artefacts of ruin

a set of characters

mapping movements

“ruin”

IN THE RIGID PROCESS OF PLANNED PRODUCTION, ARCHITECTURE LOSES ITS SPECIFIC DIMENSION, AT LEAST IN THE TRADITIONAL SENSE. SINCE IT IS "EXCEPTIONAL IN RESPECT TO THE HOMOGENEITY OF THE CITY, THE ARCHITECTURAL OBJECT IS COMPLETELY DISSOLVED"

(Tafuri 1976, p.105)

“stop”

TO OUR SURPRISE, THE STRUCTURE RISES FASTER THAN WE EXPECTED, GETTING CLOSER AND CLOSER.

THE GROUND CHANGES ITS COLOURS FROM SHADES OF SANDY YELLOW TO SHADES OF GREY AND RED. PILES OF MATERIALS APPEAR ALL OVER THE SITE, JUST TO DISAPPEAR SOON AFTER. ACCOMPANIED BY THE STEADY WHISTLE, WE CAN FEEL THE LIFE ALL AROUND THE STRUCTURE.

SILENC

THE SUDDEN SILENCE MADE OUR BREATHS STOP FOR A SHORT WHILE. IT WAS UNEXPECTED, NOT UNUSUAL. IN INTERVALS, THE NOISE WOULD COME AND GO, BUT THIS TIME THE SILENCE CONTINUED. HOW CAN THIS BE? THE SITE AROUND THIS STRUCTURE WAS BUSTLING WITH LIFE JUST MOMENTS AGO, AND NOW?

NOTHING

NORMALLY, THERE WOULD BE SIGNS BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE LONG SILENCE, WHICH MARKS OUR CLOSE DEPARTURE FROM A PLACE AND THE END OF A LIFETIME. THE COMPLETED BUILDING WOULD START TO SHIMMER AS THE FINAL LAYER REFLECTS EVERY LAST RAY OF SUNLIGHT, MARKING THE SPECTACLE AT THE END OF OUR TIME. BUT LOOKING DOWN, THIS TIME, THIS WAS NOT THE CASE.

THE STRUCTURE IS STILL GREY, UNFINISHED, AND NOT THE SPECTACLE ONE WOULD EXPECT AT THE END OF THIS PROCESS. WE KNOW THIS IS NOT HOW IT IS SUPPOSED TO BE, BUT WE ASK OURSELVES, WHAT CAUSED THIS TRAGEDY?

AS TIME PASSES, THE SKELETON STANDS PROUDLY. THERE IS STILL HOPE IN THE AIR THAT THE STRUCTURE WILL SOON CONTINUE TO RISE TO HER SPARKLING GLORY, BUT EVERY PASSING MOMENT TAINTS THIS HOPE, THIS PROMISE. A FUTURE LEFT TO PASSING TIME.

PROMISE AND HOPE DIMINISH, AND WITH IT, THE REALISATION SETTLES THAT SEEING THE LIGHT AT THE END, TURNS FROM EXPECTED REALITY TO A DISTANT WISH OF UTOPIA. A CONCRETE SKELETON IS THE ONLY THING THAT REMAINS, AND ITS ONLY COMPANIONS, BESIDES US, ARE THE PILES OF MATERIALS SCATTERED ON IT AND AROUND.

THE CORPSE OF THE STRUCTURE IS NOT AS LIFELESS AS WE ORIGINALLY THOUGHT. THE PILES OF MATERIAL MELT AND MERGE WITH THE CONCRETE, AND TIME LEAVES ITS MARKS IN STRANGE WAYS. IN THEIR FINAL RESTING PLACES, THE PILES OF REBAR SEEM TO MELT, STAINING THE GREY OF THE CONCRETE IN THEIR RED-ISH TONES.

THEY ARE LEAVING MARK

THEY ARE AGEIN

THE CYCLE OF MATERIAL LIFE

AROUND AND UPON US, RAIN POURS DOWN IN SILVER STRINGS, SOMETIMES SHORT, AND SOMETIMES FOR MOMENTS ON END. THE OH SO FAMILIAR WHISTLE OF RISING STRUCTURES IS STILL ONLY HEARD IN THE DISTANCE. SURROUNDED IN SILENCE, THE TOWER IS SLOWLY CHANGING. WITH TIME, THE UNCOMFORTABLE, UNNATURAL

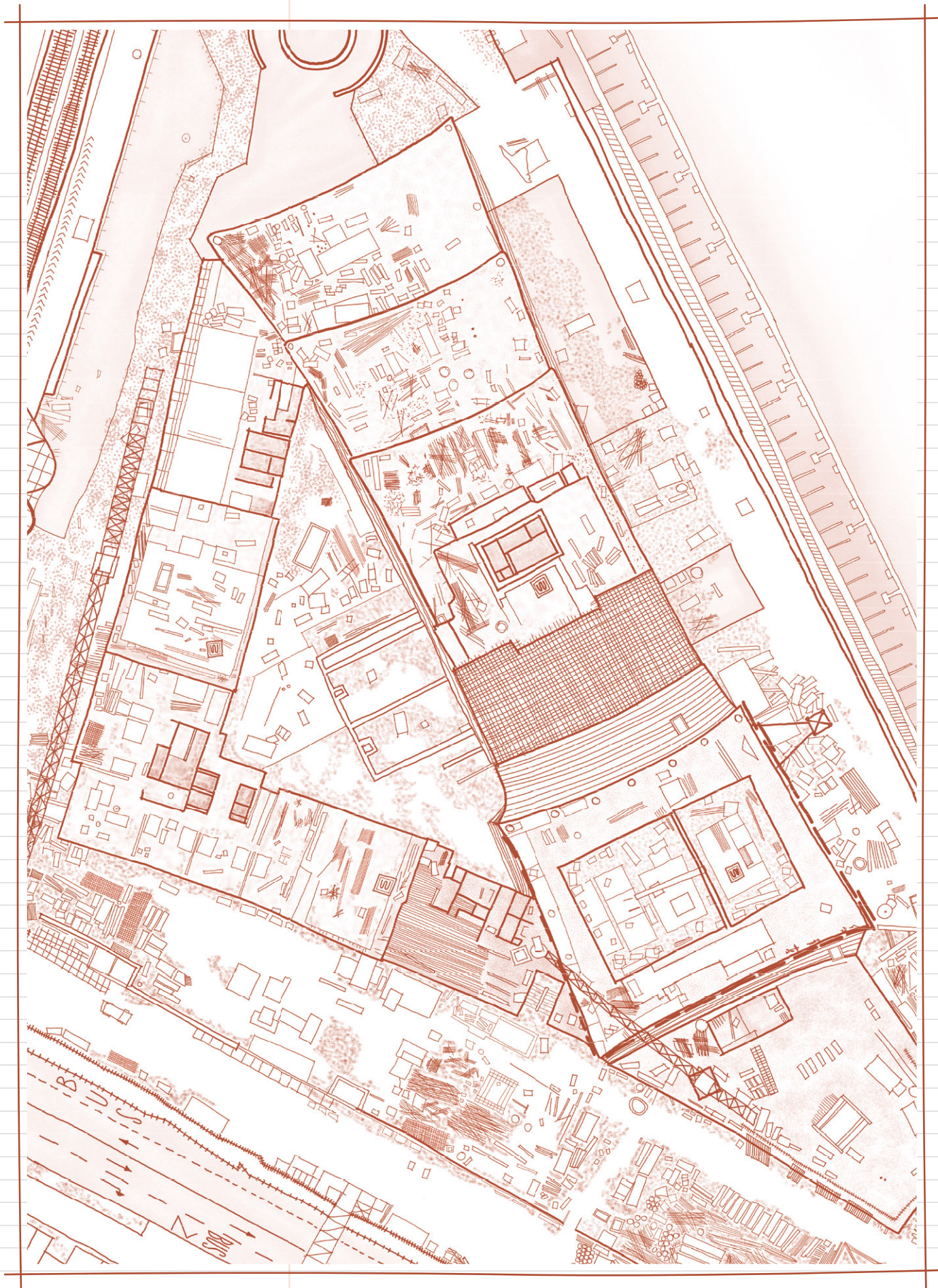


fig. 13 - The Elbtower: A Structure (current state of the Elbtower)

SILENCE TURNS INTO A PEACEFUL REMINDER OF EMBRACING EVEN THE SLOWEST OF PROCESSES. TIME PASSES.

THE GREY OF THE CONCRETE IS NOW SPECKED WITH FRECKLES OF RUSTY RED. IT SLOWLY FADES INTO THE BACKGROUND AS THE RED AND ALL SIGNS OF NEGLECT SLOWLY TAKE OVER. REMAINING PARTS OF THE SCAFFOLDING STAND PROUD AND TALL, AS THEY START TO CHANGE COLOUR.

WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES CREATED BY STILL-STANDING FORMWORK, RUSTY REBAR PEAKS THROUGH, SURROUNDED BY A SEA OF RED WATER. IN OTHER PLACES, SMALL LAKES APPEAR PERIODICALLY, WASHING AWAY SOME OF THE STAINS. AND AS QUICKLY AS THESE LAKES APPEAR, THEY ARE GONE AGAIN, AND THE MARKS RETURN.

HOPPERS AND BUCKETS FILL WITH WATER, SHIMMERING IN THE SUNLIGHT AND CREATING THE ONLY SHIMMERING REFLECTIONS ON SITE. IN THE RELICS OF THE ONCE HUGE PIT, WATER COLLECTS. ALMOST BLINDING US, THESE NEW LAKES CREATE OH SO BEAUTIFUL LIGHT REFLECTIONS. UNABLE TO INTERVENE, WE ARE AMAZED BY THE SUDDEN AMOUNT OF LIFE ON THIS ONCE DEAD STRUCTURE.

RAIN.
RUST.
TIME.

SMALL CRACKS, LIKE WRINKLES, APPEAR INITIALLY AT THE CORNERS, THEN THROUGHOUT AND WITH THEM THE BUILDING AGES. IT IS A SUBTLE PROCESS, BUT ALSO A STEADY ONE, A FLOW WITHOUT A DEFINED END. THE AGEING WILL NOT STOP UNLESS THE STRUCTURE CONTINUES TO GROW. SHE IS MISSING HER CARING ENVELOPE, PROTECTING HER FROM RAIN AND TIME.

SHE AGES.

map of ruin

As part of my observations on site and as an addition to the photo studies, mapping the current state of the ruin was a necessary step to understand the site, as well as seeing the view from above, mapping the material and objects left behind and interpreting their relation to each other and the different landscapes of the site. With that, the idea came to include the current state of decay to create a map of the current state of the building. The map was created as a result of the on-site observations and sketches, and the results of the comprehensive photo studies.

In its own way, this very speculative and subjective map is trying to catch and visualise the genius loci of this site of ruin. In its representation, it is a layered map of different drawings. The map is inspired by the speculative maps done by Ait-Touati et al. (2022). In contrast to their practice, this layer map does not show layers of different periods, but rather different elements and influences of the current state. The base layer for the map is a more current, publicly available plan of the ground floor and the surroundings (Behörde für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen, 2021). The second layer is a top-view drawing of the site and its current state.

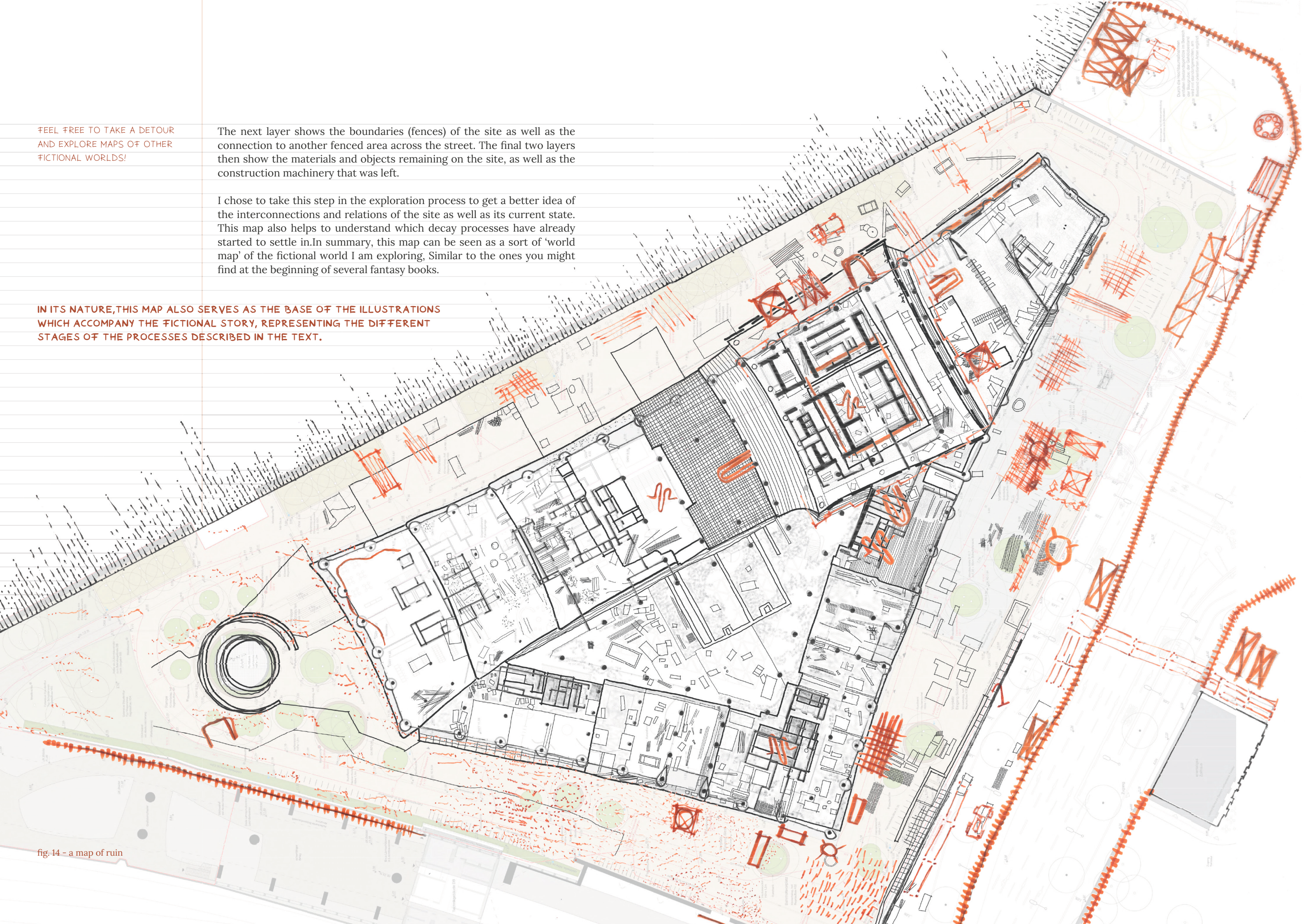
FEEL FREE TO TAKE A DETOUR
AND EXPLORE MAPS OF OTHER
FICTIONAL WORLDS!

The next layer shows the boundaries (fences) of the site as well as the connection to another fenced area across the street. The final two layers then show the materials and objects remaining on the site, as well as the construction machinery that was left.

I chose to take this step in the exploration process to get a better idea of the interconnections and relations of the site as well as its current state. This map also helps to understand which decay processes have already started to settle in. In summary, this map can be seen as a sort of 'world map' of the fictional world I am exploring, similar to the ones you might find at the beginning of several fantasy books.

IN ITS NATURE, THIS MAP ALSO SERVES AS THE BASE OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS
WHICH ACCOMPANY THE FICTIONAL STORY, REPRESENTING THE DIFFERENT
STAGES OF THE PROCESSES DESCRIBED IN THE TEXT.

fig. 14 - a map of ruin



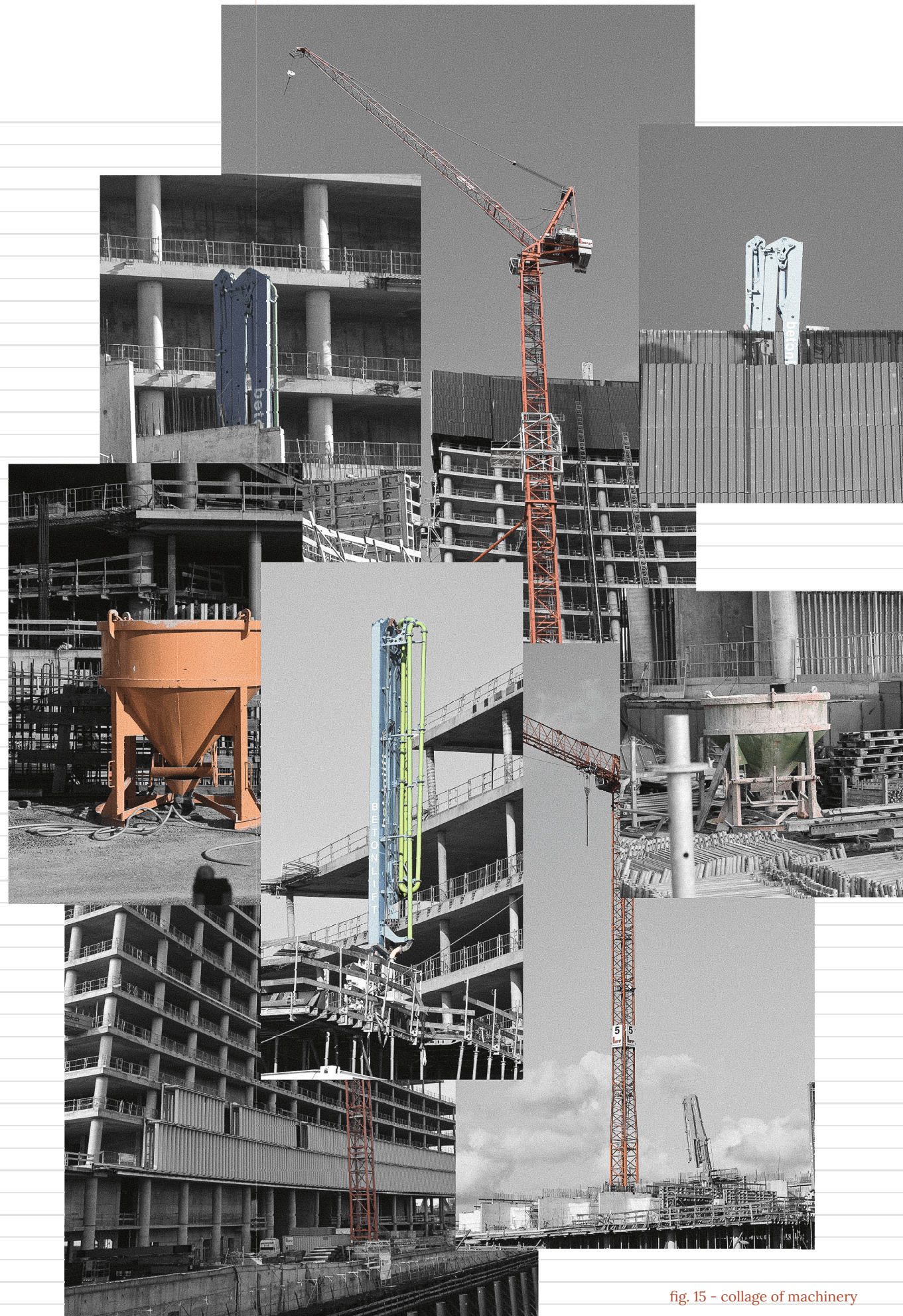


fig. 15 - collage of machinery

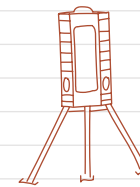


fig. 16 - Elbtower (Hamburg), 16.02.2025

artefacts of ruin

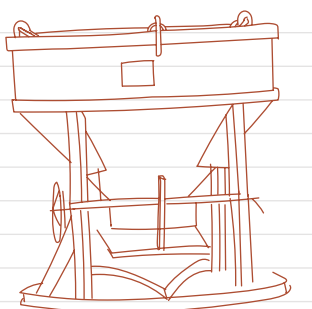
Similar to architecture, every story is set in a specific context. Whereas the architectural context focuses on the surrounding manifestations, the context of a story consists of places, characters and their connections and relations (Wolf, 2012). As already established, the context of this story is the abandoned, halted or whatever you may want to call it, construction site of the Elbtower in Hamburg. To understand the context, or place of the story, it was crucial to visit and observe the construction site.

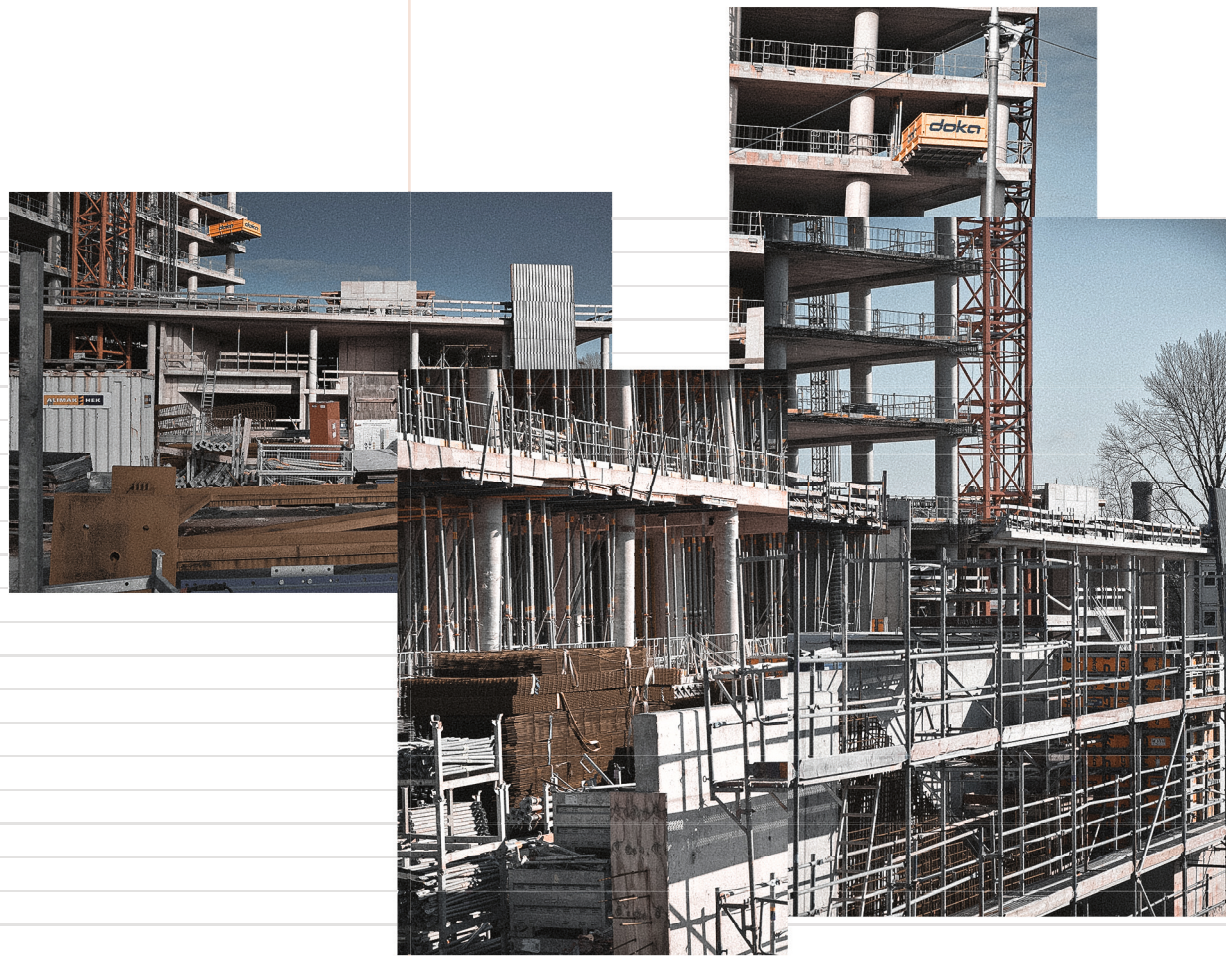
As a result of my observations over several days, I gathered a collection of what I call “artefacts of ruin”. A summary of materials and objects that make the site distinct and lively. One can also argue that these artefacts are the current users of the site, as at the moment they are the only entities using the abandoned construction site of the Elbtower. The ways they are using or inhabiting the site are invisible to the general “passerby”, but with long observations, these ways become visible. Framing materials and objects as “invisible users” and entities of the site was fundamental to understanding the genius loci, the spirit or nature of a place (Hunt, 2022, p. 7).

PLACES CAN BE, WE MIGHT SAY, 'INHABITED' IN PROFOUND WAYS

(Hunt, 2022, p. 9)

The collection of “invisible users” aims to show the current state of ruin by highlighting the interaction and connection of different invisible users. It is nowhere near complete, and I see it rather as a summary of the most obvious and visually predominant ‘invisible users’. I’m purposely refraining here from using the words “most important”, as I believe in the natural order of chaos and ruin, everything is, at least to a certain extent, equal.





GENIUS LOCI IS RARELY A PLACE WHERE SADNESS DOES NOT MINGLE
WITH ITS PLEASURE
(Hunt, 2022, p. 9)

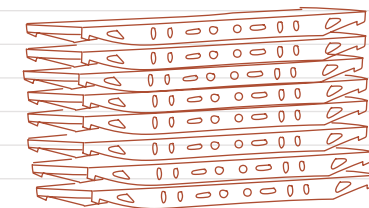
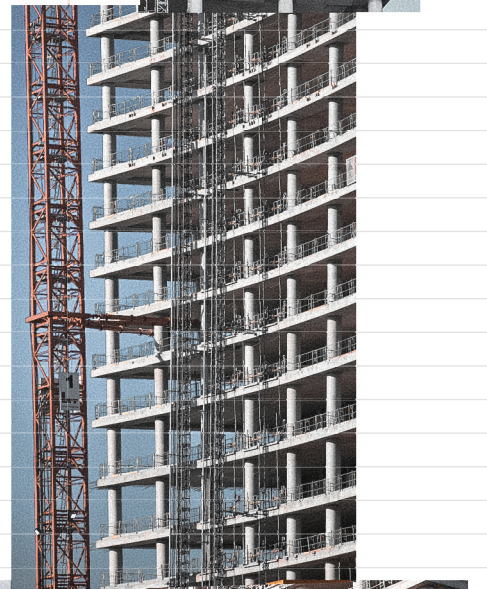


fig. 17 - 21
collages: artefacts of ruin

THEY ARE

STORYTELLERS

LIVING BEINGS

EQUAL

OBSERVERS

ADVOCATES

"ALL-SEEING EYES"

FACILITATORS

SET THE STAGE

SELF-AWARE

METAPHOR FOR
COMMUNITY

METAPHOR FOR
DEGROWTH

METAPHOR FOR
ROLE OF ARCHITECT

a set of storytellers

As a result of the site observations and cataloguing the artefacts of ruin, I started to develop the characteristics of the storytellers that tell the story of the Elbtower. As in any story, these characters are the protagonists, bringing life to the abandoned site. Developing characters is, therefore, an essential step in storytelling. When considering architectural writing, however, compared to fictional writing, one has to consider who is telling the story. Using storytelling as a tool to highlight certain aspects in the design or show a glimpse of “typical daily life” is nothing strange or revolutionary within architecture, especially in today’s architecture education.

Considering the construction site of the Elbtower raises the question of who the personas are, one can use them as storytellers and metaphors in the story. Is it the designed space itself? The construction workers? The

THE CHARACTERS IN STORIES ARE ALWAYS
METAPHORS FOR SOMETHING!

TOWER CRANE
"FIVE"

HOOK BLOCK = EYES

PAINTED RED;
STEEL (SHLA)

PLACING BOOM "B"

END HOSE = EYES

PAINTED BLUE/GREEN;
STEEL

TOWER CRANE "ONE"

HOOK BLOCK = EYES

PAINTED RED;
STEEL (SHLA)

IN A WAY
SIMILAR
TO THE
EYES OF
DR. T.J.
ECKLEBURG
IN F. SCOTT
FITZGERALD'S
"THE GREAT
GATSBY"

architect(s) who design? Or is it the people living in the designed spaces? These questions, at least to some capacity, lead to the question: Who is architecture for, if there is (seemingly) no one around to claim it? This also relates to questions of value and valuing.

THE CONSTRUCTION MACHINES WHICH REMAIN ON THE SITE ARE THE
STORYTELLERS OF THIS STORY OF RUIN.

This statement might seem abstract, but let me explain. The machines were there from the beginning and witnessed every second of the process, and even now, they remain on the construction site and tower over the concrete structure. They are the “all-seeing eyes”, overseeing the events and changes happening, yet they are not able to actively intervene with the storyline or influence the outcomes, so all they do is observe and tell the story.

In their abstract nature, they establish the fundamentals and the limits of this story. In their appearance, they initiate the processes which start the story. In terms of their metaphorical stance, the characters stand for multiple things. In their role as observers, the characters represent the architects, involved in planning the project but not involved in its construction. They facilitate the start of the project, but the completion is out of their reach, and they cannot intervene.

Looking at their view on construction and the “rise” of buildings, the machines are essentially beings of degrowth. They move slowly, and they embrace slow processes. The construction process, as it is practised today, is too fast, and through their limitations and constraints, they also embody the slowness itself.

The note cards on this and the following pages show the traits of these characters and what defines these characters. Their character traits are inspired by practices of degrowth (explained at a later point in this story).

But for now, it is important to understand that even though these characters are rooted and connected to the site, they only observe.

BY NARRATING THE STORY, THEY RELAY THE GATHERED
KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES!

PLACING BOOM "C"

END HOSE = EYES

PAINTED RED;
STEEL

PLACING BOOM "P"

END HOSE = EYES

PAINTED BLUE/GREEN;
STEEL

fig. 22 - a set of storytellers

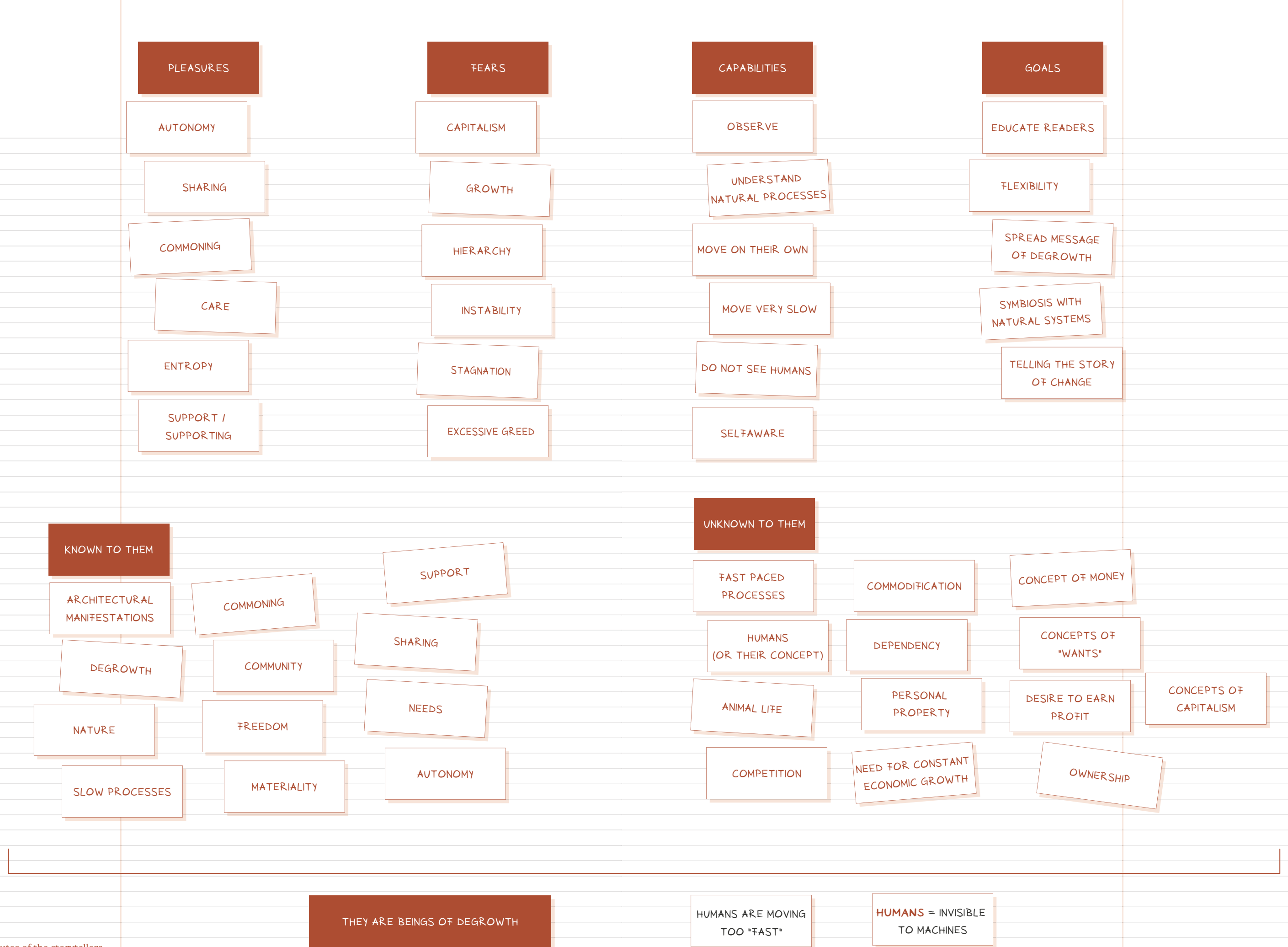


fig. 23 - attributes of the storytellers



fig. 24 - Elbtower (Hamburg), 22.02.2025

mapping views and limitations

After exploring the characteristics of the characters or “invisible users”, it was important to understand their abilities to see and interact with the site. The characters have a unique way of seeing the site, which is different to how we, as humans, perceive the site. Whereas we see the site from an upward-looking view and through a fence, the characters look at the site from above, at different distances. Both these viewpoints have their own set of limitations and restrictions, in terms of what can be observed and how the site can be accessed or used. The following representations show and explore how the characters perceive the site compared to a representation of how a human would see the site.

As previously established, the characters in this speculative scenario have their eyes positioned in a way so that they look downwards onto the site. Through this, they perceive the site differently and only see certain parts of the site. In addition to the limitation of only seeing certain areas at a time, another limitation is that they are only able to see things which are currently the highest surfaces. This means that as soon as something is built on top, the layers beneath are no longer visible.

Another layer of the exploration was to explore their limitations in accessing and using the site. Since the machines are bound to a certain point, all their movements and interactions are based on that specific, static point. Whereas the cranes can only move in circles, the concrete placing booms can move more freely and vary in their reach, and thus also are freer in varying their viewfields.

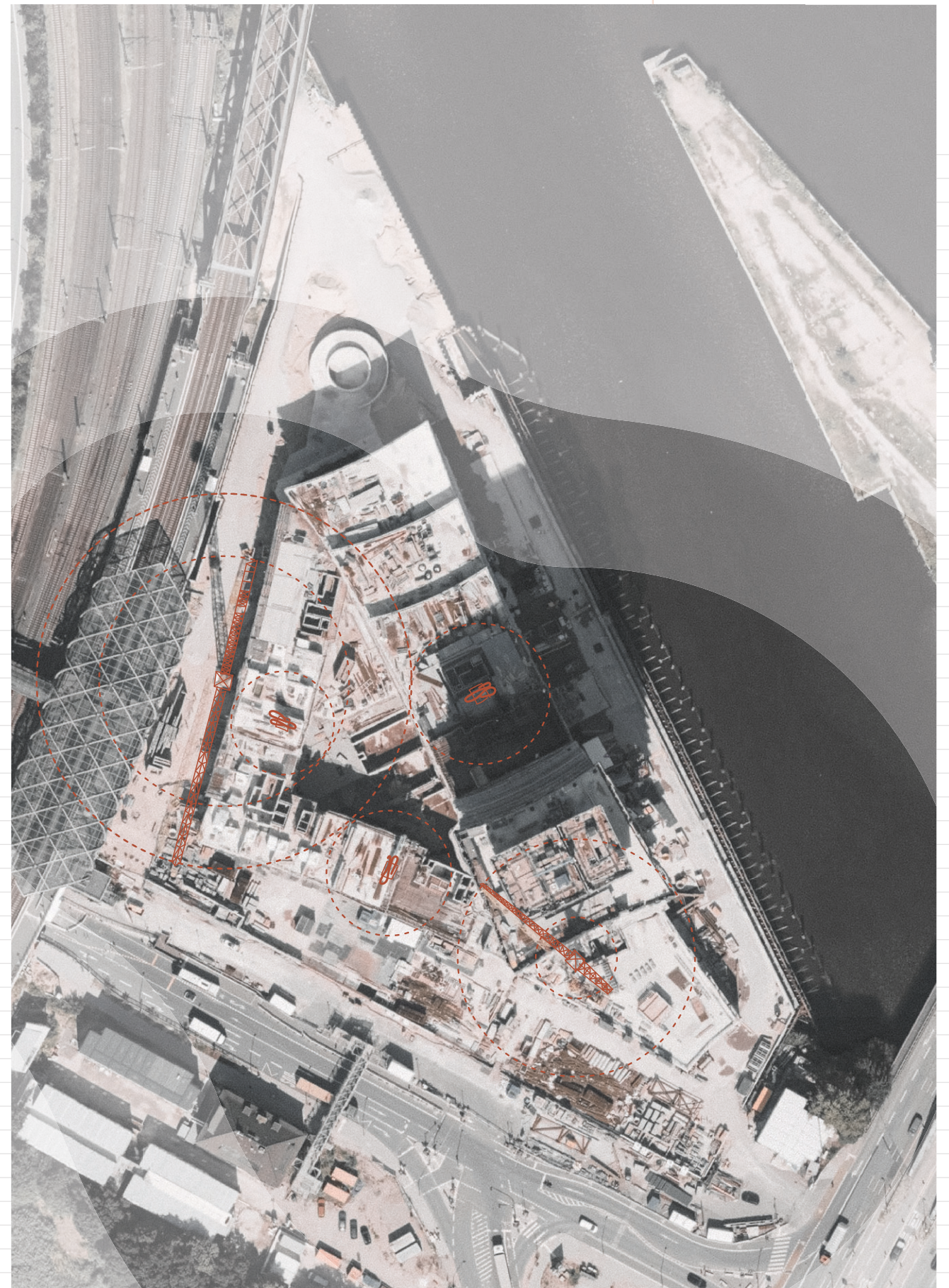


fig. 25 - mapping views and limitations

IN ANY SCENARIO, IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER AND BE AWARE OF THE INDIVIDUAL LIMITATIONS ONE HAS OR MIGHT HAVE.

“ruin”

IT MUST HAVE BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE THE STRUCTURE STOPPED RISING.

RAIN FALLS IN STREAKS OF WHITE LIGHT TO THE GROUND, AND EVERY TIME OUR VIEW CLEARS UP AGAIN, THE STRUCTURE LOOKS DIFFERENT. SHE IS NOT JUST AGEING ANYMORE, WITH TIME WE REALISE THAT SHE IS SLOWLY DECAYING, TURNING INTO THE INEVITABLE.

A RUIN.
OVER TIME.
FALLING APART.

LOOKING DOWN, SEEING THE STRUCTURE SEEMINGLY AGE IN PLACE, WE WONDER WHAT COMES AFTER. THE PROCESS OF AGEING IS SOMETHING WE RARELY SEE, AS WE LEAVE THE STRUCTURE TO STAND TALL IN HER GLORIOUS FINISHED PRIME. BUT NOW THERE IS NO TELLING WHAT HER PRIME IS OR WAS OR IF AT SOME POINT SHE WILL BE ABLE TO REACH IT.

THE PROCESS OF AGEING IS INDEED SOMETHING PECULIAR. IT IS SILENT AT FIRST, THE COMPLETE OPPOSITE OF THE PROCESS OF RISING. AGEING SLOWER, TOO, AS THE STRUCTURE SITS NAKED ON THE GROUND; SMALL, ALMOST INVISIBLE WRINKLING CRACKS BECOME BIGGER AND DARKER, SPREADING ALL OVER.

MOMENTS PASS.
RAIN POURS.
WIND WHISTLES.

WE CATCH GLIMPSES OF RED STRANDS WITHIN THE CRACKS, TRYING TO HOLD BOTH SIDES TOGETHER. AT TIMES, THEY ARE INTERRUPTED, AND THE HOLE THEY CREATED APPEARS TO BREAK OPEN, OFFERING GLIMPSES OF THE DARK UNDERNEATH. WHERE ONCE WERE SHARP CONCRETE EDGES ARE NOW FRAZZLED LINES. SOMETIMES CRACKS MEET AND MERGE. RED REPLACES GREY SOON AFTER, ONCE MORE, REVERSING THE CYCLE OF RISING.

IN MOMENTS, MERGING CRACKS TURN INTO RIFTS, EXPOSING EVERYTHING BENEATH. AS THIS UNSTOPPABLE PROCESS CONTINUES, WE SEE THE RED OF RUSTY STEEL PIERCING THROUGH THE CONCRETE. LIKE CLIFFS, THE STRUCTURE'S BORDERS BEGIN TO GIVE WAY TO THE SPACES BELOW. WITH CHANGE, THE SILENCE OF THE SITE IS BROKEN BY QUIET, MUFFLED SCREAMS. WE CAN HEAR THE PAIN WITHIN THEM AS WE OBSERVE THE SITE CHANGING OVER TIME.

WITH PAIN, A STRUCTURE DIES AND TURNS INTO DUST. IN THIS RARE MOMENT, AS TIME SEEMS TO SPEED UP, WE OBSERVE THE UNFINISHED STRUCTURE REVERSE AND FADE AWAY. A PROCESS SLOW AND LONG, PROGRESSES FAST. UNABLE TO INTERVENE, WE LOOK WITH SADNESS AT THIS SITE OF RUIN.

RISING TURNS INTO UN-RISING. CONSTRUCTING TURNS INTO UN-CONSTRUCTING. THE STRUCTURE BECOMES UNDONE, SETTING IN MOTION A PROCESS OF DE-GROWING. WHEREIN, THE STRUCTURE BEGINS TO BREAK DOWN INTO HER INDIVIDUAL PIECES, AS SHE IS TRYING TO FADE BACK INTO THE GROUND, ALMOST AS IF SHE WERE ASHAMED. MATERIALS THAT WERE ONCE BONDED TOGETHER DRIFT APART, AND THE BONDS MEANT TO BE ETERNAL BECOME TEMPORARY.

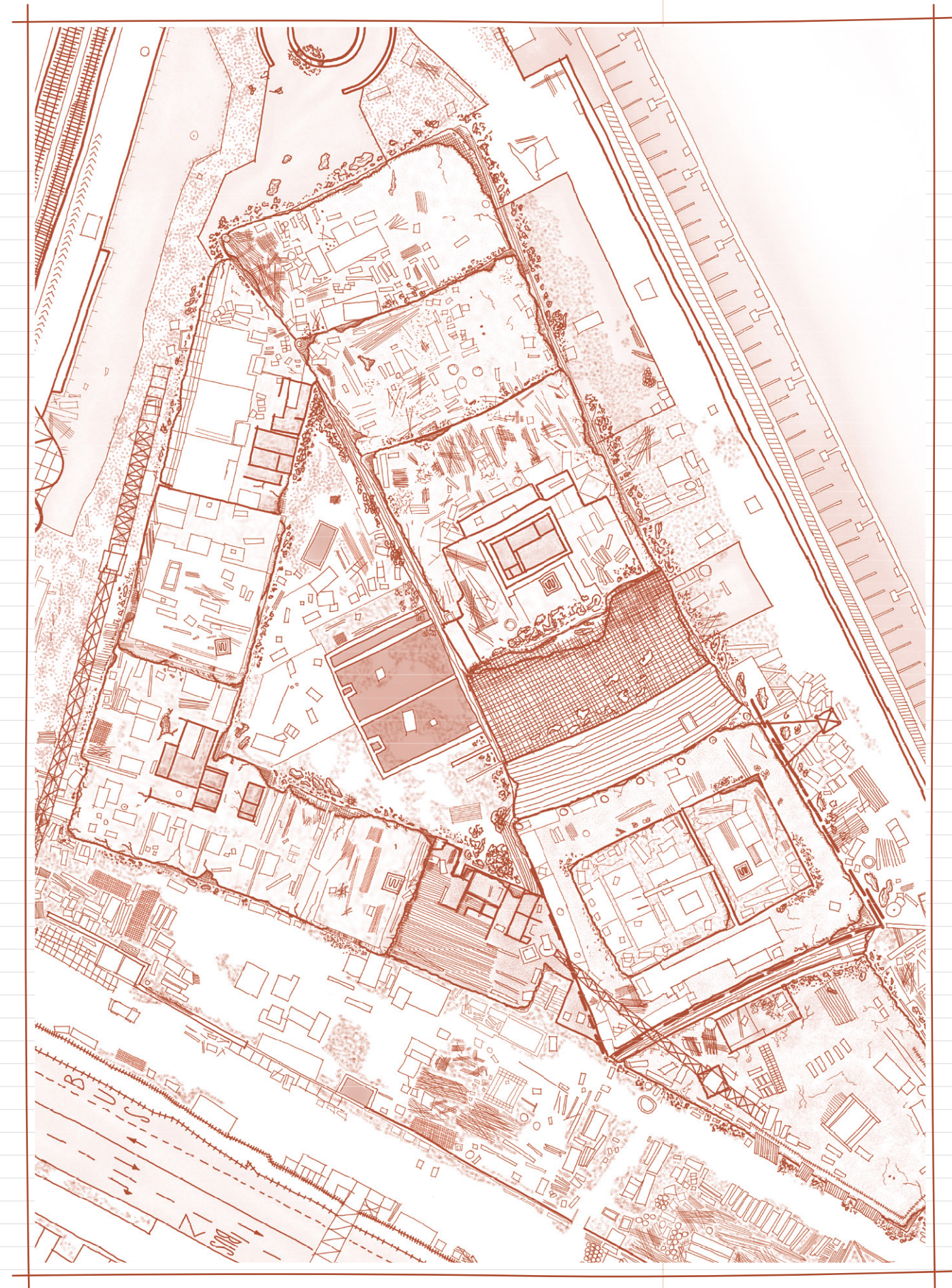


fig. 26 - The Elbtower: A Ruin

SILENCE.
QUIET SCREAMS.
SILENCE.

THE SILENT STASIS MAKES ROOM FOR A PROCESS, BEAUTIFULLY RUINOUS IN ITS OWN WAYS. ACCOMPANIED BY QUIET SCREAMS, CRACKS CONTINUE TO SPREAD AS THE STRUCTURE DISSOLVES AT HER BORDERS. WHERE ONCE WERE SHARP GREY EDGES, NOW STEEL PIERCES INTO EMPTINESS; WHERE NO CONCRETE WAS CAST, STEEL RODS SUPPORTED THE YELLOW FLOORS OF FORMWORK AND ON TOP RUSTY STEEL SWIMS IN RED TAINTED WATER.

MOMENTS PASS, AND SCAFFOLDING FALLS. WHAT ONCE WERE SQUARES AND LINES NOW MERELY FORM A PILE OF ENTROPIC WONDERS. IN THIS CHAOTIC STATE, THE SUPPORTING STRUCTURE NOW LIES NEXT TO ITS FORMER COMPANION, DETACHED AND WITHOUT PURPOSE. WALLS PREVIOUSLY ENCLOSED AND SUPPORTED NOW STAND ALONE AS ORDER FAILS, AND THE CHAOTIC ENTROPY TAKES OVER.

LOUD SHORT BURSTS MARK THE FINAL STAGE OF CHAOTIC UN-GROWTH OF THIS PECULIAR SCENE. SOUNDS ARE FOLLOWED BY CHANGE; IT HAS BEEN THE CASE EVEN IN THE BEGINNING, AS THEY USED TO ACCOMPANY THE PROCESS OF RISING. EVERY SOUND MARKS A CHANGE WITHIN THE STRUCTURE, VISIBLE OR INVISIBLE.

WHERE ONCE WERE CRACKS, NOW HOLES PIERCE THROUGH THE FLOORS OF GREY CONCRETE. MATERIALS WITHERING AWAY, MELTING INTO THE GROUND, AND PILES OF STONE NOW MARK THE EDGES OF THIS ONCE SO GLORIOUS STRUCTURE. THE SHAPE STILL STANDS, THE OUTSKIRTS BLURRY. EVERYTHING IS STILL PART OF THE ORIGINAL, BUT THE ORIGINAL IS NO MORE.

UNRECOGNISABLE, THE STRUCTURE NOW STANDS, AS TIME LEAVES ITS MARKS. THE
ONCE SO PROUD SKELETON NOW STANDS IN RUIN. NOT CARED FOR. NEGLECTED.
UNABLE TO INTERVENE, WE CAN ONLY SUPPORT HER IN SAVING HER FROM TOTAL
RUIN. SHARING THE WEIGHT OF TIME AND LOSS, WE ARE NOW INTERTWINED WITH
THE STRUCTURE, NAVIGATING TIME TOGETHER. UNKNOWNING WHAT'S TO COME.

BUT THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE.
ALWAYS A CHANCE.
A PATH ENDLESSLY CHANGING.

THE LAKES IN THE MIDDLE HAVE TURNED GREEN, SURROUNDED BY MOUNTAINS OF GREY AND RED AND YELLOW. THEY ARE OMENS OF SOMETHING NEW, INTRODUCING NEW COLOURS TO THE SCENE. AS HARBINGERS OF HOPE AND CHANGE, THEIR GRADUAL EXISTENCE FORESHADOWS THE ARRIVAL OF SOMETHING NEW. SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

chapter three

future pt. 1

GREENS GROW AND GREY DISAPPEARS.
THE CYCLE OF LIFE STARTS ANEW.

WE LOOK AT SOMETHING GROWING NOT RISING.

IN A WORLD FULL OF GROWTH, WHAT BECOMES OF
THE HALTED?

from ruin to green
speculation and utopia

“spring”

“summer”

“autumn”

“winter”

THERE MUST BE REGULARITY AND
FANTASY, RELATIONSHIPS AND
OPPOSITIONS, AND CASUAL,
UNEXPECTED ELEMENTS THAT VARY THE
SCENE; GREAT ORDER IN THE
DETAILS, CONFUSION, UPROAR, AND
TUMULT IN THE WHOLE

(Tafari 1976, p. 3 referencing Laugier 1765, pp.312-313)

from ruin to green

“The rise of structures is a fast process. Accompanied by noise, this fast-paced process dominates all lifetimes. It is an unnatural process that all have become used to, not seeing or maybe ignoring the danger it poses. Metaphorically speaking, the rise of structures is like a thunderous storm, noisy and destructive.

The growth of greens, on the other hand, is a slower process, which one rarely gets to experience in its full beauty. In its slowness, growth symbolises a deep breath, a pause. A quiet intermission. Green does not grow quickly or suddenly appear; on the contrary, it starts small and with time it spreads with utter tranquillity.

Compared to the loud noises we have grown used to, the growing of Greens sounds much quieter, like breaths from the ground. They grow and spread, taking everything beneath and around them, and in doing so, they create a protective layer.

In their own ways, they offer a new form of care and support for their surroundings. They show care and interest in otherwise neglected and abandoned spaces. Philosophically speaking, the arrival of green means the beginning of a new life, new opportunities and new value. Their appearance announces the beginning of a different and rarely witnessed process. Growth.

While structures fail and die with time, greens take over. Invading cracks and holes, greens grow where structure makes space, creating their own utopia. In this process, structures fade into the background as they are covered by the green. Growing where once rose something different and unnatural, greens are heralds of the new and symbolise change, marking the death of old structures and the beginning of new life.”

(An excerpt from “Growth without Noise”)

speculation and (capitalist) utopia

Sadler (2014b) argues that architecture gave in to the capitalist way during the Cold War and became dependent on market dynamics, naming this era the 'Golden Era of Capitalism'. He continues to argue that architecture started to provide (large-scale) structures that drove people apart rather than connecting them during this time.

With its focus shifting away from the human scale, architecture began to be dictated by market moods and fluctuations. Today, architecture is about creating a spectacle and 'showing off', following the flows of capitalism in creating one unique spectacle to distract from the injustices (Sadler, 2014b).

Large-scale structures that intend to create a spectacle are nothing new. To some extent, architecture was always designed for some sort of power demonstration. If comparing the Elbtower in Hamburg with the story of the Tower of Babel, there are indeed some slight similarities. Both

structures were designed as spectacles and as monuments of human greed. And with that, both ended in disaster and ruin, highlighting just how fragile architecture can be if anchored in greed and prestige.

In times of capitalism, consumerism and consumption become the influential forces that shape the production of architecture (Chaplin & Holding, 1998). With that said, the idyll of creating a utopia, as architects and planners strive to do, is tainted by the demands and pressures of consumption and fast production. Whereas a utopia paints the picture of a harmonious co-existence in quality and equality, the capitalist utopia is one of fast-moving cycles and constant consumption (Chaplin & Holding, 1998).

The focus on forms of consumer-oriented architecture in a capitalist utopia is by no means the actual architectural value, but rather the flashiness of its looks and the speed at which it can be sold and consumed. Eventually, architecture is reduced to its looks and only derives value through the positive perception of others and adoration of the general public or investors. And in this manifestation, architecture serves only the purpose of producing a continuous stream of revenues for the investors (Drozdz et al., 2018).

"THE SKYSCRAPER, THE MOST OBVIOUS SYMBOL OF CAPITALISTIC SPECULATION"
(Merwood-Salisbury, 2014, p. 37)

As post-war Europe succumbed to the Corbusian principles of modernist urban planning (Drozdz et al., 2018), the skyscraper moved into the cities. As Merwood-Salisbury (2014) states, the skyscraper was initially not seen as a form of architecture, but one of engineering built in the service of capital. The skyscraper becomes the utopia of capitalism, with densified cities rising to the skies becoming the ideal.

It is, however, not a utopia of the living human, but for the working human, the "homo oeconomicus". With that being said, this has been true since the rise of the first skyscraper, as even back then, skyscrapers were designed to be rented out as office spaces (Merwood-Salisbury, 2014). And even today, most skyscrapers, as in this case the Elbtower, still adhere to the concept of "office tower", just now with some added functions of temporary living in the form of hotels.

With the change of ideas of utopia, the main interest of the investments was not design or design quality but profit. Design was supposed to be simple, with the form being dictated by the motive of profit (Merwood-Salisbury, 2014). Or as Tafuri (1976) argued, the ideology of architecture turned into a capitalist industrial utopia.

ONCE ART (ARCHITECTURE) WAS MATERIALLY INSERTED INTO THE MECHANISMS OF THE UNIVERSE OF PRODUCTION, ITS OWN EXPERIMENTAL CHARACTER, ITS OWN CHARACTER OF CO-REALITY, WAS NECESSARILY COMPROMISED.
(Tafuri, 1976, p. 157)

At the same time, Sandercock (1998) argues that post-war planning turned its back on questions of value, meaning and the art of planning. It is not the architect who plans, but the ones investing who dedicate the design (Sandercock, 1998; Tafuri, 1976). Going even further, one can argue that within the fast-changing metropolis of the post-war era, architecture rises and falls equally as quickly (Abramson, 2017), and with that process, the metropolis loses its memory (Sandercock, 1998).

In the capitalist utopia, which is the metropolis, memory, value, meaning, and art have no place. They are not part of the capitalist utopia, as they can not be commodified as goods or monetised. The fast-changing and consuming utopia, in its processes of change and consumption, deliberately suppresses the creation of memory and social values as they are, unlike (economic) growth, not quantifiable and, in the logic of capitalism, not worth preserving (Sandercock, 1998).

In the early ,60s and ,70s, several architects and collectives envisioned radical, alternative and speculative designs as so-called 'counterprojects' to resist the continued dependency of architecture and strived to create another form of "utopia" (Sadler, 2014b). Design and Art are seen as models of action that counter the capitalist processes. These avant-garde movements broke with the practices of the past to create models of action (Sadler, 2014b; Scott, 2007; Tafuri, 1976). With their speculative and abstract projects, collectives such as Archigram or Superstudio demonstrated critical visions towards societal, political and environmental issues, and in that provoked discourse (Scott, 2007).

Tafuri states that "as soon as utopia is superimposed on production cycles and starts serving to production needs, it is no longer avant-garde" (1976, p. 98). Within the fabric of the capitalist metropolis, this means succumbing to rapid transformation, which reduces the artistic experience. And by striving for an organised, capitalist utopia, the "Gemeinschaft" (the organic community) gives way to the "Gesellschaft" (the impersonal, alienated relationship of society, organised in and by the great metropolis), marking the yielding of the "human" to capitalist principles (Tafuri, 1976).

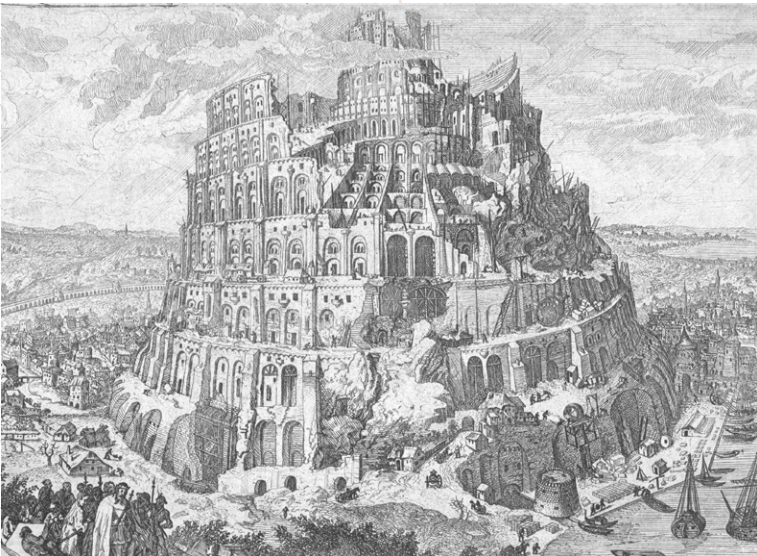


fig. 27 - The Tower of Babel, von Prenner (after Bruegel the Elder), n.d.

“spring”

SILENT MOMENTS PASS.

REFLECTING LIGHT INTO OUR EYES, THE ONCE DARK GREEN LAKES ARE NOW PEACEFUL AND CALM, SHIMMERING LIKE MIRRORS. FRAMED IN GREEN AND IN SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS, THEY BECOME ONE WITH THEIR SURROUNDINGS. LAST REMAINS OF STEEL AND CONCRETE CAN BE SEEN POKING OUT OF THE LAKES AT TIMES AND LIKE SCULPTURES, THESE REMAINS NOW BECOME A TESTAMENT TO THE DECAY HAPPENING ALL OVER THE SITE.

A CERTAIN SOFTNESS STARTED TO GROW WHERE ONCE LINES AND FORMS OF CONCRETE DOMINATED THE SITE. THE OLD GREYNESS AND RIGIDITY OF RISING IS REPLACED BY THE CHANGING GREEN OF GROWING. SHARP BORDERS GROW SOFTER, THEY BLUR AS MOMENTS PASS, WHILE THE DOMINANCE OF GREY FADES AS OTHER COLOURS EMERGE FROM THE GROUND.

THERE IS SOMETHING SWEET IN THIS ENTROPY OF RUIN. SOMETHING CALMER, BLURRING THE DECAY BENEATH IT. A GENTLE PRESENCE THAT, IN ITS STEADINESS IT RADIATES UNUSUAL AND NEW SOUNDS OF LIFE. EVEN THE ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING IT ALL IS GROWING CALMER AND LESS DESTRUCTIVE. THROUGH THESE CHANGES, THERE WAS NOW A HOPEFUL FEELING RADIATING FROM THE STRUCTURE. A SENSATION OF NEW BEGINNINGS AND A NEW START, CREATING THE PROMISE OF A NEW PURPOSE. THE TREMBLING NOISES OF THE STRUCTURE'S DECAYING CHANGES ONLY ECHO IN THE DEPTHS OF OUR MEMORY, AS NOW THE STRUCTURE SOUNDS AS IF SHE IS BREATHING.

TIME PASSES DIFFERENTLY NOW.

NOT RUSHED, BUT SOFT.

AS A ONCE-DEAD STRUCTURE COMES BACK TO LIFE.

LIKE VESSELS, THIN GREEN STREAKS ARE THE FIRST ONES TO BECOME VISIBLE ON THE STRUCTURE. THEY GROW IN SILENCE, WITHOUT NOISE, WITHOUT TENSION IN THE AIR. THEIR GROWTH IS NOT RUSHED BUT SLOW, AND IN THAT PROCESS, THEY MAKE THE STRUCTURE THEIR OWN. WINDING THEIR WAY AROUND, THEY FOLLOW THEIR INTUITION, NOT A GRID OR A PREDEFINED SYSTEM. UNPLANNED BUT STILL WITH PURPOSE, THE VESSELS GROW PAST THE GROUND AND WIND AND TWIST THROUGH THE SKELETON OF THE STRUCTURE AND IN THEIR GROWTH, THEY EMBRACE THE RUIN.

CARING. PROTECTING. LIKE A MOTHER.

WITH THE GREEN STREAKS RUNNING ACROSS IT, THE CONCRETE LOOKS LIKE MARBLE NOW. AFTER BEING LIFELESS AND COLD, WITHIN THIS PROCESS OF GROWING, THE STRUCTURE SLOWLY COMES TO LIFE AGAIN. THE RUSTING STRANDS OF STEEL GIVE HOLD TO VINES TO GROW. TWISTING AND TURNING, THE VINES FOLLOW THEIR NATURAL FLOW. IN THEIR GROWING, THEY SUPPORT THE STRUCTURE, MAKING HER INTO SOMETHING COMPLETE AGAIN. AT THE START, THEY ARE JUST GREEN LINES, BUT AS MOMENTS PASS, THEIR EDGES FRAY AND MARKS IN VARIOUS SIZES BEGIN TO GROW. WITH EVERY BREATH, THE VINES SPREAD OUT, AND LEAVES GROW. TOGETHER, THEY BLUR THE EDGES AND DIM THE GREY BENEATH.

RUST-STAINED PILES AND SCAFFOLDING TURN INTO LADDERS FOR THESE VINES. ONCE REACHING TOWARDS US, THEY NOW CREATE THE FOUNDATION FOR THE EVER-SPREADING GREEN. ONCE ELEMENTS OF ORDER, THEY NOW SUPPORT THE

ENTROPY THAT THE VINES CREATE. WHAT ONCE WAS A SYMBOL OF ORDER NOW MAKES PLACE FOR DISORDER.

THE SANDY GROUND, SURROUNDING THE STRUCTURE, IS SPLASHED WITH GREEN AS THE STRUCTURE CONTINUES TO BREATHE SILENTLY. GROWING FROM NOTHING, IN BETWEEN PILES OF FALLEN CONCRETE AND REMAINS OF SCAFFOLDING, THESE GREENS ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE WINDING VINES. THIS NEW GREEN APPEARS AS DOTS AND DENSER THAN THE VINES. AS THEY GROW BIGGER, THEY STAY IN PLACE, NOT MOVING, JUST EMBRACING. YELLOW IS SPRINKLED WITH GREEN, AS IT SPREADS WITH EVERY BREATH.

THERE IS NO URGENCY.

JUST SLOWNESS.

JUST CARE.

THROUGH PILES OF CONCRETE AND WOVEN STEEL, WINDING AND COMING CLOSER, EVEN MORE GREEN GROWS. SMALL BUT UNMISTAKABLY MAJESTIC, SINGLE GREEN DOTS APPEAR. THEY GROW BIGGER THAN THE OTHERS, AND AS THE WIND BLOWS, THEY QUIETLY START TO WHISTLE. IT IS A SWEET AND CALMING SOUND, SOMETIMES EVEN PLAYFUL. AS THE WINDS COME AND GO, THE GREEN BECOMES BLURRY, ALMOST AS IF IT WANTS TO CHANGE ITS POSTURE, JUST TO RETURN TO THEIR INITIAL POSITION.

A CALMNESS.

A PURPOSE.

A SILENCE FILLED WITH LIFE AS TIME HEALS ALL WOUNDS.

THE STRUCTURE NO LONGER FEELS ABANDONED AND NEGLECTED. THERE IS NO WISH TO BE COMPLETED ANYMORE; THERE IS ACCEPTANCE AS THIS NEW BEAUTY COMES INTO EXISTENCE. IT IS A PROCESS THAT DOES NOT RISE TOWARDS US, BUT ONE THAT SPREADS ON WHAT IS ALREADY THERE. AND LIKE A BREATH, THE NEWFOUND BEAUTY STRETCHES ACROSS TIME.

“summer”

MOMENTS PASS WHILE THE GREEN GROWS MORE ABUNDANT, IN MASS AND COLOUR. THERE IS A TENSION NOW WEIGHING ON THE SITE, NOT A PRESSURING ONE, BUT AN EMBRACING, A PROTECTING ONE.

BREATHS TURN TO PULSES.

COLDNESS TURNS TO WARMTH.

EVERYTHING TURNS GREEN.

IN THE PROCESS OF GROWING, THE STRUCTURE CHANGES NOT ALL AT ONCE AND ABRUPTLY, BUT GRADUALLY, SHIFTING IN COLOUR, IN TEXTURE AND IN RHYTHM. THE ENTIRE GREEN TURNS BOLDER AND BRIGHTER IN EVERY CORNER OF THE STRUCTURE. VINES THAT ONCE WERE JUST LINES, MEANDERING UPWARDS AND ALONG THE STRUCTURE, NOW BLOOM IN DIFFERENT SHADES OF GREEN. THEY ARE THINKER NOW, STRONGER, MAKING THEIR WAY UP THE TOWERING STRUCTURE, CREATING AN OUTER SHELL AND SHIELDING THE GREY FROM WIND AND SUN. IN THEIR CONTINUOUS GROWTH, THE VINES ARE NOT SHY BUT RATHER BOLD, AND SO IN TIME, THEY REACH EVEN US. WE FEEL THEIR EMBRACE FIRST AT OUR

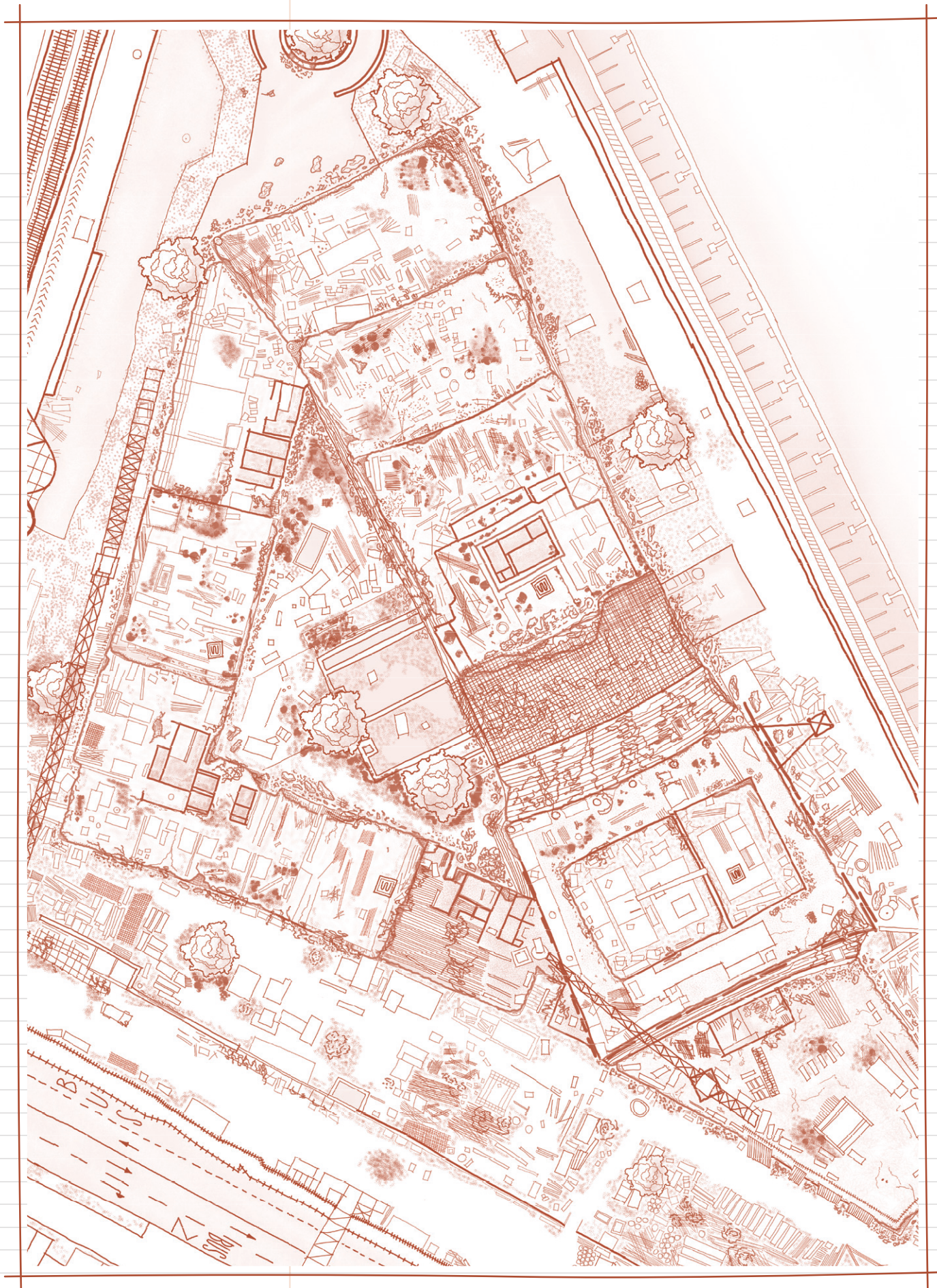


fig. 28 - The Elbtower: A Green

BASES. IT FEELS WARM, COMFORTING, EVEN AND IN THEIR BOLDNESS, THEIR HUG CONTINUES AS THEY SLOWLY GROW UPWARDS, ALONG OUR SKELETAL BODIES.

THE VINES BRIDGE AREAS THAT HAVE BECOME WEAK OVER TIME, SUPPORTING NOT ONLY THE STRUCTURE BUT ALSO US. OUR RED IS SPRINKLED WITH GREEN, OUR BLUE IS STREAKED WITH GREEN. WE WERE NOT PART OF THE PLACE AT THE BEGINNING; WE WERE ONLY OBSERVING IT, BUT AS THE VINES GROW UPWARDS, WE SLOWLY MERGE INTO THEM. IN MOMENTS, WE MORPH INTO STRUCTURES OURSELVES.

DISTANCE DISAPPEARS.
EVERYTHING CONNECTED.
ONE WITH THE STRUCTURE.

IN THICK GREEN VEILS, THE VINES HANG DOWN FROM THE EDGES AND GROW ALONG THE SLOPE OF THE TWISTING TOWER. LOOKING LIKE A STREAM OF GREEN WATER, THEY CASCADE DOWN, A WATERFALL OF VINES, ENDING IN WATER AND THE GROUND.

THE SUN COLOURS THE GREEN IN VIBRANT TONES, AND THE PROCESS OF GROWTH IS IN FULL SWING. THE PLACE IS CHANGING AS IT GROWS AND FLOURISHES. GREEN SHOOTS SPROUT FROM EVERY CRACK AND CREVICE, WHERE ONCE WERE ONLY SHALLOW PUDDLES, NOW WHOLE ECOSYSTEMS FORM. HARD EDGES BLUR, AND LAKES ARE ENCLOSED BY RINGS OF BLOOMING GREEN. THE GREEN MIXES WITH THE WATER, AND MOMENTS LATER, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL WHAT WAS THERE FIRST. THE STRUCTURE GROWS TOGETHER, NOT JUST WITHIN HERSELF BUT ALSO WITH HER SURROUNDINGS.

NO HURRY. JUST CONSTANT UNFOLDING. GROWING SLOWLY.

MOMENTS PASS, AND THE BREATHS OF THE GROUND ARE COMPLEMENTED WITH CALM HUMS AND WHISPERS OF GREEN. NEW STRUCTURES APPEAR IN THE MIDDLE OF THE GREEN; THEY LOOK DIFFERENT FROM THE CEMENT STRUCTURES. THEY ARE MORE FLUID, MORE NATURAL; THEY DON'T FOLLOW A GRID OR STRAIGHT LINES. THESE STRUCTURES ARE ROUND WITH SOFT EDGES, CONSISTING OF BROWN AND AMBER STRIPES, GROWING OUT OF THE GREEN. SOME ARE EVEN COLOURED AND MADE UP OF PARTS THAT ARE NOT FROM THIS SITE. THEY ARE DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT THE STRUCTURE IN DIFFERENT SIZES, GRAINING THE GROUND.

IN MOMENTS WHEN THE LIGHT IS JUST RIGHT, THE GREY STILL SHIMMERS THROUGH, REMINDING US OF WHAT WAS THERE AT THE END OF THE FAST CHANGE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE SLOW. DRENCHED IN SHADES OF GREEN AND SPRINKLED WITH DOTS OF COLOUR, THE STRUCTURE COMES TO LIFE ANEW. CHANGE DOES NOT MOVE IN A LINE TOWARDS ONE SPECIFIC GOAL; IT REPEATS.

CHANGE.
SLOWNESS.
LIFE.

AND SO, THE CONCRETE STRUCTURE IS NO LONGER A MONUMENT OF SHAME.

SHE IS A SYSTEM.
A VESSEL.
A SMALL UTOPIA.

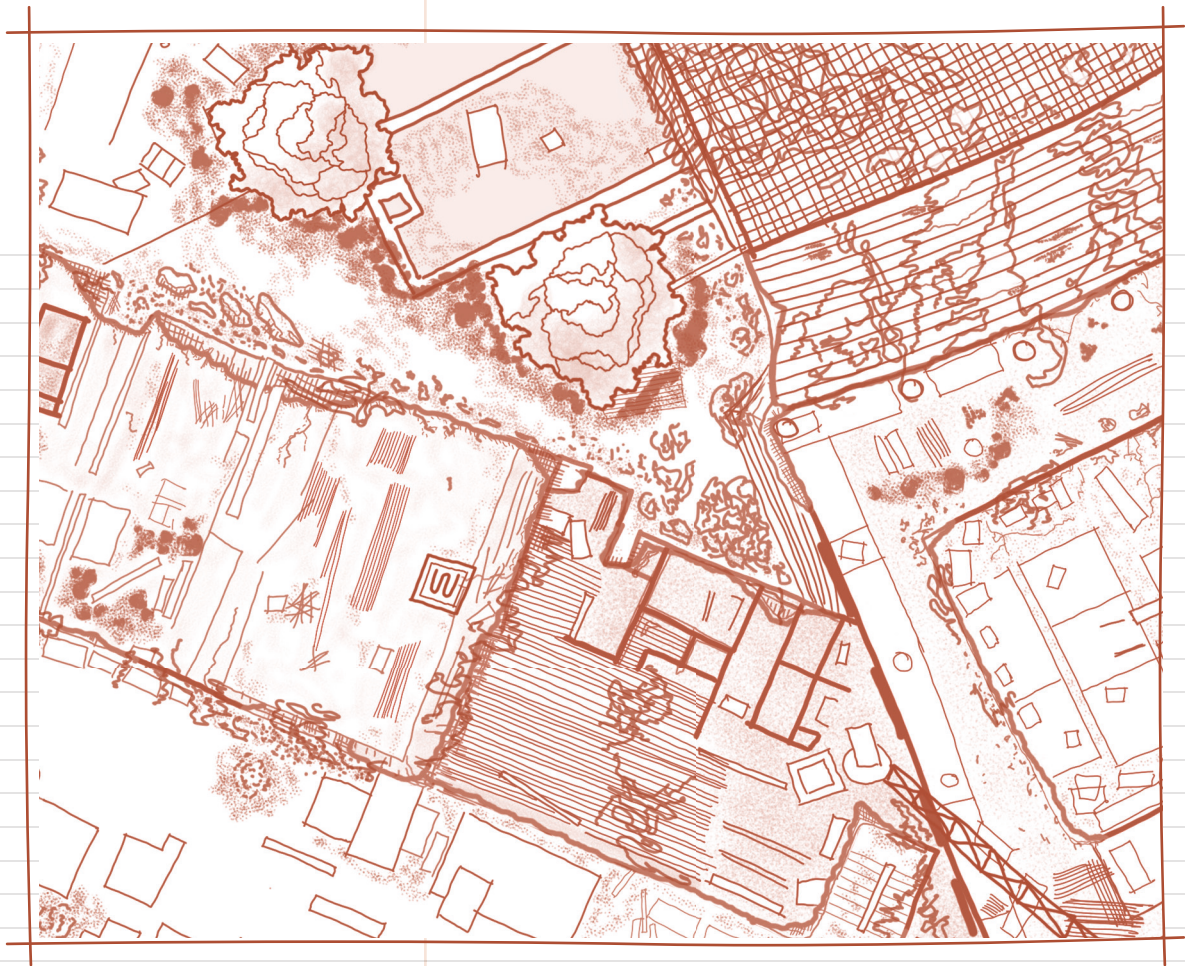


fig. 29 - The Elbtower: autumn leaves

“autumn”

IN THE TWINKLING OF TIME, THE GREEN BEGINS TO CHANGE ONCE MORE. THE BREATHS CONTINUE SLOWLY WITH SILENCE IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGE. IT IS A QUIET CHANGE, ONE WITHOUT SOUND. AND AS THE CYCLE CONTINUES, THE GREEN AND THE STRUCTURE INTERTWINED TRANSFORM ONCE MORE.

WHISTLES OF AIR.
FADING.
SILENCE?

VINES ONCE WRAPPED TIGHTLY AROUND THE STRUCTURE AND US, IN SLOW BREATHS, RELEASE THEIR GRIP AS THEY CURL UP AND TURN BROWN. IN THIS, THEIR LEAVES FADE FROM THEIR DEEP GREEN INTO HUES OF RUST, OCHRE AND COPPER. AND JUST LIKE THAT, THEY FEEL FURTHER AWAY THAN THEY WERE JUST A MOMENT AGO. THE LEAVES ARE MOVING, ONE MOMENT THEY ARE IN ONE PLACE, AND THE NEXT THEY ARE SCATTERED ALL OVER. AS THEY COME TO A HALT AND STOP, THE MULTICOLOURED LEAVES CREATE A MOSAIC ON THE STRUCTURE AND EVERYWHERE AROUND.

PILES OF COLOURFUL LEAVES ARE GATHERED AND SPREAD OUT. NOW THEY LIE THERE, WHISTLING SOFTLY WITH EVERY GUST OF AIR. SURROUNDED BY PILES OF MATERIAL AND REMNANTS OF DECAY, THEY BRING LIFE TO THEIR SURROUNDINGS. NOT DISTURBING BUT COEXISTING, THESE OBJECTS NOW SHARE A SPACE WITHOUT ENVY AND IN PEACE.

IN BEAUTIFUL RUSTY COLOURS, THE CONCRETE COMES BACK TO LIGHT, SHIMMERING IN THE SCARCE RAYS OF LIGHT. IT IS A CYCLE OF APPEARING AND DISAPPEARING. SOON, THE REMAINS OF THE DECAY BECOME VISIBLE AGAIN, AND THE VINES, NOW

FULLY BROWN, STILL EXTEND THEIR GRIP, SUPPORTING EVERYTHING, EVEN IN THEIR RELEASING STATE.

QUIET. A STILLNESS SETTLES IN, NOT ONE IN SILENCE BUT IN REFLECTION. IN PARTS, SOME PATCHES OF GREEN ARE STILL AROUND, UNBOOTHERED BY THEIR FADING COMPANIONS; THEY STAND PROUD AND TALL. MARKING THE START OF NEW CYCLES, THE AIR NOW GROWS QUIETER WITH EVERY PASSING MOMENT. THERE IS NO SPECTACLE, NO SHIMMER. THERE IS NO NEED FOR IT. LOOKING DOWN, THE STRUCTURE OF RUIN REAPPEARS. SHE IS THE MONUMENT THAT REMAINS THROUGH ALL CYCLES.

NOT IN SHAME.
BUT IN BEAUTY.
IN A PEACEFUL HARMONY.

WITH THE GREEN RETREATING, BROWNS AND EARTH TONES TAKE ITS PLACE, AND WHAT REMAINS ARE THE STRUCTURES OF BRANCHES AND TWIGS TWIRLING AROUND A HOLLOW CENTRE. ONCE JUST APPEARING AND GROWING QUICKLY, THEY NOW REST IN THEIR PEACEFUL STATIC STATE. NOT CHANGING, JUST BEING. THEY WERE HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT AND APPEARED IN PLACES YOU WOULD NOT EXPECT. THERE IS BEAUTY IN THEM. (HOW THEY ARE FORMED SHOWS THE PROCESS OF HOW THEY CAME TO BE.)

THE CRACKS AND WRINKLES TURN DEEPER AS THE GREEN VANISHES. NOT GROWING OR DECAYING. MAINTAINING HER POSTURE, THE STRUCTURE LOOKS AS IF SHE WERE AGEING ONCE MORE. ELEGANT AND PROUD, SHE AGES AS THE GREEN FADES, MAKING WAY FOR SOMETHING NEW. CONTINUING THE CYCLE OF GROWING.

CARING.
SHARING.
SLOWNESS.

SOFTENING AND LETTING GO, THE STRUCTURE, EVEN IN THE END, REMAINS STRONG AND PROUD. AND IN THE PROCESS OF LETTING GO, THERE IS BEAUTY IN UNRAVELLING, IN CHANGING, IN LEAVING BEHIND. GREEN RETREATS AND GIVES WAY TO SOMETHING NEW.

“winter”

THIS CYCLE ENDS AS IT STARTED. IN SILENCE.
THE STRUCTURE SEEMS TO BE IN A STASIS; THERE IS NO CHANGE. AS IF SHE WERE BEING PRESERVED.

THE STRUCTURE RESTS, FROZEN IN TIME.

MOST VINES HAD SHED THEIR LEAVES, AND NOW HANG BRITTLE AND BARE FROM THE EDGES OF THE GREY STRUCTURE. BROWN STRANDS FORM CURTAINS COVERING THE CONCRETE, SOME STILL HOLD THEIR LEAVES AND BRING LITTLE GREEN TO THE OTHERWISE LIFELESS SCENE. BROWN TAKES OVER AS THE GREENS FADE, AND LIFE GIVES WAY TO THIS LIFELESS NATURE. EVEN THE OCHRE AND RUST TONES OF THE LEAF PILES SPREAD ACROSS THE VAST SITE FADE AS THEY TURN VARIOUS SHADES OF BROWN.

FROM THE ONCE LUSH GREEN BALLS, ONLY THE BROWN STRUCTURES REMAIN, STANDING PROUD AND ALLOWING VIEWS THROUGH THEIR BARE SKELETON.

AS MOMENTS PASS, WATER RETURNS, SHALLOW, ALL OVER, SOON TURNING WHITE. THERE IS NO NOISE, JUST SILENCE. SHIMMERING. SPARKLING, AS THE HARD SURFACE REFLECTS LIGHT. LIKE ON THE TILES OF A MIRRORBALL, THE LIGHT DANCES AS IT TOUCHES THE WHITE SURFACES. JUST AS THE SHIMMER WE WOULD SEE ONCE STRUCTURES ARE COMPLETE, IT HERALDS THE END OF THIS GREEN CYCLE. WIND GUSHES THROUGH THE STRUCTURE, MAKING HER WHISTLE ONCE MORE, WHILE WHITE COLLECTS IN DIFFERENT PLACES.

LIGHT WASHES OUT THE COLOURS.
EVERYTHING GETS LIGHTER.
THE STRUCTURE GLOWS.

WHERE GREEN GREW, SKELETAL STRUCTURES NOW STAND. DELICATE IN THEIR WAY, THEY STAND STILL. FORGOTTEN STRANDS OF VINES TWIST AND COIL AS THEY DISAPPEAR WITHIN THE PROCESS OF LETTING GO. IN CREVICES OF BROKEN CONCRETE, LAST REMAINS OF GREEN COLLECT. LIKE LITTLE SANCTUARIES, CRACKS AND HOLES PRESERVE THE GREEN REMAINS. FRAGILE LIKE THE CONCRETE STRUCTURE, THE BROWN IS THE ONLY THING THAT REMAINS OF THE GREEN.

THE BROWN FADES INTO THE BACKGROUND AS, LIKE A BLANKET, WHITE BEGINS TO COVER SMALL PATCHES OF THE STRUCTURE. BUT ONCE IN A WHILE, SOMETHING GREEN POKES THROUGH THE WHITE BLANKET. THERE IS LITTLE GREEN LEFT ON THE SURFACES, NOT JUST THE REMAINS OF GREEN VINES, BUT A GREEN THAT IS SOFTER.

WE RARELY HEAR SOME FAMILIAR SOUNDS AS PIECES OF THE STRUCTURE FALL TO THE GROUND. IT IS A TIME OF ENDING. THE GREEN ENDS, AND SO DOES THE BUILDING. WHAT REMAINS ARE STRUCTURES AND MEMORIES. OF MOMENTS THAT WERE GREENER AND MORE ALIVE.

STRETCHING ACROSS IN THEIR EMBRACE, ROOTS AND VINES ARE WHAT IS LEFT OF THE ONCE SO GLORIOUS GREEN. THEY REMAIN, GIVING STABILITY TO THE STRUCTURE AND EVEN NOW, IN THESE MOMENTS OF CHANGE, THEY ARE PROTECTING AND SUPPORTING THE REMAINS. IN COLDNESS, THEIR WARM EMBRACE REMAINS.

SEEMINGLY FROZEN IN TIME, THE STRUCTURE REMAINS.
EVERYTHING RESTS.
ALL IS CALM, AND THE BREATHS GET SLOWER.
IT IS NOT THE END.

WE WATCH.
WE WAIT.
WE REMAIN.

chapter four

future pt. 2

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION. FORM FOLLOWS NEED.

IN CARE WE TRUST, IN COMMUNITY WE BELIEVE.

THE CYCLE CONTINUES BUT WILL IT SUSTAIN.
IN A WORLD FULL OF CYCLES, WHAT WILL REMAIN?

from green to forms

a possible future?

“need”

“care”

“community”

“autonomy”

[...] UTOPIA NOT AS AN IDEA TO BE
REALIZED BUT AS A PROCESSUAL
INSTRUMENT OF SOCIO-SPATIAL AND
POLITICAL CRITIQUE [...]

(Critical Entries, 2025)

from green to structures

“Structures adapt as their surroundings and constraints change. Similar to adaptations of living organisms, these changes are often just miniature diversions from the norm. In their purpose, they provide positive and life-altering additions to the existing structure.

Observations show that the number of adaptations is rapidly increasing, while simultaneously, the time between these adaptations is decreasing. Though changes are nothing bad per se, some of these changes give rise to concerns. Comparing the process of rising and forms of structures to older ones suggests a shift towards radical efficiency.

Structures are not only adapting but also rising at an alarming rate; at the same time, this implies that older structures disappear within mere moments, being forced to make way for the new ones. Within this constant change, the rising process also changes itself, as the once slower process now increasingly speeds up, following the shift towards radical efficiency implied from within.

Structures now show interior patterns of constant flow and movement, leaving no room for pause, decreasing their lifespan drastically. The cause of this is still unclear, but it is important to understand that fast-paced growth is not only harmful to the structures themselves but also negatively affects the lifespan of construction machines.

Without time to rest and to exist, the memory of these structures fades quicker as they come to be remembered as “no-place”. When pause is seen as a flaw, efficiency and speed are seen as a need; slowing down and trusting in slow processes is seen as something radical and disruptive.”

(An excerpt from “Rising Structures - changes of growing”)

a possible future?

Architecture exists in a system, handling different factors and influences. Therefore, architecture itself needs to consider and merge different flows in the same way that capitalism is a combination of different flows (Gough, 2018). Hence, architects should always question their practice of managing different flows (Sorkin, 2014).

This line of thinking also requires us to find alternative ways of spatial production to propose a paradigm shift. As Mazzucato (2021) states, we can no longer wait to do things differently, and to do so, we need to find a common purpose. Furthermore, she states that the current capitalist market system is not only failing many people now, but also changes the planet in ways that will also fail future generations.

It is therefore necessary that architects and planners are aware of their responsibilities, power, and influence in every design process, as every action impacts various societal systems. In this process of reflection, there also needs to be a shift within our practice.

While capitalism is dominated by the idea of constant growth (Demaria, 2021), past market failures and dips painted a different picture than the infallible growth machine. To move away from the dependency of market flows, we need to reimagine how to work and invest together. Working together brings change, and in that practice, we need to be open to uncertainty and experimentation while at the same time being aware that trying something always has its risks, but at the same time invites experimentation, visions and most importantly, imagination (Mazzucato, 2021)

[...] CHANGE CAN ONLY HAPPEN IF WE ARE CONVINCED THAT A BETTER LIFE IS POSSIBLE. (Mazzucato, 2021, p. 211)

As a result of past crises caused by capitalist market flows, the idea of degrowth emerged, arguing that downscaling the global economy is essential for creating a sustainable future (Asara et al., 2015). Following that logic and considering the current state, the architectural practice would either need to embrace and follow the concepts of degrowth or detach itself entirely from financial structures to be a driver for a sustainable future.

As of right now, growth is accepted as an unquestioned imperative in societal structures (Asara et al., 2015; Demaria, 2021), whereas degrowth is challenging this imperative. The idea is not to reduce the GDP but to increase social justice and ecological sustainability. Further degrowth argues that continuous economic growth is not only ecologically catastrophic, but also economically unsustainable (Asara et al., 2013).

Savini (2024) further argues that in a growing economy, improvements in efficiency offset increased production and consumption, which does not help to decrease emissions. He continues to argue that the path to equality is reduction and that the focus needs to be on our essential needs.

At its core, degrowth is a campaign countering the paradigm of growth (Asara et al., 2013; Demaria et al., 2013; Savini, 2024). Demaria argues that

Economic growth is unsustainable, might not be socially desirable and is based on debt; whereas wellbeing and a growth in GDP do not seem to have any relation (Demaria, 2021)

The goal is to escape from a society that is absorbed by consumption and to aim for creating a society of abundance with a focus on sharing, simplicity, conviviality, care and commons (Demaria, 2021). Even more, it aims to foster a society that is based on sufficiency, autonomy and democracy, liberated from the drive to consume and produce, by downsizing the material throughput (Demaria, 2021; Savini, 2023a).

Degrowth is formed on satiation, satisfying all essential needs (Savini, 2024, 2025). And with that, degrowth envisions a shift in the social norms that sustain the compulsion to grow, accumulate, exploit and prioritise productivity, refusing capitalist values such as work, compulsive consumption, individual competition, and profit maximisation. Instead, degrowth praises and promotes values such as repair, share, divest, gift and community (Savini, 2025).

"THE VALUE QUESTION NEEDS TO GO BEYOND CAPITAL AND COMMODIFICATION"
(Petrescu et al., 2021, p. 163; referencing Graeber, 2001)

Tim Jackson (2009) states that the economy should thrive on care, culture, education, health and ecological regeneration. This can be achieved through democratic processes that are autonomous from the socio-cultural and political institutions that sustain the growth imperative (Asara et al., 2013; Savini, 2025).

Autonomy is central for degrowth, as a core imaginary is to establish autonomy from the ideal of growth. It describes the emancipation from the hegemony of the growth imperative and the imperative of competition and productivity. Autonomy occurs through perpetual reproduction both internally and externally, which Savini (Savini, 2023b) calls nesting and federating. He argues that these practices provide stability to the fragile system of autonomy. Nesting means the creation of multiple thresholds of engagement in processes to avoid the formation of hierarchies and individual power, whereas federating means the connection to other autonomous groups.

Community is where degrowth sees value. The value of the commons means that a society provides space(s) where skills, knowledge, labour and creativity, etc., are shared and exchanged. The process in which resources, cultural or natural, are kept, governed and created collectively is called commoning (De Angelis & Stavrides, 2010; Linebaugh, 2008; Petrescu et al., 2021). Commoning and Autonomy often go hand in hand and create their own closed systems where participatory processes are promoted and elements of the conventional capitalist system are challenged (Balaguer Rasillo, 2021).

Generally speaking, degrowth is about a transition to a convivial society that lives simply, in common and with less (Demaria, 2021)! To achieve this proposed societal shift, however, change needs to happen on a large scale, in governments (Mazzucato, 2021) and not just on a small scale.

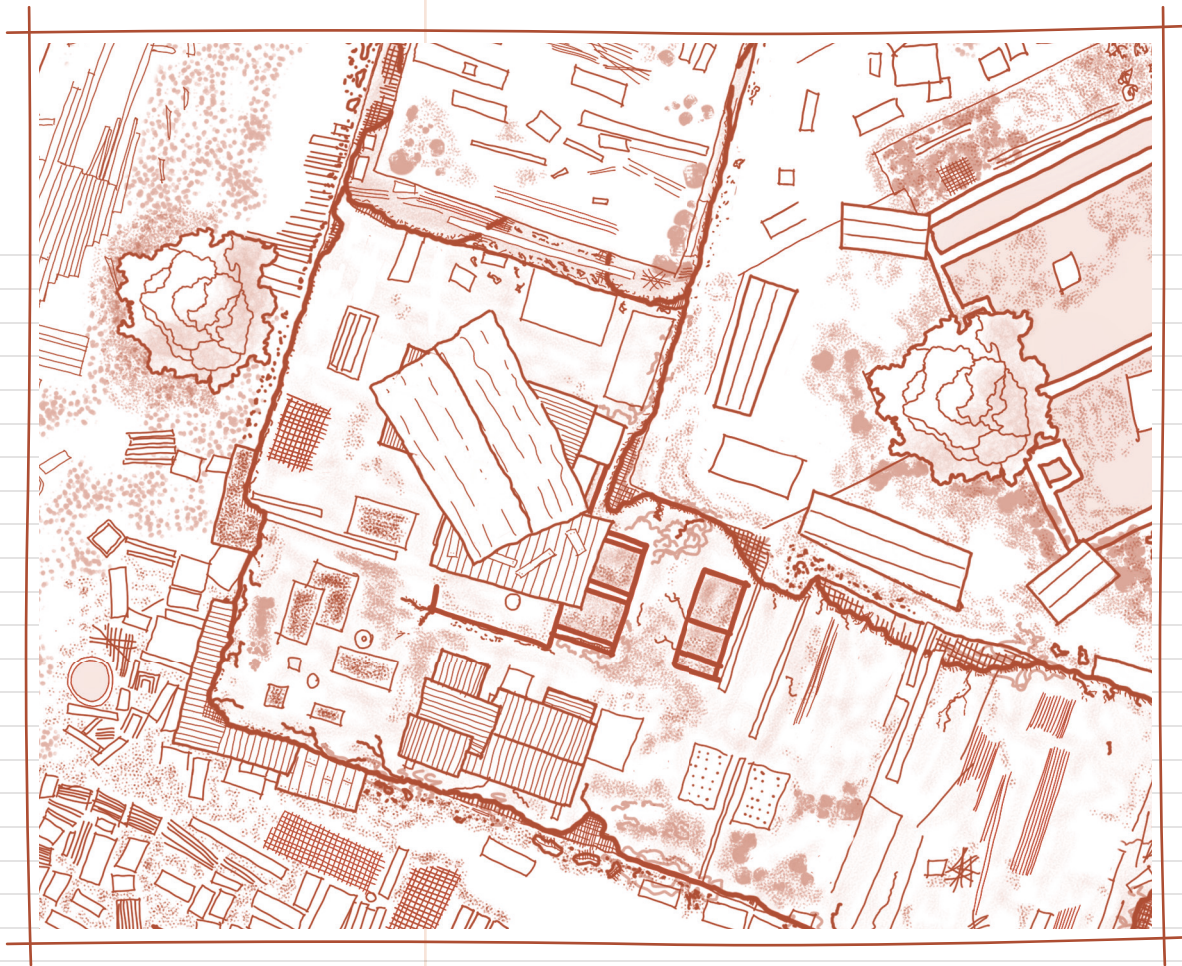


fig. 30 - The Elbtower: structures of need and care

“need”

WITH NOISE COMES CHANGE, BUT THIS TIME IT IS A DIFFERENT NOISE ONCE AGAIN. NOT THE LOUD PULSING SHRIEKS OF THE CONCRETE STRUCTURE, NOR THE QUIET BREATHS AND WHISTLES OF THE GREEN. IT IS DIFFERENT, QUIETER, BUT ONGOING, WHILE THE BREATHS OF THE GREEN STILL LINGER IN THE BACKGROUND. AS MOMENTS PASS, WE WATCH AS A NEW CYCLE BEGINS. A DIFFERENT ONE, FOR SURE, BUT LIKE ANY OTHER NOW, IT STARTS WITH THE GROWTH OF GREEN.

GREEN TAKES OVER AGAIN.
A NEW CYCLE STARTS.
QUIET MURMURS.

SOMETHING NEW STARTS TO GROW FROM THE SURFACES OF THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURE. THERE IS A NEW COMPLEXITY NOW, AND AS THE GREEN SPREADS AND BLOOMS AGAIN, NEW FORMS APPEAR ON THE GROUND. THEY ARE NOT TOWERS, NOT FLAT EITHER, THEY ARE SOMETHING IN BETWEEN. THEY EXTEND FROM THE GROUND, YET DON'T HAVE ANY ASPIRATIONS TO REACH US.

THEY DON'T RISE. THEY GROW.

IN THEIR COMPLEXITY AND PROCESS, THE NEW STRUCTURES CLUSTER IN THE ODDEST OF PLACES. SOME GROW AROUND THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURE, OTHERS GROW ON BROKEN SLABS, BETWEEN REMNANTS OF SCAFFOLDING AND DECAYING WALLS. THERE IS NO SYSTEM AND NO GUIDING PRINCIPLE. THESE STRUCTURES GROW LIKE GREEN, CHANGING AND ADAPTING ALONG THE WAY.

THEY EMERGE FROM PILES. PILES OF MATERIAL. PILES OF CHAOS. PILES OF PAST RUIN.

AND SLOWLY THEY TAKE SHAPE. A DIFFERENT ONE AND EACH ONE ON THEIR OWN. SOME LOOK SIMILAR, BUT THERE IS NO ORDER, NO HIERARCHY. THE STRUCTURES GROW AS THEY PLEASE AND AS THEY SEE FIT, OUT OF ALL THAT REMAINS FROM THE RUINED PAST. AND AS THEY GROW, NEW MATERIAL APPEARS. LEFT ABANDONED AND APPEARING, THIS MATERIAL FINDS A NEW PURPOSE AS IT JOINS THE REST AND FORMS THESE NEW STRUCTURES.

THIS GROWTH IS CHAOTIC.
UNSTRUCTURED.
BUT BEAUTIFUL.

BOXES MADE OF METAL REST AND STAND AS THOUGH THEY HAVE BEEN HERE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME. IN MOMENTS, TARPS AND OTHER STRUCTURES ATTACH, AND AS THE BOXES GROW, CHAOS MOVES IN. TARPS SPAN OVER CRUMBLING WALLS AND THE GROUND, FIXATED TO THEIR SURROUNDINGS WITH REMNANTS OF ROPES, FABRIC AND DRIED VINES. MATERIALS AND GREEN GROW AND JOIN TOGETHER AS THIS PROCESS OF RE-GROWING IS UNDERWAY. IN TIME, EVEN SCAFFOLDING RISES AGAIN, NOT TO SUPPORT THE EXISTING STRUCTURES, BUT TO STAND ON ITS OWN. JUST TO THEN BE COVERED IN LAYERS OF MATERIAL, PROTECTING IT FROM WIND AND WATER.

THE NEW STRUCTURES DON'T FOLLOW THE SAME PATTERNS AS THE ORIGINAL ONES, THEIR SHAPES ARE DIFFERENT, THEY ARE SMALLER, YET STILL MORE COMPLEX. THEY LOOK UNFINISHED AND LIKE A PART OF A NEVER-ENDING PROCESS. AS THEY TWIST AND GROW, MATERIAL ADAPTS. FRAMES YOU WOULD FIND IN WALLS NOW TOWER ALONG THE EDGES. PLANKS AND FORMWORK NOW MORPH INTO WALLS AND ROOFS, AND EVEN REACHING OUT OF THE SKELETON'S STRUCTURE, NEW STRUCTURES GROW, BLURRING THE BORDERS EVEN MORE. THEY EXTEND ON THE GROUND, BUT THEY DON'T HAVE THE DESIRE OR NEED TO START RISING TOWARDS US.

CHAOTIC. BUT CALM.
THERE IS NO INTERFERENCE.
THERE IS HARMONY.

THE STRUCTURE GROWS. SHE DOESN'T RISE UPWARDS.
SHE SPREADS. NOT IN EXCESS BUT JUST ENOUGH.
JUST AS MUCH AS SHE NEEDS.

“care”

WITH PASSING TIME, THE SIGHT OF THE ONCE REMAINING STRUCTURE CHANGES, AS THE BARE CONCRETE STRUCTURE, AGAIN, FADES FURTHER INTO THE BACKGROUND. THE SCENE CHANGES, AND EVERYTHING IS GROWING ONCE AGAIN. NOTHING HAPPENS SUDDENLY, AND EVERYTHING FOLLOWS THE BREATH OF THE GROUND. IT'S A SLOW PROCESS, ONE THAT IS NOT RUSHED. ONE THAT HAPPENS WITH CARE.

THE GROWING MATERIAL STRUCTURES STILL STAND. NOT MANY MORE. NOT FEWER. BUT LIKE THEIR SURROUNDINGS, THEY CONTINUE TO CHANGE. TO GROW, THEY EXPAND, AND SOME GROW STURDIER, MAKING THEM MORE RESISTANT TO THE FORCES OF NATURE. OTHERS GREW LARGER, NOT HIGHER, SPREADING IN SIZE, GROWING AROUND WHAT IS ALREADY THERE. AROUND THE GREEN. AROUND

CORNERS. THERE IS NO HASTE IN THIS GROWTH. IN DELIBERATE MOVEMENTS, THE STRUCTURES TRANSFORM.

SMOOTH.
CALM.
WITH CARE.

THE STRUCTURES ARE NOT THE ONLY THING GROWING AS THE GREEN CONTINUES TO GROW. UNDISTURBED. GREENS MAKE THEIR WAY ALONG THE CONCRETE STRUCTURE, ALMOST REACHING US. THEIR VINES AND ROOTS CONTINUE TO WRAP AROUND OUR BODIES, AND WE BECOME ONE WITH THE STRUCTURE ONCE MORE. THIS TIME, THEY SEEM TO GROW FASTER, NOT AGGRESSIVE, BUT FOLLOWING AN INVISIBLE PATTERN, CONNECTING THE NEW STRUCTURES AND SUPPORTING THE OLD ONES.

SOME OF THE GREEN GROWS NEW. WITHIN WOODEN FRAMES AND STONE-LINED BEDS, THEY EMERGE WITH THE SUPPORT OF WOOD AND STEEL RODS. TWISTING THEIR WAY UNTIL THEY COVER THEIR UNIQUE LATTICES. THIS GREEN GROWS - DISAPPEARS - GROWS AGAIN. DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER GREEN, IT FOLLOWS ITS OWN CYCLE. A CYCLE AS SHORT AS A BREATH, YET THE GROUND REMEMBERS THEIR SHAPE, UNTIL NEW GREEN BEGINS TO GROW.

NEW RHYTHMS.
SAME PROCESS.
REPEATING.

THE CHANGES ARE SMALL, BUT EVEN THE EXISTING STRUCTURE APPEARS TO CHANGE, NOT ON HER OWN, BUT THROUGH EVERYTHING AROUND. THE OLD CRACKS, THAT JUST GREW DEEPER OVER TIME, FILLED WITH ROOTS OF THE GREEN, ARE NOW BRIDGED WITH MESH AND PLANKS. IT IS NOT ABOUT UNDOING WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST, IT IS ABOUT MENDING. KEEPING THE STATE OF DECAY FROM EXTENDING OR GETTING WORSE. WITH TIME, LIKE A PATCHWORK, THE CRACKS AND RIFTS SLOWLY DISAPPEAR UNDER OTHER, NEW MATERIALS.

NOTHING IS BREAKING AWAY ANYMORE. THE STRUCTURE IS HEALING.

LEANING WALLS ARE SUPPORTED WITH REMAINS OF OLD SCAFFOLDING. AND GAPS ARE BRIDGED WITH WOODEN PLANKS. AS IF EVERYTHING WANTS TO BECOME ONE, MATERIALS AND STRUCTURES CONNECT AND CREATE A UNITY. SUPPORTING EACH OTHER IN LITTLE ACTS OF CARE AND ACTING TOGETHER TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF DECAY, NOT UNDOING IT.

THE RHYTHM OF CHANGE IS SLOW, AND CHANGES HAPPEN WITH PURPOSE. AS A RESPONSE.

WATER COLLECTS AGAIN. NOW, NOT JUST RANDOMLY BUT IN DELIBERATE PLACES. IN BASINS, IN MOSS-LINED TRENCHES BESIDE ROOTS. EVEN THE WATER TURNS TAMER, BUT IT IS STILL EQUALLY FREE. AS IF IT IS DIRECTED BY THE STRUCTURE, NOT TRAPPED, THE WATER KNOWS WHERE TO FLOW.

INTENTION LEAVES ITS MARK ON THE STRUCTURE.

THE CHANGES ARE SUBTLE, THOUGH ELEMENTS BEGIN TO SHIFT, AND MATERIALS

MOVE. STRUCTURES ARE NO LONGER SOMETHING IMPOSED ON THE GROUND. INSTEAD, THEY ARE ARRANGED WITH CARE AND IN DIALOGUE. PATHS CURVE AROUND BIG GREENS, WHILE SLABS AND STRUCTURES EXTEND AND RETRACT. NEW MATERIAL CURVES AROUND THE EXISTING. NOTHING IS FIXED, AND EVERYTHING CHANGES.

AND SOMEHOW, WE ARE SUPPORTED TOO. HELD. IN THIS SLOWNESS, SOMETHING
KEEPS US WHOLE; IT KEEPS US FROM FADING, FROM LEAVING THIS PLACE TOO
SOON.

WHAT ONCE WAS UNWANTED RUIN NOW SPEAKS IN GESTURES OF SUPPORT.

THIS IS CARE.

“community”

AND AS MOMENTS PASS, THE NOISES CHANGE ONCE MORE AS A NEW RHYTHM SETTLES IN THE SPACE. IT IS ONE OF REPETITION. REPETITION OF SOUNDS. REPETITION OF FORMS. WITHOUT BECOMING EXACT COPIES, THE STRUCTURES CHANGE. ADAPT. BECOME ONE, MADE OUT OF MANY. JUST LIKE US, THE STRUCTURES BECOME A COMMUNITY.

SHARING.
SUPPORTING.
CONNECTING.

THE STRUCTURES BEGIN TO EXTEND TOWARDS EACH OTHER; THEY ARE NO LONGER INDIVIDUALS. THEY CONNECT THROUGH LINES OF STEEL, SURROUNDED BY VINES. THEY CONNECT THROUGH NEW WALLS GROWING FROM THE GROUND AND REACHING TOWARDS EACH OTHER. THEY CONNECT THROUGH NEW PATHS, GROWING VISIBLE ON THE GROUND. BUT THE STRUCTURES NEVER MERGE; THEY ONLY CONNECT. WEAVING TOGETHER, THE STRUCTURES GROW INTO A WHOLE.

A CENTRE. OPEN. LEFT ALONE.
A TRIANGLE, IGNORED UNTIL NOW.

NEW STRUCTURES RISE. NOT CONNECTED TO THE OTHERS. FOR NOW, THEY ARE SEPARATE, BUT TOGETHER. IN THEIR FORMS, THEY RESEMBLE STAIRS, YET THEY LEAD NOWHERE, NOT TO DOORS NOR HIGHER GROUNDS. THEY JUST STAND FOR THEMSELVES, IN INTERACTION WITH EACH OTHER. A CIRCLE. THAT IS WHAT THEY FORM. A PLACE SO IMPORTANT. A CIRCLE IN THE CENTRE. THESE STRUCTURES DON'T ISOLATE THE CIRCLE FROM THE REST; THEY FRAME IT, ALLOWING PATHS TO ENTER. THERE IS A PURPOSE BEHIND EVERYTHING, THERE IS INTENTION, AS IF LIKE A COUNCIL, THEY FRAME THE OPEN CENTRE, LIKE WE FRAME THIS STRUCTURE.

AND IN THE CENTRE, THERE IS MORE GREEN.

THE NOISE CHANGES AGAIN. IT GETS LOUDER AND MORE ACTIVE. MURMURS CONTINUE, THEY GET LOUDER, AND THE STRUCTURES CHANGE. WHISTLES FILL THE AIR AGAIN AS THE WIND PASSES THROUGH THE STRUCTURE AND ITS NEW ADDITIONS. THOUGH NEW STRUCTURES GROW AND ADAPT, THE SOUNDS CONTINUE TO BE CALM. IT'S NOT NOISE, LIKE IT USED TO BE.

SLABS AND ROOFS START TO EXTEND BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE CONCRETE STRUCTURE. THEY EXPAND. FORMWORK AND CONCRETE SLABS TURN INTO STAIRS, CONNECTING DIFFERENT HEIGHTS, AND TARPS SPAN BETWEEN REMNANTS OF OLD AND NEW WALLS, PROTECTING THE UNDERNEATH FROM SUN AND RAIN. EVERYTHING MOVES, EVERYTHING CHANGES. AND EVERYTHING FINDS A PLACE, OLD OR NEW. ALL FIND PURPOSE. IN LONG LINES, MATERIAL GATHERS: SCAFFOLDING, PLANKS, GLASS FORMWORK. ASSEMBLED.

AND IN THEIR WAYS, STRUCTURES START TO REPEAT. THEY ARE NOT IDENTICAL, BUT SIMILAR. THEY START TO MATCH AND CONTINUE TO BE INDIVIDUAL. THE STRUCTURES COME TOGETHER, LIKE A SYSTEM, LIKE A COMMUNITY. MATERIALS THAT MISMATCH IN AESTHETICS STAND TOGETHER. INTENTIONALLY. THERE IS NO LESSER, NO BETTER. ALL ARE EQUAL.

THERE IS NO HIERARCHY.

STRUCTURES AND MATERIALS SHIFT. THE STRUCTURES MOVE IN SYNCHRONICITY WITH THE BREATH OF THE GROUND. THERE IS NO FINAL PLACE; THERE WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE. TIMES CHANGE AND PASS, AND SO DO THE STRUCTURES.

CLOSER TO US, THE STRUCTURES OUT OF TWIGS AND VINES REAPPEAR. LIKE DOTS, THEY MARK THE BUILDING. AT A SAFE DISTANCE FROM THE OTHERS, THEY SHARE THE CONCRETE STRUCTURE. CONNECTED BUT SEPARATE, THEY EXIST BESIDE EACH OTHER, IN PEACE. WITHOUT DISTURBING. CO-EXISTING!

AND EVERYWHERE, VINES CLIMB UP RUSTED STEEL. COLLABORATING. JOINING. TOGETHER. THEY SPRINKLE THE RUSTY METAL WITH GREEN. THE STRUCTURES SEEM TO COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER. THEY EXPAND AND CONTRACT WITH RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER. NO OVERTAKING. COMMONING!

AND FROM ABOVE, THE STRUCTURE NO LONGER LOOKS LIKE A RUIN.

SHE LOOKS LIKE A LIVING SYSTEM.
WHOLE.
LIKE A COMMUNITY.

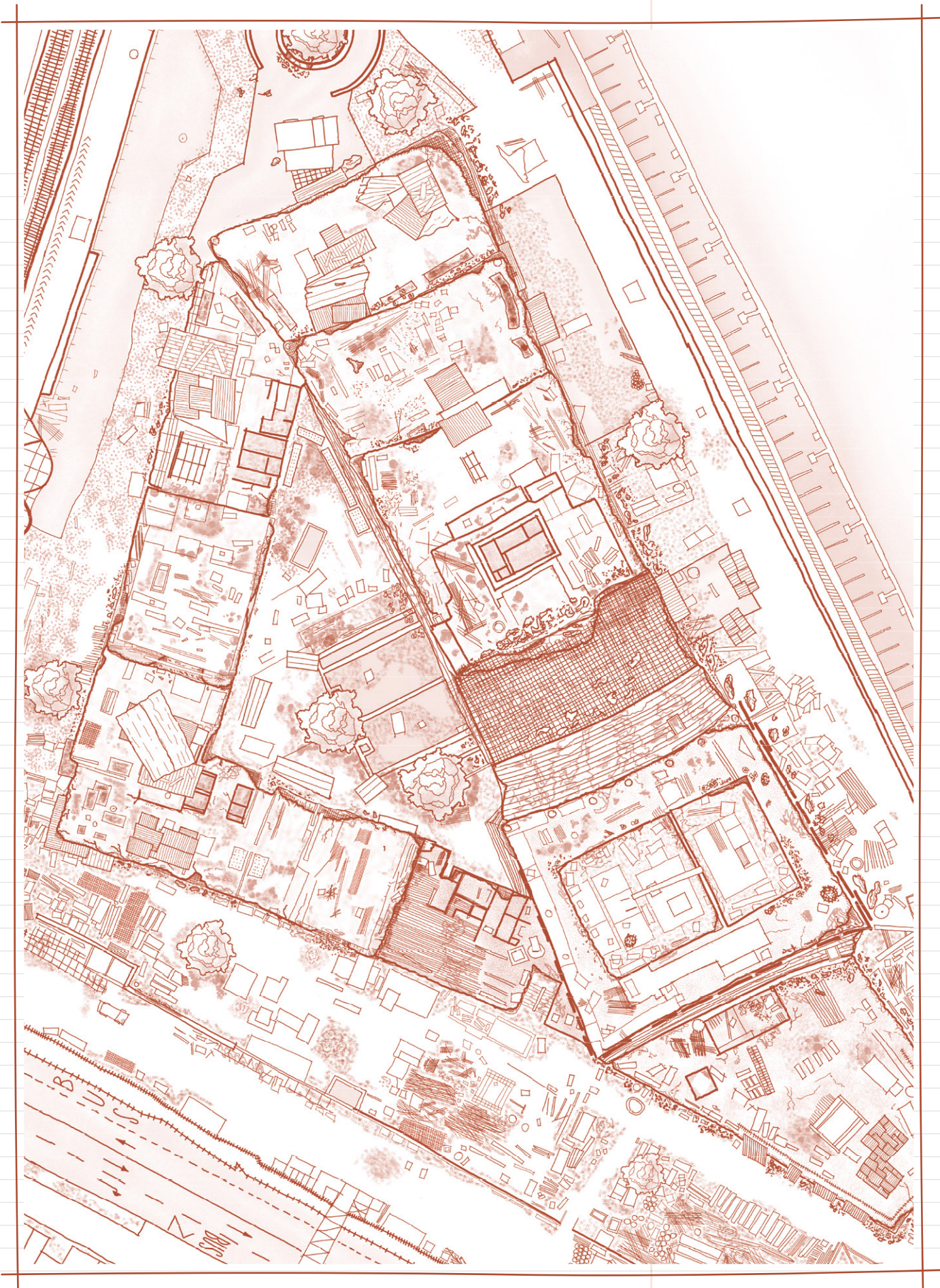


fig. 31 - The Elbtower: a utopia?

“autonomy”

NOW, THE SITE HAS ITS OWN RHYTHM, ITS OWN SOUND. THIS SOUND IS NOTHING THAT WE HAVE EVER HEARD BEFORE, BUT THERE IS BEAUTY AND RESILIENCE IN IT.

LIKE A CONTINUOUS BREATH OF THE GROUND, THE STRUCTURE NOW FOUND HER
HEARTBEAT. SLOW, CONTINUOUS AND GENTLE. LIKE A PULSE, IT RESONATES AND
AS WE GET USED TO THE EVEN SOUNDS, IT GETS QUIETER.

THE STRUCTURES, NEW OR OLD, NO LONGER GROW ISOLATED; THEY REACH AND GROW TOWARDS EACH OTHER, AND IN DOING SO, THEY CREATE SPACE FOR THE GREEN. MOVING AND TWISTING. ADAPTING. GROWTH IS NO LONGER ABOUT DOMINANCE, ABOUT SPECTACLE; IT IS ABOUT RESPONSE AND RESPECT. GROWTH BECOMES A PROCESS OF DIALOGUE, OF CARING, OF COMMONING.

AND WITH TIME, THE STRUCTURES ADAPT AND MERGE WITH THE GROUND. EVERYTHING TURNS INTO A WHOLE. ROOFS ARE COVERED IN GREEN, AS THEIR ONCE SHARP EDGES BLEND INTO THE SURROUNDINGS. ALL THESE CHANGES ARE SLOW. AND FINALLY, THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUND AND STRUCTURE SLOWLY FADE, UNTIL THEY ARE NO LONGER TWO BUT ONE. POOLS OF WATER REFLECT IMAGES OF THE SCENE, REMINDING US THAT NOTHING IS EVER SEPARATE; EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED. EVEN NOW, WE ARE INTERTWINED WITH THIS PLACE, EVEN IF WE SHOULD LEAVE AT ANY MOMENT.

NOTHING CAN EXIST BY ITSELF; THERE IS ALWAYS A COMMUNITY AROUND. GROWING
VISIBLE OVER TIME, THESE CONNECTIONS ARE WHAT HOLD THIS WHOLE UTOPIA
TOGETHER. IT IS A DIALOGUE. A COMMUNITY.

THIS UTOPIA IS STILL A SPECTACLE, JUST A DIFFERENT ONE THAN ORIGINALLY INTENDED. NEVERTHELESS, IT IS BEAUTIFUL, IT HAS CHARACTER AND IS NOT AT ALL COLD AND LIFELESS, BUT ALIVE. THERE IS NO ISOLATION, THERE IS COMMUNITY. GROWTH IS NOW A DELIBERATE PROCESS, AND WITH EVERY NEW STRUCTURE GROWING, THE STRUCTURE GROWS, YET SHE NEVER RISES.

THERE IS NO LONGER A WANT OF RISING, AND THERE IS NO LONGER A NEED. WHATEVER IS NOT USED ANYMORE CHANGES PLACES AND BECOMES PART OF SOMETHING NEW. THE ORIGINAL FLOW IS NOW A CYCLE, SUSTAINING ITSELF WITH WHAT IS THERE.

AND FROM ABOVE, THE STRUCTURE NO LONGER LOOKS LIKE A LOST AND ABANDONED CONSTRUCTION PROJECT.

NO LONGER AN ABANDONED DREAM.

NO LONGER A RUIN.

BUT A LIVING CYCLE.

BREATHING.
GROWING.
LIVING.

assembly

REFLECTING IS CARING. AND CARING IS KNOWING.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM A STORY OF CYCLES?

WHY SHOULD WE CARE?
WHAT DOES IT TELL US OF WHAT WE SHOULD DO?

reflecting
a manifesto (of sorts)

SPECULATIVE FUTURES COLLAPSE(S) THE
DISTANCE BETWEEN TOMORROW AND
TODAY, CREATING EXPERIENCES THAT
HELP US REFLECT ON THE RAMIFICATIONS
OF POTENTIAL CHANGE

(Hoffman 2022, p.2)

reflection (in the form of a summary)

No matter what happens to the Elbtower, the fact remains that its story will always be connected to ruin, to money, to speculation, and failure. It will always be a top-down decision that was made to generate value through spectacle and controversy. Even if we disregard the intended height of 245m, the decision to designate the project as an office and hotel building in a city where there is already an abundance of empty office spaces (NDR, 2025c) and a lack of housing, underlines Sandercock's (1998) and Tafuri's (1976) points on how capitalist ideologies manifest in architecture.

The thesis aimed to highlight how architectural design is linked and influenced by market practices and how, through fictional writing, an architecture that is not dependent on monetary influences can exist. The story tells a process, detached from the fast-paced practices of current social and economic change. The Elbtower was not just a place, but a world in which a fictional story developed; it is a representation of a future that refuses to rely on fragile systems. In times of continuous obsolescence, architecture needs to change in ways to not adhere to the forced temporality of economic markets. The fast-paced nature of capitalist development and consumption paints a picture that constant change is necessary for being satisfying. In ways, the thesis shows that not only is there quality in slow-paced processes, but that there is also meaning and beauty in exiting defined systems of consumption.

During the process of navigating the complexity and variety of different research fields, more questions were developed than were answered. And in its intended nature of raising awareness of a discourse and encouraging critical thought, this thesis lays the groundwork for further explorations into how fictional storytelling can shape architecture and how society can shift towards being independent from money. Whereas the architectural storytelling and criticality of current practices are the primary focus, the thesis also touched upon the economic workings, as well as possible alternatives. In future explorations of changing towards an economy beyond capitalism, it would be beneficial to also highlight Gibson-Graham's diverse economies as part of the economic discourse. This concept recognises the transformative value of economies that exist within the cracks of the current capitalist economy and through that present alternatives to waged labour, exploitative enterprises, private property, market exchange and interest-based financing (Savini, 2024).

WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

Before talking about the central takeaways of this thesis process, it is important to note again that the aim of the thesis was not to create a deep-rooted and functioning solution on how architecture can be independent from money or a proposal for the Elbtower. The aim was never to be realistic, but to imagine fictional alternatives, to polarise, and to evoke critical thinking, within my ways of thinking as well as within you, the reader.

Another important note is that the explorations and observations conducted in this process are just limited perspectives. As I described earlier in the process, it is highly important that we know and are aware

QUESTIONS THAT CAME
UP DURING THE PROCESS
AND THAT I STILL HAVEN'T
FOUND ANSWERS TO...

HOW DO THE TOP-DOWN PROCESSES
NEEDED FOR DEGROWTH HAPPEN
IF THE TOP IS UNWILLING TO MOVE
AWAY FROM THEIR COMMODITIES?

HOW CAN WE MAKE CHANGES IN THE
WAY WE APPROACH ARCHITECTURE
(BEYOND CAPITALISM) SOCIALLY
ACCEPTABLE AND NOT NICHE
PRACTICES?

I WILL ELABORATE ON THIS LATER
IN THE REFLECTION

	that everything we see and observe triggers perceptions with limitations and bias. Taking this into account and understanding our set of limitations is essential within the architectural practice. Not just one that aims to rid itself of the limitations of capitalism and its adjacent phenomena, but also in general.		the machinery, all supporting structures, and even the value of the land it is built on. All values that are quantifiable and monetary. Of course, this is all hypothetical value, but it is still there.
	Even the story itself relies on limitations, not just considering how processes or architecture are described, but also from which perspective they are observed. Describing the processes from a detached and top-down perspective was a conscious choice. The story and the processes are confined to a set area. Just the same degrowth as of right now, only works on small scales and is successful when separated from outside sources. For degrowth to be scalable, fundamental changes within political systems are needed, and to start them, there needs to be a social and economic consensus that the way of current growth model is counterproductive.		Through the story, the thesis also highlights the existence of other forms of value, which are currently not considered within any assessments of investments as they are not easily quantifiable.
			VALUE OF (EXISTING) ECOLOGY, VALUE OF HABITAT, VALUE OF COMMUNITY, VALUE OF THE COMMONS, VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE, VALUE OF SHARING, ETC.
			Nevertheless, these hidden values should not only be considered in current evaluations but also have a key role in the change away from the domination of monetary value.
	And it is exactly there, in encouraging change and promoting the discourse, where I see the strengths of this story. The speculation and the fictionality of it are rooted in a theoretical ground, and by just describing processes and not proposing a design, the story gives the freedom of imagination to all who read it. It is within the ficto-critical nature of the story that there is a call for action. Mostly in the sense of how we see and approach design. Currently, it is the architects and designers who tell these stories in their various forms. BUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE POWER NO LONGER LIES WITH THESE SELECT GROUPS, BUT WITH ALL?		IS IT ARCHITECTURE?
			With the process of creating the story, quite often the question of With the process of creating the story, quite often the question of “is this really architecture?” came up, which strangely also served as a personal reminder of the biased and limited view of what architecture is. Throughout university studies, it is taught that architecture always has some sort of physical materialisation.
			SO, HOW DOES (FICTIONAL) ARCHITECTURAL STORYTELLING PROVIDE CRITIQUE?
	As planners, we need to cultivate this potential and co-create new visions for socio-spatial change. Therefore, we must engage with grassroots organisations, NGOs, not-for-profit groups, voluntary organisations, civic society, cooperative unions, activist organisations, and socio-ecological movements to counteract the (never-ending pressure to expand production and consumption (Savini, 2024).		By only describing processes, detached from proposing specific designs, everyone can imagine and create a world and a design for themselves. Through that, the power of design is no longer just exclusively with the architect, but allows everyone to contribute design. Decolonising the imaginary is a central step in moving towards a society that can imagine ways of living without monetary constraints.
	WHAT ELSE IS VALUE?		(Fictional) architectural writing allows, to describe the atmosphere in which the architecture rests and which processes develop over time. It is a form os speculating and telling the story of processes, people and the building itself. Through its subjective lens, it also helps to transfer social values connected to the design.
	Whereas value within the economic and financial sectors has a clear definition, the value(s) or architecture are often more subjective and abstract. Increasing monetary value is the key prerogative of capitalist market practices. Throughout the thesis process, the question of what other forms value can take, if not financial, continued to follow.		In being rooted in a context, and through investigation, the story becomes an act of site-specific speculation that can easily incorporate the complex nature of diverse contexts and cycles. In being vague and descriptive, a story can manifest itself in different iterations and ways, just as Calvino describes imaginary cities, this story describes imaginary processes.
	When visiting the construction site of the Elbtower and seeing the neglected and abandoned state it was in, it seemed as if there was no appreciation. And in a way, appreciation and value go hand in hand. So, if there is no appreciation, can there be any value?		The story is about decolonising the imaginary and opening up the discussion of what limitations architecture has (in a physical space) and how they can be combated through storytelling. It is about how the architect is way more than just a designer of structures and a planner of cycles and flows.
	IS THERE VALUE IN UGLINESS? AND HOW CAN THIS VALUE BE MADE VISIBLE AND APPRECIATED?		IT IS A STORY OF HOW THE ARCHITECT IS ALREADY A STORYTELLER AND HOW RUIN IS NOT ALWAYS THE END, BUT RATHER THE BEGINNING OF NEW CHAPTERS. AND A NEW LIFE!
	In the process of the thesis, I discovered several material and immaterial forms of value and appreciation. There is, of course, still monetary value left on the site itself, including the raw materials, the concrete skeleton,		
78			79

fig. 32 - A manifesto

a manifesto (of sorts)

A manifesto on the future of the architect in a society towards degrowth and away from money.*



ARCHITECT = STORYTELLER!!

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY!
NOT INDIVIDUALITY

ARCHITECTURE SHOULD NOT BE FOR THE FEW, BUT FOR ALL

PROMOTE REGENERATION!

ARCHITECTURE SHOULD BE RESILIENT AND REGENERATIVE TO BE ABLE TO HANDLE ALL CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE (SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL)

COLLABORATE!

ARCHITECTURE SHOULD BE CREATED AND DESIGNED TOGETHER WITH ALL USERS (VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE; HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN)

YOU DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING!

THE ARCHITECT IS NOT THE ALL-KNOWING EYE. THERE ARE MULTIPLE COMPETENCIES AND ABILITIES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES. WORK TOGETHER AND TRUST THEM!

OBSERVE AND ADVOCATE!

THE ARCHITECT SHOULD NO LONGER BE THE DECISION MAKER BUT THE SUPPORTER, EXPERT IN PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE

BE AWARE!

YOU NEED TO BE AWARE OF THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT, ITS IMPLICATION AND ALL INVOLVED PARTIES AND THEIR NEEDS. BE AWARE OF YOUR OWN BIAS AND POSITION!

FACILITATE CYCLES!

ARCHITECTURE SHOULD ENABLE CHANGES ACCORDING TO ACTIONS WITHIN

SPECULATE!

ARCHITECTURE NEEDS TO CONSIDER DIFFERENT SCENARIOS, OUTCOMES OR DEVELOPMENTS. IMAGINE ALTERNATIVES TO THE STATUS QUO

CONSIDER NEW FORMS OF VALUE!

THERE ARE OTHER FORMS OF SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL VALUE WE NEED TO CONSIDER; MONEY DOES NOT RULE THE WORLD UNLESS WE LET IT!

*ALTERNATIVELY, USE THESE PRACTICES TO PREVENT INVESTMENT RUIN, OR TO SAVE A RUIN FROM TOTAL DECAY.

references

references

itinerary of quotes

image credits

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