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Hamburg's warehouse district in Martin tom Dieck's *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*

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Abstract:

Most texts that deal with Martin tom Dieck's black-and-white comic *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt* (Zürich: Arrache Cœur, 1997, French title: *Vortex*) claim that it depicts the eponymous warehouse district (Speicherstadt) in Hamburg. As this paper shows, this claim is inaccurate: although the architecture in tom Dieck's drawings clearly refers to buildings in the warehouse district, the differences in the details are so obvious, that to speak of a straightforward depiction of the Speicherstadt is oversimplifying. After a brief comparison with Christoph Schäfer's picture book *Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2010), the paper concludes with a discussion of the depiction of urban environments in general and in tom Dieck's book in particular.

Martin tom Dieck's book *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt* was first published in 1997.¹ The German title, which can be translated as „a hundred views of the warehouse district“, sounds as if this book is a collection of pictures, maybe photographs, of the eponymous former free port area in Hamburg, Germany. Instead, however, it contains an avant-garde picture story, and my central topic will be the connections between this book and the warehouse district in Hamburg.

Hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt is, in its first edition, a hardcover volume published by Arrache Cœur in Zurich, Switzerland, containing about 150 unnumbered pages in the format of 18 by 18 centimetres. Each page is entirely filled with the reproduction of a black-and-white drawing, usually in brush, pen and ink, but sometimes in several other graphic techniques. In four cases, the two facing pages form a continuous picture in landscape format, but apart from that, each page represents an image in a sequence, which can be read as a narrative. Thus we can call this book a comic, if we follow Scott McCloud's widespread definition, since each pair of facing pages can be regarded as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence”.²

However, the book has several features untypical of comics that affect its readability: written text is almost completely missing,³ some of the drawings are highly abstract, the relation

1 The lower case spelling of the title used here follows the first edition. In a later edition, published by Edition Moderne, the spelling was changed.

2 Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 9.

3 Martin tom Dieck considered both possibilities at first, with or without text, and finally found it “more attractive

between subsequent pictures is often unclear, and the story is surreal and enigmatic. Furthermore, the comprehension of the narrative is made more difficult by the fact that each picture (apart from the four aforementioned double pages) fills the entire page, so that no reading rhythm can be suggested by varying the size and placement of panels, as in other comics.⁴ Accordingly, summaries of the content of *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt* vary significantly between different readers.⁵

However, since the story is not of much relevance here, I will only briefly sum up the most important plot elements in my own interpretation. In the beginning we see a man in a canoe between the roofs of a flooded town. The scenery changes into a system of canals. The water recedes and the canals dry up. A man wearing a fur coat performs some kind of magical ritual. Then it rains, and the water rises. The two men climb onto a roof, and one is hurled into the water by the other. The book ends with his body floating towards the water surface.⁶

If this summary hasn't made the mysteriousness of the story clear already, it should be added that a warship that tows two boats manned with drumming toy pandas is also featured in the book, as well as apparently animated bundles of wrapped rods, which, according to the author, are inspired by "some African utensil, the meaning of which is unknown to himself".⁷ This mysterious narrative has led several readers to negate its meaning, calling it a "slight narrative",⁸ "reduced narrative",⁹ or "minimal narrative".¹⁰ Journalist Jörg Böckem even says, tom Dieck has done away with a narrative altogether.¹¹ Instead, some reviewers have identified the warehouse district and its architecture as the actual subject matter and protagonist of the

as a wordless" book in order to "let the pictures speak for themselves." Without text as a "tether," he allows for "openness" and avoids textual "noise" (Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011). All translations from German into English are my own.

- 4 On the other hand, according to tom Dieck the double-page full-bleed layout, i.e. the lack of blank pages and gutters, is meant to tie the pictures closer together, so that they are perceived as a narrative sequence rather than a collection of individual images, which might be implied by the title (Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011).
- 5 Even the number of protagonists is unclear: some say there is only one (e.g. Matthias Schneider, *Martin tom Dieck*, Goethe-Institut, March 2009, <http://www.goethe.de/kue/lit/prj/com/cav/cam/deindex.htm>; Herbert Heinzelmann, *Martin tom Dieck: Ich kann von hier den Hafen sehen*, 2002, <http://www.comic-salon.de/2002/pages/ausstellungen02/dieck.htm>; and Hans Keller, "Mysteriöses über Fleete und Speicher," *Tagesanzeiger*, May 4, 1997), others say there are two (e.g. Bart Beaty, "Rising to the Surface: Martin tom Dieck," *The Comics Journal* 206 (August 1998): 29-33), and Martin tom Dieck himself says there are "three persons in the background" (Martin tom Dieck, "Hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt," *M tom Dieck*, http://www.mtomdieck.net/publikation/spei/speicherstd_1.htm).
- 6 One of the protagonists is called "Buster" in one of the few pages that contain words. In fact, the actor Buster Keaton provided the inspiration for this character, but only with regard to his features, which tom Dieck adopted for his character "as a mask" (Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011).
- 7 Keller, "Mysteriöses über Fleete und Speicher". As Martin tom Dieck said in an interview with the author in Hamburg on May 28, 2011, he discovered these objects in paintings by Cy Twombly.
- 8 Beaty, "Rising to the Surface."
- 9 tom Dieck, "Hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt." In an interview, tom Dieck also said he had considered the idea of "using the warehouse district as a setting for a customary narrative," but then he thought it was such a "powerful place" that he chose to "leave it reduced to the place" (Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011).
- 10 Matt Madden, *9 Dearly Beloved Comics*, 1999, <http://www.mattmadden.com/comics/writing/beloved/>.
- 11 Jörg Böckem, "Heimspiel für den Speicher-Strichler," *Der Spiegel*, May 5, 1997, 121.

book.¹²

The "Speicherstadt", or warehouse district, is the former free port of Hamburg. It is located on an island in the river Elbe, directly south of the city centre, measuring about one and a half kilometres by 200 metres. When the city of Hamburg became part of the German Empire in 1871, it needed to be incorporated into the German customs territory.¹³ However, the city was granted a free port, a delimited area in which the trading of goods was still customs-free. The residential buildings on that island were torn down, warehouses were erected, and in 1888, the free port was inaugurated.

"Speicherstadt" literally means "city of warehouses", but it never was a proper city in an administrative sense, and it consisted almost entirely of warehouses and buildings for their administration, not of residential houses or other buildings typical of an actual town. Construction supervisor Franz Andreas Mayer (1837-1901) arranged the multi-storey warehouses in long rows separated by canals. These brick buildings exhibit elements from various historical and primarily medieval architectural styles.¹⁴ The warehouses are grouped into over 20 blocks, within which they are architecturally almost uniform, whereas the decorative elements vary from block to block.¹⁵ At the time when Martin tom Dieck began working on "hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt", in the mid-1990s, the warehouse district wasn't used as a trade port anymore, because its buildings and canals were not fit for modern maritime trade. Nowadays, the warehouse district is, above all, a popular tourist attraction.¹⁶

12 A discussion of the relevant secondary literature is given below in note 21. It should also be noted that another motif that several readers have identified as central to the book is water (e.g. Domingos Isabelinho, "Martin tom Dieck's *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*," *The Crib Sheet*, December 21, 2008, <http://thecribsheet-isabelinho.blogspot.com/2008/12/martin-tom-diecks-hundert-ansichten-der.html>; Jonas Engelmann, "Satantango: Zur Neuausgabe von Martin tom Diecks Comic 'Der unschuldige Passagier'," *literaturkritik.de*, July 7, 2007, http://www.literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=10887&ausgabe=200707; Schneider, *Martin tom Dieck*; Beaty, "Rising to the Surface"; Madden, *9 Dearly Beloved Comics*; Heinzelmann, *Martin tom Dieck*; and Jens Balzer, "Strömen und Strudeln," *Berliner Zeitung*, June 28, 2000, <http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/bin/dump.fcgi/2000/0628/feuilleton/0008/index.html>), which is not surprising given the (supposed) harbour setting.

13 This and the following information on the warehouse district can be found in various texts, the most comprehensive of which is probably Karin Maak, *Die Speicherstadt im Hamburger Freihafen: Eine Stadt an Stelle der Stadt* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1985).

14 Ralf Wegner has also identified art nouveau elements in some of the blocks. See *Wo Hamburg am hamburgischsten ist: Speicherstadt und Katharinenviertel* (Hamburg: Graciela Madrigal, 1989).

15 There is no unanimous critical assessment of the quality and significance of the architecture of the warehouse district. Some experts are full of praise (e.g. Dirk Meyhöfer, who called the warehouse district "the most beautiful warehouses in the world" - see "Abschied und Aufbruch, Kunstwerk und Konsequenz, Zerstörung und Zeitreise: Bilder der Hamburger Stadtentwicklung zwischen 1842 und 2006," in *Hamburg im Wandel, künstlerisch gesehen*, edited by Hamburger Sparkasse (Hamburg: Hamburger Sparkasse, 2006), 9-17), while others would have preferred the previous buildings (e.g. Gunnar Schweer, *Hamburger Ansichten; oder: Die Veränderung eines Stadtbildes* (Hamburg: M + K Hansa Verlag, 1975)). Karin Maak's evaluation is ambiguous, and she sees the danger of appreciating only the fascinating surface of the buildings while neglecting the historical dimension and the meaning of the architectural effort (Maak, *Die Speicherstadt im Hamburger Freihafen*, 9-11, 167). It will be discussed later on whether the architecture of the warehouse district is a topic in Martin tom Dieck's book at all.

16 For many years, the future of the warehouse district had been a matter of debate. Up until the 1980s, some argued for its continued use as a trade port (Maak, *Die Speicherstadt im Hamburger Freihafen*; Wegner, *Wo Hamburg am hamburgischsten ist*). As late as 1998, historian Wilfried Weinke feared the warehouses would be, by and by, turned into office spaces (Wilfried Weinke, *Hamburg: Luftbilder von gestern und heute; eine*

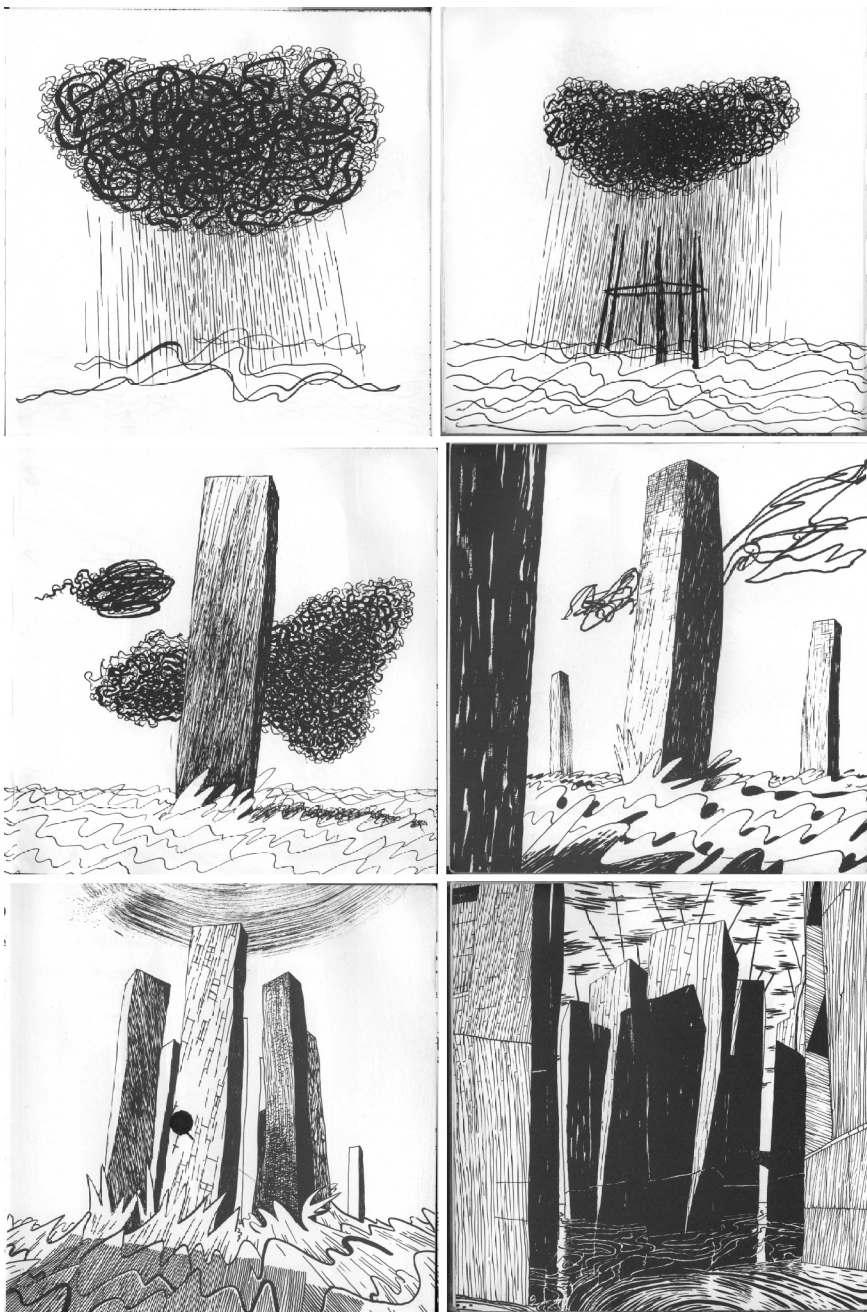


Fig. 1: *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, pages 1-6.

In order to find out if *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt* really is about the warehouse district, let us turn to the beginning of the story. On the first six picture pages,¹⁷ we

Gegenüberstellung (Gudensberg-Gleichen: Wartberg Verlag, 1998), 21). In the present day, a few offices have been established, and some warehouses are still used for (mostly carpet) storage and trading (Anja Steinbuch, "Hamburgs Speicherstadt: Büroquartier für Kreative," *Handelsblatt*, June 11, 2010, <http://www.handelsblatt.com/hamburgs-speicherstadt-bueroquartier-fuer-kreative;2599063>).

¹⁷ The numbering used in this text starts with the first picture page as page 1, i.e. the pages of the front matter

can only see wooden poles in water at first, which multiply and move closer together (see Fig. 1). Since there are no other objects for comparison, we cannot determine the size of these poles. On page 6, however, they look more like high-rise buildings, which still have a wooden texture, but also a horizontal structure that can be interpreted as a bridge between two of them, a stepped gable on the second from the right, and structures that look like window frames in the one on the far right. There are some obvious similarities between these building-like objects and the warehouses in Hamburg, such as the closeness to the water, the formation of canals, their marked verticality and their horizontal alignment. And yet, these objects are drawn rather abstractly, so it does not make much sense to compare them to the real warehouse district buildings.

It is more rewarding to look at picture page 15 (see Fig. 2). Slightly right from the center we can see two different vertical sections within a warehouse row front. In one section, two window axes are placed in a panel which ends in a pointed arch below the eaves. In the other section, we see a single vertical row of window-like elements, also in a pointed arch panel, and above that a pointed gable. These architectural elements can in fact be found in several blocks of the warehouse district, the window-like openings representing the typical green hatches, above which a freight elevator is mounted.

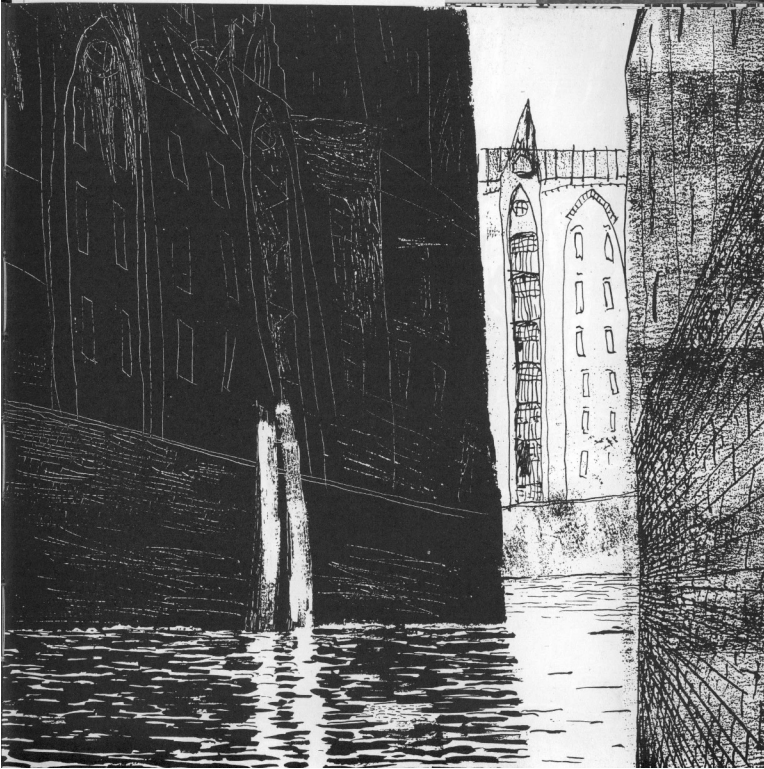


Fig. 2: *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, page 15.

However, it gets more complicated on the next page, picture page 16 (see Fig. 3, left), on which we see two more brightly lit storehouse rows. The one on the left looks, again, like a real warehouse district row. The one on the right, however, of which we see the narrow side,

are not counted.

has a single vertical row of windows as the only structure in an otherwise flat wall, and that does not look like the face of any building in the real warehouse district. There is also a steel framework bridge across a canal on this page, which consists of diagonal members that do not cross. This is a type of bridge that Martin tom Dieck uses several times in his book. However, the bridges in the real warehouse district have perpendicular piers, or crossing diagonal members, or both, like the bridge in the photograph in Fig. 3.¹⁸



Fig. 3, left: *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, page 16. Right: a bridge before a warehouse row in the warehouse district (photograph by Sascha Jens, <http://www.fotocommunity.de/pc/pc/display/18944794> (deleted)).

Then again, on page 20 (see Fig. 4), Martin tom Dieck shows two buildings with a high recognition value. The left house with its round corner towers must be Holländischer Brook 1, and the right house with its hip roof is the so-called "Wasserschlößchen" or "water palace" (also called Windenwärterhaus/winch keeper's house). And yet, if we take a closer look at this building, we find, again, differences between the drawing and the real architecture. The number of window axes was reduced from five to four, and the tower on the right (northeastern) corner, as well as the left (southern) dormer, are missing. So this drawn building is clearly identifiable, but does not look quite the same as in reality.¹⁹

18 This kind of simplification, says tom Dieck, happens inevitably in his working process, when he makes drawings in his studio from his on-site drawings - "drawings of drawings of bridges" - until he arrives at a drawing of a bridge so much simplified that it is merely a "symbol of a bridge" (Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011).

19 These two buildings might almost, but maybe not quite, qualify as what comic scholar Ann Miller has called

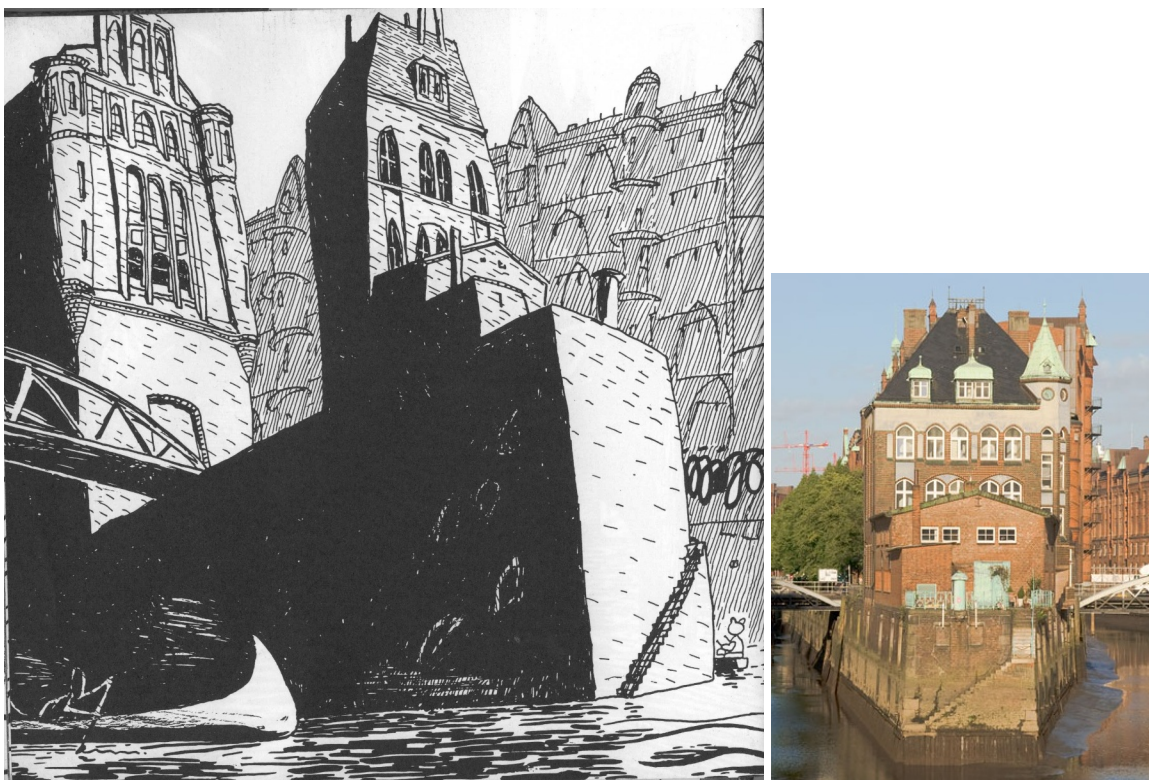


Fig. 4, left: *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, page 20. Right: the “Wasserschlößchen” or “Windenwärterhaus” in the warehouse district (photograph by Christian Terstegge, <http://www.christian-terstegge.de>).

Another interesting example is on page 77 (see Fig. 5), which shows a pointed arch window in a gable above the roof. There is only one place in the warehouse district where such an architectural element can be found: the northwestern corner building of block E. However, all other parts of the gable, as well as its placement within the building, are different. Just to point out a few differences: in the real building, the gable is a combination of stepped and pointed gable, and the window is situated in the top step of the gable, whereas in the drawing, the gable is an entirely stepped gable which has one step more, and the window is placed in the lower two steps. It seems as if Martin tom Dieck had combined motifs from several real warehouses into a single, fictitious one.

“metonym,” an image that unambiguously refers to a certain place, like the Eiffel Tower as a metonym for Paris (Ann Miller, „Citizenship and City Spaces. *Bande Dessinée* as Reportage,” in *History and Politics in French-Language Comics and Graphic Novels*, ed. Mark McKinney (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 97-116.



Fig. 5, left: *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, page 77. Right: the northwestern corner building of block E in the warehouse district (photograph by the author).

For a last example, let us take a look at page 45 (see Fig. 6), in which a completely different mode of depiction is used. This drawing, which was also used for the back cover of the book, can be easily identified as a map.²⁰ If we interpret the white area as water, an island is shown, crossed by one big canal in the middle and several smaller ones. The form of the island bears some resemblance to the warehouse district, if we assume that the map is oriented with West at the top. And yet this map does not show the exact bird's eye view of the warehouse district. The many small canals on the map are winding, spiraled, and have dead ends, whereas in the real warehouse district the canals are fewer and straighter. On the double page spread on pages 48 and 49, the meaning of the map becomes clearer, when floating houses arrange themselves roughly according to the map. The most plausible interpretation is that the character in the fur coat, who apparently drew the map, somehow brought this marvelous arrangement of buildings about. Accordingly, this map is not a representation of a real or fictitious construction, but some sort of building plan for its realization.

²⁰ Domingos Isabelinho sees in tom Dieck's drawing „a city map that's also a heart,“ and also the real warehouse district, seen from above, looks - „with a little imagination“ - like a heart to him (see Isabelinho, “Martin tom Dieck's *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*”). A similar association is made by Jörg Böckem, for whom tom Dieck's plan of the warehouse district “mutates into an anatomical cross section of a human or animal organ, a liver or brain” (see Böckem, “Heimspiel für den Speicher-Strichler”).

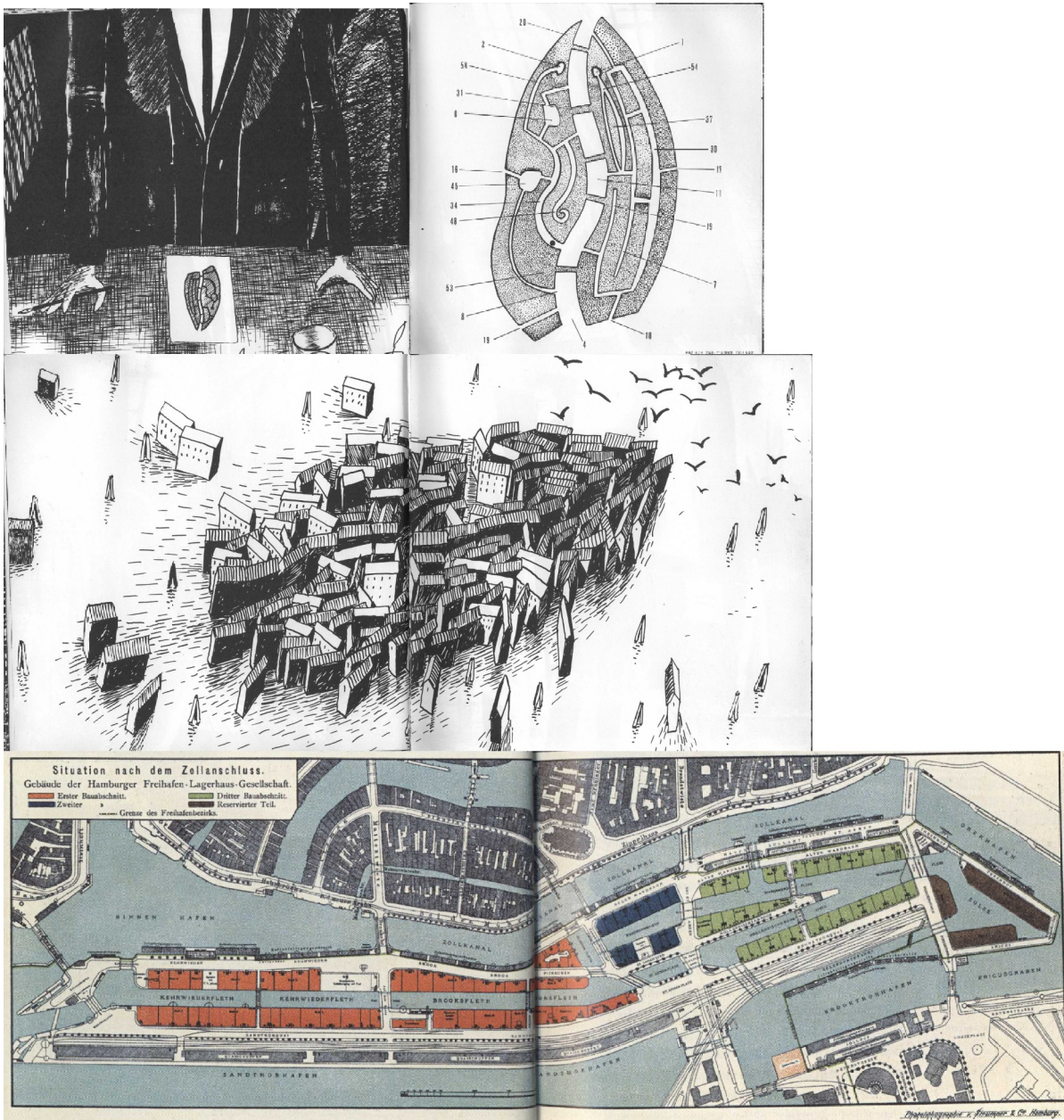


Fig. 6, above: *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, pages 44, 45, 48, and 49. Below: plan of the warehouse district from the time of its construction (image from Thomas Hampel, ed., *Speicherstadt: Ein Viertel zwischen Tradition und Vision* (Hamburg: *Elbe&Flut*, 2002)).

The examples we have seen so far already show that there is indeed some kind of connection between Martin tom Dieck's drawings and the warehouse district in Hamburg, but they are not an accurate representation, so the title “a hundred views of the warehouse district” can't be taken literally, even though in the secondary literature on *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, a lot of authors readily do so.²¹

²¹ Even before the publication of *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, Jens Balzer said in the newspaper *Die Zeit*, “his [i.e. tom Dieck's] next book is set in Hamburg, where Martin tom Dieck lives today. It is called

In order to better understand the artistic strategy at work here, I will compare Martin tom Dieck's book to another picture book about Hamburg, which follows a different aim and accordingly employs different artistic means. *Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik - The City is Our Factory* by Christoph Schäfer was published by Spector Books in Leipzig, Germany, in 2010. In this book, there is a reproduction of a drawing on each right-hand page, and the facing left-hand page is left blank except for the English translation of the German text that is included in the pictures, most of which are part of a narrative sequence. Of particular interest here are the last two chapters, which deal with the city of Hamburg. More precisely, Christoph Schäfer's topic is the gentrification of Hamburg and especially the district St. Pauli, and he presents a chronology of the recent anti-gentrification protest movement.

In contrast to *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, Schäfer's book is not fiction, it is a documentary work. He depicts real events, so he does not make many changes to the settings, but instead tries to achieve a high recognition value. The buildings are reduced and simplified as well, but they are reduced to their characteristic elements, and remain recognizable.

'Freischwimmer' and contains one hundred views of the Hamburg warehouse district" (Jens Balzer, "Neue Comicserie: Der Mensch, das Unbewußte und das Wasser," *Die Zeit*, April 5, 1996, 56). So, apparently, the title wasn't yet definite in 1996, and the working title "Freischwimmer" ("free swimmer", also the name of a swimming badge) didn't make any connection to the warehouse district. Instead, the "one hundred views of the warehouse district" mentioned by Balzer, which the book actually does not contain, became the final title later.

After its publication, *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt* was called "an odyssey through Hamburg's underworld" and a "discourse about the construction of the world of today, about the myth of its architecture" (book review, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 26, 1997, 905). Here, too, it is assumed that the real warehouse district is unambiguously depicted in the book. Shortly after *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the magazine *Der Spiegel* reviewed tom Dieck's work and praises, the author succeeds in "capturing the oppressive-attractive atmosphere of the old warehouses" (Böckem, "Heimspiel für den Speicher-Strichler"). More nuanced and more in line with my interpretation is Hans Keller's review in the newspaper *Tagesanzeiger*: "the trading and storage complex is transformed in Martin tom Dieck's comic into an imaginary place. His 'warehouse district' is a patchwork of real backdrops, which are pulled over – across one of the many bridges spanning the canals, so to say – time and again into a fantasy realm" (Keller, "Mysteriöses über Fleeete und Speicher"). Note the quote signs around the term "warehouse district" ("Speicherstadt" in the original text). Keller explains the map sequence like this: "a figure with hat invents in the course of the 'story' the warehouse district anew as a purpose-free fantasy realm." Keller seems to see tom Dieck's warehouse district as fictitious and merely inspired by the real warehouse district.

However, newer texts again identify the drawn warehouse district with the real free port in Hamburg. For instance, Matthias Schneider says: "in wordless, one-page pictures, the viewer floats through Hamburg's warehouse district, a now-defunct harbour facility for discharging shiploads" (Schneider, *Martin tom Dieck*). On the website of the publisher Reprodukt, it says: "even though a story is told here, Hamburg's warehouse district itself is at the center, as well as the beginning of the rainfall and water in all kinds of forms" (Reprodukt website, http://www.reprodukt.com/product_info.php?products_id=174). For Bart Beaty, the case is also clear when he describes the story like this: „two men circle through the flooded streets of Hamburgs warehouse district“ (Beaty, "Rising to the Surface"). The entry for Martin tom Dieck in the *Lambiek Comiclopedia* is less clear: „in 1997 followed by [*sic*] one of the highlights of his work, 'Hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt' (Arrache Coeur), a wordless comix ode to the Speicherstadt harbour quarters of Hamburg“ (*Lambiek Comiclopedia*, s.v. "Martin tom Dieck," September 28, 2008, <http://lambiek.net/artists/d/dieck.htm>). Martin tom Dieck draws only a weak connection on his website, when he writes his book was merely "inspired by an architectural ensemble in Hamburg" (tom Dieck, "Hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt"). He also said the warehouse district underwent a "transposition" in his book "from a real to an ideal place," and between these two places a "friction" arises (Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011).

Furthermore, Christoph Schäfer uses two different types of written text that add to the recognizability of the buildings. For example, on page 226 (see Fig. 7), Schäfer depicts the letters that are actually attached as signs to the buildings. So in order to show that this is a particular section of the street Bernhard-Nocht-Straße, he simply copies, albeit very loosely, what is written on the houses in this street: "Hotel Kogge," which is a bar and hotel, "Erotic Art," which stands for the "Erotic Art Museum" - Schäfer omits the last word here -, and the first letters of "Washington Bar." The second type of writing is used, for example, on page 206 (see Fig. 7), where the names of the buildings of a different section of Bernhard-Nocht-Straße are simply written next to their depictions as elevations: "Empire Hotel," "Astra Turm," and "BBDO." Obviously, there is no direct relation between the letters and the real buildings – after all, their names are not written on the street -, so this is a more abstract kind of labelling the buildings.

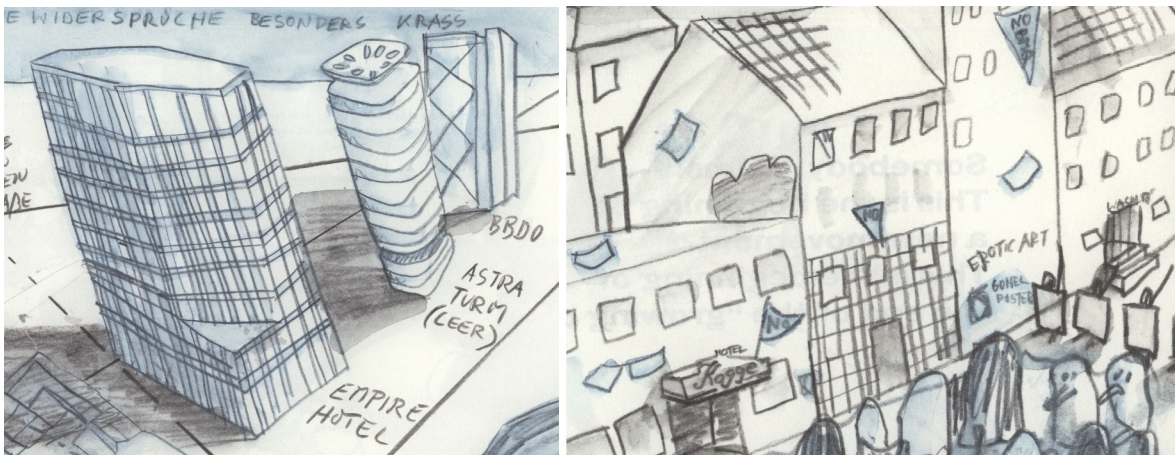


Fig. 7: Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik, details of pages 206 and 226.

Christoph Schäfer wants to present verifiable facts in his book, so his settings have to be recognizable as concrete places. In contrast, for Martin tom Dieck, an almost abstract backdrop of unclear relation to reality is sufficient. It is important for the readers of *Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik* to know where exactly the action takes place, or which places Schäfer talks about. For the readers of *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, it isn't necessary to recognize the setting as the warehouse district. Martin tom Dieck said in an interview,²² his book is meant to be accessible even for readers who don't know that the word "Speicherstadt" in the title refers to a real place. Therefore, he is free to depict his settings with a higher degree of ambiguity than Christoph Schäfer, who needs to identify his settings by both pictures and words.²³

22 Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011.

23 Another suitable object for comparison would be *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* by Katsushika Hokusai, a collection of monochrome woodcuts, published in three book volumes between 1834 and 1849 (see Gian Carlo Calza, *Ukiyo-e* (London: Phaidon, 2005); Henry D. Smith II, "Introduction: Hokusai and the Mountain of Immortality," in *Hokusai: One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji* (New York: George Braziller, 1988), 7-23). The title of Martin tom Dieck's book refers to it, and on his website, he says Hokusai was one source of inspiration for *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt* (tom Dieck, "Hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt"). The Hokusai edition consulted by tom Dieck contained short texts below each picture, which led tom Dieck to consider to

The central point of my paper is, that in the case of *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, the relationship between the work of fiction and a real place is very special, if not unique. Some characteristics of the book indicate that this relationship is weak: the surreal story has little to do with what is going on in the real warehouse district, it is highly improbable that the story could take place there, and it could be set in a completely different place just as well. As I have shown, the buildings are drawn with a lack of verisimilitude that seems to go beyond mere reduction and simplification.²⁴ Moreover, there is no verbal reference within the story to the warehouse district, only in the title and in a short afterword.

At the same time, some characteristics indicate the opposite: the setting is easily recognizable as, at least, somehow derived from the warehouse district, and even some individual buildings can be identified. The architecture takes up a lot of space in the book, with many pages not showing any of the characters. Martin tom Dieck started working on the book by drawing only the environment of the warehouse district at first, and, as he himself puts it, "implanted" the characters and the narrative at a later stage.²⁵ And last but not least, the title suggests a rather strong relationship to the real place. Altogether, the connection to the real warehouse district remains strangely ambiguous, and this ambiguity is a remarkable achievement of Martin tom Dieck.

But why didn't he represent the warehouse district more accurately, or refrain from referring to it altogether?²⁶ To answer this question, we have to consider the functional aspects of *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt* and, by extension, of depictions of architecture in general. At the most basic level, two functions of architectural drawings can be distinguished: the depiction of architecture that does not yet exist, i.e. Blueprints or design sketches, and representations of existing buildings, which are the product of an artist's individual perception.²⁷ It is safe to say that tom Dieck's book belongs to the latter category rather than to the former. To try to assess the accuracy of such artistic depictions would be futile, says art historian James S. Ackerman, because in each depiction it depends on different, personal criteria.²⁸

adopt this option for his book at first, but ultimately he discarded the idea because he thought he wouldn't have been able to collect enough texts (Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011). Unlike *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, Hokusai's pictures do not form a narrative sequence, but like tom Dieck's, the place given in the title is often not shown prominently in them, and they also simplify and distort it (Mt. Fuji is drawn steeper than in reality).

24 However, Martin tom Dieck says the differences between the real and the drawn warehouse district result from "omission". He "spared the details" of the architecture: "I don't need variety." As a result, his warehouse district "is a different place." For tom Dieck, the "game" of identifying the warehouse district in his book is interesting enough, so that the warehouse district didn't need to be "encoded exactly" (Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011).

25 Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011.

26 Due to time constraints, this final section has not been presented at the Montreal conference.

27 James S. Ackerman, "The Conventions and Rhetoric of Architectural Drawing," in *Origins, Imitation, Conventions: Representation in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 293-317.

28 Ibid. In a similar vein, Cuno Affolter and Urs Hangartner say, "the comic artist is not an architect who designs architecture, but a mirror in which existing architecture is made visible. The distortion which the original endures are deliberate characteristics of the respective drawing style and part of the artistic statement" (Cuno Affolter and Urs Hangartner, "Mit ÄCHZ und ORKH quer durch New York," *Bauwelt* 87, no. 46 (1996): 2604-09, quoted in Diane Luther, "Phantastische Architektur im Comic," in *Architektur wie sie im Buche steht: Fiktive Bauten und Städte in der Literatur*, ed. Winfried Nerdinger (Salzburg: Anton Pustet; München: Architekturmuseum der Technischen Universität München, 2006), 128-36).

More precisely, an artistic representation of existing architecture or an existing urban environment can have different functions. Most commonly it is assumed that the artist wants to make some kind of statement about the city, to reveal its characteristics.²⁹ The form chosen by tom Dieck, a comic, is particularly apt for characterizing cities – not, as Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling say, because “comics and the cityscape are very much alike in terms of their semiotics and their hybrid mixing of words and pictures,”³⁰ which after all isn't true for “silent” comics like *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*, but because a comic can represent in its sequence of panels a sequence of cognitive images of an urban space. Such a sequence is, according to urban planner Kevin Lynch, the natural way of perceiving a city anyway.³¹

What does Martin tom Dieck want to say about the warehouse district? One feature emphasized by *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt* is the monumentality of its architecture, for instance on page 20 (see Fig. 4), when the characters are dwarfed by the towering buildings. Martin tom Dieck contradicts himself when, on the one hand, he says his book is not “comical, neither cheerful,” and his characters appear to be permanently “threatened,” which is due to “the [real] warehouse district being that way, too” - or at least in certain weather conditions.³² On the other hand, he says he “didn't intend” to create a specific mood or atmosphere. The silence that can be felt in the book “results from the spatial situation”: “there is nothing between the house walls.” He himself “didn't have a specific emotional connection” to the warehouse district at the time when he made the book (though he did perceive it as a “special place” and recognized its “aesthetic appeal”), and he “didn't perceive it as sombre either.” Neither is he willing to recognize in his book a “melancholic” atmosphere which other readers have perceived.

Connected to its sombre tone is the scarcity of people in tom Dieck's warehouse district. He says that in the mid-nineties, when he was working on the book, the warehouse district “was no tourist area” and there were only “some studios” and “a gallery,” and “nothing more”. However, it is still striking that, apart from the two main characters and occasionally some seagulls, his warehouse district is almost devoid of people. Thus, *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt* does not employ the predominant strategy in contemporary art to characterize an urban space via its inhabitants.³³ At the same time, the relative absence of inhabitants creates the effect of neutrality and nonsubjectivity,³⁴ thus further focusing on the architecture itself.

At any rate, it would be an over-interpretation to link tom Dieck's depopulated warehouse district to the urban planning debate on the usage of the real warehouse district,

29 Lutz Philipp Günther, *Die bildhafte Repräsentation deutscher Städte: Von den Chroniken der Frühen Neuzeit zu den Websites der Gegenwart* (Köln: Böhlau, 2009); Franziska Bollerey, *Mythos Metropolis: Die Stadt als Sujet für Schriftsteller, Maler und Regisseure/The City as a Motif for Writers, Painters and Film Directors* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag; Delft: Institute of History of Art, Architecture and Urbanism, IHAAU, Delft University of Technology, 2010, first published 2006).

30 Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling, introduction to *Comics and the City: Urban Space in Print, Picture and Sequence*, ed. Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling (New York: Continuum, 2010), 1-16.

31 Kirsten Wagner, “Die visuelle Ordnung der Stadt: Das Bild der Stadt bei Kevin Lynch,” in *Räume der Stadt: Von der Antike bis heute*, ed. Cornelia Jöchner (Berlin: Reimer, 2008), 317-33.

32 Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011.

33 Roland Lippuner, “Sozialer Raum und Praktiken: Elemente sozialwissenschaftlicher Topologie bei Pierre Bourdieu und Michel de Certeau,” in *Topologie: Zur Raumbeschreibung in den Kultur- und Medienwissenschaften*, ed. Stephan Günzel (Bielefeld: transcript, 2007), 265-77; Jörn Ahrens, “The Ordinary Urban: 100 Bullets and the Clichés of Mass Culture,” in Ahrens and Meteling, *Comics and the City*, 214-28.

34 Nana Last, “Reimag(in)g the Urban,” *Visual Resources* 26, no. 1 (March 2001): 61-78.

that is, to say tom Dieck didn't draw the warehouse district as a populated place because he didn't see it as a place fit to inhabit. And indeed he says he didn't intend his book to be read that way ("there's no connection" between the usage debate and the comic, city planning "doesn't play any role" in the book, and the comparison with *Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik* "doesn't work").³⁵

Another general function of urban depictions is artistic "appropriation" or "taming" of a city³⁶ that is otherwise "inaccessible to the imagination unless it can be reduced and simplified."³⁷ However, this applies rather to vast urban sprawls with unclear borders³⁸ than to the relatively small and clearly limited area of the warehouse district. And yet, the limits of the warehouse district are less clear in the book, and its dimensions seem to be in constant flux.

A convincing explanation for the purpose of a real setting for a fictitious story is offered by comic scholar Jason Bainbridge (who refers to New York as the setting of the superheroes in the Marvel universe): the real place makes the fantastic narrative seem more realistic, and establishes a connection to the reader via the common environment.³⁹ Furthermore, the setting may build a link between reader and producer, if the place of production is the same as the setting. This is also true for *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt*: Martin tom Dieck lives in Hamburg, where the story is set. However, the connecting effect is weakened, because the warehouse district in the book differs considerably from the readers' perception of the real warehouse district. The surreal story additionally makes it harder for the reader to imagine it taking place in the real warehouse district. Nevertheless, it may appeal to readers – like in a disaster film – to see a well-known place like the warehouse district being flooded and dried up. All in all, the portrayal of the warehouse district in *hundert Ansichten der Speicherstadt* is as vague and ambiguous as the whole book itself.

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35 Martin tom Dieck, interview by Martin de la Iglesia in Hamburg, May 28, 2011.

36 Bollerey, *Mythos Metropolis*, 94.

37 Richard Wohl and Anselm Strauss, "Symbolic Representation and the Urban Milieu," *American Journal of Sociology* 63 (1958): 523-32, quoted in Markus Bauer, "'Czernowitz' – 'Mitteleuropa': Theater und Medien in der Produktion virtueller Räume," in Jöchner, *Räume der Stadt*, 289-304.

38 Harald Robert Stühlinger, "Grenzen, Wege und Profile," in *Die Stadt: Ihre Erfindung in Büchern und Graphiken*, ed. Ulrich Maximilian Schumann et al. (Zürich: gta Verlag, 2009), 70-93.

39 Jason Bainbridge, "I Am New York!: Spider-Man, New York City and the Marvel Universe," in Ahrens and Meteling, *Comics and the City*, 163-79.

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