

MASTER

Die Wiedergefundene Stadt Revisiting the post-war reconstruction

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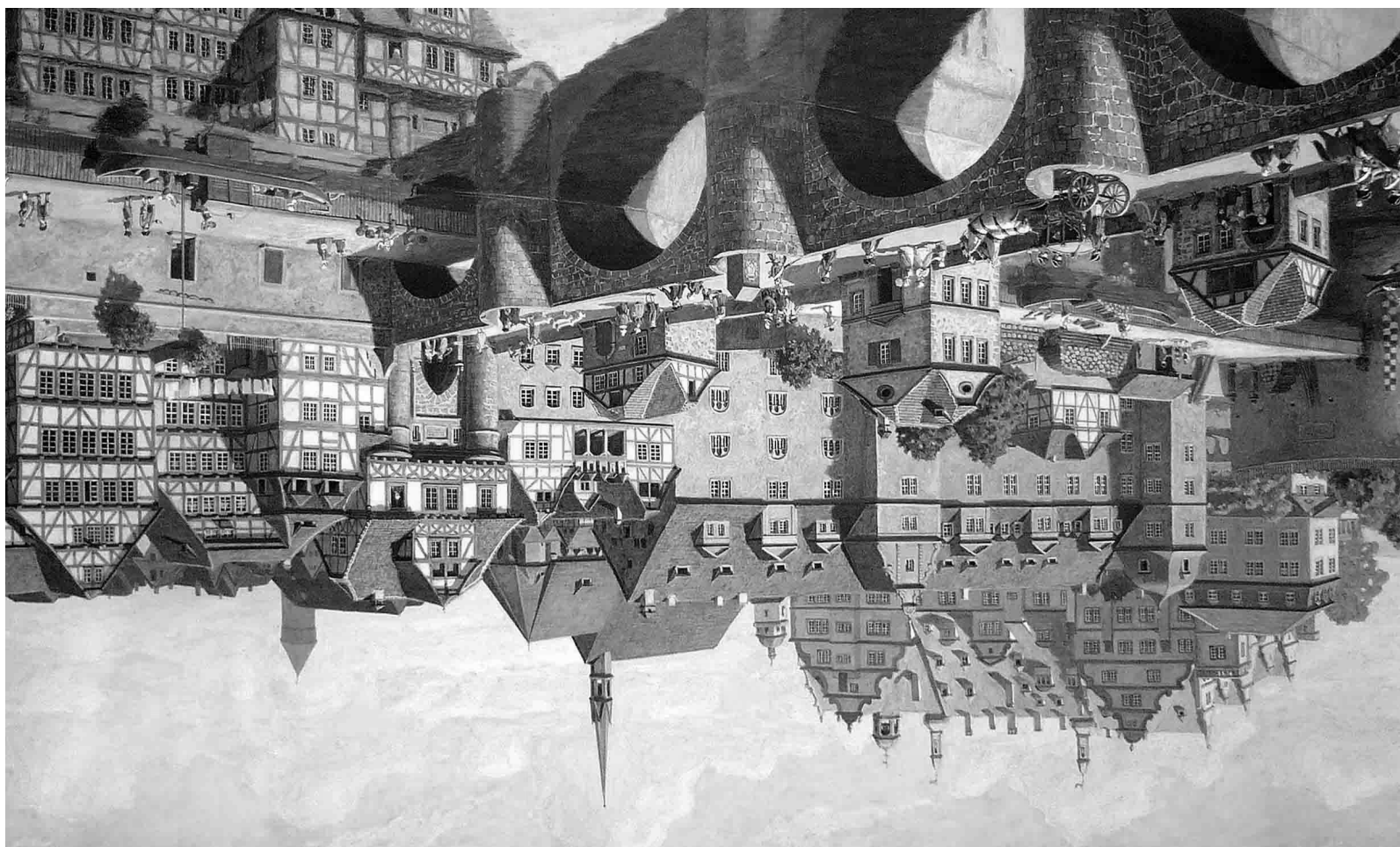
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die Wiedergefundene Stadt

Revisiting the post-war reconstruction period of Kassel



Colofon:
die Wiedergefundene Stadt
Revisiting the post-war reconstruction
period of Kassel

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die Wiedergefundene Stadt

Revisiting the post-war reconstruction period of Kassel

by J. de Winter

“Frankenstein lives on in the popular imagination as a cautionary tale against technology. [...] But the convenient trope mistakes the monster, who had no name, for its creator, Dr. Frankenstein. And just as we confuse Frankenstein for the monster, we also misunderstand Dr. Frankenstein’s real sin. For Dr. Frankenstein’s crime was not that he invented a creature through some combination of hubris and high technology, but rather that he abandoned the creature to itself. When Dr. Frankenstein meets his creation on a glacier in the Alps, the monster claims that it was not born a monster, who fled the laboratory once the horrible thing twitched to life. “Remember, I am thy creature,” the monster beseeches his creator, “I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed... I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.” Written at the dawn of the great technological revolutions that would define the 19th and 20th centuries, Frankenstein foresees that the gigantic sins that were to be committed would hide a much greater sin. It is not the case that we have failed to care for Creation, but that we have failed to care for our own creations.”

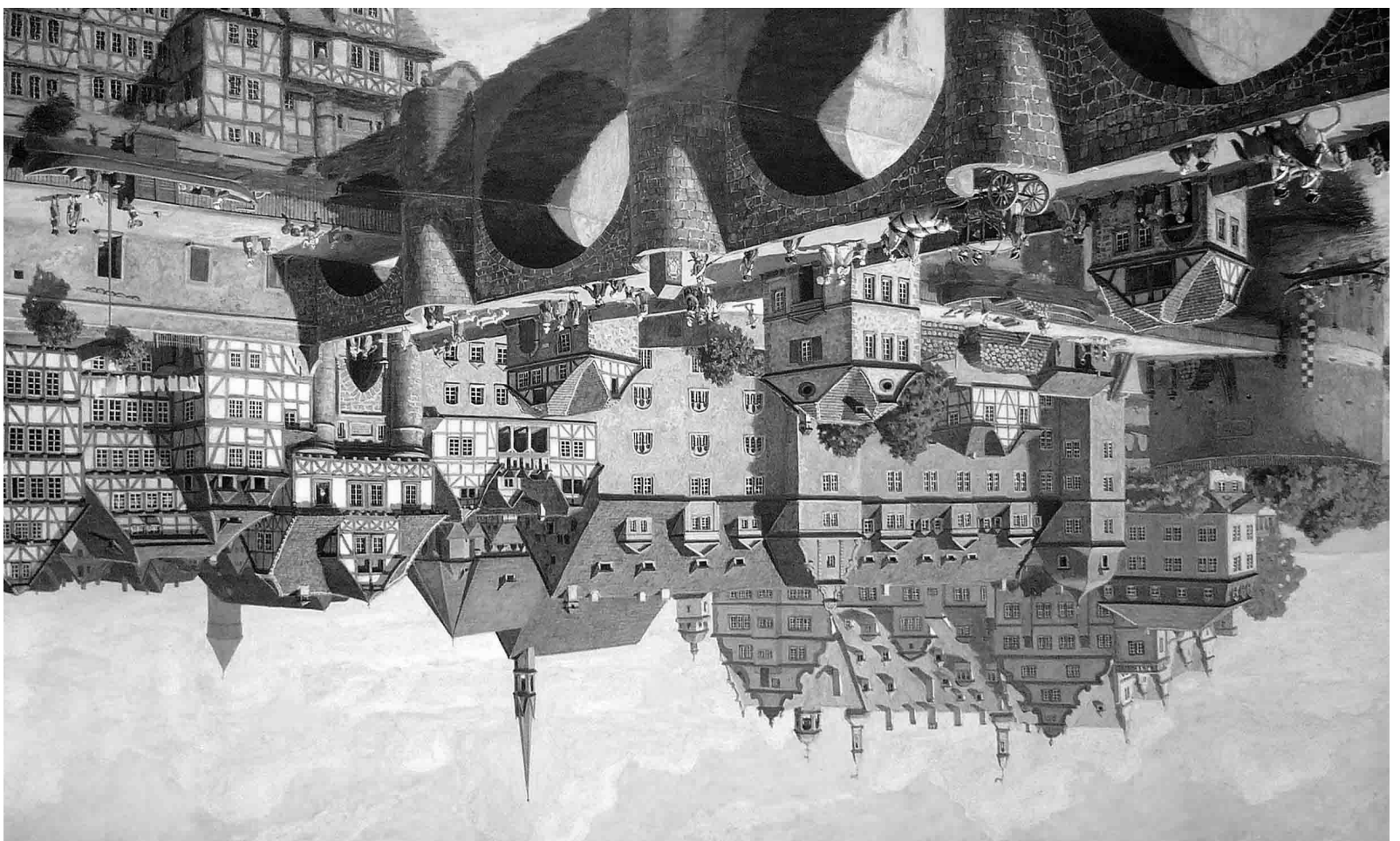
- Bruno Latour (2007), Love your Monsters

Preface

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my supervisors Jos Bosman and Marcel Musch for all the conversations, inspiration, and constructive criticism during this project.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my fellow graduate students, in particular Burak, Martijn, and Sander for the nice times this past year.

And last but not least I want to thank my family and friends for all their support. Special thanks to my father and mother without whom this would not have been possible.



Content

Introduction: Liebe Deine Stadt!	(p. 8)
Project aim	(p.10)
from Love to Hate, post-war reconstruction of Kassel	(p. 12)
Experiencing Kassel, place out of place	(p. 22)
die Wiedergefundene Stadt	
topographical instability/migration	(p. 30)
Historical layering of the 19th century fabric	(p. 36)
A photographical comparison, Fritzlar and Kassel	(p. 42)
Project location (p. 50)	
Porosity of the urban block, gaps and zig-zag figure	(p. 52)
Photographs of project site	(p. 56)
Design principles: fragmentation and tower as hinge	(p. 60)
Intervention and design drawings	(p. 62)
Morphology	
Ensemble	
House A	
Floor plan	
Section	
Facade	
House B	
Floor plan	
Section	
Facade	
Watch Tower	
Floor plan	
Section	
Facade	
Conclusion	(p. 87)
Reflection and discussion	(p. 88)
Bibliography	(p. 89)

Introduction: Liebe deine Stadt!



Fig. 1 Peter Zumthor performing his laudatio in front of the Cologne operahaus on September 2006



Fig. 2 The Cologne operahaus designed by Wilhelm Riphahn

At the start of the project, as a graduation studio, we were introduced to the 'Liebe deine Stadt' project by artist Merlin Bauer – a project currently celebrating its 10 year anniversary. Roughly speaking, the project can be seen as a re-(e)valuation of some of Cologne's post-war architecture from the reconstruction period. Through this project, Merlin Bauer has managed to influence the public opinion with regards to several post-war buildings. One of the memorable results of this project has been to save the Cologne operahaus – designed by Wilhelm Riphahn, one of the more prominent architects to be working in the reconstruction period of Cologne – from being demolished. What is interesting to note here is the role Peter Zumthor, as an architect, played in the project. On September 2006 Peter Zumthor performed a so called 'laudatio' in front of the Cologne operahaus in which he addresses his first encounter with the operahaus and explains the transformational process of his perception regarding the building. At first Zumthor considers the operahaus to be some kind of monster, yet not much latero Zumthor's perception seems to have changed. The building is now said to create an urban space and that it manages to give the place a sense of identity – things not often brought into connection with buildings from the reconstruction period!¹

It is this shift in perception that is interesting and deserves some extra attention. Within it there is a sense of overcoming the often repeated stories about modernism and the modern city, stories that seem to structure our way of looking through a rather negative lens.

¹ the Laudatio of Peter Zumthor can be seen on youtube, URL=< <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jF3cybkCcU>>

It has become a common idea to think of the modern city as one lacking a proper sense of 'inner cityness'. Missing out on the qualities of a thick urban texture, the modern city is often said to be cold and empty. Modern architecture on its turn is generally considered to be about objects in space rather than actually managing to form urban spaces. The modern city is one of fragmentation, incoherence, repetition, it lacks human scale, and is even considered to be generic.

Even though this may be true in some cases, the modern developments that took place in most cities cannot be ignored. They - like it or not - have now become integral parts of the history of the city, and hence part of its so called collective memory. If we want to continue rather than abandon the project of the city it is thus necessary to come to terms with this specific history. It is necessary to see its potentials and its qualities, to be able to reinterpret its history, to go beyond its common understandings, to make it work, to care for it like children of our own². This, to me, is the lesson of the Liebe deine Stadt project. To do so means first of all to overcome the often generalized ideas about the modern city and its architecture.

This coming to terms with the legacy of the modern city is especially important in cities which suffered severe damage during the second world war and were rebuild almost entirely in accordance to 'modern' urban and architectural principles. This project focuses on just such a city, the city of Kassel.

² This is partly drawn from Bruno Latour's Love Your Monsters; Why We Must Care for Our Technologies As We Do Our Children.

Project aim

"Historicism is content with establishing a causal connection between various moments of history. A fact can be a cause but it is not therefore historical. It became historical posthumously, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who starts with this no longer passes the sequence of events through his fingers like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation into which his own era has stepped together with a very clearly defined earlier one. In this way, he reforms his conception of the present as one of the now-time, shot through with slivers of messianic time."

- Walter Benjamin

This thesis consists of a what can be called a historical constellation of some sorts. The thesis combines 'fragments' of the history of Kassel with personal observations and experiences and tries to translate this into an architectural in(ter)vention. This way, the project has to be seen in the lines of a narrative.

In no way does the produced narrative aim to give a complete overview of the history of the city, something which in my opinion is an impossible task. In fact, it can be argued if such a thing as 'the history' of a city exists in the first place, and if it exists, whose history we are talking about. Rather I believe the history of a city has to be considered as an ongoing construction, in a way similar to Walter Benjamin's concept of history. The past shapes the present, but at the same time the past is always perceived through and constructed by the present. This results in the necessity for each and every generation to revisit and perhaps rewrite the past, in the light of new evidence and/or a shifting perspective.

The project tries to revisit and rewrite the relationship between the post-war reconstruction of Kassel and the lost condition of the Altstadt. A relationship which in the past has been emphasized primarily as oppositional. Inspired by the idea of topographical instability written by art historian Alexander Nagel in his book *Medieval Modern*, and the work of Aby Warburg – who as an art historian focused on the survival and after-life of images throughout different cultures and time periods - I wanted to revisit this oppositional diagram between the new and the old city in order to open up a different way of looking at the current city. A way of looking at the city that recognizes continuity and sameness despite the obvious discontinuity and rupture. The aim of the project then is to make the problematic past of the reconstruction period 'meaningful again' through means of an architectural design/narrative.

“Warburg wanted to understand – perhaps even to feel – the reappearance and reuse of the past in different cultural contexts. His project has what has come to be seen as a cultural studies/visual studies dimension, and it is also an invitation to artists to make the past meaningful again through juxtaposition, appropriation, repetition. Historical time is not linear in the Warburgian universe. You never know what images will become alive again, or what elements that one thought long dead are actually working in the present. This revenance [...] can be an occasion for delight when something one loved and thought lost reappears. It can also be an occasion for horror when something one had hoped destroyed rears its head once again.”³

Central to the project are the following questions:

Is it possible to re-read the history of Kassel’s reconstruction period, not focused on the loss of the medieval but rather with a focus on the ‘survival’ of the medieval within the modern - assuming a continuity rather than an opposition between modern and medieval architecture – and the possibility of movement/migration of the experience of the ‘medieval’ city – and thus to look for continuity at an unexpected place?

Generally the critique of the post-war reconstruction and the plans the deal with the lost condition of the Altstadt are focussed on the historical ground of the Altstadt - the reconstruction as it took place elsewhere in the city is easily overshadowed by the tragic loss of the Altstadt - repressing an important part of the post-war history of the city. This project then focusses on a different part of the city altogether, the 19th/20th century fabric in between the station area and the old city⁴. Paradoxically, it appears as if the reconstruction of this part of the city produced an urban logic analogue to that of a medieval city. It is this observation that drives the project.



Fig. 3 Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne atlas at the Warburg library

⁴ This area of the city has undergone significant transformations during its history, from being outside of the city walls, to being on the fringe of the development of the city under the planning of du Ry, and later being in-between the old city and the station area. The station, in urban planning, is frequently planned outside of the city center in order to leave significant amount of in-between space for development purposes. The developments that took place during the reconstruction period only further complicated the morphological structure of the area by making several cuts in its fabric. It is this dynamic of the area that creates the ‘messiness’ that appears analogue to that of a medieval city.

⁴ Micael S. Roth, review *Atlast: how to carry the world on one's back?* URL=< <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/2217>>

From love to hate, post-war reconstruction of Kassel



Fig. 4, 5 Photographs of the oldest fachwerkhaus of the Kasseler Altstadt

Somewhere outside the city of Kassel – in Harleshausen - stands the last remaining ‘fachwerkhaus’ of the former Kasseler Altstadt . In 1901 the Tränkeforte street along the Marställer Platz needed to be widened making it necessary for the building to be removed. In order to prevent the building from being destroyed it was moved to its current location, this way, escaping the tragedy that was yet to come, some 40 years later⁵.

In 1943 Kassel was severely bombed by the British air-force, killing over 10,000 people , leaving the city in ruins⁶. A map created after the war, serves as an inventory of the destruction and shows over 80% of the former Altstadt as irreparably lost. The model that is on display in the Stadtmuseum perhaps gives the most overwhelming overview of this destruction today - a visit to the Stadtmuseum certainly changed my perception of the city, and made me wonder whether or not the reconstruction period is over to begin with.

What would take hundreds of years to build was destroyed in what seems only a glimpse of the eye. As a city, Kassel awaited the huge task of its reconstruction.

⁵ note the ‘modern’ building that has been built adjacent to the ‘fachwerkhaus’. In its original position the ‘fachwerkhaus’ would be on the corner of a street, in some way the adjacent ‘modern’ building once more restores this condition.

⁶ Ralph Güntzel (2012), *The Demigods City A Short History of Kassel*



Fig. 6 Photograph of Kassel after the air-raid, the Lutherkirche left in the photograph

The tragedy and reality of the destruction of the city is hard to grabble with, even today the photographs of the city taken after the bombardments evoke a strong emotional response.

The history of the reconstruction is a much debated issue in Kassel. It is especially delicate regarding the involvement of the city planners with the nazi regime⁷. But perhaps more important in the discussion today is the loss of the Altstadt as a cultural heritage in the city and the failure of the reconstruction plan to recognize it as such. Although the bombardments left much of the city in ruins, the post-war reconstruction plans in Kassel showed little consideration to restore the Altstadt as a heritage. In fact, only very few of the old buildings were restored “causing critics to call the post-war urban development program Kassel’s second destruction.”⁸ A new ring road was imagined, in order to connect the city with its outer parts, but it came at a large price, cutting off the Friedrichplatz from the Aupark and amputating the former Altstadt from the new inner city.

⁷ The main city planner at the time of the reconstruction was Erich Heinicke, who in the NS-period was himself a Nazi. The reconstruction plans that were drawn up after the war show a clear continuity - although there are also some clear differences - with the nazi plans to transform Kassel. Furthermore the reconstruction plans are in line with some plans developed in the 1930's to empty out the building blocks of the Altstadt. The density of the inner city was considered to be too high and the living conditions in this part of the city were indeed poor. Despite all this, it was the large destruction of the Altstadt by British Air-raids that made the redevelopment possible. All this leaves a bitter taste when one knows the credo of the reconstruction period: “a disaster but an opportunity”.

⁸ Ralph Güntzel (2012), *The Demigods City A Short History of Kassel*

While the reconstruction plan has a clear affinity with the baroque history of the city⁹, on the place of the former medieval Altstadt a type of architecture and urban lay-out was imagined that might best be described as a Siedlung-architecture. The former Altmarkt – which can be considered to be the heart of the old city – is today a busy traffic intersection which presents itself as an almost impossible to cross barrier for pedestrians, while only little remains that physically reminds of its former history. The infrastructural changes and traffic intensification that occurred during the reconstruction period has had a significant impact on the city as a whole, a fact that is critically discussed by for example Dieter-Hoffmann-Axthelm in his work 'die Verpasste Stadt'¹⁰.

Despite all the criticism on the modern city, the reconstruction period was not always negatively perceived. The early phase of the reconstruction period of the city was in fact greatly celebrated, and it is not so hard to imagine why. Photographs taken during this time period show us a city still oriented towards the future (fig. 7). The buildings are slowly forming the outlines of the streets and squares, and although there are still a lot of open areas in the city, everything looks indeed very clean and organized. The buildings constructed during this period are of a particular modest quality, with nice attention to detail and a clear responsibility to the urban context within which they are embedded. The buildings have a sense of lightness in their construction, and do not at all have the necessity to be monumental.

One part of the reconstruction plan was especially appraised, the Treppenstraße. The Treppenstraße was designed as a shopping street connecting the Friedrichsplatz with the Station area, and was one of the first pedestrian streets in Germany. The Treppenstraße would become the architectural symbol of the reconstruction period, and would even be used as scenery in several movies.

It is only later that this perception of the modern city changes, with the continued infill of the modern city – only now by a much poorer architecture, and in a much less controlled way - , the expansion of infrastructure, and the significant increase in the intensity of car traffic. It was during this phase of the reconstruction that the city started to show itself as fragmented and incoherent. This shift is accompanied by what can be called the abandonment of the modern city, both mentally and physically.

⁹ "It seems that the traces of the urban heritage as a whole are defined by the way the city of Kassel keeps up a relation with the landscape. [...] The way that is easy to experience and understand is the way the city opens up to the landscape, a motive from the baroque times, with the Staircase Road extending such relationship from the station to the Friedrichsplatz and the Aue Park below. The way that is difficult to access on an emotional level is the way the landscape enters the city, with the modernist version of baroque lining in the landscape in the shape of the highway, and the modernist way of shaping and placing buildings that link such entering 'landscape' with the body of the city and its dwelling and shopping streets." Bosman, J (2007). The tale of Kassel – from a Unique and Intact 1000 Years of Urban Heritage to a Cityscape Saturated with Modernist Buildings, Crowned by a Copy of Hercules from the Palazza Farnese in Rome

¹⁰ 'die Verpasste Stadt', published in 1989 can be seen as a paradigmatic work related to the critique of the reconstruction period of Kassel. It emphasizes the loss of urban heritage though its main critique is in the way the car, and related infrastructure, have turned Kassel in a city for cars instead of for people.

The construction of the new Hauptbahnhof near the Wilhelmhöhe castle serves as a proud confession. The abandonment of the city was strengthened by subsidies for the construction of a private house outside of the city. Subsidies granted by the German government ¹¹. It must be said that this shift in perception was also accompanied by large transitions in society in general. A period in which Kassel had to deal amongst others with rising unemployment, strongly related to the increasing competition from Asia and the oil-crisis ¹² - Kassel as a city was largely dependent on industry, specifically the car industry.

It is telling that in the stadtmuseum there is currently the exposition entitled 'kennen sie Kassel?' – freely translated as 'do you know Kassel?' – with a great emphasis on this lost heritage of the Altstadt, perhaps driven by a strong nostalgia for the old city that has been present within Kassel ever since the bombardments ¹³. The post-war reconstruction period of Kassel however, takes up only a minor part of the exhibition.

Apparently this limited scope on the history of the city is a common concern today, as there have been tours through the city sharing the same title as the stadtmuseum's exhibition. Tours that revisit many of the buildings that were built during the 1950's, organized by Dr.Ing Sylvia Stöbe from the university of Kassel's architecture, urban design, and landscape architecture department ¹⁴.

This same concern can even be said to be reflected in the thematic of the 2007 documenta; 'Ist die moderne unsere Antike?'. Central to this seems to be the following question: how to deal with the reconstruction period as a heritage in itself and as a significant part of the history of the city?

The real difficulty in Kassel lies in overcoming or reconciling with the seemingly oppositional history of both the reconstruction period and the Altstadt as a heritage.

What is clear however, is that the reconstruction period of Kassel - due to its long duration - has been a very dynamic period, a period of growth, decline, and with serious transformations in land-use. All this is reflected in the Kassel of today. A city left with a strong feeling nostalgia for the Altstadt. But perhaps there are two types of nostalgia today. A nostalgia for the old city, and at the same time a nostalgia for the optimism of the reconstruction period, something that makes us once again appreciate the architecture of the 1950's.

¹¹ "Wildnis Kassel" project by university of Kassel, URL=<<http://b-o-a-r-d.nl/?p=4123>>

¹² Ralph P. Güntzel (2012), *The Demigod's City a Short History of Kassel*

¹³ ARNOLD, J., 2011. 'Once upon a time there was a lovely town ...': The Allied air war, urban reconstruction and nostalgia in Kassel (1943–2000) *German History*. 29(3), 445-469

¹⁴ Kennen sie Kassel? - Die Stadt der 50er Jahre, URL=<<http://www.architektursalon-kassel.de/anfang2016.html>>

from Love...



Fig. 7 Kassel during the first phase of the reconstruction period (1955)



Fig. 8 Postcard Kassel unknown date

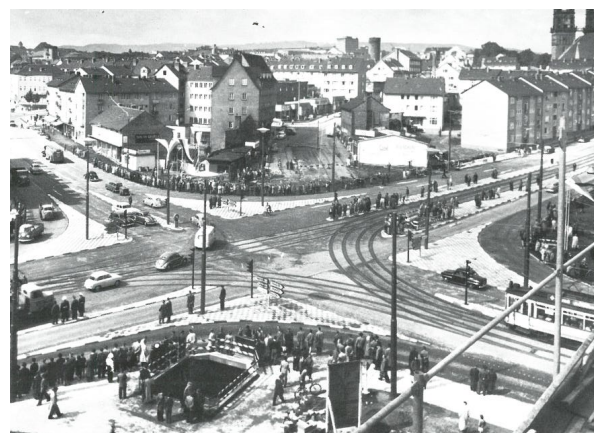


Fig. 9 Altmarkt, note the people watching the 'spectacle', the Altmarkt was one of the first modern traffic intersections

to Hate...



Fig. 10 Strong increase in infrastructure and the dominance of the car, note the tower slabs that appear in the landscape



Fig. 11 Altmarkt with increase in car traffic

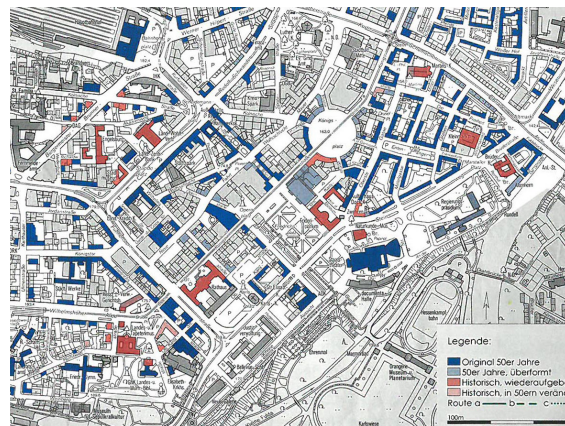


Fig. 12 Map showing different time periods in which the buildings were built. Note the blue area in the Altstadt indicating that almost the entire area was built in roughly the same period, with a coherent architecture. Because this area mainly consists of social housing, the area appears to be frozen in time.



Fig. 13 Typical corner block/hochhaus from first phase of the reconstruction



Fig. 14 Tower block from second phase of the reconstruction period, larger in scale (disproportionate to its surroundings), and monotonous building (arguably one of the worst buildings in Kassel)



Fig. 15 Entrance to roof top parking designed in the early period of the reconstruction, celebrating the car while it moves up to the rooftop from where one has a nice view over the landscape.



Fig. 16 Parking garage constructed in 1970, a repetition of floors which presents itself as a big block in its surroundings. Directly visible from the Königsplatz.

Experiencing Kassel place out of place

Kassel is still largely characterized by the destruction and respectively the reconstruction of the city. Due to this reconstruction, and the fragmentary structure of the city, there exist a large number of strange juxtapositions between urban elements and experiences, which I could only describe as the experience of being out of place. What I mean to say by this is that some of the buildings/urban elements are no longer within their expected contexts, making them feel out of place, in a similar fashion to the old fachwerkhaus that is now located in Harleshausen.

To read a sign saying Altmarkt while at the same time standing alongside a busy traffic intersection. To grab some lunch in the markethall that could normally be found in an inner city, and yet it seems to stand in the middle of a 'Siedlung'. To visit the city archive on the attic of the same building. The former hauptbahnhof, overlooking the city, appears almost abandoned - it is now called the Kulturbahnhof. Row buildings that decided to stand on their own. Tower blocks that normally can be found in the periphery of a city. The Friedrichplatz that seems disproportionately big for a city with the density of Kassel.



Fig. 17 The Markthalle in direct confrontation with the ring-road.



Fig. 18 Strange juxtaposition of old cemetery and infrastructure



Fig. 19 Building block in the Altstadt, siedlung architecture, an experience that one would normally expect outside of the city center.



Fig. 20 A row of buildings that appears to be cut.



Fig. 21 It looks as if at one point in time there was another building attached to this side. Windows are placed to take opportunity of this fact, by accepting the condition and the possibilities that it has to offer. Appropriation? Reconciliation, without the erasure of the past?



Fig. 22 What looks like a former petrol station is now a Shishalounge. A transformation which made it almost irrecognizable as a building from the 1950's.



Fig. 23 In Kassel there are many places from which one can enter into the block, because of its almost hidden character often one would find signs as an indication.

die Wiedergefundene Stadt

topographical instability and migration



left Fig. 24 “Glass floor in the Jerusalem Chapel, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome, housing earth transported from the site of the Crucifixion by Saint Helena, the mother of Constantine, the first Christian emperor of Rome.” (Alexander Nagel, 2012)



Fig. 25 Participants of the Paegant carrying around a model of the old Rathaus of Kassel

“Throughout the Middle Ages there was a site that was popularly known as “Jerusalem” despite the fact that it was located in Rome. It is a chapel in the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme [...] The chapel came to be known as “Jerusalem” not only because it housed relics from there, most important among them fragments of the cross of the Crucifixion, but because Helena had also transported, with great effort, soil from the site of the Crucifixion “soaked with the blood of Christ,” which she then laid into the floor of her chapel. An ancient earthworks project, this site was a piece of transplanted territory, a bit of Jerusalem reinstalled in Rome. [...] Earth from the place of the Crucifixion and traces of the events that occurred there were thus arrayed into a diagrammatic constellation that “generated” a double of the original site. The point was not to produce a complete illusionistic re-creation, but a space that is neither here nor there, a location without fixed coordinates. Rather than a visual replica, the constellation/installation initiates a process of activation. The potential for time- and space- travel is actualized in the experience of users who assemble the elements imaginatively and thus, for a time, inhabit a space that is removed from their own known environment, a space linked to Jerusalem through real conjunctures – the relics and the earth. Through active uptake, the fragmentary elements are completed, “grown” back into a whole, but a fluid, conceptual whole, one that is both grounded and not grounded in real earthly territory. [...] The real places and events that belong to the plane of history are a necessary part of the story, but they are only part of the story; the fact that Jerusalem can be detached and transported, to Rome and to other places, reveals this truth about them.”

- Alexander Nagel (2012), p. 100

Considering the experience of the place out of place and the idea of topographical instability as described by Alexander Nagel in the example of the Jerusalem chapel, is it not possible to converge these two ideas into one? To see the condition of the place out of place not as a problem - a traumatic experience of the fragmented city - but as a possible direction for resolving the trauma altogether, by not looking for what is left of the medieval city on its historical ground but by assuming its migration? Does the Altstadt not already function as some strange kind of holy land, similar perhaps to Jerusalem? Is it possible to converge this idea? And if this is possible, where can we expect to find it/through what mechanism did this migration occur?

I already felt drawn towards the 'messiness' that can be found in the Kassel, which is a condition strongly connected to the second phase of the reconstruction, a phase that is characterized by a somewhat uncontrolled growth and infill of the city. More and more did I start to see these places as the answer to the problem. These places have - despite their monstrous appearance - the interesting quality that one does not immediately understand them. Why are the buildings arranged in such a way? Why are there so many blind facades? Why are there so many gaps in the urban fabric? What is their potential? I noticed there was one area in particular that caught my interest, the area around the Treppenstraße, and the area directly behind it in particular. An area where the fabric started to become more complex, with clear signs of fragmentation. Not necessarily a beautiful part of the city, not at first sight! But there was one idea that in the end I had to pursue, what if the lost condition of the Altstadt indeed made its way back into the fabric of Kassel through the 'messiness' that symbolizes the failure of the modern city? What would happen if this was not seen as a failure, but indeed as something beautiful, something to care for?

Was it not so, that for a long time the medieval nucleus of Kassel was not considered valuable either?

*"Indeed the modernist industrial town of the early twentieth century, with its social problems and its sharply divided political and cultural milieus, hardly featured in representations of Old Kassel. The densely populated old town, which during the course of the later nineteenth century had decayed into a classic ghetto for the poor, was portrayed as seen by the stroller and the cultured enthusiast, not by those who lived there. In fact the old town, the historical centre of Kassel, had only recently come to be regarded by the cultured middle classes as an area that one might visit."*¹⁵

¹⁵ ARNOLD, J., 2011. 'Once upon a time there was a lovely town ...': The Allied air war, urban reconstruction and nostalgia in Kassel (1943–2000) *German History*. 29(3), p. 458



Fig. 26 Kassel current situation



Fig. 27 Old Kassel Fachwerkhaus Klosterstraße



Fig. 28 Although fragmentation is often considered to be a characteristic of the modern city, the medieval city shows similar characteristic. The complexity of such a city fabric is overwhelming and can hardly be understood in terms of its design logics. Note the seemingly accidental characteristics of the buildings and the hybrid conditions of the urban spaces, often in-between what can be called a street or a square.



Fig. 29 Medieval city structure of Kassel.

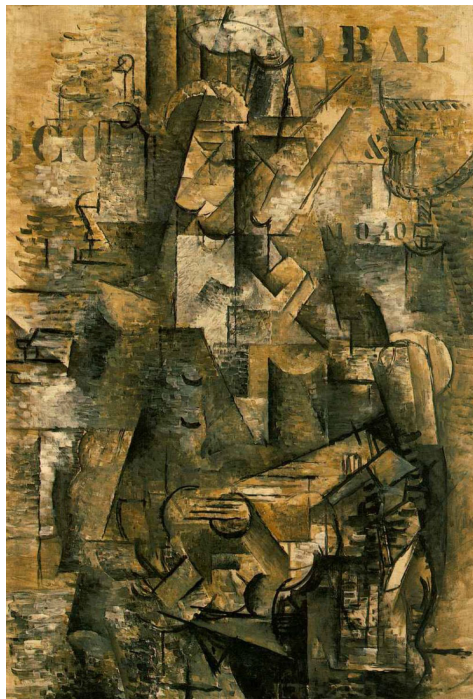


Fig. 30 Georges Braques, The Portuguese, 1911



Fig. 31 Picasso, a portrait of Wilhelm Unde, 1910

Historical layering of the 19th century fabric

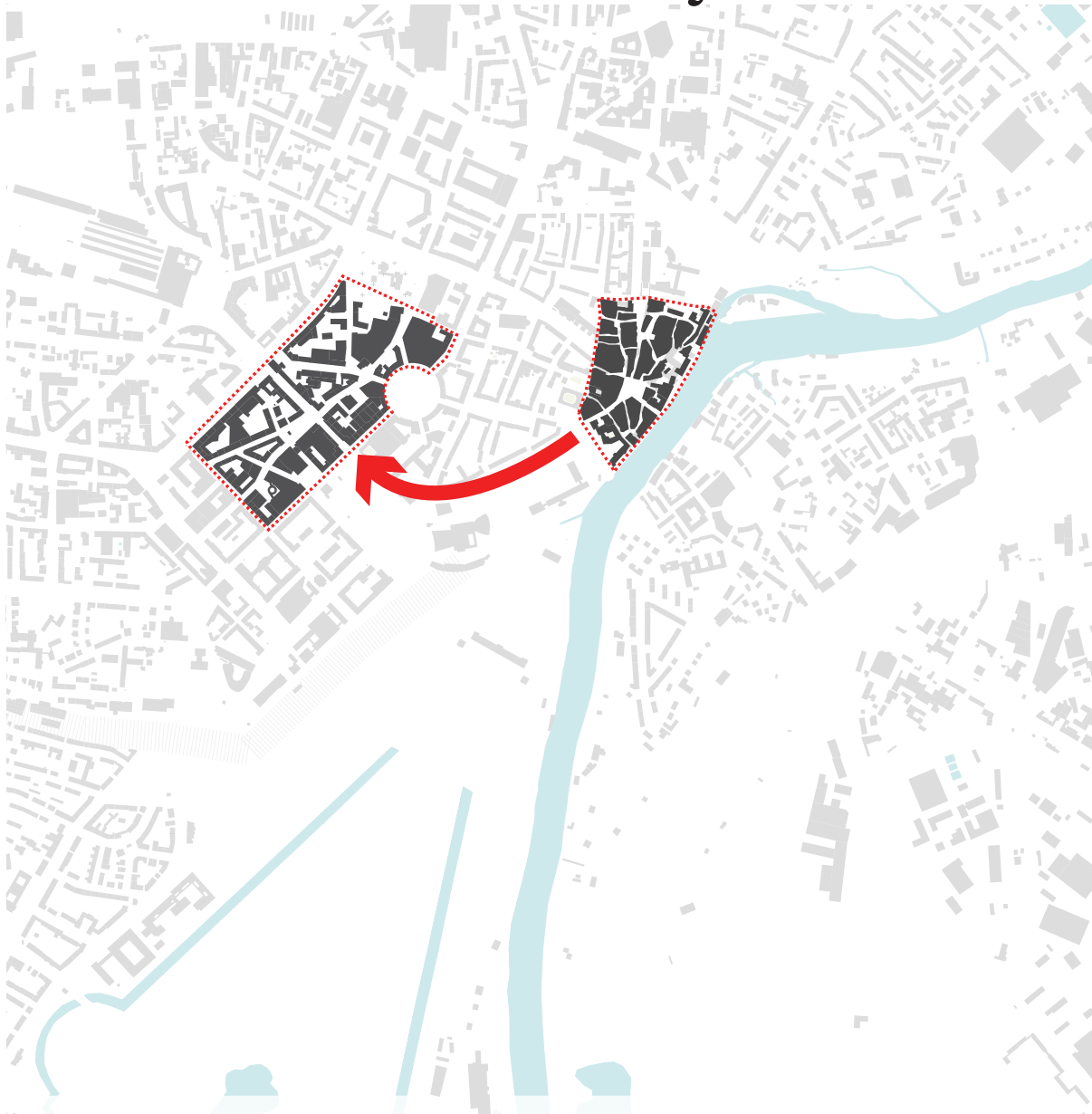


Fig. 32 Current situation with projected Altstadt. Is it possible to imagine a movement or migration of the medieval character of the city, towards an area that has known a dynamic development as well, a part of the city that had to deal with multiple transformations in the course of its history, and shows similar characteristics to the medieval city, e.g. fragmentation, rotations, and a hybrid condition of public space somewhere in-between streets and squares?



Fig. 33 Situation in 1742. The city at this period consists of several parts that can be clearly distinguished from one another. The Aupark with its symmetrical lay-out, the Oberneustadt with its grid structure and the Altstadt within the city walls. The area is situated just outside of the city walls.



Fig. 34 Situation in 1835. The city walls are no longer here, and the different parts of the city are connected by the plan of du Ry, consisting of amongst others the Friedrichplatz and the Königsplatz. The area is still at the edge of the city, and makes up an area with large estates and beautiful gardens. The Altstadt is being incapsulated by the developments under Landgrave Friedrich II.



Fig. 35 Situation in 1878. The period after the construction of the station leaves the area to be in-between the station, the Altstadt and the Friedrichplatz. It is this in-between position that creates an interesting friction between the existing structure and the need for further densification. Today, this period is still readable in the industrial building that sits just behind the Treppenstraße.



Fig. 37 Treppenstraße 1953



Fig. 38 One of the streets cutting through the fabric can be seen on the right-side of the photograph

Fig. 36 After the war, the structure of the area got altered by some additional streets and widening of the existing street pattern which further complicate the fabric. One of this streets was the Treppenstraße, meant to connect the station with the Friedrichplatz and ultimately with the Aupark. The other streets were meant for the car to enter into the area, and serve as a transition zone from car to pedestrian, this way accessing the shopping streets. This figure shows an arial photo of the area in 1928, with superimposed on it the cuts that were made in the fabric during the reconstruction period.



Fig. 39 Current situation. All this historical layering and dynamic developments have resulted in a urban texture that combines both the modern architecture of Kassel - mostly oriented towards the street - with the less structured and more chaotic architecture that is typical for the inside of a building block. Because the modern type of architecture does not perfectly match with the partly maintained plot structure of the 19th century, the area fails to close up towards the street, resulting in gaps in the fabric laying bare the messiness of the inside of the building block.

A photographic comparison Fritzlar and Kassel

The following pages contain several photographic juxtapositions taken in Kassel - in the selected area - and photographs taken in Fritzlar.

Fritzlar is a small city with a medieval city center - still surrounded by its old city walls - not far from Kassel and serves as an interesting case study for a comparison with Kassel. Fritzlar as a city has a relatively low density and does not have a fully densified inner city. Because of this it shows some remarkable similarities to the city of Kassel before the moment it intensely densified.

The similarities between the urban fabric of current day Kassel and that of Fritzlar are striking.

These areas clearly resemble the 'failure' of the modern city to be planned, and are often ad-hoc solutions and left-over spaces in the city.

Despite these similarities, the situations in Kassel show a much grimmer atmosphere.

The question that can be asked is whether or not these areas possess key ingredients for the 'return' of the experience of the medieval city - with all its complexities - and finally, how to deal with these places in order for this experience to become a quality instead of the spaces that they are today.



Fig. 40



Fig. 40 Photograph of Fritzlar 'gap' in fabric



Fig. 41 Photograph of Kassel 'gap' in fabric



Fig. 42 Photograph of Kassel 'gap' in fabric



Fig. 43 Photograph of Fritzlar 'gap' in fabric



Fig. 44 Photograph of Kassel 'gap' in fabric



Fig. 45 Photograph of Fritzlar 'gap' in fabric



Fig. 46 Photograph of Kassel 'gap' in fabric



Fig. 47 Photograph of Fritzlar 'zig-zag' figure



Fig. 48 Photograph of Kassel 'zig-zag' figure

Project location

The building block selected as a further case study is the one attached to the EAM-Hochhaus. There are a couple of reasons to choose this location:

1. A direct relationship with the Treppenstraße and the EAM-Hochhaus creates a potentially interesting dialectic between the intervention and the existing context - a context that is directly associated with the reconstruction period. Besides this, the Treppenstraße - due to amongst other reasons the construction of the new Hauptbahnhof near the Wilhelmshöhe - has become largely redundant as a shopping street. Most of the shopping now focusses itself around the Königsstraße. The Treppenstraße could use a new impulse.
2. Within the block there is a 'gap' that is part of a single plot, making it less complicated in terms of its development, this is thus a pragmatic argument.
3. The selected site-location borders one of the main axis going out from the Königsplatz and is therefore directly visible, many people still use this street in order to go to the Königsplatz as it is the most direct route from the station area to the Königsplatz.

As an urban strategy the project has to be understood as a form of 'incremental urbanism', a process of gradual transformation and accumulation. I believe this to be an interesting way of dealing with these type of places, which might even require a bottom up development in order to deal with their complexity. Doing so would further increase a sense of civicness in this part of the city, something that is strongly associated with the old medieval city. As a consequence then, each of the possible locations in the area has to be researched individually in order to come up with an architectural intervention that is tailor made for the location.



Fig. 49 Map of Kassel current situation with selected building block in red.

Porosity of the building block



Fig. 50 Left on the image, industrial building now serves as a dance school



Fig. 51 Red stop sign from car elevator, the gap in the fabric is mainly used by cars today





Fig. 52 access to the inside of the block



Fig. 53 again cars dominate the inside of the block, note the rotations of the different volumes



Fig. 54 Ramp leads to parking garage

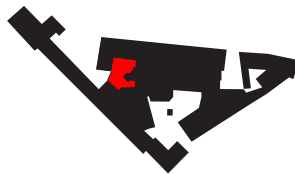




Fig. 55 closed off gap leading to parking garage

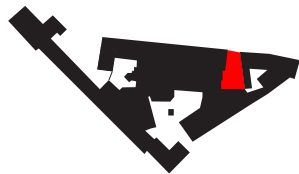




Fig. 56 gap directly behind the Treppenstraße



Fig. 57 the EAM-hochhaus

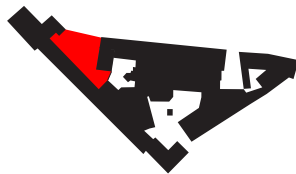




Fig. 59 The building on the left faces towards the area, already suggesting a sort of 'close'. Because of its small scale it breaks the larger scale of the surrounding.



Fig. 60 The industrial building takes up a prominent role within the building block.



Fig. 61 View into the block with the parking garage left in the image.



Fig. 62 Panorama of the project site.



Fig. 63 Front side of the Treppenstraße.



Fig. 64 Entrance to one of the small buildings.



Fig. 65 Panorama of the project site.

Design principles fragmentation and tower as a hinge

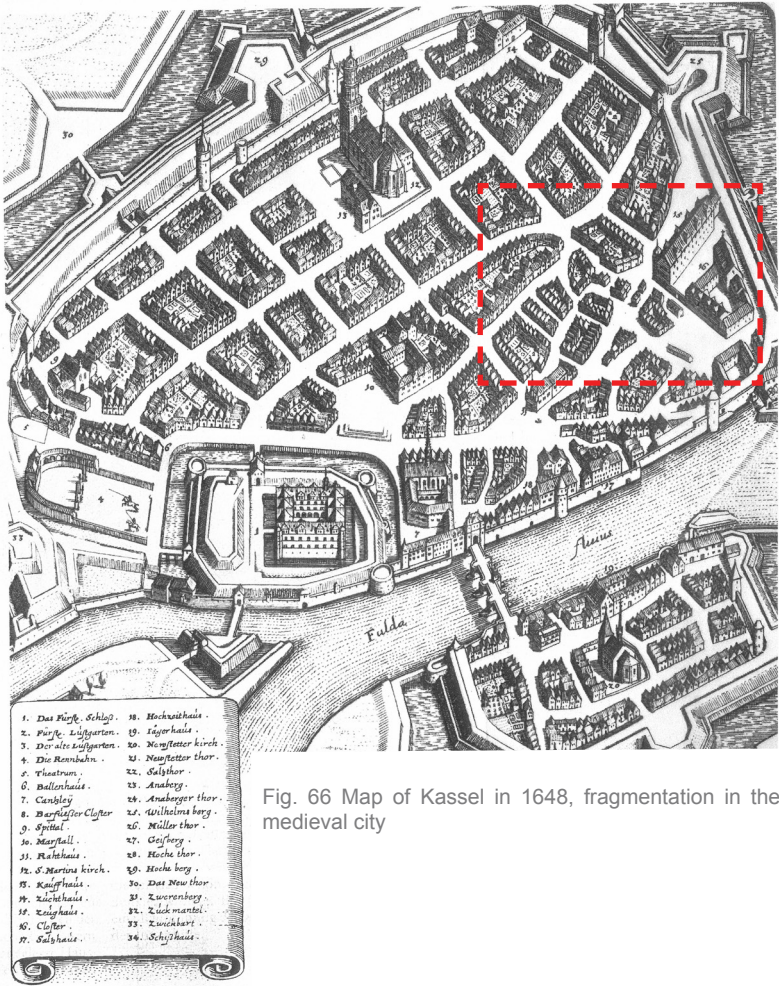


Fig. 66 Map of Kassel in 1648, fragmentation in the medieval city

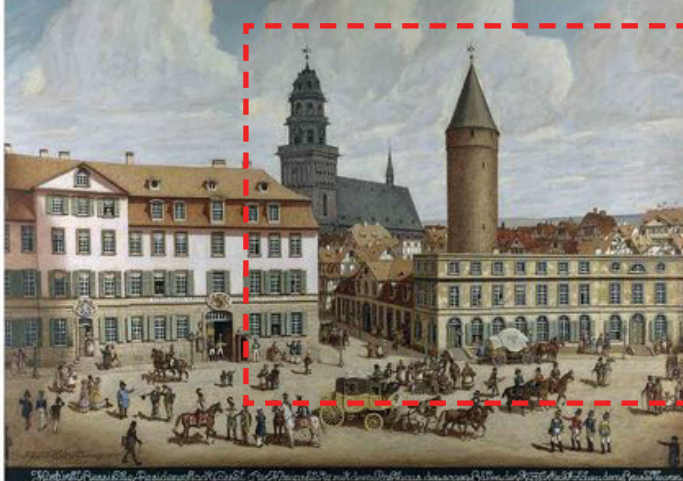
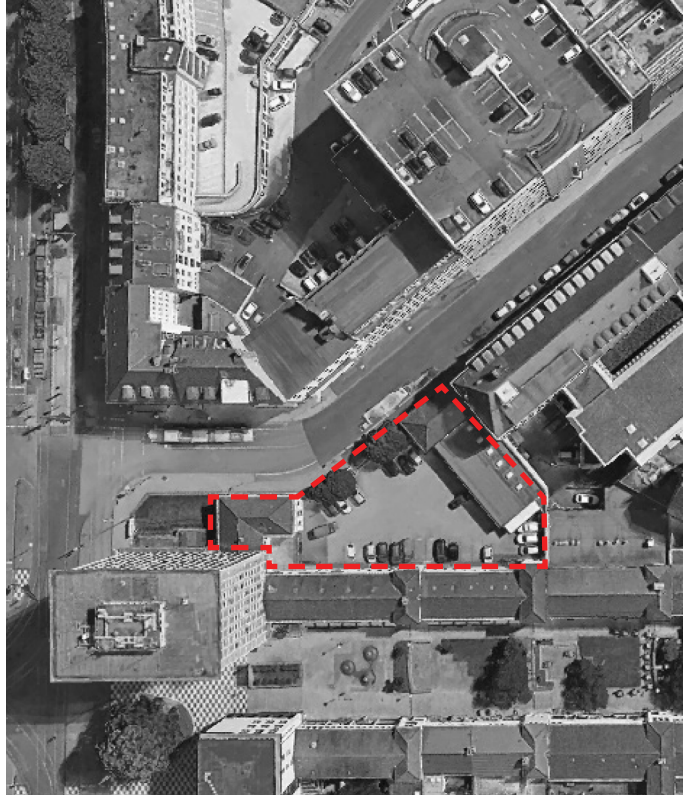


Fig. 66 Königsplatz and Druselterm. Medieval city behind formal element





The selected building block, despite being a potentially interesting block due to its porosity does not yet make this into a quality. Most of the gaps that are present in its perimeter edge are currently used either as parking space or as entrance to the parking garages positioned within the block. One particular building forms the exception, which is the small industrial building, a remainder of the 19th century fabric. As a building it is currently used as a dance-school and theater building (see fig. 50). In time this program may be expanded, offering further opportunities for the block to transform. The block has the potential to become completely fordable in the future, using the rotations of the different buildings to create an experience not unlike that of medieval town centers - e.g. the zig-zag pattern.

The fragmented condition of the block is accepted in the design, as a condition that can be seen in the medieval city of Kassel. In order to reconnect the formal space of the Treppenstraße with the fragmented condition of the block I propose to use a small tower as a hinge, which is a familiar motif in Kassel when it comes to establishing a relationship between different parts of the city. This can be observed in figure 66 when the medieval city presents itself behind the formal space of the Königsplatz and where the Druselturm can be said to link up these areas. Another good example is the Zwehrenturm, attached to the Friedrichianum, which functions as a hinge between the Friedrichplatz and the Altstadt.

al element.



Fig. 67 Selected project site.



Fig. 68 Zwehrenturm Kassel, approximately in the year 1800

Intervention and design drawings

The intervention attempts to at the same time open the block as well as complete it by mimicing several characteristics that are already present within the building block. The fragments are meant to create an open condition towards the inside of the building block, anticipating further development, emphasizing the porosity of the block.

The design consists of three smaller fragments - 2 rectangular and 1 square figure - , a small incision in order to connect the inside of the block to the Treppenstraße, and one I-shaped figure. The I-shaped figure will have to be designed in a later stage of the project - preferably by a different architect - in order to create more diversity in terms of architecture. The height of the I-shaped figure however, is limited to the height of the buildings of the Treppenstraße. Furthermore, the I-shaped building will need to have a roof type that does not deviate too much from the roof types that can be found on the smaller buildings of the Treppenstraße - e.g. a shallow sloped roof.

The program of the two rectangular fragments consists of housing, one two bedroom house, and one single bedroom house. The square figure will be programmed as a watch-tower, from which one can overlook the building block. The watch-tower serves as a hinge between the inside and the outside of the building block.

The architectural concept of the three volumes is largely based on the idea of sampling and is an attempt to combine the modern vernacular of Kassel together with some elements that are typically associated with the medieval city.



Fig. 70 3d view showing the rotated volumes creating an interplay with the surroundings (sorry not yet the actual design)



Fig. 71 Current situation, the building marked in grey will be removed in order to open up the block.



Fig. 72 The interventions shown in red, several volumes added in the location following the zig-zag pattern already present in the block, and a passage from the Treppenstraße into the area, creating a more permeable block and city structure.



Fig. 73 Morphology of the design scale 1:1000



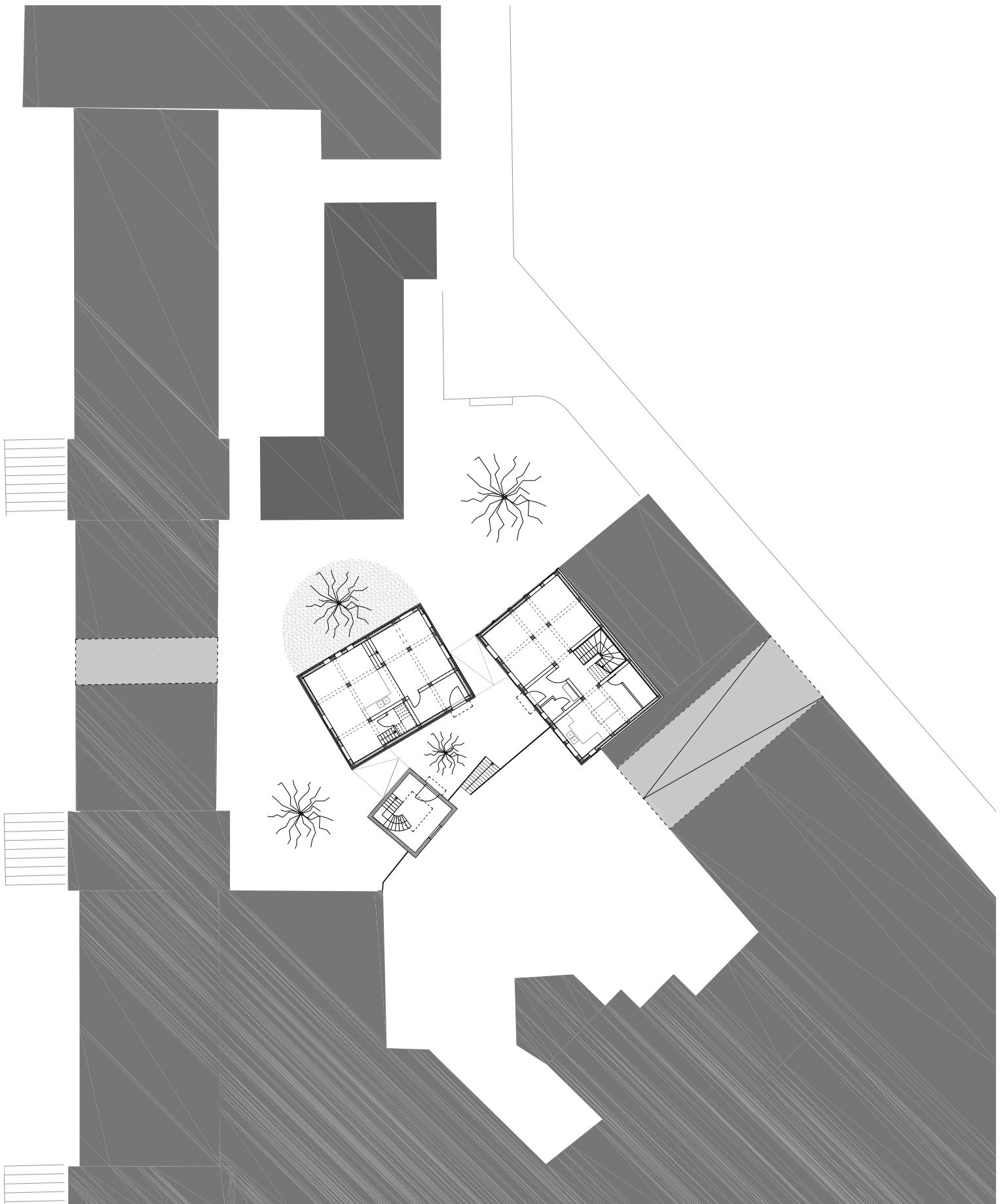


Fig. 74 scale 1:333 ground floor, the entrances are situated towards the center of the block creating a more enclosed 'collective' space



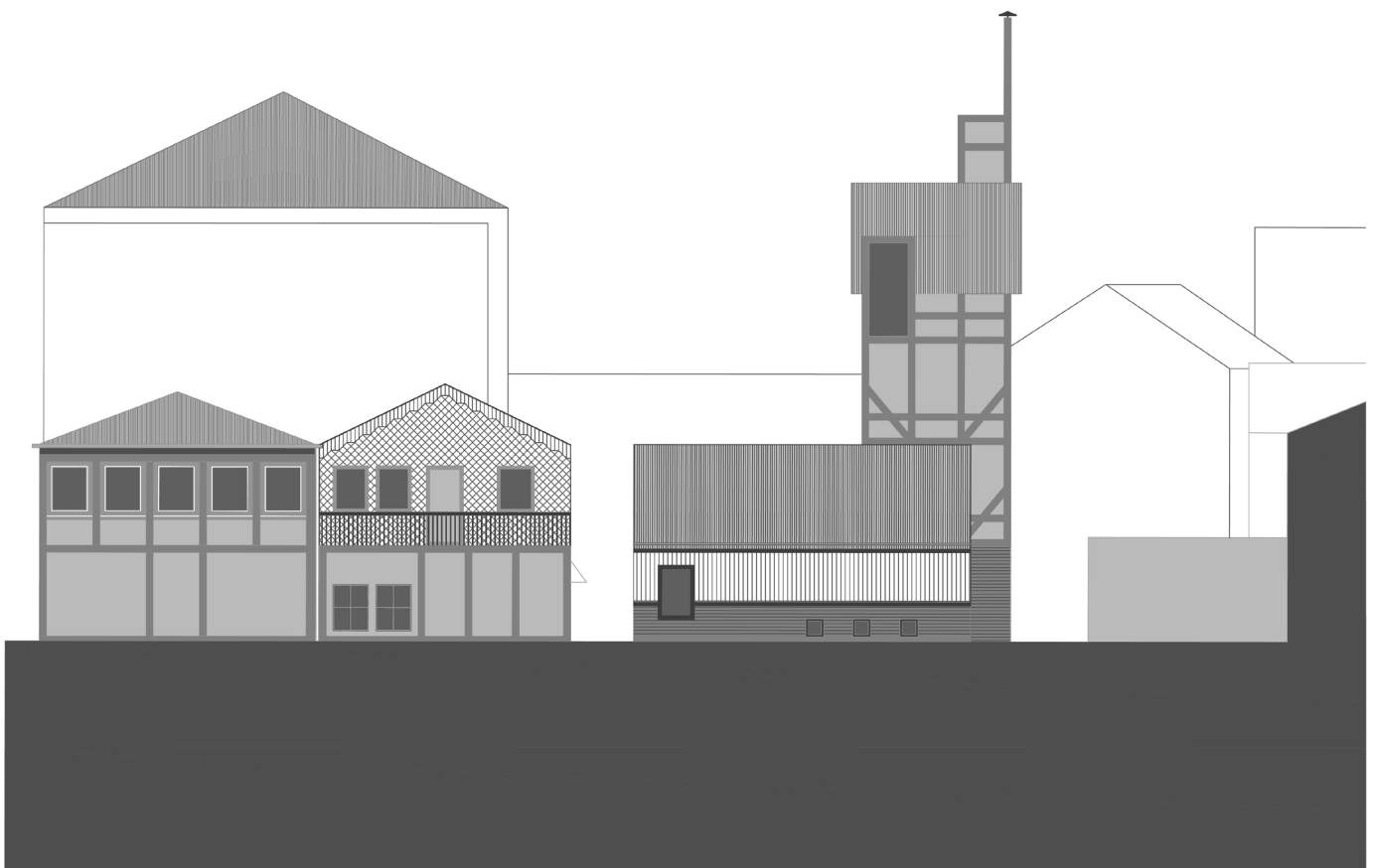


Fig. 75 scale 1:200 ensemble of the building façades from outside of the block

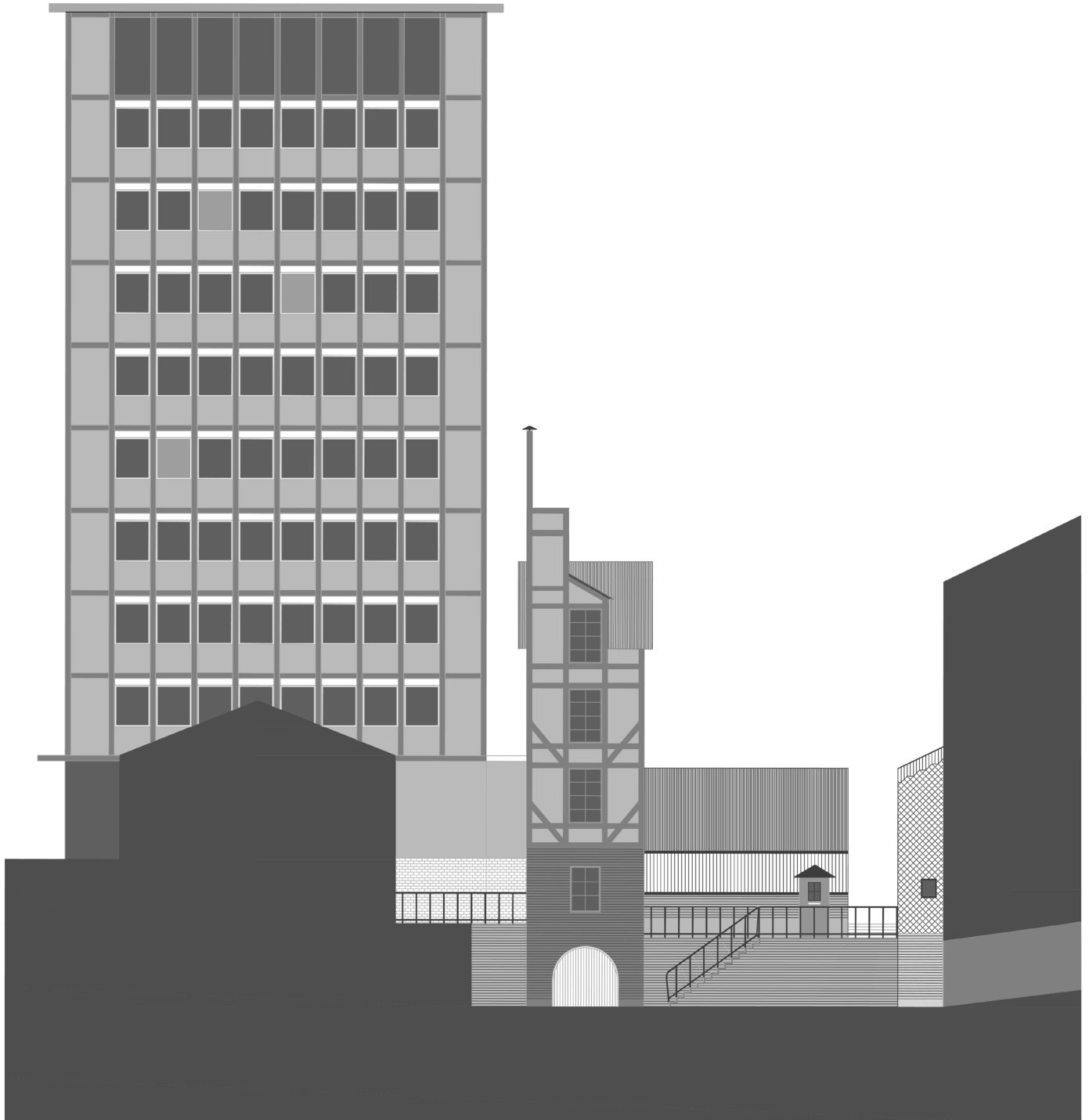


Fig. 76 scale 1:200 ensemble of the building façades from inside of the block

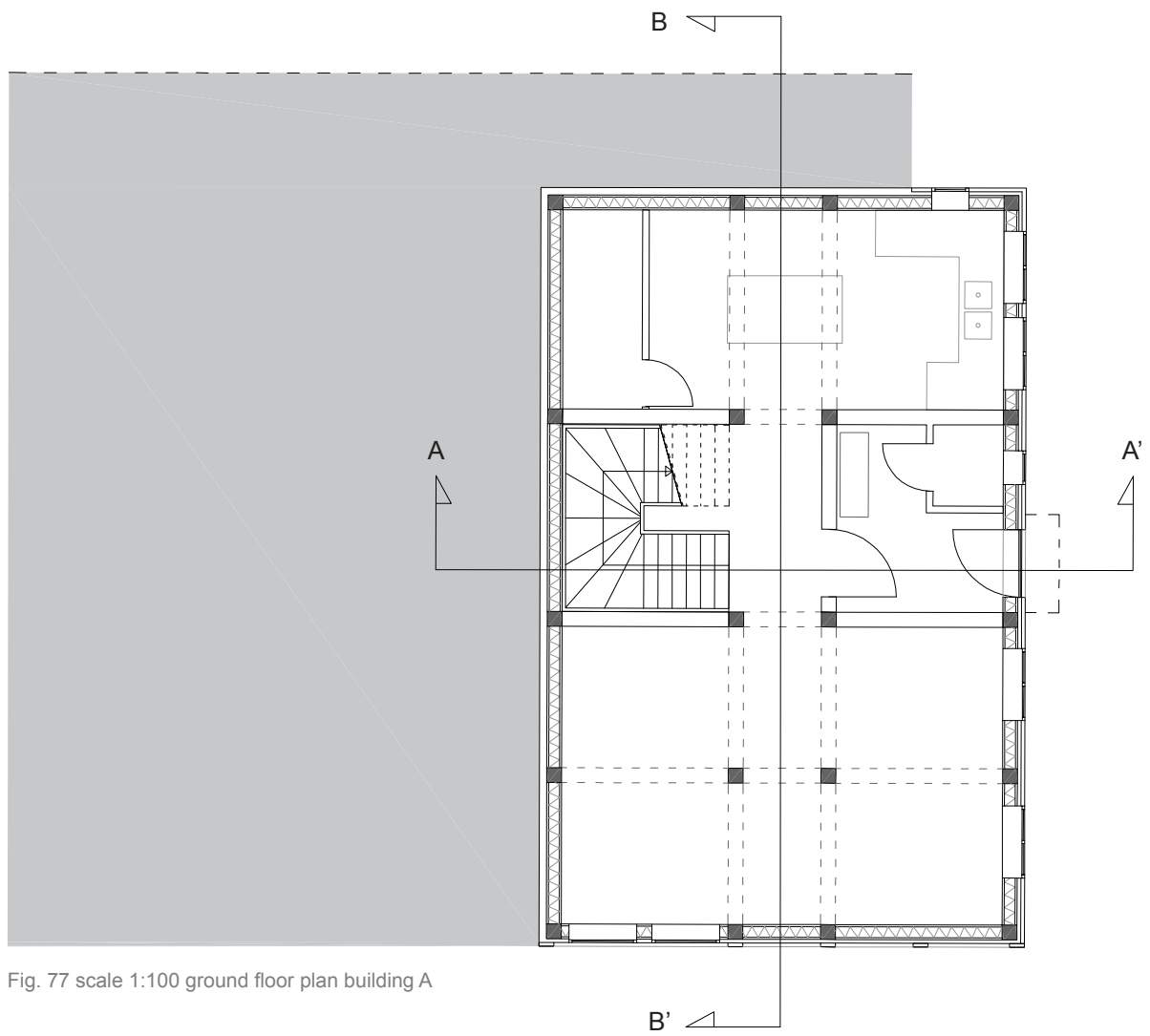


Fig. 77 scale 1:100 ground floor plan building A

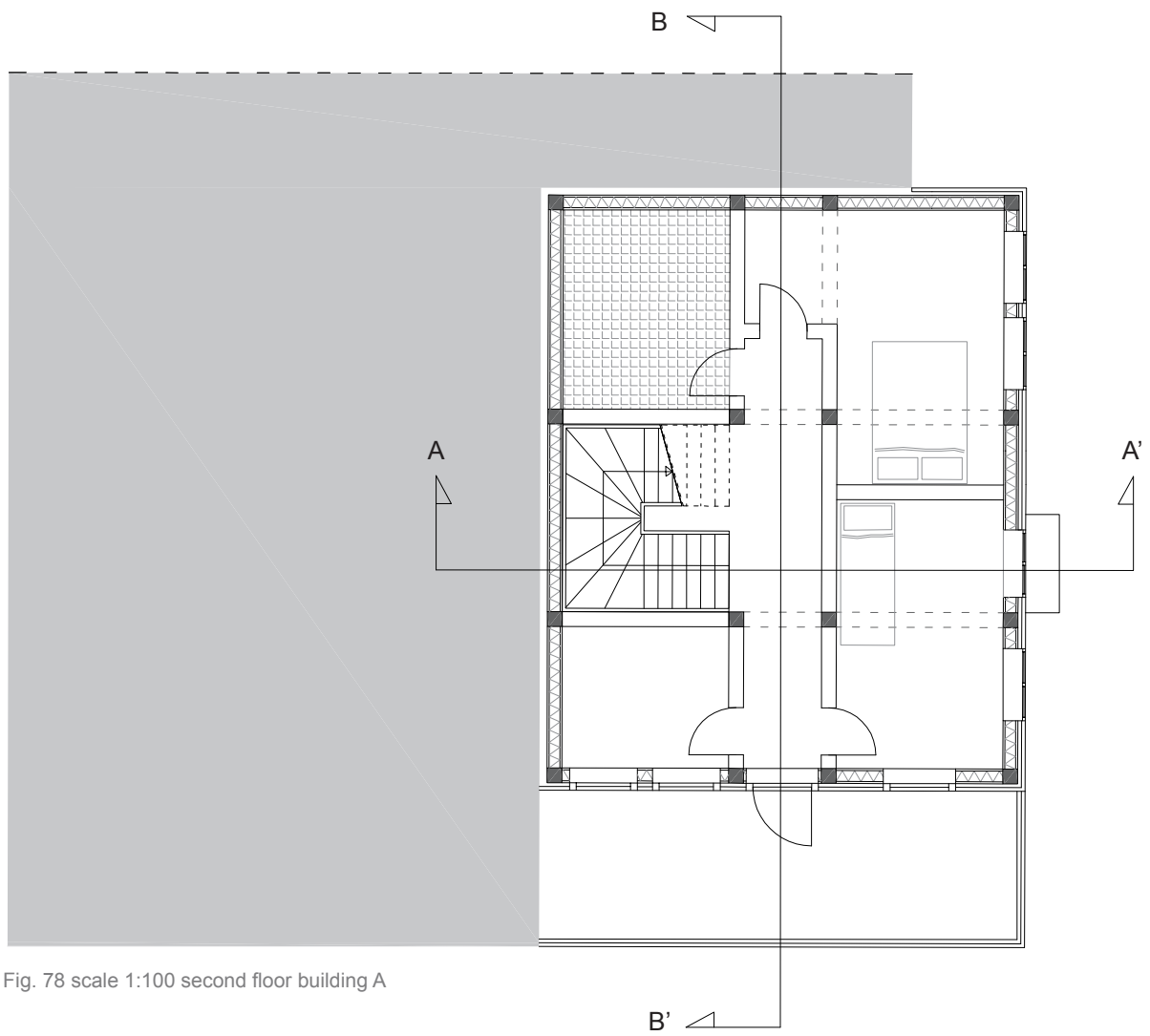


Fig. 78 scale 1:100 second floor building A

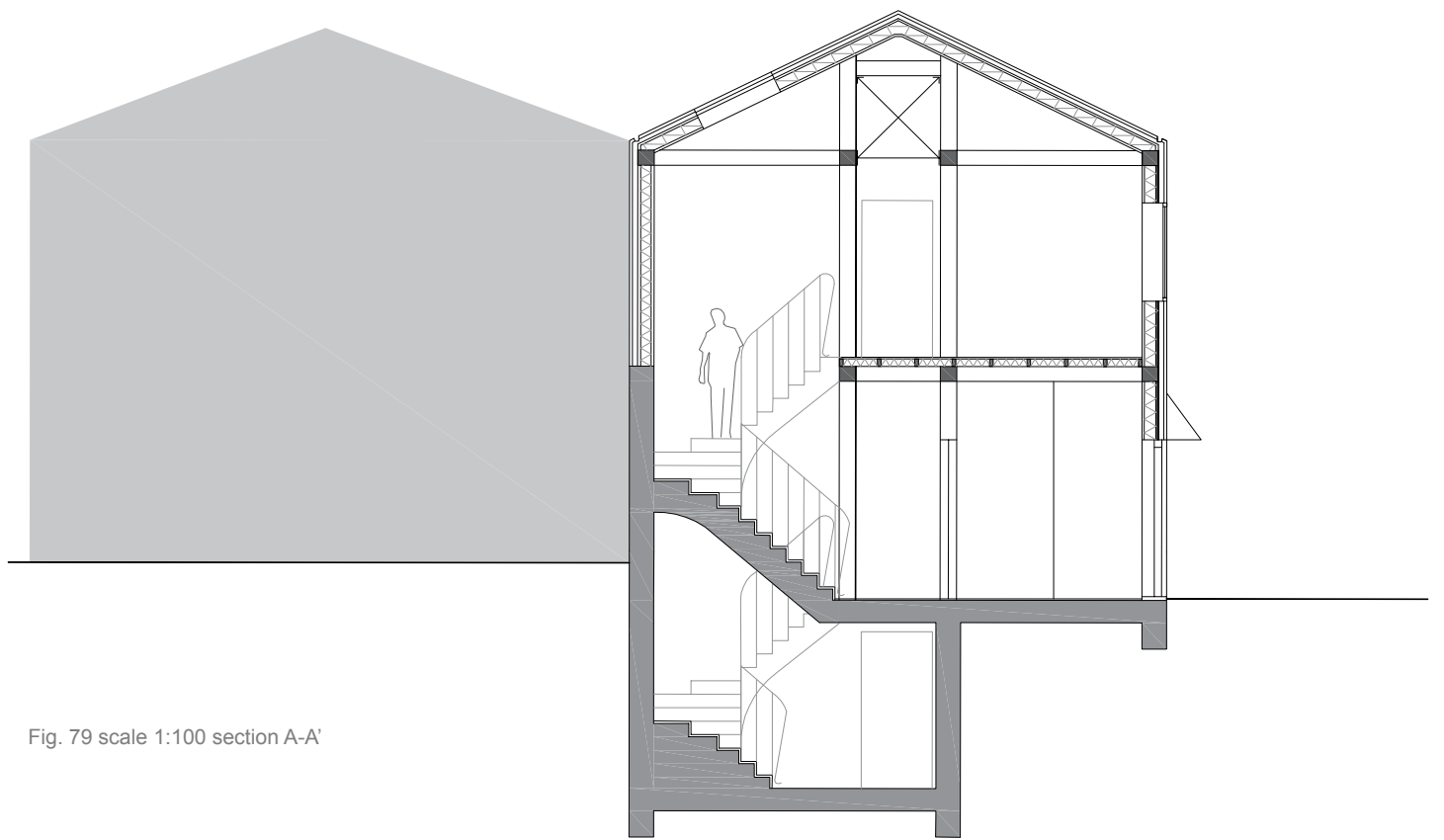


Fig. 79 scale 1:100 section A-A'

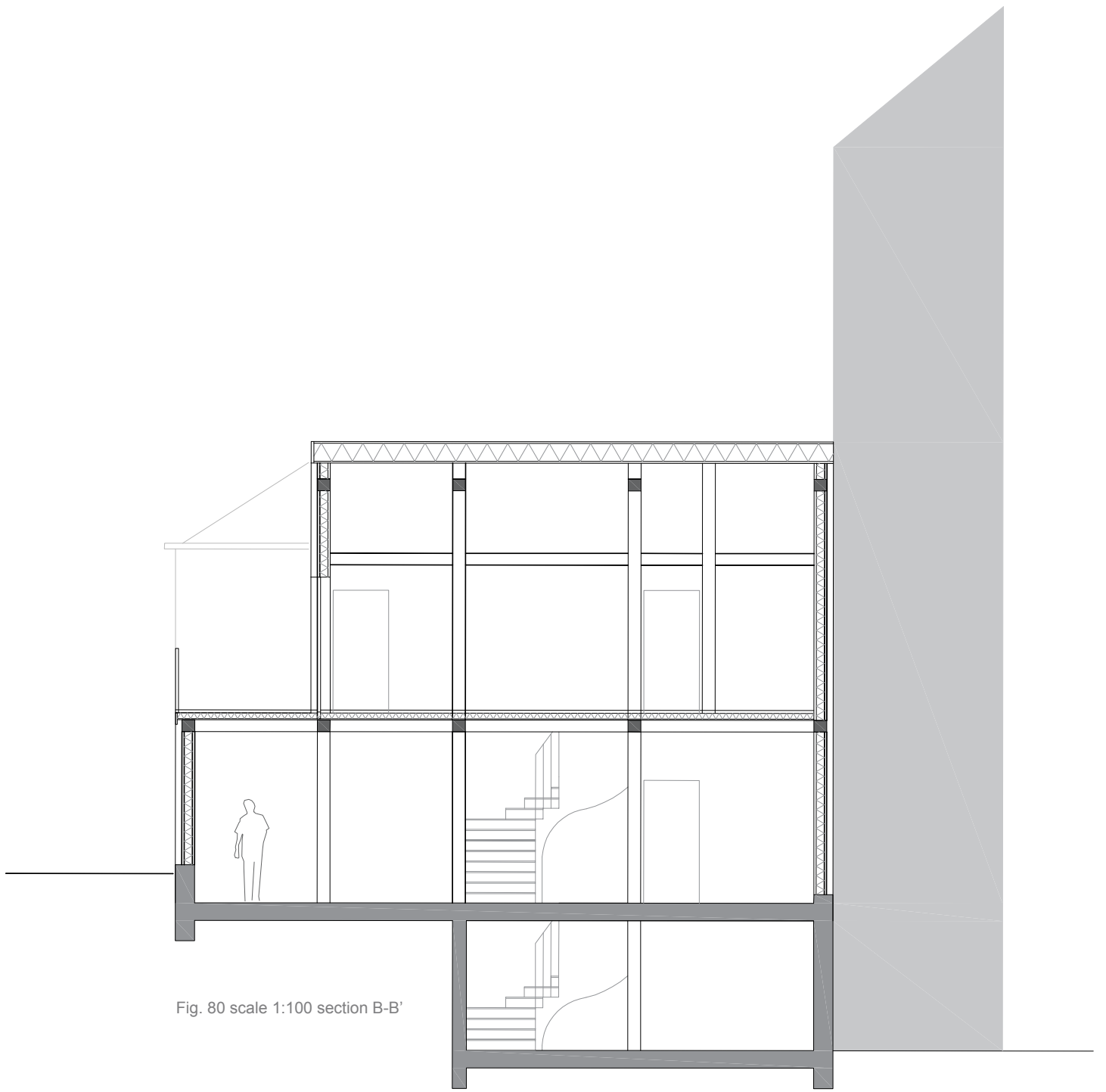


Fig. 80 scale 1:100 section B-B'



Fig. 81 scale 1:100 west elevation building A

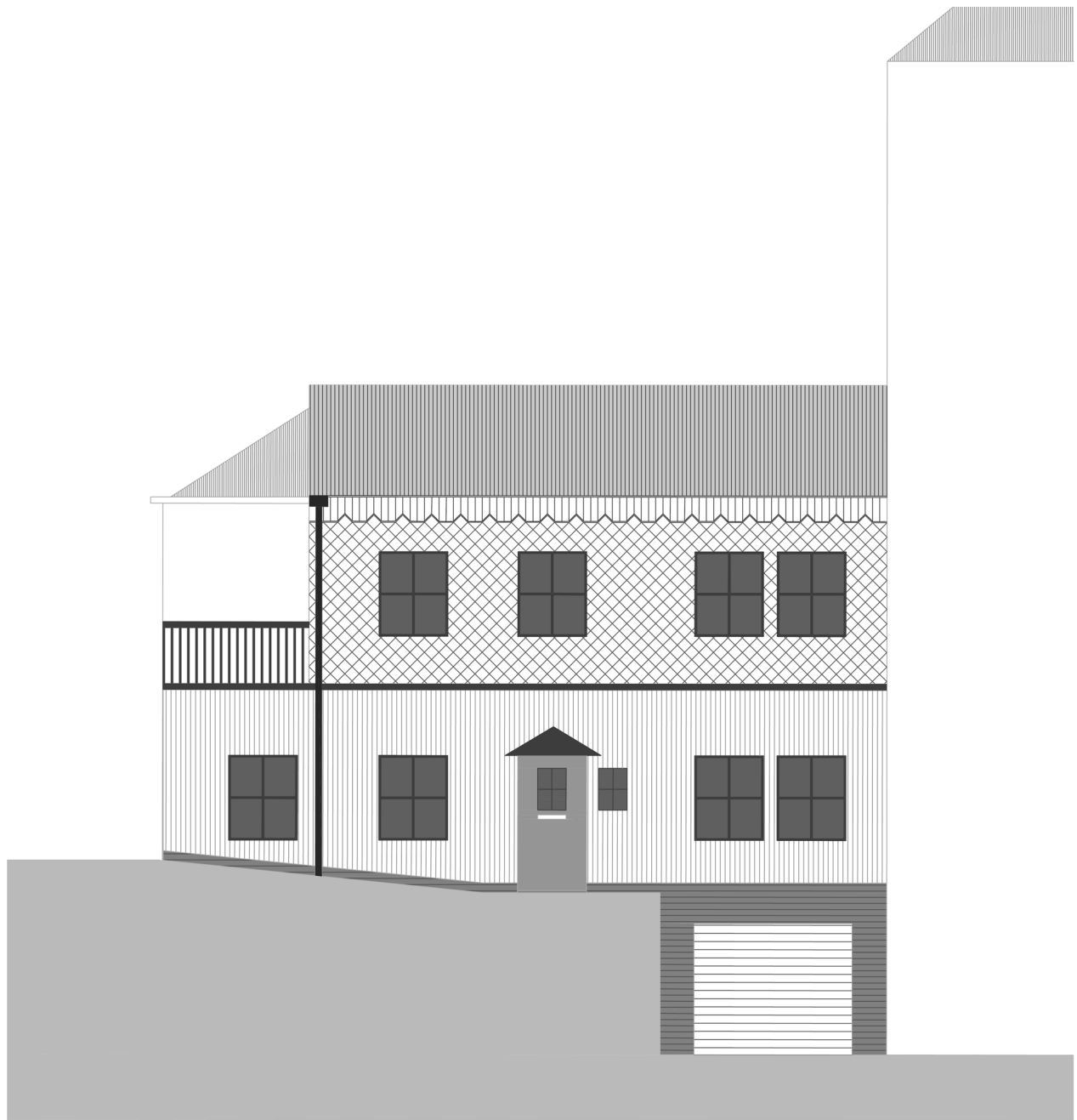


Fig. 82 scale 1:100 south elevation building A

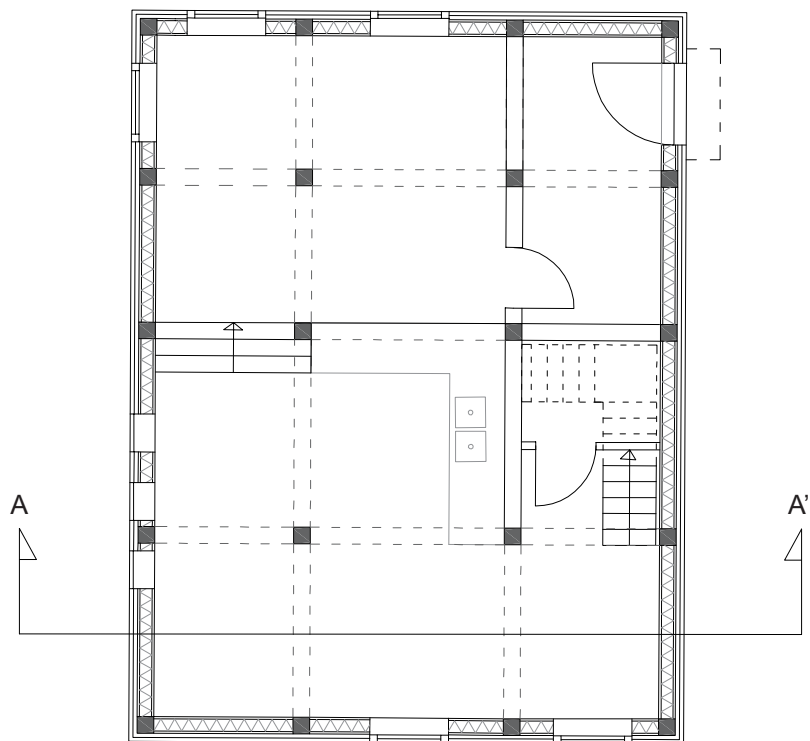


Fig. 83 scale 1:100 floor plan building B

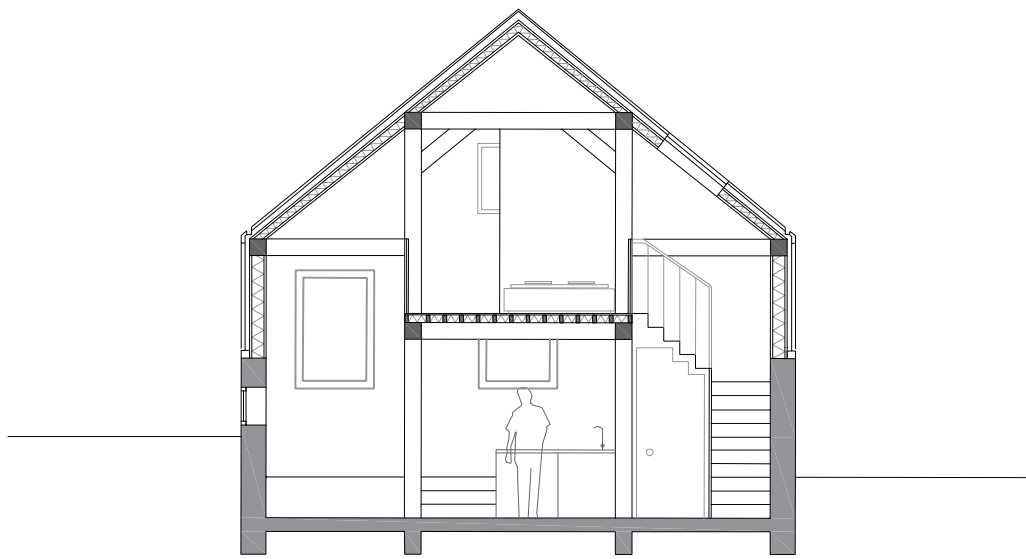


Fig. 84 scale 1:100 section A-A'

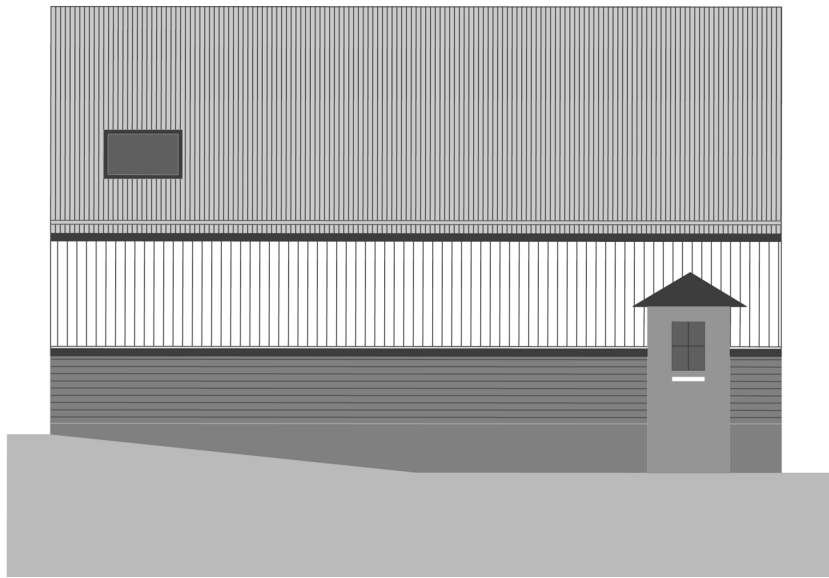


Fig. 85 scale 1:100 east elevation building A

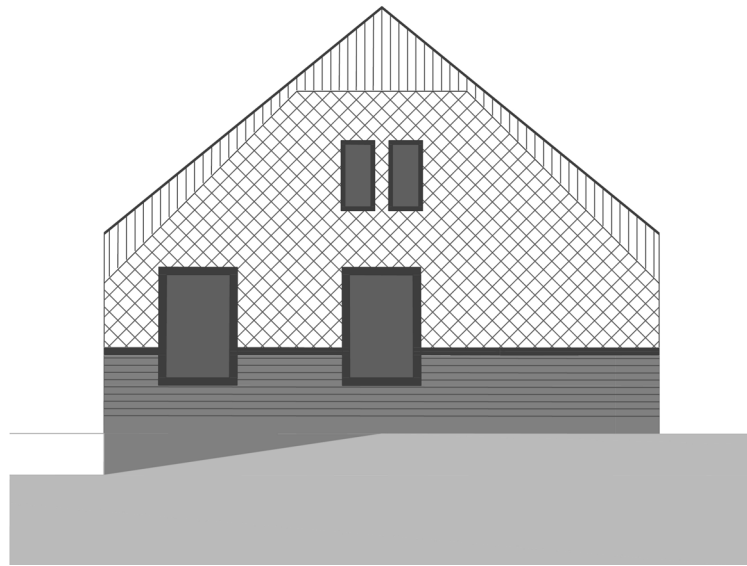


Fig. 86 scale 1:100 north elevation building A

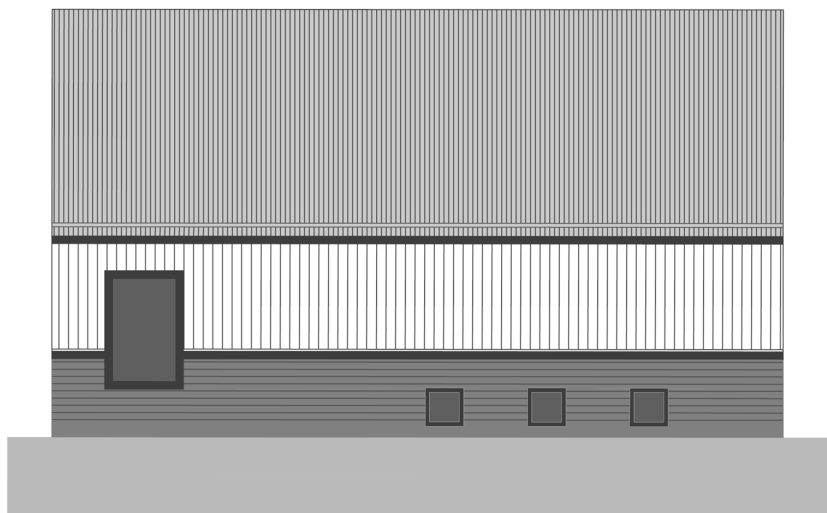


Fig. 85 scale 1:100 west elevation building A

Fig. 87

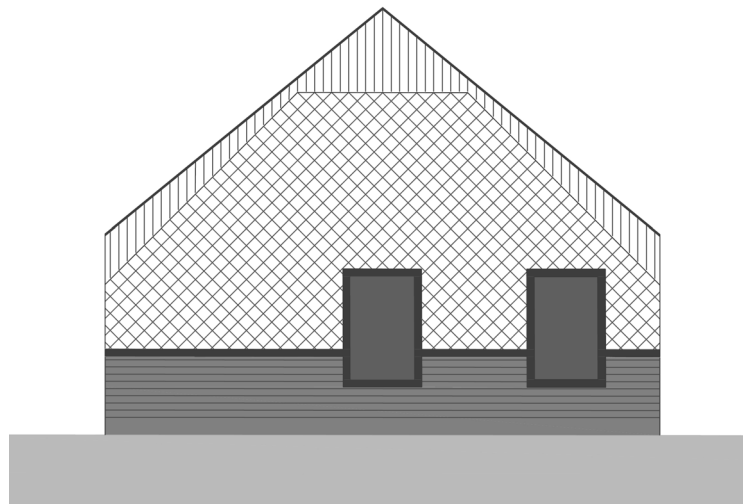


Fig. 86 scale 1:100 south elevation building A

Fig. 88

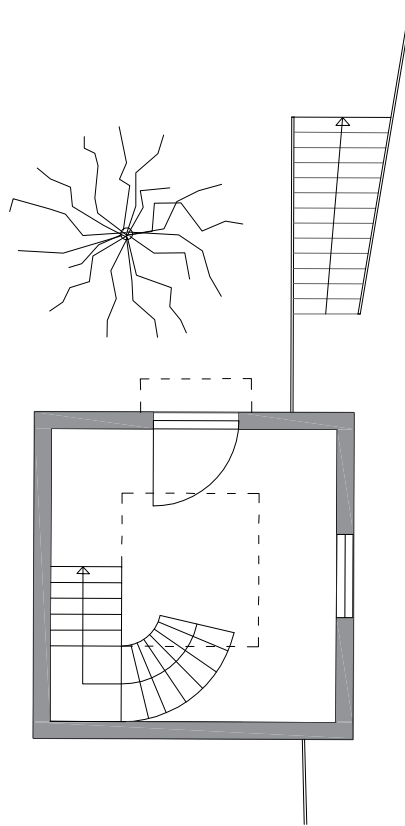


Fig. 88 scale 1:100
ground floor plan watch tower building

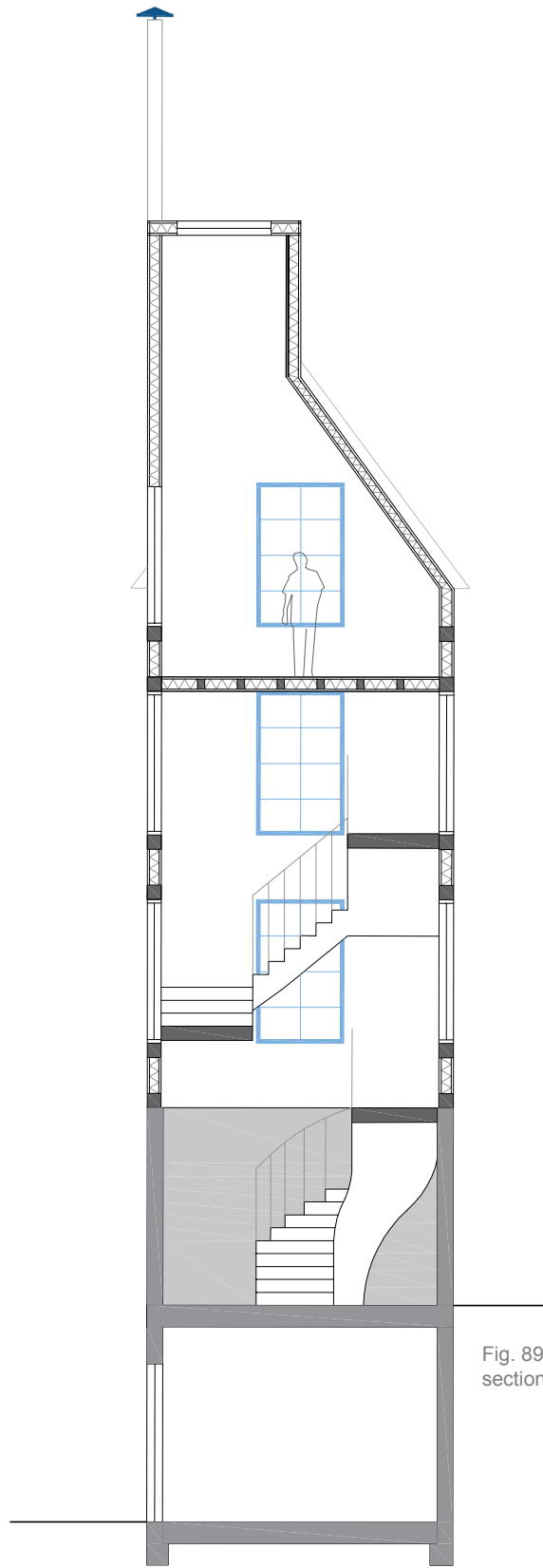


Fig. 89 scale 1:100
section watch tower building

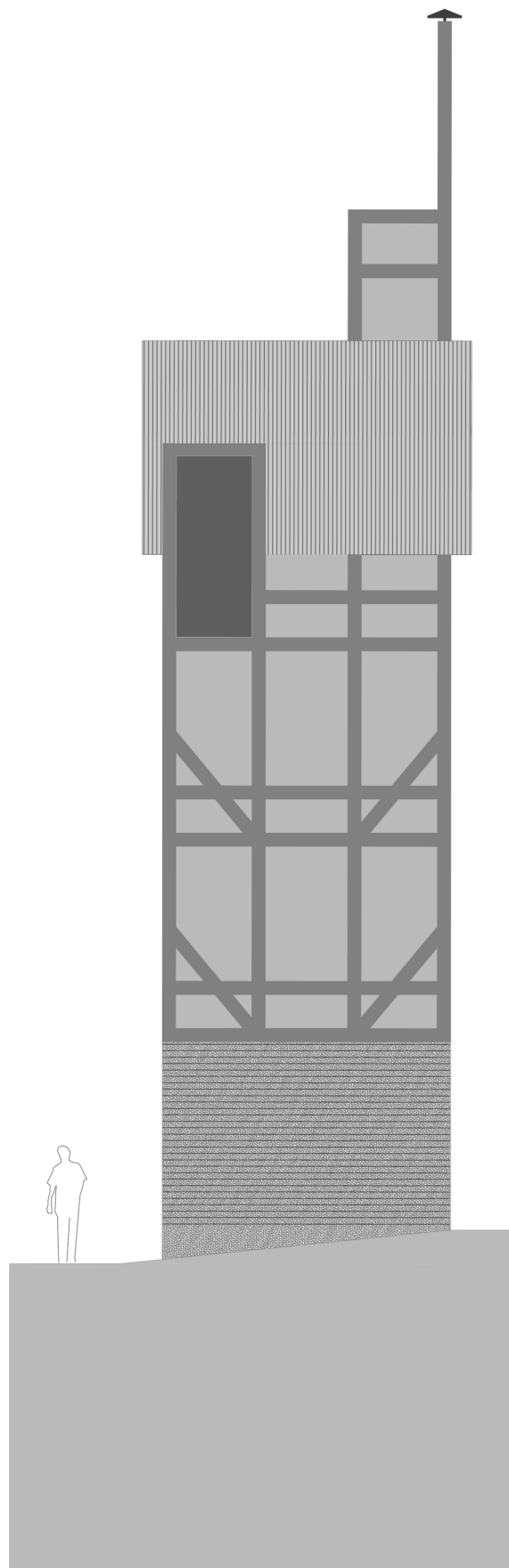


Fig. 90 scale 1:100
west elevation watch
tower building

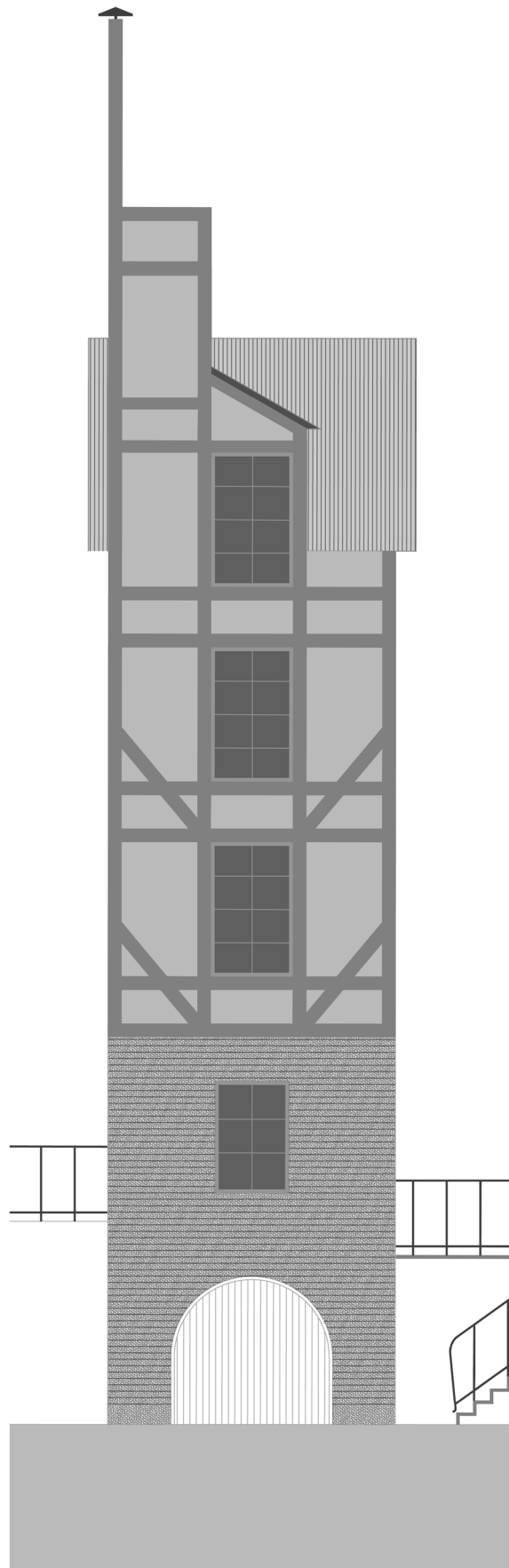


Fig. 91 scale 1:100
east elevation watch
tower building

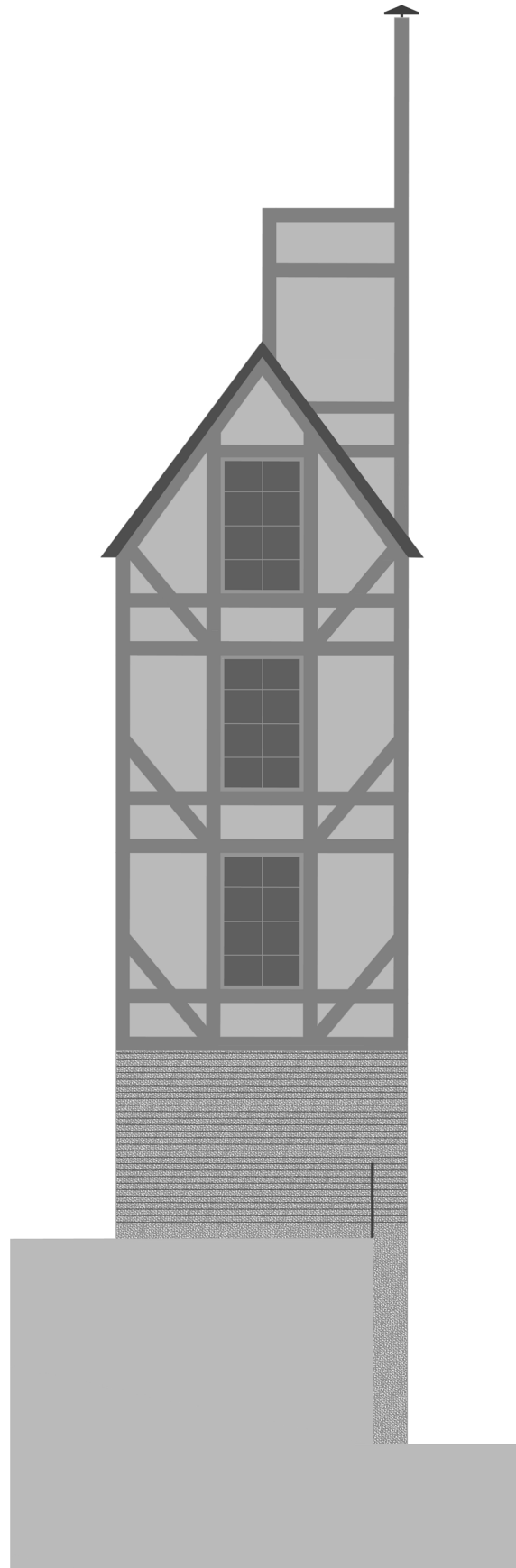


Fig. 92 scale 1:100
south elevation watch
tower building

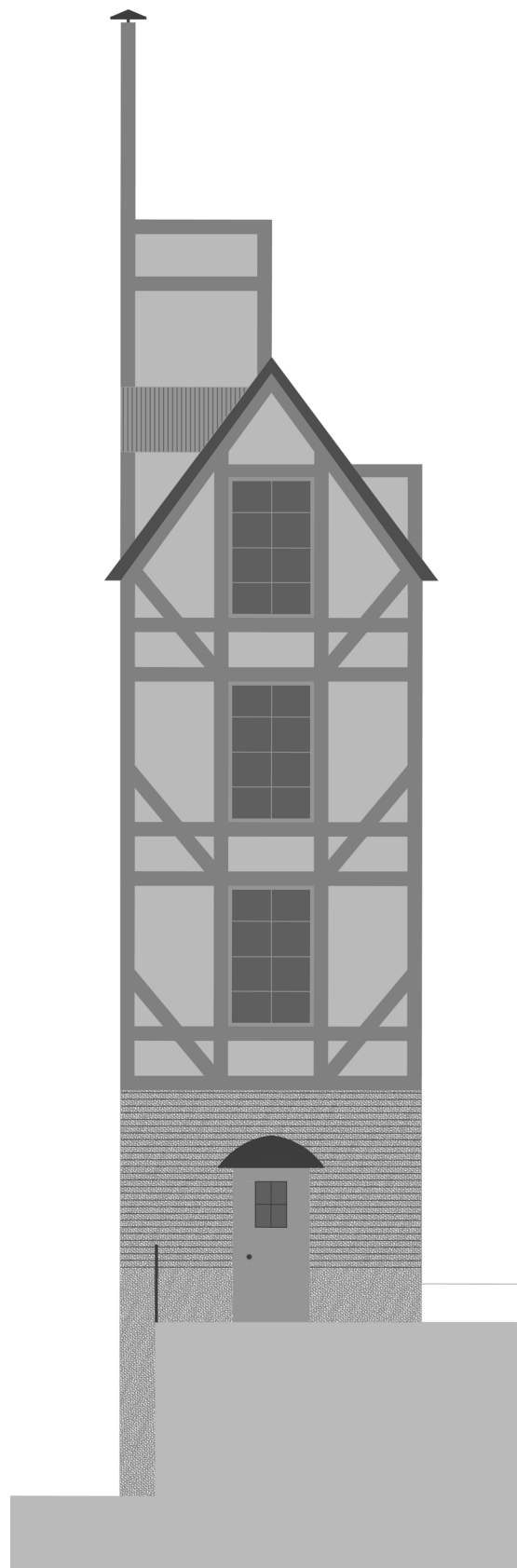


Fig. 93 scale 1:100
north elevation watch
tower building



Fig. 94 Himmelstürmer Kassel

Conclusion

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand."

- Albert Einstein

What exactly happened during the reconstruction period? In what way do the developments of the modern city reflect the developments of the medieval city? Is it just the fact that both are anti-classical, or is there something else? Can we consider the 'failure' of the modern city to be an inherent part of modernity? Does there exist something of a general spirit of a place which makes it possible to explain the analogy between the modern and the medieval city of Kassel drawn in this project? Is it truly possible for certain parts of the city to 'migrate'? And how does this work? What role do perceptions and emotions - in this case the feeling of nostalgia - play in the way we shape our cities?

It is not easy to answer these questions, as each of them leads into very different domains of research, from morphological research to research about the collective memory and psychology of the city.

I am uncertain whether or not the analogy drawn between the modern and the medieval city of Kassel is valid, nonetheless I like to imagine myself that it is. Perhaps the medieval city was never designed, perhaps it was merely discovered, something like an accident or an unexpected consequence?

Reflection and discussion

Although the project touches on some interesting thematics, it was hard get a full understanding of for example the thematics of migration/place out of place/topographical instability/psychology of the city etc. and develop it into a clear theoretical framework. This is however something I would still like to do somewhere in the near future as it simply turned out to be too ambitious to do during this project.

I realize now that during the project I have spent too much time trying to figure out what the design should be through form alone, leaving out program, construction, and material in the process. This never was my strongpoint though, and probably the reason I avoided it at first. Nonetheless, I think I have managed to make at least some progress in this regard during the final stages of the project, and the drawings do start to show a certain refinement that I was looking for. It is unfortunate that there was no more time to finish the project the way I would have liked, with a better understanding of the relationship between the way the building is made and the architectural expression/character of the buildings. There were just too many hurdles to take in-between developing an understanding about the city and the right architectural approach that would go with it. Much of the decisions in the project were made intuitively at first which often left a nagging doubt, a situation which I could not always easily resolve.

In terms of detailing and technical issues the project is by no means successful or finished, while this is certainly something that the project could still benefit from. What was interesting to see though is that the more the drawings started to look like 'technical' drawings with material properties, the more they started to counter-balance the 'strangeness' of the project, making them appear as sincere buildings rather than ironic - for me this is the quality of some of John Hejduk's work - whose work I frequently looked at during the project - who often makes rather strange looking buildings appear serious and poetic. I like the idea of a slightly absurd architecture that still manages to stay sincere, this I think is why I like the accidental situations that can be found for example in the inside of a building block. The at times absurd accumulations and juxtapositions of architectural elements show us a reality that counters today's slickness, a reality that feels indeed very authentic. I have the feeling that architecture should try to look for this sort of attachments, rather than an autonomy. Only then does it become serious, only then does it have meaning.

[Sorry if this does not make sense, I was trying to move someplace I could not yet see where]

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Images

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Fig. 39 Map drawn by author

Fig. 40 - 48 Photo by author

Fig. 49 Map drawn by author

Fig. 50 - 61 Photo by author

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Fig. 70 - 93 drawings by author

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die Wiedergefundene Stadt

Revisiting the post-war reconstruction period of Kassel

Summary



Colofon:
die Wiedergefundene Stadt
Revisiting the post-war reconstruction period
of Kassel

J. (Jeroen) de Winter
0754119

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It has become a common idea to think of the modern city as one lacking a proper sense of 'inner cityness'. Missing out on the qualities of a thick urban texture, the modern city is often said to be cold and empty. Modern architecture on its turn is generally considered to be about objects in space rather than actually managing to form urban spaces. The modern city is one of fragmentation, incoherence, repetition, it lacks human scale, and is even considered to be generic.

Even though this may be true in some cases, the modern developments that took place in most cities cannot be ignored. They - like it or not - have now become integral parts of the history of the city, and hence part of its so called collective memory. If we want to continue rather than abandon the project of the city it is thus necessary to come to terms with this specific history. It is necessary to see its potentials and its qualities, to be able to reinterpret its history, to go beyond its common understandings, to make it work, to care for it like children of our own.

Due to heavy bombardments during the second world war the city of Kassel was almost completely destroyed. After the war the city of Kassel has been rebuilt according to the rules of modern urban planning without acknowledging its medieval nucleus - the Altstadt - as a heritage. "A disaster but an opportunity" is a known credo of this reconstruction plan.

Despite all the criticism on the modern city, the reconstruction period was not always negatively perceived. The early phase of the reconstruction period of the city was in fact greatly celebrated. With the Treppenstraße as main architectural/urban symbol of the reconstruction period.

It is only later that this perception of the modern city changes, with the continued infill - only now by a much poorer architecture, and in a much less controlled way - , the expansion of infrastructure, and the significant increase in the intensity of car traffic. It was during this phase of the reconstruction that the city started to show itself as fragmented

and incoherent and that the 'failure' of modern city planning became apparent.

Today there still exists a strong longing/nostalgia for the old city while the feeling towards the city of today may best be described in terms of a love/hate relationship.

Generally the critique of the post-war reconstruction and the plans that deal with the lost condition of the Altstadt focus on its historical ground and thus with a limited scope towards the post-war history of the city and its reconstruction.

Inspired by the concept of 'nachleben' by art historian Aby Warburg (who saw the survival of antiquity in Renaissance art in the gestures and thus in the movements of the figures) and the idea of 'topographical instability' by Alexander Nagel, this project proposes an alternative reading of the post-war reconstruction of Kassel.

Instead of focusing on the loss of the 'Altstadt' on its historical ground, the project insists on the so called 'survival' or 'after-life' of the 'medieval' by focussing on a different part of the city altogether, the 19th/20th century fabric in between the station area and the old city. Paradoxically, it appears as if the reconstruction of this part of the city produced an urban logic that can be read as analogue to that of a medieval city.

The purpose of the designed intervention then is to make explicit the potential narrative that lies hidden within the 'failure' of the modern city by carefully placing a series of buildings adjacent to/behind the Treppenstraße, inside of the building block on an area now used for parking. It does so by mixing and sampling existing patterns and historical forms with 'modern' architecture as it appears within Kassel, blurring the distinction between old and new.