

Ritual Spaces

Exploring 'Speculative Fabulation':
A Testimony

Disclaimer:

This book is written within the European context and as such is situated in and relates to this particular (Swiss) geographic and social context. Furthermore it has to be understood in its particular time of origin. Reading it after the year 2020 may be confusing or even insignificant.

‘Speculative Fabulation’ is a term introduced and practiced by Donna Haraway.

Images marked with a * are linked and can be used interactively.

Content

About the Book	7
I The Site: Maag-Areal, Zürich	9
II Arriving at Spirituality	14
III From Spiritual to Ritual	17
IV About Rituals	19
// How Rituals vanished	19
// On Rituals and Architecture	26
V Designed Archaeology and Speculative Fabulation	37
// The Cloth - Slow Dyeing	63
Final Words: What is it Worth?	66
Readings	68

About the **Book**

This book tells the story of an architecture project carried out in the Spring Semester at ETH Zurich in 2020.

The project was designed during a pandemic crisis, as such it was heavily influenced by it.

As a result, the students, stuck at home, turned to a topic bigger than anything else explored by them before.

Totally awe-struck by the emitted force, that left them incapable to express the newly acquired knowledge they were left with only one thing: a tale.

Their tale is made up of (fictional) facts that either touch upon or completely strike the border of reality; to tickle it but foremost to

challenge it and us, who perceive it.

In order to tell the tale they follow a few basic rules:

- wild facts as opposed to hard facts
- tentacular thinking as opposed to linear thinking
- speculative storytelling as opposed to scientific realism

To find the thruth and with that just another truth, please continue reading.



Prime Tower

I The Site: **Maag-Areal,** Zürich

The (economical) network as crucial part of the Maag-Areal is an analogue reality which is dependent on the proximity between the different actors on a specific geographical site. However, in a globalised world the network as a global entity is not bound to a physical site but is propelled to infinity.

It is held together by different confessions of the same belief in capitalist economics. New communication methods as well as digitised markets have gradually enhanced the entropic power of the economy, transforming it into an incomprehensible force. Goods, people, services within the network are subjected to commodification and therefore represent market

value. All of those are needed to keep the system running.

>But what is it worth now?

>What happens when the global economy can no longer produce services and goods at the usual rate?

>What happens when the value of locality of the highest office in town vanishes?

>What happens when you're stuck at home because you can no longer go to work?

Suddenly, one is confronted with the superficiality of the shiny glass architecture, the tailor-made suit and the extravagant velvet bow on the Swiss cheese platter offering. Confused and anxious one turns to

the home.

Deprived of the emancipatory power of work one starts to engage with the home and everything it offers: Furniture is moved around, things are repaired, cleaned, and moved around again, and cleaned again. New compositions of the same furnitures conquer the familiar space and shed light on never before noticed things. They catch the eyes' attention, gain importance and value.

Tired of the hopeless outlook communicated through abstract numbers and devastating facts, the question of the meaning of life moves to the centre of consciousness. The answer doesn't lay in scientific reasoning but rather comes from

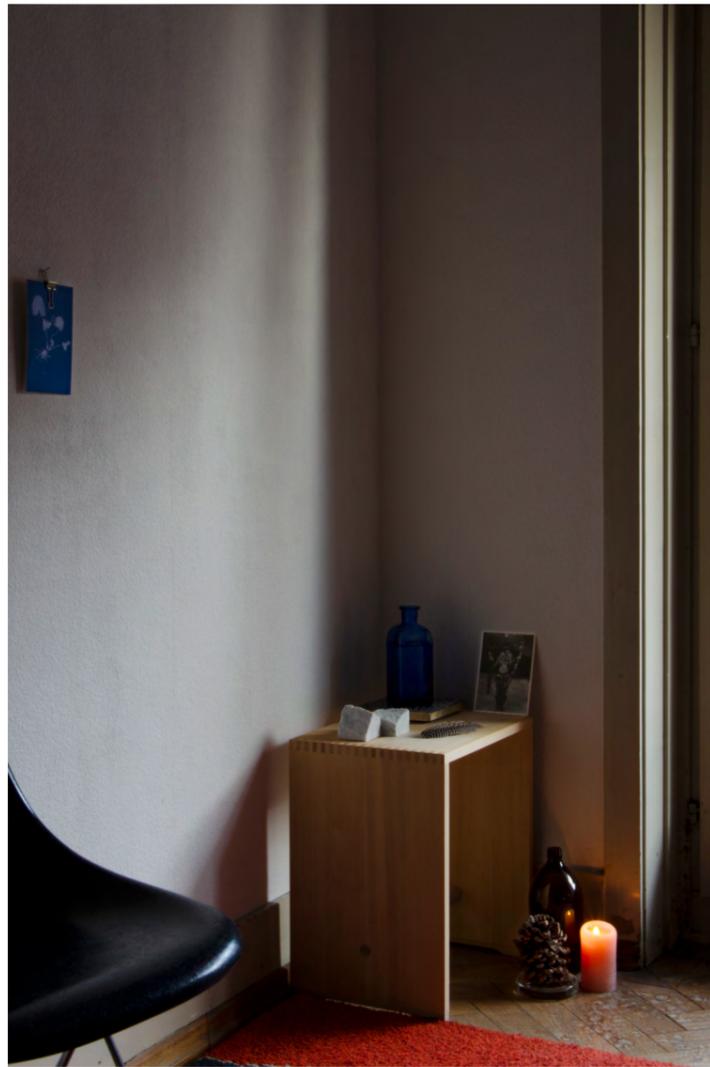
the study of the spiritual self.

// Shrines and the Commodification of Spirituality:

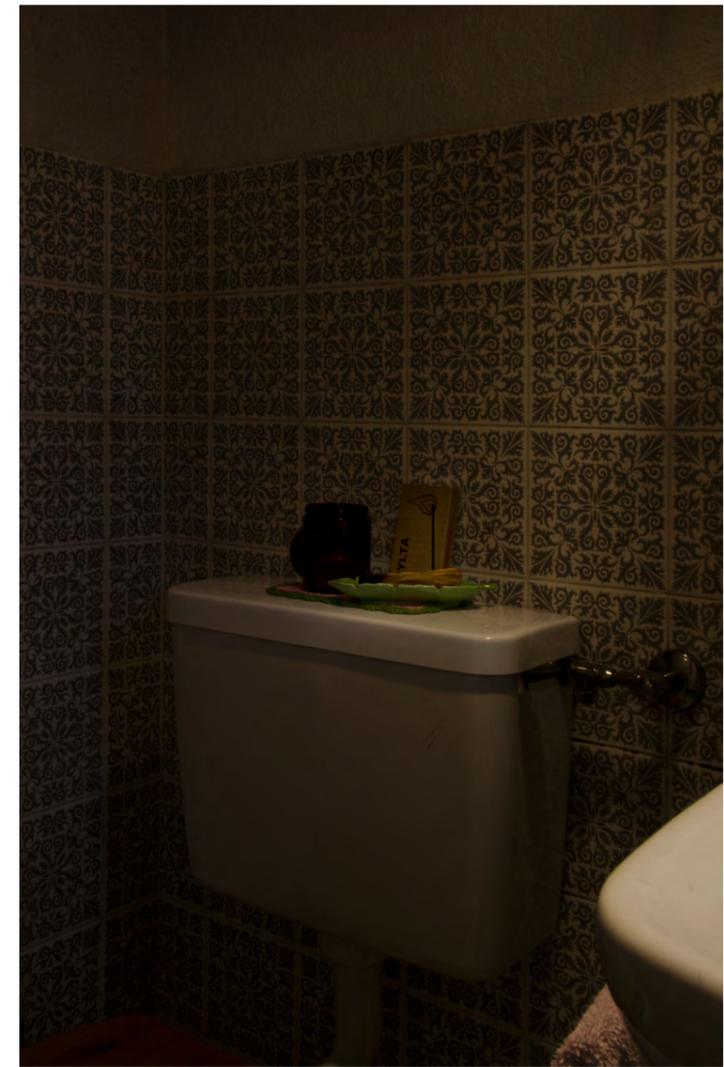
Everyone has his or her own hidden corner, her little stool, his shelf where he deposits things which don't have a clear value. Those shrines and altars are often made up of unproductive but not worthless objects. Everyone has them in their homes. Sometimes they can mean the world to someone. Sometimes it is a depository of loose thoughts.



Shrine I



Shrine II

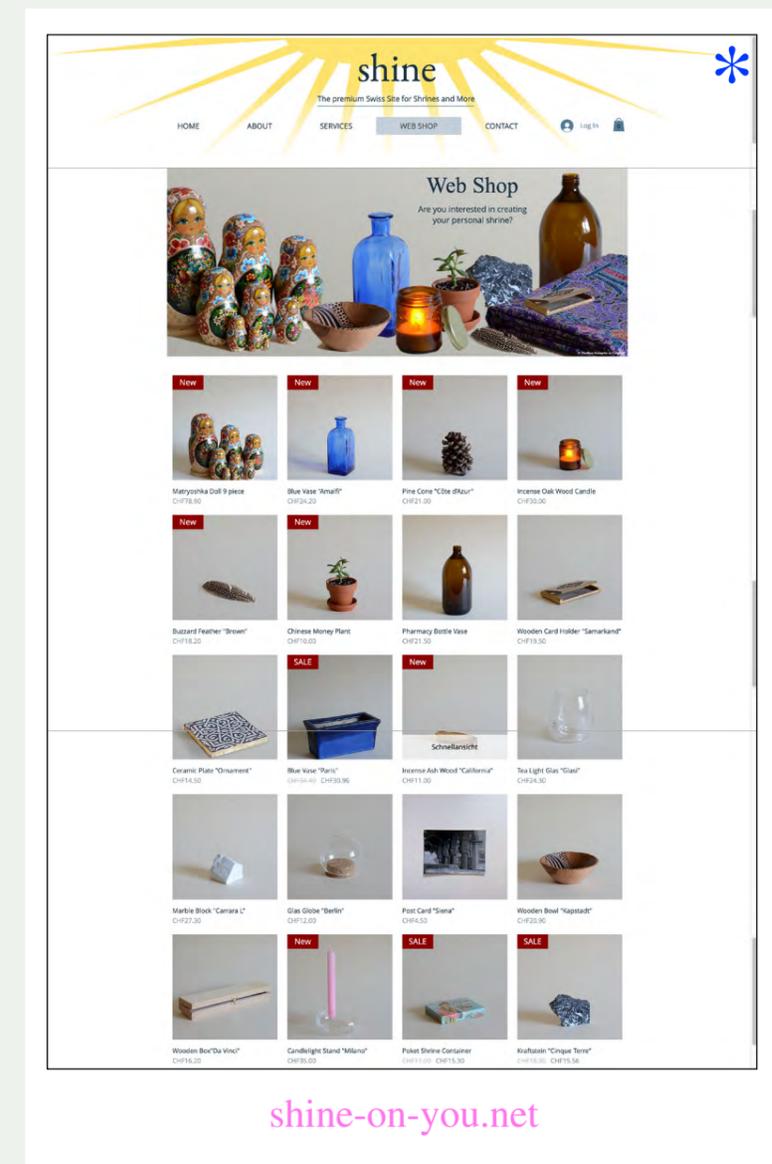


Shrine III

II Arriving at Spirituality

In her essay “A-Ware” Keller Easterling notes that in recent times site has multiplied to a more complex understanding of territory and hence of network. Like the network of neoliberal economy, so is spirituality subject to atomisation. It can’t be defined as an entity. As with capitalist economy, the industry around spirituality is governed by economic, social and therefore abstract laws. The urbanist Jochen Becker regards the spiritual industry as a worldwide phenomenon which has substantial impact on societies. According to Becker “the [religious] movements offer a triangle of services: social services when states fail, economic investment as firms, and spiritual practice.”.

// About shine-on-you.net
“Shine is a company that facilitates your access to spirituality through various services, informs you about its potential and responds to your individual ideas. In a world where prestige, money and success often come to the fore, we want to emphasize the importance of meaningful values and show you how these can be successfully used to create a balanced everyday life. Our small team consists of spiritually trained creative people who, in their respective specialisation, make a decisive contribution to the whole. We have made it our goal to accompany you on your spiritual path with our expertise, whether at home or at work. [...]”



shine-on-you.net



Semi-Public Altar in Zürich

III From Spiritual to **Ritual**

In a time where the question of value is often asked, one can either come to the conclusion that everything or nothing is worth anything. The intervention 'Shrines and the Commodification of Spirituality' aims to address certain issues and raise questions in this regard. Its focus lay on what people need in times of crisis and how the market responds.

As traditional religions are decreasing, variations of spiritual beliefs are gaining popularity. In times of crisis people don't just want to rely on external authorities such as hospitals but want to do something themselves. The possibility to connect with oneself in another way, through the

energies of the universe, in order to strengthen oneself, seem of great interest.

However, as spirituality has become a powerful industry in western culture, and thus its products and services commodified, it is also a luxury that only a few can afford. Nevertheless, the intervention shows that the spiritual industry is targeting something which society lacks.

In our society, experiences which one perceives as external: Money, success, prestige are mostly present. Other valuable experiences, which have to do with meaning, and the search for meaning are neglected.

The value of spirituality doesn't lie in the commodified products and services offered but in the collective of the community; in the act of rituals.

IV About Rituals

// How Rituals vanished

Rituals can typically be found in connection with religion or spirituality and describe periodically recurring processes of a society, whose people are brought together by carrying them out (literally + figuratively). Critics of the capitalist economy - including Karl Marx - argue that people have lost their rituals in favor of making money. The loss of rituals goes hand in hand with the increasing secularization of society and the shift from the community to the individual and is based on various processes of the past four centuries. The Enlightenment, as well as the Industrial Revolution and the resulting accelerated automation and capitalization of labour and its human force, gradually erased the time and importance for the performance of rituals. This can be illustrated particularly well with the Bank of England, which in 1834 reduced the number of bank holidays from 36 to 4 days a year, in prospects of increasing productivity. The practice and celebration of ritual occasions became an unpleasant burden in the eyes of the employers during the course of industrialisation. Rituals unnecessarily disturb the company's prosperity and thus, the collective purification of the soul in the form of rituals is no longer considered interesting. From the employees' point of view, the private and working life thereby moved into focus and as such displaced valuable, meaningful

[sinnstiftende] components of life. This process was favoured not only by the ideas of Romanticism and the Age of Enlightenment, but also by the French Revolution, during which the need for bourgeois individualism spread throughout society.

The focus on productive processes replaced rituals with so-called routines, which is why these terms are often used as synonyms today. However, such “rituals” must be understood in the context of the commodification of religion and spirituality and have little to do with the original understanding of rituals. They are therefore not spiritually based processes for society, but recurring events in the everyday economic life to increase

individual wealth and well-being. With the age of modernity, accompanied by technological innovations, scientific findings and the beginnings of globalisation, the understanding of rituals is being reinterpreted as routines. Or in other words: “When we became modern, we lost our rituals”. With the loss of rituals, and the spiritual tradition of a society that has been ingrained with them, religion as a moral compass is increasingly being faded out. New socio-cultural standards serve as a moral remedy and replace the Bible and familiar symbols of Christian iconography. Within this process, art as a submissive, serving mediator develops into an autonomous instance. With secularization, art

thus freed itself from the body of religion and rose from its oppression to independence. One could even go as far as to argue that art increasingly replaced religion in its meaningful, human and empathic power at the beginning of the twentieth century. As such, it is not surprising that art created countless new forms of expression: ready made, performances, happenings...

Taryn Simon’s work can be considered as example in this regard. Her works often present themselves in fragments - similar to the iconographies of Christianity - which only create a higher meaning through their joint presentation. The subliminal narrative composed by Simon

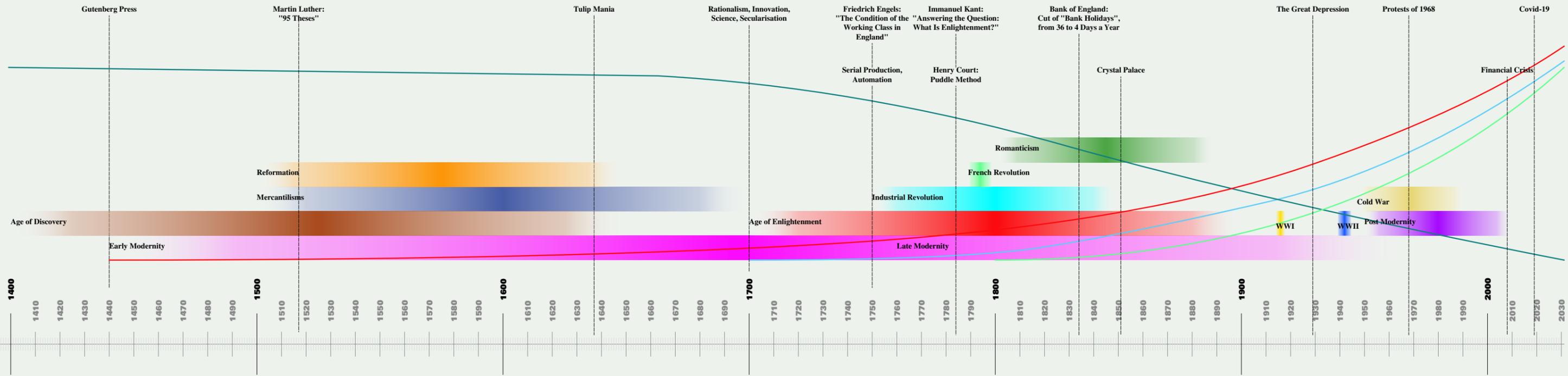
finally holds them together.

In architecture, besides the church, the monastery is an excellent example of architectural, ritual embodiment. The ritual is expressed here as the structure giving tool of a daily routine, which is reflected in the corresponding sequence of rooms. It is not about efficiency, but about brotherhood and sisterhood.

The developments of the modern age have led to an increasing rationalisation of the design of architecture. In public buildings, the dynamic adaptation of spaces is particularly appreciated today. At the same time, a strong increase in new typologies can be observed, which require a highly specific spatial design. This ambivalence

between timeless flexibility and maximum specificity leaves no room for ambiguity, as architecture must always subordinate itself to its economic provisions: The floor plans are predominantly arranged in a grid, the rooms are additive and the architectural form language is lacking in symbolic content. They offer hardly any opportunities to linger.

Rituals are linked to the way of life of a society and thus are also connected to architecture. How can rituals be understood spatially if they are detached from any economic value?



Timeline: Situating Rituals in Modernity

- Capitalism
- Ritual Acts
- Self Design
- Flexibility of Architectural Spaces

// On Rituals and Architecture

“The opposite of the purely instrumental praxis is the ritual act. A ritual consists of a strictly ordered succession of acts that have to be performed according to prescribed rules and conditions. ‘For a ceremony, the careful and faultless execution is of major importance. It must be executed completely according to the rules of the many rites, recitations and songs. The result is important, but it is merely significant within the context of the ritual. It can only be reached when it is executed according to the way prescribed by the ritual.’”

In a ritual it is not important to reach a certain result or to communicate a certain message, but rather to perform the known prescribed

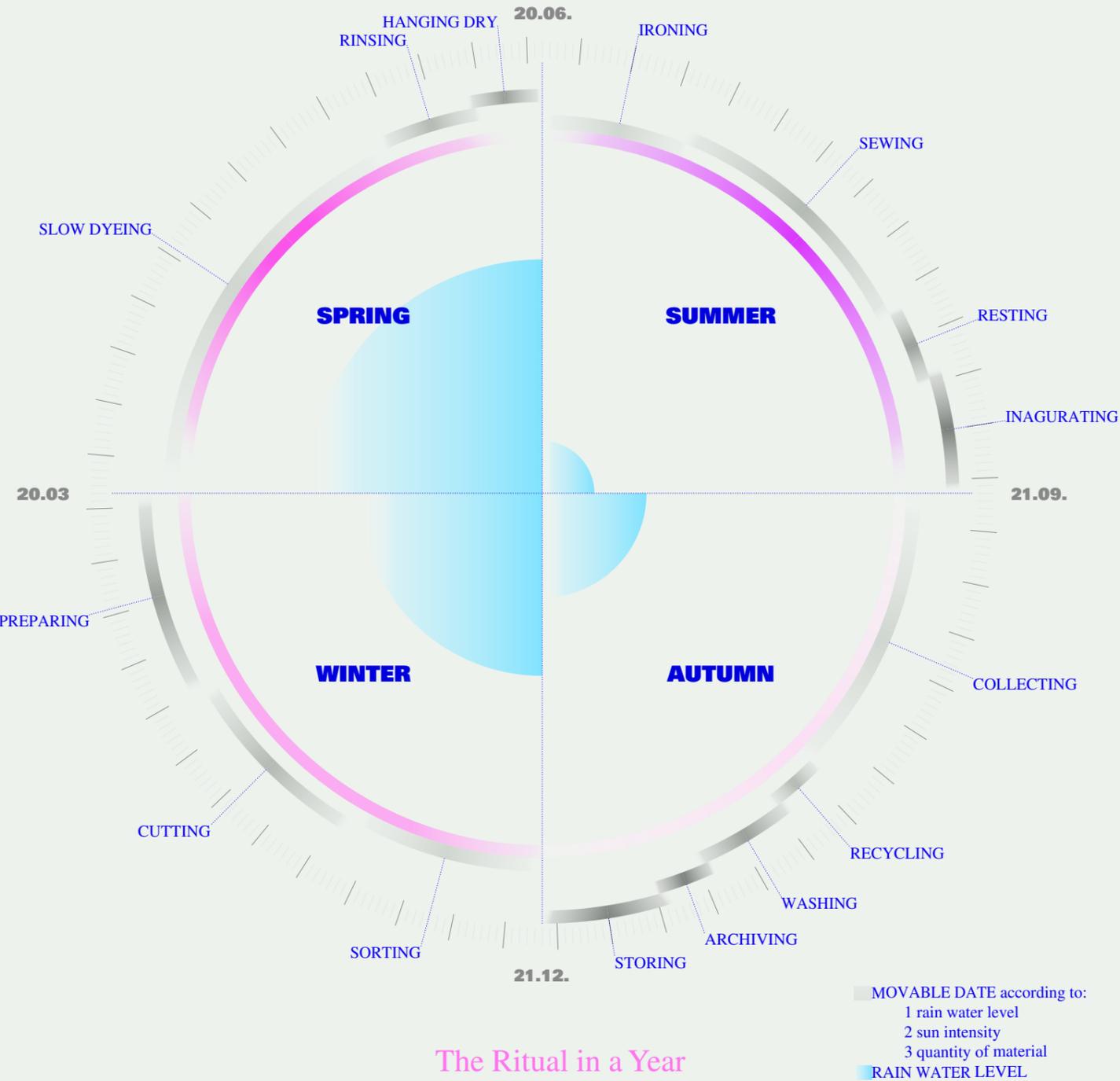
acts correctly or to speak the right words. Within this context you would only make fire by for example rubbing two wooden sticks together; it would be unthinkable to use a match. The precise goal of these ritual acts has almost been forgotten, but people know exactly how to build an altar, how to bury someone, how to clean someone’s body etcetera, and those are the things upon which all attention is focussed. The importance of this highly essential accuracy is unclear - why three fire altars and not four? - but when things are not executed as prescribed, ‘it’ does not work. And it is absolutely uncertain what this ‘it’ may be, except precisely following the rules. In a ritual, purposiveness has faded away and

only exists on a formal level.

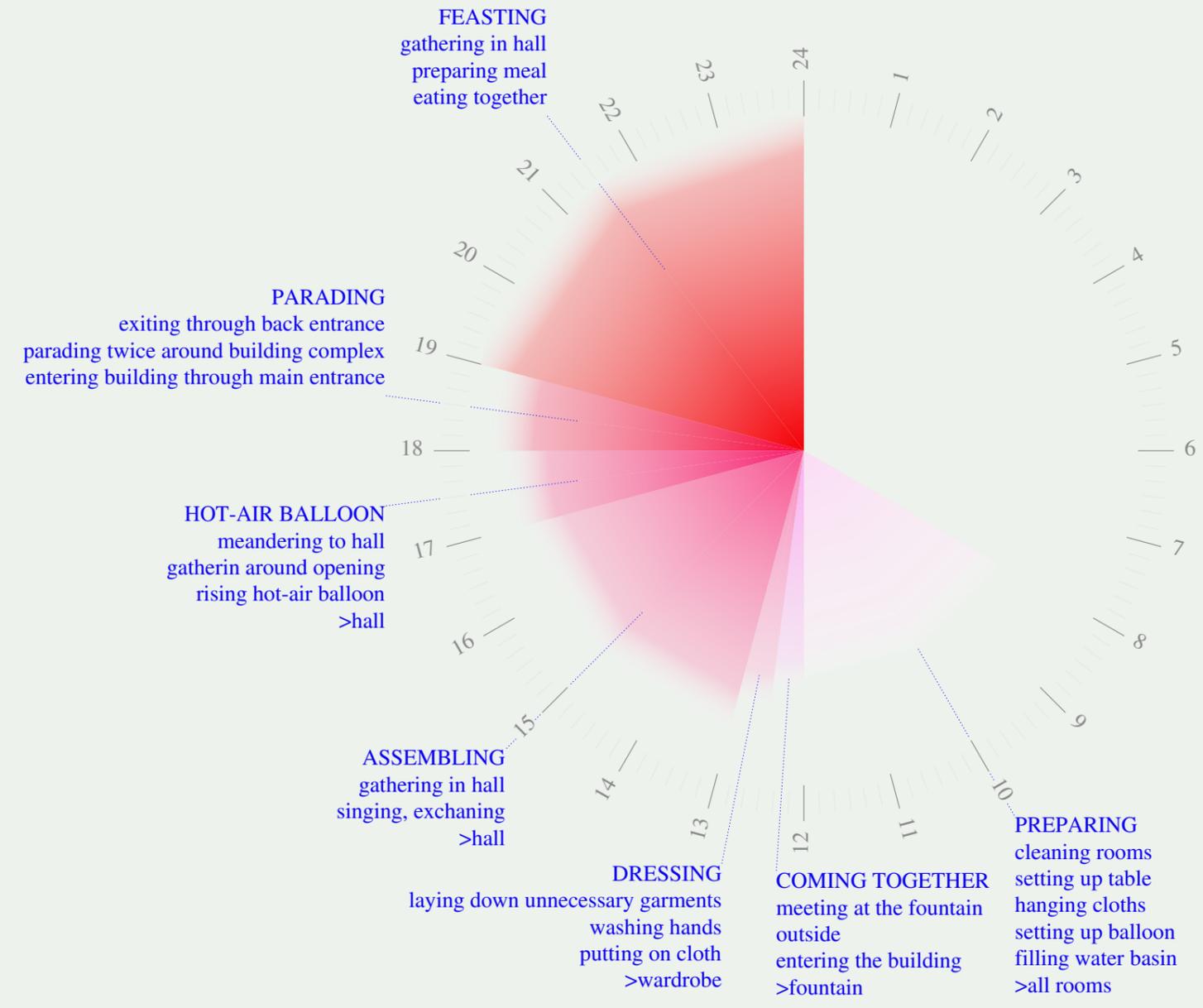
Frits Staal writes that the ritual ‘has no sense, goal or meaning’. As alternatives are unthinkable, the act itself has value. Since these rites are empty in a certain sense, you cannot account for them personally, nor can they be interpreted or appropriated. Participating in a ritual dissolves everything personal. You can only repeat it, no personal matters can be communicated or alluded to. As the ritual is essentially a repetition, it installs cyclic time, links the present to an ever more essential ‘beginning’, and in that way it neutralizes (secular) time. Between the instrumental act and the ritual which, in western culture at least, has almost completely been incapsulated by religion, there is a

third act which cannot be reduced to the other two: the ‘gesture’. “*

*Bart Verschaffel, *Architecture is (as) a Gesture*, ETH Zürich (Ákos Moravánszky), (Lucerne: Quart Publishers, 2001), 20.



The Ritual in a Year

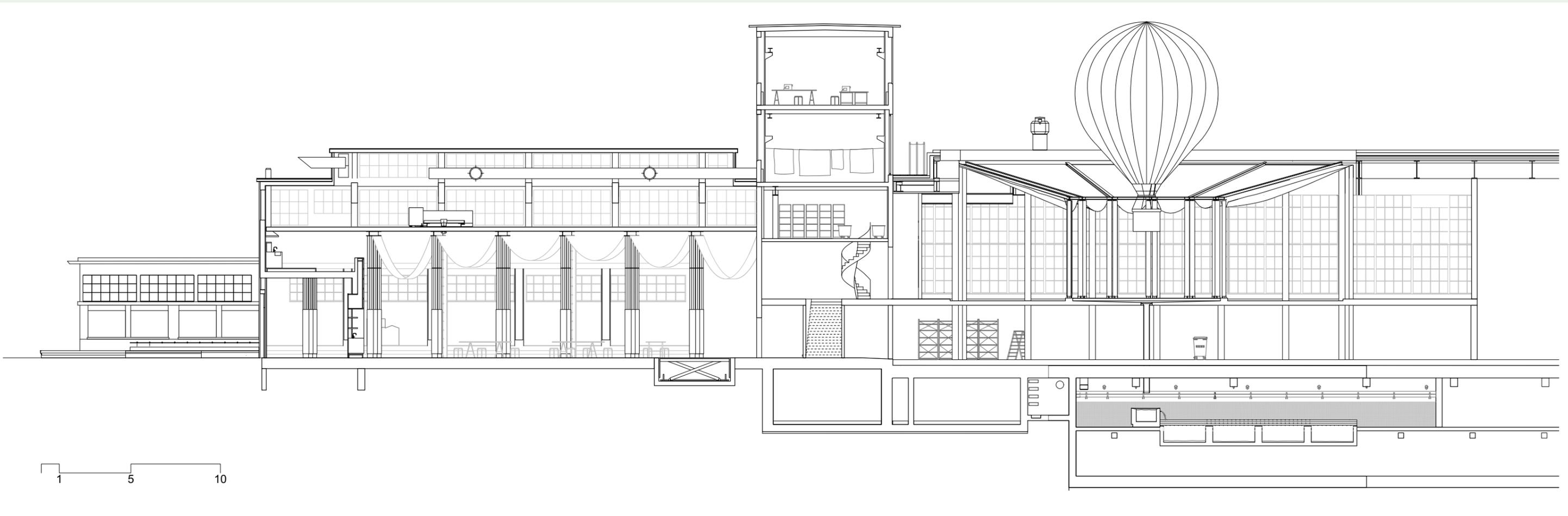


The Ritual in a Day: Inaguration

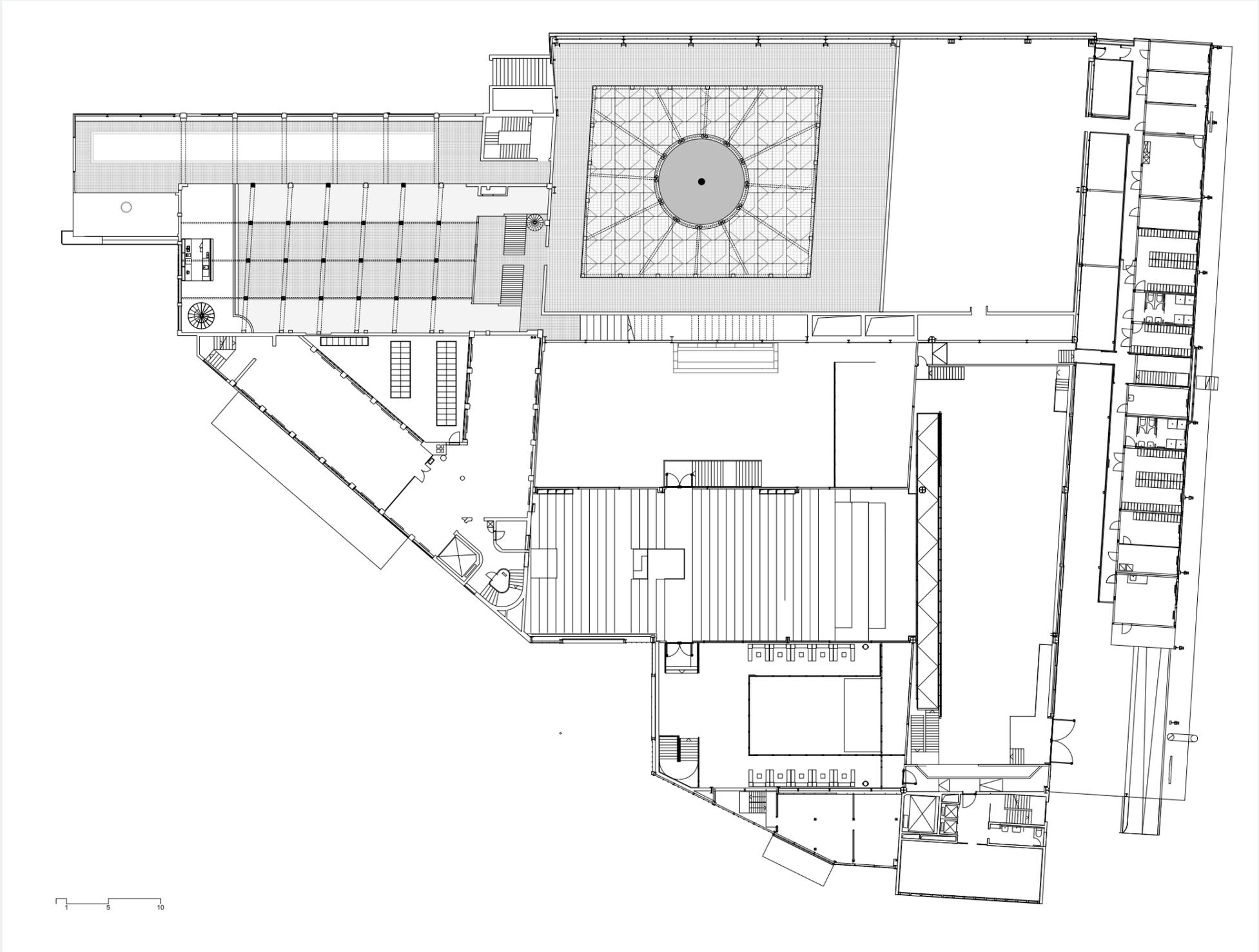


Eduard Spelterini's Hot Air Balloon: First Aerial Shots of Zurich





Ritual Spaces: Section



Ritual Spaces: Plan First Floor

V Designed Archaeology and Speculative Fabulation

Archaeology is the study of antiquity. It consists of reconstructing the past of a society and its culture on the basis of found remains. In a similarly precise manner, the past of the Maag-Halle was traced. The architectural interventions (remains) carried out over the years served as the basis for the archaeological reconstruction and provided insights into the various uses of the building composite over the decades.

Designed Archaeology is an extension of the traditional archaeology. It combines the found (hard) facts with additional (wild) facts and reformulates them into a new reality. Similar to Donna Haraway's 'Speculative

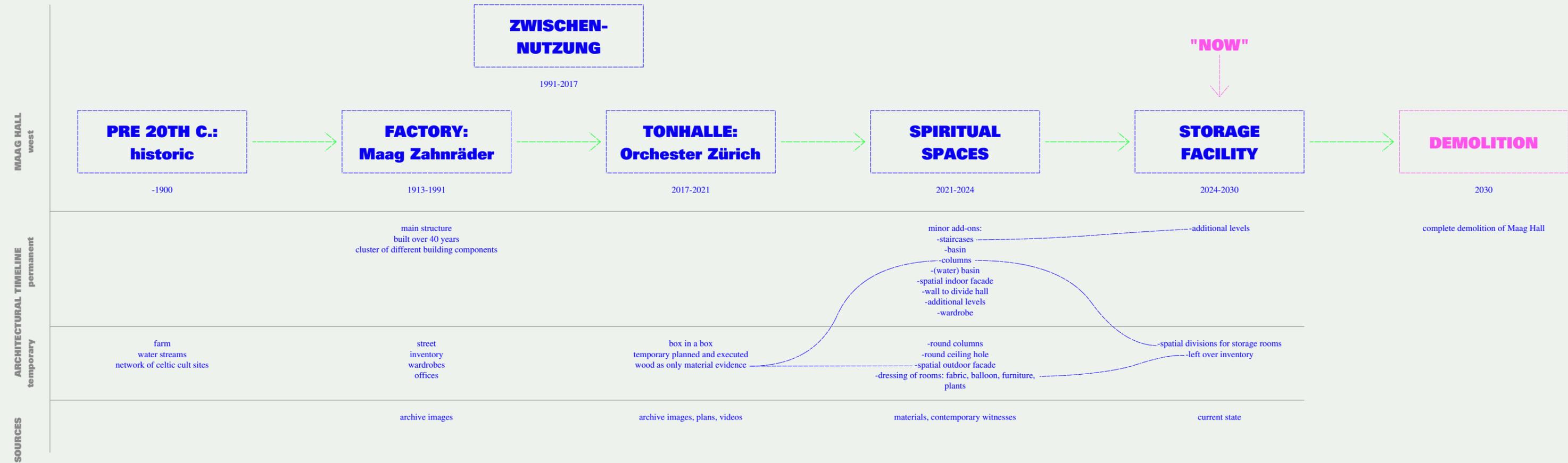
Fabulation', it is not about the absolute, scientific truth, but about the potential of a speculative possibility of truth.

The main goal is to generate a mixture between tangible archaeological finds and mythological narratives, similar to theology. Designed Archaeology is also related to the reproduction of rituals. Rituals are tied to objects or places, but are conveyed via a far more irrational entity - the myth. In order to ensure the myth, a new timeline is imposed on the site, in addition to the actual archaeology. By placing the event in the present, but looking at it from the future, the architectural form can be understood as something more

playful. In that way, a mythology is created and the narrative becomes the actual architecture.

Found things become entangled with invented things to form a constructed narrative within a different temporal context.

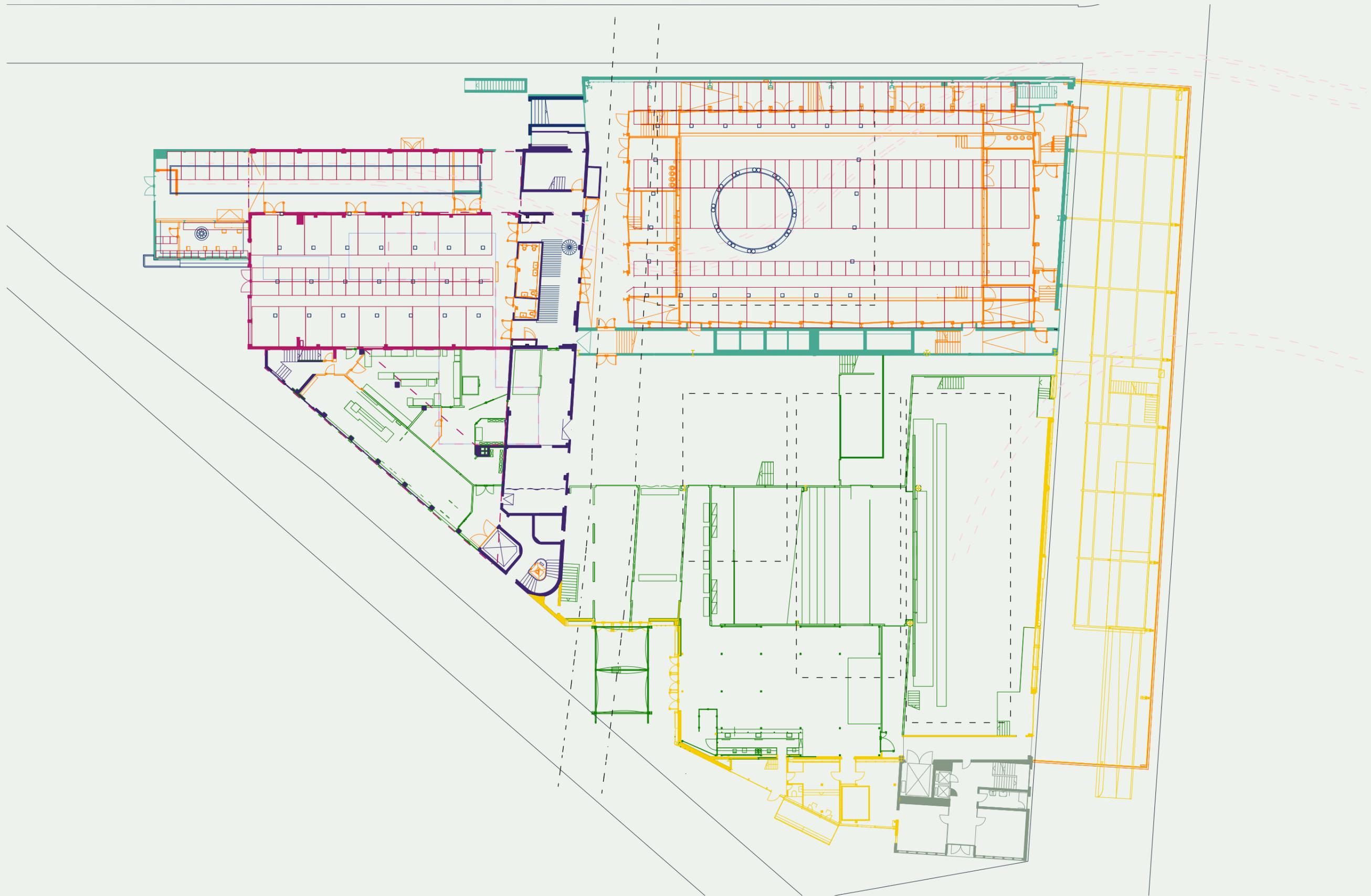
Together they tell a new story and thus become believable and real. The architecture serves on two levels, as the bridge between the reality and fiction and as the embodiment of the ritual.



Overview: Information Layers



Archaeology of the Site





Entrance
Where People Gather





Wardrobe
Washing Your Hands and Getting Dressed





Column Hall
Coming Together For a Feast





Basin
Slow Dyeing Fabrics





Rondo Hall
The Balloon Rises



// Narrative

2030, 2 May, a rainy Sunday afternoon, it is the third day of the storage sale of the Maag Hall, event hall, former sound hall and most recently private city storage for businessmen and wealthy city dwellers. Now, the former industrial hall has to make way for a hybrid tower - Prime 3. According to the media spokesman of Swiss Prime Site, urban storage facilities have become less interesting, and a far less risky tenant mix must be achieved. In contrast to the time of the last global economic crisis after the Corona pandemic, the real estate market is holding up quite well. It is booming. The dispute over building law lasted ten years, but now the Swiss Prime Site has beaten the Heritage Protection and

Historical Monuments Authority. Two architecture students take part in the stock sale of the old Maag-Hall. Costumes, building materials, furniture and also forgotten objects that have not been collected are being sold. This former concert hall has already been through a lot. Our generation will not survive it, thinks E and lets his gaze wander over the advertised objects. The wind blows through the holes of the former industrial windows. Many objects are already sold out, the only thing they find is a nice piece of wood, possibly a remnant of a joint, old slightly yellowed fabrics, an old piece of terrazzo flooring and a ceramic tile, it's still pretty well preserved, although

according to the date on the back it's ten years old, which isn't really old, says S.

On a rickety plastic table, covered with a red paper tarp, is a cash register, behind it a tipsy guy and a lady. He operates the cash register with his worker hands. They get into conversation.

“What have you got there?” -It sounded like he was saying that to anyone who brought anything by. He ought to know, S figures. He's probably seen it all before.

“Ah, just a couple of things” - replies E

“No, let me see, yes, I remember that, it was pretty hard to clean. Imagine white curtains for outside. They hung in a beautiful courtyard. What's left of it.”

“A courtyard?”

“A courtyard? Yeah. A group of architects, they redesigned the a couple of rooms. After the Corona crisis, it's a wonder they let them.” S who was visiting a studio where they talked about the value of things, listened carefully.

“They were allowed to use the hall. After two years they cut them off, period, then they had to get out. Had a good time with these guys, cooked good food, was a great time. They always had such nice gatherings, they called them *rituals*. And a few times a year they rose a huge balloon, that of course didn't please the guys up there” - pointing towards Prime Tower. Those stories didn't let go S: Who was there in the Maag Halle and

appointment. The search had just begun.

what did they do? That evening, before falling asleep, she stared spellbound at this artefact, at the tile, which was painted white and shone in the candlelight. She had to tell E, she believed that they had a project.

The next day they met at a coffee in Affoltern. They both lived there, the city has become too expensive. She told him about the idea and he was convinced. She couldn't let go of these myths, these rites, the spirituality.

The subject is super-dangerous, E thought, I don't think anyone would care, let alone allow it.

A first internet research did not yield anything. Maybe they would have to talk to the janitor again. It was surely surprising that there

were no records of it.

It occurred to E that he still had the findings at home, maybe they could shed more light on it.

“It's like an archaeological work” said S and remembered the tile that had an inscription on the back.

Once home, they laid out the bought materials, printed the floor plan of the Maag Hall on many A4 sheets, glued them together and tried to find out where these pieces belonged. They compared their speculations with what the caretaker had told them. And finally, she had almost forgotten, S looked at the back of the tile: Schwengler tiles, Hinwil. They had a name. They compared it to Google, they now had an address, a phone number and an

PAST

PRESENT

FUTURE

PHASE I: NETWORK = NET WORTH

PHASE II: SHRINES AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF SPIRITUALITY

PHASE III: DESIGNED ARCHEOLOGY

PRE-CORONA

CORONA

POST-CORONA

ECONOMY

1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029 2030 2031 2032

Swiss Prime Site acquires Maag-Areal

ICF Zurich rents Maag-Hall as Celebration Hall

Tonhalle Orchester Zürich (provisional)

Maag-Hall redesign to "Spiritual Spaces"

Maag-Hall transformed into storage spaces

Storage-Sale

Demolition of Maag-Hall, Construction of Prime 3

Timeline: Narrative



Cloth 1



Cloth 2



Cloth 3



Cloth 4

// The Cloth - Slow Dyeing

The cloths are an integral part to the ritual. Their most significant characteristic are the rusty stains of metal objects. They are a reminder of the many gear wheels produced by the Maag company throughout the twentieth century.

The steps for rust dyeing are simple. The important thing is patience:

- Rinse fabrics
- Hang fabrics to dry
- Wet fabric
- Wrap rusty objects with wet fabric, tie with cotton string
- Place items in water basin, let it sit there for 1-3 months, depending on size
- Unwrap items, set objects aside
- Place fabrics in salty fixation water for at least 1 hour



The Cloth: Modes of Uses

Readings

- Groys, Boris. 'Self-Design or Productive Narcissism', in *Superhumanity: Design of the Self*. New York: e-flux Architecture, 2018.
- Han, Byung-Chul, *Vom Verschwinden der Rituale*. Ullstein, 2019.
- Haraway, Donna. 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'. *Feminist Studies* volume 14, issue number 3 (1988), 575-599.
- Latour, Bruno. 'What Protective Measures Can You Think of so We Don't Go Back to the Pre-Crisis Production Model?'. AOC, 29 March 2020.
- Rendell, Jane. *The Welsh Dresser: An Atlas*. Surfae Tension, 2003.
- Superstudio. *Opere*. Macerata: Quodlibet srl, 2016.
- Verschaffel, Bart. *Architecture is (as) a Gesture*. ETH Zürich. Lucerne: Quart Publishers Ltd., 2001.

Bibliography Images

- Prime Tower: <https://www.homegate.ch/affittare/109914110>
- Tonhalle Zürich, Maag: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/technik-motor/technik/tonhalle-maag-in-zuerich-eine-holzbox-als-musikalisches-gottesgeschenk-15577372.html>
- All black and white images were downloaded from the ETH e-pics Archive: https://baz.e-pics.ethz.ch/#1590483182081_0

FS20

book IV

Samira Lenzin & Edoardo Signori