

## The meaning of makeshift architecture

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### Abstract

The project is searching for knowledge about ways of living that hasn't been integrated in the architectural language; apparently insignificant meaning of issues and concerns that is traditionally not regarded significant by "professional" architecture. It wants to remind architecture of the importance of things and situations that are not visible on city maps and not built from technical drawings, specifications and building permits; provisional, improvisatory building that is approaching a spontaneous order, breaking the "professional" procedures in its making.

In order to discover new ways of transmitting meaning from makeshift building, the project creates a coherence between re-presentations in academia and 1:1 created situations in public by tying together the relation between material and immaterial forces through architectural drawing. The drawing process wants to demonstrate there can be instants of intensity and significance in apparently insignificant places; structures of intensity and significance can be makeshift, provisional, incomplete and fragile in character; - and things and situations can be connected to places and communities with their history and daily practices.

The architects' traditional media – maps and technical drawings – are reconsidered in order to expose and communicate the invisible and overlooked in the drawing process.

The drawing shown at the Works + Word 2017 Biennale is especially made for the exhibition and created with pencil on a large piece of paper on a table equivalent to the exhibition table.

It is titled "In care of an improvisational order", based on the 1:1 built intervention "Streetkitchen\_Kolkata".

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### Caring

To act in care means not to be indifferent to the development of society. Art critics Jan Verwoert (2009) argues that acting usually is mobilized through our own powers, but the power to care comes to us from somewhere else. The request to act comes from the outside – but the power to act comes with it. Caring is a respond to a need, even though it might not be articulated, or known.

Verwoert raises the questions: how can we avoid reducing giving and receiving care to an economical transaction?

Verwoert points at paintings of saints to express care, which is usually invisible. Different images of “Saint Jerome in his Study” tells the story of a translator, working on the threshold to the public – in a space partly inside and outside - and with a door open to the public. The contact to the public creates potential situations of care. A lion comes in with a thorn in its paw. Jerome deals with it and from then on they share the same space.



*“St. Jerome in his study”, Antonello da Messina, 1475*

### **Building 1:1**

Verwoert’s reading of “Saint Jerome in his Study” asks necessary questions about what it means to act. The need reacted upon and the proposal made. With or without mandate. From request or from inspiration to act.

The translator could also leave the desk and walk out and act in public.

My practice has chosen to support the fragile and the immaterial, creating encounters of different practices beyond national, cultural and religious divisions. It explores how art and architecture can support authorized as well as unauthorized activities by creating situations directly in public space; in different contexts and different time frames, but always directly on site in scale 1:1 and in collaboration. It focuses on maintenance, culture and urban realities, rather than innovation, global growth and urban visions.

Every city needs to maintain its culture - which is not necessarily about innovation and growth - and any city needs to know and understand its resources and realities before creating great visions.

The practice is concerned about ordinary things and social relations and tries to get behind the immediate appearance of things and instead prompt new ways to experience what is immediately invisible. The most important thing is not to create new spaces or new objects, but to use built form to frame and understand relationships in new ways. It works with an architecture that is not complete, but always in progress. The building process is incorporated in the architectural structure, thus, the way of building becomes spontaneous and improvisatory. The practice often only provides a hypothetical form as a condition for different kinds of events to take place.

## **Reflecting**

Several aspects of the created situations cannot achieve visibility through the 1:1 direct experience or through photographs, but need to be designated, translated and re-presented. At the same time, it is crucial to experience the invisible and the immaterial in order to be able to study it. Therefore, a reflective drawing practice is taking place parallel to the 1:1 practice as an exchange between building and drawing. The method is inspired by Bruno Latour (1983) and his ideas about a laboratory, where invisible things can be turned into something visible through exercises that blur the boundaries between what is inside and what is outside. By going out to collect information and then returning to the laboratory to translate the information.

Through Walter Benjamin's essay "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man", visual artist Hito Steyerl (2006) discusses what she calls "The languages of practice". This is a language that is not defined by common origin, belonging or nation, but by common practice. Translation addresses the relationship of human language and thing language. Things are not just passive objects but a condensation of social forces. According to Steyerl, the thing language can become productive, but also illusionary when translated without being specific to different cultures and practices, but just tapped into the desires and requests of corporate industries.

Maybe these considerations also apply to the transnational language of architectural visualizations and renderings, which are predominant within present-day

architecture. Renderings mainly translate the necessities of the market forces and thus produce visuals that solely addresses architectural objects and concepts of the good life for the desired middle class. It is a standard narrative, anticipated and used worldwide, independent as it is of national and cultural differences. This type of communication ignores any relationships with local conditions and contexts and instead it creates illusions or sometimes even propaganda.

## **Drawing**

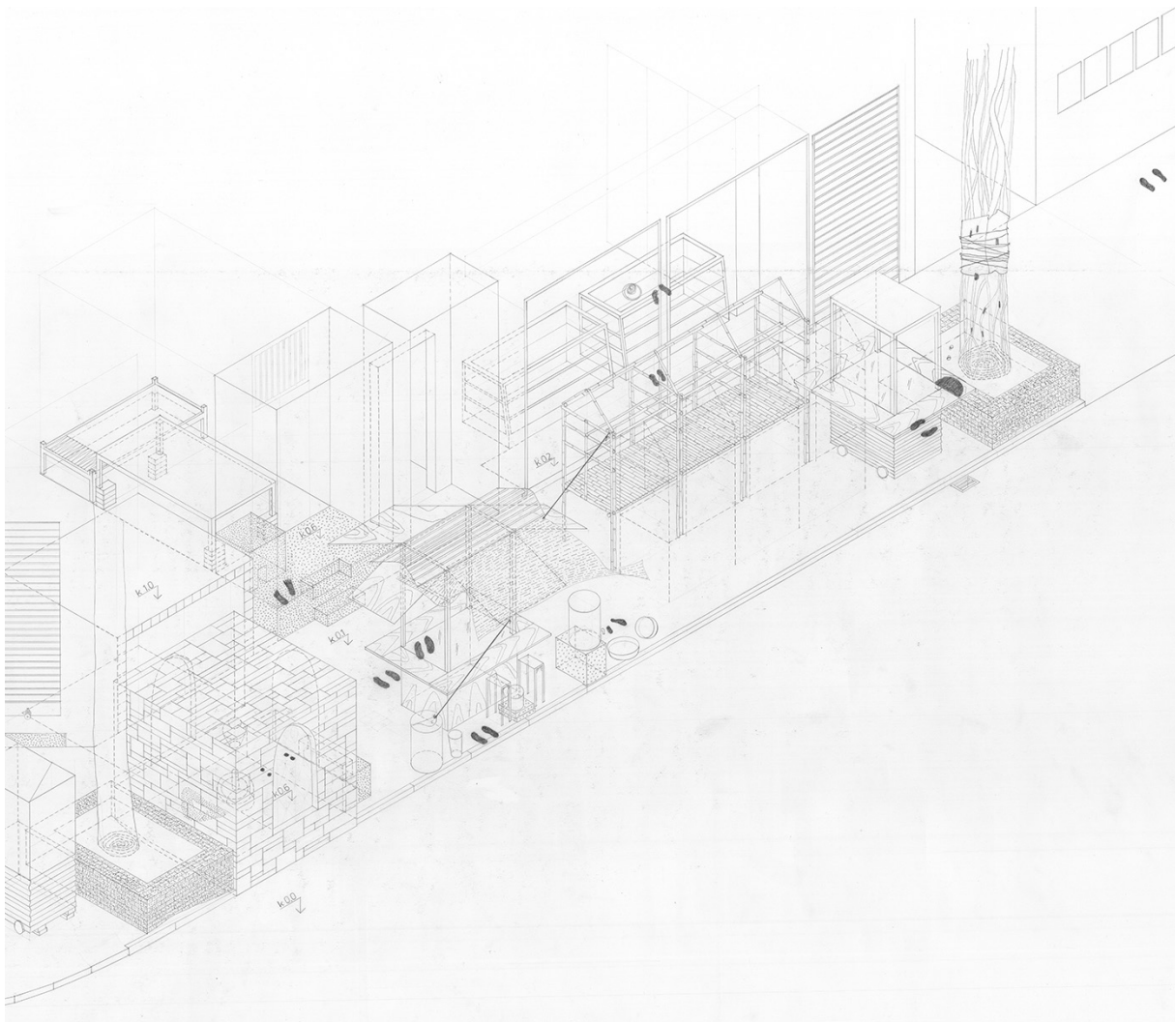
In the attempt to include the messy and the make-shift in the architectural language, this research explicitly brings forward the overlooked and apparently insignificant by drawing it very precisely. The drawings include disorder and want to demonstrate that there can be instants of intensity and significance in apparently insignificant places and that structures of intensity and significance can be fragile in character. Places of identity can be created by temporary, immaterial and minor constructions. They don't need to be monumental and finalized.

Temporary, minor constructions are usually never built from technical specifications and building permits, thus, never identified and not to be found on any map. Traditional maps are digitalized, based on functions and geometry and divided into many different layers of information that can be selected on or off, freely. Outlines of buildings, cadastral boundaries, roads and supply routes. Zooming in on an area expands the amount of information, but

the complexity of the map is almost impossible to comprehend because of the necessity to scroll over the map due to the size of the computer screen. If printed out, all you get is a fragment of the map. Places do not only consist of functions. They can unfold information about social, historical and material relations that determines the things.

Drawing 01 is an attempt to develop a form of communication that mirrors the 1:1 practice form and frames the practices on the pavements of Kolkata.

The idea is to visualize and communicate how the practices are connected to history, customs, materiality and everyday life for the majority of people in Kolkata. The drawing identifies the place by the things that are invisible on traditional maps. These things are specified by material signatures, references to 1:1 situation photographs and human activities. Details unfold the connection between the things, people, history, ideas and culture.



*"In care of an improvisational order", Drawing 01 by Gitte Juul, 2017*

*1:1 situation "Streetkitchen\_Kolkata".*

*In Kolkata the authorities look at the many provisional food stalls and shelters as mess and disorder, disturbing the image they want to create of the city. The pavement is described as a conflict zone, where formal shop owners and street vendors fight over the right to the pavement. The reality is that 70 % of the people working in Kolkata eat their lunch at street food stalls on the streets. Kolkata needs its street vendors.*

*I was curious to get beyond the propagandized conflict. I had no mandate to act and the need was not clear, but I decided to tap into the daily practice on the street to reveal, express and unfold the history and relations between things and human practice on the pavement :*

**Clay cup** - *The handmade clay cup is a symbol of tea-drinking in Kolkata. For generations "chai wal-lahs" have served tea in small cups that are thrown to the ground as soon as the tea is drunk. Previously, tea was exclusively reserved for upper circles of society in India, but with the discovery of the Assam tea plant and establishment of the Indian tea plantations during colonial times - led by Danish botanist Nathaniel Wallich - tea-drinking became a gathering ritual, shared by people from all circles of society.*

**Clothesline** - *For many people everyday rituals like eating, sleeping and bathing take place in public. Small things like water posts, benches and covered spaces make it possible to stay on the street after others have gone home.*

**Food stall** - *Street vendors from the villages bring prepared food to the city to be sold in their make-shift food stalls. The food stall provide tea and dishwashing possibilities for the Palki.*

**Gutter** - *Heaps of broken clay cups wait for the rain to come, which will transform them to clay again and lead them back to the river.*

**Ironing shop** - *The ironing man has a daybed in his shop, where he invites the street vendors to rest, when they need to withdraw from public space.*

**Newspaper** - *public wallpapers with the daily news for everyone.*

**Palki** - *A vehicle carried by people, usually for a person or Hindu God, but this Palki was created for Flora Indica clay cups and Waste Service porcelain. It was walked in and temporarily installed between two make-shift food stalls and in front of a permanent sweet shop.*

**Police kiosk** - *Various operations are emptying the streets from time to time, - otherwise the make-shift is tolerated with the help of bribe.*

**Street shrine** - *Local citizens build the small temple where they worship the Hindu God Shiva.*

**Sweet shop** - *Delivery of cakes to Palki.*

**Roxburgh drawings / Flora Indica** - *During colonial times William Roxburgh was leading The Botanical Garden in Calcutta. When going back to Europe, he left a set of lifesized hand-painted drawings with botanical dissections of 2.542 plants. He created the book "Flora Indica" wherein he described most of the species from the drawings. Seeds from plants from "Flora Indica" are implanted in the traditional clay cup, - making it "The Flora Indica clay cup".*

**Tree** - *Street trees act as static anchor points for makeshift structures, tarpaulins and other space creating elements. Women are worshipping the Banyan tree, seen as a tree of infinity.*

**Waste Service** - *Porcelain painted by citizens as an intercultural relay between the global space and the private sphere.*

**Water** - *A network of 250 water carriers provide drinking water to street vendors and households. Solidarity may lie in establishing an infrastructure of small things on the streets. Things that are part of a larger network that makes communities possible, based on maintenance and care.*





*"Streetkitchen\_Kolkata", 1:1 situation by Gitte Juul in collaboration with local clay cup maker, Palki maker and organizer Dev Nayak, visual artist Anja Franke/Waste Service, architectural students Desislava Mintcheva and Michael Lyng Jensen and the citizens of Kolkata, 2013*

### **Bibliography**

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