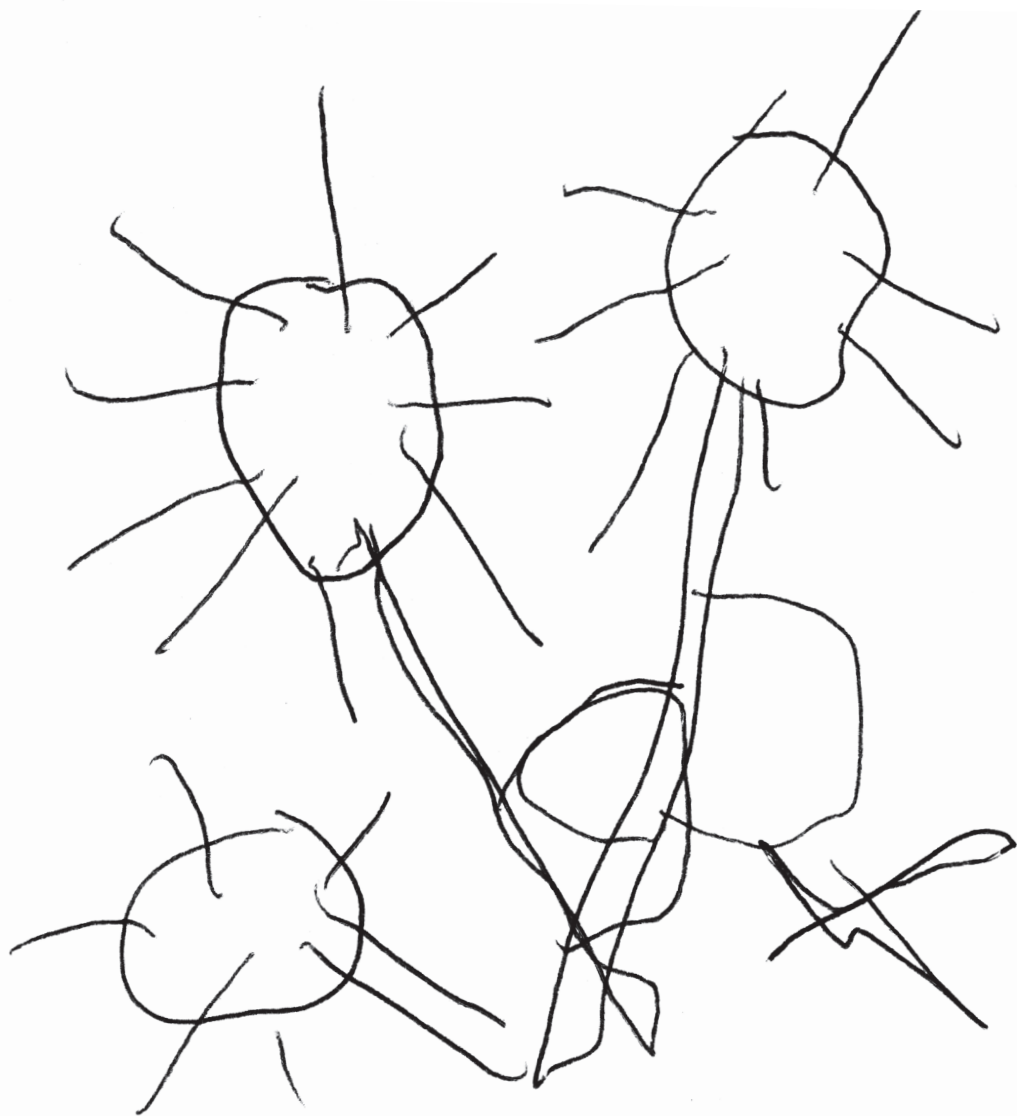




Theoretical Dissertation – Master of Architecture
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Jenny Odell is an advocate for taking a step back when making. In the urgency of an academic semester, one can easily fall into feelings of guilt and anxiety if seemingly not doing enough work that *looks like something* – writing, designing, researching. However, the part that does *not look like anything* – a day off, an unrelated conversation with a friend or an event that one gets dragged to can graciously provide multitudes of information that would otherwise not reach the bibliography.¹ In a way, taking a step back when writing is a process mirroring the non-productive activities that relate back to and enrich the productive city. In an attempt to practice what I preach, the second book is the parallel process to the productive part of writing the thesis of the first book. It is a collection of projects from various art and design practices that I stumbled upon over the semester during the occasions when I did not intend to work. They have been sitting at the back of my mind for a while. Each one of them nudged the thought process of the writing

1. Jenny Odell, *Inhabiting the Negative Space* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2021), 19.

at one point or another. However, I often found them too scattered to include in the first book – they seemed too conceptually or geographically far to jump to them and then back to Rīga in a span of a few paragraphs. Placed side by side, the discontinuity is not as disturbing anymore. Together, they form a broad field of practices with a particular relationship with space and its use in ways that deviate from the immediately expected. A list of how bodies can be placed or excluded from a space and how they perform in each instance. The collection, however, does not contain examples of existing urban commons, as naming them may pre-determine their forms to a few images. By keeping a slight distance from the concept, the collection strives to be open suggestions rather than concrete references. Through numbering in the first book, they remain lightly attached to the main narrative. Just as a laundry room or some flower boxes, one could probably do without them. Nevertheless, they play a supporting role or at least bring some joy to a place.

Baltie zvani (White Bellflowers) (1961)
Ivars Krauklītis
Rīga

1

A twenty-minute voiceless documentary shot in central Riga on a busy working day. Although a documentary, the film is structured around a little girl’s staged adventure in the city streets – characteristic of the Baltic Poetic Documentary movement of the 1960s.² Despite its sweetness, the film carries a sense of otherness. This feeling stems from something other than the buildings or city layout, which is highly recognisable. Admittedly, the army lorries, the Cyrillic signage, or the vintage clothing do indicate a gone by time. However, the most poignant aspect in which the pictured city diverges from the contemporary Riga is the sheer number of people on the streets. Counter-intuitively, when *Baltie Zvani* was filmed in the early 1960s, the number of inhabitants in the city was lower than it stands today – hovering around half a million. However, the Rīga was much denser without the sprawling tower-block suburbs that emerged in the later decades of the USSR occupation. Although it can still feel lively in some parts of the city centre, it no longer quite resembles the energetic and industrious place of the film. What seems to define it now is an overarching sparseness – plenty of room with noticeably fewer people.³

2. *Baltie Zvani [White Bellflowers]*, directed by Ivars Krauklītis, 1961, filmas.lv/movie/3145/.

3. Will Mawhood, “‘The Capital of Empty Spaces’: Dealing with the Shrinking of the Great Baltic City,” *Deep Baltic*, January 20, 2016, deepbaltic.com/2016/01/20/the-capital-of-empty-spaces-dealing-with-the-shrinking-of-the-great-baltic-city/.





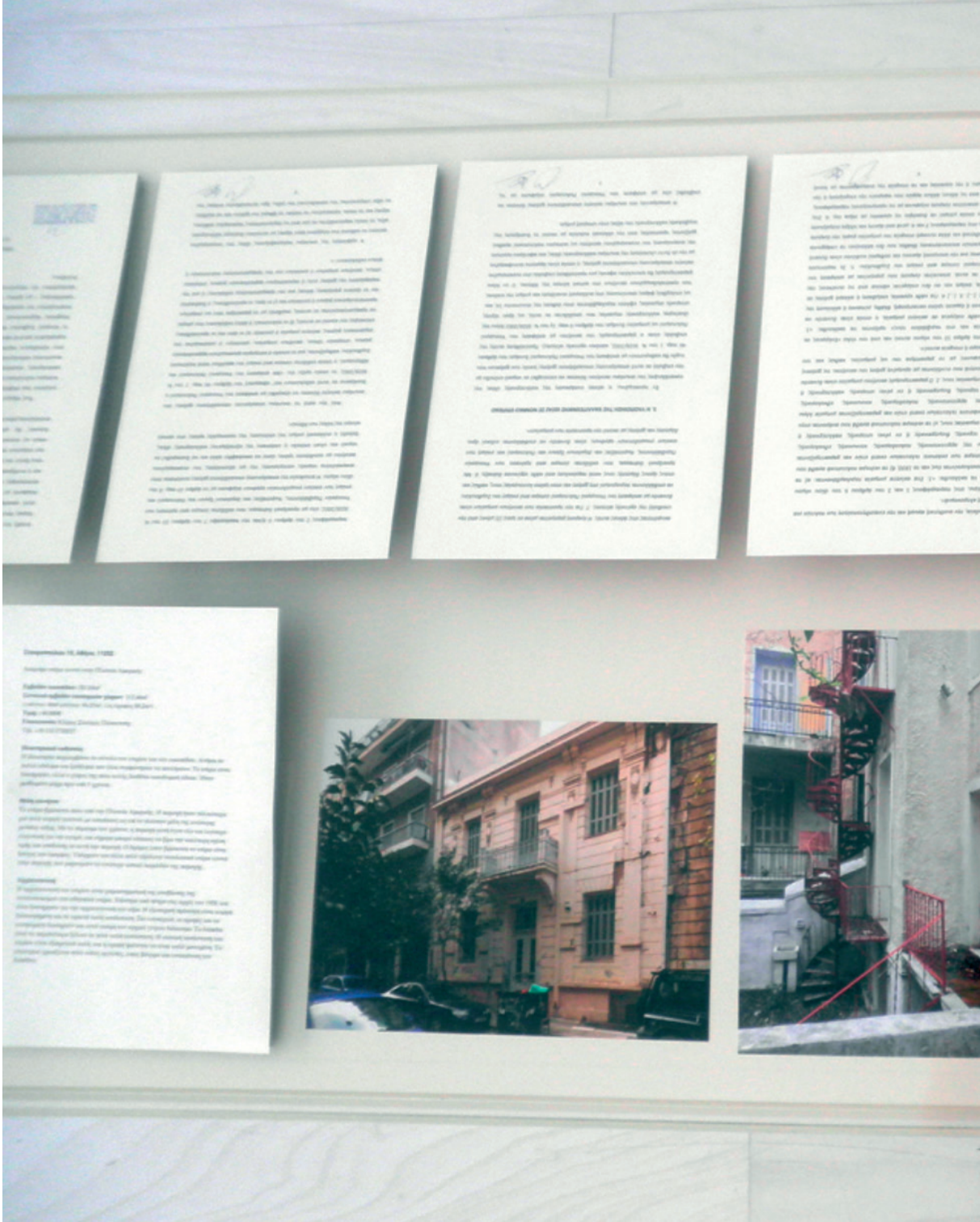


Building as Unowned Property (2017)
Maria Eichhorn
Stavropoulou 15, Athens

2

Maria Eichhorn’s series of *financial pieces* encompasses research projects that use cultural institution funds to challenge established wealth distribution and ownership. Commissioned by the *Documenta 14*, which exceptionally took place in Athens, Eichhorn’s project researched Greece’s sovereign debt crisis and its domino effect, which resulted in record-low real estate occupancy rates. Eichhorn aimed to alter the legal status of a property in a way that would render it entirely without an owner. With this, the artist sought to safeguard it against “gentrification, real estate speculation, and acquisition for commercial purposes.” She argued that seeing how ownership, within the confines of neoliberal capitalism, offers no assurance against neglect and decay, why not try to distance from the concept of ownership and instead find other strategies to protect buildings from ruination? Following meticulous research and selection process, a decision was made to submit an application to the Greek Central Council for Modern Monuments with the goal convert building on *15 Stavropoulou Street* into a monument, thus turning it into a common good. The visible part of Eichhorn’s artwork was the accumulation of documents from her research and the associated legal and financial transactions. Despite securing financial support from the Migros Museum, the final legal step of acquiring the building for conversion into a monument did not take place, leaving the artwork as a thoroughly researched theoretical proposition.⁴ One can wonder if a closed-off, ownerless building, with functions similar to a statue, would manage to bring good for the broader city community. However, it may well be that the absurdity of such a proposal highlights the equal senselessness of the many properties persisting as empty and dormant financial instruments.

4. Kelley Tialiou, “Conceptual Art in Ruins? Maria Eichhorn Commemorates Urban Ruination in Athens,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 2 (2020): 276, 284–287.





The photographer and writer is more known for his portraiture work. However, there also remains a large body of images that Guibert took of empty interiors. The photos have been described more than anything, also to be portraits. The absence is almost automatically filled with an imagined presence, gathered in the viewer’s mind from the objects found in the setting.⁵

5. Ralph Sarkonak, “Traces and Shadows: Fragments of Herve Guibert,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 90 (1996): 197.







FOOD (1971-1974)
Carol Goodden, Gordon Matta-Clark
127 Prince Street, New York

4

FOOD was a restaurant that operated in the SoHo neighbourhood of New York. Historically, the area was a centre for light manufacturing, but by the mid-sixties and early seventies, the production had left the district due to deindustrialisation trends. The withdrawal of the industry left a sizeable building stock of former manufacturing halls, which attracted artists and performers to take up residence in the area. One of the main issues of day-to-day living in SoHo arose not from a lack of creative spaces but from the fact that the area had never before been a neighbourhood where people lived but instead commuted into to work. This resulted in the district lacking basic amenities such as stores, schools, libraries, and restaurants. Originating from Godden and Matta-Clarks dinner parties, the running of the restaurant was somewhat naive. The produce was sporadically bought from multiple suppliers or haggled by daily at a market. Moreover, the hiring policy let anyone work as many or as few hours as they please. However, the goal of *FOOD* was not to run a successful business but rather to create both a social space and an affordable lunch spot in an area where it was previously unavailable. Therefore, *FOOD* is often interpreted not as a dining enterprise but as an artwork in its placement in a food desert. When *FOOD* closed in 1974 due to financial issues, SoHo had already developed. It offered numerous, perhaps more conventionally operated restaurants, posing competition that *FOOD*, with its approximate organisation, couldn't contend with. However, during a crucial period of neighbourhood transformation, *FOOD* stood out as a significant community space.⁶

6. Lori Waxman, "The Banquet Years: *FOOD*, A SoHo Restaurant," *Gastronomica* 8, no. 4 (November 1, 2008): 26–28.







Building Berlin is a photo series by the Swiss duo Nico Krebs and Taiyo Onorato, which was executed in Berlin over three years. While documenting buildings in central Berlin, the artists added crudely built constructions in the foreground of the view that, through a forced perspective, engage and blend with the background architecture. The interplay of existing and added elements is a common approach in which the duo executes landscape photography. However, its intentions, beyond visual, are also contextual. The vantage point from which pictures are taken and in whose foreground the interventions are constructed is the empty land plots left over by the former *Death Strip* on the eastern side of the Berlin Wall. In the first decades after the dismantlement of it, the land plots often were strange collections of no man's land appropriated by the citizens for recreation or gardening. However, these plots have been gradually built up with new developments since. Krebs and Onorato's project engaged with the last free plots before the large, open spaces necessary for constructing such foreground–background interplay disappeared from the city.⁷

7. Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs Teach Landscape Photography, Lecture recording, accessed December 10, 2023, vimeo.com/ondemand/taiyoonoratonickrebs.







Dirty Modernism (2013)
Andris Eglītis
Antonijas Street, Riga

6

The painting series *Dirty Modernism* was made in an empty neo-classical residential building in Riga, utilising the space as his studio during a characteristically slow renovation while many of the flats stood empty. Gathering assorted items from the renovation efforts and the former residents' belongings, Eglītis constructed abstract, geometric compositions, which were subsequently painted in the artist's typical haphazard yet academically adept technique. The paintings do not depict reality but instead, the constructions made by the artist – not accessible to the viewer and likely torn down during the ongoing renovations. A cascade of interconnected information that fails to trace back to an original source.⁸

8. "Andris Eglītis. Dirty Modernism," *Echo Gone Wrong*, accessed December 23, 2023, echogonewrong.com/andris-eglitis-dirty-modernism/.







Deep Listening (1989)
Pauline Oliveros
Dan Harpole Cistern, Port Townsend

7

The album *Deep Listening* is the recording of a musical improvisation by the musician and theoretician Pauline Oliveros, along with Peter Ward and Stuart Dempster, in a disused water cistern with a forty-five-second reverberation time. With the extensively sustained sound as a variable existing beyond an individual performer's control, Oliveros later described the space as *an instrument played simultaneously by all three composers*. *Deep Listening*, beyond the album, is a broader music and performance theory that Oliveros developed during her career. At the centre of it lies a highly sensitive mode of observation, in opposition to analysis and judgement, which is often the culturally dominant mode of perceiving. In the case of the cistern, the practice provided a sensory perception of it before learned cues of space use.⁹

9. Odell, *Inhabiting the Negative Space*, 21.



Untitled (Free) (1992)
Rirkrit Tiravanija
555 West 21st Street, New York

8

Untitled (Still) transformed the 303 Gallery into a day-and-night-accessible lounge space where traditional Thai dishes were cooked and served to visitors. Tiravanija relocated items from the gallery office and storage room to the main exposition space. This also included the director, who worked in the open amidst the aromas of cooking and dining. The artist cooked curries for visitors, and the disposable tableware, gas burners, folding tables, and stools constituted the art display in his absence. Critics, as well as Tiravanija himself, have noted that the primary focus of his work lies in involving the audience; the food serves as a means to foster a congenial relationship between the visitors. Contrary to placing significance in the objects within the space or the artist's cooking performance, the work's central theme is the act of encounter, communication, and negotiation. Instead of creating a divide between the artwork and the viewer, the emphasis is on the convivial interactions established by the viewers within the framework of the artwork.¹⁰

10. Claire Bishop,
"Antagonism and
Relational Aesthetics,"
October 110 (2004): 56.







Ghost (1990), House (1993)
Rachel Whiteread
486 Archway Road, 193 Grove Road, London

9

In 1990, Whiteread created the sculpture *Ghost* by meticulously casting the interior of a living room of a North London house using plaster. The artist undertook the laborious task alone, transporting the plaster dry mix on her bicycle, bag by bag. With a systematic approach, she applied the plaster to all surfaces of the room, dividing the space into logical, gridded sections that included the door, window, and fireplace of the Victorian salon. The gridded plaster panels, small enough to pass through the door, could be reassembled elsewhere, in an exhibition setting. In project proposals outlining her plans, Whiteread described the project's objective as an attempt to 'mummify the air in the room.' Where *Ghost* was a hollow cast of a room, *House* (1993) continues the concept of solidifying domestic spaces at an immensely higher level of devotion. The sculpture was made by casting a continuous concrete interior of a house slated for demolition. Subsequently, the house was peeled away as a mould. What was produced in both works has been described as the opposite of architecture. By replacing air with solid material, Whiteread turns interiors into inaccessible masses – the opposites of space.¹¹

11. Christophe Van Gerrewy, *Choosing Architecture: Criticism, History and Theory since the 19th Century* (Lausanne: EPFL press, 2019), 263–265.











Key to the City (2010)
Paul Ramírez Jonas
New York

10

A Key to the City is more a symbol than an object, customarily awarded to a worthy non-citizen, symbolising that they can belong to the community and have free entrance. Reinterpreted by Paul Ramírez Jonas, the contemporary *Key to the City* was mass-produced and distributed to 24,000 participants in New York when, in 2010, the city's mayor temporarily bestowed the artist with the rights to grant the award. The keys unlocked 24 padlocks, giving new access to twenty public, private, and commercial spaces, with a goal to question the nature of public space, trust, fear and living side by side in a city.¹²

*We can take something symbolic that claims to be a key to the city and make it actually open places that represent the city. And instead of only a few privileged people getting it, any person can give the key to whomever they want, for whatever reason they want.*¹³

12. Paul Ramírez Jonas, "Key to the City, 2010," accessed December 25, 2023, paulramirezjonas.com/Key-to-the-City-2010.

13. "Paul Ramírez Jonas: Key to the City," e-flux, accessed December 25, 2023, e-flux.com/announcements/470098/paul-ramrez-jonas-key-to-the-city-2022-in-birmingham/.







Belonging to the first generation of Conceptual artists of the 1970s, Bonnie Ora Sherk has described her work as *Life Frames* – inquiries into found and constructed environments and their interconnected urban, social and ecological systems.¹⁴ Rather than mentioning specific pieces, one can view Sherk’s work as a gradual expansion of a life-long practice. Her early work largely employed her own body placed in an environment to invoke change simply through a human presence. Gradually, the language of her work expanded to establish more endured interventions through arranged everyday objects, plants and animals. In the later decades of her 50-year career, her work developed into a landscape architecture practice. Sherk fully engaged with the formal mechanisms of city planning and local politics, primarily advocating for participatory garden initiatives, the most famous being the Crossroads Community (1974 – 1980) – a collectively run farm established in the dead spaces under the Cesar Chavez Street freeway in San Francisco.¹⁵

14. Terri Cohn, “Bonnie Ora Sherk,” *SEAQ*, no. 14 (2013): 78.

15. Will Bradley, “Let It Grow,” *Frieze Magazine*, no. 94 (October 2013), frieze.com/article/let-it-grow.







Partecipazione / Beteiligung (2023)
AKT, Hermann Czech
Giardini della Biennale, Venice

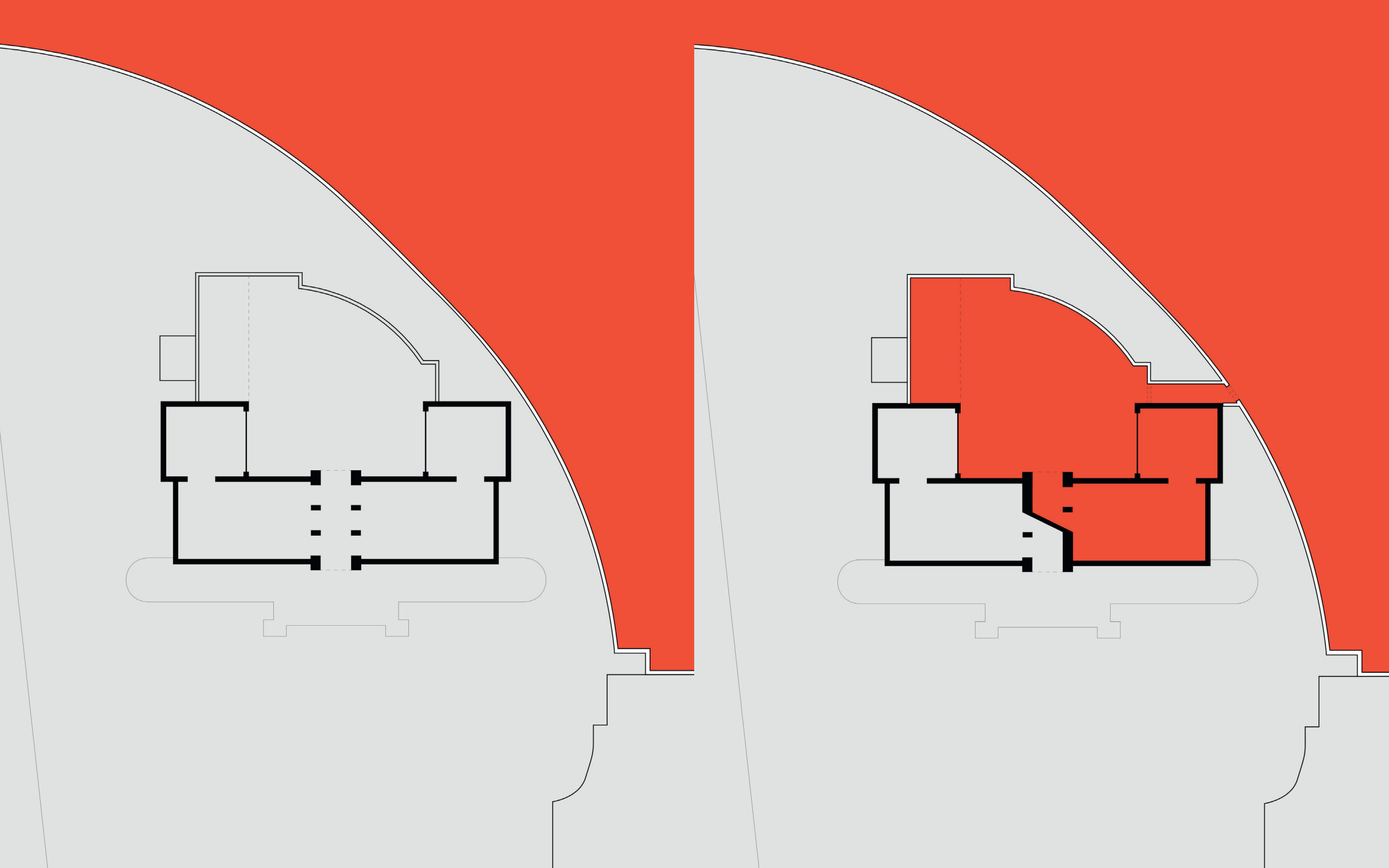
12

Partecipazione / Beteiligung was the winning proposal for the Austrian Pavilion of the 18th International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia. The project focused on the physical space of Giardini – the park where the historical pavilions of the Biennale are situated. It is accessible only with an entry ticket during the exhibition season. Beyond this period, Giardini becomes off-limits. The park stands as an enclave of international art tourism, sharply contrasting the surrounding Castello district, which remains inhabited mainly by local residents. Using the Austrian Pavilion's location at the northeastern border wall, which separates the Biennale premises from the city, the project proposed dividing the pavilion. One portion would retain accessibility from the Biennale's side, while the other would be reached from the city through a new entrance. The newly opened section was intended as a communal gathering place for the residents of the neighbourhood as well as urban initiatives. The project imagined a change in Biennale's relationship to Venice. In a city whose space is highly commodified for the tourism industry, the Biennale could shift its attitude to what uses its space can have. Rather than pursuing further expansion in a city with a particularly limited amount of available land, as over the last few decades, it could allocate space for the use of the shrinking local population. Despite a year of negotiations, both the Biennale and city authorities withheld approval for the project. The pavilion instead housed the documentation of the legal negotiations and an unfinished bridge that was supposed to reach over the Giardini wall.¹⁶

16. "Partecipazione / Beteiligung — 18th International Architecture Biennale 2023," Partecipazione / Beteiligung, accessed December 15, 2023, labiennale2023.at/en/.







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2024, Pauls Rietums

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