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What Is, What Will Be and How it Should Be

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I think I ended up in architecture because I was fascinated by the drawings. The crisp contrast of lines against the paper, the directness of the message. This is how I started out, but my brain just does not really work that way. I am equally drawn to confusion, interpretation and abstraction.
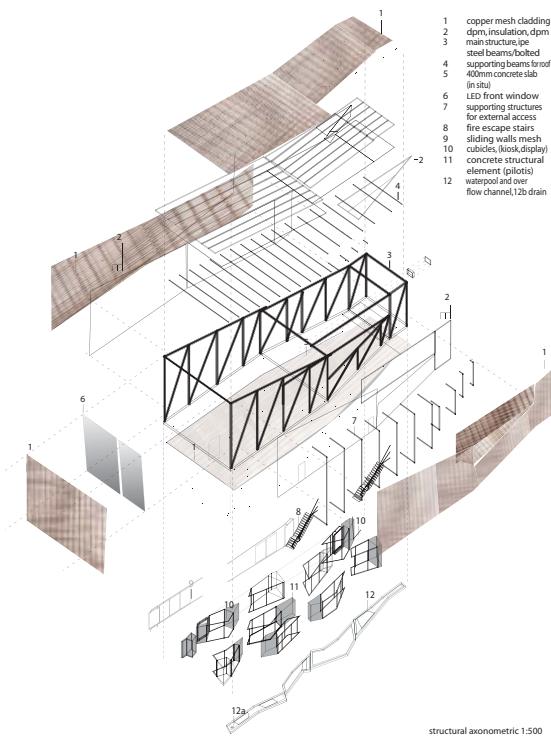Early on in my architectural education I always came across the moments of miss-communication, where in my mind drawings were suggesting something beyond the mere lines on the paper, while in the observers eye they were just that. Luckily enough I found some teachers who were thinking along those lines of abstraction and the creating and employing images became central to my design process.

bridging the gap in between what is, what will be and how it should be - drawings, renderings and collages fused into a non-contextual, multi-layered image. TU-Berlin, 2006 (fig.1)

PART ONE

In general, drawings talk about more than just a building project, or an idea. They provide an insight into the means of production, the creators mind and the medial environment. Drawings are also instruments of communication and not only construction blue prints. They can bridge the gap in between what is, what will be and how it should be (fig.1).

1 copper mesh cladding
2 dpm, insulation, dpm
3 main structure, ipe
  steel beams/bolted
4 supporting beams for roof
5 400mm concrete slab
  (in situ)
6 LED front window
7 supporting structures
  for external access
8 fire escape stairs
9 sliding walls mesh
10 cubicles, (kiosk, display)
11 concrete structural
   element (pilotis)
12 waterpool and over
   flow channel, 12b drain

structural axonometric 1:500

Bluecoat Extension - exploded axonometric/ kit-of-parts, University of Liverpool, 2005 (fig.2)

This exploded axonometric is in itself more than just a kit-of-parts (fig.2). It describes a relationship of building elements just as it highlights the main focus of the designs idea: the central space and the cladding's visual effect. The drawing uses a traditional form of representation as an excuse to show what's really important. Although seemingly constructive the image mainly explores methods of representation (Autocad line work, Illustrator clipping masks, gradients and fills).

Illustrating a narrative beyond the building scope the next drawing (fig.3) uses a traditional floor plan as a vehicle to contests the validity of the designs main argument. The brief demanded a building that would solve hardship for African migrants in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta in Northern Africa.

site and situation

access to lower floor   kitchen/laundry   access to roof
   kitchen/laundry
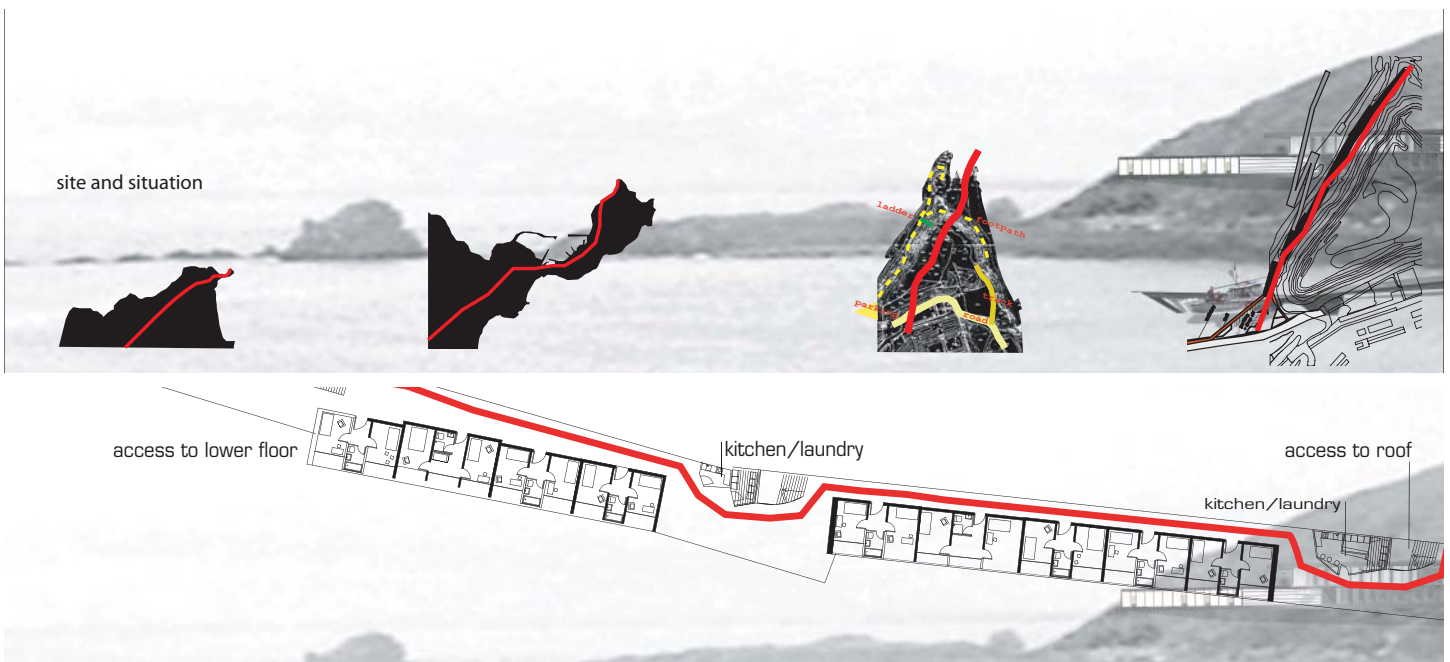
sequencer - portfolio illustrations, University of Liverpool, 2004 (fig.3)

The red-line is part of the narrative, illustrating the path that migrants follow in order to get into a European Union territory. The way this line almost crosses out the 'neat' floor plan and it's color is not coincidental. Simultaneous to it's narrative function, the line crosses out the indented or dreamed-up intention of solving a global problem on a building scale. It instills doubt and confusion. The question of what is this line trying to do, quickly becomes what is this building trying to achieve.

PART TWO

Part One explored the non-representational messages in architectural drawings. The following images bring representational and non-representational qualities together (fig.4). No distinction is being made in between what part of the image is a representation and what part is a revealed part of an invisible process. The multiplicity of situations in one instance is beyond a plan/section thinking. It's a world of everything goes. Everything and nothing is to be taken at face value. The truth is in the eye of the beholder. The architect brings flows, data and materials together, reveals them to other people. The architect is a part within the design process and is no longer the a god like creator at the top.
What if a drawing instead of being representational became the embodiment of a 'thing' in itself?
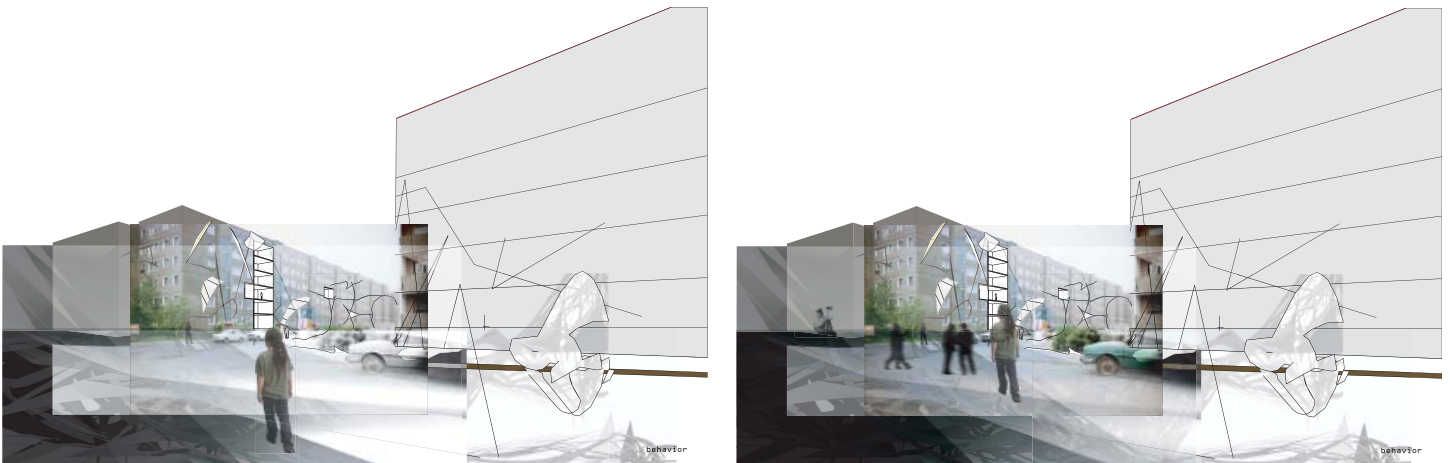
multiplicity of situations - mixed media collage from master's thesis (fig.4)

The next drawing (fig.5) uses very traditional methods of representation (lines on white background) yet it does not make a distinction in between matter and information. Everything blends together and thus creates new instances of reality, like an infrared camera revealing a level of information which is not visible to the naked eye. Traditionally architectural drawings worked in a way that microscopes work, they provide detailed and close up information of an object, by peeling away and enlarging certain parts of it.
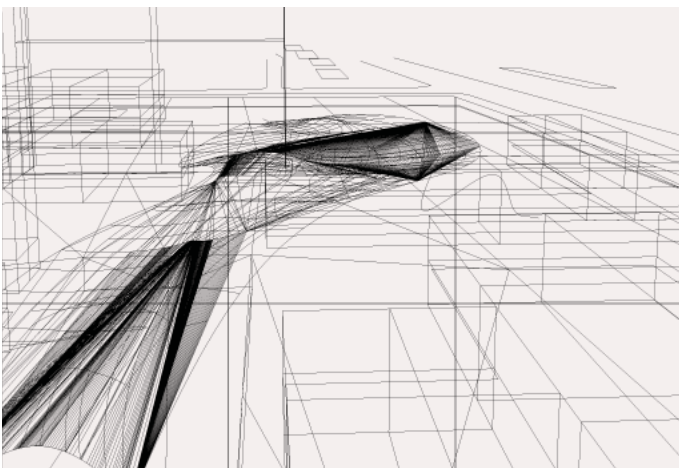

new instances of reality - from master's thesis (fig.5)

The drawing above is dealing within a sphere of intangible information and how it permeates our built up environments, just like the many processes that inform and regulate our daily lives are happening invisibly. Paradoxically though we are more aware of these processes than ever before.

Architectural drawings will always want to achieve a level of demonstration or revelation. There seems to be an inherent desire to show the inner workings of a process or object and that is why even images which try to be non-representational in their intention will be representing the non-representational. Architects are like little kids, trying to understand everything, trying to deal with the chaos that rules the world. Even though these drawings give an expression to something invisible they can still claim to be non-representational. There is no key to reading these images, what it represents depends of the viewers interpretation. The novelty here is that we are including these invisible things into our work, but we can not help ourselves to pin them down visually one way or another.

In conventional practice drawings are used to communicate a precise moment of a tangible physical object. Something highly complex is broken down in small manageable pieces and then put together into a complex structure again. The drawing represents, it stands in for something else.

My project is working in a different fashion. The starting point is not an idea or a concept. It is trying to see and reveal what is there. With the desire to be precise it engages a condition which is ever evolving and convoluted and follows a path of crystallizing and extracting matter out of a cloud of visual and intangible information.
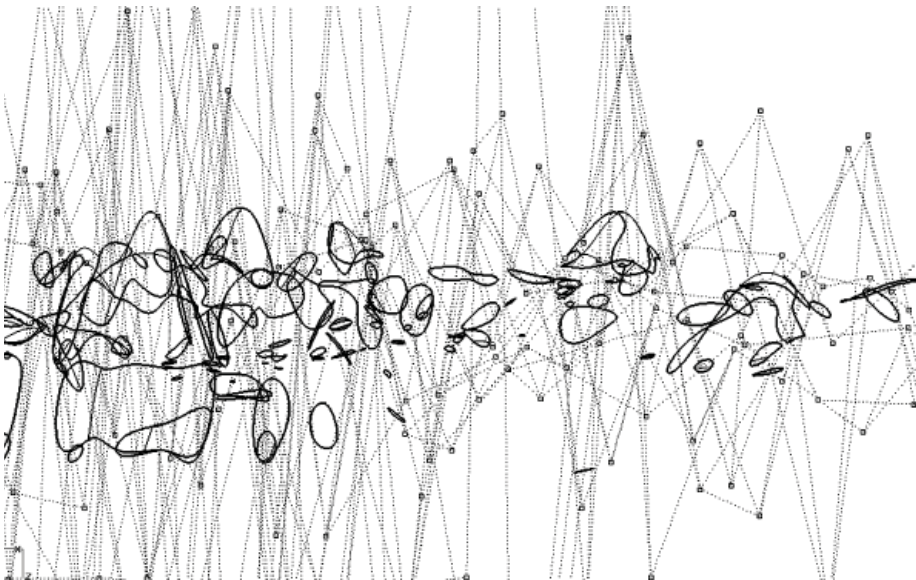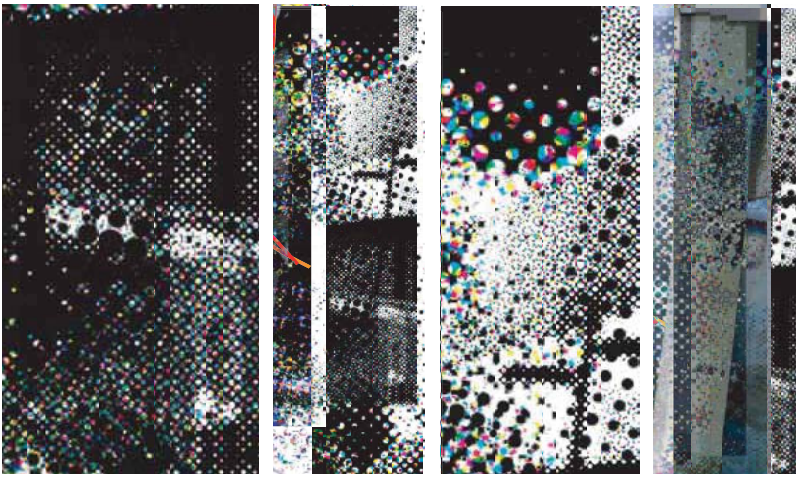

data revealing form - from master's thesis (fig.6)

Visual and avant-garde media were always fascinating for architects. At first it was the invention of the drawn perspective, then at the beginning of the last century photography and photographic collage, later moving images and lately animation have come to be influential on how architects work or conceptualize their work. Still architects always seem to only scratch the surface of these new forms of visual communication and return to flat, two dimensional drawings to communicate their ideas. The reason is in the time span in which our work (as architects) operates. Art and mass-media are rendered understandable by their context which is mostly short lived. Architecture by its nature outlives these fashions and eras and has two options. It either preserves some of the context of it's origin and makes it accessible for time to come, or it provides access to any kind of context that may come. Drawings or 2d representations carry this promise of being all accessible. It is a medium which does not depend on a specific technology in order to be understood.

My project operates in a similar manner. It takes the language and technology of our time but brings it back to a non-technological level (fig.6).

I layered data extracted from visuals of the site over and over again, running each intermediate result through the same filters until those images started to reveal patterns and shapes (fig.7). Unlike in traditional practice where lines are drafted represent objects of matter, I waited until the images started

layered data extracts - from master's thesis (fig.7)

to reveal shapes on their own. The image/drawing does not stand in for another object, it is embodies the object in itself. The jump from image to object is simply a change of medium and no translation from an abstraction to an physical object (fig.8). Despite the technology driven context two-dimensional drawings turn out to be powerful design tools and even more so if they leave the realm of the technical/representational behind.
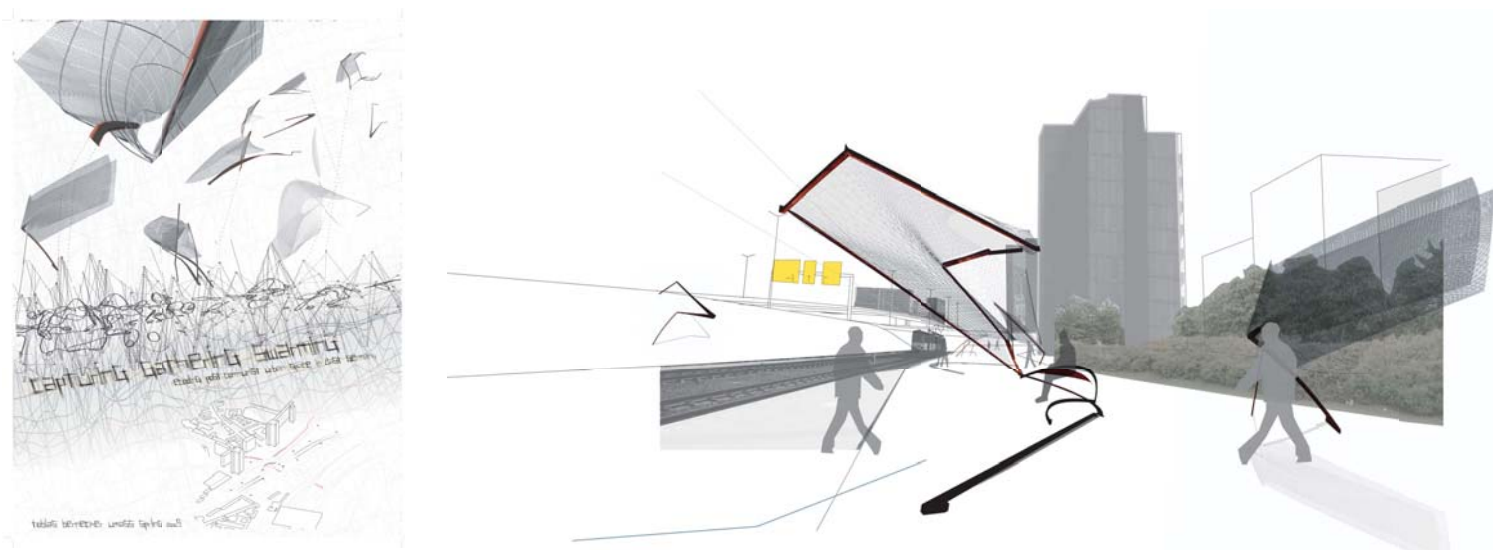
change of medium - from master's thesis (fig.8)

All images from author's studio projects and from Master's Thesis as noted below.

Bernecker, Tobias. 2009. "Capturing Gathering Swarming - Re-coding post-communist space in East Germany " Master's Thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst.