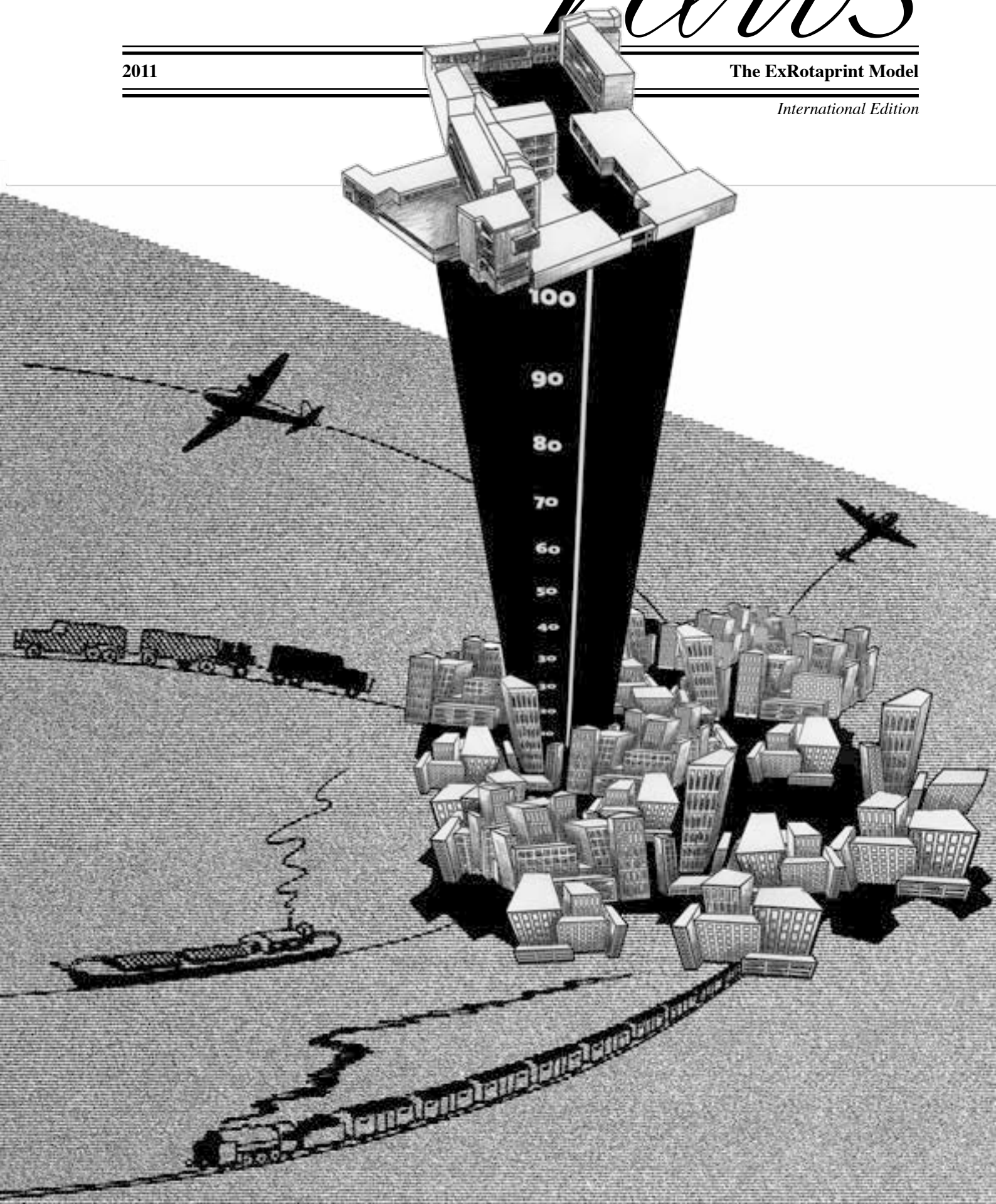


# ExRotaprint News

2011

The ExRotaprint Model

*International Edition*





Here the  
concept of  
ownership  
is abstracted  
until it  
disappears.

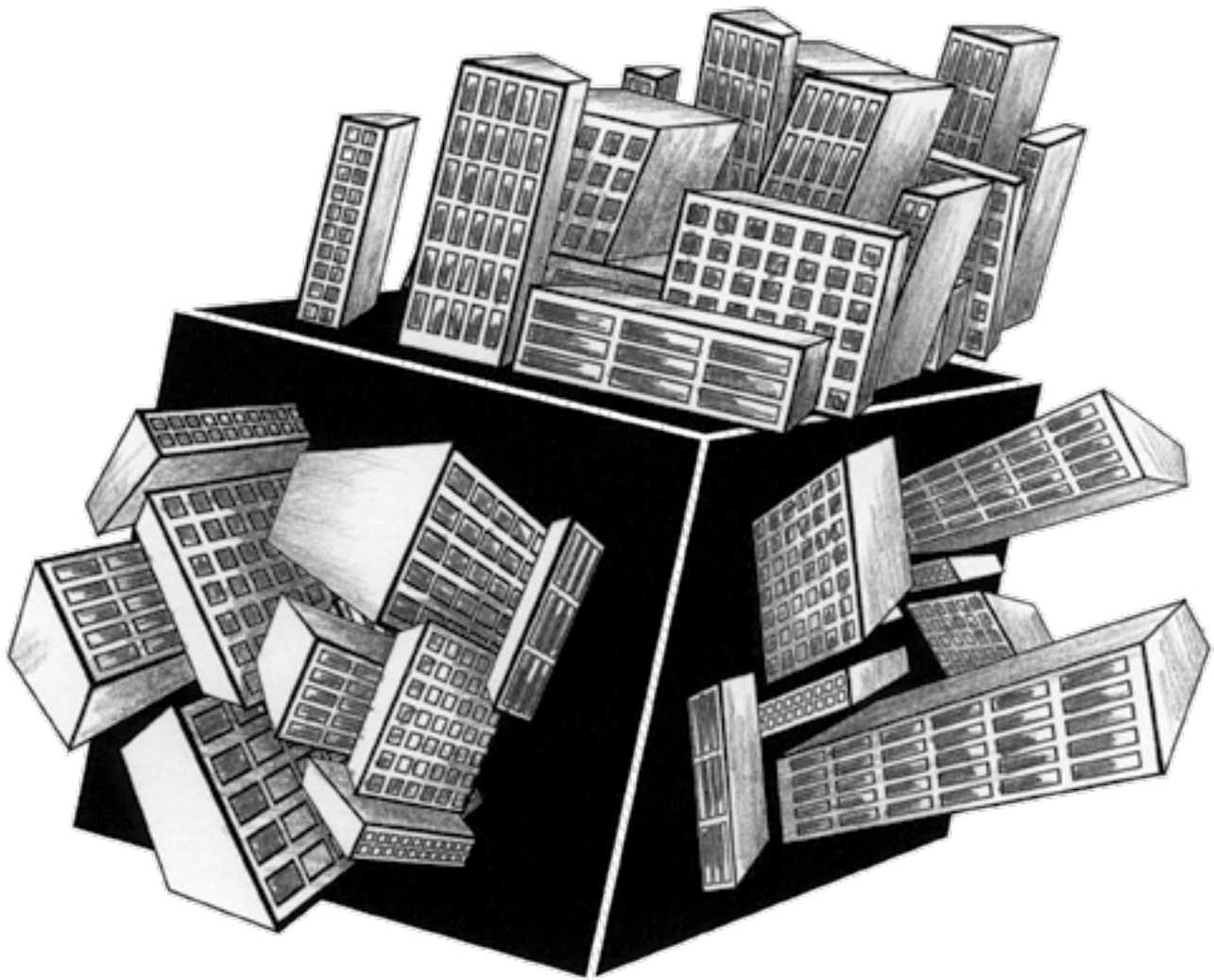
ExRotaprint is the former site of the Rotaprint printing press manufacturing plant in Berlin's Wedding district. Following the insolvency of Rotaprint in 1989, the 10,000 square meter premises fell into a state of neglect while lingering in the redevelopment line. In the mid-1980s the Berlin Senate issued a bond to the ailing Rotaprint AG; after bankruptcy, ownership of the property was then transferred to the district and later to the Liegenschaftsfonds Berlin, which was charged with selling the property.

In 2005, artists Daniela Brahm and Les Schliesser formulated a concept for taking over the property through renters already on site. The goal was to develop the location to serve a heterogeneous mix of *Arbeit, Kunst, Soziales* (work, art, and community). After ExRotaprint e.V., the Verein or association, was founded as a representative body for renters, the concept—after long negotiations and meetings with the local district, the Berlin Senat, and the Liegenschaftsfonds—was finally set in motion. In 2007, the non-profit organization ExRotaprint gGmbH took over the site.

The non-profit GmbH disrupts the speculation-spiral of the real estate market and owns the buildings through a heritable building right. ExRotaprint institutes a unique form of ownership and self-organization within a precarious environment; the legal structure situates the interest of the group above individual interests, and connects the notion of profit to the site and its goals.

**ExRotaprint concerns urban development, the real estate and monetary economy, tendencies of social separation and exclusion, and art strategies within city politics, and is an example for developing new projects in urban space. The strategy we employed in taking over this site sets a precedent that can be applied to other locations. ExRotaprint is a model.**

**Initiated by artists, it is a reality created from the viewpoint of art. Here a realm of possibility exists, non-profit and united, non-ideological but contingent on agreement and consensus. ExRotaprint forsakes the prospect of profits via ownership in favor of stability and inclusion, and balances a heterogeneous array of interests. The profit of the project lies in its permanency and the opportunities and space it provides for activities, now and in the future.**

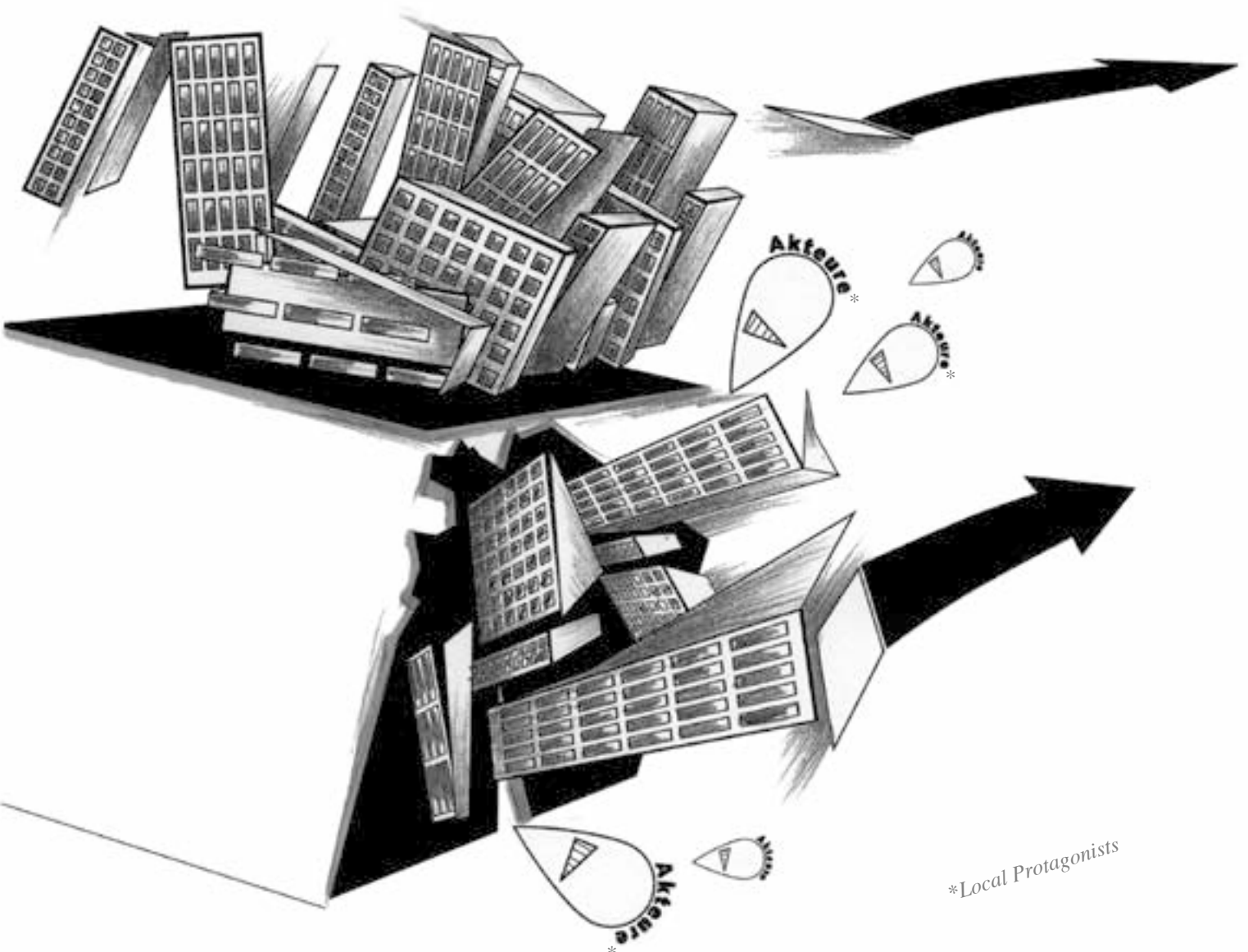


# 1. Point Zero

Disused urban spaces and real estate can be an ideal situation for such projects. “Point zero” is characterized by the moment at which—for a wide variety of reasons—capital has been withdrawn and redevelopment strategies are put on hold. During this phase the interests of renters play no role, they are disposable quantities, placeholders, or temporary users. Based on our experiences this situation offers an opportunity to implement new, innovative strategies; to be gained here are space, time for development, and insights. The real estate industry remains passive in this indifferent setting, it allows things to deteriorate or manages deficiencies. It waits until making profits seems possible again, until basic conditions change, prices rise, neighborhoods become more attractive, and problems are solved and addressed by others.

Point zero must be viewed as the moment of opportunity to be taken before a new process of appreciation begins. This is the ideal moment for approaches that are not driven by profit motive since the real estate market is either inactive locally, focused on other parts of the city, or too unfocused and self-occupied.

The former Rotaprint site sat in limbo for eighteen years. After bankruptcy the district managed the buildings and rented them for temporary uses. Plans to sell the site were not pushed through until the Liegenschaftsfonds Berlin took over the property in 2002, who then put on the market. The property was to go to the highest bidder. But for Rotaprint—a historically listed site with restrictions as to what could be torn down or added, buildings that were badly in need



\*Local Protagonists



**Akteure \***

**Ak**



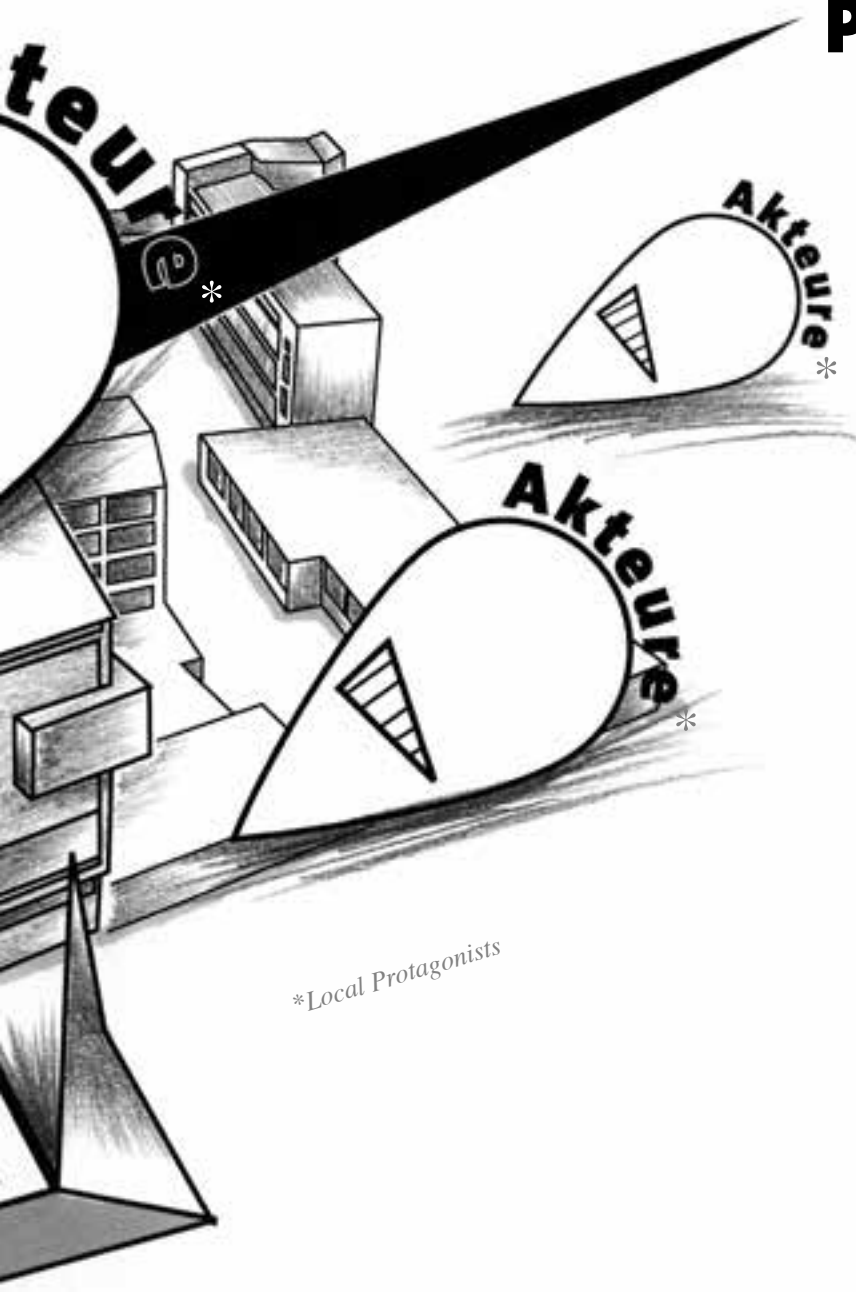
of upgrading, its location in a low-income district lacking hip bars and galleries—buyers were scarce. But no sooner than ExRotaprint had contacted the Liegenschaftsfonds to propose an option agreement for purchasing the property through the renters, the fonds initiated an open bidding process—with no minimum bid. This hasty reaction was an indication that the fonds hoped to stick to the normalized route of selling to an investor rather than having to enter into protracted negotiations with renters. The sole bidder was ExRotaprint. The Liegenschaftsfonds then entered into negotiations with us, but—in the background—

drew up a package of forty-five Berlin properties at the instigation of an Icelandic real estate fund. Notable about this package were the many “problem” real estate holdings—the Rotaprint site was also to be dealt with this way. Not until this deal finally collapsed in 2007, because the bid by the investor was too low, were negotiations taken back up with ExRotaprint. As a result of our active media campaign and the political pressure we generated, we were able to purchase the property within a minimal period of time for the price that had been set for the Icelandic real estate fund. The project could now begin—without undue financial pressures given the low purchase price. With ExRotaprint now a reality, our supporters from local politics and the Berlin Senat had managed to coax the proverbial camel of a “development from the bottom up” through the urban eye of the needle.

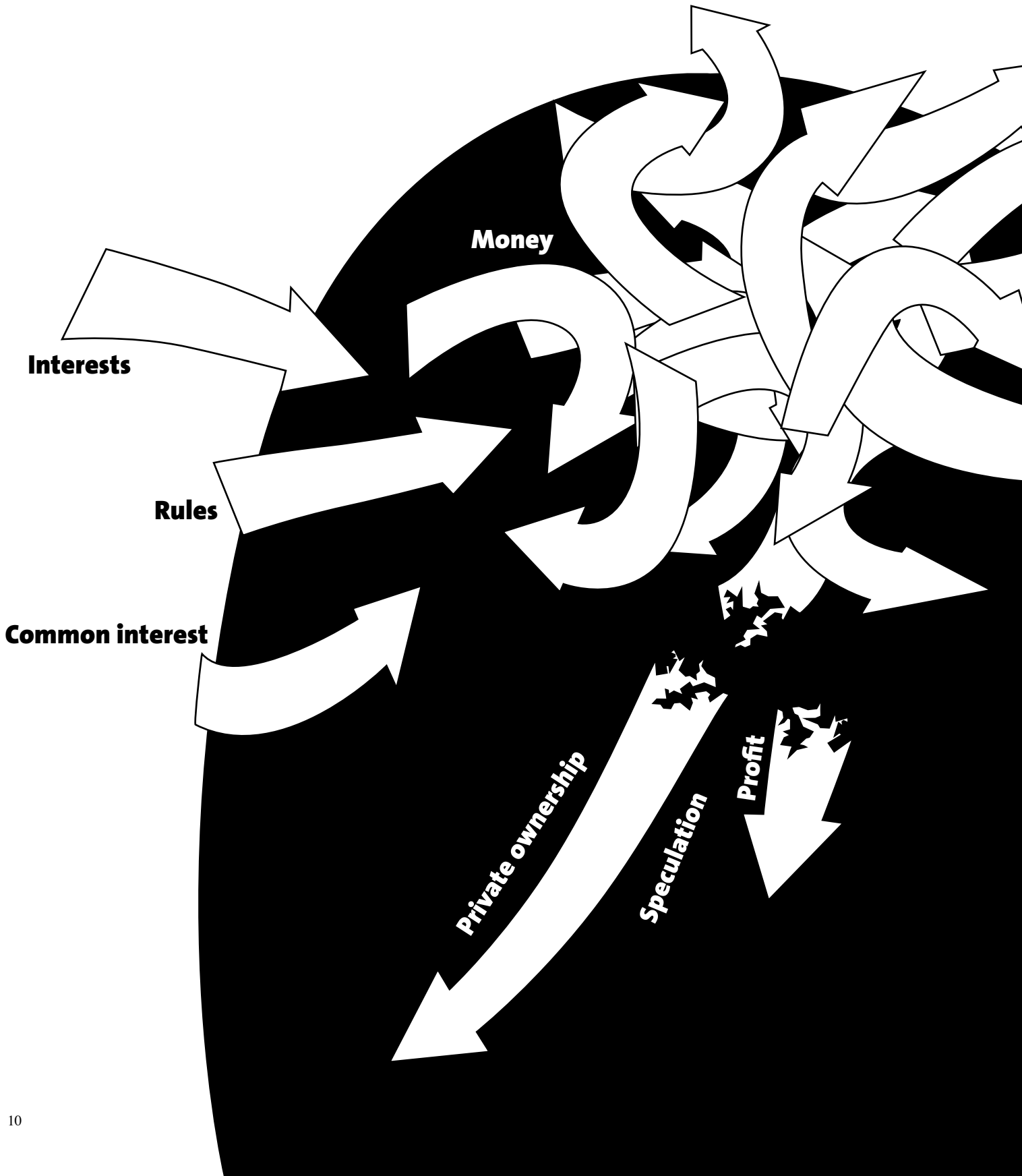
## Processes

At the beginning the outcome of the project was completely open, success improbable. New routes require passion, grit, and stubbornness. Failure as a possible result of all efforts must be taken into consideration. In the concept stage everything hinges on voluntary work and the involvement of individuals who are motivated into action by challenging circumstances. We consider it advantageous when strategies from art are employed: questioning and shifting one’s perspective, approaching details in novel ways, the appropriation of ideas and problem-solving methods, the principle of collage, integrating different levels of meaning, a sense for the public and pragmatism for what’s necessary, the potential to define and generate form without ideologies but with a sense of pragmatic idealism.

The basic features of how the project is being developed today were laid out in our first concept. This concept draft was the basis for the founding of ExRotaprint e.V. and what later became the non-profit ExRotaprint gGmbH. The renters, among them artists, business operators, and community outreach organizations, became members of ExRotaprint e.V.. The aim was to create long-term potential for already existing uses and to place responsibility for the takeover of the property in one’s own hands. ExRotaprint e.V. provided these goals a platform and gave renters greater political say. Within a heterogeneous group of artists, social organizations, and businesses there are differing visions



\*Local Protagonists



that must be discussed and moderated. “Urban design, participation, community organizing” or “sustainability” are buzz words for a socially engaged, enlightened, and cultural public. If one steps out of the space of art and takes the strategic approaches of culture into real space, encounters of a totally new, strange, and absurd kind are the result. One doesn’t speak the same language and pursues different goals. Small, local businesses operate primarily according to classical models. Day-to-day operations are the main priority; time for experimentation is scarce. Community outreach organizations are geared toward engagement, but are dependent upon city and state funding. Accordingly, potential management conflicts with long-term partners are not in their interests. Creatives are accustomed to project-based work, time plays a less critical role, self-exploitation has been practiced for years, but their discourse is hermetic. Getting all groups involved in the discussion required that we develop, more than anything, understanding and personal trust.

Purchasing a 10,000 square meter site without personal capital is a complex undertaking. ExRotaprint e.V. faced the challenge of developing an ownership model that responds to the economic and social situation of



**Heritable  
building right**

**Sustainability**

a production-oriented site. Factors such as purchase price, usage possibilities, and building condition are critical to developing the project successfully, free from outside control. Financing and renovation costs were totally open at the beginning. All buildings comprising the historically listed ExRotaprint site had to be consolidated so that a work place could be maintained for everyone over the long term.

Fantasies of profits, investment returns, or retirement safeguards quickly come to the fore and obscure the view of a common interest. During this phase we recognized that unless we developed an overarching solution for managing the backlog of renovation work the internal development of the project might simply disintegrate into individualized parts. The decision to become a non-profit organization developed out of the discussions held by ExRotaprint e.V.. It was not simply a matter of securing our own interests. ExRotaprint was intended to be a space for new strategies of social urban development, free from the exclusionary consequences of speculation. A determining factor for our considerations was the physical context, the site in an environment beset by problems. Our goal was to develop a legal structure that would meet the requirements of the scale of the production site and would provide long-term stability for its development. During this phase getting to know and becoming familiarized with the new circumstances was necessary. Seeking advice and making use of knowledge that already exists elsewhere is not to be avoided.

A significant percentage of the work is directed outward. The outcomes and decisions of the internal process must reach both politicians and the public at large. No one waits around for user initiatives. No corresponding political entities exist, no lobbies are there to channel one's interests. The search for interested parties and partners takes time and requires energy. One has to contact and convince representatives from city development, finance, the economic affairs senate, and politics. This does not happen without media involvement. Artists can generate publicity and publicity motivates politics and the press to take the goals of an initiative seriously. The press is primed to quickly respond to culture and the arts. Culture is a basic concept that allows one to forge common ground with parties of all stripes. Art can therefore be a way of opening doors, or it can be a Trojan horse—enabling processes that are generally viewed with mistrust and are easily dismissed. Once the first supporters are won over and the gates to the city are open, the entire scope of the project can be revealed.

## 2. The Social Sculpture

Local protagonists are experts; they know the potential of their surroundings. Our concept is based on engaging with the existing surroundings. Initiated by artists, ExRotaprint is not intended as a location for artists alone. From the very outset we viewed it as an opportunity to create a common space for people with different occupations, and different backgrounds and histories. Today ExRotaprint rents a third of its space to each area of work, art, and community. Working on site are businesses, community outreach organizations, and independent creatives. An overall community image emerges that presents an alternative to the imposed dreams of investment return monocultures, and instead promotes cooperation and exchange. We are constantly confronted by the challenge of finding the right balance between interests. Optimal solutions must be conceived and discussed for both spatial and social concerns in order to maintain an overall balance and to ensure its effectiveness and adequacy. Communication and direct contact are essential. Reality is organized socially, economically, and culturally using strategies that come from art. ExRotaprint, as social sculpture, implies an expansion of the remit of art, which takes form here as a created reality—not as a reproduction or quotation. Though it can be art, it does not have to be. ExRotaprint fights against the delimiting tendencies of culture and money.

### Work, Art, Community

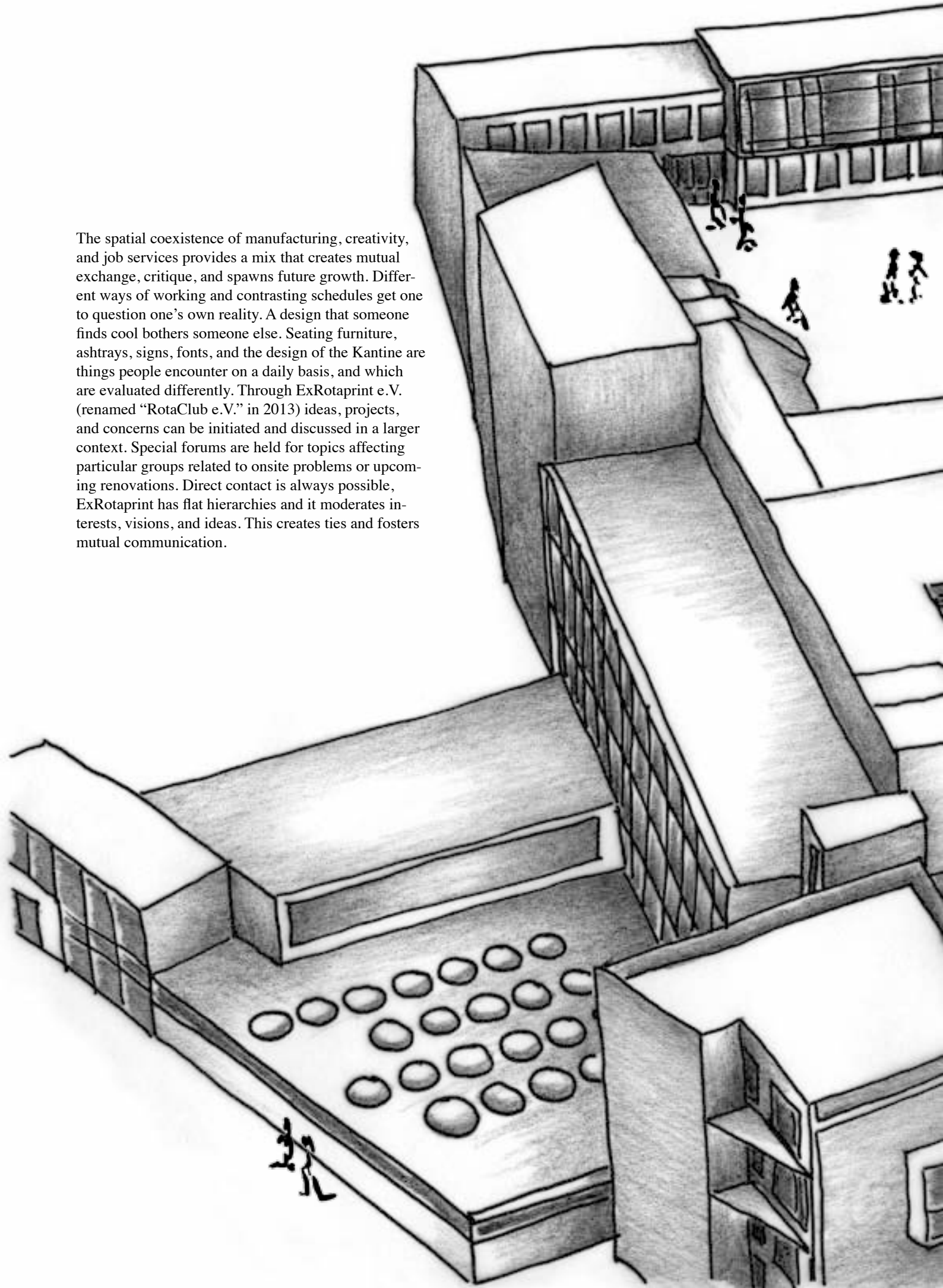
We consciously select projects that work with the neighboring community of ExRotaprint. A school run by Kurds teaches German to immigrants. Different than a Volkshochschule (adult learning center), participants here do not contend with subjective admissions criteria, and students interact with instructors with similar migrational backgrounds. Not only is German instructed here, some participants learn the basics

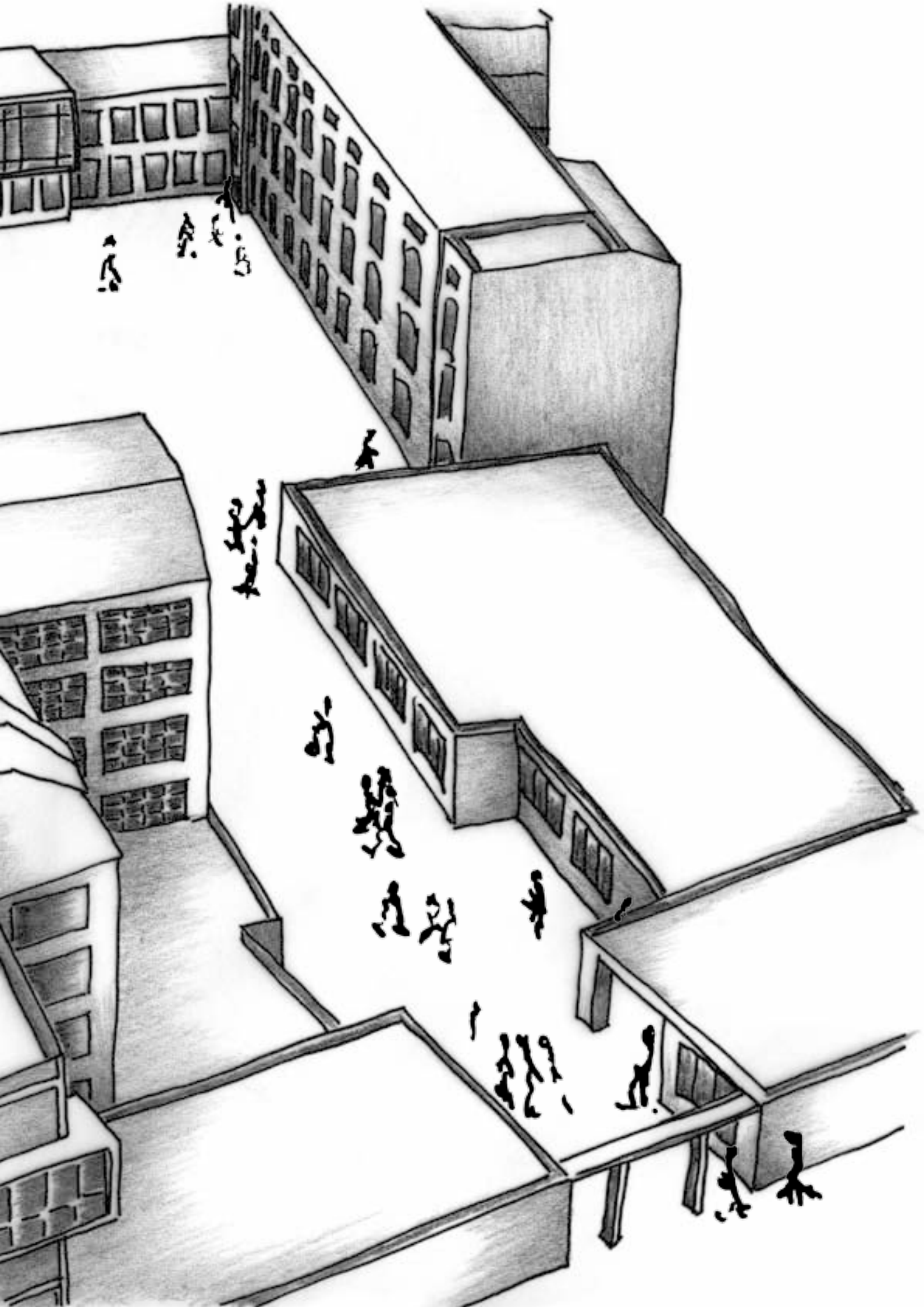
of reading and writing. Homework help for children is offered and there is also a music school. A job services agency works with the unemployed and creates projects in the narrow, nebulous zone between the real economy and employment politics. A library is also located here where books can be checked out as well as donated. A range of services is available—from help for students and filling out forms, to caring for the handicapped—that do not exist in the real economy because those they serve lack the necessary funds. At the training center school dropouts get to know a regular daily schedule and have the opportunity earn a high school diploma. The community outreach organizations guarantee that the premises are open to people who live in Wedding and are part of the social body that makes up the district. Dependent on public monies and political developments the existence of these projects is continually in question.

Musicians, designers, writers, and artists rent office spaces, practice rooms, and studios. We offer these spaces to young creatives who, in turn, operate as points of interconnection themselves. They are extremely well networked and create their own professional structures. Such an internationally connected community is constantly on the move. For the moment Wedding provides the ideal location—tomorrow a contact or a grant will set off for other districts or cities. Someone moves out, new renters arrive. The proximity to fabrication facilities and businesses ideally leads to collaborations and commissions. Recent graduates found new businesses and startups, setting up offices and studios in order to produce their ideas. This produces jobs and companies we hope to keep in Wedding through our cooperative renting policy.

The ground floor spaces are reserved for manufacturing businesses: metal construction; workshops for neoprene and wood; art framing and exhibition design; and serigraphy. Electricians and commercial cleaning and building contractors occupy the large units. In a district where manufacturing jobs have disappeared, new jobs and educational training sites are central to the economic and social stabilization of the surrounding environment. Larger operations require production space that can be calculated. Choosing a location is a long-term decision. We rent to businesses whose work adds meaning to the existing structure.

The spatial coexistence of manufacturing, creativity, and job services provides a mix that creates mutual exchange, critique, and spawns future growth. Different ways of working and contrasting schedules get one to question one's own reality. A design that someone finds cool bothers someone else. Seating furniture, ashtrays, signs, fonts, and the design of the Kantine are things people encounter on a daily basis, and which are evaluated differently. Through ExRotaprint e.V. (renamed "RotaClub e.V." in 2013) ideas, projects, and concerns can be initiated and discussed in a larger context. Special forums are held for topics affecting particular groups related to onsite problems or upcoming renovations. Direct contact is always possible, ExRotaprint has flat hierarchies and it moderates interests, visions, and ideas. This creates ties and fosters mutual communication.





**Community**



**Art**



# Work



# The Fuel

The spectacular architecture of the Rotaprint site was the motivation and fuel for ExRotaprint. In the nineteen-fifties the Rotaprint company brought in architect Klaus Kirsten to build modern additions onto the original Gründerzeit structure. The complex link between existing and new building sections, their parasitic connections, the striking cubic forms, and successive constructional phases match ExRotaprint's heterogeneous and open-ended project direction. As a superb example of Berlin's post-war industrial architecture, Klaus Kirsten's design is the expression of a demand for the modern that raises themes like hierarchy, transparency, and processes in its approach to materials, dimensions, and form. Small offices and large hall-shaped spaces for production border on light filled ateliers and studios, creating spaces for public use and private areas. The historically listed status necessitates that ExRotaprint undertakes renovations that keep the cultural requirements in mind without losing perspective of the dynamic of social processes as well as the varying uses the premises serves. At the same time Klaus Kirsten's intended aesthetic is to be reconciled with the fact that it was never fully realized, which is particularly evident on the front corner tower with its rough concrete surfaces showing the traces of its making.

As a result of the project, a cultural spotlight has been cast onto ExRotaprint's architecture and the architectural office of Klaus Kirsten & Heinz Nather. Our interest in the architecture is not an end in itself, but is part of a project that promotes and sustains heterogeneous relationships that are at times far removed from high culture.

The real estate industry makes the most money from low rent districts when they increase in value. Prices are low for living space in Wedding, and the potential for growth after restorations and renovations is high. Real estate industry representatives have long recognized the potential affiliated with artists, who in unison with those on the left and leading alternative lifestyles seek out new spaces for working and living, and, as a kind of "area fertilizer," are channeled into so-called problem zones. Those involved, regardless of affiliation, pave the way with cheap living and workspaces for the next stage of the gentrification caravan. They are then part of the first ones who are pushed further out to make the next city district attractive. ExRotaprint is viewed by the real estate industry in these terms and invoked as a positive locational factor in marketing the area. This fact cannot be avoided.

In Berlin one has the impression that such processes—which create a feel-good atmosphere of small town urbanity—are desirable and crucial to investment

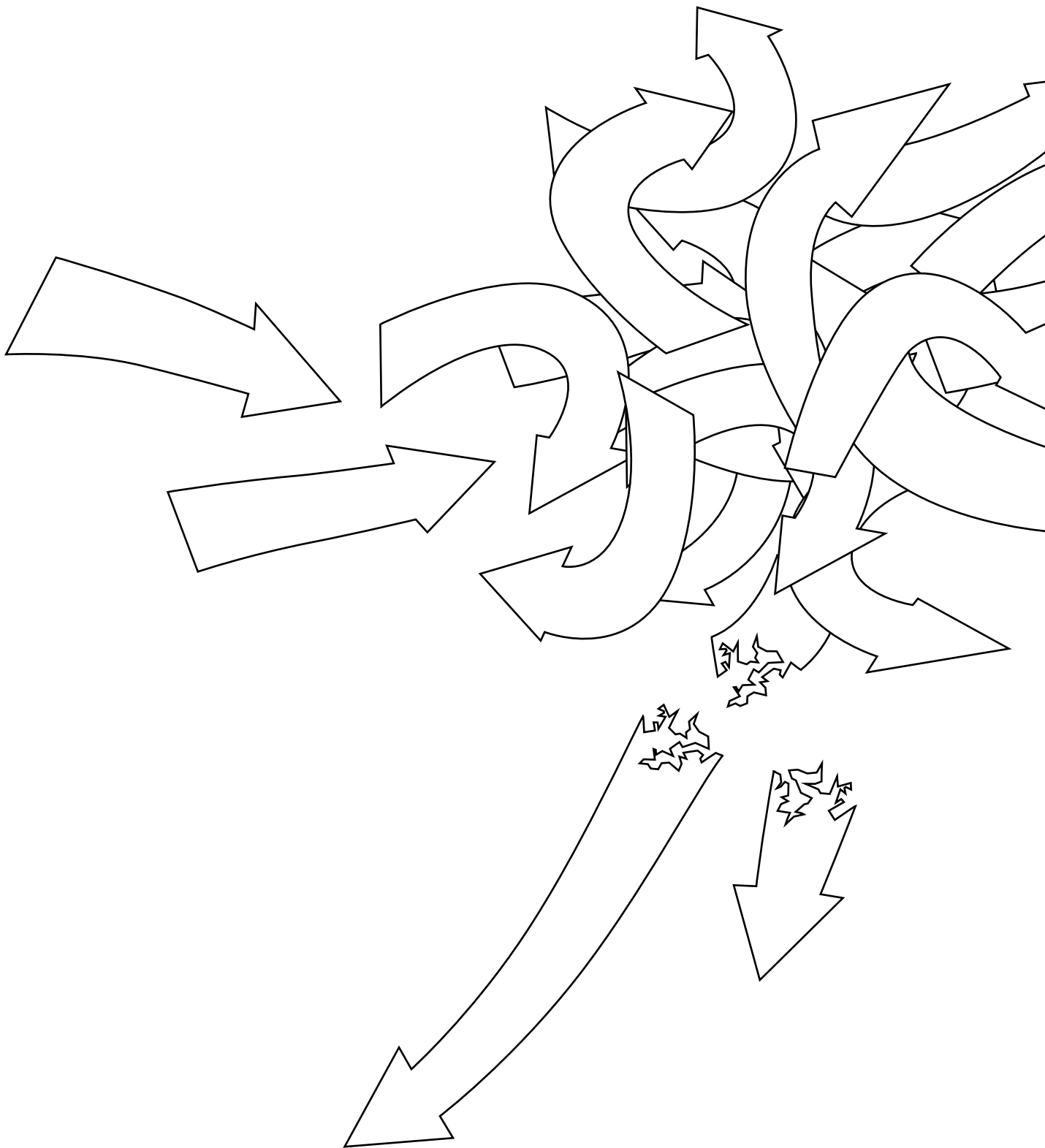
# Dilemma

Berlin's Wedding district is a real space of urban theoretical discourses. Immigration, unemployment and poverty, and the fledgling appreciation in property values via creatives are converging to produce a conflict in the years ahead that will be reflected in many cities and redevelopment processes. Wedding, along with Neukölln, is one of the last remaining "precarious districts" close to the center of Berlin with low rents and available spaces.

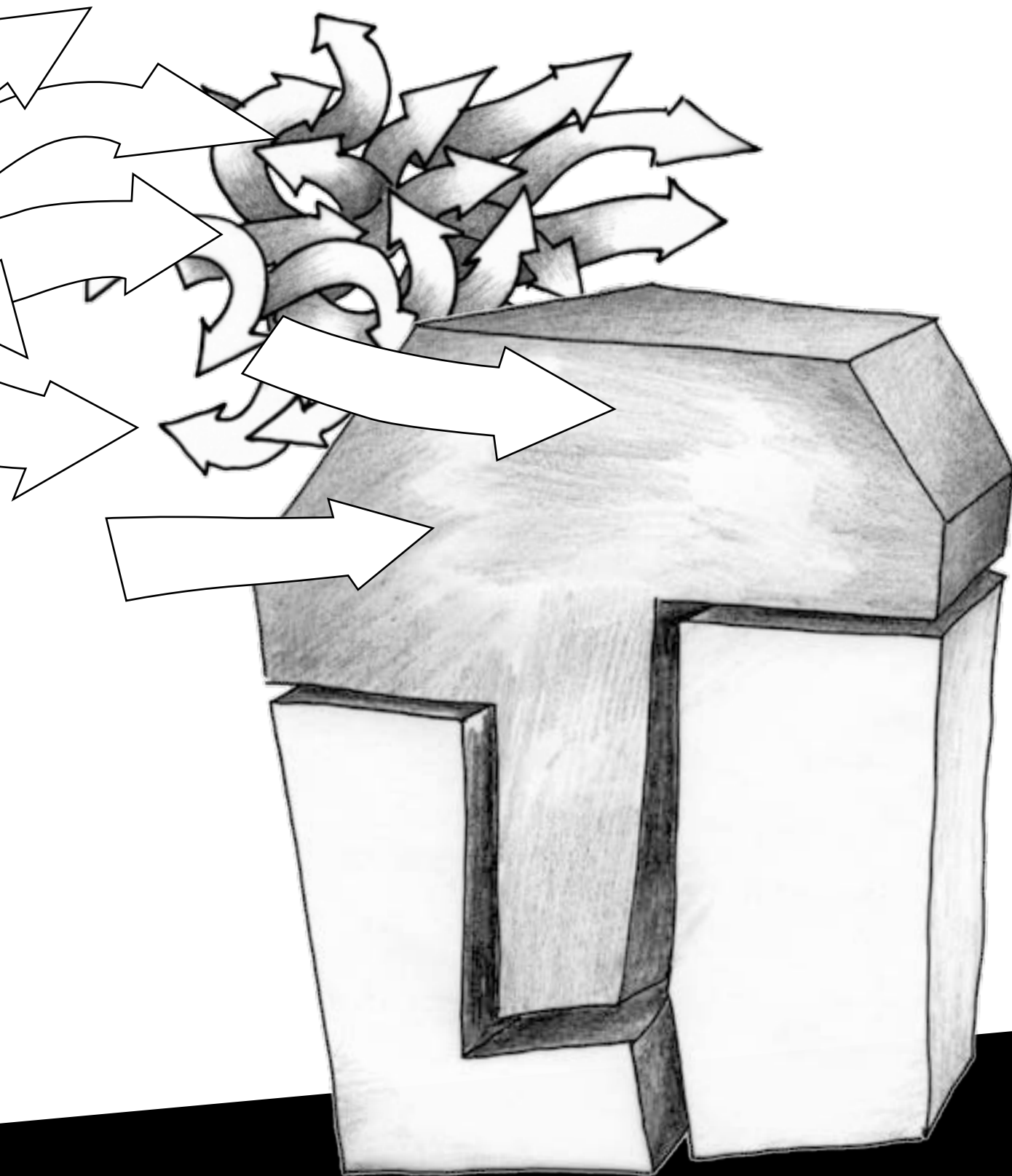


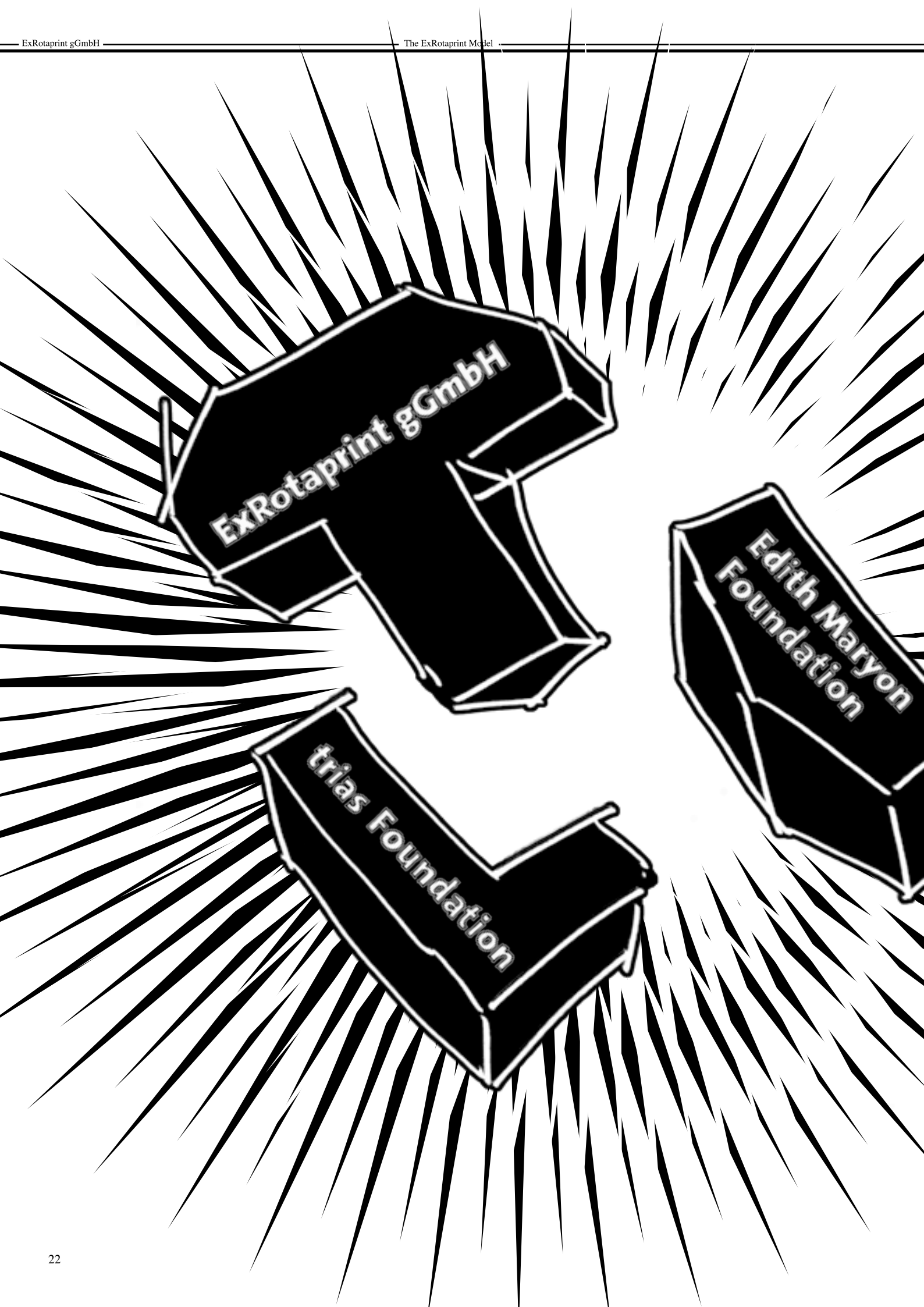
decisions and the choice of where to live. Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, and Friedrichschain have all become homogenized city districts in this way, reserved for a privileged income bracket. When comparing street scenes in Wedding and Mitte, the differences are drastic. Our experience—that the success of ExRotaprint was only possible in a precarious economic environment—has fostered a bond with the immediate surroundings. We view what's here, and its potential, in a positive light and we strengthen existing structures through our utilization plan. We ask ourselves how the processes of displacement can be suppressed, and how to develop something new and positive out of the existing surroundings.





# 3. The Legal Plinth






ExRotaprint gGmbH

Edith Maryon  
Foundation

trias Foundation



To ensure the project and to be able to shape its future, a solid legal basis needs to be created that minimizes possible risks that may result through a loss of ideas, the passage of time, or a turnover in stakeholders. This legal plinth is the unwavering foundation of the social sculpture, which cannot be misappropriated by individual interests. A heritable building rights contract with the trias Foundation and Stiftung Edith Maryon—along with a non-profit ExRotaprint gGmbH partnership agreement—forms a basis for the development of the project independent of all profits derived from direct ownership. Both contracts are the means for designing the future; their goals augment and are in accordance with one another.

## Heritable Building Right

Both the trias and Edith Maryon foundations approach property from a new perspective that circumvents real estate speculation. This makes them ideal partners for our project. We are interested in creating alternatives to the logic of ownership and the view of property as an endless resource. Profit from the appreciation in value of land or a building has the effect of excluding many others from this property and prevents the formation of social and cultural capital. The foundations work together with projects with an ecological, social, or cultural orientation, securing buildings or land in order to generate new opportunities for the surrounding communities.

The purchase price we negotiated was not financed by a bank loan. Instead we opted for a cooperative arrangement with the foundations. The foundations purchased the property on behalf of the non-profit ExRotaprint gGmbH, in order to then sign a 99-year heritable building rights contract. ExRotaprint pays yearly interest to both foundations.\* The heritable building right places ExRotaprint gGmbH in an ownership-equivalent position for the duration of that contract. We are responsible for all aspects of the

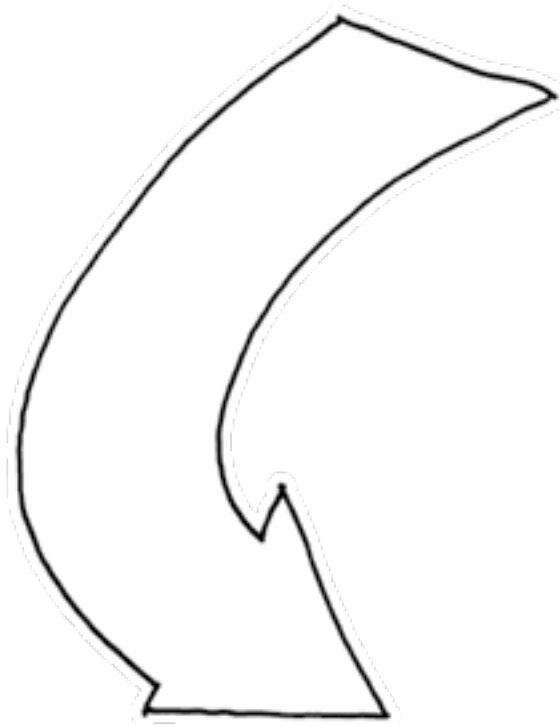
*\* The opportunities of heritable building rights can also be realized directly through an open-structured city development policy with state-owned properties.*

property related to finances and development; our only limitation is that we cannot sell it. Written into the heritable building right contract are our intentions to rent equal portions of the premises to work, art, and community, as well as a declaration of the socially integrative orientation of the project. If ExRotaprint gGmbH were to give up or lose its non-profit status, the yearly interest payment would increase dramatically. Accordingly, ExRotaprint has long-term security and can exist independently of those stakeholders involved in its inception.

## Non-profit Status

The founding of the non-profit ExRotaprint gGmbH was passed by majority within the Verein. Non-profit status dispels the conflict over partial ownership and allows for planning unencumbered by individual interests. ExRotaprint gGmbH partners do not profit from the income generated by the property and cannot realize any increase in value from a sale of their stake in the partnership. Thus a long-term and stable location is created that can be developed on its own terms. This is the profit of ExRotaprint. The historically listed status of the site made it possible to become a non-profit. The first objective of the ExRotaprint gGmbH partnership agreement is to preserve the historical site. The surplus from rent payments goes into renovating the buildings. Everyone involved is aware that the amount invested to purchase the property is far smaller than the amount that will go into the restoration of the buildings—spread out over many years, it will cost many times more. The second stated aim is to support art and culture. This allows us, in addition to shoring up the buildings, to also work on developing ideas and to free up means for other issues and goals. Thus ExRotaprint can, in the future, be a place for discussing art, culture, politics, and urban development.

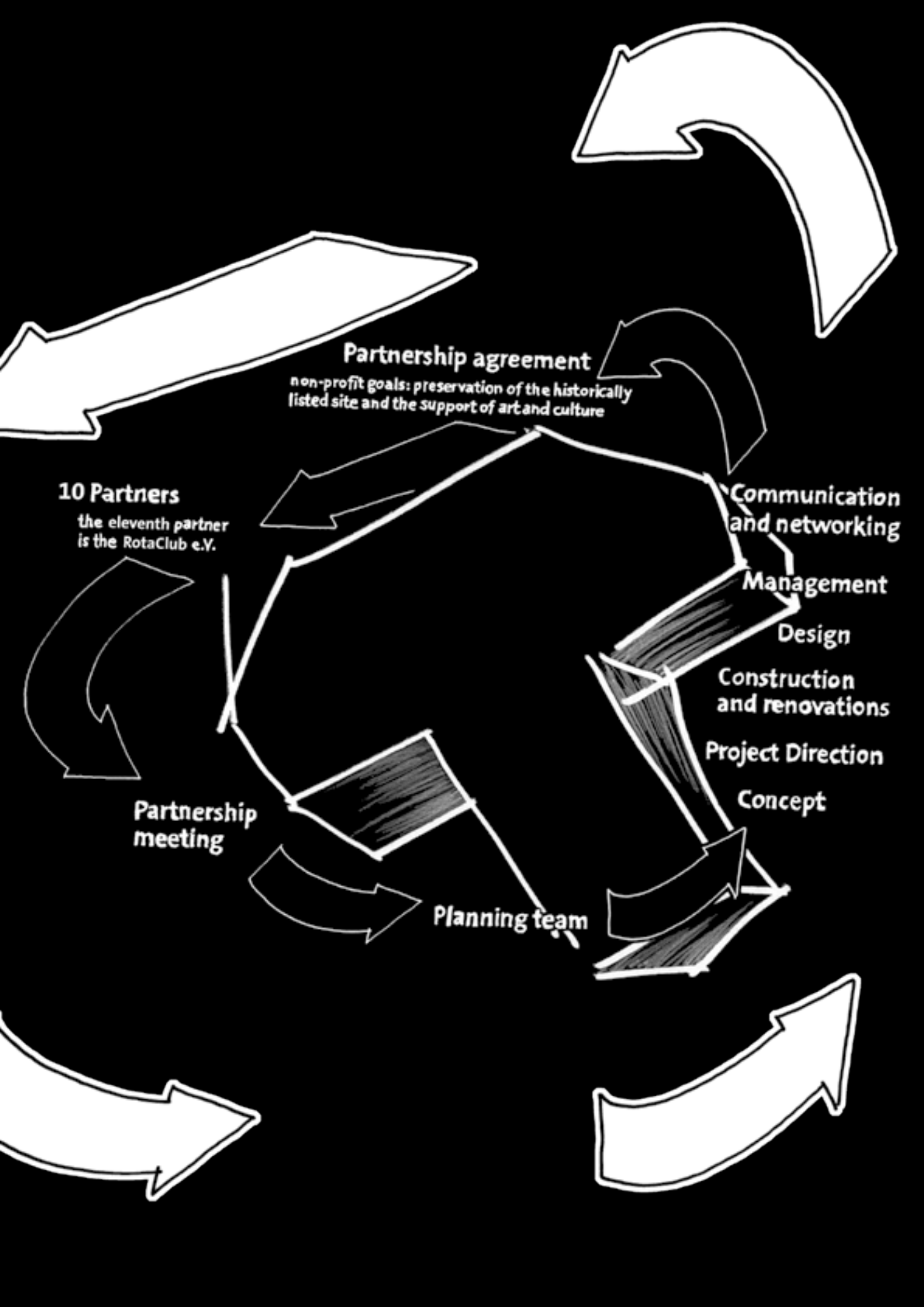
In terms of actually taking over the property, for reasons related to financing and liability, a gGmbH (non-profit organization) is more secure and provides more stability than an e.V. or Verein (association). Some members of ExRotaprint e.V. became partners of ExRotaprint gGmbH and with their share in the organization put up the start capital. The Verein remains a part of the organization as an open platform for renters and has a fixed proportional vote in the gGmbH. In 2013 ExRotaprint e.V. was renamed RotaClub e.V.. The board of the Verein has the same view over the

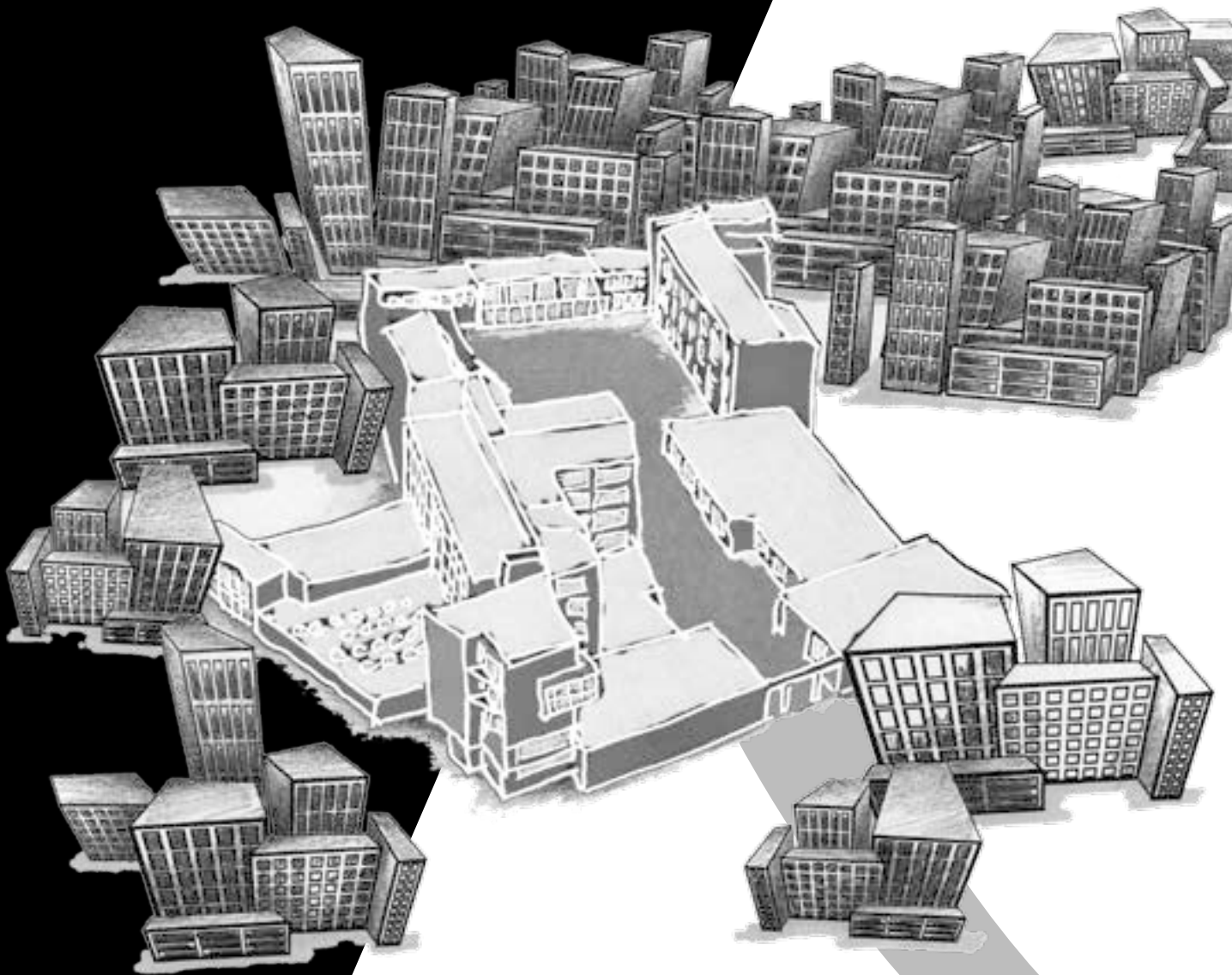


organization as the partners and exercises the same rights and responsibilities. Each renter can join the Verein and play a part in the decision-making process of the non-profit ExRotaprint gGmbH directly and without money.

The planning team of ExRotaprint gGmbH works on consolidating the buildings making up the historically listed site, the financing, the redesign of the premises, the restructuring of the rental spaces, the renting of the spaces, the designing of the project and project communications. We have allied ourselves with architects who share our belief in open-minded urban development and a social city.







## 4. Other Money

ExRotaprint is an ownership model without private ownership. Rents are the economic basis. Rent income finances the renovation, building modifications, the annual interest payment on the heritable building right, and operational costs. Work is paid.

The organizational sustainability of the project hinges on the financial costs. Needed renovations are not allowed to threaten rent stability for social, cultural, and commercial uses. The existing rental

contracts are the foundation of our investment planning; creating additional social benefits and preventing displacement are the defining factors.

Buying property with a standard bank loan means an outflow of capital for private uses. Loans are passed on by banks, sold, and come due when problems arise. The purchase price we negotiated might one day lead to expectations of profit making, thereby inspiring a desire to capitalize on this. If the project were to fail, ownership of the site would revert to a bank.

By bringing in the foundations we were able to avoid the dependency and risks connected to such structures. The annual interest payments ExRotaprint makes to the foundations refines the purchase of the site and enables the foundations to push through similarly-oriented new projects. A cash flow is created that goes beyond ExRotaprint and our own interests. The foundation's money flow is transparent and linked to goals that make sense for society.

To finance the renovation ExRotaprint took out a building loan with a Swiss pension fund. The pension fund requires investors to invest their pension payments not in the stock market but in sustainable, social-oriented, ecological, or cultural projects. The investors prefer stable interest returns and are protected from the rollercoaster ride of the stock markets. Here the interest paid by ExRotaprint also flows into another "self-aware" money cycle. Money is tied to goals. It is a means to an end. The will to see a vision through is social capital, and it is a value that can be written into a contract. The commitment of stakeholders guarantees a stability that can secure a loan more effectively than private capital.

The money ExRotaprint earns is invested in maintaining the historically listed site, it makes organizing events and social interventions possible, and, over the long term, it benefits the renters themselves, the district, and culture. Profit is not accumulated money but the capacity to act that this money generates. The flow of "other" money is not an unessential economic factor. It functions in parallel and in exchange with the traditional and speculative economy. Interventions and strategies of demarcation are possible.

**Edith Maryon Foundation, Basel**  
**Trias Foundation, Hattingen**

- jointly purchased the site in 2007 so that a heritable building right contract could be signed with ExRotaprint gGmbH.
- non-profit goals of the foundations: promoting alternative models for dealing with land and property.
- the interest payment refinances the purchase and allows the foundations to foster new projects.

**The heritable building right contract** annual interest payments for 99 years, agreed upon goals: renting to businesses, art, & community; no displacement through

**The building loan** interest and repayment

**CoOpera**  
**Sammelstiftung PUK, Ittigen**

- Swiss pension fund that invests its capital in sustainable projects.
- in 2009 it signed a loan contract with ExRotaprint gGmbH for over 2.3 million Euros for the renovation of the buildings.

events, workshops, lectures,  
seminars, parties, exhibitions

discussion

networking

designing  
of the site

economic security  
for users

## ExRotaprint gGmbH

- founded in 2007 as a non-profit organization to manage and develop the ExRotaprint site.

- non-profit goals of the gGmbH: preservation of the historically listed site and the support of art and culture.

- rents provide the economic basis for realizing the goals of the organization.

- rent income finances operating costs, annual interest payments, and the building loan.

- ten partners, mostly renters, the eleventh partner is

### RotaClub e.V.

formerly ExRotaprint e.V., renamed in 2013

- founded in 2005, negotiated the purchase of the property with Liegenschaftsfonds Berlin, appointed the foundations as buyers.

- platform for the interests of renters on site.

- minimal annual contribution, money should not play an exclusionary role.

- open to all renters.

with appreciation

upgrading of the buildings

money for defined goals

the site cannot be sold again

100

90

80

70

60

50

40

30

20

10

0

The Planning Team:  
 Daniela Brahm is an initiator of ExRotaprint, she keeps everything on track, drafts concepts, and, in her artwork, re-envision desolate urban space as an accelerated icon of pictorial space; Les Schliesser is an initiator of ExRotaprint, ponders over “point zeros” and other possibilities as an artist, drafts concepts, and works for the *MiethäuserSyndikat* (Apartment-House Syndicate), renovates buildings for self-determining leftists, and helped us evaluate risks while disguising others, today he works here as a planner/architect; Oliver Clemens is co-editor of *An Architektur* and works here as a particularly engaged planner/architect.

# Imprint

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 Content: 48.5% Daniela Brahm, 48.5% Les Schliesser, 2% Oliver Clemens, 0.5% Julia Boeck, 0.5% Heike Borgemeister  
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**ExRotaprint  
accumulates  
social  
capital.**



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