PIETER VERGEER

VOLKSBÜHNE, A STAGE FOR THE EVERYDAY

a research into the architectural transformation of the
Berlin Volksbühne into social infrastructure

Bodies & Building Studio

"I can take any **empty space** and call it a bare **stage**. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and **this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged**."

(Peter Brook, 1968)

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INTRODUCTION

01

Thesis topic

Prestigious venues like opera halls and theatres are what come to mind when one thinks about spaces for performing arts. Highly specific buildings with a strict division between audience and performer. However, the spectrum of space for performing arts is broader than that. Renowned theatre producer Peter Brook wrote: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged." (1995) As such, the essence of performance could be defined as 'anything someone does while someone else consciously watches'. This broader interpretation of performing arts makes it more accessible, both to perform as well as to observe. It allows performance to become an inclusive activity available to all the people in the everyday.

This thesis is an investigation into the role of architectural space in this broader definition of performance. The topic is investigated through a case study of the Volksbühne in Berlin, which literally translated means *People's Stage* and was a movement founded to make theatre-going possible for the working class. The Volksbühne was chosen as a case study because the movement is a prime example how performing arts were made accessible to all the people - rather than just the elite – in Berlin. The current challenges faced by the theatre in adapting to its changed societal context provide an opportunity to examine the role of an architectural transformation of the Volkbühne's monumental venue.

Problem statement

According to sociologist Eric Klinenberg, the world needs social infrastructure: 'shared spaces - physical, real-world locations where people across all strata, and ages, and races, and creeds bump into each other and form connections.' Benefits of these shared spaces are increasing tolerance and equality (2018). Places for performing arts, due to their power to connect people through shared experiences, are eminently suitable to be social infrastructure. However, in current society, performing arts primarily take place behind the closed doors of – oftentimes – prestigious institutions. The aim of this investigation is to design a place that makes performance available to all the people, at the heart of society.

The Volksbühne is an institution that has as its goal to make performing arts available to the people. However, nowadays it does not anymore succeed in this aim because its societal context rapidly changed after the fall of the wall. This results in visitor numbers going down and the Volksbühne losing its role in society. The goal of this research is to investigate if an architectural transformation of the monumental Volksbühne venue can reposition the institution as social infrastructure in the 21st century where people of different background come together through the performing arts.

Research question(s)

The research question that was formulated is as follows:

"How to design a space that brings people of different backgrounds together through the performing arts in the 21st century?"

This question is investigated through research into theory and history of the performing arts, as well as through research into shared spaces where people of different backgrounds come together. This has resulted in the following two sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: "How are the performing arts a social affair?"

Sub-question 2: "What space brings people of different backgrounds together?"

Besides these two sub-questions, three design questions related the case study have been formulated as well, according to the topics: client, program and site. These

questions are more specifically related to the Volksbühne and therewith will aid the design process. These design questions are:

Client: What are the core values of the Volksbühne organisation?

Program: What are the architectural qualities of performance spaces that allow for spontaneous and flexible performance?

Site: What is the monumental value of the Volksbühne venue?

Figure 1.1 Spontaneous performance Parco Dora, Turin

Figure 1.2 Spontaneous performance Central Park, NY

Figure 1.3 Spontaneous performance Cent Quatre Paris

RESEARCH

02

Theoretical framework

To answer the research questions, it is important to understand existing theories and previous research that was done in this field. This theoretical framework is structured along the two sub-questions.

Performance as a social affair

To understand the social character of performance, the definition of what performance is needs to be understood. Peter Brook - theatre director and cofounder of *Royal Shakespeare Company* – his book about performance and the stage called *The Empty Space* provides understanding of the scope of the definition of performance and performing arts. In the book he describes four types of theatre: deadly theatre, holy theatre, rough theatre and immediate theatre. Deadly theatre being passive an un-engaging theatre and holy theatre being spiritual but unengaging due to a lack of relatability. He describes the third, rough theatre to be based on spontaneity, impulse, and raw emotional expression, which risks lacking depth. Immediate theatre is combination of the best of the holy and the best of the rough to create the best theatrical performance. Brook is also known for the quote "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged." (1995), in which he deconstructs the act of performance to its essence and claims that performance can take place in any empty space with an observer.

Jan Gehl, architect and urbanist, wrote about observers in the public realm and how acts of the everyday can be considered performance. He writes that public spaces serve as stages for 'theatre of everyday life', facilitated by the design of space (Gehl, 1987). Also sociologist Richard Sennett writes about acts of the everyday as performance in the book *The Fall of Public Man* (1977), speaking of the 'theatricality of social life.

The reason that performing arts can establish connections between people is due to mutual experience it creates. It has been investigated that this connection is made between people of different backgrounds as well. (Allport, 1954) Besides, research show that positive experiences are experienced more positively when experienced together with other people (Boothby, Clark, & Bargh, 2014). This explains the connective power of the performing arts.

Also historically, performing arts were considered to be a social affair. The agora – town squares – of the ancient Greeks are described to, besides their primary use of politics and discussion, be used for performance (Green, 1994). Also in renaissance Venice, town squares are described to be places for performance that were enjoyed by socially diverse crowds. These performances allowed people to meet and connect (Snowman, 2010).

Figure 2.1 Performance is described to have been enjoyed by socially diverse crowds on town squares in Venice during the Renaissance (Snowman, 2010)

Spaces that bring people of different backgrounds together

In his book *Palaces for the People*, Eric Klinenberg describes spaces where people of different backgrounds come together as social infrastructure. He writes that "a healthy community is not simply held together by shared values, but by shared spaces: physical, real-world locations where people across all strata, and ages, and races, and creeds bump into each other and form connections." Examples of social infrastructure he describes are libraries, churches, playgrounds and benches. The following key conditions are described to indicate space as social infrastructure.

- **Accessible:** accessible to a diverse range of people by minimizing physical barriers and economic constraints
- **Socially interactive:** space where people come together
- **Multifunctional:** accommodate a variety of functions and activities
- **Engaging:** encourage civic participation
- **Spontaneous:** facilitate unplanned and serendipitous encounters contributes to formation of social bonds
- **Flexible:** be able to respond to changing societal and demographic trends

Henri Lefebvre wrote about space and its social implications in his book The *Production of Space* (1974). In the book he introduces the space triad, which distinguishes perceived space, conceived space and everyday space. He also describes how space is influenced by everyday activities and spatial injustice caused by unfair distribution of space in society.

An example of an architectural attempt to design flexible shared space for spontaneous activity is the Fun Palace concept by Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood (1961). Through designing a framework which allowed freedom for personal interpretation and interaction they "...synthesized influential ideas about how architecture could leverage advances in
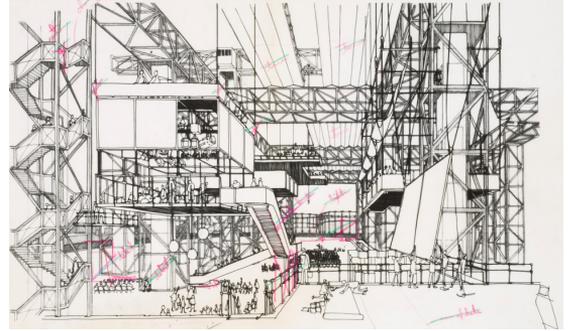

Figure 2.2 Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood's Fun Palace concept

science and technology to encourage social participation, personal initiative, and playful improvisation." The Fun Palace is even described to represent the 'ideal theatre', creating a Brechtian environment where the audience would become integral to the action. (Mathews, 2016)

Design questions

Three design questions related to the case study of the Volksbühne have been formulated according to the topics: client, program and site to aid the design process.

Design question 1

The aim of the first sub-question What are the core values of the Volksbühne's identity that should guide an architectural intervention? is to develop a better understanding of the Volksbühne and what the institute stands for. The book *The Volksbühne Movement: a history* by Cacil Davis written in 1998 provides insight into the origins of the Volksbühne movement and describes it as something that "could not have arisen in any other country [than Germany]", due to the moral and educational role theaters fulfilled in Germany. Besides, the rise of worker-class movements and occasional theater visits being regarded as normal were influential factors. It is also described how the movement has always been subject to critique and discussions due to conflicting

political, economic, and intellectual convictions. Based on the book by Davis, six core values can be described, which are: accessible, experimental, producing, equal, collaborative and political.

In the book *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* Volksbühne intendant Frank Castrof's influence on the institute is described. After the fall of the wall, Berlin's cultural world faced a problem. Due to the division, there were too many theaters for one re-united city to be funded. The Volksbühne faced closure but instead it was decided to appoint Frank Castrof director with the aim of putting together "a young ensemble with a thirst for artistic innovation and the courage to create contemporary, political relevant theatre". This appointment was successful and was the starting point of Castrof's 25-year directorship during which he managed to create revolutionary theatre for a diverse crowd of theatre-goers, unemployed students and the working class, trying to uphold Eastern values. This audience was described to be "active, engaged, often shouting out their approval or disapproval". Frank Castrofs' directorship at the Volksbühne has been of great influence on its current reputation and condition.

Design question 2

The second design question *What are the architectural qualities of performance spaces that allow for spontaneous and flexible performance?* should help define the requirements of a new space for performance in the Volksbühne. The books *Building for the Performing Arts* (Appleton, 1996) and *Theatre Buildings*, a design guide (Strong, 2010) offer extensive documentation on matters to be considered when designing a performance space, like seat arrangements, stage design, sightlines, and acoustics. Each type of performing arts has different requirements, which result in different spatial applications. For this reason, multipurpose venues tend to fail, although they can offer a solution when the priority

is not on offering the optimal conditions (Strong, 2010). The relation between the audience, the seat and the performer has been previously researched by Complex Projects student Edwin Scharringa (2023) and offers valuable insight. For instance, about the relevance of intimacy and immediacy for audience cohesion, which relates to the audience's feeling of being part of a shared experience.

Bertolt Brecht is an important name in the world of theatre when covering the relation between audience and performer, as he broke what was called "the fourth wall of theatre". He used the technique of speaking straight to the audience and as such breaking the boundary between performer and audience and did this with political, social and philosophical implications. This was the start of so called 'epic theatre' (David, 2015).

Design question 3

When dealing with the transformation of an existing building, knowing about its values and potentials is important. That is the aim of sub-question 3: *What elements of the existing Volksbühne venue bear architectural, emotional, and historical value?*

Due to its institutional and architectural significance, the Volksbühne is well documented and described in literature. The building was designed by German architect Oskar Kaufmann who is known for his theatre-design and construction was finished in 1914. When built, the building was literally in the "hands of the people" as the 14,500 shares were owned largely by small contributors (Davis, 2000). Architecturally, the building is characterized by its monumental shell limestone pillar façade, which due to its rounded shapes expresses Jugendstil features. The building is monumental in its positioning as well, situated at the end of an axis on the Rosa Luxemburg Strasse. Originally Kaufmann designed buildings to both sides of the
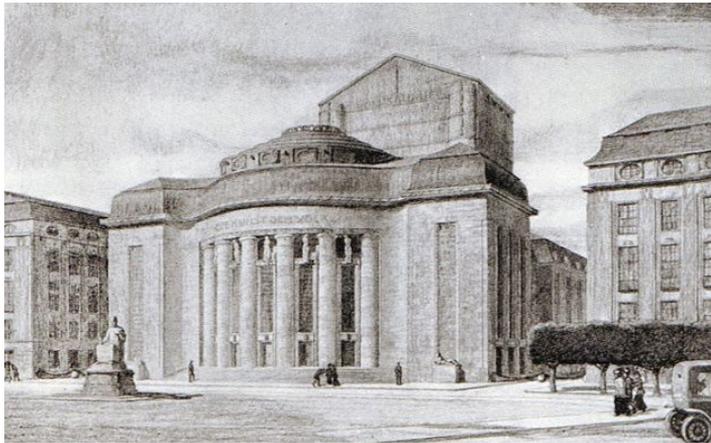
Figure 2.3 Volksbühne drawing as planned with neighbouring buildings (1914)

Figure 2.4 Volksbühne grand hall with horseshoe setup

Figure 2.5 Volksbühne destructed after the second world war

theatre (see image 2.2), but this plan was discontinued with the start of the first World War, right after the opening of the main venue.

Throughout time, multiple adjustments to the building were made. For instance, the grand hall, which was originally designed as a horseshoe opera-style auditorium (image 2.3) was after its destruction during a World War II bombing (image 2.4) redesigned into its current theatre-layout. Kaufmann's unconventional choice for a horseshoe form, which is known as a 'rang theatre' and does not fit the character of a people's theatre was originally motivated by an aim to create a larger capacity. The Red and Green Salon, the Volksbühne's two multi-purpose halls for small scale performance are post-war additions from 1954.

When dealing with an architectural monument, there are different positions an architect can take. Depending on the existing building, approaches can be conservation, preservation, renovation, and restoration. In the book Old Buildings, New Forms (Bollack, 2013) restorative reuse is distinguished into the strategies inserting, wrapping, juxtaposing, weaving and superimposing.

Besides the approach to reuse from the perspective of monumentality, there are also theories on the material reuse of buildings. Reduce, reuse, recycle (Petzet & Heilmeyer, 2012), and Reuse in Construction, a Compendium of Circular Architecture (Stricker, Brandi, & Sonderegge, 2022) being two examples of this. Both emphasize the importance of a critical assessment of the existing material potential to stimulate circularity.

Relevance

The topic of this thesis, an investigation into space that brings people of different backgrounds together through the performing arts, fits within the Complex Projects studio' broader research into the building type opera. Particularly because it aims to define a new building type for performance that does not yet exist but could be of value to society in the 21st century. Besides, because the case study revolves around the reuse of an existing structure, it fits well within the perspective of the studio-group which focusses on the theme energy.

The aim of this thesis is to architecturally transform the Volksbühne so that it makes performance available to all the people at the heart of society. That makes this project an example of a space for performing arts that fulfils the role of social infrastructure. This is not only relevant in the context of Berlin, but an idea that can be applied in other cities around the world as well to bring people of different backgrounds together and therewith increase tolerance and equality. As such the project also serves as an example of the role architects can play in dealing with societal challenges through designing shared spaces.
Besides, the project serves as a case study in architectural reuse to revitalise a highly specific building. From a sustainability point of view, it is important to regularly evaluate if a public building still fulfils a role in society or should be transformed to optimize its embodied energy. This is particularly important to buildings with a highly specific purpose as those cannot easily be transformed into another function once they have fallen out of use.

RESEARCH METHODS

03

Research methods

The overall methodology is the development of a design brief that will guide the architectural design of the case study: an architectural transformation of the Volksbühne theatre in Berlin. This case study, in combination with the literature study according to the two formulated sub-questions, serves to answer the main research question. The three design questions according to the topics client, program and site aid the design process of the case study and build upon the literature research.

Client

The sub-question *What are the core values of the Volksbühne's organisation?* is meant to create an understanding of the Volksbühne's identity and goals. This is researched through literature and archival studies and an extensive investigation into recent affairs concerning the institute through (newspaper) articles. Besides, on-site interviews are conducted with members of the Volksbühne ensemble who work in different departments of the organisation such as theatre-production and the workshop. Transcripts of the conducted interviews are provided in the appendix. Also shows at the venue are visited to get an impression of the Volksbühne's audience and the type of performance they do.

Figure 3.1 Site visit to Volksbühne workshop on december 18th 2023. Own image

Program

To define what the program of the Volksbühne should be in the 21st century it is important to document and analyse the program of the existing theatre and workshop. Besides, research needs to be conducted into the properties of spaces for spontaneous and flexible performance. This is done through the research question *What are the architectural qualities of performance spaces that allow for spontaneous and flexible performance?* and is investigated in a case study analysis. Lastly, benchmarking is applied as a method to define the sizes and relations of the venue's renewed program. Five venues were picked for the case study analysis into spaces for spontaneous and flexible performance. These venues are and the outcome has been visualised on the right:

-**Cent Quatre** in Paris, designed by Atelier Novembre
-**Theaterplein** in Antwerpen by Bernardo Secchi and Dirk Jaspaert
- **Teatro Oficina** in São Paolo by Lina Bo Bardi and Edson Elito
- **Scheepvaartmuseum** in Amsterdam by DOK Architecten
- **Aviva Studios** in Manchester by OMA

The spontaneous performance space Cent Quatre is Paris has been visited for an in-person case study analysis to get an understanding of the condition that stimulate and influence spontaneous performance.

Due to the repertory/producing nature of the Volksbühne, a good understanding of the processes involved in this particular type of venue need to be obtained. For this plans of REP Repertory Theatre Birmingham and Norwegian National Opera and Ballet are used as reference and benchmarking.

Site

Considering the design revolves around an existing monumental building, it is important to understand its value, which led to the third sub-question: What is the monumental

Cent Quatre, Paris

Area	1960m²
Floor dimensions	22,5 x 87m
Height	14m max
Capacity	3000 standing
Shape	Longitudinal hall with galleries on both sides
Acoustic measures	unknown
Features	- moveable mirrors
	- crane system
	- smooth floor
	- part of the space slightly elevated
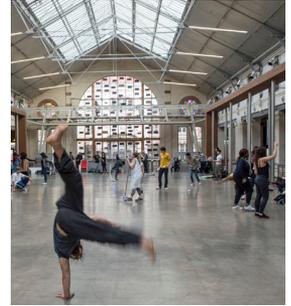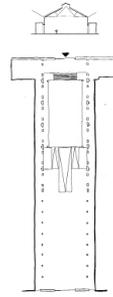
Theaterplein, Antwerpen

Area	5625m²
Floor dimensions	75 x75m
Height	32m
Capacity	not a lot of reference for professional performance
Shape	square shaped roof over outdoor square
Acoustic measures	non (outdoors)
Features	- used for markets on saturdays
	- located next to Antwerp City Theatre
	- used for spontaneous street 'performance', creative expression
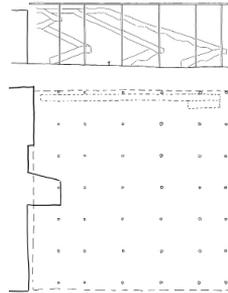
Teatro Oficina, Sao Paolo

Area	900m²
Floor dimensions	30 x 30m
Height	15m max
Capacity	1000 standing
Shape	Square shaped, surrounded by gallery
Acoustic measures	perforated floor (still very high reverberation time, also because it's a monument renovation
Features	- architectural quality, also when empty
	- monumental and heritage character
	- ambience during performance due to special setting

Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam

Area	350m²
Floor dimensions	9 x 42m
Height	10m
Capacity	350 seated
Shape	Longitudinal hall with galleries
Acoustic measures	unknown
Features	- attempt to bring street life into theatre
	- glass wall on one side brings outdoor life inside and creates a backdrop for the performance
	-
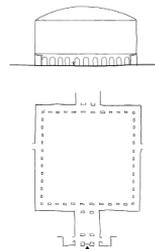
Aviva Studios, Manchester

Area	2110m²
Floor dimensions	33 x 6m
Height	21m
Capacity	max. 5000 standing
Shape	large rectangular hall
Acoustic measures	flexible (due to extensive technical grid roof)
Features	- moveable walls for flexible programming
	- large hall connected to auditorium (hall can be used as back of house/stage)
	- trucks can enter right into the space
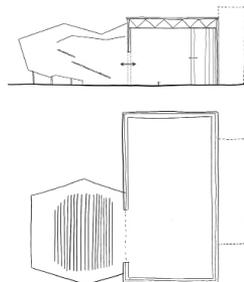
value of the Volksbühne venue? For this, literature research is conducted into the work of architect Oskar Kaufmann and the description of the building in the Berlin Listed Monument documentation is examined. This is accompanied by tracing of plans, photography, and on-site documentation. Immaterial value will be assessed by speaking to Volksbühne members, after which their stories are to be documented in plans. An investigation into the different theoretical architectural approaches to reusing a building will help to take a position into the relation to the existing monument. Besides, the site should be investigated to according to the requirements as they are described in the energy group work. These requirements are geothermal potential for the building's energy usage and testing the site on the proximity to mobility requirement.

DESIGN
BRIEF

04

Figure 4.1 collage of the Volksbühne concept

Client

The Volksbühne is a renowned institution that holds a similar cultural status as Berghain (Oltermann, 2016). However, as the organisation struggles to position itself in its changed societal context, it needs to urgently redefine its identity to preserve this reputation. This new identity revolves around its role as social infrastructure: being a shared social space that connects people of different backgrounds through the performing arts. In this role, the Volksbühne will be an example of an institution – and related building type - that fulfils a crucial role in society in cities around the world.

Ambitions

- Rethink Volksbühne identity while preserving its core values
- Maintain an independant relation with stakeholder Ministry of Culture and Europe
- Be a place for the people of Berlin

Core values

Dealing with an organisation that has existed for over 130 years, it is important to understand its core values to be able to appropriately intervene in its organisation. For that reason, research has been conducted into the organisation's history and identity. As a result the following six core values have been defined:

Accessibility
Accessibility is at the heart of the Volksbühne identity. It was founded with the aim to make theatre accessible to the working class and nowadays still has the ambition to make the performing art accessible to all the people.

Production
What makes the Volksbühne unique is its repertory character. The conservation of this approach is important and was one of the largest reason for the opposition against Chris Dercon.

Experimentation
The Volksbühne should reposition itself as the most experimental venue in Berlin, through inclusion of many different forms of performing arts, combining them, and seeking the boundaries of what's possible.

Equality
The Volksbühne strives for equality among all members of the ensemble, no matter if you are a star performer, cleaner or produce the decors. The ensemble is seen as a collective in which everyone takes up a crucial role.

Collaboration
The Volksbühne wants to- and should open up to other artists and creators, particularly those who don't get a stage elsewhere in the city. This will not only positively impact the performances of the Volksbühne ensemble, but is beneficial for Berlinís entire performing arts industry.

Expression
The Volksbühne is an expressive organisation. It concerns itself with and expresses itself about what is happening in the world, particularly politically. This is done through its performances, but also through the banners on the theatre walls. The organisation has a voice, the voice of the people, and what's to make it sound.

Berlin Ministry of Culture and Europe as stakeholder

Yearly the Volksbühne receives subsidies from the government for its activities. In 2022 the subsidies amounted 22,7 million euros, coming down to 174 euros per seat per show. Therefore, besides the Volksbühne as a client, the *Berlin Ministry of Culture and Europe* is an important stakeholder as well, as they are the organisation's main income stream. It is important that this is an independent relationship, meaning the Volksbühne continues keeps its artistic freedom of expression and any form of censorship is prevented. Political expression is an important aspect of the Volksbühne's identity and what makes the venue valuable in society. The organisation's aim is – and

has always been – to educate and inform and people. The new Volksbühne should continue to be a place with artistic freedom of expression, without external interests influencing this freedom.

Users

Currently the users of the Volksbühne are: the Volksbühne employees, visiting artists and attenders with a ticket.
The new Volksbühne will open itself up to all the people of Berlin. It will be an accessible and open environment which invites a variety of people with different backgrounds through a public multifunctional dynamic program. It will be a place for Berliners, meaning that the building should be exciting enough to encourage people to come take a look, but not too exciting that it becomes a tourist destination and therewith loses its role as a place for the citizens of the city.
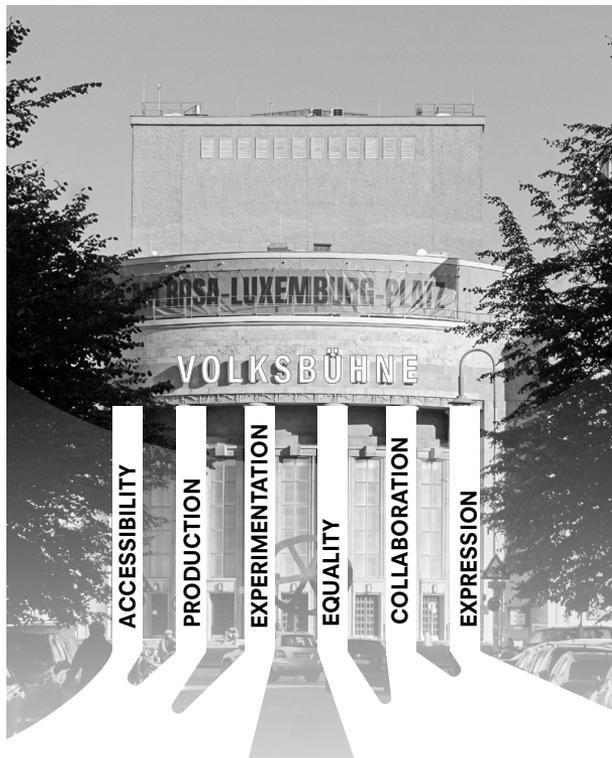

**Figure 4.2** a manifesto of the Volksbühnes key values

STAKEHOLDERS

Berlin Ministry
of Culture

BERLIN
Senatsverwaltung
für Kultur und
Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt

provides
satisfied and educated
citizens

provides
€
through subsidies

USERS

Volksbühne
am Rosa Luxemburg Platz

provide more **diverse voices** to

provides **a stage** to

THE PEOPLE
OF BERLIN

part of it will become

employees:
production
technical staff
facility support
etc.

actors

provides € through ticket fees

provides **performance** to

visitors
with a
ticket

provide **diversity and cultural
value** of the Volksbühne

provides **a stage** to emerging
artists

provides **performance** to

visiting artists

STAFF   PERFORMERS   AUDIENCE

Figure 4.3 stakeholder-user diagram

Program

The program fulfills a crucial role in the transformation of the Volksbühne as a dynamic and exciting 21st century stage for the everyday. For this the key conditions for social infrastructure as defined in Eric Klinenberg's Palaces for the People have been evaluated. To attract a diverse range of people, both a large variety of performing arts should be offered, as well as subsidiary functions to turn the Volksbühne into a place of all-day activity. These functions should exist simultaneously rather than sequential, so that different social groups mix and curiosity is triggered to explore other parts of the building. To establish the Volksbühne as an open and accessible institution, (part of) the building is publicly accessible so that the vibrant and performative character of the building can be experienced without a ticket.

Ambitions

- **All day long and multi-functional**
- **Definition of performance expanded**
- **Attractive to a diverse group of people**
- **Publicly accessible**

Publicly accessible

In the current situation, the Volksbühne venue is not publicly accessible. The venue's doors can only be passed with a ticket for a show. To truly be a stage for the people, public space will be provided that is accessible without a ticket or reservation. The Volksplatz will be the center of this accessibility at the heart of the venue. The canteen and exhibition space (where décors of previous shows are exhibited) are also open to everyone without a ticket or reservation. Besides the Volksplatz connects to the front of house.
Besides interior public space, the new plan will involve the design of outside public space as well. This is done to make up for existing public space that is removed due to the building's expansion. This outdoor space can be positioned both on street level or as a roofscape.

Buffer between Front-of-House and Back-of-House

The Volksbühne abandons the typical separation between front-of-house and back-of-house of traditional performing arts venues. Instead, functions are added which act as a buffer between front of house and back of house. These functions are the workshop, rehearsal studios and canteen. The workshop and rehearsal rooms are used both by the Volksbühne ensemble as well as by the public on reservation. The canteen is part of this buffer as well. It is used as the canteen of the employees of the Volksbühne and is also open to the public to stimulate interaction between these groups and attract visitors.

This is also done from an energy perspective, as this shared use allows the space to be used more efficiently and therewith prevents unnecessary additional construction elsewhere.

Performance spaces

Of the existing performance spaces, the grand hall is preserved due to its monumental value. The red and green salon are to be replaced by larger and more advanced halls but will keep the names red- and green salon as a reference to the original halls. The upgrades of these halls will allow for a broader range of professional performance to take place and therewith expand the Volksbühne's artistic scope. The new red salon will have a capacity of 500 people standing, and the green salon will have a capacity of 300 people seated.

Besides these three halls for professional performance, the transformation of the Volksbühne involves the introduction of the Volksplatz: a public space for spontaneous performance, for and by the people of Berlin. Half of this hall can be used for professional performance with a flexible layout, therewith responding to the Volksbühne's ambition to experiment and look for the boundaries in their performance. This large flexible space can also be used to receive a variety of

visiting artists that require a larger audience or freedom in their décor- or stage design. The characteristics of this large hall of about 2000m2 have been defined based on a case study analysis of similar halls for spontaneous and flexible performance.

Workshop

Currently the Volksbühne organisation is divided between the theatre and the workshop. After the architectural transformation, the workshop will be integrated in the Volksbühne theatre to bring the entire organisation under one roof. This will improve the organisation's identity and fits its core value of equality among the members. Also, the creation of the décor pieces can be considered an act of performance and therewith add to the dynamic and creative atmosphere of the Volksbühne. Moving the workshop into the venue also reduces truck movement between the workshop and the venue and as such save energy.

Exhibition

Connected to the Volksplatz is the exhibition space which displays set pieces and costumes of previous Volksbühne performances. This exhibition aims to be an expression of the Volksbühne's repertory identity but also provides a publicly accessible space that is free for anyone to visit.

Reuse

As the new program of the Volksbühne is about 60% larger than the existing program, an expansion of the venue is necessary. The existing program has been critically assessed to evaluate what spaces have fallen out of use or can be combined in the new program. Examples of this are the unused foyer space on the second floor and the offices of the Volksbühne workshop which are to be combined with the theatre's office space. Also integrating the workshop in the venue means a smaller assembly

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Program bar

existing situation

netto area:
12.500m²
+ 1940m²

new situation

netto area:
23.000m²

PUBLIC PROGRAM

new situation (F.O.H.):
1300m² — foyer
300m² — exhibition
1200m² — workshop
2000m² — rehearsal studios
500m² — canteen

new situation (B.O.H.):
2000m² — Volksplatz
flexible performance space
2600m² — grand auditorium / red salon / green salon
2200m² — backstage
1250m² — offices
1900m² — production
5100m² — technical/facility support

existing situation (F.O.H.):
1990m² — foyer

existing situation (B.O.H.):
2230m² — auditoriums
1240m² — backstage
920m² — offices
1760m² — production
4350m² — support facility

1940m² — workshop

F.O.H.

B.O.H.

Figure 4.4 program bar

32

Program relation scheme

employee & artist entrance

PRODUCTION

OFFICES

FACILITY SUPPORT

goods entrance - facility

BACKSTAGE

goods entrance - performance

canteen entrance

VOLKSBÜHNE CANTEEN

WORKSHOP

REHEARSAL STUDIOS

GRAND HALL

RED SALON

GREEN SALON

BACK OF HOUSE

FRONT OF HOUSE

R

R

FOYER

exhibition entrance

EXHIBITION

VOLKSPLATZ

FLEXIBLE PERFORMANCE SPACE

OUTDOOR PUBLIC SPACE

Figure 4.5 program relation scheme

Program-time diagram

| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 00 |

Volksplatz

exhibition

canteen

foyer

auditorium

workshop

rehearsal studios

offices/production

backstage
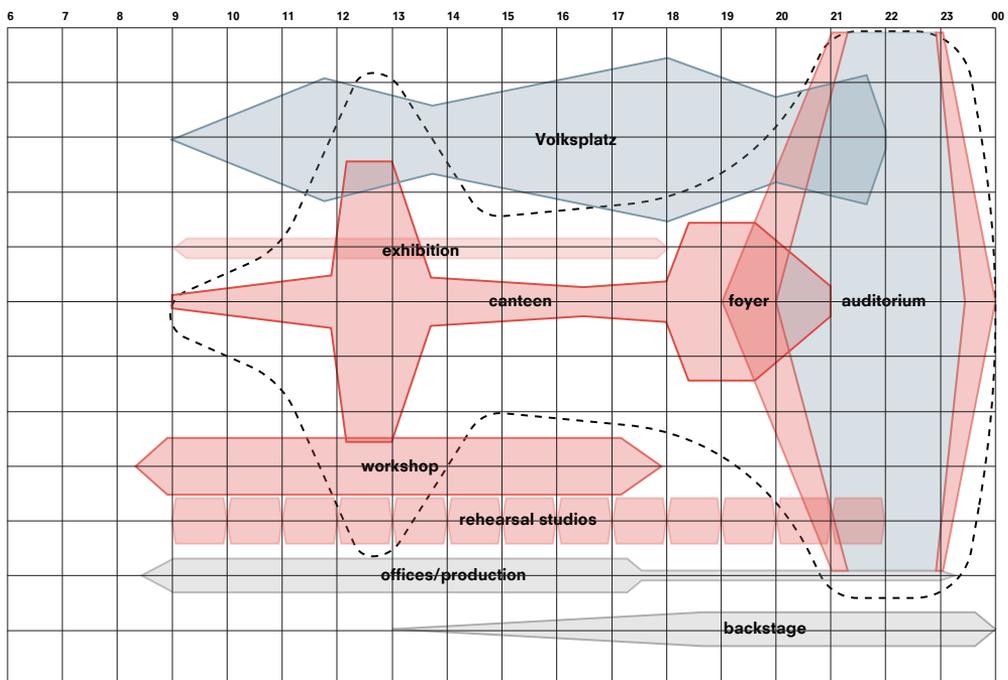
Figure 4.6 program-time diagram

Keyspace: Volksplatz

PERFORMANCE
SUPPORT

MIN. FREE HEIGHT 14 METERS

LONGITUDINAL DIRECTION

20-25 METERS
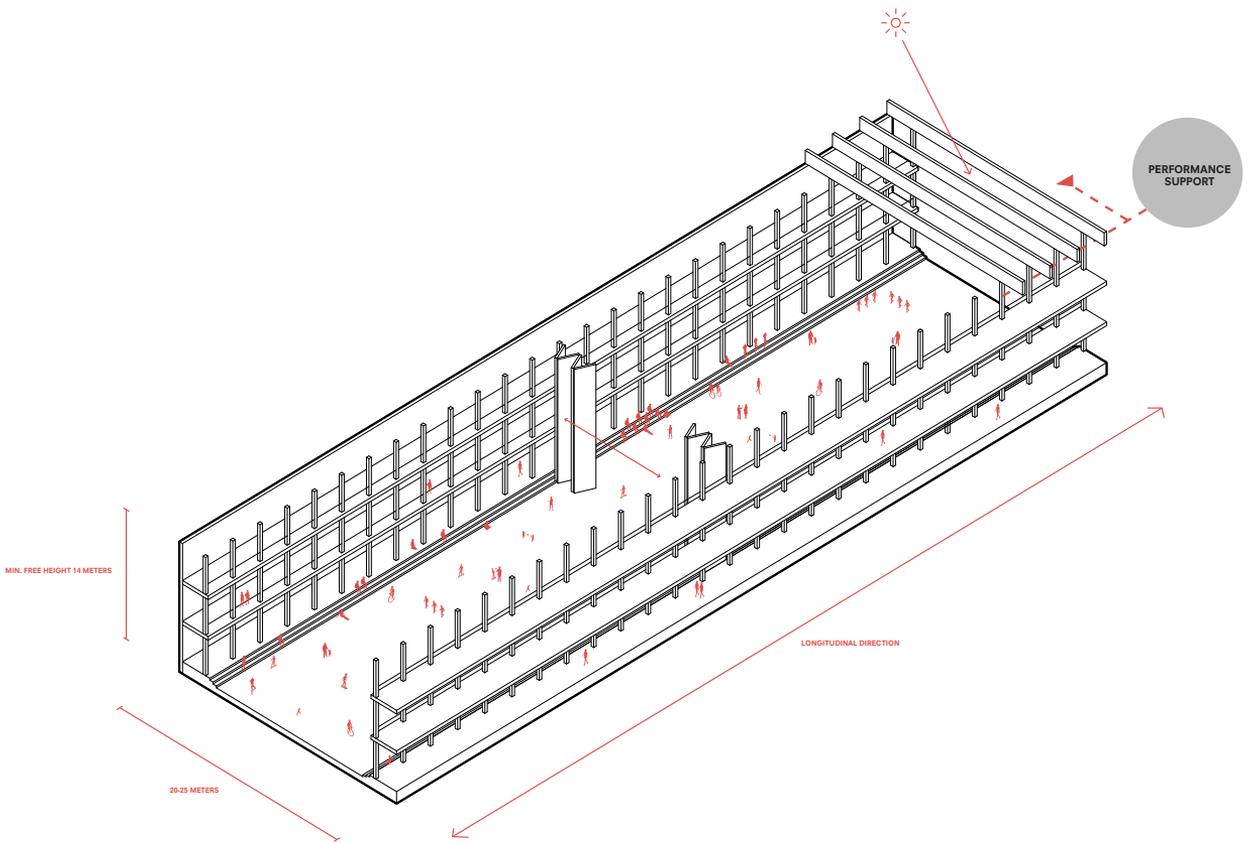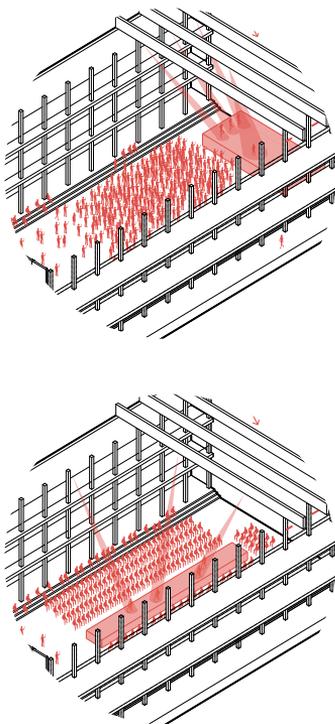
Figure 4.8 key space: professional event setup

REQUIREMENTS

Flexible division between spontaneous and professional performance space
Capacity: prof. space: 1000 seats.
Climate: temperature can be vary based on season and weather
Acoustics: reverberation time: adjustable between 1,8s and 2,0s
Daylight: prof. space to be dimmed
Noise disturbance: consider residential surroundings

AMBITIONS

Position:
- At the heart of the building, connecting functions
- On the ground floor
- Close connection to outside

Architectural features:
- Gallery to provide leveled space to view performance and provide subbtle distinguishment between performer and audience
- Space should have architectural quality, also when empty

Functionality:
- Part of the Volksbühne should always be accessible for flexible performance

Site

Rosa Luxemburg Platz

The site - back then called Bülow Platz - was originally at the heart of the working-class district, therewith making a strong connection with the Volksbühne's intended audience. However, after the fall of the wall, the neighbourhood has faced rapid gentrification, which poses a challenge to attract a diverse group of visitors. It's position right at the exit of the U-bahn station offers a solution to this situation however, as it allows everyone to reach the Volksbühne easily without a lot of exposure to the gentrified character of its surroundings.

Besides, the central location, one stop away from public transportation hub Alexander Platz promotes the intention to reinvent the Volksbühne as social infrastructure for all Berliners.

Ambitions

- Make the Volksbühne more visible
- Provide at least 50% of the public space that was taken
- Attract heterogenous visitors despite homogenous location

Morphology

The site is characterized by its symmetrical triangular shape and position on an axis. Its symmetrical shape does not result in balanced activity on the plots' east and west side however. Due to the U-bahn exit and its connection to the Torstrasse, the west side is more active, therewith being more suitable for public program and entrance area. It's a multifunctional neighbourhood with primarily active plinths with dwellings on the upper floors. The predominant building height is about 19-21 meters, defined by the typical Berlin building blocks. The Volksbühne theatre's fly tower towers out over its surroundings. South of the site taller buildings are located along the Liebrecht Strasse and more high-rise developments are planned around Alexander Platz.

Monument Linienstrasse

Along the Linienstrasse, two monumental residential buildings are located symmetrically on either side of the Volksbühne. These residences were constructed in 1935 and are monumental due to their composition in relation to the Volksbühne venue. The building on the east side is mirrored along the Linienstrasse, therewith being double symmetrical. This double symmetry allows for a more flexible approach to the volume on the west side, as the monumental value of the buildings can be preserved in the east, while taking a more free approach for the building on the west. The four strategies that have been defined are preservation, repurposing, reuse skeleton and demolishing, the first two being applicable to the building on the east side, all four being applicable to the building on the west side. Demolishment of the volume west provides a sightline from Torstrasse, therewith drastically improving the visibility of the Volksbühne from a main road.

Energy

Three site requirements have been defined by the studio group in relation to the topic of energy. Firstly, this project is an example of the reuse of a highly specific public building. Also, usage of public transportation is encouraged through its very close proximity to the U-bahn station. Lastly, the site is positioned in an area with geothermal potential, meaning this sustainable source can be used to provide the building with energy.

Figure 4.9 The site: Rosa Luxemburg Platz

# Analysis: Mitte/Prenz Lauerberg

● MAUERPARK

PRENZ LAUERBERG

FRIEDRICHSHAIN

MITTE

● Alexanderplatz

● Reichstag

● Museum Island

● State Opera Unter den Linden
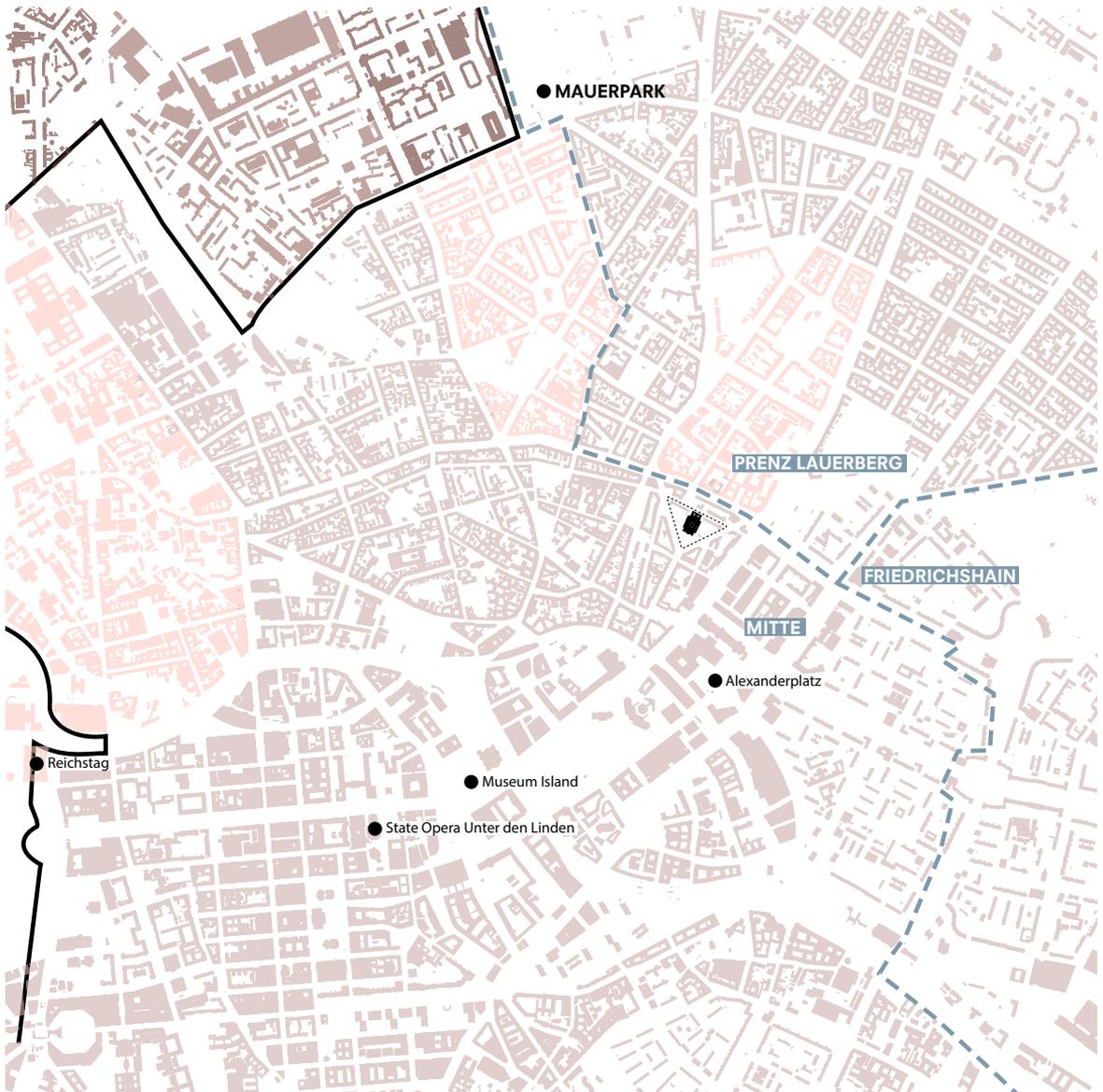
Figure 4.10 District scale analysis

Analysis: Scheunenviertel

B

T

B

Hostel ●

🚲

U-BAHN U2 STATION
ROSA LUXEMBURG PLATZ

U

BUSY

● Art gallery

● SoHo ho

QUIET

Hostel ●

● Karl Liebknecht House

B

KARL LIEBKNECHT STRASSE

● Babylon Cinema

**10 minute walk from
Alexanderplatz**
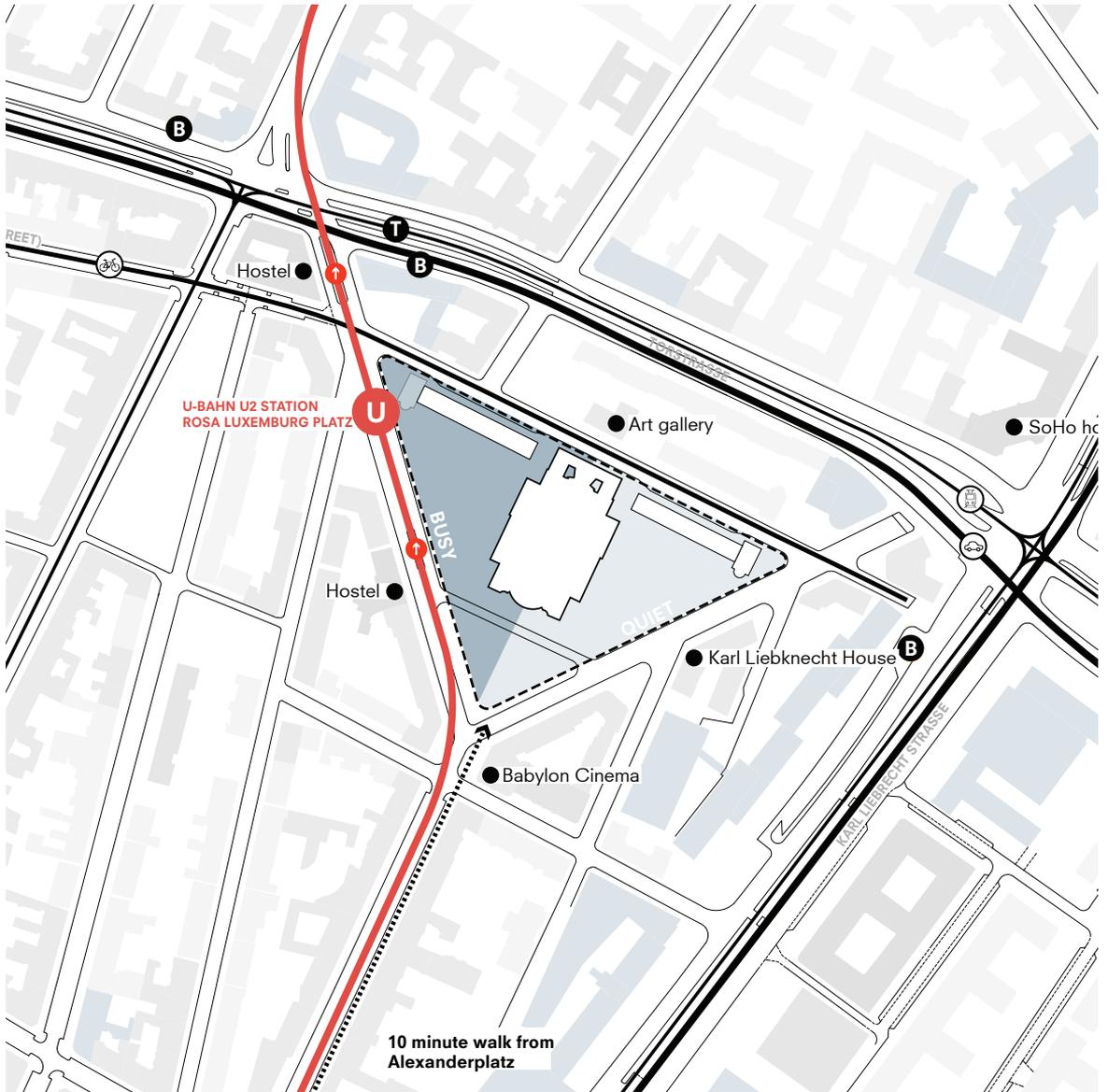
Figure 4.11 Neighbourhood scale analysis

Analysis: Rosa Luxemburg Platz

BUSY

LOGISTICS DELIVERY/ARTISTS

PUBLIC PROGRAM

++

+

+++

++

PRIVATE PROGRAM

SHOW VISITORS

CALM
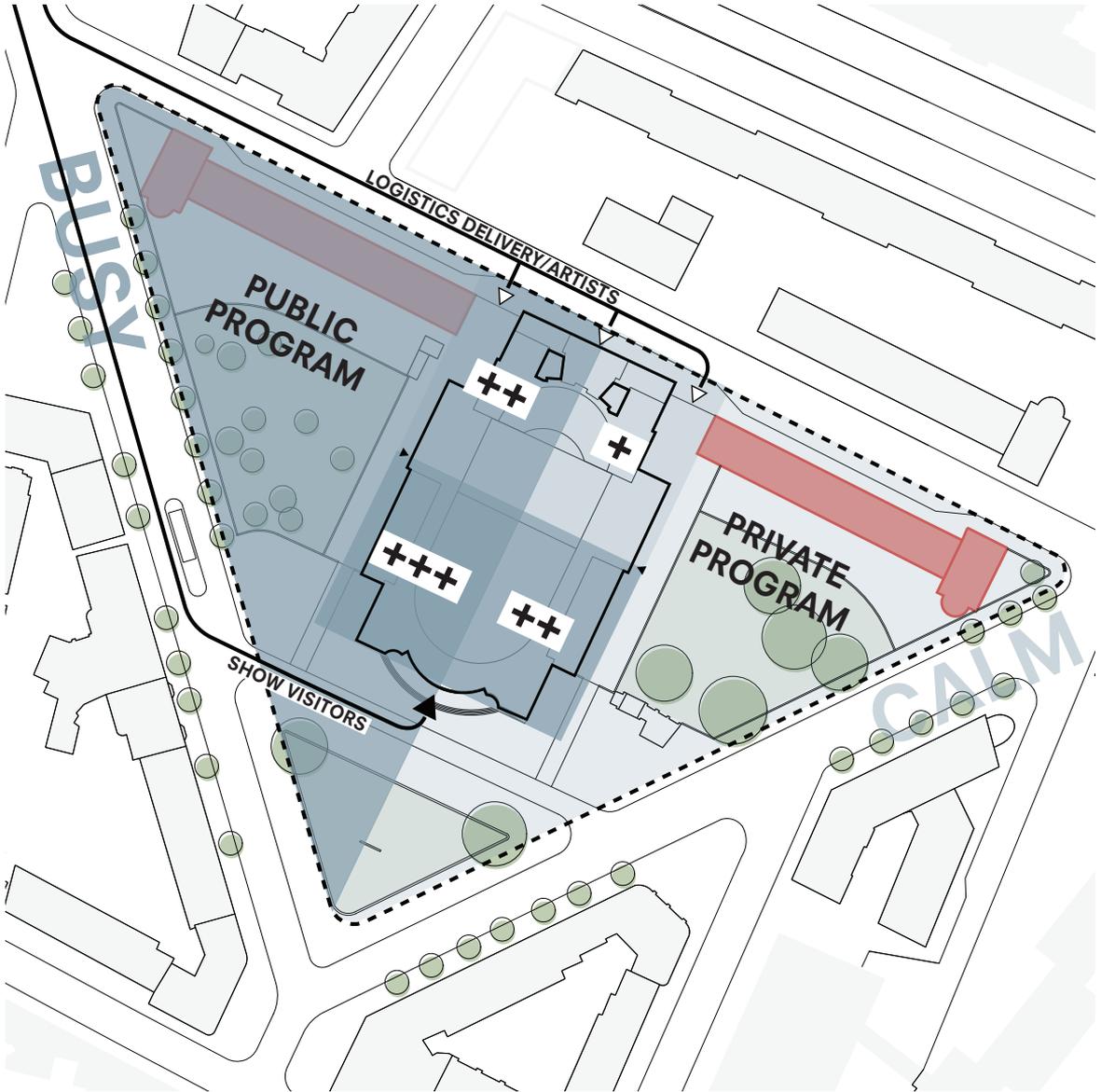
Figure 4.12 Site scale analysis

Building envelope

max. 20m

max. 36m

9250m²
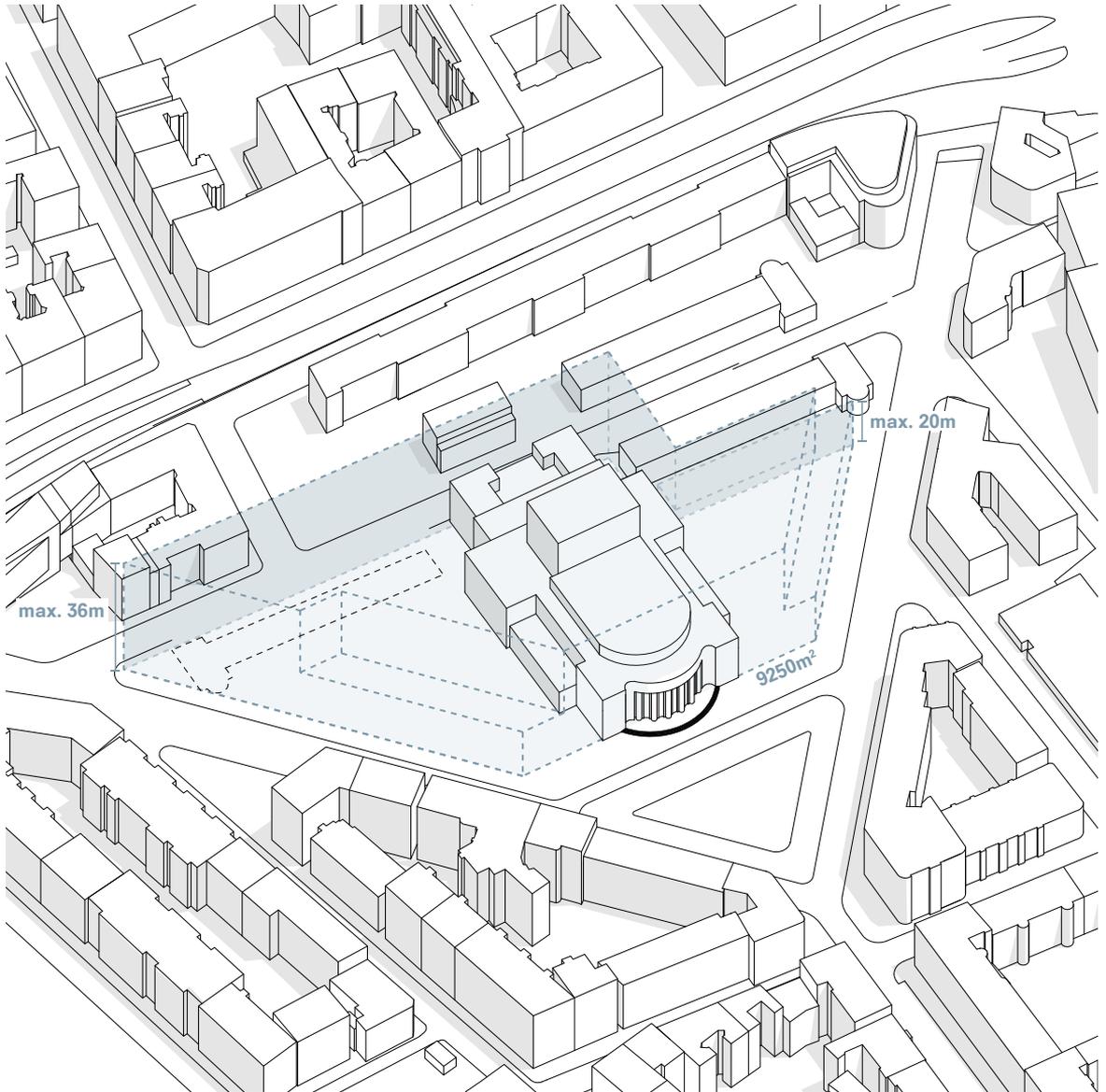
Figure 4.13 Building envelope

Linienstrasse monuments

Preserve
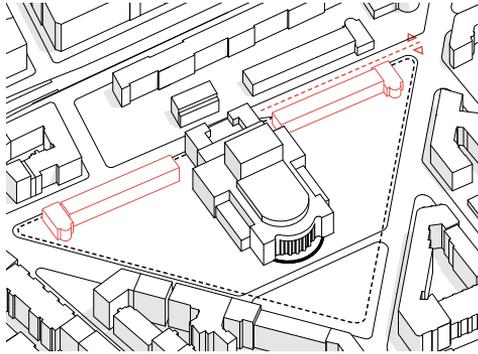
Repurpose
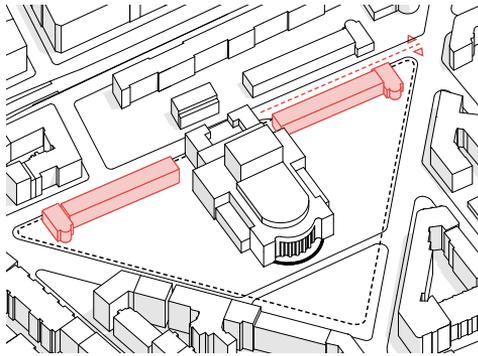
Reuse skeleton
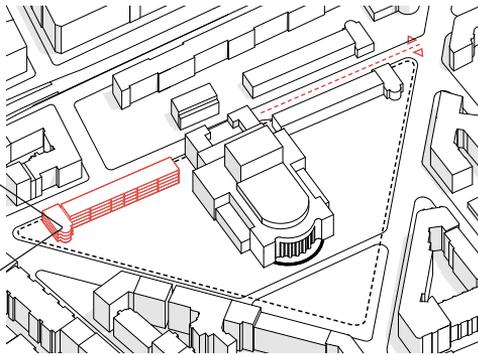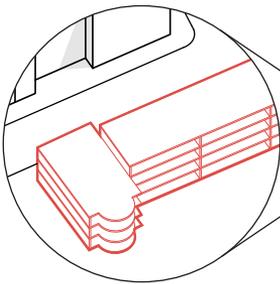
Demolish
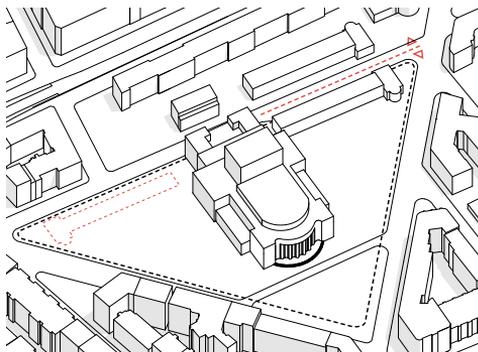
Figure 4.14 Linienstrasse monuments strategy

Monument

The listed monumental Volksbühne theatre was designed by Oskar Kaufman and construction finished in 1914 just before the start of the first world war. The building was literally in the "hands of the people" as the 14,500 shares were owned largely by small contributors (Davis, 2000). The building's monumental institution aesthetic forms a mismatch with its social and accessible function.

Ambitions

- Respect monumental values
- Restore original architectural quality
- Appear more accessible to the public
- Consider energy efficiency in reuse strategy

Value assessment

The building is largely characterised by its classicist symmetrical limestone south façade. The six pillars add to its institutional character. The symmetry of the front façade is applied through the rest of the building as well, resulting in the east and west facades being identical (although mirrored) and the floorplan being symmetrical as well.

During the second world war the building was severely hit in bombings, destroying a large portion of the original design. The roof structure which used to characterise the building's front façade (giving it a more friendly and inviting appearance) was destroyed, just like the auditorium, which used to have a capacity of 2000 seats. In 1954 the building was restored, although not in its original style. The restoration's architecture was mostly horizontal in contrast with the original primarily vertical façade. Financial limitations resulted in sober materialisation. The auditorium was replaced by the 725-seat auditorium that is still in use today. In the building's monument listing this auditorium is described to be "an important document of the representative theater architecture of the early GDR, and

illustrates the great importance attributed to the volksbuhne during this time".

Figure 4.15 Stairs used as seating (own photo)

Historic photographs

Figure 4.16

**Figure 4.17**

Figure 4.18

Figure 4.19


Figure 4.20

Figure 4.21

Original floorplans
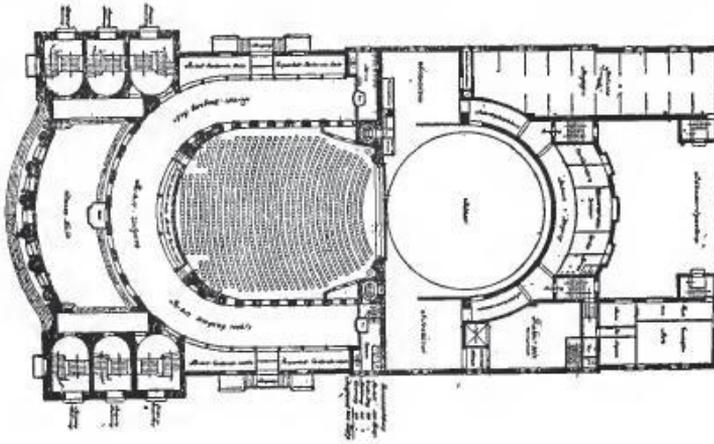
Figure 4.22
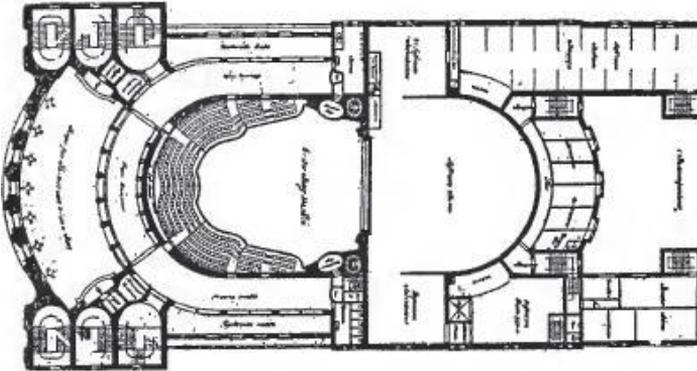
Figure 4.23
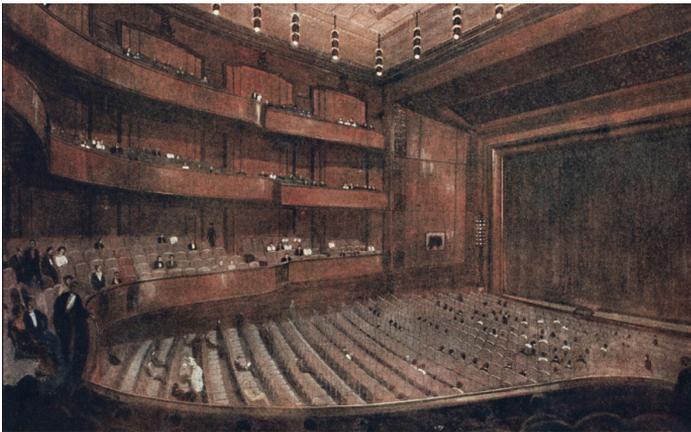
Figure 4.24

Figure 4.8 site: Rosa Luxemburg Platz

Photographs

Figure 4.25
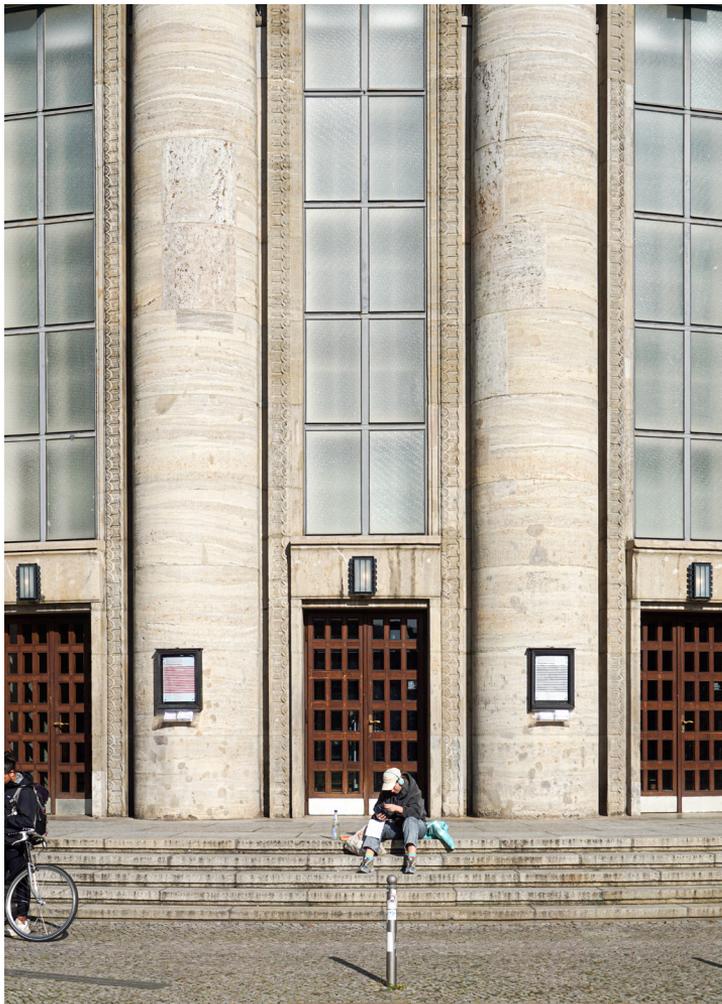
Figure 4.26

Figure 4.27

Figure 4.28

Figure 4.29

Figure 4.30

Figure 4.31

Figure 4.32

Figure 4.33

Figure 4.34

Figure 4.35

Figure 4.36

Existing performance spaces Volksbühne

Figure 4.37

Grand hall

Capacity: 725 seated
Area: 500m^2 (excl. stage)
Usage: theatre & concerts
Reverberation time: 1,5s

Figure 4.38

Red salon

Capacity: 300 standing, 150 seated
Area: 180m^2
Usage: spoken word theatre, dance, music

Figure 4.39

Green salon

Capacity: 300 standing, 150 seated
Area: 180m^2
Usage: flexible

Photos Volksbühne workshop

Figure 4.40

Figure 4.41

Figure 4.42

Monument analysis

south   north

east/west

entrance   foyer and auditorium   stage   back of house
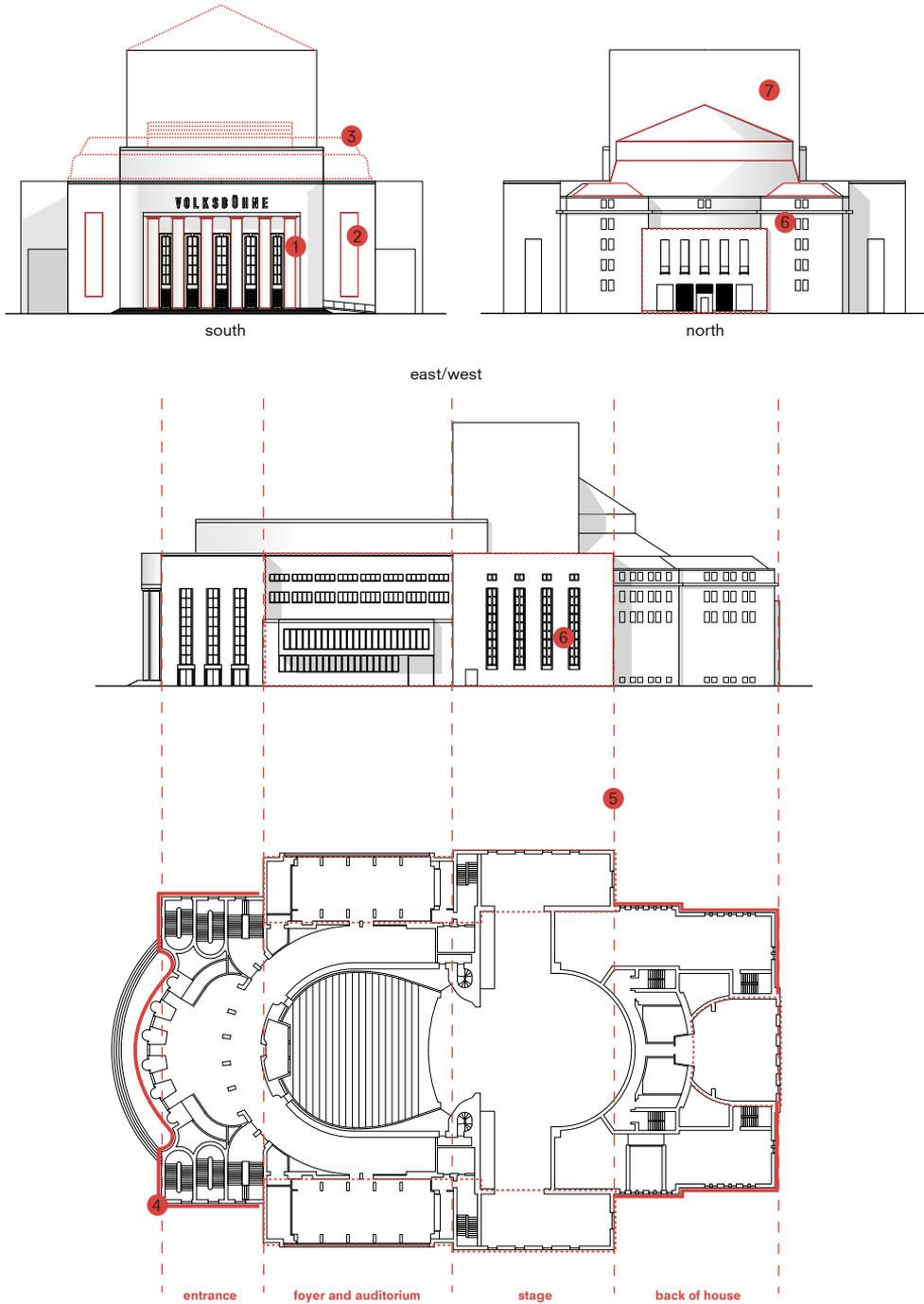
1   institutional character. Form and function don't match

2   facade used for expression

3   building changed over time

4   facade defines the building's architecture

5   clear division of floorplan functions also visible in facade

6   1954 addition

7   peculiar roof shape towards Linienstrasse (neighbourhood side)

Figure 4.43

Monument value assessment
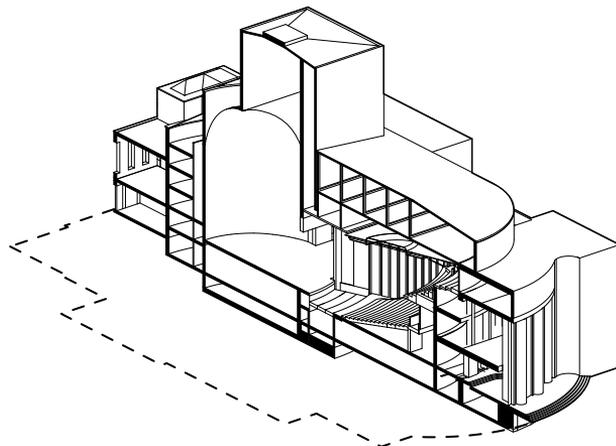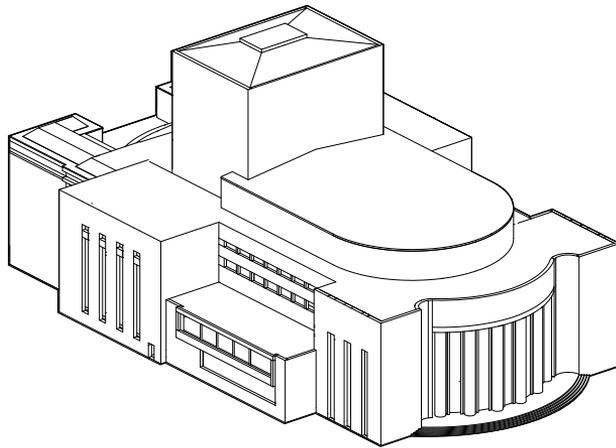
Highest monumental value (facade)

High monumental value

Medium monumental value

Low monumental value

**Figure 4.44**

Reuse strategies

Strategy 1: Demolish nothing
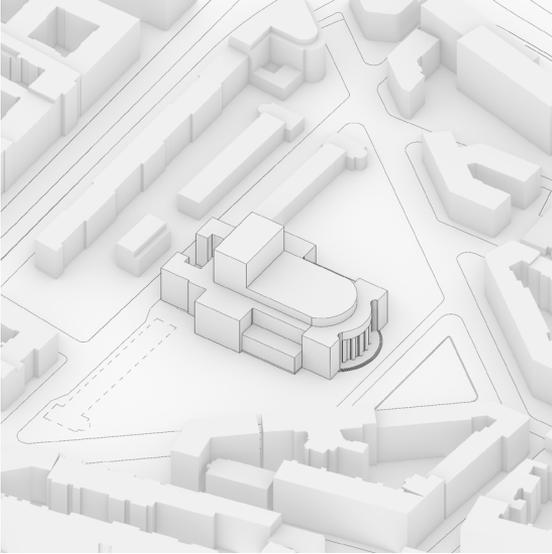
Strategy 2: Demolish low value
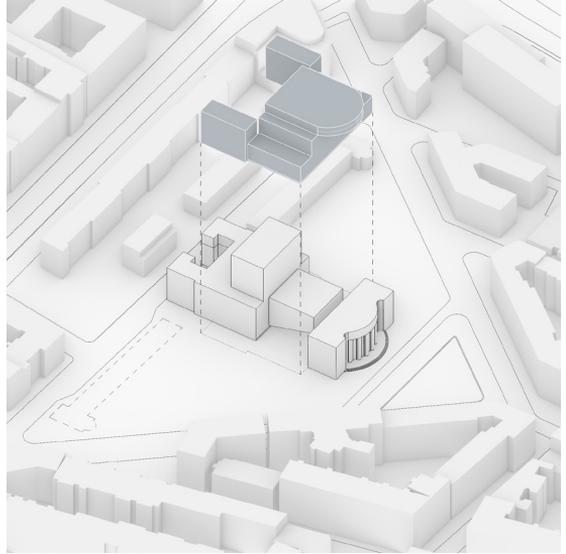
Strategy 3: Demolish low and medium value
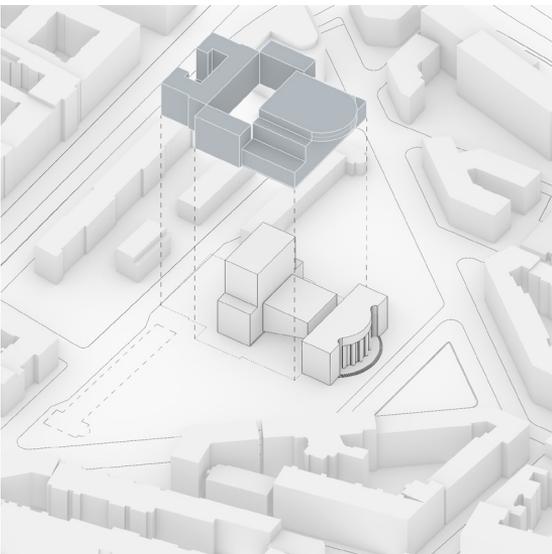

Strategy 4: Demolish, low, medium and high
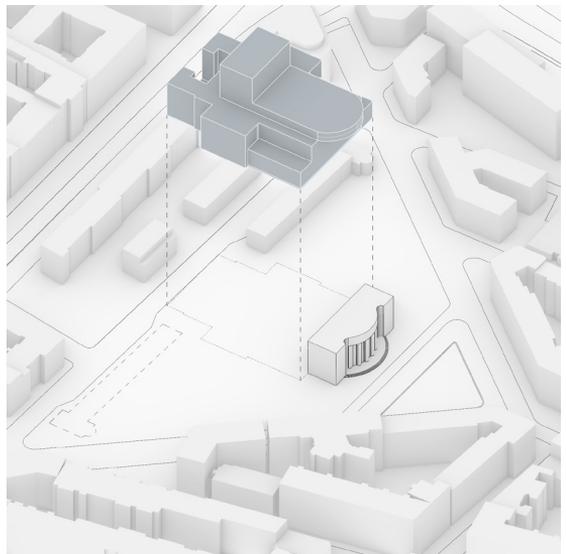
Figure 4.45

Massing studios

Based on reuse **strategy 2** and a volume of 70.000m³

Top up
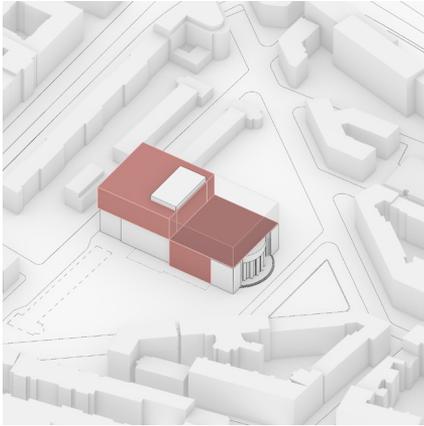
Breakthrough
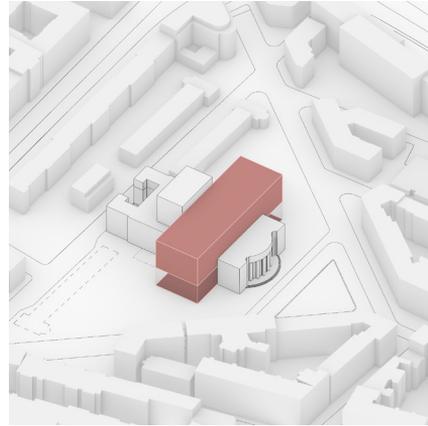
Campus
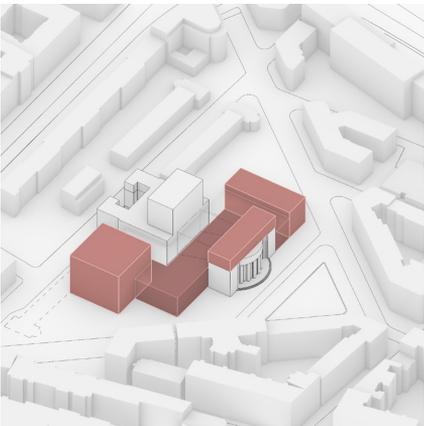
### On the side
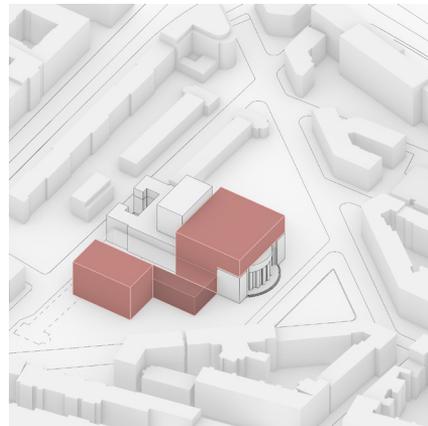
Building block
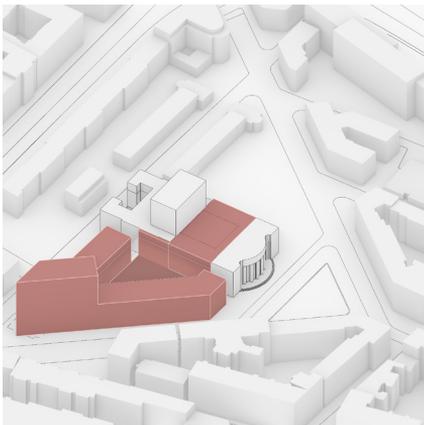
Packing-in

Figure 4.46

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05

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figures

Figure 4.22 - 4.46: own work

chapter 1
Figure 1.1: unknown
Figure 1.2: Razvan (2016)
Figure 1.3: Lorenzo de Simone (2017)

chapter 2
Figure 2.1: Snowman, D. (2010). A Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera. Atlantic Books.
Figure 2.2: University Of Brighton. 2014. Exemplary Project - Cedric Price. https://folio.brighton.ac.uk/user/km226/exemplary-project-cedric-price.
Figure 2.3: Hansen, A. (2001). Oskar Kaufmann - Ein Theaterarchitekt zwischen Tradition und Moderne. Berlin. Gebr. Mann Verlag p. 269
Figure 2.4: Hansen, A. (2001). Oskar Kaufmann - Ein Theaterarchitekt zwischen Tradition und Moderne. Berlin. Gebr. Mann Verlag p. 269
Figure 2.5: unknown

chapter 3
Figure 3.1: Diller Scifidio + Renfro (.n.d) retrieved fromhttps://arquitecturaviva.com/works/centro-cultural-the-shed-nueva-york-2#lg=1&slide=12
Figure 3.2: OMA, (n.d.) retrieved from https://www.oma.com/projects/aviva-studios-factory-international
Figure 3.3: Nelson Kon (n.d.), retrieved from https://www.nelsonkon.com.br/en/teatro-oficina/
Figure 3.4: University Of Brighton. 2014. Exemplary Project — Cedric Price. [ONLINE] Available at:https://folio.brighton.ac.uk/user/km226/exemplary-project-cedric-price.

chapter 4
Figure 4.1 - figure 4.16: own work
Figure 4.17: Das Haus, a Volksbuhne publication
Figure 4.18: Das Haus, a Volksbuhne publication
Figure 4.19: Das Haus, a Volksbuhne publication
Figure 4.20: Das Haus, a Volksbuhne publication
Figure 4.21: Walsh, T (2022)