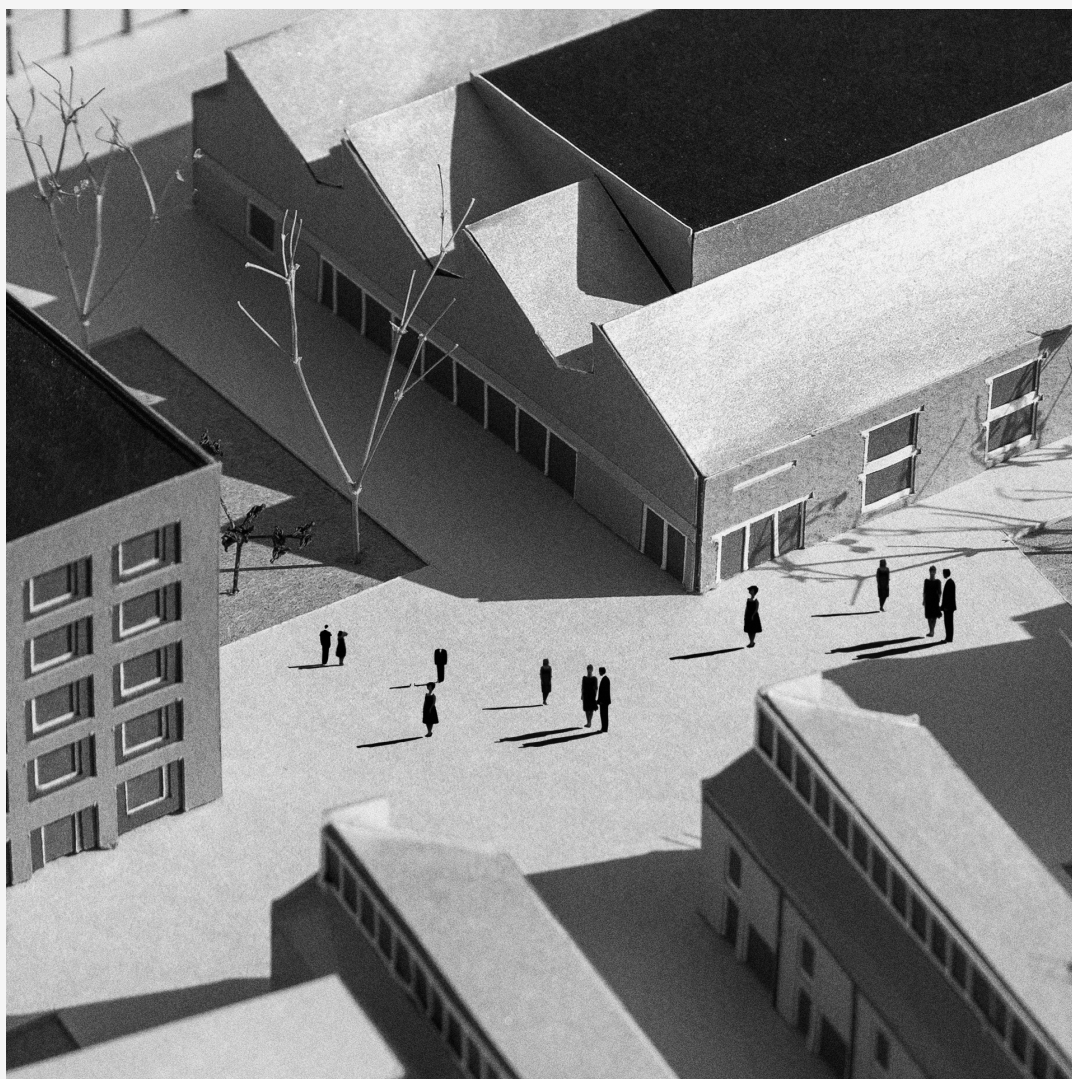


## A ROOM FOR A STAGE



Graduation project catalogue  
S Oberski





Urban Architecture Graduation Studio  
2024/2025 Low Town Down Town

Project Catalogue

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01  
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Blikfabriek, P3 Expo

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## Preface

This catalogue serves as a companion and background to the graduation project “A room for a stage” providing a window into the thought and design process. It is part of the 2024/25 Urban Architecture graduation studio, which investigates alternative futures for the site of the former can factory, Blikfabriek.

The booklet serves as the narrative thread recounting the exploration of the site-specific theatrical troupe, Comp. Marius. This exploration was not merely passive observation, but an exercise in seeing, supported by a study of theatre typologies, audiences, and performances. It involved experimenting with various perspectives to better understand the acting company and their relationship to the site.

My group and I studied the material garden of Blikfabriek for the PI exhibition, concluding that:

*Blikfabriek, as we encountered it, defies the usual logic of urban renewal, becoming a site where past and future, ruin and regeneration coexist. We explored a place where work, leisure, and creation intersect—offering alternative ways to engage with the city, its people, and its resources.*

This research takes inspiration from the activities of one of the collectives that houses temporarily in Blikfabriek, and by doing so, keeping the location alive. The findings form the basis for the design concept, aiming to explore how architectural design can address the challenge of permanently accommodating activities that were initially temporary and, to a certain extent, spontaneous.

The research set out to engage with the vast spatial condition of Blikfabriek—an endless landscape of steel and concrete halls—by examining how such an environment might be occupied or appropriated with minimal means. Central to this inquiry was the desire to avoid enclosure or privatization, instead preserving the openness and accessibility that define the site’s current atmosphere. The goal was to maintain a sense of continuity and porosity, with as few thresholds as possible, allowing for a multiplicity of uses and encounters. To achieve this, a journalistic and observational method was employed—one that positioned us as outsiders looking in, attuned to the nuances of daily activity and informal adaptation.

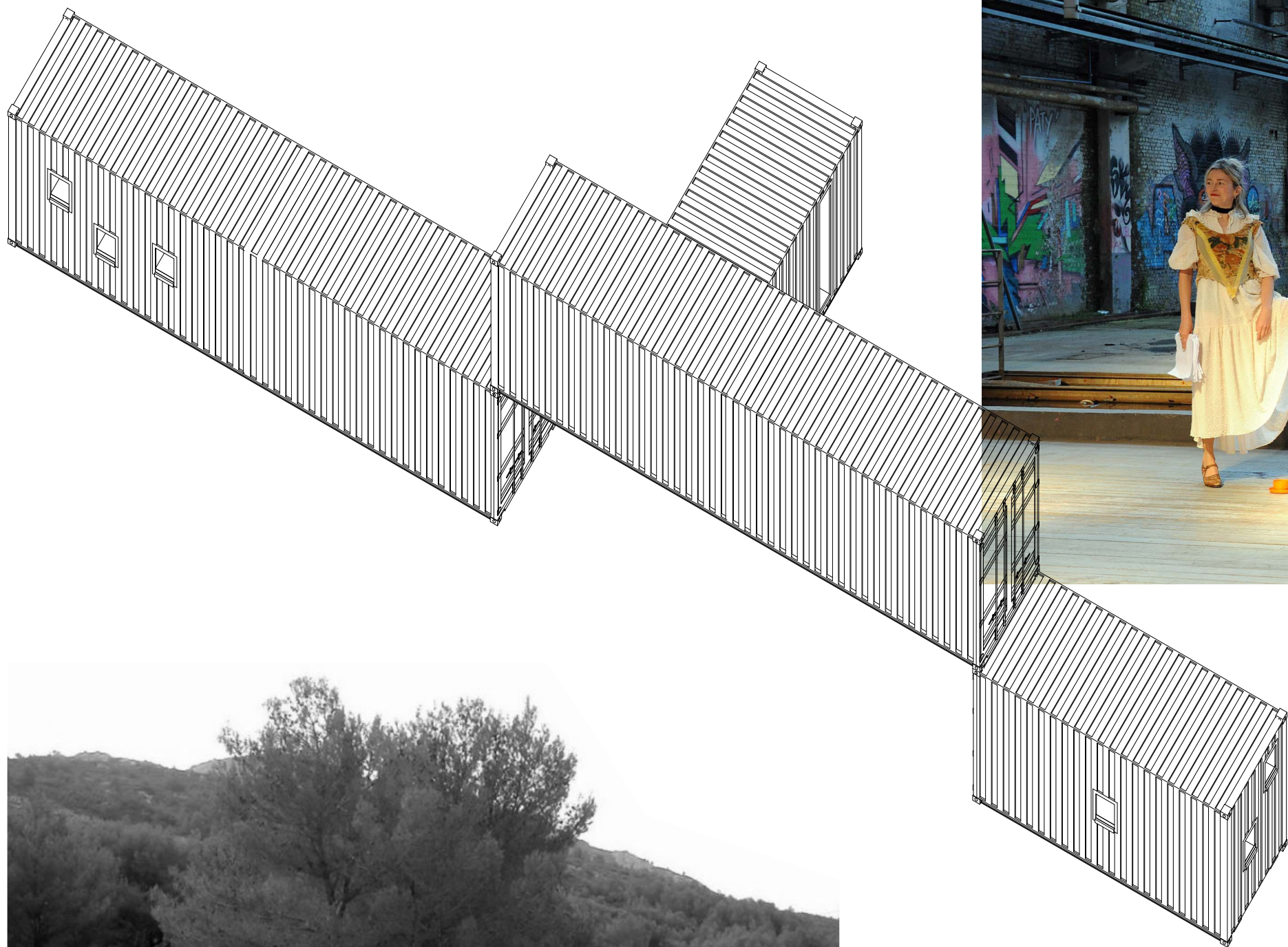
This project catalogue is structured around how an encounter with Comp. Marius might unfold: beginning with an incidental crossing of their theatre installation, moving through the pre-performance reception, and ending in an analysis of the performance (and performance space) itself. This journey—documented through pictures, sketches, and text—is my attempt to guide the reader through the unconventional theatre of Marius and the architectural implications that I took from it. I hope this overview offers a fresh perspective the design of a local theatre, and its relation to the public.





# Introduction





03  
Comp. Marius  
*Stage in Aubagne (2010)*  
8

04  
Raymond Mallentjer  
*Macht der Gewoonte (2004)*

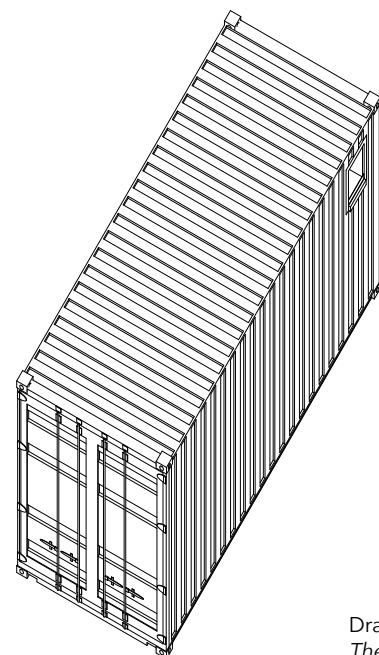


## Introduction

*The research project focuses on the evolving landscape of Blickfabriek, with particular attention to one of the current occupants of the abandoned halls: the theatre company Marius. Their method of working and creating performances on location, along with their way of engaging with audiences, informs the development of an observational and design approach that opens up new ways of understanding and responding to the site.*

Housed in a mobile container construction—into which passersby can peek through large vertical windows—the troupe uses Blickfabriek as a temporary headquarters, stage, and storage space for their mobile theatre.

Since their founding in 2006 by Kris van Trier and Waas Grams-er, the company has specialized in theatre on location, traveling through the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. In their plays and adaptations, the landscape plays an essential role in both the performance and the mise-en-scène. Rejecting the traditional stage, they install stands for the audience and use only a few objects to set the scene.



Drawing and collage by author  
*The mobile theatre at Blickfabriek*

05  
Comp. Marius  
*Performance in Blickfabriek (2024)*  
9

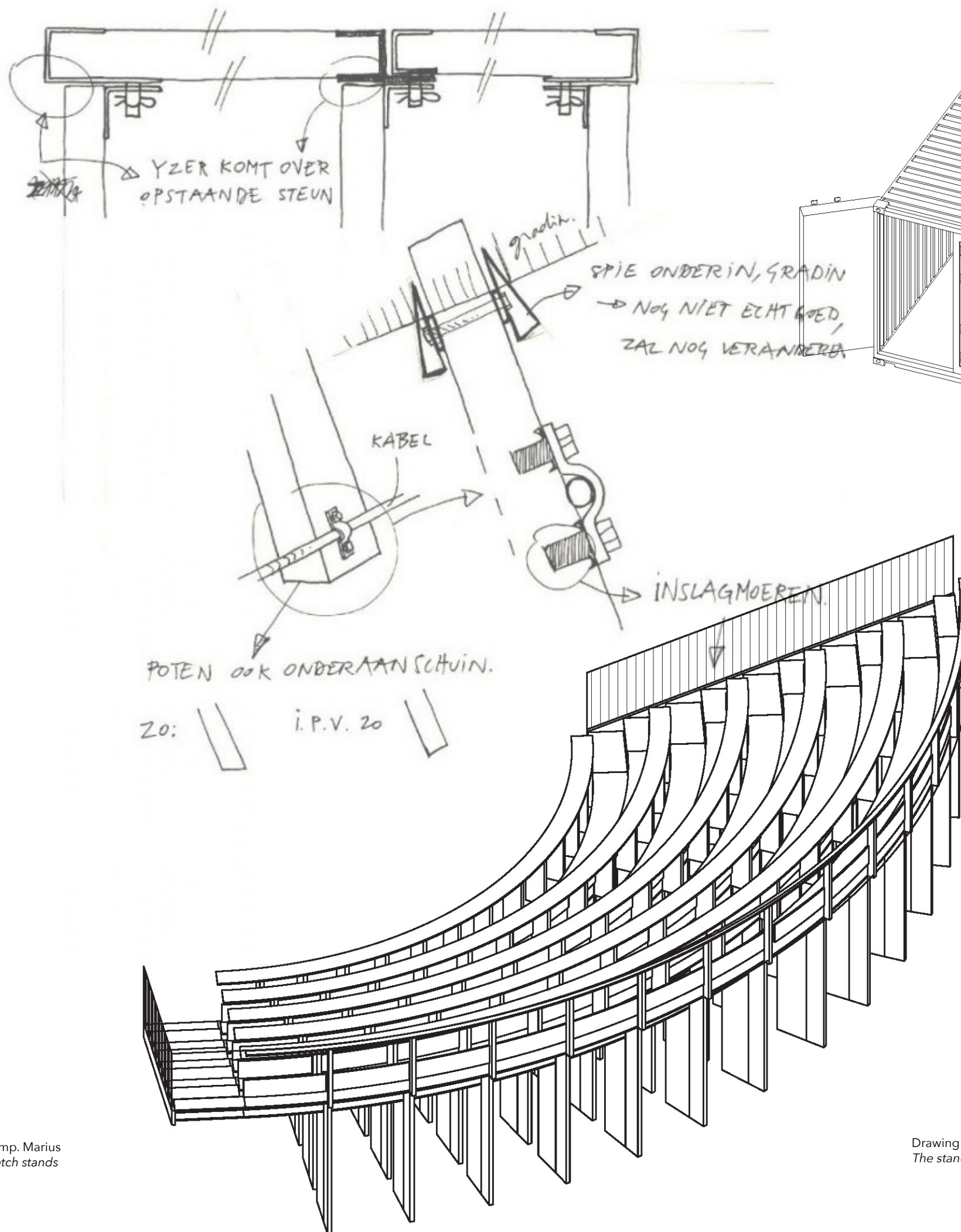


# Where is the theatre?



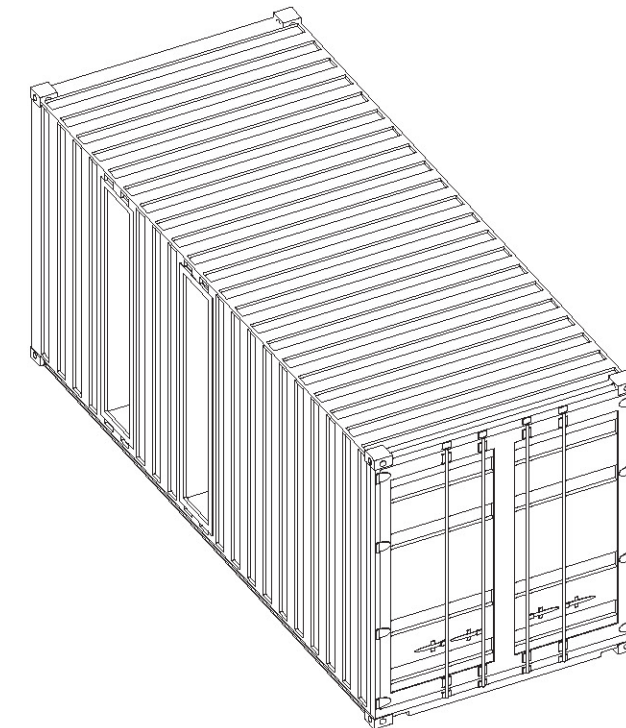
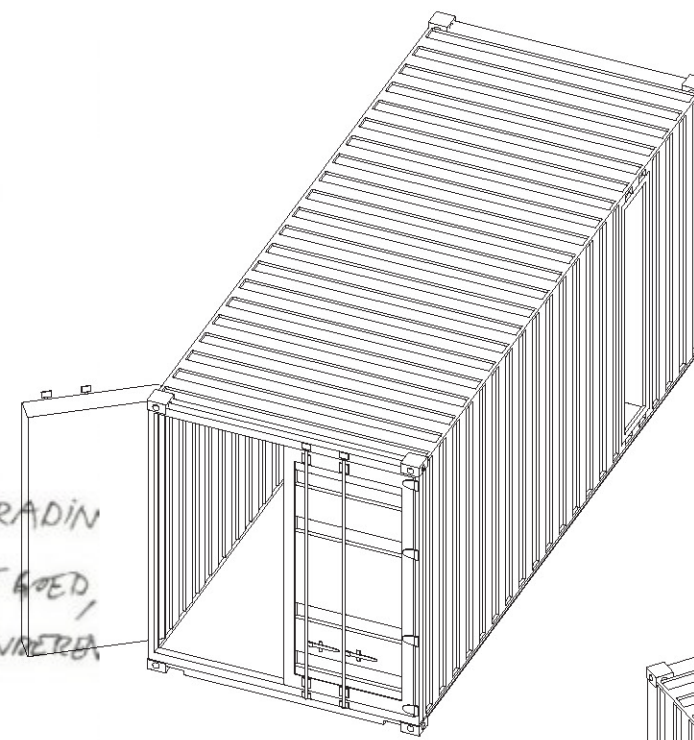
“I think the theatre we do is so direct that it deserves to be rooted in daily life, and often that removes a barrier for an audience who thinks it’s just for intellectuals, for people with money. So it’s also a way to communicate in a direct—or maybe not direct—way with a potential audience, to tell them: don’t be afraid, we are here for you, and it’s a universal story.”





“There you go, it’s small, it’s mobile, you can work with your hands. I really like the feeling of being on the road with a backpack. It’s just about being on the move and not carrying too much with you.”

Waas Gramser, Actress and founder Comp. Marius  
Interview *Espace public romantique*, Rennes, 2023.



Half-circle stands loosely frame the space, but never fully enclose it. The sense of enclosure is minimal—this is a theatre that remains open, accessible, and embedded in its surroundings.

The mobile theatre consists of these stands and two small transport containers, which act as a backstage. Both are modest in scale, and together they form the infrastructure of the performance. The stands were built by the actors themselves—a deliberate effort to stay grounded in the physical act of making, and to resist becoming, in their words, “a bureaucrat or an intellectual.”

There is no canopy to shield against the weather, no heating or cooling to soften the seasons. There is no fixed stage. Sometimes, a few wooden pallets or elements from the landscape suggest where the performance might unfold, but the action is not bound to them: it begins the moment the actors come into view.

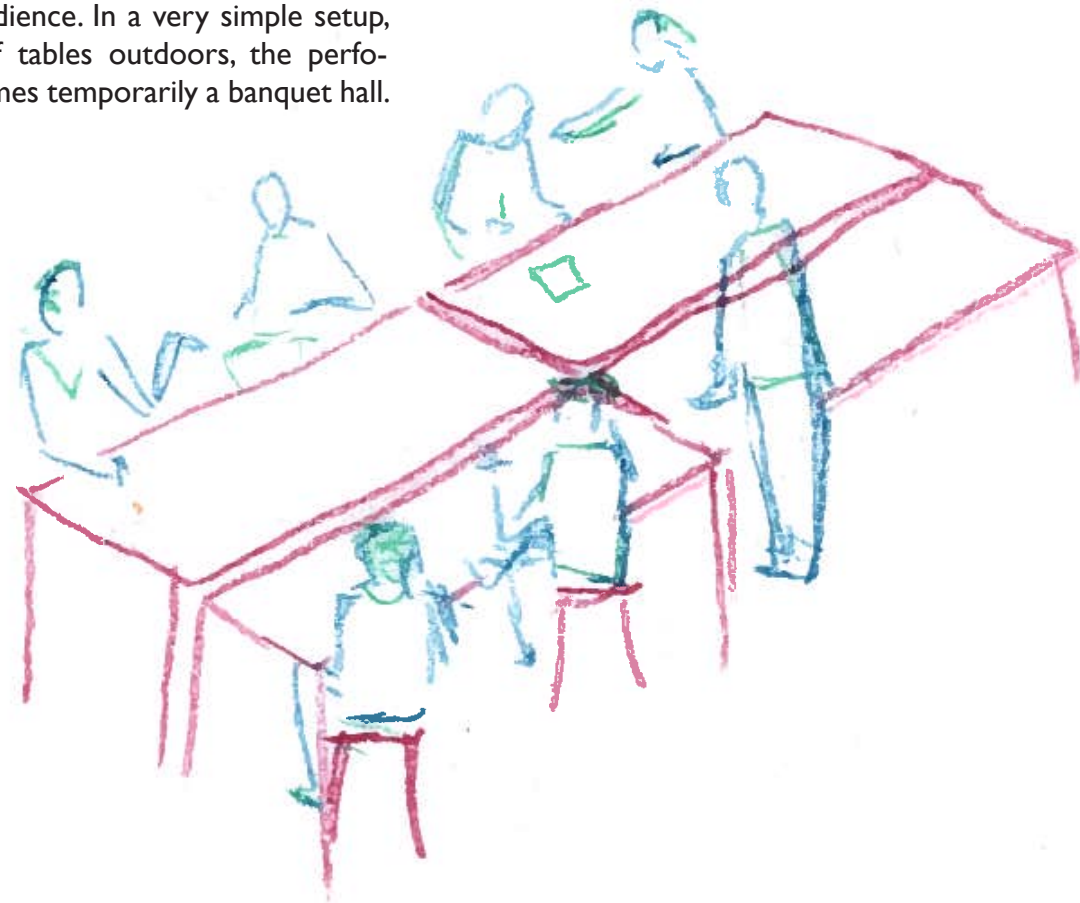


“(...)We like the idea of a small private space in order to make the most of the public space.

And on top of that, there’s the advantage that, since it’s small, we’re always outside. Even in winter, we have our meetings outdoors.”

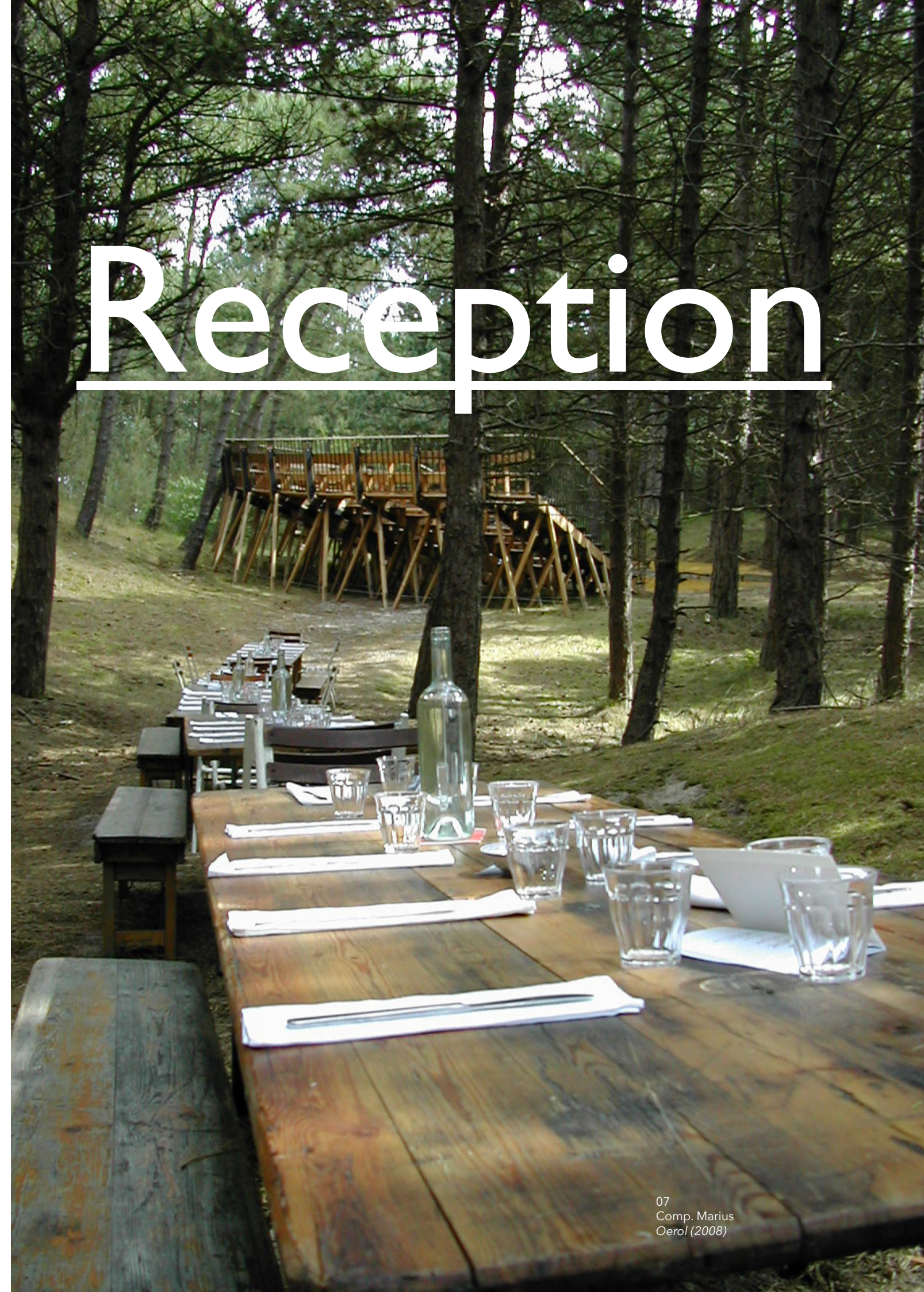
Kris van Trier, Actor and founder Comp. Marius  
Interview with Géraldine Mercier, Antwerp, 2018

Before the play, the actors share a dinner (or drink) with the audience. In a very simple setup, with long rows of tables outdoors, the performance space becomes temporarily a banquet hall.



Drawing by author

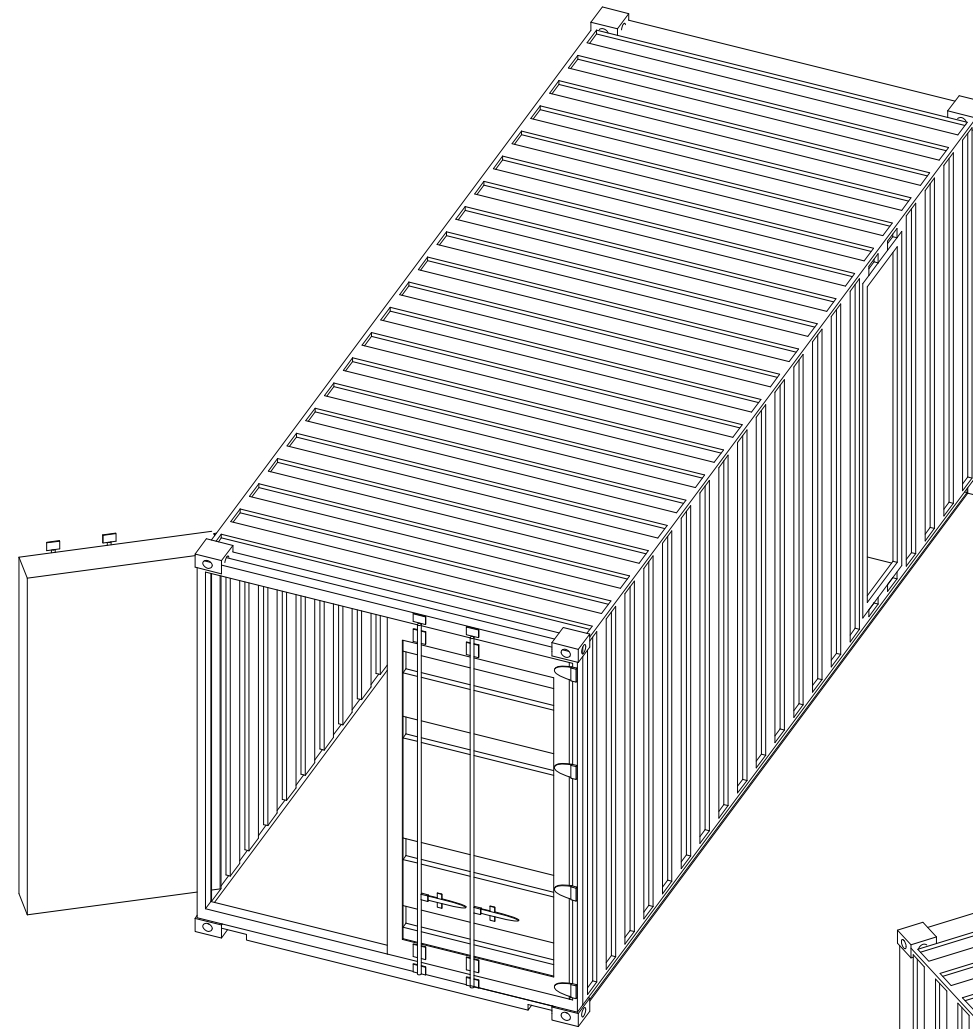
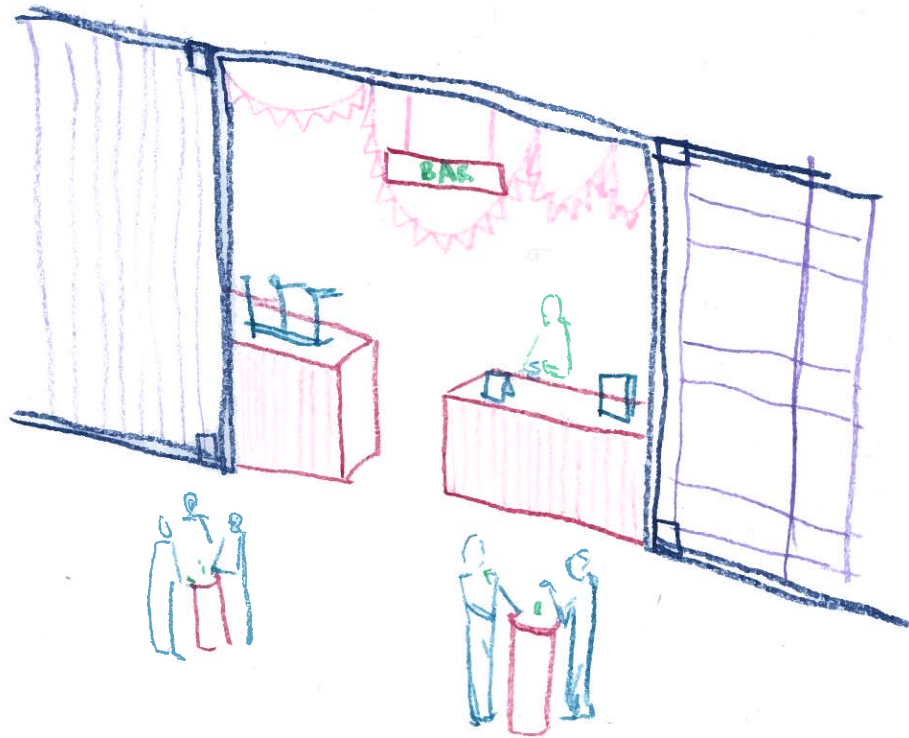
# Reception



07  
Comp. Marius  
Oerol (2008)



At once an open bar and kitchen...

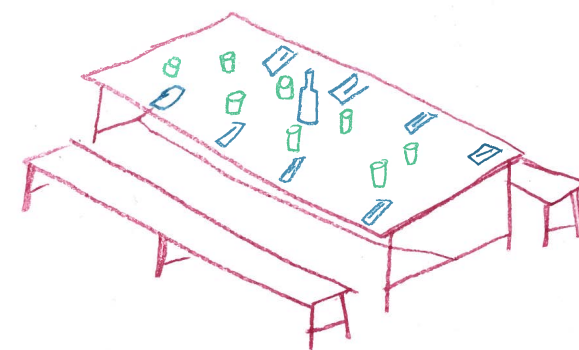
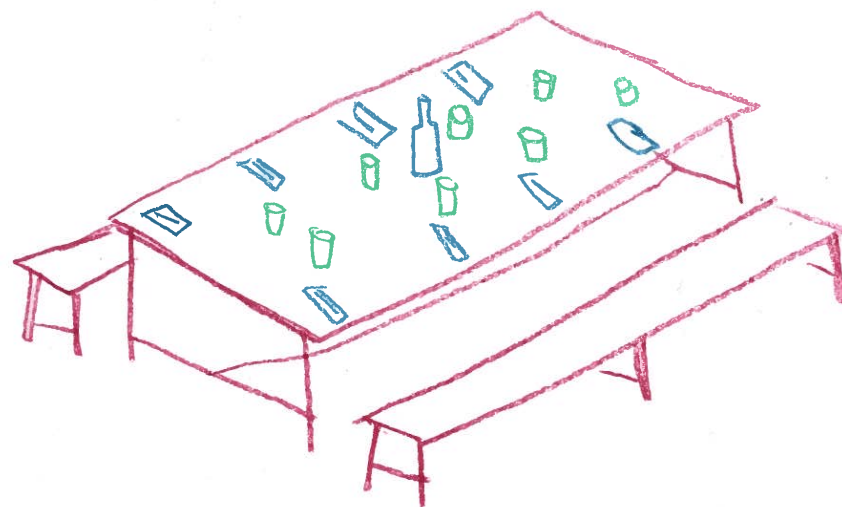
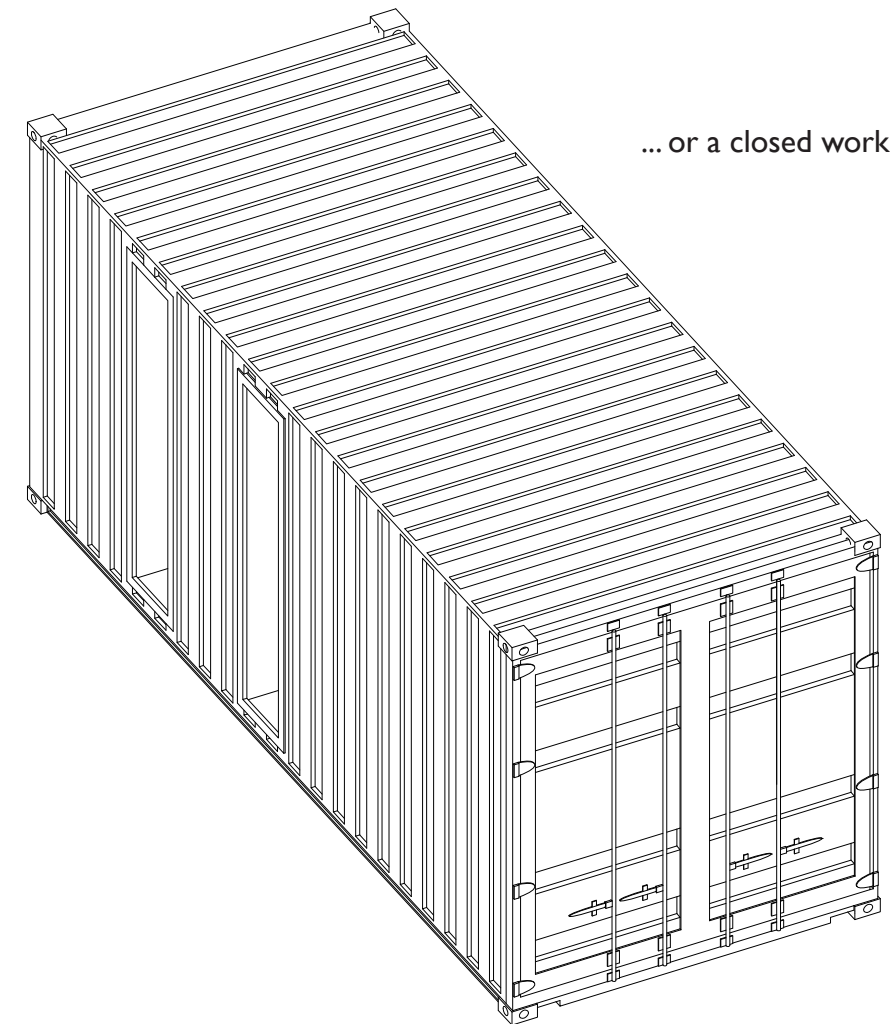


At once backstage, meeting room, kitchen, and bar, this interior-exterior space plays a key role in the reception of the audience. For each performance, spectators are invited to share a meal beforehand or a drink afterward.

When the containers are used as a rehearsal or meeting room, they do not close off completely; everything remains visible through large side openings. This transparency works in both directions: curious visitors can peer inside, while actors can observe the activity outside. And yet, within the continuous openness of the theatre, these containers form a modest refuge.

In this way, they become a small theatre of their own.

... or a closed working space.



The space between the containers changes according to the designated function of the backstage at that moment, sometimes a stage, other moments the dinner area.



# Curtain up!



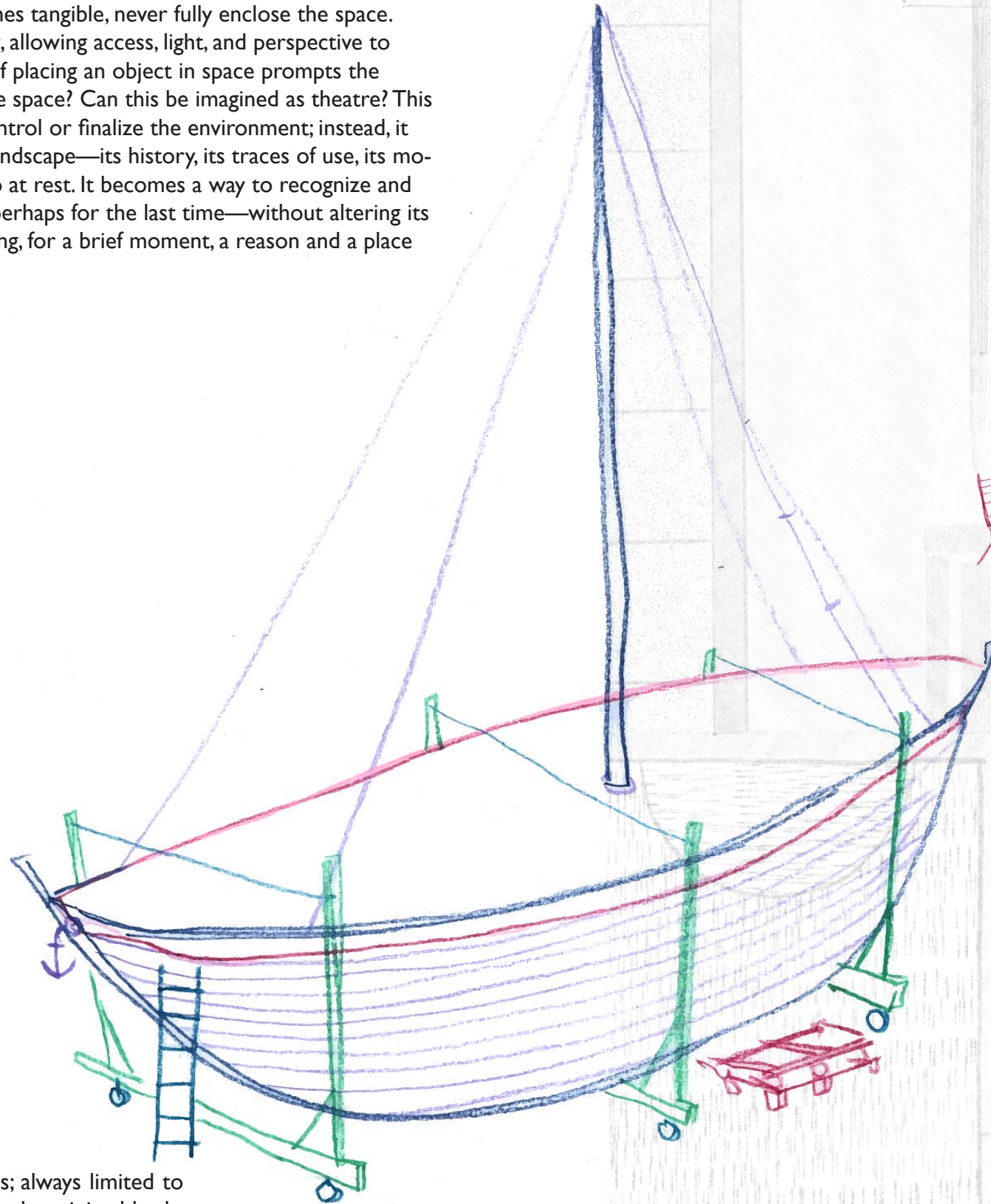
“It’s always the same question: what do we need to perform, what do we need to work? And there you have it, this is the minimum—and the minimum has to come with the maximum imagination. Here, it’s about imagining this, it’s the outdoor space.”

Waas Gramser, Actress and founder Comp. Marius  
Interview *La république des rêves*, Le Havre, 2005.



There is no curtain, no defined stage. Instead, the scenography emerges from the landscape itself, unfolding through three distinct categories: elements already present in the surroundings; objects arranged in a surreal, almost dislocated manner; and usable items that invite interaction. Each object subtly defines a space for theatrical action, forming—alongside even the most minimal of seating structures—a temporary boundary for the ‘theatre.’

These borders, while sometimes tangible, never fully enclose the space. They define without confining, allowing access, light, and perspective to remain open. The simple act of placing an object in space prompts the question: is this a performance space? Can this be imagined as theatre? This gesture resists the urge to control or finalize the environment; instead, it reveals the character of the landscape—its history, its traces of use, its moments of stillness, like the ship at rest. It becomes a way to recognize and admire a space—sometimes perhaps for the last time—without altering its essential qualities, while offering, for a brief moment, a reason and a place to linger.



Elements of the scenographies; always limited to one or two objects, they form the minimal back-drop of the play.

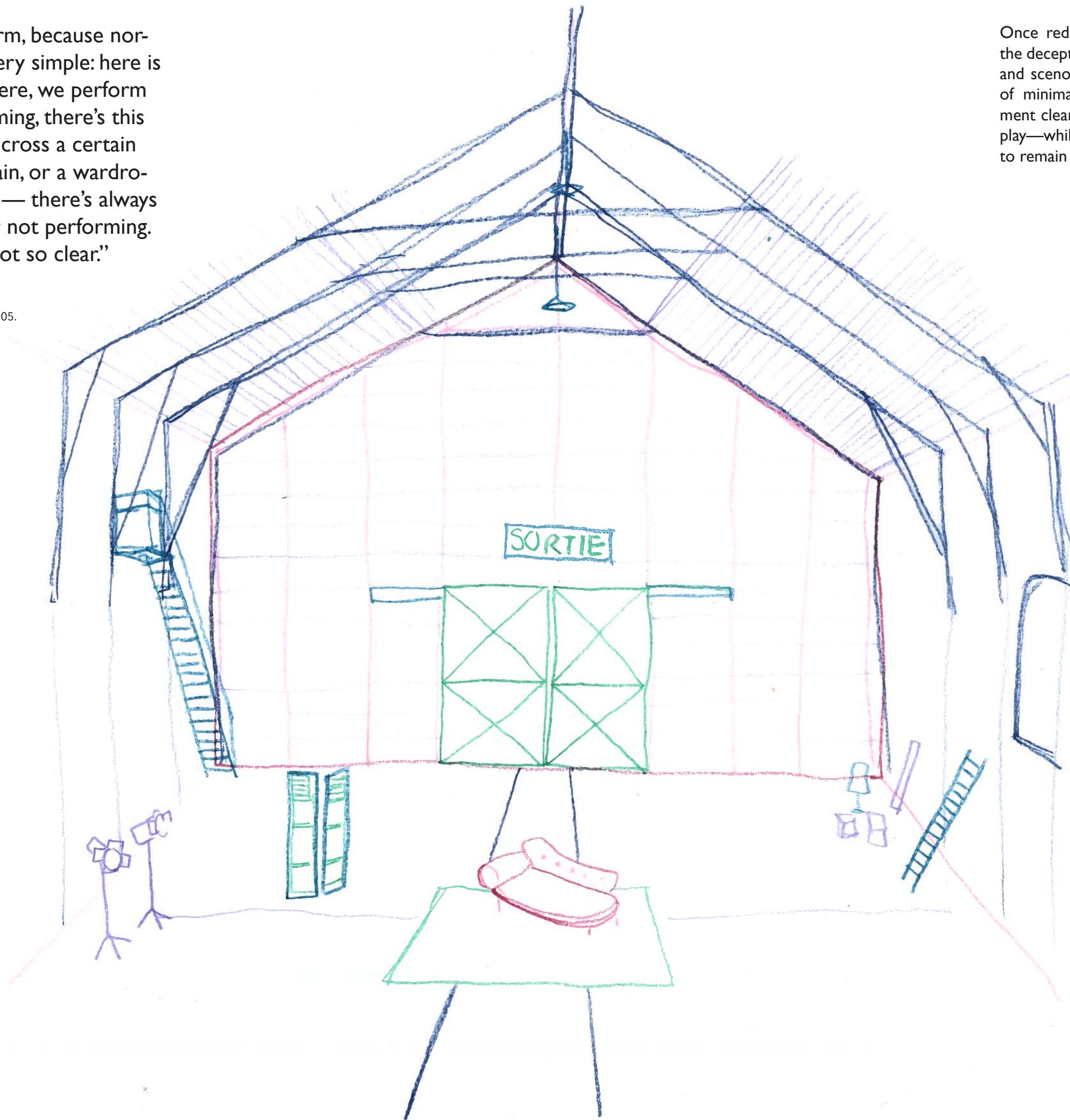


Drawing by author



“That is to say, finding a form, because normally the setup is always very simple: here is the audience, the seating here, we perform — and if we’re not performing, there’s this convention that when you cross a certain line — maybe a small curtain, or a wardrobe, or even a pile of chairs — there’s always that barrier: performing or not performing. But here it’s different, it’s not so clear.”

Kris van Trier, Actor and founder Comp. Marius  
Interview *La république des rêves*, Le Havre, 2005.



Once reduced to its essential spatial elements, the deceptive simplicity of the performance space and scenography is revealed. Though composed of minimal components, their careful arrangement clearly communicates the intentions of the play—while still allowing the surrounding space to remain legible and recognizable.





# Conclusions





## Collecting thought:

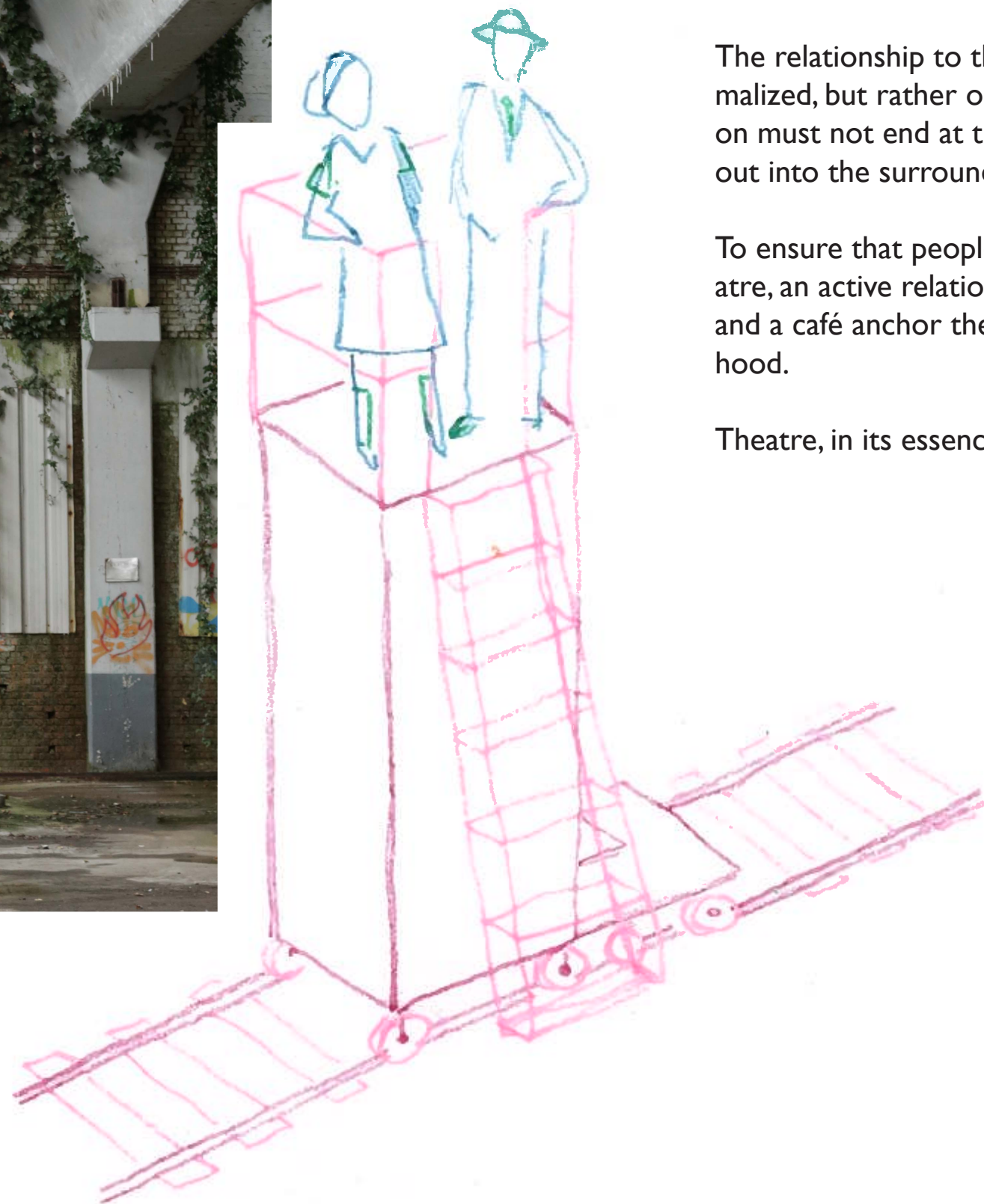
Theatre is not limited to a single room; it comes to life through a sense of flexibility and spatial ambiguity.

The theatre hall shouldn't be a black box—awareness of outside conditions grounds the play more deeply in reality.

The relationship to the audience should not be formalized, but rather organic and equal. This connection must not end at the edge of the building, but spill out into the surrounding public space.

To ensure that people care for and sustain the theatre, an active relationship is fostered: workshops and a café anchor the theatre within the neighbourhood.

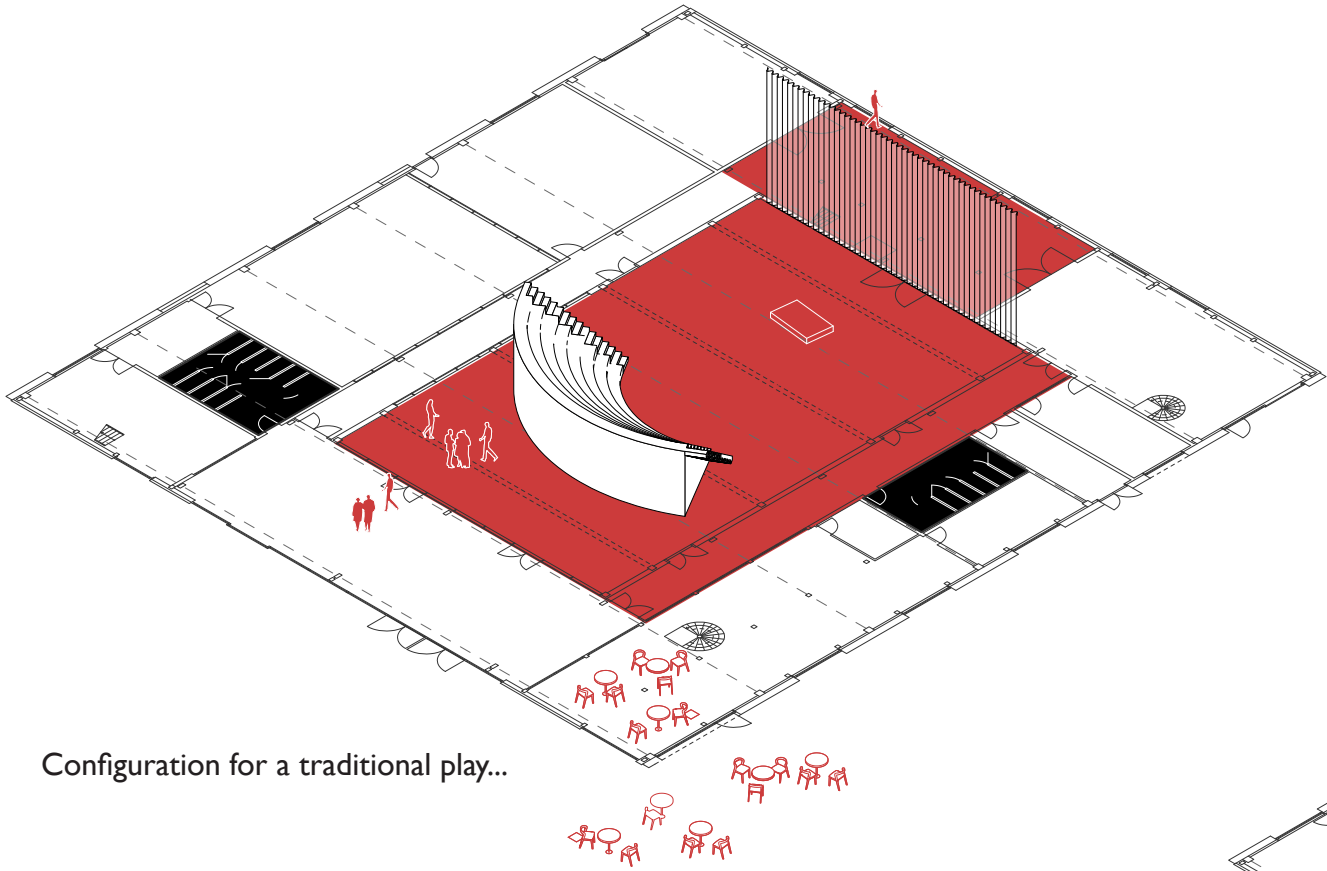
Theatre, in its essence, is a collective experience.





A room for a stage:

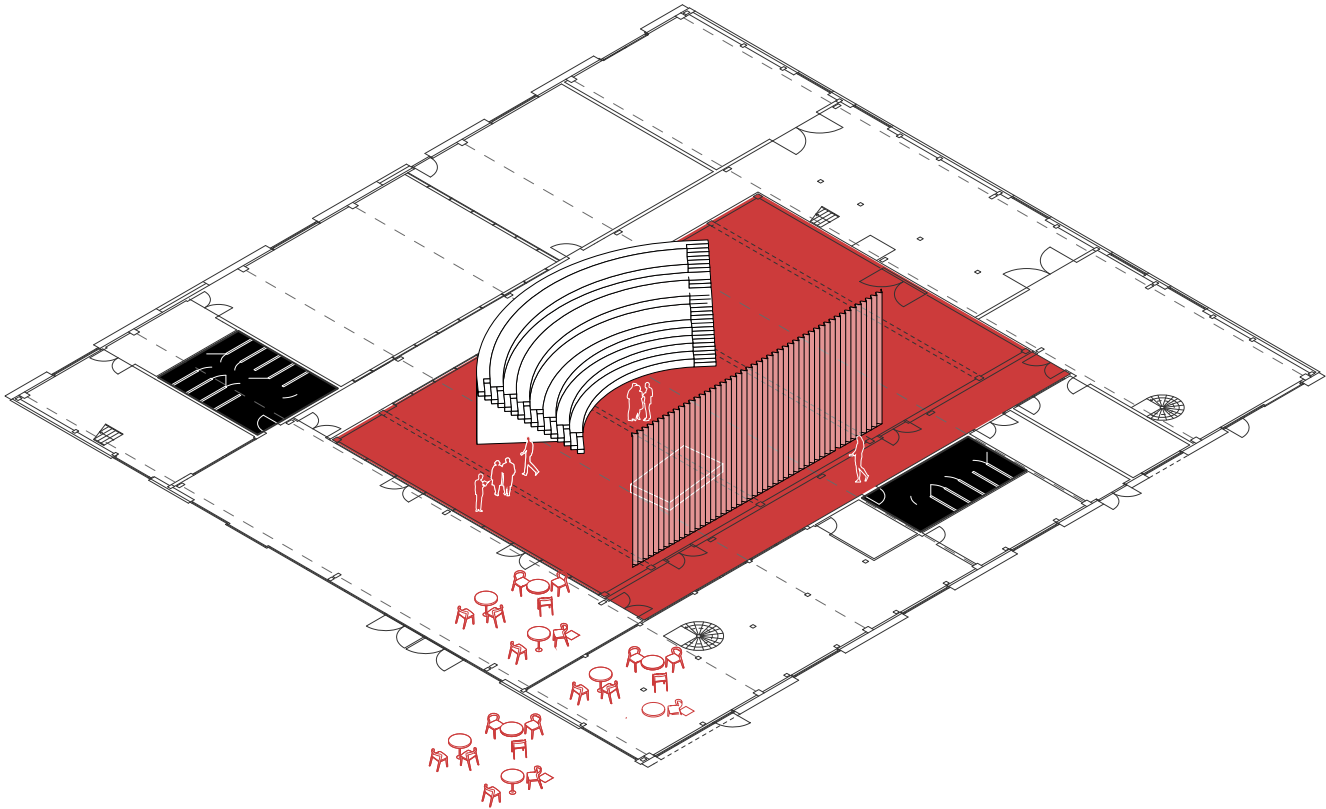
The foyer is designed as a flexible space that can host different activities—such as performances, shared meals, or exhibitions—depending on need. The theatre hall allows for a wide range of play formats through its adaptable layout and open spatial character. Windows on all sides of the building create a sense of openness and allow for casual visual connections between inside and outside, encouraging brief visits or spontaneous encounters. The existing steel trusses are preserved, serving as physical traces of the building’s industrial past and adding to its layered atmosphere. The overall layout is simple and clear, with minimal additions. The spaces are high but keep a sense of intimacy, and can extend into the public space.



Configuration for a traditional play...

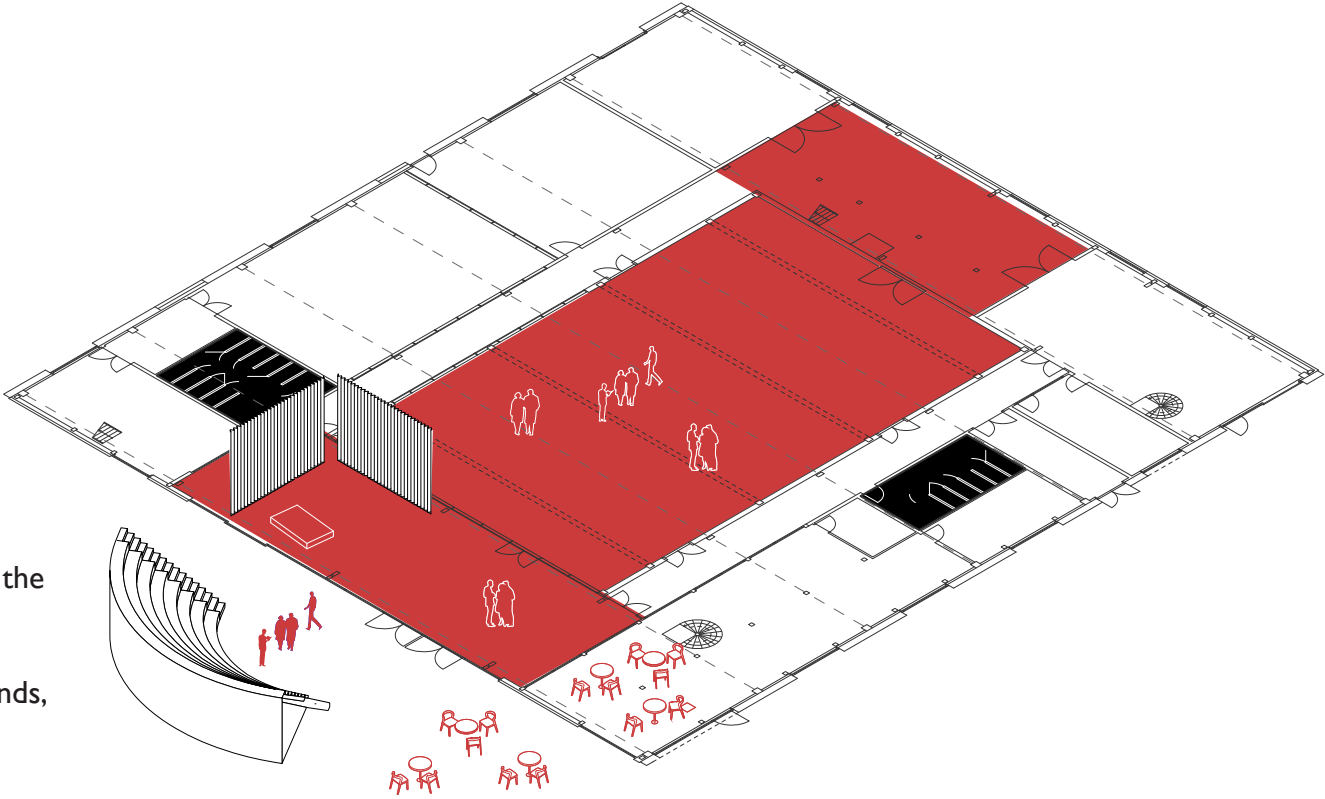
... or extended onto the square in front of the theatre.

The foyer becomes the stage, or sheltered stands, the theatre hall now becomes the backstage.



... or turned 90 degrees...

Here corridor becomes the backstage





Getting acquainted with the work of Compagnie Marius—watching their performances, speaking with them, and engaging with their interviews—has deepened my understanding of their commitment to site-specific theatre, where the location itself becomes an integral part of the narrative. Their proximity to the audience fosters a sense of shared space and immediacy that resonates with the character of Blikfabriek.

Their social approach to theatre can be summarized through a few key gestures: there is no hierarchy between actor and audience; the traditional stage is absent; and a meal or drink is shared before or after the performance, creating a moment of informal connection. There is no attempt to control the climate or environment—yet thoughtful care is taken to ensure the audience's comfort. The theatre remains open and accessible, not bordered off, but continuous with the surrounding landscape through minimal interventions. However, they create a sense of intimacy, that draws the actors closer to the audience and enhances the theatrical experience.

This openness demands a flexible, site-specific approach with each new location, fostering a relationship not only with the place, but with a new and possible audience. Through this way of working, I recognized the potential to revive the site's former *raison d'être*, offering a permanent home for this type of theatre practice in Hoboken. Compagnie Marius offers not just a form of theatre, but a spatial attitude—a way of opening up space to a broad public while remaining attentive and truthful to the existing character of a place. They allow room for chance encounters, unpredictable weather or shifting light, and a remarkable degree of adaptability.

The design builds on these concepts of adaptivity and openness, all the while providing an architecture that is permanent. Rather than prescribing use, the architecture supports a range of possible futures—remaining open to change while grounded in the specific character of its context. It provides a room for a stage, a stage for the city.

