

Guest-edited by  
ED WALL

# The Landscapists

Redefining  
Landscape Relations



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# WORKING PLACE

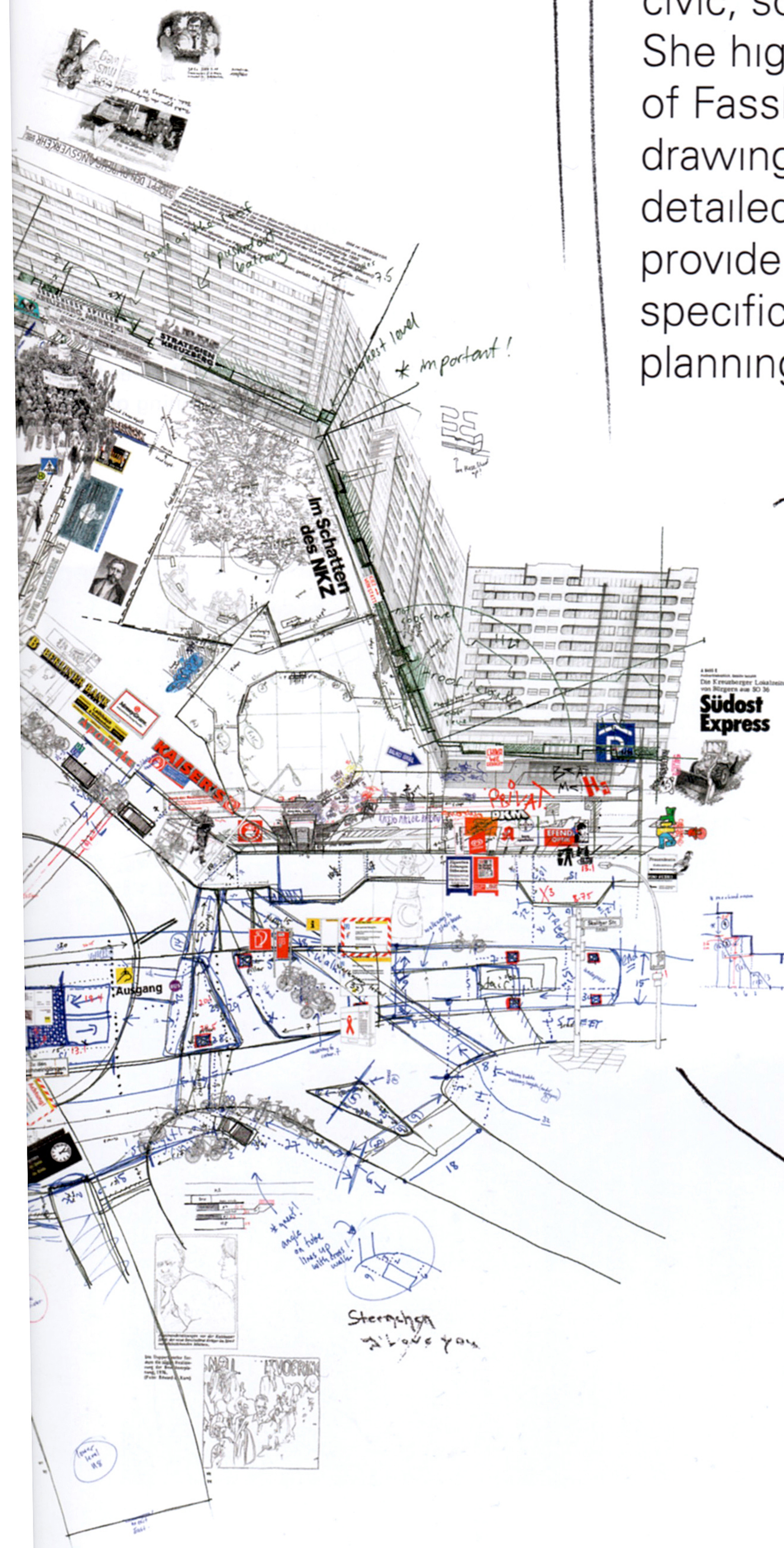
## CONSTRUCTING COLLAGE AS CRITIQUE

Larissa Fassler,  
Kotti, 2008,  
Kottbusser Tor,  
Kreuzberg, Berlin,  
2008

Collage depicting place and  
people in 2008 in Kottbusser  
Tor (nicknamed 'Kotti') with the  
Neue Kreuzberger Zentrum (NKZ)  
building as the backdrop.



Toya Peal



Landscape architect **Toya Peal** explores the work of Berlin-based artist Larissa Fassler in a quest for new ways to represent civic, social and urban space. She highlights the potential role of Fassler's social mappings, drawings constructed from detailed observations that provide multiple perspectives of specific sites, to critically inform planning and design processes.



A space must be taken over in which men construct, perform, entertain, experiment.

— Derek Jarman, 2011<sup>1</sup>

Larissa Fassler, a Canadian artist living in Berlin, observes, documents and draws public spaces of cities as part of her artistic practice to understand and portray the relationship between a place and the people that occupy it. In 2004 she began studying public places in Berlin. Using architectural methods of representation to capture the place, her quotidian surveillance and investigation into the operation of the space is collated and overlaid like a collage.

The mixed-use redevelopment block Neue Kreuzberger Zentrum (NKZ) forms the backdrop to Fassler's collages in the triptych 'Kotti'. The building, designed by architects Wolfgang Jokisch and Johannes Uhl, was completed in 1974 as part of wider postwar redevelopment plans in West Berlin. It is a landmark for Kottbusser Tor, the U-Bahn station and station square (fondly nicknamed 'Kotti') over which it towers, enclosing the public space. Straddling the main road through Kreuzberg, the NKZ block is an amalgamation of stacked housing and transport interchanges as it also connects to the subway, bearing similarities to buildings typical of the radical urban planning of the 19th century.



Wolfgang Jokisch and Johannes Uhl, Neue Kreuzberger Zentrum (NKZ) building, Kottbusser Tor, Kreuzberg, Berlin, 1974

Photomontage by artist Larissa Fassler, where the NKZ building stands as a backdrop to Kottbusser Tor station square. The mixed-use development provides a plethora of activity that animates the public space.

The three collages *Kotti*, 2008, 2010 and 2014 each took approximately a year to complete. They present like an amphitheatre with different stage sets, yet the enclosing NKZ building provides a constant scene. Fassler's variety of detailed handwritten observations, annotations, sketches and research are cut out, placed and overlaid like a collage. These observational materials animate the stage sets, and despite the chaotic appearance the overlays suggest a rhythm to the place. Are these collages the stage script, or palimpsest? Perhaps operational drawing, or even social mappings?

Although the 'collages' are large and near-human height, the layers of physical and subjective detail of the place embedded within the images draw the viewer in to the point where one's nose is nearly touching the image. Looking closely through the artists' magnifying glass, the work focuses on the relationships between places and people. The physical qualities of the spaces are recorded in footsteps and body heights, overlaid with associated research, newspaper pages, stories, historical events, advertising signs and slogans, all of which are redrawn by Fassler. Everything we see in her work has been collected and filtered through the artist to understand and make visible how these spaces impact people both psychologically and physically.





Should this methodology of social mappings be shared with urbanists and planners in order to value and provide critical interrogation of urban civic spaces as a design tool to develop places for all people?



Larissa Fassler,  
Kotti, 2010,  
Kottbusser Tor,  
Kreuzberg,  
Berlin,  
2010

Composite: The collage shows what is public and private in Kottbusser Tor. Coloured areas depict public space, and white areas private space. The NKZ building remains a constant backdrop.

Larissa Fassler,  
Kotti, 2014,  
Kottbusser Tor,  
Kreuzberg,  
Berlin,  
2014

Below: Fassler's collected observations of advertising slogans, signs and social messages are collected and reproduced by hand drawing and then scanning in to create a collaged composition of space and people in Kottbusser Tor. The NKZ building remains as the backdrop.





## Collage as Theatre

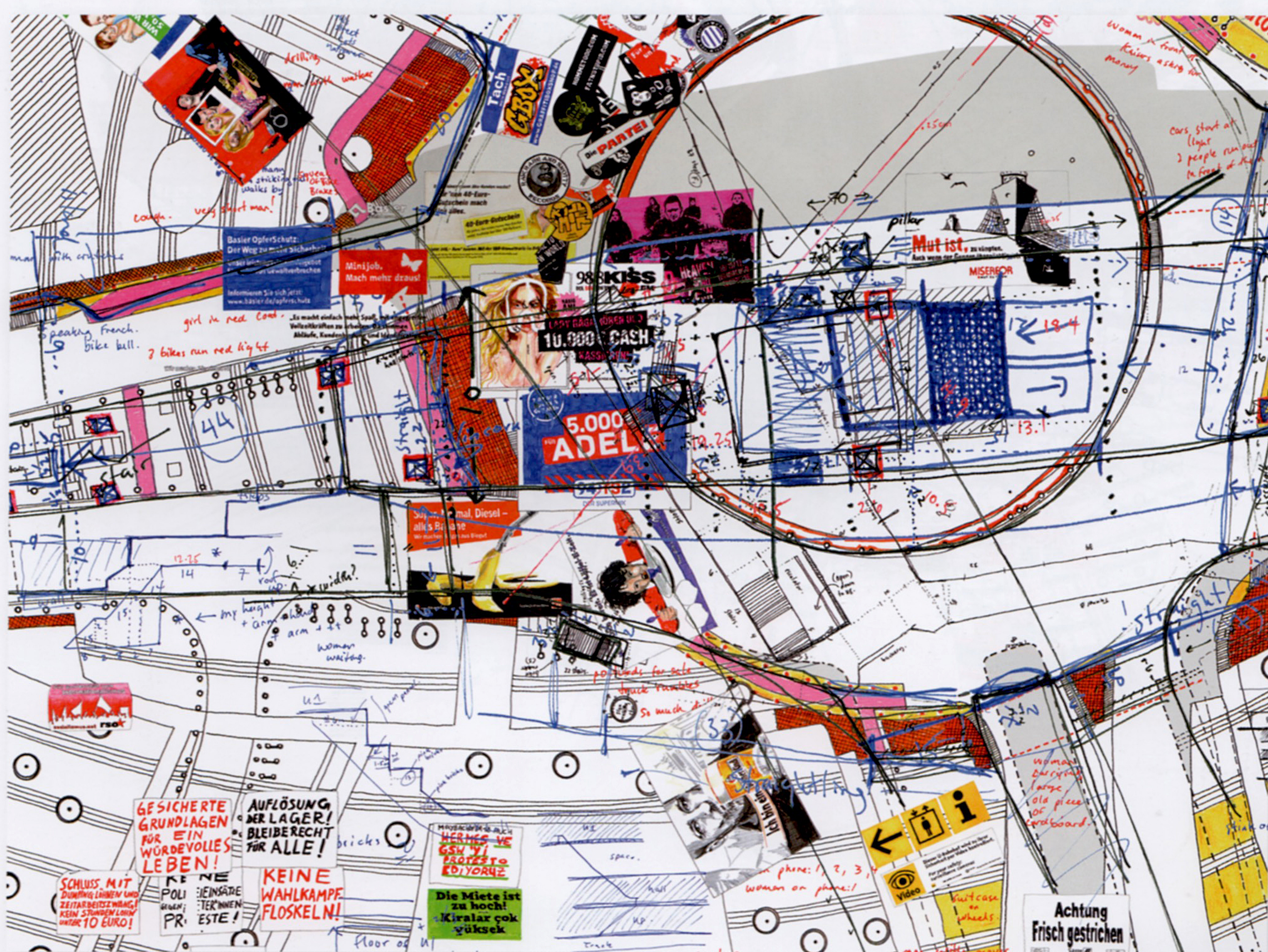
If interpreting Fassler's 'Kotti' series as an amphitheatre, who is the audience? Who is the stage director and what does this story of the space tell us? What does this seemingly chaotic social representation of Kotti reveal about the success or failure of its public space? Should this methodology of social mappings be shared with urbanists and planners in order to value and provide critical interrogation of urban civic spaces as a design tool to develop places for all people?

Despite its dark passageways, the dominance of NKZ's social housing and negative associations with crime and violence, Kottbusser Tor is simultaneously a thriving urban civic place offering social spaces for a conglomeration of people at all times of the day. Punks, LGBT communities, tourists, students and Turkish immigrants occupy its spaces 24/7; markets and cafes by day, nightclubs and bars by night.

The artist frames *Kotti, 2008, 2010 and 2014* from the same imagined viewpoint from above, but by doing so is able to capture the whole scene in one image. Fassler spends hours, days and months observing, photographing and revisiting the space to record information to construct her collages

Larissa Fassler,  
*Kotti, 2014* (detail),  
Kottbusser Tor,  
Kreuzberg,  
Berlin,  
2014

Layered signs and observations create a dense and lively streetscape to animate the space in front of the NKZ building.



and establish her physical and critical position on the public spaces of cities. Particularly in *2008* and *2014*, the 'collaged' annotations, text and coloured hand-drawn images keep the viewer's eye constantly moving around the image and thus provide many aspects. The perspective is distorted, and the sense of time removed; the handwritten observations exist all at the same time in a kind of organised chaos. As a result, Fassler's collages offer a pan-optical view of Kotti, an alternative to the traditional eye-level scenographic views associated with evolutions of landscape.

## Hyper-activity

Landscape was once termed 'a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing or symbolising surroundings',<sup>2</sup> yet this definition seemingly only applied to when landscape was purely the subject of painting in the 18th century. Now landscape is complex, layered, lived – and cities too. In the mid-20th century, Jane Jacobs appealed against the architectural styles focusing on the appearance and configurations of cities, instead advocating the importance of how a city operates. She first argued that all aspects of a city – its streets, parks and dwellings – should be diverse in use to 'give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially'.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, that cities be dense, creating liveliness and hyperactivity. Together, density and diversity may stimulate unusual encounters, discovery, a sense of place – even comedy. Through Fassler's observations and collages, people come together both in reality and through imagination

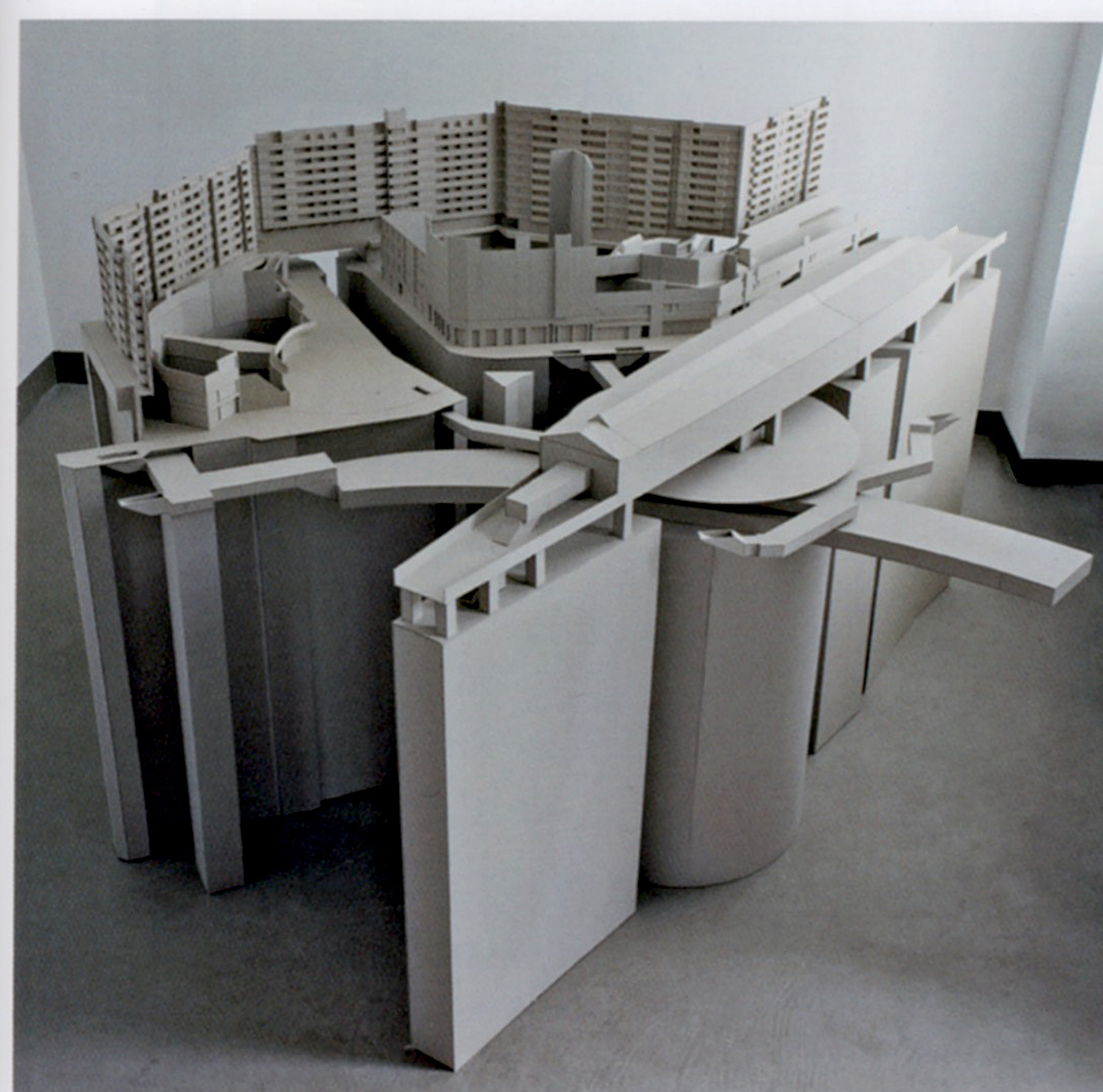
In *Kotti, 2008*, for example, an excerpt from an Ian McEwan novel, handwritten by Fassler, depicts a fictional character who lived in Kotti; below is a pencil-drawn portrait of a man wearing a sandwich board reading 'Are foreigners second class citizens?'

What does density and diversity bring to Kotti? It brings artists. William Empson famously quoted that 'the arts result from over-crowding'.<sup>4</sup> However, artists bring the bourgeois. Capitalism has taken interest in Kotti, with rental prices increasing to the point of toppling the diversity and social balance. Jacobs alludes to this issue as the 'self-destruction of diversity',<sup>5</sup> whereby the popularity of a neighbourhood with such vitality can become profitable. This is a recurring issue in Berlin, and consequently has become a part of Fassler's focus, for example in her more recent project *Emotional Blackmail* (2018). Fassler was commissioned by the KW Institute for Contemporary Art to create temporary artworks on billboards to highlight social issues arising from planned high-end developments in the Moritzplatz neighbourhood by real-estate firm Pandion. Here, her applied method of pan-optical observations of people and place helped her to create billboards that stand like mirrors, offering a true reflection of Moritzplatz.

Will developers take notice of the social issues and Fassler's foreseen consequences? Hard to tell. But nevertheless her work captures a mood, a reality, and the voice of the people who live in the neighbourhood, and this could be an important catalyst for change.

Larissa Fassler,  
*Kotti, 2008* grey  
cardboard and glue model,  
'Beyond Architecture' exhibition,  
Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen,  
Germany, 2014

The private and public spaces are represented as positive and negative forms in Fassler's architectural model of the NKZ building. Approximate scale: 1 footstep = 3 centimetres (1-inch).



Perhaps evaluations like Fassler's animated triptych should be used by designers and 'city operators' to critically interrogate urban civic spaces. An ethnographic study of people and place, the work conveys both the comical and the dysfunction of Kotti, which overall suggests its sentimental value and success as a diverse cultural space. The palimpsest script suggests a vulnerable but much-loved character. ▢

Larissa Fassler,  
*Emotional Blackmail*,  
Moritzplatz, Kreuzberg,  
Berlin, 2018

Public billboards by Fassler stand in the Moritzplatz neighbourhood as part of the REALTY project commissioned by the KW Institute for Contemporary Art. The boards reflect back to residents and developers the social issues arising from proposed developments by real-estate firm Pandion.



## Notes

1. Derek Jarman, 'Tentative Ideas for a Manifesto After 1 1/3 Years at an Art School', in Alex Danchev, *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, Penguin (London), 2011, p 374.
2. Kenneth Olwig, 'Representation and Alienation in the Political Land-scape', *Cultural Geographies*, 12 (1), 2005, p 19.
3. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage (New York), 1961, p 14.
4. Richard Sennett, 'The Open City', in Tigran Haas and Hans Westlund (eds), *In The Post-Urban World*, Routledge (London), 2017, p 100: richardsennett.com/site/senn/UploadedResources/The%20Open%20City.pdf.
5. Jacobs, *op cit*, p 243.

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