

fig. 1 – Incision. Site plan, contours and materiality (c) Daniel Marin Rabadán



fig. 2 – Unter der Prater Hochstraße. Isometric study, Site 2
Image: Sofia Abendstein

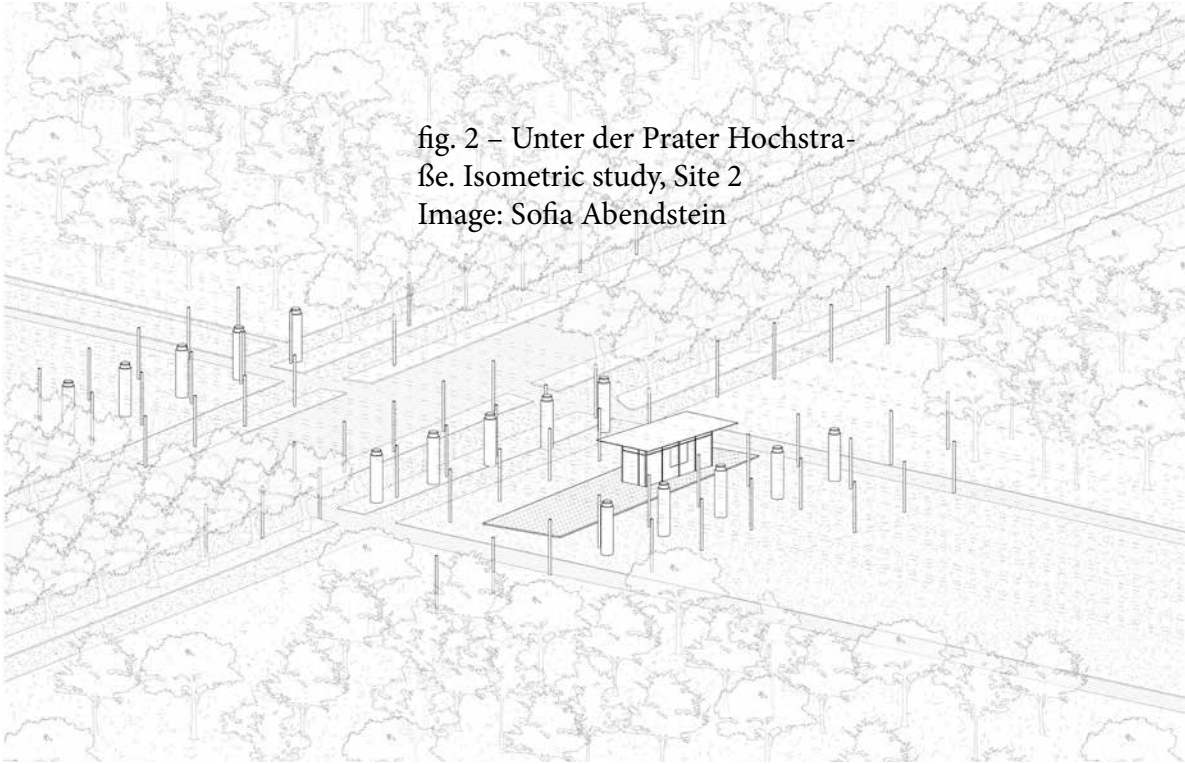
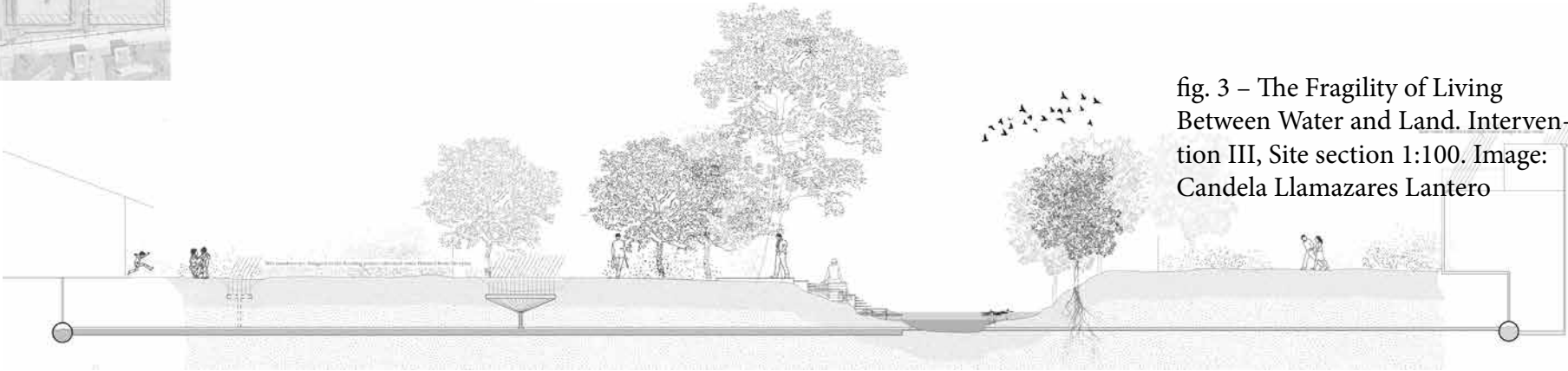


fig. 3 – The Fragility of Living Between Water and Land. Intervention III, Site section 1:100. Image: Candela Llamazares Lantero



Charging the Terrain

How can architecture act in the terrain vague without becoming an aggressive instrument of power and abstract reason? Undoubtedly, through attention to continuity: not the continuity of the planned, efficient, and legitimated city but of the flows, the energies, the rhythms established by the passing of time and the loss of limits. Ignasi de Sola-Morales, 'Terrain Vague', 1995

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City and landscape were once categorically kept separate. However, both have long since changed dramatically. It's hard to tell anymore which is which. The modernist urban landscape, promising a better life, has not only produced a substantial part of today's varied and heterogeneous urban texture, but it has also extended the city into and beyond its surrounding areas. The relationship of city and landscape is shifting and is not necessarily antagonistic any longer; it's not landscape versus city anymore.

Here's a functional opportunity: landscape used as a tool for understanding the conceptual relationship and concrete reality between people and their urban environment. The landscape spaces have their own, individual temporalities. Beyond a classic, spatial typology such as park, garden, forests or bodies of water, open spaces play an immensely important urban role as a structural time element: as archive, storage and material. Essentially, its chronological layers run concurrently: past (functional) roles, present states (of intentional and non-intentional attributions), and the expectations (or promises) of future uses. Design work on a specific project site therefore constitutes research of physical structures, as well as of temporal and natural dynamics at the same time. Beyond the initially abstract realm of landscape, it is essential to tap yet another stratum: tangibility, sensibility and sensuousness facilitate reading, communication, and representation of a project space.

Working from the Site

The design studio Charging the Terrain focused on the role of open space in the urban texture of Vienna. Eleven individual projects as concise site interventions aim to address and expand on processual aspects. The projects serve as vehicles for research and understanding – and for communicating the findings and speculations on the history and future of the sites in question. How can a process initiate a new time span, interact with those already in existence or activate those lying dormant?

Finding a Site

The search for and definition of the site is an immanent part of design work; it involves the formulation of an attitude towards the city. The focus of search and selection in the studio work of Charging the Terrain is on urban spaces of potential—places that are in a dynamic, intermediate state. A great number of different terms exists: terrain vague, brownfield, wasteland, Brache, G'Stettin. Degrees of accessibility to these spaces play a role, mostly they are characterized by an exposition to natural dynamics. These places of ambivalence are—to varying degrees and with structural difference—essential part of our cities. How might we attribute the role of these spaces as part of the city? The studio projects aim to valorize and improve their urban context, ideally a well-founded speculation about the future of the urban habitat.

Temporalities

Beyond the design work on the urban values of a specific site, accompanying model studies aim to deepen the general understanding of process and time, accumulating knowledge on concepts, methods, and representation. The essayistic models are abstract 1:1 scale studies. They strive to reflect how time and process might be involved in architectural, landscape architectural and urbanistic projects. The models materially test, observe, evaluate temporality, processuality, and change. While thematically overlapping with the individual studio projects, the models are conceived as an independent endeavour. Project and model study both were developed in parallel—yet they may have taken different directions. The independence between the models and the development of the design projects reflects the intrinsic limitations of control in the handling of terrains

vagues. In our latitudes, temporality is strongly characterized by the seasons. Plants are the most obvious indicators of this. As the model studies were all conceived and conducted in winter, they had to face the difficulty of foregoing vegetation or plant growth in their set-ups. Accordingly, the temporality models involve soil, water, corrosion, growth of crystals or bacteria, decomposition. As real as processes, surprises, and failures could be observed, the models also work as metaphors of change.

The Bigger Picture

In the face of the pressing challenges at a scale yet larger, nature and growingly controllable factors have become indelible and unignorable factors of urban life and development. While the nature of change has always been part of human habitat, nature in the city is growingly considered as protagonist. This discursive

and practical shift towards transformation and open systems has become been part of the disciplinary and urban development globally. Together, the projects of the studio Charging the Terrain – albeit limited in number of cases and with varying foci of interest – constitute an Atlas of Urban Temporalities in Vienna, thereby recording a close observation of the city's actual relationship with nature.

Thilo Folkerts, January 2025



fig. 4 artefacts from site #10

fig. 5 temporality model, Moritz Tischendorf