

“Yes write about it if I like or  
anything if I like but not there,  
there is no there there.”

Gertrude Stein,  
Everybody's Autobiography

Following the monotonous rhythm of prefabricated elements, apartments are strung together in endless repetition until they fade away into the distance. Blind facades confine interspersed green spaces. Playgrounds are silhouetted against this backdrop like theatre equipment, temporarily taken off-stage, awaiting their cue. The window grids of office buildings structure surfaces where all depth is condensed into flatness and finally eliminated. Orderly aligned rows of balconies project here and there into the slightly overcast sky. According to a rigorous utilitarian choreography building volumes are geometrically arranged. Strings of action rebel against the rigid grain of everyday banality and exhaust themselves. An absence unfolds amidst orchestrated repetition and isolation, as if reality was to congeal in abstract shapes yet unable to fully materialize. Individual ways of living are hidden behind standardized facades, which evenhandedly bear traces of attempted appropriation and of insuperable alienation.

The work there is no there there presents an inventory of typical architectural fragments taken from existing situations in European urban agglomerations. These omnipresent fragments of ordinariness are captured through the media of photography, of architectural models, and of model photography. The standardized elements of suburban architecture exist somewhere between euphoric modernist visions and dispassionate functionality, between hope and weariness. These ordinary fragments, which are at the same time exchangeable and universal—like an exterior staircase, the front of a single-family house, a garage forecourt, an entrance, the façade of an office building etc.—become the focus of attention. As models of everyday banality they turn into instruments of investigation of basic principles, problems, and qualities of our built environment. Presented in such a way the banal gains significance, loses its ostensible implicitness, and reveals an ambiguity that is hidden behind its familiarity.

Between the different media an interplay unfolds. Photographs and models relate to reality in distinct ways. They also reveal diverse aspects of reality in varied degrees of abstraction. Photographs of existing situations form the basis for model fragments. These models are then themselves photographed and through this process two versions of reality are juxtaposed against one another. Insights can be gained by comparing the different media and by realizing the similarities they reveal. A strange closeness seems to form between abstract models and built reality, which raises questions about the nature and quality of that reality. Do we live in models, in mere abstractions? What is the role of the typical and standardized for our contemporary environment? To what extent are our everyday surroundings more than an absurd encounter of standardized fragments? Is specificity nothing more than the ruptures occurring in a field of homogeneity? And can unique moments be provoked through juxtapositions of ordinary fragments? The statement there is no there there indicates a suspicion that something we believe to exist behind eagerly repeated gridded façades, amidst tightly woven networks of standardization and beyond the smooth surfaces of functional optimization is actually missing.























