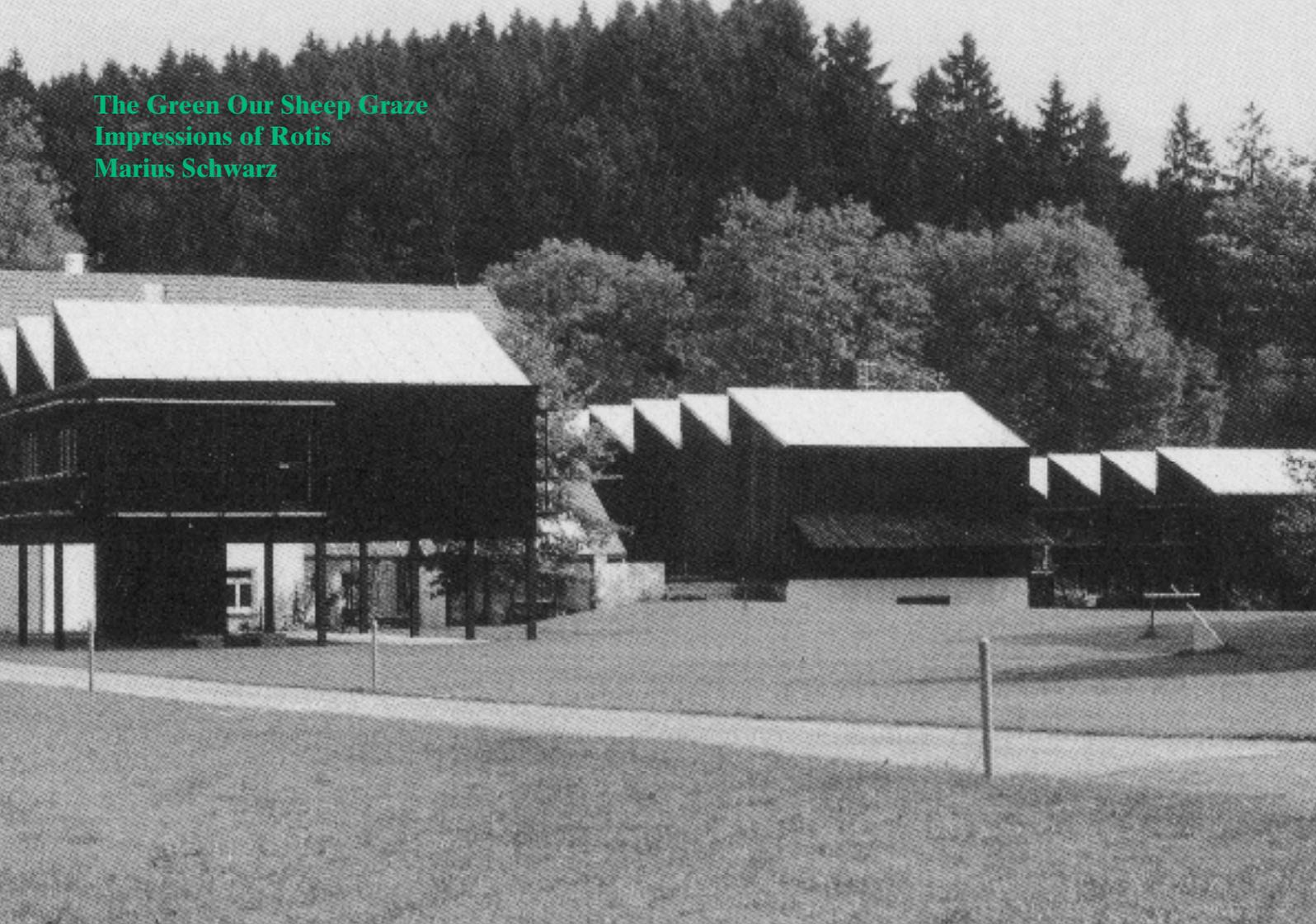
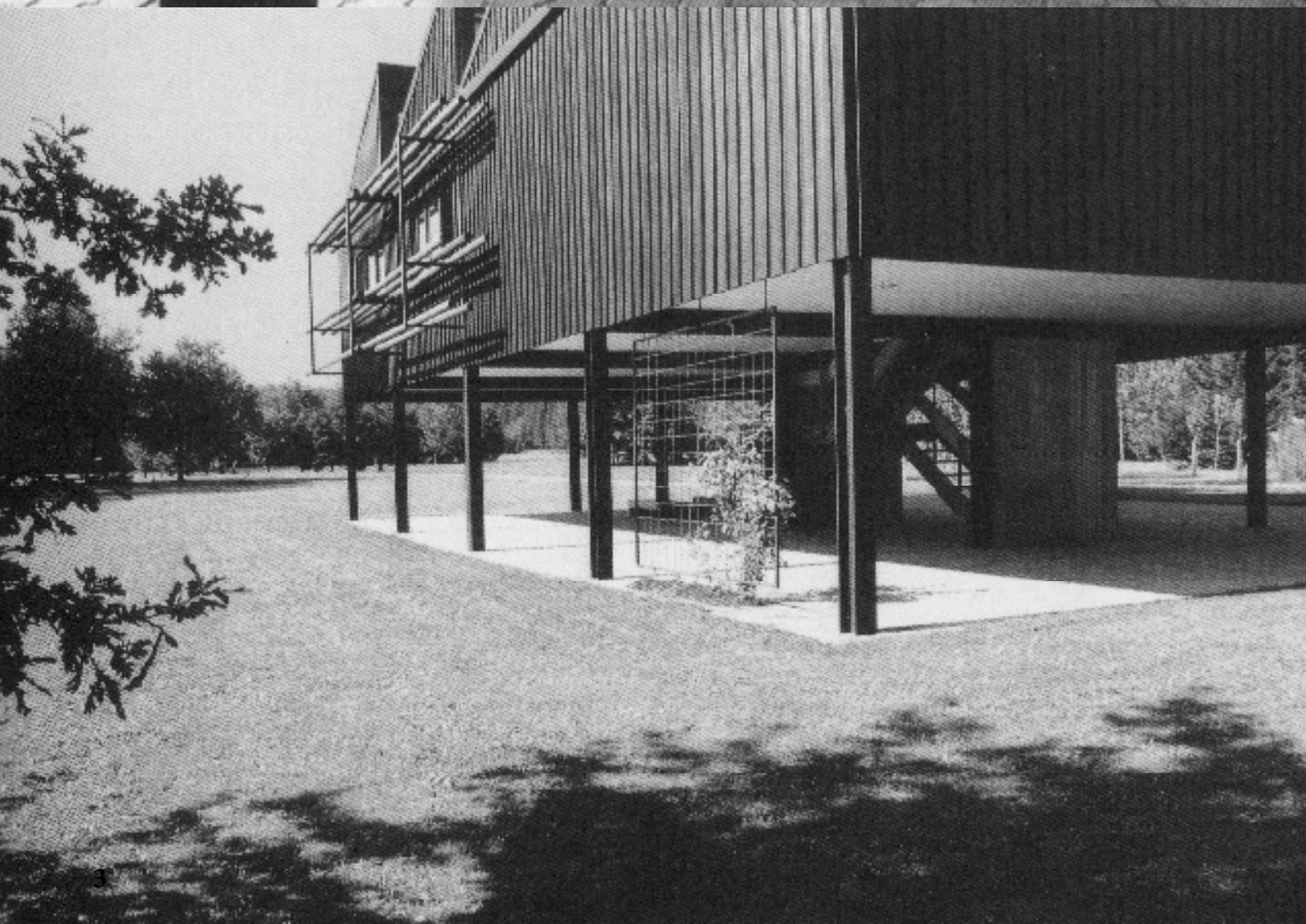
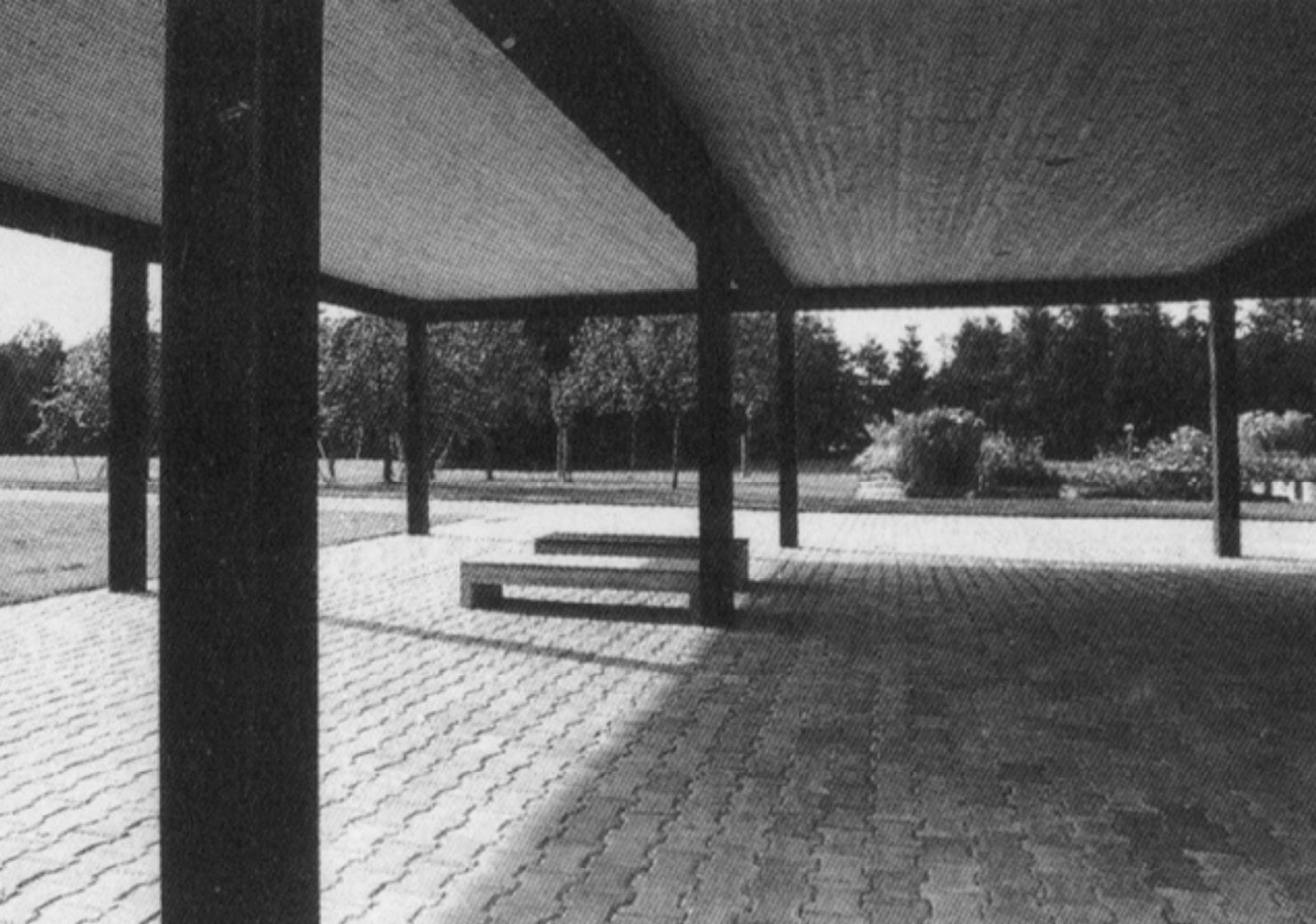


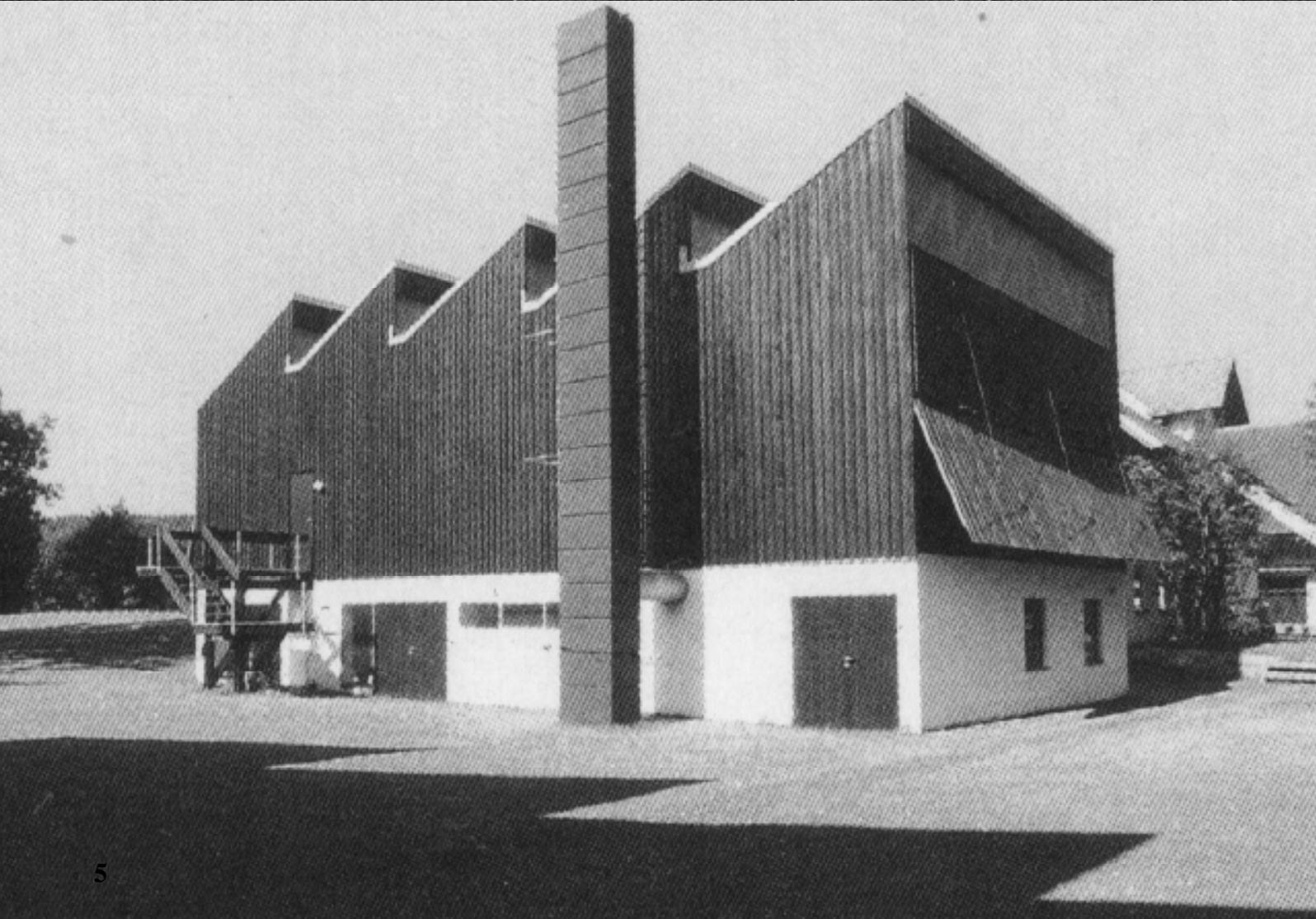
The Green Our Sheep Graze
Impressions of Rotis
Marius Schwarz













Our Sheep

Last summer when I skyped with my parents we ended up talking about Rotis, a small settlement not far from their place. I told them that I kept wondering how it must have been in the 1970s and 1980s, when graphic designer Otl Aicher ran a studio down there with up to a dozen assistants, right out in the middle of nowhere—in the alpine upland of Allgäu, South Germany.

‘Rotis?’ my mother asked, ‘funny you mention that. A few weeks ago his sons called to ask if they could borrow some of our sheep, to maintain the fields of their property.’

Our sheep grazing the fields of Rotis—it took me a while to process that.

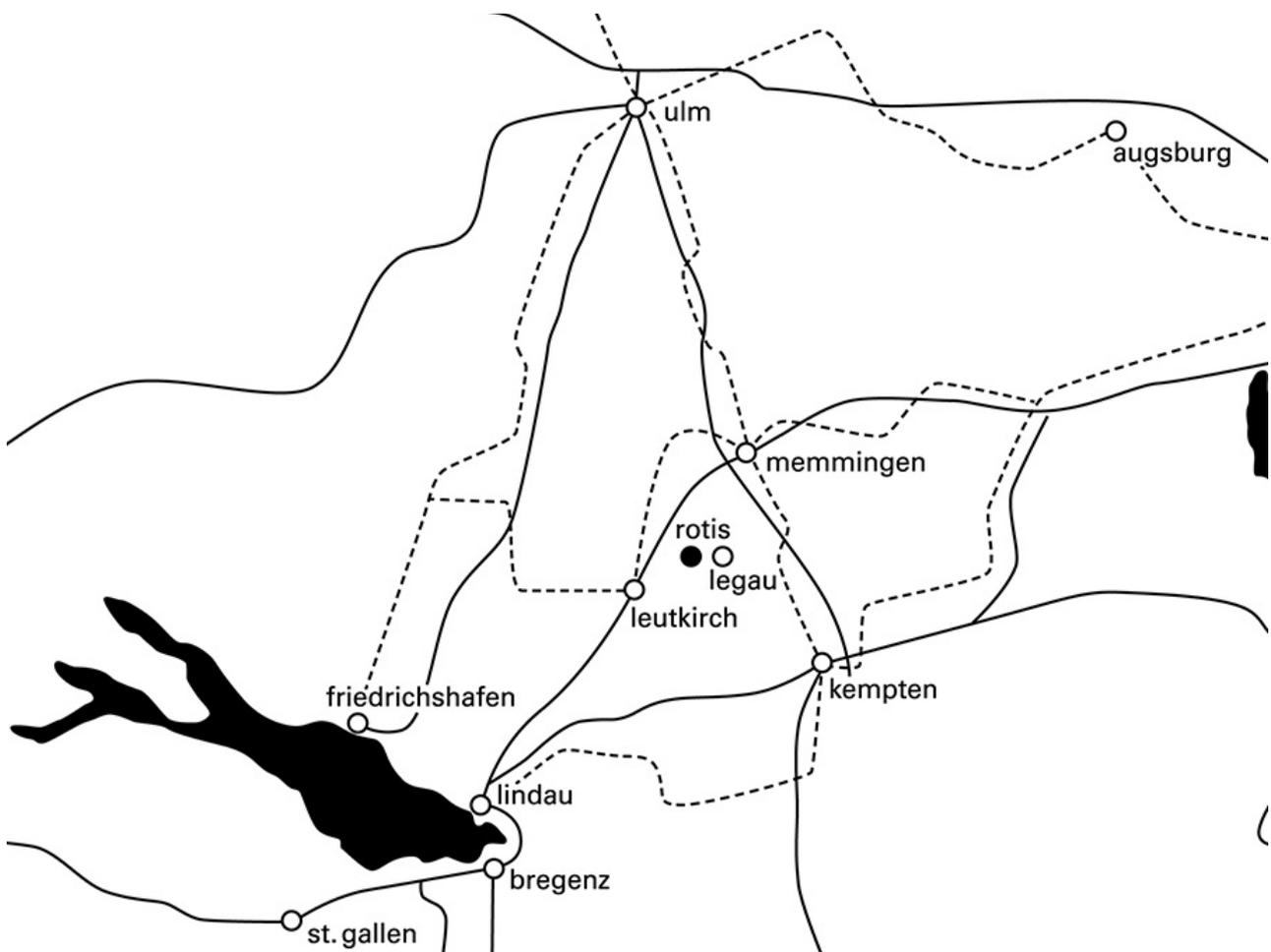
As far as I knew, Aicher mentioned that he would in no circumstances let sheep take care of his lawn. They would only ruin it, he said. Instead, I heard, he mowed his vast yard weekly, on a lawnmower. And only when the grass was trimmed evenly was he pleased and ready to put the tractor back into the garage.

After 20 years in Rotis, Aicher’s studio came to a sudden end. Without a doubt a tragic story, but also one of absurd symbolic power. Aicher’s accuracy was tireless. To avoid visible turning marks on his lawn he used to ride his tractor onto the street and turn it there. This allowed him to continue the following line with a straight start.

I can only guess how many rows he finished that late August day in 1991, when a motorcycle, coming from Bavaria, hit him on his very last turn. A week later Aicher, one of the most notable designers of post-war Germany, succumbed to his head injuries in a hospital in Günzburg.

The last turn on the lawnmower, that’s how Aicher’s idea of Rotis ends—our sheep on the lawn, that’s how this story begins. It is a story about a man’s desire for order and control among the chaos of reality. About success and meaning of the past and the subsequent disillusion of its heirs. Finally, about the decay of a modernist architectural monument in a landscape of ancient farmhouses.

And about me, digging my way through history.



A Storyteller

My first investigation of Rotis started with a rumour. A rumour that I had already picked up years ago in the only good pub in the town where I grew up: Gasthaus Lamm, or 'Lamm' as the locals would call it. The rumour claimed that when Aicher moved to Rotis in 1972 he built his ateliers on stilts to avoid an official building permission. A mischievous trick.

Apparently he would fully erect the houses without any papers, and when the building department sent their wrecking balls, he referred to the departments very own guideline book which, according to the rumour, said: 'only this is a building, and therefore in need for permission, that has a floor area of 3m² or more'. Aicher's ateliers float two meters above ground—therefore wouldn't be buildings in that sense.

Along with the two ateliers on stilts, Aicher rebuilt the old Rotis saw shed into a hall, likewise covered by shed roofs. He erected a garage, a long building with a lean-to roof. And he developed the old mill house and cowshed, the classic gabled roof buildings.

The stilt story stuck in my mind, even though I was aware of the circumstances in which it was told. The amount of heavy local beers which are known for loosening tongues, tended to make storytellers ignore facts to make their stories sound better.

The next day I called the father of a friend who I knew was a city planner in the town hall. I told him the story, hoping to find out if there was something to it or not. He had never heard about it, but as he was equally impressed by the idea he sent an assistant into the archive.

He returned my call two days later to report: 'It's a riddle to me, Aicher's file contains neither remarks nor communication. It is totally blank!'

I had forgotten about the whole thing—until coincidence brought it back.

In the following summer holiday the quarterfinals of the UEFA Euro Championship were being screened in front

of 'Lamm'. Greece vs Germany. A bitter defeat, especially in regard to the upcoming Greek economic crisis.

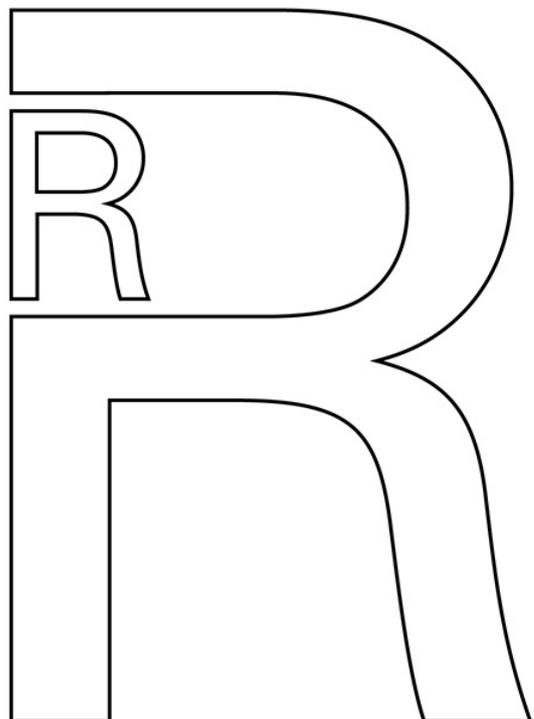
After the final whistle, I talked to the same guy again—the stilt-story-guy. A city original and long-term patron of 'Lamm', secretly nicknamed Captain Jack Sparrow due to his wooden walk, long greasy hair and the hat he wears.

'You're still interested in that?' he asked, 'then you should talk to Julian'. He pointed in the direction of a hefty, bald guy in his fifties, sitting broadly at the very last beer table. 'I'll introduce you to him.'

As we approached the guy I noticed his similarity to Aicher.

'So so,' he said in the voice of a Swabian trying to speak German, 'yet another one interested in Mr. Aicher.'

The game is now almost two years ago. In the meantime I have read everything on Otl Aicher and Rotis I could get a hold of. I went into Aicher's archive, talked to two of his former assistants and visited his son Julian down in today's Rotis.



The Design Officer

But to fully understand Aicher's Rotis we have to go further back in time. To Munich in 1972, into the last preparations of the Olympic Games, onto the office floor where Aicher worked as the design officer.

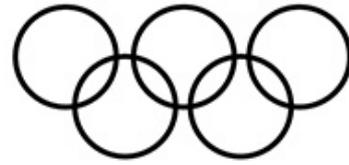
For four years he had been directing a team of assistants who helped him execute his concept: cheerful, peaceful and non-political games. The idea was to radically oppose the 1936 Berlin games which had been abused for Nazi propaganda. The Nazis whose system Aicher deeply detested and whose flag he had deserted in the Second World War. Aicher's team put traditional Munich in a modernist jacket. They replaced the totalitarian system of the Nazis by their own system, one of bright colours and clear lines.

Orange, yellow, blue and green posters, flags and signs were printed and hung throughout the city. They showed athletes of all disciplines, screened in bright pantone-colours, labelled with the Olympic logo, Aicher's spiral logo and 'München 1972' written in an expressionless typeface. Booklets, backstage passes, uniforms—everything you can imagine was designed, produced and delivered. There was a plastic dachshund named Waldi, the Olympic mascot, and a blue nylon version of the Bavarian *dirndl* for the volunteering hostesses.

The decreasing pressure in the office allowed Aicher to think about the time after the games. He played with the idea of a radical change; to retire to the countryside with both his studio and family. When a friend showed him the abandoned mill in Rotis he knew right away: 'This is it!' While he was wandering on the mill terrain he drew buildings in his mind, and back at the office desk in Munich he sketched them with a ballpoint pen.

Once the housing for his new studio was found, the next step was to look for good assistants.

A week before the Olympics began Aicher invited Monika Maus for a job



interview; a technical drawer from Ulm, long term assistant of hfg colleague Walter Zischegg, who recommended her.

Aicher showed her around the busy office. Walking from table to table he talked enthusiastically about his plans. In between talking, he bent over his assistants' drawing tables, either giving a satisfied nod or making a quick sketch for corrections. When they reached the end of the room, he turned around and asked the girl with the confident smile and the dark pageboy hair, 'Can I count on you, Mrs. Maus?'

Monika who followed him in silence had already been impressed by the colourful designs when she saw them on the way from the train station to the office. She was, without question, interested in working for this man, but she had doubts about the rural remoteness of the new studio and the consequences it would have on her life. So she replied straightforwardly: 'I think I have to see this place first, Mr. Aicher, before I can make a commitment.'

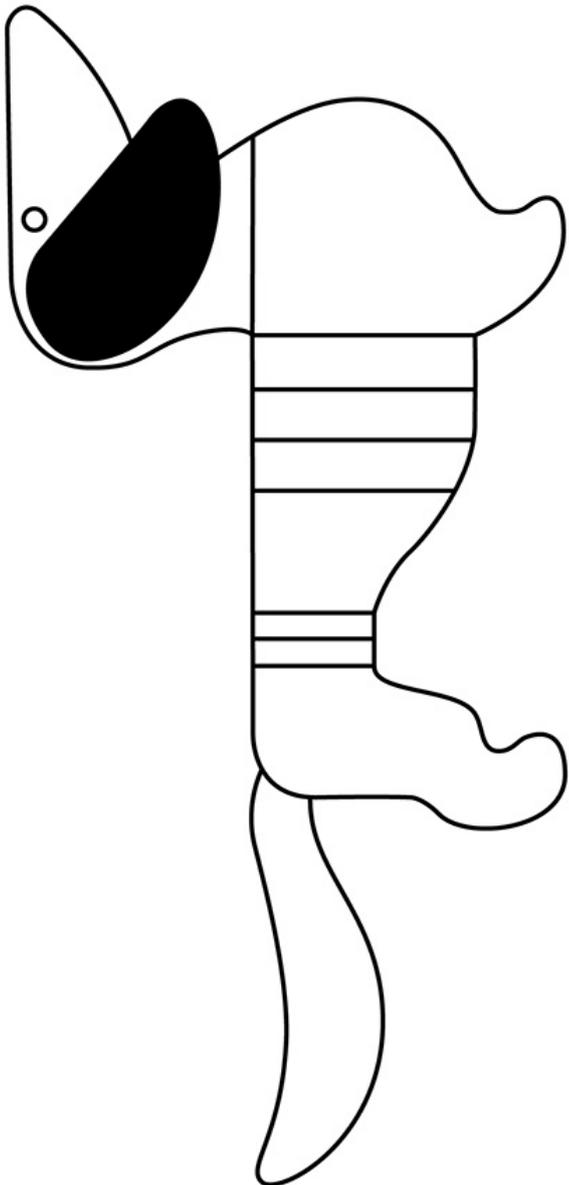
'Hoppla!', Aicher said, and talking of himself in third person: 'An Aicher didn't hear such a thing in a long time.'

But because he appreciated her directness, he promised: ‘I’ll make sure that you get to see Rotis as soon as the constructions begin.’

At the end he advised her to visit the coffee shop on the second story because its terrace gave such a good view over the Olympic Village.

‘Thanks Mr. Aicher, I was walking around the Village the entire morning. The view won’t be too surprising.’

Now honestly impressed, Aicher said: ‘Moni’—and this is how he called her the following five years—‘People who sneak past the guards to get access to the Village, that’s exactly the kind of workers I need for Rotis.’



The assistant

I have an appointment in the former hfg Ulm, the legendary design school in whose foundation Aicher and his wife were majorly involved. The building, designed by Max Bill, is used as a public museum and an archive today.

The thoroughly modernist construction is fully cast in concrete but still manages to keep a certain lightness. It might be the thin wooden planks in which Bill panelled parts of the walls, or the infinite amount of light that comes in through the big window facades.

The building is largely preserved in its original state. It is only the glass of the aforementioned windows that reveal its present time: the old ones were simply not available anymore when the city of Ulm restored the building—that’s why the complex shimmers in this omnipresent blue today. Disregarding this detail, its visitors are able to experience, as if in an architectural time machine, how it must have been once. The famous curved wooden bar still meanders its way through the canteen. Only the hfg students with their ironed shirts and slim ties are long gone when Monika Maus enters, this afternoon in spring 2014. She is wearing a black robe and a long blue silk scarf hangs down from her shoulders. She welcomes me with the warmth of a mother and sits down beside me. Her eyes start glowing when she begins talking about her youth.

‘The organizer’s nonchalance allowed me stroll inside the Olympic Village, even though I was not supposed to do so. Later it was this goodwill the terrorists abused’, she remembers.

She talks about the autumn of 1972. The moment when the ideal of the peaceful games collapsed and the events were overshadowed by the kidnapping and killing of eleven Israeli athletes by Palestinian terrorists inside the Olympic Village.

‘Aicher was personally offended by this. It was the worst that could have happened. Several months later, when we started working in Rotis he still suffered from

it. His zest for life, his humour were gone for a long time.’

So Rotis had to start off with a setback. With the first big jobs and the arrival of Aicher’s family and the installation of a fully equipped printery in the old shed, things moved on. Monika Maus became Aicher’s personal assistant and was mainly occupied with the redesign of *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*—the second German TV channel.

‘Aicher told the directors: “Look, if you always position yourself as second, you will never gain respect. Emancipate yourself, use the shortcut. From now on you are ZDF!”, and they went for it.’

He unified the studio layouts and backgrounds. He drew an alteration of the typeface Univers—with rounded edges—since the monitors at that time were not able to screen clear edges anyway.

‘The clock that the ZDF used for at least ten years—that was my clock. I was the only one in Rotis able to construct it properly’ says Monika Maus, *‘technisch korrekt’*.

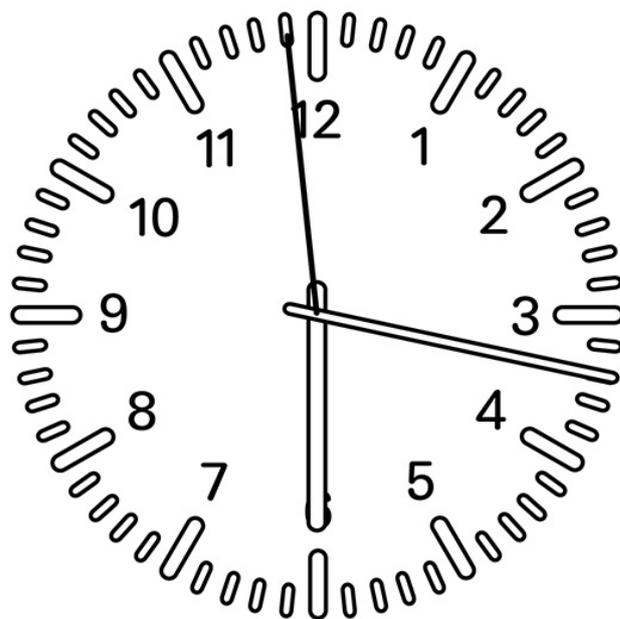
Even though her job was badly paid and the working hours were demanding, she enjoyed working in the studio. It was the parties, the exchange that came along with the many visitors and through the other young assistants, the ICE train rides to ZDF in Mainz, the exaggerated business dinners and not to forget Aicher’s strong personality that made up for it.

‘I admired his view on design. Also his sense of order; I was chaotic enough myself.’

She remembers how Aicher hated it when she was late for work, often because she had been stuck behind the slow milk truck on the unpaved road. Or how she had to repark her green R4 if it wasn’t correctly in line with the other cars.

‘It’s ridiculous to think about it now. I mean, today nobody would stay for a minute in such a place’, she says. ‘Individuality did not yet exist. It wasn’t a bad thing to submit to a bigger idea. We’ve been proud being part of it.’

First, Monika Maus and the other employees had their lunch in a nearby pub. They would regularly return late and tired from digesting the local food. ‘Schnitzel and pot roast—that’s all they had to offer’, she



remembers. Aicher figured that if he wanted to keep this office going he had to take this into his own hands. He employed a cook who daily served light vegetarian food—and this is no joke—at eight minutes past noon. He converted the historical arch basement of the old shed into his new canteen: Rotisserie.

It was possibly Aicher’s little neuroses that made Monika Maus leave Rotis in 1976, but more likely that she simply had to move on with her life, had other tasks waiting.

Aicher had a hard time letting go of assistants. Without them Rotis was a quiet solitary place. Especially for a man like Aicher who was supposedly more connected to the concept of work than the concept of family.

On a farewell note to Monika Maus and other colleagues who left in the same period he wrote: ‘The children of Israel leave the promised land.’

Monika Maus: the child of Israel.
Aicher’s world in Rotis: the promised land.

The Son

The only time I happened to be in Rotis myself, there was hardly anything promising left.

It was early August 2013. One year after I got to know Julian Aicher at the screening, where he had handed me a business card and ensured me that I could contact him for a talk whenever I wanted.

After a few mails back and forth, I received an invitation with precise instructions: ‘Tonight. 18:18 pm here at Rotis mill. [...] Bring five bottles of non-alcoholic Meckatzer for my wife and me, and four bottles of Meckatzer (alcoholic) for me.’

To pay in kind is quite common for the area. Regarding the time; I was almost sure it must have been a typo.

At 6 pm sharp I park my parent’s car in front of Julian Aicher’s building. Originally it was Rotis’ saw shed; an ordinary wooden shack with a gabled roof. In 1972 it was rebuilt into the so called ‘hall’; giving space for lectures, presentations and meetings. Norman Foster, a close friend of Otl Aicher used to call it ‘the cathedral of Rotis’. In the meantime it became the residence of Julian Aicher and his wife.

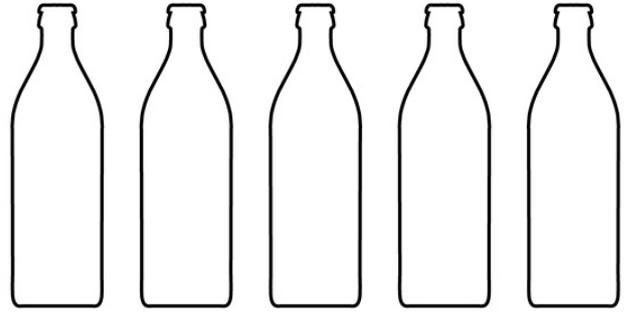
The property looks quite different from what I’ve seen on the black and white pictures in Aicher’s publications. Back then, everything was neatly maintained and cleaned up. Now, elder and nettles are wildly sprouting around the house.

In the distance I recognize my father’s sheep as white dots, hear their bleating and the dull sounds of their bells. I climb up the stairs, the beer under my arms. The door is wide open so I knock the frame loudly.

‘You’re early!’ shouts a voice from inside.

Julian Aicher pops open a bottle of the beer. We sit down on a grey, worn out couch in the unrestored part of the house. It is the remains of the hall; old studio furniture and poster rolls are stored in the corners, catching dust.

He takes a sip and starts talking about his job as a freelance promoter for alternative



energy, and how his home office isn’t always practical: ‘We’re so off the hook here, we only have an ISDN connection’, he says. He tells me how he reactivated the old Rotis mill hybrid and multiplied its power and how he is selling the leftover energy. He continues about his vision to reactivate all the ancient watermills in the area—his contribution to the renewable energy policy.

In between all this, he mentions a ruptured dream to transform Rotis into a centre for alternative energies, a broke investor, and disagreements on the heritage.

After the second beer I start inquiring on his father’s Rotis. I ask him about the architecture and the story behind the stilts. ‘Mr Aicher,’ as Julian Aicher calls his father, ‘told me that he built the ateliers on stilts to give space for parking’. This idea supposedly goes back to a design of Le Corbusier. The images of Corbusier’s Villa Savoye, from 1931, that I look up online really look a lot alike. ‘Throughout my entire life however, I haven’t seen a single car parking there.’

Then he comes up with his very own theory: ‘According to historical records the mill river was in risk of flooding. Maybe he was in fear of a flood. But admittedly, this hasn’t happened since 1972 either.’

With the final beer Julian Aicher shows me a folder: ‘the Rotis Chronicles’. It’s a record of all the happenings in Rotis—a diary of sorts—administered by his mother Inge Aicher Scholl. As we flip through the pages we stop at an entry with a photograph; young Julian Aicher, holding a rusty piece of iron to his right temple, smiling into the lens. ‘We thought it was fragments of a Celtic helmet’, he comments on the picture. It is part of an essay that Julian and his brothers contributed to the chronicles, documenting an

archaeological excavation they carried out on their father's property.

With the essays the sons must have found an access to their busy father. The helmet was displayed in a vitrine under the baroque arches of Rotisserie later. Aicher's way to reach out to his sons.

After the last bottle was emptied that night, Julian Aicher invited me to come back to Rotis if I'd need more information.

When I was about to revisit him this spring, his beer demands increased—'three crates of Meckatzer'—and he even asked for more: 'My father used to ask journalists 1.000 Mark for an appointment. No worries, I don't ask for 500 Euro. You bring the beers and a 150 Euro gift card that I'll use to maintain the mill hybrid that my father liked so much. A comparable fair deal!'

I let it be.

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The Colleague

Two days after the talk with Monika Maus, I meet Hans Neudecker, my next interviewee. I sit at one of the quiet tables in the back corner of 'Lamm' when Neudecker steps into the almost empty pub. He walks straight towards me and gives me a strong handshake, followed by a big grin.

He is still wearing the moustache that I'd seen on an image in the book *In Rotis*; a longhaired Hans Neudecker, riding to work on his racing bike. By now his hair is cut short and turned grey.

We order black coffee and without any further ado Neudecker starts talking in a sincere, Bavarian speech. It seems as if he had waited for the right person to share his story with for a while.

Neudecker initially wanted to become an artist, but because his father was a civil servant, graphic design became the compromise. However, after half a year in an agency in Augsburg, he quit his first job. Because, as he puts it, his boss was 'a Depp und a Schwatzkopf'—a jerk and a windbag. His only alternative to the agency, the only place he really wanted to go, was Rotis. Even though they could only employ him as an intern at first, he took his chance; everything was better than the commercial agency. An internship was at least a foot in Aicher's door.

That's how he arrived in Rotis in 1977, not knowing yet that he would stay for the next 24 years. Until 2001, when Aicher's sons cancelled his contract in order to sell 'atelier 1': the studio building.

'I packed my things and I never went back. I wanted to keep Rotis in mind how it was, not how it might turn out to be.'

If the sons would have proposed him a fair deal to take over the studio, he might still be working there today. But since such a deal did not happen, Neudecker moved into an office in Leutkirch, the closest town.

'Maybe I was disappointed at first, but now I am very happy with how things turned out. I think it was best to leave Rotis for good.'

In 1982 Aicher suffered from a heartattack which made him rethink the organizational structure of Rotis. He asked some of his

assistants, amongst them Neudecker, if they could set up independent studios; they could still work in Rotis and rely on his advice, but they would take full responsibility of their own projects.

Neudecker's main project was the corporate identity for the kitchen manufacturers Bulthaup, a job Aicher was initially asked for. After Aicher supervised the first ideas and moderated the crucial presentations he entirely left it to Neudecker. Aicher preferred to work on the editing of the publication *Die Neue Küche*, a research on the nature of the future kitchen, that he asked Bulthaup to finance.

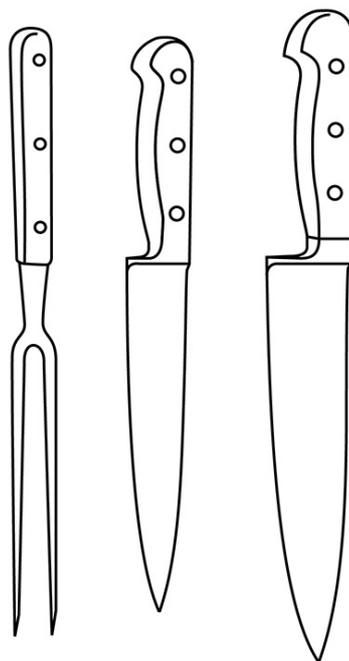
'Aicher was incredibly convincing and painfully drastic', says Neudecker. 'Once, during a company outing—a hike to "Gasthaus Gschnaid"—he kept on talking into the waitress until she gave in. She swopped the soup that the entire team just ate with an old piece of sausage Aicher found in his backpack.'

The story is followed by Neudecker's rich laughter. It is the laugh of a man who seems deeply relaxed and at peace with himself, a character hard to provoke. The exact right constitution, to work with someone like Aicher.

'We always had a high fluctuation in Rotis', Neudecker remembers, 'people came and went.' Some followed the call of clients and got permanently employed at their headquarters. Others left Rotis after one of Aicher's tirades—'got butt hurt'—and never came back.

Neudecker remembers a technical drawer from Basel who spent entire mornings satirizing Aicher behind his back. Everyone in the atelier would burst out in laughter. The drawers, who sheepishly had to execute Aicher's ballpoint sketches into layouts, were the ones who suffered the most from the high demands of their boss.

Shortly after Aicher's restructuring—his plans to work less due to his bad health condition—the opposite happened. Rotis experienced a new boom. Big clients like Lufthansa showed up. Aicher had to employ more assistants and renovated the first story



of the garage building to give space for more ateliers. He extended 'atelier 2' by adding another shed roof segment. This is where he installed the 'institute for analogue studies'—an organ for his researches and theories.

'The "institute" was a way for Aicher to fly the flag of rational Modernism. He was sceptical about the postmodern tendencies, which were coming up in Italy, where design decisions became more and more based on emotions and not on arguments. That really pissed him off. He wanted to oppose that.'

The font family Rotis, released in 1988, was one of the results of these studies. A font that wanted to be both systematic and organic; combining a grotesque and a serif type. Another megalomaniac project. Grotesque and serif types derive from different traditions: the one traditionally serves the purpose of fast understanding, advertising and signage—the other serves the purpose of education, reading and studying long texts. Aicher wanted to deliver a final answer, solving all requests of reading in one typeface.

'A font like a Swiss knife', laughs Neudecker. 'I mean, if I want to cut things I naturally take a good cutting knife, and not one with a saw and clippers attached to it.'

Although it was criticized for its legibility, the font was a big success. And since Aicher named it after the place where it was designed, the Celtic name of the settlement Rotis became known all over the world.

According to Neudecker, Aicher's buildings were built in simple wood constructions because when they were made in 1972 Aicher didn't have the money nor the time for a real construction. He heard Aicher say once: 'If those local carpenters erect a cowshed in one day, they will erect my ateliers in three!'

'He probably made a quick sketch and then a handful of carpenters put it there. Just as he drew it. He was a deeply impressive and crafty guy, this Aicher. I was always heavily fond of him. And how he drew... today you could frame and hang every single sketch of his. I regret that I didn't keep any of them. Everything he did, he did with sincerity and a ballpoint pen. He turned the entire Lufthansa upside down, he made it a modern company, just with a pen. Imagine that today!'

Why Aicher built on stilts Neudecker does not know. The only thing he always wondered about is the similarity of Aicher's buildings to the sheds of the 1972 Olympic Rowing Regatta. Aicher must have seen them before he drew the sketches for Rotis, back at the office desk in Munich.

'Ideas rarely come overnight', smiles Neudecker before he leaves the pub, paying the bill, even though I insisted taking it.



A Good Friend

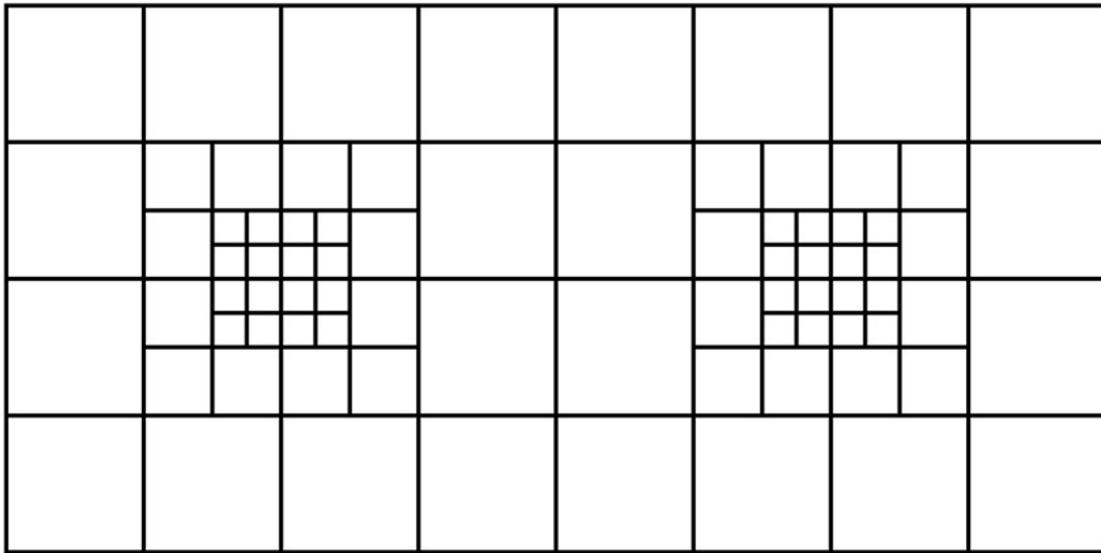
When Norman Foster stepped onto his two seat propeller plane at Wroughton airfield this time, there was no delight.

During the turbulent flight to the small sports runway close to Leutkirch, images of his last visits came to his mind. The outlines of the characteristic architecture which he thought harmonizes so well with the beautiful surrounding of Allgäu. The landscape he and his friend used to escape to on bike trips when they were tired of debating on the plans about the Hong Kong Bank. The smell of the fresh pretzels they ate, the strong coffee, the heavy Meckatzer beer they drank.

Now, he was on the way to stand by his friend's widow. Otl's sudden death was a deep shock to him and everyone else. In the first moment of grief he was convinced that it must have been a bad joke, the lines on the death notice: 'Please refrain from flower donations. Who still wants to donate something to commemorate the deceased, can do so for the benefit of Greenpeace.'

The funeral took place in a circle of immediate family and friends, at the municipal cemetery of Hofs, less than a mile from Rotis. Otl's tombstone; a structuralist iron cross without any signage, seemed appropriate, but appeared alien within the classic, chiselled stones of the local's graves.

After the funeral the guests gathered below the arches of Rotisserie and remained there in awkward silence. 'A room like a dead chamber', Foster thought. Little by little, muffled voices started filling the space. That's when he took the floor to raise the question of how it should go on with Rotis; 'the testimony of the spiritual independence of a man.' Foster suggested to institute Rotis with an archive, summer schools and symposia, organized in Otl's spirit. Otl's work should be kept and maintained at the place where a big deal of it was made; inside the architecture that Foster considered being much better than what most of his colleagues produce. Rotis should continue to work on issues that Aicher had raised, but had not been able to finish.



Foster's proposal eventually resulted in an association that was represented by Inge Aicher-Scholl and many others who gave their signature for it. A brochure said: 'It is the aim of the association to pursue its designated interest, to establish, extend and maintain the archive and to raise the funds necessary for these tasks.'

The plan never worked out. Maybe it was lack of money, maybe there were 'too many chiefs but not enough Indians', as Hans Neudecker phrases it.

Aicher's legacy became part of the hfg archive in Ulm where it is open for research since early 2000; the place where I met Monika Maus.

Apart from a few symposia, Rotis itself rarely dealt with Aicher's intellectual heritage. It was never fully open to the public and stayed private property.

Since Inge Aicher-Scholl's death in 1997, Rotis has been owned by her sons.

The New Tenants

It was probably financial troubles that made the sons place an advert in *Form Magazine* (and on the website of *Reddot Design Award*) in 2003, announcing they would sell the property of Rotis for 490.000 Euro. Title of the advertisement: 'A designer's must-have/creative monument'.

After several months they gave up on it and went the ordinary way: a broker hung a neon sign on the facade of their father's atelier reading 'TO BE SOLD'. Visible from the street for whoever would pass by.

It's mere speculation to claim that the Micciche family discovered the sign on a cross-country trip in their SUV, but that's how I picture it. Mrs. Micciche pointing at the house with the outlandish roof, saying to her husband: 'Did you see that? That looked so different!'

The Micciches who—according to my parent's phonebook—are owners of several car washing services, bought Aicher's atelier in 2004. For six months they turned it into a construction site, tailoring all the luxury 'atelier 1' was lacking, even added a bit more: full isolation, underfloor heating system and a wide window front cut into the southern facade.

The stilts partly lost their supporting function. Half the space below the atelier got expanded and bricked up. It is now used as a wellness area, a sauna and a technical room. A second floor was constructed inside the atelier and outside a bold, concrete staircase

was added, that visually borders the new owners part of the garden from the ones of their neighbours: Aicher's sons. Aicher's secretary Renate Kirchner used to complain about the wind coming through the joints of the badly isolated walls of the atelier. It used to be hot in the summer and awfully cold in the winter. One day, when she was frozen to the bones, she put an A4 sheet over one of the joints and told her boss: 'If an A4 sheet sticks to the wall because of the draft, even you must see there's something wrong!'

'A contrast that fits!' is the title of the article that I find in an online magazine launched by Schwäbisch Hall, a deeply conservative building society. It features the Micciche family and their renovation of Aicher's atelier. Another absurd turn in Aichers history.

Mrs. Mecciche is quoted in the article as saying: 'We got inspired by Aicher's style.' And as an example of this, the grey of the wall's plaster is mentioned, which supposedly goes back to a colour Aicher frequently used. The article closes this argument saying 'the blistered structure of the plaster, reminding of lava, is one of the design-achievements of the 1970s.'

The text feels like the direct reverse of a text I read earlier, in which the writer Jopseph von Westphalen wrote about Aicher's studio in the 1980s. He wrote that nothing in Rotis would be chic or styled. It would be remarkable in omission and restriction, not fuss and bother. He continues saying: 'Rotis is not suitable for any designer-portrait in a glossy lifestyle magazine. It doesn't offer the 100 teasing and eventually imitable ideas for its taste-addicted readers.'

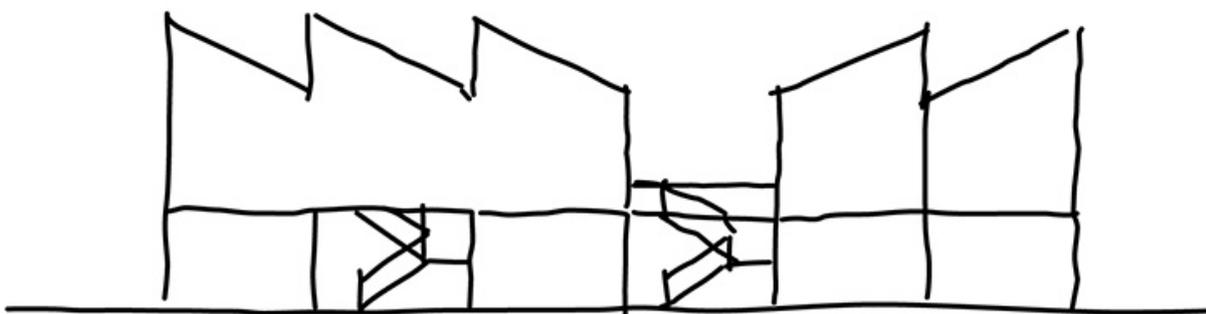
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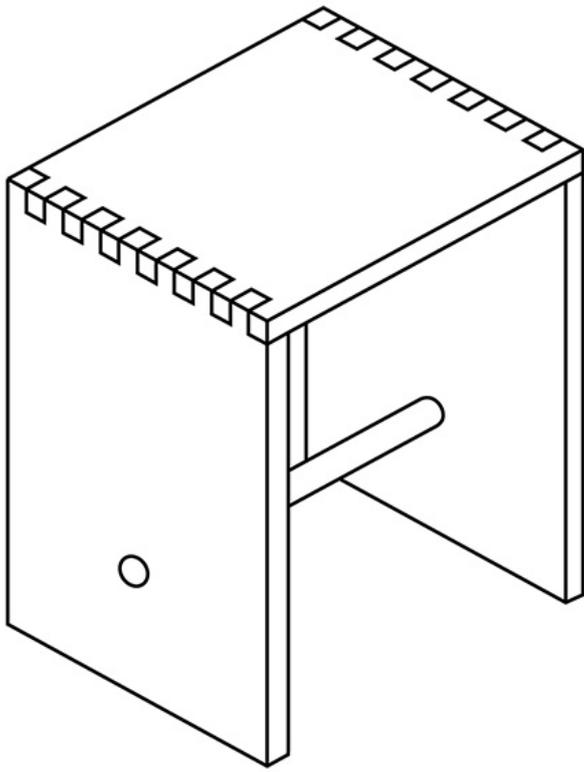
It is the end of a long week in Southern Germany. In the daytime I drove my old bike or my parents car to get to the interview appointments, in the evenings I went through my notes at my old school desk and at night I slept in my childhood bed.

Sitting at the desk, Friday morning, I think back to my exam in junior high school, a ten minute lecture on Otl Aicher. It touched on his career highlights in a PowerPoint presentation: 'The foundation of hfg Ulm', 'the design for the Olympic Games', 'the pictograms' and 'Rotis—the font'.

It may have planted a seed which led me to study design after high school myself, but most likely this was only one amongst other reasons. At art school I realized that good design doesn't stop on the surface. That it is not done when the MacBook is closed—or in Aicher's case, when the ballpoint disappears into the breast pocket. Good design is the result of an attitude that permeates many other aspects. One's relation to art, architecture, one's political beliefs but also banal things like how one dresses, cooks or the way one treats his lawn. Aicher would have named it philosophy. Rotis, the thoroughly designed island, is a manifestation of this.

Soon after I graduated from junior high school in 2005, it got renamed Otl Aicher Realschule. It was the first approach to honour the cultural heritage of Aicher within the rural context of Allgäu. Today the school's pupils produce the hfg stool *Ulmer Hocker* in their technical classes, whereas we used to be busy building bird houses.





Ulmer Hocker was a result of the need for chairs in Bill's hfg building; it is the essence of a stool, as reduced as it can be: three wooden panels of the same size, interlocked and glued, stabilized by a rod.

In the afternoon I grab my old bike to take a look at my old school.

The entire lobby is furnished with 'ulmish' stools and tables, the walls are covered in Aicher's posters and in the entrance hall hangs a timeline of his life. The black board shows a report of the annual project day, where the pupils playfully get in touch with their patron saint. Last year the boys produced iron stencils in the shapes of pictograms—with which the girls later baked cookies.

Back at my desk I write down a last paragraph: Aicher's Rotis is not preserved in original state, frozen in time, like the rooms of the hfg Ulm. It went its natural way and simply became another place; with other tenants and with them their values and beliefs.

To preserve a place in order to make people encounter its history is only one step, what counts in the end is to actively carry on the attitude that was once connected to it. The question of what we can learn from it and how we can reinterpret this, ...

The Neighbour

This is when my brother pulls me away from the desk to take me on a ride.

'You have to leave the table,' he says, 'one can only write for so long.'

So we sit in the car and head for an old farmhouse behind the woods of Leutkirch, where he and his girlfriend are about to move in as subtenants. He did not yet see the place, he just came back from his studies in Vienna. It was his girlfriend that arranged the paperwork.

We walk around the house and peek inside through the windows, getting up close to the glass. I notice the rare posters on the walls: posters of the European election for the social party from 1979. And a grey horizontal poster with an outline drawing of Hans Neudecker's race bike. A drawing Neudecker first used for one of his own clients and later Aicher reused it for the cover of the book *Sport and Design*.

We ring the bell and Simon, the landlord who inhabits the ground floor, invites us in. We take a seat in the kitchen, on furniture that I am sure comes from Rotis. It is a plumb table of the same kind that I saw in Julian Aicher's hall. It uses the same techniques as Ulmer Hocker—the interlocking of the wood panels—but seems out of proportion. The benches are too low and the table too high. Aicher must have tailored them to his own body which was according to the images of the same character: low and wide.

It turns out that Simon is the son of the only neighbour of Rotis. Aicher's property used to be Simon's childhood playground. Together with his siblings they took it as a dare to cross Aicher's lawn, who would whistle and scream after them—red-faced—when he caught them. 'We always came away, but with shitted pants', Simon laughs.

In the 1990s he was part of a team that organized concerts in the by then empty Rotisserie.

'We got big bands to Rotis. From London and Louisiana. Our events have been quite known, people came all the way from Ravensburg, Kempten, Munich. There was life down in Rotis.'

Simon doesn't remember why they stopped doing the events. It was over at one point. His last action in Rotis was to get the furniture we're sitting on. 'It had been standing in the rain there for half a year. It was pain to watch it decay. I loaded it on a truck and brought it here.'

We keep on opening beers at the small kitchen table. The evening turns out to become quite a night. Simon's cigarettes and the open fireplace fills the room with smoke while we keep on talking. My brother a student of organic farming, Simon a developer at the tractor manufacturer Fendt, me a graphic designer about to graduate with a piece on Rotis.

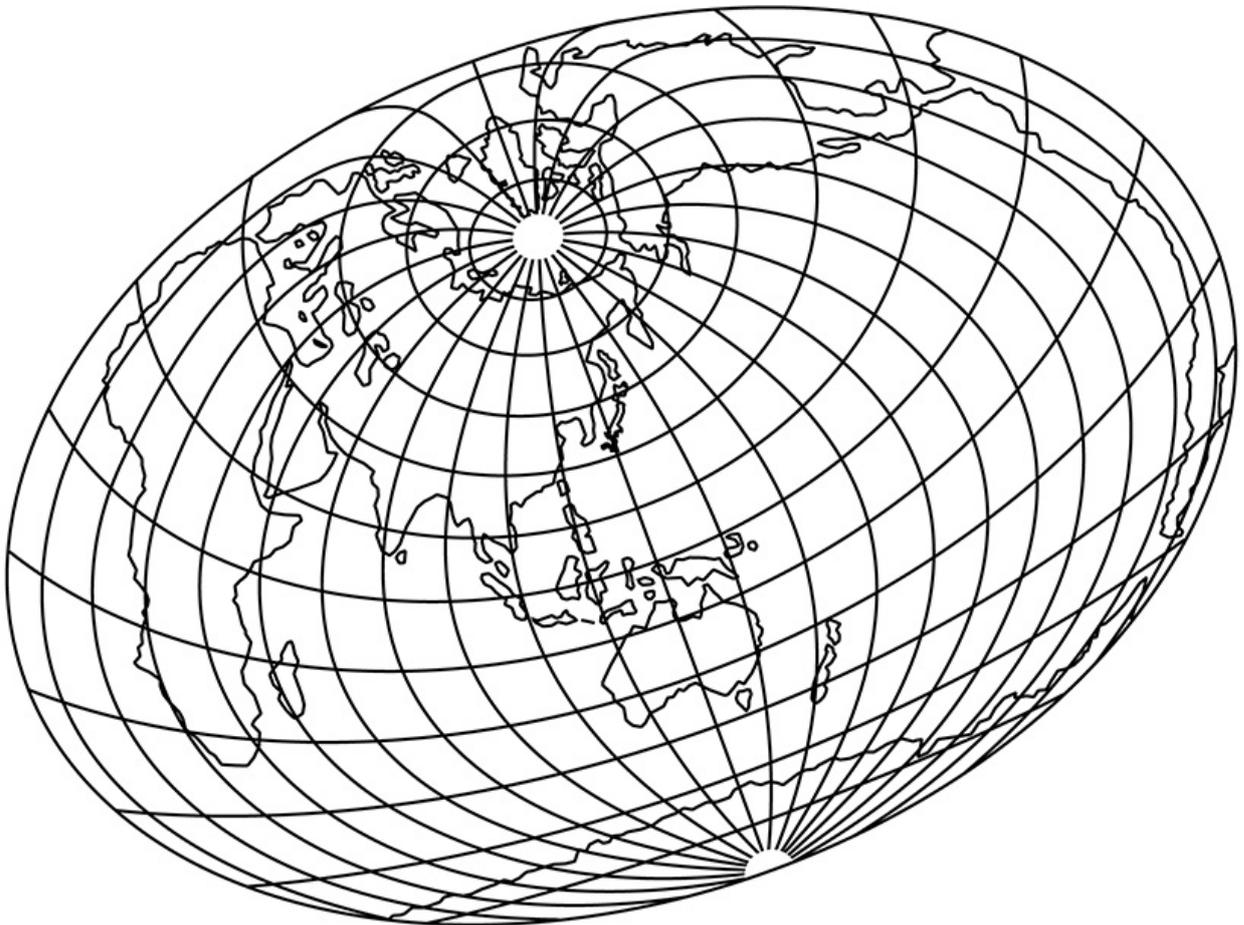
We talk a lot about farming, the main occupation of this area. We go from the decay of the small structured farms and the dumping of milk prices to the biogas policy and how it changed our landscape; cornfields are dominating what used to be pasturage.

Late at night we come back to Rotis, or maybe we never talked about anything else. Simon tells us the anecdote that I already know:

'When the Aicher boys started their excavations in Rotis, digging holes in the ground, meters deep, using a heavy digger, my father couldn't watch it. He was afraid they would fall into the pit— together with the excavator. One night, he threw some rusty pieces of scrap iron into their excavation pit.

The next day, the hole was filled and the digger was gone. Later we heard the boys proudly telling everyone about what they thought were precious Celtic finds.'

Our sheep don't mind. They eat Aicher's grass as any other. In autumn my father will pick them up. The young ones will eat different grass next year. The old ones might end up as sausage.



**The Green Our Sheep Graze
Impressions of Rotis**

Marius Schwarz

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