

Oswald Mathias Ungers and the Concept of the Open City: Grünzug Süd and the Beginnings of Ungers' Urban Thinking

Oswald Mathias Ungers, Urban Planning, Post-war Architecture, Team 10, Architecture History

/Abstract

In 1962 the German architect Oswald Mathias Ungers submitted his proposal for the competition Grünzug Süd. The project, which is an urban planning study on the reconstruction of a southern district of the city of Cologne, was the beginning of Ungers' engagement with questions concerning urban planning. After submitting the project, Ungers continued working on the design for three more years, evolving his design methodology and delving into the field of urban planning. Thus, the project plays a pivotal role in the evolution of Ungers' design thinking. He gained international recognition for his seminal projects of the 1970s, above all *The City in the City. Berlin: A Green Archipelago*, but the concepts he applied in these projects have their origin in the work on Grünzug Süd during the first half of the 1960s.

Investigating the genesis of Ungers' urban planning projects means also to investigate his connection to members of Team 10, with whom Ungers collaborated from 1964 onwards. This text will carve out correlations between Grünzug Süd and projects conceived by Alison and Peter Smithson at the same time, thereby shedding light on urban planning concepts which are still relevant today. The projects are not only case studies for the interplay between architecture and urban planning in the development of new and existing city quarters, but also for a thorough analysis – and thus understanding – of the urban environment, meaning the built and unbuilt condition of an urban context planners engage with.

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[H]is architectural work nearly always functions on the level of urban design¹

Introduction

This quote by Italian architect Vittorio Gregotti is taken from a text published in 1976 in *Lotus International* introducing a series of projects which German architect Oswald Mathias Ungers and his team had conceived in prior years.² As Gregotti implies, the projects presented³ are architectural and urban at the same time, foreshadowing Ungers' design for *The City in the City. Berlin: A Green Archipelago*, published in *Lotus International* one year later, in the summer of 1977.⁴

In the issue of 1976, alongside his projects, Ungers himself delivers the text *Planning Criteria*⁵ in which he lays down five principles that are formative for his design methodology and which build the theoretical frame for the projects presented: (1) "the dialectical process with a reality as found", (2) "the problem of planning and accident", (3) "the plurality of solutions or the wide spectrum of the architectural interpretation of one and the same element", (4) "the concept of architecture as an environment or [...], the urban characteristics of architecture, (5) "the problem of choosing between precision and adaptability".⁶

Elaborating on the fourth criterion, Ungers states: "The projects demonstrate in several cases how the object-character of architecture can be diminished in favor of an architecture concept, which accomplishes a higher degree of quality than only a simple organization of a given program. Under this aspect architecture can become an urban element, which is conditioned to incorporate environmental functions."⁷

1 Vittorio Gregotti, "Oswald Mathias Ungers," *Lotus International*, no. 11 (1976): 12.

2 Employees and collaborators of Ungers in the 1960s and 70s, among others: K. L. Dietzsch, Ulrich Flemming, Peter Riemann, Jürgen Sawade, Harmut Schmetzer, Michael Wegener. Rarely mentioned but crucial to his work was Ungers' wife Liselotte Ungers. "Not only did she edit many of his texts, she was financially involved in the office and also kept an eye on the designs as well as the selection of competitions in which the office participated." (Daughter Sophia Ungers about her mother in a conversation with the author, Cologne, 15.04.2019). In the preface to the publication *Architecture as Theme* from 1982, Ungers himself describes his wife's influence on his work: "After many delays, I finally decided to write down my thoughts and ideas in a few days in seclusion with my wife. In a painstaking and admirable piece of detailed work, she revised the spontaneously formulated manuscript, organized the thoughts, clarified them by constant questioning, and wrote them again. For many years she has been the only constant interlocutor, condenser and mediator of my thoughts. Her advice and suggestions are an indispensable part of my work. She is not only a passive, but also an active co-author of this book." Translated by the author, original in German: Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Die Thematisierung der Architektur*, (Stuttgart: Dt. Verl.-Anst, 1983). Liselotte Ungers also founded the *Studioverlag für Architektur* in Cologne and thus made it possible for Ungers to pursue his publishing activities during his tenure at Cornell University, Ithaca, USA. She also published several books herself in the 1970s.

3 Kuhgassenviertel Düren (1973), Landwehrkanal-Tiergartenviertel Berlin (1973), 4. Ring Berlin-Lichterfelde (1974), Wallraf-Richartz-Museum Köln (1975).

4 Cf. Oswald Mathias Ungers et al., "Cities within the city: Proposal by the Sommer Akademie for Berlin," *Lotus International*, no. 19 (June 1978): 82-97.

5 Oswald Mathias Ungers, "Planning Criteria," *Lotus International*, no. 11 (1976): 13. The text, with minor differences, was originally the German transcript of a lecture held by Ungers in 1975: Oswald Mathias Ungers, "Projekte als typologische Collagen," in *Dortmunder Architekturtage 1975. Das Prinzip Reihung in der Architektur*, ed. Josef Paul Kleihues (Dortmund: Universität Dortmund, 1977), 169-171.

6 Ungers, "Planning Criteria," 13. The German description of the five criteria are: (1) "die Auseinandersetzung mit der vorgefundenen Realität", (2) "[das] Problem von Planung und Zufall", (3) "die Vielfältigkeit des Angebotes oder die Bandbreite des architektonischen Spektrums", (4) "die Interpretation der Architektur als ein gestalterischer Organisator der Umwelt, [...] [der] Urbanitätscharakter der Architektur", (5) "Präzisierung und Anpassung". Ungers, "Projekte als typologische Collage," 170.

7 Ungers, "Planning Criteria," 13.

Ungers hereby advocates for an architecture which not only takes urban planning aspects into consideration, but becomes an urban element itself, trying to overcome the notion of architecture as a planning discipline dealing solely with the organization of functions and incorporating ideas in his arguments which are widely debated during the 1960ies and 1970ies.⁸

Further on, Ungers clarifies his statements and proposes examples of an “architecture as an environment”: “a street, a bridge, a plateau, a wall, a hole in the ground, a plaza, a stair, a terrace, a pedestrian system, a roof: in more general terms it can become an urban organizational element of a higher order.”⁹ These terms and way of thinking allude to Ungers’ concept of *Großform* he developed ten years before in 1966, in which he classifies selected projects in categories like street, bridge, or plateau, and pleads for a “Vorhandensein eines Ordnungsprinzips” (presence of an ordering principle) and an architecture which has to reach a “höhere Entwicklungsstufe” (higher level of development).¹⁰

Not only does the text of 1976 refer to theories Ungers developed in the 1960s, but also to a project: drawings of a building block of the urban planning study *Grünzug Süd* from 1962 are shown alongside Gregotti’s introductory text.¹¹ Without commenting on the project itself or its connection to *Planning Criteria* or the other projects presented, the drawings of *Grünzug Süd* stand for themselves. The project seems to function as an introduction to the whole article and as a reference point for the other projects. And indeed, several years later, Ungers called *Grünzug Süd* a “Schlüsselmodell”¹² (key model) for his design methodology, in which he incorporated many of the ideas he would develop throughout his career.

This paper aims at investigating the beginnings of Ungers’ urban thinking by examining the project *Grünzug Süd* thereby focusing on Ungers’ career between 1963 – the year he took up a professorship at TU Berlin – and 1967, when Ungers left Berlin for Cornell University in the USA. This time span in Ungers’ career is characterized by contemplation, experimentation and learning, and *Grünzug Süd* accompanied him during that stage of his life: after submitting it to the competition in 1962, Ungers continued to work on the project until 1965, the

8 Especially during the 1960ies, Ungers was very much influenced by architectural concepts that can be summarized by the broadly defined term of structuralism. The focus on urban planning and the emphasis on its importance for the future development of architecture and society as a whole was one of the prevalent themes in the theoretical debates of the 1960ies, be it the idea of Group Form put forward by Fumihiko Maki in 1960 (published in German in 1963: Fumihiko Maki, “Group Form,” *Das Werk: Architektur und Kunst* 50, no. 7 (1963): 258-263), or the concept of polyvalence introduced to architecture by Hermann Hertzberger in 1962: Hermann Hertzberger, “Flexibility and polyvalency,” *Forum* 16, no. 3 (1962): 115-121. The latter being an important influence for Ungers’ architectural thinking: cf. Eva Sollgruber, “Die Idee der Großform. Eine neue Sicht auf das Werk des Architekten Oswald Mathias Ungers und die Frage nach einem möglichen Entwurfswerkzeug” (PhD diss., Graz University of Technology, 2020), 133-138.

9 Ungers, “Planning Criteria,” 13.

10 Cf. Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Großformen im Wohnungsbau* (Berlin: Universitätsverlag der TU Berlin, 1966), no p.

11 An axonometric drawing and a plan, both of the so-called “Zitadelle”, are shown. Cf.: Gregotti, “Oswald Mathias Ungers,” 12.

12 Oswald Mathias Ungers, “Vielfalt, die nicht auf Einheit gründet, ist Verneinung. Einheit die nicht auf Mannigfaltigkeit beruht, ist Tyrannei (Blaise Pascal). Oswald Mathias Ungers im Gespräch mit Nikolaus Kuhnert,” *ARCH+* 19. no. 85 (1986): 34.

year he presented it at a Team 10 meeting in Berlin, finally publishing it in 1966.¹³

Ungers focused on morphological and architectural aspects while working on the project over the years, but this text will show that the analysis and identification of specific characteristics of the urban context, and in particular of existing green spaces, are key elements of the project and Ungers' approach towards urban planning. In order to investigate this thesis and get a deeper understanding of the project, *Grünzug Süd* will be compared with the concept of the *Open City* developed by Alison and Peter Smithson at the same time. During the 1960ies Ungers was in close contact with members of Team 10, especially with Peter Smithson and Shadrach Woods, whose projects had an enormous influence on his work.¹⁴

The Beginnings – Start at the TU Berlin and Contact to Team 10

In an interview from the 1980s, Ungers refers to his appointment as professor at the Technical University Berlin in 1963 as a “prägendes Erlebnis”¹⁵ (formative experience) in his career due to the fact that he is forced to theoretically articulate his approach – in practice as well as in teaching – for the first time. 1963 marked the beginning of Ungers' phase of introspection concerning his design practice and intensive theoretical research.

In 1965, Ungers began to publish the results of his teaching in a series of booklets entitled *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur* (VzA). The projects and topics presented in these brochures are a manifestation of his reflections, focusing on questions of urban infrastructure and mass housing, with the city of Berlin as a testing ground. Ungers not only documented the work of students produced in his seminars, but also presented his own designs, transcripts of various lectures, and contributions by invited guests. One of the guest lecturers was Team 10 founder Peter Smithson.¹⁶

Ungers first became acquainted with the work of Team 10 as a spectator at the ninth CIAM in 1953 in Aix-en-Provence, where the group caused an upheaval with their rebellion against the founders of CIAM and their idea of a functional city. For Ungers, the congress represented “the first ever confrontation with the question of ‘urban architecture’”¹⁷. He was particularly impressed by Shadrach

13 He first published the project in the third edition of his own series of booklets called *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur* (VzA) which were produced at his institute at the TU Berlin. Oswald Mathias Ungers et al., *Team X Treffen* (Berlin: Universitätsverlag der TU Berlin, 1966). One month later, the project was published in *Deutsche Bauzeitung*: Oswald Mathias Ungers, “ein Beitrag zur Architektur,” *Deutsche Bauzeitung* 71, no. 7 (July 1966): 579-584.

14 Cf. Eva Sollgruber, “Die Idee der Großform. Eine neue Sicht auf das Werk von Oswald Mathias Ungers,” *Wolkenkuckucksheim | Cloud-Cuckoo-Land | Воздушный замок*, *International Journal of Architectural Theory* 25, no. 41 (2021): 117-133. Here the role of the city of Berlin, as an important subject, or source of inspiration, of many of the projects conceived by the Smithson and Ungers in the 1960ies has to be mentioned. The urban condition of Berlin with its open city center, coined by the destruction of World War II and the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, sparked many theoretical debates on urbanism and reconstruction at that time and can be understood as fundamental for conceiving concepts like the Open City.

15 Oswald Mathias Ungers, “Das war eine ungeheuer kreative Situation ... Thomas Sieverts, Oswald Mathias Ungers, Georg Wittwer im Gespräch mit Nikolaus Kuhnert,” *Bauwelt* 73, no. 48 (December 1982): 1958.

16 Cf. Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric. Some thought for Berlin* (Berlin: Universitätsverlag der TU Berlin, 1965).

17 Translated by the author, original in German: “die erste Konfrontation mit der Frage ‘Städtebau-Architektur überhaupt.’ Ungers, “Das war eine ungeheuer kreative Situation ...,” 1957.

Woods and the projects by his office Candilis-Josic-Woods.¹⁸

Another pivotal moment for Ungers' career was the seminar and symposium *Sanierung der Spandauer Altstadt* (Redevelopment of the Old Town of Spandau) in 1964 at TU Berlin, which had a lasting effect on Ungers' work. Team 10 members Jerzy Soltan, Gioncarlo De Carlo, Shadrach Woods and others were invited to the symposium. Ever since then, Ungers collaborated with Team 10, becoming a loose member of the group in 1965.

In the seminar, renowned German urban planners like Fritz Eggeling and Thomas Sieverts worked alongside Ungers. This was a difficult situation for Ungers, since, up to that point, he had considered himself a beginner in questions concerning urban planning: "When it came to matters of urban planning, I was practically an amateur. I only got involved with urban planning via architecture, but not as a professional, but rather as dilettante."¹⁹

Jasper Cepl, Ungers' biograph, considers the Spandau seminar as the starting point for Ungers to reconsider his previous understanding of architecture and turn to questions of urban planning.²⁰ On the one hand, this new approach manifests itself in the topics Ungers discusses in his seminars, and on the other, in his own projects he conceives from the mid-1960s onwards, *Grünzug Süd* being their precursor.

Grünzug Süd

Grünzug Süd is an urban planning study on the reconstruction of parts of Zollstock and Raderthal districts to the south of Cologne which had been widely destroyed in the Second World War. The overall plan of those districts goes back to Fritz Schumacher's urban development plan for the City of Cologne from the 1920s, projecting these two districts as a green corridor connecting the city center with the outer green belt.²¹

Ungers worked on the project for several years, from 1962 to 1965.²² Within these four years, the project underwent several alterations and Ungers put a special emphasis on different aspects of the design: according to documents from the *Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft* (UAA) in Cologne, the plan-

18 Woods, who lived in Berlin from 1963 onwards to manage the local construction supervision for two projects of his office – the extension of the Free University of Berlin and a residential building in the Märkische Viertel – became a good friend and important interlocutor of Ungers. Cf. Jasper Cepl, Oswald Mathias Ungers. Eine intellektuelle Biographie (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007), 192.

19 Translated by the author, original in German: "In städtebaulichen Fragen war ich praktisch ein Amateur. Ich kam erst über die Architektur zum Städtebau, aber nicht als Professioneller, sondern gewissermaßen als Dilettant." Ungers, "Das war eine ungeheuer kreative Situation ...," 1958.

20 Cf. Cepl, *Oswald Mathias Ungers*, 184.

21 Cf. Plan des künftigen Systems der Grünanlagen und Freiflächen, in: Fritz Schumacher, Köln. Entwicklungsfragen einer Großstadt (Köln: Saaleck-Verlag, 1923), 112.

22 Different dates of the project circulate in various publications on Ungers' work. In order to shed light on the confusing data available about the project, this text takes its sources only from the original material available at Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft (UAA) in Cologne, and from the plans and texts of the project presented by Ungers himself in 1965 at the Team 10 meeting in Berlin: Ungers et al., Team X Treffen.



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ning phase of the general plan of the area dates from 1962 to 1964.²³ After this period, Ungers drew his attention to the design of specific buildings, above all a building block called “Zitadelle” (citadel) dominating the center of the site, and a row of single-family houses at the south end of the project area.²⁴ In the archive, the project descriptions of these two buildings dated 1965 are accompanied by a multitude of detailed plans.²⁵

Ungers divided the project area into five segments, thus trying to strengthen the existing identity of each zone with his design [Fig. 1]. He thereby established various spatial characteristics of existing public green spaces as the foundation of his proposal. Most of the project description is devoted to depicting the specific spatial qualities of the project’s urban green areas: Zone 1 is characterized by the existing *Volkspark*, which takes the form of an English landscape garden. Zone 2 accommodates sports facilities for competitive sports. The green areas in this zone are designed as artificial slopes. Zone 3 functions as a recreational area for the districts, incorporating the existing *Vorgebirgspark*. Zone 4 contains playgrounds cut into a sloping terrain level. Here, Ungers conceived the green as part of the new architecture. Finally, Zone 5 connects the district to the outer green belt. The planting and paths are laid out loosely.²⁶

The conditions of existing green spaces were Ungers’ source for carving out the urban identity of each segment, which led him to suggestions for new buildings in each zone (except Zone 1 which is dominated by the *Volkspark*):

23 Cf. project description “Projekt: Köln, Grünzug Süd,” Rotpunktordner 28/I, UAA.
 24 Contrary to usual practice, the plans of the project are presented in a west-east orientation.
 25 Cf. project description “Projekt: Köln-Zollstock, Grünzug Süd,” Rotpunktordner 28/I, UAA.
 26 Cf. “Erläuterungen zum Projekt Grünzug Süd in Köln”: Ungers et al., *Team X Treffen*.

Fig. 1
 Zoning of the planning area of Grünzug Süd. Ungers, Oswald Mathias: Architektur 1951-1990, edited by Fritz Neumeyer. Mailand/Stuttgart: Dt. Verlags-Anstalt 1991, 51. © Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft Köln (UAA).

for Zone 2 he proposed a new sports hall, while in Zone 3 Ungers designed the so-called *citadel* or “Haus der offenen Tür” (open house), which he planned in detail during the further processing of the project. In Zone 4 he added a row of single-family houses to the existing situation, and in Zone 5, a perimeter building to function as a closure for the district.²⁷

The newly built structure of the project was hereby developed from, and determined by, the condition of the existing environment. For each of the zones, Ungers developed specific characteristics for the open green spaces as well as distinct building typologies, both rooted in the spatial conditions and history of the planning area.

After his competition entry in 1962, Ungers specified his design by trying to articulate “themes” for the new buildings inserted in the area. His aim was to develop a “neue größere Ordnung”²⁸ (new greater order) for the region which would tie the new buildings to the existing heterogeneous structure. This was the starting point of Ungers’ reflections on morphological transformation and a design method he developed in the following years.²⁹

In 1963, Ungers produced a diagram depicting the themes of the design: “wall”, “block” and “street” [Fig. 2],³⁰ again a reference to his concept of *Großform* which he would formulate in 1966 and which would accompany his architectural thinking throughout his career.³¹ These themes extend over several street sections, depicting an architectural conceptual frame for the urban connection of Cologne’s inner city with the suburbs and the outer green belt. The variations within each theme coincide with the distinct zones Ungers defined for his design. Essentially, the project becomes a collection of variations of these themes which can be read along the north-south axis of the project area, manifesting themselves in different urban housing building types [Fig. 3].

In an interview from 1982, it became apparent how important the project was for Ungers’ work and for his approach to urban design: “The decisive work in this area, which had a certain theoretical basis and was not just an intuitive search, or a process of trial and error, was [...] the work for the Grünzug Süd in Cologne. This work was an important step for me towards an urban design based on three criteria.”³² One of these criteria is the method of morphological transformation. The other two criteria are the analysis of the context and the history of

27 Cf. “Erläuterungen zum Projekt Grünzug Süd in Köln”: Ungers et al., *Team X Treffen*.

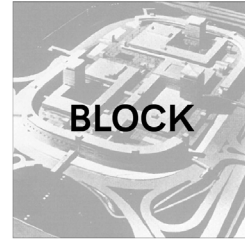
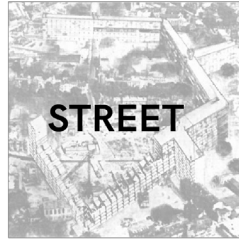
28 “Erläuterungen zum Projekt Grünzug Süd in Köln”: Ungers et al., *Team X Treffen*.

29 In Ungers’ seminal publication *Thematisierung der Architektur*, Grünzug Süd is used as an example for the topic of “Transformation” alongside the designs for Museum Morsbroich (1976-80) and the student housing in Enschede (1964). Ungers, *Thematisierung*, 17-34.

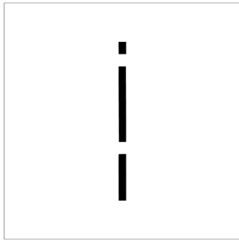
30 In *Thematisierung der Architektur*, Ungers and his wife themselves date the diagram to 1963. (Ungers, *Thematisierung*, 32) In publications about Ungers, the diagram is mostly dated to 1965. It can be assumed that 1963 is the correct date. This is relevant because it means that Grünzug Süd is the start of Ungers’ work on the design method of morphological transformation and projects like the student housing in Enschede from 1964 build on this project.

31 Cf. Sollgruber, “Die Idee der Großform”.

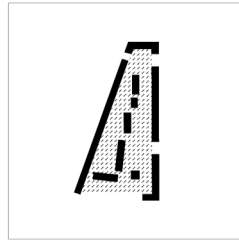
32 Translated by the author, original in German: “Die entscheidende Arbeit auf diesem Gebiet, die eine gewisse theoretische Grundlage hatte und nicht nur ein intuitives Suchen, Probieren war, war [...] die Arbeit für den Grünzug Süd in Köln. Diese Arbeit war für mich ein wichtiger Schritt zu einem Städtebau, der auf drei Kriterien basiert.” Ungers, “Das war eine ungeheuer kreative Situation ...”, 1957.



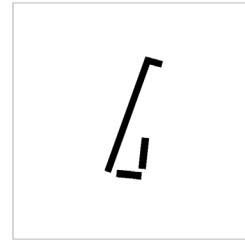
broken wall



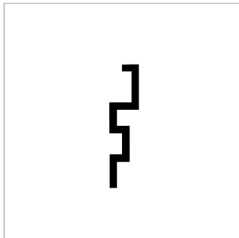
square with buildings



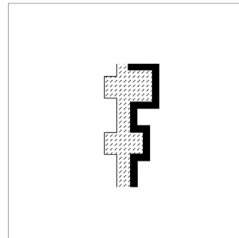
incomplete block



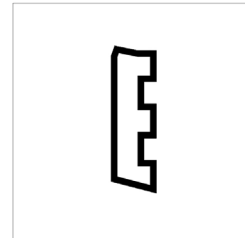
folded wall



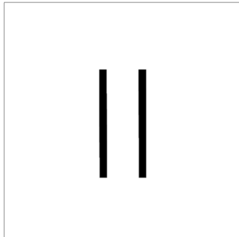
street expanded



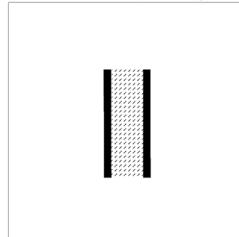
toothed block



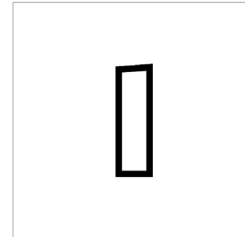
double wall



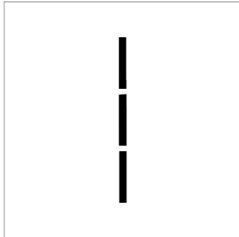
street formed by buildings



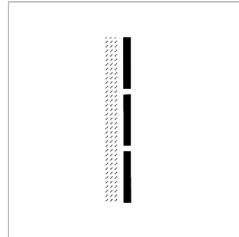
closed block



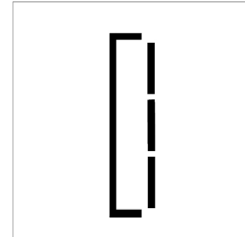
composite wall



street and building separated



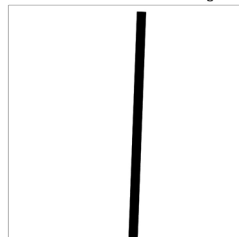
open block



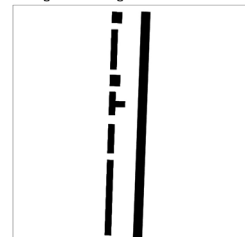
closed wall



street within the building



single buildings in front of wall



a specific place, all implemented in *Grünzug Süd*.³³

The Open City

In 1963, the same year Ungers started his professorship at the TU Berlin, continuing his work on *Grünzug Süd* following the competition entry, Alison und Peter Smithson published their project *Greenways and Landcastles*. They proposed a system of greenways and paths in West London, interspersed with residential areas called “landcastles”. This greenway structure is based on existing paths through parks and fallow land which are conceived as “open spaces”³⁴ within the city structure. In the project, these existing green areas connect to each other, creating a “green linkage system”³⁵ that functions as a route system for pedestrians and cyclists as an alternative to the city’s street pattern, and which also connects to existing housing areas in West London as well as to public buildings like schools and hospitals.³⁶

Landcastles scattered within the green areas, on the other side, are city quarters, residential districts, connected to the network of greenways, which also protect them from the city’s noise and pollution. These areas function as new city districts and are intended to mitigate the pressure on the historical city center: “the city as a whole has become a cluster of pressure points”³⁷.

With this project, the Smithsons envision an image of the city, the *Open City*, which is no longer organized as concentric and hierarchical, but flat and pluralistic. A sketch accompanying the project’s description and plans depicts this idea of a city showing *landcastles*, clusters of buildings, within an open green field [Fig. 4]. The Smithsons use this drawing one year later in 1964 to support their arguments in the article *The Open City Centre*³⁸. The text combines concepts conceived in *Greenways and Landcastles* with their project *Mehringplatz* from 1962.

In the text, they focus on the city of Berlin with its rather unique – in the European context – open city center and reflect upon new guiding principles of urban planning thinking: “The availability of space enables a new conception of urban design.”³⁹ Their proposal focuses on the area around *Mehringplatz*, a city square in the district of *Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg* which was heavily destroyed in the Second World War and subject to many development proposals and controver-

33 Cf. Ungers, “Das war eine ungeheuer kreative Situation ...,” 1957.

34 Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2005), 113.

35 Smithson and Smithson, *The Charged Void*, 113.

36 Cf. Smithson and Smithson, *The Charged Void*, 113.

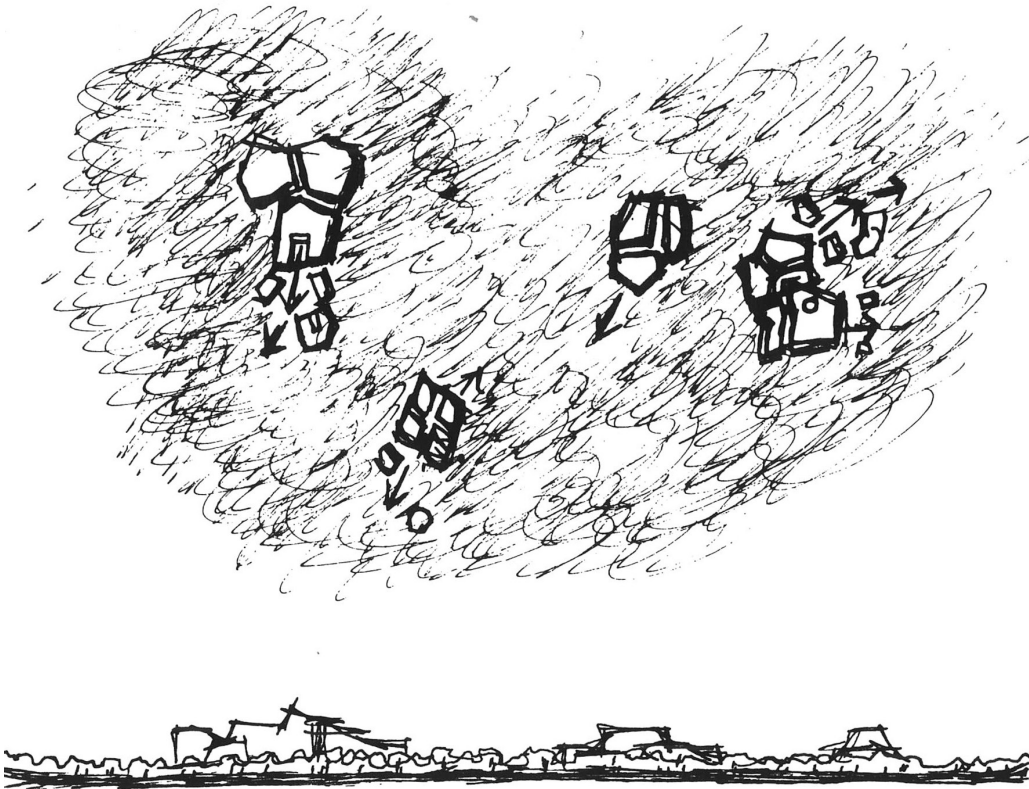
37 Smithson and Smithson, *The Charged Void*, 113. The idea of the Open City is reminiscent of concepts put forward by German urbanist Johannes Göderitz and Austrian architect Roland Rainer in 1957 under the title *Die gegliederte und aufgelockerte Stadt*. They developed a concept of the city as “an organic structure of more or less independent urban cells with their own local centers”. Translated by the author, original in German: “ein organisches Gefüge mehr oder weniger selbstständiger Stadtzellen mit eigenen örtlichen Mittelpunkten”. Johannes Göderitz, et al., *Die gegliederte und aufgelockerte Stadt* (Tübingen: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, 1957), 19.

38 Cf. Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, “Die offene City,” *Bauen + Wohnen* 18, no. 1 (1964): 18-19.

39 Translated by the author, original in German: “Die Verfügbarkeit von Raum ermöglicht eine neue Auffassung des Städtebaus.” Smithson and Smithson, “Die offene City,” 18.

Fig.3 (opposite page)

Transformation of the themes
“wall”, “street”, and “block”
© Eva Sollgruber, 2019.



sies, especially during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. *Internationale Bauausstellung* 1987).

The Smithsons' strategy for the new conception of the square was that of re-naturalization, with *Mehringplatz* planned as a park, as an open space within the city's tissue, with single buildings clustered to *landcastles* implanted in the green space. The reconstruction of old street blocks was to be abandoned in favor of a heterogeneous building structure held together by green areas. According to the Smithsons, unlike projects like the Hansa district in Berlin, this model of the *Open City* can function as a role model for a new urban thinking for the future.⁴⁰

“Place-Making”

Analyzing Ungers' *Grünzug Süd* in conjunction with urban concepts conceived by Alison and Peter Smithson at the same time, one cannot but recognize conceptual commonalities between the projects. Similar to Ungers' proposal for the districts in Cologne, the Smithsons' starting point for *Greenways and Landcastles* was the analysis of existing green public spaces in the projected neighbor-

⁴⁰ Cf. Smithon and Smithson, “Die offene City,” 18. The Smithsons also mention Scharoun's contribution to the competition of Hauptstadt Berlin in 1957 as a reference point for their arguments. Based on the fragmented structure of Berlin, Scharoun does not propose a coherent city plan, but rather a differentiated urban structure with specific architectural structures within nature, which function as carriers of central urban functions. Cf. Bundesministerium für Wohnungsbau Bonn and Senator für Bau- und Wohnungswesen Berlin, Berlin. *Ergebnis des internationalen städtebaulichen Ideenwettbewerbs Hauptstadt Berlin* (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer Verlag, 1960) 43-48.

hoods, from which they developed their concept for the built structure and the urban plan.

Furthermore, in both projects, the architects tried to put forward a strategy for creating cohesion in an otherwise heterogeneous and dispersed urban environment. The major difference between these projects were the means creating the cohesion: Ungers' unifying elements were architectural, that is, the new buildings inserted in the existing structure. The Smithsons, on the other hand, conceived the green spaces themselves as cohesive elements: "These strips of greenery are kinds of seams in areas that otherwise have no quality of cohesion."⁴¹

In addition, the concept of *landcastles* refers to the idea of the *Cluster City* the Smithson put forward in 1957⁴². According to the Smithsons, clusters represent "meaningful groupings of housing"⁴³ which are "able to give identity"⁴⁴ and are "responsive to place, to topography, to local climate"⁴⁵. Clusters, e.g. *landcastles*, are new neighborhoods developed out of the understanding of the existing context and at the same time have a distinct spatial quality in order to create identity. "[...] landcastles are quality-effective sites chosen for their power of renewal of a community [...]."⁴⁶ The same subject motivated Ungers in his work on *Grünzug Süd*: "The built structure, developed out of and determined by the situation, attempts to bind the heterogeneity of the existing structure into a new, larger order and to give the district its own physiognomy."⁴⁷ This "physiognomy", or identity, manifests itself in the formulation of various building typologies paired with distinct urban green spaces for the planning area.

This conjunction of the issues, the question of urban cohesion and of architectural specificity, was applied and taken to extremes by Ungers and his team more than ten years later in the seminal project *City in the City. Berlin: A green Archipelago* of 1977. As the architect and theorist Wilfried Kühn argues, *Grünzug Süd* and *The Open City* were prerequisites to Ungers' idea of the archipelago: "With this background in mind Ungers' Urban Archipelago project (1977) proposes the superimposition of the Grünzug Süd theme, the heterogeneous characterization of the local latent identities, onto the Open City theme of concentrated islands of built form in a re-naturalized urban landscape."⁴⁸

These projects are demonstrations of a design thinking and planning method which engages in urban and architectural matter at the same time, with the aim

41 Smithson and Smithson, *The Charged Void*, 112.

42 Cf. Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, "Cluster City: a new shape for the Community," *Architectural Review* (November 1957): 333-336.

43 Smithson and Smithson, *The Charged Void*, 20.

44 Smithson and Smithson, *The Charged Void*, 19.

45 Smithson and Smithson, *The Charged Void*, 19.

46 Smithson and Smithson, *The Charged Void*, 113.

47 Translated by the author, original in German: "Die aus der Situation heraus entwickelte und durch sie bestimmte Bebauung versucht, die Heterogenität des Bestehenden in einer neuen, größeren Ordnung zu binden und dem Stadtteil eine sich im Ansatz zeigende eigene Physiognomie zu geben." "Erläuterungen zum Projekt Grünzug Süd in Köln": Ungers et al., Team X Treffen, no p.

48 Wilfried Kühn, "Archipel Stadt. Archipelago City," in *Örbanism. Texte aus Österreich. Approaches to urbanism in Austria*, ed. Elise Feiersinger et al. (Vienna: edition selene, 2002), 23.

Fig. 4

Sketch of the image of the Open City – landcastles scattered in a green field. Smithson, Alison and Peter Smithson. *The Charged Void: Urbanism*. New York: The Monacelli Press, 2005, 113.

of focusing on “place-making” rather than “object-making”, as Peter Smithson put it in 1963: “Place-making is more difficult than object-making for it requires us rid [sic] ourselves of the idea of architecture as buildings and of urbanism as the arrangement of buildings.”⁴⁹ This attitude towards the formation of the environment of our cities could be a model for today’s building industry⁵⁰ and induce a much-needed change, which leads away from the notion of revenue-generating objects, but towards a practice in architecture and urban planning which provides the framework for “places to walk, play, sit, cycle, rush about, sledge, burn bonfires. In order to be able to enjoy each other, enjoy just doing things [...]”⁵¹.

By confronting Ungers’ *Grünzug Süd* with the concept of the *Open City* by the Smithsons and placing these urban-architectural ideas next to each other, fundamental themes in urban planning and architecture are revealed. The proposals Ungers and his contemporaries developed in the 1960s and 1970s still provide food for thought on current challenges today: not only the question of interplay between architecture and urban planning in the development of new and existing city quarters, but also of the identity and collectivity of a neighborhood, including the significance of green space in the urban environment.

49 Peter Smithson, “Form above all,” in *The Space Between*, ed. Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2017), 25. The article is first published in 1963 in the March issue of the Architectural Association Journal.

50 Referring here to the German term *Bauwesen* and Lucius Burckhardt’s definition: “The building industry encompasses the narrower field of architecture together with its superstructure, the universities, the journals, the ideologies of the architects’ associations [...]. The building industry encompasses the entire construction process, including supply by the construction business, material suppliers and the processing industry. However, it also includes financing, mortgaging, property trading, the associated bureaucracy and jurisdiction. Last but not least, it encompasses large parts of the state [...] as an intensively interwoven authority via legislation and standardization.” Translated by the author, original in German: Lucius Burckhardt, *Der kleinstmögliche Eingriff* (Berlin: Martin Schmitz Verlag, 2013), 14.

51 Smithson and Smithson, *The Charged Void*, 113.

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