Michele Caja

From the Urban Island to the Insula. Morphological Variations around a Theme

City in the City, Icon, Insula, Morphology, Urban Island

/Abstract

Starting with The City in the City, the manifesto that Ungers wrote in 1977 together with Rem Koolhaas during the Berlin Summer School on the Urban Villa, the article analyses its critical influence on the theorization of the city, referring to its recent critical reissue (Hertweck, Marot 2013).

In an in-depth analysis of the various versions of this text, common elements in the two authors' thinking – Ungers and Koolhaas – emerge, but also differences, particularly on the notions of city within the city, green archipelago and urban island. Through interviews made with Ungers' collaborators, come out different impressions of this experience: for Koolhaas, "the most fascinating aspect of that undertaking was its site-specificity, the simple fact that Ungers had taken Berlin, West Berlin, as a laboratory"; for Hans Kollhoff, it was "an interesting exercise, but it was clear to him [Ungers] that it had no chance of being converted into reality."

Considering other parallel design and theoretical experiences carried out by Ungers at almost the same time, it emerges how the radical nature of this manifesto – which sought to provide a solution to Berlin's shrinking condition through a green archipelago of formalized islands – had to confront the historic layout, which still existed despite its fragmented situation. The scale of the urban block is experimented with in different experiments, based on morphological variations. The urban island is slowly transformed into an urban *insula*, as practiced in the critical reconstruction introduced during the Berlin IBA by Kleihues, in which Ungers will be one of the main protagonists.

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Among his publications, as author and editor: *Berlino 1990-2010. La ricerca sull'isolato e sul quartiere* (2009); *Tipologia architettonica e morfologia urbana. Il dibattito italiano* (2010/2012); *Nuovi architetti berlinesi* (2011); *Berlino anni Venti. Progetti urbani per il centro 1921-1933* (2012); *Potsdam&Italien. Die Italienrezeption in der Potsdamer Baukultur* (2014); *Hans Stimmann, The Berliner Townhouse. A Typological Experiment* (2015); *Tipo forma figura. Il dibattito internazionale* (2016); *Ricostruzione critica come principio urbano e altri scritti* (2017); *Neue Projekte in historischen Deutschen Städten* (2019); *Progetti per Milano. Garibaldi, Isola, Gioia* (2020); *Urban Projects. I Berlin* (2020); *Von der Urban Villa zur vorstädtischen Villa* (2021); *Modersohn & Freiesleben: Wirklichkeit* (2022); *Urbane Projekte. Neue Ideen für das Projekt der europäischen Stadt* (2023).

Introduction

Perhaps few other urban architecture manifestos of the second half of the last century have had so much influence on the ideas that are discussed today regarding the possible models for the future of our cities – from shrinking cities to their renaturalization, from iconic architecture to the relationship with pre-existences and finally the notion of *cultural landscape* – as *The City in the City*.

Taking the city of Berlin as a reference, Ungers develops an urban model as a response to its shrinking condition. Within the fragmented structure, the proposal envisages a process of urban thinning through autonomous nuclei configured as islands within a green archipelago, rediscovering a new dimension between man and nature. Deconstructing the overall form of Berlin – which was already the historical result of several cities added over time –[1] Ungers rediscovers form within its individual parts. Where each of these parts finds its own character from precise references. These references take on the role of true icons able to generate analogical links to other cities and architectures. They give rise to a double level, in which the idea of natural landscape coexists with that of cultural landscape inside Berlin's historical urban fragments.

The City in the City

The proposal originated during a summer school in Berlin attended by American students, while Ungers was teaching at Cornell (1977). The international critical fortune of this short text, drafted with Koolhaas and of which several versions exist, is initially linked to its first English and Italian edition published in Lotus International in 1978.[2] The in-depth study of this text, however, dates to more recent years, particularly to its critical re-edition by Florian Hertweck and Sébastian Marot.[3] Applying careful philological methodology, this anastatic re-edition shows the different existing versions of the text – from the first draft written by Rem Koolhaas, after he had worked with Ungers in Ithaca. The book is enriched by interviews with other collaborators of the Summer School – Arthur Ovaska, Hans Kollhoff and Peter Riemann –, from which the close collaboration between the two authors is deepened.

Marot underlines the importance for this manifesto to be focused on a specific city, something it shares with other more or less coeval topical texts of urban theory: from Boyarsky's *Chicago a la carte* (1970), to the Los Angeles of *Four Ecologies* by Reyner Banham (1971), to the Las Vegas of Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour (1972), to the Rome of Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter in *Collage City*

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1   Berlin's first settlement cores include: Berlin, Cölln, Friedrichswerder, Friedrichstadt, Dorotheenstadt.

2   Oswald Mathias Ungers, Rem Koolhaas, Peter Riemann, Hans Kollhoff, and Arthur Ovaska, "Cities within the city. Proposals by the Sommer Akademie for Berlin," *Lotus International*, no. 19 (June 1978): 82-97.

3   Florian Hertweck and Sébastian Marot, critical ed., *The City in the City. Berlin: A Green Archipelago. A manifesto (1977) by Oswald Mathias Ungers and Rem Koolhaas with Peter Riemann, Hans Kollhoff and Arthur Ovaska* (Köln: UAA Ungers Archives for Architectural Research, Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013).

(1978) and the *Delirious New York* by Rem Koolhaas (1978).[4]

As Koolhaas also confirms in his interview, "the most fascinating aspect of that enterprise was its site-specificity, the simple fact that Ungers had taken Berlin, West Berlin, as a laboratory."[5] This close connection to the place where he was teaching had impressed Koolhaas since the accidental discovery of Ungers through his first publications. He had found them in a bookstore during his first trip to Berlin as a student, from which he had returned thrilled by the Wall dividing the two parts of the city, which was to be the inspiring object of one of his famous projects for London, *Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture* (1972-74).[6] The entire series of Ungers' *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur* (a total of 27, published between 1965-1971), in addition to the lectures and research papers given as part of his courses, also included the didactic exercises done with his students during his teaching period at TU Berlin in the 1960s. The importance of these early research and theoretical works – which would be reflected in his future theorizing on the city – has now been highlighted by their partial republication in two monographic issues of the journal *Archplus* devoted to Ungers as an educator in the 1960s.[7] According to Jasper Cepl[8] – as underlined by Lara Schrijver[9] – these *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur* could be present in London in the studio of James Stirling, maybe brought them to his attention by Léon Krier.

Already from these early exercises, Ungers took Berlin as a paradigmatic case-study due to its condition of "enclosed nature", turning it into a design research laboratory investigated through specific themes, including: the relationship between *Schnellbahn* and building, the composition of residential building complexes, the redevelopment of blocks and parking lots, the *Brandwände* (firewalls) of houses remaining within fragmented blocks cut by the wall between the two cities.

4   Alvin Boyarsky, *Chicago à la carte, The City as an Energy System*. Special Issue of Architectural Design (December 1970); Reyner Banham, *The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (London: Allen Lane - The Penguin Press,1971); Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, Mass./London: MIT Press, 1972); Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge Mass./London: The MIT Press, 1978); Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York. A retroactive manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

5   Rem Koolhaas, "Ghostwriting. Rem Koolhaas in conversation with Florian Hertweck and Sébastian Marot," in *The City in the City*, ed. Florian Hertweck and Sébastian Marot (Köln: UAA Ungers Archives for Architectural Research, Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013), 133.

6   On the relation between Koolhaas' proposal for London and Berlin see: Fritz Neumeyer, "OMA's Berlin: The Polemic Island in the City," *Assemblage*, no. 11 (April 1990): 36-53.

7   Erika Mühlthaler, ed., *Lernen von O.M. Ungers*, *Archplus*, no. 181/182 (December 2006). The previous volume is: Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft, ed., *Oswald Mathias Ungers. Architekturlehre. Berliner Vorlesungen 1964-65*, *Archplus*, no. 179 (Juli 2006).

8   Jasper Cepl, *Oswald Mathias Ungers. Eine intellektuelle Biographie* (Köln: Verlag Walter König, 2007), 295, and note 495.

9   Lara Schrijver, "OMA as Tribute to OMU: Exploring Resonances in the Work of Koolhaas and Ungers," *The Journal of Architecture* 13, no. 3 (June 2008): 235, and note 2, https://doi.org/10.1080/13602360802214927.

Ungers & Koolhaas

From such critical re-reading of *The City in the City* today, emerges, on the one hand, the close relationship existing at the time between Ungers and Koolhaas,[10] the two actual authors of the manifesto, among the major protagonists of the architectural debate in the years to come; on the other hand, emerge also the more or less declared divergences – especially regarding the notions of *archipelago*, *city within the city* and *urban island*.[11] These divergences are found through Ungers' annotations and corrections to the first short version of Koolhaas's six-page text, for which he "mainly collaborated with him as a ghostwriter",[12] in the Summer School held by Ungers in Berlin on the topics of the *Urban Villa*, within which the plan for Berlin archipelago was ideated.[13]

If the *city in the city* stands out as a happy formula, used and partly abused in those years to define the otherwise so-called principle of the polycentric city, the urban island within an archipelago seems instead to figuratively reinterpret that theory of *parti urbane* that had been widely debated, according to more or less divergent facets, in the Italian context, by architects such as Carlo Aymonino, Aldo Rossi and others since the 1960s.[14] Alongside the initial title of *Green Archipelago* given to the text by Koolhaas, according to a notion not devoid of a certain exoticism that seems to go back to his childhood spent with his family in Indonesia – as he writes: "I think that was when the archipelago established itself, in my mind, as an implicit model" –[15] Ungers had put before that of *The City in the City*, a formula frequently employed by other authors close to him, such as Léon Krier and Koolhaas himself. The former had employed it the previous year to define a new urban part at the Villette in Paris,[16] understanding it as an individually connoted neighborhood on the edge between city and country. The second, on the other hand, understood it according to an entirely different meaning, as a recognizable architectural complex within the urban fabric – such as the Rockefeller Center, investigated in his book *Delirious New York*, which was to be published the following year.

If Koolhaas was in fact interested in the notion of the archipelago for the insertion within the consolidated historical fabric of Berlin of "in-between spaces" in which it was possible to experiment new forms of living and new building types, for Ungers what was instead fundamental was the presence of "islands" to which

10   About the relation between Ungers and Koolhaas in this project, see also: Lara Schrijver, "City within the City," in *Oswald Mathias Ungers and Rem Koolhaas. Recalibrating Architecture in the 1970s* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2021), Chapter 2: 63-68.

11   See also: Pier Vittorio Aureli, "The city within the city. Oswald Mathias Ungers, OMA, and the project of the city as archipelago," in *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), Chapter 5.

12   Koolhaas, "Ghostwriting," 134.

13   Oswald Mathias Ungers, Hans Kollhoff, and Arthur Ovaska, *The Urban Villa: A Multi Family Dwelling Type*, Köln: Studioverlag für Architektur L. Ungers, 1977.

14   For the theorization about the city made by single urban parts see: Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, Oppositions Books, (Cambridge, Mass. / London: The MIT Press, 1982), Chapter 2: *Primary Elements and the Concept of Area*. Carlo Aymonino, *Lo studio dei fenomeni urbani* (Roma: Officina Edizioni, 1997). As an example of urban part can be intended the Gallaratese residential unit realized by Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino in the Milanese suburb at the beginning of the '70s.

15   . Koolhaas, "Ghostwriting," 131.

16   Léon Krier, "A City within the City," *A + U*, no. 84 (November 1977): 69-152.

an autonomous form could be given through the analogical use of references.[17] Inside the fragmentary existing structure of West Berlin, the intention of this experiment was not intended as "a master plan for the inner part of the city", but an attempt "to replace the missing brick in a wall; you had to paste, to repair the city." About the methodology they followed he adds: "it was the whole West Berlin map, as a figure ground plan, which we deconstructed [...] The 'philosophical' approach was first to decompose the city in order to reassemble it later".[18]

Urban Islands

As far as Ungers is concerned, the notion of archipelago is charged with a strong symbolic and cultural value, associated with the theme of memory. Referring to Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Glienicke Park, archipelago is understood as a *cultural landscape*, made up of fragments capable of evoking iconic moments of history.

From here we can deduce an idea of a city made up of pieces of existing fabric – taken *as found* according to the meaning given to this formula by the Smithsons[19] (and not far from Ernesto Nathan Rogers' idea of *environmental pre-existences* as elements to be involved inside the project).[20] These fragments are integrated by architectural and urban references ranging from individual buildings (Leonidov's Palace of Culture, Mies's prismatic skyscraper) to entire parts of the city (Central Park, Leonidov's design for the linear city of Magnitogorsk), assembled within specific places, and thus isolating them from the urban *continuum* of the existing fabric and inserting them into a new green archipelago. In the final version of the first draft, corrected by Ungers, the repertoire of examples expands: Hannes Meyer's Building for the United Nations, Adolf Loos's Chicago Tribune, El Lissitzky's *Wolkenbügel*, Bath's Royal Crescent, Le Corbusier's plan for Algiers, and the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York become concrete references to be grafted into Berlin's fragmented structure. If urban models served to give shape to existing urban parts, individual architectural references gave Berlin the role of a city of memory [Fig. 1].
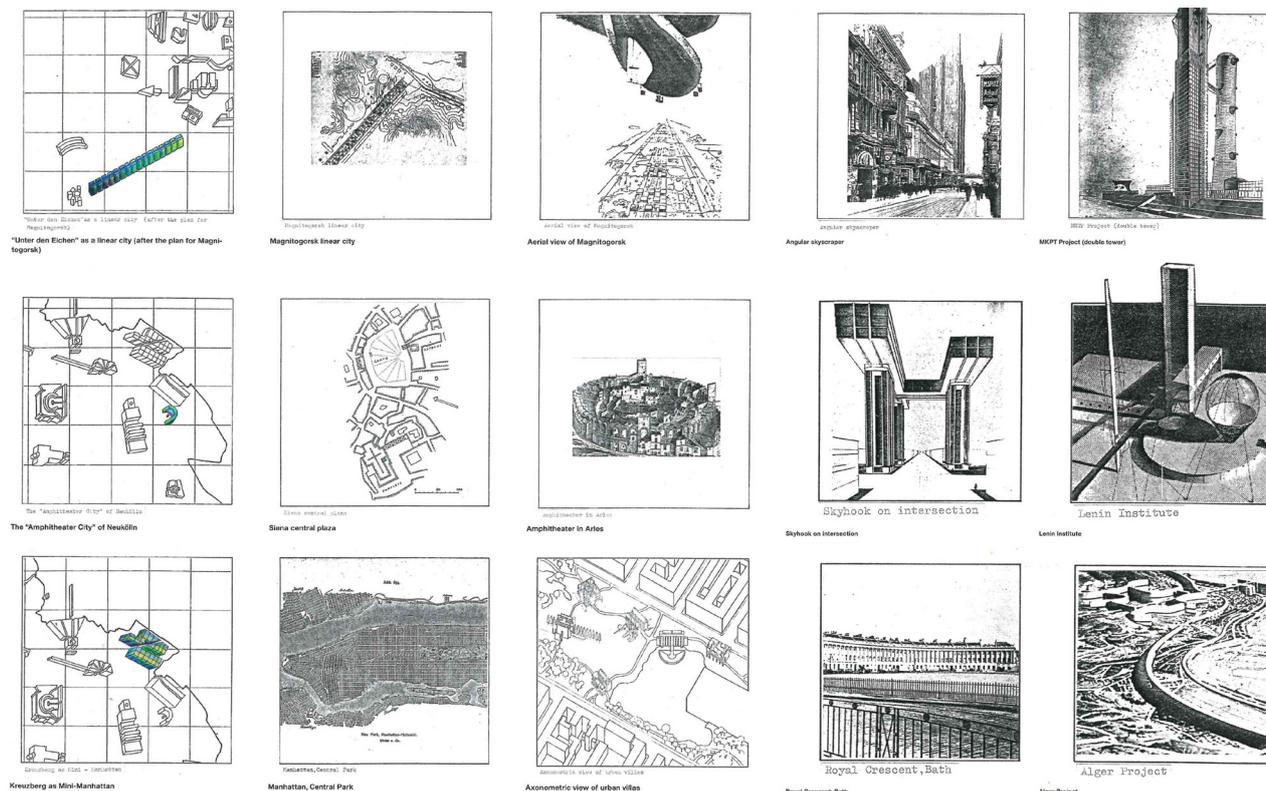
The form to be given to islands can refer to this wide repertoire of urban patterns in history, transforming the natural landscape into a cultural landscape, like Glienicke's *Havellandschaft*. A city in which new community forms could coexist between nature and culture, and where architectural quotations recalled to memory archetypes through the powerful tool of imagination – as theorized

17   Florian Hertweck, in Koolhaas, "Ghostwriting," 136.

18   Peter Riemann, "A symbiotic Operation: Rem Koolhaas in conversation with Florian Hertweck and Sébastien Marot," in *The City in the City*, ed. Florian Hertweck and Sébastien Marot (2013), 162, 164.

19   Dirk van den Heuvel, "As Found: The Metamorphosis of the Everyday. On the Work of Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Alison and Peter Smithson (1953-1956)," *Scratching the Surface*, OASE, no. 59 (2002): 52–67. Retrieved from https://www.oasejournal.nl/en/Issues/59/AsFoundTheMetamorphosisOfTheEveryday

20   Ernesto Nathan Rogers, "Le preesistenze ambientali e i temi pratici contemporanei," *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 204 (1955): 3-6.

"Unter den Eichen" as a linear city (after the plan for Magnitogorsk)

Magnitogorsk linear city

Aerial view of Magnitogorsk

Angular skyscraper

MKPT Project (double tower)

The "Amphitheater City" of Neukölln

Siena central plaza

Amphitheater in Arles

Skyhook on intersection

Lenin Institute

Kreuzberg as Mini-Manhattan

Manhattan, Central Park

Axonometric view of urban villas

Royal Crescent, Bath

Alger Project

in Designing and Thinking in Images, Metaphors and Analogies.[21] These reflections would be later elaborated in a text written for another celebrated exhibition, City Metaphors.[22] Regarding this attitude, Fritz Neumeyer explains how Ungers always relied on a way of thinking by "contrasting images" in order to find metaphorical analogies and differences to re-thematize the city according to new meanings.[23]

The *island* metaphor thus lends a naturalistic connotation to the elements that make up the idea of an urban archipelago. Instead of being immersed in an endless sea, this island landscape is held together by a complex system of parks and gardens, in which formalized portions of the city coexist – defined by Ungers as islands or even *minicities*, not simple *Viertels* as Koolhaas wrote in the first version of the paper – new infrastructures, collective equipment. Within these *in-between spaces* it could have been possible to experiment with new forms of living, such as those related to a nomadic dimension.

This archipelago of formally connoted islands scattered within a landscape continuum recalled, on the other hand, the *Stadtlandschaft* proposed by Hans Scharoun – the one who had invited Ungers to teach at TU in the early 1960s –[24]

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21   Oswald Mathias Ungers, "Designing and Thinking in Images, Metaphors and Analogies," in *Man trans-Forms* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 1976), 98-113. The text was written for the *Man trans-Forms* exhibition held in New York in 1976.

22   Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Morphologie – City Metaphors* (Köln: Verlag Walter König, 1982).

23   Fritz Neumeyer, "L'enigma dell'architettura. Un tutto a sé stante e un'unità di particolari," in *Ungers. Architetture 1951-1990* (Milano: Electa, 1991), 18.

24   Sébastian Marot, "The Genesis of a Hopeful Monster," in *The City in the City* (ed. 2013), 27.

Fig. 1

The City in the City, Urban and Architectural References (Hertweck, Marot 2013).

to rebuild a war-torn Berlin. Scharoun intended the urban landscape to be made up of old and new parts of the city, compact and open, divided from one another by wide swaths of greenery and connected by large urban highways, following the principles of the American city based on automobile and functionalist zoning. Ungers partially takes up this model but rethinks it in relation to the pressing issues of his time. The city in the process of depopulation was in a state of ruins and fragments – because of the war's damages still present and above all the consequences of the division – and now could open the imagination to new settlement forms. Within this open dimension of the existing landscape, the remaining fragments could be recomposed according to images and figures taken from history, in an ideal collection of iconic projects that transformed the city into an open-air museum.

Between Analogy and Icon

The theme of the icon, in fact, will be used years later in the title of the proposal developed by Ungers for *Berlin Morgen*, the exhibition held in 1991 at the DAM in Frankfurt curated by Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Michael Mönninger following the reunification of Berlin and the research of his future *heart*.[25] Compared to the other proposals presented on that occasion by a varied panorama of the major protagonists of the time – oscillating between reconstruction and deconstruction – Ungers' *Ikonenstadt* remains faithful to the concept of cultural landscape set out in *The City in the City*. Here too, famous unrealized Modern projects reappear – from Adolf Loos's *Chicago Tribune* to Mies's prismatic skyscraper and El Lissitzky's *Wolkenbügel* – assembled in the fragmented fabric of the historic center of Berlin [Fig. 2].

This idea of the icon as a tool adopted to embellish the Berlinese context, which allowed to accommodate reproductions of projects designed for other places went beyond the initial site-specific dimension and opened the city to a new analogical dimension, as already theorized by Aldo Rossi years earlier.[26] If in Rossi the *analogous city* is composed of fragments and projects taken from different eras and places to create a new city founded on memory, in Ungers' *City in the City* – and later with greater demonstrative force in *Ikonenstadt* – these same quotations coexist within the stratified fabric of Berlin, transfiguring it into a visionary dimension, which is the result of imagination rather than of the principles proper to urban reconstruction as understood in those years. Compared to the latter, which was fundamentally based on reconfirming not only the traces but also the structure of the pre-war *parcellarium*, this hypothesis followed two different modes: on the one hand it re-proposed iconic unrealized projects of Berlin's Modern on the site for which they had been conceived; on the other hand, it implanted in the urban fabric Modern icons for other cities, also

25   Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Michael Mönninger, eds., *Berlin Morgen. Ideen für das Herz einer Stadt* (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1991).

26   Aldo Rossi, "La città analoga," *Lotus*, no.13 (December 1976): 4-7.

Fig. 2

Ikonenstadt (Lampugnani, Mönninger, 1991).

IKONEN DER ARCHITEKTUR
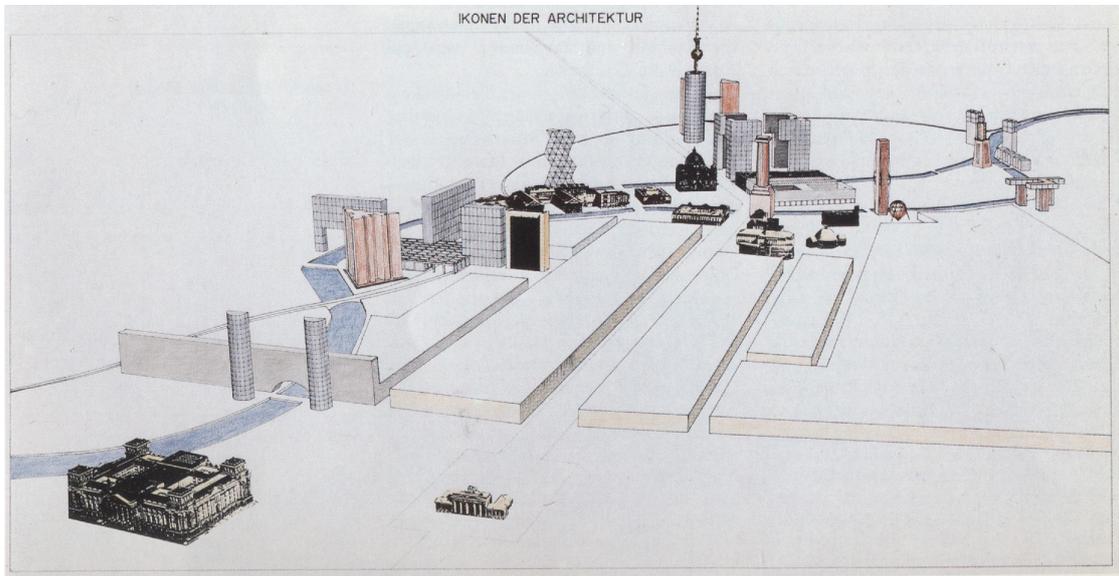
2

remained on the paper. In this way he was opening the city to a dimension other than what it had been, superimposing a new iconic layer on top of the historic one. This idea of the city as an overlapping of layers would later be formally theorized by Ungers in his book *The Dialectic City*.[27]

Similarly, Koolhaas would reuse this principle a few years later in the proposal he developed for Kochstrasse/Friedrichstadt in Berlin (1980-81), where some projects of Berlin's Modernism – Hilberseimer's City, Mies's skyscraper, and Mendelsohn's Haus des Deutschen Metallarbeiter-Verbandes – were assembled on the site of their original destination, superimposing themselves on the existing situation. It is no coincidence that it was precisely the choice to recall Hilberseimer's project – fundamentally based on the principle of *tabula rasa* – that anticipated Koolhaas's future anti-contextualist choices[28]. Compared to Ungers' *dialectical* attitude,[29] this project shows a more radical will, opposite to the choices made a few years later by Josef Paul Kleihues' IBA.

Ungers & Schinkel

If these urban proposals aspired to disrupt the historical fabric – as fragmentary as it remained – of streets and squares, blocks and individual buildings surviving on individual plots, the fate of the city of Berlin would follow other paths. Contrary to Koolhaas' claims, Hans Kollhoff confirms how *City in the City* was for Ungers "an interesting exercise, but it was clear to him [Ungers] that it had no chance of being converted into reality." And he also considers, regarding the following direction of the IBA, "that it was a piece of good fortune that Kleihues got the job" instead of Ungers.[30] Because Kleihues' approach towards the urban history and its actual possibility of a critical reconstruction, unlike Ungers', was not an artistic one, but a pragmatic one. On the contrary, the *City in the City* accepted the fragmentary condition of downtown Berlin as an existing situation to be assumed *as found*, thus avoiding the danger of restoring the artificial unity of an alleged past, now permanently erased by the historical events. An idea poised between realism and romanticism – the aesthetics of ruins and the fragment – that, if it could fit in Glienicke's idyllic landscape, it would have proved wholly inadequate with respect to Berlin's concrete aspirations to return as capital of the reunited country.

Ungers' reference to Schinkel will remain constant, especially in his urban-scale projects within the historical fabric of Berlin. In these projects Schinkel adopted –[31] a way of intervening punctually within the city's baroque layout,

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27   Oswald Mathias Ungers and Stefan Vieths, *The Dialectic City* (Milano: Skira, 1997).

28   François Chaslin, *Architettura© della Tabula rasa©. Due conversazioni con Rem Koolhaas, ecc.* (Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2003).

29   Sam Jacoby, "Oswald Mathias Ungers: dialectical principles of design," *The Journal of Architecture*, 23, no. 7-8 (2018): 1230-1258, DOI: 10.1080/13602365.2018.1513415.

30   Hans Kollhoff, "An exciting Exercise. Hans Kollhoff in conversation with Florian Hertweck and Sébastian Marot", in *The City in the City*, ed. Florian Hertweck and Sébastian Marot (2013), 155-156.

31   Hermann G. Pundt, *Schinkels Berlin* (Frankfurt a.M.: Propyläen, 1981). See also: Kurt Forster, "Schinkel's Panoramic Planning of Central Berlin," *Modulus*, no. 16 (1983): 62-77.
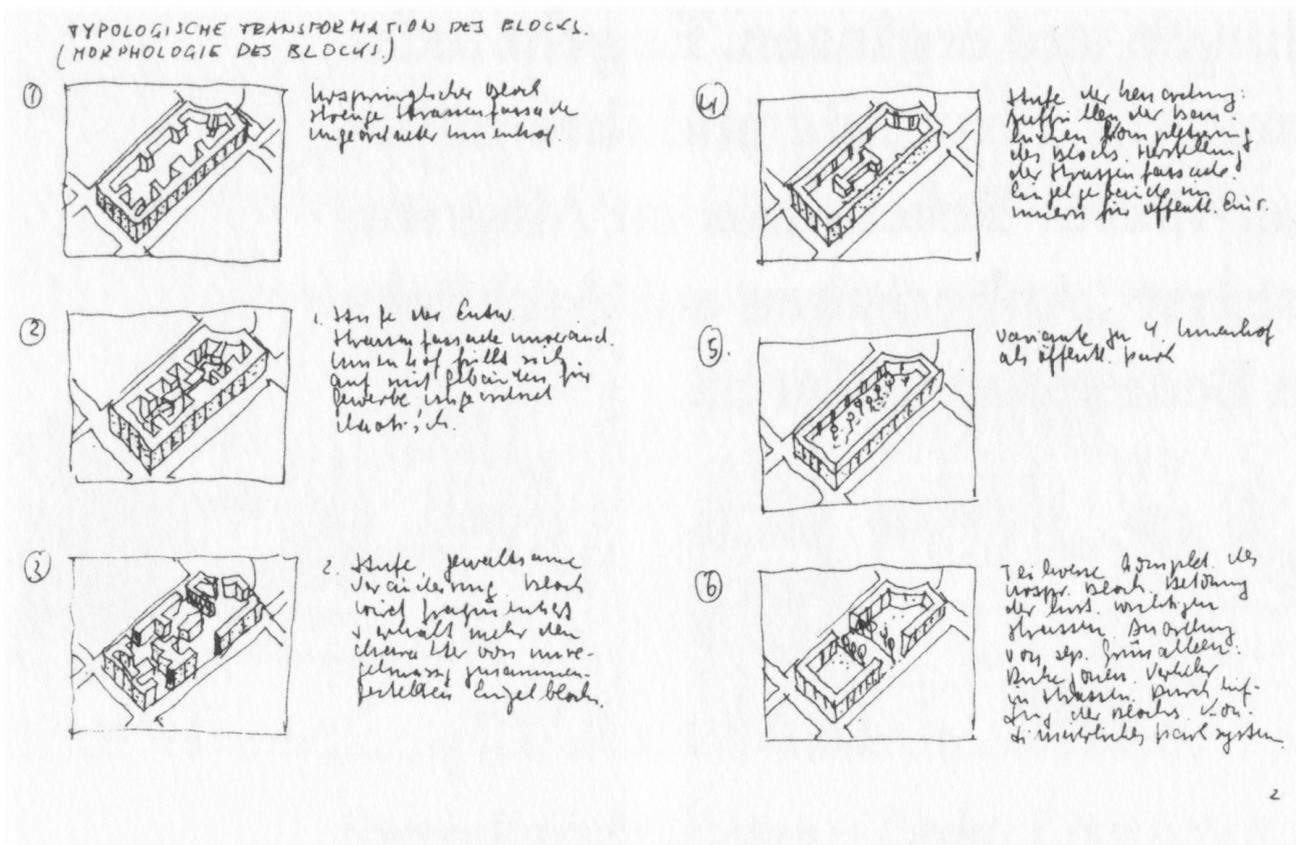
transforming it from within according to the ideal of a new Greco-Roman classicism. As Pier Vittorio Aureli writes: "Ungers derived this approach from Karl Friedrich Schinkel's work as the city architect of Berlin. In Schinkel's Berlin the capital of Prussia was punctuated by singular architectural interventions, rather than being planned along the baroque principles of cohesive spatial design for the entire city. Ungers thought that this approach would be able to overcome the crisis of the city by turning the crisis itself (the impossibility of planning the city) into the very project the architecture of the city."[32]

Abandoning the idea of transforming Berlin in an archipelago of islands, Ungers finds through Schinkel's punctual projects the right scale to intervene inside the fragmentary urban blocks of the Berlin of the '70s. From the scale of the quarter – reformalized through references in urban island – many of his future projects will thematize the scale of the urban block.

Block as *insula*

Compared to a more utopian approach, other projects and educational proposals of the same years developed by Ungers show a very different approach,

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32   Pier Vittorio Aureli, "Toward the Archipelago. Defining the Political and the Formal in Architecture," *Log*, no. 11 (Winter 2008): 91-120, here: 114. See also: Id., "The city within the city. Oswald Mathias Ungers, OMA, and the project of the city as archipelago." in *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), Chapter 3, on Schinkel: 178.

Fig. 3

Blockmorphologie, IDZ, 1975 (Cepl, 2007).

no longer influenced by Koolhaas's disurbanist aesthetic, with whom he would have no further occasion to collaborate after the *City in the City* experience. Ungers focuses on other issues, after careful consideration regarding the scale of the urban block. This had already been used in the American context in the now famous project for Roosevelt Island (1975) – a real island in this case – which reproduced the blocks of Manhattan in miniature, adopting for the first time the type of the Urban Villa, then widely experimented, around a reproposed Central Park.

The following year, the *Urban Block* would become the theme of the first Summer School held in Ithaca in 1976 with Cornell students, parallel to the project for *Gotham City*.[33] The didactic intent of the project is evident: as a sort of core sample extracted from the fabric of Lower Manhattan, a transversal strip of blocks extending between one bank and the other of the two rivers is taken to show the variational grammar of its settlement principles, according to the morphological method assumed by Ungers as the basis of his compositional procedure. In order to understand the richness and variability of the urban block, one must consider – as Jasper Cepl pointed out –[34] his contribution at the seminar held in Berlin in 1975 on the relationship between new interventions and the historic city at the IDZ (Internationale Design Zentrum), under the direction of Heinrich Klotz.[35] With the aim of proposing a "vocabulary" appropriate to the topic, Ungers illustrates with a sequence of tables "several morphological criteria" capable of covering "a whole spectrum of possible solutions," ranging from the simplest to the most complex case, with respect to the theme of the urban block. Starting from the investigation of the existing "Blockmorphologie," a block, which is for different reasons incomplete, can undergo different morphological processes of transformation. On the one hand, it can be reintegrated to its previous state through the reproposal of the original built perimeter. In this case, the continuity of the street curtain may or may not be adopted, with the possibility of using the urban villa, each individually defined. This type can also be used to densify and introduce new functions within the block, according to the theme of the *block within the block*. On the other hand, the block can be opened to the street, especially with a view to leaving the existing fragments *as found*, creating a *park* passing between one block and another[36] **[Fig. 3]**.

Even if not directly used by Ungers, the term *insula* can be considered as the correspondent German term of *Stadtblock*, developed in his idea of *Blockmorphologie*. The term goes back to the Roman city and refers to a particular typology of houses organized around a central courtyard.

33   Oswald Mathias Ungers, Hans Kollhoff, Arthur Ovaska, *The Urban Block and Gotham City. Metaphors and Metamorphosis. Two Concurrent Projects, Cornell University* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University, 1976).

34   Jasper Cepl, *Oswald Mathias Ungers. Eine intellektuelle Biographie*, 324-331.

35   Martina Schneider, ed., *Entwerfen in der historischen Straße. Arbeiten des IDZ Symposiums im Herbst 1975 zur baulichen Integration Alt–Neu* (Berlin: Abakon, Edition Lichterfelde, 1976).
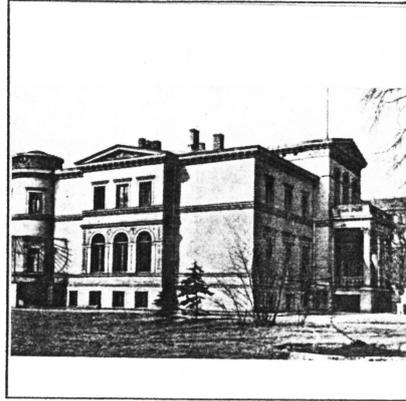
36   Oswald Mathias Ungers, „Untitled lecture on his morphological studies," in Martina Schneider, ed., *Entwerfen in der historischen Straße*, 82-97.
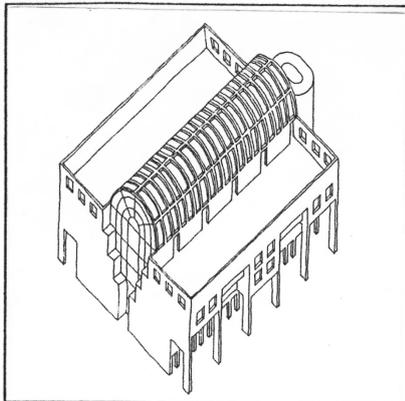
Fig. 4

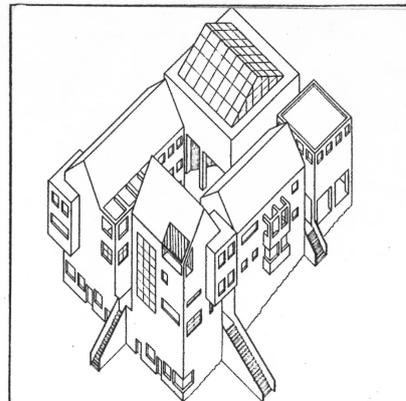Urban Villa, references and design variants (Hertweck, Marot 2013).
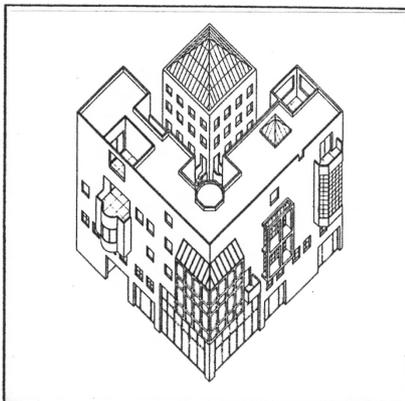
Wohnhausentwurf K.F.Schinkel 1798

Villa Pflug von E. Knoblauch 1859
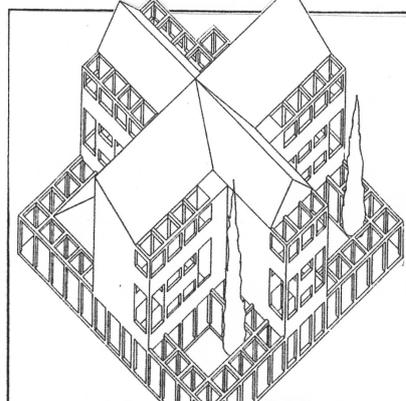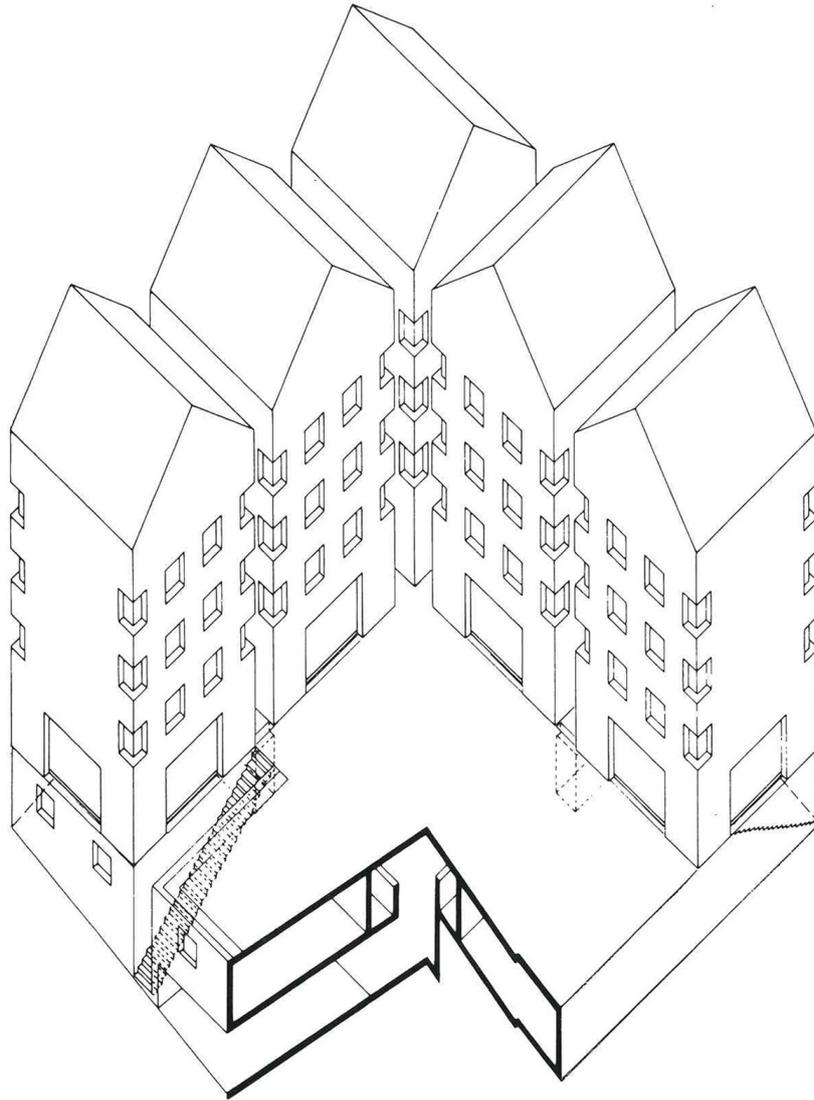

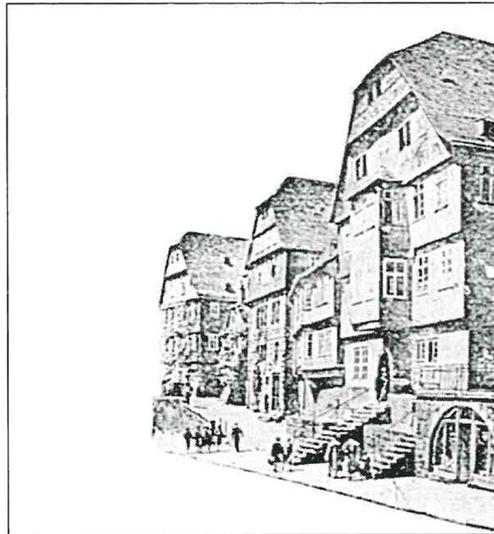Villa mit Kaufpassage

Villa mit internem Platz

Eckvilla

Kreuzvilla mit Pergola

Some examples of *insulae romanae* were used by Aldo Rossi in his discussion about typology in *The Architecture of the City*.[37]

The direct reference to the roman *insula* will be in the same years used by another architect – Léon Krier – for his IBA - proposal for a residential block in Berlin-Tegel (*Insula Tegeliensis*, 1980).[38] The proposal foresaw a regular urban block, built through isolated block houses – shaped in the form of ancient *palazzi* around an inner courtyard, and accessible to the public from narrow passages.

After having shared with Rem Koolhaas the idea of a city made of formalized *urban islands*, Ungers works with a different morphological scale, as found inside the small dimension of historic blocks – not far from what at that time theorized and put into practice by the Krier and Kleihues during the IBA Berlin.[39]

It is no coincidence that the *Lotus International* no. 19 in which *Cities within the city* was published was entirely dedicated to the theme of the *Urban Block*. Among the various contributions, Léon Krier presented the didactic experiences made with a group of international students on the Cerdà block in Barcelona – rethought from the type of the Urban Villa – as well as an extensive text devoted to the historical evolution of the urban block and its morphological variations.[40] This was followed by the presentation of Block 270, realized in the same year by Josef Paul Kleihues in Berlin-Wedding.[41]

Townhouse & Urban Villa

It is following this intention – the development of a specific "vocabulary" for different morphological variations inside the urban block – that Ungers will come into perfect harmony with Heinrich Klotz, who will later invite him to make a proposal for the completion of an urban block in the historic center of Marburg, the city where he was teaching. Later he offered him the opportunity to realize the new Frankfurt Museum of Architecture (DAM), placed – it is no coincidence – within a block of pre-existing urban villas.

The experience of Marburg was, de facto, the first opportunity for Ungers to measure himself within the consolidated limits of an historic texture. Ungers' proposal for Marburg clearly shows his conception of architectural morphology

37   See the *Insula with the House of Aurighi and Serapide*, and *the House of Diana* in Ostia Antica, after the reconstruction drawings by the archaeologist Italo Gismondi (1940), in: Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, 42-43.

38   *Insula Tegeliensis, Berlin; 1980; Krier, Leon 1946- ; Sanin, Francisco*. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/ummu/x-07-04853/07_04853. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed January 14, 2024.

39   The *critical reconstruction* of the historic urban layout – put into practice during the 1984/87 IBA coordinated by Josef Paul Kleihues for the new-build sector of Friedrichstadt Süd, in particular – is based on three common principles: the repairing of the urban blocks, the completion of the urban voids, and the perimeter building along the street curtain. Thanks to these principles, it has been possible to reintegrate – albeit in an incomplete form – the compact fabric of the historic urban blocks, as they were before the devastations caused by the war and the subsequent urban planning strategies. See also: Hardt-Waltherr Hämer, Josef Paul Kleihues, eds., *Idee Prozess Ergebnis. Die Reparatur und Rekonstruktion der Stadt*, Berlin: IBA 1987 (Berlin, Fröhlich & Kaufmann, 1984).

40   Léon Krier, "Revision of the 19. Century Block. In the Ensanche – Barcellona"; "Fourth Lesson. Analysis and project for traditional urban block," *Lotus International*, no. 19 (June 1978): 33-41; 42-55.
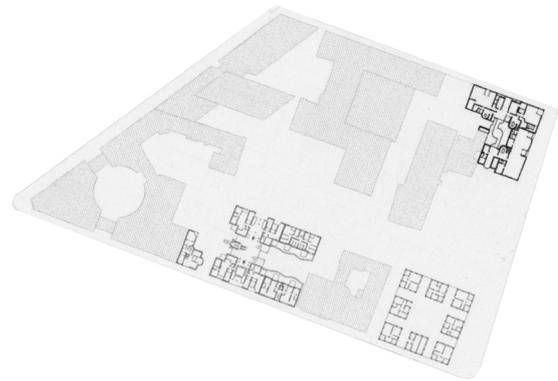
41   Josef Paul Kleihues, "Closed and open housing blocks. Notes on the case of Berlin and comments on the block 270 at Wedding," *Lotus International*, no. 19 (June 1978): 56-74.

Fig. 5,6

Marburg, morphological variations and references (Ungers, Electa 1991).
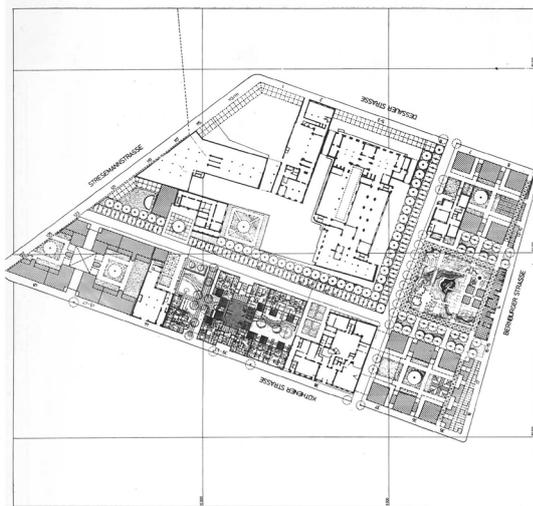
through the different variations he offers on the type of the urban *Townhouse*, whose historical examples are found on the site. Just as he would experiment with his students shortly thereafter in the Summer School on the *Urban Villa*, here too the *repertoire* of historical references becomes fundamental in defining the variations of individual houses.

If the *Townhouse* refers typologically to the traditional block houses connected each other, to be found in the dense medieval blocks of German city centers – which can vary from the *Traufenhaus* to the *Gaubenhaus*, depending on the main orientation of their roof with respect to the street or the depth of the plot[42] – the Urban Villa – as isolated block type – represents a historical reference traceable above all to the neo-classical city.[43]

Indeed, in both of these experiences, the role of references – in this case found on the site, and not iconic buildings imported from elsewhere as in the *City in the City* project – is crucial in defining the morphological variations around the adopted type. The references are collected in photographic abacuses, taxonomically ordered within frames and compared with design proposals, usually axonometric views of the different design variants. To do these – Kollhoff recalls – Summer School students were sent around in the Südliche Friedrichstadt "walking around, making sketches and photographs of everything that might be interpreted as an urban villa (...) Then we collaged these villas into the plan"[44] **[Fig. 4]**.

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42   About the difference between *Traufenhaus* and *Gaubenhaus*, see: Robert E. Dickinson, *The west European City. A geographical interpretation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951).

43   To the four different typologies of urban houses and the distinction between isolated and connected houses see: Jean Tricart, *Cours de Géographie Humaine*, Fas. II – *L'habitat urbain* (Paris: Centre de Documentation Universitaire, Sorbonne). To this way of typological classification directly referred Aldo Rossi: "From here derive four types of houses: 1. a block of houses surrounded by open space; 2. a block of houses connected to each other and facing the street, constituting a continuous wall parallel to the street itself; 3. a deep block of houses that almost totally occupies the available space; 4. Houses with closed courts and small interior structures". Aldo Rossi *The Architecture of the City*, 49. See also: Giorgio Grassi, "Caratteri dell'abitazione nelle città tedesche (1966)," in Id., *L'architettura come mestiere e altri scritti* (Milano: FrancoAngeli), 11-25.

44   Kollhoff, "An exciting exercise", 158.

Fig. 7,8

IBA - Block 1, ground floor plan: Plan elaborated by O.M. Ungers/B.F. Faskel/H.C. Müller (IBA, 1981).

Actual state (drawing: Silvia Grassi).

In the Project for Marburg, the *repertoire* of historical references – small Townhouses inserted along the street inside the building curtain – becomes fundamental in defining the morphological variations of the individual houses, distinguished according to five identified themes: regular or composite form, masonry outer shell around transparent inner core, direct quotations from historic examples, use of anthropomorphic forms. This gives rise to thirteen typological alternatives, all founded on the same square plan (6.5 by 6.5 meters). In the final version, the five houses bordering the corner of the block, next to two pre-existing historic houses, rest on a common two-story basement containing parking and other common facilities [Fig. 5].

Urban Garden

The City in the City reappears in reduced forms in the theme of the third and final Summer School, also held in Berlin, entitled *The Urban Garden*, which concludes the triad of the three themes addressed with the American students: the Block, the Villa, the Garden.[45] The theme of the urban garden is also associated with that of memory which takes on a central role in motivating the idea of *cultural landscape*, already anticipated previously, but now theorized in the text *Architektur der kollektiven Erinnerung*. If collective memory was one of the inspirational cornerstones of Rossi's theories of the 1960s – taken from the notion of *mémoire collective* introduced by French geographer Maurice Halbwachs –[46] the meaning given here by Ungers is rather inspired by the relationship between past and future as debated by the two protagonists – Marco Polo and Kublai Khan – in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.[47] The two asked each other, in an imaginary conversation, if the meaning of the journey undertaken in search of the past did not have as its objective that of finding motivations for the future. In another sense, the architecture of memory was found by Ungers in the exemplarity of Villa Adriana, understood as a "miniaturized universe" and as a humanistic city in which to preserve the knowledge of the Ancients. But also, as a model for the future, based on a pluralistic idea in which different places clash and enrich each other.[48]

In this third Summer School, as Arthur Ovaska recalls, "a new concept for a city in a garden, in what was probably one of the most ruined and fragmented areas of West Berlin," was developed. The subject of the seminar was to deal with the topic of "the ruined city, working with the existing fragments" and not with "a clean state approach like the Hansaviertel or Le Corbusier's and Smithsons'

45   Oswald Mathias Ungers, Hans Kollhoff, Arthur Ovaska, *The Urban Garden. Student Projects for the Südliche Friedrichstadt Berlin* (Köln: Studioverlag für Architektur L. Ungers, 1977).

46   Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949).

47   Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (Torino: Einaudi, 1972).

48   Oswald Mathias Ungers, "The Architecture of Collective Memory: The Infinite Catalogue of Urban Forms," *Lotus International*, no. 24 (1979): 5-11.

Berlin proposals".[49] Not, therefore, the logic of the *tabula rasa* inherited from the Modern, but a realistic approach to the city as it was in its actual state and the involvement of the remaining fragments within the project proposals. Such an approach, however, did not coincide with that of urban renewal then *in vogue* and later put into practice by the IBA. The distinction concerned above all the freedom Ungers still took with respect to the multiple morphological possibilities of resolving a fragmentary block, sometimes inserting continuous gardens between different blocks, thus partially undermining the pre-existing order defined by the street layout and the continuous street's building curtain.

Block & Court

The possibility of working with isolated elements, making use of historical types such as the courtyard building – unsatisfactorily used by him for the first time in the House on Schillerstrasse in Berlin (1978-82) – would later be put into practice in the IBA-Block in the Friedrichvorstadt. Compared with the morphological varieties of the Townhouses in Marburg or the Urban Villas designed with students, the extreme geometric regularity of the building – which is entirely defined by the square module – inaugurates a new phase in Ungers' work, aimed at geometric abstraction as a fundamental element of design, both at the urban and architectural scale. The three houses built on Block 1 between Köthener-, Bernburger- and Dessauer Strasse – along with Ungers, the other architects involved were Hans Christian Müller and the Baumeister/Richter group – are based on a unified plan he had coordinated together with Bernd Faskel and H.C. Müller on behalf of the IBA in 1981[50] [Fig. 6].

This plan did not follow the usual principle of continuous perimeter building (*geschlossene Randbebaung*) but completed the block with the addition of autonomous courtyard buildings, based on the depth of the pre-existing building volumes. In the plan conceived by Ungers the permeability of the block was guaranteed by public passages that gave access to the internal courtyard of each of the three buildings, with which they shared the same height and street-alignment. At the same time, the block was defined thanks to the individualization of each building in the single architectural choices and the morphological system, in which the continuity of the building curtain was secured through the definition of the two corners involved.

Compared to the morphological variations on the theme of the urban *insula* proposed at the conference organized by Klotz, a solution partially in line with the guiding principles proposed by Kleihues for Berlin's critical reconstruction is evident here.

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49   Arthur Ovaska, "An Exhibition Concept: Arthur Ovaska in conversation with Sébastian Marot. August 2010", in *The City in the City* (ed. 2013), 151.

50   Josef Paul Kleihues, Gesamtleitung, *Schriftenreihe zur Internationalen Bauausstellung Berlin 1984/87: Die Neubaugebiete. Südliche Friedrichstadt 1987 Dokumente Projekte 3* (Berlin: IBA 1984/87, 1981), 83.

Far from the islands of the *City in the City*, Ungers now seems to focus on the individual building and its coherent insertion within the pre-existing block. In this way Ungers shows again his ability in adapting his projects to different ideas of the city, without losing their internal coherence.

Conclusions

If the idea of the urban archipelago understood as an *in-between* empty space is easy to trace in other urban-scale projects of the same years for new *Urban Gardens*, the principle of critical reconstruction theorized by Kleihues is based by Ungers on a geometrical layout which gives an unambiguous order to the structure of the block. In doing so, Ungers is always taking into account the existing situation, since he "does not intend to substitute the old for the new, but always seeks to contemplate, complete and reinforce the sense of what already exists". [51] On the other hand, this geometric order that overlaps with that of the pre-existing *parcellarium* will allow him to regain a relationship of continuity with the historic city while avoiding any nostalgic relapse into the forms of the past.

In the space of just a few years, Ungers tackles different urban and architectural scales, always with the intention of proposing solutions of a general nature, capable of presenting themselves as possible models for the future city, without forgetting that of the past, like Kublai Khan in his journey. In *City in the City* he makes use of iconic references – taken from other contexts according to analogical procedures – to give shape to urban parts set within a new context. In coeval projects on a smaller scale, he shows the ability to reuse typologies found on site – the Townhouse, the Urban Villa, the Court House – as possible models to be subjected to morphological experimentation.

Apart from the concrete results, it is precisely in this typological and morphological process – constantly put to the test with that notion of *genius loci* taken from Schinkel's architecture understood as both spatial and temporal rootedness to a place –[52] that the full topicality of his work seems to be revealed, especially in relation to the current theme of designing within the inherited heritage of our historic cities.

51   Annalisa Trentin, "Ungers come educatore", in Id, ed., *Oswald Mathias Ungers: una scuola* (Milano: Electa, 2004), 20 (Translation by the author).

52   Oswald Mathias Ungers, „Fünf Lehren aus Schinkels Werk," in *Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Werke und Wirkungen*, edited by Senat von Berlin (Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1981), 245-249. Then in: *Die Thematisierung der Architektur* (Stuttgart: DVA-Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983).

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