

Shifting Agency in Berlin: a Critical Decade

Urbanization and Governance, Social Housing, Urban Movements, Knowledge Production, Professional Crisis

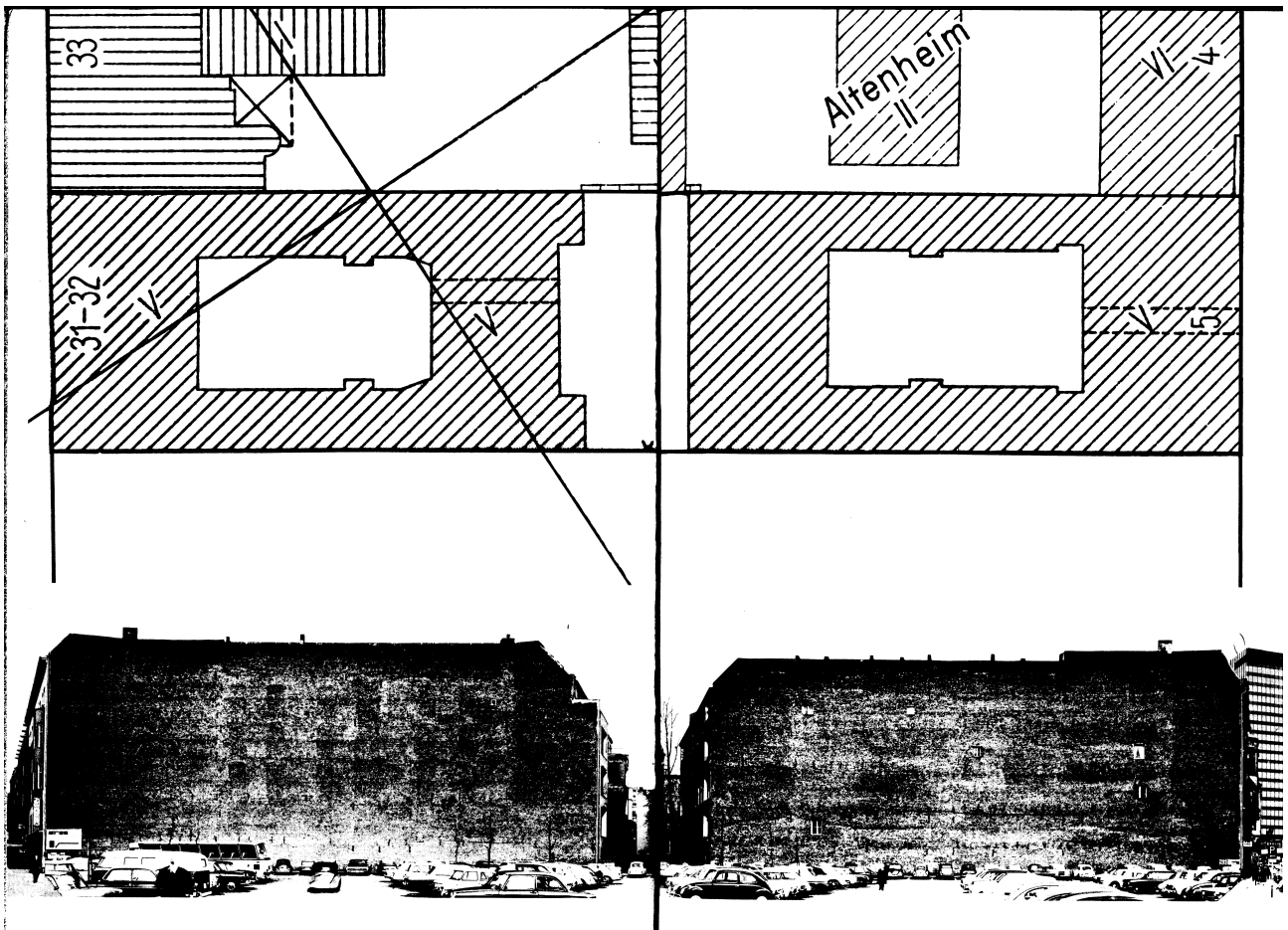
/Abstract

There is a reciprocity between architecture production and urban publics, especially clear in times of professional crisis. For O.M.Ungers, Berlin served as a model for novel themes in a period when representations and demands of social groups were appearing in the urban realm. These challenged the Welfare State and the architecture production enmeshed with it. In a fragmented urban landscape, the urban villa introduced customized objects as “prototypes for inner city residences” (Ungers et al., 1978). Together with the more notorious Green Archipelago in the same year, the urban villa was the product of a Cornell Summer Academy that was premised on the manifest shortcomings of mass housing. Its participants in 1978 were avid observers of the material evidence that contemporary Berlin presented. Ungers was himself eager to re-legitimize his architectural practice after the crisis of mass housing in the same city during the late 1960s. The accompanying text, *The Urban Villa*, refers to a “personalization of lifestyle” and the “shift from the dependant tenant to the independant home owner”: a suburbanization of the already insular, provincial city? an early vehicle for Postmodernism? The interpretation of Berlin’s distressed urban condition certainly owes to experiences that Ungers had made in a geographical and a professional distance over the past decade. His gaze was conditioned by a distinctly different professional, social and cultural context that Cornell University and New York City had exposed him to since leaving Berlin to teach abroad. Yet structural changes affected cities and urban governance on both sides of the North Atlantic. In Ungers’s case, the ‘American’ experience can be argued as informing a novel reading of the fragmented Berlin. Which architectural agency can be related to knowledge derived from an urban realm that is itself changing? If anything, the two Summer Academies organized by Ungers and his colleagues from Cornell University offer a lens to look at how external forces condition the knowledge acquired by architects.

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André Bideau has lectured and published extensively on the work of O.M.Ungers since his publication of *Architektur und Symbolisches Kapital* (2011), addressing the work of Ungers in Berlin and Frankfurt. Bideau teaches architecture history at Accademia di architettura Mendrisio and ETH Zurich where he directs the MAS program in history and theory of architecture. He is a co-founder of Zentrum Architektur Zürich where he has curated several exhibitions since 2018. Based upon his research on Swiss historian of urbanism André Corboz, he conceived *Territory as Palimpsest*, an exhibition shown at Accademia di architettura Mendrisio and EPF Lausanne in 2022/2023.



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What kind of knowledge do cities yield, how do architects unpack and leverage this knowledge in a particular moment? Which kind of architectural agency can be related to knowledge produced in the urban realm? Such questions can be raised regarding the knowledge affecting the collective of authors surrounding Oswald Mathias Ungers in the late 1970s. Was it a particular moment in the history of Berlin when they released their manifestos *The Urban Villa* and *The Green Archipelago*? Produced by Ungers and his teaching assistants in 1977 and 1978,¹ both texts hail from the decade of 'learning from': to attempts that all aimed at repositioning architectural research and practice.

To grasp of the connection between knowledge production to architectural agency one must turn to a lesser known research publication from a decade earlier. "Berliner Brandwände" [Fig. 1], dedicated to fire and party walls, is certainly one of the more startling products in Ungers's evolution. As a publication, *Berliner Brandwände* is evidence of the thematic openness of research during late 1960s and early 1970s.² A sequence of grainy images taken by photographer Arthur Laskus is combined with cartographic information related to Berlin's 19th

Fig. 1

Lateral view of Berlin's fragmented perimeter blocks with cadastral plan at Rankestrasse and Marburgerstrasse and Marburgerstrasse (Lehrstuhl für Entwerfen VI. Prof. O.M.Ungers (ed.), «Berliner Brandwände», *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur*, Berlin: Technische Universität Berlin, 27/1969).

1 Oswald Mathias Ungers, Hans Kollhoff, and Arthur Ovaska, *The Urban Villa. A Multi-family Dwelling Type*. Cornell Summer Academy 77 in Berlin (Köln: Studio Press for Architecture, 1977).

2 Lehrstuhl für Entwerfen VI. Prof. O.M.Ungers (ed.), «Berliner Brandwände», *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur*, Berlin: Technische Universität Berlin, no. 27 (1969).

century tenements. Their inner organization has been cracked open by the acts of destruction of the war which have randomly exposed party walls. This was the urban landscape such as Ungers would have experienced it upon his arrival from Cologne as a professor at Technische Universität Berlin in 1963. Countless exposed blank surfaces could still be experienced in 1960s and 1970s West Berlin— where Ungers taught, designed and built during various decades of his professional career.

Released in 1969 by collaborators Jürgen Sawade and Ulrike Pampe, the small publication was the result of a research survey conducted at Technische Universität. It is unusual as a product, showing neither a research hypothesis nor drawing any conclusion for design. Yet *Berliner Brandwände* shows an ambivalent reading of the city which is characteristic for Ungers in this period. On one hand, an urban taxonomy is presented. A formerly hidden layer of information, the party wall was peeled open by bombing and now reveals its dual nature as property line and fire wall. The photographic spreads are aligned with cadastral plans, thus revealing the economic reality underpinning the 19th and early 20th century Mietskaserne tenements. We see the matrix of the tenement city that which been discredited both by pre- and postwar modernists, most famously in Werner Hegemann's "Das steinerne Berlin" from 1930.³ On the other hand, the publication bestows an abstract, almost sculptural aura to the isolated tenements. Here the reading of the history of urbanism is not a systemic, but an accidental one. Moreover, the vast windowless elevations achieve a sublime quality in the photography of Arthur Laskus.

Although similar to jarring X-rays of the structural logic of the process of urbanization, its speculative dimension is not attacked in *Berliner Brandwände*. Rather, the party wall serves as an objet trouvé in the thinned-out urban landscape of late Sixties West Berlin. Its representation calls to mind the contemporary work of Bernd and Hilla Becher.⁴ Ungers was an avid art collector with the Bechers' photography of vernacular and industrial architecture figuring in his collection: barns, gas tanks, furnaces and water towers organized as surveys of the everyday that were as meticulously typological as they were atmospheric. Their photography took stock of abandonment and obsolescence, a condition that indirectly corresponds with the depleted urban landscape presented in *Berliner Brandwände*. Empty lots show shrinkage as a reality and contrast to the city's exponential growth during the late 19th century. The survey is an early and pivotal step towards a reading of the city that is no longer predicated on quantitative growth, but increasingly defined by the distribution of symbols and markers. By addressing urban form and morphology, the design of housing was implicitly re-situated in a referential space.

3 Werner Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin: Geschichte der grössten Mietkasernenstadt der Welt* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer, 1930).

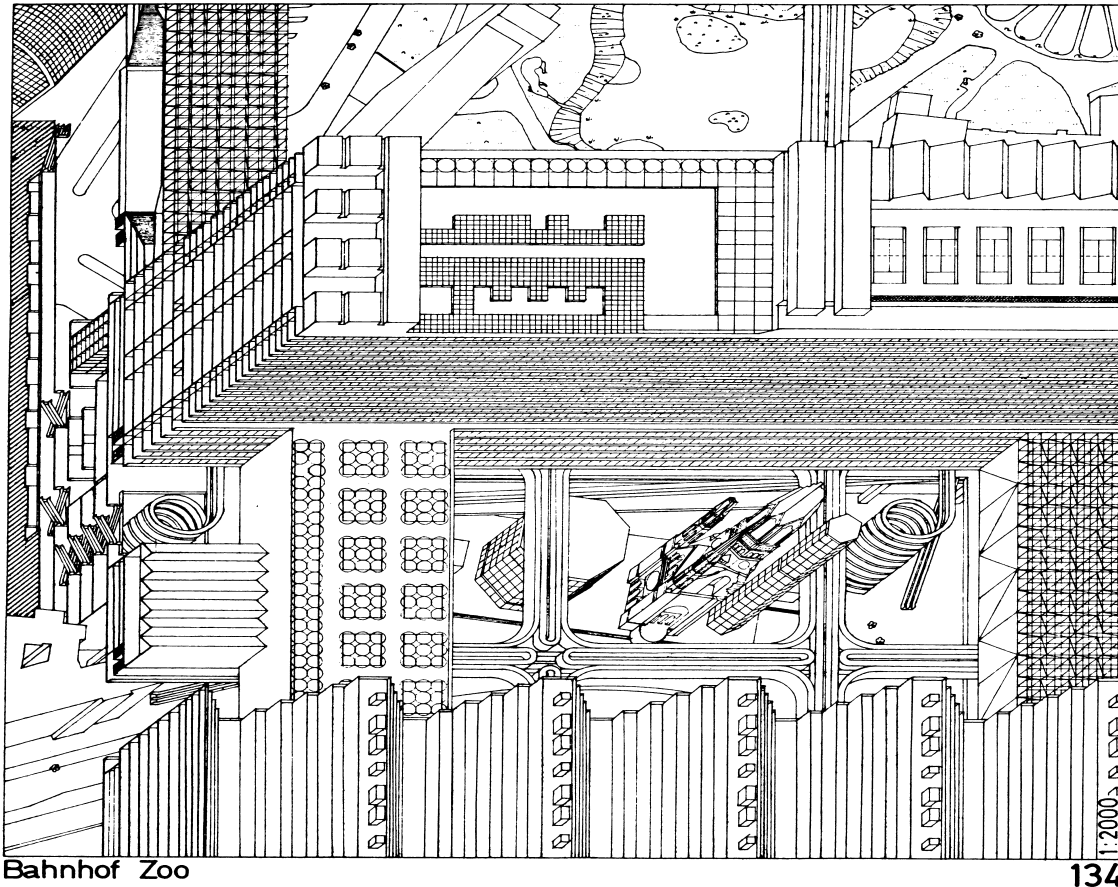
4 Ungers, an avid art collector who owned works by Bernd and Hilla Becher of vernacular and industrial architecture, is likely to have seen early exhibitions of their work during the second half of the 1960s; Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Anonyme Skulpturen: Formvergleiche industrieller Bauten* (Düsseldorf: Städtische Kunsthalle, 1969).

Fig. 2

Proposals for the megastructuralist reorganization of Bahnhof Zoo/Gedächtniskirche area ((Lehrstuhl für Entwerfen VI. Prof. O.M.Ungers (ed.), «Berlin 1995», *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur*, Berlin: Technische Universität Berlin, 25/1969).

Fig. 3

Hypothetical concentration of 1950-1966 housing production in Germany in a strip of 500 km (Lehrstuhl für Entwerfen VI. Prof. O.M.Ungers (ed.), *Grossformen im Wohnungsbau*, *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur*, Berlin: Technische Universität Berlin, 5/1966).



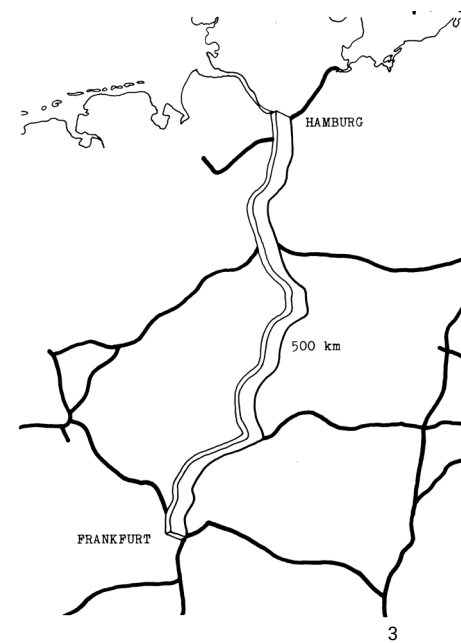
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Surveying party walls and anonymous 19th-century real estate meant coming to terms with a given urban landscape via an ‘as found’⁵ perspective, while proposing an implicit critique of ahistorical urban renewal and its techno-functionalistic discourse. Such concerns were not the case for the entire series, the latter being explicitly the focus of many of its issues. *Berliner Brandwände* is more a harbinger of a research agenda yet to come. Although in their interest in urban form the authors hark back to the Structuralism of Team Ten or to Kevin Lynch’s ‘imageability’ they offer neither a design agenda nor do they make any attempts to regulate the urban condition, past or present. Rather, their aim is to read the urban landscape in 1969. No longer is the conceptual criterium to project limitless growth, but to come to terms with the identity of Berlin.

The Demise of Mass Housing

Berlin Party Walls was the last of 27 issues of a series released between 1965 and 1969 by Ungers and his collaborators at the Berlin design chair. The *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur* (Publications on architecture) represent the topical range in which architecture production was caught up by the end of the decade [Fig. 2]: the question of whether functionalist planning, in particular



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⁵ Ungers was an informal member of Team Ten and would invite its key members to lecture and teach at Cornell University in 1972.



System der Wohnbebauung mit allseitiger Raumbildung

mass housing and urban renewal, could operate in a politically tenable way, and of who held the power and wielded the interests behind a building economy producing ever more housing units.

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Some of the research published by Ungers and his chair at Technische Universität problematized the power system under which architects operate, aspiring to transcend the production of objects and arrive at an understanding of design that was driven more by process and research and less by form. Issues were devoted to prefabrication, circulation systems, hybrid housing and traffic megastructures or the vision of a fully networked Berlin⁶— in other words, to utopias premised on mobility, industrialization and limitless growth.

Ungers himself was apt at balancing conceptual issues such as historicity, phenomenology, urban history on one hand and extreme technocracy, while thinking in terms of systems on the other for his research and design agenda. Yet this dichotomy of design led to an increasingly tense situation within the ideologies of architecture discourse, ie especially concerning how professionals

6 Notably these issues of *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur*: «Schnellstrassen und Gebäude», no. 4 (1966), «Wohnungssysteme in Stahl», no. 17 (1968), «Schnellbahn und Gebäude», no. 21 (1968), «Wohnungssysteme in Gross-tafeln», no. 22 (1968), «Wohnungssysteme in Raumzellen», no. 24 (1969), «Berlin 1995», no. 25 (1969).

Fig. 4
O.M. Ungers: grid with massing of Märkisches Viertel housing, Berlin-Wittenau (1962-1967).

leaning toward the radical left should position themselves. The issue of mass housing embedded in contemporary 'Grosssiedlungen' [Fig. 3] was particularly contentious. Although 'social', this model was increasingly enmeshed with market dynamics, a result of the opening of housing production to private capital or to large semi-public corporations in many countries such as the developer *Neue Heimat* in Germany. Given his involvement with subsidized housing since the 1960s, the challenge for Ungers lay precisely in addressing the ever-larger scale of these projects, providing his expertise to increasingly anonymous developers and to the building sector at large. The conflict unfolded when mass housing was already seen as the culprit in the dissolution and neglect of both the social and built fabric of cities – such as the porous perimeter blocks surveyed in Berlin Party Walls in 1968. Paradoxically, at this time Ungers was being attacked for his involvement with Märkisches Viertel [Fig. 4], the notorious 17000-unit superproject in Berlin-Wittenau. From within radicalized academia, he saw his work criticized for providing the building sector with a veneer of cultural distinction, contributing to a monofunctional satellite in a remote location adjacent to the Wall.

In mass media, Märkisches Viertel became an easy target and a scapegoat.⁷ Ungers became so disillusioned with this climate that he took an academic leave to teach at Cornell university in 1968,⁸ remaining attached to Berlin through his participation in competitions, symposia and workshops for the next decade. But his building activity entirely ceased after 1967 when Märkisches Viertel was completed. This led to a career evenly split into two halves, with approximately two decades of building activity on each side of a gap that coincided with Ungers's immersion in the United States. This interval and the conceptual experimentation stemming from it are of particular interest here. They reflect the changing role of the city as a site of knowledge production.

To grasp the breadth of subjects addressed by Ungers, one must consider the time span of his work as a designer, theoretician and educator. Not only does his activity cover a substantial historic range with such significant periods for Germany as postwar reconstruction and economic recovery, the Cold War, the recession of the 1970s, the prosperity of the 1980s and subsequent reunification.⁹ It also coincides with fundamental changes in the profession which was, as in the case of the experiences made with Märkisches Viertel, under critical stress from the late 1960s onward. These changes would impact the relationship between theory and practice, research and design, and, especially, the role of architects narrating the city.

7 Kurt Wolber, «Leben wie im Ameisenhaufen», *Stern*, no. 30 (1970): 62-77; Hermann Funke, «Da hilft nur noch Dynamit», *Der Spiegel*, Heft no. 45 (1970): 238.

8 Accepting the invitation to teach there in the Spring term of 1968 extended by Colin Rowe. Jaspar Cepl has detailed the ensuing situation of his chair at Technische Universität in Berlin in 1968 and 1969, when research studios were run by teaching assistants like Michael Wegener and Jürgen Sawade, but still entailed oversight by Ungers who by then had begun to teach at Cornell University. Jasper Cepl, *Oswald Mathias Ungers: Eine intellektuelle Biographie* (Köln: Walther König, 2007), 243, 254-256.

9 For this broader arc see: André Bideau, *Architektur und symbolisches Kapital: Bilderzählungen und Identitätsproduktion bei O. M. Ungers* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2011); André Bideau, «Elusive Ungers», *AA Files*, no. 64 (2012): 3-14.



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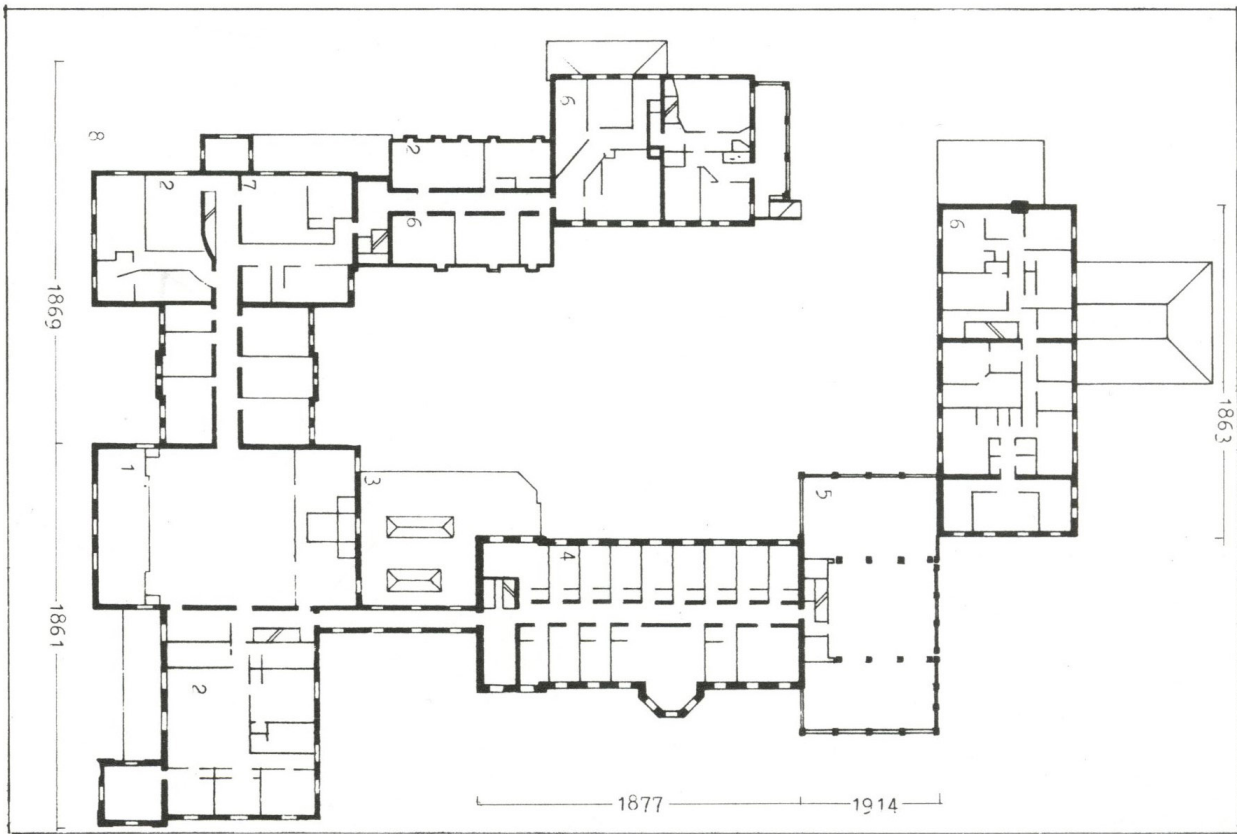
Exceptionalism: Seeing Berlin as a Model

Can a city condition or shape architectural narratives? Which factors, agents and scales are relevant in a given time? To consider the impact that Berlin had upon the discourse of Ungers one must reflect upon the city's postwar identity – both as a political territory and as a site of cultural exchange. An isolated, non-sovereign outpost, West Berlin was dependent on relationships to other territories such as the *Länder* of West Germany and the Western nation states. Heavily subsidized, it was a privileged laboratory – regardless of its provincial status. From the 'Interbau', the international building exhibition in 1957, to ambitious undertakings of the 1960s such as the new national gallery by Mies van der Rohe or the satellite city Märkisches Viertel, West Berlin, the symbolic weight of architecture in West Berlin was different from other Western German cities. Without doubt, Ungers responded to the force field intensified by the construction of the Wall, two years prior to his appointment at Technische Universität in 1963. The division of the former capital into rival systems provided a spotlight for architecture production with a thematic and iconographic dimension.

Berlin's condition privileged the 'identitarian' turn that Ungers's work began to take during the 1970s. But in their studios and research, he and his collaborators also reflected the socio-economic context during this period. For instance, when taking up the question of housing, *The Green Archipelago* and the related research studio, *The Urban Villa*, both engaged with countercultural and alternative milieux of Berlin. The metaphor of urban 'islands' conveys the autonomy

Fig. 5

Hosted by socialist student organization SDS in February 1968, the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongress at Technische Universität Berlin attacked United States involvement in Vietnam, NATO and capitalism in general (Landesbildstelle/Uni-Archiv).



that the design proposal sought to provide these milieus with. Their members are equipped with an individual agency, taking charge of their local environment through home ownership or cooperatives. Implying the empowerment of individuals, this model differs from the housing policies of the Keynesian Welfare State.

Previously, planning endeavors on either side of the wall had been magnified as through a Petri dish, offsetting different narratives of welfare: *Soziale Marktwirtschaft* in the Federal Republic from the planned economy in the German Democratic Republic. Given this rivalry of two systems, housing, cultural facilities, education and traffic infrastructure were heavily subsidized in West Berlin which lacked in private building activity. Via his research at Technische Universität Ungers had gravitated toward the demands of technocratic planning and the industrialized building sector. Beginning in 1967, however, the student protests increasingly problematized the systemic dimension of architecture. Attacking the power structures of the West, the radical Left criticized US military hegemony as well as the ensuing political and economic entanglements that affected liberal and progressive planners and educators like Ungers.¹⁰ Rejecting the German Welfare State and enlightened capitalism entailed the constellation of mass housing and urban renewal. Fresh from his involvement with

10 A watershed event for the German left was the state visit of the Shah of Iran to Western Germany in 1967, including the Imperial couple's visit to Berlin where protesters were attacked by local police and pro-Iranian supporters. On June 2 a Berlin police officer shot Benno Ohnesorg, a student at Technische Universität.

Fig. 6
Mansion House of Perfectionists, Oneida, New York, showing construction phases between 1861 and 1914 (Liselotte and Oswald M. Ungers *Kommunen in der Neuen Welt*, 1972).

Märkisches Viertel and serving as the current dean of the architecture department at Technische Universität, Ungers was an obvious target in 1967.

As a critical juncture this moment can be related to the shifting perception of West Berlin as an outpost: Its singular destiny in opposition to Communism was increasingly less a defining feature.¹¹ As the prevailing power structure of the West was questioned the spotlight shifted away from megastructures at a heroic scale. Furthermore, Berlin's exceptional Cold-War status was diminished as the relationship between the two superpowers began to evolve under a coalition led by chancellor of Willy Brandt, a former mayor of West Berlin: By signing peace accords in 1972, the two German states acknowledged their mutual right to exist and initiated diplomatic relations. This marked the beginning of a depoliticization of space, now no longer tasked with translating a political ideology. After the late modern superproject, political détente opened up architecture for narratives that were increasingly geared toward difference, community and heritage.

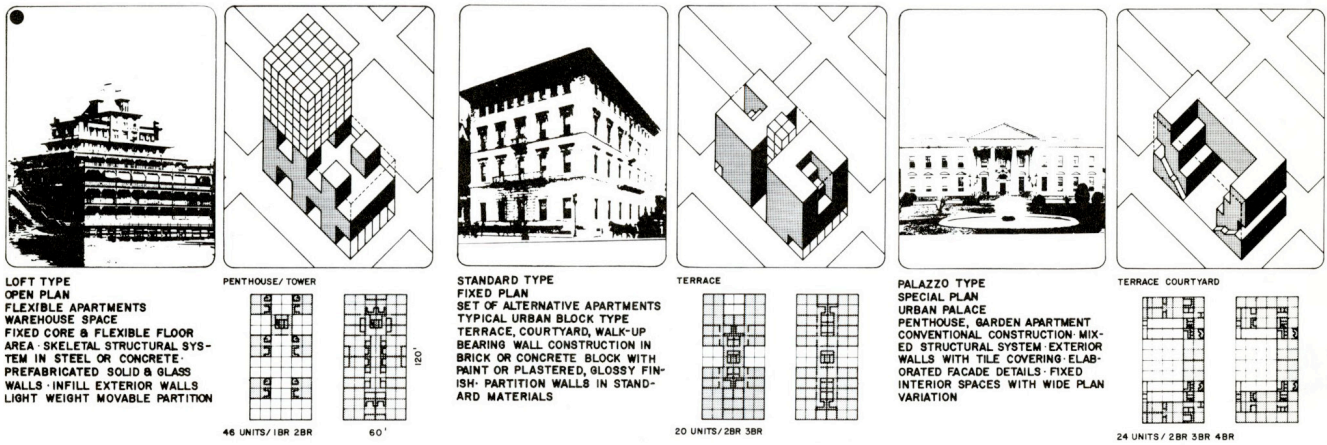
If West Berlin served as a model for novel themes for Ungers, it did so because his gaze was conditioned and informed abroad. As both the cultural critique and the geopolitical shift redefined the professional agenda 1967-1972 Ungers was himself exposed to a completely different context. His 'American' experience can be argued as informing a novel reading of Berlin. The interpretation of its distressed urban condition owes to experiences made while in the United States: to the distance both in a geographical and a professional sense.

Communities as Opportunities

Is it a paradox that physically leaving Berlin in 1968 can inspire a new relationship of architecture and the city? Had Ungers not witnessed issues of territory, community, urbanity in Berlin first-hand, subsequently testing them through the Cornell Summer Academies in 1977 and 1978, the theorization of its urban landscape would not have taken on the same significance. On the other hand, the interests that he pursued while based in the United States would have been different had he arrived there without his experiences as practicing architect in postwar Germany. Ultimately, the theoretical agenda and, eventually, the building practice that Ungers resumed in Germany in the late 1970s bear a connection to the prior United States exposure. And here the relevant insight was addressing shrinkage and crisis instead of growth.

The first semester of Ungers's activity at Cornell University coincided with the assassination of Martin Luther King Junior on April 4 1968, an event triggering riots where countless downtowns went up in flames. The acute crisis only aggravated an ongoing implosion based on destructive urban renewal,

¹¹ To understand such shifts of consciousness in the perception of cities, sociologists Martina Löw and Helmuth Berking coined the term of the 'inherent logic', in part referring to the concept of 'habitus' developed by Pierre Bourdieu. Martina Löw, Helmuth Berking (eds.), *Die Eigenlogik der Städte: Neue Wege für die Stadtforschung* (Frankfurt a.M: Campus Verlag, 2008).



economic segregation and white flight to suburbia, while the two previous years had already seen race riots in Los Angeles and Detroit.

Although far away from any urban center and from the conflicts unfolding on a national scale, protests eventually reached the Cornell campus in Ithaca, New York. One year after his arrival, as Ungers had become chair of the architecture department, armed African American students occupied the student center Willard Straight Hall in spring 1969.¹² The claim to specific territories made by individual communities was a subject that Ungers immersed himself when an opportunity arose in the first years in upstate New York. Together with his wife Liselotte Ungers, he published a series of articles for Swiss periodical *Werk*, then under the direction of sociologist Lucius Burckhardt. The five articles presented the socio-economic experiments of settler communities, mostly dating from the first half of the 19th century and active for several decades only. Expanded to include contemporary countercultural communes, the articles published in *Werk* in 1970 and 1971 were subsequently released in paperback by German publisher Kiepenhauer & Wietsch as “*Kommunen in der Neuen Welt*” in 1972. [Fig. 5]¹³

The projects presented by Liselotte and O.M Ungers were demonstrations of how private enterprise could impact remote areas. By and large, the historic sites were located in upstate New York or the rural Midwest, examples of the overlap of pioneering settler dynamics, spiritualism and socialism, a subject also addressed in the contemporary research of Dolores Hayden on the ‘idealism of the American environment’.¹⁴

Kommunen in der Neuen Welt presents case studies of the historic communities created by Owenites, Fourierists, Rappists, Perfectionists, Shakers, and

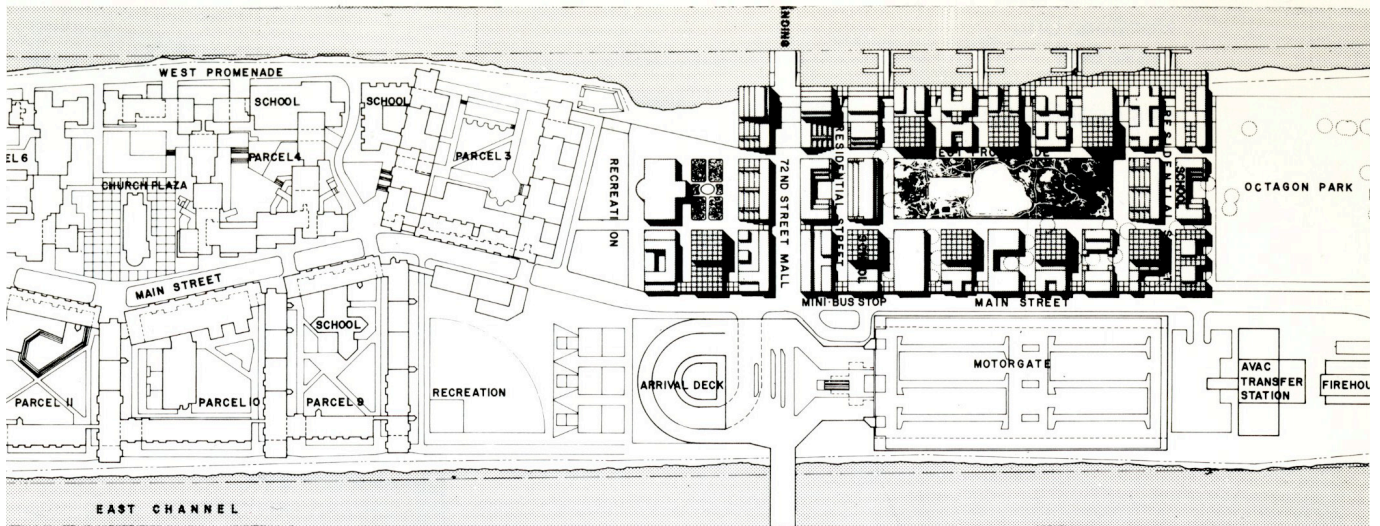
12 Cepl 2007, 253.

13 Liselotte Ungers, *Oswald Mathias Ungers. Kommunen in der Neuen Welt, 1740-1971* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1972).

14 Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias. The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge-MA: MIT Press, 1976), 377: Hayden refers not to the 1972 publication, but to the earlier article by L. and O.M. Ungers, “Utopische Kommunen in Amerika, 1800-1900. Die Amana Community”, *Das Werk* (August 1970): 543-546.

Fig. 7

O.M. Ungers: Manhattan references and massing studies for Welfare Island competition, New York City (1975).



other, mostly spiritual movements, all with a critical and ideological distance to the respective mainstream of their time. Taking a particular interest in the agency of each settler group, the authors demonstrate how identity is translated into a specific spatial arrangement, self-contained and with a programmatic dimension. Among the case studies analyzed, the issue of ownership, the position of women, the relationship between the community and the exterior are recurring categories. In its research interests, *Kommunen in der Neuen Welt* is indicative of the scrutiny that the social policies of the postwar Welfare State were subjected to around 1970. But whereas contemporary criticism of these policies was mainly voiced in cities, Liselotte and O.M Ungers took their inquiry to the open territory. Here, the utopian settlements provided knowledge that would ultimately inform an alternative approach to urban issues in Berlin.

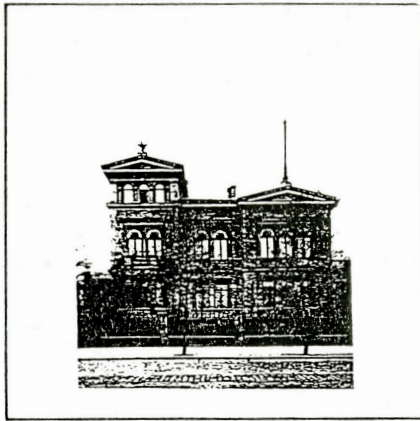
The publication was a response to the new environment of academic life in the United States – the Cornell campus itself being an isolated, rural community. The fieldwork was in part based upon travel undertaken by Ungers together with his family, now also based in Ithaca. But the study must also be placed in context with Ungers's previous career in mass housing. Lost in a project like Märkisches Viertel, the utopian dimension was the central feature of the collective experiments from the 19th century. At the same time, these pioneering projects addressed economic and spatial issues. *Kommunen in der Neuen Welt* was also an attempt to grasp this organizational dimension, a comprehensive, urbanizing potential. In this regard, the research around 1970 relates to some of the previous *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur* at Technische Universität Berlin.

In the wake of the scathing criticism he had faced in Berlin, Ungers was still eager to reposition the subject of large-scale planning and mass housing.¹⁵

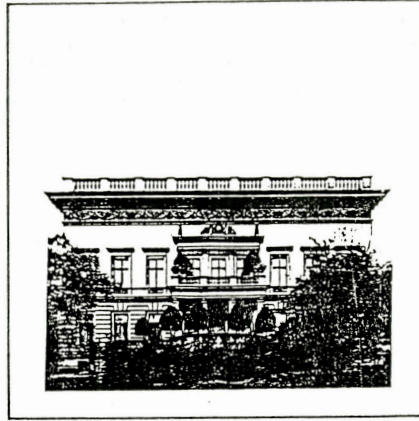
15 He remained in touch with developments in Germany where in 1967 social democrats had joined the coalition government, embarking on a policy of Keynesian 'Globalsteuerung' (global control), amongst its goals the regulation of the overheated economy and a coordinated policy for the transformation of urban centers, passing the 'Städtebauförderungsgesetz' in 1971. André Bideau, "Housing as a discursive void: Oswald Mathias Ungers in the 1960s and 1970s", *Candide*, no. 7 (2013): 70.

Fig. 8

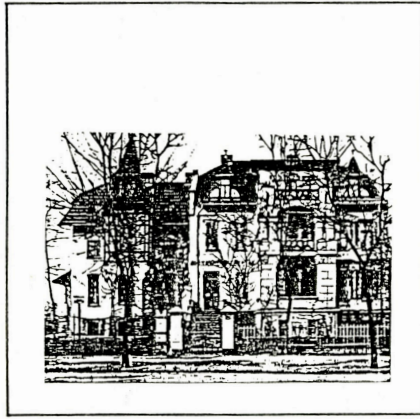
O.M. Ungers: proposal for Welfare Island with quotations of Central Park and Manhattan grid, New York City (1975).



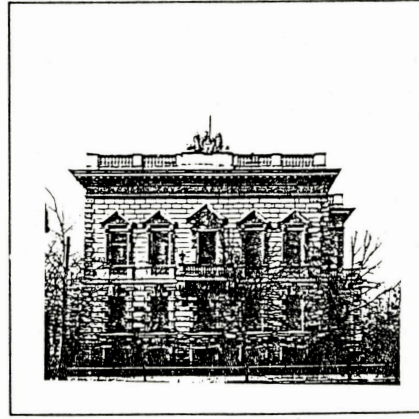
47. Maassenstrasse 28, Berlin, 1879



48. Weinbergsweg 12, Berlin, 1874



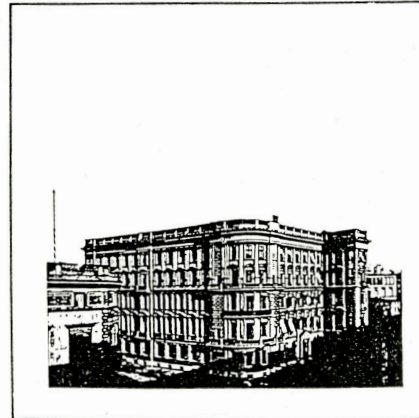
49. Wilhelmstrasse 33, Berlin, 1893



50. Kurfürstenstrasse 136, 1884-86



51. Kurfürstendamm 6, 1883-84



52. Königrätzerstrasse 132,

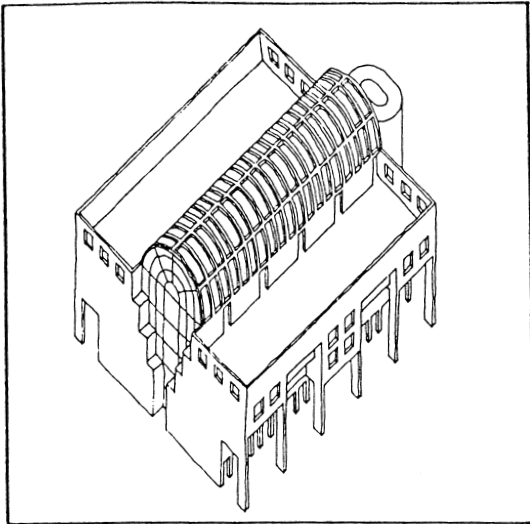
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Some of his first Cornell design studios would address housing on the territorial scale. Again, an opportunity was provided by a project in the area. Lysander was one of the new towns then under consideration by the Urban Development Corporation (UDC), an agency established by New York State in 1968 under interventionist governor Nelson Rockefeller. Located near Syracuse NY and destined to accommodate 55000 inhabitants, Lysander was premised upon the improved production of affordable housing. The UDC sought innovation in design and a departure from the formula of slum clearance, introducing architectural competitions into the conceptually impoverished housing sector. The UDC also targeted inner-city areas where blight was rising after more than two decades of the dual

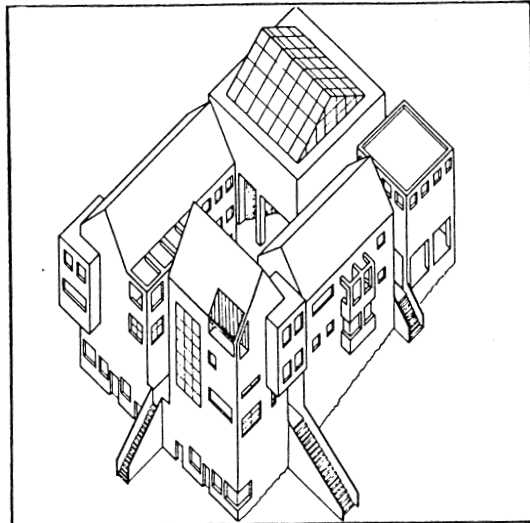
Fig. 9

Berlin reference examples from 1874-1893 for the urban villa (Cornell Summer Academy 1977).

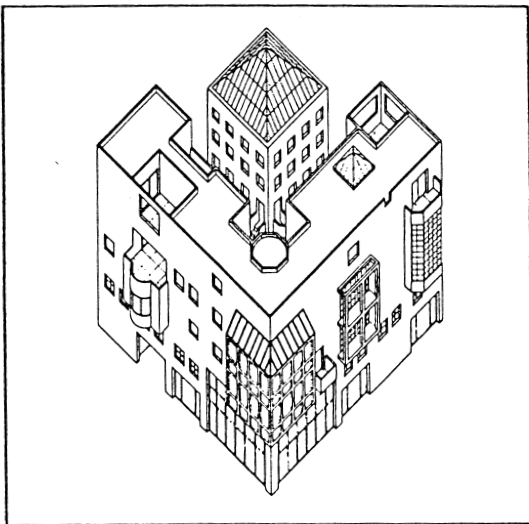
Entwurfsbeispiele für städtische Mietvillen



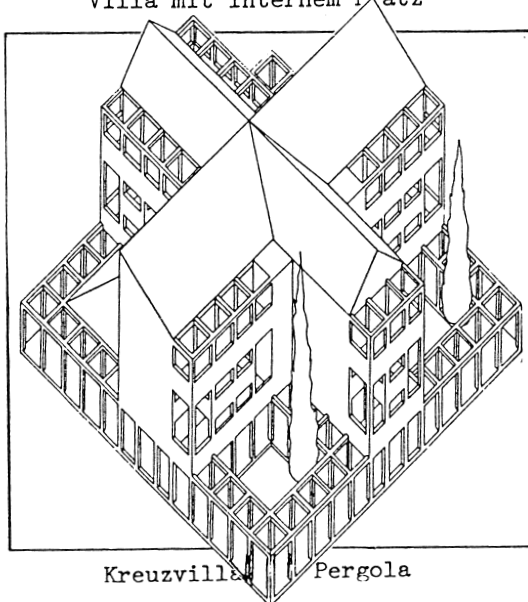
Villa mit Kaufpassage



Villa mit internem Platz



Eckvilla



Kreuzvilla Pergola

policy of neglect and urban renewal. The challenges posed by mass housing were addressed in Ungers's studios at Cornell University, as well as in 'The Urban Block', a summer academy that he taught in New York City in 1976.¹⁶ Driven by planning methodology, such research by design also fed his own practice.

Having secured no building commissions since the late 1960s, the UDC offered opportunities such as the Welfare Island competition in New York City [Fig. 8] in 1975. This virtually abandoned, yet highly visible strip of land in the East River had been designated as a key UDC redevelopment site, intended to become a model middle-class metropolitan community. Based on the master-plan by Philip Johnson & John Burgee from 1969, consecutive planning phases

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16 O.M. Ungers, Werner Goehner, Arthur Ovaska, Hans Kollhoff, *The Urban Block and Gotham City, Metaphors & Metamorphosis. Two Concurrent Projects, College of Architecture, Art and Planning* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University, 1976).

Fig. 10

Oswald Mathias Ungers, Hans Kollhoff, Arthur Ovaska, *The Urban Villa. A Multi-family Dwelling Type. Cornell Summer Academy in Berlin, 1977: exemplary configurations.*

were to achieve a strong identity for Welfare Island.¹⁷ In the competition that was launched in 1975, Ungers responded with a miniaturization of the adjacent midtown Manhattan, replete with its own grid and Central Park. The modular forms of his entry were the result of an iteration of block structures: different sets of genealogies all premised upon a footprint defined by Manhattan's grid. Therefore, the generative logic of real estate [Fig. 7] addressed in *Berliner Brandwände* in 1968 resurfaced in the morphological transformations for Welfare Island in 1975. What had been a survey of tenements was now operative for design.

Toward a Customized Urban Environment

In 1976 Ungers extended the exploration of scale, image, metaphor to the exhibition installation 'City Metaphors'. Again in New York City, this was his contribution to 'Man TransForms', the inaugural group exhibition curated by Hans Hollein for the Cooper Hewitt National Museum of Design. Ungers's installation and subsequent publication¹⁸ were an attempt to reclaim a conceptual dimension for the thinking on urban form – and clearly a shift away from the infatuation with process, system and structure. A version of Ungers's exhibition catalogue text, "Designing and Thinking with Images, Metaphors and Analogies" was used in the printed documentation when the Cornell summer academy went to Berlin the following year.¹⁹

Regarding comprehensive, large-scale planning, New York City experienced its turning point in 1976, however. A two-fold collapse occurred the same year as the Cornell summer academy and the 'City Metaphors' installation at the Cooper Hewitt Museum: The UDC foreclosed and the city reached the brink of bankruptcy – the former effectively terminating all government-assisted innovation in housing production, the latter only narrowly averted by a joint plan of New York's banks. In either instance, the federal government under President Richard Nixon had already distanced itself from municipal problems and begun to dismantle the 'Great Society' programs launched under Lyndon B. Johnson. The scope of federal and local policy was re-defined by supply-side economics. Facing austerity and increased dependency on the private sector, the UDC now reverted to incentivizing economic development in urban areas.

Combined with publications, symposia or the participation in exhibitions like

17 Although Welfare Island was officially renamed Roosevelt Island in 1973 the UDC competition carried the previous name.

18 Hans Hollein (ed.), *Man TransForms: An International Exhibition on Aspects of Design: For the Opening of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design Cooper-Hewitt Museum: October 1976* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 1976). Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Morphologie. City Metaphors*, Köln 1982.

19 Oswald Mathias Ungers, "Designing and Thinking with Images, Metaphors and Analogies", in *The Urban Block and Gotham City. Metaphors & Metamorphosis. Two Concurrent Projects, College of Architecture, Art and Planning* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University, 1975).

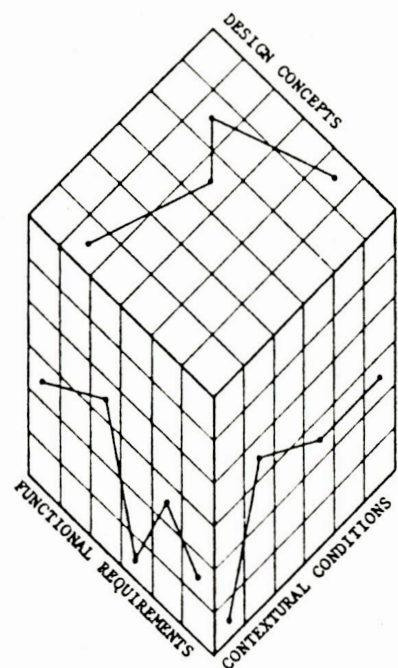
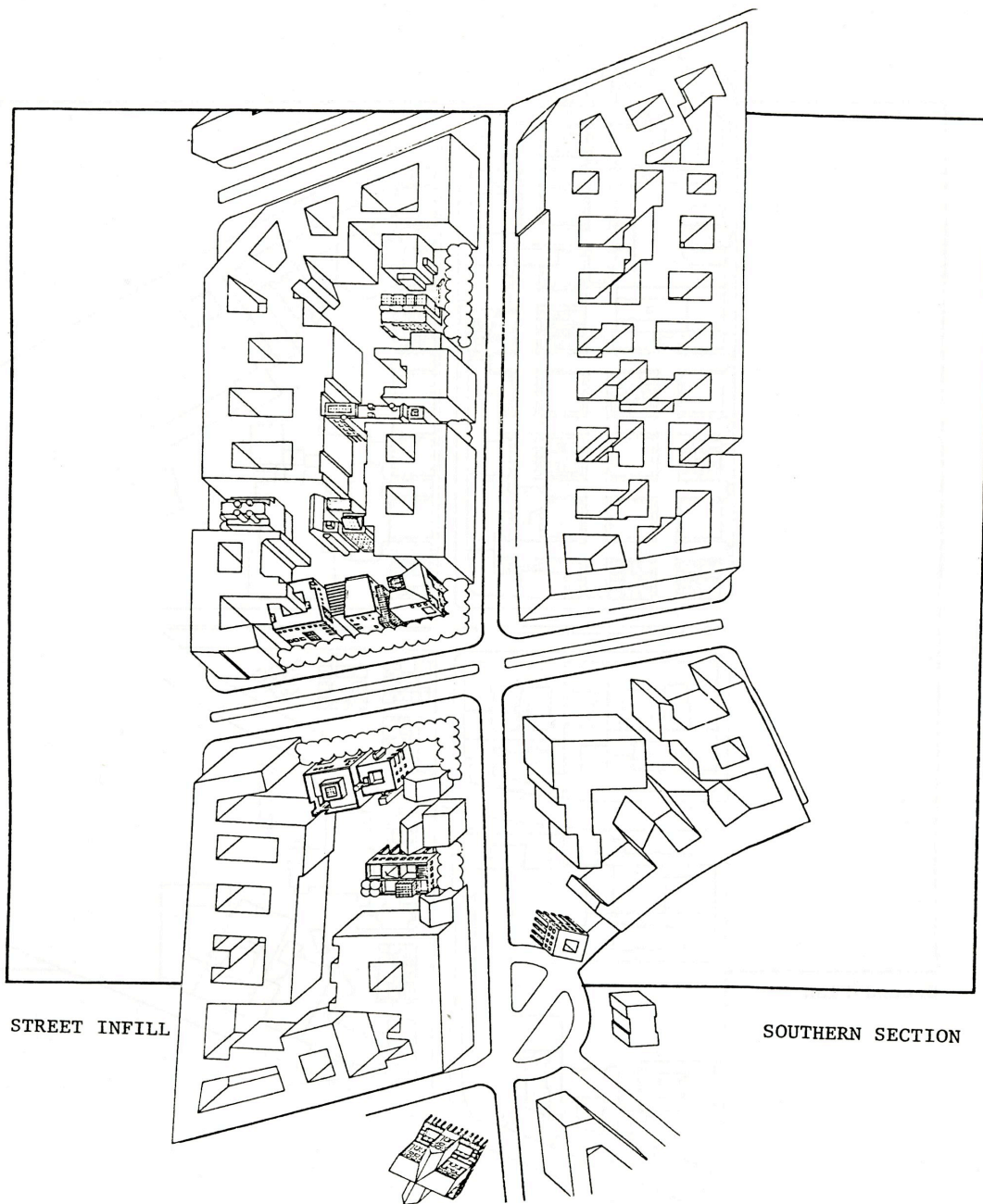


Fig. 12

Arthur Ovaska: 'synthetic programming' generating design parameters for the Urban Villa (Cornell Summer Academy 1977).



'Man TransForms', the decade-long academic exile from Germany arguably served as a conceptual incubator for Ungers. Although he never severed his ties to Germany and participated in numerous competitions there, he returned with a new narrative for the city that he had abandoned left in early 1968. Essential for this repositioning was also the research-based design with Cornell University students in Berlin where the second and third summer academies were conducted. In itself, the engagement with European cities was a genuine United States tradition as well. Hailing from the Beaux Arts curriculum of elite schools, the idea was to immerse architecture students in European culture, most

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Fig. 11
 Urban villas inserted in
 existing fabric of Südliche
 Friedrichstadt, Berlin-Kreuzberg
 (Cornell Summer Academy,
 1977).

typically by offering studios, often entire semester programs taught in Rome or Florence. The classical format was reappropriated when Ungers decided to bring Cornell students to Berlin during two consecutive summers where they would deal with a contemporary European urban condition. Clearly a more challenging case than Rome, Berlin was an open text awaiting reinterpretation. It was also the city where Ungers sought to re-establish his lost design authority. With their titles *The Urban Villa* (1977) and *The Urban Garden* (1978) the two summer academies each gave programmatic importance to a particular research topic, while extending the thematic arc begun with *The Urban Block* (1976) in Manhattan.²⁰

The first of the Berlin topics shows an intersection between historical analysis and a new housing model, akin to its predecessor the previous year. Following the Manhattan block, the 'villa' is based on the evolution of a precedent, now identified in Berlin. A hybrid concoction that synthesized historical precedents, the urban villa was promoted as a 'Multi family dwelling type' [Fig. 10]. The Summer Academy based its research on various precedents that afforded adaptability through their scale: large residences which often been subjected to subdivision and reuse in the recent past. However, the references did not hark back to the perimeter block, but instead to the free-standing housing that had preceded it. These townhouses continued to be produced in more affluent neighborhoods of German cities in the latter part of the 19th century, evidence of "a typological vocabulary of formal richness", presenting an architectural language that reflects "social diversity".²¹ The catalogue went on to encompass 20th-century examples by Walter Gropius (Meisterhäuser in Dessau, 1926), Frank Lloyd Wright (Suntop Homes in Ardmore, 1939), Marcel Breuer and Emil Roth (Doldertalhäuser in Zurich, 1936) Atelier 5 (Siedlung Brunnadern in Bern, 1974), but the survey was clearly aimed at reconciling contemporary housing with the context of a historic neighborhood like Berlin-Kreuzberg, the site chosen for the Cornell students.

The resulting publication presents the urban villa as an alternative to the contemporary tendency to understand the perimeter block as sole representation of a legacy that Modernism had discredited. According to the authors, O.M. Ungers, Hans Kollhoff and Arthur Ovaska, housing issues could no longer be reduced to issues like repetition and quantity. Neither did they deem functionalist urban renewal appropriate, nor the generic infill of blocks and courtyards, rather a 'pluralistic urban environment with mutually unresolved contradictions'.²²

Which urbanity did the Summer Academy identify for Berlin, and did the United States have an impact upon Ungers in 1977? *The Urban Villa* and *The Green Archipelago* – the draft of which was produced in parallel to the Summer

20 In the introduction to the 1977 studio publication not the "Urban Garden" is mentioned as a theme, but "Art and Architecture in the Public Space" (sic) instead; the resulting publication was: Oswald Mathias Ungers, Hans Kollhoff, Arthur Ovaska, *The Urban Garden. Student Projects for the Südliche Friedrichstadt Berlin. Summer Academy for Architecture 78 in Berlin* (Köln: Studio Press for Architecture, 1978).

21 Ungers, Kollhoff, Ovaska, *The Urban Villa*, 4.

22 Ungers, Kollhoff, Ovaska, *The Urban Villa*, 6



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Academy by Rem Koolhaas with Ungers²³— sought a proposal for an increasingly diverse society in a shrinking city. In West Berlin this two-fold dynamic of size and differentiation was unfolding as much as it was in contemporary New York: an “exodus psychosis” of “anxiety-prone inhabitants” coupled with the “desire for a stronger individualization of the environment”.²⁴ The envisioned urbanity by the authors would be pluralistic and decentered, its physical density significantly lower [Fig. 10] than that of the historic tenements. With participants more diverse, this urbanity would be informed by a multitude of quasi-independent communities, owing less to the urban tradition of Europe than to the notion of the United States neighborhood. Obviously, what sociologist Herbert Gans had identified as ‘The Urban Villagers’²⁵ in 1961 had come under stress over the following two decades as ethnic communities were increasingly destabilized. In New York, the UDC had sought remedies to counter the social and physical depletion caused by white flight and urban renewal.

23 The co-authorship and its context are discussed in: Florian Hertweck, Sébastien Marot (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, Arthur Ovaska (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013).

24 Oswald Mathias Ungers, “Cities within the City. Proposals by the Summer Academy for Berlin”, *Lotus International*, no. 19 (1978): 82, 91.

25 Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: The Free Press, 1965).

Fig. 13

Urban renewal involving typical Kreuzberg tenements, late 1970s (IMAGO / Peter Homann).

Which Heritage?

Given his firsthand experience of the demise of the UDC, Ungers could fathom the consequences of policy changes for the relationship of architecture and urbanism. The United States had exposed him to the social realities of the failing fabric of inner cities. After the defunding of public programs, deprived inner-city communities had become increasingly involved with private foundations, philanthropy, religious and organizations. Participation and ad-hocism offered forms of agency that were incremental and reduced in scale.

Such was also the case in Kreuzberg although public investment was not at stake in Berlin. Home to West Berlin's most disenfranchised communities and slated for further massive redevelopment, publicly funded urban renewal had come under attack in Kreuzberg. As its test site the Cornell summer academy selected a particularly war-torn area. Still underpinned by traces of the layout of 18th century royal Berlin, this part of Kreuzberg was defined by a confrontation between sparse remnants of prewar fabric, recent public housing, underutilized traffic infrastructure and gaping voids. Later designated as key zone for the 1987 IBA International Building Exhibition, its remaining housing stock from the 19th century was already at the center of attention for preservationists, critical neighborhood collectives to the squatter movement.

When the group from Cornell University arrived here in 1977 the studios took place at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Kreuzberg, a venue resulting from a squat at the beginning of the same decade. It is no surprise that the text for *The Urban Villa* refers to increased citizen participation and private initiative in housing while addressing adaptive reuse. Through its intermediate scale the urban villa encourages not only participatory planning but also home ownership and 'free expression of personality.' [Fig. 12]²⁶ The positive connotations of the free market are essential in preparing the new reading of Berlin as a collection of relatively autonomous 'Cities within the City' each allowing a 'stronger individualization of the environment'.²⁷ Inspiring user-driven customization of the habitat is a clear break with the universalistic standards of the welfare state. The new approach addressed an increasingly middle-class city in which residents voice diverse needs.

1970s Berlin, with the environmental movement, community advocacy and urban counterculture on the rise, was fertile ground for experiments that drew from United States individualism like the Cornell summer academies. Both *The Green Archipelago* and the *The Urban Garden* claim that the Genius Loci of Berlin has always been that of a verdant city. Introducing the concept of urban farming to the walled city, *The Green Archipelago* again adopts a user-driven perspective. Residents are meant to establish a close bond participating in their individual neighborhoods. This agency is conveyed in the very metaphor of the

26 Ungers, Kollhoff, Ovaska, *The Urban Villa*, 4.

27 Ungers, "Cities within the City", 91.

island. As an open constellation the archipelago is no longer premised on a comprehensive urbanity. Instead, it implies negotiation between communities 'floating' in an open space.

The Cornell Summer Academies perceive Berlin as a green, quasi suburban territory. Their frame of reference not only encompasses contemporary ecological awareness, however. In advocating for a porous urban landscape they also embrace historical precedent by drawing from the works of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Peter Josef Lenné or Hans Scharoun. The conceptual aperture reveals how versatile the discourse of a 'green' Berlin was during the mid-1970s: On one hand, the local activism of citizens and the ad-hocism of homeowners is invoked. On the other hand, it allows professionals to deploy the cultural capital of the historically informed architect – asserting disciplinary authority in interpreting an urban environment with references made to Italo Calvino, C.G.Jung and Arthur Schopenhauer.²⁸

This ambivalence points to a shift in the mediality of architecture itself, as different narratives and audiences regarding history emerge. Here Ungers's relationship to heritage in the shattered and shrinking urban fabric of Berlin is the example of a transition. In 1968 *Berliner Brandwände* had already re-visited the 19th century and the related real estate, the 'Mietskaserne'. But since the *Veröffentlichungen zur Architektur* were released by the Ungers chair at TU Berlin, the function of history had fundamentally changed for architecture production, thus providing new opportunities. In the wake of the European Year of Preservation in 1975 coalitions willing to support the heritage represented by tenement housing had emerged. In response to the tenets of historic preservation promulgated by the Venice Charter in 1964, the isolated monument was de-emphasized while the everyday environment was validated as a bearer of identity. Accordingly, *The Green Archipelago* perceived anonymous structures or accidental urban configurations and infrastructures as specific historic markers. In Berlin, these markers encompassed the



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28 As an introduction to publication of the student projects from the 1978 Cornell Summer Academy, Ungers contributed his essay "The Architecture of Collective Memory" where a series of his unbuilt designs from the first half of the 1960s illustrated the compositional themes such as the 'environment of recollection' or the idea of the city as 'not a uniform picture but a vivid ensemble of pieces and fragments', along with a drawing of "The City within the City" proposal. A revised version of the text was released as "Architecture of the collective Memory. The infinite Catalogue of urban Forms", *Lotus*, no. 24 (1979): 5-11.

Fig. 14

Liselotte and Oswald M. Ungers *Kommunen in der Neuen Welt*, 1972: back cover showing members of a contemporary US commune.



everyday environments of a metropolis largely defined by industrialization and its explosive, speculative growth after German unification in 1871. The related tenements were no longer surveyed as enigmatic relics: Less than a decade after the publication of *Berliner Brandwände*, they had become sites of resistance to urban renewal. Soon the object of subsidies, then of private investment, 19th century heritage became desirable real estate and, by the 1980s, a driver of gentrification.

Although opting for a more open approach to housing than merely repeating the Berlin perimeter block the authors of *The Urban Villa* and *The Green*

Fig. 15

O.M. Ungers: Köthener Strasse housing, Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin (1988-89).

Archipelago tapped into the same legacy: the *bürgerliche* Stadt. Ungers and his team were keen to reappropriate the morphology of the 19th century by invoking the townhouse [Fig. 9]. The same era had already served as the frame of reference in 1975 when Ungers participated in the symposium/design workshop 'Bauen in der historischen Strasse' curated by François Burkhardt, again targeting a dense working-class neighborhood of historic Kreuzberg.²⁹ The event was sponsored by Berlin's department of housing and urban planning, in turn hinting at a paradigm change in planning doctrine. With its guest list 'Bauen in der historischen Strasse' also signaled the international awareness that Berlin would attract when the International Building Exhibition (IBA) was launched in 1979.³⁰ Fusing architecture and urban design, it would be characterized by the rediscovery of the façade-lined streetscape. The bulk of its projects were located in Kreuzberg. As a highly mediatized event IBA reflected how the urban territory had become a curated marketplace of architectural concepts that welcomed international practitioners. Encouraging this spotlight signaled a departure from the community issues that the Cornell Summer Academies had recently identified: the demise of a more politicized concept?

Which Agency?

The exchange with the United States that IBA fostered overlapped with Ungers's own transatlantic professional biography. Quite contrary to many of his German colleagues he interacted with different national and international contexts as a practitioner, educator, and theoretician. When marginalized in Germany during the 1970s, Ungers saw his work and writings published in Italy.³¹ Mainly, he exemplifies the strong influence of United States architecture and urban development upon several generations of European practitioners and theoreticians.³² To an extent unthinkable in the geographies and geopolitical contexts of today, the US exposure of Europeans to both practice and academia endured well into 1980s, in turn contributing to the reception of Postmodernism. However, this exchange goes further back in time than IBA.

After 1968, the United States presented a specific cultural context to think about the identity and agency of social groups [Fig. 11]. In this regard, Liselotte

29 Another precursor to the IBA, co-hosted by Internationales Design Zentrum and Berlin's department of housing and urban planning for the Adalbertstrasse block with participating designers Gottfried Böhm, Vittorio Gregotti, Charles Moore, Alison Smithson and theoreticians André Corboz and Christian Norberg Schulz. François Burkhardt, Heinrich Klotz (ed.), *Entwerfen in der historischen Strasse: Arbeiten des IDZ Symposiums im Herbst 1975 zur baulichen Integration Alt-Neu veranstaltet mit dem Senator für Bau- und Wohnungswesen* (Berlin: Abakon, 1976).

30 Shortly after the 1978 Cornell Summer Academy in Berlin Ungers, together with Josef Paul Kleihues and Hardt-Waltherr Hämer became co-director of IBA, soon resigning from the post which did not permit him to engage in related building activity.

31 In particular the Welfare Island Competition for New York City: Oswald Matthias Ungers, "Planning Criteria", *Lotus International*, no. 11 (1976): 14-41 and the revised version of the Cornell Summer Academy 1977 - Ungers, "Cities within the City", 82-97.

32 Exemplary figures: André Corboz, Heinrich Klotz, Rem Koolhaas, Stanislaus von Moos, Manfredo Tafuri, Bernard Tschumi. Manfredo Tafuri "L'Architecture dans le Boudoir/The Ashes of Jefferson", in Manfredo Tafuri, *La sfera e il labirinto: avanguardia e architettura da Piranesi agli anni '70* (Torino: Einaudi, 1980), 269-303.

and Oswald M. Ungers had been drawn to the 'utopian' communities – whose collective projects represented the sheer opposite of the lifestyle that social housing in Postwar Europe had come to produce. In their field trips to the habitats left behind by these communities, they retraced the polycentric settlement patterns of the American landscape. Dispersed and remote, the communes were a manifestation of a general cultural legacy imbued with an anti-urban bias. From Thomas Jefferson onward, subsequently in the romanticism of Henry David Thoreau or the rugged individualism of Frank Lloyd Wright, the dialectic of landscape and city in the United States is distinctly different from Europe. Ungers was exposed to this cultural tradition at a critical juncture in his career. He made experiences while in the United States that later shaped his response to Berlin. This response was in turn conditioned by the circumstances of 1970s Berlin. *The Green Archipelago* was developed and deployed as a metaphor to engage with this specific context.

The Cornell Summer Academies questioned the shortcomings of architecture in dealing with the urban condition and with social housing. If anything, they offer a lens to look at how external forces condition the knowledge that architect acquire. At the same time, there is a reciprocity between this knowledge and the urban publics. This reciprocity refers to a given time and space such as West Berlin where architecture production cannot be separated from economic and political institutions, nor from power relations and their regulation. The cultural and social "embeddedness" of these power relations has been described by Bob Jessop.³³ This evolving relationship can be seen in the attitude toward subsidized housing and urban renewal in the German Welfare State.

Ungers and the group of researchers involved in Cornell Summer Academies were avid observers of the material evidence that Berlin presented. Their research interests were motivated by design. They were opportunists and strategists alike – eager to re-legitimize architectural practice in an urban realm which was itself changing.³⁴ As demonstrated by the decade addressed here, the relationship between architects and society shifted both in Berlin and New York. Structural changes affected cities and urban governance. New power configurations unfolded, challenging the Welfare State and leading to new representations of social groups in urban space. This in turn changed the nature of the architectural product, as demonstrated by *The Urban Villa*. As a type it was embedded in the dynamic of nascent Post-Fordism, responding to the desire for differentiation and identity production that came to define urban policies in the 1980s and 1990s on both side of the North Atlantic. Here, *The Urban Villa* redirected the agency and imaginary of architecture toward individuals and markets. After the crisis of mass housing through urban renewal the "personalization of lifestyle" and the "shift from the dependant tenant to the independant

33 Bob Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 8.

34 Their exploitation of the social dimension of architecture in times of professional crisis was astutely diagnosed by Werner Sewing: «Die Gesellschaft der Häuser», *Archplus*, no. 187-188 (1997-1998).

home owner” heralded a new legitimacy for practice in Berlin.³⁵ A “Prototype for Inner City Residences”,³⁶ the urban villa was an early vehicle for Postmodernism [Fig. 13], introducing its themes and customized objects into the fragmented urban landscape.

35 Ungers, Kollhoff, Ovaska, The Urban Villa, 5.

36 Ungers, Kollhoff, Ovaska, The Urban Villa, 2.

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