

Sophia Ungers

Notes on Oswald Mathias Ungers

In 2004 Oswald Mathias Ungers received his honorary doctorate from the University of Bologna. It was his second honorary doctorate after the Technische Universität Berlin awarded him this honor in 1999. It was a great honor for him and the event will always remain in our memory. The University of Bologna staged a spectacular event, and all the deans of the Italian architecture universities were present to share this moment with Ungers. His deep connection to Italy, starting from the Roman architecture of Vitruv, through the Renaissance with Leon Battista Alberti, Andrea Palladio and Donato Bramante, up to the friendships with his contemporaries Aldo Rossi, Vittorio Gregotti, Carlo Aymonino, Adolfo Natalini and Gianni Braghieri just to name a few. All these colleagues informed his thinking and his design. It was in 1959 that Gregotti and Rossi came to Cologne to see the new building by Ungers in the Belvederestrasse 60 and wrote a comprehensive article in *Casabella* on "Un giovane architetto tedesco". Their interest in his work, especially the house Belvederestrasse 60 (which is now home to the UAA foundation), was among the catalysts that started his international career.

As early as in the 1960's, Ungers was interested in passing on his enthusiasm for architecture. It was therefore in line with his thinking that he and Liselotte Ungers founded the UAA Ungers Archive for Architectural Research. This foundation was created to make the extensive library that he and his wife collected, available for researchers and the interested public. In 2011, Anja Sieber-Albers and I began to activate the foundation to make it more visible in the architectural landscape of Germany, with the goal to promote architectural discussion and research. It is



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based in the former home and office building of Ungers which was built in 1959. In 1989 Ungers added a cube of black basalt in the garden to house the library. Both buildings are national monuments. The UAA also manages the estate of Ungers including his plans, models, lectures and bibliography. It aims to make these unique research tools available to researchers and Phd students for their work, as well as communicating architecture to a general public.

The UAA is more than pleased to be a part of this number of HPA journal dedicated to Ungers. As a foundation, we have been in close contact with the University of Bologna and the Technische Universität Berlin and have received their support throughout the years. Again, this publication and the following symposium underline the deep ties between Ungers and Italy, between the architect and his history. We want to thank Annalisa Trentin and Jörg Gleiter, as well as all the authors who have contributed to this publication. Some we know well and have spent many days with them looking through archival material, while others are new to us. It is exciting to see how all are interpreting the work of Ungers and keeping his thinking relevant today.

In the beginning of his architectural career, urban planning was not that important in Ungers' architectural agenda. However, the situation in Berlin and other modern cities gave him the impetus to study the urban structure of a city and give impulses to a new way of thinking about urban infrastructure. To start off this publication, we are adding a text by Ungers that was published in *Tageszeitung* in November 1990, which continues his idea of the city archipelago. The last paragraph clearly sums up his approach:

The problem which is open for discussion – and this especially applies to Berlin -is not to design a completely new urban environment, but to design a complement and transform that which exists; it is not the invention of a new urban system, but the reformation of the present one; not the discovery of a new order but the rediscovery of existing principles; not the construction of a new city, but the reconstruction of the given situation; not a new beginning but the continuation of the old. Not to strive for a new utopia but rather design a better reality, not the concept of a new world but the improvement of the existing one and a meaningful interaction of heterogenous parts – that is the future of the city of Berlin.