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## The Urban Islands in the Ocean of the Metropolis

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Die Stadtinseln im Meer der Metropole. Das Neue Berlin (VII): Das pluralistische Konzept der Städtearchipel – Planung auf historischem Boden, *was first published in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, November 22nd, 1990. Then in an untitled version, in: Berlin morgen: Ideen für das Herz einer Großstadt, an exhibition catalogue, edited by Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Michael Mönninger, Gerd Hatje, Stuttgart, 1991, pp. 160-167, published for the exhibition in the German Architecture Museum, Frankfurt am Main, January 26th to March 24th, 1991. See also: Stadtinseln im Meer der Metropole, in: Michael Mönninger, Das Neue Berlin: Baugeschichte und Stadtplanung der deutschen Hauptstadt, Frankfurt am Main, Insel, Leipzig, 1991, pp. 214-223. The incipit of Ungers explanation of the project is based on the text Die Biographie einer Stadt published in Idee, Prozess, Ergebnis. Die Reparatur und Rekonstruktion der Stadt, exhibition catalogue, edited by Felix Zwoch, Frölich & Kaufmann, Berlin, 1984, pp.255-258.*

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Towns and cities are places for the constant formation and transformation of concepts, ideas, realities and conditions which are reflected in sensual experiences. They are like figures undergoing a metamorphosis, which sometimes develop from some topographical chance or from a deliberate decision, following the laws of logical consequences or antithetical leaps.

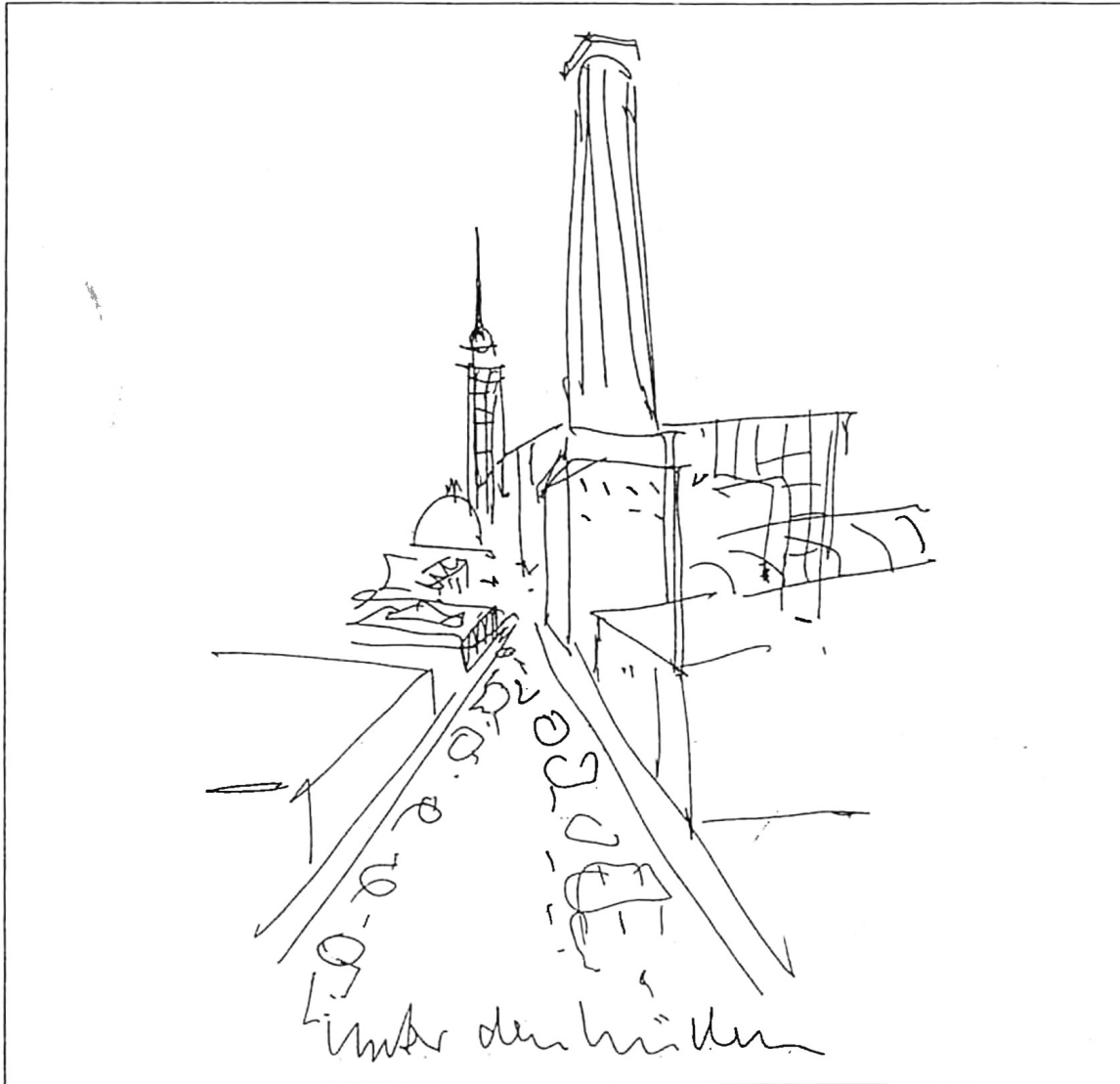
The story of mankind is also the story of its built environment – its towns and cities. Towns are phenomena that cannot be comprehensively captured with scientific theories alone, even though many such attempts were made in the 19th and 20th centuries in particular. The complexity is obviously too multi-faceted to be compressed into a theory that cannot avoid being one-dimensional. Theories generally only explain facts that have already been isolated and are derived from quantitative criteria. A town is of course also defined by its land use, transport networks, locations, population figures, economic activity, social situations, productivity and all kinds



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of other quantifiable facts, but what actually characterises the town goes far beyond that. Just supposing we could capture all the measurable factors: even then, we would still not know what actually keeps the town alive.

Is it a place of commerce, of the exchange of goods and ideas, or is it a place of liberation, of protection and security, as in older times?



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Towns are places where the traces of different cultural eras and architectural mindsets are preserved. They bear witness to people's intellectual spirit and physical capacity to the extent to which political, social and aesthetic ideas, convictions and utopias coincide with the history of the local architecture and urban planning.

Such a town, in its dialectically opposing architectural elements and fragments, which exist side by side and are either mutually exclusive or complementary, has the appearance of an urban nexus of intellectual qualities.

Do we still believe, despite the experience of history, that the town plan is final and irrevocable? If so, it is worthwhile reflecting intensively once again about the

Fig. 1-9

Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Die Stadtinseln im Meer der Metropole. Das Neue Berlin (VII): Das pluralistische Konzept der Städtearchipel – Planung auf historischem Boden.*

idea of the fragment, as it used to be interpreted and understood in the age of humanism. Applied to the concept the town, it means discovering and taking into account the spaces in between, the parts and what is special about each of them, and integrating them into the complexity of the whole. Both the clear message of the past and the idea of the future as a continuation of the past are part of the concept of the humanist town, a town which, as Nikolaus von Kues put it, draws life from the "coincidentia oppositorum", the "coming together of opposites".

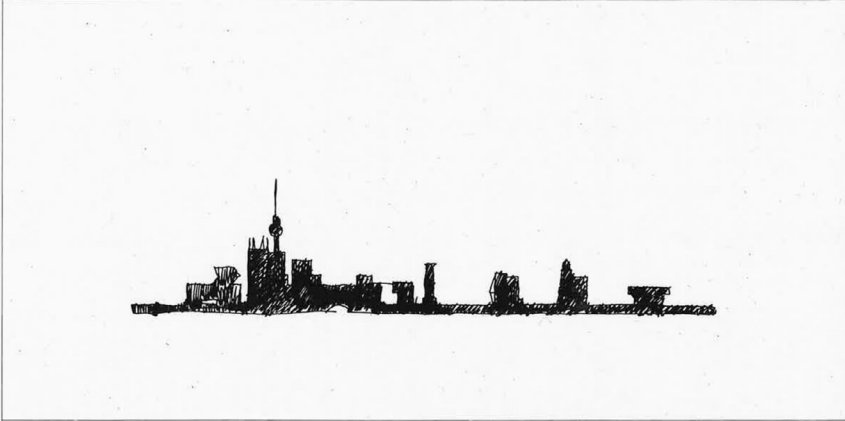
Instead of trying to understand the town as a system of logical connections - a common goal in modern-day urban planning -, we would perhaps obtain more insights into the mutual dependencies if we were to think of the town in morphological terms - i.e. as a transformation from one appearance to another - and accept the present aspect of the town as a manifestation of past historical events.

Berlin could be said to constitute the model of a city which, in the course of its 700-year history, has passed through predictable and unexpected stages that explain the present appearance of the city better than any number of functional analyses. Initially, Berlin consisted of two villages – one for fishermen and the other for traders; then it was a market place and soon after that, it became the residence of a Renaissance Prince. He changed it into a military garrison and finally a fortress. After that, it became the capital of a kingdom and then, after the foundation of the 2nd German Empire, the imperial capital. In the 20th century it developed into the biggest industrial city in Europe, became a metropolis and then once again the capital, this time of a 1,000-year Reich. The experience ended in the biggest heap of rubble in Europe. It culminated in Berlin's being divided into two cities again - East and West Berlin, as it had been at the start of its history. Today, it has a chance to become a metropolis again and perhaps the capital of a unified Germany for the third time.

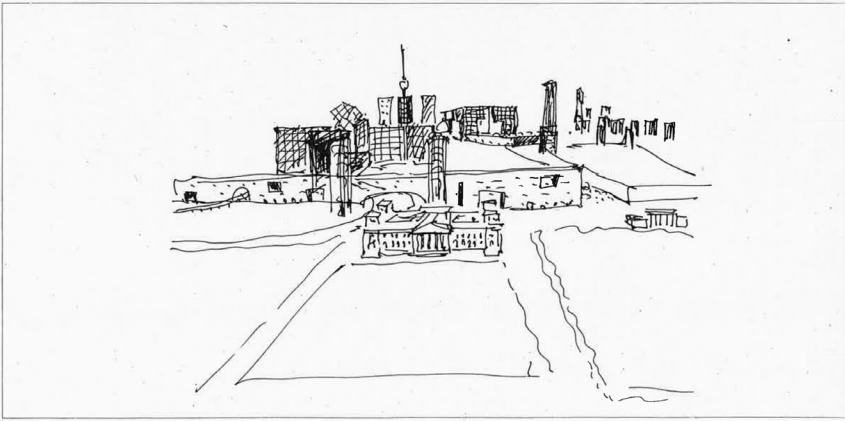
The built structure of Berlin is the sum of ideas, thoughts, decisions, chance events and realities from its history. Planned and fortuitous events, constructive and destructive forces have determined the shape of the city and at the same time its diversity. The town map is like a textbook of events in which every mark left by history is recorded. The records are more like a gigantic jigsaw puzzle composed of bits and pieces than an ordered, logical whole. Each generation passed the town on to the next as a collection of fragments, which constantly changed and multiplied. No generation has ever succeeded in coming to a final conclusion. The city has – thank goodness! – remained piecemeal, discontinuous, incomplete and therefore varied and alive. The only continuous element is a constant dialectic process, in which each thesis is refuted by the antithesis.

All future planning for Berlin will inevitably have to deal with the problem of the city's history. This presents an opportunity to develop strategies for the city's future. Care must, however, be taken in order to avoid two directions of illusory thinking: one is to assume that the city could be repaired in its historical form.

DAS NEUE BERLIN



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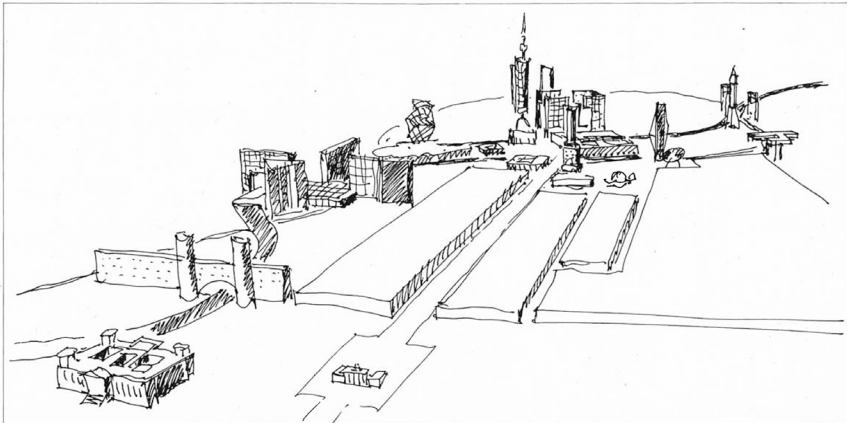


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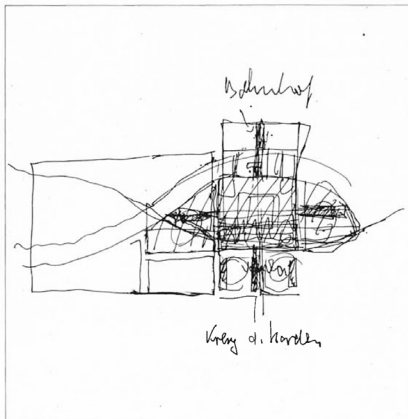
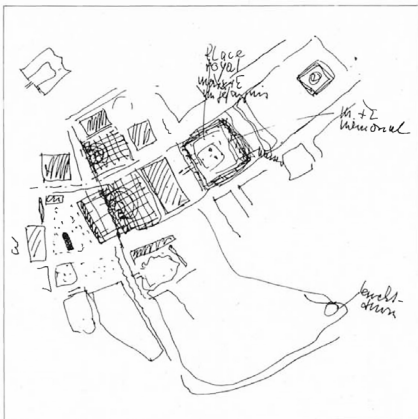
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The situation, demands and expectations are just not sufficient for this purpose.

Secondly, the process process of renewal must not be left to chance. The disorderly development that this inevitably involves includes chaotic elements, which are destructive for a city.

The unavoidable process of reorientation can be seen as an experience which remains permanently concealed behind manifestations of a simulated and hence false vitality. On the other hand, it can also be regarded as an experimental project, as a consequence of which the experience of the city as an architectural and urban environment in the sense of a varied ensemble becomes more intense.

Thanks to its extreme and idiosyncratic character, Berlin is simply predestined, more than other cities, to act as a kind of laboratory in the search for solutions to the new problems. Berlin today could – as has happened so frequently in its history – again assume the prototypical status of a pilot project, and the Berlin case could be used to demonstrate new exemplary concepts for the general European problem of a synthetic metropolis.

The prevailing opinion nowadays that inner-city districts can only be rehabilitated by means of more intense construction activity, in order to restore the original condition in this way, is based on the wrong premise and is therefore illusory. Implementing the idea of urban repair entails an inescapable constraint of exclusiveness.

Assumptions of this kind disregard the fact that most districts have fallen into a state of disorder, simply because the need for further development did not exist. In fact, proposals like this not only result in the general problem of confusing real and synthetic history, with all the consequences of producing kitsch in the name of good taste, but what is more, the underlying demand is just as artificial as the products created to satisfy it. Especially in Berlin, this only disguises the inexorable problems of reorientation, and the confrontation with reality is merely delayed.

Based on this awareness, it would be worth considering whether, in the context of a programme for the selective relief of the urban pressure, indeed of a partial demolition of poorly functioning parts of the present city, Berlin's future development might not offer a unique opportunity to reorganise districts that no longer satisfy the necessary requirements – whether for architectural, social or structural reasons. At the same time, it would be necessary to identify areas worth preserving and either to intensify their unique character or – where they are fragments – to round them off with additions. The enclaves carved out of the urban chaos in this way would then in effect become independent "urban islands" in a part of the city which had otherwise been cleared and would form an "urban archipelago" as it were, in a "green natural lagoon".

The first step towards implementing the idea of a “city within a city” - Berlin as an “urban archipelago” – would be to identify and select those districts which have identifiable characteristics of a quality that justifies preserving and elaborating. These identity spaces, if we may call them that, should not be determined on the basis of a particular taste or merely aesthetic aspects. The decisive criterion for selecting them ought to be the question of the extent to which ideas and concepts are present in a pure and tangible form, so that the history of the city and also the architecture can once again be brought into line with the history of ideas.

The second step in reordering the city in this way is to complete the fragments to be preserved, which could then achieve their final architectural form for urban planning purposes in the course of that process. First of all, the objective needs of these fragmentary urban islands would need to be identified and then, in response to this, satisfied in detail by using a range of social institutions aimed at a certain densification. This approach leads to the development of a repertoire of supplementary facilities which are decidedly unsentimental in nature. In areas of great urban density, the existing pressure should be reduced by creating open spaces such as town parks, public amenities and squares, whereas areas with less population density could be further intensified by integrating centres of densification.

The sole intention of future architecture and draft planning should be to elaborate the proper form of each individual “urban island” which has been selected as such. The prime task in this context is to determine the physiognomy, as it were, of the district concerned and to shape it in such a way that it develops a character of its own. The “urban archipelago” which arises in this way, consisting of individual “urban islands” which differ in their nature and their urban and social structure, then corresponds to the image of a “city within a city”.

Each district considered separately acquires its own peculiar identity, which differs substantially from that of each other district. This is not just an open urban concept, in which many different places compete with each other and in so doing enhance the diversity and complexity of the city at the same time, but also from the political and social point of view it is a pluralist concept, in which multiple ideologically differing opinions can coexist side by side. In specific terms, both the Märkisches Viertel and Westend, Kreuzberg and Lichtenfelde, and the new multi-story blocks at right angles to the streets in the East of the city, are necessarily elements of a pluralist urban concept, and should be seen as complementing each other with different qualities, which increase the range on offer and hence the freedom of choice. They are not mutually exclusive contradictions.

The urban concept of the “city within a city”, which is pluralistic in this sense, corresponds to the modern structure of society, which is developing more and more into an individualistic society with different expectations, wishes and ideas, in contrast to the totalitarian view of society, in which any kind of individ-

ualism is systematically suppressed.

The concept of "the city within a city" means nothing other than individualising the city and thus at the same time abandoning type-casting and deliberate uniformity. This is how on the one hand the openness of the concept and on the other hand diversity should be understood.

The individualisation of the city also addresses the question of the citizen's identification with his city. Whereas a loss of identity and hence depersonalisation inevitably occurs in a town or city which is formed anonymously according to a uniform principle, the resident in an open system can decide for himself on an identity space shaped according to his own wishes and ideas.

The phase of identifying localities, the "urban islands" as we term them, would be one of defining and describing the programme and, of equal importance, dealing with the formal elements of urban development. Not all the new additions would necessarily have to be designed from scratch. It would certainly be conceivable also to realise projects that had been designed at a different time and for different situations, but which for some reason or other had not always been implemented, and to use them as models. Leonidov's Kulturpalast, for example, could serve as a model for developing the Görlitzer Bahnhof station in Kreuzberg, and the linear urban project for Magnetogorsk might act as a point of departure for the development parallel to the "Unter den Eichen" street.

Other examples of retroactive architecture could relate more specifically to Berlin's architectural history and in this way correct some major failings of the past, such as the late realisation of such important projects as Mies van der Rohe's glass high-rise building, sited at Friedrichstrasse station as a symbolic landmark indicating the entrance to the central district and as a counterpart to the television tower in East Berlin, which dominates the entire scene, constructing Taut's hyperbolic dome over the Olympic stadium, or completing the chain of towns along the Havel in line with Wilhelm IV's plan for the Havel landscape.

In their present state, both the Tiergarten district and the southern part of Friedrichstadt offer a unique opportunity to demonstrate the reduction model and its positive application. All the existing buildings in these areas should be carefully restored irrespective of their historical past and embedded in a park. No new buildings and architectures would be needed, only a town park with the present buildings dotted round it like urban palaces.

The concept of "the city within the city", consisting of a collage of different urban units, is complemented antithetically by the areas between the "urban islands". There, urban structures which are in some cases of no value at all should be allowed to revert gradually to nature and green land, and it should be ensured that the city is not rebuilt there. This would certainly apply to the area around Kemperplatz. The urban islands would thus be separated from one another by belts of nature and green, which explains the metaphor of the city as a green archipelago and defines the structure of the "city within a city".

The green spaces in between form a system of modified nature and contain a catalogue of types ranging from suburban areas, open parks, wooded regions and even urbanised agricultural use (allotments).

The polarity between nature and culture, or nature and metropolis, which is absent today in most cases, having been compromised and blurred, and is sorely missed, is given a new impulse by this concept. Since such a nature/culture system would have to be designed as a matter of principle, i.e. it is purely synthetic in essence, it would tend to intensify rather than reduce the experience of the metropolis, thanks to its rich contrasts. The metropolis is of course nothing other than a name for an environment whose configuration is based solely on human inventiveness.

The natural pattern should also absorb the infrastructure of the modern technological age, i.e. in addition to an extensive system of roads for cars linking the urban islands, there should also be supermarkets, industrial estates and similar facilities dependent on cars, and also all those 20th-century typologies which are not tied to a specific location, but are dependent on mobility and cannot be integrated into a dense urban structure on the right scale without destroying it.

When the concept of the “city within a city” is applied specifically to the existing reality, some districts stand out more sharply because of their urban development qualities than other, less significant areas. A random selection of districts like this includes:

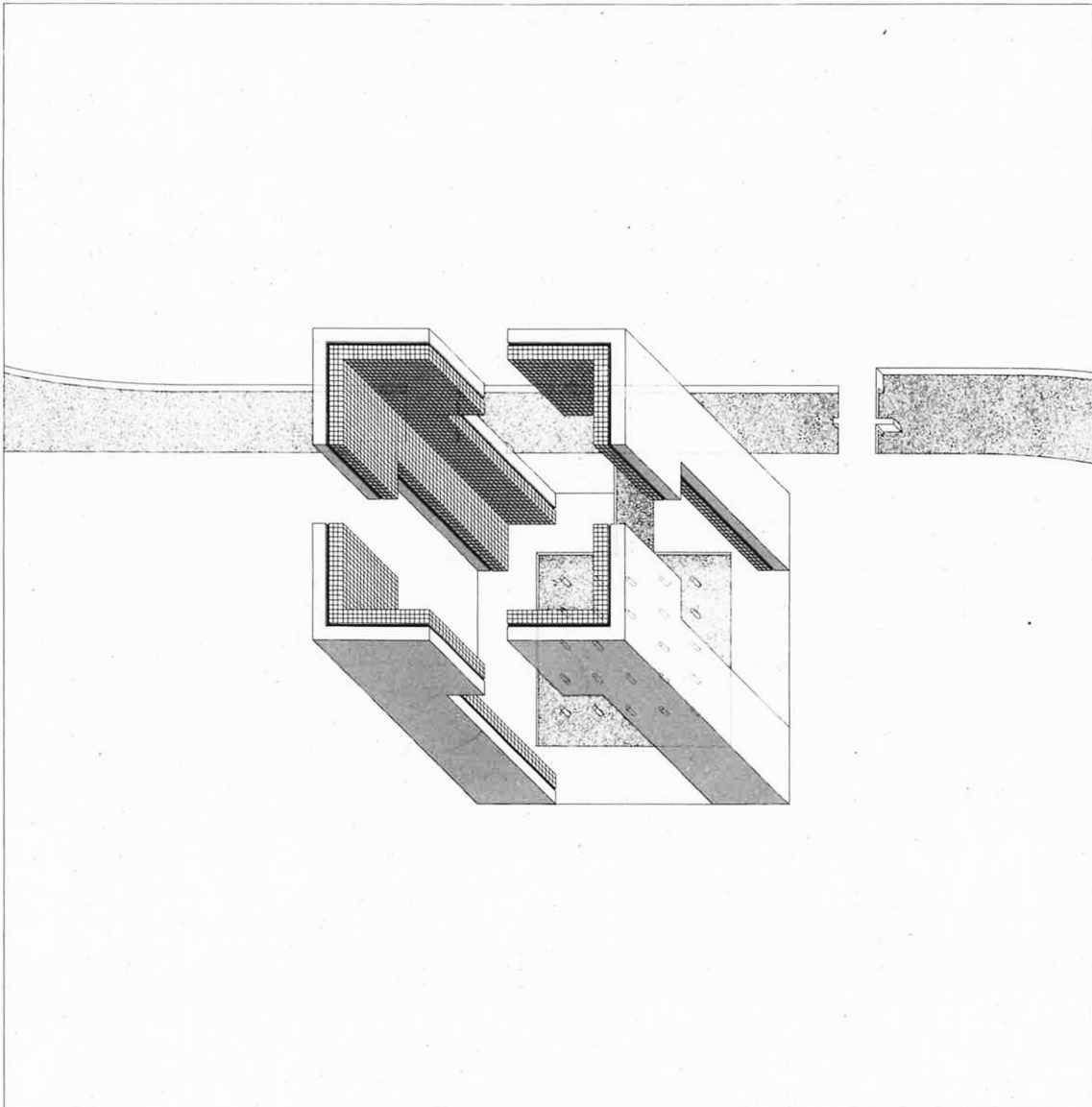
- the Kreuzberg district round the Görlitzer Bahnhof station
- the southern part of Friedrichstadt
- the central district
- the “Spree ribbon”
- the Prenzlauer Berg district
- the perimeter development by the Volkspark
- Müllerstrasse
- the Tempelhof Field
- Stalinallee
- Alexanderplatz
- the Museum Island

to list only a few striking examples.

The areas mentioned represent extremely different building structures and include on the one hand block developments and on the other hand more loosely packed quarters with villa-type housing, high-rise buildings, blocks at right angles to the streets and mixed housing. These different typological uses ought to be preserved and supplemented where necessary by additional measures that blend well with what is already there. This avoids having a uniform development principle spread over the entire city.

There are some architectural projects in the existing urban space that could be cited as comparatively historical projects, though they are not meant literally, nor can they be applied in the utopian sense, but they are intended more as





MARX-ENGELS KUBUS

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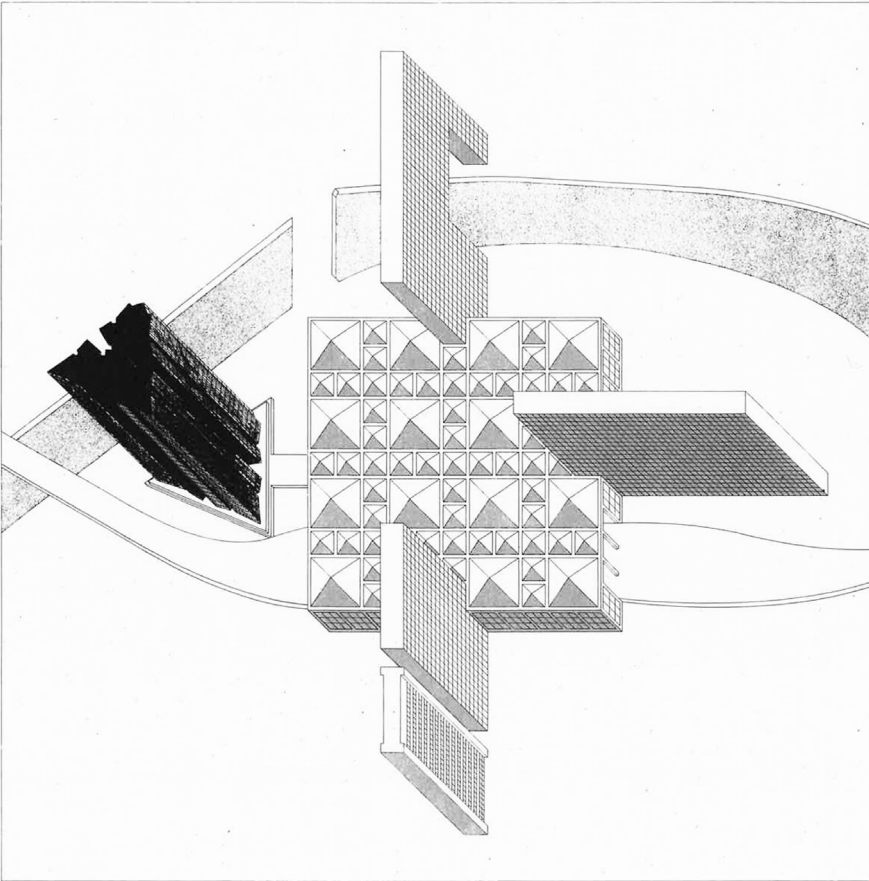
analogies to explain the urban development intentions behind them. These are the following projects for comparative purposes:

- the construction of a cultural building in the style of Leonidov's library project on the Ernst-Reuter-Platz roundabout
- the realisation of Mies van der Rohe's Expressionist glass high-rise building as a social multi-purpose centre at Friedrichstrasse station
- the realisation of Adolf Loos's design for a skyscraper for the Chicago Tribune in the form of a Doric column at the end of Unter den Linden street.

The placement of these three typologically and historically decisive buildings would not only give Berlin's principal axis its final form, which would include the Brandenburg Gate and the Victory Column, but would also set a counterbalance to the prosaic dominance of the Television Tower, which these measures would move to the end of an axis that had been re-interpreted in the historical sense:

- the transplantation of Leonidov's linear urban concept along "Unter den Eichen" street

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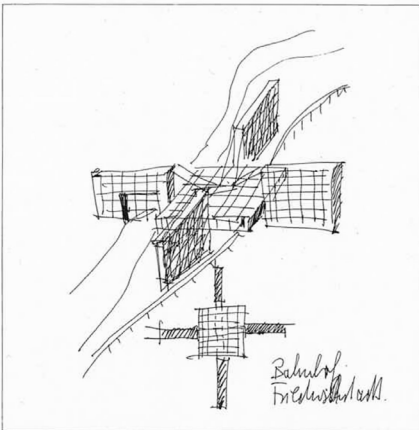


BAHNHOF FRIEDRICHSTADT

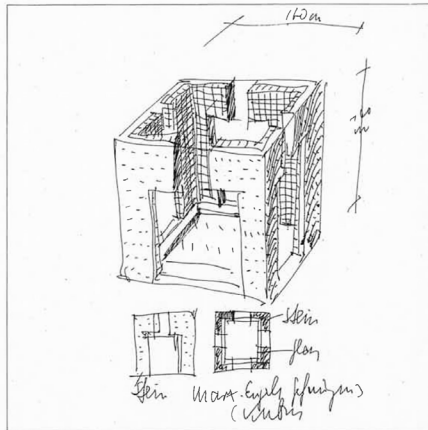
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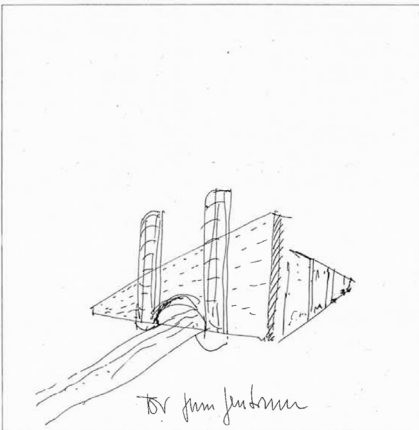


Bahnhof  
Friedrichstadt

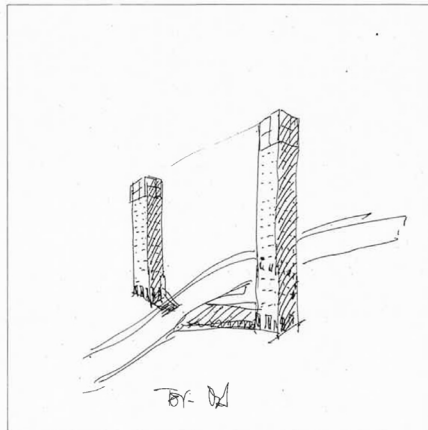


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Friedrichstadt



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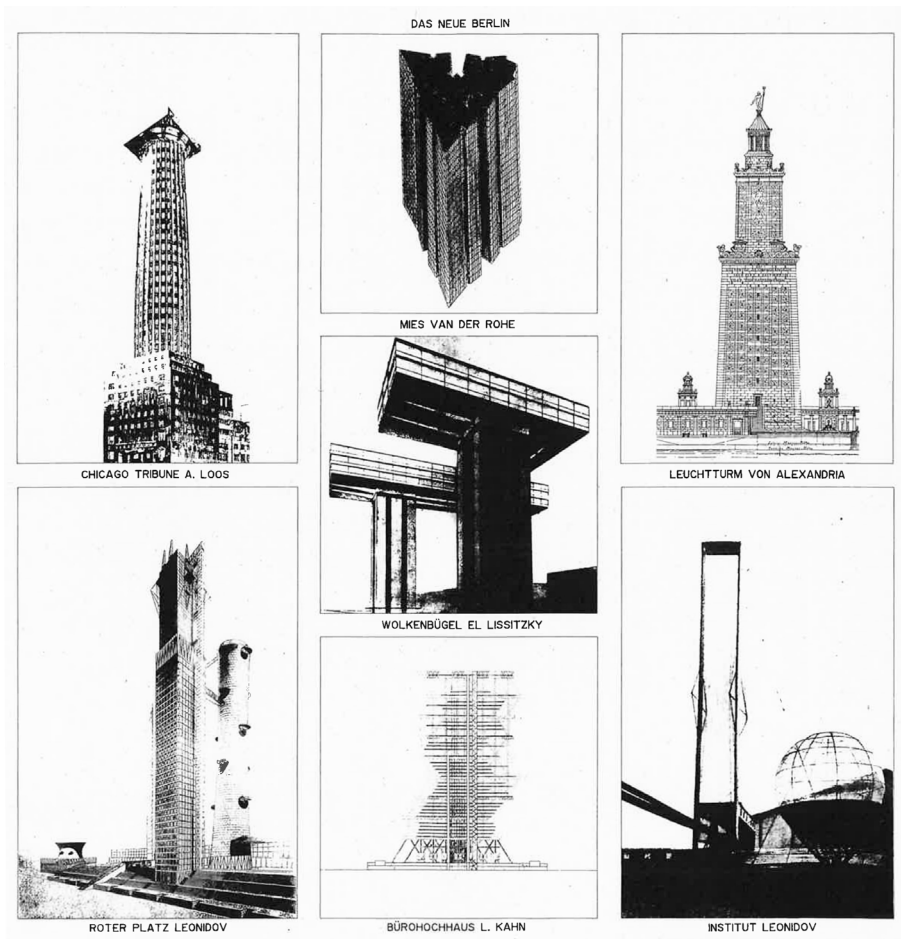
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- the transfer of New York's Central Park to the area around the Görlitzer Bahnhof station as a central park for the Kreuzberg district
- the construction of a continuous perimeter development on the southern edge of the Volkspark on the lines of the Royal Crescent in Bath (England)
- the step-by-step realisation of a linear strip of residential housing on the banks of the Landwehr Canal like Le Corbusier's Algiers project
- the construction of cross-road buildings at regular intervals along the "chain of generals", the succession of streets and squares named after generals, comparable to Lissitzky's horizontal skyscrapers or "cloud-hangers" project for Moscow
- laying out a linear park tracing the death strip of the former Wall
- the development of the Tiergarten district to create an open urban landscape
- In the free areas between the self-contained urban islands of the urban archipelago, projects with a suburban flair should be developed in line with a number of proposals that have already been put forward, such as:
  - creating a suburban grid modelled on Ludwig Hilberseimer's detached-building project for Chicago
  - introducing a regional network in line with Frank Lloyd Wright's proposal for Broadacre City
  - providing mobile-home sites to replace inner-city flats and as an alternative to living in the Green Belt and leisure-orientated dwelling
  - creating sports, recreational and leisure facilities, beginning with parks and playgrounds, wildlife enclosures and artificial landscapes for mountain-climbers, and also Walt Disney-type leisure landscapes, but also with natural landscapes with nature conservation parks
  - - setting up industrial estates in the style of Silicon Valley with leisure facilities such as areas for games, bathing and sports facilities for the employees

The model of the "city within a city" is one approach to solving a series of major problems which urban planning will need to confront in future. These include

- restoring identity in the urban space
- improving the urban quality in the sense of a space for living and activity offering variety and diversity
- solving the problem of improving the quality of the city in contrast to constant growth and unlimited expansion, with the loss of quality which that entails
- fostering a close link between town and country, i.e. renewing the relationships between culture and nature
- creating a pluralist system of mutually unresolved contradictions in contrast to a uniformly orientated, centralist system
- intensifying the location and preserving the collective memory and historical awareness in the sense of continuity of time and space

In historical terms, the model of the "city within a city" transforms Wilhelm IV's



CHICAGO TRIBUNE A. LOOS

DAS NEUE BERLIN

MIES VAN DER ROHE

LEUCHTTURM VON ALEXANDRIA

ROTER PLATZ LEONIDOV

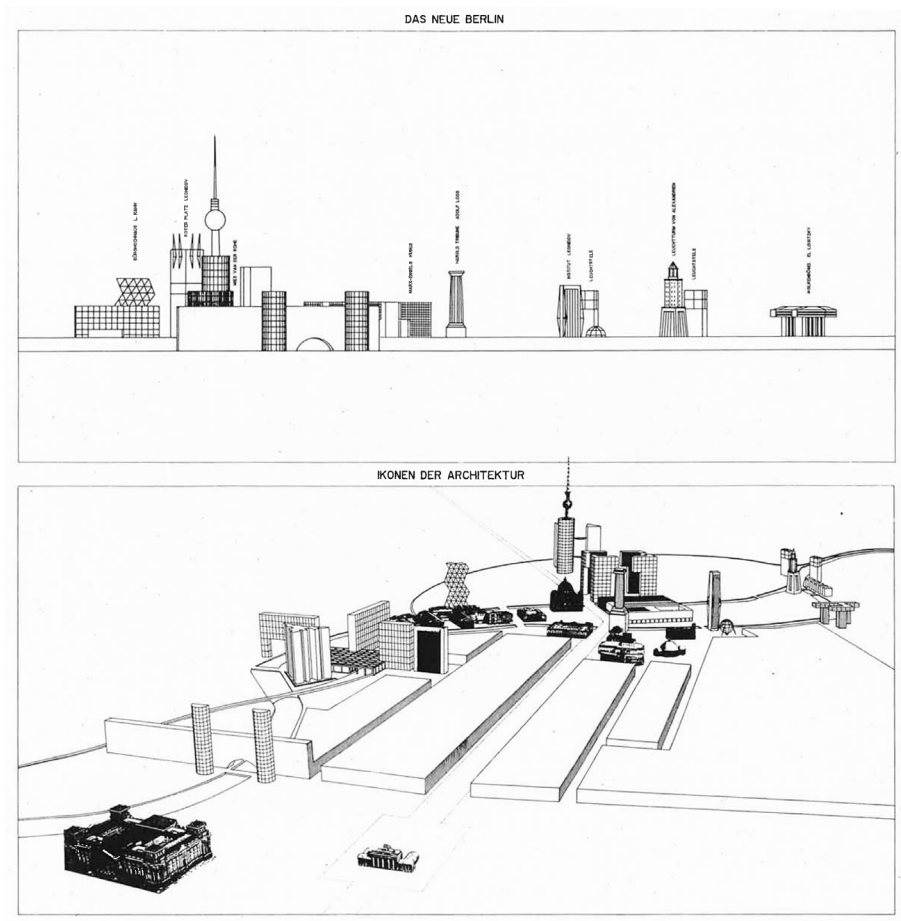
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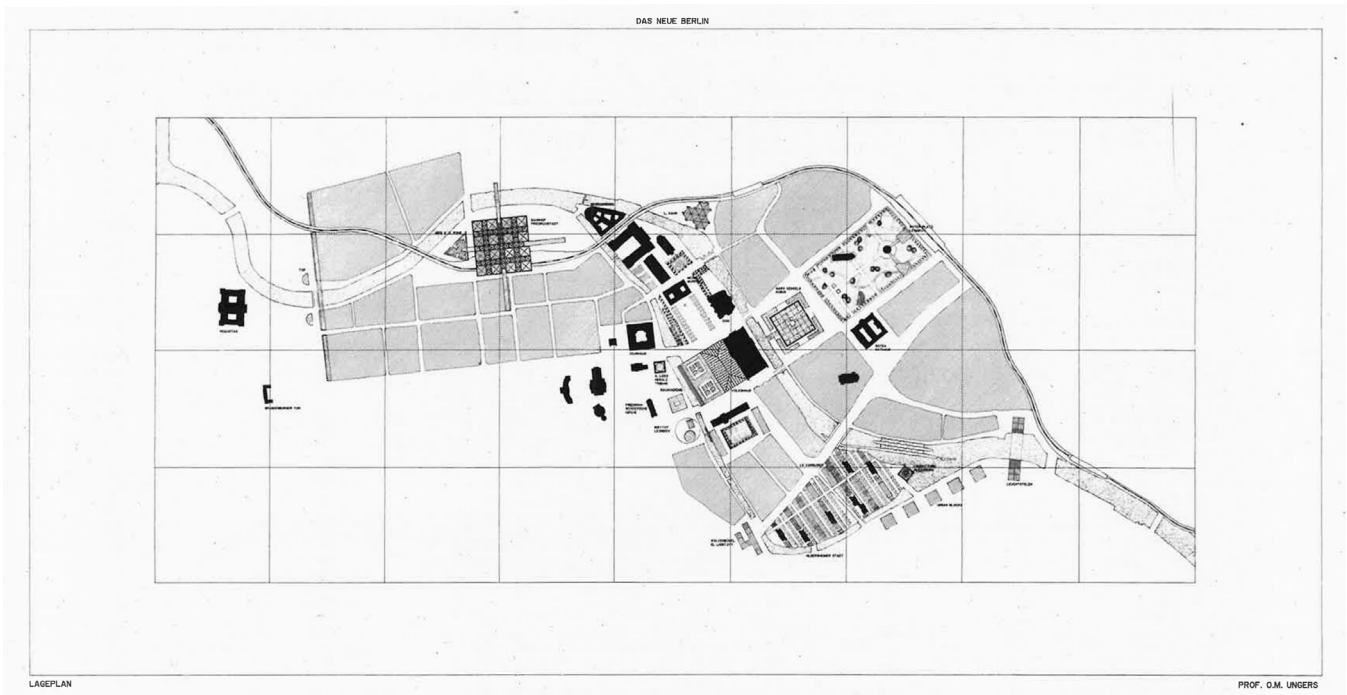
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concept for the Havel landscape, which contemplated architectural events as historical mementoes. In his historical design, the Havel landscape between Potsdam and Berlin has a system of architectural monuments artificially superimposed on it to reflect history, thus transforming it into an educational landscape in the humanist sense. In it, memories become reality and reality becomes an experience of history.

It is a landscape in which the individual events from different cultural eras are placed in a mutual relationship with ideas and theories. These include the Pfaueninsel with the Baroque ruins of the castle and the dairy embodying a romantic world gone by, Stüler's church in Gatow radiating the rational spirit of the Italian Renaissance, the Pfingstberg with the fragments of an ancient temple, the church in Sacrow in the Byzantine style, Schinkel's Casino as a document of the Enlightenment and an ideal structure along Classical lines. Nor should we forget Glienicke, the Neogothic Babelsberg and Stüler's pumping station, which form part of this antithetical world of architectures and references.

With the architectural islands, the city itself is also transformed into an archipelago of special places. The only connection between the objects is the memories they evoke and the historical awareness. In much the same way, the design of the Havel landscape contains the key and the actual basic idea behind the concept of Berlin as a "city within a city", as an "urban archipelago", which picks up Berlin's humanist tradition and carries it forward in modified form to the present day.

This only hints at some of the subjects whose importance in connection with the future of the city had to be examined discussed. The problem to discuss - and this applies to Berlin to an especially great degree - is not a plan for a completely new urban environment, but rather a plan for supplementing and

transforming what is already there; it is not a question of inventing a new urban system, but rather of improving the existing one, not discovering a new order, but rather rediscovering existing principles, not how to construct a new city, but rather how to “reconstruct” the present one, not making a new start, but continuing the old. It is not a search for a new utopia, but rather a plan for a better reality, not a concept for a different world, but one for improving what is there and enabling heterogeneous parts to interact meaningfully: that is the future of the city of Berlin.

Cologne, 13.11.1990

O.M. Ungers