



Histories of Postwar Architecture



Histories of
Postwar Architecture

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Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft



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LetteraVentidue Edizioni S.r.l.

via Luigi Spagna, 50P
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edited by
Annalisa Trentin
Jörg H. Gleiter

Envisioning Tomorrow's Cities

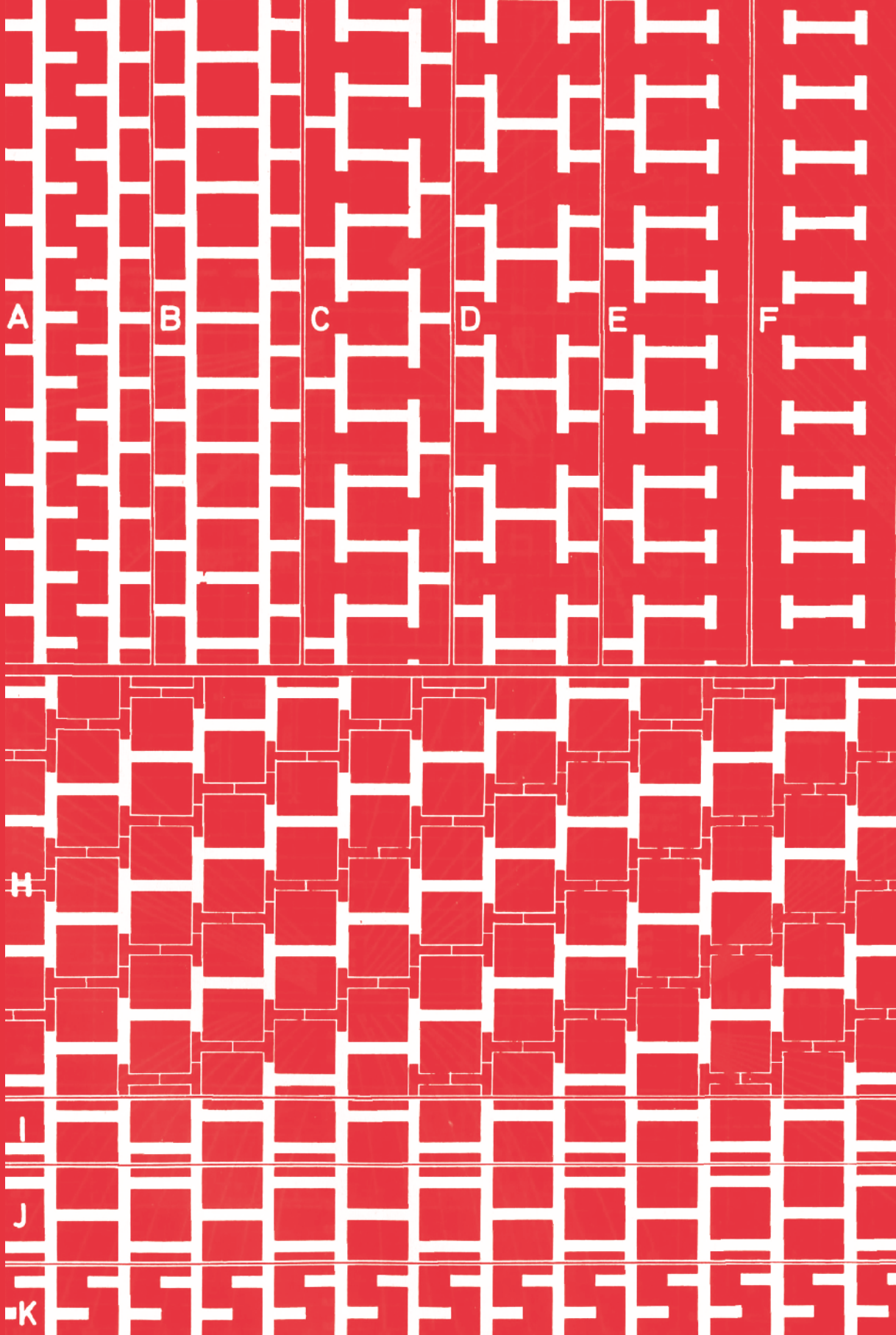
O. M. Ungers' Urban Reflections



Gesamtplan, O.M. Ungers,
Schnellbahn und Gebäude,
Veröffentlichungen
zur Architektur, n.21,
Dezember 1968.

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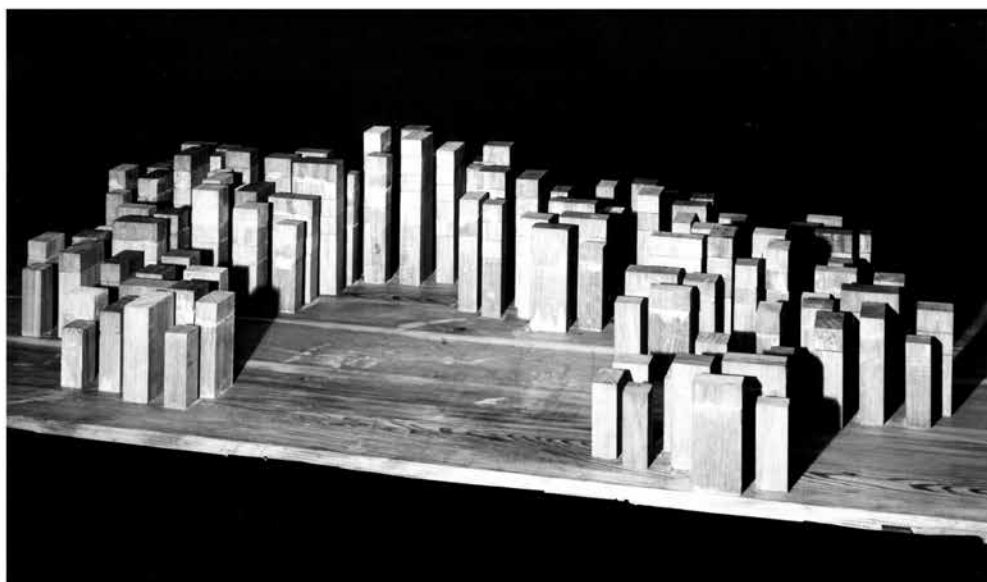
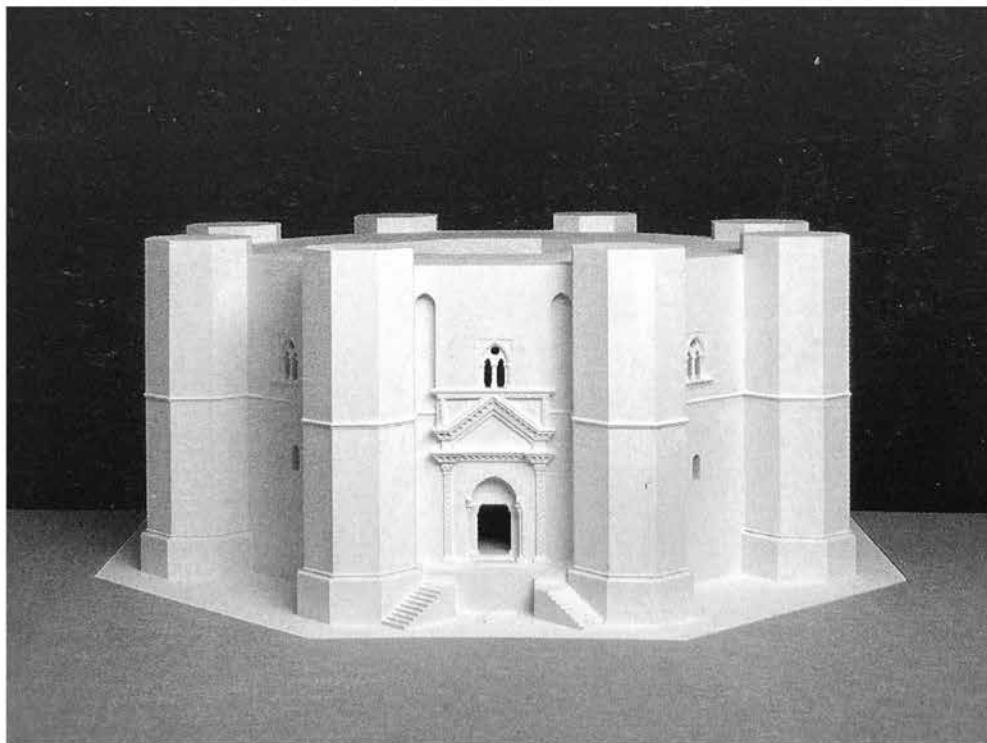
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Tiles of Space: Typology and Morphology in Action. Genealogy and Legacy of the Project for the Neue Stadt

Among the splendid plaster models that Oswald Mathias Ungers surrounded himself with in his studio is the 1:70 scale model of Federico II Castel del Monte [1]. Governed by geometry, the angular towers complement the growth of the central volume, emptied by the courtyard. Between each tower, to bind them together and create tension, runs the continuity of the main body. Ungers often spoke of it as an idea, an idea of space.¹

Just a few years after graduating, the young Ungers participated in the 1960 competition for the development of a part of the new residential district in Cologne, the *Neue Stadt*. The competition brief requires working on an already given urban plan, with diversified residential typologies, which the German architect resolves with a system he describes as the articulation of a positive matter, complementary to the negative space.² The theme has been well addressed in a study comparing various projects by Ungers from the same period³. Therefore, we will try to study this design proposal and the aggregative principle used, as a piece of a broader exploration of modern housing design, seeking to identify its genealogies and legacies. The models representing the initial design hypothesis are wooden, have a handcrafted and sculptural character completely different from the plaster models, paralysed in the beauty of the ideal. They show a fragment of an experimental city, made up of overlapping and visibly glued together pieces. These are evidently trials, abstractions, where the building is reduced only to the composition of solid elements, the positive ones, which by a scalar estrangement effect, outline a profile of urban towers of increasing height [2]. In the most published model, it is almost impossible to recognise the more complex layout of the project: a wall of houses closing towards the busy street to the



1-2. *Castel del Monte and first project model*
 (from Oswald Mathias Ungers: *una scuola*,
 ed. Annalisa Trentin (Milano: Electa, 2004)
 and photo from Ungers Archive).

east, clusters of block houses organised to form public spaces, and lower houses in the Southern part of the sector. Different typologies, resolved with the same idea of a cell made of matter and space. Ungers describes it clearly:

The plans for the Neue Stadt are based on the idea of placing individual autonomous volumes in relation to each other in such a way as to create new spatial relationships between them. The positive form of the matter and the negative interspace are brought into correlation. This interrelation between matter and space expresses a characteristic of architecture, which consists in the fact that two spheres of action – the interior and the exterior – are simultaneously organised for a final purpose.

The phenomenon of the double goal, which Sörgel calls the Janus face of architecture, is the essential factor in configuring a city."⁴

There is a sketch by Le Corbusier of the *Maison Planeix* in Paris, a project from 1924 whose plan of the upper flat is articulated around a backbone of services. The design innovation consists in the consistency of the articulated and volumetric form of this element, partly distributive and partly technical, and the resulting space in the adjacent rooms, enriched by the arrangement of the volumetric element [3].

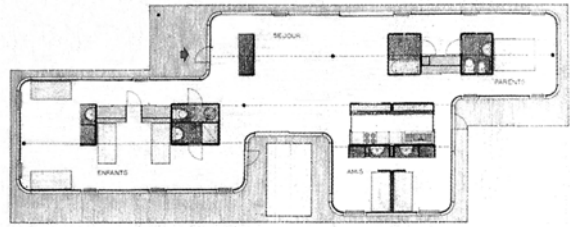
Le Corbusier would return more decisively to this aggregative principle in 1954, when he designed the never realised Governor's Palace in Chandigarh. The plan arranges different elements on a squared plate, including residential nuclei enclosed by curved folded walls. They are solid spatial units, that relate to each other through the space they carve out, sometimes paths, other times lounges or common spaces.

Even the experimental houses that Jean Prouvé designs in the 1950s and 1960s are also often played on the ability to arrange a block, which concentrates the services, within an emptied plan. The precise placement of a solid volume determines the design of the resulting spaces and thus the articulation of the entire house, as can also be seen in the *Maison Seynave* designed in 1961 [4].

Also in 1956, Alison and Peter Smithson presented the *House of the future*, a daring model consistent with the research for *Appliance house*, and a series of projects, which will be further defined in the 1959 *Retirement House*, where solid and compact nuclei relate to each other, articulating livable and recognizable spaces thanks to their *dispositio*⁵.

This is a research project that is easily recognizable, even though the variations in the functions attributed to the solid volume may be different each time. They are all projects that disrupt the usual sequence of rooms, more or less large, that carve out the spaces in the building block that organise the human home: the compactness that held the building together was its most evident characteristic, often hiding differentiated spatialities behind unitary façades.

Genealogy



Legacy



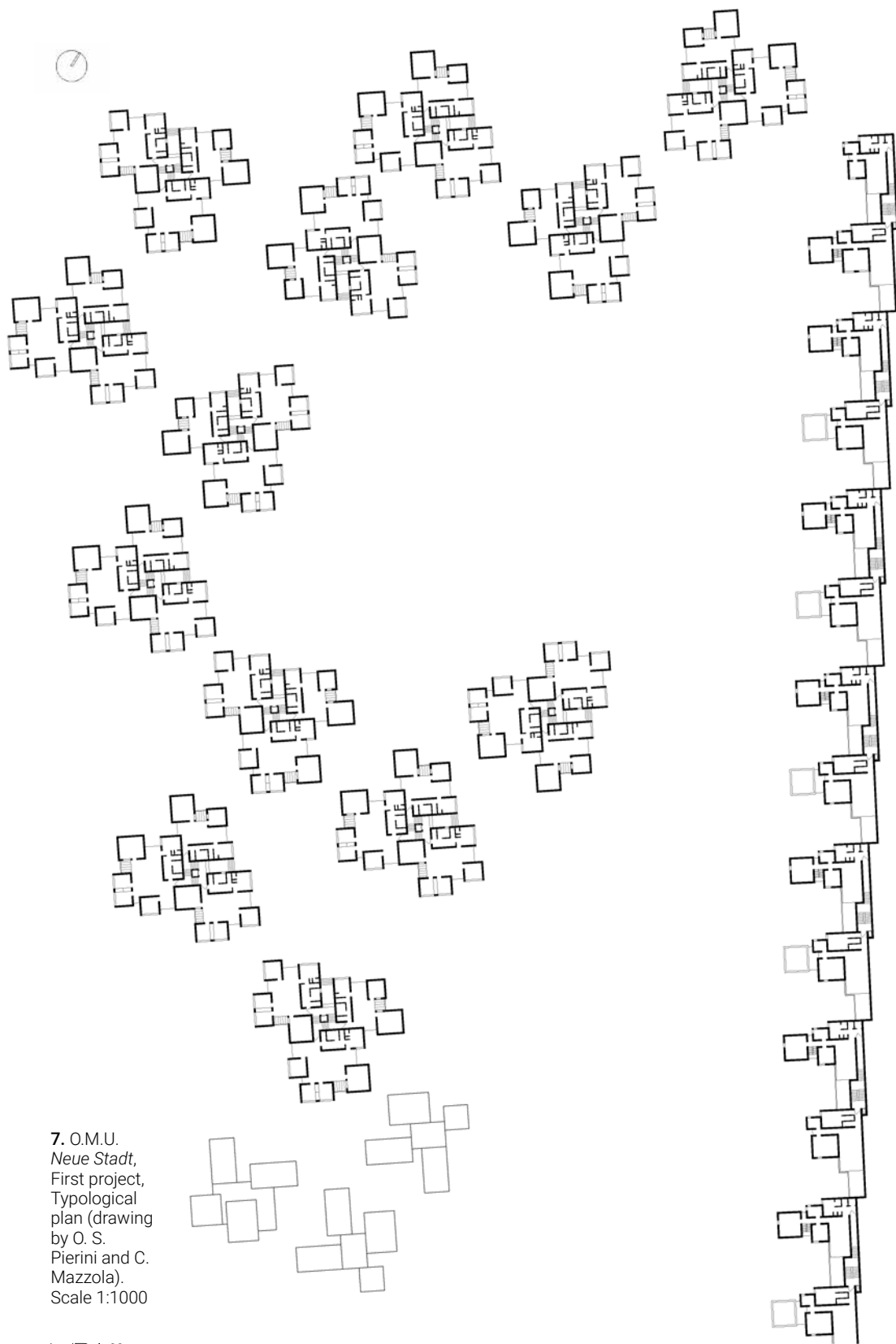
Instead, this family of projects introduces a variable to define space, which plays on opposites, as Ungers well explained. Solids and voids in the pursuit of their architectural definition, no longer alternative but complementary. Not necessarily just a two-faced Janus that solves everything, then, but elements where the relational system proves decisive.

In the early years of his career, during the programmatic and experimental phase, Ungers had expressed himself in his work on the house as a system of volumetric modules. This approach is particularly evident, as previously analyzed, in the early single-family houses ⁶, and is a recognizable pursuit even in the large residential complexes such as the *Mauenheimer Strasse* in *Köln-Nippes*.

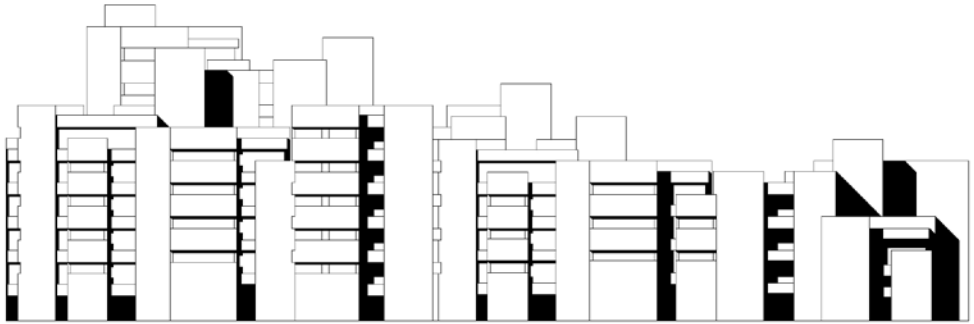
The competition project for *Neue Stadt* is the outcome of this experience and, while still essentially a typological project, it differs from it by being articulated into various urban morphologies [7].

The horizontal section seems to be the most fertile moment: a clustered plan where walls close in solid blocks to accommodate bedrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms. A stairwell generally distributes three dwellings, set on the central void, the *atrium*, which receives light from the various intervals, from the intermediate spaces⁷, as Ungers would define them, between the solids.

3-6. Genealogy: le Corbusier, *Governor's Palace* in Chandigarh, 1954 and Jean Prouvé, *Maison Seyname*, 1961. **Legacy:** Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, *Moriyama House*, 2005 and Duplex Architekten, *Hunziker Haus A*, 2015 (from Xavier Monteys, *Casa Collage*, Gustavo Gili, 2014 – Nils Peters, *Jean Prouvé*, Taschen 2015 – *Lotus International* n. 132 – *Housing for all*, building catalogue, Paul Andreas, Karen Jung and Peter Cachola Schmal ed., DOM, 2019).



7. O.M.U.
Neue Stadt,
First project,
Typological
plan (drawing
by O. S.
Pierini and C.
Mazzola).
Scale 1:1000



This is a decisive attack on the corridor, the functionalist element par excellence.⁸

It is interesting to note that to dismantle the scheme of standardized housing, Ungers employs the revival of ancient models, namely the *atrium*, but also the concentrations of volume in the *plan poché*, where excavated space and resulting space worked complementarily.

Once again, the potential of opposites, so dear to domesticity, so much so that we have complementary *oikos* and *oikía*: a place of staying and moving, of closed and open, of permanence and mutations, for the masculine and the feminine, as Hestia and Hermes tell us.

The central space of the house loses the form of a room, closed on all four sides, its dimension is generous and articulated in multiple places of dwelling, while simultaneously gaining the openness of air, accommodating at least one loggia, an external extension of the internal space between two volumes. The floor plans are repeated identically on all levels, creating the verticality of tower elements that impart a fragmented effect to the entire structure.

To understand the architecture envisioned by Ungers in this initial design hypothesis, we have, in addition to photographs of models, few study drawings of elevations, where individual residential units are hardly distinguishable, all playing on the tension between the verticality of the towers and the horizontality of the openings [8].

The façades are designed by the repetition and articulation of only three elements: closed blocks, volumes carved by thin continuous horizontal windows, and finally windows with parapets or loggias in the intermediate spaces. All the windows run along an entire side of the wall volume, never holes, but horizontal cuts.

The challenge of giving three-dimensionality to a hypothesis designed for voids is apparent; the compositional expedient of mediation and gradualness seems to harmonise the modules while simultaneously restoring them a scale.

8. O.M.U. *Neue Stadt*, First project, Elevation (drawing by O. S. Pierini and C. Mazzola).

As in fractals, the different residential blocks arrange themselves to form concentrations of public space. Even in this morphology, there is no mechanical repetition, but rather an adaptation and various openings to interpret a layout that tends to close towards the West, protecting the collective space of the neighborhood.

Despite the use of the block type and the audacity of the layout, the project takes on the characteristics of an ancient city, moving away from the character of more recent urbanity, perhaps due to the turreted stance that the system accentuates.

It is thus that some cells are arranged along the large wall protecting from the eastern road axis, creating a new type, stretched in the living rooms along the wall and concentrated in the volumes of the rooms, demonstrating the great transformative capacity of the system. The same principle of articulation between blocks and spaces is no longer central; the axis of the rooms is perpendicular to that of the living rooms, defining a kind of L-shaped typology that repeats in series.

Along the street, there are offsets and serrations of now linear elements, containing the stairs and reinforcing the idea of protection, delimiting a morphological layout devoid of urban references.

The development of the project that will allow its realisation will be very far from the strong experimental character analysed so far, which instead will leave an important theoretical legacy in other authors.

Starting from the concentrations and dilations of space, from the densifications of meaning, as Luigi Moretti would have called them in those very years in his magazine *Spazio*, the legacy of experimentation is easily recognizable in many projects that extend to the present day, with different variations.

At times, the principle is taken up by more theoretical experiments. We do not know exactly how John Hejduk had the opportunity to explore this project, although the American years of teaching by the German theorist certainly allowed its knowledge and dissemination beyond the ocean. However, it seems possible to recognize a similar experimentation in some of his projects, even though interpreted with different curved forms, between compact closed bodies and fluid spaces.

Many projects by Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, SANAA have worked on this theme, going so far as to fragment the volumes of the house into functional cubes resting on the ground, as in the Moriyama House [5].

Finally, we can find a revival of the theme most recent developments of contemporary collective housing. The principle of compact, closed, and defined nuclei, and of the free space on which these are grafted, seems to be among the most suitable for determining new gradations of privacy and interesting places of collective sociality.

Consider the experience of the Hunziker cooperative initiative district in Zurich, where projects such as those of Duplex Architekten

are conceived to contrast, in a plan emptied on the inside to position vertical distribution, compact residential blocks, concentrations of the private that fit into the fluid collective space [6]. A planimetric arrangement that seems to be one of the most explicit heirs of the Cologne experience, also considering the social vocation that Oswald Mathias Ungers undoubtedly aspired to when thinking of the atrium as the foundational collective space of the dwelling.

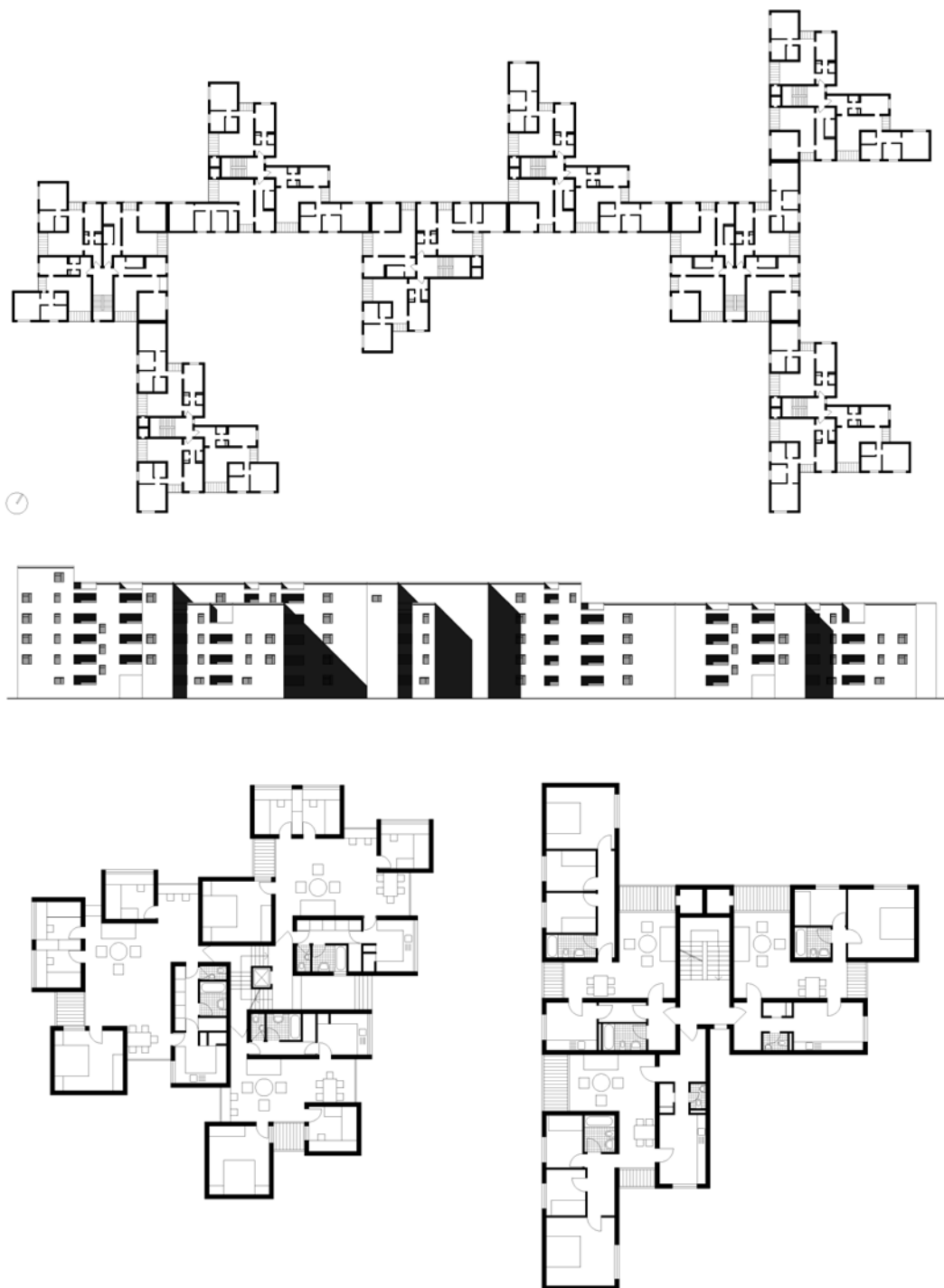
A further, possible development of the principle of the settlement of solids and voids can also be found in the work of some young Spanish architects, e.g. Peris+Toral Arquitectes, where the “breath” of the building, its thermic life are realised not through mechanical technology, but with the wisdom of tradition in circulating warm and cold air. This is how the principle of voids and solids can be applied, as in the project in Borrassà, in the province of Barcelona, both in the communal space with a thermal greenhouse and in the residential cell, where the blocks of bedrooms seem to float in the adaptable space of the living room. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the authors have given this work the explicit name *Social Atrium* [12].

These are just a few examples of the many pieces of space in a quest that for Ungers had found a halt in the actual construction of the *Neue Stadt* district and the later *Märkisches Viertel* in Berlin. It was a clash with reality, even volumetric reality, perhaps accepted with difficulty.

Obviously even in the final design of the *Neue Stadt*, which was only partially realized, we find traces of the original work on the cell: they are units with an L-shaped living room, an empty space carved out between the staircase, the kitchen and bathroom service block and the volume containing the sleeping area [5]. Throughout the volumetric structure, the living room is always connected to the outside by a loggia, making the compositional principle more recognizable on the elevation [10]. The blocks, on the other hand, are pierced by windows, as the construction system to which they allude seems to require.

However, something has been lost in this didactic contrast, which in the initial project tended to harmonize opposites in the design of the fronts, thanks to the same horizontality of the cuts. There has been a shift from the model of positive elements alone to build reality, from an aggregative principle to a defined typology.

It is certainly an alternative project, which, above all, addresses urban planning in a completely different way. The residential block composed of three dwellings is no longer autonomous, but is added to the others, arranging on the territory a linear element with perpendicular insertions. Once again, the skilful arrangement of the blocks produces more intimate courtyards to the South and a volumetric cadence towards the street to the North. It is an aggregative work rich in potential, where the morphological result is no longer a sum but gains new spatial articulations, as it was for Berthold Lubetkin's Highpoint project.



9-12. O.M.U. *Neue Stadt*, As built, Typological plan and elevation. Scale 1:1000 (drawing by O. S. Pierini and C. Mazzola). O.M.U. *Neue Stadt*, First project, type floor plan – as built, type floor plan (drawing by O. S. Pierini and C. Mazzola).

Among the drawings in the archive, there is a section where a long perspective is represented, only on the ground floor, that holds together and crosses the various parts of the building, where blackened shadows and illuminated parts tell the story of the urban street brought into the project. A friend of Peter Smithson, actively participating in many Team X meetings, Ungers offers his own declination of the theme of the internal street, as well as the idea of a single large linear element crossing the territory, a concept widely practiced in many urban projects of those years.

We can say that the competition project undergoes an important transformation, on the one hand a compactness partly due to its constructive feasibility, on the other hand a real morphological transformation, which brings it back to its time.

An attempt has been made to reinterpret, both in words and drawings, one of the German architect's lesser-known projects, but one that is seminal in several aspects.

It is a long journey that spans time, in the works and concepts to which it refers, as we have seen for Castel del Monte. A piece that fits into research on space, a term not always easy to handle. An experience that reflects on the home cell, on the fragmentation or compactness of architecture, on its aggregation of elements, in search of a new urbanity.

The drawings presented here were recently made for the volume *Housing Atlas - Europe 20th Century*⁹. They are a graphic reinterpretation based on drawings published in magazines and monographs, as well as from drawings received from the Ungers Archive.

It is indeed through drawing and the comparison in scale of its different design phases that the process of understanding brings this work into the present.

A present where we have tried to trace in the interesting experiments on contemporary housing, where the word "collective" becomes "shared."

Biographies

Oswald Mathias Ungers

12.07.1926 born in Kaisersesch / Eifel.
1947-1950 Studied architecture at the TH Karlsruhe - Diploma with Prof. Egon Eiermann.
1950 Opening of an architectural office in Cologne and Berlin.
1963 Appointment as full professor at the TU Berlin.
1965-1967 Dean of the Faculty of Architecture at the TU Berlin.
1968 Moves to the USA with his family.
1969-1975 Professor of Architecture at Cornell University, Ithaca.
1970 Licensed Architect in New York State.
1973+1978 Professor of Architecture at Harvard University.
1975-1986 Professor of Architecture (Chairman) Cornell University, Ithaca (emeritus).
1974+1975 Professor of Architecture at the University of California, Los Angeles.
1979+1980 Professor of Architecture at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna.
1986-1990 Professor of Architecture at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (emeritus).
1971 Member American Institute of Architects AIA.
1988 Honorary member of the Association of German Architects BDA Berlin.
1982 Member of the Accademia di San Luca Rome.
1987 Member of the Academy of Sciences in Berlin.
1987 Grand BDA Prize.
1989 Prix Rhenan Strasbourg.
1992 Member of The Moscow Branch of the International Academy of Architects.
1994 BDA Prize Bremen.
1997 Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.
1999 Dr.-Ing. E.h. of the TU-Berlin.
2000 Member of the Akademie der Künste zu Berlin.
2000 Grand DAI Prize.
2002 Goethe Plaque, Frankfurt.
2002 Honorary member of the Academy of Arts, Hamburg.
2004 Honorary degree in Architecture from the University of Bologna.
2006 Order of Merit of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.
2006 Honorary member of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts
30.09.2007 O.M. Ungers dies in Cologne.

Ioanna Angelidou is an architect and historian of architecture. She undertook her doctoral studies at Yale University; she studied Architecture at Columbia University in New York and Aristotle University in Greece and worked as an architect and curator in Europe and Japan. Her research has been supported by grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Getty Research Institute, the Max Weber Foundation, the Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte, the MacMillan Center for International Studies, the Canadian Centre for Architecture, the Society of Architectural Historians, Yale's John F. Enders Fellowship, the Juliane and Franz Roh Fellowship awarded by the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte and the Institute for Art History at Ludwig Maximilian University, and a Visual Arts Grant from the Japan Foundation.

André Bideau is an architecture theorist, historian and critic based in Zürich with a Master of Architecture from ETH Zurich and a PhD in Art history from Zurich University; he 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 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 EPFL Lausanne in 2022/2023.

Gerardo Brown-Manrique is professor of Architecture, Interim Director of Architecture Graduate Studies, Department of Architecture + Interior Design and Affiliate, Latin American, Latina/o and Caribbean Studies (LAS) Program in the Department of Global and Intercultural Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, Miami University, Oxford, OH, USA.

Michele Caja is associate Professor in Architectural and Urban Design at Polytechnic of Milan, PHD in Architectural Composition at IUAV, Venice (2005). He has taught at ETH Zürich, 'Aldo Rossi' Faculty of Architecture in Cesena and FHP Potsdam. He has collaborated with various architectural firms in Italy and abroad, as in Dortmund (J. P. Kleihues, 1990), Vienna and Milan (G. Grassi, 1994-96). Since 1993

he has been practicing as a freelancer in Milan. His field of research focuses on the relationship between theory and contemporary design, particularly in the Italian and German context. He has organized conferences and exhibitions, he has participated in several national and international architecture competitions, he is author and editor of several monographies and international publications.

Benjamin Chavardès is a professor at the Ecole nationale supérieure d'architecture de Lyon and a member of LAURE-EVS (Lyon architecture urbanism research). His research focuses on the history and theory of postmodern architecture, intervention in the built heritage and religious architecture. He holds the SACRES chair (Architectural solutions for the design and conversion of sacred spaces). He is coordinator of the international scientific and educational network "Architecture Heritage and Creation". He is the author of *Quand le postmodernisme s'expose* (Éditions de l'Espérou, 2015) and *L'Italie post-moderne. Paolo Portoghesi, architecte, historien, théoricien* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2022).

Chiara Ciambellotti is a PhD candidate in *Architecture and Design Cultures* at the University of Bologna. Her

master's thesis, *Project for a Non-Extractive Architecture*, was among the winners of the *Call for Projects 2022-2023* launched by the *European Architecture Platform LINA*. She has participated in international conferences, published research articles, and contributed to organizing workshops and exhibitions, primarily in architectural and urban design. Her work focuses on social and ecological dynamics, exploring alternative approaches that place degrowth at the center of urban discourse. In this context, she investigates the foundational contributions of Liselotte and Oswald Mathias Ungers between the 1960s and 1970s.

Simon Ganne is an architect, he studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Lyon and the Institut National des Sciences Appliquées de Lyon, from where he holds a professional Dipl.-Ing. (Arch.) degree. He participated in a one-year exchange program at Polytechnic di Milano, during which he authored the paper "*The Search for a Phenomenon for a Sustainable Architecture*" for a course instructed by Andrea Canclini. His graduate research, titled "From Theory to the Block: The Influence of O.M.U in Postmodern Berlin", delved into architectural theory within the context of the IBA 87 exhibition in Berlin and garnered

honors in the master's program "Architecture Heritage, Theory, and Creation".

Orsina Simona Pierini Full Professor in Architectural and Urban Composition at Department of Architecture and Urban Studies at Milan Polytechnic. After taking a degree in Milan in 1989, she completed her PhD in Architectural Composition with Giorgio Grassi in Venice (IUAV) in 1995. Honorary Research Fellow at Liverpool School of Architecture. Her research activity is based on an idea of architectural design that interprets the architecture of the city in its historical experience as material for contemporary design: she has published the book *Sulla facciata, tra architettura e città* (2008), *Passaggio in Iberia* (2008) and *Casa Milanese 1923-1973, Fifty Years of Residential Architecture in Milan* (2017) and recently *Nelle case. Interiors in Milan 1928-1978* (2023). She has addressed the importance of the role of housing in the urban design of the contemporary city in *Housing Primer, le forme della residenza nella città contemporanea* (2012) and recently in *Housing Atlas - Europe 20th Century* (2023).

Eva Sollgruber is an assistant professor at the Institute for Building Typology and Design at Graz University of Technology. After studying architecture at TU Graz and Aalto University

Helsinki, she worked in various architectural offices in Graz as well as in Amsterdam. Since 2013 she has been working in design teaching. She completed various research and teaching stays abroad and is co-editor of the publication *Trofaia.ch. Architectural Concepts for a Future Coexistence*. Her dissertation focused on the work of German architect Oswald Mathias Ungers and his concept of Großform. Her research includes historical investigations on post-war modernism as well as design research with the focus on circularity, refurbishment and building typologies.

Sophia Ungers studied art history at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree. In 1989, she founded her own gallery for contemporary art in Cologne. During this time, she realized several art-in-architecture projects for Ungers and other clients. From 1998, she worked as an authorized signatory and exhibition curator at the Ungers architecture firm. In 2011, Sophia Ungers became Managing Director of the Ungers Archiv für Architekturwissenschaft Foundation.

Nella stessa collana:

Ilaria Cattabriga

**Leonardo Ricci in the United States
(1952-1972)**

Antonio Esposito, Giovanni Leoni

**La Quinta da Conceição di
Fernando Távora.**

Variazioni fotografiche

Annalisa Trentin Professor of Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna. Former coordinator of the PhD program in Architecture and Design Cultures. She carries out research and teaching activities, mainly dealing with the relationship between architecture and construction, focusing her attention on the relationship between theory and practice in architecture. She has coordinated for Unibo international research groups always looking at an innovative and interdisciplinary way of thinking pedagogy and university teaching.

Jörg H. Gleiter Professor of Architectural Theory at the Technical University of Berlin. Professor of Aesthetics at the Free University of Bolzano/Italy (2008- 2012). Visiting professorships at VIU Venice International University (Venice), Waseda University (Tokyo), Bauhaus University Weimar, Brown University (Providence/ RI) and Politecnico di Milano. He is editor of the series ArchitekturDenken (Transcript Verlag Bielefeld); his main research interests are Critical theory of the Anthropocene, transformations of knowledge, Critical theory of Ornament, Architectural theory, Philosophy, and Semiotics.

On the cover page:
Megastruktur – Bebauung
Modell B, O.M. Ungers, Berlin
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Envisioning Tomorrow's Cities: O. M. Ungers' Urban Reflexion addresses those visionary and experimental aspects in the research of the German architect Oswald Mathias Ungers (1926-2007) that still today can serve as a starting point for the visions of the cities of tomorrow and that, so far, scholarly work has not sufficiently addressed. For this end this issue of HPA focuses on Ungers' radical vision of future cities that exceeds his rational approach to form, morphology and urban transformation to which he is too often reduced, despite his multifarious activities as a visionary architect, farsighted planner and scrupulous intellectual. A look with new eyes at the urban visions that Ungers developed in the 1960s and 1970s, can open fresh insights into the increasingly complex contemporary urban systems – diversity, new traffic systems, climate change, biodiversity, affordable housing, land and energy sustainability – and stimulate imaginative reflections and scenarios for new urban perspectives. Along the line of the binomial's utopia/dystopia, ecology/ biodiversity, rhetoric/humanism, universality/eurocentrism, morphology/transformation and postmodernism/ posthumanism the authors André Bideau, Ioanna Angelidou, Chiara Ciambellotti, Simon Ganne and Benjamin Chavardès, Michele Caja, Eva Sollgruber, Orsina Simona Pierini and Gerardo Brown-Manrique analyse the ideas of city that Ungers' experimented and generated in a comparison with others European design experiences.



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edited by
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