

THE BERLIN COMEDY

Le Corbusier and the 1958 Competition for the Reconstruction of Central Berlin

(Hauptstadt Berlin, Internationalen Städtebaulichen Ideenwettbewerbs)

Posthumous men - myself for instance - are worse understood than timely men, but better heard. Said more rigorously: we are never understood – hence we are authorities.

Friedrich Nietzsche
(*Twilight of the Idols or How one philosophizes with a hammer*¹)

OSCAR TENREIRO

Caracas, May 2006

¹ *El crepúsculo de los ídolos* /Alianza Editorial, 1982, Page. 31.

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Acknowledgements

This work is one of the consequences of my experience as a visiting professor in the College of Architecture of the University of Kentucky (USA) in 1985-86. I wanted to leave to my students of that time something similar to a message of my reflections of that period. A message that could stimulate them to examine in a critical mood the avalanche of simplifications that were common in those days (particularly in the United States) regarding the modern heritage. That is why it is written in English, because the basic text that I had in my hands when I resumed the task of completing it in September 2005 was written in that language.

But there is another reason for writing in English: to make the text more accessible to German readers and particularly to Berliners, for an ample interchange of ideas about the course of the events, and the concepts that have been established for the reconstruction of Berlin, can be a source of knowledge.

I have to insist that my concern regarding Corbu's experience in Berlin is mainly related to my condition as a practicing architect not necessarily as a scholar or historian, because I am above all an architect in search of architecture. An architect practicing in a developing nation, I must add. And my concern with the Berlin experience is cultural as well as disciplinarian. We are not, those who live outside the opulent world, out of the game so to speak. Of course we are not of the refinements and the ready-made rhetoric of the prestigious architecture of economic surplus and editorial preferences, but we are not outside of the universality of knowledge. We, in the underdeveloped world, can learn very much from Berlin, a world capital with a long history, as much as we can learn from a modest experience in Curiepe, a small Venezuelan village with mostly oral history. It is time to overcome the prejudices that place our societies in a protected limbo where some of the civilized values simply do not apply. If we suffer under a dictatorship disguised in democracy (as is the case nowadays in Venezuela), many Europeans think it is a necessary step for us to be able to overcome our social and economic inequality. Human democratic rights are not for us, as much as the cultural concerns of the highly developed nations are not for us either; with the exception of course of writers and artists who always enjoy the tolerance of the markets. *¡A la mierda con los prejuicios europeos!* is then the colloquial phrase we want to pronounce, loudly and clearly, as a reaction to such a particular form of cultural racism. Yes, not only can we, we should discuss Berlin as much as we should discuss Caracas or any other city inside or outside of industrial opulence.

This said, I have to acknowledge those who helped me to complete this work. First of all, my German supporters, architects Felix Harbig and Rico Emge, former students from the School of Architecture of Bauhaus Universität in Weimar (Rico now a professor there in the Urban Planning Department), who were excellent collaborators in my office in Caracas during one year of their Erasmus program some ten years ago, and helped us a lot during our recent visit to Berlin. Felix secured a couple of key interviews and Rico was of great help for documentation. Both are now practicing architects: Felix in Erfurt and Rico in Berlin. Also a Berliner, professor Helmut Geisert, until 2005 professor of History and Theory of Architecture in KHB (Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee), and currently professor in the Fachhochschule in Potsdam, suggested to me useful reflections during an interchange of ideas and as a reader of the manuscript. I met him thanks to the help of Eumilis Arellano, Venezuelan architect living in Berlin. Stephen de Rudder, also a professor of the Urban Planning Department of the School of Architecture at Bauhaus Universität, gave me important clues that helped me to articulate some of the ideas I was dealing with and facilitated my access to some of the documents I worked with.

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And I have to dedicate a special acknowledgement to Pep Quetglas, the editor of *Massilia*, for his interest in this work, for giving me the opportunity to communicate ideas, and particularly for his activity as a promoter of the study of the legacy of Le Corbusier, whose work, in writing, images and built architecture, provides us of an apparently inexhaustible source a knowledge.

Caracas May 2006

Architect Dietrich Kunckel, in Caracas, lent me a copy of *Ergebnis des internationalen städtebaulichen Ideenwettbewerb*, the volume published by Berlin authorities with the results of the competition. Architect Pedro Sosa, also from Caracas, lent me an extra copy of the same publication and a Planungs Grundlagen (Land Use Plans) that was given to the participants in the competition, wherein I had access to first hand information, including the photos of old Berlin that are published here.

I had experienced in France back in 1961, as a very young architect, that a general reaction against Corbusier was on its way. Corbusier was then, already, a scapegoat, the most conspicuous representative of the ideological program of the Modern Movement. The reason usually was that a new understanding (political, economic) of urban problems required approaches other than those posed by *avant garde* in the early years of the twentieth century. Forerunners as we know, especially if they are militant and messianic, are always doomed to confront *realism, objectivity or rationalism* from their contemporaries.

But in fact this reaction, especially in France, was against the irreducible position of Corbu as a constant critic of official policies and as a promoter of his ideas as the only alternative to the overall mediocrity that ruled over realizations to transform them into caricatures of *modern* thinking. Le Corbusier always stood firmly defending his right to build following a set of principles that for him were still valid since the early years of the century. He kept being the *enemy* of the Academy, that in postwar years was personified by technocrats and bureaucrats and all the beneficiaries of building programs, among them dozens and dozens of *professional* architects.

When in mid seventies it was evident that particularly the massive housing programs were facing a deep crisis and that many rebuilding programs in cities had done more harm than good, the Academic critique instead of accusing the real wrongdoers, directed its weapons to the only polemist of early years that remained intellectually strong and ever present even after his death: Le Corbusier. When coming to the "*Corbusian*" city, reductions and half-truths that had taken hold of the debate became arguments that today usually end up in this commonplace: *we are*

recovering from Le Corbusier's mistakes, we are trying to get over his ideas and find the lost connections with the true urban tradition.

The errors of Corbu's contemporaries are rarely part of the picture, nor are the perversion of his ideas through partial interpretations or the imposition of speculative political and economic strategies that usually dispensed with principles. The audience is better prepared to pay attention to intelligent, digestible schemes about the lost *master* and the terrible consequences of his ideas than to admit that his former opponents of that time are still in command with other faces and other schemes. The Academy is always there: a well-extended resistance expressed through multiple instruments that disdain clarification, in-depth debate, a better understanding of what was before and what is now. The Academy is rooted in misunderstandings. And, following Nietzsche's aphorism that we chose as an epigraph for this text, Le Corbusier was an authority, likewise he was not understood. Or only partially understood, hence misunderstood.

In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche also wrote: "*The defects of a great man are the defects of his time.*" If we are not able to separate the biases, misjudgments or even mistakes of the intellectual atmosphere at a particular moment in history from those derived from the personal views of exceptional men, we will not be able to understand their teachings. Le Corbusier's project for Berlin, not only because of its intrinsic values but when compared with the universe of selected proposals that were competing with it, even though it clearly shows some of his misconceptions, demonstrates the validity of many of his design *principles* and other contributions that remained obscured by prejudices or suspicion. Confirming our hypothesis that Le Corbusier, even though he shared with his contemporaries many views that

proved wrong, or promoted in fairly dogmatic ways mistakes of his own responsibility, showed an admirable capacity for reshaping his own intellectual patrimony in order to open new approaches or establish new paradigms that would eventually amplify our knowledge.

These reflections remind me of a saying of my dear and admired professor August Komendant,² engineer and intellectual: *if they do not understand it, they hate it!* This very sad truth explains perhaps the intellectual atmosphere of Hauptstadt Berlin 58. Otherwise it is impossible to understand why not a single one of the virtues of Corbusier's entry was mentioned in the "General Report on the Results of the Competition." Not one. Its redactors limited themselves to transcribe the comments of the Jury as part of the set of comments on the entries that were included in the *short list*. They carefully avoided any comment on the work of this *specialty invited architect* who angrily forbade the inclusion of his project in the results of the competition.³

Forty years after his death we should be able to see Le Corbusier's oeuvre less reluctantly. In the first place we are no longer *afraid* of his architecture or his personality. In the second place, if we are rigorous enough to overcome prejudices and commonplaces, we will be able to identify the strong connections that his

² August Komendant (Estonia, 1906, Upper Montclair, New Jersey, 1992), engineer, expert in pretensed and postensioned concrete structures, he studied engineering in Germany, emigrated to the United States in 1950. and worked with Louis Kahn for eighteen years (1956-1974), an experience he recollected in his book *Eighteen Years with Architect Louis Kahn*, published in 1975 (Spanish translation: Colegio de Arquitectos de Galicia, 2000). We met in 1976 and worked together on several projects.

³ *Ergebnis des internationalen städtebaulichen Ideenwettbewerbs*, Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1960. In a letter sent to Senator Schwedler, an important promoter of the competition, after knowing that his entry had failed, on July 15, 1958, he writes: "The object of my letter is to ask you not to authorize any right for reproduction of my project to anyone." In another letter he sent to Schwedler, written on July the 24th, he says: "...besides, I take advantage of this letter to ask you not to pay me the 4.000 marks that had been agreed upon if this payment would have the effect of giving you copyrights of my project. If that is the case, please do not pay me the 4.000 marks."

approach to urban form has with our present knowledge of the structure of the cities. Le Corbusier can be seen as a source of knowledge, for good or for evil.

Hauptstadt Berlin 58 is the proof.

THE COMPETITION

The last public episode in Le Corbusier's life was the competition for the reconstruction of the center of Berlin in 1958). In some ways the events related with this competition are the reenactment of an ever-present drama in Corbu's life: on the one hand, the struggle with his colleagues in order to overcome their resistance to accept the validity of his intuitions about architecture and urban form, in order to convince them to stand apart and leave the way for him to materialize his architectural and urban images; in other words to accept his well-earned leadership, as obvious then as it is now forty years after his death. On the other hand, his continuous confrontation with professional jealousy and the self-defensive attitude from those in administrative key positions who felt obliged, in view of his own bureaucratic shortcomings, to reject the pertinence of his approach to architecture and the city. Corbu's attitude regarding this competition was as well the reedition of his ever-frustrating relation with power depicted by Claudius Petit⁴ as "*his ever present and never successful pursuit of The Prince.*" The possibility of having an important word to say in the reconstruction of one of the most important European capitals was the enticement that seduced and lead him to another frustration.

⁴"...his ever present and never successful pursuit of The Prince...When later in his life he left this anxiety behind him, then the Prince came by, and looked for him." Words pronounced in Caracas during a lecture given at the School of Architecture (UCV) in 1983. Claudius Petit was a very close friend of Corbu, whom he met in December 1945 during an Atlantic cruise on board Liberty Ship Vernon S. Hood from France to the United States. Claudius was part of a group of official representatives that included Le Corbusier, that traveled to the States in view of France reconstruction. He was a respected *partisan* (member of the anti-nazi French resistance) that founded a minority political party that had some relevance during the after-war years. During one of the several political coalitions formed in those years, Claudius became Minister of Reconstruction from 1947 to 1952. He then was instrumental in the completion of the *Unité de Marseille*. Later in his life he became mayor of the city of Firminy (very close to St Etienne, in the vicinity of Lyon) for almost fifteen years. During his mandate he commissioned Corbu the *Maison de la Jeunesse*, one *Unité* and the *Église de Firminy*. We invited him to Caracas in 1983 on the occasion of the Exhibition *Firminy, the last project of Le Corbusier* organized by the professors and students of my Studio in the School of Architecture of the Universidad Central de Venezuela. He was one of the founders of the *Société des Amis de Le Corbusier*.

The competition was organized by the Senate of the City of West Berlin with the support of the central government of Federal Germany. Willy Brandt, the leader of German Social Democratic Party (SPD), was the mayor of Berlin at the time and Konrad Adenauer, leader of the Christian Democratic party (CDU), was the German chancellor. At the time, the conflicts of the Cold War were not as acute as they would become in the following years; however, as the competition was convoked by West Germany and its objective was the center of Berlin, mainly *East* Berlin, it was considered by the authorities of the GDR (German *Democratic* Republic) as a provocation, as an instrument of Western propaganda that resulted once more in a confrontation issue between both sides of the *Iron Curtain*. Willy Brandt, in a presentation text of the book published with the documentation of the competition, wrote:⁵ “*We are planning the capital of Germany; by this – putting aside any propaganda interest, turning aside from the transient polemics of the day - we confess our faith that **the present unnatural state of things will be overcome...that our demand for reunification of what has absurdly been dismembered...is a reasonable one.***” So the competition had, no doubt, a strong political content. In the “General Report on the Results of the Competition” included in the book, the phrase *reunification* (of Germany) appears now and again. In fact, shortly after the competition various initiatives were taken in East Germany in order to attract the attention of architects from all over the world for the reconstruction of Berlin as it was seen from the *eastern* side of the border.

⁵ Hauptstadt Berlin, *Ergebnis des internationalen städtebaulichen Ideenwettbewerbs*. Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart 1960.

Le Corbusier was among a group of architects that were “specially invited” to participate.⁶ The Federal Minister for Housing himself sent him a letter late in February 1957 inviting him and fixing the economic compensation.⁷ More than a one month later, on April 2nd, he replied to the Bundesminister saying that he would participate, and that he was expecting more details from the Senator for Construction and Housing of the city of Berlin, Rolf Schwedler.

Le Corbusier was reluctant to commit himself with Berlin in view of his previous experiences in several competitions that ended up in a considerable loss of physical and emotional energy expressed in drawings, ideas and not realized dreams. That is the typical output for non-winners in most competitions, but if we consider his position as one of the most influential architects of his time, it is clear that he had an astonishing (and incomprehensible) collection of failures.

In a letter to Walter Gropius, member of the Jury,⁸ dated November 5, 1957, when he was actively working on his entry, while he carefully tries to make clear that he respects Gropius’s neutrality as a member of the Jury, he mentions his experience

⁶ This is the complete list of architects that were “specially invited following Art. 3 of Principles and Directions ruling Competitions in Germany”: Adolf Ciborowski from Warsaw; Frederick Gibberd from London; Sven Markelius from Stockholm; Sverre Pedersen from Trondhjem, Norway; Luigi Piccinato from Rome; Roland Rainer from Vienna; Albert Steiner from Zurich and Hans Scharoun from Berlin / document 12-10-29-001 Le Corbusier Foundation.

⁷ Each of the “specially invited” architects would be paid 4000 German Marks. The original document has Corbu’s handwriting making the transfer to French francs followed by the word *reflechir*.

⁸ This was the Jury when it formally met to deliberate in June 1958: Arch. Alvar Aalto; Arch. Otto Bartning (as the President of the Federation of German Architects); Prof. Arch. Cornelius Van Eesteren; Arch. Walter Gropius (replaced by Eng. Herbert Jensen, official); Prof. Werner Hebebrand, official; Prof. Rudolf Hillebrecht, official; Eng. Johannes Rossig, official; Eng. Max Steibiss, official; Eng. Hans Stephan, official; Arch. Pierre Vago (President of the International Union of Architects); Eng. Edgar Wedepohl, official. Six more members as representatives of the “Administration”: Secretary Hermann Wandersleb replacing the Bundesminister; Eng. Hans Tockuss; Eng. Gustav Schneevoigt; Eng. Rolf Schwedler, Berlin’s Senator for Construction and Housing, Le Corbusier’s official interlocutor; Bernhard Skrodzki, and Armin Häusler, replacing Ernst Schanorowski from Berlin. Briefly: four (not including Gropius) practicing Architects among seventeen members! The scenario was so poor in terms of commitment with architecture that Corbu can be considered naïve when he expected that the only possible presence of Gropius with all his prestige (leaving alone his differences with Berlin authorities) would be enough guarantee that his entry would be examined with sympathy.

in Stockholm competition in 1933 (*"When honesty made a fool of itself"*),⁹ and later, on February 20, 1958, after submitting his entry, when asking José Luis Sert to put some pressure on Gropius regarding his possible absence from Berlin's Jury,¹⁰ he again regrets his previous experiences. In fact, paradoxically as it may seem, Corbusier, apart from the *Société des Nations* Competition in 1927, where he was disqualified after having been awarded first prize, never again won a competition.

His personal saga *à la recherche d'un concours juste* could be a conclusive

⁹ This letter demonstrates Corbu's anxiety regarding the competition. He asks Gropius a somewhat embarrassing favor: to channel to Berlin's Senator for Construction and Housing, M. Schwedler a letter (dated November 4) whereby Corbu asks authorization to send one extra document that would be added to those required by the competition. Such a document "will contain the total indication of a three-dimension urbanism allowing us to depict all the nuances of the project and to make it look real thanks to a clean and decisive visual expression"; he asks Schwedler expressly to let him "know whether this extra document will be examined by all those involved because it is the only one that truthfully explains the project." He writes Gropius to ask him to translate his letter and send it "*with or without comments, from you to Mr. Schwedler...*" and after one explanatory paragraph he says, "*Perhaps you know that I had in Stockholm a ridiculous misadventure. I had made twenty pages...full of drawings in colored ink to express the whole project. The administration put together the drawings, packed them in a box secured with tape with this note: 'will not be submitted to the Jury because the author's hand can be identified'. I had published this project in volume 2 of Complete Works under the title: 'When honesty makes a fool of itself'...My dear Gropius, you are an honest man. I am too. I count on you to send my letter...*" Letter to Walter Gropius, November 5, 1957 / Le Corbusier Foundation, document 12-10-83-001.

It is understandable that Gropius could have felt uncomfortable with Corbu's petition. He was a member of the Jury and Le Corbusier was exceeding the limits of friendship asking him to send a letter from one of the competitors. Of course Corbusier supported his petition and all the initiatives he took before submitting his entry (he sent quite a number of letters regarding the extra document) on the grounds that there was a contradiction between the "special invitation", the nominal participation that it implied, and the general requirement of anonymity. He refers to that contradiction in a letter he sent after the closing of the competition to the Bundesminister (the Federal Minister) dated January 10, 1958: "*...because I am quite perplexed. If I send it anonymously the Jury will not be able to identify my project with certitude and then it would not be logical to have invited me to do such a considerable amount of work; if I have to send it in my name I would appreciate that you give me instructions to comply with your intentions...*" Le Corbusier Foundation, Document 12-10-73-001.

¹⁰ In the end, Gropius did not attend the Jury. This was a bit of a tragedy for Le Corbusier who was counting on him to be the chairman of the Jury. To what extent Le Corbusier's uncomfortable pressure had to do with his absence is difficult to know. His formal excuse was his health. Perhaps the fact that he was on bad terms with Berlin authorities had as well something to do with it. Le Corbusier refers to those differences in a letter to José Luis Sert, a mutual friend and a close collaborator of Gropius at Harvard Architecture School, when he mentions some of his bitter experiences with competitions: "*I ask you to use your authority and your lucidity to see that Gropius attends the Berlin Jury...he is like the Polar Star (sic) that largely guides those who have participated in the Competition. We know Gropius as the most loyal of men, I would not like to influence him in whatever verdict he would eventually dictate, but 1) he has the absolute obligation to attend the Jury, he is the chief. 2) many people around me are participating (one of them was his long-time collaborator André Wogensky) (we will have few or many Le Corbusiers) but a wise eye will know the difference...*" Gropius has had deceptions at the Interbau exhibition. For me, that has been a horrifying treason, *scandalou*" (he is referring to the annoying events that ended with the construction of his Unité in Berlin (1956-58) following his project only partially and with "a manner of execution and ...aesthetical interpretation...quite incompatible with (his) desires"...My life is very intense ..I claim that no one has made the urbanism that I have proposed here, but I remember well Anvers' proposal: the Jury passing by, running, and one of its members saying "nuts!" In Saint Dié and La Rochelle the same story. I repeat here, I have made for Berlin an extraordinaire work of total precision." / Complete Works, 1910-1960, page 169, Les Editions d'Architecture Zurich 1965.

argument to put under scrutiny the very idea of architectural competitions as they are organized up to present days. The never confirmed anecdote of Eero Saarinen rescuing from the package of *rejected entries* Jörn Utzon's drawings for the Sidney Opera House, saving them to be transformed into a building that became the symbol of the city, seems very distant from present day competitions routinely awarding the next member of the *star system*.¹¹ Exceptions to the rule of notoriety of its author as the most reliable argument to select a project are very rare, one after the other poor-but-glamorous projects resulting from prestige competitions are built with generous budgets. In contrast it is a cruel paradox that one of the twentieth-century architects that has earned a solid place in the history of architecture, whose buildings have become part of the cultural patrimony of mankind, was never the winner of an architectural competition.

We said before that after some hesitation Corbu decided to participate. But he remained extremely anxious in regard to the Jury. He had many doubts (that proved at the end entirely justifiable) about its composition, but gained some self-assurance when considering that five *friends* or at least four *compagnons de route*

¹¹ Frank Lloyd Wright described the decisions of the Juries in architectural competitions as "the average of averages" in a letter he sent to Albert Kesley in 1928 (Frank Lloyd Wright, *Letters to Architects*, Selection by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, The Press at California State University, Fresno, 1984, page 73). On the other hand, the temptation to manipulate the competitions have been always a problem. I can refer to a personal anecdote related to a much publicized competition, Aldo Rossi's Terza Mostra in the Venice Biennale (1985). Being in Paris on the return from Venice I had the opportunity to interview the French architect and critic Bernard Huet, one of the members of the Jury. According to Huet most of the awards were pre-arranged flattering gestures aimed at Aldo Rossi's North American good friends: Robert Venturi, Peter Eisenmann, Daniel Liebeskind etc. These awards were mixed with other *secondary* awards granted to appease Italian (Rome or Milan) fraternities. In cases like this it is not the selection of an *average* but the convenience of the Jury's most influential members, the *ultima ratio* for their decisions. Another more recent fiasco was the El Prado Competition (1994-95) in Madrid. When the competition was launched, every architect in Spain said in private that Rafael Moneo was previously selected no matter what could have been the opinion of the very few practicing architects that were members of the Jury, completely unbalanced, packed with functionaries. The well-done and well *designed* artifact that Moneo has finally built, is a good proof of what can be expected from a competition with so many predetermined limitations. The competition for the City of Arts in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, can also be cited: the first prize awarded to the widely rhetoric project by Peter Eisenmann seems a gratuitous eccentricity in Galicia's landscape willingly promoted by the new wave of Spaniard officials in search for international stars.

were among the Jury members: Alvar Aalto, Walter Gropius, Cornelis Van Eesteren, Pierre Vago and, to a lesser degree, Otto Bartning.

But Corbu was not in a position to evaluate other aspects that had a decisive influence on the evaluation of his entry. In 1958, *père Corbu's* architecture was no longer a novelty. CIAM was on the verge of vanishing¹² due to obsolescence, with some help from the attacks of emerging architects like Giancarlo de Carlo,¹³ the architect-intellectual from Urbino; Alison and Peter Smithson, the British architects (participants in the competition) and Georges Candilis et al. (all of them members of Team 10)¹⁴ as the new pontiffs of urban design. Chandigarh did not enjoy a good reputation when confronted with the sociological (and political) wave that was to permeate architectural debate in those years and especially during the sixties and early seventies. And last but not least, urban planning had undergone a radical transformation from the early days of the century when architects had a leading influence in the emerging discipline, to the slow but constant transformation of urbanism into a *scientific* activity loaded with all sorts of technocratic biases. After the war, urbanism entered the Academy through universities and public institutions, and the pioneering discourse of architects, utopian, poetic, suggestive hence

¹² The last CIAM Congress took place in Otterlo (Netherlands) in 1959. During the 10th Congress in Dubrovnik, ancient Yugoslavia, in 1956, the organization was practically put to an end.

¹³ "*Le Corbusier is a great Master*" writes Giancarlo de Carlo in a letter to Ernesto Rogers, editor of Casabella, the Italian architecture magazine, issue 210, in 1956, "*but we have come to a parting of the ways...we are now facing limited and modest problems which are, however, more subtle and profound (!) than those he has hitherto brandished...it is useless to continue along the road to Utopia or the great plastic adventure.*" De Carlo had already expressed, in relation to the CIAM Bergamo Congress in 1949, ironic and quite destructive remarks (loaded with ideological marxism-inspired considerations) regarding Le Corbusier's influence on the activities of the Congress.

¹⁴ Team 10 was a group of critical young architects from different European countries who had met under the umbrella of CIAM. During the 10th Congress in Dubrovnik in 1956, Team 10 (the Smithsons, Jaap Bakema, Candilis, Aldo Van Eyck, De Carlo) harshly criticized the functionalist approach that prevailed within CIAM (Corbusier being its outstanding leader). They saw themselves as pioneers of a new tradition they wanted to establish as part of the international debate on modern architecture and urban design. Team 10 was the group charged with the preparation for the 10th CIAM Congress, hence the name.

subjective was replaced by the objectivity of scientific reason: urbanism is a science (a *social* science...) hence the methods of urbanism should be *scientific*. That was *l'ordre du jour*.

And the Berlin Jury was a very good example of this last phenomenon. It represented "*the state of the arts*" on urban planning at the end of the fifties: a drastic imbalance in favor of bureaucrats and *technical* town planners in detriment of architects and architecture. We will refer again in the following lines to that particular issue, but it seems evident that German officials did not trust very much active architects and their *subjective* discourse to say an authorized word regarding Berlin reconstruction. Only five practicing architects among twelve officials selected to give satisfaction to every bureaucratic department. Even worst: after Gropius's alleged health problems that prevented him from attending the meetings, there remained only four: Alvar Aalto, Otto Bartning, Cornelis Van Eesteren and Pierre Vago.

Anyway, Le Corbusier thought that Gropius's presence into this forest of bureaucrats was enough to impose a particular perspective on the deliberations of the Jury. His was to be a *leading* presence, so he thought.¹⁵ On the other hand he was confident that his other *friends* would be there as a guarantee: in the documents of the Berlin competition relating to the Jury kept by the Le Corbusier Foundation, there are handwritten notations by Corbu highlighting the names of his would-be allies: Gropius, of course, Aalto, Bartning (underlined only in one document), Pierre Vago and Van Eesteren. It is interesting to make a rapid comment on each of them to see to what extent Corbu was right.

¹⁵ See footnote 10: Gropius would be the *Polar Star* of the Jury.

Cornelis Van Eesteren (1897-1988), for example, was a member of CIAM.¹⁶ Although trained as an architect he made a career as a town planner, having been part of the town planning department of the municipality of Amsterdam for thirty years, from 1929 to 1959. If we consider the tradition he established in Amsterdam, rational and very effective but essentially two-dimensional (zoning, investment, strategies, infrastructures etc.), very much in line with *academic* town planning of the fifties, hygienically distant from any strong commitment with architecture, it is difficult to see him supporting Corbu's way. Especially if we consider how much Corbu insisted on that he was making *three dimensional urbanism*, a new approach to urban design, as he said again and again in numerous letters. He thought that his approach to the problem might not be fully understood, hence he insisted (see footnote 9) on the acceptance by the competition authorities of an extra document, "*a complementary page (number VII) containing the total indication of a Three Dimensional Urbanism that will allow us to express all the finesse of the project and to materialize it thanks to a visual expression limpid and decisive.*"¹⁷ That document (so far we have not been able to determine which one it was) would make himself clear before the Jury.

On the other hand it was a fact that Corbusier did not trust the typical rhetoric, and the methods as it were, of urban planners at the time. He does not hesitate to express this conclusively in the first two lines of his project description:¹⁸ "*It is useless to demonstrate that traditional Urbanism does not have the right to exist.*"

¹⁶ He was chairman of CIAM from 1930 to 1947, presumably a good friend of Corbusier, who was during those years a sort of *Pater familias* for CIAM's members. If Van Eesteren was not a member of Team 10, it is not unlikely that he had been sympathetic with the Dutch group that was part of it, namely Bakema and Van Eyck.

¹⁷ See footnote 9.

¹⁸ Berlin Capitale, Rapport Explicatif / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169-001.

Obviously Le Corbusier was referring to the current (the *Modern*) approach to town planning, not to the Beaux Arts tradition. What could have been Van Eesteren's reaction to such a definitive remark if he can be deemed a pioneer of such a *traditional* urbanism?¹⁹

Pierre Vago (1910-2002), on the other hand, was not in an independent position vis-à-vis Federal Germany authorities, having at the time important architectural commissions.²⁰ It was not easy for him to stand for Corbu's emphatic and radical positions if he had to oppose any of the important bureaucrats on the Jury. He was editor in chief of the architectural magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* from 1932 to 1948 and president of its editorial committee from 1949 to 1968. *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* like most architectural magazines was both respectful of the established *masters* and the instrument of a commercial editorial policy that was not particularly selective. Vago was appointed a member of the Jury as president of the International Union of Architects (IUA) (from 1948 to 1965), of which he was cofounder in 1946 in London. As a representative of an international institution (at that time generously supported by Soviet interests) Vago was forced to be cautious, diplomatic and to avoid controversy. And Corbu was always controversial.

Otto Bartning (1883-1959) can be defined as an architect who had resisted the Modern Movement's ideological pressure, as an architect as well as an architectural theorist. With his works and his writings he wanted to keep up with a

¹⁹ Van Eesteren was co-author (with Van Louhizen) of one of the earliest modern town planning documents: The General Extension Plan for Amsterdam of 1929.

²⁰ He had built an apartment building for Berlin's Interbau Exhibition in Hansa-Viertel not very far from Corbu's *Unité* caricature (see footnote 10), and was working on the project of the Library of the University of Bonn. If we consider his career as an architect, it can be said that Vago knew very well how to behave in the presence of power to assure his survival as an active architect.

German architectural tradition exemplified by such architects as Muthesius, Tessenow, Poelzig and to some degree Bruno Taut, who did not consider themselves as Modern Movement militants and were reluctant to accept without objections Bauhaus *ideology*. He was very well known in Germany as architect of Protestant evangelical churches, some of them with quite interesting steel or wooden structures. He was involved with Gropius in the very beginning of the Bauhaus but stayed at Weimar University when the Bauhaus moved to Dessau. He was president of the German Federation of Architects from 1950 until his death in 1959. Bartning can not be seen as a fan of Le Corbusier or even as sympathetic to his ideas or much less to his architecture.

And, finally, no one less than Alvar Aalto, one of the fathers of Modern Architecture.²¹ Diametrically opposed to Corbu in terms of his approach to architectural problems, his personality, his *ideology* (or apparent lack of it), his aesthetic creed. Even if they were complementary as they evidently were, they did not seem to see each other from such a perspective. In fact, they tended to ignore each other. Aalto, to our knowledge, never explicitly mentioned Corbusier in his public statements. Corbu, in his turn, seemed to avoid any specific remark regarding any of his great contemporaries. It is quite unlikely that Aalto would put to risk his proverbial equanimity in order to stand for Corbusian images, theories or expectations. Especially if we consider the nature of the objections to Le

²¹ If we follow Carl Gustav Jung, Aalto can be considered a member of an archetypal *quaternity* which is at the origin of the language and methods of Modern Architecture, or if one prefers, twentieth century architecture. The others being Le Corbusier, of course, Mies Van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright. Louis Kahn, for many critics *the last Master*, although member of the same generation as Aalto (Aalto was born in 1898, Kahn was born in 1902) came onto the scene of architecture late in his life and his approach to architecture and his teachings set the foundations for a new stage in the development of the Modern Movement's tradition.

Corbusier's proposal raised during the discussions of the Jury²² born, essentially, as we will see in the following text, of a rejection to the scale and location of his skyscrapers, a typology radically distant from Aalto's architectural iconography.

And there was as well the embarrassing issue of anonymity. It seems contradictory to *specially invite* a group of architects and maintain for them the requisite of anonymity (see footnote 9). If the authorities wanted to have Corbu, Scharoun, Markelius or Gibberd, to name the best known of the group, among the participants, presumably due to the quality of their contributions to architecture and town planning, why then require that they hide their identity? Was it not illogical to suppose that it would be impossible for the members of the Jury to identify the entries of the *specially invited* competitors, knowing their names, as all of them surely knew? For that same reason, was not this forced and hypocritical anonymity a burden for all the *specially invited* in the sense that the jurors had to pretend they did not know the author of a particular project when they actually knew it? Were not the jurors forced to feign impartiality or show psychological distance regarding that entry? And for these reasons would not that *distance* prevent them from standing for it in critical discussions? This curious schizoid atmosphere was a negative burden to all the *specially invited* and, particularly Corbusier, the best known of²³ them all. For Scharoun, very well known as a Berlin architect, the situation was entirely different: in Germany he was a personality of consensus, accepted as one

²² "Thereby he modifies completely the western part of Unter den Linden Ave., giving a great importance to the Official Zone to the North of the Ave. proposing the construction of a skyscraper for the Ministries right at the entrance of Friedrichstrasse Station. The Jury considers this as acceptable. However, the dimensions of the building, sixty stories high according to the author, seem excessive..." The lines that follow in the Report are even more negative, as we will see. Report of the Jury, Page 23 of the French translation. Le Corbusier Foundation, document 12-10-114. Our translation.

²³ Who, among the jurors with some knowledge of architecture or town planning, would not be forced to pretend that he did not know who was the author of Corbu's drawings?

of the leading architects of the *new* German architectural tradition; his Philharmonie building, a sort of symbol for West Berlin-West Germany was already under construction. He could expect a highly positive acceptance of his easily identifiable entry.

On top of that, there was an unusual, and again hypocritical, warning aimed at the jurors, right in the first session of the Jury: "*The President (of the inaugural session) informs all those involved that the deliberations are confidential. He invites all members of the Jury and all experts to state that they don't know who the authors of the projects are and that they have not had any exchange of views with the participants about the Competition problems regarding the solutions. He also calls all those present to abstain, during the Jury's sessions, from expressing suppositions regarding the authors.*"²⁴

The report of the Jury throws some light on the process of selection:

There were 151 entries (three more were disqualified, nine others were consigned with alternatives for some sectors so were submitted to the Pre-Classification Committee). Seven projects were submitted after the deadline. In total 144 projects remained in the Competition, fifty-two were eliminated during the session of the second day.

During the fourth session of the Jury, the 13th of June, under the presidency of Cornelis Van Eesteren, 73 projects were eliminated and 19, including Corbu's

²⁴ Report of the Jury, page 3 of translation into French / Le Corbusier Foundation document 12-10-105. That report, translated into French, was in Le Corbusier's hands as early as September of 1958, only two and a half months after the Jury's sessions, that took place from June 10th to June 18th. Le Corbusier carefully studied it as his handwriting is everywhere in the document. He underlines all this paragraph, adding an admiration symbol on one side of the page.

The hypocritical character of the warning is emphasized by the fact that the president of the inaugural session was Otto Bartning one of Corbu's *allies-to-be*. It was established that there would not be a president of the Jury but a presidency constituted by three members: Van Eesteren, Hillebrecht and Bartning. Each of them would alternatively be president of the different sessions.

entry, were put under *restricted selection*, to eventually be subject to awards or honorary mentions. The decision implied that a closer consideration of the project descriptions sent by the authors and of the reports of the Experts Committee was to be conducted by the Jury. The following day the discussion of the selected projects continued and the Jury decided “*to make models, in the meeting room, of some of the projects to be inserted in the model scale 1:1000 that is placed there.*” The fifteenth of June deliberations continued, and the sixteenth, under the presidency of Prof. Hillebrecht (on page 11 of the report, Le Corbusier crosses out his name) and by *majority of votes* the Jury selected 10 projects *to be awarded* and three projects (among them Corbu’s) on a *reserve list*, “*providing that could come out, during the proceedings, that any of the projects awarded or receiving honorary mentions does not have the right to participate in the competition*”. Later on the same day the Jury voted the awards. There were one first prize, almost unanimous (the votes was 16 for, one against); two second prizes, unanimous; three third prizes, not unanimous (12 for, 6 against) and four honorary mentions *by majority of votes*. Three projects on the reserve list were registered, also *by majority of votes* following a hierarchical order, to eventually substituted any of the awarded entries. Le Corbusier’s entry was not considered as the first choice: he was classified second.

The following day, under the presidency of Van Eesteren, the Jury recommended publication of the results and stated that the competition had had “*favorable results and obtained the desired outcome.*”

On June 18th, the eighth day of sessions, the envelopes with the names of the awarded projects were opened. These were the results:

First prize: The team of Friedrich Spengelin, Fritz Eggeling and Gerd Pempelfort, from Hanover.

One of the second prizes: Egon Hartmann and Walter Nickerl, from Mainz and Gelsenkirchen.

One of the second prizes: Hans Scharoun, from Berlin-Charlottenburg.

One of the third prizes: Gerhard Kern and Rainer Rümmler, from Berlin-Spandau.

One of the third prizes: Bodo Fleischer and Herman Kreidt, from Berlin-Grunewald.

One of the third prizes: Alison and Peter Smithson, from London.

One of the honorary mentions: A team from Italy: Lisindo Baldasini, Luigi Biocchi, Marisa Conti, Sergio Conti, Luciano Grassi and Roberto Monsani.

One of the honorary mentions: A team from France: Marion Tournon-Branly, Pierre Devinoy (his name underlined by Corbu), Jean Faugeron and Bernard de la Tour d'Auvergne.

One of the honorary mentions: Wilhelm Holzbauer from Vienna.

One of the honorary mentions: Wolfgang Rasper and Horst Kolster from Berlin.

The Jury also wrote 19 commentaries on the awarded entries and on the projects of the reserve list. The report was signed by all the participants.

It is useless to remark how disappointing these results were for Corbusier. His account of the competition was published in volume 7 of his *Complete Works* in quite a laconic way. There are no details, no identification of the different buildings but for a very small sketch, no information about the competition's basic program. He prefers to let the drawings speak for themselves.

He wrote an introductory text²⁵ that shows his negative feelings. There are four issues in the text that demand our attention: one, his insistence on the *planning in three dimensions* as the controversial feature of his proposal,²⁶ and one of the reasons for his elimination. Second, his reference to CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne) *principles* as a highly positive aspect of his proposal: his project was conceived “*conforming with the principles advocated by CIAM for thirty years*” Third, his complaint about the Jury, Gropius’s absence, the probable disloyalty of his *allies*. Fourth, his allegation that the visual interference of a *certain building* was an important reason for the elimination of his entry.

Let’s make a short comment on each of them.

1) Corbu’s complaint that the awarded projects did not express a three-dimensional urbanism does not seem entirely justified. In fact, one of the documents that were required by the organizing officials was an axonometric of the inner city, a requirement that underlines their wish that the proposals should be conceived in

²⁵This is the complete introductory text written by Corbu: *Competition for the reconstruction of the center of Berlin which was destroyed by the war.*

There had been no hesitation: no need to pull down masterworks of the past in order to rebuild. The demolition had been performed by airplanes and nothing was left standing on the center of Berlin. The German government had invited Le Corbusier to participate in the competition. In Berlin Le Corbusier found himself faced with the problems which he had already studied for the center of Paris forty years earlier.

In Berlin it was not practicable to take the city on a ride into the countryside or the forests of Brandenburg. The program had been very well prepared by the authorities. The planning study was made in the Atelier at 35 Rue de Sèvres with extreme care, a total realism. The time had come to take advantage of forty years of study and experimentation in architecture and planning.

But the feat of planning in three dimensions was considered a crime. Of 86 projects, thirteen were retained; the thirteenth was that of Le Corbusier. It was eliminated. The Report of the Jury declared that the project had completely resolved the problem of circulation in large cities such as Berlin, but that a certain building, that was quite high, hid a municipal administration building located on the other bank of the Spree. Before the bombardment and the destruction this latter building was, as all of the buildings of this height, visible only from its immediately adjacent surroundings. This excellent design conforming with the principles advocated by CIAM for thirty years (1928-1958), a modern exercise in three dimensional planning, was rejected. Walter Gropius was to have been a member of the Jury and it was for this reason that Le Corbusier had agreed to participate. Walter Gropius remained in America because of his health. However, also on the Jury were Alvar Aalto, Van Eesteren and Pierre Vago! / Complete Works vol. 7, 1957-65, pages 230 to 237.

²⁶ Le Corbusier writes: *It is no use to insist on the fact that the awarded proposals did not express three-dimensional urbanism.* Complete Works, vol. 7, page 230. The English translation is misleading for it omits this phrase, placed as a lapidary conclusion in the French text.

three-dimensional terms. All the awarded entries complied quite satisfactorily with this requirement and it can be said that they fully engaged volumetric considerations to illustrate their points of view. But Corbu was right in the sense that these considerations were always made, excepting Scharoun's, in theoretical terms, using generic volumes devoid of a precise architectural content. Le Corbusier had a completely different approach, very much in line with the method he always used (and which rarely was accepted) to confront urban design: he worked with *real* architecture as an instrument to illustrate his urban ideas, his architecture. Every building he inserted in the proposal, with a few exceptions, was well known not only by him, but by any architect or town planner with a minimum knowledge of his discipline at that time.

Such a distinctive quality, paradoxically, instead of being understood for what it was, a conscious and mature way of expressing urban design concepts rooted in experience, a feature that refers to the city as a built experience in opposition to the city of norms, became a drawback by virtue of prejudices. It was judged arrogant and overemphatic. Corbusier was proposing a sort of *homage to himself*.²⁷

2) As for the CIAM *principles*, Le Corbusier seemed not to have been fully conscious that in 1958 they were no longer the decalogue of town planning. We have referred before to the wave of criticism of CIAM that had begun in the mid fifties, even before the Dubrovnik Congress in 1956. But there was more: the rigid rules of zoning, the *Civic Center* concept, the strict separation of pedestrians from

²⁷ Even today, Berlin city officials say ironically that Corbu wanted to make a *Corbusian Berlin*. We heard such a comment in an interview we had in the Berlin Planning Department in November 2005 when doing the research for this essay.

vehicles and many other *principles* had been put under critical scrutiny. Architects and town planners were looking for the *new*. CIAM was slowly becoming part of the *old*. To conform to CIAM principles was more a choice than an obligation.

3) The Jury of course was a big obstacle for Corbusier. As we have seen, its seventeen members were mostly representatives of the German or foreign bureaucracy, with only five architects (considering Van Eesteren as an architect) among them: two invited as representatives of national or international organizations (Bartning, Vago), one as a well-known town planner working in the town planning department of the municipality of Amsterdam (Van Eesteren) and only two for their outstanding mastery of the discipline (Gropius and Aalto). Gropius, as we saw, did not attend the meetings for never-confirmed *health reasons*, and was replaced by an engineer (Herbert Jensen). Aalto was then the only one with complete freedom to express his personal preferences. To what extent these preferences stood for Corbu we will never know. Le Corbusier's elimination was decided by a *majority of votes*, as were the other awards, and the report of the Jury doesn't give any clue that could reveal the individual opinions in that particular instance. We know that every member of the Jury agreed with the two second prizes for they were the only unanimous awards (Hartmann and Scharoun). As for the first prize, with only one vote against, we have some room to speculate. Aalto could have been in favor of Scharoun's entry. Its low density and especially its graceful use of diagonals and changes of direction of the different components, its geometry in sum, seem close kin to Aalto's architectural *grammar*. As for Hartmann, his project tried to keep architecture adjusted to a low and quiet profile, spreading the built requirements all over the territory to reduce the impact

of individual architecture. But it is difficult to assume that Aalto could have been sympathetic to the rigid academic monumentality of Spengelin's proposal. Hence, following the line of speculation, that single vote against could have been Aalto's. But we will never know the individual position of each of Corbu's *friends* regarding his elimination.

4) And last, there is the issue of a *certain building*, wrongly placed, as the reason for the elimination of Corbu's proposal.

That building was one of his Cartesian Skyscrapers that were grouped following a sinuous trajectory on the eastern side of the inner city. After the negative comments of the Jury regarding the Ministries skyscraper, the text reads²⁸ : “A group of five buildings, also 60 stories high (one of them outside the territory of the competition), is proposed by the author near the eastern limits of the territory. The jury thinks that these giant buildings, particularly because of their north-south orientation, cut off the eastern parts of the city as well as the parts of the old city east of the Spree that harbor the Municipal Administration, too much from the core, and diminish the harmony of the old city with its historic buildings as well as those at the Lustgarten. The Jury can not accept such a proposal.”

As we said above, the territory of the competition covered East and West Berlin (see ill. 1 and 2). It embraced North (East Berlin) and South Friedrichstadt²⁹ (West

²⁸ Report of the Jury, page 23 of the French translation, Le Corbusier Foundation, document 12-10-114. Our translation.

²⁹South Friedrichstadt-Kreuzberg happens to be one of the sectors covered by IBA, the International Building Exhibition (Internationale Bauausstellung) promoted by Berlin's Senate and the Federal German Government between 1979 and 1987, where architects from Europe and the United States were commissioned to make projects for housing and mixed-use developments together with a heterogeneous group of German architects. In South Friedrichstadt there are buildings by Rossi, Eisenmann, Hertzberger, Bohigas, Krier, Hedjuk, Brenner, Valentini, Grassi, Nielebock, Kollhof, Schultes, Kleihues, Ungers, and many others. In terms of urban design and architecture IBA 87 was under the direction of Hardt-Waltherr Hämmerl and Josef Kleihues. The term *Critical Reconstruction* was coined by Kleihues for IBA and since then it has become a sort of ideological

Berlin), from Mehring Platz in the south, to Oranienburgerstrasse and a projected freeway (in 1958) on the north bank of Spree River. From east to west it extended from the railroad tracks south of Alexanderplatz and Karl-Marx-Allée in East Berlin to the Tiergarten in West Berlin.

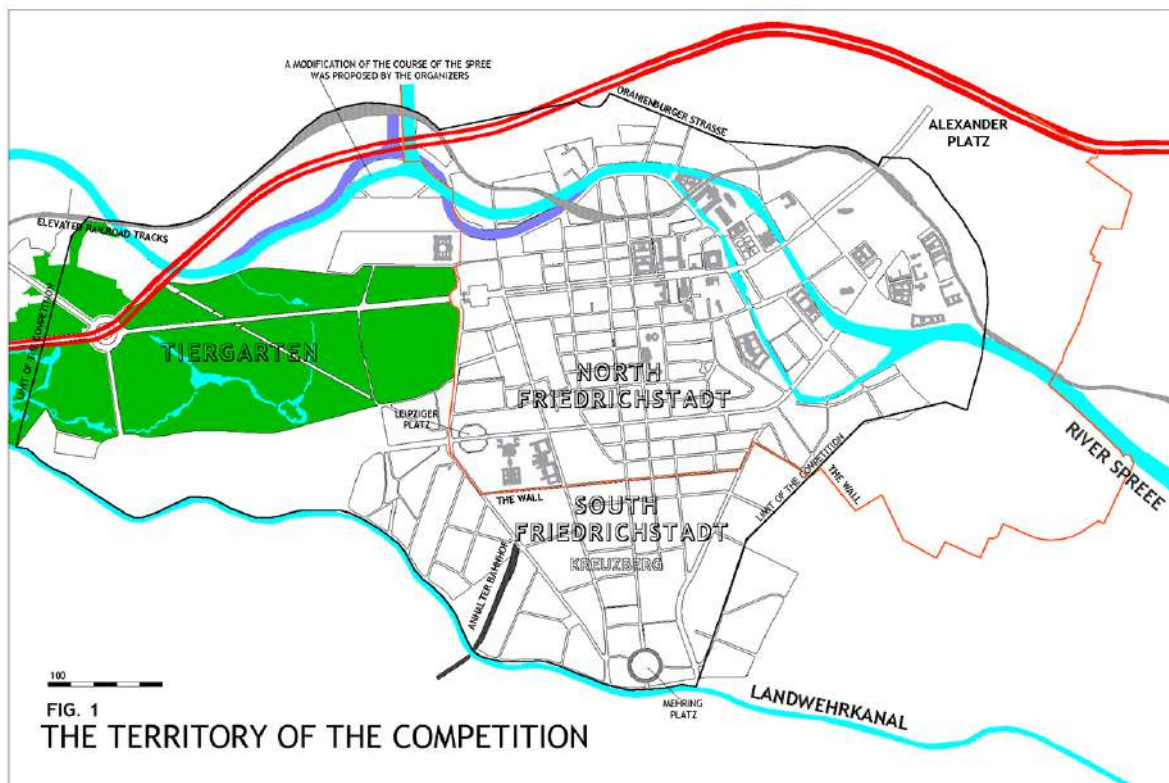


Fig. 1. A deviation of the course of the River Spree was foreseen by the organizers of the competition, right on the Spreebogen, adjacent to the Reichstag.

banner, not devoid of populist content, for the post-reunification reconstruction of Berlin. The fact that IBA took place before the fall of the Wall reveals the demands regarding its different building operations (South Friedrichstadt), somewhat in contradiction to the present demands for North Friedrichstadt (both sides of Friedrichstrasse north of Checkpoint Charlie, the frontier between West and East Berlin). Understandable as it could be, the IBA proceedings seemed to lack a comprehensive vision regarding Central Berlin.

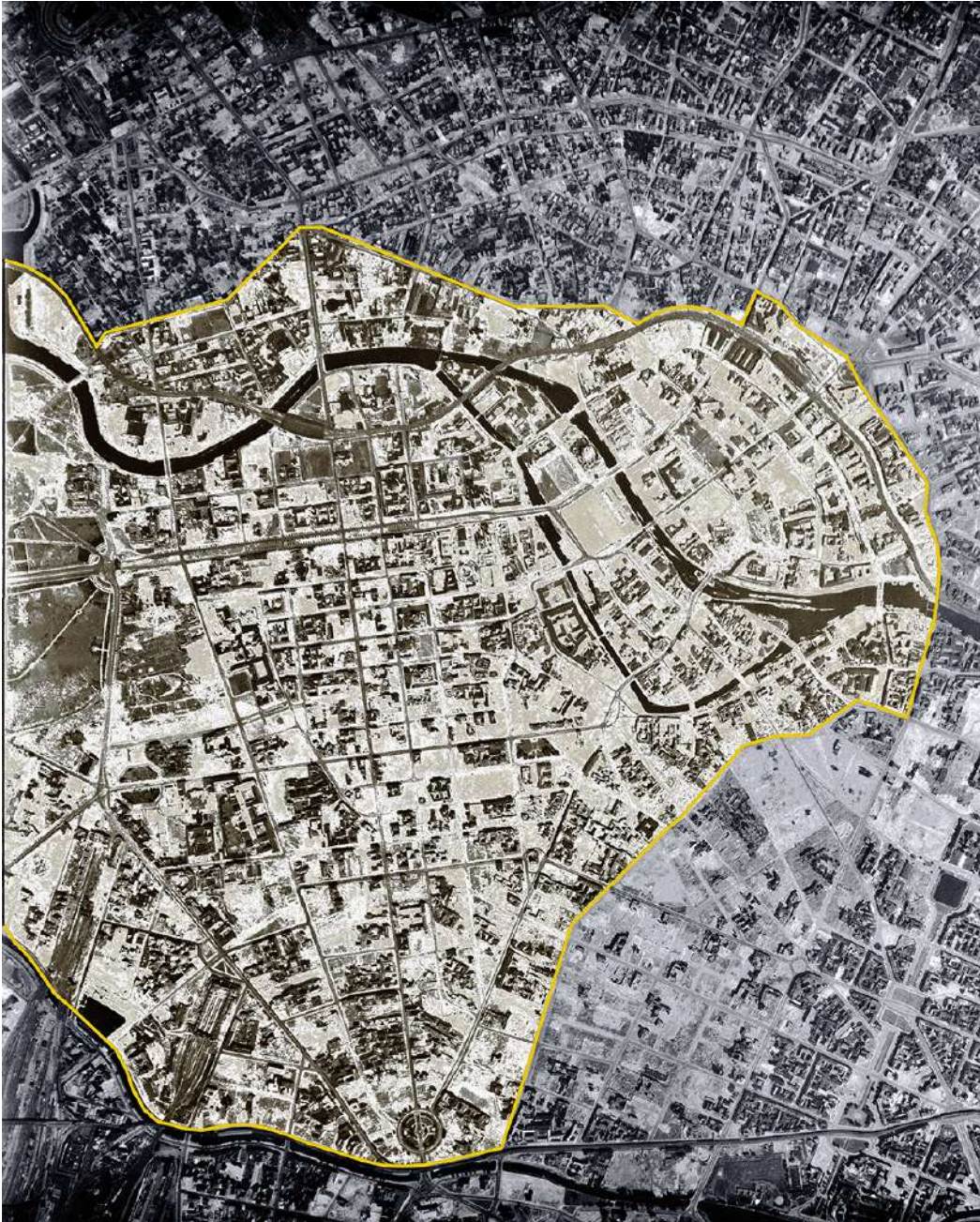


Fig 2. Aerial photograph taken in 1953 showing the limits of the competition. The center of Berlin was almost completely destroyed by bombings



Fig. 2a. The southern part of the territory of the competition, with the diagonals of Wilhelmstrasse and Lindenstrasse converging into Mehringplatz. To the left, Anhalter Bahnhof, the train station that was to feed the sector (dismantled today).

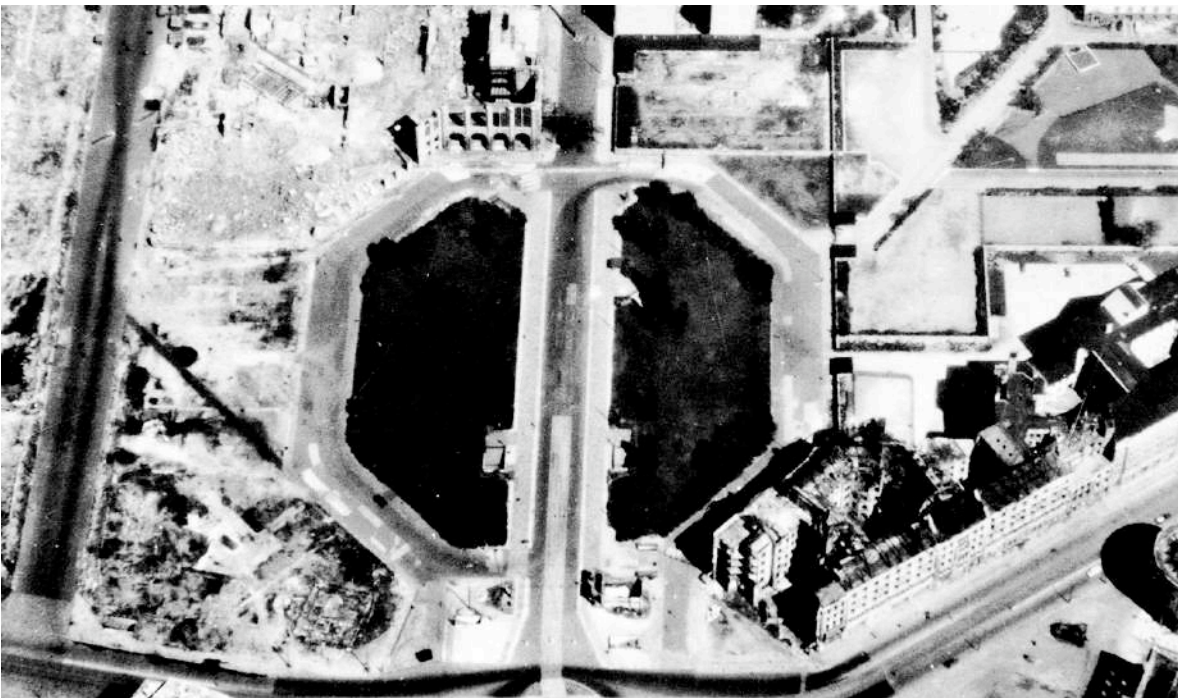
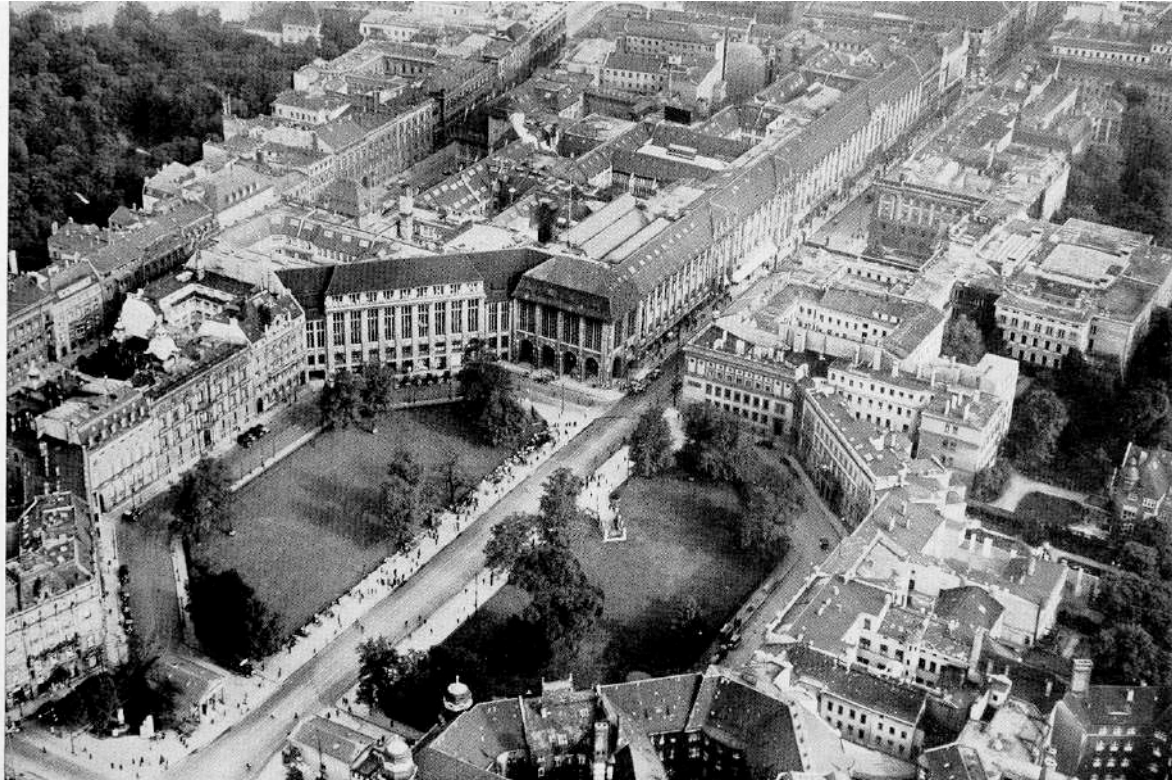


Fig. 2b. Leipzigerplatz at the time of the competition.



Leipzigerplatz in 1939.



Fig. 2d. The Reichstag with Bismarck monument in the Platz der Republik.

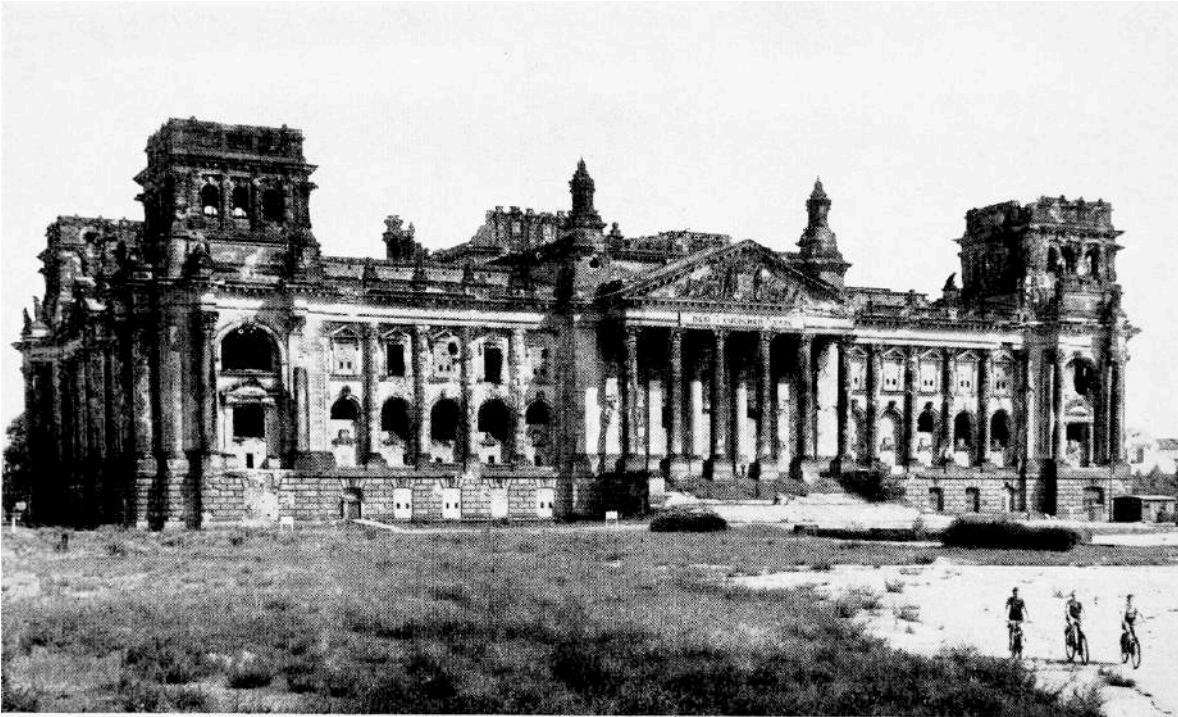


Fig. 2e. The Reichstag in 1955.



Fig.2f. The Dom, and Schinkel's Altes Museum in the background, in 1951.



Fig. 2g. Unter den Linden in 1939: Bebelplatz with St. Hedwig's church, the Staatsoper and the Ehemalige Bibliothek. On this side of the avenue, the Humboldt Universität and, to the right, the Staatsbibliothek, to the left, the Zeughaus (today the Museum of History). Schinkel's Friedrichswerdersche church can be seen to the upper left of the Staatsoper.

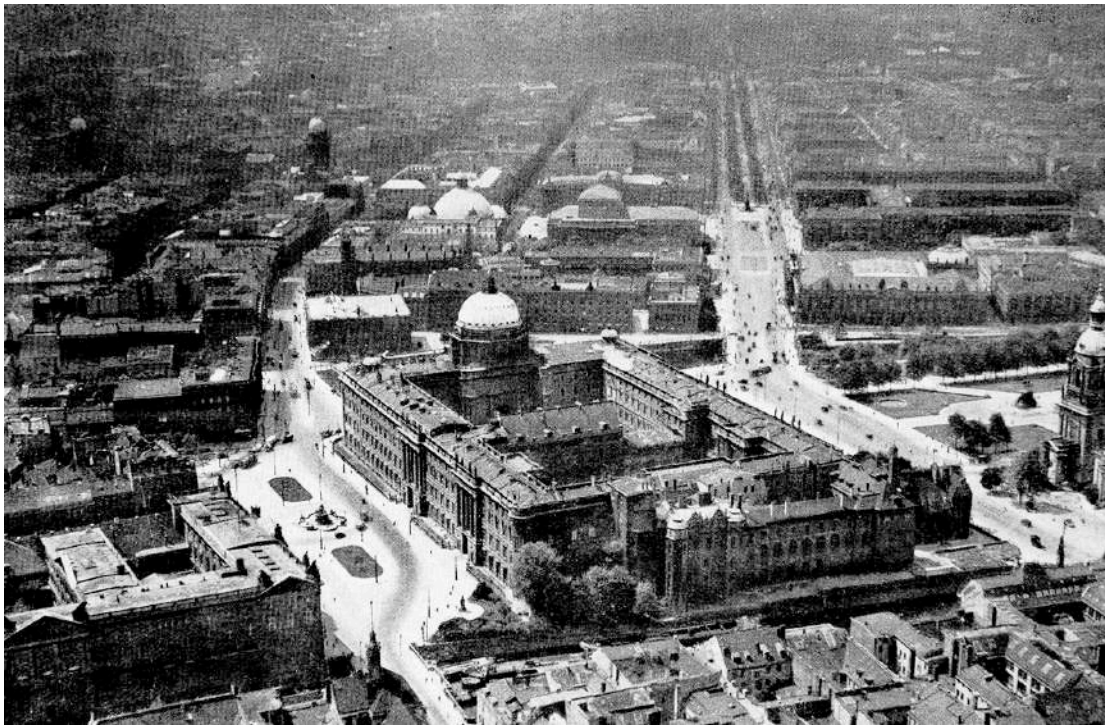


Fig. 2h. The Hohenzollerns' palace (die Stadtschloss), the palace of Prussian emperors at the east end of Unter den Linden. Demolished by GDR authorities in 1950.

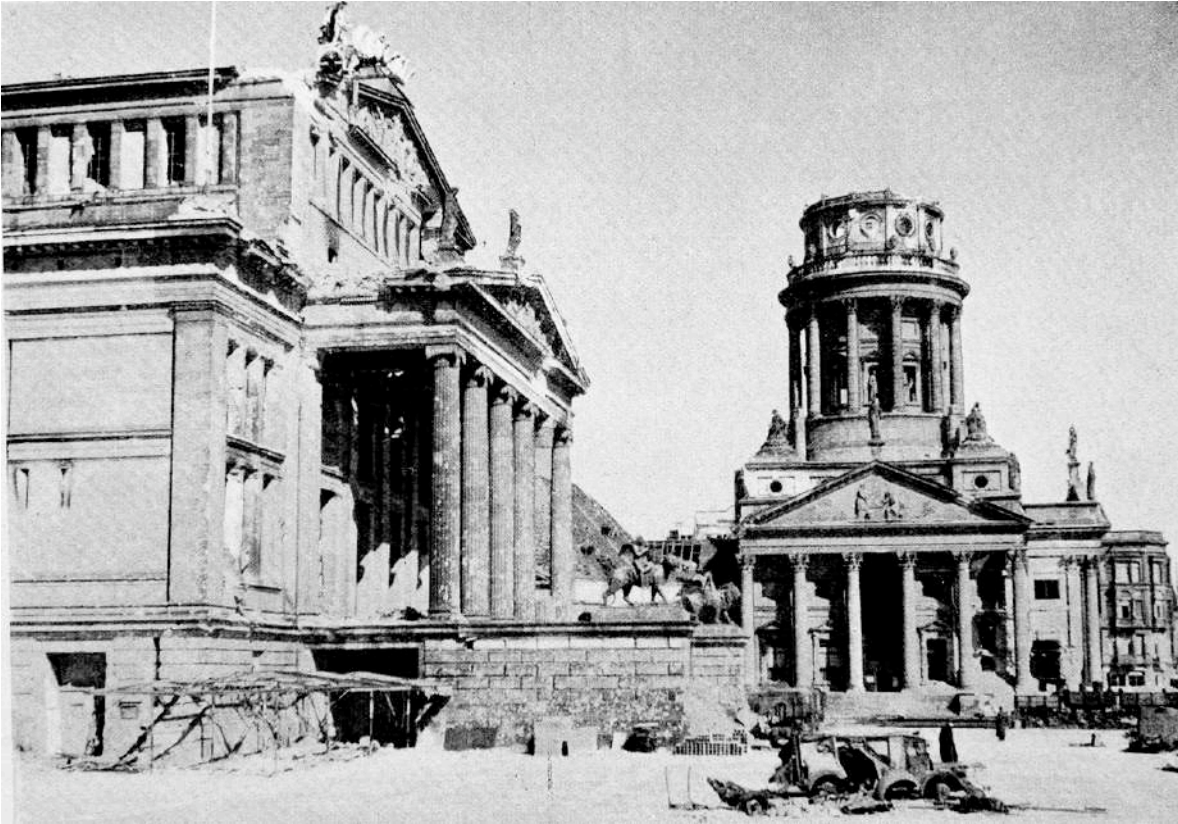


Fig. 2i. Gendarmenmarkt in 1946.



Fig. 2j. The seat of the Municipal Council (Rathaus) before the war.



Fig. 2k Marienkirche in 1920.

The program for the competition established very precise demands in terms of built areas for the different functions, mainly for public administration of a *reunified Germany*,³⁰ but also for private corporative headquarters, banking, insurance, private office space, theaters, churches, commerce etc.

Housing was not included within the limits of the competition territory and, during the questions stage, all the suggestions proposing the inclusion of housing were dismissed.

There was as well a list of buildings (historical or traditional) to be preserved, These buildings (fig. 3) were called Fixed Points by the Organizing Committee, and they were classified as mandatory (had to be preserved) and optional (their preservation was desirable but could be demolished with the condition that a lot of the same importance should be assigned to the institution). There were 88 Fixed Points. Profiles of the most important monuments were given to the participants.

In the end, it can be said that the expectations of the organizers were much in line with the conception of city centers at that time: a highly concentrated nucleus of

³⁰ The reunification is mentioned here and there in the program. This makes clear the political intention behind the competition.

This was the basic program (Le Corbusier Foundation, document 12-10-29):

The Parliament, the Länder Chamber, the Constitutional Court, the Chancellery, the Ministries (a total of 300,000 square meters of built area), Embassies of Foreign Countries (150,000 m2 of land that had to be provided in the vicinity of Tiergarten), Representation of the Länder (40,000 m2 of land, also near Tiergarten), Offices for Political Parties, Administration of the City (115,000 m2 of new built area), Police Headquarters (90,000 m2.), Universities, Libraries (90,000 m2), New Museums and a Technical Center (100,000 m2), a Main Art Exhibition Hall and two others of less importance (30,000 m2), a new Theater (1,800 seats) a Concert Hall (1,200 seats), two Music Halls of 2,000 or 3,000 seats each, and a number of smaller public institutions for Tourism, Youth, Press etc. Churches were to be mostly reconstructed, but an Episcopal Church, a Protestant and a Catholic Administration building had to be provided. A very important amount of Office built area (4 million square meters) for the Economy sector (private enterprises) and banking, insurance and big enterprises required. There had to be retail and gross commerce as well, and 10,000 hotel beds in the vicinity of the Economy (offices) sector. Finally, there were the Judiciary Courts (135,000 m2), the Postal Services (45,000 m2) and a number of smaller items.

political and cultural institutions, private and public office space, commerce and leisure, excluding housing.

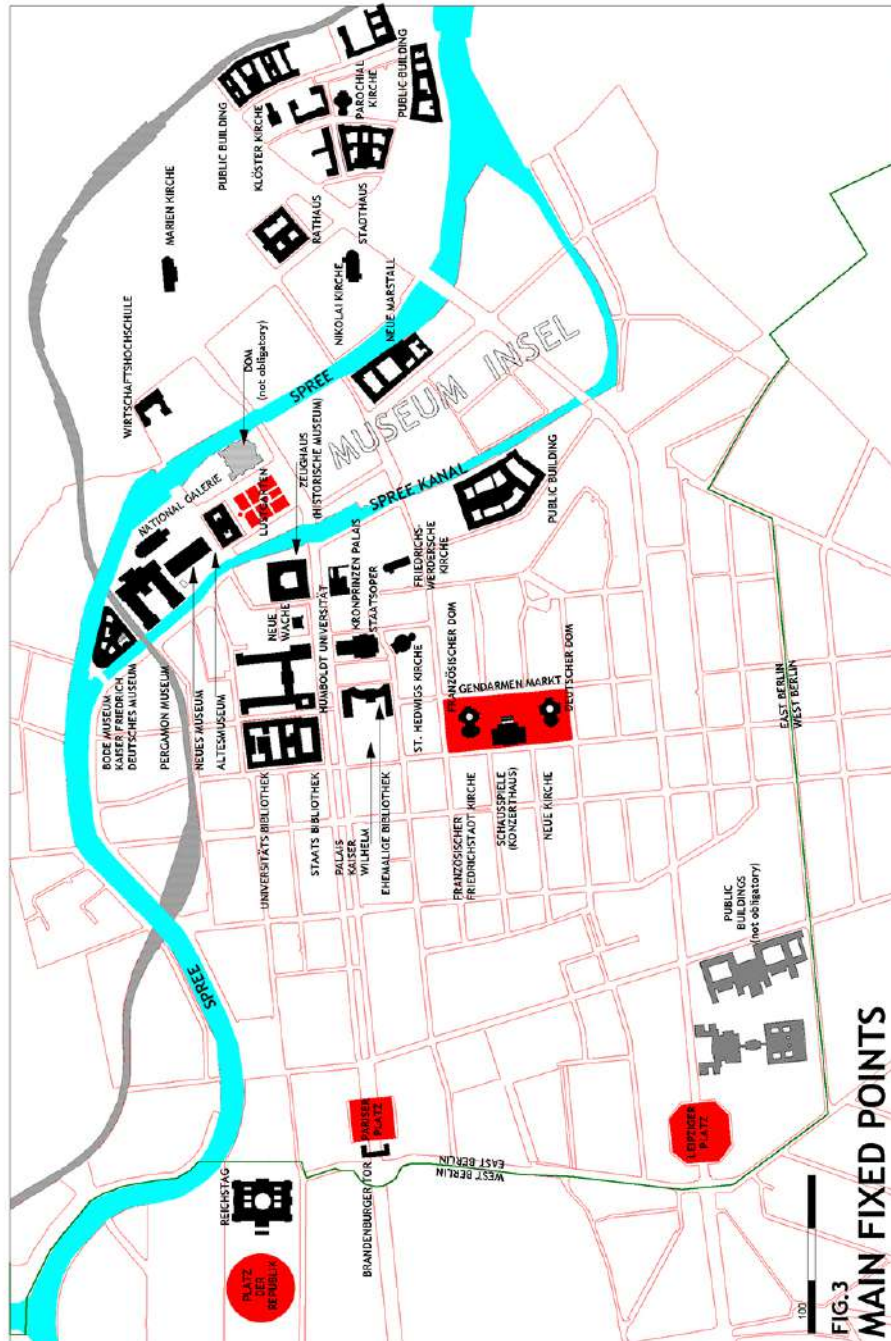


Fig. 3. There is one Fixed Point not included in this scheme: the Congress Hall (today the House of World Cultures), facing the Reichstag, five hundred meters to the west, built by the U.S. following the project of Hugh Stubbins. It was opened in 1957 a few months before the competition.

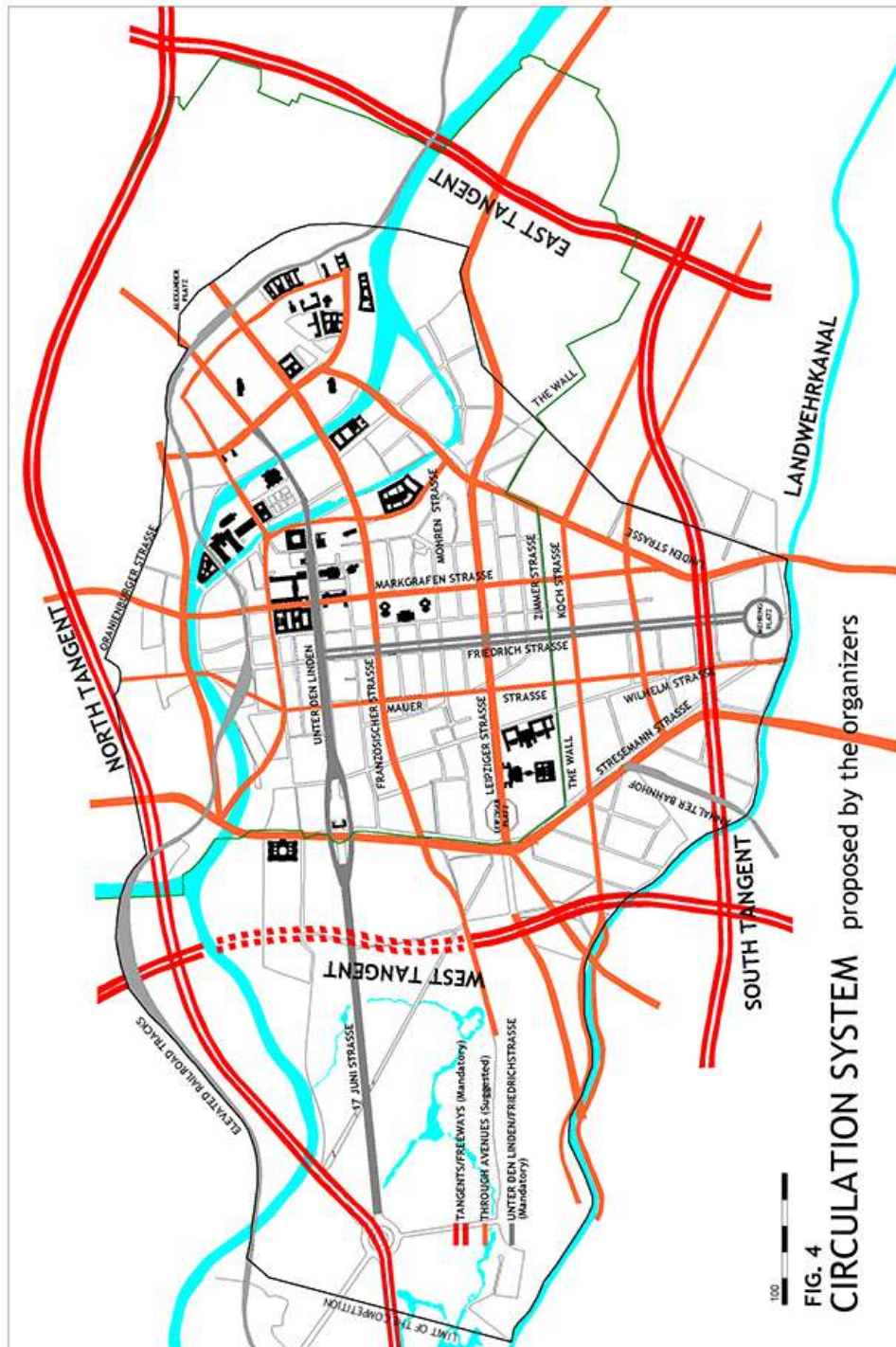




Fig. 6. Corbu basically followed the old grid, eliminating the internal diagonals (Wilhelmstrasse and Lindenstrasse). Architecture gives a three-dimensional expression to the grid.



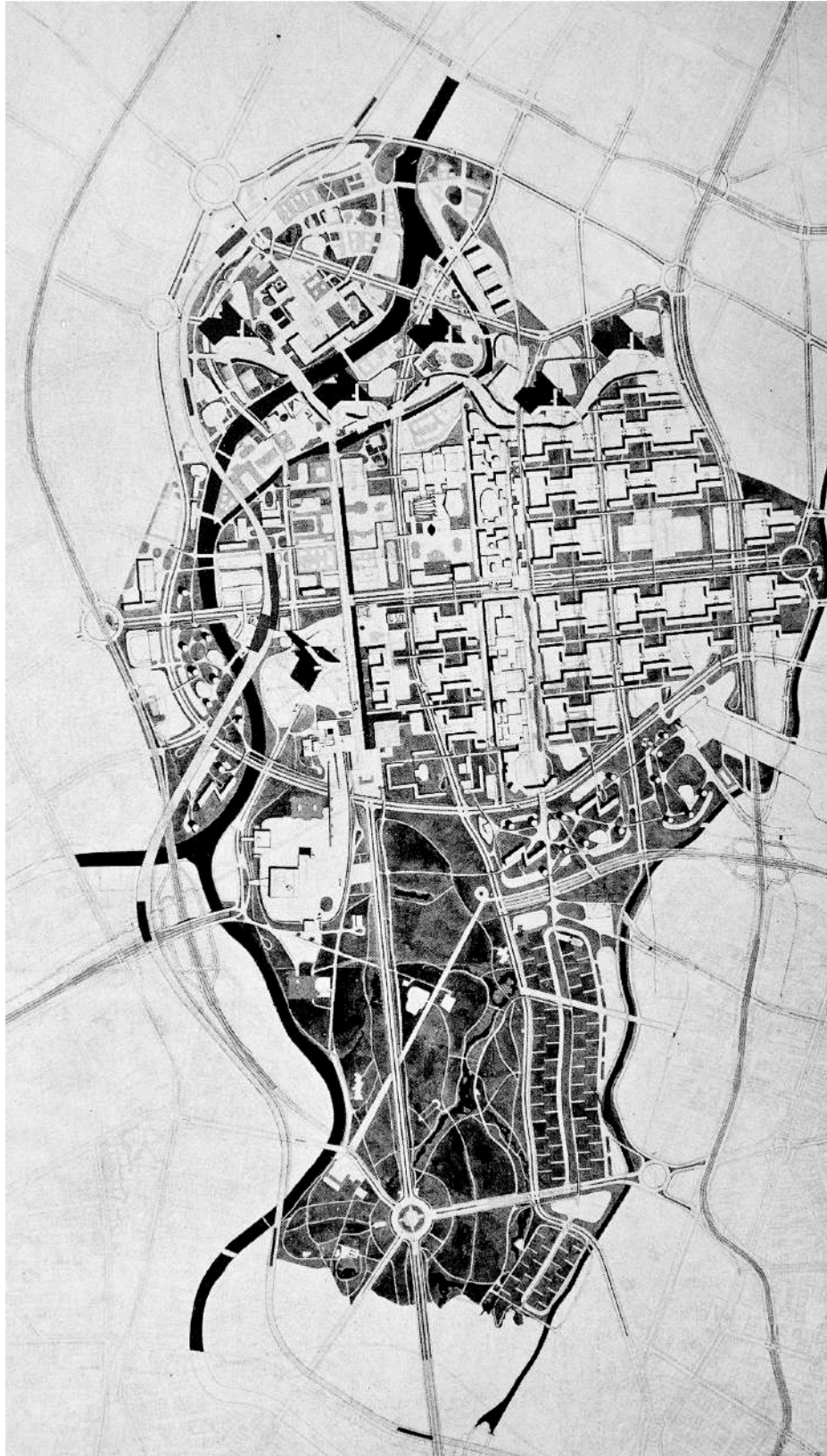
Automotive circulation was determined on the periphery of the territory of the competition by four main freeways (north, south, east and west) called *tangents* (fig. 4). Only the west and the south tangents could accept some modifications, one of them regarding the length of the tunnel under Tiergarten (west tangent). In addition there were two avenues that had to be preserved with the necessary modifications: Unter den Linden Avenue (west-east) and its feeding street, the Strasse des 17 Juni, and Friedrichstrasse (north-south), particularly the sector between Unter den Linden and Mehring Platz in the south. All other streets could be modified.

Finally, a number of particulars regarding railroads and subway networks were given as mandatory.

THE PROPOSAL

The first images of this chapter are the original plans of Le Corbusier's entry for the competition. They are the same that Corbu included in volume 7 of his *Complete Works*, and will allow the reader to have a basic understanding of the project. The captions were kept without changes. After the plans, we are including a set of sketches that summarize the conditions of the competition as well as some of the concepts Corbu dealt with. We have also included a number of photographs that were part of the documents the organizers gave to the participants. Some of these photographs show the destruction of the city; others are from the prewar period. We also made a full three-dimensional reconstruction of the proposal, knowing how difficult it can be to have a complete appreciation of a large-scale urban project without being familiar with the physical context or its basic details. We thought the reconstruction could help to make the project better understood, becoming as well an extremely useful instrument, possible today thanks to CAD techniques, that allow a more accurate assessment of the relation between the particular qualities of architecture and those of public space, a key element of Le Corbusier's approach. Such a reconstruction was an enlightening experience that made us discover many aspects of the project that positively changed some of our early assumptions. It followed Le Corbusier's provisions as expressed in the plans; notwithstanding, we added in different spots other elements (from his own projects) as well as architectural speculations that partially try to emulate the natural development of a city throughout the years. We apologize for some inaccuracies that became evident for us after having the opportunity to study in a more precise way the original documents.

The author of the three-dimensional CAD reconstruction is Augusto Terán, Venezuelan architect who completed his studies in the School of Architecture of San Cristóbal (UNET), 450 miles to the southwest of Caracas, in 1993. He has been my collaborator for recent commissions, but in this particular case he decided to help basically for the sake of the experience. And he did a superb job with fulltime dedication and personal contributions without which the whole idea could never have been possible. He deserves all the merit for the images that illustrate Le Corbusier's ideas for Berlin.



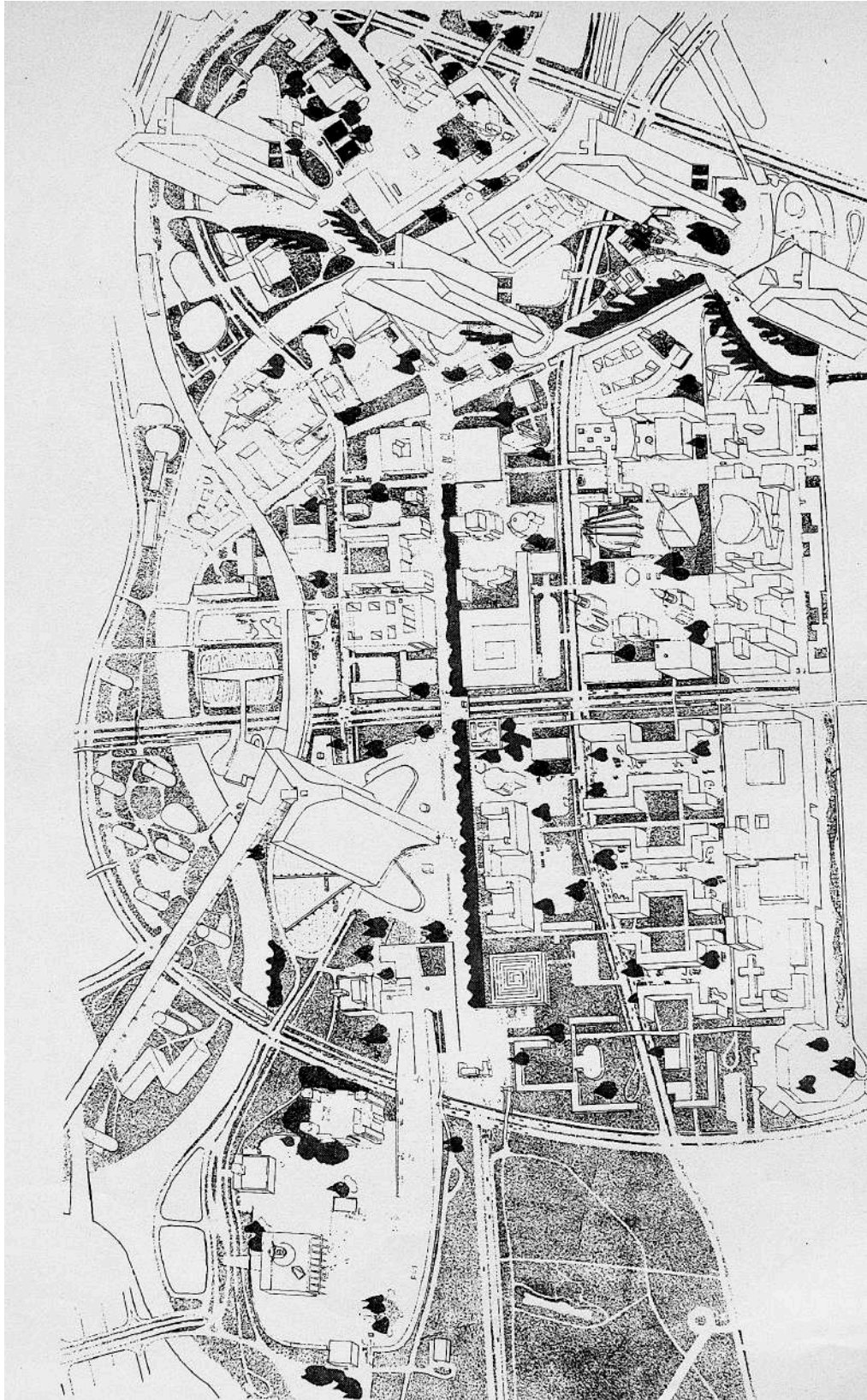
A1 General site plan of Le Corbusier's project.



A2 Site plan.



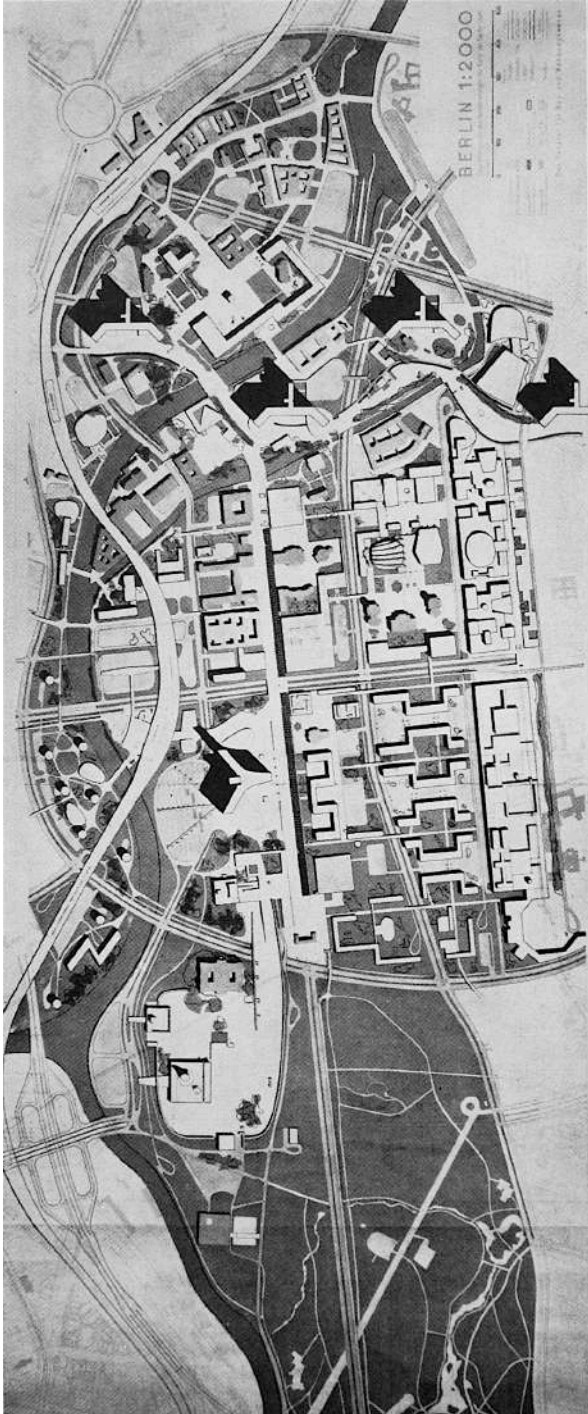
A3 Site Plan. Orange: internal traffic; red: transit; violet: urban railroad and railroad tracks.



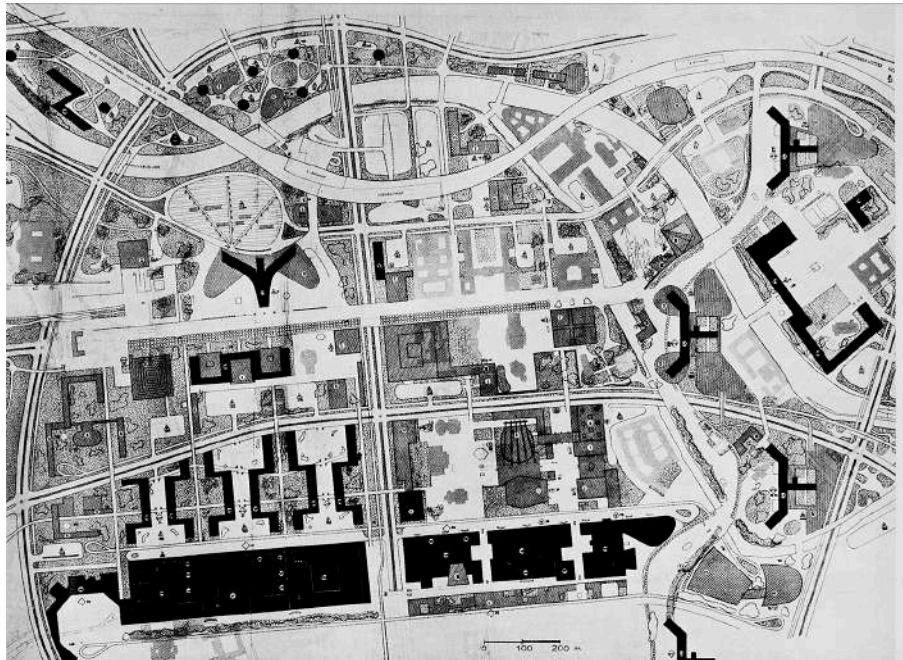
A4 Isometric view.

¿The Crime?

Le Corbusier had provided in his plan that the Avenue "Unter den Linden" be reserved exclusively for pedestrians (shown in white on A3). Automobile traffic was channeled across at intervals by means of elevated highways leading down to parking places tight in front of the buildings –multilevel parking (shown in pink on the plan). The Avenue "Unter den Linden" would have become the grand promenade, modern this time. In previous times it had been the avenue for walkers (before the automobile). But the Jury decreed that the linden be covered by automobiles as in all the rest of the world.



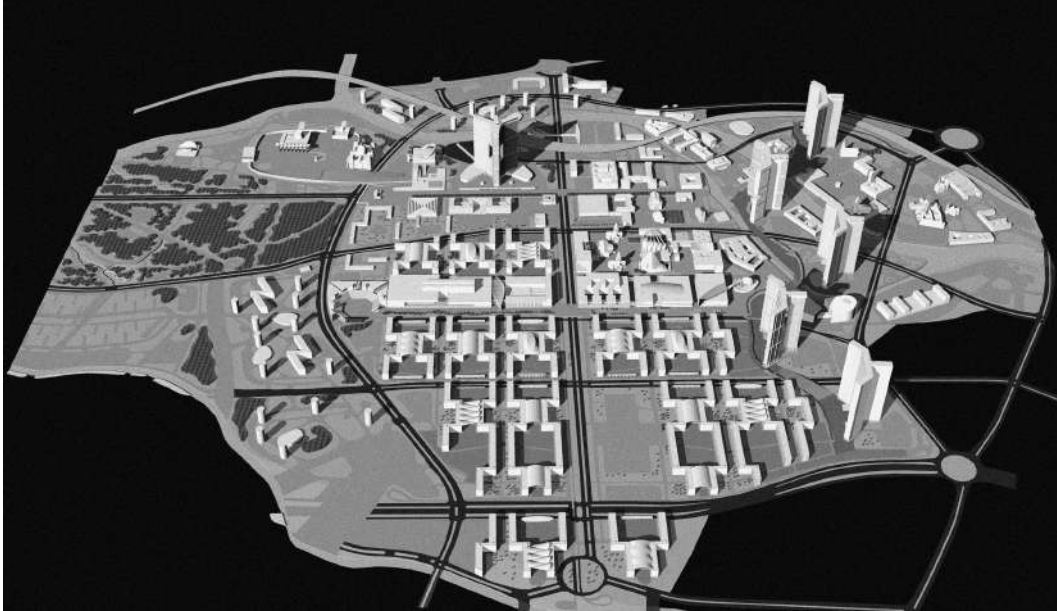
A5 General Site Plan.



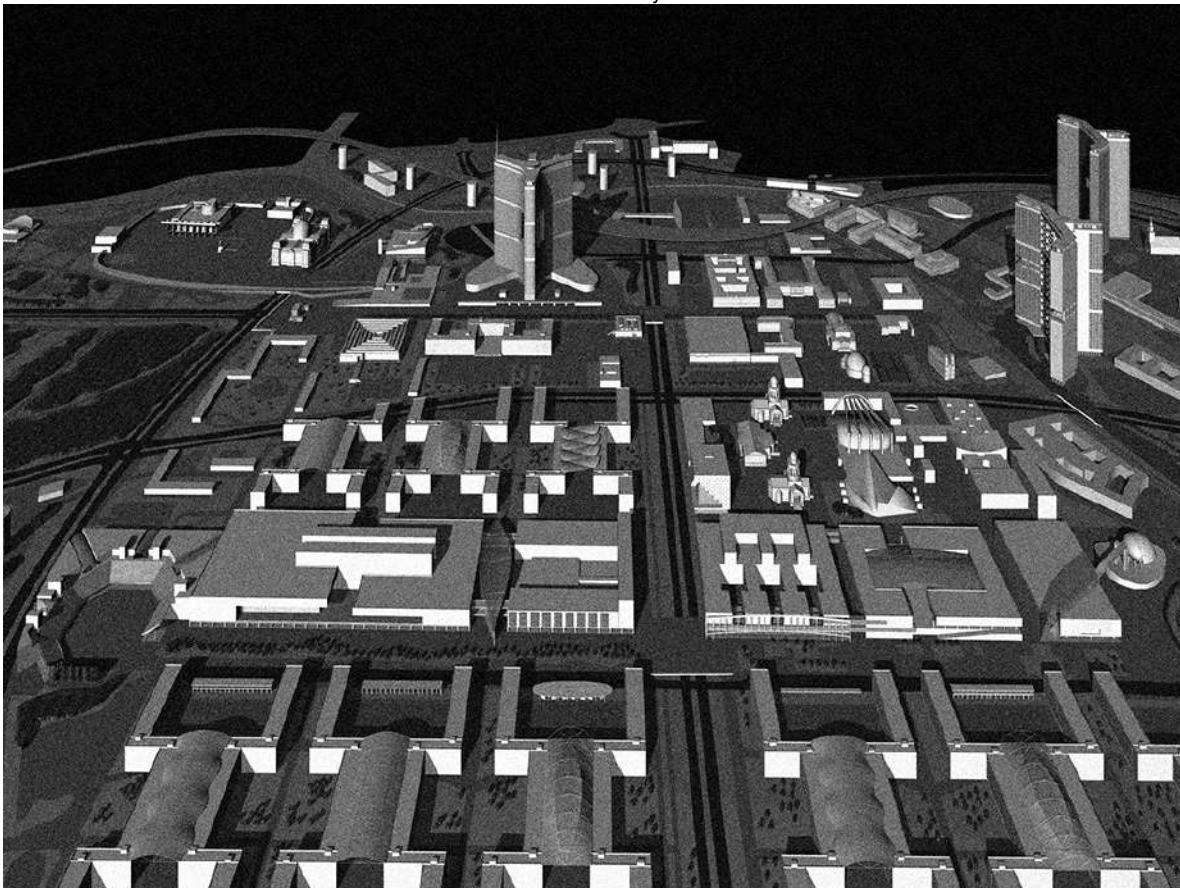
A6. Plan of administration center.



A7. Le Corbusier had previously lived for nearly a year in Berlin and thoroughly knew the center of the city. His plan therefore was made in full knowledge of what was involved



A8 and A8a. Our three-dimensional reconstructions. As it is obvious that in any large-scale urban proposal the intervention of many different architects throughout the years is to be expected, we decided to play in different spots with fictional architectural *imagery*. We kept of course the same *types* Corbu had used, although we added some LC after 1958, as with the Chancellery.



Le Corbusier rigorously kept up with the most important requirements of the program. He was particularly careful about the preservation of the Fixed Points and the provision of the required built area for the different functions. Beyond that conservative approach he took full advantage of the opportunity the competition gave him to illustrate the continuity as well as the transformation³¹ of his very basic ideas about city form. Through his urban images he was trying to restate his lifelong preoccupations.

The introductory statement of the text published in his Complete Works Volume 7 (see footnote 25) leaves clear that Le Corbusier acted with complete freedom in terms of preexisting Berlin. He makes no reference to any particular value he would like to restore from the city he lived in during his early twenties, although he insists on his knowledge of the center of the city.³² Nevertheless, he tried to adjust to the old Berlin east-west street grid (fig. 5). His basic strategy was to keep automotive circulation every two (or three) streets in the east-west direction, keeping the intermediate one(s) for pedestrians, one of them with a zigzag trajectory, the other rectilinear. In that way he had automotive crossings every 200 to 250 meters, and even more to the south, in the vicinity of Mehringplatz. The two main through roads that cut across the center in east-west direction, follow

³¹ The capacity Le Corbusier had to overcome his previous ideas, to transform them under the light of experience was manifest all through his life. He never stood in the same spot in intellectual terms. He left the *international style* when his followers stood for it. It has been remarked that the Errazuris house in 1930 and the Mme. de Mandrot House in 1930-31 show the beginnings of a departure from the *rationalist* language. Both projects were made before the International Style Exhibition in the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1932 promoted by Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock. That exhibition was like the worldly consecration of rationalist *white* architecture, right when LC was abandoning it. For some authors (F Marzá y E Roca / Le Corbusier i Barcelona, Fundació Caixa de Catalunya, Sept. 1988, page 97), Corbu's departure from rationalism had to do with his visit to Barcelona in 1928 and his contact with Antoni Gaudí's architecture.

³² He writes: "Le Corbusier had previously lived for nearly a year in Berlin and *thoroughly knew the center of the city*. His plan therefore was made in full knowledge of what was involved." Complete Works, vol.7, page 237.

approximately the old grid, two of them connecting East and West Berlin: one along Französischestrasse, the other along Kochstrasse, both trajectories partially modified. Doing so, he reduced considerably the impact of the system of arterial through roads proposed by the organizers, five in total including Unter den Linden and Leipzigerstrasse, two important streets that he transformed into pedestrian boulevards. For the north-south direction, he adjusted his scheme of local service streets to the old grid in the vicinity of Friedrichstrasse, while eliminating the old diagonal streets further west or east (Wilhelmstrasse and Lindenstrasse) that converged in Mehringplatz, with the evident intention of amplifying the Cartesian chessboard order. As parking facilities are kept in the interior of the blocks serving the pedestrian areas, the meander-like *redent*³³ buildings provide a volume for such a two dimensional structure. The result can be read as an increase of the basic old Berlin grid in two as well as in three dimensions (fig. 6). Architecture grows out of the bi-dimensional structure. Every decision at ground level takes its form in the built realm. This is another aspect of his idea of *three-dimensional urbanism*.

This is not always the case in the awarded proposals. In the first prize (Spengelin) the grid, although present as a pattern, gradually vanishes toward East and West borders and completely loses its volume when reaching Leipzigerstrasse to the point that Leipzigerplatz completely disappears (fig. 7). The grid gains some

³³ For those not familiar with Le Corbusier's vocabulary: The *Redents* (*indented*, in English) belong to the library of types Le Corbusier created to summarize the architectural scale sequences in city planning. They are eight or nine story high buildings with a polygonal meander-like footprint meant for housing or offices depending on the problem posed. They first appeared in his proposal for the *Ville de Trois Millions...* in 1922 together with the *perimeter block* and the first version of the *Cartesian Skyscraper*. In 1930 he developed it for the *Ville Radieuse* proposal, and was used for many other urban schemes afterwards. The meander-like condition is an obvious result of Corbusier's doctrinal rejection of the *rue corridor*, the traditional street that serves buildings grouped as an urban wall on both of its sides.

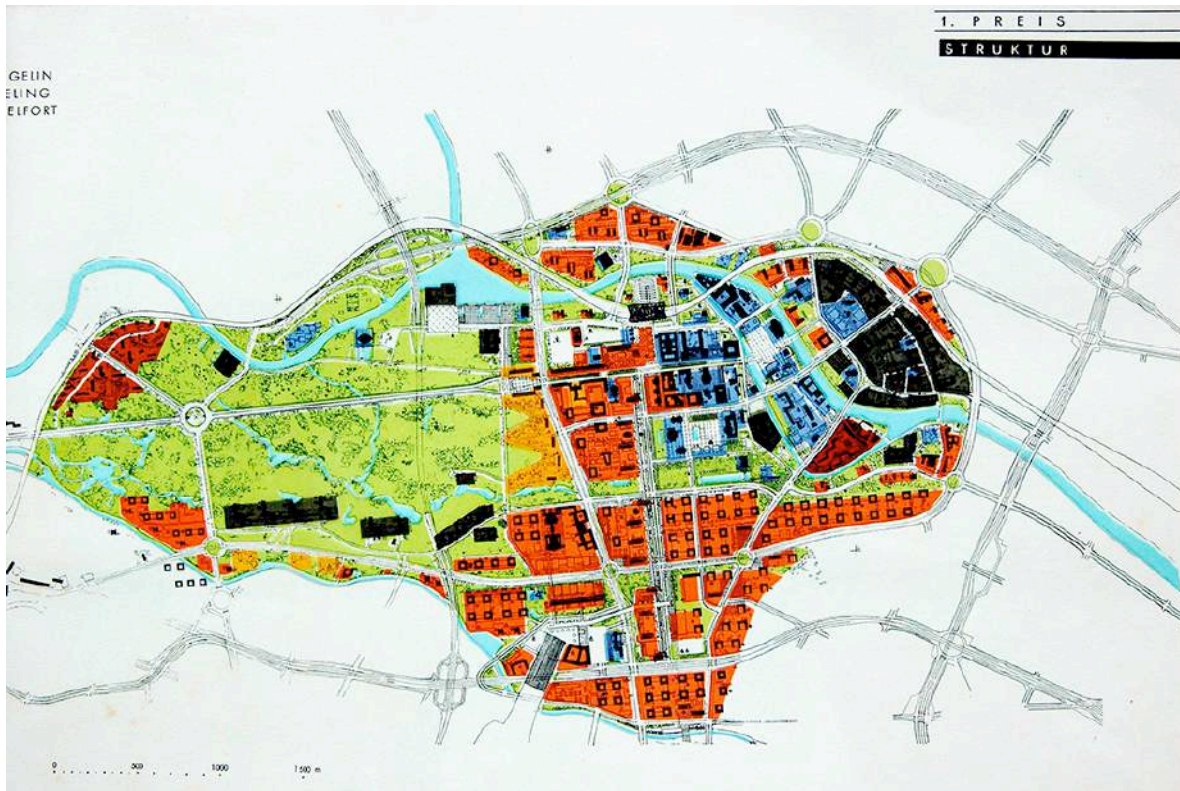


Fig. 7 First prize: the project of Spengelin, Eggeling and Pempelfort. The Berlin grid disappears north of Leipzigerstrasse

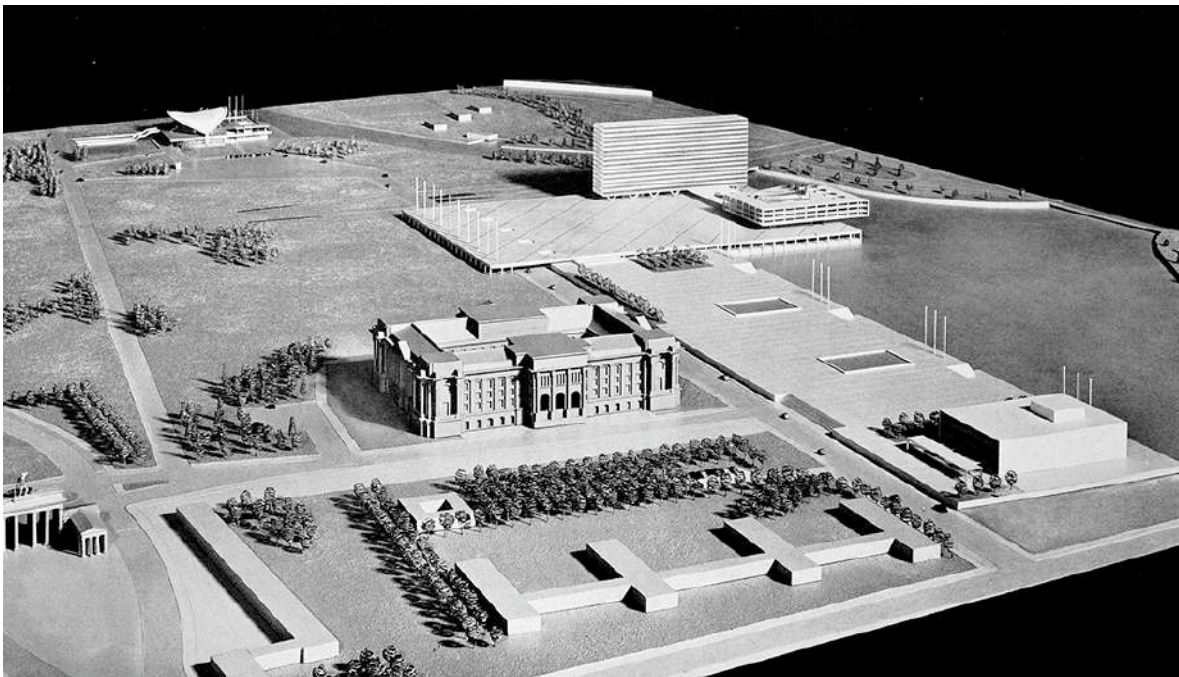


Fig. 7a First prize: the Government Center stands on a platform on the edge of an artificial pool of the Spree, practically ignoring the Reichstag, whose main façade faces an anonymous lawn adjacent to the Tiergarten, partially occupied by the Platz der Republik in old times. This solution triggers associations with the present situation of this sector.

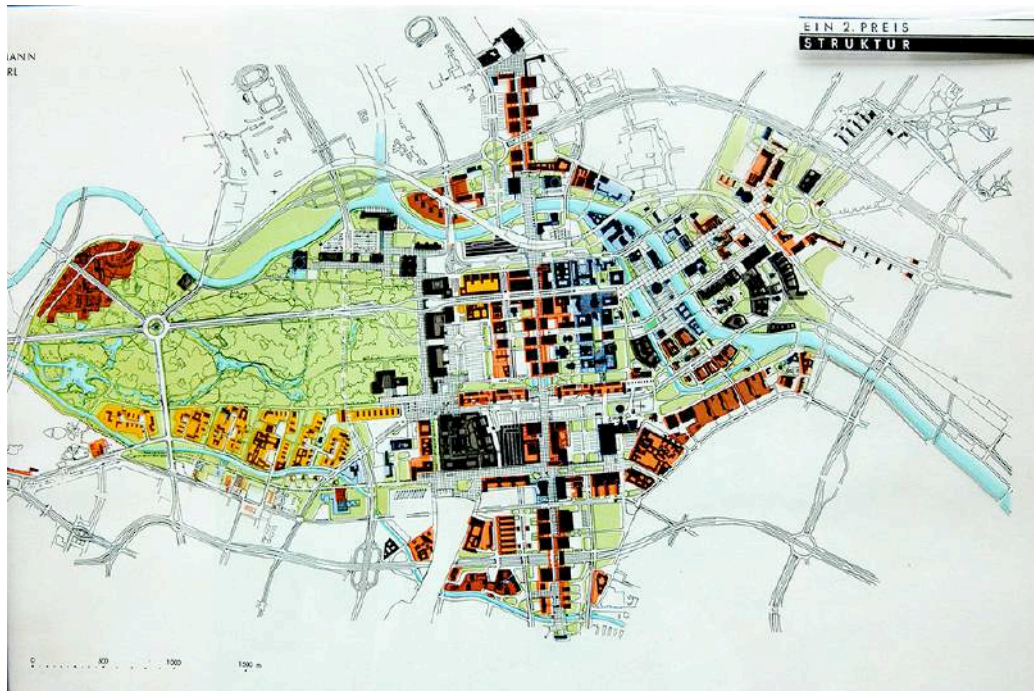


Fig. 8 One of the second prizes: the project of Hartmann and Nickerl. Again the linear development near the Reichstag whose back façade pays homage to a traffic distributor. Leipzigerplatz loses its octagonal shape in favor of an indeterminate polygonal form, two of its corners opened to parkings. It is difficult to discern which is the discipline behind the scheme.



Fig. 9 One of the second prizes: the project of Hans Scharoun. The Tiergarten flows freely to the east, thanks to a network of highway tunnels more than six miles long! Not only does the Berlin grid disappear, there is no grid at all. He creates a Civic Center featuring a paved square that takes all the space (500 meters) between the Reichstag and the Congress Hall. The south bank of the Spree is changed at two points. Along Leipzigerstrasse, he proposes what he calls a *hill*, a compact compound meant to harbor economic activities.



Fig. 10 One of the third prizes: the project of Alison and Peter Smithson with Sigmund Wonke. A network of pedestrian platforms crisscrosses the entire city center, overpassing streets and public space. The Reichstag is a big building, until compared to the pedestrian platform next to it!

weight, timidly, in South Friedrichstadt. In Hartmann's scheme (second prize) the grid is better read in plan (fig. 8), but much less in volume by virtue of decisions like the arbitrary distribution of parking lots here and there disrupting the continuity of urban facades. And, again, goodbye Leipzigerplatz!

In Scharoun's proposal (one of the second Prizes), the whole grid (fig. 9) is erased and replaced with large green areas interrupted by built compounds with *organic* geometries and isolated groups of tall buildings. Friedrichstrasse vanishes underground. Not to mention Alison and Peter Smithson's entry (second third Prize) where an enormous system of pedestrian platforms (fig. 10) combined with south-north streets give a sense of a Flash Gordon like-city imposed into the remains of old Berlin

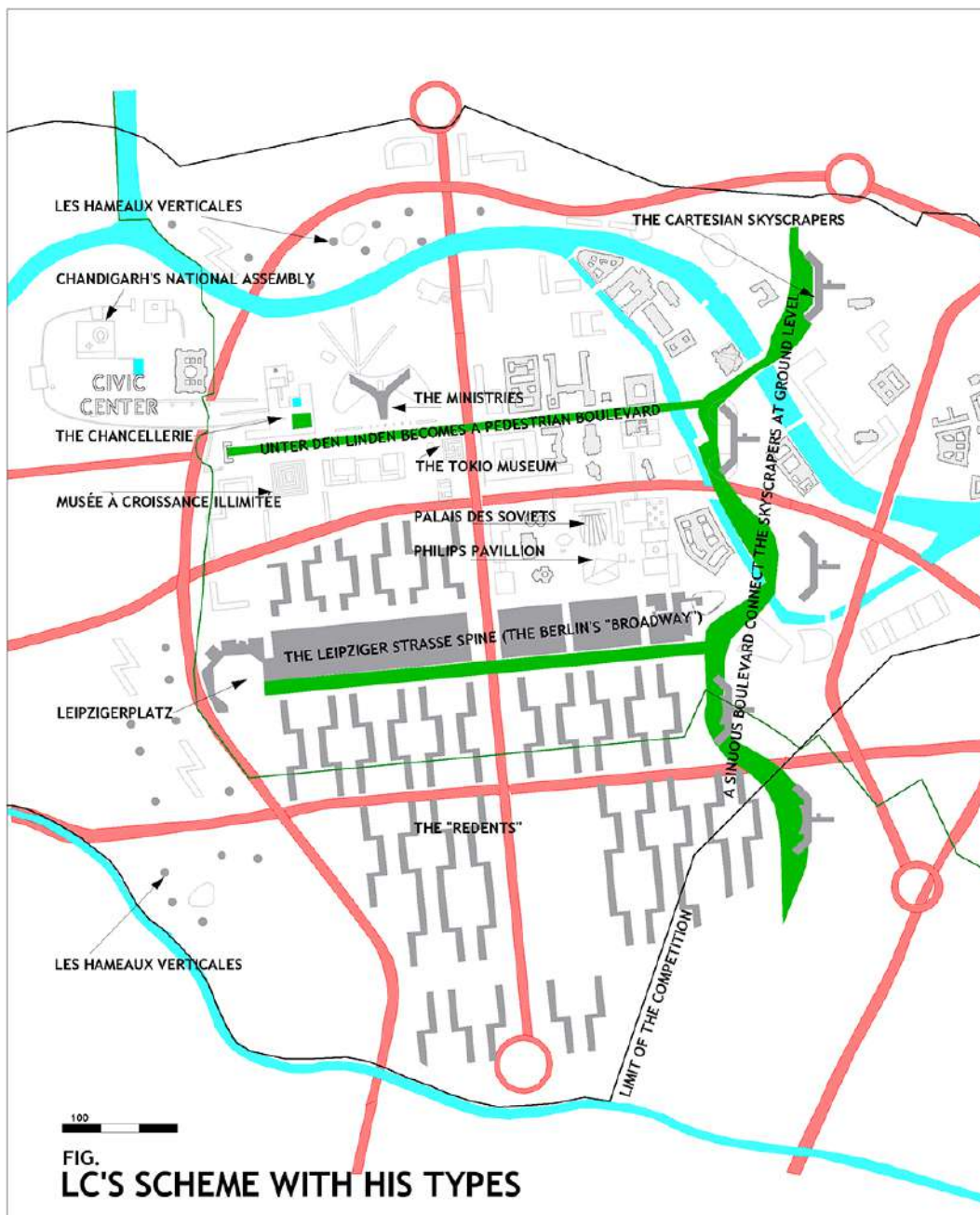


Fig. 11 A synthesis of Corbu's proposal:

- Four west-east thoroughfares: two for pedestrians (Unter den Linden, Leipzigerstrasse), two for vehicles (Französischerstrasse and Kochstrasse).
- One north-south thoroughfare for vehicles and pedestrians: Friedrichstrasse.
- The Civic Center and the Ministries.
- The Cartesian skyscrapers and the pedestrian boulevard connecting them.
- The hotels on the west and north perimeters.
- The green penetrating through the pedestrian boulevards.
- The *redents* for offices.
- His *types* identifying the different institutions.

Coming back to Corbu's entry, its most prominent feature is the importance he gives to the *civic* condition of the west-east axis that starts right before the old Reichstag (1884-94), around which he proposes a National Civic Center formed by the Parliament (Bundestag), the Chancellery, the Constitutional Court, the Federal Council (Bundesrat), and their annexes (fig.11). This axis follows Unter den Linden to the east, up to the Museuminsel (Island of the Museums,³⁴ formed by the Spree River). Unter den Linden becomes then a civic thoroughfare exclusively for pedestrians³⁵ (an idea rejected by the Jury).³⁶ For that purpose he redirects in north and south directions the automobile circulation coming from 17 Juni Strasse using the west perimeter through road proposed by the organizers with a slight modification of its trajectory and classified as a V4 according to Corbu's taxonomy for highways and streets: the 7V's Rule. A pedestrian system is then created starting in the *Civic Center* (Fig. 12) in front of the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate (1789-93), continuing all along Unter den Linden, jumping across the Spreekanal (the southern arm of the Spree River) and joining the sinuous north-south pedestrian boulevard that connects at ground level five *Cartesian* skyscrapers 60 stories high (fig.13). This system is fed by subway and bus lines. Unter den Linden is treated as a linear urban park whose southern boundary is a continuous volume of *verdure*, a triple row of basswood – *linden* - trees, planted as

³⁴ On this island were built the Bode Museum (old Kaiser Friedrich Museum, 1898-1903), the Pergamon Museum (1906), Schinkel's Old (Alte) Museum (1824), and August Stüler's National Gallery (1867) and New (Neues) Museum (1843).

³⁵ Le Corbusier writes: "Le Corbusier had provided in his plan that the Avenue 'Unter den Linden' be reserved exclusively for pedestrians. Automobile traffic was channeled across at intervals by means of highways leading down to parking places right in front of the buildings...The Avenue 'Unter den Linden' would have become the grand promenade, modern this time. In previous times it had been the avenue for walkers (before the automobile). But the Jury decreed that the 'Linden' be covered with automobiles as in all the rest of the world." / Complete Works vol. 7, Page 235.

³⁶ "To make out of Unter den Linden a street exclusively reserved for pedestrians does not correspond, according to the Jury, to the importance and the function of this Avenue"/ Report of the Jury, Page 23 of the French translation, Le Corbusier Foundation, document 12-10-114. Our translation.

a massive longitudinal barrier. It seems evident that LeCorbusier was trying to achieve, at least partially, a sort of reinterpretation of this traditional urban space of old Berlin.

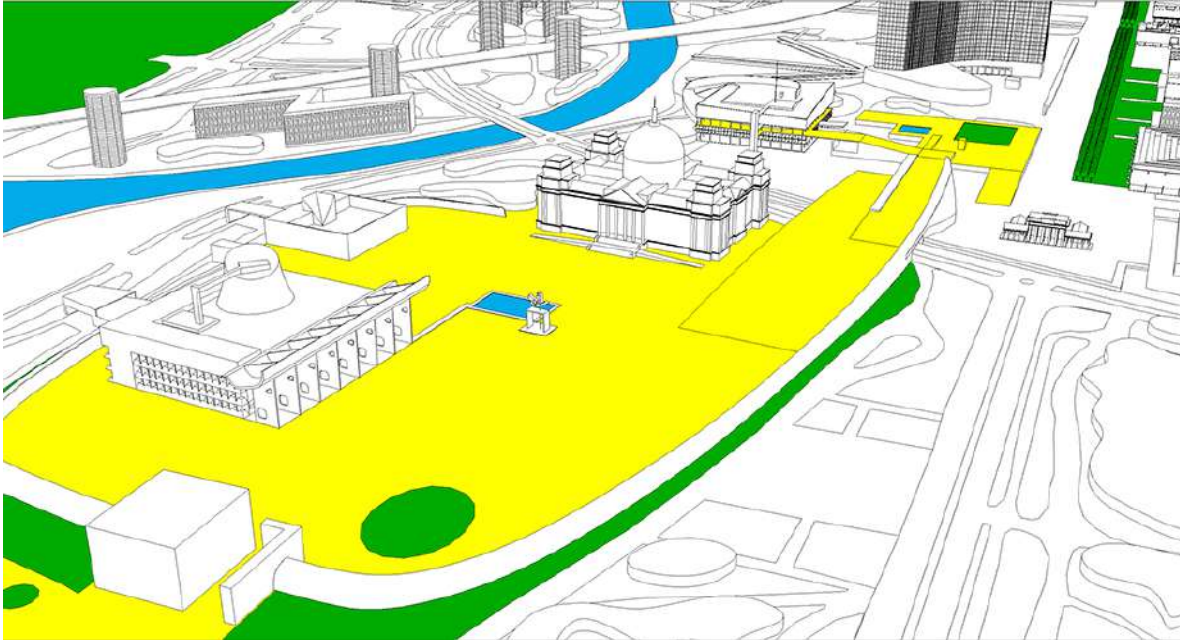


Fig. 12. The Civic Center: the Parliament (Bundestag) is the National Assembly of Chandigarh, in abstract volumes, the Bundesrat (Federal Council) on the lower left corner, and the Constitutional Court near the Spree. We used Corbu's project of the Strasbourg Congress Hall (1964) to identify the Chancellery, which stands behind the Reichstag. We also added the Open Hand monument.

The Civic Center deserves a special consideration.

Corbusier describes it: *"The Parliament (Bundestag), the Länder Chamber (Bundesrat), the Constitutional Court and the old Reichstag on one side constitute the government territory surrounded by a huge covered portico 7 meters tall, forming an architectural complex orderly grouped in the space. A large esplanade is thus formed, a forum, that will shelter open air community meetings. This forum is absolutely protected from car circulation. Each Palace is also guarded against the car assault. This esplanade is connected with the residence of the Chancellor and to the various Ministries gathered in one building. This complex is the government zone. The residence of the Chancellor acts like a joint between the*

Assemblies and the Ministries thanks to an interplay of inclined planes and terraces...The place for this Government City seems well chosen inasmuch as it is placed around the Brandenburg Gate.”³⁷

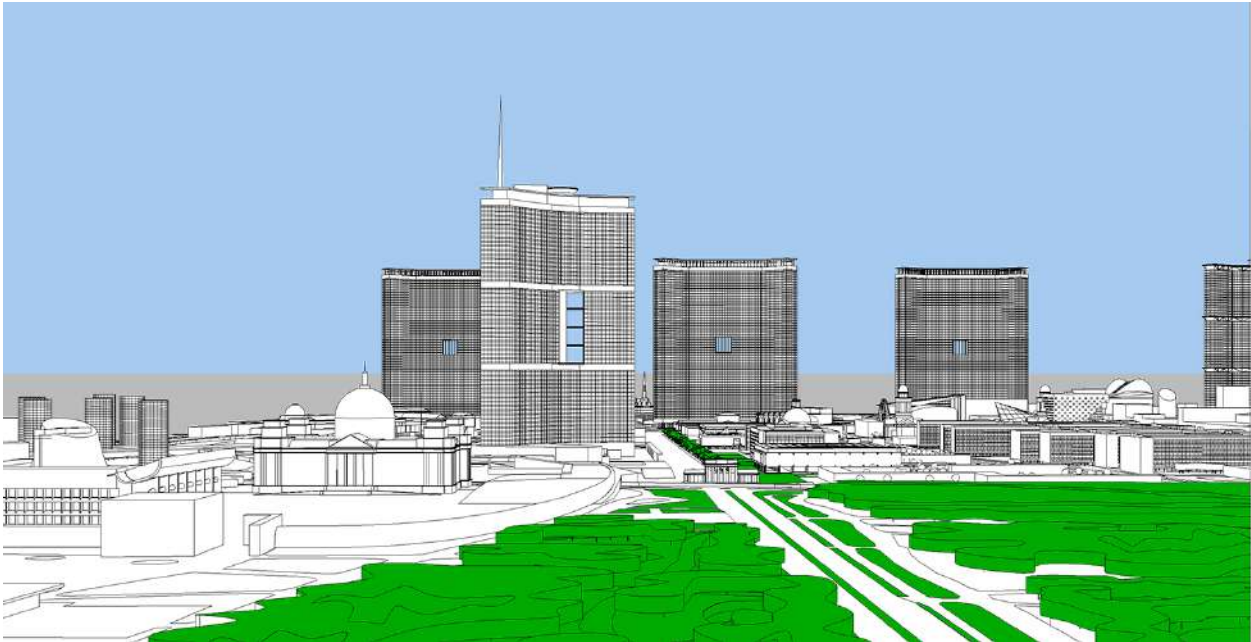


Fig. 13. The Civic Center to the left, behind it the hotel towers. The Ministries skyscraper between the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate. The green penetrates along Unter den Linden. As backdrops of the unified profile of the city center, the Cartesian skyscrapers. The upper volumes of the Leipzigerstrasse compound can be seen to the right.

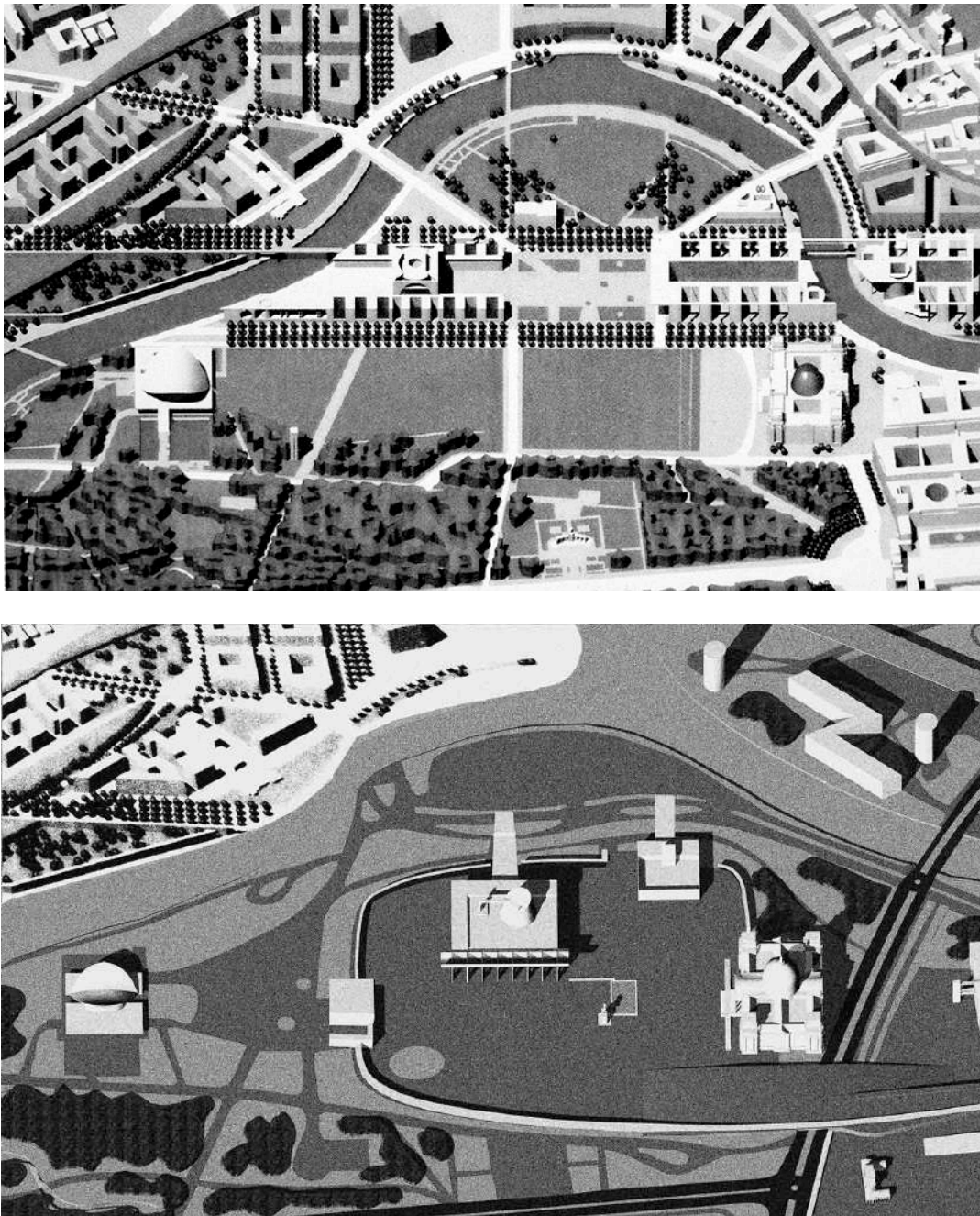
Le Corbusier gave a precise architectural identity to the seat of the Parliament, on the eastern side of the Tiergarten forest. It is a version of Chandigarh's *Assemblée General*, presiding over the monumental square. On the eastern side the old Reichstag remains.³⁸ The Bundesrat and the Constitutional Court are shown as abstract volumes standing in secondary positions. To the west, accessible by means of a platform that bridges over the V4 highway, stands the Chancellery. Corbu's architectural statement is inevitably compared with the present³⁹ situation of the same area: today the *grandeur* of the Reichstag, present seat of the

³⁷ Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 7, Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

³⁸ In the program of the competition it is not clear what would be the destiny of the Reichstag.

³⁹ October 2005.

Parliament, has no interlocutor. It stands in front of a very large green esplanade,⁴⁰ the Platz der Republik, at the far west end of which the Bundesrat would be built⁴¹.



Figs. 14 and 15.

Two concepts, one purpose: on top (Fig.14), the Reichstag as the present (2006) seat of Bundestag with Axel Schulte's building for the Chancellery and that of the administrative services by Stephan Braunfels; below (fig. 15), Le Corbusier's proposal for the Civic Center.

⁴⁰ The round square in front of the Reichstag shown in old photographs disappeared with the war destruction.

⁴¹ Apparently the Bundesrat (Federal Council, Council of the Länder) decided to stay in Bonn. As to our knowledge the Berlin seat will never be built.

On the other hand, the possibility of creating some sense of enclosure in this area was not considered. The virtual mile-long⁴² gesture took all the architectural energy. The *Reichstag* remains *über alles*

Corbusier, on the contrary, as a child of his time that believed in the capacity of architecture to convey ideological contents, proposes here once more⁴³ his idea of the Civic Center as the symbol of *civitas*. In that particular moment of European history, at a time when the East-West confrontation found in Berlin its emblematic battlefield, that Civic Center had a disruptive meaning. It was placed there as an affirmative *democratic* offering in the symbolic home of Prussian autocracy, establishing a direct dialogue with the preserved Reichstag as a vestige from the past and the new democratic institutions emerging from the experience of war and destruction, the new Parliament presiding. This Civic Center, a democratic gathering place, the agora of present times, becomes the monumental gate of the New Berlin. The *heart of the city*⁴⁴, where Architecture reigns (figs. 14 and 15).

The Chancellery does not have a recognizable form in terms of previously known Corbusian buildings, but it appears to have been designed in some detail⁴⁵. Part of the building is treated as a podium with a reflecting pool and a large opening to an internal courtyard. It is accessible to pedestrians via a large ramp limited by the portico (mentioned by Corbu in his description) on its southern edge. The podium

⁴² It seems dubious that the formal continuity of Schulte's proposal will ever be perceived with the strength suggested by the images of the project. The second jump over the Spree (the first takes place in the vicinity of Reichstag) would be towards a park (the Chancellor's Park) using weaker architectural elements. The section joining the Chancellery and the Administrative Section is yet to be built. It will be a *Forum* with rapid transit stations.

⁴³ Almost fifteen years after Saint Dié, his first architectural image of a *Centre Civique*.

⁴⁴ The central theme of CIAM's 8th Congress, held in Hoddesdon, England, in 1951.

⁴⁵ In our three-dimensional reconstruction of the proposal we used Corbu's project for the Strasbourg Hall (1964) to replace the Chancellery's architectural volume..

is connected on its northern side to a square volume, most likely the public areas of the institution (see Corbu's axonometric).

The Brandenburg Gate is left alone as a monument, growing out of a paved platform, forming an urban architectural unit with the Chancellery and the Museum of Knowledge to the south (Fig.16), facing the huge skyscraper (star-shaped footprint, 60 story, 220 meters high) reserved for the Ministries located as an imposing symbol, a backdrop for the Civic Center. *"This Gate, considered as one of the keys of the urbanization of the new capital, turns Unter den Linden into the essential promenade axis that, protected from any motor vehicle, integrates into an imposing unity the old buildings...and the new buildings."*⁴⁶

Going back to Unter den Linden, as the northern side of the avenue up to Friedrichstrasse was empty of any remains from the past, the huge Ministries skyscraper took its place precisely there as the last and powerful architectural

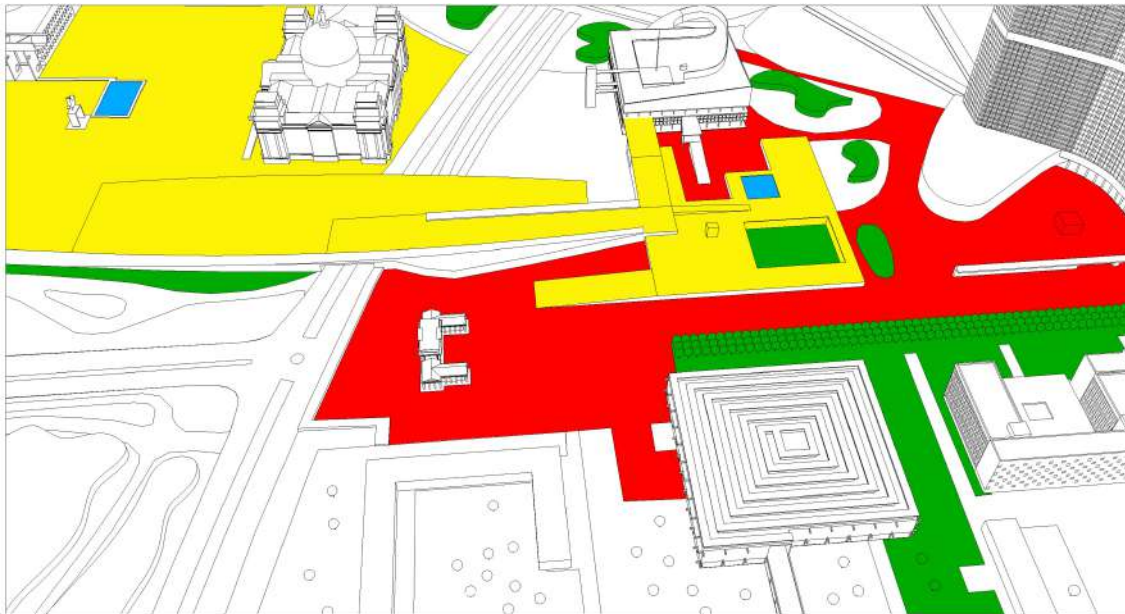


Fig. 16. The building across Unter den Linden facing the Chancellerie is a Museum of Knowledge

⁴⁶ Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 7 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

element of the governmental complex. In the remainder of the avenue, as he wrote in his description, the empty spaces left by bombing were filled with new public institutional buildings: in front of the Ministries skyscraper, across the avenue., a very large double u-shaped building for banking and insurance (that lot was partially used to build the Soviet Embassy in the late fifties, according to the organizers it *would be demolished*),⁴⁷ and further on to the east, the Academy of Science (the Tokyo Museum, to the right the Press Center) and the Center for Technology in front of the old National Library (Staatsbibliothek ,1908-13)⁴⁸ (fig.17).⁴⁹An exhibition hall is proposed in the site of the old Kronprinz Palace.

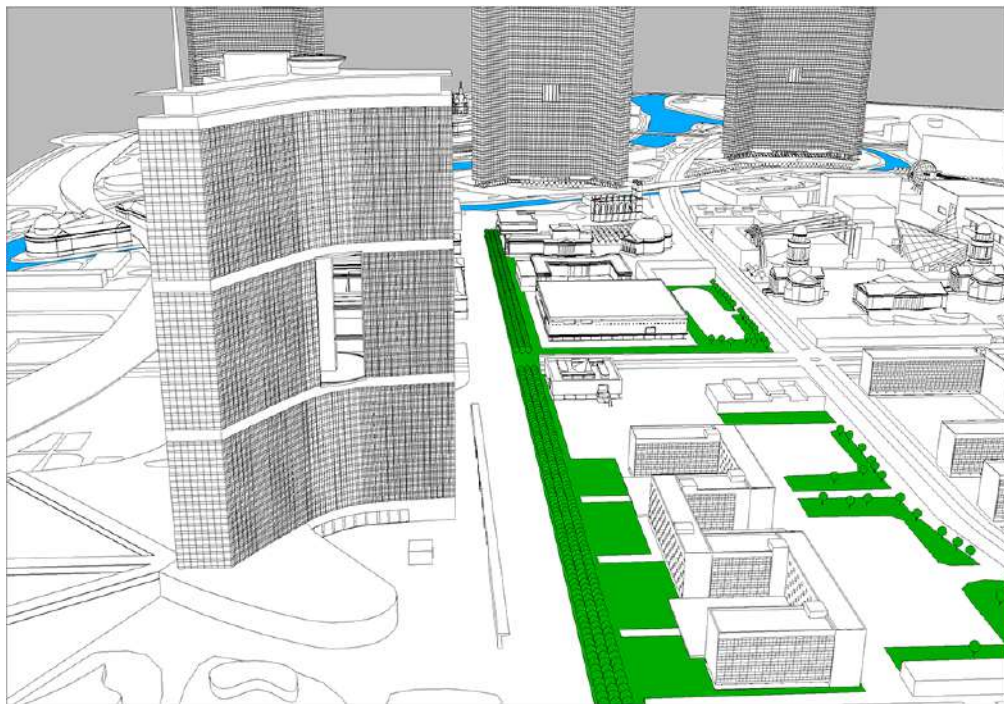


Fig. 17. The Ministries skyscraper; behind it, in the distance, the Bode Museum on the Museum Insel. Across Unter den Linden, the seat of the German Central Bank. On the far right, Gendarmenmarkt; close to it, to the left, St. Hedwig's church and the Staatsoper surrounding Bebelplatz; behind, Schinkel's Friedrichswerdersche church. Französischestrasse jumps over the Spreekanal between the Cartesian skyscrapers.

⁴⁷ This decision shows the strong political content of the competition. This building is now the Russian Embassy

⁴⁸ In mid seventies the National Library was designed By Hans Scharoun and built in the Kulturforum, in West Berlin, across the Philharmonie.

⁴⁹ "...the Museum of Knowledge facing the Chancellery, the Banking Headquarters facing the Ministries, the Science Academy, the Technical Center, the Exhibition Palaces, the old Kronprinz Palace. Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, Page 7 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

The other key element of the proposal in terms of its powerful architectural meaning is the second west-east axis, Leipzigerstrasse, where the built density is regained by means of a very dense compound for entertainment facilities⁵⁰ (music-hall was the term used in the program), large-scale commerce, department stores,⁵¹ retail commerce, hotels, corporate offices and cultural institutions, these last in the buildings that reconstruct the old pattern of the baroque square,⁵² or in the sector west of Friedrichstrasse. It is a compact *container* eight stories high, that resembles a huge *podium* from which built volumes adjusted to specific functions emerge. It is a continuous, compact, very dense strip of urban activities, that occupies a whole block in south-north direction (from Leipzigerstrasse to

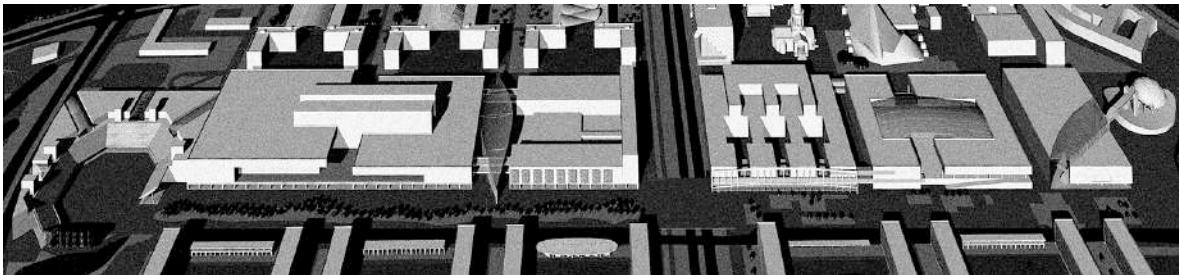


Fig.18. Our three-dimensional reconstruction of the Leipzigerstrasse spine. To the left Leipzigerplatz surrounded by a glazed gallery. The arbitrary architectural shapes represent the progressive construction of the compound throughout the years by different architects (good and bad, of course). We also added the porticoes on the northern end of the *redents*.

⁵⁰ "The word Music-hall doesn't comprehend the multiple present and future reality of an entertainment place correspondent to the transformations produced by modern techniques. Here we have the opportunity to create a sector for varied and multiform entertainment facilities offering all sorts of grouping possibilities, gatherings, contacts, etc...with enough diversity of entertaining techniques. Entertainment can become a licit collective phenomenon. Hence this entertainment sector has been placed on the border of the Economy and Cultural Zone along a large V4 (Corbu's taxonomy for highways and streets: the 7V's) that acts as a counterweight of V2, Unter den Linden." Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 10 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

⁵¹ "After our plan, department stores are made out by three or four groups in a block 650 to 850 meters long by 170 meters wide. This important block can be subdivided in three or four sectors, each with a different standard, allowing for all possible combinations regarding subdivisions or appropriations of the land, leaving a great flexibility for each owner and in the end allowing for an ambitious architectural result." Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 14 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

⁵² "If it is considered a better solution, the Museum as well as the Library (he is referring to the Ethnographic Museum and the Neue Bibliothek which he originally proposed in the vicinity of Gendarmenmarkt) can be at Leipzigerplatz, in buildings designed accordingly; we have decided to rebuild Leipzigerplatz following its previous design." Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 9 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

Mohrenstrasse), and goes from Leipzigerplatz to the west, to the southwest tip of the Museuminsel (Island of the Museums) along Leipzigerstrasse, that crosses the whole body of the inner city (fig. 18).

For Le Corbusier this dense complex could become a central spot for entertainment analogous to Broadway in New York. He writes: *“we would feel inclined to baptize as Broadway this cumulative entertainment system.”*⁵³ Its other section, east of Friedrichstrasse, is divided in three parts, cut by south-north streets and, as we said before, mostly harbors cultural institutions. On the southern edge, a pedestrian boulevard, a rectilinear active park served by a subway line (U Bahn), accompanies the (V4) west-east street, goes over Friedrichstrasse and joins the north-south sinuous walkway that serves the Cartesian Skyscrapers. Corbusier conceives this powerful *spine* of urban activities, together with Friedrichstrasse⁵⁴ as a *distribution cross* of urban exchanges: *“If we consider Unter den Linden avenue as the seat of the most representative institutions of the modern capital, we have used Friedrichstrasse and Leipzigerstrasse as a repartition cross of exchanges all over the surface comprising Unter den Linden south up to the Mehringplatz. Friedrichstrasse becomes the great vertical circulation axis; Leipzigerstrasse the seat of retail commerce (department stores, hotels, entertainment).”*⁵⁵

⁵³ Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 10 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

⁵⁴ The pedestrian boulevard and the new street open an “air corridor” that follows old Leipzigerstrasse’s trajectory.

⁵⁵ Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 13 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

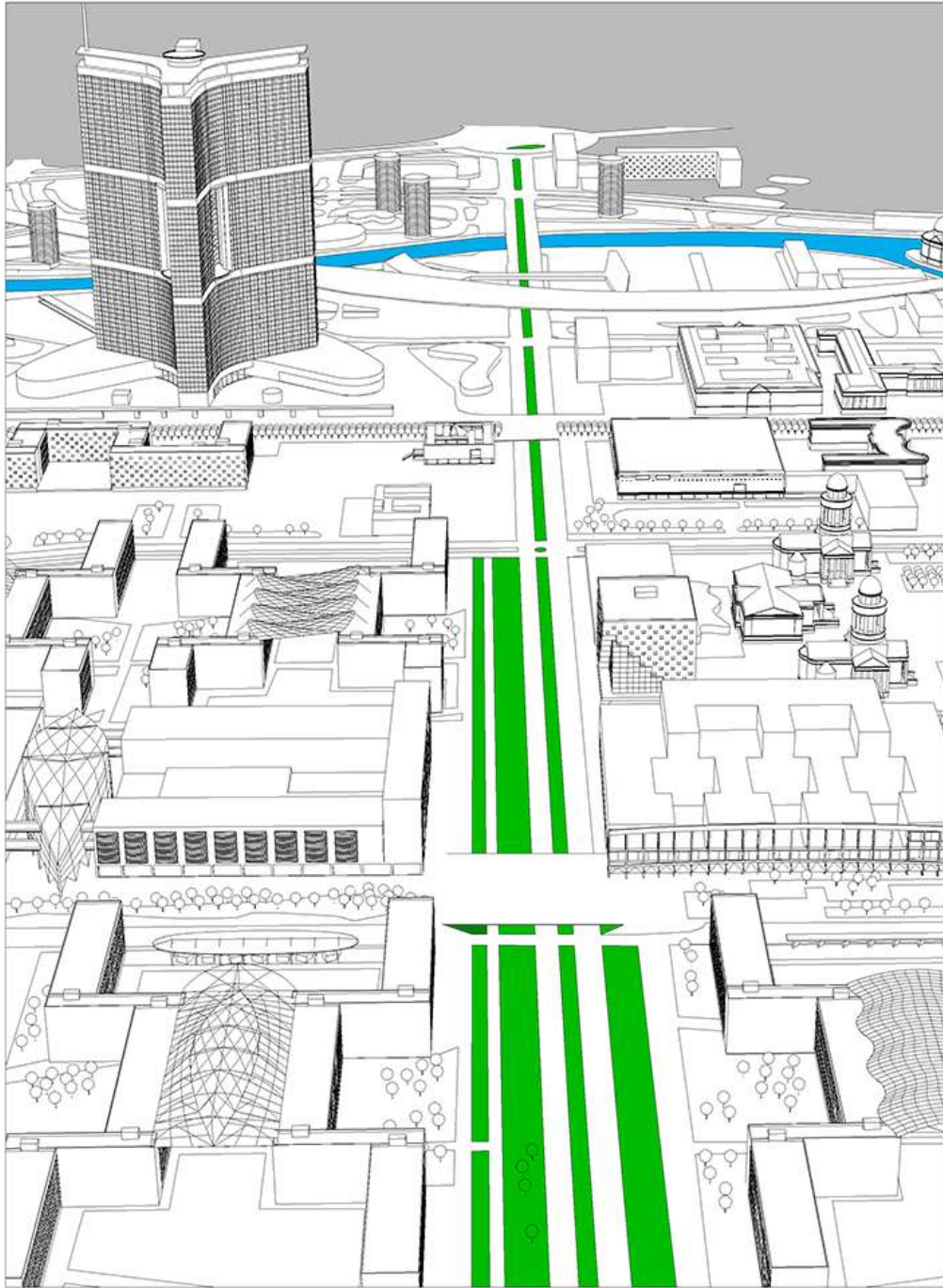


Fig. 19. The Friedrichstrasse north-south thoroughfare. Unter den Linden crosses from west to east in front of the Ministries skyscraper. On its south side, from left to right, the German Central Bank, the Academy of Science (Tokyo Museum), the Center of Technology (Corbu specified an abstract volume; we opened windows and raised it on pilotis), the Staatsbibliothek, Humboldt University and the Ehemalige Bibliothek on the west side of Bebelplatz. In the lower left corner of Gendarmenmarkt a postmodern architect had his opportunity. The Leipzigerstrasse spine between the north and south redents.

We added tensile roofs in the narrow space between the redents. Behind the Ministries' skyscraper the sinuous trajectory of the railroad tracks can be seen crossing east-west: the Friedrichstrasse station was not drawn. In the background, on the northern side of the Spree, the hotel towers (the *hameaux verticales*) close the scene

The south-north central axis, Friedrichstrasse (fig. 19), on the contrary, is treated as a wide avenue (V7), three lanes for cars in each direction, with wide green zones and pedestrian walkways on both sides before the *redents*, their façades standing 150 meters apart. What looks like a huge sports park⁵⁶ (a 10 Hectares lot) is proposed on its southeast side not far from Mehringplatz, this last transformed into a round green park surrounded by streets (as it was in the past)⁵⁷ and served by one of the Friedrichstrasse walkways that bridges over the streets to join a subway station on the north bank of the Landwehrkanal. Following up north, Friedrichstrasse runs under Leipzigerstrasse boulevard, intersects Französischertrasse V7, and goes under Unter den Linden to finally join in Oranienburgerstrasse the north *tangent*. The decision to transform Friedrichstrasse into a North-South car thoroughfare is a direct consequence of privileging the conversion of Unter den Linden into an exclusively pedestrian boulevard. It also makes for the loss of its traditional commercial density, this last feature considered *desirable* by the organizers.

We have mentioned and described with some detail⁵⁸ three of the main urban design decisions that characterize Le Corbusier's entry: The Civic Center and the transformation of Unter den Linden, the spine along Leipzigerstrasse and the conversion of Friedrichstrasse into a thoroughfare. There is a fourth feature of his

⁵⁶ Up to the moment we write this text we have not been able to identify the actual use of this area.

⁵⁷ Mehringplatz was transformed into a pedestrian square surrounded by housing in 1975.

⁵⁸ The program of the competition reads: "*Retail Commerce: In a metropolis, the tasks concerning elegant stores as well as department stores suppose business streets with a convenient location. The traditional commercial streets of Berlin, especially Leipzigerstrasse and Friedrichstrasse, will most likely exert their attractive force. The competition is expected to harmoniously include them in the whole of the city, or, if there is the option, to propose the development of new commercial streets.*" Program of the Competition, French translation, Page 15 / Le Corbusier Foundation, document 12-10-29.

proposal that revealed itself as decisive for the Jury: the north-south *chain* of Cartesian Skyscrapers (fig. 20).

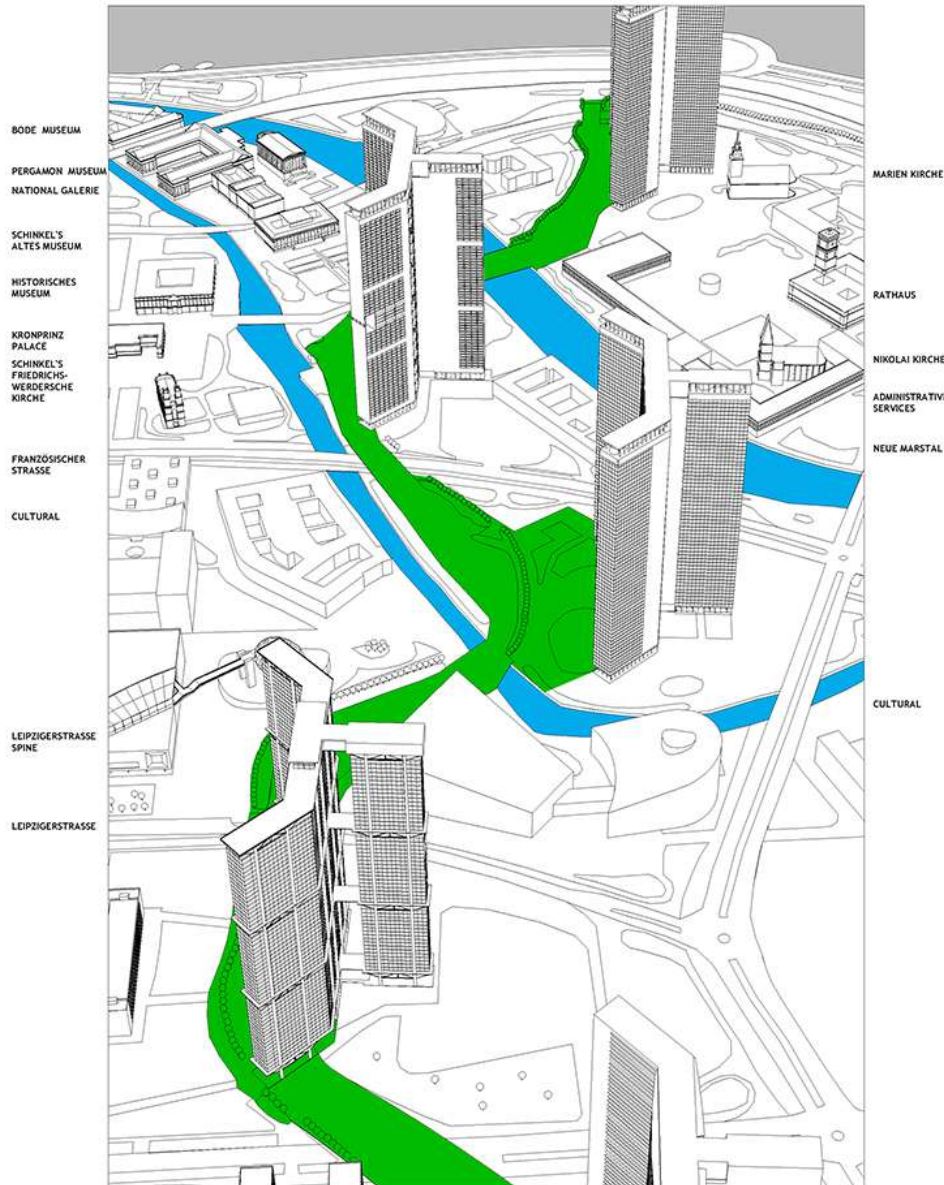


Fig. 20 The Cartesian skyscrapers, two of them standing on the Museum Insel, and the pedestrian boulevard connecting them at ground level. The continuations of both Französischestrasse and Kochstrasse cross from west to east between them, with Leipzigerstrasse in the middle, all of them joining the perimeter highway. The seat of the Municipal Council, the Rathaus, can be seen on the upper right as part of a square formed by the building for administrative services and the Nikolaikirche. Across the river, the Neue Marstall, today a cultural institution, one of the Fixed Points; further up, the Marienkirche faces the last skyscraper as Trinity church relates to New York's skyscrapers in Wall Street: a radical opposition of scales. This image clearly shows how debatable was the Jury's claim of obstruction of the views at pedestrian level, as a reason to reject the skyscrapers.

Le Corbusier places the facilities for the city authorities in the old Rathaus (1861-69, one of the Fixed Points), and the supporting administrative departments in a polygonal building facing the Rathaus and placed on the southeast bank of the Spree. Directly in front of it, across the river, stands the old Neue Marstall (1897-1901, a Fixed Point), seat of the Municipal Library, and one of the Cartesian Skyscrapers. As we have seen before, the Jury rejected emphatically the position of this skyscraper as well as its scale.

Corbusier proposed the *Cartesian Skyscrapers* for private office space (the organizers used the word *Economy* for this use). He writes: "*The second type of offices building proposed here, the 'Cartesian Skyscraper', puts together a considerable amount of office space as required by the program, in four 60 story office buildings (220 meters high). A supplementary skyscraper, the fifth, stands out of the limits of the competition, but finds its place at the southeast end of the complex in perfect harmony with the other four. It will be in the future a more than welcome reserve of space.*" And he continues: "*...all these conditions have been difficult to obtain in existing, not demolished, cities. In a city like Berlin, its buildings destroyed by the war, such conditions have become real. It is useless to insist on the admirable presence that these constructions will have, their design derived from the sun, with precision. All the necessary corrections considering Berlin latitude can be done.*"

Born in the twenties when he proposed it under different form for the City of Three Million Inhabitants, the *Cartesian Skyscraper* had been subject to many explorations: Plan Voisin in its various versions, through the years in urban projects for Algiers, Buenos Aires, Anvers, Nemours, Paris 37, and many other places. It is

obvious that Corbusier saw in Berlin, one of the most important capitals of the European world, its authorities having the emotional drive and the financial resources to engage in an ambitious reconstruction, an unexpected opportunity to build his already mature child. And by the same token his sense of opportunity must have become *opportunistic*.

For it is very difficult not to ask questions when considering the insertion of the skyscrapers in his scheme. On the one hand they do not seem to belong to the city context at ground level; they look foreign to it as if responding to a different structural order, that of the *skyscraper context* instead of the *city context*. Or better said, the necessity of structuring the skyscraper's chain, keeping a precise distance between each of them, following an exact north-south alignment but displacing them to the west or the east every other unit, all this geometry imposed its *order* over the city *order*. On the other hand, when coming to the area around Lustgarten, the skyscraper facing Schinkel's Altes Museum undeniably raises the issue of scale (fig. 21). It doesn't look right; many questions can be asked about its relation not only with Schinkel but with Corbu's own proposed church meant to replace the old Evangelical Church (the *Dom*, built in the early 20th century, its preservation not being obligatory, today one of the monuments of Berlin) in the Northeast side of the Lustgarten. That seems one of the worst problems of that building, not the Jury's alleged *obstruction* of the views down to the Rathaus complex.

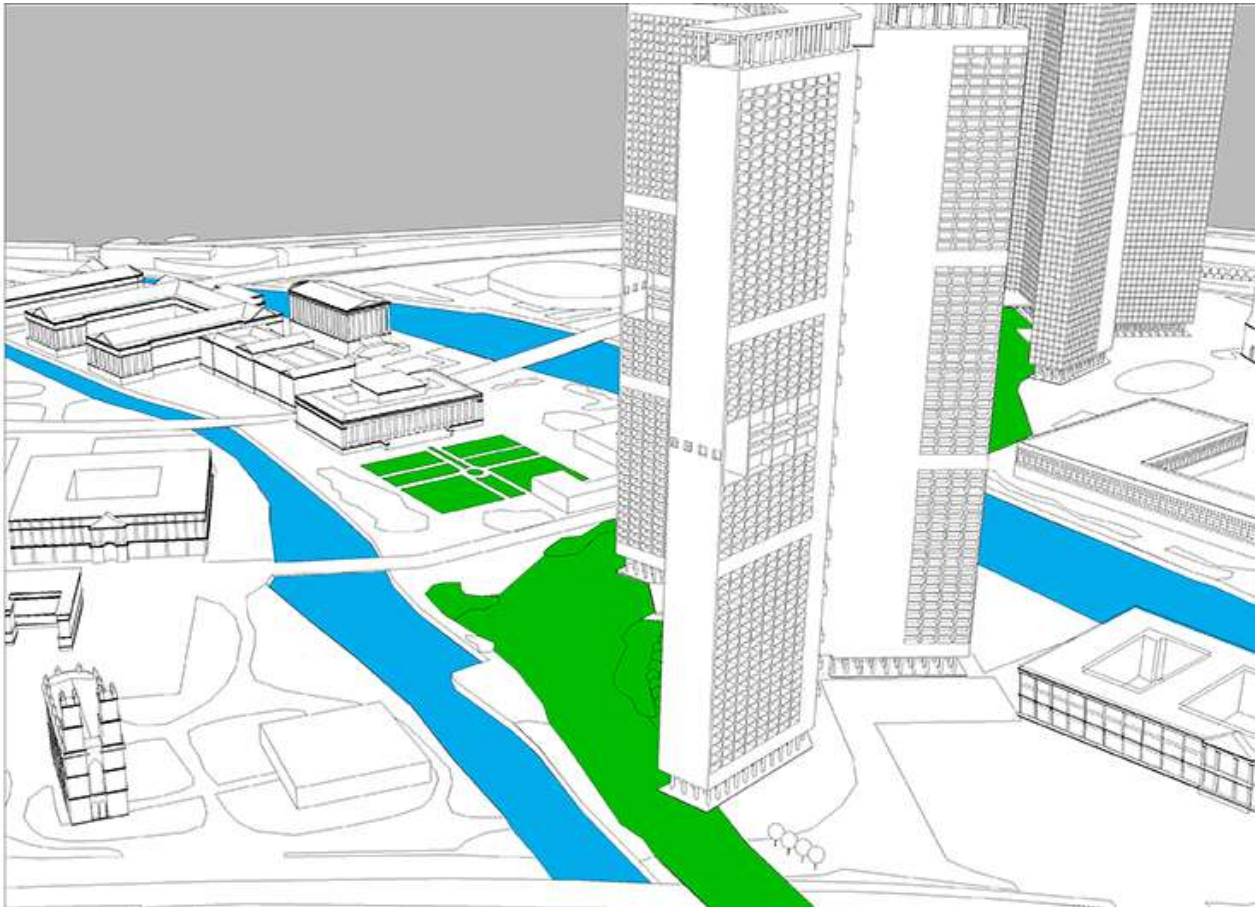


Fig. 21. This skyscraper was particularly criticized by the Jury. In the left lower corner we can see Schinkel's Friedrichswerdersche church and next to it a volume in the site of Schinkel's Bauakademie (Building Academy). The organizers of the competition did not consider the reconstruction of the Bauakademie, almost completely destroyed by bombing. Today, there are plans for its reconstruction.

This view enables one to better appreciate the scale issue regarding the Cartesian skyscrapers. Le Corbusier replaced the old Dom across from Schinkel's Altes Museum with a new Evangelic Lutheran church, that he represented as an abstract volume partially hidden by the skyscraper, whose western tip can be seen next to the green polygons of the Lustgarten. It partially closes the space in the southeastern corner of the Lustgarten, a feature that creates a reference to the Museum in terms of scale. The abrupt change of dimensions introduced by the skyscraper and the distance between the buildings contribute to a counterpoint relation between both scales. In contrast, the Neue Marstall, one of the Fixed Points, seems more or less abandoned to its own fate: the buildings of a similar scale, the administrative services of the city, are across the river. Its north and west façades face a lawn, a parking lot and the ground floor of the skyscraper.

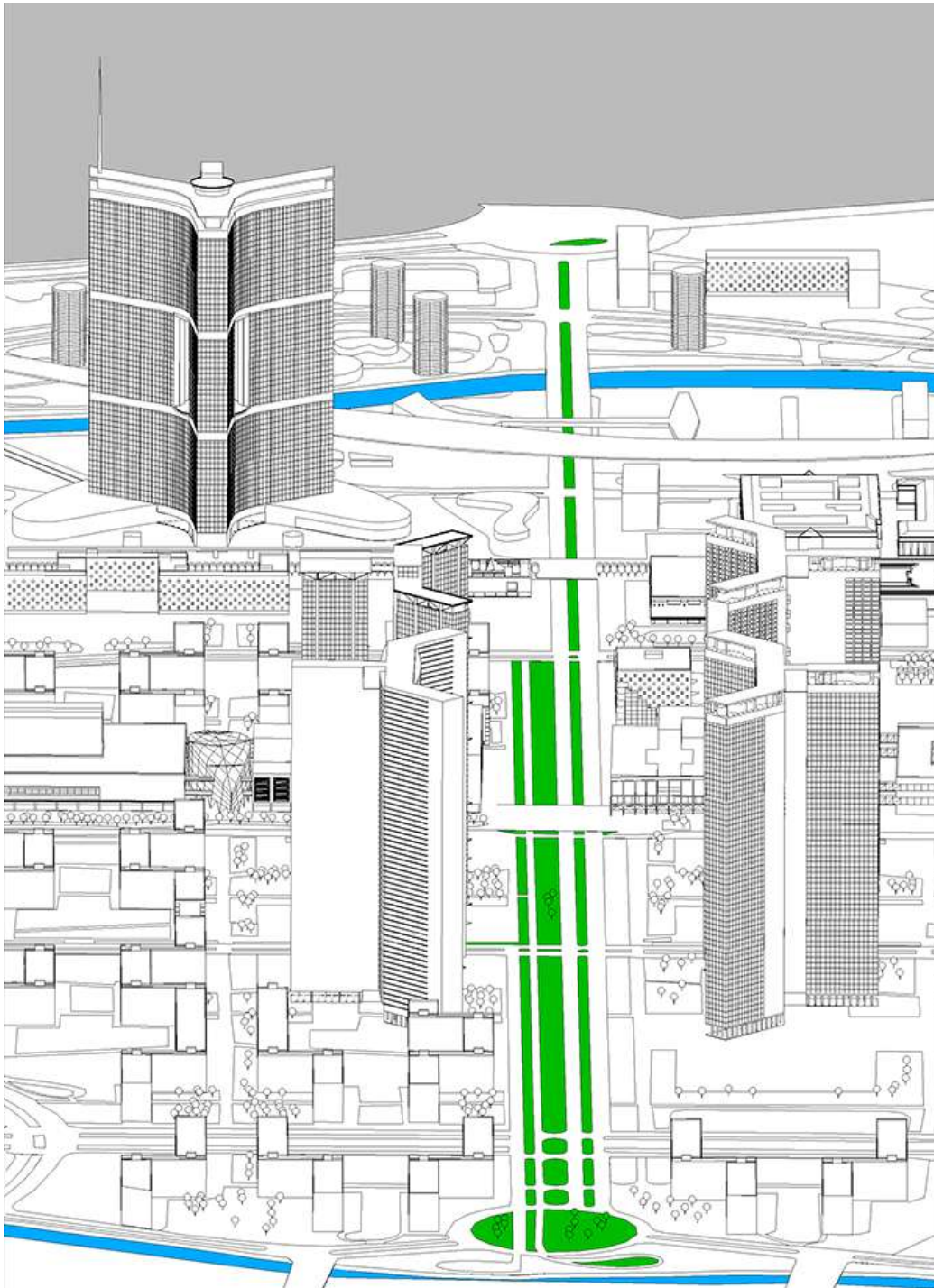


Fig. 21a. We speculate here placing the Cartesian Skyscrapers in the intersection of Leipzigertrasse and Friedrichstrasse, south of the *spine*. In terms of the city *order* this location seems logic, although the skyscrapers lose their condition of backdrops of the view along Unter den Linden, an obvious objective of Corbu's decision. It is pertinent here to remark that after the experience of an in-depth revision of the project, one becomes seduced by the rationale behind Corbu's decisions as well as with the beauty and power of his urban images. Undoubtedly, he addressed the issue of scale in a non-conventional way, convincing enough.

And there is also the apparent contradiction between the *Cartesian* group and the star-shaped skyscraper for the Ministries on the west end of the avenue. Don't they diminish the importance of the Ministries seat in the urban profile of Unter den Linden? Or was it that perhaps Corbu was looking for a counterpoint between the isolated verticality of the first and the *backdrop* role ⁵⁹ of these last?

In any case, the *Cartesian chain* produces a lot of discomfort. One question that comes to mind is Corbu's above-mentioned statement about the importance of Friedrichstrasse and Leipzigerstrasse as the *repartition cross* of the inner city. If Corbu needed the built space to comply with the requirements of the competition, why then were the skyscrapers not placed, for instance, on both sides of Friedrichstrasse, south of the Leipzigerstrasse spine? Considering the logic of the whole scheme, that seems an acceptable location (fig. 21a) for his office buildings: no confrontation with preserved monuments, they perfectly fit in the circulation grid, and they are in a better relation with the most intense core of business activities.

But let us go back to the other aspects of his entry.

He tries to restore historic alignments along north-south streets using the *redents*, for private office space south of Leipzigerstrasse and, specifically, banking and insurance offices between this last and Französischerstrasse. In strategic spots he creates small squares or adds built density to create commercial or institutional activity, as it is between the Press Center (on the corner of Friedrichstrasse and Französischerstrasse) and the Technical Center in Unter den Linden, or around

⁵⁹ This text was written some time before we completed the reconstruction of the proposal in three dimensions. I have to say that the extremely powerful image of the skyscrapers standing as a counterpoint to the low profile of the rest of the city, impressed me so much that I do not entirely subscribe today the doubts I had while writing.

Schinkel's Friedrichswerdersche Kirche (1824-30), but particularly in the vicinity of Gendarmenmarkt (fig. 22).⁶⁰



Fig. 22. In Gendarmenmarkt Le Corbusier expands the square facing the existing Schauspielhaus and proposes the construction of a new Concert Hall (the Soviets Palace competition of 1931-33?) and other cultural buildings. One of them, the Operetta Theater, evokes the Philips Pavilion in Brussels-1958.

He locates there the new Concert Hall and the Operetta Theater facing Gendarmenmarkt, and two Exhibition Halls adjacent to the StadtsKontor (city offices, also a Fixed Point), and the Ethnographic Museum.

As for the rest of the competition territory, Corbu's entry sees it as an expansion of Tiergarten Park. The park penetrates the city from the west particularly along the southern side of Unter den Linden or through the pedestrian boulevard of Leipzigerstrasse.

⁶⁰ One of the traditional squares of old Berlin, flanked by Schinkel's Drama Theater (Schauspielhaus, 1818-21), the French Church (Französischer Dom, Louis Cayart 1701-05) and the German Church (Deutscher Dom, Martin Grünberg, 1701-08).

It also surrounds the Civic Center, jumps over the Spree and joins the open spaces around the Rathaus, the City authorities sector on the East bank. Beyond the southern limits of the Tiergarten, the Diplomatic sector is also conceived as a park, as well as the area west of Leipzigerplatz⁶¹ (Postdamer Platz) in direction of the Landwehrkanal and Anhalter Bahnhof. There, the hotel buildings stand in the green: zigzag-like 8 story buildings and circular towers 15 stories, 50 meters high (the *hameaux verticales*, vertical villages, that Corbusier never built).⁶² Likewise, hotel buildings⁶³ pinpoint the extension of the park on the north bank of the Spree, near the Civic Center.

The idea of the City in the Green was of course one of the concepts that inspired Le Corbusier's project (see the original plans of Corbu's entry, figs. A1 to A7). Particularly in the Situation Plan (A3), where green is like the background color of the image of the city, we can see how important *verdure*, greenery, is in the conception of the city. In this particular respect and also in the separation of pedestrians and cars, Le Corbusier was inflexible. *"One ineffable objective is therefore obtained, the "City will be Green", "Radiant City" type with all the qualities*

⁶¹ "The first group of first class hotels, to the west, next to the Tiergarten and the Embassies sector is in walking distance from the V4 of Stores and entertainment (Leipzigerstrasse) and, by car, to the V3's horizontal and vertical grid of the new city". Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 15 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

⁶² This type, a cylindric "tower" the same height as the Unités, appeared occasionally in his housing projects as in Marseille-Sud 1951, Strassburg 1951, Meaux 1956. It was meant to house small apartments (for *bachelors* as in Meaux) and in an earlier stage of its development was baptized *hameaux verticales* or vertical villages. In Berlin they would be 50 meters high.

⁶³ "Hotels are proposed as large buildings 8 stories high, that could well be 15 stories high, solar oriented. They are complemented by a group of cylindric towers that are the result of long term studies about housing problems, and could be used for a certain type of hotel client (single visitors with simplified service). The same towers are proposed in both hotel sectors, in Tiergarten or the Spree." Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 15 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

these categories imply in terms of new points of view, renovation of the life conditions in urban agglomerations:

Creation of green surfaces (lungs of the cities), creation of open spaces in front of the windows of working places (sun, space, greenery), creation of silence zones around office buildings, spaces free enough to allow for rigorous orientation of the rooms to the sun: the sun condition of life – instruments have been created up to now to control sun exposure in summer solstices. Separation of pedestrians and cars, the most revolutionary solution contributed by this project. Surfaces absolutely deprived of cars: the simple speed (men walking steps) has surfaces with no intrusion of the multiple speeds characteristic of mechanical transport. Dignity is regained!”⁶⁴

We can see how emphatic Le Corbusier was, how much he praised aspects of the quality of life in cities that we see in present days in a much more moderate way. And he was not the only one to see things from such point of view among the competitors. We have mentioned Scharoun’s conception of a Berlin-in-the-green. Less extreme but otherwise very generous provision of green areas was a leitmotiv among the projects.⁶⁵ And the separation of motor and pedestrian traffic was present with more or less intensity in almost any of the projects.⁶⁶ Both principles were, no doubt, part of the zeitgeist.

⁶⁴ Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 4 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

⁶⁵ “The proposals generally tend to incorporate the Tiergarten in the inner city by providing green belts spreading close to the city core and laying out grass ribbons along the banks and the waterways.” General Report on the Results of the Competition, page 5 / Hauptstadt Berlin, *Ergebnis des internationalen städtebaulichen Ideenwettbewerbs*, Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1960. English translation, page 5.

⁶⁶ “The authors almost unanimously hold the opinion that this separation is necessary.” General Report on the Results of the Competition, page 7 / English translation / Hauptstadt Berlin, *Ergebnis des internationalen städtebaulichen Ideenwettbewerbs*, Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1960.

TRYING TO UNDERSTAND

I

A number of characteristics of Le Corbusier's project for Berlin can be defined as *unexpected*, particularly when we see them from the stereotyped and reductive perspective usually used to judge his ideas about city form. We have discussed in the previous text one of these *unexpected* features: his decision to structure his project working with the old Berlin urban grid, making it present in the third dimension by means of architectural volume. By the same token, a feature to be highlighted as *unexpected* is that he tried to obtain built density at will, depending on punctual situations, an approach distant from the stereotyped *Corbusian* city image of isolated volumes growing out of open space. Likewise, he establishes a dialog with historic monuments preserving their scale, as in part of Unter den Linden or in the area around Gendarmenmarkt. Or establishing a contrapuntal relation between the past and the present.

This search for built density is not always consistent as is shown in the northern edge of the new Französische Strasse,⁶⁷ and in sensitive spots he did it in an almost irreverent form as with the already-mentioned Cartesian skyscraper across the Lustgarten. And if it is true that *redents* define south-north *urban walls* as if they were "broken" *perimeter blocks*, it is not less true that the east-west façade of the block they form is practically nonexistent as it is reduced to the presence of their narrow ends separated by open parking space (fig. 23).⁶⁸ In any case, despite these punctual problems, of relative importance when the modern city form was

⁶⁷ One feels that open parking space substitutes for architecture, cars acquiring a sad protagonist role before the buildings in the back.

⁶⁸ The main reason for this being the *doctrinal* rejection of any possible north-south orientation for office areas and the rigidity of zoning. Retail commerce could have been used to partially close the space between the end façades of each *redent*.

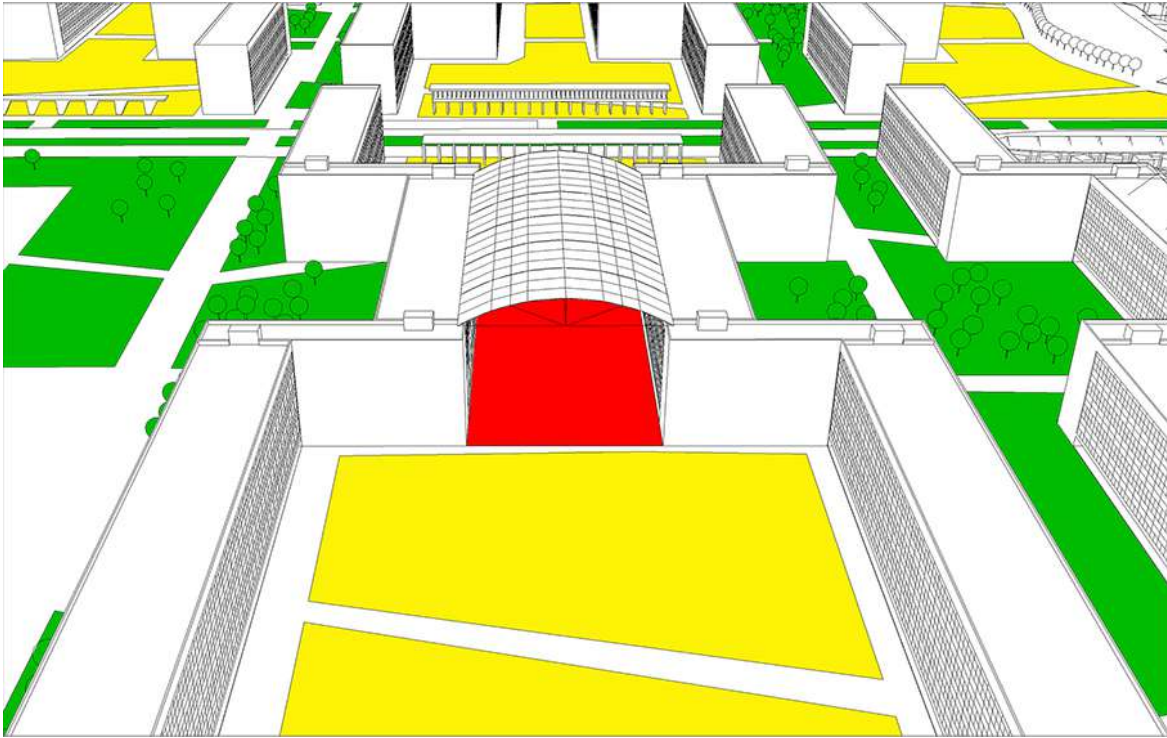


Fig 23. We can see here how poor the relation of the institutional buildings along Unter den Linden is with the urban space on the north margin of Französicherstrasse: the buildings face parking lots and residual areas. On the other hand, the *redents* present their narrow ends to the street and, again, its private parking. In our reconstruction we inserted porticoes before the parking to restore the alignments of the urban façades.

taking shape albeit shocking to the current conception of the city, his search for built density as a *continuum*, an overall quality of the inner core of the city, appears to us as an *unexpected* virtue. Now when the monotony and uniformity of the *perimeter block* has regained universal esteem by virtue of its adaptability to different architectural forms under the tutelage of its geometric discipline, and as a reliable instrument for the configuration of public space, the doctrine of Corbusian *redents* can be better understood. Le Corbusier when proposing the *redents* was in fact establishing a *proved* architectural frame (with precise ground level connections, volumes and heights) previously studied in all its basic features. A frame that could accept different architectural developments (fig. 24). In that respect, the *redents* had many of the qualities of the perimeter block and particularly its capacity of definition of an urban façade, with the only and important difference of the meander-like pattern of alignment, meant to avoid the corridor street. His abhorred *rue corridor*, one of his dogmas; for us today a prejudice.

Corbu is particularly assertive in his search for built density in the Leipzigerstrasse complex, the *spine* we have discussed before, one of the most interesting items of his proposal, a concept that remains valid today. This quality of visual built density at human level stands out when comparing his proposal with most of the awarded projects, perhaps with only the exception of the Smithsons. That his approach to urban form was changing or reaching a more comprehensive level was symptomatic. Perhaps because he was dealing here with a city of business, a *cit  d'affaires*, an inner core, where concentration of activities hence *density* is a precondition. For we know on the other hand that when housing was part of the

problem he was more dogmatic; the *doctrinal* use of the *Unités* dominates: *isolated built volumes growing out of open space.*



Our intention when drawing tensile roofs covering the space between the *redents*, is to show that the scale of LC's proposal had a potential for different arrangements of public space. Of course LC not necessarily had in mind options that have become for us almost routine. He was creating open space in the modern sense, green areas that would reproduce the nature conditions (*conditions de nature*). However, if we see his proposal having as a reference the debate on urban form of recent years, Corbu was in fact proposing a system of *almost closed* (a term used by Oriol Bohigas to describe a personal experience in Barcelona) perimeter blocks with an enclosed space where protecting porticoes and covered pedestrian areas for commercial or civic activities would be possible under different forms. Of course, the intellectual atmosphere in late fifties was not prepared to openly accept the idea that different architectures could be developed out of one specific type. Corbu's redents were seen as dogmatic statements, not as an architectural frame to be designed following different directions.

II

We have said before that Le Corbusier inserted in his Berlin project practically all his architectural types as well as many of his buildings. We have mentioned among the types the *Redents*, the *Hameaux Verticales*, the *Cartesian Skyscrapers*. Among the buildings, the *Chandigarh Assemblée* in the Civic Center, the *Musée à croissance illimitée* near the Brandenburg Gate; further east along Unter den

Linden Avenue the *Tokio* (or Ahmedabad) *Museum*, southeast of the Museum facing Gendarmenmarkt a sort of caricature of the Auditorium of the *Palais des Soviets* and across the square the *Pavillon Philips*. We have also mentioned that some of the buildings drawn in the scheme seem to have been designed to some degree, as the Chancellery, the Skyscraper for the Ministries and the Technical Center in Unter den Linden, the church on one side of Lustgarten, the administrative building near the Rathaus and even the polyhedric volumes on the Leipzigerstrasse *spine*.

When we see these buildings playing their referential role in the axonometric, James Stirling's entry (figs. 25 and 25a) for the Roma Interrotta⁶⁹ competition, in 1974, comes to mind. Stirling was the only one among the participants who instead of indulging in rhetorical images of *would-be* architecture took each and every one of his most important projects, built or not built, to give form to his vision.

Stirling's witty game, based on the insertion of his earlier *real* projects in Giovanni Battista Nolli's 18th-century plan, was perhaps only partially understood in 1974, fifteen years after the Berlin competition, yet it triggered a stampede of imitations. His was a powerful allegation in favor of the use of specific, well-known, personal or collective architectural images as *living* references in urban design plans. Of course, no one dared to accuse Stirling of arrogance on the grounds of his eventual aspiration to build *his* buildings; Roma Interrotta was not meant to be *real*.

⁶⁹ Roma Interrotta was the symbolic name given to an invitational international competition organized in 1974 by Giulio Carlo Argan, highly esteemed art and architecture critic who was at the time Mayor of Rome. Although the selection of the 12 invitees was rather pluralist (James Stirling, Aldo Giurgola, Leon Krier, Paolo Portoghesi, Venturi and Rauch, Colin Rowe among others), it can be defined as the first *postmodernist* architectural competition by virtue of its objectives: a play of somewhat arbitrary architectural images inserted in the plan drawn by Giovanni Battista Nolli in 1747 after 12 years of work. The images each architect included in Nolli's plan were meant to continue the *interrupted* plan of Rome.

The postmodernist debate had conquered for architects the right to speculate on urban form using known architecture as a reference tool.

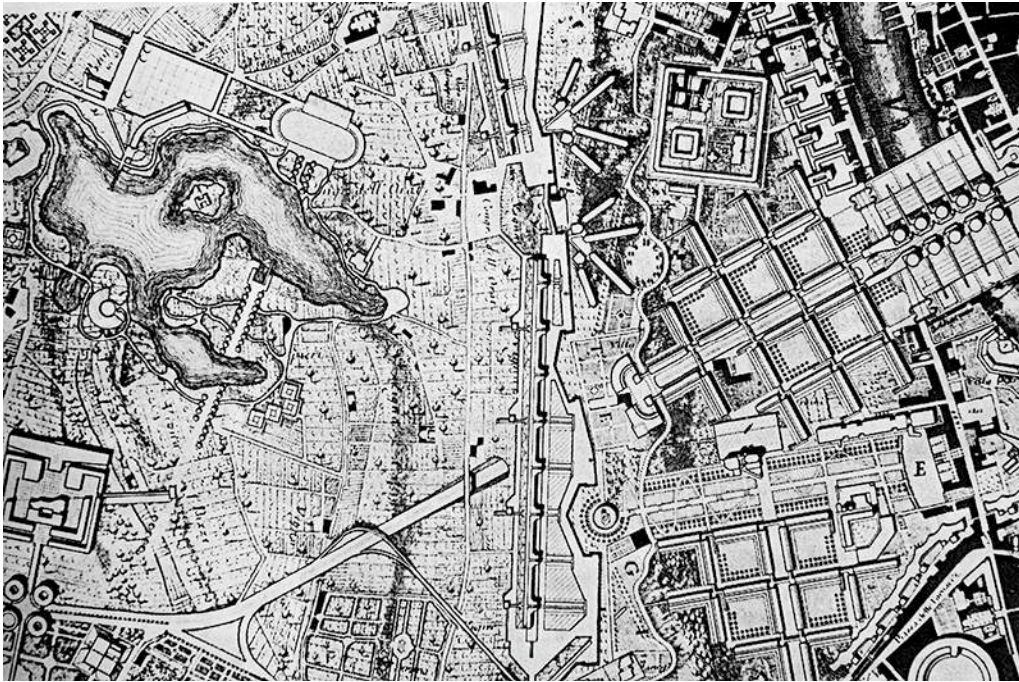


Fig. 25. James Stirling's *insertions* in Giovanni Battista Nolli's plan for Rome (1748), on the occasion of the Roma Interrotta competition in 1974

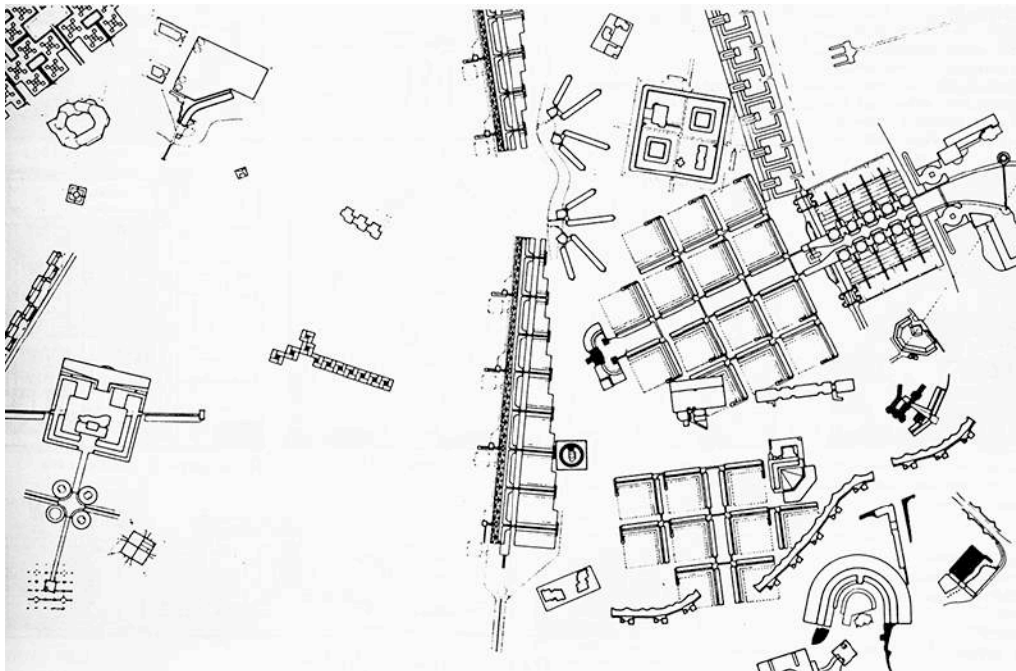


Fig. 25a. James Stirling's *types*.

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Not only after the Stirling *collage* but after decades of a debate that has restated the role of architecture as the main instrument of city planning we can better understand Le Corbusier's Berlin gesture. Whenever he had the opportunity to give shape to a city fragment, he used his *types* as instruments in order to define the contours of the built domain. Le Corbusier's entry was not only following the personal *tradition* he had established throughout the years,⁷⁰ he was being faithful to an urban design *method* as well, a method that has as a point of departure the indissoluble relationship between architecture and urban planning. As we discussed earlier, he was not simply proposing volumetric parameters, the only accepted *scientific* method in those days, he was, as he insisted, "*planning in three*

⁷⁰ Since the City for Three Millions Inhabitants in 1922, we can see that LeCorbusier always supported his urban planning proposals in specific architectural types: the Plan Voisin (1925) featured the *Cartesian Skyscraper*, the *Redents* and the *Cité d'Affaires* skyscrapers; the proposition for Rio (1929), the amazing linear *mile-long* housing building that reappears in Algiers (1930). The *Cité d'Affaires* for Buenos Aires (1938) on piles over Rio de La Plata was also based on the "*Three Millions*" skyscraper. The Anvers Master Plan (1933) had the *Redents* and the *Cartesian*; in Nemours (1933) there were the ancestors of the *Unités*. In Hellocourt (1935) the *Cartesian* again; in Saint Dié (1946), *Unités* and *Redents* combined with the *Musée à croissance illimitée* and a number of administrative buildings clearly identified in architectural terms. In Bogotá (1948), *Unités* and his very personal administrative buildings again. In La Rochelle-Pallice (1945-46) the *Unités*; in Marseille-Sud (1951), the *Unités*, three more units that were proposed after the *Unité de Marseille* (1946-1951) and, finally, at Meaux (1956), the *Unités* combined with the *Hameaux Verticales*.

dimensions.” Likewise, he was proclaiming the pertinence of his types as tools to implement his method. However, his continuous demand for attention for his architectural types resulted in a reaction against them as soon as they became *old*, or better said, *déjà vu*. In fact, a wave of resistance to his insistence on the validity of such types became a commonplace.⁷¹

The use of architectural imagery and in some cases specific architectural types as instruments of urban design was a strategy commonly accepted and practiced in the twenties and thirties when urbanism was only an emergent discipline, but it was more and more anathematized by *technical* urban planners in the fifties and sixties when it was thought (as it still is today in many instances) that urban design *had* to be architecturally neutral. We have referred to this issue when we discussed the composition of the Jury, that included many town planners. In the late fifties the most advanced trends of town planning, even if taking distance from the most common color-patched diagrams that became routine in the immediate post-war era, went as far as to accept that master plans for new developments should fix alignments and heights, propose neutral volumetric diagrams to establish the boundaries between public and private spaces, but *could never be specifically architectural*. That was the *ideology* of mainstream urban planning until the late seventies. As we have mentioned above, urban planners, as scientists, were not supposed to accept the *subjectivity* implicit in architectural design. This prejudice although based in a share of truth, has been at the origin of misconceptions that affected negatively many European cities. Nonetheless, it was a commonplace at

⁷¹ The Berlin proposal was known and discussed just when I was midway through my architecture studies. I remember clearly how Corbu’s entry was judged *more of the same* among my schoolmates or by some of the professors (*Le Corbusier and his ghosts...!*).

the time, and it was even more so in Eastern Europe where ideologically biased bureaucracies supported in doctrinal terms a strictly technical conception of urbanism. A conception that had an emblematic condition in the era of Soviet dominance when official thought was permeated by all kinds of technocratic theories about city growth. Theories that were also favored among *progressive* sectors of the *intelligentsia* in Europe and all over the world.

The curious paradox that can be glossed out of all these considerations is that Le Corbusier's entry, even though in many ways it had qualities that would still be valid in the years to come, was seen instead as if anchored in the past, as old-fashioned, as surpassed by the new *trends*.

III

We have seen how the location and the dimensions of the Cartesian Skyscrapers turned into one of Corbusier's bigger obstacles to obtain the favor of the Jury. We have also expressed our reserves on the same subject. But perhaps Corbu had in mind other considerations that justified the location of his skyscrapers.

One, the necessity of pedestrian density to feed Unter den Linden, the other the undeniable *civic* beauty of the sinuous pedestrian boulevard with the huge buildings pinpointing its trajectory and acting as a massive background on the eastern limits of the inner city in contrast with the Tiergarten in the west. And last, the ever-present fascination that skyscrapers have exerted on architects in modern times. Not only in ideological terms as demonstrated by the theoretic *corpus* of the Modern Movement, but as a technological possibility as well.

In present times, skyscrapers are usually viewed with suspicion. Particularly after September 11, many things have been written declaring nothing less than the

death of this typology. The well-supported allegations against their condition as arrogant symbols of a neo-liberal transnational economy, notwithstanding they keep a distinctive place in the agenda of public and private promoters. Not only Shanghai, Hong Kong, Beijing, Kuala Lumpur, Taiwan, Singapore, New York, Chicago, and other capitals compete to build the most glamorous of them all, but recently much publicized commissions,⁷² not to mention the reconstruction of Ground Zero itself, confirm that skyscrapers are still on demand. Perhaps it doesn't seem politically correct in Academic contexts to propose an skyscraper or a group of skyscrapers for *public* administrative institutions, but when it comes to urban design decisions, they are always part of the solution for the seats of large and powerful private corporations that take advantage of the readability derived from their symbolic capacity, their formal appeal, the economic advantages of their compactness etc. The type is still alive and well.

If that is the case in present times, it was even more so in the late fifties when the critique of the punctual concentration of activities in city centers had not yet emerged. The great majority of the entries for the Berlin competition adopted in one form or the other the skyscraper type to house public and private office space. The difference between them was the scale. And scale always was a central issue for Corbusier.

Needless to say that the distinctive quality of a skyscraper is its height. Corbusier once said during a visit to New York: "...*the [New York] skyscrapers are too small.*"

⁷² As the *tallest skyscraper in the world*, the Turning Tower, to be built in Chicago by Santiago Calatrava the Spanish architect-engineer. His *twisted* skyscraper for apartments in Otterlo, Norway, has received a lot of publicity. Daniel Liebeskind's entry for the Alexanderplatz competition or Coop Himmelblau's ideas for Leipzigerstrasse and the southern edge of Museuminsel also attest to the fact that this fascination (that has very important economic *reasons*) has not diminished.

He meant by that, as he explained later, that skyscrapers had to have, as had the *Unités*, a specific dimension in order to liberate enough space at ground level. He writes: *“This Skyscraper has been studied for a long time from the standpoint of urbanism as well as architecture. Its conception, its height, has been confirmed by the experience of building similar buildings all over the world. It should also be said that the ‘Cartesian Skyscraper’ can not survive if it is not supported by its context at ground level: enough parking, enough surface for pedestrians. A good connection with car traffic must also be assured. All these conditions have been difficult to obtain in existing, not demolished, cities. In a city like Berlin, its buildings destroyed by the war, such conditions have become real. It is useless to insist on the admirable presence that these constructions will have, their design derived from the sun, with precision. All the necessary corrections considering Berlin latitude can be done”*.

Skyscrapers, for Corbu, were meant to be big enough as to be an instrument against urban congestion. His motto *grandeur conforme*, coined for *Unités*, can also be applied to his conception of skyscrapers: standing on liberated ground, keeping a specific distance from each other as urban signs of the *cit  d’affaires*. When coming to the *center of the city*, as was the case in Berlin, they were like a final stage in a sequence of scales: 1) Parks / green areas / civic open space / monuments of the past: *monuments of today / public institutions / cultural infrastructure*. 2) Private economy: *redents for office space / commerce containers / department stores / entertainment facilities / retail commerce (Leipzigerstrasse)*. 3) Spots for high concentration of activities: *Skyscrapers*.

It was for him an *exact* sequence.⁷³ There was no room for intermediate, timid solutions. The 220-meters-60-stories-high dimension was not arbitrary; it came out of experience and reflection. His skyscrapers were *real* skyscrapers. All the explorations he carried out in the past characterized the skyscraper as a type that proposed an entirely different scale: the expression of a new vertical dimension for the *cit  d'affaires*, the city of business. That was what he was looking for in Berlin. In any case, Le Corbusier's search for a three-dimensional urban discipline as it was proposed for Berlin seems today a more than positive quality especially in contrast with many of the awarded entries, where different and even contradictory architectural footprints, alignments, heights and volumes are combined in ad hoc situations (this for this, this for that, this for these, this for those).

IV

The rigid discipline for automotive circulation, classified according to Corbu's 7V principle,⁷⁴ is for us today one of the shocking features of the scheme, perhaps because it brings to mind the negative consequences of many *modern* urban renewal operations that gave a high priority to private car mobility: freeways or heavy traffic *through* roads superimposed over the traditional urban tissue creating barriers that interfere with the continuity of public space. This negative impression

⁷³ This is his description: "One can accept the constitution of two essential qualities of buildings: 1) Eight story buildings with punctual orientation (no north-oriented offices). 2) If there is the necessity, 60 story buildings of a considerable size, seats of a certain number of big companies or on the contrary divided at will into medium size or small offices." Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 12 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

⁷⁴ We have mentioned before this 7V's rule. In fact, one of the personal contributions of Le Corbusier to urban planning, based on his research during the Second World War. For transport engineers today, such classification is basically similar to the routine codes used everywhere. In 1945 it was a pioneering systematization effort. Especially coming from architecture-oriented urban planning. Le Corbusier was especially proud of this *invention* and used it whenever the scale of the urban problem required an automotive circulation grid. A summary of the theory was published in his Complete Works, Vol. 5, pages 92-94.

gives us a good opportunity to discuss one aspect of the typical superficial criticism of the Modern Movement's heritage.

Urban renewal projects during the sixties and seventies ascribed extreme importance to automotive circulation not only because it was considered that the amount of land reserved for *arterial* highways was in direct proportion to an adequate efficiency of private traffic, but also because such efficiency imposed its priorities over any other aspect of the problem, including architectural considerations.

It has been frequently said that this particular feature stems from the Athens Charter's dogmatic approach to circulation. This point of view overlooks the fact that in the late fifties transport engineering had already acquired a great importance that was to reach its maximum during the sixties and seventies. As a result, urban planning became flooded with the technical paraphernalia derived from this auxiliary discipline. In 1963, a report on urban traffic based on intensive research of technical facts of the post-war experience in Europe and the United States was published under the title *Traffic in Towns*⁷⁵. This book was enormously influential and it was basically a consequence of the Buchanan Report, a study on urban traffic commissioned by the London County Council that was conceived as an in-depth analysis of the universal experience, to that date, of accessibility to congested central areas in big cities. One of the conclusions of the report was that the restrictive measures to minimize the use of private cars in order to improve *public* accessibility to central areas in European cities, very dear to urban planners

⁷⁵ *Traffic in Towns: A Study of the Long Term Problems in Urban Areas / Great Britain*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1963. More recently in 2003, an article written by Stephen Marshall was published in the magazine of the Town and Country Planning Association. Its title: *Traffic in Towns Revisited. A study of the influential Buchanan Report of November 1963.*

during the fifties and early sixties, could never be enough to eliminate the necessity to build comprehensive freeway systems. Freeways, stated the report, were necessary to adequately respond to the ever increasing private car use facilitated by economic development.⁷⁶ Today, of course, street-oriented urban design tends to emphatically discard solutions where traffic distributors confiscate urban terrain creating residual *green* areas with no significance whatsoever in terms of public civic space. In the early sixties that problem was not an issue. The public *conscience* of the destructive consequences of designing traffic *solutions* that imposed its priorities over those of urban designers had not a strong presence in the debate about city form. That is why we can see among some of the awarded Berlin entries traffic distributors in the inner city regardless of their invasive impact. The first prize (Spengelin) has two distributors in the east and west diagonal avenues in South Friedrichstadt that follow Lindenstrasse and Wilhelmstrasse (fig. 26); the first second prize (Hartmann) features one, right behind the Reichstag (fig. 27); one of the third prizes (Fleischer) puts six of them in South Friedrichstadt (fig. 28), the other (Kern) four big ones also in South Friedrichstadt (fig. 29); and many examples more can be cited among the mentions and in the shortlist. Le Corbusier, on the contrary, as did Scharoun (fig. 30), carefully avoided such intrusions, although Scharoun does it thanks to a costly network of tunnels. And finally, the Smithsons propose a massive invasion of through streets and parking in the inner

⁷⁶ The report closely examined the North American experience. Urban planners in the early sixties were usually extremely critical of the U.S. urban megalopolis. On the contrary, the Buchanan report considered such criticism as unjustified suggesting that it was important to analyze U.S. freeway construction programs because they had provided, up to that time, fairly acceptable solutions for accessibility problems. One consequence of the report was the radical change in urban planners appraisal of the arterial automotive circulation in such cities as Los Angeles or San Diego, California. They became case studies instead of politically incorrect solutions.

city (fig. 31), that can be over-passed, of course, using the pedestrian platforms. There is not one single comment on this issue in the Report of the Jury or in the Results of the Competition.



Fig. 26. First prize (Spengelin). Two important traffic distributors were inserted in South Friedrichstadt



Fig. 27. One of the second prizes (Hartmann). He proposes tunnels to connect 17 Juni Strasse with Französischerstrasse as well as to underpass the new Leipzigerplatz. A traffic distributor is placed directly in front of the Reichstag.



Fig. 28. One of the third prizes (Fleischer). Six traffic distributors in South Friedrichstadt plus smaller ones in other places.



Fig. 29. One of the third prizes (Kern). Two large distributors in South Friedrichstadt.



Fig. 30. One of the second prizes (Scharoun). To avoid the interference of vehicle circulation at ground level he proposes more than six miles of tunnels. One goes under Unter den Linden and the Spree to return to surface on the northeast side of the Museum Insel. A second one connects the West Tangent to the center. A third follows all along Leipzigerstrasse. There are two traffic distributors underground.

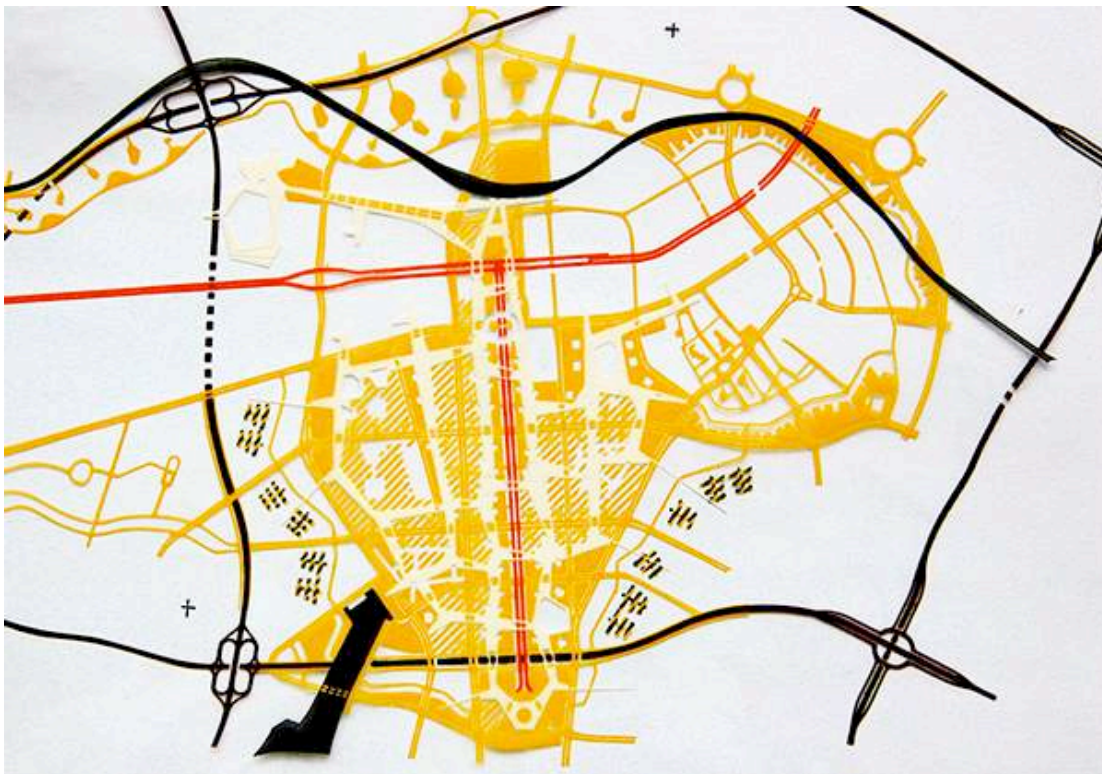


Fig. 31. One of the third prizes (the Smithsons). Streets and parking lots invade the central core. The pedestrian platforms, of course, overpass the parking lots! To transform them in parking structures!

Back in 1958, the immense majority of European capitals were yet to engage in aggressive public works programs to improve accessibility to central areas. Most of these programs with perhaps the exemption of Eastern Europe capitals have been completed today. As a result, accessibility to central areas is no longer a top priority problem as it surely was in the late fifties. In fact, present transportation priorities have radically changed. New highways, new rapid transit systems and new lines for the existing ones as well as new perimeter freeways have been built. There is more wealth to finance costly operations to *hide* arterial roads in central areas, meant to reduce their environmental impact.⁷⁷ For all these reasons, it is more than likely that the impression we have when examining large-scale urban proposals conceived between the late fifties and late sixties will be that automotive circulation has been assigned an unjustifiably predominant role in public space.

It seems thus simplistic to assume that such a predominance in town planning schemes in city centers during those years had ideological origins mainly rooted in Modern Movement's architectural and urban debate. It was more a skewed hierarchy of priorities typical of the *modern* approach to urban problems, when engineering technicalities were imposed over social or cultural arguments, among them architectural values. There can be no doubt that the *real* city of the fifties was not the city of architects, or the *Athens Charter city*, as it were.

As for Berlin in 1958, the exigencies for accessibility, private traffic, parking facilities and the like were predetermined by planners, by the technical bureaucracy behind the organization of the competition. In this respect, the Report

⁷⁷ In Boston, a very large and extremely costly operation to put underground the freeway system that went across downtown and became a source of visual, acoustic and architectural contamination has been under construction. Today the authorities and the community agree that the extra cost of this renewal operation is entirely justifiable. That of course was not the case when the system was originally built.

on the Results of the Competition is illustrative: “*The participants have been asked to make proposals for the organization of private traffic, the greatest difficulty of which, the provision of parking space, has become the pivotal problem of our cities (our emphasis). The provision of four express highways in tangential fashion was an obligatory item of this task...in addition, the planning maps showed the conception of the arrangement of the individual traffic as contemplated by the organizers, designated as a ‘non obligatory road system’ which provides for the opening up of the city core by means of a close network of arterial through roads (our emphasis).” Therefore the frame for private traffic proposed by the organizers called for maximum accessibility to the inner core. It was not a question of denying or accepting it, it was a *technical* decision imposed over any individual conception of city form.*

And here we face a peculiar paradox. Le Corbusier was extremely sensitive to technical contributions that he presumed would eventually enrich his intuitions or *inventions*. This was the case with his 7V’s *rule*,⁷⁸ which was very much in line with the technical contributions of traffic engineering. He must have been more than willing to accept the design parameters imposed by the organizers and he worked with them to establish the overall conception of the circulation grid of his entry. In that respect he lost the distinction of the prophet and became nothing more than a

⁷⁸ A condensed description of this *rule* was included in his description of the project. “V1: A road that goes through continents, countries, regions...it doesn’t end in a city. V2: It is big urban road of high potential...V3: For mechanical speeds...it is a through road...intersections every 400 meters...no pedestrians...no housing doors open to it...no housing on its borders. V4: Is the Main Street of tradition. The cinemas, the cafés, the police etc... V5 and V6: ...get to the door of the house (offices, public buildings)... it is a service road...no through vehicles will be there. They will be designed to make impossible any excessive speed... V7: ...it is a street for green areas, sport facilities, schools...the benefits of everyday sport next to the houses...and when everything was settled the V8 was born.V8: The street for bikes, two wheels (the two wheels after being asleep for a hundred years...have invaded the streets and the roads facing all kind of dangers)... the V8 absorbs bikes, scooters, Lambrettas etc. etc...the rule of 7V, and they are 8! Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 21 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

*child of his time.*⁷⁹ He was, only five years before the Buchanan report, keeping up with the *new* ideas regarding accessibility to town centers.

However, this primacy of private traffic accessibility to city centers was not, in Corbusier's conception of urban design, without a very important counterpart: the separation between pedestrian and automotive traffic, a key item of the program laid out by the Athens Charter,⁸⁰ one that he always insisted on complying with and that became for him a doctrinaire premise of high priority.

We mentioned this when commenting on the first pages of his description of the project where, after praising the necessity of pedestrian freedom he concluded with the phrase *"Dignity is regained"*. But he kept insisting further on: *"One word makes clear the whole situation: men are doomed to enter through the door of the house or the building. The cars leave one door to arrive at another door. The question is to fix the number of useful and needed doors, of knowing how to forbid the unnecessary doors and knowing how to identify the indispensable hierarchy of cars that have the right to arrive directly to the doors from those that have no absolute necessity of arriving there. Thus the problem of parking can be reduced. All the cities of the world are on the edge because of this problem."*

*"The fate of pedestrians in the city has to be faced. Or better said: things have to be done in such a way that the pedestrian regains his lost royalty and becomes master inside the city. The car is not a God: the car is a servant."*⁸¹

And:

⁷⁹ He writes: *"The report of the Jury declared that the project had completely resolved the problems of circulation."* Complete Works / Vol 7, Page 30.

⁸⁰ Athens Charter, paragraph 62: *"Pedestrians should take paths different than those of the cars."*

⁸¹ Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 17 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

“On the plans it can be seen that the arrival of persons to every place in the center of Berlin happens with the contribution of : a) exclusive car service or exclusive pedestrian routes (V3) horizontally serving a complete sector (between east and west) as it is for the Government Center, the Cultural Center, the Economic Center, the Municipal Center; b) likewise: exclusive pedestrian routes. The pedestrian mass will arrive by different means but mainly by the subway stations that presently seem to be enough. This disposition is very important because it kills the drama of the pedestrian and the car. This is a research we have engaged in many years, studying all the imaginable situations and their reasons in many cities in the world.⁸²

Therefore, in Berlin, the old street grid is rearranged in such a way that pedestrians and cars follow independent routes on the existing geometric pattern. Pedestrian routes become a system complementary to the automotive circulation system, and the grid, Cartesian as it was in the past, provides the geometric order.

The interchange between both systems was also rigorously considered by Corbu. The main pedestrian ways like Unter den Linden and the one on the southern edge of Leipzigerstrasse's compound are intensively served by rapid transit lines and particularly with special lines for small buses that Le Corbusier proposed as an essential component of the circulation system. The *navettes autobus* lines served the whole center vertically and horizontally. Corbu writes: *“...an important innovation created after observation in many cities in the world which is the result of discussions with experts (including taxi drivers) is the creation of ‘vertical and horizontal navettes autobus’ (east-west and north-south) that can respond to the*

⁸² Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 19 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

*interior and daily movement in the center of the city. The principle is as follows: each trajectory is about 2 1/2 Kilometers long...with a brief schedule and very high frequency of buses with a capacity limited to 16 to 20 passengers.*⁸³ This system was a key element to preserve and guarantee the dynamics of pedestrian movement in every direction in the city. Private cars and public rapid transit lines were for Corbu the external feeding system; public small-scale public transportation was the internal network for dynamic movement in the inner city.

The idea of the city center as a system of different circulation networks following a geometric order is clearly expressed in Le Corbusier's entry. It is one of its most outstanding qualities for us today when the idea of a Cartesian grid as the origin of the city form has regained general acceptance by virtue of its essential logic.⁸⁴

However, even though *modern* town planners at the beginning of twentieth century were fully aware of that solid tradition⁸⁵, the monotony that characterized the *real* fragments of modern cities built everywhere produced a reaction. Curved street patterns in housing areas to avoid linear perspectives had become very popular in postwar years as can be seen in the tradition established by the British *New Towns* and in many private-funded housing developments in the United States and abroad. And the search for a certain type of *liberating* arbitrariness, where diagonals, zigzags, broken paths and sinuous trajectories would govern the pattern

⁸³ Le Corbusier, Description of the Project, page 18 / Fondation Le Corbusier, document 12-10-169.

⁸⁴ Since the *cardo* and *decumanus* of the Roman cities, the logic of a basic grid based in X and Y Cartesian coordinates has been at the origin of the structure of cities throughout the centuries. The spontaneous development of pathways radiating from a center of power or cult, as was the case of medieval cities, produced singular structural patterns with intrinsic value, but whenever the city demanded discipline, the Cartesian grid took over, with the exception of the settlements designed for military purposes, or in baroque times with the search of *ideal* geometries, or those examples where a diagonal order was established (usually stemming from medieval grids) with diagonal streets converging on a point of interest, a monument or a point for redistribution of circulation (Paris). The *chessboard* pattern (*el damero*), rigidly *Cartesian*, as the genesis of colonial cities in Hispanic America, produced innumerable urban settlements that can be seen as a confirmation of the logic of the Cartesian scheme.

⁸⁵ A very good example is the Le Corbusier's *City of Three Million Inhabitants*.

followed by streets and public spaces; and surprising changes in shapes, heights and volumes imposed into architecture, were finding their place whenever the form of the city was in debate. A posture very dear to Team 10 members as to become a *trade mark*, as the Smithsons' Berlin entry convincingly shows.

For these last reasons the overall orderly quality of Corbusier's entry, its reference to the idea of tissue (*urban tissue*, the *continuum* established by the *redent* type we have mentioned before), was entirely overlooked by the Jury. A quality foreign to most of the awarded entries with few exceptions. The first prize (Spengelin), for instance seems to hesitate: part of the inner core follows a certain discipline, another part a different one; buildings are oriented following punctual requirements (fig. 26a). One of the second prizes (Hartmann) shows a type of order in plan and a totally different one in volume (fig. 27a). Two of the third prizes are good examples of the reaction against the Cartesian grid: one (Fleischer) indulges in a system of medieval-like intricate pedestrian walkways (fig. 28a); while the Smithsons entry is a manifesto against Cartesian order (fig. 31a). The other third prize (Kern), on the contrary, adopts a boring Cartesian arrangement, almost military, along Unter den Linden (fig. 29a) while playing with small clusters that contradict each other to the south of Gendarmenmarkt (fig. 29ab). Hans Scharoun's entry (one of the second prizes) in a sense is as well a manifesto although not based on scenographic tricks (fig. 30a). It shows more the will to erase the signs of the old center, preserving strategic spots: the Lustgarten area, Gendarmenmarkt, the Rathaus, Leipzigerplatz, allowing the Tiergarten *invasion* of the territory and proposing very appealing and carefully studied architectural complexes along two main linear trajectories: Unter den Linden and Leipzigerstrasse

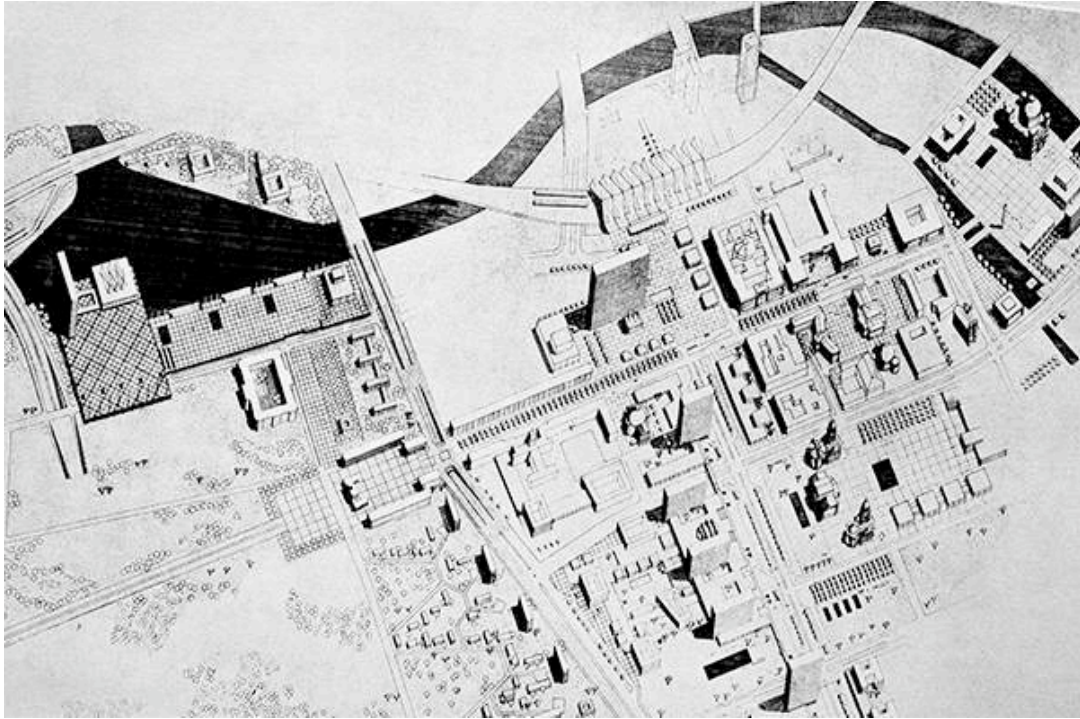


Fig.26a. The axonometric of Spengelin's entry.



Fig. 27a. The axonometric of Hartmann's entry.

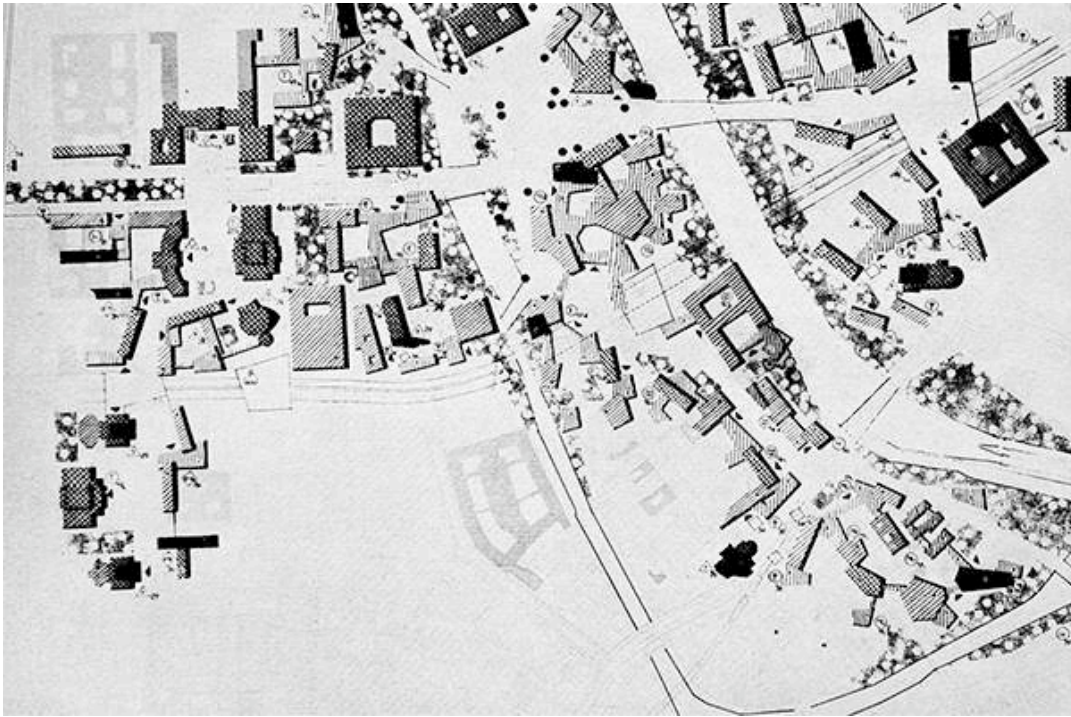


Fig. 28a. A detail of Fleischer's entry showing his search for a medieval-like configuration of public space using connecting covered walkways or platforms with organic geometries. Bebelplatz and Gendarmenmarkt can be seen to the left.

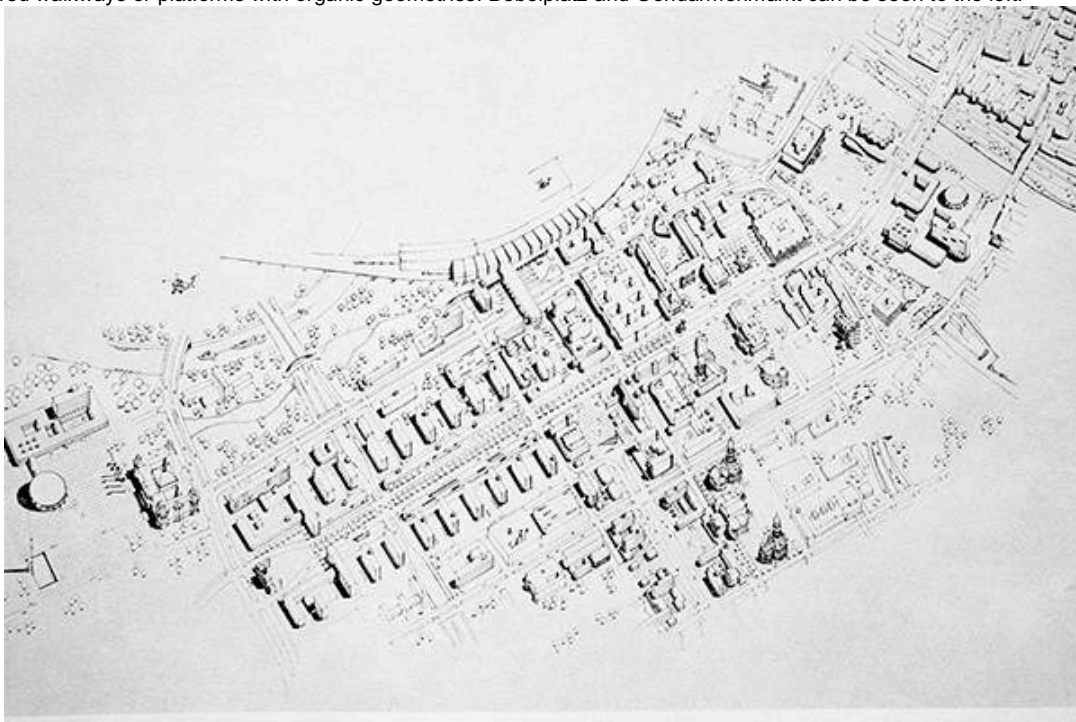


Fig. 29a. Kern's axonometric (third prize), detail of Unter den Linden axis. The buildings stand as soldiers in a parade.

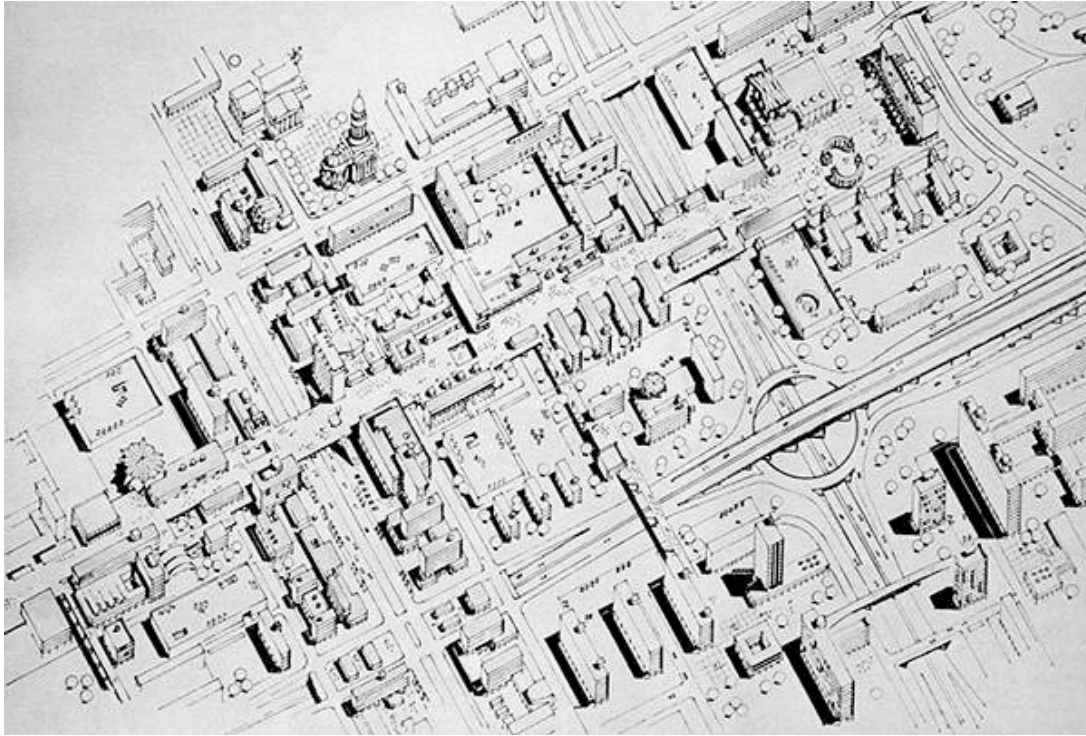


Fig. 29ab. Kern's axonometric, south of Gendarmenmarkt. Some details are astonishingly poor.



Fig. 30. One of the second prizes (Scharoun). To avoid the interference of vehicle circulation at ground level he proposes more than six miles of tunnels. One goes under Unter den Linden and the Spree to return to surface on the northeast side of the Museum Insel. A second one connects the West Tangent to the center. A third follows all along Leipzigerstrasse. There are two traffic distributors underground.

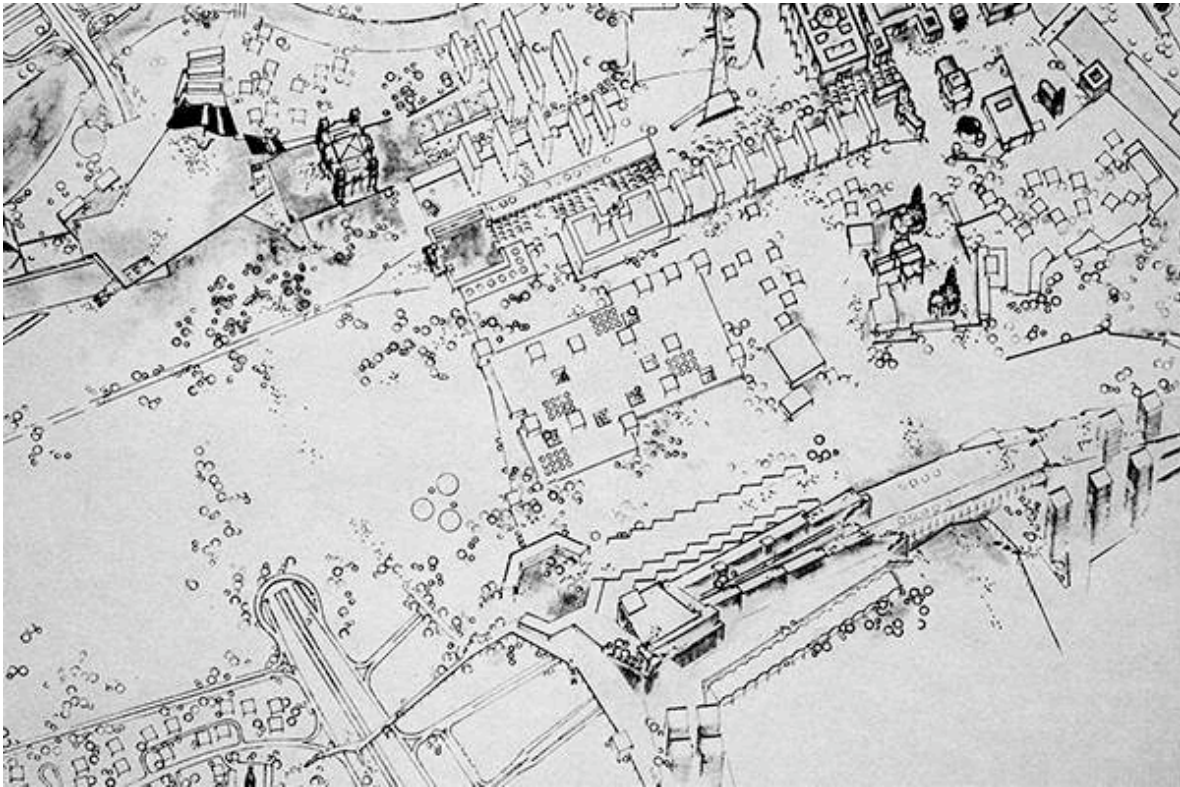


Fig. 30a. Scharoun's axonometric. The Reichstag and the Civic Center are in the upper left corner.

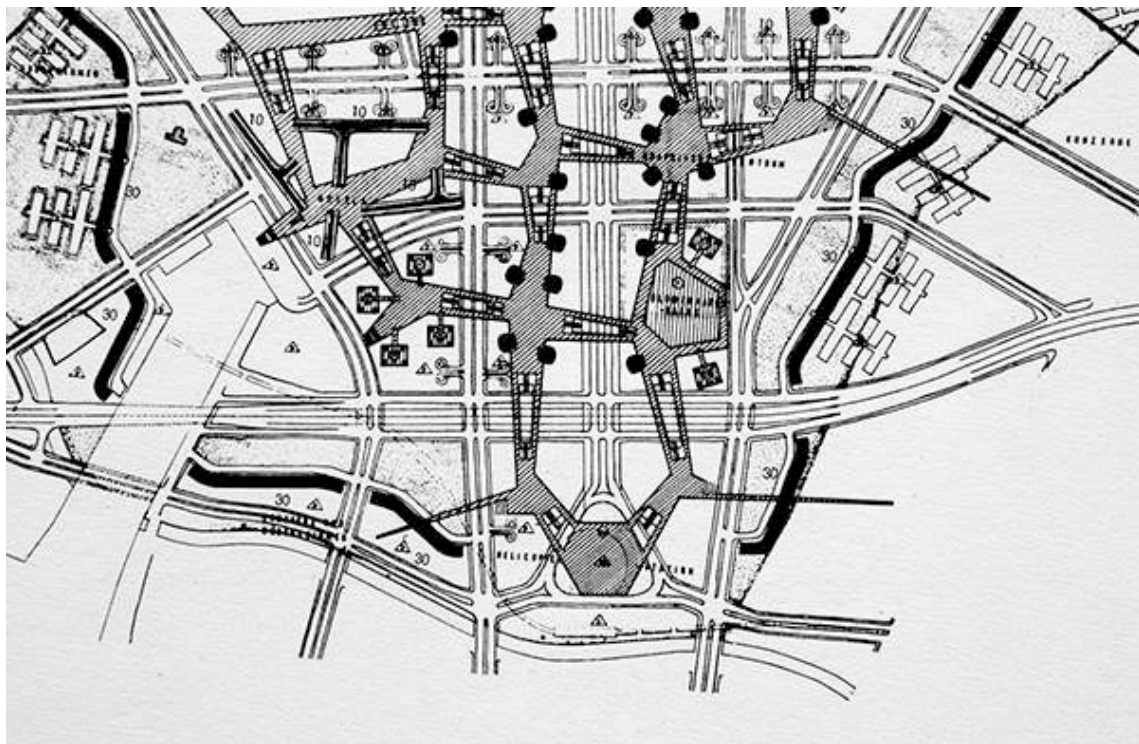


Fig. 31a. A detail of the Smithsons' entry. The black dots are office towers around the pedestrian platforms. The three t-shaped forms forming a cluster on the left are hotel buildings.

V

And finally, the Berlin of today and how it gives us clues to better situate the 1958 competition.

This is a very complicated matter. Many things have been said about Berlin's reconstruction, debate has been intense and above all the scope of the enterprise that has been assumed by public and private German authorities is of such a scale that any attempt to discern good from bad seems somewhat irrelevant. Let us try anyway.

When visiting *new* central Berlin on a normal working day one has the impression that it is a holiday and activities are at a minimum. Light traffic, few pedestrians, an atmosphere of relax and calm. At first, this sensation is pleasant and even welcome, until you realize that the real core of the city is somewhere else. If you want to participate in the rhythm of the real Berlin that is not the place to be. Things are not happening there.

If one walks along Friedrichstrasse, particularly when starting at its southern end, from Mehringplatz, the sensation is that you are in a suburb (fig. 32), or perhaps in the center of a small provincial town. Further north, after Checkpoint Charlie, the high standard of the new buildings of *Friedrichstrasse passage* with its expensive stores (fig. 33) imposes a change in quality that reminds you of the importance of the neighborhood, although the sensation of slow motion and calm remains. A few blocks up north, when reaching Unter den Linden, things are the same: the wide and prestigious avenue of the past looks neat, clean, friendly...and very calm. It keeps its low key in both directions: west to Pariser Platz and the Brandenburg Gate or east to the Lustgarten (fig. 34): no signs of the usual dense activities in the



Fig. 32. Mehringplatz in April 2006. (photo by Rico Emge)

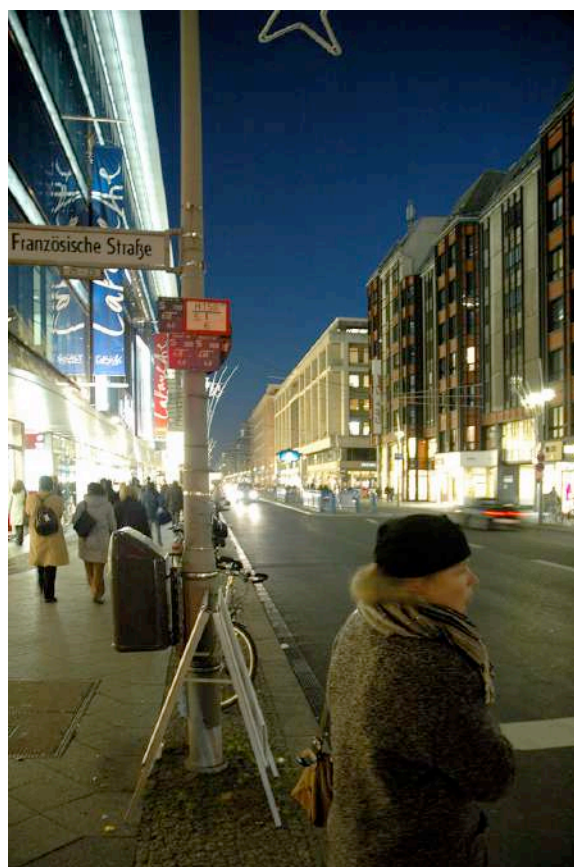


Fig. 33. The corner of Französischerstrasse and Friedrichstrasse in late afternoon. To the left, the glass façade of Jean Nouvel's Galeries Lafayette. November 2005.



Fig. 34. Unter den Linden looking east, just before the Friedrichstrasse crossing. November 2005.

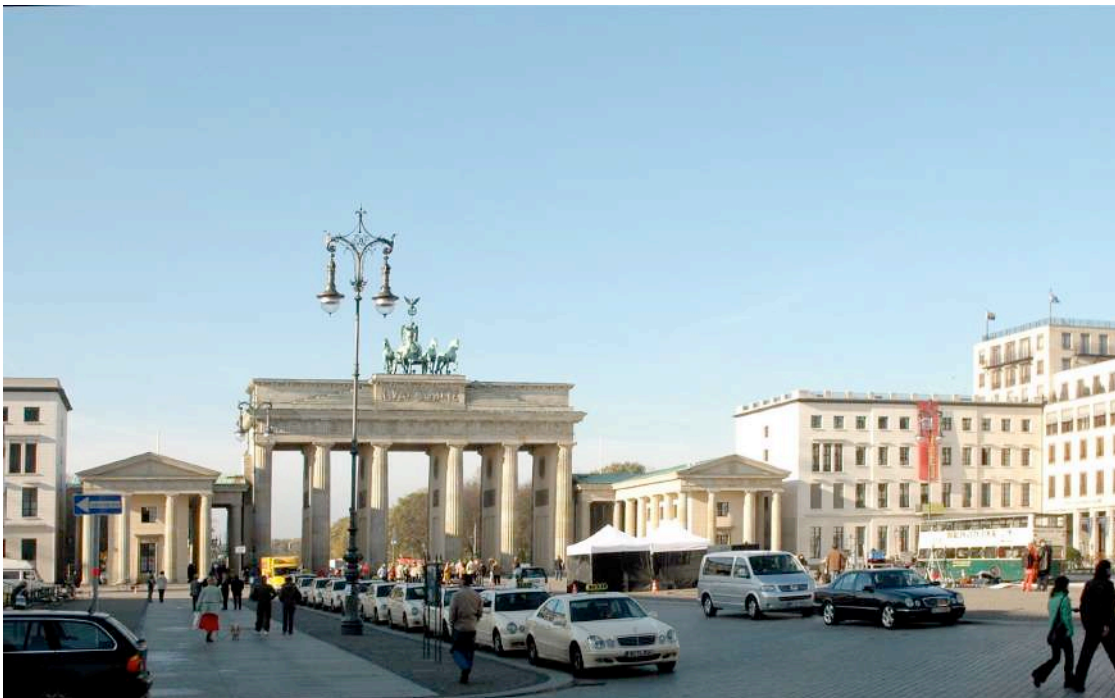


Fig. 35. Pariser Platz and the Brandenburg Gate. On each side Joseph Kleihues' *traditional* buildings close the square in the direction of the Tiergarten.



Fig. 36. The present Platz der Republik: *Reichstag über alles.*



Fig. 37. The west façade of Stephan Braunfels' building for services to the Parliament, and the Reichstag in the background. Between the camera and the building, the Forum with U-Bahn and S-Bahn stations will be built, connecting the Chancellery (behind the camera) and the administrative building and completing Axel Schulte's mile-long proposal.



Fig. 38. No eye contact between the administrative services building and the Reichstag.



Fig. 39. The south façade of the Chancellery, a project of Axel Schulte.



Fig. 40. A sculpture by Chillida presides over the courtyard entrance to the Chancellery.



Fig. 41. Bebelplatz. The southwest corner of the Staatsoper is seen to the left. Saint Hedwig's Catholic church (1773) in the center; in the background a new building that partially imitates the former Kronprinzpalace.

center of a big city. When reaching Pariserplatz, we can see that the traffic coming from 17 Juni Strasse along the Tiergarten can not go through the Brandenburg Gate; it turns south in order to feed the inner core through the old street grid. In the square itself cars are allowed to service the buildings (hotels, banks) cutting the pedestrian areas (fig. 35). The Kleihues buildings that close the view to the Tiergarten on each side of the Gate look completely foreign to it. They want to look *traditional*, they look dull. The idea of letting the Gate stand alone as a monument (Corbu) takes then its full meaning, as well as the idea of *restoration of the old square at any cost*. Turning right after crossing the Gate one runs into the *backyard* of the Reichstag formed by the imperial building and the new buildings aligned with the Gate. Cars serving the Parliament come and go through this area not very often, but *you better watch out*. On the other end, the mile-long Schulte's building can be seen, cut by the Spree, that flows under graceful and elegant pedestrian bridges that connect the east end with the rest of the building in direction of the Platz der Republik. A square that, as we have said before, is more a green esplanade where the only real sense of order is given by the Reichstag and the memories it triggers (Fig. 36).

Leaving apart the outstanding quality of Foster's design and construction as well as its public success, the decision to keep the building as the seat of the German Parliament makes one feel somewhat uncomfortable. It is true that the almost entirely new interior of the building, flooded by natural light coming from the transparent dome, sends the message of the new times, of the new democratic institution. But the almost untouched exterior remains with all its strength as a symbol of old imperial times. It *speaks* of authoritarianism and, why not, of a

reverential relation with a tradition of power. When we think of Foster's first version of the project, when the technological umbrella offered its protection to the vestiges of the building, we feel more at ease. And we can appreciate with all its meaning the sad comedy of his acceptance to change the project and to adapt it, stage after stage, to the requirements of the authorities. The famous photograph of the models of the innumerable versions of the dome waiting for the selection of bureaucrats is appalling; it looks so decadent. It sends us a message: marketing is the main ideological impulse behind most of the stars of architecture today. Everything can be done to please the client, to please the one who pays, even the radical change of the spirit of a project.

But more than the reverential preservation of the exuberant image of the building, the absence of any intention to form a civic space is also shocking: nothing can be opposed to the predominance of the Reichstag. The Platz der Republik is not a square; it has no frontiers, no thresholds, no borders, no changes in levels; it is completely neutral, a lawn limited only by the horizontal gesture of the Administrative building *line*, including a Chancellery that looks as if diminished in a context where space escapes in every possible direction (waiting perhaps for the construction of the section that would complete Schulte's building to the north) (figs. 37, 38, 39 and 40).

Back to Unter den Linden.

When in Unter den Linden and Friedrichstrasse you decide to go east the monuments from the past take over: on the southern edge the Bebelplatz with St. Hedwig's Church and the Staatsoper around it (fig. 41), on the northern edge the Staatsbibliothek, Humboldt University, Schinkel's Neue Wache (fig. 42) and, after



Fig. 42. Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Neue Wache (1817) on the north side of Unter den Linden.



Fig. 43. The Lustgarten and Schinkel's Altes Museum (1823).



Fig. 44. The Evangelic Lutheran cathedral (the Dom), was built by order of Emperor Wilhelm II between 1894 and 1905, designed by Julius Raschdorff. To build it, a church by Schinkel that had been erected on the same site between 1816 and 1822 was demolished, perhaps the reason (apart from its dubious cultural value) why many Berliners have little esteem for this building. It was heavily damaged by bombing during the war and its restoration begun in 1975, during the GDR era. It was reopened in 1993. The organizers of the Hauptstadt Berlin 1958 competition did not consider its preservation mandatory. Le Corbusier proposed its demolition, as did Hartmann, Scharoun, Fleischer and many others. Spengelin and the Smithsons kept it.

To the left, Altes Museum; to the right, Marienkirche.



Fig. 45. Friedrichstrasse looking south from Unter den Linden. A subway station in the middle of the street.

the Spree, the Island of the Museums where the Lustgarten stands with Schinkel's Altes Museum (fig. 43) on the north side and the Cathedral, the Dom (fig. 44), on its east side. Again few pedestrians, a few more cars, but the same quietness. More welcome here.

The lack of activity⁸⁶ in the system Friedrichstrasse-Unter den Linden is essentially a problem of scale. Density is too weak on both margins of Unter den Linden. As for Friedrichstrasse it is too narrow and on top of that the entrances to the subway stations are right in the middle of the street without any special protection for pedestrians (Fig. 45), a situation that could be acceptable in the prewar years, but looks absurd after the *reconstruction* and especially if we have in mind the strict German regulations.

When we come to this point we start wondering what have been the parameters established for the reconstruction of central Berlin.

One important issue is the refusal to change the *scale* by means of the modification of streets (as in Friedrichstrasse), dimension of lots, heights and densities in the inner core. In other words, to consider a complete or even partial restructuring of the old center.

Apparently there was an important obstacle to this change in scale: the rights of prewar owners of the land that pleaded for indemnities or established limitations for regrouping of lots. Other obstacles were the conditions imposed by private developers, the main tool used by authorities to build the *new* Berlin; perhaps the interventions imposed during the GDR era that could have created new alignments

⁸⁶ The usual comment when discussing what has been done in central Berlin is that all the international commercial firms that have opened stores in the area lose money. They remain there mainly for prestige reasons.

or heights, and last but not least the urban interventions in Kreuzberg (south of Chekpoint Charlie) promoted by IBA in West Berlin before 1989 that were rigorously adapted to old alignments and uses.

All these obstacles of course had an influence but we have to conclude that it was only partial. For instance, if the IBA 87 consolidation of blocks in Kreuzberg imposed a rule, there was no reason for keeping the same structure North of Leipzigerstrasse. In fact, from thereon Friedrichstrasse could have had an entirely new section. The GDR previous interventions in East Leipzigerstrasse were not a big obstacle to proposing, as it has been done, a *new* scale in Leipzigerplatz and Potsdamerplatz in its west end. The impression one has is that all central Berlin from Leipzigerstrasse to the Spree River could have had a new scale, perhaps assuming the dead weight of important demolitions of buildings that were restored and used during the GDR era, a polemic item difficult to justify, as difficult, however, as many other issues that had been under intense debate and have been carried on against strong opposition.

It is clear that there has been an ideological pact, very simple, consensual, among the high ranks of power (among citizens too?), hence very effective, that has determined the strategy followed for the reconstruction of central Berlin. Reconstruction should be, whenever possible, *construction-as-it-was*. Alignments, scales, volumes were to be respected (figs 46, 47, 48, 49 and 50). There even has been the promotion of a *style*, a *Berliner Architektur*, coming out of a conservative debate seen with sympathy by authorities and personified by some architects that have assumed the role of spokesmen of the official ideology: *Berlin, city of stone*. This is, we think, the real meaning of the slogan coined by the authorities, *critical*



Fig. 46. Gendarmenmarkt in April 2006. To the left, Schinkel's Schauspielhaus (1818-21); in the background, Französischer Dom built originally by French architect Louis Cayart (1701-05). (photo by Rico Emge)



Fig. 47. The Spree, the Dom in the background and the dismantled building that was formerly a seat of the Parliament during the GDR (Palast der Republik) to the left, standing on the site of the former Hohenzollern palace (*die Stadtschloss* for Berliners), damaged during the war and demolished by the GDR in 1950 for ideological reasons. This building was built in 1973-76; it was recently decided to demolish it to build a hotels and entertainment complex. There has been an intense polemic regarding this decision.



Fig. 48. The Spree, part of the Palast der Republik and the Neue Marstall, one of the Fixed Points. Corbu's controversial Cartesian skyscraper was meant to be built on part of the site where the Palast stands. In the background, some of the prefabricated blocks built during the GDR era along the east end of Leipzigerstrasse.



Fig. 49. The Neue Marstall



Fig. 50. Schinkel's Friedrichswerdersche church. To the left, a backdrop of Schinkel's Bauakademie, announces its reconstruction.

reconstruction, a *mot d'ordre* of official Berlin. Returning to the 1958 competition, we can for instance reevaluate, if we leave behind the prejudice about *the old city profile* which seems more ideology, or nostalgia, than reality, as well as any contention regarding skyscrapers, we can reevaluate, I repeat, Corbu's insertion of the huge skyscraper meant to harbor all the Ministries that would give a strong impulse to Unter den Linden conceived as a pedestrian boulevard. The same can be said of the Banking building across the avenue (the Central Bank of Germany), in the same lot where the Soviet embassy was built almost ten years before the competition.⁸⁷ Not to mention how prejudiced the Jury's objection to the pedestrian

⁸⁷ The Soviet embassy was built in 1948-50 by Anatoli Srichewsky. It was not among the Fixed Points established by the organizers, so obviously it was meant to be demolished. It is an example of the rhetoric of Socialist Realist architecture. This is an interesting point for discussion, the decision to keep the Russian embassy where it was and in the next block close to the Brandenburg Gate, the British and American embassies, and across Pariserplatz, the French embassy. It was obviously a political decision. The problem is that for security reasons, the traffic by the British embassy is restricted as perhaps it will also be restricted by

boulevard itself seems to us today. For that is almost its present condition, and still it is a plausible option providing some measures that are of course out of the question. And we can perceive as well the logic of taking the rest of the avenue as the seat of the most important cultural institutions of the city, a much better destiny for the illustrious avenue than the present arrangement of its northern and part of its southern edges between Friedrichstrasse and the Gate.

The transformation of Leipzigerstrasse into a very intense spine of entertainment, Berlin's Broadway Corbusier had in mind, looks even more logical today when Potsdamerplatz has been completed and Leipzigerplatz is in its final stages of construction. And however reluctant one could be with the scale he proposed, the conversion of Friedrichstrasse into a thoroughfare appears far more logical or even suggestive than the midtown *passage* that has been built.

We have implied before when making comments about *scale* how appropriate it would have been to restructure the street grid in central Berlin as well as the volumetric order that has been imposed on the whole area. This said, the Corbusian *redent* tissue acquires a solid logic. If we don't see it solely as Corbusier's trademark, If we take it as a discipline in volume, height and alignments, it acquires all his meaning as a substitutive scale where many architectures could have found their place.

And finally, when we react to the cumulative effect of the differences and difficulties between the Berlin authorities and the architects, of the frequently absurd

the American embassy when it is completed. This seems a permanent problem for the area in the future, not only for the restrictions of this kind but also for the consequences in terms of the loss of urban vitality. The rest of the embassies are or will be in the Diplomat Quarter that has been kept on the southern edge of the Tiergarten as the organizers of Hauptstadt Berlin had in mind in 1958. One can speculate: Why not all of them there?

requirements, of the coming and going of restrictions, impositions, changes etc. that are part of the process of making a building in Berlin, when we react to stories that are not only recent but look like a *tradition* that goes back to Interbau in 1957, the ominous image of conservative and authoritarian officials brandishing their ideology about the eternal values of the city,⁸⁸ of narrow-minded promoters along with the typical drawbacks of the effort to propose real and positive changes in city form, takes its place on the Berlin scene.

⁸⁸ This state of mind, the one that produces slogans as the *city of stone* (by the way, completely absent from today's Berlin) is the same that guided those who wrote the overtly ridiculous description of the Berlin citizen that was part of the text included in the General Report of the Competition. It has the title "The intellectual Atmosphere." An excerpt: "*One easily asks for the 'Berliner.' What are his peculiar features?...he is quick in thinking and reacting...Though always in a hurry nothing can disturb his equanimity. His statements are of striking mother wit but without malice (!). He is a man of humor full of self-irony. Briefly a rough diamond, warm-hearted but without any sentimentality...he takes keen delight in crowds and noise when at work; for recreation he prefers...the calmness 'with Mother Green' as he calls nature...There is a good reason to call him the 'Spree-Athenian'...*" And so on, one *sentimental* phrase after the other. Could such childish ideological background have been receptive to new ideas? / *Ergebnis des internationalen städtebaulichen Ideenwettbewerbs*. Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1960, page 9 of the English translation.

CONCLUSION

I was midway in my studies of architecture when I first learned about the Berlin Capital competition: Le Corbusier was among the participants and that was a good reason to pay attention. The vague image of the city center and the very clear star-shaped footprint of his skyscraper for the ministries were the only things that remained in my memory from that time, together with the news of his elimination. In the mid eighties, when writing a text that I thought was a modest contribution to do justice to Corbu's legacy, I ran again into the visual image as well as into the *official* version of the events. What really happened there? Why the results? What was the logic, if any, behind the output of a competition that called for universal attention? These questions gave me the impulse to start rewriting a text that I had left incomplete until now; and I decided to assume again the task of getting to the bottom, if possible, of the whole episode.

The preceding lines are the result of my effort to answer those questions. I went through documents, texts, interviews and the usual support everyone needs when doing this type of work, but essentially I followed my own reflections and intuitions which I made not from the perspective of the scholar but from that of the practicing architect. Because my real concern is not only to tell a story as I see it but better to make deductions that can be used to enrich our discipline: to learn from Hauptstadt Berlin 1958.

In the first place it can be said that Le Corbusier, and with him most of the participants, was not in a position to give the right weight in the scenario of the competition to the political scene and its influence: on the one hand, the German Federal government was after an image for new Berlin, not after an architect. The

idea of *especially inviting* a number of prestigious architects was not based on the possibility of using their talent to attain the best possible solution for the reconstruction, or having them as consultants for the future stages of the development of the idea; it was more to have their names associated with the initiative of convoking the best people in the world to debate about Berlin. Propaganda over substance. On the other hand, the image the politicians were looking for had to be necessarily consensual, not controversial. It had to be easily digestible. It could not pose debatable issues.

And there was more: the precondition for the actual development of the project was reunification. So it was more than obvious that nothing was meant to be done in the immediate months or years after the competition. The competition was essentially a political operation. If that was the case, it did not matter much who the architect was.

And, finally, it was altogether dubious that the shaping of the symbolic *image* of Berlin Capital would be entrusted to an architect like Le Corbusier, arrogant, controversial, who in addition was not German. If we follow Nietzsche's dictum we can say that Corbusier was specially invited by virtue of his status of *authority*, not necessarily to expect from him guidance or precise recommendations.

This superstructural context was definitive in the outcome of the competition, in combination with other professional or disciplinarian considerations that we have discussed up to this point.

We can also learn from *Hauptstadt Berlin 58* that there are more than enough reasons to distrust architectural competitions. They frequently are a *mise en scène*, a theatrical representation, a comedy that follows a script ruled by conveniences

and occasional jealousy and hypocrisy. They seldom are opportunities for a better knowledge of our discipline. Their output is usually misleading and in some cases, as in Berlin in 1958, mediocre or even negative.

For it is shocking to see that a great percentage of the awarded entries in Berlin are of a very low interest for us today, unless it be anecdotal. It is true that the same can be said about many well-known competitions of the past, but we tend to forget how poor the tradition has been. In Berlin, apart from Corbusier's, only two projects among those we were able to review⁸⁹ have enough interest to be retained: Scharoun's and the Smithsons'. Some of the others might elicit our curiosity, for instance Jörn Utzon's,⁹⁰ but in general they are good examples of the average and conventional in the mid fifties (fig 51).

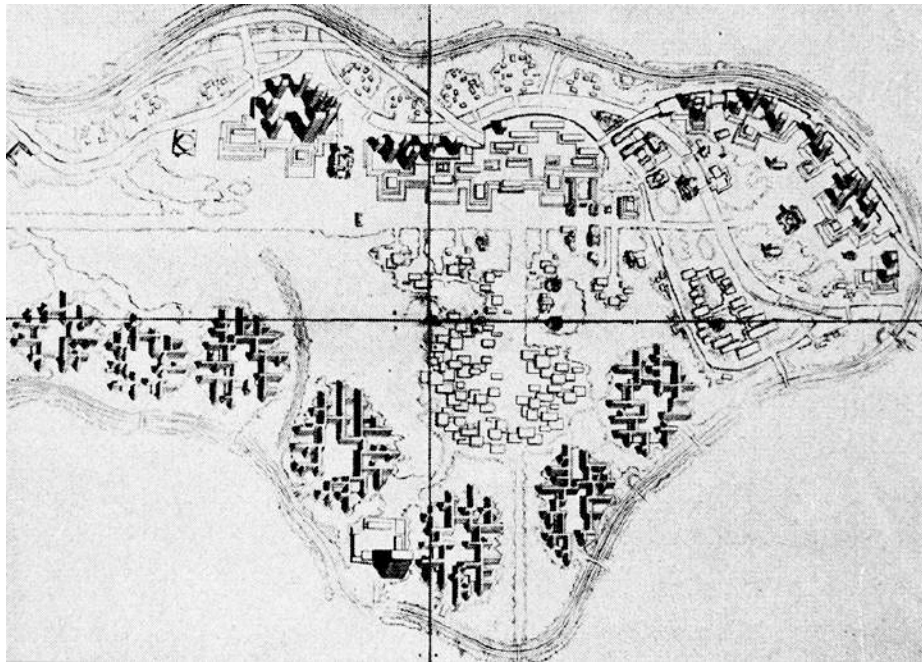


Fig. 51. Jörn Utzon's entry.

⁸⁹ Only the awards, the mentions and the short-listed, published in *Ergebnis des internationalen städtebaulichen Ideenwettbewerbs*, Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1960.

⁹⁰ A very small image of Utzon's proposal (which was not given an award or included in the shortlist) was published in *Ergebnis*. It appears as non city, featuring a number of clusters of office buildings on the periphery of a disintegrated nucleus with a few traces of old Berlin.

Scharoun's project on the contrary is committed to architecture, his drawings showing a strong architectural will capable of making us imagine spatial and formal virtues. If his idea of erasing every trace of old Berlin with the exception of Unter den Linden and Leipzigerplatz-Leipzigerstrasse seems openly debatable, it is no less true that the invasion of Tiergarten Park to the west bank of the Spree with the strong and appealing architectural gestures of Unter den Linden and Leipzigerstrasse on its north and south edges is not only attractive but a very good example of a well-conducted dialogue between architecture and the greenery.

As for the Smithsons, the story is completely different. Their proposal looks as if they were playing with three-dimensional objects useful in their intention to form different points of interest, but with a very light, if any, architectural content. These *objects* (with an amoeba-like geometry) form clusters along the northern periphery of the competition. On the southeast and southwest borders they become long snaking buildings that form mile-long continuous walls. The network of elevated pedestrian platforms of variable widths (meant to harbor the required built office and commerce areas) looks capricious and a lot more unrealizable, obstructionist and aggressive to views, to urban perspectives and to the scale of old Berlin than any of Corbu's skyscrapers. Notwithstanding, the proposal won an award.

This is the reason why I retain it. It confirms how competitions can be captured by fashion; in this case, Team 10 rhetoric, on top of the wave when the competition was launched,⁹¹ rhetoric that fifty years later seems devoid of any lasting content.

⁹¹ I clearly remember when as a young architect I participated in 1961 in Paris, in a seminar given by Georges Candilis on his Toulouse Le Mirail project, highlighted here and there by his *with due respect* remarks on how they (Team 10, of course) had said what was wrong, what was right to *Père Corbu*. The seminar was organized by the French Ministry of Construction, a demonstration that Candilis's discourse was officially promoted.

For it was true then as it is now that architectural marketing promotes architecture for its capacity to attract attention, for its appeal, not necessarily for its intrinsic values. Marketing's main concern is to follow or promote success and notoriety not the promotion of debate. And success does not care for ideas. Success is self-sufficient. Success usually is the antithesis of (real) prestige. That is why today, when marketing has acquired an unprecedented relevance, the scene of architectural notoriety is so poor in ideas. It looks more like a panoply of personal languages exposed for passive contemplation, waiting for us to choose one and adhere to it. It can be said that what you see is what you get. Image, or better, imagery is what matters.

Le Corbusier, in contrast, took Hauptstadt Berlin 58 competition as an opportunity to expose his ideas, not as an exhibition arena. After reading his texts and going through his drawings and remarks, we better understand his anxiety regarding the Jury and the careful consideration of all his documents. For it becomes obvious that Berlin was not for him a simple occasion to demonstrate his personal skills. He strongly believed that in that particular instance he had made a project entirely committed with the real challenges posed by the reconstruction of Berlin. His Berlin fragment could become as well a model to be followed. He was putting within the reach of society the result of many years of personal research. Such a moral proposition is a powerful background for all of the Berlin episode. And that was precisely the least understood aspect of his proposal: Corbusier was again assuming the role of prophet, and only followers or *believers* are capable of accepting such a self-appointed role. The ever-present Corbusier drama when interacting with his contemporaries.

One aspect to be remarked on is that neither Corbusier's nor Scharoun's projects, among those that capture our interest, proposed a utopian Berlin. If Scharoun's proposal could be considered *difficult*, it was by no means impossible. It was a realistic option as was Le Corbusier's, which was difficult in a different sense. Being artists in the deepest sense of the word, with different aesthetic worlds and personal architectural languages, they assumed the challenge of Berlin as down-to-earth problem-solvers supported by their own experience.

Real architecture as the only legitimate instrument in the process of giving shape to city form is the crux of the matter in modern tradition: architecture's inner logic, briefly, its rational viability, was a precondition for any speculation regarding the configuration of public space. If that architecture is the result of the interplay of apparently opposed two-dimensional and three-dimensional geometries (late Scharoun) or, on the contrary, is ruled in plan and in volume by the right angle's precision (most of Corbu), the public space would be shaped differently. But there was no room for architecture as a simple scenography. In orthodox modern terms this was considered an unacceptable perversion. Paraphrasing Corbu's statement on two-dimensional urbanism: *paper architecture* does (did) not have the right to exist.

In contrast, the buildings the Smithsons used in their project were like stage properties placed at will following the requirements imposed by the supposed morphologic qualities of public space.

In fact, the Smithson's project can be read as an exercise based on a *new* language that did not care much for the real. Apart from the other remarks we have

made above, if we take the elevated platforms that crisscrosses the entire center of Berlin it is obvious that they would create at ground level a forest of columns or load-bearing devices that would make some sectors look like an immense underground parking structure. Of course, this problem did not worry the Smithsons: they wanted their proposal to be a sort of manifesto: the new opposing the old. The problems that could be faced to build what they were proposing were not *their* problem.

The confrontation conducted by Team 10, theoretical at its beginnings, if it was to be considered in all the significance they wanted it to have, needed to be supported by new conceptions of architectural as well as urban design, new instruments, new language, in short, new *formal* characteristics. One of them was the elevated walkway, a feature that fell short of being doctrinaire, a banner, for Team 10. More essential to their view was the absolute necessity, even the anxiety, to escape from the tutelage of Cartesian geometry (the right angle that Corbu idolized) and to impose the idea of an architecture conceived as a servant of a predetermined configuration of the public space. This is to some extent a point of view that can be seen as stemming from the baroque tradition.

Hence, the Smithsons were not necessarily trying to comply with real requirements; they were responding to an ideological necessity that obliged them to put to the test the arsenal of *forms* that had become Team 10's trademark, no matter the scale of the problem to be solved. Their role as spokesmen of a movement imposed on them certain obligations that were clearly ideological. The city of Berlin, its monuments, its perspectives, its places and, curiously enough, the

aggressive automotive circulation grid suggested by the organizers that the project left untouched, seem buried under an avalanche of *design* gimmicks (fig. 52).

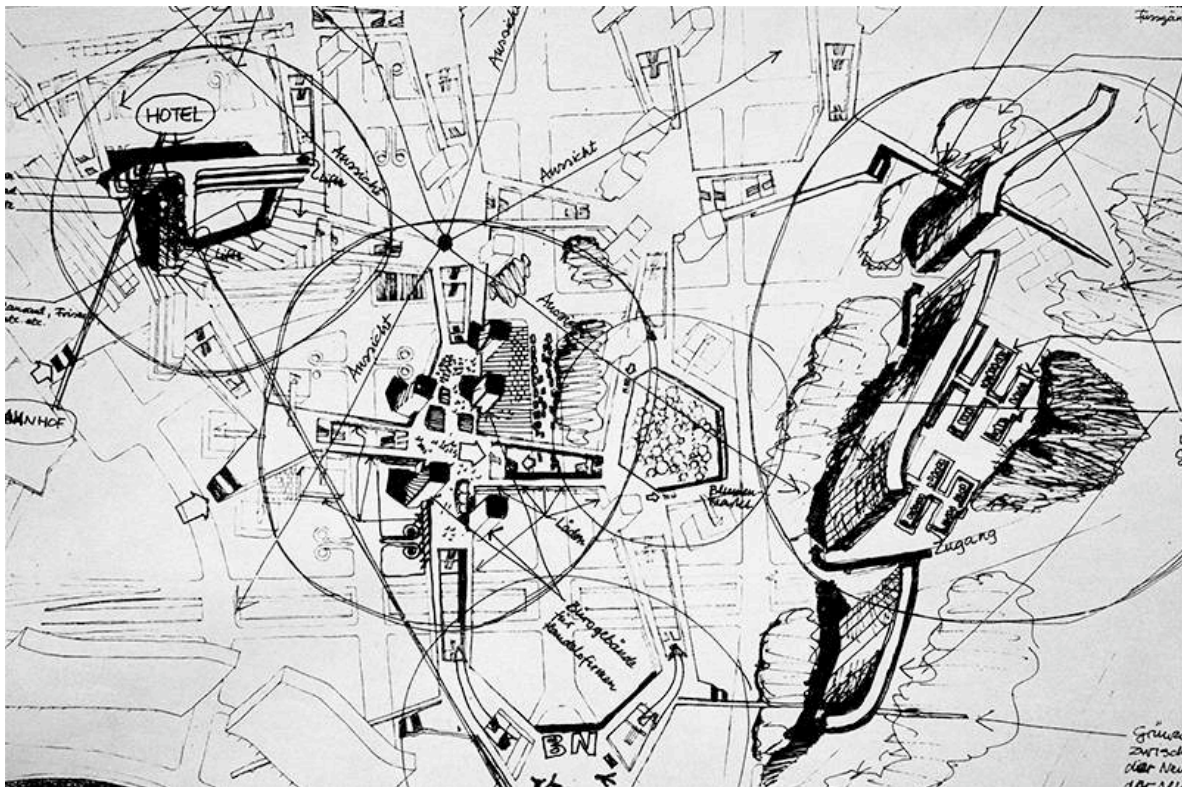


Fig. 52. The Smithsons' rhetoric.

Of course, ideology has always been a strong component of the rationale for some architectural decisions. When Le Corbusier gave form to his urban proposals during the twenties and thirties, including his Plan Voisin for Paris, he was also being faithful, if we use a term borrowed from Ortega y Gasset, to an ideological *imperative*.⁹² They were aggressive, provocative gestures with a very fragile instrumental connection with the real city, meant to become arguments to be used in the midst of the intense debate of those years about urban form. Even though the architecture itself was never utopian, for it was studied in design as well as in technological terms (his Types), when addressing the debate about the city as a

⁹² Ortega y Gasset took the philosophical concept of *imperatives* from Kant and developed it in his book *The Modern Theme*/ Harper Torchbook, 1961.

whole, Le Corbusier in those times was more an ideologue, and to some extent a demagogue. That was his somewhat contradictory situation before the second world war: he insisted on proposing real architectures for unreal cities, a dilemma he was to solve after the war. Le Corbusier conducted his urban proposals in this second stage of his life in a completely different mood. He wanted to build, not to provoke. He left the *revolutionary* ego behind and addressed the problems with a better sense of reality. Chandigarh and Berlin are the best proofs.

The Smithsons and Team 10 can be considered forerunners of the ideological wave that gave the initial thrust to movements like Peter Cook's Archigram⁹³ or the Metabolists (Yona Friedman in Europe; and particularly the Japanese: Tange, Kurokawa, Shibuya et al.), that produced suggestive imagery and enjoyed a considerable success until the late sixties. In those cases it was the fascination with technology used in a science fiction mode or as the ingredient that gave new formal appeal to early modern inventions, remakes so to speak; in the following years and particularly during the postmodern fever, *l'ordre du jour* was the refutation of the basic premises of the Modern Movement's vision of the city. It was, as it were, a negative ideology, an ideology of restoration with many different faces, some of them interesting and still valid, some others only enjoying their ten minutes of success.

However, in present times, at least in the first world of opulence, the ideological imperative that gave form to those revisionist movements has changed from the

⁹³Cook (1936) recently completed the construction of the museum of modern art in Graz, Austria. It has the futurist look that was his trade-mark. The paradoxes of opulence: conservative Austria builds a small fraction of Archigram's futurist imagery. Two questions can be asked: Is Cook's building really futurist? Is Austria really conservative? A yes for one question is a no for the other.

collective to the individual perspective. The *I-am-ok-you-are-ok* motto very dear to corporative psychology or the postmodern slogan *everything is valid* define *grosso modo* the present universal esteem for neutrality, the often cited relativism that may have become the most relevant feature of our zeitgeist. The present strong impulse in favor of diversity, exemplified by philosophical concepts such as the *weak thought* (pensiero debole) of Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo (1936), has become an important component of the ideological corpus of present times. Today, all possible efforts, outside of politics, to establish a set of principles that could become a collective, nonreligious, moral platform for action are seen as something belonging to the past. Private convictions are the only credible arguments to justify a course of action.

In such an intellectual atmosphere, conservatism, the most accessible area of consensus, imposes its values. And conservatism is not necessarily one-sided or negative. When addressing the issue of the city and its architecture it includes many different and even contradictory concepts that in some cases exclude each other: preservation, restoration and imitation; defense, respect and nostalgia; vernacular, classic, traditional and self-effacing; repetition, contention and austerity; all of them, however, in the same territory of *cultural correctness*

Where is then the other side of the debate, where is the contradiction?

It always has been in the hands of individuals and their capacity to establish a common platform for action: the simple effect of charisma, the definition of an

objective, a doctrine, a group of ideas, an *ideology*, very difficult conditions to comply with in present times,⁹⁴ as we have said above.

It is not only the zeitgeist that demands that the individual speak for himself. We have said that in these times of media predominance success is the necessary credential, and the chronicle of their own success the main theme of the successful. The anxiety of well-known architects to sell their personal, newborn or discovered approach to architectural and urban problems, using as instrument the charm of a personal repertoire of talented visual gymnastics, takes almost all of the public's attention. With very few exceptions successful architects' discourse about city form travels within the limits of a private experience leaving aside any systematic intention to contribute to the amplification of a collective knowledge. Celebrities defend their right to develop their private vision supported by the drive of the general public to consume the new.

As a result, urban debate tends to become a polarization between the conservatives and the successful, individual agendas versus fear of freedom. Polarization is the absence of debate.

But there is enough room between these two poles to establish a positive connection with tradition without renouncing innovation, to escape from the obsession with novelties, to overcome the dead load of a critique mainly committed to publishing interests, briefly, to work for a commitment to the necessity of giving form to a set of ideas that could serve as a common ground for action more conscious of the obscene imbalances of the universal scene: there is enough room

⁹⁴ Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) used to say that the spirit of the times, the zeitgeist, imposed on every person a sort of territory in which to move in intellectual terms. To try to confront it is possible, of course, but whatever could be said or contended in the process ran the risk of being misunderstood or not heard at all.

for ideology, or at least for an urban thought, perhaps weak in Vattimo's terms, but capable of helping us to escape from polarization.

There are contemporary experiences that can serve as an example for such a possibility. Barcelona in Spain is one of them. For decades now Barcelona has been a global focal point of the most ambitious operation of renewal and reconstruction. Particularly in the eighties and nineties, the process was carried on with an intensive interchange of ideas that included architects, politicians and the community as a whole. An entire generation of exceptional architects had generous access to building programs and produced an architecture of the highest quality. An urban doctrine took shape. The schools of architecture organized a rich debate. The Barcelona experience opened a chapter in the process of elucidation of the mechanisms that make possible the transformation of our cities. And the main reason for all this was, in the first place, the lucidity of the city's bureaucracy and the appointment to the highest ranks of administration of a group of high-level architects committed to architecture, to teaching, to the effort to build a corpus of ideas. Behind the Barcelona experience there was, no doubt, an ideology.

And the Barcelona experience was not part of the postmodern reaction. The search for internationally successful architects was moderate and specific, at least until the early years of this century. Barcelona's experience was not a rupture; it was a new stage of development of *modern* thinking, Barcelona is an evolution, a development. And if it is true that recent decisions seem to have forgotten some of the best features of the policy established at the beginnings of the experience, Barcelona has not ceased to be a model to be followed.

In Berlin, on the contrary, we have the impression that the polemics that took place regarding the reconstruction since reunification was governed by polarization. The debate was in the hands of star-architects, their glamour and ready-made philosophy, on one side; and the spokesmen of the conservative sector, their prejudices and their authority on the other. The third party, the middle-ground sector, those concerned with ideas, not slogans, not exclusions, seem to have been more or less neutralized. For us, observers from the other side of the world, far from the heart of the events, foreigners as it were, there has not been anything like an in-depth discussion. The reconstruction has been followed from abroad more as an ambitious and well-conducted operation using interesting administrative resources than as an opportunity to set a new level of knowledge in the debate about city form. The international interest raised by Hauptstadt Berlin 58 competition was substituted fifty years later by the glamour of the different, not very well coordinated, isolated competitions, in some cases (at least apparently) ignoring each other, and of course by the general admiration for the scope and magnitude of the whole operation, with few precedents in history. If back in 1958 there was an opportunity for an ambitious discussion that had international repercussions, the output of the competitions conducted in the early nineties was mainly the usual celebration of successful architects and their architectures.

If we take the previous reflections as a guideline, we may then ask, which was Corbu's family in Berlin in 1958? Which sector of the polemics was he in?

If we go back to the early days of the Modern Movement at the beginning of twentieth century, it can be said that there were only two sectors confronting their

ideas regarding the city and its future, two poles: the academy and the avant-garde with Le Corbusier as one of the spokesmen of avant-gardism. If it is true that many architects did not consider themselves participant in either of the poles, they were silent observers with a very light presence in the debate. Or perhaps they were passive companions of avant-gardism. I have mentioned before the position of architects such as Tessenow, Poelzig or Taut; I could have mentioned J.J.P. Oud, Perret, Plecnik or Lewerentz, architects who were not by any means conservative but can not be considered enthusiastic followers of the Modern Movement's ideology.

But the scene drastically changed after the war. The academy and conservatism stayed in their trenches adopting a totally new weaponry, while avant-gardism lost its primitive stamina and became more reflexive, adopting the teaching mode and losing the appeal of novelty, moving to the center, so to speak. The seduction of the new, passed progressively to new hands, new discourses, new aesthetics.

In such a scenario the fathers of the Modern Movement (Le Corbusier among them) acquired, we have said it above, the status of authorities, and *those in the know*⁹⁵ pretended to be their substitutes, the new avant-garde. However, the new arrangement of the debate, influenced by the postwar political realignments, had reduced considerably the significance of the avant-garde. Using again Corbu's words, they even had lost *their right to exist*. In the late fifties and early sixties, when Europe started its vigorous economic growth and had completely recovered

⁹⁵ Le Corbusier wrote a letter to the CIAM Congress in Dubrovnik in which with profound irony he said: "*It is those who are now forty years old...and those now twenty five years old... the only ones capable of feeling actual problems...they are in the know* (our emphasis). *Their predecessors no longer are, they are out.*" Cited by Kenneth Frampton in *Modern Architecture, a Critical History*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1980, page 271.

from the war's destruction, the would-be avant-garde was captured by fast-growing media marketing interests and lost its subversive condition. The modern movement's avant-garde was subversive; postwar novelties were, more than anything, new merchandise.

Team 10 was a novelty in the late fifties. They had not lost the tendency to give form to an ideological body, the zeitgeist at the time still allowed enough room for it, but their main attraction was formal, the possibility of a new language, the exploration of a new aesthetic world. So, as we have said before, they were representing in Hauptstadt Berlin 58 competition one of the sides of the discussion. The other was the great number of uncommitted, routine projects that enjoyed the *discreet charm* of conservatism, while in the middle were Corbusier and Scharoun, but particularly Corbu with all his powerful ideological energy and the solidity of his architectural conceptions. That is the complete picture, although still lacking a distinctive definition, of the scene of discussion that was to prevail until today: the defenders of novelties, the self-assured focused on their own, individual, private discoveries; the conservatives with their fears, passiveness and nondeclared connection with established power; and those who cared about ideas as vehicles capable of opening new opportunities for those to come, the very few that were capable of establishing solid grounds for the development of architectural knowledge, those committed to thought. *Nothing is transmissible but thought*, said Corbu in his last piece of writing, before his death.

It is up to each of us to discern and decide where to choose the tradition, where to build and let grow the roots of our own experience as architects and thinkers.

The truth, as Corbusier wrote one month before his death, *“is not to be found at the extremes. The truth flows between two banks, a tiny rivulet or a mighty torrent... and different every day.”*⁹⁶

I think that a tiny rivulet flows from Le Corbusier’s proposal. It encourages us to rethink some of the forgotten elements that were part of bygone modern ideologies more or less discredited by the present idolization of neutrality. It tells us that to reflect on the city inevitably leads us to adhere to a certain type of metaphysic. Hence, it will inevitably raise some moral issues. That, in my view, is one more of the important teachings of Le Corbusier’s proposal and his written discourse.

The preceding lines are an invitation to give a close look to one event, Hauptstadt Berlin 58 competition, that can open many perspectives for a stimulating reflection keeping in mind the arrogant three last lines of Le Corbusier’s introduction to the description of his project:

“Here in Berlin the thing is possible.

It even looks like (before the evidence of the plans)

that we can not have any doubts about it!

Caracas, January 2006

⁹⁶ In his text titled *“Nothing is transmissible but thought.”* Complete Works, volume 8, page 173 / Les Editions d’Architecture Artemis. Zurich 1970.

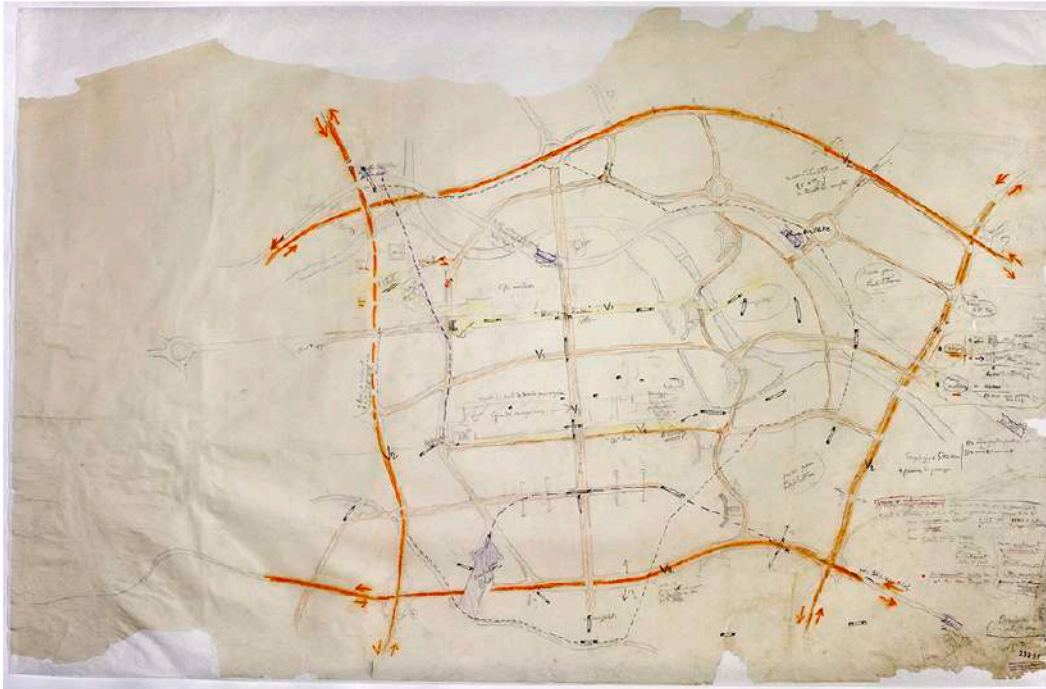


Fig. 32-1. This sketch (FLC 23980), dated December 15 (1957) shows some of Le Corbusier's main concerns for his proposal:

- 1) The Civic Center around the Reichstag (with an underground parking on the north side of the Reichstag). The pedestrian platform connecting with the Chancellery is suggested.
- 2) The location of the Ministries, with the bus terminal on the north side of Friedrichstrasse Bahnhof.
- 3) Pedestrians in Unter den Linden ("Unter den Linden" *piétons*)
- 4) Provisions for housing around Alexanderplatz.
- 5) Public transportation: the network of subway stations is clearly shown in ink.

The commercial and entertainment spine of Leipzigerstrasse (*grand magasins...grande rue...dancing, restaurants, boîtes...nuit, cinema, theatres, etc ...le Broadway!*)

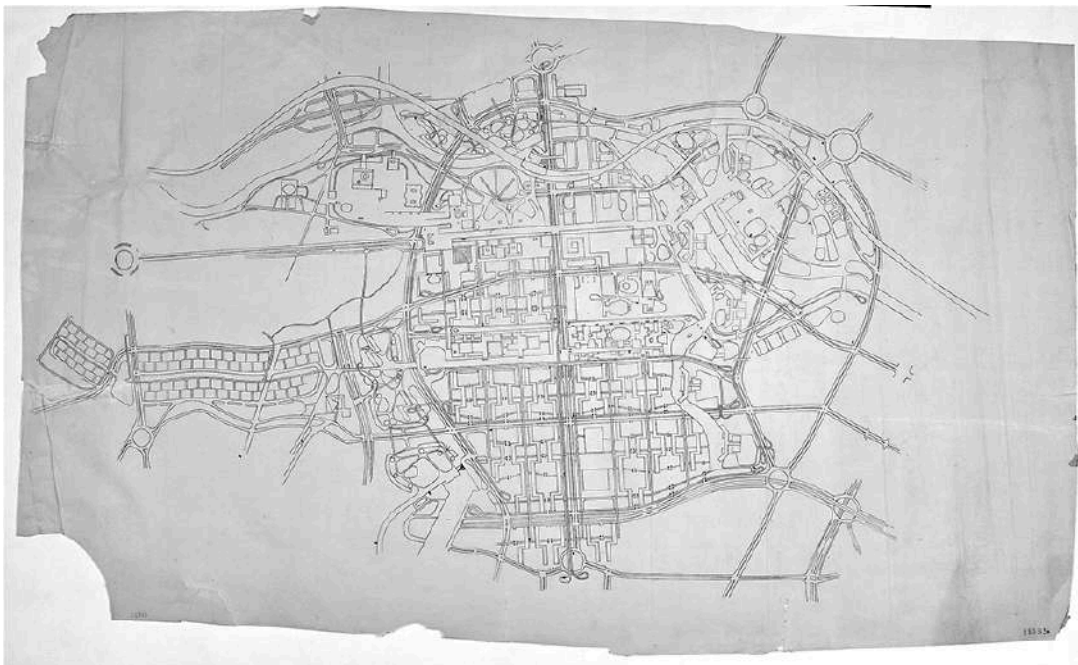


Fig. 32-2. Line drawing of the master plan (FLC 23983A).

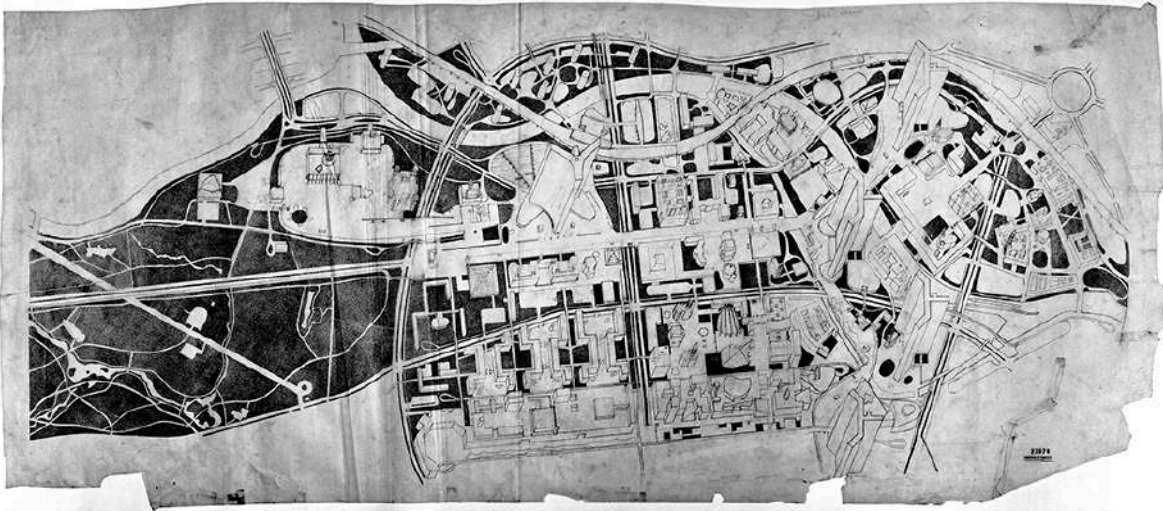
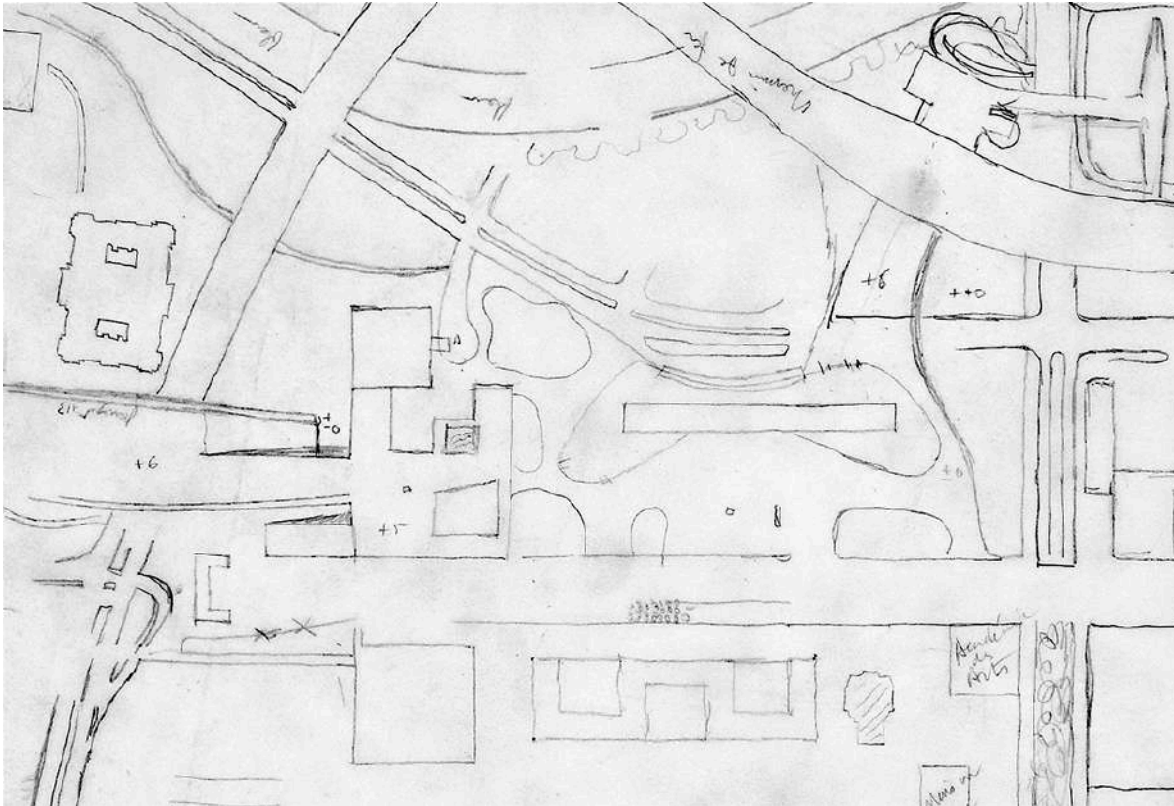


Fig. 32-3. The original isometric (FLC 23978) that was published in different format in Vol. 7 of Complete Works (fig A4).



Fig, 32-4

Figs. 32-4, 32-5, 32-6 and 32-7

Figs. 32-4 and 32-5 show two aspects of the evolution of the Civic Center. The black and white sketch (FLC 24009) has the basic footprint of the Chancellery; the Ministrie's skyscraper, however, is yet to take its star-shaped form, that can be seen in the colored sketch (fig. 32-5 FLC 24049, wrongly dated January 10/57 instead of January 10/58). The pedestrian connection with the bus terminal adjacent to Friedrichstrasse Bahnhof is an important element in the structuring of open space. Fig. 32-6 (FLC 24031), also wrongly dated, shows the genesis of the pedestrian porticoes leading from the parking lot to the back entrance of the building. Fig. 32.7 (FLC 24030) features the final footprint of the skyscraper and, laterally, a section through the platform of the Chancellery with the triple row of linden trees in the avenue (*trois rangées d'arbres*).

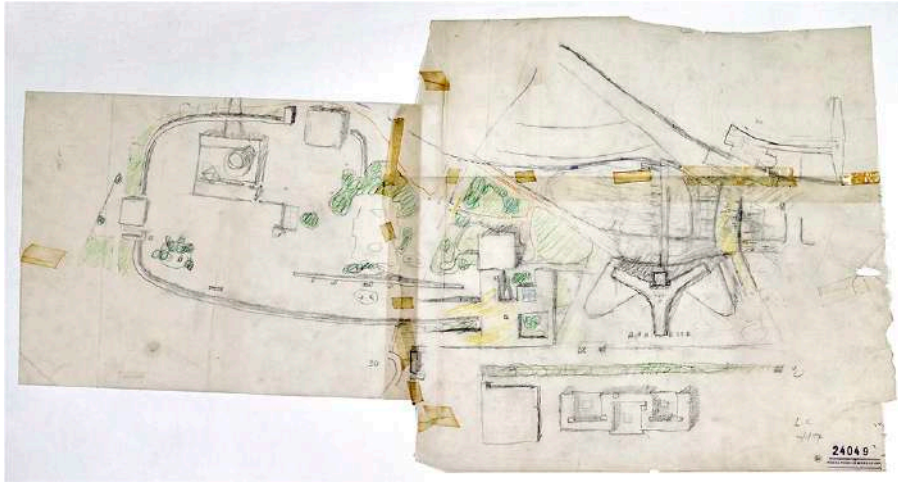


Fig. 32-5

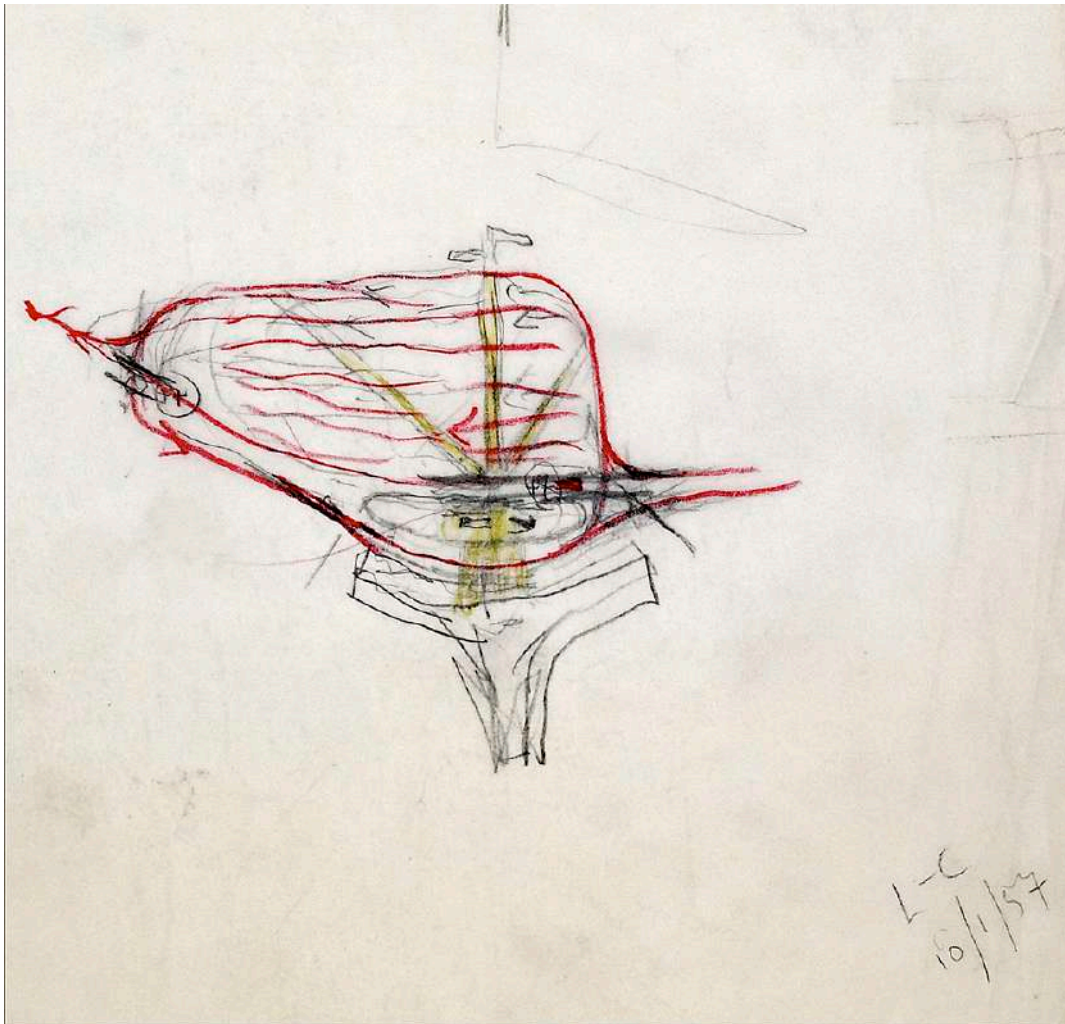


Fig. 32-6

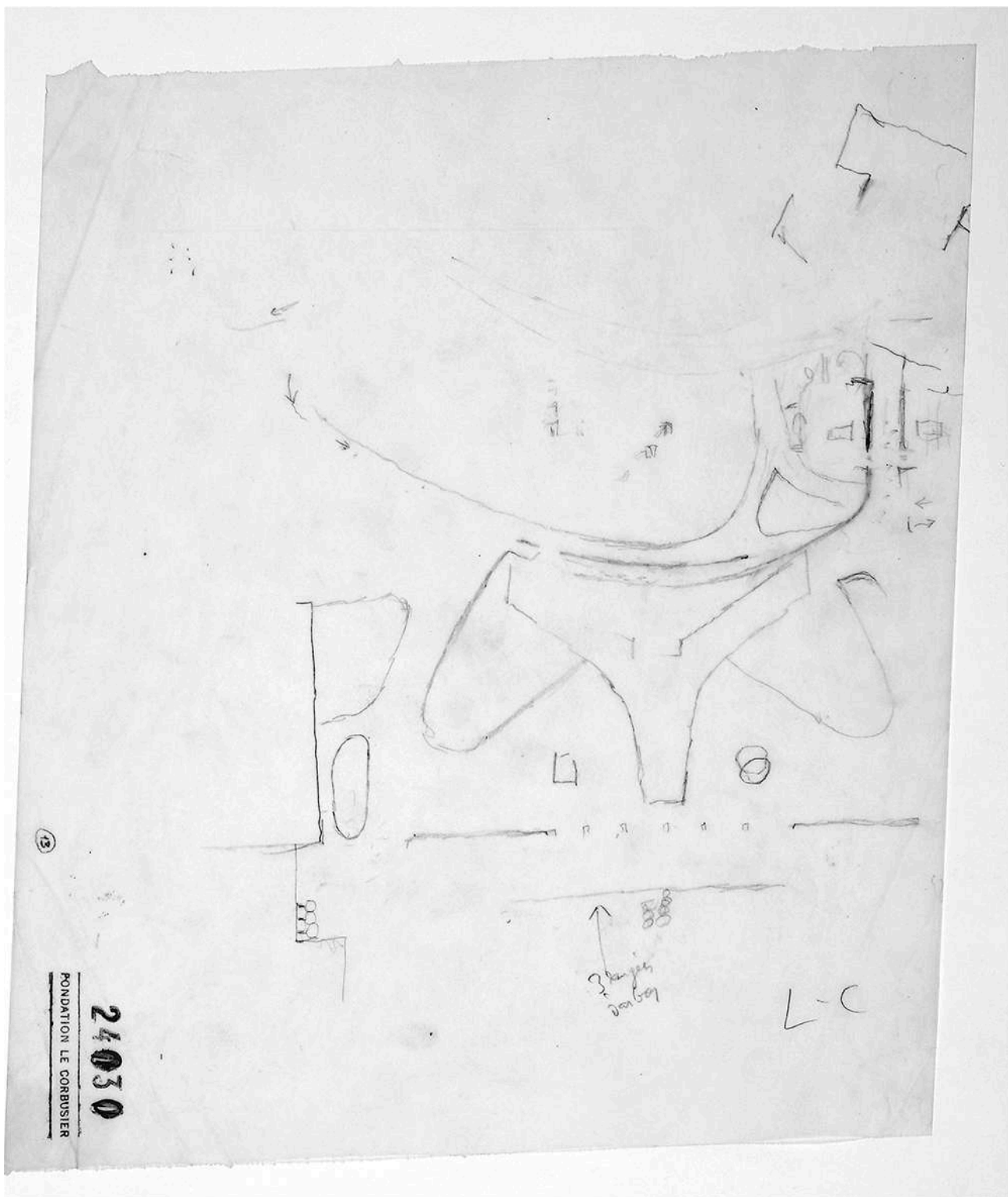


Fig. 32-7

Fig. 32-8, 32-9, 32-10, 32-11 and 32-12

Different aspects of the evolution of Leipzigerstrasse spine. Fig 32-8 (FLC 24036) features the search for pedestrian routes and squares east and west of Friedrichstrasse, fragmenting the department stores' block on the west sector and configuring a network of pedestrian routes and squares between the spine and the cultural institutions, south of Gendarmenmarkt area. In the detail of the same sketch (fig 32-9), the search of a variation of widths and depths in the public space is a constant that remains through the following sketches as a radical refutation of the postmodern commonplaces about LC's vision of the city. Fig. 32-10 (FLC 24043) shows a stage of the design exploration when a fragmentation of the department stores' block was proposed and rejected. Fig. 32-11 (FLC 24023) keeps the compactness of that block, a feature that was to be kept in the final version. Fig. 32-12 (FLC 24024) takes all the west boundary of the inner core north and south of Leipzigerplatz.

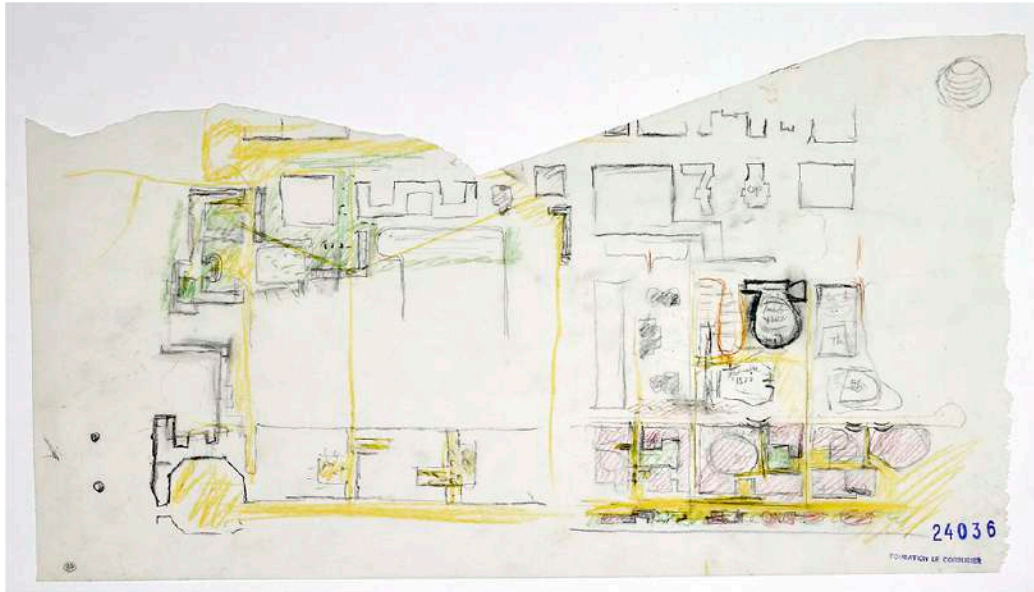


Fig. 32-8

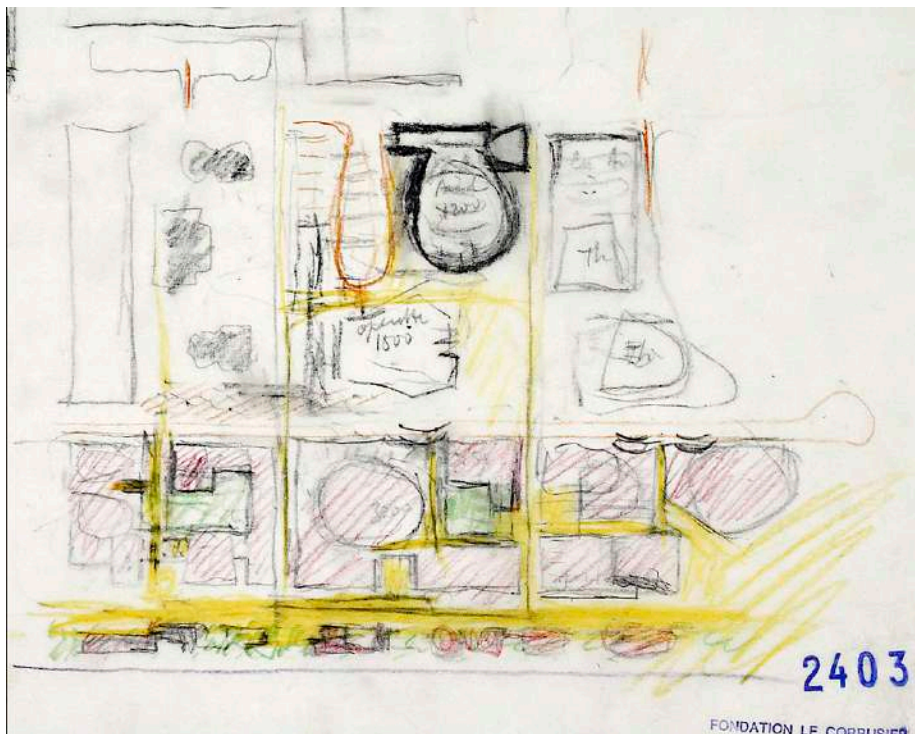


Fig. 32-9

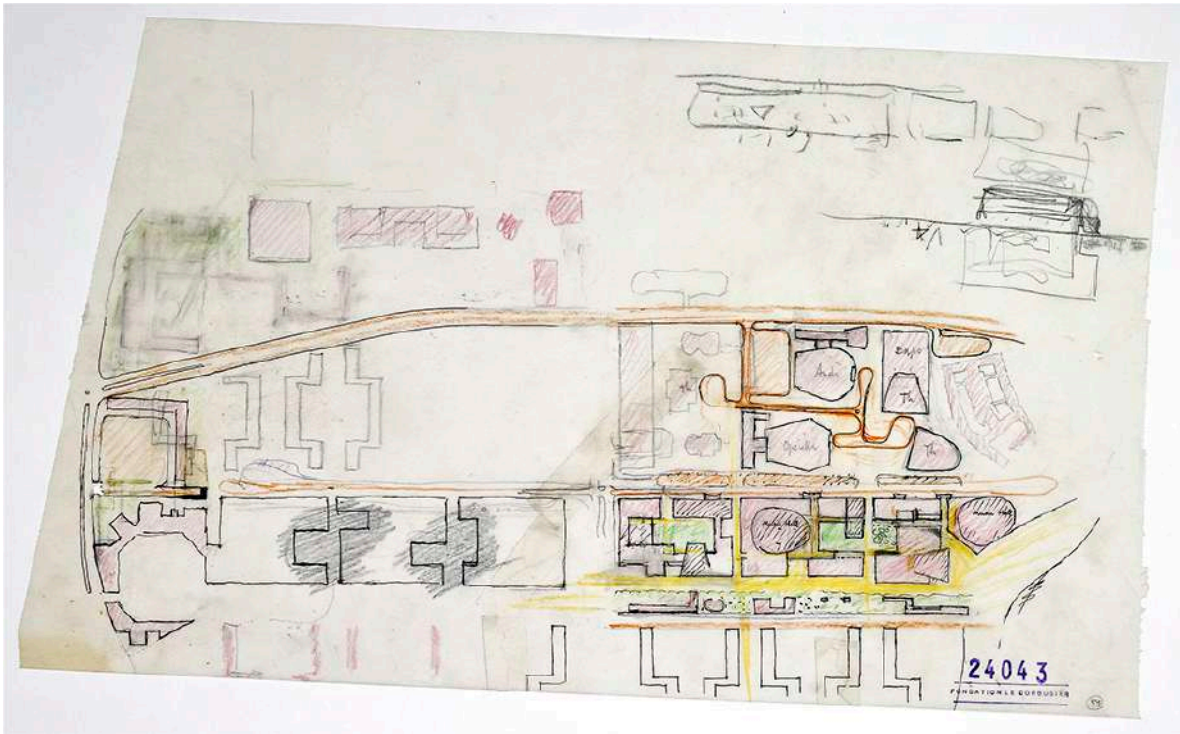


Fig. 32-10

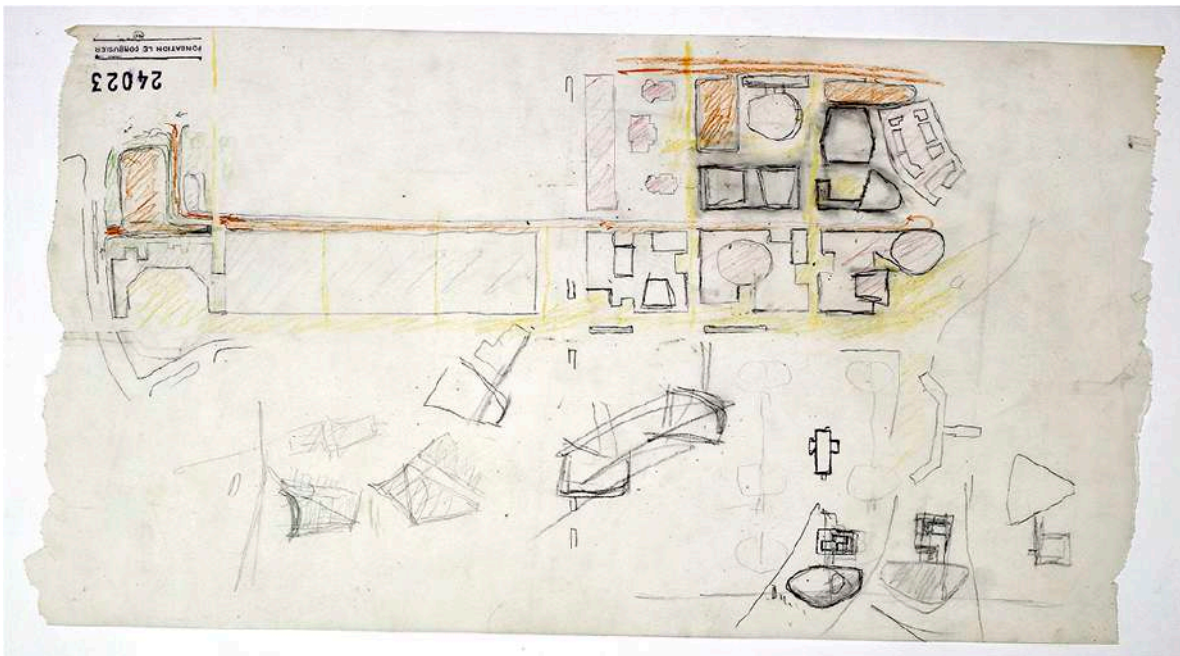


Fig. 32-11



Fig. 32-12

CORBU'S BERLIN AT EYE LEVEL

The following views were made using the three-dimensional reconstruction of Corbu's proposal. We added photographic grain to partially reduce the typical shine of digital rendering and avoid the necessity of details, while allowing the reader to appreciate at pedestrian level the public space of the city as it was imagined.

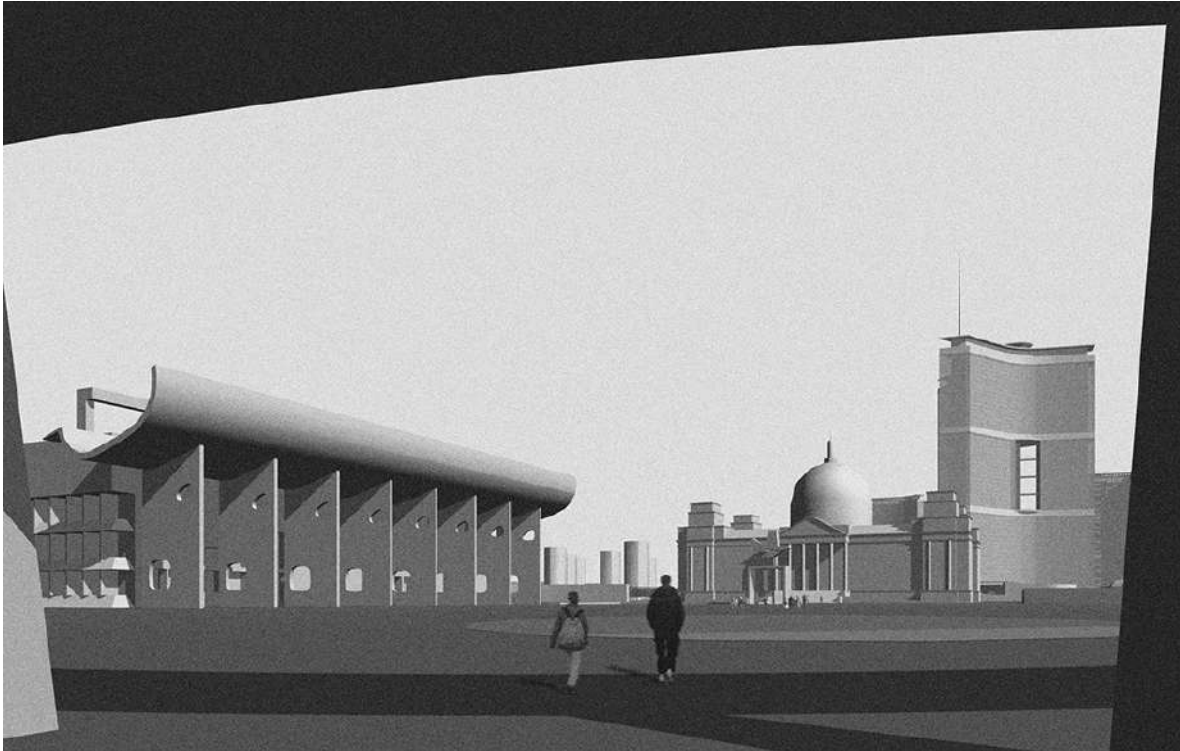


Fig. 53. The Platz der Republik from the portico of the Civic Center. In the middle, in the distance, the hotel towers



Fig. 54. The role of the skyscrapers as backdrops. The Bode Museum can be seen to the left.



Fig. 55. Unter den Linden. The Rathaus tower and the Nikolai Kirche can be seen. The first building on the right is the Center of Technology.

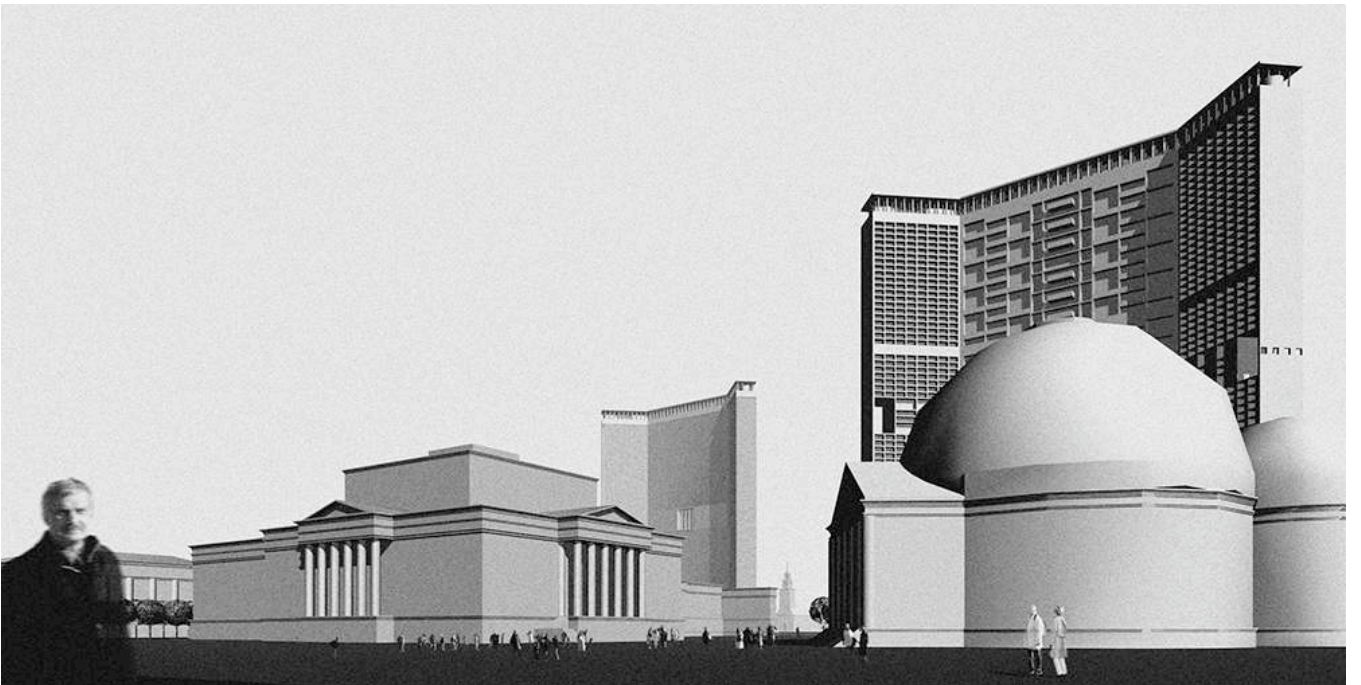


Fig. 56. Bebelplatz approached from Behren Strasse. The Staatsoper in the center along Unter den Linden, to the right St. Hedwig's church. In the distance Marien Kirche.



Fig. 57. Kochstrasse looking east.

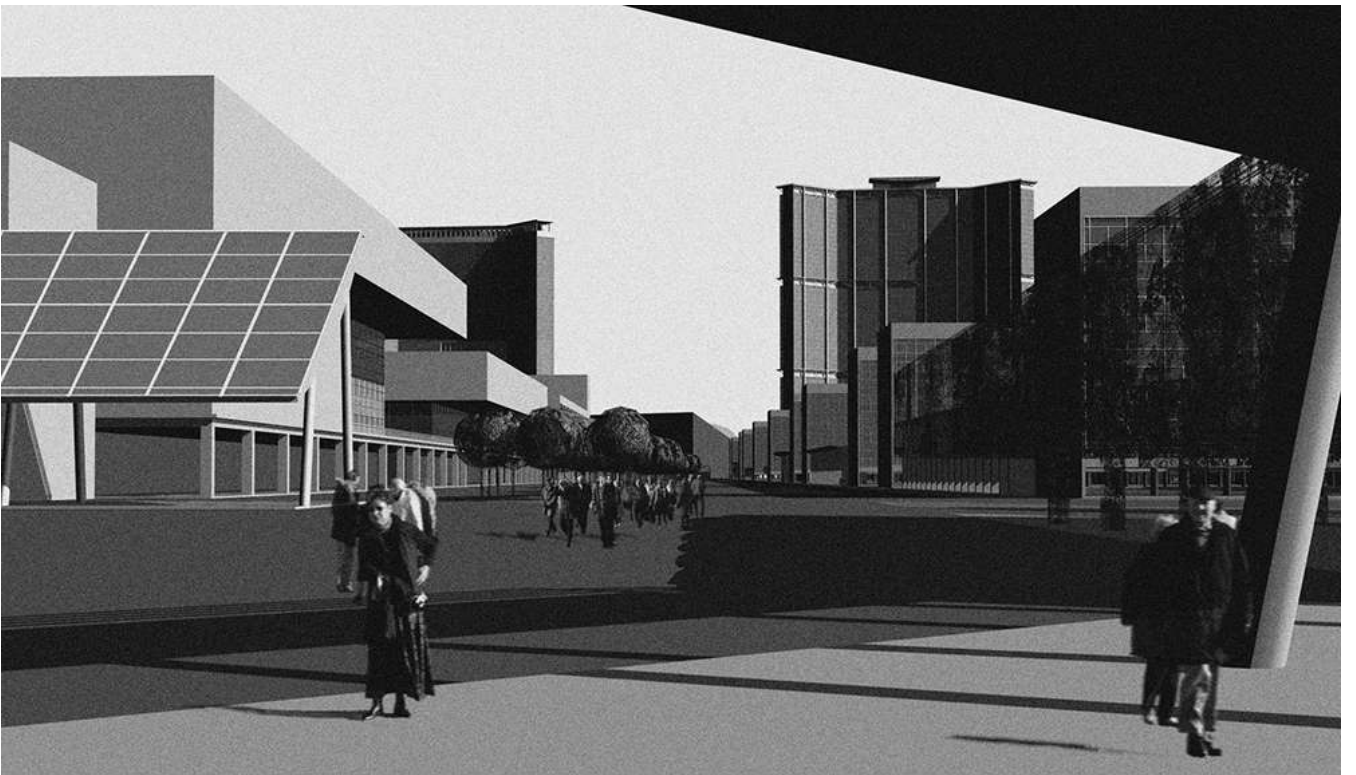


Fig. 58. Leipzigerstrasse *promenade* looking east from Leipzigerplatz

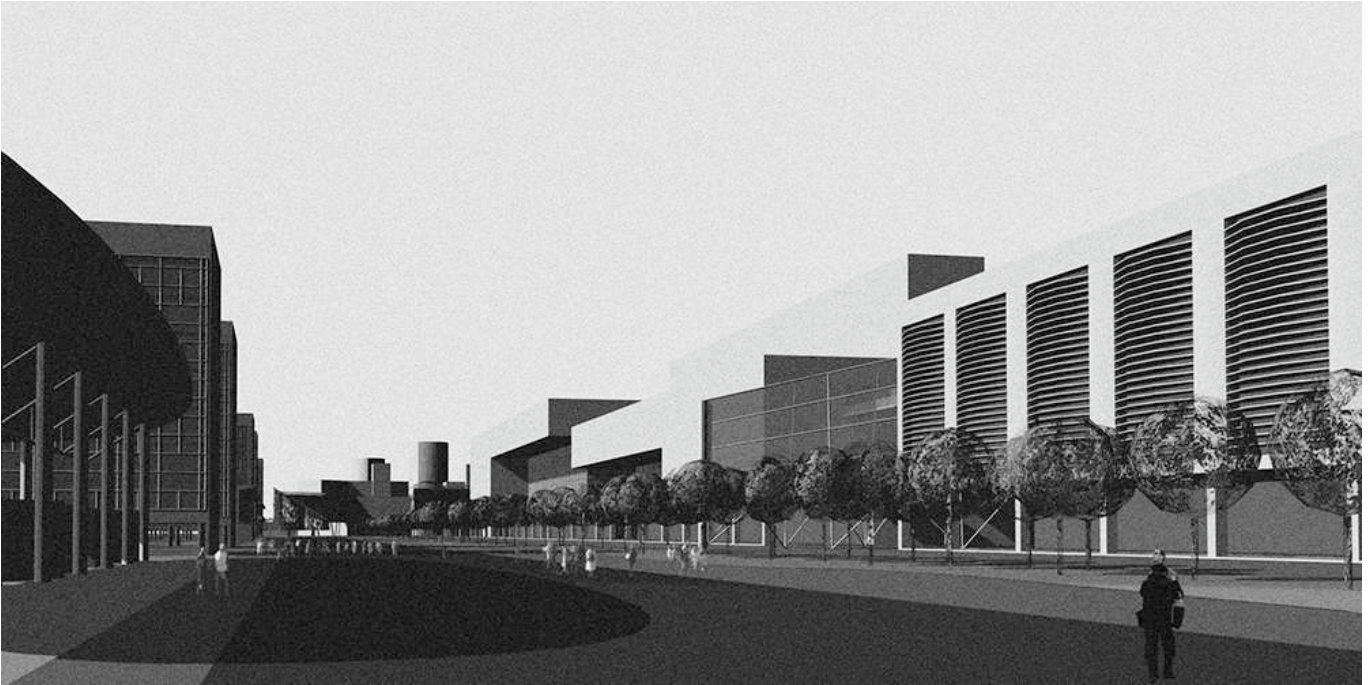


Fig.59. Leipzigerstrasse *promenade* looking west. Behind Leipzigerplatz's glazed gallery, the hotel towers.

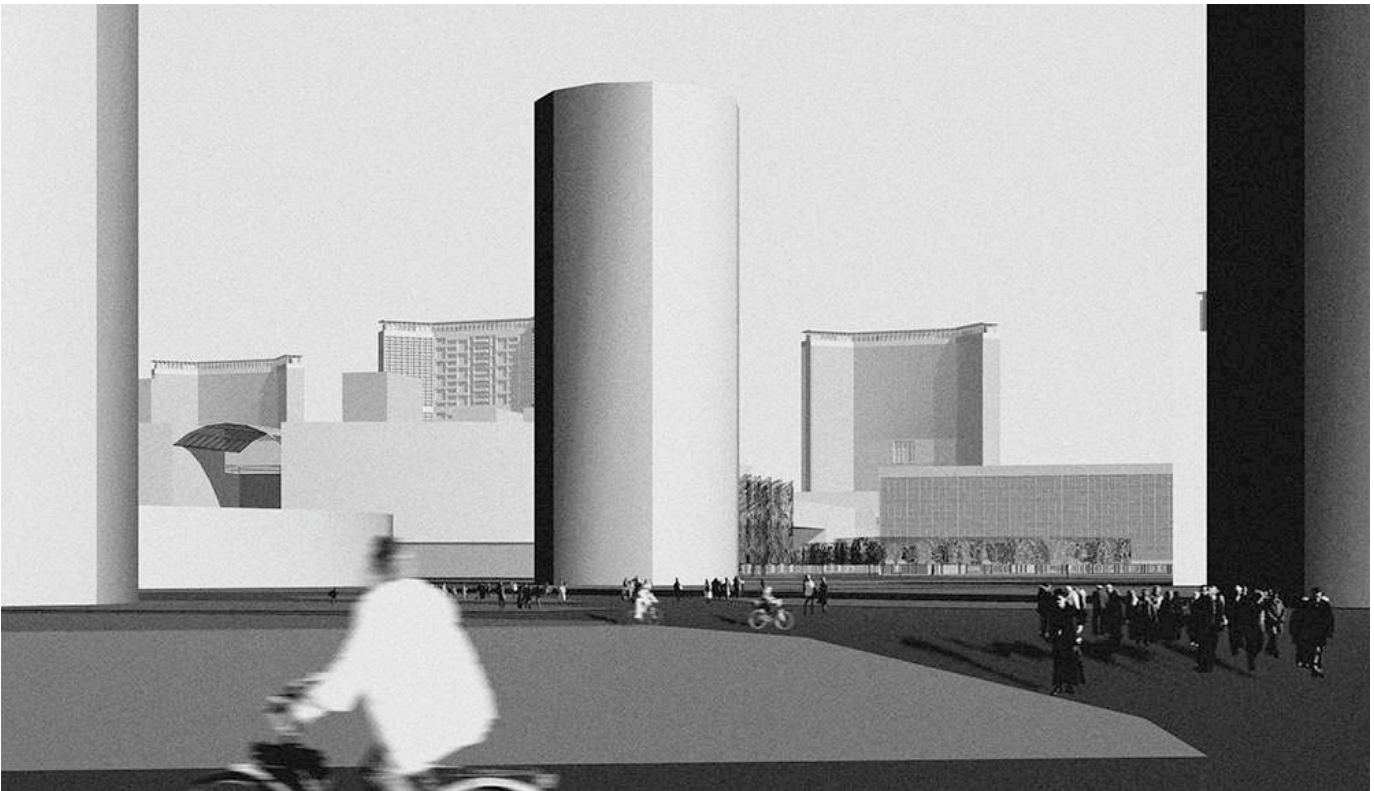


Fig. 60. Leipzigerplatz compound seen from the hotel's esplanade.



Fig. 61. The courtyards between the *redents*. Covered.

APPENDIX

In the Archives of Fondation Le Corbusier there is a Corbu's manuscript on the Berlin Project. It is basically the same text of the typed version of the Introduction to the Description of the Project that was submitted with the plans. With some changes: the manuscript included a description of "The Theory of the 7V" that was removed from the introduction to be placed in the description itself; and there are some minor changes here and there.

Our translation of the typed version follows.

BERLIN CAPITAL

Description of the Project

It is useless to demonstrate that traditional urbanism has not anymore the right to exist.

Three-dimensional urbanism: extension and height.

Irrefutable objective:

1/ To create organs (containers) responding to specific functions:

- housing
- offices
- meeting places
- instruments for circulation

These are: volumes
surfaces
ribbons

each of them being a pure and healthy organ. Together they constitute a healthy organism, flexible, complete, protected from slow and brutal deteriorations.

The solutions must be the output of observation, criticism, invention and imagination.

The present case. The center of Berlin is unique; due to war events its land is available. Consequently, everything that since forty years has been declared

chimerical, utopian, “easy to imagine in the moon,” find here in Berlin the place, the circumstances, the conditions that call for the more comprehensive, detailed, loyal, inventive propositions of the urbanism of modern times.

Nothing will be waste, everything will be efficiency, economy and irradiation. Since longtime propositions could have been studied, subject to the public opinion or the authority itself. Their realization demanded such a dose of optimism, such a burden on the future, that men and resources have not been brought together yet.

Here in Berlin the thing is possible. It even seems (before the evidence of the plans) that we can not have any doubts about it!

I

The Objects

- Government
- Municipality
- Economic Life
- Entertainment

We have created ad-hoc working instruments. Particularly, a parliament, a senate, the ministries complex, a high court, a chancellery.

One gives them dimensions, one gives them shape: from now on they are beings, a modern biology shows up in the history of architecture as a constructive, technical, plastic and aesthetic symphony. Even ethical. A harmony. An authenticity, a truth.

One groups them. And life will take place there, inside and outside. As a whole.

One places them. There, where history, the social event of the City, the capacity of the site, the contacts, and the isolation as well, designate the place, propose it, impose it.

X

A municipality: different rooms, circulation flows lead to a site, as a confirmation of the place where the city was born.

X

An economic life. Of a modern capital that demands an enormous amount of offices that can (or must, from now on) take advantage of all the modern equipments: the contacts (the place and its circulation flows), the best instruments (light and furnishings), silence, flexibility of the internal organization of work.

X

Entertainment. Here, entertainment of the spirit and the body entertainment as the function of housing (the 24 hours of the sun). Intellectual entertainment: museums, auditoriums, theater, etc; entertainments of socialization; that is to say, the mass promenade that has always brought men together in their cities: the forum, the *corso*, the *rambla*, the boulevard, the *piazza*, etc. Here: Unter den Linden, reinstalled along of old and new buildings, regains its interrupted destiny becoming the pedestrian promenade, the pedestrian's royalty is proclaimed (and obtained) again.

II

The surfaces

An ineffable objective is then attained through the plan: the City will be Green.

A “Radiant City” type, with all that this double condition comports and implies in terms of new points of view, of renovation of living conditions in urban agglomerations.

- Creation of green surfaces (lungs of the cities)

- Creation of open spaces in front of the windows of working places (sun, space, greenery)

- Creation of silence zones around the office buildings

- Spaces free enough to allow for the rigorous organization of the rooms to the sun: the sun a condition of life. –instruments have been created up to now to control sun exposure in summer solstices.

- Separation of pedestrians and cars, the most revolutionary solution contributed by this project. Surfaces absolutely deprived of cars: the simple speed (men walking steps) has surfaces with no intrusion of the multiple speeds characteristic of mechanical transport.

Dignity is regained!

III

The Ribbons

It was necessary to reach this point! The confusion that has taken hold of modern transportation can not subsist. Berlin Hauptstadt has given us the occasion for a comprehensive proposition. The circulation ribbons are those of the pedestrians (yellow), those of cars and buses (orange for the distribution), red for the high speed traffic, those of the *vedettes-autobus* (violet); the subway stations that bring the pedestrians are indicated with a sign.

The ribbons are places strictly for movement and require a regular bed (a river). The parking is a surface (a lake). Transportation can be assimilated to a hydraulic phenomenon: pedestrian hydraulics, through traffic hydraulics, transit and distribution (the stream), parking hydraulic (lakes or floods).

Each of these functions use a specifically adapted organ and has a reciprocal independence.

There are however occasions of conflict: transfer or crossing. In these precise spots, red and green lights solve the problem.

The "V3" (from the 7 V's rule) prepare the beginning of a new era for the modern bus that will dissipate the present disorder of the car in the city.

It is a question of coordination, dosage, invention.

The promoting authority of Berlin Hauptstadt's plan has tackled the task with wisdom, previously establishing the reorganization of railroads and freeways through which the persons are taken to the limits of the competition area (railroads, subway, buses, freeways): different means used for arriving and departing by the users of the new City (from Grand Berlin or from the provinces, or even from abroad).

Based on these peripheral contacts, we have taken care of the coming or going users and have placed them in their destination points (work or housing) implementing a punctual symphony of transport facilities.

METHOD

Berlin, Paris, London. Moscow, New York, Buenos Aires, Rio, seats of particular civilizations, subject to precise climate conditions, endowed in each case with a particular history.

Places to live that have been stamped with the seal of mechanization, disturbed by the first stages of the mechanization era, slowly becoming agonic places, explosives, unadjusted.

But layers of experiences as well, lived and assumed, animated of the desire and the necessity of acquiring, of conquering harmony; layers of a wisdom capable of manifesting itself if there is the occasion, if a conjuncture takes place.

The scale of events, reforms of the available means of universal nature. The science of cities is universal. Each city, based on this science, will make its own work adapted to its condition; localized work, seated, rooted on specific ground.

Who will plant the germ of creation? The program, in its material preparation and its support.

Then the town planner talent will be deployed.

The Berlin program has been carefully prepared by the authority. This program has in itself a great urban hope. Everything that has been studied by us since forty years now is inscribed in this city and its history. And because everything has been leveled by the war, inventions doomed as utopian can be calmly proposed to the concatenation of the pathetic stages of realization: efficiency, economy, well-being.

The splendor of architecture and urbanism fused: urbanism in three dimensions.

Caracas, January 2006

CREDITS

All of the present-day photographs of Berlin were taken by the author, except otherwise noticed.

The photographs of old Berlin, identified with numbers 2a,2b,2c,2d,2e,2f,2g,2h,2i,2j and 2k were taken from the book:

**BERLIN Planungsgrundlagen für den städtebaulichen Ideenwettbewerb
“Hauptstadt Berlin”** (herausgegeben 1957 vom Bundesminister für Wohnungsbau, Bonn, und vom Senator für Bau- und Wohnungswesen, Berlin).

The plans from the awarded entries were photographed from the book
**Hauptstadt Berlin – Ergebnis des internationalen städtebaulichen
Ideenwettbewerbs** (Herausgegeben 1960 vom Bundesminister für Wohnungsbau, Bonn, und vom Senator für Bau- und Wohnungswesen, Berlin /Sonderausgabe in der Schriftenreihe “architektur wettweberwe” im Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart.)

All the other images are from Oscar Tenreiro.