

REBUILDING THE URBAN MARGIN AND THE MODERN IDEAL

by

Vishaan P. Chakrabarti
Cornell University
A.B., The History of Art, 1988
B.S., Operations Research & Industrial Engineering, 1988

Submitted to the Department of
Urban Studies and Planning in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the
Degree of

MASTER OF CITY PLANNING
at the
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

June 1993

© Vishaan P. Chakrabarti 1993
All rights reserved

The author hereby grants to MIT permission to reproduce and to distribute publicly
copies of this thesis document in whole or in part.

Signature of Author _____
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
May 10, 1993

Certified by _____
Lois Craig
Associate Dean, School of Architecture and Planning
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by _____
Professor Ralph Gakenheimer
Chairman, MCP Committee

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE
OF TECHNOLOGY

JUN 03 1993

LIBRARIES

REBUILDING THE URBAN MARGIN AND THE MODERN IDEAL

by

Vishaan P. Chakrabarti

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
on May 14, 1993 in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of City Planning

Abstract

In many Western cities, an urban margin has developed between the traditional central business district and the new suburban office environment. These inner-city neighborhoods tend to house the vibrant and rich subcultures that many associate with the very notion of urbanity. Yet the physical conditions of these neighborhoods have atrophied, often characterized by vacant lots and abandoned housing. The transition of Western nations to a service economy has exacerbated these conditions, leaving unemployment and under-utilized land in its wake. While it is clear that marginal urban areas are in desperate need of investment, social services, and other types of intervention, it is also clear that as urban planners and designers, our track record with these areas is abysmal. Historically, physical intervention in the urban margin has been typified by two approaches: large-scale urban renewal, and more recently, the fostering of gentrification through the "theming" of urban culture.

An alternative approach to rebuilding the urban margin has been successfully implemented in Europe over the past decade. Derived from Modernist ideals developed in the early twentieth century, the approach suggests a community-based reconstructive urban design strategy that has also been attempted at a smaller scale with mixed success in the United States.

This thesis examines the potential for applying this reconstructive strategy in marginal urban areas in the United States by exploring the origins of the strategy in projects such as the 1927 *Weissenhofsiedlung*; documenting its most recent manifestation in Berlin's 1987 *Internationale Bau Ausstellung* (IBA); comparing these and other European efforts to recent attempts to rebuild marginalized neighborhoods in Manhattan such as Harlem, Clinton, and the Lower East Side; and proposing an alternative urban design strategy for a marginal area in the City of Boston. The document closes by comparing the notion of public purpose latent in current urban design practices with that which underlies this new reconstructive urban design paradigm.

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Dean Lois Craig

Table of Contents

REBUILDING THE URBAN MARGIN AND THE MODERN IDEAL

Abstract		3
Acknowledgements		7
Introduction		9
Chapter 1	The Legacy of the Weissenhofsiedlung	15
Chapter 2	Transforming the Siedlung: The IBA and Beyond	31
Chapter 3	Reconstructing the Margins of Manhattan: A Convergence of Ideas	51
Chapter 4	Public Purpose in Contemporary Urban Design: A Proposal for a Siedlung in Boston's Fort Point District	75
Conclusion	Towards an Alternative Urban Design	95
Bibliography		101

Acknowledgements

It is difficult to acknowledge the scores of friends, colleagues and educators that over the years have influenced the thinking that has funneled into this document. Most prominent among them is my thesis advisor, Associate Dean Lois Craig. Lois' dedication to the demystification of design ideas through the power and elegance of the written word will stay with me always.

Thanks also to my thesis readers, Professors Dennis Frenchman and Roy Strickland--to Dennis for his exceptional graciousness in the face of differing perspectives, and to Roy for his reserved poignancy and the many oysters. A special thanks to Professor Gary Hack, who tirelessly has guided so many of us through the labyrinth of urban design in 10-485, in Japan, and in China. I would also like to express my gratitude to the many busy people who gave of their time and information, especially Paul Buckhurst, Professor Ghislaine Hermanuz, Barbara Littenburg, and Rebecca Ruopp.

Those who bear most of the stress associated with such an endeavor are usually not the authors, but rather those around them. My family and friends are truly remarkable in that sense, and for their unfaltering support I thank them, particularly Jennifer Mecca, Tom Campanella, Ian McArthur, Jennifer Devine, and the unshakably jovial Roger Simmonds.

Finally, to the "incredible and infamous" Jean Riesman, without whom the intellectual and comical value of these two years would have been diminished immeasurably, no words can describe your allegiance to friendship or my indebtedness to it. Pijiu.

This thesis is dedicated to New York City, Land of the Free and Home of the Brave.

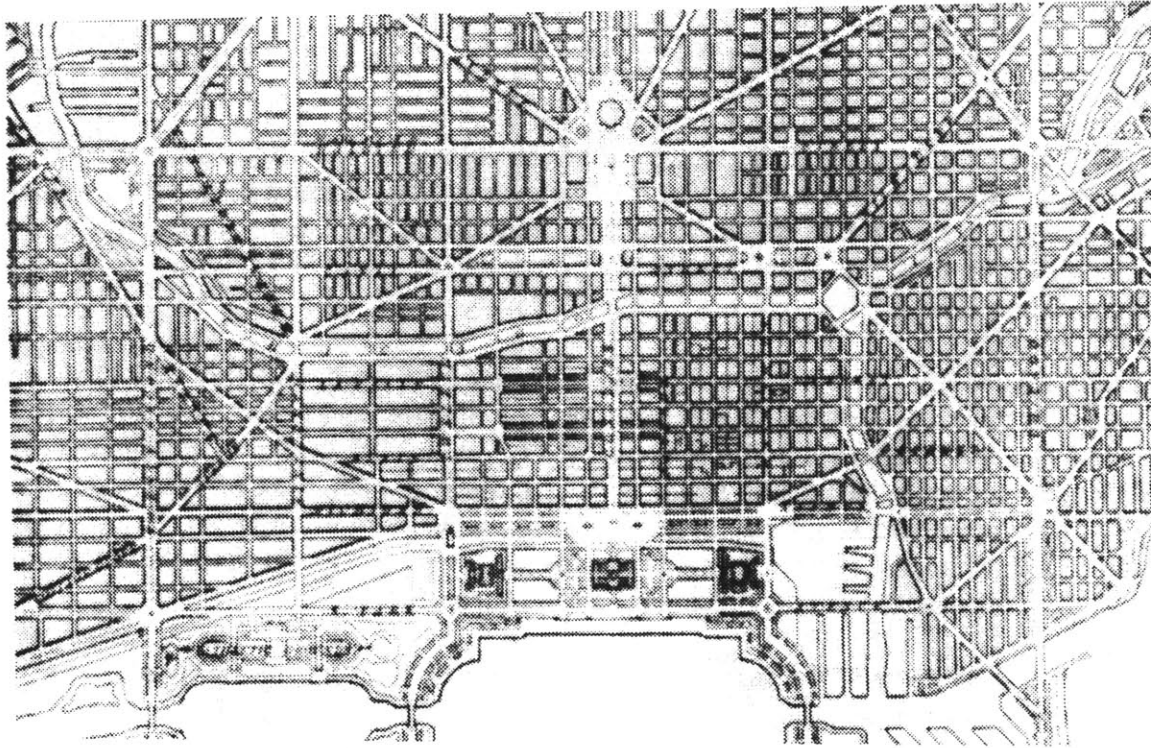


Figure 1: Plan for Chicago Harbor and Civic Center, 1907
(*Burnham of Chicago, Hines, 1974*)

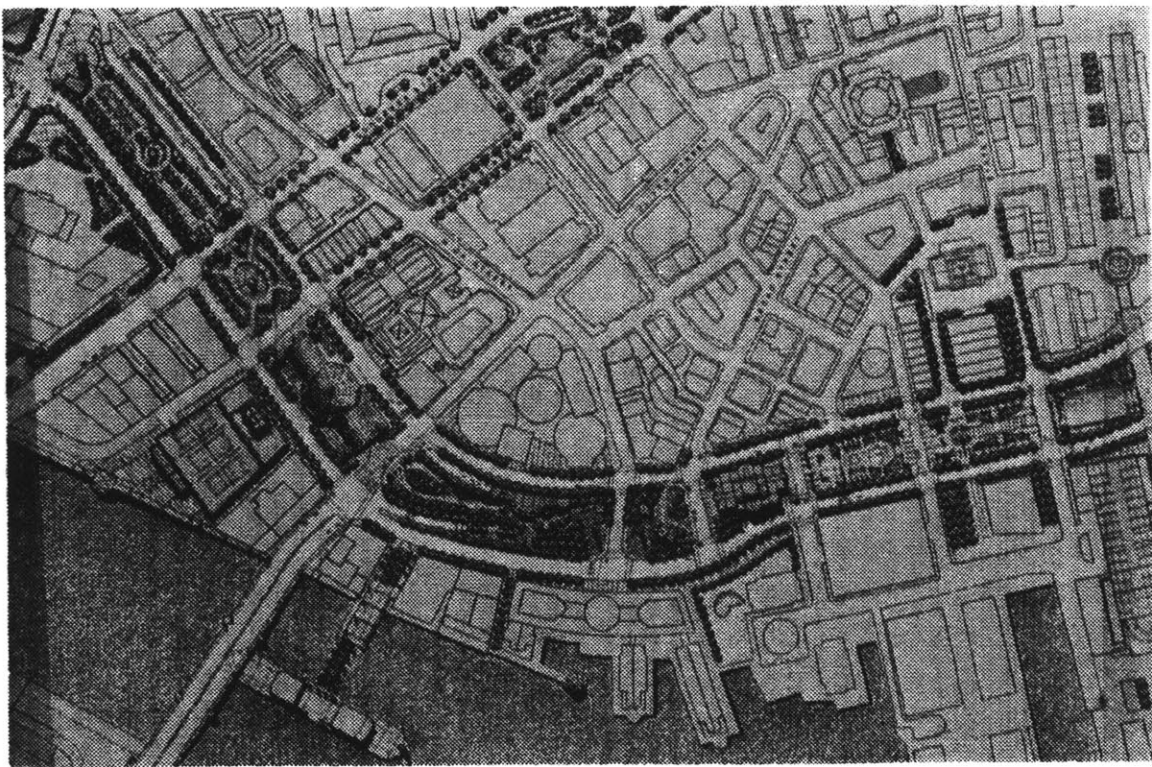


Figure 2: BRA Open Space Plan for Central Artery, 1991
(*Progressive Architecture, January 1992*)

Introduction

As the inner life of the Greek city disintegrated, the outer aspect of the city showed a far higher degree of formal order and coherence...Not the city of the sixth or fifth centuries [B.C.], but that of the third century would be the modern town planner's dream; not the city of free men but the city of insolent power and ostentatious wealth.--Lewis Mumford

Some months after the recent completion of Boston's relocated Orange Line, Progressive Architecture heralded one of its new stations as the harbinger of a reborn City Beautiful movement. As one considers the "civic" gestures in much of the architecture and large-scale urban design completed over the past decade--the Winter Garden in New York's World Financial Center, the axial composition of London's Canary Wharf, or the neoclassical design of Boston's Rowes Wharf--there indeed has been a set of underlying goals consistent with those of the original City Beautiful movement as glorified by Chicago's Colombian Exposition in 1893. In the Exposition and the plan for Chicago that followed, Daniel Burnham along with others in the city's business community envisioned a Haussmann-like organization of streets, squares, and civic buildings where a gleaming "white city" would replace the gritty slums associated with the burgeoning industrial metropolis. Similarly, recent urban redevelopment has used neoclassicism to evoke images of Rome and Athens, attempting to imbue within their high-density, privatized environments the ideals of Western humanism such as republic and democracy. Yet, as one critic observed, the design of these environments are "dictated by the necessities of control and profit but legitimized by concepts of efficiency and beauty."¹ Even public sector projects, such as the new Orange Line and the open space plan for Boston's Central Artery, rely on arches and axes to "beautify" open space above while passengers and goods are transported efficiently and invisibly below. City officials have come to realize that responding to such notions of beauty and efficiency serve their economic development plans, marketing "livability" to residents and businesses alike. Missing from

¹ Deutsche, Rosalyn. "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City," October, Volume 47, 1988, p.6.

this notion of public purpose is regard for the disenfranchised--consider, for instance, the amount of affordable housing that could be constructed with the \$6 billion of public monies appropriated to depress the Central Artery.

Further, as the Western economies shift from industry to service, the public and private sectors within cities are finding new ways to capitalize on the industrial obsolescence that has exacerbated homelessness, racial division, and urban poverty. Geographically and socially marginal neighborhoods whose often immigrant residents comprised America's urban industrial labor force are becoming increasingly unrelated to the mainstream economy, and as a consequence are increasingly subject to gentrification. Historically such neighborhoods have had what some have called a "bipolar" relationship to the mainstream environment, supplying the middle- and upper-classes with places where they could break their own rules ranging from suburban teen hangouts to brothels for executives.² Even the gleaming white city of the Columbian Exposition had the Midway just beyond its gates as a bawdy counterpart where upstanding citizenry could surreptitiously go to have their fun. More recently, redevelopment efforts in marginal neighborhoods have centered around a practice known as "theming," where planners and developers look to the history and culture of a place as its market niche. Through mechanisms such as tax-increment financing, city governments and developers are able to redevelop these marginalized areas, typically characterized by low land value and high subcultural content. The most obvious examples of this process can be seen in the redevelopment of obsolete industrial areas into the Rouse Company's festival markets, but subtler examples can be found in the marketing of low-rent urban neighborhoods as counter-cultural "edge" districts featuring artists and immigrants.

The justification for theming recalls urban renewal and its claim for sustaining the "public good." Theming, it is argued, not only brings economic development but also can educate us about history (South Street Seaport), or the arts (New York's East Village), or even

² Lecture by Professor Julian Beinart. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, April 7, 1992.

multiculturalism (the "United Colors of Benetton"). The role of developer as cultural mediator is warranted, we are told, because of the locational implications of the information age. Corporate locational decisions in the developed world no longer hinge on the proximity to a highway or a downtown as production and transportation increasingly occur through computer and modem. Consequently, greater emphasis is now placed on "quality of life" issues for the white-collar service sector, such as luxury housing, good schools, and "public" amenities in the built environment. Theming proponents assert that in order to provide the latter, developers and planners must uncover the stories offered by a building, neighborhood, or city and turn up the volume. By packaging and selling the information latent in place, developers have been entrusted with the task of the recreating a differentiable geography in a Postmodern world.

However, evidence suggests that the so-called economic development brought about through this approach led to gentrification and contributed significantly to homelessness in cities like New York during the eighties.^{3 4 5} Furthermore, theming raises the question of whether a developer, planner, or anyone else is qualified to reinterpret history, art, or multiculturalism in a generic way for mass consumption, particularly when it requires displacing residents. The notion that the theming process will create differentiation across cities is also questionable. A comparison between the Rouse markets on the east coast and San Diego's Horton Plaza, for example, reveals the same lack of diversity found when comparing two shopping malls: both developments house national chain stores wrapped in differentiated facades. Lastly, one also wonders whether

³ Deutsche. pp.41-43.

⁴ Smith, Neil. "New City, New Frontier," Variations on a Theme Park (Michael Sorkin, ed.), 1992, pp.82-89.

⁵ Boyer, M. Christine. "Cities for Sale: Merchandising History at South Street Seaport," Variations on a Theme Park (Michael Sorkin, ed.), 1992, p.204.

the culture that surrounds us needs to be artificially amplified for our edification despite market tendencies to do so. The subtlety of authentic and informal culture, it could be argued, is the essence of urbanity.

Public purpose in American architecture and urban design must be reexamined to preserve the integrity and diversity of the urban built environment and the cultures it houses. While large-scale development and theming has also occurred in Europe, the notion of public purpose often differs from in the United States, particularly in terms of government intervention. This difference is best illustrated in the publicly-initiated "infill" housing developments recently completed or underway in Berlin, Vienna, Barcelona, Frankfurt, Salzburg, and Rome. These infill projects usually involve sensitively-scaled construction on vacant inner-city lots as well as rehabilitation of dilapidated buildings. The comparison between such projects and the current practice of large-scale redevelopment is valid because the project sites in both approaches are often marginal urban areas, and because both approaches claim to be sensitive to the cultures housed in these areas.

While in the United States redevelopment within these marginal areas is ironically replacing authentic culture with images of culture, European infill efforts are reinforcing the housing stock and social needs of the multiple cultures in their inner-city neighborhoods. By allowing design diversity within a limited scale and density, the European efforts are reiterating their proponents' implicit respect for cultural diversity. Architectural design is viewed as a conduit for individual expressions of history and culture rather than as a marketing tool for those who control land.

The precedents for these ground-breaking reconstructive efforts in Europe come from the German concept of the *siedlung*, or housing project, which dates back to the early twentieth century. Stimulated by the problems and potential of the new industrial age, designers of that era organized in guilds such as the Bauhaus to redefine architecture as a profession that evolved from and responded to those problems and potentials. This included a commitment to build so-called worker housing out of inexpensive mass-

produced materials, representing a break in both the motivations and the aesthetics of past architects. Sponsored by their governments, these guilds organized building exhibitions in the form of *siedlungen*. While many problems and inconsistencies existed within these groups and their housing projects, including the eventual appropriation of many of their now famous architects and their Modernist style by the corporate world, they represented an ideal unique to the history of architecture. The Modern ideal embodied a notion of public purpose in which architects served the working class instead of wealthy patrons, engendering within government the motivation to build quality low-income housing. This ideal has since been widely berated as singular in its definition and top-down in its approach, resulting in the excesses of urban renewal in which neighborhoods were cleared for public housing, highways, and other "public" projects. Recent infill efforts, however, have proved that this criticism underestimated the potential of the Modern ideal to deal with existing urban structure and diverse community needs.

This thesis, therefore, begins with an exploration of the Modern ideal and its roots by examining the 1927 Weissenhofsiedlung, perhaps the most famous example of the *siedlung* in history. In Chapter 2, the discussion turns to the most recent descendant of the Weissenhofsiedlung, Berlin's 1987 *Internationale Bau Ausstellung* (IBA), which exemplifies how the *siedlung* notion has been transformed from an isolated architectural exhibition into an urban design strategy for the inner-city marginal neighborhood. Chapter 3 then examines similar efforts that have recently been attempted by small, independent groups working to rebuild Harlem, Clinton, and the Lower East Side in New York City. The final chapter illustrates how the IBA approach could be applied in a largely vacant industrial area of Boston, exemplifying how the strategy is not limited to infill or to housing but in fact suggests a new paradigm for reconstructive urban design even at larger-scales and with a greater diversity of uses.

Chapter 1

The Legacy of the Weissenhofsiedlung

...the history of modern architecture is as much about consciousness and polemical intent as it is about buildings themselves.--Kenneth Frampton

Opinions vary regarding Modernism's date of conception, but it is clear that by 1900 Western society had undergone a dramatic 150-year transformation process. Throughout Europe the power of monarchies had fallen to a burgeoning merchant class under the new socioeconomic structure of capitalism, bringing about the rise of the industrial revolution. Labor was organized around the factory, leading to the development of large industrial cities. Technological innovation and mass production were the harbingers of a new era characterized by an increased standard of living and vast income inequities.

These changes inspired dramatic reactions among the intelligentsia. Karl Marx--spurred by the conditions of the working class in Manchester--attacked the underpinnings of capitalism, claiming that the bourgeoisie were robbing from workers the "surplus value" of their labors. Marx called for a new social order in which workers would have collective control over society.

In the arts, Cubist painters led by Pablo Picasso searched for a new way of seeing, while Expressionists Ernst Ludwig Kirschner and Edvard Munch depicted the isolation of urban life. The Russian Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin designed the Monument to the Third International, a 400-meter high tower of iron, glass and wood to proclaim the supremacy of an engineered world. The new status held by engineering emanated from the great building accomplishments of the late 1800s including the Crystal Palace, the Eiffel Tower, and the Brooklyn Bridge, all of which had a profound effect on young designers.

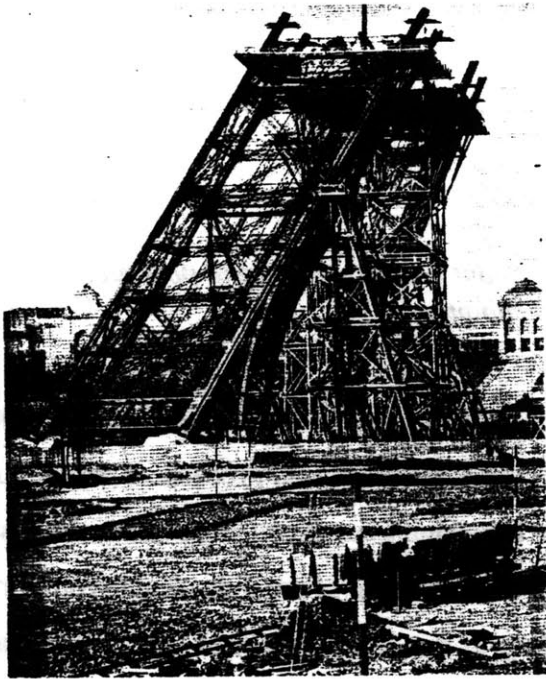


Figure 3: Eiffel Tower Under Construction in 1888

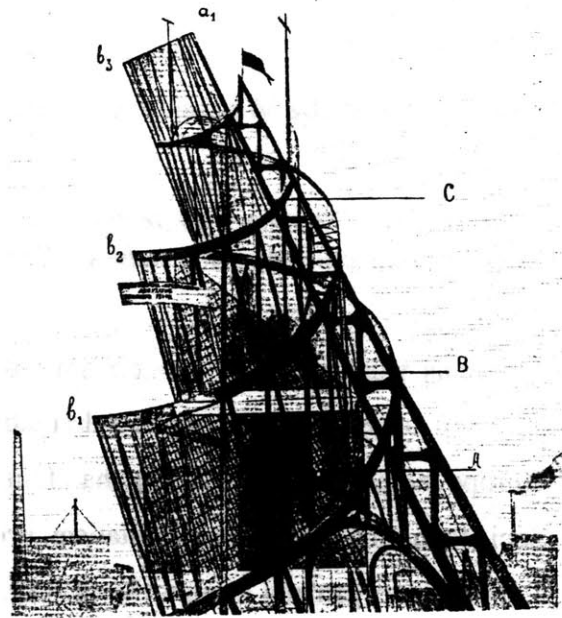


Figure 4: Tatlin's Monument to the Third International, 1920

(Tatlin and the Russian Avante Garde, Milner, 1983)

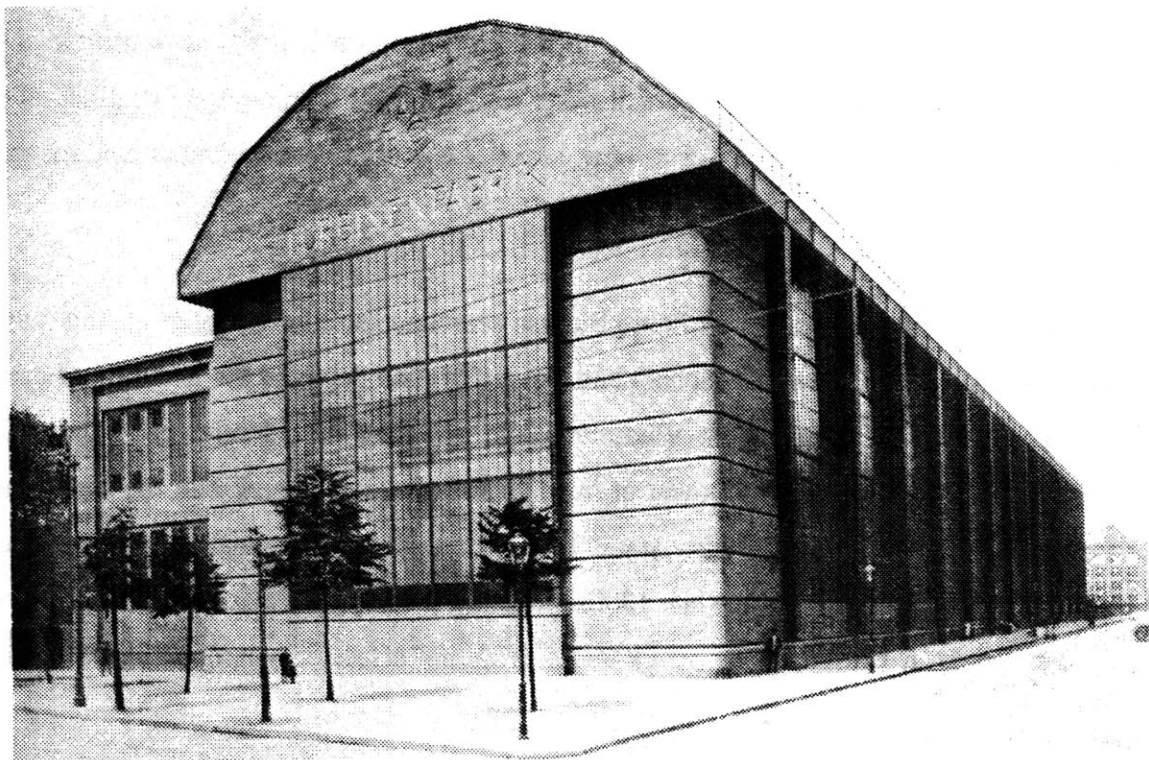


Figure 5: Behrens' AEG Turbine Factory, 1909
(Cultura E Industria, Buddensieg, 1979)

The beginnings of early Modern architecture were to be found throughout the Western world--Philip Webb and Richard Norman Shaw in England, Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright in the United States, and Otto Wagner and Josef Maria Olbrich in Austria--but it is in Germany that they were eventually knit together with the political philosophy of Marx and the rationalist aesthetic of the new art. In 1907, a heated debate surrounding the future of German arts and crafts resulted in the creation of the Deutsche Werkbund. The architect Hermann Muthesius led the group, calling for a new arts and crafts industry based on mass production. One of the principle objectives of the Werkbund was "to give precedence to the expressive resources of the present day over the imitation of past forms."⁶ The group had a notable membership comprised of twelve craft firms and twelve independent artists, including the architect Peter Behrens. That same year, Behrens was hired as a designer for AEG, a Berlin-based electrical company with substantial international holdings. Two years later he designed the AEG Turbine Factory as a monument to the industrial age.⁷

Out of Behrens' firm rose the young Walter Gropius, who at the age of twenty-six outlined an entire methodology for the production of standardized housing in a memo to the president of AEG. A decade later, Gropius became the head of the Bauhaus, a workshop-based design school grounded in the following proclamation:

Let us create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsmen and artist. Together let us conceive and create the new building of the future, which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and which will rise one day toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith.⁸

⁶ Kirsch, Karin. The Weissenhofsiedlung, 1989, p.10.

⁷ Frampton, Kenneth. Modern Architecture: A Critical History, 1992, pp. 110-113.

⁸ Ibid. Quoted on p.123.

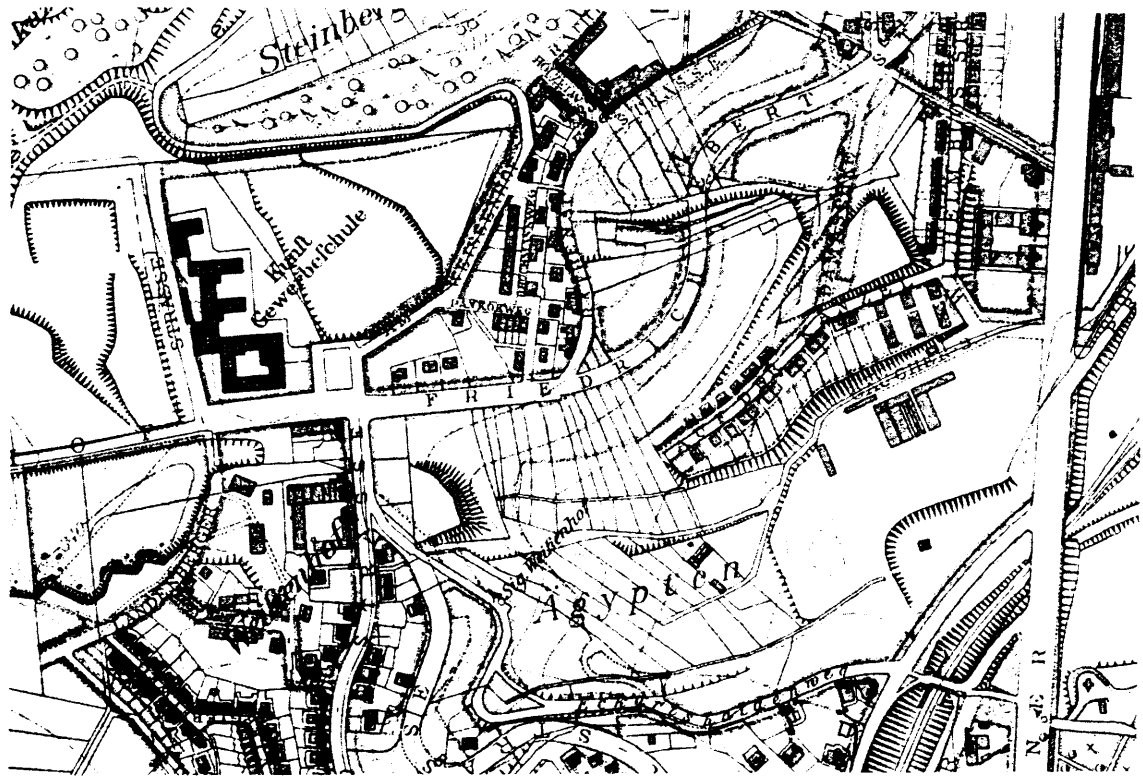


Figure 6: Weissenhof Site Area, Stuttgart, 1928
(The Weissenhofsiedlung, Kirsch, 1989)

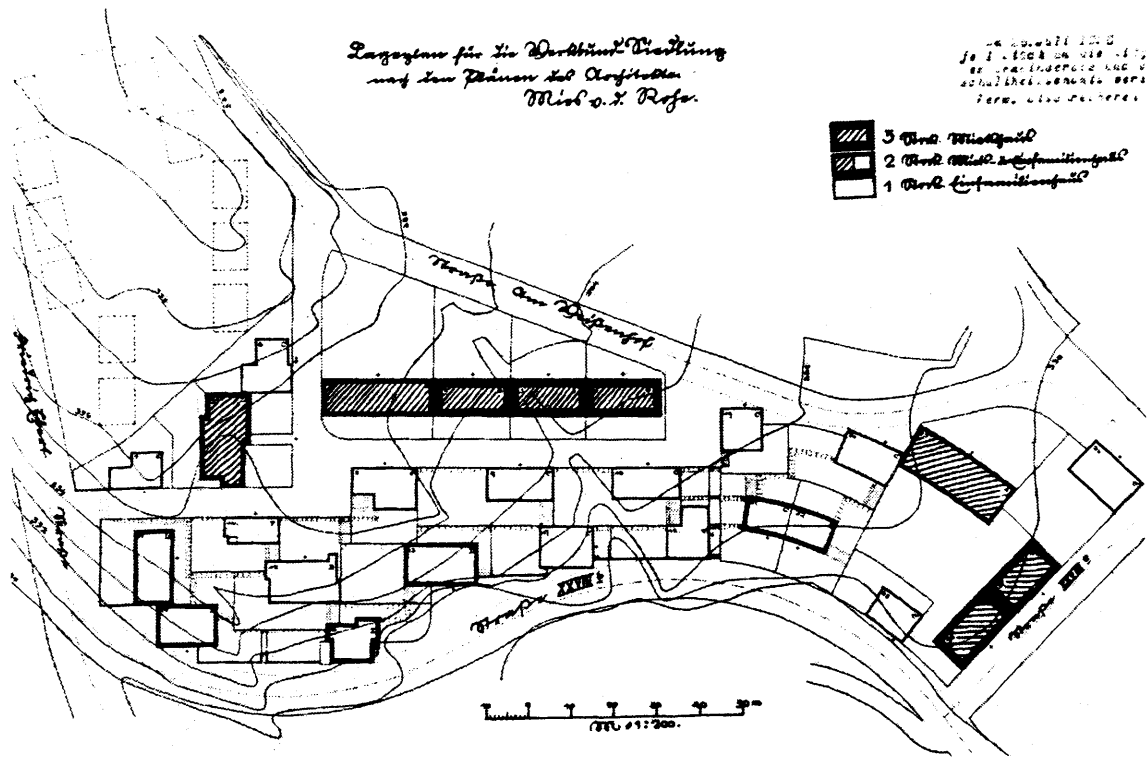


Figure 7: Site Plan for Weissenhofsiedlung, July 1926
(The Weissenhofsiedlung, Kirsch, 1989)

The Modern ideal was thus formed as a social construct, rooted in Marx's concern for the working class, and propelled by advancements of industry. In technology the early Modernists saw the opportunity to build housing and factories at greatly reduced costs, and envisioned the aesthetics of glass and steel as the proclamation of a break from nineteenth-century bourgeois Europe.

By the 1920s, Modernism became the inspiration for widespread change in the built environment in a time that was ripe for it. Europe was emerging from the Great War, and in Germany the Social Democrats had taken power. The economy and the pride of Germany had been crushed, and much of the country had been reduced to rubble. The *Zeitgeist* called for a new order where "starting from zero referred to nothing less than re-creating the world."⁹

Consequently, the Social Democratic party agreed to back experimental housing projects such as the Weissenhofsiedlung, funded in large part by U.S. post-war reconstruction funds. While most of the participating architects were members of the Werkbund, the concept of the *siedlung*, or housing project, had its roots in many of the German arts and crafts groups that had emerged since 1900 including the Bauhaus, Der Zehnerring (later Der Ring), the Arbeitsrat für Kunst (Art Soviet), and the Novembergruppe. Although there was substantial squabbling within and among groups, they tended to maintain a consistent premise: to promote an industry-based design paradigm that would embody the emergence of a new society. It was Bruno Taut, in the 1919 premier flyer for the Art Soviet, who clearly posited the notion of a *siedlung* as a housing project on "a test lot" to be planned such that "one architect sets out extensive guidelines...without interfering with personal freedom in matters of detail..." in an effort to pursue "utopian ideals;" try new ideas and materials; alter the training of architects; and propagate new architectural and artistic ideas.¹⁰

⁹ Wolfe, Tom. From Bauhaus to Our House, 1981, p.14.

¹⁰ Kirsch. pp.14-15.

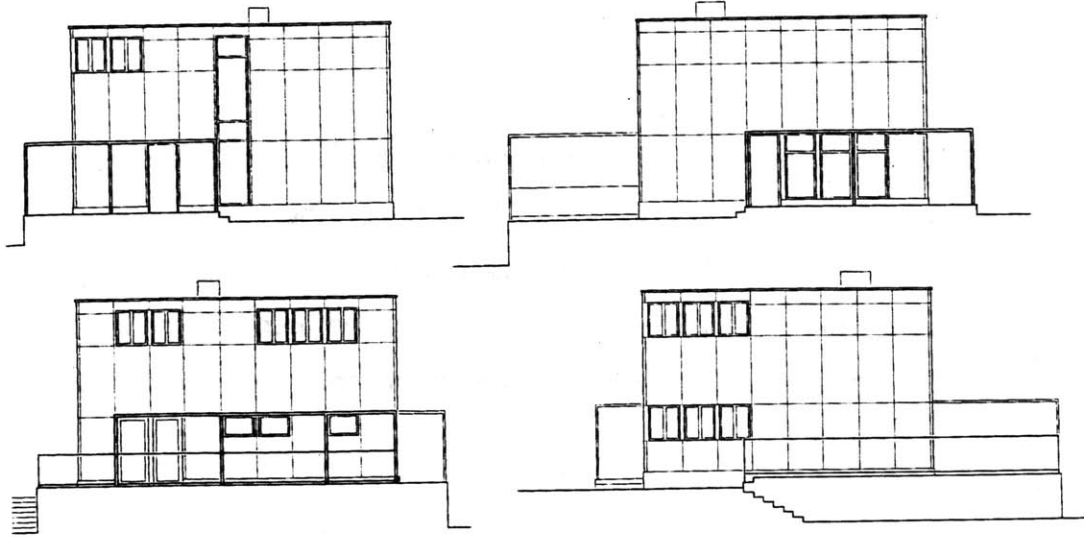


Figure 8: **Walter Gropius, House 17 Elevations**
(The Weissenhofsiedlung, Kirsch, 1989)

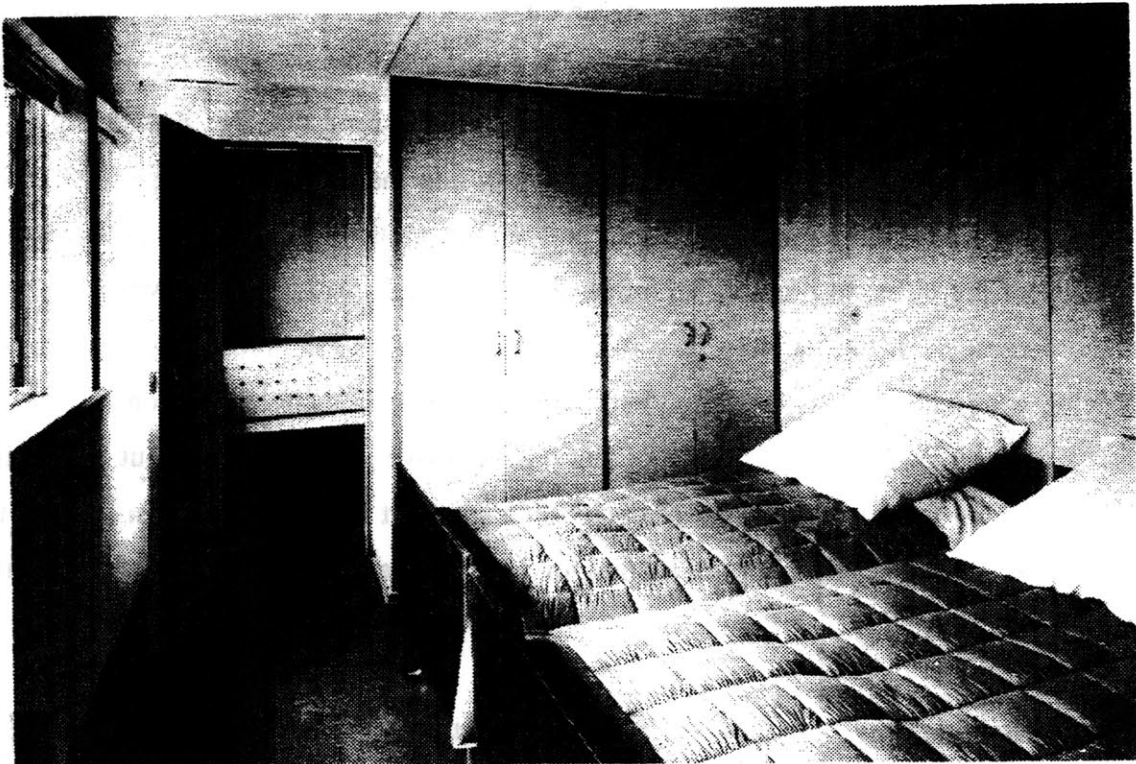


Figure 9: **Walter Gropius, Bedroom in House 17**
(The Weissenhofsiedlung, Kirsch, 1989)

In 1924 the *Stuttgarter Kunstsommer* art festival featured a Werkbund exhibition entitled *Die Form*--"form without ornament"--which was orchestrated by Peter Bruckman, chairman of the Stuttgart-based Wurttemberg section of the Werkbund. The following year the City of Stuttgart increased its total public housing budget to 1.5 million marks, and within months Bruckman proposed a building exhibition during the national Werkbund board meeting in Berlin. By mid-April of 1925 Bruckman had filed an application with the City of Stuttgart to construct government-financed public housing as a *siedlung* on a city-owned site adjacent to the Weissenhof neighborhood. Mayor Karl Lautenschlager and Bruckman issued the following joint statement on June 27, 1925:

The rationalization that has affected every area of our life has extended to the housing problem also. The economic circumstances of our time forbid any extravagance; they demand that the greatest ends be attained with the smallest means. For house building, and for home economy itself, this entails the use of such materials and such technical installations as will reduce the cost of the building and administration of housing, simplify housekeeping, and improve living conditions. A systematic pursuit of these objectives signifies an improvement of conditions in large cities, and of the quality of life in general; it thus serves to strengthen our national economy.¹¹

The city council approved 40 units of housing to be completed by 1926, but both the amount of housing and the time needed to design and construct it were expanded by the autumn of 1925. At this point Mies van der Rohe was officially appointed Artistic Director for the project. A debate had ensued over the initial curvilinear site layout he and Hugo Haring had proposed. Paul Bonatz, head of the Stuttgart School of Architecture, argued that such a layout would be costly and impractical as compared to two straight rows of housing, but at a later meeting it surfaced that the issue driving the protest was political: he and others were upset with the decision to appoint Mies--a Berliner--as the director of a local project.¹²

¹¹ Ibid. Quoted on p.17.

¹² Ibid. See "Project Chronology" on pp.202-203.

Figure 10: Le Corbusier, House 13
(The Weissenhofsiedlung, Kirsch, 1989)

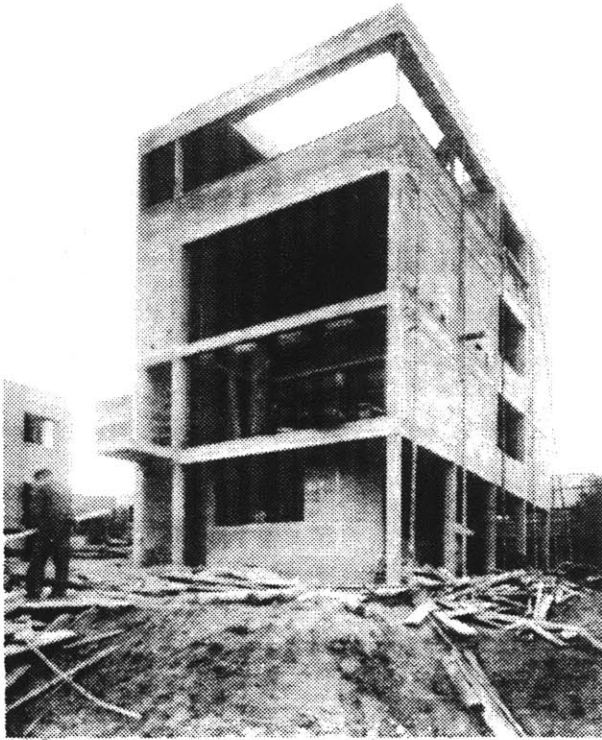


Figure 11: Hans Poelzig, House 20
(The Weissenhofsiedlung, Kirsch, 1989)

The site plan was approved by the government based on its interplay with the cube building forms anticipated to be designed. In its official statement of support, the urban expansion department explained:

...This form of building represents a total break with tradition, and its abstract form means that it must be defined as an international art...It is therefore also understandable that the Werkbund wants to involve architects of international reputation...¹³

The list of architects to be involved was also a topic of fierce debate--the list changed no less than eight times over the course of thirteen months. The selection criteria were first spelled out by Bruckman in 1925 as "those who work in the spirit of progressive artistic form, in keeping with present-day conditions, and who are familiar with...home building." Mies, not one to mince words, suggested the participation "of all left-wing architects..." The final list included Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies himself, among a total of fourteen architects from Germany, the Netherlands, Vienna, and Switzerland (Corbusier resided in Geneva at the time).¹⁴ The representation of such a broad range of countries ultimately led to the designation of the Weissenhofsiedlung as the vanguard of the so-called International Style.

The exhibit opened on July 23, 1927. Twenty-one buildings were constructed at a cost of 1.5 million marks provided by both the municipal and federal governments. The resultant designs were highly consistent despite Mies' reluctance to control design outright. After all, design control had been built into the architectural selection process, thus the vocabulary of flat roofs, unadorned mullions, and monochrome with little exception. Bruno Taut--known to have been influenced by color schemes in Japanese homes--specified that his House 19 be painted a brilliant red on the upper stories, much to the chagrin of Corbusier and other participants. Taut also had been criticized for the

¹³ Ibid. p.35.

¹⁴ Ibid. pp.41-46.

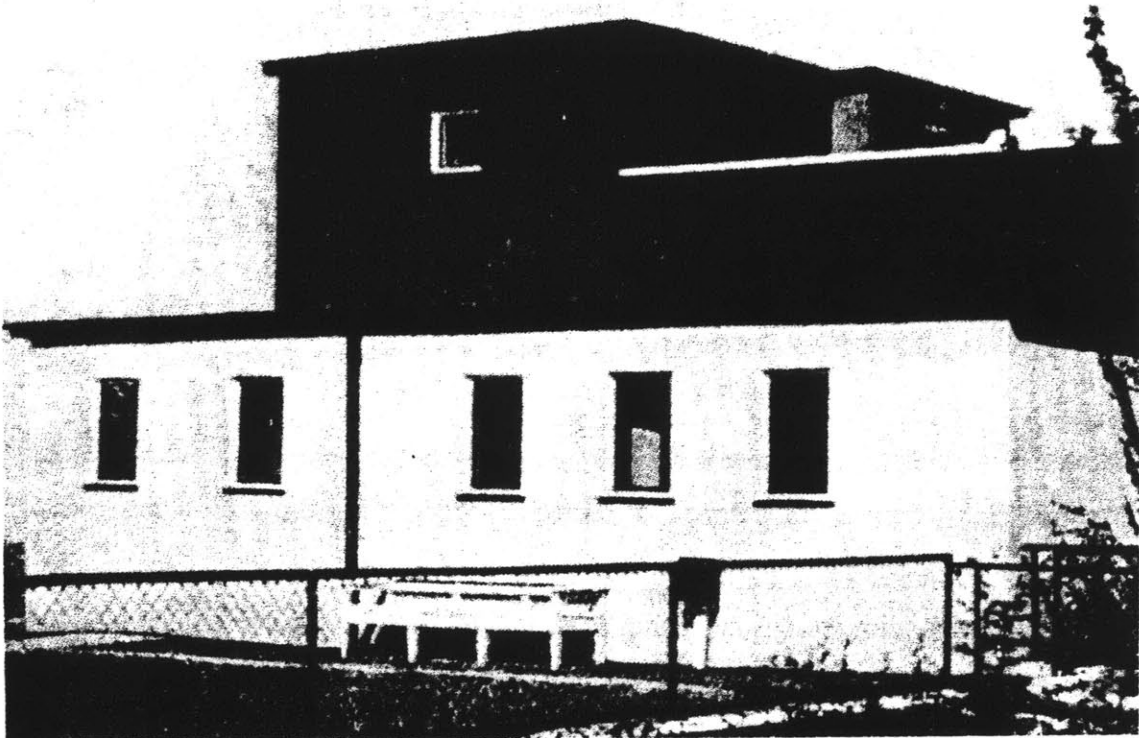


Figure 12: Bruno Taut, House 19
(The Weissenhofsiedlung, Kirsch, 1989)

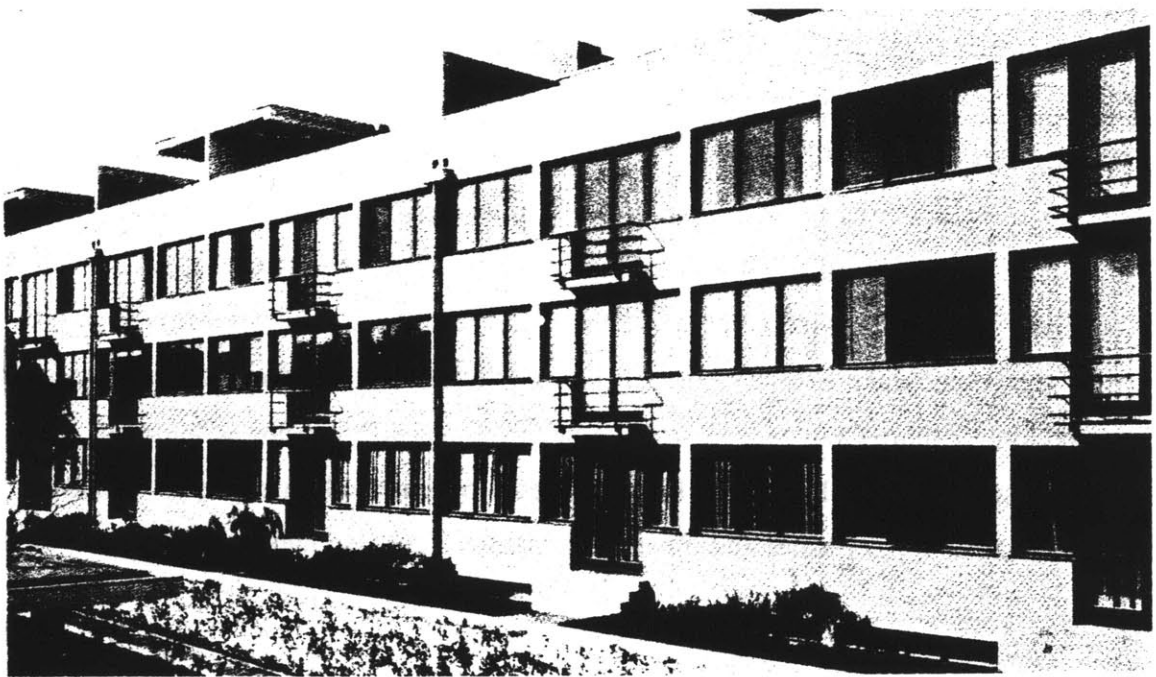


Figure 13: Mies van der Rohe, Apartment Building
(The Weissenhofsiedlung, Kirsch, 1989)

widespread use of primary color in Onkel Tom's Hutte, a large-scale public housing project that he designed and built while the city architect for Berlin; ultimately Taut, and for that matter color, fell out of favor with the early Modernists.¹⁵ Ironically, Gropius and Behrens, among others, signed Taut's 1919 "Call for Colorful Building" in which bright colors were supported as superior to "the dirty gray house."¹⁶

The promotion and subsequent condemnation of the use of color is typical of the early Modernists' reactionary dogmatism that so many have criticized. Their vacillation on such issues seems particularly unacceptable in the face of the absolutist, virtually religious, tone in which these men stated their convictions.

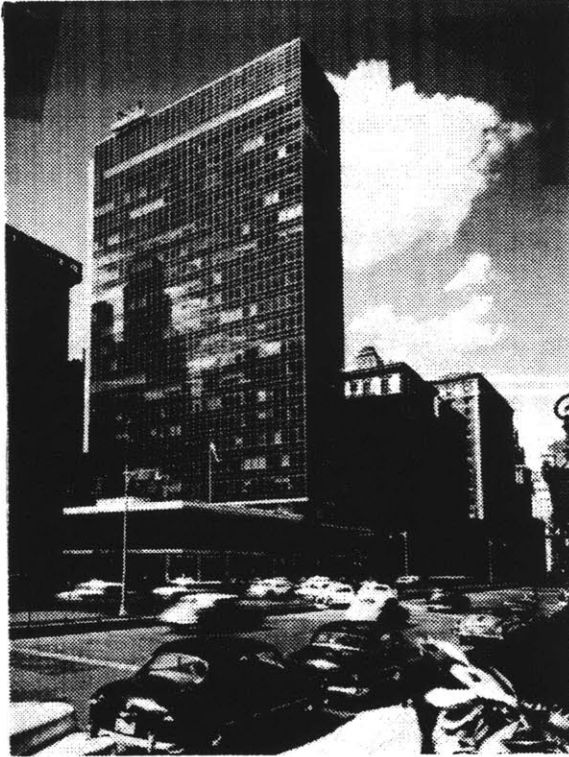
Their polemical intent was similarly inconsistent. The Weissenhof housing was ultimately designed for and occupied by the middle, not lower, classes. The fact that the chosen site was essentially suburban, and that much of the product was single-family detached housing, said little about the designers' concern for the blighted inner-city conditions already prevalent throughout Germany and much of the newly industrialized world. Kirsch points out that some of the Weissenhof designers were far more concerned with highly specific, personal issues rather than the well-being of society or new building methods. Thus in the eyes of onlooking Socialists and Communists, the Weissenhof architects remained little more than "Salon Marxists."¹⁷

The monastic overtones implicit in a group of young men invoking terms such as "a new faith," and in Oskar Schlemmer's 1922 call for the erection of "a cathedral of socialism" were in fact the strength and weakness of the Modern ideal. While it provided stimulus to promote and build ground-breaking design in an era that was yearning for change, it also opened the door for widespread criticism that continues today. Tom Wolfe, the

¹⁵ Wolfe. p.23.

¹⁶ Kirsch. p.137.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.33.



**Figure 14: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Lever House, New York, 1951
(*Skidmore, Owings & Merrill*)**



**Figure 15: Demolition of Pruitt Igoe, St. Louis, 1971
(*Collage City, Rowe and Koetter, 1978*)**

populist American social critic, berates these designers as hypocrites that fashionably denounce the bourgeoisie despite their own monied pasts. He blames them for creating an architecture based more on the rhetoric of manifesto than on actual buildings, all of which supposedly continues to plague the halls of architectural education and practice. He, among others, decries the arrogance of the Marxist zeal of Modernism, claiming that their socialist intentions are top-down strategies that consider irrelevant the opinions of the workers for whom they are supposedly building. Often it is asserted that concern for these anonymous "workers" was actually a brilliant ruse to remove the patronage system--that is, the demanding client--from architecture. Often underlying such criticism is an unsubstantiated assumption: that while Modernism has prospered because of fad and ideology, *everyone* considers it to be ugly. The shallow quality of this body of criticism is furthered by its implicit glorification of the pre-Modern era despite the social bankruptcies that dominated earlier design ideologies, and by its attempts to blame Europe for derailing the supposed rise of a "truly American" architecture as embodied in the work of H.H. Richardson and Frank Lloyd Wright.

In actuality, the transition from early European Modernism to American Modernism in terms of polemical intent is sketchy at best. During the late twenties many young American architects including Louis Kahn, Edward Durell Stone, and Louis Skidmore were making pilgrimages to Europe. Gropius ultimately escaped to the U.S. to flee the Nazis--who had closed the Bauhaus in 1933--and went on to fame as the head of architecture at Harvard; Mies became head of the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1938; Le Corbusier remained in Europe for the most part; and Taut emigrated first to Japan and later to Turkey. Gropius and Mies became the centers of American corporate Modernism with the aid of the young aristocrat Philip Johnson, who created the architecture division of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York and in 1932 co-curated a show entitled "The International Style." During the post-war building boom, corporate hallmarks of this style were created, including the Lever House by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and the Seagram Building by Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson.

Lost in this transformation was the Modern ideal--the sparse glass-and-steel style of Modernism was appropriated to create distinctive corporate identities within a U.S. pre-war context dominated by masonry and cast iron. Thus the 1932 MoMA exhibition had reversed the summons made by Schlemmer a decade earlier: its curators called for the erection of the cathedral of capitalism.

The relationship between the Europeans and the Americans is muddier in the field of public housing--that is, the part of the design world that attempted to remain "socialist." Yamasaki's infamous Pruitt-Igoe project in St. Louis is often cited as the embodiment of this relationship. Designed in 1955 and premiated by the American Institute of Architects, the 14-story towers set in large fields of open space were demolished within two decades of their construction as they had become a center for crime and abandonment. Claims that such designs were practically peeled from a Corbu drawing, complete with his notion of "streets in the air." This alleged correlation is questioned by some scholars, however, who contend that domestic reform housing efforts around the turn of the century, including work by Ernest Flagg and H. Atterbury Smith, were equally influential in the development of post-war "tower in the park" public housing in the United States.¹⁸

Nonetheless, Europe--particularly the Eastern Bloc--as well as many developing nations built the same type of housing during the post-war period. In many cases this was part of the larger process known as urban renewal, which had a pronounced effect on the form and social conditions of cities in Europe and the United States. The mass demolition of neighborhoods such as the West End in Boston and substantial portions of the Bronx in New York in an effort to construct "public" projects such as highways, slab public housing, and institutions is undoubtedly the most visible reason that Modernism, as a social construct for urban planning, has been rejected.

¹⁸ Interview with Professor Roy Strickland, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, March 5, 1993.

The isolationist impulse of a design cult creating standardized buildings for the worker is without question reminiscent of Frances Perkins' statement regarding Robert Moses: "He loves the public, but not as people."¹⁹ Yet it is possible that some part of the Modern ideal--to create inexpensive, quality building in the public interest--is salvageable. For instance, a multiple notion of public interest that fully includes community, racial and gender perspectives could be embedded within a revised conception of the Modern ideal.

The Postmodern penchant for "theming" the built environment and thereby supporting gentrification in the name of history and multiculturalism has resulted in few improvements over Modernism. Inner-city neighborhoods are now losing the battle to both a history of Modernist urban renewal and to the current practices of Postmodern real estate speculation. Many urban design professionals cling to the mixed-use "historicized" environment as a model for stimulating so-called economic development. Others look to community self-determination as the method for fighting both urban renewal and gentrification, but without economic or professional resources the notion seems incomplete. Urban design in the United States has stagnated as a result of these debates.

The legacy of the Weissenhofsiedlung has been the catalyst for an alternative urban design in Europe. Incorporating the premise that new architecture can be shown to fulfill the needs of low-income groups, recent "siedlungs" have advanced the Modern ideal by injecting it into the inner city. By attempting to rebuild marginal urban neighborhoods through "infill" techniques, these projects have addressed the fundamental problem with the early siedlung--its isolation from the city. Consequently, the siedlung has been transformed from an architectural exhibition into an urban design approach. The new urban design represents a method for rebuilding both the Modern ideal and the urban margin, giving "precedence to the expressive resources of the present day over the imitation of past forms."

¹⁹ Caro, Robert. The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York, 1974, Quoted on p.318.

Chapter 2

Transforming the Siedlung: The IBA and Beyond

The IBA has never been a gesture of architecture. Architecture at the IBA has always been at the end, not at the beginning.--Bernhard Strecker, IBA Manager

In 1974 the next generation of the German architectural exhibition was set to take place. Precedents such as the 1927 Weissenhofsiedlung and the 1957 Interbau--a post-war housing exhibition set in an isolated site near Berlin, which called upon Modernist designers to define "Living in the City of Tomorrow"--prompted the government of Berlin to plan a new exhibition on an empty site south of Tiergarten Park that was to demonstrate ways of "living in the inner city." Like their predecessors, the new group of exhibition buildings were to be "undisturbed" by the city, a set of jewels with the atrophied urban fabric of Berlin as a backdrop.

Criticism against the "undisturbed" principle became heated. Residents of Berlin had grown wary of a municipal government that not only had done little to repair the war damage that had blighted the city for decades, but to the contrary exacerbated the situation with top-down urban renewal strategies that leveled neighborhoods to make way for new highways and other large-scale projects that often went unbuilt. Anger over such practices combined with the new voice of social progressiveness that had risen throughout the Western world led to an opposition campaign against the exhibition as it had been envisioned. In January 1977 architect Josef Paul Kleihues and publisher Wolf Jobst Siedler using the daily *Berliner Morgenpost* called for a revised exhibition plan "that would be integrated with the existing urban context, to renew, repair and complete it."²⁰

²⁰ Beerheim, Wilhelm. "IBA Berlino: un bilancio di sette anni di lavoro," *Domus*, July-August 1987, p.74.

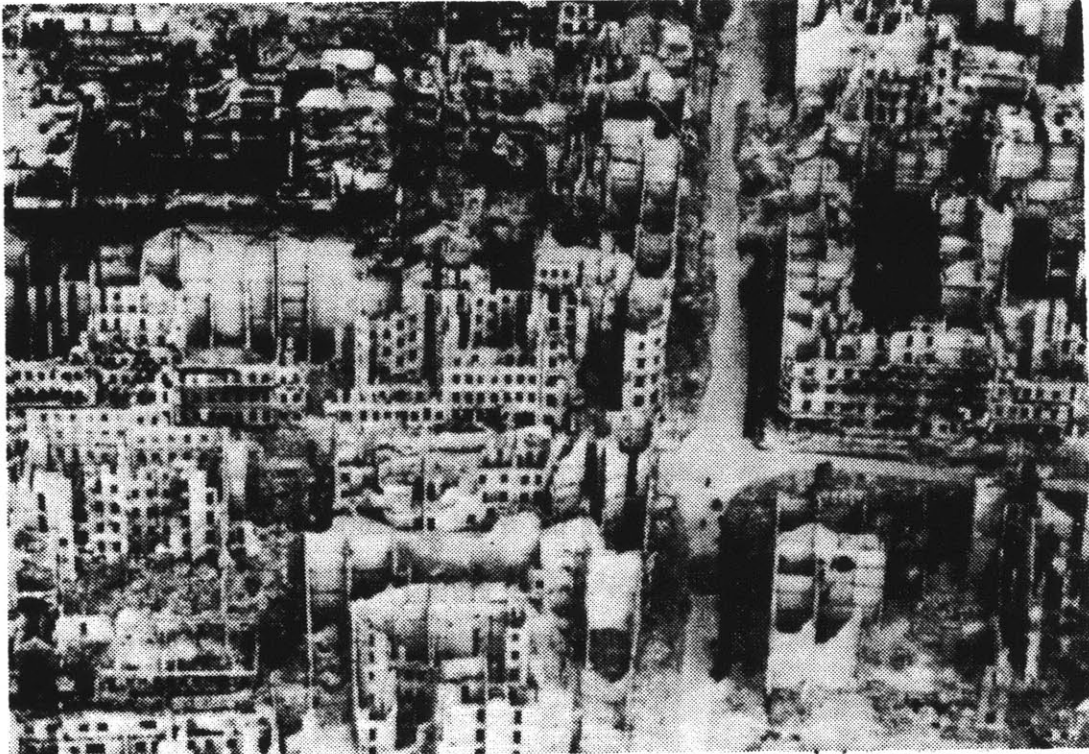


Figure 16: Kreuzberg, Berlin, 1946
(The Architectural Review, April 1987)



1950, after the war



1979, slum clearance



1984, new development

Figure 17: Kreuzberg Block 88, Berlin
 1950: Figure-Ground After World War II
 1979: Urban Renewal Impact
 1984: Proposed Figure-Ground by the IBA
(International Building Exhibition, Dietrich, 1987)

In June 1978 public pressure led to a new bill presented by the Senat, the city's legislative body, "to prepare and implement an international building exhibition in Berlin in 1984."²¹

The *Internationale Bau Ausstellung* (IBA), or the International Building Exhibition, was conceived and executed as a gesture of urban design predicated on "critical reconstruction" and "living in the city." The IBA involved a massive urban reconstruction program for sites scattered throughout six square miles of West Berlin to the south and east of Tiergarten, although some peripheral sites were also included. The primary objective was to construct or rehabilitate over 9,000 publicly-subsidized housing units in traditional-sized apartment buildings. Much of the project area including Southern Friedrichstadt and Kreuzberg had suffered from extensive bombing during World War II, and in subsequent decades was destroyed further by urban renewal. The predominant physical conditions that resulted were vacant lots and abandoned residential tenements, many of which had become home for squatters. The Kurfurstendamm, West Berlin's post-war downtown, lay to the east, and the Wall to the north and west--thus the project area, once central to all Berlin, had fallen to the periphery as a result of the Cold War. Nonetheless, most of these marginalized neighborhoods remained vital despite the factors working against them. The multi-story mixed use apartment blocks of Kreuzberg, for instance, became homes and businesses for thousands of Turks and other immigrants. The cheap rents of Kreuzberg attracted the city's counter-cultural youth as well, adding to Berlin's infamy as a city on "the edge."

The IBA's innovation lay in its recognition of the need for physical reconstruction of these marginal neighborhoods within the context of their social value. The 1978 Senat IBA bill stated that the project was an effort to:

²¹ Ibid. Quoted on p.74.

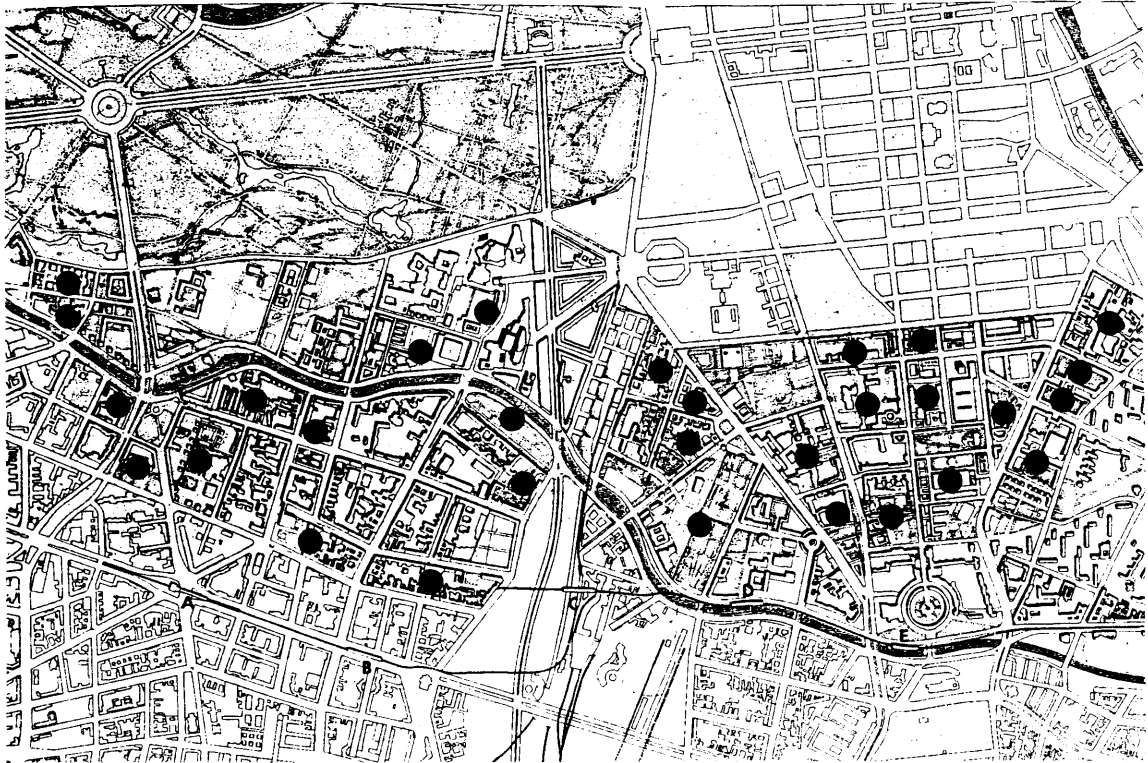


Figure 18: IBA Projects in Tiergarten and Friedrichstadt
(The Architectural Review, April 1987)

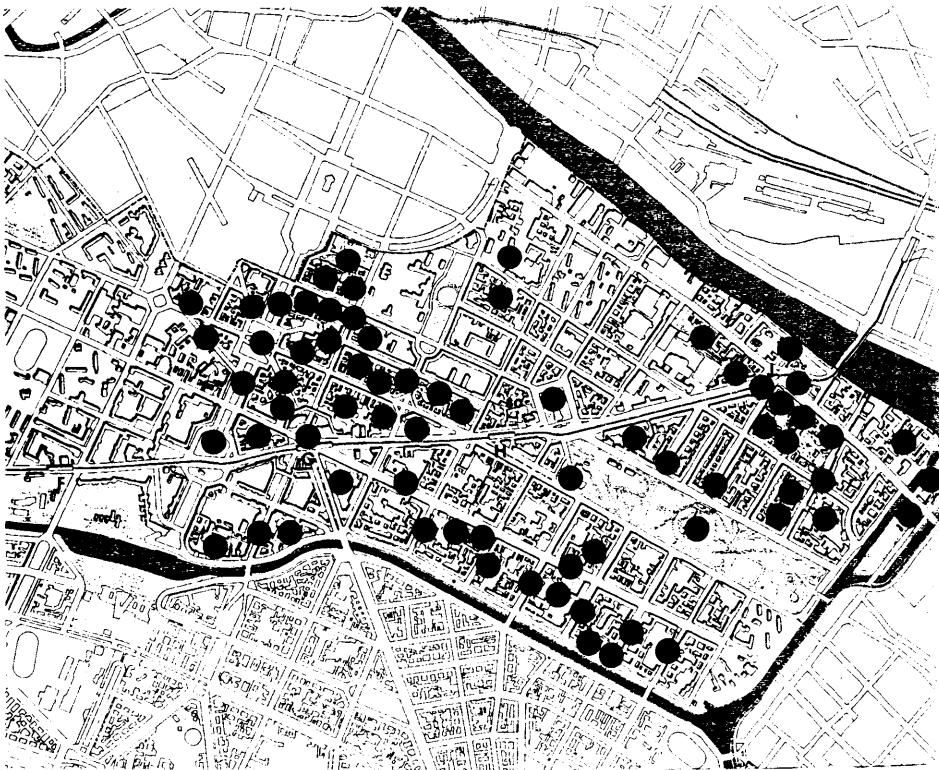


Figure 19: IBA Projects in Kreuzberg and Luisenstadt
(The Architectural Review, April 1987)

- limit the disparities in living conditions across the city;
- encourage the "polycentric" nature of West Berlin;
- maintain Berlin's historic block structure as the basis for development;
- reformulate the relationship between "social norms and individual freedom;"
- promote the city as a place to live in through the creation of quality housing;
- and, foster "a productive tension...between social requirements and the individual, artistic responsibility of the architect."²²

Planning work was to be executed by an autonomous non-profit IBA office that had a staff of 50 and a budget of DM 85 million (\$27 million at that time), 75 percent of which came from municipal funds and the remainder from the federal government. The construction and rehabilitation itself would be funded by public, semi-public, or private investment. Thus the IBA office essentially acted as a planning consultant with no ability to actually finance or authorize construction, which slowed the project administratively. The exhibition deadline was pushed to 1987, and ultimately 1,000 fewer units were constructed than originally planned.²³

The IBA office was organized into two divisions: *Neubau* or City New Construction, headed by Josef Paul Kleihues; and *Altbau* or City Renovation, led by architect Hardt-Waltherr Hamer. This organization was based on the 150 sites within the central project area, the majority of which were city-owned. One hundred of these sites were vacant and designated for new buildings, while the remaining 50 were slotted for renovation. In general the *Neubau* project sites lay to the west while the *Altbau* projects were in

²² Davey, Peter and Clelland, Douglas. "Berlin: Origins to IBA," The Architectural Review, April 1987, p.28.

²³ Beerheim. p.76.

Figure 20: Peter Eisenman
IBA Neubau, 1987
(The Architectural Review, April 1987)

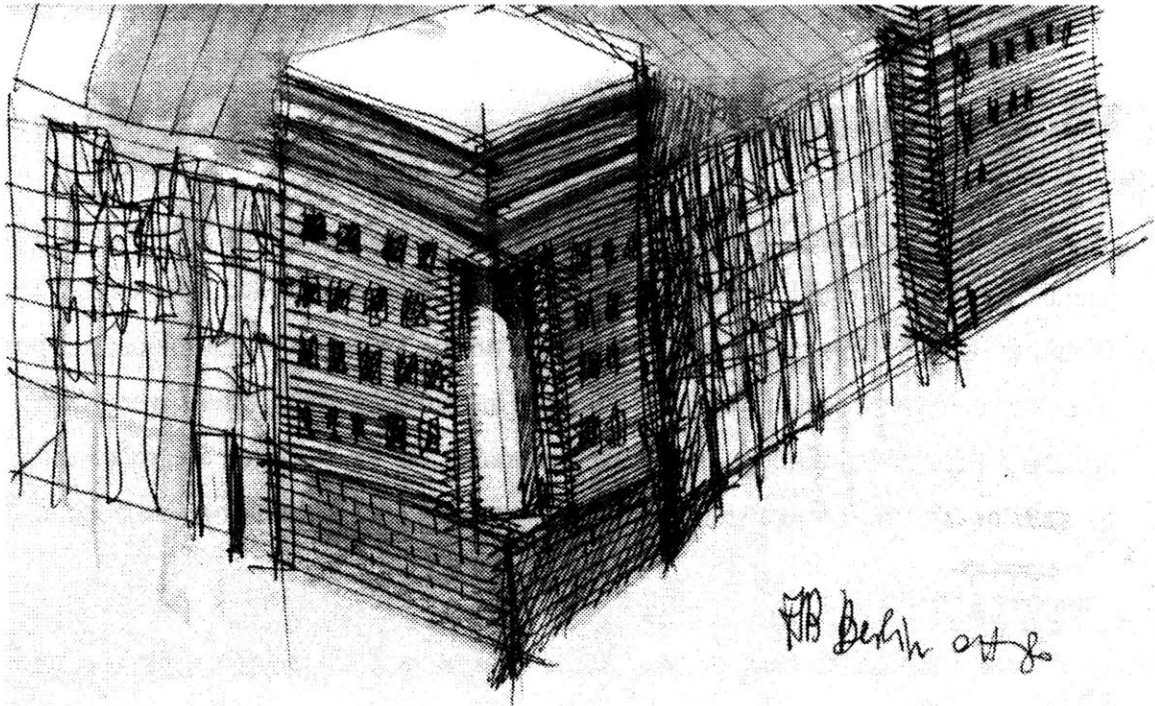
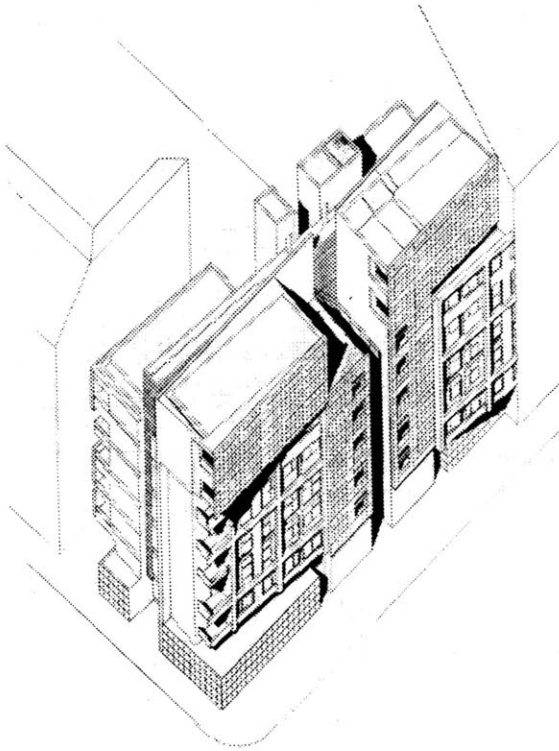


Figure 21: **Aldo Rossi, IBA Neubau, 1987**
(The Architectural Review, April 1987)

Kreuzberg to the east. The renovation efforts often involved "sweat equity" in which occupants--often squatters--would trade rehabilitation labor for unit ownership.

Kleihues summarized the entire approach with the term "critical reconstruction," which he viewed as a response to the decline in "the classical faith in a universal regulative," or nonpluralist approach, often associated with Modernism. Towards the end of the IBA, Kleihues wrote:

...the conception of plurality in a totality which characterizes the historical image of European cities, can be realized even when modern and contradictory ideas are respected--not as the superficial classical need for harmony but by opening up to experiments and contradiction...In concrete terms, this means granting greater autonomy to the individual elements of the city (apartment/building/block), which allow that multiplicity...without releasing them from their social and formal ties. Critical reconstruction hence means a functionally, socially and formally increased differentiation.²⁴

The central tenet of the IBA was respect for existing residents and structures at both the scale of the individual building and the larger scale of Berlin. Population displacement was to be kept to a minimum, and tenants were to be involved in decisionmaking. Existing buildings were to be saved, and if necessary, rehabilitated whenever possible. The historic block structure, streetwalls, and building heights of Berlin were considered the physical guiding factors for new development. These three parameters of block, streetwall and height were used to generate massing envelopes for each vacant lot. In cases where entire blocks had been destroyed, streets were laid out according to the historic block patterns of the city.

This immediately set the course for the Neubau design regulation. A designer working on an individual site had freedom of expression within the confines of the massing envelope, and was required to follow the building line at the ground level--the streetwall

²⁴ Kleihues, Josef Paul. "The Critical Reconstruction of the City," Domus, July-August 1987. p.80.

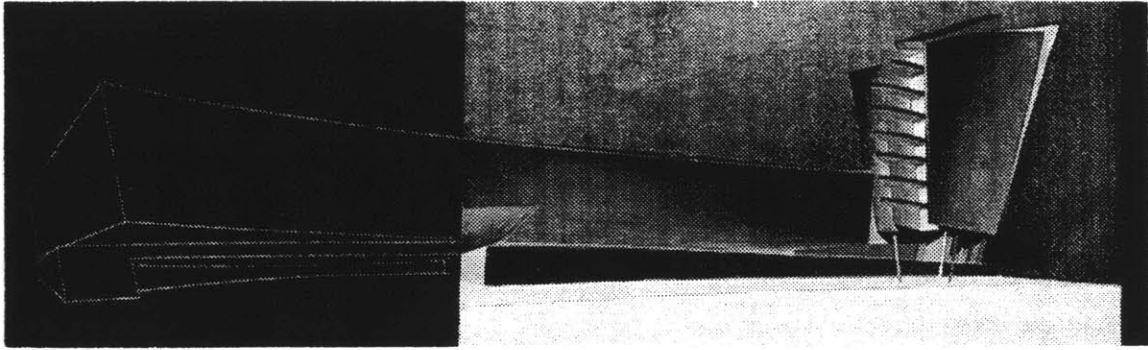


Figure 22: Zaha Hadid, IBA Neubau Proposal
(The Architectural Review, April 1987)

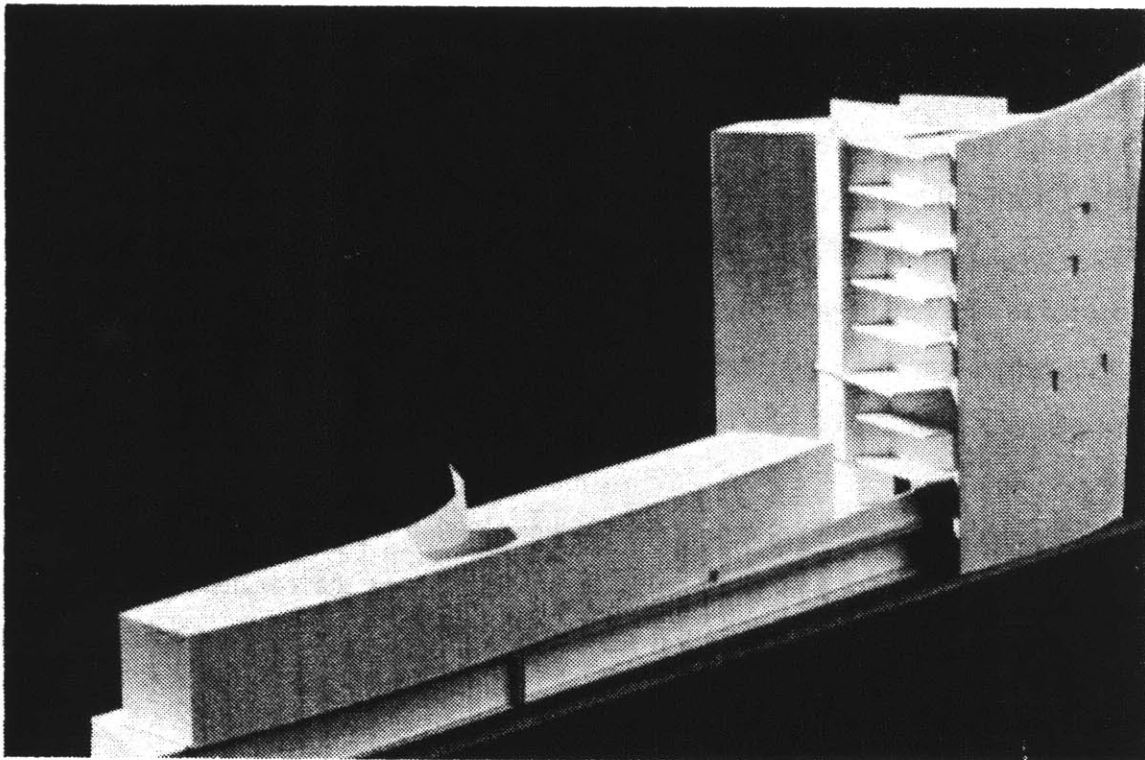


Figure 23: Zaha Hadid, IBA Neubau Proposal
(The Architectural Review, April 1987)

could modulate above this point. In most cases the heights of the buildings were held to an average of five stories, with retail encouraged on the ground floor and housing above. For larger buildings, internal courtyards intended for greenspaces and children's play areas--in keeping with traditional "perimeter block" residential buildings existing throughout Berlin--were encouraged. There was no control over materials, regardless of context. Architects were asked by Kleihues to be sensitive to the image of Berlin, but this was left to the individual designers to discern and express. Taken together, this suggested an approach to grafting new architectural ideas into the existing body of the city.

Individual architects for new buildings were chosen through limited competitions. Many of the star architects of the eighties were in the clique--Peter Eisenman, James Stirling, Zaha Hadid, Rob Krier, and Aldo Rossi to name but a few--though it has been pointed out that those chosen were "at the forefront of architectural thinking" as opposed to "the megastars of corporate architecture like Johnson and Pei."²⁵ The competition often required the design of an entire block despite the fact that the winning architect would only be responsible for the design of an individual building within the block. The rationale for this multi-scale approach remains unclear, but it is possible that it was used to assess the entrants' sensitivity to context. The competition entries and the later designs for individual buildings by these renown architects have dominated press related to the IBA, at times obfuscating the project's larger urban design goals and the social ideals that underlie them.

The selection of architects for the IBA Neubau was among the more troublesome aspects of the project. Just as Mies maintained indirect design control of the Weissenhof results through the selection of Modernist architects, Kleihues undermined his own call for "increased differentiation" by primarily selecting Postmodern historicists such as Krier and

²⁵ Hoffman, Peter. "Report from West Berlin: An Ambitious Urban Renewal Plan is Creating Much-Needed Housing and Considerable Controversy," Architectural Record, February 1985, p.67.

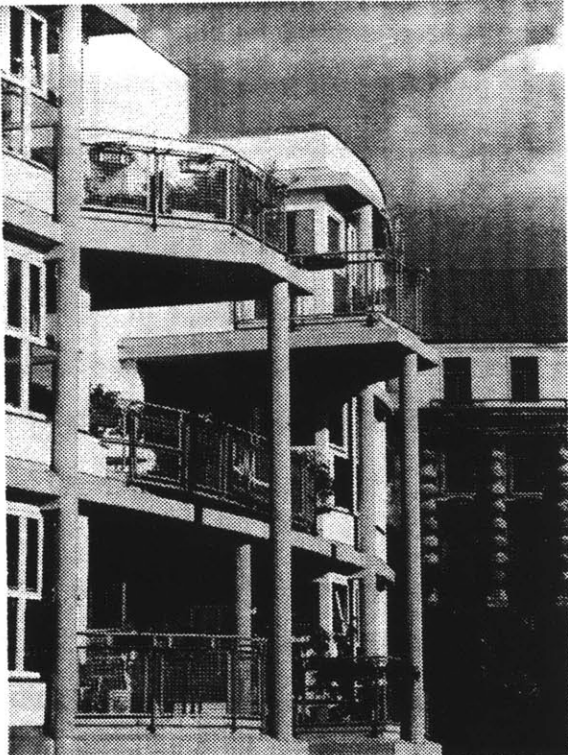


Figure 24: Herman Hertzberger
IBA Neubau, 1987
(The Architectural Review, April 1987)



Figure 25: Herman Hertzberger, IBA Neubau, 1987
(The Architectural Review, April 1987)

Rossi, although the inclusion of Eisenman and Hadid could be argued to be a balancing factor. Nonetheless, most of the selected architects were world-famous Western architects with very few women, people of color, or nationals from developing countries represented. Thus the "Internationale" Bau Ausstellung represents as much of an ethnocentric misnomer as did Johnson and Hitchcock's MoMA exhibition entitled "The International Style" a half century earlier. Given that many of the neighborhoods in which these projects were implemented housed large numbers of immigrants from outside the Western world, and that many of these subsidized units became homes for families headed by single mothers, the fact that the majority of the new buildings were designed by Western men seems particularly problematic.

Zaha Hadid participated in the project under protest. In 1985 the IBA office had designated portions of Block 2 in Kreuzberg to be designed by women--she was eventually chosen as one of three selected females. Hadid responded that the gender segregation was equivalent to "being told you have leprosy."²⁶ She went on to criticize the IBA's entire approach to design: "They are completing the city with traditional, almost suburban, housing types...It's not like the Weissenhof exhibition in Stuttgart; nobody has made a statement about a new way of living." This final comment spoke to the highly limited technological innovation that was attempted by the IBA, unlike the Weissenhofsiedlung where technology was the purported impetus for changing the way people live. Hadid further explained that she agreed to participate despite these reservations in an attempt to design "an innovative alternative to the exhibition's 'toytown.'²⁷ Her 1987 proposal, which was completed at the end of the IBA and during the concomitant decline of the Postmodern style among better known architects, unquestionably represented a break from earlier IBA designs. Hers was among the most

²⁶ Dietsch, Deborah. The Architectural Record, June 1987, Quoted on p.122.

²⁷ Ibid. Quoted on p.122.

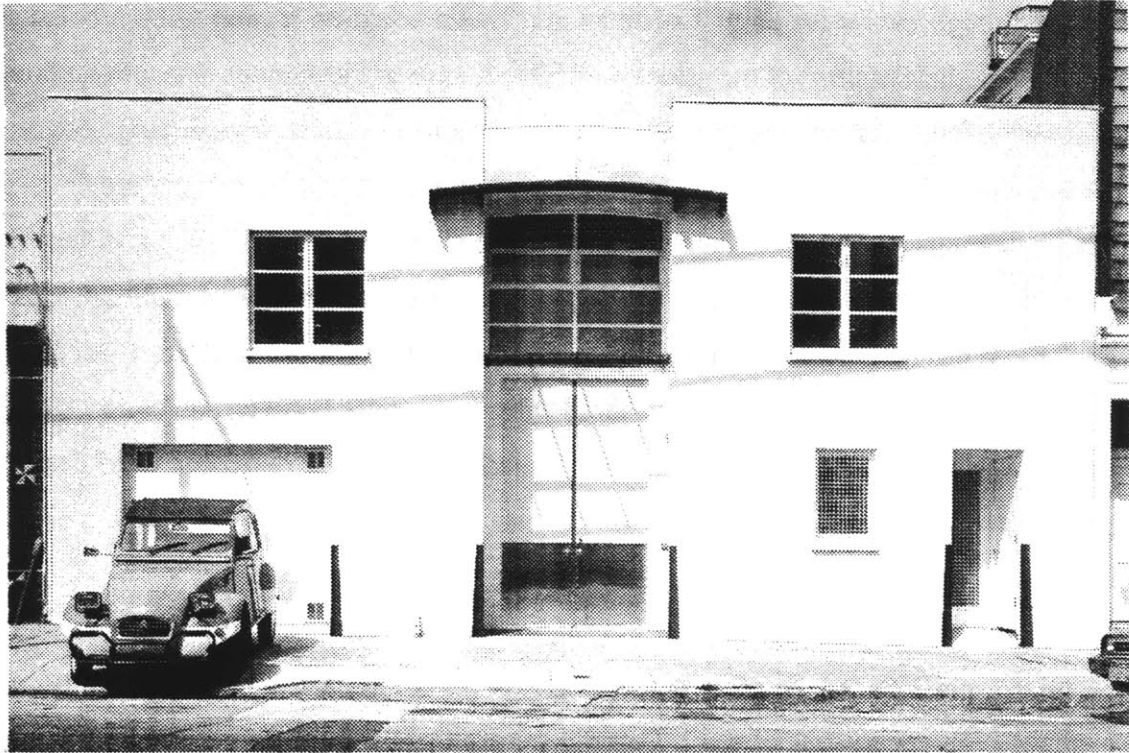


Figure 26: William Leddy, Studio, San Francisco, 1988
(New Architecture San Francisco, Shay, 1989)

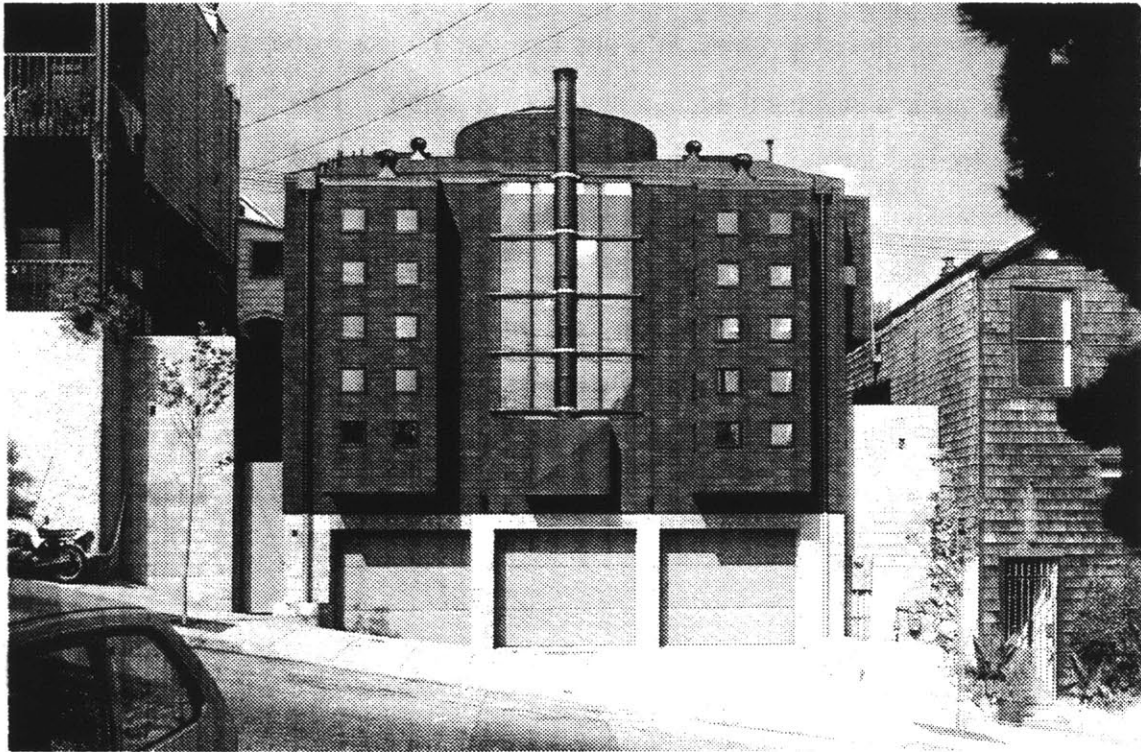


Figure 27: Daniel Solomon, Residence, San Francisco, 1988
(New Architecture San Francisco, Shay, 1989)

liberal interpretations of the massing envelope defined for her site, taking the five-story average height requirement at its word by designing a three-story base with an eight-story tower that met the corner of her site and confronted the then neighboring Berlin Wall.

Colin Rowe has also criticized the IBA Neubau projects as suburban in nature. Rowe questions the wisdom of prescribing large perimeter block buildings with internal courtyards open to public access, asserting that the courtyards will be used as short cuts that will deny the surrounding streets of necessary pedestrian traffic. A deeper consequence of this "preoccupation with block" is claimed: the designs will be internalized, resulting in streets that act as little more than "rivers" between separate courtyard housing structures that represent an "architectural zoo."²⁸ Others have also evoked the imagery of isolated architectural islands in criticizing the IBA results despite the project's original goals. Yet while the former criticism seems easily dealt with simply by limiting access to the courtyards, the latter seems unfair. New buildings littered throughout a blighted downtown are bound to at first rest uncomfortably within their surroundings, possessing the temporary appearance of, well, an exhibition. But as time passes this seemingly flashy, isolated architecture will integrate into the environment as has Gaudi's work in Barcelona, Ando's work in Osaka, and modern rowhouses in San Francisco. This is the nature of infill.

The final serious criticism to be launched against the IBA Neubau was on the question of land use. The new IBA buildings experienced trouble in terms of leasing their ground-floor commercial spaces, which could not be publicly subsidized.²⁹ Many Berliners and outside critics insisted that a city cannot be built on social housing alone, that work spaces, retail, and community facilities must also be built. The dominance of the housing component of the IBA seems to be a direct descendant of the Weissenhof and the Interbau, which is precisely why the IBA planners were short-sighted in their land use

²⁸ Rowe, Colin. "IBA: Rowe Reflects," The Architectural Review, September 1984, pp.92-93

²⁹ Interview with Bernhard Strecker, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, February 12, 1993.



Figure 28: Alvaro Siza, IBA Altstadt, 1984
(The Architectural Review, September 1984)

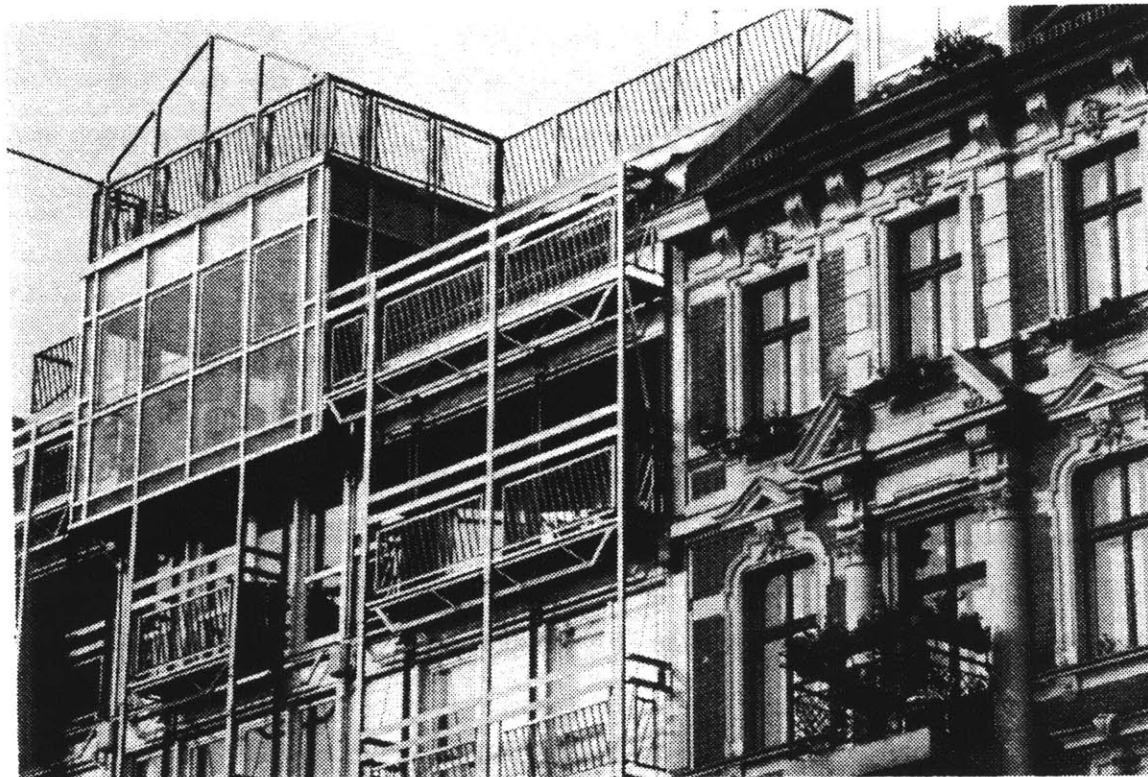


Figure 29: Nylund, IBA Altstadt: Self-Build Housing, 1987
(The Architectural Review, April 1987)

approach. While they altered the physical design approach of the siedlung to interact with the city, they did not alter the programmatic approach with the same consideration. Thus much of the "suburban" nature of the IBA was not the fault of the individual designers but of the program they had inherited.

The Altbau, or renovation side of the IBA, suffered far less from these problems because it dealt with the programmatic infrastructure of the existing city. The Altbau had more of a grassroots approach, and that is where it met its greatest challenge. Planners were dealing with tightly knit, highly politicized neighborhoods that despite their defunct physical surroundings had no trust for men in white shirts and funky ties. In response, Hamer as head of the Altbau division set forth the following "12 Basic Principles of Careful Urban Renewal:"

1. Planning and realization of the renewal must be carried out together with the present inhabitants and business and tradesmen, and must preserve the building stock.
2. Planners, inhabitants, business and trades people must be in agreement about the aims and renewal measures. Technical and social planning must go hand in hand.
3. The special character of Kreuzberg should be retained, trust and confidence in the endangered parts of the city must be reawakened. Damage which threatens the building stock must be dealt with immediately.
4. Careful changes in the ground plan should enable the development of new forms of living.
5. The renewal of dwelling units and buildings should be carried out in stages and gradually extended.
6. The structural situation should be improved by few demolitions, provision of greenery in the block interior and facade design.
7. Public facilities such as streets, squares and green areas must be renewed and extended in accordance with needs.

8. Participation and material rights of those affected must be clarified at the social planning stage.
9. Decisions concerning urban renewal must be openly made and, if possible, discussed on site. Representation of those affected should be intensified.
10. Urban renewal which creates confidence must have guaranteed financial backing. Money must be quickly and directly available.
11. A new type of executive body must be developed. There must be a clear division of the tasks of the executive redevelopment agency (services), and of the developers (construction).
12. Urban renewal in accordance with this concept must be guaranteed beyond 1984.³⁰

The Senat adopted these goals in March, 1983 in contrast to the plan they had backed three years earlier that called for the displacement of 15,000 residents and hundreds of businesses.

The IBA Altbau has met with remarkable success relative to other attempts to rebuild marginalized neighborhoods. The undertaking required that hundreds of detailed meetings take place over issues ranging from the transformation of a parking garage into a kindergarten to the installation of toilets in old apartments. Some new buildings were required to accommodate the demand created by modernizing existing apartments, since many of the older units had no kitchens or bathrooms. The start of construction or renovation was contingent on a majority vote to do so by those affected. Translators were engaged when necessary. Traditional households often required multiple visits to assess women's needs because wives were found to stay quiet when their husbands were present. Dissenters within government claimed that such a lengthy participation process would cripple the project schedule, but the reverse proved to be true.

³⁰ Hamer, Hardt-Waltherr. "The Other Face of IBA/Careful Urban Renewal in Kreuzberg," Space & Society, September-December 1985, pp.79-80.

By 1987, approximately 5,500 dwelling units were rehabilitated, 485 new units were constructed, three schools for 1,500 children and day care centers for 1,400 children were developed, 250 courtyards were renovated as semi-public greenspaces, 20 public spaces have been refurbished, and 20 new institutional facilities have been constructed including a youth and cultural center and a senior citizen's home. Five hundred of the renovation projects were completed by the residents themselves. Ninety-five percent of the residents remained in the area, and 61 percent remained in their original homes.³¹ The main fear for these neighborhoods now is gentrification--some feel that Kreuzberg is becoming the Greenwich Village of Berlin. Government rent control was promised to residents for the majority of the renovated apartments, and Hamer insisted on the same for new buildings in the Altbau project area.³²

In contrast to the Altbau's overwhelming success, the Neubau project completed only 27 of the 100 projects planned. The 27 new structures include 2,500 subsidized dwelling units, a phosphate elimination plant, a science center, a *Kulturforum*, a pedestrian bridge, as well as some new public spaces. Planning for the remaining sites has been taken over by the municipal government, which has promised to follow the principles of the IBA.

The IBA contract ended on December 31, 1987. The total construction cost for the two divisions was DM 3 billion, which came from private, semi-public, and public sources. Over 200 architects participated in the entire program. The IBA Altbau division continues to exist under the name STERN (Careful Urban Renewal Non-Profit Organization). The IBA has stimulated the young architects of Berlin--many of whom remain critical of the IBA results--in what has been called "a thriving architectural culture." Berlin's Senat continues to organize architectural competitions to encourage this

³¹ Hamer. pp.81-86.

³² Davey, Peter. "Altbau: STERN Work," The Architectural Review, April 1987, pp.87-89.

culture.³³ The project is also said to have had the "IBA Effect" all over Europe, inspiring similar projects in Vienna, Barcelona, Frankfurt, Salzburg, and Rome.³⁴

Similar urban design strategies are being attempted in East Berlin since the demolition of the Wall.³⁵ However, there are lamentable aspects to that symbolic event. Land values in Berlin have risen dramatically since reunification, particularly with the decision to relocate the capital from Bonn to Berlin. New building demand is estimated at 10 million square meters of office space and up to 100,000 new, mainly luxury, residential units. Skyscrapers are being proposed through competitions for Potsdamer Platz, and a new "American Business Center" is planned, ironically, at Checkpoint Charlie.³⁶ Star architects, including Kleihues, continue to hover above Berlin to build these new corporate complexes, but many of the socialist impulses of the Modern ideal so present in the IBA seem to have come down with the Wall. Kreuzberg, once marginalized because of the Cold War, is now geographically central thanks to the "New World Order," prompting one to question whether the government will be able to keep its rent control pledges.

Nonetheless, the IBA represented a renaissance for the Modern ideal, if not for the Modern style. Firmly rooted in the *siedlung*, its proponents saw the opportunity to adapt the building exhibition to meet the physical needs of the city as well as the housing needs of its inhabitants. The *Neubau's* failures included a lack of innovative urban programming; little technical innovation; exclusion of alternative design perspectives; and inability to complete its stated goal. Yet these shortcomings all seem resolvable within the framework of the overall IBA approach--programming could be changed, technical

³³ Pepchinski, Mary. "The End of IBA and After," Progressive Architecture, November 1987, p.44.

³⁴ Beerheim. p.78.

³⁵ Interview with Bernhard Strecker.

³⁶ De Michelis, Marco. "After the wall: back to Great Berlin," Casabella, November 1992, pp.52-53.

innovation could be fostered, more marginalized architects could be included, and administrative problems could be surmounted without altering the central tenets of the IBA. Furthermore, the success of the Altbau points to one of the primary strengths of the entire IBA: in order to rebuild marginalized neighborhoods, new infill construction must come with the simultaneous renovation of existing housing stock. If this had not occurred, development pressure would have eliminated the atrophied buildings surrounding the new, prominently-designed structures. Rehabilitation is insurance against the potential gentrification that would likely occur if new infill designed by famous architects suddenly appeared in a low-rent neighborhood because it stabilizes the entire housing stock.

In 1985 a two-day symposium was held in West Berlin that attempted "to explore architectural identity questions between Berlin and New York." Participants included a number of architects, Barbara Jakobson, a trustee at MoMA, and Stuart Sloame, then Assistant Secretary for Program Development of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the U.S. government. Jakobson pointed out that the IBA approach could be implemented in New York's Lower East Side. Sloame stated that federal support for such a program would be impossible due to a lack of funds, sparking disbelief from the European participants and anger from the Americans. John Hejduk, who chaired the final session, addressed Sloame, stating, "We have not achieved the level of urban rebuilding that our colleagues here in Berlin [have]...I hope that you as a representative of the U.S. government will take away some feeling of this concern."³⁷

The thought that the IBA approach could be implemented elsewhere has been posited and acted upon by many. In Vienna the municipal government is attempting to build 10,000 units per year using the IBA Neubau approach to accommodate Eastern European

³⁷ Hoffman. p.67.

immigration; the funds for the project are being raised through a liquor tax.^{38 39} In the United States we can scarcely conceive of such a bold public intervention, mainly because the federal government over the past decade has withdrawn from most of its social responsibilities, but also because of community mistrust. Neil Smith, noted for his studies of gentrification of the Lower East Side, has stated that "nothing" can be done about the problem by the government--the government should simply stay out and let the community handle it. This seems unrealistic, particularly given that the social problems of crime and homelessness are far more severe in the Lower East Side and other marginal New York neighborhoods than they were in Kreuzberg when the IBA began. Community groups have plenty of reasons to mistrust plans made on their behalf, just as the residents of Kreuzberg did. In the United States, however, a basic disbelief in government espoused by the right and much of the left compounds the problem.

In New York some progress is underway. Several projects have adopted portions of the IBA approach, converging on an appropriate system of "critical reconstruction" for the United States context. From the outset, urban designers from the IBA warned that they did not intend to propose universal solutions, that their approach was specific to Berlin. While the IBA clearly represents a feasible alternative to both large-scale renewal and "themed" redevelopment in its successful attempt to house authentic histories and multiculturalism in appropriately-scaled buildings, it is evident that applying such an approach elsewhere will require careful study of indigenous block structures, streetwalls, and building heights to define massing envelopes, as well as an appropriate approach to community participation and land management. Sensitivity to local needs is precisely what the original version of the Modern ideal lacked and the emerging notion of reconstructive urban design could provide.

³⁸ Rodkin, Dennis. "Vienna Builds for the People," Metropolis, December 1991, pp.13-17.

³⁹ Muschamp, Herbert. "New Housing in Vienna," The New York Times, January 1, 1993, p.C4.

Chapter 3

Reconstructing the Margins of Manhattan: A Convergence of Ideas

There are physical and social similarities between the marginal neighborhoods of Berlin, such as Kreuzberg, and the marginal neighborhoods of Manhattan, such as the Lower East Side, Clinton, and parts of Harlem. To varying degrees these places are all characterized by decaying, often abandoned, tenement housing and city-owned vacant parcels. In large part this is so because all of these places have been the casualties of large-scale urban renewal throughout the post-war period. Both governments saw fit to appropriate and demolish substantial sections of these neighborhoods because of their marginal status relative to the cities' central business districts and the suburbs beyond. The "public good" that was to accrue from these acts often went unrealized, and even when the Cross-Bronx Expressways or Lincoln Centers were built, their benefits were rarely enjoyed by the neighborhoods cleared for their arrival. More recently these neighborhoods have been among the worst hit by the transition from industry to service in the Western economies, leaving fast food and drugs as the major employment options for uneducated urban youth. The situation in New York, as with most U.S. cities, has been exacerbated by the full-scale withdrawal of Federal funds and services since 1980.

Yet to many these marginal neighborhoods remain the lifeblood of their cities. In New York, the immigrant cultures, artists, street fairs, informal activities, and nightlife associated with "the City" as illustrated by the writing of William H. Whyte, the music of De La Soul, and the paintings of Keith Haring, tend to center in the so-called margins. Many factors account for this. For example, land values have historically been low in these areas because the mainstream perceived them as slums from which to escape. In actuality they housed the large and rich subcultures that comprised America's urban industrial labor force: Eastern European in the Lower East Side, Puerto Rican on the West Side, and African-American in Harlem to name but a few. As described by Richard

Sennett in The Uses of Disorder and John Gruen in The New Bohemia, the sixties "Beat" generation--post-Suburban youth seeking alternative culture--flocked to these areas, particularly the Lower East Side, for the low rents and the urbane atmosphere. This social history is remarkably similar to that of Kreuzberg, which is predominantly Turkish and has become the locus for Berlin's counter-culture.

Recently, critics such as Neil Smith and Rosalyn Deutsche have examined the neighborhood impacts of this counter-cultural atmosphere, arguing that the "urban edge" has been exploited as a marketing point by developers. Deutsche discusses the complicity of artists in fostering a marketable "scene" in her article "The Fine Art of Gentrification," while Smith uses a New York Times real estate advertisement proclaiming "The Taming of the Wild Wild West" to illustrate how the "frontier myth" is generated and used to sell the Clinton neighborhood in Manhattan's west side as the land of the urban pioneer.^{40 41}

In the instance of the marginal neighborhood, the much berated use of themes as marketing mechanisms differs in conception and execution from the large-scale consolidated developments typically associated with the urban theme park such as the Rouse Company's festival markets. The conception of the theme in the marginal neighborhood is far more diffuse and as a result the execution is far less explicit. The "theming" process in such areas typically is undertaken through individual, often uncoordinated, actions by developers, landowners, and public agencies. This is true in both of the cases cited by Deutsche and Smith. No single sign hangs above St. Mark's Place as the entrance to an "East Village Art Scene," or above 46th Street as the doorway to "Pioneerland." The signs are subtler and work in concert--second story art galleries, funky up-scale restaurants, the GAP displaying all black clothing--yet as these authors point out the net effect is the same as urban renewal: existing residents get displaced, in

⁴⁰ Deutsche, Rosalyn and Ryan, Cara Gendel. "The Fine Art of Gentrification," October, Volume 13, 1984, p.92.

⁴¹ Smith, Neil. "New City, New Frontier," Variations on a Theme Park (Michael Sorkin, ed.), 1992, pp.61-93.

this case because of the resultant increase in land value. Ironically, the existing subcultures that get themed to market such neighborhoods consequently get replaced by mainstream images of those subcultures.

The question of redevelopment in Manhattan's marginal neighborhoods is thereby fundamental not only to the future of their communities but also to the future of the city as a whole. Just as in the case of Berlin, the social texture of New York is highly dependent on the sustenance of these marginal neighborhoods. Yet once in the service of the free market, the low rents and the subcultures they subsidize could vanish. Paradoxically, however, these same neighborhoods suffer from urban ills that must be addressed by the system and the larger society it represents.

The precedent of the IBA infill strategy provides an innovative alternative for community-based physical intervention in Clinton, Harlem, and the Lower East Side. The socioeconomic diversity represented by the three neighborhoods could take advantage of the IBA's respect for existing residents, while their remarkable physical similarities could benefit from the IBA's experience with reconstruction. Several noted planners, architects, and community advocates in New York have drawn similar conclusions or adopted comparable techniques, though most do not relate their work to the IBA.

Harlem

In 1988, the Harlem Urban Development Corporation (HUDC) initiated an economic development plan for the Morningside Valley area surrounding Frederick Douglass Boulevard in South Central Harlem. Bounded by 125th Street, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, 110th Street (Central Park), and Morningside Park, the site was defined as "an area of maximum abandonment."⁴² In 1960 the city had acquired and demolished many

⁴² Interview with Roy Strickland, Principal of Strickland and Carson Associates, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, March 10, 1993.



Figure 30: Morningside Valley Study Area
(City of New York, 1987)

of the buildings in the area in conjunction with expansion plans for Columbia University. The University was attempting to create a buffer zone along Eighth Avenue to separate itself from Harlem. This led to many city-owned vacant lots and abandoned tenements, all of which encouraged flight of the remaining middle-class.⁴³

Recent studies indicate that Morningside Valley is in severe distress. Between 1970 and 1980 the area lost over 40 percent of its population. Approximately 15,000 residents live in the area today, 97 percent of whom are African American. Nearly half of these households have annual incomes below \$5,000, with less than 8 percent exceeding \$20,000. Over half of all families are headed by single women, double the citywide average for New York. Almost 40 percent of the land in the area is either vacant or occupied by abandoned structures. It is estimated that an additional 9,000 residents could be housed in the area.⁴⁴

The HUDC contracted City College Architectural Center (CCAC) and a small architecture firm, Strickland and Carson Associates, to design the reconstruction strategy. Key objectives included the construction of affordable housing; minimal displacement of existing residents; preservation of the existing building stock whenever possible; creation of economic development opportunities including a new commercial and retail base; provision of a range of social services; and development of a strong sense of place through the programming and design of public amenities and the fostering of appropriate public/private relationships.^{45 46}

⁴³ Interview with Professor Ghislaine Hermanuz, City College Architectural Center, April 7, 1993.

⁴⁴ Hermanuz, Ghislaine. Frederick Douglass Boulevard: A Strategy for Revitalizing Morningside Valley, July 1989, pp.1-30.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.16.

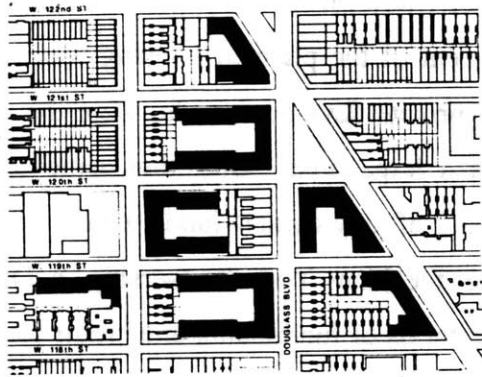
⁴⁶ Strickland, Roy and Gatter, Linda. Boulevard/Manhattan, Columbia Architecture Planning Preservation Miniseries 6, 1991, p.4.



Figure 31: **Morningside Valley, Vacant Lot & Abandoned Housing**
(A Strategy for Revitalizing Morningside Valley, Hermanuz, 1989)

The redevelopment effort was predicated on creating a new mixed-income community that would stabilize the area. Approximately 50 percent of the planned housing was to be market rate--this proportion was required to lure private developers, who were the only available funding source for redeveloping such a large area. Subsidies were to be generated through the free transfer to the HUDC of city-owned land, which private builders were to then develop. Entities such as the New York Partnership, a David Rockefeller initiative, were to assist the HUDC in terms of fundraising and credit access. The residential units were to be sold as condominiums targeted mainly towards low- and moderate-income households, with some upper-income along Central Park. The low-income units would require further subsidy through existing housing programs. The moderate-income target group was a two-income household earning \$50,000 per year. This strategy represented a significant departure from past public housing strategies where developments were built, owned, and managed by a public agency.

An infill concept evolved out of discussions between the CCAC and Strickland and Carson Associates. The proposal, entitled Boulevard/Manhattan, included 2,500 new housing units to developed on small and large parcels, 100,000 square feet of commercial and retail space, 100,000 square feet of institutional and social service space, 31,000 square feet of cooperative work space, a new park, an open-air market, and subway renovations. Densities were planned to be in the FAR 8 range. Smaller parcel development was to be accomplished through a non-profit developer, while larger blocks were to be constructed by private developers. Rehabilitation of existing units was to be executed contemporaneously through public sponsorship. Special attention was given to the programming along Frederic Douglass Boulevard, which was seen as the potential locus of public activity for Morningside Valley. A museum, a single-room occupancy hotel serving students and those in need of transitional housing, a theater, community



**Figure 32: Strickland and Carson Associates
Infill Locations**

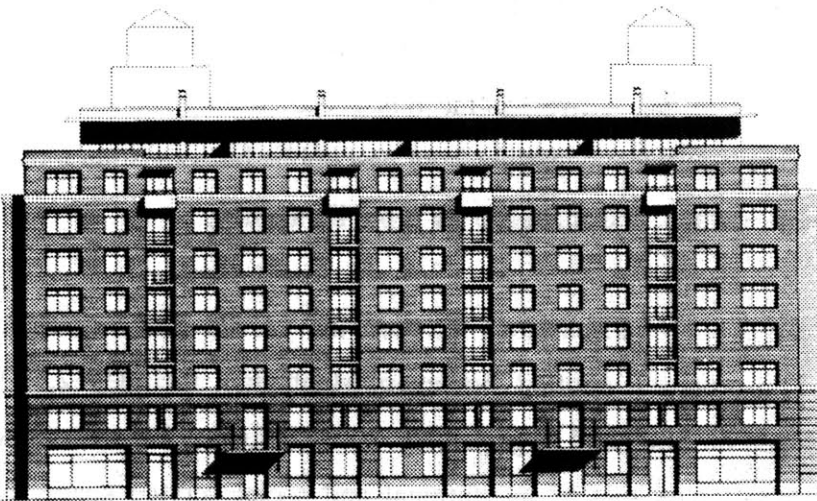


Figure 33: Strickland and Carson Associates, Typical Boulevard Elevation



Figure 34: Strickland and Carson Associates, Typical Courtyard Section/Elevation
(Fig. 30-32: *Boulevard/Manhattan*, Roy Strickland and Linda Gatter, 1991)

work spaces, a YMCA, a recreation space, and retail were planned along the boulevard from Central Park to 125th Street to create a sequence of public activities primarily intended for neighborhood use.⁴⁷

The housing was designed with the notion of being "at home in the city," much as the IBA was based on the idea of "living in the city." The proposal notes the importance of maintaining the relationship between the public realm of the street and the private realm of the home:

Within the dwelling, the street is visible from the window. As street and dwelling bear against each other, they enter into a spatial order. Occupancy of this order shapes a common experience of people who live in the city. Through intimate use, occupants come to know their dwelling. Through use of and social associations with public space, they come to know the space between the dwelling's walls. Yet the vagaries of public space--of unanticipated movements, sounds, sights--undermine any complete knowledge of public space and, given the latter's relationship to the dwelling, of the dwelling itself. In the tension between knowing and not-knowing, between privacy and exposure, lies the special emotional content of dwelling in the city.⁴⁸

This notion of "spatial order" manifested itself within the design through the retention of the Harlem streetwall. Ground-floor retail was also encouraged, with emphasis on the street corners as hubs for public activity. Large-block apartments were designed with individual sidewalk entrances for duplex units and shared entries for access to the upper floors. Similar to the IBA, large blocks were designed with internal courtyards.

Within the housing, flexible unit layouts were provided to serve a broad range of household sizes and types including the potential for unrelated single individuals to share an apartment. Extra space was provided for working at home or creating an additional bedroom.

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp.3-8.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.18.

The award-winning Boulevard/Manhattan plan could not be built as currently envisioned without surmounting considerable regulatory hurdles. Developers would have to apply for "contextual zoning" to obtain permission to build the proposed densities and massings. If the project were to go forward, the proponents of the plan envision a relatively limited set of project-imposed design guidelines. Three factors would have to be considered by anyone who designed a specific site: the building line, the public-private relationship between the street and the building, and the height.⁴⁹ Taken together, these three factors would define a massing envelope similar in scope to the design control undertaken by the IBA Neubau.

Implementation of the plan has proved difficult for a number of reasons. The downturn in the economy has sharply curtailed most development in New York. Developers that have shown interest in the project tend to focus on the larger parcels; infilling the smaller sites would be difficult both from the financial and regulatory standpoints, even for a non-profit developer. Even if these issues could be surmounted and the housing were to be built, attracting the first wave of middle-class occupants--including African Americans--into the area also would be challenging because of crime and a lack of concentrated retail activity. Nonetheless, three of the larger sites have recently been transferred from the city to the HUDC.⁵⁰

Criticism of the project, and particularly of the HUDC, mainly has concerned the mix of low- and moderate-income occupants. While the proponents admit that housing more low-income people would be desirable, they assert that a shift in that direction would make the project financially infeasible. They also point out that a two-income household earning \$50,000 per year describes working-class, not middle- to upper-class, New Yorkers.

⁴⁹ Interview with Roy Strickland.

⁵⁰ Interview with Ghislaine Hermanuz.

Area community groups have been particularly concerned about the gentrification issue. During the eighties building boom there was substantial fear surrounding the future of Morningside Valley given its low land value, good transit access, and proximity to Central Park, the Upper West Side, and Columbia University. The Morningside Valley community viewed Boulevard/Manhattan as an attempt at "controlled gentrification."⁵¹ The HUDC initiated a similar effort for the Bradhurst area, just north of Morningside Valley, and met with slightly better success because the community was organized around the project first.⁵²

In East Harlem, Mayor Koch initiated an infill redevelopment plan mainly to cater to the area's predominantly Latino and Puerto Rican communities. Infill was seen as the only physical alternative that would respect the existing city.⁵³ The goal was to establish a comprehensive plan for Community Board 11, which has jurisdiction over the area. The East Harlem Plan was also highly dependent on private developers, and consequently relied on two strategies for attracting investment to city-owned parcels: vacant sites were often linked with abandoned buildings to create a larger development site that would require rehabilitation as well as new construction (there were few squatters in the abandoned buildings); and, small sites scattered over several blocks would be given over to one developer to create an economy of scale.

The Community Board as well as a host of community groups opposed the idea of encouraging the middle-class to move in for fear of gentrification, but once again proponents felt it was absolutely necessary if lower-income tenants were also to be housed. Community Board 11 ultimately agreed to the strategy, and adopted the document as its official comprehensive plan for guiding future development in the area.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Interview with Paul Buckhurst. Principal of Buckhurst, Fish, Hutton & Katz, New York, NY, April 7, 1993.

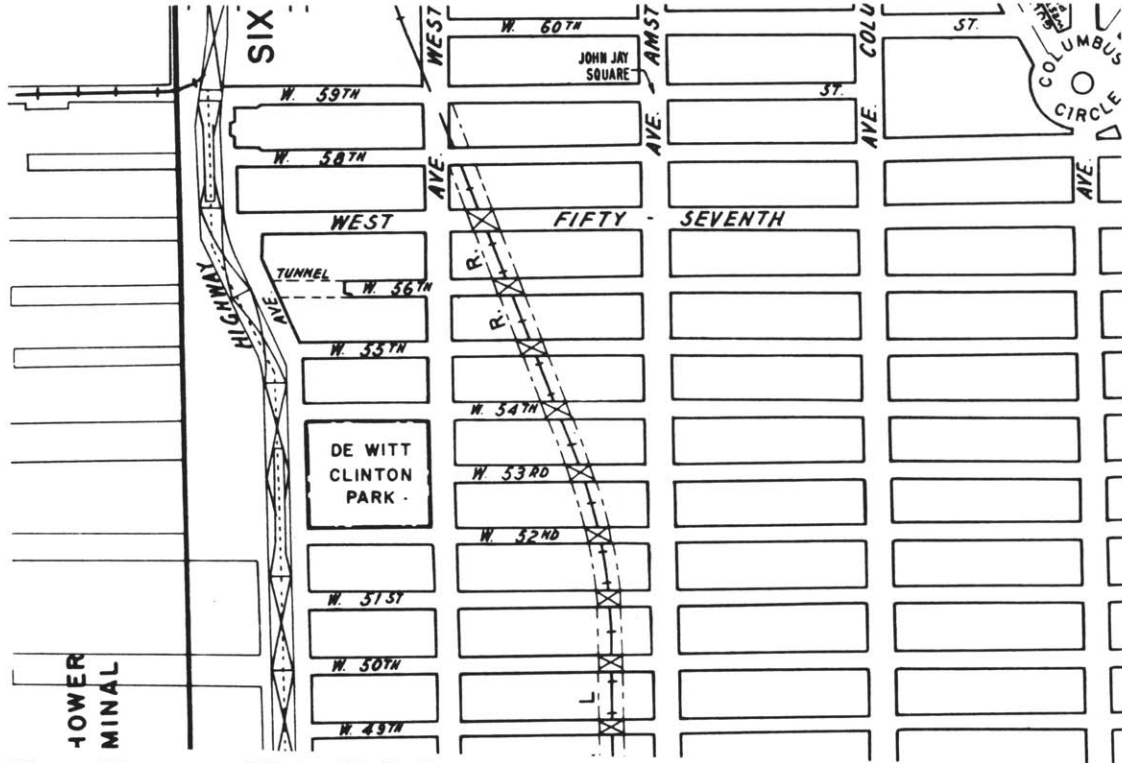


Figure 35: Clinton Study Area (City of New York, 1987)

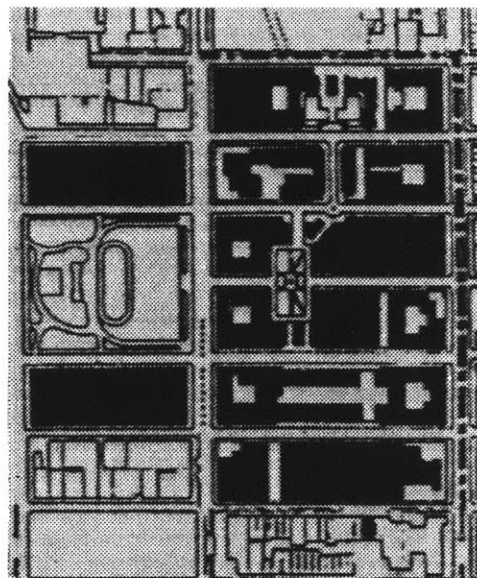
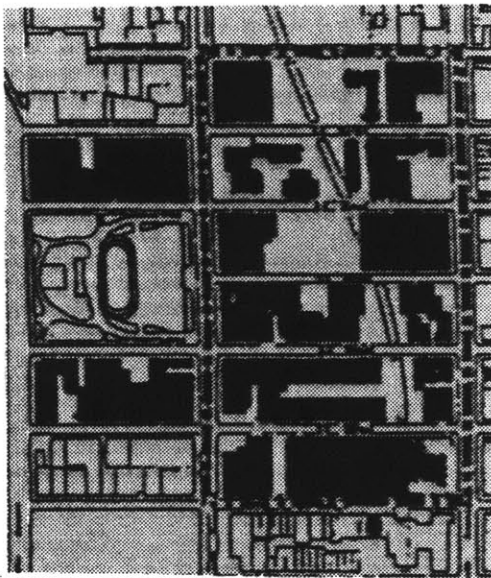


Figure 36: Existing Blocks vs. Proposed Peterson Littenburg Infill & Courtyard Proposal (Progressive Architecture, 1990)

Despite its formal adoption, the East Harlem Plan faced a number of the same implementation issues as Boulevard/Manhattan. The larger sites have attracted some investment, while the smaller lots generally remain undevelopable. Much of the financial unattractiveness of small lots throughout the city is a consequence of zoning, which does not allow one to build infill as-of-right, and establishes per-square-foot open space requirements that would require developers to release up to 25 percent of an infill lot for open space. Zoning also tends to prescribe land use in a rigid manner, which is counter to the needs of a developing community that depends on flexible land use regulation to stimulate small, often informal, businesses. Project proponents have also cited community groups as major impediments, claiming that they are often ad hoc, reactionary, and individualistic in their motivations and actions. Community groups in this instance were considered to be the largest hurdle to overcome despite the considerable financial and regulatory problems facing reconstruction of East Harlem.⁵⁴

Clinton

In Clinton, the neighborhood due west of midtown Manhattan and once referred to as "Hell's Kitchen," the community has played the opposite role, acting as the catalyst for infill development. In 1968 an urban renewal plan was announced for the area bounded by 50th and 56th Streets between 10th and 11th Avenues. The city took over the site. Most of its tenements were demolished, and 30-story towers were built on portions of three of the sites' six "long blocks," two of which contained public housing. Tenements and small vacant parcels remained scattered throughout the site. In 1984, while much of Clinton was gentrifying, the two blocks facing 10th Avenue between 51st and 53d Streets had been unaffected, and the City Housing Preservation and Development Administration (HPD), a municipal agency, proposed two 30-story towers to replace the tenements and vacant lots that remained there. To build these towers, the Gruzen Partnership and the Glick Development Affiliates had been offered development options on city-owned land,

⁵⁴ Ibid.

municipal tax abatements, tax-exempt bonding, and a federal grant. Despite all of these financial advantages, HPD agreed that 80 percent of the 680 units would be market-rate, representing a substantial windfall for the two developers.^{55 56}

By 1986 the community had organized to fight the project as it had been proposed. The area directly east of the site, bounded by 43d and 56th Streets between 8th and 10th Avenues, had been designated as the Clinton Zoning District in 1974 to protect the brownstones of the Clinton neighborhood, restricting heights in the district to eight-stories. Because 30-story towers had been built on either side of the two blocks now in question, the community argued that the line of towers that would form adjacent to the district if the proposal were to go forward would place development pressure on the adjacent zoning district, and would eventually undermine the eight-story cap so essential to Clinton's neighborhood character.⁵⁷

Residents on the project site did not want to leave. Alice Lang, a 78-year old widow who had already been displaced once by urban renewal, made the following statement at the Planning Commission hearing on January 15, 1986:

Now they want me to evaporate again. There are plenty of places where they can build an apartment building. Let them build it on top of the Mayor's rent-controlled apartment. Let him find out what it feels like to be trampled on.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Goldberger, Paul. "Community's Alternative Offers a Low-Keyed Mix," The New York Times, January 16, 1986, p.B1.

⁵⁶ Gottlieb, Martin. "Planners Considering Blockfront Towers," The New York Times, January 16, 1986, p.B1.

⁵⁷ Interview with Barbara Littenburg. Principal of Peterson, Littenburg, Architects, New York, NY, April 7, 1993.

⁵⁸ Gottlieb. Quoted on p.B6.

Prior to the hearing, the owner of a gas station on the site had helped fund the non-profit Clinton Preservation Local Development Corporation to hire the architecture firm of Peterson Littenburg to develop an alternative master plan for the six-block area. Their plan called for integration of existing buildings into the new development by infilling low-scale structure throughout the six blocks, particularly along 10th Avenue, while shifting some density to the mid-block in 18-story towers. The proposal thus maintained the density of the original proposal by using more of the scattered vacant land on the site. Open space requirements were fulfilled through the incorporation of courtyards and a new "Clinton Market Square" opposite the existing DeWitt Clinton Park. Programming included new artist lofts and indoor/outdoor work spaces. Existing tenements were incorporated into the development by internalizing the circulation system through the courtyards, leaving retail instead of individual tenement entrances facing the street, and by adding an additional floor that would unify the cornice lines along 10th Avenue. All existing residents would remain in their apartments, which would be renovated. No demolition would take place.^{59 60}

A total of 680 units would be built under either plan, but the Peterson Littenburg plan would contain 40 percent subsidized housing rather than 20 percent. To finance this alternative plan, \$65 million was arranged in credit, \$1.5 million was pledged by local businesses, and \$500,000 was assured by a private developer for renovation funds.^{61 62}

Barbara Littenburg, chief architect for the award-winning design, insists that a city is more than market-rate housing. She felt special obligation towards providing artist housing, particularly with a site so near the theater district, in order to keep artists from

⁵⁹ Interview with Barbara Littenburg.

⁶⁰ Progressive Architecture Urban Design Award (No Author Given), "Mid-Manhattan Urban Renewal," Progressive Architecture, January 1990, pp.110-112.

⁶¹ Interview with Barbara Littenburg.

⁶² Gottlieb. p.B6.

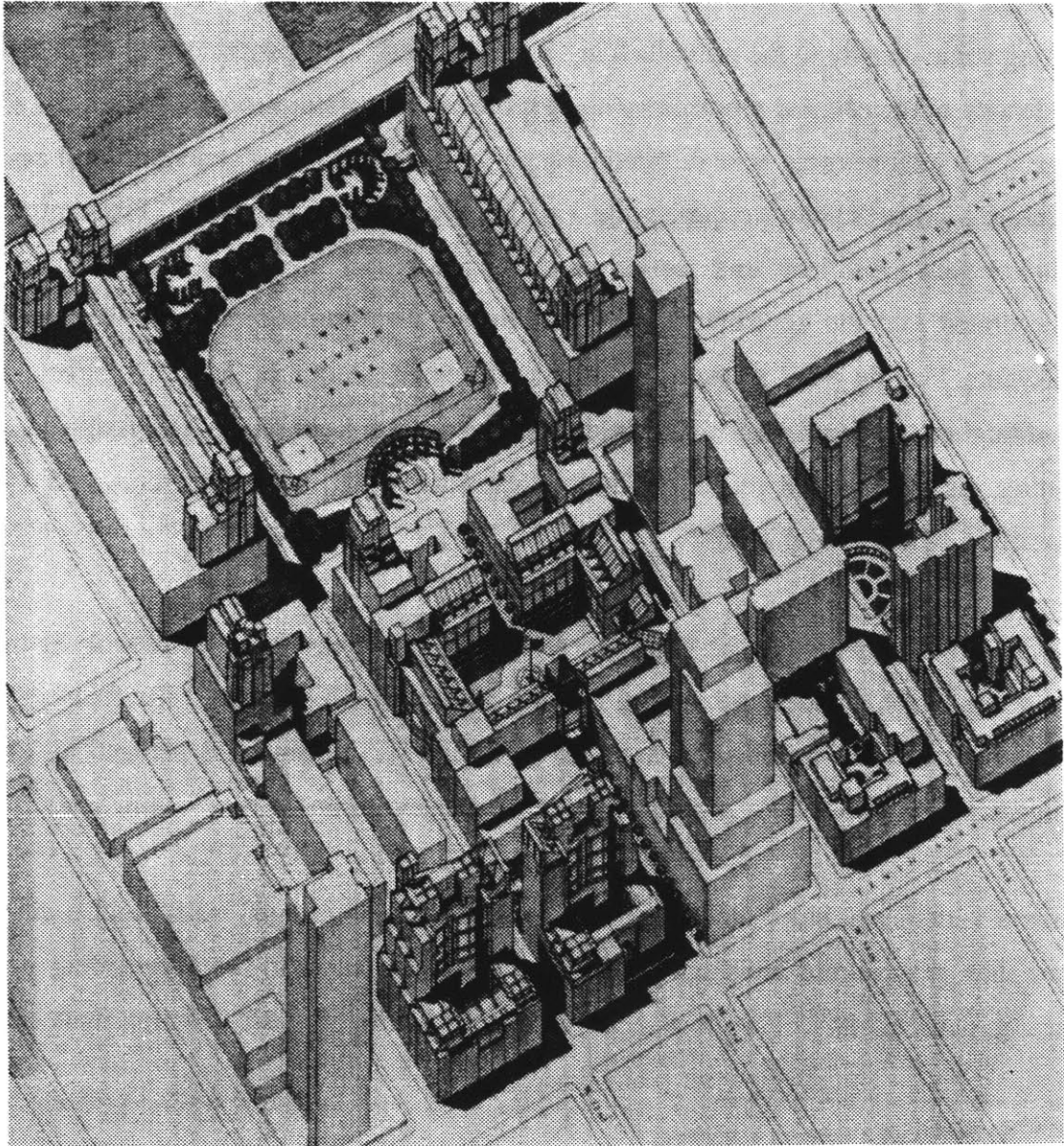


Figure 37: Peterson and Littenburg, Clinton Infill Design, 1986
(Progressive Architecture, January 1990)

moving out of Manhattan because of ever increasing rents. She feels that the design also emphasizes secure, community-oriented public spaces where residents can do anything from shop to fix their cars. The City Planning Commission, as well as Community Board 4, were swayed by the proposed alternative, and rejected HPD's two tower scheme. The Peterson Littenburg plan, however, remains on the shelves of the Department of City Planning, tied up by the approvals process. Littenburg feels that this may be due to "sour grapes" on the part of HPD. At this point the question has become mute because much of the funding originally arranged for the project in the late eighties has since dried up.

The Lower East Side

In contrast to the Clinton experience, the city has played a more active role in fostering development in the Lower East Side of Manhattan through the Quality Housing and Cross-Subsidy Programs. The Lower East Side, which is roughly delineated by East 14th Street, Avenue D/Pitt Street, Grand Street, and the Bowery/Fourth Avenue, is largely a poor but diverse area. Within this area, the median income tends to be 40 percent less than that of Manhattan as a whole. According to the 1980 census, the population is 40 percent white, 37 percent Hispanic, and 9 percent black.⁶³ Many of the white residents are of Eastern European descent.

The area's physical makeup is dominated by four- to six-story tenement structures. Approximately 270, or about 10 percent of the area's residential buildings, are abandoned, 140 of which are city-owned. There are also about 350 vacant lots, 70 percent of which are city-owned. The 1987 Quality Housing Program was put forth to streamline development in these vacant parcels by allowing higher lot coverage and retention of streetwalls as-of-right, but does not require the construction of subsidized housing. The Cross-Subsidy Program, agreed to in 1987 by HPD and Community Board 3, was an

⁶³ City of New York, Department of City Planning. Memorandum Re: "Lower East Side Zoning Study," March 2, 1988.

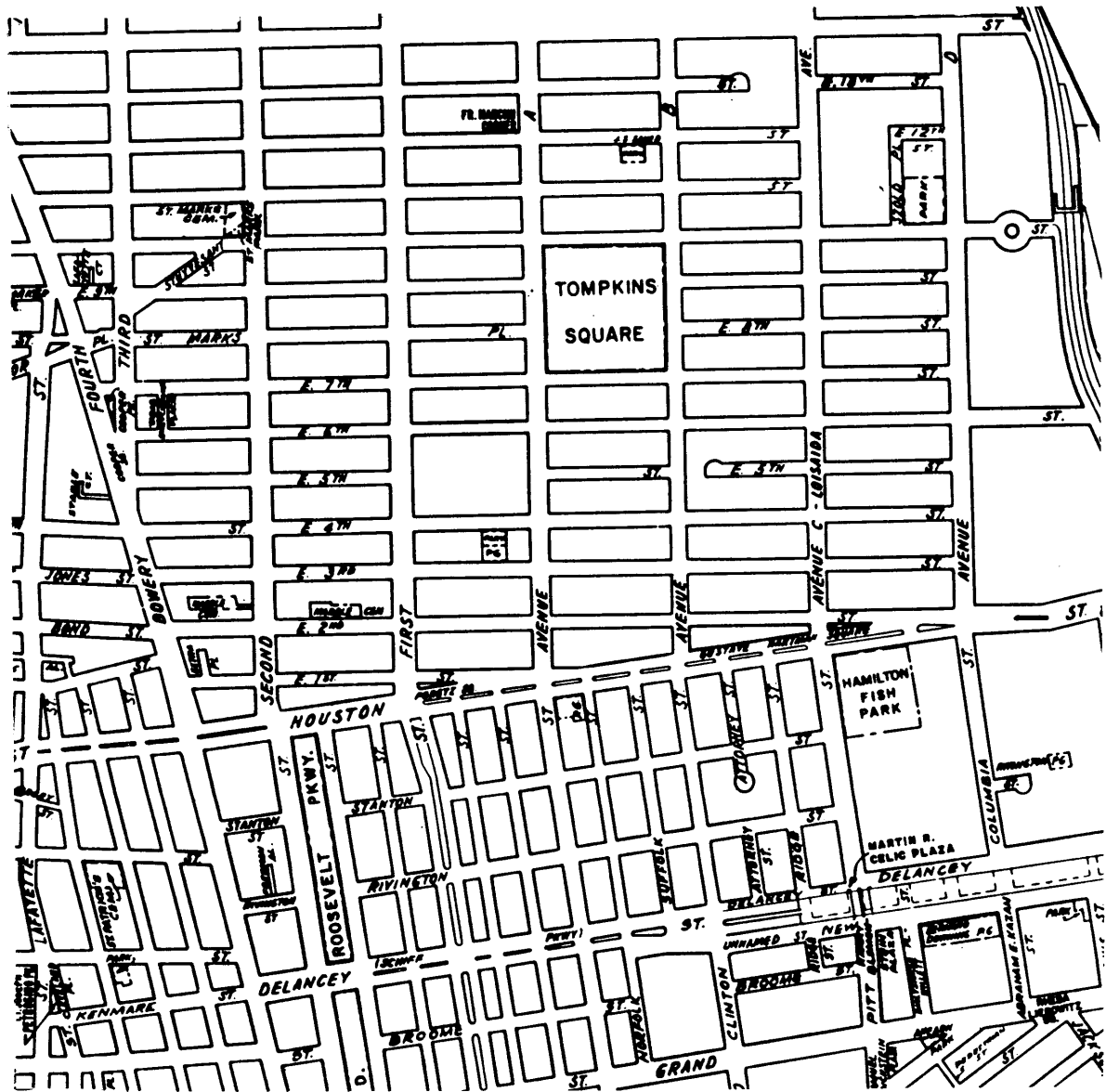


Figure 38: The Lower East Side Study Area
(The City of New York, 1987)

effort to build 2,000 housing units, 50 percent of which were to be low- to moderate-income. The program was based on the idea that city-owned vacant lots would be sold to private developers for market-rate development, and funds from the sales would be used to rehabilitate abandoned tenements for subsidized housing.⁶⁴ By 1991, 277 subsidized units had been rehabilitated. In its calculations, HPD took credit for an additional 458 units constructed through other programs, thereby claiming that 735 of the 1,000 subsidized unit target had been produced.⁶⁵

Such practices on the part of HPD has added to the growing mistrust felt by Lower East Side residents for the city's government. The portion of the Lower East Side north of Houston Street has been a lightning rod for controversy since the early sixties when real estate brokers, in an attempt to expand the lucrative Greenwich Village market, started referring to it as the "East Village."⁶⁶ This is usually attributed to the movement of the likes of Allen Ginsburg, Jack Kerouac, and others of the so-called Beat Generation eastward from the then gentrifying West Village. They would eventually be followed by many of the Abstract Expressionists, and later, Andy Warhol. It is possible that this migration was also a result of the 1955 demolition of a major physical and psychological barrier, the Third Avenue Elevated Subway. In 1959 Robert Moses attempted a massive urban renewal plan that would have razed a one-mile strip down the western portion of the Lower East Side. While this plan was defeated by community opposition, the majority of the area east of Avenue D from East 14th Street south to Delancey Street fell to slab housing projects.

The East Village designation aided the rise in land values and the subsequent destabilization of the neighborhood that occurred throughout the seventies and eighties.

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp.19-22.

⁶⁵ City of New York, Housing, Preservation and Development Administration. "Lower East Side Vacant Land Use Inventory," February 14, 1991.

⁶⁶ Miller, Terry. Greenwich Village and How It Got That Way, 1990, p.237.

In response to growing market demand, many landowners engaged in a myriad of illegal practices to evict tenants in rent-controlled apartments. Apartment renovations and condominium conversions were especially prevalent around the borders of Tompkins Square Park, a central 10-acre public space with a long history as a stage for heated protests. On Avenue B alongside the park, a penthouse apartment in the Christadora building, which was once a community center and home for the local chapter of the Black Panthers, sold in 1987 for \$1.2 million in a neighborhood where a few years earlier apartments had rented in the low hundreds. The new upper-income residents complained, ironically, about the noise created by the homeless now in the park. The police imposed a curfew, and on the night of August 6, 1988, 400 officers clad in riot gear and with badges covered proceeded to evict the homeless. A riot ensued, yet despite 121 civilian charges of misconduct and a video-tape clearly documenting police brutality, not a single officer was convicted.⁶⁷ One witness reported:

The police seemed bizarrely out of control. They'd taken a relatively small protest and fanned it out over the neighborhood, inflaming hundreds of people who'd never gone near the park to begin with. [There were] cavalry charges down East Village streets, a chopper circling overhead, people out for a Sunday paper running down First Avenue.⁶⁸

Ultimately the city closed park for a two-year "renovation." Tompkins Square Park reopened recently, and has been redesigned with high fences limiting access to its lawns, providing only footpaths and gated recreation facilities that are locked at night.

These actions on the part of the city have called into serious question the motivations behind its Lower East Side Housing plans. Portions of the community hold intense mistrust for any government plan for the area, although some, such as the business

⁶⁷ Smith. p.61, 81.

⁶⁸ Rosler, Martha. "Tompkins Square Park, East Village, Lower East Side, Manhattan, New York," If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism (Brian Wallis, ed.), 1991, Quoted on p.212.

owners that benefit from gentrification, sympathize less with the plight of the homeless. Critics have accused the city of encouraging gentrification by turning over its vacant land, giving tax abatements to undeserving developers, and using police to evict the homeless.

But groups other than city agencies also have proposed infill development and rehabilitation for the Lower East Side. In spring 1989, the Cooper Union conducted a studio entitled "Strategies for Loisaída," which was led by visiting professor Bernhard Strecker, a former manager for the IBA. The group project envisioned "the rehabilitation and reintegration of the Lower East Side into the urban fabric of Manhattan" by infilling city-owned lots and building new low-rise structures around the perimeter of the sixties high-rise housing east of Avenue D.⁶⁹ In 1991 the Green Guerillas, a community group that promotes the use of vacant parcels as community gardens, proposed an infill scheme that attempted to balance the need for new affordable housing and the need for open space. The scheme was predicated on shifting community gardens to thirty three mid-block vacant lots, allowing new housing development to occur on or near the avenues.⁷⁰

Impediments to Reconstructive Development

Despite the many intelligent and sensitive infill plans recently proposed for the Lower East Side, Clinton, and Harlem, little has been built or renovated. The proponents of these plans cite a range of impediments that roughly fall into three categories:

- **Funding:** At the federal level funding for new public housing construction is extremely scarce. State and local funds have also dried up, particularly in the wake of the 1989 stock market crash and the recession that followed. Most agree that in order to fund such development in the U.S. system, public-private partnerships are a necessity.

⁶⁹ Studio Publication. "Strategies for Loisaída," Professor Bernhard Strecker, The Cooper Union, Spring, 1989.

⁷⁰ Michael Kwartler and Associates. Report from Green Guerillas to the New York City Planning Commission, August 26, 1991.

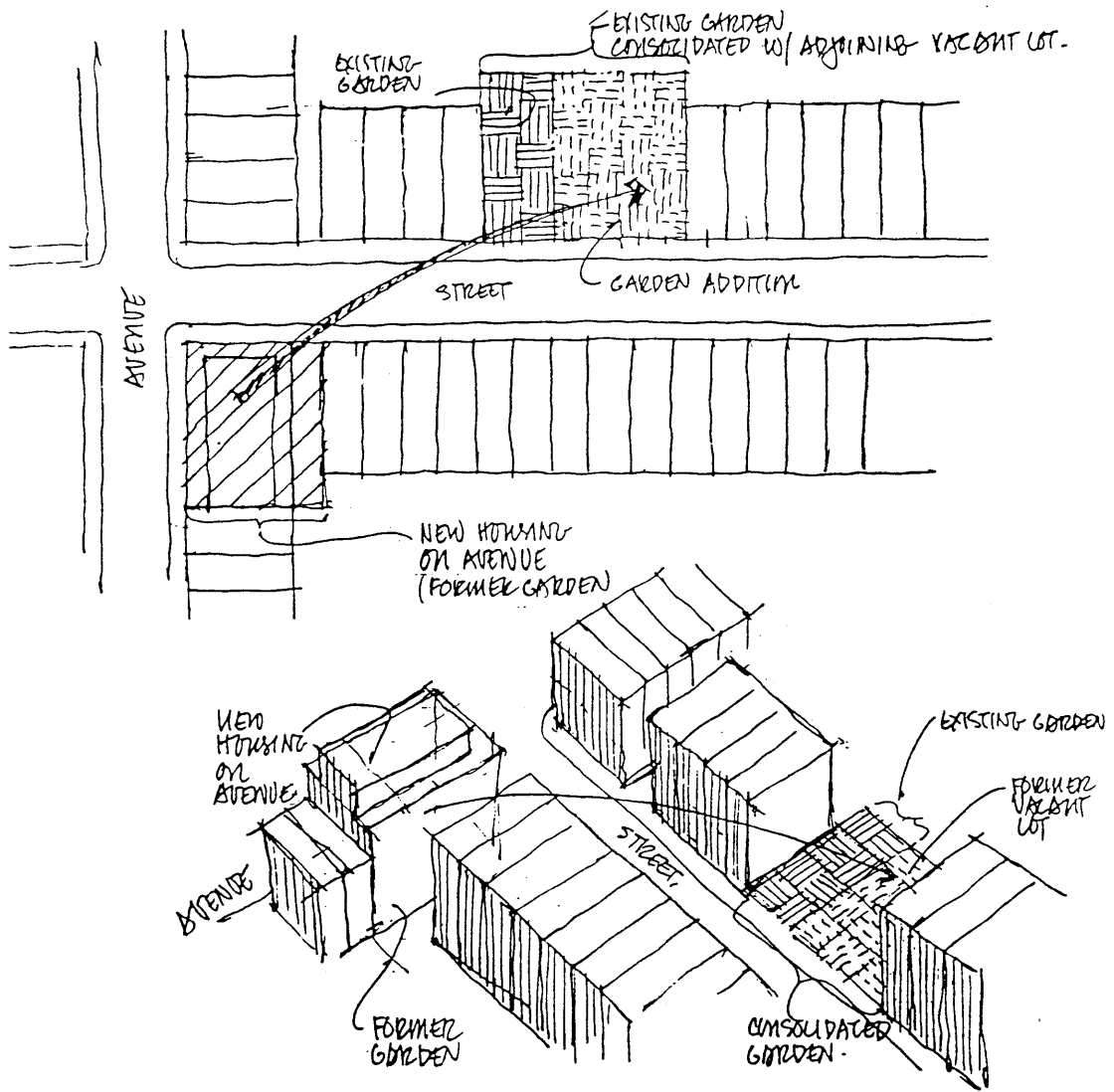


Figure 39: Green Guerillas Lower East Side Infill Study
 (Michael Kwartler and Associates, 1991)

- **Regulation:** The New York City zoning code in all three neighborhoods "allows high rise towers which conform to the existing 3.44 floor area ratio limits, but deviate from prevailing building heights and streetwalls."⁷¹ In order to build appropriate infill, contextual zoning must be applied for, adding unnecessary time and expense. Also cumbersome are open space requirements that make most small-lot infill projects financially infeasible. Most concur that the zoning code in such areas should be amended to allow infill to be built as-of-right when it is similar in massing to the existing context in terms of height and streetwall.
- **Community Politics:** All three neighborhoods live with the legacy of urban renewal, and in recent years have been the testing ground for any number of failed social projects such as crime-ridden homeless shelters. Consequently, community groups mistrust and often block projects claimed to be in their interest. The situation is exacerbated by infighting among community groups and politically savvy yet questionably motivated personalities rising to power. Projects that have involved community groups from the outset have met with the least opposition.

A recent decision by the City Planning Commission to give development options on city-owned vacant land over to adjacent landowners represents a further setback to the development of well-designed, subsidized infill.⁷² This will allow landowners to consolidate large areas of land that can then be developed as fully market-rate housing. The decision represents the city's efforts to withdraw from its responsibilities towards its marginal neighborhoods, choosing instead to allow the market to gentrify these areas.

The city has no coordinated low-income housing strategy for rebuilding Harlem, Clinton, and the Lower East Side despite their similar physical and economic conditions. Community representatives from these neighborhoods do not meet to discuss these similarities either, mainly because they are forced to compete with one another for very limited public funding.

⁷¹ Memorandum Re: "Lower East Side Zoning Study."

⁷² Interview with Ghislaine Hermanuz.

The various groups that have proposed infill projects also have had little to no interaction, primarily because their work has evolved independently of one another. Thus, unlike the IBA, there is no city-wide reconstruction effort despite the fact that the IBA's strategy of "critical reconstruction" has been attempted in each of the three neighborhoods, often with the community as the impetus. The lack of a coordinated effort that recognizes the similarities and differences among these three remaining marginal Manhattan neighborhoods is a poignant statement about urban planning in America today.

Chapter 4

Public Purpose in Contemporary Urban Design: A Proposal for a Siedlung in Boston's Fort Point District

New York City lacks a vision for appropriate redevelopment in its marginal neighborhoods. But other American cities such as Boston and Washington have exercised much broader and more concerted controls over development, often with a highly uniform vision for the character of their built environments. Popular among tourists and most residents, cities like Boston are often considered "livable" because of their lower scale and legible sense of place, which to some extent has evolved out of strong design review and controls.

Boston's urban design approach, and the resultant use and form of the city, differs significantly from the IBA's infill strategy for rebuilding its marginal neighborhoods. Through the combined planning and development power of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), the city has concentrated its efforts on public-private negotiation over the last decade, with particular emphasis on extracting "public" benefits in exchange for private gains. Under examination here is the definition of public purpose that underlies the BRA's regulated and negotiated approach to the built environment, and how that notion of public purpose differs from the Modern ideal as asserted by the Weissenhofsiedlung and reinterpreted by the IBA. This comparison is based on assessing the BRA's current plans for the Fort Point Waterfront, a marginal area adjacent to downtown Boston, and contrasting those plans to a proposal for a siedlung in this same area that would create a new neighborhood in terms of use and form in the city.

The Evolution of Urban Design for the Fort Point Waterfront

"'Fringe' areas lure adventurous developers" read the leading headline of the Boston Globe's Real Estate section from October 14, 1989. The article elaborates on the risks

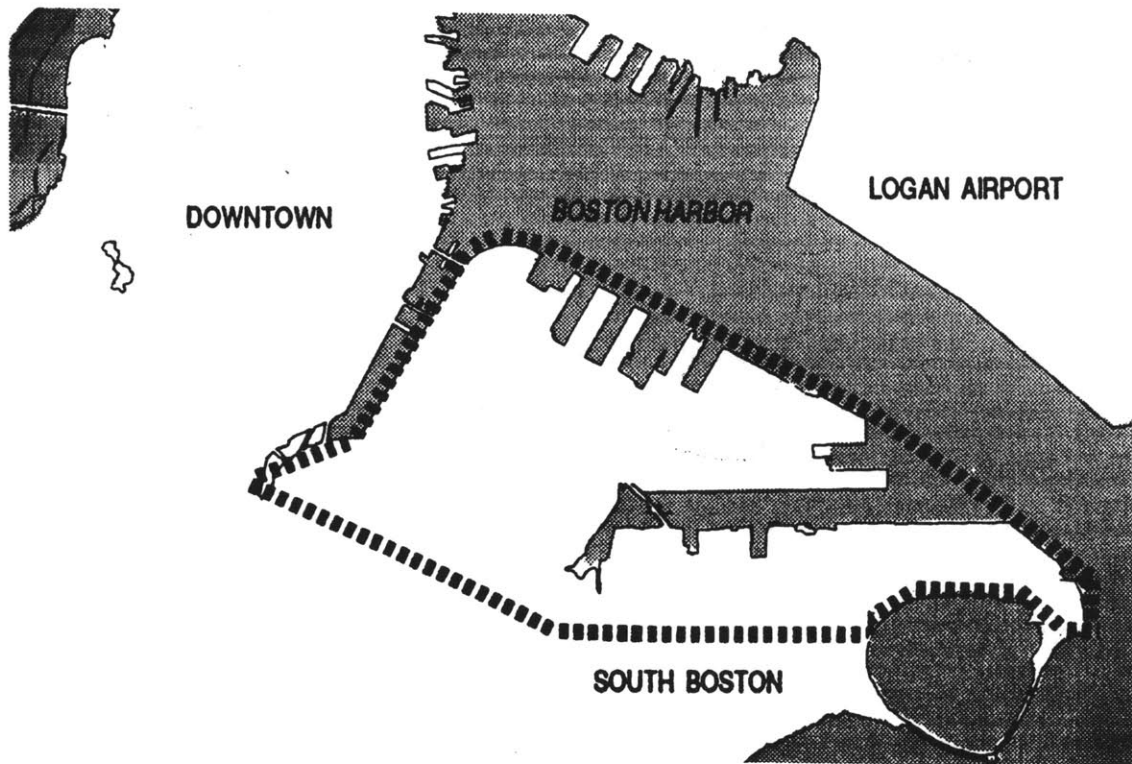


Figure 40: The Fort Point District
(Fort Point District Plan Progress Report, BRA, 1989)

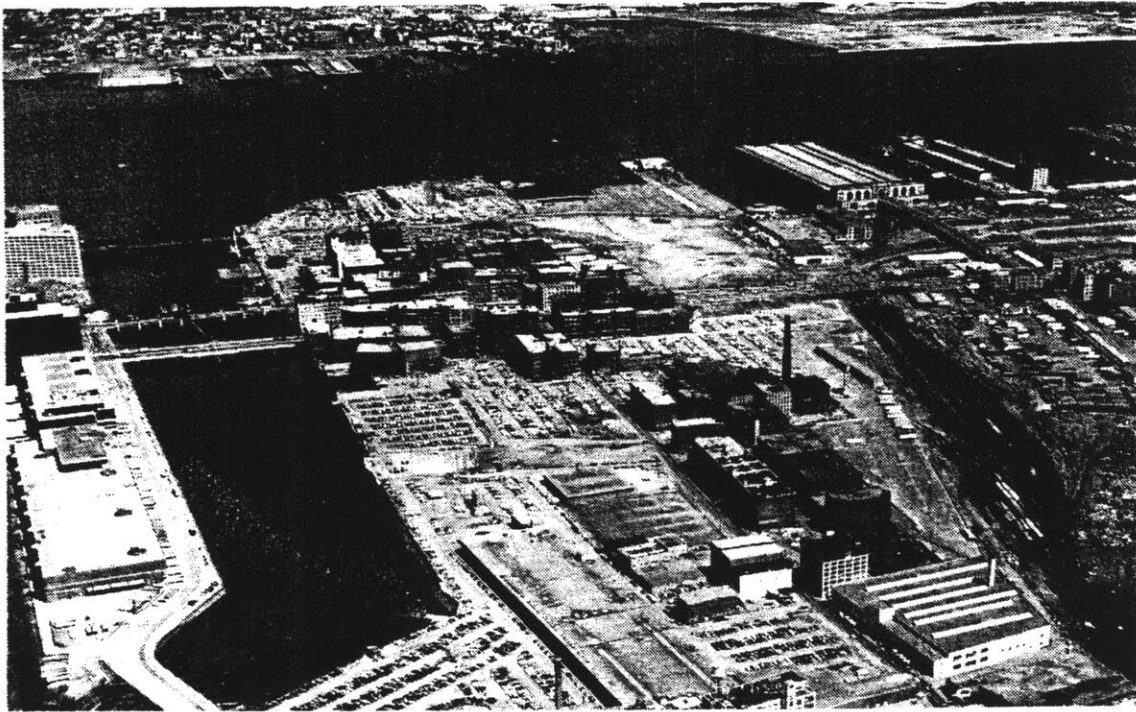


Figure 41: Aerial View of the Fort Point Waterfront
(Fort Point District Plan, BRA, 1990)

and benefits encountered by various developers who through the eighties had been speculating on the "fringes" of the city including Charlestown, East Cambridge, Bullfinch Triangle, and Fort Point Channel. One developer, known for his trail blazing success in the North Station and Fort Point Channel areas, stated that

...these projects succeeded despite their initially marginal locations because they were aesthetically striking and offered lower rents that appealed to professional businesses in the financial district.⁷³

As Neil Smith has pointed out in his gentrification studies of New York's Lower East Side, the tone of this and other development-related articles and advertisements regarding the urban margin is often the same, portraying the developer as the pioneer charting a new course for untamed urban wilderness. Thus the "frontier myth" used to market New York's East Village also has been used to market marginal areas in Boston such as the Fort Point Channel area. In 1990 Paul Barrett, then director of harbor planning and development and now BRA director, referred to Fort Point as "the next frontier in Boston," adding "It's just going to bloom."⁷⁴

In actuality the 900-acre area now referred to as the Fort Point District, which is bounded roughly by Boston Harbor, First Street, and Fort Point Channel, is hardly a new frontier. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Boston Wharf Company created the district as a maritime industrial area by incremental landfill throughout the nineteenth century. The area would come to house light manufacturing, water-related businesses, and a large intermodal passenger and cargo facility known as Commonwealth Pier. The western edge of the district, just across the channel from Boston's central business district, is dominated

⁷³ Weaver, Jay. "'Fringe' areas lure adventurous developers," The Boston Globe, Real Estate Section, October 14, 1989, Quoted on p.41.

⁷⁴ Stone, Amey. "Is Fort Point area hostage of Big Dig?," Boston Business Journal, September 17, 1990. Quoted on p.21.



Figure 42: View of Boston Wharf Buildings
(By Author, 1990)



Figure 43: View of Surface Parking and Commonwealth Pier
(By Author, 1990)

by the Boston Wharf Company buildings--a series of turn of the century six- to eight-story masonry warehouses considered historically significant by the Boston Landmarks Commission.

By the mid-seventies many of the buildings in the Fort Point District had been converted to other uses as the advent of containerized shipping, air travel, competition from other ports, and the transition to a service economy had greatly diminished the district's role as a hub for maritime industry. Some industrial and water-dependent uses towards the eastern end of the district, however, had survived. Most of the Boston Wharf buildings had been converted into residential lofts, many of which became home to a thriving artist community. Some of the wharf buildings on the channel were ultimately converted to museums. Much of the central area between the eastern industrial zone and the Boston Wharf buildings, as well as Fan Pier and Pier 4 to the northwest, had been converted to surface parking by landowners awaiting redevelopment.

In 1984, during the midst of a nationwide building boom, a 1.7 million square feet office, hotel, and condominium redevelopment proposal was announced for Fan Pier/Pier 4, which is the most prominent waterfront site in the district due to its proximity to downtown Boston and its unique quarter-moon orientation. Reminiscent of New York's World Financial Center and London's Canary Wharf in size and aesthetic, the project proponents boasted of a myriad of "public" benefits that would accrue from the redevelopment such as canals, waterfront parks, and linkage funds. Linkage was seen by then BRA director Stephen Coyle as a method to "redistribute" income by extracting funds, often millions of dollars, from developers in exchange for approvals for high-density commercial development. Supposedly the linkage would then be used to pay for scarce social services such as low-income housing, which would be developed off-site. The Fan Pier/Pier 4 developers were thus able to purchase approvals from the BRA through "negotiation," but the development never occurred because of litigation between the development partners.

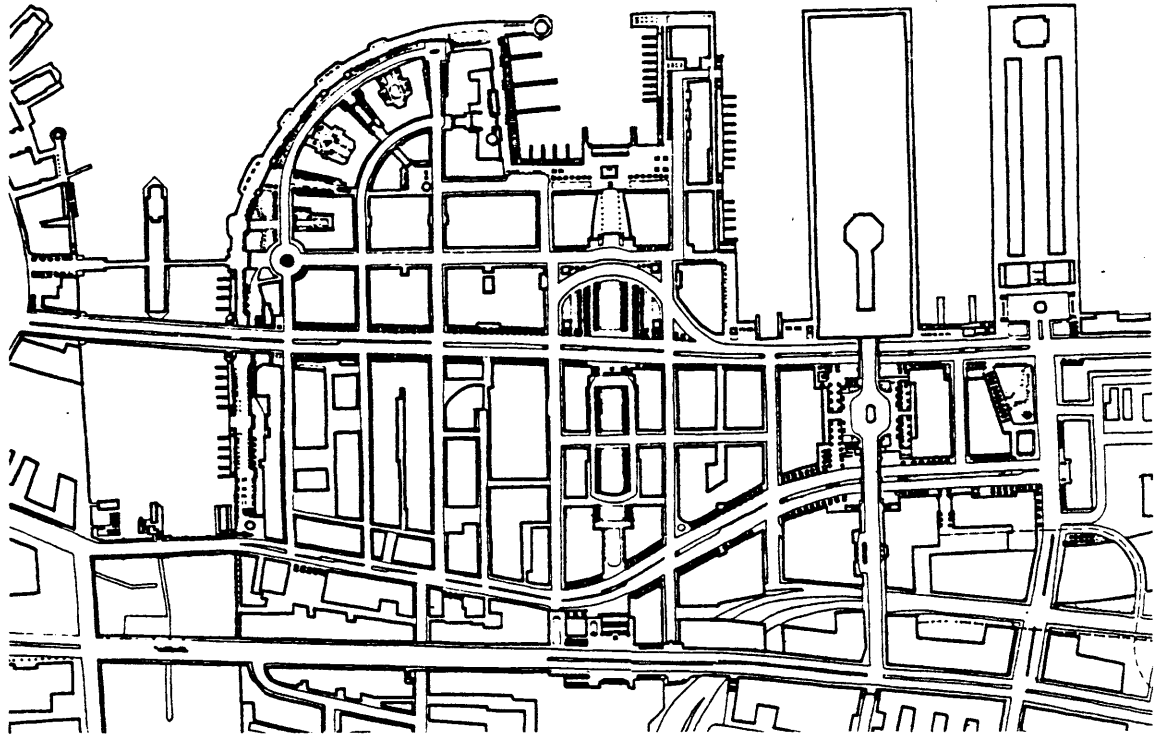


Figure 44: BRA Proposed New Street Pattern
(*Fort Point District Plan, BRA, 1990*)

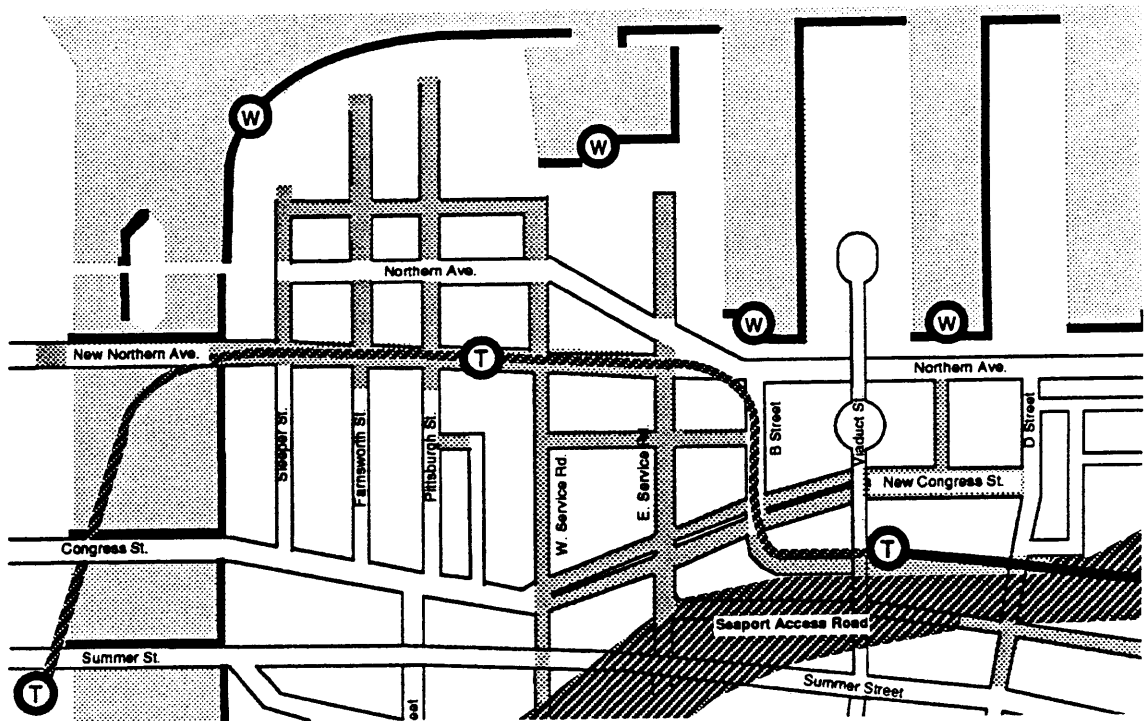


Figure 45: State Proposed Transportation Improvements
(*Fort Point District Plan, BRA, 1990*)

The redistributive benefits of linkage have been questioned. By sequestering low-income housing off-site, the strategy serves to further divide a city already known for its racial and economic segregation. Furthermore, selling zoning and other public approvals undermines the entire basis for planning by allowing incredible density variances for the right price, removing the predictability upon which the entire land use regulation system is predicated. Marginal areas are particularly vulnerable to this approach as the existing zoning is rarely capable of addressing redevelopment pressure. With the Fan Pier/Pier 4 development, for instance, the existing zoning called for industrial uses with a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 2, thus it provided no standard with which to gauge the variance requested by the project proponents.

Consequently, independent development proposals such as Fan Pier/Pier 4 and the more recent World Trade Center Boston proposal across from Commonwealth Pier have been major catalysts for a new BRA redevelopment plan for the entire district. The other major factor that has stimulated planning in the district is a range of anticipated publicly-funded transportation improvements including the underground Seaport Access Road (SAR), linking the Massachusetts Turnpike and the depressed Central Artery with Logan Airport via the Third Harbor Tunnel; the South Boston Haul Road, providing exclusive truck access to the SAR and the waterfront; and the South Boston Piers Transit line, proposed to link the district to the existing city subway system with stops at the Fan Pier and the World Trade Center development sites.

A Fort Point District planning and development study initiated in the late seventies under Mayor Kevin White sought to encourage office, light manufacturing, wholesaling, secondary retailing, and warehousing, but sought to discourage "development of new major office and service activity east of Fort Point Channel."⁷⁵ In contrast, the 1990 Fort Point District Plan calls for substantial office, retail, and hotel development east of

⁷⁵ City of Boston, Boston Redevelopment Authority. The Fort Point Channel Area Planning & Development Study, December 1977.

the channel. Much of the northwestern quarter of the district, now referred to as the Fort Point Waterfront, was designated as an Economic Development Area (EDA) in an effort to "create an appropriate match between Fort Point's traditional manufacturing base and Boston's recently expanded service economy."⁷⁶ Other goals of the district plan include the expansion of the transportation network; on- and off-site development of 2,500 units of market-rate and affordable housing through linkage; creation of public access and open space; strengthening of the working waterfront; protection of the existing industrial and manufacturing base; and management of balanced growth.⁷⁷

One month after the Fort Point District Plan was finalized, new zoning became effective for the Fort Point Waterfront. This 175-acre subdistrict is bounded by Boston Harbor, D Street, Summer Street, and Fort Point Channel, with a separate set of regulations governing new development in the Boston Wharf area. The Fort Point Waterfront zoning allows for commercial buildings of up to 250 feet in height and up to 4.5 FAR, with lower heights and densities required along the waterfront, Northern Avenue, and the border with the Boston Wharf buildings. But the zoning controls much more than height and density, regulating detailed aspects of design in an effort to prescribe the *image* of development through the following urban design guidelines:

1. New development and rehabilitation shall reinforce the traditional pattern, height, and massing of the urban waterfront.
2. Buildings and spaces shall direct views and pedestrian movements towards the water.
3. Buildings on piers shall be sited so as to reinforce the geometry of the pier; and buildings near the water's edge shall not be massed so as to create a continuous wall along the water's edge.

⁷⁶ City of Boston, Boston Redevelopment Authority. Fort Point District Plan, December 1990, p.13.

⁷⁷ Ibid. pp.13-14.

4. Inland buildings shall reinforce the city street pattern and avoid continuous walls parallel to the water's edge by maintaining view and access corridors, especially at cross-streets.
5. Buildings shall be sited to provide view and access corridors towards the open water and to preserve views from Public Access Facilities and Open Space areas at the Ends of Piers. Open archways [of a minimum size and with appropriate orientation as determined through design review] shall not be deemed inconsistent with this design guideline.
6. Building elements on a site shall generally step down in height towards the water's edge.
7. Open spaces, building entrances, shopfronts, shop windows, shop entrances, terraces, gardens, arcades, and similar elements shall be designed to enhance pedestrian activity, access to, and enjoyment of the waterfront.
8. Facade treatment, building materials, and design details shall complement the traditional character of Boston's historic waterfront development patterns.
9. Setbacks, corner treatments, and other design details shall be used to minimize the sense of bulk of structures, and ornamental and decorative elements appropriate to the urban and historical waterfront context are encouraged.
10. In addition to the foregoing, design features of a Proposed Project shall take into consideration the characteristics of the site and its location in the Harborpark District, shall provide opportunities for special amenities, such as panoramic views of the Harbor, and shall enhance and reinforce any historic qualities of existing structures. New development shall be consistent with design guidelines established in the Harborpark District Plan.⁷⁸

The specifics of these regulations evolved out of subdistrict design guidelines prepared by David Dixon & Associates as a part of the BRA's overall district planning process.

⁷⁸ City of Boston. Zoning Text Amendment No. 149, Article 42E "Harborpark District: Fort Point Waterfront," Effective January 28, 1991.

These 1989 draft design guidelines call for a "a true public/private partnership" where

the public environment will provide the focus for the district, connecting private developments with one another...In turn, private developments will help to create the public environment, by defining its physical scale and character, and by providing the lively mix of uses necessary for the area's vitality and success.⁷⁹

The design guidelines go on to define a public open space system; a new block structure; land use and density controls; street-level activity patterns; massing, height, and scale guidelines; and "architectural vocabulary" for the Fort Point Waterfront.

Comparison to the IBA Urban Design Approach

As with the IBA, the Fort Point Waterfront design guidelines prescribe a new block structure for the large swaths of vacant land in the area, repeating the historic size and organization of blocks in the city. In this instance the street patterns within the Boston Wharf area were referred to as a precedent. Similar to the Boulevard/Manhattan project, an avenue entitled New Congress Street is proposed as a locus for public activity.

The similarities with the IBA and some of the New York infill projects, however, are limited to issues of block structure. Land use, massing control, and architectural character are approached from the opposite perspective--in the Fort Point Waterfront, much higher, denser, and more private-sector buildings are allowed, but much stricter restrictions are dictated in terms of materials and architectural style.

In the IBA, new buildings were limited to four to six stories in height; had to conform to the streetwall only at the ground level; were dominated by public housing or other public uses; and were free from design restrictions in terms of style, materials, and

⁷⁹ David Dixon & Associates and the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Fort Point District Plan--New Congress Street/Piers Urban Design Guidelines: Building a New District, Draft, June 2, 1989, p.7.

articulation. By contrast, in the zoning and design guidelines for the Fort Point Waterfront, new buildings can be twenty five to thirty stories in height; must conform to the streetwall for the first ten stories and conform to prescribed setbacks thereafter; can be dominated by office, hotel, condominium and other private uses; and are required to use masonry walls, vertical articulation, horizontal emphasis at the top floor, and ornamental and decorative elements "appropriate to the urban and historical waterfront context," in an effort to create a "district-wide" architectural vocabulary.^{80 81}

One can compare and contrast the substance and scope of design control in the IBA and the Fort Point Waterfront because both allege to fulfill "public purpose." The IBA planners implicitly define public purpose as housing low- to moderate-income individuals in high-quality diversified architecture that is respectful of the existing scale of the city. The Fort Point Waterfront planners implicitly define public purpose as the accommodation of dense private sector development in pseudo-historical structures. While the guidelines state that they are "not intended to prescribe a specific 'style' for the district," the restrictions and design review specified by the zoning amendment--a document littered with variations on the word "history"--leave individual designers almost no latitude to actually design their buildings. The private sector will demand that the building fill the massing envelope to maximize floor space, and the public sector will demand specific materials and articulations. Given the prescribed setbacks, the district-wide vocabulary will become an articulated masonry version of the Park Avenue "wedding cake" building.

In the Fort Point Waterfront zoning, the desired style for new buildings is hinted at by Urban Design Guideline 5, which allows for archways leading to the water given a specific size and orientation. This is a direct reference to Rowes Wharf, a late-eighties upscale waterfront office, hotel and condominium development designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill directly across the Harbor from Fan Pier. Rowes Wharf is heralded

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.32

⁸¹ City of Boston. Zoning Text Amendment No. 149.

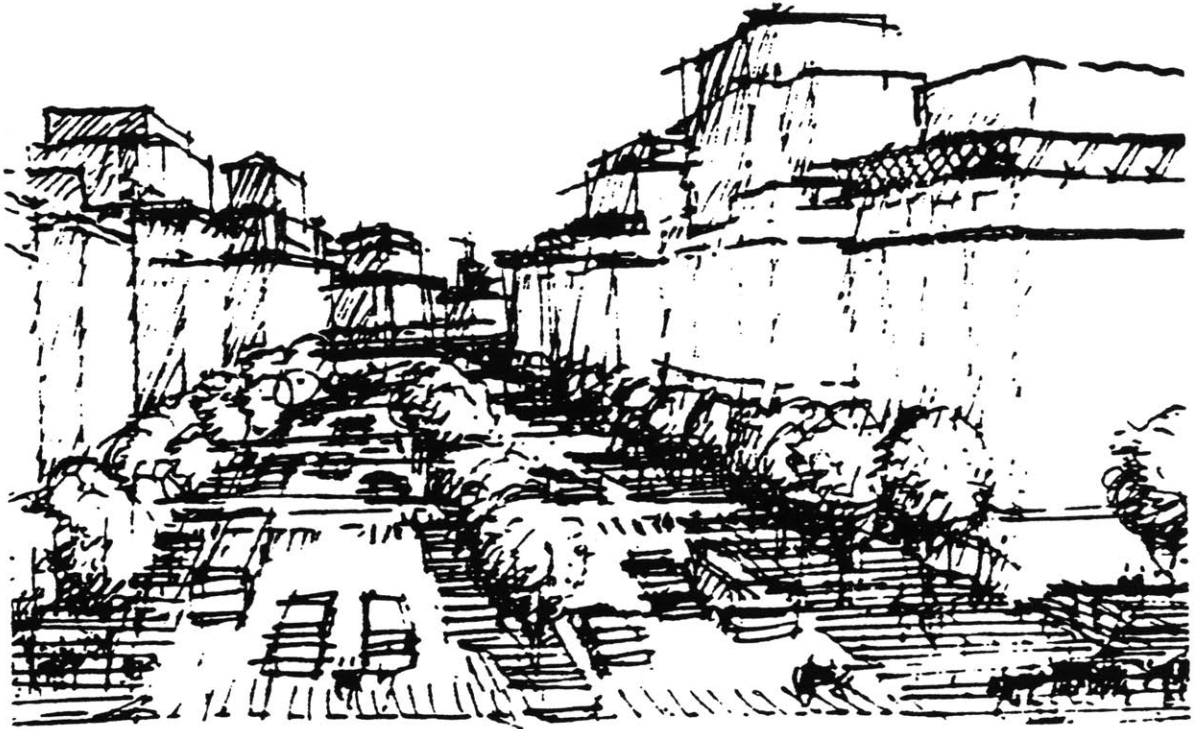


Figure 46: BRA Proposed Massings for the Fort Point Waterfront
(Fort Point District Plan, BRA, 1990)



Figure 47: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Rows Wharf, 1987
(Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1990)

by the BRA as an urban design triumph because of its "public" nature as exemplified by its waterfront walkway accessed by a grand Romanesque arch, its docking provisions for an airport water shuttle and some commuter ferries, its ground-floor hotel lobby, and its Postmodern neoclassical design. Yet every element of the building, from its brass rails to its coffered dome invoke the image of Western opulence. The water shuttles that dock there charge high fees, excluding most users through pricing. An unusually dressed individual in the hotel lobby is sure to be made uncomfortable. Nonetheless, the design pleases its users and the city's tax base gains. Thus the style becomes the model for new "public" development in areas like Fort Point, and in a wider context becomes the embodiment of the Postmodern ideal.

The issue of style is as much economic as it is aesthetic. The call for historicism, as explained by one BRA urban designer, is predicated on increasing the flow of tourists and businesses to the city.⁸² Red brick, symbolic as the material most prescribed to reinforce the city's historic environment, is used to confirm the expectations of tourists and businesses who have a preconceived notion of Boston as a historic city. This notion, of course, is not unfounded. However, the question remains whether new development need always reinforce a specific interpretation of Western history, or whether new buildings can evoke new ideas and other histories.

The Fort Point Waterfront Siedlung

The design guidelines for the Fort Point Waterfront were issued five months before the stock market crash of 1989. Much of the program specified for the area was predicated on a booming real estate market. Since that time, downtown office vacancy rates have risen dramatically, and little has been built in Fort Point. In 1991, the federal government announced a new courthouse for the western corner of Fan Pier, which is being designed

⁸² Interview with Eric Schmidt, BRA Urban Design Department. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Fall, 1992.

by Pei, Cobb & Freed. Because of its status as a federal project, the courthouse is not required to conform to local or state regulations, but the project proponents have stated that the building would be designed in the "spirit of the BRA guidelines."

Given the unexpected downturn in the economy and the equally unanticipated siting of the courthouse, the Fort Point Waterfront zoning and the design guidelines that preceded it have become less relevant to current conditions. Nonetheless, the BRA over the long term hopes to channel approximately 10 million square feet of new office development into the Fort Point Waterfront in order to protect the agency's open space-intensive plan for the right-of-way that will become available over the depressed Central Artery.⁸³ This amount of office development would not be allowable under the current Fort Point Waterfront zoning, leaving one to speculate about the BRA's intentions to enforce the already lenient height and density restrictions in the area. The BRA track record shows a propensity to negotiate such restrictions away during a boom economy, and the agency may be willing to do so to a larger extent during a slow economy.

The BRA's land use strategy for the Fort Point Waterfront is the reverse of what it should be. Except for the fact that major office developments have been proposed there during an overzealous building boom, nothing indicates that offices and hotels are the preferable dominant land use in the area, including its proximity to the central business district. After all, most would not imply that office buildings should take over Beacon Hill, which is just as close to downtown Boston. What is clear is that the city and the nation is in the midst of a housing crisis, and that our land use policies should attempt to address this.

The Fort Point Waterfront has the potential to be a truly public area that could expand upon its role as an interesting, marginal neighborhood in Boston. While planners point to the historic value of the Boston Wharf buildings and Commonwealth Pier, one cannot ignore the beauty and uniqueness of the area's industrial structures, bridges, working

⁸³ Ibid.

waterfront, and bi-level street system. These grittier elements have the potential to be just as significant as design cues for new structures as do the more traditional historic buildings. Additional community assets include the district's artist community, the South Boston residential neighborhood, and the area's impending role as a new international gateway into the City of Boston.

The Fort Point Waterfront is capable of accommodating a siedlung that combines the qualities of the Weissenhofsiedlung, the IBA, and ongoing efforts in New York. An appropriate block structure has already been defined in the existing design guidelines. However, a host of revisions to the plan would be required. Currently the land use plan for new development calls for approximately 50 percent commercial, 25 percent light industrial, and 25 percent housing and other. At present, only 10 percent of the housing built on privately-owned land and 25 percent of the housing built on publicly-owned land is required to be affordable.

In the siedlung plan, the land use mix would be reversed between commercial and housing, with 50 percent of redevelopable land dedicated to housing, half of which would be affordable in each residential building. Two major housing areas could be developed, the first growing southeast out of the Boston Wharf buildings, and the second along Pier 4 and the eastern side of Fan Pier. As shown in the New York projects, such a mix could be financially feasible, particularly given that much of the land in question is prime waterfront, and will be accessible by a new subway and road system. Additional housing funds could also be obtained through impending federal monies for construction of public housing. Retail or other active uses should be required on the ground floor of new buildings.

The 25 percent commercial component could cluster around the new courthouse in the southwest quarter of Fan Pier. This would form a compact office and hotel district along New Northern Avenue that would be a convenient walk or subway ride to downtown.

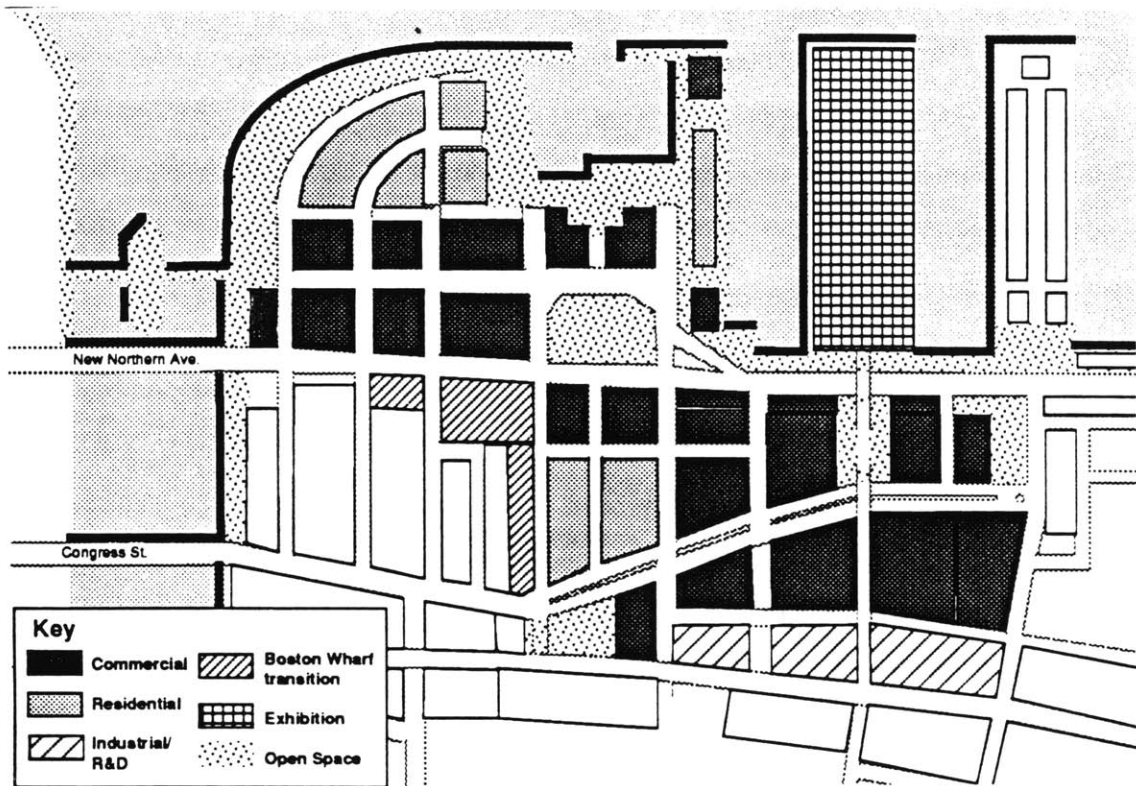


Figure 48: BRA Proposed Land Use
(*Fort Point District Plan, BRA, 1990*)

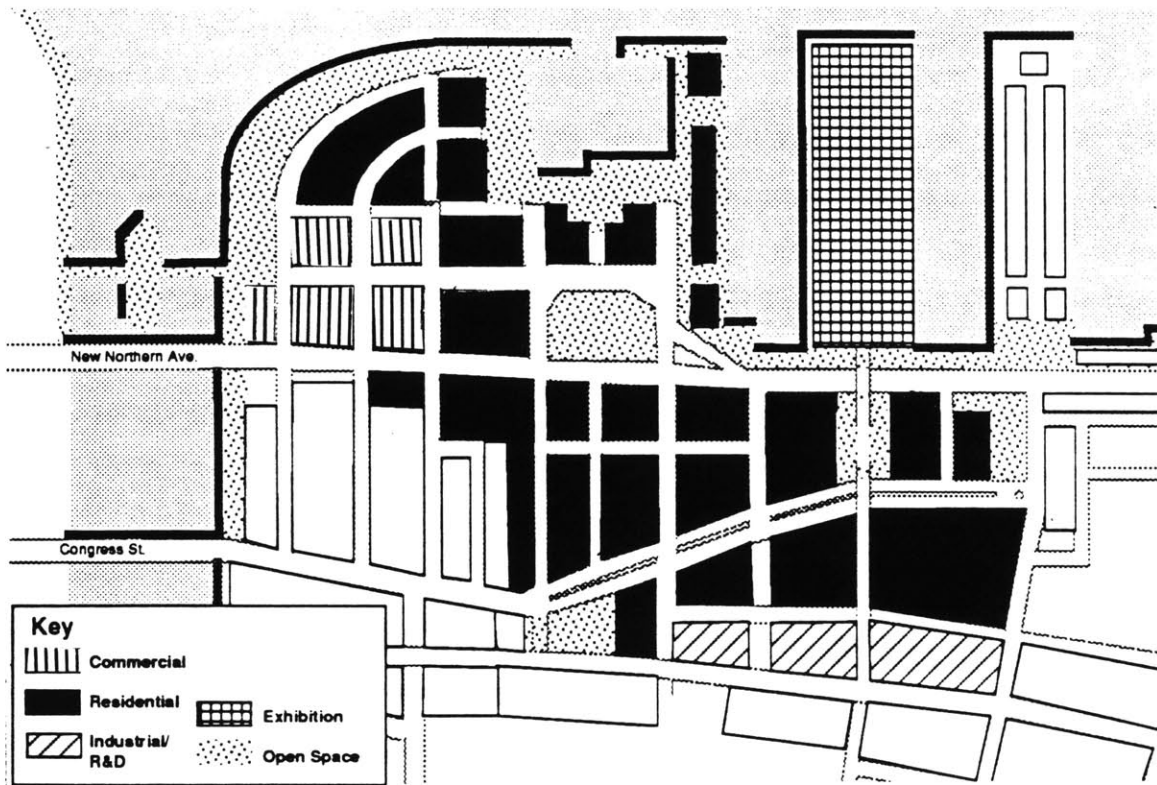


Figure 49: Fort Point Waterfront Siedlung: Revised Land Use
(*By Author, 1993*)

The remaining land to the southeast could be used for light industry as specified in the existing design guidelines. Opportunities would also be created for community workspaces, such as those suggested in the Boulevard/Manhattan and Peterson and Littenburg plans, as well as artist work/live lofts. Innovative programming would ensure that those individuals entering affordable housing would have a livelihood as well as a place to live.

Design control should be limited to issues of scale, block structure, and retention of the streetwall at ground level. In this case, most buildings would maintain a 90-foot height limit, which is the average height of the existing Boston Wharf buildings. Lower buildings would be required along the waterfront because of state regulations and solar access. Set backs would not be required as buildings would be lower than those specified in the design guidelines. Thus a massing envelope for each lot would be specified based on the new street pattern, the 90-foot height limit, and the streetwall requirement. Materials, articulation, and other forms of expression would not be regulated. This would give particular freedom to designers of residential buildings, who may need to specify prefabricated or other inexpensive materials to keep costs down. Herman Hertzberger, a participant in the IBA, has made cost-effective and aesthetically-pleasing use of wood, glass, and prefabricated metal panels in his designs for low-budget housing and school projects.⁸⁴

Each building should be designed by a different architect. Given the new international status of the site, individual designers could be chosen through international competition. While entrants would be thoroughly briefed on the history of the district, they would not be asked to express a specific history or tradition in their designs. The selection committee would include representatives from the community and the BRA, as well as design professionals from Boston and elsewhere.

⁸⁴ Lecture by Herman Hertzberger, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, April 27, 1993.

Some would object that allowing individual designers so much freedom would devalue land and historic structures such as the Boston Wharf properties. The opposite has proven true with every *siedlung* that has taken place in Europe. In actuality, the larger worry has been the maintenance of firm rent controls that stem the gentrification that may potentially evolve out of a *rise* in land values. Aesthetically, the masonry facades of the Boston Wharf buildings and the headhouse of Commonwealth Pier would probably benefit from the diversity of styles and materials that would emerge around them, just as they have for years from the bridges and industrial structures that surround them today. Ironically, Europe and Japan, which boast cultures far older than America's, are often much less concerned about the visual or financial impact of the juxtaposition of historical and contemporary architectural expression.

The proposed Fort Point Waterfront *Siedlung* departs from Weissenhofsiedlung, the IBA, and the New York infill projects in a variety of ways. The program is far more diverse than the original conception of the *siedlung* in response to the variety of uses needed within an urban neighborhood. The higher density and the involvement of a larger range of architects addresses concerns that the IBA was too suburban in scale and too "clubby" in architect selection.

Perhaps most importantly, the Fort Point Waterfront *Siedlung* could exemplify a new reconstruction-based paradigm for urban design in the United States. The *siedlung* as it is proposed would entail more than infill between and rehabilitation of existing structures. The undertaking would require reconstruction of much larger swaths of currently vacant land, which for the most part are not bordered by existing structures. In the case of infill, the structures surrounding a vacant parcel explicitly define a massing envelope for new development in terms of height, streetwall, and block structure. In the case of the much larger vacant lots in the Fort Point Waterfront *Siedlung* proposal, the massing envelopes and block structure would be implicitly defined by the closest reference point, the Boston Wharf buildings.

Thus the IBA approach of respecting existing scale, block structure, and streetwall, would be maintained and extended into a much larger redevelopment area than the IBA infill lots, indicating a larger range of application than just infill. "Critical reconstruction" suggests respect for the city's existing scale and block structure regardless of whether a redevelopment entails the construction of a new building in an infill parcel, or twenty new buildings in a large expanse of vacant land. "Living in the city" suggests a land use emphasis on residential construction, where authentic urban culture derives from culturally and economically diverse groups interacting in the city. Taken together, this reconstructive approach is based on a surgical grafting of what is new into what exists, both in terms of buildings and people. Thus the Fort Point Waterfront Siedlung could be an example of a new architecture and urban design with a true public purpose, rebuilding both the urban margin and the Modern ideal.

Conclusion

Towards an Alternative Urban Design

Urban designers think that unity is the answer to quality of life in a city. But it's just the opposite. The answer is to let things happen naturally rather than try to control too much. The cities that are alive today are un-unified, where many cultures live together gracefully, with wit.--Robert Venturi

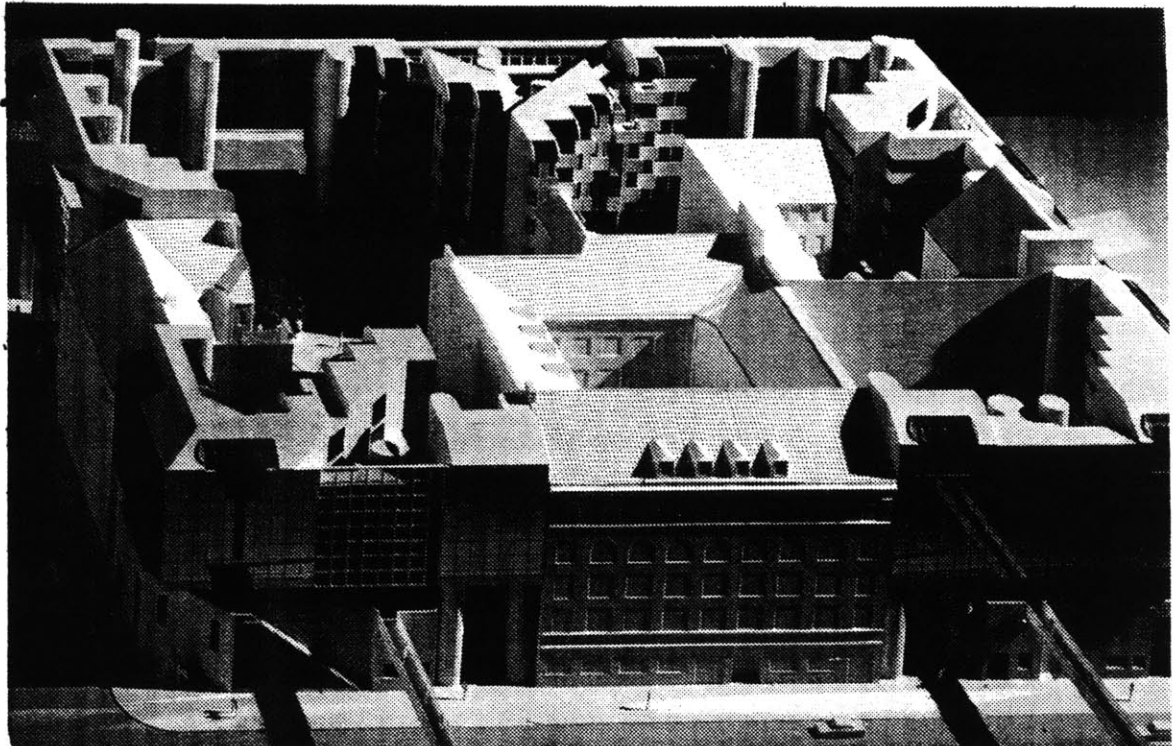
During a recent presentation on city design, a noted Boston architectural critic made reference to the changes that have occurred over the past decades on 6th Avenue between 45th and 46th streets in Manhattan. He showed a panoramic image of what used to be--small-scale tenements with shops below, filled with activity and life--and what exists now, floor-to-ceiling glass panels forming the ground floor of a large, Modernist office building. He decried this change, and went on to contrast images of Albany, New York and Oxford, England. The Albany image showed a Brasilia-like landscape of independent Modern buildings in an empty field of hard-surfaced open space, while the aerial view of Oxford showed the historic city as an organization of streets and courtyards where buildings purportedly formed corridors and rooms not unlike a home. He used the comparison to condemn what Modernism has done to the urban built environment.⁸⁴

Missing from this analysis were current images of the dense European and Asian cities that one could rightfully compare to New York, such as Berlin and Tokyo. Such images would bring out a much-needed distinction between Modernist urban planning and the Modern ideal because they would show contemporary buildings that defer to the scale of their respective cities. Modernist urban planning, as embodied by the work of Robert Moses, conceived of city building at a much larger scale where land consolidation by the public or private sector was essential to the construction of massive public housing

⁸⁴ Campbell, Robert, Architecture Critic for The Boston Globe. Lecture at the Mayors' Institute on City Design, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, April 16, 1993.



**Figure 50: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Worldwide Plaza, New York, 1990
(*Reality Before Reality, Edizioni Tecno, 1990*)**



**Figure 51: Kisho Kurokawa, IBA Neubau, 1987
(*Rediscovering Japanese Space, Kurokawa, 1990*)**

projects, or highways, or the office building on 6th avenue. The Modern ideal as interpreted by the IBA, in contrast, never required land consolidation. This distinction is essential because land consolidation directly effects the scale at which a city can be built. Urban design in the United States has tended to ignore this distinction by controlling style more than scale. Thus if one considers the land consolidation required to build the Rouse festival markets, or any skyscraper, it becomes evident that despite claims to the contrary, cities and developers are still engaged in Modernist urban planning, only with a Postmodern facade. Urban designers must learn that a 65-story skyscraper built in red brick, such as New York's recently completed Worldwide Plaza in Clinton, is no less damaging to a city's fabric than the glass and steel office tower on 6th avenue completed over a decade ago.

Few understood this issue of scale as well as Jane Jacobs, who has become a mentor for many as a champion of anti-Modernist urban planning. Jacobs set forth four conditions "to generate exuberant diversity in a city's streets and districts:"

1. the district must serve more than one primary function to assure that people use the streets at different times for different reasons;
2. city blocks must be short so that pedestrians have more route options;
3. buildings in the district must vary in age and quality to promote diverse real estate values;
4. the district must contain a sufficient density of users including residents.⁸⁵

The first and last conditions involve use, the second involves scale as it relates to block structure, and the third involves building diversity. Nowhere does she suggest that a new building in her native West Village should be required to use wrought iron and red brick to complement neighboring brownstones, but in fact she implies the opposite, that new

⁸⁵ Jacobs, Jane. The Death and Life of Great American Cities, 1961, p.150.

structures should introduce diversity through use and style. What is clear, however, is that she would not approve of the uniform redevelopment of several blocks of the West Village, neither as a glass office building nor as a brick festival market.

The writings of Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, and others formed a canon of criticism against Modernist urban planning, not against Modernist design. But instead of focussing on these writers' concerns for issues of scale, block structure, streetwalls, and land use as the parameters by which to judge a redevelopment proposal, many professionals have formed a Postmodern urban design paradigm that hinges on issues of style. Also referred to as Neotraditionalism, this paradigm has resulted in approvals not only for "historically-themed" high-density environments, but also for privatized resort developments such as Seaside. Furthermore, these large-scale developments are marketed as "public" as a consequence of style, despite the fact that they withdraw from the larger public purpose of addressing urban ills.

An alternative urban design must be found that attempts to deal with the atrophied state of urban marginal areas. Land use planning should emphasize the social needs of the city, including the clear need for affordable housing. Physical intervention should be sensitive to the existing scale of the city, with an emphasis on regulating height, streetwall, and block structure rather than expression and materials. Land consolidation should be illegal after a specific threshold, which could easily be determined through analysis of a city's typical block size.

Developers and private landowners would probably fight such stringent development regulations. Yet while market forces must be acknowledged by urban design professionals, they should be placed in perspective with the greater needs of the city. Some would argue that this would deter urban redevelopment, and that the consequences to a city's tax base would hinder its ability to provide social services to the poor. Yet throughout the eighties, during one of the nation's greatest building booms, homelessness

increased while social services decreased. Proponents of large-scale urban redevelopment have yet to prove their claims that such projects "trickle down" wealth.

The Modern ideal as interpreted by the IBA and proposed in the Fort Point Waterfront Siedlung provides an alternative to large-scale urban redevelopment. The focus of development control in both cases is scale, not style. As the reconstruction efforts in New York's marginal neighborhoods revealed, there are significant barriers to implementing such projects including financial, regulatory, and community impediments. However, experience with such projects suggests that community groups can become allies if involved from the outset of these projects. Regulatory impediments can be altered through zoning revisions. Lack of money to build affordable housing can be addressed in a number of ways. As championed by the Weissenhofsiedlung, prefabricated and other industrially-produced building elements could be employed to bring construction costs down. In the case of Fort Point, linkage funds from office, hotel and condominium development could be used on-site. Federal monies may also become available given the recent shift in administrations. Perhaps most importantly, public funds that in the past have gone to fund large-scale private developments, such as the \$83 million of Federal and state monies that helped fund Boston's Fanueil Hall Marketplace or the \$33 million of municipal funds that went into San Diego's Horton Plaza⁸⁶, should be redirected to solve the nation's urban housing crisis.

In sum, these are not individual issues of sensitive infill, or authentic urban cultural diversity, or freedom of design expression, or public housing, but rather are a combined issue regarding what constitutes true public purpose in urban design. Gandhi asked that we judge society based on the treatment of its minorities, and perhaps the urban corollary is that we judge a city based on the treatment of its margins. Economic and cultural diversity in marginal areas is best enhanced by the provision of affordable housing and

⁸⁶ Lecture by Professor Bernard Frieden, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, April 22, 1993.

other community-based uses in sensitively-scaled structures. Aesthetic diversity will complement this social diversity, and should be encouraged by urban design professionals.

The rationalist progenitors of the Modern ideal did not seek this economic, cultural, and aesthetic diversity. Armed with notions of truth and beauty that they considered universal, these designers sought uniformity through physical determinism, attempting to rebuild Europe by "starting from zero" in a new industrial age. The most valuable lesson of Postmodernism is the critique of these universal notions, yet this critique has borne few alternative urban design paradigms of merit. With the IBA, it becomes clear that these criticisms of the Modern ideal can be addressed without rejecting the ideal in its entirety. Reconstructive urban design represents the transformation of the Modern ideal into a pluralist notion that attempts to rebuild the city by starting from the richness of the peoples and the structures that already exist within it.

Bibliography

- Beerheim, Wilhelm. "IBA Berlino: un bilancio di sette anni di lavoro," Domus, July-August, 1987.
- Beinart, Julian, Professor of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Lecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, April 7, 1992.
- Boyer, M. Christine. "Cities for Sale: Merchandising History at South Street Seaport," in Variations on a Theme Park, Ed. Michael Sorkin, New York: The Noonday Press, 1992, pp.181-205.
- Buckhurst, Paul, Principal of Buckhurst, Fish, Hutton & Katz. Interview by Author, New York, NY, April 7, 1993.
- Campbell, Robert, Architecture Critic for The Boston Globe. Lecture at the Mayors' Institute on City Design, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, April 16, 1993.
- Caro, Robert. The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974.
- City of Boston, Boston Redevelopment Authority. The Fort Point Channel Area Planning & Development Study, December 1977.
- City of Boston, Boston Redevelopment Authority. Fort Point District Plan, December 1990.
- City of Boston. Zoning Text Amendment No. 149, Article 42E "Harborpark District: Fort Point Waterfront," Effective January 28, 1991.
- City of New York, Department of City Planning. Memorandum Re: "Lower East Side Zoning Study," March 2, 1988.
- City of New York, Housing, Preservation and Development Administration. "Lower East Side Vacant Land Use Inventory," February 14, 1991.
- Davey, Peter. "Altbau: STERN Work," The Architectural Review, April 1987.
- Davey, Peter and Clelland, Douglas. "Berlin: Origins to IBA," The Architectural Review, April 1987.

- David Dixon & Associates and Boston Redevelopment Authority. Fort Point District Plan--New Congress Street/Piers Urban Design Guidelines: Building a New District, Draft, June 2, 1989.
- De Michelis, Marco. "After the wall: back to Great Berlin," Casabella, November 1992.
- Dietsch, Deborah. The Architectural Record, June 1987.
- Deutsche, Rosalyn and Ryan, Cara Gendel. "The Fine Art of Gentrification," October, Volume 13, 1984.
- Deutsche, Rosalyn. "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City," October, Volume 47, 1988.
- Frampton, Kenneth. Modern Architecture: A Critical History, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992.
- Frieden, Bernard, Professor of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Lecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, April 22, 1993.
- Goldberger, Paul. "Community's Alternative Offers a Low-Keyed Mix," The New York Times, January 16, 1986, p.B1.
- Gottlieb, Martin. "Planners Considering Blockfront Towers," The New York Times, January 16, 1986, p.B1.
- Hamer, Hardt-Waltherr. "The Other Face of IBA/Careful Urban Renewal in Kreuzberg," Space & Society, September-December 1985.
- Hermanuz, Ghislaine, Professor of Architecture, City College Architectural Center. Interview by Author, New York, NY, April 7, 1993.
- _____. Frederick Douglass Boulevard: A Strategy for Revitalizing Morningside Valley, Study for the Harlem Urban Development Corporation, New York, NY, July 1989.
- Hertzberger, Herman. Lecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, April 27, 1993.
- Hoffman, Peter. "Report from West Berlin: An Ambitious Urban Renewal Plan is Creating Much-Needed Housing and Considerable Controversy," Architectural Record, February 1985.

- Jacobs, Jane. The Death and Life of Great American Cities, New York: Vintage Books, 1961.
- Kirsch, Karin. The Weissenhofsiedlung, New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1989.
- Kleihues, Josef Paul. "The Critical Reconstruction of the City," Domus, July-August 1987.
- Littenburg, Barbara, Principal, Peterson, Littenburg, Architects. Interview by Author, New York, NY, April 7, 1993.
- Michael Kwartler and Associates for the Green Guerillas. Report to the New York City Planning Commission, August 26, 1991.
- Miller, Terry. Greenwich Village and How It Got That Way, New York: Crown Publishers, 1990.
- Muschamp, Herbert. "New Housing in Vienna," The New York Times, January 1, 1993, p.C4.
- Pepchinski, Mary. "The End of IBA and After," Progressive Architecture, November 1987.
- Progressive Architecture Urban Design Award (No Author Given), "Mid-Manhattan Urban Renewal," Progressive Architecture, January 1990.
- Rodkin, Dennis. "Vienna Builds for the People," Metropolis, December 1991.
- Rosler, Martha. "Tompkins Square Park, East Village, Lower East Side, Manhattan, New York," in If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism, Ed. Brian Wallis, DIA Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture #6, Seattle: Bay Press, 1991. pp.208-220.
- Rowe, Colin. "IBA: Rowe Reflects," The Architectural Review, September 1984.
- Schmidt, Eric, Urban Designer, Boston Redevelopment Authority. Interview by Author, Cambridge, MA, November 2, 1992.
- Smith, Neil. "New City, New Frontier," in Variations on a Theme Park, Ed. Michael Sorkin, New York: The Noonday Press, 1992, pp.61-93.
- Stone, Amey. "Is Fort Point area hostage of Big Dig?," Boston Business Journal, September 17, 1990.

Strecker, Bernhard, Manager for the IBA Altbau. Interview by Author, Cambridge, MA, February 12, 1993.

Strickland and Carson Associates. Boulevard/Manhattan, New York: Columbia Architecture Planning Preservation Miniseries 6, 1991.

Strickland, Roy, Professor of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Principal, Strickland and Carson Associates. Interview by Author, Cambridge, MA, March 5, 1993.

Weaver, Jay. "'Fringe' Areas lure adventurous developers," The Boston Globe, Real Estate Section, October 14, 1989, p.41.

Wolfe, Tom. From Bauhaus to Our House, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981.