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Three prescriptions

Daniel Libeskind

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Landsberger Allee/Rhinstrasse: the mechanism of the city

The interpretation of the city as a kind of mechanism is a concept with a long history. Traditional urban designs have concentrated on this image either as a metaphor for functional efficiency or as the point of departure for the systematic organization of forms.

Out of this tradition, we have sought to develop a strategy that traces a line between and beyond these discourses. It points towards an alternative morphology whose result would be neither the discrete zoning of functions, nor the prescription of forms, but would allow for and support the unpredictable – a flexible, dynamic organization responsive to the fluctuating energies supplied by economics and desire.

The area around the junction of the Landsberger Allee and Rhinstrasse provides an ideal situation for the exploration of such possibilities, reflecting a history of diverse colonization, and the juxtaposition of industrial pragmatics and open nature.

The proposal suggests an understanding of the city complex not as an instrument for the subjection of the individual to the homogeneity of the whole, but as a mechanism formed out of diverse ideals, made up of heterogeneous components defined and refined by their interdependence, plurality and possibility.

The methodologies underpinning much of this century's urban planning, whether functionalist or formalist, have until now proved insufficient to describe the dynamic richness of diverse inter-

actions that make up the contemporary city after the experience of the last hundred years.

Our millennial generation stands at the threshold of a clearing formed out of this perception. The diverse spatial approaches and interlocking functional relationships of the Landsberger Allee proposal constitute a response to new urban possibilities – an armature connecting memory and possibility, metaphor and idea. They outline a potential energy that could, by an act of imagination, be transformed into a new spatial, urban and functional reality: an intersection between the past and the present, pointing towards a democratic and exciting future.

Visible cities archipelago: Lichterfelde Süd

How can one avoid the banality of expressing the edge of the city by a total urban gesture, which will in time be undermined by future developments? The images of edge and frontier become outdated even before they are completely realized. What is needed is a new planning and architectural framework that can deal with the radical conditions that an edge of a city implies. Harking back to walls and divisions on the one hand, or letting the city spread endlessly into the countryside on the other, are inadequate responses to the ecological, environmental and urbanistic challenges of today and tomorrow.

The Visible Cities Project disseminates the edge of the city in an organic relation to the landscape, creating a decisive end-condition to building, while opening the edge to a permeable relation. City

and landscape intertwine in a visible way as a gateway.

This project incorporates a number of contemporary strategies towards planning and living in our time. Vertical and horizontal distribution of units creates an ecological whole without hierarchies of centre and periphery, of frontages and preferred views. Housing as well as commercial and cultural facilities are pluralistically ordered so that the heterogeneity and variety of spaces, places and functions creates a micro-cosmos of the city itself at its edge without the monotony and uniformity characteristic of such large estates.

New ecological configurations of forms, volumes, landscapes, roofscapes and fa ades support an atmosphere and quality of everyday life while providing imaginative figures on the horizon within an economically realistic framework. Such an organic diffusion of spaces and fusion of function give an image of an *archipelago* in which architectural richness and urbanistic organization flow together in the sea of Brandenburg. Planning contributes to the openness of architecture, while architecture constitutes the disclosure and plurality the edge.

The *visible city* is the very image of the edge, which becomes blurred and disappears into the invisible as it reaches the centre. The edge of the city is not only the dissolution of mass but also the compression of time made visible as the space of arrival and departure. In this way the site of Lichterfelde Süd is considered as one of the crucial topographies of Berlin and a paradigm of Berlin's edge. And this edge reveals its lightness and optimism, without the heavy hand of reductionism,

historicism and nostalgia of putting the edge to an end: for visible cities are reborn as the edge, while being guided by it.

Alexanderplatz

I am working today in Berlin with a project I have termed the 'Traces of the Unborn' – a term to describe the need to resist the erasure of history, the need to respond to history, the need to open the future: that is, to delineate the invisible on the basis of the visible. The scheme has developed certain planning and architectural concepts that reflect my interest and commitment to the memory of the city, to the time in which it dwells, and to the freedom it represents.

Even though the competition for Alexanderplatz took place in a particular area of Berlin, there were certain fundamental points that were addressed that relate to issues of other urban centres, whether the devastation has taken place because of war, or political catastrophes, or economic disasters. I followed Paul Valéry's axiom that 'humanity is permanently threatened by two dangers: order and disorder'. I have tried to make a scheme that navigates between the Scylla and Charybdis of nostalgic historicism and the *tabula rasa* of totalitarianism.

Alexanderplatz constitutes the largest urban area for development in postwar Germany. It is the place where well-worn as well as completely new sections of the city meet, where a new centrepiece of a united Berlin must happen – the dynamic vortex that has remained untameable and undeniable from the time of the entrance of Czar Alexander to the exiting of the Russian troops in 1989.

The distance separating my scheme from the scheme that won first prize was only one vote; however, there was an unbridgeable spiritual gap in the attitude towards urban space.

I proposed a scheme that opens the area and emphatically rejects the idea that public space needs to be closed in an urban room. My design for Alexanderplatz does not enclose the centre, but relies on the history of Alexanderplatz to resist wilfully imposed planning concepts. It calls for immediate interaction with the existing by both supplementing and subverting, stabilizing and destabilizing the network of traffic, street patterns and building.

A radical feature of the scheme, in view of Berlin politics today, was to advocate the acceptance of the existence of the GDR, which represents almost 50 years of building. Even the prefabricated ill-conceived buildings of the GDR, which have little architectural merit, should not be singled out for demolition, but rather incorporated in an ecologically responsive manner. The contradictions inherent in bringing together mass housing of the former GDR with high-density commercial development is mediated by a major urban park, which would act as a field thematizing the ruin of time.

Having rejected the option of erasing the history of the city, the proposed gradual improvement of public space and traffic and organization of Alexanderplatz does not rely on some hypothetical 'time in the future' where Alexanderplatz would be perfect. The given is not treated as an obstacle, nor seen as a form of pathology, but rather as an opportunity pregnant with new relations and new urban experiences.

This scheme, which rejects contextualism and utopianism, advocates instead the transformation and metamorphosis of the existing. There is an important need in every society to identify the icons that constitute a particular area – the structures that form the texture of living memory. Thus, in refuting the past and the future alike, the eternally present transformation and metamorphosis are used as strategies for the creation of unpredictable, flexible and hybrid architecture disseminated both horizontally and vertically. This structure introduces a connection or a knot between buildings and their sites. From this structure emerge forms whose individual expression and representation are indistinguishable from the political space they occupy.

The city is the greatest spiritual creation of humanity – a collective work that develops the expression of culture, society and the individual in time and space. Its structure is intrinsically mysterious. It develops more like a dream than a piece of equipment. In this competition I have challenged the whole notion of the master plan with its implied totalism and finality, its misguided ambition of eternal recurrence of the same through replication. Rather, I have suggested the open and ever-changeable matrix that reinforces the processes of transformation and sees the dynamic of change in a diverse and pluralistic architecture. Such an approach is an alternative to the traditional idea of planning, which implies continuity based on projection, rather than an approach that treats the city as an evolving, poetic and unpredictable event.