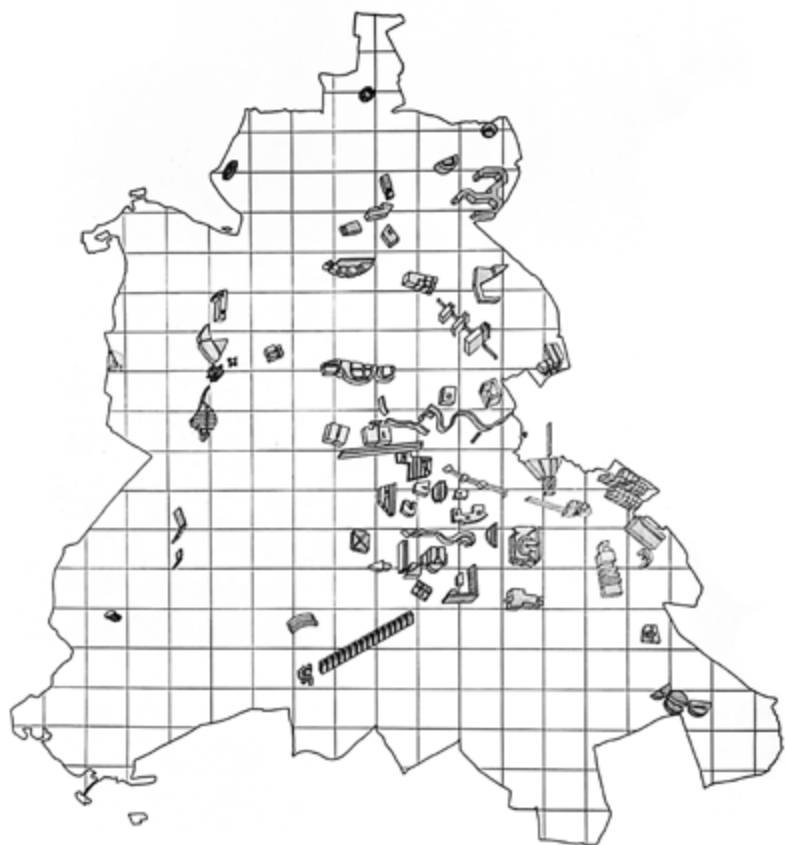


GROSSFORMEN AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

**PRE DIPLOMA RESEARCH PROJECT
AT THE OSLO SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN**

by Clemens Pörtner
2020

INSPIRED BY MY TIME LIVING IN THE OLYMPIC VILLAGE IN MUNICH IN 2018 AND IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSTANTLY INCREASING RENTS AND A SEVERE SHORTAGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN MANY GERMAN AND EUROPEAN CITIES, I WANTED TO INVESTIGATE THE POTENTIALS OF LARGE-SCALE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS. WHICH ASPECTS ARE UNIQUE TO THIS TYPOLOGY AND HOW DO THEY CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUCCESS OF A NEIGHBORHOOD? WHAT ROLE DO IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION PLAY?



INTRO

The Olympic village in Munich is a large scale housing development constructed in 1970's. Even though receiving criticism in the early years, denouncing it as a concrete jungle, it is one of Munich's most popular neighborhoods with an exceptional level of identification and resident satisfaction nowadays.¹ Located in the north of Munich in the Olympic Park the village floats like an island concentrated urban fabric in the vast park landscape and can easily be considered an city within the city. Living in this vibrant environment for half a year made me experience first hand which potential can lay in this architectural concept are.

In 1977 Oswald Mathias Ungers and Rem Koolhaas published their Manifesto *The City in the City – Berlin: A Green Archipelago* in 1977 in which develop a utopian urban system of 'city islands' in a decaying urban context.² The ideas of enclaves of distinct structure they developed in the manifesto were an ongoing topic in Ungers' work at that time. Several years prior, in 1966, he published *Großformen im Wohnungsbau*, a theoretical work about architecture existing simultaneously as 'object' and 'city'.³

Many of the aspects depicted by Ungers in *Großformen im Wohnungsbau* appear as design principles in the Olympic Village. On the following pages I try to point out some of the main aspects of his work, explain how they contribute to a successful neighborhood, and show in a series of case studies how they are implemented in build projects.



PLACE ATTACHMENT

The Olympic Village is known as a place with a high degree of identification. Many people stay forever once they moved here. They become "Villagers" as they call themselves around there. The community can appear quite closed. Since most of the moves take place within the village, it can be hard for an outsider to get an apartment. People who once moved away are likely to come back one day.⁴ The adjacent student village, where I lived myself for half a year, has a long waiting list because people want to become part of this special community.

In environmental sciences, the identification with a place or the development of a feeling of belonging, as it can be seen in the Olympic Village, is described with the concept of place attachment. It describes a relationship or an emotional bond between a person and a place. It can be an important measure to encourage the use of public places, green spaces, and therefore is a crucial factor for the success or failure of neighborhoods.⁵

The question is, how the architecture of a place can contribute to the development of this phenomenon in general, and in which way it does contribute in the case of the Olympic village?

SCALE

Neighborhood as a definition of scale plays an important role in the process of identification with a place. It is not the only unit in which place attachment can occur. Basically one can develop an emotional bond to a place of any scale – small as an apartment or the building you live in, a neighborhood, district, city, or even a whole state. Within the field of environmental sciences neighborhood as the midpoint of the scale of place continuum, is the most recognized and researched scale of place attachment.⁶ In addition to attributes like density, materiality, or size of buildings, the most important aspect to distinguish a neighborhood is space. A neighborhood is a spatially limited area. An area in a scale that can be grasped and be overlooked – an area in a human scale.⁷

“For personal initiative and participation, the small entity (neighborhood) always provides a much better field of operations than the city as a whole.”⁸

INSIDENESS

A key factor for the development of attachment with a place is the definition of place itself. A place has to be identifiable as one. The easier it is to recognize it as a separate entity the stronger the identity. Edward Relph describes the identity of a place, in its sameness and unity as a characteristic that allows that [place] to be differentiated from others, and argues that the identity of a place results in a feeling of being inside or outside of it:

“If a person feels inside a place, he or she is here rather than there, safe rather than threatened, enclosed rather than exposed, at ease rather than stressed. Relph suggests that the more profoundly inside a place a person feels, the stronger will be his or her identity with that place.”⁹

INTERACTION

An important aspect of place attachment is the way in which humans interact with a constructed environment. Altman and Low define place attachment as a symbolic relationship with a place which is formed by giving the emotional meanings and common sense to a particular place or territory and that explains how people's percept of places and how they relate to them.¹⁰

The bond between a person and a place is stimulated by everyone's very own perception of it not by its actual physical appearance. How someone percepts of a place, therefore, depends not on aesthetic preferences but rather on personal experiences, memories, and social contacts connected to this place. A good place might not be necessarily aesthetically pleasing but provide the possibilities for social interaction, sensory stimulation, and discovery. This can be done through the creation of informal meeting places in the streets or the implantation of public programs like communal centers, churches, or sport facilities. Through the placement of playgrounds, benches or table tennis plates, or through sources for sensory experiences like water basins or flower beds.

Even though it up to everyone's very own experience with a place if it will be referred to as a good or a bad one, and not necessarily up to its physical appearance, its design can play an important role in creating the right circumstances to enhance social interaction or positive collective experiences. In addition, the scale and the formal appearance can help to create identity and make a place distinguishable from others. especially this aspect, the importance of formal coherence, is a central topic in Ungers and Koolhaas elucidation of 'Großform' and 'Cities within the City'.



GROSSFORM

The work with metaphors and analogies can be seen as an essential part of Oswald Mathias Ungers work in the 60's and 70's. In the preface of his publication *Morphologie*, first published in 1976, he starts with an explanation of the process of designing and thinking in images. He says there are two different ways of developing thoughts:

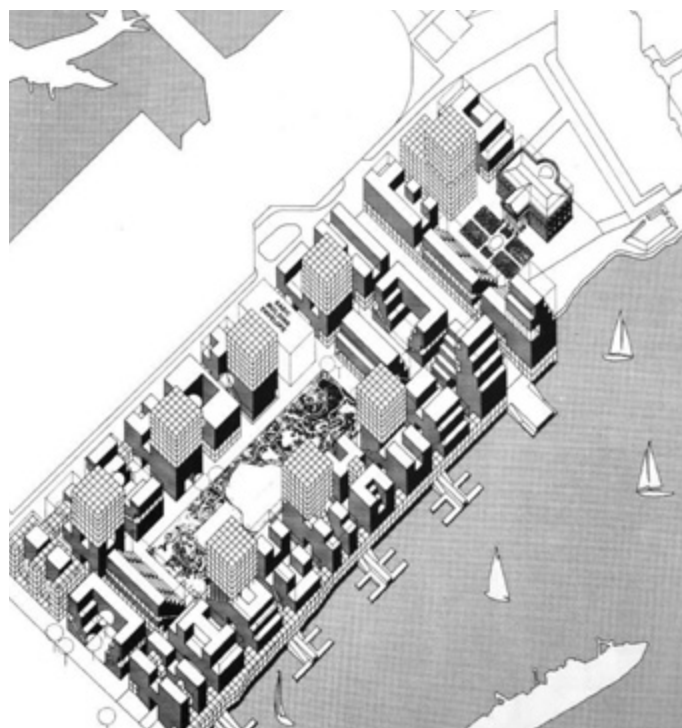
The first is the empirical way. Only concern about isolated facts deriving straight from practical experience. The other one „seeks out phenomena and experiences which describe more than just a sum of parts, paying almost no attention to separate elements which would be affected and changed through subjective vision and comprehensive images anyway. The major concern is not the reality as it is but the search for an all-round idea, for general content, a coherent thought, or an overall concept that ties everything together.“¹¹

The concept of designing in a metaphorical way, to describe the essence of an idea with images and analogies can be seen in direct connection with the theories he published 11 years earlier in *Großformen im Wohnungsbau*. 'Großform' which literally means 'large form' refers to the strength and clarity of a form rather than to its actual scale. The term is a concept about the metaphorical legibility of an architectural object. Absolute size is not the exclusive qualifying criteria for Grossform. For Ungers a house can be a Grossform, as much as a block, a district, or an entire city.¹²

„The cognitive process of “reading” architecture– less in an analogy to language but as a fundamental visual act – allows the architectural intervention to become a charged presence in the city by directly appealing to the observer’s capability for conceptual synthesis.“¹³ The metaphorical legibility or ‘Theme’ as Ungers calls it allows the architecture to become a distinguishable object within the urban fabric. Creating „a clear boundary to the outside, all relationships [...] are relegated to the inside of a complex contained and negotiated within the confines of the object and its inherent formal logic.“¹⁴

In *The City in the City – Berlin: A Green Archipelago* Ungers and Koolhaas search for those objects in the context of West Berlin. They tried to identify islands of a distinct structure and theme within the general urban fabric to reinforce and strengthen their character and create islands of urbanity in the disintegrating urban context of 1970th West-Berlin.¹⁵

I believe the contrast of structure and the legibility of the theme within a certain area or district or neighborhood is equivalent to the theory of inside- and outsideness Edward Relph describes in *Place and Placelessness*. It is about the ability of a place to be recognizable and to create an identity that allows people to relate to it.







OLYMPIC VILLAGE MUNICH

The Olympic village is located in the north of Munich on the side of the former military Airfield Oberwiesenfeld.

The housing complex was developed for the Olympic games 1972 and was hosting the athletes as well as media. Approximately 6000 people in 3500 units live in the Village today. It is one of Munich's most popular neighborhoods.

THEME

The Olympic village is an Island in the green. Along a backbone of tall linear towers, three fingers stretch out into the park landscape. In the south, a carpet-like structure completes the composition. By its isolated location, it becomes an easily readable enclave in the surrounding urban context.



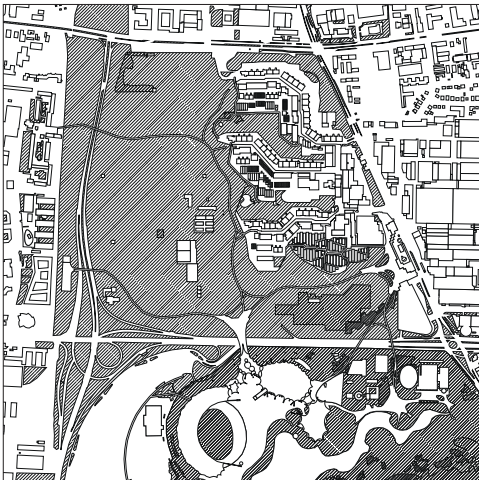
Aerial



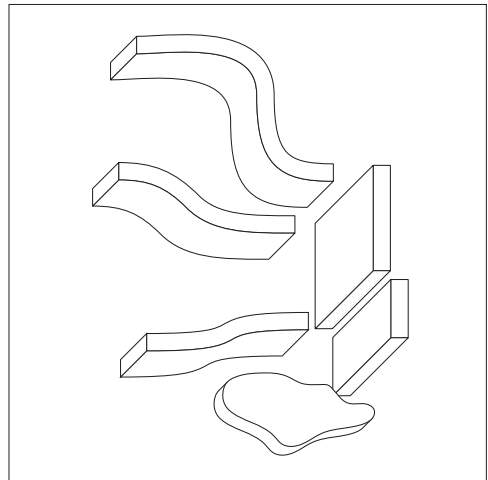
Site plan



Building mass



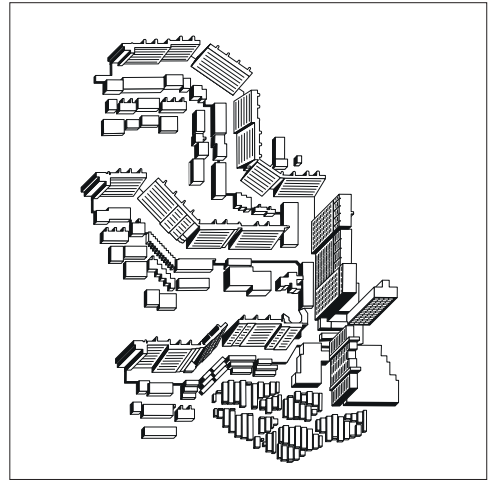
Park



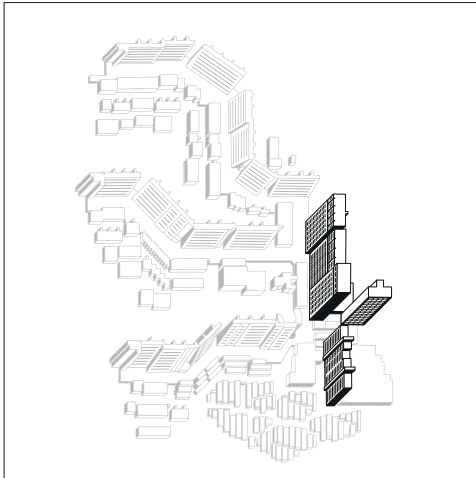
Composition

STRUCTURE

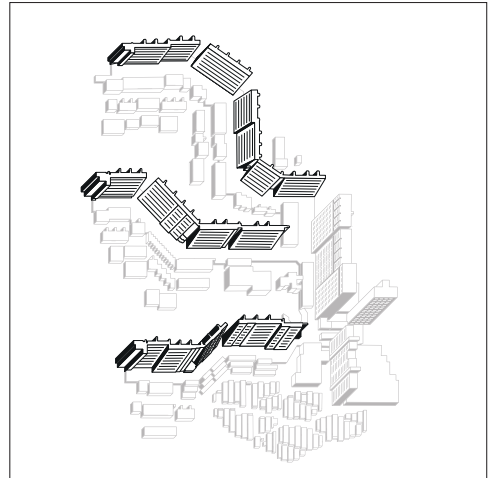
The building structure consists of four different typologies: Towers, terrace houses, row houses, and bungalows. The towers are the backbone of the complex. The Terrace houses articulate the fingers reaching into the park. The row houses lie at the foot of the terrace houses, scrambling into the park. The bungalows lay like a carpet at the southern end of the complex.



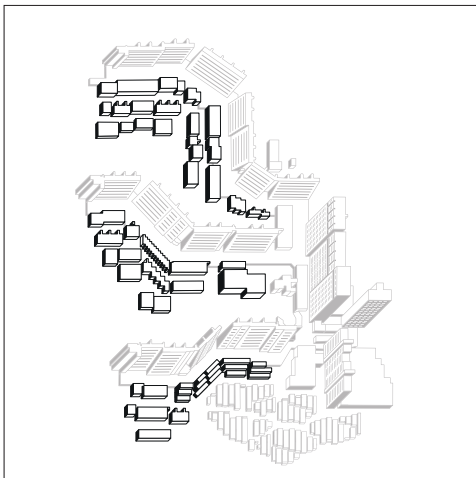
Axonometry



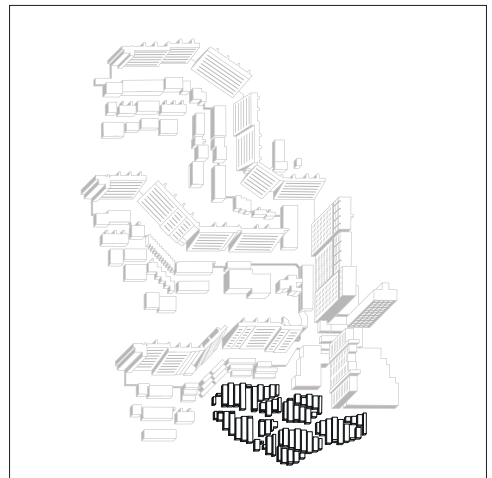
Towers



Terrace houses



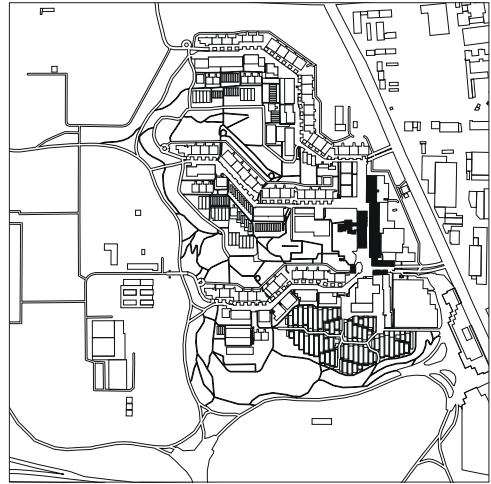
Row houses



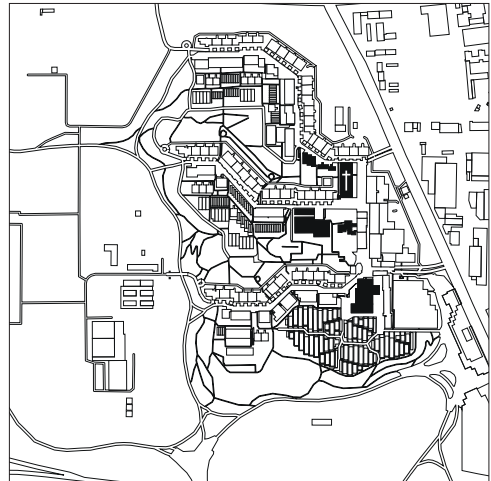
Bungalows

PROGRAM

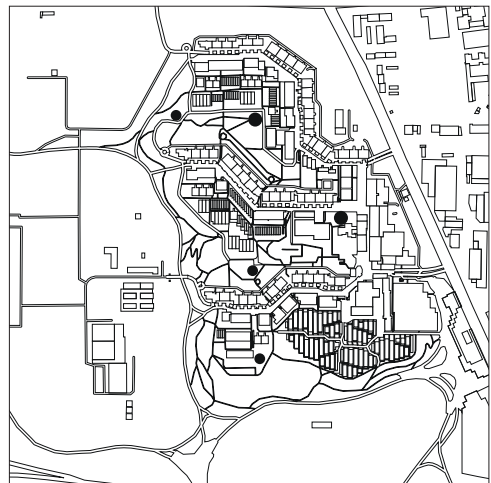
Besides the 3500 apartments, the complex includes a variety of public programs. Supermarkets, doctors, bars, and restaurants are located on the ground floors of the towers along the backbone. A school, a kindergarten, a church, and a community center with a library and study places spread out into the fingers. Sports and playgrounds are scattered even further out.



Retail, doctors and restaurants



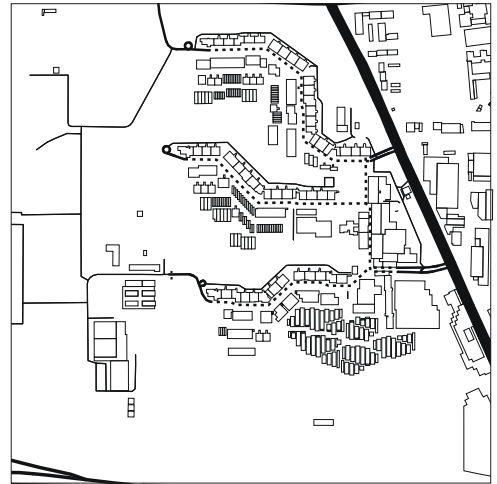
Public programs



Sports and play grounds

TRAFFIC AND ENTRANCES

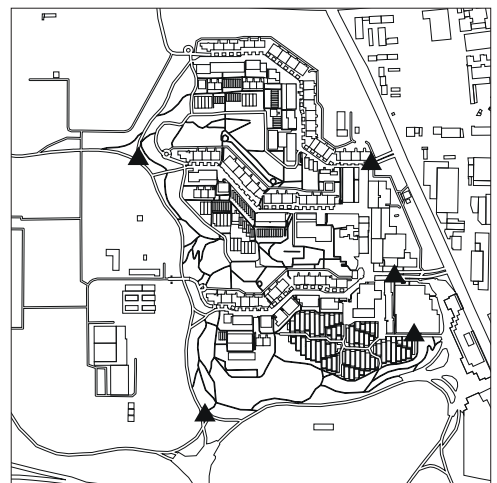
Pedestrian and car traffic are strictly separated. Cars can only enter in two places into the village and follow the access roads underneath the terrace houses into the fingers of the complex. All surface area is dedicated to pedestrians. The plinth around the buildings and along the backbone as well as an extended web of small passages and alleys allow the village to be discovered by foot.



Streets (dashed lines – underground)



Pedestrian walkways



Entrances

FORMAL LANGUAGE

Throughout the whole complex, a coherent architectural style is pervaded. All buildings are built in exposed concrete. All pedestrian zones are paved with red and yellow bricks. The same geometric patterns can be found in a fractal style in multiple scales – from the arrangement of building mass, through the layout of public spaces like the amphitheater to the balcony details in the terrace houses. The theme of obtuse angles defines the appearance of the entire neighborhood.



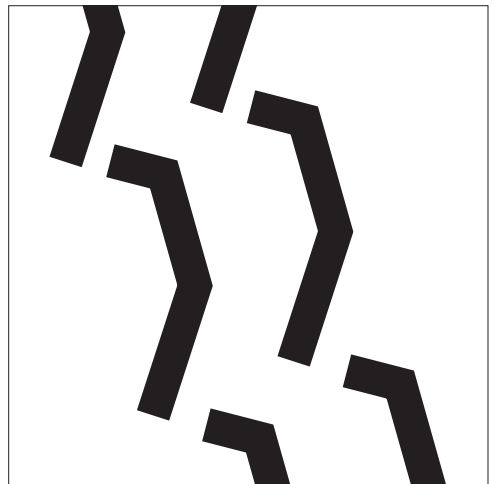
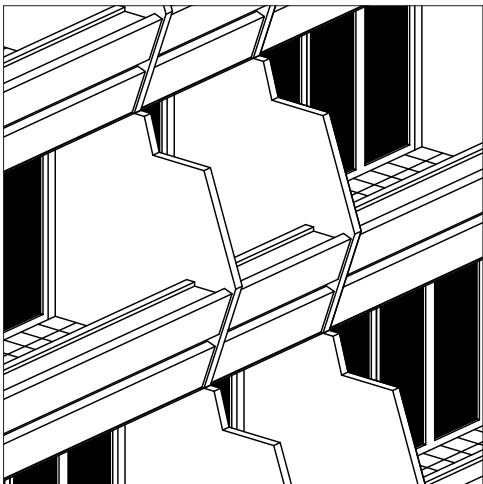
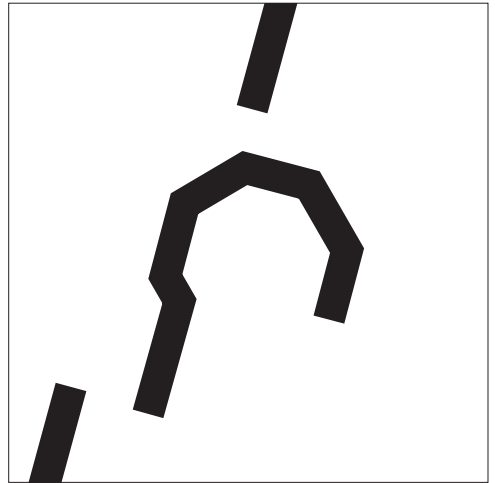
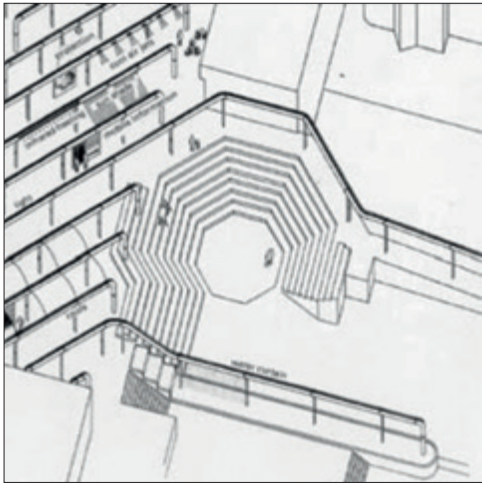
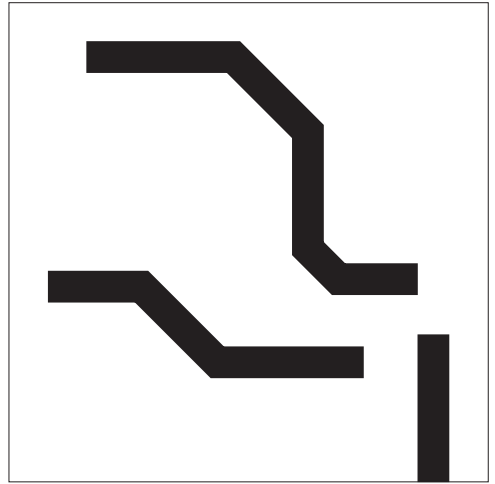
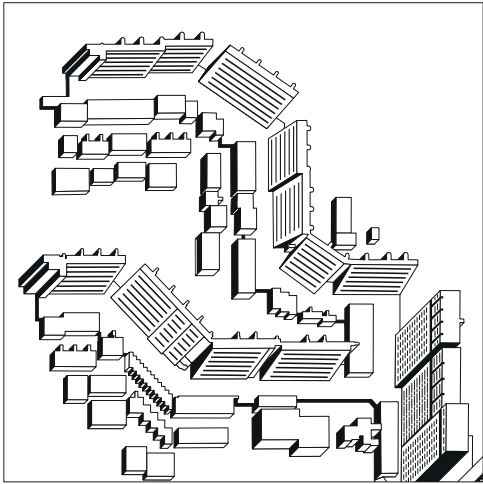
Arrangement of buildings



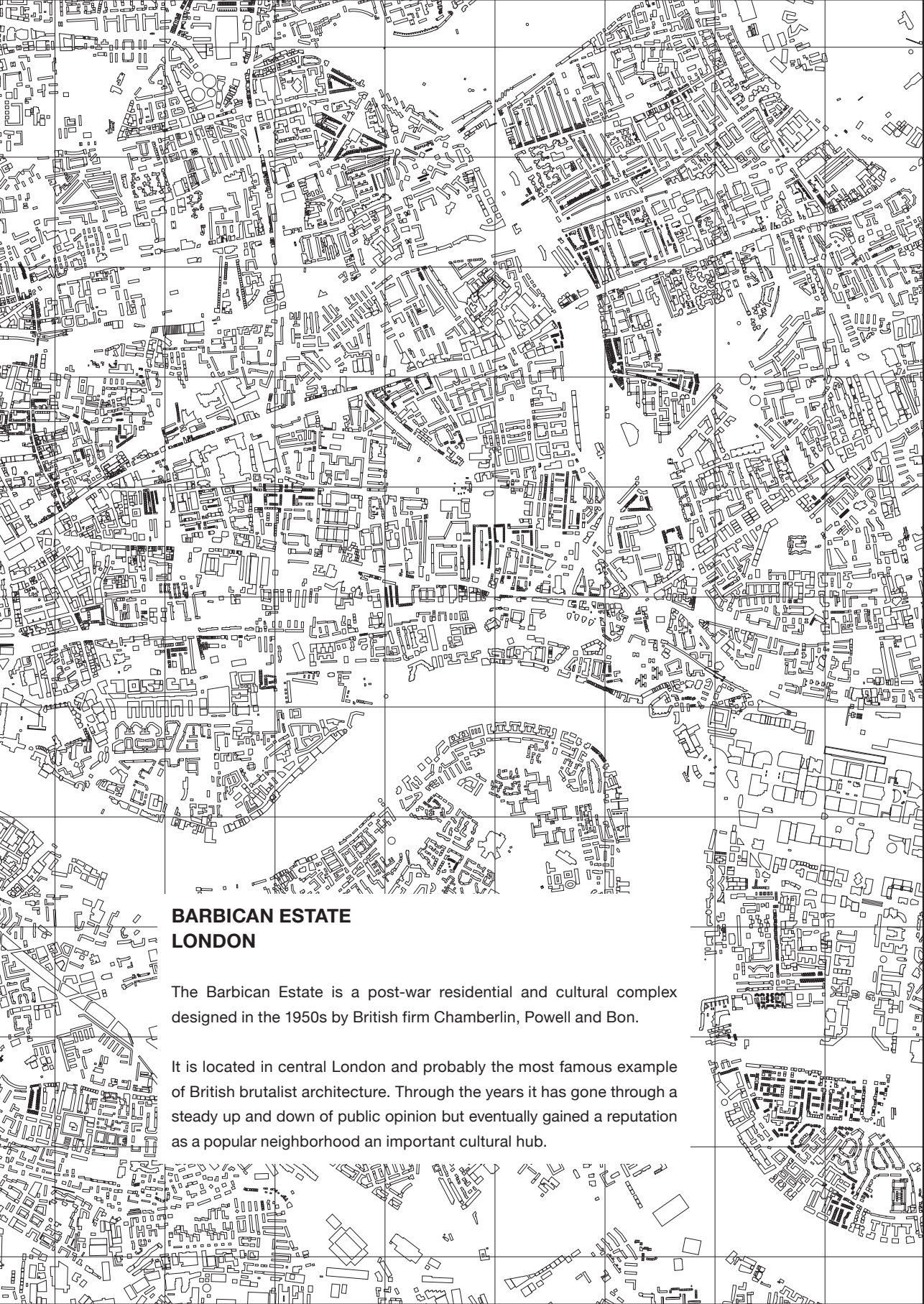
Layout of public spaces



Design of building details







BARBICAN ESTATE LONDON

The Barbican Estate is a post-war residential and cultural complex designed in the 1950s by British firm Chamberlin, Powell and Bon.

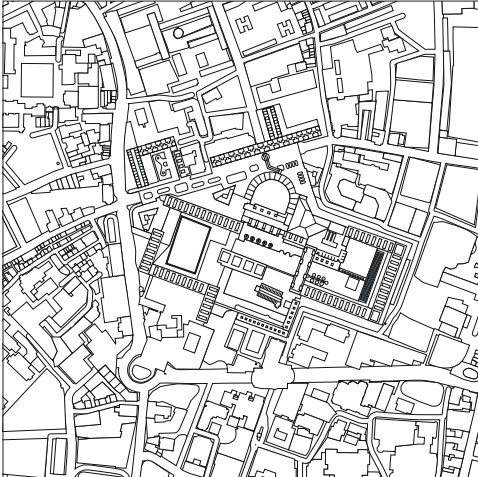
It is located in central London and probably the most famous example of British brutalist architecture. Through the years it has gone through a steady up and down of public opinion but eventually gained a reputation as a popular neighborhood an important cultural hub.

THEME

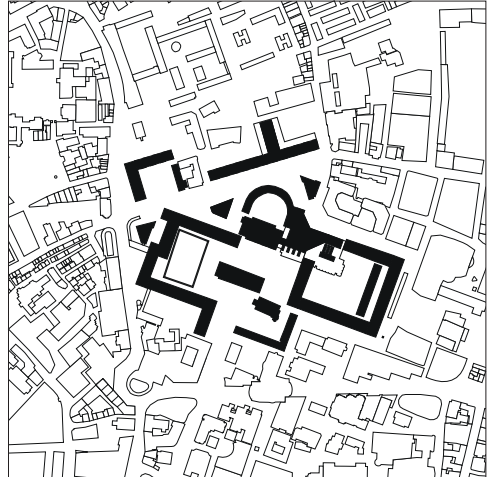
The Barbican estate is located in the dense urban fabric of central London. Multiple building volumes meander along the plot and create several relatively enclosed courtyards. A plinth is lifting the whole complex off the ground and creates an impermeable boundary between the city around the city inside. The unintuitive thresholds and entrances discourage people to just wander inside the Estate, making it almost a fortress within the City.



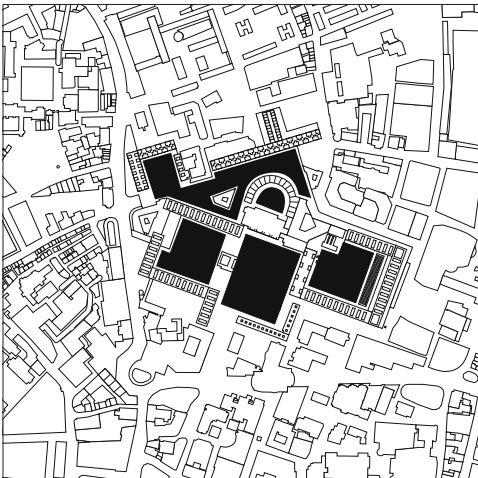
Aerial



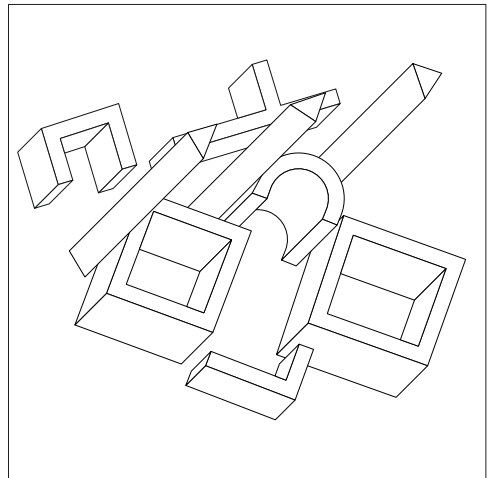
Site plan



Building mass



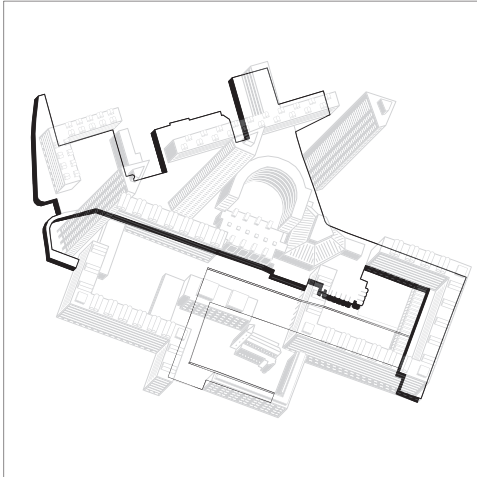
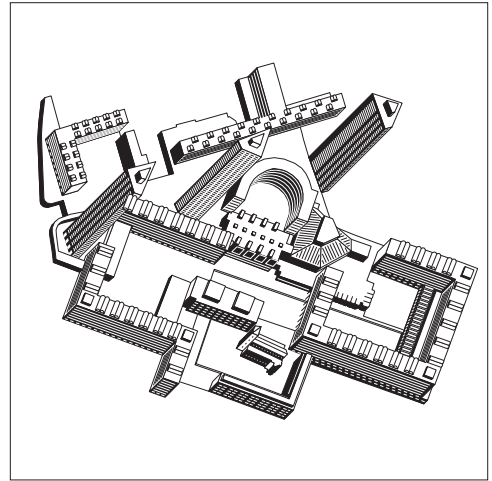
Courtyards



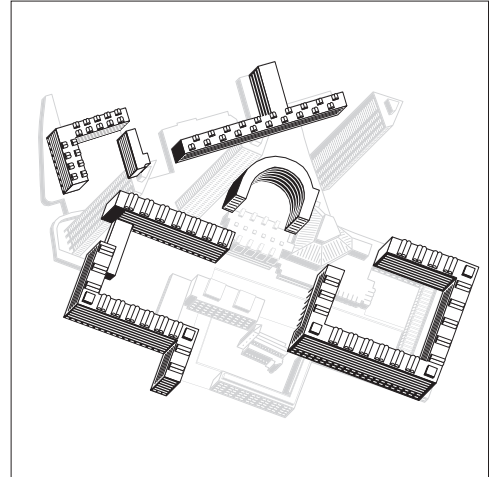
Composition

STRUCTURE

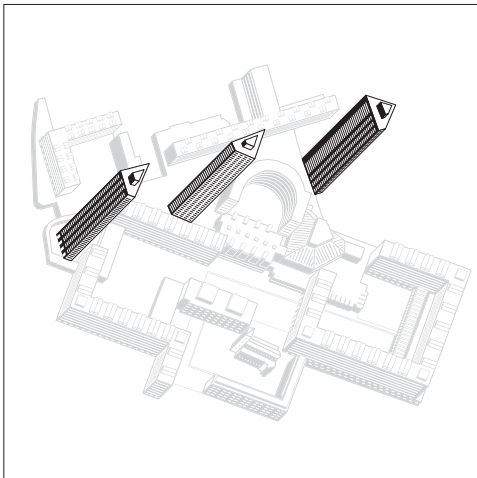
A plinth is lifting the complex out of its surrounding context. A series of meandering bands containing most of the Apartments create several courtyards. Three Towers rise above them and create visual orientation points in the city. A number of solitary volumes are scattered inside the courtyards.



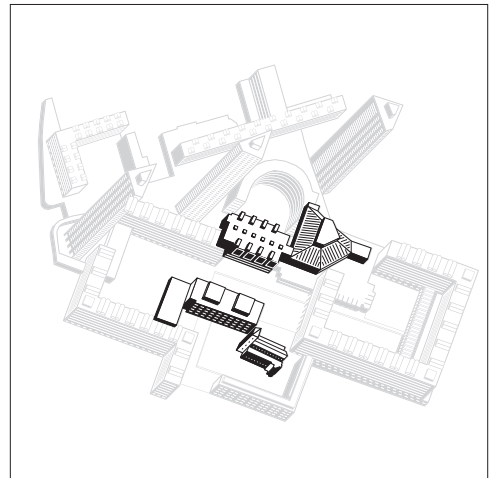
Plinth



Bands



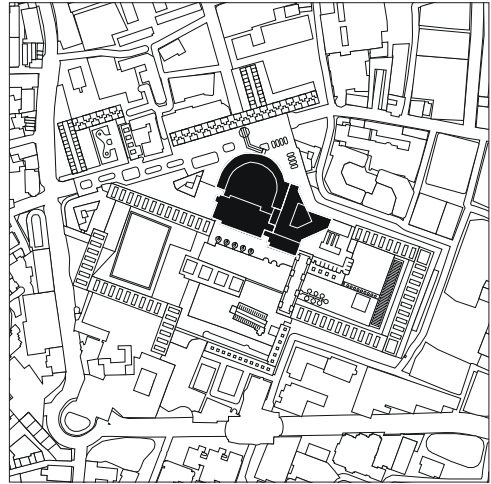
Towers



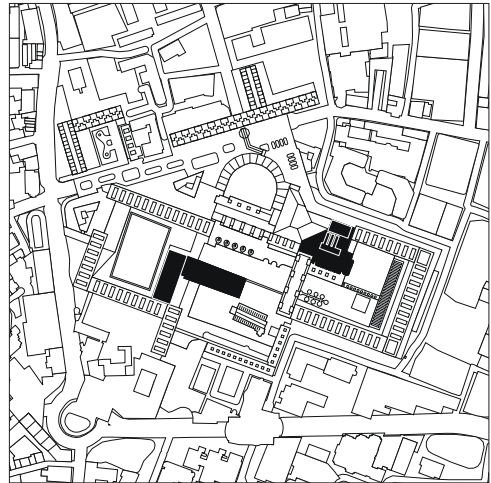
Infill

PROGRAM

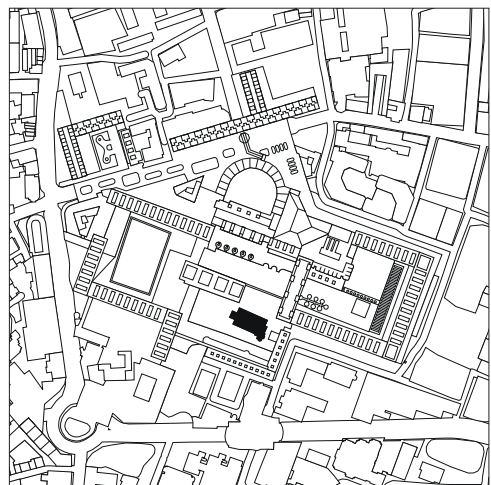
Next to the roughly 2000 apartments, the Barbican estate excels through its broad range of cultural programs. Next to the Barbican center, a performing arts center with cinemas a library, and a theater, the estate is home for the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and the City of London School for Girls. Also, the fully reconstructed St Giles Cripplegate Church is located in the heart of the complex.



Barbican Centre



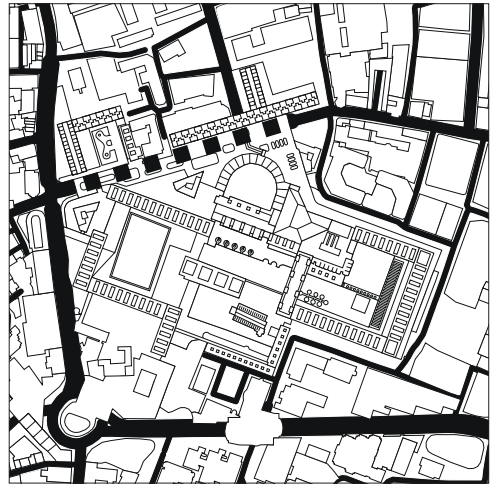
Schools



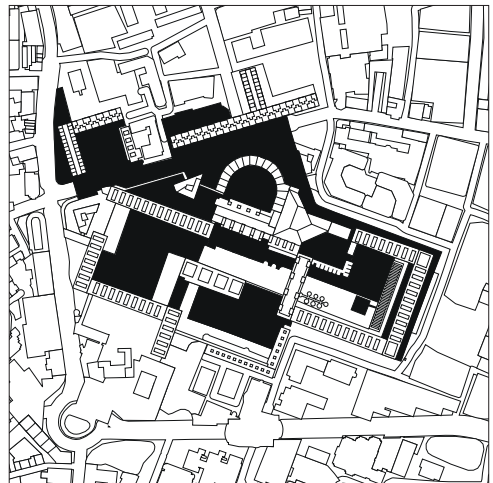
Church

TRAFFIC AND ENTRANCES

All streets lead around or go underneath the Barbican Estate. Cars are completely excluded, leaving the surface area to the pedestrians. A series of plazas and gardens make the interior of the complex one continuous space.



Streets (dashed lines – underground)



Pedestrian areas

FORMAL LANGUAGE

The semi-circle is a visual motive that reoccurs throughout the neighborhood over and over again. It can be found in multiple scales, from the composition of the building volumes through the design of the roofscape to layout of the plazas and gardens and even up to the shape of the windows and ventilation ducts in many of the buildings.



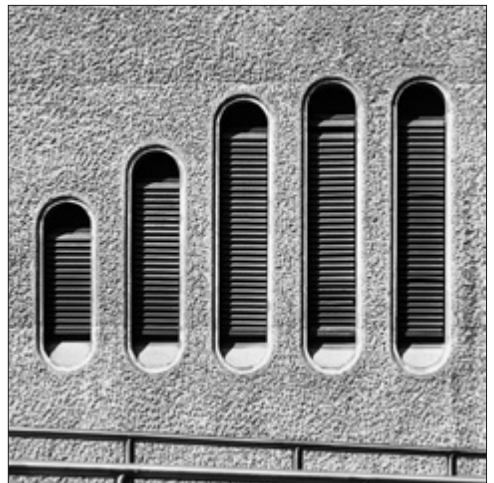
Arrangement of buildings



Layout of public spaces



Window shapes



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