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ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT This article traces the emergence, activity and legacy of the “Office for Urban Rehabilitation and Social Work,” an anti-authoritarian space opened in Kreuzberg in 1969 by a group of architecture students to prevent tenants’ eviction and buildings’ demolition. By investigating its production of papers, newspapers and architectural projects, the article illustrates the Office’s theoretical and practical contributions to the debate in the late 1960s and early 1970s around architectural preservation, urban transformation and citizens’ participation. It then analyses the contribution of a group of the Office’s activists who later critically reflected on its limitations and contradictions from an orthodox Marxist perspective.

Thesis

Between 1969 and 1970, a group of architecture students from the Technical University of West Berlin (TU Berlin) created the “Office for Urban Rehabilitation and Social Work” (the Office). Its aim was to organize grassroots resistance against the planned demolition of nineteenth-century tenement blocks in the Kreuzberg district of the

city. Despite its short duration and unsuccessful campaigns, this undertaking contributed to post-1968 radical architectural scholarship in at least three ways. First, the Office was possibly the earliest community space in West Germany that focused primarily on architectural and urban issues at a time when top-down demolition-and-reconstruction approaches still enjoyed a significant consensus. Second, following and developing the anti-authoritarian political mindset, it theorized a new role for architecture students and professionals in which social and political activism was prioritized over traditional design practice. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Kreuzberg's Office displayed an approach that has been extremely widespread since the 1970s, both in terms of architectural and political orientation, that of grassroots urban activism. In hindsight, however, rather than endorsing this legacy, the experience of the Office, and the self-criticism of the activists who took part in it, constitutes an early caution concerning the limitations of and contradictions within such urban campaigns.

Context

In the first decades after the Second World War, West Germany had a thriving industrial economy and a conservative cultural and political life. On one side, the "social market economy," merging welfare state and free-market principles, favored economic growth and spread wealth and optimism among large swathes of the population.¹ On the other, the 1956 ban on the Communist Party and the social-democratic anti-Marxist turn in 1959 meant the political arena lacked any real alternatives to the political-economic status quo established after the war.² Between 1966 and 1967, however, two events significantly altered this balance: an economic crisis and a political uprising.

The 1966-67 economic crisis caused the first slump to hit West Germany in the postwar period and resulted in significant social, political and economic changes. To counter a recession, the government passed new laws in favor of state intervention in the economy, while a reduction in the purchasing power of the working class led to a gradual increase of protests and strikes, almost unheard of in the early 1960s.³ In this context, in July 1967, police shot and killed the student Benno Ohnesorg while he was protesting against Shah Reza Pahlavi's visit to West Berlin. After Ohnesorg's murder, the activities of the West German Socialist Student Union (SDS) began to gather momentum, rapidly involving thousands of new members and causing the SDS to stand out as the only political group capable of advancing a leftist agenda on the national level.⁴ This West German expression of the "New Left" came to be known as the "anti-authoritarian" movement for the priority it gave to the fight against political and educational authorities, while exploring libertarian forms of co-habitation, organization and confrontation.⁵

The architecture students of TU Berlin responded promptly to the new anti-authoritarian political environment, organizing themselves as

part of the SDS national platform called “Critical University.”⁶ The first opportunity to manifest their dissatisfaction was during a symposium organized by Oswald Mathias Ungers to discuss architectural theory. While the symposium was intended to explore the “most significant social conditions, technical factors, historical experiences or formal aspects” of architectural theory,⁷ nothing could have been more at odds with the politically-charged mood among the attending students, who saw abstruse theoretical discussions as merely serving to justify the material requirements of the building sector – a dynamic they later labeled as “alibi-aesthetics.”⁸ This is why a group of students who subsequently claimed their allegiance to the “Critical University” invaded the lecture theater during the final discussion and unfurled a banner that declared: “All houses are beautiful. Stop building.”⁹ Through this rallying cry, they wanted to show how learning about the various theories of architecture in abstraction was not on their agenda. Instead, they were interested in the relationship between theory and practice, between what was professed in the university and realized in the city.¹⁰

This was the primary purpose of *Diagnose*, a large exhibition organized in September 1968 by a around one hundred TU architecture students and assistants exploring an anti-authoritarian approach to urban development.¹¹ The exhibition put together a significant amount of independent research which, while it did not provide a single and coherent point of view, was united by a fierce critique of current West Berlin building policy – policy based on the so-called “Urban Rehabilitation” (*Sanierung*) of derelict areas spared by the WWII bombings but blighted by overcrowding and substandard sanitary facilities and collective services.¹² The Urban Rehabilitation plan proposed the total demolition of 56,000 derelict homes in the center of Berlin, inhabited mainly by working-class communities who would be relocated to large, segregated, and at the time unfinished modernist estates on the outskirts of the city.¹³ The TU students showed how this model of demolition and mass relocation did not benefit tenants but only politicians, building cooperatives, building speculators and architects who stood to gain either economically or politically from the eviction of the working-class tenants to peripheral new estates. As powerfully synthesized in the poster designed for the exhibition, all four groups involved in the Urban Rehabilitation were tied up in the form of a modern swastika oppressing the city and, in particular, its public housing tenants (Figure 1).

Out of this exhibition emerged an image of the engaged architect as a researcher interested in studying the socio-economic make-up of the city rather than the conventional field of architectural design. The aim of this understanding was not epistemological but purely political: the knowledge produced was to be shared with the “affected communities” (*Betroffene*), enlightening them on the current misdeeds of the authorities and, if possible, persuading them to take collective action.¹⁴ A key influence on this anti-authoritarian understanding was philosopher Jürgen Habermas’ 1962 publication, “The Structural Transformation of the



Figure 1

In the *Diagnose* exhibition poster, the handshake between the West Berlin Senate, building cooperatives, building speculators and architects formed a swastika on the background of the Märkisches Viertel housing estate in West Berlin. Aktion 507, *Diagnose zum Bauen in West Berlin*, 1968, n.p. Exhibition poster (courtesy Klaus Brake).

Public Sphere,” in which he investigated the historical genesis of the public sphere in bourgeois culture and the way its forms of communication – such as parliamentary debate, editorial commentary, and rational-critical discourse in salons and journals – had been key for the establishment of bourgeois rule.¹⁵ For Habermas, these communicative practices were not merely incidental but constitutive of the public sphere itself, as they enabled the formation of collective opinion and political will. Expanding this theory, the students set out to create a new emancipated “public counter-sphere” (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*) outside traditional forms of bourgeois communication and representation to give voice to those who were being excluded from this channel.¹⁶ Alongside the exhibition, they organized a roundtable discussion with the people affected by Urban Rehabilitation to talk about their problems and potential mobilization strategies.¹⁷

After the *Diagnose* exhibition, which was given significant space in national mainstream media and triggered a vigorous debate around new housing estates, the politicization of the TU Architecture Faculty grew sharply.¹⁸ On one side, national and international tensions – a federal bill limiting constitutional social rights, the events of Paris 1968 and the Vietnam War – fueled students’ desire to rebel against the establishment.¹⁹ On the other, specific conditions favored the radicalization of the architecture students in West Berlin. In particular, thanks to the coincidental resignation of two full-time professors (Bernhard Hermkes and Ungers) and to the political leverage gained in the previous years, students and assistants were able to organize the “COOP,” an independent series of seminars aiming to provide a positive model of student-led education while simultaneously critically exploring the relationship between architecture and politics.²⁰ Throughout the winter semester of 1968–1969, the student-led activities of the Faculty expanded to include nineteen different seminars and 350 enrolled students – approximately half of the cohort of Masters students.²¹ Although most of the seminars did not produce significant material outputs, one of them did manage to explore a new relationship between architecture and politics, the seminar “COOP 3K Communication.”²²

Theory

The foundation stone of the seminar COOP 3K was the centrality of communication for the emancipation of the people affected by Urban Rehabilitation. Developing the anti-authoritarian concept of a “public counter-sphere,” the COOP 3K students set out to analyze the existing private and public forms of communication for tenants who were about to be evicted, and to put forward possible strategies to give them a voice. They divided communication into two models, trivial and constructive, the former being “decision-less, self-focused and private,” and the latter “decision-based, collective-focused and public.”²³ While constructive communication was accessed and used by bourgeois individuals and institutions, housing tenants were limited to trivial communication. Their

oppression was so overwhelming that “they ha[d] no concrete forms through which they could participate in the decision-making process [...], resulting in the general ignorance of those who might act politically” and “preventing the establishment of potential fields of experimentation.”²⁴

The roundtable discussion held during the *Diagnose* exhibition had demonstrated the limits of existing public communication mechanisms, which left no space for the emancipation of the people directly affected by Urban Rehabilitation. Because these communities lacked the social and cultural means of entering bourgeois discourse and making their voices heard, the goal of the students was twofold: to criticize the official Urban Rehabilitation approach of demolition and eviction of inhabitants to peripheral housing estates, and to find ways of altering the acceptable modes of public discourse. Given this dual aim, producing architectural designs for housing, however viable and moderate, would have only reinforced existing injustices, changing nothing in the way in which housing is supplied; equally, authoring harsh academic attacks against the status quo would not have been accessible to the affected public. Only by trying to establish direct contact with the urban masses – the inhabitants of the buildings under threat – and so concretely intervening in transforming their material situation could politicized architects escape their own destiny of participating in the demolition and reconstruction of the poorest areas in West Berlin. For this reason, the TU students proposed abandoning their faculty rooms and relocating their activity to those urban areas affected by the demolition and reconstruction processes.²⁵ In this way, they could establish a sound connection with the people under threat of eviction, simultaneously making sure that the rehabilitation plans were understood and raising social and political awareness about how to resist their implementation.

In West Berlin, this approach was possible in two areas, at the two ends of the Urban Rehabilitation process. One was Märkisches Viertel, the largest housing estate to which the evicted population was being moved and where it was being concentrated, in the far North of West Berlin, hard against the Wall.²⁶ The other was Kreuzberg, one of the poorest areas of the city in which the demolition program was taking place, much more central, but also in its own beleaguered enclave once the Wall divided the city.²⁷ The students of COOP 3K opted to move to Kreuzberg, which they saw not only as a nineteenth-century working-class borough where people were living in unhealthy conditions but also as a neighborhood bearing an urban image in which were embedded values of community and solidarity (Figures 2 and 3). Highly influenced by the studies by Marc Fried and Herbert Gans on the dramatic social and psychological costs of the Boston West End urban renewal of the late 1950s, the students argued that Kreuzberg’s cultural and environmental image could become pivotal in propagating popular opposition to the government’s version of so-called Urban Rehabilitation.²⁸



Figure 2

Exterior of nineteenth-century tenement blocks in Kreuzberg and neighboring boroughs, photographed in the 1960s. Heinrich Kuhn, *Armutszeugnisse. West-Berlin vor der Stadterneuerung in den sechziger Jahren*, Berlin: Braus, 2014. © Braus.

In the context of West Berlin in the 1960s, calls for preserving the nineteenth-century urban fabric were not unheard of. Still, they came mainly from the bourgeois intelligentsia, longing for the urban forms that expressed the economic success and apparent political stability of Prussian and imperial industrial capitalism.²⁹ For the COOP 3K students, the case was the opposite: Kreuzberg's stucco and plaster represented an antagonistic power now defeated in which "the sense of dominion is passed into oblivion, and the affective connection of the inhabitants to



Figure 3

Interior of nineteenth-century tenements blocks in Kreuzberg's neighboring boroughs, photographed in the 1960s. Heinrich Kuhn, *Armutszeugnisse. West-Berlin vor der Stadterneuerung in den sechziger Jahren*, Berlin: Braus, 2014. © Braus.

[the buildings] is now devoid of authority.”³⁰ This was not the same in new estates like Märkisches Viertel, where the modern image of standardized social housing carried with it an immediate relationship with the existing economic and political establishment. Because of its very obsolescence, Kreuzberg allowed “a libidinous occupation of the building,” which in turn could lead “the inhabitants to construct an identity with their district and, through this, with themselves.”³¹ This identity, however, was potential rather than actual, as it clashed with the

much more powerful demands of modern-day consumer society, oriented to create new needs and desires that could not be satisfied within Kreuzberg's environment. It was for this reason that the development of an "affective connection of the inhabitants with their district" – i.e., "the creation of community solidarity" – had to become itself "the goal of political agitation."³²

The reappraisal of nineteenth-century working-class urban values went hand in hand with reformulating another critical question of the New Left political debate: who was the revolutionary subject? In principle, the COOP 3K students accepted the Marxist centrality of class structure, according to which workers were the first target of systemic exploitation and therefore the bearers of potential emancipation.³³ However, against this principle they followed the lead of André Gorz, one of the most prominent Mittel European New Left intellectuals, who suggested that contemporary Western working classes were now integrated into and compliant with the capitalist system thanks to their ever-increasing consumer power.³⁴ For Gorz, "poverty [was] no longer represented by the bare economic satisfaction of biological needs [...], but rather by the interpersonal needs that reveal themselves in alienated activities and instrumental duties."³⁵

Claus Offe, a young sociologist from the Frankfurt School, and therefore familiar with Habermas's arguments concerning the bourgeois dominance of the public sphere, took the antagonism toward purely class-based politics (a conventional feature of the anti-authoritarian 1968 New Left) a step further.³⁶ Offe's "disparity theory" postulated that the most significant social conflicts no longer ran between classes but rather between variegated groups fighting to satisfy their needs and desires, independently of their social position. According to him, the most effective fuel for social struggle was the "disparity" between material conditions and psychological desires, between standardized rationality and unbridled humanity. Overshadowing the notion of class in favor of more variegated groups fighting for the satisfaction of their needs, Offe not only suggested the formation of interclass groups based on urban location, he also identified architecture and urbanism as being among the most promising fields of social struggle. Offe went on to argue that, because contemporary authorities were entirely absorbed in managing economy, geopolitics, and politics, they failed to keep up with the demands from more apparently marginal spheres of public life, such as architecture and the city. For this reason, within the struggles centered on architectural and urban issues, a "social subject of historical change" capable of establishing "new forms of social interaction and new forms of need satisfaction" could emerge.³⁷ However, this new social subject would not take form spontaneously but would have to be forged through the work of a "professionalized intelligence" that, thanks to its knowledge, would be able to offer a new definition of needs supposedly external to the constraints of the existing capitalist system.

Offe's theory provided a coherent expression for the anti-authoritarian political approach of the New Left, which posited that political attention should be focused on the student movement and, increasingly, on the urban question, while ignoring the potential revolutionary power of the working class. Offe's influence on the early ideas of the COOP 3K students is hard to overestimate. They recognized the revolutionary subject not in terms of class but as "the one who is most dramatically suspended between possible gratification drives and what society really offers to them."³⁸ They also identified impoverished, neglected and about-to-be-demolished Kreuzberg as the West Berlin site where it was best possible to intercept and radicalize this revolutionary subject. Finally, they tacitly recognized themselves as a "professionalized intelligence" capable of delivering to Kreuzberg's inhabitants the "formation and education [...] necessary to make them aware of their oppression."³⁹ For all these reasons, the students of the COOP 3K seminar concluded that "presenting a model or a plan to the inhabitants [...] makes sense only if they understand its context [...] and they dedicate themselves to the implementation of its content."⁴⁰ In the belief that it was only possible to change the Urban Rehabilitation process by being in immediate connection with the population affected by it, they abandoned the Faculty and moved their activity to Kreuzberg to engage with direct social and political activism.

Beyond the particular political interpretation focusing, through Offe and Gorz, on the identity of the social subject, the theoretical impact of this choice for the agency of architecture was far-reaching. For the COOP 3K seminar students, the power of architecture to change the world through design was not taken for granted; rather, it was inscribed in the historical and social relationships of the present and could effect change only if they, too, were transformed. Architecture could ameliorate certain features of the built environment, but it could not autonomously and unilaterally challenge the system in its most structural dimensions. Only direct social and political work could produce change, so the COOP 3K seminar students enthusiastically turned to it.

However, if, for COOP 3K, architecture had lost its prestigious role of imagining and designing alternative realities, it was not entirely sacrificed on the altar of politics. Architecture became "one medium, one of the instruments" engaged in political mobilization and social emancipation, an instrument that could visualize oppression and establish demands rather than produce immediate change.⁴¹ The students often referred to Ernst Bloch's notion of "concrete utopias," which anti-authoritarian philosopher Hans Magnus Enzensberger defined as ways of realizing "the articulation and the liberation of the needs and desires of the oppressed masses" – something the masses who, inasmuch as they were oppressed, were not able to do by themselves.⁴² For the COOP 3K students, concrete utopias were designs developed from their theoretical knowledge together with the inhabitants' practical

experience of alienation and oppression, pioneering new forms of social organization rather than architectural styles.

In this sense, the final aim of the students was best summarized in one of their favorite quotes from Mao Tse-Tung: “Discover the truth through practice, and again through practice verify and develop the truth.”⁴³ The instrument through which they would verify and develop their truth would be the “Office for Urban Rehabilitation and Social Work” (*Büro für Stadtsanierung und soziale Arbeit*) in Kreuzberg.

Practice

At the same time as the COOP 3K seminar was developing its theory, the West German political situation was shifting toward the left. After the events following the police killing of student Benno Ohnesorg in July 1967, the Socialist Student Union (SDS) gained a huge number of members among the university population.⁴⁴ As Ulrike Meinhof – at that time a well-known left-wing intellectual – phrased it, it was the moment for a transition “from protest to resistance.”⁴⁵ However, in a country that had not known significant forms of political radicalism in the previous twenty-five years, it was not clear how this should be accomplished. The central question was how to spread the SDS’s success outside the university, to include social groups other than students and intellectuals. After an intense debate, the idea of encouraging the formation of independent rank-and-file groups within the SDS prevailed, in the hopes that a more flexible and open structure would permit the involvement of a rapidly evolving social body. It would also allow for the coexistence of different political views, which were increasingly dividing the SDS at the time.⁴⁶

As a result, a series of “basis groups” (*Basisgruppen*) and heterogeneous political formations spread throughout West Germany. Although there was no unified ideology or centralized strategy, they were, in a manner, coherent with the prevailing anti-authoritarian approach. While the definition of the tasks and aims of the basis groups was largely left to the interpretation of each of them, Rudi Dutschke – one of the SDS leaders – provided a blueprint for their activity. He suggested the creation of “clandestine groups of four or six people at most” that “every year for four months carry out their political activity in the most crucial social places (factories, offices, shopping centers, farms, police stations, etc.) [...] where new needs, hopes, desires [...], and revolutionaries are born.”⁴⁷ Following Dutschke’s lead, most of the basis groups directed their activity toward recruiting new members, visiting factories and workplaces. Only a few groups – two out of twelve in West Berlin – opted for a more urban-oriented approach, launching a series of grassroots activities to organize tenants and workers based on their urban position.⁴⁸ Among them was the Kreuzberg Basis Group, founded at the end of 1968 by social science students from the West Berlin Free University, some of whom also took part in COOP 3K and established meaningful relationships with the architecture students and assistants.⁴⁹

They named themselves “Basis Group Rehabilitation District Kreuzberg” (*Basisgruppe Sanierungsgebiet Kreuzberg*), stressing from the very beginning the political centrality of the Urban Rehabilitation process.

At the turn of 1969, when COOP 3K decided to move to Kreuzberg, some architecture students took charge of the Basis Group activity, rented a former shop in one of Kreuzberg’s most popular squares and opened a community space (Figure 4). They canvased Kreuzberg’s homes and workplaces to inquire into social, economic and domestic issues and to raise awareness of the government’s imminent Urban Rehabilitation plans. At the same time, they launched a series of grassroots activities inside the Office that included a consultation service for tenants that were about to be evicted, a street theater, a social club for building industry workers, and recreational activities for children and families as well as open seminars and meetings to discuss the Office’s political strategy.⁵⁰ Part of this activity was recorded in the sporadic publication of a neighborhood newspaper called *Wohn-Info* (Housing-Info), a black and white single-sheet folded paper addressing the socio-economic, material and architectural aspects of the ongoing Urban Rehabilitation program (Figure 5).

Based on careful considerations of the broader industrial and financial context of this urban process – and in a partial distancing from Offe’s and COOP 3K’s focus largely on cultural issues – *Wohn-Info* showed how the Urban Rehabilitation plan served the interests of West German capitalism in at least three ways.⁵¹ First, it kept the obsolete West Berlin building industry alive, an industry which specialized in demolishing and replacing bombed buildings and was not suited to more complex interior refurbishment operations. Second, the Urban Rehabilitation plan offered a lucrative investment opportunity for financial capital that benefited from a very generous system of economic incentives, tax deductions and interest subsidies for financing the replacement building schemes. Third, *Wohn-Info* showed how Urban Rehabilitation operated in tandem with the so-called “White Circle” (*Weißer Kreis*), a policy that liberalized formerly capped private housing rents and brought them back into the free market economy.⁵² In their difference, both the White Circle and the Urban Rehabilitation program aimed at forcibly removing affordable housing for the working classes from the market to boost rent prices for existing landlords and create demand for new large-scale housing estates.

Furthermore, *Wohn-Info* illustrated the material consequences of the Urban Rehabilitation plan by showing how even perfectly safe buildings that had been entirely renovated in the 1950s had been or were about to be demolished. The newspaper also gave attention to the new urban motorways crisscrossing Kreuzberg, highlighting both their environmental consequences and their inevitable historical obsolescence. The plan for Berlin’s urban motorways dated back to the early 1950s, when cross-movement and joint development between East and West Berlin were still possible and when vast bombed areas of Kreuzberg were still available for lanes, ramps and roundabouts. As of 1969, because of

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Figure 4

This 1971 newspaper advert invited Kreuzberg's population to inform themselves about the current Urban Rehabilitation. Although the founding TU Architecture student group had already left Kreuzberg by this time, the image indicates what the Office would have looked like in 1969. Büro für Stadtsanierung und soziale Arbeit, *Kreuzberg Stadtteilzeitung* 2 (1971): 22. Archive of the Friedrichshain Kreuzberg Museum, Berlin.

WOHN-INFO 2

Informationen zur Wohnungs- und Baupolitik, herausgegeben vom Büro für Stadtsanierung und soziale Arbeit; Berlin 36, Wrangelstr. 5 (Tel. 613002) und Naunynstr. 48

Protestkundgebung gegen Kahlschlag-Sanierung Grundstückspekulation und Mieterhöhung.

Mittwoch, den 26. März, um 17.30 Uhr Mariannenplatz (an diesem Tag feiert der Verein der Haus- und Grundeigentümer die Einführung des Weißen Kreises, Ernst-Reuter-Haus, Straße des 17. Juni)



Der weisse Geier über Bethanien

Es stimmt: Das Krankenhaus am Mariannenplatz besteht seit 120 Jahren. Noch ein Jahr gibt ihm der Senat. Dann soll es einem Wohnbau weichen, den die Architektin Kressmann-Zschach für die Stiftung Bethanien errichtet.

Dabei hat der Senat in den letzten zwölf Jahren mehr als 8 Mill. DM aus öffentlichen Mitteln für Modernisierung und Ausbau bezahlt. Noch 1967 wurde eine moderne Heizzentrale für über eine Mill. DM installiert.

Seit Jahrzehnten stellen die Bethanien-Schwester ihre Arbeitskraft billig zur Verfügung: Auf jedes der 400 Betten kommt ein Pflegesatz von DM 35,— pro Tag. Die städtischen Krankenhäuser brauchen DM 60,—. Trotzdem lehnt der Senat es ab, den mittlerweile unhaltbar niedrigen Pflegesatz von Bethanien auf 45,— zu erhöhen.

Der Abriß von Bethanien ist für Juni 1970 vorgesehen. Die Stiftung Bethanien hofft, aus der Sanierung das Beste herauszuschlagen: Sie bleibt Eigentümerin des Grundstückes und verwendet die Mieteinnahmen aus der dichten

stern, die nur zum Teil im Waldkrankenhaus Spandau tätig sein werden.

DIESE ABMACHTUNGEN WURDEN IN GEHEIMEN VERHANDLUNGEN ZWISCHEN DER STIFTUNG, WOHNBAUGESELLSCHAFTEN UND SENATSBEHÖRDEN ÜBER DIE KÖPFE DER BETROFFENEN HINWEG BESCHLOSSEN!

Die Schwestern fühlen sich von dem Schwesternrat übergangen, der sie in der Stiftung vertreten soll.

Die Chefarzte Schulz und Dorka sind der Auffassung: Das Gangsystem in der Anlage von Bethanien entspricht mit seinen kurzen Wegen eher modernen Anforderungen als die in den letzten hundert Jahren errichteten Pavillonbauten wie zum Beispiel das Virchow-Krankenhaus.

Die Ärztekammer sowie eine Gruppe von Bauhistorikern und Architekten haben sich gegen den Abriß von Bethanien ausgesprochen. Sie schickten an den Senat eine Petition, in der sie die verschiedenen Gründe darlegten, die für die

Figure 5

The cover of the newspaper *Wohn-Info* 2, 1969, invited readers to join the protest against demolition of the Bethanien Hospital, as well as against the land speculation and rent increase that would follow. Büro für Stadtsanierung und soziale Arbeit, *Wohn-Info* 2 (1969): 1. University Archive of the Technische Universität Berlin (Courtesy Helga Fassbinder).

the construction of the Berlin Wall, and because Kreuzberg's empty sites were now largely filled, these conditions no longer existed; the motorway project had no rational explanation other than the destruction of affordable housing.

Finally, *Wohn-Info* published concrete architectural solutions to counter the idea that demolition and reconstruction were the only way to deal with derelict housing stock.⁵³ For instance, since in Kreuzberg's nineteenth-century tenement blocks the most severe breach of sanitary standards was the lack of toilets, the Office promoted the "Sanitary Cell" [*Sanizell*], a self-sustaining toilet that could be clipped onto the building's rear façade and thus supply each flat with the necessary sanitary services externally, without the need for major refurbishment (Figures 6 and 7). The implementation of this cell – whose design resonates with contemporary projects such as the "Living Pod" of Archigram's David Greene (1966), or Nicholas Grimshaw's "Service Tower" projects (1967) – would permit cost- and time-effective updating of buildings' sanitation, thus avoiding the need to evict tenants and demolish buildings.⁵⁴ In its avant-gardism, the "Sanitary Cell" demonstrated how even the most technical and apparently neutral goal – providing a toilet for every flat – could be pursued very differently depending on the social and political premises involved. For the West Berlin authorities, such provision involved complete demolition and reconstruction of the building. To accomplish the same outcomes for the sake of the tenants rather than the building industry, other technologies were necessary and, in the case of the "Sanitary Cell," arguably already available.

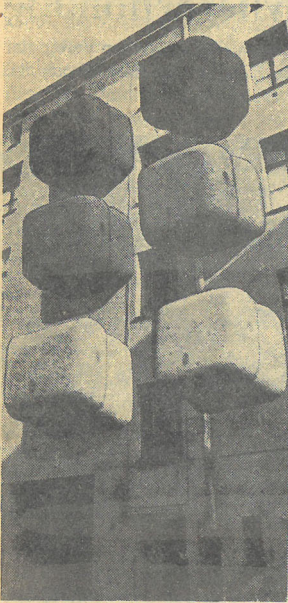
During the first few months of the Office's activity, the political situation continued to shift toward the left. A wave of wild strikes paralyzed West German industrial production in September 1969, succeeded in obtaining a considerable pay rise for millions of workers and gave new centrality to the conflict between capital and labor.⁵⁵ This turn in the industrial relationship was also reflected in party politics, where in 1969 the Social Democratic Party (SPD) won the federal elections for the first time in postwar history, appealing to people's desire for greater democracy and equality.⁵⁶ Conversely, in the extra-parliamentary arena, a series of political defeats and the final disintegration of the SDS resulted in new forms of organization. An increasingly significant part of the student movement started to join newly-formed non-revisionist Marxist parties – parties that identified with the political line of the USSR or China – confident that a more disciplined structure based on the centrality of the working class and its revolutionary organization would overcome the limitations of the anti-authoritarian, less class-based approach that had dominated in the preceding few years.⁵⁷

Kreuzberg was initially marginal to this turbulent social environment. In fact, until the end of the 1960s, there was no noticeable dissatisfaction with the Urban Rehabilitation program, whether from amongst Kreuzberg's residents or from elsewhere. The first demolitions

Der Senat besteht darauf: Die für Berlin durchschnittliche Verweil-Dauer eines Patienten von gegenwärtig 36,5 Tagen soll auf 22 Tage herabgesetzt werden. Deshalb hat die Verwaltung kein Interesse daran, ein Krankenhaus zu erhalten,

das besonders geeignet ist, um langfristig Kranke stationär zu behandeln. Dies aber ist ein notwendiger Schritt, um die Erforschung von Alterskrankheiten voranzutreiben, die un-
leugbar von hoher Bedeutung für Berlin sein wird.

Erhaltung niedriger Mieten durch Sanitärzellen



Fotomontage eines
sanierten Gebäudes

Nach Vorstellungen der Senats-Bauverwaltung sind nur etwa 3 % des Kreuzberger Sanierungsgebietes erhaltenswert (d. h. von 16000 Wohnungen). In der Gitschiner und in der Wassertorstraße wurde bereits mit dem Abriß von Häusern begonnen, deren Modernisierung erwiesenermaßen lohnend gewesen wäre.

Entgegen einzelnen Gutachten hält der Senat daran fest, Bauten mit unzulänglichen sanitären Einrichtungen auch bei gutem Erhaltungszustand abzureißen, mit der Begründung, die Kosten für den Einbau von Bädern und Toiletten seien zu hoch.

Nun gibt es in Berlin 300000 Wohnungen ohne Bad. Selbst nach den Plänen des Senats sollen jährlich nur 5000 von diesen Wohnungen durch neue ersetzt werden.

So radikal die Stadtsanierung in einzelnen Gebieten durchgeführt wird: Zur allgemeinen Verbesserung der miserablen Wohnverhältnisse wird diese Methode Jahrzehnte brauchen.

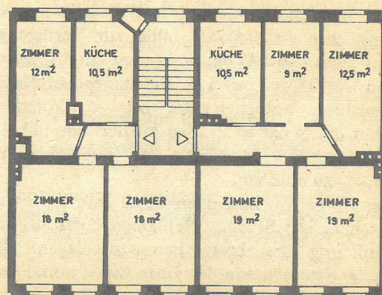
Doch auch das jahrelange Warten auf menschenwürdiges Wohnen bleibt für viele ohne Erfüllung:

1. Die Wohnungsmieten des von der GEWOBA sanierten Gebietes werden zu hoch sein für die gegenwärtigen Bewohner, zum Großteil Arbeiter und Arbeiterrentner. Wo heute eine 3-Zimmer-Wohnung 100,— DM kostet, wird nach der Sanierung der dreifache Preis verlangt.
2. Neben den Großprojekten für den Neubau führen die Sanierungs-Gesellschaften, die die Grundstücke aufkaufen, selber keine Modernisierungen durch. Da billigere Sanierungsmethoden vernachlässigt werden, werden viele Bewohner der billigen Altbauten gerade durch die Sanierung, die ihnen gelten sollte, aus ihrer gewohnten Umgebung vertrieben.

Architekten des BÜROS FÜR STADTSANIERUNG UND SOZIALE ARBEIT haben ein Projekt ausgearbeitet, das die Verbesserung der Wohnverhältnisse, speziell der sanitären Einrichtungen für eine geringe Mieterhöhung gestattet:

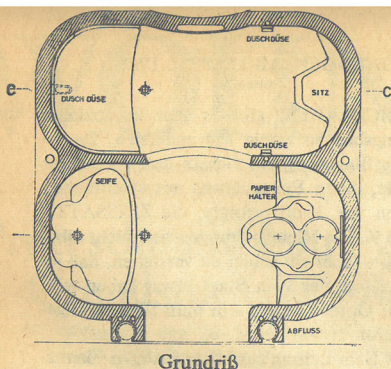
SANIZELL ist eine selbsttragende Kunststoffeinheit, die mit Bad, WC und Waschbecken ausgestattet ist. SANIZELL wird an die Hofseiten der Gebäude angehängt (oder mit einem Stahlgerüst abgestützt). SANIZELL wird an die Installationsstränge angeschlossen und ist betriebsfertig.

VOR DER SANIERUNG

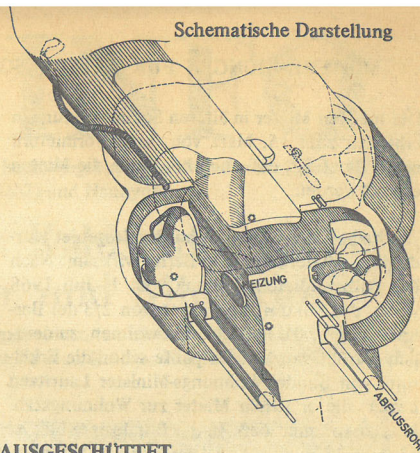


Figures 6 and 7

An article promoting the implementation of the *Sanizell* or "Sanitary Cell" as a way to maintain low rents. Urban Rehabilitation and Social Work. Büro für Stadtsanierung und soziale Arbeit, *Wohn-Info* 2 (1969): 2-3. University Archive of the Technische Universität Berlin (Courtesy Helga Fassbinder).



Grundriß



Schematische Darstellung

HIER WIRD DAS KIND NICHT MIT DEM BADE AUSGESCHÜTTET

Bei der Befestigung von SANIZELL an der Gebäude-Außenwand ist kein kostspieliger Umbau im Inneren erforderlich.

SANIZELL ist ebenso leicht vom Gebäude abzulösen und bei Abriß des Hauses anderswo weiterzuverwenden. Der städtische Sanierungsträger soll die Zelle, die er in Eigenproduktion herstellt, an die Bewohner von Sanierungsgebieten vermieten. Die kostensparende Weiterverwendung der Zelle ist dadurch gesichert.

SANIZELL hat eine Lebensdauer von 50 Jahren.

SANIZELL ist bei serienmäßiger Produktion für DM 5000,— herzustellen.

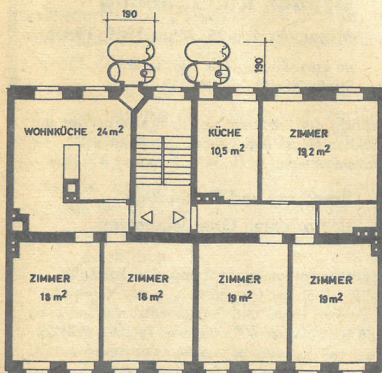
Die zinslose Vermietung von SANIZELL wird pro Wohn-Einheit zu einer Mieterhöhung von DM 10,— führen.

Bei SANIZELL weiß man, wofür die Mieterhöhung verlangt wird.

EIN TECHNISCHES GUTACHTEN ÜBER DAS PROJEKT SANIZELL WURDE VOM SENAT VERWEIGERT.

Durch planmäßige Vernachlässigung ganzer Wohngebiete will er Auftrags-Reserven für Baufirmen sichern, indem er die Nachfrage auf dem Wohnungsmarkt durch Umsiedlung der Bevölkerung gewaltsam in die Höhe treibt.

NACH DER SANIERUNG Küche zu größeren Einheiten verbunden



In den nächsten Wochen entscheidet die Verwaltung über

1. den Verlauf der Autobahn-Tangenten Süd und Ost im Sanierungsgebiet, der die Zerstörung des Grünzuges vom Urbanhafen bis zum Oranienplatz und fast der gesamten Naunynstraße mit sich bringen soll;
2. projektierte Wohnbauten von Kressmann-Zschach und Weber für die Gegend von Bethanien.

Bereits das Projekt SANIZELL wurde vom Senat als Politikum abgelehnt. Der Senat kann es sich offenkundig nicht leisten, den massenhaft Betroffenen wirklich zu helfen.

Er wird es sich aber ebensowenig leisten können, einen Stadtteil gegen den Willen der Bewohner abzureißen.

- Demonstriert Euren Willen bei der Protest-Kundgebung auf dem Mariannenplatz am 26. März, Beginn 17.30 Uhr.

and evictions were accomplished without any visible opposition. This was for both general and local reasons: in West Germany, particularly in West Berlin, a robust anti-communist feeling dominated the public discussion, strengthening support for the existing parliamentary parties.⁵⁸ In particular, Kreuzberg was a social-democratic stronghold, with 57.6% of voters supporting the SPD (Social-Democratic Party of Germany) in 1971, when the rehabilitation program was at its peak.⁵⁹ Moreover, in the late 1960s, Kreuzberg was not yet the migrant and student district that it would become at the end of the 1970s, it was a working-class area with an aging – and shrinking – population, and with a bohemian allure related to its decaying nineteenth-century tenement blocks scheduled for demolition.⁶⁰

In its first months of activity, the Office did not seek confrontation with the authorities. Its demand was “the discussion of alternative building plans with the communities who are affected by the [Urban Rehabilitation] plans,” as it was these communities who had “the right to co-decide on the issues that concern[ed] them.”⁶¹ However, Kreuzberg’s inhabitants did not appear very interested in exercising this right. This was manifest in December 1969 during the so-called Prinzessinnenstraße campaign. More than one hundred tenants were suddenly delivered a mass eviction notice without being offered any affordable alternative accommodation. It seemed as though this situation could be the perfect testing ground for the Office’s political strategy, since it involved a large group of tenants who would surely be ready to protest against their own pressing case of housing eviction.⁶² To raise awareness of the issue, the Office launched a second newspaper, *Neuer Kietz* (New Neighborhood) (Figure 8).⁶³ Referring to the contemporaneous rent strike of tenants against the GLC (Greater London Council) in London, the newspaper’s editorial line stressed that, in order to have a say in dealing with the authorities, tenants would have to challenge the evictions collectively, form a union and launch a rent strike.⁶⁴ It is interesting to notice how, in this dramatic phase, the Office’s communication strategy went back to prioritizing the affective connection between Kreuzberg and its inhabitants rather than the economic and political features of the Urban Rehabilitation project, drawing nearer to the first ideas exposed in the COOP 3K seminar. Most of the articles in *Neuer Kietz* focused on the impact of the Urban Rehabilitation on Kreuzberg’s cultural context, singing the praises of its community life and painting a romanticized picture of garden squares, public facilities and corner pubs which they set against the alienation and the destitution of the new social housing estates.

The Office’s campaign was unsuccessful in mobilizing the tenants against eviction. The Prinzessinnenstrasse buildings were promptly demolished, and tenants dispersed throughout the city from the following year. After this defeat, which came at the end of more than one year of campaigning in Kreuzberg, the architecture students who had launched the Office abandoned Kreuzberg and returned to university to complete

their degrees. They also reflected critically on their experience (Figure 9).⁶⁵

Criticism and Self-Criticism

From its early days, the Office attracted a mix of criticism. Among the positive critiques, the most notable was Offe's mention of it as the most constructive and effective Basis Group active in West Germany.⁶⁶ Some of the most negative criticisms of the Office were raised in the TU Architecture Faculty by other student movement groups. Among them was the "Baukoop" (Building Cooperative) group – led by two other members of the COOP seminars, Hartmut Frank and Bernd Jansen – which organized an alternative seminar on Kreuzberg's Urban Rehabilitation, abandoning the tropes of anti-authoritarian ideology and developing an architectural perspective more in line with the growing Marxist sentiment.⁶⁷

Unlike the Office, the Baukoop's judgment on the physical condition of Kreuzberg's housing stock was overwhelmingly negative: the area to be demolished was in fact "objectively speaking miserable, [...] almost a slum."⁶⁸ For the Baukoop's members, its lack of sanitation was a problem beyond repair. They commented that the few cultural and esthetic qualities of the neighborhood – the prevalence of local pubs or the beauty of historic façades – had no appeal to the working class, who saw in the depleted status of Kreuzberg's architecture and infrastructure only the reminder of their material deprivation and social segregation. As a result, wrote Baukoop, the inhabitants evidently felt a "negative connection" with Kreuzberg. It was only bourgeois students – those not actually exposed to the economic shortages connected with Kreuzberg's image – who became "victims of their own romanticism" in their belief that it was possible to mobilize deprived tenants by appealing to their affective connections with a dilapidated environment.⁶⁹

The Baukoop disagreed with the Office's cultural reading and focused on the material needs of Kreuzberg's population. According to the Baukoop's analysis, the working class lived in Kreuzberg only because of the low rent, and not for any esthetic or cultural reasons; they wanted to live in modern bourgeois neighborhoods, provided with all private comforts and public facilities, regardless of the architectural style of buildings. As a result, a viable alternative model for Kreuzberg had to be based on two essential features: low rents and high living standards. Through a detailed comparison of all available options, the Baukoop seminar highlighted how the only possible strategy to preserve low rents, solve sanitary problems and, above all, render Kreuzberg as attractive as other "high-end" neighborhoods, was to demolish the whole area and rebuild it under public ownership. In this way, it would be possible not only to fulfill the inhabitants' needs and desires but also to progressively sideline private market rents thanks to the plentiful supply of new public flats that would be available.



NEUER KIETZ

Herausgegeben vom BÜRO FÜR STADTPLANUNG UND SOZIALE ARBEIT
80 56, Granienplatz 15/Hauptstr.48 Tel. 61 30 02

MASSENKÜNDIGUNG IN DER PRINZESSINENSTRASSE

SITUATIONSBERICHT AUS DER PRINZESSINENSTRASSE

Mehr als 100 Mietern in der Prinzessinnenstraße 20 bis 24 flatterte die Kündigung am 1. Dezember 69 auf den Tisch des Hauses. Jeder hat einen Mietvertrag - also teilen die Eigentümer denen einsein mit: Es ist Schluss, so steht es.

Natürlich sind immer schon Mieter gezogen. Die Höhe der Abfindungen bei der "Umsetzung" steigt aber - für wen beide etwas heraus springt und für wen nicht. Weil die Hauseigentümer darauf verzichteten, ihre Mieter weiter auszuhebeln, bekommen sie von der GEMEINSCHAFTLICHEN FÖRDERUNG UND WOHNUMWANDLUNGSGESellschaft (GFW) nochmal den Kaufpreis drauf - das ist gewöhnlich ein Mehrfaches der üblichen Miet-Einnahmen.

Die Mieter aber werden abgespielt mit Umzugsgeld und einer "Sicherheits-Franchise" von 750,- DM für Elektro-Heizkörper und Gardinen (die für's Kleinstbüro).

Die Zukunfts-Angebote, die den Mietern so individuell gemacht werden, sind überall dieselben: Wohnungen, die weit draußen liegen und das Dreifache kosten, nur dafür daß sie die mindesten Ansprüche an ein bequemes Leben in der Wohnung erfüllen.

Wer die teuren Neubau-Mieten nicht zahlen kann, auf den wartet die Kasse und nicht letzte Mieterhöhung schon ab Januar 1970 (für Wohnungen, die mindestens innen-toilette haben). Nicht zuletzt wohnen viele Areuburger in verhältnismäßig unkonfortablen Wohnungen, weil sie mehr Geld für die Miete nicht aufbringen können oder wollen.

Die Massen-Kündigung in der Prinzessinnenstraße zeigt, für wen der "sanft sanierende Betrieb" nicht das Post-Grundstück wird ein Betrieb von HANNOVER an gesiedelt - so als gäbe es in Areuburg keine bestehenden Grundstücke mehr. Es geht, wie dieses Beispiel zeigt, also gar nicht darum, die schlechten Wohnverhältnisse der Bewohner zu verbessern. Dann würde man etwas vorsichtiger verfahren und

stehen lassen, was noch brauchbar ist. Dem Senat geht es um die Bereicherung von Spekulant: Man hilft ihnen, indem das "offizielle Hand" die Kosten für Abriss und Eigentümer-Befriedigung großzügig aus Steuermitteln deckt.

Die Mieter sind praktisch rechtlos, solange sie einzeln hinkommen, was auf sie gemeinsam zukommt. Aber - Es ist kein Pappenstiel für den Senat, wenn Tausende von Mietern sagen: Nein! - ihr bekommt uns erst aus unseren Häusern heraus, wenn die Neubau-Mieten halb so hoch sind (was automatisch eintritt, wenn man nur die billigen Steuerpöcher und kein privates Kapital für den Sozialen Wohnungsbau verwendet) - und wenn die Neubauten hier in der Stadt liegen.

- Es ist kein Pappenstiel für die Hauseigentümer, wenn die Mieter eine Hausse die letzte Miet-Erhöhung nicht mehr zahlen, weil seit dem ja doch nichts mehr für das Haus getan wurde. Oder wenn sie gar nichts mehr zahlen, weil sie ja für die teuren Neubau-Mieten sparen müssen.

Senat, Hauseigentümer und GFW verschächern die Häuser der Prinzessinnenstraße an HANNOVER, weil sie glauben, daß in diesem Winkel des Sanierungsgebietes außer den Betroffenen Keiner was merkt.

Was aber auf der einen Seite vom Segitdamm anfängt, wird morgen auf der anderen Seite vom Granienplatz versucht.

Im Betrieb hat bei Massen-Entlassungen (ab 50 Belegschaftsmitgliedern) der Betriebsrat ein Mitsprache-Recht, das er ausüben kann. Die Mieter erkämpfen sich ihr Recht, indem sie sich zu Mieter-Räten zusammenschließen.

EINEN FINGER KANN MAN BRECHEN, FÜNF FINGER SIND EINE FAUST !

Stefan A., Arbeiter, jung verheiratet (seine Frau steht kurz vor der Entbindung):

- * Ich wohne seit 1 1/2 Jahren in der Prinzessinnenstraße. Von der GFW erhielt ich jetzt folgende Angebote an Neubau-Wohnungen:
 - Großstadt, 2 1/2 Zimmer, 50 qm, Miete: 280,- DM
 - Mariendorf, 2 1/2 Zimmer, 60 qm, Miete: 270,- DM
 - Kleinsche Viertel, 2 1/2 Zimmer, 40 qm, Miete: 260,- DM
 - Sanierungsgebiet Wedding, 2 1/2 Zim., 77 qm, Miete: 240,- DM.

Ich habe die letzte Wohnung gemietet.

Sehen der Miete habe ich monatlich an festen Ausgaben:

- 1) Ratenzahlungen 200,- DM
- 2) Rückzahlung Ehestandsdarlehen 100,- DM
- 3) Licht und Gas 82,- DM
- 4) Versicherung 24,- DM

Für die sind noch ich mit 75,- DM monatlich.

Da diese Ausgaben decken zu können, wird meine Frau bald wieder arbeiten gehen müssen. Wir haben aber keine Lust, über eine Woche im Monat für Grundstückspekulanten und Geldverleiher zu arbeiten.

Bei den heutigen Mieten brauchen wir mindestens 150,- DM Monatslohn, wie es die streikenden Lehrlingsgehilfen gefordert haben. Alles andere ist Betrug.

Seit dem 1. August 1969 zahlen wir keine Miete mehr, da wir für die Neubau-Mieten sparen müssen.

WIR FORDERN VON AUF, DER FASSEN HAFEN MIETESTREIK VORZUBEREITEN UND IHM SELBER ZU BEGRIFFEN !

Ein weiterer Situationsbericht aus der Prinzessinnenstraße auf Seite 7

80 000 LONDONER IM MIETERSTREIK

Die Meinungsmacher von BILD und SZ versuchen seit Jahren, den Arbeitern einzureden: Häufiges Streiken schadet an der Substanz - sind unverantwortliche Gewerkschaftsbesitzer, die in die britische Arbeiterklasse die ENGLISCHE KRANKHEIT hineingetragen haben.

Der MIETERSTREIK gegen den größten Haus- und Grundeigentümer Europas, die Verweisung der Sozialwohnungen Groß-London (GLC), zeigt ein anderes Bild. Klassenbewusste Mieter weigern sich seit einem Jahr, die letzte verordnete Mieterhöhung von 25% zu zahlen, die nur der Anfang einer Miet-Eskalation sein sollte.

Die Damschraube von Miet-Erhöbungen gehört auch in Berlin zum Arsenal einer fehlbaren Art von Ausbeutung, die sich kaum spürbar, aber massiv durchsetzt. Die Erbschaften der Mieten-Appele sind damit längst in die Tat umgesetzt. Trotz allen Spektakels um die neue Obergrenze, die der WEISSE KREIS eingeführt wird:

AN DEN NOHEN SOZIALMIETERN KÖNNEN NUR DIE MIETER SELBER ETWAS ALLES - INDEM SIE SICH ORGANISIEREN

(Ausführlicher Bericht über den Londoner Mieterstreik auf S. 2)

SANIERUNG JA TOTALABRISS NEIN

Figure 8

In its second newspaper, *Neuer Kietz*, the Office agitated against the mass eviction in Prinzessinnenstraße, with the slogan "Yes to rehabilitation. No to demolition." Büro für Stadtplanung und soziale Arbeit, *Neuer Kietz* (1969): 1. Archive of the Bibliothek der Freien, Berlin.



Figure 9

The cover of a book containing historical and analytical texts produced by the Kreuzberg Office displayed a gloomy collage in which the nineteenth-century Kreuzberg facades on the front cover seem to be inexorably swallowed up by the modernist blocks forcing their way in from the back cover. Büro für Stadtsanierung und soziale Arbeit. *Sanierung – für wen?* Berlin: Agit-Druck, 1971 (Courtesy Helga Fassbinder).

Reflecting a split that was increasingly dividing the left between reformist and socialist approaches, the Baukoop rejected the focus on cultural and environmental values that was characteristic of the Office's approach in order to ground their analysis on an objective and material reading of Kreuzberg's Urban Rehabilitation.⁷⁰ This difference also emerged in Kreuzberg's politics where, in the autumn of 1969, some activists who had previously been part of the Office left to set up a branch of the Communist Party of Germany/Marxists–Leninists (KPD/ML), one of the newly formed West German non-revisionist Marxist parties.⁷¹ Stressing the need for an overarching organization capable of developing revolutionary politics, they proposed that the organization of tenants opposing building demolition and that of workers fighting against the termination or relocation of their workplaces should unite. Despite an auspicious beginning, with a very well-attended and heated assembly of hospital workers held in February 1970, this approach also failed to take root in Kreuzberg's population. In the following months it dissipated without having produced a significant impact.⁷²

The short-term failures of these and other experiences were analyzed at a congress held at the University of Dortmund in October

1970, where non-revisionist Marxist parties' supporters from all over West Germany decided to draw a line between their current practices and their previous urban activism.⁷³ They rejected the focus on urban issues, as they had come to believe that improving housing, services, and infrastructure operated not against the needs of advanced industrial capital, but in league with it. At a time of capitalist expansion, it could be in capital's interest to improve workers' housing and living conditions to increase their productivity and consequently increase profits.

Helga Fassbinder, one of the COOP 3K students who had founded the Office, expanded and strengthened this analysis in two articles published in the early 1970s. Here, Fassbinder produced a self-critical account of the anti-authoritarian political ideology that had underpinned the work of the Office, calling into question its theoretical coherence and acknowledging the practical and structural limitations of all urban campaigns. Fassbinder suggested that the limited interest shown by Kreuzberg's inhabitants was perhaps specific to their situation and that urban campaigns would be more successful in garnering residents' support in the future.⁷⁴ However, she also argued that, even in the case of broad and militant participation, very little could be achieved. Drawing from the analysis of the San Francisco Mission District campaign as presented in the US radical students' journal *Leviathan*, she argued that the problem with urban campaigns lay in the pitting of purely locally-based organizations against international financial capital that was pushing for investment opportunities in the urban sector.⁷⁵ As theorized in 1969 by *Leviathan* authors Wanny Beagle, Al Haber, and David Wellman, urban campaigning "is at best a holding action against the overall corporate plan," whose "basic forces shaping the future of the area are not within the purview of [...] cities' power."⁷⁶ Capitalist interests in urban investment did not represent a one-off pressure, but rather an inherent feature of the economic system, which constantly required opportunities to invest accumulated capital profitably. Therefore, regardless of their local outcome, the possibilities of urban campaigns to challenge capitalist development were doomed from the beginning. If redevelopment went ahead, any urban campaign against it would have only served to mitigate the plan's most irrational aspects, such as corruption or poor planning. Thus, the campaign would be used to increase the efficiency and the legitimacy of the capitalist process without challenging its nature.

Furthermore, even if an urban campaign prevented the redevelopment of a particular area, the financial capital behind the redevelopment would not be defeated but only diverted to seek other opportunities to invest and profit elsewhere. In this way, by protecting one neighborhood, urban campaigns would either transfer the redevelopment to another less politically organized neighborhood or simply postpone it to a time when the political organization of the local community might have exhausted itself. In short, urban campaigns had no agency in fighting capital expansion as an overarching socio-economic process. As Beagle, Haber and Wellman explained, "community control

accomplishes the adjustment to the inevitable and unchangeable with less rancor and injustice. But the right to preside over the liquidation of your neighborhood is no triumph for democracy.”⁷⁷

Fassbinder concluded that both the San Francisco Mission District and Kreuzberg demonstrated that political groups that focused exclusively on the urban question could not fight on equal terms against capitalist urban redevelopments. However, this did not mean “that every form of defensive struggle in the housing sector [was] necessarily attached to reformist or revisionist tensions.”⁷⁸ Despite being ultimately incapable of escape from the constraints of the capitalist system, urban campaigns constituted a moment of possible politicization for many citizens who, once deprived of their houses or threatened in their rights, engaged in political conversations and in solidarity and community-building practices for the first time.

From this awareness, in the following years, Helga Fassbinder – together with the other coeditors of the West German architecture journal *arch+*, Klaus Brake and Renate Petzinger – advocated for including the demands for better and cheaper housing in the larger industrial struggle.⁷⁹ Referring to the 1969 Italian “Hot Autumn,” in which workers and tenants successfully organized unitary strikes and demands, they contended that the worsening of living conditions should not be considered as an independent issue but rather as an aspect of the evolving relationship between labor and capital.⁸⁰ The higher costs or poorer services in the areas of housing, transportation, education, and leisure with which workers had to contend corresponded to nothing but the depreciation of their own labor value. Even where salaries and working hours stayed the same, workers ended up living in more miserable and ever larger cities. At the same time, capitalists enjoyed higher revenues made through investments in urban redevelopments and savings in taxes.

Fassbinder, Brake and Petzinger tried to balance the foundational character of labor and class to Marxism with the contextual urgency to include non-industrial forms of struggle. This more orthodox Marxist political understanding of urban campaigns developed in reaction to the long experience of the Office, learning from its intuitions and, above all, its mistakes. On one side, their emphasis on contextualizing grassroots urban activism within the labor movement – understanding housing as a process of exploitation and oppression and therefore reframing it as an opportunity for class struggle – shows how, rejecting both the reformist and anarchist influences of the anti-authoritarian student movement, they returned to a Marxism grounded in the critique of political economy. On the other side, their lack of emphasis on the need for a revolutionary party and a unified theory of proletarian strategy implies that their position was not Leninist – at least not in a strict theoretical sense – and therefore it remained outside the confines of non-revisionist Marxist parties emerging at the time. Formulated at a moment in which the drive

Behutsame Stadterneuerung und danach...



**Der Senat brüstet sich mit der Internationalen Bauausstellung
... und die Mieter läßt er bluten:**

Leerstand Abriss Mieterhöhung

Herausgeber: BI SO 36 — Gestaltung: FDGÖ

Figure 10

A poster showing some preserved nineteenth-century housing in Kreuzberg which is being swept away by an enormous wave. The caption reads: "Cautious urban renewal and then ... empty houses, demolitions, rent increases."

Bürgerinitiative SO36, *Behutsame Stadterneuerung und danach ... Leerstand, Abriss, Mieterhöhung*, 1984. Archive of the Friedrichshain Kreuzberg Museum, Berlin.

toward class struggle was being devalued, assumed to have exhausted itself, Brake, Fassbinder and Petzinger's proposition failed to have a significant influence on West German architects and architecture students.⁸¹ In the following decades, the issue of what had previously been called Urban Rehabilitation, stripped of any connection with labor or class – most evidently in the example of Kreuzberg itself – would be either radicalized as the anarchist battleground between squatters and police,⁸² or anesthetized as the reformist terrain for the celebration of less brutal models of redevelopment which nevertheless did not question its position within the process capitalist accumulation.⁸³

Conclusions

Despite its short lifespan, the Office passed through very different phases, originating in the 3K COOP seminar's analysis, developing in Kreuzberg's anti-authoritarian grassroots urban activism, and finally giving rise to orthodox Marxist critical analyses and proposals. Because of this inclusion of a theoretical, a practical, and a self-critical dimension, the history of the Kreuzberg Office offers a valuable panoramic view of the complex intertwining of architecture and politics in West Berlin at the turn of the 1970s.

From a more political angle, the perspective developed in the context of the Office experience emerged simultaneously with some of the more well-known propositions of the early 1970s New Left. These include the argument in favor of the self-organization of small-scale communities proposed by activists such as Jane Jacobs, which served the objective interests of a *petit bourgeoisie* threatened by modernization and standardization.⁸⁴ They also encompass the suggestion that the urban struggle should be considered independently from the industrial mode of production, as advanced in the theory of Henri Lefebvre, a contention which contributed to depriving workers of their most radical weapons, that is, class organization and class struggle.⁸⁵ In her critique of the Office's approach, Fassbinder departed from these and other similar arguments, as she clarified not only how the city was a dependent function of capital development, but also how any possible resistance could emerge only in the working class capacity to fight capital exploitation and accumulation. The urban struggle was important as one of the many ways in which the foundational antagonism of this society, that between labor and capital, could emerge and gain success.

From the point of view of its architectural contribution, the Office trajectory is complex. The students of the 3K COOP already suggested a meaningful change in the understanding of the architectural discipline. Drawing from the context of the New Left and anti-authoritarian student movement, they had no doubts about locating architecture firmly on the side of the economic and political establishment. In addition to this, they also argued that architecture does not have the power to correct structural inequalities according to its own design and that its capacity to

produce change was fixed within the boundaries of the status quo. To change this condition, rather than producing visionary theories or projects, the students argued for the necessity to return to “the people” – and in particular to the communities affected by urban transformations – as this was the only subject capable of fighting for a different reality, so creating the preconditions for the emergence of a different kind of architecture.

Architects and architecture students could have a role in this process if they were ready to abandon their design professionalism and employ their knowledge to materialize social and political demands in a continuous and open dialogue with tenants who were about to be evicted. From this perspective, the architecture students behind the Office and other groups at TU Berlin tried to establish a new relationship between architecture and politics at the turn of the 1970s.⁸⁶ While exposing the political implications of the architectural profession and of architectural education, they did not, like some, disown direct political engagement to resort to the thaumaturgic belief in the miraculous potential of new technologies to bring about urban change, overshadowing class contradictions and “solving” any social and material problem in a supposedly neutral, nonpolitical way.⁸⁷ Nor did they jettison their primary architectural expertise when they embraced more immediate forms of political activism, such as finding work in large factories to establish direct contact with the working class. Using architecture as a critical starting point for their critique of the status quo, they valued architectural knowledge in its peculiarity but above all in its insufficiency, using it as merely “one of the instruments” to raise social awareness and political struggle.⁸⁸

The Office’s experience of using architectural knowledge in this way cannot be considered fully successful. Above all, the reference to Claus Offe’s anti-authoritarian disparity theory – soon rejected by the same Office’s activists – did not stand the test of time.⁸⁹ In particular, Offe’s idea that economic and political powers were disregarding the urban environment was proved wrong by the ever more central role this setting would play in the processes of capital reorganization between the 1970s and 1980s and beyond.⁹⁰ Also, the Office’s insistence on the cultural and environmental hypothesis that tenants would have an affective connection with their buildings was only superficially correct.

This principle of affective connection would be further developed in the 1970s and 1980s when Kreuzberg emerged at the forefront of community participation and architectural conservation projects – projects that entirely fit Helga Fassbinder’s 1971 criticism.⁹¹ Initiatives like the *Strategien für Kreuzberg* (Strategies for Kreuzberg) competition of 1977 and the *IBA Altbau* (“Old Building” section of the International Building Exhibition) in 1987 both focused on the renovation of Kreuzberg’s remaining nineteenth-century building stock, as the

previous decade's activism guaranteed a certain degree of protection and experimentation to its inhabitants. But the capital pressures they resisted were, as predicted, only moved elsewhere and postponed. The effect of Kreuzberg's urban campaigns were immediately felt in the rest of West Berlin, where an increasingly large proportion of the population, excluded geographically from Kreuzberg's activism, faced an ever more acute housing crisis (Figure 10).⁹² Within Kreuzberg, the postponement of the urban redevelopment meant that, as Kreuzberg's resistance movement weakened, it became one of the most gentrified neighborhoods in Western Europe, entirely converted to the needs of financial capital.⁹³

Despite its pitfalls, the Office served as a valuable touchstone for its architectural activists, who criticized the mistakes of their experiment without abandoning its architectural and political ambition. In particular, the reading developed in *arch+* by Brake, Fassbinder and Petzinger still stands out for its capacity to fully articulate the legacy of the Office, valorizing its ground-breaking capacity to address urban changes, but also denouncing its shortcomings in terms of class and labor analyses. Although this reading, and the approach it suggested, did not find application in the whirlwind of 1970s West Berlin, the soundness and completeness of its analysis still represents one of the most coherent outcomes of the debate around architecture and politics in postwar Western European history.

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Notes

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