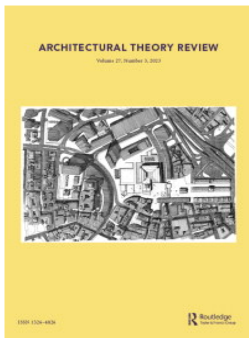

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Reform or Revolution: Architectural Theory in West Berlin and Zurich (1967–72)

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the evolution of architectural and urban theory in the wake of the 1960s politicisation of the architecture faculties of TU Berlin and ETH Zürich. Focusing on Oswald Mathias Ungers, Jörn Janssen, and their students, it examines a symposium, an exhibition, and a seminar that shaped divergent perspectives on architectural theory. It considers Ungers' attempts to reform architectural education and the profession itself in relation to West German socio-economic transformations, focusing on Ungers' 1967 symposium and Janssen's contributions to it. It then considers student criticism through a "go-in" organised at that same event and the 1968 student-led exhibition *Caution Architectural Theory*. It finally examines Janssen's 1970 seminar at ETH, which unravelled the socio-economic roots of a Zurich housing development and demonstrated the need for revolutionary change in housing and planning. These episodes, observed through their material, social and political contexts, display alternative understandings of architectural theory and, consequently, of architecture's role in achieving change.

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Over a period of months spanning 1966 and 1967, economic crises and political uprisings dramatically shifted the socio-economic, political, and architectural landscape established in West Germany during the post-war era. Architects and students of architecture, motivated by the decline in their professional circumstances and a growing interest in political activism, began to challenge the prevailing understanding of architectural theory—and, for some, its complicity in maintaining the existing social order.

In 1967 Oswald Mathias Ungers organised an international symposium at the TU Berlin to stress the importance of using theory as a key weapon to reform the current position of architecture within the building industry. His modernisation agenda stirred the response of political students and of Jörn Janssen, who, with different arguments and at different moments, challenged the reformist belief in the possibility of transforming architecture and architectural theory from within the status quo.

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Despite their radical difference, through their reorientations of architectural theory each offered astute readings of the current social and professional developments and suggested viable changes—even if the respective projects ended up unfolding in different places, as occurred for Ungers, who moved to Cornell in 1968, and Janssen, who went to Zurich in 1971. The ideas of Ungers, Janssen, and their students were each rooted in the specificities of this moment. And yet, if opposing architectural and political positions may be perceived as being equally timely, then the question becomes, rather, in the interest of whom did these theories develop their timeliness? What were the results in the sphere of architectural production of the transformations suggested by each party? Which class benefitted from these proposed transformations, and which did not?

This paper analyses a series of cases that gave rise to reformist and revolutionary approaches to architectural theory at the turn of the 1970s, investigating them in light of their historical and material context. The paper thematises these and other questions stressing the political orientation developed by each definition of architectural theory: it first shows how Ungers' symposium, as well as Janssen's contribution to this event, allowed the possibility of reforming architecture within the boundaries of the status quo; it then illustrates how political students convincingly rejected this possibility but struggled to formulate a positive and alternative agenda for architectural theory; finally, it shows how an alternative was eventually pioneered in Janssen's seminar at the ETH, where architectural theory became an instrument for the development of a revolutionary critique of capitalism and its spatial dynamics.

West German Housing in the Post-War Decades

Throughout the post-war years, West Germany accumulated growing internal contradictions, despite appearing solid and stable on the surface. Even before World War Two had concluded, the Western Allies recognised the strategic importance of a prosperous capitalist Germany in countering the USSR and curbing the spread of socialism in Western Europe. Consequently, the United States and the United Kingdom chose not to punish Germany overly harshly for its Nazi history. Instead, they focused on fostering economic prosperity and political stability in their respective occupation zones.[1]

This approach led to significant economic growth in the first two decades of the newly established West German state, guided by the principles of the "social market economy."[2] This economic theory advocated for the freedom of the capitalist market while assigning the state the responsibility of ensuring social protection for the weakest social groups. On the one hand, this approach resulted in impressive industrial growth, contributing to the rise of West German capital and the expansion of the bourgeoisie. On the other, it also shifted the social costs of this process onto the working class, leading to considerable levels of social inequality and immobility.[3]

These dynamics also influenced urban planning and housing, which played a key role in both garnering support for the government and discouraging socialist sentiments among the working class.[4] The West German government invested significantly in these sectors, implementing two Housing Acts that facilitated a "housing

miracle" involving the construction of around five million new flats by 1960.[5] Notably, half of this initiative comprised social housing, a collaboration between the public and private sectors in which the state provided private investors with low-interest loans, tax exemptions, fee relief, and additional subsidies to build houses subject to fixed rents and social restrictions for the first twenty-five years. After this period, controls were lifted, and social housing transitioned into fully private property.[6] Importantly, while around 70% of the population was eligible for a social housing dwelling, the rent for these dwellings was notably higher than that for impoverished private market flats.[7] This situation favoured a small segment of the better-off working class, granting them high-quality state-funded yet privately owned dwellings while the majority of workers, without access to social housing, found themselves relegated to deteriorating nineteenth-century private dwellings.

In the isolated enclave of West Berlin, the impact of these conditions was more pronounced. Disconnected from West Germany's industrial network and stripped of its status as a capital city, West Berlin faced a sharp decline in productivity and a rise in unemployment.[8] Its unique position, however, made it the "showcase of the West": the symbol of capitalist opulence and freedom behind the Iron Curtain, enticing populations from the Soviet bloc to consider opposition and defection. To sustain this image, both the US and West Germany ensured the city received substantial budget subsidies, one-time investments, tax rebates, and refunds.[9]

The building sector, and particularly housing, was a major beneficiary of this support.[10] For instance, in March 1963, West Berlin became the first West German city to adopt an extensive urban renewal plan for residential purposes, aiming to redevelop 56,000 flats, including renovating 10,000 units and demolishing and reconstructing 46,000. This was just the beginning, with a potential plan for the renovation of 180,000 flats and the demolition of 250,000 over the next twenty-five years.[11] Reflecting the prevailing disciplinary theories of the time, which favoured a "dispersed" and "car-oriented" urban model, the initial projects proposed tearing down large portions of the existing nineteenth-century city, segregating zones based on function, placing buildings on large-scale parks and high-traffic avenues, and reducing residential density significantly.[12] Once again, the redevelopment targeted new central and modern housing for the bourgeoisie, while the working-class tenants of the depleted and slated-for-demolition dwellings would be evicted without compensation and left without an equally affordable alternative.[13]

While these housing and planning models maintained strong support until the end of the decade, the early 1960s witnessed the first signs of political and socio-economic challenges to this approach. Intellectuals pointed out the authoritarian, hierarchical, and consumerist aspects of West German society, drawing connections to pre-war fascism and calling for the application of democratic principles not only in political institutions but also in everyday cultural and social life.[14] Alongside political scrutiny, post-war urban theories started to face critique in the 1960s. The first among them was from economist Edgar Salin, who in 1960 delivered a speech challenging the prevailing enthusiasm for the "car-oriented" and "dispersed" city model and exploring an alternative concept of "urbanity."[15] Inspired by the values of classical Athens, Salin praised the "humanistic urbanity" of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Germany and

questioned the then-current functional model of urban centre redevelopment. He advocated instead a return to iconic European cities of commerce, culture, and politics.[16]

Successively, a growing number of critics from West Germany and beyond began challenging the established principles of post-war planning.[17] Notably, Alexander Mitscherlich's 1965 book, *The Inhospitable Nature of our Cities*, made a significant impact on architects and planners.[18] It vehemently criticised the post-war city, examining it from an individual and psychological standpoint. Mitscherlich argued that West Germany's standardised and rationalised housing approach, evident in both social housing and urban sprawl, created an environment lacking the social and cultural qualities of pre-modern cities. Architects and planners played a seminal role in this process, accused as they were of concealing the increasing urban impoverishment and the consequent psychological risks for the city's inhabitants. Critics like Mitscherlich approached the critique of West German housing and planning without accounting for any economic foundations. In this respect, they represent the viewpoint of a discontented bourgeoisie no longer satisfied with existing urban transformations. While the "dispersed" and "car-oriented" model may have suited the post-war economic recovery and the years of austerity, it no longer met the needs of larger and wealthier bourgeois segments, which saw monotonous urban redevelopment as a constraint on their cultural and political ambitions. This critique reshaped the architectural discourse, with the new focus on "urbanity" gaining support after the late 1960s.[19]

This perspective did not challenge the logic of clearing older neighbourhoods, constructing satellite towns in the periphery, or urban motorways in the centres—even less did it address the social inequalities that this system produced. Instead, it aimed to strike a compromise between different sections of the capitalist class: on one side, the building industry and financial capital, which argued for the large-scale and standardised approach to urban renewal; on the other, small and medium-property owners, who had little to gain from such developments and lobbied for small-scale refurbishment.

Oswald Mathias Ungers and the Anti-Authoritarian Student Movement

In this quest for a compromise, Oswald Mathias Ungers was a key figure, who at the turn of the 1960s was exploring a hybrid aesthetic, blending his fascination with the alternative trends of functionalism and expressionism.[20] This approach quickly propelled him to prominence in the architectural world, and by October 1963 he became a professor at the Architecture Faculty of the TU Berlin.[21] Upon arriving in West Berlin, Ungers initially focused on the architectural principles of "composition," evident in both his introductory lectures and early design studios in 1964 and 1965.[22] However, West Berlin's urban dimension soon captivated him, despite considering himself an "amateur" who "did not know his way around planning."[23] In both his teaching and design practice Ungers increasingly focused on the urban transformations faced by the post-war city.[24] Criticising the shortcomings of urban planning's scientific methods, Ungers asserted that architecture remained the most adept

discipline for interpreting the city's crucial significance, both in its aesthetic value and as an economic asset. The architectural profession was, in his conception, the only profession capable of synthesising an artistic and scientific approach that would reconcile various economic, technical, social and environmental demands.

Ungers' attempt to balance architectural, cultural, and socio-economic tensions established him as an original professor, capable of engaging with pressing urban issues without forsaking the traditional leadership role of the architectural profession. This approach caught the attention of the architecture students of TU Berlin, who increasingly followed him during a period marked by growing participation and politicisation.[25] As Hartman Frank later put it, Ungers' earlier engagement with the simultaneously technical, social and political dimension of architecture "ignited [us] more radically than anywhere else, as he researched the possibilities of architecture in the most extreme and coherent form."[26] In Ungers' seminars, according to Ingrid Krau, "at last, aspects of the increased uncertainty with which everybody was dealing individually, were finally debatable in collective meetings. This mobilised us all."[27]

This mobilisation occurred in an increasingly unstable context marked by two significant events in 1966 and 1967 that disrupted the socio-economic, political, and architectural balance achieved in post-war West Germany.[28] In these years the first post-war economic crisis hit, accelerating industrial rationalisation and capital centralisation. This prompted the abandonment of the "social market economy" model and the embrace of Keynesian policies. Based on vast public spending measures, these policies aimed at increasing demand through full employment, higher wages, money stability, and trade balance. This new economic orientation led to a further expansion of the construction sector, in the form of even more generous subsidies for the private building market.[29] Simultaneously, on July 2, 1967, during protests against an official visit of the Shah of Iran to West Berlin, the police shot and killed student Benno Ohnesorg.[30] This event fuelled the momentum of the Socialist Student Union (SDS) in the emerging opposition movement, attracting thousands of new members and standing out as the only organised political group committed to a leftist agenda.[31] SDS students formed the backbone of the "anti-authoritarian movement," which gained popularity by focusing on a progressive set of educational, cultural, and political claims mostly enticing liberal bourgeois students. Their demands included the democratisation of the university and its politics, the liberalisation of moral and cultural values, the nationalisation of monopolistic media institutions, and support for national-liberation struggles.

Profiting from personal and political contacts with students from the nearby Freie Universität, architecture students at the TU Berlin were the first of their discipline to become organised in this setting.[32] Already in late 1967 they published a brief text outlining their research aims, which included the analysis of architects' socio-economic position and their historical "alliance with the ruling elite," the investigation of the West Berlin building industry and its relationship with the political environment, and analysis of the built environment of the newly constructed West Berlin housing estates.[33] While demanding changes in the professional sector, architecture students also advocated for reforms in their academic curriculum, which was rooted in an outdated image of the architectural profession. In this endeavour, Ungers strongly

supported the students, proposing a new course structure that introduced career specialisation through technical courses, which also included interdisciplinary, collaborative, and intermediate examinations.[34] However, Ungers' support for the students was, at least initially, not limited to academic issues: on June 2, 1967, Ungers was the only architecture professor to stop his studio and join protests against the Shah, and he was also one of the few who publicly criticised the police for having "sought confrontation […] through deliberate provocation" against students.[35]

During the first months of the academic year of 1967–68, the mutual appreciation between Ungers and the students reached its peak. However, this relationship turned out to be short-lived: the students were dramatically expanding their demands beyond the modernisation of education, and increasingly questioning the role of architecture within the political system and the legitimacy of the system itself; and yet Ungers showed no interest in radicalising his reformist stance and remained primarily focused on professional and institutional modernisation. After some semesters, the potential coalition between the liberal professor and his radical students waned.

The 1967 Berlin Architectural Theory Symposium

A notable moment marking a new phase of student politicisation was the *Architectural Theory* symposium organised by Ungers from December 11 to 15, 1967.[36] As Ungers stated in his welcoming remarks, "after a period of extensive construction activity, and on the cusp of development on an even larger scale, it was a good time to investigate architecture's theoretical foundations." In particular, he emphasised the urgency to recognise "which phenomena should serve as the basis for a theoretical framework, or what kind of findings we might expect." The primary question revolved around "whether social phenomena, technical conditions, historical experiences, or immanent formal laws should primarily be recognised as the planes of reference."[37]

Reflecting similar efforts in other faculties in Europe and North America, Ungers' interest in establishing architectural theory within the TU Berlin academic curriculum illustrates his attempt to reform the discipline in an affirmative and operative sense.[38] A new architectural theory would not only be instrumental in conserving the position of architecture at the forefront of the building industry, but also in absorbing the contradictions between monopolist and small-scale capital. From this point of view, Ungers' concept of theory hinged on the possibility of architecture's reform and, more importantly, the reform of the capitalist system. He nonetheless believed in the possibility of resolving architecture's more recent challenges without questioning the socio-economic foundations on which the system was based.

The four areas he identified as potential frames of reference for theory demonstrate this reformist orientation, with a "progressive" emphasis on social and technical conditions countered by a "conservative" focus on formal and historical aspects. The roster of speakers invited by Ungers maintained this balance professionally, geographically, and, most importantly, theoretically: Colin Rowe spoke in favour of the formal dimension of architecture; Reyner Banham emphasised the role of technology; Ulrich Conrads highlighted the prominence of society; and Sigfried Giedeon focused on

history.[39] Furthermore, the event included key figures who were also engaged in the discussion of architectural theory in the German-speaking academic environment, such as Jürgen Joedicke in Stuttgart and Lucius Burckhardt at ETH Zürich.[40]

Despite this rich and diverse context, Jörn Janssen, a West German architect not widely known in the international architectural scene, struck a markedly different tone from the more practice-oriented perspectives offered by others. Distancing himself from the main approach of the symposium, Janssen observed how pure theory, as well as its opposition to practice, did not actually exist, since theory and practice represented two complementary elements of the same process. He argued that the false dichotomy of theory and practice concealed the real opposition between mental and physical activity, historically reflected in the conflict between rulers and those they rule. To move beyond this false dichotomy, he proposed shifting attention from architecture to "construction planning" (*Bauplanung*), a discipline aimed at overcoming architecture's obsolescence by applying more modern planning techniques to the building industry. Construction planning, as "the programming science of specific building processes," was not equipped to deal with the traditional focus of architecture on "cathedrals, palaces, […] theatres and prisons," since "problems which do not have a social relevance, allow no modern solution."[41] Construction planning was rather tied to such key sectors of the economy as "industrial production, transportation, communication, energy provision, regional development, land and water management," in which the rationalisation of the building industry could no longer be delayed.[42]

Janssen argued that post-war social and technical developments made planning indispensable, even in the building industry, where a complacent intellectual class avoided the modernisation of architecture in order to align with the interests of the most regressive segments of capitalism. Architects had either hidden the sector's obsolescence behind formal and cultural concepts or confined planning to partial or marginal processes. He expanded this point in opposition to the words of the Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius, who in the middle of the twentieth century could still maintain that:

> Good architecture […] implies an intimate knowledge of biological, social, technical and artistic problems. But then—even that is not enough. To make a unity out of all these different branches of human activity, a strong character is required. […] Our century has produced the expert type in millions; let us make way now for the men of vision.[43]

In contrast to Gropius, Janssen believed architecture should be entrusted to the "minds of the millions of experts" collaborating peer-to-peer and utilising scientific and mathematical methods of construction planning. Architects would in this way be unambiguously deprived of their hypothetical capacity to single-handedly design the built environment. Nevertheless, he assigned architects the "special role" of "selecting experts" and "controlling and coordinating their work" so that, even as technicians among technicians, architects would somehow find themselves at the top of the working pyramid even in construction planning.[44]

Peter Lammert reported that Janssen's contribution to the symposium was the most well received among the political students.[45] It had the merit of being the only

paper framed by a clear Marxist perspective, which saw the architectural profession as a dependent part of the production sector, to be analysed primarily in light of its technical developments and social relationships. At the same time, abandoning a more classically Marxist point of view, Janssen seemed to accept that the progressive interests of capitalist rationalisation would allow the building industry to emancipate itself, at least partially, from its most backward features without immediately imposing new oppressive productive conditions. In this sense, he envisioned the possibility of construction planning reforming the system from within, that is, without requiring any preconditional transformation of the political or socio-economic order.

While Ungers may have endorsed some aspects of Janssen's vision, especially to the extent that it worked within the status quo, the students increasingly questioned this approach. For instance, as Frank recalls, they felt that the symposium "entirely missed the public's interest. Many students in the audience had just discovered the social dimension of architecture and considered theoretical or historical questions as superficial or, at least, marginal."[46] The relationship between Ungers and his students was then on the brink of a radical change. His architectural and political position had remained largely unchanged since his arrival in Berlin. After 1967, this position was recognised by politically engaged students as insufficient, to the extent that it was confined to marginal or superficial details, and incapable of working towards a real transformation of the status quo. As a result of this widening split Ungers decided to move to Ithaca in the winter of 1968. His teaching would, there, be spared the kind of unwelcome political criticism that would soon increase dramatically at the TU Berlin.[47]

Anti-Authoritarian Architectural Theory

The students' new orientation became evident on the last day of the symposium, on which occurred the first protest initiated by West Berlin architecture students. During the final collective discussion, a group of students organised a "go-in," entering the theatre hall, distributing SDS leaflets, and unveiling a banner with the message: "All Houses Are Beautiful. Stop Building."[48] This succinct statement encapsulated the widening gap between the students' idea of architectural theory and that of Ungers and the other panellists. The promise of a new, abstract theory, addressing architecture's social, technological, historical, and formal dimensions, was for the students simply an excuse to avoid questioning the role of architecture in the real world, and hence its subordination to the ruling class. Against the perpetuation of existing dynamics, the anti-authoritarian architecture students seemed to believe that the only solution was to stop all building activity.

The uncompromising "Stop Building" slogan expressed the students' demands for a transformation of architecture's broader professional, political and social contexts. The call to stop building might have been motivated by the students' understanding of architectural value—the "beauty" of "houses"—not in the aesthetic sense, but rather in terms of the personal and cultural relationships embedded in dwellings. Simultaneously, the post-war surge of modernist buildings did not result in any real improvement of West German cities, as in the students' view the unprecedented scale

of social housing construction had achieved nothing but the eviction of working-class tenants and the frustration of the bourgeoisie's cultural and environmental ambitions. For the first time, students were dismissing the possibility of reforming the architectural discipline, as they considered the source of its problems to lie beyond its practical and theoretical reach.

However, "Stop Building" was also ambiguous. While dissociating from the reform of architectural theory and practice, it did not indicate a long-term strategy to address this dissociation. On one side, affirming that the issue was building neither better nor more houses, architecture was finally denied its steering role in solving urban problems, and was thus invited to stop concerning itself with them. On the other side, it was unclear whether building activity should be temporarily or permanently stopped, what would substitute it, how and why. The slogan also left the origin of the problem unaddressed. Was the issue professional, with architecture having to be replaced by new disciplines better suited to respond to the changed requirements of the building industry? Was it political, with the West Berlin geopolitical objectives and local interests preventing architecture from serving the interests of its citizens? Or was it socio-economic, given the capitalist system that created both the material and cultural preconditions for an oppressive urban environment? "All Houses Are Beautiful. Stop Building" encapsulated the uncertainties of the anti-authoritarian phase of the student movement, caught between outright rejection of the existing system and indecision about what should replace it.

It is possible that at least some of the anonymous initiators of the go-in were also involved in the organisation of *Caution Architectural Theory*, a section of the *Diagnosis* exhibition organised by students in September 1968 at the TU Berlin Architecture Faculty.[49] In contrast to the go-in at Ungers' symposium, this exhibit stripped architectural theory of any aura and defined it as a readily deployable ideology capable of legitimising whatever building the ruling class desired. Professional architects were portrayed as those who cunningly and disingenuously employ any theoretical principle for an immediate economic and cultural return. The authors of *Caution Architectural Theory* argued that, in this ideological context, every architectural definition becomes an "alibi aesthetics," an arbitrary theoretical construction meant to justify any design, regardless of its concrete social consequences.[50] Without a genuine engagement with the status quo, every theory was deemed equivalent, and there was no sense in discriminating amongst them or supporting the one that sounded more radical or liberal. Instead of being used for changing reality, theory became an "alibi" to conserve it, hiding its most undesirable and unjust characters. The consequence of this alibi aesthetics was "theory hostility," as architects were "not prevent[ed] from 'thinking,' judging, teaching, and drawing manifestos" but "released from the obligation to check their own theoretical assumptions."[51]

The statements made in *Caution Architectural Theory* represent a complete overturning of the approach to theory taken by Ungers' symposium less than a year earlier. What Ungers presented as a pluralist theory of approaches striving for the reform of architecture was condemned in the exhibition as a single ideology aimed at justifying the current professional, political, and social status quo. Students proudly reported Giedion's comments on the go-in, where he maintained that he "was amazed

by the disorientation of the listening students. It will take years to put them back on the right track."[52] From the students' perspective, however, what Giedion labelled "disorientation" was their opposition, and what he considered "the right track" was nothing more than an old track they were both ready and happy to leave.

Despite the exhibition's more in-depth analysis of the ideological role played by architecture, *Caution Architectural Theory* possessed ambiguities comparable to the "Stop Building" banner. Both critiques considered the reform of architecture not only to be inadequate, but potentially harmful, since it could merely mask the genuine roots of the issue. However, neither of the two actions clearly demonstrated how students or architects could actively engage to bring about change. Jörn Janssen, following a brief stint at the TU Berlin, where he was hired and fired in 1969, offered a potential response to this question in the following year, when he assumed a teaching position at ETH Zürich and held an architectural theory seminar entitled "Economic Criteria for Planning Decisions."[53]

Jörn Janssen and the Socialist Phase of the Student Movement

In the early 1970s, the West German student movement underwent a significant transformation. Despite the widespread influence of the SDS among the student population, the movement failed to recruit members from different social groups and achieve major national political victories.[54] Against this backdrop, and influenced by the resurgence of strike campaigns in West German industrial cities in September 1969, larger and larger factions of the movement began advocating for more class-based and party-centred politics, abandoning the anti-authoritarian ideology in favour of a socialist organisation.[55]

A central theoretical reference in this process was the 1969 essay *Fetish Revolution*, in which the German philosopher Hans G. Helms showed how the anarchist trends within the leadership of the SDS had corrupted the Marxist concept of revolution, turning it into an act of rebellion against modernity and technology.[56] From this perspective, the anti-authoritarian movement's politics reduced social revolution to a series of alternative practices and lifestyles, neglecting the Marxist emphasis on production and replacing it with a focus on critical individual consumption. Helms viewed the student "revolution" as a "fetish," an event that seemed, in theory, capable of abolishing existing power relationships but was, in reality, unable to alter the material base of society.

Building on these ideas, between 1969 and 1970 Hans Helms and Jörn Janssen co-edited the book *Capitalist Urban Planning*, which expanded on the *Fetish Revolution*'s argument from an architectural and urban perspective.[57] In his introduction, Helms characterised the city in historical materialist terms, seeing it as a "means of exploitation" and a "product of social division of labour, class dominion, and class struggle."[58] He scrutinised the proliferation of cars and motorways, arguing that these developments served capitalists' interests in financing key industrial branches and promoting small property among the working class. Accordingly, he observed:

> It would be superfluous and ridiculous to expect from urban planners a transformation of the urban order which was stimulated by the automobile industry. The necessary

> changes cannot be achieved through urban measures, but only through the political overturn of the conditions of production and transportation.[59]

According to Helms, only a political upheaval of the conditions of production—a social revolution—could truly transform the nature of urban space. He therefore believed that architects and other technicians could, at best, add a "thin veneer of natural and restorative demands" to the preservation of the existing order.[60]

In his own contribution to this volume, Jörn Janssen completed a century-long historical examination of the relationship between German capitalist development and housing policies.[61] From this analysis, he concluded that the struggle for better housing would only be meaningful if seen in the context of the broader battle to abolish the entire system of capitalist production and exploitation. A century of capitalist and social-democratic housing policies had, in fact, diluted the immediate capacity of housing campaigns to activate the working-class struggle in a revolutionary perspective, instead aligning them with the preservation of the status quo. To counter this deadlock, Janssen suggested illustrating how all these housing achievements were temporary and illusory by, first, drawing the connection between housing and other sections of social life in which class oppression was more apparent and, secondly, demonstrating how even the most celebrated social-democratic policies actually went against the interests of the vast majority of the working class.

Overturning the approach developed by Ungers and, at least in part, by his own presentation to the TU Berlin symposium, at the turn of the 1970s Janssen dismissed any hope for an operative theory capable of improving architectural efficiency within the status quo. Architectural theory had to locate itself clearly outside the context of the current profession to produce a critique illuminating the non-architectural origin of the specific problems discussed.[62] While the authors of the "Stop Building" banner and *Caution Architectural Theory* had already arrived at a similar approach, their reading of architectural ideology was equivocally suspended between an emphasis on political, professional and social aspects of architectural thought and practice. In turn, this resulted in an incapacity to find a way out from the deadlock, as the students remained confined in the realm of theory themselves.

In contrast, and returning to a more classical Marxist definition of historical materialism, Janssen unambiguously located architecture in the context of the socio-economic dynamics of capitalism—which, if analysed scientifically, could not help but unveil the opposition between capital and labour that lie at its core.[63] By illuminating this foundational contradiction, architectural theory could produce a revolutionary critique that displayed how the entire capitalist system, and not just some of its technical or social aspects, needed complete transformation. This allowed Janssen to provide his students with a clear pedagogical agenda: here, architectural theory was connected with a precise area of investigation (the relation between architecture and capitalist development), a unique time of action (the present, with all its load of inherited material and ideological contradictions), and, above all, an uncompromising direction of transformation—revolutionary change.

When Janssen arrived in Zurich to apply this theory, the educational and professional situation in Switzerland bore more than just a passing similarity with the context of West Berlin.[64] Political students were increasingly determined to influence

academic policies while the university leadership was trying to placate them by hiring a few radical figures, among whom figured Janssen himself. Outside academia, the building industry also found itself in an expansive phase, allowing for experimentation with new scales and types of urban intervention. In this context, Janssen organised a four-semester seminar on "Economic Criteria for Planning Decisions." Janssen and his students chose to investigate a new private residential development on the outskirts of Zurich, owned and constructed by the largest Swiss building company, Göhner AG.[65] The estate, named Sunnebüel, was situated in the peripheral area of Volketswil and provided a case study deeply intertwined with the formation of monopoly capitalism in the building industry. This shift in focus, from the denunciation of political and professional injustices to the scientific analysis of capitalist companies, marked an evident departure from the anti-authoritarian phase.

In researching Sunnebüel, Janssen applied his method of "Learning in Conflict," in which:

> The idea of unbiased science, unpolitical curriculum, neutral information, and objective facticity has finally been demolished. Everyone could experience how different reality presents itself, depending on the point of view from which it is observed. Everyone could see that every insight […] includes partisanship, and that learning is therefore itself a political act, which one can undertake either blindly and servilely or conscientiously. […] Conscious learning is, under this premise, inherently critical learning. This necessitates a thorough questioning of existing notions and concepts within their historical context. Consequently, conflict becomes the essence of the learning process, and only through conflict is the learning journey truly fulfilled. Anything else is merely a form of training.[66]

Seen from this perspective, Janssen's method could be deemed highly effective, as it not only provoked conflict in the students' approach to urban issues but also within the broader cultural and political context in which they studied.[67] The analysis of the socio-economic foundations of contemporary architecture through the lens of Marxist literature, conducted by his students, proved too provocative for ETH. In June 1971, succumbing to sustained pressure from bourgeois local and national press over the course of a year, ETH decided to terminate Janssen and his team of assistants in the midst of their research. Six months later, Janssen's position would be assigned to Aldo Rossi who, given the context, was intended as a compromise: someone who would continue developing a Marxist approach to architectural theory, but in a way that would not upset the Swiss bourgeoisie and its capital investments.[68]

However, the dismissal did not mark the end of Janssen's and his students' work on the estate. Despite this setback, they continued their research, culminating in the publication of the collective book *Göhnerswil: Housing Construction in Capitalism*, following a second year of investigation.[69] This book represented a practical application of the political and educational methods discussed in Janssen's essay *Capitalist Urban Planning* and serves as a valuable standpoint for evaluating urban planning during the socialist phase of the student movement.

Akin to the work of the TU Berlin students in *Diagnosis*, Janssen and his students scrutinised the non-democratic and opaque processes employed by major construction companies to secure land, permissions, and concessions for their building projects. Their focus, however, shifted towards the economic nature of Göhner AG,

a corporation which effectively leveraged profits from its construction endeavours to internalise numerous associated trades and diversify investments across various branches of the building industry.[70] Conducting a comprehensive analysis of the costs and profits tied to the company's residential properties within the framework of Marxist political economy, the students illustrated how the increasingly socialised mode of production within Göhner AG could have facilitated the effective construction of affordable housing for lower-income classes. Nevertheless, due to the implicit thrust of the capitalist system, companies like Göhner AG could not help but prioritise their own interests and aspire to the highest profit. In this case, this involved over-saturating the market with opulent houses tailored for the needs of the bourgeoisie. Janssen and his students harboured no optimism for a potential reversal of this situation, as they demonstrated that the concentration of capital and the rise of monopolies across all sectors of production were neither recent nor exclusive to the construction industry.[71] Instead, they underscored how private companies like Göhner AG could, in theory, feasibly construct affordable housing thanks to their advanced, standardised, and bureaucratically organised production structures, while their capitalist nature compelled them to prioritise profit expansion, thereby intensifying the internal contradictions within the system.

Extending Janssen's analysis in *Capitalist Urban Planning*, a crucial distinction emerged between the notion of a "housing shortage" (*Wohnungsnot*)—a pressing social concern impacting workers who struggle to afford adequate housing—and the "housing problem" (*Wohnungsproblem*), a market bottleneck wherein the bourgeoisie faced challenges in acquiring or renting residences commensurate with their heightened purchasing power.[72] While Göhner concentrated solely on addressing the "problem," the true urgency, that is, the "shortage" of housing for the working class, remained unattended. This perspective revealed additional contradictions within the productive system, as Göhner AG relied on high-income earners to afford the elevated prices of its houses, but it simultaneously also paid its own workers miserable wages, relegating them to the confines of suburban slums (fig. 1). On one hand, the working class, who were responsible for constructing the houses through their labour, found themselves excluded from dwelling in them. On the other, "the propertied class was expending an increasing share of social wealth on their unproductive pursuits."[73]

This case made clear that the problem was neither the lack of theoretical foundations in the building process, as suggested by Ungers' symposium, nor the building process itself, as claimed by the anti-authoritarian students. Architecture was neither the problem nor the solution. The issue was entirely political-economic, and thus could only be addressed from this point of view. The students concluded their essay with a famous quote from Engels, asserting that "[i]n order to make an end of this housing shortage there is only one means: to abolish altogether the exploitation and oppression of the working class by the ruling class."[74]

While the West Berlin anti-authoritarian students limited themselves to denouncing architectural theory as a reformist instrument that preserves the status quo, Janssen and his Zurich students took a different approach. They argued that architecture's shortcomings were not a by-product of political corruption or professional obsolescence, but rather the structural outcome of capitalist production and

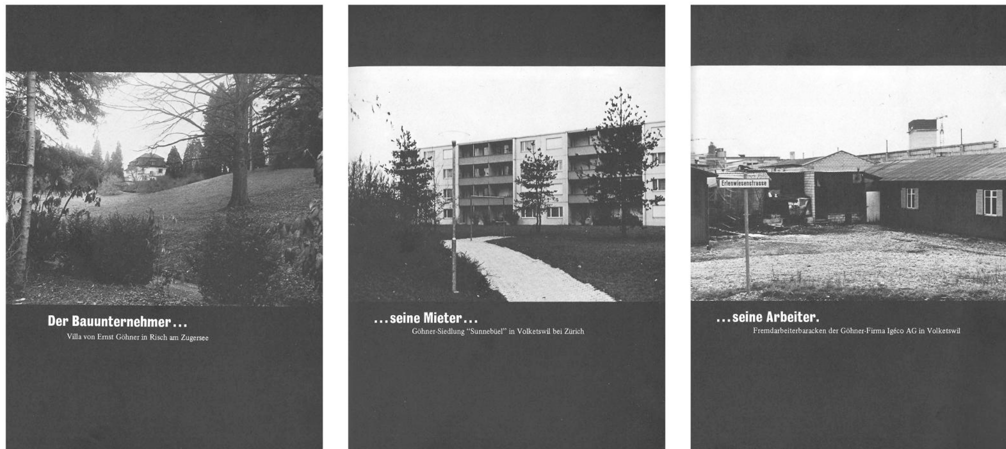

Figure 1. The first three pages of the book "Göhnerswil" effectively establish its tone by contrasting the housing arrangements of the three distinct classes involved in the estate construction. As the original captions report: "The building contractor [lives in the] Villa of Ernst Göhner at Risch am Zugersee; his tenants in the Göhner estate "Sunnebüel" in Volketswil, nearby Zurich; his workers in immigrants shacks of the Göhner-owned Igéco AG in Volketswil." Source: Autorenkollektiv an der Architekturabteilung der ETH Zürich, *"Göhnerswil": Wohnungsbau im Kapitalismus* (Zurich: Verlagsgenossenschaft, 1972), 1, 3, 5.

exploitation. Architectural theory, in their view, played a crucial role in investigating and critiquing this economic system, and as such it need not be stopped but rather coherently developed, as exemplified in the unconventional study of "economic criteria for planning decisions." If engaging with architectural theory was a necessary step to understand reality, however, it was not sufficient to transform it. Real change, they argued, would only come through a working-class revolution, in which architecture was, of course, not the leading figure.

Conclusion

By clarifying the aim and the strategy of revolutionary change, and defining in this framework a small but coherent space for architectural theory, Janssen and his Zurich students developed one of the clearest and most radical contributions to the relationship between architecture and politics, only to be abruptly interrupted by Janssen's second politically-motivated layoff, all in the space of three years.

Dismissing political opposition was not an extraordinary circumstance in the German-speaking world of the period. Throughout the post-war decades, the West German state had unambiguously opted to forsake the democratic values it so convincingly upheld any time it feared serious political opposition: in 1956 it banned the Communist Party of Germany; in 1968 it passed the Emergency Laws, introducing draconian restrictions to fundamental constitutional rights in case of natural and political crisis; and in 1972 the social-democratic Chancellor Willy Brandt approved the Anti-Radical Decree, a repressive law excluding any citizen considered radical from public employment—first and foremost, teaching.[75] On one hand, architecture students' dissatisfaction was progressively channelled into more and more reformist

experiences, which celebrated less comprehensive but equally unfair models of urban renewal—as, for instance, the experience of the 1977 "Sanierung für Kreuzberg."[76] On the other, pockets of anarchist resistance broke out in West German cities at the turn of the 1980s, managing to squat up to 165 buildings in West Berlin, but failing to produce any meaningful attempt to transform the socio-economic conditions of housing and planning for the majority of the population.[77]

Although largely overlooked in architectural historiography, the ideas, actions and publications discussed in this article constitute a coherent critique of the relationship between architecture and politics from different perspectives. Among them, Janssen's analysis of *Göhnerswil*, as the climax of a broader political experience stretching between West Berlin and Zürich at the turn of the 1970s, offers a powerful cautionary tale about the possibility of solving social and material problems by reforming architecture—or, indeed, architectural theory. His teaching, however, makes a strong case for observing these issues in their wider socio-economic setting, and for addressing them only as an opportunity to achieve the total transformation of reality. However ambitious this program may seem, it is, perhaps, the most critical insight that contemporary architectural conversations on theory can draw from this key episode of Marxist thinking and action.

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