The City and the city
Finding traces of the ideal city in actual urban form

Proposal for the John K. Branner Travelling Fellowship in Architecture
The City and the city

“Form matters, but not so much the forms of things as the forms between things.” ¹

Proposal
This proposal posits that the difference between the “authentic” city (dense, traditional, low-rise and sometimes un navigable) and the “ideal” city (ordered, legible, sometimes sterile) is rich with architectural possibilities. Through comparative studies of real and ideal urban form at similar physical and cultural latitudes, I propose a hybrid form of urbanism that intelligently combines the idealized world of energy flows, circulation and infrastructure, and the real, living tissue of the city. In an era of sweeping, informal urbanization, diminishing resources, and environmental instability, I believe the answer lies not in the city as it is, or in the city as we might like it to be, but in the fruitful co-existence and cross-fertilization of the two - the City and the city.

The <Ideal> City
Some cities were formed by geometrical ideals, others from geometry derived from performative qualities, like defense. Other cities were resultant aggregates of an ideal unit - the siedlung - that create a particular urban texture. The modern era brought forth a new urban texture with larger, taller buildings standing alone, like pavilions in ever larger swaths of open land. The walking city gave way to the driving city.

the <authentic> city
Old towns exhibit an urban texture that was created over a long period of time carrying embedded knowledge. These parts benefit from the patina of time - some boast a reclaimed or reused infrastructure that creates a space that is nearly impossible to create in a single, simultaneous design. However, tight urban fabric faces the problem of being too quaint for today’s way of life. Any fabric that give access to flows no larger than pedestrian risks becoming an outdoor museum.

the <hybrid> city
The urban project is a morphological exercise that accepts that architectural components can vary according to specific pressures but that they must always fit into the overall syntax. Today that syntax can be computationally scripted and superimposed on the existing to reveal violations and potentials. Fabrics that exhibit a combination of rigor and flexibility like Eixample in Barcelona have proven most successful, and would probably match up well with an idealized version of Barcelona. How would other parts of Barcelona perform? How would other cities, at different latitudes and with different cultures match up?

¹ Stan Allen. Points and Lines.
Transverse Itineraries: Urban Commons and Active Alleyways

A phenomenon I will be looking for is what I refer to as "transverse itineraries". These are porous off-street, off-grid pedestrian passages that contain nooks or cul-de-sacs for various programming. They are excellent relief for extra large urban blocks, and when they link with other itineraries, the result is a network of alternative paths through the city.

Urban Fabrics

Many cities have multiple fabrics that not only reflect their purpose, but also their natural setting and their time. Whether masterplanned or haphazard, these fabrics come together at seams to form the present city. We can learn a lot about ourselves by examining the makeup of the space in which these fabrics transition. Each fabric is an aggregation of local spatial rulesets set by culture.

Can we deconstruct these fabrics into their elements? Would these elements allow us to design not by mimicking aesthetics, but rather by extending the mechanisms that originally created the fabric? Moreover, can we combine the most effective mechanisms of separate fabrics to create a new condition?

Hybrids

"[New urbanism] will not be based on the twin fantasies of order and omnipotence; it will be the staging of uncertainty; no longer concerned with the arrangement of...permanent objects but the irrigation of territories with potential; not about separating and identifying entities, but about discovering unnamable hybrids." 1

"The tensions and contradictions that arise from different scales of spatial specificity, as well as from the contrasting perspectives used to interpret them are resolved - or at least unfold - in a third process, which Lefebvre described most comprehensively as the (social) production of (social) space. This alternative and intensely politicized way of looking at cityspace, combining both macro and micro perspectives without privileging one over the other, has been much less frequently explored in the literature on cities, for too often the views from above and below have been defined as separate and competitive empirical and interpretive domains rather than interactive and complementary moments in our understanding of urbanism and its spatial specificities." 2

Relational Thinking / Modeling

"We do not live in a sort of vacuum, within which individuals and things can be located... but in a set of relationships that define positions which cannot be equated or in any way superimposed." 3

Complexity

"Extremely intricate systems can most effectively be built up messily, in steps and layers, from approximate rather than finished and perfect parts, and incrementally over time, rather than in one fell swoop of assembly. Indirectness...is the secret to achieving a robust, flexible, and evolving design. Such systems... have been essentially self-designing. They are wild systems that range and explore and mine their environment, that capitalize on accidental successes, store them, and build upon them." 4

1 Rem Koolhaas, "Whatever Happened to Urbanism", S,M,L,XL
2 Edward Soja, Post-Metropolis. Critical Studies of Cities and Regions, 2000
3 Michel Foucault. Other Spaces - Utopias and Heterotopias.
4 Sanford Kwinter, pp. 186-193.
**Negotiated Spaces**

The city is laid out according to a mixture of some ideals, but local behaviors subvert it. In this way the city negotiates the real against the planned, the local against the global. How does this negotiation play out in the built environment? What is the potential of these spaces?

While architectural projects usually deal with a single building amid existing urban fabric, new development is increasingly happening in large, multi-plot swaths. In these cases the architect must consider the relationships of buildings to one another and the quality of the spaces produced by them - the open, interstitial spaces.

At one end of the spectrum, the ideal city is designed for a particular parameter - wind, sun, military protection, walking, biking, the automobile. At the other end of the spectrum local behaviors and conditions shape the city or subvert it, override it, break it. Somewhere in the middle lies a city that is negotiating the real against the planned, the local against the global. I’m interested in this negotiation - how does it play out in the built environment? What are the appropriations and reappropriations? Are there impromptu or unplanned spaces being used in ways other than originally intended? What are the proportions of these spaces? What are the light qualities? What are the surface textures? How do these spaces handle flows?

**Ideal City: Apolropolis**

Imagine a city that is dense but provides access to sunlight everywhere. Access to sunlight is fundamental, because it ensures a spatial-temporal relationship with nature (the sun) while also providing a naturally-induced spacing of the built environment.

What would a city look like that values access to sunlight above all else? Lots of sun, open space, but maximum density. Would the other planning parameters fall in line?

What is the best model for a given latitude or topography? Consider the courtyard typology as an example [other typologies would certainly need to be investigated]. How tall can a building be in a given block size for a courtyard to be effective at the ground floor (i.e. all floors receive adequate daylight)? The angles of the sun can indeed be parameterized along with other criteria to find this out exactly. In this regard, an ideal city block can be programmed for any given latitude, climate, and topography. This resulting model from tabula rasa is called “Apolropolis” – the ideal city of the sun.

Why is Apolropolis better than other modernist master plan models of the past? Based on flows of energy and matter, it maximizes density, increasing living working proximities, promoting biking and walking, thus reducing the need for automobiles. All buildings are energy users, but what if they had the access [in all spaces] to solar energy? They would use less lighting, which in turn reduces electricity loads, reduces heat gain, and reduces cooling loads.

Apolropolis is really a range of possible cities based on local rules that create a field condition. “A field condition could be any formal or spatial matrix capable of unifying diverse elements while respecting the identity of each. Field configurations are loosely bound aggregates characterized by porosity and local interconnectivity. Overall shape and extent are highly fluid and less important than the internal relationships of parts, which determine the behavior of the field. Field conditions are bottom-up phenomena, defined not by overarching geometrical schemas but by intricate local connections. Interval, repetition, and seriality are key concepts. Form matters, but not so much the forms of things as the forms between things.”

1 Allen, Stan. Points and Lines.
Research Detail

Key Questions

- What is the culture of space in a given city? How does it vary between districts or neighborhoods?
- What are the mechanisms that carve and hold space?
- What impact does the culture of space in the city have on the experience?
  (measure for connectivity | continuity | public-private | individual-collective-corporate)
- What are the architectural typologies created by the culture of space?
  (courtyard, passages, enclave development, slums)
- What is the underlying structure / nature of the city?
  (axis, topography, hydrology) How has it influenced the formation of the city?
- How are different urban flows negotiated?
  (identify Transitions | Edges | Seams | i.e. architecture meets transport | telecom | energy | water flows)
- How is the fabric squeezed, stretched, ruptured, ripped, or torn?
- What is the role of architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, city planning at these junctures?

Key Architectural Considerations

- Qualities of Light in conjunction with architectural articulation and surface textures
- Linkage + Connectivity (Physical, Visual, and Aural)
- Circulation Patterns
- Programming
- Scale + Proportion

Precedent Work

- Urban Transect (“The Valley Section”), time/activity diagraming, surgical urbanism
- Cities in Evolution - Patrick Geddes
- Urban Legibility
  
  The Image of the City - Kevin Lynch (If Lynch’s work is about image, my thesis is about experience and flow)
- Networked Infrastructure
  
  Splintering Urbanism - Steven Graham
- Pedestrian flow in urban settings
  
  Situationists International: Flâneur / Dérive
  New Babylon - Constant Nieuwenhuys (multiplicities, transverse itineraries)
  “Wildness: Prolegomena to a New Urbanism” - Sanford Kwinter
- Urban Continuity (Fabric, Texture)
  
  Collage City - Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter
  Suburban Space: The Fabric of Dwelling - Renee Chow
  Collective Form and Linkage - Fumihiko Maki
- Resilient City / Ecological Urbanism
  
  The Nature of Cities - Jennifer Light
Some aspects of space are impossible to measure with instruments. For each area of study, a gestural drawing would attempt to capture the essence of a site, the temporal phenomena, the energy flows, the mechanisms both visible and invisible, present, past, and speculative future. These drawings could be simultaneously in plan, section, and perspective.

**Detailed Itinerary and Methodology**

**Arriving**

Week 1: Getting settled
- day 1: move in
- day 2: casually explore neighborhood
- day 3 - 6: explore / meet with contacts to identify or confirm observation points, access to academic resources

**Research**

Week 2-4: Spatial Continuity Tests*
- day 1: North zigzag from point / return zigzag to point / document (map, field sketches)
- day 2: South zigzag from point / return zigzag to point / document (map, field sketches)
- day 3: East zigzag from point / return zigzag to point / document (map, field sketches)
- day 4: West zigzag from point / return zigzag to point / document (map, field sketches)
- day 5: Retrace one or two of the paths, photo-documenting
- day 6: Reflect and compile: writing, thinking, archiving, organizing / produce one 4-hour drawing

Week 5: Chronological Trace
- day 1 - 6: walk through the neighborhoods of the city from oldest to newest, noting flows and interface.

Week 6: Human Subject Trace [from a set of origin points]
- day 1: follow a teenager
- day 2: follow a college student
- day 3: follow a blue collar worker
- day 4: follow a white collar worker
- day 5: follow a mother/father
- day 6: follow a senior citizen

**Further Afield**

Week 7-8: Field trips to nearby projects / towns / regional points of interest

*Spatial Continuity Test: a rigorous form of Derive detailed on next page.*
Spatial Continuity Test - a more rigorous form of Dérive

Rule 1: Walk in a straight line on the right side of the street.
Rule 2: Turn right at the first available path, stay to the left side.
Rule 3: Turn left at the first available path, stay to the right side.
Rule 4: Repeat, stop at two hours mark. (this way, different results can be compared)
Rule 5: If the chance to go up or down presents itself, I must take it. (engage the Z vector)
Rule 6: The main turn is what counts, not micro-turns (e.g. stairs with multiple landings do not count as turns)
Rule 7: If a path turns out to be a dead-end, make the last available turn, even if it flips the order of turns.
Rule 8: If there is no other available path on a dead-end segment, continue the original vector before the turn.
Rule 9: If I come to a T intersection, I cannot jaywalk.
Rule 10: I cannot go into private property, even if it is open.
Rule 11: If a bus comes I must hop on and take it one stop, then continue. This will be shown as a dashed line.*

* this is the same graphic language of the itinerary (solid line for time in the city, dashed line for air travel.

Documentation format and photo-documentation method:
Spatial Continuity Test, Continued...

Qualities / Data to capture:

1. **Grain / Fineness**: Count number of buildings on either side of every segment
2. **Textures / Surface**: Noted in sketches and photos
3. **Traffic flows**: Number of people / cars / traffic types to be noted in sketches and photos
4. **Traffic flows**: Record time of waiting at each turn
5. **Sunlight / Shading**: This will be captured in the photography and could be analyzed later
6. **Network Infrastructure Interface**: Looking for where flows are disrupted or augmented by infrastructure
7. **Program and activity
8. **Demographics**

Diagram showing the tests from four separate points of origin.
Preparation (FA13)

Mapping
- Further identification, and rigorous mapping of areas of focus.
- Workflow: GIS, Grasshopper, Rhino for layers of background information
- Testing: Sample sites and fieldwork in San Francisco and Berkeley.
- Contacts. Set up meetings with urban designers, officials and architects in each city.

Additional Site Research
- Enhanced 3D GIS maps with layers of data identifying the areas of study
- Sections of study areas, noting proportions, building height, street width, etc
- Circulation tracings overlaid on the maps / sections.
- Time lapse of the tracings and the main area of study (7 days in each area).
- Spring semester: parameters drawn from this data and used to script alternatives that would then be overlaid on the existing - the overlay revealing spatial potentials or violations.

Itinerary Refinement and Contacts
- Refine itinerary based on semester research and testing
- Identify contacts based on finalized itinerary and projects

Solar envelope constructions (Knowles)
Transportation $10,000
Lodging (200 nights) $15,000
Food $10,000
Total Budget $35,000

$1000
$1200
$1200
$1000
$750
$750
Barcelona is a privileged city. In addition to its landscape and architecture it has an age-old urban culture rich in successes and innovations.”¹ Formed by a pair of axes laid out by the Romans that until the modern era always guided the siting of important buildings and the direction of roads and circulation.

**The Ferran-Princesa Axis** - A seminal pair of reform streets that exhibit the transverse orientation of modern Barcelona, highlighting the underlying Roman cardus-decumanus. These are “knife-like incision[s] in the Gothic city introducing to Barcelona an idea that had until then not been seriously entertained: the very notion of the street as we understand it today.”²

**Eixample** - an extensive realized proposal for the Barcelona plain, “Eixample in contrast to the other proposals, had no other logic than its own, acknowledging neither the idea of supramunicipal integration nor the image of industrial axis nor simple expansion. Instead, it is purely its internal reasoning (the General Theory of Urbanization), the definition of streets and ‘interstreet blocks’ in accordance with a systematic analysis of the technical requirements of traffic and hygiene and the comarcal and the regional structure of the road system that define the grid that imposes itself autonomously and absolutely on the territory, without directions or axes or priority areas but with the independence of its own autonomy of theory.”³

**Additional points of interest:**
Banco Urquijo Apartment Complex and Las Cocheras Apartments - by Jose Antonio Coderch
Barcelonetta

Contacts: Carmen Fiol (Arriana+Fiol)
Jordi Trucco (HYBRIDa, scp)

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¹ de Sola-Morales, Manuel. Ten Lessons on Barcelona, p. 22
² ibid, p. 40
³ ibid, p. 286
Rome is a city of landscape and monuments. The city exhibits several layers from bygone eras. The way these layers are sometimes exposed and at times hidden fascinates me. In parts one might find a natural city beneath an imposed city beneath a natural city. In Rome the built and the unbuilt mutually structure each other. What is Rome’s relationship with its natural setting? How are the fabrics of different eras functioning?

**EUR (Esposizione Universale Roma)** - a development for the 1942 world’s fair. The design was commissioned from the leaders of both of the rival factions in Italian architecture: Marcello Piacentini for the “reactionaries” and Giuseppe Pagano for the “progressives”. Each of them brought in their own preferred architects to design individual buildings within the district. EUR offers a large-scale image of how urban Italy might have looked, if the Fascist regime had not fallen; wide axially planned streets and austere buildings of either stile Littorio, inspired by ancient Roman architecture, or Rationalism, modern architecture but built using traditional limestone, tuff and marble. The design was inspired, according to the fascist ideology, to Roman Imperial town planning, with modern elements which came from Italian rationalism, the result being a sort of simplified neoclassicism. The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana serves as the icon.

**Roman Forum | Foro Imperiali** - this is a very large archeological excavation that reveals the public part of Imperial Rome. The organization of buildings in this part is of particular interest, but also of interest is the way the ancient fabric and the current fabric interface.

Further Afield:
Florentine New Towns: Palmanova, Pienza
“Haussmann’s plans for Paris cut wide boulevards through the old fabric and combined the agendas of the time: to render the capitalist instrument of the city more efficient by liberating its circulation; to celebrate the monuments and glory of empires past and present by linking focal points with vistas; to let in light, air and greenery for the bourgeoisie, but push the poor elsewhere; to turn the boulevard into a social stage, but also a vector of military control.”1

More recently, “Paris has relied heavily on projects that tackle the intermediate scale. Two new quarters, Bercy and Massena, were derelict postindustrial land along the Seine that was recaled and reparceled to accommodate new uses stapled by a large housing stock and a series of commercial and public facilities.”2

**Quartier Massena** by Christian de Pontzamparc proposed a new block typology that emerges from a variety of interrelated elements that establish individuality while they maintain loose relationships with each other. The large urban blocks are selectively perforated to establish a variety of open spaces. The project tests Pontzamparc’s idea of “the third-age city” which generates a block structure that negotiates between the well-defined closed block of the traditional city with the loose perimeter of the Modern Movement block. If the traditional model provides a clear definition of private and public spaces, the modern model allows for more flexible open spaces. Massena attempts to synthesize both into a more animate massing type wherein fenestrations are calibrated to specific contexts.

**La Promenade Plantee / La Coulee Vert** an elevated greenway cutting through several urban textures.

**Parc de la Villette** a new fabric condition inserted between two others.

**La Defense** commercial district on the edge of the city

**Içi-les-Moulineaux** business district southwest where the elevated train is packed with program underneath.

Further Afield:

Lyon **Etat-Unis**

Villeurbanne **Quartier des Gratte-ciel**

Just a few kilometres away from each other, these two sites exhibit the will of politicians and of architects to improve the often shocking living conditions of their fellow city-dwellers. As far as they were concerned, it was essential to reinvent architecture and urban planning.

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1 Curtis, William. Modern Architecture Since 1900. p. 34
In its colonial heyday Dakar was one of the major cities of the French Empire, comparable to Hanoi or Beirut. French trading firms established branch offices there and industrial investments (mills, breweries, refineries, canneries) were attracted by its port and rail facilities.

Dakar is a major financial center, home to a dozen national and regional banks (including the BCEAO which manages the unified West African CFA currency), and to numerous international organizations, NGOs and international research centers. Dakar has a large Lebanese community (concentrated in the import-export sector) that dates to the 1920s, a community of Moroccan business people, as well as Mauritanian, Cape Verdean, and Guinean communities. The city is home to as many as 20,000 French expatriates. France still maintains an air force base at Yoff and the French fleet is serviced in Dakar’s port.
Jakarta’s figural ground

“Jakarta’s conditions on the ground have to be understood in relation to ideas of saturation and viscosity. The trajective is a term that tends to be associated with modernity and speed, and with a relatively friction-free medium. The arcing lines that describe the flows of motorway traffic, international air traffic, electronic data transmission, etc., are almost always represented on smooth and undifferentiated backgrounds. A city such as Jakarta also demands a consideration of slowed trajectories through more viscous urban substances, substances that are constituted by entropy and decay as much as the smoothness of the new. It is a city whose typical trajectories lie somewhere between the slow time of romantic ruination and the speed of consumerist expendability, strange hybrid conditions that seem old from the moment they are made.

This is not an urban fabric as that term might be traditionally understood, but appears to be a different kind of medium altogether, a medium constituted by industrialised, peri-urban, ex-urban, suburban, agricultural zones, some densely populated, others derelict. [Jakarta exhibits] an urbanism constituted not by a stable underlying fabric but by its unlooked-for surplus. The interpenetration of urban and rural spaces gives rise to radical shifts in speed, scale, and variable trajectories in close proximity—intercontinental data transmission and bicycle taxis ferrying passengers from the market to the village.

the sheer over-abundance and variability of vectors, trajectories, temporalities and scales. Here the idea of disegno as a kind of disciplinary mark of distinction that authorises the architect-as-conceiver cannot sustain itself. What these grounds demand is not so much new figurative forms, resting transparently upon it, as a figural condition, a condition that has the capacity to interrupt the flows of representation and meaning.”

Contacts: Andres Sevstuk (City Form Lab)

“Verticalization has become a dominant factor influencing urban form in many Brazilian cities. The isolated tower on a lot and the complex of towers on a block are hegemonic models resulting from the Brazilian modernist paradigm. This has configured Sao Paulo’s contemporary cityscape sets the standard for the country and most cities emulate what happens there.

In Sao Paulo the verticalization process is based on the urban planning legislation and zoning code enacted in 1971, and also on the planning models adopted by the real estate market. Mandatory set-backs and land-use regulations resulted in 50 percent site coverage, which created a typology of a tall building standing isolated on its lot, in sharp contrast to the previous building codes, which specified little or no setbacks and allowed high lot coverage and floor area ratios.”

SESC Pompeia Complex  Architect Lina Bo Bardi spearheaded the unofficial and gradual rejuvenation of this defunct 1938 barrels factory complex in the late 1970’s. She saw that the inner streets of the abandoned factory were already being used by families and children during the weekends, and sought to maintain that.

Minhocao  An elevated roadway that is closed to auto traffic at certain times. Local urban planners have long advocated tearing down the road in order to promote urban renewal.

Mosby  Lina Bo Bardi designed building that is hovering above its base creating a unique plaza.

Projecto Novel Luz  the Luz neighborhood is being revitalized. the plan is extensive and broad.

Heliopolis a large favela that has in parts been reurbanized.

Cidide Jardim  a large swath of new urban fabric by the river.

Bras  an old working class neighborhood

25 de Marco  a shopping street in an old centro neighborhood

Higienopolis  a rich Jewish neighborhood with older buildings

Liberdade  Japanese neighborhood

Further afield in Brasil

Curitiba  larger-than-life mayor with an innovative master plan from 1990’s

Rio de Janiero  following the Barcelona model in the run-up to Olympics.

Contacts: Maureen Boyer [Gensler Sao Paulo]

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“Mexico City is both enormous and minuscule, super-fast and maddeningly slow, wealthy and impoverished, lush and barren, dense and sparse, global and local. Unlike Tokyo, London, Sydney or New York, Mexico City has no ready-made iconographic image. The city resists reduction to an icon precisely because its single most distinguishing feature is the complex and radically heterogeneous mixture of components that define it.” ¹ The city has struggled to keep infrastructure growing as fast as the population.

**Azcapotzalco** an important industrial area of the city, the district suffers from a lack of green areas.

**Polanco** historically the city’s most exclusive neighborhood, it was converted from farmland in 1937 with one third of the land decicated to public parks, gardens, wide avenues and streets. Redevelopment along the major avenues has introduced hotels, art galleries, restaurants, and fashion design houses into the once entirely residential fabric.

**Centro Historico** the heart of the Spanish colonial city, constructed on top of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan. The Zocalo is the second largest square in the world, surrounded by palaces and government buildings.

**Colonia Condesa** neighborhood with elongated parcels, established itself as an elegant residential are with lots of green and open space. Developers, planners, architects, government agencies, and the public are recently refocusing their attention on the neighborhood’s unique urban characteristics.

**Iztapalapa** with a population explosion after WWII, Iztapalapa was unevenly and irregularly urbanized through speculative development, self-built housing, and squatter settlements. Identified as one of the delegations with the most crowded and deteriorated living conditions, the area has been the focus of new public programs to improve its housing, education, and employment opportunities.

**Nezahualcóyotl** begun as an informal settlement, the area was developed prior to the provision of city services. until the 1970s few residents had water, electricity or drainage, and to this day services are still ad hoc. transportation for the significant percentage of residents who travel one to two hours a day to the wealthier, western half of the city or the northern industrial area is largely accommodated by privately contracted minibus.

**Torre Punta Del Parque** two narrow, thirty-one-story tower blocks, where the public domain of the pedestrian experience has ceased to exist as almost all movement is by automobile. Here the architecture turns its back on the city, perpetuating a deteriorization of the outdoor urban experience.

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Bibliography


Stalinallee

Spectacle of the Social
“The symbols of the old Germany – the imperial palace in Berlin, the Hindenburg Palace, Hitler’s Reich Chancellory, and the Police Headquarters – were destroyed in the Second World War. The men and women of the new Germany are clearing away the ruins of the old imperial Germany. From the ruins of the old Germany a new one arises.”

- Walter Ulbricht, GDR Leader

Amid post-war devastation Germany had a chance for a democratic new beginning¹ (see figure 1). Stalinallee was a product of government sponsored development to kick off organized rebuilding. Berlin, however, was an increasingly divided city and the ideologies of east and west would be highly influential in how the street would be planned and construction executed. Though the planners and politicians set out to make a street to exemplify the power of the proletariat in the newly formed GDR, the development could not have happened as it did without a high degree of government support. This support, coming from Moscow and the officials of the GDR, came with highly directed planning principles that dictated much of how the street would be planned. Stalinallee honored the existing city grid, but imposed a uniform building type, rather than allowing each block to develop autonomously (see figure 2). The East Germans, keen to establish a new national identity, took cues from 19th century architect and planner, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, who planned much of central Berlin to neo-classical standards. Many of these elements make it into the vocabulary of Stalinallee and couple with the grandiosity of the soviet scale – a scale for street events, demonstrations, and parades -- to create an extraordinary boulevard. From the clearing of rubble, through construction and in its first years of operation, Stalinallee was documented in the most hopeful of tones. All of this made a falsely advertised standard

¹. Nicolaus and Obeth, Die Stalin Allee, 131.
of living for the new socialist state – an unsustainable model for a socialist economy. The power of the proletariat would prove to be a myth, and the street would briefly serve as only a spectacle – the image of a promise of a new form of society.

**Soviet Influence**

Russia set out to make a deep and permanent mark on the city of Berlin\(^2\), and by extension East Germany. To that end, Russia constructed three memorials in quick succession immediately following the war. The Soviet War Memorial, built in 1945 within a hundred yards of the Reichstag, is a white monolith of marble supporting a soviet soldier (see figure 3). Stalin had removed every usable asset, from hand tools to power stations, as reparation to Russia from German aggression and destruction. As the East Germans wallowed in poverty, he promised through rigid and loyal communist administration a great future under socialism.\(^3\) The Soviet Embassy near Potsdamer Platz was another major move and a project in which Stalin took a personal interest. The Embassy had to be compelling, powerful, and permanent – a symbol of Soviet presence there and the idea of East Germany as a stand-alone state with Berlin as its capital. Stalin dismissed all modernist experimentation in the arts as bourgeois indulgence, and spent years theorizing to define the appropriate architecture for the Russian Soviet.\(^4\) Classical architecture emerged as the most appropriate and highest expression of socialist realism. He was now imposing this on the new German Soviet.

\(^2\) Balfour, Politics of Order, 159.
\(^3\) Balfour, Politics of Order, 160.
\(^4\) Ladd, Ghosts of Berlin, 182.
The Battle for a New German Architecture

Development kicked off with a controversial building by Hans Scharoun’s associate, Ludmilla Herzenstein. His gallery courtyard apartment design was oriented north-south, perpendicular to Stalinallee (See figure 6 and 7). The reaction to this modernist housing was severe. The newspaper Neues Deutschland hosted a debate about the future of German architecture, in which journalists, architects, and politicians alike declared a prevailing sentiment captured by journalist Ernst Hoffmann: “Formalism, which includes the modernist schools of Constructivism and Functionalism attached to the Bauhaus style, reflects the declining imperialist world with American finance capital at its head. Its worst fault is to propose an architecture independent of the social structure, a development equally at home in New York and Moscow.”5 What they wanted was a new national identity, and it could not come from something so cosmopolitan. Walter Ulbricht, in a speech at the Third Party Congress in July 1950, accused unnamed municipal architects of wanting to diminish the significance of Germany’s capital by rebuilding it with low buildings. “[In their] cosmopolitan fantasies, [they believe that] one could build houses in Berlin that would be just as appropriate to the South African landscape.”6

Famed architect Herman Henselmann was originally a proponent of the modernist style. Just as the Herzenstein courtyard housing project was rejected by the community, Henselmann was submitting his proposal for the Weberweise highrise, a keystone to the Friedrichshain Residential Cell. It was immediately sucked into the

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5. Balfour, Politics of Order, 162.
media hailstorm, and the modernist design for Weberweise was vehemently rejected. Henselmann was given eight days to redesign the proposal. In a move of desperation, he incorporated a massing not unlike the Russian buildings he knew, but detailed it with neoclassical elements (see figure 8 and Appendix B). The submission was overwhelmingly accepted – toasted as the successful amalgamation of German heritage and social aesthetics. Concurrent with the debate, the competition for the masterplan of Stalinallee was underway, and the winning schemes were those that most embodied the “Sixteen Principles of Socialist Town Planning”, released in 1950. Five winners were chosen (Henselmann was not one of them), but after the success of the Weberweise redesign, Henselmann was asked to join the team of five for a redesign of Strausberger Platz.

**National form and democratic content**[^7][^8]

The buildings of Stalinallee were conceived as urban palaces for the proletariat where ordinary workers were to enjoy the comforts of the old bourgeoisie[^8]. It is an exceptionally wide axial tree-lined boulevard in the spirit of Unter den Linden or Champs Elysees (115 meters in some parts). Historically a thoroughfare, it was conceived not just for cars, but actually was meant more for pedestrians and demonstrators, as part of the east’s re-centering. It is a street for strolling and shopping, replete with shops and restaurants at street level. As the street is the main focus, walls of buildings enclose it. There are two plazas on the street – Strausberger Platz is enclosed by high rises, while a framing focal point is the Henselmann-designed towers on Frankfurter Tor (see figure

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[^8]: Ladd, Ghosts of Berlin, 183.
The buildings themselves are made up of seven to ten-story buildings, all uniform in massing. The apartments were more spacious than their post-war modern predecessors, and they had higher ceilings (3m floor-to-floor). The facades were generously proportioned, articulated horizontally and vertically, and ornamented with classical detail. The bases were clad in stone and many were pillared. The facades were clad with ceramic tile from a worker-owned factory in nearby Meissen. From an urban design perspective, the street reflects the “Sixteen Principles of Socialist Town Planning” in that the city center is politically and visually important, decentralization was highly discouraged, and the axial plan was favored. Formalism and cosmopolitanism characterized international modernism and was thus antithetical to the victorious working class as well as to the German nation. Where the west was designing from the inside out, the east was designing from the outside in.

The SED party then organized a “National Program for the Reconstruction of Berlin”, launched with the first stone laid for the new Stalinallee. There was enthusiasm, hope, and willingness on the part of the people to take part, collectively, in the affairs of the city and the life of the city. 45,000 volunteers began removing rubble on January 2, 1952. The program was documented by Gerhard Puhlmann in his book “Die Stalinallee” with this printed on the flyleaf: “With the popular movement for the National Reconstruction program of Berlin begins a new section of the history of the liberation struggle of our nation. Every German should be able to say with pride that they were there.” The book itself promotes the very image Stalinallee was creating.

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Analysis / Criticism

Widened and fronted with similarly massed and ornamented buildings, Stalinallee was a manufactured spectacle. The building type was not economically viable in a post-war, planned economy. Embodying many Socialist ideals of community, the extra-wide street was public space as a site of state representation, social encounter, and community creation\(^\text{12}\), but this model could not be effectively propagated.

It is conceivable the spectacle was meant to serve as a catalyst for socialist hopes and dreams to eventually come true by way of continuous edification from this street’s image. To this end, socialist ideals were reinforced in socialist realism – Soviet partisan art that realistically depicted scenes of everyday proletarian life – the reliefs of which can be found along the street’s facades. The reliefs were meant to show that top leaders are united with trades, student, housewife, and factory workers.\(^\text{13}\) Indeed, First Party secretary, Walter Ulbricht, and the state president, Wilhelm Pieck, had been trained as carpenters. The construction employed a good deal of manual labor and generously applied detailing and material uses meant to keep craftsmen working. No fewer than 369 different tile types were used in the façades. The project pits craftsmanship against the modernist machine-age. To avoid objectification and subsequent alienation which was believed to be inevitable in the capitalist model, the socialists looked to use handcrafted details and materials to connect the people with the product, as well as to keep them employed. Further, the machine aesthetic so ardently sought in the west produced homogenized surfaces that the East wished to avoid. It was reviled as cosmopolitan without national origin. Industrial processing was seen as

\(^{13}\) Wagner, “Machine Aesthetics,” 69.
“cold” and “leveling”, and an expression of alienated, capitalistic labor. Wrought iron bars were used on gratings and railings on French windows, balconies, entry doors, and stairwells even though iron was in very short supply.

Ideas of social space were fundamentally different from the West. The façade was used to conceptualize urban space, and there was a balance of both individual and social space (see figures 15-22). Keeping privileged individual residential space strictly separate from social space was not desired. Even private space of Stalinallee apartments were made into image to convey the new high quality living standard being offered. Stalinallee produced 5,000 new dwellings - a drop in the bucket of total housing needs - while some would enjoy this standard of living, most would not.

Conclusion

Stalinallee intended to express the political power of the working population of East Germany. However, it was perceived as order established by the apparatus of the party and state for the life of the citizens. Construction costs were too high. The prototype never made it to type. Newer developments along the avenue - west of Strausberger Platz and east of Frankfurter Tor - would push toward industrialization techniques, leaving ornamentation and articulated facades behind. Thus former Stalinallee, now called Karl-Marx Allee, exists today as a monument to the post-war socialist spirit.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


