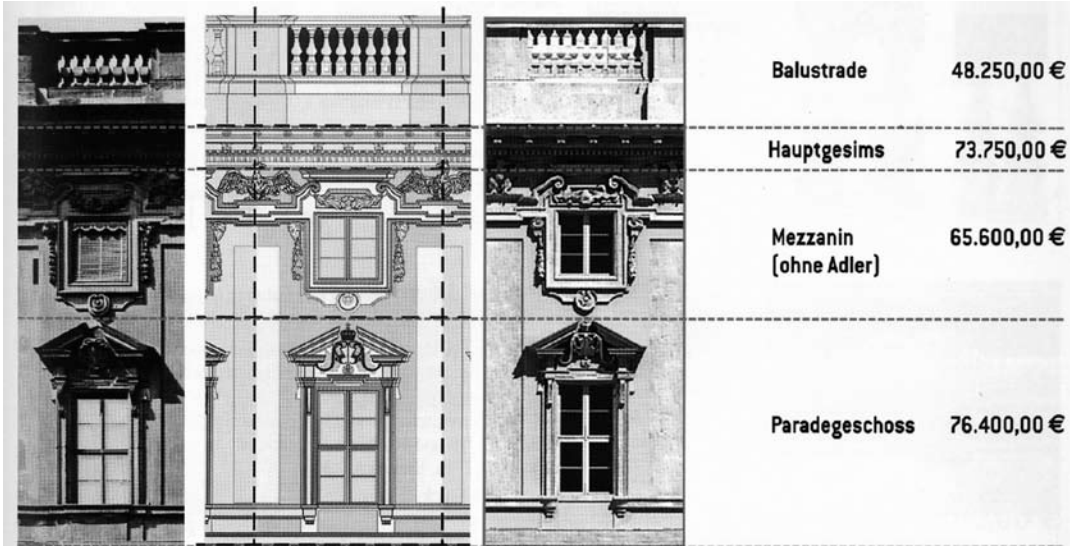
Display Architecture



Förderverein Berliner Schloss e.V. (Eds.): Wiederaufbau Berliner Schloss. 2. Katalog der Fassaden- Schmuckelemente, 2006, detail of p. 47.

The replication of Goethe's house in Weimar next to the original in 1999 was an experiment that raised the issue of display architecture: Does the original house have an aura that is lacking in the copy? Is it possible to replicate space? Does architecture have an ideal transferable value independent of its non-transferable physicality? These questions apparently did not play a role in the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche in Dresden. However, they are pressing issues in the debate surrounding the Humboldt-Forum and the process of re-erecting the Baroque façades of the Berlin Castle. In the course Exhibition Design and Curatorial Practice at the School of Design in Karlsruhe this topic has been examined on both theoretical and practical levels and the competition entry by architects Kuehn Malvezzi, whose non-conformist design received a special commendation, has remained controversial even after the competition. Is it possible to consider the questionable Berlin competition of 2008 as a call for display architecture? As a form of display, architecture also functions as externalized memory. The human brain is dependent on establishing relationships with external space. But what specific role does reconstruction play in the externalization of memory? Can architectural reconstruction be couched in rhetorical terms? Why should we even discuss a matter considered to be indisputable by many architects and preservationists? According to Heiner Mühlmann, reconstruction provides an X-ray image of cultural deep structures, which reflect the organization of culture as a whole. How can we assess the complexity of projects like the Humboldt-Forum from this perspective?

Heiner Mühlmann, Stephan Trüby

Display Architecture

STEPHAN TRÜBY What's interesting about reconstructivism? Why should we discuss a topic that many architects and preservationists can't talk about?
HEINER MÜHLMANN **We should be interested in reconstructivism mainly because it is having so much cultural success right now.**

ST Do you have a sense for why it is currently successful?
HM **Let me back up briefly. Architecture is, in a way, a memory system, an externalized memory. We rely upon the externalized memory of architecture because the human brain alone is incapable of remembering so much complexity. It's just not possible to do everything in your head. The human brain relies upon interconnections, and external spatial configurations are very important aids for memory in this regard. Architecture doesn't exist, only this topographical memory system does. With the example of mnemonics, one recognizes that architecture is best suited for retaining the contents of memory: artists who work with memory invariably work with topographies: spaces, rooms, and urban structures.**

ST And what is particular about the externalized memory system of 'reconstructivism?'
HM **Memory systems display something like a self-healing automatism: if something drops out somewhere, if an illness crops up somewhere, if a gap opens up somewhere—then a dynamic is initiated that seeks to offset these gaps by itself. Rebuilding would happen throughout Western culture—especially in Europe—if as much had been destroyed overall as in Germany. If a sensitive gap opens up somewhere, the desire to fill in these gaps will always exist.**

ST How do you read Kuehn Malvezzi's competition submission for the Berlin Schloss from this perspective?
HM **The design features a two-channel structural configuration: on the one hand there's the technical channel—the technical core of the building, the brick corpus—and then there's an application channel or display channel of theatrical behavior, the ornamental elements. This structural division is found not only in architecture.**

ST You're alluding to rhetoric, the 'mother' of all two-channel systems?
HM **Yes. Rhetoric exported its two-channel structure into theater, into literature, into music, into architecture, etc. All cultural expressions rely upon a technical channel—which is categorical and semantic—and a display channel—in which recognizable linguistic elements are handled. What emerges in reconstructivism is in some measure an x-ray image of this deep-seated cultural structure: it can't be architectonic; it also can't just be linguistic; it has to go deeper. It actually has to have something to do with cultural organization.**

ST Your differentiation between technical and display channels was known in the architectural theory of the mid-19th century as the differentiation between 'core form' (structure) and 'art form' (ornamentation). This differentiation comes from Carl Bötticher. Linked to Bötticher toward the end of the 19th century is Joseph Bayer's architectonic image of ornamentation and structure. In contrast to Bötticher, for Bayer the relationship between structure and ornamentation is already loosened. Bayer states: '[…] indeed the wondrously ornamented historical shells fell away, they were shed forever and the new structure stepped blank and clean out into the sunlight.' Here Bayer verbally draws Le Corbusier-style white cube architecture out into the sunlight a few decades in advance. What remained was a liberated structure that stood blank and pure, geometrically unambiguous, timeless, and everlasting. Werner Oechslin saw this evolution honored in Adolf Loos' architecture. At the same time he yearned for a 'Greek idea' of architecture that remained unaware of the division between core and art form, or structure and ornament. Does display-less architecture exist?
HM **There's just as little of that as there is pure architecture. Greek architecture is also display architecture: its stone architecture employs forms that only make technical sense in wood architecture: for instance Doric triglyphs—small tablets that are designed to prevent water from seeping into wooden support beams. Here it's about a projection of wood architecture into the medium of stone architecture—about a self-imaging architecture. Similar to how the new Fiat Cinquecento is a self-imaging of the Fiat Cinquecento of the 1960s. A law of design evolution goes: at a specific point it always comes down to self-imaging, and if you're at a loss then you give way to a double-articulated system. The double-articulated system is an invariant natural structure.**

ST You're part of a scientific research group called TRACE (Transmission in Rhetorics, Arts and Cultural Evolution), which conducts neuro-scientific architectural experiments. Which neurological research findings make it easier to understand reconstructivism?
HM **In our experiments we examined two building families that we had selected according to the principle of decorum. With decorum I mean the sum/collection of rules of correct ornamentation according to ranking systems. We compiled the first group according to a 'high-ranking' level of decorum, and the others according to 'low-ranking' decorum. The ancient Greeks would have called our two building families 'hypsos' and 'tapeinos.' We predicted that the human brain would differentiate between both building families on an unconscious level, and that 'high-ranking' buildings would trigger a particular response in the brain.**
I don't want to go into all the details of the experimental setup here, but will provide just the following brief summary: ornamentally lavish buildings, called 'high-ranking' in our experiment, trigger the response 'familiarity' and 'intimacy' on a seemingly non-conscious level of cognitive activity. Buildings lacking ornamentation activate the response 'newness/importance' (novelty detection, relevance detection). The neuroscientists also called the familiarity response the 'butcher on the bus effect.' It's difficult to recognize the butcher on the bus because he's not wearing a white smock, and because he's not standing in his shop. But you recognize that you know this man somehow. The term 'déjà vu' would also apply here.
In terms of reconstructivism this applies to ornamentally lavish buildings like the ones in our experiment. This architecture triggers a déjà vu effect, even if you're only seeing the actual building for the first time. This is pleasing to the cognitive system.
It transmits something like a sense of security. By contrast the 'novelty detection' response associated with 'low-ranking' triggers something akin to a warning signal.
While discussing our experiment we talked about prototypical memories that could be carried over in the dynamic of cultural transmission from one generation to the next. In this context you could also talk about a cultural instinct.

ST How do you evaluate the complexity of reconstruction projects like the Berlin Stadtschloss?
HM **In the realm of design codes a design like Kuehn Malvezzi's has undoubtedly greater structural complexity than a typical building of current 'star architecture.' You taught us that in the language of architecture one differentiates between design codes and building codes. Building codes refer to structural engineering, construction techniques, etc. Here the towers of star architecture are undoubtedly highly complex. But in terms of design codes, for star buildings it's a matter of simply detecting the attributes that vary on a basic sculptural level. The entire building is supposed to become a distinctive sculpture. Here the limits to systems based on distinctiveness are quickly reached. Thus for me this means I'm always mistaking one star building for another.**

Wilfried Kuehn

Star architecture functions with only one channel at the design level. A building like the one designed by Kuehn Malvezzi is doubly articulated. First of all there's the technical core structure that formulates the building as a self-contained design. Second, there's the ornamental level, a second level of representation that integrates the building into the first representational level. Double articulated systems are more complex than single articulated systems. What's new here is the representation of the reconstruction process. To a certain extent the time axis itself is represented. It no longer has anything to do with artistic transcendence and timelessness. Kuehn Malvezzi are no longer artists. They are evolutionary engineers.

The contribution is based on a public conversation on January 28, 2009 at Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe.

'It was neither the intention nor the aim of this film to explain or justify cinema; instead the film was intended to demonstrate a few actual possibilities of how one could arrive at this point. That does not mean that this film had to be made. It simply means to show that everyone who wants to make a film must necessarily go down one of the paths shown here.'
Jean-Luc Godard, **Le Gai Savoir**

Pain

'If the demolition of the castle is to be considered the symbol of the victory of the GDR, then the reconstruction of the castle would be the symbol of its failure.'
Joachim Fest (1991)

'The original can never be regained, even if one finds thousands of individual pieces to incorporate into the new building. However, there is no other possibility of saving the city as a city, and therefore in a painful good-bye one must reproduce what was lost, not with triumph but resignation.' Wolf Jobst Siedler (1993)

After the fall of the Berlin Wall the idea of re-erecting the castle took root in the circle surrounding the journalists Fest and Siedler, both native Berliners born in 1926 who have childhood memories of the former Hohenzollern castle. Memory and politics at least apparently have quite a solid relationship here: The individual stories of Fest and Siedler as citizens of Berlin and the political history of the city as the capital of various obsolete empires and states come together in a painful yearning for the return of the lost, although the fact of this disappearance has long since been accepted with resignation.

Façades

Ten years after the journalists' appeal an expert commission recommended the reconstruction of a part of the Baroque façades in combination with a new contemporary building—a surprise to preservationists and architects alike. The German Parliament followed the recommendation by passing a resolution on July 4, 2002 by a two-thirds majority in the first ballot to reconstruct three external and three courtyard façades. The longing for the ultimate disappearance of the GDR and its architecture, exemplified by the Palast der Republik, meets with the yearning for a 'historic city center,' which now seems to be attainable through quite ahistorical means.

Trompe l'oeil

'Donate for the reconstruction! Buy a castle building stone—as easy as that. Building stones starting at €50. Decorative façade components starting at €850 and continuing up to well over €1 million. Take your pick!!'
A call for donations by the Friends of the Berlin Castle (2009)

It began with a cloth mockup of the castle in 1993. In the mode of a talented trompe l'oeil painter the Hamburg businessman von Boddien presented the castle as an illusionary façade and founded an initiative to support the reconstruction of the Baroque decorative façade. A catalogue of all façade ornaments was published for the occasion and depicted each with an item number and price, which citizens are called to purchase just like from a mail-order catalogue. Like most of his fellow supporters of the castle, von Boddien was too young to have any personal memories of the building and thus is completely free of the resignation and pain such as experienced by Wolf Jobst Siedler. He only knows the castle as an image, and he wants to reconstruct it as such. A simulacrum, Disneyland or a new form of media architecture?

Competition

'In architecture the answer must always contain the problem. A good architectural solution is always a clear expression of the problem out of which it was born.'
Giorgio Grassi (1986), Member of the jury, Humboldt-Forum Competition

A competition is a means of finding the right answer to the wrong questions. The process begins with an inaccurate title: 'Reconstruction of the Berlin Castle.' The clear contradiction in the competition mandate illustrates the fundamental problem that makes a hidden minefield out of the grey area between reconstructing the façades and a desire for the castle itself. This problem is carried over into the contrast between the structure of the façade and the arrangement of the space within. How does one create a decorative façade out of reconstructed Baroque elements in conjunction with a new museum building, which represents the largest cultural building project of the Berlin Republic and which will serve as its contemporary architectural self-portrait? Is this a new outgrowth of what Rem Koolhaas diagnosed as the 'lobotomy' of the modern high-rise: the absolute separation between interior and exterior, content and form of an immensely large building?

Retroactive Architecture

The demolition of the Palast der Republik in 2008 is rooted in the tradition of tabula rasa urbanism. Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin for Paris (1922-25) and also Oswald Mathias Ungers' idea of a green urban archipelago in Berlin (1977) are the artistically outstanding urban models with a history of city planning that includes demolition, new building and reconstruction: urbanism as curatorial practice that views buildings as objects on display and the city itself as an exhibition. The Plan Voisin explicitly made room also for historical buildings; once historical monuments had fallen victim to the tabula rasa approach, they could, according to Le Corbusier, be rebuilt at any other random location in Paris. In his urban archipelago Ungers planned—subsequent to the destruction of entire city neighborhoods—to reconstruct historical architectural projects unrealized until today. These ranged from Mies van der Rohe's glass high-rise to Adolf Loos' Chicago Tribune Tower. These urbanistic designs of early and late modernism are brought together in the intention to carry out reconstructions in which authenticity is not a question of material correspondence but purely a matter of concept: a monument without any patina, emancipated from Alois Riegl's long-dominant idea of age-value. The notion of retroactive architecture represents a challenge

Françoise Choay: Das architektonische Erbe, eine Allegorie (1992), Bauwelt Fundamente 109, Braunschweig/Wiesbaden 1997.

Barbara Jakubeit, Barbara Hoidn (Eds.): Schloß, Palast, Haus Vaterland: Gedanken zu Form, Inhalt und Geist von Wiederaufbau und Neugestaltung, Basel/Boston/Berlin 1998.

Heiner Mühlmann: Ästhetische Theorie der Renaissance: Leon Battista Alberti, Bochum 2005.

Heiner Mühlmann: Die Natur der Kulturen – Entwurf einer kulturgenetischen Theorie, Wien/New York 1996.

Werner Oechslin: Stilhülse und Kern. Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos und der evolutionäre Weg zur modernen Architektur, Zürich/Berlin 1994.

for conventional preservation, in which the traces of history are just as important as the conservation of the original state and certainly rank higher than any reconstruction. As with the Japanese Ise Shrine, the kind of material rebuilding proposed by Corbusier and Ungers does not mean the negation of the original but, in contrast, the guarantee of its authentic preservation: based in concept and not material substance.

Model

Museums are places for the preservation of authentic works of art; originals that cannot simply be copied—not because a copy would be impossible in terms of the technical skill involved but because of an agreement that protects the original from being reproduced. Nevertheless, our museums are full of copies. Created for the purpose of research and study or with the aim of creating a realistic presentation of ruins and fragments, such replicas are considered legitimate: reconstructions, casts and models are not forgeries. What generally differentiates these original copies from others is their being produced from molds like the plaster cast of a stone sculpture. They are one-to-one models, which faithfully correspond to absent originals in terms of form but decidedly differ in terms of content: a thing that has no history, no age and no author, in contrast to the original. The reconstruction of Mies van der Rohe's pavilion in Barcelona that was carried out fifty years after its demolition could be thus defined as a one-to-one architectural model.

Display

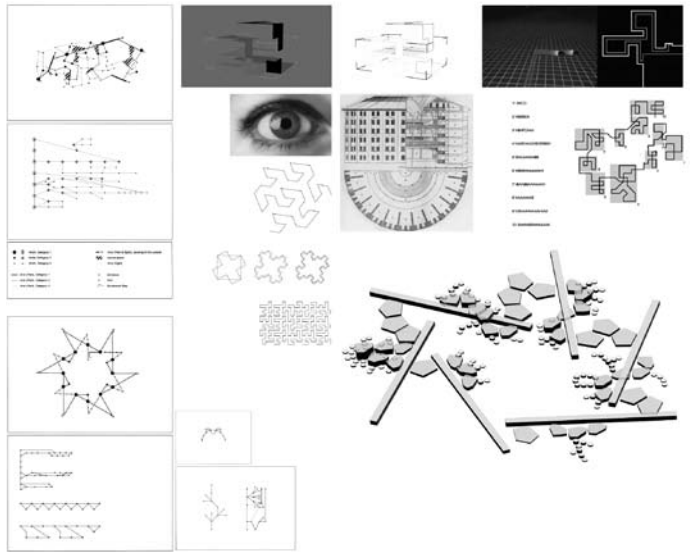
The Humboldt-Forum is not a replica. As a museum and building for public gatherings it will be an original, and it thus necessitates an architect. Its repetitive elements must also entail a kind of update, in which the illusion of history must be simultaneously worked through together with the disillusioning experience of the present: the conscious incongruity between form and content will be important at first glance, similar to the effect of illusionistic architecture in trompe l'oeil. It will be a form of architecture that thoroughly and utterly adheres to the laws of display. A kind of display architecture that functions on different levels: in correspondence with the surrounding building shells, such as the Bauakademie, as a true-to-life, walk-through model of the city, the content of which is not the buildings themselves but the space between them. By contrast, in terms of its museum interior it will function as an exhibition apparatus for the ethnographic collection. Situated between these two unrelated forms of display, the new architecture emerges as something that exhibits itself. The architecture of the Humboldt-Forum represents the moment between presentation and the presentation of itself, in which the entire tension of the façade is being concentrated. In this in-between moment the mediatory façade of the castle once again may turn into architecture, the image again may become a building and the ahistorical illusion become a living instance.

Kuehn Malvezzi: A Design

The two-dimensional concept for the façade in the competition brief is countered by a three-dimensional structure. As exposed brickwork construction, the perimeter structure between the museum and urban space is an autonomous building that incorporates historical portals and stairways as well as the façade of the Schlüter courtyard. At the same time, the autonomous perimeter allows the footprint and shape of the museum building to depart from the historical plan, and interior spaces can be configured sensibly for the cultural venue, collection and library of the Humbolt-Forum. In direct correspondence to Museum Island and the Schlossfreiheit,[1] the brick perimeter structure serves as a membrane in which the ground floor windows extend all the way down like door openings and are completely open on the west side of the structure. The result is an extensive entry hall and gathering place in the area of the former Eosander Courtyard, where the building is brought into generous relationship with the city through a podium and where the brick façade makes its full impact felt on the interior. Thus, the urban space between the castle façade and the Altes Museum already addressed by Schinkel, once again becomes a focal point, and a corresponding opening up in the castle façade, not yet possible in the nineteenth century, now can find a contemporary solution. Within the cityscape the structural arrangement of the exposed brickwork looks like a completed building shell, similar to the side façades of the Neue Wache—a precise stereometric model of the former castle. It is deliberately left up to later phases of construction to what extent the façade will be clad with stone components, which allows this aspect of the architecture to become a process of negotiation about the final appearance of the Humboldt-Forum—not just based on the availability of donated funds but as a political question in and of itself.

The text is based on a public presentation on January 28, 2009 at Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe.

1 Translator's note: The Schlossfreiheit is an open area to the west of the building, where a row of houses stood in close proximity to the palace up through the 19th century.



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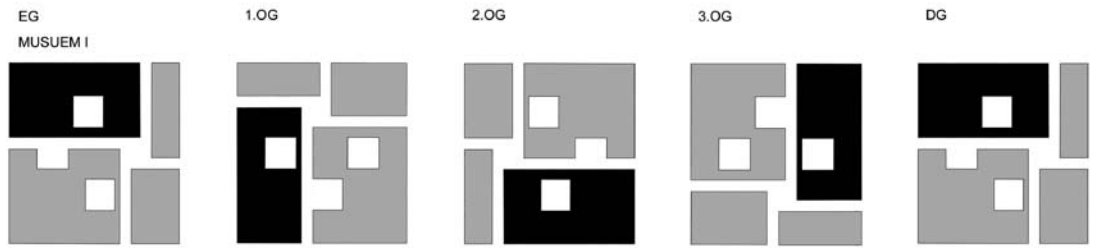

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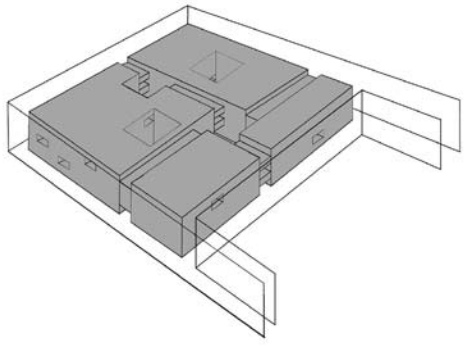

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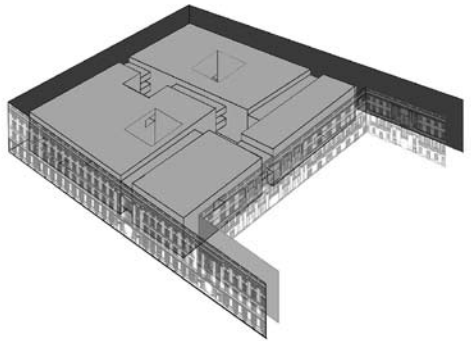

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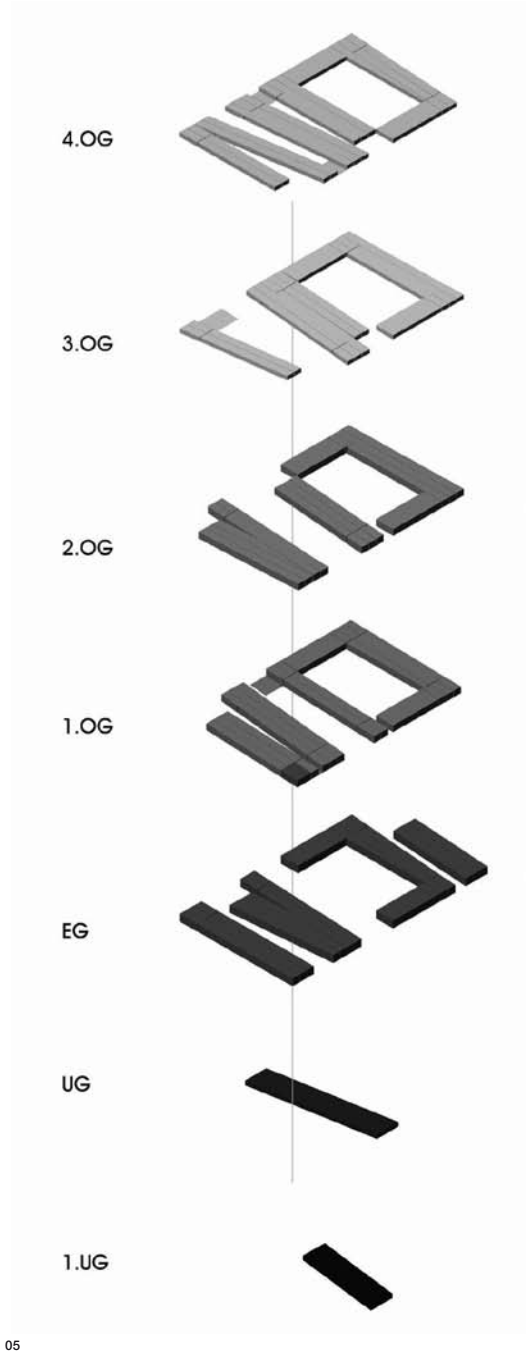

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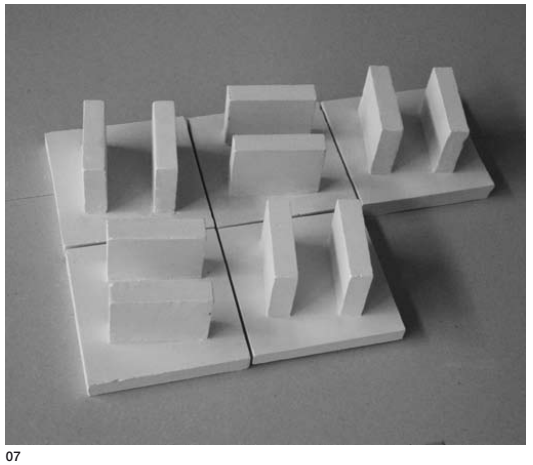

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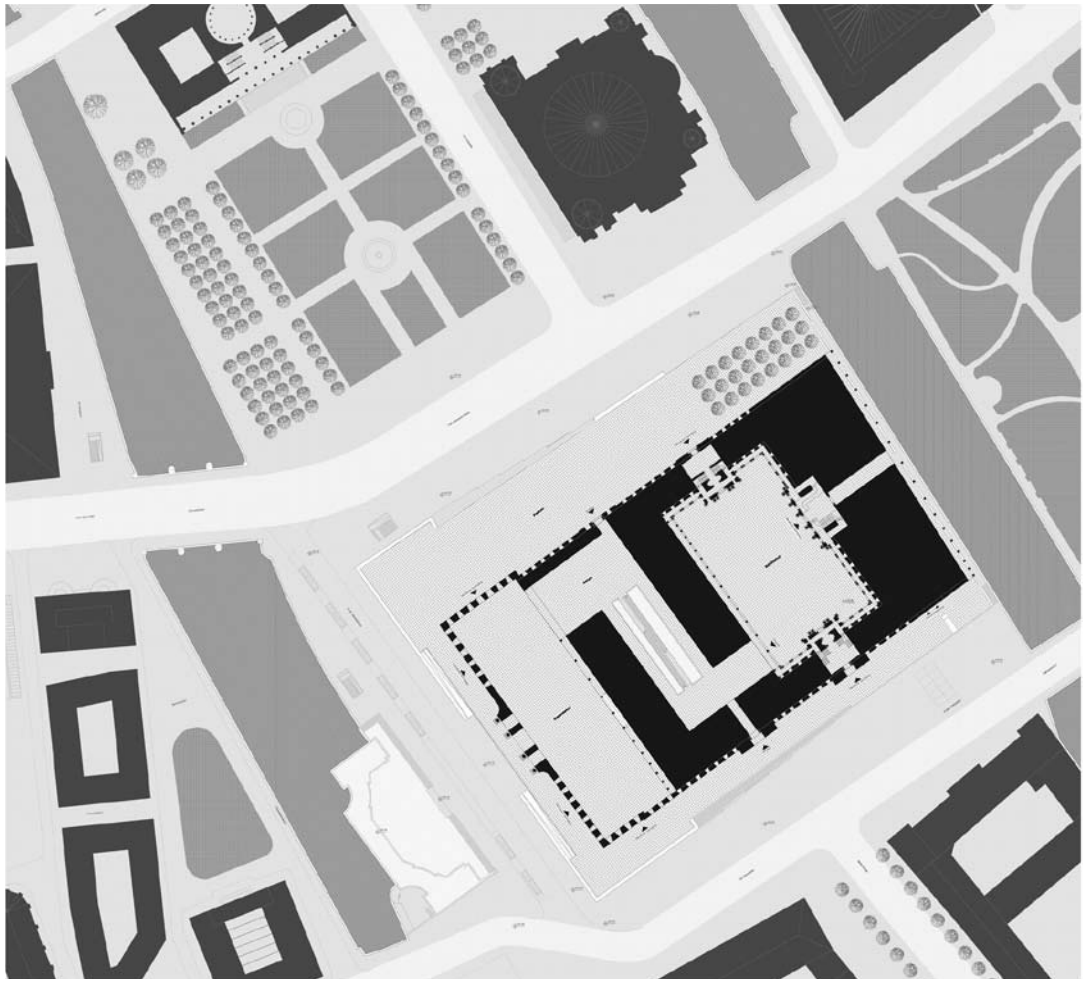
Selections of students' projects, developed at the course Models of Space II on the reconstruction of the Berliner Schloss, summer term 2008:
01 Samuel Korn: Rekonstruktion Superdisplay.
02–04 Johanna Hoth: Annexion.

05 Kristina Moser: Keimzelle.

06 Nicolas Rauch: ReKon+ (software programme).
07 Kilian Fabich: Good Content.



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01 Kuehn Malvezzi: Site plan of Humboldt-Forum Berlin, 2008.

02 Kuehn Malvezzi: View into the covered entrance court (part of agora), 2008.
03 Kuehn Malvezzi: View from the covered entrance court to Schinkel's Altes Museum across the Lustgarten.