

Urban Hacking. A Nobel Project for the Redundant City

URBANISM

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ABSTRACT - In 1963, Constantinos Doxiadis, Buckminster Fuller and Marshall Mc Luhan signed, among others, the little known "Delos Declaration," which alerted the world that the "problem of expanding urban area may soon outstrip all other problems facing mankind, except that of nuclear war." In the year 2016, it is clear to most that the "urban meltdown" has indeed outstripped "all other problems facing mankind, 'including' the possibility of nuclear war" and the reality of the financial meltdown, of which it is a direct result and from which there is no U-turn. How can we assure that modern cities develop a regenerative relationship to the living world on whose health they ultimately depend?

The current scenario is dominated by the Redundant City whose march cannot be stopped ex-ante. Staying clear of Renzo Piano's misguided (and falsely politically correct) rhetoric of urban mending, through "urban adjustments" we have a shot at trying to restore a sense of urbanity or "cityness" to constantly growing, shapeless conurbations. "Urban Hacking" argues for a new way to organize our urban systems, and for thinking and acting beyond what is considered "sustainable" development. Urban Hacking aims at establishing a healthier relationship between Natur and Kultur. The theory sponsors a new attitude towards urban matter based on little talked about modus operandi like demolition, recycling, multi-scaling and urban hacking.

Urban Hacking may eventually lead to a Dörfer-Großstadt (metropolis of villages), namely an adjustable planning concept to counter the various redundancies of our time.

Keywords: Berlin, bigness, redundant city, smart city, urban meltdown

Be it wild urbanization or depopulation, urban phenomena seem to be generating tacit - and unsubstantiated - general agreement. Be it because they happen on such a grand scale, everyone seems to think they can only be handled by resorting to two all-pervasive rhetorics: the rhetoric of the large scale – Bigness - and the rhetoric of the smart city. Taken together, they seem to be forming a new urban species for the third millennium (MMM) being implemented at the global scale: “the Redundant City.”

Is it credible that the sheer size of urban matter and its alleged increasing smartness has led everyone - including architects - astray?



Figure 1. Dörfer-Großstadt.

MMM PROBLEM

In the MMM it has become clear that architects have simply stopped imagining (or reflecting upon) livable urban growth models, arguably because Bigness itself—by virtue of its sheer “encumbering presence” - has closed the door to any other kind of urban thinking. Architects, urban thinkers, urban doctors, highly trained and highly paid professional urban consultants (the academia at large) appear to be happy taking comfort in filling the intellectual void by gathering intelligence - bad big data - on the so-called Urban Age or by digitally mapping uninteresting data, such as traffic behavior or phone access, that reveals more about the apps themselves than about urban matter. Bigness and smartness have become post-facto wisdom, in spite of being based on no wisdom at all.

The whole design discipline appears to have fallen under the spell of the *post-facto* wisdom typical of the financial world: it can never foresee a crisis but has to gather an arsenal of “logical arguments” to explain any crash, be it a financial or an urban meltdown. Engaged in a variety of nihilistic sideshows, two entire generations of architects and urban planners have proven incapable of confronting extreme social and economic events, which, uncannily, have actually offered the potential of transforming the persistent structural weaknesses of their chosen professions into opportunities.

The absence of theoretical inquiry on how urbanization performs, or should perform, suggests that all (theory-based) resistance to the upcoming *tsunami* of known and unknown urban substance has vanished. The large-scale urban meltdown has turned into a pre-theoretical dimension: Bigness. But Bigness is not generating operative theoretical speculation that can counter it, in spite of being, in theory, the one topic that should spark the endless array of intelligence that is supposed to characterize the various professional fields revolving around urban matter. How did we get to this?

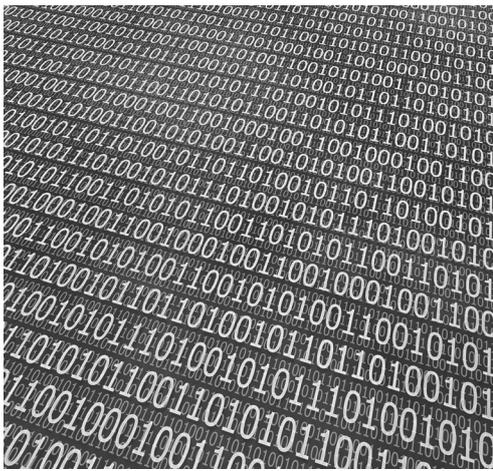


Figure 2. Data.

URBAN BIG BANG

In 1914 Europe as a whole precipitated into a full-scale war triggered by reasons that still today, one hundred years later, are not agreed upon. Brought to an end by the first Communist revolution (Russia) and the first military surrender based on no military reasons (Germany), the first European war from 1914 to 1918 unleashed the full force of a rapid “first modernization” fuelled by a seemingly endless list of technological breakthroughs. The latter opened the door to a mad urban explosion - a Big Bang? - reflecting a silent international competition among the world’s most developed nations all seeking to house the largest metropolis of the day.

The first randomly scattered seeds of Bigness generated a new, unknown physical species, an arrangement of collective human life credited to be able to rationally solve most of the problems related to urban life and/or urban matter, which, in turn, was assumed to work best if not limited in size or, better still, in the size of its “administration.” For a while, meaning the better part of the twentieth century, unlimited urban expansion seemed to be a typically Western phenomenon, a phenomenon for the Old and the New World (the USA). Yet, in 1991, the seemingly peaceful ending of the seventy-plus years of the Soviet ruling experiment effectively put an end to Cold War beliefs and assumptions, while generating the illusion that “history,” as people knew it, was ending.

The 1991 event created new waves of “thoughtless optimism” in the West due to a newfound, self-appointed sense of superiority. It simultaneously signaled that the “buildable field” was wide open and that it was eager to embrace the glorious, triumphant march of a number of Western-concocted financial (and urban) strategies and beliefs. Two examples: the notion that there was plenty of space for everyone and the idea that, should space shortage become a problem, one could always invent new virtual fields inhabited by newly designed avatars.

The Eastern worlds (Far and Near) swallowed the “open-field theory” hook, line, and sinker. They too started forming urban incrustations in the field that were so wild that even the West, before partaking in the same game, had to go through various layers of psychoanalytical work to effectively remove any sense of guilt or ill-directed pride.

2001: Ten years after Moscow’s alleged “transition” into the wildest sphere of (instant) high capitalism, Steve Jobs, the widely, ex-post elected “philosopher of the twenty-first century,” launched (in less than nine months) iTunes and the iPod. Embedded into both applications was the assumption that a right to easily available, cheap, and portable “smart fun” was to become the daily priority of (rural and urban) citizens of the world, regardless of their chosen occupations.

DIGITAL FUN

The MMM kicked off under the assumption that anything was possible and everything was about to be ameliorated or “fixed.” All this could be done having a lot of “digital fun”: the kind of fun that could be had by the sheer means, not the end, of any given activity.

Machiavelli’s terms got switched. The new digital credo (smartness) effectively convinced most everyone that, in the grand scheme of things, what exactly is to be improved is not that important: what matters is being able to change things, maximizing efficiency. The MMM’s new agenda followed suit, putting the focus on the mechanics of the tool (or platform), rather than on substance, any substance.

Technological evolution makes fixing things easier, cheaper, and harder to resist. It is a highly disorienting and intoxicating drug that makes people believe they are living in an exceptional, revolutionary time. They think they are holding the key to its unfolding, while building temples of modern-day Taylorism in which everything is tracked, analyzed, and optimized. Everything can now “be fixed” by all kinds of cheap digital fixes. There is no point in bothering about the true costs of fixing things, or in factoring in the real (anthropological) costs of the highly anticipated tyranny of the social and digital Eden of an intellectually diminished “augmented reality.”

The sheer awesomeness of the available digital tools has led the silent majority astray: “I do it because I can.” The possibility of doing something

prevails over real needs, increasingly convincing everyone that it is necessary to rid public life of inconsistencies and imperfections, as a seemingly endless number of TED talks testify.

Good is not good enough. One is expected to thrive for perfection, which is just a few clicks away. Oblivion of human finiteness is now a dime a dozen today: it does not matter if one works in Silicon Valley or North Korea.

IT IS JUST THERE!

The first decade of the MMM is the first decade in world history in which the Internet became a permanently available tool for quick and easy (and never wrong) explanations and solutions. In the second decade, digital solutionism and Silicon Valley's tendency to solve problems it has itself fabricated (or simply do not exist) has become the new *über*-ideology. It updates Prince Minsk's heartfelt belief: it is now assumed that an algorithm, not beauty, will eventually save the world.

One is somehow not allowed to think about the pre-Internet world. To look for a possible way out is to buy a one-way ticket to irrelevance or public ridicule. Trying to imagine the world in its pre-Internet state has become pointless, unless one has suicidal tendencies or simply wants to be labeled as nostalgic, reactionary, anti-modern, or worse. What? Are you not being interested in being invited to the next Google (or Apple) press conference? Digital measurement, mercification, increased efficiency, solutionism, data, and minority dictatorships are now permanent fixtures of the MMM landscape. They have become the holy, democratic presence of the daily experience. They cannot be discussed as contingent, or as something that might go away or may prove to be potentially unhelpful, helpless, or mischievous.

The Urban Meltdown, too, is here to stay: it has happened. It has arrived: like the Internet, "it is just there." As strange as it might be that an endless series of cables—the Internet—is invested with manual-free, meta-narrative qualities, it is equally strange that the urban meltdown and its narrative (Bigness) have no operative guide. Basic questions, like "how do they work?" are best left unanswered, even if digital geeks are ready to acknowledge that "there is nothing permanent about the Internet." In the MMM Mind Twist it seems that theory and practice have no problem standing in stark contrast to each other, a stance that carries the not-insignificant-advantage of shifting away any debate about alternative models, such as, for instance, a small-scale approach to urban matter. Ideas that attempt to counter the status quo can be easily buried under an endless heap of digital garbage.

The project of ameliorating contemporary life can only be implemented by pushing technological development to its natural conclusion: self-tracking devices able to defeat obesity, insomnia, global warming, and, most of all, memory loss. Everything get stored, nostalgia has no chance. (Proust will pardon humankind of the MMM.) One's life is permanently available on

some digital cloud a few clicks away and can be indefinitely retold, changing the narrative or the angle for the benefit of posterity. Digital participation, in the form of blogging, is waiting at everyone's bedroom door.

The Urban Meltdown itself is soon likely to "vanish" from both the debate and public view thanks to all-recording glasses that will keep everyone busy or entertained. Self-driving cars will chauffeur the affluent to the restaurants TripAdvisor has selected by fishing from the lists ranked by best FB "friends," whom they have never physically met, courtesy of Google maps.

Streets will always be clean and shining. Some innovative, free of charge app will have convinced the entire population that its main goal is to accumulate bonus mileage for exotic, connected tropical islands through civic duty, like cleaning the portion of street that runs in front of their homes, which, like cars or glasses, will also have turned into smart, self-cleaning objects equipped with 24-7 video monitoring for social networking, courtesy of FB.

Everything will be customer-based, custom made depending on the mood of the final user: news, algorithmic book reviews, self-tracking devices, networking, chat-lines, recipes, books, magazines, and Hollywood movie endings. Nothing will go un-clicked or un-tweeted. The never-ending "digital" culture of (individual) fun has arrived. For good.

While Western philosophy has abandoned—even in France—the idea of providing one, unique answer to the big questions of human existence or grand philosophical systems, the Internet has become the one and only grand system. It has become the solution to all our problems by promising to rid our lives of any friction once and for all.

The Urban Meltdown and "thinking big" are mere "conditions" that are not supposed to deserve "thinking." They have been permanent fixtures of our mental landscape for almost a century now. They are a merely physical reflection of the financial logic of permanent, a-critical growth for growth's own sake.

The Urban Meltdown and "thinking big" are just a blueprint for permanent growth. They cannot be animated by small intentions. Their limitless masses rule out any risk-taking proposition. Like freedom on the Internet, they are assumed to have fallen from the sky. Their origin is not to be questioned, just their impact is worth studying.

MMM QUESTIONS

Aside from ridiculing it, there is little one can do about the Redundant City beyond trying to redraw the lines of the intellectual argument about digital omnipresence and omnipotence. This, perhaps, may show the possibility of other, post-Internet angles from which to approach the problem of urbanization, as the promised Silicon Eden may turn out to be not worth the price of the one-way ticket necessary to reach it.

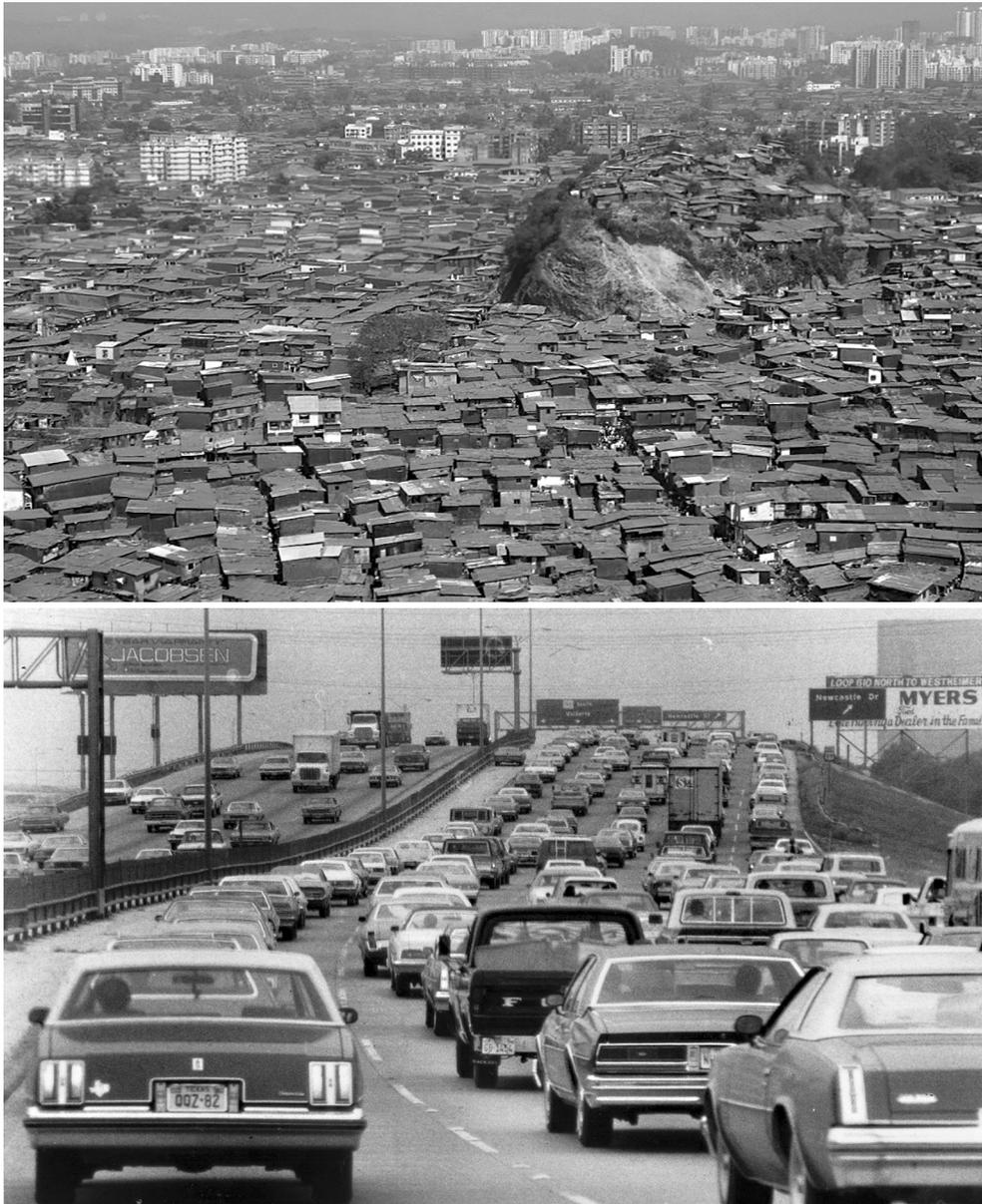


Figure 3. Periphery.

It remains important to try to secularize the debate about the relationship between technology and urban development and to cleanse it of its various, pernicious, financial and intellectual misunderstandings. It also remains important to counter the need to reach for the answers before the questions have been fully asked. Or to investigate problems rather than presuming them, putting aside the tempting possibility of immediate and cheap results.

Investigating means exercising a practice of resistance, producing radical reflections on society and demonstrating the irreducible anarchy of the human being vis-à-vis the apparatuses that are increasingly regulating its life in a seemingly irreversible (and pervasive) fashion. Investigating means putting a buffer between ourselves and the fake optimism of marketing, the good will of newspaper, or the private masked as public. It is also essential to resist the integrated spectacle (Guy Debord) that is now a permanent, ubiquitous fake presence of the daily (global) experience, a presence that can fabricate consent and level contradiction, making it almost impossible to go beyond stale, accommodating, partial, cunning formulas hidden behind meaningless twisted logic.

Much like the integrated spectacle (or the Rolling Stones), the urban meltdown “can’t get no satisfaction.” Its consumerist logic only allows temporary relief that—like industrial food devoid of nourishment—paves the way for its next act while it is happening. We keep consuming (eating?) soil as if it were barely edible, unsatisfying industrial food. The key challenge of the present, therefore, is to ask questions. Asking questions has become more important than providing answers, because, in the era of nihilism, it is the only act left that can claim a foundation. If we start asking the right question, perhaps we can provide an answer to the current nihilism of soil consumption. Perhaps we can avoid looking



Figures 4a/4b. The redundant city.

like a blindfolded boxer who might eventually manage to place a few good punches but, in truth, cannot see where his opponent is going. A basic question emerges: should one find a way to urbanize technology or should one accept the transformation of urban matter into one, big, permanent technological testing ground?

TESTING GROUNDS

Urban matter has become the main target—a strategic space—for testing computer-based technology expressed by apps of infinite nature. But if we take our blindfolds off, perhaps we'll start to realize that

urban matter is not comparable to cars, phones, watches, glasses, or whatever object now nostalgic of its lost simplicity. The rhetoric of the smart city just assumes that cities can be as “smart” as a phone. But it is very well known that urban matter, much like architectural matter, is the opposite of smart or simple. It is actually quite dumb, complex, and anarchical, much like the human beings who are responsible for its inception. Urban matter is a complex, anarchic, and irrational matter that can’t be anything but incomplete given that it is built and used by flawed users—human beings—who cannot be compared to digital apps. Its very incompleteness is what allows its own resilience; it is what permits the formation of its many inner *limes* (frontiers) and the different scales housed within its perimeter. It is only by taking into account this complexity that one may look for the most appropriate “scale for action,” in seeking alternatives to the impossible smartness of the Redundant City.

ANTI-IDEALISM

Perhaps the complex aspects of urban matter are best exemplified by the urban structure of Berlin, which emerges today as an extraordinary anti-ideal, non-western exemplar (something that is appreciated only with the senses) that is also an *exemplum* (a form whose interpretation requires intellectual speculation). It is an example of how, livable urban matter, to be truly livable and enjoyable, should be proud of its distinct *limes*, its numerous scales, and its varied technological dumbness.

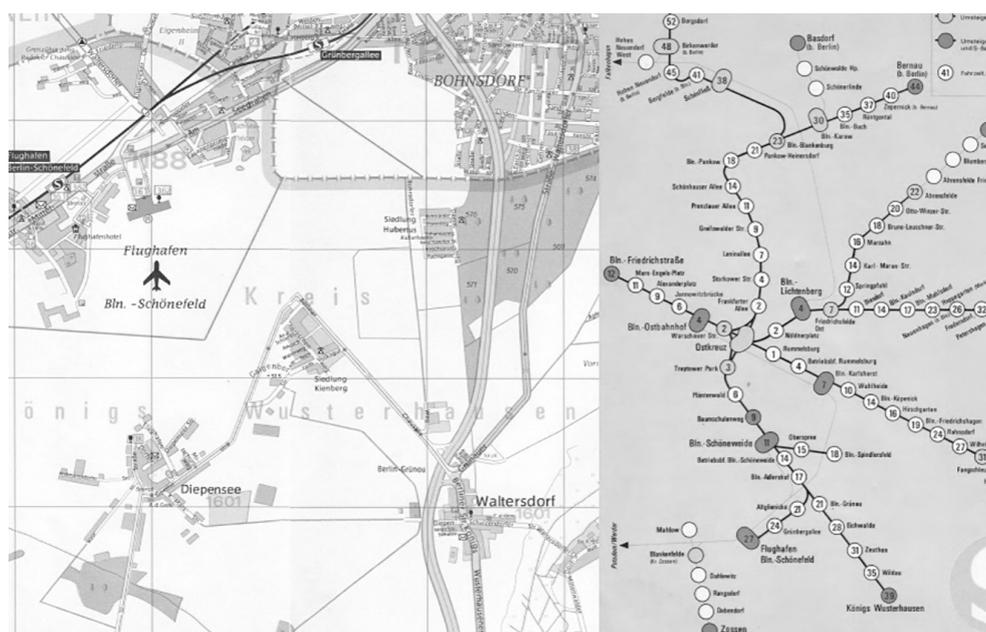


Figure 5. East Berlin maps.

Berlin's urban structure stands out because the texture of its urban fabric incorporates a number of elements that are precious in creating living conditions that resonate with basic human needs. These elements suggest a latent, larger alternative interpretation of how urbanity can be achieved. The elements are able to generate casual design principles that never have the intention of becoming "ideal" prototypes as they are always, rigorously site-specific. This makes one read Berlin as a unique anti-ideal, geo-political urban form, able to evoke potential or even pregnant geographic and political scenarios.

Its urban structure reads as an alternative idea of what urban matter should be: a casual, romantic, multi-polar aggregation of individual and self-sufficient "islands," or *dörfer* (villages). This aggregation lacks a center and therefore a "periphery," or the place where all urban evils seem to have gathered - if the intelligence gathered by the academia is to be trusted.

UNICUM

A Berlin paradox is in place: a conurbation that is the result of a series of political, economic, and historical circumstances that proved crucial for the recent history of the West itself now stands outside of Western tradition, at least as far as urban *exempla* are concerned. Berlin stands out as a "unicum" in the spectrum of Western urbanization.

Several demolition sprees (caused by war's destruction and the clearing of the rubble) managed to produce collective despair in Berlin for a prolonged time, a half a century. But somewhere between these various waves of despair, they brought about a unique, "unplanned urban landscape,"

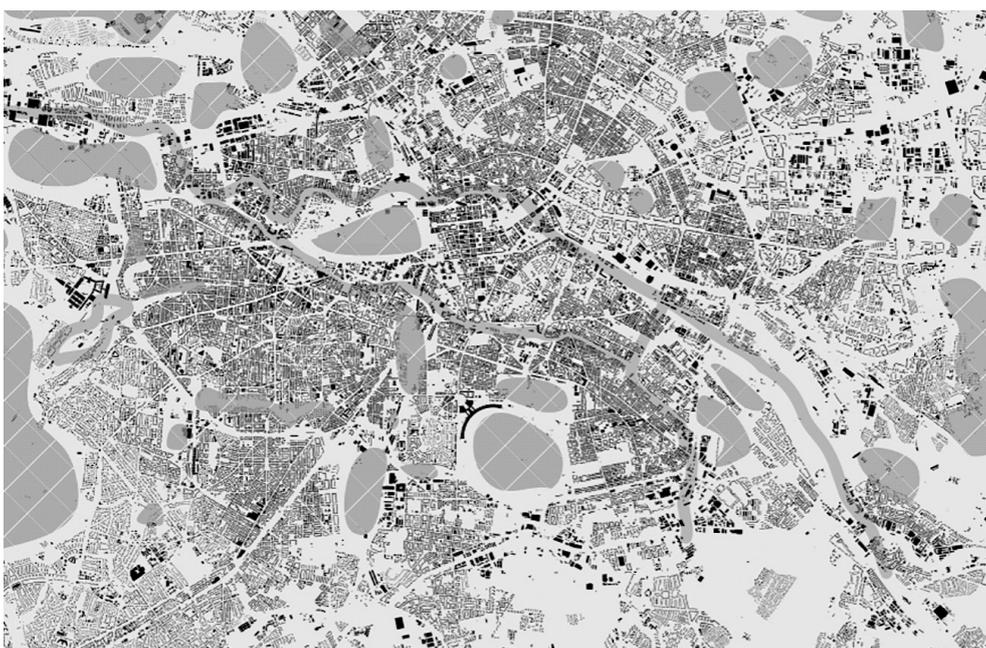


Figure 6. Berlin voids.

formed by vast tracts of empty space with isolated buildings here and there, casually displaced. It is a landscape that does not rely on large-scale urban planning but on the casual accumulation of formally distinct urban episodes, micro-cities, or mid-size “towns” sitting in a vast (and intimate) unused space.

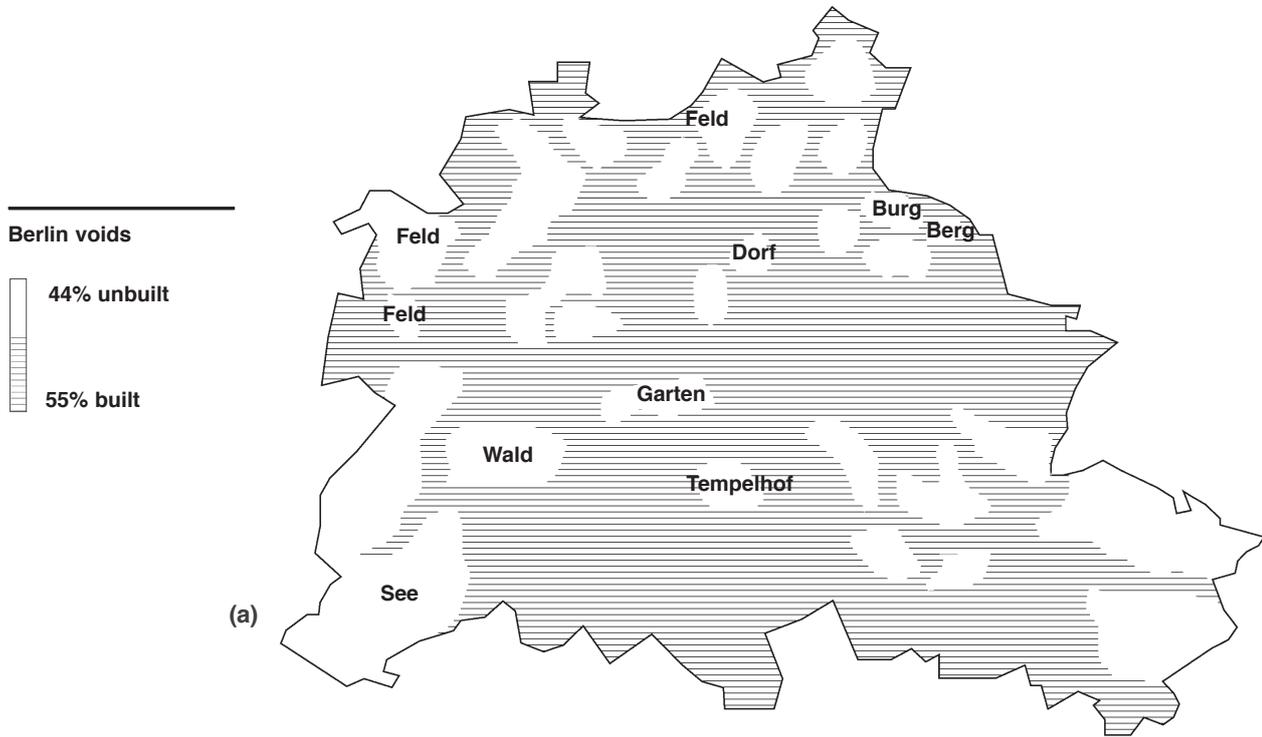
Berlin’s urban structure appears deeply skeptical not only about the possibility but also about the theoretical merit of putting in place an overarching urban plan. Berlin’s implicit project for urbanity is tactically open to the multiplicity of its territorial circumstances, even if its individual parts (islands, or *dörfer*) are resolute in their formal appearance. It is an urbanity that can be read as an exemplar territory taking full advantage of its geographical conditions.

DÖRFER-GROBSTADT

From a strictly urban angle, Berlin is a non-Western island that lies inside of the so-called Western Europe. Berlin appears as a physical and geopolitical island. Its (theoretical) island status is the sum of a number of physical urban islands whose “islandness” may prove to be the last, true opportunity that urban speculation has for developing its culture in an enjoyable, livable fashion. Berlin shows how the notion of “islandness” and urban archipelago can be used as conceptual tools for a broader understanding of urban development. Berlin can in fact be defined a *Dörfer-Großstadt*: an archipelago of built and unbuilt islands - open spaces, parks, canals, forests, lakes, in-between spaces, space of the third landscape - that have independent and complementary mutual relationships and that, taken together, form a unique ecology of what the urban landscape might (should?) look when seen at a regional scale. With the exception of the Innenstadt (city center), which fell victim to the 1980s *Stadtreparatur* (urban repair) logic theorized by Josef Paul Kleihues for the IBA (Internationale Bauausstellung – International Building Exhibition) and later implemented in various versions by short-sighted administrative bodies (like the Berlin Senate), Berlin’s ecology is based on the notion of “multi-scaling” or of recognizing that city-related ecological conditions operate at various geographic scales and that, in consequence, “urban ratios” have to be set.

URBAN RATIOS

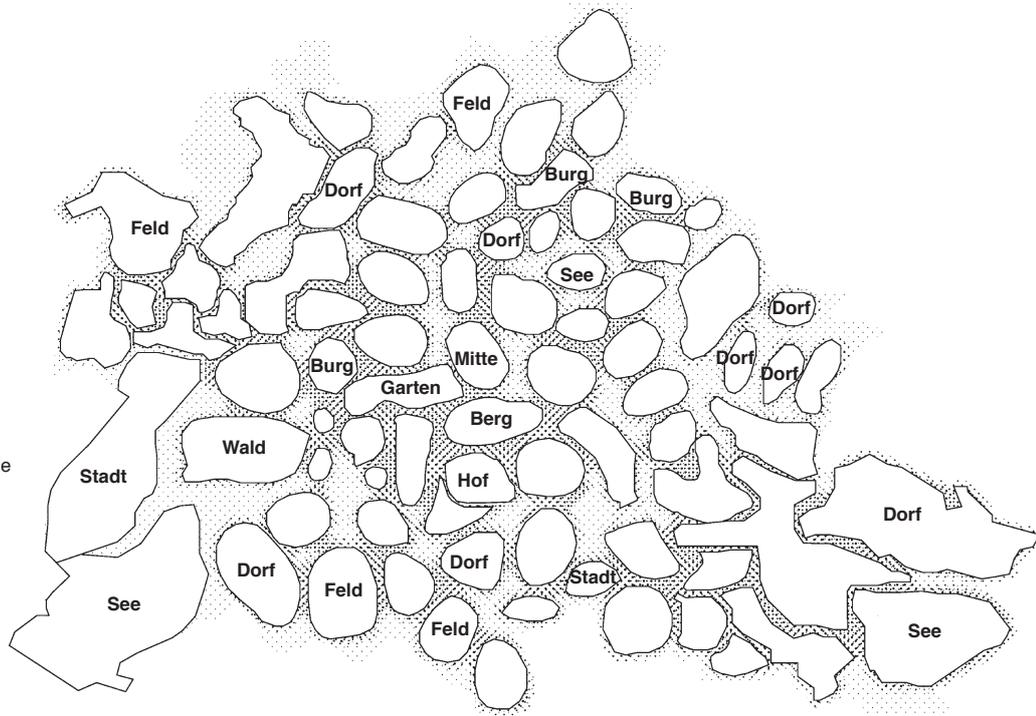
Contrary to the impersonality of Bigness, this multitude of scales is made evident and is recognized by its residents, who describe themselves as citizens of the *bezirk* (district) in which they live rather than of Berlin. This visibility is due to a specific, anthropological way of understanding infrastructure, which is treated at the local and regional scale simultaneously. Air quality, water pollution, social services, public transportation, noise control, green areas, and commercial venues have to meet local and regional standards calibrated on the number of residents in each district/municipality.



Berlin's urban organs: Berg, Burg, Dorf, Feld, Stadt, See, Wald

Berlin Zaune:

- Berg** Falken-Berg
Kreuz-Berg
Lichten-Berg
Prenzlauer-Berg
Schöne-Berg
- Burg** Blanken-Burg
Charlotten-Burg
Warten-Burg
- Dörf** Bies-Dörf
Bohns-Dörf
Heller-Dörf
Kauls-Dörf
Marien-Dörf
Mahis-Dörf
Rahns-Dörf
Reinicken-Dörf
Zehlen-Dörf
- Feld** Blanken-Felde
Falkenhagener-Felde
Lichter-Felde
Marien-Felde
- Stadt** Gropius-Stadt
Siemens-Stadt
Wilhelm-Stadt
- See** Muggel-See
Nikola-See
Weissen-See
- Wald** Grune-Wald



Figures 7a/7b/7c. Berlin maps.

In the hour of triumph of increasingly smart (and impersonal) urban Bigness, in the hour in which everyone seems to be talking nonsense about the (non existing) option of controlling the megalopolis or the megaform, Berlin unequivocally affirms that the administration of urban matter can be successfully implemented by understanding the crucial importance of the small scale, like that of its various *bezirke*, which, on average, vary between 200,000 and 300,000 residents. Size does matter, and it should be considered the most strategic scale for action.

Berlin is an abstraction, a conceptual label that stands in opposition to the increasingly popular Westernized “Redundant City.” Berlin is simply the name used to identify not a city of 3.5 million people, but an archipelago of twelve towns (*dörfer*) or of ninety-five *Kieze* (localities) of different size. Berlin is governed according to certain, simple, pre-tech urban ratios that do not seem to have the need of being transformed into some savvy app. These ratios are also based on distance, multi-scaling among building, open areas, urban infrastructure, citizens’ needs, and the diverse, often non-urban terrains and domains onto which urbanity projects its effect. The Berlin ratios have not surrendered to technologies, engineering, contracts, manufacturers, politicians, or international corporations. They keep delivering an urban landscape aligned with walkability—or personal health—as primary goal: 30 m² of green space per dweller.

MULTI-SCALAR THINKING

Berlin demonstrates that there are physical limits to what we call urbanity and that a multi-scalar (not global) scale is the most strategic plane on which one can operate.

Multi-scalar thinking may perhaps turn out to be the most strategic plane on which one can operate. A change of scale often results in new relationships and interactions.

Multi-scalar thinking acknowledges the fact that different national, regional, and local policies are needed in different places of the same conurbation, depending on the features of the specific landscape.

Multi-scalar thinking treats urban matter not merely as the sum of its aggregated part, but as a greater, far more complex aggregation of events, of circumstances or features, such as density, for example, which has simultaneously both a small scale and large impact on its very fabric.

Multi-scalar thinking acknowledges that, beyond a certain scale, urbanity turns into urbanization or an impersonal, generic accumulation of brainless, yet comatose, urban matter. A city without quality, or without “cityness.” Can this be turned into a formula?

Multi-scale = urbanity Large scale = urbanization

URBAN HACKING

Multi-scalar thinking implies a latent alternative ecology that, like all ecologies, relies (in theory) on *ex-ante* planning. Yet, as it has become abundantly clear to anyone who can still use their own eyes, the current scenario is dominated by a new kind of city (the Redundant City) whose inexorable march cannot realistically be stopped *ex-ante*.

Ex-ante planning is no longer an operative option for architects, planners, or administrators. What it is available, without resorting to apocalyptic scenarios, is *ex-post* alterations, or “urban adjustment,” trying to restore, at least in the most acute cases, a sense of urbanity or “cityness” deprived of some of the distorted logic of the financial world.¹

Perhaps urbanization can be effectively *ex-post* “corrected” by resorting to “urban hacking,” or to a Nobel project that can limit the seemingly unstoppable march of the Redundant City, that urban hackers may find attractive.

Hacking is the activity of the “hacker”: an individual busy taking on intellectual challenges apt to creatively overcome limitations and restrictions imposed by self-nurturing, hostile systems.²

Urban Hacking is a concrete, pragmatic strategy. It is neither utopian nor dystopian. It is an effective, operative *modus operandi* that grows out of the acknowledgement of the following observations.

1. In many places, the combination of unused recent urbanization and an aging population is creating unprecedented portions of redundant



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Figures 8, 9, 10, 11. Berlin post war debris.

urban matter: many structures are being abandoned but they still occupy urban land.

2. On average, at least 10% of the built matter everywhere is either so disgusting it is uninhabitable, or simply redundant, and is therefore not used. Existing pockets of masked emptiness already exist but remain hidden in an obnoxious and disordered built amalgam.
3. Many parts of the Redundant City are based on an incomprehensible geometry that most users fail to understand, from the temporary to the permanent, from the “documented” to the “undocumented.” Urban matter could be reduced for the benefit of the geometric design of the negative (empty) portion of the urban texture that makes the positive (filled) readable—or manageable. At least 10% of most urban conurbations could conceivably be demolished to give city dwellers urban matter defined by something other than buildings alone.
4. Demolition is part of the life cycle. Urban matter is no exception. Demolition reboots urbanity and the minds of so many “city experts” who have spent so much time producing new urban planning they have lost sight of their work’s final goal. As Steve Jobs himself put it: “Remembering that I’ll be dead soon is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Almost everything - external expectations, pride, fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. (...) death is the destination we all share and that is how it should be, because death is very likely the single best invention of life. It’s life’s change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new.”
5. The scrapyards are a place like many others. The scrapyards make room for a decentralized, distributive, open, shared, asymmetrical, and emphatic option for urbanity, allowing the territory to breathe, providing an option to indiscriminate land consuming.

A NOBEL PROJECT FOR MMM URBANITY

Much of the literature about urban sustainability is based on the damage the environment has suffered, without clear, effective operative actions. The above observations entail a new course of action: a Nobel Project to limit the Redundant City based on six simple theorems.

1. Varying percentages of the “not-used” city could be selectively torn down, putting an end to its misery or agony. This would create (via demolition) new un-built islands or towns (*dörfer*) that, in turn, create value for everyone involved in the development of urban matter: investors, the administration, the real estate market. The selective



Figure 12. Berlin *Trümmerbergen* (artificial hills of debris).

reduction of urban matter aims at creating some badly needed “pockets of emptiness” that can become instrumental in defining a *Dörfer-Großstadt* in which a suffering population may enjoy the breathing space of a truly sustainable urbanity rather than suffocating in its ultimate demise.

2. By applying selective demolition, clear geometric administrative and human lines can be identified within the urban fabric. Selective demolition makes it clear that urban fabric is not a container or a bounded closed unit, but a multi-scalar system through which multiple cross-border economic circuits circulate. Multi-scalar thinking suggests that living in urbanized areas is a “border-crossing experience,” navigating from one island to the other.
3. The *Dörfer-Großstadt* is also an “administrative model.” It defines a new collection of “towns” that, individually, form a neighborhood, a community; in short, a multitude of languages sharing a zip code—an urban island. The *Dörfer-Großstadt* is based on the individuality of the different building units of the different “islands” that, as in a virtual network, depend upon the mutual interaction between the different single members.
4. Selective demolition makes it easier to find greater balance between the verticality and the horizontality of the urban landscape. The *Dörfer-Großstadt* does not preclude “densification.” Dense structures can actually be inserted at critical infrastructure nodes. It is an option that reflects the diverse dynamics of the systems at play in the body of urban matter.
5. Demolition does not have to turn into an unsustainable economic nightmare. Pockets of technological dumbness should be created within the existing urban fabric. Rubbles can be piled up to artificially create natural landscapes on the very site where demolition is done. These areas can become pockets of technological dumbness able to provide a pause in a redundantly hyper-connected smart city. The German *Trümmerbergen* from World War II provides a spectacular, convincing precedent in this regard, indicating the way.

6. At key locations, demolition could also invest anything inside abandoned buildings that is structurally redundant, or not load-bearing. This could turn these already existing structures into “new, open plan, covered spaces” available to the public for social gatherings, urban expositions, urban theaters, and the like.

Western urban science has developed on the assumption that the number one issue of urbanism is the act of building. It does not take into account the spaces between buildings. The time has come to use more resources for the well being of the void, rather than the solid. By giving greater importance to the design of the void, we might be able to contain the solid. *Bâtir san bâtir* means starting to “build” the landscape in-between the solids, demolishing the solid in accordance with a master plan that values the void over the solid.

The time has come to put the Redundant City to rest. For good.

POST-SCRIPTUM

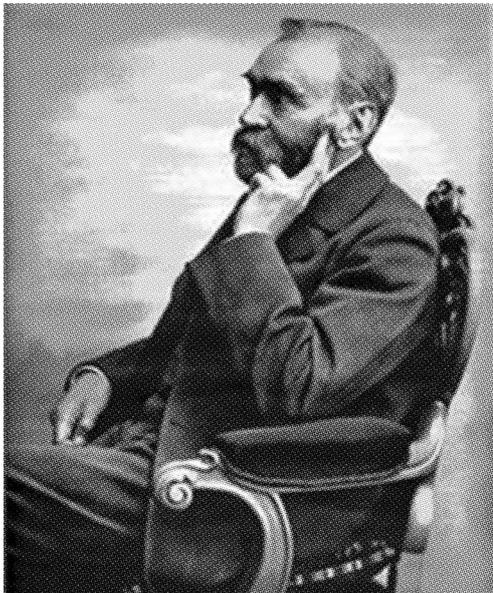


Figure 13. Alfred Nobel.

Alfred Bernhard Nobel is the Swedish chemist and engineer who held 355 different patents, dynamite being the most famous. In 1888 Alfred's brother Ludvig died while visiting Cannes, and a French newspaper erroneously published Alfred's obituary, which is said to have brought about Nobel's decision to leave a better legacy after his death. The obituary read “*Le marchand de la mort est mort*” (The merchant of death is dead) and went on to say that “Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday.” Nobel immediately understood how he would be remembered and,

consequently, on November 27, 1895, he signed his last will and testament and set aside the bulk of his estate - 31,225,000 Swedish kronor (equivalent to about 250 million US dollars) - to establish the Nobel prizes to be awarded annually without distinction of nationality. A year later, on 10 December 1896, he had a stroke in Sanremo, Italy, and passed away. The Nobel prizes are awarded for eminence in physical science, in chemistry, and in medical science or physiology. There is a fourth prize for literary work “in an ideal direction” and fifth to be awarded to the person or company that renders the greatest service to the cause of international fraternity, in the suppression or reduction of standing armies, or in the establishment or furtherance of peace.

The phrasing for the literary prize given for a work “in an ideal direction” has caused a great deal of confusion since the start. For many years, the Swedish Academy interpreted “ideal” as “idealistic” and used it as a reason not to give the prize to important but less Romantic authors, such as Henrik Ibsen and Leo Tolstoy. This interpretation has since been revised and the prize has been awarded to authors who are not representative of literary idealism.

In 2001 Alfred Nobel’s great-grandnephew, Peter Nobel, asked the Bank of Sweden to differentiate the award given to economists “in Alfred Nobel’s memory” from the five other awards. This has caused considerable controversy about whether the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel is actually a “Nobel Prize.”

I believe that all of the above will convince others, other than me, that it is time to ease the political or artistic tension surrounding Nobel’s name, and to call for the establishment of a true Nobel project, one that is more in tune with the well-deserved aura of the mythical inventor.

A previous version of this article was awarded Second Prize at the 2015 THE PLAN Best Paper Award contest. – Ed.

Notes

1. The anarchic, deeply flawed status of urban matter, in which most of the planet finds itself, does not sit well with any logic of mending that, although possible, stands no chance of scratching the surface of the problem of urbanization. Thank you very much, dear Renzo Piano, but we are perfectly OK without your PC rhetoric.
2. "Hacking" is derived from the verb "to hack," which means to undermine, to make a dent in. In information technology, hacking can be defined as a set of methods, techniques, and operations aimed at understanding, accessing and modifying a hardware or software system. The person who "hacks" is known as a "hacker": someone who takes on intellectual challenges to creatively circumvent or get past the limits imposed on him/her, not only in his/her field of interest, but in every aspect of life. There is a cliché, which has been used primarily by the media (since the 1980s), with which "hacker" has been associated with cyber criminals, the correct label for which, however, is "cracker." Although the term is used primarily in relation to information technology, hacking is not limited to a specific technical field. More generally it refers to any situation in which one uses creativity and imagination in the search for knowledge: Leonardo da Vinci, for example, might be considered a fifteenth-century [hacker](#).

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