8 Düsseldorf / Germany
Size Matters. Modern Megastructures as Heritage

> The fact that something has grown old now gives rise to the demand that it be made immortal
> *(Friedrich Nietzsche)*[1]

The question of how to deal with the large buildings and megastructures of modernism is one that increasingly both urban conservationists and the general public. These 'giants' appear to pose a new challenge for institutions charged with preserving the built environment: On the one hand, they go against the ideal image of the human-scale, mixed-use city that has been re-established as the urban ideal since the 1970s, partly as a result of the work of just such conservationists.[2] Civic initiatives and conservationists vehemently opposed the monofunctional and giganticist planning of the 1960s and 70s, seeking to banish such 'inhospitability' (*Unwirtlichkeit*) from the urban environment and to restore quality of life.[3] European Architectural Heritage Year in 1975 was an important step towards re-establishing the positive values of the historical city with its liveability and traditional use of space in the public consciousness.[4] On the other hand, attitudes towards the buildings of post-war modernism have also changed in recent years. Outside architectural circles, a growing number of people agree that many of the modern 'giants' possess architectural merit and aesthetic value of their own. This supports the aim of conservationists who seek to place a representative selection of buildings from the modernist period under protection; especially since this period is increasingly seen as a completed historical epoch. After all, conservationists now more than ever see it as their task to represent the architectural canon as completely as possible in their lists. Today it is simply the turn of high modernism and brutalism – this is an international phenomenon.[5]

1 Nietzsche, Untimely Mediations, 1997 (1873–1876), 75.
2 Vinken, Im Namen der Altstadt, 2016.
3 Mitscherlich, Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte, 1965.
4 Cf. several chapters in Falser/Lipp, A Future for Our Past, 2015.
5 Glendinning, Postwar Mass Housing, 2008; Escherich, Denkmal Ost-Moderne, 2012/2016.

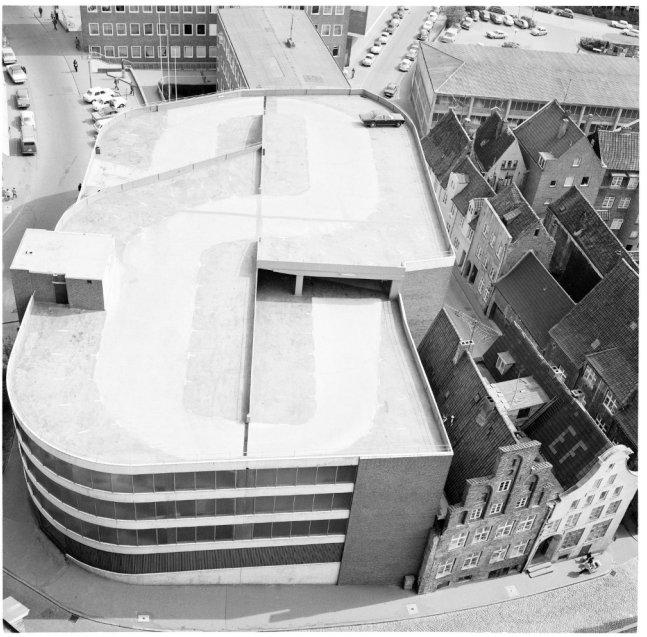

Figure 1: Lübeck, view from St. Peter's Church (Photo: M. Brix 2014)

The view from St Peter's church in Lubeck (fig. 1) makes abundantly clear, however, that this re-evaluation reveals a fundamental dilemma. This is not merely a matter of dealing with shifting tastes; there is more at stake here than an expansion of the architectural canon. The dilemma of this re-evaluation in the field of conservation lies in the fact that now, buildings are to come under protection which have often had lasting negative and destructive effects on the substance of the city and were often constructed in the face of vehement opposition on the part of the citizenry. Many of the major modernist projects continue to stand quite literally in the way of liveable urban development; they can have a lasting detrimental effect on civic spaces and a negative influence on other buildings and even on protected monuments. Modern megastructures are coming down in part because cities are seeking to reshape and upgrade the space they have available.

An instructive example of this trend is the demolition of the Technical Town Hall (*Technisches Rathaus*) in Frankfurt am Main (fig. 2). Erected in 1972–74 to a design by Bartsch, Thürwächter und Weber, whose winning proposal in 1963 had seen off prominent competitors such as Ernst May, Walter Gropius, Hans Scharoun and Arne Jacobsen,[6] this controversial project, with its rather forbidding 'brutalist' raw concrete surfaces, went ahead in the face of considerable public protests, which were supported by Frankfurt's active squatter movement.

6 Müller-Raemisch, Frankfurt am Main, 1998, 56–64, 342–345.

Figure 2: Frankfurt, "Technisches Rathaus" and Dom (Photo: S. Suchanek 2010)

Five houses had to be demolished to make way for the modern Town Hall, one of which dated back to the 16th century. In contrast to some of the high-rises that define Frankfurt's famous skyline, the *Technisches Rathaus* never enjoyed much popularity in the city. It should be noted, however, that the height of the building, which was considered excessive given its historical setting, as well as the fortress-like solidity of the structure were partly the consequence of alterations and expansions to the plans undertaken in 1969 to meet increased requirements for floor space. Consequently, the decision made in 2005 to demolish the building did not initially cause much of a stir. Only when the first competition to design its replacement produced a series of unimaginative and arbitrary mall-like structures did the debate take an unexpected turn. The civic protest movement kindled by the Society of Friends of the City of Frankfurt (formerly Friends of the Old Town: *Altstadtfreunde*), the city's marketing department and an association of local entrepreneurs, and championed politically by the centre-right Christian Democratic Union party, called for the 'recreation' of the Old Town that had been burnt down in 1945.

Erected on the site of the *Technisches Rathaus*, the project known as the *DomRömer-Areal* (fig. 3), a laboratory-generated piece of Old Town, pervaded with reconstructions and authenticated through the inclusion of architectural spolia, has just (2018) been completed.[7] It is a clone of dubious worth, though one that is likely capable of commanding the support of a majority, while barely anyone mourns the fallen giant.

7 Cf. Vinken, Geschichte wird gemacht, 2018, and the essay on Frankfurt in this volume (Chapter 12).

Figure 3: Frankfurt, restored Hühnermarkt (Photo: Simsalabimbam 2018)

Düsseldorf's 'Millipede'

The fate of the modern Town Hall in Frankfurt can be contrasted to the case of Düsseldorf's *Tausendfüßler* ('Millipede') (fig. 4). The elevated roadway built in the 1960s between Hofgarten, a public park, and the Dreischeibenhaus high-rise was part of the effort to rebuild Düsseldorf as a modern, car-friendly city.[8]

Figure 4: Düsseldorf, 'Millipede', (Photo: Heinz Gräf 1961)

The project aimed to break up and reorganize traffic flows and, thanks to its stylish design, became a symbol of the city. In the words of the cabaret artist Jürgen Becker, "the

8 Droste/Fischer, Düsseldorfer Tausendfüßler, 2015; cf. also Sterl, Tausendfüßler in Düsseldorf, 2015.

Millipede gave the city a shot of roller-coaster".[9] Though the elevated roadway has been protected as a stand-alone monument since 1993, the decision to demolish it was taken in 2012 when it was decided to remodel the central area of the city between Hofgarten and Königsallee as part of the project to construct Daniel Libeskind's new *Kö-Bogen* complex (fig. 5).

Figure 5: Düsseldorf, "Kö-Bogen" complex (Photo: FSWLA Landschaftsarchitektur GmbH 2013)

Unlike in the case of the *Technisches Rathaus*, not only did Hessen's state office for the preservation of monuments *(Hessisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege*) lodge an objection, there were also unexpectedly loud protests and campaigns by citizens in favour of keeping this particular giant, and these ultimately contributed to the election defeat of the city's long-serving mayor. This is all the more astonishing as the plans to which the Millipede fell victim represented a significant revision of the city's post-war planning mistakes and aimed at 'repairing' the city, drawing on a vision of the historical qualities of city centre spaces. Specifically, the connection between Königsallee and the Hofgarten park that was destroyed in the course of post-war reconstruction was to be restored, while Hofgartenstraße was to be rebuilt on a new, curved plan, based on historical precedent. Removing traffic in this area by means of tunnels enabled a redefinition of urban space, as already achieved at the Rheinpromenade. In Düsseldorf as in Frankfurt, a modernist 'giant' was felled in the name of retrospective planning that sought a qualitative restoration of urban life. Lanes of traffic were replaced by urban spaces where people would want to spend time. In Frankfurt, a brutalist block was, without a word of complaint, replaced by a pathetic clone of an old town, while in Düsseldorf, the citizens took to the barricades to oppose the 'repair' of their city and the

9 Jürgen Becker on 16 January 2013 in the Neue Ruhr Zeitung, quoted in: Website Düsseldorf Blog, Ein Schuss Achterbahn.

reduction of traffic volume, and to save an elevated expressway. What is impossible to overlook is that modern megastructures – regardless of the quality of the planning that is carried out – often represent a major challenge for the development of liveable cities.

Modernization and Destruction: Giants in the City

When this topic is placed in a broad historical context, it is easy to show that the conflict between megastructures and urban development is nothing new, but it also becomes clear that the fronts have now shifted. The struggle used to be between the modernisers and the conservationists. Paris only became the modern city we know, the capital of the 19th century, as a result of Haussmann's radical reshaping. This was necessary for the creation of effective large-scale systems of order and the series of squares connected by boulevards that became the model for city planners around the world – though many contemporaries mourned the loss of *Vieux Paris*. "The old Paris is gone" wrote Baudelaire in an oft-cited section of *Les fleurs du mal* in 1857: "the form a city takes more quickly shifts, alas, than does the mortal heart".[10] The urban metropolis in particular seems to be inherently dynamic in its development; for modern urban planning, the phenomenon of the city itself is inescapably bound up with continual and wide-reaching destruction.

Le Corbusier already made this explicit, advising that 'surgery', cutting deeply, was necessary for the modernization of the city.[11] Accordingly, in 1925, he proposed replacing the centre of Paris with a monostructural megacity (fig. 6). In line with the principles of his *Ville Contemporaine*, the first ever 'Fordist' design for a city, which was based on a concept of functional zones for diverse activities and a radical reduction in density, the chaotic patchwork of central Paris was to give way to an urban landscape cut through by highways and studded with tower blocks.[12]

Although the functionality of the structure, which was provocatively named after a make of car, was barely called into question, critics focused on what they considered the destruction of the character and identity of the city. Le Corbusier gave a remarkable reply: Change, and even destruction, he insisted, belonged to the history of the city and were constitutive of its progress. The *Plan Voisin* was part of a tradition of great architectural transformations, among which we could already count the Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower: "That is still Paris" pleaded the caption of an accompanying sketch (fig. 7).[13] The architect prophesied shrewdly that his megastructures would one day be considered aspects of the identity of the global metropolis that is Paris. The *Plan Voisin* would today certainly have been one of those giants born out of destruc-

10 Baudelaire, The Flowers of Evil, 1998 (1857), 175.

11 Vinken, Ort und Bahn, 2008, and the essay on *The Crises of the Modern City* in this volume (Chapter 2).

12 On *Ville Voisin*, cf. Le Corbusier, The City of To-morrow, 1987 (1925), 277–289; Le Corbusier, Precisions on the present State, 2015 (1930), 169–214.

13 Le Corbusier, Precisions on the present State, 2015 (1930), 169–214.

tion over which splendid arguments would be exchanged regarding their worthiness for consideration as historic monuments.

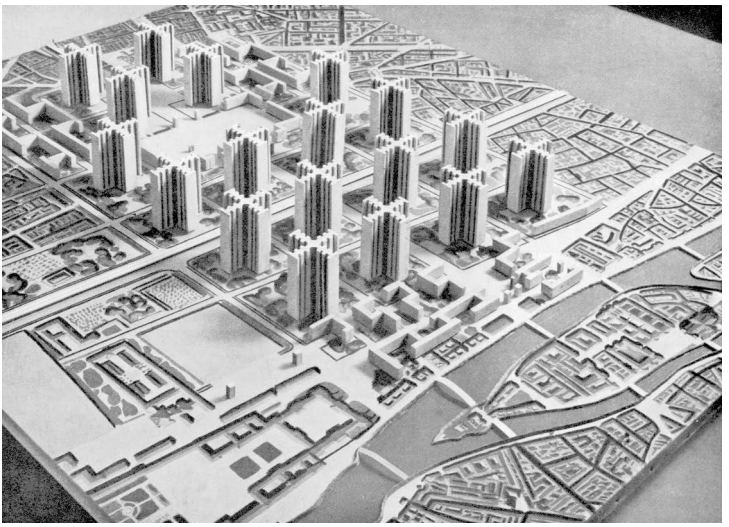

Figure 6: "Ville Voisin", Le Corbusier 1925

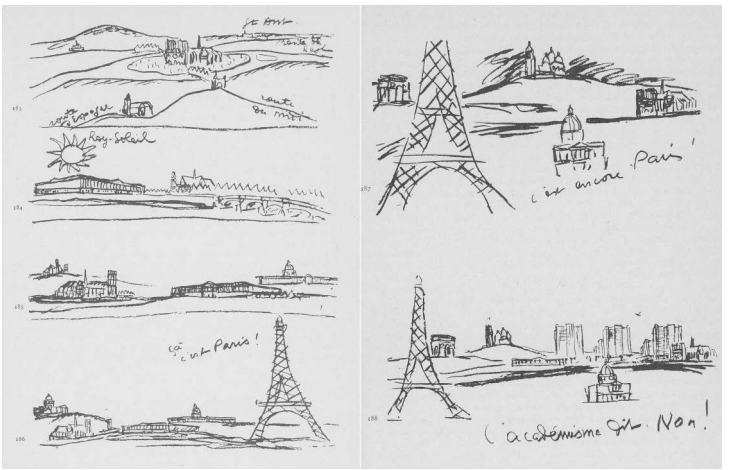

Figure 7: In the tradition of great architectural transformations? "That is still Paris!", Le Corbusier 1930

Modernization as a consequence of disruptions of scale and structural change, brutality and surgery: Le Corbusier almost enthusiastically associated himself with this tradition – and for many he remains the incarnation of a destructive and ignorant planning mania. In this connection, it should not be forgotten that the earth-shattering

experience of aerial bombardment had not stopped most city planners from seeing in the large-scale destruction of so many cities a unique opportunity.[14] And in retrospect it is just as clear that, since the 1960s, modern conservation has found its place in the heart of society by opposing modernist planning and outsized megaprojects and setting itself up as a brave and cunning David in an eternal struggle with the destructive 'giants'.

No better symbol for this struggle between David and Goliath can be found than New York, a city that was long in thrall to modernist planning and yet can also be considered something like the cradle of urban conservation as a civic movement.[15] The conflict crystalized in the 1960s in two prominent protagonists who appeared each to embody one side of thinking about urban planning. On the one side, there is Robert Moses, whose large-scale infrastructure plans and modernization programmes make him something like the Haussmann of New York and of the 20th century.[16] His key opponent was Jane Jacobs, the icon of civic action and advocate of a liveable city, who brought about a transformation in city planning, who invented the use of civic engagement as a weapon, and whose popular book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*[17] was an early statement of a foundational critique of modernist urban planning policy. The Lower Manhattan Expressway was a key part of Moses' urban highway network that was to cut through Greenwich Village, SoHo and Little Italy. To build it, the heart of alternative and activist New York would have been laid waste and largely rebuilt in the name of 'slum clearance'. Following persistent protests, the city government finally shelved the project in 1964. The move marked a major shift in planning policy – and in conservation: today, the Village and SoHo are Manhattan's largest 'historic districts' by area.[18] Car-friendly, large-scale planning vs. neighbourhoods – that is the same basic conflict that led to the emergence of a conservation movement in Europe.[19] The small-scale, mixed-use city with its organic structures is defended against the hostile giants. In Germany, this conflict has flared up in Frankfurt's Westend, in the Kreuzberg neighbourhood of Berlin, and in Hanover's List district, as well as many other historic areas, particularly those developed during the Wilhelmine period.

Role Reversal: Canon and Heritage

These days, the established roles have changed. To some degree they have even swapped places. Since the dawn of postmodernism, architects and urban planners have developed an interest in the positive qualities of historic architecture. Authors such as Aldo Rossi and Kevin Lynch have brought about a decisive shift in thinking, which is reflected in planning approaches such as critical reconstruction, 'urban repair', and lo-

14 Vinken, Zone Heimat, 2010, 124.
15 Gratz, Battle for Gotham, 2010; Flint, Wrestling with Moses, 2011.
16 Ballon/Jackson, Robert Moses and the Modern City, 2007.
17 Jacobs, Death and Life, 1961.
18 Cf. also the essay on New York in this volume (Chapter 7).
19 Vinken, Escaping Modernity, 2017.

cation-sensitive building. The International Building Exhibition Berlin (*IBA Berlin*) 1987 even created a separate 'Old Town' section (*IBA Alt*), which foregrounded the effectiveness of minimal intervention, rehabilitation and revitalisation in place of large-scale planning. In the meantime, German cities including Dresden, Hildesheim, Frankfurt and Potsdam have been outdoing each other in the creation of 'islands of tradition'.[20]

By contrast, conservationists have come to embrace the legacy of radical modernism. After resistance to late modernism's faith in planning culminated in European Architectural Heritage Year in 1975, we have now reached the point predicted by Le Corbusier, at which brutalism and satellite towns, multi-storey carparks and multi-lane expressways – in short, Goliath's legacy – are considered in terms of their heritage value. In a reversal of roles, conservationists are now placing under protection precisely those forms of architecture and structure that are considered the incarnation of state and capitalist arrogance, products of real-estate speculation and planning mania. But if this hostile Goliath against whom David had forged his identity has now mutated into a friendly Gulliver, what happens to David himself?

As I see it, this debate concerns more than merely the normal and predictable expansion of the stock of buildings that are subject to conservation to include an additional epoch. Pressure in this direction is created by a discipline of conservation that understands itself to be a (historical) science. From this perspective, listed structures should portray each past period as fully as possible and provide a base of sources broad enough to enable us to trace all of the various branchings of architectural history. By this logic, a heritage site, conservation site or monument is above all a witness or a source; every design task, every type of building is evidence for one or another epoch and its artistic, historical and social practices and preferences. Of course, urban conservationists have to consider the value and quality of the buildings and structures of the late 20th century – as, thankfully, is now being done again with renewed seriousness. But when it comes to evaluating the giants, it has also become clear that inventorization has to be more than merely a positivistic reflection of architectural history. If built heritage is taken seriously as an identity-forming anchor for the self-reassurance of a society, it becomes clear that this is not a purpose that can be fulfilled using the scientific categories applied by specialist authorities. Cultural heritage and its value can be captured only incompletely using the categories of History and Art History; heritage is more, it is the result of complex societal negotiation processes that are, at heart, processes of acknowledgement, adoption and appropriation.[21]

Processes of Deliberation and Negotiation

Modern megastructures reveal the problems with defining heritage value in a one-dimensional way in terms of historical and scientific criteria more clearly than do most types of monument. The question of historical (local-historical, architectural-historical, technological-historical) value (like 'oldest elevated railway bridge'; 'characteristic

20 Vinken, Im Namen der Altstadt, 2016. Cf. also the essay on Frankfurt in this volume (Chapter 12).

21 Franz/Vinken, Monuments – Values – Assessment, 2014.

example of brutalism'; 'early steel-frame building'; 'first skyscraper', 'technologically innovative', etc.) is revealed here to be simply inadequate. The question of what should be acknowledged as heritage from a period whose legacy often involves conflicts of use and frequently turns out to have lingering structural-spatial problems needs to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis in a more widely ranging debate with broader participation. This is likely to involve a discussion of what values are associated with each building beyond its strictly historical significance. Düsseldorfers clearly embraced their elevated highway. But that is not enough by itself to justify its preservation. Even if the structure's value as a historical object is indisputable, even though many citizens are willing to campaign for its preservation, the 'giants' pose certain questions in a more urgent way than do other buildings, simply on account of their scale (fig. 8).[22]

Figure 8: Limiting urban life? 'Millipede' overshadowing public space in Düsseldorf

Often destructive as a result of their monopolization of space, 'large' structures raise questions such as: How are they integrated in urban spaces? Can they even be so integrated? Who and what do they stand in the way of? What qualitative features of urban life do they block, damage or limit?

In Düsseldorf, even the defenders of the Millipede appear to have been surprised at the positive effects its demolition had on the urban space. Not only can the long-destroyed link between the City and Hofgarten park be enjoyed once more, but the new spaces that have opened up have revealed a number of historical monuments that had literally been overshadowed by the elevated highway, including St John's church, which has only been able to exert the effect it was intended to have on the cityscape by its 19th century architects since the Millipede's demolition (fig. 9).

22 The significance of scale in architecture has been discussed with great insight by Rem Koolhaas, cf. Koolhaas/Mau, S, M, L, XL, 1995.

Figure 9: Düsseldorf, Demolition of the 'Millipede' next to St. John's Church (Photo: Perlgrau 2013)

This is not a plea to condemn, reject or exclude the legacy of modernism. It is a plea to orient our gaze not towards the object, the giant, but rather to its potentials and problems in terms of space and urban planning. Our goal cannot be to retrospectively memorialize and legitimize structures that have come to be recognized as dead ends in the history of architecture and of urbanism. Only in a few exceptional cases will something that has tangibly harmed the development and quality of life of a city become a part of cultural heritage. At a fundamental level, conservation needs to open itself to qualities and values beyond academic historical categorization and learn to listen to and respect voices from outside its own field. Many people will want to join discussions on the quality of the urban environment, because these are fundamentally matters of quality of life and of sustainability, to which a living heritage ultimately contributes.

Today, the logic of the representative and illustrative canon that guided the approach to inventarization established in the 19th century has reached the limits of its applicability. Establishing a canon always entails value judgements. Heritage is not merely a programmable and objectivizable activity (a simple 'handing on'). To inherit means to accept, to select, to adopt. An unwelcome legacy is something you can fight for, if you can persuade others of its specific value and potential. This reveals once again the dilemma of state conservation programmes, which have to rest on a solid legal basis and work according to rational, scientific criteria – in a field that draws its vitality from emotion and the collective generation of meaning, from the work of memory.