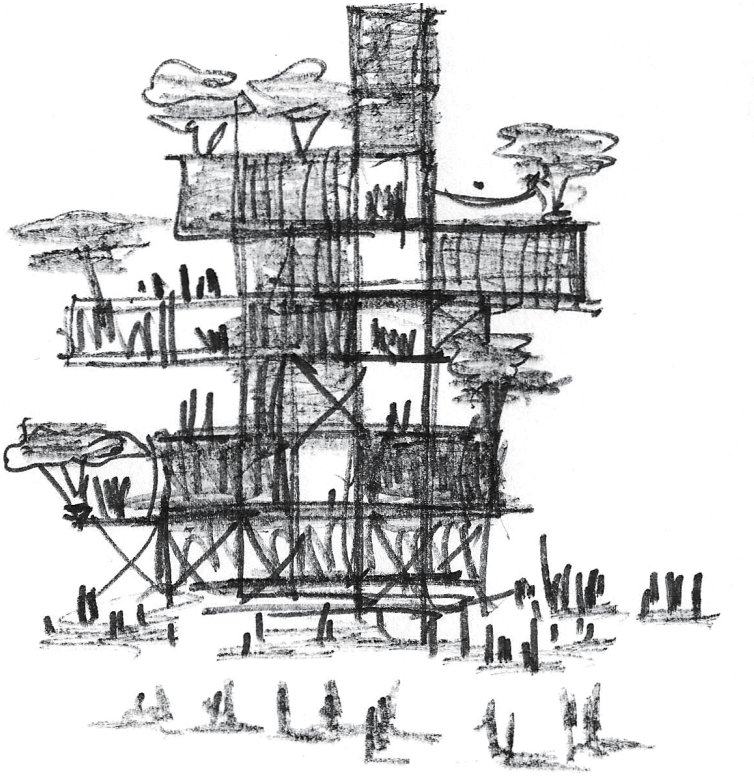
Niklas Maak

LIVING COMPLEX



From Zombie City to the New Communal

HIRMER

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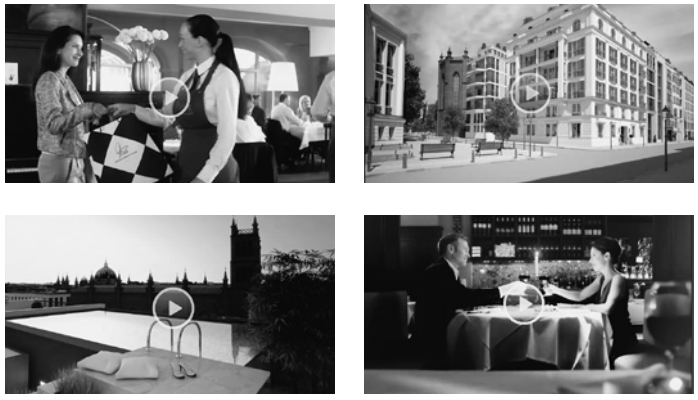
Contents

"Living like the Queen of Prussia"

What the new commercials for homes tell us

What could life look like? Like this, for instance: a woman, perhaps in her mid-thirties, wearing cream-colored pants and a gray blazer, rambles through Berlin in the morning hours, passing by the Deutscher Dom cathedral, crossing Gendarmenmarkt, walking past the red awning of the Borchardt restaurant, which—heavy, red, and upscale—projects into the Berlin morning, as if all by itself aspiring to transform the cold center of Berlin into a part of Paris. The woman goes shopping; she is seen on the escalator of Quartier 206, where she disappears into a store. A couple of Louis Vuitton purses can be seen in the store's shopwindow. Now it is afternoon: the woman walks past Schinkel's old museum—strumming and violins can be heard, the sounds plunging like cascades in minor into the depths. The woman enters a restaurant. A man with a wolf-like grin greets her with the snappy upbeatness of a sportscaster. He is wearing an open shirt and a dark suit and grins at her as if wanting to bite her. Obviously, he works in the neighborhood and is meeting his wife here for lunch.



Advertising for the Kronprinzengärten complex in Berlin

Cut: we see the new residential quarter where the woman lives: white façades, muntined windows, green blinds, boxwood trimmed in a round ball shape, the architecture looking as if the architect added some whipped cream-like plaster around the boring flan case to make the whole look a little more like Art Deco. Oddly, a carriage is parked in front of the house; the woman seems to be hosting a just defrosted Alexander von Humboldt.

We follow the woman into the apartment; inside, everything is cream-colored and dull blue; a reading chair is beckoning behind the fireplace and we see a gramophone whose horn seems to be inaudibly blaring something.

Located on the roof of the house is an elongated swimming pool with a view across to the Friedrichswerder Church. The woman goes swimming until it gets dark; her high heels can be seen at the edge of the pool. Later she meets the well-toothed man for dinner. This time she is wearing a gown that makes her look even paler. She raises an oversize red wineglass to the man, while outside the city lights go on; based on the way they sit at the table, it is as if they were keeping a watchful eye on one another. It is easy to imagine how, a few months later, she will be seeing a therapist and he will be seeing another woman, or vice versa. But before it gets to that, the short film, a promo of real estate developer Bauwert advertising the "Kronprinzengärten" at Friedrichswerder Church, an 85-million-euro residential complex with thirty luxury condos in the center of Berlin, is already over.

The new luxury real estate projects have given rise to a new film genre—that of the commercial architecture film, which, usually accessible on the company's website, uses sophisticated technology to showcase life as it could be in an (as yet) unbuilt house. This particular one is a horror film: it shows an empty existence. The woman is not doing anything: rather than going to the museum, she just walks past it; she does not work and apparently has no job nor any friends, just her husband. Her day consists of shopping, swimming, and waiting for the husband, a man who can only be found in restaurants; even for him the apartment is obviously too boring.

The film's setting, central Berlin, was where, after the fall of the wall, the excessive epicenter of the city was located, the world of

illegal clubs, extreme physical exertion, drugs, deep basses—of pale, sweat-soaked figures being flushed past the construction sites of office blocks by the end of the night; the ear-deafening omnipresence of techno; the partied-out and sweat-soaked and dirtied-up and tattered. And here, of all places, is where a world of creamy dull pleasures is created, as shown in the film—a world in which the most intense experience is the Louis Vuitton purse straps cutting into the flesh.

One could write a sociopolitical theory of the body based on these figures, an anthropomorphosis of capital that shows how an economic system seeps into the sensibility and the shape of bodies: we see two individuals here who are defined by the curious concurrency of a need to relax and self-discipline, as found in yoga: the woman, silently, pliantly, and doggedly fighting off decay, and the man, a jovially grinning wellness wolf with marathon-toughened calves. It is impossible to imagine these people screaming, partying loudly, goofing off, wasting time, fighting, laughing—all they seem to do is silently and energetically carry on a cold marble existence they "want to create" for themselves, its highlight being the long bath in the rooftop pool.

"Continue the story—the next chapter can be written by you," it says in the film's closing credits: buy an apartment and you can become like the two shown here. It is meant to be a promise, but it feels like a threat.

The promotional film advertising the "Lenbach-Gärten," a luxury housing complex in Munich with a price per square foot ranging between 418 and 930 euros, offers more of the same. The "Frankonia Premium Stadtquartier"—built by real estate developer Frankonia Eurobau, whose development portfolio includes the "Sophienterrassen" in Hamburg, the "Klostergärten" in Münster, and the "Heinrich-Heine-Gärten" in Düsseldorf—is said to exude the "magic of grandeur" and "intimate comfort." According to the Frankonia website, "spacious piazzettas lend the Frankonia Urban Quarters their special urban charm. The wrought-iron fences not only serve security purposes, but also delight the viewer's eyes with their classical proportions based on the golden ratio." The commercial can be taken apart like a riddle poem: it is about double safety—

from burglars, from the present and change—provided by the certitude of classical proportion and the golden ratio. It evokes the nostalgic image of the Italian piazza and its "urban charm"—a square whose urbanity used to be defined by its general accessibility and the absence of classically proportioned fences.

Yet another promotional video can be found on the Internet, one in which an unshaven man with a high-pitched voice speaks to the people of Berlin. Judging by his accent the man is French and what he says suggests he is the villain of a new James Bond movie. People will be surprised, this man says. He claims to be speaking for an organization called "Yoo," which indeed appears like the negation of 007 with a stylized Martini glass at the beginning instead of a figure seven at the end. When figures like this appear in Bond movies, nothing less than the world itself is at risk, and a city like Berlin will not exist much longer. And this is exactly how it is—even if the man speaking is merely the designer Philippe Starck, whose ideas have so far threatened primarily the world of chairs and functional lemon squeezers, albeit quite successfully. For Berlin he developed, together with Peach Property Group, the "Yoo" real estate project: right on the Spree River, adjacent to the theater that is home to the Berlin Ensemble, a ten-story, formally conservative building is going up, featuring a spa, an indoor pool, and other amenities that until now have been rare in Berlin, and in this building ninety-five condos are for sale at an average price per square foot of 810 euros. No need to bring furniture: the apartments are furnished upon request. Regarding the interior, the threat uttered by Philippe Starck in the video applies: "Nothing is normal, everything is a creation"—a creation, that is, from the headquarters of design-idea hell: the chandelier looks as if it has been produced by a raging beaver with a tail full of cement, and in the middle of the space stands a wheelbarrow that serves as a chair.

We are all part of a cultural family, Starck explains in the architect's film, a family that can be divided into four stylistic subsets, which correspond to the four interior design categories of the apartments in the "Yoo" building: "Classic," "Minimal," "Nature," and "Culture." "Your wife will love it," Starck says (apparently the promo is aimed exclusively at men). "Those who opt for the Culture

Style savor luxury," the Peach Property Group explains in a dossier. "He or she could be a collector, for example." The theater people and the artists who until recently lived next door, sometimes using the square for performances or picnics, are rubbing their eyes: where just a short while ago there used to be culture, there is now *Culture*.

Art plays an important role in the new real estate projects, since no one who is buying an apartment in Berlin for over a million euros wants to hear that the neighborhood consists of twenty mansions and fourteen guard dogs that pee on the rhododendrons in the front yard. Buyers want to participate in the so-called bubbling cultural life that is said to define Berlin's center—a center that is, as the sales brochure for "Yoo" states, populated by "self-assured successful people and young art stars in waiting," the implicit promise to future "Yoo" residents being that they may even be able to release those young talents from their wait state. Beckoning with the purchase of one of the overpriced condos is a future as a popular patron and/or collector, an exciting life in bohemian circles.

It has rightly been pointed out that gentrification also has positive aspects and that there is an unsympathetic, populist aggression toward anything that endangers Berlin's dallying foot-dragging, a hatred of everything that looks like money and style. Yet the new properties in the city center do not, in spite of all claims and wishful thinking to the contrary, signal a return of middle-class culture into a center devastated by socialism. What it does signal is cynical real estate capitalism exploiting and consummating the woes of antiurban command economy. The new buildings with their synthetic old-city flavor have nothing in common with the lifestyle epitomized in Berlin by, say, the upper-class building at no. 15 Bleibtreustrasse, where the art dealer Alfred Flechtheim lived until 1933.

Still, the developers of the "Kronprinzengärten" do bank on the appeal of art as well: the planned structures include a gallery building, a "house of art" with ceiling heights of up to 15.7 feet. With the self-confidence of a drunken pub-goer, the new structures edge within 16 feet of their neighbor, Schinkel's famous Friedrichswerder Church, where during construction the plaster from the ceiling came crashing to the floor. At the time, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation issued a statement that for safety reasons all sculptures had to be removed from the church.

Yet the new construction projects do not just, in the good old ways of gentrification, replace the simple and makeshift with a more affluent middle-class life: they zombify the city, resurrecting what they supplanted—the studios, the small art spaces, the improvised, the provisional—as a value-enhancing, exhilarating image. The new city recreates as fiction what it has just displaced: the artist is to lend the neighborhood the flavor of urban resistance; he is allowed to return, as an impersonator of himself, to the place of his displacement, to keep the residents from recognizing the sterility they have brought with them.

Where too much obvious capitalism prevails, calls for art arise—as in the new development area behind Berlin's Hauptbahnhof, or central station, a neighborhood blocked up by tangled office and hotel buildings, where the mayor of Berlin would have liked to build a new art gallery. Putting art spaces as value-enhancing decorative cherries on top of commercial real estate projects has become fashionable. Wilhelm Brandt, the former press spokesman of real estate developer Vivico, described art as bait to lure important people into the city: "It is like the sausage and cold cut counter: the more choice the better."[1]

Zombification: 40 Bond Street and the cynicism of the post-urban city

The zombification of the city center is not a European phenomenon. Manhattan's Lower East Side is seeing high-end condo buildings going up in places where there used to be punk clubs, with real estate agents unwaveringly advertising the neighborhoods' "bohemian character"—a character that is in danger of disappearing not least because of the new construction. Accordingly, the few remaining punks and underground artists vent their displeasure and cover the new buildings with angry graffiti, which the owners do not, mind you, accept as art, but rather decry as vandalism.

The sociologically most interesting of the new buildings in the Bowery is the luxury apartment block at 40 Bond Street, which was

built by the Swiss architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron for hotelier-developer Ian Schrager.

There have been protests against the building, which stands for the gentrification of one of the last social oases and the final displacement of the median-income population from Manhattan. This was one reason why the architects had a bizarre structure raised between the street and the building itself—it looks like a mixture between a fence and sculpture and is, in fact, both: a barrier against the real bohemian world of the punks and an emblem of the perceived underground affiliation of the new tenants, who are paying steep prices for the luxury apartments in this building (according to the industry information service "The real deal," the monthly rent is said to be well above $20,000).

40 Bond Street, New York
(Herzog & de Meuron)

The fence in front of the façade has a labyrinthine curving shape that looks as if Jackson Pollock had painted it in the air with liquid, rapid-hardening lead. On the website we learn that the building is "New York City graffiti-inspired"—that is, it derives its form from the kind of graffiti that in the past was all over the Bowery and which can still be seen on the façades of the new buildings as a sign of protest against the gentrification of neighborhoods. Once word got around that this fence was really a graffito congealed into a sculpture, it became the symbol of an equally brilliant and cynical assimilation strategy of the gentrifiers, a sneering salute from the new property owners to the sprayers, whose own form of protest now faces them as a fortification shielding the façade from being sprayed.

Cast in aluminum and with a length of 128 feet and a height of 23 feet, the fence achieves both: it advertises the flair of the subculture, while at the same time keeping it at arm's length. It transforms the anarchic energy of the bohemian punk scene into an artwork and this artwork is at the same time the best conceivable protection

against the real resentment of the culture it references. It frustrates the actual anger that is armed with spray cans, for any attempt to spray on this barrier inevitably leads to the paint being scattered in the air; it never reaches the actual façade behind it. Like prewashed jeans, the building flirts with the aesthetics of damage, thereby converting any conceivable protest into part of its design: the aesthetic of the graffiti fence absorbs all forms of ideological opposition and turns them into an ornament of its triumph.

The overfurnished city: strategies of control

The fence at 40 Bond St. is just one example of a new form of furnishing the city with objects of control and partition that deftly deny their defensive character. Overgrown parks are redesigned and furnished with bicycle lanes, benches, plantings of flowers, small fences, and playground and fitness equipment. One may welcome this overfurnishing of former wasteland and open space as an improvement of a city's quality of life, but it can also be seen as a subtle form of control of public space, leaving no room for unrest, demonstrations, marches, or riotous assemblies of any significance.

When looking for the causes underlying the drab appearance of cities, the failure of institutions that could contain the proliferation of profit-oriented low-end buildings and luxury ghettos besetting open spaces stands out. These institutions include, more than anything, public authorities—in Berlin, for instance, the Berliner Liegenschaftsfonds, a real estate fund that far too often and for far too long has been accepting the highest bids, even if this entails high long-term consequential costs, meaning the desolation of entire city districts and historically developed structures. Instead, people rejoice over the profitable sale of land to private players when the city could have emerged as the inventor and builder of new social spaces and new forms of housing. The mayor of the Berlin district of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, Reinhard Naumann, enthused over the "Rosengärten" project: "The 'Rosengärten' provide new housing in [our] district where demand is very high due to a major influx of residents and an increasing number of small households. The realization of the 'Rosengärten' is an important step to meet demand,

especially for a wide range of rental apartments in the district." By this he meant the demand for upscale real estate; the need for centrally located, affordable apartments that would allow families, students, and elderly people to live in central parts of the city seems to have been less of a concern here. Hence it is above all politics with its short-sighted, for-profit sale of municipal property that contributes to making city centers desolate.[2]

From place of promise to security zone

In nineteenth-century novels and songs, as well as in films and paintings, the big city is a chaotic, overcrowded, confusing and dark open space full of perils and opportunities—on the one hand, the well-founded fear of literally going under in the crowded streets and, on the other, the promise of a glittering world full of possibility. Petula Clark in her song "Downtown," the anthem of bored suburbanites, still celebrated the city center as a glittering, sparkling promise, where the lights are brighter, the music louder, and the people friendlier. It would be wrong to romanticize this idea of the city and take it at face value: cities have always reflected commercial interests; they were never cheerful playgrounds. Even so, something has changed in the approach to urban spaces.

The new cities are not shaped by the idea of promise, but rather by the ideal of protection against threats: automobile traffic has been minimized, empty spaces have been cluttered up with street furniture, and everything has been pedestrianized and shopping-optimized. The "Other"—in 1970s and 1980s philosophy and urban design theories the projection surface of the wildest imagination and a promise—has turned into a threat. One might ask if the tendency to think about everything from the perspective of the possibility of death is a symptom of a society that is no longer predicated on a concept of freedom, like in the 1970s, but rather on a notion of security. Data retention and the surveillance of public space are largely accepted—because they increase safety. The encounter with others in public space has become a fearful notion and is imagined as potentially life-threatening. Terror, AIDS, crashes: the man wearing a turban could be an assassin; the nice person at the bar could carry a

dangerous disease; there is a constant fear of collisions, muggings, gang attacks, civil commotions of all kind.

What these new cities look like, guided as they are by the promise of profit, principles of minimizing dangers, calming traffic, and other ways of casketing urban energies, is exemplified by Hamburg's "Hafencity."

The myth of the economic imperative

Hamburg's "Hafencity"

There is a shortage of affordable housing in Hamburg as well. High hopes were pinned on the "Hafencity," one of the largest urban building projects in Germany. Several promising housing cooperatives had already formed there and if one had continued condensing the new city in this manner, it could have become a vibrant part of town. Instead, the so-called Überseequartier, or Overseas Quarter, was built, a new neighborhood where about 7,000 people are supposed to work. Eight hundred million euros were invested, among other things in an "Überseeboulevard" whose brick wall canyons tend to evoke the etymological origin of the word "boulevard" in German war vocabulary, that is, of a bulwark or bastion. What has happened here? Why was the most beautiful waterfront location used to create a pedestrian zone that one could not imagine more desolate?

The answer is simple: because the aim was to create above all office space. It was argued that a mixed, compartmentalized residential area with affordable apartments and gardens near the water is a beautiful utopian, yet unrealistic dream. Offices were said to be needed in order for the whole thing to pay off. Yet the claimed economic necessity was a mistake: while there is a shortage of housing in Hamburg, about ten million square feet of office space was already vacant before construction even began, almost four million of that in the Hafencity alone, and the oversupply drove down prices.

Economically in particular, the consequences were disastrous: the Hamburg senate had pledged to take over 485,000 square feet from

the investor of a commercial complex, apparently because it feared that the image of a flourishing commercial district could otherwise collapse. Now the public authorities had to live up to its promise. After looking in vain for another buyer, the city had to step in as lessee. At first there were plans to move the Central District Office to the Hafencity, which the district politicians, however, considered too expensive: they would have had to subsidize the Hafencity rental market by paying a leasing rate of 161 instead of 86 euros per square foot. Eventually, the Hamburg Ministry of Economic Affairs was to move in, but its employees protested vehemently against the remote location. What happened here was not the global economy pouring money into public coffers that authorities could then put to beneficial use; rather, public authorities supported the image of a flourishing economy at the cost of a desolation of public space. The Überseequartier in Hafencity soon became a Potemkin village of the global economy, a simulacrum of urbanity, a cityscape instead of a city.

Hafencity, Hamburg

More than anything, it is the subordination to the supposedly inevitable imperative of the economic that shapes the current image of cities. The "heart of the Hafencity" was sold early on to a German-Dutch consortium, and the attempts by city planners to still breathe life into the area have been limited to urban cosmetics: architecture is allowed to provide the homey camouflage for the forms that commercial interests have taken. The office blocks were thus given a nostalgic local color in the form of brick façades, and because people in Hamburg always fret that things look too staid, the architects were allowed to incorporate a couple of meaningless visual turbulences. Erick van Egeraat's Sumatra House looks as if a rusty oil tanker has been cut apart and recycled as façade decoration. The economic disaster is memorialized by the visual ruin and the heart of the Hafencity is allowed to look like what, socially and in terms of urban planning, it actually is: a heap of rubble.

What notion of society and what priorities the marketers of the new city district have is illustrated best by the Hafencity website, where a new school called Katharinenschule is pitched not as a place of humanist education but rather as a manager mill for future business leaders. "The children," we read, "enjoy their break on what is most likely the city's highest schoolyard, which offers a spectacular panorama, and in doing so they learn an important entrepreneurial virtue: farsightedness."[3] All the more embarrassing then that everything the young entrepreneur sees from up here had to be state-financed.

A theory of overcrowding

Dreams of the Romanisches Café

What is so drab about Berlin's Friedrichstraße, Hamburg's Überseeboulevard, and all the new synthetic urban development plans? Those newly constructed buildings that line the streets like filing folders? The nighttime desolation indicating that the place is dominated by offices rather than apartments? And what makes the intersection at Bahnhof Zoo where the "Romanisches Café" is located—a café that adopted its name from a famous predecessor—so depressingly dismal?

It has not always been so utterly drab here. There is a painting from 1910 that shows glitter; the sky over Kurfürstendamm is sulfur-yellow from the lights of the city, rather than black; the light is reflected on the wet pavement and one cannot even see the way toward the Romanisches Café through the throngs of people shoving along Kurfürstendamm and toward the Bahnhof Zoo train station. This is what it was like in front of the Romanisches Café in 1910 when the artist Adolf Müller-Cassel created the eponymous painting. The writer and journalist Egon Erwin Kisch and the painter Max Slevogt had a stammtisch here; Sylvia von Harden, the model for a famous Otto Dix painting, and the satirist Kurt Tucholsky were among the regulars, as were the poets Else Lasker-Schüler und Gottfried Benn. Mascha Kaléko wrote some of her most beautiful poems here ("Half past one. So late! / Time to count the guests /

I am packing my optimism / In this city of four million souls / A soul seems scarce indeed." The year 1933, when Mascha Kaléko wrote this poem, spelled the end for the Romanisches Café. The building was eventually gutted in a November 1943 air raid. Seventy years later the new Zoofenster tower was opened, which houses the Waldorf Astoria Hotel—and the so-called new Romanisches Café. Yet at the opening you couldn't even tell until the last moment that there was, in fact, a café here: elements essential to a café, such as a door, were missing. You had to steal into the new Romanisches Café through a side entrance of the hotel. Similar to the showroom of a fertilizer dealer, the windows facing the street were blocked by big containers that had disoriented grass growing in them, and from the ceiling, neon spotlights, like those in a hospital, beat down on the plates, as if one were meant to operate on the cakes rather than eat them.

The new Romanisches Café showed what is missing in Berlin, and not just in Berlin. Whether we look at Müller-Cassel's painting or read Kästner on the "infernal bustle" at the old café, we always get the impression of overcrowding, of an extreme, chaotic super-compression of the city. Perhaps what made the city so vibrant was not just the "urban spaces" of the old Berlin—as Berlin city planners thought after 1989, leading to coarse efforts of reconstruction in the form of hard-edge boxes—but rather the overcrowding which, unfortunately, had not been reconstructed along with it: façades wildly leaning into the street with baroque balconies that had armies of caryatids attached to them, and underneath that a hustle and bustle, a chaos of carriages, people, kiosks—a culture of public space that emerged because so many people were moving to Berlin, and who went to the cafés because apartments were too cramped.

Those who step out of the new building of the Romanisches Café at 10 p.m. find themselves in a wasteland with some light added to it by the blue neon tubes of the Karstadt store, the red ones of the Beate Uhse store, and the green ones of the "Wursterei," a sausage shack. At least the neon writing on the train station has been renewed, so that it no longer reads "_ _ _logischer Garten."

This impression of desertedness also has something to do with the city's population density; too few people live in the center. The Berlin of the 1920s, which on old photographs appears as a glittering, sparkling jumble of coffeehouses, neon signs, traffic lights, streetcars, horse-drawn vehicles, fur coats, automobiles, hats, electricity, hustle and bustle, love, and cigar smoke, was the product of insane compression. In 1877, Berlin's population reached one million, by 1905 the population had doubled, and by 1920 it was four million. Berlin was now the third-largest city in the world after London and New York. Emigrants flocked to Berlin and overcrowded the city, and this overcrowdedness was its richness: three times the number of people actually planned for were living on Friedrichstrasse and in the areas where today "Yoo" and the "Kronprinzengärten" are being constructed. These masses that flocked to the center brought a mix of social strata and cultural rituals with them, a chaotic compression that was the opposite of taking vacant properties in the city center and covering them with upscale, sleek, and zombifying urbanism. Of course, 1920s Berlin also had posh residential buildings. But living right next door to them, behind them, under the roof were people with considerably less money who opened bars and small stores.

In the new residential areas you look in vain for this kind of intermixture and super-compression. Berlin's Friedrichstrasse is suffering from the fact that the urban silhouette—perimeter development, eaves height, façades with proportionally more stone than glass—has been reconstructed (thereby preventing large autistic projects such as the Kudamm-Karree), but the life that once made Friedrichstrasse a dense, bubbling place has not been restored. The reconstruction of this area in the center of a city also points to more comprehensive structural woes of state building policies: formal shells are recreated to win back a lost, vibrant city feeling, a lost atmosphere, without understanding that it is necessary to examine the structural conditions of this atmosphere and, maybe, build very different forms in order to arrive at a similar urban atmosphere. It would have benefited Friedrichstrasse if from the beginning, rather than banking on maximization of profits by developing office space, plans had called for extremely compressed, popular residential development as well: soon cafés, small stores, and movie theaters would have moved into the neighborhood. The way things are, though, Friedrichstrasse is a Berlin version of La Défense in the cus-

tom-made suit of the old European city: an office district in a nostalgic mold. Closer examination of most façades leaves no doubt that what has established itself here is not a mixed center but rather an office world where form follows efficiency: instead of displaying the wealth of detail and almost hysterical overdecoration of old *Gründerzeit* façades, the office buildings stand in file like petrified ring binders. The city is a reflection of the construction industry's pursuit of returns. The state responds to this by introducing mere cosmetic changes, such as stipulating a certain small percentage of subsidized housing.

It is also possible, of course, that the planners of the new cities really do not want to return to the ideal of the unruly, overcrowded city. Perhaps the ideal is not the glittering, cosmopolitan, confusing, dangerous, seductive, wild, loud, steaming, blurred, sharp, shrill, soft, lost, ice-cold, and overheated metropolis of modernity, the city of peril and promise, but rather the opposite: the feudally lukewarm, small-town premodern city that is evoked by the old carriage in the promo for the "Kronprinzengärten," a complex whose name, Crown Prince Gardens, suggests exactly that: the city of the safe idyll. The two models are antithetical: the city as a place of adventure, of encountering the unfamiliar and the confusing, and the city as a tidy, spick-and-span, manageable vision of order. The way the Berliner Liegenschaftsfonds advertised a large city-owned piece of land near the Charlottenburg Palace gardens to potential bidders is telling: as "land for the development of high-end housing" under the slogan "Living like Sophie Charlotte," the Prussian queen.

Metamorphoses of public space

How the airport becomes a shopping mall

The commercial transformation of public spaces is not a phenomenon that is limited to squares and streets in city centers. What once defined cities reappears as a strange mirage, a fata morgana of steel, outside of the cities: airports in particular are turning from places that are about providing as expeditious a departure as possible into places where one can—and indeed is supposed to—spend days among hotels, massage centers, boutiques, and restaurants. In the very places modernity invented for the purpose of accelerating circumstances, life decelerates into the forcibly flâneur-like.

Built in 1974 by the German architectural firm gmp, Berlin Tegel Airport was an acceleration structure: a large hexagonal building onto which airplanes can directly dock by means of fourteen jet bridges, while travelers can be dropped off directly in front of a particular check-in counter in the terminal's inner court. It may be that such a design is no longer possible today, but the potential terror threat alone does not explain why travelers who are forced to show up at check-in at an absurdly early time must now wander through endless shopping malls at the new airport, where they will indiscriminately buy things just to fill the time.

If the new Berlin airport does in fact ever open, it will be a place of strategic delay. The engineers of consciousness, who eventually have to sell the features of such structures to the public, would rather call it "deceleration," because that is considered socially desirable. People do not like speeders and tailgaters and turbo-capitalism; they want quiet zones and retreat. Yet what is overlooked in the process is that deceleration, the apotheosis of the loiterer turned epicure, is by no means an act of rehumanization, but rather the true pitch of the very so-called turbo-capitalism that it is ostensibly pitted against. By now, wellness centers, yoga spaces, low-fat gourmet food restaurants, and other upscale self-consolation facilities are available at the airport, and this metamorphosis of the airport into a stroller's maze with well-hidden departure options is quite simply predicated on the profits that can be made with the promise of comprehensive self-optimization through relaxation and culinary art.

As the Moodie Report and the annual reports of London Heathrow and other airports point out, "non-aviation areas" are by now one of the largest sources of revenue for airport operators. Fifty percent of the revenue of major international airports is no longer generated by passenger fees and freight charges but by what is called, even in contemporary business German, "airport retailing" and what, at over 1,200 euros per square foot, yields considerably more than any regular urban shopping center. For example, according to "Research Network Airport City Facts 2012," the Hugo Boss store

at Frankfurt Airport achieved a "surface area productivity of 1,858 euros per square foot," and "rents topping at 95 euros per square foot are no longer uncommon in airport retailing." In Athens, Greece, and Portland, Oregon, the airports even have retail parks with Ikea stores attached to them.

Based on this alone it is understandable that retail space, which at Tegel was around 35,000 square feet, is to cover about 236,800 square feet at Berlin Brandenburg International and that delay is the very essence of new transportation infrastructure.

The mutation of the airport from a temple of acceleration into a shopping maze with peripheral departure option is not the result of safety requirements or general growth, but rather of the economic transformation of public spaces. With the metamorphosis of airports into highly profitable shopping centers, airport architecture, too, reaches new lows: the new airports look like what they are: glorified shopping malls where one is forced to slow down on the way from the entrance to the airplane and stay forever in coffee bars, restaurants, shops, and lounges. The new airports abolish the idea of flying, the fastest possible mode of transportation: the aesthetic promise is gone and so is the real velocity.

Through the addition of urban décor the commercial patronizing of the air traveler awaiting departure in endless shopping arcades is turned into a fancy "city experience" where the boundaries between the public sphere and intimacy become peculiarly soft. Under the overarching metal roofs of these malls a strangely hybrid intermixing of intimate and public spaces is taking place; weary business travelers sleep in living-room-like lounge corners and waiting areas, while next to them people are ordering coffee, buying magazines and small presents. In between there are no walls. It is as if the front of a house had been removed and with it the distinction between private and public. Understood as a place accessible to all residents of a community, the piazza at this mall is, of course, not really a public square, but rather the fiction of a square that is public only for the privileged world of air travelers. And what is all the more interesting is that this very exclusive location cannot but reference the premodern "market square idyll" from whose essential feature, general accessibility, it has departed.

Some architecture theoreticians suggest that in terms of layout, the architecture of airports and shopping malls is modeled on classic city centers and in terms of their concentration, on places of trade. There is indeed some evidence for this, but nowadays we can find the reverse as well: aseptically well-planned city centers that resemble the shopping zones of major airports. Surveillance cameras everywhere and squares as smooth as glass, forbidding façades, illuminated nooks, the city as an endless sequence of locks that people are pushed through.

Understandably, the cluttering, commercialization, and disinfection of urban centers in such massive form entails evocations of an unobstructed idyll. The appearance of urban centers and airports alone may explain the successes of magazines such as *Landlust* (Country Delight) and *Country Life*, which eulogize life in the countryside and, as consolation, offer all kinds of strategies for making one's home cozier.

Suburbia

War of ideals

The forlornness of the economized city centers continues in the suburbs: because the city does not offer any affordable living space for families, they migrate to the housing mush at the outskirts. Yet even there, in the new building plots the municipalities release for construction, things are already very tight.

Many of those building plots suffer aesthetic massacres. Because the overextended communities cede development planning to private investors, design guidelines are lacking, and because no agreements are reached, one architectural design batters the next. Thus we encounter, next to one another in the smallest of spaces: the shrunken version of a Bauhaus home that calls for other white boxes as neighbors; an elaborate half-timber house that would need a field with horses or an old windmill as neighbors, rather than white boxes, so as not to lose its impact—yet instead, a low-end house