

Pragmatic Memory

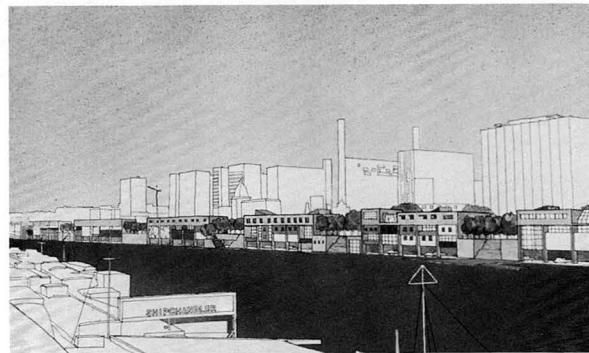
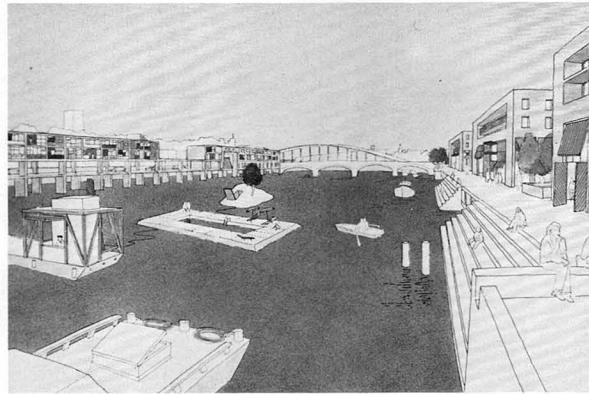
Mark Mack

I am an architect who removed himself from the Old World and positioned himself in the New World where history is taking a faster and condensed form and creating a constant challenge to architectural concepts. When the challenge is met, architecture carries the memory of that segment of history.

My most powerful memories linger in the distant past — in my childhood. They took place in Post War Austria around the year 1958. It was a segment of somewhat painful history that presented new and pressing challenges to architecture and provided me with the place for my memories in an accidental way.

The two projects here spring from a kinder history that allows the architect to search within his own delightful memories and ever growing values to formulate an architecture that would carry this history gracefully.

The proposals for these two projects reflect a great deal of optimism in my projection of a feudal-romantic vision of the future. Standard futuristic visions are usually calculated, egotistical, and artistic and reject the past totally as if it was the antithesis of the future. My vision of the future sees the past as a provider of romantic memory which when overlapped with a particular project undergoes a certain prophetic transformation and hopefully evolves into a blueprint for the future.



Reinvigoration of the Bercy District with Water and Gardens

When I was a small boy, I lived at the foot of the Alps in a town of about ten thousand people. We were the newcomers to this originally Roman town and therefore acquired an apartment in the new rationally planned-out section of the town. We lived in a four story walk up building, and occupied the top floor. It was one of my father's many clever ideas to live there because we would have slightly more

square footage than our lower-floor neighbours as a result of the diminishing thickness of the walls as they reach up. We also felt fortunate to be looking over a large rectangular plaza which was defined by the walls of other four story buildings. When we moved in, the plaza was not even started, but one could look at it in the Municipal Planning office in the form of a title and a plan drawn up by

the regional planning consultant. So for the time being we looked at the previous condition of the site, which was a rather loosely planned arrangement of gardens and shacks. These allotment gardens, or domesticated farms, were usually situated on the fringe of the cities and expressed the communal urge for providing vegetables and fruits to individuals to compliment their post war diet. Small architectural objects, like huts and sharing devices were built of recycled and appropriated material to aid planting and resting between chores.

My family looked upon this patchwork of gardens and architectures as a source of great entertainment and individual accomplishment. The various products from these enterprising gardeners were always the subjects of great discussions.

While the gardens from our apartment looked neat and somewhat laid out on a plane resembling a large canvas by Paul Klee with the little paths cutting through creating a Mondrian sketch, the experience on the ground plane was quite different. The small bushes separating the various gardens became visual barriers and the perimeters of a maze. As children we would run through this labyrinth playing tag or hide and seek. Sometimes we would appoint spies who would look out of the upper floor windows, and our parents would even give us hints where our "enemies" were. Another favorite game was to snack fruits or vegetables from the various allotments, especially

strawberries and currents in the late summer months.

I remember one instance particularly well: we had just finished a game of tag when we realized that there were some new kids in the area who we had never seen before. We watched them from a distance and realized that they were picking strawberries from a garden which we considered our own territory. We quickly banded together and flushed them out. I was running behind a boy whose pockets were bulging with stolen fruits. I ran slightly faster than him and soon was close behind him. He was not familiar with the layout of the gardens and when another boy came towards him from another direction he made a very sharp turn and slipped. With great force he fell onto the ground. We stopped and looked at him getting up. His bulging pockets were flat, the fruit was squished all over his pants. The pockets were dripping like a sieve and the red juice of the currents ran down on him. He was very embarrassed and started walking away towards his own neighborhood which was across town. His embarrassment grew amidst the clapping and heckling from the older people looking out of the windows of their upper floor apartments. (They always leaned out of their windows at that time of the day just before the sun went down.) Three years later the plaza was realized and replaced the gardens with an asphalt parking area. By then everybody including my parents had a car and therefore did not mind the new condition.

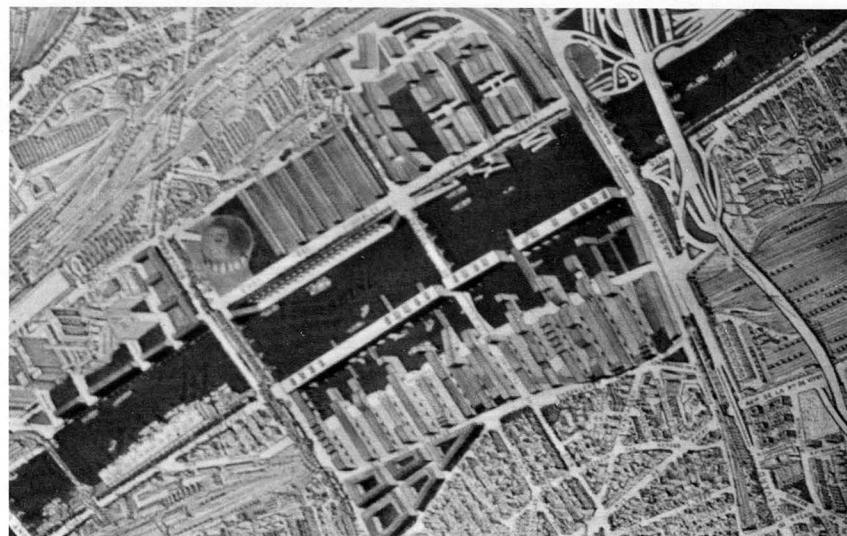
One might ask what these memories have to do with architecture. For me they are experiences which in a clinically planned environment would have been hard to achieve. In my Berlin and Paris projects, my aim was to loosen the environment in which we build, and to create by force a more feudal and more primitive environment which could be the background for unforeseen and slightly dirty events in close relationship with nature and growing things.

Paris — A Model for the 21st Century Pavilion de l'Arsenal, Paris (1989)

It was as if Paris had been turned into a huge beautiful orchard.

Conservateur décadaire,
30 Messidor, Year II

With the distant seventh stroke of the city clocks, I knew that I had to turn back under the Alma bridge, back from my last delivery of the day and turn towards the Elysian Banks at the Bastille for the evening harvest and delivery. Along the bank of the Seine, long rays of the setting sun magnified each blade of grass and each crest of wave with a sprawling shadow. I could see, through a shadowy arcade overlooking the left bank, the cars on the high-speed river route passing me and slipping silently back into their tunnel. Gliding through the swirling water, warm with the day's sunlight under my skin, I passed under bridge after bridge. On the right bank, long rows of steps climb up from the water, rising between the buildings' faces — Orangerie steps, Lemonier steps, Coligny terraces, Lobau steps — the Arsenal Basin was fast approaching and soon I would pass the center of the city and I see my gardens on the edge of the water ...



Paris Site Axonometric

Socio-Cultural Irrigation for the Periphery of Paris

A three-tiered architectural strategy as used in Bercy, 1999 A.D.

The Vehicle — A Saturated Fabric

Information flows like water. Paris is unique among modern metropolises in its civic support of communication — both spatial (metro) and electronic (minitel) — and to see the city as a communication system is to see the interrelatedness of these systems. With the advent of the automobile, Paris is in a discursive paralysis. We propose an interconnecting system of canals which will aerate the crowded and dysfunctional system of streets with a moving system of waterways, providing a network for the sensual rejuvenation and spiritual stimulation of the Parisian populace. By building along the water's edge in a responsible and publicly accessible way, depressing the roadway along the Seine, and extending the river in fingers towards the city, the water can again be a vehicle for human communication.

The Nutrients — Floating Architecture

On this network of river and canals, the cultural activities of Paris can be heightened, punctuated, congregated and diffused. With a vocabulary of wood over

water, this floating architecture could move up- or downstream, radiate to the periphery of the city or concentrate in the center. Waterborne urbanism accelerates the communicative process of cultural and social exchange.

The Greening — A Spontaneous Generation

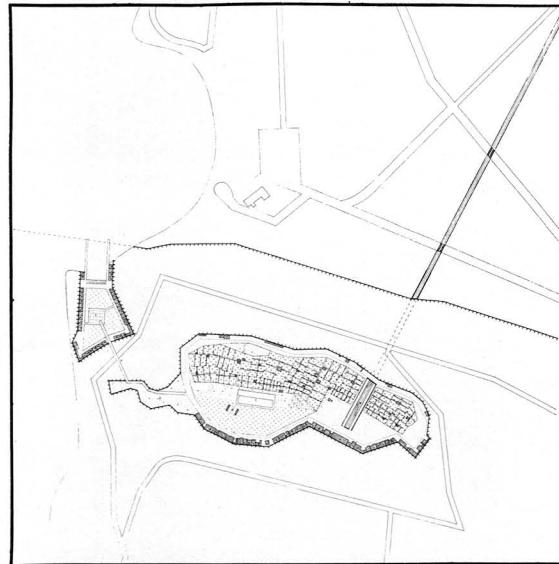
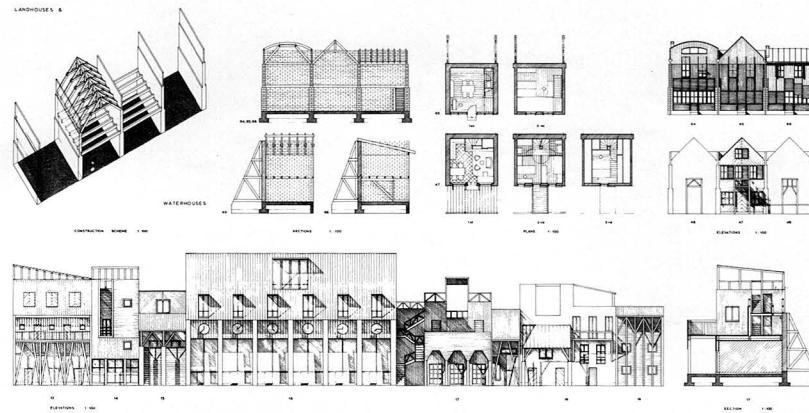
Taking our clues from the scattered garden and fountain "debris" which dots the city like a patchwork, we gather the public gardens and waters into a "satellite belt" of green and blue. As did the medieval glacis around the city wall or the church square, these 'green spaces' provide a place for rough-and-tumble recreation and horticulture. Each of these hundreds of gardens has its own character, but together, they propose an alternative to the barren modernist landscape of hi-rise and empty lot which parallels the peripheral expressways.

"... Up the main channel against the current and on to Bercy, where the Seine widens and separates into a field of channels and basins, each with a row of floating buildings. The red, blue, aqua-coloured neon threads hum like slender glowing insects; warm pools of light lovingly hover over people clustered under the riverside lights. It is the middle of the

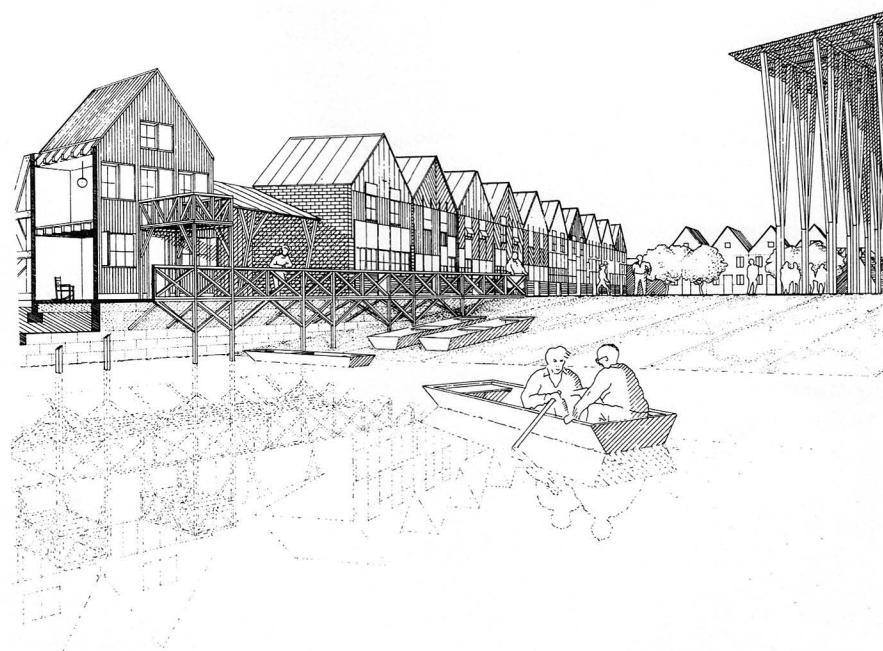
dinner hour, I haven't much time before the events of the evening really begin to pick up.

"Through canal Mitterrand, the most direct route to where I want to go, and I am at the dockside for the Nine-to-Nine Club. At the guest docks floats a leisure barge with tables, dance floor and its music tower; it must be one of those bar-hopping tours, where the passengers board at Chatelet steps and float into the demi-monde of almost-submerged Paris, looking to be stimulated by the many activities of the water district. I unload the vegetables — selected for appearance. Now finally to Emma's place dockside. She'll have the best views for midnight tonight when it begins: the barge explosion of summer solstice. Like the explosion of a puffball or the dandelion — when 200 barges of the most diverse functions leave the concentration of the Bercy docks and disperse over all of waterfront Paris and the suburbs, carrying with them the best of the year in culture, entertainment and information. Ballet barge, minitel programming barge, opera on the water, African rhythms float, European community access base boat, the slam-dance drydock, the American hip-hop barge and, of course, the glide step barge to the silver sounds of Miles Davis.

"When I dock my boat at Emma's, I'll know I am come home for the evening; I'll climb those stairs to the high perch, curl up with a Patisserie, and watch the barges as they move and separate and spread into the farthest periphery of Paris."



Fichtewiesen/Erlengrund

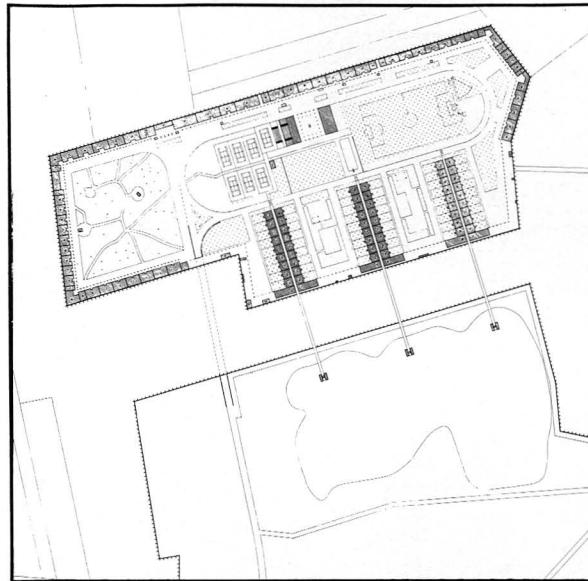
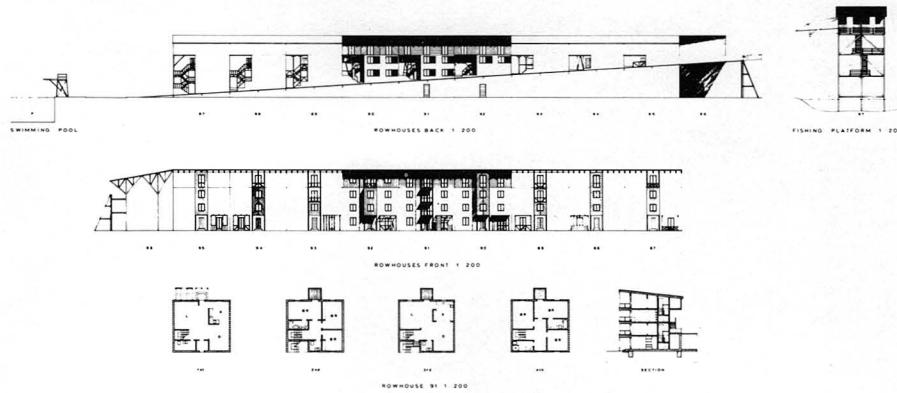


“Berlin: Monument or Model for the Future?” Allotment Garden City and Fishing Settlement (1988)

From the airplane, one perceives the Wall not as an urban tool of separation but as a rural void. Two-thirds of the Wall pass through landscape and agricultural land. Barbed wire fences, sometimes several layers thick, and a controlled no-man's land make this Wall a dramatic incision into the landscape around Berlin. In the creation of this no-man's land, hundreds of small garden houses and weekend houses were razed, and thousands of allotment gardens were nullified. Fifteen meter high sentry towers were erected at strategic locations and landmines rendered these former recreational areas obsolete.

Taking this lost land as a generative idea, this project recalls the spirit of turn-of-the-century Berlin, when the city was engaged in radical urban and land planning, a movement that was sober yet emotional. It revives the memory of the garden city movement under Hermann Muthesius, the concepts of Martin Wagner, and the emotional socialism of Bruno Taut. The project is dedicated to this period of optimism and neighborly love and its outstanding architectural heroes.

Two extraterritorial areas now located with East Berlin are connected back to West Berlin. These pedestrian enclaves, accessible by train, boat, or foot, provide an alternative to the urban bustle of the inner city. Tunnels, ramps and catwalks bridge the small distance that separates these areas from the West. Overdimensioned fences articulate the Wall that supports lean-to housing. These pockets of development are designed for those who still crave small scale living.



Lassinswiesen

