

A New Federal Capital for Germany

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A work of architecture establishes, by design or default, a spatial framework which can structure one's engagement with the world. This ability has, in the past, given architecture a large role in shaping a culture's self identity. Traditionally, the social sphere did not exist as an autonomous body which inhabited architecture. Rather, architecture defined this body and gave it its vital sense. This political dimension of architecture has been almost totally lost to other fields. Architecture is no longer the primary arena for shaping the public's engagement with the world. Ironically, this engagement now occurs mostly in fields (such as electronic media) which are independent of materiality, physical extension and duration—the traditional tectonic qualities of architecture.

In discussing the current condition of public life, Paul Virilio cites the end of classical space arguing that physical referents no longer define the urban spatial experience. In the field of architecture, classical space forms a convention which permeates every aspect of production from conception to execution. More than an expedient system of documentation and communication, this convention controls the design process, containing it within fixed spatial parameters.

In other fields critical analysis has shown that the political positioning of a work depends on its structural premise rather than on its stated intentions

or outward appearance. Conversely, focusing only in its explicit theme allows the structural premise to operate unchallenged. Architecture finds itself in the cultural and social margins because it has been unable to confront and transform its outdated spatial premise. The characteristics of this premise include the definition of objective boundaries separating object and void, a durability in time and the operation of a regular projective geometry predicated on a stable and homogeneous plenum.

Scientists have been able to create materials which exhibit properties outside of classical boundaries; super critical materials which cannot be classified as solid, liquid, or gas. They are real world manifestations of quantum scale effects. I believe that we, in architecture, can produce an analogous super-critical condition of space in which the topology and materiality of classical space is pushed beyond a critical limit.

Typically, arguments are made that such speculation ignores the physical fact of architecture which stubbornly remains within Newtonian limits. But this argument presupposes that architecture cannot achieve more than the sum of its parts. To engage the super-critical condition one must sever the convention that links volume and space as identical properties. Rationally determined space is a particular subset of the vast range of spatial possibilities in architecture.

Our entry for the Berlin Spreebogen International Design Competition applies this intention to a large scale architectural project. Beyond implementing the general spatial strategy outlined above, this project confronts a series of complex issues arising from the particulars of the site and program. The competition is to design a new federal capital complex in Berlin. The project comprises the German Parliament (Bundestag), Federal Chancellery, Bundesrat and Federal Press Conference. The building program totals more than 250,000 square meters consisting of over 7,000 government offices and meeting rooms with virtually no major spaces. Programming for the remainder of the site is left to the competitor. The 62 hectare site is along the Spree River, straddling the route of the former Berlin Wall and includes the historic Reichstag building. It is now a nearly barren scar abutting several districts and sits midway between the former East and West Berlin city centers.

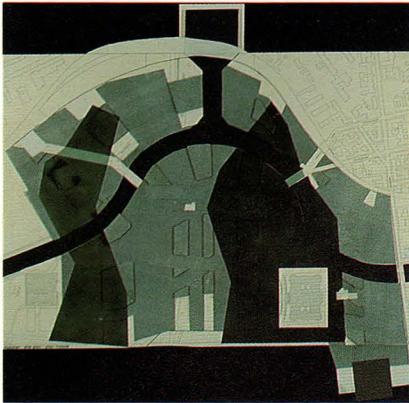
The competition presents a series of important issues which have a major impact on our design. The most important are the simultaneous operation of four different scales of context, the dilemma of Berlin's physical history and the question of reflecting a German national identity in a capital design.

In designing any project, there is a relevant context to be considered beyond those things in immediate physical proximity. This is especially so in this

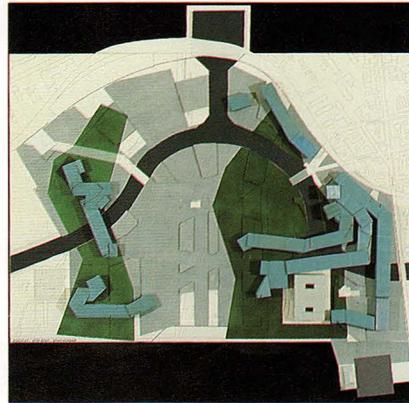
project where there is a four-tiered context, each tier operating at a different scale. First is the immediate site and its local interface. Second is the city of Berlin and its urban form. Third as a capital complex, is the nation of Germany. And finally, as a preeminent nation, the global context. Our project addresses these contexts simultaneously both in form and function.

The physical developments and transformations of Berlin since the eighteenth century can be analyzed as a series of operations defined by Cartesian parameters. Strategies of extension, delineation, superimposition, eradication and division, all reinforce a strongly defined space of objects, borders and voids within a homogeneous plenum. These parameters have persisted in various manifestations, positivist (Friedrich Wilhelm extension of 1734, Albert Speer's Third Reich axis), nihilist (Allied bombing, the Berlin Wall), self reflective (IBA housing projects). The premise which formed this tradition and counter tradition has, in the course of this century, lost its relevance. A new project for Berlin must accept this new condition.

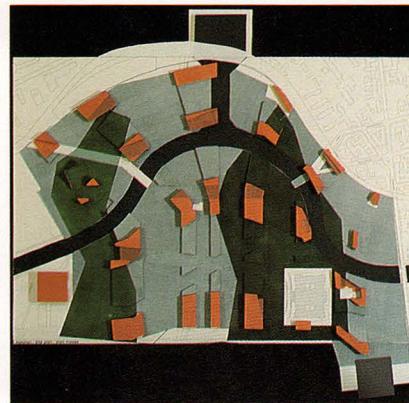
Analogously, capital designs have been traditionally employed unequivocal symbols and classical spatial strategies to fix a strong symbol of national identity in architectural form. It is ironic that the last comparable capital project anywhere (given the scale of the project and Germany's current promi-



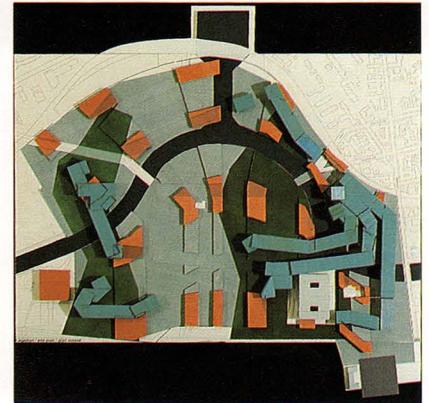
World Garden and Festival Structure



Government Buildings



Exhibition Halls



Composite of Layers

nence as a nation) is Albert Speer's proposal for the Third Reich on the very same site. Speer's Great Hall for 300,000 is an extreme example of an object use as a device for spatial and political control. It makes a caricature of the political bias that use of classical tradition necessarily engages.

Since re-unification, the question of the character of German national identity

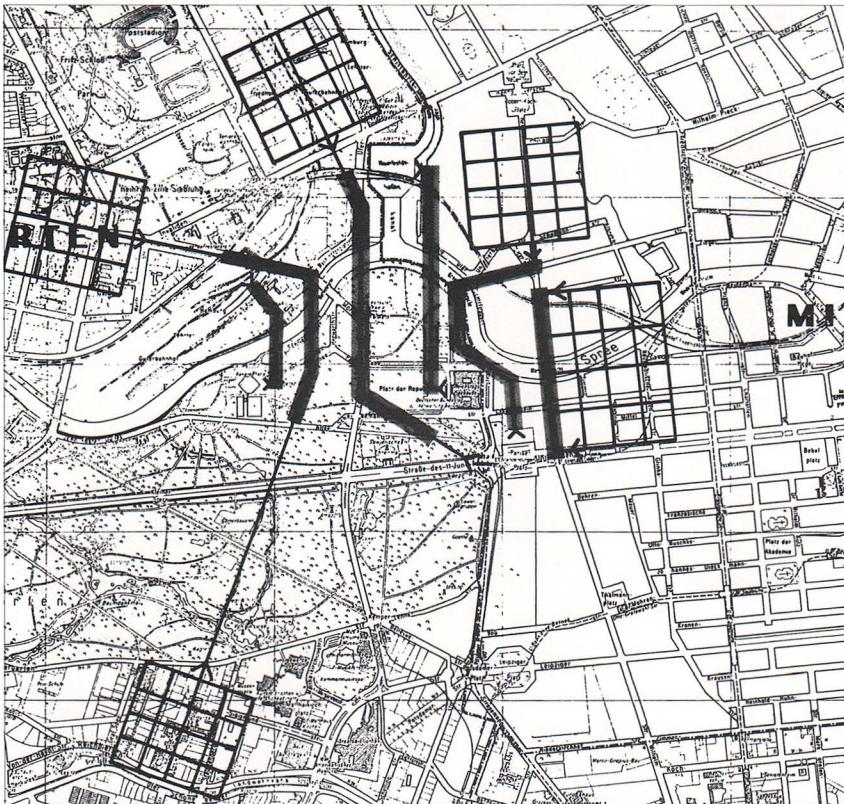
has reemerged. It has, in the past, oscillated between an agglomerated particularism and a hegemonic unity. Goethe described it as a paradox "estimable in the individual and so wretched in the generality."

Our project does not attempt to impose a single face on so complicated an entity. Rather, it acts as a challenge to conventional representations of power

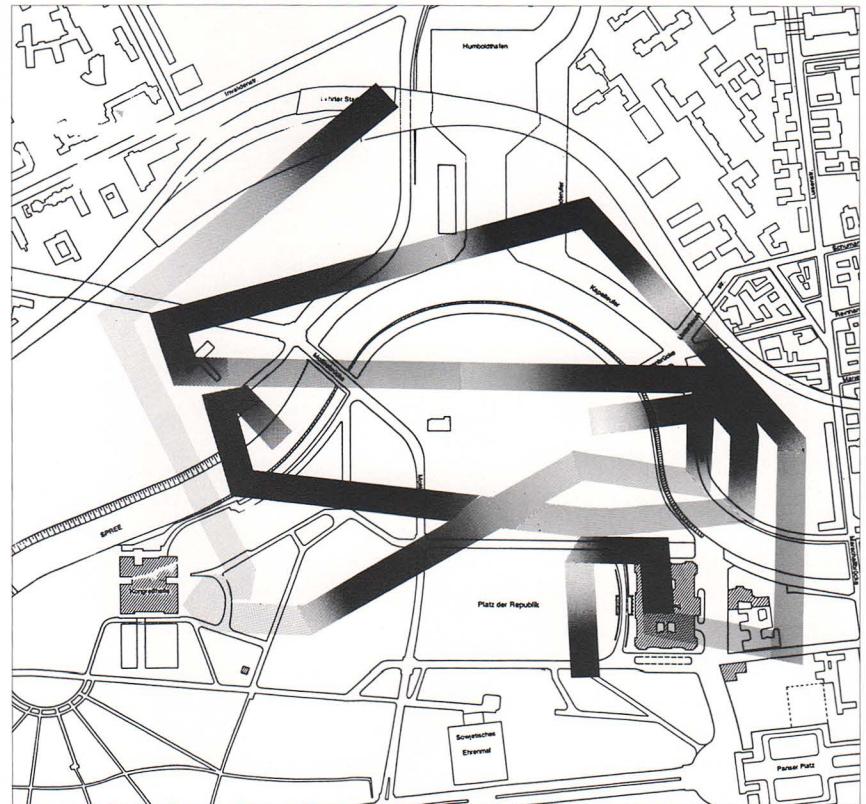
by creating a structure which is simultaneously one thing and many things, allowing multivalent readings. A series of formal and programmatic components are interwoven to perform a complex urban, national and international role. The interaction of components produces a field of relationships which is neither hierarchical nor random.

This field is a fitting structure for the

German capital. It can be seen to symbolize the dynamics of a modern democracy and its vital lines of communication. Increasingly spheres of power, wealth, and information no longer coincide with geopolitical boundaries. As the first capital design project in the post cold war era, it resonates with a global shift in the conception of boundaries and a dissolution of clearly delineated entities of



Context at the City Scale



Programmatic Bands

commerce, ethnicity, communication, politics and science.

Our project creates a viscous and differentiated plenum making the ether/void of space thematic. Manifesting the ether/void as an explicit theme is relevant for the nation of Germany, and the city of Berlin in that it departs from the closed spatial systems of the past. It does not add to or subtract from the urban fabric. It makes an opening in the city by creating a topological exception to the urban fabric. By consuming objective frames of reference, our project proposes a categorically new condition. It appears in many forms simultaneously, variously connecting to and then separating from its contexts. It is a permeable and convoluted entity, eluding clear outline.

Although the project consists of four distinct components they are not combined to form an amalgam or a layered superimposition. The components act in mutual interference, one altering the other. They are interwoven to create a differentiated whole.

Exhibition Halls

The most intimate and tangible scale is the configuration of the site itself, strongly defined by the arcs of the Spree River and the S-Bahn track, and by the northern edge of the Tiergarten.

A rectangular grid containing 24 halls distorts according to these forces conforming itself to the configuration of the site.

The halls/grid turn the singular event of the Kongresshalle into a field condition.

The districts abutting the site contain a wide variety of uses and activities. The programming of the halls takes a local, adjacent use and projects it into a national and global scale. As such the halls act as intermediaries reconciling the neighborhood scale with the capital complex.

The programming of the halls (Hall of Transportation, Hall of World Ecology, International Performance Hall, etc.) infuses a World's Fair atmosphere into the otherwise staid bureaucratic functions.

Urban Tubes

The Friedrich Wilhelm extension gave Berlin a string of three plazas with distinct geometric shapes (Pariser Platz, Leipziger Platz, Mehring Platz). This notion of giving a characteristic shape to public space is here deployed in section as Urban Tubes.

Each Urban Tube connects to one of the adjacent districts and takes on its formal orientation. The tubes connect these districts across the site.

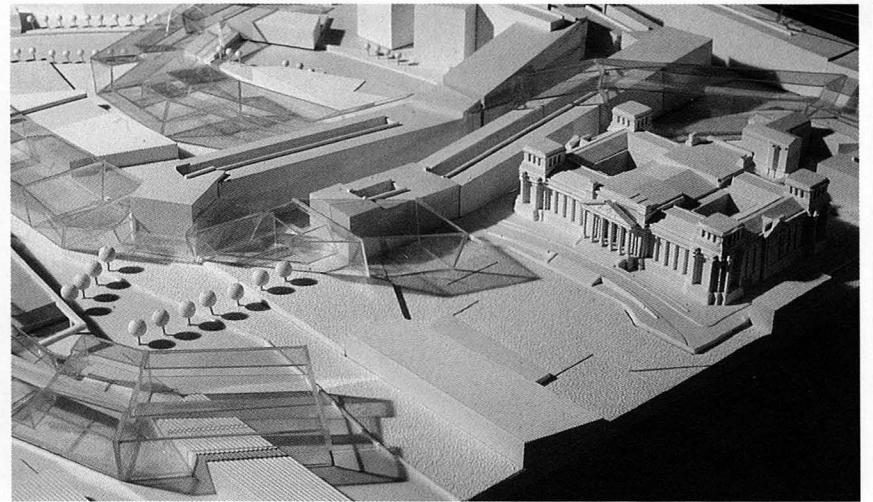
The Urban Tubes are the chief vehicle for materializing the plenum. They are a topological distortion drawing the city through the government functions without intermixing. This interface serves to make the democratic function transparent.

The Tubes are irregular sectional extrusions which allow for pedestrian and limited vehicular circulation. The tubes act as a kind of arcade/winter garden programmed with recreational and retail uses.

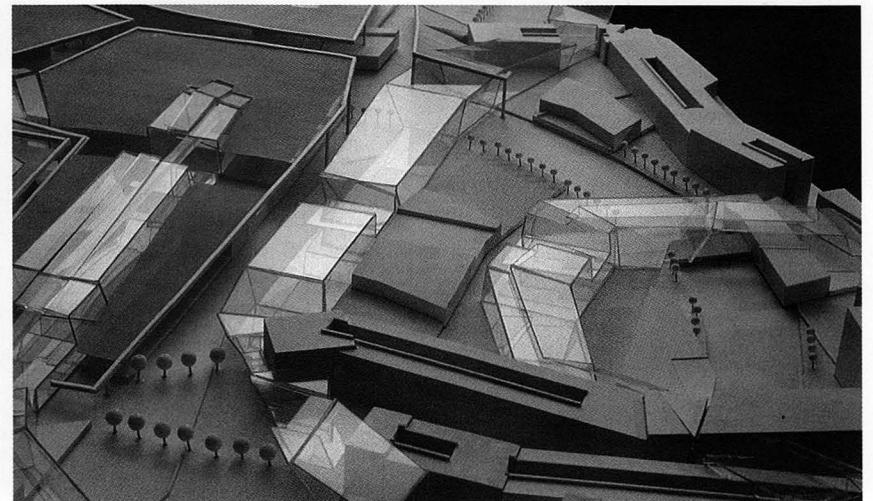
Government Buildings

Applying the tube idea to the program, the government functions are conceived as part of a band of continuous relationships rather than as a collection of separate destinations. The band becomes materialized in places along its path thus forming the buildings.

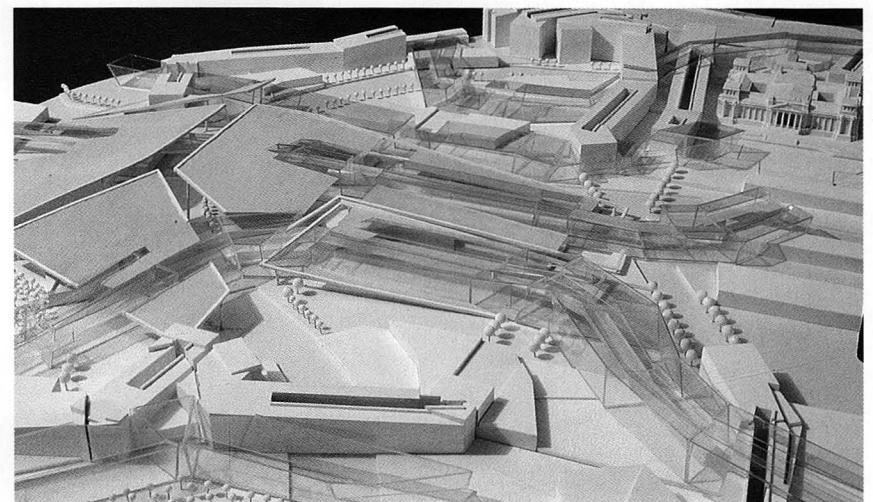
In conventional bubble-diagram programming each use is circumscribed by a volume. Here, the space between programs is built as a spectrum of gradually shifting use. The fine grain of program components makes it possible to implement this idea.



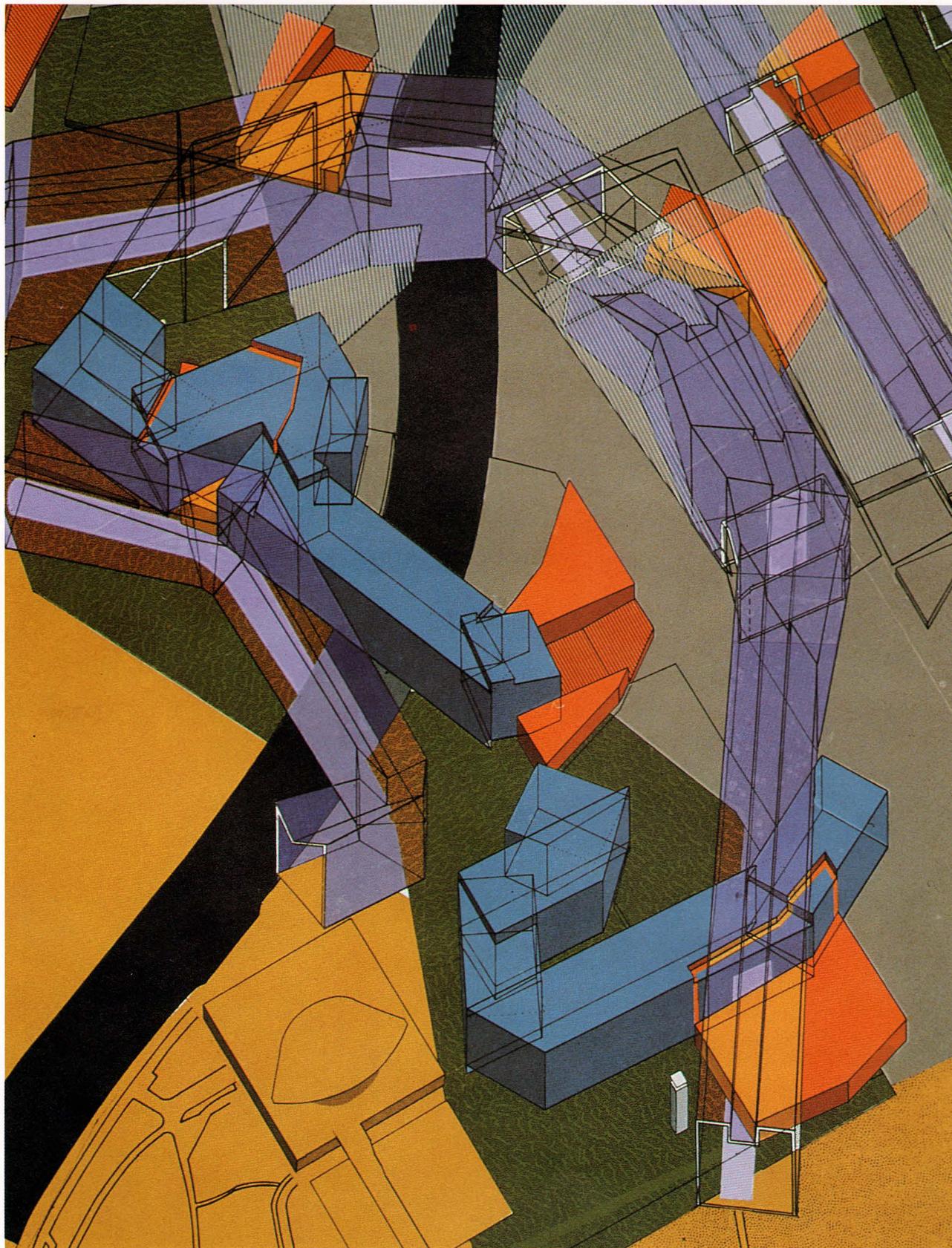
Plaza in Front of Reichstag



Detail at North End of Complex



Model of New Federal Capital



Rather than articulating the separation of the branches of government, this project stresses their dynamic interrelationship.

By their alignment and the visible effect of their path, the buildings form a loop with themselves, with other government districts and with Bonn.

In between the buildings is a negative zone that cuts through the intervening layers.

The arrangement of the buildings is independent of the urban context. Symbolically the bands make a national-scale diagram spanning across the former borders of East and West Berlin and East and West Germany.

The continuity of the bands can be made visible at night during special events by projecting laser lights along their paths.

World Garden and Festival Structure

The World Garden and Festival Structure symbolically acknowledge the global scale by mimicking the shape of a world map.

This layer provides the large scale ground shaping of the project. By sinking and swelling the ground, the objective datum is removed.

Within the gardens are flora characteristic of each continent. In the places where the tubes intersect the garden they become greenhouses for more delicate species.

The Festival Structure provides a sheltered outdoor space for large public events near the Lehrter Bahnhof.

The World Gardens and Festival Structure provide all the required ceremonial and public open spaces including a reconfigured Platz der Republik north of the Reichstag.



THE NEW FEDERAL CAPITAL OF GERMANY