

## **Figured Block**

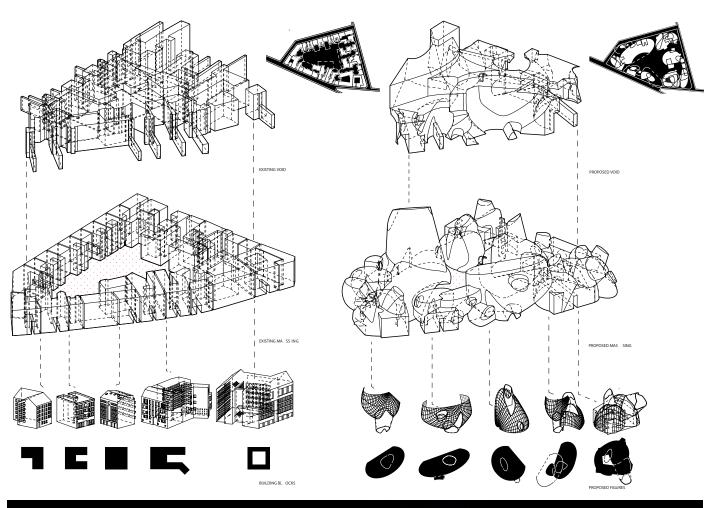
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The project challenges the idea that an expanding metropolis must either extend its borders or completely infill. Instead, we have chosen to rewrite the rules of the Berlin block to intensify the shared spaces of the city. To do this we have examined and carefully restructured a typical block to celebrate inner urban courtyards, the outdoor rooms of Berlin. This design, a prototype for the city, illustrates our idea of an innovative in-between. We call this the figured block. This configuration considers the spatial ambiguity of the in-betweenbetween inside and outside, between one space and another, between one room and the next—a core urban strength. We carefully design those interstitial zones that are frequently neglected: the interior courts, porticos and plazas that enhance civic life.

Block typology is regularly used as a specimen to evaluate the whole urban organism. Important examples include Unger's urban villa, Koolhaas's islands, Krier's village, Choasy's single field and Assmann's linked fields. These schemes all use the block to seed urban multiplicities with strategies of compressive overlap, discrete compartmentalization or dynamic links. Our scheme adds the figured block to this list of strategies. An intensified figure-ground dynamic is the principle innovation of our approach. Rejecting a proliferation of urban walls, our block design produces a lively figure-ground oscillation by emphasizing the new figures and social-spatial opportunities that can be produced in-between. Our design breeds urban relationships. The inner block concurrently spills out into the street, frames urban vistas and invites passersby to explore its layered interior. Edge transitions are not crisp, but rather develop into rooms of multiple sizes, from open, vast rooms at the scale of the city to intimate, fully-enclosed rooms at the domestic scale. The project expands Berlin's block typology by multiplying grounds, spatial relationships and redefining interior and exterior volume.

The Great Berlin of the future should not be a city of autonomous neighborhoods. Rather, the city's blocks should continuously redefine the possibility of the urban through individual and collective superimpositions of objects and events. We have designed a block that introduces voluminous shell-like geometry to intermingle with the existing masonrylike housing blocks. The combination creates new figural poche, sharp creases and spatial transitions capable of transforming the urban narrative. We imagine that this strategy could be used with any proportion of new and old and can be applied to enhance the city at a variety of scales. At the small scale it creates covered gardens and the larger scale offers a new skyline. The results would create a rich urban tapestry as an arsenal of new void figures wrestled, merged and intersected with the existing blocks of the city.

Berlin, a city notable for its expansion and contraction, could finally give internal civic thresholds and transition spaces the same attention as its peripheral urban edges. The newly figured blocks would amplify social and spatial connections by transforming the corners and thresholds of the city into new rooms that connect Berlin.





**STREET ELEVATION** Physical Model. Photo by Phil Arnold