

The Idea of the large form. A New Perspective on the Work of Architect Oswald Mathias Ungers

Abstract

In the 1960s the German architect Oswald Mathias Ungers was engaged in a regular dialogue with members of Team 10 and notably with the architect Shadrach Woods. The investigation of the intellectual affinity of these formative figures of post-war modernism provides new insights into Ungers' work as well as a different perspective on the topics discussed in the architectural avant-garde of the time, whose projects are once again referenced as historical models in the design work of contemporary architectural offices.

The exchange with Woods shapes Ungers' understanding of architecture and urban planning and manifests itself in the theoretical and design work on the concept of Grossform. Formulated in the mid-1960s, the idea of Grossform appears at first glance to be a sideline of Ungers' oeuvre. However, the analysis of his texts about Grossform and the investigation of Ungers' influences to which he was exposed at the time of their writing, shed light on concepts which are relevant to Ungers's work up to the 1980s. This essay wants to show that the idea of Grossform is a multi-layered design tool: on the one hand the principles of "form" and "structure"—seemingly incompatible, diametrically opposed architectural themes—converge within Grossform, on the other hand the idea of Grossform translates concepts from Gestalt Theory into architecture.

Keywords

Oswald Mathias Ungers, Team 10, Structuralism, Form, Gestalt Theory