
Introduction

Over the last two centuries, the architecture in Berlin has not only been the creator but also champion to the creation of change. From the onset of modern industrialization and urbanization in the 1870’s, architecture has played a major role in reinforcing the political establishment, accommodating function with aesthetics, and serving as an agent to social integration. After World War II, the reconstruction of Berlin created a conundrum in the continuity of exactly how to rebuild and is analyzed by two different schools of thought. On one hand, maintaining cohesion with the past was necessary to developing the discourse that defined the new political establishment. More excruciating attempts to maintain a sense of historical legacy prior to National Socialism were established in both the East and the West. However, many of the city planners were once part of the Nazi regime. According to Lawrence J. Vale and
Thomas J. Campanella, “this may explain why the designers made less explicit attempts to vilify Third Reich architecture, and yet also less willingness to risk anything that might be seen as resembling Nazi design.”¹ These endeavors to avoid the Nazi era all together were more severe in the West. For example, the use of the North-South axis was excluded from planning specifically as it was reminiscent of Albert Speer’s plan for Germania. While in the East, Stalin exerted his monumental triumph through the use of Neo-Classical architecture much in the same vein as Hitler.

On the other hand, “complication arose from the fact that the city was then divided between East and West, governed by two ideologically opposed regimes, each determined to claim the legacy of pre-Nazi Berlin.”² This claim to legacy creates a competitive discourse that is polarized by the division of Germany. According to Elkins and Hofmeister, “the perplexity of cohesion with the past was a less provocative approach to understanding the concerns of reconstruction, but rather it was to a much larger extent dictated by the development of relations between two parts of a divided Germany, and even more to decisions and events at an international level.”³

While these two schools of thought present problematic elements that influence the dialogue of architecture in the post war era, they also work hand in hand in understanding the architectural discourse during and after reconstruction. This essay is meant to peel through the layers of architectural dialogue that are prescribed as contributors to the perplexity of rebuilding Berlin after World War II. In the post war era

---


² Ibid.

³ T.H. Elkins with B. Hofmeister, Berlin: The Spatial Structure of a Divided City, (London and New York, Methuen, 1988),
the architectural debate of power realizes a dialogue with the past while at the same time presents the tensions of a divided city in one country. Once Germany is reunified, the capital of Berlin is presented with resolving that tension and the architectural design of the Band des Bundes represents Germany’s dedication to the political, economic, and social challenges of the 21st century. In specific there are three particular structures that will be analyzed to present these challenges. On the West, the new capitalist regime manipulated the historical Fredrick Wilhelm Gedaechtniskirche to wield its new ideology while linking it to a shared memory of the past. In the East, Stalin took liberty to construct the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park immediately after the war much in the same vein, as a collective memory and to implement the foundation of a socialist order. In addition after reunification, the Band des Bundes was designed and constructed not only as the embodiment of unity between the East and West, but also to reflect Berlin’s new role in the international arena.

Reconstruction

During reconstruction, Berlin became an architectural exhibition of the discourse between capitalism in the West and Communism in the East. The two sides engaged in architectural discourse with each other and each side utilized architecture to employ a symbolic obligation to the state, collective memory, and progression. As Vale and Campanella stated, “many of the leading German designers held high positions during the Third Reich and tried to steer the designs for West away from anything related to Nazi architecture.”

There were several disputes among city planners of West Berlin with their vision of the new city landscape, as they made specific efforts to deny any

---

North-South axis for any main thoroughfare and thought to move away from neo-classical designs that would maintain a dialogue with National Socialism. It was important to validate the new and improved form of democracy by linking it to where the Weimar Republic left off. In the East, Stalin also tried to lay claim to the pre-Nazi era by utilizing monumental architecture to substantiate the defeat of the Weimar Republic by the socialist uprising. By continuing the neo-classical elements of National Socialism in the East, the language barrier might be seen as less imposing yet just as powerful. The argument that architectural discourse was influenced greatly by maintaining a dialogue with the past was just as influential as Hofmeister’s argument in regards to the international influences of a divided city. As the circumstances of power changed in Berlin so did the circumstances of architecture. This tension to lay claim to the pre-Nazi era became polarized by the competitive nature of Capitalism vs. Communism.

**Gedaechtniskirche in the West**

While the American influence on policy in West Berlin was focused on creating a democratic state based on free market and denazification that would separate West Germans from their past, architecture would substantiate and memorialize the new democracy. According to Peter Rumpf, author of *In Dialogue with Witnesses to the Past*, “it was through the construction of churches during the 1960’s that provided the most conflicting architectural trends with a formal experimental field and an architectonic sphere of action.”\(^5\) He argues this because, “the image of the church was probably the

most shattered; it was also the most open to all attempts to view society in new forms."

The rebuilding of the Gedaechtniskirche in particular represents the directive of Western ideology and its location substantiates its claim to pre-Nazi legacy in its dialogue with the East.

City planners and architects like Egor Eiermann would create structures that would author a dialogue not only with society, but with the neighboring communist regime and the rest of the world. Eiermann’s design for the Fredrick Wilhelmgedaechniskirche (Memorial Church) is a prime example of a church shattered by its past and being open to a new definition. His design initially meant to completely break away from the past and make way for the future. He initially proposed to demolish the original structure and erect a new religious complex in its place. There is an explicit dialogue with society as to how Eiermann internalized the new ideology of capitalism and how it was to be envisioned in the international spectrum.

After the war, West Berlin held an architectural competition to deal with the remaining fragment of the Gedaechtniskirche. “Egon Eiermann’s winning entry showed a new fluorescent-blue chapel and bell tower replacing the old bombed-out church. When that front-page headline hit the newspapers “Gedaechtniskirche wird Abgerissen!” (Memorial Church To Be Torn Down!), Berliners hit their typewriters: one newspaper received 47,000 letters.” “Eiermann’s revised winning entry showed a new

---

6 Ibid.

fluorescent-blue chapel and bell tower flanking the old bombed-out church." In response to the public outcry, Eiermann not only reconstructed the Gedaechtniskirche in the same likeness of his original design that was to illuminate capitalism, but also his new layout revealed the discourse from the public to preserve the old church. The Gedaechtniskirche would also reflect the discourse of society and be the embodiment of democracy at work. This decision to rebuild, rather than remodel or fully demolish and start over is symbolic of the collective struggle of the West Germans fight for a new identity while maintaining a dialogue with their past. “Every option entailed an engagement with the city’s historical past, its present needs, and its envisioned future.” However, it is important to understand the purpose of the original building before one can understand the true dialogue and symbolism between the two structures.

8 Ibid.

“The original Gedaechtniskirche was completed by Franz Schwechten in 1898 as a monumental edifice designed to meet not only the religious needs of local communities but also the political ends of the young German Reich. The Gedaechtniskirche honored the memory of Kaiser Wilhelm I, who presided over the Prussian defeat of France in 1870 and the unification of Germany in 1871. Schwechten interwove the symbols of German empire with those of Christianity in an effort to represent the Wilhelmine understanding of church and state. Wilhelm I saw Christian piety as the key to a strong nation and a "Schutzwall gegen das Eindringen atheistischer und freidenkerischer Weltanschauung." (Barrier against the penetration and freethinking atheist beliefs.)”

According to Alvis, the old structure created

10 Ibid.
tensions for not only the new political orders in post-war Germany, but also for society. The partially ruined church loomed as a symbolic challenge as authorities reinvented Berlin to express their political allegiances and ideals by engaging themselves with its structures. Alvis’ argument supports Elkins and Hofmeister’s theory of the people needing to maintain a dialogue with the past, but also represents the infiltration of Western culture in Berlin and its response to Eastern ideology.

The location of the Gedaechtniskirche plays an important role in its discourse with society and place in the international spectrum. “As the focal point of a junction of five important streets, where the surrounding buildings had been completely cleared away and replaced with widely spaced new constructions of varying quality, Egon Eiermann’s architectonic ensemble can be seen as the first postwar attempt to give form to the inner city.”11 The location of the church was coincidentally centered between the main thoroughfares of the Kurfuerstendamm and Budapesterstrasse and situated at the end of the Tiergarten. It was also strategic when it came to implementing the capitalist and democratic ideology of the West. It substantiated the continuity of Weimar and Western democracy, prescribed the capitalist tendencies, and monumentalized the superiority of both over communism. Being located between such thoroughfares adds to its meaning. For instance, Budapesterstrasse itself is a symbolic gesture towards communism, “as Budapest, Hungary was first faced with Nazi invasion during WWII and then Soviet occupation following Allied victory, and finally with an opportunity to escape

the oppressive regime during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.”  

The new church located here over another location substantiates the triumph over communism and exemplifies the competitive dialogue polarized by division. While the paralleling street, the Kurfuerstendamm (Ku’damm), provides the main shopping district of the middle and upper class, expensive boutiques, hotels, and restaurants currently line the street. The bright blue light guides the people to purchase all the things that will make their lives easier. According to Erica Carter, “by the end of the 1950’s, that mass consumption of cars, washing machines, refrigerators, and leisure goods had taken root in defining the Federal Republic of Germany as a “consumer society.”  

Peter Rumpf may be on to something when it comes to using churches to reform society because the prescription for life in West Berlin is the worshiping of material goods.

The new Gedaechtniskirche has been nick named by the people, (der Lippenschtift und Puderdose) meaning “lipstick and powder case” and creates rich symbolism of the distraction and superficial nature of capitalism. The bright fluorescent blue geometric forms made of steel and glass surround the dark and broken old church made of bricks and stones that reaches high into the clouds in mourning and asks for forgiveness. For some it is nothing more than a lingering antiquity more so than a memory. Outward symbolism projects the new regime and its bright beacon away from the religion of God, but rather the religion of materialism and power of possession. It

---


13 Erica Carter, *How German is She?: Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman*, (Michigan, Michigan University Press, 1997), P. 3
questions the validity of the mystical nature of Germany’s past, yet at the same time links itself with the original foundation of democracy.

The blemished walls and broken spire are the only outward memory of the destruction of the Nazi regime. Inside the new church stands “an iconic cross of the Russian Orthodox Church. It is a graphic known as the Stalingrad Madonna that marks the invasion of Russia. Also incorporated in the interior is a cross designed by the nails from the Coventry Cathedral, which was destroyed by the blitzkrieg in Britain. For some this use of specific material symbolizes three enemies who have come together in reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{14} However, it can also be interpreted as a mark of shame upon the German people and forgiveness by the Allied powers. But most importantly, the individual must see beyond the outward distraction of the materialistic facade in order to repent. The materials, style, and location of this icon of Berlin’s past meshed with her future specifically represent the discourse not only with society, but also to represent a symbolic difference in ideology within the divide of East and West. Thus, the power of capitalism and the capitalism of power that is dignified by a church provides the discourse against the weakness of socialism in the East.

Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park in the East

The reconstruction of both East and West Berlin reflected their contrasting ideologies while also maintaining a pre-Nazi legacy. In the East, Stalin substantiated the Socialist claim to Germany through maintaining the familiar language of monumental architecture as a manifestation of the greatness that should have been. Stalin sought to make a deeper and more permanent mark upon the city than the West, while at the

same time professing his beliefs that the West was corrupted by materialism. According to Robert Alvis in terms of German architectural past, the GDR’s program bore striking a resemblance to the ambitions of another admirer of the classical tradition, Adolf Hitler. In 1938, Stalin wrote, “the artist who understands the “totality of social relationships” comes forth as the engineer of the human soul”,¹⁵ “and like Hitler, he saw himself as the supreme artist of the state.”¹⁶

Erica Carter exemplifies “the vision of social order of socialist nationhood that now imprinted itself on the urban fabric had two characteristic elements in the East. Urban form, first, had been made to embody the humanist ideal of a fully integrated socialist citizenry divided neither by the functional separations of urban life in the West (work vs. leisure and politics vs. culture) nor by hierarchical divisions of class, gender, sexuality, or race. The only hierarchy, second, that was admitted in this Utopian scheme was that of the Party and state over the individual, and that authority relation was embodied in the physical structures of East Berlin primarily through privileging of the city center as a symbolic core of city and nation.”¹⁷ Immediately after the war Stalin began to reconstruct East Berlin as a monument to the past, the future of the Party, power, and peace.

The architectural context of East Berlin is comprised of several layers, as the ideology of the government must be attuned with society from within. In establishing this


¹⁷ Erica Carter, How German is She?: Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman, (Michigan, Michigan University Press, 1997), P. 129
cohesion, Stalin aimed the reconstruction of East Berlin to unify its citizens under a collective identity. “The Soviet War Memorial in Treptow demonstrates how the meaning of place is shaped and reshaped through time to symbolize social values and political ideologies. Studies of such value-laden landscapes are an important part of contemporary cultural and historical geography. This interest stems from the view that landscapes “symbolize and sustain collective values over long periods of time” and enables these values to play an important role in the reproduction of a culture.” The building of the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park was a testimony to socialism’s permanence in Germany.

Before any construction of residential dwellings began, Stalin started planning the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park. Much like the Gedaechtniskirche in the West, the War Memorial was a mark of shame. It played on the collective guilt that was placed on the Germans in the denazification process on both sides. However, it also embraces the collective idea that everyone, Russian and German, were victims. As the memorial is most definitely a graveyard for the fallen Russian soldiers and a tribute to the innocent people that died in the Russian villages, the design of the park utilizes Naziesque propaganda to illustrate the story. It alludes to the idea that the story is being told from the perspective of the Germans. “The Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park is a grand expression of heroism and triumph—a style the GDR leaders embraced in the name of the antifascist man state, born of the alliance with Soviet antifascism. In glorifying the Soviet Union and Communist resistance, the GDR’s own memorials

18 Kenneth E. Foote, Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy, (Texas, University of Texas Press, 1997) P.33
contributed both to the creation of indigenous traditions and to Cold War propaganda.”¹⁹

The monumental construction of the Memorial in Treptower Park speaks to the West as if to say, “ours was fought for and won.” The impression is that the West was taken over by imperialism while the East was liberated and the workers’ original fight was finally won.

In the vastness of the park, the visitor approaches a statue of a mother dressed in black and kneeling to the East in contemplation of her loss and survival. Her posture focuses towards a tree lined path that takes the visitor on the journey of decimation, destruction, and finally salvation. She is looking upon her surviving son, a comrade, and a savior. He stands in the far distance skewed in perspective. The visitor walks through “a portal consisting of a pair of stylized Soviet flags clad in marble recovered from Adolf Hitler’s demolished Reich Chancellery. These flags are flanked then by two statues of

kneeling soldiers. Once through the portal, the central area is lined by sixteen sarcophagi, eight on each side, that represent the sixteen Soviet Republics." Each sarcophagus is covered in relief carvings that illustrate the invasion and destruction of the war. Using the same stylistics of Nazi propaganda, the faces of the people meant to be Russian are in the same facial likeness of Arians. The quotations on each sarcophagus are authored by Stalin himself. The story is told equivocally on each side, one in German and the other in Russian. By the time the viewer has reached the end, he is overcome with emotions of sadness and guilt. “The most spectacular element of the memorial towers up the rear end of the park on a grassy hill. It is a mausoleum on which a ten to twelve meter high bronze statue is placed depicting a bareheaded, heroic, Soviet soldier wielding a sword and standing on a smashed swastika, into which the sword is deeply cut. On his left arm he is carrying a child while staring out over the plaza”21 back at the mourning mother. While it symbolizes the triumph of the East, it also symbolizes the liberation of the people that were not only criminals of the Nazi regime, but also victims. The statues of both the mourning mother and the slaying of the Swastika are a metaphor for Mary watching her son Jesus die at the cross for our sins.

“This memorial can be seen as a gift from Josif Stalin to the collective of soldiers and their families, but it was also a reminder to the East Germans that they should not forget that it was the red Army that liberated them from the Nazis.”22 The dialogue of the Memorial represents Stalin’s use of architecture to employ a symbolic obligation to the

---


21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.
state, collective memory, and to implement the reclaiming of the foundation of the socialist order.

Band des Bundes and Reunification

After reunification, the city planning of Berlin was plagued with a different spectrum of continuity issues. Unlike with the previous era, how to maintain a dialog with the past was least of its concerns. Coming out from behind the “Iron Curtain”, Germany would face its fifth government seated in the city of Berlin. The government unified the Eastern and Western political structure by instituting social equality through social-capitalism. The architectural critique of this new brand of democracy is revealed by modern technological advancements in architecture. “Berlin was to become the powerhouse of the new Republic, the focal point for an entire “Generation Berlin”, the “hub” that would connect East and West, a veritable “laboratory of unification””. However, creating a new unified identity in the international spectrum and proving to be a leading contender in globalization presented other challenges. The structures that form the New Berlin reflect Capitalism as the winner in the battle of Eastern and Western ideology.

With capitalism being the winner, “architects were beginning to envisage a new city and international developers were imagining the vast profits to be made from the development of a free Berlin into a world financial and corporate center. Corporations and developers struggled to acquire possession of the extensive areas of land. In reaction to the aggressive corporate invasion the City scrambled to regain authority and

23 Jens Bisky, Berlin a Profile, Translated by Alexa Alfer, Urban Edge Newspaper Essay, November 2006
launched a two stage competition to establish in broad terms a master plan that would not only heal the “wound”, but would resolve the discontinuity of realities that the years of division had produced.”\textsuperscript{24} This however did not resolve the issue of creating a united city center. The corporate spectacle established in Potsdamer Platz with its big top canopy covering the Sony Center is polarized by the eco-friendly and modern Band des Bundes that spreads across the Spree in efforts to convey the new direction of the Federation.

As the new Berlin architecture represents a complete ideological break from the past, that is no longer guided by ghosts nor competing with a divided ideology, the architectural discourse provided by the Band des Bundes champions a balance between function and aesthetics with eco-friendly solutions to the 21\textsuperscript{st} century challenges in response to the corporate takeover and mass consumption. As the East and West are bound together in a marriage of western democracy, the Band des Bundes is meant to be the foundation of a new political and economic direction. “The decision to move its government seat from Bonn to Berlin has set off a remarkable debate about what kind of official architecture is appropriate for a country whose past has rendered patriotism suspect and whose expressions of national pride have, as a result, been consigned to the soccer field.”\textsuperscript{25} “The making up of the New Berlin is dominated by attempts to reinterpret and re-imagine its history: it is a city of memorials and of deliberate absences; of remembering and forgetting, or trying to forget; of reshaping the past as well as trying to build a new future. The juxtapositions of urban

\textsuperscript{24} Alan Balfour, \textit{World Cities: Berlin}, (St. Martin’s Press, 1995)

experience, the layering of memories, and the attempt to imagine a different future come together to define Berlin as a contemporary capital city.²⁶

"Architects Axel Schultes and Charlotte Frank won the international competition for the master plan at the Spreebogen in Berlin in 1993. Their vision of the reunified Germany's new government seat proposed a linear band of buildings on an east-west axis, which traversed the loop of the Spree River, thus binding the two sides of the formerly divided city."²⁷ The Band des Bundes is an elongated structure that includes three separate faculties of the government buildings from left to right: the Chancellery (Bundeskanzleramt), Parliament (Paul-Lobe Haus), and the Federal Library (Marie-Elisabeth-Lueder-Haus). The concept suggests the place of legislation was to be a bridge for a torn nation as well as a transparent and inclusive government. However, it is in the context of using eco-friendly materials that places this new form of government


in its leading role internationally. Social-capitalism is meant as a cohesive measure to balance contending ideologies while placing Berlin at the forefront of championing the need for balance in all areas of globalization. It represents a response to the blatant frivolity of mass consumerism and its impact on the ecology that sustains it.

The idea of appropriate architecture of the New Berlin meant to define the German state as progressive and a separate state from that of the past. After WWII reconstructions meant to maintain that dialogue with the past and create an identity heavily influenced by the American brand of democracy that embraced capitalism as its mascot. Defining the New Berlin through architecture meant that designers needed to adjust the function of new buildings to aesthetically reflect Berlin's new identity as unified with a democracy that was responsive and interactive with the demands of mass consumption. “Through the use of eco-friendly materials and a façade of absorbing and reflective windows and sturdy concrete, the Band des Bundes is poised to project a new identity. Opposite the Federal Chancellery is the Paul-Lobe-Haus, which houses the offices of many members of the Bundestag. The Paul-Lobe-Haus is one of a number of new government buildings crisscrossing the river Spree and straddling the formerly divided sectors of Berlin. A huge atrium is formed by a roof, which bears the world's largest power plant above it and forms the main axis of the building. So, the central Spree is bridged not only by a ribbon of governmental buildings, but also by a string of solar power plants. An underground energy system links the government buildings; connecting them is a network of heating, cooling, and electrical pipelines as well as connections to an aquifer storage deep underground. Decentralized combined heat and power plants running on biodiesel produced from rapeseed oil provide most of the
energy requirements of the government quarter. Taking all renewable resources into account, more than 80% of the overall energy demand in the new governmental quarter is met from renewable energy sources.”

Conclusion

“Political places are not randomly or casually brought to existence,” political scientist Charles T. Goodsell writes in his study of political meaning in architecture. For these spaces are embedded with key clues about a nation’s power structure and nonverbal discourse about its people and civilization.” “Berlin has been scarred like no other city by the upheavals of Europe’s war torn- 20th century.” A notorious past is not something that Berlin has ever tried to hide, but rather incorporate in its dialogue through architecture. The architecture from reconstruction reveals the need to maintain a dialogue with a claim to the pre-Nazi legacy. The past was defined as a continuation of the democracy of the Weimar Republic for the West and the triumph of Communism for the East. Substantiating that legacy with connection to the past manifested in an architectural dialogue that memorialized Berlin’s past and current political and social position. In the West, the Gedaechtniskirche represented a democratic and capitalistic cohesion with the past, but symptomatically, capitalism blurred the connection to the immediate past. The fact that the old broken church that remains to this day, flanked by


the new fluorescent blue amalgamation of the capitalist regime, was and still is a direct reflection of the new democracy at work. In the East, Stalin forced the people to come to terms with their past with the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park and feel an obligation to the state as it was meant to be before National Socialism. However, the dialogue is polarized by the division of Berlin because they are not only trying to convey their ideology to the people, but to the other side. In the end, the importance of memory and connection to the past seems irrelevant by the time Germany is reunified. “Just as the New Berlin has been given a radiant material form through buildings and districts designed by world-famous architects, so places and landscapes throughout the contemporary city embody new Berlins, imagined in the past and historic Berlins imagined today.”31 “As the capital of five different historical Germany’s, Berlin today represents the “unstable optic identity” of the nation”32—“for it is the city where, more than any other, German nationalism and modernity have been staged and restaged, represented and contested by architectural discourse. While the symbolism connected with buildings like the Reichstag and Brandenburg Gate has raised questions of the re-empowerment of existing national icons, other buildings and designs slightly further north in the Government Quarter of the Spreebogen have raised questions over the representation of German identity in the new built fabric of the city.”33 The New Berlin moves away from a melancholic dialogue that once embraced her past and signals her cohesion with the state and her future role as leader in a globalized economy.

32 Rudy Koshar, Germany’s Transient pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century, (Chapel Hill,University of North Carolina Press, 1998)
33 William J. V. Neill, Urban Planning and Cultural Identity, (Rutledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2004), P. 44
Bibliography

Primary Sources


Photo: Gedaechniskirche http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gedaechniskirche-berlin.jpg


Photo: Main Soldier http://mockduck.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/24953755.jpg


Photo: Kanzleramt http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berlin-_Kanzleramt.jpg

Secondary Sources


### Additional Reading Resources


Josef Paul Kleihues, *From the Destruction to the Critical Reconstruction of the City: Urban Design in Berlin after 1945,* Edited by Josef Paul Kleihues and Christina