
The Surfaces of Memory in Berlin: Rebuilding the Schloß

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The Surfaces of Memory in Berlin Rebuilding the Schloß¹

This article uses the demolition of the Palace of the Republic, razed in order to reconstruct the Hohenzollern City Palace, as a lens to view the complex relations between the urban manifestations of collective memory and the contemporary architecture in Berlin. Berlin's search for a historical identity is manifested in contradictory ways; while the concern for architecture shrinks to surfaces as representations of "traditional" images, the surface of the city expands, transforming Berlin into an archaeological site, unearthing historical layers beneath it. The site of the Palace of the Republic constitutes a micro model, representing these facets of urban transformation.

Introduction

In November 2003, after a long debate, the German parliament finally decided to demolish the Palace of the Republic, which between 1976 and 1990 had held the People's Chamber (Volkskammer), as well as two large auditoriums, conference halls, restaurants, art galleries, and a bowling alley (Figure 1). The intent was to replace it with a park until the authorities were able to raise the estimated 670 million Euros needed to reconstruct the Hohenzollern City Palace, referred to often as the Berlin castle, or the Schloß. The foundations of a palace were first laid in 1443 on the site of the Palace of the Republic, which is an island in the Spree River at the heart of Berlin. Throughout its nearly five hundred years of existence, the palace was rebuilt and revised several times. Andreas Schlüter was the most well-known architect to have worked on the design at the turn of the eighteenth century. Schlüter's Baroque design shaped the exterior of the Schloß, which had come close to its final form by the mid-eighteenth century. It was a massive landmark with its two large courtyards in a rectangle 192 m long and 116 m wide. As the principal residence of the Kings of Prussia after 1701 and of the German Emperors after 1871, its monumentality was a fitting emblem of the Hohenzollern monarchy's centrality in Berlin's history (Figure 2).

Following the fall of the monarchy in 1918, it was partly used as a museum, but it remained almost entirely empty. After its destruction during World War II (WWII), in 1950 the Schloß was completely razed by the German Democratic Republic (GDR)

government. The young socialist regime's desire to distance itself from Prussian imperialism played an important role in its demolition.

The empty site served as a major parking lot until 1973. Between 1973 and 1976, the GDR



1. The Palace of the Republic (2005). (Photo by the author.)

2. The Schloß (1913). (Courtesy of Landesarchiv Berlin.)

3. The eastern façade of the Palace of the Republic facing the Spree River (2002). (Photo by the author.)

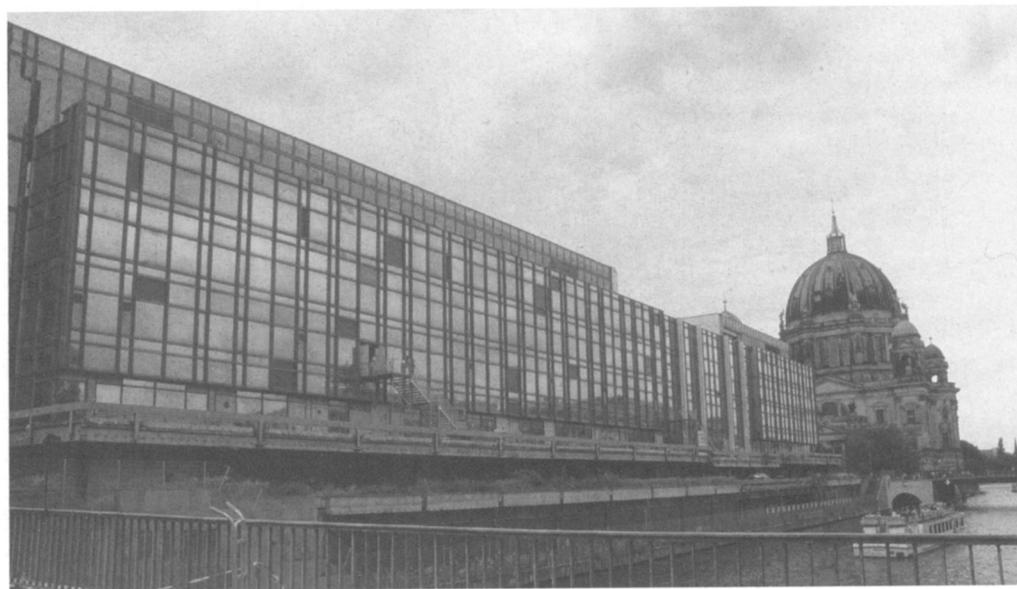
regime built the Palace of the Republic on the eastern end of the site of the destroyed Schloß. Building a palace dedicated to the people on the former site of the imperial palace was a highly symbolic gesture for the GDR regime; it was a vast modern building, with a façade of more than 180 m long, which was originally clad in white marble and bronze-colored glass panels. The last GDR government closed the building to the public due to asbestos contamination in September 1990, six weeks before the reunification. The asbestos removal, which lasted from 1997 until 2002, left the building an empty shell² (Figure 3). Between 2004 and 2006, after the final decision to demolish it was taken, the building was used for cultural events under the name of Volkspalast. It housed art installations, exhibitions, and concerts that attracted thousands of visitors. The demolition started in February 2006 and will last through 2008. Cranes are dismantling the Palace of the Republic in the reverse order in which it was built. The government, trying to represent the demolition as a process sensitive to urban and environmental concerns, is manipulating how it is perceived: billboards surrounding the site as well as the Web site of the Senate for Urban Development proclaim, "Dismantling, not demolishing: good for the environment and city-friendly" (Figure 4). Government officials claim that the "intricate dismantling process" allows Berlin's sensitive inner city area to be spared air and sound pollution to the greatest extent possible, while the materials removed from the building can be used, recycled, or disposed of in an environmentally friendly manner.³ The government's representation aims to render the demolition, which has been a controversial issue, less violent.

Given the fact that the original Schloß was destroyed half a century ago, building a replica has been justified through a negation of the original's aura. In other words, supporters of rebuilding the Schloß argue against authenticity in architecture. Walter Benjamin, writing in 1936, defined aura as the distinct sensation experienced in the presence



of a unique work of art. He argued that the forms of mechanical reproduction such as photography undermine an artwork's "presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."⁴ Photography not only reproduced copies of authentic works of art but also defined them in terms of their surface appearance. As a result, architecture was increasingly "known through photography, and photography construed architecture as image";⁵ the contemporary understanding of architecture as image thus entails the idea that a building can be reproduced as a repre-

sentation of the original. In this light, the proposed replica would be a representation of the destroyed Schloß since the partial reconstruction of its historic façades will cover a modern building with a program totally different from the original, incorporating a museum complex, libraries, restaurants, etc. One question that emerges in this context is how the historicist reconstructions might undermine the collective memory of urban space, not only through distorting the original meanings associated with the reconstructed buildings but also by creating an illusion of continuity between the present and



4. A billboard bearing the slogan, "Dismantling, not demolishing," on the site of the Palace of the Republic (2006). (Photo by the author.)

a selected past—in this case a Prussian past—thus reducing the multiple layers of urban space to a linear narrative.

Longing for a Shared German Past

For Germans today, the Palace of the Republic, like other East German architectural landmarks, symbolizes a recent, thus, insecure past: as the symbol of the socialist regime, it is a constant reminder of the post-WWII division of the country, which lasted until the reunification. Although ninety-eight percent of former East Berlin residents favored its preservation according to a survey conducted in 1992, the building's political meaning as the seat of the GDR parliament aroused antipathy toward its preservation among former West Germans.⁶ The debate over its demolition, even though sometimes held under the guise of purely aesthetic or urban concerns, was highly politicized at a time when a reunified Germany was trying to establish a new national identity; it represented a historical fault line between former East and West Germans. Some former West German critics argued that the building was ugly, a judgment that extended to the majority of East German architecture. One critic wrote: "The profession of architecture had ceased to exist in the GDR. With a few isolated exceptions . . . the next forty years saw no architecture in East Germany worthy of the designation."⁷ This judgment was based more on opposition to the East German ideological legacy than on any architectural or aesthetic criteria. Barbara Jakubeit, Berlin's former municipal building director, said in 1996:

It is an urbanistic problem. One can't get rid of the Palace of the Republic for ideological reasons. It is not that it's so ugly that we have to tear it down. We would drown in rubble if we were to tear down everything in the Federal Republic that is not beautiful. But in such an important place, one must be concerned about the urbanistic concept. And this building is simply totally wrong for the site.⁸



Jakubeit was not alone. The proponents of rebuilding the Schloß claimed that urban harmony in the historic center of Berlin could only be restored by reconstructing the Schloß. The publisher Wolf Jobst Siedler wrote in 1993:

The question of a reconstruction of the Schloß is not so much about the Schloß itself, but about the classical center of Berlin. What will [Unter den Linden] approach, when the Palace of the Republic is removed sooner or later? The demolition is inevitable, not because [the Palace of the Republic] would have been a symbol of a shattered state and not even because its architectural mediocrity damages everything standing nearby. But because this socialist multipurpose hall stands at the wrong place, with a wrong angle, and its volume is not sufficient to bind Knobelsdorff's opera, Nering's armory, Boumann's university and Schinkel's museum together. The actual function of the Schloß's architecture was that it could hold those so different buildings together by its sheer existence; the baroque power of the armory, the restrained rococo style of the opera building, the relatively simple Palladianism of Prince Heinrich's palace, and the purity of Schinkel's classicism.⁹

Unter den Linden is the street at the heart of the historic section of Berlin that runs from the

Brandenburg Gate to the former site of the Schloß, where the Palace of the Republic is being demolished. Dating from the sixteenth century, the street includes many important Prussian monuments and museums such as the Berlin State Library, the Berlin State Opera, Humboldt University, Cathedral of St. Hedwig, the Kronprinzenpalais (former palace of the crown princes), the Neue Wache war memorial, the Zeughaus Berlin (the old armory that now houses the German Historical Museum), Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Altes Museum, and the Berliner Dom. Many buildings on the street from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which were in the former East, have been restored and reconstructed since the fall of the Wall, turning the district into Berlin's most important tourist destination. On the other hand, the two GDR state buildings at the eastern end of the street, in Marx Engels Platz—renamed Schlossplatz in 1994, long before any decision to rebuild the Schloß was taken—have been gradually demolished. First, the white aluminum-clad Foreign Ministry, a decidedly modernist building, was demolished in 1995 with scant resistance to make space for a replica of Schinkel's Bauakademie that occupied the site from 1835 until 1961. The second building being demolished is the Palace of the Republic. Demolishing both buildings is part of the government's plan to restore the square to its pre-World War I state. The only GDR state building that survives is

the Council of State Building located on the south side of the square.

Supporters of the Schloß focus on the pre-1914 buildings on Unter den Linden, arguing that only the imperial building, by its volume and external appearance, can unite their eclectic styles harmoniously. This idea of visual harmony in the cityscape can be traced back to the nineteenth century. Christine Boyer has observed that during the nineteenth century, the fascination with photographic images of cityscapes conditioned the ways in which cities have been looked at by reproducing stereotypical urban scenes.¹⁰ Increasingly in the 1970s and 1980s, the centers of American and European cities have been reconstituted through the use of old photographs, paintings, lithographs, and past architectural styles, such as the Place Beaubourg in Paris, Quincy Market in Boston, and Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco. The postmodern return to history and the evocation of past city tableaux, Boyer contends, is an attempt by political and social authorities to regain a centered world in the face of a deep cultural crisis caused by modernism's rejection of the stability of history and past traditions.¹¹ The aftermath of Germany's reunification marks one such deep crisis, which caused Germans to return once again to history. Even though the Palace of the Republic was criticized as being ugly and being wrong for the site—because allegedly it breaks the visual urban harmony created by a selectively restored German past—the Federal Chancellery (Bundeskanzleramt) announced in 2000 the political agenda behind rebuilding the Schloß. "We need the Schloß, since there is a manifest longing for a historical identification point."¹² The Schloß, once a powerful symbol of monarchy, therefore became not only a symbol of urban unity but also a symbol of national unity.

Although the debate about the fate of the Palace of the Republic accelerated after the reunification, East Germans had already started to discuss rebuilding the Schloß in the mid-1980s.¹³ It

was a highly unrealistic project, however, given the GDR's poor financial situation. As historian Rudy Koshar noted in *Germany's Transient Pasts*, the debate over the monuments had become unusually controversial in both Germanies almost twenty years before the unification and had its historical roots in how Germany imagined itself as a nation since the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Preservation, which emerged as a movement backed by the government and the middle class in the late nineteenth century, loaded buildings with new meanings in order to create a visual identity for the nation in an era of political, economical, and social uncertainties. Preservation of traditional environments and monuments helped build a national and cultural unity by inventing histories and connecting the past with the present in new ways. In other words, restoring a nation's heritage by preserving its artifacts served to extend the roots of the young empire, founded in 1871, into a distant past. The goal was to shape the collective memory in order to make it accountable for a national identity.

Under the burden of the nation's recent Nazi past, a new generation of West Germans experienced an even deeper uncertainty about political identity than their nineteenth-century ancestors. This process, Koshar writes, culminated in a wave of nostalgia about a shared German past. During this period, preservation of architectural works grew into a popular movement. It was especially marked by the European Cultural Heritage Year in 1975 that symbolized a major turning point in postwar German history, as "an end to the post-war phase of German rebuilding and a valorization of the new popularity the preservation of monuments had in German life."¹⁵ The modernist rebuilding of the postwar era followed a similar trajectory in both the East and West, introducing superblocks and large avenues and wiping out not only war-ravaged buildings but also entire neighborhoods. In the early 1970s, the West Germans' growing dissatisfaction with the earlier process of rebuilding drew

attention to historic buildings and town centers. Restoring monuments and renewing historic centers became an important response to urban problems as well as profitable investments for tourism and commerce. City centers, such as Römerberg in Frankfurt, have been increasingly commercialized, aestheticized, and made attractive for tourism. In the 1980s, the GDR also acquired such historicist milieus as the reconstructed Nicolaikirche Quarter in Berlin, even though the "regime policy was based less on consumerist fantasy than on the aesthetic resonance of a monument and its role as a carrier of historical information."¹⁶ The increased concern with the appearance of historic urban centers was reinforced with postmodern architectural trends that produced an architecture of surface through a playful historicist masquerade.¹⁷

After the unification, renewal projects in Berlin continued under the new urban policy known as "critical reconstruction." As historian Brian Ladd has shown, advocates of critical reconstruction saw the essence of Berlin—untainted by Nazism, communism, and capitalism—in nineteenth-century neighborhoods of rental barracks (*Mietskasernen*).¹⁸ The planning guidelines required a reduction in urban scale to the nineteenth-century block to restore diversity, human scale, and street life in neighborhoods. The rental barracks were favored because of their combination of housing, shopping, and streets, the elements of which were separated in the postwar large-scale modernist housing projects. Such a modernist project in the former West was the Hansa Quarter that was reconstructed by prominent architects Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Oscar Niemeyer, and many others after its destruction in the war. Its socialist counterpart in East Berlin was the former Stalinallee, which again introduced superblocks and large avenues, however, in a stripped-down Neoclassical style. After the reunification, living in the restored rental barracks became much more desirable than living in these large-scale housing projects.

Ironically, the rental barracks that were a century ago emblematic of the miseries of the working classes and of urban rootlessness were now perceived as generating a sense of community and place. Critical reconstruction initiated a set of strict regulations for new buildings in order to recreate the nineteenth-century inner city as city tableaux. The new urban projects guided by critical reconstruction restored the old streets and squares lining them with classical masonry buildings (Figure 5). Andreas Huyssen argues that critical reconstruction in Berlin not only creates a sense of pre-1914 traditional identity but also serves to create an international commercial identity in an age of global service economies and urban tourism.¹⁹ The traditional image enhances the marketability of contemporary cities as the locus of history and culture.

Critical reconstruction operated in response to an increasingly visual culture, which attempted to shape collective memory through nostalgic representations of Berlin. A wave of books featuring black and white photographs of old Berlin that were published after the unification helped solidify the romantic belief that the pre-World War I years embodied Berlin's architectural identity.²⁰ Rebuilding the Schloß and critical reconstruction are motivated by the same selective memory that overlooks most of the turbulent twentieth century in its desire to create a visually unified cityscape mirroring a sterile, stable national identity. It loads such historic landmarks as the Schloß and nineteenth-century working-class houses with new meanings in order to convey a sense of a shared and enduring past. This transformation has taken place mostly at the expense of the recent past and its alleged "unworthy" architecture. State officials, developers, architects, and city planners have sought to restore the image of Berlin, which, they believe, was brutalized by Hitler's hegemonic plans, WWII, the Berlin Wall, and large-scale modernist intrusions in both the East and the West.



5. The new historic Leipziger Platz built according to critical reconstruction guidelines. *Trompe l'oeil* facades featuring advertisements cover the ongoing construction (2006). (Photo by the author.)

The Surfaces of Memory

The staging of Berlin's historic identity has mostly emerged on the surface of the built environment. The urban elements have been displaced, decontextualized, and transformed into pure decoration. Two examples illustrate the commodification of Berlin's historic landmarks packaged for visual consumption. The first example is the historic grand Hotel Esplanade, built in 1907, now existing only in fragmented parts. The walls of its two lavishly decorated rooms, the neo-Rococo Breakfast Room and neo-Baroque Imperial Room, stand behind glass windows, frozen in time, and at odds with the futuristic image of the surrounding Sony Center. In order to integrate the historic hotel into the Sony Center, the entire Imperial Room was moved 75 m in a costly operation in 1996. The second example is the fragmentation of the Berlin Wall, both by placing parts of it as decoration in public spaces, such as shopping malls, and by selling its small pieces as souvenirs. This seemingly infinite fragmentation of the wall, ranging in scale from huge chunks to tiny pieces, can be seen at the same time

as a serial production, a commodification, in the service of the city's tourist industry.

Not only historical urban artifacts but also new urban elements take the form of street decoration. The new buildings employ nineteenth-century classical façades disguising the contemporary social, economical, and technological processes that formed them. The simulation of traditional architecture is brought to an extreme through *trompe l'oeil* canvas panels that dress temporary installations or buildings under construction in neighborhoods in popular tourist destinations. These façades are life-sized images with perfect detailing that give the illusion of the "real" (Figure 6). They often incorporate commercial advertisements and thus amplify the commodification of the cityscape through a fusion of restylized historical façades and consumer culture.

The discussions of rebuilding the Schloß gained intensity with a similar *trompe l'oeil* canvas model of the imperial palace (Figure 7). A life-sized canvas mock-up of the Schloß, featuring its three Baroque façades as well as a huge mirror partially

covering the Palace of the Republic, was erected on the site in 1993. The installation was accompanied by an exhibition entitled “The Schloß?” It was on display for several months and was visited by thousands of people; it created a lot of publicity in favor of rebuilding the Schloß. The main message of the exhibition was that only a reconstructed palace could be a fitting crown at the end of the Unter den Linden, thus reestablishing the historic center of Berlin, whereas modern architecture would be out of place in this site since it would not fit in stylistically. The exhibition catalogue proclaimed, “this central trauma can only be healed through the reconstruction of the palace.”²¹ Susan Buck-Morss criticizes the installation as:

a brilliant example of postmodern principles: what couldn't be resolved politically was resolved aesthetically: a pseudo Schloß to provide a pseudo-nation with a pseudo-past. It reduces national identity to a tourist attraction and stages German nation as a theme park.²²

However, historian Goerd Peschken and architect Frank Augustin did not intend to erect a pseudo Schloß in their installation, which was a precursor to their proposal for a permanent structure. They sought to retain the Palace of the Republic, albeit behind a large mirror, which reflected and at the same time distorted the Schloß's façade. They wrote:

We originally conceived the façades for this installation of the Schloß in the urban space quite differently from what is seen today. It was not designed to underscore the huge mass of the building . . . but rather to create a subtle distortion of visual effect with its different facet. We would have liked to see the vibration of colors on the baroque façade enhanced with the help of reprographic techniques such as dissolving the surfaces into dots or fields of dots in the paintings of Roy Lichtenstein . . . The



6. While awaiting rebuilding, a canvas mock-up of Friedrich Schinkel's Bauakademie featuring commercials is erected across the former site of the Schloß (2006). (Photo by the author.)



7. The canvas mock-up of the Schloß. Behind the mirror panel stands the Palace of the Republic (1993). (Courtesy of Landesarchiv Berlin.)

building to be erected might . . . show the fully intact structure when looking from the Lustgarten with the aid of optical or electronic means, or both. A glass façade could be animated in such a way that passers-by would see, depending on their position, either the intact Schloß or its ruins.²³

The architects argued that the alternating images of an intact and ruined Schloß would be more of a true monument to German history than a copy in stone could ever be.²⁴ In this sense, such a reconstruction of the Schloß would be a constant reminder of historical ruptures, as opposed to covering them up, while at the same time acknowledging the impossibility of reconstructing the original building as a national symbol. And yet, disregarding the proposal of Peschken and Augustin, the supporters of the Schloß used the installation to propagate a literal reconstruction.

In 2002, an international expert committee formed by the government completed its report on the fate of the Palace of the Republic and suggested a compromise of opposite views regarding the reconstruction. The committee members recommended the demolishing of the Palace of the Republic; however, they rejected a full reconstruction of the Schloß. Instead, they proposed reconstructing its three baroque façades facing north, west, and south—like the *trompe l'oeil* canvas model—and keeping the general plan of the building with a courtyard. Depending on “the architectonic composition, technical feasibility, and possibility of use,” the commission recommended also integrating a reconstructed part of the Palace of the Republic such as the People’s Chamber into the new building.²⁵ The final composition, including the eastern façade facing the River Spree, where the Palace of the Republic once stood, would be determined with an international architectural competition. The committee’s proposal incorporated into the new building the historical ruptures that the Palace of the Republic represents. As such,

even though the government has made no definite decision yet, the committee’s report might be considered a compromise to counter the debates aroused by the proposed rebuilding of the Schloß. Independent from the committee’s report, different civic organizations are already planning a more literal reconstruction of the Schloß, which means reconstructing all historic façades, both of the historic courtyards and of the two halls, the Knight’s Hall and the White Hall.

The reconstructed façades will not only be a backdrop to the surrounding historic buildings, but they will also create an illusion of a common memory. Historian Pierre Nora writes, “The less memory is experienced from the inside, the more it

exists through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs.”²⁶ The frantic memorialization in post-wall Berlin is a testimony to the lack of a common public memory that German society experiences as a result of the country’s division. The memorialization, however, is not only concerned with a pre-1914 past but also the recent past that has been increasingly erased under new urban policies. In August 2006, even before it was completely demolished, the Palace of the Republic was memorialized in a way similar to other historicist reconstructions: a *trompe l'oeil* canvas depicting the Palace of the Republic’s façade was hung partly covering the front façade of the Volksbühne, Berlin’s leading theatre, established in 1914. Given



8. The canvas façade depicting the Palace of the Republic collaged onto the Volksbühne’s façade (2006). (Photo by the author.)

the fact that the Volksbühne, which was located in the former East Berlin, has had a leftist agenda since its founding, its memorialization of the Palace of the Republic is not surprising (Figure 8). The canvas façade appropriated the historicist surface architecture through its reversal of the latter's logic of representation since in this case it is a modernist façade that covered a historic building rather than a historicist façade veiling a modern building. This temporary masquerade disguising the building with a pseudo façade also indicates that despite its marginalization by official preservation policies, the GDR past still holds sway over public memory. Collective memory, which is contingent, unstable, and dynamic, cannot be contained by official preservation practices that have privileged a pre-1914 past in Berlin in an attempt to sanitize the past.

Aura of the Copy

Wilhelm von Boddien, a Hamburg-based businessman, initiated the construction of the life-sized mock-up of the Schloß. As the director of the "Friends of the Berlin City Palace" (*Förderverein Berliner Stadtschloß*), he is the driving force behind the reconstruction plans. He defines architecture as a reproducible object, detached from its original context:

Certain branches of the fine arts, such as music and theater, live exclusively via reproduction. Others are not reproducible, as is the rule with painting. In that case, the artist's hand is seen in the last detail, without leaving behind for posterity his thoughts in the form of plans or music scores. In architecture, the architect's genius is to be found in the plans. Hardly a single architect of a Gothic cathedral lived to see its completion, perhaps at most the finishing of the apse. Hundreds of stone masons and sculptors, bricklayers, and other manual laborers brought his idea to completion, often generations later. *If the plans or comprehensive*

documentation exist, such buildings can be rebuilt, and continuity maintained.

... Again and again there are arguments as to whether one should rebuild such totally destroyed structures. Opponents of this project toss around not exactly accurate terms such as "clone", "Disneyland" or "Las Vegas". How unjustified they are, is shown by ... buildings that have been reconstructed true to their originals and which bear witness to the reclaimed historical identity of famous cities. Often the reconstruction does not occur immediately after loss. Political or also economic conditions prevent it.²⁷

By this definition, von Boddien blurs the boundaries between the original and the reproduction, defying the notion of aura in architecture. The modernist avant-garde's negation of aura in the age of mechanical reproduction served to disrupt the traditional perception and production of art and architecture, whereas today the negation of aura serves to produce an illusion of continuity of "tradition" that selectively resorts to a historical era, symptomatic of a desire for national unity. What was once a tool of the avant-garde has become a conservative strategy. For example, the continuity that von Boddien desires to maintain is an imaginary one that serves to create an enduring past for a nation erasing the heritage of the Nazi regime and the divided Germanies, whereas the actual social, economical, and political structures that gave rise to the Schloß disappeared a long time ago. Not only von Boddien but also several other supporters of the Schloß justify the rebuilding by arguing against aura in architecture. For example, Jakubeit denies the notion of aura in architecture by comparing it, like von Boddien, to the fine arts:

In music, if one has the score then one can perform concerts and play the music over and over again. If I have the text of a book I can

republish it. And if I have a Maillol original, and he has authorized it, then I can cast a copy ... What makes the art of architecture so precious that if its score still exists it can't be reproduced?²⁸

Both von Boddien and Jakubeit blur the architectural artifact with its representation. In Benjamin's words, "the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility."²⁹ The concept that the architectural artifact is reproducible as an image inevitably turns it into a commodity. The reproduced buildings take their place in today's hyperculture, which Jean Baudrillard defines as a global language, in which commodities acquire cultural and aesthetic legitimacy, erasing differences between the real and the imaginary.³⁰ The replica will be a substitute for the destroyed Schloß as the symbol of a unified Germany, erasing its original meaning as the seat of monarchy.

On the other hand, architect Eduard Bru Bistuer, another supporter of the Schloß, extends aura to the copy: "The loss of aura that Walter Benjamin saw in the copy is a nineteenth-century concept. Today the copy has its own specific aura."³¹ Bistuer's concept of the copy with aura undermines the hierarchy between model and copy; Gilles Deleuze defines the simulacrum in similar terms. Deleuze, in his article "Plato and the Simulacrum" (1983), argues that the simulacrum is not a degraded copy but a different phenomenon altogether.³² It collapses the very distinction between copy and model. For Deleuze, the copy is an image endowed with resemblance, whereas the simulacrum is an image without resemblance. Yet, the simulacrum produces an effect of resemblance, which is external and produced by entirely different means from those that are at work in the model. In fact, the supporters of the Schloß seem to argue for a simulacrum: a building that resembles the Schloß only externally but with a different meaning and function and therefore producing its own aura. The

rebuilt Schloß will no longer symbolize monarchy or function as an imperial residence. On the official Web site of the Stadtschloß Berlin Initiative, the project is advertised as “the biggest (tourist) attraction in Berlin, with a wide range of quality shops, restaurants and even a business centre.”³³ The proposed replica under the name of “Humboldt Forum” brings together a museum complex; libraries; an agora for receptions and large events as well as for theatre, film, music, and dance presentations; and an extensive selection of restaurants. This commodified version of the palace is envisioned as an element of spectacle that will cater not to the *flâneur* but, in Andreas Huyssen’s words, to the “city tourist,” who is in the center of cultural consumption.³⁴

Baudrillard has argued that in our age of mass media and consumer culture, we are faced with a phenomena that he calls the “hyperreal,” which is “not only what can be reproduced, but that which is already reproduced.”³⁵ The definition of architecture by von Boddien complies with the hyperreal since for von Boddien architecture is always already reproduced—through renewals and restorations, even if it is not completely rebuilt. He claims:

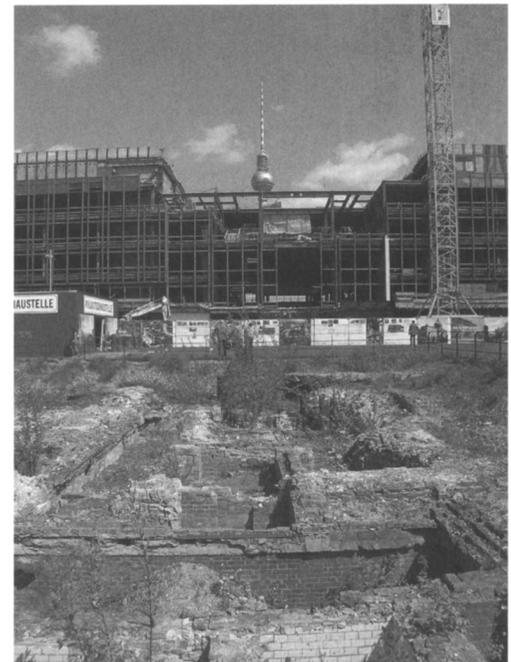
Because of weathering, all historical buildings have long since experienced one, or *often multiple, renewals of their façades. They, thus, have become copies of themselves.* Likewise the demolished Schloß was comprehensively restored in the nineteenth century. Thus Walter Ulbricht, who ordered its destruction, destroyed largely a copy of Schlüter’s building, but not its essence.³⁶

The argument of von Boddien that there is no possibility of the original because of the continuous change in façades reveals the contemporary understanding of architecture as image and representation. His argument is twofold: first, he substitutes the surface for the building itself and second, he claims that the essence of a building

lies in its drawings. This view embodies an inherent contradiction, which leads to an impasse. The nostalgia of the supporters of the Schloß for the “authentic identity” of Berlin can only be fulfilled by an architecture freed from the burden of authenticity, reduced to reproducible abstract drawings and façades. The symbolic meaning that they attribute to the Schloß as well as to a pre-1914 Berlin is informed by contemporary desires and needs. In other words, the authentic identity of Berlin is invented to achieve social and cultural unity and to normalize national identity in the aftermath of the reunification. The resulting urban image, in turn, caters to tourism, putting the “unique” German history on display.

Beneath the City Surfaces

The historical identity in Berlin is simulated not only on the city surface but also through dissecting the city surface. The suppression of the recent past in the immediate postwar decades was replaced by attempts starting from the 1970s to recover German history and identity. Political authorities and civil society increasingly pursued an archaeological approach to the past, which they believed was necessary to recover the historical traces from the destruction caused by the Nazi past and WWII.³⁷ Digging for traces of history, Koshar writes, has transformed the German memory landscape into a topography of traces, a process that has altered the canon of monuments and historic buildings since the 1970s.³⁸ It has led to “new ways of perceiving historical environments, which [are] now not simply accretions of monuments, ruins, and reconstructions but broadly defined landscapes, whose historical meanings [are] richer and more differentiated than previously thought.”³⁹ For example, the concept of the topography of traces undermined the hegemonic national narratives associated with monuments through the inclusion of repressed pasts that left nothing more than traces. The most popular example is the *Topography of Terror* exhibition in Berlin, a historical site



9. Excavated remains of the Schloß being exhibited in front of the ongoing demolition of the Palace of the Republic (2006). (Photo by the author.)

documenting Nazi crimes on the unearthed foundations of Gestapo prison cells. It was initiated in 1985 by Berlin civic groups, the Active Museum of Fascism and Resistance, and the Berlin History Workshop.

The site of the Palace of the Republic is also transformed into a topography of traces. While the demolition of the Palace of the Republic is underway, the empty site in front of the building has become an open-air exhibition, displaying the excavated foundations of the Schloß along with panels narrating the brief history of the site throughout the turbulent twentieth century (Figure 9). In contrast to the linear narrative given on the panels, the visitors experience a superimposition of multiple layers of urban history. They walk through the excavated remains of the Schloß, right

across the ongoing demolition of the Palace of the Republic, and look at architectural drawings and three-dimensional simulations of the proposed replica. Visitors experience the past, present, and future traces on the site simultaneously without a given representational order. The site experienced as it is today—as a disarray of fragmented, dynamic histories, still in the process of being made—is much truer to the historical identity of Berlin than a frozen, reconstructed “narrative tableau” would ever be.⁴⁰ In this sense, as a site of collective memory, it resists a linear historical narrative and a selective reconstruction.

Conclusions

While the Schloß as a monument can be simulated on the surface, the “original” monument is yet to be discovered beneath the surface of the site. The historical identity of Berlin is found not only in the hyperreal surfaces of the built environment but also through an archeology of the city surface. The site of the Palace of the Republic brings together these two tendencies, where the public memory of Berlin is framed on the surface of the built environment and also beneath the city surface. The first tendency denies aura to the architectural artifact, while the latter fetishizes the architectural artifact through its obsession with the aura of the original. However, both tendencies combine to form a new perception of city surfaces, transforming them into surfaces of memory by inscribing new meanings.

Boyer argues, “historical phenomena portrayed as ‘heritage’ are cultural treasures of art carried out by the authorities in every triumphal march, and these treasures reek of omissions and suppressions.”⁴¹ The Palace of the Republic fell prey to the politics of national heritage. Its site, which could remain empty for years given the enormous cost of rebuilding the Schloß, is yet another topography of traces reminding the visitor of each regime’s desire to reconstruct over the ruins of the recent past.

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Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was presented at the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments conference “Hyper-Traditions,” in Bangkok on December 15, 2006.
2. After the reunification, building engineers demanded the Palace of the Republic’s destruction due to an excess of asbestos in the building posing a health hazard. Yet, when similar problems were discovered in Berlin’s major exhibition and convention hall, the International Congress Center, the asbestos could be stabilized. Once it became evident that the same treatment could be applied to the Palace of the Republic, the German Federal Minister for Building, Irmgard Schwaetzer voiced her desire to see the building restored. See Alan Balfour, *Berlin* (London: Academy Editions, 1995), p. 75.
3. Senate Department for Urban Development, “The Removal of the Palast der Republik,” http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/bauen/palast_rueckbau/en/dismantling.shtml (accessed January 10, 2007).
4. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p. 220.
5. Daniel Naegle, “Object, Image, Aura: Le Corbusier and the Architecture of Photography,” *Harvard Design Magazine*, 6 (Fall 1998), p. 2.
6. INFAS survey from 1993 in *Die Zeit* 47 (2003) in Nina Brodowski, “Geschichts(ab)riss,” in Philipp Misselwitz, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Philipp Oswald, eds., *Fun Palace 200X—der Berliner Schlossplatz: Abriss, Neubau oder grüne Wiese?* (Berlin, Germany: Martin Schmitz Verlag, 2005), p. 53.
7. Quoted in Michael Z. Wise, *Capital Dilemma: Germany’s Search for a New Architecture of Democracy*, 1st ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), p. 109.
8. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 117.
9. Wolf Jobst Siedler, “Das Schloss lag nicht in Berlin,” in Förderverein Berliner Stadtschloss, ed., *Das Schloss? Eine Ausstellung über die Mitte Berlins* (Berlin, Germany: Ernst & Sohn, 1993), p. 18.
10. M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 6.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
12. *Die Zeit* 35 (2000). Quoted in N. Brodowski, “Geschichts(ab)riss,” p. 51.
13. Jürgen Trimborn, “Palast der Republik oder preussisches Stadtschloss?” *Die alte Stadt* 25, no. 3 (1998): 219.
14. Rudy Koshar, *Germany’s Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. xii.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 324.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
17. Architecture as sign and image was first theorized by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenhour in their classic work *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).
18. Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 230–31.
19. Andreas Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (1997), p. 58.
20. B. Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, p. 230.
21. Goerd Peschken, “Thesen über das Berliner Schloss,” in *Das Schloss?*, p. 106.
22. Quoted in Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 192.
23. G. Peschken and Frank Augustin, “Zur Restitution von Stadtraum und Schloss,” in *Das Schloss?*, p. 100. Quoted in A. Balfour, *Berlin*, p. 135, and in S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 192.
24. G. Peschken and F. Augustin, “Zur Restitution von Stadtraum und Schloss,” p. 100.
25. Internationale Expertenkommission, *Historische Mitte Berlin: Abschlussbericht* (Berlin, Germany: 2002), p. 19.
26. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 13.
27. Emphasis in italics is mine. Wilhelm von Boddien, “Totally Destroyed and Newly Rebuilt Buildings,” 2004, <http://www.berliner-schloss.de/start.php?navID=99&typ=main> (accessed May 15, 2006). Among the rebuilt structures W. von Boddien lists are the Mostar Bridge in Bosnia, the Campanile in Venice, Cloth Hall in Ypres, and Gross St. Martin in Cologne.
28. Quoted in M.Z. Wise, *Capital Dilemma*, p. 117–8.
29. W. Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” p. 224.
30. Jean Baudrillard and Monica Sassatelli, “An Interview with Jean Baudrillard: Europe, Globalization and the Destiny of Culture,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 4 (2002): 2.
31. Eduard Bru architectes, “Die Aura der Kopie,” in *Fun Palace 200X*, p. 204.
32. Gilles Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” *October* 27 (Winter 1983), pp. 45–56.
33. Stadtschloss Berlin Initiative, “Wir bauen das Schloss,” 2006, <http://www.stadtschloss-berlin.de/englisch.html> (accessed January 7, 2007).
34. A. Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin,” p. 58.
35. J. Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 146.
36. Emphasis in italics is mine. W. von Boddien, “Totally Destroyed and Newly Rebuilt Buildings.”
37. Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 253.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
39. *Ibid.*
40. I borrow the term “narrative tableaux” from M.C. Boyer. M.C. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory*, p. 377.
41. *Ibid.*