

Susanne Ledanff (University of Canterbury)

**The rebuilding of the city centre in Berlin in the nineties under the label of the  
"European City" - a critical perspective**

What American urban sociologist Sharon Zukin calls the "symbolic economy"<sup>1</sup> of cities is demonstrated particularly at Potsdamer Platz. Its architectural language reflects the images of "spectacle, power, and money"<sup>2</sup>. My article is on the European City Plan in the inner city districts of Berlin in the nineties. The question is indeed: is the "rebirth" of the "European City" in the heart of the old-new capital city of Berlin just another aspect of the cult of the image in today's city planning and city marketing? It certainly is if we look at the trends in the past decades in European or Western cities generally, the trend towards the revitalization of city centres in the context of a new urbanism<sup>3</sup> in the eighties. These trends existed long before the gigantic urban experiment in Berlin. However, what has been formulated in the Inner City Master Plan or the Planwerk of 1999, is a rather radical concept of the European City, first of all by its huge dimensions: the Inner City Master Plan includes today not only the historical centre East but part of the inner city districts including the City West. Secondly it stands out by a rather rigorous and 'dogmatic' management of "critical reconstruction" of what can be called the largest inner city periphery of a contemporary Western city, a project which, thirdly, takes place in a capital city, which, as everybody knows, has a violent and contradictory past.

The "European City" project, to define the term briefly, means a shift in architecture and planning and reviewing the role of city life in today's urban and ecological crisis, but predominantly a shift from modernist cityscapes and concepts to postmodern nostalgic urbanism, ie. the longing for attractive, stimulating images of the heritage of European cities. This, of course, has a longer tradition city planning, dating from the sixties. The

Planwerk refers to Aldo Rossi's book from 1966 "Architecture of the City" containing the idea of permanence of the city ground-plan and the heritage of historical monuments.<sup>4</sup> But again, Berlin claims a leading role in a fundamental rethinking of the city, as a "city of the future". These claims culminated in the late nineties in the German contribution to the Architecture Biennial in Venice and to the Urban 21 in 2000 in presenting the Berlin "Stadtewende", "a turn in city planning"<sup>5</sup>, as a paradigm of the sustainable city, a heroic battle against suburbanisation. However, during the whole planning and building period it is striking that the planning discourse in Berlin is highly emotional. The metaphors of "healing the wounds" appear explicitly or implicitly in projects and articles with such a strong emphasis that this suggests that there is more at stake than the obvious sins of modernism in the cityscape and, most lamentably, in the historical centre.<sup>6</sup> Berlin seems to have many and - as I will point out in my article- conflicting obsessions.

My critical review of the planning and the urban transformations in Berlin will deal with their postmodern aspects. In this respect, I also wish to present some parallels and differences comparing the creation of a fictitious or "virtual past" in the cityscape in Moscow and Berlin in the nineties. Main parallels would consist in the spectacle of a rigorously planned new visual outfit, which is historizing and nostalgic, the fact that the "recycling" of a city's past is largely imaginary and creates a "virtual capital" ie. a capital built out of an imaginary past, as Svetlana Boym terms Berlin, but demonstrates a similar process in Moscow.<sup>7</sup> The differences lie, of course, in the different pasts of both capital cities, not only the more recent past of the divided city, but Berlin's history in the 20th century which is at the centre of an international critical interest in the way the buildings of the new capital deal with German national history. Not only would an unbridled national "Kitsch" in architecture, as demonstrated in some "Phoenixlike" projects" in Post Soviet Moscow (Boym, 100) not go unnoticed and uncriticised. Rather, the public debate on how to face history turns mostly on the buildings of the German capital in the

worlds' attention. Historian Brian Ladd says about Berlin's public discourse: It is "the Holocaust-centred discourse" which "is *the* Berlin public sphere."<sup>8</sup> This brings me to my next point, which is important as a context for the actual review of European city planning in the centre of Berlin: the interest in Berlin as a site of preservation of memory. I distinguish two discourses on the New Berlin, I have detected in my research. The critical perspective of what occurred in Berlin in the nineties is expressed in urbanistic and architectural criticism (by the experts and reported by the journalists in the German media), more a German discourse which seems concerned with the city's "normalisation", but also failures and problematic aspects of modern city planning. This is opposed to the more 'idealistic' views and expectations of Berlin as a site of memory, formulated in culture theories, by city historians and scholars mainly outside Germany.

*Urban sites of memory - memory practices in Berlin and the "Schlossplatz" debate*

Referring to the views of the second group, there is a strong emphasis on Berlin's role as an "unusual world city", "hyped by its images of cultural significance"(Ladd, 2000), which means preserving and reflecting history. Culture of memories as a "current obsession with memories" in the times of cultural "amnesia".<sup>9</sup> Andreas Huyssen informs us, came as a surprising "memory boom" in the past two decades, a boom to be explained as a crisis of postmodern culture, ie. the paradox that the memory boom is accompanied by a "boom in forgetting" in our entertainment and informational society. This rather recent interest in memory discourses in postmodern cultural studies also recognises that "memory discourses appear to be global in one register (the Holocaust, S.L.), but in their core they remain tied to the histories of specific nations and states".<sup>10</sup>

The point that memory practices are still national is particularly valid for Germany and its capital city. No other city" bears the marks of twentieth century history as intensely

and self-consciously as Berlin."(Huysseu)<sup>11</sup> In his article "The Voids of Berlin" Huysseu is fast to blame "critical reconstruction" as a false nostalgic continuity with a pre-war 1914 national past. "The new nationally coded simplicity is just as image-driven as the image ecstasies of the high-tech camp (of Potsdamer Platz, S.L.) except that it posits banal images of a national past against equally banal images of a global future."<sup>12</sup> That is maybe true. But what would be the more creative alternatives in order to give the city a new vocabulary of urban space which makes its historical layers transparent? Considering the options for a true "architecture of memory" - deconstructivist architect of the new Jewish Museum Daniel Libeskind is the exception and positive example in Huysseu's article - a main problem seems that the city as a whole cannot be planned in such a way, as a monument, that is. The monuments and many historical buildings in Berlin's centre, which are discussed by Ladd (1997)<sup>13</sup> and Svetlana Boym, both historians interested in individual memory sites and relics of the past, or, in Boym's tour through the centre, also places of "unintentional memorialisation"(Boym, 180) of East and West Berliners, produce the intriguing aspects of the cityscape of lived memories and of contested nostalgias. There are still some ruins as monuments, re-used government buildings with their sometimes ludicrous histories, the run down remains of the Palace of the Republic, the Checkpoint-Charlie-Museum, the Tacheles, in the meantime a completely commercialised bohemian artists' location, or as another example in Boym's tour through a transitional Berlin already at the verge of its disappearance, the Info-Box at Potsdamer Platz, which now has been dismantled. But as for contested nostalgias from which Berlin is building its future, one has to be careful. Despite the lively public debate of the future of each site of memory for the East and West population, one will find that there are scarcely any identities to be negotiated as the Berliners grow tired of the public debate, mainly of the Stadtschloss debate.

Nevertheless, it is useful to recapitulate once again the “tale of the two palaces” (Ladd 1997) and the Schlossplatz debate (and also to add the latest chapter) because we have here an issue of a phantom site in the city which seems to require critical reflection of history, which for some critics consists in the - now abandoned - idea of “mirroring” the GDR Palace of the Republic in the historical palace. A tension could be created by the collision of both. The main issue is the debate of the “fake” aspect of bringing back the historical palace of the Hohenzollerns, a “master piece of Baroque architecture”, “the Prussian version of the Louvre” (Boym, 182), which was badly damaged during the war and demolished in 1950 after the foundation of the GDR. The other issue is the preservation of GDR history and memories of the Eastern population, ie. of “their” Palace of the Republic, the much debated “eyesore” erected in part of the terrain occupied by the former Royal palace, in my opinion a concern which has largely disappeared from the public debate and which has never been the object of a clear cut division of East Berlin defenders of the “eyesore” and West Berlin conservative nostalgias for the historical heart of the city, the Royal Palace.

In any case, German historical mythologies and uneasy nostalgias are involved in the planning debate of the Schlossplatz, which makes the site an equivalent of an urban phantom site caught in postmodern ironies of historicising simulation of a virtual past: the rebuilding of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, which is marked by the “totalising nostalgia for eternal grandeur” (Boym, 100) and of a mythical past in Post Soviet Russia. However, as already mentioned, “megalomaniacal imagination” (Boym, *ibid.*) which were the much criticised aims of building projects in Post-soviet Moscow, ie. of its mayor Luzhkov, is scarcely a danger in the German capital, even if a future “exact copy” of a national monument could bear Prussian associations. This argument has been part of the debate and the object of careful examinations - and refusals.<sup>14</sup> The Royal palace cannot be reduced to the darker sides of German history, it is a symbol of

urban pride and worth restoring! But one should reflect how this specific void - because the Palace of the Republic occupies only part of the gap left by the disappearance of the Stadtschloss - has been created as a consequence of tragic events in German history! Boym quotes Hoffmann-Axthelm's "discussion of aesthetics and politics, of guilt and expiratory sacrifice"<sup>15</sup> in an article where the theorist argues for the "mirror solution", but mainly votes for bringing back the Schloss as a true concern for the place and its history, as we will see. There were many more arguments by the experts: that any reconstruction would be a fake in terms of architectural authenticity but, as others say, no more than in reconstructions in other cities in postwar Europe, arguing even that the "exact copy" would help to avoid "kitsch and fakes".<sup>16</sup> A number of critical arguments are therefore still unsolved as regards the outcome of the architectural competition and the decision made at the beginning of 2002

The European city building plan and its idea of preserving historical monuments has finally won with the decision in favour of the reconstruction of the walls of the Royal Palace. The Palace of the Republic is history and will only survive as an "idea" of an urban space for collective use. The definite visual appearance the historical palace, however, has not yet been decided. The design could follow the model of the exact rebuilding of a monument which had been a ruin for decades, a version which would also follow the successful fundraising program in order to finance the project: the Frauenkirche in Dresden. The other model would be a "critical reconstruction" version giving freedom to the architects to "modernise" the re-emergence of the building as a whole.

The German concern about the building of a "fake", or as new Berlin minister of Cultural Affairs Thomas Flierl puts it (who is strongly in favour of the second version)<sup>17</sup>, of "cloning" the building marks a clear difference to the fervour shown in Moscow to

resuscitate national monuments of a mythical past, showing at the same time a naive enthusiasm for folklore and nationalistic motifs in style and decor, but at the end, the result could be, despite the endless debates and critical examinations of possible solutions in Berlin, be very similar especially if version number one is realised. On the other hand, fifteen years after the fall of the wall (that's about the earliest date for the actual beginning of the construction), and, especially after the shift of perceptions of the run down empty Schlossplatz with its temporary installations, nothing can surprise the Berliners any more. Any final solution for the ghostly terrain would rather put an end to a series of truly postmodern impressions over the past decade. The empty Schlossplatz and the Linden were a playground for simulations. The most prominent simulation was a scaffolding with the painting on canvas of the palace facades at the front side at Unter den Linden of the Palace of the Republic in 1993. As a correction of Boym's interpretation of the canvas as a critical historical and political "reflection", "reflection" taken literally, ie. the mirroring of both the old and the new palace (Boym, 192), one has to say that the project was financed by the conservative defenders of the Schloss, led by the Hamburg industrialist Wilhelm von Boddien. A number of other temporary installations followed, for example a beach volley ball field (which I myself took for a hoax when I bought a postcard of it), or an exhibition of washing machines as a message to the politicians. Boym is possibly right when she states that "transitional Berlin" in the nineties was the period when the city could plausibly be called the "most virtual city in the world" (176), but she is not right when she examines possible "authentic" reflections of Berlin's contradictory history by the planners, a "reflective moral discourse that is on the verge of disappearing in the hectic pace of development of the new united Berlin." (184). If such a forgetfulness is demonstrated more in an advanced stage of the rebuilding program, it has less to do with the unhistorical and superficial image production in the New Berlin. The Schlossplatz debate for instance was never a debate between historical readings of the city and global consumerism as discussed with regard to other places of

the centre, but had more to do with the problems of translating the reflective discourse of memory sites into a definite architectural form.

This brings us to the questions mentioned earlier on, ie. Huyssen's criticism of the suppression of historical periods in the Inner City rebuilding program. Historising architecture brings about nostalgias which are not innocent, but not necessarily nationalistic, but they certainly express in Berlin at least a historising nostalgic populism<sup>18</sup> which has displaced a more scrupulous examination of the political and historical implications of the site. Extinguishing the Palace of the Republic, dropping the "mirror solution", would be just one more example of forgetfulness in the city planning. But does it really? Would keeping the GDR palace as a footnote in the visual outfit of the city centre change postmodern ironies in any way, that means creating an architectural language which tends towards a quotation rather than to a meaningful urban icon. Briefly, today we live in cities of signs and not in cities of symbols.

I would like to ask the same question which I raised when I mentioned the expressive symbolism of Libeskind's New Jewish Museum, a true "architecture of memory" in Huyssen's interpretation. As regards the aesthetics of voids in Libeskind's concept, this could, by the way, demonstrate another plundering of Berlin's city mythology from the past. Coming back to the Schlossplatz one can ask: what are the options for a "true" reflection of history which could have been more convincing than the postmodern fake of the rebuilding of the palace? The mirror solution? Theme park as well! It was exactly the Potemkin village impressions of the canvas of 1993 which prepared the Berliners to the playful visualisation of the playground qualities of the heart of Berlin. An audacious postmodern architectural vision of the site full of quotations? Architectural theme park as well. I have to add that these impressions come from the my visit to the exhibition of the Plans for the Schlossplatz in 2001.<sup>19</sup>

The parallels with Moscow's obviously more naive theme parkisation of history are instructive for the crucial question: What is a phantom site in a capital city and what are the intriguing aspects of urban hyper reality in cities such as Berlin and Moscow? Both cities were labelled "chameleon cities"<sup>20</sup> in the way their urban iconography has been permanently distorted and created the need for re-interpretations and new messages in huge rebuilding programs under new (post)ideological constellations. The consequences of the erasure and destruction of central areas of the city either by war or totalitarian systems, make the sites interesting and extremely ironic. What Berlin has in common with Moscow, despite Moscow's more obvious neomythical aspirations for certain sites, is the problem of recycling a city's past, de facto, of dealing with the voids or ghostly superpositions of history such as a swimming pool in place of the cathedral in Moscow, and the task of the new leaders to develop a new narrative for the site. It does not necessarily have to be a nationalistic one, rather, as in the case of Berlin's Schlossplatz, it expresses a final victory of architectural aestheticism as one of the most striking features of the Inner City rebuilding program. Especially a more or less true copy of the building would be perceived as an aesthetic sign, as an element of normalisation and historicising urban design, not much different from the Hotel Adlon and the Museum's island in the historical centre, and thus part of the postmodern "decentring" of city images similar to Moscow's historicising nostalgias.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, this can be seen critically, but I want to hint at a few more contradictions which can be observed in the process which finally led to the recent, clearly less reflective nostalgia, a longing in order to regain the former image of the heart of the city. In general, in Berlin urbanistic and aesthetic considerations of "healing the wounds" can overlap with arguments of critical reflection of German history. Both discourses were for a certain period intensively connected in the Schlossplatz debate. The concept of wound could refer to traumas of German history

which need a visual sign, a memorial site, in the future cityscape, and to the damages the city experienced in a way which was no longer bearable.

It is therefore interesting that Berlin architectural historian Hoffmann-Axthelm can be quoted both ways: as one of theorists who kept the moral memory discourse alive, and as we will see, in his role as the “spiritual father of the Planwerk” who is on the ‘side of the city’ and its overall historicising design so much criticised by Huyssen. In reality, this is scarcely a contradiction for the architectural theorist since there can be sites within the urban repair work which would stand out as a memorial topos transcending urbanistic concerns. “The Schloss is needed to remind us of the unmastered history.”<sup>22</sup> But this argument was brought forward against the then prevailing equally highly reflective “ban on reconstruction” on moral grounds, of “guilt” and sacrifice” (ibid.) Hoffmann-Axthelm’s suggestion that *not* rebuilding the palace would mean missing a chance to confront history for which the actual building was needed, is still valid. But the following years after the climax of the moral debate on the future of the square around mid-decade show the difficulties of the survival of these complex theoretical readings. It is a paradox that not only an increasing nostalgic mood for historical city images made the rebuilding of the Schloss more and more acceptable and will therefore undermine a “reflective” experience of an urban memory site. The question is: is there a theoretical chance for such a reading of the eerie historical dimensions behind the surfaces of the new building? In my opinion, there is a general problem of translating the memory discourse into a concrete place, which, as I mentioned before, can hardly escape the theme parkisation of history the moment the “void” is filled by concrete interpretations. In the case of the Stadtschloss, which was “present in its absence”<sup>23</sup>, this is even more the case. The “Stadtgespenst”, the “spectre of the palace”, due to disappearances and superpositions in German history and in Berlin, was meant to vanish in the process of the resurgence of the

actual building: in debates, in architectural competitions, not omitting the canvas and its playful simulations, and finally, one day, as a new tourist site in Berlin's city centre.

I have to stop my visit to this most prominent monument in Berlin as one aspect of the European city building plan which is also a cornerstone in the debate of memory practices in culture theories, for example, to mention a few aspects, the danger of marketing memory in consumers' society and tourist economy, dangers which rather strengthen the arguments that cultures of memories are needed more than ever. Probably the future resurgence of the historical palace will be just as ambiguous in these respects. Its only existence will be intriguing enough to remind of postmodern issues with confronting the past: the tendencies towards simulation of historicising architecture which nevertheless, even in its most banal form of a fake, will tell a "story", and - in a subtle way - will reveal the artificial character of Berlin's and German aspirations of normalisation in a capital city. Closer to the "authentic" memory discourse would be the "critical reconstruction" solution for the building: a "third city" interpretation, as mentioned by Senator of Cultural Affairs Flierl, a contemporary interpretation of the facades in order to avoid the "cloning". Interestingly the GDR palace, which indeed became for the architectural visions of the site an intellectual challenge in order to visualise tensions and contradictions of German history - rather than a real concern for peoples' memories! - is not totally forgotten. It could end up as a remembrance of the conference rooms of the "peoples' palace" in the inside, well hidden behind the monumental urban icon of a (critically) restored historical palace. As ironic as these latest possible compromises sound, there is an overall concern of "critically" bringing back the past in Berlin. The Inner City building plan is just under the same spell, but the formalistic, ie. aesthetic answers to "authentic" memory cultures, are not only the planners' fault. Because their aura of deeper meaning was connected with a melancholic image of the city as a whole in the pre-unification period.

What is urgently needed in order to understand the limitations of architectural “authentic” memory practices in Berlin is a critical view of the fundamental changes of the expressive “voids” in Berlin. Mentioning the symbolism of voids and collisions which make it so hard for the historical palace to justify itself as a memorial site, this brings us to yet another difference between Moscow and Berlin for reflecting their “chameleon” histories. Indeed, this difference does not stem from the new (post or neo) ideological strategies and decentring image productions in the new era, but from Berlin’s specific traditions as a “city of voids” after 1945 which is replaced by a post ideological cityscape in the nineties. I will take a different stance than Huyssen for whom “the notion of Berlin as a void is more than a metaphor, and not just a transitory condition”<sup>24</sup>. What did really happen to the mythology of the “city of voids” in the nineties? Finally, one has to acknowledge the end of modernism in Berlin: a radical break after the fall of the wall.

In the past, before the fall of the wall and the beginning of the rebuilding project, urban sites were bound to be meaningful in some "grand narratives" (Lyotard), referring to traumatic national history. Berlin had been for forty years such an - anachronistic - archive of “meaningful” historical sites, although already touristified, such as the wall, but transfixed in time and space. What was going to change after the fall of the wall is the whole chapter of the aesthetics of Berlin's paradoxical urban eccentricity, the beauty of the "Kapputte", the melancholy of the fragment. This subtext, represented by the wall, ruins, bullet holes, empty spaces, followed the Freudian concept of absences and discontinuities which speak the language of traumas of history, the monumental mnemonic dimension of the whole city. The paradox is that with the loss of this subtext of the wall and the cold war, oddly connected with the consequences of the “Third Reich” and the Holocaust, a subtext which was inscribed in the fragments and the fallow land of Berlin, the "city as monument" is now replaced by a diversity of strategies of

memorialisation: Two of them are rational uses of memory: the memory practices in monuments and in public debate, and the urbanistic repair work as another memory discourse. The Holocaust centred discourse in memory sites in the New Berlin, however, has to justify itself anew, sometimes not an easy matter, when one thinks that, for example, the "Gelände des Terrors", the memorial of Terror (of the Gestapo) had the wall as its neighbour, which was probably the most appropriate symbolic neighbourhood in the mnemonic structure of the whole city.

In the nineties, the subtext of discontinuities, wounds, distortions and voids of the city had to undergo major reinterpretations. Some of the relics of the older subtext are, of course, still there, slumbering outside or at the edge the magic circle of the Inner City Master Plan such as the ruin of the Anhalter Bahnhof. That means that Berlin's juxtapositions of history are still there, but the already anachronistic modernist historical imaginations of the divided city have finally become postmodern: "Postmodernism destroys historical narratives as chronology and sequences and promotes at depthless collage that juxtaposes past and present moments in a fragmented city."<sup>25</sup> The Master Plan, as one will see has to deal with juxtapositions of the city's history, that means also its more recent layers. It is not just about a homogenous pre(1914)war city image, although, it is in this specific form that postmodern simulation of "critical reconstruction" appears more drastic. The historicist urban design of the city centre proposed by the Planwerk could be based only on "the invention of its virtual tradition" (Hartung)<sup>26</sup>, a formula that corresponds even more clearly to Baudrillard's definition of simulation which is "an exact copy of an original that may have never existed".<sup>27</sup>

Filling the voids is the main preoccupation of the planners. But it would be too easy to recur to a hidden psychoanalytical meaning of this concern or to suspicious political - nationalistic - afterthoughts since Berlin' city centre is a perfect example of postmodern

aestheticism in planning and architecture. The architectural criticism - at least until the more recent debate on the "neue Stadtbürger", the new responsible citizen - focussed on the architectural and aesthetic dimension of the construction process. But these obsessions with urban aesthetics involve also a rather profound reflection, formulated by Hoffmann-Axthelm, the same who, as we have seen, showed a true concern for the Schlossplatz. The rebuilding of the European city, he says, should present a turn against Berlin pre 1989 anti-urban aesthetics of the "beauty in the form of destruction, according to Adorno"<sup>28</sup>, a shift in the current hostility against cities, the indifference towards city form and city culture which has to be overcome.

#### *The European City Plan and the new architecture of the nineties*

The question is now whether the planning in Berlins' city centre aims at a certain period of a recycled national imagination as Huyssen suggests. First, I have to say, that the planning process and accompanying debate is highly complex. Any criticism of the dogmatism of the Planwerk has to take into account the well founded arguments of the theorists behind it, first of all chief theorist Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm. But also Senate Director of Building Affairs Hans Stimmann is a conceptionalist as well as a politician used to appearances in the media. Called a new Baron Haussmann, but a "reversed Baron Haussmann"(Zohlen<sup>29</sup>), opting for "density" rather than monumental axes, he was criticized for the dogmatic execution of the planning, but his theoretical concepts are certainly more subtle than those of the almighty mayor of Moscow Luzhkov (until 1998).

For my review I will focus mainly on the so-called "architects' debate" in the first half of the decade. First some dates: In 1999, after three years of debate after its first presentation in 1996, the Inner City Master Plan was put into effect. The victorious

Berlin Senate planning authorities in the architects' debate, the Borough Councils and the Berlin Ministry of Building in the Hassemer-Stimmann era did not come up in 1996 with a complex concept of urban renovation as something entirely new. The "stone faction", "Steinfraktion", had gradually imposed its traditionalist concept since the very beginning of the decade. One should not forget that between 1990 and 1995 Berlin was considered to be the capital of architectural competitions. Paradoxically the competition for the Potsdamer Platz in 1991 was the first demonstration of the victory of the European city concept over the American city partisans - and the architectural design was quickly criticised as Berlinish provincialism and mediocre. The key issue was the high rise. There should be no Manhattan at Potsdamer Platz. The winner, Hillmer-Sattler, presented a rather uninspired "European" concept of small blocks. The investors finally made their own interpretations of these regulations, making the Potsdamer Platz a compromise, a mix of rather heterogeneous quotations, a "miniaturised" Manhattan and a Little Milan at Daimler City designed by Renzo Piano, rather a theme park of the European city, a "Disneyland" (Sewing)<sup>30</sup> with its boulevards, streets, alleys, courtyards, a piazza, water features, etc.

The so called architects' debate had its climax in 1994<sup>31</sup>: the adherents of the "stone faction", the Berlin "cowboys" against the "Indians", the experimentalists and modernists, the supporters of glass and steel. The debate was soon overhauled and contradicted by reality a bit around the same time, when the dreams of a booming downtown and the expectation of a leading service centre derailed. Far too much office space had been built, so that the debate on the "American Skyline" at Alexanderplatz was laid to rest. In the meantime the Berlin Senate planning authorities (both departments) had won over the investors to the "Leitbild", the guiding principle, of the traditional city concept. Large parts of the historical centre were divided up into major blocks and sold to be developed by the investors of the service industries such as in the Friedrichstrasse.

The architectural debate was a "Scheindebatte", a fictitious debate, and became quickly politicized. In reality, Stimmann's rebuilding of the European city plan was rather consequently executed, but, as it has been criticised, resulted in the Friedrichstadt as an empty downtown. A problematic consequence of globalisation is that large scale development and international investors contradict the very basis of the European city and its tradition of private, individual investors and of buildings in blocks and sub blocks. (Häußermann).<sup>32</sup> Building permits to the investors were generally granted to projects which fitted into the guidelines, ie. to "fit into their environs" (that also meant the use of stone), respect a height limit of 22 meters, buildings in blocks and twenty percent residential use. In the Planwerk of 1999, one has to add, mistakes of the first period are corrected. The "Land", the state of Berlin still owns large tracks of property in the central districts and formalistic European city building regulations are revised. Regulations and subsidies aim at an even higher proportion of residential use and mixed functions by attracting middle class apartment owners - the legendary "Stadtbürger"! What I want to talk about in my critical review is rather the issue of the "virtual past" which is brought back in the rebuilding of the city centre.

In reality, the architectural results are far from homogenous if we are looking for a traditional European city design. In individual buildings there is modernist, deconstructivist as well as truly historicising architecture such as the Hotel Adlon and finally enough miniaturised Manhattan simulations, not only at Potsdamer Platz but at the Zoo in the centre West and in the planning for the Alexanderplatz. All these different architectural styles are being held together by the largest common principle of the Planwerk: the reinterpretation and restoration of the city map before 1945. The "modern" interpretation of the European city can be seen for example at Friedrichstrasse: a computer generated variety of facades in order to break up the block. It is no coincidence that the much acclaimed Berlin film by Tom Tykwer, "Run Lola run" with its digitalised

sequences captures this new rationality of "Stadtmitte" which is indeed not so different from the glass and steel architecture at Potsdamer Platz.

But is there a "remythologisation" of history (Oswalt)<sup>33</sup>, and which historical period of the city's past is supposed to be "restored"? The answer is not easy. The European city plan consists of a number of exclusions, ie. what should not be built, mainly a vehement rejection of postwar modernism. There should also not be international high rise architecture which led to the rejection younger experimental "dirty realism" architects. Also the more playful postmodern architects of the IBA of the eighties were pushed aside and, to his great frustration, deconstructivist architect Daniel Libeskind. "Berlin must look like Berlin" - "Berlin does not have to be reinvented again" (Stimmann),<sup>34</sup> is maybe one of the most revealing principles of simulation of a virtual past, the "invention of a tradition" (Eric Hobsbawm).<sup>35</sup> But one has to remember that this was an architectural principle since the seventies and eighties.

City planning in Berlin of the nineties is inspired by the principle of regionalism in architecture: "Berlinish or Prussian simplicity", an incautious formula, quickly attacked because of the ideological meaning of "Prussian" architecture. But which Berlin? Not Baroque (except for the restoration of the ground-plan), not Romanticism and Historism, not Founders Years, not the Neobaroque of the Wilhelmine period, not Expressionism, not Bauhaus, not the problematic heritage of the GDR.<sup>36</sup> "Berlinish architecture" is indeed a good example of simulation in architecture tending towards the "typical", the easily recognisable image of the new city, always as a fusion of modernity and tradition, a synthesis of a number of various historical patterns.<sup>37</sup> Simulation in architecture and planning is, of course, not new. It is a common cultural technique as to be seen in all neoclassicist modernisations. In today's European city building plan it is again the classicist ideal of Berlinish tradition, but, at a closer look it is abstract and synthetic,

described in terms such as "disciplined, Prussian, reserved, stony, more straight lines than curved ones". The "new simplicity" stimulated something like a historians' debate attacking "Knobelbecherarchitektur", since the Prussian style had been misused by the Nazis. The term of Prussian architecture was therefore replaced by "Berlinish" architecture which is indeed synthetic. (Oswalt, 95) The "Berlinish" rationalistic looking identity is very versatile. In reality Stimmann recurs to the period of the "Halbzeit der Moderne", of early modernism, the period before the first world war, the architecture of New Sobriety and rationalistic office buildings and department stores. (Behrens, Messel, Mendelsohn or Max Taut, etc.)<sup>38</sup>

To summarise the two principles or "Leitbilder" presented as essential: there is the Leitbild "critical reconstruction" and the Leitbild "European City", both intimately connected. The first involves a historicising principle in a more abstract meaning when referring to the city's past. "Critical reconstruction" is, as already mentioned, a limitation of the heights of buildings, style and the respect of the historical ground plan. The Leitbild "European city" is a city idea of a strict separation of private and public spaces and of the creation of density in damaged central areas. This is foreseen for architectural competitions in specific areas.<sup>39</sup> The Planwerk intends no further abolition of the GDR heritage in the centre, but envisages new buildings in the front of streets that leave - and conceal - modernist GDR architecture in the background such as at Fischerinsel as a kind of "bricolage"<sup>40</sup> of the historical layers of the city. Nevertheless, the radical break with modernist cityscape is intended and the argumentation has become a memory discourse. Now it is only question of the "black plans", what has disappeared and has to be filled.

The Planwerk is overly politically correct. It refers to the "plan as the memory of the city". Stimmann:

The texture of a city reflects the sum of complementary locations which exist alongside each other, overlap each other or are linked to each other. Each site has its own characteristics without making any claim to unchangingness. Hence the city can be viewed as a collage in which urban attitudes, social criticism and dealing with history manifest themselves in buildings. Reading urban texture means understanding the city as text. The planner, urban developer and architect must therefore repeatedly revise his city, examine it for spelling mistakes, add a new chapter at some points, shorten a bit, read the text from the angle of social and political guidelines without however completely rewriting it.<sup>41</sup>

It is true that "critical reconstruction" in the historical centre could be a reconciliation project for the divided city, but the results of the city planners' readings of the text of the city form a surprise element for both halves of the population and scarcely lead to a common memory project. It can be read only by the experts. Maybe there are some *deja vus* for the older population. But this is really not what matters. The virtual past which is coming back is the result of certain paradigms in city planning and architecture, an obsession with urban aesthetics, where Berlin's historical material as a European city is rediscovered in its aesthetic elements. Urban density is not just a result of the honest intention of bringing back the ground-map, it is an aim in itself because it is perceived as a shift in urbanism towards attractive "historical city" images. What I wanted to show, however, is that memory practices are clearly intended by the Planwerk. They are far from being superficial and cannot be reduced to a nationalistic codification. They show indeed a concern for the real city, but, on the other hand, the tendentially conservative historicising urban design - despite the planners' more recent caution *not* to "completely rewrite" the text of the city, caused well founded irritations among architectural critics.

Philipp Oswalt remarks that existing texts and traditions of the city are just as brutally overwritten by the new dogma of the historical European city as in former periods of Berlin's abrupt modernisations.<sup>42</sup>

Seeing the results, for some as for Michael Mönninger, Berlin could represent a success story of the ambitious ideas of setting an example of the European city building. For others, such as Werner Sewing, who also criticised the bureaucratic planning machinery and sees the victory of traditionalist concepts rather pragmatically as generational shift within a small group of leading architects, Berlin's city planning is rather an example of new urbanism, a matter of urban design devoid of real innovative principles.<sup>43</sup> Heinrich Wefing summarises the "backward projection" of the European city building plan under the formula of "conjunction of urbanity", a romanticised European city image.<sup>44</sup> Finally coming back to the "Stadtwende", the turn in city planning, in terms of creating urban density on the ecological grounds of sustainability of cities and the aims of a social not only formal reading of the European city, one could ask whether the new "Stadtbürger" is just part of postmodern urbanism, ie. a fashionable new urbanism of privileged urbanites. It is interesting to note, however, that, as the reflexive history discourse moved in the background, the aesthetic dimension of the project of "healing the wounds" in the centre needs yet another strategy in order to fill it with a societal meaning. Berlin as a historical city might as well provide a seductive playground in order to change peoples' attitudes towards living in the city centre, another way of selling the city's past. Since this is an open-ended debate on sociological implications of the European city building plan, I want to come back at the end to its role in culture theories.

Berlin is fascinating as a historical city, maybe *the* historical city in Western Europe, which is by the way a strange development of perceptions of a European capital city which was once considered as an "always new" city without traditions and historical

impressions. The topos is picked up again in so far historicity for us means nowadays something else than two thousand years of monuments and historical traces, but just the opposite of this kind of continuity: living history, its contradictions and discontinuities and- what seems most interesting to me - impressions of hyper reality in urban spaces once new dramatic transformations bring about a series of new readings which reveal, in certain sites, postmodern - unsolvable - issues of how to translate “authentic” historical readings into a definite architectural form. For the reinterpretation of the city centre as a whole many arguments, strategies and criticisms seem heteronomous as to be seen in the conflicting obsessions of urban repair work, the nostalgia for the ground-map and a lost past. This could constitute a form of memory culture, but quickly turns into postmodern mechanism of contemporary historicising planning ideologies. Berlin also has totalising nostalgias, not so different from Moscow. The difference lies more in the accompanying public debate, the justifications the planners had to deliver, the delay in certain decisions such as at the Schlossplatz which is exactly the reason why during the past decade till today Berlin offers not only a spectacle of quasi anonymously orchestrated and accelerated transformations in the era of the cult of the image, but hesitations, exhibitions of contradictions and undefined places stemming from the past which could not be overwritten from one day to the other - and will not be so in the future! They are part of a film like cityscape which, with its new surfaces and asynchronic dimensions, is so attractive for postmodern cultural connoisseurs, film makers, authors, journalists and philosophers.

---

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Sharon Zukin, *The culture of cities* (Cambridge MA.: Blackwell, 1995)

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Strom and Margret Mayer, “The New Berlin,” *German Politics and Society* 16/4 (1998): 122-139

---

<sup>3</sup>Hartmut Häußermann, and Walter Siebel, *Neue Urbanität* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1987)

<sup>4</sup>Hans Stimmann, “Die Textur der Stadt,” in *Z.B. Berlin. Zehn Jahre Transformation und Modernisierung*. Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung (Edition Foyer, 2000), 125

<sup>5</sup>See contributions by Engel, Stimmann and others in *Foyer. Journal for urban development* (Urban 21. Cities in debate) (June 2000)

<sup>6</sup>The Planwerk formulates this concern of “healing the wounds” of the city as follows:

“The first move was to make the Berlin public aware of the problems posed by the present, sadly disparate state of its centre with its stretches of motorway and disconnected fragments of modern urban development.”(*Planwerk Innenstadt*, 1999, English Summary: “Planning concept of the inner city as an urban development motif”, 184)

<sup>7</sup>Svetlana Boym, chapters “Moscow, The Russian Rome”, and “Berlin, The Virtual Capital”, in S. B. *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic book, 2001), 83-119; 173-218

<sup>8</sup>Brian Ladd, “Urban Design, Place Memory, and Resistance to Globalization in Berlin”, paper presented at *Towards a New Urbanism* conference, organised by American Studies HU Berlin and the American Academy Berlin, 29 June to 1 July 2000, kindly sent out to interested participants of the conference

<sup>9</sup>Andreas Huyssen, “Introduction”, *Twilight Memories. Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York; London: Routledge, 1995), 7. See also A. Huyssen, “Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia”, *Public Culture* 12 (1) (2000): 21-38

<sup>10</sup>Huyssen, *ibid.* (2000): 26

<sup>11</sup>A. Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin”, *Critical Inquiry* 24, 1 (1997): 57-81, here 70

<sup>12</sup>, *Ibid.*:71

<sup>13</sup>B. Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin. Confronting German History in the Urban landscape* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997)

<sup>14</sup> This is analysed by Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, “Zumutung Berliner Schloß - und wie man ihr begegnen könnte”, in H.-A. *Die Rettung der Architektur vor sich selbst* (Braunschweig; Wiesbaden: Vieweg, 1995), 100-114. Compare Wolf Jobst Siedler, “Das Schloß lag nicht in Berlin. Berlin war das Schloß”, in W.J. S., *Phoenix im Sand. Glanz und Elend der Hauptstadt* (Berlin Propyläen 1998) (essays 1989-1998), 116-132. Both texts are mentioned in Boym’s chapter on “Berlin, The Virtual Capital”, 181; 184 ff.

<sup>15</sup>Boym, “Berlin, The Virtual Capital”, 184. The English quotes refer to Hoffmann-Axthelm’s essay mentioned above.

---

<sup>16</sup>More recently Helmut Engel, “Constructive Honesty”, *Foyer* (Urban 21. Cities in Debate) “This is about accuracy. If history - in its lexical meaning - is to be made understandable, then the reproduction must be an exact copy of the original otherwise in the worse case we will see the creation of kitsch and fakes.”

<sup>17</sup>See *Der Spiegel* 26/2002, 24 June 2002, and “Ein Schloss soll man nicht klonen”, Interview mit Berlins Kultursenator Flierl *Spiegel online*, 24 May 2002

<sup>18</sup>Werner Sewing, “Planwerk Innenstadt Berlin. Ein Frontbericht aus der Europäischen Stadt, “*Centrum. Jahrbuch Architektur und Stadt* (1997/98): 37

<sup>19</sup> See *Historische Mitte Berlin. Ideen und Entwürfe 1991-2001*. Catalogue of the exhibition, ed. by Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Wohnungswesen (2001)

<sup>20</sup>For Moscow see Boym’s portrait of Moscow as the Third Rome, 96 ff. , and for Berlin see, among others, Alexandra Richie, “Introduction”, *Faust’s Metropolis. A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc. , 1998), here in the metaphor of Faust’s “constant striving without counting the cost”, XVIII

<sup>21</sup>See the contribution by Evgeny Pavlov in this volume

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in the English translation from Boym, “Berlin, The Virtual Capital, 184. I also refer to the original article in German (see footnote 14)

<sup>23</sup> Berlin’s fascination through its aesthetics of absences is, as expressed in Huyssen’s article (see footnote 11) a permanent topos in the architectural debate, often emphasising Libeskind’s architectural “Inexistenzphilosophie”. See also Richard Schustermann, “Ästhetik der Abwesenheit. Der Wert der Leere. Pragmatische Überlegungen zu Berlin”, *Lettre internationale* (Winter 1998), 30 ff., as mentioned in the chapter “Leere” in Philipp Oswalt’s excellent study *Berlin --STADT OHNE FORM* .Strategien einer anderen Architektur (München. London. New York, 2000), 58 ff.

<sup>24</sup>Huyssen, “The voids of Berlin”, 64

<sup>25</sup> Mike Crang and Penny S Travlou, ”The city and topologies of memory, “*Environment and Planning D:: Society and Space* 19 (2001): 161-177, here referring to Harvey (The Condition of Postmodernity) and others, 163

<sup>26</sup>Klaus Hartung, “Doppelgesicht. Über die Paradoxien Berlin”, in *Kursbuch 137* ( Berlin. Metropole) (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1999), 22

<sup>27</sup>Quoted from Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis. Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000), 327

<sup>28</sup>D. Hoffmann-Axthelm, “Berlin: Schönheit der Stadt”, in *Kursbuch 137* , 94

---

<sup>29</sup>Gerwin Zohlen, "Introduction", *Berlin - offene Stadt*. Vol. 2 *Die Erneuerung seit 1989*. (Ed. by Berliner Festspiele und Architektenkammer Berlin. Berlin: Nicolai, 1999), 15

<sup>30</sup>Werner Sewing, "Heart, Artificial Heart, or Theme park? Trying to make sense of Potsdamer Platz", in *Der Potsdamer Platz. Urban Architecture for a new Berlin*. (German and English), ed. by Ymin von Rauch and Jochen Visscher (Jovis Verlagsbüro 2000), 47-58

<sup>31</sup>The following details are taken from W Sewing, "Planwerk Innenstadt Berlin": 37-48 (see footnote 18), as well as from Sewing's more detailed study "Steinernes Berlin. Soziologische Überlegungen zur aktuellen Architekturkontroverse," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift. Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen Weimar -Universität*, 40/3 (1994): 57-71

<sup>32</sup>H. Häußermann, "Social transformation of urban space in Berlin since 1990", in *Cities in Transformation - Transformations in Cities. Social and Symbolic Change of Urban Space*, ed. by O. Källtorp, I. Elander, O. Ericson, M. Franzén (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1997), 80-97, here 95

<sup>33</sup>Oswalt, *Berlin --STADT OHNE FORM*, 94

<sup>34</sup>H. Stimmann, "Berlin nach der Wende: Experimente mit der Tradition des europäischen Städtebaus", in *Berlin die Hauptstadt. Vergangenheit und Zukunft einer europäischen Metropole*, ed. by Werner Süß; Ralf Rytlewski (Berlin: Nicolai, 1999), 547

<sup>35</sup>See Sewing, "Steinernes Berlin", 61

<sup>36</sup>ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Oswalt, *Berlin -STADT OHNE FORM*, 95. One should mention that Oswalt is very critical of historical mythologisation in the Inner City Rebuilding Plan in the chapter "simulation" of his book and of the conservative planning ideals in Berlin in the 90s in general; yet he does not offer straightforward alternatives which could enable a true reflection of history. Rather does he opt for a creative contemporary architecture which could relate to Berlin's "eccentricity", the city's potential of collisions, discontinuities, unfinishedness, abrupt modernisations, temporary uses, etc.

<sup>38</sup>Michael Mönninger, "Rückkehr in die Stadt. Politik und Architektur in Berlin", in *Berlin - offene Stadt*. Vol. 2, 38-53, here 43. For "Berlinish" architecture see also Stimmann's concept for the Friedrichstadt. Stimmann, "Kritische Rekonstruktion und steinerne Architektur für die Innenstadt", in *Neue berlinische Architektur - eine Debatte*, ed. by Annegret Burg. Senatsverwaltung für Bau- und Wohnungswesen (Berlin, Basel, Boston: Birkhäuser1994), 107-122

<sup>39</sup>Stimmann, "Berlin nach der Wende", 543-558

---

<sup>40</sup>See the famous architectural theory by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage city* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1978). Stimmann's argumentation for reading the "texture of the city" also refers this postmodern theory. ("Die Texture der Stadt," in *Z.B. Berlin*, 125)

<sup>41</sup>Stimmann, "The texture of the city. A contribution of Germany to the Architectural Biennial in Venice. Berlin's inner city history from 1840 up to the present day", *Foyer* (Urban 21. Cities in debate): 10

<sup>42</sup>Oswalt, *Berlin --STADT OHNE FORM*, 95

<sup>43</sup>Sewing, "Steinernes Berlin", 70

<sup>44</sup>Heinrich Wefing, "Berlin", in *Kursbuch Stadt. Stadtleben und Stadtkultur an der Jahrtausendwende* (DVA 1999), 143-159