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Making up meanings in a capital city: power, memory and monuments in Berlin

Contemporary writing on cities often focus on their position within wider global networks and explore their role as economic centres or nodes of one sort or another (see, e.g., Begg 2002, Castells 2000, Sassen 1994, Taylor 2004) and there is no doubt that these approaches provide important insights on contemporary urban development, particularly in an era of globalisation. But there is also, as Amin and Thrift (2002) suggest, a danger of underplaying the significance of other aspects of the experience which helps to define cities.

Here we shall explore some of the ways in which the status of some major cities as ‘capital cities’ may play a significant part in shaping them. The choice of capital cities as a focus is not an arbitrary one, for several reasons. First, their existence implies a counterposition to simple accounts of globalisation – in principle, at least, capital cities are defined in terms of their role within nations or the construction of nations, even if those nations are themselves constrained to find a role within a globalising world. Second, recent decades have seen the creation of a range of ‘new’ capital cities of one sort or another, most clearly alongside the creation of new nation states, particularly – but not only – in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia and former Soviet Union. The last ten years have seen the emergence of Cardiff and Edinburgh as capitals of newly devolved territories within the UK, in Europe Brussels is taking on many of the features traditionally associated with capital cities as it is positioned as the centre of the European Union (Baeten 2003), and Berlin has been constructing itself as the capital city of a unified Germany since the early 1990s (Cochrane and Passmore 2001). Third, capital cities fit uneasily with the dominant model of the entrepreneurial city fostered by those promoting ‘urban renaissance’ as a

key strategy of global neoliberalism. The OECD makes this explicit, arguing that, while capital cities may have some competitive strengths, they also exhibit fundamental flaws. According to the OECD the main problems are that ‘generous’ government salary packages and terms and conditions make it difficult for others – particularly ‘start-ups’ - to compete for workers; that able young people are attracted by the ‘cachet’ of government employment, because of its high status; and that ‘in capital cities the mentality of the population is often that of the bureaucrat, rather than that of the entrepreneur’ (OECD 2003, p. 157).

Despite the contemporary emphasis on global networks and the hierarchies associated with them, capital cities still have a significant role in shaping national urban and regional relations (and hierarchies). So, for example, Amin et al (2003) have effectively highlighted the significance of London’s capital city role in defining the South East of England and shaping regional inequality in the UK. Similarly, although this is not an issue raised directly in their review of major urban development projects, seven of the nine case study cities considered by Moulaert et al (2003) are ‘capital cities’ and several of the projects discussed arise from the capital city status of the locations and help to reinforce that status.

Making up the new Berlin

Berlin has already been the subject of substantial analysis, largely focused on its potential repositioning as a major European city after years of division. The popular and official euphoria of the early 1990s about what was possible suggested that Berlin was becoming or might become a ‘global city’ or a ‘world city’ (see, e.g.,

Wechselberg 2000, pp. 74-75). This wishful thinking has been thoroughly and systematically demolished in a series of publications by Krätke (2001, 2004) and Krätke and Börst (2000. See also Häußermann and Kapphan 2000). The hopes were not and could not be realised in practice. Traditional industries declined and were not replaced while new service jobs did not come as fast as expected or predicted. Meanwhile the office building boom that was encouraged through the 1990s, led to 'the making of Germany's largest pile of unoccupied office space' (Krätke 2004, p. 523).

As well as making it clear just how distant the initial dreams of world city status for the city have become, Krätke and Börst (2000) go further to question the optimism of the planners and others who see it as an emergent metropolitan service centre. And they highlight the ways in which social segregation is accelerating, as a combination of gentrification, suburbanisation, public policy and economic pressures reinforces existing divisions and builds new ones (Krätke and Börst 2000, Ch. 6. See also Häußermann and Kapphan 2000, Chs. 6 and 9). Although Krätke identifies a significant concentration of creative talent in Berlin's culture and media industries he remains sceptical of the city's ability to take advantage of this (Krätke 2004).

The arguments developed by Krätke and Borst are overwhelmingly persuasive, but Berlin also offers a particularly instructive case through which the nature of capital city building may be explored. It has been at the centre of continuous and continuing debate about its role in a newly (re)unified Germany, whose outcomes and intensity find a clear expression in the city's emergent urban landscape.

Berlin was given a central role within the wider national symbolism of German state policy in the 1990s. The 'new' Berlin was not only to be the home of the German government, but also, in the words of its then Bürgermeister, the 'workshop of German unity' (Diepgen 1995, p. 52). Berlin was presented as a key element in the process of creating a united Germany, of rediscovering a wider German nationhood (see also Gittus 2002). To create such a feeling, argued Diepgen (1995, p. 52), the German people needed not just a flag and a national anthem, but also a fully functioning capital city, which helped to define Germany as a liberal, Western country albeit one that provided some sort of bridge to Central and Eastern Europe.

The debate at the start of the 1990s around the move of the capital from Bonn to Berlin highlighted tensions over the ways in which the German nation was understood. This was no glorious reaffirmation of the decision of the Bundestag in 1949 that the government's 'supreme organs' would return to Berlin as capital as soon as free elections had been held throughout Germany. On the contrary, in 1991 the vote to move achieved only a small majority in the Bundestag, reflecting the shift of political and economic power (as well as population) towards the West of the country. Apart from the self-interest of those more or less directly affected by the move, it was argued that the creation of an old-style national capital was inappropriate for a pluralist society, and might encourage centralising tendencies and even authoritarian attitudes. Berlin it was suggested was not only too far from the heart of the European Union and the core of the German economy but also from the new cosmopolitan (even post nationalist) Germany (see, e.g., von Beyme 1995).

Habermas (1995) was among those particularly concerned about the ‘normalisation’ promised by the construction of a ‘Berlin’ republic (to replace the ‘Bonn’ republic), warning that it might threaten Germany’s pluralist polity. He argues that Germany’s post war liberal culture was built on the fundamental break with ‘normality’ represented by War and, indeed, the Holocaust – it is precisely ‘because of Auschwitz’, he maintains, and not despite it, that the new Germany could be built (Habermas 1995, p. 170). Anything that, in effect, redefines the Hitler period as an aberration in some otherwise ‘normal’ process of development, he argues, may also threaten the existing liberal culture. For Habermas the rediscovery of some sort of ‘continuity’ stretching back to the Bismarck era would be a threat to the more open, pluralist regime constructed after 1945.

One of the aims of this paper, therefore, is to explore the role of Berlin in the making of the Berliner Republic and the ways in which Berlin is defined (and defines itself) within that Republic. It is in this context that Ladd’s metaphor, highlighting the way in which Berlin is haunted by ‘the ghosts’ of its history as they are expressed in its urban landscape, is particularly powerful (Ladd 1997). The making up of the new Berlin as capital city is dominated by the question of how to reinterpret, and re-imagine its history: it is a city of memorials and of deliberate absences; of remembering and of forgetting, or trying to forget; of reshaping the past and of trying to build a new future. The sections that follow, focus on just two aspects of this process - the building of Berlin as a space of government and political power and the politics of memorialising, first in confronting the experience of Nazism and second in dealing with the legacies of the DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik – East Germany).

The new architecture of power

A major new 'federal quarter' is being created through the realisation of plans for a chain of new buildings stretching across the River Spree and passing through the Northern section of the Tiergarten (Berlin's centrally located park). It is intended to link the two parts of the city with a 'chain' of federal buildings (the so-called 'Band des Bundes'), from the Chancellery Garden and Department at one end, to an office building for offices of the Bundestag at the other (Wise 1998, pp. 57-63). As Marcuse (1999, p. 335) notes, the government area is being constructed in ways that reflect and reinforce 'the power and wealth of the German state' but this is by no means a straightforward process. For the political elite the new Germany – and its new capital – offers the opportunity to move on from the understated, almost apologetic, national identity associated with Bonn towards another, more confident, one, which nevertheless somehow eschews the symbols of arrogance and authoritarianism. According to Schultes, the planner of new quarter, the task is to 'correctly gauge the power of the statement, so that it is not pompous, so that it does not look like a so-called fat Germany'. However, he stresses, 'This is no longer understatement', since the 'republic must show its colours' (quoted in Wise 1998, pp. 67-73).

The implications of this can be seen in the debates surrounding two particular buildings – the new Chancellery and the renewed Reichstag, as home for the Bundestag. Despite popular support for a classically inspired design for the Chancellery, which Wise (1998, p. 67) describes as a 'highly formal colonnaded palace', it was finally decided to accept a more modernist design by Schultes. The

arguments mobilised by those who supported the choice, included the view that the neo-classical design had a 'feudal air', which was unsuitable as 'an expression of a pluralist, democratic polity'. One critic (a Social Democratic politician) argued that it was too close to the vision of Hitler's architect, Albert Speer, and maintained that, in Germany, classicism was no longer an acceptable architectural form because of its co-option by Hitler, and similar points were made by other architectural critics. Finally, the Chancellor in announcing the decision to give the brief to Schultes, emphasised the importance of having architecture that enhanced Germany's external image as a pluralist and democratic society, by radiating 'confidence, modesty, and dignity' (Wise 1998, p. 72).

In the case of the Reichstag, Foster Associates - rather than a German firm - were given the brief to transform it into the parliament of a unified and democratic Germany. The symbolism is heavy: the original design that won the competition 'placed a vast canopy over it, as though to insulate it from the past. It was a gesture no historically aware German could fail to understand, retaining an auspicious national emblem, but giving it a new meaning' (Pawley 1997, p. 38). The symbolism of Berlin, however, is rarely quite as simple as this suggests. Hitler, and his architect Speer, also had a vision of a massive dome to define their new city of Germania, which was intended to replace the dangerously cosmopolitan (Marxist and Jewish) Berlin (Hall 1996, pp. 197-200).

The final version of the Reichstag dome is more modest than what was initially proposed - it does not stretch beyond the borders of the old building and is, instead, neatly contained within it - but the building has been transformed by the introduction

of a glass cupola to replace the dome destroyed in the 1933 fire. And the image of German citizens processing through the cupola and (in principle at least) looking down on the legislators is seen to offer the message of a new – democratic – Germany. The internal reshaping was equally significant, both because of the way in which it opened up previously enclosed spaces and the way in which the graffiti left by Soviet soldiers was uncovered and left on display. The ‘Financial Times’ commented at the time that the restructuring was ‘intended to bring transparency to the inner workings of democracy’ (FT 17/18 April 1999). The ceremony held for the formal reopening of the Reichstag building as the new home of the Bundestag on the 19th April 1999 was deliberately low key, with little celebration, without even the playing of the national anthem, and no space for grandiose statements (Sontheimer 1999, pp. 15-18).

INSERT Figure 1 The Reichstag

INSERT Figure 2 The Chancellory

The (temporary) monumentalising of the Reichstag building through its wrapping by Christo and Jeanne-Claude in 1995 was also part of the process of reclaiming it as a popular symbol. Huyssen (2003, pp. 32-36) argues strongly that, paradoxically, the veiling of the building in massive sheets of polypropylene is best understood as a strategy intended ‘to make visible, to unveil, to reveal what was hidden when it was visible’ (Huyssen 2003, p. 36). The wrapping opened up a ‘new layer of public memory,’ distinct from the authoritarian past, through ‘a genuinely popular event, of thousands of people milling around the building day after day, celebrating a symbol of German democracy in all its fragility and transitoriness’. In other words, concludes

Huyssen, this was a 'monument to democratic culture instead of a demonstration of state power' (Huyssen 2003, p. 36). It helped to undermine the significance of the words inscribed above the portal - 'Dem Deutschen Volke', 'to the German people' - an apparently innocent phrase but one which makes it clear that the building was not envisaged as the home of a democratic or constitutional monarchy, but was, rather, a gift from on high to the German people.

Yet national politicians have also intervened to ensure that the various government buildings and their disposition are sufficiently impressive and separate from the other aspects of Berlin to reflect the powerful status of the politicians, their senior civil servants and diplomats (Häußermann and Strom 1994, p. 343, Wise 1998). The central area of Berlin is being redefined to include a wide range of government ministries, embassies, and party offices. These are making full use of the complex architectural legacies of power. Some are tacitly assumed to be less problematic than others. So, for example, with little debate the Bundesrat has been housed in the building of the old Prussian parliament, and the Russians have simply taken over the old Soviet embassy close to the Brandenburger Tor, merely symbolically removing the bust of Lenin. Elsewhere the issues have been rather more contentious. So, for example, the Nazi period Reichsbank is being used as the home of the Foreign Ministry and Göring's Air Ministry now serves as the Ministry of Finance.

The reuse of these buildings has raised fundamental issues. Attempts have been made to find ways of sanitising the past through refurbishment (e.g. opening them up to more light and removing material and design intended to 'humble', 'browbeat' or intimidate visitors), and some commentators have stressed that acknowledging their

history is important as a continuing message to the state employees working in them (Wise 1998, pp. 89-107). In practice, the outcome remains ambiguous and uncertain – these are still spaces of power and retain some of the heaviness associated with that, even if the explicit symbols of Nazism (as well as communism, since these buildings were also used by the East German regime) have been removed, more open space has been created and new furniture inserted (with Eames and Le Corbusier chairs replacing heavy leather in the public rooms of the new Foreign Ministry). In the case of the Finance Ministry, an extension dominated by glass has been used to remodel the entrance way. Although the architect responsible for the refurbishment of the Foreign Ministry argues that ‘We’re trying to show the building like a book of history where you can read the pages that show what happened already, and we just add a few pages and write our own story’ (quoted in Wise 1998, p. 106), some of the older pages are being put in rather different frames, which serves to change their meaning.

Although some DDR buildings are also being reused for official purposes (following major external and internal restructuring), the contrast with the way in which that regime’s prestige government buildings are being reworked and the use of those bequeathed from the Nazi period is striking. With the exception of the Council of the State building on Schlossplatz, which was even – briefly - occupied by Helmut Kohl, most are being sanitised out of recognisable existence. The experience of the Palace of the Republic is discussed more fully below, but one of the first buildings to be pulled down (in 1995) was the DDR’s foreign ministry building (itself erected on the site of Schinkel’s Bauakademie, following its demolition at the start of the 1960s).

The politics of power and identity have run through the wider planning of development in the city, particularly its centre (see, e.g. Lenhart 2001) and the culture wars that have characterised debates around new architecture in Berlin have been widely noted (see, e.g., discussion in Balfour 1995, Cochrane and Passmore 2001). These are reflected in a tension between the proponents of ‘critical reconstruction’ (including Hans Stimman, the city’s Senator for Building through much of the 1990s) and the proponents of modernist (or post-modernist) style (see, e.g., Häußermann 1996, p. 492, von Beyme 1996, p. 315). Schinkel’s spare neo-classical style (to be seen, for example, in the lines of the Altes Museum) offers an architectural language free of the baggage of Nazism and communism and provides an acceptable national heritage on which it is possible to draw in redefining Berlin as capital of a civilised – a ‘normal’ - nation. Kleihues (one of the leading Berlin architects) argues that reference back to the architecture of the eighteenth century also offers a means of relating back to the perceived humanism of the era (interview, 1999). However, as Huyssen notes ‘ Prescriptions such as city block building, traditional window facades, a uniform height of twenty two metres...and building in stone are all vigorously defended against all the evidence that such traditionalism is wholly imaginary,’ since, ‘the most stone you’d get is a thin stone veneer covering the concrete skeleton underneath’ (Huyssen 2003, p. 61). ‘The hidden object of Stimman’s moralizing protest is Weimar Berlin’, when, he argues, modernism was defined as aping ‘America’ – and Berlin sought to define itself as ‘Chicago on the Spree... The desired image is decidedly pre-1914’ (Huyssen 2003, p. 62).

The extent of the reference back to forms of Prussianism (something of which the orthodox architects of the new Berlin have been accused) during the building boom of

the 1990s remained incomplete, however, as the debates around the development of the government quarter confirm. The retreat into the building of simulacra of the past has certainly accelerated in recent years - across the Square from the Palace of the Republic (at 1 Unter den Linden) Bertelsmann have already constructed their own headquarters building in the style of the eighteenth/nineteenth century building that once stood on the site, but with offices inside styled according to the needs of the early 21st century. Meanwhile Schinkel's Bauakademie, behind the Bertelsmann offices, too, is being rebuilt as the home of a new international architectural academy (Internationale Bauakademie). The Hotel Adlon at the other end of Unter den Linden is a copy of the luxury hotel that stood on the site before the War and, with a few exceptions, the Pariser Platz (the square facing the Brandenburger Tor) draws overwhelmingly on the style of the past, at least as far as the external cladding is concerned.

INSERT Figure 3 Bertelsmann Offices, 1 Unter den Linden

INSERT Figure 4 Reconstructing Schinkel's Bauakademie

However, the Potsdamer Platz, whose buildings (with the exception of the Sony Centre and the DB tower) follow many of the rules on line and stone, and whose street lay out explicitly refers back to the past, too, can – at most – be seen as a contemporary interpretation of the nineteenth century (and perhaps the 1920s). It was built across an area sterilised by a combination of Hitler's unrealised plans for a new city, and the only things preserved were a restaurant (Haus Huth) and some of the interior rooms of the old Esplanade hotel (dating from 1908), but now incorporated into the Sony complex. Ladd describes the process as an attempt to achieve 'a glossy

modernity without the subversive sexuality of the 1920s or the political terror of the 1930s' (Ladd 1997, p. 120). He explains that, 'Whereas the past is visible and palpable in so many other sites across the city...the layers of history are not on display here... The new masters of Potsdamer Platz invoke the past, but not in the subversive and provocative ways it is done elsewhere in Berlin. This history is much closer to the Disney version' (Ladd 2004, p. 132). Even here, however, in the midst of the temples to consumption, entertainment and corporate power, there is a small reminder of the past in the form of a modest monument to Karl Liebknecht, just outside the U-Bahn station and originally planned by the DDR regime in the early 1960s (before the Wall went up), as the base of a much bigger monument, but now finally placed there by the PDS controlled local council.

INSERT Figure 5 Sony Centre

INSERT Figure 6 Remains of Hotel Esplanade in Sony Centre

INSERT Figure 7 Potsdamer Platz

INSERT Figure 8 Memorial to Karl Liebknecht, Potsdamer Platz

Memorials and memorialising: forgetfulness and forgetting

Berlin is a city of paradox – a city of monuments and memorials and of absences.

This may sometimes amount to the same thing, in sense that capturing something in stone or other monumental form may offer a means of sanitising the memory, making it safe, to allow a process of forgetting or marginalising. It could be argued 'that there is nothing as invisible as a monument,' and that, 'Berlin...is opting for invisibility.

The more monuments there are, the more the past becomes invisible, and the easier it

is to forget: redemption, thus, through forgetting' (Huysen 2003, p. 32. See also Marcuse 1999).

Berlin is scattered with the memorials of the military might of the Prussian state and the German empire it founded. Ladd (2004) identifies and charts them all. The great monuments, such as the Siegesäule (Victory Column) at the heart of the Tiergarten, the Kreuzberg monument (commemorating victory over Napoleon) and even the Brandenburger Tor are hard to ignore, even if they have increasingly been reclaimed and given different meanings – as the focus of the Love Parade or in the firework celebrations of New Year that stretch from Brandenburger Tor to the Siegesäule. And such monuments may at least be seen as safely historical, almost acceptable – after all it would be hard to miss similar expressions of power (and empire – see, e.g., Driver and Gilbert 2003) in the capital cities of most of Germany's European neighbours – even if the Siegesäule was moved to its current imposing position as the focus of the Grosser Stern by the Nazis in 1938.

But other military monuments fit less easily into the landscape of a 'normalised' Berlin, since the memories of Soviet domination have also found their expression in stone and marble. One condition of the departure of Soviet troops from Berlin was that the Soviet war memorials would be maintained, and the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park, with its massive Stalinist structures it remains there inviolate, visited by the occasional tourist. A second memorial, on a slightly smaller scale, is more centrally located in the Tiergarten, incorporating tanks and other heavy weapons, has historically received rather more attention from the local population, attracting the epithet 'tomb of the unknown rapist' or 'tomb of the unknown plunderer' (Ladd

2004). The German-Russian museum, where the German capitulation was signed has replaced the DDR era Soviet military museum, or ‘Museum of the Unconditional Surrender of Fascist Germany in the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945’. Following work by a joint Russian-German commission it was re-opened in 1995, with exhibitions on Nazi extermination policy and the crimes of the Wehrmacht in the occupied zones, as well as documenting the fate of Soviet prisoners of war and forced labourers (Endlich 2003, p. 257).

INSERT Figure 9 Soviet War Memorial Treptower Park

INSERT Figure 10 Soviet War Memorial Treptower Park

There is, of course, nowhere in Berlin where the experience of the city and its citizens in the last days of the War is memorialised, despite the well recorded history of brutalisation and large scale destruction (see, e.g. Beevor 2003). It’s the Nazi period and that of the DDR that present the most serious challenges for the new Berlin and the new Germany. How should the former be acknowledged – particularly the Holocaust - and the latter dealt with? Both are hard to incorporate into what Till has called ‘the cultural politics of normalisation’ (Till 1999, p. 269)

Facing up to Nazism

One strategy for engaging with the legacies of Nazism has been to remove the most obvious symbols and to find ways of reusing what has been left behind – this (as discussed above) has been the approach adopted in the case of some government buildings. Tempelhof airport, provides another example. It has remained in use as an

airport (for some time as the US military airport) and been sanctified by the placing of a memorial to the Berlin Airlift of the 1940s in the square that it faces. Tempelhof has been successfully domesticated as a quaint relic from aviation history, rather than a symbol of Nazi modernity and its commitment to air power.

The Olympia Stadion to the west of the city is a more difficult case. It was built for the 1936 Olympics and is now the ground used by Hertha Berlin for their games in the Bundesliga. It will be used for the final of the World Cup in 2006. However, despite Ladd's suggestion that it could be seen as representing a 'conservative style of modern architecture that predates the Third Reich' (Ladd 1997, p.142), it is hard to view its stark if rather bombastic beauty without reflecting on the power embodied in that architecture (Rürup 1996). Its slabs of limestone in monumental classical forms and the oversize statues distributed around its grounds continue to overpower the human scale.

INSERT Figure 11 Tempelhof Airport

INSERT Figure 12 Olympia Stadion

INSERT Fig 13 Statues in Olympia Stadion

INSERT Figure 14 The location of the Führerbunker

Other symbols of Nazi power have simply disappeared – literally buried, like the notorious People's Court under Potsdamer Platz and the Führerbunker, where Hitler saw out the last days of the war before committing suicide, beneath a car park at the rear of some DDR era flats in the Wilhelmstrasse. It is an unspoken absence that

somehow reinforces the memory of the Hitler period, by emphasising the power of myth, an expression of the fear that the bunker might become an object of pilgrimage.

Another way of responding is to memorialise, to build monuments and museums.

Sachsenhausen (a former concentration camp just outside Berlin) has been maintained as a state memorial, although little has been invested in developing it as a major site of remembrance; the synagogue in the Oranienburger Strasse, largely destroyed during Kristallnacht in 1938, has been lovingly restored; in Rosenthaler Strasse the brush-making workshop operated by Otto Weidt commemorates Berlin's own (rather less successful) Schindler. A sign in the Rosenstrasse commemorates the resistance of a group of 'Aryan' women married to Jewish men to their deportation. Outside U-Bahn stations in the West it is still common to find modest displays reminding people of the camps and a plaque in the entrance to U-Bahnhof Nollendorfplatz memorialises the gay victims of Nazism. A small, if powerful, memorial to the book-burning by Nazi students in 1933 is to be found in the middle of Bebelplatz, opposite Humboldt University, from whose library most of the books were taken.

More dramatic than any of these, however, is the Jewish museum (designed by Daniel Libeskind) opened in 2001. Libeskind summarises the basic ideas that underpinned his design: 'first, the impossibility of understanding the history of Berlin without understanding the enormous intellectual, economic, and cultural contribution made by its Jewish citizens; second the necessity to integrate the meaning of the Holocaust, both physically and spiritually, into the consciousness and memory of the city of Berlin; third, that only through acknowledging and incorporating this erasure and void of Berlin's Jewish life can the history of Berlin and Europe have a human future'

(Libeskind 1999, p. 10). Huyssen takes this further to argue that ‘Libeskind’s museum is the only project... that explicitly articulates issues of national and local history in ways pertinent to post-unification Germany. In its spatial emphasis on the radical ruptures, discontinuities, and fractures of German and German-Jewish history, it stands in opposition to the critical reconstructionists’ attempts to create a seamless continuity with a pre-1914 national past that would erase memories of Weimar, Nazi and GDR architecture in the process’ (Huyssen 2003, p. 71).

The most high profile monument is the ‘Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe’ on land between the Brandenburger Tor and Potsdamer Platz (and coincidentally not far from the site of the Führerbunker), designed by the US architect Peter Eisenman due for completion in 2005. A popular campaign to build the monument first developed in West Germany in the late 1980s and was later taken up by the Kohl government, although it is coming to fruition under Schröder. There is obviously a powerful argument for having a memorial, but the scale and the nature of the monument being built suggests that this is seen as a means of drawing a line under the past. There is a danger that such memorial becomes the site of official mourning, while the possibility of any individual connection with the daily detail of oppression and atrocity simply gets lost. The contrast with the Libeskind Museum, which ‘opens a space for remembrance to be articulated and read between the lines’ (Huyssen 2003, p. 69) rather than imposing a single totalising message, is hard to ignore (see also Marcuse 1999).

INSERT Figure 15 The Jewish Museum

INSERT Figure 16 Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

INSERT Figure 17 Topography of Terror exhibition

Capturing the daily detail, charting the process of forced labour, torture and finally industrialised killing, is more difficult. But attempts have also been made to do this. The Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz - the site of the conference where the decisions on pursuing 'the final solution to the Jewish question' were made - was opened in 1992, to commemorate the bureaucratic banality of mass murder – the accumulation of decisions made by men in suits as much as those in uniform. Like Sachsenhausen, however, it is on the edges of the city, so only those committed to making the pilgrimage will go there. Dealing with the remnants of Nazi power in the central parts of the city is rather more of a challenge. This can be illustrated in the debates that took place over the complex of buildings on the Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände where the head offices of the SS and the Gestapo were based.

The buildings included an eighteenth century palace refurbished and reshaped by Schinkel in the nineteenth century, and were severely damaged during the War. Instead of looking for ways of restoring them (even the palace) they were demolished by the West Berlin government in 1949, removing buildings that would have been a constant reminder of the police terror imposed by the Gestapo and the plans of the SS for racial cleansing. However, the area was preserved in undeveloped form by the Wall that marked its boundary and by the early 1980s it had been agreed that some sort of memorial was needed on the site, becoming the focus of a significant citizen's movement – the 'Active Museum of Fascism and Resistance in Berlin' – which undertook a process of contemporary popular archaeology, finding much more than might have been expected, including foundations and cells. The celebration of

Berlin's 750th anniversary in 1987 was marked by a major historical exhibition in the neighbouring and recently refurbished Martin-Gropius-Bau, and became the moment in which a temporary open air exhibition – 'Topography of Terror' - was opened. The 'temporary' exhibition has survived to become permanent and plans are now underway to build a 'documentation centre' close to it (Ladd 1997, pp. 154-167).

The exhibition incorporates a series of display boards, setting out the stories of some of those held in the cells, as well as those who worked there, exploring 'the connections between Nazi repression and German society by examining the terror's geographical embeddedness in Berlin' (Ladd 1997, p. 163). This is a museum about the 'perpetrators' as much as the 'victims' and those responsible have been concerned to keep it as 'an open wound' in the centre of the city encouraging engagement and confrontation (Ladd 1997, pp. 162,167, Rürup 1999). As the authors of one study of the site argue:

The place of terror and of forgetting must become a place of awareness and confrontation. That certainly cannot be achieved with a 'monument' in the nineteenth-century tradition. Characteristic of a monument is the reduction of a complex development to a single aspect that the monument's sponsors have identified as the most important. Such a monument is thus the result of a selection; it prevents the observer's own confrontation with the complex historical event. Insofar as the monument narrows one's perception and dictates the conclusions one draws from it, it is authoritarian (Billiger et al 1983, p. 33, quoted in Ladd 1997, pp. 167-168).

Learning to live with the DDR

If handling the Nazi period has represented one challenge for the new Berlin, then dealing with the legacy of the DDR has offered a parallel one. If the former is too often about the victims, there is a danger that the latter sometimes seems too concerned to represent Germans as victims. Examples of such approaches are to be found in the STASI museum and the maintenance of Stasi cells as memorial in Hohenschönhausen, but these remain relatively understated, one at the back of Unter den Linden, the other close to an East Berlin housing estate far off the main tourist routes, even for German visitors. However, the privately run Haus am Checkpoint Charlie (popularly known as the ‘Mauermuseum’) located at the former border crossing point, has a significantly higher profile and is less restrained. It was the third most visited museum in Berlin in 2000 (after the Pergamon and – jointly – the Prussian palaces) (Baumunk 2003, pp. 109) and displays a wide range of memorabilia associated with those seeking to escape from the DDR into West Berlin, from false bottomed cars to pictures of members of the Volkspolizei shooting those trying to make it across the wasteland between East and West. In a strange echo of Eisenman’s ‘Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe’ a section of the wall has been rebuilt close to the Museum, all in white and without any of the familiar graffiti, but on the East German side full of crosses memorialising those (hundreds) who were killed while attempting to reach the West.

INSERT Figure 18 Haus am Checkpoint Charlie

INSERT Figure 19 Rebuilt Wall and commemorative crosses, Haus am Checkpoint
Charlie

Yet this is not the dominant form of memorialising, remembering or forgetting. Instead that is far more confused and uncertain, not least because it is not always how former residents of the DDR themselves wish to be portrayed or how they wish to remember their time as citizens of the ‘other’ Germany. This ambivalence was captured in the film ‘Goodbye Lenin’, with its many shots concentrated around the Alexanderplatz and the Karl-Marx Allee, much of which is itself now listed as a ‘monument’ and subject to renovation and renewal. The Alexanderturm (the television tower initially intended as a symbol of the modernity of DDR technology) has instead become a ubiquitous symbol of the united city. The East German Ampelmann (pedestrian crossing symbol) with his hat and cosy rotundity was first targeted for removal, but has now begun to spread into to the West of the city. Even the PDS (the Party of Democratic Socialism – successor party to the ruling party of the DDR) was strong enough to form a ‘Red-Red’ coalition with the SPD (Social Democrats) to govern the city in 2001 (McKay 2002).

The destruction of the Wall has been thorough and its absences are no longer easy to identify – most obviously, perhaps, the new Potsdamer Platz occupies space that was ‘no-man’s land’ and across which the Wall passed. In some places there are red lines in the road to mark where the Wall was, but more often, its position is simply no longer marked and roads have opened up where previously physical division was apparent (see, e.g., Bouvy 2002, whose photographs chart the Wall’s absence).

Fragments remain, but have largely been domesticated, e.g. in a small display outside

the Märkisches Museum, along the side of the ‘Topography of Terror’ exhibition and in the rather longer display of (post unification) wall art incorporated in the East Side Gallery, which stretches between the Ostbahnhof and Warschauer Strasse along the side of the River Spree.

INSERT Figure 20 The Alexanderturm

INSERT Figure 21 Section of the East-Side Gallery

INSERT Figure 22 Karl Marx Bookshop in Karl-Marx-Allee

In the early years after reunification steps were taken to remove many symbols and monuments of the DDR regime. One early initiative was to remove a series of DDR memorials and to rename a number of streets, celebrating the politicians of the old regime – so, for example, Wilhelm-Pieck-Strasse became Torstrasse. The issue of renaming has been explored by Sophie Calle (the French artist) in her work ‘The Detachment’. She returns to a number of the places where symbols have been removed and asks passers-by what they make of the absences that have resulted - ‘I photographed the absence and replaced the missing monuments with their memories’ (Calle, undated, p. 7). The responses are ambivalent and uncertain, sometimes contradictory. In a few cases the absences are barely noticed; in some the symbols were for granted as part of daily life; for others the memories evoked remain powerful.

In the case of the Neue Wache (war memorial in Unter den Linden), for example, for some the memories of the now absent honour guard were positive – ‘These were men who represented Germans in the best possible way’ – for others it was the absurd that

remained in the memory – ‘Like mechanical puppets, they kicked up their free legs and waved their arms’. Till (1999) charts the debates around the redefinition and redesign of the *Neue Wache* in the first half of the 1990s. In the 1950s, the building was appropriated by the East German state to become a memorial to the victims of fascism, by the late 1960s being ‘transformed into a secular altar to anti-fascism’ helping to sustain the official myth of the GDR as ‘a state dedicated to fighting fascism’ (Till 1999, p. 261). After reunification, there was a new appropriation, as the memorial was redesigned and rededicated to the victims of war and tyranny – ‘the two World Wars and the two dictatorships’ (Till 1999, p. 262). In other words, it celebrated the reunification of Germany on the terms given by the West, while also claiming to be a unified war memorial.

One of the best known architectural controversies stretches across the years since 1989 and focuses on plans for the Palace of the Republic built by the GDR on the site of the old imperial Stadschloß, which was demolished in 1950. For Richie (1998, p. xli) the Palace of the Republic, ‘is a perfect symbol of the GDR, epitomising the lack of creativity, the dearth of compassion and insensitivity to the past which characterized the bankrupt regime’. By contrast, the same building’s symbolism is interpreted quite differently by Marcuse (1999, p. 335): ‘In fact the Palace of the Republic is a modernist building... It contained nine theatres, multiple restaurants and the legislative, but not the executive of or party, organs of the state and was...quite a popular and accessible building to the people of East Berlin’.

The DDR insignia hung over the entrance and its central symbol (of hammer and dividers) was removed soon after reunification, in much the same way as the swastika

was removed from the buildings of the 1930s after 1945. Again the comments drawn out by Calle are significant. Some are dismissive of the decoration – ‘A symbolism contrived by bureaucrats. Not of great interest to me’ – but more question its removal: ‘I don’t think we need to preserve and reconstruct everything. We could just leave things as they are. As traces. Rather than make way for Coca-Cola signs’... ‘There’s a resistance in that hole. In my mind it’s still there. Like a ghost I see it there’... ‘The instruments of the utopia have now disappeared. All that’s left is the utopia, but an empty one. We only see the void’ (Calle, undated, pp. 26-27).

INSERT Figure 23 Looking out of the Palace of the Republic through the ‘ghost’ of the DDR insignia

INSERT Figure 21 Palace of the Republic as Volkspalast 2004

In the early 1990s, the governing Christian Democrat leadership in Berlin was committed to demolishing the Palace and rebuilding the Stadtschloß on the site, although it did not have the resources to do so itself. The symbolism was clear, however, and for a long time the frontage was covered by plastic sheeting on which the image of the Stadtschloss was printed. The contrast with the wrapping of the Reichstag in neutral colours – opening up new possibilities - could not be more stark. In this case neither the future nor the past were open to question. The more popular reclaiming of the site had to wait for the asbestos to be removed and the interior to be gutted, when – for a time in 2004 – it became the ‘Volkspalast’ a site of film shows, conferences, concerts and discos. The latest (and almost certainly final) twist in the saga is that proposals to have it rebuilt in the style of the Stadtschloss have been approved by the SPD/PDS coalition, but the more ambitious hopes for a full

reconstruction (internally as well as out) have been jettisoned – the frontage will replicate the look of the old palace, but the structure and the internal rooms will use contemporary approaches.

This latest approach emphasises a role for the renewed building in the development of a renewed cultural centre for the city, linked to the Museeninsel. It also (like the proposals for the Bauakademie) stresses the centrality of ‘public-private’ partnership as the route through which development will be achieved (see, e.g., Berliner Extrablatt 2004, pp. 4-5). The ‘normality’ being reconstructed is, in other words, one that draws directly on the language and strategies of neoliberalism, even as it uses the architectural symbolism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to do so.

Building normality in an abnormal place

As capital city, Berlin is the (and often literally the building) site on which a new Germany is being constructed. The search is for some process, through which Berlin – and though Berlin, Germany – may become a normal place once again, with all the tensions that implies, but without the constant reminder of a history that appears to exclude it from the mainstream of capitalist urban development. This is, however, not a completed process. It is, rather, an ambivalent and ambiguous one, reflecting the continuing uncertainties of German national identity and their expression in Berlin as once and present capital city. The juxtapositions of meaning, the layering of memories and the attempts to imagine a different future come together to shape Berlin as a capital city, as much as a wannabe world city.

Habermas is not alone in questioning attempts to construct a continuous narrative that connects Bismarck to the contemporary German polity. This is apparent in the debates considered above, but also in the built forms that have emerged alongside them. Like any capital city, Berlin has its places of bombast and shows of power, but its urban landscape reflects a continuing ambivalence, as tensions are explored and given a physical expression in the built environment. Attempts to construct a new Berlin through a vision of the future enabled by some sort of historical forgetfulness, a back to the future of some romanticised Wilhelmine - or at any rate, pre Weimar – ‘normality’, have been confronted by the stubborn ‘ghosts’ of Nazism, War and the more recent legacies of the DDR, as well as imagined ‘memories’ of the culture of Weimar Berlin.

In other words, the normality of this Berliner Republik (or, at least, that aspect of it represented by Berlin) is being made up out of ambivalence and ambiguity, rather than a confident certainty about how best to understand the city’s (and the nation’s) past and construct its future.

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