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## HE BIG “MITTE-STRUGGLE” POLITICS AND AESTHETICS OF BERLIN’S POST-REUNIFICATION URBANISM PROJECTS

### ABSTRACT

There is hardly a metropolis found in Europe or elsewhere where the urban structure and architectural face changed as often, or dramatically, as in 20<sup>th</sup> century Berlin. During this century, the city served as the state capital for five different political systems, suffered partial destruction during World War II, and experienced physical separation by the Berlin wall for 28 years. Shortly after the reunification of Germany in 1989, Berlin was designated the capital of the unified country. This triggered massive building activity for federal ministries and other governmental facilities, the majority of which was carried out in the old city center (*Mitte*). It was here that previous regimes of various ideologies had built their major architectural state representations; from to the authoritarian Empire (1871-1918) to authoritarian socialism in the German Democratic Republic (1949-89). All of these époques still have remains concentrated in the *Mitte* district, but it is not only with governmental buildings that Berlin and its *Mitte* transformed drastically in the last 20 years; there were also cultural, commercial, and industrial projects and, of course, apartment buildings which were designed and completed. With all of these reasons for construction, the question arose of what to do with the old buildings and how to build the new. From 1991 onwards, the Berlin urbanism authority worked out guidelines which set aesthetic guidelines for all construction activity. The 1999 *Planwerk Innenstadt* (City Center Master Plan) itself was based on a *Leitbild* (overall concept) from the 1980s called “Critical Reconstruction of a European City.” Many critics, architects, and theorists called it a prohibitive construction doctrine that, to a certain extent, represented conservative or even reactionary political tendencies in unified Germany. This article reconstructs the main lines of this discussion and evaluates the influence of political aesthetics on post-unification Berlin urbanism.

### KEY WORDS

Berlin, european city, critical reconstruction, political aesthetics, contemporary urbanism, history of architecture.

O GRANDE “CONFLITO DO CENTRO”  
POLÍTICA E ESTÉTICA DOS PROJETOS DE  
URBANISMO DE PÓS-REUNIFICAÇÃO EM  
BERLIM

RESUMO

É difícil encontrar na Europa, ou em qualquer outro lugar, uma metrópole onde a estrutura urbanística e a Arquitetura tenham se modificado com tal frequência e drasticidade, como aconteceu em Berlim no século 20. Durante esse século, a cidade serviu como capital estatal para cinco sistemas políticos diferentes e sofreu a separação física, pelo muro de Berlim, por 28 anos. Pouco tempo depois da reunificação da Alemanha, em 1989, Berlim foi nomeada a capital da Alemanha unificada. Isso provocou uma grande atividade de construção dos ministérios federais e outras construções governamentais, a maioria delas levada para o centro velho (“Mitte”), onde os antigos regimes de várias ideologias - do Império autoritário (1871-1918) até o governo autoritário comunista na República Democrática da Alemanha (1949-89) - tinham construído sua maior representação estatal arquitetônica. Todas essas épocas ainda têm suas memórias concentradas no distrito *Mitte*. Mas não somente de construções governamentais é formado o centro de Berlim - sem contar que se transformou drasticamente nos últimos 20 anos: havia também projetos culturais, comerciais e industriais e, é claro, prédios de apartamentos, que foram projetados e realizados. Com todas essas razões para construção, vem à tona a questão sobre o que fazer com os prédios antigos e como construir novos. De 1991 em diante, as autoridades responsáveis pelo Urbanismo de Berlim desenvolveram diretrizes de construção sob os moldes de um plano piloto para o centro (*Planwerk Innenstadt*), que foi baseado no conceito geral (*Leitbild*) de 1980, chamado “Reconstrução Crítica das Cidades Europeias”. Muitos críticos, arquitetos e teóricos chamaram o conceito, que, em certo âmbito, representava tendências políticas conservadoras ou mesmo reacionárias na Alemanha unificada, de doutrina proibitiva. Este artigo procura reconstruir as linhas majoritárias dessa discussão, para avaliar a influência das políticas estéticas no Urbanismo da pós-unificação de Berlim.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Berlim, cidades europeias, reconstrução crítica, política estética, urbanismo contemporâneo, história da arquitetura.

LA GRAN “LUCHA-MITTE”  
POLÍTICA Y ESTÉTICA DE LOS  
PROYECTOS URBANÍSTICOS  
POSREUNIFICACIÓN EN BERLÍN

RESUMEN

Diffícilmente haya otra metrópolis en Europa, o en cualquier lugar, donde la estructura urbana y el rostro arquitectónico hayan cambiado tan frecuente y dramáticamente como en la Berlín del siglo XX. Durante este siglo, la ciudad fue capital de cinco sistemas políticos diferentes, sufrió una destrucción parcial durante la II Guerra Mundial y la separación física con el Muro de Berlín por veintiocho años. Poco después de la reunificación de Alemania, en 1989, Berlín fue declarada capital del país unido. Esto generó una inmensa actividad constructora para los ministerios federales y otras construcciones gubernamentales, la mayoría llevadas a cabo en el viejo centro de la ciudad (*Mitte*). Fue allí donde los regímenes anteriores de ideologías diversas - del autoritarismo imperial (1871-1918) al socialista de la República Democrática Alemana (1948-1989) - habían construido sus mayores representaciones arquitectónicas estatales. Los restos de todas estas épocas aún permanecen concentrados en el distrito *Mitte* de Berlín. Pero no fueron solo las edificaciones gubernamentales las que transformaron a Berlín y su *Mitte* drásticamente en los últimos veinte años, sino que también se dieron proyectos culturales, comerciales e industriales y, por supuesto, edificios para viviendas, que fueron proyectados y completados. Con todas estas razones para construir, surgió la pregunta de qué hacer con las edificaciones antiguas y cómo construir las nuevas. Desde 1991, la autoridad urbanística de Berlín ha elaborado lineamientos que establecen marcos estéticos para toda la actividad constructora. El mismo *Planwerk Innenstadt* (Plan maestro para el centro de la ciudad), de 1999, se basó en un *Leitbild* (concepto general) de la década de los ochenta, llamado “Reconstrucción crítica de una ciudad europea”. Muchos críticos, arquitectos y teóricos consideran el concepto - que, hasta cierto punto, representa tendencias políticas conservadoras e, incluso, reaccionarias de la Alemania unificada - una doctrina prohibitiva para la construcción. Este artículo busca reconstruir las ideas principales de esta discusión y evaluar la influencia de la estética política en el Urbanismo posreunificación de Berlín.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Berlín, ciudad europea, reconstrucción crítica, estética política, urbanismo contemporáneo, historia de la arquitectura.

## INTRODUCTION

When the Berlin wall collapsed at the end of 1989, it was not self-evident that the city would be appointed capital of a unified Germany. Until February 1990 it was not even clear that the two German states would unite. The unification process ultimately took less than one year. Bonn, the West German capital since 1949, in practice served as capital of the unified Germany till 1997. The unified German state took over the name, the constitution and the political, societal and economic systems of the previous West German state, the Federal Republic of Germany. The eastern German Democratic Republic's political, societal and economic systems were erased, or "unreeled" ("*abgewickelt*") as a famous expression puts it symbolically.

Only by the end of 1990 did the discussion begin to where the new capital of the unified Germany should be. Aside from not very auspicious and probably not seriously suggested proposals to make Bavarian Munich the capital, there were two serious suggestions: to maintain the capital in Bonn, or to make Berlin the new capital. A third option was a compromise: to share the functions of the capital between Bonn and Berlin. There was a very strong fraction in the deciding body, the Bundestag (Federal parliament), to maintain the capital function in Bonn. This was no surprise. The Bundestag worked in Bonn for 40 years, federal ministries and administrations with tens of thousands of state employees had their seat in Bonn. Therefore many parliamentarians – of all parties – voted to remain in Bonn. But there was also some support from the population due to historic reasons.

For hundreds of years Berlin was exclusively the capital of Prussia. The first German unification in 1871, which made Berlin the German capital for the first time, was a result of a militarily rather than politically forced integration of the smaller German states – namely the kingdoms of Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg – into one Empire under Prussian leadership. The Rhine area, where Bonn is situated and which was under French influence for decades, was integrated into Prussia only in 1815 as a result of Napoleon's defeat against the unified restorative armies of Austria, Prussia and Russia. So – and this remains up till now – Berlin was considered by many Germans a symbol of Prussian militarism and suppression.

Aside from this many Germans, especially East German Saxons, considered Berlin a symbol for communist suppression, as it served as capital for the socialist state which signified many privileges for the citizens of East Berlin, at the costs of the rest of the population. Finally many European neighbors still identified Berlin as the capital of the Nazi regime that caused World War II, resulting in the death of more than 50 million people. Berlin was also the city where the Holocaust, with at least 6 million killed in concentration camp, was planned and administrated. So in 1990 there were many rejections against Berlin as a capital. But after a long lasting debate on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1991 the *Bundestag* (German parliament) voted with only a slim majority to change the capital from Bonn to Berlin.

## MAIN PROTAGONIST: THE DIRECTOR OF CONSTRUCTION (*SENATSBAUDIREKTOR*)

Aside from governmental issues, other measures had been taken to prepare Berlin for the new role as the capital. At that time the expectations were that Berlin's population would quickly increase from 3.4 million to over 4 million inhabitants (e.g. MONNINGER, 1991). Other expectations were that the city would regain its pre-war importance for industrial production now in the service industries (BODENSCHATZ, 2010, p. 87). These expectations were confronted with a city structure that not only showed the marks of a 40 year political and physical separation, but also the economic stagnation of the last two decades in both East and West Berlin. In the heart of the city center there were large wastelands, very prominently at *Potsdamer Platz*, which in the 1920s was considered one of Europe's busiest squares. In 1990 it was an enormous deserted zone which still physically divided East and West. Also many residential areas in both parts of the city, built in the *Jugendstil* (Art Nouveau) style during the Empire, had been in ruinous conditions after decades of decay; provided they had not been destroyed in order to give space for new buildings in the post-war era. So there was a triple challenge for urban planning at this time: To provide the expected, internal migrants (first of all the tens of thousands governmental employees) with accommodation. Secondly, to fill the gaps in the city with new buildings for business and commerce, and to remake the old city a real center again. All this called, thirdly, for a master plan, that appreciated the chance of a new start in Berlin and give aesthetic guidelines for architecture and urban planning. The man to organize all this was Hans Stimmann, appointed in 1991 as *Senatsbaudirektor*, the city's director of building and construction.

Stimmann, born in 1941 in Lübeck, studied architecture in his hometown. Lübeck, also the birthplace of Thomas Mann and the setting of his Nobel prize winning romance *Buddenbrooks*, is one of the major examples of the *Hanse* brick stone architecture. Though heavily destroyed during World War II, Lübeck was carefully reconstructed and in 1987 was nominated a World Heritage site by UNESCO as the first entire old town in Northern Europe. Though Stimmann passed some professional time in Frankfurt and Berlin, it was certainly Lübeck (where he also served as senator for Construction before moving finally to Berlin), that influenced his viewpoints on urban planning and architecture. His motto for Berlin's transformation was called "Critical Reconstruction of a European city".

## THEORY OF THE CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION

The term "Critical Reconstruction (of a European city)" was introduced to the architectural scene by Josef Peter Kleihues when he acted as co-director of the 1984-7 International Building Exhibition (IBA) in Berlin. The theory was a systematic outcome of critics against radical modernism which aimed to destroy the old 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings and to replace them with modernist buildings made of steel, concrete and glass. Accompanied by the ideas of a "city designed for the use of cars" (*autogerechte Stadt*, Bodenschatz, 2010, p. 61) both the former East and

West parts of Berlin had been severely transformed – some say “murdered” (SIEDLER;NIGGEMEYER, 1964) – by this doctrine since the 1950s (the so called “second destruction” (op.cit.)). Though there had been critics against this “redevelopment through demolition” (*Kahlschlagsanierung*) already in the 1960s (SIEDLER;NIGGEMEYER, 1964; MITSCHERLICH, 1965), it was not until the end of the 1970s and under the influence of strong social resistance, including the occupation of buildings that were destined to be demolished, that city planners and architects turned their opinion and instead voted for a “cautious urban renewal” (*behutsame Stadterneuerung*) (HAMER, 1990). The IBA was the turning point when preservation and reconstruction of old building material, accompanied by the ideas of a lot-oriented city planning instead of large scale block structures. There was also preference to pedestrians and bicycle users with limited accessibility for cars (HOFFMANN-AXTHELM, 1990), which gained international recognition and turned mainstream in Berlin’s urban structure as well as in many other German cities.

The term “Critical Reconstruction” reveals a nexus in political philosophy, especially theories from Jürgen Habermas. Habermas defines reconstruction, as a method “to dissolve a theory and put it together in a new form in order to meet the objective better” (HABERMAS, 1976). In addition with the term “critical”, which in the political philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is linked to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School by Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and their successor Habermas, a term was created that in pre-globalization and pre-neoliberal times gained a lot of attention. With the worldwide reception of the IBA Berlin – though not the first city to adopt a change in re-urbanization strategies – gained the reputation of a laboratory for urbanism by the mid-1980s.

## CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION IN THE POST-UNIFICATION PRACTICE

“Critical Reconstruction” was at hand to serve as the general idea or, as some say, ideology (OSWALT, 2005) for the building of the “new Berlin” when Stimmann was appointed the city’s responsible official for urban design. Right from the beginning he left no doubt that he had very distinct ideas about construction criteria in Berlin’s *Mitte*, and that he was willing to pursue his ideas with all the means of the authorizing construction institution (STIMMAN, 1991). Critics arose right from the beginning. Some architects dedicated to modernism or deconstructivism felt embarrassed by Stimmann’s strong emphasis on Berlin’s building traditions and the need for the architecture as a means for remembrance of Berlin’s history. But there were even more objections against Stimmann’s discussion and communication style. His 1991 “*Berliner Abkommen*” (“Berlin agreement”) was merely a decree, as there had not been an inclusive public discussion on the regulatory policy, not even within Berlin architectural circles. It was an *ad hoc* document set in a relatively authoritarian way to give regulations to the beginning construction activities. Of course 1991 was a complicated time for a long public discussion on architecture and urbanism regulations. Investors from all over the world stood in line for projects in the old center, especially around *Friedrichstraße*, the pre-war amusement district,

and at *Potsdamer Platz*, the ancient commercial center. The Berlin authorities had to act fast to avoid “savage” construction activities, typical for highly dynamic situations under a liberal regime like is seen particularly in emerging economies all over the world. And as every political scientist stresses, democracy is everything but a fast means of decision making. Authoritarian laws, in the short term, are much more effective as they are set by a decree. The deficits of authoritarian decision making such as arbitrary execution, liability of the executors to corruption, mediocre results, all happened during the construction of the Berlin urbanization projects after 1990 on the ground of the so called *Berliner Abkommen*. This provoked the image of Stimmann as an “aesthetic dictator” (*Geschmacksdiktator*) (LAUTENSCHLÄGER 2006).

But Stimmann’s actions stand in line with that of his predecessors. The most senior of Berlin’s construction authorities always decided in an authoritarian way on how to build, and a strict regulation policy for the city building indeed is a sign of the European city. Referring to Walter Siebel (2006) five characteristics can be defined as the essence of the European city which distinguishes it from American, Asian, African and Australian cities:

1. The European city is marked by difference: Difference from the countryside, difference from cities of other continents, difference between themselves. Not a single European city is like the other. All European cities have this in common.
2. This difference is characterized by the specific history of each city. This history is visible. In contrast to other world regions this history is not seen as an obstacle but as cultural heritage.
3. The polarity of public space and the private sphere is another basic principle of the European city. This difference once again can be divided in five dimensions: From a sociological standpoint the polarity must be observed by its social, functional, juridical, and material-symbolic aspects.
4. Density is another typical aspect of the European city. This density, grounded in the medieval, unplanned urban layout, brings the citizens in close communication with neighbors and strangers. This face to face communication brought social, economic and technical innovation.
5. And finally the European city represents a regulated and planned development model. The connection of urban planning to the welfare state brought several incentives and subsidies into action in order to avoid social segregation and harsh conflict. These politics promoted a mixed society and a mixed use of the European city (For further information on the characteristics of the European city from a sociological standpoint, in Portuguese, see: GEGNER, 2006, p. 764-5).

Stimmann’s “Critical Reconstruction” program is in agreement with this definition of the European city: His search for a typical Berlin tradition which distinguishes the city from all other (European) cities interprets the first point coherently. Stimmann’s stressing of the specific history also seems to be in accordance with the second point. But here also the critics have some merit when they say that Stimmann contradicts his own principles by focusing on a certain historic period and neglecting several others, (as will be seen below). Stimmann’s focus on public spaces as well as on private property, the reconstruction of

architectural density and the limitation and architectural accentuation of formerly spacious and only roughly defined modernist squares, avenues and settlements, can be seen as an interpretation of Siebel's fourth argument. Siebel's last point, the strong regulatory policy social development in European cities, is perfectly transformed into the architectural context by Stimmann's doctrine. So from the standpoint of traditional Europeans Stimmann's program, in theory, is adequate to save or reconstruct Berlin as a European city.

But it must be mentioned, that there are not a few theorists, architects and urban sociologist, who consider the "European city as a myth" (SEWING, 1994, p. 68). Others make the point that the European city was a relic of the past, and that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it will dissolve in a "post-European" global type of city (VENTURI, 2004). In contrast to these assumptions, Stimmann's program of the "Critical Reconstruction" of the European city is not only conservative, but backwards oriented.

But Hans Stimmann did not mind this. He considered his role as a policymaker for urban construction, and not for urban planning (STIMMAN, 2005 et al., p.53). For him the European city is a place for remembrance of the past, historicity and tradition. Architecture has to serve this aim. He even speaks of a public "duty" (*Pflicht*), which had been a keyword in Prussian political theory and practice since Frederic II. Stimmann wants to build the "new Berlin" by reconstructing the old" (STIMMANN, 2005 et al., p.114-120). What sounds contradictory might make sense – if one is willing to agree with the definition and appreciation of the European city given by Siebel (see above) and others. But let us have a look at the implementation of this theoretical program into architectural practice. Three examples shall be discussed whether Stimmann comprises his program or if his critics are right in blaming him for an undemocratic, backward oriented architecture that reflects the conservative or even restorative politics these critics blame the German government to pursue with the so-called "Berliner Republic".

## I<sup>ST</sup> EXAMPLE: *FRIEDRICHSTRAßE*

Stimmann's interpretation of the "Critical Reconstruction" for the first big project was the development of the business district around *Friedrichstraße*, which focused on recovering the baroque city layout, the continuity of the block structure, limitation of the immediate buildings' height to 22 meters (the traditional measure defined in the 1862 *Hobrechtplan*), and constructions directly on the border between public and private property. In 1990 national and international capital stood in line to invest at *Friedrichstraße*, and there was a large amount of pressure on rapid execution. City officials wanted to set an example for the new beginnings of the city to attract more investors for the economically exhausted capital.

Even in communist GDR times, there had been plans worked out to reconstruct the area by concrete-slab buildings imitating old façades in the same way as had been completed at the nearby *Gendarmenmarkt*. After the political change the last, already democratic, government of East Berlin decided to unveil a competition for the reconstruction on the basis of the baroque orthogonal layout. Yet no attention was paid to the ancient proprietor structure. The area, one of the



Figure 1: Galeries Lafayette (Jean Nouvel, 1996),  
Source: Erik-Jan Ouwerkerk, 2005



Figure 2: Friedrichstadtpassagen (Oswald M. Ungers, 1996), Source: Erik-Jan Ouwerkerk, 2005



Figure 3: Friedrichstrasse 119 (Kollhoff u. Timmermann, 1999),  
Source: Erik-Jan Ouwerkerk, 2005

top spots for real estate investment in Berlin, was harshly disputed by restitution claims. A passage within the unification treaty set priority to handing back real estate to expropriated (by either GDR or Nazi-Germany) real estate owners (FLIERL, 1998, STIMMAN 2005, p. 38-43). But in order not to blockade investment by long judicial processes of beneficiaries (against the German state and amongst themselves), a law defining priority of investment on property disputed by restitution claims was established on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1992 (BRD 1992). In practice this inversed the previous priority. Institutional investors who were able to submit detailed large scale projects, including disputed restitution spaces, were able to achieve permission to construct. Former owners and their heirs were compensated with the actual market value of the sale. In case of dispute, the *Treuhandgesellschaft (trust law society)* fiducially administered the profit of the restitution. In a precedent setting act at the end of 1990, even before this law was established, the area at *Friedrichstraße* was sold under these conditions. The three biggest investors, *Galleries Lafayette*, *Bouygues Immobiliers* and *Cobb and Tishman Speyer Properties*, paid large restitutions to former owners or their heirs, and presented their plans to build *passages*, a mixture of European warehouses and the American shopping mall concept into one whole block. (Figure 1)

These large scale buildings in their layout were precisely to the contrary of what Stimmann preferred: Small scale, tiny constructions with an individual façade. But as there was political and economic pressure, these three blocks were built in the longitude and depth in the way the investors planned. Stimmann, on the basis of the East Berlin regulations was only able to downsize the height of the buildings. The architectural solution chosen by the architects, Jean Nouvel (for *Lafayette*), Pei Cobb Freed and Partners, and Oswald Mathias Ungers, was to transform verticality in horizontality. (Figure 2 e 3)

Also other buildings in the area seem to have undergone a spontaneous shortening to 22 meters. Especially Hans Kolhoff's building at *Friedrichstraße* 119, which lies outside the first *Friedrichstraße* competition and which was only built in 1999, symbolizes the aesthetic problem of Berlin's new construction. The architects, and the investors, wanted to build high-rise buildings, but had to downsize them to the regulations of the "Critical Reconstruction". The result was an aesthetical compromise, neither "American" nor "European", or in other words neither "high and tiny" nor "small and diversified". Most of the buildings, especially on *Friedrichstraße*, have strange proportions. They are very voluminous, with similar facades formed by strict and redundant orthogonal formats; a front with up to 50 windows per level (Ungers at *Friedrichstraße* 66-70 "Quartier 205"). Aside from Nouvel's glass palace of the *Galerie Lafayette* (fig. 1), the façades of *Friedrichstraße* set the example for the new "stony" Berlin, that is to say façades primary made of sandstone clad. Stimmann always denied that there ever existed any regulatory reference to facades in post-unified Berlin (STIMMANN, 2005 et al., p. 119), but he does not hide his appreciation with the style that others call "soul killing monotony of stony holed facades" (MÖNNINGER, 1995). However in Stimmann's eyes, what he calls "cautious or conservative (*zurückhaltende*) elegance and strictness of forms" (STIMMANN, 2005 et al, p. 119), links contemporary architecture to the traditional Prussian classicism of Schinkel.

In Berlin Schinkel serves as the positively interpreted key reference for almost all participants of the Berlin architecture struggle (HERTWECK, 2010,

p.13). Simplicity, elegance and optimal proportions are Schinkel's (1979, p. 41 et seqq.) principles that have been common-sense for the majority of Berlin architects throughout the centuries (except for deconstructivists and expressionists). But Schinkel's idea of catalytic monuments, which stand alone and are landmarks in an urban landscape (ibid.), is precisely to the contrary of Stimmann's concept of closed block structures and complex density. In this respect Schinkel, who expressively opposed the baroque city structure, was instead an ancestor of the modernist vision promoting a cityscape that is structured by free iconic architectural sculptures (HERTWECK, 2011). On the other hand, it must be noted that Schinkel was not only an exponent of classicism, but built also neo-gothic and neo-renaissance buildings. In some of his unconstructed designs, he even mixed styles. He also wanted to integrate historic remnants as romantic fragments in garden landscapes (e.g. in the unrealized plans to build a castle on the Acropolis in Athens). In this sense he was a predecessor of the later 19<sup>th</sup> century eclecticism, and if we may dare to say, of post-modern architecture.

A post-modernist who committed himself to Schinkel and other Berlin architectural traditions (including that of East German Hermann Henselmann) was Aldo Rossi (2002[1967]). In 1993-8 he constructed in the southern *Friedrichstadt*, together with Götz Bellmann and Walter Böhm, a set of business, tenements and commercial houses onto one whole block between *Schützenstraße/Zimmerstraße/Markgrafenstraße*, though they still seemed to depend upon the principles of the "Critical Reconstruction". Rossi et al. used differentiated façades from neoclassical to early 20th century modernism in a front of no more than eight windows per level. They even distinguished the height and went below the "sacred" 22 Berlin meters. However criticism is often leveled that this block would only simulate the European city (SEWING, 2003; OSWALT, 2000). The named block at *Zimmerstraße*, for instance, seems to be seven different houses, but in fact they are two integrated buildings. What seems diversified is a post-modern ensemble that could also had been built in 21<sup>st</sup> century China. It is a fake architecture that does not support or give back the "identity" to Berlin, instead it is imitating historic buildings from different époques. This might enchant tourists who visit the nearby "Checkpoint Charlie", a location that is also overloaded with fake historic artifacts which do not serve any function other than being photographed, and symbolizes nothing more than Berlin's architectural fragmentation (OSWALT, 2000).

## 2ND EXAMPLE: POTSDAMER PLATZ/LEIPZIGER PLATZ — RECONSTRUCTION OF A EUROPEAN CITY CENTER?

At the same time when the *Friedrichstraßen* projects were underway, a competition for *Potsdamer Platz* was organized. The big challenge was to fill the enormous gap produced by the East Berlin wall system that at this point reached its maximum depth (up to 250 meters), on which *Leipziger Platz* was once situated. *Potsdamer Platz* had been west of the wall; it was also empty and served for several years as West Berlin's biggest flea market. Already by July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1990

the West Berlin government under Mayor Walter Momper sold this area of 61,000 square meters for 47 million Euros to *Daimler-Benz*, a price that the European Union ordered had to be re-adjusted later because it was judged to be a price far below market value (STIMMANN, 2005 et al, p.58). Only five years later, in the same area, real estate marketers will sell an apartment property by the square meter for almost the same price (RADA, 1995, p.23). After not being re-elected in 1991, Walter Momper became a consultant in the real estate industry. Later, in 1996, the senator for construction, Wolfgang Nagel did the same. The north-eastern parts of *Potsdamer Platz* were sold to *Sony*, which aimed to build its European headquarters there. The third big slice of the cake was sold to mixed investors, with the *Volksbank* as the largest investor.

Even before the beginning of the architectural competition, there were strong criticisms against the urban development at *Potsdamer Platz*. On the one hand commentators like architect Phillip Oswald (1998) questioned the cheap selling prices that poured little money in the notoriously slim city purse. On the other hand critics asked how the aim of construction of a European square within a defined public space could have been reached when selling enormous areas to private multinational companies. In fact the selling of the area was a privatization of public space that had never been witnessed on such a scale in post-war Germany. Whereas East Berlin urban planning was marked by nationalization of private space and houses, the post-unification era was marked by the opposite phenomenon. The selling of *Potsdamer Platz* was a symbol for a new era, and along with it, its erected architecture.

The results of the competition for the master plan, was not only a symbol for the (old) new capitalist society, but also an aesthetic compromise between the investors and the official aim to reconstruct a European City. Rem Koolhaas, avant-garde mastermind of OMA-architects, left the jury in anger at Stimmann's "autocratic decision making" and what he called "the massacre of ideas" (KOLHAAS, 1991). Right from the beginning, Stimmann made clear that he did not want *Potsdamer Platz* to become a place for architectural experiments. He forced the "Critical Reconstruction" to be the overall concept (*Leitbild*) for the master plan. The proposal that served best for this was the plan by the Munich based architectural firm *Hilmer & Sattler*. The plan oriented itself on historic pre-war sight axes, inclusively imitating the vanished rail track axis of the *Potsdamer Bahnhof* (railstation) that now was interpreted as a monumental boulevard with the emphasis on a pedestrian area. It was one of three plans from the twelve final participants that did not count on building high-rises. The use of the buildings was determined by the Senate with 50% use for business, 20% for apartment space and 30% for commerce, leisure and entertainment. The investors were shocked.

At the same time the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, an influential conservative newspaper, initiated a somewhat 'counter competition' in which they invited international architects to present their modernist visions for a "world city architecture at Berlin's Potsdamer Platz" (MÖNNINGER, 1991, p.6). In particular, Richard Rogers, by invitation of *Sony*, countered the traditionalists' vision for Potsdamer Platz. What followed was a large quarrel between "modernists" around Mönninger, Rogers, Libeskind, the investors and "traditionalists" like Kleihues, Hoffmann-Axthelm and the Berlin construction authority under Stimmann. Heavy publication activity preceded the construction activity. The big media discussion



Figure 4: Potsdamer Platz skyscrapers (Renzo Piano, Hans Kollhoff, Helmut Jahn, from the left), Source: Andreas Greuter 2004



Figure 5: False Façade at Leipziger Platz, vis a vis Potsdamer Platz Source: Martin Gegner 2010

that had substituted formal citizen participation, which neither traditionalists nor modernists were interested in, finally showed an effect: After long discussions the investors finally succeeded in their aim to build at least three high-rises on the general basis of the winning plan by *Hilmer & Sattler*. The very edge of the square where in 1920 was one of Europe's biggest traffic crossings, was designed as a densified area with permission to construct three sky-scrapers. The general height of the buildings at *Potsdamer Platz* could rise up to 35 meters instead of the traditional 22 meters.

This was the basis for the 1992 architectural competition organized by the investors and the Berlin Senate. This competition was won by Hans Kollhoff, Helmut Jahn and Renzo Piano for the three high-rises. Hans Kollhoff, before 1990 a "modernist", now planned his *Potsdamer Platz* buildings with brick wall façades. He designed a skyscraper imitating New York architecture from the 1930s, while Helmut Jahn reproduced one of his glass palaces from Chicago and Renzo Piano with a slightly post-modern hybrid building made of glass *and* stone were the other two main architects. (Figure 4)

The investor (*Daimler*) decided to build the forefront of the square to the east, *vis a vis* the to-be-reconstructed octagon of *Leipziger Platz*. The high-rises were aimed to symbolize a portal. Between the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Leipzig gate was part of the ancient city wall. If there would have been two high-rises, they might have matched the goal. But three buildings and the way they were positioned to each other rather demonstrates (capitalist) concurrence (here, for the public attention) than symbolizing a gate. Like most high-rises, these building do not qualify their next ambience, they do not construct a "space to be", but yield on the effect of being looked at from far away (MAIER-SOLGK; GREUTER 2004, 14). (Figure 5)

In the back of this high-rise forefront the height of the building was limited to 35 meters (fig. 4). Once again (like in *Friedrichstraße*) the outcome of this was a broad, voluminous superblock structure. Instead of being built high, the office-buildings were funded into the earth by down to five levels, or an even 25 meters.

Oswalt (1998) calls this the prime Berlin architecture innovation of this period, that is to say buildings built into the ground instead of trying to reach the sky.

Apart from this peculiarity, many other critics like Martin Kieren (2005), who is a strong supporter of traditional building, complain about the failure of the aim of the “Critical Reconstruction” at *Potsdamer Platz*. According to him, no public spaces were designed because the streets were not constructed as European boulevards with large sidewalks, but served rather as access roads to the shopping zone. The shopping mall, built as a three level arcade, is a popular meeting point. But it is not a public space in the strictly legal sense, even if sociological research of the *use* sometimes describes shopping malls as at least semi-public (SELLE, 2004, p.143). The architecture of this mall was often criticized as possibly having been erected in “*Posemuckel*” (REUTER, cit. in *Der Spiegel* 1991), a synonym for deepest provincialism. The only bigger open space in front of the two double massive entrance cubes to the new *Potsdamer Platz* train station, which is completely built underground, is like the historic layout from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is cut through by the avenues of *Potsdamer/Leipziger Straße* and *Anhalter Straße/Tiergartenstraße*. This is a square to enter the train station or to shoot a photo, but not to remain. According to Frank Meier-Solggk and Andreas Greuter (2004) this place is not a square because there is a lack of edging walls. The skyscrapers offer their small side to the square, Renzo Piano’s building even a forefront. For the two aforementioned critics, this part of *Potsdamer Platz* shows “the image of an American silhouette: a strange contrast against the Berlin city image” (MEIER-SOLGGK; ANDREAS GREUTER, 2004, p.112). Piano himself considered the forefront in direction to the square as a “catastrophe” (SIEGERT, 1998). The whole ensemble designed by Renzo Piano, with 69,000square meters, the biggest terrain at *Potsdamer Platz*, is considered by neither the architect nor architectural critics, of being worthy of mention as one of the best 15 projects of this architect (FOLHA, 2011). Even if city managers try to upgrade the space with the temporary integration of playgrounds or even ice-skating and skiing facilities, this ambience does not lend itself to events, maybe because “the buildings stand harshly aside like safes, [...] they do not have a common referential point [...] and they do not serve as borders for a qualitative comprehensive space” (KIEREN, op. cit., p.110).

The spaces around *Potsdamer Platz* that to a certain extent serve for public use (meaning for the purposes of entertainment, leisure, consumerism and probably Simmelian *flanerie*) are in the back row and are focusing on the interior, not on outdoor spaces. They are architecturally linked to the *Kulturforum*, an area where in the 1960s the modernist architects Hans Scharoun and Mies van der Rohe designed “culture palaces” such as the *Philharmonie* (philharmonic building), the *Neue Nationalgalerie* (new national gallery) and the *Staatsbibliothek* (state library). Jahn’s post-modern cupola of the Sony center corresponds with the expressionist Hans Scharoun *Philharmonie* by its deconstructive design as a circus tent, which refers also to a popular nickname in the 1960s when Berliners called the *Philharmonie* “*Circus Karajani*”, referring to the expressive forms of the buildings and at that time the conducting maestro. Inside the Sony center are a series of cafés, restaurants and cinemas, and there is enough space to stroll around. But it is clear this is a space for consumption, other “public” activity, such as political demonstrations, is prohibited. The *Sony Center* is, first and foremost, privately owned. (Figure 6)

Figure 6: Semi-public space in the backyards of Potsdamer Platz, on the left: the Renzo Piano project. Source: Andreas Greuter 2004.



Equally so is *Marlene-Dietrich-Platz*, the only real open-air square around *Potsdamer Platz*, which leads from the latter through the *Alte Potsdamer StraÙes*(street), which was reconstructed as a boulevard, in the direction of the musical theatre and the casino. *Marlene-Dietrich-Platz*, with its pleasant sounding name, imitates a public space, but it is owned by *Daimler-Benz*. During the Berlin film festival it serves as façade for the photo-shoots of the stars. Here again political activity would not be possible. Though *Marlene-Dietrich-Platz* is the only area that in Stimmann's sense is constructed as a European square, it is clearly limited by the bordering buildings; Renzo Piano uses terracotta and sandstone for the façdes, and the square shaft set down into the musical theatre. The latter adopts the architectural language of Hans Scharoun's state library, and thus also connects *Potsdamer Platz* with the *Kulturforum*. Nevertheless, Solgk and Greuter are not alone with their judgment of *Marlene-Dietrich-Platz* when they describe it as "artificial, small and trivial" and "as a camera-compatible foyer for the film festival, a proof for current priorities" (SOLGK/GREUTER 2004, p. 114).

*In toto* one must say again, that "Critical Reconstruction" fails in its aims at *Potsdamer Platz*. The area is neither European nor American, in particular a clear distinction between public and private space is not met. To the contrary, legally and architecturally *Potsdamer Platz* serves the new dogma of public-private-partnership, which primarily had to serve the investor's interests. The aesthetical conception of the Critical Reconstruction was completely undermined. On the edges of the area there are skyscrapers that do not engage in a dialogue within their architectural surroundings. Or, as Oswald puts it:

*"In the light of the contradictory desire for homogeneity and small sections the current finalized buildings with their stuck on facades look like oversized exemplars of façades manufacturers on a construction fair: A perplexing diversity of different yellow, red, grey and green façade cladding"* (OSWALT, 1998).

Outdoor squares and streets do no invite *flâneurs*, on the contrary they are missing *charme* and mediate a cold and functional impression. In this respect

they are at least honest: They represent the purposes the buildings were constructed for in a harsh and clear language. *Potsdamer Platz* is a place for making money.

But concerning the social use, even the harshest critics must confess that nowadays *Potsdamer Platz* is accepted by the Berliners as new and old center again. Though it is not connected completely to both ancient parts of the city, the links to the West via the *Kulturforum* and to the East via *Leipziger Platz* are getting tighter. While at the beginning there were merely tourists visiting *Potsdamer Platz*, many of them with architectural interests, it is now a well adopted place for shopping and going to the cinema and restaurants. It is hard to say how many of the passers-by are Berlin citizens and how many are tourists. But even at nighttime there is some movement. Yet still this cannot compete either with other central squares worldwide such as Times Square or with other Berlin entertainment districts in the former old town or neighborhoods such as *Kreuzberg* and *Friedrichshain*. So the résumé of *Potsdamer Platz* – referring to the objectives described within the “Critical Reconstruction” – is mixed. Some aims were reached, namely mixed use and connection of the two city parts, but on the other hand many objectives (also those formulated within the master plan competition) were missed. Especially the so-called ‘public spaces’ are, in fact, not public in either the legal or in the social or in their functional senses. *Potsdamer Platz* is neither a good example of European nor of world architecture. It is an example of how politically determined aesthetics constrain great architects in their creativity. The completed projects are far from being exceptional. The only exceptional work is the civil engineering beyond the surface of *Potsdamer Platz*.

## PLANWERK INNENSTADT 1996-9

Before examining one more practical example, the new formal regulation given to the city in 1999 has to be explained. While for *Friedrichstraße* and *Potsdamer Platz* the “Critical Reconstruction” served as a general concept (Leitbild) with a merely informal character Stimmann developed a formal work called *Planwerk Innenstadt*, which can be translated as “Master Plan City Center”. The development of this master plan was completed within a continuous workshop lasting several years by a group nominated by Stimmann himself. Neither the public nor his own department within the Berlin Senate was informed about the existence of the workshop and its aims. Stimmann mistrusted his own department in which he suspected too much modernist influence (STIMMANN et al, 2005, p. 59 seq). Later, critics would call the employment to work out a formal plan by an informal group as anti-democratic (OSWALT, 2000; HENNECKE, 2010; HERTWECK, 2011). The first sketch of the master plan was presented in 1996 and then discussed by the public. Its aim was to overcome the “separation of the city by traffic avenues and ‘distance green’, solitary big constructions and the public property of houses” (STIMMANN, 2005 et al, p. 60). In fact the last point was crucial to the plan. While in postwar Berlin, in East as well as in West Berlin, there was a large amount of public tenement houses, the conservative and social-democratic coalition that reigned Berlin from 1991 to 2001 was keen to sell the

public property and to pour liquid money into the chronically weak city treasury. A city outline on the basis of private property parcels offered the opportunity to undertake the work on a small scale with the historic architecture like Stimmann and his followers desired.

The *Planwerk Innenstadt* was divided into two main sections: City-West (named like this in German, the old center of West Berlin around *Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche* and *Kurfürstendamm*) and the *Historische Mitte* (historic center), the area east of the *Friedrichstadt*, excluding the *Spreeinsel* (Spree island) and *Alexanderplatz*, which were once the medieval roots of Berlin. This area was, after heavy destruction during World War II, re-organized according to the principles of East German modernism, dominated by the planning and architecture of Hermann Henselmann.

Critics of the western plan, merely old West Berlin elites, were unhappy that the plans worked out by Fritz Niemeyer and Manfred Ortner did not permit new high-rise constructions and of plans to terminate the inner *Autobahn* ring. Finally by intervention of the Senator for City Development, Volker Hassemer, (who in many ways opposed the Senator for Building and Construction, Wolfgang Nagel) three high-rise buildings in the West were built.. The discussion continues whether this half-hearted plan was responsible for the obvious decay of the City West in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many critics say that Berlin is too small to have three equivalent centers (FLIERL, 1998; SEWNIG, 2003), and that post-unification downsized City West to what it was before the war: A secondary center developed out of an autonomous town (Charlottenburg) that did not even belong to Berlin up until 1920.

When critics of *Friedrichstraße* and *Potsdamer Platz* were still moderate, taking into account the big political and economic pressure to build fast, they no longer hid their massive disappointment with the regulatory policy. It is possible to write a book's worth of material to sum up the discussions up till the *Planwerk Innenstadt* was finally approved by the parliament of Berlin in 1999. Here it is sufficient to summarize that there was fierce resistance against the plan, especially by the authorities in the *Mitte* district, mainly its official Counselor for Construction (*Bezirksbaurat*), Thomas Flierl. Flierl was a member of the post-communist *Partei des Sozialismus*, PDS and son of Bruno Flierl (1998), one of the leading architectural theorists in the GDR.

Because of limited space within this article, this interesting discussion must be set aside for another opportunity. We will go on examining the plans and constructions in the historic center ("historische Mitte") around the Television Tower at *Alexanderplatz*.

### 3<sup>RD</sup> EXAMPLE: ALEXANDERPLATZ

The Stimmann interpretation of a "historic layout" was referring to the medieval city and its baroque extensions. The reconstruction of this meant to reverse the modernist layout of the capital of the GDR. Many critics said the *Planwerk Innenstadt* was an attempt to erase the remembrance of the GDR and – by reconstructing the pre-modern early 19<sup>th</sup> century outline – also to reconstruct and overcome policies (HERTWECK, 2010; OSWALT, 2004). At least the massive



Figure 7: Alexanderplatz” 1973, urban design in the GDR. Source: Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung Berlin



Figure 8: Alexanderplatz” 2006: “Destruction by construction”. Source: Phillipp Eder.



Figure 9: Electronics Store in front of “Haus des Lehrers”, destruction of the sight-axis. Source: Phillipp Eder.

selling of public ground to private investors – in economic political terms – can be seen as a restorative act. With the re-privatization it had been made clear that the ‘Berlin Republic’ was no longer based on state socialism but on capitalism. However there were more signs coming out from the aesthetics of the city layout and the proposed “new” buildings that sometimes were criticized as “crusade against GDR-modernism” (ROOST, 2005, p.347).

Stimmann claimed that the *Planwerk Innenstadt* was worked out without destruction of existing material (2005, p. 60). This is obviously not true. A series of East German modernist buildings were destroyed and replaced by mediocre new buildings, most of them in sandstone clad (the most prominent are the *Ahornblatt* at Leipziger Straße, and the *Lindencorso* on the corner Friedrichstraße/ Unter den Linden). In total, from 1990-95, 200 buildings were torn down in the Mitte district alone (OSWALT, 2000, p.54). Not all of them, of course, represented quality architecture.

The biggest destruction – that of the coherent city layout at *Alexanderplatz*– was made by constructing solitary buildings that seem to have not been founded on urban planning at all. The urban plan for Alexanderplatz designed by Kollhoff and Timmermann which turned out to be the winner of the competition in 1993, was not even partly constructed. It was marked by a combination of “European” density and block structure, in addition to nine 150 meter tall skyscrapers. Because of a lack of demand for office space, none of these were completed. So once again, as in 1927 when Martin Wagner designed a plan for a metropolitan modernist square, *Alexanderplatz* suffered a rudimental and fragmented modification. The coherent GDR modernism design by Henselmann was destroyed.

Sight axes such as those from the World Time Clock (*Weltzeituhr*) towards *Kongresshalle* and *Haus des Lehrers* were destroyed by the style less building of a shopping mall (architects Ortner&Ortner) on the opposite side of *Alexanderstraße* (fig. 8, on the right) Further, unmotivated constructions of an electronics store just in front of these icons devaluated the urban design of GDR modernism (fig. 9). This solitary building was set in the north-east of *Alexanderplatz* (fig 8).

The aim was to give a limit to the broad square that is in a tangent by a crossing of two broad ten-lane avenues. Stimmann always declared *Alexanderplatz* as being “out of scale” and an “exercising square for communist parades” (STIMMAN, 2005 et al., 53). In fact the square hosted the annual GDR anniversary parades, but it was also obviously the most vivid square with all the signs of public use. And finally *Alexanderplatz* also hosted the big anti-government demonstration on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1989, where more than 250,000 people participated, and which finally forced the communist regime to resign, and make the fall of the wall possible. Today the square could not handle such a political manifestation, because it does not appear as a unique square, but like several disconnected entrance halls for the newly erected shopping and entertainment centers. Around the year, the square is used for all kinds of events such as a Christmas fair, *Oktoberfest* and so on. The public function of *Alexanderplatz* is reduced to sheer commerce. New buildings are a provocation of the classic modernist outline and architecture by Henselmann, and some of the ‘old’ modernist buildings have to endure replicated sandstone facades, that can be described as post-modern mimicry (a prime example is the former *Kaufhaus am Alexanderplatz*, now *Kaufhof*, reform by Josef Paul Kleihues). All this can be described as an erasure of architectural symbols of the former GDR. (Figure 10)

Figure 10:  
“Alexanderplatz”,  
replicated facade at  
“Kaufhof”. In front:  
razzle dazzle instead of  
a public space.  
Source: Martin Gegner  
2010



## CONCLUSION

The three examples presented here show that it is unnecessary to wholly focus on government buildings to prove the strong correlation between aesthetics and politics in architecture and urbanism. Hans Stimmann's successful approach as Berlin's construction director to establish the "Critical Reconstruction of the Historic City Layout" as a binding regulation policy was often criticized as an authoritarian doctrine. This had something to do with the way the regulation was developed, but also with the limited interpretation of architectural history within the document. Stimmann ought to reconstruct the "historic outline" as if there was only one history: he refers strictly to the medieval, pre-modern idea of the town and the short baroque époque between 1750 and 1815. This one-dimensional interpretation of the "historic outline" neglects classical, classic modernist and, last but not least, GDR-modernist urban designs and their history. Therefore critics argue that the Stimmann type of urban design aims to reconstruct the former Berlin of Prussian glory (HERTWECK, 2010; OSWALT, 2005). Stimmann himself claims that his planning has nothing to do with political conservatism or reaction (2005 et al., p. 118). He sees his construction policy as a call for "normality" in a typical European capital (ibid. 2005: 116). However, Jürgen Habermas, among others, says that the German capital with its history as a Nazi and Communist capital cannot expect to ever be appreciated as a "normal" European city (HABERMAS, 1995).

By putting Stimmann's idea of a "Critical Reconstruction of the Historic City Layout" into practice (especially around Alexanderplatz), he is responsible for the partial erasure of the architectural memory of the preceding regime. His predecessors Schinkel, Hobrecht, Wagner, Speer, Scharoun and Henselmann acted the same way. But contrary to them, Stimmann did not want to replace existing urban structures with new city design and architecture. Instead he was aiming to go back to formerly approved architectural forms. The dialectics of this concept that might be called the "future by referring to the past" are contradictory, the practical solutions are compromises.

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