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Berlin Traditions and Potsdamer Platz: Architectural Reconstruction and the Transformation of a Public Place

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This essay is a critical history and analysis of the architectural reconstruction of Berlin's Potsdamer Platz. My primary purpose is to ascertain if the site functions as an authentic public place. Though many factors contribute to this process, I concentrate on how well the architecture integrates aesthetics with cultural traditions and urban spatial planning. To determine what type of place Potsdamer Platz has become, I contrast it with renovated sites in East Berlin's Scheunenviertel (Old Jewish Quarter). Borrowing from Walter Benjamin's philosophy of experience, I argue that the authenticity of these public places depends on how well these sites preserve and present multiple pasts that can be useful and transformative for the diverse populations of the present.

1. Introduction

Since the reunification of Germany, perhaps no other aspect of the cultural landscape has changed as much as the architecture in East Berlin. Many hoped that this transformation would enable the reunified city to resume the position it had enjoyed in the 1920s when it had been Germany's capital and the center of a cosmopolitan European culture.[1] Nonetheless, urban planners did not simply wish to recapture the past. As German architectural critic Bruno Flierl stated "What we need is a way of thinking that is capable of moving beyond nostalgic longing for the unified Berlin of the past, beyond the differences and divisions that will certainly persist for a long time to come, and reconnecting today's two halves into a whole Berlin of tomorrow." (quoted in Rumpf 2000: 363). City officials believed that the new Potsdamer Platz would be such a unifying site.

Instead, the reconstruction of Potsdamer Platz was the "catalyst" for the larger public debate on what type of city Berliners wanted (Rumpf 2000: 366). Architects and planners differed markedly as to how to fuse the two halves of the city into a revitalized whole (Kähler 1995). Traditionalists argued that Berlin should be "critically reconstructed" according to the nineteenth century "city-block and street pattern." (Ladd 1995: 228-235; Fisher and Findlay

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[1] The debates surrounding Berlin's rebuilding has been extensively covered in *Einfach schwierig: Eine deutsche Architekturdebatte,* ed. Gert Kähler (1995). I will only briefly recount some of the highlights in this essay.

2000: 42). Axel Schultes, for example, contended that any redevelopment should reflect Berlin's architectural traditions, specifically "the solid and Prussian approach" to urban planning (1995: 45). Daniel Libeskind regarded such sentiments as "reactionary." (1995: 35). To Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas and other deconstructionist architects, preserving the Berlin avant-garde tradition of openness and cultural experimentation was for more important than maintaining a nineteenth century "Prussian approach" to urban design. As Rudolf Stegner put it, the proposed architectural models of the traditionalists were "at best like a thirties boulevard in Milan or Madrid, at worst like a German military parade street" (1995: 55).

In this essay, I will assess what the planners and designers eventually built at Potsdamer Platz. Given that architecture and urban forms are, as Sharon Zukin remarks, the "two cultural products that most directly map the landscape …[and] shape both the city and our perception of it" (2003: 178), I will focus on whether or not the built environment at Potsdamer Platz frames a public place that is open to all Berlin's citizens. Because place has a variety of metaphorical meanings, it is necessary to first establish what I mean by it and by the closely related term, space. To the eminent geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, space is a geography that we pass through while place represents a meaningful "pause" in this movement (1991: 694). John Rennie Short states that "place is space that is occupied" (2001: 16). But for Tuan, place is much more than the physical transformation of a geographic space into a habitable location. It is a geography that emerges from the nexus of language and other socio-cultural processes. Building on this notion, Doreen Massey argues that place is a porous, physical site "constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus." (1994: 154-5). Laura Pulido notes that Massey's constellation – what she terms "articulation" – is dependent upon social "patterns of capital investment, class struggle, agency and racism." (1997: 19).

For purposes of this essay, I will adapt Massey's and Pulido's definitions of an urban place as visible "articulation" of the social processes at work in a city. Place encloses (but does not fix) and gives a particular meaning to a given configuration of urban social spaces. To determine whether or not Potsdamer Platz represents an authentic public place, I will compare the design of its architecture and open, landscaped spaces to other sites in the former East Berlin. Borrowing from Walter Benjamin's philosophy of experience, I will argue that the authenticity of a public place depends on how well the site preserves and

presents multiple pasts that can be useful and transformative for a multicultural present.[2] In other words, as Sharon Zukin argues, an effective public place is one that frames collective memory and elicits "new collective identities" (1995: 294). It is an enclosed but permeable, multi-purpose, textured space that is accessible to all citizens and one that encourages genuine interchange among the city's competing interests.

2. Potsdamer Platz: The Story of Berlin's Historical and Contemporary Center

Until the early 1800s, Potsdamer Platz was simply the area outside the Potsdam gate and the endpoint of the Potsdam/Berlin road (Ladd 1997: 115). By the mid-nineteenth century, it had become a central public square in an expanding Berlin. For the next one hundred years, Potsdamer Platz functioned as the transportation and commercial hub for the rapidly modernizing country. As such, the square was considered to be the visible symbol of a progressive, industrial and cosmopolitan Germany. Early photographs suggest that the movement of streetcars, automobiles and hurrying pedestrians was its distinguishing feature. Brian Ladd maintains that Potsdamer Platz contributed to the city's designation as the "German Chicago"; as a cosmopolitan or "Jewish city" in which movement was the defining condition (1997: 117). Even when the National Socialists came to power, the plaza itself hardly changed. Despite their attempts to surround it with a ring of classically inspired government buildings that would proclaim the enduring character of their Third Reich, the Nazis did not alter its essential, modernist character.

Though its transformation began with the Allied bombardment during World War II, it was not until the cold war that Potsdamer Platz suffered its final destruction. The square became a

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[2] As many scholars have argued, Benjamin's conclusions are generally contradictory, reflecting his ambivalent feelings about modernity. His definition of experience also suffers from the same contradictory impulses. Generally, his understanding of experience derives from the German terms *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. In the *Work of Art* essay, Benjamin argues that film, photography and other forms of modern art have eroded traditional artistic experience, or *Erfahrung*, the amalgamation of sensual and cognitive impressions and perceptions that are filtered through the distancing veil (the aura) of tradition and collective memory. For Benjamin, modern life is associated with *Erlebnis,* which he defined as those shocks or discreet present moments of existence unconnected to past traditions. Though Benjamin ultimately selects what he terms a "genuine *Erfahrung*" over the immediacy associated with *Erlebnis,* his notion of the former is tinged with inflections of the latter. In other words, the discrete shocks of experience associated with *Erlebnis,* give form and meaning to *Erfahrung.* (Benjamin 1969: 155-200; 217-242.)

contested site in which two powers sought hegemonic control over the German people and nation. While West Berliners could, from a safe distance, view the quelling of the East Berlin rioters of 1953; Easterners could look back at their relatives with contempt, sadness or hope. Once the Wall went up in 1961 and transformed Potsdamer Platz into a no-man's land, Easterners were no longer constantly subjected to the West's fearful, and sometimes mocking or pitying gaze. And Westerners were, of course, no longer subject to its return. But the wall represented more than just a physical border between East and West. It barricaded historical memory as well. With the Cold War looming, both sides attempted to forget their shared history (Holbrook: 1999). Eastern Germany disavowed any connection with the Nazi debacle, regarding itself as a victim of Nazi repression and not as a perpetrator of it. While West Germany did acknowledge a collective responsibility for the Holocaust, as Mary Holbrook suggests, it was a "ritual" rather than actual, "public penance" (1999: 98). Despite this attempt at collective amnesia, the presence of the wall and the empty landscape were the uncanny reminders of Berlin's recent history. According to Anthony Vidler, an "uncanny" structure "allows us neither to stop at the surface nor to penetrate it, [thus] arresting us in a state of anxiety" (1992: 28). No matter how forcibly we seek to turn away from or to repress tragic memories, an uncanny object like the Wall holds us in its powerful, albeit ambiguous gaze. In other words, the half-forgotten past was something that Berliners, whether they admitted it or not, were continually forced to remember.

Many Germans were, in fact, fascinated by this border between the East and West. As the old man in Wim Wenders *Himmel über Berlin* states: "It's got to be here somewhere. I can't find the Potsdamer Platz" (quoted in Large 2000: 268). But he could not help searching for it. According to urban planner Ananya Roy: "Borders, unlike boundaries signify … a confrontation with inalienable difference. But borders also hint at the possibilities of crossing over, of violating and redrawing limits. They carry with them … 'the febrile fascination and flavor of the illicit'" (2001: 238). The flavor "of the illicit" was, undoubtedly, part of Berlin's cold war fascination. It exerted an extraordinary pull on those who wished to step outside the bounds of conventional society. The wall and the desolate spaces of no-man's land, an area that connoted terror and tragedy, also suggested change and possibility. The Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas claims: "And that was the beauty of Berlin even ten years ago, that it was the

most contemporary and the most avant-garde European city because it had these major vast areas of nothingness" (1999, cited in Ruby 2002: 300).

In his studies of Berlin, Moscow and Naples, Walter Benjamin argued that spaces of apocalyptic desolation are paradoxically, sites of regeneration. For Benjamin, the visible presence of emptiness and ruin is the necessary shock that awakens the observer to history's forgotten voices and rejected paths (1979-1982, I, IV, V; also Benjamin 1978; see also Buck-Morss 1989: 159-204). The reawakening of these buried memories, he concludes, may jolt the passerby into seeing new political realities that ultimately may "redeem" society (1979-1982, V, 1: 578). According to Gershom Scholem, from whom Walter Benjamin adapted his notion of redemption, "hope, is not directed to what history will bring forth, but to that which will arise in its ruin, free at last and undisguised" (1971: 10). [3] For Andreas Huyssen, what is arising in the former "seventeen-acre wasteland" is an "erasure of memory rather than its imaginative preservation" (1997: 64, 66). Indeed, he argues that Benjamin's nineteenth century flaneur who "reads urban objects in commemorative meditation" has been replaced by the contemporary "tourist" who values "attractiveness" and "image" more than "use" (1997: 58, 66).

Huyssen's criticism of the early reconstruction of Potsdamer Platz is relevant today. Rather than retain remnants of the former no-man's land or reminders of the earlier vibrant metropolis, designers allowed the space to be overwhelmed by a new development that simply celebrates global capitalism. More importantly, the planners did not attempt to maintain the empty areas that Koolhaas believed to be so compelling. In fact, once Berlin was chosen as the new capital city, planners sought to quickly fill in the open spaces to which Koolhaas refers. They intended to create a new metropolitan center where the uncomfortable memories of the past were buried beneath shiny new architectural exteriors. According to Peter Rumpf, "there lives on a fateful tendency … to start from zero, to clear away what has been passed down … so as to make space for the new, [for] the spectacular"

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[3] Although Benjamin wrote about nineteenth and early twentieth century European cities, his criticism is relevant even today. Daniel Libeskind, designer of Berlin's Jewish Museum and the chief designer for the reconstruction of New York's World Trade Center, utilized Benjamin's essay "One Way Street" (1978) for his design for the Jewish Museum (2000). Contemporary scholars who rely on Benjamin's essays for their interpretations of the city include Susan Buck- Morss (1989) and Sharon Zukin (1995).

(Rumpf 2000: 368). Even before the Wall's demise, global corporations were interested in the spaces around Potsdamer Platz. The city eventually sold large parcels of the area to Sony, Daimler-Benz (now DaimlerChrysler) and the engineering firm ABB. The large corporations in turn, hired internationally renowned architects to build public relations trophies that would add to the firms' cultural capital. Bureaucrats hoped that this transformation of symbolic (architectural design) into corporate cultural capital would also add to Berlin's economic and political regeneration. In the beginning, city officials ceded their planning authority to the corporations because they feared that the new capital city of a reunified Germany would not be able to stand up to global expectations as to how a city should look. They feared that Berlin might be "too provincial;" that it would not be able to function as a capital of an expanded European Union or as a global city equivalent to a London or New York (Ruby 1997: 296).

In their rush to rebuild, politicians initially ignored local traditions. Not surprisingly, there was a public outcry and an acrimonious debate erupted in the media (Kähler 1995). Berliners worried that their city would lose its very identity, with good reason. As the voluble publicist for Daimler-Benz remarked, "Potsdamer Platz is a free land. It has no memory. It is a new country." (quoted in Conrad 1987: 225). In order to counter residents' concerns and to rein in the corporations, city officials assumed a greater role in the decision-making process. They concluded that a single design firm, chosen in a juried competition, should supervise the overall construction at Potsdamer Platz. Much to the chagrin of Koolhaas and other experimental architects, officials also named Hans Stimmann, a conservative proponent of traditional urban reconstruction, as the Municipal Building Director. The Munich architectural firm Hilmer and Sattler was subsequently awarded the contract and set out to transform Potsdamer Platz into a European square that would embody – as Stimmann hoped – Berlin's distinct charm and its architectural traditions (1995).

Certainly, the new Potsdamer Platz does remind the visitor of the commercial vibrancy and constant motion of its earlier reincarnations. Many of the individual building designs also reference Berlin's modernist and nineteenth-century traditions. Renzo Piano's headquarters for DaimlerChrysler, a transparent geometric structure whose glass layers are punctuated by a regular series of ceramic elements, clearly recalls early Bauhaus visual design (Fig.1). The Parc Kolonnaden at Potsdamer Platz and Köthener Strasse, in contrast, is reminiscent of the

compact, self-contained block structures of nineteenth century Berlin. The twelve-story curving façade of the block's primary structure whimsically brings to mind the entertainment center Haus Vaterland, one of the most recognized architectural forms of the pre-War modernist square. Architects have also incorporated remnants of traditional structures into the new corporate centers. The façade of Weinhaus Huth (1911), the square's only building to survive the twentieth-century wars intact, has been included in the DaimlerChrysler office and commercial complex (Fig. 2) while the Kaisersaal from the Hotel Esplanade has been blended into the Sony Center exterior glass curtain walls. Even the general architectural framework of the new Potsdamer Platz visually echoes earlier architectural traditions. Helmut Jahn's Sony Headquarters and Hans Kollhoff's DaimlerChrysler tower, which loom over the entryway to the Neue Potsdamer Strasse, are the contemporary transformations of the early nineteenth century Potsdam gate (See Fig. 1). At night, the lights at the top function as welcoming beacons for the pedestrians who emerge from the adjacent transportation center.

Despite the planners' desire to preserve Berlin's traditional cultural identity, they have only partially succeeded. Though the reconstructed Potsdamer Platz is reminiscent of its nineteenth and early twentieth century predecessors, evidence of the square's other histories – both tragic and avant-garde – is markedly absent. Even the original planners, who wished to recreate a traditional Berlin experience, were selective as to what traditions they might invoke. Though Hilmer and Sattler, and later Renzo Piano, based their design on a European model of compact and interconnected public streets, courtyards and squares where life "unfolds"; Potsdamer Platz is not an authentic public place in which this occurs (Balfour 1995: 237). Walter Benjamin states that genuine experience occurs when buried memories burst into the "now-moments" of present-day existence. Such memories erupt when visible reminders of the past confront the passerby. The most important fragments of the past – the Nazi occupation, the destruction of Germany's Jews, Roma and other minorities, the Soviet occupation, the construction of the wall and the modernist social and architectural experimentation – are essentially absent. Christine Boyer states that "[p]assages through the city must lead the traveler … forward toward the city of hope … and backward toward the mire of decay" (Boyer 1994: 475). Unfortunately, as I will discuss below, Potsdamer Platz does neither.

Even the designers' incorporation of pre-War structures into the Sony and DaimlerChrysler centers is only a cursory acknowledgement of Berlin's collective traditions. These older façades and interior spaces are overwhelmed by the corporate architecture that engulfs them. Given that the historical context in which the buildings were used is absent, these material remnants of old Berlin are simply nostalgic ornaments that adorn corporate headquarters. What is even more significant is the architects' apparent lack of interest in capturing the Weimar Bauhaus' politicized aesthetic. Rather than building an urban center that is aesthetically experimental and socially inclusive, city officials and planners have encouraged the development of a place that is devoted to up-scale residential living and consumption. They have incorporated luxury penthouse apartments (Sony), "exclusive" living spaces (Daimler), and generally expensive housing into their mixed-use sites. Though designers have utilized some traditional visual forms, they have clearly rejected the modernists' interest in creating layered, urban social spaces. According to the American architectural critic Paul Goldberger, the city's traditional cultural openness has become "threatened by a desire to make Berlin too comfortable," as though "the city had gone from oppression to smugness in one step" (1999: 49).

The Potsdamer Platz architects have instead, designed a place of consumption that sells corporate image. Though DaimlerChrysler's playful yellow and glass building on Linkstrasse suggests welcome and transparency, passersby are denied access to its interior. Peter Marcuse rightly concludes that the glass façade is merely a "display" or a cover for a building in which decision-making is anything but transparent (2003: 155). Zukin argues that corporate architectural trophies often look "stupendous" from the outside but do not contribute to an authentic "sense of place" because they do not nurture collective memory or promote local social interests (2003: 181). Similarly, Piano's and Kollhoff's colossal, gateway structures at the entry to Potsdamer Platz are hardly the contemporary equivalent to the traditional public gate (see Fig. 1). Indeed, Kollhoff's stepped office tower, which draws the eye upward to its triangular point, is a secular version of a Gothic cathedral; one that conflates corporate power with divine inspiration. Like Kollhoff's cathedral, Piano's design also connotes power. Its pointed form suggests the "bow of a ship"; one ready to guide Berliners through the vast sea of consumable possibilities (Kieren 1997: 13).

For its headquarters, Sony did not even try to adhere to Berlin's architectural traditions let alone attempt to contribute to the creation of a genuine public place. Clearly, the company did not wish to visually blend into a seamless urban landscape. As Peter Rumpf claims, Sony's chief architect Helmut Jahn produced a design that is "exactly what a multinational concern considers prestige architecture" (Rumpf 2000: 367). Yet, the site is visually spectacular. The glass covered Forum in the center of the 27, 000 square meter plot is undoubtedly the most impressive of the Sony buildings (Kieren 1997: 22). The partially attached roof that resembles a bicycle wheel or a child's toy top appears ready to spin off into space (Fig. 3). This highly whimsical roof playfully frames an interior area that consists of offices, a pedestrian mall, living accommodations and entertainment centers (Fig. 4). As such, the entire building, with its high-tech steel tubes and glass, is a noteworthy headquarters for the giant media conglomerate. In fact, the three-dimensional glass exterior, which is continually transformed into two-dimensional canvases of color and light, could be seen as a material metaphor for the virtual Sony world. The Sony Forum along with Renzo Piano's entertainment complexes at Eichhorn Strasse and Marlene Dietrich Platz, might be considered as the German equivalent of New York's new Times Square.

Nevertheless, unlike Times Square, a "great public" place where throngs of disparate New Yorkers and tourists still engage in a form of street "theater" (Zukin 1995: 44), the visually spectacular Sony Forum frames a place that is entirely commercial and "inward-oriented in character." It is in no way reminiscent of a traditional shopping area "with its classic sequence and hierarchy of streets, open areas and building structures" (Kieren 1997: 22). Rather, like many contemporary malls, the Sony Forum removes the aura of unpredictability and potential conflict that is associated with a lively urban plaza. The spaces under the dome are woven seamlessly together and protected from an unpredictable street. As such, these spaces have been transformed into a place that has more to do with global economics and capitalism than with the needs of all the diverse peoples that inhabit Berlin. This is not to say that only the site's well-to-do inhabitants move through the areas under the dome. Many others do as well. But these "others" come to gawk and to gaze at the flashing lights and luxury goods that they can only wish to obtain. Visitors partake, or want to partake, in an upper-class lifestyle. In this place, life is prescribed and inscribed in the spectacle of consumption.

Indeed, it may be the spectacle and not the architecture that lures the consumer. According to Martin Kieren, the theatrical architecture of Renzo Piano's new musical theater at Marlene Dietrich Platz and his Big Screen Theater at Eichhornstrasse suggests that the architect is more concerned with informing the observer about interior events than he is with the exterior architectural design or with creating a genuine public place (Kieren 1997: 15). Like the Sony Forum, Piano's theaters are advertising vehicles. Even when standing outside these buildings, individuals can no longer engage in the open, conflicting and collective activities that had marked earlier urban, public experience. Like visitors to the Sony Forum, pedestrians who move through the space framed by Piano's entertainment complexes are bombarded with a barrage of unchanging, self-referential and repetitive stimuli (what Benjamin refers to as *Erlebnis*). These visual sensations blind them to the chance encounter that is a hallmark of city life. Piano and Jahn have flattened the potentially textured exterior space into a sanitized – albeit visually enticing – site of consumption. In spaces such as these, notes Richard Bolton,

> the sensuality of information takes over; the experience fills with rapidly changing images, swirls, glass and light; the fetish of surface dissolves the contradictions of experience. Drunkenness is not an inappropriate metaphor, and the intersection of cognac, architecture and advertising makes further sense; postmodernism and capitalism join to form an inebriated state of consciousness. (Bolton 1988: 90)

Conceivably, such spectacular spaces could contribute to the formation of an authentic public place. Bernard Tschumi states that imaginative architecture, which results from "the pleasurable and sometimes violent confrontation of spaces and of activities," must subvert the natural order (1994: 217). Instead of subverting an architectural order, many of the structures and exterior areas at Potsdamer Platz adhere to the standards of the planners' pre-modern Prussian model. They conform to an eaves height of 22-25 meters, subscribe to a general design conception, and are comprised of a homogenous interior consisting of two ground floors of pedestrian shopping, four floors of commercial office space, and two floors of luxury flats (Stimmann 1995; Stegers 1995). Such a design, notes Huyssen, represents a mythical view of a tradition that is "a strange mix of leftist Kiez romanticism and a nineteenth century vision of the neighborhood" (1997: 94). Moreover, Huyssens's 1997 fear that the designs that Sony and then DaimlerBenz commissioned, would "encage and confine

their visitors rather than re-creat[e] the open, mobile … culture that once characterized" Potsdamer Platz, appears to have been justified (1997: 72).

Because planners have accounted for and regulated every square meter of usable space, they have eliminated the open and potentially transgressive spaces that help transform urban centers into open, culturally diverse public places. They have, in effect, eliminated the non-commercial, multipurpose spaces that enhance the life of the city. Though many of the residential apartments have balconies that face the roadways, for example, few have courtyards or spaces that extend into it. Rather than linking the interior courtyards with the socially layered, unpredictable street; workers and residents of Richard Rodgers' mixed-use buildings on Linkstrasse (including DaimlerChrysler office space, see Fig. 2) view the street behind a protective glass wall. Even Giorgio Grassi's Parc Kolonnaden, which is based on Berlin's traditional block/courtyard model, inhibits the creation of an authentic public place. Of its five buildings, four are classified as offices and one as residential living quarters (and tucked away into the corner of the site). Much of the green space that separates them from Rogers' and Piano's buildings across the street is more like a barricade than a public, multipurpose park. It is a space that is meant to be viewed from the sidewalk or, more likely, from behind an apartment glass window.

Like any other city, urban planners are clearly entitled to transform public land into a place that exemplifies a global rather than local model. But given its historical significance and symbolic value for both Germany and the world, Potsdamer Platz cannot be considered as just any geographic location. Yet, city officials and architects seem to have done just that. In failing to turn Potsdamer Platz into a place that is permeable, open and reflective of the site's many histories, Berlin officials squandered an opportunity to create an urban center that could be a model for other cities. Instead, they have constructed a place that celebrates global capitalism and luxury consumption. Moreover, they neglected to incorporate the open, transgressive spaces that might serve as "correctives" for their planning model. As a result, officials bypassed an opportunity to create an authentic public place where the interests of global capitalists could intersect with the traditions, memories and needs of Berlin's older and newer inhabitants.

3. The Scheunenviertel: East Berlin's Authentic Public Place

Although Potsdamer Platz does not qualify as an authentic public place; there are places in the former East Berlin where Berlin residents can engage in a dialogue that is not entirely framed by private surveillance or commercial enticement. In these places, multiple cultures coexist. More importantly, they enclose open spaces where collective and individual memories intersect and burst forth into the consciousness of everyday experience.

One could consider the Old Jewish Quarter, roughly demarcated by Oranienburger Strasse, the Hackesche Höfe and Grosse Hamburger Strasse, as just such a site. Prior to World War II, over a quarter of Berlin's Jews resided here. After the war, working class Communists replaced the. Unlike Potsdamer Platz, this area had not been consigned to a no-man's land but remained safely behind the wall. In fact, before the reunification of Germany, it did not look all that different from the overcrowded tenements that Döblin so aptly described in his *Berlin Alexanderplatz.* After reunification, coats of fresh pastel paint covered the traces of its seedy, impoverished past. As a result, the area attracted both prosperous tenants and tourists looking to experience a safely gentrified view of Berlin's history. As Rudy Koshar concludes when speaking of Bonn's refurbished Südstadt, gentrification expresses the middle class's "need for. . . the symbol of grandfather's house and its decorated façade." Gentrification, he argues, "transform[s] entire urban districts and their historical houses into stage sets for new wealth" (1998: 283). It would appear that the renovated Jugendstil apartments, nightclubs, and restaurants near the Hackesche Höfe are examples of Koshar's stage sets. There seems to be no trace of the sinister, dangerous street life described by Döblin. Here, young professionals with enough income to support a middle-class lifestyle have replaced the enclave's former Jewish and Eastern working class residents. Though gentrification has certainly transformed the Hackesche Höfe, the area has not entirely forgotten its past. Traces of the open-air markets and courtyard cafés characteristic of an older Berlin are evident here (Fig. 6). Nearby on Rosenthaler Strasse and Sophien Strasse, street vendors, strollers and passersby commingle with the solitary coffee drinker and engrossed student. Though the edginess of the Scheunenviertel is gone, there is time for the chance and unregulated encounter that takes place in an open, public place – an encounter that is an important feature of genuine urban experience. One could in fact regard the Hackescher Markt, the central area

with its numerous trams and large train station, as a contemporary version of the pre-War Potsdamer Platz.

According to Benjamin, a chief determinant of authentic urban experience is the material presence of historical ruins. In this part of Berlin, despite the gentrification of the area, architects and planners have preserved some of the area's tragic past. The Neue Synagogue at Oranienburger Strasse represents one such site (Fig. 5). Now a museum, the structure was partially destroyed during Kristallnacht and almost completely ruined during the GDR time. Today, its whimsical, orientalizing façade and minaret-like cupola is a material reminder of the absence of Berlin's Jews. At the same time, it is the material proof of the centrality of Jewish culture to German history. As such, the cupola of the Neue Synagogue appears to be the proud twin of the one that crowns the church in nearby Sophien Strasse. Both, in turn, define the East Berlin skyline and reinforce the authenticity of this public place because they are visual markers of collective memory and identity.

Though the Neue Synagogue might have been transformed into a traditional museum which would house the artifacts for Berlin's vanished Jewish culture, the architect Bernhard Leisering has correctly preserved the building's own history. Rather than completely rebuild the museum, he left it partly as a ruin. In doing so, the architect has given material shape to the cultural void created by the absence of Germany's Jews. He has given voice to a people who had been silenced. By visually encapsulating this silence, the designer challenges the contemporary visitor to see/imagine the past with all its contradictions. The observer is confronted with the possibility of what might have been and with the mournful knowledge of what was. More importantly, by incorporating ruins into the façade, Leiserung has created an ambiguous architectural site in which the individual visitor's mind can wander and reflect on her own tragedies. Once outside, she is brought back to the present – and all its contradictions and conflicts – because of the visible presence of the German police who guard the museum and the Berlin inhabitants who sip coffee in nearby cafés.

This area also has reminders of other pasts. In nearby Grosse Hamburger Strasse, the traces of the German Jewish life that existed before the Holocaust are preserved, albeit in the midst of a vibrant, new Berlin. A visitor can stroll along one of its streets and purchase Judaica from one store and then buy toys for his children in the adjacent establishment. At the right

time of day, the door of the old Jewish boy's school still opens to the rushing children who pass through its gates. Culture is preserved in this ritual reenactment of schooldays. The early twentieth century cherubic sculptures, which watch over these students as they leave the renovated building, are the nostalgic reminders of the bourgeois Jugendstil culture that once included Berlin's Jews. These playful sculptural guardians contrast sharply with the plaques on the nearby apartment house. Because only the name is given, the viewer cannot be certain as to what these signs might "mean." The plaques, which are records of the names of those who were murdered by the Nazis during World War II, give a permanent voice to those who were thought to be silenced. Whether or not the observer is aware of this fact, these records do inform the present. They are the visible, uncanny reminders that something occurred beyond what the eye can see.

This intertwining of memory and of present experience is particularly evident in the green space at the site of the old Jewish cemetery near the renovated Neue Synagogue. Such a space allows us, to borrow Andreas Huyssen's words, to resist "the erasure of memory" (1997, 66). Here the visitor is forced to confront multiple layers of memories. Although the old cemetery is no longer a graveyard, this transformed green space is a public, memorial site (Fig. 7). Like the cold-war Potsdamer Platz, it is a material reminder of desolation and destruction. But unlike the newly rebuilt Potsdamer Platz, history is not obscured by the close presence of flashing lights and theatrical displays. This is a space of quiet contemplation. The undated plaque at the entrance to the former cemetery which celebrates the memories of those who perished during the Holocaust and the nearby representational sculpture by Will Lammert that signifies the victims' anguish (Fig. 8, *Figurengruppen,* 1985*)*, demarcate a space that reminds the visitor not only of the Holocaust but of the many other tragedies associated with East Berlin's history (and the former GDR's attempt to finally come to terms with it in the 1980s). In addition to German Jews, 2500 people who died during the allied bombing are interred here. Moreover, the history of the terror unleashed by Stalin and others in this former Communist city can hardly be forgotten. This past is materially embodied in the *Fernsehturm*, the East German television tower that looms in the distance, and functions as the visible embodiment/ruin of a vanished regime.

Whether looking down at the memorial markers in the former cemetery or up at the *Fernsehturm*, an observer is clearly aware that she is looking at a world that is both

uncannily present but forever gone. For genuine urban experience to occur, as Benjamin has argued, memories and histories must be continually reinterpreted in the present. At the former cemetery, the smells and sounds of the surrounding city transform memory of the past into one that the contemporary visitor continually and viscerally experiences. The presence of the odors from the nearby Middle-Eastern restaurants and the noise from the ever-present traffic remind observers that a vanished people once shared similar traditions and similar daily encounters. But these smells and sounds are also metaphors for Berlin's evolution as an urban center.

Unlike Potsdamer Platz, the cemetery and its surroundings are the visible "articulation" of Berlin's pasts and presents. Together, these spaces form an authentic public place, one that derives its power from its ability "to nurture citizens' public memory [and] to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory" (Hayden 2003: 72). Here, commercial activities do not overwhelm or inhibit other social processes. At the former cemetery, for example, I observed strollers with their dogs, older persons resting and tourists coming to gaze or to remember. Around its perimeter, which functions like a transgressive space, one can see busy workers and passersby jostle tourists gazing at the *Figurengruppen.* Even the walls, which demarcate the former cemetery's boundary, function more as a visual frame for the nearby Fernsehturn and surrounding apartment houses than as a barricade to the area outside. Indeed, it is the Fernsehturm, Sophienkirche and the renovated Synagogue that are the important spatial markers of this quarter. In other words, this place, which incorporates the old Jewish cemetery, parts of Grosse Hamburger Strasse and areas near Oranienburger Strasse; represents a public place that both shapes and reflects Berlin's many identities. Here, the material ruins of Berlin's multiple pasts share the site with the present and the promise of its future.

Unlike the Scheunenviertel, which evolved over time, the spatial transformation of Potsdamer Platz was generally well-planned and efficiently executed. At Potsdamer Platz, where the architectural forms are visual monuments to global, economic power; the past has been effectively expunged. Though few would have expected its designers to recreate the visual forms of the old Jewish quarter, nonetheless they certainly could have used its spatial terrain as a template for what makes an effective public place. Presumably, they decided against this. Although the remnants of the past, like Weinhaus Huth, had the potential to be

incorporated into a public memory landscape, designers decided to utilize them as nostalgic ornamental dressings. Because of this, Potsdamer Platz is not an authentic public place that could help move us "forward toward a city of hope" and "backward toward the mire of decay" (Boyer 1994: 475). Rather than a place that nurtures collective memory, the former no-man's land is a "landscape of power" where history has been sanitized and the public interest sacrificed to private economic power (Marcuse 2003: 141).

In contrast, the Scheunenviertel is a place where multiple pasts and horrors can be glimmered. Though the old cemetery is a space that nurtures memory, it is also a geography of possibility and of hope. To reiterate Gershom Sholem's words: "hope is not directed to what history will bring forth, but to that which will arise in its ruin, free at last and undisguised." By acknowledging that the memory of past destruction must be visibly available to the present, we can, to use Daniel Libeskind's words, begin to read "between the lines" (2000, also Schneider 1999) and see a different future for Berlin and for the public square.

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Biodata

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Appendix

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8