**STRATEGIES OF RECONSTRUCTION AND ALTERATION
BERLIN AND THE PALACE OF THE REPUBLIC**

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STRATEGIES OF MONUMENTALITY
BERLIN AND THE PALACE

John MacLennan

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ABSTRACT

The empty site where the Palace of the Republic once stood, now stands for the erasure of history, a silent void populated by the ghosts of a long and contentious past. The Palace stood in the way of vision—the vision of an invented past by the circumvention of a real one. The symbolic importance of the Palace and the history of its place in the city became the premise for its destruction.

This thesis is an investigation of the historical, social and political context surrounding the Palace of the Republic in Berlin, in order to understand strategies of reconstruction in the city. The proposed new architecture will attempt to find and determine new spaces through an alteration that acknowledges the history and context of the site.

The hope of this project is to arrive at a strategy for approaching similar sites of contention and destruction. The hope is to be able to find opportunity in loss, creativity in disagreement, and new life in seeming death. It is to rebuild without starting over, and without forgetting. The hope is to articulate a strategy of alteration with a new construction that speaks of itself and its history openly and unmistakably.

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INTRODUCTION

The city of Berlin has been destroyed and rebuilt in numerous ways. It has become a patchwork, filled with holes that span the gaps of time, and great importance has been placed on how to rebuild, and in what way. In the heart of the city, on an island in the river Spree, is a square that held the ruins of two iconic structures. The foundations of the demolished ancient castle, the Berlin Schloss, remained hidden in the ground next to the large exposed steel structure of the Palace of the Republic. This thesis investigates theories of reconstruction and alteration, and includes a design proposal for this square that presents a strategy of alteration on other historic and contentious sites. The design proposes to reuse both existing ruins to guide and inspire new structural elements, and provide the foundation for a new building. It will be necessary first to frame its context—historically, morphologically, politically, and socially—in order to more fully understand the implications of rebuilding on this site.

HISTORY AND SITE: POWER AND SUCCESSION

Any historical narrative is a bundle of silences. –Michel-Rolph Trouillot¹

A History of Alteration

The land on which the Palace of the Republic was built, the *schlossplatz*, or castle square, has been central to Berlin throughout its history. The records indicate that the first foundations of the Schloss were laid on the Platz in 1443, when the Margrave Frederick II replaced the existing river fortifications.² The situation of the Schloss was strategic because the old fortifications had guarded the lands around it for over two hundred years, since the spot itself was the site of a town called Cölln.

The Schloss was the first residence of the Margraves of Brandenburg, the Hohenzollerns, whose royal lineage would extend their rule on this very site for over five hundred years. The castle was twice expanded and renovated as the needs and desires of the royalty determined and as the city gained in prominence within Europe. The first of these alterations, in 1538, was in the Renaissance style and continued to occupy much the same area along the eastern edge of the Platz, although it had been enlarged and many small courts and gardens had been added. This castle was featured in the first extant plan of the city, drafted in 1648.³

Fig. 1 Illustration, Berlin, 1650

The next and much larger expansion was designed by architect Andreas Schlüter, which included the large eastern courtyard known as the “Schlüterhof”, and was the first major instalment of the baroque building that survived until 1950. The expansion had been commissioned by King in Prussia Frederick III to coincide with the creation of a monarchy in 1701, when the Hohenzollern family was granted higher status by the Holy Roman Emperor. Johann Friedrich Eosander von Gothe soon expanded the Schloss westward with its second courtyard in the same style. And many others, notably Karl Friedrich Schinkel, contributed with additions and interior alterations, as well as the construction of August Stüler’s dome in 1845.

The Schloss had become in 1701 the home of Prussian kings and would remain so for one hundred and seventy years. During the 18th century the considerable growth of the city was forced to respond to the position and orientation of the Schloss.⁴ Its relationship to Berlin’s principle street Unter den Linden reinforced the importance of this axis to the planning of new streets along its length and throughout the city. Moreover, the style and size, and the relationship of the Schloss to the street would influence the design and planning considerations of new buildings for hundreds of years.⁵

Fig. 2 Plan, Berlin 1648

Fig. 3 Illustration, Berlin 1688

Prussia would soon rise to its position as one of the world's most powerful and industrialized states, through a series of wars and land acquisitions. During its many successes and defeats the monarchs continued to rule from the Schloss, and Spree Island remained a place where countless decisive plans were forged and implemented. In 1871, King Wilhelm I extended the long tradition of Hohenzollern rule and became the first *Kaiser*, Emperor of a united Germany, and the Schloss remained his place of residence. Berlin had become the capital of the new Empire.

Traum and Trauma

The activities of the Empire in its first decades were focused towards the intense industrialization and militarization of Germany. Competition among European countries escalated tensions between them and the spread of democracies on the continent lead to ideological clashes with old monarchies and empires. War loomed in the air as nations built up their military reserves.

The Great War ended in 1918 with the defeat of the German Empire and the abdication of the Kaiser. For the first time in five hundred years Berlin was without a royal family. The Schloss, which had lost its *raison d'être*, was soon considered obtrusive and bourgeois, and converted into a museum.

Fig. 4 "Shlüterhof" courtyard

Fig. 5 Illustration, "Shlüterhof" in 1700

Hitler had stirred pride and ferment in a wounded and beleaguered nation and appealed to its desire to restore national honour and to promote peace. His message was directed at a country that had suffered the embarrassing losses and penalties of war, as well as the restrictive sanctions placed upon it, and was therefore quick to find solace in his seductive vision of unity and pride. The devious and heinous means by which Hitler understood its undertaking requires an analysis and scope that are outside of this thesis. Suffice it to say, that in response, the damage to the city of Berlin was extensive. The Second World War brought the swiftest and most thorough destruction the city had yet known, and the outcome forced a change in government that split the city in two for over forty years.

The Wall and the Island City

Berlin was once again a defeated city, this time painfully aware of its responsibility. Germany was now occupied by the four allied powers and the capital like the country found itself divided between east and west. The USSR controlled East Germany and established the German Democratic Republic based on communist ideals. France, Britain and the United States occupied their own sectors of democratic West Germany, and the floating state of West Berlin surrounded like an island by the east.

Fig. 8 Celebration of Hitler's Chancellorship, 1933

Left with a crumbling ruin after the destruction of the allied bombing raids over Berlin in 1945, and the fires that spread through the building because of them, the GDR razed the Schloss in 1950. Opposed by scholars on both sides of the city, the East German government opted to replace the remains with a grand square for demonstration, and renamed it *Marx-Engels platz*.⁸ The role played by the condition of the Schloss is not clear however, since those in the west argued that it was not beyond the means of reparation and those in the east were secretive about their appraisal. It would prove to be a decision of contention in the disapproving west.

In its destruction of the Schloss, the new republic salvaged one portal of particular significance to their cause. In 1848, Prussian King Frederick William appeased an uprising from this portal of the Schloss before giving consent to his troops to open fire on the insurgents, and reinstate his autocracy. It was an event recalled by generations of socialists with reference to the sometimes brutal oppression of Prussian militarism. That same portal was the one from which Karl Liebknecht, founder of the Communist Party of Germany, proclaimed the new “socialist” republic in 1918. Crowds of people had gathered there at the Schloss to witness the birth of the republic and the abdication of their emperor.

Fig. 9 Berlin after war bombing, 1945

This relic was then incorporated into the façade of the Council of State building, which housed the national council and was erected next to the Platz. Although the ornamental architecture of the portal contrasted severely with the austerity of the GDR's socialist building, it had been imbued with meaning by its role in subverting their Imperial oppressors and in the emancipation of their founding fathers.

Mass exodus and public unrest escalated in the new East German republic, as citizens fled over the border in the city to escape economic hardship. Public dissent spurred the GDR to implement in 1961 the construction of a protecting wall around the whole of West Berlin. The Berlin Wall, perhaps the most powerful and enduring physical symbol of modern Berlin created unique conditions on both of its sides. It would have lasting effects on the people who grew up never knowing the other half of their city and eventually came to represent in the West the failures of communism as a whole.

The Palace of the Republic and “the Reality of Socialism”

For decades the Platz was used as a parking lot and ceremonial space as the GDR constructed a complex of new government buildings around it, including the Council of State Building. The decision to build in the modernist style was in line

Fig. 10 Council of State Building
Façade, now the ESMT Business
School

with the restrained functionalist tendencies of the GDR and deemed appropriate to represent the realities of modern socialism.

Positioned strategically as a link between Alexanderplatz in the east and Unter den Linden in the west, the GDR constructed a new palace on the site from 1973 to 1976. Erik Honecker made this announcement while proclaiming the opening of the Palace of the Republic on the Platz.

“Stretching ahead from the Palace’s glass façade we see the panorama of a capital risen from rubble. The television tower, the fountains, the new Alexanderplatz, the Rathauspassagen and the Fischerinsel’s tall buildings. In this scenery continuing in the shape of new avenues, new residential areas and those now being built, the Palace of the Republic is only one item in the reality of socialism as a whole, one item of our life in this, our republic. Only one item—but a magnificent one.”⁹

There was a definite sense of optimism at the opening that life in the German Democratic Republic would improve, and the proof was in the Palace itself. The building itself was monumental, despite only covering half of the Platz, and the new square, since renamed Marx-Engels Platz, was to be used for lavish public gatherings and protest marches. The Palace consisted of two enormous blocks and a central area used for galas and large public gatherings. The north block housed the Parliament, with an assembly chamber and many smaller meeting rooms. The south block housed a large 5000 seat theatre that converted, with

Fig. 11 Palace of the Republic

modern hydraulic machinery, into a ball room for 530. The rest of the building contained numerous restaurants and wine bars, souvenir shops, coffee bars, a youth centre, a post office and many other diverse programs. For an East German building of the time, the Palace was quite advanced, with well ventilated kitchens, closed circuit cameras in the theatre, and a famous abundance of distinctive glowing lamps.

It was a building that aimed to combine parliamentary functions with the pleasures of life. Although the role of parliament in the GDR was limited, and most decisions were made in the Council of State Building, this was undoubtedly a strong and deliberate idea. The GDR could in one swift motion bring together government and life, the rule of authority and the apparent freedom associated with dances and public performances.

The statements issued from the leaders of its time take on a particular tone of fateful irony in the present, “here the future is worked out, policies decided, laws and plans brought into effect, all under one roof, the results of design and decision, laws and plans can be experienced and enjoyed.”¹⁰ There is no question about the duplicitous ideology of the communist leadership at this time, but the importance of the Palace extended beyond its function in the city and the nation to the events of

Fig. 12 Grand Foyer, Palace of the Republic

history and the collective memory. It is critical to understand that to a great number of East Germans the Palace became one of the most celebrated places to gather, and a place where they shared many positive memories in a period marked by secrecy and oppression.¹¹ The building also represents an outstanding example of post war modernism, not yet appreciated for its architectural merit, due to the perceived failures of many urban renewal schemes in the 1960s and 1970s.

History and Perspective

The extent to which these histories penetrate the German national psyche is invisible. Buildings, however, can be seen as visible remnants of past lives and histories and many people desire to destroy or preserve buildings according to the memories associated with them. We can learn about the collective will of a society by looking at its attitude toward these buildings, and we can look at the histories of preserved and demolished buildings to help us understand why decisions are made.

Looking back in time, it is easy to perceive buildings as witnesses of the ages. Buildings are powerful carriers of ideas as well as memories, and they will always speak of the society in which they were created. They appear to take on the role of a link between past and present that connects us with the events of history. Over

the centuries, its history of alteration has changed the face of Berlin many times. Brian Ladd noted that in order to discuss these histories we must deal with our interpretations of each successive era and its identity, "as royal residence, as industrial and imperial powerhouse, as Nazi capital, as Cold War battleground, and as newly reunified capital."¹² We must therefore look at these histories in the context of more recent events to understand their importance to how these conditions formed.

NOTES

- ¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 27.
- ² Didem Ekici, "The Surfaces of Memory in Berlin: Rebuilding the Schloss," *Journal of Architectural Education*, (2007), 25.
- ³ Hermann G. Pundt, *Schinkel's Berlin*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 7.
- ⁴ Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), 52.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Ralph Haswell Lutz, The Causes of the German Collapse in 1918: Sections of the officially authorized report of the Commission of the German Constituent Assembly and of the German Reichstag, 1919-1928, (Hamden: Archon Books, 1934), 97.
- ⁷ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 5.
- ⁸ Ladd, 56.
- ⁹ Erich Honecker, *Palace of the Republic*, (Dresden: Zeit Im Bild, 1976), 32.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.
- ¹¹ Ladd, 62.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

CONTEXT: POLITICAL VISION

In a Berlin U-Bahn station mounted in a frame opposing the platform, where one might normally see an advertisement for Skoda cars, or H&M, there hangs a poster with an historical image of the Schloss. At first glance the image depicts an old building, beautiful with its ornamental balustrades, pilasters and pediments, sculpture and statuary. But the poster is part of a larger campaign and a larger set of ideas about how the city should be built and represented. It contains a link to the website of the Friends of the Berlin Castle, for anyone interested to visit and ultimately to hear their pitch. And indeed, their proposal to resurrect an historic icon of the past in the heart of the city seems convincing, and would seem to raise no opposition. Why then do they need these posters? If the reason for the reconstruction of the Schloss is so clear, why do they need to rouse this nostalgic imagery in the minds of the public? It is curious, but recent developments and the context of radical political change may shed light on the issue.

Reunification and Paradigm Shift

The fall of the Berlin Wall resulted in a vast reopening and reorganizing of the city. To most of the world it signalled the end of the Cold War, but to Berlin it had removed a barrier from the streets, squares and rail lines that had been segmented

Fig. 13 Poster reads, *Infocenter Wiederaufbau Berliner Schloss*, Infocentre for the Reconstruction of the Berlin Castle

for decades. The image of the city as it had once formed was being restored. Or so it seemed at the time. The process of reunification was in fact much more complex for a number of reasons. The removal of the wall, for one, left gaping holes in the urban core and made apparent the need to reorganize city streets and transit as each side had operated independently since partition.

In 1990 the decision was made to transfer the status of capital to Berlin from the West German capital of Bonn. This resulted not only in a federal building campaign that sought real estate in the city centre but a power struggle over all kinds of urban issues. The newly re-established federal forces, led by the conservative Christian Democratic Union party, clashed with those of the local governments in west and east. East Berlin, like other newly westernized cities, was opened up to the free market system in a hail storm of activity. International competition bids, backroom business and real estate deals, citizens groups and the interests of local authorities, as well as land claims to urban properties were all thrust upon the city in the years following reunification.¹ "Berlin's story is one of capitalist economic restructuring in an era of increasing international competition."² The city experienced a period of unprecedented growth, accompanied by a surge in construction projects as the city refashioned itself as the capital of a new economic power.

The Reconstruction Condition

The 1990's were cataclysmic times for Germany and for Berlin in particular. The city experienced the biggest rebuilding campaign in the world, seemingly transforming the entire city into one large construction zone. Architects from around the world vied for their share of the action and vast areas still vacant from war bombings were developed wholesale.

The policies of the governance that resulted in these reconstruction efforts were guided by a particular set of ideas for how the city should develop: what to build, and what to remove. This salient issue was complicated by the many troubling histories revisited by the rebuilding frenzy. Karen E. Till, wrote in her book *The New Berlin* about the dizzying array of billboards and advertisements issued during the Kohl administration to promote a new image of the city as the emerging cosmopolitan centre of Europe. This hopeful message would inevitably evoke the hopes of past regimes doomed to the failures of history. "Berlin is a place haunted with landscapes that simultaneously embody presences and absences, voids and ruins, intentional forgetting and painful remembering,"³

Fig. 14 Palace closed for decontamination

Closure without Closure

In 1990, almost immediately following the transfer of power in the East to its new democratic leaders, the Palace of the Republic was closed due to claims of an asbestos contamination. Many people have questioned these measures as being politically motivated, used to effectively close the debate over its closure, and some questioned the very existence of asbestos in the building.⁴ Others questioned the motives of the leaders to single out the Palace among other buildings of note that were known to contain asbestos, and to act so swiftly to close its doors.⁵ Brian Ladd noted the ironic timing of the discovery, and stated “and so it continued to stand for years, in many eyes the symbolic legacy of a poisonous state.”⁶

The new government commenced what would be a very lengthy removal process during which time the interior of the Palace was gutted and left to ruin for the rest of the decade. This period of stagnation was encircled by a heated debate over the site's redevelopment, with the floods of proposals submitted by thousands of architects from around the world, and the tireless protestors pleading for the retention and preservation of the Palace. Interestingly, many of the proposals submitted to these competitions involved integrating the restored Palace with a partial reconstruction of the Schloss, including that of O.M. Ungers in 1994, which

received 4th prize in its competition. No proposals involving the retention of the Palace were given first prize by the juries. The closure of the building only initiated a debate over the fate of the Palace that continues to this day.

Campaigns of Nostalgia

In this context the Palace of the Republic was as an extant political message of the outgoing regime stranded in the heart of a city eager to reform its image. Since, as we have seen, the Platz was a place held fast in the minds of Germans for centuries, to the new government it would represent an opportunity to solidify their presence and leave their mark on history.

The reunified government and other interest groups set to work initiating a campaign for support to rebuild the Schloss.⁷ Historical books, documentaries, photographs, drawings, posters, articles, publications, museum installations, design proposals and even outright statements clearly articulated their unconcealed desire to generate support for the replacement of the Palace with a copy of the old royal residence. This is particularly interesting because aside from a small minority no one in the new Germany had particular reverence for the monarchy of any kind. And yet, countless images of pre-WWI Berlin were released

Fig. 15 Schloss, 19th century

onto the streets in a move seeming to harken back to monarchical rule, or to what were deemed to be better, simpler times.

It was clear that these images were intended to reintroduce the Schloss as a lost symbol of German identity, not to renew sentiment for old systems of government but to restore to the city—and the newly reformed government—a sense of historical legitimacy. Writer and lecturer Karen E. Till argued that this effort was part of a larger campaign to uncover and include an historic Berlin as an intrinsic part of the new and emerging city. “A newly reconstructed city palace would satisfy nostalgic longings for royal (i.e., pre-Nazi) European pasts previously denied to the Cold War Germanys but would necessitate the erasure of other pasts”.⁸ The campaign amounts to an attempt to reinterpret and undermine the past with surface level imagery that focuses on more “positive” histories.

History has seen many instances of newly crowned regimes toppling the structures of its rivals upon seizing control. It almost always involves the destruction of the most prominent buildings and monuments in an effort to physically reinforce the ideological change implied. One such example had already occurred in 1995, involving a building located next to the Palace and also constructed for the GDR. The demolition of the Foreign Ministry building in the early years of the Federal

Republic was swift and unchallenged for a significant building in the centre of the city that remained structurally sound and contained no asbestos.⁹ Its only crime was its association with an undesirable past and its incompatibility with the new government's vision for its historic core.

Strangely, while the new government scrambled to rid the city of the visible reminders of its more recent communist past, it promoted the “hypervisibility” of its traumatic Nazi era past with the proliferation of memorials, museums, exhibits and even a venerable memory district near Potsdamer Platz.¹⁰ Many of these new memorials are reflective spaces of personal memory and loss, which recount individual stories of the Holocaust, and re-inhabit specific places of historical events.

All of these actions have occurred within what cultural theorist Andreas Huyssen calls a “culture of memory” throughout western society. In his essay *Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia*, he refers to a wide ranging societal trend towards historicism that has transpired since the 1970s and 1980s. He pointed to the proliferation of events and trends including war tribunals and media publicity about atrocities committed in wars past, commemorations of the world wars, new monuments, memory discourses in the arts, the revitalization of historic city

Fig. 16 “Stumbling stone” memorials, by artist Gunter Demnig, mark the houses owned by Holocaust victims

centres, and the popularity of documentaries, memoirs, historical fictions and history television. This overtly historicized political arena was accompanied by the “mass marketing of nostalgia”. It amounts to what Huyssen claims is a pervasive obsession with memory and the past, and represents an increasing desire to bring the many varied pasts into the present.¹¹

These accumulated histories have presented an indomitable task for any empowered regime, the task of establishing its legitimacy by its treatment of the past.¹² The Federal Republic is therefore charged with the condemnation and commemoration of its many histories. And the government will be judged against history according to what and how they remember. They have, as we have seen, shown their ability to remember, and in the years following reunification many high profile projects of remembrance have materialized; the Jewish Museum, the Topography of Terror, and the East Side Gallery to name a few.

What is more concerning is the selectiveness with which they approach these monuments to the past. Typically in Berlin, the creation of memorials is initiated by civic organizations and private citizens and then entered into the approval process of the governing body.¹³ Looking at East German monuments to Nazi era tragedies that marked historical realities of Berlin, Jennifer A. Jordan noted that

Fig. 17 “Fallen Leaves” installation by artist Menashe Kadishman in the Jewish Museum

most of these memorials were not removed by the new government after reunification. More important, she argued, is the attention paid to the memorial landscape. Some, considered unsuitable, have been modified and updated and some have been forgotten and are in disrepair. "Physical persistence does not guarantee continued resonance, or that a site will continue to be used in the way that its creators intended."¹⁴

Likewise, Joachim Schlör, author of the study "It Has to Go Away but at the Same Time it Has to be Kept: The Berlin Wall and the Making of Urban Icons" highlights the tendency for icons and memorials to transform, and to take on new life through the filter of historicism and nostalgia.¹⁵ As has been the case to the present, the influence and relevance of monuments will continue to fade and resurge according to their management and their resonance in the cultural and collective memory of the people.

The trepidation with which many Germans approach their past can easily be understood, but it adds a layer of complexity to the treatment of remembrance that manifests in their structures and monuments. Berlin may be constitutive of Germany's highly politicized approach to structures intended to represent the past—or our memories of it—but it is also more keenly and more intensely debated

here than anywhere else in the country. Brian Ladd pointed out in his book *The Ghosts of Berlin* that monuments, which in most cities would not raise any eyebrows, in Berlin are highly politicized because of its conflicted and controversial history.¹⁶ Issues as salient as nationalism and identity, which many monuments are dedicated to fortifying, find few common adherents in Berlin.

This condition makes it uniquely difficult to build structures in Berlin. Of course, some sites have been imbued with more historical significance than others and this may translate both to its contentiousness and its influence. Ladd noted, “the process of creating monuments, especially where it is openly contested, as in Berlin, shapes public memory and collective identity.”¹⁷ In this respect it is easy to understand that not only does history create monuments but monuments in turn shape history.

It was no doubt both the symbolic significance of the Palace of the Republic and the perceived importance of its site to the historical identity of the nation that made it the target for usurpation, as well as the perhaps natural fear of a resurgent communist uprising. The irony was, however, no doubt lost on the decision makers of the Federal Republic that the solution they sought to rid Berlin of its communist

past was to repeat the destructive course their predecessors had taken for the same reason on the same site at the beginning of their reign.

The Urbanist Problem

In politics, of course, implicit directives of dubious intent rarely align with the public rationale for decision making. As we have seen, during the hundreds of years of successive rule in Berlin the centre of power had always remained in the area around the Palace. When parliamentary functions returned they were situated in a new area that became the Federal Strip, the centre of which spanned the border between West and East Berlin surrounding the Reichstag. Power and influence had transferred away from Spree Island to the Spree Bend in a move that predicated the idea that the new government was intended to be a reunited one.¹⁸

The Federal Republic established itself unabashedly as a new stronger West German government and set about to refashion the former East Berlin as the *Mitte* of a new capital. The federal agenda to create a new capital city in a politically and stylistically sensitive image, here met with local forces that envisioned a liveable urban environment.¹⁹ A new argument for reconstructing the Schloss emerged; that it would restore spatial order and harmony to Spree Island. “The proposed new building will re-establish the historical dimensions of this central part of old

Berlin. It will also re-frame the Palace Square and close the urban gap resulting from the demolition of the City Palace in 1950.”²⁰

Statements like these were the mantra of many theorists and planning officials of the time who ascribed to a broadly based set of policies and planning guidelines called “critical reconstruction”. These guidelines, originally developed in reaction to failed modernist endeavours in West Germany, were being used as a measure to guide the development of the historic centre of the city in the wake of its largest construction surge.²¹ The historicist bent of the strategy was closely related to the concurrent campaigns of nostalgia and aimed to restore the pre-existing image and plan of 18th century Berlin.

The vision of a reconstructed Schloss aligned perfectly with the tenets of critical reconstruction, and as one of its staunchest adherents, Hans Stimmann was Berlin’s building director from 1991 to 1996.²² Critics of the strategy, as well as the proposal, pointed to its restrictive, bourgeois and regressive historicism, and argued that the plan of the Schloss no longer corresponded to the city around it.²³ It is true that the Schloss had shaped its surrounding streets in previous centuries but its reconstruction would ignore the many changes in the urban environment, including the redevelopment of Marx-Engels Platz based on the idea of *freiraum*, in

which open spaces were interspersed with large building blocks for government and commerce.

As Berlin's next municipal building director, Barbara Jakubeit posed the question in 1996, "what makes the art of architecture so precious that if its score still exists it can't be reproduced?"²⁴ The government's vision of the time was laid bare with Jakubeit's comments. It served to diminish the role of architecture to that of the city's surfaces, and offered no solution other than to destroy those surfaces that contained negative reminders of the past. It is this narrow vision that when looking back can never see forward.

Nevertheless, the planning authorities were able to propose with success that the Palace should be replaced for urbanistic reasons. They argued that the ailing and sick-looking Palace should be torn down not because of its significance or appearance but because it represented a planning barrier in the city. If questioned, they had readied their solutions to the urbanist problem: the resurrection of the enlightened planning sensibility of the past by which Spree Island and the surrounding area were once laid out, the defining element of which happened to be the Schloss.

The Polemical Debate

The Federal government sponsored a design competition in 1993, which gave its entrants full powers to reshape the Platz and its surrounding communist-era buildings. The entertaining of such ideas and the jury's undisguised preference for proposals to rebuild the form of the Schloss, led many to wonder whether the legitimacy of the competition had been undermined.²⁵ The sensitivity of the project, as well as public dividedness, academic disapproval, and a severe lack of funds in the newly reunified nation, forced the bundestag to put their plans on hold. The Palace sat empty but was not without controversy.

Private donor and Hamburg businessman Wilhelm von Boddien has headed the association at the heart of the reconstruction campaign since 1992. In addition to raising funds toward financing the building of the Schloss walls, von Boddien's group was also responsible for an enormous life sized mock-up of the walls around an exhibit that dominated the Platz for over a year from 1993 to 1994.²⁶ The exhibit was a carefully conceived re-telling of the history of the Platz that not only documented the Schloss and generated support for its reconstruction, but initiated a polarized public debate between the Schloss and the Palace.²⁷ Von Boddien was later honoured with the Federal Cross of Merit on Ribbon by the Federal Republic, an award for outstanding achievement and service to the nation.

Fig. 18 *Das Schloss?* Mock-up walls and exhibition on the Platz, 1993

Fig. 19 Palace wallpaper

In support of reconstructing the Schloss, German parliament approved the decision to demolish the Palace in 2002, as well as 2003 and 2007. Delayed by monetary constraints the final project outline was not tabled by the politicians until late 2007.²⁸

In the stasis of the years awaiting its fateful end, under the leadership of the social democratic SPD party in 2004, the government conceded the temporary use of the Palace for an artistic intervention, *Volkspalast*, the “People’s Palace”. Reluctant permission was provisional on the basis that the exhibit would not challenge the fate of the Palace, and would not sway public support for its retention through nostalgic retrospectives.²⁹ Despite this, the Palace’s newly exposed structure, stripped of surface, was inhabited with many lively and challenging installations, which permeated its spaces with possibility and renewed hope for its continued existence. As a result, demands to save the Palace intensified in the following years.

The implicit purpose of many of these installations was to reinforce the physical and social metamorphosis of the Palace.³⁰ Protests and further exhibitions more expressly challenged the ideology of the reconstruction. Creator of one such

Fig. 20 Protest poster, “The Palace Stays” 2005

Fig. 21 *Der Berg*, Protest installation and exhibition, 2005

installation, Lars Ramberg pointed out that for most of its history the Palace has existed as a ruin without function.³¹ The desire to change how we perceive the building was shared by the organizers of *Der Berg* in 2005, an enormous protest exhibition in the Palace, held as the government concluded feasibility studies for its destruction.

The Cosmetic and the Competition

During the two and a half year demolition, which finally commenced in April of 2006, the government accepted submissions to three phases of what was intended as the final design competition for the “Humboldt Forum”. Named after the brothers Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, both notable intellectual figures of the 19th century and natives of Berlin, the Forum is intended as an international centre for the arts and sciences, to be used for conferences, research and public dialogue.

The official outline was not always specific to the intended program, and yet was bound to the likeness of the Schloss because of its pre-emptive vision of critical reconstruction. The idea to recreate the Schloss was set into motion in the early 1990’s but the program was not determined until more than a decade later when parliament set aside considerable funding for the project and secured additional funding from the city and from private donors and fundraisers.³²

Fig. 22 Placards financed by von Boddien's organization “Friends of the Berlin Castle” describe the vision of the reconstruction

Fig. 23 Viewing stands and placards for visitors to the Platz, 2008

After a series of three stages the final competition winners were unveiled at an exhibition in December 2008 that displayed all the entries of each phase. The most incredulous aspect of the competition, for a project of great significance to the field of architecture in one of the most important sites of the world, was that no major international architectural firms entered the competition. In their stead was a list of proponents from the critical reconstruction camp, including Josef P. Kleihues. This raises the question of whether the official outline for the design brief promotes an idea that goes against established architectural ethics. It is possible that no one in the wider architectural profession wished to be associated with a high-profile case of an historical cover up. In regard to the reconstruction, architect Rem Koolhaas noted in a 2005 interview for the New York Times, “I think that’s a painful part of it—that most historicism is realized at the expense of history.”³³

The official project outline, and the ardent support shown for the construction of the Humboldt Forum, highlights a particular symptom of this shift in attitude toward the architecture of surfaces. This focus on a guiding image, or *leitbild*, has devolved into what I would term, the cosmetic. It is related by the very root to the idea that a problem can be fixed by a surface-level solution. The evidence for this particular ideology lies in the fact that the official outline for the reconstruction deals only with

Fig. 24 Logo for the “Friends of the Berlin Castle,” the organization behind the funding and reconstruction of the Schloss walls

the appearance of the new edifice. Parliament stipulated as a condition of the 1997 design competition the integration of new program with the detailed fabrication of a copied façade, which they had already commissioned before the competition for the reconstruction was ever held. This is significant—the outline publicizes their singularity of thought and vision.

In a 2006 interview, von Boddien made clear his intentions by addressing the detractors of the Schloss reconstruction, “they fail to see that people have a yearning for beauty, for identity. We’re returning Berlin’s identity.”³⁴ In one statement, he brought together the collective identity of the people with the architecture of surfaces.

Didem Ekici of Michigan University wrote an article about the demolition of the Palace as representative of a wider trend in Berlin toward viewing architecture as surface. In the article she warned that replacing the Palace with an historical façade will run the risk of weakening the collective memory of the site by distorting the original meaning of the Schloss, and “by creating an illusion of continuity between the present and a selected past”. This is perhaps the most powerful and therefore dangerous message of the reconstruction—that it suggests a re-telling of history that omits the communist era. It is a message of denial at a grand scale.

Fig. 25 Winning proposal for the Humboldt Forum construction, by Architect Francesco Stella, 2008

Fig. 26 “BLASPHEMIE!” 1999, notes The irony of the apparent lack of concern for functional and programmatic elements in the reconstruction effort

Writer Bernhard Schneider came to a similar conclusion about the overt and uncritical historicism that marked the interests of the city's planning regulations in the 1990's, in his study of the redevelopment of Pariser Platz in relation to the Brandenburg Gate.³⁵ "They wanted to shape the image of the new born-again Pariser Platz through an act of incantation recalling better times somewhere between 1871 and 1933, as if the destruction and eradication had never occurred."³⁶

The message becomes all the more concerning when we consider that the Humboldt Forum was conceived as a place of learning and is intended to represent the celebration of culture, art, science and history. The question may remain, how can an institution of such high regard succeed when its initial gesture was so expressly adverse and deleterious? How can a building stand on such faltered ground?

Ruckbau

When dismantling the Palace, the German government used the phrase "Reverse building—not demolition," an almost defensive statement, as if warding off criticism in expectation. The process, billed as their responsible and ecologically sensitive

Fig. 27 Competition Image, Francesco Stella 2008, misleading contrast between "old" and new construction

approach to the site, referred to the slow and methodical dismantling of the building ruins that lasted for more than two years. The term mentions nothing about the structural integrity and quality of the building parts that made this strategy possible, and that would also seem to validate its reuse. This *ruckbau* also exposed the high quality steel of the Palace's intricate structure, as it transformed the building. In this light, we can take the government's statement to heart, and begin to imagine the dismantling of the building not as demolition but as alteration, and as a necessary phase in its transformation.

Fig. 28 Above: Palace demolition 2007,
Below: Palace construction 1974

NOTES

¹ Elizabeth A. Strom, *Building the New Berlin: Politics of Urban Development in Germany's Capital City*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 2.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 8.

⁴ Michaela Heinemann, "A Culture of Appropriation: Strategies of Temporal Reuse in East Germany," (Master's Thesis, MIT, 2005), 22.

⁵ Michael Z. Wise, *Capital Dilemma: Germany's Search for a New Architecture of Democracy*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 114.

⁶ Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), 59.

⁷ Wise, 114.

⁸ Till, 7.

⁹ Wise, 113.

¹⁰ Till, 7.

¹¹ Andreas Huyesson, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 15.

¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³ Jennifer A. Jordan, *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 176.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁵ Renée Kistemaker, ed, *City Museums as Centres of Civic Dialogue?* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Historical Museum, 2006), 27.

¹⁶ Ladd, 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Wise, 120.

¹⁹ Strom, 145.

²⁰ Senate Department for Urban Development, *On the Way to the Humboldt-Forum*, <www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/bauen/palast_rueckbau/index_en.shtml> [14 April 2009], par 4.

²¹ Ladd, 231.

²² *Ibid.*, 232.

²³ Strom, 141.

²⁴ Wise, 118.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

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- ²⁶ Didem Ekici, "The Surfaces of Memory in Berlin: Rebuilding the Schloss," *Journal of Architectural Education*, (2007), 32.
- ²⁷ Heinemann, 23.
- ²⁸ Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs. *Reconstruction of the Berlin Royal Palace – Construction of the Humboldt-Forum in the Grounds of the Palace*. <http://www.bmvbs.de/en/Building/All-articles-concerning-Buildi-,2552.1007758/Update-on-the-reconstruction-o.htm?global.back=/en/Building/-%2C2552%2C0/All-articles-concerning-Buildi.htm%3Flink%3Dbmv_liste%26link.sKategorie%3D> [14 April 2009], par 5.
- ²⁹ Heinemann, 23.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ³¹ Geeta Dayal, "Berlin's Indoor Mountain of Art and Protest," *New York Times* (25 August 2005). <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/25/arts/design/25pala.html?_r=2&oref=slogin> [14 April 2009], par. 20.
- ³² Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs, par 6.
- ³³ Dayal, par 10.
- ³⁴ Mathis Winkler, "The Struggle to Shape the Heart of Berlin," *Deutsche Welle* (2 August 2006). <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2140162,00.html>> [14 April 2009], par 14.
- ³⁵ Fred Scott, *On Altering Architecture*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 195.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

ALTERATION: A NEW DIRECTION

“Buildings are taken over in the recurrent victory of the living over the dead, new ways of life replacing the old. The object of alteration is to translate a building into the present, in so doing making it suit a modern way of life. The new organization imposed on the building in the course of its being changed for new uses is in part a guarantee of this transformation.” –Fred Scott¹

Alteration as Palimpsest

The question of alteration opens the field to questions involving the building in its place and time. Given the transitory nature of culture and fashion in the information age, can a building be timeless? How does the alteration of a building address the history of its site? Can alteration be used to develop a strategy of reconstruction on historic and contentious sites? It stands to reason that a building can never be timeless, and that it must respond to the temporal, transitory nature of the world and so lend itself to its own modification. The history of Germany is rife with the architecture of alteration. The nation of the 20th century witnessed unprecedented change and destruction resulting from the Second World War, division and socialist rule in the East, and the building boom after reunification. Its uneasy history offers many fascinating examples of redevelopments on contentious sites where alteration and change have been an important and sometimes necessary part of the lifecycle of the building. It is often the act that renews and maintains the

historical continuity of the existing building, and extends its life. Through examination we can critically assess the approaches taken.

It may be necessary first to define my use of the term alteration. 19th century writer and architectural theorist John Ruskin believed that a building's essence lies in its passage through time, in the passing of ages that wear away its skin and give to the building its historical integrity. He believed that to change or restore a building is to destroy it because the worth of a building is measured by its age and wear.² Architectural theorist Fred Scott referred to alteration as "the agent of temporality".³ This denotes the inevitability of temporality, that in order for a building to last, either our ideas about the building must change or the building itself must be changed. Alteration is the means by which buildings are able to retain their relevance in the city through time. And this may provide the solution for those in power who are faced with the decision of how to treat buildings that find themselves without a function. Alteration may present itself as a more viable alternative to heritage conservation and demolition because it aspires to retain the essential character and memory of the building while adapting it to the conditions and necessities of the present day.

Rudolfo Machado related the planning of a building to the writing of a text, by describing each process as a palimpsest. He explained that altered buildings, represented by architectural drawings, are the product of selective addition and removal and by this means the drawing becomes a palimpsest of overlapping structures. To him, the building itself is also a palimpsest, "since it can be seen as a text of a special kind that is characterized by the juxtaposition and co-presence of other texts."⁴ According to this theory, the remains of all layers of previous buildings constitute an existing palimpsest and these elements are considered authentic because they are the given conditions of the site to be altered. An alteration, like a text, is "written over, partially erased and written over again so that traces of the previous writings remain discernable."⁵ The palimpsest is therefore a process of consciously adding layers to the accumulated traces accrued over time. This process of alteration builds on existing traces to create something new. Cities like Berlin can be conceived as vast landscapes of palimpsests, where new buildings are built upon centuries of overlapping foundations, each overwriting and concealing or revealing the last.

The palimpsest shares with modern cities the qualities of overwriting and replacing, but also superimposing. In medieval Europe the practice of inscribing new text where existing texts had been cleared was a result of the value of the vellum.

When we consider the destruction in Berlin caused by the war and the real estate surge after reunification, we can understand the desire to overwrite by means of replacing what had existed. The base level, like the existing remains of a building, is the layer on which a new text is written and new foundations are laid. Altered buildings, as opposed to conserved or demolished buildings, represent the result of its many transformations, and superimpositions, through time.

The Reichstag: History and Transformation

Alteration can be an integral stage in the life of the building, as a force of change and adaptation that renews and extends its lifespan and prepares the building for further use and relevance in the future. In the Berlin context, one may take the Reichstag as a successful example of renewal through alteration, in aid to those who argue that adaptation to the realities and complexities of present day is the best way to prolong and preserve the life and history of a building. To frame this perspective, we must remember the significance of the building from its inception as the lower house of Parliament for a newly defined German Empire, to its redefined existence in the Federal Republic of Germany today.

The Reichstag building may be understood as a series of events and alterations through time that have allowed it to remain significant, and which have invested it

Fig. 29 The Reichstag fire, 1933

with meaning. The original building, by German Paul Wallot, was completed in 1894 as a compromise solution to a host of varied interests. Less than two decades later its first alteration had been proposed to provide additional space when the outbreak of war in 1914 made this impossible.⁶

Despite the many changes in leadership, political ideology and political structure in Germany, the building remained largely unchanged from its inception until the rise of the Nazis when its Debating Chamber was set alight and parliament was forced to relocate.⁷ British historian A.J.P. Taylor noted that the fire happened at a pivotal moment of instability and political ferment in the nation's history, and therefore allowed Hitler to pass the Reichstag Fire Decree, and the Enabling Law that granted him the powers of a dictator.⁸ After the fire, German parliament convened at the Kroll Opera and the Reichstag building no longer serviced the political leadership of the Nazis. During the 1930s it was decorated with swastikas and used for propaganda exhibitions, and when the war commenced it was used as a maternity hospital. Other than minor restorations to the building there were no alterations made to accommodate these new purposes. To their enemies, however, it functioned as a symbol of the Nazi regime.

Fig. 30 Soldier marking the Reichstag after defeat of the city, 1945

Its symbolic power was reinforced with the infamous photograph of the soldier raising the flag of the Soviet Union atop the Reichstag building in the Battle of Berlin, which became synonymous with the end of the Second World War and the defeat of the Nazis. Martin Pawley, explained in his essay *The Rise and Fall of the Reichstag*, that for the Soviets, the building was a reminder of communist failures in 1917, and Nazi oppression of communists in 1933. He remarked that to them, “the conquest of the Reichstag had become symbolic of recent victory as well as past defeat.”⁹

The capital was moved to Bonn, and the war-ravaged Reichstag was left abandoned and ruinous for many years. With the construction of the Berlin Wall along its east façade the building became a symbol of the city’s guarded wall frontier.¹⁰ In the 1970s, amidst an abatement of Cold War tensions and restrictions, the decision was made to restore the building in anticipation of its eventual use as the federal assembly. In the interim, the architect Paul Baumgarten’s repairs made it usable for various events and as a backdrop for political rallies, and substantially enlarged its main assembly chamber. This process of modernizing, however, also involved the significant removal of ornament inside and out, and noticeably concealed its wartime destruction.

Fig. 31 Foster’s re-inhabitation exposes wall graffiti

After reunification, debates concluded that parliamentary functions would be restored to the Reichstag. “Then as throughout its history the building was there: needed but unwanted; available yet unsuitable; historical and yet, as it were, tainted by its own history.”¹¹ The undoing of Baumgarten’s alteration was central to Norman Foster’s 1997 design. The focus of his alteration was transparency, for its ability to represent the openness and legitimacy of government. By way of the new dome and circular ramp the public is allowed to see down into the chamber, a gesture that implies the accountability of its officials to the people. Although the surprisingly modern interior seems to operate independently from the historic shell, Foster opened some interior views of the historic walls to reveal writings inscribed by Soviet soldiers awaiting the arrival of the Allied troops after the capture of the city in 1945. The project allows us to glimpse the transformative power of alteration to extend and renew the life of the building while this gesture adds a layer of meaning by revealing one of the buildings storied narratives.

The Documentation Centre: Insertion and Intervention

In dealing with historic and therefore contentious sites in Germany, the strategy of alteration must be tied to the historical and political context of the site as well as the intended program of the new construction. As the host city of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds and the writing of many sinister laws, and later as the site of the

Fig. 32 Re-inhabitation of the Reichstag, follows original geometry

infamous Nazi war crimes trials, Nuremberg shares with Berlin the many vestiges of history-laden structures. After many years of use as storage space the city of Nuremberg decided to reconstruct part of the Rally Grounds' enormous Congress Hall. Built during the Nazi era, and only half completed, the original Hall was to be the centre of a complex of buildings designed to allow Hitler to address the nation. As such, all axial orientation was directed to a central point, and all areas of the building were subordinate to the platform from which the Fuhrer would address his subjects.

The city held a competition in 1998, won by the Austrian firm of Gunther Domenig, and the outline involved the redevelopment of the Congress Hall's north wing to accommodate the Documentation Centre, and a permanent exhibition on the horrors of the Third Reich. Domenig's winning design was for the insertion of a new lecture hall and cinema into the existing Nazi shell that subverts its rigid axes by cutting through the building like a piercing knife.¹² He presented a type of alteration based on asymmetry and juxtaposition with the original. This approach runs counter to that of the Reichstag alteration. Foster made no attempt to diverge from the existing geometry of the shell, in preference of re-inhabiting the building in a more traditional, if modernized way. In the Documentation Centre, Domenig's

Fig. 33 Illustration of Nazi plans for Party Rally Grounds

Fig. 34 Model view of Congress Hall, showing axial symmetry

Fig. 35 Digital model of Documentation Centre, showing insertion of new axis, new inhabitation

alteration challenges the original building by setting up a dialogue of juxtaposition between the existing historic fabric and the new intervention.

Kolumba: Foundations of Reuse

Similar to Berlin and Nuremberg, the city of Cologne experienced extensive damage in the bombing raids of World War II. The modern city re-grew over the ruins of its historic centre, and in some areas left them standing as testament to the destruction. One such example was the church of St. Kolumba. The original Romanesque church had been transformed in the gothic style centuries before its significant destruction. Decades after its reuse as a memorial garden in the 1950s, important and vulnerable archaeological finds were revealed and the decision was made to cover the ruins of the church. Peter Zumthor was commissioned by the Archdiocese of Cologne as architect of the new building and his proposal called for the construction of a museum covering the existing remains. Rather than destroying or attempting to reconstruct the original church, Zumthor allowed the existing fabric of the building to inspire a new construction, in a new language, built directly on its existing walls. Using what has been described as, “the communicative power of construction” the alteration has allowed the Kolumba Diocesan Museum to exist as the newest phase in the life of the church.¹³

Fig. 36 Remains of original St. Kolumba church and new construction

Alteration and Alternatives

The alterations made to each have secured their existence in the present. As palimpsests they retained the existing physical traces of history to alter and renew the building. They have been the result of political change, remembrance, and the destruction and reparation of war, and each of these causes has left its mark. Like the concealed graffiti made visible, or the covered scars of wartime bombs, some of these changes may be left visible while others remain hidden.

As shown in each example, alteration must always involve the interplay between two distinct modes. One is that of the past, or the existing, the other is that of the alteration, the new. The approach of alteration is mindful of the past because it must literally build onto it. It follows that the art of alteration is what Fred Scott terms, “the art of response.” The designer’s aim is to achieve a relationship between these two modes by responding to what exists.¹⁴

Already, the decision to alter, rather than to conserve or to demolish a building, speaks of the desire to extend its life into the present while remaining mindful of the past. This may involve adapting the existing building to a new purpose, thereby stemming the tide of functionalist buildings that are torn down because they have outlived their function. Whereas demolition brings an end to the process of

Fig. 37 Kolumba Museum floor plans

alteration and change in response to time, alteration represents the means by which a building at the end of its physical or functional existence has had its life prolonged. Conservation, in its rooted desire to sustain history, beauty, or a specific way of life, may represent the retention of a building despite its functional obsolescence, and in some cases may only function as a monument to the past.

As in the case of the Humboldt Forum, reconstructions can result in a mimicking of historical form, and often stem from a desire to resurrect a particular memory or aesthetic. In Japan, the ritual rebuilding of the Ise Shrines, every two decades, might seem to validate mimicking in the name of tradition. The purpose of each rebuilding is the imitation in process and product of one of the most important structures in the Shinto faith. When we consider the duality implied by the mirrored reconstruction of this ephemeral structure repeated over hundreds of years we understand that essential change is the central message of the Shrine.¹⁵ It is reconstruction as mimesis, rather than duplication. The shrines themselves are built with the knowledge that they will be replaced. The process is undertaken in recognition of its place within the continuity that is the life of the building. The message reaffirmed with each generation is that renewal, and not preservation, is the method by which the life of the Shrine is extended.

This relates to Aldo Rossi's use of the term "*fabbrica*," as construction that occurs and continues over time. In this sense, construction is understood as a process of evolution in the city through time. The persistence of this process results in cities that are constantly changing and forever being built. We come to understand the city through this evolution and through the artifacts it creates.¹⁶ The city is therefore a product of the many artifacts, interruptions and incompletions of history.

Intentions and the New

The alteration of the building is a translation that extends its life into a new age and should therefore accept the need for buildings of the 21st century to be alterable in order to be sustainable. The completeness of the new alteration then comes into question. It may be important that the new building should never assume the completeness of its morphology, since "a project of completion [is] one that aims to remove the building from the cycle of alteration that will see it into the present and also allow for later translations to ensure its active existence."¹⁷ This is significant because it means that the aim of alteration is that it never intends to be complete. The Ise shrine demonstrates the temporality of life and the perennial nature of architecture, in stark contrast to the historical prominence given in the West to the perdurable infallibility of structures.

Fig. 38 Palace of the Republic,
November 2007

Fred Scott suggested that the very purpose of architecture is the perpetual demolishing and replacing of structures, and the alteration of existing ones.¹⁸ Instilled in the latter are processes of both removing selectively the old, and adding selectively the new. "The work is a mediation between the processes of accretion and purification."¹⁹ As American artist Gordon Matta-Clark has shown, in his project *Splitting (In Process)*, the alteration of a ruin can be a careful and purposeful process towards a new understanding, and towards the opening of new spaces for new uses.²⁰ In a similar vein, Scott also equates the selected removal of building parts to the insertion of new spaces.²¹ In this light, demolition can be seen as a creative as well as destructive force, and this idea provides a very hopeful outlook to dealing with the ruins of a valuable building as a valuable opportunity.

If alteration is indeed considered to be an addition or extension in the life of the building, then it stands to reason that the building is not complete until the moment before its final and eventual destruction. Its relationship to time is therefore responsive to the inevitable force of change that permeates all structures. The alteration is a transformative and restorative mediation between the existing and the new and between what is removed and what is added, which ensures the continuity of the building from the past to present age. It is the process of layering physical traces and additions as well as remembering and revealing, that may

Fig. 39 Palace of the Republic,
November 2007

come in response to swift destruction or slow obsolescence. Alteration is, in either case, the agent of renewal that extends the life of the building and affirms its continued existence and significance within its time and place.

The design proposed in this thesis is a translation and alteration of an existing building, the Palace of the Republic, which has extended its life into the new century. It proposes a new building that recognizes its own fragility, as well as the need for buildings of the 21st century to be alterable in order to be sustainable.

The design calls for the demolition to have ceased in late 2007, when parliament tabled its official outline for the Humboldt Forum competition, in order to make use of what still remained at this time, and to determine and give life to a new building. The remains of the Palace in late 2007 consisted of a massive structure revealed by the dismantling of the building shell. The ruin looms over the site, strewn with trucks, scaffolding, fences and mounds of earth like a spectre. And yet, with all the reminders of Berlin's recent past, it could easily be confused for a new construction project. It possessed all the outward signs of a ruin two hundred years into the future, when even the most modern buildings of our day are crumbling back down to earth.

Fig. 40 Palace, November 2007

The hypothetical nature of this proposal is intended to underline the fact that the damage of the “*ruckbau*” demolition is irreversible. Those who achieved the demolition of the Palace destroyed a vital artefact that reminded the city of how it became what it is today. In order for a thoughtful and appropriate redevelopment to take place on the Platz, we must first transcend the laws of nature, and go back in time to the last possible moment at which the physical remains of the Palace could provide the foundation of a new construction and therefore contribute to the enduring memory of the site and the city with continuity.

The remains must be analyzed and treated with care because the ruin will become the foundation for the intervention, and will in the end determine the resultant form. The ruin is a state of alteration, in which its bones are exposed, and it thereby tells the story of its undoing as well as its making. Retaining the ruin leaves in tact the honesty of this story, and allows its life to continue in a new direction.

A Strategy of Alteration

The central question of this thesis then comes into play. How should we deal with these indelible symbols of the past? Based on the theories and examples reviewed, alteration presents the clearest and most appropriate alternative to the reconstruction. I will attempt to establish the rationale of my proposal by means of

Fig. 41 Layers of inhabitation, overlapping foundations (black), and inhabited spaces (white)

three instances; three examples that represent parts of my proposed building. It has been my intention since the beginning to arrive at a strategy of alteration that addresses the structural as well as social and functional realms. I will therefore introduce the structural details of these instances and expand on their influence to the building as a whole.

I had set out to add to the ruins of the Palace and the Schloss, while allowing the remaining structure to inspire the design of new components, and to guide the planning principles of circulation and access that would result in a building of public spaces. Within these ideas are contained three important threads that permeate every decision made in the design: 1) openness and access, 2) the re-inhabitation and alteration of existing structure, and 3) the new as the re-appropriation of the existing. I have selected the three instances to introduce these threads of thought, and also to represent the building as a series of details devised with a common purpose.

Access and the Rituals of Inhabitation

The first instance is the first thing you see, your first moment of entry, the exterior and shell, the enclosure and the face. As a contentious redevelopment on the site of a palimpsest of overlapping foundations and ruins, I chose to make use of what

Fig. 42 Model, view of west façade

still remained to plan the ordering of spaces and points of access. The excavated remains of the Schloss foundations, which remained in late 2007, would therefore inspire the construction of a new floor plate hovering above them, to create a path of inhabitation into the Palace remains. This path, which finds its meaning buried and unearthed beyond the steps of the Palace, provides the first opening and principle entrance to the new building. The path is defined not only by the dimensions of the remaining foundations, but patterned on the rituals of inhabitation latent within the history of the site. It was important for this alteration project to reaffirm its connection to the mostly destroyed castle, not by imitating its likeness as is proposed in the Humboldt Forum, but by allowing the rituals of inhabitation that determined the form of the Schloss to play a role in the new construction.²²

In its new context this path directs the circulation within by connecting disparate parts of the building and defining new spaces. The differing geometry of the Schloss sets up a compositional tension within the determined axuality of the Palace that allows the circulation to circumvent the existing grid. This first gesture is also the first challenge of the design, to insert new paths based on rituals of inhabitation and develop an architecture of alteration that mediates between the two distinct systems.

Fig. 43 Model, plan view of inserted floor plates inspired by remaining Schloss foundations

At the structural level, the alteration began after the removal of the outer bays that once surrounded the Palace. The cores and steel skeleton had become fully visible and the interior structure was no longer masked by the labyrinth of its heavy surrounding structural grid. The view from outside can therefore penetrate into the heart of the building. This was in marked contrast to the original state of the Palace, although faced with a glass façade, its copper tint afforded no views to the inside except by night. The demolition of this layer of structure was a revealing and opening up of the building that seemed in accordance with the desire to open it up to the outside in terms of access and transparency.

In my efforts to determine selectively which parts of the newly disrobed Palace to add to, I looked firstly for moments in which existing structure might have the potential to support a new component. After these moments were found I determined the spatial opportunities provided by extending the structure using its existing directionality. The desire was for the enclosure to achieve openness and access throughout the building, so I imagined spaces that might be created by taking advantage of existing structure and adding new structure. The result in most cases was the addition of steel members along existing axes to establish new

Fig. 44 Model, view of components that attach to the existing structure to form the exterior bay

Fig. 45 Sketch of exterior bay structure

spaces determined by the structural potential and spatial arrangement of the original building.

The layer of structure, removed in the dismantling of the Palace, had wrapped the building with a six metre wide bay on each of its four sides. My first intervention was designed to take advantage of the strength of the interior columns and the structure of the two basement floors in order to re-inhabit this six metre wide space in a new way.

Keeping in mind the programmatic concerns for openness and access I decided that this new outer bay would be entirely transparent and would allow for multiple points of access from its lower floors. The new glazed enclosure would function as a shell through which the original concrete cores and steel columns and beams, which still function as the primary structure of the building, can be seen.

The new layer also forms a bay that surrounds the building and works to modify air temperature and filter light and air, much the same way as a double skin system, but one that is itself inhabitable. The enclosure is not just about providing access to people, but to light and air as well. Alterations to the exterior layer also change the way it mediates between the building and the environment.

Fig. 46 Model, structure of the exterior bay and façade

Fig. 47 Sketch of exterior bay and north entrance

The detail that achieves this was designed as a modification of the columns and beams that were removed. Following from the new demands of its use, and its role within the building, these new brace-like beams make use of the strength of the structural grid to project outwards and become lighter as they extend. This action relates to a common thread throughout the building, in which a strong internal core lightens as it extends out to its open and accessible shell. These braces connect with light frame columns to support the exterior glazing of the outer skin.

In some areas this outer bay provides the structure to support roof terraces and to connect existing wall structure to roof structure. In other areas it provides usable space as reading areas for the library, seating areas for restaurants and cafés, and circulation space for conference halls. On the ground level floor this bay is opened as sheltered exterior space from rain and sun. In these cases it structures the street front of the building to shelter points of access to the interior and to the many retail shops and restaurants that line the Unter den Linden and Spree River façades of the building.

Tied to the ideas of the openness and transparency of glass, natural lighting and ventilation systems, and the clear views of the interior from outside, is the idea that

Fig. 48 Model, façade and shading system

the structural systems remain exposed. The asbestos removal and subsequent dismantling of the Palace resulted in an opening up and revealing of the intricate and beautiful structure within. The introduction and use of intumescent paints have allowed for exposed steel and ductwork that is fire resistant. The revealing of structure allows for the exhibition of the Palace ruins in their new capacity, which not only reminds us of its tumultuous history, but makes clear the role of the Palace remains in its transformation. Only in this state of openness and transparency can we understand the societal changes that forced such opposing treatments of the original structure.

It was my intention that the added façade structure would provide additional usable floor space and circulation, help to structure the perimeter glazing, as well as perform basic functions as rain and sun shelters. Conceptually, it was also important that the façade represent the openness and accessibility of the building's strictly public programs, as a place in the city where people are free to go, where the building opens itself to the city, to the river and to the street.

Re-inhabitation and Structural Extension

The second instance begins with a structural solution to a gap in the existing Palace structure. At the point in time when the demolition was to have ceased,

Fig. 49 The re-inhabitation of the gap

there was a large gap between the roof and wall structure. In order to redefine the enclosure in a useful and meaningful way, I imagined ways for the structure to guide and support an added layer of extended elements in order to respond to the demands of program.

On the inside surface of this connection I have placed a theatre, small galleries, an interior atrium, classrooms and a library. On the exterior is a stepped roof terrace with a connection to the green roof garden on the truss level. The elements left to my disposal consisted of an enormous pair of steel roof trusses spanning the length of the south block, and a row of truss columns originally used to support the many tiers of the Palace's Grand Hall, as well as the outer bays.

In addition to forming the roof of the Palace these large trusses were designed to support weight from above, including most of the interior structure now removed from the frame. I decided to inhabit the grid of trusses on the top level with a green roof, gardens, seating and viewing areas. This massive structure could then be put to use to open up new space to the public that was previously unusable.

It became clear that the resulting gap between these elements might be resolved by hanging a series of new columns from the truss overhead to support a new floor

Fig. 50 New connection to the existing structure

Fig. 51 Structure of new theatre

The re-inhabitation of these spaces is achieved through the alteration of the existing building by the addition of new structural elements. The placement of these additional elements relies on the original geometries that determined the articulation of the structure. The theatre, as an example, was designed by the confluence of a number of colliding elements. First, we have the insertion of the abstracted Schloss floor plate, the function of which is primarily to provide access and circulation through the building in a meaningful way. The insertion of this path divided the structure of the interior, designed for the Grand Hall of the Palace, which originated from its own geometry fused with the orthogonal geometry of the Palace. The resulting area was easily adaptable for reuse as a smaller theatre because of the relationship between the existing interior truss columns and the newly inserted pathways.

Interestingly, the open space defined within the surrounding Schloss floor plates was the historical location of the Schlüterhof courtyard, the most important courtyard of the Schloss, and the private courtyard of Prussian kings and emperors. It is not insignificant that the space, in this design, is re-inhabited with the most public, celebrated functions of the new building.

Re-appropriation and the New Third Structure

The extent of the deconstruction of the Palace was such that one large space, that of the centre block, had been completely dismantled. The proposal requires this space to be rebuilt in order to reconnect the Palace's two remaining blocks. This involved the design not just of new components, as we have seen, but a new mediating third structural system. The challenge here was to reconnect the north and south blocks by spanning this new atrium space from specific structural points. This last instance involves parts of the design that seem to be wholly new additions, but which use the original structure as foundation and re-appropriate its structural principles.

An example of this can be seen in the roof trusses of the reconstructed centre block, the atrium. Using the existing structural grid as guide and foundation, the new trusses span the length of the atrium to open the space below and allow for

Fig. 54 Roof connection detail, new braces support the roof terrace

Fig. 55 Atrium space, new third structure spans the gap between the two existing blocks of the Palace

Fig. 56 New trusses derive from geometry of existing trusses

solar gain. The new light-frame steel trusses reuse the geometry and spanning principles of the existing roof trusses and anchor to the same structural points. The attempt was made wherever possible to reuse existing point loads.

In the same way, the excavated remains of the Schloss, as original structure, provide the foundation for the platform based on its dimensions. The wall foundations are then reused as foundations for the new walls and platform, which define the viewing space for these remains. Visitors of the building are then able to see the alteration and the reuse of existing structure, as well as the remains left in tact and sheltered. The result is a newly defined viewing space for these unearthed historical remains that have inspired the design and re-inhabitation of an entirely new building rooted in its history and its site.

Fig. 57 Connection of new elements in atrium space

Fig. 58 New structure rests on foundation and principle of existing structure

Design Panels

Fig. 59 The ruin as existing structure, November 2007

Fig. 60 Layers of Inhabitation: Palimpsest and Planning

Fig. 61 The alteration

Fig. 62 The alteration

Fig. 63 The Public Program

Fig. 64 The building in the city

Fig. 65 The building in the city

Fig. 66 View from the Altes Museum

Fig. 67 Access, Entry and Enclosure

Fig. 68 The Site: Excavations and the Plinth

Fig. 69 Access, Structure and Inhabitation

Fig. 70 Re-inhabitation: Section facing north

Fig. 71 The Theatre: Insertion and Re-inhabitation

Fig. 72 Re-appropriation and the New: The Atrium and Intermediate Structure

Fig. 73 The Existing as Inspiration and Foundation

Fig. 74 Structure: The Original and the Alteration

Fig. 75 Detail and Connection

Fig. 76 Surface and Material

NOTES

- ¹ Fred Scott, *On Altering Architecture*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 153.
- ² *Ibid.*, 45.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 153.
- ⁴ Rodolpho Machado, "Old Buildings As Palimpsest," *Progressive Architecture* v.57 (November 1976): 45.
- ⁵ Scott, 39.
- ⁶ Norman Foster, *Rebuilding the Reichstag*, (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 2000), 40.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.
- ⁸ Fritz Tobias, *The Reichstag Fire*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), 12.
- ⁹ Foster, 56.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 57.
- ¹² Hans Christian Taubrich, ed, *Fascination and Terror: Documentation Centre*, (Nurnberg: Museen der Stadt Nürnberg, 2006), 17.
- ¹³ Ellis Woodman, "Zumthor's Modern Art Museum is Beyond Time," *BD The Architects' Website* (21 September 2007). <<http://www.bdonline.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=3095607>> [14 April 2009], par. 7.
- ¹⁴ Scott, xvii.
- ¹⁵ Tara White, "Ise Jingu: Monument to the Now," Master's Paper (Rhode Island School of Design, 2006), 12.
- ¹⁶ Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), 18.
- ¹⁷ Scott, 161.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.
- ²⁰ Pamela M. Lee, *Object to be Destroyed: the work of Gordon Matta-Clark*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), xvi.
- ²¹ Scott, 126.
- ²² Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19.

CONCLUSION

As revealed in the preceding strands of history and theory, entwined to present a re-telling of the story, the proposed solution is burdened by its impossibility. I have argued that the redevelopment of this highly contentious and historically charged site should not start from a new beginning. Like the city itself the Palace should have been rebuilt in a new way guided by its remains. Using alteration as a strategy for replacement, the design would not be an imitation of any previous structure, but one that would re-inhabit the heart of Berlin in light of its context and its many successive, overlapping histories. It would represent the translation of an existing building, which retains its essential nature in order to renew and extend its life, and which re-appropriates its structural system to reveal the processes intrinsic to its own making.

The Palace of the Republic, now vanished, will soon be replaced by the Humboldt Forum, to the detriment of history. Having set out to arrive at a strategy for alteration, the Palace remains have nevertheless inspired an approach to similarly contentious sites. In a sense, the initial aspirations of this thesis have been satisfied. The hope of the design as well as the thesis was to invest the Palace with new life by allowing its destruction to inspire a strategy for approaching other

Fig. 77 Schloss demolition 1950

sites of contention. In an effort to expose those who destroy symbols to destroy memories, we find opportunity in loss, creativity in disagreement, and new life in seeming death.

Fig. 78 Palace demolition 2008

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