
Alexander Sedlmaier

Many of those who saw the newly-built Europa-Center in 1965 associated it with America (Figure 1). The newspaper Die Welt wrote: “An air of Manhattan blows through the . . . heart of Berlin . . ., the future has begun . . . The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church ducks under the glass and aluminum giant of the new Europa-Center a bit like St. Patrick’s Cathedral does in front of Fifth Avenue’s Rockefeller giants.”¹ A commentator from an architecture journal likened the 20,000 square meters—which accommodated shops, a business center, theaters, cinemas, sports facilities, and restaurants—to Rockefeller Center or Piccadilly.² Another observed “American speed” in the raising of the tower.³ Critical opinions were rare. One person from a small town in West Germany lamented the half-English, half-German name, “one constantly had to put up with such English-American namings [sic]: when is the Deutschlandhalle going to be re-christened ‘Germany Hall’?”⁴

The builders of the twenty-two story high-rise office block—the investor Karl Heinz Pepper, the architects Helmut Hentrich and Hubert Petschnigg, and the advisors Werner Düttmann and Egon Eiermann—clearly adopted the International Style, which had come to signify faith in economic growth and technological progress.⁵ Following the ideal of integrating multiple functions into one project, they aimed to reproduce the splendor of Raymond Hood’s Rockefeller Center and the new civic spaces around its base.⁶ The Europa-Center’s office tower with an adjacent shopping center was one of the first of its kind in Germany. It accommodated 1.8 kilometers of display windows and was situated at the intersection of several important roads. Its developers frequently used the slogan “a city within the city.” They remained faithful to their model, down to an ice skating rink. The tower’s steel frame construction with curtain walls was obviously inspired by such examples as Mies and Johnson’s Seagram Building or Lever House by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merill. With its revolving Mercedes roundel, the Europa-Center—then the tallest building in Berlin—quickly became a symbol of West Germany’s “economic miracle” and its successful integration into Western consumer culture. The production and consumption of style and lifestyle in this urban complex were inherently connected with the Cold War antagonism between two systems, each seeking ways to express its superiority.
The Europa-Center is therefore an ideal starting point for an inquiry into the transatlantic transfer of architectural style and urban lifestyle. In the postwar era, American influences were manifold in culture, politics, and economics. In the following, I will attempt to identify the push and pull factors—that is, American input and German needs—which constituted this transfer. Crucial to the process were the developers’ and architects’ actual “Atlantic crossings” that went into the shaping of the complex. The project’s protagonists played interesting parts in Germany’s reception of American models, which included modes of familiarizing, interpretation, acquisition, cultural translation, and alienation.  

The architect Werner Düttmann, who occupied the second highest post in West Berlin’s building authority, functioned as urban planning advisor for the Europa-Center. Düttmann had a long record of good connections with the Americans; his career had blossomed on the basis of million dollar grants to Berlin from West Germany and the United States. He was involved with the European Recovery Program in the construction of the George C. Marshall Haus, the United States’ pavilion at Berlin’s central exhibition site. He then served as contact architect for Hugh Stubbins, who built West Berlin’s famous convention hall, the American

Figure 1. The Europa-Center after its completion in 1965. Source: Düttmann papers, Academy of the Arts Berlin Archive.
contribution to the International Building Exhibition of 1957. There he met the husband of a former fellow student and collaborator, the German-American chemical magnate Henry H. Reichhold. This acquaintance led to Düttmann’s professional breakthrough between 1958 and 1960, when he was commissioned to build a new home for West Berlin’s Academy of the Arts, financed with a million dollar donation. As Eleanor Lansing Dulles wrote, on State Department stationary, “Dear Werner: I was delighted to learn of the definite announcement of Mr. Reichhold’s contribution to the cultural life of Berlin...I am sure that you have played a part in this decision.” The academy was originally planned as a high-rise, but protests from the district government limited it to a roof-shaped low building.

Düttmann created the overall arrangement of Breitscheidplatz, which was then filled in with the Europa-Center by Hentrich and Petschnigg, who had won a competition. His model from 1961 was very close to what was actually built, except for one important detail: he proposed a hori-

Figure 2. Source: Ein Mann in unserer Stadt: Karl H. Pepper. Konsul Karl H. Pepper von Mitarbeitern und Freunden zum fünfzigjährigen Jubiläum seines Hauses (private edition, Berlin, no year), 61. Courtesy of EUROPAHAUS Grundstücksgesellschaft mbH & Co KG.
Hentrich and Petschnigg (HPP), from Düsseldorf, had been successful in designing International Style skyscrapers. In Germany as well as abroad, their glass and steel skyscrapers symbolized the republic of the economic miracle shaped by Adenauer and Erhard. Their 1957 “three-slab-building” for the Thyssen group marked a radical departure from Germany’s past. Among architects, Hentrich was one of the few in Germany to adopt “American methods” such as marketing or teamwork.13

Hentrich became familiar with American working methods in 1930–31 when he worked in the office of Norman Bel Geddes in New York. He got to know another young German architect, Alfred Kastner, who had immigrated in the 1920s and worked for Raymond Hood. At the time, the latter was commissioned with the blueprint for Rockefeller Center. It was at the Rockefeller Center construction office that Hentrich met Frank Lloyd Wright. Simultaneously, the Empire State Building’s shell was nearing completion. Through the help of the German consul general, Hentrich obtained a permanent permit to visit the building site. From New York he went to Chicago, where skyscrapers were again among his top concerns. And in Los Angeles it was Richard Neutra—another famous player in the transatlantic architectural dialogue—who made the buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright accessible to him.14 From the late 1930s onwards, Hentrich worked under Generalbauinspektor Albert Speer and was involved in planning his neo-classicist German Weltmachtstädte (cities befitting a world power). One of his tasks was to study and adapt American models of organization.

Between 1952 and 1957, Hentrich and Petschnigg built the first post-war skyscraper in Germany, for BASF, which was among the tallest in Europe. Because there were few high-rise buildings in Germany at the time, BASF was happy to pay for a field trip to New York. In his memoirs, Hentrich writes that he was particularly fascinated by the Unilever House and the Seagram Building: “Just like during my first visit, I had the feeling that the fortunes of the world were governed from here.” During the building of the Thyssen-house, Hentrich and Petschnigg crossed the Atlantic again. This time they visited the leading skyscraper architects Skidmore, Owings & Merill.15 In the Hentrich papers at Berlin’s Academy of the Arts there is a letter from 1930, signed by Louis Skidmore, rejecting Hentrich’s application to join the planning staff of the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair.16 The transatlantic route of exchange was firmly established by 1960, when Hentrich informed Egon Eiermann that the preceding year’s trip had convinced him that interior staircases with airshafts were much safer in a case of emergency than those located on the outer wall.17
Hentrich was friends with those who had coined the very term “International Style.” Henry-Russell Hitchcock was his guest in Düsseldorf in 1957 and later published an illustrated book on HPP. In 1960, Hitchcock wrote to Hentrich: “It is interesting that a theater by Neutra is to go up next to your skyscraper.” Hentrich also exchanged visits and letters with Philip Johnson.

International Style (or Bauhaus) was transatlantic at heart. Paul Betts has shown that the popular image of Bauhaus as a hotbed of a left-wing architecture had fundamentally changed, leading to a revision of the history of Bauhaus during the Cold War. In Germany, the Bauhaus of the 1920s functioned as a starting point for the construction of an alternative and liberal past, while the American side was prone to see itself as the original headquarters of a genuinely American “International Style.” With different premises, both countries strove to build a postwar cultural identity based on liberalism and International Style.

The Europa-Center’s artistic advisor, the renowned architect Egon Eiermann, originally did not mean to be associated with Bauhaus, but the public nevertheless perceived his buildings within that framework. In 1954, when he worked on a tall office building in Düsseldorf, he wrote to his patron: “You worry that the new building could look like the American high-rises. . . .” Denouncing Hentrich’s tower, he criticized “this covering with a steel, aluminum or glass wall that . . . negates the structural elements of a building, namely the supportive structure and the horizontal divisions . . . Once I start to make the forces at work invisible . . ., I succumb to a fashionable foolishness that won’t last.” With these words, he describes the avoidance of the curtain wall which was common in Germany at the time (Figure 3).

Nevertheless, Eiermann also became a key figure in the transatlantic exchange. He had visited the United States in 1936, 1950, and 1957. He again made frequent visits in 1962, when he built the German embassy in Washington. In 1936 he had participated in a study trip sponsored by the National Socialist Reichskammer der bildenden Künste. He went to Rockefeller Center and visited William Lescaze to express his admiration for the skyscraper of the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society, one of the first to adopt the International Style. In 1946 he reviewed the catalogue of the Zurich exhibition on American architecture, which he could not see because Germans were not allowed to travel. In this review, he stresses the German component of modern architecture: “[Le Corbusier’s] works were read and understood in the USA just as in Germany, where Peter Behrens and Poelzig, and later Gropius and Mies, became the pioneers of modern German architecture.” Eiermann remembered Lescaze telling him that only two percent of American modern architecture was good according to European standards. He repeatedly stressed the role of the
emigrants: “It is a proof of the intensity of the intercontinental relationship that . . . German architects have found . . . chairs at excellent [American] universities, where their work has united with that of their American colleagues . . . modern American architecture strikes me as very strongly European.” But he added, “only someone who has felt the still chaotic strength of New York’s skyscrapers foresees the possibilities.”

In the 1960s, Eiermann did not present himself as an enthusiast for America. He wrote, “[there is] a rubbish of new things in New York . . . it is over with American modernism since the big people have gotten old.” Back home he confessed, “one could never work with Americans; they have neither fantasy nor sensitivity and think exclusively of dollars . . . the official style there differs from that applied in Soviet Russia only by very small degrees.”

Eiermann’s aim in the discussions about the Europa-Center was to reduce the height of the high-rise and to divide the building into several parts because he feared too much dominance adjacent to his Gedächtniskirche.

Next we should turn our attention to the investor. Karl Heinz Pepper also traveled to America, but “Atlantic crossings” are not so crucial to his biography. On the contrary, he embodies West Berliners’ famed stubbornness and energetic staying power. His whole career—from the parental piano factory to a wholesale radio business to building contractor and operator of a shopping center—took place in Berlin, despite or perhaps because of, the fact that division, Khrushchev’s ultimatum, and the Berlin Wall caused many entrepreneurs to leave the city.
The Western Allies obliged the Federal Republic of Germany to introduce emergency economic measures to support Berlin. In addition to the European Recovery Program, the Berlin-Hilfegesetz provided generous tax relief and subsidies. In 1959, in response to Khrushchev’s threat to terminate the four-power status, a write-off allowance topped this package. Depreciating invested capital could be written off after three years, at seventy-five percent. As a result, the isolation resulting from the building of the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961, hardly impeded the development of trade in West Berlin. After a short period of recession, the increased spending power of Berlin’s consumers (induced by the Berlin aid) became apparent. The retail turnover in West Berlin climbed from DM 4.4 billion in 1959 to 5.5 billion in 1963.

Pepper cleverly made the most of these opportunities by encouraging people not to transfer their money to the revenue office but instead to Berlin, in the hope of recovering it in a few years. The investment sum total came up to DM 84 million at the time of the opening in 1965. Treasury Minister Dollinger had provided a substantial part through an ERP-credit of DM 23 million. Twenty million had been raised by the Europa-Haus Grundstücksgeellschaft mbH und Co. KG (Pepper’s private limited company in partnership with a group of partners). The remaining DM 41 million were mortgage loans, making it the largest private building investment in Berlin at the time. Pepper achieved a great success with this risky financial arrangement, which was just within the limits of the law. However, by the end of 1965 both Minister Dollinger and Chancellor Erhard voiced some irritation with this organized tax loophole. There was talk of “Las Vegas on the Spree,” prompted by an advertising brochure in which Pepper had reckoned that a partnership would be worthwhile even if the finished product did not generate a profit. But indignation subsided, the general public celebrated the Europa-Center, and the Berlin aid remained unchanged. Hence the Europa-Center’s success became the starting point and a model for a high-rise and shopping center building boom in Berlin, which increasingly involved local party politics in dubious lending practices (Figure 4).

Ultimately this led to the scandal-ridden resignation of the Berlin state government under Mayor Dietrich Stobbe in January 1981. In fact, according to Thomas Hanchett’s analysis of “U.S. Tax Policy and the Shopping Center Boom of the 1950s and 1960s,” we have here a telling transatlantic analogy.

American involvement in the Europa-Center’s ongoing business is easy to discern from the press coverage of the new attraction. The commander-in-chief of the United States Armed Forces in Europe, General O’Meara, attended the opening ceremony, conveying greetings from Lucius D. Clay. The entrepreneurs lamented the failure of a planned
“American drugstore” due to “our provincial law regulating the closing time of shops.” The Schwab department store, an anchor store, belonged to the Singer Company. The Europa-Center’s Irish Pub became an important meeting point for American and British soldiers. Changes during the 1970s and 1980s reproduced well-tried strategies in mall development from the United States: the windy courtyards were covered, the ice skating rink was abandoned because it attracted an undesired clientele, and the whole complex was air-conditioned. A New York architect by the name of Henry Walshe carried out these measures (Figure 5).

The ubiquity of American modernist models obviously provided an attractive alternative to totalitarian concepts in Germany’s past and present. The very name of the Europa-Center points to a reinvention of a tradition, as does the fact that it was built on the site of the Romanisches Café, a celebrated gathering-place for artists in the 1920s. A prerequisite for the Europa-Center was, of course, the building site that used to accommodate the Romanisches Haus, which had been pulled down right after the war. This circumstance is not trivial, for the prevailing ideology of demolition in this case did away with a building that could have offered ample opportunity for reconstruction (Figure 6).

Thus, for over a decade the site was an urban wasteland, housing circus tents, snack stalls, and rats. The semiotic connotations of this site were clearly those of the experience of air war, misery, and temporary use (Figure 7). The splendid Europa-Center carried on this lost tradition by...
accommodating a rather modest Romanisches Café in its basement. Meanwhile, on the twenty-second floor there was a bar with a view of the whole city which reminded observers of a similar one in San Francisco. The Aluminium-Zentrale, a trade group representing German aluminum
producers that used to have its name displayed on a huge advertisement at the Romanisches Haus, now financed the transatlantic study trips bringing Hentrich and his colleagues to America.\textsuperscript{39}

The name of the complex was originally meant to be “Europa-Haus.” This name was already used by an older high-rise, one of the first office-towers with a steel frame construction in Berlin. Here we have a telling analogy. With its eleven stories, it exceeded the maximum height permitted by law. Dietrich Neumann educates us about the curious building freeze imposed by the government for that reason, which halted the ongoing construction for two full years before the complex and its huge sky signs could be finished in 1931.\textsuperscript{40} In the 1960s, this building had fallen out of favor because it had housed a National Socialist ministry and was located near the commercially unattractive Berlin Wall. The Europa-Center, by contrast, never encountered any serious problems during the planning procedures because it was constructed as an icon of the modern metropolis that postwar West Berlin wished to be. The new scope in height, together with the curtain wall and the shopping center, advertised an identification with “Western” values and American “lifestyle.”

Volker Berghahn and others have noted a “triumph of the American model” in the realm of industrial culture in postwar West Germany.\textsuperscript{41} Americanization was equally manifest in the sphere of consumption, if not more so. Here we need to employ Americanization as an historical concept. The United States functioned as a pioneer of consumer moder-
nity. Between 1890 and 1940, new consumer habits were defined in North America: mass production, marketing, the consumer household, the spread of consumer culture to broad segments of society, and the interpretation of the right to participate in the marketplace as democracy realized. The subsequent influence on other societies followed between 1920 and 1970. The bourgeois-Malthusian economic model appeared to be in crisis after World War II. National Socialism and Soviet communism had discredited the counter-model of autarkic command economies. Hence postwar experiments strongly stressed mass consumption. 42

Within that chronological framework, I interpret the Europa-Center as a symbol for the heyday of American impact on Germany. This is paralleled by developments in architecture. Düttmann states that it was only in the 1960s that Germany’s insurance palaces and bank buildings ceased being built in the style of Third Reich architecture. At that time, sandstone, travertine, and marble were overcome and skyscrapers from Frankfurt to the Ruhr were modern again. 43

Although shopping malls and high-rises continued to spread, a new phase in the German conception of consumption and American influences began with occurrences such as the first demonstration at the Europa-Center in 1967. 44 The protest against extended store hours marks a departure from the almost unanimous approval that the public had extended to this rather successful attempt at international style and lifestyle.

Notes


7 Bernd Greiner, “’Test the West’. Über die ‘amerikanisierung’ der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” in Westbindungen. Amerika in der Bundesrepublik, eds. H. Bude and B. Greiner (Hamburg, 1999), 27.


9 Eleanor Lansing Dulles to Werner Düttmann, 14 March 1958, Düttmann papers, Academy of the Arts Berlin, Archive, WV 12.


11 Werner Düttmann, verliebt ins Bauen: 282; Düttmann papers, WV 82.


14 Ibid., 95–112.

15 Ibid., 221–24.

16 Skidmore to Hentrich, 24 July 1930, Hentrich papers, Academy of the Arts Berlin, Archive, not yet registered.

17 Hentrich to Eiermann, 19 August 1960, ibid.


22 See Adrian von Buttlar’s contribution to this volume.

23 Eiermann to Ministerialdirektor Rossig, 6 November 1958, in Briefe des Architekten, 148–149.

24 Sonja Hildebrand, Egon Eiermann. Die Berliner Zeit (Braunschweig, 1999).


26 Egon Eiermann to Brigitte Eiermann, December 2 1962, in Briefe des Architekten, 153.


30 Kurt L. Shell, Bedrohung und Bewährung. Führung und Bevölkerung in der Berlin-Krise (Cologne, 1965), 422.


Illustration 7: *Ein Mann in unserer Stadt*, 48.


