

WHOSE SCHLOSSPLATZ? ARCHITECTURE AND THE “MATERIALIZATION” OF GERMAN IDENTITIES IN BERLIN’S HISTORIC CENTER, 1945-2009

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On September 3, 2008, the *Berliner Morgenpost* newspaper recounted an event in Long Island, New York, of considerable significance to Berliners: 150 donors, guests, and “deutschlandfreundliche Millionäre” interested in supporting the reconstruction of the Berlin castle had assembled for a gala benefit at the estate of New York businessman and antique porcelain collector Richard Baron Cohen. Among the guests admiring Baron Cohen’s collection (which included porcelain models of the castle from the Königliche Porzellanmanufaktur of Berlin) were George H. W. Bush senior, cosmetics mogul and art collector Ronald Lauder, and former secretary of state and Nobel Peace Prize winner Henry Kissinger.¹

In his introductory address to the group, Kissinger observed that the rebuilding of the Berlin castle (Stadtschloss) represented “the reconstruction of an important part of the heritage of Berlin and of Europe, a heritage that transcends geographical and ideological boundaries.”² Kissinger’s reference to a geographically and ideologically transcendent “heritage,” with its pan-European flavor, framed the historic Berlin castle as many “pro-Schloss” historians have: as a contribution to northern baroque architecture and as the oldest symbol of the city.³ Historic Berlin’s first family, the Hohenzollerns, after all, had commissioned the palace in 1450 following the promotion of Frederick I in the Holy Roman Empire to the rank of Elector in Berlin-Brandenburg. After relocating from their ancestral home in northern Bavaria, the Hohenzollerns built and expanded the castle numerous times over the next four centuries. The building’s increasing scale and architectural grandeur across centuries essentially followed the elevation of the Hohenzollern patriarchs from Elector and Grand Duke to King of Prussia and, eventually, Emperor of Germany. Heavy wartime damage in 1945 destroyed some 75 percent of the building, while GDR leader Walter Ulbricht sealed the castle’s fate by ordering its demolition in the fall of 1950, one year short of the building’s 500th anniversary.

At Baron Cohen’s Long Island residence, itself modeled on a pleasure palace in Versailles, Kissinger and other board members of the

1 The article “Zusammenarbeit mit den Friends of Dresden, New York” reports that Lauder, Kissinger, and David Rockefeller all sit on the board of the American group “Friends of Dresden,” which, after organizing the donation of millions of US dollars for the reconstruction of the Dresden Frauenkirche, pledged in February 2007 to officially back the reconstruction of the Berlin castle as well. See the Förderverein Berliner Schloss e.V. newspaper, *Berliner Extrablatt* 54, Nr. 4 (2008), 46.

2 “Reiche Amerikaner sammeln für Berliner Schloss,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, September 3, 2008, online edition [http://www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article872187/Reiche_Amerikaner_sammeln_fuer_Berliner_Schloss.html]. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

3 See, for example, the arguments for and against Berlin castle reconstruction in Wilhelm von Boddien and Helmut Engel, eds., *Die Berliner Schlossdebatte - Pro und Contra* (Berlin, 2000). A strongly pro-reconstruction view is manifest in Hela Zettler and Horst Mauter, eds., *Das Berliner Schloss: Eine Fotodokumentation der verlorenen Stadtmitte* (Berlin, 1991). A nuanced historical analysis of the Berlin castle and its role both as royal residence and center of royal administration can be found in Wolfgang Neugebauer, *Residenz-Verwaltung-Repräsentation: Das Berliner Schloss und seine historischen Funktionen vom 15. bis 20. Jahrhundert* (Potsdam, 1999).

newly expanded “Friends of Dresden” recruited donors to help finance the reconstruction of three historic façades of the Berlin castle to house a new “Humboldt Forum.” The architectural evocation of the Hohenzollerns’ past baroque glory, in its new incarnation as a public institution devoted to learning and culture, would achieve for Berlin what the “Friends of Dresden” had accomplished in their aid for Dresden’s “Frauenkirche”: the reconstruction of an historic and highly symbolic monumental building.⁴ Berlin castle supporters sought simultaneously to reinsert a portion of Berlin’s regal past into the city’s historic center, while reprogramming the building’s interior to provide a future-oriented symbol of both learning and culture, of reunification and reconciliation.

4 For an outstanding assessment of the multiple meanings of the Frauenkirche and its status as church, memorial ruin, and reconstructed urban symbol, see Christiane Hertel, “Beyond In/Authenticity: Dresden’s Frauenkirche,” in *Architourism: Authentic, Escapist, Exotic, Spectacular*, ed. Joan Ockman and Salomon Frausto (Munich, 2005), 40-49.

One can hardly imagine a more appropriate spokesman for decisions taken in Germany to rebuild the Berlin castle than the German-born former US secretary of state. Yet Kissinger’s words bear closer examination as they valorize an official history that has



Figure 1. Heinz Graffunder Architectural Collective, Palace of the Republic, East Berlin, as photographed shortly after completion in 1977. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Palast_der_Republik_DDR_1977.jpg

by no means gone uncontested. The construction of this official history is bound up with the reconstruction of the Berlin castle and the historic buildings surrounding it; even now, the planning and construction process in central Berlin is still smoothing over controversial issues of heritage and historical meaning that have dogged the process of reunification and the treatment of former East Germany. As history is indeed written by the “winners,” West German

authorities have taken it to be self-evident that the East German state was illegitimate, a view that has predominated in the process of dealing with its institutions and its built environment.

Occupying the oldest portion of the Berlin castle site from 1976 until 1990 was, of course, the GDR's Palace of the Republic (Palast der Republik) (Fig. 1), widely acknowledged as one of the most significant buildings in the entire GDR. The Berlin authorities shuttered the GDR palace in 1990 and, following years of protest, discussion, and debate, completed a politically charged demolition of the building between 2006 and 2009 through a gradual, highly publicized process

it dubbed "dismantling" (Rückbau). Early in the dismantling process, during the spring and summer of 2007, the government placed banners at different points on the construction fence around the demolition site. Intended to steer the public reception of the decision to dismantle the GDR palace and re-erect the Berlin castle, one banner



proclaimed the palace demolition "A Democratic Decision" (Eine Demokratische Entscheidung) (see Fig. 2), while another, featuring a shadowy image of the GDR palace, read "A Project of Prestige—East Germany Asserts Its Legitimacy" (Das Prestigeprojekt—Die DDR macht Staat).⁵ As part of the larger universe of "Germans' things," or objects of material culture that in this case were government-issued, glossy color vinyl productions of text and images, the banners reflected official positions being communicated to the public and visiting tourists. Yet these publicly displayed texts themselves became templates for protest and reinterpretation during the season in which they were on display. One graffiti artist altered the first banner by adding a question mark (clearly visible in Fig. 2) to cast doubt on its statement, while beside it (the small scribbles to the right) graffiti listed, in English, the

Figure 2. Banner on construction fence surrounding the Palace of the Republic "dismantling" site. Photo by John Maciuka, July 2007.

⁵ Author's onsite photos, July 3, 2007.

damning assessments of “Western Revisionism,” “Den[ial] of History,” and “Propaganda of a Repeating Waste.”⁶

If the official state point of view now reflects the efforts of the leading private, non-profit group, Wilhelm von Boddien’s “Förderverein Berliner Schloss e.V.,” to reconstruct the Berlin castle, then graffiti writers’ responses reflect objections of the type common among former GDR residents and East Berliners—a significant percentage of whom live near the castle site and continue to cast the largest number of votes for a minority successor communist party, the PDS. Those who accept Kissinger’s language at face value are, in the eyes of those sympathetic to the half century of the GDR’s existence, completely obliterating key monuments and moments of GDR history, along with the history of acrimonious post-Cold War debates over GDR palace preservation and castle reconstruction. Where the post-reunification government ruled the GDR palace an object of the “socialist dictatorship” (SED-Diktatur) and deemed it unworthy of landmark status and consequent legal protections, former GDR citizen-supporters saw its demolition as the denial of a way of life they experienced for more than four decades.

Viewed from the perspective of “things,” and in this case of course “Germans’ Things,” the material culture associated with controversies over Berlin castle reconstruction/GDR palace destruction speaks volumes. Indeed, it does so whether one chooses to examine objects on a small scale—historic porcelain displays of the Berlin castle, or government banners with accompanying graffiti, for example—or on a very large scale—say, decisions over which monumental buildings will be destroyed, and which will be revived or reinserted into the cityscape from scratch. One side’s resources permit the projection of government establishment views in colorful, professionally designed and manufactured vinyl banners; the other side relies on Scripto permanent markers to question or deface the official position. One side publishes lavish full-color brochures, public display boards, and sympathetic history books with top-quality publishers in support of Berlin castle reconstruction; the other side self-publishes or uses small-scale, one-color vanity presses to promote preservation of the GDR palace. In the final days of the GDR palace, concessions to youthful, self-styled avant-garde artists led to a series of impromptu art installations, organized exhibits, and parties that fed a post-unification Berlin “mystique” as a city of exuberance and spontaneity. But by 2006,

⁶ Author’s onsite photo, July 3, 2007, detail.

government demolition equipment had taken sole possession of the palace site for a more purposeful display of dismantling and permanent site redefinition.

On the scale of the city, Berlin castle reconstruction must be understood in the context of the government's orchestration of the hugely expensive, comprehensive re-creation of the entire historic core of "glorious Prussia" circa 1850 in and around the Berlin castle site. Synthesizing public and private funds, the city has removed objects like Josef Kaiser's GDR Foreign Office (completed 1964; demolished 1996) and Heinz Graffunder's Palace of the Republic (1976; 2009). Such large-scale "editing" of the cityscape effectively rewrites history in material form and represents the sort of monumental urbanism that accompanies any kind of momentous regime change and redefinition of national identities.

Much as the government's banners—meaningful things in themselves as designed—project a certain understanding and view of history in the cityscape, decisions concerning architecture in and around the site of the former Berlin castle result in the inscription of a new, post-unification identity in the heart of Berlin. The new construction of "old" monumental buildings is a fundamentally political act that projects a certain vision of identity and legitimacy on the part of those decision-makers who have exercised their will on the charged symbolic soil of Berlin's built environment. As at other contested sites in post-unification Berlin, the site of the Schlossplatz has tended, as Dirk Verheyen has recently written, to "trigger underlying tensions between Ossis (usually the local activists) and Wessis (authorities on the city or federal level) that were but a reflection of the broader challenges facing Western and Eastern Germans on a political, intellectual, and psycho-cultural level since 1990."⁷ Numbers and the deployment of resources, however, do not always explain the outcomes of Berlin controversies: Adrian von Buttlar, an art historian at the Berlin Technical University and prominent preservation activist, writes that in the mid-1990s, some 80,000 signatures had been obtained in a petition for the preservation of the GDR palace, at a time when the membership of von Boddien's Association for the Berlin Castle numbered well under 1,000.⁸

As overdetermined by competing historical meanings as any architectural site in Berlin could possibly be, the site of the former castle is, for this very reason, one of the most powerful touchstones

7 Dirk Verheyen, *United City, Divided Memories? Cold War Legacies in Contemporary Berlin* (New York and Toronto, 2008), 184. Interestingly, this recent study avoids discussion of the Berlin castle and GDR palace controversy in favor of a host of other particular governmental, memorial, and symbolic sites, from the Stasi headquarters to the Berlin Wall.

8 Adrian von Buttlar, "Berlin's Castle versus Palace," *Future Anterior* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 13-30. This article lists the membership in Boddien's organization at 463 in the year 2006, including "a growing number of conservative intellectuals and politicians"; Gerhard Schröder garnered votes by publicly favoring reconstruction and joining the association because, he said, the reconstructed castle would present "a nicer view" (22).

Berliners have for reflecting their complex relationship to both past and present. Setting a course for the site's future form and function has involved the clash of citizens' groups and private initiatives, while local, state, and federal government bodies are all major contributors to the replanning and financing of the castle area. To the extent that East and West Berlin bestrode a kind of political "fault line" dividing Cold War Eastern and Western Europe, it is now quite obviously a focal point for Germans striving to develop a capital city consistent with a post-Cold War vision of a reunited Germany. Appropriately for a site at the historic heart of Berlin, the castle square has been a central battleground for determining not only what the new Berlin and the new Germany will be, but also how Berliners will project this sense of identity in urban and architectural form.

The pace of developments surrounding reconstruction of the castle and many of its neighboring historic structures raises difficult questions about monumental historic buildings as "things," or key symbolic "objects," at the historic center of Berlin. For example, many people (this author included) experienced an initially powerful, negative knee-jerk reaction to the decision to reconstruct buildings like the Berlin castle, Karl Schinkel's building academy, and Johann Memhardt's Army Command Headquarters on Unter den Linden.⁹ Does this negative reaction represent any sort of indictment (real or implied) of the Berlin leadership for selecting to replace GDR buildings with replicas of historic structures that were destroyed decades before? Put another way, does widespread doubt and skepticism at the prospect of reconstructing the Berlin castle imply the belief that Berlin authorities should have chosen to erect a brand new building on this site? Connected to these questions is another uncomfortable question: Can reconstructing a historic building destroyed long ago be regarded as authentic and continuous with the past that inspired its construction, or is it in fact a mere token, talisman, or, worse, an unimaginative production of historic kitsch that forecloses opportunities to erect monuments expressive of the present age and its unique aspirations?

At times during the debates over castle reconstruction in the 1990s, it appeared that perhaps those intellectuals who are more accustomed to debating the finer points of identity politics were simply more at ease with the idea of some sort of "hybrid" building on this site—that is, a building that could, as some architects' drawings projected, incorporate elements of both the former Berlin castle and

⁹ This assertion is not based on any social scientific evidence but rather on the author's own experience and conversations in a totally unscientific, ongoing poll of Berliners and others during periods of residence in Berlin for the years 1995-96, 1998-99, 2001-02, and the summers of 2007 and 2008.

the East German Palace of the Republic. Might such a hybrid architectural work somehow have better expressed a forward-looking spirit on the part of a new, reunited Germany while acknowledging in a more honest and realistic manner the complicated history of the formerly divided city?¹⁰ These questions touch upon issues of authenticity, modernity, and historical memory that have preoccupied scholars of Berlin from fields as diverse as architectural history, literary studies, and cultural studies.¹¹ German studies scholars Godfrey Carr and Georgina Paul summarize these debates well with this observation: “What the debates reveal above all else is the dilemma of attempting to express a unified cultural identity in public buildings which are manifestations of a history of political discontinuity and ideological antagonism.”¹²

Another German studies scholar, Rolf J. Goebel, defines Berlin’s interest in “architectural citations” from its past as separate and distinct from historic building restorations: to him, such architectural citations “reveal a productive tension between past and present, between the metaphysics of authenticity and the media-directed politics of simulation.”¹³ Less clear, however, is what exactly this media-directed politics of simulation is productive of: does it contribute to the production of a more authentic contemporary German identity following the fall of the Berlin Wall? Or, by contrast, does it result in the creation of an architectural spectacle that balances the need for public institutions (libraries, museums, etc., which are to be housed in the Humboldt Forum) with the seemingly global desire of cities to produce sites for mass tourism in their historic city centers, as has been traced by such architectural historians as Françoise Choay?¹⁴

Locals who support castle reconstruction have long insisted that a hybrid solution of a Berlin castle façade adjoining a portion of the GDR palace is out of the question. Under the leadership of Wilhelm von Boddien, supporters formed the Association for the Berlin Castle in 1993 to lobby for reconstruction of the original royal residence and displayed a model of the castle in a diorama of historic Berlin. They commonly tout the castle as “the most significant baroque building north of the Alps,” and one of its principal architects, Andreas Schlüter, as “the Michelangelo of Northern Europe.”¹⁵ Yet

>> 35-39. For examples of the hybrid building as well as a variety of other projected architectural “solutions” to the question of Schlossplatz construction, see *Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, Historische Mitte Berlin-Schlossplatz. Ideen und Entwürfe 1991-2001* (Berlin, 2001).

11 Compare, for example, two nuanced discussions by literary scholars of the broader context of Berlin’s castle reconstruction debates: Rolf J. Goebel, “Berlin’s Architectural Citations: Reconstruction, Simulation, and the Problem of Historical Authenticity,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 118, no. 5 (October 2003): 1268-89; and Andreas Huyssen, “After the War: Berlin as Palimpsest,” in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, 2003), 72-84.

12 Godfrey Carr and Georgina Paul, “Unification and Its Aftermath: The Challenge of History,” in *German Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Rob Burns (Oxford, 1995), 325-48; quotation from 338.

13 Goebel, “Berlin’s Architectural Citations,” 1269.

14 Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, trans. Lauren M. O’Connell (Cambridge, 2001), especially Chapter 6, “Historic Heritage and the Contemporary Culture Industry,” 139-63.

15 These and similar characterizations recur in issues of the association’s own newspaper, the *Berliner Extrablatt*, for example, in vol. 46, no. 4 (2007): 19.

10 The Berlin architectural historian Johann Friedrich Geist traces

the evolution of this attitude in “Der Palast aus westlicher Sicht,” in *Zur*

historischen Mitte Berlins: Denkschrift, ed. Michael Kraus et al. (Berlin, 1992), >>

these obvious exaggerations aside, we should make no mistake: the Berlin castle, locally if selectively celebrated, is a virtual unknown in the global canon of architectural history—as compared to, say, the Louvre or Versailles in Paris, or Buckingham Palace or St. Paul’s Cathedral in London.

Yet the story of how the canvas façade project of 1993 generated early momentum for Wilhelm von Boddien’s nonprofit association has become quite well known, and is publicized in numerous historical and journalistic publications. Also well known is the gradual accumulation of city and state support over the past decade for this private group’s initiative for castle reconstruction. The private initiative of Wilhelm von Boddien and his supporters, in effect, carried the ball on behalf of castle reconstruction during the 1990s; government authorities at that time appear to have wrestled with questions of how to tear down the GDR palace without incurring too much organized political opposition or poor publicity.

The physical treatment and fate of the Palace of the Republic during the 1990s seems to support this. While the city wrapped such monuments as the Brandenburg Gate or the Berlin City Hall behind protective canvas-covered scaffolding to complete renovations, the Palace of the Republic was left exposed to the elements for years while the building was gutted in an asbestos removal process conducted on the cheap. Architectural historian Johann Friedrich Geist of West Berlin lambasts the government’s widely accepted claim that asbestos contamination required the Palace of the Republic’s destruction: the International Congress Center in West Berlin, similarly plagued by asbestos contamination as a result of broadly similar construction techniques used in the 1970s, was never torn down; its asbestos abatement program, unlike that of the GDR palace, simply found a ready budget appropriation.¹⁶

Similarly, when I first met Justinian Jampol, director of the Wende Museum of East German Culture in Los Angeles, I told him of my theory that Berlin authorities may have let the GDR palace rot under repeated seasonal cycles of sun, snow, and rain intentionally to advertise for the building’s own destruction. I had, in fact, taken to referring to this phenomenon at the GDR palace as “historic preservation in reverse.” Jampol offered an interesting anecdotal reply. He recalled his conversations with Berlin asbestos abatement contractors who competed in the mid-1990s to win the contract for

16 Johann Friedrich Geist, “Der Palast der Republik aus westlicher Sicht,” in *Kampf um den Palast*, ed. Rudolf Ellereit and Horst Wellner (Berlin, 1996), 34-36. This article appears to be an updated version of Geist’s similarly titled essay in note 10.

asbestos removal at the palace. After several rounds of bidding and repeated government requests to contractors to further reduce their estimates, a government official finally admitted to the contractors, “Don’t worry if these low cost estimates mean that you aren’t able to do the most thorough job possible. The Palace of the Republic is not meant to survive in the long run anyway.” Although unscientific, this story clearly represents a reversal of the cause and effect events that have become the official and popular history of why the GDR palace was dismantled: the asbestos is given as the reason the palace could not survive when it appears, in fact, to have served as a pretext for the building’s demolition.

After nearly a dozen years of campaigning by von Boddien in favor of the castle, and the neglect and partial destruction of the GDR palace during the same period, the government stepped up its resolve. It followed the conclusions of a specially appointed commission in 2002 that recommended destruction of the GDR palace and reconstruction of the castle. This report fueled a vote on July 4, 2002, in the Reichstag, that prevailed by 380 to 133, to dismantle the Palace of the Republic, a process that would take place with much fanfare and environmentally correct propaganda from the period beginning in June 2006 and ending in February 2009.¹⁷ What we now have on this site, from an architectural historical perspective, is a rather unique situation: an historical royal palace structure, largely shunned by the rulers who built it in favor of their palace retreats in Potsdam, which nevertheless occupied a site of overwhelming historical, geographical, symbolic, and urbanistic significance. The symbolic reoccupation of the GDR palace site and the former Marx Engels Platz site with the ideologically “right” kind of architecture is every bit as important as the West’s perceived elimination of GDR structures, which, like the Palace of the Republic, were in use for less than two decades. These could therefore be regarded as temporary, illegitimate defacements by the communist bloc of a historic Berlin in need of restoration.

Central to the planning and reconstruction of the castle site has been the fact that, while the union of East and West Germany in 1991 is touted as “reunification,” it was, of course, the capitulation of East Germany to West Germany, with the subsequent absorption of the East German territory, economy, and society into a completely West German democratic capitalist system. The West’s system, having been “the enemy” to the East German state for some four decades

17 Beitrag zur Schloss-Debatte im Deutschen Bundestag: Auszug aus dem Plenarprotokoll 14/248 (4 Juli 2002), Stenographischer Bericht, 248. Sitzung, online at http://www.antje-vollmer.de/cms/default/dok/4/4417.beitrag_zur_schlossdebatte_im_deutschen_bundestag/html.

of the Cold War, was now, for better or worse, the new master of East Germans' fate. Why is this important? Because this political dynamic underlying the otherwise reassuring and peaceable term "reunification" has also determined the course of decisions taken in the parliament, or Reichstag, and elsewhere, concerning planning, demolition, and reconstruction at the castle square. Virtually from the end of the Cold War, a tension has existed between what is discussed as being possible for the site of the former castle, on the one hand, and what is actually done to determine the final fate of GDR buildings and, ultimately, to prompt the reconstruction of the main façades of the historic Berlin castle itself, on the other.

Witness the ambitions displayed by West German government departments in moving from Bonn to Berlin: a kind of agency land grab ensued as, for example, the Foreign Office showed great interest in constructing its new headquarters on the site of the former Berlin castle. As Michael Wise argues in his book, *Capital Dilemma*, the Foreign Office nearly succeeded. It certainly did succeed when it came to setting the wheels in motion for the destruction of the old East German Foreign Office building, a long, obtrusive "bar"-shaped structure that framed the western edge of the Marx Engels Platz from Unter den Linden down to Werderstrasse, along the western side of the Spree River Canal. Compared to the furor generated by discussions over whether to destroy Heinz Graffunder's Palace of the Republic, which ran parallel to the Foreign Office on the opposite side of the Marx Engels Platz, there was relative calm in the public sphere when, in the fall of 1995, demolition equipment tore through the repetitive vertical windows and aluminum panels of the Josef Kaiser Architectural Collective's 1966 GDR Foreign Office building.¹⁸

Appeals from four points of view have primarily driven the dynamics behind the decision to reconstruct the Berlin castle: the historical, geographical, symbolic, and urbanistic significance of the castle. Specifically, proponents of castle reconstruction have gained maximum momentum by pointing to the simple fact that it is Frederick I's elevation to Elector status in the fifteenth century Holy Roman Empire, and the Hohenzollern family's subsequent move to this relatively small town on the Spree River from Bavaria, that gave rise to the castle and the rapid growth of the town in the centuries that followed. The sound bite used most frequently in the post-Cold War castle reconstruction debates has been, "The castle was not in Berlin—the castle WAS Berlin" ("Das Schloss lag nicht in Berlin—Berlin

18 Michael Z. Wise, *Capital Dilemma: Germany's Search for a New Architecture of Democracy* (New York, 1998), 49-50; 113-16.

WAR das Schloss”). Coined in 1992 by the Berlin historian Wolf Jobst Siedler, this phrase has become something of a slogan for pro-reconstruction forces. By invoking the castle as the beating historical heart of the city almost from its inception, the claims of would-be reconstructionists sidestep debates over aesthetic merit and the questionable authenticity of a twenty-first century façade in the baroque style. They appeal instead simply to the awesome significance of the site and the role that the building and its occupants played in the evolution of the city over 500 years. The fourteen-year



period during which the offending Palace of the Republic served as a showcase for the “Socialist Party Dictatorship”—the Federal Republic’s still current term for the East German state responsible for blowing up the castle ruins in 1950—is judged to represent insufficient cause for the preservation of a socialist “palace” over a reconstructed “Berlin palace.”

This argument feeds into several others. Geographical and historical essentialism justify the reconstruction of a replica. This replica is then taken, paradoxically, as an authentic expression of Berlin’s history and a sense of loyalty on the part of leading constituencies to institutions like the monarchy that helped shape Berlin, Prussia, and Germany over centuries. Simultaneously, castle reconstruction is

Figure 3. Aerial view of the dismantling of the Palace of the Republic, July 2008, with views, shown clockwise beginning at far left, of the Marstall building (façade only), the Ministry of State building, the new Foreign Office building, the partially reconstructed Bauakademie, the Werder Church, the reconstructed Schinkel Plaza, and, on the far right, the reconstructed Kommandatur/Bertelsmann Foundation building on Unter den Linden. Photo by John Maciuika.

seen as necessary for reaffirming the key role the building played in the urban development of the city district around it. And, to be sure, much of the urban fabric surrounding the castle was laid out in response to the castle and its domineering presence—Schinkel’s grand façade for the Old Museum (Altes Museum) is a well-documented, archetypal example of such a response, as are the Prussian Armory and the Marstall building. This fact strengthens justifications for reconstructing the castle “as it was,” even if only for the urban scenography of the historic façades.

The destruction of the GDR Foreign Office exposed the site of Memhardt’s Army Headquarters on Unter den Linden, which was reconstructed to house the Bertelsmann Foundation in 2005. Foreign Office demolition also laid bare the site of the former Building Academy and the Schinkelplatz, whose postwar ruins were cleared in 1961. Both are now undergoing reconstruction with support from corporations like Daimler-Benz and a separate nonprofit organization, the Association for the Support of the Building Academy (Fig 3).¹⁹ Finally, removal of the last of the Palace of the Republic in February 2009 has opened the way for the scheduled reconstruction of the castle façades in anticipation of the new “Humboldt Forum.” Construction is slated to last from 2010 through 2014 to the designs of the Italian architect Franco Stella, winner of a 2008 competition for the three façades, although exact design details for the building interiors have yet to be worked out.²⁰

The reconstructed castle façades of the new Humboldt Forum will, in any event, house educational, cultural, and scientific facilities. These include a “Museum of Non-European Art” comprising the ethnographic collections that had been displaced in the Berlin suburb of Dahlem; a “Museum of Sciences” from the Leibniz Society and the Academy of Sciences; and a “Library of Arts and Sciences” made up of selected holdings from the city and state libraries. Finally, there is to be something called the “Cultural Events Agora.” This will be centered around a reconstructed and covered version of the “Schlüterhof,” the largest of the castle’s courtyards.

The estimated total cost of the project is €480 million, although a September 2008 issue of the *Berliner Morgenpost* reported that the government now estimates a cost ceiling of €510 million. The federal government has pledged to provide €386 million of this, and German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrueck has approved the first €105

19 See Förderverein-Bauakademie, *Mythos Bauakademie—Bauakademie Journal* (Berlin, 2007), journal/large format color brochure.

20 “Zurück in die Geschichte,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 64, No. 278 (2008): 1; Jens Bisky, “Triumph des Rasters: Der italienische Architekt Franco Stella hat den Wettbewerb für das Berliner Humboldt-Forum gewonnen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 64, No. 278 (2008): 15.

million in expenditures. A projected €80 million in private funds—€15 million of which Wilhelm von Boddien’s castle association has gathered so far—is to match this sum. The City of Berlin has committed a further €32 million, marking a serious commitment of public and private funds.²¹ For its part, Boddien’s association has decorated its public information offices at Berlin Hausvogteiplatz in part as a showroom on a 1:1 scale, with plaster replicas of ornamental portions of the Berlin castle, complete with prices at which a donation can link any donor’s name in perpetuity with the building element in question. As of July 2007, for example, a complete window unit with ornamental sills and decorative balustrades based on the designs of Andreas Schlüter exhibited in plaster listed donation prices between €48,250 and €76,400, depending on the architectural detail and the story of the building.²²

To understand the decisions behind castle reconstruction requires us to understand that there may be elements of revenge as well as repression, which I mean in the sense of eliminating key elements of GDR history in the form of the architecture that stood on this site. This may be combined with a desire to resurrect historical buildings created at a time when Berlin, and Germany as a whole, had not yet plunged into the catastrophic experience of two world wars, followed, obviously, by two opposed Cold War regimes. By approximately 2015, if all goes as planned, a rebuilt royal castle surrounded by a reconstructed ensemble of mostly nineteenth-century buildings will comprise the heart of a new, tourist-dominated quarter. The historic heart of the city will be composed of structures that evoke Berlin as the capital of a state that unified Germany in 1871 rather than a socialist state and Eastern Bloc Soviet colony, or, before that, a command post for the military campaigns and worst genocidal horrors perpetrated during the Second World War.

The participation of American politicians and philanthropists in funding the reconstruction of the Berlin castle points to another feature of the entire castle debate: its link with larger geopolitical realities that shaped the city after the end of the Second World War. American conservative politicians’ support for castle reconstruction is entirely consistent with those quarters in American politics that most favored aggressive responses by Western occupation forces to real and perceived threats from the East bloc, beginning with the Berlin airlift and extending through opposition to the Berlin Wall and right up to the events that precipitated the end of the Cold War. To that extent,

21 *Der Tagesspiegel*, June 10, 2007, as cited in Stephen Naumann, *Solving the Stadtschloss Dilemma: What an Old Façade Will Say about New Berlin* (Saarbrücken, 2007), 45. It should be noted that these figures are subject to adjustment based on prevailing economic and political conditions.

22 Author’s site visit and photos, July 3, 2007. Further examples in *Berliner Extrablatt* 46, no. 4 (2007): 18: individual balustrade elements at €850 apiece, a metope for portal II at €8,160, a “colossal column capital” for €159,900, etc.

American support for a project predicated on the removal of the GDR Palace of the Republic and its replacement by the Berlin castle and Humboldt Forum represent in part a further “nail in the coffin” of an East bloc power, at the same time reconstructing an element of German and Prussian heritage of value to the West German government forces that Americans had supported since the late 1940s.

Whereas the American Friends of Dresden would support reconstruction of the Dresden Frauenkirche and, later, reconstruction of the Berlin castle, other Americans sensitive to the GDR history being expunged stepped in to salvage and preserve what they could. As a result, some East German material artifacts managed to survive the general post-reunification fever, in which so many such objects were discarded or destroyed, ending up in American collections like the Wende Museum and the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. These two institutions hold some of the finest examples of architectural plans, models, and actual flatware and stationery from the Palace of the Republic that might not have survived had they remained in Germany. Such artifacts have recently been lent back to German and European institutions for exhibitions seeking to represent Cold War material culture and the historical realities of that time.²³

As plans to reconstruct the Berlin castle proceed at a pace dictated by fluctuating political and economic realities, visitors to Berlin will encounter both a modern cityscape and a historical fabric reconstructed atop the “edited” urban core—a core dominated until the first decade of the twenty-first century by a GDR ensemble. If, as pro-castle forces in the parliament and elsewhere have repeated, modernism has been the architectural language of choice at Potsdamer Platz, the Sony Center, the Jewish Museum, the Reichstag Dome, and the Holocaust Memorial, then perhaps the historic heart of Berlin is one location that has been granted a special pass to re-erect historical architecture as part homage, part heritage, and, to be sure, part victory monument.²⁴

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23 An example of this phenomenon is *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970*, an exhibition organized by the Victoria & Albert Museum from September 25, 2008-January 11, 2009. See the exhibition catalog: David Crowley and Jane Pavitt, eds., *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970* (London, 2008), as well as Jana Scholze's contribution in this volume.

24 An exhibition at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, organized by the Munich Technical University Architecture Museum and on view from July through October 2010, thematized the politics and meanings of historical reconstruction in an immense global survey of more than 150 projects. The Berlin castle reconstruction was omitted from the exhibition, possibly because of the highly politicized nature of the project, but it is discussed in the exhibition catalog: Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *Geschichte der Rekonstruktion-Konstruktion der Geschichte* (Munich, 2010), especially 16-17.