BERLIN. THE CHOSEN HISTORY

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[fig. 2] Berlin aerial view from the Reichstag
Since Berlin was elected new capital in 1991 for the reunited Germany, its future has been designed through the lost history.

As Berlin has left behind its heroic and propagandistic role as flashpoint of the cold war and makes forceful efforts to imagine itself as the new capital of a reunited nation, the city has become something like a place where we can focus issues of contemporary urbanism and architecture, historical memory and forgetting.

The projections for Berlin are now in line with the obsessions for the historical memorial, in the middle of intense debates about how to arrange its pasts when the cold war has disappeared.

Urban projects that are subject to be visited by the great mass of public in the city of Berlin seem to respond in a clear manner to the call of profits in the capitalist system, sometimes with some melancholy towards a past that seems to be reconstructed in a forced way.

Too far away are the days where the urban plans of reference, which became important in the world of architecture and urban planning, were those the purpose of which (achieved to a greater or lesser extent) was the construction of the city and the welfare of its inhabitants. However, the appearance and propaganda that we see today as the purpose of some buildings, were also the most important reasons for architecture during some other periods in the past.

Koolhaas marked the first half of the twentieth century as the period in which the system chose Manhattan as a laboratory to study the limits of the city. The keys of the contemporary metropolis for the architect were, though, divided into two: one in New York, USA, another in Berlin, Europe. Berlin as a palimpsest was a superposition of several times that revealed realities and situations.

“Berlin as palimpsest, a disparate city-text that is being rewritten while earlier text are preserved, traces restored, erasures documented- all of this producing a complex web of historical markers that point to the continuing heterogeneous life of a vital city ambivalent about both its built past and its urban future.”

The reconstruction of Berlin in this century shows us the practical consequences of architectural theories and economic constraints to which a large city is subjected. In Berlin we can find the architecture of Peter Behrens, the expressionism of Mendelsohn and Hans Scharoun, the Internationale Bauaustellung, the plans of Welt Berlin Stadt, the modernity of Hansaviertel, or the postmodernity of Tegel... It looks like a museum of world architecture: works by James Stirling, Aldo Rossi, Daniel Liebeskind, Zaha Hadid, Giorgio Grassi, Rob Krier, Frank Gehry, Norman Foster, John Hejduk, Peter Eisenman, Rem Koolhaas, Alvaro Siza, Rafael Moneo, Renzo Piano ... But more than an architecture exhibition, Berlin is like an urban laboratory, steeped in experimentation and constant review.
1. *Growth euphoria and the great city spaces*

The Städtebauaustellung Allgemeine (General Exhibition of Urbanism) in 1910, was aimed at drawing up proposals for a new master plan for construction of Greater Berlin.

- One goal of this exhibition was to show its greatness and prosperity and to be a focus of attraction throughout Europe.

The First World War (1914-1918) destroyed those illusions of wealth and growth and the "utopia of a happy world".
2. From the futuristic to the functional city.

- Homelessness and the dynamics of trade unions in the Weimar Republic were leading the action. Under the leadership of Martin Wagner and his strong political commitment came the famous large industrial estates in Berlin (Siedlungen).
3. The second architecture exhibition in Berlin in 1931

- "Building the Third Reich" by Albert Speer

(fig. 9) Plan of the avenue Unter den Linden during the Nazi period. Landesarchiv Berlin

(fig. 10) of the avenue Unter den Linden during the Nazi period. Landesarchiv Berlin
4. New beginnings

[fig. 11] Aerial view of the Friedrichstadt after the war, 1945.
5. Interbau versus Stalinallee

In the mid-fifties, the two completely opposed emblematic examples of urban ideologies appeared on both the east and west of the divided city:

- Stalin Avenue (Stalinallee). It was a fundamental part of the political action of propaganda, which was held with the National Aufbauprogramm (National Reconstruction Program) and the new theory of socialist realism in architecture and socialism.

- The Hansa district in West Berlin: undoubtedly the main part of the inner urban reconstruction within modern principles, symbol of a democratic and free construction and opposite to the sumptuous Stalinallee.
Berlin: the Chosen History to the contemporary tourism.

After the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the two parts of the city, old guilt and memory retrieval were the keys to restore the sense of national identity and the large capital that Berlin once had been. Although the most publicized urban projects have been Potsdamerplatz and Alexanderplatz, they are also representing the total surrender to the consumer society. Other examples, however, with public investment, are also centers of cultural and tourist attraction but face memory in other ways.
1. **Memories of the Holocaust.**

- This are the most important symbols that connect the desire to make the city a magnet for visitors and the memory of the tragedy of the past of Nationalsozialism.

- However, the new invented Berlin architecture, forget about other passages of the history mentioned above.
2. **Institutions and symbols of the new democratic Germany.**

Another example of restoration would be the most eclectic combination of the Reichstag, the square of the Brandenburg Gate with:

- a new Hotel Adlon built and opened in 1997 in imitation of the old hotel from the Gründerzeit.
- The Reichstag, with a hypermodern dome designed by Sir Norman Foster
- The reconstruction of the Stadtschloss, old palace of the Hohenzollern.
3. The new financial centers, centers of attraction for divisas.

The site shows the power of the new global capitalism (the Sony Center, Daimler Chrysler Headquarters), large areas of consumerism (the Arcade) and the entertainment industry (Cinemaxx, the theater in Berlin Marlene-Dietrich-Platz) in the same place, while reconstructing fragments of the buildings that occupied the square in the Greater Berlin (halls of the Hotel Esplanade).
4. Berlin’s museums and restoration of monuments

The negotiation with history, in some cases, has led Berlin to an eclectic reconstruction. However, in the Museum Insel, which was quite deteriorated after World War II, but never demolished, conventional principles of restoration and preservation have been followed, repairing damage to preserve the essential, although details have been lost. This model is in contrast to the previous one, not letting political interests or desires of false appearances interfere.

We have seen then, that Berlin has become a major tourist attraction like a theme park of "history being represented in the twentieth century." Berlin has been built with the postmodernists abuse of “historical citations”, with memories elected by the interests of the political class, urban “booms” financed by big business... and among these, conventional restoration, peaceful and sincere with historical memory.
Conclusion.

The problems facing Berlin's negotiation of the past are rooted not only in the intricacies of postmodernist uses and abuses of historical origins. More profoundly, they go back to the material ravages wreaked by wartime bombings and to an ongoing crisis of historical consciousness that combines visionary ideologies of utopian city planning with a ruthless disrespect for the historical Berlin.

- It is important to acknowledge that the process we described show that the new urban models under capitalist enterprise and consumerist materialism open up physical and cultural spaces that choose remembering some forgotten or destroyed memories of the past and bury the rest.

- Urban projects that are subject to be visited by the great mass of public in the city of Berlin seem to respond in a clear manner to the call of profits in the capitalist system, sometimes with some melancholy towards a past that seems to be reconstructed in a forced way.