THE CITY OF A HUNDRED VOICES
Berlin’s Polyphonic Urbanism

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The City of a Hundred Voices

- Berlin’s Polyphonic Urbanism -

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The City of a Hundred Voices

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ABSTRACT:
Berlin’s multiple layers and its eclectic urban character of the past 100 years have resulted in a city rich with different architectural voices and urban ideals. The constant making and unmaking of Berlin’s urban form has become part of its unique DNA. Yet, after its reunification in 1989, a new voice emerged which began to strongly dominate the city’s other “voices”. Reacting to the traumas of the previous century, this voice, now termed “The Critical Reconstruction,” attempts to glaze over the city’s rich and conflicted personalities of the past. It resurrects a convenient and conservative interpretation of the 19th Century city and its bourgeois ideal of urbanity to “beautify” and “unify” the urban environment. New projects that appear old, zoning laws that dictate all new inner-city developments to mimic Berlins fictive and idealized past, and many other planning and design operations, most symbolically the recent reconstruction of the Stadtschloss (City Castle), are all representative of this trend. This “Critical Reconstruction” approach continues to lead the city into an architectural-urban monoculture, creating a homogenous image of the city, overpowering its other voices. Where there was once a plurality, now stands a single voice above the rest.

This project brings to the forefront a polyphonic mechanism by which Berlin’s diminishing other voices can recover and regain a prominent role in shaping its urban character. By redeveloping the principles of each voice into spatial operations, speculative interventions into the city fabric redraw the image of the city through a manipulation of the lens through which the city is read by its users.

Photo-collage 1968/69 © Schüler, Schüler-Witte / Berlinische Galerie
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PROLOGUE
A Visit to Berlin

- Berlin’s Polyphonic Urbanism -
After being away from Germany for several years I came back and I went for a walk through the city center of Berlin.

I wanted to get a fresh look at the city, act as a tourist or a situationist on a derive. I was curious about what I would see if I went into the representative center of Germany’s capital. What kind of image would the city try to communicate?
When I got out of the subway and walked past the endless construction sites on my way to the Museum Island, I saw that Berlin is still the same: construction as far as the eye can reach.
But then, as I got closer to the central island the first thing the struck me was this:

Looking at it, I was a little confused, and not quite sure about what I saw there. As an architect educated in Germany I thought I should probably know what it is. So I looked it up and it turns out that this is a reconstructed piece of Friedrich Schinkels Bauakademie building from 1836.
As I continued to the Island, still not sure what that piece was doing there, the next thing I saw was this:

This is not a prop for a movie, It is a one-to-one detail section of the future façade of Berlin’s new city castle.
The city castle was the next thing I saw, and it looked something like this:
And I remember that at this very location there was the famous Palace of the Republic, the former Eastern Germany’s representative government center. This is a picture from 2008, where the Palace of the Republic still exists but the prop for the new castle is already positioned, waiting to be realized.
After seeing all of these strange and surreal additions to the cityscape, I had some new questions about Berlin (and also about Germany). What is this city trying to do? What kind of cultural identity is it striving for with this? And what is the intended image of the city of Berlin and its citizens?
On my search for Berlin's identity I found an interesting quote by the cultural historian Karl Scheffler that seemed to fit quite perfectly:

"Berlin is a city condemned forever to becoming and never to being"

This quote is from 1910 but it more relevant now than ever before. Considering the last 100 years of Berlin with all of its traumatic events, the constant making and unmaking of Berlin's urban form has become part of its unique DNA. Berlin has become a city of multiple layers and its eclectic urban character has resulted in a city rich with different architectural voices and urban ideals.
PROLOGUE

SOMMER IM SCHLOSSHOF

1960-1969 - The exhibitions

For the benefit of...
Images:

01 Bautzle, Image: © Arwed Messmer 1995

02 Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the German Democratic Republic October 1995 Image: © Landesdenkmalamt Berlin

03 Reconstructed corner of Friedrich Schinkel’s Bauakademie from 1836 Image: © ABRI + RAABE Architekten

04 Reconstructed facade detail of Berlin’s Stadtschloss Image: © Władysław Sojka, www.sojka-photo

05: fotocommunity, user: Pixellator fc-user:2164200 http://www.fotocommunity.de/photo/schloss-neubau-berlin-pixellator/56544376

06 http://auguststrasse-berlin-mitte.de/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/stadtschloss3.jpg

07 Palace to the Republic Image: © dpa http://www.mdr.de/danalds/archiv/artikel66472.html

08 Graffiti on leftovers of the Palace to the Republic Image: © Arwed Messmer

09 Interior of the Bauakademie Mockup 2007 Image: © Arwed Messmer

The City of a Hundred Voices

- Berlin’s Polyphonic Urbanism -
INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Albrecht
INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

The multiple layers and eclectic urban character of Berlin in the past 100 years have resulted in a city rich with different architectural voices. An architectural voice, an expression of an urban ideal comprised of both formal and conceptual elements, shapes the experience of the city and communicates visions of past and future society.

The conversation of these voices guides the city, creating an ethos unique to Berlin. Nine primary voices have contributed to the past century, falling in and out of favor, but always keeping up a dialogue. The range of the voices begins with the late 19th Century Gründerzeit architecture, to Early Modernism, Nazi Architecture, Stalinism or Socialist Classicism, Late Modernism in East and West Berlin, Post-modernism to the enthusiastic Period of reunification and finally the now popular neo-conservative or “Critical Reconstruction”.

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Gründerzeit
19th Century Berlin

Stalinism
Soviet Classicism

Cold War
Post-Modernism

Early Modernism

Late Modernism West

Enthusiasm of Reunification

Late Socialist Modernism East

Neo-Conservativism Critical Reconstruction
Each of these voices entered the conversation in its own specific way. Originating from individual traumas or various forces of transformation (see page 57-93), these voices were triggered by events that gave them their individual forms and ideologies. Each one possesses a unique answer to their transformative forces, and a new vision for an existing urbanity, which reacts to preexisting conditions.
These new visions are communicated through strong images – images that reflect a desired urbanity and in many cases also communicate a desired society. For example, the imagery produced by the Nazi regime communicates its vision of society both through its political propaganda as well as through the monumental nature of its architecture, as an axial classicism stripped down to its bare bones. Reacting to this, the 1954 Hauptstadt competition in West Berlin was full of proposals of anti-monumental, dispersed urbanisms embedded in nature, such as the entries by Hans Scharoun and Alison and Peter Smithson. Simultaneously, an alternative reaction to the Nazi fascist architecture arose in East Berlin, termed Stalinist Classicism, which monumentalized open spaces with heroic statues, amplifying the citizens under their new socialist leader.
DIAGNOSIS

For about one century the voices of Berlin participated in a mutual performance of overwriting, erasing, remaking, and combining to maintain urban equilibrium in the city. However, emerging in the last twenty years, one voice has insidiously spread, dominating the existing fabric. Beginning at the reunification of Berlin by reacting to the traumas of the previous century, this voice, now termed “The Critical Reconstruction,” attempts to glaze over the city’s rich and conflicted personalities of the past. It resurrects a convenient and conservative interpretation of the 19th Century city and its bourgeois ideal of urbanity to “beautify” and “unify” the urban environment. New projects that appear old, zoning laws that dictate all new inner-city developments to mimic Berlins fictive and idealized past, and many other planning and design operations, most symbolically the recent reconstruction of the Stadtschloss (City Castle), are all representative of this trend.

Acting at the building and city scale, the Critical Reconstruction created new zoning laws that dictate a perimeter block organization with a maximum building height of five stories and a façade design that includes a specific ratio of stone and glass. The zoning is applied to the entire inner city and erases the non-conforming voices piece by piece. Taking the existing 19th century perimeter block as its inspiration, the new perimeter block of the Critical Reconstruction strips down and simplifies what was a rich and complex urban form, replacing it with a homogenous and simplistic interpretation.
Built city fabric since 1990

Quantified areas occupied by the cities voices of Berlin throughout the century
On an architectural scale, one of the key symptoms of the Critical Reconstruction’s desire for a historicized city is exemplified by the reconstruction of the City Castle (Stadtschloss). Replacing the now unfashionable Palace of the Republic from the socialist GDR era, this project marks a unique moment where collective memory is made manifest through a work of architecture. The initial idea of the 2008 brief was to create a public monument that represents an open worldview, communicating a city ready for the 21st century, which embraces technology and change, yet rooted in culture and tradition.
The idea to rebuild the castle stems from the use of historical monuments to evoke a gesture of reunification in a divided city. The new castle – or what will now be called the Humboldtforum - is meant to reunite the East and West and create a new but old common center. However, the planners conveniently forgot that this was never what the original feudal castle of the 19th century was intended to do. The main prominent façade was oriented to the West, towards the newly developed Friedrichstadt, effectively making the old medieval East of Berlin its backyard. Following the model of a baroque castle, the formal organization of the current project is deeply rooted in segregation. A closed and uninviting block surrounds a royal courtyard protected by thick walls. The project of the Humboldtforum is reconstructing an urban condition that never was, fabricating a memory of a reality that never existed.

These future memories can be found sprinkled all around the city. The Visit to Berlin shows some of them, these prop-like building sections that suggest an inevitable future and project the image of the city before it is built. Are they just images, or are they tools of subversion that covertly instill a homogenous morphology? And further, what does it mean to build an image of the city based on an interpretation of one specific voice, namely the 19th century and its bourgeois ideal of urbanity? Why this voice?
Projecting a counter image to the over-saturated one of the current status quo, this proposal operates on the same grounds as its target. By interjecting in the contemporary image of the city, the project facilely combats the assertions being imposed by the Critical Reconstruction. By hacking Google Street View, the contemporary image of the city, the project brings to the forefront a polyphonic mechanism by which Berlin’s diminishing other voices can recover, and positions them so that they can regain a prominent role in shaping Berlin’s urban character.

Each voice comes with a very specific formal principle that is translated into a set of operations (see page 105-129) and applied onto the visual testing ground. By redeveloping the principles of each voice into spatial operations, speculative interventions into the city fabric redraw the image of the city through a manipulation of the lens through which the city is read by its users.

(continue on page 120)
snapshots of Google Street View showing the props of the city
Albert Speer and Adolf Design for the ‘Hall of the People’ which was to be twice the size of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome with a dome 16 times the size and room inside for 180,000 people. [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2764440/]

Alison and Peter Smithson, Hauptstadt Competition. [http://hacedordetrampas.blogspot.com/2011/02/proyecto-berlin-hauptstadt-de-ap.html]

Hans Scharoun, Hauptstadt Competition. [http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/]

Albert Speer, Germania: Wikipedia / Bundesarchiv; Bild 146111-373 / CC-BY-SA 3.0


Palast der Republik: Bundesarchiv

© Stiftung Berliner Schloss – Humboldtsforum / Franco Stella

© Lothar Willmann

Stadtschloss Berlin / Humboldtsforum:
[http://www.rbb-online.de/kultur/thema/stadtschloss-berlin/beitraege/berlinerschloss-richtfeste.html]

Interior of the Baudakademie Mockup 2007
Image: © Arwed Messmer
BERLIN'S POLYPHONIC URBANISM
THE CITY OF A HUNDRED VOICES
THE CITY OF A HUNDRED VOICES

BERLIN'S VOICES IN TIME

Findrichst

Peter den Linden
Hilbersheimer
Alexanderplatz Competition
BERLIN'S POLYPHONIC URBANISM

The City of a Hundred Voices
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BERLIN'S POLYPHONIC URBANISM

The City of a Hundred Voices

Built since 1990

Maps source:
Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt, Berlin
BERLIN’S ALTERNATIVE CITY FABRIC

Albert Speer

Smithons

Scharoun
TYPICAL BLOCK:
19th CENTURY
TYPICAL BLOCK:
21st CENTURY

THE 20th CENTURY IS CUT OUT
BERLIN'S POLYPHONIC URBANISM
The Voices of Berlin

- Berlin’s Polyphonic Urbanism -
Gründerzeit

19th Century Berlin
GRÜNDERZEIT

PERIOD OF EXISTENCE:

19th Century

FORCE OF TRANSFORMATION / ORIGINATING TRAUMA:

Industrialization, Urbanization

IDEOLOGY / REACTION TO TRAUMA:

Large scale tenement housing throughout the city.
Establishing the typical Perimeter Block based on the Hobricht Plan
Early Modernism
EARLY MODERNISM

PERIOD OF EXISTENCE:

1910s / 20s

FORCE OF TRANSFORMATION / ORIGINATING TRAUMA:

Rise of technology,
Mechanical reproduction

IDEOLOGY / REACTION TO TRAUMA:

Dematerialization through technology.
Creation of plinth for a new ground and de-solidifying above the plinth
VOICES OF BERLIN
Nazi Architecture
NAZI
ARCHITECTURE

PERIOD OF EXISTENCE:
1930s / 40s

FORCE OF TRANSFORMATION / ORIGINATING TRAUMA:

Fabricated trauma of WWI - Germany is feeling under pressure
("making Germany great again")

IDEOLOGY / REACTION TO TRAUMA:

Heroic and bulky Monumentalism.
Idealizing form (race, architecture)
“stripped classicism”
Stalinism

Soviet Classicism
STALINISM / SOVIET CLASSICISM

PERIOD OF EXISTENCE:

1950s

FORCE OF TRANSFORMATION / ORIGINATING TRAUMA:

Reaction to the Nazi regime and their urban and architectural proposals.
Defeat of fascism and celebration of Stalin / Socialism

IDEOLOGY / REACTION TO TRAUMA:

Monumentalizing spaces instead of buildings.
Grand classicistic gestures and simplistic decorations
VOICES OF BERLIN
Late Modernism

West
LATE MODERNISM
WEST

PERIOD OF EXISTENCE:
1950s / 60s

FORCE OF TRANSFORMATION / ORIGINATING TRAUMA:

Reaction to the Nazi regime and their urban and architectural proposals.
Defeat of fascism and celebration democracy

IDEOLOGY / REACTION TO TRAUMA:

Urban Landscape and the Anti-Monumental City.
Based on the ideals of German Expressionism (Gläserne Kette/ Bruno Taut) and Early Modernism.

Floating buildings hovering over a free landscape.
VOICES OF BERLIN
Late
Socialist
Modernism
East
LATE SOCIALIST MODERNISM EAST

PERIOD OF EXISTENCE:

1960s / 70s

FORCE OF TRANSFORMATION / ORIGINATING TRAUMA:

New ideals for a forward thinking and modern socialist society

IDEOLOGY / REACTION TO TRAUMA:

Rational and modern architectural language for representative buildings.

Pragmatic solutions for prefabricated mass housing: Plattenbauten
VOICES OF BERLIN
Cold War

Post-Modernism
COLD WAR POST-MODERNISM

PERIOD OF EXISTENCE:

1970s / 80s

FORCE OF TRANSFORMATION /
ORIGINATING TRAUMA:

Failure of rationalistic modernism and the division of the city in: housing, working, leisure

IDEOLOGY /
REACTION TO TRAUMA:

A skeptical and critical interpretations of culture and history as a reaction to rationalistic modern ideas
VOICES OF BERLIN
Enthusiasm of Reunification
ENTHUSIASM OF REUNIFICATION

PERIOD OF EXISTENCE:

1990's

FORCE OF TRANSFORMATION / ORIGINATING TRAUMA:

Berlin's reunification and restablismment as the new / old capital city of Germany.

Boom of urban developments

IDEOLOGY / REACTION TO TRAUMA:

A fresh start for the city that addresses its historic traumas but is optimistic in the form of the future. Formal reunification and deconstruction
Neo-Conservatism

Critical Reconstruction
NEO-CONSERVATIVISM
CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION

PERIOD OF EXISTENCE:
2000 - now

FORCE OF TRANSFORMATION / ORIGINATING TRAUMA:

Searching for an identity of the city and finding its roots in the principles of the 19th century architecture and urbanism. Declaring the typical Berlin block as the DNA of the city.

IDEOLOGY / REACTION TO TRAUMA:

New zoning laws based on 19th century principles that aim to unify the eclectic urban environment of Berlin: Perimeter block organization, maximum building height 5 stories, continues eave line, minimum 25% Stone facade.
INTERMISSION
This excursion shines a spotlight on one of the many moments in Berlin’s history when its self-remaking was highly active. The film Swan Island from 1983 tells a story that highlights the discourse between two different architectural voices in Berlin, the late GDR Modernism and the 19th Century tenement housing.
The age-old question of the correlation between built form and social behavior finds an answer in 1980’s East Berlin, revealed by the film Swan Island (“Insel der Schwäne” 1983) directed by Herrmann Zschoche. Following the life of Stefan Kolbe, who was relocated from an idyllic rural life by a new job for his construction worker father, the film unravels the adjustments, both social and phenomenological, the boy undergoes in his new concrete environment of the Marzahn housing projects. Beyond a tale of the poignancy and angst of coming-of-age, Swan Island makes clear the implications of the new housing developments of East Berlin, and how those environments can intervene in unexpected or perhaps improvable ways in the lives of their inhabitants. Explicitly, through the imagery and plot developments within the film narrative, and implicitly, through a reading of the reactions of official and public voices to the films’ release and historical events the film addressed, the effects of architecture are mapped onto the social sphere. In this way they serve to define a particular moment of convergence of the various transitions occurring at that moment in Berlin’s history.

Swan Island acts as an eyewitness to the historic events, showing an urbanism reduced to pure efficiency producing a non functional society: Parents who don’t care about their kids, a janitor with a strict conception of tidiness which he tries to impose onto the kids, weak teachers, and an anarchic rowdy attitude of the young boys that try to use their environment in a playful and free manner. All this happens in front of a dystopic background of unfinished concrete slabs situated loosely in muddy ground. When the film was shot in 1983 the housing projects of Marzahn
were nearly completed but around the big residential towers it was still a construction site everywhere – none of the promised public plazas had been realized. Upon his arrival at the new “Plattenbauten” Stefan is overwhelmed with the appearance of the development and the ongoing construction everywhere. The “Plattenbauten” were intended to represent pinnacles of socialist community planning and forward thinking, but, as was so often the case in the later years in East Germany, the system’s ever-growing bureaucracy became its own worst enemy. Compromises to the ideas of the Marzahn communities were made every day until the final result was a pale shadow of the ideas and ideals of the original planners.¹ The German city planner and theorist Harald Bodenschatz explains in his brief history of Berlins urban design “The public spaces in between the concrete-slab apartment buildings were often neglected due to the rapid pace of construction. Nevertheless, moving into such a settlement represented upward social mobility as the older, pre-World War I housing stock had not been modernized and therefore generally lacked appropriate sanitary fittings.”²

The story centers around the teens living in the housing complex, their internal conflicts and their attempts to have some influence over the features of the complex’s playground that was promised but was never built. The viewer follows Stefan’s struggles as he adapts to new people and the radically different environment. With its visually cold realism the director shows us his view of the housing projects; construction everywhere, newly finished towers, artificial and slick, loosely dispersed in a field of mud and decamped earth. In many scenes the kids fight in the dystopic and brutal architectural landscapes of the
construction sites. Contrasting this to the idyllic countryside scenes in the beginning of the movie, the new housing area reminds the viewer more of an industrial mine rather than of an ideal housing community. The schools are temporary barracks and the kids look rather lost between the machinery and the concrete slabs. Their playgrounds are unfinished buildings or stacks of precast concrete elements. In the first years of the Marzahn developments most public functions were either of tentative nature or simply nonexistent.\(^3\)

The film also communicates how the usual atmospheres of these developments affected their inhabitants. For example, the sheer scale of the buildings completely dwarfs the residents, despite their sheer quantity. Upon the arrival of Stefan's family to Berlin Marzahn, his little sister is afraid that the buildings might fall down and bury her beneath their rubble, whereas Stefan thinks they ridiculously resemble advent calendars.

The director embedded symbols in the movie that are emblematic of the social conditions in the period of the early 80s in East Berlin. The most prominent of these is the elevator. In a tense scene, the older kid called Windjacke, who has been threatening Stefan, displays his power over the elevator. He knows how to stop it and what to do in case it gets stuck somewhere in between floors, and he also knows that Stefan is new to this technology. He broadcasts his superiority as the older teenager who knows the technique, and manipulates the elevator to make it stop and scare the young boy.

The elevator is also the social space of the building. In one scene, Stefan is coached on how to navigate this new social realm. The janitor tells him, "You have to greet everyone in the elevator, you are not allowed to paint the walls of the elevator or any other
walls of the building! No strangers are allowed in the building. Don’t walk on the grass or leave any of the designated paths. Don’t let anyone in! clear to you young fella?!?’– In the final scene of the movie Stefan and Windjacke are chasing each other through the skeleton of a raw and unfinished housing tower. The showdown is a fight between the two in an empty elevator shaft. Windjacke tries to push Stefan down into the depths of the shaft but Stefan manages to jump to the side and Windjacke falls down instead. He manages to hold on to a steel rebar and together with Stefan’s help escapes his near death. This scene had to be heavily adapted to the demanded regulations of the censorship. Zschoches first version had a more dramatic ending, leaving it open and not clear to the viewer which kid fell to his death.

The city center, another symbol, represents another reality, similar to the idyllic rural one of Stefan’s past, which is being displaced by the new regime. On a trip to the historic center of Berlin Stefan and a girlfriend from his school visit the abandoned and desolate 19th century tenement houses of Prenzlauer Berg. She brings him to the pre-World War I housing area where she was born and tells him about the vibrant social life they had there: “there was interaction everywhere, my grandmother lived right across the street and everybody was connected” until the whole family moved to the new “Plattenbauten” (GDR housing projects), dispersed over the whole city, wherever they could get an apartment. This scene was shot in 1981, just shortly before the 1987 restorations of the central area of Berlin. Here, Herrmann Zschoche picks up a popular theme of the time, explained by Florian Urban in his dissertation “The Invention of the Historic City” as the increasing awareness of the importance of the historic urban fabric of East Berlin in the 1980s that let to its expensive restoration and rebuilding of the late 19th century architecture for the 750th anniversary of central area.4

For the historical context of the movie it is important to
understand the general dynamics of the time in the GDR. The film was released in the 1980s, when the GDR was facing increasing economical, political and social problems. Prices for food and commodities were increasing at a staggering rate.\(^5\) Despite all the efforts of the propaganda it became more and more clear to a broader public range of society that the economic politics of the GDR were not successful. In this political climate of rising frustration, culture, such as music, art and film, played an important role in the articulation of such problems. However, with increasing political instability in the GDR, the freedom of expression and the freedom of speech were more and more reduced and the cultural institutions underwent increasing censorship. The state-owned DEFA Film production company experienced rising problems when realizing any film that could have been understood as even slightly critical of the regime or the political ideals of the society. The directors were under high pressure and censorship, which resulted in many cases of resignations throughout the 1980s.\(^6\) In the case of Swan Island the movie had to undergo multiple steps of censorship. In 1983, after many passes of adaptation, such as giving the protagonist a short monologue of explaining the advantages of the new housing projects, Zschoche finally released a version of his movie. Even though he made drastic changes to the movie in order to get it release through the DEFA Film Production, Swan Island was still very controversial and too critical for the regime of the GDR. Many scenes of this movie reflect problems of daily life in the GDR and allowed the viewers to identify with the situations of the protagonists. This portrait was not aligned with the official propaganda for a successful housing policy of
the GDR. It turned out to be an unsuccessful production and a financial disaster and only later got recognition from a broader public.

Thinking of the importance of the DEFA film academy in the GDR, the cultural studies of its relation between society and politics are few and far between. One of the important researchers in this field is Dagmar Schittly. In her book “Zwischen Regie und Regime” she explains the dynamics between the Eastern German culture of film-making and the politics of the republic and the social conditions. To her, the medium of film reflects in a unique way the social condition and the relation between culture and politics in the GDR. As the German director and film critic Egon Günther puts it, “The DEFA movies show in many cases, an often unintentional, reflection of the condition of circumstances in the GDR”. In the pragmatic realism of many examples the everyday life is reflected and shows us clearly that every action in the GDR was political – there was no private realm the way we think about it now. The movie was criticized in the GDR media as “distorting the view of our reality” being “on the shadow side of DEFA Film production” and for not representing the “real” GDR youth in the magazine Junge Welt 3. Mai 1983. Interestingly, even the BdA (“Bund der Architekten” - the Architectural Association of the GDR) campaigned for a restriction of the movie, claiming that the image of the housing policy had been sullied. However, the fact that the movie addresses the problems of the built environment from within the GDR and from a “non-professional” perspective gives us an interesting understanding of the hopes and disappointments in the everyday life of the regime.
Clearly, the architectural environment surrounding people in a society is a controversial issue that cuts to the core of the very ideals of a society. Swan Island demonstrates, through the story of one boy, the kinds of effects that architecture can have on lived experience, and tells the tale of how this may have played out during this period in Berlin. It shows that despite problematic occurrences and the overall pessimistic tone of the film, stemming from the drastic shift from rural life to living in the “Plattenbauten,” the director creates an austere beauty with a severely plain feeling, not only melancholic and lonely, but also unscripted and somehow full of potential. He orchestrates the image of the Marzahn projects according to the aesthetics of Modernism and Russian Constructivism – orthogonal objects floating in the turbulence of raw earth. Kids play in-between, moving freely, neglecting existing borders as they rewrite the terrain according to their own rules. They act as agents of re-naturalization in a rigid and “unnatural” environment of rationality. In other images of photographers in the same period in Marzahn we can see similar scenarios; mostly finished concrete slabs, sitting amidst untamed earth, creating a wild and jungle-like feeling. (Fig.5,6,7) The movie picked up this very aesthetic and amplified it. In that way it can be read as not only criticizing the missed opportunities of the social housing projects of East Germany but also creating a hope and faith in the human ingenuity and its potential to generate a public social life that reshapes its own environment. As if taking cues from the latent message residing in the film, Marzahn mostly overcame the 1990s exodus due to high crime rates and unappealing living conditions, to become an area that
is now experiencing expanding popularity and another wave of individuals rezoning its potential to fill the desires unachievable in city centers.12

1 This process is portrayed very well in the DEFA movie ‘The Architects’ from 1990 by Peter Kahane

2 Harald Bodenschatz: Berlin Urban Design - A Brief History, p.66


7 Dagmar Schittly: Zwischen Regie und Regime. Die Filmpolitik der SED im Spiegel der DEFA-Produktionen


11 Maria Brosing: “‘Es ist ein Experiment’. Traditionsbildung in der DDR-Literatur anhand von Brigitte Reimanns Roman ‘Franziska Linkerhand’” p.68


Fig. 01- 04.
Stills from the movie Insel der Schwäne

Fig. 05.
Gerd Danigel: Menschen in Marzahn 1980

Fig. 06.

Fig. 07.
Sybille Bergmann: Marzahn 1980

Small Images:
01: Wolfgang Armbruster


03: Learnign From IBA. Harald Bodenschatz

04: https://ddrinberlin.wordpress.com/auferstanden-aus-ruben/inleiding/

05: http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/denkmal/denkmale_in_berlin/de/weltkultur-erbe/staedtegen/hintergrund.shtml

06: https://de.pinterest.com/pin/161637074105384813/
Principles, Schemes, Operations

- Proposal -

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SMArchS Urbanism
2016
SOME FORGOTTEN VOICES
SOME FORGOTTEN VOICES

Smithon’s Hauptstadt Competition, Ahornblatt Restaurant, Mies van der Rohe’s Tower Friedrichstr., Palast der Republik, Schlossfasade, Mies van der Rohe’s Monument for Communism
Typical
19th Century Berlin Block
1887 Tenement Housing / Himmelskrene

Typical Critical Reconstruction Block
2000s Berlin "DNA"
According to main City Planner H. Stimmann
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOICE</th>
<th>PRINCIPLE</th>
<th>OPERATION</th>
<th>SCHEME</th>
<th>TESTING GROUND</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grinderzehi</td>
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<tr>
<td>19th Century</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Modernism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bauhaus / Post WW1 1920s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nazi Architecture</td>
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<td>1930s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stalinism / Socialist Classic</td>
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<td>1950s</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDR Modernism</td>
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<td>1960s/70s</td>
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<td>1980s</td>
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<td>1990s</td>
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<td>Period of Enthusiasm / Reunification</td>
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<td>2000s</td>
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<td>2000s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Principle</td>
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| Gründerzeit  
Mietskaseren / Tenement housing  
19th Century | PRINCIPLE:  
Continues Perimeter Edge  
Frayed Interior Edge | OPERATION:  
Fraying Interior Edges |
| Early Modernism  
Bauhaus / Post WWI  
1920s | PRINCIPLE:  
Raising Ground - Creating Plinth  
De-Solidifying / De-Materializing Above Ground | OPERATION:  
Raising Ground - C  
De-Solidifying / De  
Above Ground |
| Nazi Architecture  
1930s | PRINCIPLE:  
Monumentalizing | OPERATION:  
Scaling Up |
| Stalinism / Socialist Classicism  
1950s | PRINCIPLE:  
Monumentalizing Spaces | OPERATION:  
Carving out spaces |
| GDR Modernism  
1960/70s | PRINCIPLE:  
Rationalizing | OPERATION:  
Repetition |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOICE</th>
<th>PRINCIPLE</th>
<th>OPERATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDR Modernism</td>
<td><strong>PRINCIPLE:</strong> Rationalizing</td>
<td><strong>OPERATION:</strong> Reiteration</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960/70s</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>West Modernism</td>
<td><strong>PRINCIPLE:</strong> Urban Landscape</td>
<td><strong>OPERATION:</strong> Clearing the Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950/60s</td>
<td></td>
<td>Buildings Hovering Above Landscape</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Modernism</td>
<td><strong>PRINCIPLE:</strong> Pastiche, Drawing</td>
<td><strong>OPERATION:</strong> Additive Collage -</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>From All Methods, Equalizing</td>
<td>Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period of Enthusiasm /</td>
<td>and Combining</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reunification</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td><strong>PRINCIPLE:</strong> Deconstruction ?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neo-Conservatism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Reconstruction</td>
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<td>2000s</td>
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Through the now heavily communicated image of the city, a highly homogenous city is represented as Berlin. A visit to Berlin through Google Street View reveals a cityscape adorned with props and fake facades. The complete inner city thus communicates a “perfect” perimeter block organization and a typical bourgeois “European” city.

This “Critical Reconstruction” approach continues to lead the city into an architectural-urban monoculture, creating a homogenous image of the city, overpowering its other voices. It is an attempt to cut out all the inconvenient voices of the 20th Century. Where there was once a plurality, now stands a single voice above the rest.

Appropriating the mechanisms used by the Critical Reconstruction, this project defines operations for each preexisting voice and reapplies them to the contemporary image of the city. Google Street View is the testing ground in which the operations are deployed.

The proposed project seeks not to judge the preexisting voices, but rather mines their formal potential to reactivate the formal diversity within the image of the city. It does not attempt to make one voice louder than the others; they should all formally coexist, even including the conservative reconstruction of the castle. Aiming to maintain Berlin’s productive state of flux, this project holds true to the 1910 saying by Karl Scheffler: “Berlin is a city condemned forever to becoming and never to being,” or as Jack Lang, France’s former culture minister, said in 2001: “Paris is always Paris and Berlin is never Berlin.”
THE SCHEMES
PRINCIPLE:
Continues Perimeter Edge, Frayed Interior Edge, Single Eave Line

OPERATION:
Fraying Interior Edge
PRINCIPLE:
Raising Ground - Creating Plinth
De-Solidifying / De-Materializing Above Ground

OPERATION:
Raising Ground - Creating Plinth
De-Solidifying / De-Materializing Above Ground
PRINCIPLE: Monumentalizing

OPERATION: Scaling Up
PRINCIPLE:
Raising Ground - Creating Plinth
De-Solidifying / De-Materializing Above Ground

OPERATION:
Raising Ground - Creating Plinth
De-Solidifying / De-Materializing Above Ground
PRINCIPLE:
Monumentalizing Spaces

OPERATION:
Carving out spaces
GDR Moderneism
1960/70

PRINCIPLE:
Rationalizing

OPERATION:
Repetition
PRINCIPLE:
Urban Landscape

OPERATION:
Clearing The Ground
Buildings Hovering Above Landscape
PRINCIPLE:
Urban Landscape

OPERATION:
Clearing The Ground
Buildings Hovering Above Landscape
PRINCIPLE:
Pastiche, Drawing From All Methods, 
Equalizing and Combining

OPERATION:
Additive Collage - Drawing from all Methods
PRINCIPLE:
Deconstruction

OPERATION:
Fragmenting, Deconstructing
Testing
Ground

- Hacked Google Streetview -

A Video Installation
at the
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Clearing the ground.

Late Modernism
Creating a plinth.

Early Modernism
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