

## MIT Open Access Articles

*Damage and Renewal at the Württembergische Staatstheater,  
Stuttgart*

The MIT Faculty has made this article openly available. **Please share** how this access benefits you. Your story matters.

**Citation:** POLLOCK, EMILY RICHMOND. 2022. "Damage and Renewal at the Württembergische Staatstheater, Stuttgart." *Twentieth-Century Music*, 19 (2).

**Published Version:** 10.1017/s1478572222000093

**Publisher:** Cambridge University Press (CUP)

**Permanent Link:** <https://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/144386>

**Version:** Author's final manuscript: final author's manuscript post peer review, without publisher's formatting or copy editing

**Terms of use:** <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>



## **Damage and Renewal at the Württembergische Staatstheater, Stuttgart**

On 16 September 1944, just five days after Allied bomb attacks caused severe damage to the Württembergische Staatstheater complex in Stuttgart, the company's Generalintendant (head administrator), Gustav Deharde, sent a distraught letter to the musicologist Fred Hamel:

Due to the terrible attacks on Stuttgart, the charming Kleines Haus [Small House] has been totally burned out, and irreparable damage also occurred in the Großes Haus [Big House], all the sets burned, and though the essential furniture, props, and costumes have been saved, total chaos has ensued, which we are trying with all our might to get under control. Under these circumstances, all of our beautiful plans have dissolved [zu Wasser geworden].<sup>1</sup>

Most of Germany's major civic opera houses—architectural monuments that had been strategically located at the literal and symbolic centres of cultural life—were heavily damaged by the bombing campaigns that targeted German cities in the final years of World War II. After the

---

<sup>1</sup> '... ist durch die schrecklichen Angriffe auf Stuttgart das entzückende Kleine Haus total ausgebrannt und auch im Großen Haus unersetzlicher Schaden entstanden, alle Dekorationen verbrannt, und wenn auch der wesentlichste Teil der Möbel, Requisiten und Kostüme gerettet ist, so ist doch ein völliges Chaos eingetreten, dessen wir mit allen Kräften Herr zu werden versuchen. Unter diesen Umständen sind alle schönen Pläne zu Wasser geworden.' Letter from the Generalintendant Gustav Deharde to Dr. Fred Hamel, 16 September 1944. Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg - EL [hereafter SL-EL] 221/3 Bü 149 (1936–1953). Württembergisches Staatstheater Stuttgart [hereafter WSS]: Verwaltungsakten II: Korrespondenz mit Schriftstellern und Komponisten über die Aufführung ihrer Werke.

war's end, iconic images showing landmark buildings in rubble evoked a complex mixture of emotions from observers, from a sense of just retribution to horror at the destruction and wastefulness.<sup>2</sup> The 'rubble' archetype of total obliteration acquired a kind of photographic charisma, gaping spaces asking to be remembered and then filled in by the new.<sup>3</sup> Bombed buildings became metonyms for German suffering and victimhood, sometimes additionally serving as alibis to avoid postwar reckoning. Historians have interpreted the ways in which ruined cityscapes were treated—rebuilt, renewed, modernised, monumentalised—as evidence of highly local dynamics of mourning, memory-making, and narration.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War: The Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993); Anthony Vidler, 'Air War and Architecture', in *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. Andreas Schönle and Julia Hell (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 29–40.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Rentschler, 'The Place of Rubble in the *Trümmerfilm*', in *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. Schönle and Hell, 418–438. See also Johanna M. Blokker, '(Re)Constructing Identity: World War II and the Reconstruction of Cologne's Destroyed Romanesque Churches, 1945–1985', PhD diss., New York University, 2011 (ProQuest AAT 3466856). On the rubble trope in music and rubble's aestheticisation, see Abby Anderton, *Rubble Music: Occupying the Ruins of Postwar Berlin, 1945–1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> On Dresden and its musical responses to destruction, see Martha Sprigge, *Socialist Laments: Musical Mourning in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 23–74. See also Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Paul B. Jaskot, eds, *Beyond Berlin: Twelve*

Once the opera houses' 'rubble' had been alchemised to mere debris, it could eventually be cleared and, in its place, a bumper crop of modern opera houses could emerge.<sup>5</sup> West German metropolises such as Frankfurt, Cologne, Hamburg, and West Berlin contributed both to a golden age of development in modern theatrical design and to a rejection (some might even say, a betrayal) of the history that had taken place in the old theatres. In contrast, Munich, like Vienna, took the exceptional route and reconstructed its theatre 'faithfully', avoiding said betrayal, but arguably failing to even superficially grapple with the horrors of recent history.<sup>6</sup>

The situation was categorically different in Stuttgart: despite Deharde's despair at the state of the city's 1912 Max Littmann-designed double theatre complex, it had fared better than most. As Kurt Honolka wrote retrospectively in 1987, 'the Stuttgart Opera was lucky': the bombs had left the bigger stage and auditorium of the Großes Haus intact, and 'if it rained through the roof here and there, Honolka continued, 'that sort of thing was quite normal at the

---

*German Cities Confront the Nazi Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Neil Gregor, *Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Emily Richmond Pollock, *Opera after the Zero Hour: The Problem of Tradition and the Possibility of Renewal in Postwar West Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 28–32.

<sup>6</sup> Pollock, *Opera after the Zero Hour*, 174–212; Peter Stachel, "'Das Krönungsjuwel der österreichischen Freiheit": Die Wiedereröffnung der Wiener Staatsoper 1955 als Akt österreichischer Identitätspolitik', in *Bühnen der Politik: Die Oper in europäischen Gesellschaften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Sven Oliver Müller and Jutta Toelle (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 2008), 90–107.

time'.<sup>7</sup> Less lucky was the Kleines Haus, the smaller theatre in the complex in which spoken drama and smaller operatic works were presented. Over the nearly two decades that followed the end of the war, the Staatstheater administration and the people of Stuttgart worked through two difficult problems: first, the problem of repairing the Großes Haus; second, the problem of rebuilding (and ultimately, redesigning) a Kleines Haus that could restore full artistic function to the theatre complex. Opera was continuously produced throughout this period, amid significant material scarcity and uncertainty. The Stuttgart theatres' situation of partial destruction led to a unique constellation of constraints as to how to move forward, but also enabled narratives of persistence to emerge on which the company later capitalised.

Stuttgart was liberated by the French army on 21 April 1945 and occupied by American forces. A mere two months later, in late June, a building inspector visited the Großes Haus to document twenty-one of the most 'urgently needed' repair tasks, including:

- Roof over the auditorium, replacing the beams and repairing the roof cladding
- Roof over the stage, same thing...
- 13 front doors for the main entrance, new...
- All of the windows in the corridors, lavatories, some new, otherwise repaired...
- The entire second story of the building must again be totally reconstructed for a piano room, additional choir cloakroom, ballet cloakroom, ballet hall, extras' cloakroom, ballet master, solo dancers (doors, window, flooring, plastering, etc.)
- Repair lavatories (toilet, urinal, tanks, sinks with taps)...

---

<sup>7</sup> Kurt Honolka, 'Die Ära Schäfer 1945–1972', in Ute Becker, ed, *Die Oper in Stuttgart: 75 Jahre Littmann-Bau* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1987), 88.

- Restore the fire extinguishing system in the whole house
- Fire alarm apparatus ditto [i.e. to restore in the whole house]
- Stage control apparatus ditto
- Security system ditto.<sup>8</sup>

Additional aesthetic and functional upgrades were recommended to the seating, flooring, electrical systems, and furnishings.<sup>9</sup> Damage to the paint shop and set storage, and to linoleum flooring in the corridors, put past productions at risk and created safety hazards.<sup>10</sup> The administration fretted as broken windows exposed stored costumes to humidity, quickly threatening to render ‘irreplaceable’ garments ‘moldy and worthless’.<sup>11</sup> Through all of this, the impact was not only material but also emotional; the first postwar Intendant, Albert Kehm, found the state of German cities painful and particularly mourned the destruction of ‘my Vaterstadt Stuttgart, my parents’ house, and especially the constant sight of the theatre complex’s ruin’.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Document from the Building Inspector / Theaterinspektor Guter. Stuttgart, 24 June 1945. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 8 (1945–1957). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Instandsetzung der Gebäude.

<sup>9</sup> Document from the Building Inspector / Theaterinspektor Guter. Stuttgart, 24 June 1945. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 8 (1945–1957). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Instandsetzung der Gebäude.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Schorsch to Theaterinspektor Guter, 7 November 1946. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 6 (1946) WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Schorsch to Oberbaurat Kiefner. 6 August 1946. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 6 (1946) WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau.

<sup>12</sup> ‘... denn auch ich leide, nach den entsetzlichen Eindrücken, die ich in München aufnehmen musste, doppelt schwer unter der Zerstörung meiner Vaterstadt Stuttgart, meines Elternhauses

Progress on the repairs began slowly, but not because the theatre was thought unimportant. In August 1945, the Oberbürgermeister of Stuttgart wrote reassuringly to the Staatstheater administration that ‘in the name of the city of Stuttgart we have the greatest interest in this work commencing and progressing as quickly as possible, in order to promote theatre and concert life to the benefit of our populace and members of the occupying forces’.<sup>13</sup> But the district building authority informed Kehm that while they were trying to repair the Großes Haus as quickly as possible, only the American Red Cross could facilitate the acquisition of building materials. This had proved difficult even with Kehm himself making the request: ‘the seal of the General Intendant of the Staatstheater proved worthless’, with an American order and stamp

---

und insbesondere auch unter dem ständigen Anblick der Trümmerstätte der Theateranlage’.

Letter from Generalintendant Kehm to Wilhelm von Scholz, 13 November 1945. SL - EL 221/3 Bü 149 (1936–1953). WSS: Verwaltungsakten II: Korrespondenz mit Schriftstellern und Komponisten. For more on the longstanding emotional impact of ruins, see Amy Lynn Wlodarski’s essay on George Rochberg in this Forum.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Namens der Stadt Stuttgart habe ich das allergrößte Interesse daran, dass diese Arbeiten raschmöglichst begonnen und gefördert werden, um auf diese Weise das Theater- und Konzertleben zugunsten unserer Bevölkerung und der Angehörigen der Besatzungsmacht zu fördern.’ Letter from Dr. Klett, the Oberbürgermeister der Stadt Stuttgart to Kehm, the Generalintendant of the Staatstheater, 27 August 1945. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 9 (1945–1946). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Instandsetzung der Gebäude.

required to authorise the work.<sup>14</sup> Hence, only the most urgent tasks at the theatre were prioritised, and these not only so that opera performances could resume but so that the Red Cross could use the auditorium for assembly and the Americans could use it for church services.<sup>15</sup> (Kurt Honolka later recalled hearing the unmistakable sounds of a soldiers' table tennis tournament during the most adagio, pianissimo sections of a Bruckner symphony performance in 1949).<sup>16</sup>

In early March 1946, the Military Government authorised the refurbishment of several rooms, a staircase, and an entrance in anticipation of productions that would use more personnel

---

<sup>14</sup> ‘... ohne die Mitwirkung und Anweisung des Amerikanischen Roten Kreuzes die nötigen Baustoffe nicht zu erhalten sind. Ein wiederholter Versuch des Bezirksbauamts eine solche Anweisung bei den Amerikanischen Besatzungsbehörden zu Erlangen, war vergeblich. Der Stempel des Herrn Generalintendanten der Staatstheater hat sich als wertlos erwiesen.’ Letter from the Bezirksbauamt to the Intendant, 31 July 1945. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 8 (1945–1957) WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Instandsetzung der Gebäude.

<sup>15</sup> For a time in August and September 1945, authorities briefly considered turning the Reithalle (a late-nineteenth-century riding arena) into a theatre, which would have been consistent with the practices in other cities of performing opera in alternative or contingent spaces, but despite the support of the American military officials and going as far as to draw up project plans, the plans were perhaps predictably thwarted by the lack of necessary building materials. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 9 (1945–1946) WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Instandsetzung der Gebäude.

<sup>16</sup> Honolka, ‘Die Ära Schäfer 1945–1972’, 88.

and extras: *Aida* was planned; *La bohème* was staged instead.<sup>17</sup> But the Finance Minister, Fritz Cahn-Garnier, warned the Staatstheater administration that ‘construction progress depend[ed] on the allocation of building materials’ from a modest budget, and that no further construction projects would occur until at least the following year.<sup>18</sup> Renovation of the spaces therefore happened piecemeal, without any particular guarantee of continuance, and wood shortages additionally impacted the company’s capacity to build sets. The historical fact of the company’s speedy October 1945 re-opening with stagings of *Die Fledermaus* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, then, should be appreciated as coexisting with conditions of disruption, disrepair, and scarcity, and any latter-day idea that the Großes Haus had been left luckily ‘intact’ is a categorical designation that emerged only with a bit of mythological thinking and some judicious toilet repair.

By 1956, 1.2 million DM were finally allocated for the auditorium renovation first proposed back in 1945, with a new airflow system, new colours, a new proscenium, and so on.<sup>19</sup> But ironically, the acoustics that resulted were judged to be disastrous, especially by Ferdinand Leitner, the Staatsoper’s music director in the 1950s, who complained that ‘in comparison to our earlier acoustics or to that of other famous theatrical spaces, in our house one can no longer

---

<sup>17</sup> C. E. Gooding, Lt. Col of the OMG Information Control Division, 2 March 1946. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 8 (1945–1957). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Instandsetzung der Gebäude.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Finanzminister Dr. Cahn-Garnier to Staatstheater administration, 26 July 1946. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 10 (1946). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Instandsetzung der Gebäude.

<sup>19</sup> Becker, ed, *Die Oper in Stuttgart*, 28.

speak at all of a sound suitable for the opera'.<sup>20</sup> Leitner believed that the subordination of artistic values to technology had the result that 'not a single one of the concert halls or theatres built after the war possesses the flawless acoustics of a number of old theatres and concert halls'.<sup>21</sup> So if indeed the Stuttgart Opera had been luckily left intact, according to whom? And what is then elided by the rhetorical line between that which is destroyed and that which 'endures'?

If there is instead a spectrum from obliterated to intact, then the survival narrative for the Großes Haus rested in part on its comparison to the devastated Kleines Haus. The smaller theatre had been modest compared to the grander edifice to which it was connected (see Figure 1), but it held significant local and national meaning, as the charming chamber in which Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* had premiered during the complex's first season in 1912. As Kehm explained: 'The destruction of the Kleines Haus of the Staatstheater... not only meant the loss of

---

<sup>20</sup> 'Im Vergleich zu unserer früheren Akustik oder zu der von anderen berühmten Theaterräumen kann man bei uns überhaupt nicht mehr von einem der Oper entsprechenden Klang reden.' Letter from Leitner to Schäfer, 28 June 1957. SL - EL 221/3 Bü 197 (1955–1958). WSS: Verwaltungsakten II: Korrespondenz mit Ferdinand Leitner.

<sup>21</sup> Emphasis in the original. 'Meiner Ansicht nach besitzt kein einziges der nach dem Kriege gebauten Konzertsäle oder Theater eine einwandfreie Akustik, wie sie eine Reihe alter Theater- und Konzertsäle hat... Die Musik immer mehr der Technik unterzuordnen, nur weil Akustiker und Architekten unfähig zu sein scheinen, klangschöne Räume zu bauen, erscheint mir fragwürdig.' Letter from Leitner to Arch. Dipl. Ing. Karl Ziegler (Ludwigshafen a.Rh), 8 November 1960. SL - EL 221/3 Bü 248 (1957–1961). WSS: Verwaltungsakten II: Korrespondenz mit Ferdinand Leitner [N–Z].

a part, perhaps the most architecturally beautiful part, of our theatre complex, but also inflicted intolerable long-term damage... from both a business and an artistic point of view.’<sup>22</sup> Yet rather than immediate reconstruction, years of rubble and ruin were followed by a range of competing proposals and several phases of architectural competition, only coming to fruition in 1962. In the meantime, the Großes Haus provided contrast as well as constraints (since the new design would need to relate, one way or another, to the extant design) and a reminder of the cherished tradition to which many Stuttgarters wanted the new Kleines Haus held accountable.

More than two years after the bombing, loss-mitigation measures to protect the remaining structure of the Kleines Haus and its assets failed to be funded. Writing to the Württembergisches Kultministerium, administrator Herbert Schorsch wrote, ‘If we don’t succeed in getting a roof over this part of the house as quickly as possible, then its total destruction

---

<sup>22</sup> ‘Die Zerstörung des Kleinen Hauses der Württ. Staatstheater bedeutet... nicht nur den Verlust eines Teiles und vielleicht des architektonisch schönsten Teiles unserer Theateranlage, sie fügte uns darüber hinaus einen auf die Dauer untragbaren Schaden zu, der sich nicht nur in wirtschaftlicher, sondern auch in künstlerischer Hinsicht.’ Letter from Kehm to the Landesverwaltung für Kultus, Erziehung und Kunst in Württemberg, 24 September 1945. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 9 (1945–1946) WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Instandsetzung der Gebäude. Emphasis in the original. Without the Kleines Haus, the programming capabilities of the Staatstheater were much reduced. Starting in March 1946, the architect Paul Stohrer designed a provisional ‘chamber theatre’ space in the choir rehearsal room of the Großes Haus, at a cost of about 140,000 RM apportioned by the Kultministerium. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 35 (1945–1947). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Einbau einer Kammerspielbühne im Chorprobensaal des Großen Hauses.

should be anticipated in the near future.<sup>23</sup> Only in 1949 did the company raise the funds, with an artists' ball and raffle event at the Kursaal Bad Cannstatt, to begin clearing the rubble.<sup>24</sup> A real plan started to take shape in the 1950s: in November 1951, the construction bureau of the Finanzministerium authorised an open competition for the 'Wiederaufbau' (reconstruction) of the Kleines Haus.<sup>25</sup> Archival documents about the competition are evidence of the project's initial assumptions. Although the Kleines Haus was used primarily for drama, for example, the committee specified that opera performances must still be possible in the new hall, so designs needed to have appropriate flexibility of space and attention to operatic acoustics.<sup>26</sup> Designers were asked to 'retain the approximate former external shape of the Kleines Haus', and in particular the floor plan and proportions.<sup>27</sup> Redesigning the layout could occur to the extent that

---

<sup>23</sup> 'Gelingt es nicht, diesen Hausteil schnellstens zu überdachen, so ist in allernächster Zeit mit seiner restlosen Vernichtung zu rechnen.' Letter from Schorsch to the Kultministerium, 8 November 1946. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 8 (1945–1957). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Instandsetzung der Gebäude.

<sup>24</sup> SL - EL 221/3 Bü 244 (1949–1958). WSS: Verwaltungsakten II: Opernbälle 1949–1958.

<sup>25</sup> Letter 29 November 1951: Finanzministerium Bauabteilung Schuler to the Intendant Schäfer. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 20 (1953–1958) WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses.

<sup>26</sup> Meeting notes of 12 October 1956. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 23 (1952–1954). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses.

<sup>27</sup> '... über den Wettbewerb zur Erlangung von Plänen zum Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses wurde als wünschenswerte Voraussetzung die ungefähre Beibehaltung der früheren äußeren

it met updated technical requirements, but ‘the external design [of the new Kleines Haus] should be reminiscent of the extant building [the Großes Haus]’, and, if possible, the same materials should be used (Maulbronner Schilfsandstein, a kind of sandstone found in the region).<sup>28</sup> A greater potential for design change, however, emerged in an August 1952 amendment to the contest rules, which changed the heading from ‘Competition for the Reconstruction [Wiederaufbau] of the Destroyed Kleines Haus’ to ‘Competition for the *Construction* [Aufbau] of the Destroyed Kleines Haus’—a subtle difference implying that a new approach might be possible, or at least that the charge need not be a reconstruction by definition.<sup>29</sup> This easing of restrictions may have reflected emerging trends in opera house reconstruction in the 1950s, with highly publicized plans throughout West Germany for modern buildings to replace the ruins of older opera houses in several cities.

---

Form des Kleinen Hauses festgestellt.’ Letter from Schäfer to the Kultministerium, 6 March 1952. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 20 (1953–1958) WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses.

<sup>28</sup> Draft of the contest rules, 27 August 1952. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 20 (1953–1958) WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses.

<sup>29</sup> Emphasis mine. Draft of the contest rules, 27 August 1952. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 20 (1953–1958) WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses. On the document, the deletion of ‘Wieder’ is handwritten.

In 1953, the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* printed three prize-winning designs—by Paul Stohrer, Hans Paul Schmohl, and Wilhelm Riphahn—all of which completely reimagined the theatre.<sup>30</sup> Stohrer’s design, boasting a ‘bright, elegant foyer’, was faced with substantial glass windows on three sides and had an unusually angular fly loft. Schmohl suggested a blocky structure with a triangular roof and stark fly loft, and a ‘ponderous’ façade somewhat lightened by a proposed water feature. Riphahn’s model was by far the most modern, with solid glass ‘porch’ and a flat roof. The amount of glass used by Riphahn was deemed inappropriate on economic, technical, and thermal grounds; Riphahn withdrew his plan from consideration, and the two remaining architects worked towards a compromise, complicated by conflicts over money and different priorities.<sup>31</sup>

During the long period in which the plans remained unsettled, a brisk debate over various potential approaches continued, and the 1955 reconstruction of the Vienna State Opera became a catalyst for particular public dissent.<sup>32</sup> A letter from a Stuttgart man named Ernst Rupp

---

<sup>30</sup> Hans Zimmermann, ‘Drei Entwürfe fürs Kleine Haus’, *Stuttgarter Zeitung* No. 245, 20 October 1953, 11. Models of the three designs were reproduced in the article, and descriptive quotations in the following few sentences come from Zimmermann.

<sup>31</sup> n.n., ‘Es steht schlecht ums Kleine Haus’, *Neues aus Stuttgart*, 11 December 1954.

<sup>32</sup> Stuttgarter Markus Beißwenger, for example, wrote to the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* decrying the substandard conditions in which their own Staatstheater was performing and citing Vienna as a shaming example. 28 November 1955. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 20 (1953–1958). WSS:

Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses. Another supporter of the opera wrote that, ‘I may only wish that more Stuttgarters in positions of power were as excited about their

exemplifies the citizens' backlash against modernism, using Vienna's example as a way to argue against replacing cities' grieved-for ruins with modern designs. Rupp argued that in order to preserve the 'unified artistic concept' of Littmann's original, the Kleines Haus must be restored:

The published draft by architect Paul Stohrer... may be a very interesting attempt at a reworked theatre building, but it is not the building to complement Littmann's wonderful Großes Haus on this Platz, no counterpart to [the Großes Haus]—a glass house next to [Littmann's] work of art in a classicist style. And anyway: why does a modern building have to replace the small house at all costs? Why not construct the earlier Kleines Haus with the old, beautiful façade and the enchanting, acoustically excellent auditorium, for which we in Stuttgart were envied everywhere? ... In other cities, people don't shy away from holding on to old traditions, where preservation is the best artistic solution (State Opera in Vienna). Only in Stuttgart must a modern building be built at all costs, even

---

theatres as the Viennese'. She expected that the chosen design to be the one that 'matches the style of the Großes Haus', which elsewhere in her letter she called a 'Temple of the Arts'. Letter from Maria Nisch to Schäfer, 30 November 1955: 'Ich möchte nur wünschen, dass noch mehr maßgebende Stuttgarter sich für ihre Theater so begeistern könnten wie die Wiener. Vor allem gilt das für "Vater Staat" und den Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses, von dem wir alle erwarten, dass die Ausführung gewählt wird, die sich am besten dem Stil des Großen Hauses anpasst. Bei dieser Gelegenheit möchte ich anregen, ob Sie, Herr Generalintendant, nicht ebenso einmal dafür eintreten könnten, dass unsere Kunsttempel—wie vor dem Kriege—in entsprechender festlicher Kleidung, auch im 3. Rang und auch unter der Woche, betreten werden?' SL - EL 221/1 Bü 20 (1953–1958). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses.

when it doesn't fit its surroundings, and huge costs are spent on a competition for it, which would be better spent on the reconstruction of the earlier house.<sup>33</sup>

Walter Erich Schäfer, the Intendant from 1949 on, aired his own opinions about the Kleines Haus project in an essay about Vienna's reopening, suggesting that 'the bombs have made Germany into an ideal experimentation field for new theatre buildings. Courageous architects have created interesting and sometimes fascinating things, and it would be sad if the Vienna

---

<sup>33</sup> '[der] veröffentlichten Entwurf des Herrn Architekten Paul Stohrer... mag ein ganz interessanter Versuch eines neugestalteten Theaterbaues sein, er ist aber kein Bau für diesen Platz zur Ergänzung des wundervollen Littmann'schen Großen Hauses und als Pendant für dieses, ein Glashaus neben diesem in klassizistischem Stil gestalteten Kunstwerk. Und überhaupt: weshalb muß an die Stelle des Kleinen Hauses um jeden Preis ein modernes Bauwerk? Weshalb nicht ein Aufbau des früheren Kleinen Hauses mit der alten, schönen Fassade und dem entzückenden akustisch hervorragenden Zuschauerraum, um das wir Stuttgarter von überallher beneidet wurden? ... In anderen Städten scheut man sich nicht, an alten Traditionen festzuhalten, wo die Wahrung derselben die beste künstlerische Lösung bildet (Staatsoper in Wien). Nur in Stuttgart muß um jeden Preis ein modernes Bauwerk erstellt werden, auch wo dies nicht in die Umgebung paßt, und es werden dafür große Kosten eines Wettbewerbs ausgegeben, die zum Aufbau des früheren Hauses besser verwendet werden könnten.' Letter from Ernst Rupp to the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 17 November 1955. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 20 (1953–1958). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses.

example meant the end of these attempts.’<sup>34</sup> Indeed, none of the experts now thought it prudent to rebuild the Kleines Haus in its old form; even though they had loved and mourned it too, modern theatrical technology would be too challenging to put into the old design.<sup>35</sup> Other architects sent additional unsolicited designs and advice, often with a more modern slant, including Raimund Doblhoff, who enthusiastically recommended that the Kleines Haus follow the path of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s ‘impossible’ (and never built) Mannheim Nationaltheater and the CBS Television City building in Los Angeles. According to Doblhoff, many newly built theatres in Germany were only ‘superficially modernised’, and Stuttgart should create instead ‘an instrument on which a rich bounty of new, old, and not-yet-experienced theatrical events may come to fruition’.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> ‘Der Staat und sein Theater: Drei Lehren aus Wien’. ‘Die Bomben haben Deutschland zu einem idealen Experimentierfeld für neue Theaterbauten gemacht. Es sind von mutigen Architekten interessante und teilweise faszinierende Dinge geschaffen worden, und es wäre traurig, wenn das Wiener Beispiel nun das Ende dieser Versuche bedeuten würde.’ Walter Erich Schäfer, opinion piece in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 26 November 1955.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* editorial department to Rupp, 22 November 1955. SL - EL 221/1 Bü 20 (1953–1958). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses.

<sup>36</sup> Letters from Raimund Doblhoff to Intendant Walter Erich Schäfer, 6 May 1958 and 2 September 1958. ‘... mit dem Neubau ein Instrument zu schaffen auf dem eine reiche Fülle neuer, alter und auch noch nicht erlebter Theaterereignisse entstehen können’. Elsewhere: ‘oberflächlich modernisiert’ SL - EL 221/1 Bü 20 (1953–1958). WSS: Verwaltungsakten I: Wiederaufbau des Kleinen Hauses.

The Kleines Haus project thus inevitably took its place in a much broader contemporary discourse on modernisation and tradition, including similar debates occurring in the realm of music and production aesthetics. Artists and citizens were deeply invested in reconstructing cultural life from the literal and figurative rubble, sometimes using reconstruction as an opportunity to advance, sometimes as an occasion to reassert connections to a cherished past. I perceive Stuttgarters' impassioned appeals that the Kleines Haus be rebuilt according to the old style and structure to be reminiscent of the position that a new work like Carl Orff's *Oedipus der Tyrann*, which premiered in Stuttgart in 1959, was too alienating to count as opera, and correlated too with the opera fan who wrote to the Intendant to inquire, 'on which days will you produce *Parsifal* and in which style—Richard or Wieland Wagner?'<sup>37</sup>

By September 1956, yet another plan was publicised, still lacking reconciliation.<sup>38</sup> The administration now began considering designs by Otto Jäger and Hans Volkart, who had initially placed in the competition's second tier.<sup>39</sup> An editorial in the *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* wrote that it was a 'surprise' that these two architects were now being considered over the original

---

<sup>37</sup> 'Heute erlaube ich mir nun die Anfrage, an welchen Tagen Sie den "Parsifal" bringen und in welchem Stil—Richard oder Wieland Wagner?' Letter from Werner Usinger, 28 March 1952 to the Intendant Walter Erich Schäfer. SL - EL 221/3 Bü 82 (1951–1952). WSS: Verwaltungsakten II: Korrespondenz mit Ferdinand Leitner sowie mit dem Künstlerischen Betriebsbüro (L–Z). On the public's reception of *Oedipus der Tyrann* in Stuttgart, see *Opera after the Zero Hour*, 116–118.

<sup>38</sup> n.n., 'Das Kleine Haus am oberen Anlagensee', *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 15 September 1956.

<sup>39</sup> n.n., 'Kleines Haus so oder so?' *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 12 October 1957.

competition winners.<sup>40</sup> Jäger and Volkart were positioned as ‘opposite solutions’: Jäger’s was the more progressive, and Volkart’s—a sleek, octagonal structure faced with flat white marble and accented with narrow glass windows—was ‘a more conservative building’.<sup>41</sup> While perhaps not a reconstruction fit to satisfy the letter writers above, Volkart’s relative conservatism rang true as an approach to theatrical architecture in Stuttgart. It is worth recalling that the courtly and classical Littmann building had itself been considered quite conservative when built in 1912, a conservatism that served the design’s remit to replace the previous eighteenth-century Hoftheater, which had burned down in 1902.<sup>42</sup>

As late as 1958, a large batch of letters in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* was published under the heading, ‘Old or new—that is the controversial question’.<sup>43</sup> Even with Volkart’s solution in the works, many citizens remained stubbornly attached to the idea of reconstructing the building in its old form, and did not appear to perceive, at least consciously, that their wish for restoration could be interpreted as a political retrenchment of sorts. On the other side, likewise, the idea that there might be a reason beyond technical and aesthetic contemporaneity to reject the old seems to have been sublimated if present at all. Ultimately, the solution was arguably old *and* new: the

---

<sup>40</sup> p. 1., Editorial, *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 12 October 1957.

<sup>41</sup> ‘ein mehr konservativer Bau’. ‘Kleines Haus so oder so?’ *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 12 October 1957.

<sup>42</sup> On the Hoftheater fire and Littmann’s conservatism, see Becker, ed, *Die Oper in Stuttgart*, 8–10.

<sup>43</sup> Series of letters under the headline, ‘Alt oder neu—das ist die umstrittene Frage’, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 20 March 1958.

repaired Großes Haus was joined by Volkart's moderate design, its gentle octagon rhyming with the curved front of the Großes Haus, and boasting fewer boxy angles and less glass than the other proposed designs. It opened in 1962 (Figure 2).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Stuttgart Opera sought international renown as a site of modern repertoire and innovative approaches to staging and design. This trend began in the 1950s, when Stuttgart became Wieland Wagner's 'winter Bayreuth', and continued with abstract and revisionist productions by Götz Friedrich, Robert Wilson, and Achim Freyer, among others.<sup>44</sup> (Some might draw an additional dotted line back to a brief experimental period in Stuttgart in the 1920s, led by Oskar Schlemmer and Willi Baumeister; others might point out that there were still plenty of quite traditional stagings in Stuttgart throughout the twentieth century.)<sup>45</sup> That many 'advanced' operatic projects occurred in the Großes Haus, which lacked the visual tropes of modernity characteristic of other postwar West German opera houses, is not necessarily a contradiction. But perhaps Stuttgart's administration pursued bolder moves in the absence of a more extensive rebuilding project that would have demanded massive public goodwill and funding, and which in turn might have encouraged conservative choices to convince a conservative public of its worth. Perhaps the tradition-oriented cultural capital preserved in the neoclassical façade provided a kind of 'cover' for experimentation inside the building, even as it weighed down the architectural modernism

---

<sup>44</sup> Becker, ed, *Die Oper in Stuttgart*, 88–123

<sup>45</sup> Becker, ed, *Die Oper in Stuttgart*, 46–47, 142–147. A more conservative aesthetic can be seen in the portion of this book devoted to famous singers (many pictured in costume); these stagings are of course not featured in the section about edgy productions.

eventually possible in the Kleines Haus. Perhaps, too, the Stuttgart Opera's status, previously stalled at 'provincial', was unexpectedly bolstered by the luck of its 'surviving' grand opera house—cultural momentum it used to secure major premieres and artists, in a virtuous reputational circle.<sup>46</sup>

The needle to thread, both in the building itself and on its stages, was to allow tradition—a lavish *Rosenkavalier* here, sandstone columns there—to sit in tension with sleek glass angles, abstraction, and dissonance. Compared to modernism's alibi of rebirth (a more decisive break with the past after total destruction), or to a denial-fueled restorationism, the Stuttgart scenario of partial damage and compromise resonates more fully with the realities of rebuilding German culture after 1945. If a narrative advantage emerged to describing the building as a historical survivor (as amply evidenced in the company's current 550-million-Euro renovation campaign, necessitated this time not by bombs but merely by time), it remains incumbent upon us to be analytical about the fixed identity of places and institutions that are periodically subject to deterioration and damage, renewal and maintenance, repair and renovation of different types.<sup>47</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic has shaken many of our assumptions about the resilience of arts institutions; postwar Germany's era of rebuilding suggests diverse historical models for how to move forward in the wake of these disruptions. And extreme weather events, intensified by climate change, are likely to lead to more such reckoning in the future.<sup>48</sup> Earlier this year, on

---

<sup>46</sup> On Stuttgart's status as provincial vs. national, see Becker, ed, *Die Oper in Stuttgart*, 30.

<sup>47</sup> Staatstheater Stuttgart, 'Sanierung', <https://www.staatstheater-stuttgart.de/sanierung/>

<sup>48</sup> On the future trauma of climate change, see E. Ann Kaplan, *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016).

June 28, 2021, a torrential thunderstorm in Stuttgart toppled several of the rooftop statues on the Großes Haus and caused parts of the copper roof to fly off entirely, causing internal water damage.<sup>49</sup> Again, seventy-six years hence, it rained into the auditorium of the Staatstheater. Repairs are now being planned.

---

<sup>49</sup> Kathrin Hasselbeck/Viktoria Schulmann, ‘Sturm- und Wasserschaden an der Oper Stuttgart: Es war Gespenstisch’. *BR-Klassik*, 30 June 2021. <https://www.br-klassik.de/aktuell/news-kritik/oper-stuttgart-sturm-wasser-schaden-regen-unwetter-dach-abgerissen-100.html> (last accessed: November 20, 2021).