

Dealing with Remnants of Politics, Power and History in Germany

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ABSTRACT: The link between place and identity is not stagnant or fixed. It changes over time, influenced by social and political changes and ethical developments, from one generation to another. What was important to remember (or commemorate) yesterday may not have the same significance tomorrow. What we see as right and just now may be viewed as wrong or obsolete in a decade or two. So, what do we do when the storyline changes? In our current political climate, the question about the validity of certain historic monuments, their context, their meaning for various groups and our handling of these at times uncomfortable monuments gained unexpected relevance. Suddenly the question becomes important what to do with these memories, with monuments and buildings that clearly reference a certain time or nationalistic expression and that today leave us with an uncomfortable aftertaste.

This abbreviated version of the paper explores the questions posed above by looking at Germany as one example of where the people had to grapple with the role and impact of collective memory, of public monuments and architecture that are freighted with heavy past. German history since 1871 is filled with fractures of political, cultural and social orders that forced the definition and re-definition of what to remember and how to remember appropriately by its politicians and citizens. The paper will retrace the changes in significance and how authorities and the public dealt with buildings of historic significance in two locations of Berlin as examples from a larger range of buildings and monuments the author is investigating in context of the topic. They give an overview how uncomfortable monuments were treated in a country with turbulent past.

KEYWORDS: Berlin, architecture, symbolism, perception, monument, politics, history

Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.
George Orwell¹

INTRODUCTION

Our cities and landscapes are filled with remnants of the past; with authentic traces of lives that passed and histories that happened. These remnants – intentional memorials as much as unintentional monuments² – tell their story and give form to the collective identity of place. Space, memory and history are often intrinsically linked. However, memory and history cannot be considered synonymous. Memory is rooted in the concrete, in spaces and places, images and objects. Memory evolves, is “open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived.” (Nora 1989, 8) History, on the other hand, is a representation of the past – its reconstruction of what is no longer, always problematic and incomplete. It “belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority.” (Ibid. 9) The links between place and identity, memory and history are not stagnant or fixed. What do we do with monuments and buildings that clearly embody a certain time or nationalistic expression that today leave us with an uncomfortable aftertaste?

Orwell's quote points to two aspects related to this question: history is not a monolithic narrative, that cannot or should not be questioned. The shaping of history can range from omission of important facts to recounting different versions of the same events to outright fabrications, which today are also called “alternative facts”. Orwell's quote also implies that the “power to shape the historical narrative is elemental to the ability to influence future development” (Dellenbaugh-Losse 2014). Who holds the key to “the truth” at any given time? Who writes the story? Who decides which memories or memorials to keep and which ones to abandon? This paper attempts to review the handling of memory and historic architecture by reviewing the story of artefacts and places in Berlin. We will observe how their importance and appreciation changed over time and become witness to stories of construction, reinterpretation, destruction, revival and renewal.

1.0 BERLIN

Berlin has surpassing importance and symbolic meaning in the nation's more recent history. Its fate during and after World War II highlights how its urban landscape was exploited more than any other German city to

further political agendas in various ways. A complex set of historical and political issues has influenced the urban form and symbolism of Berlin. Before serving as the capital of the Kingdom of Prussia, Berlin had existed for five hundred years. Berlin became the residence of the Prussian kings and later the center of Wilhelmine Germany. After 1871, it was successively the capital of the first unified German republic, the Second Reich and of the Weimar Republic. It was the epicenter of the National Socialist governments during Adolf Hitler's Third Reich, and after World War II, the capital of the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR). At each stage of Berlin's development, the ruling regime has imprinted signs of its power on the architecture and urban fabric of the city. Had the most megalomaniacal dreams of Hitler and his architect Albert Speer for the "World Capital Germania," a monumental Berlin been constructed, it would have changed the face of the city drastically. However, World War II scarred the metropolis deeply. In a city divided between the Soviet forces and the western allies after the war, any symbolism appeared to have been amplified on both sides of the wall with various measures. Berlin Mitte, the central district, was of crucial importance and a focal point of eastern propaganda. Here the east German socialists demolished badly damaged buildings to create a monumental central axis spanning from the Palace of the Republic and to the Television Tower at Alexanderplatz with the extensive use prefabricated construction, the so called *Plattenbauten*. Along with renaming of streets and erecting monuments to Lenin, Marks, Engels and other socialist and communist heroes, the governing Social Unity Party of Germany SED created the modern socialist city (Dellenbaugh-Losse 2014). The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union triggered yet another shift of Berlin's status by the 1990s and put the city into the political and social epicenter of its time and marked its renewal as the capital of a reunited Germany. "The choice of the monumental city of Berlin as capital raised fears about the emergence of a powerful and assertive Germany willing to exercise its newfound strength" (Asher Barnstone 2005). The decision to abandon Bonn as the capital in favor of Berlin, a city in the heart of the former East Germany, also marked an openness to form a new state identity and allow noticeable change rather than merely absorbing East Germany into the social-capitalist West Germany. Establishing Berlin as the capital of the reunified Germany brought with it discussions and assessments to use or repurpose historic buildings – some of them with significance from the Nazi era. More than a decade ago, Huyssen wrote about the city:

"As Berlin has left behind its heroic and propagandistic role as flash point of the Cold War and struggles to imagine itself as the new capital of a reunited nation, the city has become something like a prism through which we can focus issues of contemporary urbanism and architecture nation identity and statehood, historical memory and forgetting. Architecture has always been deeply invested in the shaping of political and national identities, and the rebuilding of Berlin as capital of Germany gives us significant clues to the state of the German nation after the fall of the Wall and about the ways it projects its future."³

In a country so sensitive to symbols and to references to its past, the decisions concerning relocation were bound to cause controversy. While the city today is filled with many examples of buildings or locations that experienced significant symbolic changes, we will be able to discuss only two locations in Berlin in this paper. Both are, in their unique ways, "uncomfortable monuments," that address remnants of power and architecture. Each building/location was at times cherished and important, then lost significance and purpose and was threatened with demolition that has or has not been executed. Each of these locations, at every symbolic fracture, stood at the center of public discussions and debate about its future. At every instance, political decisions were weighted against public resistance or support and prompted action.

2.0 STADTSCHLOSS BERLIN – THE CITY PALACE

2.1. The royal palace

On the Cölln-side of the river Spree the royal palace once stood. It served as the winter residence of the Electors of Brandenburg and the Hohenzollern Kings of Prussia since 1701. For this purpose, a medieval fortress that was first turned into a renaissance palace. It was later transformed and expanded by one of Germany's most significant baroque artists, Andreas Schlüter. This palace for Friedrich I was to show off the young Prussian monarchy and strike out its significance among other sovereigns of the Holy Roman Empire within the Germanic ethnic sphere. The magnificent Berlin Palace, the Stadtschloss, was praised as *the* masterwork of northern baroque architecture. Located on the Museum Island at Schlossplatz, across the Lustgarten (pleasure garden) park and adjacent to the river, "its long and ornate facades, four stories and 30 meters high, established the final scale of the palace and – it has been argued – of all Berlin architecture" (Ladd, 1997; p. 52). A second addition by Johann Eosander von Göthe doubled the palace in size. Focal point of this extension was the Eosander portal that was later crowned by a 100 m tall cupola designed by August Stüler. When King Wilhelm I was elevated to the status of Emperor (Kaiser) of the new united Germany in 1871, the Stadtschloss became the symbolic center of the German Empire as the central royal residence.

The German Empire, however, was a constitutional state, and from 1894 the newly constructed Reichstag building, served as seat of the German parliament.⁴ The new parliament building quickly came to overshadow the Stadtschloss as the center of power. This contributed to the loss of significance of the imperial palace in parallel to the loss of political power of the monarchy. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, the emperor was forced to abdicate on Nov. 9, 1918. The Spartacist leader and founder of the communist party, Karl Liebknecht, declared the German Socialist Republic that same day, first from Tiergarten and then two hours

later from a balcony of the Stadtschloss. The political acts of that day ended more than 400 years of royal occupation of the building.⁵ Following the fall of the German Empire, the Stadtschloss, no longer needed as a royal residence, became a museum and housed one of the most significant collections of artwork in Berlin. During the summer time, concerts were hosted in the Schlüter courtyard and interior spaces were rented out to a number of different organizations with widely different backgrounds. During the Third Reich, the Hitler's National Socialist (Nazi) Party largely avoided the use of the imperial palace for their events and the building was mostly ignored. However, the former Lustgarten was remodeled in 1935. A statue of King Wilhelm III and the garden's fountains were moved to the side so the space would serve better as parade ground.

During World War II, the Stadtschloss was twice struck by Allied bombs. On the latter occasion, the building lost its roof and largely burnt out. And while the Stadtschloss was a burned-out shell of its former glory, it could have been restored, as many of the other bombed-out buildings in central Berlin later were. The building remained structurally sound, much of its interior decoration was still salvageable and it had been documented well prior to the war. However, the palace's location was within the Soviet zone, which became the German Democratic Republic. "The East German governing party SED and state institutions failed to create a coherent, national preservation policy. Without formal ideological or state guidance on preservation, the Stadtschloss was bound to become a site of extraordinary conflict" (Campbell, 2005). The new Communist regime installed in East Berlin soon declared the palace a symbol of Prussian militarism, although at first there appeared to be no plans to destroy the building. Some parts of it were in fact repaired and some interior rooms used from 1945 to 1950 as exhibition space while others served as office space. However, during the late 1940s there was a steady increase in the subtle attacks by the SED politicians, who increasingly demanded the removal of the palace. In October 1949, Soviet authorities filmed the war movie "The Battle of Berlin," in which the ruin of the Stadtschloss served as backdrop (Maether 2000). For realistic cinematic impact Soviet soldiers acting as extras for the film fired with live artillery shells. This vandalized and further damaged the palace. Campbell notes that the notion of neglect or failure to act to preserve the Stadtschloss was not unique:

In terms of nation building, preservation often played a negative role. The East German government and SED neglected and demolished older buildings on the one hand while promoting future oriented, utopian architecture on the other. Under Walter Ulbricht, historical buildings were symbols of the decay of capitalism, the destruction of Nazism and the Second World War and emblems of organized religion and past feudal aspirations. This changed under Honecker as the SED appropriated historical monuments to create a narrative of East German history which extended beyond Soviet liberation and the GDR's establishment. At the same time, Honecker sealed off the GDR from the rest of Germany in an attempt to create a national identity based upon a socialist state rather than German ethnicity.⁶

In his research on the Berlin Stadtschloss, Maether concludes that Walter Ulbricht, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) of Germany and thus effectively the most powerful man in the state, finally decided alone to destroy the Stadtschloss in June 1950 (Maether 2000; Campbell 2005). Despite public objections and criticism from east and west, the demolition of the palace commenced only a few months later, in September, 1950. The task took four months, consuming 19 tons of dynamite. So solid was its construction that the dome and its entire base remained intact even after it fell to the ground. In place of the Stadtschloss there arose a parade ground with a huge grandstand in the east, the Marx-Engels-Platz. Here, enormous parades to celebrate the German Democratic Republic with as many as 750,000 people filed past the top leadership of the East German state for hours. Interestingly enough, it must be noted that not all of the old palace was lost: One particular section of the Stadtschloss was preserved: the Eosander Portal with the balcony on which Karl Liebknecht declared the German Socialist Republic in 1918. And thus, the Eosander Portal was included in the new Council of State Building (Staatsratsgebäude) in 1964, an otherwise plain structure that exemplifies the reduced GDR modern style, which was erected to the south of the vacated site (Ladd, 1998). With an altered cartouche, the baroque portal forms the main entrance of the building designed by the architecture collective lead by Roland Korn and Karl Erich Bogatzky (Ströver 2010).

2.2 Palast der Republik

While the government of the GDR used the vacant plaza for parking when it was not needed for propaganda purposes, only following diplomatic recognition of East Germany plans for a new structure in the same location became concrete. From 1973 to 1976, during the reign of Erich Honecker, who succeeded Ulbricht as Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, a large modernist building was built designed by lead architect Heinz Graffunder and his design collective (Holfelder 2008). The so-called "Palace of the Republic" was erected on one side of the giant square occupying most of the site of the former Stadtschloss. By virtue of its location more than by its architectural presence, it became the old city center's most prominent structure (Ladd 1998). The Palast der Republik was the seat of the parliament of the German Democratic Republic, the Volkskammer (People's Chamber). The building further housed two large auditoria, art galleries, a theatre, 13 restaurants, a bowling alley, a post office and a discothèque. Thus, the Palast der Republik was the central venue of the German Democratic Republic for major political and cultural events while the remaining area in front of the Palast der Republik continued to be used as a parade ground.

The building was promoted as the “House of the People” to millions who experienced all sorts of functions and events there. Constructed with a steel skeleton, its exposed structure was sprayed with about 5,000 tons of asbestos for fire protection. Shortly before the German reunification in October 1990, the Palast der Republik was found to be so badly contaminated with asbestos that it had to be closed to the public. After reunification, the Berlin city government ordered the removal of the asbestos, a process which was completed by 2003. At the same time, a 20-year-long debate started as to whether the former Stadtschloss, the royal palace, should be reconstructed in its former location to replace the Palast der Republik, and whether this should be done in part or completely. By the mid-1990s, somehow, the earlier demolition of the Stadtschloss appeared to have given legitimacy to the liquidation of the Palast der Republik and seemed to justify erasing the GDR showpiece from the urban memory of Berlin (Holfelder 2008, Ladd 1998). In 1991, the Marx-Engels-Platz was once again renamed to Schlossplatz. In 1993 a scaffold was erected and shrouded in fabric depicting the former baroque palace that used to hold its place (Holfelder, 2008). Despite the fact that the majority of East Germans opposed the demolition and various protests by people who felt the GDR building was an integral part of Berlin’s culture and the historic process of the German reunification, in November, 2003 the German parliament decided to demolish the Palast der Republik and leave the area as parkland until further use of the site was decided. This decision was especially controversial with former East Germans for whom the Palace of the Republic had been a place of fond memories, or who felt a sense of dislocation in a post-communist world. For others, who had suffered during socialist times, it was a blessing that this testament of their oppression would disappear at last.

2.3 The Humboldt Forum – Reconstruction of the Stadtschloss with new function

While the future of the Palast der Republik was uncertain, the debate about reconstruction of the Stadtschloss, however, amplified. Some groups argued that the rebuilding of the Stadtschloss would restore the unity and integrity of the historical center of Berlin. Opponents of the project included those who advocated the retention of the Palast der Republik on the grounds that it was itself a building of historical significance. Then there were those voices who argued that the area should become a public park that would allow the opportunity for the creation of a new history. Then again there were those who believed that a reconstructed palace would be an unwelcome symbol of Germany’s imperial past and others voiced that it would be unacceptably expensive for no definite economic benefit. The public debate was varied and heated. The reconstruction scheme was not without precedent: Completed in 2005, the rebuilding of Dresden’s Frauenkirche was an encouraging example for those who wanted the palace back. There, the new building incorporates the remaining original stones, stained black by bombing and fire. Some had been piled up to a huge mound in the middle of the city, others were neatly stored on gigantic shelves close by (Bucharth 2016). However, in Dresden no new building had occupied the site of the destroyed church and remains of it had been archived and saved for future use. The situation in Berlin was more complicated. Eventually, it was decided to rebuild the palace but with a new function. The design of Italian architect Franco Stella was the winning entry in an architectural competition in 2008. The new building will have the massing of the former palace and include authentically reconstructed facades on three of the four exterior sides. While the interior will be modern, the facades of one of the courts will be in the original style (Schlüterhof). The floorplan, however, has been designed to allow potential future reconstruction of notable historical rooms. The building will house the Humboldt Forum museum, a museum that has been described as the German equivalent of the British Museum, and congress center. The corner stone was set in June 2013. Completion is scheduled for 2019. And while construction is ongoing, discussions about details of the new “old” building have been ongoing as well.

3.0 THE REICHSTAG

3.1 The Reichstag as Diet of the German Empire

The Reichstag may take the most prominent place in Berlin’s contested historical landscape (Ladd, 1998, p.84). Ascher Barnstone points out that “any interpretation of the meaning of the Reichstag is wholly dependent on the reading of its history” (Ascher Barnstone 2005, 180). Germany’s parliaments had to endure “many vicissitudes in modern German history—in Bismarck’s Second Reich, the Weimar Republic, Hitler’s Third Reich, divided Germany, and now the unified Federal Republic. The Reichstag’s prominent role in each period makes it a monument to Germany’s troubled national dignity” (Ladd 1998, 84). “The word *Reichstag* initially referred to the politically weak pan-Germanic parliament that began meeting in the seventeenth century” (Ascher Barnstone 2005, 180). Best understood as semi-parliamentarian, the empire’s 1871 constitution of the Second Reich created an awkward balance of power between the emperor and a modern representative government with the imperial chancellor at the center. Otto von Bismarck, who was the first who fill that role, was in the unique position to manipulate both – the political parties and Emperor Wilhelm I. Initially Bismarck was able to keep democratic impulses in Germany under control, much to the pleasure of autocrats and the Emperor himself. However, the Reichstag became increasingly more independent with the strengthening of liberal, conservative and religious parties and increasingly social democrats represented in parliament. Already the decision on the location for a new building appeared complicated. It was “inseparable from the unsettled question of the Reichstag’s role in governing the new German state” (Ladd 1998, 85). A

first international architectural competition was held in 1872 but led nowhere as parliament was initially unable to purchase the proposed site on Königsplatz. Only after another decade of uncertainty, construction of the building designed to house the *Diet of the German Empire* began. In 1882, the Neo-Baroque design of architect Paul Wallot, that was modeled after Memorial Hall, the main building of the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, was chosen as winner of a second design competition.⁷ The architect was charged "to create a symbol of Germany and of German parliamentarism" (Ladd 1998, 86) but there was no model for him on which to fall back. In fact, there was not even a national style he could use to help his design. Nevertheless, in 1884, the foundation stone was laid. Construction was completed in 1894. The building was acclaimed for the construction of an original cupola of steel and glass, considered an engineering feat at the time and interpreted as a symbol of modernity. But its mixture of architectural styles drew widespread criticism and "has often [been] labeled the epitome of bombastic "Wilhelmine" architecture, a usually pejorative term to the bluster and bombast of the autocratic Emperor William II (Ladd 1998, 87).⁸ It was not until 1916, in the middle of World War I, that the iconic words *Dem Deutschen Volke* ("[To] the German people") were placed above the main façade of the building – much to the displeasure of emperor Wilhelm II, who had tried to block the adding of the inscription for its democratic significance. (Cullen 2014, 61). Kaiser Wilhelm II, who undoubtedly took the construction of a dome five meters higher than the one towering over his Stadtschloss as a personal insult, publicly referred to it as "the epitome of bad taste" and "the ape house" (Cullen 1995; Turner 2000, 83.). After losing World War I, the monarchy collapsed. William II was forced into exile and to abdicate.⁹ Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed the institution of a republic from one of the balconies of the Reichstag building on Nov. 9, 1918. It was "an attempt to preempt the radical Karl Liebknecht's proclamation of a socialist republic from the royal palace on the same day" (Ladd 1998, 88). Following a brief occupation by the Workers' and Soldier's Councils, parliamentary order was reestablished. The building, which was still called the Reichstag, continued to be the seat of the parliament of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) and transformed into the real center of power.

3.3 Reichstag Brand – Reichstag Fire and Nazi rule

The National Socialist Party rose rapidly in popularity during the 1920s. The nation had never fully recovered from the disgrace of a lost war and suffered from additional hardship due to payments of reparation to the victory powers. Widespread unemployment and economic hardship helped to promote the Nazi message. During the Reichstag elections in 1930, the National Socialist Party managed to win 18.3% of the votes and became the second-largest party in the Reichstag after the Social Democrats. Political instability and weak minority governments deepened Germany's political crisis during 1931 and into 1932. The votes that the Nazis received in the 1932 elections established the Nazi Party as the largest parliamentary faction of the Weimar Republic government. Then on Jan. 30, 1933, Hitler was appointed as German Chancellor. The tragic consequences of those events are well known. The Nazi era is the darkest chapter of German history. On Feb. 27, 1933, the Reichstag building caught fire, under still uncertain circumstances (Cullen 2014, 121). The Nazi propaganda machine quickly put blame on the communists. Only about a month into taking political office, the event gave Hitler a pretext to suspend most democratic rights provided for by the 1919 Weimar Constitution. The *Reichstag Fire Decree*, allowed Nazis to arrest communists and other political opponents without specific charge, curb the freedom of speech and press and increase police action throughout Germany. The burning of the Reichstag had also created fear in other capitalist states of the rise of communism in Germany. This furthered their *Policy of Appeasement* towards Hitler, a self-proclaimed anti-Communist. During the 12 years of Nazi rule, the Reichstag building was not used for parliamentary sessions. If the Reichstag convened at all, it did so in the Kroll Opera House, across from the Reichstag building. On March 23, 1933, the Reichstag parliament surrendered its powers to Adolf Hitler in the *Enabling Act*, another step in the so-called Gleichschaltung ("coordination"). The Reichstag, never fully repaired after the fire, was further damaged by war-time air raids. During the *Battle of Berlin* in the spring of 1945 it became one of the central targets for the Red Army to capture due to its perceived representational significance. On May 2, 1945, the photo of a Soviet soldier raising a flag over the Reichstag was taken, which celebrated the victory of the USSR over Nazi Germany. "For the Russians, then, the taking of the Reichstag was synonymous with vanquishing Fascism; the Reichstag was seen as the symbol of the National Socialist state no matter how it was understood by the Germans and the other Allied Power" (Ascher Barnstone 2005, 182).

3.4 An empty shell during the Cold War

When the Cold War emerged, the Reichstag was physically within West Berlin, but only a few meters from the border of East Berlin, which ran around the back of the building. In 1961 the Berlin Wall, a heavily guarded concrete barrier that physically and ideologically enclosed the western sectors of the divided city and sealed them off toward the east. The Wall highlighted the dissection of the city and the country as it passed the building freighted with history and symbolism only a few steps from the Reichstag's rear entrance (Ladd 1998, 91). After the war, the structure was essentially a ruin. In addition, there was no real use for it, since the seat of government of West Germany had been established in Bonn in 1949. Still, in 1956, after some debate, the West German government decided that the Reichstag should not be torn down but restored instead. It's

historic and political significance was too important to lose what was left. However, the cupola of the original building, which had also been heavily damaged in the war, was demolished. Paul Baumgarten oversaw the reconstruction of the building from 1961 to 1964. He removed all monuments and decorations referring to German mythology. In effect, he created a plain building inside the historic Reichstag, retaining only the outer walls stripped of most of their ornamentation. Starting in 1971, a permanent, widely lauded exhibition on German history was displayed and tours of the building were given. However, until 1990, the building was otherwise used only for occasional representative meetings.

3.5 From Reichstag to Bundestag

After weeks of peaceful civic resistance against the dictatorial GDR regime, public and political pressure built up. On the evening of Nov. 9, 1989, the East German government announced that GDR citizens would be permitted to visit West Germany and West Berlin. East Germans rushed to borders, crossed and climbed onto the Wall, joined by West German citizens from the other side in a celebratory atmosphere. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification within reach, things began changing rapidly and the hope that the Reichstag would one day return to prominence grew stronger (Ladd 1998, 82). On Oct. 3 1990, the official German reunification ceremony was held here, and one day later, the parliament of the united Germany would assemble in an act of symbolism in the Reichstag building. At that time, the role of Berlin had not yet been decided. On June 20, 1991, after fierce debates the parliament, the Bundestag, decided, with a slim majority of 17 votes, in favor of relocating the newly reunified government's seat from Bonn back to the German pre-war capital, Berlin (Walker 2009). In 1992, Sir Norman Foster won the architectural contest for the reconstruction of the building. His winning concept looked very different from what was later executed and did not include a cupola and the construction process was accompanied by much public debate. The decision to rebuild the dome was probably the most controversial aspect of all.

"Many found the dome the part of the Reichstag most representative of the authoritarian German past, associating domed capital buildings with expressions of power. Ironically, in its day, critics considered the Reichstag dome the one modern element, the one architectonic component representative of the New Order and a democratic future on an otherwise reactionary piece of architecture" (Ascher Barnstone 2005, 207).

During the reconstruction in the early 1990, the Reichstag building again was gutted, taking out everything except the outer walls, including all changes made by Baumgarten in the 1960s. However, traces of historical events were retained in a visible state; among them the graffiti by Soviet soldiers from the final battle for Berlin.

But before reconstruction began, the Reichstag was wrapped by the Bulgarian-American artist Christo and his wife Jeanne-Claude in 1995, attracting millions of visitors. The project was financed by the artists through the sale of preparatory drawings and collages. In June 1995, for two weeks, the building was shrouded with silvery fabric, shaped by blue ropes, highlighting the features and proportions of the imposing structure. The slogan accompanying the wrapping of the Reichstag was "What is veiled can be perceived more clearly." Christo chose the Reichstag for its symbolic meaning: for years it stood up in an open, strangely metaphysical area, with a complex past and an uncertain future. While the building has experienced its own continuous changes and perturbations, the Reichstag always remained the symbol of democracy and a signifier of German identity. Ascher Barnstone interprets the event as follows (2005, 168):

Although the perception of the building underwent a change in the eyes of some commentators in the popular press, the fact that the Reichstag's transformation was intended as purely symbolic meant that the event had virtually no effect on public opinion about the building, as numerous contemporary articles demonstrate. The wrapping and unwrapping did signal another potential reading of Foster's coming project and its relationship to history; the way interpretations of architecture are profoundly related to how people think and see the world, and the irrational force of associations. Christo and Jeanne-Claude referred to the project as a "memorial to democracy." In which sense they intended this memorial is unclear, however, to the death of democracy or the rebirth, or the commemoration?

The reconstruction based on Norman Foster's design was completed in 1999, with the Bundestag convening there officially for the first time on April 19th of that year. The Reichstag is now the second most visited attraction in Germany, not least because of the huge glass dome that was erected on the roof as a gesture to the original 1894 cupola, giving an impressive view over the city, especially at night. "The new dome has assumed as many layers of meaning as the building on which it stands. Moreover, it has rapidly become a symbol, if not the symbol, of the new Berlin" (Ascher Barnstone 2005, 205).

CONCLUSION

The urban environment with its public and private building represents the material remanence of our historical past in the present. As Huyssen states, "we have come to read cities and buildings as palimpsests of spaces, monuments as transformable and transitory, and sculpture as subject to the vicissitudes of time." (Huyssen, 2003. 7) There would be many other buildings, structures and monuments in Berlin alone that are suitable to discuss how we define and re-define national identity. This paper can only discuss a minimal sampling to illustrate how perception of these places change over time along with our attitude and treatment of these monuments: The site of the former Stadtschloss is an example where in a number of decidedly political moves, the historic imperial palace, a monument to aristocratic power and social oppression, was destroyed to

superimpose a building that would represent a new, radically different, modern state and symbolize socialist ideals. Within decades of its erection, the GDR's Palast der Republic was torn down and had to make way for a reconstructed Hohenzollern palace. While each step was highly controversial, the decisions must be understood as the humiliation and final Cold War victory of capitalist politics over socialist ideas at the expense "an East German population that felt increasingly deprived of its life history and of its memories of four decades of separate development." (Ibid. 45) The Reichstag building that housed the first German parliament played an important part in the rise and the fall of the Weimar Republic. Gutted by the Reichstag Fire and mostly ignored during the Nazi era, it's conquest still became the symbol of ultimate victory during the 1945 Battle of Berlin. As a reminder to the failed republic, it stood mostly in ruin after the war until it resumed its symbolic power and political value in the 1990s through the German reunification. The 1995 veiling as part of an art installation allowed the Reichstag to become a monument of democratic culture and opened space for reflection. With its new cupola, the building today symbolizes the new Berlin and "it successfully embodies the tensions between the unloved imperial past (the building's outside shell), a bureaucratic functional present of the German republic (the plenary hall for the Bundestag), and the desire to have a flashy image of democratic transparency marking Berlin's reclaimed status as capital." (Ibid, 76-77)

The examples illustrate how those in power took the opportunity to steer public debate, to interpret or re-interpret history to conform with their opportune narrative. They should also be a reminder to all of us that we must grapple with the meaning of national identity and the shifts, fractures and re-interpretations that happen as they relate to the built environment. What parts of our history, which monuments and buildings do we retain, which ones do we leave behind? Why are some spaces "cleansed" of unwanted or uncomfortable histories and their symbols, while others become subject to historiographies and yet other spaces are not? The traces and remnants of our history we find in our city form the collective identity of the place. The link between place and identity is not stagnant or fixed. It changes over time, influenced by social and political changes and ethical developments, from one generation to another... what was important to remember (or commemorate) yesterday may not have the same significance tomorrow. What we see as right and just now, may be wrong or obsolete a decade or two from now. So, what do we do, when the storyline changes? And why is it important to argue especially about those spaces, places and buildings, that seem uncomfortable or contested. We must question what makes us uneasy and we also must question their representation. We should carefully observe changes and ask, why some spaces will be or have been cleansed of unwanted memories and their attendant symbols while others remain intact. What are the underlying motivations? Dellenbaugh-Losse describes a fourfold process for normalizing a selected past in the landscape or urban fabric (Dellenbaugh-Losse 2014). It is a process of selection, representation, presentation, and normalization. She further points out that "contested spaces, spaces with multiple narratives, or spaces of parallel histories serve as good examples for such issues" (Ibid. 2). Looking back at the examples from Berlin, the city that stood at the center of the German state that collapsed four times within a single century, we understand that the historical narrative found there reflect the impression of historiographic links that connect our time with the past. The symbolic values have served and still serve to reinforce the political narratives, even if it may mean that at times we begin editing the past.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Orwell, G. 1984. 1984. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. P. 35.
- ² A monument in the context of this paper is a type of structure that was explicitly created to commemorate a person or event, or which has become important to a social group as a part of their remembrance of historic times or cultural heritage, or as an example of historic architecture. The term is often applied to buildings or structures that are considered examples of important architectural or cultural heritage.
- ³ Huyssen, Andreas. 2003. *Presents Past: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. P. 49.
- ⁴ The first imperial Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, established a welfare state to gain working class support in an industrializing country and to undercut a strengthening of socialist powers. Distrusting democracy, Bismarck controlled domestic and foreign affairs under Wilhelm I, until Kaiser Wilhelm II forced his resignation in 1890.
- ⁵ Socialist Party leader Philipp Scheidemann however was the first who had proclaimed the founding of the German Republic based on democratic parliamentary principles at the Reichstag just prior to Liebknecht.
- ⁶ Campbell, Brian William. 2005. "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past: Historic Preservation in the SBZ/GDR 1945–1990." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester.
- ⁷ The Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 was the first official World's Fair in the United States. The location was chosen to be Philadelphia, PA, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia. Designed by Herman J. Schwarzmann in Beaux-Arts style as the Art Gallery building, Memorial Hall was the largest art venue in the USA when it opened. Its 150-foot dome sitting atop a 59-foot-high structure was highly applauded as a symbol of modern engineering at the time.
- ⁸ Emperor William II ruled from 1888 to 1918. He judged the Reichstags building as the "height of tastelessness." His judgement of the architecture likely reflected his attitude towards the parliamentary system in general. (Quoted Michael S. Cullen. 1982. *Der Reichstag: Die Geschichte eines Monuments*. Berlin: Fröhlich & Kaufmann. As referenced in Ladd, 1998.)
- ⁹ While he had fled Germany earlier and in Belgium, William II did not abdicate as German Emperor and King of Prussia until November 28 in his Doorn exile. Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed the republic based on rumors that the emperor had already abdicated.