Robert Halsall

GDR architecture and town planning in post-unification Germany: 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' or aesthetic autonomy?

> Von meinem Übergangsburo im ehemaligen Staatsratsgebäude muß ich immer auf den Palast der Republik gucken. Der ist so monströs, daß ich da lieber ein Schloß hätte. [...] Den Befürwortern (des Schlosses) wird ja unterstellt, sie wollten – weil dann der Palast der Republik wegkäme – damit gleichsam die Geschichte der DDR eliminieren. Das steht für mich überhaupt nicht im Vordergrund. Wenn der nicht so häßlich und voller Asbest wäre, könnte der meinetwegen stehenbleiben.[1]

These comments by Gerhard Schröder about the 'Palast der Republik' encapsulate much of the substance of the debate about GDR architecture in the 10 years since the 'Wende'. Schröder's carefully chosen words illustrate his desire to move the debate about the retention or demolition of the 'Palast der Republik' away from the symbolic level of ideology, the triumph of one system over another and the elimination of the history of the GDR, to that of pure aesthetics: his personal architectural preferences for a historical building rather than the modernist 'Palast'. His comments recognise the emotions behind the debate as far as 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' of the GDR past is concerned, but he wishes to distance himself from the debate. For those interested in the architecture of the GDR, Schröder's comments could be interpreted as a welcome turn in the debate: a move away from ideological posturing towards more reasoned architectural debate. On the other hand, this might indicate, that, as far as Schröder is concerned, the questions of 'Gesschichtsaufarbeitung' which have dominated debate about the building for 10 years are now effectively over. Could this mean that any

historical reasons for preserving GDR architecture are also now past? If we look at the debate about GDR architecture, however, it is clear that, whilst recently the debate has become more about architecture than ideology, the questions of 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' are clearly not over, even if Schröder wishes it were so.

When we speak of 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' in relation to GDR architecture, we are faced with the fundamental question raised by Schröder's comments whether the architectural legacy is to be treated primarily as an aesthetic expression of a discredited ideology and thus to be treated in the same way as other expressions of this ideology, in comparable fashion to the architectural expression of other totalitarian ideologies in the 20th century. We are, of course, here faced with an immediate and ultimately unhelpful comparison with the post-war 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' relating to the symbols and architecture of the Third Reich. Like the period after the Second World War, the initial period after the end of Communism in Eastern Europe was accompanied by the desire for a 'Bildersturm', the immediate removal of the most easily identifiable symbols of the previous regime.[2] Whilst this may have satisfied the initial desire to remove icons of a discredited regime, it cannot be said to constitute 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' in any deeper sense, in fact could be seen as a reflection of an uncritical attitiude of 'out of sight, out of mind', such as might have been the case in relation to the symbols of the Third Reich. The desire to remove all symbols of a regime without reflection on what history lessons they can teach us is, as Habermas has argued, just as much an inadequate guarantee of the critical reflection on history necessary to genuine 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung', as an uncritical historicism, where everything from the past is preserved simply because it is from the past.[3]

If we are to address adequately the question of 'Geschichts-aufarbeitung' in relation to architecture, we need in particular to address the specific theoretical and aesthetic questions which relate to the relationship between architecture, ideology and history. If we are to learn history lessons from architecture, as the theorist Fredric Jameson has argued in relation to the architectural debate in Eastern Europe since 1990, we need to address two questions: 'the pedagogical value in the present of urban traces of the past; and the relationship between space and current production as such'.[4]

The first of these questions, the pedagogical value of the architecture of the past, we can describe as the degree to which we can learn history lessons, positive or negative, from the architecture of the past. However, this is not just related to the general question of what we can learn about values and ideologies of the past *through* architecture, but also the specific *architectural* debates amongst architects about the interpretation of past architectural styles. Our ability to learn history lessons from an overtly political architecture such as that of the GDR depends on the degree to which it is possible or desirable to separate political intention from aesthetic result. As Jameson puts it, the question is: 'whether the work of art, the building as such, has any kind of intrinsic power to enforce any kind of aesthetic response, let alone the one planned or foreseen by its maker'(Jameson, p.72). If the answer to this question in relation to GDR architecture is unavoidably affirmative, in other words that there is an essential relationship between the ideological nature of the GDR regime and its architectural products, then this will determine our actions in wishing to remove it in wholesale fashion, as in the case of Nazi architecture. If we answer the question in the negative, admitting a more complex relationship between political intention and reception, then, accordingly, we have a more complex debate about the positive and

negative aspects of the architecture of the GDR and the relationship between the architecture and the people who live in and around it.

As we examine the debate in the former GDR over the past 10 years, we can see evidence of two distinct phases of the debate, relating to this central question of political intention and reception. In the first phase, the 'Bildersturm', which took place in the initial years after the 'Wende', there was an understandable simple unambiguous identification of the regime with its most obvious architectural symbols and the consequent desire to remove them. In the later phase, a more complex debate has ensued, in which there has been a more distanced, critical examination of the positive and negative features of GDR architecture, even resulting in the desire to preserve what was formerly seen as worthless.

Returning to Jameson's two criteria, the second of these, the practical question of how past architectural space relates to the present requirements of production, has been just as important in the debate as the more 'ideological' dimension. In other words, planners and architects in the former GDR have faced the practical problems of how to adapt the GDR architectural inheritance (even if it is accepted that it is desirable to preserve some of it) to the needs of capitalist society. This need for adaptation relates, for instance, to the unsuitability of GDR planned towns and cities to the commercial and other needs of capitalist cities, and to the loss of function for individual buildings. In many ways, as we shall see, the 'ideological' debate, which has been ongoing parallel to this, has hindered architects and planners in coming up with solutions at a more practical level to the architectural and planning problems involved in this.

GDR state architectural policy and the architectural legacy

Before examining each of these criteria in detail and looking at case studies, if we are to examine the general question of the relationship between ideology and architecture in relation to GDR architecture, we need firstly to outline how GDR state ideology expressed itself in terms of planning and architecture.

Perhaps the most important feature of GDR architecture, at least in terms of the current legacy, was the attempt to create a unity between town planning, architecture and art. As the GDR architectural historian Bruno Flierl puts it, this was:

> der Anspruch, die Stadt in der Qualität des Architektonischen und die Architektur in der Dimension des Städtischen zu gestalten – sozial-räumlich, praktisch und ästhetisch strukturiert nach Ensembles – als kommensurable Teile eines Ganzen.[5]

This idea of 'Ganzheitlichkeit' had its origin, of course, in ideology, namely, to quote Flierl once again: 'Die Stadt in der DDR ist die sozial-räumliche Organisation des Zusammenlebens der Menschen unter des real-existierenden Sozialismus'(Flierl 1998, p.32). Looked at purely in terms of intention, we might see this as just a reflection of a totalitarian ideology. Looked at in terms of the result produced, however, we might view it as a utopian idea which went wrong because of the rigidity with which it was employed. In practical terms, however, the ideal of 'Ganzheitlichkeit' had a number of dimensions which, applied more or less uniformly throughout the GDR, have produced the particular problems which planners and architects now have to come to terms with.

The first of these was the attempt in the 50's and 60's to give town centres a symbolic significance which would represent the triumph of the socialist idea through the building of dominant symbols, such as the 'Fernsehturm' in Berlin, the university skyscrapers in Leipzig and Jena,

and hotels and other dominant buildings in other cities. Tied up with this 'need to represent' the state was the idea that the centrality of urban spaces should be based on what Flierl calls 'autoritäre Zentralität' or 'kommunikative Zentralität' rather than the commercial centrality typical of the capitalist city.[6] This was reflected in the wide open squares and gardens such as those between Marx-Engels Platz (now Schloßplatz) and Alexnderplatz in Berlin, and the wide avenues such as the former Stalinallee in Berlin or the Straße der Nationen in Chemnitz (former Karl-Marx-Stadt). In addition, the fact that centrality in GDR cities was given to non-commercial uses such as housing, together with the huge empty spaces has, from the practical point of view, been one of the most important dimensions of the problems faced by architects and planners in the former GDR cities in the last 10 years. Added to this were the numerous political statues and monuments and examples of 'Kunst am Bau', which also gave expression to the state ideology. Important to note about these, however, was that they were intended as an integral part of ensembles. In other words, decisions about the removal or retention of individual statues, monuments and examples of 'Kunst am Bau' in the last 10 years have had to take account their importance in terms of the architectural ensemble rather than in isolation. This fact, as we shall see later, has led to a more differentiated 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' in relation to these monuments, at least in recent years.

We can, of course, trace changes in ideology in relation to architecture and planning in the course of the 40 years of GDR history. The 'representative' phase of the 50's and 60's, in which most city centres and planned towns were built, was replaced by a no less ideological phase, but one with a different emphasis, namely the slogan 'Wohnungsbau statt Städtebau'. In this period the mass-produced housing or 'Plattenbauten' was produced, both on edge of city housing

estates and housing blocks in city centres. This period was also characterised by a move away from the wholesale demolition policies of the 50's and 60's in relation to older buildings to some conservation of the historic city fabric (e.g. the Nicolaiviertel in Berlin).

We have here, then, a sketch of the main elements of GDR architecture and planning which had to be dealt with after 1990. Before looking in detail at the decisions and debates which have ensued, we might attempt to assess what the positive and negative features of the architectural legacy (rather than the ideological intention) might be. We might divide these into two dimensions, not exclusive of each other, the utopian and the totalitarian. In the former we might include the social aims of planning in the GDR, for instance, the production of low cost housing in city centres. Against this, of course, has to be balanced that, in practice, the 'Plattenbauten' produced, in their uniformity and poor aesthetic quality, might be held to be a totalitarian distortion of a laudable social aim.

A second utopian element might be the fact that communal property determined the development process in cities rather than the needs of property developers and private enterprise, enabling the realisation of social aims. The other aspect of this, however, was that, as we see today in former GDR cities, without the discipline of the market and the necessary mixing and centralisation of uses, city centres have an empty, 'desert-like' appearance and lack the vibrancy associated with town centres in the West.

Finally, the utopian attempt to achieve a unity of planning, architecture and art might be seen as a positive element of the legacy. However, in practice, the massive scale and monumentality of the ensembles produced often dwarfs the human being and could be seen as an allegory of how the state dominated the individual in the GDR.

These principal ideological elements of architecture and planning in the GDR, therefore, could be interpreted, in terms of 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung', as either an allegory of a failed utopia or the product of a totalitarian ideology, or both. In assessing the arguments for and against the retention/demolition of individual monuments and buildings and in the planning of cities, we will find this essential ambiguity reflected in more or less all of the discourse. We can at this point rehearse some of the principal arguments which have been put forward:

1. The 'unambiguous ideological expression' argument. GDR architecture represents an unambiguous expression of the ideology of the regime. There is therefore no case for retaining it.

2. The 'negative history lesson' argument. There is a case for retaining at least some GDR architecture as a reminder/warning of the dangers of totalitarianism.

3. The 'allegory of utopia' argument. There is a case for retaining some GDR architecture as an allegory for utopian thought which, although people no longer believe in the ideology which produced the architecture, still has some positive value.

4. The 'identification of the population' argument. There is a case for retaining some GDR architecture because some sections of the former GDR population identify with it as part of their lived experience, despite their rejection of the ideology which produced it. The question is whether this constitutes an example of the phenomenon of 'Ostalgie' identified by critics in relation to other aspects of life in the former GDR.

5. The 'normality' or 'aesthetic autonomy' argument. That, with more distance in time from the ideology which created it, it should be possible to judge GDR buildings primarily on aesthetic merit, as is the

case with buildings in Western cities, rather than primarily as expressions of ideology.

The first phase of the debate: the 'Bildersturm'

The years following successful revolutions in the 20th century have tended to be accompanied by a 'Bildersturm', the removal of the most immediate images or icons of the power of the old regime which has been replaced, such as public statues, monuments and insignias. This way of coming to terms with the misdeeds of the hated regime has been a feature not just of post-war Germany's response to the Nazi era in East and West, but also the GDR's own treatment of its 'imperialist' past in terms of the demolition of key symbolic buildings such as the 'Stadtschloß' in Berlin.

In the case of the socialist monuments of Eastern Europe, however, and in the GDR in particular, the initial understandable emotive response has been tempered in the passing of time with a more complex and differentiated debate about precisely which monuments should be destroyed and which retained.[7] This debate, as did the debate about street renaming, generated widely divergent responses on the degree to which figures after whom monuments had been erected or streets named, were tainted by association with the regime or whether they had any lasting historical significance notwithstanding this.

In Berlin the Senate set up a 'Kommission zum Umgang mit den politischen Denkmälern der Nachkriegszeit im ehemaligen Ost-Berlin' to discuss the issues raised by controversial cases such as the Lenin Monument or Ernst Thälmann Monument. The Commission concentrated on three factors in coming to a decision on individual monuments: firstly, the nature of the figures/events commemorated by the monuments and whether they were necessarily associated with the regime and had no

historical significance outside this; secondly, the nature of the monument itself, its style and setting, in other words its artistic merit; thirdly, its historical significance as a testament of history.

The first factor necessitated a debate about the significance of figures in GDR history which was ongoing in the general process of 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' and was paralleled in the debate on street renaming. However the second factor, the stylistic debate about individual monuments, was a factor specific to the debate about architecture. As regards monuments such as the Lenin and Ernst Thälmann monuments in Berlin, it was not just the figures themselves, but the nature of their depiction which were thought unacceptable as far as retention were concerned: the bombastic and authoritarian gesture of the statues was thought an unacceptable reminder of the triumphalist and authoritarian nature of the state which built them. Other monuments, on the other hand, such as the statues of Marx and Engels on the Marx-Engels Forum, were thought less obtrusive and authoritarian, and were even looked on with affection by the East Berlin population, and thus were thought worthy of preservation.

The debate surrounding the third dimension considered by the Commission, the wider historical significance of monuments, was characterised by a fundamental ambiguity in relation to public works of art. Whilst it is possible to debate the historical significance of the figure represented in a monument or the artistic merit of the statue in isolation, the historical significance of a public work of art in a time of historical change such as this is marked by a fundamental ambiguity which has been described by Mark Lewis in the following terms:

> Like the fetish, the public work of art serves (at least) two ends, […].The
> monument covers up crimes against the public in so far as it is able to
> temporarily 'smother' the possibility of remembering specific histories in

terms of the violence that engendered them; it instead commemorates a history or event in terms of a pernicious heroism or nationalism. But at the same time, the monument exists as a perpetual marker, a reminder of those very crimes. […] And when the symbolic order is thrown into crisis […] the public monument's semantic charge shifts and the work […] begins to take on the characteristics of a scar – literally a *permanent monument* to the original crime(s). This may be as good a reason as any for the retention of at least some works.[8]

Ironically, then, even the more bombastic, authoritarian monuments from the GDR might, it could be argued, act as a negative history lesson, testifying to the crimes which those who built them or whom they commemorate committed, contrary to the intentions implicit behind the monument. If all the offending monuments are removed, according to this argument, there is nothing left from which we can learn negative history lessons, and thus this can perhaps lead to the erasure of the negative associations of history from the public memory. It is difficult to locate the precise point in history afer the 'Wende' where, in Lewis's terms, the 'semantic charge' of such monuments shifted sufficiently to allow the 'negative history lesson' argument to emerge. It is true to say, however, that the necessary distance required for such a symbolic re-orientation is rarely present in the immediate aftermath of a change of regime and was not in the early years after the end of the GDR.

As the debate progressed, it became apparent that not just factors relating to the interpretation of history had to be taken into account, but the importance of the monuments and ensembles of which they formed a part to the local populations to whom they were part of their urban identity. In other words, the associations of people living in the spaces which surrounded these monuments were not necessarily those associated with the political intentions of the monument. The recognition of the urban context of monuments, particularly important, as I have argued, in

terms of GDR architecture, led to a move beyond the phase of the debate in which the simplistic formula 'removal = forgetting, retention = remembering' was the motto.

The importance of context has been stressed by Hans-Ernst Mittig in his examination of the removal of GDR monuments in East Berlin in the period 1990-95. He divides these cases into three categories:

1. Where the monument has been removed and its site has been made unrecognisbable from its state during the GDR.

2. The monument has been removed, but the space it inhabited remains redolent with associations of the GDR.

3. The monument has been removed and a previous (i.e. before the GDR) form of the space has been reconstructed, thus obliterating any association with the GDR.[9]

An example of the importance of the urban context was provided in the case of the Lenin monument in the district of Friedrichshain in East Berlin. After heated discussion the decision was taken by the Commission to remove the statue in 1992. After the removal of the statue, the pedestal which it formerly occupied remained in an empty square for some two years. During the period various graffiti and even the painting of a silhouette of the statue on the ground indicated that, although the statue had been removed, the memory of it as something giving context to the urban space remained amongst residents. Given the emptiness of the square, some residents obviously wished that the statue was still there. This should not necessarily be taken as an expression of identification with the figure of Lenin himself. The pedestal was then removed and two years later, in connection with the renaming of the square as 'Platz der Vereinten Nationen', a fountain was erected from blocks of stone from around the world.

This case clearly represents a move from Mittig's category 2 to category 1: not only has the monument been removed, but the space has been transformed so that it no longer has any associations with the GDR. We can perhaps interpret this as a political counter-gesture to eradicate any memory of the former political significance of the place, but what is clear from this and other examples is that 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' in relation to such political monuments is not simply a question of removing or preserving monuments, but the transformation or otherwise of the whole context in which they existed and the identification of the population with their lived experience of the past, although not necessarily the political intentions behind it.

The second phase of the debate: the move to 'aesthetic autonomy'

The raising of the question of the identification of the former GDR population or at least sections of it with particular buildings or spaces either removed or under the threat of removal indicates a new phase of the debate, where 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' is more complex and controversial, but more 'normal' than in the 'Bildersturm' phase in the sense that this has seen the attempt to apply 'normal' aesthetic and historical criteria associated with urban conservation in other parts of Germany to these decisions, albeit no less controversially.

An example of the entrance of the 'normality' or 'aesthetic autonomy' argument into the debate and the controversy evoked by it was the decision of the state of Saxony in 1994 to issue a preservation order for the Karl Marx monument in Chemnitz and the complex of buildings associated with it, the Karl-Marx-Forum. In the justification for the preservation order, the following reasons were cited:

> Das öffentliche Erhaltungsinteresse gründet sich auf die hier zutreffende Bedeutung für die Deutung einer Epoche der jüngeren Geschichte Sachsens und Deutschlands insofern, als an keiner Stelle Sachsens so anschaulich wird, was der Alleinvertretungsanspruch des Marxismus-Leninismus als Philosophie- und Gesellschaftsmodell darstellte, wie eine geschlossene Gesellschaft und ein zentralistisch ausgerichteter Staat sich verstanden. Der geradezu sakralen Erhöhung eines der Begründer dieses Gesellschaftmodells Karl Marx, kommt darüber hinaus Singularität zu.[10]

Apart from this overall justification, relying heavily on the 'negative history lesson' argument, the following factors, relying heavily on the 'aesthetic autonomy' argument, were considered equally important:

1. The ensemble of buildings around the Karl Marx monument is all-important in the preservation decision. One element of this ensemble (i.e. the statue) could not be removed without destroying the architectural qualities of the whole.

2. This is a typical example of 60's architecture in Europe as a whole. Apart from the obvious ideological associations as testified by the statue and inscriptions on the building behind it, it can be compared with similar 60's developments in Rotterdam or in West German cities. So far as 60's architecture is deemed worthy of preservation, therefore, the Karl-Marx-Forum is worthy of preservation as an example of this architectural style.

We see here the emergence of a 'normality' or 'aesthetic autonomy' argument: the belief that it is possible and desirable to assess the architectural merits of a GDR building or ensemble on its own merits as an example of an architectural style and not just as an expression of ideology.

This invocation of 'normality' in relation to architectural decisions, however, did not mean that this decision and others like it did not provoke an emotional response from the media and the public. The

Chemnitzer Morgenpost, for instance, called the proposal to designate the area a conservation area equivalent to the idea 'Teile der Chemnitzer Plattenbau-City zum DDR-Freiluft-Museum zu machen'![11] The emotional response, however much influenced by the media is perhaps understandable as, for some people, declaring these buildings, including the former offices of the SED 'Bezirksleitung' as worthy of conservation as any 'normal' building might be considered equivalent to saying that we should forget about the crimes of the Stasi.

The emphasis in these decisions on architectural context, the permanence of the lived environment and the ambiguities of the identification of the population with it, however, demonstrate that the debate in relation to buildings cannot be conducted in the same way as that as regards people or institutions, because of the nature of architecture as such.

The trend, in the years which followed, away from the relatively simplistic debate of the 'Bildersturm' period towards a more differentiated view culminated in a statement by the 'Deutsche Nationalkomittee für Denkmalschutz' in November 1995:

> Die abgeschlossene Bauepoche der DDR ist Teil der jüngeren deutschen Architektur – und Baugeschichte. […] In der Betrachtung und Bewertung 'historischer Bausubstanz' dieser Bauepoche kommen Betroffene und Fachleute begreiflicherweise zu unterschiedlichen, oft kontroversen Ergebnissen. Um so mehr ist es erforderlich, sich […] Zeit zu nehmen und eine sachbezogenere Forschung zu den treffenden Entscheidungen voranzustellen.[…] Auch die Notwendigkeit, in zeitlicher Nähe zum Gegenstand bewerten zu müssen, darf nicht dazu führen, die bewährten Ergebnisse der Denkmalwürdigkeit presizugeben.[12]

In this recommendation that there should be a presumption in favour of preserving notable examples of GDR architecture and a call for a more distanced, expert and less emotive debate, we can clearly see the

increasing influence of the 'normality' or 'aesthetic autonomy' argument. The further we get from the actual historical events, the more it should be possible to use 'normal' but not necessarily ahistorical criteria in our assessments of buildings.

A move to a more normal and distanced view has also been reflected in the appearance of historical studies of GDR architecture, which have not only documented the surprising variety of styles, but also by documenting the social and cultural functions of buildings in the GDR as well as their political intentions, have contributed to a more reasoned and distanced debate. Examples of this are Ulrich Hartung's study of the 'Kulturhäuser' of the 1950's.[13] These buildings, constructed in a variety of styles from classical to modernist, illustrate the fact that the idea of a uniform 'GDR style' which corresponds simply to a political ideology masks the diversity which actually existed. Hartung's book also shows how the utopian ideas of social and cultural use behind the building of the 'Kulturhäuser' have increasingly come back into favour in the context of the commercialisation and lack of cultural facilities which now characterise the post-unification period in east German cities:

> Das wachsende Interesse an den Kulturhäusern liegt sicherlich nicht nur in dem Wunsch gegründet, eine (un)gewisse ostdeutsche Identität zu bewahren. Viele der Bauten gefallen wegen ihrer altmodisch-repräsentativen Erscheinung, die postmodernen Geschmacksvorstellungen wie der Vorliebe für Barock und Neoklassizismus entspricht. Einige Politiker beginnen diese monumentalen Altlasten als Oasen in einer neugeschaffenen Kulturwüste wahrzunehmen. (Hartung, p.12)

A new 'normality'?: two contrasting examples in Berlin

If there has been a call for more 'normality' in the debate in recent years, however, the degree to which this has been carried through into

practice has depended on the nature and the symbolic importance of the individual cases, as we can see if we examine two contrasting examples in Berlin. If we are to look for a 'new normality' in the debate about GDR architecture, in many ways Berlin is not a typical example. Since the designation of Berlin as the capital and the accompanying government and commercial developments, the GDR debate has become caught up in a wider debate about how to represent the new 'Berliner Republik' in architectural terms, and an architectural debate about which architectural style(s) are considered appropriate to the development of the image of Berlin as capital.[14] This wider debate, although not specifically related to GDR architecture, has been superimposed upon the 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' debate, perhaps throwing the issues into sharper relief. We can illustrate this by looking at two contrasting examples, the former 'Stalinallee' housing development in East Berlin, and the 'Palast der Republik'.

The first phase of the 'Stalinallee' development, east of Strausberger Platz, has been seen as a putting into practice of state architectural and planning ideology of the 1950's, in particular the 'Grundsätze des Städtebaus' of 1951.[15] Behind the ideological posturing and distancing from the West which formed the background to the development's planning, however, the architecture actually produced by the architects produced in the attempt to fulfil the state dictate to create a 'national style' for the GDR contained an eclectic mix of styles which we would call, in today's architectural parlance, 'postmodern' quotations of other styles. The first phase of 'Stalinallee', therefore, although produced at the height of Stalinist influence on architecture, is interesting historically precisely because of its non-uniform mix of styles:

> der kritischer Betrachter (kommt) bald zu der Feststellung, daß hier
> Zeitströmungen der Romantik, des Historismus und in dessen Gefolge der

Eklektizismus sichtbar werden. [...] Das ist, seitdem wir durch die Erfahrung der Postmoderne in unseren Wertvorstellungen entkrampfter sind, eo ipso kein Negativum oder Zeichen einer nichtschöpferischen Architektur. (Peters, p. 30)

The second phase of the development, west of Strausbergerplatz towards Alexanderplatz, planned in 1958 and built during the 60's, in contrast, marked a turn towards the functional, standardised building chracteristic of the GDR in the 60's and 70's and is of much less architectural interest than the first phase.[16]

The importance of the 'Stalinallee' development and the need to preserve it have not been in dispute since reunification, perhaps not primarily because of the fact that it is a unique historical testament to an ideolgy, but more because the architectural style, particularly the first phase, is interesting in itself and is acceptable to current tastes. The symbolic dimension, i.e. the ideological intentions behind its planning, has hardly been the most important aspect in the debate, but, rather, practical problems such as the crumbling facades (mainly built from post-war building rubble), and the need to adapt both internal and external structures to modern requirements.[17]

However, historical factors, with their necessary ambiguity, have not been totally left out of the debate. In fact it is the symbolic dimension which makes out the case for the importance of the development over and above other housing developments in East Berlin:

Unzweifelhaft bleibt der Wert dieser großen innerstädtischen Achse als städtebauliches Denkmal und ein Zeichen sozial-utopischen Denkens, ja sogar Versuchs. Der gelang indes nur unter der rigiden Enteignung von privatem Besitz, Voraussetzungen, welche die Demokratie nicht fordert und kennt. In diesem Sinne bleibt die Absolutheit dieser Straße ein Stück Geschichte nicht allein Berlins.[18]

In this historical assessment we can once again see here instances of both the 'allegory of utopia' and the 'negative history lesson' arguments

expressed simultaneously. Only because of the fact that the development is being preserved and renovated, however, primarily for architectural reasons, to restore it to a state as close as possible to its original condition, can we learn history lessons from it, whether positive or negative.

We can contrast this relatively uncontroversial debate about 'Stalinallee' with one which has been much more controversial, that relating to the 'Palast der Republik'. To summarise this debate, still ongoing, and the huge quantity written and said about it, would go beyond what is possible in this paper. However, we can outline the main phases of the debate. The building has been closed since 1990 because of the presence of asbestos in its structure. The building itself, and the Schloßplatz (formerly Marx-Engels-Platz) on which it is situated, are owned by the Federal Government. By virtue of this fact alone, together with the designation of Berlin as the capital and the accompanying relocation of government buildings, has meant that the debate about the building has taken on a symbolic importance well beyond that associated with any other former GDR building. In fact it could be said that the fate of this building has, for some people, come to represent the fate of the former GDR itself.

In the early years following re-unification, a clear decision was taken to demolish the building, principally on the grounds of the asbestos and the technical and financial impossibility of removing it (if the original decision had been implemented the building would have been demolished in 1994). This decision to remove the building was confirmed by the winning design in the architectural competition held for the Spreeinsel in 1993 by Bernd Niebuhr, which envisaged the construction of a building similar in design and proportions to the original

'Stadtschloß' which occupied the site until its demolition by the GDR in the 50's.

The proposal to rebuild the Stadtschloß as an alternative to the retention of the Palast meant that the debate about the future of the building moved onto a new plane: the debate was now about *which* past was deemed appropriate to represent the new Berlin.[19] A further complicating factor in the debate was the decision of the Federal Government in 1994 to reduce the original cost of the move from Bonn to Berlin by using existing buildings rather than constructing new buildings for government offices. This obviated the need for Schloßplatz to be used as a 'representative' site for a new government building. With this decision the arguments for a more 'Berlin-specific' rather than a state use of the site increased. The current situation as regards the building is that, although the decision to remove the Palast remains in principle, asbestos is currently being removed from the structure, a process which will be completed at the end of this year. At that point a decision will be made about the future of the building.

This obvious indecision about the future of the building is tied up with its symbolic importance in terms of 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' in relation to the GDR. This is largely because the building has, at least in the initial phases of the debate, been seen mainly in terms of its political intention – as a 'representative' building of the GDR state. The debate about its removal or retention, therefore, was seen largely in terms of demolition as a 'symbolic act of revenge' upon the state which built it, and whatever was erected in its place as the symbol of the triumph of one system over another.[20] This was, of course, further reinforced by the proposal to rebuild the 'Stadtschloß' as an alternative to the Palast. This would, when argued purely at the symbolic level, not just involve a

symbolic act of revenge or triumph, but imply a rejection of the post-war era in Berlin per se and a return to a former era.

This 'meta' level of debate at the level of ideological symbolism, however, was not the level at which most East Berliners saw the question. For them the more important debate was about to whom the centre of Berlin, of which the Palast for them represented the symbolic heart, belonged: the state or the people? As Bruno Flierl puts it:

> Viele Ostberliner verstehen dies (the proposal to replace the Palast with a state building representing a unified Germany) […] als Machtwechsel am tradierten Ort der Macht und keineswegs als einheitsstiftendes Werk für die Politik Deutschlands und seiner Hauptstadt in Zukunft. Sie haben an diesem Ort schon genug vom Staat und von Staatsspielen, sie wünschen sich dort […]: *Stadt statt Staat.*[21]

Ironically, the fact that, for many East Berliners, the Palast was *not* regarded primarily as a 'representative' symbol of the state which created it, but rather as a central point of cultural communication, a meeting point, and thus as something with a positive identification, was now emphasised by those who campaigned for the retention of the building:

> Der 'Palast der Republik' ist kein sozialistisches Schloß als Herrschaftsgebäude geworden, sondern fungierte, solange er noch nicht geschlossen war, als ein großes, für jedermann geöffnetes Volkshaus und Kongreßgebäude. […] Statt eines abgeschlossenen Regierungshochhauses entstand ein offenes Haus für kulturelle Kommunikation.[22]

The fact that the communal, social function of the building has been emphasised by those East Berliners campaigning for its retention rather than its totalitarian associations, has been criticized by some in the West as evidence of a selective dealing with the past or 'Ostalgie' on the part of former GDR citizens. If this positive identification with a building is an example of 'Ostalgie', however, surely this is the expression of a preference for a certain type of use – the social and communal – over the

commercial and state representative uses which have predominated in the development of Berlin since 1990, rather than a preference for the ideological system with which the building was associated. This is surely an example of the phenomenon which Lothar Fritze, in his analysis of the phenomenon of 'Ostalgie' has called 'Partial-Nostalgie', a feeling which:

> bezieht sich gerade nicht schlechthin auf *die* DDR, sondern auf bestimmte Lebensbedingungen, die zur Wirklichkeit in der DDR gehörten. […] Faktisch handelt es sich um eine 'Partial-Nostalgie' auf der Basis eines kritischen Vergleichs zwischen den früheren und den heutigen Lebensverhältnissen.[23]

As Fritze has pointed out, the phenomenon is by no means as irrational as it has been portrayed. The fact that the genuinely-felt 'feeling of loss' in the East as regards the social and communal orientation of the centre of Berlin finds its symbolic projection on to the Palast is falsely interpreted by some in the West as identification with the system which produced it.

The 'Architektenstreit' in Berlin

In the case of the 'Palast der Republik', because of its key position and central importance, we can see more clearly than in any other case the ambiguity of interpretation of symbols of political architecture as regards intention and reception we have noted in the debate about GDR architecture. The debate, particularly as it became associated with the proposal to rebuild the Stadtschloß, has become not just a debate about one building and its symbolic importance, but part of a wider architectural debate in Berlin about which historical style(s) are deemed worthy of representing the 'New Berlin' as capital. This 'Architektenstreit' has been arguably similar in form to the 'Historikerstreit' in that it had at its core an appeal for a return to 'normality' or 'Einfachheit' in planning and architecture in Berlin and an

implicit rejection of the experimentation and Modernism of the post-war period in East and West. The debate was initiated by an article written by Vittorio Lampugnani, the Director of the German Architectural Museum, calling for an end to the experimentation and utopian visions which had dominated post-war planning and architecture in East and West Berlin since the war and a turn (or return) to a 'Neue Einfachheit' of domesticity and a 'Prussian style', thus reconnecting with Berlin traditions of the past.[24] Lampugnani criticizes the 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' of 1950's and 60's architecture in East and West for its belief that what he calls the 'Mythos der Innovation', the ideological commitment to modernism and utopian thought in planning was the only way of coming to the past. The ensuing debate about architectural style became polarised into one between left and right, in that Lampugnani and others of a similar architectural conviction were accused by some of constituting a 'New Right' with architectural intentions similar to the Nazis.[25]

Although this debate has not concerned itself with GDR architecture specifically, the fact that buildings such as the 'Palast der Republik' are prime representatives of the utopian modernism which Lampugnani and others have attacked, means that the debate about their retention will not be restricted to the question whether the Palast is an architecturally appropriate building for the site given its setting amongst predominantly classical buildings, but seemingly inevitably will be bound up with a wider historical and political debate about the interpretation of Berlin's architectural past.

The call for a 'Neue Einfachheit' and the debate about whether Berlin can or should construct for itself a new 'normal' identity based on reconnecting with the pre-war past seems to some to imply the denial of the architectural inheritance of the post-war division. This attempt to redefine 'normality' in terms of one architectural past and the implied

rejection of others has been criticized by one of the leading 'postmodern' architects practising in Berlin, Daniel Libeskind:

> Kaum war die Mauer gefallen, da trat auch schon die Tendenz zur Nostalgie zum Vorschein. […] Und […] die Leute (geben) die Vorstellung auf, daß Berlin eine einzigartige Stadt ist […] nicht, weil es eine Hauptstadt ist oder ihres ökonomischen Status wegen, sondern aufgrund ihrer Geschichte, die die Stadt unverwechselbar macht. Berlin hat kein normales Zentrum […]. Deshalb ist es ein Fehler, eine Hierarchie der Vergangenheit wiederherstellen zu wollen.[26]

The 'hierarchy of pasts' which Libeskind criticizes is one in which the GDR and its architecture would be held to be 'abnormal' and thus not worthy of preservation. Libeskind advocates the recognition of the validity of *all* the pasts which exist in Berlin, including the GDR. In relation to Alexanderplatz, for instance, a typical example of GDR architecture, for instance, whilst recognising its deficiencies, he states:

> (It) is lived experience. It is not an abstraction, it is not something you that you can change by renaming it. […] It does not matter whether you have the GDR or not, you have that space. You can call it no longer the GDR […]. But this does not change the nature of that space or its experience […]. No-one can afford to ideologically just wipe it out of their minds and say, we don't like it, we like the old streets of medieval Berlin, because this is just wishful thinking.[27]

The 'Architektenstreit' in Berlin, then, has demonstrated that the arguments about GDR architecture has been overlain with a wider debate about the identity of the city and the degree to which the GDR past is included within this.

'Normality' and city planning: Berlin and Chemnitz

The debate about GDR architecture has not just been confined to individual buildings and developments, but to the planning of city centres

as a whole, as can be seen in relation to debate about the 'Planwerk Innenstadt', the master plan for Berlin produced by the Berlin Senate in February 1997. The main professed aim of the plan was to create an identity for the city centre which would overcome the legacy of two centres produced by the wall and division of the city. The problem involved in this, however, is stated clearly by Senator Peter Strieder in the introduction to the document:

> Es gibt aber nicht nut keinen Konsens darüber, wo sich dieses Zentrum befindet, […] sondern es läufen auch die Meinungen darüber auseinander, was ein Zentrum der Bundeshauptstadt sei, was hier stattfinden und vor allem, wie es auszusehen habe.[28]

The key point of the plan is that, in order to develop a true centre with which all Berliners and, as the new capital, all Germans can identify, the 'historische Mitte', in other words what constituted the focal point of the former 'Hauptstadt der DDR', cannot remain just a point of identification for East Berliners and thus must undergo fundamental changes. As Staatssekretär Hans Stimmann says in the plan:

> Die Mitte ist in Zukunft nicht nur Zentrum einer 3,5 Millionen-Einwohner-Stadt, sondern ebenso ein räumlicher, funktionaler und emotionaler Bezugspunkt der Bundesrepublik. Das jetzige Bild kann man zwar als Ergebnis sozialistischer Planungsgeschichte erklären, die Erwartung an die Gestalt des Historischen Zentrums erfüllt man allerdings nicht (Planwerk, 20).

The plan did not aim to achieve this by means of creating a 'tabula rasa' by the wholesale demolition of GDR buildings, but by seeking to connect the present city to the past, basing future planning as far as possible on the original street pattern of the historical city and the remnants of the former city wall (not the Berlin wall). As the plan states in justification of this: 'die Erinnerung an eine historische Stadt (ist) ausgelöscht worden […]. Es ist, als hätte hier vor 1960 niemand gelebt' (Planwerk, 49).

As well as trying to create a common identity by reconnecting with the past, the plan also attempts to come to terms with the fact that the City-Ost cannot function as a functioning city centre for all Berlin because of the legacy of GDR planning – the wide open spaces and lack of commercial uses prevent this: 'eine City kann sich nur dort bilden, wo eine Vedichtung von Geld, Kultur, Mode und städtischem Raum möglich ist' (Planwerk, 51). From this need stemmed one of the main principles of the plan, 'Verdichtung' or filling out of the spaces between buildings, and the mixing of city functions typical of a 'normal' city centre.

The plan has generated controversy since its formulation, in particular the lack of acceptance of its main principle by many East Berliners, that the City-Ost must adapt and change in order to function as a centre for the whole of Berlin. The debate about the plan has focused, firstly, on the question 'whose city' the centre is, in particular the area between Schloßplatz and Alexanderplatz. Many East Berliners identify strongly with this area as 'their' city centre and rejected the planned 'Verdichtung' and introduction of commercial uses put forward in the plan. As a result, the Senate has had to scale down its plans for the development, for instance, allowing Marx-Engels-Forum to remain primarily a green space between Rathaus and Fernsehturm. Secondly, residents of the 'Plattenbauten' housing blocks around the Alexanderplatz do not accept that their area should not continue primarily as a residential area for them rather than part of the new city centre, nor that there is a need to introduce a mix of different social groups into the area as proposed by the Senate.

We can conclude that the situation in Berlin, perhaps because of its enhanced significance as the capital and the ensuing 'Architektenstreit', is far from being 'normal' if this this means uncontroversial, and the debates there rage on. If we are to look for a more typical example of

successful 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' in relation to GDR architecture and planning, we can perhaps turn to a city outside Berlin, Chemnitz. The very fact that the city was so comprehensively planned as a GDR model city and the concomitant fact that it is simply impossible to go back to a past before this, has meant that planners and architects have had to accept the GDR legacy as a fact and deal with it on a more pragmatic and practical, but not ahistorical basis. The principal problem which faced planners was that the centre, a huge area between Rathaus, Stadthalle and Congress-Hotel was, to all intents, empty, and that, as a consequence, the city had no central area to attract investors and thus to compete with other cities in Saxony. However, the unalterable fact of its outward appearance has meant that planners and architects have continued to build in the modernist tradition, not trying to change the identity of the city, but improving it in terms of a pragmatic 'Stadtreperatur', encouraging new buildings of a high standard in a modernist style.[29] To this end, Chemnitz attempts to portray itself as a city of modernity and innovation, accepting its GDR past as part of this.

Conclusion

If we are seeing a new phase of 'normality' in relation to the debate about GDR architecture 10 years after the Wende, it is no means the case that questions of ideology, history and 'Geschichtsaufarbeitung' have all been solved or left behind. However the distance in time from the events of 10 years ago may enable those involved in decisions to take more account of the complexity and ambiguity of the relationship between architecture, symbolism and the identification of people with the built environment than was the case in the early years after reunification.

NOTES

[1] Interview with Gerhard Schröder, *Die Zeit*, 4th February 1999.

[2] See John Czaplicka, 'Monumental Revisions of History in Twentieth-Century Germany: An Ongoing Process' in Donald Martin Reynolds (ed.), *Remove not the Ancient Landmark. Public Monuments and Moral Values*, Amsterdam 1996, 141-60.

[3] Jürgen Habermas, 'Aus der Geschichte lernen?', in Habermas, *Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik. Kleine politische Schriften VIII*, Frankfurt am Main 1995, 9- 18.

[4] Fredric Jameson, 'History Lessons', in Neil Leach (ed.), *Architecture and Revolution. Contemporary Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe*, London 1999, 69-80 (71). Further references appear in the text.

[5] Bruno Flierl, 'Nachdenken über Städtebau und Architektur in Deutschland Ost und West' in Bruno Flierl, *Berlin baut um – Wessen Stadt wird die Stadt?*, Berlin 1998, 27-34 (32). Further references appear in the text.

[6] Bruno Flierl, 'Stadtgestaltung in der ehemaligen DDR als Staatspolitik' in P.Marcuse (ed.), *Wohnen und Stadtpolitk in Umbruch*, Berlin 1991,49-65.

[7] See Bernd Kramer (ed.), *Demontage: revolutionärer oder restaurativer Bildersturm?* Berlin 1992.

[8] Mark Lewis, 'What is to be done?' in A. & M. Kroker (eds.), *Ideology and Power in the Age of Lenin in Ruins*, Montreal 1991,1-18 (5).

[9] Hans-Ernst Mittig, 'Politische Denkmäler und "Kunst am Bau" im städtischen Kontext', in *Verfallen und vergessen oder aufgehoben und geschützt? Architektur und Städtebau der DDR – Geschichte, Bedeutung, Umgang, Erhaltung.* Dokumentation der Tagung des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz am 15/16 Mai 1995. Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz, Band 51, Berlin 1995, 23-31.

[10] Quoted in Gerd Glaser, 'Das Karl-Marx-Forum in Chemnitz' in *Verfallen und vergessen oder aufgehoben und geschützt? Architektur und Städtebau der DDR – Geschichte, Bedeutung, Umgang, Erhaltung.* Dokumentation der Tagung des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz am 15/16 Mai 1995. Schriftenreihe

des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz, Band 51, Berlin 1995, 52-60 (58).

[11] Chemnitzer Morgenpost, 31.8.1994, quoted in Gerd Glaser, above, 57.

[12] Empfehlung der Deutschen Nationalkomittees für Denkmalschutz vom 27.November 1995, in *Verfallen und vergessen oder aufgehoben und geschützt? Architektur und Städtebau der DDR – Geschichte, Bedeutung, Umgang, Erhaltung.* Dokumentation der Tagung des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz am 15/16 Mai 1995. Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz, Band 51, Berlin 1995, 113-114 (113).

[13] Ulrich Hartung, *Arbeiter- und Bauerntempel. DDR Kulturhäuser der fünfziger Jahre. Ein architektonisches Kompendium*, Berlin 1997. Further references appear in the text.
    See also Werner Durth, Jörn Düwel & Niels Gutschow (eds.), *Architektur und Städtebau der DDR. Band 1: Ostkreuz, Band 2: Aufbau*, Frankfurt am Main 1998.

[14] See Gerd Kähler, Ulrich Conrads & Peter Neitzke (eds.), *Einfach schwierig: eine deutsche Architekturdebatte*, Braunschweig 1995.

[15] 16 Grundsätze des Städtebaus, reproduced in Paulhans Peters, *Eine Zukunft für die Karl-Marx-Allee*, Hamburg 1997, 20.

[16] Jörg Haspel, 'Zwischen Kronprinzpalais und Stalinallee – Rekonstruktion and Destruktion in der Hauptstadtplanung', in *Verfallen und vergessen oder aufgehoben und geschützt? Architektur und Städtebau der DDR – Geschichte, Bedeutung, Umgang, Erhaltung.* Dokumentation der Tagung des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz am 15/16 Mai 1995. Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz, Band 51, Berlin 1995, 35-46.

[17] See Paulhans Peters, *Eine Zukunft für die Karl-Marx-Allee*, Hamburg 1997.

[18] Diskussion 'Stalinallee' (Moderation: Helmut Lange) in *Verfallen und vergessen oder aufgehoben und geschützt? Architektur und Städtebau der DDR – Geschichte, Bedeutung, Umgang, Erhaltung.* Dokumentation der Tagung des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz am 15/16 Mai 1995. Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz, Band 51, Berlin, 1995, 61-78 (63).

[19] For a review of the debate relating to this see Robert Halsall, 'The Architectural Debate in Berlin: An Aesthetic Historians' Debate?' in *Debatte*, No.1, 1996, pp.91-108.

[20] For a summary of this phase of the debate, see contributions in *Bauwelt*, Heft 23, 1993, Sondernummer 'Die Mitte'.

[21] Bruno Flierl: 'Wem gehört die Stadtmitte?' in Bruno Flierl, *Berlin baut um – Wessen Stadt wird die Stadt?*, Berlin 1998, 129-133 (132).

[22] Wolfgang Ribbe, 'Ein Baustein für die Neugestaltung der Berliner Mitte'. Denkmaldiskussion: Palast der Republik, in *Denkmalpflege nach dem Mauerfall. Eine Zwischenbilanz*, Berlin Senatverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, Umweltschutz und Technologie, Beiträge zur Denkmalpflege in Berlin Heft 10, Berlin (1996), 126-28 (128).

[23] Lothar Fritze, *Die Gegenwart des Vergangenen. Über das Weiterleben der DDR nach ihrem Ende*. Weimar, 1997, 95.

[24] Vittorio Lampugnani: 'Die Provokation des Alltäglichen', *Der Spiegel* 51/1993, reprinted in Gerd Kähler, Ulrich Conrads & Peter Neitzke (eds.), *Einfach schwierig: eine deutsche Architekturdebatte*, Braunschweig 1995, 20-27.

[25] See 'Neue Rechte am Bau?' in *Der Spiegel* 45/1995.

[26] Daniel Libeskind, *Kein Ort an seiner Stelle. Schriften zur Architektur – Visionen für Berlin*, Dresden 1995, 97.

[27] Daniel Libeskind in conversation with Anne Wagner, 'Resisting the Erasure of History' in Neil Leach (ed.), *Architecture and Revolution. Contemporary Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe*, London 1999, 130-37 (130).

[28] *Planwerk Innenstadt Berlin. Ein erster Entwurf*, Berlin Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, Umweltschutz und Technologie, Berlin 1997, 5. Further references appear in the text.

[29] *Städtebauliche Rahmenplanung Stadtzentrum Chemnitz*, Stadt Chemnitz 1998.