Berlin: a city awaits: the interplay between political ideology, architecture and identity.

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1 Contextual Setting: Political Ideology, Architecture and Identity

Capital cities are symbols of both national identity and historical cognisance. They are "not only workplaces but stages for the visualisation *of power*" (Wise 1998, p. 15). As the apparatuses of significant cities, the public spaces and physical structures, which are the bedrocks of the governing state, have the potential to simultaneously inspire, amaze, isolate and intimidate global urban theorists. Whether it be Beijing's Forbidden City, Moscow's Kremlin, Washington D.C.'s Capitol Complex, or Berlin's Chancellery, there exists a central nexus between planning, architecture and political power.

The political connotation in architecture has been a subject of interest to many critics and writers. The most prominent of these include Charles T. Goodsell and Kenneth Frampton. In Goodsell's (1988) statement "*Political places are not randomly or casually brought into existence*" (ibid, p. 8), the stipulation is that architecture has been used very purposefully in the past to reinforce connotations of power and strength in cities, symbolic of larger nations and fundamental political movements. The question central to this book relates to how this has been achieved in the specific case of Berlin. Goodsell argues that any study of the interplay between political ideology, architecture and identity, demands a theoretical premise imbued with political ideas opposed to "*cold concepts and lifeless abstractions*" (Goodsell 1988, p. 1). To examine and appraise the processes of creating and re-creating cities being subjugated by the polarity extant in the political and ideological forces, this book focuses on Berlin, as a political discourse. Moreover, the book includes a collective view of the political movements and architectural interventions illustrating the significant destruction and reorganisation to reinstate the identity of Berlin in the context of geopolitics

and the advent of globalisation (Figure 1). This new book complements the previous book – *Potsdamer Platz: The Reshaping of Berlin* (Nowobilska and Zaman, 2014) with the intention that the inter-disciplinary approaches would unveil, methodologically, the effects of political ambitions on Berlin over several decades, and identify the language of architecture as the manifestation of power and politics.

For many, the mere mention of Berlin immediately evokes vivid imagery of capital, and indeed a nation, whose identity is affected unreservedly by the prejudices we hold of its turbulent past. As a city, it found itself at the forefront of global attention during World War II, only then to be sandwiched between the superpowers of East and West for a further 40 years. When the infamous Wall, which had come to symbolise the Cold War, finally fell in the late 1980s, the third period of transformation swept through the city as it made the transition from a divided to a united geographical and political entity. Reunification intended to redefine a national identity, which had been overshadowed by the conflict of power and crumbling political scaffolds. While it is true that Berlin is not, by any means, the only city in the world ever to have been affected by a political movement, the threefold development of the city gives us a unique opportunity to examine the relationship between political ideology, architecture and identity in three different eras: National Socialism, The Cold War and Post-Reunification.

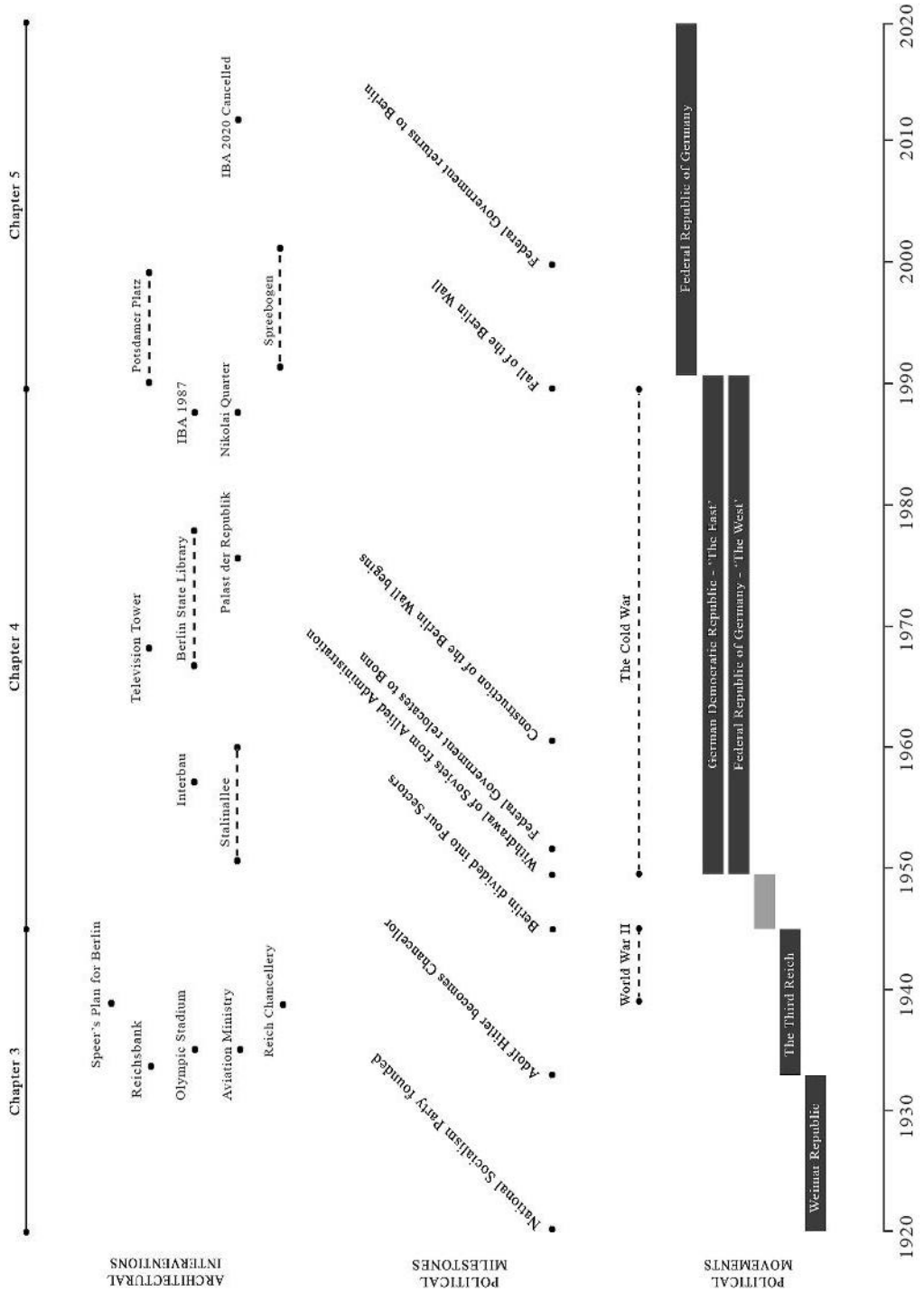

Figure 1: Political Movements and Architectural Interventions (Mair, 2017)

A significant body of existing research has sought to analyse and evaluate Berlin's political architecture, but in almost all cases, attention is paid only to one political period in isolation. History is not readily divided into neat packages. It is, instead, a continuous entity, such that "*each period has within it the seeds both of its own demise and of the beginnings of subsequent periods*" (Agnew 2003, p. 86). It is, therefore, the fundamental aim of this book to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the city as a vehicle through which a more holistic understanding of the influence of the political landscape on architecture can be developed. This is achieved through the examination of three significant political periods of the 20th century, as opposed to one in isolation.

In methodological terms, the research attempts to present an intensive review and synthesis of existing literature of both Berlin's architecture and politics of the 20th century. Taking the form of a chronological narrative which allows for the reconstruction of the political and architectural history of the city as a progressive, rather than a static entity, the review of existing literature is subsequently underpinned and verified through the discussion of exemplary buildings and projects from each of the three political movements. Through this means, the following objectives are used in the research of Berlin:

1. To gain a theoretical understanding of the critical socio-political characteristics of the duality of city and society in Berlin specific to each political period. Further, the authors intend to identify critical drivers influencing the architecture of Berlin in each given movement.

2. To analyse and appraise how the factors identified in Objective 1 contributed to a palpable change in the urban landscape of Berlin in each political period to establish the historicity. In doing so, the research attempted to determine whether the effect of a given movement on architecture was related only to form and aesthetics or characterised through much broader, planning-based principles.

3. To consider the relationship between a given period and that which precedes it in order to determine if there were identifiable factors attributed to earlier periods, which account for the subsequent architectural responses in the later periods.

4. Finally, to determine the effect that Berlin's history has had on the way urban development is managed in the city today.

While contributing to more extensive discussions within architectural theory connecting to the issues of identity and historical consciousness, it is hoped that the rigorous process through which the extreme example of Berlin is examined will present a viable model for future research. To this end, the methodology employed might be applied to other notable cities to understand how political dynamics shape and reshape the built environment.

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2 Berlin's Earlier Development: Power and Economic Growth

It was in the 13th century that Berlin, in tandem with nearby community Cölln, first began to develop at a narrow crossing point on the River Spree (Figure 2) (Balfour 1995). At this time, it was the introduction of custom policies within the two townships, which led to early economic development. As a direct result of establishing opportunities for new trade and commerce, the new custom policies allowed Berlin to become part of the Hanseatic League in 1359. Berlin's association with this "*powerful confederation of Baltic towns*" (Fraser 1996, p. 8) affirmed the then-town as a regional capital for over a century.

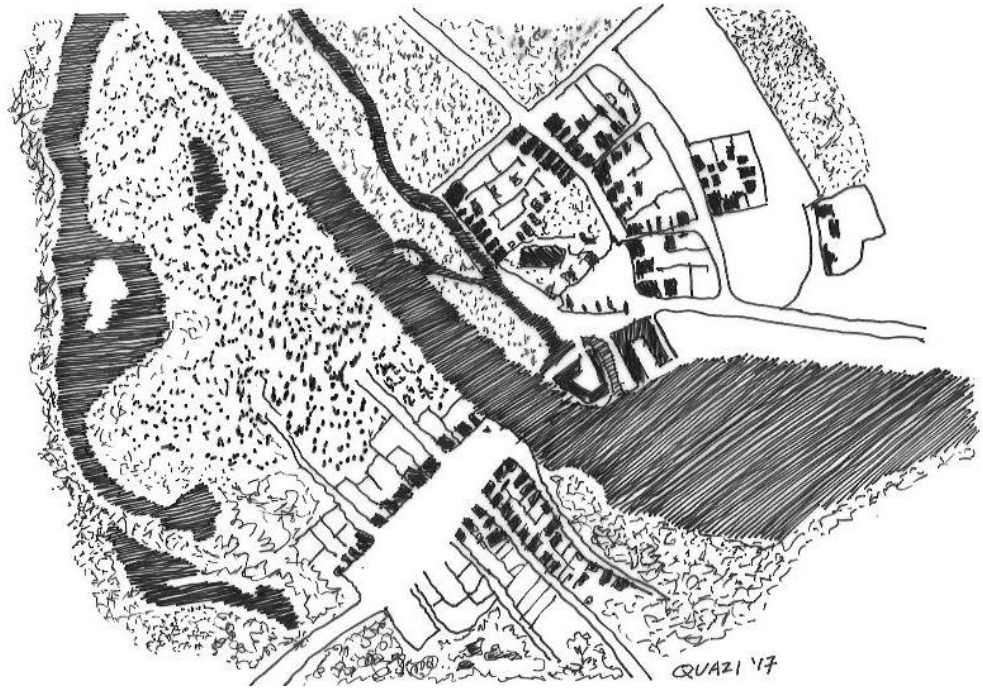

Figure 2: An early map of Berlin and Cölln in the 13th Century

By the late 15th century, Berlin had become an ‘electoral capital’ which played host to the Princes of Brandenburg. Cited as a critical figure in the city’s early development, the ‘Great Elector’ Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg built a canal to connect the ‘Spree and Oder’ to stimulate further commercial growth and, most notably, issued several edicts, which significantly eased the restrictions existing on immigration. The subsequent development through the 17th century is said to have led to the introduction of some 46 new trades to the city (Fraser 1996).

It is noteworthy to mention that the political periods of the 20th century, being the primary subject of this study, are not the first instances in the city’s history where power and national identity could be seen to be expressed through architecture (Balfour 1995). In the years leading up to the 18th century, an idea which would resurface at the hands of the National Socialist Party prevailed: there was a deliberate shift towards the use of the classical architecture of antiquity and the idealised societies of Ancient Greece and Rome as models for the new Prussian state. The construction of the Brandenburg Gate epitomised this shift as a symbolic entry point to Berlin and the subsequent development of public squares and buildings by Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Schinkel had been commissioned to develop the city to suit the political interests of Friedrich Wilhelm III (Fraser 1996).

The mid-19th century was characterised by both rapid economic and physical growth, despite the city’s relatively modest inception as a regional capital. At this time, the municipal government, seemingly aware of the future need to expand, significantly upgraded Berlin’s infrastructure under the guidance of engineer James Hobrecht. Drawing inspiration from Paris, the resulting plan revolved around the expansion of the city along with its limits to the west and south-west through vast sweeping boulevards punctuated by public squares (Figure 3). The centre was laid out on a grid pattern of huge urban blocks (Figure 4), imposing a sense of order through which future development could be controlled (Balfour 1990).

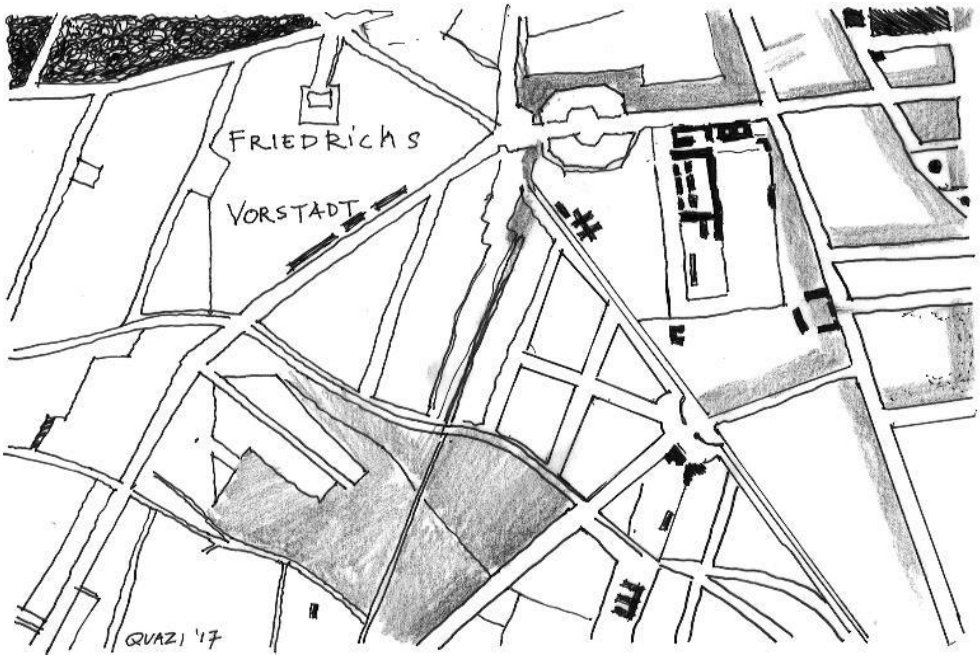

Figure 3: The new boulevards connecting key public spaces

Figure 4: The order imposed on the medieval city by Hobrecht's grid

The emphasis placed on Industrial production and the subsequent promotion of Berlin to Imperial Capital in the early 1870s expedited the city's growth, such that it raised the population from 932,000 to 2.7 million before the 20th century (Pugh 2014). It was with this significant rapid growth that the city became unable to cope with the vast numbers of people flocking to the area in search of work. To this end, Berlin went from being "Athens on the Spree" to "Chicago on the Spree" (Rathenau as cited in Pugh 2014, p. 22), depicted as an urban slum where disease and death were rampant, and where evident disparities existed between the working class and the asset-accumulating elite (Figure 5). Currency depreciation and strikes added to the general air of unrest, which had existed since Germany's defeat in the First World War. Despite this, the proliferation of creative movements in art, film, music and architecture which extended into the 1920s allowed the city, at least outwardly, to express itself as the absolute embodiment of Modernity (Figure 6) (Colomb 2012).

Figure 5: Working-class tenements were perceived as slums

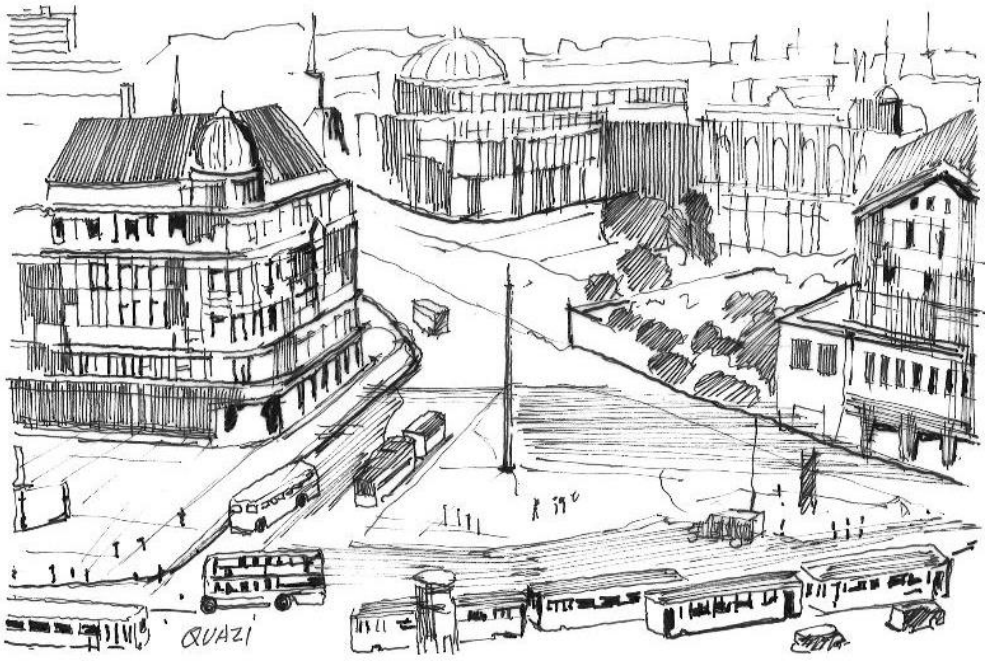

Figure 6: The bustling Potsdamer Platz spoke of modern vitality

It has been argued that the various regimes which ruled Germany from Berlin through its early development could not take its capital status for granted. To this end, they "*very deliberately and consciously had to construct the city as a site of national identity*" (Pugh 2014, p. 2). This statement forms a useful starting point from which to consider how the political history of the remainder of the 20th century was played out within the city. After World War I, the country found itself unified under the guise of the Weimar Constitution. Within this context, attention was paid to Berlin's role in a newly unified Germany. The view held by critics, politicians and the general public alike was one, which questioned whether Berlin could represent a single German identity, or that such an identity even existed. This gave way to debates about Modernity, Germany's future, and the kinds of ideals the country wanted to represent. The ensuing discourse on this matter gives context to the conditions in which the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) was to take control of the country's affairs, at the time when the "*principle of totalitarianism replaced municipal self-government*" (Fraser 1996, p. 18).

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