CITY DYNAMICS AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: 
URBAN STRATEGIES AT NEW POTSDAMER PLATZ, BERLIN

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New Potsdamer Platz is not only the flagship project but, with an average of 70,000 visitors per day, also a major tourist attraction of reunified New Berlin. In the 1990s, millions of people witnessed the breathtaking development of Potsdamer Platz from a no man’s land, which had been – until 1989 – situated right in the middle of the death strip of the Berlin Wall, to Europe’s largest construction site and, finally, to the internationally renowned new center of the new German capital. However, the piecewise sale of Potsdamer Platz and its vicinities to international enterprises such as DaimlerChrysler and the Sony Corporation within the framework of public-private partnership agreements provoked highly controversial discussions. The enterprises developed an entire urban quarter in the new middle of the city, comprising apartments, offices, shopping and entertainment facilities, bars and restaurants.

Astonishingly enough, the fact that several protected monuments and other relics from the history of Potsdamer Platz were part of the agreements, has hardly caught the attention of the scientific community. Therefore, my paper aims to identify the different actors involved in the politics of urban development, history and memory at New Potsdamer Platz, and to analyze their motives, strategies and diverging interests under the pressures of globalization dynamics. It will focus on the selling, planning, and festivalized development of the area in the 1990s and then set out to investigate New Potsdamer Platz against the background of recent changes in the design-mediated representation of history in urban space. The paper will end with an imaginary promenade across New Potsdamer Platz to see what has been left of history, which historic themes and motifs have been revived and integrated into the urban space, how that was done and what exactly is commemorated at today’s Potsdamer Platz.

Keywords: Berlin, Potsdamer Platz, Heritage, Built Environment, Public Private Partnerships
**Introduction**

"New Potsdamer Platz" is the flagship urban development project of "New Berlin". Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, millions of people have witnessed the breathtaking development of the once so famous traffic square Potsdamer Platz from a no-man's-land on the Berlin Wall to Europe's largest construction site and, finally, to the much-sworn "new centre" of the new German capital. This unparalleled touristic and media attention did not just focus on Potsdamer Platz because it was the first town-planning project of reunified Berlin that integrated East and West. Beyond that, much controversial discussion was provoked by the Berlin Senate's piecemeal sale of Potsdamer Platz and its Western vicinity to international enterprises at the beginning of the 1990s.

Astonishingly enough, the fact that several protected monuments and other relics of the changing history of Potsdamer Platz were found on this 150,000 square meter of development area that were also part of the contracts of purchase, has hardly caught the attention of the scientific community. Therefore, after a brief historical introduction to Potsdamer Platz, this paper aims at identifying the public and private players in the selling, the planning and the building process of the site, and at analyzing their diverging interests. Moreover, it will address the question of which aspects of content and structural remnants of its ever-changing history can still be found at Potsdamer Platz, and how they are (re)presented in today's urban space. In doing so, the Potsdamer Platz example will finally be spotlighted as indicating a paradigm shift in the field of both monument preservation and the representation and perception of history in the public arena and the built environment.

**The History of Potsdamer Platz until the Fall of the Berlin Wall**

The history of Potsdamer Platz begins with the inauguration of a new Berlin town gate in 1735 (Plewnia et al., 1995). The opening of the "Potsdam Gate" marked the final point of a vast town extension project towards the West undertaken by the Prussian king, King Friedrich Wilhelm I, of his town of residence, Berlin.

The quiet rural area right outside the new Potsdam Gate was considerably affected by the opening of the new eye of a needle into the city. The more people and chariots queued up on their way into the city, the more shops, cafés and restaurants were built in front of the gate to care for the waiting travellers' needs. In the 19th century, when Berlin became the fastest growing metropolis in Europe, many apartment houses were constructed outside the gate, and in 1831, the meanwhile densely built area in front of the gate was baptized **Potsdamer Platz** (Potsdam square). After the opening of the **Potsdamer Bahnhof** (Potsdam station) in 1838, the final station of the first Prussian railroad from Potsdam to Berlin, the Potsdam Gate became the most overcrowded of Berlin's town gates. But it was not until 1866, when the old town wall was torn down, that the history of Potsdamer Platz as a rural-suburban place came to an end.

In the following decades, Potsdamer Platz attained significance as a place of direct metropolitan experience. Originally an area of assembly for entering the city, it was not a real square, but rather an enormous crossing of five streets (Figure 1). In the second half of the 19th century some more railroad stations were built around Potsdamer Platz, several horse trolley lines crossed the square, and after 1902 Berlin's first subway line served it as well.
With the German unification of 1871 Berlin had become the capital of the First Reich, and many government and administration buildings had been built around Potsdamer Platz. This time also saw the beginning of the legendary traffic countings at the crossing, and the registered number of people and vehicles which crossed the square day by day produced ever-increasing fascination. In 1924, the traffic chaos became so overwhelming that the Berlin police decided to erect a traffic tower in the centre of the square which displayed the first German traffic lights (Figure 2). The tower quickly became a renowned symbol for Berlin as a metropolis, and for a while even threatened the Brandenburg Gate in its function of Berlin's landmark. By the early 1930s Potsdamer Platz was ranked the busiest square in Europe, even outnumbering London's Piccadilly Circus.

Figure 1: Aerial view of Potsdamer Platz from the East (1919) (Plewnia et al., 1995: 73)

Figure 2: The traffic tower on Potsdamer Platz (1924) (Plewnia et al., 1995: 77)

But not only the traffic contributed to Potsdamer Platz's metropolitan image. Besides the square's neon signs, numerous famous cafés, breweries, vineyards, cinemas, and hotels attracted both tourists and Berliners. Two of the most famous sites on Potsdamer Platz were the traditional Café Josty (since 1880) and the impressive round building of Haus Potsdam
(since 1912) with the Café Piccadilly, at the time the largest café in the world (Figure 3). In the year 1928, after a long period of reconstruction, Haus Potsdam reopened its doors as Haus Vaterland and in no time became the most frequented entertainment establishment in Berlin. Another famous address was the so-called Vox House, from where the first German radio transmission was broadcast in 1923. However, the crossroad was also a political place: The communist Spartakisten, for example, organized their 1917 May celebration there, in the course of which their leader Karl Liebknecht, calling for revolution, was arrested.

Figure 3: Haus Vaterland at Potsdamer Platz (around 1930) (Plewnia et al, 1995: 83)

Potsdamer Platz still was a traffic-laden square in times of German National-Socialism from 1933 to 1945. But at the same time it was one of the most strongly controlled areas of the city: located in its immediate vicinity were the Nazi's Volksgerichtshof (People's Court), a special criminal court for the punishment of high treason; the Gestapo (Secret State Police) with its prisons; the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Central Reich Security Office); the Ministry of Propaganda; and, not least, the Neue Reichskanzlei (New Chancellery of the Reich) with the air-raid shelter where Hitler committed suicide in 1945. Consequently, Potsdamer Platz was one of the major targets of the Allied forces in the Second World War. When the square was overtaken by Soviet Forces in April 1945, it was almost completely destroyed.

After the war, Berlin was divided into four sectors by the Allied Forces, and on the grounds of Potsdamer Platz three of these four sectors adjoined: the Soviet, the British and the American Sectors. Because of this feature Potsdamer Platz became a most intense site of the Cold War. In 1948, the Soviet military marked the border of the Soviet sector with illuminating banners and barbed wire. After the foundation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) with East Berlin as its capital, road blocks were raised, and two years later the Soviet military established border controls for pedestrians as well. In 1951, Walter Ulbricht demonstratively revealed a cubic "anti-war monument" directly at the border, commemorating Karl Liebknecht's call for revolution in the year 1917. But the most intense incident of the Cold War occurred on June 17, 1953. On this day, thirty-three East Berlin workers, who had protested in the square against the recent increases in production rates, were killed when their rebellion was struck down by Soviet tanks.
With the building of the Wall on August 13, 1961, cutting right through the square, the eastern three quarters of the former crossroad became part of the so-called death strip. This was the name of the closed-up borderland with mines and watchtowers between the Berlin Wall in the West and the so-called hinterland wall in the East (so-named from a western perspective). To make the no-man's-land between these two walls more controllable, all buildings were torn down by the East German military (Figure 4). In the West, demolition of the war-damaged houses also prevailed. In this case, the demolitions were meant to literally pave the way for a city motorway that was planned to be built alongside the Berlin Wall. But before the project could start, the West-Berlin Senate, curiously enough, had to acquire two pieces of land that were located on the western side of the Wall but belonged to the territory of the GDR. Due to this obstacle, the western part of the square gradually developed into to a large green "biotope" vigorously defended by West German nature conservationists.

Figure 4: Death strip at Potsdamer Platz in 1966, seen from the West. The former layout of octagonal Leipziger Platz can still be identified (Lampugnani/Schneider, 1994: 62)

However, with November 9, 1989, the day the Wall came down, all plans for Potsdamer Platz suddenly became obsolete. When the Wall was broken down here three days later for a new inner-city border crossing point, only two buildings of the former square had survived both the hail of bombs in the Second World War and the post-war destruction in the East and the West: the ruins of the former Grand Hotel Explanade (1908), and a former wine house called Weinhaus Huth from 1911. Together with two stations underneath Potsdamer Platz, both buildings were classified as historical monuments by the Berlin Senate in 1990.

The Sales: Public Private Partnerships

Just a few weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall, public discussions started on what function Potsdamer Platz could have both in and for a likely-to-be reunified Berlin. What could the rebuilding of the area look like? But before initial ideas could be presented, the following press release curtailed all fantasies: in the spring of 1990, after negotiations with the Berlin SPD (Social Democrats) which formed a coalition government in West Berlin with the Alternative Liste (Greens) at that time, the Daimler Benz Corporation declared that they had
secured an option for an almost 62,000 square meter area west of Potsdamer Platz. On that site, the enterprise planned to set up the headquarters of a service subsidiary named Daimler Benz Inter Services (debis). The selected area also covered the protected wine house Huth. The envisaged settlement of debis did not encounter approval everywhere. On the contrary, it inflamed fierce resistance and alternative recommendations for the new "heart" of the city that was suddenly threatened by privatization. Regardless of the ongoing discussions, the West Berlin Senator for Finances, Elmar Pieroth, submitted a sales contract with debis as early as June 1990. Without consultation of the Berlin parliament it was approved by the SPD-dominated Senate a few days later, against the votes of the Green Senators.

As soon as the contract details became publicly known they created full-blown scandals. First, it turned out that the agreement with the Daimler Benz Corporation was not a "simple" sales contract, but a co-operation model with a private investor hitherto untested in Berlin: a large-scale public private partnership agreement for urban development. This meant that Daimler had not just promised to settle the debis headquarters at Potsdamer Platz but also to erect an entire new urban quarter with office spaces, apartments, hotels, spaces for retail trade, culture, restaurants and entertainment facilities. Moreover, the investor agreed to restore the remains of the wine house Huth. In return, the Land (federal state) Berlin committed itself to cover all preparations of the land for building and compensation for adjacent owners, and to issue an urban development plan for the area.

A second scandal was provoked by the retail price: the Senate had sold the huge area at Potsdamer Platz, including the Huth, for only 1,505 Deutschmarks (at the time approximately 915 US Dollars) per square meter. This sum was so spectacularly low that it even attracted the attention of the European Commission which made the Daimler Benz Corporation pay an additional third of the retail price – 33.8 Million Deutschmarks (approximately 22.9 million US Dollars) – to the Land Berlin a few months later to prevent legal proceedings because of "competition-distorting subsidies" (Schweitzer, 1997: 100).

Considering this public embarrassment and the ensuing bad image of the project, what made the public private partnership model so attractive for both partners? For the enterprise, the bargain bore the opportunity to develop a highly profitable urban quarter in the new city centre. From the Senate's perspective, the settlement of a firm head office in Berlin appeared as an absolute fluke: after the fall of the Wall the Senate had recognized that they could no longer count on the sumptuous support both East Berlin (as the GDR's capital) and the West of the city (as a Western "island" within the territory of the GDR) had received throughout German separation. Hence, the public-private-partnership model seemed to promise the city - which had to struggle with high rates of unemployment and an underdeveloped industrial and service sector in both parts of the city - not only a prestigious urban development project in times of public money shortage but also highly-qualified jobs in the service sector. Accordingly, the governing mayor Walter Momper (SPD) celebrated the signing of the agreement as a grandiose politico-economic success. When the Berlin parliament formally approved the sales contract in September 1990 – again, against the votes of the Greens, long after the payment of the sum, and without parliamentary debate – the "resignation of the municipality before the investors" seemed to have been carried out in a hush (the German intellectual Wolf Jobst Siedler, quoted according to Zohlen, 1994: 20).
But Daimler would not remain the only investor in the area. In the spring of 1991, the Senate of the newly elected grand coalition of SPD and CDU (Christian Democrats) under the governing mayor Eberhard Diepgen (CDU) announced another public-private co-operation model. The Japanese electronics company Sony, it was reported, had secured itself the option for a piece of land north of the debis area in order to establish its European headquarters there. Again, the negotiations with the investor ran behind closed doors, so that the parliament learned about the contract with Sony only after the signing of the document. With the sales contract, Sony became the owner of an approximately 31,000 square meter area north of the Daimler premises at the square-meter price of 3,270 Deutschmarks (1,846 US Dollars). This included the remains of the old Hotel Esplanade as well as the property where the Volksgerichtshof of the National Socialists once had been. The contract with Sony was also examined by the European Commission. This time, however, the Commission refrained from charging additional payments because Sony had committed itself to more substantial obligations than Daimler, among them the preservation and restoration of the Esplanade.

A short while later, Daimler and Sony were joined by the Foundation Hertie Corporation. Soon after the fall of the Wall the area north of the Sony premises was to be their restitution. In the autumn of 1992, a company named A+T acquired another 12,000 square meters at Potsdamer Platz. A+T – consisting of the Swedish electronics company Asea Brown Boveri (ABB) and a company called Terreno, a merger of real estate dealer Roland Ernst's group of companies with the German entrepreneur Bertold Kaaf and the Bavarian Hypobank – purchased the former area of the Potsdamer Bahnhof south of the Daimler site for a square-meter price of 4,120 Deutschmarks (2,768 US Dollars). With that, almost the entire old and planned-to-be new "heart of the city" was in the possession of international enterprises.

The Planning Process: History as a Field of Conflict

After the selling of the premises at Potsdamer Platz, the planning of the area was characterized by a deep conflict between the enterprises and the Berlin Senate. At the heart of the conflict lay the question of representing history. In the guidelines for the urbanist competition issued by the Berlin Senate the preservation of a complex landscape of history at Potsdamer Platz was a crucial asset: the Senate called upon the architects to re-establish the 19th century ground plan of the area, which had been characterized by a sequence of streets and public squares and a building height limit of thirty-five meters, and to preserve the protected Hotel Esplanade and Weinhaus Huth as "places of memory". The Sony Corporation was asked "to find an appropriate way of reacting to the former location of the destroyed Nazi Volksgerichtshof". As to the recent history of Potsdamer Platz, all companies were requested to integrate the line of the Berlin Wall in such a way that "also this part of German history will remain recognizable" (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umweltschutz, 1991: 26-28). Contrary to these guidelines, the enterprises insisted on adding to the tenders their own position paper which warned of an orientation towards the past and emphasized that the participating architects should provide a "statement of the 21st century" with skyscrapers for the companies' headquarters and spectacular shopping malls (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umweltschutz, 1991: 35).
Against this background, the decision of the competition jury for a strongly 19th-century oriented city model by the Munich architects Hilmer and Sattler was a victory for the Senate. But the enterprises did not give up: for an astronomically high fee they assigned the London star architect Richard Rogers the task of developing an urbanist counter-model. In parallel, they turned to the press in massive polemics to fulminate against the city's provincialism – still a sticking point with the Senate. When, after all, the enterprises threatened with the termination of their contracts, the governing mayor Eberhard Diepgen personally intervened in order to find a compromise with the investors, thus persuading them to remain. The compromise insisted that Hilmer’s and Sattler's model should be followed officially but that the Senate loosened the guidelines as to the architectural competitions for the realization of each of the enterprises' properties.

In 1992, the architects Renzo Piano and Christoph Kohlbecker won the first prize of the competition for the Daimler area. Ignoring central aspects of the Hilmer and Sattler model, their draft envisaged three skyscrapers and a mall that crossed the premises. Helmut Jahn, who won the Sony competition, presented a complex, triangular glass building that was grouped around a roofed indoor plaza. Potsdamer Platz was crowned with a skyscraper and the Hotel Esplanade had been overbuilt. The fact that the Nazi Volksgerichtshof had once stood on the premises had been ignored by Jahn. Also the model drafted by Giorgio Grassi, the winner of the A+T competition, deviated from the requirements of the Senate, as it did not adhere to the Senate's guideline to build a continuous line of block structures along the planned streets. As a consequence, the Berlin newspaper *die tageszeitung* bid farewell to the idea of historic continuity at Potsdamer Platz: "What remains? The remembrance of a place that once was called Potsdamer Platz" (Kieren, 1992: 18).

**The Construction Process: Making the Building Site an Entertainment Site**

Even though the investors had succeeded with pushing through their concepts of multi-storied buildings and malls against the Berlin Senate's historicizing approach, the enterprises were confronted with a substantial problem at the beginning of the building phase: as the selling and the planning process had been so conflict-rich, the Potsdamer Platz project had fallen into public disgrace. The investors saw themselves confronted with the reproach of having undermined the Senate's competition procedure with unfair means and were accused of having "bought" the city. As the investors – following market analyses – displayed a strong tendency toward conceptualizing Urban Entertainment Centres with high-tech cinemas, vaudeville shows and musical theatres on their premises, this bad image had to be ironed out as soon as possible - for how would the new "heart of the city" pulsate without customers? The solution strategy was obvious: the future consumer was declared king. As early as during the building process one was supposed learn how to appreciate the advantage of New Potsdamer Platz: namely the entertaining one.

Accordingly, in the years of construction that started in 1994, numerous festivals and events lured tourists as well as Berliners to the building site that was staged as the New Berlin's "laboratory", titillating the Berliners' pride. Not all events of this sophisticated bread-and-games strategy can be mentioned here. Nevertheless, two intense conflicts as to the handling of the relics of historic Potsdamer Platz shall be recalled.
For example, on the Sony premises an especially delicate conflict had evolved around the remains of the *Hotel Esplanade* in 1992, which had led to an eighteen-month delay of construction. After the conclusion of the urbanist competition, it had turned out that a famous hall of the monument-protected *Hotel Esplanade*, named *Kaisersaal* after the "gentlemen's evenings" once held there by the last German Emperor Wilhelm II, rose up five meters into the sidewalk of the Neue Potsdamer Straße, a street between the Daimler and Sony premises that had been broadened in Himler and Sattler's winning model. Hence, when Sony-architect Helmut Jahn presented his plans, he had solved the problem by eliminating the entire backward hotel tract that also comprised the *Esplanade's* former Breakfast Hall, as it disturbed the free space needed for profiling the Center's office tower (Figure 5).

![Figure 5: Translocation of the Esplanade: the translocation plan (hatched areas to be demolished) (Info-Box, 1997: 187, adapted by Sybille Frank).](image)

What followed this announcement was large public criticism. Only after several months of negotiations a compromise was found between Sony and the Senate which promised to preserve at least parts of the backward hotel tract. The solution read "translocation" and promised another event on the construction site. It meant that the entire *Kaisersaal* would be moved on air cushions seventy-five meters away from its original location into the new building line of the Sony Center. As to the Breakfast Hall, its walls would be cut into more than 500 pieces and stored. After the end of the construction, two of the four walls would be restored in their original place and exhibited behind a glass wall, whereas the other two walls, together with the floor and the stucco ceiling of the Breakfast Hall, were planned to be moved to the other side of the translocated *Kaisersaal*.

The technically unique translocation of the *Kaisersaal*, criticized by prominent monument conservationists as "mere shuffling of scenery", "bankruptcy of monument protection", or "Kaiserschnitt" (portioning of the halls, Kugler, 1993: 19), was publicly celebrated as a mega-event in March 1996 and reported worldwide. By that, Sony succeeded in advertising the translocation as a world premiere of entrepreneurial engagement for local monument
protection resulting in the expensive preservation of an endangered Berlin monument, thereby distracting attention from the de-facto demolition of large parts of the protected building.

A second conflict that touched upon the historical relics of Potsdamer Platz was triggered off in the winter of 1996 between Sony and a German merchant called Erich Stanke. This time the bone of contention was a longer section of the so-called Berlin hinterland wall that extended itself across the properties of Sony, the federal government and the Land Berlin, being the last remaining bit of the former frontier fortifications in the proximity of Potsdamer Platz, as the Wall had been torn down the years before. When Sony prepared to tear down the Wall segments on their premises, Stanke climbed on the Wall and threatened to burn himself. It was only after the demonstrator had been marched off that the caterpillars could start their work.

However, Stanke's action was to have long repercussions. Irritatingly, the merchant could prove that he had acquired the border fortifications in the summer of 1990 from the former GDR border personnel stationed at Potsdamer Platz in exchange for jobs in his dispatch department. The resulting, unequally odd fight for the possession of the Wall segments dragged on through more than forty trials, until the Berlin Regional Court (Landgericht) approved Stanke as their legitimate owner in September 1998. This sentence was accompanied by a restraining order against the Land's plans to tear down the Wall segments for the building of a supply road for the construction site, and an old GDR watchtower that was as well confirmed to be Stanke's possession. In April 1999, however, as a result of a revision of the trial in front of Berlins Superior Court of Justice, the Senate sued out that the remains of the former Wall, which had divided Germany for almost forty years, were defined as "movable objects", thereby demanding that Stanke's property be transferred from the historic place (Sentence by the Berlin Superior Court of Justice, 21 April 1999: 8). As Stanke did not follow this obligation, the Wall remains were torn down a few weeks later. Together with the watchtower, only 15 segments of the former hinterland Wall located on a piece of land belonging to the Federal Government remained in place some steps away from Potsdamer Platz. Stanke and some artists transformed them into a Wall memorial under the slogan "Never forget German history – least of all at Potsdamer Platz!" (Figure 6). The wall segments have been carried away in the meantime: they will be restored in their original place as part of an indoors exhibition to be located in the lobby of the new building of the Bundesumweltministerium (Ministry for the Environment) that will be inaugurated on the premises in 2011.

However, such conflicts were rapidly displaced by the impressive festivals on the companies' building sites. In 1994 and 1995, for example, Daimler Benz celebrated an entire "construction site summer" with events scheduled almost daily, and in the autumn of 1995, the red pile Infobox was inaugurated near Potsdamer Platz as a temporary exhibition building. The box was the first place where the formerly controversial parties – the Senate and the enterprises – presented themselves and their building projects jointly again. Until its dismantling in 2001 the box had become the second largest tourist attraction in Berlin, only being outvisited by the Brandenburg Gate. Acknowledging the success of the Infobox and the events on the building site, the Senate eventually turned to the marketing strategies of the enterprises: in 1996, the Senate created their own PR agency "Partners for Berlin", under the
auspices of which the entire city becomes the *Schaustelle* (showcase) of various happenings every summer.

Figure 6: Preserved segments of the former hinterland Wall near Potsdamer Platz (Photo, Sybille Frank)

Finally, on October 2, 1998, as the first new town quarter at Potsdamer Platz, the "Daimler City" was inaugurated in a gigantic, well-composed ceremony. However, it had to be renamed "Quartier DaimlerChrysler" only one month later because of the fusion of the Daimler Benz Corporation with the Chrysler Corporation. Sony followed in June 2000 with the "Grand Opening" of its Sony Plaza, while A+T inaugurated their *Park Kolonnaden* silently, as the
building process had been overshadowed by the bankruptcy and sentence of one of its main
investors, Roland Ernst. At the beginning of the year 2000, the Hertie Corporation sold its
property to the Beisheim Holding Corporation, a newly established company of the Metro
shop owner Otto Beisheim who opened a mix of luxury dwellings, offices and first class
hotels on his area in January 2004. The Beisheim skyscraper at the edge of Potsdamer Platz
 corresponds with another building tower of the Delbrueck Bank. For the development of the
last 13,000 square meter territory south of the A+T site, the Society for Town Construction
and Project Development (GSP) secured itself an option in 2000. The GSP plans to set up a
building complex with two office towers. However, the start of the building process had to be
postponed, as the "New Potsdamer Platz" is suffering from dramatic vacancies as to both its
office and residential spaces today (Figure 7).

Imaginary Walk Through New Potsdamer Platz With a View At History
Having arrived in the present, I would now like to ask which material parts of the history of
Potsdamer Platz are still represented on the early-sold premises of DaimlerChrysler, Sony and
A+T, and on the areas belonging to the Land Berlin.
When approaching the Quartier DaimlerChrysler from Potsdamer Platz today, the first thing
to be seen is a historic eye catcher. Located on the pavement right in front of the two
skyscrapers that mark the entrance to the Quartier, one cannot fail to spot a replica of the
once so famous traffic tower which had displayed the first German traffic lights from 1924
until 1936, when it was torn down. Jointly donated by the Siemens and the Daimler Benz
Corporation in the summer of 1997 and well-placed beside the Infobox, the replica visionarily
projected the thrilling atmosphere of the legendary first third of the 20th century right into the
chaos of Europe's largest construction site (Figure 8).

Figure 8: DaimlerChrysler: reproduction of the traffic tower in front of the InfoBox (Photo,
Sybille Frank)
If one passes the traffic tower to enter the Quartier, the old Weinhaus Huth appears on the left. It now directly clings to the entrance of a newly built shopping mall. The facade of the Huth had been carefully restored by the Daimler Benz Corporation, but behind the facade a completely new arrangement of floors and rooms was undertaken for the sake of the company, and the basement was extended by two stores. With respect to the building's nostalgic atmosphere, Daimler has chosen to settle its representation offices here. On the fourth floor, the art collection of the enterprise can be visited. On the ground floor, a wine shop was opened in November 1998, capitalizing on the historic theme of a Weinhaus.

A few steps ahead of the Huth, a newly laid street and a restaurant, both named "Vox", are commemorating the famous Vox house (1923), the cradle of German broadcasting that once stood on the Daimler area and that was dismantled in 1971. With the help of these new symbols, memories of the metropolitan significance and vitality of the square in the first third of the 20th century were etched into DaimlerChrysler's new Urban Entertainment Center, along with some nostalgic media flair.

Figure 9: Sony Plaza: Arrangement of the Esplanade parts in the Sony Plaza (Photo, Sybille Frank)

Heading towards the Sony premises, again, the first thing to be seen is a display of history. The two walls of the Breakfast Hall of the Hotel Esplanade that have been restored in their original place and been put behind glass now direct the visitor right into the large indoor Sony Plaza. Next follow, also behind glass, the preserved marble staircase of the Esplanade’s Palm Court and the translocated Kaisersaal which can now be rented as an "event location" to "celebrate a rendezvous with the Roaring Twenties" (advertisement for the Kaisersaal in the Sony Plaza). Next to the Kaisersaal, a café called Josty, replicating "the design of London and New York coffee-bars", celebrated - as Sony's press release stated - its "resurrection" in April 2001 (Sony Berlin GmbH, 2001). But the new café, named after the famous Café Josty that
once resided directly at Potsdamer Platz until its destruction in the Second World War, does not only attract the passer-by because of its famous name. Even more historical ambience was added to the Café's champagne bar: the glass front of the bar draws the view into the inside that is decorated with two of the four walls, the stucco ceiling and the floor of the former Breakfast Hall of the Hotel Esplanade. In sum, these cut out remains of the Hotel Esplanade in the Sony Plaza, changed from interiors to exteriors and arranged like exhibits, convey a well-composed picture of "good old times" to the spectator (Figure 9).

On the other side of the Center's plaza, Sony tried to revive another tradition of the "Roaring Twenties": in 2000, a Hofbräuhaus was opened that was planned to tie in with the tradition of the Bavarian brewery guest houses, plenty of which had been around Potsdamer Platz in its heydays. But Sony soon doubted this rather rural and ribald side of the first third of the 20th century and wondered "whether this beer culture would fit the Sony Center" (the Hofbräuhaus owner Peter Wunderlich, quoted according to Bollmann/Hennecke, 2000). A few months later the owner of the venue was pressured into renaming the Hofbräuhaus. The new name, Lindenbräu, connected with the famous Berlin boulevard Unter den Linden. In order to make the name change more plausible, Sony even donated a few young linden trees to its plaza. Some Mediterranean dishes, in addition to the rustic offer, now provide the Lindenbräu with a "mixture of Bavarian tradition and metropolitan flair" characterized by its owner as "Bavarian light" (Peter Wunderlich, quoted according to Meier, 2000).

On the area of A+T a round office building is to be found that is promoted as an architectural reference to the famous Haus Vaterland. However, commemoration of Karl Liebknecht's revolutionary speech of May 1, 1917, was not approved by the company: the cubic anti-war monument donated by the GDR in 1951, which had outlasted German separation in the middle of the death strip, was removed from the A+T grounds by the Senate in 1995, to avoid its destruction by the enterprise.

Finally, if one enters the premises belonging to the Land Berlin, three peculiarities spring to mind: first, since August 2001, when the 40th anniversary of the building of the Wall was commemorated, the former lines of both the Wall and the hinterland Wall have been marked by a double-row of cobblestones and memorial plates. Also, the remains of Erich Stanke's hinterland Wall, considerably diminished by the Senate only shortly before, were put under monument protection in the summer of 2001, together with the old GDR watchtower. Still standing in the way of the planned street, it had been quickly translocated eight meters beforehand. Second, since October 2001, a memorial plate embedded in the sidewalk next to the Sony Center commemorates the Nazi Volksgerichtshof. The third specialty can be found near one of the entrances to Potsdamer Platz subway station: here, the GDR's Liebknecht memorial that had been stored in one of the Land's archive was set up again, transferred onto the Land's grounds and provided with an information panel.

Conclusions

Turning back to the initially posed question of which aspects of history can still be found in today's New Potsdamer Platz, therefore leads to the following three conclusions:

First, the remaining relics of historic Potsdamer Platz from the time before 1933 have not been preserved according to monument preservation guidelines, as had been imposed by the
retail contracts, but were changed according to the companies' preferences. Both the Weinhaus Huth and the Hotel Esplanade were altered in their construction, partially dismantled and – in case of the Esplanade – even cut into pieces to be translocated to a new place where it did not disturb Sony's project. This enabled the companies to capitalize on the nostalgic atmosphere of the preserved most famous parts of the buildings without subduing their projects to history. With the Huth, now serving as DaimlerChrysler's representation office, and the Kaisersaal, celebrated as Sony's generous investment in local monument protection, the enterprises have incorporated the relics of the heydays of Potsdamer Platz into their corporate images, changing them into monuments of their companies.

The second finding reads that the capital investors at New Potsdamer Platz integrated some new historicizing symbols into the urban space in the course of the construction process. These new historicizing symbols are, in the case of DaimlerChrysler, the reproduction of the famous traffic tower and the Vox street and restaurant. In the case of Sony, the "resurrected" Café Josty and the Lindenbräu, and on the A+T grounds the architectural reference to Haus Vaterland must be mentioned. All these replicas and revived old names exclusively derive from of the legendary first third of the 20th century but solely appeal to those facets of the "roaring Twenties" which are supporting the companies' development projects: liveliness, media, lifestyle and entertainment. A commemoration of the political aspects of that time, as embodied in the Liebknecht memorial, or of its "ribald" sides, as connected with the Hofbräuhaus, was not embraced by the corporations. Thus, the highly selective memory of the history of Potsdamer Platz becomes even more selective if one regards this legendary period that was characterized by inflation and political unrest.

Third, what can be said about the representation of the past of Potsdamer Platz from the beginning of Hitler's reign in 1933 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989? To answer this question, the short history of New Potsdamer Platz must be divided into two phases: if one entered the urban development site during the first phase, lasting from autumn 1998 to summer 2001, in search of historical remnants from that period, all of them had vanished in the course of the construction process: a commemoration of Potsdamer Platz as a center of National-Socialist power had been avoided by the Sony Corporation in that they refused to represent the Volksgerichtshof. The same story had to be told about the long phase of the Cold War. With the tacit removal of the East German Liebknecht monument by A+T and the pulling down of the Berlin Wall by Sony and the Land Berlin, that part of German and world history had been expelled from New Potsdamer Platz as well. Finally, only the few segments of the former hinterland wall, preserved on Erich Stanke's initiative, commemorated the long period of the separation of the city that had shaped the place so dramatically. Thus, when the first three quarters were opened and New Potsdamer Platz redefined and reconstituted, the uncomfortable recent history of Potsdamer Platz was obsolete. We leave that part of history behind to set off for a better metropolitan future – this was the message both of the companies and the Berlin Senate.

However, in the second phase that has started in August 2001, this message was changed: with the 40th anniversary of the building of the Berlin Wall, the historicizing of the Cold War began. In a recognition of the Cold War's touristic value twelve years after its sudden end, the row of cobblestones simulating the former line of the Berlin Wall was installed to commemorate the Iron Curtain that once cut right through Potsdamer Platz, stabilized by the "commented reinstallation" of the GDR's Liebknecht memorial on the Land's grounds. As the
monument also bears memories of Liebknechts's famous speech of 1917, it has also brought back commemoration of the political history of the "legendary times" repudiated by the companies.

However, having been developed as a planning-guiding concept, the ex post implantation of the Senate's model of a complex landscape of history into New Potsdamer Platz with the help of simulations and translocations now has to compete with the enterprises' shopping and entertainment offers. The model which could not be enforced against the companies in the 1990s now clashes with an urban space, the perception and use of which has already been shaped rather differently. If the torn-down and now simulated Berlin Wall, the translocated watchtower, the translocated Liebknecht memorial and the newly installed memorial plate to the Nazi Volksgerichtshof, that had also to be transferred on public land, will succeed to stimulate, as mere appendices to the companies' entertainment and shopping offers, a complex commemoration of the difficult recent history of the place, is to be doubted.

The Potsdamer Platz Case: Paradigm Shift in the Field of Monument Preservation and the Representation of History in the Built Environment

Taking into account the above conclusions, what can be learned from public-privately developed New Potsdamer Platz as to current tendencies regarding monument preservation?

First, New Potsdamer Platz established a new actor in the field of monument preservation. In view of continuously tight public budgets, private companies have taken up monument preservation and heritage interpretation tasks in the frame of public private partnerships, alongside democratically elected political institutions. The restoration of two of Berlin's most well-known architectural monuments, the Gedächtniskirche at Kurfürstendamm (1999) and the Brandenburg Gate (2000-2002), using funds of L'Oréal and the German Telekom respectively, are only the most prominent examples of the ongoing application of public private partnerships in the field of monument protection in Berlin and elsewhere.

Second, the Potsdamer Platz example at the same time reveals the dangers implied by this model: the dictate of a preferably positive corporate identity might rob history of its complexity – even in spite of different political guidelines, as issued by the Senate. But on the long run a complex historical picture of the city also proved to be incompatible with the Senate's goals. The lesson the Senate learned was that cities, as well as corporations, must develop a positive, striving image to be competitive in the international competition of cities as locations for corporate settlements. This is apparent in the Senate's hasty sale of Potsdamer Platz to large investors and in the subsequent adoption of entrepreneurial city marketing strategies in the shape of the Infobox, the Schaustelle and the Senate's own PR-company Partner für Berlin (called Berlin Partner today). With this, the Senate's former aim of preserving a complex landscape of history at Potsdamer Platz was eventually abandoned, and history became a valuable promotion tool, extended to the Cold War phase only recently: after all, the Berlin Wall proved to be a desperately searched-out and frequently asked-for tourist attraction. In 2005, the Berlin Senate therefore inaugurated a Wall exhibition at Potsdamer Platz that displays six Wall segments that are connected by information boards explaining the history of the Berlin Wall.
Third, the aestheticized, cut-out remains of Hotel Esplanade and Weinhaus Huth as well as the newly installed historicizing replicas and symbols award the new urban quarter an atmospheric surplus value – notwithstanding their narrative reduction. The latter consists in the atmospheric patination of the present and thus the historical upgrading and thereby legitimation of the enterprises' development projects that are, basically, without local traditions. The new café with the old name Josty, integrated into translocated parts of the Breakfast Hall of the Esplanade, which itself has been integrated into the new Sony Center (thus being a name fragment in a new place, in a historic architectural fragment at a new location, which is again part of a new building complex), is the most intense example of the historical confusion of sceneries, locations and times at New Potsdamer Platz on the one hand and of the capitalization of tamed historic trophies on the other. The past at New Potsdamer Platz is thus transformed into the present and the present is glossed over as if it were the past. Today's Potsdamer Platz is a hybrid, largely self-referential place.

By that, the Potsdamer Platz example announces a paradigm shift in the public presentation and preservation of history. Opposing the modern preservationists' credo which propagates the authenticity of the historic original and its preservation in its original place, New Potsdamer Platz, being characterized by demolitions, translocations, replicas and simulations, advocates the authenticity of a perfectly staged nostalgic experience. With its mixture of event and nostalgic sentiment, New Potsdamer Platz functions as a "collective souvenir" (Boyer, 1992: 201) that invites the visitor to consume and return – and people return because of the positive atmosphere (Rainer Wagner, manager of the newly founded Sony-Berlin GmbH, about the aim of the Sony project, quoted according to Hartung, 1991: 15-16). With an average of 70,000 visitors per day, New Potsdamer Platz has become the symbol of New Berlin that stands for the city's takeoff into a better, reunified future that leaves behind the burden of the discomforting parts of German history to continue where its legendary metropolitan times had been "cut off by history".

To maintain the once-favoured model of a complex landscape of history at Potsdamer Platz against this tempting grand narrative, however, it would have required a much stronger public partner than the Berlin Senate: a partner who does not give away its negotiation basis by harum-scarum sales of public land and monuments, and a partner who confronts the logic of globalization that is said to push communal governments into understanding local history one-sidedly as a communal advertising tool, with a clear concept.

The fact that local history which may provide the searched-for "center that holds" (Baumann, 1995) in times of globalization is more and more difficult to maintain against the background of the international competition of "locations", has been addressed by David Harvey as follows: "The irony is that tradition is now often preserved by being commodified and marketed as such. The search for roots ends up at worst being produced and marketed as an image, as a simulacrum or pastiche" (Harvey, 1990: 302). In this sense, New Potsdamer Platz has remained true to at least one of its traditions: like in former times it is a place keeping up with the ravages of time.

References


