CAPITAL DILEMMA
Germany's Search for a New Architecture of Democracy

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When Roman Herzog succeeded Richard von Weizsäcker as German president on July 1, 1994, he stepped into the shoes of a man who had enjoyed considerable esteem at home and abroad. The German president, a largely ceremonial head of state with little actual power, concerns himself in part with educating the citizenry about democratic values and setting an appropriate moral tone for the nation. During his term, Weizsäcker cogently warned against letting Nazi atrocities slip out of memory. In his inaugural speech as reunified Germany’s first president, Herzog, former chief justice on the country’s highest court, immediately addressed the weighty issue of the national past, saying that it still burdened the Federal Republic’s relationships with its neighbors. Many of these, he noted, regarded the enlarged German state with great suspicion.

While expressing the wish that Germans “must become more sure of ourselves than we are at present,” and insisting that “the love of our country should not be silenced for a moment,” Herzog urged that citizens of reunited Germany “take pains to use a decidedly soft tone. National hullabaloo, fanfare, and the clashing of cymbals are the last thing that we need.” The admonition also applied to the president’s attitude to the rebuilding of Berlin. Thus Herzog found himself in an awkward spot when he learned about the proposed design for a new Presidential Office, the Neubau des Bundespräsidialamtes, to house his administrative staff, chosen just weeks before he took office in one of the government-sponsored architectural competitions.

The design, by Martin Gruber and Helmut Kleine-Kraneburg, a young Frankfurt-based duo in their early thirties, called for an elliptical black granite structure (see figure 28). Enthusiasts called it jewel-like, a cabochon to be set in a wooded park adjacent to the presidential
residence in Schloss Bellevue, the eighteenth-century palace of Prussia’s Prince August Ferdinand. But others, including Herzog, feared that the project resembled a shadowy coliseum, a fortress, or a massive sarcophagus that risked setting precisely the wrong tone for the German head of state. There were even suggestions from within the Union of German Architects that the president renounce the elliptical architectural plan altogether and quietly hold another competition to come up with a less ponderous design. “We could only shake our heads,” the union’s dismayed president, Andreas Gottlieb Hempel, said of the stone-faced ellipse. “It gives the impression that the public servants who work inside are bearers of state secrets.”

In contrast to the hallmarks of transparency, accessibility, and humanity invoked for decades in Bonn by Behnisch and others, Gruber and Kleine-Kraneburg used watchwords like stability, calm, and timelessness to describe their black house. “Now that one has the chance to build a new capital, it would be a shame not to express a certain confidence,” said Kleine-Kraneburg. His partner made their dark design sound like a willful aesthetic provocation to challenge the design credo that prevailed in Bonn. “This is a breaking away from all the unfortunate constraints that have arisen…away from constraints imposed on the architectural discussion, including this fictitious concept of democratic architecture,” Gruber said.

The young team discouraged any intimation that the elliptical shape was inspired by the Oval Office in Washington. But like the U.S. president’s working quarters, the new Berlin presidential project bears a resemblance to the abstract geometrical simplicity of eighteenth-century French neoclassical architects like Claude-Nicolas Ledoux and Étienne-Louis Boullée. Its sculptural form will stand as a solitary object in the park adjacent to Schloss Bellevue, fitting neatly into its greenery. During the Enlightenment such a form was seen to be based upon a belief in order, reason, and harmony—a reflection of natural law and republican ideals, rather than political absolutism. In postwar Germany, “classicism has always had a negative reactionary tinge,” protested Gruber. “In no way is that the case.”

The oval Presidential Office, set between the palace and the nearby Victory Column designed to celebrate nineteenth-century Prussian military conquests, would never have been proposed for unassuming Bonn. Undeniably elegant and distinctive, its original design had a detached and enigmatic air that a democratically elected president of a country with a totalitarian past could easily forego. But Herzog was disinclined to make waves in the early days of his term by taking the controversial step of autocratically scuttling the government-sponsored jury’s choice. He opted instead to order alterations in the design after meeting with the architects at his Bonn offices in November 1994.

“He said straight away, ‘I am responsible for this. I am the one who will be associated with this…It is too forbidding and not the way to represent ourselves to the outside.’” Kleine-Kraneburg recalled, adding with undisguised annoyance, “Such a discussion could take place only in Germany.” The president went on to tell Gruber and Kleine-Kraneburg that their four-story design made an “unfriendly impression” and ordered the 240 narrow windows encircling the ellipse enlarged for more “transparency.” The young duo begrudgingly complied, nearly doubling the windows in size, but balked at the presidential request that they change the black granite that clad the ellipse to a lighter stone to soften its image (see figures 29 and 30).

The jury that chose the design, by a vote of seven to four, had already voiced its own reservations about the use of the highly polished black granite—a stone infelicitously named Nero assoluto. By a subsequent vote of ten to one, the jury requested that the architects rework the plan, forgoing stone for a more modest material like unglazed brick for the building’s facade. The architects refused to budge on this aspect of their proposal, insisting that their desire for a shiny black granite was purely an aesthetic choice with no symbolic component. The dark facade, they explained, was intended to mirror the surrounding vegetation and allow the
building to merge with the landscape.

All the same, black gave the ellipse the stench of death, a funereal aura of doom that was highly problematic for the capital of post-Auschwitz Germany. This unlucky architectural symbolism did not occur to the architects—or if it did, it failed to deter them. Walter Karschies, the presidential aide in charge of administering the project, detected a warning of the sensitivities that had marked the older generation of German political figures. “I notice in my dealings with the architects that they are sometimes totally astonished by my logic and the scruples that we carry around with us,” said Karschies. “I am a bit older and this life has left its mark upon us. We have a very fruitful dialogue. Sometimes with regard to architectural questions they devise a solution that seems self-evident and I say, ‘Watch out, there’s this or that sore spot.’”


The adjacent, creamy white, neoclassical, U-shaped Schloss Bellevue has a more welcoming form. Its main facade features four Corinthian pilasters and a modest templelike gable. Two side wings form the edge of a large forecourt and seem to throw open the building in an inviting gesture suited to its current use as the president’s permanent base. The palace has had a variety of tenants since its completion in 1787. It became an exhibition space in the 1920s, and under the Nazis served for a while as a Museum of German Ethnology. After 1938, its interior was redesigned as the Third Reich’s official guest house. Allied air raids badly damaged the building in 1944, but it was remodeled in the 1950s to become the Berlin residence of the Bonn-based West German president, a symbol of his own commitment to return to the historic capital. After unification, locating the presidency’s permanent quarters at Schloss Bellevue dovetailed nicely with the topography of the new Berlin’s official power center, since the palace is just west of the Federal Strip.

Despite the warnings by Karschies and President Herzog himself, the architects resisted further changes in their ellipse. Seeking outside help as Chancellor Kohl had done when facing his own impasse over the Chancellery design, Herzog referred the matter of the building’s facade to a three-man commission of architects, consisting of two Germans, Otto Meitinger and Helge Pitz, and a Spaniard, Victor Lopez Cotelo. This team reported back that the somber stone was “not acceptable, and also not the appropriate manifestation for a new building of the Federal Presidency.” The three consultants then examined a palette of fifteen other shades of stone, and recommended a far lighter green–gray granite that would better enable the building to blend in with its surroundings.

Reluctantly, Gruber and Kleine-Kranenburg went along with the commission’s recommendation, having no choice but to do so or lose the coveted job. Several months later, to the architects’ delight, the approved green–gray granite turned out to be unavailable in the quantity required. The commission, in turn, suggested using a gray South African stone it judged equally adequate to avert a situation whereby an introverted black house overshadows the more welcoming Schloss Bellevue as the architectural emblem of the German presidency.

The changes seem to have satisfied President Herzog, who publicly at least has made his peace with the architects and their design. Lest the unusual Presidential Office retain any lingering dark connotations or mystery, the presidency set up a large informational panel outside the high wrought iron gates surrounding the head of state’s compound while the building was under construction. Affixed to the panel was a box filled with leaflets describing the building’s design. In the six-page brochure, Germany took the remarkable step of distributing to the general public detailed blueprints of the official building’s layout. “We want to create the impression that we have nothing to hide,” said Karschies. At the groundbreaking ceremony on March 14, 1996, Herzog expressed a tentative hope that the structure would be rapidly accepted by Berliners. “There are enough boring buildings!” he proclaimed. “Therefore we have settled on an unmistakable yet unobtrusive building. Perhaps the Berliners will take a bit of capital city pride in it. That would make me happy.”

The elliptical object in a sylvan setting will hardly be boring. The substantial enlargement of its windows and subtle modification in the
color of its facade may help in transforming the look and feel of what would otherwise have been an impenetrable monolith shrouded in gloom. Yet as the building neared completion, some Germans could not help but worry that Gruber and Kleine-Kraneburg's design had recast an important part of the symbolic image carefully cultivated by the Federal Republic prior to the move to Berlin. For them, the unmistakable Presidential Office still had an elusive, sepulchral quality they regarded as ill advised for the titular leader of a nation that wanted its intentions to be crystal clear.
NAZISM’S ARCHITECTURAL REMNANTS

Berlin’s largest surviving Nazi-era buildings, the former Reichsbank and Aviation Ministry, are prime examples of the Third Reich’s efforts to deploy monumental architecture as a propaganda tool and use huge public construction projects as a means of job creation and economic revival in the 1930s (see figure 31). “Our opponents will come to realize it, but above all our followers must know it: our buildings are built with the aim of strengthening … authority,” Hitler declared. The buildings’ dark past, some Germans in the 1990s believed, disqualified them from housing the public entities of a democratic capital. Unified Germany would do better to construct new ministries from scratch, ostensibly free of historical burdens.

Soon after the vote to move the government seat, the Bonn authorities envisioned taking a wrecker’s ball to the Nazi structures. Building Minister Irmgard Schwaetzer and other Bonn leaders were intent on bulldozing remnants of the defunct East German government as well, such as its Council of State Building, its Foreign Ministry, and its Palace of the Republic. Once these were cleared away, a string of up-to-date ministry buildings would arise on the vacated land.

Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, an influential Berlin urban planner and architectural critic, stated that it would be wrong for the government to “heedlessly” reoccupy buildings that had served the criminal Nazi regime and “cover up the [original] function with an apparent neutrality.” Their reuse by today’s Germany was highly questionable. He proposed that they be handed over for occupation by international tenants like the United Nations or the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The call for eliminating the tainted historic architecture, made by Schwaetzer in late 1992 and provisionally approved by the federal cabinet
a few weeks later, relied on an architectural consultant’s report that found the structures unsuitable for use as modern offices. But in a city that had witnessed repeated destruction of its historic buildings, the plan alarmed the local Berlin government and mobilized a substantial conservation lobby that spanned a political spectrum from conservative to progressive. The city government, in turn, commissioned another consultants’ report that determined that tearing down the structures and rebuilding new ones of the same size would be more expensive than renovating them. The report also deemed the Reichsbank, the Aviation Ministry, and the Council of State Building to be “landmarks of the first rank,” equally deserving of preservation. “There are alternatives more appropriate to the culture of Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany than simply disposing of history by tearing down buildings,” the report concluded. In any case, it warned that the heavy stone Nazi-era buildings would not be easy to eliminate. The destruction of the Reichsbank alone would take at least a year to accomplish. This was not the first move towards sweeping Nazi remains under the carpet. In the period immediately following World War II, some key Nazi structures were regarded as too politically toxic to leave standing. The Soviets flattened Hitler’s office, the Reich Chancellery designed by Albert Speer, and used the scrap marble to build a subway station and Berlin memorials to Moscow’s fallen soldiers. United States General Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered the destruction of the Hellenic-style temples built in Munich by Hitler to enshrine Nazism’s “martyrs” in the birthplace of the movement. But countless other Nazi-era buildings were left largely untouched. Any ethical misgivings about reusing them fell by the wayside amid a critical shortage of intact infrastructure. A cursory architectural variant of de-Nazification—the removal of swastikas and Nazi inscriptions—was deemed sufficient to render them “disinfected,” neutral shells in the popular consciousness. In many cases, little or no effort was made to recall the buildings’ origins. Hitler’s grandiose Nazi Party Headquarters, where the Munich Accord was signed, became a state music academy in which students perfected partitas unaware of the previous occupant. The House of German Art in Munich remained in use as an exhibition hall, forfeiting part of its name to become simply the House of Art. Barracks erected for the Third Reich’s Wehrmacht were taken over by armies of the two Germanys and the four victorious allies. The parade grounds built for Nazi Party congresses in Nuremberg underwent a more banal transformation; they became the scene of high-speed auto races and rock concerts.

Such pragmatism eventually prevailed in unified Berlin. As plans for moving the capital progressed, an economic recession set in and government officials were faced with the staggeringly high cost of German unification. By late 1994, financial constraints together with opposition to razing functional buildings pushed the government to roll back considerably its call for eliminating Berlin’s difficult architectural legacies. Chancellor Kohl replaced Building Minister Schwaetzer with Klaus Topfer, who took a more realistic approach to reusing older buildings in East Berlin that became federal government property upon unification. He decided that ninety percent of the federal bureaucracy would be housed in the buildings already in hand, calling it a form of environmental “recycling” that would be welcomed by the citizenry. The government also placed an overall limit of 20 billion marks, or roughly 12 billion dollars, on expenditures for its move to Berlin, including all capital reconstruction plans. This meant that aside from the new Presidential Office, the fragmented Federal Strip in the Spreebogen, and the new Chancellery and Parliamentary Offices, all ministries would be housed in renovated structures.

The decision to reuse old buildings rather than erecting new ones left cabinet ministers to jostle among themselves in something like a game of musical chairs to determine which federal agency would take over which historic structure and its associated symbolic burdens. The Finance Ministry, the primary advocate of holding down costs of the capital transfer, agreed to take up headquarters in Hermann Göring’s massive
Aviation Ministry from which the Luftwaffe waged its terrifying air war to conquer Europe. The Labor Ministry had to make do with the former Nazi Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, from which Joseph Goebbels put German culture into a totalitarian straitjacket and directed his anti-Semitic diatribes in press, radio, and film.

Unified Germany’s decision to reuse these buildings did not imply support for fascist policies. But as its partners in the European Union were worried about renewed dominance of the continent from Berlin, German government officials were concerned that a return to these megaliths might heighten simmering suspicions and resentments. In symbolic terms, what could be more awkward than the Foreign Ministry setting up shop inside the imposing former Reichsbank, a building whose architectural design was personally selected by Hitler and which after the war served for thirty years as headquarters of the East German Communist Party? Not surprisingly, Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel fought vigorously against government pressures for him to accept such premises as his new headquarters. An internal ministry newsletter distributed to diplomats in 1992 explained that Kinkel desired an architectural setting that “did justice to the ministry’s special concerns of political image in representing the Federal Republic of Germany abroad. . . . Future-oriented quarters for the Foreign Ministry in Berlin therefore require a new building.”

Kinkel and/or his successors will nonetheless have to execute their daily duties from within the doubly burdened Berlin building long identified with both Nazi and communist repression. Elsewhere in the world, other governments have adapted buildings of fallen rulers for their own use. Russian President Boris Yeltsin occupies the tsarist-built Kremlin where Lenin, Stalin, and other Communist leaders reigned. Sir Edwin Lutyens’s palace for the British viceroy in New Delhi has become home to independent India’s democracy, and Mexico’s president governs from the sixteenth-century Spanish palace erected by Hernán Cortés. The retention and reuse of these structures helps endow today’s rulers with an air of authority and stability, and over time the buildings have acquired new symbolic significance. Will time and new occupants ever erase the stigma associated with Berlin’s buildings?

So far, the Foreign Ministry is doing its best to put a positive spin on its new location. “I think it’s not at all bad for the federal government to constantly be conscious of living and working against the backdrop of a difficult history,” said Fritjof von Nordenskjöld, the Foreign Ministry official overseeing its move to Berlin. “These buildings will leave their mark on the policies that are made there,” said Andreas Nachama, a Berlin historian who has avidly fought against the eradication of the Third Reich’s unholy remains. “Every civil servant who works there, every minister, every state secretary, every representative who comes in and goes out will be aware of them.”

The natural tendency of postwar German authorities to seek out positive aspects of the past on which they can base a future will color that awareness of the buildings’ infamous history. A selective appropriation of German history is already influencing the official interpretation of the democratic government’s reoccupation of the Berlin buildings. “We can occupy this building very easily,” said senior Finance Ministry official Hans-Michael Meyer-Sebastian as he sat in the Aviation Ministry where the bombings of Coventry, Rotterdam, and Guernica were planned. “It was a building of the resistance during the Third Reich.” Meyer-Sebastian was referring to the Red Orchestra resistance group, which operated covertly within the Luftwaffe Headquarters until the arrest and execution of its leading members. As the building underwent renovation in 1997, the lobby contained a small exhibition paying tribute to the Red Orchestra’s courage. There was no marker on the facade—aside from the powerful architecture itself—alluding to the building’s genesis or documenting the military aggression plotted there. A plaque affixed four years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall recalled only the anti-Communist demonstration held in the forecourt at the start of the 1953 workers’ uprising crushed by Soviet tanks.
Will this stress on the more appealing legacy of resistance activities obscure Germans' understanding of the buildings' broader context and distort the role they played in validating totalitarian rule? "The buildings cannot be seen in isolation," said Winfried Nerdinger, an architectural historian who is director of Munich's Architecture Museum. "They stand in a direct connection with the military industry and often with the concentration camps. I have always objected when people say, 'Oh, these are merely neoclassical buildings. They are harmless, innocent stones that one can deal with today.' They remain bloodily entangled and one must see them in their entirety or do injustice to history." 127

The Reichsbank exemplifies this legacy of bloody entanglement. It was the first prestige architectural project to get under way after the Nazis came to power. A competition for the central bank building, actually an addition to the nineteenth-century Reichsbank Headquarters next door, was held in the weeks following Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933. At this point, the Third Reich's architectural credo had not yet been firmly determined. The competition guidelines set out the symbolic importance of the commission, stressing that the contest came in the midst of Nazism's rise and at a moment "in which the art of construction must also announce its goals." That the new design needed to impress was also emphasized. "An expansion of the state bank is unthinkable as merely a rational office building. It must have the character of a monument, it should be an ornament for the state capital and should represent the dignity of a world institution." 128

Mies van der Rohe, Hans Poelzig, and Walter Gropius were among those who submitted designs. But a jury of experts was unable to choose a winner from six finalists, among them Mies with a striking modernist proposal. In the meantime, Reichsbank President Hans Luther had been resisting Hitler's requests to provide larger sums for publicly funded employment projects. Hitler had him replaced by Hjalmar Schacht, a nationalist who would prove, at least for a few years, more amenable to financing a German revival. The Führer's involvement in policy and personnel at the state bank drew his attention to its architectural stalemate. Hitler reviewed the proposed designs, but found all of them lacking in grandeur and overly similar to ordinary office buildings. He then personally chose a design that had been prepared prior to the competition by an in-house architect, Heinrich Wolff, manager of the bank's construction department. 129

Ten thousand people, including brown-shirted storm troopers and members of Nazi organizations from throughout Germany, attended the 1934 laying of the foundation stone for Wolff's design. Hitler presided over the ceremony at the building site, swastika-bedecked and transformed into a lavish stage that was part of the Nazis' effort to depict a national resurgence (see figure 32). The crowd shouted "Heil!" and thrust its arms forward to salute the Führer as he stood before a model of the new bank building, which Schacht called "an example of patriotic will." 130 Construction of the Reichsbank, its modern steel frame skeleton encased in sandstone, lasted six years. The finished product was an enormous labyrinth of spare classicism with nearly one thousand rooms arrayed along seemingly endless corridors (see figure 33). A row of stolid pillars stretched across the main facade, decorated with a large frieze of muscular figures carved by Josef Thorak, whose sculptures also adorned the Reich Chancellery and the 1936 Berlin Olympic Stadium. Swastikas decorated the heavy doorknobs and huge reliefs of bellicose eagles were inscribed on either side of the main foyer walls. At the top of the entrance staircase, Thorak placed two pedestals on which he planned to set massive busts of Hitler and the Prussian monarch the Führer revered, Frederick the Great.

The busts were never completed. For by the time the building went into full operation in 1940, Germany was at war. Soon the "final solution" was well underway. The bank's financial functions were augmented by a new and urgent task—stockpiling stolen goods, which arrived in a steady stream from the extermination camps. The newly constructed three-level subterranean vault rapidly overflowed with booty including gold yanked from Jews' teeth, watches, earrings, bracelets, necklaces, rings, and spectacle frames. There were also great hordes of diamonds, silverware, and
banknotes seized from Nazism’s victims. The identical fireproof region in the bowels of the former Reichsbank was later used to safeguard the Communist Party’s top-secret documents. After 1999, the same vault will store the Foreign Ministry archives.

Andreas Marx, an architectural historian advising the government on the Reichsbank’s latest conversion, pressed the government to openly acknowledge the building’s history. At a meeting with government officials soon after the 1994 decision to reuse the former bank as the Foreign Ministry, Marx said, “Mr. Töpfer expressed the view that Hjalmar Schacht had given some very critical speeches...[in] an attempt to argue that the Reichsbank was simply a banking institution and that Hjalmar Schacht was an obstructionist” to Nazi rule. Although Schacht did join the small resistance movement to Hitler in the last years of the war, Marx objected to Töpfer’s summation and pointed out Schacht’s key role in putting Nazi Germany on a war footing. “No single man in all of Germany would be more helpful to Hitler in building up the economic strength of the Third Reich and in furthering its rearmament for the Second World War than Schacht,” William L. Shirer wrote of the Reichsbank president in The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. Hitler replaced Schacht with Walther Funk as Reichsbank chief in 1939, and the bank became increasingly ensnared in officially sanctioned brutality. Nuremberg war crimes trial testimony showed that the bank was well aware of the source of its unusual “deposits.” Funk was sentenced at Nuremberg to life imprisonment; Schacht was acquitted.

“One should portray the [building’s] history as it is,” Marx said. “There’s no sense in lying and afterwards having the Israeli Foreign Minister visit and then learn from some media campaign about all the things that happened there. It’s better to lay it all on the table and discuss it.” After Marx emphasized this point, the Foreign Ministry agreed to have him and architect Peter Kroos author an official publication about the Reichsbank for distribution to visitors. “We will see how far we can, should, and must go into details” of the building’s history under both Nazi and Communist regimes, ministry official von Nordenskjöld said. “It is important for the people who work here to know what happened before them within these walls.”

The structure’s history and architecture were bound to create public relations anxiety for the government. “I was concerned that the image of this building would always appear on television when state visitors arrived,” said Barbara Jakubeit, the former Federal Building Board President. “In Europe everyone can tell that it belongs to that era.”

The Foreign Ministry’s need for additional space pointed the way to resolving this symbolic quandary with architectural sleight of hand. Despite its enormous size, the Reichsbank was insufficient to house all 2,500 members of the ministry’s capital-based personnel. So Jakubeit organized a government-sponsored design competition for an extension. The guidelines stated that the facade of the old building “will be hidden from the public eye” by the new addition covering an entire city block in front of the Reichsbank. “The new building will have a powerful impact of its own,” the competition brief added, underscoring that the Foreign Ministry’s “architectural identity will be determined by the new structure.” Just how to carry out this gesture, equal to having a construction crew paper over an unpleasant reminder, was left up to competition entrants.

In December 1995, sixty architectural offices were selected to participate, and half a year later the jury chose a design by the Berlin-based Swiss architect Max Dudler. His submission involved not a single structure but two seven-story cubes, one for the ministry’s library and the other for the administrative offices. A gap between them allowed a partial view of the Reichsbank from the front of the ministry extension. But with its regimented pattern of identical square windows, the overall effect was as monotonous and dour as the facade of the Reichsbank it was intended to obscure. The critical reception was decidedly unenthusias-
Burdensome Legacies

Dudler's design, Jakubeit said, was "incapable of making a statement about our age, about our totally different democratic identity." In August 1996, the Foreign Ministry disregarded the decision of the jury—an option it had reserved for itself under the terms of the competition—and gave the commission to the second-prize winners, the Berlin architects Thomas Müller and Ivan Reimann.

Their proposal, featuring a large glass atrium or loggia, posed a greater contrast to the old building and, in the ministry's eyes, made a more convincing gesture of democratic renewal. Müller and Reimann housed the offices and the ministerial library under one roof, thereby fully blocking the view towards the Nazi-era building from the front. But rather than having the new structure directly abut the old and cover it up entirely, the architects left a narrow courtyard between their extension and the former Reichsbank, where the foreign minister's office will be located. The court will serve as a ceremonial space for the arrival of visiting diplomats and foreign ministers of other nations, who will clearly detect the ghosts of the German past in the historic portion of the ministry just opposite the architecture of the new annex (see figure 34).

The atrium at the front of the annex will serve as the general public's main entry to the Foreign Ministry. Five stories in height, it will provide expansive views of Karl Friedrich Schinkel's neo-Gothic Friedrichswerdersche Church and the proposed site for the reconstruction of his Bauakademie. The architects aimed to create a building that did not shut itself off from the rest of the city, like most government structures, but by means of the atrium was integrated with its surroundings. They envisioned the atrium as a space accessible to the general public as if it were an enclosed park with benches and a cafe. "One can drink a cup of coffee and feel part of this whole, while inside ambassadors take part in negotiations," said Müller.

How accessible the new building will be in actuality depends on security requirements imposed by the ministry. Even before these were finally determined, the ministry portrayed the light-filled annex as embodying its current self-understanding. "We are no longer the agency of secret diplomacy," said von Nordenskjöld. "We are a service enterprise that pursues the interests of Germany and its citizens abroad: economic, touristic, cultural. We are a modern agency that engages in dialogue with the public. If one does not make one's foreign policy intelligible to the public, then it won't be supported by the public. This modern annex should mirror this thinking as far as possible."

As part of their proposal, Müller and Reimann submitted a perspectival drawing of the atrium that was cleverly evocative of a famed 1829 sketch with which Schinkel documented the brilliant spatial arrangements at his nearby Berlin Altes Museum (see figure 35). The drawing itself must have gone some way to garner support for their plan, which does not fully merit comparison to Schinkel. Even if it does represent an improvement over the design by Dudler and contrasts with the Nazi-era Reichsbank, the Müller-Reimann scheme seems unlikely to provide a memorable image for modern Germany's involvement in world affairs.

For the renovation of the Reichsbank itself, the Foreign Ministry chose the Berlin architect Hans Kollhoff, who proposed infusing the somber stony labyrinth with natural light, natural greenery and color. These elements could be highly effective as keys towards unlocking the building for reuse in a new age, but because of Kollhoff's own architectural approach, his modifications will probably accentuate the building's inherent severity. Kollhoff is known for his rigidly geometrical architecture not dissimilar from the stripped classicism of Heinrich Wölfl's Reichsbank. "This is a very solid building, one has the feeling that it could stand for centuries," he said, voicing unabashed admiration for a design that bears some resemblance to 1930s architecture erected in Washington, Moscow, or Rome. "Despite its rather conservative, gloomy style, this building's structure has a whole series of technical and architectural refinements that one encounters over time and realizes that much of this
gloominess, particularly in the interior, is due to postwar renovations." Kollhoff aimed at a renovation that would not "degrade or stigmatize the essential structure that we have from the Reichsbank or from the East German era as something antiquated, unusable, or wrong. We are respecting it for the first time; we accept it as an essential part of a historical layer, but we are adding to it anew."142

Major modifications to the building were first undertaken after 1949 when it was used as the East German Finance Ministry, and after 1959 when it was occupied by the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the East German communists. Kollhoff is attempting to eliminate those elements that altered the positive qualities of the original design. He hopes to bring in more natural light by opening up windows and skylights sealed during earlier renovations, and to use landscaping to alleviate claustrophobic views onto the drab interior courtyards. The office formerly occupied by Communist Party leader Erich Honecker will be torn down, and roughly the same space will be occupied by Foreign Minister Kinkel and/or his successors. "Erich's fortress will become an open building—for Berliners and for our partners around the world," Kinkel said as the renovations began in 1996.143 The offices of party Politburo members on the same floor will also be gutted to make way for new spaces to accommodate the Foreign Ministry state secretaries, comparable to U.S. assistant secretaries of state.

Intervention by landmark preservation authorities led to the retention of several other parts of the building, including the Politburo meeting room, with its forty heavy chairs upholstered in a plush red fabric and arranged around a U-shaped conference table. But the architects clashed with preservationists over whether to keep the pillars on which Thorak's busts of Hitler and Frederick the Great were to rest as well as a ceiling painting dating from the Nazi period that was uncovered during the renovation. Kollhoff eventually got his way in having the pillars removed and the painting rendered invisible with a neutral interim ceiling, as it had been under the Communists. "In a building where state visitors are to be received this would be too strong a reminder," said Tobias Amme, Kollhoff's project director for the Reichsbank refurbishment.144

A strong palette of colors is being added to walls, floors, and ceilings by the artist Gerhard Merz, whom Kollhoff asked to help with the interior design scheme to give the solemn building a new freshness and visual unity. To some, Merz was a thorny choice because of his coy use of fascist symbols in art installations over the past decade. Hans-Ernst Mittig, a Berlin historian specializing in fascist-era architecture, opposed his involvement since he regarded the artist's installations as calling into question Germany's postwar anti-fascist partisanship. "Works like those of Merz perpetuate, elevate, and certify the practice of superficial and indecisive discourse about National Socialism," Mittig has written.145 In addition to this contentious political aspect of his art, Merz's aesthetics seemed likely to reinforce the building's chilly atmosphere. Members of the Federal Government Art Advisory Board, reviewing Merz's proposed alterations, expressed particular concern about his plan for the imposing main entrance staircase and foyer. This involved installing a cobalt blue ceiling ringed at the cornice line by fluorescent lights and retaining the original floor of highly polished red porphyry, a combination that some board members feared would create an uncomfortable space in which to greet foreign dignitaries and put them at ease about the new Germany. "One might ask if it would not make more sense to commission artists who would attempt a more critical confrontation with the building," said Art Advisory Board chairman Klaus Bussmann. "Merz has a severity that could be misunderstood."146

Like Merz, Kollhoff himself has been accused of pursuing a rightist agenda through a penchant for fascist design, a charge he rejects as confusing aesthetics with politics.147 "Everything that has a stone facade and a large door is regarded here, in this paranoid situation, as a fascist building," he said. He wants the contemporary visitor to the Foreign Ministry to "always be discovering new constellations. One will only gradually notice what actually belongs to the original Reichsbank building, what
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The design’s military regimentation mirrors its political intent. Göring’s chief aim was to rebuild the German Air Force, which had been quashed as a condition of the post-World War I Treaty of Versailles. Like Hitler at the Reich Chancellery down the street, Göring desired a building that could browbeat those who had previously humiliated Germany. “Whoever approached here felt as if he had been knocked down a peg,” was how Günter Grass described the Aviation Ministry in his 1995 novel, Ein Weites Feld (A Broad Field). “Even state secretaries who drove by in official cars, and high-level foreign guests... had to endure an immediate sense of insignificance, if only as a feeling of spiritual suffocation.”

Hentrich-Petschnigg & Partners, a leading West German architectural firm, was appointed the task of renovating the Aviation Ministry Building. The firm’s co-founder, Helmut Hentrich, now in retirement at age ninety-two, had a varied career, having studied under Hans Poelzig and Norman Bel Geddes before working as a member of Speer’s team redesigning Berlin as the Nazi capital. After the war, Hentrich designed high-rise corporate headquarters, and his firm became the German equivalent of the giant U.S. office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Wolfgang Keilholz is responsible for the renovation as project director. At thirty-seven, Keilholz brings an entirely new perspective to the renovation; he spent four years working in the Atlanta-based practice of John Portman, where he designed hotels for the Hyatt chain. He claims Sagebiel’s “architecture lacks every poetic, every musical element.”

Aside from a few curving banisters on interior staircases, Sagebiel’s Aviation Ministry shows no trace of the sculptural flair he might have picked up while serving as Mendelsohn’s director of construction.

Like the Reichsbank, the Aviation Ministry Building has had a new tenant at each turn of Germany’s difficult history since the Nazi takeover. The steel-framed building survived the bombing of Berlin with remarkably little damage, and from 1946 to 1949 the Soviet military administration located its headquarters there. In 1949, the ceremony founding the German Democratic Republic was held in the same large conference...
room where only a few years earlier Reichsmarschall Göring presided from a leather-padded throne. The Berlin Wall ran right up to the building’s southern edge. Until the Wall’s collapse in 1989, a dozen or so top East German government agencies were located in the complex, which the Communists renamed the House of Ministries. From 1991 to 1995 it was occupied by the Treuhandanstalt, the federal agency that oversaw the privatization of East German state enterprises.

All these government entities, each of a different ideological stripe, sought to modify the building in its own image. None had much success in mellowing its martial feel. The Soviet administration purged the Nazi decor, replacing it with the Soviet-style neoclassicism then in favor under Stalin. Göring’s lavish reception rooms with their dark wood paneling and heavy furniture gave way to gilt and cream. The Soviets went so far as to pry out the marble floor and coffered ceilings in an effort to alter the appearance. The East Germans made their own attempt at exorcising the Aviation Ministry’s ghosts by removing a massive bronze relief of Wehrmacht soldiers marching ominously eastward from the large arcade along the north facade, and substituting an equally huge painted mural depicting a joyous socialist paradise. When the building became the headquarters of the Treuhand, that agency temporarily masked the facade by draping it with large banners bearing photographic images of the anti-Communist protests that occurred outside the ministry in June 1953. The Finance Ministry will preserve the socialist mural. But in front of the arcade housing it, the ministry is considering making its own political-aesthetic statement by building a permanent memorial to workers killed in the course of restoration work. For this reason, replacement of the stone cladding proceeded gingerly, with the design team averting its gaze from what it preferred not to see revealed. “We will leave these places alone,” Keilholz said of areas where reliefs were believed to lie in wait. “We are not excavators, we are pragmatists.”

Refurbishment of the exterior was carried out with trepidation because of unwanted mementos thought to lurk just beneath the surface. Keilholz believed that the building’s Soviet-decreed “denazification” in some cases involved merely reversing carved stonework, leaving the uncarved side facing outwards, and thereby rendering invisible Nazi propaganda reliefs and insignia. He and government authorities were eager to avoid the awkward prospect of negotiations with preservationists over how and whether to conserve whatever might be unveiled in the course of restoration work. For this reason, replacement of the stone cladding proceeded gingerly, with the design team averting its gaze from what it preferred not to see revealed. “We will leave these places alone,” Keilholz said of areas where reliefs were believed to lie in wait. “We are not excavators, we are pragmatists.”

Try as it might, the team could not prevent the past from resurfacing. In early 1997, workers in the former Aviation Ministry’s basement accidentally uncovered a small brass chest interred there on October 12, 1935 to mark the completion of the building’s structural frame. The chest, its cover engraved with the Luftwaffe eagle and a swastika, contained a set of architectural drawings for the ministry, crumbling proclamations in Gothic script, and curled photographs depicting Hitler, Göring, and
architect Sagebiel. These items were then sent from the renovation site to the German Historical Museum to be documented and catalogued. But rather than go on display there, the box and its contents are expected to be reinterred within the walls for which they were originally intended, a time capsule from a totalitarian age deposited beneath the future machinery of a popularly elected finance minister. “This does not mean that it’s being buried and hidden away, it’s simply a part of the building and cannot be removed,” said Christine Hoh-Slodczyk, a preservation specialist advising the government.158

Interior renovations also aspired to mitigate the harshness of Sagebiel’s design. During the Third Reich, theatrical lighting effects in the building’s entry hall served to humble those who entered the premises, as did the high placement of doorknobs at a level closer to the average shoulder than waist. Now high-tech lighting elements are being installed in the entry and corridor ceilings. The former Grosse Festsaal, which Göring had decorated with Nazi symbols, will become a ministerial conference room with sleek high-backed chairs designed by the American modernist Charles Eames. Waiting areas will be brightly lit and furnished with white Le Corbusier chairs on black rugs. The four interior courtyards, used during the Nazi era as military marching grounds, will be softened with greenery.

The addition of new artworks is also expected to go some way to adding a welcome new layer of history. Given the aesthetic predilections of the Third Reich and the communist regime, figurative works have been expressly ruled out. “The danger of misunderstanding is too great,” said Keilholz. “I don’t want to take the risk. We are consciously striving to avoid parallels with the 1930s. What we’re doing here is confronting this building with a clear modern style. Whatever we add will be very purist, very simple, very clear. We’re trying to show the building like a book of history where you can read the pages that show what happened already, and we just add a few pages and write our own story. We’re trying not to erase anything that’s happened. It’s almost like an injection of a new philosophy to the building. We are trying to start this transformation. The user will have to finish it.”159

Keilholz thus rejects the notion that the buildings should be barred from reuse by the Federal Republic. “The guilt is born by people,” he said. “But today one must respect that guilt emanated from this building. The user who will now occupy this building must know that. And by occupying such a building one takes on an obligation, one that is greater than if one were just to tear down the building.”160 For Germany to destroy the Nazi structures would be tantamount to suppressing the past, and it is far preferable for the government to try and live with them as best as possible. History cannot be changed by negating it architecturally. “The important thing,” Building Minister Töpfer observed, “is the spirit that reigns in a building today and in the future.”161

Berlin’s architecture itself is not to blame for the terrible crimes once organized from the German capital. The stones themselves are not guilty. Punishing these buildings for what happened there would be like tearing down Canterbury Cathedral for the murder of Thomas à Becket. On the other hand, political architecture cannot be entirely separated from the context in which it arose. It is instilled with meaning related to its past, happy or not. The integration of the burdensome legacy into the framework of a democratic capital and the manner in which its history will be conveyed to future generations pose important tests of German political character. For this reason, the refurbishment and reuse of these buildings must entail more than aesthetic attempts to neutralize the designs that the Nazis regarded as an effective means towards achieving their dictatorial goals.
COMMUNIST RELICS

If German politicians worried that reusing Nazi-era buildings in the capital might complicate their country's reputation abroad, domestically they were even more at pains to distance themselves from the built legacy of the German Democratic Republic. Communism was a more vivid and direct memory for the electorate than the Third Reich. So despite the evolution towards “recycling” Nazi-era buildings as modern-day ministries, there was strong resistance to applying this practice to the most prominent state architectural projects of the only recently defunct East German regime. In cases where East German buildings were accepted for official reuse, the renovations often involved total transformations of their appearance. For instance, when the Bundestag turned the former Ministry for Foreign Trade and the Ministry for People’s Education into offices for its own members, both were stripped to their structural frames and rebuilt from the outside in.

In contrast to the perdurable former Reichsbank and Aviation Ministry Building, the Communist-era buildings had the reputation of being decidedly dingy and poorly crafted. This was reinforced by harsh assessments of East German architecture delivered by Western critics. “The profession of architecture had ceased to exist in the GDR,” wrote Manfred Sack in summing up its design achievements since 1949. “With a few isolated exceptions... the next forty years saw no architecture in East Germany worthy of the designation.” Given the high degree of standardized construction and material shortages under the Communist centralized economy, there was truth to this judgment. The sweeping condemnation typified dismissive West German attitudes towards the legacy of their fellow Germans.
A notable exemption was made in the case of East German buildings from the neoclassic period of the early 1950s. This was largely a question of style and shifts in architectural taste, since the Stalinist regime that created them was even more rigid and orthodox than the one that constructed the more modernist Marx-Engels-Platz. But by the 1990s, the grandiose apartments along the Stalinallee, now the Karl-Marx-Allee, were hailed as great urban architecture by fashionable foreign architects like Philip Johnson and Aldo Rossi. Johnson called the former Stalinallee “real city planning in the grand manner.” Rather than being regarded as the remnants of an unjust political system, the buildings were viewed by some as admirable aesthetic progenitors of postmodernism. The Karl-Marx-Allee apartment houses were privatized in 1993, and much of the boulevard underwent investor-funded restoration.

Elsewhere in Berlin, there were fears that the modernist architecture and urban planning of the fallen Communist regime would blemish the shining new countenance of the unified capital. “What difference does the postmodern splendor of the Parliament Buildings, the Foreign Ministry, or the Chancellery make when in front and behind them stretch amorphous and shabby urban spaces?” queried the influential weekly Die Zeit. The government acknowledged the sheer impossibility of tearing down all of the buildings put up by the East German government. But it proposed fundamentally altering the urban environment by increasing Berlin’s density and filling in the vast empty windswept spaces that were commonplace in the old Communist capital.

The ensemble of East German state buildings around the Marx-Engels-Platz bore the brunt of the official disapprobation. In 1993, the federal government sponsored an architectural competition to redesign the square and the surrounding area, known as the Spreeinsel (island in the Spree) since it is bounded by that river and its smaller tributaries. The competition guidelines formally left the fate of the Communist-era buildings up to the entrants, while hinting at the government’s true aspirations by urging a restoration of the historic street pattern. For this reason, critics accused Bonn of exploiting the professional legitimacy conferred by a design competition as a means to bolster top-level plans to eradicate East German architectural remains.

The contest drew a dizzying 1,106 submissions. Brazilians, Japanese, Australians, and Saudi Arabians were among the architects of fifty-eight nations vying against German colleagues to redesign what was Berlin’s most ancient core. First prize was awarded to a thirty-five-year-old West Berlin architect, Bernd Niebuhr, who did propose demolishing the Council of State Building, along with the Palace of the Republic and the East German Foreign Ministry Building. In his scheme, the vacated Marx-Engels-Platz would then be covered by a vast quadrangular conference center, library, and exhibition hall. This complex had the size and shape of the vanished Royal Palace; it occupied the palace’s footprint and centered around an oval courtyard.

The competition results stirred outrage among a broad cross-section of architects and urban planners who saw the democratic government behaving little differently than the Communists had when they ordered the palace’s demolition. “We find it unacceptable that buildings that have become a part of urban history are being erased from memory precisely because they are historically burdened,” said Cornelius Hertz, president of the Berlin Chamber of Architects, an umbrella organization of architects from both parts of the unified city. “History and identity are thereby being eradicated.”

In June 1994, over one hundred respected architects, historians, and landmark preservationists signed a petition protesting the elimination of the Council of State Building. More than half of the signatories were from former West Germany. This was a calculated move. “We were of the opinion that it had to be a majority of Westerners in order for it to be politically successful,” said petition co-organizer and urban historian Harald Bodenschatz. “We are still in the remarkable situation whereby projects that are advocated primarily by Eastern colleagues are much more likely to be denigrated and brushed aside.” The architectural
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Consultant’s report prepared for the Berlin city government had already found the Council of State Building to be eminently worthy of preservation. “It represents not just any state building, but the most important state building of the former GDR,” the report said.167

The timing of the protests coincided with official worries that the electorate might balk at the increasingly high financial cost of unification. These anxieties prompted the government to reign in its original plans to build entirely new ministries in Berlin, and eventually led to a partial change of heart regarding the government’s plans to dismantle the East German buildings. In effect, the results of the Spreeinsel competition were nullified shortly after being made public. The Council of State Building then got a stay of execution when Building Minister Töpfer moved his own Berlin headquarters into its upper floors. The ground floor conference and reception rooms were converted into the federal government’s information center for capital planning. The generously proportioned spaces, designed for formal state occasions hosted by Communist leaders, proved equally well suited for architectural exhibitions and symposia.

What once had been a guarded preserve of top-level Communist chiefs became a highly accessible public building and a popular meeting place for open debate about Berlin’s future. Culminating the remarkable symbolic transformation of the once-threatened building, Chancellor Kohl announced in February 1997 that he would temporarily move his offices there from Bonn in May 1999, while he or his successor awaits completion of the new Schultes-designed Chancellery, scheduled to open January 1, 2000. Kohl decided to take up the provisional quarters in order to ensure that the government stuck to its timetable for completing the capital’s transfer before the end of the millennium. In a telling sign of lingering ambivalence about contact with the physical remnants of the Communist state, the chancellor and his aides avoided referring to the Council of State Building by that name. Nor did they refer to it as Marx-Engels-Platz 1, its postal address for decades, but as 1 Palace Square (Schlossplatz 1), its latest incarnation. Kohl also termed it “a place where never in my wildest dreams could I have foreseen that I would one day work.”168

Though Bonn’s reversal of plans to raze the Council of State Building represented a major victory for preservationists, it still did not lead to widespread acceptance for the adjacent structures. Removing them from sight continued to preoccupy many politicians in both Bonn and Berlin. In 1995, the white aluminum-clad Foreign Ministry became the first building erected by the German Democratic Republic to fall prey to the wrecker’s ball since unification (see figure 41). Its overblown dimensions, in clear violation of the city’s traditional height limits, made it an easy target for demolition. Mindful that Communists had been accused of sweeping history out of view with similar actions, the government took care to use a bizarre linguistic contortion, “Rückbau” (a newspeak term meaning “reverse building”) rather than “Abbruch” (demolition) to refer to the Foreign Ministry’s removal. The task was completed with scant protest or regret. The Berlin newspaper BZ, a popular tabloid whose readership included former East Germans, bade farewell to the bulky Communist Foreign Ministry with the headline: “Bye, Bye Clunker. No One Sheds Any Tears Over You.”169

Just as it ensured the preservation of the former Stalinallee, 1990s architectural taste helped ease the way for the ministry’s removal. A private citizens’ group called for replacing it with a resurrection of Schinkel’s Bauakademie, the Prussian state architectural school that had stood on the site from 1835 until 1961. Regarded as Schinkel’s first “modern” building designed according to functionalist dictates, the four-story Bauakademie was a cube of flaming red bricks. Its window areas and door frames were surrounded by ornamented terra-cotta panels that were richly illustrated with carved reliefs. Some portrayed the concept of architecture as both an art and a science; others depicted the qualities demanded of its practitioners. Because the once trend-setting Bauakademie enjoyed cult status among architects and urban planners, many of the same people who indignantly

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(continued)
protested against razing other East German landmarks readily turned a blind eye to the elimination of the Foreign Ministry. But in the absence of funds to pay for rebuilding the Bauakademie, the vacated ministry site was covered for the time being with grass and a statue of Schinkel.

Far more disputed was the government’s decision to eliminate the Palace of the Republic that covered part of the site along Marx-Engels-Platz where the Hohenzollern Royal Palace stood until 1950. The government ordered the building shut in 1990 after finding it contaminated by large amounts of asbestos fireproofing. But East Germans saw this justification for the closure as a mere political pretext, since another equally ugly convention and entertainment center that also dated from the 1970s, the Internationale Congress Centrum in West Berlin, continued to operate despite its own asbestos contamination. Outside the shuttered Palace of the Republic, placard-carrying protesters demanded that it be reopened. In the meantime, the terraces surrounding the building became a skateboarders’ paradise. With no more party apparatchiks left to park their cars in the Marx-Engels-Platz, the disused square was temporarily taken up by an itinerant amusement park with carnival rides and refreshment stands.

No sooner was the Palace of the Republic sealed to the public than a campaign by West Germans to replace it with a replica of the original royal residence began. Enthusiasm for this ambitious undertaking was spurred on by a spate of books that appeared in the wake of unification containing photographs and drawings of old Berlin. These burnished the image of the pre-World War 1 monarchical age as the time of the city’s greatest beauty and splendor. Nostalgia for that bygone day often reflected aesthetic and political naiveté. “Everyone, whether left or right, wants a beautiful city, apart from a few intellectuals who say we must continue to suffer from our Nazi-era sins and that these must remain visible,” said Annette Ahme, the head of the Society for Historical Berlin, a leading backer of the campaign to rebuild the palace. “We see that as totally perverse. It is very important for the history of National Socialism to be taught and remembered in museums, concentration camps, memorials, and so on. But it makes no sense to overload the city with these pedagogical things and have every building and empty lot proclaim forever, ‘You evil Germans. You made the war and now you must put up with an ugly city.’ The city must be beautiful so that people will be happy and they will not repeat these mistakes.”170

The view that Berlin was more pleasing in its prewar manifestation got a major boost when in 1993 a life-size canvas mockup of the royal residence was raised upon scaffolding that covered much of the glass-faced Communist structure. The trompe l’œil canvas panels, painted by the French artist Catherine Feff and a crew of Parisian art students, extended into the Marx-Engels-Platz and roughly reproduced the exterior of the Prussian royal residence designed in the eighteenth century by Andreas Schlüter and Johann Friedrich Eosander von Göthe (see figure 43).

Feff had constructed similar public installations elsewhere. In Paris she covered the Place de la Concorde’s obelisk with an enormous trompe l’œil radio to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Charles de Gaulle’s broadcast calling for resistance to the Nazi occupation. But what exactly was the message broadcast by the fake palace in Berlin? Did it imply that Germans had overthrown a Communist dictatorship in order to restore the monarchy or the hierarchical society that existed during its heyday? Or did it suggest that one could undo the misdeeds of East German leader Walter Ulbricht by repeating his act of architectural destruction on the same site over forty years later?

The mural’s bright yellow panels enlivened the area around the Palace of the Republic for nearly a year. By the time they were removed, the specter of the Royal Palace had left a lasting impression on Berliners. One hundred and eighty thousand people visited an exhibition held within the canvas facade that documented the vanished building and proposals to rebuild it. The project’s sponsor, Hamburg businessman Wilhelm von Boddien, estimated that it would cost $600 million to tear down the Communist-era building and reconstruct the shell of the
Royal Palace in its place. Rebuilding the lavish interiors, including the throne room and ornate ballrooms, would have pushed this figure much higher. As a consequence, this option was never seriously considered by the German government.

The last monarch to have used the palace, Kaiser Wilhelm II, left Berlin for exile in Holland in 1918. Little had been heard from the Hohenzollern dynasty until 1991, when the family oversaw the reburial of Frederick the Great at a royal residence in Potsdam, which came under Red Army control in 1945. His remains had been transferred to West Germany by the family after World War II, and they opted to return them when the Communists had been removed from power. Chancellor Kohl’s decision to attend the reburial in effect rendered it a state occasion and stirred disquiet among liberal Germans, many of whom were equally troubled by the symbolic ramifications of the palace mockup. It was not so much fear of a royal restoration—that topic was never even broached—as German anxiety about pride in the past and suspicion of the cultivation of tradition. Deeply distrustful of themselves, many Germans panicked that even a fleeting revival of national spirit could be a slippery slope. Kohl took a different view, saying that Germany “needs to stand before our entire history,” rather than demonize its past, a statement indicating impatience with those the chancellor saw as focusing too much attention on the twelve years of Nazi rule.

The surviving members of the Hohenzollern family were largely absent from the palace debate, although a collateral descendant, Ferdinand von Hohenzollern, now a Berlin architect in his late thirties, was among those competing to redesign the Spreeinsel. His proposal avoided calling for reconstructing the palace once occupied by his ancestors; instead, von Hohenzollern figured among those advocating a modern convention center on the site. According to his design, which placed in the top fifty entries but won no actual prize, the convention center would be built after razing the Palace of the Republic and the East German Foreign Ministry Building.

For Berliners, the fleeting experience of the original palace’s massing via the mockup underscored the importance of the site and its role in determining the city’s identity and historical self-understanding. The Royal Palace had been a crucial landmark marking the eastern terminus of Unter den Linden. Whatever structure occupied that locale—be it the copper-colored reflective panels of the Communist’s palace or the eighteenth-century ornamentation of the Hohenzollern residence—would be visible from the Brandenburg Gate in the west and Alexanderplatz in the east.

What also became more clear through the mockup was the degree to which the original palace’s form determined the layout of the surrounding area, which had served as the symbolic center of German power for centuries. This included the position of the Berlin Cathedral, the Lustgarten, and the Altes Museum. With the palace gone, this spatial arrangement lost its coherence. “Ulbricht not only took the palace from us,” said Barbara Jakubeit, who became Berlin municipal building director in 1996. “He destroyed the entire urban space. It’s an urbanistic problem. One can’t get rid of the Palace of the Republic for ideological reasons. It’s not that it’s so ugly that we have to tear it down. We would drown in rubble if we were to tear down everything in the Federal Republic that is not beautiful. But in such an important place, one must be concerned about the urbanistic concept. And this building is simply totally wrong for the site.”

Proponents of rebuilding the palace cited Poland’s 1970s reconstruction of its royal palace in Warsaw, as well as the reconstruction in the 1950s of another Hohenzollern residence, the Charlottenburg Palace in West Berlin. Many other buildings along Unter den Linden that had their genesis under the monarchy were also rebuilt by the Communists after suffering wartime damage. Defending her desire to reconstruct the palace against criticism that it would lack historical authenticity, Jakubeit said, “In music, if one has the score then one can perform concerts and play the music over and over again. If I have the text of a book I can
In addition to those advocating the reconstruction of the Royal Palace and those who wanted to preserve the Palace of the Republic, there were others who regarded the Communist-era building as simply an inadequate work of architecture for such a pivotal place in the city. They advocated a modern structure. But there was some doubt that contemporary architecture would be able to rise to the challenge. "The superiority of the canvas Berlin palace over the actual modern structures surrounding it was a shock to realize," wrote the urban planner Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm. "But it was not the superiority of a staged illusion or of historical decor; it was the superiority of a historical appearance that can no longer be restored—a historical fate, in a word, that we would do good to accept. The design process goes on, but no one should continue to pat himself on the back and imagine he could do it as well as [Andreas] Schlüter." 175

As historian Brian Ladd observed in his book *The Ghosts of Berlin*, rival nostalgias were at work here.176 While West Germans looked back to the beauty of a misty monarchical age, former East Germans fondly recalled their leisure hours spent at the Palace of the Republic and in doing so mused that the life under Communism had not been all that bad. For these East Germans, the threatened removal of one of their former capital's prime landmarks came amid a disorienting series of street name changes and the elimination of other historic plaques and markers set down by the vanished Communist government. Advocates of retaining the building cited the apolitical nature of the "people's palace" open to all. But it was never so clear-cut. Certainly, a range of entertainment—including performances by acrobatic teams, rock musicians and jazz bands, art exhibitions, and festivals highlighting regional culinary specialties—had been offered then. But the program for January 1984 shows that much of this fare had a heavy ideological tint. Its listing for a three-day

"Rock for Peace" music extravaganza assailed Alexander Haig, former commander of NATO forces in Europe, for his "attack on human existence through the confrontational policies of the most aggressive circles of the USA and their NATO puppets." 177

The Palace of the Republic's politicized reputation fed West German antipathy to its preservation. Chancellor Kohl himself advocated its demolition to make way for a reconstruction of the Royal Palace facade, as did the Berlin division of his Christian Democratic Union. Many West German advocates of the palace reconstruction were determined to seal their victory over the exhausted Communist system, as if they were uncertain that their cold-war triumph would be secure until they had eradicated the architectural reminders. Destroying the East German remains was seen as a step towards expunging the evil of communism itself. "In the worldwide political conflict that lies behind us, what was ultimately at stake was thwarting the advance of this domination," the historian Joachim Fest wrote of communist ideology. "If the destruction of the palace was supposed to be the symbol of its victory, then reconstruction would be the symbol of its failure." 178

A joint committee representing the federal government and the city of Berlin did decide to order the removal of the asbestos, a step required for either refurbishing or destroying the Palace of the Republic. The committee also invited private investors to submit proposals for commercial use of the square, and the question of what to do with the extinct socialist forum was further debated in the Bundestag, in countless newspaper articles, and in public symposia. After the palace mockup was removed, the newspaper *Berliner Tagespiegel* ran a twelve-week series of proposals by a dozen leading architects for redesigning the square. Many of these urged a compromise between old and new by incorporating the Palace of the Republic into part of a reconstructed palace facade. President Roman Herzog, advocating a middle ground, supported this position. "It should not be a question of the palace versus the Palace of the Republic," the German head of state said, "but a bit of the palace and a bit of the Palace.
of the Republic, and above all something brand new.” This approach sounded less like a reasoned middle ground than a feeble solution for an irresolute nation.

The symbolic emptiness of the competing visions for the square came into even sharper relief as unified Berlin shifted its locus of power and its primary architectural embodiment westwards from the Spreeinsel to the Spreebogen. It will be on this spot, bounded by the bend in the Spree River, rather than on the historic terrain where kings, kaisers, and communists reigned for centuries, that the new political apex will arise with the Reichstag and the Federal Strip. The Spreeinsel remains urbanistically important but, at least for now, devoid of real content. Suggestions that the area be put to use as home to a new convention center, hotel, art gallery, or library ring hollow and unconvincing since these functions are amply fulfilled elsewhere in the city.

Like the Nazi buildings, the East German structures are repositories for the long-term memory of the political and social conditions that created them. The preservation of at least some key examples of communist-era architecture could help promote an understanding of a common past among Germans. After all, both the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic arose from the ashes of the Third Reich. Hard as it is for some Germans to accept, the Palace of the Republic represents a heritage they now share.

No structure in Germany has a more potent or more turbulent presence than the Reichstag (see figure 44). Shortly after the Bundestag’s 1991 decision to move back to Berlin, the parliamentary body quietly and with little controversy voted to use the notorious building as its new home. The consensus surrounding the plan proved short-lived. At a 1992 Bundestag-sponsored colloquium to discuss overhauling the Reichstag, it was depicted as a bombastic, war-scarred fossil, the scene of Germany’s darkest hours, an unwelcome symbol of democracy’s failure to grow deep roots under either the monarchy or the succeeding Weimar republic. The argument continues to this day.

Critics repeatedly disparaged the Reichstag with the word “Wilhelmine,” by which they meant that it epitomized the saber-rattling bluster of the last German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II. Architect Günter Behnisch, frustrated that his message-laden Bonn parliament was being abandoned so soon after its completion, compared the Bundestag’s decision to reconvene in the century-old Reichstag to the federal president taking the Kaiser’s uniform out of mothballs and wearing it in the 1990s. Pressure from conservative parliamentarians to restore the Reichstag cupola only inflamed censure of the building, for critics saw this crowning element as a blown-up version of the spiked military helmet worn by the Kaiser’s troops in World War I.

The actual history of the much-maligned building at times has been misconstrued. When the Red Army conquered Berlin at the end of World War II, its soldiers signaled that the German enemy had been defeated by unfurling the Soviet flag not atop the Reich Chancellery, from which Hitler controlled much of Europe, but over the battered Reichstag (see figure 45). For the Soviets, and many others who fought against Nazism, the
68 Wolf Eisenraut, interview with author, Berlin, 10 December 1996. Eisenraut, now 54, is currently an architect in private practice. “It was perhaps the most exciting time of my life,” he said of his work on the Palace of the Republic. On 4 October 1989, only weeks before the Berlin Wall fell, Eisenraut accepted East Germany’s National Prize for Art and Literature from Prime Minister Willi Stoph for his state architectural work. Today he says, “One didn’t take ideological matters very seriously. From the professional standpoint of an architect, one wanted to make a beautiful building and it was a wonderful commission. I must admit—-you don’t hear this much anymore about the GDR—-it was a good time for me.”

MASTER PLAN FOR A GOVERNMENT DISTRICT

74 Claude Vascony, telephone interview with author, 26 May 1997.
75 Quoted in Van Langen, interview.
76 Quoted in Arbeitsgruppe Berlin-Wettbewerbe, Hauptstadt Berlin—Parlamentsviertel im Sprechogen, internationaler Städtebaulicher Ideenwettbewerb (Berlin: Bauwelt/Birkhäuser Verlag, 1993), 47.
78 Ibid.
80 Transcript of Second Colloquium, 9.

CHOOSING A CHANCELLERY

81 Quoted in Speer, Inside the Third Reich, 69.
91 Peter Conradt, interview with author, Bonn, 24 October 1995.
93 Quoted in Der Spiegel 8 (20 February 1995): 64.
102 Schultes, interview.
103 Ibid.
104 Axel Schultes, interview with author, Berlin, 15 October 1996.
105 Ibid.
106 Quoted in Die Bundesregierung zieht um (Bonn: Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, December 1994), 60.
107 Schultes, interview, 15 October 1996.

PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE

112 Kleine-Kranenburg, interview.

NAZISM’S ARCHITECTURAL REMNANTS

117 Quoted in Taylor, Word in Stone, 140.
118 Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, “Politik, Investoren, Kultur im Streit um das Berliner
Notes to Pages 89–101


123 Vom Nordenskjöld, interview.


127 Winfried Nerding, interview with author, Munich, 30 October 1995.

Notes to Pages 101–118

146 Klaus Bussmann, telephone interview with author, 11 June 1997.


148 Kolhoff, interview.

149 Quoted in Taylor, Word in Stone, 197.

150 Ibid., 196.

151 Ibid., 197.

152 Ibid., 196.

153 Günter Grass, Ein weites Feld (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 1995), 66.


160 Ibid. In this context, it is interesting to note that the United States Consulate in West Berlin has long occupied another Nazi-era military complex designed by Sagebiel, the former Luftwaffe Command Headquarters for eastern Germany.

161 Quoted in Karl Hugo Pruys, Auf dem Weg, 98.

COMMUNIST RELICS


166 Harald Bodenschatz, telephone interview with author, 17 March 1997.

167 Bodenschatz, Geisenhof, and Tscheschner, Gutachten zur Bau-, 10.


171 Quoted in Marc Fisher, After the Wall: Germany, the Germans and the Burden of History (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 73.


173 Jakubeit, interview.

174 Ibid.

175 Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, “City and
NORMAN FOSTER’S REICHSTAG
ILLUMINATING SHADOWS OF THE PAST

182 Quoted in Michael S. Cullen, Der Reichstag: Die Geschichte eines Monumentes (Stuttgart: Parkland Verlag, 1990), 32.
184 Cullen, Der Reichstag, 314–7.
189 Ibid., 12.
190 Oscar Schneider, interview with author, Bonn, 24 October 1995.
191 Sir Norman Foster, statement at Second Competition Stage of Reichstag Competition, June 1993.
196 Foster, Reichstag Berlin, 30.
197 Mark Braun, Sir Norman Foster and Partners Reichstag project director, interview with author, Berlin, 12 December 1996.
198 Ibid.


I. M. PEI AND A PRUSSIAN INHERITANCE

205 Quoted in Regina Müller, Das Berliner Zehnhaus: Die Baudichter (Berlin: Brandenburger Verlagshaus, 1994), 249.
207 Quoted in Müller, Das Berliner Zehnhaus, 227.
208 Quoted in Harold James, A German Identity: 1770–1990 (New York: Routledge, 1989), 204.
210 Ibid. The exhibition has been questioned by critics who argue that it overlooks what they see as Germany’s unique, fatally flawed, historical trajectory outside liberalizing trends elsewhere on the continent. See Peter Reichel, Politik mit der Erinnerung: Geschichtsorte im Streit um die Nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1995), 253–7.

MONUMENTS TO VICTIMS, NOT HEROES

214 Pei, interview.
215 Ibid.
216 Christoph Stötzl, interview with author, Berlin, 3 April 1997.
217 Ibid, interview.