

The street as locus of collective memory

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Abstract. In discussing the role of streets and urban spaces as a locus of collective memory, I draw a distinction between overt commemoration of public memory and the accumulation of group memories in the setting of the everyday street. Community struggles over postwar street clearances stimulated interest in the physical layout of the public realm as a gestalt for shared memory, a theme of earlier work on memory and urbanism by Maurice Halbwachs. I show how Aldo Rossi and colleagues put the concept onto a practical footing by making morphological analysis the basis for urban infill, repair, and extension, most ambitiously and controversially in the ‘critical reconstruction’ of modern Berlin.

Introduction

Children develop imagination at play in the spaces under tables or inside empty boxes (Downing, 1994). Adults recall memories by thinking of associative spaces and places (de Certeau, 1990, page 163). Human memory and identity are rooted in bodily experiences of being and moving in material space (Fried, 1963). The very process of remembering grows out of spatial metaphors of connection and topography. To remember, says Umberto Eco, is like constructing and then travelling again through a space: “We are already talking about architecture. Memories are built as a city is built” (1986, page 89). And, for Sigmund Freud (1955 [1895]) analysing the hysterical rheumatic pains in the right thigh of “Fraulein Elisabeth Von R”, memories were excavated as an archaeologist uncovers the layers of a buried city. Several decades later (1961 [1930]) he abandoned that analogy, because the archaeologist excavates by destroying whereas in psychoanalysis all the successive layers of mental life may be preserved and excavated intact as separate ‘cities’ coexisting on the same site—a concept that expresses the abstract-yet-concrete spatiality of memory all the more powerfully.

Patterns of enclosed, interconnected space are the oldest mnemonic device. Before the invention of print, practitioners of the ancient art of memory—the *ars memoriae*—developed elaborate teaching and learning systems based on imaginary spaces furnished with mental reminders. Humanists in the 16th century went on to build these memory machines in three dimensions (Yates, 1966). Their experiments contributed directly to the design of the Renaissance theatre and to the subsequent application of scenographic technique in Baroque town planning, which made the city not just a metaphor for individual recollection but a giant device for shaping collective memory (Boyer, 1996). Alex Vidler reads the history of urban design into those Renaissance theatres where streets were built in three-dimensional false perspective from arches at the back of the stage: formal, colonnaded streets for tragedy and mixed irregular streets of small houses for comedy (satire had a rustic landscape). Tragedy Street leads towards a public architecture expressing institutional power and continuity; Comedy Street leads to an everyday urbanism that grows cumulatively from the routine patterns of everyday life for people living, working, and coexisting in urban space (1978, pages 86–93).

Most writing around urban collective memory follows Tragedy Street. Baroque urbanism used theatrical effect to make the imaginary symbolic order of the established power an insistent reality in everyday life. To escape the ideological grip of the state, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had to escape the city. The French revolution took over the entire apparatus of Tragedy Street, adding the use of street names as an instrument of education, glorification, and revenge (Milo, 1986). Ever since, changes of street names have been an obligatory accompaniment to political change (Nas, 1993). On the scenographic front, the classical language of uniform cornice heights and marching columns has never lost its appeal to civic improvers, dictators, business corporations and property developers. Nationalism in the 19th century enlarged this spatial imagery with romantic and regional motifs (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1983), and the 20th century further extended the symbolic range with machine-age imagery that looked forwards and historic-environment conservation that looked back (Boyer, 1996; Lowenthal, 1985).

Much has been written about the widening gap between symbol and meaning in a heterogeneous and globalised society. Between 1984 and 1992 Pierre Nora published *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (sites of memory) (1984–92), an immense exploration of the sites (*lieux*) of France's national collective memory, some of them metaphorical but most material and spatial, reflecting the pervasive embodiment of French national identity in the form of its towns and in the symbolism of its buildings. Nora's project was prompted by a sense that the resonance of *Les Lieux de Mémoire* was weakening in a mobile and culturally diverse society. Postmodernity tends to be unsympathetic to the claims of any building, monument, or space to embody a shared past. For Michael Landzelius (2003), the very act of memorialisation invites questions about exclusion, institutionalised amnesia, nonrepresentation, nondisplay, and—in his phrase—dis(re)-membering. When Mike Crang and Penny Travlou examined the abundance of remnants in the city of Athens they found no unification or sense of duration. The memory elements appeared nondirectional and fragmented, “discordant moments sustained through a mosaic of sites” (2001, page 173). Individuals may have intense moments of communion with history, but in a city of heterogeneity space has no collective meaning.

Nevertheless, Tragedy Street remains a work in progress. No city demonstrates its persistence better than Berlin. For the Prussian Emperor Friedrich Wilhelm III, the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel designed spectacular stage backdrops in the royal theatre—the Schauspielhaus—at one moment, and laid out the imperial streets and squares of Friedrichstadt the next (Boyer, 1996, pages 97–99). Up until 1914 the Prussian state retained tight control over the great central axis on which its military power paraded daily (Fritzsche, 1996). Under Nazi patronage Albert Speer pursued a colossal architecture of totalitarian space, replanning the city around a second monumental axis that would run northwards to terminate in Hitler's Valhalla, the Great Hall at the Spreebogen (Speer, 1978). After the Second World War the German Democratic Republic employed that monumental language to the glory of Communism as President Walter Ulbricht oversaw the construction of the two-kilometre neoclassical set piece of the Stalinallee (Kostof, 1992). And according to critics the Berlin authorities have reverted to the city's worst urbanistic traditions since the fall of the Berlin Wall, imposing what *Blueprint* magazine called “reactionary and grimly historicist” building controls (Horn, 1996, page 35) based on a spurious evocation of the stone-built city of Schinkel and Speer: “a rhetoric of a totalitarian identity and controlled image ... a destruction of difference and contradiction in the name of preservation. What is being preserved is a singular controlled image in the face of uncontrolled differences” (Cupers and Miessen, 2002, page 62).

Daniel Libeskind speaks of this “Call to Order” as an authoritarian vision with the building of a New Teutonia as its object (quoted in Balfour, 1995, pages 35–36). The gravest of many criticisms levelled against the city authorities is that they have wilfully falsified collective memory, eradicating traces of the wall, and imposing a spurious aesthetic of the golden 1920s which allows Germans to cast themselves in the role of victims—not perpetrators—of 20th-century history (Ladd, 1997; Luescher, 2002; Marcuse, 1998; Oswalt, 2000; Wise, 1998). By trying to rebuild Berlin as a theatre of memory, the authorities have ineptly stirred the swamp of recent and unspeakable real events which refuse to be forgotten (Kündiger, 1997; Neill and Schedler, 2001).

I will return to Berlin, but not by the route of Tragedy Street. Instead I go out through the other door at the back of the stage, down the street whose collective memory is based on shared everyday experience. Maybe even the name of that street is a local invention. Historically, street names served in some way “as almanacs, registering those personalities and events, mythic or real, which have imprinted themselves on popular consciousness” (Samuel, 1998, page 354; see also 1994). Looking for collective memory in the streets of Vitoria, Brazil, the anthropologist Geert Banck found the names of generals and governors in the central boulevards, but the dirt roads of the squatter settlements conveyed the solidarities of the people who had built them: one is named after a man who died of a heart attack in a police raid; another is called *Rua Quatro de Setembro* (September 4th Street), to commemorate the day the squat was officially recognised as a city neighbourhood and linked up to an electricity supply; another is named *Rua do Acordo* (Agreement Street) to celebrate the settling of a row about a school site (Nas, 1993). In the parish maps devised by the grassroots research organisation Common Ground, streets show up as the organising basis of memories, hopes, evasions, meanings, emotions, celebrations, and worries (Crouch, 1998). What Dolores Hayden (1995) calls their ‘power of place’ is the shaping of collective memory through cumulative small-scale action. The street is, in Spiro Kostof’s memorable phrase, a ‘communal register’. In its untidy, mundane, undesigned life it is, or *was* (writing in California shortly before his death Kostof used the past tense), “the safeguard of those continuities of culture and place that made us as street users vastly and substantively older than our age and infinitely wiser than our natural gifts” (1992, page 243).

This is a paper about Comedy Street. It addresses a type of memory experiment which is not about commemoration of collective events or identities, but about maintaining, repairing and (sometimes) inventing an everyday public realm that will help its occupants to be, in Kostof’s evocative phrase, ‘older than their age’. The focus is not on monuments or architectural meanings but on street fabric. Following Marshall Berman and Christine Boyer, the first three sections of the paper move from an early-20th-century modernism that celebrated the street, through a mid-20th-century modernism that spurned it, to an end-of-century postmodernism that seeks to repair it. These sections all lead us back to Berlin not for its commemoration and dis(re)membering of official memory but for its large-scale experiment in making a shared street network and public realm across former lines of division

Collective memory discovered

In *Berlin Chronicle* (1979 [1932], pages 292–320) Walter Benjamin described a moment of illumination that came to him one afternoon in Paris before the First World War. Suddenly—out of doors, in the street—he sketched a diagrammatic vision of his life on a sheet of paper. Though he subsequently lost the diagram he remembered the illuminating concept, a network of spaces between street walls and quaysides, revealing a pattern of human encounters. In it he glimpsed the structure that a city can give to

memory (1978 [1932], page 318). Writing years later in the wasteland of a North American postwar suburb, Hannah Arendt envied him that moment of discovery of the imaginative meaning of the city street (1973, page 25). This peculiarly Parisian episode, made possible by the ‘singular language’ of the Haussmann boulevards, opened the way to something more universal, Benjamin’s contribution to the early modernist counterpoint of vivid individual experience against the impersonal flux of a great city (Berman, 1982).

Whereas Benjamin wrote epigrammatically and from the subjective perspective of a flâneur, the Parisian boulevards also stimulated the first objective studies of society, space, and collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs was a distinguished lawyer, statistician, and sociologist, a student of Henri Bergson and Émile Durkheim, and one of a remarkable generation of social science pioneers at the *École Normale Supérieure* (Rabinow, 1989). He succeeded Georg Simmel to the Strasbourg chair of sociology in 1919 when France reestablished the university on a Francophone basis and sought to make it among the most prestigious in Europe. Working with the International Labour Office in Geneva, Halbwachs pioneered the statistical investigation of household budgets and expenditure patterns. As well as the first French texts on probability theory, he wrote about Leibniz and about the causes of suicide. His last book, published in 1941 in occupied Paris, was *La Topographie Légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte: Étude de Mémoire Collective* (1971), a study of collective memory in pilgrimage through Bethlehem, Nazareth, the shores of Lake Tiberias, and the holy city of Jerusalem.

It was Halbwachs’s belief that all memory is socially constructed around some concept of space: only spatial imagery has the stability to allow us to discover the past in the present (1980, page 167). He studied various frameworks that allow memory to be shared and transmitted: for example, musical notation, the layout of churches and ceremonial spaces, and town plans (1928; 1980). He wrote that, in our perceptions and memory of place, “we are never alone” (1980, page 23). In particular, urban space is a receptacle of collective memory. French geographers had constructed an entire science on the nexus between rural people and their landscapes—Halbwachs dared to suggest that the identity embodied in a city’s streets is even stronger:

“The place a group occupies is not like a blackboard, where one may write and erase figures at will ... The board could not care less what has been written on it before, and new figures may be freely added. But place and group have each received the imprint of the other. Each aspect, each detail of this place has a meaning intelligible only to members of the group, for each portion of its space corresponds to various and different aspects of the structure and life of their society, at least of what is most stable in it” (1980, page 128).

The persistence of street plans is a powerful social law. In our personal lives, the normality of street life is a consolation during times of crisis—the impersonal flux of people and traffic ‘calms and steadies us’. What affects the material aspect of an urban quarter matters more to its residents than high politics, and in the life of the city—war, upheaval, new roads, economic decay—people will always try to restore some elements of their familiar material environment. Even if they cannot arrest change, they try to hold firm to what they can and protect it within a new equilibrium (1980, page 133). It is in urban space that humans discover who they are and make history—a radical and timely message for Parisian workers in the aftermath of the Great War (Pleh, 2000). Benjamin had found mnemonic meaning in the street map of Paris. As a student Halbwachs watched the completion of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s boulevards, and in 1928 he published an extraordinarily detailed empirical study of the demographic, physical, and land-price effects of those sabre slashes through the tissue of the old city (Topalov, 1997). Perhaps the most striking finding was that the sabre

wounds had healed: urban tissue had formed around them, seamlessly incorporating ancient streets within a modernised urban order (Halbwachs, 1928, page 263).

Halbwachs was an articulate pro-urbanist. He statistically refuted the supposed links between urbanisation, social degeneracy, and cultural decline. At a time when social reformers, (whether German, French, or Anglo-Saxon) looked for social policy solutions in terms of getting people off the streets and into smaller face-to-face communities, he affirmed the value of the great flux and roar—the ‘collective exultation’—of big city life. He was an active participant in the French planning movement, and campaigned to strengthen the powers of municipalities to manage their cities and intervene to prevent social polarisation through housing market processes (Topalov, 1997). While Oswald Spengler proclaimed the coming collapse of urban civilisation in the bestselling *Decline of the West* (1932), Halbwachs demonstrated that the supposed infertility of the city dweller was a demographic myth. Far from being pathological, the giant modern metropolis was a litmus of biological and social organisation. It was the source of innovation in religion, culture, politics, business, and medicine. Such inventiveness was peculiar to “compact and complex urban milieux” (Halbwachs, 1938, page 128), cities which put their people to the test but also stimulate their will to succeed (pages 69–82).

Spengler and Halbwachs were exact contemporaries and both wrote memorably about urban form and collective memory. To shield himself from the modern urban world Spengler made it a habit to hang a sign on his door saying ‘out of town’ which he took down when he actually left town (Fischer, 1989, page 70). He died in 1936 disappointed that Hitler (with whom he had a personal audience at Bayreuth in 1933) would not accept his doctrine of manly pessimism. Halbwachs was taken to Buchenwald by the Gestapo in 1944. As he died of dysentery in Block 56 of the Little Camp, he was consoled with Baudelaire by a fellow prisoner who had attended his lectures at the Sorbonne in the 1920s (Semprun, 1994, page 70).

Collective memory forgotten

After the war, Halbwachs’s work on collective memory was almost completely ignored. He had no influence on postwar French urban sociology, not being cited either by Paul-Henri Chombart de Lauwe in the 1950s or by Manuel Castells or Raymond Ledrut in the 1960s (Topalov, 1997). Social psychology was similarly dismissive of his collective memory concept. Postwar psychology of memory took the ‘single-minded’ premise that remembering and forgetting are individual, not social, activities (Middleton and Edwards, 1990). Work on the social basis of memory, and interest in Halbwachs, would revive only with the radical constructionist approaches of the 1990s (Pleh, 2000). There was similarly an “almost total neglect of the spatial dimension” in the human sciences of the postwar decades (Fried, 1963, page 156), and the concept of city streets and neighbourhoods as receptacles of collective memory had no place in the thinking of a generation of architects, highway engineers, landscapers, and town planners who were influenced more by Spengler’s philosophy of antiurbanism, conveyed through the popular biologising metaphors of urban cancer and putrefaction (Tunnard, 1953, pages 43–44). There was a Spenglerian thread in Lewis Mumford’s widely read planning theory, which emphasised the need to break the inherited gestalt of the industrial city (1966, page 631). *The Twilight of Cities* (1962) was a characteristically Spenglerian title for the historian Erlich Gutkind’s polemic about the eradication of the ‘humbug’ of building facades, the dispersal of cities into regions, and the reversion of cities to nature by large-scale landscaping schemes, bringing “life, change and vigour direct to the townsman” (1962, page 52). Gutkind’s generation of modernists were impatient to “go out into the wide spaces and build anew”

(1943, page 326)—the city was a memory to be expunged. Policymakers assumed *tabula rasa* even in the absence of wartime destruction (Diefendorf, 1993). The new urban world of democracy would be judged by its transparency and uniformity, space being an isotropic concept in which no point should be differentiated from or favoured over any other (Bayle, 1996; Dekker, 2000; Worpole, 2000).

At this moment of total eclipse, Halbwachs's theory of collective memory was suddenly vindicated by grassroots politics. Across the Western world, urban communities facing the bulldozer reacted to the breaking down of street walls with grief and anger (Marris, 1974). Interviewing slum relocatees in the West End of Boston, Marc Fried (1963) recognised that what his interviewees were experiencing was a *bereavement*—"intense, deeply felt and at time overwhelming" (page 151):

"How did you feel when you saw or heard that the building you lived in was torn down?"

"It was like a piece being taken from me."

"I felt terrible."

"I used to stare at the spot where the building stood."

"I was sick to my stomach" (page 152).

Observing the *Neubau* (new building) of German cities in the 1950s, Alexander Mitscherlich (1970) discovered the same sense of psychological abandonment amongst individuals stripped of the shared identity of their urban setting. In *The City: New Town or Home Town?* (1973) the sociologist Felizitas Lenz-Romeiss contrasted the impersonal 'transit-camp' ambience prescribed by modern town planning with the complex and rich semantic environments of the unimproved street. Reacting against the triumph of the "Bureaucratic Society of Controlled Consumerism" (1984 [1958], page 65) in the morphologically exploded settings of the suburbs of Paris, Henri Lefèbvre explored the meanings of traditional urban form, and demanded an alternative urbanism that would reconstitute the street as a space of continuity, variety, and encounter. Michel de Certeau wrote his two-volume *L'Invention du Quotidien* (The invention of everyday life) in response to the same "immense social experience of loss of place" (1990, page 155), sending his research team to explore "the true archives of the city", the spatial practices of everyday life in neighbourhoods where town planners had not yet imposed their standardising logic of production (1990; de Certeau et al, 1994). Back in Boston, reviewing the first appearance of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Jacobs, 1961), Herbert Gans had rightly predicted that the destruction of street-based environments would send intellectual shockwaves through the modern project (1968, page 30). Direct encounter with the amnesia effect of urban clearance was formative for Jane Jacobs and many other late-20th-century urbanists—Spiro Kostof, Henri Lefèbvre, Richard Sennett, René Schoonbrodt, Joseph Rykwert—who together restored the Halbwachian conception of urban space as a locus of collective memory. None was more ambitious for urbanism than Marshall Berman, who placed the recovery of the street at the heart of the modern project, hailing the Latino immigrants under the shadow of the Cross Bronx Expressway as heirs of the tradition of Goethe:

"It has taken the most extraordinary labours to rescue these ordinary streets from death, to begin everyday life here from the ground up ... It is a risky and precarious enterprise—we can feel the risks when we see the horror just around the corner—and it takes a Faustian vision, energy and courage to carry through. These are the people of Faust's new town, who know that they must win their life and freedom every day anew" (1982, page 344).

Collective memory recovered

The people of Faust's new town needed a new type of town planner. Such a designer would need to engage with modernity yet respond to the urban context in a way that CIAM (International Congress of Modern Architecture) modernism had not done. He or she would need to understand the linguistics of the city and its need for continuity of meaning (Boyer, 1996, page 178), and to devise forms of action which Roland Barthes compared to the Argonauts maintaining their ship, "every piece of which was replaced over time but which always remained the Argo, that is a set of quite legible and identifiable meanings" (1973, page 157). The architect Aldo Rossi showed how these things could be done.

Rossi sought to respond to the crisis of collective memory without betraying the Corbusian spirit of free architecture and the modern project. He was an acid critic of pasticheurs and contextualists, and disliked what he called 'Anglo-Saxon' urban design. Efforts to preserve history by retaining facades or mimicking traditional form and materials produced "an empty, often repugnant stage" (Rossi, 1982, pages 118, 123). In his *L'Architettura della Città* [The architecture of the city] (1966, published in English in 1982) he set out an alternative strategy for the recovery of urban collective memory. It presented the city as a totality, a thing in itself, the most authentic expression of collective will: in Claude Lévi-Strauss's words, *la chose humaine par excellence* (of all things the most human) (1955, page 122). Rossi looked for urban memory not in buildings but in the voids between them, the space pattern that constitutes the enduring skeleton of a town. He argued that a city's street plan is "a primary element, the equal of a monument like a temple or a fortress" (1982, page 99).

The Architecture of the City (1982) introduced a worldwide readership to the techniques of morphological mapping and building-type analysis developed in postwar Italy by Saverio Muratori, Gianfranco Caniggia, and Carlo Aymonino (Boyer, 1996; Ellin, 1996; Moudon, 1994). In his autobiography Rossi (1981) described the sense of passionate discovery with which in his late twenties he had walked the cities of Europe—"like a general who wishes to know every possible battlefield ... like a lover sustained by my egotism" (page 16)—to unlock the secrets of their planform through the technique of morphological analysis. Rossi also drew widely on Austro-German theories of spatiality, particularly Camillo Sitte and Adolf Loos, and from French urban theory, particularly Marcel Poëte and Pierre Lavedan. His central argument that investigation of a town's plan can reveal its deep structure—"the soul of the city"—was drawn from a source that would be known to very few of his readers, Halbwachs's posthumous *Mémoire Collective* (Collective memory) of 1950. Rossi paraphrased Halbwachs in these words:

"One can say that the city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like the memory it is associated with objects and places. The city is the locus of the collective memory. This relationship between the locus and the citizenry then becomes the city's predominant image, both of architecture and of landscape, and as certain artefacts become part of its memory, new ones emerge. In this entirely positive sense great ideas flow through the history of the city and give shape to it ... Thus the union between the past and the future exists in the very idea of the city that it flows through, in the same way that memory flows through the life of a person; and always, in order to be realized, this idea must not only shape but be shaped by reality" (1982, page 130).

Here was the message that Barthes's Argonauts needed. *The Architecture of the City* (Rossi, 1982) taught designers how to escape the modernist fixation with buildings as isolated objects, and rediscover and give contemporary expression to the collective architecture of street, place, and quarter. The emphasis on memory experience was

quite unlike the visual perspectives and townscape analyses of Anglo-Saxon urban design: it was said of Rossi and colleagues, such as Alvaro Siza in Oporto or Oriol Bohigas in Barcelona, that “the city is their mother” (Carbonell, 1986, page 65). Practitioners of the architecture of the city became the *urbanismo de izquierda*—the planning left—for democratic municipalities regaining control of urban space from the office and hotel speculators who had flourished under Franco and Salazar. The message of the book was disseminated through the vigorous Marxist political culture of the 1970s and 1980s, its morphological approach meshing with the Eurocommunist strategy of mobilisation around neighbourhood and community issues, and with Lefèbvre’s fluent ruminations on contemporary urban experience (1991). In Paris it coincided with the first translations of Benjamin, and morphologists made a motto of his simile—in a 1913 letter to Carla Seligson (in Benjamin, 1979, page 52)—of the city’s street facades as the wings of a stage set through which Baudelaire, Apollinaire, and the surrealists have walked before us (Cohen and Fortier, 1988, pages 18–25; Loyer, 1987). The city set up an architectural centre in the Pavillon de l’Arsenal where building projects could be juxtaposed through maps and models with a continual exploration of collective memory embodied in the street plan. Plaster maquettes at the scale of 1:1000 showed the contrast between the postwar city where the buildings stand free as objects, and the traditional tissue where the street has the appearance of being carved out of a block of solid mineral. The central insight in all this new urbanism was a Halbwachian focus upon the ‘transhistorical’ nature of urban space (Bailly, 1988), “the permanence of history in the play of solids and voids” (Ansay and Schoonbrodt, 1989, page 33).

Though European urbanists liked to distance themselves from US urban design, the morphological approach was already becoming established in the United States before the (belated) English translation of *The Architecture of the City* in 1982. The key text—*Collage City* (1978) by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter—paralleled Rossi’s attempt to reconcile the modernist promise of change with an urbanist sense of continuity (Mumford, 2002). Rowe reproached contemporary architects for making too much of the *zeitgeist*—that exclusivist deity—and not enough of the she-god, the spirit of place. Having studied for his doctorate at the Warburg Institute in the 1940s Rowe was influenced by Frances Yates’s work on theatres of memory (1966), and like Rossi wanted to lay the basis for an urbanism which could also look forward and function as a theatre of prophecy (Rowe and Koetter, 1978, page 49). For this purpose he introduced a device simpler than the complex morphological atlases of the Italian school—a reductive black-and-white figure–ground plan, showing built and unbuilt space. Figure–ground images were easy to prepare from available maps and did not require the ample resources of student assistance available to Italian researchers. Yet a map of building footprints was rich with the ambiguous meanings of gestalt psychology. The voids could be read as a figure against the ground of the built form, or vice versa (Schumacher, 1996). And, like Benjamin’s illuminating street map of Paris, the figure–ground was also a memory diagram. Often, the black-and-white plans were framed in a triptych of past, present, and future, *hier, aujourd’hui, proposition*: first, the mid-century labyrinth of continuous streets and places; second, the breakup caused by wartime destruction, highways, surface parking, freestanding object-architecture, landscape planting, and urban blight; third, the figure–ground of prophecy, showing how urban space could be recovered. Popularised through the Cornell urban design studio and Anne Vernez Moudon’s writings on urban morphology (1997), the triptych became the universal design tool for the rediscovery of the street and of a Halbwachian idea of collective memory.

Rossi remained at the centre of this revival of urban praxis. Besides his own place-making activity as a practising architect (for which he was awarded the Pritzker

Architecture Prize in 1990), he was a prolific writer and networker on both sides of the Atlantic, teaching at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York in 1976–79 and establishing an office in the city in 1986. To promote the concept of the city as theatre of memory he organised displays of projects at the Venice Triennale of 1973 and the ‘Rational Architecture’ show in London in 1976. Under the title ‘Presence of the Past’ he stirred controversy at the Venice Biennale of 1980 and subsequently in San Francisco with *Strada Novissima*, a street of twenty-two three-storey town-house façades by contemporary architects (Ellin, 1996). Though many of the designs involved a game play of postmodern pastiche and irony which would date very quickly, Rossi sought to decouple the underlying urbanism from the controversies over architectural style, arguing that what mattered was the rediscovery of the city “as the place where people can live their lives” (Carbonell, 1986, page 27).

Whereas US postmodern urbanism is closely associated with a neohistoricist architecture of pastiche, European new urbanism has married contemporary building design with traditional street and block form. Barcelona and Amsterdam are well-known examples, but the most significant demonstration project took place in West Berlin in 1984–87. It had its origins in squatter protests around a proposed urban motorway running parallel to the Berlin Wall, and the adverse public reaction to the harshness—since tempered by maturing landscape—of 1960s housing projects such as the huge Märkisches Viertel estate (Bullock, 1999). In 1970 the Paris-trained architect Josef Paul Kleihues produced a chronological figure-ground atlas of the Charlottenburg and Kreuzberg districts of inner Berlin, starkly revealing the erosion of streets and blocks. He argued for a strategy of piecemeal repair to reverse the process and repopulate the centre. The concept won the support of the private (though publicly funded) building exhibition society, Internationale Bauausstellung GmbH (IBA). IBA originally thought in terms of an ideas exhibition in the Tiergarten. Instead—backed by Rossi, James Stirling, and Carlo Aymonino—Kleihues persuaded them to assemble land and provide finance for two neighbourhood-scale demonstration projects (Kleihues and Klotz, 1986). Altbau-IBA, directed by Hardt-Walter Hämer, tackled the Kreuzberg district of tenement blocks north of Tiergarten, in participation with squatters, immigrants, small businesses, and environmental groups. Neubau-IBA, directed by Kleihues in the war-stricken zone of Friedrichsstadt by the Berlin Wall, applied the principle of critical reconstruction to rebuild the urban tissue of a Baroque suburb. In both cases, simple morphological rules, devised through participation, ensured that building blocks would join up to make recognisable and liveable urban spaces. The IBA mottos were “a caring approach to urban renewal” and “rebuilding the city of streets” (Kündiger, 1997; Uhlig, 1994). At its initial exhibition at the Milan Triennale of 1985—*La Ricostruzione della Città* (Reconstruction of the city)—IBA-Berlin emphasised the universal relevance of those themes. Of the hundred participating architects a third were non-German. It was by far Europe’s largest and most diverse experiment in urbanism, and the acknowledged source for some of the most innovative design elsewhere, including Roland Castro’s ‘Banlieu 89’ programme for failed suburban estates around French cities, Oriol Bohigas’s preparation of Barcelona for the Olympic Games, and Amsterdam’s building out across the dock islands of the River IJ (Bédarida, 1985; De Michelis et al, 1985).

Rem Koolhaas had been involved in the early stage of IBA-Berlin but pulled out, deciding that he disliked the idea of reurbanising the city. He wrote in 1989 that it would be better to have made Berlin “a sort of territorial archipelago ... a system of architectural islands surrounded by forests and lakes in which the infrastructures could plug without causing damage” (1989, page 16 cited in 1996, page 329). That was unprophetic. By the end of 1989 the Berlin Wall was down and Berlin was set to become the biggest construction site in Europe.

Berlin revisited

The Venice Biennale in October 2000 included a show called Città—less aesthetics, more ethics. Most of the ninety installations were multimedia and non-Cartesian, and “chaos (not disorder but sublime order) and transgression were the points of departure” (<http://www.designboom.com/eng/archi/biennale.html>). The City of Berlin contributed something very different: just three cartographic images (scaled at 1:5000) headed *Stadtewende* (city change). The first was a figure–ground map of the urban fabric in 1940, a city substantially unchanged since the turn of the 20th century. The second, was a pocked and gaping figure–ground image of modern Berlin, after war damage, postwar urban renewal, highway schemes and proposals, and—of course—the huge linear void of the wall. The third was the town plan of 1999 in which Senator Peter Strieder and his building director, Hans Stimmann, set out the city’s strategy of long-term morphological repair. With existing fabric in grey, and new insertions in orange, the draft plan for inner Berlin—*Planwerk Innenstadt Berlin* (Burg, 1997)—showed how streets could be restored, lost frontage rebuilt, and the grid extended over voids such as the goods yards of the old Hauptbahnhof, the grass verges at the Alexanderplatz end of the Karlmarxallee, and along the projected motorway route to the south of An Der Uranie Strasse. The exhibit explained how infill and densification would rebuild streets, squares, and quarters, and join the city together again (Burg, 1997).

The Berlin plan responded to an acute regulatory problem. The city was suddenly no longer on a periphery. German unification and the imminent prospect of an eastward enlargement of the European Union had stoked a speculative boom along the voids of the former Berlin Wall. Corporate developers had recruited a galaxy of star architects to create their signature buildings in the emerging world city. The planning systems of the two former administrations were incompatible and neither was designed to handle such demand pressure. The wall had gone but the ‘wall in the head’ between Osis (easterners) and Wessis (westerners) remained. The outflow of retailing and residents to new suburbs beyond the city boundary was accelerating.

A simple strategic concept was needed and the city had one ready to hand in the recent and widely acclaimed experiment of IBA-Berlin. Kleihues’s philosophy of ‘critical reconstruction’ was applied first to a pilot in the Friedrichstadt sector then across the inner city. Stimmann took the 1940 figure–ground map from the archive, marked in yellow the tissue that had been lost, and aimed to offer automatic building consent within the yellow envelope.

“Critical Reconstruction methods are applied to expose traces of historical development patterns in the downtown area. Modern and postwar urban development projects are valued as they add layers to this historic base, and so altogether a significant inner-city structure is created for Berlin of public streets spaces and squares. This redeveloped structure thus does not disown any phase of Berlin’s development history” (Süchting and Weiss, 2001, page 62).

Simple morphological rules were set in place to define block structure, set height and capacity, and ensure a mix of activity (no less than 20% residential). The design code encouraged a background architecture of street frontage rather than freestanding forms—*Bauwerk als Textur* (building as texture) rather than *Bauwerk als Objekt* (building as object). Shifting from a car-based to a sustainable transport strategy, the plan contained radical proposals to reclaim highway frontage and road space. It also encouraged small-scale densification and infill and a revival of narrow-lot townhouse construction.

Berlin has been Europe’s most ambitious and consistent public realm project (*Architectural Review* 1999). Rossi was involved from the outset till his death in 2002 and is described by Stimmann as “the godfather of our strategy” (personal communication,

25 November 1999). The plan contains a minisummary of Rossi's *The Architecture of the City*:

“Modern urban design in the twentieth century sought to dissolve the city, leading it to deny the city as a cultural form which had evolved historically, and as a place of collective memory. Today our treatment of the city as an essential manifestation of life is determined not by the model of *tabula rasa* which modernism used to sacrifice existing substance and make way for the new, but by dialogue with the features of place and memory” (Burg, 1997, page 19).

The plan spells out in very explicit terms its aspiration to give Berliners an identity-giving image or *identitätsstiftenden Gesamtbild*, not through architectural iconography but by remaking a joined-up figure–ground labyrinth—a medium for shared ownership of the city through everyday encounter (Kündiger, 1997). Supported by innovative forms of public participation at neighbourhood level (Schwedler, 2001), the plan can be read as an extremely literal, physical response to Jürgen Habermas's plea for a decentred and porous public realm in the spirit of Benjamin and Arendt (Habermas, 1998).

But it has not worked out that way. Many things have gone wrong with the Berlin experiment (Gittis, 2002; Hain, 2001; Ladd, 1997; Luescher, 2002; Oswalt, 2000). Political control of the city has been subject to fluctuating coalitions of Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, and Greens, and Berlin élites have tended to use physical reconstruction as the marker to define their differences. There has been interference from the federal level and obstruction from the local boroughs or *Bezirke*. State-owned property assets in East Berlin were sold off with excessive haste to developers and speculators in large parcels in contradiction to the plan. Proposals to transform wide-verged highways into boulevards roused an improbable alliance of the motoring lobby (loss of road space) with the Greens (loss of green space). The planners underestimated the attachment of East Berliners to the grassed areas of open-plan estates. Whereas the plan looks to a joined-up figure–ground as a basis of identity, many Berliners base their tactics of everyday living on the spaces of discontinuity (Cupers and Miessen, 2002). The city's still-vibrant counterculture defended the voids and gaps in the figure–ground maps as the squatters of the 1960s had defended Kreuzberg from the urban motorway. By the eradication of the Berlin Wall and the entire collective memory of spatial organisation of the dual city, the plan became “a declaration of war” (Hain, 2001).

The city made a strategic error in going beyond the minimum morphological controls needed to rebuild a street grid. Its plan extended into the minefield of architectural style, setting aesthetic guidelines for new construction—stone facades with vertical oblong windows and a set ratio of stone to glass. Mayor Eberhard Diepgen nostalgically evoked students and visitors at street cafés in urban quarters with “the character and charm of a cityscape like those we know from old black and white photographs” (Ladd, 1997). There was broad support for a strategy of critical reconstruction but not for a neohistoricist design regime, particularly when it was coupled with wilful demolitions of witty and well-loved modernist designs such as Ulrich Müther's ‘Ahornblatt’ (1973) on Leipziger Strasse, and the Technical University of Berlin Architecture School by Hans Scharoun (1968) on Ernst-Reuter-Platz. Imposition of the architecture of an ersatz 19th-century stone city—*das steinerne Berlin*—was indefensible in art-historical terms, it discouraged experimental materials and environmentally friendly design, and (unlike the parallel experiments in Barcelona, Amsterdam, and elsewhere) it opened up a vicious ideological trap, pitching Stimman into acrimonious disputes with the cream of the international design profession, such as the encounter reported by Giovannini (1998, page 53):

“Johnson: What you need is a symbol

Stimman: We need volumes, not symbols.”

No city can win simultaneous public arguments with Philip Johnson, Frank Gehry, Richard Rogers, Daniel Libeskind, Helmut Jahn, and Jean Nouvel—the one thing star architects know about is opinion forming. Adverse coverage of Berlin's policies made the city authorities draw into their shell and become overdependent on a clique of trusted architects, none of them modernists and none from the former German Democratic Republic (Giovannini, 1998). Despite its innovative emphasis on grassroots participation, where IBA had been a dialogue, the *Planwerk Innenstadt Berlin* became a monologue (Kündiger 1997; Luescher, 2002).

Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard wrote very beautifully that they wanted planners to awaken 'the ghosts of the city' by working with the narratives of everyday lives (1994, page 204). That was really the idea behind critical reconstruction of Berlin. But in the process other spirits were roused—the ghosts we met at the start of the paper (Ladd, 1997). Critical reconstruction in Berlin stands condemned while the linked and essentially similar IBA-inspired *urbanismo urbano* (urban urbanism) of Barcelona wins the RIBA Gold Medal (Hebbert, 2004). Comedy Street achievements of a serviceable reconstruction which even Koolhaas has to admit works well (2003), have been overshadowed by Tragedy Street controversy over nostalgia, commemoration, and denial.

Conclusion

Human memory is spatial. The shaping of space is an instrument for the shaping of memory. A shared space—such as a street—can be a locus of collective memory in a double sense. It can express group identity from above, through architectural order, monuments and symbols, commemorative sites, street names, civic spaces, and historic conservation; and it can express the accumulation of memories from below, through the physical and associative traces left by interweaving patterns of everyday life. In practice the two types are inseparable—national commemoration in street and pub names is woven into the soap operas of everyday life, private lives are played out in the rhetorical spaces of public symbolism. But the distinction between them becomes more important as the conventional tropes of collective memory lose their grip on postmodern consciousness. That is why Christine Boyer set out in *The City of Collective Memory* (1996) to discover the basis of a public realm for a fractured and pluralist society, one that allows "the play of oppositions, the existence of randomness, disturbances, dispersions and accidents" (page 68). The search is unsuccessful. After almost 500 pages she finds only decline, numbness, and blasé indifference. The public realm has either vanished into the privatised, inward-turned spaces of condominiums and shopping malls, or become dissipated into the fragmented virtual worlds of television, film, and cyberspace: "an unbridgeable reality gulf divides and separates the fablelike quality of the forgotten city from the space of electronic transmissions" (page 493).

One way towards a less pessimistic conclusion would be through the hypothesis that managed shopping centres, though legally private, may provide an environment as 'public' in use as a conventional street or square (Jackson, 1998). Another approach—the one taken by this paper—sees the open, interconnected spaces of street networks not as something fablelike or forgotten but as a going concern, disrupted but repairable. In the past two decades European cities have experimented extensively in recovery and extension of the public realm. Berlin has played a leading role, alongside Barcelona, Paris, Birmingham, and Amsterdam. Figure-ground technique and morphological design have proved their worth. Street-based urbanism is being widely practised at every scale from mixed-use infill development to the remodelling of freeways into urban boulevards. These experiments require political courage because they challenge the vested interests of the highways and automobile and retail industries, and impose unaccustomed constraints on the creative freedoms of the architect and the commercial

horizons of the property developer. Far from being driven by appeal to nostalgia the agenda responds to pressing economic and environmental demands, and to the need of heterogeneous societies for a public realm which is legible, trusted, and well-trieed. Repairing the physical fabric of a public realm does not in itself ensure trust or sharing but where other conditions are met—which may or may not be the case in Berlin—it helps those relationships to become, in the words of Ken Worpole and Liz Greenhalgh (1999, page 30), a collective memory “embodied in bricks and mortar, carved out in air and space.”

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