

This paper is the culmination of a project that I conducted as result of the award of the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship for 2006. The project's focus was an investigation of the development of recent architecture in Central and Eastern Europe in light of the social, political and economic changes that occurred after the dissolution of the Communist Bloc. It was my understanding, before beginning the project, that architects responded to these changes; and that the changes produced the kind of cultural climate in which the role of architecture in contributing to questions of identity was seriously considered.

The project centred on an analysis of recent architecture in Moscow, Prague and Berlin. These three cities have seen the greatest amount of development in the former Communist Bloc and, in the context of this study, were an appropriate choice. The project covered the work of both domestic and international architects and involved first-hand experience of most buildings. I aimed at discovering which influences and traditions had motivated the architects and which external forces impacted on their work. In reporting the outcomes of the project, the buildings are discussed within the context of the broader architectural debates in the respective cities. Finally, I endeavoured to draw links between these architectural works and the role they have played in contributing to the creation of new civic, cultural, national and political identities.

I commenced general reading for the scholarship in February, and this included several books on modern German, Central European and Russian history and culture. Though ultimately not of great use to the project, I nonetheless found these books to be worthwhile in aiding my understanding of the countries that I visited. My travels began in Moscow in late May and ended in Frankfurt at the beginning of August. From Moscow I travelled to St Petersburg and then the Baltic states. This was followed by Ukraine, Vienna and Prague. I concluded my trip by spending several weeks visiting Dresden, Leipzig, Cologne and Berlin. As most of the projects that I discuss are public buildings in urban areas I was able to visit and photograph them. Occasionally, however, I was prevented from seeing some key projects as they were inaccessible, either because they were private homes and commercial premises or were in outlying areas. A large portion of time in each city was spent walking around and finding out about the different neighbourhoods; when I came across something that I thought was unique or interesting I would photograph it. A lot of these small elements actually went a long way in shaping my impression of the city but are not crucial to the project and haven't been included.

Both Prague and Berlin have highly informative, public access centres for architecture and I visited both while travelling. The Centre for Central European Architecture in Prague is a small organization devoted to the advancement of contemporary Czech architecture. Unfortunately, the centre was partly closed for the summer holidays but the staff was able to provide me with access to their journal library and information about some of their recent exhibitions. The Deutsches Architektur Zentrum in Berlin held an exhibition called "Emerging Identities – East!" early last year. The exhibition sought to engage in a cultural dialogue with Germany's eastern neighbours through the

prism of contemporary architecture. The catalogue to the exhibition has proved invaluable in understanding the direction that is being taken by young architects in Central and Eastern Europe.

After my return I began more specific research on the contemporary architectural debates and the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture in the cities I visited. I also read reviews and critiques of the particular buildings which I saw. Surprisingly, Russia had the most accessible, bi-lingual, academic journal, *Project Russia*, and this was the source of a great deal of information. Both Germany and the Czech Republic were lacking in this area, though the German *Arch++* is reputedly very good but seemingly unavailable in Australian university libraries. The contemporary architecture of these two countries has, however, been the subject of several recent books. The writing of this paper occupied the months of October and November.

In pursuing this investigation I wanted to become familiar with the direction that architectural discourse had taken in Central and Eastern Europe. This was part of an effort to be more generally aware of the different issues that influenced the creation of architecture in other countries. I was particularly interested in issues that went beyond the buildings themselves; issues such as general political pressure or the impact of public opinion. Ultimately, I hoped that understanding the position of architects and the role of architecture in other countries could lead me to a greater appreciation of Australian architecture and the questions that face our profession.

## MOSCOW

Modern Russian history has been characterised by struggles to determine the direction of Russian society, culture and politics. The 19<sup>th</sup> century debate between Westernisers and Slavophiles has been well-documented. The primary concern of the debate had been whether Russia belonged to a progressive and enlightened West and should seek to fulfil its destiny as a European state or whether it was a nation spiritually and culturally irreconcilable with Western traditions and should seek its identity in its past. It appears that 80 years of Communism only put that debate on hold and did not make it disappear.

“The question of Russian national identity..., how the country should develop, and what its relationship with Europe should be continued to bedevil Russian intellectuals...The extraordinary longevity and power of this cluster of problems – not exhausted to this day, most observers would say – suggest some of the anomalies of Russian culture, in which old problems seem to reappear...generation after generation. It is the view of some scholars that the powerful anti-Westernism of these ideal images of Russia has played an important role in the failure of ‘modern’ and democratic ideas to take root in Russian soil.”<sup>1</sup>

Cultural and political developments in Russia in the last 15 years follow a general pattern of Russian history – a struggle between conceptions of Russia as part of the West or conceptions of Russia as something “other”. The current predominance of the idea of Russia as being distinct from the West has led to a period of introspection on the part of Russian architects. It appears as though the messianism that is a part of Russian culture is shared by the architectural tradition in Russia<sup>2</sup>. Stylistically, contemporary Moscow architecture looks to itself for inspiration and rarely beyond the borders of Russia. Accordingly, identifying the influences of past styles on today’s architecture becomes a relatively easy exercise, though understanding why these influences have come to bear on contemporary work is more difficult. Of all the styles represented in 200 years of Moscow architecture that have been mined for inspiration by contemporary architects it is above all the Russian Style and the Stalinist Gothic that need to be explained.

The Russian Style emerged in the 1860s as part of the populist movement that made appeals to the national character and Russia’s cultural heritage. The style sought to respond with a greater degree of sensitivity to function and physical setting, goals seemingly ignored by classicism, by reviving traditional timber architecture in the form of the *izba*, or peasant house (Fig.1 Pogodin Izba, 1850s) and delicate wood carving<sup>3</sup>. Not confined to its interest in vernacular architecture, however, the Russian Style went on to address the

---

<sup>1</sup> Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea* in Abbott Gleason, “Ideological Structures”, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*

<sup>2</sup> Grigory Revzin, “‘Russian style’ and the professional tradition” in *Project Russia* No.3 p.24

<sup>3</sup> William Craft Brumfield, *A History of Russian Architecture*

forms and decorative motifs present in medieval Russian buildings, particularly churches and monasteries. The porch, peak and turret came to be applied to large, municipal projects such as the brick Historical Museum (Fig.2 Shervud 1875-83) on Red Square.



Figure 1, Pogodin Izba  
(source: *The History of Russian Architecture*)



Figure 2, Historical Museum (source: own photo)

Socialist Realism and the Stalinist Gothic made similar appeals to national character 100 years later. Equally retrospective, the aesthetic content of Socialist Realism was to be a “critical assimilation of heritage”<sup>4</sup>. Heritage was defined as late 19<sup>th</sup> century classicism – a style more conducive to monumentality and the representation of the achievements of Soviet society than the Constructivist style, which preceded it. The pinnacle of Socialist Realism came with the construction of the seven tower buildings (Fig.3 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Gelfreikh and Minkus, 1948-53) that encircle central Moscow. They came to known as examples of Stalinist Gothic and displayed a pastiche of motifs adapted from early 20<sup>th</sup> century Manhattan skyscrapers and classical elements of the unrealized Palace of the Soviets. To this day they are some of the largest buildings in Moscow and dominate the skyline in each direction. Despite being of dubious architectural merit, associated as they are with a despot and vastly regressive in their wasted spaces, the towers are symbolic of the city and are constantly referenced by Moscow architects.

It is interesting to observe that the aesthetics of Constructivism, which abroad is the most well-known and respected period of 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian architecture, is not readily applied by architects in Moscow. In fact, few Constructivist buildings have been restored and many are threatened with demolition. Bart Goldhoorn, editor of the journal *Project Russia*, speculates that the search for a style to represent contemporary Moscow begins at a “hunger for authenticity...[that] cannot be filled with contemporary buildings, but only with nostalgia. It is not so important what this nostalgia relates to: a wooden hut, pre-revolutionary palace, art-deco, art-nouveau or Stalinist empire”<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> William Craft Brumfield, *A History of Russian Architecture*, p.489

<sup>5</sup> Bart Goldhoorn, Editorial *Project Russia: Capitalist Realism* No.24 p.5



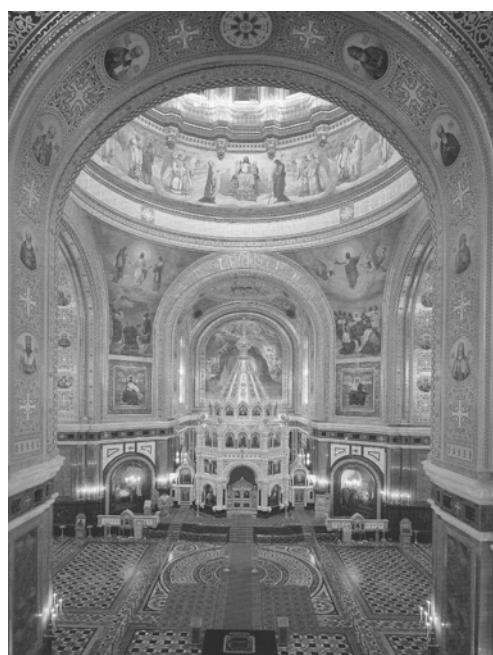
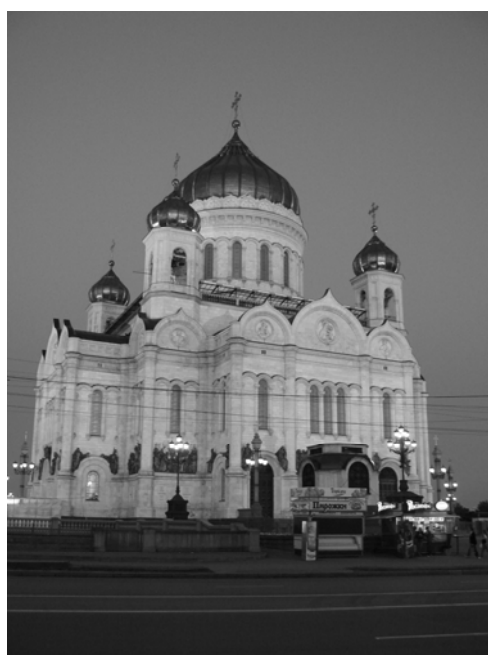
Figure 3, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (source: own photo)

In Moscow architecture in the 1990s, there was a definite preference on the part of clients, planning and development authorities and to some extent even architects for historicist designs that exhibited “contextuality”. The push to design buildings that were sensitive to context had begun in the late 80s when there was a popular dissident movement to preserve the historical centre of Moscow. The historicist rhetoric of the movement became politically significant after the demise of the Soviet Union and it was embraced in the planning policy of the new democratic city administration. The notion of “restoring historical fairness”, whereby the damage inflicted by Soviet planning would be “corrected”, became increasingly popular in the early 90s. The key proponent of this concept was the powerful Moscow mayor, Yuri Luzhkov.

Luzhkov envisaged several key projects in the centre of Moscow that would be built in time for the city’s 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. The projects he proposed, particularly the reconstruction of the Church of Christ the Saviour and the new shopping complex at Manezhnaya Square, provoked heated discussion and some protest amongst Muscovites. Their expense, their symbolism and their affect on significant public spaces within the city were all contentious issues. Luzhkov’s dismissal of these protests led to widespread disenchantment with the city administration and consequently the new democracy.

The original Church of Christ the Saviour was built on the banks of the Moskva River in close proximity to the Kremlin in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and was designed in the traditional Russian style. Its size and prominent position made it a target for the Communist campaign against churches and it was demolished in the early years of the regime to make way for the Palace of the Soviets. It is likely that the historical significance that the original church acquired on being demolished was more instrumental in plans to recreate it than its spiritual importance. The rebuilt Church of Christ the Saviour (Fig.4+5 Mosproekt-2, Studio 12, 1994-2000) is undoubtedly the single most significant building to have been constructed in Moscow since the fall of Communism. It is one of the largest and most expensive public projects to have been completed

and is remarkably well executed. Though it is too new and grandiose to have the aura of other Orthodox churches it succeeds in being a more true to life reconstruction than the Frauenkirche in Dresden, another recent reconstruction in the former Communist Bloc. The Church is also seen by many as symbolic of a renaissance in Russian church life, and with growing numbers of people returning to Russian Orthodoxy this view seems justified. Its detractors, however, say that the Church, which was promoted as a building to “unite us all”<sup>6</sup> was used as a smoke-screen for corrupt dealings within the city administration. It is bewildering to an observer from abroad that the new democratic state, which is secular, intent on building capitalism and deeply divided between the haves and have-nots, would choose to resurrect a church as a symbol of national unity. It appears almost as if the Church is meant as a sort of spiritual consolation prize for those that are missing out on Russia’s wealth.



Figures 4+5, Church of Christ the Saviour exterior and interior (source: own photo, *Project Russia* No.30)

The underground shopping and leisure centre at Manezhnaya Square (Fig.6 Mosproekt-2, Studio 11, 1993-7) is an example of the kind of projects, large commercial complexes, generally completed in Moscow in the 90s. The Square is one of the most prominent public areas in the city and plans to develop underground facilities in this location began in the mid-80s. It is striking that the complex, the most universally despised of the jubilee projects, is a direct embodiment of the contextual approach. It accommodates a token archaeological museum, borrows classicist elements from the surrounding buildings for its terraces and promenades, recreates a medieval chapel that stood in the vicinity and hints at the underground river in this location in a series of pools and fountains that feature statues of characters from Russian folklore. All these “contextual” elements struggle to mask what is in reality a pompous and kitsch shopping mall. The complex was envisaged completely underground in the 80s, but as a result of the *laissez-faire* conditions of the 90s

<sup>6</sup> Grigory Revzin, “‘Russian style’ and the professional tradition” in *Project Russia* No.3 p.24

it grew above ground. This changed the topography of the Square and effectively cut off direct access from Arbat Street, the main city thoroughfare to Alexandrovskii Gardens and the Kremlin.



Figure 6, Manezhnaya Square Shopping Complex exterior, Alexandrovskii Gardens to the right, (source: *Project Russia No.5*)

While historicist designs can be justified by appeals to “contextuality” on the part of historians and city administrators in the city centre, the appearance of the style in the suburbs and outside the city can have no such justification. The city administration is actively promoting the “Moscow style”, as it has come to be known, for all parts of the city. Clients, too, seem to prefer the historicism of the style, but it is difficult to know whether this is a genuine desire prompted by nostalgia for the past or a realization that their development is more likely to meet with approval from authorities. The architect is often left apprehensively following the lead of others and he or she perceives the Moscow style not as a necessary component of urban planning or as a search for cultural identity, but as an indistinct threat and intruding problem<sup>7</sup>. The style has popular manifestations, such as the neo-classicist or neo-Russian style, but is not limited to a period, place or ideology. Its definitions are so vague and it is so arbitrarily implemented by development authorities that it is less a style than an appeal to a style. Perhaps its nearest Australian equivalent is the demand of municipal councils for “streetscape character”.

The Moscow style is often criticized by the members of the profession and the general public for being tasteless. Some of the fiercest criticism is reserved for the Patriarch Apartment Building (Fig.7+8 SPAR Studio, 1997-2002). Its campy baroque combines spacious modern planning and contemporary

---

<sup>7</sup> Olga Kabanova, “New Moscow architecture in a compulsory search for cultural identity” *Project Russia No.3*, p.27?

construction technology with classicist décor, Stalinist Gothic massing, and a paraphrase of Tatlin's Monument to the Third Internationale on its roof. It is perhaps tasteless but it is also one of the more successful designs in the Moscow style in recent years, primarily because it avoids the two most common pitfalls associated with the style; it's not bland and it's not staggeringly disproportionate.



Figures 7+8, Patriarch Apartments, exterior and roof detail (source: *Project Russia No.24*, own photo)

Despite most architecture in the city continuing to exhibit elements of the Moscow style there have been some departures from this in the last 5 years. The tastes of Moscow's elite have slowly caught up with their counterparts in the Western world and this is beginning to be reflected in their preferences for a more modernist architecture. The contrast between the country houses and city apartments of wealthy Muscovites in the 90s and now is stark. The Moscow architects who work for such clients have become adept at imitating contemporary Swiss concrete architecture, Scandinavian timber architecture or the way the Dutch use brick. In the expensive, historic, inner-city residential area of Ostozhenka, projects like the Apartments on Borisoglebsky Lane (Fig.9 Ostozhenka Architects, 2003-7) are becoming more common. They respect the existing city block pattern and are of a comparable scale to the surrounding 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings but do not borrow stylistic cues from them. Instead the Borisoglebsky Lane Apartments are inspired by Konstantin Melnikov's House (Fig.10 Melnikov, 1927-9) – the facade replaces traditional windows with smaller diagonally reconstructed ones. This new modernist trend in residential Moscow architecture features heavily in Russian architecture journals but is so exclusive and has such a small market share that it is not representative of architecture in Moscow as a whole and cannot currently be considered as the future direction of Moscow architecture.





Figure 9, Borisoglebsky Apartments, exterior  
(source: *Project Russia No.44*)



Figure 10, Melnikov House, exterior  
(source: *A History of Russian Architecture*)

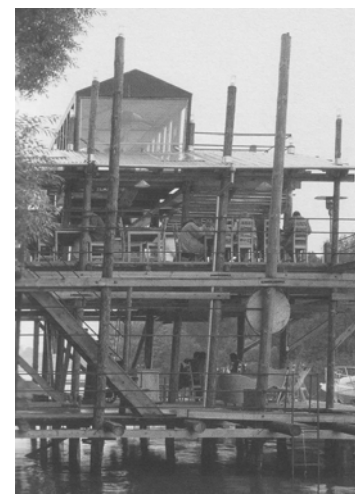
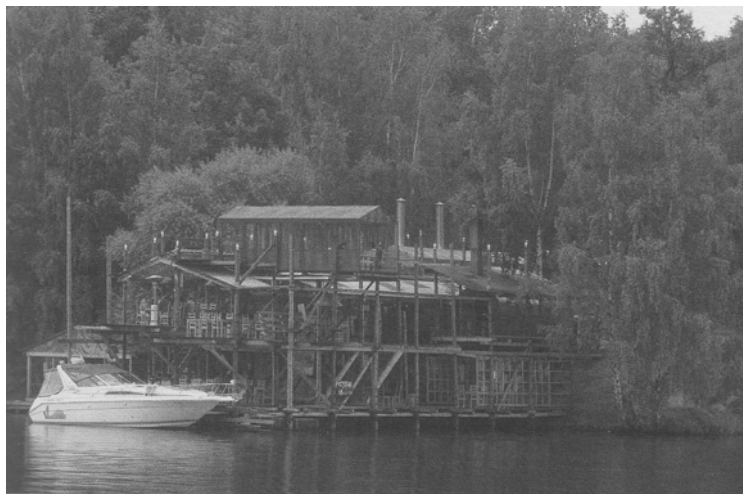
The aspiration to be the equal of the West in taste and refinement has led the same Russian elite that adopted a Western modernism for their private residences to adopt Western star architects for their larger projects. Norman Foster, Jean Nouvel, Zaha Hadid and Rem Koolhaas have all been drafted to create the city's next masterpiece. As yet none of the proposed projects have been completed and it is difficult to say what effect they will have on the architectural scene in Moscow. It is worth noting that, once again, it is not Moscow architects but others, namely Moscow clients, who are responsible for the stylistic shift that contemporary Moscow architecture is experiencing.

Few Russian architects are known internationally or could be conceived of as visionaries within the context of Russian architecture, but if there was such a figure it would be Alexander Brodsky. Brodsky was a leading member of the Paper Architecture movement in Russia in the 80s and his drawings and competition entries as part of the Paper Architects meditated on a nostalgia for the authenticity of old cities in a time overwhelmed by the monotony of Soviet architecture. His architecture is deeply conceptual, something not generally found in Russia, and exhibits a plasticity and approach to materials that is more reminiscent of visual art than architecture. This is perhaps best seen in works such as the Pavilion for Vodka Ceremonies (Fig.11+12 Brodsky, 2003), which uses timber windows salvaged from a 19<sup>th</sup> century factory to play on the modernist concept of a "glass box", and in the 95<sup>0</sup> Restaurant (Fig.13+14 Brodsky, 2000), constructed over a lake without proper plans and using rough materials to create a kind of timeless boathouse and quay. Brodsky is an architect who at first glance doesn't seem particularly influential; he only recently completed a small number of commissions, has no interest in stylistic trends, does not use a computer and is actually better known as an artist than an architect. Such an assessment would obscure the fact that most Russian critics and architects consider Brodsky's work as encapsulating an architecture

that is uniquely Russian<sup>8</sup>. Brodsky is conceptually uncompromising and resolutely follows his own aesthetic line. I believe that, regardless of what his architecture actually looks like, he is admired by the profession because in the Russian context at least, his approach to architecture is unique. In a time when most Russian architects would agree that historicism is *khaltura*<sup>9</sup>, or hack-work, but continue to build in the style, it must be refreshing to see a countryman carry on better work and be a true rallying point.



Figures 13+14, Pavilion for Vodka Ceremonies, exterior and interior (source: *Project Russia No.37*)



Figures 15+16, 95° Restaurant at the Bay of Joy (source: *Project Russia No.37*)

Perhaps to the credit of many architects it is worthwhile pointing out that the bureaucratic complications involved in developing in Russia mean that projects are rarely realized in the way they were envisaged. These complications range from land acquisition and planning procedures to interference in the design by various stakeholders and overall monopolization of the process by city authorities<sup>10</sup>. Hence, there is every possibility that through the profession runs

<sup>8</sup> Sergei Sitar, "The beginning of movement" *Project Russia No.26* p.94

<sup>9</sup> Bart Goldhoorn, "Sources and structure of Capitalist Realism" *Project Russia No.24* p.11

<sup>10</sup> James McAdam, "Urban regeneration in Moscow: economic development v. cultural heritage" *archXchange: Berlin and Moscow Cultural Identity through Architecture* p.23

an undercurrent of progressive thinking about contemporary Russian architecture that is simply stifled by external forces.

Geographically, Moscow is part of Europe, but culturally and politically it is very far removed. Where other former Communist countries have embraced democracy, in some cases become part of the European Union, and look towards a greater cultural dialogue with the West, Russia has done the opposite. Failing in its attempts to build democracy, Russia has abandoned it in favour of a more authoritarian system and the increasingly nationalistic cultural discourse concentrates on the glories of the country's past. To some degree these conditions are reflected in the contemporary architecture of Moscow. City administrators imagine a future Moscow that is a continuation of the Moscow of the past and promote a conservative, historicist architecture.

As I perceive it, the situation in contemporary Moscow architecture has few parallels. The Moscow style, by virtue of its very name is the embodiment of a contemporary architecture in that city. Architects, however, are not its chief proponents nor do they define the parameters of the style. Grigory Revzin goes some way to explaining this anomaly by pointing out that for contemporary Russian architects style is unimportant; it is their professionalism that they value most and this is seen in their ability to turn to any style<sup>11</sup>. For a western observer this seems like nonsense. The decision by the profession to retreat from a meaningful stylistic debate has handed control of the issue to politicians and bureaucrats and has consequently made architects almost completely beholden to authorities. The level of corruption evident in Russian bureaucracy means that if such a step is not outright damaging to the direction of contemporary architecture in Russia it is at the very least undermining the position of architects in Russian society.

---

<sup>11</sup> Grigory Revzin, "Scripts for Russian Historicism" *Project Russia* No.10 p.30

## PRAGUE

A popular thesis in Czech architectural discourse on the nature of Czech architecture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the concept of “austerity”. Detailed in Rostislav Šváchá’s book *Czech Architecture and its Austerity*, it introduces the idea that Czech architecture has for the most part reflected European trends but succeeds in adding to them a layer of home-grown common sense. The resulting architecture is if often less exhibitionist and more heavy-handed than in the West but prides itself on adhering to a set of socially responsible values. The rhetoric used by prominent architects and critics in the Czech Republic often revolves around ideals of “ordinariness”, “simplicity” and “lack of pretentiousness”<sup>12</sup>. In the course of explaining the background and origins of such thinking in his survey of 20<sup>th</sup> century Czech architecture, Šváchá hints that it is not only in this field where answers to the question of what Czech “austerity” is are to be found. Rather, that this is a concept that is inextricably linked with the social and political history of the Czech Republic.

It is perhaps the aesthetic and social, if not political, legacy of Czech Functionalism in the 1920s and 30s that is most prominent in contemporary Czech architecture. The conclusion of the First World War saw the creation of the new Czechoslovak Republic and the beginning of a lively debate about a national architectural style. The new state built many municipal buildings in the early 20s in a variety of styles, which included the popular pre-war Cubist style (Fig.17 Hodek Apartments in Vysehrad, Choccol 1913-4) and the merry, round-formed Rondocubisim (Fig.18 Palác Adria, Janák, 1922-5) that it engendered and that had its roots in folk art and architecture. The axis of the debate, however, leaned increasingly in the late 20s towards a conviction that architecture should reflect the political aims of the state and so be as democratic as possible. This did not depend so much on a stylish representation of a new political form but rather on the ability of the entire population to have access to quality architecture<sup>13</sup>. The proponents of Functionalism in Czechoslovakia claimed that their methods of rationalization and standardization would soon lead to this outcome and their schemes concentrated above all else on collective and mass housing. In order to comply with new construction techniques and the socialist agenda of the movement’s leaders, Czech Functionalism (Fig.19 Private Clerk’s Union Building, Krejcar, 1930-1) argued for an extreme reduction of architectural form and was most closely associated with the Russian Constructivists.

The architectural debate in the Czech Republic throughout the 1990s was dominated to a large extent by associates and students of SIAL. This was an association of architects and engineers that had formed in the late 60s and was dedicated to keeping alive the creative spirit in Czech architecture in the face of mass-produced Soviet design. SIAL made a lasting contribution to contemporary Czech architecture by founding Školka SIAL, an informal postgraduate school that helped shape the ideas of some of the today’s leading Czech architects and teachers of architecture.

---

<sup>12</sup> Rostislav Šváchá *Czech Architecture and its Austerity: Fifty Buildings 1989-2004* p.263

<sup>13</sup> Šváchá p.38



Figure 17, Hodek Apartments, exterior  
(source: www.archiweb.cz)



Figure 18, Palác Adria, detail  
(source: own photo)



Figure 19, Union Building, exterior  
(source: www.archiweb.cz)

Two former SIAL associates, Emil Přikryl and Josef Pleskot, both completed projects in the 90s that were widely acclaimed for their sensitive approach to context and respect for vernacular architecture. The two projects were lauded for being less built works than simple interventions. Pleskot's pathway through Deer Moat (Fig.20 Pleskot 1996-2002) is particularly interesting as it is situated adjacent to Prague Castle and was one of a series of projects initiated by President Václav Havel in the mid-90s to open up the grounds and interiors of the Castle. This was an important step for the new democratic government as the Castle had always been considered the heart of Czech history but had been closed to the public under the former regime. The Deer Moat is a deep, wooded valley that was divided by an embankment and bridge in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The brief was to connect the divided moat and to provide access through the valley. Pleskot's solution was a series of meandering paths, footbridges and a tunnel. The tunnel is elliptical in section and, as the architect intended, is reminiscent of crack in a rock. It is faced with a smooth, russet-coloured brick set vertically. This prompted several critics to compare it with the brickwork found in Josef Plecnik's tunnel and staircase additions (Fig.21 Castle Stair, Plecnik, 1920s) to Prague Castle in the 20s for then president, T.G. Masaryk<sup>14</sup>. Despite Pleskot's path and tunnel being a seemingly minor project, the symbolism of the work and it's proximity to the Castle elevate it to the status of one of the defining works of contemporary Czech architecture.

<sup>14</sup> Švácha p.184

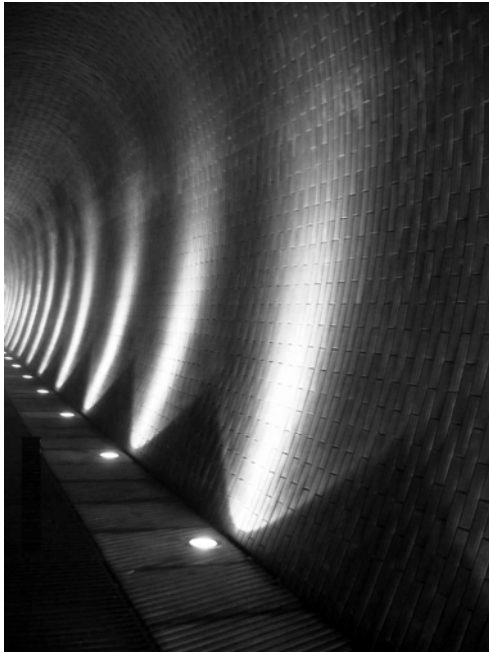


Figure 20, Deer Moat Tunnel (source: own photo)



Figure 21, Castle Staircase (source: one photo)

Emil Přikryl designed a small extension for the entrance of the Benedikt Rejt Gallery (Fig.22 Přikryl 1993-8) in the town of Louny. The gallery specializes in abstract Czech and Minimalist art and has been occupying an 18<sup>th</sup> century brewery building. The architect claims that he did “virtually nothing” to the gallery itself, but attempted to discover the logic of previous work carried out on the building from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and “endeavoured to enhance the geometry already inherent in the building.”<sup>15</sup> The interior was stripped bare and painted and the extension, which included a lift core, was almost entirely exposed poured concrete construction. Přikryl’s gallery, though not in Prague, was immensely influential within the Czech profession. It set a precedent as one of the first projects by a Czech architect after the Velvet Revolution, in which a heritage building was renovated and restored with such attention to detail and context and without reverting to the use of a historicist canon.



Figure 22, Benedikt Rejt Gallery, interior showing life core (source: [www.archiweb.cz](http://www.archiweb.cz))

<sup>15</sup> Švácha p.40

The Prague architect, critic and teacher Alena Šrámková, another SIAL associate, has since the late 1970s proposed that architects should design according to stringent ethical and moral values and seek to educate society through architecture that is pure, simple and timeless. This architecture would steer clear of ostentatious forms or a conspicuous “idea” and be characterized by words such as “sobriety” and “humility”<sup>16</sup>. Šrámková’s approach has obvious associations with the socially motivated programme of the Czech Functionalists. The main difference would lie in the aesthetic content of this new post-Functionalism, which concentrates less on a standardized industrial product than on a kind of reserved eternal form.

This is perhaps best seen in one of Šrámková’s few realised projects, the Tower for a Scientist in the village of Košík (Fig.23 Šrámková 1993-4). The brief called for an extension to the house of a prominent Czech mathematician. Šrámková’s tower, critics have noted, references other towers for academics, such as Einstein’s tower. The reference maybe merely nominal as the addition is a simple square-planned, three-storey, timber-framed and clad building. It has a window in the middle of each façade on every floor, a spiral stair in the corner and a hip roof with an aerial on top of it. The Tower for a Scientist is the embodiment of Šrámková’s philosophy that good architecture may be ordinary and that the idea of a “house with windows” is sufficient<sup>17</sup>.



Figure 23, Tower for a Scientist, exterior (source: [www.alenasramkova.com](http://www.alenasramkova.com))

Two young architects that Šrámková worked with in SIAL in the 80s went on to form ADNS architectural studio and in the mid 90s completed an office building in central Prague. The ground plan of the OMG Building (Fig.24+25 ADNS, 1993-4) was rational and modular and this was carried through to the façade, which was flat and featured punched horizontal windows. The façade was finished in a high-gloss black stone facing. The architects attempted to create

<sup>16</sup> Švácha p.19

<sup>17</sup> Švácha p.32



a universal building that in one respect followed up on the planning tradition of Czech Functionalism, and in another was attracted to Šrámková's ideas of simplicity and timelessness in building.



Figure 24, OMG Building, exterior  
(source: *Architectural Design: Beyond the Revolution*)



Figure 25, OMG Building, staircase detail  
(source: *Architectural Design: Beyond the Revolution*)

Following the Velvet Revolution there was a great deal of interest from foreign architects in the future of building in Prague. Several conferences and urban planning workshops were organised in the early 90s and were well attended by famous western architects. Of the few works completed by a foreign architects in the Czech Republic in the 90s, Frank Gehry and Vlado Milunic's Dancing Building (Fig.26 Gehry+Milunic, 1993-7) on a prominent site on the Vlatava River embankment is the most well-known and one of the most controversial. The collaboration between Gehry as design architect and Milunic as planning architect was symptomatic of a situation prevalent in Eastern European architecture throughout the 90s. Foreign investors would regularly undervalue the skills of even top local architects (to the extent that they would often be used only to acquire the necessary approvals) and would insist on importing Western talent to design the projects. There was often a great deal of animosity in such cases, though the Gehry/Milunic partnership was fairly unproblematic. The building is generally admired by the Czech profession, though its detractors view it through the prism on Šrámková's rhetoric and maintain that it is less a building and more an urban sculpture. The social dimension of Gehry and Milunic's undertaking can not be ignored, however, as the building evoked a very warm reaction from the wider community. Up until the construction of the Dancing Building the public had remained largely ignorant of the role that architects could play. The Dancing Building ushered in a new era in contemporary Czech culture in which architecture became a "public topic".





Figure 26, The Dancing Building, looking down embankment (source: own photo)

One of the most interesting episodes in Czech architecture in the 90s was the to and fro discussion about the design of a new parliament building. In the context of a conservative political environment, it is perhaps not so surprising that there was little interest on the part of politicians to engage with the profession on the topic. The government did in fact abandon their old premises, an admired Soviet-era building, because it was deemed to be ideologically unsuitable to remain and moved into a series of baroque palaces beneath Prague Castle. For the profession this seemed to be an opportunity lost, as at the time the focus of all Europe was on developments in Berlin. Many architects were left thinking that the government, and particularly city officials, were not interested in championing contemporary architecture and would rather focus their attention on occupying existing heritage buildings in the city. The situation led Emil Příklad to conclude in 1996 “that the absence of interest on the part of Czech democratic institutions in an adequate architectural expression was due to a lack of civic awareness.”<sup>18</sup>

The last several years have seen a great deal of focus on contemporary Western European architecture in the Czech Republic. This is mainly due to the new, younger generation of architects that have studied and often worked in countries throughout the European Union. The projects presented in the Czech Architecture yearbooks are increasingly unrecognisable as specifically “Czech” or even as engaging to a great degree with a Czech architecture. The critic, Matúš Dulla, has pointed out that cultural boundaries in contemporary Europe are so fluid that it is difficult to pinpoint architectural trends with any great accuracy as belonging to one country or another. He contends that the spare, reduced, “austere” style that is still prevalent in Czech architecture can

---

<sup>18</sup> Švácha p.22

be seen as part of a general European phenomenon<sup>19</sup>. If young architects are not driven by a desire to set the boundaries of a Czech architecture any more, they are driven by a desire for “refined simplicity and effectiveness”<sup>20</sup>. They seek to gain prestige through the quality of their work, seemingly regardless of its origins and influences, and not through the polemics or social agendas of their predecessors.

Prague I found to be a very difficult city to pin down. It has a remarkable old town centre of which the Czech people are justifiably proud. However, this well preserved and now well restored area of the city is like an island floating in amongst greater Prague. The suburbs that surround the city centre are very ordinary and contain typical pre-fab apartment buildings, have dirty streets and derelict street furniture. In the greenfield areas on the outskirts of the city, one comes across the kitsch, new “cottedges” that city dwellers are building in order to escape the boxiness of their apartments. So much of that side of Prague is completely ignored by the Czech architectural profession. They are not alone, however, the overwhelming emphasis placed on the heritage buildings in the old town centre by everyone from tourism operators, to planning departments, local politicians and the average man on the street seems to me to be needlessly exclusive. Very few projects that I came across engaged with the suburban setting. And though the suburbs are ugly and individual projects are perhaps justified in attempting to shut them out or ignore them completely, I think that there is a great potential to work within the suburban context. Questions of what is to be done with suburban housing estates and with the left-over spaces in and around these housing estates are not being asked in the Czech profession. In not seeking to counter or present alternatives to the images of Prague as quaint, medieval city, I think Czechs might run the risk of having it one day passed over as “just another quaint, medieval city.”

Czech architecture may not have any internationally recognised stars and has very few projects that are known outside of the Czech Republic. I believe that the reason for this is a combination of the types of projects completed in this country, most often unglamorous renovations to heritage buildings and humble houses in the countryside, and the reticent and “austere”, to borrow from Švábka, ethical and aesthetic direction that Czech architecture adopts. The Czech profession does, however, maintain contact with top Western firms and engages more readily and consistently with current architectural discourses in the West than other former Soviet countries<sup>21</sup>. I consider contemporary Czech architecture as having succeeded in raising its standard to that of other Western European countries. This is seen not only in the quality of its output but also in the seeming lack of corruption in planning and development offices and in the way that good architecture is beginning to be discussed and encouraged by the wider community.

---

<sup>19</sup> Matúš Dulla in Petr Kratochvíl, “Contact with Europe without Presentation and Display” *Česká architektura – Czech Architecture 2005-2006* p.143

<sup>20</sup> Igor Kovačević, Yvette Vašourková “Young Czech Architecture – A Snapshot” *Emerging Identities – East!* p.116

<sup>21</sup> Matúš Dulla in Petr Kratochvíl, “Contact with Europe without Presentation and Display” *Česká architektura – Czech Architecture 2005-2006* p.142

## BERLIN

It is difficult to talk about contemporary Berlin architecture as being characteristic of German architecture in the last 15 years. Despite the Berlin debate being at the forefront of German architectural media in the 90s the architectural profession in Germany as a whole, unlike that in Russia and the Czech Republic, is not dominated by the discourse of the capital. The specific conditions found in Berlin in the 90s were not replicated elsewhere in the country. The solutions that these conditions produced stand more as a testament to the search for an identity for a reunified Berlin than of a reunified Germany. It is also worth noting that several different debates in architecture occurred in Berlin in the 90s. The central debate, which was led by planning authorities and city administrators, concerned the form that the physical reunification of Berlin should take and the future of commercial development in the old city centre. This debate was accompanied by two others, the first about an appropriate architecture for new government buildings and the second about the role that history and memory play in the creation of architectural and urban form.

To understand the development of architecture in Berlin in the 90s certain political developments in Germany after reunification have to be considered. Before the wall came down West Berlin was a heavily subsidised and somewhat marginal outpost of the FRG, well known for its alternative political culture and building squatter scene. As the capital of the GDR, East Berlin held slightly more prestige but was by no means a world city. The fall of the wall in 1989 made Berlin the symbol of German reunification but it was the decision to move the seat of government from Bonn to Berlin in 1991 that catapulted the city into a context of national, if not international, importance. The architecture of the new capital assumed appreciably greater political significance. To knit the city together and prepare it for its role as capital, politicians required future buildings in Berlin to exhibit an architecture of national stature and discipline-inducing monumentality<sup>22</sup>. On top of political concerns about how the new capital should look there were growing concerns about regulating the interest of private investors in prime inner-city real estate. This was either land which had originally been occupied by the Wall or was adjacent to it and had during the division been considered unappealing. The decision was made that a normative overall concept must be developed for Berlin's transformation.

The basis for such a concept was found in the discourse of West Berlin planning and architecture professions in the 70s and 80s, which focused on conservative urban renewal. Post-war *tabula rasa* modernist planning was rejected in favour of a model of "European cities", greatly influenced by Aldo Rossi, which appreciated the existing traditional typologies of urban architecture – the grid pattern of streets and city blocks, sequence of private courtyards and public squares and the solid and void of lot structures. This model became known as "critical reconstruction" and aimed at a dialogue between modernism and tradition in order to achieve a balance between past

---

<sup>22</sup> Andreas Ruby, "The Eternal Return of the Void" *New German Architecture A Reflexive Modernism* p.296

and present elements in the city. Critical reconstruction was put into practice in the variety of projects that were undertaken as part of the International Building Exposition (IBA) in West Berlin in the 80s. The goal of the IBA was to reinvigorate certain central areas of the city that had been relegated to the periphery by the Wall by making them attractive areas to live and work. Internationally recognized architects undertook projects that filled the empty spaces left by war and piece-meal development in parts of the city. The projects were generally modern, small-scale, historically aware insertions into the existing urban fabric.

In the light of epoch-making changes in Berlin after 1989, it seems anachronistic that critical reconstruction should have become the dominant guiding concept in a new urban development strategy. The conservative political environment, however, favoured such planning guidelines and they were adopted on a city-wide scale. The goal was the restoration of the old centre of Berlin as it had been before the damage of the war and division. This gave preference to classicist Prussian planning and the typical courtyard configuration of buildings constructed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It ignored the contribution of post-war building and particularly sought to “plan over” the area formerly occupied by the Wall. The decision to take pre-war Berlin as a precedent for reconstruction was heavily debated in professional circles in the 90s and the urban expression of the city’s history became a focal point of the search for a new identity after reunification.

The master planning competition for Potsdamer Platz and adjoining Leipziger Platz in the early 90s sparked controversy as it was one of the first occasions on which the planning of a reunified Berlin was discussed in a public arena. The winning proposal accepted the version of Berlin’s architectural history that was being promoted by the city administration and proposals that refused to acknowledge this direction were discreetly but resolutely passed over. The competition effectively divided the architectural profession in Berlin into two groups; one believed in the continuation of contextual, conservative urban renewal strategies for the city and the other sought more radical and innovative solutions to the unprecedented urban planning challenges that faced Berlin.



Figure 27, Potsdamer Platz, looking from station  
(source: own photo)

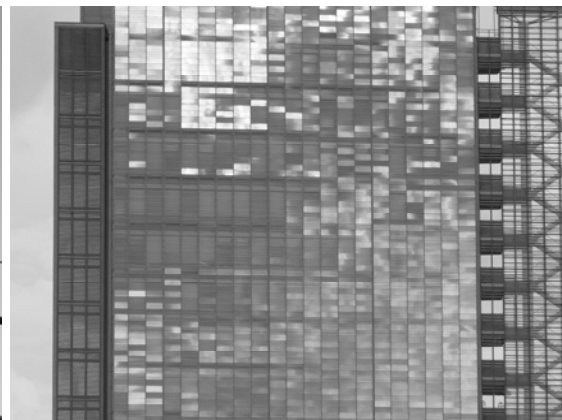


Figure 28, Renzo Piano Building, detail  
(source: own photo)

Before reunification the Wall had run through Potsdamer Platz and nothing remained of its popular cafes and theatres, its hotels or the two train stations that had made the area such a hub during the Weimar Republic. The brief for the competition proposed to turn Potsdamer Platz into a centre for business and leisure and internationally renowned architects were invited to develop different sites. Over a period of several years Potsdamer Platz (Fig.27-31 various) began to resemble a small American “downtown”; it acquired a series of office high-rises, shopping arcades, theatres and cinemas. Stylistically, the ensemble of buildings is varied. There is the brick DaimlerChrysler Building by Hans Kollhoff, reminiscent of early 20<sup>th</sup> century New York skyscrapers, and the adjacent high-tech Sony Centre designed by Helmut Jahn, which has a large tensile roof over its large, internal “public square”. The overwhelming impression from walking around Potsdamer Platz is that it is empty and if the goal of planning departments had been to recreate the vibrant atmosphere of the area in the 20s, then it has failed. Unfortunately, the commercial nature and the atrium design of most buildings on the site internalize the urban energy that would have been better exercised in the surrounding streets<sup>23</sup>. The few residential developments that were incorporated into the site do not provide enough after-hours activity to make the area resemble either its former self or even surrounding suburbs. The general criticism is that too much happened too fast and that the area wasn’t allowed to develop organically<sup>24</sup>. Potsdamer Platz appears to add little to the character of Berlin and most Berliners view it simply as an international showpiece.



Figure 29, DaimlerChrysler Building  
(source: own photo)



Figure 30, Façade detail  
(source: own photo)



Figure 31, DaimlerChrysler and Sony Centre, detail (source: own photo)

New development in the old centre around Friedrichstrasse and Pariser Platz is undoubtedly representative of the kind of image and identity for the city which planning authorities and politicians wished to construct. The general reconstruction of the city has not inspired a great deal of interest in the wider community, rather it has been a debate confined for the most part to professional circles. It is, therefore, difficult to ascertain whether the results are a valid reflection of the views of the wider community. The redeveloped old centre is remarkably empty and exhibits an unrelenting uniformity. New

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Giovannini, “Berlin’s New Walls” *Architecture* v.87 n.9 p.51

<sup>24</sup> Ulf Meyer, “City Focus – Berlin: Confidence Building” *World Architecture* 84 p.49

developments were subject to overly prescriptive guidelines, forcing them to conform to the traditional courtyard block structure of the area, have historically consistent cornice heights and comply with a particular ratio of glass to stone in the façade. In addition, most city blocks were consolidated for development by a single owner and a single architect and this not only affected the traditional stylistic mix of facades but also compromised the hybrid urban vitality that had been so typical of the area at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the architect Matthias Sauerbruch of the Berlin firm Sauerbruch Hutton, in focusing on only certain aspect of historical Berlin, the planning authorities had subsumed the architecture of the individual to the harmony of the whole<sup>25</sup>.

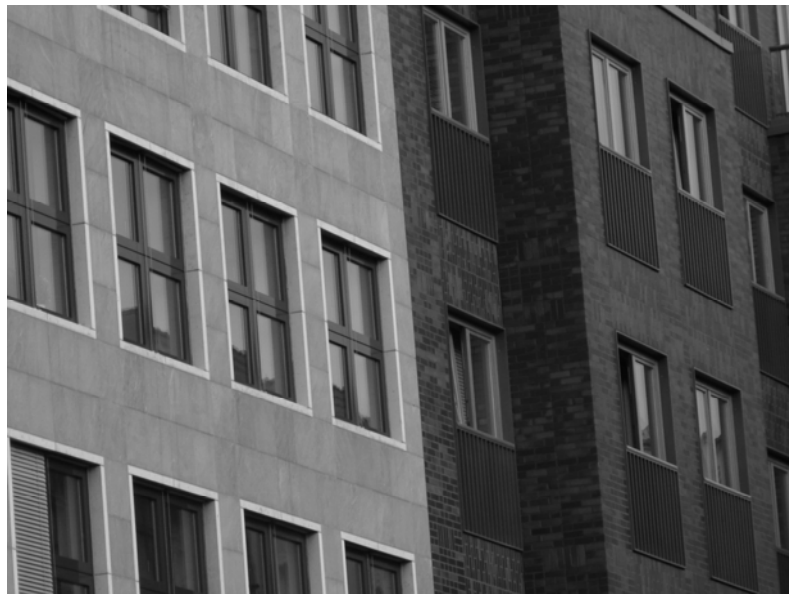


Figure 32, Facades of new buildings in old city centre (source: own photo)

This is perhaps nowhere as apparent as in Frank Gehry's design for the DZ Bank Building (Fig.33+34 Gehry, 1995-2001), which occupies an infill parcel on Pariser Platz. Of all the city's squares this is perhaps the most historically significant as it lies at the end of the processional Unter den Linden and is crowned by the Brandenburg Gate. Extremely strict guidelines were put in place for development around the square and the bank's exterior was designed with a self-effacing, gridded limestone façade. It is only in the atrium, which is occupied by a large sculptural form that contains a conference room that Gehry's brand-name architecture comes on display. "The position of the piece is emblematic of the city's cautious attitude to architectural freedom."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Matthias Sauerbruch in James S. Russell "The New Berlin" *Architectural Record* v.190 n.3 p.79

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Giovannini, "Berlin's New Walls" *Architecture* v.87 n.9 p.50



Figure 33, DZ Bank, Pariser Platz facade adjoining new American Embassy (source: own photo)



Figure 34, DZ Bank, rear, looking from Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe (source: own photo)

The development of Potsdamer Platz and commercial precincts around Freidrichstrasse were largely overshadowed in the sphere of public discussion by the renovation of the Reichstag (Fig.35+36 Foster, 1995-9). The building had a chequered history, often serving as an emblem of the instability of German democracy. Damaged during the war, it lay unoccupied just west of the wall during the division. After reunification it was not immediately certain that the building would be used to house national parliament and in the early 90s not much attention was paid to the site. The popularity of the wrapped Reichstag project by Christo and Jeanne-Claude in 1995 refocused public attention on the future of the building. Norman Foster's competition winning design was explicit about on the need to create an inherently democratic space. This entailed transforming an imposing, monumental civic building into one in which was more physically transparent and where the visiting public could observe the proceedings of democratic government. The most visually symbolic element of the design is the spectacular, intricately-engineered glass dome that rises above the debating chamber and contains a public viewing platform. The dome instantly became a popular Berlin landmark and every day hosts a steady stream of visitors. The Reichstag is an overt symbol of a new political and civic identity for a reunified Germany. The dome, instead of having a fixed meaning with its source in history will acquire whatever connotations adhere to 21<sup>st</sup> century German democracy<sup>27</sup>. This would make the Reichstag one of the few Berlin buildings in which the search for an identity concentrates on the country's future rather than in it's past, a circumstance much more in tune with the optimism and excitement that accompanied reunification.

<sup>27</sup> Kathleen James-Chakraborty, "The new Berlin" *German Architecture for a Mass Audience* p.126



Figure 35, Reichstag, exterior (source: own photo)



Figure 36, Reichstag, dome detail (source: own photo)

Not all the new government buildings can be said to have struck the right balance between past and future in their architecture. Nearly all the ministries moved into existing late 19<sup>th</sup> century or Nazi era buildings in the city centre, to the exclusion of the entire ensemble of GDR government buildings. There was some criticism of this, particularly in the remodelling of the Reichsbank, a Nazi showpiece, into the Foreign Ministry. The architect maintained that the form itself was innocent and required respect, in spite of its controversial history<sup>28</sup>. This kind of philosophy sought to distance the activities of the profession from a position in which they would have to make aesthetic statements with political or social content.

Parallel to the debate in Berlin about an appropriate architecture for a reunified and democratic city and has been a debate about the role of history and memory in the creation and experience of urban and architectural form. The Jewish Museum and the questions surrounding the redevelopment of Schlossplatz have been at the core of this debate. Both projects are highly symbolic and have generated a great deal of attention in the wider community. In the case of the Jewish Museum, the interpretations of which are possibly too abstract for a casual observer to grasp, this is particularly striking. The competition for the design of the Museum, incidentally, was held before the Wall came down. Libeskind's design, therefore, takes no cues from critical reconstruction or neo-Rationalism. The beginning of an argument that would see the Jewish Museum (Fig.37+38 Daniel Libeskind 1989-99) as contributing to the identity of contemporary Berlin would lie in its immense popularity. Even before it was officially opened and contained actual exhibits, it was the second most visited museum in Germany. This could, of course, be put down to the

<sup>28</sup> Hanno Rauterberg "History – That was Yesterday" *New German Architecture A Reflexive Modernism* p.316



interest of visitors to the city. At the same time, however, the eagerness of most Germans to complete such sites of commemoration, in spite of escalating costs for most of the projects, is symptomatic of a desire to acknowledge this part of their history. Daniel Libeskind believes that Berliners are extremely sensitive to architecture as an expression of the forces of history and react to new buildings with curiosity, wondering what they will look like and why it is that way<sup>29</sup>.



Figure 37, Jewish Museum, exterior and garden (source: own photo)



Figure 38, Jewish Museum, interior Void (source: own photo)

The rebuilding of the Berlin Stadtschloss is the single debate in Berlin architecture to have extended beyond a professional audience and involved the direct participation of large numbers of the population. It is one of the only points of contention between former East and West Berliners. The Stadtschloss was the principal palace of the Hohenzollern dynasty, an extensive baroque building that was badly damaged during the Second World War. It was demolished by the GDR to make way for the smaller Palast der Republik, a multifunctional modernist edifice that apart from housing parliament was the premier cultural venue in East Berlin. In the early 90s a discussion started about the possibility of reversing history and rebuilding the Schloss. Such initiatives cited the need to give Germany a new cultural and spiritual centre, a “site of national remembrance” and a focal point of reunification<sup>30</sup>. In this respect the Schloss debate parallels the debate that surrounded the reconstruction of the Church of Christ the Savior in Moscow. Proponents of the plan talked a great deal about the desire to make the city beautiful again and return it to its original state – that such a move would heal the wounds of history. They felt that the demolition of the Palast was justified on the grounds of it being historically complicit with the politics of the GDR and an ugly building. The opponents of the plan to rebuild the Schloss believe that it simplistically recalled certain periods of history while ignoring others and sought to deny memory altogether by attempting to erase such a prominent GDR building from the city’s urban fabric. East Berliners, especially, remembered the Palast as being the focus of East German cultural life. It is

<sup>29</sup> James S. Russell “The New Berlin” *Architectural Record* v.190 n.3 p.79

<sup>30</sup> Hanno Rauterberg “History – That was Yesterday” *New German Architecture A Reflexive Modernism* p.321

interesting that, professional arguments aside, the overriding motivation of the public in this debate has been nostalgia for their particular version of history. The decision on the part of the German Senate to initiate a program of rebuilding the Stadtschloss has clearly demonstrated the relationship that the state has with regards the architectural representation of its own past.



Figure 39, Dismantling the Palast (source: own photo)



Figure 40, Berlin Stadtschloss circa 1920s  
(source: [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com))



Figure 41, Palast der Republik circa 1990s  
(source: [www.volkspalast.com](http://www.volkspalast.com))

One of the great puzzles for a visitor to Berlin today is the almost complete disappearance of the Wall from the centre of the city. In light of the conservative model of reconstruction adopted by planning authorities this perhaps does not seem so unusual. Most Berliners appear to have little interest in preserving the legacy of the Wall (after all, they demolished it) and there is no popular movement to physically acknowledge it ever existed. The Berlin Wall was, however, one of the most potent symbols of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and had some spatial interruption remained in the urban fabric to mark its former location, I doubt that the city would have been the worse for it.



Figure 42, Tourist at East Side Gallery, largest remaining section of the Wall (source: own photo)



Figure 43, Strip marking the line of the former Wall, Leipziger Platz (source: own photo)

I found one of the most unique features of Berlin to be the suburban quality that it retains despite being the largest city in Germany. Each district of the city has its own individual character, from chic Prenzlauer Berg in the east and stately Charlottenburg in the west to the gritty, multicultural Kruezberg and Freidrichshain districts; with bustling centers and a lively mix of commercial and residential buildings, each district is in itself a little self-contained city. Over time, and partly as a result of the division, the urban landscape of Berlin has acquired the kind of density and patterns of use that other cities only envy – work and leisure opportunities exist not only in the centre, but more often in the suburbs. I believe this aspect of the city has been sadly overlooked in the development of the old centre of Berlin. Where the debate focused on the way in which the centre should look and sought precedents in the past, it neglected to consider the present and attempt to recreate the urban mix of the suburbs in the centre. Despite this, the city remains full of potential due to its still incomplete state and the unclear future of development in areas immediately outside the centre.



Figure 44, Outdoor restaurant in Prenzlauer Berg (source: own photo)



Figure 45, Street in Mitte (source: own photo)



Figure 46, Café in Kreuzberg  
(source: own photo)



Figure 47, Balconies in Friedrichshain  
(source: own photo)



Figure 48, Florist in Prenzlauer Berg  
(source: own photo)

It is worth pointing out in conclusion that the degree to which the profession and wider community engage with the many ongoing discussions about the form which the reconstruction of Berlin should take, demonstrates the investment that Germany believes it has in new architecture. Views on what the form of the reunified city should be may differ but everyone shares the assumption that architecture plays a key role in decisions about how the state represents itself both to its own citizens and to the rest of the world. Of the three cities that I visited, it is only in Berlin that there is a general awareness of the potential of architecture to contribute to questions of national, cultural or civic identity.

The stylistic direction taken by domestic architects in all three cities since the dissolution of communism has primarily been conservative and introspective. The trend is more apparent in cities where planning authorities and city administrators, as well as the general public, are more involved in the process. International architects, where authorities have allowed them, have often been the first source of a more innovative, contemporary architecture; one that engages with international discourse.

Moscow especially has been witness to an almost absolute exclusion of contemporary architectural discourse. The debate there has been forfeited to the whims of authorities and clients. City administrators are most concerned with finding an appropriately grandiose style to represent Moscow and often fall back on a contextual approach to architecture that involves literal reproduction. The power wielded by a base of wealthy clients in Moscow has meant that in private commissions, architects have sought to please and to display their “professionalism” by adapting their work to whichever style pleases their client. The turn towards historicist architecture has been politically motivated and is an example of the attempts at a cultural monopoly by the current government.

The response of Prague architects has been more measured. The great number of exemplary heritage buildings in the city has meant that the bulk of work carried out has been renovations and additions. The debate has revolved around designing in context and producing modest but good quality architecture, often in a style reminiscent of early Functionalist work. Czech architecture experienced a continuity of rhetoric though the Velvet Revolution that created a stable professional environment. Perhaps as a result of this, contemporary Czech architecture escaped some of the stylistic hand-wringing that other countries have experienced.

The trend towards retrospection in Berlin architecture was a result of the fundamental disagreement about the form that future development in the city should take. A group of influential West Berlin architects and planners, despite being opposed by several prominent international architects and critics, promoted conservative urban renewal strategies that came to dominate the architectural debate in the city. Authorities were often overly prescriptive in applying these strategies and while the ensuing architecture succeeded in physically re-knitting the old centre back together it was generally mediocre. Several public projects by international architects have produced more inspired results. These were often the focus of parallel debates, particularly the role of history and memory in the creation of architecture.

One of my initial questions at the beginning of the project was how contemporary architecture could be linked with the creation of new identities in these three cities. In hindsight it was perhaps an overly ambitious question. Very few architects in Moscow, Prague and Berlin actively engage with the idea of identity in their work; there are exceptions of course, Foster’s Reichstag being the main example. Regardless, it is less the intention of the architect and more the reaction of the general public that marks a project as contributing to the identity of a place. This reaction is not easy to gauge nor does it follow an

established pattern. Muscovites might cite the Church of Christ the Saviour as the most important project but it is probably the many nameless, historicist business complexes that reflect the character of contemporary Moscow and are symbolic of the changes in that society. In much the same way, Berliners have the well-publicised Potsdamer Platz but would maintain that the character of post-reunification Berlin is defined by the many different scenes in each neighbourhood; scenes that are fostered and shaped by the interventionist projects of young Berlin architects<sup>31</sup>. If contemporary architecture has made a contribution to the way in which identity is created in these cities, it is not through individual projects; rather it is through more general patterns of building.

By looking at the architecture of others and seeking to understand what had influenced and impacted on it, this project led me to an increasing self-awareness as an architect. I have begun to appreciate that architecture, if it is to be realised, can not just be an object that is the manifestation of my own ideas but must concede to being the manifestation of the ideas of many different people. This I think will lead me towards tempering my idealism. At the same time however, I did see some inspiring architecture; the disorientating physiological impact of Libeskind's Jewish Museum that borders on genius, the heavy aura of medieval Russian monasteries and the crumbling houses and vibrant public squares of St Petersburg and Lviv. These experiences might help me to overcome the kinds of conflicts between idealism and practicality that inevitably come up early in a graduate's career.

As I prepare to begin the new Master of Architecture program next year I find my thinking about architecture informed more and more by my travels on the Byera Hadley Scholarship. Of the many architectural debates that are ongoing in the countries that I visited none are more divisive and so readily engaged in by the wider community than the one revolving around heritage. The concept of heritage I find particularly interesting; it has varied definitions and is used by many different groups in our society. Built heritage and the way in which architects relate to it is an area that I would like to explore in my future studies.

---

<sup>31</sup> Arne Winkelman, "Young Berlin Architects in not quite the Center" *Emerging Identities – East!* p.80

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brumfield, William Craft *A History of Russian Architecture* University of Washington Press (2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2004)
- Giovannini, Joseph "Berlin's New Walls" (1998) 87 *Architecture* 50
- Gleason, Abbott, "Ideological Structures" in Rzhevsky, Nicholas (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture* Cambridge University Press (1998)
- Goldhoorn, Bart, Editorial "Capitalist Realism" (2001) 24 *Project Russia*
- Goldhoorn, Bart, "Sources and structure of Capitalist Realism" (2001) 24 *Project Russia*
- James-Charkraborty, Kathleen *German Architecture for a Mass Audience* Routledge 2000
- Kabanova, Olga, "New Moscow architecture in a compulsory search for cultural identity" (1996) 3 *Project Russia*
- Kovačević, Igor and Vašourková, Yvette, "Young Czech Architecture – A Snapshot" in Ring, Kristien (ed) *Emerging Identities – East!* Jovis 2005
- Kratochvíl, Petr, "Contact with Europe without Presentation and Display" in *Česká architektura – Czech Architecture 2005-2006* Prostor 2007
- McAdam, James, "Urban regeneration in Moscow: economic development v. cultural heritage" in Ax, Bernd et al. (ed) *archXchange: Berlin and Moscow Cultural Identity Through Architecture* Jovis 2006
- Meyer, Ulf, "City Focus – Berlin: Confidence Building" (2000) 84 *World Architecture*
- Rauterberg, Hanno, "History – That was Yesterday" in Schwarz, Ullrich (ed) *New German Architecture A Reflexive Modernism* Hatje Cantz 2002
- Revzin, Grigory, "'Russian style' and the professional tradition" (1996) 3 *Project Russia*
- Revzin, Grigory, "Scripts for Russian Historicism" (1998) 10 *Project Russia*
- Ruby, Andreas, "The Eternal Return of the Void" in Schwarz, Ullrich (ed) *New German Architecture A Reflexive Modernism* Hatje Cantz 2002
- Russell, James S, "The New Berlin" (2002) 190 *Architectural Record*
- Sitar, Sergei, "The beginning of movement" (2001) 26 *Project Russia*
- Švácha, Rostislav *Czech Architecture and its Austerity: Fifty Buildings 1989-2004*, Prostor 2004

Winkelman, Arne “Young Berlin Architects in not quite the Center” in Ring, Kristien (ed) *Emerging Identities – East* Jovis 2005