

Disposable and Usable Pasts in Central European Cities

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Abstract

In Central European cities memories and material histories of socialist regimes remain particularly difficult to address and incorporate into the new democratic present. After 1989, city authorities in the region have chosen to emphasize some pasts and neglect others and, thus, (re)write their own versions of (urban) history and (re)shape their (urban) identities. In my paper I inquire into how post-1989 Central European urbanities are shaped by and communicated through various designations including signs and symbols on city streets, monuments, and buildings. Predictably, many material remnants of the socialist regimes have been destroyed or hidden from the public eye – my interest lies not only in which various designations on buildings and which monuments had to go, but also in why and how they disappeared. I discuss the most popular methods of hiding and/or effacing the remnants of socialism that range from subtle (surrounding of communist landmarks with tall buildings) through the obvious (renaming of streets, squares, metro stations; giving old communist buildings new names and functions) to the irreversible and, thus, most controversial (the razing of socialist architecture and monuments). The disappearance of the material capital of the socialist past has been accompanied by intense commemoration practices verging on memorial obsessions. New monuments, plaques, street names, and museums appeared almost as quickly as the old “disposable” ones were forced out from the urban landscape. The complexity of an urban identity as communicated through city streets, monuments, and buildings not only invites, but necessitates an interdisciplinary approach and, thus, my analysis includes elements from such diverse areas of knowledge as aesthetics, architecture, communication studies, comparative cultural studies, economics, history, and political science.

Keywords: Central Europe, Berlin, Warsaw, post-communism, cultural memory, urbanism

Disposable and Usable Pasts in Central European Cities

Although today's urbanities of European metropolises have been shaped by centuries if not millennia of turbulent histories, the recent pasts invariably arouse most public interest and controversy. In Central European cities in general and in Berlin and Warsaw in particular memories and material remnants of the communist/socialist regimes remain difficult to address and incorporate into the new democratic present. After 1989, the city authorities of Berlin and Warsaw have chosen to emphasize some pasts and neglect others and, thus, (re)write their own versions of urban histories. Importantly, as capital cities, Berlin and Warsaw represent not only their local heritage, but also that of whole nations; therefore, their identities are of crucial importance to the country's image and, as such, especially valuable. In what follows I look into which elements of the cities' recent pasts have been remembered and which have been forgotten. In the growing absence of the traces of the socialist past, the focus had to be shifted to other historical periods. The collapse of the communist regimes put an end to decades of silencing and/or misrepresenting uncomfortable pasts, especially the Second World War and the Holocaust, ethnic cleansings and expulsions, and people's revolutions repressed by Soviet and/or Soviet-imposed authorities. Consequently, after 1989, Central European capitals have witnessed an emergence of countless monuments, plaques, and museums, whereby, remarkably, the object of commemoration differs depending on which political party happens to rule the city and/or the country at a given moment. The complexity of an urban identity as communicated through city streets, monuments, and buildings not only invites, but necessitates an interdisciplinary approach (see Barthes 1967): the below analysis includes elements from such areas of knowledge as aesthetics, architecture, communication studies, comparative cultural studies, history, and political science.

Destruction of the Socialist Past – Impossible, Prevented, and/or Encouraged

The material remnants of the previous system that vanished in the first years after the 1989 revolutions were destroyed or changed for a number of reasons. First, many residents of (East) Berlin and Warsaw were simply embarrassed by omnipresent red stars, communist memorials, and statues of Soviet revolutionaries and supported their destruction (see Velinger 2005). Second, some of the communist symbols were of very poor artistic quality and, as such, generally (although until 1989 secretly) criticized for their grey concrete drabness; still, it is only realistic to assume that the new municipal and state elites used the aesthetic argument as one of the possible excuses to rid of the inconvenient symbols of the most recent past. Third, as Andreas Huyssen argues, the post-1989 treatment of the socialist herit-

age was “a pure strategy of power and humiliation, a final burst of Cold War ideology, pursued via a politics of signs, much of it wholly unnecessary” (Huysen 2003: 54). Huysen's explanation supports my claim that Central European capitals are (post)colonial cities. According to the definition I develop elsewhere, Berlin and Warsaw are (post)colonial cities because their politics, cultures, societies, and economies have been shaped by two centers of power: the Soviet Union as the former colonizer, whose influence remains visible predominantly in architecture, infrastructure, social relations, and mentalities, and the Western culture and the Western and/or global capital as the current colonizer, whose impact extends over virtually all spheres of urban life. Consequently, both cities are characterized by political, cultural, social, and economic tensions resulting from the condition of being postcolonial and colonial at the same time.

Despite the relative freedom with which new democratic authorities removed the remnants of the previous regime from the view, much of the socialist architecture proved impossible to destroy for practical and cultural reasons. The prefabricated apartment buildings in the outer city districts had been losing on popularity already in the 1980s – especially in Warsaw, where increasingly more people were allowed to build family houses in the suburbs (Murawski 2007: 94 – unless otherwise indicated all translations from Polish and German into English are mine) – and in the 1990s experienced an exodus of their residents followed by a ghettoization of whole neighborhoods. Despite the declining living conditions, however, razing prefabricated tenements has never been a serious option because of the tremendous economic and social costs such enterprise would entail. Similarly, prefabricated office and hotel buildings in downtown areas have been renovated rather than demolished and, thus, continue to exist in the urban landscape as reminders of the communist system. Moreover, some architectonic objects of the gone era have been embraced by post-1989 popular culture, aesthetically rehabilitated, and reevaluated as “cool”. In Berlin, for example, many newcomers from West Germany found East German architecture exciting and exotic; consequently, the GDR became the new German pop (Cammann 2003: 285-86).

When it comes to socialist statues and memorials, a few survived either because they were overlooked in the general frenzy of the transition period or – which was especially true of Berlin – because community protest groups and activists prevented their demolition (Huysen 2003: 54). Post-war Soviet memorials in Berlin, such as those in Treptower Park and Tiergarten, are special case as their preservation and maintenance were secured during the international negotiations preceding Germany's reunification (see Ladd 1997: 194). Nevertheless, most communist monuments in Berlin and Warsaw were destroyed primarily because the new political authorities viewed socialist monuments in strictly ideological terms and (dis)regarded them as propaganda tools of the previous regime (see Benning 1998). The prompt destruction of the monuments commemorating feared Soviet leaders produced various responses: while Warsaw residents generally welcomed

the disappearance of the reminders of Kremlin's influence, in Berlin some struggled to preserve socialist monuments as part of the urban environment. The removal of Dzerzhinsky's statue in Warsaw in November 1989 was enthusiastically greeted by the gathered crowd and the photographs documenting the event are among the most popular images to symbolize the fall of the largely unwanted regime. The demolition of the Lenin monument in Berlin in 1989 "was certainly the best-publicized case of post-revolution iconoclasm. This highly-symbolic event is remembered to this day in the city's collective memory and was alluded to, for example, in the final sequence of the feature film *Good-Bye, Lenin!*" (Sigel 2008: no pagination). Unlike in the case of the Dzerzynski statue, however, the Lenin monument in Berlin-Friedrichshain found supporters among local residents, politicians, and artists. The promptly established community initiative "Lenindenkmal" protested for weeks against the razing of the monument, but only managed to postpone it for a few days (see Strauss 2001). Where the Lenin monument used to stand, today there is an assembly of fourteen large rocks and fountains – an intentionally neutral *ersatz* that continues to be seen as alien by those who can still remember the previous look of the square (see Strauss 2001).

Next to the removal of communist monuments, changing of street names was a particularly widespread method of urban memory engineering in and right after 1989, possibly because it was relatively easy to execute and allowed for immediate substitutes. The street renaming in (East) Berlin may be seen as a (post)colonial practice since the new street names were "imposed" by West German politicians (Huysen 2003: 54). Huysen is convinced that much of the "often petty" street renaming was "wholly unnecessary" and only intensified the "political fallout in an East German population that felt increasingly deprived of its life history and of its memories of four decades of separate development" (Huysen 2003: 54). While the German capital witnessed protests against some of the changes imposed on the former East Berlin city text (Jordan 2006: 54), the residents of Warsaw seemed – at least in the first years of the transformation – rather content with what they perceived as liberating anti-Soviet developments. Generally, the choice of new street names in the Central European capitals was influenced by what political parties were in power in local and state governments at the time and the renaming process was often chaotic and lacked a bigger plan. In Berlin, many streets were given back their "presocialist" names, some of which were "decidedly antisocialist" (Huysen 2003: 54), while others received neutral city names: e.g., *Leninallee* became *Landsberger Allee*, *Dimitroffstrasse* became *Danziger Strasse*, and, similarly, the subway station *Dimitroffstrasse* was named *Eberswalder Strasse*¹ (see Umbenennungen Berliner Straßen, Plätze, Bahnhöfe 1995-). Warsaw's city text experienced a return to the interwar period and to more recent pasts that had no chance of being commemorated under the socialist regime. Consequently, *ulica Marcelego Nowotki* was renamed *ulica Generała Władysława Andersa*, *aleja Karola Świerczewskiego* became *aleja "Solidarności"*

(“Solidarity” Avenue),² and the avenue devoted to the October Revolution (*aleja Rewolucji Październikowej*) received a new patron, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński also known as the Primate of the Millennium (*aleja Prymasa Tysiąclecia*).

Berlin and Warsaw as Urban Palimpsests

Keeping the above in mind, Berlin and Warsaw may be described as urban palimpsests, i.e. metropolises whose city-texts have been constantly reimagined and rewritten and where the same buildings or squares play diametrically different roles under various political regimes. As the examples below demonstrate, historical irony became particularly widespread in Central Europe after 1989. In 1991, the building where the *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* (PZPR or Polish United Workers' Party) once had its headquarters was transformed into the seat of the newly established Warsaw Stock Exchange. Despite the decidedly non (or even anti) communist character of its post-1989 function, many (especially older) residents of Warsaw keep calling the building by its former name, i.e. *Dom Partii* (House of the Party) or *Biały Dom* (White House). Since 2000, when the stock exchange relocated to the newly constructed *Centrum Giełdowe* (Stock Exchange Center) at 4 Książęca Street, the 1952 building has been hosting offices of financial and banking companies.

Quite another trend in the treatment of the past has been the museumization of important socialist buildings. The headquarters of the Ministry of State Security in Berlin-Lichtenberg were turned into the Stasi Museum as early as 1990, soon after the building had been stormed by crowds seeking information and justice. Among other rooms, visitors have access to the offices of Erich Mielke, GDR's last Minister of State Security. Also the former Stasi prison in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen was preserved as a historical document and transformed into a memorial in 1994: “since the vast majority of the buildings, equipment and furniture and fittings have survived intact, the Memorial provides a very authentic picture of prison conditions in the GDR” (Stiftung Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen 2008: no pagination). Preserving the prison and opening it to the public not only makes it possible to learn about recent history in the place where it actually happened, but also commemorates the victims of the GDR regime and, as such, renders Berlin-Hohenschönhausen valuable both as a museum and as a memorial.

Although obsessed with monuments (Huysen 2003: 31), Berlin has also shown pragmatism in relation to its history: some of the buildings constructed under and for the Nazi regime were used during the GDR and then recycled again by reunited Germany. The most prominent example is the 1936 building of the former Reich Air Ministry at 97 Wilhelmstrasse, which – having suffered only little damage during the bombings of Berlin – was used immediately after the war as the headquarters of the Soviet military administration and served several functions under the GDR regime: first as the seat of the *Volkskammer* (People's Chamber),

where the GDR constitution was signed in 1949, then as the *Haus der Ministerien* (House of Ministries). On June 16, 1953, crowds of East Berlin workers gathered in front of the building and demanded economic reforms: their protests escalated to a brutally repressed revolution and ignited mass emigration from the GDR. In 1990, the *Treuhand* privatization agency moved in and in 1992 the building was renamed *Detlev-Rohwedder-Haus* after the former *Treuhand* director murdered by RAF terrorists in 1991. Ten years after the Fall of the Wall, the former House of Ministries became the seat of the Federal Ministry of Finance (Bundesministerium der Finanzen 2005). Similarly, the *Haus am Werderschen Markt*, built in 1935 as an extension of the *Reichsbank* and home to the Central Committee of the SED party in the GDR, was transformed into the Federal Foreign Office in 1995.

Removal of the Berlin Wall and its Consequences

Karen E. Till argues that East Berlin buildings “were quickly closed or renovated because they were perceived as a threat to the legitimacy of a new Germany. ... These sites were understood by Western officials as places of GDR memory that promoted Eastern values, pride, and truths” (Till 2001: 273). Although Till is right to observe that the treatment of socialist buildings in reunited Berlin has had a remarkably colonial character, it is important to differentiate between various intensities of those practices: assigning new functions and names to old buildings seems mild – if, at times, paradoxical or ironic – when compared to the more dramatic razing practices. The most obvious example of destroying the remnants of the previous regime is the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. International media reports turned the Fall of the Wall into a collective experience: the videos and pictures that traveled across the world showed cheering crowds tearing down the concrete slabs with whatever sharp objects they could lay their hands on. Despite the ensuing impression that the Wall was spontaneously dismantled by the city residents, the actual destruction of all border installations around West Berlin took two years and several political decisions to complete; the official dismantling works did not even start until June 1990. Right after the collapse of the socialist regime, the destruction of the Wall seemed the most natural thing to do not only because the concrete structure symbolized the Cold War and Germany's postwar division, but also because keeping it in the reunited city would be simply impractical. Only few observers argued in favor of keeping part of the border installations in place for the sake of future generations (Klausmeier und Schmidt 2005: 11).

Today, the Berlin municipality, city visitors, and some residents seem to regret the thoroughness with which the Wall was torn down – even if, presumably, for different reasons (Klausmeier and Schmidt 2005:11). Searching for the remnants of the Wall has become an urban obsession, a quest for contemporary historians, and a highlight of thematic guided tours. It turns out that despite the seemingly

minute destruction of the border installations, hundreds of remnants can be still found in Berlin today, some kept on purpose, other simply forgotten: they range from solitary concrete slabs covered with graffiti through random watchtowers and lampposts to desolate and rusty distribution boxes (see Klausmeier und Schmidt 2005). Despite their remarkable quantity, the traces of the Wall remain mostly overlooked or undecipherable to a layman's eye. Surprisingly, it took the city authorities a decade to realize the necessity of commemorating the former division. Among dozens of memorials, a museum, artistic installations, and exhibitions, possibly the most important attempt to revive the memory of the Wall was the creation in 1999 of a twenty-kilometer long stretch of a double-row cobblestoned line built into the streets and sidewalks, where the inner city border used to run. The subtle yet clear outline serves as a tip not only to those Berlin visitors, who try to understand the topography of the former city division, but also to older generations of Berliners, who, among the constantly changing urban landscape, may not be able to remember, where the Wall used to stand. Immersed in streets, intersections, sidewalks, curbs, and bike paths, the line becomes part of the city body without posing any inconvenience for the residents.

Disappearance of Landmark Socialist Architecture

Whereas tearing down the Wall was generally applauded, the decision to demolish the *Palast der Republik* (Palace of the Republic) aroused controversy and resulted in protests, petitions, uncertainty, and, above all, chaos. The concrete and steel cube with an orange glass façade was open in 1976 as, primarily, the seat of the GDR parliament, but owing to its diverse functions quickly became one of the most popular buildings in East Berlin. The Palace of the Republic hosted a theater, concert halls, discotheques, restaurants, day care centers, stores, and a bowling alley and was visited by 15,000 people a day (see Bündnis für den Palast 2005), some even called it their second home (see Tangen 2006). Clearly, the political function of the Palace seemed secondary to its role as a meeting point and an entertainment center and the multifunctionality of the building emphasized its uniqueness: “perhaps nowhere else in the world did a parliament share quarters with a bowling alley” (Ladd 1997: 59). After the collapse of the communist regime, construction inspectors discovered that the building was contaminated with asbestos and ordered it closed. For years, the sealed Palace remained “in many eyes the symbolic legacy of a poisonous state” (Ladd 1997: 59), while others missed its socialist-day attractions. 1993 marked the beginning of a never-ending dispute between those advocating the preservation of the Palace as a natural and crucial element of Berlin's complex history and those in favor of its demolition and rebuilding of the Hohenzollern castle seriously damaged during the Second World War and then destroyed by the East German regime in 1950. In other words, “the empty GDR showpiece and the ghost of its baroque predecessor were

competing for the same site” (Ladd 1997: 59). Since both options found devoted followers and opponents, the heated discussion continued for over a dozen years. As if irrespective of the ongoing debate, between 1998 and 2003, the asbestos was removed at the great cost of DM 105 million (see Aldenhoven 2002) and in the summer of 2003 local architects, artists, and activists started using the Palace as a temporary art space (see Bündnis für den Palast 2005). Despite the popularity of the new cultural activities taking place in the decontaminated Palace, in November 2003 the Bundestag voted to tear the building down and – after taking into consideration protest statements and petitions issued by various non-government organizations, intellectuals, artists, urban planners, as well as some of the left wing and green parties – reconfirmed its decision in January 2006, after which demolition works commenced (see Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung 2008). For technical reasons, the Palace had to be deconstructed piece by piece rather than simply torn down – ironically, it has taken longer to destroy it than it took to build it.

Whereas the demolition of the Berlin Wall became an international historical and media event and the deconstruction of the Palace of the Republic triggered a decade-long nationwide debate involving politicians, architects, urban planners, activists, and artists, the destruction of valuable examples of socialist architecture in Warsaw took place among little to no media exposure. While large socialist edifices like the Palace of Culture and Science escaped razing, a number of small buildings such as cinemas and supermarkets were torn down despite protests of local communities, architects, and activists. Three of the destroyed movie theaters – *Kino Moskwa* (1948), *Kino Praha* (1948-49), and *Kino Skarpa* (1956-60) – were widely acknowledged relics of postwar architecture, rich in symbolism, and popular among the city residents (Pinkas and Kozak 2008). *Kino Moskwa* possessed a particularly iconic quality primarily because of the famous photograph showing a tank parked in front of the cinema in December 1981, right after the introduction of the martial law in Poland: the large neon sign on top of the building reads *Moskwa* (Moscow) while the billboard stretched above the pillared entrance advertises Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. In the 1990s, despite its good technical condition, *Kino Moskwa* proved less attractive to new investors than the plot it stood on and, consequently, in 1996 the building was razed and soon replaced by a Silver Screen multiplex cinema. Similarly, *Kino Praha* was torn down in 2005 to give way to a new movie theater *Nove Kino Praha* (see Pinkas and Kozak 2008). Where *Kino Skarpa* stood until early 2008, a luxurious condominium will be built (see Kozak 2008). Interestingly, the official reasons for demolishing Warsaw's postwar cinemas were purely economic, not ideological or aesthetic as was the case of many socialist buildings in Berlin. Since the futures of *Praha*, *Moskwa*, and *Skarpa* were decided solely by the free market, the protesters pointing at the cultural, historic, and architectonic values of the cinemas used argu-

ments irrelevant to the interested investors and, therefore, were doomed to fail in their attempts to save the buildings.

The Palace of Culture and Science Controversy

Whereas statues and small buildings could be demolished at a relatively low financial cost, the removal of larger structures such as prefabricated apartment houses and office buildings has been in most cases – with the notable exception of the Palace of the Republic in Berlin – considered too expensive to execute. Also, some early socialist and/or Stalinist buildings have been classified as cultural heritage and, thus, saved from demolition. While the *Zuckerbäckerstil* (“wedding cake style”) buildings on Karl-Marx-Allee in Berlin, previously the object of ridicule and/or embarrassment, have quite unanimously become part of the post-1989 German pop (Cammann 2003: 285), the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw continues to arouse controversy. Hardly any other building in Poland's capital has been producing such extreme responses and engaging the public in equally heated discussions involving decision makers and respected figures from the world of art and entertainment (see Wajda 2008). Razing the Palace of Culture and Science has never been a serious option; instead, there have been numerous attempts to hide it among other tall buildings and, thus, degrade from its role as a landmark and the most outstanding element of the Warsaw skyline. While the decision of the Warsaw authorities to hide the Palace of Culture and Science behind tall office buildings may be influenced by financial rather than ideological factors, some public figures have been advocating the removal of the Stalinist edifice for – what they considered – aesthetic and cultural reasons. One of the loudest voices in the debate belongs to film director Andrzej Wajda, who claims to be personally offended by the Palace's presence. In his open letter published in Poland's biggest daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Wajda mockingly calls the Palace “the temple of Joseph Stalin” and reminds warningly that “works of architecture are the most important symbol of what the sovereigns want to tell their subordinates” (Wajda 2008: no pagination). Wajda demands “more courage” and adds that the Palace “has to disappear among other high-rise buildings so that, surrounded by them, it is no longer a symbol of those gruesome times, but rather an example of the 1950s Soviet architecture astray on the Vistula” (Wajda 2008: no pagination). Crowded with skyscrapers, the new Warsaw skyline envisioned by the filmmaker would resemble Manhattan and not “the village of Warszawa with Joseph Stalin's church” (Wajda 2008: no pagination). Also minister of foreign affairs Radek Sikorski would like the Polish capital to look like New York City and suggests the Palace be razed and replaced with an enormous lawn with a pond in the middle and, a Warsaw version of Central Park (Sikorski qtd. in *Dziennik* May 9, 2008).

The desire to get rid of the Palace of Culture and Science has been motivated by two forces: the embarrassment at and, in turn, rejection of the Soviet-imposed

heritage on the one hand and the aspiration to transform Warsaw into a Western(-like) metropolis on the other hand. In his commentary to Wajda's letter, urban planner Krzysztof Nawratek dismisses the proposal to copy the forms existing in the United States as "infantile" and, as such, characteristic of the Polish elites who "not only accept the imitational capitalism of the periphery that is being created in Poland, but are simply numbed by their fascination for it" (Nawratek 2008: no pagination). The "in-between peripheral" position of Central European cities (see Tötösy e.g. 2002) and their (post)colonial nature are clearly acknowledged in Nawratek's critique, even if not exactly expressed in these specific words. Nawratek interprets Wajda's appeal as merely a shift of directions in the center-periphery relations from East to West: "We are no longer to follow the example of the Big Brother from Moscow, but that of the Bigger Brother from New York" (Nawratek 2008: no pagination).

The attempts to hide the Palace of Culture and Science among modern skyscrapers have been partly successful. Still, the landmark position of the Stalinist high-rise remains not only unshaken, but also increasingly popular, especially among foreign tourists who come to Warsaw in search of the city's communist past (see Kowalska 2007). Just like Berlin's TV tower, the Palace has become an important inspiration for designers: its outline has been reproduced on t-shirts, mugs, calendars, and other types of souvenirs and, therefore, has become an internationally known symbol of Warsaw. Interestingly, both the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw and the TV tower in Berlin are more popular among the city visitors and residents than among urban planners and decision makers. The new development plans for Alexanderplatz – the central square neighboring the TV tower – foresee a construction of several high-rise office buildings, similar to those towering over Potsdamer Platz. East Berlin architect Bruno Frierl criticizes the plans as "stupid and dangerous ... from the point of view of German unification ... *It's occupation and not unification*" (Frierl qtd. in Harris 2006: no pagination – emphasis mine). Hans Kollhoff, the (West) German architect responsible for the new development plan for Alexanderplatz, dismisses the above accusations on what he claims to be aesthetic grounds: "the TV tower can be respected as a DDR monument in East Berlin, but it cannot be respected by any means as a great piece of architecture" (Kollhoff qtd. in Harris 2006). Kollhoff's judgmental stance implies that one of the city's most important architects is uninterested in the cultural implications of his designs and remains oblivious to the impact the hiding of the TV tower may have on Berlin's urban identity.

Commemorating the Victims of the Socialist Regimes

The disappearance of the remnants of the socialist past has been accompanied by intense commemoration practices verging, especially in the 1990s, on memorial obsessions (Huysen 2003: 52). New monuments, plaques, street names, and mu-

seums appeared almost as quickly as the old “disposable” ones were forced out from the urban landscape. Berlin and Warsaw set on transforming their identities and chose new memory policies, among other tools, to achieve their goals. Despite local differences, it is possible to distinguish two main trends common to both cities. First, the most recent past has been commemorated only to a limited extent, primarily because of the proximity of these events and the difficulty to reach consensus on how the era of Soviet-imposed communism should be judged, if at all. The monuments and museums devoted to the postwar decades either pay long-due tributes to the victims of the socialist regimes or take on a Disneyesque form and aim at entertaining the viewer. Second, after 1989, the Central European cities bid farewell to the Soviet-imposed reading of the Second World War and started, if painstakingly, revising their pasts. Although countless war memorials had been built in Central Europe during the socialist regime, many of them misinterpreted, belied, or ignored the facts. The fall of communism and the subsequent withdrawal of the Soviet Army created a new opportunity to come to terms with the atrocities of World War II (see Judt 2006). In what follows I discuss the ways in which different pasts have been commemorated in the Central European capitals after 1989 and how the new monuments and museums have influenced urban identities and landscapes.

Berlin is home to several monuments and museums that focus on hitherto silenced aspects of the city's complex postwar history. The emergence of memorials devoted to (East) Berlin's socialist decades was prompted by the re-unification of 1989/1990 and remained “in line with the general memorial obsessions of the 1990s” (Huysen 2003: 52). Importantly, the new memorials focus primarily on the uprising of June 17, 1953, the Wall, the Stasi, and their many victims. The 1953 demonstrations of East Berlin workers were commemorated in West Berlin as early as four days after the brutally repressed events: the large avenue between the Brandenburg Gate and the Siegessäule was renamed *Straße des 17. Juni*. It took nearly five decades to honor the victims of the uprising in the part of town where the protests actually took place. On June 17, 2000, right in front of the former House of Ministries on the corner of Wilhelmstrasse and Leipziger Strasse, a new memorial created by the Berlin artist Wolfgang Ruppel was unveiled: the artwork is an enlarged photograph covered with glass and depicting workers marching forward with their arms linked. Since it is incorporated into the pavement, the monument could have been easily overseen if not for the colorful mural on the façade of the ministry building that Ruppel's piece corresponds to both in its proportion and motif (see Schomaker 2000). Max Linger's propaganda wall painting depicts a crowd of workers cheerfully praising socialism. Remarkably, the mural was unveiled in January 1953, only few months before the East Berlin workers' rebellion. In the words of Germany's former finance minister Hans Eichel, the artworks “juxtapose the real and virtual socialism” and, as such, present a poignant combination (Eichel qtd. in Schomaker 2000: no pagination).

Similarly, the victims of the Wall had been commemorated in West Berlin already during the city's division, but it was only after the collapse of the socialist regime that more elaborate Wall memorials have been erected. Although the Wall has almost completely disappeared from the urban landscape, it is still possible to find original parts of the border installations scattered in the city. The most famous and longest (1.3 km) stretch of the Wall has been preserved in the (Eastern) district of Friedrichshain. In February 1990, over a hundred international artists were invited to cover the grey concrete slabs between the *Oberbaumbrücke* and the *Ostbahnhof* with their own interpretations of the then ongoing system change. The result, known as the East Side Gallery, may (and does) appear confusing to some tourists, who tend to think the graffiti and murals had been painted already during the city's division (as was often the case of the border installations facing West Berlin, but would have been impossible in East Berlin as that part of the Wall was constantly watched by border guards). The Gallery's exposure to changeable weather conditions, traffic, and vandalism has resulted in serious damage of both the artworks and the concrete slabs and, consequently, necessitated a thorough renovation that began in the fall of 2008 as part of the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the Fall of the Wall.

On the tenth anniversary of the Fall of the Wall, the former division of the city was commemorated in three different ways in Bernauer Strasse. Back in August 1961, the street witnessed some of the most dramatic and symbolic scenes from the first chapter of the city's division: the houses on Bernauer Strasse were located in the Soviet sector, but the street was already part of the district of Wedding administered by the French; when the Wall was built, the apartment buildings became part of the border installations with ground- and first-floor windows forcefully bricked up. Archival photographs and films document the escapes of desperate residents jumping out of the windows as well as the subsequent demolition of the borderland houses by East German soldiers. Today, Bernauer Strasse is home to the Berlin Wall Memorial (1998), the Berlin Wall Documentation Center (1999), and the Chapel of Reconciliation (2000). The Berlin Wall Memorial incorporates part of the border installations that survived in Bernauer Strasse: it consists of two concrete walls separated by the death strip and limited on both ends by large steel walls that are polished and smooth as mirrors on the inside (and, thus, symbolize infinity), but rusty on the outside and, as such, reminiscent of the backwardness of the “iron curtain” reality. It was only after years of debates on the “appropriate form and design of commemoration” that the Kohlhoff & Kohlhoff design was accepted as the winning project and even then it continued to arouse dispute: “The memorial is dedicated to ‘the memory of the division of the city from August 13, 1961 to November 9, 1989,’ but following vehement protest from people who had been personally affected by these events and from victim associations, the inscription on the memorial plaque was extended to include the words ‘in memory of the victims of the communist tyranny’” (Gedenkstätte Ber-

liner Mauer 2008: no pagination). Owing to its size, the Berlin Wall Memorial can be seen in its entirety only from above – an opportunity that the upper terrace of the neighboring Documentation Center conveniently provides. The third element of the Bernauer Strasse ensemble, the Chapel of Reconciliation, was built in 2000 in place of the 1894 Evangelical church that – located in the death strip and, thus, considered “Wall property” – had been blown up in 1985 during the renovation of the border installations. Parts of the old staircase and the altarpiece have been incorporated into the chapel while the original church bells hang on the scaffolding outside.

Not far from the Bernauer Strasse ensemble, on Invalidenstrasse, there is another memorial devoted to the former border: it is entitled *Sinkende Mauer* (Sinking Wall) has the form of a tilted rectangular block of concrete disappearing in the ground and calling to mind an iceberg or, more adequately, *Titanic*. The latter association is prompted by the cascades of water flowing down the top edge of the concrete wall. Interestingly, the 1997 monument was also built in place of a church (*Gnadekirche*) razed during the Wall construction works in 1967. Although both Invalidenstrasse and Bernauer Strasse are streets in Berlin's central district of Mitte, they are relatively far from other tourist attractions and, hence, do not attract as many visitors as they may have, had they been located closer to the Reichstag or the Checkpoint Charlie.

Most museums dedicated to the city's former division and the socialist regime focus on the victims of the Wall (e.g., the Berlin Wall Documentation Center, the House at Checkpoint Charlie) and/or the GDR secret police (e.g., the Memorial Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, the Stasi Museum) and, thus, fail to document other aspects of life in East Berlin. Apart from the city and historical museums (*Märkisches Museum* and *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, respectively) that occasionally feature exhibitions on various themes from Berlin's postwar past, the newest attempt at approaching East Berlin's reality – although not exclusively, but rather as part of a larger East German culture – has been the establishment of the DDR Museum at 1 Karl-Liebknecht-Strasse, right across the river from the cathedral (*Berliner Dom*) and across the street from where the Palace of the Republic used to stand. Advertised as “one of the most interactive museums in Europe” (DDR-Museum 2008: no pagination), the exhibition aims first and foremost at entertaining visitors by presenting well-known GDR products such as the *Trabi*, the *Plattenbauten*, the Free German Youth (*FDJ* or *Freie Deutsche Jugend*) uniforms, and the Wall, among many others. The concept and form of the museum are based solely on stereotypes about East Berlin and the GDR. Although on its website the DDR Museum claims to allow for “a hands-on experience of history” and an “opportunity to experience the GDR everyday life yourself” (DDR-Museum 2008: no pagination), it resembles a theme park or a toy store rather than a competent historical exhibition.

Despite its strongly anticommunist policy (especially under mayor – and later Poland's president – Lech Kaczyński, 2002-2005), after 1989 Warsaw has seen only two major monuments devoted to the victims of the communist regime, both focusing on the first postwar decade: the Memorial to the Martyrs of the Communist Terror in Poland 1944-1956 (1993) in Warsaw-Ursynów and the Memorial to the Victims of Stalinism (2001) in Warsaw-Praga. The former, located near the cemetery on Wałbrzyska Street where the *Urząd Bezpieczeństwa* (*UB*, or Office of Security, as the communist secret police in postwar Poland was called) dumped the bodies of their victims, is an ensemble of large rocks with torn prison bars sticking out from one of them and a 10-meter tall iron cross in the back. Both the openly (Catholic) Christian symbolism and the choice of materials (stone and iron) follow the Polish tradition of monuments commemorating victims of communism (e.g., the Memorial to June 1956 Events in Poznań, the Memorial to the Dead Shipyard Workers in Gdansk, the Memorial to the Victims of Communism in Rzeszów). The Warsaw Memorial to the Victims of Stalinism has been heavily criticized as the “ugliest monument in recent years” and dubbed a “bugaboo from Praga” (Urzykowski and Majewski 2005: no pagination): it depicts a man captured between two gigantic walls, his arms are stretched apart – which lends his figure the shape of a cross and corresponds to the cross hanging around his neck – and his head slightly tilted forward as if from exhaustion; from one of his wrists hang prison chains while the other hand is resting on the bars sticking out from the wall. The monument is located on Namysłowska Street, previously home to the infamous “Toledo” prison where between 1944 and 1956 the *UB* and the *NKVD* interrogated, tortured, and kept soldiers of the Polish Home Army and members of independence and conspiracy organizations. Presumably, the monument aims at presenting a victim of the communist regime breaking away from the prison. To many locals, however, the statue resembles a drunkard trying to keep balance by holding on to the walls or a criminal waiting for his victim in a dark alley (see Urzykowski and Majewski 2005).

Warsaw's reluctance to commemorate its postwar past has been also visible in the difficulties, uncertainties, and delays surrounding the establishment of the Museum of Communism. The idea came from filmmaker Andrzej Wajda, satirist Jerzy Kawalerowicz, and architect Czesław Bielecki, who in the late 1990s started the SocLand Foundation and put together a traveling exhibition on communism in Poland. Their hope that the collection would find its home in the basements of the Palace of Culture and Science had been shattered many times for various reasons ranging from architectonic through financial to political. In the summer of 2008, the City of Warsaw re-embraced SocLand's idea, however, not without emphasizing that “locating [the museum] under the Palace is unfeasible as it would necessitate drilling through the fundament, which is technically very difficult. Besides the Palace is a historic building” (Warsaw's mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz qtd. in Urzykowski 2008: no pagination).

Commemorating the Victims of World War II

Andreas Huyssen repeats after Robert Musil's that "there is nothing as invisible as a monument" and concludes that the "memorial-crazed" Berlin clearly opts out for invisibility: the more monuments there are, the more the past becomes invisible, and the easier it is to forget: "redemption, thus, through forgetting" (Huyssen 2003: 32). Still, it is important to remember that after 1989 Berlin – as well as other Central European cities – had no chance but to rethink their commemoration practices in regard to the Second World War and the Holocaust. In the postwar decades the city built only few monuments related to its Nazi past. Aside from the mentioned Soviet war memorials and a few monuments devoted to the communist victims of Hitler's regime in East Berlin, only three other memorials in (West) Berlin attempted to thematize some of the aspects of World War II: the German Resistance Memorial on Stauffenbergstrasse (1953), the Topography of Terror (1987) on the grounds of the former Gestapo headquarters, and the information center in the House of the Wannsee Conference (initiated in 1987, but opened five years later), where the "Final Solution" was officially agreed on in January 1942. As German historian Götz Aly was right to observe in 2005, "Berlin's so-called memorial landscape [left] all the central questions unanswered" (Aly 2005: no pagination). Aly criticized not only the lack of thematic and organizational connection between the museums of terror, resistance, and persecution, but also their "mustiness and hostility to innovation", stating bluntly that "they have become museums to themselves" (Aly 2005: no pagination).

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe that opened on the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War started a new trend in the commemoration practices in Berlin. The idea for the memorial surfaced as early as 1988, however, it was not until the reunification and the relocation of the federal government to Berlin that the project became "the subject of a fundamental debate concerning German people's historical self-awareness at the end of the 20th century" (Stiftung Denkmal 2008: no pagination). The unprecedented dispute aroused countless controversies and went on for over a decade before the parliament was able to pass a resolution that gave a green light to the construction of the memorial. The Bundestag chose Peter Eisenman's monumental design as the winning project, but stressed that the memorial "cannot replace the historical sites of terror where atrocities were committed" (Stiftung Denkmal 2008: no pagination). Furthermore, the resolution explicates what the parliament intend to achieve with the memorial, namely to "honour the murdered victims, keep alive the memory of these inconceivable events in German history, and admonish all future generations never again to violate human rights, to defend the democratic constitutional state at all times, to secure equality before the law for all people and to resist all forms of dictatorship and regimes based on violence" (Stiftung Denkmal 2008: no pagination). Whereas the intentions behind the project have been clearly expressed, the memorial itself continues to provoke controversy, confusion, and criticism.

Spread over 19,000 square meters (or the size of two Bundesliga football fields, as it is often explained in the media and Berlin guide books), the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe consists of 2,711 concrete slabs that vary in height and angle. Neither the number nor the shape of the stelae intentionally possess any symbolic value because, in the words of New York architect Peter Eisenman, “the enormity and scale of the horror of the Holocaust is such that any attempt to represent it by traditional means is inevitably inadequate” (Eisenman qtd. in Stiftung Denkmal 2008: no pagination). Instead, the memorial “attempts to present a new idea of memory as distinct from nostalgia” (Eisenman qtd. in Stiftung Denkmal 2008: no pagination). Whereas the intention behind the memorial may be unclear to those unfamiliar with its political and artistic background, the Information Center located underground provides information on the history of the Holocaust. The museum consists of several rooms that correspond architectonically to the memorial and incorporate various audiovisual techniques to convey the complex themes. Importantly, the exhibition relies not only on academic texts and original letters and photographs, but also includes video and audio recordings of testimonies by Holocaust survivors. The Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe has been also entrusted with supervision of the Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime (2008), the Memorial to the Murdered Sinti and Roma (scheduled to be completed by the end of 2009) and, together with the Topography of Terror, the “Gray Buses” Memorial devoted to the victims of the Nazi-imposed “euthanasia” (2006-2008). Sadly, in August 2008, merely three months after the Homosexuals Memorial was unveiled, unknown offenders smashed the viewing window that is part of the cube-shaped artwork and through which visitors normally can see the film showing two kissing men. Survivors, gay activists, and Berlin's (openly gay) mayor Klaus Wowereit voiced their concern over the incident.

One of the first remarkable monuments to appear in the city after 1989 was the Book Burning Memorial on *Bebelplatz* that opened in 1995. Designed by Israeli artist Micha Ullman, the memorial is located precisely on the square where on May 10, 1933, members of the SA and the SS, together with students and professors of the nearby Humboldt University, burned thousands of books by authors considered “un-German” such as, for example, Sigmund Freud, Heinrich Mann, Karl Marx, and Kurt Tucholsky. The major part of Ullman's artwork is underground and can be seen through the glass plate incorporated into the cobbled-stoned square: the inside of the memorial shows empty brightly lit bookshelves. The second part of the memorial is located several meters away and consists solely of a bronze plate immersed in the pavement with a quotation from Heinrich Heine dated 1821 prophetically pronouncing “Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen” (Where they burn books, they will also, in the end, burn human beings). Up to date, Ullman's underground library remains one of Berlin's most subtle memorials and, as such, speaks against Huyssen's

claim that “the notion of the monument as memorial or commemorative public event has witnessed a triumphal return” (Huysen 2003: 31).

In Warsaw, many World War II monuments had been built already under the socialist regime: the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Memorials (1946 and 1948), the Nike Monument to the Heroes of Warsaw (1964), the Little Insurgent's Monument (1983), the Umschlagplatz Monument (1988), and the Warsaw Uprising Monument (1989), among others. Still, because of the Soviet-imposed interpretations of history that were in force throughout the postwar decades, certain events and organizations of the Second World War – such as the Polish anti-Soviet partisan movement, the Battle of Monte Cassino, and the deportations of Polish civilians and soldiers to Russia – were allowed to be commemorated only after 1989. Remarkably, the Monument to the Fallen and the Murdered in the East was one of the first war memorials to open in Warsaw after the fall of the socialist regime. The monumental bronze structure includes railway tracks and a train carriage (reminiscent of those the Soviets used for deportations) filled with religious symbols: predominantly Roman-Catholic crosses, but also some Orthodox Christian crosses, Stars of David, and Islamic crescents, which reminds of the multiethnic and multireligious character of the former East Poland. The tracks are inscribed with the names of the cities and towns from which then Polish citizens were forced out (Grodno, Wilno, Białystok, Brześć, Pińsk, among others) as well as the names of the Siberian deportation and labor camps where they were delivered (Krasnoyarsk, Yakutsk, Irkutsk, etc.) Symbolically, the monument was unveiled on September 17, 1995 – an anniversary of the Soviet invasion on Poland, which had been unspoken of under the socialist regime.

Another tragic event that had been mostly ignored or downplayed by the local and state authorities before 1989 was the Warsaw Uprising of 1944: an enthusiastic patriotic rebellion against the German occupant that led not only to the murdering of an enormous part of the young Polish intelligentsia, but also to the complete destruction of the city. While the Warsaw insurgents and civilians alike were slaughtered by the German troops, the Red Army stood waiting on the other bank of the Vistula river, waiting for the city and its people to perish (see Davies 2006). Naturally then, the Soviet-imposed regime was not keen on commemorating the uprising in the postwar decades. After 1989, dozens of monuments, plaques, and street names devoted to the uprising appeared in the city. Moreover, each anniversary of the uprising is elaborately commemorated not only in Warsaw, but also in the rest of the country.

The Warsaw Uprising became particularly celebrated under mayor Lech Kaczyński. The Warsaw Rising Museum opened on the sixtieth anniversary of the insurrection; its goal is not only to conduct teaching and research, but also to “integrate veterans’ and military circles and educate youth in the spirit of patriotism and respect for national traditions” (Warsaw Rising Museum 2005: no pagination – it is unclear why the official English name of the museum features the word

“rising” instead of “uprising”). The patriotic education and commemoration of the victims dominate the concept of the multimedia exhibition, which focuses on the determination, idealism, and suffering of the insurgents and Warsaw civilians alike. The museum is well integrated with the city: apart from constant cooperation with schools, historical institutes, and veteran associations, it initiates various entertainment and educational mass events for the residents of Warsaw.

Another important part of the elaborate commemorations on the sixtieth anniversary of the insurrection was the renaming of the *Kopiec Czerniakowski* (Czeraniakowski Mound). The mound in the district of Mokotów was created from the rubbles and ashes of destroyed Warsaw: fragments of buildings, bricks, roof tiles – some of them mostly likely containing human remains – were piled up together in 1946-50 in an attempt to create a pantheon for those who died during the uprising (Warsaw Municipality 2008). For decades, the mound remained neglected and it was not until 1994 that the Home Army veterans initiated a monument on the top of the hill: a 15-meter tall symbol of the “Fighting Poland,” the so-called *kotwica* (or anchor). In 2004, when the mound was renamed in honor of the Warsaw Uprising, 400 steps and 40 landings (thus, symbolizing the year 1944) were added constructed to make it easier for visitors to climb uphill.

Whereas outside of Poland the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 is often confused with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, in the Warsaw urban landscape the differences between the two are clearly marked and commemorated through separate memorials. Importantly, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Memorials (1946 and 1948) were among the first to appear in postwar Warsaw. The Museum of the History of Polish Jews is scheduled to open on the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto in 2011. The “multimedia narrative museum and cultural center” – as its creators describe it – “will be a unique institution,” primarily because to date there is no other museum that focuses on the history of Polish Jews (Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2008: no pagination). The museum, which expects 450,000 visitors a year, is directed primarily at Jewish visitors from Israel, the United States, and Europe as well as Polish visitors, who “will discover that the history of Poland is not complete without a history of Polish Jews” (Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2008: no pagination). The curators ambitiously aim at demonstrating that “being a Jew in Poland was not limited to being a Holocaust victim” (Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2008: no pagination).

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews is likely to resemble – both when it comes to the content and form of the planned exhibition – the Jewish Museum in Berlin located in Daniel Libeskind's world famous building. The exhibition on the history of German Jews opened on September 11, 2001 and had to be immediately closed for a few days in fear of terrorist attacks. The building has the form of a zig-zag and contains numerous voids that refer to “that which can never be exhibited when it comes to Jewish Berlin history: humanity reduced to ashes” (Libeskind qtd. in Jewish Museum Berlin 2008: no pagination). These aspects of

history that can be represented are exhibited along three axes: the Axis of Emigration that leads outside the building to the Garden of Exile, the Axis of the Holocaust that ends in the Holocaust Tower, and the Axis of Continuity that leads to the exhibition. Whereas the exhibition itself tells the history of German Jews in a rather conventional way, Libeskind's architecture, his use of light and air, the surprising angles of the walls, the heaviness and lightness of the used materials, among other devices, create an opportunity to “sense” the fate of German Jews and, thus, learn about it through empathy and imagination rather than through curatorial texts. Andreas Huyssen is among many to praise the Jewish Museum for its uniqueness and insightful consideration of Berlin's urban landscape and history: “Libeskind’s museum is the only project in the current Berlin building boom that explicitly articulates issues of national and local history in ways pertinent to post-unification Germany” (Huyssen 2003: 71).

Conclusion

The post-1989 urban identities of Berlin and Warsaw are (re)shaped by the cities' obsession with history coupled with their often uncritical willingness to absorb new, mostly corporate-driven, architecture. The remnants of the socialist past such as prefabricated apartment blocks exist side by side with modern office buildings and brand-new war memorials, thus, creating a fragmented as well as aesthetically and historically diverse urban landscape. The inescapable juxtaposition of the pre- and post-1989 elements creates surprising and ambivalently symbolic combinations such as the fake Statue of Liberty sitting on top of the former East Berlin watchtower (Huyssen 2003: 53) or the monumental McDonald's restaurant overlooking the neighboring Palace of Cultures and Science. One of the reasons why cultural differences between the East and the West – or between the defeated communist system and the victorious capitalist order – are so poignantly visible in Berlin and Warsaw is because of the war destructions. Whereas Budapest and Prague, for example, were able to keep large parts of their urban landscapes intact and, thus, preserve many elements of their long urban histories, Berlin and Warsaw had to be thoroughly rebuilt and, given the political situation, they had to follow the imposed image of what a city should look like; therefore, Berlin and Warsaw had to reinvent themselves in 1945 and then again 1989, which has led to spatial confusion, countless architectonic and aesthetic hybrids, and a specific obsession with cultural heritage and its commemoration.

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Notes

- 1 Alt-Landsberg and Eberswalde are towns in Brandenburg, Danzig is the German name of the Polish (and previously German) city Gdańsk; Georgi Dimitrov (1882–1949) was a Bulgarian communist.
- 2 Marcełi Nowotko (1893–1942) was a Polish communist politician, Karol Świerczewski (1897–1947) was a Polish general in the Red Army, Władysław Anders (1892–1970) was a general in the Polish Army before and during World War II and later a member of the Polish government in exile in London.

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