Memory and Architecture

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chapter two

DisguisedVisibilities

Dresden/“Dresden”

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The New Dresden

When the Boston Globe recently proclaimed in a headline, “Dresden Builds a Future: German City Reconstructs Its Demolished Past,” the words, inadvertently, raised some intriguing questions.1 What does it mean “to build a future?” What is the nature of that “demolished past?” Even the first word, Dresden, is something of a conundrum. The city actually consists of two cities, one on each side of the Elbe. On the north side one finds Dresden-Neustadt, which was laid out in 1732 over the ruins of the old medieval township that had burned in a massive conflagration in 1685. A good portion of that “New City” is now, ironically, the oldest part, since sections of it were spared in the bombing raids of 1945. By contrast, the part of Dresden south of the Elbe that had been destroyed in the war had been rebuilt by the Socialists in a Marxist modernist manner. As the article proclaims, Dresden is presently again in the process of being worked over. This newest of the “new” Dresdens is divided into two zones. The area closer to the train station is becoming a postmodern-styled commercial center, while the area along the Elbe, containing the castle, ministry buildings, and museums, as well as that famed eighteenth-century baroque
masterpiece, the Frauenkirche, is in the process of becoming Dresden’s reconstituted historical quarter.

The restorers’ hope, in particular, is to recapture the silhouette of Dresden’s once-famous skyline as seen from Dresden-Neustadt.

Before one can attempt to critique these developments, the Nazi-era Dresden must also be taken into consideration. Part of the problem, however, is that the Nazis did not add any major buildings to the city’s center but adapted old structures to their purposes. The Taschenbergpalais, located just behind the castle, was used, for example, as the Nazi army command headquarters. But when the multimillion-dollar restoration of the building was recently completed, the book that celebrated that event mentioned its wartime use only vaguely as something that the “old timers remember.”

Not only does one wonder what those memories might consist of, but one may also ask, why is it mentioned as a “memory” and not as a fact?

As it turns out, the Nazis contributed more than just “memories” to the urban landscape of Dresden. Along the foundations of the Elbe Bridge that links Neustadt to Dresden, at the very point from which Dresden’s famous silhouette can best be seen, Hans Nadler designed a loggia in 1935 that houses a set of enameled panels depicting the building of Dresden-Neustadt.

The theme of the panels, showing a confident ruler looking down at broad-shouldered workers, is certainly innocuous, but one should not forget that the Nazis perceived Dresden as a perfect Germanic city, with the only disturbing element the nineteenth-century synagogue that had been designed by Gottfried Semper and located in a prominent spot close to the Elbe. And so, in 1939, after the building had already been firebombed on Kristallnacht, it was blasted into oblivion. Though a new synagogue has recently been built on the same site as the old, it is a low, modern building, not visible in the newly reconstructed skyline. In that sense, the contemporary Dresden skyline still carries the imprint of the Nazi-era vision of the city.

The history of Dresden is thus not only a history of multiple “Dreidents,” but also a history of the problematic interweaving of overlapping and
competing narratives about its past and future. This comes very well into focus in the movie that is shown to today's tourists at the Transportation Museum located in the very heart of Dresden's newly created heritage district. The film, entitled *Das alte Dresden, in den 30-er Jahren* (The Old Dresden, in the 1930s), shows tourists being driven through the city on buses to view the sites.

With similar buses still being used for the same purpose, and parked not too far away, the film tries to evoke a sense of continuity with the 1930s. That some of the movie's clips derive from Nazi propaganda films is not revealed and might not be evident to the viewer. Nor have the current directors as of yet made any attempt to provide a more accurate picture of what everyday life was like in Dresden during the 1930s. Furthermore, even though the film was made by the Socialists with an accusatory agenda, the film is shown today to bracket out not only the city's destruction but also the equally problematic presence of the Socialist modernism that had left the church abandoned. In other words, when one exits the Transportation Museum, after viewing the movie, and looks directly at the Frauenkirche across the street, one could easily get the impression that the movie had just recently been conceived as a promotional film for the rebuilding of the city.

My point is to draw forth awareness of the complex nature of the history of a city like Dresden, or of any city for that matter, when studied from the perspective of its representational elucidations, whether that be a film, a building, or a monument. Though these elucidations all exist within the public domain, and may appear relatively innocuous, they are all part of the history of multiple and overlapping claims to modernity. The historian must thus be on guard to transcend the false pairing of memory and modernity, where memory, by implication, is assigned a positive value and modernity a negative one. Dresden's "memory," like its history, is very much a modernist construction and can be discussed only in those terms. This does not mean that one has to diminish the horror of its destruction on February 13, 1945, only that...
Dresden’s contemporary history should be defined by the complex accumulation of narratives that exist within the fabric of the city itself.

My concern is born of urgency, for the city—already being primed for its eight-hundredth birthday celebration in 2006—is being rebuilt and transformed at such a fast pace that it is increasingly difficult to differentiate the still-potent, bricolaged layers of Dresden’s mnemonic structure. Soon the moment will be lost and indeed become irrelevant. The dust that hovers over the city’s numerous construction sites will settle, and the layered, dynamic, and complex nature of Dresden’s history will be lost.

Rebuilding and Forgetting

After the war it was more or less assumed that Dresden’s Frauenkirche would be rebuilt, but this did not happen during the four decades of Socialist rule. Instead, the ruins were left abandoned and the heap of blackened stones were designated a memorial to Allied atrocity. And so, when, in the early 1990s, in the euphoria of German reunification, the decision was finally made to rebuild the church, the announcement opened a floodgate of pent-up remembrances not only about the circumstances of the church’s destruction but also about the destruction of the city itself. Overnight, the Frauenkirche became the symbol of the city’s past, its survival, and its rebirth.

The announcement, accompanied by the commensurate rhetoric, not only reawakened Dresden’s civic spirit but also heralded the return of religion after decades of “god-less” Socialist rule. For political and economic reasons, speed was of the essence, especially since the West, in rebuilding the church, felt that it was atoning for the damage done by the Allies in the war. Framing the enterprise were speeches by politicians, visits by dignitaries, candlelit prayers, and somber memorial services. Queen Elisabeth, the Duke of Kent, and other English notables were invited to Dresden for various ceremonies of reconciliation. Even Henry Kissinger has weighed in on the matter: “The rebuilding of Dresden’s Frauenkirche demonstrates an international commitment to overcome the cruelties of war and to build bridges among nations.”

But it would be a mistake to reduce the architectural history of this building to an official narrative of the building’s destruction, subsequent “neglect,” and, with the reunification of Germany, its reconstruction. The task itself was undertaken with the help of an advanced French computer modeling system known as CATIA, which had been developed for the design of military aircraft. This technology was also used for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, and indeed, there is something uncannily similar about these two buildings, as both are central to a narrative in which political symbolism, regional identity, and international tourism are conflated. Nor should the irony that the very avitational technology that once facilitated the bombing of the building was now helping to repair it, be lost on us.

One of the pressing problems of the Frauenkirche was what to do with the heap of old stones. Should one discard them and start over or accept and preserve their accusatory meaning, Socialist-inspired or not?
The controversy filled many pages in the German press, but it is largely an either-or debate. Finally, the decision was made to treat the stones as elements of a vast, DNA-like research puzzle. They were separated, measured, analyzed, and then placed into the fabric of the new walls of the church, hopefully at the very spot where they once belonged. Preservationists call this a “critical restoration.” Yet, despite all the technology and science that went into the church’s rebuilding, the placement of most of the old stones was quite arbitrary. Some of the stones were parts of capitals and moldings, but many were generic blocks that could be put anywhere. They were thus sprinkled around to make it look as if the preservationists had indeed figured out where they had come from. As a result, what started as an honest attempt to make a building with “embedded memory” became an aesthetic governed by the positivistic conceits of the restorers. It could even be argued that the Socialist monument was, in essence, dispersed throughout the fabric of the building so that it was no longer possible to read its former presence back into existence.

But where then, one may ask, can citizens mourn their dead or reflect on the painful events of the recent past on a human and secular level not tainted by the paradoxes of the reconstruction industry? Oddly enough, there are such places, although largely overlooked by “official” historians. On the busy Sophienstrasse next to the castle, for example, one encounters the figure of Trauender Mann (Mourning Man), created in 1985 by the Dresden-born Wieland Förster.

The sculpture depicts a man with knees pulled up tightly to cover his face in a way that was intended by the artist to express not only grief but also shame. Like the Greek Niobe, who averts her face in silent grief, the Trauender Mann evokes the profound anguish of self-inflicted tragedy. Initially, during the height of the Socialist regime, the statue had been rejected, no doubt because it was seen as too ambiguous and self-indulgent. But in the 1980s, with the arrival of glasnost, permission was granted for its display. Though many Socialist sculptures were removed after reunification, this one survived the “cleansing,” as it was not considered overtly ideological.
The statue, in our current phraseology, qualifies as both a memorial and a counter-memorial. It is classical and profound, and yet, because it not only states the human tragedy of war but also, historically, evokes the memory of a Socialist optic, it might be perceived by some as deeply unsettling. The West likes to think that it has mastered the trauma of war more effectively than the Socialist regime it replaced. But Socialist modernity, especially in this particular case, should certainly not be denied its rightful place in the space of urban reflection. The statue’s sitting will be critical in this respect. Originally, the sculpture was placed in the Georg-Treu-Platz, only a few steps from the Frauenkirche. It was moved to the more remote Sophienstrasse, however, because of construction work in the area. Though it is likely that the statue will be returned to the Georg-Treu-Platz, I would argue that it be brought to a location somewhere between the Frauenkirche and the nearby synagogue to expand its message to include also the Jewish victims of the city. I would also argue that this equidistance be noted in a sign so that the statue is understood as a memorial to all human suffering that occurred in Dresden—the Jewish suffering not excluded—as a symbol of reconciliation in grief.

I make these claims mainly to critique the tendency of urban historians to parallel state-supported discourses. Heinz Quinger’s art and architectural guide, *Dresden und Umgebung* (Dresden and Environ, 1993), for example, mentions in its very first sentence the wartime destruction of the city, but without any mention of the Nazi past or the complete destruction of Dresden’s Jewish community. For sure, this is not out of any disrespect, but a forgetting nevertheless, because the image of the new postreunification “Dresden” is built almost entirely around the narrative of the church’s destruction and rebuilding, with the intervening Socialist phase left a blank. The *Trauender Mann* is briefly mentioned but only on page 152.9 The more recent book, *Dresden: A City Reborn*, a work that deals with the broad spectrum of Dresden’s history, is not much better in this respect. It was authored by English scholars—with an introduction by the Duke of Kent—and is dutifully laudatory of the English contribution to the rebuilding of the Frauenkirche. The new golden orb, made by English craftsmen and personally handed over to the city by the duke himself, is featured in the only color plate of the book’s first edition. The globe is now proudly displayed in front of the church, awaiting its final placement on the top of the dome. In contrast to such works of art, the Socialist contributions are described as “primitive,” and their politics as a combination of “scandalous neglect” and “ideological desecration.”10 Clearly one ideological bias has superceded another.

The Question of the New Synagogue

The attempt to narrate the history of Dresden through the lens of its various representational modalities is made difficult by the overwhelming immensity and invasiveness of the current reconstruction. It is one of the largest urban preservation projects ever attempted in all of Europe. Buildings that had been restored to their original appearance under the Socialists, like the Zwinger and the Dresden Opera House, were reappropriated into an overarching scheme that includes the reconstruction of the Schloss, its stables, the Brühlische Terrasse, as well as former government buildings, palaces, and museums. Everything in that preservation zone is designed to replicate the configuration prior to the bombing, down to the last finial. A notable exception is the rebuilding of the erstwhile synagogue.

Built in 1840, it had formed the eastern anchor of Dresden’s great Elbe silhouette, the western one having been defined by Semper’s other building, the famous Opera House. Though the synagogue may never have been as remarkable a piece of architecture as the opera house, it represented, in human and visual terms, the attempt to integrate Jews into German culture. In political terms, it came to represent the aspirations of the Jewish emancipation of 1848.

It was precisely the synagogue's historical and architectural significance in that respect that caused Nazis to vent their fury against it with such excessive venom. The building was not only burnt in Kristallnacht, in 1938, but consequently blasted away to make a military training film demonstrating how to “scientifically” demolish buildings.11 To add insult to injury, the name Rathenau Platz, on which the synagogue had fronted, was replaced with the name Schlagererplatz, after Leo Schlager, one of the earliest members of the Nazi party.12 He was among the first “martyrs” for the Nazi cause, having been arrested and shot in 1923 by the French for dynamiting a bridge in protest of the French occupation of the Alsace. His deed resonated triumphantly over the ruins of the devastated synagogue.

Though the Socialists erected an elegant memorial on the site, it was decided with reunification to build a new synagogue despite the fact that
there were barely sixty Jews, most of them secularized newcomers from Russia, then living in Dresden. But the government pressed ahead, with Saxony’s Minister President Kurt Biedenkopf reminding Dresdeners that the synagogue needed to be built not only as a symbol of justice and restitution, but also because it had once been “an important element in the picture of the city.” So what then is the nature of that “picture” today?

Sadly, Semper’s building could not be reconstituted, since the conditions of the site had been significantly altered by the construction of a Socialist-era bridge embankment. The new building, completed in 2002, was designed by the architectural firm Wandel, Hoefer, Lorch, from Saarbrücken, and consists of two almost prismatic boxes facing each other over an open courtyard. One box is twisted as it rises, apparently so that the orientation of its top faces Jerusalem. In the courtyard between the two boxes, the architects, in an effort to introduce the site’s “memory” into the design, delineated the footprint of Semper’s synagogue.

The building has been well received in the professional press, but as an uncompromising statement of formal purity, it sets in play a series of problems that, though perhaps inadvertent, are nonetheless troubling. For example, it is not mandated by Jewish law or custom that a synagogue face Jerusalem. It should, if possible, face east. It seems that the designers got Judaism confused with Islam, where mosques have to face Mecca. An even more complex problem stems from the fact that unlike the rebuilt churches and palaces of the city center, which will regain, at least visually, their “age-value,” as Alois Riegli might have put it, this building, because of its bold modern design, will always point to the problematic of Jewish “otherness.” Jews, invited to grow new roots in Dresden, are given a modern building in which to do so, whereas the rest of the Dresdeners can practice their religion in the re-created historical context of the city center. In other words, the synagogue does not belong—and will never belong—to the “picture” of the reconstructed city center.
The situation is not made any better by the fact that within the immediate urban context of the synagogue one finds several other examples of unwanted modernity. The cornice of the synagogue, for example, lines up with the imposing façade of the neighboring former Reichsbank, designed by Heinrich Wolf in 1928. Wolf was to become an important Nazi-era architect. The synagogue also blends in with the Socialist-era housing blocks on the other side of the street to the south. This set of three buildings constitutes a perhaps inadvertent but nevertheless telling ensemble all its own, one that uncomfortably puts the Jews, the Nazis, and the Socialists into an enforced visual and historiographic grouping that contrasts with the neohistoricist core of the beloved Dresden.

What we have with the Frauenkirche and the synagogue, and their associated silhouettes, is a situation where they are constructed as "witnesses" to two different events, the bombing of World War II and the Holocaust. Both silhouettes are thought to form a barrier against the past. Both, in that sense, do the honorable thing. And for this there must be some credit. But in reality both are bound up with a catastrophe of another kind. One building is a manifestation of healing, the other of trauma, creating once again the illusion that modernity and tradition are two separate entities. History and memory are all placed in the premodern category along with the reinforcements of preservation and tourism. Modernity, rupture, Socialism, and the Holocaust are put into another category. Out of that paradox comes a particular type of victory, for the ambiguity of the Jewish space in Dresden parallels the ambiguity of other spaces, the Socialist space, and the Nazi space, all unified into the framework of the trauma of modernity. If conventional trauma theory emphasized the destructive repetition of the trauma necessitating the intervention of science and healing, a more postmodern reading of trauma suggests that healing is really a question of technology and capital. Trauma is not the rupture of the flow of history, but a historiographic force that, when properly understood, can set the stage for an awakening into consciousness of the temporally mutilated entanglements of memory and history.
From Apocalyptic Picture to Socialist Civitas

The Socialist contributions to the city’s structure and appearance are clearly foundational to this representational complexity. Some contemporary Dresdener like the historian Jürgen Paul, have claimed that if Dresden’s first destruction came with the Allied bombing of 1945, the “second destruction” came with the failed Socialist attempt to rebuild the city.16 The Socialists, he argued, transformed Dresden into little more than “a chaos of disconnected fragments.” But that is, of course, a question of perspective, and could easily be applied to the current rebuilding efforts as well. Nevertheless, the photograph of the flattened landscape of Dresden’s center from the 1960s showing the extent of the demolition takes one’s breath away. But the claim that the socialists failed in their effort needs to be reassessed.

The most important feature of Socialist Dresden was the monumentally scaled, east-west Ernst Thälmann Strasse that ran parallel to the Elbe and that bisects what once was the old city.17 A comparison of that project with a map of old Dresden helps visualize its dramatic scale. The street’s name itself served a symbolic purpose, having to do with Thälmann himself. Born in 1886, and rising to prominence after the death of Karl Liebknecht, he became the first president of the German Communist Party. Steering a close course to the policies of Stalin, he ran in the bitter 1933 national election against Hitler. The success of Hitler sealed his fate. He was arrested by the Gestapo, sent to prison, and eventually died in Buchenwald.18 A Socialist-era film, shown at schools throughout East Germany, Ernst Thälmann—Sohn seiner Klasse (Ernst Thälmann—Son of the Working Class), directed by Kurt Maetzig, gives us a glimpse of his role. The film, taking place in 1918, shows the young Thälmann on the German western front, sitting in a small hut, drawing up a manifesto that calls on the soldiers to turn their guns away from the alleged enemy on the front and point them instead against the real enemy in their own land.

Not only did the Ernst Thälmann Strasse appear to carry out this purifying logic, but so, too, did the Kulturpalast.19 It was a simple and elegant glass box, not unlike what one might have found in the West at that time, except that the building’s five bronze doors featured a vivid history lesson of the city’s past as seen through the lens of Socialist historiography. They
show the people’s oppression by the feudal and bourgeois overlords and how this led in the end to a—for the Communists—fortuitous destruction of the city, a destruction that cleared the field for the triumphant victory of the Socialist working class.

This arrival of the new age was demarcated quite literally on the sidewalk around the Kulturpalast by a red pavement that not only emphasized Dresden’s allegiance to Moscow, but also pointed out the metaphysical ground on which a new Socialist city has to stand. This red “ground” was meant to triumph over the memories of the bourgeois world that lay in ruins below it. In 1974, the *Jahrbuch zur Geschichte Dresdens* continued the historical “readjustment” of Dresden’s urban consciousness by listing events deemed of importance to the history of the working class in Dresden. A new *Museum für Geschichte der Dresdner Arbeiterbewegung* (Museum for the History of Dresden’s Worker’s Movement) was set up, and there were, of course, statues, rituals, parades, exhibitions, and street namings.²⁰

Other aspects of the city were incorporated into this message. Unlike the Frauenkirche, which was left abandoned, the Renaissance-era palace known as the Johanneum, which lies between the Kulturpalast and the Frauenkirche,
and which survived the bombardment with most of its walls standing, was rebuilt. Its antiquated “bourgeois” historical form was meant to stand in contrast to its new contents, a Museum of Transportation, which exhibited the latest in socialist tractors and railway engines. The tactic, similar to one used after the French Revolution, put the usurpation of the building on display to demonstrate, in this case, the triumph of Communist industrialism. Dresden’s cultural heritage was also not overlooked. In fact, it is remarkable how much was actually rebuilt. But even the restoration of the Zwinger, one of Germany’s most famous baroque buildings, was not without a heavy-handed dose of ideology. The considerable expense of reconstruction was partially justified by the claim that the building, designed by Daniel Poppelmann, a merchant’s son, demonstrated the “emergence of the bourgeoisie” from the oppression of the feudal aristocracy, a necessary in-between step in the Marxist topos. Semper’s Opera House was also slowly rebuilt, as were parts of the famous Brühlische Terrasse that overlooked the Elbe.

In summary, what emerged was a powerfully effective three-dimensional map of a Socialist civitas, all in all, no small accomplishment.

The New “New Dresden”

Whether or not the Socialist city constituted Dresden’s first rebuilding or Dresden’s second destruction, there was no escaping the fact that what was done was a far cry from what was envisioned. The fault lay not only with the perpetually depleted coffers of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik, but also with the type of modernity into which the Socialist regime had trapped itself. Nonetheless, after reunification in 1989, the city planners, most having been trained in West Germany, felt that they had to undo the “utopian” message of the Socialist planners. The principal strategy was to divide the city’s core into two zones, one given over to preservation and tourism and the other to commerce. “Civic identity” was equated almost exclusively with the “premodern,” the only exception being, of course, the synagogue. As for the commercial center, the planners used an approach called Verdichtung, or densification, in which buildings were inserted into the Socialist fabric to simulate a more compact, nineteenth-century urban grid.

A team of urban design professionals was assembled by the Saxon government to come up with studies and make suggestions to the local planning
FIG. 2.18. New urban plan of Dresden showing projected “Densification.” Drawn by Mark Jarzombek.

boards. The task was made difficult by the grafting of the West German legal system onto the older systems that were partially grandfathered in, some even dating back to prewar days. Financial compensation to thousands of former property owners and their offspring also had to be undertaken. Today, the old Socialist-era CIAM-styled (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne) “civic center” has been transformed into a large and vibrant shopping district. It has a Burger King at one end and an enormous and well-supplied department store, Warenhaus Karstadt, at the other, with new bank buildings, shopping centers, tourist offices, ATM machines, and cinemas in between. From a contemporary planner’s perspective, it is an unequivocal success. To integrate the Kulturpalast in this urbanization process, the planners decided to transform the building into a philharmonic and redesign it on the outside.

The attempt to disguise the former Socialist presence and deny its representational claims on the city extends even to the privileged position of the ground. To destroy the ground’s unwanted symbolic memory, the city fathers called in urban archaeologists to explore the ruins buried beneath the streets. The result is yet another historiographic conundrum. The “history” of the city that is being uncovered—a history that goes down to the city’s medieval layer—erases the historicity of rupture that was so important to the Socialists. It does so without having to admit its own strategy of rupture by submitting the argument that one is going back to the city’s origins. But as valuable as that may be, it is not without political implications.

As fate would have it, the old Ernst Thälmann Strasse, now named Wilsdruffer Strasse after a village north of the city, separates the preservation district from the new commercial center. It is ironic that a street that had once represented the victorious annihilation of the past now survives as the city’s most successful urban statement. Needless to say, Heinz Quinger’s Dresden und Umgebung mentions neither the history nor the original name of this street.

We should reject at all costs Maurice Halbwachs’s old-fashioned notion of a “collective memory” as some sort of generic, ontological marker bestowing meaning and significance to a culture. What remains of memory in a place like Dresden is a dialectical modernist proposition that is extracted only with difficulty and against the grain of various intervening historiographic ambitions. The recovery of “memory” is only possible if one acknowledges the traumatized, and traumatizing, temporal dislocations of the urban narrative. It is a narrative in which even nonaccidental omissions are regulated by history-producing visions that can be brought to light and challenged only by scholarship that looks behind the dynamics of the representational strategies out of which the urban consciousness is constructed. This brings us back to the question of memory and public space, for public space is the primary
medium through which memory and its associated historiographical energy seeks its representation, and thus it is in the public space that the retrieval process works. To go to Dresden and focus only on the official discourses of therapy-in-public-space—the new commercial center “healing” the trauma of a failed Socialist economy, the Frauenkirche “healing” the trauma of the war, the State “healing” the trauma of the Holocaust—is to overlook the complex aporias of the city’s own urban self-reflections. Attitudes to the Trauernde Mann, to the film “Das alte Dresden,” and to Dresden’s “new” archaeological history, are all part of the city’s larger portrait. Though they might normally be considered to be at the periphery of urban history, they are, in actuality, the constitutive elements of the urban episteme. They are shaped by a dialectic that articulates presence and silences simultaneously.

It is not a traditional notion of dialectic of which I speak, one in which life is perceived as eternally trapped in a morass of history from which it can only extricate itself through the sublime temporalities of violence and rupture. Rather, it is a dialectic that inhabits the system in the form of confusions, proximities, anxieties, and fated overlappings that in itself constitutes the flesh and blood of modern urban life. The navigation process through this heterological system is the burden of the cosmopolitan self.77 The irony, of course, is the text against which that episteme articulates itself is something that no fiction writer could have imagined. Who, in the 1930s, could have believed that something like the Holocaust would take place? Who, even in the early 1940s, could ever have thought that Dresden would be totally destroyed in the war? Who could ever have thought that Dresden would be bulldozed down to the ground? And who, even in the 1980s, would ever have thought that the city would be part of a united Germany and that it would be rebuilt in the blink of an eye? Registering these fantastic events, the city becomes the locus of a memory to which no single person can ever have total access, for it only succeeds “as memory” when it challenges us to enter the shadows of our disparate modern subjectivities. What is needed, therefore, is an insistent deconstruction of the difference between fiction and reality that exposes the fateful illusions on which urban epistemologies are based.

In thinking of the city, one must resist reducing modernism to a negative that stands in temporal opposition to a revival of meaning, memory, and history. Instead, one must see the city as a transformational work-in-process that operates out of, and on behalf of, various modernizing and historiographic forces that have not one, but diverse articulations and presences. Their torts, both real and imaginary, require a compensatory probing and scholarly structure along which the narrations of trauma can surface and be “lived out.”28 A critical urban epistemology, therefore, must be distinct from the all too often encountered attempt to essentialize the urban narrative or to reduce its history to a linear formation; it would have to begin and end with this problem and thus with the city’s ambiguous location in its representational history.29 To use a phrase by Adorno, but changing his word art to my words the city, one can say that the city desires to be what has not yet been, even though everything that the city is has already been. Playing one end of this scenario off the other to expose the paradox of urban history is no doubt little more than a theoretical project, but it is a form of action in its own right. For only in perceiving of the city in this way, from the inside out as well as from the outside in, can we comprehend and respect the dialectical incompleteness of the modern city. As a humanistic construct, the city may not be all that we hoped for, but, as an intellectual construct reflecting the geography of time, it is more than one could ever have imagined.

Notes


3. The panels under the bridge were also a commentary on the Fürstenzug, an enormous one-hundred-meter-long wall mural on the side of the castle that is on the other side of the Elbe bridge and depicts the history of Dresden as a march of Dresden’s nobility from ancient times to the late nineteenth century, when the mural was designed. The Nazi mural tries to point away from the contributions of the aristocrats to the more universal “aristocracy” of the
German nation. It was thus meant to represent the arrival of a new historical consciousness toward the city, one that purges and unifies at the same time.

4. The following quote was posted on the Web site of an organization called the “Friends of Dresden.” Based in New York City, it was founded by Günter Blobel, professor of Cell Biology at Rockefeller University, in an effort to promote the city. Blobel donated a good portion of the money from his Nobel Prize to the organization. The “Friends of Dresden” has also made an effort to support the construction of the synagogue. See their Web site www.friends.dresdener.com.

5. There were some attempts at providing alternative designs. Helmut Jahn, a member of the “Friends of Dresden” Honorary Board, opened an exhibition about the Frauenkirche at Christie's new office in the Hancock Tower, Chicago. Jahn challenged the audience to participate in the building of a cathedral much in the way communities did in the Middle Ages.


7. Wieland Förster was born in 1930 in Dresden. He studied sculpture in Dresden from 1953–1958. He now lives in Berlin.


9. Ibid., 152.


11. The film, which has since been recovered, was shown as part of the kick-off campaign for the rebuilding of the synagogue. Of the deported Jews, few survived Theresienstadt, where most were sent.

12. Leo Schlageter was an artillery officer during World War I. He had joined the Nazi Party, which was founded in 1920, at an early stage. His membership card bore the number 61. When the French occupied the Ruhr in 1923, Schlageter helped to organize resistance on the German side. He and his companions blew up a railway bridge for the purpose of making the transport of coal to France more difficult. For his part in the action, Schlageter, who was captured by the French, was condemned to death, but he refused to disclose the identity of those who issued the order to blow up the bridge. He was shot by a French firing squad on May 26, 1923. The renaming of Rathenau Platz to Schlagerplatz was, of course, a calculated move comparing his bombing of the bridge to the destruction of the synagogue.


14. Henry Landsberger, who was born in Dresden, and whose grandfather was the rabbi, has been instrumental in organizing the campaign for the new synagogue. Parallel projects are also underway in cities like Darmstadt, Ulm, and, of course, Berlin. The Dresden-Meissen Diocese raised fifty thousand dollars for the construction of the synagogue. The Catholic News reported that, in Dresden, “Today, we have a chance to do things differently and can dare to attempt to make amends.”

15. The judges, under the chairmanship of Professor Karljosef Schattner, originally awarded Wandel, Hoefler, and Lorch the third prize, with Livio Vacchini of Locarno and Heinz Tesar of Vienna coming in first and second respectively. Discussions with the Jewish Congregation changed the order.


18. Thälmann was idolized in party propaganda because of his loyalty to Moscow. The history of the leftist movement during the 1920s and early 1930s is a complex one, driven not only by the differences between the more moderate Socialists and the more strident Communists, but also by the sometimes ambivalent politics of both. For a good discussion, see Istvan Deak, *Weimar Germany’s Left-Wing Intellectuals: A Political History of the Weilbühne and Its Circle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

19. It was designed by the firm Wolfgang Hänsch, Herbert Löschau, Heinz Zimmermann.

20. See, for example, *Beginn eines neuen Lebens; eine Auswahl von Erinnerungen an den Beginn des Neuaufbaus in Dresden im Mai 1945*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Dresdener Arbeiterbewegung 7 (1960).

21. The museum got the name in the nineteenth century when King Johann, who ruled from 1854 to 1873, made it into a historical museum.


23. The restoration of the Zwinger was begun immediately after the war. Despite the difficulty of undertaking such a project at that time, money was found already in 1945. Work was completed in 1964. The fate of Semper’s Opera was less clear. Money was found, however, for its restoration, starting in 1953. After undergoing several phases, work was completed in 1985. The full ideological explanation of the Zwinger was articulated by Hubert Mohr in *Der Dresdener Zwinger* (Berlin: Deutsche Bauakademie, 1956). For Mohr, the Zwinger helps visualize an important time in German history, when the bourgeoisie was attempting to liberate itself from the strictures of absolutism. Though the Zwinger is indeed the architecture of the aristocracy, we should see it not simply as a masterpiece of a doomed feudal mindset, but rather as a site where the newly emerging spirit of an industrially oriented bourgeoisie began to play itself out. Daniel Poppe bemann represents, according to Mohr, all that which is "immortal" in the German people (p. 13). And it was for this reason that the German Democratic Republic invested so much money in the Zwinger’s reconstitution.

24. For a not inaccurate but clearly pro-Socialist spin on the Socialist and Russian contributions, see Max Seydewitz, *Die unbesiegbare Stadt* (Berlin: Kongress Verlag, 1956).

25. The team was headed up by Professor Zech, from Munich, where he was the head of the City Building Department and emeritus professor at the Technische Universität of Munich. *Projektgruppe Stadtentwicklung Dresden*, as it was known, was answerable to a body of experts, the Lenkungsausschuss, which had representatives in it from both the city and the state, as well as from the Dresden Building Department. This body instructed the *Projektgruppe* with the duties of what to work on. Most often, these were tasks in the interest of the state, but within the area of the city of Dresden. The *Projektgruppe*, formed in the early 1990s, was always planned as a short-term institution. It ceased to function at the end of 1999. Professor Zech continued to represent the group for three more years.

26. The German government reported that approximately two million claims were filed with claims offices (Vermögensämter) in eastern Germany. In Berlin, approximately 310,000 property claims have been filed. Of these, approximately 150,000 claims were filed for the return of approximately 100,000 real-estate properties. From these, approximately two thirds have been decided. Thirty to fifty percent are given back, and the remainder were satisfied by restitution payments or rejected. See David Rowland, "Entschädigung im neuen Gewand," *Aufbau* (Nov. 22, 1996); "East German Claims Revisited," German American Chamber of Commerce (Nov. 4, 1996).


28. History, as presumed in the bourgeois world, does not think that it needs much in the way of this (from its perspective, "cynical") reflection, and it thus forces aesthetic practices to require of themselves a heavy dose of self-objectification so that they can be more easily identified and targeted for critique. (The figure of Peter Eisenman in Berlin comes to mind.) But once identified as "art," as something that can be bought and placed in the public domain, it begins to attach itself to the complexities of the historiography of its modernity.

29. This does not mean that the historian has to give up the principle of objectivity or the premise of critical action. But it does mean that, just as objectivity has to remain both grounded and ungrounded, the historian has to accept a degree of ambiguity between what he or she does as "an
historian” and the multiple locations of “history” in the political production. The synagogue project in Dresden, trapped in a similar in-between space, becomes the perfect metaphor for this problem. A figure of importance in this respect is Hans Gadamer, who, in studying Plato in Wahrheit und Methode, elaborates on the priorities of the question over the answer. I end with Adorno, however, because I feel that the idea of a negative dialectic more accurately frames the paradox of wanting to express something without being able to and of being able to express something without wanting to. His work reconstitutes the fragility of philosophical speculation, and by extension, the fragility of historical speculation.

chapter three
Designed Memories

The Roots of Brazilian Modernism

FERNANDO LARA

To the memory of Lúcio Costa (1902–1998)

We must give Brazil that which it does not have, and for that reason it has not lived until today; we must give Brazil a soul, and for this every sacrifice is grandiose, sublime.

—Mário de Andrade, letter to Carlos Drummond, 1924

Memory and Modernism

Memory and modernism do not appear to go together at first. Born to overcome the dominance of nineteenth-century neoclassicism, modern architecture reinforced the idea of rupture with the past, any past. This position is not exclusive to architectural modernism. Modernity assumes that the present is a new era; it is not a continuation of the past, but rather it grew out of the rupture with past traditions. As a universal concept, modernity should go hand in hand with local modernization. Nonetheless, the