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The Gesamtkunstwerk of a Reunifying Metropolis: Berlin's Kunsthaus Tacheles

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**THE *GESAMTKUNSTWERK* OF A REUNIFYING METROPOLIS: BERLIN'S
*KUNSTHAUS TACHELES***

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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The *Gesamtkunstwerk* of a Reunifying Metropolis: Berlin's *Kunsthau Tacheles*

Intro

In the decade following the fall of the Berlin Wall, politicians, planners, and citizens were searching for normalcy—for a way of redefining and re-imagining the city. *Tacheles*, the site of a squatting artists' commune, represented an organic answer to this search. *Tacheles* is the simulacrum of Berlin, past and present; as a microcosm, it told stories of the city's layered past while showing promise of a rich future. It is not just a building, community, or attraction, but a cultural site that is perpetually changing. The ethos of the site as such – an organic cultural center that mirrors the 21st century city around it – is not sustainable against the growing trends toward a “clean” urban plan. As an alternative urban space, it cannot withstand the privatization of the surrounding area, nor can the site be successfully preserved. To preserve the site as a memorial and represent it as a static entity would leave *Tacheles* as an empty shell holding ghosts of its visionary past. Berlin holds a number of involuntary memorials that originated organically – memorials that are ephemeral and over time will exist only in photographs and defunct guidebooks.¹ *Tacheles* is an undeniably significant location, but its moment has passed; it will be lost to history and memory in the efforts initiated by the city government and private businesses to create a static urban plan.

Tacheles is a Yiddish word meaning, “to disclose, to speak clearly, and to reveal”. If one were to “*tacheles reden*,” he would be speaking frankly. In the early nineteenth

¹ Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 179-180. Print.

century, Jewish communities that were confined to ghettos and Shtetls (small towns of high Jewish concentration) used Yiddish as a tool for expression. The language created an outlet for the members of the community to relate and describe the intimate and energized life that they had created despite the restrictions of the societies that suppressed them.² Decades later, a number of subcultures developed under the reign of the East German Democratic Republic (GDR) that sought the ability to freely express artistic and political pursuits. These groups, like the communities confined to ghettos, also found creative egress by using the Yiddish language in their adoption of the term “*tacheles*”.

The term first made its appearance in the underworld of the GDR in the music scene during the early 1980s. A group of musicians assumed the name “*Tacheles*” and proclaimed that their mission was to dissolve the two-faced and muddled discourse that was so prevalent in the arts and media during the reign of the GDR. Censorship strictly prohibited expression of political and social beliefs; artists attempted ways around the censorship to disseminate their ideas, but the results were often so cryptic that their messages were difficult to decipher. The *Tacheles* musicians wanted the messages in their songs to be direct and accessible to their audience.³ The concept of the term is not directly translatable into the common German language used in Berlin; similarly, the anarchistic and experimental concepts of the artistic and political subcultures of the GDR were not translatable or easily diffused into their environment. The term was a successful tool of opposition.

² Shyovitz, David. "The History and Development of Yiddish." *Jewish Virtual Library*. n. page. Web. 14 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/yiddish.html>>.

³ Krempel, Dr. Ulrich. House Magic Bureau of Foreign Correspondence. *Kunsthau Tacheles - Berlin*. 1997. Web. <<http://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc/about/kunsthau-tacheles>>.

In 1990, a group of likeminded artists working with varying media adopted the term and established a commune under the name “*Tacheles*” in the Mitte district of Berlin. The commune of artists inhabited the entrance of a building that originally housed a shopping arcade and set up ateliers, a restaurant, a bar, music venues, a sculpture garden, and a nightclub in the vacant space, and covered the building with graffiti inside and out. The members of the commune did not obtain legal ownership of the building, but were squatting in the unclaimed space. A small group of about twenty artists still resides and works there today, but the ethos of the site has significantly changed, since most of the artists have been successfully evicted. The building is a 9,000 square meter structure, which has been scarred by bombs and bullets and bares the first signs of official demolition. It now stands in ruin on the busy Oranienburger Straße.⁴

Paradoxically, no one seems able to *tacheles reden* about the *Tacheles* commune site. It eludes definitions; it has a layered history of constantly changing ownership, retooling, vacancy, neglect, decay, and rejuvenation. It has been a site of revolutionary architecture, a forgotten, overgrown and crumbling eyesore, a haven for artists of every medium, and a site of opposition occupied by squatting protestors. It is not definable in its present state nor is its future easy to project. The site’s most recent ethos is one of an international cultural Mecca, but even this phase was contested. The neighborhood of *Mitte* is increasingly gentrifying, the property value of the site is rising, and the community trying to keep *Tacheles* alive is faced with constant threats of eviction. Most of the community has left and the ethos of the site is fading.

⁴ "History." *kunsthau tacheles*. n. page. Web. 15 Dec. 2011. <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

The building's origin was not nearly as nebulous. It was built as the Friedrichstadt Passage shopping arcade. Franz Ahrens directed the 15-month long construction of the department store building in 1907 and 1908.⁵ Completed in 1909, the structure spanned the Friedrichstrasse and Oranienburger Strassen, with passages and entrances from both sides, connecting the two bordering streets. The Friedrichstadt Passage was the second largest passageway mall in Berlin, following the Kaiserpassage, which connected Friedrichstraße and Unter den Linden. The Kaiserpassage was entirely destroyed in the aerial bombardments of 1944, leaving the Friedrichstadt Passage as the only remaining structure in the passageway architecture style that distinctly marked the streets of Berlin at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶ In this way, the building was symbolically transitional – representative of experimental architectural developments as well as a literal link between two main thoroughfares in the city.

The Need for a New “Normalcy”

Martin Walser, the respected German intellectual and writer, observed in his acceptance speech of the *Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels* (Peace Prize of the German Book Trade) that in order for the country to successfully and genuinely grow together after its official reunification, a communal, adhesive patriotic sentiment must exist, and “normalcy” must be achieved. Walser has produced plays, novels, lectures, film scripts, and prose, addressing identity challenges created by war and political strife.

⁵ "History." *kunsthau tacheles*. n. page. Web. 15 Dec. 2011. <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

⁶ Krempel, Dr. Ulrich. House Magic Bureau of Foreign Correspondence. *Kunsthau Tacheles - Berlin*. 1997. Web. <<http://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc/about/kunsthau-tacheles>>.

In 1998, Walser received the Peace Prize of the German Booksellers for his novel “*Ein Springender Brunnen*” (“A Springing Fountain”). The jury named Walser “the author of German unification,” and attested that he had successfully, “explained Germany to the Germans themselves and to the world”.⁷ Thus, Walser’s call for “normalcy” garnered significant attention from the population and government of both Berlin and of Germany.⁸

A “normal” Germany, according to the *Leitkultur* position, would be amalgamated through analyses of the better parts of the country’s culture. The *Leitkultur* position was presented in the late 1990s. It consisted of more conservative views and supported the idea that German culture was a dominant culture. The analyses of culture would bolster a harmonious society on the foundation of a cultural and ethnic homogeneity. The term “normalization” has since become less controversial, and is no longer as closely associated with conservative and elitist cultural views as it was in the 1990s.⁹

More recently, the prevailing model for a “normal” Germany relies less on historical trends and tradition. The newer vision is built on Western and comparatively liberal value archetypes. Fair governance, judicial justice, human rights, including equality of the law, and multiculturalism are the principles being internalized in the developing German norm during the time of reunification and reorientation after the fall of the Berlin Wall—referred to as the era of the Berlin Republic. This era is marked by

⁷ "Martin Walser [Germany]." *Internationales Literaturfestival, Berlin*. 09 May 2005: n. page. Web. 1 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.literaturfestival.com/participants/authors/2005/martin-walser>>.

⁸ Taberner, Stuart, and Frank Finlay. *Recasting German Identity, Culture, Politics, And Literature In The Berlin Republic*. Camden House (NY), 2002. 1-2. Print.

⁹ Taberner, Stuart, and Frank Finlay. *Recasting German Identity, Culture, Politics, And Literature In The Berlin Republic*. Camden House (NY), 2002. 3-14. Print.

an ingrained self-understanding of the nation's past and present; the Nazi past was viewed as an antithesis to the current era and to a future liberal agenda. The thorough acknowledgement of the past creates a positive and solid foundation for the new state ideology and for developing national consciousness that is increasingly a province of the individual level. It becomes the individual's responsibility to practice a conscientious openness in regard to the Holocaust, to take advantage of lessons from past events, and to appropriately hold sorrow in respect to the past while avoiding self-debasement. Enactment of these ideals on the individual level can be facilitated by the state and public institutions by their initiation or fostering of occasions and establishing locations for such purposes, for example the Berlin Holocaust Memorial.¹⁰

In speaking of a collective state or city norm, many historians and social analysts prefer to use the term "self-understanding" rather than "identity". This is due to the flexibility and progressiveness that the act of self-understanding allows. This term incorporates an idea of construction, whereas identity is more of a static entity with assumptions of sameness. Thus, state identity is more readily accepted as a conception of a narrative that is both consciously and unconsciously formed by intersecting histories of its different aspects (local, class, gender, ethnic, national, military, etc.). For the purposes of this essay, the city identity of Berlin will include this aspect of self-understanding, and allow for transformation with time as a flexible, fluid amalgamation of cultural, gender, ethnic, class, political, and geographic histories.¹¹

¹⁰ Taberner, Stuart, and Frank Finlay. *Recasting German Identity, Culture, Politics, And Literature In The Berlin Republic*. Camden House (NY), 2002. 1-19. 27-29. Print.

¹¹ Schödel, Kathrin. "Normalising Cultural Memory? The "Walser-Bubis Debate" and Martin Walser's Novel *Ein springender Brunnen*." *Recasting German Identity, Culture, Politics, And Literature In The Berlin Republic*. Comp. Taberner, Stuart, and Frank Finlay. Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002. 67-80. Print.

Identity Development in an Adolescent Post-Wende Berlin: Main Sites

Berlin's history is marked by a lack of continuity. It began with rapid development, is stunted with scars of battle destruction and a harsh division in the Cold War, and now continues with the reunification of its two so distinctly different halves.¹² From one perspective, this discontinuity engenders great potential for fluidity in terms of the city's present and future. It allows great possibility for citizens' and visitors' ability to consciously determine the course of the city's development. However, this malleability is also the greatest enigma for those trying to analyze and historicize the metropolis. Nabakov fell to describing Berlin as a city of oblivion,¹³ without distinct markers and with infinite corners wherein to lose oneself. The transitory quality of Berlin allows for a romantically gross number of possibilities, yet evades descriptions of a single moment or of a collective history. *Oblivion* describes a quality of the city that cannot be denied, yet fails to illustrate the substance of Berlin.

Karl Scheffler described Berlin's heavy tragedy: "*Berlin ist eine Stadt, verdammt dazu, ewig zu werden, niemals zu sein* (Berlin is a city condemned to always be becoming, never to be)".¹⁴ Scheffler warned that the city would always be something that *would be*, something with potential and a future, but something that would never just be in the present—something to never be actualized. Characterized as such, citizens of

¹² Zitzlsperger, Ulrike. "Filling the Blanks: Berlin as a Public Showcase." *Recasting German Identity*. Comp. Stuart Taberner and Comp. Frank Finlay. Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002. 37- 50. Print.

¹³ Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 209. Print.

¹⁴ Zitzlsperger, Ulrike. "Filling the Blanks: Berlin as a Public Showcase." *Recasting German Identity*. Comp. Stuart Taberner and Comp. Frank Finlay. Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002. 37- 50. Print.

Berlin are fated to be roaming through an unfixed culture: nomads without static roots.¹⁵

However, to take this quality of Berlin as a truth may allow one to see the particular character of the city. The city is a constant project, always under development, never static, and therefore a place of infinite potential. Just as the walls of *Tacheles* never saw their final coat of paint, and though the sculpture garden was overgrown with wrought iron formations and thick with welded and cast creatures, the site was never fully exhausted or finished. The aesthetics of Berlin reflect its ability to constantly adapt to a new era in history, while respecting and remembering its past.

The identity of Berlin then, manifests itself most profoundly during its transition periods. The early 1990s were one such period, as the city worked to fill in its gaps that were opened and revealed in the years following the demolition of the wall. During this time, the citizens of Germany were being critically analyzed due to the flagrant contrasts in ideologies that existed between those of the former East and West. This analysis was illustrated in a *Stadtforum Berlin* meeting in 1991, with the observation that the space of former West Berlin had an evident public, but offered no public space, while East Berlin offered an expanse of public space, but lacked a strong sense of a public. The *Stadtforum Berlin* was established by the Berlin Senate as a panel of specialists from a wide range of fields. Its project was to address the urban planning issues of the reunification of Berlin, including those relating to the environment, architecture, economy, and culture. The *Stadtforum* emphasized the importance of a public, efficient urban space, and an identity and stressed the importance of urban planning in its ability to intricately define the political and cultural identities of the city. This discourse also highlighted the importance

¹⁵ Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 179-180. Print.

of creating an urban space that respects the collective history of the citizens as well as their visions of the future.¹⁶

The urban space and identity of Berlin is doubly significant, as it stands as a nation's capital as well as an influential city that serves as a gate between East and West.¹⁷ Throughout the 1990s and into today, a number of events of significant change to the topography and culture of Berlin have contributed to the formation of a more unified identity. One of these series of events revolves around the longlasting debate of the *Berliner Stadtschloß*. The debate surrounding the *Stadtschloß* parallels the discussion of the fate of the *Tacheles* site in many ways: the *Stadtschloß* was a communal gathering place and cultural center, a symbol of Berlin's reunification, and puzzled politicians and members of the community with the decisions of its future.

The *Stadtschloß* stood in the center of Berlin's neighborhood of Mitte, the political center of the West German DDR. The *Hohenzollern Stadtschloß* was a looming shadow of Prussian privilege and aristocracy. The memory of the Prussian reign was thus too strongly visible and it was politically necessary that the *Stadtschloß* be demolished and replaced with an impressive symbol of the new Germany. The *Stadtschloß* had also been damaged in the war and funding did not allow for reconstruction of the building. The *Stadtschloß* was demolished by order of the East German government in 1950, in its place, the *Palast der Republik* was constructed. Along with the newly built Foreign Ministry Building and the *Staatsratsgebäude*, the

¹⁶ Zitzlsperger, Ulrike. "Filling the Blanks: Berlin as a Public Showcase." *Recasting German Identity*. Comp. Stuart Taberner and Comp. Frank Finlay. Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002. 37- 50. Print.

¹⁷ Zitzlsperger, Ulrike. "Filling the Blanks: Berlin as a Public Showcase." *Recasting German Identity*. Comp. Stuart Taberner and Comp. Frank Finlay. Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002. 37- 50. Print.

Palast der Republik redefined the triangular sides of Marx-Engels-Platz and created a new place and identity for the state of the DDR.¹⁸

The *Palast der Republik* was built to visualize the unity of state and people. The building of the *Palast der Republik* began in 1973 and was completed in 1976. The demolition of the building was completed by 2008. Standing on the shore of the Spree River in the former place of the *Stadtschloß*, the *Palast der Republik* was full of cultural and historical meaning for both its function and symbolism. The building served as a cultural center, as well as the seat of the *Volkskammer*, the communist parliament of the German Democratic Republic of East Germany.¹⁹

The *Palast der Republik* was one of the largest cultural centers for its time and became an escape for those living in the East because it provided material comforts and communal space that were otherwise restricted in East Berlin. The building was furnished with items that East Berliners and East Germans were unable to buy in stores: chairs of real leather, wood décor, and extravagant lighting fixtures. The aesthetic was a profound contrast to the bleakness of everyday life and thus became a social meeting place.²⁰ Citizens gathered in the building to enjoy its comforts together and used the site to throw celebrations.

In September 1990, asbestos used in the building's construction was discovered and the building was closed to the public. In November 2003, the German parliament

¹⁸ "Palast der Republik: Berlin." *Kultur-Netz* n. pag. Web. 5 Dec 2011. <<http://www.pdr.kultur-netz.de/>>.

¹⁹ "Palast der Republik: Berlin." *Kultur-Netz* n. pag. Web. 5 Dec 2011. <<http://www.pdr.kultur-netz.de/>>.

²⁰ Blum, Martin. "Remaking the East German Past." *Journal of Popular Culture*. 229-253. Print.

made the final decision to demolish the building, which began in February 2006.²¹ A number of politically and culturally historical events took place in the *Palast der Republik*, which made the demolition controversial. As the house of the *Volkskammer*, many important decisions and political events took place within the walls of the *Palast der Republik*. Many saw the building as a symbol of the reunification and wanted to preserve it for this reason.²²

After the demolition, numerous contests were held in attempts to fill the historically significant site of the *Palast der Republik* and the *Stadtschloß*. Suggestions included hybrid designs incorporating original parts of the *Palast der Republik* structure, a combination of the *Palast der Republik* and the *Stadtschloß*, or a new building entirely. The idea of a totally new building was adamantly rejected due to the site's great historical significance.²³ The *Palast der Republik* truly was a symbol of unity. Built as a structure to unify the people under the new state, it became the site of the political decision to reunify Germany on August 23, 1990.²⁴

In 2001, lobbyist groups banded together creating the *Stadtschloß Berlin Initiative*. The groups planned the rebuilding and projected functions of the *Stadtschloß*. After much debate, resolutions were agreed upon in 2002 and 2003 with the Bundestag deciding for at least a partial reconstruction of the *Stadtschloß*. In 2007, the Bundestag decided that three facades of the *Palast der Republik* will be reconstructed. It has also been decided that the interior will be decorated in a contemporary style to visualize the

²¹ "Palast der Republik: Berlin." *Kultur-Netz* n. pag. Web. 5 Dec 2011. <<http://www.pdr.kultur-netz.de/>>.

²² Neill, William J. V. *Urban planning and cultural identity*. Psychology Press, 2004. 97-107. Print.

²³ Blum, Martin. "Remaking the East German Past." *Journal of Popular Culture*. 229-253. Print.

²⁴ Neill, William J. V. *Urban planning and cultural identity*. Psychology Press, 2004. 97-107. Print.

desire to unify the past with the present and due to the fact that replication of the interior is impossible without adequate knowledge of the original plans. The new building will be called the *Humboldtforum* and will serve as a center honoring the German traditions of science, art, and culture. The forum will honor the Humboldt family, one renowned for scientific advances, geographical exploration, and philosophical study and the founding of the Humboldt University of Berlin. As of now, construction is delayed until 2014 because of budget cuts, though off-site masonry has begun.²⁵

The quest to adequately fill this specific parcel of land brings up questions of memory politics. *Ostalgie* (the identification of products and objects with memories formed in East Germany; nostalgia for the East, German *Ost*) can account for some of the attachment those who opted to preserve the *Palast der Republik* had for the building. The *Palast der Republik* not only stood symbolically for the reunification of Germany, but was also a large part of the lives of many East Berliners. The events that took place in the building are not just historically significant, but personally significant to those who spent time, went to concerts, ate, celebrated, and were married there.²⁶

Ostalgie is also an escape. It is an escape from a difficult acclimation to a new world that is sometimes socially and financially instable. As those who became *Ostalgie* sought out their personal comforts, whether it was in the GDR brands of *Mokka Fix Gold* coffee or *Florena* hand cream, it would be disorienting and frightening should such a staple of East Berlin and their old lives be wiped away. East Berliners found stability in *Ostalgie* material culture and had found stability in the *Palast der Republik*. It is no

²⁵ "Palast der Republik: Berlin." *Kultur-Netz* n. pag. Web. 5 Dec 2011. <<http://www.pdr.kultur-netz.de/>>.

²⁶ Neill, William J. V. *Urban planning and cultural identity*. Psychology Press, 2004. 97-107. Print.

wonder such a fight was put up to preserve the *Palast der Republik*, a monument of stability, while so many were seeking the familiar stability of the GDR.²⁷

Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, German architectural historian and philosopher, defines the site of the *Schloß* as a place to acknowledge and reflect upon critical memory of the building that formerly occupied the site. Hoffmann-Axthelm argues that the debate of rebuilding or not rebuilding the *Schloß* is not based on the attempt and inability to restore a history that cannot be reprised. Instead, he argues, the *Schloß* is a catalyst of discourse: encouraging aesthetic and political discussion, with dialogue of atonement. This catalytic characteristic is valuable in modern society, as such moral discussions reflecting history have become rare. Hoffmann-Axthelm goes further to redefine the *Schloß* as a structure with a strong ethos of aesthetic power and impressive architecture, rather than a controversial ideological symbol.²⁸

Hoffmann-Axthelm expands on this, denying the *Schloß* as a symbol of “Germanness,” declaring it a symbol of urbanity. As a stunning structure in the Baroque style, the *Schloss* was an architectural masterpiece. The Baroque style was an architectural marker of early modernity across Europe, making the structure symbolic of a shared urban European identity, not specifically German. The *Schloß* did not spring from German romanticism, but was a product of the collected enlightened rationalism of Europe that expressed a pre-romantic measured beauty. As such a weighted structure, the *Schloß* became a generator of civic pride and a tool for architectural orientation for Berlin. The *Schloß* acted as a compass for Berlin architecture; new construction projects

²⁷ Blum, Martin. "Remaking the East German Past." *Journal of Popular Culture*. 229-253. Print.

²⁸ Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 180-194. Print.

were scaled in relation to it and it acted as a cohesive element that tied together the eclectic architectural styles of the city.²⁹

As of this moment, the site of the former *Palast der Republik* remains a field of green grass with wooden pathways running through it. Once a monumental structure stands in a place, something must always stand in that place. If that site is ever left empty, it will always be remembered as “the place where (the structure) stood.” Berliners are relieved by the postponement of the building of the *Humboldtforum* and appreciate the green expanse. It seems as though, for some at least, the green emptiness is enough of a monument. It is an escape: a most simple statement, that in a bustling, industrial city, residents are drawn to the comfort and calm relief of nature. This sentiment is illustrated by the giant grass heart that was planted in the field by an anonymous graffiti artist. As Berlin resident and architect Stefan Rindisbacher said, “*Grün ist immer gut* [Green is always good].”

Identity Development in an Adolescent Post-Wende Berlin: Main Cultural Events

Other markers of Berlin’s identity development in the era after the fall of the wall include events such as *Lange Nacht der Museen*. This is an annual event including over fifty museums and institutions and an arranged public transport that shuttles viewers through a planned itinerary. The participating museums and institutions enhance their exhibits with supplements of soundtracks, written programs, and refreshments for the viewers.³⁰

²⁹ Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 180-194. Print.

³⁰ Zitzlsperger, Ulrike. "Filling the Blanks: Berlin as a Public Showcase." *Recasting German Identity*.

The establishment of the Love Parade, with the first taking place in Berlin in 1989, was also significant to the collective history of the New Berlin. The initiative was the project of a group of techno enthusiasts, a style of music that, at the premiere of the Love Parade, was not widely known. As the parade came to attract nearly one million participants on its tenth anniversary event, political leaders acknowledged the cultural force that resulted from the popular appeal it was obtaining. When environmental and financial concerns arose and the proposal to move the parade to Paris was made, Berlin officials acted to keep the parade in the city.³¹ The Love Parade had become a symbol of youth and harmony, two things essential to the healing of the scar left behind by the city's former division. The parade eventually did begin to travel, leaving its home of Berlin, but most definitely made a mark with its peaceful yet exciting energy that was created by a like-minded community, much like *Tacheles*.

Another event with such monumental impact on the developing cultural aura of the city was Christo's exhibition "Wrapped Reichstag", in which Bulgarian artist Christo and his wife Jean-Claude draped the Reichstag in over one million square feet of aluminum colored polypropylene fabric, as one of their many fabric wrapped installations in a series that includes monuments, trees, and walkways. The act of wrapping the Reichstag visually solidified the idea that Germany was again united and was now a nation of progressive vision. The plans for wrapping the 101-year-old building began in 1971 but were not able to be actualized due to heightened tension during the Cold War.

Comp. Stuart Taberner and Comp. Frank Finlay. Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002. 37-50. Print.

³¹ Zitzlsperger, Ulrike. "Filling the Blanks: Berlin as a Public Showcase." *Recasting German Identity*. Comp. Stuart Taberner and Comp. Frank Finlay. Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002. 37-50. Print.

Once wrapped, the aesthetically solid and impressively heavy-looking building adopted a delicate beauty, appearing as more of an ethereal structure while retaining its essence as a monument of significant political power. After the wrapping was removed, renovations to the Reichstag were completed and the German Bundestag was relocated from Bonn to Berlin. This relocation of the German Parliament was a significant symbol in the transformation of the city and nation after the fall of the wall and its true political reunification.³²

The city's tagline was no longer "Berlin is becoming", as it was from 1989 to 1999, but simply referred to the city as "New Berlin". It was these events and projects that began to shape the identity of the new city. Through these developments, Berlin was beginning to be seen again as a metropolis and to draw in both inhabitants and visitors in increasing numbers. The establishment of New Berlin emphasized normalization over memorialization and attempted to leave nostalgia behind with symbols like the renovated Reichstag and an abstract logo of blue and red geometric shapes that symbolized the open Brandenburg Gate.³³ Soon enough, the name of "New Berlin" began to be shed for less ephemeral descriptions such as "Hauptstadt," "Kreative Stadt," and "Junge Stadt".³⁴

In a sense, between the fall of the Berlin Wall and before the solidification of New Berlin and its development as the capital of reunified Germany, the city underwent a

³² Goldberger, Paul. "Christo's Wrapped Reichstag: Symbol for the New Germany." *New York Times*. (June 23, 1995): n. page. Web. 12 Dec. 2011.
<<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/06/23/arts/christo-s-wrapped-reichstag-symbol-for-the-new-germany.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>>.

³³ Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 176. Print.

³⁴ Zitzlsperger, Ulrike. "Filling the Blanks: Berlin as a Public Showcase." *Recasting German Identity*. Comp. Stuart Taberner and Comp. Frank Finlay. Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002. 37- 50. Print.

time of rocky adolescence. During this transition, the city was malleable. The city was extremely susceptible to forces of change. It was a canvas that needed to be repaired and repainted. It was the citizens of the “shadow classes” that initiated one of the most remarkable movements of this settling era; as the city began to settle around them, citizens who needed creative space began to settle into the unused territories of the city.

The Reanimation of Vacant Space as Alternative Space

On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. The physical barrier had divided the city and sanctioned off East Berlin from West Berlin for twenty-eight years. As the wall fell, family and friends rushed across to reunite with one another. The unification of the city, however, would be much more difficult than the elimination of a physical barrier. The city had existed for almost thirty years with two separate ways of life, two separate ideologies, and two separate societies on either side of the wall. An entire generation grew up in the city while the wall cast a shadow that stretched over both halves. The demolition of the wall left a physical and cultural void in the city.

The task of filling the vacuum and repairing the bisected city posed a great challenge. It would be met by both the Berlin Senate, the *Stadtforum*, and independent movements initiated by citizens. Major obstacles encountered along the way to reunification include ambiguity of property ownership, the desire of citizens of the former East Berlin to retain cultural markers while being absorbed by the *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, and the unification of two groups that once had a collective history but had grown apart. The city shared two distinct cultures, both which were to be respected by

those who were working to mend the metropolis both on official institutional and underground levels.

The Berlin Senate, the executive governing body of Berlin, was required to move quickly in reunifying the city. The result had to be solid and unambiguous, as the government and parliament were to move back in to the abandoned buildings, jobs were to be created, and private developers' expectations of the newly reunified city were to be met—all as quickly and fluidly as possible. Some of the most involved decisions dealt with the destruction and reconstruction of buildings, monuments, squares, and parks, as well as the determination of ownership of private properties. Deciding which buildings were to be repaired, which were to be demolished and replaced, and who was to claim them were huge challenges of organization and urban planning. The Senate decided that the ground plan of the city would not be reinvented or renovated. Though it was clear that drastic social and economic transformations would soon occur, architectural and urban planning changes would happen only if they significantly improved the traditional form of architecture and layout of Berlin. The city would retain its pre-wall urban development model and its traditional architectural style.³⁵

To this day, the Berlin Senate dedicates a significant portion of its work to the convention of the city's architectural and urban development, making a point to adequately modernize the city while respecting its common past, avoiding major destruction and demolition, and bolstering internal development. In order to achieve all of this, numerous reports were commissioned, contests held, and varying plans collected.

³⁵ Holm, Andrej, and Armin Kuhn. "Squatting and Urban Renewal: The Interaction of Squatter Movements and Strategies of Urban Restructuring in Berlin." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 35.3. (2011): 644-58. Print.

Eventually, in 1999, the *Planwerk Innenstadt* was adopted. This plan ensured thorough revitalization and urbanization of the city while maintaining its historical center.³⁶

In addition to the government's actions, the city was reunifying itself culturally in organic and unguided ways. After the fall of the wall, squatting was common, as many buildings in the areas of East Berlin were deserted and ownership was contested or simply unknown. Squatting movements often form in response to crises created by previous urban-renewal systems and during times of transition between urban-renewal campaigns, such as the era Berlin was experiencing. The patterns of squatting movements closely rely on the fluctuating strategies of urban renewal plans. In Berlin, the patterns that result in the situation of Tacheles can be analyzed beginning with the TUNIX Conference, which assembled in the city in 1978. The conference marked the end of 'the red decade'. Beginning with the student riots in 1967 and 1968 that protested poor living conditions for students and named the Western German government authoritarian and hypocritical, 'the red decade' was filled with social movements that lay revolutionary foundations for movements promoting sexual-equality, and those against atomic power, war, and militarization. The motions set the scene for experimental sectarian parties to establish and for an increased radicalization of political attitude. The alternative movement was quickly evolving and expanding and Berlin was established as its epicenter. Squatters were not just

³⁶ Holm, Andrej, and Armin Kuhn. "Squatting and Urban Renewal: The Interaction of Squatter Movements and Strategies of Urban Restructuring in Berlin." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 35.3. (2011): 644-58. Print.

using the empty buildings as residential space, but also began to use the deserted spaces as art studios.³⁷

Artists' initiatives were forming and occupying these buildings in collectives. The buildings were visible to the naked eyes of passersby, but not acknowledged by the government. They were not owned by anyone and were therefore not anyone's official responsibility. The buildings were, however, seen as empty places of potential to the artists who sought spaces to work. These communes and undefined space offered common ground for Berliners of the former East and West as well as visitors and immigrants from other parts of Germany and other nations. They became makeshift foci, where likeminded people congregated and practiced alternative lifestyles under the common belief in autonomy and improvisation. One such commune, *Tacheles*, became the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the grassroots reunification of Berlin.

The History of the Physical Structure of Kunsthau Tacheles

The construction of the building is reinforced concrete with a giant ribbed dome atop. It is one of the earliest examples of reinforced concrete construction in Europe. The facades of the structure borrow from Gothic and classical styles of architecture, with columns, gargoyles, and high archways. The building was uniquely constructed with the front entryway (the primary space which the *Tacheles* artists inhabited) and the steel skeleton of the main frame of the building independent from one another. The reinforced concrete dome was one of the largest at its time of construction. The collective structure

³⁷ Holm, Andrej, and Armin Kuhn. "Squatting and Urban Renewal: The Interaction of Squatter Movements and Strategies of Urban Restructuring in Berlin." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 35.3. (2011): 644-58. Print.

is indicative of the modern trend of architecture that was emerging in Europe at the turn of the century.³⁸ The building was also constructed with a pneumatic tubing system, enabling those working in the building to send material and mail throughout the complex,³⁹ a very different underground communication system than the graffiti that winds in and out of the buildings passageways today.

The main department store in the passage mall struggled from the time of its establishment and was forced to file bankruptcy. Stores no longer occupied the building by 1914 and the structure was auctioned off just before World War I. The ownership and use of the structure between 1914 and 1924 is unknown. In 1924, adaptations were made to the building including a cellar, known as the Tresorraum (a word usually used for mine-like passages in which safes are installed). The height of the passage ceiling was lowered to the level of the store ceilings, drastically changing the appearance of the structure.⁴⁰

The building continued to pass through phases. In 1928, the AEG electric company used the building as a showcase and storage space for their products. AEG found its new home in the Friedrichstadt-Passage after a fire destroyed their former showroom in 1927.⁴¹ During this time, the building took the name “*Haus der Technik*” (“House of Technology”). The House of Technology emitted one of the first television broadcast in the world.⁴² The building continued to represent a forward-thinking site,

³⁸ Krempel, Dr. Ulrich. House Magic Bureau of Foreign Correspondence. *Kunsthau Tacheles - Berlin*. 1997. Web. <<http://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc/about/kunsthau-tacheles>>.

³⁹ "History." *kunsthau tacheles*. n. page. Web. 15 Dec. 2011. <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

⁴⁰ "History." *kunsthau tacheles*. n. page. Web. 15 Dec. 2011. <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

⁴¹ "History." *kunsthau tacheles*. n. page. Web. 15 Dec. 2011. <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

⁴² Krempel, Dr. Ulrich. House Magic Bureau of Foreign Correspondence. *Kunsthau Tacheles - Berlin*. 1997. Web. <<http://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc/about/kunsthau-tacheles>>.

almost as an anachronism, as it represented a place of *fernsehen*, where one could see into the distance and into the future.

The building also converted into a station for sections of the Nazi Party administration and departments of organization beginning in 1934. The fifth floor was used to detain French prisoners of war. The Allied air raids thus targeted the building between 1943 and 1945. The building was significantly damaged and the East Berlin government did not have sufficient funds to rebuild the giant passageway. The building was largely ignored by the East Berlin government and began to decay and become overgrown.⁴³ The damage from the war and weathering left the building with pockmarks and wrinkles: an unsightly ruin in the geographical center of Berlin.

The ownership of the property was transferred to the Free German Trade Union Federation of East Germany in 1948. Despite this change in ownership, the site remained overlooked and was not a priority on any list. Over the next few decades, intermittent use of the building slowed the concrete structure's otherwise sure entropy. A travel agency established an office in the upper floors,⁴⁴ providing customers with pathways to vacations from a city that was being jostled into zones delegated by the three Western Allies and about to be wracked with Cold War tensions.

The building was first used as an artistic space in the middle of the twentieth century. The cinema group CAMERA utilized the space as a theatre and the East Berlin

⁴³ "History." *kunsthau tacheles*. n. page. Web. 15 Dec. 2011. <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

⁴⁴ "History." *kunsthau tacheles*. n. page. Web. 15 Dec. 2011. <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

Art School used rooms for holding seminars. The roof was rebuilt and a lobby area was constructed to improve conditions for these groups.⁴⁵

In 1980, the building was used as a storage space for material from the Friedrichstadt Palace. The Friedrichstadt Palace theater house was originally constructed in the mid 1860s. The building has changed hands many times, had a number of architectural renovations, and even relocated over the decades.⁴⁶ Like *Tacheles*, the eras of Berlin's history can be read in the history of the Friedrichstadt Palace. It is only appropriate that the two should cross historical paths.

An organized demolition of the building began in 1980 and was scheduled to be completed in April 1990.⁴⁷ The building was considered an eyesore and was to be demolished in order to pave a street through the property that would connect Oranienburger Straße and Friedrichstraße. The movie theatre was closed and the iconic dome was destroyed. The remaining part of the building was to be unceremoniously demolished by detonation in April 1990.⁴⁸ The demolition was not completed according to schedule, due to interference by a growing movement that would define the next era in the history of the site.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, an improvisational, expressive, and autonomous subculture took advantage of the abundant vacant residential and industrial spaces of inner city East Berlin. The significant supply of housing and studio space was inspirational to groups of artists who were testing improvisational and

⁴⁵ Krempel, Dr. Ulrich. House Magic Bureau of Foreign Correspondence. *Kunsthau Tacheles - Berlin*. 1997. Web. <<http://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc/about/kunsthau-tacheles>>.

⁴⁶ Krempel, Dr. Ulrich. House Magic Bureau of Foreign Correspondence. *Kunsthau Tacheles - Berlin*. 1997. Web. <<http://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc/about/kunsthau-tacheles>>.

⁴⁷ "History." *kunsthau tacheles*. n. page. Web. 15 Dec. 2011. <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

⁴⁸ "History." *kunsthau tacheles*. n. page. Web. 15 Dec. 2011. <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

alternative lifestyles.⁴⁹ The empty structures were visible to passersby on the streets, but not recognized on the civic grid. The housing initiatives of the GDR had focused on building large estates of apartment buildings in newly established districts and towns on the edges of the city limits. The inner-city housing structures were neglected and devalued as a result of the investments in the capitalist urban development; this caused upkeep to decline and vacancy to increase.⁵⁰

The first inhabitants of these vacant buildings were mostly East German youths from subculture groups and West German artists. The first phase, lasting from December 1989 to April 1990, was characterized by squatters who publicly and assertively occupied the structures, in contrast to squatters in the GDR, who more quietly practiced *schwartz wohnen* (residing illegally). These newer groups created experimental communities to explore anarchist and libertarian philosophies that were anti petit bourgeois, anti-Nazi, and against formal legislation.⁵¹ The squatters of this phase were committed to openness and clarity of intent.

During this era, a group of twenty artists from East and West Berlin discovered the giant vacant space of the Friedrichstadt-Passage on February 13, 1990 and occupied the building as the *Kunsthau Tacheles Gruppe*.⁵² The artists of *Tacheles* approached the Building Management of Berlin-Mitte to retract the decision to complete the demolition

⁴⁹ Holm, Andrej, and Armin Kuhn. "Squatting and Urban Renewal: The Interaction of Squatter Movements and Strategies of Urban Restructuring in Berlin." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 35.3. (2011): 644-58. Print.

⁵⁰ Holm, Andrej, and Armin Kuhn. "Squatting and Urban Renewal: The Interaction of Squatter Movements and Strategies of Urban Restructuring in Berlin." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 35.3. (2011): 644-58. Print.

⁵¹ Holm, Andrej, and Armin Kuhn. "Squatting and Urban Renewal: The Interaction of Squatter Movements and Strategies of Urban Restructuring in Berlin." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 35.3. (2011): 644-58. Print.

⁵² Krempel, Dr. Ulrich. House Magic Bureau of Foreign Correspondence. *Kunsthau Tacheles - Berlin*. 1997. Web. <<http://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc/about/kunsthau-tacheles>>.

of the building that coming April. The building management was hesitant, but the Berlin Round Table answered the group's appeals and issued an injunction. Engineering surveys concluded that the building was sound and would not be demolished on schedule, and the site was named a historic landmark, thus protected under the Monument Preservation Act.⁵³

The *Tacheles* commune grew in membership and notoriety, receiving international attention. At its height, the *Kunsthau Tacheles* accommodated over one hundred artists with working and living space and had thirty studios under its miraculously supported roof. The studios reigned in between 300,000 to 400,000 visitors each year. On account of its international fame and pull of visitors, as well as the recognition it gained for being a forum for revolutionary and experimental art, the *Kunsthau Tacheles* received an annual subsidy, in varying amount, from the Berlin government to help financially support a broad range of projects. The *Kunsthau Tacheles* also raised money self-sufficiently through commercial endeavors; the building housed a cinema, bar, and club with multiple venues, and offered a nightly line up of a variety of bands, DJs, and music styles.⁵⁴

The habitation of the ruin inadvertently answered the most straining complications of urban development in reunification and coincided with classic urban planning ideas. The artists of *Tacheles* respected the memory and heritage of the building while they adapted it to the modern and future directions of their era. The members of *Tacheles* were instrumental in the construction of the post-reunification

⁵³ Krempel, Dr. Ulrich. House Magic Bureau of Foreign Correspondence. *Kunsthau Tacheles - Berlin*. 1997. Web. <<http://sites.google.com/site/housemagicbfc/about/kunsthau-tacheles>>.

⁵⁴ "History." *kunsthau tacheles*. n. page. Web. 15 Dec. 2011. <<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>>.

identity of Berlin by taking over unused spaces and making them tangible to the city by filling the spaces with public art and cultural venues. The new uses of the building offered a range of notable uses: the commune hosted a bar, music venues, art classes, a sculpture garden, galleries, and a nightclub. A diverse group of people frequented the building for a variety of reasons at all hours. *Tacheles* became a symbol of the city and was featured in most guidebooks and welcomed between 300,000 and 400,000 visitors each year.⁵⁵ The commune of citizens from the former East and West Berlin, other parts of Germany, and other nations exhibit a plausible healing of relationships between citizens and introduce diversity to the city. These concepts were deemed essential to a healthy urban area by well-respected urban analyst Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.⁵⁶

Unfortunately, the relationships between the artists were not seamless and differing philosophies created a rift, separating the group into two. *Gruppe Tacheles des Kunsthaus* formed one group and was in control of the cinema space, restaurant, club, and bar, and the remaining artists were a loosely grouped unaffiliated collection of artists who contributed to the sculpture garden and assorted studios. On April 5, 2011, the members of *Gruppe Tacheles* left the Friedrichstadt Passage property for a payment of one million Euros. The members of *Gruppe Tacheles*, numbering near eighty, peacefully left the site that was the commune's home and project for twenty-one years. With the *Gruppe Tacheles*, went the venues of Zapata, Restaurant, Kino, Biotop, Freifläche, and Kalerie. Another eighty artists, belonging to the loosely knit group, remained in the

⁵⁵ Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 204-209. Print.

⁵⁶ Reference: Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.

Friedrichstadt Passage.⁵⁷ Motions are still underway to completely evacuate the site. In the meantime, though artists still work at the site and visitors continue to visit, many of the spaces are now closed and barricaded off, leaving the site as a shadow of its former self.

HSH Nordbank is currently the effective owner of the Friedrichsstadt Passage and moved for eviction of the site in preparation for its auction as the real-estate values in Mitte have risen significantly: the land value was conservatively estimated at €35 million in 2010, not taking the value of existing buildings into account. The one million euro payment to persuade the artists to leave was given anonymously and presented to the artists in *Tacheles* by the Berlin lawyers Schultz and Seldeneck. The majority sentiment of *Gruppe Tacheles* was that their time in the Friedrichstadt Passage was expired and that their legal fight to stay could not be sustained. The group peacefully accepted the payment and left, projecting to use the one million Euros to begin a new project in another location.⁵⁸

The city of Berlin was in support of the *Tacheles* initiative, but did not, to public knowledge, offer to buy the space in order to protect the cultural venue and the artists.⁵⁹ Had the government stepped in to protect the group, accepting the protection would have gone against the founding ideas of the commune that denied formal rule. The commune

⁵⁷ Wroe, David. "Art icon Tacheles shrinks after €1-million payout." *Local*. (2011): n. page. Web. 8 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.thelocal.de/society/20110405-34205.html>>.

⁵⁸ Wroe, David. "Art icon Tacheles shrinks after €1-million payout." *Local*. (2011): n. page. Web. 8 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.thelocal.de/society/20110405-34205.html>>.

⁵⁹ Wroe, David. "Art icon Tacheles shrinks after €1-million payout." *Local*. (2011): n. page. Web. 8 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.thelocal.de/society/20110405-34205.html>>.

was attempting to live independently of the established order of federal law and economy; living on land owned by the city would abase that commitment.

On March 5, 2012, workers from the Berlin-based company Lahr, Gawron GmbH, acting on commission from HSH Nordbank, measured the arching main entryway to fit the passage with a fence. The fence would block visitors from entering and place the studios, exhibits, and remaining artists (around fifty at the time) behind a wall. The artists in *Tacheles* at this time were acting with current rent contracts and not using space illegally. The blockade would effectively force the art house to close.⁶⁰

On March 22, 2012, the blockade was constructed and the entryway was sealed. Near one hundred demonstrators gathered and protested the externally organized closing of the art house. The artists remaining in the building were removed by force and fights broke out among demonstrators on the street. The site, which was always a strong symbol of peaceful community was now upset with violence. On March 23, the blockade was deemed unjustified in court, it was taken down, and the artists were allowed to return to the building.⁶¹ A forced closure of the iconic cultural space is symbolic; a forced closure and smothering of the social and artistic venture as the result of a wall being erected in such a tender city could be monumentally detrimental.

On March 24, twenty artists staged a sit-in, locked themselves into the *Tacheles* building, and painted their bodies with labels of “victim of bank”.⁶² Their actions

⁶⁰ Ahner, Petrov. "Artist Wall to protect the Arthouse Tacheles." *Petrov Ahner: Photography Berlin*. <<http://petrovahner.net/category/kunsthautacheles/>>.

⁶¹ "Uncertain future for the Tacheles art house in Berlin." *Art Media Agency*. (2012): n. page. Web. 15 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.artmediaagency.com/en/tag/tacheles/>>.

⁶² Connolly, Kate. "Berlin artists' lock-in protest to halt developers." *Guardian* 24 Mar 2012, n. pag. Web. 25 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/25/berlin-bohemian-artists-kunsthautaus>>.

protested the privatization of the public sector that Berlin is experiencing on a large scale. HSH Nordbank plans to develop a complex of offices and luxury apartments on the site.⁶³

The bohemian lifestyle that has been a main characteristic of Berlin for the last few decades is being compromised through privatization. The bohemian culture of Berlin encouraged artists and writers to live and act without regard for standard conventions and practices. This is becoming an increasingly more difficult way of life to practice in its truest form while there is less common space available in the city and property ownership must be respected. Governing mayor Klaus Wowereit described Berlin at the turn of the twenty-first century as 'poor but sexy'. The city was, and still is, rich in creative wealth and able to use its sexy, bohemian culture to draw in the tourist industry and art market. With this attention, developers and big businesses were also drawn to Berlin, money began to funnel in, and a decrease in the unemployment rate was catalyzed.

Berlin is now no longer 'poor' but maintains its alternative aesthetic and drive.

Describing something as 'rich but sexy' is not nearly as enticing and has, as demonstrated by the protesting artists who locked themselves into the *Tacheles* building, created unrest in those still appreciating the bohemian lifestyle in Berlin.

Berlin's economy is strengthening because of privatization, but the conventions associated with it (property ownership, exclusivity of access, and adherence to law) severely clash with the bohemian and alternative culture that drew the privatized forces in. Though ironic that such an alternative off-capitalist culture should limit its freedoms by attracting private investors, it is a fate that cannot be stopped. Even if the artists of *Tacheles* or their supporters in the public body would band together to purchase the site

⁶³ Connolly, Kate. "Berlin artists' lock-in protest to halt developers." *Guardian* 24 Mar 2012, n. page. Web. 25 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/25/berlin-bohemian-artists-kunsthau>>.

themselves, it would still transfer the site to the private sector and compromise the founding and persisting ideals of the *Tacheles* community.

In a city that is ever-changing and impossible to succinctly define throughout its many historical phases, the *Kunsthau Tacheles* is an appropriate emblem of the transitional years in Berlin after the wall came down. A ruin that is inhabited and made into a productive cultural project that symbiotically exists with the city is a perfect embodiment of the identity of Berlin. If this famous off-capitalist icon of *Tacheles* would cease existing in Berlin, it could dispirit the other projects in places like New York, with the No Longer Empty initiative, and Budapest, where artists inhabit ruined bars.⁶⁴

The eras of the site now known as *Tacheles* stand clearly along a timeline, though the ethos of the site seems to elude time. The *Kunsthau Tacheles* was seeded in the permeable era of transition before the solidification of New Berlin. During this time of transition, the aspirations of the city had vectors reaching from the past as strong backbones carrying them into the future. Such oriented views of time largely excluded the present.⁶⁵ The artists of *Tacheles* were the exception with their adamant attention to the present. *Tacheles* developed when Berlin was a place in which there were “always new cracks in the asphalt, and out of them the past grows luxuriantly”,⁶⁶ but instead encouraged the present to grow and thicken.

“Tacheles ist ein Magischer Fleck (Berlin is a Magical Place)”: The Ethos of Kunsthau Tacheles

⁶⁴ Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 204-209. Print.

⁶⁵ Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 175-176. Print.

⁶⁶ Schneider, Peter. *The Wall Jumper: A Berlin Story*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. 6. Print.

Tacheles is a phenomenon. Leo Kondeyne, one of the founders of *Tacheles*, described *Tacheles* as a site of magic.⁶⁷ It is exactly that. The artists built a community in a ruined building that they radically and quickly transformed functionally and aesthetically. The ruin became a home, a studio, a hot nightlife scene, a sculpture garden, and a tourist site that caught droves of international visitors. The layers of graffiti that coat the interior and exterior walls answered the questions of the unsure urban growth in the decade following the fall of the Berlin Wall faster than urban planners and government officials were able. The graffiti was a way for the artists to proactively normalize their surrounding environment. It is an outlet to express the beliefs, political standings, social statements, relationships, customs, and personal sentiments of the culture of the residents and artists. The art created a sense of community in an eclectic group residing in a partially bombed out, partially demolished historical landmark in the middle of a city that was trying to find its cultural footing.

Kunsthau Tacheles was birthed by great energy input from the artists and residents of the site. It was constructed on their beliefs in order to facilitate their customs, and to practice and actualize their ideals. Because East Berlin was a place in which artistic expression was limited, artists felt great relief with the expanded freedom they had in the reunified city and were ready to exercise it. The members of *Tacheles* seized the opportunity of empty space and few restrictions to practice their autonomous and experimental lifestyle. A common intent of many squatters was to employ and revive the empty shells of buildings that had been left deserted for too long. The

⁶⁷ Kondeyne, Leo. "Tacheles, was ist das?." *kunsthau tacheles*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Dec 2011. <<http://www.tacheles.de>>.

members of *Tacheles* made a home, workplace, and cultural center from a building that had been blown away, demolished, and was nearly crumbling beneath them.

All of this was a reaction to a time of great flux in Berlin. During this era, the city was consumed with analyzing its past and projecting potential futures. Less thought was given to the present, while so much of the momentum was focused on creating the next phase of Berlin. *Tacheles* was the exception. The artists used every minute of the present, even using time as a medium. One of the most notable pieces of graffiti stands nearly alone on a white exterior wall, in contrast to the other walls which are densely covered in colorful statements. It reads, "How Long is Now". The fact that the complex statement remains solitary reflects the group's collected investment in the principle of 'now'.

While spending time at the site, especially during the darker hours, one did not have the slightest idea of how long now is: trance music would pound through every thought, endless Ping-Pong games took place on tables in the dim entrance to Zapata, the fire in the outdoor area seemed to burn ceaselessly, and the crowd may have changed but the dancing would never end. The repetitive actions reflected the circling metal staircase that still winds up and down to various studios and rooms, though it now sees fewer travelers ascent and descent upon it. The wall on the side of the building that faces the outdoor area has long ago fallen away, exposing the interiors of ten rooms to the naturally weathering elements and adding to the confusing spiral of time that the building induces and illustrates as it is simultaneously under processes of both renovation and decay.

This uncertainty of time feeds the comfortable chaos that marked *Tacheles*. The site was described as, “*Alltag im Chaos*”;⁶⁸ at its peak, projects were constantly starting and evolving, new artists were moving into the crumbling ateliers and droves of regulars, tourists, and artists were buzzing about. The chaos was descriptive of the larger cultural scene in Berlin, outside the microcosm of *Tacheles*. Berlin has a *renitente Kultur* – an unruly culture that is never at rest, but is a constantly re-configuring ebb and flow of different tendencies, genres, and styles. This art culture of Berlin separates its goals from endorsing what is cool or hip as is circulated in the tourist realm of the city, but has goals of symbolic intervention. Individuals are able to find emancipation through art in a *renitente Kultur* and are able to articulate their individual statements outwardly to reach society.⁶⁹

Renitente, unruly culture is not surface-oriented, but effective with concept, unhinging previously established beliefs and ideas. It is perpetually abrading and thus constantly inspiring new ideas and facilitating enlightenment to methods and beliefs that are alternate to the status quo. The unruly culture inspires these shakeups in the realms of art, music, theatre, literature and actions and interactions on the street, at kitchen tables, and in clubs and bars. These actions in social gatherings and effects on culture ripple out to affect the political scene as advocacy for society’s underdogs including groups such as the homeless, immigrants, and the unemployed. The unruly culture holds each responsible for his own actions and practices, it is not a scene that feeds opinions to

⁶⁸ Reference: Rost, Andreas. *Tacheles: Alltag im Chaos: ein Fotobuch*. Elefanten Press, 1992.

⁶⁹ Tannert, Christoph. Germany. International Fair for Contemporary Art ART FORUM BERLIN 2005. *Katalog der Internationalen Messe für Gegenwartskunst ART FORUM BERLIN 2005*. Berlin: Messe Berlin GmbH, 2005. 40-45. Print.

participants.⁷⁰ There is a certain honesty in the chaos of *Tacheles*, which allows residents and visitors to find comfort in the perpetual change. Attempts at preservation would fail to maintain the characteristic chaos of *Tacheles*, but would tame the site in a practiced stillness that would project uncharacteristic structure onto the site.

The ethos of *Tacheles* was further defined by the site's location and its surrounding context on the street. While walking down Oranienberger Straße, one couldn't help but be struck by the grand archway of the old shopping arcade, which was embellished with coats of intricate and bold graffiti and impressive metal sculptures at its entrance. Looking through the archway, during the day one would see the casual bustle of visitors and artists in the sculpture garden and after dark one would be tempted into the scene by a burning bonfire, pulsing music, stocked bar, and conversationalists enjoying the night air. *Tacheles* could draw in aimless passersby with its curious mix of a crumbling Gothic façade and throbbing cultural crux within. The site stood as an integral part of one of the main thoroughfares in Mitte.

From Ebenezer Howard's planned city in *Garden Cities of To-morrow*,⁷¹ to Reyner Banham's analysis of a product city in *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*,⁷² the street is an essential pillar in the equation for an ideal city. The street does not stand merely as a passageway, a mode on which to walk, bike, or drive; it is a vein by which people disperse into the body of the city. It is also a book of the city, which stands to be read. The pages of the street depict the people, the culture, the time,

⁷⁰ Tannert, Christoph. Germany. International Fair for Contemporary Art ART FORUM BERLIN 2005. *Katalog der Internationalen Messe für Gegenwartskunst ART FORUM BERLIN 2005*. Berlin: Messe Berlin GmbH, 2005. 40-45. Print.

⁷¹ Reference: Howard, Sir Ebenezer. *Garden Cities Of To-morrow*. The MIT Press, 1965.

⁷² Reference: Banham, Reyner. *Los Angeles, The Architecture Of Four Ecologies*. Univ of California Press, 2009.

and the welfare of the city. Oranienberger Straße will read differently without *Tacheles*, but the book of Berlin, as it always has been, is changing.

The *renitente Kultur* and street art of *Tacheles* would be lost with preservation. Preservation would encourage commercialization of the site in a static form, a form that does not justify the true essence of the urban art and denies it of its virility. Lock Anderson Kresler, Associate Director of Christie's auction house, said of urban art:

Throughout art history, movements have been defined by their disavowal of the traditionally accepted themes, mediums and messages to create a new voice that defines the ascending movement. I believe that street or urban art is a movement within the field of contemporary art that is constantly evolving.⁷³

Urban art is defined by its quality of movement and by its context in history; its preservation or reproduction without thorough contextualization is flawed. This is why the fear of selling out arises as the urban art scene is becoming increasingly commoditized. Many artists are now selling canvases, clothing, and reproductions of their work in auction houses, galleries, and on the mass market. Blu, international graffiti artist known for his large-scale provocative surrealist wall paintings, said of the evolving scene:

I see that contemporary street art only exists because of these commercial interests—selling prints or artwork, making books about it, etc... unfortunately, many of these artists were much more interesting outside, dealing with public spaces and common people, than they are now inside the galleries.⁷⁴

As more and more Banksy posters are mounted in dorm rooms and his screen-printed t-shirts are worn to music festivals, the aura of his work is lost. With reproduction, the

⁷³ Nguyen, Patrick, and MacKenzie Stuart. *Beyond the Street: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art*. Die Gestaltung Verlag, 2010. 69. Print.

⁷⁴ Nguyen, Patrick, and MacKenzie Stuart. *Beyond the Street: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art*. Die Gestaltung Verlag, 2010. 392. Print.

work of art is detached from its traditional domain, causing the aura to vanish. Urban art is inseparable from its context of tradition and its time and place of its origin.⁷⁵ Looking at *Tacheles* as a work of urban art, reproduction as well as preservation would damage the relationship of the site to its context in time and space, and catalyze the loss of its aura.

The site held the promise of limitlessness. There were no rules as to what is displayed on the walls, no final goal to reach in the progress of the physical transformation of the site, and no end to its potential to inspire. The site flourished because it offered an idea of experimental, autonomous, and expressive living that could be openly interpreted. It was a surrealist place that was created by genuine, untainted desires and honest expressions of the artists, by their stream of conscience, which comparably was the most stable element in the refiguring city. The site is nearly impossible to describe but is best understood in its true effect when it is experienced firsthand. As a site created by energy with experimental intention, that is immeasurable by conventional time, and that is not restrained by limits, the *Tacheles* site surpasses succinct verbal definition. Without definition, preservation of the site is impossible. To preserve *Tacheles* would be to kill it. To paralyze the site in any one moment would omit its most essential elements of improvisation, development, and the acknowledgement of “now”.

Conclusion

⁷⁵ Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*. Ed. Neil Badmington and Ed. Julia Thomas. Routledge, 2008. 34-56. Print.

Three ravers walk into a bar. The first says to the group, “Techno is just not what it used to be.” The second says to the group, “The Love Parade is not what it used to be.” The third says to the group, “Ecstasy is not what it used to be.”⁷⁶ This joke is tossed around amongst Berliners with a sentiment of acceptance that times don’t stay and what once was will never be experienced again.

Nothing in the city of Berlin is what it used to be. It is a city of ephemera and of transition. The metropolis is always *becoming* something; for this reason, it is not quite real – it is always in motion and always offering possibilities. As Karl Scheffler said at the beginning of the nineteenth century, “*Berlin ist eine Stadt, verdammt dazu, ewig zu werden, niemals zu sein.*” This defining observation is one of the few to have persisted without being touched by time. Berlin is fated to be a changing entity – it is always becoming and will never simply be. Like the heavily debated memorial of the *Stadtschloß*, *Tacheles* served as a catalyst for aesthetic and political discourse of the urban area, and the morals of reflecting on history while acknowledging the collective histories of different cultural groups. *Tacheles* was also a symbol of European unity and identity, not just specific to Berlin, or Germany. With its worldwide fame, image of free expression, and far-reaching cultural draw, the site effectively characterized Berlin as a place of European unity and thus generated civic pride as an international magnet pulling introspection into the city. As a closely watched icon of Berlin, *Tacheles* should not be paralyzed and preserved.

As *Tacheles* became a tourist destination, the issue of commoditization. The group of artists in *Tacheles* confronted tensions including those created between a sub-

⁷⁶ Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. 218. Print.

cultural group and commoditization, the organic growth of their community and the master plan of the government's urban planners, and a local identity being discovered and adopted by a global tourism system. The *Tacheles* commune was created as an outlet of expression and a place for the members to live, explore their identities, and produce and appreciate art. The global acknowledgement of the community was not detrimental to its existence, but the diverse addition of members and contact with visitors fostered new ideas. *Tacheles* was not a product constructed for tourism, but tourists appreciated it. The commune has been able to gain from the tourism industry through donations, which were significantly bolstered by increased exposure. The endorsement of countercultures by industry and capitalism is not manipulation, exploitation, or appropriation, but a convergence of interests.

Watching the traces dwindle away of the unruly and vivacious life force that *Tacheles* once pulsed into the center of Berlin is like witnessing an ebullient beast pathetically wasting away in its final days. With the passing of a life comes the question of how it will be memorialized. *Tacheles* was a site of an intense symbiotic exchange of life: it fed the city with energy and inspiration just as much as the city fed it in return. How the memory of *Tacheles* is dealt with will play a hand in characterizing the next phase of Berlin's development.

Should a simple eulogy be written that gives the site a just and adequate tribute? Such a memorial could be engraved upon a plaque and placed in the sidewalk like the *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) that are scattered along the walkways of Berlin to acknowledge lives lost in the Holocaust. Or the plaque could be cemented into the foundation of the future building planned for the site – forever embedding its memory in

whatever the site is to become. Could words do the life of *Tacheles* justice; would any compilation be able to speak clearly and frankly enough about the site and its community? With a diverse international composition and support, the language of such a memorial would be greatly contested.

As discussed earlier, the government of Germany has purposefully bolstered acknowledgement and understanding of the nation's past in the move for normalization after the fall of the wall. The question then arises as to how the 1990s and 2000s should be treated as history. These recent decades are now an integral part of the nation's past and should be treated as such. While still so close to the time of the climax of *Tacheles*, it is difficult to put its true effects into perspective. *Tacheles* and the squatting, experimental, and alternative culture it represents must be acknowledged in history, though it is a larger movement that is not yet concluded.

If it cannot be memorialized adequately in words, then maybe relics from the site be should be captured, and stored in museums, like religious artifacts that following artists would make ritualistic voyages to visit. Or photographers of the site might try to embody and recast its memory with still pictures. The physical elucidation of an entity, such as *Tacheles*, that is created with so many media, with so many dimensions, and through the care and labor of such a motley group of creators is impossible. The aura of the artifacts and photographs of *Tacheles* would be compromised to the point of complete decay if pieces or images of the site were displayed as exhibits. This would require separation from their origins of the *Friedrichstadt-Passage* building and of the *Tacheles* commune and a separation from the ethos that defined the site.

If it cannot be represented in writing, by relic, or in photographs, perhaps the entire site should be preserved as it stands. The government, some preservation committee, or an interested philanthropist may step in to purchase the property. If given the option of staying in the site, the members of the commune would most likely not accept in respect of their founding ideals. Once empty of human life, the site could be preserved at a standstill, letting time carry on around it, and visitors could continue to be awed and inspired. Or it may be preserved to the extent that visitation would be limited to a select audience of scholars and anthropologists like a 27,000-year-younger modern day version the Chauvet Caves, with analysts interpreting the wall paintings and drawings in order to crack the culture of those who created them. The unique character of Berlin's art culture is written all over the streets of Berlin and in thick layers upon the walls of *Tacheles* in graffiti. To tear these walls down would be to tear down recorded layers of expression of what it is to live in Berlin. It would destroy the semiotics that reveal a pivotal transition in European history. Residents and passers-by have illustrated the walls with their identities, ideas, fantasies, political orientations, and opinions. Like cave paintings, these walls tell simple stories of everyday life and epic accounts of great hunts. But why should the building be stalled in this phase of its biography; is the phase of the artists' occupation any more significant than the building's other stories?

Maybe the passing of *Tacheles* should be ignored and the building should be treated as a ruin, demolished, and regarded as another passing phase. Memorializing the site signifies that the life of *Tacheles* has completely passed and the phase is over, while groups of artists continue to squat in unclaimed spaces such as a retired rail yard in the eastern part of Berlin. Graffiti is still an essential medium for expression in Berlin. This

is exemplified in the publicly accessible graffiti wall in the iconic Sunday gathering place of *Mauerpark* and in government commissioned works throughout the city that illustrate everything from the city's collective history, to civic pride, to climate change. The phase characterizing the cultural ethos of *Tacheles* has not passed nor left Berlin, though the site's time is nearing its end. Preservation would confine *Tacheles* to *just be*, though the cultural momentum the site created will progress with the tradition of Berlin and continue to become, rippling into future movements.

Nostalgia for *Tacheles* will always tragically seek the feelings it spurred and the emotions it evoked, without ever recreating the site to its fullest extent. *Tacheles* was defined by its inhabitants' persistence to keep the ruin alive. Without its inhabitants, the site is a haunted grave that tempts visitors with visions of a remarkable life. It has been proven by supporters and by the remaining artists that this life will not end quietly. The most humane and fitting action to take is to end it quickly.

To symbolize the end of such a magnificent life force that was organically created by the energy of the city, an explosive demolition would be the most felicitous conclusion. The plumes of smoke and clouds of dust and paint particles would billow up and dissipate into Berlin, just as the legacy of *Tacheles* will disseminate into the ever-evolving culture of the city. Before the explosive funeral, a wake should be held and attendees can pay their respects and view the site one final time. They should leave their last words on the walls of *Tacheles* among the other moments of its life that are illustrated in bright pictures and brief statements. The "funeral" should be a community event and a mass spectacle to respect the passing of a vibrant life that shared so much

energy with the city. The ashy remains of the building can then lie buried under the next phase of Berlin.

In a city that is lapping up capitalist endeavors, job opportunities, and the influx of private money, the momentum of the economy will not allow for a disturbance in its development. The new buildings and business that are slotted to be constructed in the site will be erected, despite the romantic protests against the plans that are spurred by the bohemians' attempts to hold on to the past that was full of free space and opportunity. As a magical place, *Tacheles* is best left to be told as a myth with its legacy felt in its effects upon the pervading culture of the city of Berlin.

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