3. Curating Out the Socialist Alternative

Art and Architecture in a Neoliberalized Leipzig

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Abstract

This chapter looks at the development of art and architecture in Leipzig, Germany, during the Cold War era, and how, after 1990, the material traces of this past were re-curated through a neoliberal lens to downplay or eliminate any positive references to socialism. As such, this chapter offers insight into how ideology is made palpable in three dimensions. It also offers a reminder of a time before the present state of 'capitalist realism', the term Mark Fisher used to describe a reality in which it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Leipzig was an important centre for the visual arts during the Cold War and home to some of East Germany's best known artists. It was also the focus of significant investment in its architecture. By looking at the art and architecture in Leipzig before and after 1990, this chapter makes visible some of the losses Leipzig has endured since unification, losses largely unseen by western eyes focused on a city brimming with renovations, construction, tourism and investment.

Introduction

Recent scholarship on neoliberalism has critiqued the claim that there are no political or economic alternatives, yet the same works also frequently acknowledge the difficulty of even imagining what such an alternative might look like (Fisher 2009).[1] But this was not always the case. As Vladimir Kulic has pointed out, during the Cold War, capitalism was balanced by socialism and the two were deeply connected, like 'communicating vessels' in science (Kulic 2019). As such, former socialist cities like Leipzig, Germany, may hold a key to life beyond neoliberalism today, their collective memory and physical objects – such as art and architecture – serving as reminders of life be-

1 | Fisher points to Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek as the possible originators of the idea that it is easier to envision the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

fore the collapse of European socialism and, thus, a resource for rethinking the current condition. As a result, it is perhaps not surprising that the physical reminders of this past have been largely erased or re-curated in the decades since unification rather than allowed to stand on their own where they might raise uncomfortable questions.[2]

In this chapter, I take up Philipp Schorch's call in the introduction to this volume to understand how ideology is made palpable in three dimensions and how such physical manifestations were then re-curated through a neoliberal lens after unification by focusing on the East German city of Leipzig. An important centre of art, Leipzig was home to some of East Germany's best known artists. It was also the focus of significant investment in its architecture. This chapter looks at both of these areas as they developed in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and then at how the transition to capitalism and the concomitant global imperatives of neoliberal ideology affected them. The intent is to make visible the losses Leipzig has endured, losses largely unseen in a city brimming with renovations, construction, tourism and investment, but which are keenly felt by many locals, and how these losses – which include the removal of East German art and architecture from view – have contributed to the current reactionary backlash.[3]

The city of Leipzig was officially founded in the 12th century and is perhaps best known as a city of trade fairs, a publishing powerhouse and a city of music (Crummenerl 1985: 3). It is also home to Germany's second oldest university, which was founded in 1409. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Gottfried Ephraim Lessing, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Richard Wagner and Karl Liebknecht all studied there (Crummenerl 1985: 11). Leipzig became known as a *Messestadt* (city of trade fairs) in the 15th century when it began hosting the international *Reichsmessen* (trade fairs of the Reich), making it the leader of trade in the area and a doorway to Eastern Europe (Crummenerl 1985: 4). It established itself as a centre for publishing two hundred years later. Barth, Brockhaus, Reclam, Teubner, Meyer and Hirzel were all located in Leipzig, as were the *Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels* (German Publishers and Booksellers Association, since 1825), the *Deutsches Buch- und Schriftmuseum* (German Museum of Books and Writing, since the 1860s), and the *Deutsche Bücherei* (German Library, opened in 1912).[4] Leipzig is also known as a city of music, with one of the country's first boys' choirs, the *Thomanerchor*, founded there in 1212. More importantly, it was home to Johann Sebastian Bach, who was cantor at the Thomaskirche from 1723 until his death in 1750 (Crummenerl 1985: 13). Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy was another major name in Leipzig's music history, becoming *Kapellmeister* of the world-famous

2 | Traces of the East German past can most often be found in Germany today in history museums, where the objects have been selected and presented to fit a particular narrative, such as the emphasis on repression found in places like the Zeitgeschichtliches Forum in Leipzig, or on Ostalgie, such as in the DDR Museum in Berlin. This article, on the other hand, focuses on the erasure and re-curation of such works from their original or intended locations.

3 | By locals here, I mean East Germans: those who have lived in Leipzig since before German unification.

4 | The *Deutsche Bücherei* is now known as the *Nationalbibliothek Leipzig*.

Gewandhausorchester (Gewandhaus orchestra) in 1835 (Crummenerl 1985: 14). Robert Schumann spent four years composing music in the city in the 1840s, while Gustav Mahler was a conductor at the *Neues Stadttheater* (New City Theatre) for nearly two years toward the end of the 19th century.

During the Cold War, Leipzig was one of the GDR's most international cities due to its annual trade fairs, which regularly attracted visitors from both the Eastern and Western blocs. As a showcase city like Berlin, it received special attention from the authorities and was a major centre for rebuilding in the wake of World War II. It did not hurt that it was also the birthplace of Walter Ulbricht, First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party of the GDR from 1949–1971. Leipzig was also home to one of the GDR's four main art academies, the *Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst* (HGB, Academy for Graphics and Book Arts), originally founded in 1764 to train students in the creation of book illustrations and graphics in response to the city's strengths in publishing. It continued with this tradition in the GDR but also became well-known for painting: by the 1970s, a number of its artists had pioneered a modern style of painting that was regularly included in major exhibitions on both sides of the Iron Curtain, including at documenta in Kassel and the Venice Biennale. Known as the 'Leipzig School', they were some of East Germany's best-known and most successful artists. Leipzig also played a key role in the events that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, holding weekly demonstrations that started at the *Nikolaikirche* (Nicholas Church) and gained increasing numbers each Monday throughout the fall.

While unification is often believed to have been a freeing experience for those in the East, the city of Leipzig faced a number of major challenges in the wake of 1990. No longer the internationally prominent city it had been during the Cold War, it became one of many medium-sized cities in a larger Germany, and one without the name-recognition of nearby Dresden or Berlin.[5] Like many eastern cities in the 1990s, it also endured significant unemployment as industries important to the GDR were dismantled, resulting in the loss of 100 000 jobs. There was also a loss of population – from approximately 530 000 in 1989 to a low of 437 000 in 1998 – as people moved, often to the West, in search of new jobs and opportunities.[6]

In the face of these challenges, Leipzig set about recreating itself for a neoliberal world – as a centre for culture and consumption, a 'small Paris' like in Goethe's day – and thereby regaining the population size it had had before the Wall fell by attracting newcomers (Walter 2005). In terms of financial investment and potential for growth in eastern Germany, Leipzig is considered second only to Berlin (Walter 1996). But in the process, it has become a very different city than it was during the Cold War.

In order to understand how Leipzig has been curated, this chapter takes a closer look at what Leipzig was in the GDR and how it has changed as part of the Federal

5 | As of December 2010, Leipzig was Germany's 12th largest city and one of eight cities with a population between 500 000 and 600 000 people. 'Germany: States and Major Cities', https://www.citypopulation.de/Deutschland-Cities.html (accessed 22 April 2012).

6 | City of Leipzig website, https://www.leipzig.de/ (accessed 2 March 2020).

Republic of Germany. In particular, it argues that for forty years, the cultural scene in Leipzig was created largely by the people of Leipzig for the people of Leipzig, but whereas in the last twenty years, it has increasingly become a city created by outsiders for outsiders, or more specifically, by 'Westerners' for tourists and consumers. This shift from a focus on locals to a focus on outsiders, together with the change from a manufacturing to a consumerist society, is a hallmark of neoliberal capitalist societies, whereas other cities have gone through this process over the course of several decades, Leipzig has had to do so in a much more condensed period of time. Indeed, the careful curation of Leipzig as an important Socialist centre for art and architecture built up over decades has been largely dismantled in the years since unification. The resulting losses, although invisible to many outsiders, are close to the surface and easily recovered, making Leipzig a useful case study of the impact of neoliberalism on city life and an important resource for envisioning alternatives to the current political and economic system.

Leipzig in the GDR: an art scene by and for the people of Leipzig

The GDR was founded in October 1949. Three years later, the communist government dissolved the former regional structure of five *Länder* (states) and replaced it with fourteen *Bezirke*, or districts.[7] Over time, the art created in each district developed its own 'personality' based on the people involved and the city's relationship to Berlin. This regional 'stable smell', as one artist termed it, was the result of the organisational structure of East Germany and, in particular, the existence of local chapters of national organisations.[8]

The national *Verband Bildender Künstler* (VBK, or Union of Visual Artists), for example, was divided into fifteen local branches, each of which was run by and responsible for the artists in its respective district.[9] The local branches took care of commissions and pensions; they also held regular meetings and discussions, which built relationships – as well as antagonisms – among the artists in the area. (To be an artist in East Germany, one had to be a member of the VBK, although the level of involvement in the daily running of that organisation varied widely.) Each district also had a major exhibition every two to three years that would showcase local artists. Artists from that district worked together on the call for entries, the judging of submissions and the hanging of works, which built awareness of each other's strengths, weakness-

7 | The district system went into effect in 1952, replacing the previous *Länder* divisions of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt and Thüringen. East Berlin was a quasi-fifteenth district.

8 | Gerhard Kurt Müller, Leipzig artist, in meeting minutes following the controversial 5th Congress in 1964; *Bericht vom Auftreten der Leipziger Genossen auf dem V. Kongress des Verbandes Bildender Künstler*, 2 April 1964 (SächsStAL: SED-L 362: 3).

9 | The VBK was founded in 1950 as part of the *Kulturbund*. It became an independent organisation in 1952. In 1970, it was renamed the *Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR* (Kuhirt/Heerklotz 1983).

es and interests, while simultaneously encouraging competition between the districts since many of the works that were shown at the more prestigious national exhibition that took place every four to five years in Dresden were pulled from these district exhibitions.

In addition to a local branch of the VBK, Leipzig also had its own art school, one of only four in East Germany. According to the East German government, the HGB was to specialise in graphics and book illustrations as befitted the publishing strengths of the city, leaving painting for the art schools in Berlin and Dresden, which were traditional strongholds in that area. But already in the early 1950s, a number of artists in Leipzig had set about learning how to paint because painting was a more prestigious medium in the GDR than graphics. Without a local painting tradition to draw upon, these artists followed the dictates being promoted at the time and emerged to great praise at the *III. Deutsche Kunstausstellung Dresden* (Third German Art Exhibition in Dresden) in 1953 with a number of Soviet-style Socialist Realist paintings, including Harald Hellmich and Klaus Weber's *The Youngest Fliers*.

By the early 1960s, however, a number of artists in Leipzig – including Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer and Werner Tübke – became dissatisfied with the conservative realism that politicians' desired from painting. The reasons for this shift are complex and multiple. They include the high praise that a poorly skilled but highly ambitious colleague of theirs had received in 1959/60, which made many of them start to question whether politicians should be the ones dictating artistic style.[10] Additionally, the similarities between the conservative Socialist Realist style they were promoting and Nazi art made many artists increasingly uncomfortable, as became clear in a number of speeches given at the controversial *V. Kongress* (Fifth Congress) of the VBK in 1964, when artists Fritz Cremer and Bernhard Heisig and art historian Hermann Raum argued for a more complicated art for East Germany. The following year, several artists from Leipzig, including Heisig, Mattheuer and Tübke, exhibited paintings at the *7. Bezirkskunstausstellung Leipzig* (Seventh District Art Exhibition in Leipzig) that demonstrated a modern style and complex subject matter that they felt appropriate for the 'educated nation' – the term Ulbricht used for East Germany in 1963. These works marked a sharp break from the conservative works they had shown in official exhibitions just a few years earlier and were more in keeping with the works being made in artistically 'problematic' cities, such as Halle and Berlin, where artists had been creating modernist works for many years in spite of official preferences for a simple realism.

The modern style that these artists in Leipzig had developed, however, was significantly different from that found in the traditional painting strongholds of Berlin and Dresden. Whereas artists working in the latter two cities tended to emphasise

10 | The colleague was Heinrich Witz, who was given a major prize in 1959 for a painting inspired by the Bitterfeld Way conference earlier in the year. Another reason was that with the passage of time, artists became increasingly unwilling to create art that resembled that created in the Third Reich. Additionally, they wanted a German, rather than Soviet-inspired, style of art.

aesthetics, subtle explorations of colour and brushwork, the 'Leipzig School' artists tended to create bolder, intellectually complex works filled with allegorical references that were well-suited to the city's background as a publishing centre.[11] Although this new style resulted in much criticism at the time, by the late 1970s, and in the wake of Erich Honecker's declaration that there would be 'no taboos' in art and literature, such works came to dominate art in East Germany and to represent the GDR in major exhibitions in the West. Leipzig artists such as Heisig, Mattheuer and Tübke became synonymous with East German art, especially in the West, their brand of art typical for Leipzig artists more generally.

But there were many more artists active in Leipzig, indeed across East Germany, in these years than those who were known in the West. By the mid-1980s, more than 1,500 of the VBK's members were painters and graphic artists; 57 of them were active in Leipzig (Müller 1989: 6). These artists regularly showed work in local, district and national exhibitions and were the focus of media attention, including articles in local newspapers such as the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and the national art journal *Bildende Kunst*. Their work was collected by major art museums in the GDR as well as by organisations such as the *Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (FDGB, Free German Trade Union) for display in public places. Art was an important part of East German society, where it was not only supported and promoted, it was part of the everyday (Eisman 2019). The curatorial lens of East Germany, as it were, focused on culture as an important part of the Socialist personality. This would all change with unification.

Leipzig art after Unification: the loss of the local

In the wake of unification, the VBK in eastern Germany was dissolved and the related district and national art exhibitions ceased to exist, and with them, the sense of artistic community that had developed during the Cold War period. Without an artist union and the activities it organised, artists were left having to fend for themselves – and in a completely different artistic environment. Moreover, institutions that had previously supported local artists, such as the *Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig* (MdbK, Museum of Fine Arts Leipzig), turned their attention away from the local to focus instead on artists prominent in the West and, thus, recognisable to 'Western' art specialists and tourists. When the new building for the MdbK opened in 2005, for example, the formerly prestigious Leipzig School was exhibited in the basement, while other important artists from Leipzig, who were not well known in the West, were largely confined to the depot.

The MdbK's shift in focus to artists well-known in the West was largely the result of new staff, most of whom were themselves from the West and had little knowledge

11 | Art created in nearby Halle by artists such as Willi Sitte were similar in style and content. Indeed, Sitte is often mentioned together with the 'Leipzig School'. Like Leipzig, Halle did not have a strong painting tradition, nor was its art academy intended to focus on painting.

of East German art. Whereas most, if not all, of the staff in the 1980s considered themselves 'Leipzigers', today 'Westerners' hold most, if not all, of the leadership positions in the museum. This change in the origins of the museum's staff also reflects a significant difference between how museums worked in East Germany versus how they work today: in East Germany, museum staff tended to stay in one job for decades, which enabled them to build up a deep knowledge of the collection, whereas today, positions are often used as springboards to 'better' jobs.[12] After the former curator of the paintings and sculpture department retired in 2011 after more than thirty years in the position, he was replaced by a 'Westerner' with little or no background in East German art.[13] Whereas in East Germany, there would have been a long training period that would have enabled the outgoing curator to pass along some of his or her knowledge to the incoming curator, that was not the case here. Moreover, the new curator left the museum seven years later for a director position elsewhere and was not replaced.[14]

The shift from local and eastern German artists to a focus on western artists occurred in many art museums in eastern Germany after unification, which resulted in a loss of uniqueness and a loss of appeal to locals.[15] It also left the museum in a more precarious position as it understandably had many gaps in its holdings of post-war western art and not enough funds to fill them adequately. The western 'greats' it did have were mostly pre-war artists, including Max Klinger, Max Beckmann, several German Expressionists, and – to jump ahead many decades – the New Leipzig School.

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12 | Hans-Werner Schmidt (b. 1951), director of the MdbK from 2000–2017, was from western Germany. Before moving to Leipzig, he was a curator at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf for seven years and then director of the Kunsthalle Kiel for eight years. Similarly, the current director of the museum is from Austria, Alfred Weidinger (b. 1961). Weidinger has shown significant interest in Leipzig artists and the GDR, culminating in a major exhibition in 2019, *Point of No Return*, but his departure in 2020 throws the future exhibition possibilities for eastern German artists back into question.

13 | The East German art historian Dr. Dietulf Sander joined the museum in 1972. He worked in the paintings department beginning in 1980, and was head of the department from 1986–2007 (https://personen-wiki.slub-dresden.de/index.php/Sander,_Dietulf, accessed 20 April 2012).

14 | The department of paintings and sculptures is now run by one person rather than divided into pre- and post-1800 as had been the case previously.

15 | David Harvey states, 'The contradiction here is that the more easily marketable such items become, the less unique and special they appear. In some instances the marketing itself tends to destroy the unique qualities […]' (Harvey 2012: 92). In thinking about Harvey's concept of monopoly rent, it is surprising that the MdbK does not capitalise on its own strengths. If it emphasised its substantial holdings of Leipzig artists as the context from which to understand the New Leipzig School, it would be able to offer something unique that it could market to its advantage. It would also allow the museum to connect to tourist interests in the GDR, as evidenced in the success of a number of GDR museums in Berlin. It should be noted that the MdbK has had several exhibitions of Leipzig artists from the Cold War period. But these exhibitions, which are of limited duration, do not express the same level of commitment to the artists and their work as including them in significant numbers in the permanent display.

The New Leipzig School emerged to international prominence in the new millennium after being 'discovered' by the US-American collectors Don and Mera Rubell in 2003 (Gopnik 2006). These artists, most of whom were born in the early 1970s, chose to study painting at the HGB in the early 1990s, preferring the East's emphasis on technical skills over the West's emphasis on creativity. The best known among them – besides the head of the group, Neo Rauch, who was born in Leipzig in 1960 – are Tilo Baumgärtel and Martin Kobe, both of whom grew up in the East, and Tim Eitel, Christoph Ruckhäberle, David Schnell and Matthias Weischer, who grew up in the West. Their technically accomplished blend of Eastern-style figuration and Western-style abstraction was viewed by many curators as an antidote to what some see as the morally and technically bankrupt 'shock tactics' of the Young British Artists of the 1990s. As one author described them, these painters 'deal seriously with the anxious horizons and wavering hopefulness of a new German generation' (Volk 2005: 197). This statement presumably helps to explain why the New Leipzig School artists became 'the hottest thing on earth' in the early years of the new millennium, according to a curator from the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Lubow 2006).[16]

The New Leipzig School, by its very name, acknowledges its connections to the 'old' Leipzig School of artists from East Germany, which is largely unknown outside of Germany today. Many of these older artists were teachers at the HGB when the New Leipzig School artists began studying there in the 1990s, and they brought to their classes the training and perspective on art that they had acquired in the east. In East Germany, the emphasis in art education had been on technical skills, with the belief that artists had the rest of their lives to develop their own unique voice. Indeed, and in contrast to the West, most artists were able to support themselves as artists, i.e. without the need for a second job. Another important difference was that when artists in East Germany became internationally famous, they tended to be older, more established artists who had already developed their artistic voices. By contrast, the New Leipzig School artists became famous less than a decade after they had graduated, many of them in their early thirties, and it is even worse today, with students being approached by galleries wanting to represent them even before they have finished school simply because they are studying at the HGB. As Rauch complained, his students were no longer able to develop first as artists. Similarly, the focus today is oftentimes more on the hype than the art. As one of the New Leipzig School artists observed, collectors at major art fairs do not even look at the work, they simply buy it if it is by an artist from Leipzig. This, too, reflects significant differences between art in East Germany, which focused on the art itself, and art in the West, which often seems more interested in the market and investments than the art itself.

The years since unification have seen a shift from a dynamic local art world in which artists actively engaged with their local audiences – both in Leipzig and East Germany – to an art world run largely by 'Westerners' and oriented to western tourists and consumers. In this context, local artists – with the exception of the New Leip-

16 | The curator who said this is Joachim Pissarro.

zig School – have been largely ignored, as the curatorial lens under neoliberalism has shifted to focus on acquiring and exhibiting works by Western greats, with only occasional exhibitions of local artists.[17]

A showcase of East German architecture: Karl-Marx-Platz

Just as the local art scene has been largely ignored in the years since unification, with major works confined to museum depots, so too has the built environment of Leipzig been largely altered to erase its East German past. To illustrate this, I focus on Karl-Marx-Platz, a major square in the GDR. Most of the buildings in this square were built during the Cold War, the result of a decades-long curatorial effort. Indeed, the eastern German architectural historian Thomas Topfstedt has called it 'an object lesson of GDR architectural history from the mid-1950s through the beginnings of the 1980s' (Topfstedt 1994: 75).

Karl-Marx-Platz, known as Augustusplatz before and after the Cold War, was almost completely destroyed by Allied bombers in December 1943. Of the two buildings that remained at the end of the war, both located on the western side of the square, one was later destroyed to make more room for a new building for the *Universität Leipzig* (University of Leipzig, which was known in the GDR as Karl-Marx-Universität).[18] Originally, the plan had been to rebuild the square according to its pre-war appearance. The decision to create an entirely new space – albeit sharing the same basic size and shape of the old – did not take place until the early 1950s, at which point Leipzig had been designated one of the GDR's most important cities for rebuilding, and Karl-Marx-Platz, at its centre, was to become a major square for socialist demonstrations. By the time of German unification in 1990, the reconstruction of Karl-Marx-Platz had been completed, and the square offered a compact overview of East German architectural styles from the late 1950s to the early 1980s. With only one exception, all of the buildings had been built in the GDR.[19]

The first new building in the square was the *Oper Leipzig* (Leipzig Opera House). Located on the northern edge of the square, it replaced the *Neues Theater* (New Theater) that had been destroyed in the war. Although the decision to build it had been made already in 1950, post-war financial difficulties delayed its construction, which did not begin until the latter half of the 1950s. This led to a number of changes in the

17 | The success of the New Leipzig School at the turn of the millennium enabled the MdbK to both show some local works and interest an international audience.

18 | Despite protests, the Universitätskirche St. Pauli was razed on 30 May 1968. After much debate, the university building that replaced it was razed in 2006. The Paulinum, a new building that incorporates an outline of the former church, was completed in 2017. See Philipp Schorch's introduction to this volume for more information about the church and the building that replaced it.

19 | The remaining building is in the northwest corner and houses the *Ägyptisches Museum der Universität Leipzig* (Egyptian Museum of Leipzig University) today.

building's design in the interim years as architectural styles in the GDR changed. The final work, designed by the East German architects Kunz Nierade and Kurt Hemmerling, demonstrates a reduced classicism clad in sandstone typical for the late 1950s. It opened its doors on 8 October 1960.

The opening of the Oper Leipzig was followed shortly thereafter by the rebuilding and significant enlargement of Leipzig's *Hauptpost* (Main Post Office) that had been located on the northeast corner of the square. Built between 1961 and 1964, this new building displayed an entirely different aesthetic from the modern classicism of the Oper Leipzig across the street. Designed by the eastern German architect Kurt Nowotny, the building, instead of being clad in sandstone, was constructed from steel and glass, making it one of the first buildings to have an aluminium 'curtain' facade; this feature became characteristic of architecture in East Germany in the 1960s, especially in Berlin.

Construction on the third new building on Karl-Marx-Platz began before the Hauptpost was completed. Located across the street from it on the eastern edge of the square, the *Hotel Deutschland* (Hotel Germany) was built in just seventeen months between 1963 and 1965. It was 'the largest project in the Hotel building programme for the 800-year anniversary of the *Messemetropole* Leipzig' and was intended as a 'Travel Hotel of the First Order' to impress visitors, especially those from abroad (Winkler 1967: 454–456).[20] Designed to complement the Hauptpost, it had eight floors and a modern, metal-frame structure with a glass façade intended to reflect the clouds and, thus, lend the building a sense of movement. Inside, a large reception area on the ground floor contained a front desk and elevators to the hotel rooms located upstairs; there were 280 rooms with a total capacity of 430 beds. These rooms were equipped with the latest comforts, including a telephone, radio and electric alarm clock (in East Germany, telephones were a luxury item that most households did not possess) (Winkler 1967). A variety of premium services was also available, including a full-service beauty salon, a couple of restaurants and bars, and a dance floor, as well as childcare and dog-sitting.

Construction began on the 29-story, 427.5 foot tall *Universitätshochhaus* (university high-rise building) for Karl-Marx-Universität in 1968. Designed by the Berlin architect Hermann Henselmann, the triangular-shaped building was completed four years later and was an example of 'the avant-garde of the late 1960s' (Pasternack 1999: 177). Seventy per cent of the building was designed for offices and classrooms and 30 per cent for infrastructure, such as stairs and elevators. It was also in 1968 that one of the two remaining original buildings on the square was destroyed: the *Universitätskirche* (University Church). Built by Dominican monks in the mid-13th century, the Universitätskirche, also known as the *Paulinerkirche* (St. Pauli Church), was secular-

20 | The Hotel Deutschland was renamed the Hotel 'Am Ring' in the 1970s when the GDR changed from using 'Germany' to using 'GDR' in the names of its organisations. In the wake of German unification, the hotel was renamed the Hotel 'Merkur'. It is now a Radisson.

ized with the Reformation and given to the university in 1539.[21] For GDR officials such as Walter Ulbricht, however, there was no place for a church in a square named after Karl Marx. In an action many people in Leipzig abhorred at the time, the 700-year-old church was destroyed to make room for a new, more modern building for the university. Completed three years later in 1971, the new building later housed a large mural by the Leipzig artist Werner Tübke titled *Arbeiterklasse und Intelligenz* (The Working Class and the Intelligentsia), which was finished in 1973, and a large bronze relief sculpture by a collective of Leipzig artists – Rolf Kuhrt, Frank Ruddigkeit and Klaus Schwabe – that included a giant profile of Marx.[22]

The new *Gewandhaus*, built on the south side of the square between 1977 and 1981, was the final building created in the square during the Cold War. Located across from the Oper Leipzig, it housed Leipzig's symphony orchestra and was the location where the former art museum had stood until its destruction in World War II. The new building was designed by architects from East Berlin and Leipzig under the guidance of Horst Siegel and included a giant mural painted by the Leipzig artist Sighard Gille. Titled *Gesang vom Leben* (The Song of Life), the painting is more than 700 square meters in size and is clearly visible from outside the building.[23]

By the time of unification in 1990, Karl-Marx-Platz had been completely rebuilt and stood as a compendium of East German architectural styles as they changed across the decades. The architects involved were from the GDR and the buildings included significant amounts of art, often by artists from Leipzig. In addition to those works already mentioned, all of which are visible from the square, there were also murals by Heisig, Mattheuer and Hans Engels inside the former Hotel Deutschland. Karl-Marx-Platz was, thus, exemplary of a square curated across decades through a socialist lens, a lens that emphasised the importance of both the arts and the local.

Contested memories: remaking Augustusplatz after Unification

With German unification in 1990, Karl-Marx-Platz was renamed Augustusplatz, and in the years since, the square has been heavily altered, especially on the western side where the university is located. These changes – the result of the imposition of a neoliberal lens on the city – have largely erased the East German past. One of the earliest changes was to the Universitätshochhaus, which was sold by the university in the mid-1990s after estimates suggested it would cost significantly less to build something

21 | 'Universitätskirche St. Pauli', https://www.leipzig-lexikon.de/kirchen/pauliner.htm (accessed 12 January 2020).

22 | See the introduction to this volume for more information about this.

23 | 'Der Augustusplatz in Leipzig mit dem Opernhaus, Gewandhaus zu Leipzig, Universität & Cityhochhaus', http://www.leipzig-sachsen.de/leipzig-fotos/augustusplatz.html (accessed 12 January 2020).

new.[24] The new owners renovated the building between 1999 and 2002, most noticeably by adding a granite siding and the logo of one of the tenants – the German TV and radio station MDR – near the top.[25] The observation deck which towers above the city has become an important stop for tourists.

In 2000, discussions took place within the university about the creation of a more modern and future-oriented central campus in time for the institution's 650th anniversary in 2009. A competition was held and in May 2002. The jury, which include the director of the university, the mayor of the city and a member of the federal government, awarded second prize to a design submitted by the architectural firm behet + bondzio from Münster in western Germany.[26]

Although the jury had chosen a winning design, their decision was overturned a few months later after a small group of people began agitating for the rebuilding of the church that East German officials had knocked down in 1968. Motivated both by a desire to have the church back and to erase the erasure perpetrated by the East German government, this group managed to convince the state government, located in Dresden, to push for its rebuilding.[27] Their view, however, was not one supported by those who actually lived in Leipzig. The president of the university and three pro-rectors resigned in protest against the idea of rebuilding the church, and a poll taken by the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* showed that 76.5 per cent of the Leipzig population were similarly against it.[28]

Eventually, a compromise was reached and a new competition was held that included a requirement that the former church be worked into the designs. On 24 March 2004, the jury chose the design submitted by Erik van Egeraat Associated Architects from Rotterdam, which consisted of a glass and steel building that contained a triangular outline where the original church had been. A few years later, in 2007, the East German university building was razed to the ground to make way for the new building, which was completed in 2017. As Schorch details in his introduction to this volume, the new building not only incorporats the outlines of the historic church that had been destroyed in 1968; it also jettisoned the large sculpture of Marx by local artists that had decorated its predecessor.

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24 | The decision to sell the Universitätshochhaus was controversial, in part, because it seemed to have been made in secret. Renovations would have cost approximately 240–300 million Marks. The university ended up spending much more to move the faculty and rent space to house them while new buildings were constructed (Pasternack 1999).

25 | 'Der Augustusplatz in Leipzig mit dem Opernhaus, Gewandhaus zu Leipzig, Universität & Cityhochhaus', http://www.leipzig-sachsen.de/leipzig-fotos/augustusplatz.html (accessed 12 January 2020).

26 | A first place award was not given in order to allow for room to rework the original designs.

27 | The *Staatsregierung* in Dresden decided in favour of rebuilding the church on 28 January 2003.

28 | 'Universität Leipzig: 1990–2013', http://zv.uni-leipzig.de/de/universitaet/profil/entwicklungen/baugeschehen/1990-2013.html (accessed 11 April 2012) and 'Ausschnitte einer intensiven Debatte', http://www.uni-leipzig.de/chronik/diskussion_lang.html (accessed 11 April 2012).

The new university building, although beautiful, offers a clear example of the neoliberal re-curating of Augustusplatz by physically anchoring the painful memory of the destroyed church into the urban fabric, where it functions as a reminder of 'socialist wrongdoing'. This physical reminder, by drawing upon a real moment of discontent between the people and the East German government, helps to support current power structures by emphasising a negative view of the socialist past and, thus, seeming to discredit it as a source for alternatives to the present. The concretization of a painful moment from the past also fits into the current tendency, as described by Jodi Dean, to desire victimhood status: to be a victim is to be 'morally correct […] and never politically responsible' (Dean 2009: 6). It is also the result of 'Westerners' meddling in local affairs: in this case, the Nobel Prize-winning Günter Blobel, who, although born in eastern Germany, had moved to the United States in the 1960s and was a vocal advocate for a design that included reference to the church.[29]

Another controversy around the new university building emerged in 2006, when Tübke's mural was moved from the main university building to the MdbK for safekeeping and conservation while the old building was torn down and the new one erected. Prominent Leipzig author Erich Loest argued that the mural should not be hung in the new building because it included portraits of prominent East German politicians from Leipzig, including Paul Fröhlich, who was responsible for the destruction of the church in 1968. For Loest, who had been jailed for years by the East German government and then expelled from the GDR in 1979, the mural was an example of East German propaganda that did not include the perspective of its victims. Art historians and art critics, on the other hand, defended Tübke's mural, stating it was a pivotal work by an important artist. It looked to Christian motifs and Renaissance styles for inspiration and was not the only painting in the history of art to include references to historically unpopular figures. Ultimately, the controversy ended with Loest commissioning a local artist to paint a response mural that focused on the negative history left out of Tübke's painting; both are on display in the completed building. Engagement with Tübke's work – viewed through the neoliberal lens as too positive toward the GDR – is, thus, tempered, or re-curated, by the addition of this second work.

Changes to the eastern side of Augustusplatz have been more subtle. The post office, now privately owned by western Germans, has been refinished such that most visitors would assume it was built in the new Germany.[30] Adding to this impression

29 | Blobel was born in Sileasia in 1936 and spent his childhood in Dresden and Freiberg before moving to West German and, later, the United States. He had also played a major role in helping to get Dresden's *Frauenkirche* rebuilt. In Leipzig, a reference to the razed church was made with a steel triangle placed at the entrance of the university building in Augustusplatz in 1998. 'Ausschnitte einer intensiven Debatte', http://www.uni-leipzig.de/chronik/diskussion_ lang.html (accessed 11 April 2012).

30 | The Hochhaus' aluminium sheathing was replaced with grey granite between 1999 and 2002 by the architect Peter Kulka, who was born in Dresden and studied briefly with Henselmann in East Berlin, but then moved to West Germany in 1965 (https://www.peterkulka.de/buero, accessed 12 January 2020). The

is its new function: rather than a post office for all, it contains – or soon will – a hotel, office space, restaurants, a supermarket and a parking garage. The former Hotel Deutschland across the street is also now privately owned by a western company, although it went through more substantial renovations: its cutting-edge socialist modern façade from the 1960s was removed, making it now a nondescript glass and steel building. Its function, however, remains the same: it is a hotel.

Only two buildings from the GDR era remain largely untouched: the Oper Leipzig on the northern edge of the square and the Gewandhaus on the southern edge. These are the first and final buildings built on the square during the Cold War and are also the only opera house and concert hall built in the GDR. The Oper Leipzig, with its neoclassical façade, seems to predate the GDR. Moreover, its East German history – discussed earlier in this chapter – is entirely absent from the 'About Us' page of its website.[31] Instead, the page mentions the first opera house built on the site, in 1693; it then jumps to 1840, and from there, to 2009/10, with no mention of the fact that the current building is not the one from the late 17th century. The Gewandhaus, on the other hand, stands as a reminder of the socialist past, its giant mural by Leipzig artist Sighard Gille drawing further attention to itself as something unexpected. In comparison to the opera house, its website mentions the building's East German lineage, linked, as it is, with its highly praised conductor Kurt Masur, who played a key role both in the construction of the new building – campaigning to get it erected and collaborating with those who built it – and in the peaceful revolution of 1989 that brought the Wall down; he later moved to the United States to conduct the New York Philharmonic. The fact that both buildings are government-owned presumably explains, in part, why they have not undergone massive renovations.[32] Each of the other renovation projects in Augustusplatz costs hundreds of millions of Euros, money that came from private investors. But another factor is that these buildings fit within the curatorial lens of neoliberalism by either ignoring their East German past – easy to do with the Leipzig Oper – or supporting a narrative that flatters the West, as in the case of the Gewandhaus.[33]

Although I have focused on the changes that took place in many of the buildings that border Augustusplatz, these are not the only changes that have taken place. Eight frosted-glass mini-towers now appear around the square as ventilation for a new train

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post office building on Augustusplatz continued to be used as a post office until 2011. After disagreements with the *Denkmalschutzbehörde* (Historic Preservation Authority), the building remained empty until 2015. Renovations began in 2015 (Morgenpost 2015). It was announced in January 2017 that the (western) German billionaire Hasso Plattner had bought the building (Rometsch 2017).

31 | 'Oper Leipzig' (https://www.oper-leipzig.de/de/oper-leipzig, accessed 12 September 2020).

32 | According to the Gewandhaus Orchester website, the Gewandhaus zu Leipzig is an 'owner-operated municipal enterprise of the City of Leipzig' (https://www.gewandhausorchester.de/en/contact/legal/, accessed 12 January 2020).

33 | Many 'Westerners' assume the demonstrations in 1989 were about bringing an end to the GDR when, in fact, they were initially about making changes to it.

system running below the city. There is a building with restaurants on the western side, parallel to the university building and covering a parking garage, and there is a large fountain in the former parking lot in front of the opera house on the northern side, creating a contemporary parallel to the 1886 Mende fountain that stands in front of the Gewandhaus on the southern side. In many ways, the square is now more tourist friendly, with restaurants, stores and hotels. The square also hosts events at various times of the year, setting up large tents with food, wares and carnival games that appeal to locals and tourists alike. Thirty years after unification, it is easy to forget that Augustusplatz – now dominated by Western-owned and -renovated buildings dedicated to consumerism and tourism – had once been a curatorial showcase of socialist architecture and ideology.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the changes that took place in Leipzig after 1990 as a result of the imposition of a neoliberal curatorial lens on this former socialist city. Whereas Leipzig had been an internationally prominent city in East Germany, after unification, it became just one of many mid-sized German cities. Similarly, the Socialist art and architecture for which it was known was re-curated to downplay or eliminate any positive references to the Socialist past. In the MdbK, western Germans took over the leadership positions and re-curated the collection to better reflect their values: East German art was either put into storage or given lesser prominence and Western artists were given preference in both exhibition displays and acquisitions. Similarly, Augustusplatz was re-curated to reflect neoliberal interests: in this case, a focus on commerce and tourism. Gone is its titular reference to socialism and the compact, physical overview of socialist architectural styles from the 1950s to the 1980s – buildings that had been designed primarily by local architects. The façades most heavily changed are those showing the socialist modernist styles existent in the GDR, including the Hauptpostamt, the former Hotel Deutschland and the Universitätsgebäude, and with them, evidence of a modernist alternative to capitalism.

The loss of the local in the art and architecture in Leipzig is not merely the loss of the East German past, but it is also symptomatic of a larger problem in contemporary society: current politics have abandoned the local, including the needs and desires of the people, in favour of the global. In response, there has been a populist revolt in recent years, one felt particularly strongly in eastern Germany where movements like Pegida (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* [Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Western World]) and the AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland* [Alternative for Germany]) have significant support, but one also evident in the West: in the UK with Brexit and the USA with Trump. As Wolfgang Streeck explains, this populism is the result of all those passed over by globalization and abandoned by politicians taking matters into their own hands (Streeck 2017: 16–18). With the failure of the Left to offer effective hope for change – according to Jodi Dean, even

the Left has embraced neoliberal economics – people have turned to the Right, which does not share the Left's reluctance to speak for others (Dean 2009: 15–16). The Right claims the universal – and with it the political – with its clear, if dishonest rhetoric (ibid.: 12, 16). As Jan Sowa states, if people 'are unable to organize around their class positions, they will look for what they have at hand and in the contemporary neoliberal world that means mainly: identity'; in this case, a reactionary nationalist identity (Sowa 2018).

This case study of Leipzig's Socialist art and architecture before and after unification also shows the active re-curating of socialism and with it, the erasure of alternatives to the current system. Neoliberalism thrives on the belief that there is no alternative. As Mark Fisher emphasises, 'it's easier to envision the end of the world than the end of capitalism', a condition he terms 'capitalist realism' (Fisher 2009: 1–11). And yet, capitalism is not the only alternative. The physical reminders of socialism, thus, stand as a challenge to such rhetoric.

It is easy to maintain that the GDR did not have art, just kitsch and propaganda – as is often assumed by 'Westerners' – if one cannot see any evidence to the contrary.[34] When such works are visible, on the other hand, they disrupt the narrative told by 'capitalist realism' by standing as a reminder not only of a vital art scene – one in which artists were both valued and actively engaged – but also of an alternative political system.[35] That system (Socialism) challenges the idea that there are no alternatives; it also offers a resource from which to think outside the neoliberal capitalist box.

In a neoliberal system, physical evidence of an alternative politics, be it art or architecture, must be erased and rewritten or re-curated. We see evidence of both in Augustusplatz. What had been a compendium of East German architectural styles from the 1950s to the 1980s has been re-curated into a capitalist square of restaurants, hotels and cultural centres or was destroyed, as was the case for the main building of the university building. The new building in its place stands as a permanent reminder of a moment in East German history when the government and the people were at

34 | A clear example of the elision of East German art from German art history is the *60 Jahre – 60 Werke* exhibition in 2009. None of the GDR's most important artists were included despite twenty years' activity in the Federal Republic of Germany (in addition to having shown there before 1989). Similarly, in 2017, a controversy emerged in the German press over the lack of visibility of East German art in the Albertinum's permanent display in Dresden. The first article in the series was by Paul Kaiser, 'Markenwechsel'.

35 | Numerous artists I have interviewed over the course of the past twenty years have mentioned how they miss the greater sense of community they had as artists in East Germany as well as their importance within that society. This is not to downplay the challenges artists faced in that system. The greater importance of art and artists in East Germany meant that politicians were often actively engaged in the art scene, not only visiting major art exhibitions but also making pronouncements on art. At times, this greater importance led to public controversies and, sometimes, to works being removed from an exhibition, an exhibition being closed early or the artist having to give a self-criticism. Such negative events were more likely to happen in the Ulbricht era (1949–1971) than in the more relaxed atmosphere of 'breadth and variety' of the Honecker era (1971–1989).

odds: the destruction of the St. Pauli church in 1968. This historical trauma has now been preserved in three dimensions as a constant physical reminder of the horrors of socialism. Similarly, when public protest prevented the permanent removal of the Tübke mural from the university building, a vocal individual hired an artist to create a counter narrative, one that emphasises the victims of socialism. Tübke's mural is, thus, not allowed to stand on its own, as an uncurated physical reminder of the past that might cause someone to question how that past is presented today and therewith to question the present. Tübke's mural, for example, emphasises the importance of the working class, education and the arts as well as gender equality under socialism. Rather than allowing such socialist ideals to stand on their own, Erich Loest – himself a victim – commissioned a painting that emphasises the victims of that society, a painting that now also hangs in the main university building.

To look at how the Socialist past has been re-curated in recent years is not to ignore the problems of the East German system but rather to point out that there seems to be an ideological need to counter any positive aspect of the socialist past with a negative that serves specific interests in the present: those of neoliberal capitalism. Significantly, whereas the crimes and victims of the socialist past are emphasised, the crimes and victims of the current system, legion as they are, are nowhere to be found.

Leipzig's socialist past as evidenced in its art and architecture serves as a reminder of the fact that capitalism has not always been the dominant system. Indeed, for forty years, it was just one half of a 'communicating vessel' (Kulik 2019). Such physical reminders of this other half, of an alternative political system and a time before 'capitalist realism', however, are dangerous to the present and, thus, need to be tamed or, to use Schorch's term, 're-curated'. We see this in the relocation of East German art into storage after unification and the recladding – if not destruction of – socialist buildings. And yet, as long as these material remains exist, even in altered form, they stand as a reminder that there are other political systems and possibilities, and that current political systems can change – and can do so, as 1989 shows, even sooner than we think possible.

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