Urban Memory and Visual Culture in Berlin

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2. ‘Place Memory Work’ in Berlin 1975-1989

This chapter traces how ‘place memory work’ developed across forms of visual culture in the 1970s and 1980s, a period that sees a generational shift in urban consciousness and the emergence of curators, for whom the need to respond to the traces of the city’s past (both from before and after 1945) led them to theorize how to ‘work with place’ in the production of spatial images through architecture, site-specific intervention, as well as photography and film. As this chapter shows, the dynamics of place memory can be generated through a direct encounter with the material remnant, but also through the indexical recording forms of the photograph and film, whose strategies for displaying the cityscape dovetail with the display strategies of material interventions.

Beyond the piecemeal work of Stadtbildpflege and sporadic journalistic spatial images of resistance to demolition, Berlin’s Second International Building Exhibition, which had its beginnings in the late 1970s and officially concluded in 1987, established the institutional curation of the built environment within the city, under the guiding principle that ‘the fundamental historical structure of the city must become the basis of future urban development.’ This involved the institutional incorporation of figures from a younger generation who had previously been on the margins of urban planning. The major actors of this generation include the architect, JP Kleihues (born in 1933) whose 1971 design – ‘Block 270’ – for a residential building in Berlin-Wedding had been a seminal work in making Berlin’s ‘block plan’ publically visible again after the wholesale disregard for this form of urban organization in the post-war era. They also include Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm (born in 1940), who was heavily influenced by the alternative politics of Berlin-Kreuzberg in the 1970s, and through his involvement in the critical architectural journal, Arch+, and the influential alternative publishing house Ästhetik und Kommunikation had begun to address questions of urban planning and architectural history through a varied intellectual career. At the core of the International Building Exhibition (IBA) is the assumption that the built environment has a connection to the past, its fabric has an anamnestic dimension, a ‘memory value’ in Huyssen’s terms. What constitutes that past and how it is to be both curated and displayed are the central concerns of the museal gaze in this period, which sees both the theoretical discussion and practical operation of a museal urban gaze and the production of spatial images. This will be discussed through the lens of the IBA, and its projects, as well
as in other forms of visual culture, in particular site-specific installations, photographic practice, and film, all of which enacted forms of the museal urban gaze in this period.

The second IBA

Planning for the IBA took its impetus from developments within the city of Berlin and from the rediscovery of the tradition of the ‘European city’ by the Italian architect Aldo Rossi (1931-1997). Rossi’s influential book, *The Architecture of the City* (*L’architettura della città*) had been published in 1966, and played a major role in convincing the European Council to establish the European Year of Architecture, and its adoption of the European Charter of the Architectural Heritage in 1975. Rossi’s understanding of ‘monumental urban architecture’ that was neither a specific monument to a past event, nor sought to dominate its citizens, deeply chimed with Halbwachs’s theories of collective memory, particularly the persistent street network as the ‘genetic code’ of the city.²

The slogan for the European Year of Architecture, ‘A Future for Our Past’, invoked a collective temporality within the city. Berlin’s IBA was intended to take account of an emerging new urbanism, in terms of an engagement with a philosophy of urban history. As we shall see, in practice, it cultivated an image of the past, through the post-modern, playful appropriation of previous architectural forms by the architects invited to become involved, who included Peter Eisenman, Zaha Hadid, Aldo Rossi, and Rem Koolhaas, and whose brief expected them to respond to the requirements of modern life, and the social, economic and technical requirements of the city. While the Interbau of 1957 had been focused on a particular district (the Hansaviertel) quite distinct from the rest of the city (though the principle had been gradually and less sophisticatedly extended to other areas, such as Kreuzberg), the IBA’s emphasis on ‘urban repair’ meant gap-filling in the urban landscape. While this was not restricted to any particular part of the city, many of the projects were located in the ‘southern Friedrichstadt’, in the western part of Kreuzberg. It is here that the differences in the museal urban gaze emerge between the two distinct parts of the exhibition, the IBA-Neu and IBA-Alt, the former concerned with ‘reconstruction’ of urban living, the latter with the maintenance of the old built structures. It is these differences that will be delineated in the following discussion of their underpinning principles, for the IBA-Alt and IBA-Neu developed two very different conceptions of urban memory.
The museal gaze of the IBA-Neu

The first central formulation of the philosophy of IBA-Neu was to be found in the newspaper series, ‘Models for a City’ (Modelle für eine Stadt), published in the Berliner Morgenpost in early 1977. The repair of the cityscape that is promoted in the articles by Josef Kleihues and the architectural theorist Heinrich Klotz is founded on a vision of the contemporary cityscape as ‘fragmented’ and ‘empty’. Direct reference to an urban past is not made explicit in these articles, but evident in all of them is the implicit remembrance of a former building tradition and its incorporation in a narrative of cultural memory.

The specific aims of the IBA were discussed at length by Kleihues after the fact and indeed after German unification in 1993. This particular essay has much to do with debates about the meaning of the key concept of the IBA, ‘critical reconstruction’, in terms of the reconstruction of Berlin after 1989, but it is also significant in outlining the principles of the IBA as Kleihues understood them, and as they were practised by the loose collective of architects involved from the late 1970s onwards. The essay is entitled Städtebau ist Erinnerung (Urban Construction is Remembrance), and yet ‘collective memory’ is less significant than the architect’s relationship with tradition.

The first iteration of memory in the essay is connected to the Senate prescriptions for the IBA, which stated that ‘the fundamental historical structure of the city must become the basis of future urban development.’ The fundamental historical structure of the city is itself not historicized, but conceived as something that is profoundly set in stone. While after 1990 Kleihues retrospectively criticized Aldo Rossi’s fetishization of classical urban unity and the neo-classical architectural structures of Leon Krier for their rejection of experiment, he remained still committed to a recuperation of a generic ‘city’, since ‘the layout [of Berlin] bears witness to the spiritual and cultural idea of the founding of a city.’ These ‘authenticated traces’ signify, even after their decay, a former mode of urban experience that predates the over-rationalization of city structures and their subservience to mere functionalist dictates: the ‘wrong path’ which the IBA sets out to correct.

The second iteration of memory is related to the work of Peter Eisenman, for whom, programmatically, ‘where history ends, memory begins’. This post-modern position that rejects the historical mission of the architect, gets to the heart of the complexity of Kleihues’ relationship to the past in this essay. The architect’s remembering of past forms and styles is founded
on a rejection of a modernism that had now itself become classical. When Kleihues claimed that urban planning after 1945 took ‘no notice’ of the historical evolution of the city, these post-war developments were framed as failing to pay ‘attention’ to the past, and so the recovery of urban experience through the IBA was also the recovery of attention to the city structure by the architects designing spatial images (through) the museal urban gaze.

Kleihues’ reflections are memory traces of a tradition that itself emerged as a particular form of socio-economic organization. The post-war deindustrialized status of West Berlin is a defining factor in being able to recuperate a former conception of the city. Nostalgia is avoided through the historical narrative of urban modernism as a wrong path. The IBA’s (re)production of the spatial image of a cityscape is, however, founded on a quite specific historical perspective – the original points de vue which Karl Friedrich Schinkel constructed in the southern Friedrichstadt in the nineteenth century, which enable, according to Kleihues, forms of social interaction which connect to a possibility of spatial experience.

In a second, shorter essay on the southern Friedrichstadt, Kleihues admits that it was not so much urban reconstruction that was at the heart of this second IBA as the curation of ‘memory traces’ (Gedächtnisspuren). Within the autonomous development of the individual projects of the IBA, an ordered history is experienced, in line with the way the order of the cityscape can be experienced as a whole. Kleihues names three strategies for organizing the museal urban gaze: first, the literal reconstruction of a former situation; second, where the past is extended in a defamiliarizing, collage-like fashion, which ‘activates the silent reserves of the place’ through a respectfully playful engagement with historical traces; and third, the ‘self-conscious contradiction’, an intensification of the second strategy through the ‘calculated break, the political, intellectual or artistic provocation through the intervention of the new and different.’ The distinction between strategies two and three would seem only to be grounded in the architect’s intention, and indeed this is implicit in Kleihues’ analysis of Peter Eisenman’s constructions which, he claims, embody a ‘refreshing conceptual idea’ that still has to be recognized by a lesenden Betrachter [‘reading observer’].

Reframing the parking lot

The specific example discussed by Kleihues and Klotz in the 1977 article is James Stirling’s proposal for a ‘repair’ of the corner of Meinekestrasse/
Kurfürstendamm, which had been demolished after the war and replaced by a high-rise parking lot. The understanding of ‘emptiness’ and ‘fragmentation’ in the cityscape is telling: for Klotz, ‘the meaninglessly loitering fragments’ of the city (of which the parking lot is a typical example) need to be brought together to form an intact ‘environment’.”10 Kleihues similarly refers to the site as an ‘unused or badly used’ plot of land, complete with ‘left-over’ spaces that need to be reactivated and ‘grey zones’ that need to be removed.11 This empty space is to be replaced by buildings such as that proposed by Stirling, which is designed to reinstate the ‘original’ urban structure of the ‘block edge’ (Blockrand). Although this block structure is the element of the urban past that is to be recuperated within contemporary cultural memory, its collective experience is to be tactile, in the mode of a recovered place memory. Such buildings were intended to create an interactive urban experience (the German term used here is Erlebnis), in contrast to the façade of the parking lot, which ‘merely happens’ (according to Klotz). Central to this assertion is the construction of ‘streetscapes’ that can be reclaimed for ‘urban life’, where the encounter is a kind of event. In Klotz’s terms, the parking lot disregards the citizen, much as the citizen, in synchronic sensory-motor mode, does not encounter it in a meaningful way.

Klotz identifies an ironic relationship to the past in the transformation of the ‘banal’ petrol station on the street corner into an ‘urban(e) situation full of experience’ (erlebnisreich). The corner of Stirling’s planned building has the addition of a lift shaft that rises above the traditional Berlin eaves height. For Klotz, this mundane element has the quality of an ‘unmonumental monument’, creating an erfahrbaren [visually experiential] context that can be erlebt [encountered] as a recognizable ‘place’. Such a ‘place’ would be beautiful, in Klotz’s view, since ‘the building regains a face’ in which the reality of its function is not hidden, but remains visible. Indeed the parking lot at times ‘nakedly announces itself’ in the structure, or ‘peeks out unexpectedly’. Klotz describes this effect as a ‘dramatization’ of the problem posed by the post-war situation: urban experience is again conceived as a dramatic event. Although this engagement with the past is not only visual, it is unclear how such a partial reconstruction has any effect on the body of the inhabitant. The citizen in Klotz’s vision is still a spectator in a car, waiting to go into a parking lot that is still present, if almost invisible from the street.

The museal gaze of the IBA-Alt

The identity of this spectator-citizen is not addressed by the IBA-Neu architects, who remain the ‘reading observers’ of their own constructions. The
identity of the observer is, however, central to a seminal article published in 1978 in the architecture journal *Arch+* by the architectural critic Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm. The article, entitled *On the Treatment of Destroyed Urban History*, was clearly a response to the ideas of the IBA-Neu. As such, the essay is a critique of the policy of ‘urban repair’ (*Stadtreparatur*) as an aesthetic response to the two waves of destruction that had been visited upon the city. Nevertheless the essay shared with the IBA-Neu a critique of the synchronic urban gaze that had dominated urban planning since the end of the Second World War in West Berlin. Hoffmann-Axthelm’s position is a refinement of the ‘second destruction’ argument (made by Siedler in particular, as discussed in the previous chapter), in that he identifies the clearances of the centre of Berlin as a ‘primarily technical’ exercise; the centre of Berlin became empty through ‘a tirelessly technical clearing-away’. He distinguishes between the fate of those districts at the centre which ‘developed as an urban desert under a sky barely impinged upon by buildings, with their own vegetation and a subterranean aesthetic eccentric charm’, and the neighbouring intact proletarian districts (such as Wedding and Kreuzberg) that were then being demolished under the principle of ‘large-scale rehabilitation’ (*Flächensanierung*). Such renewal had also been seen as only a technical process. Importantly, these proletarian neighbourhoods had not been left in ruins by the war; rather these were intact communities and, according to Hoffmann-Axthelm, a ‘historical cityscape’ that had not yet become a ‘commodity mask’.

Hoffmann-Axthelm recognized that the IBA-Neu contained a critique of the post-war reconstruction process, but condemned it as an ‘aesthetic programme’, for it was the *image* of the city, streets, squares, courtyards and parks that was being repaired. The city was ultimately still being viewed as a machine, and a broken machine can be made to function again. One part of the city was being repaired, but without reference to the whole, since the ‘broken social relationships’ were not being repaired:

The new buildings contain no dialectic; the historical substance leaves behind no traces, it is simply taken away by digger, and the new buildings stand there, as if the destroyed city had never existed.

For Hoffmann-Axthelm, the removal of all traces meant not simply the disappearance of particular buildings, but also the extinction of an authentic past; the destruction caused by the Second World War is also part of urban history, as a rupture it generates its own historical urban environment: ‘we only have “historical” buildings as a result of the destruction’, he claims,
adding that one may not, and indeed cannot, build up a destroyed city as if nothing had happened, more precisely, one cannot rebuild this city Berlin, as if it were any other city, as if it had (merely) been subject to an earthquake.

At this point, Hoffmann-Axthelm introduces the *morality* of a relationship to the past into the curation of both the built environment and of its memory value. What has been ‘excluded’, according to Hoffmann-Axthelm, is what happened and originated in Berlin as the seat of a ‘terror organization’ that tortured, gassed and murdered many millions of people: Jews, resistance fighters, Socialists, the mentally disabled and homosexuals. For that reason, according to Hoffmann-Axthelm, attempts to build over these spaces in Berlin could only lead to further denial of that past. With IBA-Neu, he argued, what was emerging is an urban history without victims, ‘interchangeable and without age’. The return of (neo-) classical forms (in the architecture of Rob Krier, for example) is for Hoffmann-Axthelm simply the ‘return of the repressed’. The framings of the past, and the monuments that have been constructed, are ‘incomplete, biased, [they] render harmless, or simply melancholic (as expressed in the cliché, “in difficult times”).

Hoffmann-Axthelm rejected the (re)construction of the urban environment as the source of a comforting narrative of cultural memory. He proposed instead a history that ‘should’ be told, founded on emerging models of collection and curation of the past, driven by a growing interest in a history ‘from below’. As he noted, within the workers’ districts there was remembrance of the class struggles of the past, but this had not taken on the public form of commemoration, i.e. it had not been accepted as cultural memory. Similarly, there was the oral testimony that was being recorded by historians and video documentarists. For Hoffmann-Axthelm, however, the demolition of whole housing blocks destroys a system of orientation. The population changes and quite different forms of urban experience come into play, in particular, the individualization of urban experience. For the new inhabitants, the history of the quarter is not their history, is unknown and ungraspable for them. For Hoffmann-Axthelm, such an individualization of history means that the criticism directed against post-war urban planning had no collective focus and merely became a way of expressing an unproductive and harmful social discontent: protests against the urban motorway served ultimately as a conduit for xenophobia. The reconstruction of the ‘southern Friedrichstadt’ had produced an area that is now inhabited by people who have no historical relationship to the quarter and are getting used to the interstitial spaces (‘this confusion of ruin fields, snack bars, remainders of houses from the former business district’). For these inhabitants, the historical process has become fundamentally abstract.
Their relationship to history is a symptom of a wider abstract relationship to civic society in general.

This describes a model of how place memory is eradicated, along the lines described by Connerton, whereby the synchronic urban gaze produces a related form of attention at ground level. Importantly, Hoffmann-Axthelm claimed that the area did, in fact, contain a legible prehistory of the foundational urban structures within it. He formulated a museal urban gaze that is structurally similar to the principles of the IBA, except that this ‘prehistory’ is not founded on recovering and recuperating an ‘original’ city. Hoffmann-Axthelm attempted to describe an appropriate way of dealing with ‘destroyed urban history’, or of writing the ‘history of urban destruction’. He did this with reference to an area in the southern Friedrichstadt that had been the site of the SS headquarters during the ‘Third Reich’ and had been demolished after the war. As Hoffmann-Axthelm notes (at this point becoming collector and curator of the city as a repository of the past), an engagement with this empty site means producing the visibility of the historical process as duration, which was to form the basis of a critical relationship to the ‘memory value’ of the remnants. He asks:

which are the signs contained within the destroyed area that can orientate the expansion and collation of the existing patches, without the erratic historic-aesthetic pattern that has been woven by urban repair in the area. It is history that reaches from the past into the planning of current living conditions, the prehistory of the current situation, not as an image to be observed, but a process that is connected with current conditions and gives them the perspectival depth.

The material remnant ensures the cityscape possesses ‘perspectival depth’: one of the earliest definitions of the ‘critical dimension’ of the anamnestic dimension evoked by the museal urban gaze and its spatial images. The abandoned object, like De Certeau’s ruins, is both far away and close, because the remnant ‘reaches’ into the present. The past is apprehended as a living process within that present. ‘The ruin fields of the southern Friedrichstadt are closer to being a legible history of the city than the formal corpse we are promised [by the IBA]. [...] History is there. It does not need to be invented, merely liberated from its repression.’ For this to happen, the southern Friedrichstadt should not become an official monument. There should be no sense of an absence of age but rather the presence of the historical process. Hoffmann-Axthelm imagines this as a different form of cultural memory from that offered by the IBA-Neu, albeit one that
is similarly grounded in an immediate experience of the built environment. The urban experience that returns here is an experience of historical time through the spatial image.

This is a museal urban gaze that is developed in rejection of the synchronic gaze, which is associated here clearly with the removal of the past (and a particular form of the past). The question of ‘legibility’ however still haunts Hoffmann-Axthelm’s work of curation. He makes no suggestions as to how these ‘ruin fields’ should be ‘curated’ other than as a critique of other framings and their (ahistorical) philosophy of history. For Hoffmann-Axthelm, city repair treats urban destruction as a natural catastrophe not worthy of representation. While he recognizes that the arrogance of the post-war urban planning paradigm had passed, no new way of seeing the city had emerged other than as a return to the former state of affairs.

Two different theories of the museal gaze, of memory value and the anamnestic dimension of the material cityscape are thus elaborated within IBA-Neu and IBA-Alt. In both cases, the memory value must be first generated within urban experience. Although they share key dynamics of place memory, in their resistance to homogenization and their emphasis on a non-instrumentalized and unmediated encounter with an inexplicit spatial image, they nevertheless differ fundamentally in the way they shape a perception of the past. The built environment may contain the anamnestic dimension Andreas Huyssen associates with the memory value of the material object, but that memory value can, however, be extrapolated in two directions, either as a memory of former urban experience, or as a way into understanding the present’s relationship to the past.21

The ‘memory value’ of the material object from the past derives its auratic quality from the implied testimony to historical time. Kleihues’ model of memory value in the cityscape is founded on the testimony it bears and the transmission it enables, of the city’s architectural origins, whereas the authenticity of the cityscape for Hoffmann-Axthelm is founded on both substantive duration and historical testimony. While this explains their differing claims to authenticity, their differing instrumentalizations of place memory can be described through Nietzsche’s analysis of history in On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life in terms of ‘monumental memory value’ and ‘critical memory value’.22 In the former, the ‘monumental memory value’ of a place is founded on the construction of an unmediated experience of the past that emphasizes its poetic qualities: the encounter with ‘the silent reserves of place’ generates a poetic and fundamentally affirmative, coherent and resolved understanding of the past, whereas in the latter the encounter with ‘place’ generates a critical, unresolved understanding of
the past. ‘Critical memory value’ tries to organize those poetic qualities in order to induce critical insight without becoming so legible as to override the glancing encounter on which it relies for its authenticity.

**The sited practice of the museal urban gaze**

How does this form of the museal urban gaze emerge in practice, and how does it address the question of an evocative ‘legibility’ of the past. The museal gaze, as a form of remembering well, formulates itself in contradistinction to what it views as the hegemonic urban gaze. We shall now look at a series of examples, beginning with the framing of the former SS-headquarters discussed by Hoffmann-Axthelm in his essay and then contextualizing what was practised here through other examples of site-specific framing of remnants in Berlin, such as the Anhalter Bahnhof and the former Embassy quarter, which will open out the question of the various media (photography and film in particular) through which the museal urban gaze operates in this period.

1. **The Topography of the Terror: ‘No place for roads’**

As discussed above, the former SS-headquarters in the Prinz-Albrecht Strasse had been demolished after the war. Hoffmann-Axthelm suggested that urban planning after 1945 had no language to deal with the remains of war and ‘simply demolished, and allowed grass or asphalt to grow over everything […]’. The language that it did have at its disposal was the grammar of abstract space. The directive that came from Bonn in 1962 merely described the clearing away of administrative buildings (*Abräumung von Verwaltungsgebäuden*), as part of the preparations for a new urban motorway.

The location was not recognized as a ruin site with memory value at this stage. Indeed it was also disregarded for a long time by the synchronic gaze of the planners, as it was rendered low in exchange value due to its proximity to the Wall, only coming into view as a relatively late part of Berlin’s urban motorway project. One part of the site was a dumping ground for rubble from demolished buildings in nearby parts of Kreuzberg. Another, as Hoffmann-Axthelm discusses, was asphalted over and formed an unregulated track for driving without a licence. The ruins were not even tentatively identified as an ‘unintended monument’ until 1978. James Young follows both Mitscherlich’s socio-psychological reading of
the built environment and De Certeau’s imputation of agency to ruins, when he suggests that the remains lay dormant until this point, but, ‘as is the wont of repressed memories, however, the site returned to public consciousness with an obsessive, ferocious vengeance.’ In fact, 1978 is the year of Hoffmann-Axthelm’s essay and the urban archivist curated the unintended monument through a key form of the urban museal gaze’s collective address: the guided tour. In January 1978 Hoffmann-Axthelm led tours of the site during a convention of environmentalists and anarchists (the ‘TUNIX’, or ‘Do Nothing Congress’, a notable rejection of the ‘active city’), effectively conducting a training in the museal urban gaze as an act of discovering counter-histories. In contrast to Kleihues, the curator of the silent reserves of ‘place’, Hoffmann-Axthelm is the activator of the silent reserves of place as a counter-historical ‘movement’ through the city.

In 1979, the IBA-Alt attempted to intervene in the plans to run the motorway over the terrain. In a move analogous to Hoffmann-Axthelm’s invocation of the history of victims of National Socialism, Michael Kraus, a member of IBA-Alt, recalls the moment in February 1980 when he introduced the question of the site’s former usage into the context of a planning meeting about the site:

It was not unproblematic to depart suddenly from the level at which the conversation had taken place up to that point and to allude to the political and moral background, for that could be understood – and was indeed understood by the supporters of the road-building programme – as a purely tactical manoeuvre, as an non-objective, emotional and unfair move into an area which could not be rationally grasped with the criteria which had been used up to now.

Kraus’s invocation of the memory value of the site, in terms of understanding the site’s material presence as a ‘place of memory’, radically breaks the frame of discussions about the rational ordering of space in terms of the synchronic gaze. This terrain is, in the title of his essay, ‘no place for roads’. This is the first step in the establishing of the memory value of the place: its relationship to authenticity is established in terms of historical testimony. The next problem that arises: how is the authenticity of encounter to be framed in a spatial image?

One of the tensions between ‘critical memory value’ and ‘monumental memory value’ lies in the fact that critical memory value introduces a potentially intellectual, abstract engagement with a site that would deprive it of
the qualities of place memory that rendered it auratic in the first place. This tension can be followed through the protracted discussions and competitions that ensued in the past twenty-five years, as people have attempted to maintain this interstitial location as a site of the historical imagination. A critical understanding of memory value has to grapple with the paradox that once the unintended monument becomes the location of a verbalized, conceptualized critical history, it can no longer function as its own point of historical reference. The debates surrounding the Topography of the Terror demonstrate uncertainty about whether this site of memory can be its own referent, although little doubt that it should be.

Descriptions and visualizations of the site from the early 1980s emphasize spatial images of absence. The site is described as empty, an emptiness in contrast to the traces of the site’s usage over the past decades: the rubble from the building work and the rubber tyres of the racing track. Hoffmann-Axthelm suggested that the ‘fundamental emptiness’ is the ‘message itself’; the site was an unintended monument to post-war indifference to the crimes of the Nazi state and that lack of intention is central to its initial significance, as is clear from the journalistic tours of the site which foreground the act of discovery.

The discovery of an ‘unintended monument’ led to reflection on how the ‘message itself’ was to be made legible. The tension between aesthetic effect and ethical meaning in the work of curation was picked out by Hoffmann-Axthelm in considering how one might turn this ‘unintended monument’ into something more durable. He pointed to the dangers of ‘aesthetic legibility’, arguing that ‘one cannot simply relate to the location in a visual manner’, and that the last thing that should be enabled is ‘a cultivated shiver down the spine’ of the bussed-in tourists. The tension between the sensory impact of the encounter with the location and its potential didactic function was drawn out by Ulrich Eckhardt, who made a distinction between an emotional reaction resolving into ‘self-satisfaction’ and its status as a ‘place of reflection’ (Denkort – a reworking of Denkmal), a ‘strange, questioning site’.28

The ‘critical memory value’ of the site was, however, not the only value placed upon this space. This became evident in the first competition to find an adequate way of marking the site, where it was also stipulated that the designs had to include an area of recreation for the inhabitants of Kreuzberg. This compromise illustrates that area of tension between ‘habitable space’ and ‘historical consciousness’ that marks the conflict within the IBA as a whole. The museal gaze for that first competition was framed by the then Mayor of Berlin, Richard von Weizsäcker:
Reshaping the terrain where the Prinz-Albrecht-Palais formerly stood is one of the most important responsibilities our city faces both for reasons of history and urban development. For better or worse, Berlin is the custodian of German history, which here has left worse scars than anywhere else. [...] The terrain adjacent to the Martin Gropius Bau [...] contains invisible traces of a heavy historic legacy: invisible are the buildings from which the SS state operated its levers of terror. Visible is the Wall, cutting like a knife across the former Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse. [...] As we go about reconstructing this area, it will be our task to proceed with contemporary history in mind while also providing a place for contemplation. Yet at the same time we must not miss the opportunity to give the Kreuzberg district a terrain where life can unfold and leisure is possible.

Three aspects of the speech can be highlighted. First, there is the emphasis on visibility/invisibility at the site. Second, and connected to this, the idea that spatial practice should be directed towards contemplation, one of the key tropes of the museal urban gaze. Third, the fact that, nevertheless, a contemplative site did not count as a functioning/useful space within the city: it has to be functionalized as a leisure space. In this light, Ulrich Conrads’s commentary on the 1983 winning design by Jürgen Wenzel and Nikolaus Leng is revealing:

What one enters there can be called neither grove nor park nor wood. One will enter into something dead but alive, in an absolutely artificial landscape, which, however, is not entirely devoid of nature. [...] The documents, laid out on the ground, will say why this is the case.

The Wenzel/Leng solution combined the aesthetics of the ruin, between life and death, artifice and nature, image and materiality, with the didactic abstraction of the verbal. The value of the documents, reproductions of Gestapo and SS policy records, is a combination of ‘age value’ (in their testimonial authenticity), ‘exhibition value’ (in that they are displayed) and ‘critical memory value’ (in that they serve a didactic purpose for the present and work with a disruptive juxtaposition between past and present). The winning design was by no means universally acclaimed. It was attacked by neighbourhood groups who realized that it had not really provided them with a recreational space. It was also criticized by those who thought that the design, which sealed the ground with cast-iron plates, ‘closed off’ the site, rather than leaving it as an open wound. Dissatisfaction with the solutions offered established once more the peculiarity of this
space: Hoffmann-Axthelm observed that it would have been interpreted as a cursed space by premodern societies, while Ulrich Conrads talked of the site being ‘poisoned’. There was consensus for Hämer’s observation that the site can have no functional role to play in the city. Indeed the dangers of abstract space are invoked in Conrads’s concern that compromises could lead to the influence of ‘a calculating administration’, and Hoffmann-Axthelm’s warning that the ‘administration of space’ should not be allowed to dictate the treatment of a site that was richly layered in history.

A number of the 194 entries for the 1983 competition had made use of architectural metaphors of excavation but the memory value of the site was heightened when actual archaeological finds from the Gestapo era were made during the 1986 excavations, which followed on from the polemical intervention by local historical activists a year before. These remnants dealt the Wenzel-Leng plan a final blow and greatly enhanced the auratic power of the site. Thomas Friedrich called the uncovered Gestapo cells the ‘most expressive part’ of the area. The expressive fallacy is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that in 1981 Hoffmann-Axthelm had argued that the site was to speak, ‘and indeed without display signs’, although he did later suggest that the power of the site to speak had in fact been proven by the signs that had been erected. The site uncovers the tension between the intended and unintended monument, or the monument of mourning and that of melancholia. The testimonial aura of the site had been secured by excavations displaying themselves in the centre of the city, ensuring the direct, visual ‘memory value’ of the encounter with the site; the signs ensured the exhibition value of the remnants. How to ensure the establishment of ‘critical memory’, or a critical awareness of the historical process?

The Topography of the Terror site illustrates formal questions surrounding the technological construction of the spatial image of urban memory. The museal urban gaze is related to the interactive construction of aura, but how is time (‘past time’) framed for experience in the urban environment? The recovery of place memory is also the recovery of a way of relating to history. The case of the Topography of the Terror is clearly a significant moment in the history of national memory discourse in post-war Germany – for Young, it became ‘the controlling focal point for all German memory’. In terms of the emergence of urban memory, its significance lies principally in the shift away from the dominance of the synchronic urban gaze and the grounding of a different form of memory value, namely the ‘critical memory value’ of the built environment, in the way that it produced the presence of a (repressed) past through the dynamics of the encounter, aiming for a moment of discovery that is also a moment of preservation. While the
Topography of the Terror has been subject to much public and academic discussion, it has not previously been contextualized with other projects of the late 1970s and early 1980s that were grappling with the appropriate form of a museal urban gaze in relation to other, less immediately charged, ruin sites in the western half of the city. The first concerns a site just a short walk from the Prinz-Albrecht Strasse, a location that was equally disregarded by the post-war authorities, though perhaps without the claim to social amnesia through which the Topography of the Terror has been framed. That site is the Anhalter Bahnhof.

2. **Anhalter Bahnhof: Ruin or temple?**

The cover of the photograph book produced to accompany the Federal Republic’s contribution to the 1975 focus on the European city, juxtaposes the remnant of the façade of the Anhalter Bahnhof with the Europahaus behind it. The railway station’s status as an official monument related only to this portico remnant. As with any unintended monument, the historical meaning of the remnant was ambiguous: the ruination of the Anhalter Bahnhof had only been partially shaped by the war, but had been completed thanks to its demolition by the city authorities in 1959. The image of the ruined station façade was refunctionalized in a variety of contexts. The image also reappeared on the cover of the booklet ‘Antifascist City Plan for Kreuzberg’ (*Antifaschistischer Stadtplan Kreuzberg*), set against the backdrop of a schematic map of the district, a spatial image again signifying the auratic encounter with the past, vouching for the authenticity of the historical labour contained within the booklet. The portico appears in Figure 1 of this book, as an image staged in front of the actual ruin. Its form also appeared in December 1977, with the staging of an updated version of Hölderlin’s ‘Hyperion’ in the Olympic Stadium in the west of the city. A football goal had been replaced by the ruin silhouette of the portico, around which was gathered a group of those marginalized from society, in that RAF-overshadowed autumn of 1977. It was however not just a ruin gaze that was in play here, but the spatial practice of the post-war interstitial space and its marginalized characters. Within the ruin gaze, the definition of the monument remains unresolved; is this ruin the product of the war, or of the product of the ‘second destruction’ of urban reconstruction? Contextualized within the setting of Hitler’s Olympic Stadium, it would seem to be the former, but it can also be seen as a revisiting of the immediate post-war period, with the façade standing in for an abandoned ruin that can be recuperated for an experience of the past.
While the façade has an iconic value as it circulates as the image of a post-war ruin, the remainder of the space previously occupied by the station was a kind of no-man’s land that was used as a free car park. The iconic ‘face value’ of the portico was interrogated by the curatorial approach taken by Raffael Rheinsberg, for which the site-specificity of the authentic object was central. In 1979 he constructed an ‘installation-exhibition’ about the station in the Galerie Gianozzo in the Suarezstrasse in Grünewald in south-west Berlin. The installation began already on the pavement outside the gallery where 54 railway sleepers were laid out. Inside, two display rows of photographs vouched for the substantive duration and testimonial value of the site by showing the history of the Anhalter Bahnhof from its busy days to its post-war usage to its demolition. Among those photographs, Rheinsberg exhibited his own Polaroids of the current state of the site, details and documentation of his own traversing of the site. Displayed alongside those photographs were commentaries on the site made by nearby residents, without any clear connection of specific commentary to image. It was not just images that were on display, though; on a podium in the gallery a series of objects were exhibited: a bent fork, five-pfennig pieces, a lock, a brush, photographic mementoes, an old sole of a shoe and a football. In the cellar space, which was laid out with railway gravel, Rheinsberg had spread old coins, shrapnel, the fragments of a KPM-mug, broken MITROPA cutlery, and iron tools. The objects of a relatively recent everyday spatial practice were presented as if in an archaeological museum, placing in question conventional boundaries between past and present.

Rheinsberg enacted a museal gaze and also constructed a spatial image for the viewers of his exhibition, reconfiguring their relationship to the original object in its urban location, by moving beyond the visual appropriation of the iconic façade while generating a multidimensional spatial image. The exhibition engaged with levels of mediation (of time and the built environment); the historical photographs, themselves taken from a photographic archive and exhibited, the contemporary photographs, and then the objects themselves, framed within the gallery space.

While Rheinsberg was not bound to the didactic intentions in play at the Topography of the Terror, his installation speaks to similar concerns with social history that informed the work of the IBA-Alt and processes of urban memory in its formulation of a mode of encounter with the object, as well as interrogating the process of the transmission of historical knowledge through captions, something that was highlighted in the book publication. This book publication, *Anhalter Bahnhof: Ruine oder Tempel?*, inevitably diminished the spatial dimension of the installation. The structure of the
book organizes a linear framework, in that (following the introductory essay, discussed below), historical photographs of the Anhalter Bahnhof are placed before an essay by Janos Frecot. Then follow Rheinsberg’s photographs of the site, but presented as follows: each photograph is preceded by a not quite translucent piece of ‘tracing’ paper on which is printed a hand-written commentary, so that the photographic image is slightly obscured and certainly rendered opaque. This heightens awareness of the act of seeing and deciphering (though the handwriting is mechanically reproduced and is all from the same hand, as if Rheinsberg has appropriated authorship of the comments).

This first text/image combination also highlights the act of seeing, taken from an elevated vantage point looking down on the portal remains and to the former bunker in the back right of the image (Fig. 6). The quality of the reproduced Polaroid is sufficiently poor that the buildings at the back of the image/site become unidentifiable, lending the photograph an impressionistic quality. The textual supplement on the tracing paper – ‘looks like an old temple’ – is paradigmatically ambiguous as a supplement. Rather than resolving the enigmatic image, it actually only throws us back to the attempt to determine the object. The image is itself ambiguously composed: the elevated vantage point means that the portico is to the front right of the
image, the bunker to back right – as if the subject of the photograph were the empty space and the temple could be the bunker. The disjunction between inscription (and much play is made of graffiti on the walls of the buildings) and visual evocation is highlighted with a photograph of the bunker overlaid with a commentary that reads ‘This is supposed to be a railway station.’ Rheinsberg highlights here the ambiguity of a defunct site (defunct also in terms of spatial practices). Similarly a photograph of a concrete slab set against a backdrop of winter trees is captioned ‘When a person is dead, then he has died’, rendering the banal slab the image of a gravestone; the next image, a more closely cropped image of a gravestone is captioned ‘I see no train.’ The question of value is highlighted by a statement (directed we might presume to Rheinsberg, but also to us as readers), ‘what you have there is valuable’, that frames an almost unidentifiable image. Similarly, the phrase ‘that is worth it’ (which could also be a question) captions a photograph of objects on the gallery dais.

‘Do you want to clear up here?’ (aufräumen) can be read as an ironic reference to the official language of clearing up the rubble spaces, accompanying an image of spades found at the site and displayed in the gallery. This is the final image, addressing Rheinsberg’s purpose in ‘ordering’ the material; he clears it up, renders it museal (ready for the museum) – one of the captions reads ‘that is all in the museum.’ Yet Rheinsberg does not produce a museum, but an open site where the everyday and the banal has memory value, rooted in the materiality of its objects, a value that remains open as the result of an encounter that generates both presence and distance.

Rheinsberg achieves what Hoffmann-Axthelm saw as the necessary function of an engagement with the history of the urban environment: he makes the historical process perceptible. Nevertheless, the aesthetic framing of the perception of the fragments of the urban environment leaves their ‘memory value’ only ambivalently incorporated into a historical narrative that is not provided textually – although it is provided in the book by a visual history of the Anhalter Bahnhof up to 1959. Rheinsberg’s urban museal gaze engages with the people who live close to the site, but not in the sense of constructing a coherent collective; their voices are present, but anonymous and incoherent.

The aesthetic framing of perception enables the visibility of the process to remain open-ended. Removed from the processes of circulation, the site can be framed with the qualities of the encounter with place memory that Rheinsberg seeks to enact through his sacralization of the encounter with everyday objects. Their meaning is embedded in the nature of the encounter with them. This does, however, have to be set against Andreas Huyssen’s
observation that a traditional aesthetic of monumental ruins points towards the durability of origins. Indeed the place memory work at both the Topography of the Terror and the Anhalter Bahnhof, which both pursues and interrogates a melancholy ruin aesthetic, is also aimed at uncovering (and conserving) the origins of the current German state.41 Most importantly, Rheinsberg shows that critical visual culture can analyse the technologies at use in the narrativization of the remnant in urban space through mobilizing an encounter with place that is at odds with the synchronic gaze.

3. Embassy quarter: ‘Messages’ from the past?

This engagement with technologies of narrativization is evident in another Rheinsberg installation, this time from 1983, when the competition to frame the Gestapo site was ongoing. This project was entitled ‘Embassies’ (Botschaften – the German term can also mean ‘messages’, and the ambiguity was not unintentional). The exhibition was held in the Berlin-Museum from 27 March to 9 May 1982. The exhibition followed the archaeological principle that had determined the Anhalter Bahnhof exhibition: in the museum space Rheinsberg exhibited the ‘found objects’ that had attracted his attention (e.g. a rusted bomb, the remains of carpeting, Nazi propaganda, invitation cards to a diplomatic ball, old embassy signs) as a barely ordered ‘storage facility’ of the everyday that did not explicitly distinguish between the sacred and the banal. Memory value was not instrumentalized according to a historical narrative. While Rheinsberg’s exhibition sought to establish the memory value of the location, its exchange value was also being established: the Danish embassy had been sold off to Berlin’s (at that time) largest real estate owner, Neue Heimat (‘New Home(land’) in 1980, and the nearby Zoo Station had an eye on the site as part of a possible expansion.42

In addition to the exhibition, Rheinsberg’s curatorial activities included guided tours, like Hoffmann-Axthelm at the Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse, through the embassy district, offering the ‘view on foot.’ The terrain had apparently been the location for a film about the end of the Second World War and had been subject to the destructive spatial practices of squatters and homeless people in the meantime. As with the Prinz-Albrecht terrain, the remnants of past time were not simply those of the war, but traces of the time that had passed since the war.

The exhibition catalogue established the distinction between the synchronic urban gaze and Rheinsberg’s own gaze through its opening image, the reproduction of the 1938/39 GBI (General Building Inspection) plan for the diplomatic residences, which takes a bird’s eye of the surface of the site.
The black-and-white photographs that follow, by contrast, are taken from ground level.43

One of the major differences to the Anhalter Bahnhof catalogue is that there are photographic series that document the encounter with the terrain, imitating the guided tour and also the excavation, in the production of ‘spatial images’, where the bodily presence of the photographer is implicated in the image. Whereas the Anhalter Bahnhof exhibition framed the ambiguity of the undetermined remnant through the interplay of image and text, the Embassies exhibition alludes in its title to the ostensible presence of a message, but then seems to express visually a refusal of communication. This is evident in the choice of photographs from the first series (of the Spanish embassy). Gates are closed (18); windows and doors are bricked over (19, 23, 24); even bricked-over windows have iron grills over them (24-27). The concluding image, of a bricked-over doorway was the one chosen for the catalogue cover (Fig. 7).

In this opening series, Rheinsberg thematizes the problem of access to the past while also engaging with the visual effect of ‘age value’ through focusing attention on the way in which, for example, weathering has affected the eagle insignia on the embassy façade. The ‘tour’ section (Begehung) is simply four photographs; the first of which shows an empty streetscape with a (barely legible) street sign as the only marker; the three that follow show mosaics laid into the pavement of the street. These mosaics also display evidence of the passage of time and even attempted repairs, and iconographically recall the mosaics uncovered at Pompeii.

The section entitled ‘Tour on Foot’ is also short. Rheinsberg’s photographic series of the various embassies remains directed towards their exteriors, cataloguing the crumbling façades, but also gesturing towards the theme of the ‘message’, the crude graffitied inscriptions (also political ones, as on p. 81). The centrepiece of the volume, though, is the Danish embassy. As if geographically specifying the location, while gradually training our gaze to the perception of the transmission of ‘messages’ in the encounter with the cityscape, the first photograph is of the street sign (‘Thomas-Dehler-Strasse, 51-48’), but a large part of the sign has been rendered illegible by some process of erosion/defacing/violation. The next photograph is of the house number ‘48’, the third a photograph of the stone inscription that commemorates the architect of the building (Johann Emil Schaudt), with the date of the building’s completion (1939). There follows a wide panorama of the building’s frontage and then, focusing on a detail perhaps not immediately evident in that photograph, an image of a provisional entrance door, which has been inscribed with graffiti (‘Your palace
is your prison’, ‘here wants to live’) and also the name ‘Raffael Rheinsberg’ (alongside inscriptions on individual bricks). The act of photographic appropriation is marked as an act of inscription. From here the photographs enter the building and there follow 72 images from the interior, images of the detritus of forty years’ neglect that construct a tour through the building. The concluding section of photographs shows objects collected from the Danish embassy.
As with the Anhalter Bahnhof project, these images are accompanied in the catalogue by a series of historical photographs. On this occasion, Rheinsberg highlighted the process of translation from archive to exhibition through the reproduction not only of the photograph, but also the archival record card from the ‘Ullstein Bilderdienst’ (which includes references to newspaper articles from which the images derived). The record card is thus itself a palimpsest of traces (from the period 1938 to 1960), and breaks the topographical frame of the project in that there are images of the American Embassy on Pariser Platz during the Second World War, as well as one of the former Spanish embassy in the Hitzigallee in south-west Berlin immediately prior to its demolition in 1958).

Whereas the archaeological project around the Anhalter Bahnhof translated objects directly from repository to exhibition, Rheinsberg here highlighted the process of transition from photographic archive to exhibition, while also recording that process of cataloguing through the inclusion of the record cards. It would be an oversimplification to suggest that Rheinsberg’s projects are only reactivations of objects through the encounter with the urban repository, for there is also the reactivation of the historical photograph of the cityscape. Indeed this use of historical photographs in both of Rheinsberg’s projects is an interesting phenomenon of the period, as it forms a different technology of the museal urban gaze, a looking back at the gaze upon the former city, which we shall turn to shortly.

The catalogue is accompanied by a number of essays. The first, which precedes the photographs, by Ulrich Bischoff, contains a clear delineation of Rheinsberg’s gaze which is described as ‘comparable with the initial investigations which a child undertakes in an alien terrain’ and differs from the ‘selective mode of seeing (betrachten) of the tourist or the businessman.’

The synchronic urban gaze, ‘the abstract reference point of utilization, of profit [...] fires the imagination of the housing speculator, who already can see a wide variety of chic apartments growing out of the still standing and intact representative buildings.’ Rheinsberg, says Bischoff, is drawn to the ruin ‘where the language of things begins quite audibly and looks for someone who will lend them an ear, will take them on, preserve them and communicate them further.’ This illustrates how Rheinsberg’s museal gaze, not that of a nostalgic inhabitant of the original place, produces place memory after the fact. Recalling the idea of the non-assimilated body within the city, which we discussed in the introduction, Rheinsberg’s gaze upon the Deleuzian ‘any-space-whatever’ sees beneath the ‘asphalt carpet of forgetting’ that was laid over the urban environment and is out of joint with the synchronic rhythms of the tourist or the businessman. For Bischoff,
Rheinsberg's work resolves the paradox of aesthetic and critical perception through the work of art, with the artist as curator of the museal urban gaze for a collective. Rheinsberg's method is 'exemplary', producing in the spectator a moment of recognition 'about ourselves and our history that encompasses both intellect and emotion.' What Bischoff does not recognize is that Rheinsberg is unlocking both the asynchronic and allegorical potential of the remnant, but is foregrounding the process of transmission.

The synchronic urban gaze, which only pays attention to surface, is contrasted by Bischoff with the child's gaze. This idea is evoked by 'Postscript 1981', an essay later in the volume by Janos Frecot which follows his piece on 'Tiergarten Quarter 1965', in which he recalled the former embassy space in that era in a poetically associative prose. Frecot's 'Postscript 1981' is in fact a reminiscence of the space in 1947, when he experienced it as a young boy on his route to school. Frecot's essay concludes with a plea for the preservation of the space in its current form(lessness):

The terrain has not yet been comprehended neither in urban planning terms nor as a space between park and canal or as an historical environment. Therefore, one should fence it off, preserve it, and charge admission until something proper has been thought of. 'Archaeology of a War' should help us think of it as a historical site. The Tiergarten quarter should not be merely a free space at/for disposal.46

‘Place memory work’ and the photographic archive

Frecot presents Rheinsberg here as the facilitator of a collective museal gaze, but he himself is also operating as a curator of the urban past, creating an encounter with past material.

This period sees the archiving and display not only of the Berlin cityscape, but also of photographs of the former Berlin cityscape, both of which are increasingly understood as a palimpsest of history. This was a process in which Frecot himself played a major role as curator and archivist. Frecot was intimately involved in the emerging intellectual-cultural scene in Berlin (he was acquainted, for example, with photographers who would go on to have very successful careers in that field, for instance Michael Schmidt and Bernd and Hilda Becher, with whom he shares an affinity for seriality). Under the direction of Eberhard Roters and Jörn Merkert, Frecot had begun in the winter of 1978 to construct a photographic collection for the Berlinische Galerie, within a newly established institutional context
(the Galerie was founded in 1975). This was shaped by more egalitarian understandings of aesthetic value, which meant he was not obliged to try and legitimize the value of photography as a form of visual culture.47 Here Frecot’s role as curator of the archive comes to the fore. The initial collection included architectural photographs from the latter half of the nineteenth century that were presented in the first exhibition of the archive in 1982. Frecot wrote an essay introducing the catalogue to this exhibition, Berlinfotografisch, which documented a history of photography in the city between 1860 and 1982, illustrating, as the title suggested, how the history of the city and the history of photography are inextricably linked. Frecot claims that Berlin developed in this period into a ‘centre of photography in creative, journalistic, in industrial and scientific terms’.48 The catalogue effectively functioned as a stocktaking of the collection at this point in its development and thus reflected on the process of archivization. The presentation eschewed chronological order, but instead ordered the images alphabetically according to photographer, as one might find it in an index of an archive rather than as an already ordered history.

Frecot saw the ‘Zero Hour’ as ‘urgently contemporary’49 in 1982 and his perception of this urgency clearly informed his curation of the collection. From the very beginning, the archive’s major focus was the ‘rubble photography’ of the immediate post-war years, whose significance had not yet been recognized. When Janos Frecot was interviewed (in 1989) about the collections of the Berlinische Galerie, he distinguished between artistic photography (as ‘creative’, in the sense of darstellend) and a representational photography (abbildend) that was more the matter of the institutional archives (the Landesbildstellen).50 Frecot, however, immediately undid this neat distinction by observing that the Galerie’s collection did include the likes of Fritz Eschen and Henry Ries, described as prominent examples of journalist photographers.51 For Frecot in 1982 it was clear that ‘where art can be understood as a force for spiritual as well as a political resistance, it is clear that merely aesthetic criteria of value no longer suffice.’52 This lends a particular resonance to the quotation from Werner Schmalenbach with which Frecot concluded his remarks in the Berliner Kunstblatt volume from 1989: ‘It is less the task of the museum to concern itself with living art than with the art that has survived.’53 This suggests that, just as material remnants abandoned in the post-war urban environment were being translated from the city’s repository into a functional cultural memory, so a corresponding translation was happening with a variety of photographic images from the post-war period. The photography of the ‘Zero Hour’ was being recuperated within cultural memory, but beyond the assertion of its
artistic merit, what was the memory value of such photographs? Another exhibition that Frecot was working on from 1979 onwards, *Berlin im Abriss*, the catalogue of which was published by the Berlinische Galerie in 1981, offers an answer to this question.

*Berlin im Abriss* translates literally as ‘Berlin in Outline’, but it is also a play on words: ‘Abriss’ also denotes ‘demolition’, so ‘Berlin within the Demolition/under Demolition’, or ‘Berlin: A Survey’ are possible translations that capture some of what is at stake in Frecot’s work (‘Survey’ refers neatly to the dominance of the visual economy of urban planning to which the exhibition responds). Indeed Frecot’s introduction to the exhibition catalogue outlines a ‘history of demolition’ (*Abrissgeschichte*) that is different from a standard architectural history in that it does not study constructed but demolished buildings. It is founded on the premise that building has demolition as its precondition and that urban history has to be recognized as a series of destructions. That history is set, according to Frecot, within two opposing conceptions of time. These two conceptions propose, on the one hand, time as intimately connected with ‘life’ as a process whose course is not calculable and whose end is not foreseeable; and on the other hand, a conception of time as linear, which means that life can be planned and administered: it is calculable and can be made subject to statistical analysis. Frecot also argues against the dominance of such analytical procedures as an epistemological mode for engaging with the spatial dimension of the city, arguing that the central method for such an engagement should understand urban experience, beyond ‘mere’ gazing, as a sense of being engulfed, since all senses are being involved in the act of perception. Frecot’s central method of capturing urban experience is suggestively reminiscent of psychogeographical approaches. He describes it as a form of creatively losing one’s way: ‘Dead ends open up the opportunity for the disorientated to become aware of the finite nature of space and time.’

As a result, *Berlin im Abriss* works with the photographic archive in order to formulate a particular experience of time and space in the city. One example – a sequence that treats the Potsdamer Platz and its main tributary, the Potsdamer Strasse – serves to illustrate this. The series on the Potsdamer Platz (123-37) begins with a photograph of the abandoned Potsdamer Strasse from 1981 that shows trees lining grassed-over tarmac. This image, far from being self-evident, is only made to speak through Frecot’s image-archaeological procedure that follows. As such, it suggests Frecot’s own form of ‘media archaeology’, a recent approach to questions of archivization developed by theorists such as Wolfgang Ernst. Read in this way, Frecot’s approach could be seen as producing a form of cultural
memory that has become technical memory. Whereas media archaeology emphasizes the medium over the message, Frecot’s approach, due to its interest in the representation of the cityscape, remains indebted to the ‘indexical’ quality of the image, which ‘points’ to the cityscape that the photograph has recorded.56

The next images are of the Vox-Haus, built, as the caption notes, in 1923 and demolished in 1969 (though the photograph is not dated) and of the house at Potsdamer Strasse 9 (dated to 1910). There follow two photographs of the Bayern-Brunnen, the first showing it in its current location in 1981, and the second in its original location in the ruin of the Haus Bayern, which, as the caption notes, was at Potsdamer Strasse 24. This photograph is dated as prior to the house’s demolition in 1972. The fascinating aspect here is that Frecot is given as the author of the 1981 photograph, whereas the 1972 photograph was sourced from the Landesbildstelle (the regional photographic archive). Frecot’s media archaeology moves back and forth between the cityscape and the production of the photographic archive to illustrate how engaging with the latter can in fact inform contemporary photographic production. Here Frecot has highlighted the way that the synchronic urban infrastructure of the road system has impeded the encounter with the cityscape.

The next photograph, from 1910, shows the house in its former function as a Wertheim department store. This is accompanied by an extensive caption outlining the history of the building that makes clear its various uses over time. This photograph then has only a limited connection to the history that is narrated in the caption – here Frecot has foregrounded the variety of media at his disposal in the exhibition process: the caption comes at the end of the series, as a supplement to the initial encounter with the images. The next sequence begins with an image of traffic at the Potsdamer Bridge in 1979, and follows this with a photograph of the construction work at the bridge in 1966, when it was realigned to take account of the Kulturforum buildings that had been and were being erected there. This image is accompanied by a caption that outlines much of the history of the bridge, revealing that it had already been structurally realigned in the 1930s by Albert Speer. The next image shows the 1945 ruins of Speer’s ‘House of Tourism’ which was built in the 1930s close to the bridge in 1945, and the one that follows shows the bridge in 1913. The final image reproduces an engraving of the location, with a much more rudimentary bridge, around 1780, prior to its urbanization.

This is, of course, not a complete photographic history of the Potsdamer Strasse. In his introduction, Frecot explicitly rejects a totalizing impulse:
‘We know of countless further examples and reject the attempt to aim for completeness where the matter at hand is a consciousness of an almost totally destroyed history.’ Frecot manipulates this photographic archive through an archaeology of urban image-making that reveals the forms of image-making as well as the layers of urban spatial practice that are to be discovered through non-chronological ordering, that is, not according to the dictates of linear time, which one might anticipate as a formal method of ordering within an archive. Frecot plays with the ‘explicatory’ role of textual supplementation and focuses on the past, bypassing almost entirely any linear narrative of political history in favour of a history of the architectural layers of the cityscape. It presents here a model for making the passage of time visible in an archiving procedure through a series of historical photographs selected from the repository. Photographs that were not necessarily the product of a conservationist focus on the vanishing site are now seen through one, although the intention is not to conserve these photographs in themselves, but to generate a new form of juxtaposition that undermines the self-evidence of the contemporary cityscape.

This approach is founded not on a simple juxtaposition between old and new, as with the use of archival photographs in earlier decades, but on forcing the viewer to consider history as non-teleological, and on fragments of the past being recombined in a different way. As a result, the Potsdamer Platz can now be seen as a space that is infused with history. Frecot’s engagement with the photographic archive seeks to frame, both in the exhibition and in the printed catalogue, a ‘sensual’ experience of passing through layers of time rather than thinking of urban space as a merely quantifiable entity at the viewer’s disposal. It is in this evocation of a ‘tactile’ encounter with the archive that Frecot comes close to the kind of media archaeology that would, as Jussi Parikka has formulated, ‘focus on archives and archaeology [as a] mode of analysing […] media in the way they channel and synchronize patterns of “cultural” life.’

This principle underpins the re-emergence of ‘rubble photographers’ such as Fritz Eschen and Henry Ries within the exhibitions of the Berlinische Galerie (Eschen in 1985 as part of a series on the ‘Aufbaujahre’, and then in 1990 in a single retrospective of his work; Ries in 1988). These curations of the photographic archive speak to the same idea of exploring the prehistory and fissures in an allegedly intact contemporary cityscape. This photography of the immediate post-war years looked upon a formerly intact city reduced to fragments and it is the productivity of the intervention of such archival photographs into the present that is emphasized by Frecot in the volume on Eschen. Here Frecot frames Eschen’s photography as a point of
contrast to the mythical narratives of the city that were being composed by governmental institutions on either side of the Wall for the city’s 750th anniversary in 1987. The photographic remnant as evidence of a survival that bears witness to the history of its forgetting is a key premise of the curatorial activity of this period that seeks to use photography to recover a misplaced past opportunity for anamnesis. This is the significance of the photographic archive of the ‘Zero Hour’ when viewed from this point in the early 1980s; it becomes a site where a more recent past can be undone and through its activation of the repository, it allows for a reimagination of the contemporary city.

The Berlinische Galerie was by no means the only curator of post-war photography. A striking example is the rediscovery of work by Friedrich Seidenstücker, a photographer of the immediate post-war era. Seidenstücker, like Eschen, was not self-consciously an ‘art’ photographer, but rather a practising journalistic professional, and was mostly known for his work for popular magazines, both during the war and in the post-war era. For this reason, a retrospective of his work in 1962 in the Rathaus Wilmersdorf clearly focused on the populist aspect of his work, in particular his images from the Berlin Zoo. While attention was given to these popular images, which were often reproduced in newspapers, the unpublished body of work that Seidenstücker had produced in the immediate post-war era, in which he minutely recorded the ruined city centre, went almost unnoticed. Seidenstücker’s post-war work was salvaged only by the chance intervention of a zoologist who was interested in his animal photography. Unable to afford Seidenstücker’s collection, the zoologist asked for the support of the Bildarchiv Preussischer Besitz, which then acquired the images in 1971, although they showed little interest initially in exhibiting them. It was only from the mid-1970s that his photographs appeared on display, initially with a focus on his images from the Weimar period in Kassel and Hamburg, before his post-war work began to emerge, first in a gallery exhibition in Berlin in 1980, the curators of which produced the first publication collecting his work from the 1920s through to the late 1950s.

The photography of Eschen and Seidenstücker had not previously been regarded in terms of its aesthetic value, although, as noted above, the documentary value of the former’s images had certainly been asserted and instrumentalized in the 1950s. Within the local context of Berlin, it is important to stress that the growing awareness for this photography of the immediate postwar era in the 1970s and 1980s was not only concerned with ‘coming to terms’ with the period of the National Socialist regime, but also, and crucially, meant revisiting the disavowals of the post-war
era. Frecot’s assertion that the ‘Zero Hour in its openness seems more urgently contemporary than ever’ stands as a motto for the emergence of the photographic archive of the immediate post-war period into a critical form of cultural memory work in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This archiving of the ‘Zero Hour’ more than thirty years after the fact was an attempt to see the ‘open city’ once more following the impact of the post-war reconstruction. Through Frecot’s media-archaeological approach to the photographic archive, ‘excavation sites’ become speculative ‘reconstruction sites’ for an imagining of the history and future of the city as an antidote to a melancholic memory culture that views the historical as little more than one of traumatic loss.

Contemporary urban photography and the museal gaze

In this same interview in the *Kunstblatt*, Frecot also referred to ‘Stadtphotographie’ in the list of photographic categories that spanned the art/documentary photograph distinction. While he meant this primarily historically (listing earlier photographers such as Schwartz, Rückwardt, Mende and Lange), it could also refer to another name he mentions later in the interview: the contemporary photographer, Michael Schmidt. His volume *Berlin-Kreuzberg*, from 1973, is a subtle examination of the interplay of old and new, which also picks up on and replays some of the tropes of Siedler/Niggemeyer’s *Murdered City*, particularly in its depiction of children at play, but also through the framing of the water pump and the pissoir, and through the layout of the photographs that plays with the grid structure of representation and which contrast empty streetscapes with scenes of spatial practice. The perspective is so repetitively that of a ground-level pedestrian that any very infrequent deviations are immediately striking. It also juxtaposes old and new in key ways; either through the use of facing pages, such as an old façade versus a renewed façade, or within the same image, as most strikingly in the book’s final image, captioned ‘Contrasts at Askanischer Platz’ (the captions are listed at the back of the book, leaving the images primarily to ‘speak for themselves’).

The important development in *Berlin-Kreuzberg* is Schmidt’s presentation of ‘obsolescence’ as a critique of a new that proclaims the obsolescence of the old. The ruins have been ‘overcome’, but the ‘memory value’ of the vernacular cityscape is becoming evident in the kind of spatial images that Schmidt is producing, as a way of seeing West Berlin.
As with Niggemeyer’s photography, the spatial image of ‘obsolescence’, when juxtaposed with cityscapes formed by the synchronic urban gaze, becomes a critique of the synchronic urban gaze. In photography, as in text, the formulation of the museal urban gaze is rhetorically dependent on the formulation of the synchronic urban gaze (i.e. of the modern). The experience of the asynchronous city is dependent on the construction of a synchronic city that it seeks to resist.

We see this, too, in the work of one of the most significant photographers within the East Berlin context in this period, Ulrich Wüst. His collection, *Fotografien*, was published in 1986, and the introduction to this slim catalogue, published by the Berlin-Friedrichshain Photography Gallery, was written by the GDR architect and critic, Wolfgang Kil, who cited an 1980 article written by Hein Köster in the critically oriented journal *form + zweck*, in an issue which also included some of Wüst’s images. Köster’s commentary on Wüst’s photographs formulates an important dimension of the museal urban gaze.

Images only speak to the person who first of all trusts his own eyes. Anyone, on the other hand, is already finished with things when he can
say their name or finds his prejudice about them confirmed, overlooks the freedom on offer here to fill the scene with actions and to let himself be told history [‘Geschichte’].

Köster here formulates two forms of gaze: the instrumentalizing gaze that reduces the object to what it signifies and another gaze that opens out the image as a process and involves the paradigmatic loss of control. Kil’s 1986 introduction expands on Köster’s observation, proposing that Wüst’s ‘architect eyes’ closely observed the built environment and ‘encountered time’, in a manner which fulfils Halbwachs’s injunction about remembering place well that was discussed in the introduction:

Lived life that engraved its traces into formerly pristine surfaces: the remains of countless, anonymous existences, in the course of which houses were not admired like works of art, but used, used up.

Key here is a Rieglian definition of ‘age value’ that, as with the official GDR line expressed in Deutsche Architektur in the early 1970s, clearly distinguishes between the official monument and vernacular remnants that attest to the passage of social time. Through this close observation, Kil argues that Wüst discovered that:

everyday life [is] more interesting than academic architectural history in the mundanity of the many generations who make the life-history of a street, of a house, of a square metre of plaster. At first Ulrich Wüst refused aesthetic strategies, began with an enlightened gaze to engage in analysis: urban space as living space, newly built areas, small city streets, and always with a particular eye for those difficult to grasp zones in which the obsolete and the recently added collide with one another (a collision of the eras materialized through building structures: the city appears thus not simply as a collage of different architectural styles, but of different cultures).

Kil contrasts the abstract calculations of the synchronic urban gaze with the effect which Wüst’s photography achieves:

What was created was photography, inspired by general knowledge about the phenomenon of the city, but driven by the very concrete experiences of one’s own – urban – existence [...] as if the mountain of stone and concrete, of numbers and facts and geometries had gradually been cleared away and enabled the gaze to grasp a wider terrain.
He then explains the quality of Wüst’s museal gaze upon the city: it is no longer simply observation (Betrachten) but seeing (Schauen), which implies something more ‘profound’, a perception of the process of time, for in Wüst’s photography reality is no longer being ‘documented in concrete detail’ but as a ‘fleeting fragment’ – ‘the moment becomes important, with everything that it evokes – atmosphere, mood, subjectivity.\textsuperscript{68}

The fragment here is both spatial and temporal: a material fragment momentarily perceived. Wüst’s museal gaze is contrasted with the pseudo-objectivity of the synchronic urban gaze that renders the object (and thus the subject) intact and impermeable, also to time. Such a perception of ‘obsolescence’ in the GDR contrasts with the state’s vision of the intact, coherent built environment.

Turning to the photographs in Wüst’s book, we find that the opening image (Fig. 9) appears at first glance to be a typical evocation of ‘age value;’ the remains of an eroded sign gives a clue to a topographical location (the second-half of a street name), but the window is bricked over, implying inaccessibility. Obsolescence is only superficially self-evident and not as transparent nor as calculable as the synchronic urban gaze would have it. This opening image appears as part of a juxtaposition between the ‘emptiness’ of a new housing block, but this façade too exhibits signs, but signs that are signs of urban regulation (no parking/direction).\textsuperscript{69} Having established a contract with the viewer through these distinctive forms of gaze, the rest of the photographs do not dwell on obsolescence, but rather offer ways of bringing ‘process’ into the ostensibly sterile cityscapes of the new buildings and their environs, principally through unconventional angles on spatial practice or the way in which spatial practice negotiates with the regulations of urban space that have been imposed.

The pictures are not captioned in any way, heightening their potential for ambiguity, simultaneously invoking and complexifying the self-evidence of the images; neither are the catalogue pages numbered (which creates a further difficulty of referentiality). The text within the images on occasion suggests legibility: an image of what might be an old factory has the old Fraktur inscription above the entrance, but letters are missing. By contrast, a photograph two pages later of a fragment of a new apartment includes the signs (with arrows) directing pedestrians to a series of streets and house numbers. This again sets the ostensible transparency of the synchronic urban gaze (the streets/houses are themselves NOT visible) against the ambiguity of the museal urban gaze (the factory might be identifiable, in a Halbwachian sense, to those inhabitants familiar with the site through their long-term, historical spatial practices). This illustrates that Wüst’s
architectural photography is directed not towards our acknowledgement of what is being represented, but we are required to pay attention to the ways in which we recognize and are asked to recognize the urban environment around us.

Michael Schmidt, already discussed above, published a further volume of photographs in 1978, entitled *Berlin: Cityscape and People (Berlin: Stadtlandschaft und Menschen).* The introduction by Heinz Ohff highlighted a connection with Wüst’s focus on the fragmentary detail, suggesting that Schmidt ‘documents an excerpt, a part of the cityscape.’ Ohff’s introduction points to the longer-term historical trend of the tourist appropriation of the cityscape, but it is marked by an ambiguity:

> There have been and are many photograph volumes about Berlin. Anyone who wanted to keep a city, possibly his city, in his memory and place it as a second visual memory (*Gedächtnis*) on his bookshelf or hang it on his wall, would have bought in the past the veduta of the travelling artist.

In addressing the popularity of the photobook, this is a very striking analogy, for it implies a process of translation of the ‘memory’ from the storage repository to a display situation, while also affording the curator of the museal gaze a crucial outsider status as neither visitor nor citizen. Perhaps
the clearest example of this interrogation of the threshold between tourist and non-tourist gaze is provided in the opening photograph of Schmidt’s book, which is a view – not from a car, but from the S-Bahn – of the approach to Zoo Station. The correlations between the urban photography of Schmidt and Wüst speak to a broader sense of convergence in the museal gaze between East and West. This convergence finds its expression in 1980 in two films released in East and West respectively: *Solo Sunny* and *Chamissoplatz*, in which the critique of the destruction of ‘place’ is conjoined with the promise of a place memory.

**Film and the museal gaze around 1980**

In Chapter One, we discussed *The Legend of Paul and Paula* (1973) as part of an emergent critique of the synchronic designs of the GDR state. *Solo Sunny* (1980) is very aware of the codes which shape the structure of its forebear. Nevertheless, unlike the earlier film, *Solo Sunny* refuses to sentimentalize the community networks of the old apartment block, which is shown to be a place of petty jealousies and suspicions amongst its long-term residents, as well as a not always positively portrayed upwardly mobile bohemian clique. The film is also more ambiguous in its presentation of the relationship between the obsolete and the modern. Although the camera frequently lingers on decaying façades in front of which Sunny walks, it seldom directly juxtaposes this with a vision of the new. This ambiguity is derived from its more subtle exploration of the cinematic gaze as a way of framing the built environment.

The film’s opening titles seem to offer us a static image of an ‘obsolescent’, decaying façade, but as we watch, Sunny comes into view, introducing movement into an apparently still image. A later shot is of demolition, but it is followed by a shot of Sunny’s shopping on the kitchen table, as if to imply that such demolition is now simply part of the everyday, rather than the visceral interruption that it is in *Paul und Paula*.

*Solo Sunny* reflects on the gaze upon and from the built environment in the sequences set in the new apartment block where Sunny’s friend has moved. In the first scene set there, we see Sunny putting up wallpaper that is a life-size scale version of a sunlit and fertile classical arcade. The trompe l’oeil effect is perfect as we see the back of Sunny framed by this illusion of harmonious urban living. During the next scene set in the apartment block, we see a black silhouette of Sunny from behind as she gazes out of
the window; the next shot (Fig. 10) shows us what she sees: a grey, desolate, empty streetscape with a single car. This is less the critical gaze at the product of the synchronic urban gaze, as with *Paul and Paula*, but rather a demonstration of how the subjective gaze (of Sunny) has been shaped by the synchronic urban gaze.

As with Paula in the earlier film, Sunny is also offered a way out of her situation by a man with a car. In this case it is Harry, a taxi driver. Her alternative (in more than one sense) is Ralph, who describes himself at one point, in a rejection of the culture of the synchronic city, as ‘not living in a new apartment block, *not having a registered car* nor a television’ [my italics – SW], and whom the mise-en-scène associates with the decaying back courtyards of the former ‘rental barracks’, as these tenements of the late nineteenth century were typically described. One scene locates Sunny and Ralph in a graveyard framed in ivy. Ralph is, perhaps unsurprisingly writing about ‘death and society’, addressing the question of decay which the GDR state with its synchronic gaze was refusing to address.

Such contemplative views of obsolescence and decay are examples of a museal gaze that attends to the (passage of) time within the built environment, offering by extension a critique of the ostensible quantifiability of the cityscape and its ideological rejection of obsolescence.

This framing of the visual power of obsolescence is not however situated within a clear narrative of history or cultural memory, due to the
absence of historical commentary, but is closer to the indeterminate ‘age value’ of obsolescence. *Solo Sunny’s* rejection of automobility is central to establishing a perception of the city that offers an alternative to the rhythms dictated by urban planning and takes us back to the ‘alternative’ photographic framing of the Berlin cityscape in the east and west of the city from the 1970s onwards. This was demonstrated in the work of Ulrich Wüst and Michael Schmidt, but can also be seen in the East in the photography of Evelyn Richter, Helga Paris, Christian Borchert, Manfred Paul and Uwe Steinberg. In the West, a striking comparison can be made with Helke Sander’s 1978 film, *Redupers*, a remarkably subtle portrayal of the everyday life of a female photographer, Edda Chiemnyjewski, struggling to make a career in West Berlin. While the film is generally considered in terms of its investigation of gender, it is also susceptible to the approach undertaken in this book. The film begins with, and often reiterates, a long, unedited sequence of the view of the West Berlin cityscape from the side window of a car. This synchronic gaze imitates the endless, monotonous rhythm of urban life that produces the ‘all-round reduced personality’, the film’s English title that captures, in its parody of the GDR’s claim to produce the ‘all-round Socialist personality’, precisely that convergence of the pernicious effects of urban living on both sides of the Wall.

Edda is working on many photographic projects simultaneously, always in the hope of generating, with site-specific interventions and critical photographic practice, an insight into the gaps in the Wall, but also, by extension, in the apparently seamless urban fabric. Edda is interested in images of demolition, and many of the car sequences captures elements of obsolescence, but there are only two particular sequences when the car halts. First, when it encounters on a billboard one of the Wall images (which strikingly contains a car parked front on to the Wall) and secondly, in conclusion, when Edda is observed walking down a street away from the camera, ultimately vanishing from view.

As a further point of comparison with *Solo Sunny*, Rudolf Thome’s 1980 West Berlin film, *Chamissoplatz*, is on the surface an issue-based film taking a realistic look at the debates surrounding modernization and renovation in the Kreuzberg district around the time of the IBA (not mentioned directly in the film). These debates are filtered predominantly through two perspectives. On the one hand, that of a young female Sociology student, Anna Bach, who is making a documentary film as part of her involvement with a group of activists seeking to fight the demolition of, in their eyes, still viable housing stock. On the other, a rather disillusioned architect,
Martin, entangled in the processes of city planning (one shot shows him in supervisory mode standing atop a new housing development, framed by tower blocks).

The film operates with a series of juxtapositions, starting with a crane-shot gaze upon the city: the opening sequence (Fig. 11) is a long, slow pan across the rooftops of the city before descending to street level, where a local street event is underway.

A loudspeaker intones the following piece of exposition, which also aligns the spectator with Anna, the student with a camera, and implicates a specific collective audience:

‘Ladies and Gentleman! You being the affected residents of Chamissoplatz, I wish to call for your attention for a moment. The area around Chamissoplatz is the last remaining in Berlin where the original buildings of the nineteenth century have been completely preserved. This lends a particular historical value to the quarter.’

This ‘historical value’ is not explicated directly in the rest of the film, but remains implicit in the shots of the façades that form the film's mise-en-scene. In the discussion between the student and the architect that follows this exposition, Martin accuses Anna of personalizing questions that are actually system-related. This point is a crucial juxtaposition in the film, which obviously creates a more nuanced investigation of its ostensible
topic through the initially tentative, but growing, emotional connection between the two figures.

The film investigates the impact of the cityscape on its protagonists, both of whom are products of an urban system that they cannot ultimately escape. For example, the film sets up an explicit contrast between automobile Martin and pedestrian Anna, who refuses lifts in order to take the subway and who, to begin with, is seen walking around the streets of her neighbourhood and shopping at her local market. If, as in *Summer in the City, Solo Sunny* and *Paul and Paula*, automobility is figured as one particular form of encounter with the cityscape, then *Chamissoplatz* follows this pattern. At the film’s opening, Martin’s wife, from whom he is separated, has had a car accident. The space he goes to in order to pick her up in his car is a functional space for a functional transaction founded on an empty contractual arrangement (a marriage that only exists in name).

The relationship between Anna and Martin is set, by contrast, in ‘natural spaces’ outside the domain of the urban infrastructure. For example, linking back to Frecot’s focus on the Potsdamer Strasse as a palimpsestic space of the post-war city, they walk and talk in an untended patch of grass just north of the Neue Nationalgalerie near the unshown Wall at Potsdamer Platz. They also go to Wannsee: we see their car arrive at a barrier, over which they leap as they head out towards the lake. In both cases, their relationship is figured as an escape from urban infrastructure. This is most explicit in the remarkable sequence towards the end of the film, where the couple drive, overnight, from Berlin to a sun-kissed Italy. Of course, this is the reiteration of a familiar German trope, reaching back to Goethe, and indeed, the car stops in front of a ruined castle, as Goethe does in Malcesine on his Italian journey. Yet, as with the earlier ‘nature’ sequences, this escape from the urban infrastructure is only a brief one, undone by an argument that ensues when Anna reveals she is pregnant, although she neither wants to keep the baby, nor indeed accept Martin’s offer of marriage.

The most striking sequences in the film are the ‘night drives’, analogous to the car journeys in Wenders’s *Summer in the City*, that serve no functional plot purpose. Rather than offering us a view of the city by night, they frame the isolated driver in an environment devoid of detail, merely composed of dark and blinking neon lights set to an arhythmic non-diegetic jazz soundtrack that accompanies the relationship between Anna and Martin throughout. This, along with the drive to Italy, proposes a gaze from within the synchronic system that is blind and lost, something mirrored in their earlier visit to the dark of the cinema.
The plot follows the growing dysfunctionality of Martin, the city functionary. The penultimate driving sequence illustrates this clearly, where his night drive leads him to Chamissoplatz. The camera frames him asleep in the car, being closely observed by a traffic warden. Martin is clearly now ‘homeless’, the logical consequence of his automobile dependence. This is reinforced on the return from Italy, where it becomes clear at a party that Anna’s friends have published the clandestinely recorded, very revealing remarks by Martin about the inner workings of renovation processes in the city. He storms out of the party and drives off. Anna, catching sight of him, follows in a borrowed VW beetle (the same model crashed by Martin’s wife). They disappear into the automobile labyrinth of the city. At this point the film ends, implying there is ultimately no escape from the automobile urban infrastructure.

Other than the opening sequence discussed above, the film rarely offers the obsolescent cityscape as a specific object of contemplation (this is the most explicit contrast with Solo Sunny). The one exception is a sequence involving Martin’s investigation of Anna’s tenement’s foundations. Here we watch Anna filming Martin and also the dilapidated exterior of the building; this is an interrogation of the surface assumption that that which looks old is necessarily obsolescent. While it similarly critiques the mode of encounter with the city that is generated by urban gaze, unlike Solo Sunny, the film does not celebrate ‘age value’ over the new. This has much to do with the systems in which the films are made: the valuing of obsolescence has a subtle but, to the initiated, clear political subtext in East Berlin as a form of clandestine, unspoken resistance to dominant state discourse. The urgent demands of a socially acceptable housing policy dominate the valuing of the obsolescent in the housing debate in the West, though there is obviously a crossover within the memory discourse of the period. The state discourse is less clear-cut in the West, not least because the Senate, through its policies of Stadtbildpflege and support for the IBA-Neu, had paid lip service to preservation. This sequence, which looks behind (and below) the façade in Chamissoplatz, serves that same purpose of the museal urban gaze of looking behind the surface of the city, towards a different kind of display of the built environment, rendering visible (through the camera) what is usually invisible, or not put on display, other than as a strategy of devaluation, as in the city-sponsored films of the 1960s, which showed conditions in the ‘rental barracks’ of the proletarian district of Wedding.

We have seen how the museal urban gaze is shaped by slightly different focuses in East and West on the neighbourhood as ‘abandoned remnant’ in these two films. Beyond this, neither engages in an elaboration of the
‘memory value’ of the cityscape in terms of a historical narrative. It is the asynchronous dimension of the material remnant that comes to the fore, primarily shaped through a critique of the automobile gaze and its impact on the subjectivity of its synchronized protagonists.