I GOT UP AT 10.57 A.M.

ELLIE SIEGEL
318 E. 90TH ST.
NEW YORK N.Y.
10028
USA

On Kawara
Damaschkestr. 21
1 Berlin 31
Deutschland

17. Sep. 1976

I GOT UP AT 11.37 A.M.

ELLIE SIEGEL
318 E. 90TH ST.
NEW YORK N.Y.
10028
USA

On Kawara
Damaschkestr. 21
1 Berlin 31
Deutschland


I GOT UP AT 12.05 P.M.

ELLIE SIEGEL
318 E. 90TH ST.
NEW YORK N.Y.
10028
USA

On Kawara
Damaschkestr. 21
1 Berlin 31
Deutschland


I GOT UP AT 10.00 A.M.

ELLIE SIEGEL
318 E. 90TH ST.
NEW YORK N.Y.
10028
USA

On Kawara
Damaschkestr. 21
1 Berlin 31
Deutschland

20. Sep. 1976
The life-cycle of an ordinary building typically begins with a plan and ends with a quiet process of decay. Not so, when national interests are at stake, as is the case with Berlin’s Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche (Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial church, consecrated in 1895). In such cases, a building’s collapse, especially if caused by deliberate ruination, tends to entail either a radical damnatio memoriae or a second life in the form of its physical reconstruction (a process ominously demonstrated in the demolition and subsequent reconstruction of the Berliner Schloss 1951-2023). In the present case, what happened was the monumentalization of the remains that document its downfall. The essay tries to highlight some moments in that process.

That the Gedächtniskirche’s long history roughly coincides with the growth and decline of the illustrated postcard as a means of mass communication is perhaps a coincidence. Yet if what one may call the political symbolism of a building is the result of complex dynamics of production and reception, then the magnitude of the visual archive left behind by postcards, “the first world-wide social network” (Lydia Pyne, 2021), turns out to be a stunningly vivid visual record of such processes. Especially so in the case of the Memorial Church, given its key position in Germany’s troubled history of imperial ambitions and subsequent self-awakening as a modern Western democracy.

**PALABRAS CLAVE**
Arquitectura Neo-románica como representación imperial y proto-funcionalismo; arquitectura y fotografía; la postal ilustrada como medio de masas, simbolismo de la ruina, arquitectura de la Guerra Fría

**KEYWORDS**
Neo-romanesque architecture as imperial representation and proto-functionalism; Architecture and photography, The illustrated postcard as a mass medium, Ruin symbolism, Cold War architecture

What drives a tourist to pick one card rather than another from the rack in a souvenir shop? — On the spot, the subject, often enough a building, may seduce by a specific light condition, the allure of its surroundings, or the graphic presentation (“contemporary” or

**Stanislaus von Moos**

**Fig. 01**
On Kawara. “I got up at 10 a.m.”. Series of four picture postcards purchased 1976 showing Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church and Europa Center Berlin (recto) and indications of date sender (verso). Courtesy Larkin Erdmann Fine Art, Zurich.
“nostalgic”), depending on the nature of the collection it will be part of, or the kind of complicity with the perhaps already earmarked recipient. Beyond that, what counts is the role it may play in a narrative that the buyer believes is relevant or at least reasonably entertaining. In that sense, the choice is a question of taste and its oscillations relative to personal rememberance, aesthetic preference, or patriotic sentiment. As to the artist On Kawara’s legendary (if inevitably dispersed) archive of “every-day images of power”, it not only reminds us of the postcard’s most basic function, to recall a location that has been visited, and its quality as “ready made”, i.e. as a mass produced industrial artifact: In doing those things, it also sets a perhaps unintentially ironic full stop behind a culture of mass communication that is definitely a thing of the past (fig. 01)

Fig. 02
Berlin. Picture postcard showing Kurfürstendamm with Memorial Church Ruin (photography; early 1960s).

Fig. 03
„Ein Pilsner - aber Engelhardt!“, Mid 1950s advertising Card showing the Memorial Church Ruin next to the Funkturm (built 1925-26) and the nearby Messegebäude in Berlin Charlottenburg (1935-37).
The ruin of Berlin's Gedächtniskirche (Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church), together with the new church and campanile designed by Egon Eiermann in the 1950s, is an obvious example. Nobody knows for sure what exactly the combination of old and new represents: a nostalgia for lost imperial glory, romanticized in terms of ruin aesthetics, mourning and soul-searching regarding German responsibility in World War II, or the phoenix-like rise of the new from the debris of the old? To some it has become a synonym of Berlin's identity as the fallen capital of the Third Reich, to others its mere location in West Berlin and the complex's hastily planned "modern" surroundings recalls that city's role as a primary stage of the Cold War. "Intentional and commemorative" for having been planned and built in order to celebrate the Reich, the church is now primarily an "involuntary" monument insofar as it bears witness to its downfall. Yet considering the complications involved in its completion, the "cornerstone of West Berlin's introspective reflections" should perhaps rather be seen as emblematic of the difficulties of reaching a compromise when it comes to public representation in democracy. After all, it is the diffuse nature of its messages, combined with the plastic power of the sign as such (for Alexander Calder, the church ruin was "perhaps the greatest abstract sculpture in the world") that has made the Memorial Church a built paragon of what some have called the "New Monumentality".

Architecture and photography have formed a battle order at least since the 1870s, when the professional press began to systematically adopt photolithography. An unspoken conspiracy among the two media resulted: a chain reaction of architectural production and photographic reproduction that worked both ways. While the photographic image has become a formidable instrument of architectural promotion, architecture itself, more specifically: the architecture of the "modern movement" began to align with the imperatives of the medium (it has...
been argued that Le Corbusier’s architecture was by and large “the result of his positioning himself behind the camera”)⁶. As to the picture postcard, photography’s younger sibling, its agenda is linked to the industry of tourism and hence comparatively unspecific and open ended. “Good architecture” or what architects consider such, is hardly at stake. “Cards reveal not only a miscellany of topographical information, taste and sensibility (...) but an unselfconscious regional pride, sometimes oozing with self-caricature, reflecting what is thought to be of interest to visitors”⁷.

Capitalizing on the vagaries of commerce and on the entertainment value of buildings turned into rubble (and vice versa!)⁸ picture postcards also recapitulate the entire spectrum of artistic genres: Seen through the camera of the photo reporter, what remains of the disfigured Gedächtniskirche may remind one of the ruins of Rome as pictured by Piranesi (fig. 04), while on a 1950s beer advertising card the church ruin ends up as part of a capriccio à la Canaletto or Aldo Rossi (fig. 03). As a remote backdrop for the bustling streetlife of Kurfürstendamm, finally, it survives as a mere, albeit ominous, marker (fig. 02).

As a “cupola building that is coupling sword to altar”, as Siegfried Kracauer would joke in 1928 (“Kuppelbau, der Schwert und Altar miteinander verkuppelt”)⁹, the neo-Romanesque Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church had been planned and built by Wilhelm II as a national monument in honour of his grandfather, Wilhelm I, the founder of the German Reich (1871-1945). The postcards commemorating its consecration (1895) must have formed a considerable portion of that year’s German output. We can only speculate as to what fascinated buyers more: the sublime of imperial pomp and the feeling of being part of it? Or the fairytale allure of precious regalia? In one instance, the Kaiser’s insignia take up to a third of the space reserved for the church itself: the imperial sword, partly covered in ermine, as well as the crown, presented on a napkin like a cake. The holy cross that emerges behind the arrangement is almost equal in size to the steeple of the church crossing to its right (fig. 05). Langenscheidt publishers and booksellers appear to have seen no problem in adopting this combination of church and cross as a logo to promote dictionaries (fig. 06).

The idea of a monument to German unity had been key to that nation’s exacerbating searches for identity throughout the nineteenth century. Friedrich Gilly’s legendary proposal for a monument to Frederick the Great in the shape of a Doric temple precedes it by more than a century (1797). It was to be erected in the midst of Potsdamer Platz. Some seventeen years after its invention, the military triumph of German forces over France in the Battle of Leipzig (1814) had triggered nationwide revival of the idea. Already at that time, many appear to have envisioned the church as the natural ally in view of such an undertaking. So had Karl Friedrich Schinkel when he proposed a “Denkmalkirche” in the style of a Gothic cathedral to be built before the gates of Berlin (indeed at Leipziger Platz) in commemoration of the War of Liberation (1814-15). It was never built, nor were similar reconfigurations of the Doric temple that were subsequently envisioned throughout Germany. The idea of instrumentalizing religious enthusiasm for the celebration of national unity (and vice versa instrumentalizing national pride for the strengthening of religious zeal among the populace)
had found a new focus in what was to become one of Germany's most emotionally charged construction sites: the renovation if not de facto reinvention of Cologne Cathedral.

Wilhelm II had been obsessed with the idea of closing the ranks between empire and church. With the Deutscher Dom, the neo-Baroque mastodon near the Berliner Schloss, and with the "Gedächtniskirche" he managed to succeed at least twice in Berlin with this agenda. In 1895, the Memorial Church's inauguration was celebrated by Wilhelm II on his beloved grandfather's birthday (September 1), and, more importantly, in commemoration the battle of Sedan that, similar to the "Völkerschlacht" of 1814, had sounded the bell for France's defeat and consequently Germany's triumph in the Franco-Prussian War a quarter of a century before (1870). If Gilly had used the Greek temple as a model for his shrine and Schinkel the Gothic cathedral, Franz Schwechten, the architect of the Gedächtniskirche, had been instructed by the Emperor...
to use the Romanesque. Wilhelm II is said to have engaged in studies of Romanesque architecture in the Rhineland, southern Italy, Sicily, and elsewhere. This was in 1889/90. Of all epochs of German history he appears to have considered the rule of the Hohenstaufen in the tenth and eleventh centuries to be exemplary for his own time, given that the expansion of Christendom in Europe so blatantly coincided with the rapid expansion of the Reich in that era. Hence with recourse to the forms of churches of the Lower Rhine region such as St. Aposteln, Gross St. Martin, St. Pantaleon in Cologne, the parish church in Sinzig or the Münster in Bonn, (fig. 07) all built in the Hohenstaufen era, architecture,
besides nourishing a sudden blossom of religious faith, would also trigger a revived sense of belonging to the empire\(^\text{12}\).
via the Zoologischer Garten train station would see the portal and the rose window above it from a considerable distance (figs. 05; 06; 08). Second in importance is the view from Wittenbergplatz along Tauentzienstrasse toward the choir; on some pictures the street is shown with garlands (perhaps related to some festival or jubilee), thus underlining its rural character as if it wanted to be an alley in a park (fig. 09). Unsurprisingly, the most “picturesque” views are those from Budapester Strasse which runs along the trees of Tiergarten; it goes without saying that Schwechten’s penchant for the “picturesque” produces the most powerful effect when a “pictorial” technique of photographic representation is used. Some early images of the church make one think of Alfred Stieglitz.

If picturing the church in the midst of trees, surrounded by garlands of greenery, like a folly in a park, appears to have been a hobby-horse of photographers and postcard publishing houses after 1900, the emperor and his architect had other priorities: for them, what the implant needed first was a dignified architectural bedding. It is for that reason that while the church was under construction the Emperor commissioned two large residential and office buildings (one near the church portal, the other between Budapester Strasse and Tauentzienstrasse across the street from the choir, both in the imperial neo-Romanesque style) to form the Romanisches Forum (figs. 08; 09)\(^7\).

When World War I ended, there seems to have been no public left for the imperial fairytale. The intelligentsia of the Weimar Republic despised the building. Franz Schwechten, the architect, all but disappeared from the city’s shared cultural nomenclature\(^8\). That the neo-Romanesque had in many ways been an entry portal for new concepts of use and spatial configuration in public building commissions like churches, schools, libraries and even railway stations, shops, banks and department stores, as is probably best demonstrated in the muscular organicism of Henry Hobson Richardson’s libraries and

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**Fig. 13**
(Luckhardt-Anker-Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin)
private residences in New England, has been discovered and explored only much later (one should not forget that Richardson’s use of the Romanesque style in the Trinity church in Boston predates the Gedächtniskirche by two decades). Consequently, those interested in the neo-Romanesque in late nineteenth and early twentieth century architecture focussed on American architects like Richardson or Frank Furness and their considerable impact in Scandinavia, southern Germany and Switzerland. Setting apart this “progressive” tradition within the neo-Romanesque turned out to be one way of relegate the Gedächtniskirche, if not Schwechten’s architectural legacy altogether, to the reactionary “also ran”, completely discarding such innovative work as the Anhalter Bahnhof in Berlin from the record19.

But the coup de grâce of the Gedächtniskirche as part of the metropolis’ shared cultural record was its awkward position as the centerpiece of an urban traffic roundabout in the midst of the “Berliner Westen”, meanwhile one of the city’s commercial and nightlife hotspots.

Fig. 14  
Kohlmaier & Sartory, architects. „Rolling Sidewalks on Breitscheidplatz“, Photo collage, 1969. (Berlinische Galerie, Berlin)
One must know that the Memorial Church had never been very popular in "enlightened" circles in Berlin: in 1907 already, Karl Scheffler described the building as a symbol of a "regimented state religion" that acts as moral police and places its richly decorated church backdrops in front of the social abysses of the time. Kracauer considered the building a "giant traffic obstruction" and mocked the soft light that emanated from it in the evening, "as if it were the holy of holies itself" (in reality, it was a "reflection of the light facade that turns night into day" from the Ufa Palace to beyond the Capitol). "The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in the evening", he writes: "Anyone seeing it approaching from the Zoo train station — and the city dweller only sees it in the evening, since during the day it is nothing more than a gigantic traffic obstruction — is witnessing a strange, quasi — supernatural spectacle. A soft glow is radiating from the religious building mass, both calming and inexplicable, a brightness that has nothing in common with the profane reddish glow of the arc lamps, but in its strangeness is standing out from the surroundings as if it had its origin in the Kaiser Wilhelm memorial walls themselves". In such a way, Kracauer notes, the church is turning night into day "so as to scare the horror of the night out of the work day of its visitors".

Nightlife and traffic congestion are the Gedächtniskirche's nemesis under the Weimar Republic. Can one see Kracauer's satire of the church's dubious nighttime glow as a somewhat somber response to the fascination of traffic flow and flashing illuminations that by 1930 had already begun to infiltrate the architectural avant-garde's imaginary, in Berlin more than elsewhere? It is as if in their proposal for redesigning Alexanderplatz Hans and Wassily Luckhardt and Alfons Anker had aspired to sublimate and transmogrify the paradox of Breitscheidplatz into a strategy of urban design as a way of visually orchestrating traffic flow, a "streamlining" strategy that was to shape the cities in the German-speaking world from Berlin to Zurich (1929). As to the nightmare of strangulation by the ever increasing traffic flow, it has continued to be a theme in visualizations of the Memorial Church, though Kohlmaier / Sartory's proposed pedestrian tubes as a means of easing circulation probably never made it to the postcard racks (1972).

Nobody knows to what degree films like Billy Wilder's *A Foreign Affair* of 1947, not to mention Rossellini's *Germania anno zero*, also of 1947, may have contributed to the "ruin tourism" that began to proliferate soon after World War II. When Wilder put together *A Foreign Affair*, he is said to have basically relied on documentary footage of the destruction of Berlin that he himself had shot on behalf of the U.S. Army toward the end of World War II. Closer on history's heels than any other medium, the documents provided by photography and film turned out to be an amazing source of entertainment. As the English poet Stephen Spender wrote, "the Reichstag and the Reich Chancellery are already tourist attractions and will probably remain so after 500 years (...). One looks at the ruins with the same awe as the Colosseum in Rome". As to the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, now a rare survivor amidst a hastily reconstructed business district, it was then still part of a citywide universe of debris. The cultural historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch has thus described the contradictory
ways of picturing Berlin and its ruins after 1945. "To the historical-romantic gaze, it appeared as a field of ruins of ancient grandeur, timeless like the Forum Romanum. The alternative point of view could be described as modern-surrealistic: broken houses and streets are seen not as timeless witnesses of transience, but rather as slain living creatures, destruction in process, in its steaming stage. 'Slaughtered and disemboweled' were the terms used by Johannes R. Becher when he described such houses, whose rooms offered themselves to the viewer like naturalistic stage sets". Upon returning to Berlin in 1947, Walter Gropius in fact summed up the impression with these words: "Berlin has been. A decaying corpse!"

The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church had been badly damaged in an Allied bombing raid in November 1943. But while after the currency reform of 1949 the businesses, shops, insurance companies and hotels in its neighborhood began to shake up its already badly chunked remains, the church authorities couldn’t decide as to how to go about reconstruction. The sheer bulk of the church ruin and the church authorities' lack of money and decision thus donated to the city a token sign that was to occupy its imagination for decades. As to the typical postcard gaze toward the church, by 1950 it had steadily moved from Hardenberg to Tauentzienstrasse and from there to Kurfürstendamm (fig. 02; 15; 16). Here more than elsewhere in the city’s Western sectors, the signs of commercial vitality and nightlife had begun to re-electrify streetlife and to give it back some of its erstwhile raunchy glamour. On many of the new postcards the tragic stump of the church’s crossing tower now appears as if lit from behind, thus in its blackness maximizing the contrast to the glittering nightlife in the foreground (see figs. 02; 16) — in contrast to 1930 when the church walls still served as a perversive screen for the lights of the nearby movie houses (see fig. 11). While Kurfürstendamm, sliding more and more into the role of West Berlin’s “Champs Elysées”, is celebrated in thousands of black and white as well as color postcards ever since the early 1950s — a precious archive of that street’s diversified commercial iconographies and building histories — Hardenbergstrasse no longer seems to interest. By the early 1960s, the slab-shaped, sixteen-story Palast am Zoo, waveringly flirting with the pilotis of Le Corbusier’s Unité d’habitation (Paul Schwebes and Hans Schoszberger, architects) and the barely younger Schimelpenning-Haus across the street (1957-59) had transformed the area into a piece of “modern urbanism”. With its free-standing “volumes in space”, demonstratively contrasting with the prewar closed block and “rue corridor”—system, it certainly interested investors, engineers and architects, however it no longer fitted into the canon of the conventional postcard view of an urban street or avenue. In fact, the high-rises of the “Neues Zooviertel” may have been one very birth place for a new technique of representing the city on a postcard — certainly so within Berlin. From now on, Berlin’s cityscape, including Breitscheidplatz with its Gedächtniskirche, is more often than not represented in a bird-eye’s view. As the point of vision thus more and more approaches the altitude held by the architect-planner or the legislator in the act of inspecting a plaster model in a meeting, the distracted “flaneur’s” gaze from the sidewalk is replaced by the eagle’s eye of authority, or at least of the hotel guest enjoying view from his room in the nearby Europa Center (or, better still, in the more recent “Zoofenster”) (fig. 17).
Fig. 15
Berlin. Picture postcard showing Memorial Church Ruin from Kurfürstendamm with Café Kranzler (left). (photograph, c. 1958?)

Fig. 16
Berlin. Picture postcard showing Memorial Church ruin from Kurfürstendamm with Café Kranzler (left). (color lithograph, slightly blurred. c. 1968?)

Fig. 17
Berlin, Neues Zooviertel. Picture postcard showing Zoo-Palast high-rise building (top right) with Schimmelpfenghaus and adjacent office complexes along Hardenbergrasse, Kant-Strasse and Kurfürstendamm. (Photograph, c. 1960)
Charged with the aura of its location in the heart of West Berlin the ruin of the Gedächtniskirche inevitably attracted semantic attributions that went beyond the intentions of its makers. To see it as an illustration of what Albert Speer described as the “ruin value” to be aimed for by those in charge of building for the Third Reich is as obvious as it is ultimately pointless: “Hitler loved to explain that he was building in order to hand down his time and its spirit to posterity. In the final analysis, the great epochs of history would only be remembered by their monumental buildings (...). But when, after a long period of decline, the sense of national greatness is rekindled, those monuments of the ancestors are the most impressive reminders”29. Had Kaiser Wilhelm intended his buildings to one day speak in similar ways to the conscience of his fellow countrymen, the ruins on Breitscheidplatz would most likely have achieved the opposite effect — at least in the short run.

As products of willful demolition, ruins can’t help raising questions of guilt and shame. In 1944, after the Allied destruction of downtown Frankfurt, the Völkischer Beobachter was already arguing that the city’s burned-out landmarks should not be restored but preserved “as eternal accusatory ruins” (“als ewige Anklage erhebende Ruine”). A “Forum Romanum” would thus be created, “whose monuments would be seen in the midst of green spaces (...). As ruins, the monuments would still bear a testimony that is wistful for us, yet they would be permanently shameful for our enemies”. — That was 194430. But who was to blame for ruining the Memorial Church now, in 1952, when the preservation of the ruin was finally decided (a ruin located, by the way, in Berlin’s British sector)? The Royal Air Force, who had dropped the fatal bombs? Or the Wehrmacht, who a few years previously had initiated the war? 

In a yet to be written history of World War II ruin monuments, the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in its present form is a latecomer. We do not know if there would have been room (or a public), in Berlin in May 1945, in the final days of World War II, for an art historian to proclaim that “war damage in itself is picturesque” as Kenneth Clark, the director of the National Gallery had famously done with impunity a year before in London. It might be remembered that in July 1941, a few months after the “Blitz”, the Architectural Review had reminded its subscribers that to appreciate the war ruins as “architectural phenomena existing in their own right” was self-explanatory for architects31. Later, in one of his articles written for the same journal, the painter John Piper prophesized that Christ Church on Newgate Street, St. Albans on Wood Street, and St. Mary, Aldermansbury might gain an unknown impact in the future from the proximity of large new office buildings. The Gedächtniskirche in its current surroundings is arguably the most poignant demonstration of the kind of urbanistic “collage” he may have had in mind (see figs. 01; 25).

Modernism’s conquest of Breitscheidplatz has doubtlessly found its culminating point in the mysteriously “simple” octagonal glass box of the new Gedächtniskirche by Egon Eiermann (1959–63) (fig. 18). Seventy years after its completion, the dark blue glow of the church’s interior still makes it one of modern architecture’s consummate interior spaces in Berlin. Reminiscent of the elements

THE OCTAGON AND THE “PILE OF STONES”
of a Froebel building set the church’s elementary stereometry speaks a universal language while also making a bow to the chic of a bandbox. As to the very choice of the octagon, recalling the ninth century Palatine Chapel in Aachen, an archetype of Carolingian architecture, it is not, after all, without echo of the Gedächtniskirche’s original program. In terms of urban design, too, the project’s force lies in its restraint. Unobtrusive to the point of being invisible at first in the mess of commercial signs, the hexagonal campanile laconically marks the Kurfürstendamm’s eastern vanishing point (fig. 21). Its completion depended on the removal of the badly damaged remains of cross aisle and choir, which in turn enforced the ruin’s singular iconic power.

Eiermann’s dialectical composition of old and new was the result of exacerbating transactions. Before 1952, nothing except an integral reconstruction of the ruined church in its Romanesque forms appears to have been imaginable in Berlin. The church community had
originally designated Werner March for the job, the designer of Hitler’s Olympic Stadium. Nothing materialized, however, and when things began to move again, after 1960, modern architecture had gained a relative sovereignty of discourse in German culture. Along came a growing skepticism with respect to the idea of an integral reconstruction of buildings damaged or destroyed in the war. In Cologne Rudolf Schwarz had recently incorporated the ruin of St. Alban’s Church into the new complex of the Gürzenich, the city’s guildhalls, while Gottfried Boehm was about to set up the remains of the Marienkapelle as the “Notkirche” over which Peter Zumthor would later build the “Diozösan-museum Kolumba”. Meanwhile, Berlin appears to have remained stuck in a stubborn culture of ruin exorcism. In the 1957 competition brief for the new Memorial Church the ruin was not even mentioned —note that, by then, thousands of postcards had already made it into an undeclared city logo (figs. 03; 04; 12). An “architectural triviality”, the “pile of stones” was a testimonial only for those who had lived through the war, Eiermann argued in the early stages of his work for the parish (he had won the 1957 competition) (fig. 16); at first he allowed it to stay in place only on a short-term basis 33. It is only after months of bitter clashes in the press, and once it had become clear that the church would never be realized except with the ruin as part of it, that Eiermann was willing to integrate a substantial part of the debris as part of the building project (the choir was sacrificed to the new campanile) (figs. 01; 02; 03; 16; 18; 21; 25). Later he did eventually acknowledge that the church he had designed might after all stand anywhere, and that it was its combination with the debris that made it unique, conceivable as a complex only in Berlin.

SMOKE SIGNALS OF THE COLD WAR

Though Europa Center, the slab-shaped office building and hotel complex that now dominates Breitscheidplatz at its eastern end was no longer a novelty when On Kawara visited Berlin in 1976 (it had been completed in 1963), the postcards continued to glorify it as a token of Berlin’s belonging to the universe of modernity, at times even surrealististically overstating the point (see fig. 01). This universe was understood to have its driving force in the United States, the unquestioned leader among the Allied Forces that had
liberated and occupied what was widely felt to be Berlin’s pounding heart: Kurfürstendamm and its beacon, the Memorial Church. On both side of the political divide, the type of the slab-shaped office building was an unfallible token of progress by 1963. Some eight to ten years earlier, when the Polish architect Edmund Goldzamt described the recently completed United Nations Secretariat in New York as “stretched like a sky-high matchbox on extended foundations” (1956), and when his Swiss colleague Hans Schmidt insisted that “a high-rise building could be more than a matchbox with n number of office floors” (1953) such comments were tantamount to a rejection of US imperialism34.

Matchboxes can be used to send smoke signals or even result in a devastating fire. When the publisher Axel Springer decided to move his company headquarters from Hamburg to Berlin and to build an office tower in the old newspaper district of Kochstrasse, right on the sector border, his intention to use architecture to send a political signal was apparently clear to everybody35. It is not worth building “high-rises for newspapers without an idea that is greater than ourselves. An idea, that means: freedom for all Germans in one fatherland with the legal capital of Berlin in the midst of a Europe at peace”, he proclaimed36. The Springer building, 78 meters high, built from 1959 to 1962 at a right angle to Kochstrasse, shimmering festively with its golden aluminum coating, was to be understood as a “scream into the wind”, indeed a “powerful architectural exclamation point (...) of the belief that Berlin and Germany would soon (...) be reunited”37. The location directly on the sector border provided the necessary visibility to this program and Müller and Sobotta’s architecture even gave it a somewhat sleazy appearance of luxury. Then, just two years after construction, the sector border was sealed off by the Wall. Countless photographs document the situation, among them a picture taken by Rem Koolhaas in 1971 that shows the Springer Building towering in the evening twilight over the wall (figs. 22; 23)38.

The decision to build the Europa-Center was made “a few days after the Wall was built”39. The project, realized in the extremely
short time between 1961 and 1963, thus was charged with politics from its very inception. Eighty meters high, making it the highest office building in Berlin (two meters higher than the slightly older Springer tower), the Center unmistakably laid claim to centrality within the city, contrasting in that respect with the earlier post war buildings on Breitscheidplatz. In fact, on the opening day, *Tagesspiegel* reported on the “magnificent urbanistic conclusion” that the building provided for Kurfürstendamm. Not merely an “exclamation point of free enterprise” in Berlin, the building was seen as “the most important commercial project of the postwar period on our continent” —in fact, the “first response to New York’s famous Rockefeller Center”40.

There can be no doubt that the UN Secretariat Building was among the projects that Helmut Hentrich, the leading architect of the Center, studied closely during his 1954 trip to New York, even though a different building plays the starring role in his memoirs: the Lever House, on Park Avenue, diagonally across from the Sea-gram Building (which did not yet exist at the time)41. Lever House was built from 1949 to 1952 by SOM (Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill). The vertical office slab is here demonstratively combined with a similarly slab-shaped horizontal element at its foot, a combination that has found a comparatively crudely proportioned echo in the Europa-Center (figs. 24; 25; 26)42. From the investor’s perspective, the shopping center complex with its wealth of shops, bars, casinos and other amenities at the foot of the tower was the core part of the center. Somewhat predictably, the covered rink in the second courtyard has even been presented as the European counterpart to the skating rink at Rockefeller Center —though it was in the end more adequately characterized by the *Tagesspiegel* as a mere appendix to the air-conditioned “ladies’ shopping paradise”43. As if to further underline the autonomy of generic notions of architectural amenities with respect to actually existing buildings the shopping center was subsequently even marketed as an adaptation of the shopping arcades of Bern (in reality, the only plausible model was the shopping centers and malls that Victor Gruen began erecting

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Fig. 22
Berlin, Kochstrasse with Axel Springer high-rise office building (1959-1962). [Book cover; Ullstein Verlag]

Fig. 23
Berlin, view along the wall towards Axel Springer high-rise office building. Photograph by Rem Koolhaas (1971).
throughout the United States around 1950)\textsuperscript{142}. Granted the crudeness of its underlying marketing agenda, Karl H. Pepper, the initiator and builder of the Europa-Center, nevertheless has a point when he writes that church and monument only became the center of the square once the skyscraper was complete (fig. 25). If Eiermann's preciously proportioned new church adds a sense of spirituality to the complex, the Europa-Center next to it manages to define the area as a whole in the wider cityscape and its economic logic. Like thesis and antithesis, the ruin and the slab manage to characterize the physiognomy of the place while also marking out two extremes within the range of possibilities in architectural signification available in the early decades.

Fig. 24

Fig. 25
Berlin, Breitscheidplatz at night with Bikini-Building (bottom left), Europa Center and Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche. Photograph from Zoo-Palast high-rise building, c. 1970.

Fig. 26
Berlin Spielbank. Postcard showing view of Europa Center office and hotel slab (center) with casino interiors. (Colour photo collage, c. 1965)
after World War II. One form seems to refer dialectically to the other, both are charged with ideological urgency: Towering over and framing the church ruin at the same time, the office building in fact forms a paradoxical alter ego to the Gedächtniskirche — even down to recreating its toppled tower cross in the form of a colossal Mercedes star.

The Europa Center's much more recent companion on the Western edge of Breitscheidplatz, the Zoofenster complex by Christoph Mäckler (2008-2012) may be towering even higher than its predecessor across the square, yet it can no longer claim to play a role in a conflict that split the world in two. Nor has it left a significant trace in the history of postcards, since at the time of its completion the business of illustrating architecture as a tourist amenity has definitely been taken over by the digital maelstrom of hotel websites. Breitscheidplatz with its Gedächtniskirche and Europa Center thus at least survives as a touchstone of the picture postcard's early days of glory and of its subsequent slow decline and ultimate demise as a means of mass communication.

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The series of four colour postcards On Kawara sent to Ellie Siegel in New York between September 17 and September 20, 1976, sums it all up. It follows the logic of a storyboard: Approaching the Europa Center from Hardenbergstrasse, the visitor subsequently recedes from it step by step via Tauentzienstrasse beyond Wittenbergplatz. Then, the fourth card shows the "canonic" view of the complex from Kurfürstendamm, with an impossible close-up of a passenger jet surreally arrested between the two landmark (see fig. 01). Cinematic in character, the set both celebrates and mourns the twilight of an era where eminently touchable, physical objects like small rectangular pieces of cardboard used to serve as a primary means of communication, side by side with church ruins and office slabs.
Notes


04. See FROWEIN-ZIROFF, Vera, Die Kaiser Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche. Entwicklung und Bedeutung, Berlin (Gebrüder Mann), 1982 (on the controversy on whether to maintain or dismantle the building — they reach back to the 1920s — see especially pp. 333-340) and WARNKE, Stephanie, Stein gegen Stein: Architektur und Medien im geteilten Berlin 1950-1970 (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), pp. 220-231.


12. FROWEIN-ZIROFF, Vera, Die Kaiser Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, 99; pp. 169-70, and passim. The first application of Romanesque forms i.e. the "national type of the best imperial era" to Wilhelm II's church building campaigns occurred in the «Gadenkirche zum Andenken an Kaiserin Augusta», (1890) at Invalidendstrasse in Berlin Mitte, shortly before work on the Gedächtniskirche began (ibid., 91-108).

13. SITTE, Camillo, Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundlagen betrachtet, Wien (Graeser) 1889.


18. As late as in 1979 Julius Posener's monumental Berlin auf Dem Wege zu einer Neuen Architektur (Studien zur Kunst des 19. Jahrhunderts, Bd40), München (Prestel-Verlag) — the unchallenged standard work on Wilhelmian architecture in that city — is referring to the church only marginally, in the biographical notes on Schwechten, p. 631.


28. On modernism’s fascination with the “view from above” see now LUGON, Olivier, “Vue aérienne, vue en plongée, Nouvelle Vision,” in LAMPE, Angela and BONNEVIE, Claire (eds.), Vue d’en haut, Metz (Editions du Centre Pompidou - Metz), 2013, pp. 208-27.


34. Parts of the following notes are based on my “The Monumentality of the Matchbox”, in KÖHLER, Thomas and MÜLLER, Ursula (eds.) Radically Modern. Urban Planning and Architecture in 1960s Berlin, Berlin (Berlinische Galerie / Wasmuth), 2015, pp. 28-43.


37. SCHWARZ, Hans-Peter, Axel Springer, p. 206 (the quotation is slightly shortened here). The very dedication of the building was a political event, as the guest list for the event indicates: Heinrich Lübbe, President of the German Confederation was present; so was Defense Minister Franz Josef Strauß along with Herbert von Karajan and Günter Grass. West Berlin’s mayor Willy Brandt and the vice-chancellor Erich Mende celebrated the building in their speeches: see SCHWARZ, Hans-Peter, Axel Springer, p. 383.


42. Note that Gordon Bunshaft, who had been responsible for the design of Lever House, later played a key role in consulting for the Thyssen Building in Düsseldorf (designed by Hentrich, Petschnigg & Partner, HPP). There can be no doubt, on the other hand, that the spectacular three-story slab building in Düsseldorf had its share in Karl-Heinz Pepper’s choice of the architect of his prestigious Berlin project; see HENTRICH, Bauzeit: Aufzeichnungen aus dem Leben eines Architekten (Düsseldorf, 1995), p. 224.


45. Karl H. Pepper, the initiator and builder of Europa-Center, thus has a point when he writes that church and monument only became the center of the square once the skyscraper was complete. See PEPPER, Karl H., “Erftüller Traum”, Der Tagesspiegel (April 2, 1966).

46. See note 1 to this essay. Mailing a series of postcards to a friend in chronological succession so that they form a “cinematic” sequence over time was a practice apparently initiated by On Kawara in 1971 with the “UN Headquarters series” (Roger Mazarguil, recipient). See DOUROUX, Xavier and GAUTHEROt, Franck, On Kawara. Whole and Parts 1964-1995, Paris (Les presses du réel), 1996, pp. 218-232.
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