Neues Bauen: The Politics of Housing in the Post-War Berlins

Berlin offers multiple, unique opportunities to think about the politics of the built environment, from the overt demonstrations of power at the Schlossplatz to the subtler displays of the Kurfürstendamm. As part of our course, we will also visit sites of everyday residence and consider the politicization of housing across the different eras of Berlin's political and economic development. This project will allow a closer focus on the politics of housing for those interested in examining how three different Republican contexts shaped the built environment Berliners called home.

At the end of both world wars, new republics faced daunting housing crises in Berlin. The Weimar Republic faced a housing shortage that pre-dated World War One and was exacerbated by the lack of investment in domestic infrastructure of the period 1914-1918. The priorities of the new state included “building anew” (neues Bauen) in both structural and conceptual ways, and housing the working class was a significant political and economic project for the new state. Modernist architects brought their vision to bear on "the dwelling for the common man," producing a variety of settlements in and around Berlin (at least one of which we will visit as a whole class group). After World War Two, the devastation of housing stock in Berlin presented an immediate challenge to the occupation authorities and later to the governments that replaced them and established Berlin as a focal point of the Cold War. Housing was doubly politicized on both sides of the East-West divide, as the new regimes sought legitimation from their own citizens and the wider world. Housing the people became a test of the respective political and economic systems of the "social market" in the West and state socialism in the East.

Elements of the project:

You may choose to focus on either of the post-war periods in question, and will perform site-specific research appropriate to that choice. Because of the sheer number of possibilities in Berlin and the limited number of English-language sources, I will identify a group of sites from which you may choose. The site-specific research will include at least one visit to the site and a written analysis of the built environment there that will form the kernel of your final paper. The entire class will be visiting at least one Weimar-era Siedlung (settlement), as well as the two spectacular Cold War examples (the Stalinallee in the East and the Hansaviertel in the West), so you will have a chance early in the course to develop a sense of how to analyze the spaces. As a small group, we will also work together on establishing the questions that will guide your approach to site-specific research and read a variety of sources on architecture and planning to give you the background you need.
The group component of the project will involve a presentation to the rest of the class (which may include travel to the site(s) of your choice, within reason) placing the specific research performed by each member in a larger context. It may become necessary to develop separate presentations for the two different post-war periods, while still connecting them as examples of the relationship between housing and legitimacy.

Following the end of the course, you will build a longer paper (8 pages) from your site-specific analysis, making the broader connection to the politics of your respective time period, drawing on the primary and secondary source materials listed below. Your outline and bibliography will be due June 7, and the final paper will be due June 21.

**Source Materials**

**1920s:**

*Das Neue Berlin* (1929), translated excerpts [to be posted on course website]

Sabine Hake, *Topographies of Class*, selections [posted on course website]

Kathleen James Chakrobarty, *German Architecture for a Mass Audience*, selections [posted on course website]

Brian Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 96-110 [class reading]

Barbara Miller Lane, “The New Architecture in the Service of Society,” from *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945* [posted on course website]

Bernd Nikolai, “The Symphony of the Metropolis: Berlin as Newlin in the Twentieth Century,” in Thomas Deckker, Ed., *The Modern City Revisited* [posted on course website]

Bruno Taut, excerpt from *Modern Architecture* [posted on course website]


Ronald Wiedenhoeft, *Berlin’s Housing Revolution: German Reform in the 1920* [entire book; Marynel brought it to Berlin]

**Post-World War II:**

Greg Castillo, “The Bauhaus in Cold War Germany,” from Kathleen James Chakrobarty, Ed., Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War (Minneapolis, 2006) [posted on course website]

Greg Castillo, "Building Culture in Divided Berlin: Globalization and the Cold War" [class reading]

Doug Clelland, Ed., “Postwar Berlin,” special edition of Architectural Design Profile [Marynel brought this to Berlin]

J. M. Diefendorf, In the Wake of War: The Reconstruction of German Cities After World War Two, excerpts [posted on course website]

Brian Ladd, Ghosts of Berlin, 185-192 [class reading]

Peter Marcuse and Wolfgang Schumann, "Housing in the Colours of the GDR," in The Reform of Housing in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union [Marynel has a hard copy; a long chapter which describes planning for housing in Berlin during its entire existence]


Ed Taverne, “The Last Avenue of the Other Europe. The Stalinist Universe of the Karl-Marx Allee in Berlin,” European Review 2005 [posted on course website]


Images from Wir in Berlin and Das neue Gesicht Berlins [Marynel and MJ brought these two books to Berlin]