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BEATE BINDER

## Performing and Constructing:

**Ethnological Perspectives on the symbolic transformation of Berlin<sup>1</sup>**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2002, the youngest German national holiday was celebrated in Berlin: the day of German unity. This newly established national holiday (having begun in 1991) is meant to commemorate the re-unification of Germany which took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1990. A state-ceremony took place in the opera house and a street was held at the Pariser Platz and around the Brandenburg Gate. The most important symbolic center of the re-unified city turned into the grounds for a huge open-air festival. Like every year, German counties were encouraged to present their regional or local specialties, in the first place food and drink, such as fish from Hamburg, Hessian apple wine, Bavarian white sausages and so on, and to show folk dances, music or other “traditions” from their “home” countries. Dancing companies, cabaret, music or folklore groups presented their programs during the day on a huge stage which was put up for this occasion. The Ministries and the government had information desks and gave informative materials and gadgets to punters. A parade took place in the afternoon, which was also meant to present “Germany’s feast” as a celebration of the re-unification and to show the richness and diversity of Germany’s regions: folklore groups, groups wearing traditional costumes, and some brass bands walked along the alley Unter den Linden and showed the richness of German regional “heritage.”

This year, the celebration was even bigger, because Berlin hosted the central festivity which is the honor of that country – the chairman of the Bundesrat, the upper house of the German parliament which houses all the representatives of the German counties. On this occasion, the Berlin government thought of a special event to celebrate re-unification day. Thus the focal point of the celebration was the uncovering of the Brandenburg Gate, which had been under reconstruction during recent years. The famous German designer Willy Bogner lifted the covering out of the air and the rebuilt monument came to the fore – new and bright.

The symbolic structure of this event is not very sophisticated: the day is meant to celebrate the national self-image of Germany as a federal state, and to commemorate the re-unification as an important turning point of national history. It aims at showing the progress of the unification process and stages the joy at the fall of the wall and the overcoming of the division of Germany. In the terms of Don Handelman, it is a public event “that presents the lived-in world”.<sup>2</sup> Thus the celebrations and the feast offer Berliners as well as city visitors a pleasant atmosphere of consumption which enables to experience the “German-ness” of Germany and its new capital.

Another short glimpse at another public event: the opening of the Mex-Artes festival which took place at the House of World



*Street party on the occasion of the arrival of the government – September 1999.  
Photo: Beate Binder*

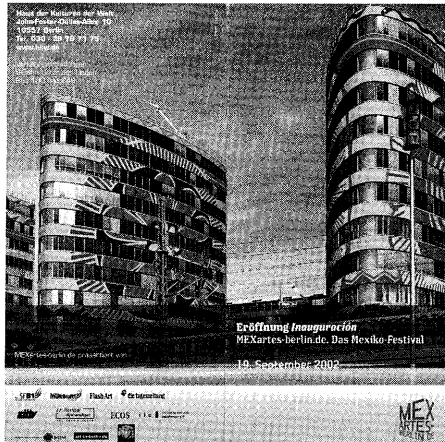
Cultures in the summer of 2002. The House of World Cultures describes itself as one of the leading centers for contemporary art of non-European origin. It provides a platform for projects and themes transcending borders and frontiers. This is also what the opening ceremony aims at. It announces the beginning of a rich cultural program – that is an art exhibition, concerts and film programs, round table discussions and symposiums all concerned with the contemporary culture of Mexico and German-Mexican relationships in terms of cultural exchange over the centuries.

About 1000 people came to the House of World Cultures that very evening. Advertised all over the city, the event obviously was able to pull in a crowd, and it offered a stage for all those who are involved in culture (politics), who are simply interested in culture and/or Mexico, and, last but not least, for all Mexicans and Latin Americans living in Berlin. Framed by the speeches of national representatives of both Germany and Mexico, the festival

stages an atmosphere of multiculturalism and creativity, of importance and a “Good to be here”-feeling in terms of networking and showing oneself to the public.

These two events are taken out of a huge amount of similar happenings which have taken place in Berlin during the last few months more or less randomly. While talking about the restructuring of the city’s landscape, I shall take them as starting points in order to discuss the symbolic restructuring of the city during the last years. In order to understand the cultural logic underlying this symbolic re-structuring of the city and its landscape, I propose to concentrate not only on discourses concerned with old and new architectures, the (re-)naming of streets and places, monuments and commemoration sites (in short, with the whole “architexture”<sup>3</sup> of the city), but to take into account the special quality of cultural performances and their “contribution” to the symbolic structure of a city’s landscape as well. Cultural Performances – commemorations,

**Invitation card for the opening of the Mexartes Festival.**



demonstrations, or in short all kinds of modern public “rituals” – inscribe meaning into the urban landscape on the one hand, and offer a space which allow people to experience the city in a particular way on the other.

Per-Markku Ristilammi<sup>4</sup> proposed that we compare the space of public events with those spaces that Foucault called heterotopias – spaces which reflect and comment on the hopes and fears of society. “Events”, writes Ristilammi, “are inextricably linked to the surrounding world because they are designed to reflect and make an impression on the world outside. The visualizing of an [*sic*] utopian past and future is often a technique used in the managing of events.” At the same time, public events bear mechanisms of opening and closure within them. They show who belongs and who will not. And last but not least the special atmosphere of public events effects people and opens them up for agency. Thus the space-time structure of public events allows people to join together, to confess to celebrated goals and symbols and to conceive of decisions for their engagement in something because of the emotional surplus which taking part of the event produces.

Therefore, as I would suggest, public

events are also important “agents” in the structuring and defining of urban space. They offer stages for a special way of experiencing a city and, in addition, they take part in the production of a “discerning eye”, which is what the anthropologist Yi Fu-Tuan named the eye which is able to read and interpret the meaning of urban space, and which perceives the historical heritage incorporated in the urban structure.<sup>5</sup>

Of course – public events have always been of great interest for ethnographic research. For example, Emile Durkheim, Milton Singer, Victor Turner, or Clifford Geertz proposed that they are keys for the investigation of societies, because they enable ethnographers to grasp the symbolic structure, collective understandings or principles of social structures underlying a societal order. Or, as Don Handelman put it: “They constitute dense concentrations of symbols and their associations, which are of relevance to a particular people”.<sup>6</sup>

Today these assumptions are being criticized. Whereas Clifford Geertz<sup>7</sup> interpreted the Balinese cock fight as a key symbol of the whole society, and Milton Singer<sup>8</sup> saw cultural performances as elementary for the great tradition of Hindu Indian culture (to mention only those two classic accounts on cultural performances), these holistic interpretations are questioned today. It does not seem clear if it is possible to “read a culture from the symbols of a cultural performance,” warns for example Bailey.<sup>9</sup> And Don Handelman calls for careful consideration that a cultural performance or public event “among a particular people communicates only a *version* of their social order.” Different versions or interpretations, according to Handelman, “overlap and conflict with one another, in the knowledge and experience, and affect they convey. If events contain keys to codes, then these unlock many doors, as much to labyrinths

as to great halls and cosy kitchens.”<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless and with this warning in mind, I suggest taking public events more seriously not only in ethnography as such but especially in urban anthropology. But before talking more about the theoretical framework which investigates the study of public events with sense, I would like to return to the city of Berlin for a moment where those above-mentioned events were set onto the scene. The special situation of Berlin during the last decade gives reason for the assumption that studying public events allows one to explore the question how the new-old capital of Germany is re-defined and – in a certain sense – produced.

### **Building a “new, old capital” – the symbolic transformation of Berlin**

The two events, the celebrations of 3<sup>rd</sup> October and the opening ceremony of the Mexartes festival, belong together insofar as both offer spaces in which the “New Berlin” is staged. They are meant to show different aspects of this newness in that they talk about a twofold problem which Berlin is confronted with today while trying to find a place on the mental map of European Capitals as well as in the international network of metropolises. And they are meant to produce places which are appropriate for staging these events.

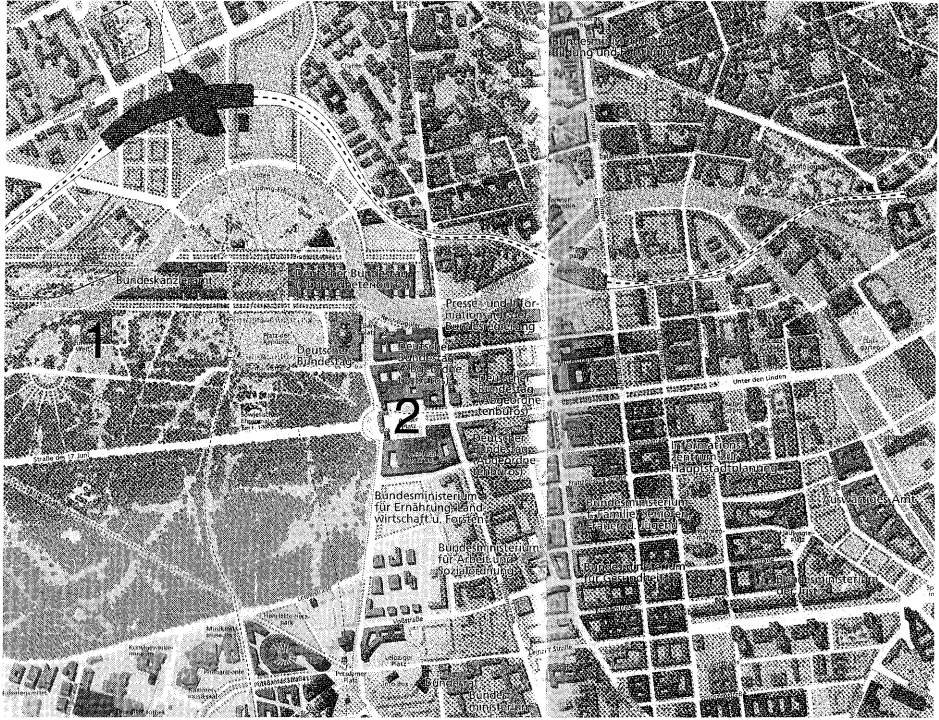
Since the fall of the wall in 1989, German unification in 1990 and the decision to move the seat of parliament from Bonn to Berlin, the city has been undergoing a process of symbolic transformation which is set on the scene in different places. Because of this, Berlin offers a special frame for investigation. The city is a “zone in transition”<sup>11</sup>, and this, the city’s liminality (Turner), is visible last but not least in the very fact that the public spaces are not finally defined and classified in terms of symbolic structure and in terms of their appropriate uses. In this sense Berlin

is very much “in the making.” Thus the transformation Berlin is undergoing on a material level is accompanied by transformation processes concerning the symbolic content of the urban landscape. For the former front-line city, a socialist capital and a capital waiting to become a capital and metropolis in its own right, Berlin must modify or even change the symbolic structure of its image and its representations in public spaces.

This means that the process of defining spaces and structuring the urban landscape is not only at work “as usual”, but is also very dynamic and accompanied by a whole range of conflicts and discussions. Indeed, since the fall of the wall in 1989, the reunification of Germany and Berlin, and last but not least the decision to move the parliament seat from Bonn to Berlin in 1991, turned Berlin’s inner-city into an immense collection of cranes, construction fences and ditches and more. As soon as the first plans were rendered, the construction work was accompanied by a discourse on questions of national representation, the appropriateness of the planning and the emerging new tasks and functions of the city. Politicians as well as newspapers, panel discussions, exhibitions and “normal citizens” engaged in these questions of who, where and what of the transformation, the re-definition of the city and its urban landscape.

On the one hand, the task of national representation is questioned. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, European capitals have been distinguished sites of national politics and culture. They have represented themselves as national cities, and they are still treated as products of different national histories. London was – and in a certain sense still is – an English, Paris a French, Helsinki a Swedish-Finnish, and Berlin a German city in the first place. Even though modern European cities have always been international, heterogeneous and

**Map of the City  
Center: 1 House  
of World  
Cultures, 2  
Pariser Platz**



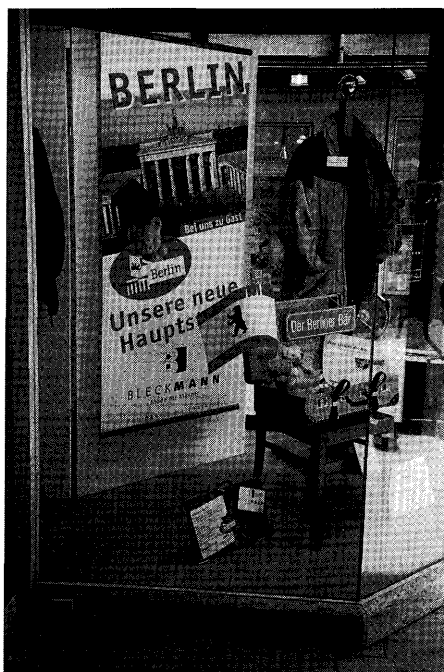
cosmopolitan sites, European capitals have been first of all localized manifestations or peculiar urban versions of different national cultures and histories. It is not only the architecture and the cultural grammar of the built landscape which represents changing images of the national self. The capital serves at the same time as a stage for national representations, feasts and ceremonies which stage the central values and convictions the “imagined community” of the nation which it will follow.

Indeed, since 1991 the question of what consequences the move of parliament will have for national and international politics has been under discussion. How will other countries perceive the new German capital and its buildings? Which kind of national representation is necessary and appropriate for a nation in the middle of Europe at the turn of the millennium in general and appropriate especially for Germany with its national past?

In this context, the discourse produced the metaphor of the “Berliner Republik”, which opened up a symbolic space for a bundle of different interpretations and meanings of the national. The metaphor structures time by separating the new period from its predecessors, namely the “Bonner Republik”. Despite the somehow felt beginning of a new era, the discourse emphasizes the continuities between the old Federal Republic of Germany and the unified Germany in terms of democratic consent, the reliability of German politics, and the state’s orientation towards Europe and the West. At the same time, the metaphor “Berliner Republik” structures space and emphasize the importance of the capital as a central site of national representation. Thus it refers to the city as symbol *and* as the output of the new political situation in general. Due to the high degree of “social present time reality” ascribed to the city, the discourse stresses

the question of whether the past is still alive in Berlin. Thus, while the discourse on the “Berliner Republic” opened a space for negotiations about national self-images and the possibility and necessity of national pride, even for Germans, it has to cope with the problem of representation. For in many respects Berlin represents an undesired national continuity, which is of history, or even better, the continuing effect of history on contemporary politics. By moving from Bonn to Berlin, the German government as well as the “Germans” in general are perceived as being confronted with the “burden” of German history more than ever (mit der Last der Vergangenheit). Whereas Bonn was a “neutral” place in terms of history and therefore able to represent the West-German will to begin anew in 1949, many consider Berlin as a place where history “really took place”, and that means German fascism and the killing of millions of people, the beginning and the end of World War II, the Cold War and the division of Germany, of Europe, and, in the end, of the whole world, the fall of the wall and German and European unification – just to mention the most important turning points of 20<sup>th</sup> century history. And all these events have left their traces in the spatial and symbolic structure of the cityscape. Therefore, for the former “front-line-city”, the socialist capital, and the old centre of power to become a true capital city in its own right, Berlin must structure its historical narrative in a new way and find new modes of national representation in and through the city. And that is what the metaphor of the “Berliner Republic” tells us about.

But apart from this national narrative touched on with the metaphor “Berliner Republic”, a second metaphor, namely the “New Berlin”, tells us about another story and about another problem the city has to cope with. Because cities, and especially big cities and metropolises, are now the



*Advertisement for the new capital in a shop window in Tübingen, October 1999. Photo: Beate Binder*

most important scenes of current social and political transformations taking place in late capitalism and post-socialism. A whole range of sociological as well as anthropological accounts narrates the story of the late modern city and renders pervasive pictures of the dramatic changes the political and cultural economy of urban space is undergoing. On the one hand, they tell us about the emergence of a new urban underclass, living in damaged or ruined urban quarters, about slums and ghettos, about poverty and social exclusion. On the other hand, there are the new urban shopping and entertainment centres as well as the business quarters with their malls, sky-scrapers, and bank towers representing richness and economic growth.

The changes which urban landscapes are undergoing are reflections of the ongoing processes of social, political, and economic transformation which normally underline terms of globalization and/or second modernization. Many authors in this

context have pointed out the emergence of a new symbolic economy and new city marketing strategies, which are mainly based on culture and cultural politics. In as far as the imaginability of cities “becomes the new selling point” – as Christine Boyer put it<sup>12</sup> – the aesthetic and design of the urban landscape, its incorporated heritage and its new zones of attraction are strong and powerful resources for marketing a city.

Efforts to create a symbolic, selling economy produce social, political and cultural conflicts between local economies and the logic of globality. Cities have to accumulate ever more political, economic, and cultural functions, making them international, or (even better) cosmopolitan. Thus the representation of cosmopolitanism within a city offers pervasive symbolic capital in the world-wide struggle for hegemony; it enables cities to enter and to take part in the global competition for economic and symbolic capital successfully.

And this is what the term of the “New Berlin” tells us too. It tries to bundle all those efforts undertaken during the last decade in order to attract investors, developers and, last but not least, tourists to leave their money in the city. The economic situation of Berlin changed dramatically after German unification. While West Berlin used to function largely on the basis of an extensive politics of subsidies and East Berlin, as the capital of the GDR, had access to larger resources than any other East German city, Berlin now must enter the general economic and cultural competition of cities in order to gain ground on a national as well as on an international scale. Whereas the old production industry broke away on a large scale, the city aims at building up an economy mainly based on service industries. Tourism, media, and information and communication technologies are the main areas of engagement. Thus a lot of different efforts of the last decade aim at the modernization of the entire city. The

metaphor of the “New Berlin” tells us about the “cosmopolitan dream” of becoming an economic and cultural metropolis. This dream is a strong force, and it structures the rhetoric of change and legitimizes a lot of different activities that are concerned with the rebuilding of the city. By envisioning the future role of Berlin as a “turntable between East and West” and as an important economic as well as political knot in the network of European cities, Berlin tries to render the attractiveness of its location.

Insofar as Berlin encounters both the task to become more national and more global at the same time, the symbolic transformation of the city appears to be extremely dramatic. Behind the question of how to cope with the contradictory tasks of becoming national and cosmopolitan at the same time hides a field of political and cultural struggle and conflicts which accompany the restructuring not only of the city and its landscape but of the entire society.

This is even more so because of the former division of the city into two halves. Today two societies with different experiences and starting points come together within in the city of Berlin. And that is what the metaphor of the “New Berlin” tells us about as well: the vision of the re-unification of the two city halves and of the will of rejoining the divided metropolis into one smoothly functioning urban structure.

With the two metaphors of the “Berliner Republic“ and the “New Berlin” I have rendered the central problem that faces Berlin today. In short, the “New Berlin” aims at constructing a new image which is supposed to fit the tasks of representing both the national and the global. To reinvent the “new/old capital” means to produce new images which can turn the German and the Prussian Berlin into a world city by keeping its local traditions at the same time.

To follow this field of struggles between



*The Dome of the Reichstag building is open for public. Photo: Beate Binder.*

different symbolic systems and their respective logics, I propose starting with the texture of the city, or even better, the changing pattern(s) of this texture. Understanding cities as texts means to interpret the buildings, places, streets, parks, monuments – in short the whole urban street design and built environment – as a culturally encoded text of urbanity. The “architexture” of a city represents historical imaginations, political visions and myths, social memories and cultural nostalgia living in the society. Cities with their spatial order, their architecture, buildings, and commemoration sites, represent historical imaginations and political visions, social hierarchies and cultural constructions of the self. And as far as cities are places and locations of cultural myths, memories and nostalgia as well as of contemporary power and hegemony, the constantly changing physical environment tells of the social, political, and cultural changes a society is undergoing.

As Sharon Zukin pointed out in her book “The Cultures of Cities”,<sup>13</sup> the decline of

industrial production and the increasing importance of deal-making and selling investment have fundamentally changed the working and meaning of the symbolic economy of cities. While it is most important for cities to construe a legible and identifiable image nowadays, Zukin emphasizes that the material landscape itself became the most important visual representation of cities and thus plays a fundamental role in the construction of cities. The new symbolic economy is based on the appropriation and use of culture for the development and material reproduction of cities. This means that the very social and cultural conflicts in contemporary societies take place as struggles about modes of representation, aesthetics and their connected meanings. The new symbolic economy structures cities by making “decisions about what – and who – should be visible and what should be not, on concepts of order and disorder, and on uses of aesthetic power”, to quote Sharon Zukin again.<sup>14</sup> Thus understanding cities as texts means taking the representational



practices of different social groups and the aesthetics or visual means of inclusion and exclusion as starting points for further investigation.

But, as I have proposed at the beginning, not only the architecture and design of a city structures its texture, but so do social practices themselves and public events which take place in urban space. In the remainder of this article I would like to concentrate on this last point. Because, in the context of the symbolic transformation processes of Berlin, new public events are invented and/or incorporated into the urban landscape. These public events are meant to make the content and possibilities of “New Berlin” visible, and they open these contents and possibilities up for experience. As cultural representations these events become real in order to define and structure urban space, and in order to articulate political positions and power.

To be able to follow up these mechanisms of public events, I will have a somewhat closer look at the events mentioned in the beginning. I can’t describe them in complete detail, so they are not meant to prove the thesis of the evidence of public events in any systematic sense. But they allow me to discuss some preconditions and problems concerning the investigation of public events in urban settings. My considerations focus on the question of the effect which public events have on the production of locality as outlined above.

### **Public Events re-visited: The 3<sup>rd</sup> of October and the opening of the Mexartes Festival**

Both events, Germany’s Feast on 3<sup>rd</sup> October and the opening ceremony of the Mexartes Festival, serve different purposes and speak different languages. And they are set on the scene in different parts of the inner city, even though both locations are not far away from each other. The old congress hall which hosts the House of

World Cultures is located close to the newly built Kanzleramt, the seat of the Chancellor. The Pariser Platz, which is maybe a 15 minute walk away from this place, is situated close to the Reichstags-building.

Despite their closeness, the two places belong to different symbol systems in terms of the national and the cosmopolitan. Gerhard Schröder, the German chancellor, characterizes the House of World Cultures as follows: “When we say that Germany has to become more international, then the House of World Cultures is doing real pioneering work.”<sup>15</sup> While the House of World Cultures represents the world’s cultural diversity, it simultaneously shows the openness of Berlin towards the diversity of its own citizens. It stages new ways of cultural hybridization, products of cultural contact and its influence – especially on the high arts. First and foremost, it opens a space for the intellectual exchange on questions of cultural globalization. Or, as Homi Bhabha put it last year: “In this momentous of transition, the House of World Cultures – like Berlin itself – is becoming a meeting place for dialogues between cultures, a bridge between the past and the present, East and West, North and South.”<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to the House of World Cultures, the Pariser Platz represents the local and national heritage of Berlin. The reconstruction of the buildings around the place followed the guidelines of historical reconstruction issued in the beginning of the 1990s, even though interpretations of these guidelines vary from building to building. Thus the two more postmodern houses designed by Behnisch and Gehry were discussed heavily and had to change at least their front façade to better fit the rules of historical reconstruction. Nevertheless, the Pariser Platz is perceived as the “parlor” of the city for now. The Berlin Newspaper Tagesspiegel named the square a magical site and the “first address

of Germany”, last but not least because of the four Bank houses, the French and the planned American embassies, the Hotel Adlon. And, the Tagesspiegel announces, “Besides the nearby Potsdamer Platz, the citadel of the globalized urban planning, the Pariser Platz appears as a national forum made of stone.”<sup>17</sup> In short, the Pariser Platz is a German place – not only because of its architecture but because of the events taking place there. It is not so much a place of daily routines of the citizens but a place for special events and, of course, for tourists looking at the Brandenburg Gate or watching the official guests of Berlin residing in the Hotel Adlon on their way from the car to the entrance.

Thus a perfect alliance exists between the two events and their respective locations. On the one hand, both belong to different symbol systems; on the other, the two locations are able to investigate the events with legitimization and authority, whereas the events themselves structure and reify the symbolic content of these locations.

The opening of the Mexartes Festival does not stand alone. In fact, the efforts to stage Berlin as multicultural, as open to the world and as enjoying its diversity structure a whole range of different public events which are put on during the year. Parades – like the Love Parade of the techno kids, the Carnival of Cultures – a parade of different migrant organizations -, the Christopher Street Day, which is the parade of the gay and lesbian community, or – to some extent – the Berlin Marathon. These all are the biggest and most important of these public events which operate on arguments of cultural diversity, multiculturalism and internationalism. Besides these, every year events are performed. There are a lot of single occasions, like the opening ceremony of the newly built Debis and Sony Center at the Potsdamer Platz, which try to produce an atmosphere of cultural diversity and to show difference as a central resource of the

city. All these events belong to the process of the festivalization of city politics, which Hartmut Häußermann and Walter Siebel have identified as an emerging new marketing strategy of cities.<sup>18</sup> Even though they all have different promoters and organizers, these events are part of the city’s marketing because of their attractiveness not least of all for tourists who will come to the city and leave their money in the city.

All of these events are interesting by themselves, as they stage different messages and produce different modes of agency. But in light of the restructuring of urban space they belong together. In the line of these events, the process of restructuring becomes visible. In this sense they are interconnected as they together produce the text of multicultural diversity, of openness towards the world and of the rich mixture and creativity Berlin is able to offer. Combined, they draw a mental map of the city in which all of those places where these events take place are integrated. This map tells about the joyful atmosphere of festivities which are able to satisfy curiosity and the lust for adventurous tours through the diversity of the world. The title of this map is “through the world within the city”.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> of October belongs to another map of the city and to another atmosphere of discovery. It is the map of national heritage and of those events which enable one to experience the “imagined community” (Anderson) of the nation. And this map also creates its own centres and places. The Pariser Platz, the Brandenburg Gate and the famous Alley Under den Linden, the Reichstags-Building and in a certain sense the Museumsinsel are built at the very centre of this map. The events taking place in these inner city spaces do not only strengthen the national meaning and perception of these places, but they do make it a lively space of encounter and negotiation framed by features of national self-image.



SCHLUSS. Manche Probleme hätte es bei der Restaurierung des Brandenburger Töres gegeben, seine Ehrfüllung aber, showgerecht serviert von Willy Bogner, vertief wie am Sc

Tagesspiegel 4. 10. 2002

## Die Hüllen sind gefallen

henk zum Einheitsfest: Brandenburger Tor mit spektakulärer Aktion ausgepackt / Hunderttausende drängten

ingungen waren ideal. Der  
 ill. Zum krönenden Ab-  
 ern zum Tag der Deutschen  
 Berlin seine Bescherung:  
 20.30 Uhr schwebte der

Schon Stunden vor der spektakulären Ent-  
 hüllung des Nationalsymbols war der neue-  
 geplasterte Pariser Platz mit Menschen über-  
 füllt. Weitere Schaulustige drängten nach-  
 doch rund 700 Polizisten sicherten die abend-

Operndiva Montserrat Caballé auf. Vor dem  
 großen Akt der Enthüllung des Töres versam-  
 melten sich Bundespräsident Johannes Rau,  
 Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröder, Bundes-  
 tagspräsident Wolfgang Thierse, der Regie-

der Hoffnung auf Freiheit für alle Völker der  
 Welt", sagte Clinton, nachdem er von Wowe-  
 reit einen Stein des Brandenburger Töres als  
 Geschenk erhalten hatte. Bereits am Nach-  
 mittag hatten hunderte Menschen die Aus-

Especially the Pariser Platz became the locale for staging the national during the last years, thereby using the symbolic content the Brandenburg Gate as national monument bears and strengthening it at the same time. Already in 1991 the official opening of the reconstructed Gate was meant to set the national symbol anew. The farewell ceremonies for the allied troops took place at the Pariser Platz in front of the Brandenburg Gate in 1994, and the official celebration of the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, the day of the opening of the wall, is normally staged at the Pariser Platz, to mention but a few festivities which the place hosts. More and more, the Gate and the Pariser Platz became the central stage for celebrating national holidays and commemoration ceremonies in public. Located next to the Reichstags-building, the Pariser Platz and especially the Brandenburg Gate seem to offer the "right" setting for the staging of these national holidays. At the same time, these public

events help to strengthen the role of Berlin as the new national capital, which, in turn, found in a way its public stage in the Pariser Platz. Historical narratives which talk about the varied history this part of the city experienced established finally and strengthen constantly the image of the Pariser Platz as the "parlor" of the nation.

Especially the celebrations on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2002 made this mechanism obvious. Even though the renovation work was finished some weeks ago, the uncovering took place during the celebration of German unity and, thus, was embedded in the national narrative of unification. Probed in advance and more than once announced in the newspapers, people were put in the mood of expectation. Finally, the Brandenburg Gate was given back like a gift to the Berliners and their visitors, given to them as a site of identification and belonging.

But the process of defining this national urban space was structured not only by the public events themselves but by those

discussions accompanying and commenting on them as well. At least two discourses structure the staging of 3<sup>rd</sup> October at the Pariser Platz in 2002.

The first is concerned with the question of whether it should be allowed to pass the Brandenburg Gate by car in future. This discourse touches questions of everyday practices taking place in public urban space in general, and in this square in particular. Both the pro-car party as well as those who want to have the Gate car-free try to strengthen their argument by pointing out the national importance and symbolic content of the Brandenburg Gate.

The second discourse is concerned more directly with the symbolic content of the Gate and the square as national locale. It asks who shall be allowed to use the Pariser Platz as site of demonstrations and as a stage for festivities. In 2000, this discussion became extremely dynamic because of the right wing party NPD, which marched through the Brandenburg Gate.<sup>19</sup> During the days following the event, the media, especially the Berlin newspapers, and some politicians asked for stronger restrictions on the right's ability to demonstrate in the middle of this newly built government quarter. And somehow it seemed that the walk of the NPD through the Gate was even worse than the very fact that their right wing positions gained ground in Germany at all. In the following weeks, counter-demonstrations and meetings were arranged in which thousands of people joined. Of course, this took place at the Pariser Platz. It was a symbolic occupation of the somehow "contaminated" place, a public demonstration of the "other", that is democratic Germany, and, at the same time, a self-assurance that those democratic forces are stronger than the NPD and its followers.<sup>20</sup> Here as well, the localized urban history and the newly constructed national content of the Pariser Platz worked together and invested the demonstrations

with legitimacy and gave them their strength.

**To sum up:** Discussions between events are most often concerned with the question of whether the setting, the framing and carrying through of the event fulfilled its purposes. And while the public event itself represents only one single version, namely the one which has gained the most authority, the discussions taking place (whether in the media or in face-to-face debates) offer a wide range of different interpretations, while showing strategies to legitimize positions and interpret the staged performance in terms of content, sense and meaning. In short, they evaluate and reify the very meaning of the public event and thus help to uncover the problems and conflicts underlying the performance itself. In consequence, these debates restructure the event and reflect on their "improvement." The discourses on events become themselves part of the following stagings.

And the discourses offer a key to follow up the process of the symbolic transformation of an urban landscape. Coming back to my starting point (namely that public events may help to investigate in the symbolic landscape of cities), I suggest the following: Ethnological investigation of cities finds in public events a useful starting point for investigation, but has to keep in mind that public events can no longer be interpreted as a single key to a society. That is why not only the events themselves and their immanent symbolic language are important sites of investigation, but also the discourse following up these single events investigates them with sense and meaning. Lead by the question of how it is possible to stage an event at all, the reflexive interconnectedness between event and discourse seems to be a key feature. It contributes to producing the symbolic structure of the event and is the most important frame for understanding the input

and outcome of a single event. Last but not least, the series of events during the year as well as over the years offer a key to investigate the process of (re-)structuring an urban landscape.

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<sup>xiv</sup> **Zukin 1995, 7-8.**

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