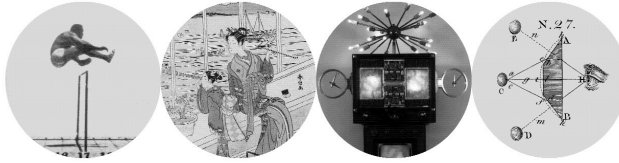


# journal of visual culture



## Berlin, the Virtual Global City<sup>1</sup>

Janet Ward

### Abstract

This article analyzes the significance of the global-city epithet as a transformational city-building image for post-Wall Berlin. The boosterist ambitions of the New Berlin's massive rebuilding program have not brought the former Cold War outpost into the top tier of contemporary global cities; rather, the regained capital is languishing under bankruptcy and high unemployment. Nonetheless, Berlin's legacy of extreme mutability, combined with its obsessive self-representations in architectural exhibitions and other virtual environments, provide a strategic platform that enables the city to imagine and plan its urban future toward globality. The multiple virtual-city stagings of Berlin function in a pragmatic, entrepreneurial manner, by serving as a lure for, e.g., culture and multimedia industries to relocate to Berlin. Such globally linked companies are indicative of how branding in the virtual realm can help build a new economic reality into being.

### Keywords

globalization • post-Wall Berlin • urban boosterism • virtual cities

## Prologue: Televisual Urban Identities

Urban identities – of cities, of parts of cities, and of actual people as denizens of those cities and boroughs – have been ineradicably altered ever since televisual space effectively replaced the metropolitan street-scene as the major site of consumerist display and social exchange. Ironically, however, the same electronic technologies that have been blamed for diminishing so many of the major public spaces (or three-dimensional 'faces') of the modern city are themselves the building blocks of how cities are now planning their future growth. Importantly, the existing activities and potential new functions of the 'electronic agora' are not deaf to the basic human instinct of

journal of visual culture

Copyright © 2004 SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi)

Vol 3(2): 239-256 [1470-4129(200404)3:2]10.1177/1470412904044819

re-situating and re-inventing the need for shared communities as befits a globally connected era (Rheingold, 1994: 58; Robins, 1996: 98). As such, today's sites of televisual space (those created by the nodes and grids of global telecommunications traffic in and between urban centers) can be considered the virtual, ever-mobile entities best capable of staging the city of tomorrow. In the case of post-Wall Berlin, it is possible to chart how the very fluidity of telematics, both as imagery and industry, has proceeded to influence urban planning to a remarkable degree. Certainly, the time-space-compression powers of the televisual city have lent themselves spectacularly well to Berlin's self-reinvention process since Germany's reunification. As this study will show, the 'on-the-ground' results in terms of urban architecture and economy, however, have been far from even.

### Boosting the New Berlin

The contemporary cliché of the global city suggests an urban form that rises above social and territorial borders toward a new, wholly interconnected condition. The ideal global city is the virtual metropolis *sans frontières*. It is this criterion, right or wrong, that sustains the vision of an unavoidable urbanized globalization. As Gallis and Russell (2002) have declared of globalization's impact: the '*connectivity*' that the information society makes possible has created 'a new kind of urbanity ... In these networks, cities are the hubs for making, for distributing, and for consuming' (p. 72). Even less-than-world cities are being impacted by the effects, both actual and predicted, of globalization, and are changing their planning goals as a result. Politicians, developers and investors alike tend to subscribe to the vision of a limitless transformation of urban form in the electronic age – just at the point, ironically, during a worldwide recession at the start of the early 21st century, when the material and social limits of urban change are becoming most apparent. Nonetheless, the dream of the city without borders still brings with it the promise of a new type of urban power. Economist Saskia Sassen (1991) has emphasized how global cities are 'postindustrial production sites' that re-centralize and reconsolidate between themselves the command functions of the world economy (p. 126). Hence, for those cities capable of being fully integrated into the global network, this means the very opposite of the geographic 'drift' sensed by Virilio (1998[1984]: 544), i.e. the purported death of the city brought about by the suburbanization-effect of the information superhighway.

The apparent freedom and appeal of global-city status have featured strongly in the discourses involving Berlin after that city was voted, by the Bundestag in 1991 (with a mere 17-vote majority), as the reclaimed seat of government for the reunified Germany. Understandably enough, the once heavily bordered city of the Cold War era now wished to embrace the opposite image of unfettered, borderless global-cityness, hankering after an electronic-age equivalent of the world-city label that Berlin of the 1920s not only attained but exemplified. The architectural transformations of Berlin during the Weimar Republic underlined both consciously and unconsciously the

urgency, visibility and tactility of the city's world-city status. Boosters<sup>2</sup> for Berlin in the 1990s intended that its identity be shifted by dint of renovated and reconnected boroughs into an updated Proustian version of *temps retrouvé*, i.e. of what it used to be. This goal, despite a radical re-making of the city's architectural and infrastructural landscape, has not been achieved.

Yet what Berlin used to be has never been a fixed concept for long. Due to the shock-effect of its belated, accelerated accession to the league of modern world cities, Berlin has been known, ever since Karl Scheffler's initial designation in 1910 and Ernst Bloch's re-use of the phrase in 1932, as a city fated 'always to become and never to be' (Scheffler, 1989[1910]: 219; Bloch, 1998[1932]: 366). This moniker of transformational rebuilding for the post-1871 (and hence still relatively new) German capital was deemed to be a positive component of the Bauhaus-style modernizing ethos of the mid-1920s: the very sense of 'becoming' was the guarantee, not the inhibitor, of a city's relevance for modernity. Berlin's 'especially abstract ground' had, for Bloch as he wrote at the end of the Weimar Republic, not yet settled on its sandy, swamp-like foundations: a topo-conceptual instability that he famously referred to as the 'colonial exhibitional character of the always new City of Hollow Space' (p. 370). Since, however, the city's three subsequent breakdowns – its planned transformation into the Nazi Germania, its partial erasure by fire-bombing in the Second World War, and its subsequent Cold War division – Berlin has been the eternally sought but never reached castle in Kafka. Nowadays, as it languishes bankrupt amidst 18 percent unemployment, the reborn German capital seems further than ever from attaining its lost status (Strom, 2001: 79–94). According to the recent GaWC (Globalization and World Cities Research Group and Network) inventory of the top 55 contemporary global cities – which ranks cities according to their representation by advanced producer services in law, accounting, banking/finance and advertising – Berlin is nowhere near 'alpha' or even 'beta' global-city status. It only reaches the lowest grouping on the third-highest rung of 'gamma' globals, along with both Munich and Hamburg, as well as with, e.g., Amsterdam, Budapest, Miami, Atlanta, Shanghai and Kuala Lumpur (Beaverstock et al., 1999: 456). The most that Sassen (1996) predicts for Berlin in the near future is that it will be part of a Berlin–Vienna–Budapest 'regional, yet transnationally oriented urban system' (p. 62).

The advocated promotional desire for Berlin to become a leading site of today's global economy constitutes, in fact, a veiling over that which the city needs most. After all, the global city, as defined by Sassen (1991), works covertly against the traditionally conceived economic and political identity of the nation-state (p. 9). Reunified Berlin, on the other hand, is working toward primarily a more localized recognition of capital-city status within the strong federalist system of Germany, and by extension within Europe itself. The case of Berlin, therefore, shows selectivity in adopting the techniques of globalization – such as renewing urban relevance by re-establishing the centralization of command functions on the national and international levels of the service economy. Becoming even a partial player in the distribution network of global city functions has been regarded as a key way to re-forge

Berlin's ranking, both domestically and abroad. Yet Berlin's regained status as capital of the German nation is still being withheld, in part due to the urban regional strengths of the West German federalist system.

This article analyzes the significance and function of the global-city epithet as a transformational city-building image for post-Wall Berlin, in order to assess how boosterism's virtual realities for the reunified capital are impacting actual urban economic growth. Efforts in global-city marketing have produced a hyped realm of substitution and modeling (based on other global cities in Europe and the USA), as well as simulation and reconstruction (based on Berlin as modern world city before the Second World War). For having hyped itself as that which it wishes to resemble, however far out of reach, post-Wall Berlin deserves to be forgiven, at least from the point of view of the American experience of city-building. After all, both promises of the future and substitutions of an urban historical past (borrowed from other established cities) have been a fundamental part of regional and urban boosterism; some of its most influential historical applications can be found in the mid-19th- and early 20th-century creation of the American mid-West and West, with promoters' myriad promises to potential migrants back East and to potential immigrants in Europe (Hise, 1999; Wrobel, 2002). Of course, boosterist images cannot be applied to any city indefinitely without adapting to actual material conditions. The prototypical boosterist city of Los Angeles at the beginning of the 21st century is now as aging as was New York at the beginning of the 20th, and hence has to see itself more clearly along its own trajectory, as Hise has indicated. The initial phase of Berlin's post-Wall reconstruction, then, despite the fact that it has been more heavily dependent on virtual projections of globalization than on economic manifestations of the latter, may be considered a first malleable step in this direction.

### The Limits of Global Berlin

It is widely assumed that the rise of global information technology promises (or threatens) to turn urban space into an ageographical entity – or its very inverse, a 'universal conurbation', as Mumford (1989[1961]) predicted of the 'de-materialization, or etherialization' caused by the 'removal of limits' in the 'Invisible City' (pp. 540, 563, 540). Mitchell (1995) has declared in his update of Mumford's terms: 'The network is the urban site before us, an invitation to design and construct the City of Bits' (p. 24). In fact, neither Mumford's nor Mitchell's McLuhanesque vision of cyberspace heralds the total demolition of urban context. The Invisible City/City of Bits is altering how we perceive urbanity itself; the virtual realm of high tech is transferring itself onto our vision of the urban, and hence also onto the entities once represented by the urban. These entities were first articulated by Aristotle in book VII.5 of his *Politics*, specifically in his expectation that state territory should have clearly defined, controllable borders. Aristotle's ideal state is the opposite to the dream (or nightmare) of the virtual city as 'uncontrolled territory', as Mitchell (1995: 150) suggests. But still, the more mundane truth for today's three-dimensional cities lies somewhere in between Mitchell's free-

wheeling City of Bits and Aristotle's totally bordered-in state. The aspirations of city-builders certainly mine the representational pull of a border-free economy, but usually in the service of some form of desired Aristotelian control, especially an enhancement of the status and visibility of the urban setting – and for capital cities, that of the nation as well.

There is, then, a blend of the new virtual and the old territorial in any post-modern city-building trajectory. One can imagine Aristotle looking favorably on the way in which post-Wall Berlin, in order to proceed up the global economic urban ladder, has sought to re-introduce a high degree of nodal relevance and efficiency – in air, rail and highway links, as well as in telecommunications infrastructure. One still-significant problem for Berlin is that its geographical position during the Cold War made it into a subsidized 'out-post'. Surrounded by and cut in two for 18 years by the Wall, Berlin was shut out from the trade corridor that continues to extend across western Europe between London and Milan. This corridor, known for its shape as the metaphorical 'Blue Banana', has encouraged polarization between cities in Europe (Wegener et al., 1994: 29). While the conurbations within this central business corridor do include two West German areas, the Rhein-Main and Rhein-Ruhr regions, Berlin is situated too far to the east, and thus still remains outside its scope. As Sassen (2000) has succinctly asserted, Berlin is 'definitely on the periphery' (p. 17). Indeed, the only direct flight between Berlin and Washington DC – re-introduced by Lufthansa in the spring of 2001 after a gap of four years, more as a symbolic boosterist gesture than as a financially viable one – was cancelled less than two weeks after 9/11. There is no direct flight to Japan, either. The lack of such high-level transportation connections for the reunified German capital seriously endangers the continued presence of the city's few global players, such as Sony at Potsdamer Platz. In fact, Berlin's direct train connections are still very much a part of the Communist past: one can travel directly, for example, all the way from the Lichtenberg rail station in East Berlin to the Siberian city of Novosibirsk over three thousand miles away (Hagel, 2002).

One can but hope that Berlin will be able to escape its relatively polarized condition within one generation of planning. Due to the ongoing development of high-tech communications and high-speed rail and highway systems, an ever more rapid networking of European cities with each other is emerging. In the case of Europe, 'time-space maps' are being applied to help predict the future rankings of cities: these are non-topographical, literally 'warped' maps that show the shrinking of distances between cities according to time-units of travel. Geographers like Wegener et al. (1994) have predicted that ongoing and future infrastructural improvements will, if completed, cut in half most travel times from the German capital to cities within Europe by 2020, which would significantly condense the time-space map for the Berlin region (p. 32). Examples of these projects include the seven new highways built by the federally owned company DEGES; the central rail station under construction, the Berlin-Hauptbahnhof – Lehrter Bahnhof, designed by the firm of Meinhard von Gerkan; or the future Berlin Brandenburg International airport. What applies here to Berlin is even more crucial for

peripherally located East European nations that have joined the European Union in the last year. This kind of 'time-space' accessibility of cities *vis-à-vis* their distribution of trade and telecommunications thus becomes a vital planning consideration for luring advanced producer services to those locations.

Even if federal support successfully recalibrates Berlin's nodal position on the infrastructural level, much more must still occur to rectify the real estate bust that emerged in the mid-1990s after an initial speculative boom. There are increasing instances of castles in the air – namely, failed real estate investments where supply clearly outpaced demand. The 'virtual reality' of these unfinished projects is now becoming more and more noticeable. Such structures include the Landsberger Arcades, a retail, office and hotel complex in Lichtenberg that was designed by the late Aldo Rossi; started in 1996, the project was left half-built three years later and still stands as a building-site ruin. More visibly, investors for the Zoofenster (the renovation of the area diagonally across from the Zoo train station) withdrew in 2002, and the Hilton chain cancelled its plans for a hotel on that site; currently, a different hotel occupant is being sought while the lot stands completely levelled, an embarrassing hole in the middle of City-West (Figure 1). On a less dramatic

**Figure 1** An empty lot in 2003 is all that remains of the former Hilton Hotel project, part of the 'Zoofenster' re-development area near Bahnhof Zoo in (West) Berlin.

© Copyright Janet Ward.

but more frequent level, billboards and posters on many East Berlin tenements and bombed-out lots have been proclaiming the imminent advent of renovated or new mixed-use apartments, office and retail – but not all such announcements are leading from the image-stage to actual construction. An example of this virtual architecture, or billboard- or poster-stasis, is at the





intersection of Kastanienallee and Oderberger Straße in Prenzlauer Berg (Figure 2), where the developer's poster for the rejuvenation of the Wilhelmine-era corner building was layered as an advertisement over the façade of the crumbling tenement.

Indeed, the barriers impeding the New Berlin's ascent to globality appear insurmountable for the near future. All of Berlin's global image-making must compete with, and yet also compensate for, the hemorrhaging of the city's industry in both its western and eastern parts after the loss of special Cold War-era state subsidies in the former, and the end of GDR manufacturing in the latter. Even though one-third of all Berlin residents are new since the fall of the Wall, the population has not grown. As Germany's most populous city covering the largest terrain, Berlin was losing 20,000 inhabitants a year in the late 1990s (many to the outer ring [*Speckgürtel*] in surrounding Brandenburg), and it has only recently stabilized at 3.4 million inhabitants. There are about 130,000 empty apartments in the city – symptomatic of the more than one million vacant homes in the former East Germany, as people migrate westwards in search of work. These harsh facts notwithstanding, real estate speculation has caused Berlin office space to expand 20 times over since the *Wende*. For a while in the 1990s, building volume was DM27 billion, making Berlin the largest building site in the world. The real estate boom has since turned into a bust, a slump of units standing unleased as the city's lender, the Bankgesellschaft Berlin, went into bankruptcy. In 2001, the Berlin Senate for Urban Development (Berliner Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung) reported that in terms of the 20 million square yards of office space that it offers, post-Wall Berlin is now third in line next to Europe's two 'alpha' globals, Paris and London (with their respective 37+ and 32+ million square yards of office space). In other words, Berlin has literally constructed for itself, in terms of commercial architecture, the shape of a European world city – but Europe and the world have yet to respond to the invitation.

Berlin has thus fallen prey to urban capitalism's weak underbelly tendency of credit-financed overbuilding. The New Berlin has been quite literally over-produced. As urban geographer Stefan Krätke (2003) has stated, Berlin's



Figure 2 Advertisement in 2002 for the renovation of the corner building of Oderberger Straße and Kastanienallee, in Prenzlauer Berg, (East) Berlin.  
© Copyright Janet Ward.

development management during the last decade of the 20th century was no less than 'an outstanding example of a "worst practice" urban governance' (p. 13). In short, only a bail-out by the federal government, now in its fourth year of near-zero growth, can save the capital from its debt of €53.9 million (as of April 2004). Over €6 million a year are wasted simply in paying back the interest on time. Astonishingly perhaps, Berlin's virtual boosterism continues unabated – in fact, all the more so, since a positive image of Berlin must necessarily be hawked and marketed as positively as possible by Berlin credit managers so as to lure potential investors.

### Berlin and the Infinity of Urban Self-Representation

Notwithstanding these economic limitations, post-Wall Berlin is caught up in a seemingly infinite web of self-representation. The German capital's eternal artifice of becoming, made more acute by the euphoric planning hopes and then disillusionment after the *Wende*, is, however, certainly not a new tendency. Rather, it corresponds to a Berlin tradition of creating a virtual metropolis as a substitute for perceived deficiencies, past and present. The entire 20th century contains instances of Berlin's self-aggrandizing stagings, particularly by means of architectural exhibitions. Early instances of this trend – which in fact corresponded rather closely to the then-modern Berlin's actual ability to realize such visions – were the 'Groß-Berlin' ('Greater Berlin') urban planning exhibition of 1910; the Weimar era's competitions for Alexanderplatz in 1928 and for Potsdamer Platz the following year; the Nazis' Berlin Olympics of 1936; and, ultimately, Albert Speer's and Hitler's plans for Berlin, as the reborn city of 'Germania', to host a world trade fair in 1950. During the decades after the Second World War, architectural exhibitions and competitions were used as a stabilizing means of promoting the rebuilding of (West) Berlin and of demoting its 'outpost' status: e.g. the International Building Exhibition (Interbau) of 1957; the 'Hauptstadt Berlin' ('Berlin Capital') competition of 1958 that willfully ignored the division of the city; West Berlin's International Building Exhibition (Internationale Bauausstellung, or IBA) of 1987, and the official 750th anniversary of the city in the same year with rival celebratory efforts both sides of the Wall; as well as the fêting of West Berlin as the 'Kulturhauptstadt' ('cultural capital') of Europe in 1988, the city's penultimate year as Cold War symbol.

German reunification brought about an understandable surge in this habitual self-staging of Berlin. Peaking around the millennium, a significant number of architectural exhibitions reflected their organizers' boosterist hopes, including 'e.g., Berlin' ('z.B. Berlin') in 2000 at the Postbahnhof (Figure 3). Beyond the need to exhibit Berlin as a permanent architectural exhibition, promotional imaging for the capital also featured strongly in the German architectural profession's publications throughout the 1990s. The tendency to view the city through the appealing, virtual lens of an axonometric model became city policy with City Building Director Hans Stimmann's initiative, the 'Planwerk Innenstadt' ('Inner City Plan'), which





**Figure 3** Model of the redevelopment plans for central Berlin, as displayed at the 'z.B. Berlin' ('e.g. Berlin') architectural exhibition held in 2000.  
© Copyright Janet Ward.

together with his IBA-inspired doctrine of Critical Reconstruction sought to combine boosterism with a desire to restore Berlin's original pre-Second World War footprint. This repair-work has been one of eradication, not recovery, seeking to combat and overcome planning and building alterations caused first by the air war and then by postwar modernism (deemed particularly egregious in the former Communist East). Nor is it over yet: a lavish 2002 volume edited by Stimmann (2002) foresees the 21st century's building phases for the German capital in hundreds of computer-assisted-design images.

Architecture in the New Berlin is shamelessly self-referential because it has become synonymous with the post-Fordist growth industry of city marketing. The re-shaping of the city-image is also tirelessly corporate: indeed, Manhattan's Times Square redevelopment under the aegis of Disney can be regarded as a precursor to the purchase and rebuilding of Potsdamer Platz by Daimler-Benz and Sony. As a result of serving as a piece of play-dough for post-Wall planning commissions, architectural organizations, and speculative investors and developers, much of Berlin-Mitte (namely, the downtown area rediscovered after the fall of the Wall) appears as a work of art on display as reality and vice versa. Building-site tourism, as symbolized by the huge popularity of the former Info-Box at Potsdamer Platz during its construction phase, led to the 'spectacularization of the building process' (Lehrer, 2000: 110). As the urban planner Peter Marcuse (1998) has noted, the New Berlin's love affair with constant construction is such that 'what is being constructed is an image': the 'new character of the city' is contained within 'construction *per se*' (p. 331). Cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek (1999) has satirized this condition, confessing how he once mistook street work for an artwork, when he beheld the various brightly colored utilities pipes exposed on and above

Berlin streets and thought they were 'another one of those postmodern art events, the aim of which was ... to make visible the belly, the hidden inner machinery of the city' (p. 61). Hence it is not so surprising that, representationally speaking, virtual Berlin has entered toy-land. In a move that illustrates architecture's increasing proximity to children's games, the city is 'for sale' in stores as an architectural cardboard pop-up in various models of buildings and structures (including the former Wall) that one associates with East Berlin's lost *mythos*. Thanks, then, to an overloaded impetus toward urban transformation, architectural boosterism in Berlin has become an infinitely self-replicating process.

This fictional 'web', while often amusingly virtual, cannot be so easily discounted. Virtuality plays a major role in the only industries that stand a chance of helping to make Berlin global: the contemporary growth areas of (city- or place-) marketing, sports, culture, entertainment and the service economy. Urbanists are realizing the powerful extent to which televisual space remains socially embedded (Floeting, 2000: 3). Sassen herself (2003), in considering the ways in which telematics is always 'inflected by the cultures, the material practices, the imaginaries that take place outside cyberspace', returns her reading public to the embedded social reality of the virtual realm (p. 19). Televisual Berlin-representations tend to appeal to the wished-for reality of the glorious lost city of pre-Second World War years, as well as the romantically disused 'other-space' of the Cold War's Wall. Views of a digitized Berlin are now available on CD-ROM, with aerial shots at important junctures in the 20th century. Berlin 'online' also exists in 360° panoramic perspectives, often in real time, at favorite sites like the new Potsdamer Platz or the view from the roof of the renovated Reichstag. The various news and city-marketing websites that emerged in the late 1990s, like that of 'tagesspiegel.de', 'meinberlin.de', and 'zitty.de' (all owned by Urban Media GmbH), function not simply as tourism portals but as multi-service city information systems.

Recent ad campaigns for the city have often been merged with these virtual and exhibition venues, especially 'Schaustelle Berlin' ('Display Site Berlin'), an ongoing summertime promotional series of self-celebratory events and tours, based on the premise of boosting the new architecture to Berliners and (albeit German-speaking) tourists. The motto 'Das Neue Berlin' ('The New Berlin'), a 1920s phrase re-used by the Berliner Festspiele, was subsequently adopted by the city marketing company 'Partner für Berlin' as a product in and of itself. The sheer plethora of these events certainly leads one to suspect that there could be some wished-for collective identity-transformation afoot on behalf of all Germans, far broader than just for the city itself. However, as philosopher Peter Sloterdijk has noted, in the ongoing re-make of Berlin, there is as yet no psychiatric treatment that will enable Germans to 'become something other than what they are' (Rada, 1997: 8).

One may well also inquire as to the degree of satirical self-awareness in these multiple self-stagings of the renewed German capital. Virtual multiplications in city-building have been made the reflective subject of a 2003 exhibition at

Düsseldorf's Kunsthalle: here, the architectural theorists Sybil Kohl, Philipp Oswalt and Albrecht Schäfer scathingly depicted three categories about urbanism, predominantly in the former East Germany, that do not exist except in the virtual realm and are hence even more worthy of recording – 'Verlassene Stadt' ('Deserted City'), 'Ersatzstadt' ('Substitute City'), and 'Ungebaute Stadt' ('Unbuilt City'), respectively. In this photo-album trilogy of urban non-form, the reader learns, in turn, about the myriad empty sites caused by the exodus of former East Germans to the West German states; about the instant architecture born of the speculation wave; and finally about those projects doomed to remain forever stuck at the design or competition stage. For all this, however, it does not seem as if the city government itself has caught on to the growing sense of Berlin's risibility, as witnessed by its ad campaign for the summer of 2003, 'Mir geht's Berlin!'. This poster, launched in 70 German cities, was intended to promote a sense of Berlin's unique individuality – as in the sense of 'How are you?' 'I'm feeling Berlin, thank you very much' – all of which made it sound as if the Berlin experience was akin to catching a cold (Figure 4).

This rising sense of the unreality of the New Berlin's aspirations is also being charted in recent literary and cinematic output. Berlin's indeterminate



Figure 4 'Mir geht's Berlin!' ('I'm feeling Berlin!'), a poster campaign across German cities in 2003. © Copyright Janet Ward.

virtuality has perhaps been best captured by the film *Run Lola Run* (dir. Tom Tykwer, 1999), where the plot turns around various possible arbitrary outcomes of life and death akin to an interactive video game. The heroine Lola is shown alternately as a human and as a cartoon video-game protagonist, and the Berlin streets that she continually runs through, while appearing realistic (i.e. non-virtual), bear little resemblance to direction and topography on any actual map of the reunified city. Another significant articulation of the risks inherent in Berlin's infinite self-representability is made by Norman Ohler's recent novel, *Mitte* (2001), which depicts a virtual-reality realm within the rotting fabric of an old tenement ('Altbau') in the former East Berlin. In Ohler's post-Wall novel, the 'Schaustelle' ('display site') principle has taken over in the New Berlin, which has somehow sold its authentic Faustian soul *en route* to a desired rehabbing and a vainly sought-after world-ranking among cities. Within Ohler's (i.e. the protagonist Klinger's) world, a seismic fault seems to lie underneath post-Wall Berlin's attempt to refurbish its streets with a sense of the pre-Wall capital city's identity. Cracks will appear in the New Berlin's structures because the new is make-believe old.

### Building for Real in Virtual Berlin

At this stage in urban fakery-assessment, one can turn to cultural critic Andreas Huyssen's (2003[1997]) concern that Berlin is squandering its chance at self-reinvention: summing up his critique of such infinite, often mindless stagings, Huyssen finds that 'from void ... to mise-en-scène and to image, images in the void: Berlin wird ... Berlin becomes image' (p. 64). But can any pragmatic successes be charted in such a virtual image-status? While the legacy of Berlin's former border-status has refused to give way to a renewed globalized relevance, it is in the realm of virtual urbanism that Berlin has been able to pick up the slack. This phenomenon is of course happening in myriad metropolitan centers as a technique of postmodern place-marketing. In fact, contemporary Berlin's specific kind of virtual topophilia provides far more than just a compensatory role for the city's long litany of urban failures (cf. Cochrane and Jonas, 1999). Beyond the ironic gap projected between actual material conditions and the image, urban or otherwise, the self-stagings of this city have in fact ended up having a concrete effect on Berlin's ability to progress beyond its backwater status, and move toward the possibility of a future world-citydom befitting the postmodern era. Thus in post-Wall Berlin's case, image really is almost everything.

Moreover, Berlin is but one of the more visible and dramatic participants in a broader evolution of and by cities, especially aging western ones, toward a competitive realm of the virtual in which image-city competes against image-city. Geographer David Harvey (2000[1989]) has defined this as a shift toward 'urban entrepreneurialism', a distinguishing feature of the service economy in the post-Fordist (essentially, post-1970s) era (p. 51). For cities in the new (formerly East German) *Bundesländer* in particular, self-reinvention, especially the improvement of 'locational quality' ('Standortqualität'), has

become a basic necessity after the harsh impact of de-industrialization and unemployment, two by-products of unification and the Treuhänd's privatization efforts (Helm, 1998: 8). Harvey (2000[1989]) refuses to totally demonize the ongoing hegemony of urban entrepreneurialism, stressing that its most frequent crime (the 'triumph of image over substance') remains a relatively innocuous house of cards (p. 59). Moreover, the creation of a positive boosterist image for a city can go a long way to forging 'refuge', 'solidarity', culture and identity – in short a renewed sense of place for its denizens (Harvey, 2000[1989]: 58). Hence *civitas* can be the outcome of such an obviously fake process as postmodern boosterism, on the condition that it is performed well. In this context, Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit's notable number of foreign trips since taking office (to, e.g., Beijing, Moscow and Los Angeles, three of Berlin's 17 'sister cities') is indicative of an engaged desire to make Berlin's imagery work toward its economic promotion. Wowereit (2002) has himself described the need for a 'network of connections between the metropolises' – and what he means by that is the enabling act of linking Berlin both associatively and substantively to these other prime urban sibling sites. The mayor's boosterist 'sister'-trip to LA in the fall of 2002, for example, is reputed to have facilitated the Denver-based Anschutz corporation's recent decision to develop a massive piece of land east of the Ostbahnhof. Whether Anschutz can actually create *civitas* in the urban entertainment complex planned for this disused section of Berlin along the East Side Gallery remains to be seen.

Marketing the New Berlin according to its inherited imagery, especially as the 'capital city of knowledge and culture', according to a recent slogan, is proving to be a case of how branding can literally build a new economic reality into being, by means of industries whose products and services are located primarily in the electronic realm. Sassen (2000) has drawn attention to Berlin's strong participation in an international 'network that has to do with culture and the so-called "new content industries"' of multimedia etc. (p. 18). The work of urban geographer Stefan Krätke (2003) demonstrates such a thesis: he refers to Berlin as the 'city of talents', advocating this phrase as a 'new urban *marketing formula*' for the capital, one that builds on Berlin's accepted strengths (p. 1). These building blocks are contained within the 'knowledge economy' (Cooke, 2002) for which Berlin is so famous: namely, the '*culture and media industries ... the software industry ... and the life-sciences sector*' (Krätke, 2003: 7). Even after the recession of the New Economy after 9/11, this is not mere wishful thinking, particularly as far as the first area of strength is concerned. Berlin boasts at least 7000 firms in cultural and media production – and, additionally, 1700 software companies, as well as 300 in biotechnology and medical engineering (pp. 7, 16). (Nor is the power of cultural capital limited to high-tech ventures, of course: witness Berlin's 150 theaters, 160 museums, three opera houses, and 880 choirs.) Hence, despite being a third-tier global city, Berlin actually ranks as a first-tier 'global *media city*', according to Krätke's ranking of cities according to their level of networked media company clusters, just as global cities are typically defined by their level of advanced producer services (p. 9; see also Cooke, 2002: 130–56).



Intriguingly, in this realm, locality and virtuality go hand in hand. As Krätke (2002) demonstrates in another study of multimedia-company clustering, there is a strong interrelationship between the product-services of such companies and their location within the trendy, gentrified parts of former East Berlin, and even at sites along the former Wall. The Chausseestraße area in Mitte, in particular, has attracted a strong presence of multimedia firms and has gained the epithet 'Silicon Alley'. Such areas of the city become wholly part of such companies' brand image, and the firms, in turn, are interdependent on one another's proximity in these shared arenas in order to build up a networked "space of opportunities" (Krätke, 2003: 8). A certain synergy between local urban identities and globalization can thus be witnessed in the way these multimedia company clusters serve as 'local nodes' within the global network of media corporations (p. 8). As Sassen (2003) has argued, these days there is an important 'imbrication' between the local and the global: the former can serve as a "microenvironment with global span" insofar as it is deeply internetworked' (p. 20). And just as precisely a city like Berlin, with its high degree of cultural capital, is needed for such companies to flourish, so too is the activity of such enterprises helping to create a 'new idea of ... urbanity' (Sassen, 2000: 19).

In particular, the presence, since 2001, of the world's largest record company, Universal Music Group, in a converted warehouse (first built in 1928 for food refrigeration purposes) next to the Oberbaumbrücke, is part of a synaesthetic 'clustering'-transformation of that entire area of dead docklands once adjacent to the Wall. While London's financial center has been effectively moved eastwards by the 1980s development of Canary Wharf out of once-deserted docks, Berlin's plans for the Osthafen area are perhaps no less ambitious. Universal's relocation led MTV Deutschland to move from Munich to a nearby Osthafen warehouse in 2004; the music TV station Viva is set to follow suit. The 'media-spree' project at the newly named Oberbaum City, just north and east of the Oberbaumbrücke, has created an entire media/IT-area out of the former Osram electric company's headquarters from a hundred years ago. Its most symbolic building is an office tower, a former light-bulb factory built in 1907 that now presents a new glass façade and five additional storeys. It stands as an impressive architectural merger of Berlin's Wilhelmine manufacturing glory days and the hopes of wedding the New Berlin to the New Economy (Figure 5).

The New Berlin's chances of success, in its ongoing re-formation as a global capital participating in the virtual industries of today, can be said to revolve around the notion of whether Berlin ultimately succeeds in identifying the 'ghost of a better future' over the ghostly memories of its past. This is Bloch's phrase of 1932 as he ploughed the metaphor of Berlin's unfinished condition and "newly constructed" feel' into his vision of an improved German democratic landscape, hoping in vain for better things beyond the stock market crash, economic depression, and rising unemployment that ultimately led German voters to Hitler (Bloch, 1998[1932]: 370). Certainly, one can ponder the degree to which Bloch's assessment of modern Berlin's fertile mutability has been overtaken by more recent takes on Berlin's postmodern condition as



**Figure 5** Office tower at the new Oberbaum City, near the Oberbaumbrücke, (East) Berlin. Renovation and extension by Schweger & Partner (2000); original building by Theodor Kampffmeyer (1907).  
© Copyright Janet Ward.

an overrated Humpty-Dumpty that is beyond repair to its former condition. Bloch's words can nonetheless provide a conceptual bridge that optimistically links the old Berlin, in its world-city function of modernity, with the televisual New Berlin as it assumes a different role for the 21st century:

This unreal Berlin, in the humor of its emptiness and the seriousness of its mutability ['Beweglichkeit'], is one of the most genuine of all cities accursed and elected to existence in these times ... This city's mutability ['Wendigkeit'] makes it a site of least resistance to turning points ['Wende'] – the ones that truly bring change – and to the renovation of the world ... Other cities are often mere ghosts of a better past; hollow Berlin is possibly – there is no choice – the ghost of a better future. (Bloch, 1998[1932]: 371; 1965: 419)

Berlin's better future may well have been more accurately assessed by its boosters than the city's current climate of economic doom would suggest. A leading global-city status may be far off at this stage, but it should be recalled that such ranking really can be artificially created: after all, Frankfurt am Main of the immediate post-Second World War era was the focus of a carefully controlled and hyped urbanization program, one that sought to prove that city's world-metropolitan status to the outside world. Frankfurt as a global city is but an export product of the Marshall Plan, having served as an *insta-fix* for the postwar West German democratic economy, optimally linked to the world via its stock exchange, trade fairs, road and rail connections, and airport hub for Lufthansa. If the next generation of Berliners is lucky, the virtual reality might just stick in a similar way. The city as Schopenhauerian *Wille und Vorstellung*, indeed.

## Notes

1. This essay is drawn from my current book project, *Berlin Borders: Building the Post-Wall Metropolis*.
2. Major Berlin boosters include: Volker Hassemer, former CDU Urban Development senator for Berlin, and founder of the marketing company Partner für Berlin; Wolfgang Nagel, former SPD Building senator for Berlin, now a private real estate developer; Hans Stimmann (SPD), Berlin's Director of Urban Planning from 1991 to 1996, and again from 1999 to the present day (with the additional title of State Secretary); architectural critic Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, who with IBA-architect Josef Paul Kleihues influenced Stimmann's strict views on building and zoning codes, with an eye toward the 'Critical Reconstruction' of the city's pre-Second World War footprint and urban block appearance; and Peter Strieder, former SPD-head and Building senator in Berlin.

## References

- Beaverstock, J.V., Taylor, P.J. and Smith, R.G. (1999) 'A Roster of World Cities', *Cities* 16(6): 445–58.
- Berliner Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und der Industrie- und Handelskammer zu Berlin, ed. (2001) *Bürostandort Berlin – Strukturen und Perspektiven bis 2010*. Berlin: Regioverlag.
- Bloch, Ernst (1998[1932]) 'Berlin, as Viewed from the Landscape', in Andrew Joron et al. (trans.) *Literary Essays*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bloch, Ernst (1965[1932]) 'Berlin aus der Landschaft gesehen', *Literarische Aufsätze*, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 9. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Cochrane, Allan, and Jonas, Andrew (1999) 'Reimagining Berlin: World City, National Capital or Ordinary Place?', *European Urban and Regional Studies* 6(2): 145–64.
- Cooke, Philip (2002) *Knowledge Economies: Clusters, Learning and Cooperative Advantage*. New York: Routledge.
- Floeting, Holger (2000) 'Virtual Cities?! – Telematics and Spatial Development', *Occasional Papers*. Berlin: Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik.
- Gallis, Michael and Russell, James S. (2002) 'World City: Why Globalization Makes Cities More Important than Ever', *Architectural Record* 3: 70–3.
- Hagel, Markus (2002) 'Mal eben nach Siberien – ohne Umsteigen', *scheinschlag* 11: 16.
- Harvey, David (2000[1989]) 'From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism', in Malcolm Miles, Tim

- Hall and Iain Borden (eds) *The City Cultures Reader*. New York: Routledge. (Originally published in *Geografiska Annaler* 71(1): 3–18.)
- Helm, Jutta A. (1998) 'Introduction: German Cities between Globalization and Unification', *German Politics and Society* 16(4): 7–17.
- Hise, Greg (1999) *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Huyssen, Andreas (2003[1997]) 'The Voids of Berlin', in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kohl, Sybil, Oswald, Philipp and Schäfer, Albrecht (2003) *Architektur-Stadtführer Ostdeutschland*. Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König.
- Krätke, Stefan (2002) *Medienstadt. Urbane Cluster und globale Zentren der Kulturproduktion*. Opladen: Leske & Budrich.
- Krätke, Stefan (2003) 'City of Talents? Berlin's Regional Economy, Socio-Spatial Fabric and "Worst Practice" Urban Governance', [<http://home.t-online.de/home/320024190425/Kraetke/index.html>], accessed 11 August.
- Lehrer, Ute (2000) 'Zitadelle Innenstadt: Bilderproduktion und Potsdamer Platz', in Albert Scharenberg (ed.) *Berlin: Global City oder Konkursmasse? Eine Zwischenbilanz zehn Jahre nach dem Mauerfall*. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag.
- Marcuse, Peter (1998) 'Reflections on Berlin: The Meaning of Construction and the Construction of Meaning', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22(2): 331–8.
- Mitchell, William J. (1995) *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mumford, Lewis (1989[1961]) *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co.
- Ohler, Norman (2001) *Mitte*. Berlin: Rowohlt.
- Rada, Uwe (1997) *Hauptstadt der Verdrängung: Berliner Zukunft zwischen Kiez und Metropole*. Berlin: Verlag Schwarze Risse.
- Rheingold, Howard (1994) *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerised World*. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Robins, Kevin (1996) *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*. London: Routledge.
- Sassen, Saskia (1991) *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sassen, Saskia (1996) *Metropolen des Weltmarkts. Die neue Rolle der Global Cities*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag.
- Sassen, Saskia (2000) 'Ausgrabungen in der "Global City"', in Albert Scharenberg (ed.) *Berlin: Global City oder Konkursmasse? Eine Zwischenbilanz zehn Jahre nach dem Mauerfall*. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag.
- Sassen, Saskia (2003) 'Reading the City in a Global Digital Age', in Linda Krause and Patrice Petro (eds) *Global Cities: Cinema, Architecture, and Urbanism in a Digital Age*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Scheffler, Karl (1989[1910]) *Berlin – Ein Stadtschicksal*. Berlin: Fannei & Walz.
- Stimmann, Hans, ed. (2002) *Vom Plan zum Bauwerk. Bauten in der Berliner Innenstadt nach 2000*. Berlin: Verlagshaus Braun.
- Strom, Elizabeth A. (2001) *Building the New Berlin: The Politics of Urban Development in Germany's Capital City*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Tykwer, Tom, dir. (1999) *Lola rennt*. Released as *Run Lola Run* (2001). Columbia / Tristar.
- Virilio, Paul (1998[1984]) 'The Overexposed City', in K. Michael Hays (ed.) *Architecture Theory since 1968*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Reprinted from *Zone* 1–2 (1986), trans. Astrid Hustvedt. New York: Urzone. (Originally 'La ville surexposée', in *L'Espace critique*. Paris: Christian Bourgeois.)

- Wegener, Michael, Kunzmann, Klaus R., and Spiekermann, Klaus (1994) 'Wachsendes Europa – schrumpfender Kontinent', *arch+* 122: 238–43.
- Wowereit, Klaus (2002) speech cited in *BerlinBrief* 10. [info@berlin-partner.de]
- Wrobel, David M. (2002) *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1999) 'Wer naiv fragt, wird schockiert. Fragen wir also naiv!' *Die Zeit* 50, 9 December: 61.

**Janet Ward** is Associate Professor of History and Director of Interdisciplinary Programs at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. She researches and teaches urban studies, visual culture, European modernity, and Holocaust representation, and is the author of *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (University of California Press, 2001). The title of her current book in progress is *Berlin Borders: Building the Post-Wall Metropolis*.

**Address:** Department of History, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 4505 Maryland Parkway, Box 455020, Las Vegas, NV 89154-5020, USA. [email: janet.ward@ccmail.nevada.edu]