

Architecture as a Medium of American Cultural Diplomacy

*Architecture as a Medium of American Cultural Diplomacy
between the Second World War and the Cold War*

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This essay introduces the Habilitation project in the field of art and architectural history that I began in the summer of 2013. It presents the topic and goals of the project and outlines its structure; in addition, it describes some of the challenges that I face as I carry out my research and attempt to formulate conclusions from it.

The project reflects my ongoing interest in the relationship between architecture and politics. Here architecture is conceived as a powerful tool for the shaping of society and the achievement of social and political ends; the products of design thought and work are understood not merely as material constructions housing certain functions, but as media of communication, representation, persuasion and control. These kinds of interests also informed the doctoral dissertation that I completed at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts in 2011.¹ It focused on the post-war reconstruction of the destroyed Romanesque churches of Cologne, a decades-long process which I presented and analyzed as a form of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or "mastering the past". The current project grows out of this earlier work: as I discovered in my dissertation research, the reconstruction of one of Cologne's iconic churches was actively supported and promoted as well as partially financed by the United States government, for political reasons of its own. This involvement by the Americans was previously little known and immediately caught my attention, leading me to want to explore the U.S. government's broader use of architecture as a medium for achieving its cultural-political aims in Germany and Europe after the Second World War.

Foremost among these cultural-political aims were the denazification and democratization of Germany and its (re)integration into the Western community of nations – as moral as well as economic and military ends in themselves, but also as aspects of the Cold War effort to contain

¹ Johanna Blokker, *(Re)Constructing Identity: World War II and the Reconstruction of Cologne's Destroyed Romanesque Churches, 1945-1985* (Ann Arbor MI: UMI/Proquest, 2012).

the spread of Communism from the East. It may at first seem far-fetched to suggest that architecture could play a role in such major international geo-political questions, but in fact this role – and that of the fine arts and of culture in the broadest sense – was significant, and it was taken very seriously by the political and military leadership of both East and West. The postwar struggle for the future of Germany and Europe was, after all, a battle of cultures, and from the beginning it was largely fought with cultural means. Indeed, architecture was deployed consciously and explicitly by both sides as a "weapon" in this battle: in American government circles it formed an integral part of a so-called "cultural offensive" which aimed at winning the hearts and minds of Germany's population to the idea of their past history and future destiny as part of the democratic West. Already planned during the war years, this offensive was powered by the belief that shared cultural traditions and values – including those manifested in the arts – represented the strongest link between Germany and the West, and that the arts could thus be an effective medium for reforming Germany along Western lines and cementing its political allegiance.

The American "cultural offensive" was implemented in a limited way in the first years after 1945, then steadily intensified and expanded through the late 1940s and into the 1950s as tensions with the Soviet Union increased. Architecture was deployed in all its dimensions: historical, aesthetic, and functional. First, the evocation and confirmation of the associations attached to the great monuments of Germany's past (among them the Romanesque churches of Cologne) could serve to highlight the history, traditions and values that this country shared in common with its Western occupiers. Second, architectural design and the language of form could be used to exert influence: the supposedly "democratic" and "progressive" character attributed to the Modernist idiom in particular, with its qualities of rationality, flexibility and transparency, could embody these values and model them for German society, especially when employed in highly representative buildings such as embassies and U.S. Information Centers. Third – less spectacularly but equally importantly – architecture could provide a setting for the pursuit of various other elements of the cultural offensive, such as the reform of Germany's political and educational system. Thus the United States supported the

construction of numerous schools, universities, community centers and related facilities throughout Germany.

The aim of my habilitation project is to examine this larger American cultural offensive and to discover the role that was assigned to and played by architecture within it. A few of the buildings that will be invoked as examples are well-known: they include the U.S. Information Centers or *Amerika-Häuser*, the American Memorial Library (*Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek*) in Berlin, the Berlin Congress Hall, and the American embassy buildings erected in various German cities in the 1950s. All of these projects have been the focus of in-depth studies over the years.² Many other examples, however, are less familiar or are completely unknown: here in Bamberg, for example, it has largely been forgotten that the successful postwar effort to restore the Dominican monastery church and convert it into a cultural centre and concert hall for the Bamberg Symphony (*Kulturraum*) was made possible in part through American financial support.³ My research will fill in this and many other gaps in the scholarship; it will also generate a synthesis of the results of earlier studies on individual buildings or building types in order to reveal how these various initiatives together composed the larger American postwar/Cold War project.

Basic to my investigation are questions concerning the kinds of architectural initiatives that the American government undertook in Germany, the ends they were intended to serve, the design means used, and the results achieved. My research so far suggests that the answers to these questions are various and at times surprising, and that together they can

² On the *Amerika-Häuser*, see Gabriele G. E. Paulix, *Das Amerika-Haus als Bauaufgabe der Nachkriegszeit in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2012), and Sonja Schöttler, Stephanie Lieb et al., *Funktionale Eloquenz: Das Kölner Amerika-Haus und die Kulturinstitute der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika in Deutschland* (Worms: Wernerische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2011). On the American Memorial Library, see Fritz Moser, *Ein Denkmal freiheitlichen Geistes* (Berlin: Hartmann, 1964). On the Congress Hall, see Steffen De Rudder, *Der Architekt Hugh Stubbins. Amerikanische Moderne der fünfziger Jahre in Berlin* (Berlin: Jovis-Verlag, 2007), and Barbara Miller Lane, "The Berlin Congress Hall, 1955-57", in *Perspectives in American History* new series vol. 1 (1984): 131-185. On United States embassies in Germany, see Jane C. Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011).

³ See Johanna Blokker, „Architektur als Medium amerikanischer Kulturdiplomatie in Deutschland nach 1945: Die Dominikanerkirche in Bamberg“, forthcoming in an essay collection edited by Sabine Freitag and Gabriele Wiesemann.

tell us much about America's vision for a postwar world order. At the same time, it is quickly becoming clear to me how much more there is to the story: for the American vision for Germany was of course not one that could be imposed unilaterally. The German “subjects” of American cultural diplomacy had their own perspectives on Germany's postwar future, as well as their own agenda in the Cold War, and they actively transformed the American programme as they received, interpreted and realized it. Indeed, the majority of the buildings to be discussed in the study were not designed or built by Americans; rather, the U.S. authorities typically set priorities and defined goals and objectives, then left it to local Germans to realize them in architectonic form. To account fully for the character and significance of the architecture produced in the context of the American cultural offensive, therefore, my project must also examine the German discourses involved, as well as the motivations and influences operating at the local level.

The intersection and interaction of politics and design, together with their ideological and social dimensions, means that my approach is necessarily interdisciplinary; my objective is in fact an interweaving of 20th-century history with architectural historiography. In what follows, I will outline the structure of the project and offer some indications as to the content to be handled in each of the chapters and sub-chapters.

Chapter outline

Following a brief chapter of introduction, the main body of the project will begin with a chapter establishing its conceptual and historical framework. This chapter (Ch. 1) will describe the historical context, present the main lines of argument, and identify the goals and the methods to be used in reaching them. The study will then proceed chronologically, following the major phases of historical development in political and cultural relations among the United States, Germany and the Soviet Union, up until the end of the "cultural offensive" in the mid-1960s:

Ch. 2: Germany under occupation (1945-1949)

Ch. 3: The HICOG years (1949-1955)

Ch. 4: The Eisenhower / Adenauer / Khrushchev Years (1955-1965)

Within each chapter, the focus will first of all be placed on the main actors involved – that is, the responsible U.S. government agencies and their German partners – in order to reveal the motivations and positions in play. Attention will next be given to the programmes developed by these actors, in order to access policy and objectives; and then to a selection of case studies in order to discover and illustrate how these motivations, policies and objectives were realized in architectural form. The main body of the study will close with a chapter of conclusions (Ch. 5), which will then be followed by a catalogue of American-sponsored projects (Appendix) that includes data on projects not dealt with in detail in the case studies.⁴

From this brief outline it will be clear that in scope and scale, the habilitation project is very ambitious, and indeed the danger of it growing unmanageably large exists: some of the existing in-depth studies mentioned above dedicate several hundred pages to a single programme (e.g. the *Amerika-Häuser* or the U.S. embassy buildings) or even to a single case study (e.g. the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* in Ulm). Thus it will be essential to remain focused on the primary goal, which is to gain an overall view of the role of architecture as a dimension of American cultural diplomacy in Germany during the initial decades after 1945. It will be necessary, in other words, to sacrifice depth in order to present this view in its full breadth – while at the same time avoiding the opposite danger of superficiality. This will be the original contribution that the project will make to the scholarship: it will draw the connections that will create this broad view, not least by filling in the elements that have been missing so far.

Chapter contents

Ch. 1. Conceptual and historical framework

This chapter will begin with a section on the concept of “cultural diplomacy” as it had developed in the United States by the close of the Sec-

⁴ The generation of this catalogue will be the topic of one or more Master's theses to be completed by students in the Master's Program in Heritage Conservation at the University of Bamberg. It will likely not form part of the habilitation project proper, but will appear as an appendix to the published version.

ond World War. The goals of American cultural diplomacy in general – i.e. as regards the United States' position in the world – will be discussed, as will the specific policies and strategies developed in relation to Germany. Two aims in particular will be highlighted as central to American strategy in Germany after 1945: namely, “reorientation” and “reintegration”. The first of these was centred on assisting Germany to reform and change, in part by following America's example but above all by rediscovering and recommitting to the democratic values in its own (lapsed) tradition. This was connected to the second aim, which was to reintegrate Germany into the Western community of nations, and at the same time to secure its economic, political and military allegiance to the West – an aim that became ever more important to the United States as tensions with the Soviet Union grew. Both efforts found their counterparts in the German discourses of “rechristianization” (*Rechristianisierung*) and “Western integration” (*Westbindung*) that were pursued by the reconstituted CDU under the leadership of Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of the Federal Republic after 1949.

The chapter will then go on to introduce the role assigned to culture, and in particular to architecture, in pursuing reorientation / *Rechristianisierung* and reintegration / *Westbindung*. The exploitation of culture by both Americans and Germans as a consensus-building figure, as an area of common ground between former enemies, will be indicated: this includes its use as an argument for the “true” character of Germany as a *Kulturnation* – the society that produced Goethe, Kant and Beethoven – and as evidence for the shared history and common destiny of Germany and the other nations of Europe and the West. This in turn will open a discussion of culture as a weapon in the Cold War: as a medium deployed by governments in both the East and the West to represent and make arguments about the superiority of their respective systems and points of view.

Having thus established the basic conceptual and historical framework of the study, I will then proceed with my examination of the three broad temporal phases of U.S.-German-Soviet cultural relations, the actors and programmes involved and the case studies that I have selected to illustrate the dynamics of the American cultural offensive.

Ch. 2. Germany under occupation (1945-1949): Architecture in the reform of society and politics

The years immediately following Germany's military defeat by the Allied forces saw the country divided into four occupation zones controlled by four different powers, each with its own priorities and its own vision of how to rebuild and reform. On the American side, cultural-diplomatic goals were pursued through the medium of architecture by several different agencies, including the Monuments and Fine Arts Division (MFA&A) of the U.S. Army, popularly known as the "Monuments Men".⁵ This was a corps of approximately eighty officers and enlisted men specially selected from both the American and British armed forces for their museum experience and their background in art history. Their mandate was to accompany the advancing armies into conquered territory and to carry out emergency measures for the protection and consolidation of the works of art and the historic monuments that they encountered there. The rationale behind this effort was complex, but one of its guiding ideas was that the great works of architecture of the past would be needed as a resource for the planned reorientation and reintegration effort, both as models of achievement and virtue, and as manifestations of the long tradition of common values binding Germany to the other nations of Europe.

Another agency which used architecture to further the cultural-diplomatic goals of the United States was the Education and Cultural Relations Division (E&CR) within the Office of Military Government (OMGUS). As its name suggests, the E&CR was the primary agency for cultural contact and exchange between the American occupation forces and the German public, and many of its activities were concerned with the arts, including architecture. Its main objective, as described by one insider, was "through the arts and through cultural activities to try to induce a more liberal temper in the German mind, and a greater sense of international solidarity and of international obligation".⁶ One of the ways it did this was by organizing exchanges of students and profession-

⁵ See Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (New York: Knopf, 1994).

⁶ William George Constable in a lecture entitled "The German Problem" (Feb. 1950), in Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Washington DC, William George Constable Collection, microfilm roll 3073, frames 0463 ff.

als as well as recognized “experts” in various fields.⁷ Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius, who had fled Germany for the United States in the 1930s, was one such expert; in 1947 he was invited to return to his homeland to give advice on how to begin building “democratic” homes, offices and factories for the German people, as part of the larger project of reorientation.⁸

Parallel efforts were also being pursued, though on a smaller scale, by the other Western Allies in their own occupation zones, and these will also be evoked in this chapter: the role assigned to architecture in the British “Reconstruction” effort, in the French “*mission civilisatrice*”, and in the Soviet Union’s “*antifaschistisch-demokratische Umgestaltung*” of eastern German society will be compared and contrasted to its use in American “reorientation”. The internal German discourse on architecture’s role in the reform process, a discourse which was extremely lively, contradictory and complex, will also form a constant counterpoint to the examination of these external efforts.

Ch. 3. The HICOG years (1949-1955): Reorientation and reintegration through architecture

With the formation of the new Federal Republic under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in 1949, Germany made the transition from a state of military occupation by the four Western powers to one of civilian administration and oversight within the framework of the Allied High Commission. The American arm of this body, the U.S. High Commission for Germany (HICOG), took up and continued the “cultural offensive” begun under OMGUS; now, however, the emphasis began to shift from “reorientation” to “reintegration”, as the U.S. strove to win Germany’s allegiance to the West in the developing struggle against the new common enemy in the East, the Soviet Union. The fight for German hearts and minds took on ever greater urgency as the Truman Administration grappled with a new series of communist expansion efforts, not only in Germany with the Berlin Crisis of 1948-49, but also in China and in

⁷ See Greg Castillo, “Design Pedagogy Enters the Cold War: The Reeducation of Eleven West German Architects”, in *Journal of Architectural Education* 57 / 4 (May 2004): 10-18.

⁸ See Friedhelm Fischer, “German Reconstruction as an International Activity”, in *Rebuilding Europe’s Bombed Cities*, ed. Jeffrey M. Diefendorf (London and New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990): 131-144.

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Korea, where a “hot” war between the Chinese- and Soviet-backed North and the United Nations- and American-backed South broke out in 1950. In this context, the American cultural offensive in Germany developed as a component of the Truman Administration’s “rollback” policy which aimed at pushing the Soviets out of the country by undermining their influence and credibility among the people of the newly-formed German Democratic Republic. Pursued by peaceful means rather than – as in Korea – using military force, this effort was now led by the State Department, which set to work developing a broad range of strategies in what would soon amount to a full-scale “cultural Cold War”.⁹ Among these strategies were the public exhibitions and trade fairs that offered Germans from both East and West a vision of life in a modern capitalist democracy: the Constructa Building Exhibition held in Hanover in 1951, for example, featured the latest in reconstruction technology and architectural design from the U.S. and its Western allies. Meanwhile in Berlin, the State-Department-financed Marshall House Pavilion (Otto Grimme, 1950) not only served as a setting for displays of Western culture, but was itself a model of “democratic” International Style design – and one that contrasted sharply and self-consciously with the examples of Socialist Realist architecture being built in the eastern half of the city. The same was true of the series of consular headquarters built by the State Department’s Foreign Buildings Office beginning in 1952: designed by SOM (Skidmore Owings & Merrill), the preeminent commercial architecture firm in America, the consulates were intended to evoke the virtues and advantages of enlightened capitalism and to contrast with the “pretentious classicism of official Soviet architecture abroad”.¹⁰ The cultural offensive was of course also a major priority for the American civilian administration “in country”, the U.S. High Commission for Germany, with Commissioner John J. McCloy at its head. Upon taking up his appointment in 1949, McCloy immediately ordered the creation of a new Office of Public Affairs (OPA), a “vast indoctrination unit”¹¹

⁹ See Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War. The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2000), and Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabben-dam, eds., *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-60* (London: Cass, 2003).

¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Architecture Abroad. Modern Design at its Best Now Represents this Country in Foreign Lands”, in *The Architectural Forum* 3 (1953), p. 102.

¹¹ The phrase “vast indoctrination unit” was used to describe the OPA in the *New York Times* in July 1949. See Thomas Alan Schwartz, “Reeducation and Democracy: The Policies of the United States High Commission in Germany”, in *America and the Shaping of*

with significant powers and an annual budget of nearly US \$50 million to spend on what was described as “a Marshall Plan in cultural matters”.¹² Architecture and construction were to be major components of this plan: over the years of HICOG's mandate, almost 500 building projects were completed with American backing and support in towns and cities throughout Germany – among them the American Memorial Library in Berlin and the restoration of the churches in Cologne and Bamberg mentioned above. In this chapter of the habilitation project, other products of this large-scale but little-known effort – schools, universities, community centres, hospitals and other public welfare facilities – will be investigated and described, thus filling a significant gap in the scholarship.

Ch. 4. The Eisenhower / Adenauer / Khrushchev Years (1955-ca. 1965)

This chapter will focus on the decade that followed the granting of full sovereignty to the Federal Republic of Germany under the terms of the Bonn-Paris Conventions of 1955. These years saw a hardening of positions in Europe: West Germany was admitted to NATO, thus binding it firmly into the Western military alliance, while in the East the Warsaw Pact was formed; within a few short years, the U.S. also began to shift its “rollback” policy towards one of “containment” – a move that was mirrored by the authorities in the East, who in 1961 began construction of the Berlin Wall. They were also years decisively shaped by the personalities and convictions of the three principal political leaders involved: President Eisenhower (1953-1961), Chancellor Adenauer (1949-1963), and First Secretary Khrushchev (1953-64).

Both these personal factors and broader political developments were reflected in American strategy with regard to culture and architecture in Germany. Already in the lead-up to sovereignty in 1955, the HICOG

German Society, ed. Michael Ermarth (Providence, RI and Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 38 and 40-41.

¹² Roger H. Wells, Chief Historian of the Historical Division, Office of the Executive Secretary, HICOG, in the “Preface” to J. F. J. Gillen, *The Special Projects Program of the Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany* (Bad Godesberg and Mehlem: HICOG, 1952), p. i.

administration had begun to be dismantled and its existing programmes brought to a close, including those of the OPA. The OPA's functions did not simply disappear, however: rather, they were taken over by other government agencies, including the new United States Information Agency (USIA) and its cultural arm, the United States Information Service (USIS). Like the new Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the USIA was now responsible directly to the President – clear evidence of the continuing importance of cultural diplomacy to the realization of American interests at the highest level. One of its most visible undertakings was the *Amerika-Haus* programme, which will form the focus of a subsection in this chapter. Initiated under OMGUS and continued through the HICOG years, this programme saw the establishment of “U.S. Information Centers”, as they were formally known, in dozens of towns and cities throughout Germany. Here locals could access books and magazines on the American political and economic system and way of life, as well as listen to records, attend lectures and classes and watch American films specially chosen for their reorientation value.¹³ These earliest Information Centers had been set up in existing buildings, but as the Cold War heated up after 1949, plans had been developed to create purpose-built structures in which the design of each *Amerika-Haus* would itself become part of the expression of the ideals promoted within: they would be modern, forward-looking, rational and transparent – just like the government and society of the new democratic Federal Republic was intended to be. The first such purpose-built structure, the *Amerika-Haus Ruhr* in Essen, was opened in 1952, and five of the seven *Amerika-Häuser* that were built by 1961 still stand today. Promoted by the U.S. and designed by mixed German-American teams of architects, they bear witness to America's sense of its leadership role in the world and to Germany's hopes for its own future as America's ally and a valued member of the international community in its own right.

Likewise still standing and still enjoying a high profile as a symbol of friendship between America and Germany is the Congress Hall (now *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*), located just a few hundred metres to the west of the Bundestag in the centre of Berlin.¹⁴ Its construction was again an initiative of the State Department, and more specifically of Eleanor Dulles, the Department's representative in Berlin and the sister

¹³ See note 2 above.

¹⁴ See note 2 above.

of then-Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (as well as CIA Director Allan Dulles). Designed by American architect Hugh Stubbins, a former partner of Walter Gropius in Cambridge, the Congress Hall was completed in 1957 as part of the larger International Building Exhibition (*Internationale Bauausstellung* or InterBau) organized in the divided capital in that year. The discussion of the Congress Hall in my study will thus be embedded within a subsection on InterBau as another major assault in the U.S. cultural offensive and a further attempt to convince the populations of both East and West Germany of the superiority of the Western system and Western values.

A further subsection in this chapter will introduce the initiative to establish an American-style university in Berlin. The Free University (*Freie Universität Berlin* or FUB) was developed and built with the support of the Ford Foundation, and as such is an important example of private engagement in the cultural offensive and private cooperation with government agencies in the furthering of America's Cold War aims in Germany.¹⁵ Other examples include the Academy of Fine Arts (*Akademie der Künste*) in Berlin, financed by Detroit industrialist and philanthropist Henry E. Reichhold.¹⁶

The last blows in the “cultural Cold War” in Germany were exchanged in the early 1960s. After about 1965, an architectural stalemate set in: the long-term division of Germany became a more or less accepted fact, and the U.S. no longer invested on a large scale in building programs designed to win German hearts and minds, but rather was content to defend and maintain the *status quo*. Its active attention and the main focus of its efforts in the cultural offensive against Communism now shifted to other theatres of the Cold War, such as Cuba and Vietnam.

Ch. 5. Conclusions

The habilitation project will close with a chapter that brings together the primary insights gained in the course of the study and attempts to synthesize some broad conclusions about America's use of architecture as a medium of cultural diplomacy in Germany after 1945. In it, I will take a

¹⁵ See Jessica Hoffmann, Helena Seidel and Nils Baratella, eds. *Geschichte der Freien Universität Berlin. Ereignisse – Orte – Personen* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2008).

¹⁶ See Hans Gerhard Hannesen, *Die Akademie der Künste in Berlin. Facetten einer 300jährigen Geschichte* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2005).

position on the importance of these efforts in shaping the character of the Cold War conflict; I will also make suggestions as to their role in producing the political culture of Germany as we know it today and the unique American-German relationship in the latter half of the 20th century. Partly on this basis, I will also introduce arguments for the “heritage value” (*Denkmalwert*) of buildings erected in Germany with the moral and financial support of the U.S. – many of which are currently unrecognized and therefore face the threat of irrevocable change or demolition – and thus compelling and reliable grounds for their preservation. And finally, I will point to architecture's ongoing role in American cultural diplomatic policy and practice and will offer some thoughts on the usefulness of this medium in the pursuit and achievement of political goals.

Appendix

The published version of the study will include an appendix of American-backed and American-financed buildings constructed in West Germany from 1945 to 1965. It is planned that, pending the procurement of appropriate funding and partners, this material should provide the basis for a museum exhibition on the theme of the habilitation project.

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