

## The green hills of rubble in black and white

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### Abstract

When Edmund, the child star of *Germania Anno Zero*, crosses Voßstrasse to sell the faded relics to American soldiers visiting the ruined building of the new Reich Chancellery in the summer of 1948, the area around Potsdamer Platz, though still recognizable, is invaded by debris caused by the destruction of Allied bombing and all shots and tracking shots that Roberto Rossellini has handed down of the German capital are packed with these materials: ruins and rubble. Almost forty years later, Cassiel, an angel from *Der Himmel über Berlin* by Wim Wenders, accompanying the elderly poet who is unsuccessfully looking for Potsdamer Platz, crosses a vacant lot overgrown only by the fateful wall – that here saw its first line drawn on the ground – and a flyover. Where did the debris and the ruins of Berlin get to in the forty years that separate the two films? Potsdamer Platz where is it? Is it still possible that traces of the lost capital can be found anywhere and that pieces and fragments of the ruins as well have given, in spite of themselves, a new face to the geography of Berlin today? From these questions and from the story of the German mountains of debris, known as Trummerbergen, was conceived the topic for the research “Ruins, rubble and debris of the theaters of war: the problems of decontamination and disposal to the configuration of new landscapes”, that has been carried out by the research unit of the IUAV Architecture, Archaeology, landscape: theaters of war. The first results of such research will only be available in a year. Meanwhile, in this brief essay I’ll try to reconnect the threads of a story, also partially known, to explain the architectural interest of the topic.

*Keywords: architecture, ruins, debris, military archaeology in Germany, Berlin post war reconstruction.*



## 1 Introduction

Both the films dealing with Berlin rubble (Germania Anno Zero) and the one centered on its empty abandoned spaces (Der Himmel über Berlin), despite the time that divides them, are shot in black and white icy denouncing the dramatic state of suspension in which the German capital lived for a long time for the trauma of the loss of its own Urbis form. Of that austere, tragic and poignant two-color there is no trace in the city today, replaced by the new architectures of the greatest architects of the world, who have been reinventing the face of Berlin since the fifties, as well as by the green hills beneath which the mountains of debris lie.



Figure 1: From the top, still frame from Germania anno zero and from Der Himmel über Berlin.

## 2 Debris hills as symbol of a new urban landscape

The hills made from the rubble of war are, no doubt, a feature of many German cities and represent, in the contemporary story, one of the founding not only metaphorically but also for the role they play in the cities themselves through practical work redesign of the ground. What else, in the European cities has been hidden or at least silenced through the work of philological reconstruction of entire neighborhoods or the creation of new urban districts, in Germany it has generated a specific reference system within the city destroyed, even apart from plans reconstruction later developed. It almost seems that in Monaco, in Nuremberg, in Berlin and in the rest of German cities, the reconstruction had to find the contours of a new landscape, made of the same substance of the destroyed city, even before defining lots of new buildings and monuments of stone glass steel and concrete of today's cities. Sort of monuments of the city – where are celebrated martyrs and civilian and military casualties of World War II – the mountains of debris are now an amazing device for the detection and staging of a kind of the archaeological layer made of the architecture in ruins of the third Reich. But before that they form a proper system of structuring the environment since – except in rare cases where the hill was used as a dump for all kinds of waste in an uncontrolled manner – almost always it is possible to notice a transformation into a public park with paths, new plantings and small ponds; from a urban point of view then these hills have become, in many cases, the core around which new settlements are built. In Munich, for example, one of the four mountains of rubble, the Olympiaberg, built on the first aviation area of the city, has become the focus point around which to build a great neighborhood sports of the Olympics game in 1972. In Stuttgart the forty meter summit of the hill Birkenkopf, with fragments of cornices, columns and capitals in view between the lawn, become a panoramic terrace to overlook the romantic landscape of the city and the Neckar Valley. In Nuremberg, on the foundations of the Deutsches Stadium designed by Albert Speer stands the Silberbuch mountain and the polluted pond Silbersee exploiting the huge reservoir already



Figure 2: Contemporary views of debris mountains in Germany; on the top, Volkspark Friedrichshain in Berlin; bottom, Birkenkopf hill in Stuttgart.

completed during the war and the fatal theory of the ruins of Speer turns into prophecy by its architecture that today, at times, emerges from the undergrowth.

## 2.1 The Berlin choice

In Berlin, finally, there are now thirteen artificial hills produced by the accumulation of waste materials of war. At first sight the appearance of these hills is the result of an accidental landscape project, made possible thanks to the backbreaking and patient work of women (*trummerfrauen*) and unemployed people in the capital, who for more than twenty years selected, in the rubble of the city destroyed, the bricks and building materials that could be useful in new buildings from those which could only be taken to a landfill. These thirteen hills have completely transformed the landscape and in some places they have generated an unexpected orography. This is actually a vast operation of recycling and landscaping unplanned. As early as June 1945, in fact the office for landscape planning was founded in Berlin whose leader was the landscape architect Reinhold Lingner from 1945 to 1950, who introduced the concept of landscape in the city within Hans Scharoun's plan.

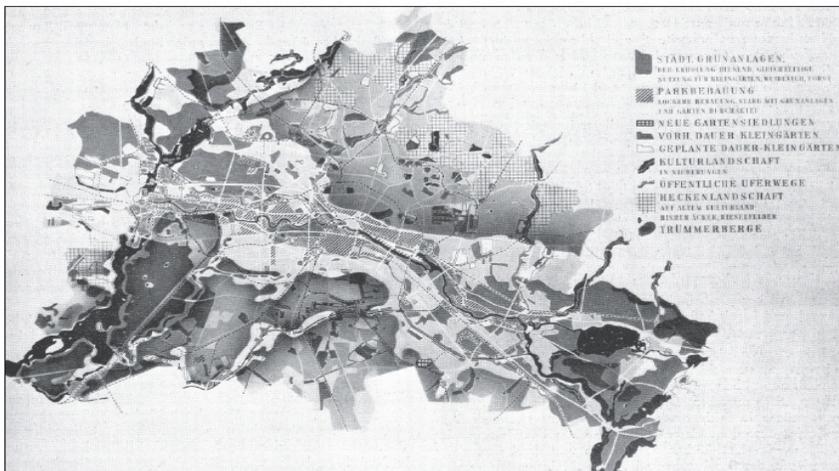


Figure 3: First localization of the debris hills in the Scharoun plan, drawing by Reinhold Lingner.

In the immediate postwar time, the German intellectuals just appointed by the occupants of Berlin, to organize the reconstruction, had to face the most difficult issues, and among them the one intended to translate into valuable operational tool to reconstruct the identity of the German cities destroyed by Allied bombing, the undoubted and widespread landscape sensitivity inherent in German culture from Romanticism onwards, and which under Nazism had assumed the aberrant result of the supremacy of the Aryan race through the *heimat* movement and the earth and blood ideology. It was, in other words, for

Sharoun, Lingner and the collective that flanked them, beyond the mere practical problems of cleaning of the rubble and of physical reconstruction of the city, a question of defining the new face of the German capital starting from a reinterpretation of the positive value of the identity between nature, landscape and the German people, overcoming issues of power and dominance of the myth of the Germanic race that in the projects for the fortifications (the Atlantic Wall, the urban fortifications), for Ordensburg and highways of the Third Reich, Fritz Todt, Alwin Seifert (leaders of the green wing of the Nazi Party) and their colleagues (Paul Schultze Naumburg to Albert Speer, Paul Bonatz etc.) expressed in projects through the link between technological innovation and industrial, elements taken from vernacular tradition and careful study for the inclusion of new infrastructure systems within the landscape of Germany. The draft of the hills of Berlin does not exempt from this attempt to subvert the negative value that environmental awareness had become under the Hitler regime; it becomes an instrument of obliteration of the traces of the architecture and urban planning in the Third Reich and at the same time the strategy to define the new *Imago Urbis* in some German cities and in the capital in particular. The project was also an immediate practical response to the immense problems that the military division of Berlin into four sectors occupied, has produced to the task of reconstruction.

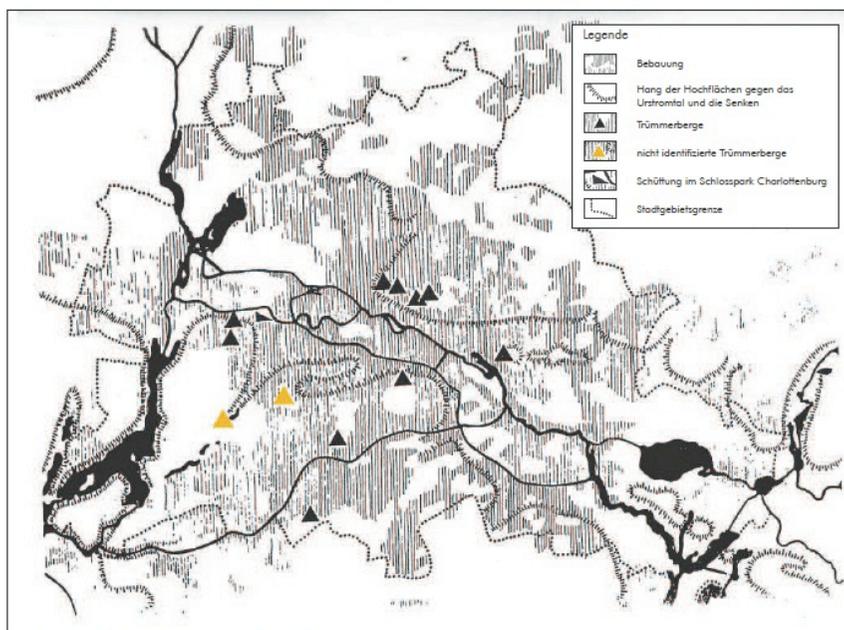


Figure 4: Final localization of the debris hills in Berlin, drawing by Reinhold Lingner.

Surely it would have been more logical to choose for these dump areas huge abandoned sites outside the city which for example could be ancient quarries etc. But its military division made it difficult to practice this solution, and the final decision was to favor central areas with specific geomorphological features that would allow a project of the storage of debris in shape of hills with no risk of polluting of the vast network of rivers and groundwater in Berlin. The current location so it is the result of different options: some arise in flat agricultural areas and have been turned into public parks after that the transfer to landfill had profoundly changed the profile – the case of Volkspark Prenzlauer berg before 1969 called Oderbruchkippe, and Dorferblick berg south of the district of Neukölln, whose name immediately conjures up a new condition for the look of the landscape adjacent, since from this high hill 86 meters you can enjoy the view of some villages; others arise in nineteenth-century public parks and their story has a lot to do with the desire to remove some of the buildings born from the will to power of Hitler's Germany. Some of these hills are also on the board the fateful wall and bind in a tangible way the transition of Berlin from city marked by the defeat to the new condition of hostage – this is the case of Rudower hohe and Dorferblick berg – while others are settled in the public parks of the former East Berlin – Humbolthohe to Humbolthain, Mont Klamott (with the large and the small mountain of bunkers) in the park of Friedrichshain and Prenzlauer Berg . Three other mountains of rubble arise around Tempelhof Airport – Insulaner berg, and Marienhöhe to southwest, Rixdorfer Höhe in the Hansenheide park to northeast. The presence of these hills also centrally located in the districts of East Berlin belies the assertion that these dumps of stone bricks and concrete iron glass can be attributed to the condition of isolation from the territory of Brandenburg, in which West Berlin had been living since 1961. At the time of construction of the wall, in fact, each sector of Berlin had already seen the rise of these artificial hills. Further indication that this was a deliberate choice dictated by the emergency and that apart from the case of the Tiergarten – where it was stocked, in the early years after the war, a large amount of debris to cover the ruins of the giant bunkers for anti-aircraft artillery, then in 1958 transferred to other location to allow the passage of the new metro area – these hill were placed in a context of urban redevelopment aimed at outlining a new *Imago Urbis* made of a different monumentality than the Hitler's dream translated in Berlin through the megalomaniac plan of its architect. An ecological monumentality, precisely – with Tobogganing and skiing, cycling and pedestrian paths – and at the same time able to produce a reflexive sense of intimacy and distance from the recent past. Around the value of landscape there are more complex issues and it become emblematic in this respect, for example for using the ecology key as anti-Nazi attempt to erase the sad memory of the third reich architecture, the case of the Trummerbergen in the Friedrichshain and Humboldthain parks and finally the story of Teufelberg in Grünewald, the highest and most famous mountain in Berlin. Of the first, labeled as the big Bunkerberg and small Bunkerberg and Humboldthöhe there is to say that arise at the point at which two of the six sets of artillery towers and command towers, in defense of allied bombing, were erected between 1940 and 1942, the third arose



in the Tiergarten park. These complexes, known by the name of the guns Flakturm placed on the roof terrace, were each made from real artillery tower 40 meters high and 70x70 feet in size and a control tower and command post at 300 meters – to avoid the smoke of artillery prevented the view – with the same height but reduced planimetric dimensions, 23x50 meters. Provided within a larger system of urban fortifications designed by Hitler with Speer, Todt and Tamms between 9 and 20 September 1940 to protect Berlin, Hamburg and Vienna, it was difficult to hypothesize their location within the dense urban fabric.



Figure 5: The bunker in the Volkpark Friedrichshain and the new hill Bunkerberg.

Therefore, the sites were chosen in the major public parks in Berlin, to build a kind of triangulation to defend the area around Potsdamer Platz, and they stood precisely where the new Chancellery and the ministries were situated, and the height of the towers was established to compensate, on a ground flat, for the height of the trees.

The initial sketch for the architecture of these buildings, the massive square or octagonal shape and with a vague character of medieval fortification, was the hand of the Führer and was then refined by Albert Speer while the entire section on technical issues and engineering was entrusted by Fritz Todt to Friedrich Tamms, the engineer of bridges and viaducts of the motorways of the Third Reich. Real counterpart of the Atlantic Wall even this kind of city fortification was most effective for propaganda purposes than for strategic defence and the reuse of the huge bunkers after the end of the war had been already planned for civilian purposes such as cultural centers, as documented in the preparation of the compartments for the windows and in some drawings of the elevations. Each tower had six floors.

The ground floor, in addition to containing deposits of ammunition was used for the air raid shelter of the civilian population, together with the first and second floor; the third and fourth were generally employed as hospitals and offices while top two floors were reserved exclusively for the soldiers. Inside the bunkers were also stored a large number of works of art, of which over four hundred were then dispersed as a result of the fire which suffered the Friedrichshain tower few days after the entry of the Russians in Berlin. Huge amounts of concrete and steel were used in these monolithic architectures and the economic cost reached as high figures even though for the labor were used the prisoners of concentration camps and deported into slavery. Although there was high demand immediately after the war to place hospitals and offices, allied commands took the decision of the destruction, especially for the towers of Berlin. Since this solution after several attempts failed (except in the case of the towers of the Tiergarten) and proved incredibly expensive it was decided to cover them and concealing them with debris of the bombed city, thus transforming them into green hills that we visit today. However, while the towers of the park Friedrichshain were completely buried one of the two towers Humboldthain, the one of the artillery was only partially destroyed, and stand up from the northern part of the hill top and has been transformed in recent times in a panoramic terrace while inside the hill itself becomes with the recovery of the space of the bunker the start of a walking tour through the underground archaeology of World War II and the Cold War, which among its most significant steps has the dense network of bunkers, tunnels and stations abandoned underground subway of the Potsdamer Platz.

### 3 Conclusion

The construction of these two new layers of soil, which have become symbols and museums en plein air and underground tour of Berlin on the twenty-first century, concerns even the Teufelberg, the hill of hell, which stands on the site



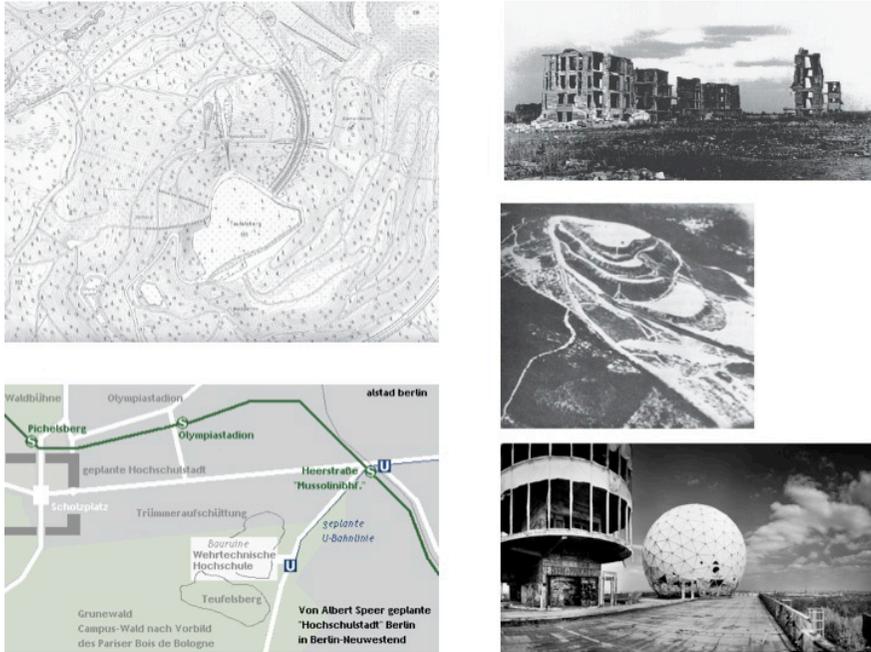


Figure 6: From top; map and picture of the Teufelsberg in the site of Grünewald, plan of the university campus by Albert Speer with the Teufelsberg location, view of the contemporary radar station.

where the College of Military Engineering was built planned by Albert Speer in the plan for the University campus, within the larger plan of Berlin, just inside the forest green of the capital. In this case, therefore, the hill includes and submerges the building of the maximum theoretical of the architecture designed to become a ruin and a new involuntary monument of the Cold War dominates from the 114 meters. This is the radar station with which the Americans used to spy on the Russians from the western enclave of Berlin between 1961 and 1989. In the form of a ruined building it also has become the destination to observe the continuous change of this city, finally no longer disputed, on which continues to rely once again the future of Europe. Kind of implicit project on which converge landscape features, new architectural forms and semantic and monumental values, the thirteen hills in Berlin affect us not only as a historical document and tourist route which has a certain aura, but as an alternative in the transformation of our cities starting from what we usually consider as the pars destruens of our task of architects.



Figure 7: Volkpark Humboldthain, views of the bunker hill.

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