

Archiving Berlin's Past and Renewing the Ruhr Valley

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Living means leaving traces.
Walter Benjamin, 1935.¹

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyse the shaping of regional identities in Germany, using as case studies Berlin and Essen. In order to do so, certain buildings - including the Holocaust Memorial, the Museum of German History in Berlin, the Küppersmühle Museum, Duisburg, the Zollverein Museum and the Museum Folkwang, Essen - will be studied against Walter Benjamin's theories, especially the idea of barbarism in history and the concept of renewal as they can be found in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History* and the essay "Edward Fuchs: Collector and Historian". By doing so, two different narrations will be identified: the first one struggling with the idea of "barbarism" as a contradictory counterpart to the progress of civilization (Berlin); the other, promoting the notion of "renewing the old" in its desire to look forward to the future, aiming to transform the past through present experiences. These two narrations respond to two completely different constructions of regional identities in the German context. On the one hand, Berlin has an institutional obligation to respond to the demands of history, to the expectation created by the constant reproduction of images referring to a past that needs redemption. On the other hand, the Ruhr area, the old industrial part of Germany, seeks to transform its past in order to construct a new cultural identity. In this sense, the promotion of this area as the European Capital of Culture 2010 has been essential.

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) is considered to be one of the most enigmatic philosophers of the twentieth century and beyond.² His approach to historical materialism offers the possibility of a unique experience of the past from the present,³ allowing us to not to revive the past (which is impossible) but to update it in the present and act accordingly. Benjamin highlighted the parallelism between acts of barbarism and progress in civilizations, making

¹ Benjamin, Walter, "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century". In *Perspecta*. Vol. 12, 1969 (1935), p. 169.

² Wieseltier, Leon, "Preface", in Benjamin, Walter, *Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Peter Demetz, Schocken Books, New York, 2007 [1978], p. X.

³ Benjamin, Walter, "Edward Fuchs: Collector and Historian", trans. by Knut Tarnowski. In *New German Critique*, n. 5, Spring 1975 [1937], pp. 25-75, p. 28.

the built environment a clear witness of these acts: which can be read in monuments, memorials, and ruins.⁴ The built environment becomes, then, material culture, a source that can be analysed on its own right.⁵ Benjamin not only referred to the urban landscape to recall its negative heritage; it also served him as a tool to overcome homesickness, looking back to the city from his childhood memories of Berlin from around 1900.⁶ Benjamin's approach to the past was a "quest for time gone by, for lost time, which is, in sum, a quest for the lost future."⁷ This article is not offering new information or a new reading of Benjamin's theories; this paper simply uses Benjamin's ideas in an attempt to analyse the construction of regional identities in both Berlin and Essen.

The Architecture of Aftermath

Following Theodor Adorno and his famous sentence "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,"⁸ Terry Smith argues that buildings such as the Jewish Museum in Berlin by Daniel Libeskind will inspire an "after Aftermath kind of art", since Libeskind was able to create a "post-Auschwitz architecture, and did so poetically."⁹ Whether agreeing or not with Smith, it is possible to argue that since 1945 every single piece of architecture - in Germany and Europe - has been part of that aftermath. Whether consciously or not, architecture has been built to comply with the necessities of the post-war: probably in a more prosaic way during the reconstruction period, whereas from the 1980s onwards, and more specifically since the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is possible to trace an interest in a more poetical approach to the built environment (i.e. Reichstag, Potsdamer Platz, Government quarter, etc.). But both options are, nevertheless, the architecture of the aftermath, an architecture that is always taking part in the construction, reconstruction and modification of the urban landscape, always leaving a mark on the palimpsest of the city. Furthermore, the Built Environment highlights the multi-layered composition of memory, with its voids, scars and versatility when blending and/or manipulating old and new structures.

It is this built environment which has become the material form of identity, a heritage that "best denotes our inescapable dependence on the past."¹⁰

⁴ Löwy, Michael, "Against the grain: the dialectical conception of culture in Walter Benjamin's Thesis of 1940", in Steinberg, M.P.(ed.), *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1996, p. 209.

⁵ Umbach, Maiken, "Memory and Historicism: Reading Between the Lines of the Built Environment, Germany c. 1900", *Representations*, Vol. 88, No. 1, Fall 2004, p. 28.

⁶ Benjamin, Walter, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, translated by Howard Eiland, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, 2006.

⁷ Szondi, Peter, "Hope in the Past. On Walter Benjamin", in Benjamin, Walter, *ibidem*, p. 22.

⁸ Adorno, Theodor W., "Cultural Criticism and Society", pp. 17-34. In *Prisms*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1981 [1967], p. 34.

⁹ Smith, Terry, "Daniel among the philosophers. The Jewish Museum, Berlin, and architecture after Auschwitz", pp. 137-159. In Hartonian, Gevork (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Architecture*. Routledge, New York and Oxon, 2010, p. 142.

¹⁰ Lowenthal, David, "Identity, Heritage and History". In Gillis, John R. (ed.) *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1994, pp. 41-57, p. 43.

Heritage promotes cultural continuity for its physical and irreplaceable qualities;¹¹ and ultimately, it also stimulates remembering by “bringing back experiences which otherwise would have remained dormant, repressed or forgotten.”¹² In this sense architecture connects us to the past in the form of historical materialism, by giving us the opportunity to experience the past and bring it forward to the present, updating its meaning as Walter Benjamin underlined it:

[...] for every image of the past that is not recognized in the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.¹³

The ultimate goal of the recovery of the past would be, following Benjamin, to offer a “moral homage to the past in its actuality”, from a present which should look at the past from a critical point of view.¹⁴

Architecture, with its different styles and adaptations to climate, geography and culture, serves as a national portrait which showcases different episodes in the history of a country. That is how Aldo Rossi defined the architecture of the city, as the ultimate “repository of history”, “the locus of the collective memory.”¹⁵ Furthermore, architecture, as a permanent marker on the city is, first of all, a spatial representation of people in the world.¹⁶ However, only people in positions of power can leave a more permanent mark on the landscape, communicating the victories of their history towards the future, in an attempt to defy death and to fight against oblivion.¹⁷ In this sense, architecture becomes one of the best physical embodiments of power, of the ruling class that through its victories has gained and transformed its own and other heritages. This is why Walter Benjamin alerted us about the value of culture, heritage and progress in civilization, since there is always an important component of barbarism in them.¹⁸

The urban landscape can embody not only a positive meaning, an episode in history to be proud of – heritage is also charged with negative connotations. The built environment can become a burden, a reminder of a past that is shameful, and as such, a past that forces the process of coming to terms with a difficult history and ultimately, a shaky and unstable identity. That is what Lynn Meskell has defined as “negative heritage, a conflictual site that

¹¹ Matero, Frank, “Ethics and Politics in Conservation”. *The Getty Newsletter*, 15.1, Spring, 2000.

¹² Kwint, M., “Introduction: The Physical Past”, pp. 1-16. In Kwint, Marius, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Ainsley (ed.) *Material Memories. Design and Evocation*. Berg, Oxford, 1999, p. 2.

¹³ Benjamin, Walter, “Thesis on the Philosophy of History”, *Illuminations*, Intro by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, New York, 1968 [1955] p. 247.

¹⁴ Steinberg, M.P. “introduction: Benjamin and the Critique of Allegorical Reason” in Steinberg, M.P.(ed.), *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History, opus cit*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Rossi, Aldo, 1982, *The Architecture of the City*, MIT Press, USA, pp. 127 and 130.

¹⁶ Findley, Lisa, *Building Change. Architecture, Politics and Cultural Agency*, Routledge, New York, 2004, p.30.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p.3.

¹⁸ Löwy, Michael, “Against the grain: the dialectical conception of culture in Walter Benjamin’s Thesis of 1940”, in Steinberg, M.P.(ed.), *opus cit*, p.208.

becomes the repository of negative memory in the collective imaginary.”¹⁹ The political agency in power will decide what to do with both positive and negative heritage (erasure, preservation or revival), depending on the nature of the latter and the context in question.²⁰ By doing so, architecture becomes part of the power agency which transforms landscapes in order to leave or remove permanent markers which were meant to survive time.²¹

When preserving conflicting layers on the urban palimpsest, negative heritage serves as a prompt to face the past’s liabilities, and encourages sharing responsibilities, creating, ultimately, a new and stronger identity. Lisa Findley explains how

The buildings themselves become part of the process of telling more complete histories, of giving voice to the silenced, of reconciling historical victims and victimisers [...] implicated in the process of apology, guilt, restitution, reconciliation and profound cultural change²².

The conservation of these places, traces, and buildings, bears also the important connotation of authenticity, namely the aura, borrowing Benjamin’s term, which he applied to art. Authenticity transfers credibility to the original objects; a quality that cannot be found in the reproduced copies.²³ This concept could also be applied to the analysis of Berlin’s museums and memorials. It highlights the authenticity of the place, the veracity of the story recalled through architecture - this time not necessarily in the age of mechanical reproduction, but the iconic one, which responds to struggles for meaning and ultimately, for power.²⁴ Furthermore, certain buildings, such as museums - whether original or not - will stand for the identity of a given nation since they select and showcase relevant objects to a particular region and culture.²⁵ Even though these institutions construct memory in an artificial way²⁶ and as such are places where identities are constructed, and invented,²⁷ museums also offer an opportunity for revising certain memories, and as a consequence could set the basis for the construction or reconstruction of identity.²⁸

¹⁹ Meskell, Lynn, “Negative Heritage and Past Mastering in Archaeology”. *Anthropological Quarterly*. Vol 75, n. 3, Summer 2002, pp. 557-574, p. 558.

²⁰ Eagleton, Terry, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*. Verso, London, 1981, p. 32.

²¹ Findley, Lisa, *opus cit*, p. 3.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 18.

²³ Steinberg, M.P. “The collector as allegorist: goods, gods, and the objects of history” in Steinberg, M.P.(ed.), *opus cit*, p. 95.

²⁴ Sklair, Leslie, “Iconic Architecture and Capitalist Globalization”, pp. 207-220, in Wegerhoff, Erik, *Architecture and Identity*. Habitat international, Germany, 2008, p. 207.

²⁵ Narred-Rainer, Paul von, *Museums Buildings. A Design Manual*, Birkhäuser, Berlin, 2004, p. 15.

²⁶ Crane, Susan A., *Museums and Memory*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000, p. 6.

²⁷ Hobsbawn, E. J., *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003 [1990], p. 10.

²⁸ Gillis, John R. (ed.), *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1994, p. 3.

In Germany, negative heritage has been a key part of the identity process since 1945, the “uniquely unspeakable Nazi past.”²⁹ The built environment related to the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was reappropriated, neglected, demolished or represented, depending on the politics of memory in place, but always surrounded by controversy. According to Fulbrook, it is possible to identify two different phases in the conservation of negative heritage. The first one, immediately after the war, promoted the disuse of iconic Nazi buildings, allowing them to fall into ruins. The main objective was to rebuild not only the urban landscape but a sense of normality, later the German economic miracle.³⁰

The second phase aimed to commemorate the past “with a heavy overlay of emotion, guilt and political bias.”³¹ This phase took place later on, since it was necessary for some time to pass between the “zero hour” (1945) and the naming of the events, setting up of memorials and museums, and finally, establishing the identity of the victims – a time when it was not clear whether the Nazi genocides should be represented or avoided.³² This process began at the same time as the students’ demonstrations in the 1960s, with an especial emphasis during the 1980s, the decade of commemorations.³³

Parallel to the process of acknowledgement of the Holocaust, the 1980s in Germany also saw an attempt to “play down the severity of these atrocities by pointing to the crimes of other nations, notably the Soviets.”³⁴ Examples of this attitude would be the Neue Wache, reopened by Helmut Kohl with the addition of Kate Kollwitz’s pieta - a universal symbol of victimhood- and the House of History in Bonn, both making “second –class victims of the Jews.”³⁵

The reunification of Germany offered a new stage for the politics of memory, since it was then necessary to introduce the double German past, showing how even utopian socialism ended up creating a shameful past since it evolved in “self-contradictory and destructive forms.”³⁶ However, conflictive the united German conflictive memory in united Germany was still dominated by Western guilt about the Nazi past, which overlooked the antifascist foundational identity of the GDR,³⁷ even though new layers of memory were acknowledged in certain spaces. These included Buchenwald, showing the Nazi origins from 1937 to 1945, the Soviet use of the camp site between 1945 and 1950, and the creation of the antifascist Eastern legend between 1950 and 1990.³⁸

The main characteristic of the 1990s and 2000s was to introduce a new German identity based on regional and supranational allegiances to the

²⁹ Lowenthal, David, *opus cit*, p. 48.

³⁰ Fulbrook, Mary, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*. Blackwell, United Kingdom, 1999, p. 26.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 36.

³² Edkins, Jenny, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 2 and 117.

³³ Gillis, John R. (ed.), *opus cit*, p. 268.

³⁴ Niven, Bill, *Facing the Nazi Past. United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Right*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 202.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁷ Kattago, Siobhan, *Ambiguous Memory. The Nazi Past and German National Identity*, Praeger, Westport, Conn., 2001, 83.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

constitution and to Europe.³⁹ Immigration and multiculturalism introduced a new understanding of German identity; as a consequence, the fourth generation of Germans born since 1945 based their patriotism not on a linear understanding of history, but on a selective and recent past, that of the achievements of the Federal Republic.⁴⁰ Only by doing so would German nationals be dealing with ethnicity and immigration as identity dilemmas “just like any other country,”⁴¹ introducing a level of normality and parity with other European countries.

Parallel to the creation of a more European German identity, the obsession with remembering, with the idea of not forgetting a shameful past, ultimately promoted the proliferation of museums, memorials, commemorative plaques, the preservations of ruins, traces, etc. A common feature of all these projects would be the intention by the cultural agency in place – the government, or a private initiative – to offer “apology, guilt, restitution, reconciliation and profound cultural change.”⁴² Shame has been a determinant component of the “desire to make reparations for the past,”⁴³ since even though the third generation of Germans born after 1945 cannot be considered guilty or held responsible for the Holocaust, they did experience shame as a consequence of their identification with their country and its history.⁴⁴ As explained by Dirk, the stigma of the Holocaust is not a self-imposed status, but it is “constructed and maintained by the gaze of others,”⁴⁵ so the main problem is not only to address the past among German nationals, but also to manipulate the perception of the “other”. Thus, the selection of international star-architects when recreating identity through the built environment seems logical, with designs by Chipperfield, Eisenman, Foster, Ghery, Pei, etc.

One could argue, however, following James Young’s ideas, that the multiplication of memory tools actually promotes forgetting, since “once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, as Edkins pointed out, these markers on the built environment “commercialises and hence trivialises remembering.”⁴⁷ Encouraged by this memory-culture, a new category of tourist comes to the fore: it is the tourist of history, a visitor who wants to engage with the past, and up to a point, revive a cathartic experience of history, or some sort of connection with the traumatic events that took place in certain conflictive spaces.⁴⁸

Two case studies have been identified for analysis in this paper, two cities that have embraced architecture in the aftermath of World War II as a way of

³⁹ Dirk, A. Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 236.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 281.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 283.

⁴² Findley, Lisa, *opus cit*, p. 39.

⁴³ Dresler-Hawke, E. and J.H.Liu, “Collective Shame and the Positioning of German National Identity”, *Psicologia Politica*, n.32, 2006, p. 131.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 134.

⁴⁵ Dirk, Moses A., *opus cit*, p. 25.

⁴⁶ Young, James E., *At Memory’s Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000, p. 94.

⁴⁷ Edkins, *opus cit*, p. 126.

⁴⁸ Sturken, Marita, *Tourists of History. Memory, Kitsch and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*. Duke University Press, United States, 2007, p. 9-11.

reconstructing themselves. The built environment has supported the process of coming to terms with the past through the conservation, transformation and construction of traces, museums and memorials.⁴⁹ This architecture of the aftermath has a unique role in the formation of a new German identity, firstly because of the physical impact on the landscape and secondly as a consequence of the narration that is embedded in their architectural designs and collections. The first case study is Berlin, the capital city of Germany; the second one is Essen, the capital of the Ruhr area, the industrial heart of Germany. Even though these cities share few elements in common, it is possible to observe important differences regarding their approach to their own pasts through the analysis and description of a few key pieces of architecture. The analysis of these buildings and exhibitions will ultimately draw a portrait of the collector, of the cultural or political agency behind these projects – just as Benjamin generated portraits of the authors by describing their archives.⁵⁰ In order to understand these different narratives, the theories of Walter Benjamin on recollection, redemption and barbarism will serve as the basis of this study.

Archiving Berlin's past. Traces of redemption in the built environment.

Berlin, as the capital city of Germany, is not only the seat of the government but also, and more importantly, the “focus of its symbolic presence”, and as such, it has “to promote a sense of national identity.”⁵¹ Accordingly, Berlin has been chosen to portray the image of redemption through its built environment since, as Walter Benjamin explained,

[...] our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption⁵².

The ultimate goal of embracing the German conflictive past through its negative heritage is not only atonement, but also happiness, two images that are necessarily linked to each other. In Berlin, the landscape is carrying the heavy load of a past that is actually overwhelming the present and the future of the city by citing so many episodes related to the Second World War. But,

⁴⁹ According to Theodor W. Adorno, it will not be possible to come to terms with the past “until the causes of what happened [the Holocaust] are no longer active. Only because these causes live on does the spell of the past remain, to this very day, unbroken”. Adorno, Theodor W., “What does coming to terms with the past mean?”, pp. 114-129. In Hartman, Geoffrey H., *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1986, p. 129.

⁵⁰ Wölin, Richard, *Walter Benjamin. An Aesthetic of Redemption*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, p. 2

⁵¹ Vale, Lawrence J., *Architecture, Power and National Identity*. Routledge, London, 1992, p. 16.

⁵² Benjamin, Walter, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, *opus cit*, p. 245.

just like a museum, the built environment also offers the opportunity to select the events that will construct the narrative of its memory. It is necessary to highlight how most of the elements preserved or recovered in order to be part of that narrative are linked to the Nazi past, avoiding a clear connection with the communist past of the city, which seems to be reduced to the Wall, Check Point Charlie, and Alexanderplatz. It seems that the communist heritage is on the one hand a reminder of a dissonant past, which interferes with the reconstruction of the new German identity. On the other hand, the communist heritage has become an attraction for tourism, and as such, it also has to be preserved.⁵³

In this sense, Berlin is, borrowing Crane's neologism, the capital of *cite-geist*,⁵⁴ where shameful memory cannot rest, where the Holocaust must be remembered, especially since Germany's new identity is being analysed by a world still traumatised by the atrocities that took place during the Nazi period.⁵⁵ Hopefully, this process of remembering the barbarian past— which is almost as obsessive as Funes, the literary character created by Argentinean Jorge Luis Borges⁵⁶ - will help not only to create an image of redemption but also ultimately achieve atonement and happiness for Berlin and Germany.

In order to gain atonement, Germany, after a period of amnesia, has confronted its history and seems to be following Benjamin's thoughts regarding the relationship with the past:

This state of unrest refers to the demand on the researcher to abandon the tranquil contemplative attitude toward the object in order to become conscious of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past finds itself in precisely this present.⁵⁷

Benjamin insists in the importance of recognizing not only relevant episodes from the past, but also its common relation with the present. Moreover, Benjamin goes on defending historical materialism in its commitment to experiencing the past in current times, tracing the past's pulse in the present.⁵⁸ The way to find that pulse, as Benjamin suggests, implies to "conduct [your]self like a man digging."⁵⁹ Literally, this is the kind of activity that has taken place in Berlin, the Topography of Terror being an example of such a moral homage to the past in its actuality.⁶⁰ The former Gestapo Headquarters, destroyed during the war and hauled away in 1949, was rediscovered in the 1980s by increasing popular interest in using the site as a "thinking place [... which would work] better than any monument to sharpen

⁵³ Light, Duncan, "Gazing on communism: Heritage tourism and post-communist identities in Germany, Hungary and Romania", *Tourism Geographies*, 2:2, 2000, p. 159.

⁵⁴ Crane, Susan, *opus cit*, p. 12.

⁵⁵ Lowenthal, David, "identity, heritage and history", in Gillis, John R. (ed.), *opus cit*, p. 48.

⁵⁶ Borges, Jorge Luis, "Funes. His Memory". In *Fictions*, Penguin Books, London, 2000 [1944], p. 99.

⁵⁷ Benjamin, Walter, "Edward Fuchs: Collector and Historian", *opus cit*, pp. 25-75, p. 28.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Benjamin, Walter, "A Berlin Chronicle", *opus cit*, p. 26.

⁶⁰ Steinberg, M.P., "Introduction: Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History", *opus cit*, p. 3.

consciousness and memory.”⁶¹ Once again an international star-architect was chosen to deal with such a conflictive site. However, Peter Zumthor’s project proved to be too expensive and ended up being replaced by Ursula Wilms, of Heinle Wischer & Partner, with a building that was “intended neither to neither serve as a memorial nor interpret the events related to the site, but rather to provide an information resource.”⁶² It is interesting how a non-German architect could have interpreted the site, but a German one could not, preferring to avoid any critical approach to her conflictive history and identity.

The Reichstag, renovated by Sir Norman Foster, also introduces a new layer of meanings in another conflictive building. The Reichstag is now the image of “democratic transparency” but it also is a reminder of the imperial past, the destruction carried out by the Nazis in the 1930s, the graffiti left by Soviet soldiers during the War, the wrapping of the building by Christo in 1995, and ultimately, the site of the Bundestag.⁶³ The new addition designed by a British star-architect offers the possibility to ‘dig’ into the walls of the Reichstag in order to face and learn from the past, a memory exercise that seems to be banned for German national architects.

So many other buildings in Berlin tell stories that can still be read through their surfaces and traces that have not yet been erased. An example of these authentic sites would be the Workshop for the Blind, Museum Otto Weidt, which tells the story of a “silent hero” – not as famous as Oskar Schindler - who tried to help Jewish workers in his factory during the Nazi period. The main interest of this small museum is the power of its aura – nothing has changed in the building since it was closed during the war⁶⁴ - which makes the process of ‘digging’ rather easy and accessible. However, what is very interesting about this authentic site is the fact that it is not imposed on the built environment, it is actually hidden in the small courtyard of Rosenthaler Straße 39, making it difficult to find; just the opposite to the experience of facing the overwhelming Holocaust Memorial.

Berlin is covered with traces of its “negative heritage”: from the bullet holes on the facades of many buildings, to the multiple memorials built ex-profeso all over the city. Some of them are as subtle as the Bebel Platz memorial, which commemorates the site of the 10th May 1933 Nazi books’ burning. This monument, designed by Micha Ullman in 1995, is an underground empty bookshelf, dug in the authentic place where the events took place, and as such can only be seen through an unobtrusive glass panel set in the ground. This memorial offers, just like Otto Weidt Museum, an invitation to rediscover the traces of Berlin, rather than imposing them on a more monumental scale.

The Reichstag, the Museum Otto Weidt, the Topography of Terror or Bebel Platz are examples of this idea of activating the past for the sake of both the past and the present,⁶⁵ with the intention of coming to terms with the past, and

⁶¹ Eckhardt, Ulrich and Andreas Nachama, *Jüdische Orte in Berlin*. Nicolai, Berlin, 1988, p. 59. In Jordan, Jennifer A., *Structures of Memory. Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2006, p. 47.

⁶² Anon. “Heinle, Wischer & Partner: Topography of Terror Museum, Berlin”, *AT (Architecture Today)*, 212/October 2010, p34, URL: <http://www.architecturetoday.co.uk/?p=10921>, accessed on the 12th October 2011.

⁶³ Huyssen, Andreas, *Present pasts. Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003, pp. 76-77.

⁶⁴ Jordan, Jenifer A., *opus cit*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ Steinberg, M.P. (ed) *opus cit*, p. 22.

building upon it a stronger sense of identity in the present. Some other examples of Berlin's built environment can be understood following Benjamin's concept of digging, but are also related to the idea of Barbarism in History, such as the Royal Palace, the Museum of German History or the Jewish Museum.

Walter Benjamin, in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, stated that "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."⁶⁶ In his comparative studies between the Roman empire and modern imperialism, he realised how the concept of "heritage" had always been constructed by the elite of winners who appropriated it by means of war and other barbarian acts, and integrated it into their own culture. Benjamin suggests that culture and heritage, then, have become tools of the ruling classes and should be understood as such⁶⁷. In this sense, it is fair to say that Berlin, and other parts of Germany, have embraced the notion of barbarism as part of both their negative and positive heritage, and artefacts and memories related to conflictive eras such as the Third Reich, are now being kept in museums for public display. An example of this attitude is the Museum of German History, in Berlin.

In 1982 two projects were aiming to fulfil the need to have a museum of German history. The first one, the House of History, was designed to be built in Bonn, capital city of the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany). The second one was an initiative to house the German History Museum in Berlin (*Deutsches Historisches Museum* - DHM). The main problem that both projects encountered was the so-called *Historikerstreit*, the historians' conflict: how central should the Third Reich be in those collections?⁶⁸ The plan of the DHM already shows that the space dedicated to the different periods of German History is not equal, questioning, as Benjamin dictated, "every victory, past and present, of the rulers."⁶⁹ By doing so, the collection shows what Michael Rothberg has coined a "multidirectional memory", an open minded point of view which aims to acknowledge all the "conflictive claims that constitute the archives of memory and the terrain of politics."⁷⁰

The museum is divided into two floors, the first one showcasing German history from 100 BC up to 1914, whilst the ground floor covers the uncomfortable twentieth century, the Second World War, the Holocaust, divided Europe, and contemporary Germany from the fall of the Berlin Wall until 1994. The difference in space is quite striking, not only between the two floors (twenty centuries in the first floor versus eighty years in the ground floor); but also between the periods exhibited in the contemporary section, allowing the same space for the period between 1933 to 1945 and for that between 1945 to 1994. This division of space shows the relevance of the Holocaust and the Second World War, which seems to occupy the core of the

⁶⁶ Benjamin, Walter, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *opus cit*, p. 256.

⁶⁷ Lowry, Michael, "Against the Grain: the dialectical conception of culture in Walter Benjamin's Thesis of 1940", in Steinberg, M.P. (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1996, pp. 208-209.

⁶⁸ Maier, Charles S., *The Unmasterable Past. History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1997 [1988], p. 123 and 126.

⁶⁹ Benjamin, Walter, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *opus cit*, p. 255.

⁷⁰ Rothberg, Michael, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford University Press, California, 2009, p. 29.

collection and the building, and ultimately, of historical and national identity discourse in contemporary Germany.

Even though this museum aims to give a broad spectrum of German History, including episodes that in other countries would have been avoided (such as the Vichy government in the Musée Memorial pour la Paix of Caen⁷¹), it is possible to agree with Benjamin when he recognizes that public museums can only offer “fragmentary notions of the culture of the past”⁷², a selection of the most significant episodes which aim to create a coherent narrative⁷³. As pointed out by Claire Sutherland, the DHM is “portrayed as a bastion of objective, scientific research aloof from any manipulating agents or ideas”, even though it is also quite clear that the exhibition is promulgating an image of Germany mainly linked with European history. Again, this is based on a unilaterally Western German museology, which tried to disengage itself from the previous GDR museum of German History, also housed in the same building.⁷⁴ Moreover, the fact that the international architect I.M. Pei was appointed to design the extension also shows the importance of creating a new, non-German, international and iconic face to the DHM.

The Silent Heroes Memorial Centre, attached to the aforementioned Otto Weidt Museum, provides a completely different approach to the barbaric episode of the Holocaust. Instead of presenting the misdeeds of Third Reich Germany, this documentation and research centre aims to highlight the other side of the coin, that of the German individuals who tried to protect their Jewish neighbours on a smaller scale⁷⁵. Like in many other memorials, one of the main features of this centre is the naming of these silent heroes – as can be seen on the staircase wall – avoiding numbers, making their actions more human, based on individual histories. In this sense, this space showcases a conflictive memory in which barbarian acts have a humanitarian counterpart thanks to these silent heroes’ actions. However, and in harmony with Otto Weidt’s museum, this centre is also an invitation to knowledge, rather than an imposition on German identity.

Other memorials, however, have a much more intrusive impact on the urban context. That would be the case of the Holocaust Memorial, designed by Peter Eisenman in 2005. This project has been surrounded in controversy since the competition was launched in 1995 until today. The site (the city centre), the shape of it (similar to a graveyard), the size of it (19,000 square meters), all contributed to the controversy, as has been explained in detail by James Young, who was a member of the Commission for the Memorial. Young understood that German nationals had to embrace their past, instead of being paralyzed by it. He believed that

⁷¹ Brower, Benjamin C., “The Preserving Machine. The “New” Museum and Working through Trauma – the Musée Memorial pour la Paix of Caen”. In *History & Memory*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Spring/Summer 1999, pp. 77-103.

⁷² Benjamin, Walter, “Edward Fuchs: Collector and Historian”, *opus cit*, p. 55.

⁷³ Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson (ed.), *Culture, Power, Place. Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1997, p. 97.

⁷⁴ Sutherland, Claire, *Soldered states: nation-building in Germany and Vietnam*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2010, p. 108-127.

⁷⁵ Silent Heroes Memorial Centre, at <http://www.gedenkstaette-stille-helden.de/english.html>, visited on the 28th of June 2011.

[...] in their memorial visits [living Germans] will be asked to recall the mass murder of a people once perpetrated in their name, the absolute void this destruction has left behind, and their own responsibility for memory itself⁷⁶.

However, the fact that the Holocaust Memorial has been built on an empty space, void of historical authenticity (i.e. it is not on the former grounds of a concentration camp), and the way it has been designed by introducing abstract forms, forces the visitor to engage in imagination exercises, trying to understand “what is the meaning of this place?”⁷⁷. In the Neues Museum, the Reichstag or the Otto Weidt Museum, the traces left on the architecture are strong enough for us to understand their historical implications: the ruins left by the bombings, the bullet holes as scars on the walls, the hide out behind a closet, they all share the aura of authenticity, something that cannot be replaced or created artificially. It seems, as Dekel argues, that the ultimate function of the Holocaust Memorial as an abstract and ‘inauthentic’ site of memory is mostly commemorating the *rememberers* themselves⁷⁸, the ones who actively experience the past during their visits. What is clear after analysing its location, size, and design (again by an international star-architect) is that the Holocaust Memorial will “serve to place the Holocaust at the centre of national memory, but memory can have many centres.”⁷⁹ Some of them are authentic, some others ex-novo, but they all create a network of memory traces in Berlin.

The Jewish Museum was built on a void in the city landscape, but this time not on an authentic site. The void that was trying to be filled was that of atonement, as “a further step in recognizing and repairing the barbarisms of its recent past.”⁸⁰ And in order to do so, the whole design project revolved around the idea of experience, again trying to follow Benjamin’s materialism “to account for the present’s particular experience of a particular past”⁸¹. In this case, the design of the building - with its broken star of David layout, staircases that end on walls, windows that cross the walls at strange angles, the dark tower which recalls the horror of extermination devices, the inaccessible gardens and the confusing layout of the museum overall- was created to provide a suitable environment to experience the particular past of the Jewish population during the Holocaust;

[...] a site of Jewish experience. An architecture that induces this experience in all of its users, Jews and others at once (but not, of course, alike).⁸²

⁷⁶ Young, James E., *opus cit*, p. 223.

⁷⁷ Dekel, Irit, “Ways of looking: observation and transformation at the Holocaust Memorial”, *Memory Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2009, p. 76.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

⁷⁹ Niven, Bill, *opus cit*, p. 232.

⁸⁰ Smith, Terry, “Daniel among the philosophers. The Jewish Museum, Berlin, and architecture after Auschwitz”, pp. 137-159. In Hartonian, Gevork (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Architecture*. Routledge, New York and Oxon, 2010, p. 141.

⁸¹ Newman, Caroline, “Cemeteries of tradition: the critique of collection in Heine, Nietzsche and Benjamin”, *Pacific Coast Philosophy*, Vol. 19, No. 1/2, November 1984, p. 17.

⁸² Smith, Terry, *opus cit*, p. 153.

Terry Smith argues that with his 'style' Libeskind has offered a new choice in architecture, a new hope to build within the aftermath of the Second World War. And as such, Libeskind has provided the world with, on the one hand, theoretical exercises which showed Libeskind's interest to the urban memory;⁸³ and on the other, a series of buildings of the "aftermath" (Jewish Museums in Copenhagen and San Francisco; and the Felix Nussbaum House in Osnabrück). However, it could be argued that the style that has created "a site of a Jewish experience" is not the most appropriate style for a memorial commemorating the 9/11 terror attacks in New York (One World Trade Centre, New York and Memoria e Luce, Padova), the devastation created in different wars and scenarios (Imperial War Museum North, Manchester), or even a museum of Modern Art (Denver).

Another interesting example of lack of authenticity would be the reconstruction of the Royal Palace in Berlin. Erased from the urban landscape by the bombings of the Second World War, it was demolished by the communist government of East Germany and replaced by a more socialist space, the Palace of the Republic. When the Wall fell this new palace was demolished since, according to the official records, it was infected with asbestos.⁸⁴ The controversial site, which was a manifestation of the communist history in Berlin, will be now completed with a nostalgic replica, a new Royal Palace which aims to recall the royal Prussian capital, before the barbarian episodes of the two world wars took place. Even though the new palace will be built on an authentic site, the building will not be able to replace the original one, just like a translation can never do what the original text does⁸⁵. The new construction will be lacking the aura, the quality of authenticity; furthermore, it will be the epitome of what Dolgoy has coined as anti-palimpsest⁸⁶: the reconstruction of three of the four facades of the original Hohenzollern Stadtschloss will attempt to erase the memory of the Palace of the Republic in the centre of Berlin.

This reconstruction could also be read as a new wave of historicism in Germany, aiming to protect the original one which left its mark in Berlin's Mitte district in the nineteenth century. This option moves away from the contemporary architecture used to transform completely Potsdamer Platz, avoiding any nostalgia in its modern design. This new historicism shares certain elements with the one from the nineteenth century, described by Umbach,⁸⁷ since both were driven by unification (that of 1871 and 1989); the economic boom (of 1867-1873 and the economic miracle of the sixties); and finally, the rise of history (and currently of memory) as an academic discipline.

⁸³ Libeskind, Daniel, *opus cit.* See his proposals for Alexanderplatz, City Edge, Potsdamer Platz and Unter den Linden in Berlin and the regeneration of Sachsenhausen in Oranienburg.

⁸⁴ Frantz, Monika de, "Localizing Multi-level Space in Urban Cultural Politics: The Reconstruction of the Museumsquartier Wien and the Schlossplatz in Berlin", in Luigi Doria, Valeria Fedeli and Carla Tedesco (eds.), *Rethinking European Spatial Policy as a Hologram. Actions, Institutions, Discourses*, Ashgate, Burlington, p. 51.

⁸⁵ Harootunian, Harry D. "The Benjamin Effect: Modernism, Repetition, and the Path to Different Cultural Imaginaries", in Steinberg, M. P. (ed.), *opus cit.*, p. 70.

⁸⁶ Dolgoy, Rebecca Claire, "From Ethos to Mythos: The becoming mythical of history", *Austausch*, Vol. 1, No. 1, April, 2011, p. 32.

⁸⁷ Umbach, Maiken, *opus cit.*, p. 29.

Berlin's emphasis on unlocking the past, and in reading it through a critical perspective identifying barbarism in its history, seems to follow Benjamin's ideas on the past and its permanence in the present. By doing so, Berlin offers the opportunity for

[...] rescuing the subversive and critical forms of culture, those viscerally opposed to the bourgeois ideology, from being embalmed, neutralized, academicized, and enshrined by the cultural establishment⁸⁸.

By acknowledging the barbarian past and providing a place to revise it critically in the present, Berlin could gain atonement, which, as explained before, could support the recreation of German identity. The Royal Palace is a clear attempt to do so by going back to a former and more pleasant past, whilst still including, at least, part of the functions that the Palace of the Republic held during the communist era (acting as a social meeting place). Similarly, the Neues Museum on Berlin's Museum Island, just a few metres away from the Museum of History, offers another interesting solution to the traces left by the past in an attempt to gain not only redemption, but normalization. Recently opened after years of ruination (since 1945), this museum explores the coexistence of the past, the present and the future in the same premises. On the one hand, there is a clear intention to recover the original museum built by August Stüler in 1840, transformed in the 1920s and heavily damaged during Second World War. On the other hand, David Chipperfield has introduced new structures which promote a dialogue between different episodes in history: the past and the present. As Joseph Rikwert explains it,

The reborn building now speaks anew to the visitor in accents that echo the intentions of its original designers and assumes the role of a witness to its own tragic story. [...] The effect is that of a palimpsest, a surface on which any number of texts have been written but only imperfectly erased, so that it becomes possible for us to trace earlier fragments under existing lines.⁸⁹

This description of the Neues Museum could easily be applied to Berlin, as an urban complex in which it is possible to read different levels, meanings, episodes, stories; a city that is not hiding its past, but is exposing its barbarism in order to confront it with the present.

Even though the built environment embodies the traces of barbaric episodes in history, it can also become a prompt to critically reconsider our past, and from that confrontation with unpleasant memories, it would be possible to build a stronger sense of identity and belonging to the place. As explained

⁸⁸ Löwy, Michael, "Against the grain: The dialectical conception of culture in Walter Benjamin's Theses of 1940", pp. 206-213. In Steinberg, M.P. *opus cit*, p. 211.

⁸⁹ Rikwert, Joseph, "The Museum rejuvenated", pp. 25-35. In *Neues Museum Berlin*. David Chipperfield Architects in collaboration with Julian Harrap. Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Germany, 2009, p. 35 and 52.

through the above examples, this seems to be the case in Berlin as a consequence of being the capital city of Germany. In Essen, the capital of the Ruhr Valley, the built environment is used in a completely different fashion, as an excuse to select only positive memories from the past in order to transform the built environment and its regional identity.

Renewing the Ruhr Valley. Essen for the Ruhr 2010

Essen has been awarded the title of European Capital of Culture 2010 under the motto “Essen for the Ruhr”. As a consequence, Essen became also the representative of the Ruhr Area (German: ‘Ruhrgebiet’ or simply ‘Das Revier’), an urban conurbation of fifty-three cities and towns. Thus the Ruhr Metropolis is the biggest conurbation in Germany, and the third largest one of its kind in Europe, containing 5.300.000 people within its borders.⁹⁰ The western part of Germany which developed around the rivers Ruhr, Emscher and Rhine became an essential focus for the industrialisation process at the beginning of the twentieth century, thanks to its soil rich in coal, the so called “black gold.”⁹¹ Coal and steel were essential in the development of this area as the industrial centre of Germany, a process accelerated by the Kaiser’s armament policy before the First World War and later on by Hitler and his rearmament interest after the Great War.⁹²

During the 1960s most of the coal mines were closed down, leaving many monumental traces of a richer and busier past, alongside a deep social and economical crisis, with very high unemployment. Some of the industrial relics from the 1980s were put to new uses: museums, cultural centres, exhibition halls or places of recreation, such as the Zollverein Pit (Museum of the Ruhr), the Duisburg Landscape Park and the Gasometer in Oberhausen.⁹³ It was thanks to the International Building Exhibition (IBA) in 1999, that the Ruhr area benefited from a wider regeneration project around the river Emscher, which not only returned the banks of the river to nature, but also reinterpreted the old industrial heritage.⁹⁴

Culture had been present in the Ruhr Area in the form of museums since the early twentieth century. Alfred Salmony, a German art historian, wrote an article in 1929 entitled “The Rhineland as an artistic unit”, highlighting not only the industrial landscape of the region, but also the large number of museums

⁹⁰ Essen for the Ruhr. European Capital of Culture, 2008. *Essen for the Ruhr. Book 1.* Essen for the Ruhr, Bochum, 2010, p. 12.

⁹¹ Junkermann, Susanne, *Metropole Ruhr. Kulturhauptstadt Europas.* Ziethen – Panorama Verlag, Germany, 2009, p. 4.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Prosek, Achim, 2006. ‘Culture through transformation – transformation through culture. Industrial heritage in the Ruhr region – the example of the Zeche Zollverein’, in Dieter Hassenplug, Burkhardt Kolbmüller and Sebastian Schroeder-Esch, *Heritage and Media in Europe- contributing towards integration and regional development* (Weimar: Institut für Europäische Urbanistik, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar), pp. 239-248, p. 239.

⁹⁴ Essen for the Ruhr European Capital of Culture 2010, *opus cit*, p. 12.

and cultural institutions supported by the municipalities.⁹⁵ Despite his positive impression of the cultural background of the region, it is difficult to assess the real impact that these institutions had on the population at the time (namely mine and factories' workers), even though, as explained by Abigail Green, the educational project of the second half of the nineteenth century in Germany moved away from "the traditional catechism school towards a more comprehensive *Volkschule* education"⁹⁶ which ultimately served as an integrative social element. It could be argued, then, that members of the working class would have also been, at least, aware of the cultural richness of the area.

Among the museums described by Salmon it is worth mentioning the Museum Folkwang, founded in Hagen in 1902 by Karl Ernst Osthaus. Osthaus, a philanthropic young man born into a rich family, inherited a great sum of money when he was only 22 years old, and used his fortune "to make beauty once again the dominant force in life" by creating museums and supporting art and its creators⁹⁷. Despite all his efforts to transform Hagen into a beautiful and artistic city, overshadowing its industrial condition, when he died in 1921 the Folkwang Museum's collection of modern art – his greatest legacy – was sold to the City of Essen, leaving Henry van de Velde's (is this the architect?) original museum in Hagen completely empty.⁹⁸ This event has been interpreted as due to the people of Hagen's inability to understand the value of Osthaus' ideals.⁹⁹ However, in the last few decades much effort has been invested into recovering part of the glory that Osthaus brought to Hagen, even though his most important legacy is not kept in its original structure, but in Essen.¹⁰⁰ The former Folkwang museum in Hagen has recently been recovered and extended, and currently houses a new museum. More importantly, Osthaus' original collection and his spirit have been renewed thanks to the project Essen for the Ruhr, European Capital of Culture 2010, since its motto is: *Transformation Through Culture – Culture Through Transformation*.

When the Folkwang Museum's collection was acquired by the city of Essen, it was housed in the building of the Essen Museum, which was completely destroyed during the Second World War. Since then the collection has been exhibited on the same site, but in different buildings and extensions, until the most recent one, by the London architect David Chipperfield, opened in 2010. A competition was launched in 2006 and the first prize was won by Chipperfield¹⁰¹, a star architect who has worked in Germany in the last few

⁹⁵ Salmony, Alfred, 1929. 'The Rhineland as an Artistic Unit', *Parnassus*, vol. 1, n.4, pp. 12-13, p. 12

⁹⁶ Green, Abigail, *Fatherlands: State-building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 222.

⁹⁷ Schulte, Birgit, 'Karl Ernst Osthaus, Folkwang and the 'Hegener Impuls'. Transcending the walls of the museum', pp. 213-220. In *Journal of the History of Collections*, vol. 21, n. 2, 2009, p. 213.

⁹⁸ Schulte, *ibid*, p. 218.

⁹⁹ Fehr, Michael, *Text and context: developing a museum by reflecting its history*, Lecture given to the Hereford Salon, London, 16th May 1996, URL:

<http://www.aesthetischepraxis.de/Texte2/TEXTCON.pdf>, accessed on 11/05/2010

¹⁰⁰ Fehr, *ibid*.

¹⁰¹ Woodman, Ellis, 'David Chipperfield's Museum Folkwang in Essen, Germany', *bdonline*, 19/02/10,

<http://www.bdonline.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=3158321>, accessed on 12/05/2010.

years with great success. He won the Stirling Prize for the Museum of Literature, Marbach am Neckar, 2002-2006. This was followed by his masterpiece, the aforementioned Neues Museum in Berlin, which opened in 2009.

Chipperfield's project is based on the pre-existing 1960s structure. As stated by Chipperfield himself, apart from the new material used in the façade (recycled glass), the rest of the building aims for a complete integration with the old museum.¹⁰² Some critics have argued that Chipperfield's project is not the best of his works: it works so well with the old building that sometimes it is difficult to realise when one is in the original building, or in the extension. That is the reason why, after his great project on the Neues Museum Berlin (which has been analysed earlier on), the extension for the Folkwang museum seemed to be 'too safe.'¹⁰³ But that was the project that the client, the Krupp Foundation, was looking for: an extension that would embrace the past instead of overshadowing it. The idea was to renew the past, but be selective about it. The episode that was chosen to be renewed was not that of the industrial heritage and the coal mines, but that of the first European museum of Modern Art.

The IBA in 1999 and the project 'Essen for the Ruhr' have become the stepping stones for a deep transformation in the Ruhr area: from an industrial past to a cultural present. Industrial monuments have the material form of reconciliation with the past as a past to be proud of; a past that is bringing tourism and regeneration to the Ruhr; a past that, ultimately, is constructing a new regional identity.¹⁰⁴ And the Folkwang Museum is playing an essential role alongside the Zollverein Pit (Museum of the Ruhr), the Duisburg Landscape Park and the Gasometer in Oberhausen. They all talk about the industrial past in a renewed/ reconstructed cultural way.

It is in this context in which it is possible to draw connections with Walter Benjamin's theories. In this case, the past is not necessarily an opportunity for atonement, as analysed earlier in Berlin's case study, but an excuse "to renew the old world"¹⁰⁵ which is, according to Benjamin, "the collector's deepest desire when he is driven to acquire new things."¹⁰⁶ By hiring star-architects and updating former mine pits or factories, the Ruhr area is renewing its old world, giving new meanings to the built environment. As explained by the initiative "Essen for the Ruhr":

New aesthetic buildings are beginning to impose themselves on places where the industrial past has left its ruthless scars. Internationally famous architects, like Norman Foster, Rem Koolhaas, David Chipperfield, Herzog and de Meuron, and Ortner & Ortner – to name but a few – are some of the many architectural protagonists behind this "art of transformation."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Chipperfield, David, *Museum Folkwang*, Press Conference, 27/01/2010. URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUAfhYQM-yE>, accessed on the 11/05/2010.

¹⁰³ Woodman, *opus cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Prosek, Achim, *opus cit.*, p. 246.

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin, Walter, "Unpacking my library", pp. 61-69. In *Illuminations*, *opus cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ Essen for the Ruhr, *opus cit.*, p. 14.

Such an exercise has been performed in the Zollverein Museum, in Essen, and the Duisburg Museum Kuppersmühle of Modern Art. The latter used to be a warehouse at the beginning of the twentieth century, and was converted into a museum in 1999 by Herzog and de Meuron architects. Hoping to regenerate the urban area around Duisburg's inland harbour as part of a masterplan designed by Sir Norman Foster, this development was also included in the IBA's project of 1989-1990.¹⁰⁸ It seems as if the Kuppersmühle Museum was designed to recreate the success of the Tate Modern in London, a project by the same architects in a similar industrial structure. In 2008 a new extension to the museum was commissioned from the same architects, parallel to the new extension of the Tate Modern London. It was meant to be finished for 2010, as part of the projects surrounding Essen as European Capital of Culture. However, there has been a considerable delay in the delivery of this project (expected to be open in 2013).¹⁰⁹

The Zollverein Museum, Essen, is another example of the interest in regenerating the Ruhr area through architecture. In this case, the shell of a former mine pit has been updated in order to house the collection of the Ruhr museum. The architects chosen for this project were Sir Norman Foster in 1997 and Rem Koolhaas in 2001. The Zollverein Museum proposes the updating of the old industrial heritage by transforming it into a cultural site. What Benjamin referred to as "the renewal of the old world" has found in this institution an interesting approach: past, present and future are intermingled in this space, which has very few additions (the most imposing being Rem Koolhaas' external staircase), whilst the circulation of the collection follows that of the former pit, descending to the underground levels where the collections are exhibited (Nature, culture and history). Most of the objects portray a multicultural, green and interesting *Ruhrgebiet*, but there is also an acknowledgement – not exhaustive - of the connection between the industrial area and the Second World War and the Holocaust, with comments such as:

In World War Two the Ruhrgebiet **was just one** of a number of armament centres producing war goods in masse. Nonetheless the myth of the "armoury of the Reich" was maintained by Nazi propaganda, the armaments industry, and not least by the allied countries opposing Germany.¹¹⁰

In this context, where it seems that the aim of cultural institutions is to achieve the Bilbao effect with the hiring of Herzog and de Meuron, Koolhaas or Foster, it is very refreshing to see how the Museum Folkwang, and the new extension built by Chipperfield in 2009, has avoided an "alien intrusion" in Essen's urban context in order to create an architecture that lasts, "that resists the culture of spectacle."¹¹¹ The museum opened a competition in order to

¹⁰⁸ Museum Kuppersmühle, "Architecture". In <http://www.museum-kueppersmuehle.de/index.php?id=14&L=1>, accessed on 18th July 2010.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Information panel, The Zollverein Museum, as displayed in August 2010. Author's emphasis.

¹¹¹ Sudjic, Deyan, "Exhibiting Architecture", pp. 5-7. In Chipperfield, David, *David Chipperfield Architects. Form Matters. Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Design Museum, London, 21/10/2009-31/01/2010*. Verlag, Cologne, 2010, p. 6.

find a suitable architect who could renew the old structure, and update it for the current needs of such an institution. The main idea was not to overwhelm Essen with an iconic building, but to expand the impact that this landmark already had on the landscape. Chipperfield has created a bridge between the past and the present: he designed a silent extension to a museum full of memories and pride. The Folkwang Museum recalls an important episode in the Ruhr area's history, renewing it for its consumption in the present.

The Museum Folkwang, together with the project 'Essen for the Ruhr' and the renewal of industrial heritage can be read as one unit, as a monument to the past, a memorial hoping for younger generations to learn about the origin of their identity, and for older generations coming to terms with a past that gave them an opportunity to work, and then put them in the difficult situation of unemployment.¹¹² As a common project, these initiatives appear to answer the difficult question asked by Halbwachs in 1941: 'Where can (the present) find the necessary impetus to free itself from the past? And in what direction can it reconstruct itself?'¹¹³ The Ruhr region is using the past to reconstruct its identity, without necessarily completely erasing the memories attached to its industrial heritage. By doing so, there is a clear interest in avoiding nostalgia – as a longing for a home that no longer exists.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the opportunities opened up by the IBA and the European Capital of Culture have demonstrated that memory is not static, that it can actually be shaped, preserved and/ or erased¹¹⁵.

Conclusions

Throughout this article redemption, barbaric episodes, and the renewal of hidden meanings, are the main ideas borrowed from Benjamin in order to understand the construction of regional identities: the first one through redemption by archiving the past in Berlin; the second one through the renewal of the Ruhr's landscape by transforming its industrial past into cultural heritage. Two urban contexts in the same country, Berlin and the Ruhr Valley, have chosen very different options when dealing with their heritage. On the one hand, Berlin, as the capital city, has chosen to portray the image of redemption, the image of a city overwhelmed by its past. Positive and negative heritage – especially that related to the Holocaust, avoiding too many connections with the GDR past – are represented at the same level in the different layers of the city. The barbarian episodes of its past are forever present in the urban palimpsest: they are necessary in order to gain redemption, and ultimately, happiness, as Benjamin proposed.

¹¹²Schroder, Sebastian, "Culture through transformation – transformation through culture. Industrial Heritage in the Ruhr region – the example of the Zeche Zollverein", pp. 239-248. In Hassenpflug, Dieter, Burkhardt Kolbmüller and Sebastian Schroder-Esch (ed.), *Hermes vol. 3. Heritage and Media*. Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Institut für Europäische Urbanistik, 2006, p. 240.

¹¹³ Halbwachs, Maurice, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Translation and Introduction by Lewis A. Coser. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992 [1941], p. 187.

¹¹⁴ Boym, Svetlana, *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, New York, 2001, p. XIII.

¹¹⁵ Crane, Susan, opus cit, p. 1

On the other hand, the Ruhr area represents hope based on a fresh start: selecting from the past industrial heritage, the accent is on the buildings as shells in order to house new uses. Redemption and negative heritage are avoided in the construction of the new regional identity for the Ruhr, whose difficult past is very briefly dealt with in a few information panels in the Zollverein Museum. The construction of a new and stronger identity was the main goal of both the IBA 1989-1990 and the Essen for the Ruhr through its built environment. In order to reach this result, certain episodes from the past had to be concealed, and by doing so, as Connerton affirms, “what is allowed to be forgotten provides living space for present projects.”¹¹⁶ ‘Culture through transformation – transformation through culture’ has been the motto behind both projects in 1990 and 2010: renewing, changing, updating the heritage, reusing the old in bringing new meanings to the fore. However, it is important to remember that, even though this region aims to transform its economy towards the services, the industrial heritage still remains as a fundamental role in the shaping of the regional identity.¹¹⁷

The residents, tourists, visitors and *rememberers* should then use this material culture – the built environment – and experience the past in the present, acknowledging events that shaped and still inform the construction of regional identities.

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¹¹⁶ Connerton, Paul, “Seven types of forgetting”, pp. 59-71. In *Memory Studies*, 2008, 1, 59, p. 63.

¹¹⁷ Schroder, Sebastian, *ibid.*, p. 243.

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