

COUNTERPRESERVATION AS A CONCEPT

I propose the term “counterpreservation” to understand the intentional use of architectural decay in the spatial, visual, and symbolic configuration of buildings.¹ The word “counterpreservation” serves to identify, analyze, and aggregate tendencies present in a range of examples, indicating coincident social processes and convergent cultural meanings. While this book was born out of the observation of Berlin’s specific and unique circumstances, it holds value for the critical study of architectural and urban heritage beyond the borders of Germany’s capital city, as I discuss below.

1. To the best of my knowledge, the term “counterpreservation” has not been explored in art and architectural history other than in my own research, which was partially published (in abbreviated form) as “Counterpreservation: Decrepitude and Memory in Post-Unification Berlin,” *Third Text* 25, no. 6 (November 2011): 687–97. The only example other than my research is a tangential, offhand mention in an article on New York tunnels by Ginger Nolan. Nolan uses the term in a similar way, to signify an interest in preservation that involves an aesthetics of decay: “In general, art and aesthetics played a significant role in both the preservation of the underground and then, later, in the sort of counterpreservation [*sic*] stance that romanticized and aestheticized the tunnels and their inhabitants.” Ginger Nolan, “Film Monsters and Mole People: Exorcising New York’s Underground,” *Journal for the Arts, Sciences, and Technology* 3, no. 10 (2005): 81. Nolan does not expand on what she means by “counterpreservation,” nor does she relate the word to theories of heritage and memorials. For an overview of recent approaches to the incorporation of decay and ruination, including my article on counterpreservation, see Caitlin DeSilvey and Tim Edensor, “Reckoning with Ruins,” *Progress in Human Geography* 37, no. 4 (November 2012): 465–85.

In Berlin, counterpreservation is a response to three issues that have defined the city since 1989: gentrification, historical memory, and unification. Architects, artists, and activists use ruination consciously as a communicative gesture in the cityscape. In some cases the message of counterpreservation is overtly political, as in the antigentrification movement. In this case, the stakes are very tangible: affordable spaces for living and working in central areas. In other cases, the political dimension is symbolic, related to historical forgetting in narratives of unification, German division, and the Nazi era. In these cases ruination allows for the resurfacing of voices effaced by conventional architectural restoration.

As a spatial tactic, the intentional incorporation of decay had been a part of the urban landscape since the postwar era, especially from the 1960s on. Its reach and symbolism were, however, more limited then, partly because so much of the city looked decrepit that the effect was lessened by a background in which decay was an involuntary and pervasive circumstance. It was only in the first decade following unification that counterpreservation came into its own as a multivalent and politically powerful practice at the heart of the city. While the years since the first decade of the twenty-first century have curbed counterpreservation because of political, economic, and legal pressures, it continues to be a significant and strident presence in the material and symbolic life of Berlin. The case studies in this book trace the arc from the explosion of counterpreservation in the 1990s to its more limited and exceptional status in recent years. Thus the case studies evince larger transformations in urban planning, political orientation, and economic makeup, which relate not only to the particular history of Berlin as a national capital and tourist center, but also to its place in larger transnational processes of globalization, speculation, and urban competition.

The flowering and fading of counterpreservation also relate to changing tendencies in Germany's engagement with its history. The 1990s saw not only the reconstruction of a freshly unified country, but also the proliferation of memorials, self-made historians, institutional programs, and scholarly publications. Then, counterpreservation thrived as one of many possible responses that acknowledged a traumatic history in all its complexities. Now, almost two decades later, the "memory boom" has crystallized into a tourist attraction in its own right, while Berlin has found other vocations—creative city, media center, expat haven, trendy place. Instead of the "dig-where-you-stand" attitude that unsettled the ground of historically charged sites and left them open as urban wounds, as Karen Till recounts,² now the engagement with the past is contained in centralizing, polished, and grandiose structures such as Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which by its very monumentality seems to offer a final, all-encompassing gesture. One may lay a wreath and pay respects, then head off to check out the

2. Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

shops in nearby Potsdamer Platz. This comes close to the problematic attitude identified by Theodor Adorno as the “intention . . . to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory.”³ In this context, counterpreservation survives as a pesky, uncomfortable proposition, dissonant in the increasingly slick city of tourism and real estate development.

The appropriation of decay for social practices and symbolic statements reveals an active public sphere for exercising the right to the city as Henri Lefebvre defined it: the right of socially, economically, and culturally diverse groups and individuals to use urban space for everyday life, personal and social development, and dialogue. When this right is not ensured by capitalist or technocratic regimes, Lefebvre suggests that city dwellers must employ alternative tactics, such as the reappropriation of space, its occupation, or its “diversion” (*détournement*).⁴

This attitude of collective engagement, which views the city as a labile medium for spatial and social transformations, is not exclusive to the case studies presented in this book, but connects to two larger phenomena. One is the culture of public dialogue and citizen participation characteristic of Berlin, manifest in grassroots initiatives (including the squatter movement and its heirs), in socially engaged planning philosophies (such as the idea of Careful Urban Renovation, or *Behutsame Stadterneuerung*, proposed in West Berlin in the 1980s), in the Stadtforum Berlin (an advisory board founded in 1991 that aimed to foster public debate about the planning and transformation of the city),⁵ and in the antigentrification movement of the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

The second phenomenon is the rising tide of public demonstrations and occupations of urban space around the world since at least 2009: student protests in Tehran in 2009, political protests in Spain in 2011 and 2012, the Occupy movement that began in the United States in 2011 and spread internationally, the Arab Spring in 2010, the Gezi Park and Taksim Square protests in Turkey in 2013, the nationwide street demonstrations in Brazil also in 2013, and the political protests in Venezuela in 2014.⁶ These larger social movements suggest a return to participatory forms of political action that take advantage of urban space as a platform for visibility and effectiveness, often including the city itself as the object and subject of demands (through issues such as affordable housing, public transportation, and green spaces).

3. Theodor Adorno, “The Meaning of Working through the Past,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 89.

4. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 164–68. See also Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, published in French as *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968), and translated in English as the second section in Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

5. “Stadtforum 1991–2001,” Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt, http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/planen/forum2020/index_stadtforum.shtml.

6. David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012).

In connecting with these broader contexts, counterpreservation can be understood as one among many possible activist tactics that share common goals: affordable housing, access to public space, historical awareness, diversity, inclusiveness, and social justice. This connection with international movements also means that counterpreservation may be deployed in different places besides Berlin—and indeed it is—but in each place it will relate to specific conditions, values, and struggles. Therefore it will not look the same, or convey the same messages, everywhere.

However, counterpreservation is also unwillingly complicit in some of the very processes it seeks to critique or undo. The rebelliousness of Berlin's alternative culture has itself become a tourist attraction, and as it increases the city's desirability and cachet, it also increases its real estate prices—a well-documented phenomenon in gentrification, which I discuss in more detail in the following chapter. And while the multilayered, constantly changing spaces and materials of “counterpreserved” buildings offer a dynamic representation of history and memory, they also risk becoming a new cliché, a conventionalized signifier under a veneer of thoughtfulness that eventually might neither shock nor engage as it originally did.

Finally, the willing embrace of decay is a cultural luxury. Only those privileged with enough social, cultural, or material capital can afford to dwell so conspicuously, and so proudly, in the middle of shambles. They do not need to fear that their address and the look of their home might hurt job prospects, welfare rights, or their social life; or that the appearance of their business or place of work might repel customers. More than that, they can symbolically dissociate decay from misery in a way that others—ethnic minorities, recent migrants, or the very poor—cannot. I will address these shortcomings toward the end of this chapter. While they do not cancel out the positive potential of counterpreservation, they do limit it in important ways.

Decay Pride

Counterpreservation begins with the refusal to restore buildings and sites that are weathered, decrepit, or ruined. When groups and individuals first occupy these buildings, or consider them as part of designs and interventions, they encounter decay as an existing condition—a condition that is not necessarily sought out or artificially cultivated, but which is taken as an essential material and historical datum. They do not see decay as a vicissitude, as a temporary misfortune to be corrected so that one may reveal the “real building” beneath. Rather, decay is integral to the building, even if the ideas of decay and integrity might seem antithetical. The refusal to restore is parlayed into the appropriation of decay for symbolic purposes, along with the conspicuous display of features such as bullet pockmarks, grimy façades, crumbling walls, and precipitous holes (fig. 1). In addition, these groups might add new elements, such as murals, installations, and functional fixtures, that would not have been permitted by strict preservation guidelines. The buildings



Figure 1. Haus Schwarzenberg, street façade on Rosenthaler Straße 39 (2004).
© Daniela Sandler

are open not just to weathering, but also to present and future interventions. All of this represents, on the one hand, a departure from conventional restoration and conservation practices. On the other hand, counterpreservation retains a sense of contrivance and intentionality that distinguishes it from forgetfulness, inadvertent destruction, or intentional demolition.

Counterpreservation is not the same as passively letting a building decay. It is neither neglect nor active effacement. Even though the decay may have resulted from involuntary actions, in counterpreservation it is intentionally framed as a desirable feature, as an element to be displayed and noticed. Individuals, groups, and designers *reappropriate* decay—in the Lefebvrian sense mentioned above—and put it to good use, turning decay into a means of achieving affordable living and working spaces in prime neighborhoods. This reappropriation is not only concrete, but also symbolic, infusing decay with positive associations of social inclusiveness, freedom, and creativity.

In counterpreservation, decay is also seen as a way to represent the history of buildings and sites more truthfully than restoration. This particular view was recurrently voiced to me in interviews with the occupants of counterpreserved buildings. It is precisely because the building occupants (or designers, in some cases) are concerned with knowing and displaying history that they refuse to preserve or restore. This allows all of the diachronic transformations of the building to remain, synchronically, in the present, through the overlaying of traces, signs, ruptures, and additions.

There are plenty of buildings in Berlin and elsewhere that show signs of decay, but this does not mean that these signs are intentionally exhibited. They are contingent upon other circumstances—say, a landlord's neglect, or scarce financial resources. In these cases, the attractiveness of a weathered building may reside in literary or visual representations, in the way these buildings might have been captured in film or on paper, even becoming tourist attractions. Those who inhabit these run-down buildings, or their surroundings, would not necessarily concur that there is beauty in such decay: the romance is in the eye of the beholder.

Ruinenlust is the widely used German term to denote this lust for decay, which has been well recognized in art history and philosophy, and extensively studied with relation to neoclassicism, the picturesque, and romanticism.⁷ *Ruinenlust* never really went away, despite the experiences of widespread destruction by war or natural disasters that produced vast ruined landscapes, and even vaster human losses, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The subject cyclically recurs in popular and academic culture: for example, the Tate Britain in London organized a show in 2014 entitled *Ruin Lust*; in 1998, the Getty Center in Los Angeles had organized

7. Sophie Thomas, *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 48. See also DeSilvey and Edensor, "Reckoning with Ruins."

Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed.⁸ Numerous recent publications attest to the continued fascination of ruins.⁹

A correlated, contemporary manifestation of *Ruinenlust* is “ruin porn.” The term is attributed to Detroit-based photographer James Griffioen to describe the trend of visitors going to the city only to tour its abandoned factories, much to the chagrin of Detroiters who feel their hometown is shortchanged by being reduced to a ruin playground.¹⁰ Tours of ruins are an example of a broader and more widespread practice called urban exploration, also known as urbex or urban spelunking. Urban explorers venture into off-limits structures ranging from ruins and vacant buildings to sewers and utility systems, in cities across the world. Their excursions often require a good deal of bravery and physical dexterity, and involve very real dangers such as falls or arrests for breaking in.

Urban spelunking and ruin porn attest to the grip of destroyed, mysterious, and menacing environments on a public that *consumes* these spaces by using them for personal exploits, which are recorded in photographs, videos, and verbal testimonies. These spaces are treated as a hybrid of fun house and rock-climbing wall, without the safety net. While these acts may be seen as a form of reappropriation, they are usually motivated by the individual experience of pleasure, thrill, or physical challenge—hence my emphasis on the idea of *consumption*.¹¹ In counterpreservation,

8. See the companion book by Brian Dillon, *Ruin Lust* (London: Tate Publishing, 2014); and *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Michael Roth, Claire Lyons, and Charles Merewether (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 1997).

9. Scholarly studies include Gastón Gordillo, *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Bjørnar Olsen and Þóra Pétursdóttir, eds., *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics, and the Archaeology of the Recent Past* (New York and Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014); Brian Dillon, ed., *Ruins* (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics, and Materiality* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2005); Robert Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004). A sampling of nonscholarly books: Robert Harbison, *Ruins and Fragments: Tales of Loss and Rediscovery* (London: Reaktion, 2015); Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins: A Journey through History, Art, and Literature* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001); Sylvain Margaine, *Forbidden Places: Exploring Our Abandoned Heritage* (Versailles: Jonglez, 2009); and several titles by the independent, Darlington, UK-based press Carpet Bombing Culture, such as Andre Govia, *Abandoned Planet* (2014); Rebecca Litchfield, *Soviet Ghosts: The Soviet Union Abandoned; A Communist Empire in Decay* (2014); and Daniel Barter and Daniel Marbaix, eds., *States of Decay* (2013), to name just a few.

10. Interviewed by Thomas Morton in “Something, Something, Something, Detroit: Lazy Journalists Love Pictures of Abandoned Stuff,” *Vice*, August 1 2009, <http://www.vice.com/read/something-something-something-detroit-994-v16n8>. For a discussion of ruin porn and urban exploration in Detroit, see Dora Apel, *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

11. My comment about consumption does not preclude the critical potential of urban exploration. This critical potential has been compellingly discussed by Pablo Arboleda in “Heritage Views through Urban Exploration: The Case of ‘Abandoned Berlin,’” *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, vol. 22, no. 5 (2016): 1–14. However, I do not share the unbridled enthusiasm of many scholars and explorers who have published on the topic, which they see as intrinsically subversive and liberating, in books such as *Beauty in Decay: Urbex* (Darlington, UK: Carpet Bombing Culture, 2010), and Bradley Garrett, *Explore Everything: Place-Hacking the City* (New York and London: Versen, 2013). Garrett published

the emphasis is on *production*; decayed buildings are transformed functionally, materially, and symbolically by acts of design: decisive, consequential interventions in architectural and urban space, motivated by activism and an ethical commitment to long-term goals.

Counterpreservation is neither *Ruinenlust* nor ruin porn, but it does have strong affinities with Svetlana Boym's idea of ruinophilia. For Boym, the ruin gaze is one attuned to the temporal and spatial disjunctures of modernity, acknowledging the unavoidable uncertainties and gaps in historical knowledge. Boym's ruinophilia is not the same as the pastime of urban explorers; the ruin gaze she describes is epistemological and ethical, and relates to an emancipatory political and aesthetic project. This is made clear in her distinction between two modes of nostalgia, which she defines with relation to ruins: "Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time."¹² Reflective nostalgia not only engages the past critically, but also propels it toward unrealized futures; it is therefore utopian.¹³ This utopian impulse is also present in counterpreservation, along with very clear verbal and visual statements that elucidate how and why decay is used. The significance of counterpreservation is not only in the eye of the beholder.

Adaptive Reuse

Defaced or dirty edifices, their masonry and armature exposed through gashes and scratches like innards through a wound, are out of place in the gentrified landscape of central Berlin. The center of the city was beautified by careful historical restoration combined with rigid rules for new construction whereby new buildings blend in almost seamlessly with the old. These rules, known as Critical Reconstruction, were championed by Hans Stimmann (head of Berlin's Urban Development Department), based on ideas by architectural theorists Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm. Critical Reconstruction prescribes materials, colors, heights, and other guidelines, so that new buildings end up as simplified renderings of the nineteenth-century city. As Till puts it, "Planners known as 'critical reconstructionists' . . . argued that their job was to

a scholarly ethnography, "Undertaking Recreational Trespass: Urban Exploration and Infiltration," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39, no. 1 (January 2014): 1–13. For a critical perspective, see Luke Bennett, "Bunkerology: A Case Study in the Theory and Practice of Urban Exploration," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, no. 3 (2011): 421–34.

12. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

13. Svetlana Boym, *Architecture of the Off-Modern* (New York: Temple Hoyne Buell Center, Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).

bring back the historic texture of the city that was destroyed by poor postwar urban design.”¹⁴

Critical Reconstruction had been in place in West Berlin since the 1980s, but after unification it gained momentum with the city’s architectural and urban makeover. New, circumspect buildings with opaque stone façades, uniform windows, and no setbacks from the street filled in the many vacant lots left by the war and its aftermath. They blended in with whatever remained from the old city, and those remains were gradually restored—not necessarily to their original (often less-than-glorious) state, but to a fresher, more sparkling, more upscale version. The apartment buildings (*Mietskasernen*, or “rental barracks”) that had once been densely occupied, with dank and dark courtyards and shared bathrooms, were now revamped: side wings torn down to enlarge courtyards, private bathrooms built inside each unit, more light and ventilation, even elevators. They had never been so comfortable and salubrious, despite their ornate façades.

The streets of Berlin began to show a whimsical cohesiveness they had seldom enjoyed before. In this context, the semi-ruined buildings of counterpreservation stand out as dirty and precarious, destabilizing the otherwise clean and controlled cityscape, denying the eye-candy quality of renovated constructions. They do not invite a conventional tourist’s snapshot, they do not make for pretty postcards, and they seem downright inhospitable to visitors. And yet, perhaps because of the particularly complicated ways in which Germany and Berlin address memory, these rough buildings are not only effective urban statements; they are also popular destinations for locals and tourists alike. These buildings encapsulate the traumatic histories that have made Berlin attractive for history buffs and memorial scholars: the Holocaust, World War II, the East German dictatorship, and the very intense although less evident traumas of unification. In architecture, these traumatic histories are present as physical traumas: weathering, demolition, neglect, bullet marks, bombings, fires, and alterations.

Preservation and restoration tend for the most part to erase these marks. More recently, less conventional refurbishment projects have taken an approach variously called combined, integrationist-historical, juxtapositional, or archaeological for the respectful incorporation of material remnants and traces of the past.¹⁵ This

14. Till, *The New Berlin*, 37. On pp. 45–71 Till provides a detailed explanation of Critical Reconstruction. For documents produced by the proponents of Critical Reconstruction, see Philipp Meuser and Hans Stimmann, eds., *Vom Plan zum Bauwerk: Bauten in der Berliner Innenstadt nach 2000* (Berlin: Braun, 2002); Hans Stimmann and Eric-Jan Ouwerkerk, eds., *Von der Architektur- zur Stadtdebatte: Die Diskussion um das Planwerk Innenstadt* (Berlin: Braun, 2001); Hans Stimmann, ed., *Berlino–Berlin, 1940–1953–1989–2000–2010: Physiognomie einer Großstadt* (Berlin: Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, 2000); Annegret Burg and Hans Stimmann, eds., *Berlin Mitte: Die Entstehung einer urbanen Architektur* (Berlin: Bauwelt; Berlin and Boston: Birkhäuser, 1995); Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Michael Mönninger, eds., *Berlin morgen: Ideen für das Herz einer Großstadt* (Stuttgart: Gerd Hatje, 1991).

15. Harold Kalman, *Heritage Planning: Principles and Process* (Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge, 2014), 162; Andreas Kluth, “The Graffiti That Made Germany Better,” *The Atlantic*, July 3, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/07/the-graffiti-that-made-germany-better/373872/>; Deborah Ascher Barnstone, *The Transparent State: Architecture and Politics in Postwar Germany* (Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge, 2005), 190.

approach is not the same as counterpreservation; however, because at first sight they may appear similar, it is important to explore their differences so as to define not only what counterpreservation is, but what it is not.

In these combined or “integrationist-historical” approaches, the traumas or marks are displayed and spotlighted, much as a fresco, sculpture, or historic relic might be. This is the case with the “Wunden der Erinnerung” in the Villa Parey. As I mentioned in the introduction, these “wounds of remembrance” are deep bullet pockmarks left by the street battles at the end of World War II.¹⁶ The villa has been restored, its stone masonry cleaned to a light gray, creating a chiaroscuro effect that makes the dark pockmarks appear even sharper by contrast. The effect is striking, as the holes are impressively deep and numerous, but the overall composition is finished and controlled—polished, even, if one can apply this word to bullet holes.

David Chipperfield also incorporated fragmented, marred, and pockmarked walls into his redesign of the Neues Museum (1997–2009); and architects Hilmer & Sattler and Albrecht kept blackened and maimed sculptures in front of the restored façades of the Martin-Gropius-Bau (1998). The previous location of the C/O Photo Gallery, in the old Kaiser Postfuhramt building (from 2006 to 2013), juxtaposed crisply framed and expertly lit photo exhibitions and a background of peeling, severely weathered walls. These walls were set off all the more bluntly by the refined graphic design and smooth freestanding surfaces of the photo exhibitions.¹⁷

This is also the approach in Norman Foster’s refurbishment of the Reichstag building (1992–99), which he gutted to make room for a new assembly room famously topped by a glass dome open to the public. Construction work revealed graffiti made by Russian soldiers upon their arrival in Berlin at the end of the war, and some of this graffiti was carefully preserved—but “in such a precious way as to diminish their power in the minds of many observers.”¹⁸ Foster preserved other marks of the past, “arguing that these traces comprised the record of the building’s history,” including “rubble arches . . . a crumbled stone frieze . . . disfigured stonewalls . . . fragments of nineteenth-century moldings and mason’s marks.”¹⁹ But the overall effect is not one of pervasive, ongoing decay. The clear hierarchy of design elements, and the refined balance of old and new—along with gleaming floors, bright lighting, and digital panels—circumscribe the fragments and graffiti as contained details within an otherwise sleek environment.

16. Ulf Schubert, “Einschusslöcher in Berlin: Narben im Stein,” *Tagesspiegel.de*, May 5, 2015, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/einschussloecher-in-berlin-narben-im-stein/11718016.html>.

17. Kolja Reichert, “Des Kaisers neue Kuppel,” *Tagesspiegel.de*, June 11, 2006, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/des-kaisers-neue-kuppel/719294.html>; Oliver Kranz, “C/O Berlin im Amerika Haus: Aus dem Dornröschenschlaf erwacht,” *Deutschlandfunk.de*, October 30, 2014, http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/c-o-berlin-im-amerika-haus-aus-dem-dornroeschenschlaf.807.de.html?dram:article_id=301830.

18. Barnstone, *The Transparent State*, 188. See also Frederick Baker, Deborah Lipstadt, and Norman Foster, *The Reichstag Graffiti* (Berlin: Jovis, 2003).

19. Barnstone, *The Transparent State*, 190.

All of the examples above integrate elements traditionally seen as anathema to preservation: dirt, destruction, gaps, spurious interventions, and defacements. But these elements never dominate the design, nor do they set the tone for the form of the building as a whole. These elements may be present, and they may even be important, but they are ultimately ancillary to the architectural *parti pris* (for example, in the case of the Reichstag, the *parti* is the cupola and assembly room, not the walls with graffiti).

These examples should be understood, as Rolf J. Goebel proposed, as “architectural citations.” Goebel argues that fragments and signs of destruction, when incorporated into new designs, motion toward the past without allowing for its retrieval. By virtue of being mixed with the new, the citations dispel any cognitive or phenomenological illusion of historical totality: “The obvious artificiality of partially historic and partially modern spaces, by virtue of their collagelike incongruity and continual surprise effect, deliberately draws attention to the work of interrogating the past.”²⁰ These citations might have a critical potential, but they are not the whole text. They are supporting elements bracketed by an all-encompassing design that is as conventionally controlling, comprehensive, and final as most other projects of architecture or historic preservation.

Goebel’s concept of architectural citations belongs in the more general practice of adaptive reuse—the repurposing of existing buildings to new uses through alterations of form and structure.²¹ While adaptive reuse has arguably been practiced since the beginning of architecture (for example, the conversion of ancient Roman basilicas to Christian churches), it was singled out and named as such in the second half of the twentieth century. Adaptive reuse has become more popular with the growing inventory of vacant industrial structures due to deindustrialization, and because of environmental concerns about the conservation of energy and materials. Despite its popularity, and the high profile of many of its examples, adaptive reuse is not always endorsed by official preservation guidelines, internationally or locally.²² Adaptive reuse takes material and stylistic liberties, departing freely from the principles of the original building, and destroying much of its extant fabric. In some cases, buildings are completely gutted so all that remains is the outer shell, to

20. Rolf J. Goebel, “Berlin’s Architectural Citations: Reconstruction, Simulation, and the Problem of Historical Authenticity,” *PMLA* 118, no 5 (October 2003): 1275.

21. David G. Woodcock et al., eds., *Adaptive Reuse: Issues and Case Studies in Building Preservation* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1988); Ernest Burden, *Illustrated Dictionary of Architectural Preservation: Restoration, Renovation, Rehabilitation, Reuse* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004); Ismail Serageldin et al., eds., *Historic Cities and Sacred Sites: Cultural Roots for Urban Futures* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001).

22. Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999); Gottfried Kiesow, *Denkmalpflege in Deutschland: Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000); Miles Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation, Antiquity to Modernity* (Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge, 2013); Michael A. Tomlan, *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy* (Cham: Springer, 2014).

be filled in by new architecture (this has been called *façadism*). In other cases, even the façades and outer appearance are changed.

The premise of adaptive reuse is that architecture—however old or unique—should be dynamic and responsive to changes in social demands and expectations. This dynamic perspective approximates adaptive reuse and counterpreservation. Both approaches see transformations as part of a building's history, and not as mistakes or detours. Like adaptive reuse, counterpreservation does not aim to protect buildings from further interventions, even if they are anachronistic. This is different from the faithful restoration of buildings according to their original stylistic principles. Traditional architectural preservation can fall into a taxonomic approach to styles as a basis for preservation and restoration decisions. The taxonomic approach owes much to “Hegelian notions of the dialectical progression of world history” that imply “that each style is singularly connected to the historical period it is supposed to represent.”²³

Some adaptive reuse designs are very conscious of the complexity of their social and historical contexts, while other projects are less judicious, so that it is impossible to make blanket statements about the category. It is, however, possible to assert that in adaptive reuse in general, the *reverence* for the building's original design or stylistic cohesiveness is forgone, even if there is *acknowledgment* of the past. Conventional preservation treats historic buildings as immutable objects that can only be touched in order to clean, preserve, or restore the original condition. When modernization happens, it is as subtle and discreet as possible, and only used when absolutely necessary for safety or functionality. Adaptive reuse is more radical. Instead of gently nudging the building toward modernization through localized and minimal interventions, adaptive reuse appropriates the built substance as raw matter for new designs and forms. The whole building is irrevocably altered.

Adaptive reuse projects sometimes incorporate architectural decay, either by framing eroded surfaces or damaged fragments, or by cutting through parts of a building and exposing masonry, floor slabs, and other elements. Sometimes this is done through architectural citations, in a controlled and localized manner. In other cases, the fabric of the building is transformed more radically. The “original” is used in novel ways; old walls, columns, or ornaments might still be *visible*, but they are not *seen* as they originally were. They become part of a collage, a new composition. If architectural citations are akin to an academic quoting of historic vestiges, then this more radical kind of adaptive reuse is a creative rewriting of buildings.

This is the case, for instance, in the restoration of the Harvey Theater of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, by the architectural firm H3 Hardy Collaboration Architecture in 1987, where the architects “took advantage of what nature had accomplished” by preserving the decayed interior surfaces, which had been

23. Goebel, “Berlin's Architectural Citations,” 1287.

damaged by rainwater. The resulting “rich tapestry of color and texture . . . became a major element of the design,” and “taunts the senses with random juxtapositions brought about through the layering of time.”²⁴ In the Pinacoteca (State Art Collection) building in São Paulo, Brazil (1999), architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha sliced through thick bare brick walls. His design draws attention to their rough and unfinished character through the contrast with smooth white surfaces, black rubber floors, and metal platforms, which completely changed original circulation and use patterns. And in the Documentation Center at the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg (2001), Günter Domenig used the ruins of the unfinished Congress Hall building to set off his new glass-and-steel accretion.

These examples suggest a kinship with counterpreservation through the appropriation and display of decay. But adaptive reuse projects exert a much higher level of control over the redesign and final appearance of the architectural object. They predefine down to the smallest detail the spatial and aesthetic qualities of the building, such as finishes, fixtures, colors, materials, equipment, exteriors, and interiors. This definition includes both the new elements that are added to the existing building, and the original structure. Once construction is finished, these spatial qualities are also fixed, closed to further transformation. Indeed, redesigns such as the examples mentioned above achieve such a fine-tuned balance between new and old that any further changes would be very difficult to make.

Adaptive reuse designs do not accommodate gradual change, adaptation, weathering, or unpredicted transformations. They do not look decrepit; they look artfully remixed. Counterpreservation, in turn, makes room for these changes by incorporating accident, chance, and even more deterioration. The formal result is not as refined or controlled as adaptive reuse projects, because the emphasis of counterpreservation is not on an end result—the emphasis is on process. Adaptive reuse should be understood in terms of what Jorge Otero-Pailos describes as “the stamp of incompleteness”²⁵—a contemporary, sophisticated understanding of preservation that allows more freedom to the architect’s treatment of old buildings, with an apparent but strategically limited open-endedness. While these projects may be based on a complex view of history that incorporates discontinuities and repressed events, they still operate within the basic premises of preservation and architectural design, whereby the finished product is fully composed and arranged, the result of an architect’s creation and not of the passage of time.

Counterpreservation provides a way to incorporate a more dynamic view of history into the treatment of architecture and urban space. It privileges change instead of any single specific moment or style. The layered imprints of time and

24. “BAM Harvey Theater,” H3 Hardy Collaboration Architecture, <http://www.h3hc.com/&flashid=1124>.

25. Jorge Otero-Pailos, “The Contemporary Stamp of Incompleteness,” *Future Anterior* 2 (Fall 2004): iii–viii.

the ongoing process of weathering result in open-ended, ambiguous, and even somewhat puzzling buildings where different periods are entangled. Those who use and visit these spaces are not offered fully spelled-out historical messages, but rather have to perform the task of historical interpretation themselves by engaging with the architectural object in a variety of ways (from intellectual reflection to phenomenological experience to everyday use).

In counterpreservation, historical narratives are not clearly conveyed by form or program, and instead may only be evoked in an incomplete or opaque way. This is not a failure, but rather a goal. For instance, a visitor to the Haus Schwarzenberg cultural center (which I discuss in more detail in chapter 3) may not be able to understand the history of the building transparently at first sight. But the building offers clues, small provocations, intriguing features. Broken or eroded moldings fuse into each other and dissolve in the play of light and shadow over roughly textured surfaces. These elements form a complex environment, but cannot be completely teased out or isolated as individual components, partly because many of them are fragmented or incomplete. Thus counterpreservation has a cryptic quality. This resistance to complete legibility relates to the romantic sense of mystery. At the same time, it resonates with the idea that history is not immediately accessible in a clear narrative, where all of the elements make sense and connect to each other logically. The visual opacity of counterpreservation parallels the semantic opacity of a history of conflicts, diverging narratives, and controversial events.

This does not mean illegibility. The Haus Schwarzenberg offers enough elements to provoke curiosity and suggest that something significant might lie behind its murky façades. There are two museums devoted to the history of the Holocaust and the Nazi era (the Otto Weidt Blind Workshop Museum and the Anne Frank Center), for example. But it is not immediately clear why the museums are sited there (the first has a connection to the building's history; the latter does not). Visitors to the Otto Weidt Museum will find bits and pieces about this history; even so, they will not be provided with a master narrative on the whole history of the building beyond the spaces and period of the exhibition. And the building houses much more than these two small institutions: a café, nightclub, movie theater, art galleries, studios, and bookstore. Not everyone who visits the Haus Schwarzenberg, whether occasionally or regularly, goes inside the museums.

A building preserved or restored traditionally—abiding by the integrity of a particular moment in time, a well-defined style, or a specific event—is a building that tells a story unequivocally, didactically. The Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam, the Goethe Haus in Weimar, the House of the Wannsee Conference in Berlin, the Bauhaus in Dessau—these sites convey their messages clearly, and not only because of their plaques, pamphlets, and tours. Polished marble floors, unified decorations, and period-appropriate materials form cohesive architectural narratives. They signal the origins of the building, where and when it belongs, and what kind of social values or status it represents. In the Haus Schwarzenberg these questions

reverberate unanswered, or only partly answered, by the peeling walls, cracks, and missing fragments. Visitors must extract possible narratives on their own. This task is never complete, not only because buildings continue to change and weather, but also because the meanings are socially produced and as such change as social conditions change. Counterpreservation is dialogical, rather than merely iterative.

The sense of incompleteness is also meant as a prompt for visitors to situate the Haus Schwarzenberg building with relation to a larger context, so that inquiries into history, culture, ethics, architecture, or representation do not end once the visit is over. The artists' association behind the Haus Schwarzenberg makes this goal clear in their mission statements. They organize activities where local groups, especially schoolchildren, can appropriate the building's materials creatively and with a sense of history. The exhibition and publication *Fundstücke*, for instance, which collected objects found in the building—ranging from old cigarette cases to coins, stamps, and shoes—also incorporated texts written by children who had been invited to engage with these objects.²⁶ As James Young would say of the unconventional Holocaust memorials he calls countermonuments, counterpreservation does not place the “burden of memory” in spaces themselves, but on those who use, transform, observe, and reflect on these spaces.²⁷

The reference to Young's concept of countermonument is not casual, as counterpreservation engages memory and represents history in ways that are similar to those of public memorials. A discussion of memorials can illuminate aspects of counterpreservation that are left in the shadows by heritage and conservation theories. For example, the iconoclasm of counterpreservation—its apparent self-destructive proclivity—is not easily explained with reference only to the incorporation of signs of destruction in adaptive reuse. The radical openness to weathering and the embrace of decay are design approaches of a different kind from the dedication of some wall space to graffiti or unrestored broken moldings.

Here, Young's countermonument proves helpful. For Young, the countermonument is a contrived effort at memory-work—in line with the commemorative character of traditional monuments—with the difference that it resorts to provocative, self-extinguishing strategies in order to complicate the very idea of memory. If traditional monuments suffer from an “essential stiffness” that “turns pliant memory to stone,” countermonuments are “brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being.”²⁸ Some of these countermonuments are designed to disappear completely—such as Jochen and Ester Gerz's Monument against Fascism in Harburg, a black metal pillar gradually

26. Frank Eckart et al., *Fundstücke: Die verborgene(n) Geschichte(n) des Hauses Rosenthaler Straße 39* (Berlin: Anne Frank Zentrum, 2004), 25–39.

27. James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 30.

28. *Ibid.*, 13, 27.

lowered underground on six separate occasions in the course of five years until it was completely buried and invisible. In Young's discussion of the Monument against Fascism, he notes not only this self-destructive quality, but also its connection to a somewhat belligerent critical attitude:

The countermonument thus flouts any number of cherished memorial conventions: its aim is not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by passersby but to demand interaction; not to remain pristine but to invite its own violation and desanctification; not to accept graciously the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town's feet.²⁹

The embrace of decay in counterpreservation echoes the countermonument's self-destructiveness: a critical attitude so implacable that it does not spare anything, not even itself. The countermonument is provocative; so are buildings where architectural decay is exposed, encouraged, and displayed. There is something aggressive about these buildings, almost a punk sensibility; grimy walls are affronts to beautified surroundings, and decaying fixtures that look on the verge of cracking appear to threaten passersby with the possibility of injury (a threat that is only visual in most, if not all, cases).

The countermonument is polysemic, and even semantically murky; it is not simply open-ended; it is also intentionally unfinished, incomplete. Similarly, counterpreservation strives to make the solidified, built matter of spaces into a more flexible medium, where *multiple historical narratives* might be read. These multiple narratives may be differing accounts of the same event—for instance, and hypothetically, an evocation of German complicity with Nazism may be present at the same time as the memorialization of German resistance. The physical traces of these narratives would not simply be layered, but might sometimes be inseparable from each other, irrevocably connected. The refusal of a single narrative with univocal meanings also makes room for the history of conflict and embattlement itself: the ambiguous feelings of Germans toward a war in which they were both perpetrators and victims, or the divergent expectations of East and West Germans with relation to unification. Counterpreservation, like the countermonument, conjures up this multiplicity without trying to gloss over contradictions.

Romance of Ruins

So far I have argued that counterpreservation is eminently a socially grounded practice, involving participation, activism, and historical reflection. I have also hinted at the aesthetic component of counterpreservation in my discussion of ruinophilia. This aesthetic component, while not central (as it is, for example, in romanticism

29. Ibid., 30.

or in ruin porn), is nonetheless important. The cultivation of grime, rust, and fragmentation betrays a romance of glumness, the eternally returning fascination with ruins, which Walter Benjamin famously called “irresistible decay.”³⁰ Counterpreservation is not immune to the seductions of semi-destroyed structures, of surfaces slowly carved out by time and use—or violently torn by aggression, haunted by the signs of the past even when the memory of events has faded.

This fascination with ruins, as suggested by *Ruinenlust*, is exclusive neither to counterpreservation nor to romanticism. Contemporary cities and rural landscapes feature ruins that, in some way or another, have become landmarks, monuments, or involuntary attractions: the Foro Romano, the Athenian Acropolis, the shells of Catholic mission churches scattered across the Latin American countryside, the remnants of empty structures turned into adventure parks for urban explorers in postindustrial cities, even the site of Ground Zero in New York City as a decade-long pilgrimage destination before its reconstruction. In Berlin, the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche cuts a chiseled silhouette against postwar modernist structures, forming one of the most recognized postcard views of the city.

As Elizabeth Spelman notes, “Ruins are not just any state of disrepair”; she adds that “*Ruinenlust* tours don’t include sites of urban blight.” Spelman implies a distinction between, say, the attractive ruins of classical antiquity, and the repellent sites of inner-city decay. In her words, “There is a difference between a state of disrepair to which one eagerly rushes and a state of disrepair from which one desperately flees.”³¹ The difference may be aesthetic, but it is not purely so—it might also be temporal and contextual. After all, abandoned factories were not always treated with the same interest they now arouse.

Counterpreservation straddles the line between the disrepair to which one rushes and that from which one flees. All of the examples of counterpreservation presented in this book are much closer to blight than to the picturesque. Some of the buildings were never particularly beautiful to begin with, and none of them aged gracefully: muddy grime on the walls instead of soft patina; scattered fragments on the ground instead of towering façades; nondescript metal beams instead of fluted columns. A first look at the Haus Schwarzenberg or the Kōpi *Hausprojekt* might suggest these are derelict tenements, which at some point they were. It is the particularities of Berlin culture and history—from its postwar countercultures to its post-Wall alternative scenes—that have pushed the perception of these sites into a favorable light. And, as Engle suggests with relation to decayed buildings in Prenzlauer Berg during the GDR era, this perception was often ambivalent and contradictory.³²

30. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: NLB, 1977), 177–78.

31. Elizabeth Spelman, *Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 113.

32. Greg Engle, “Ruinous Charm: The Culture and Politics of Redevelopment in Eastern Berlin” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2009), 37.

Additionally, in counterpreservation the fascination with ruins is mixed into the functional and utilitarian preoccupations of everyday activities such as inhabiting, working, eating, and recreation; it is applied to apartment buildings, galleries, cafés, offices, print shops, soup kitchens, movie theaters. This is different from the enjoyment and use of most ruins, which are usually removed from everyday or practical concerns, and set in the context of leisure or contemplation. Travelers or painters can appreciate ruins in a landscape, and tourists can stroll freely through the Foro Romano or the city of Pompeii, which are set up as open-air museums. Some ruins are converted into event sites, thus incorporating function without losing their contemplative quality. The ruin of the Franziskaner Klosterkirche in Berlin offers a poignant setting for open-air concerts and everyday wandering, with its roofless brick walls, but the site does not have to accommodate bathrooms or dressing rooms, or provide shelter from rain or sun. Not so in counterpreservation, where people live, work, dine, meet, party, make and display things, launder clothes, and go to the bathroom.

If counterpreservation harbors, to some measure, an aesthetic fascination with decay, it cannot be reduced to this aspect, as it simultaneously encompasses a variety of other impulses that stem from a critical view of history and urban life. The marks of time must be shown not just for their visual seductiveness, but because they are an imprint of history. In this sense, counterpreservation should be compared to John Ruskin's writings on architectural history and preservation, which mediate between a romantic background and social, cultural, and political ideals. Ruskin famously praised the patina left by time as a sign of the character and spirit of a building. Ruskin viewed historical reconstruction, or restoration, as "the most total destruction which a building can suffer" because it erased the signs of weathering and falsified the building's history.³³ For Ruskin, authenticity in architectural preservation did not consist in following an abstracted system of stylistic cohesiveness like that proposed by Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, the other nineteenth-century exponent of preservation.³⁴

Rather, for Ruskin authenticity or "truth" resided in the whole incarnation of an edifice. Ruskin saw "truth" as one of the essential virtues of architecture, the qualities that every worthy building should have—in his words, the "seven lamps."³⁵ Truth and honesty meant among other things expressing the characteristics and nature of building materials, the original values and beliefs that informed the building's conception, the craftsmanship and work of the master builders, and the

33. John Ruskin, "The Lamp of Memory," Aphorism 31, in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1880), 256.

34. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française* (Paris, 1866), 8:24.

35. The seven lamps are Sacrifice, Truth, Power, Memory, Beauty, Obedience, and Life.

meanings of spatial and ornamental elements for designers, builders, and users.³⁶ A building had to be understood in relation to its place in history and its existence over time, including alterations, decay, and additions. In his careful study of Venice architecture, Ruskin does not strive to isolate stylistic periods for buildings, but describes the different contributions from each century, which he calls “interpolations.”³⁷

Ruskin rejected the classical canon, and with it the very idea of beauty. A building was interesting not because of its harmonious composition, exquisite materials, or pleasing appearance. For Ruskin, these could be empty qualities if the building did not relate to its immediate and historical environment. He was an early champion of English Gothic not simply because he found the pointed arch more attractive than the round one. His argument was sociocultural: the Gothic expressed the relationship between artisans and the materials naturally available to them, between religious beliefs and sacred buildings, between folk culture and ways of inhabiting and perceiving space.

A consequence of Ruskin’s propositions is that, according to his approach, the value and meaning of architecture extend far beyond the physical limits of a building’s walls or foundations. The building cannot be seen as a static object whose formal properties can be abstracted in a coherent system, immune to context or change. A relic such as a Carolingian scepter or a Saxon crown may be safeguarded in a museum and congealed within narratives of historical progression and stylistic belonging (although even these narratives can be questioned in their refractoriness to social and symbolic change). The same cannot be said of a building. Architecture is irrevocably rooted in everyday use.

The opposition between Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc is echoed in the opposition between preservation and restoration. Supporters of preservation advocate limited and ongoing maintenance, and more extensive repairs only when absolutely necessary for a building’s integrity. Those in favor of restoration argue for more intrusive work, from scraping and cleansing to the reproduction of missing parts with new materials. In early twentieth-century Germany, this debate converged in the discussion about *restoring* the ruins of the Heidelberg Castle to its former integrity, or just *preserving* the remnants of the castle in their ruinous state.³⁸

Is counterpreservation, then, not simply a more radical form of preservation? Indeed, counterpreservation’s dynamic view of architecture owes much to Ruskin and those who followed him. But Ruskin would not have advocated letting buildings weather and decay until they disappeared. On the contrary, he advised

36. John Ruskin, “The Virtues of Architecture,” *The Stones of Venice* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1890), esp. 37–39 and 43–44.

37. See, for instance, his remarks on the church of St. Mark in the preface to *The Stones of Venice* (v, vi).

38. Georg Dehio and Alois Riegl, *Konservieren, nicht restaurieren: Streitschriften zur Denkmalspflege um 1900* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1988).

ongoing maintenance: "Take good care of your monuments and you will not need to repair them. . . . Watch an old building with anxious care; guard it as best as you may, and at any cost, from every influence of dilapidation."³⁹ Counterpreservation, in contrast, welcomes and even promotes dilapidation. Counterpreservation is not mainly concerned with prolonging duration indefinitely. Preservation cares for a building's integrity (and safety), while counterpreservation opens the building to the action of time, invites this action, and sometimes immerses the building in self-destructive elements. The building's extinction or death becomes part of its life.

Preservation in the sense devised by Ruskin, and reconstruction according to Viollet-le-Duc, are both caught in the pursuit of the past, in prolonging the duration of buildings in their historical form—either in an idealized original state for Viollet-le-Duc, or as an enduring witness of time for Ruskin. There is indeed room for change in both views. Ruskin's opposition to clearing a building's patina (which spurred the so-called Anti-Scrape movement)⁴⁰ incorporates the worn film that covers and softens surfaces over time. Viollet-le-Duc's restoration principles, based on rebuilding a unity of style that may never have existed, and making use of the best possible available techniques, introduce change more assertively. But neither attitude privileges ongoing transformation. They advocate controlled or moderate intervention so as to emphasize and guarantee duration. Ruskin goes so far as to say that even new buildings, that is, the "architecture of the day," should be rendered "historical" so as to bear witness of their time for generations to come.⁴¹

Utopia or Social Practice?

Counterpreservation is at once a form of preservation that engages social groups and invites a critical stance, and a utopian conception that can never be fully realized. If a building were left completely vulnerable to the action of time, it would be completely destroyed. This would also pose practical difficulties to most quotidian uses; the building would become an aesthetic or poetic object detached from function or utility. Therefore, the examples of counterpreservation presented in this book also resort, at points, to tools and practices of conventional preservation. They attempt to conserve materials, and to foreclose or limit weathering. They also frame history. For any group involved in the reflection over a building's historical meaning, certain periods and events have more importance than others. Therefore, signs of weathering and transformation are presented selectively, according to specific narratives, as I explain for each case study in the chapters that follow.

39. Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 258. See also John Delafons, *Politics and Preservation: A Policy History of the Built Heritage, 1882–1996* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997), 17.

40. John Summerson, "Ruskin, Morris, and the 'Anti-Scrape' Philosophy," in *Historic Preservation Today: Essays Presented to the Seminar on Preservation and Restoration, Williamsburg, Virginia, September 8–11, 1963* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1966).

41. Ruskin, Aphorism 27, in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 235.

The first shortcoming of counterpreservation is the impossibility of incorporating change, time, and open-endedness completely. Practical concerns limit the scope of counterpreservation—that is, how much weathering, transformation, and destruction a building can sustain. Architects or tenants are compelled to prevent deterioration, safeguard current structures or components, and restore broken pieces. And if we are to interpret the concept of counterpreservation as complete and absolute openness of meaning, then it is an impossibility. For even the choice to open up a building to weathering and decay is a particular approach that excludes many other possibilities such as painting, cleaning, restoring, refurbishing, or adapting. Leaving a building completely open to the effects of time might indeed encompass a multiplicity of meanings, but it cannot include them all.

It is easier to incorporate the idea of a dynamic, interactive memory in monuments than it is in buildings. Memorials, installations, and sculptures—even those that attempt to penetrate the prosaic and quotidian aspects of life—are less encumbered by practical or functional concerns than an apartment building, a film theater, or a park. Jochen and Ester Gerz's *Monument against Fascism* can be sunk underground because its primary function is that of a memorial, and its disappearance will not hamper everyday activities or practical life. While art is never separate from social and political contexts, there is a difference between the Gerzes' memorial installation and a building where people live, work, watch movies, visit exhibitions, and eat and drink at a café. The Haus Schwarzenberg cannot gradually disappear, because its spaces are constantly used for a variety of purposes. Its façade cannot be left to weather indefinitely, unprotected, because it will fall on the heads of passersby.

There is another limitation. To a great extent, counterpreservation derives its force from the contrast with renovated, conventional surroundings. The Haus Schwarzenberg cultural center would lose its effect if all buildings around it kept the same characteristics: gray, eroded façades with fallen pieces and exposed wires. Not only would the aesthetic impression be diluted in the overall homogeneity, but the intentionality behind the dilapidation might also be lost. This would be a problem insofar as the social, economic, cultural, and political causes and consequences of urban blight are quite different from the self-reflective, contrived statement of the Haus Schwarzenberg.

At the same time that counterpreservation is a utopian stance that cannot be fully realized, it is also an actual practice. The cooperative that manages the cultural center Haus Schwarzenberg, in Berlin's central district, or the inhabitants of apartment buildings in the neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg are identifiable agents actively involved in concrete processes: cultural programming, architectural design, temporary interventions in buildings, street demonstrations, public discussions and events. These are real instances, not purely conceptual ones. I insist on this point because it contains the significance of counterpreservation not only for Berlin, but also for other contested places and disputed histories. Counterpreservation attests to the possibility of alternative spatial practices, however flawed or imperfect.

Although the examples of counterpreservation cannot fully embody its ultimate consequences, they are valuable for carrying out the concept into real social contexts. Moreover, the very opposition between utopia and reality is problematic. Utopia is not simply a non-place: it is a place that exists—not as an actual site, but as a discursive one. The underlying tension between counterpreservation as utopia and as an actual practice allows for meaningful transactions between conceptual speculation and practical experimentation. This tension also points to the impossibility of drawing a clear-cut line between theory and practice. When the artists behind the Haus Schwarzenberg meet to discuss their cultural or architectural projects, and then publish a text on their website or print pamphlets, are they engaging in theoretical debate or concrete action? Is not the very process of critical reflection itself already a form of action? Conversely, is the refusal to restore the façade restricted to the materiality of the building, or does it not make a more far-reaching statement about history and urbanism?

The contribution of counterpreservation is not so much a specific model for the treatment of buildings as it is a critical way of thinking about history and the city. Although each counterpreservation example starts out from a particular building, all share a common preoccupation with the city as a whole—with the spread of corporate culture, the privatization of spaces, the aggravation of economic disparities, and the loss of political participation. The discourses that accompany counterpreservation make it clear that the object of criticism is not necessarily a single building, but the city and beyond; and that their cultural and political project is aimed at a wide and diverse social body. Each intervention hopes to inspire similar actions, to spur engagements elsewhere, to spread over the cityscape. Even if the shapes, uses, and meanings of buildings—as well as the forms of social organization around them—might have to be reformulated, counterpreservation still carries the potential for a different and more open history, for *another* history.

Beyond Berlin

The use of decay and ruination as an expression of alternative cultures, collective residential projects, and antigentrification sentiment is the most salient way in which counterpreservation can be seen across different cities and countries beyond Berlin. These examples usually include squats (or former squats), cultural and art venues, and spaces for leisure and sociability, in cities with thriving squatter cultures: Hamburg, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, New York. There are anonymous examples, and notorious ones: the Blitz House in Oslo and the defunct Ungdomshuset (Danish for “the Youth House”) in Copenhagen, both centers for cultural activities, music concerts, and meetings; Freetown Christiania, a whole squatter neighborhood in Copenhagen; Fort Thunder in Providence, Rhode Island, a decrepit warehouse used by an artists’ collective for residences, studios, and

concerts from 1995 to 2001; and the many squats in the East Village in New York in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Serenity House and the Fifth Street Squat. Of East Village squatters, a *New York Times* journalist notes: “Where some saw blight, the squatters saw new opportunity.”⁴²

The artful cultivation of decay present in Berlin’s Haus Schwarzenberg is comparable to the spaces and façades of the Kunsthaus Raskolnikow in Dresden, an arts center that originated as a squat in 1989, and which now houses galleries, a restaurant, and a small hotel.⁴³ In Budapest, ruin bars and pubs have become a trend for tourists and locals alike. They are “one example of a radical use of public space that is not designed to satisfy the constant need for urban development. . . . It allows people who do not have a lot of money to make their mark on the city.”⁴⁴ These are not the words of a Lefebvrian scholar or a radical activist, but rather of a journalist writing for an in-flight magazine (*Scandinavian Traveler*, published by Scandinavian Airlines). As an index of worldly middle-class tastes in a commercial vehicle, this article might herald a bright future for counterpreservation—or else, perhaps more likely, its co-optation by the market.

Many cities boast alternative cultures as lively and vocal as those of Berlin; and many groups cultivate an international network of cooperation and solidarity, such as the website Squat!net (<http://planet.squat.net>), which congregates information on squats and important events such as demonstrations and evictions. The attitude is similar in all of these places. Dilapidation is worn on the face of buildings as a mark of distinction from mainstream landscapes, expressing affiliations with anarchism, identity politics, radical leftist politics, and the punk scene.

If in some cases the emphasis is on the cultural and aesthetic expression of dissonance, in others the political dimension is more clearly articulated. In New York, members of the squatter movement founded the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space, in an East Village building known as C-Squat.⁴⁵ The museum is a hub for activities and publications that promote squatting as a way of making urban space more democratic and affordable. The sense of social justice means that for the museum, squats are not simply specific solutions to the housing needs of a particular

42. Colin Moynihan, “Squatters’ Paradise Lost,” photographic essay by Ash Thayer, *New York Times*, October 4, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/10/06/nyregion/album-squatters.html>.

43. Raskolnikoff, <http://www.raskolnikoff.de/geschichte.html>. Please note that while the Kunsthaus uses the spelling “Raskolnikow,” the restaurant, pension, bar, and website use the spelling “Raskolnikoff.”

44. Emma Olsson, “Ruinophilia: A New Phenomenon,” *Scandinavian Traveler*, December 14, 2014, <https://scandinaviantraveler.com/en/food-drink/ruinophilia-a-new-phenomenon>. See also the website Ruinpubs, <http://ruinpubs.com/>, which maps and promotes Budapest’s ruin bars.

45. “Experts Lay Out a Comprehensive Primer to Squatting in NYC,” *Curbed*, February 28, 2014, http://ny.curbed.com/archives/2014/02/28/experts_lay_out_a_comprehensive_primer_to_squatting_in_nyc.php.

group of people, but rather models that can potentially create a more inclusive city on a large scale. The museum defines its mission in the following terms:

The Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space promotes and archives the work of community activists and artists in the squatting movement, which successfully reclaimed and repurposed derelict housing stock . . . as an alternative sustainable strategy for social and community development in blighted landscapes.⁴⁶

Squatting is seen as a movement that can teach lessons, and an “alternative sustainable strategy.” The choice of words is important. While a squat may evoke negative connotations of crime and illegality, the idea of “reclaiming” implies a restitution of something to people who are rightfully entitled to it. This is not merely the transference of property to different hands, but a questioning of the meaning and ethics of private property (obviously a radical proposition in an age where most alternative models, from the welfare state to Socialism, have given way to financial, speculative capitalism).

But squatting is not the same as counterpreservation (and vice versa). Not every squatter community appropriates decay, and not every example of counterpreservation is a squat or collective residential project. In most cases, squats and residential communities that resort to counterpreservation are located in affluent societies: North America, Europe, Australia. The punk aesthetics works in opposition to the bourgeois mainstream (or what is assumed to be a bourgeois mainstream). The rejection of conventional or trendy groups (be they traditional nuclear families, conservatives, hipsters, young urban professionals, techies, etc.) is a powerful motor for the adoption of decrepitude as a badge of identity.

This does not work in the same way in societies that are poorer or more unequal. In Latin American cities, for instance, where slums house a huge portion of the population, and urban poverty permeates cities in every way (from shantytowns to the homeless), dilapidation has deeply ingrained connotations of destitution, lack of alternatives, despair, and oppression. In poor societies, blight is the mark of poverty. While there are examples of rough-looking squats in these societies, this is a circumstantial contingency rather than a choice. The preoccupation with a layered history, a complex past, or even the romantic fascination with ruins and decay is not present.

For example, the squat on 342 Mauá Street in São Paulo, one of the many active squats organized by the city’s homeless community, was refurbished in 2013 by the inhabitants themselves, who cleaned graffiti and moisture stains off the façade, and painted it in fresh white and red, a sober color scheme that emulates the aesthetics

46. “What We Do,” Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space, <http://www.morusnyc.org/reclaiming-space-squats/>.

of bourgeois apartment buildings in the city.⁴⁷ The question of why this is so can only be sketched here in preliminary hypotheses; it would be necessary to do a focused investigation of specific case studies, through fieldwork and cultural analysis, to untangle the culture-specific meanings of decay and their variances.

It is possible that in poorer or less equal societies, the struggle for basic living conditions such as shelter, nourishment, and health services is so urgent as to take the focus away from more rhetorical reflections. Instead of subscribing to an anti-bourgeois attitude, squatters fight for inclusion in bourgeois standards and modes of living. Perhaps “roughing it up” by choice is a luxury of people who have other options, who were not raised in destitution, or who possess enough cultural (if not economic) capital to move elsewhere, if they wish. Maybe this luxury is also afforded by a prosperous society with a public welfare safety net. Social security benefits and provisions, and public services, are much better and more widely accessible in Europe than in Latin America. Or is it possible that the embrace of decay is also, at the same time, a sign of change—that social disparities are worsening and becoming more permanent and pervasive even in wealthier societies? These questions must remain unanswered here, as the scope of this book is limited to an in-depth study of Berlin, but they suggest possible avenues for further research on the topic. They are stated here as ways to illustrate the sociocultural specificity of counterpreservation and decay.

Back to Berlin

This is a book about Berlin, and that is where the story begins. Berlin is not only the source for the concept of counterpreservation, but also a particularly resonant place for its application. The examples are numerous enough to make their mark on the urban landscape as a whole and not only as exceptions; and their myriad forms and variations allow for a rich and expanded view of counterpreservation. It does not mean that the city is unique in this way—many other cities are shaped by creatively appropriated ruins, from Havana to Detroit; and the factors that make Berlin into such a prolific place for counterpreservation are also present elsewhere. But Berlin presents a condensed and intense example, partly because of the city’s longtime association with a bohemian and liberal culture, leftist politics, and a gritty landscape. This grittiness was more evident in the preunification city, but some areas of Berlin still retain this atmosphere. Although the influx of investment and visitors has transformed the city since the Wall was torn down, this transformation has been

47. Piero Locatelli, “Sem tetos reformam o próprio prédio no centro de São Paulo,” *Carta Capital*, February 5, 2013, <http://www.cartacapital.com.br/sociedade/sem-tetos-reformam-o-proprio-predio-no-centro-de-sao-paulo/>.

uneven and focused on particular neighborhoods (the unevenness is itself a hallmark of contemporary urbanism).⁴⁸

The association of Berlin with roughness, grittiness, and ugliness is not lost on cultural observers and mass media, and has become not only a distinctive mark of the city, but also an attraction in its own right. In 2002, a *New York Times* article about the growing trend of living in East German *Plattenbauten* announced: "In Chic New Berlin, Ugly Is Way Cool."⁴⁹ A few years later, the same newspaper announced the emergence of an alternative art district in the area of Brunnenstraße, younger and more avant-garde than the established galleries of Auguststraße, by praising the "New Art District's 'Raw' Charm."⁵⁰ The writer, Kimberly Bradley, noted the mixture of "new polish" with "decrepit buildings, fast-food kiosks and empty storefronts . . . like a crooked smile with missing teeth." Bradley quoted an American who opened a bar in the area as saying, "It's a bit like the old '90s Berlin scene. There's a certain brutality to the street, but it's the coolest part of Mitte." A more recent article continues to propagate the perception, declaring that "grimy graffiti" is part of "Berlin's cool factor."⁵¹ Even housing listings capitalize on this; an apartment for rent was once advertised as "Classic East-Berlin Anti-Chic."⁵² Berlin mayor Klaus Wowereit's assertion that bankrupt, trendy Berlin is "poor, but sexy" might be interpreted in this light: the city makes its roughness attractive.⁵³ While in more recent years there have been signs of prosperity, this has accordingly brought a conflict of identity; the city is, in the view of some, "torn between wealth and cool."⁵⁴

This predilection for grit and grime—and the appropriation of a rough aesthetics not only for identity, but also for tourism and marketing—might help explain, at least partly, why counterpreservation has flourished in the city. Decay, along with other markers of urban roughness, gains positive connotations: it is trendy, artsy, interesting, unique; the sign of creativity, hipness, of belonging to a desirable alternative scene; it is associated with liveliness, with the potential for thriving activities

48. Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 34, no. 2 (2002): 434–57.

49. Alisa Roth, "In Chic New Berlin, Ugly Is Way Cool," *New York Times*, January 24, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/24/garden/in-chic-new-berlin-ugly-is-way-cool.html>.

50. Kimberly Bradley, "A New Art District's 'Raw' Charm," *New York Times*, March 25, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/25/travel/25surfacing.1.html?_r=0.

51. Chloë Webster, "Berlin's Cool Factor: Hipster Clubs, Grimy Graffiti, and an Honour Payment Metro," *Daily Mail Online*, November 1, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-2483668/Berlins-Cool-Factor-Hipster-clubs-grimy-graffiti-honour-payment-metro.html>.

52. Message number 4807, posted on the Berlin Scholars Yahoo Group, December 3, 2008, Berlin Scholars Group Archives, <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/BerlinScholars/conversations/messages/4807> (access to the group archives is restricted to members).

53. Quoted, among other places, in "Poor but Sexy," *The Economist*, September 23, 2006, 61–62.

54. "Berlin Torn between Wealth and Cool," *BBC News*, March 28, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17538025>.

such as nightclubs, art galleries, bars, residential projects.⁵⁵ The multivalence of ruins and blight is illustrated by this context-dependent interpretation. The context illuminates not only why dilapidation may acquire positive meanings, but also why it is used as a protest against urban renovation and regeneration. Picture-perfect renovated buildings appear to betray Berlin's proverbial ugliness.

This applies not only to the appearance of renovated buildings, but also to their new uses: chic restaurants and art galleries, boutique hotels, touristy shops and cafés, business offices, upscale apartments for sale as opposed to cheap rental flats. The clean and bright façades of these buildings appear foreign in Berlin, associated with the invasion of tourists and hipsters. These renovated buildings look as if they were pasteurized and homogenized for safe consumption rather than produced out of lively everyday life (an association reinforced by the German word for "renovation," *Sanierung*, with its evocation of cleansing, health, and sanitization). The new colors of old buildings in Berlin do not necessarily follow original coats of paint found beneath soot or plaster. The elaborate ornaments and moldings are in many cases completely new, since the original ornamentation was often removed in the postwar period.

As Henri Lefebvre might have put it, renovation and gentrification turn urban space into a commodity of exchange value, while counterpreservation appropriates urban space for its use value to everyday social practices. The idea of counterpreservation may thus figure as a "social space" in what Lefebvre identifies as the

potentialities—of works and of reappropriation—existing to begin with in the artistic sphere but responding above all to the demands of a body 'transported' outside itself in space, a body which by putting up resistance inaugurates the project of a different space (either the space of a counter-culture, or a counter-space in the sense of an initially utopian alternative to actually existing 'real' space).⁵⁶

Thus understood, counterpreservation's election of dilapidated and dirty spaces is not a celebration of morbidity, destruction, and death. It is the defense of vital and imperfect social contexts. Moreover, there is no direct equation between social diversity and architectural decay. Dilapidation is neither an end result nor the symbol for social or cultural values. Rather, counterpreservation is the condition that makes it possible for certain social groups to use urban spaces within the context of globalization and gentrification. Counterpreservation is instrumental. Seen this way, counterpreservation is the defense of the right to the city. This approach is present in all of the examples in this book, although it is most clearly seen in the

55. Anja Schwanhäuß, *Kosmonauten des Underground: Ethnographie einer Berliner Szene* (New York and Frankfurt: Campus, 2010); Ulrich Guttmair, *Die ersten Tage von Berlin: Der Sound der Wende* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2013); Engle, "Ruinous Charm."

56. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 349.

residential communities discussed in chapter 2 and the alternative art centers in chapter 3.

There is another sense of inclusiveness. The right to the city is not just the right to affordable housing, leisure, and public services, but also the right to a multiple and democratic history and memory, open to debate and dissonant voices. Such a democratic memory is one that allows for the inclusion and representation of conflicting groups and narratives, not only as objects of representation, but also as subjects: those who interpret, ascribe, and build meaning.

This returns us to Young's participatory countermonuments. Young suggests that monuments in and by themselves are mere stones in a landscape.⁵⁷ By the same token, stones in a landscape can be animated by active engagement. Memory-work and historical consciousness can revive sites and buildings quite independently from official or conventional ideas of restoration or museum display. As long as there are social groups or individuals who perform the work of remembrance, silent heaps of stone come alive. Counterpreservation cannot be the exclusive province of designers or housing collectives. In order to realize its own goals of memory and social participation, it needs interlocutors. Counterpreservation points the way toward a communicative architecture whose ever-changing quality lies not so much in crumbling walls and rusting mullions, but in the ever-changing nature of the social realm.

57. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 2.