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Review essay

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Reference is made to Mächler's meetings with remarkable men from Lenin to Goebbels and to attempted interventions in matters of politics and planning during the Third Reich. What emerges is that where Mächler's proposals were directed at the modernization of Berlin's urban structure, they met with little resistance. Where the envisaged transformation of Berlin into a world city implied an opening towards internationalism (other than an influx of finance and building materials) he found, of course, no resonance in a Germany that was about to close its borders and start war. It was only as a Swiss national that Mächler was able to suggest to people such as Secretary of State Weizsäcker at the 1939 town planning congress in Stockholm that Germany be opened to international influences. For a German subject, such a lack of a commitment to Greater Germanic ideals would have proved lethal. The rejection of Mächler's ideas in 1939 was as predictable as that of the proposals he is said to have made in 1945: "As late as 31 April (!) 1945, Mächler makes a last attempt to make Hitler declare Berlin a 'White Zone', i.e. an 'open city'. But in vain!". Unfortunately, the book does not contain any documentary evidence on this and many other statements of the editor. And, unfortunately, it does not make clear whether we can trust such statements any more than the date of 31 April. What game Mächler was playing remains a secret: whether he was just naive, a dreamer, an impostor or simply a man who spoke out (and sometimes sketched out) what he believed in, sometimes as a representative of a strong lobby, sometimes a one-man lobby is unresolved. It has to be said, though, that the fact that attempts to help people like Mies van der Rohe, Hugo Häring and Alexander Schwabe against the persecutions of the Nazis proved unsuccessful in the end cannot be used as evidence against him (as in fact has been intimated).

Like any archive, this 'printed archive' is not for the general reader but for the researcher. Ilse Balg's merit is that she has made material from her Mächler archive available to a broader public. Here and there, a certain inconclusiveness of material and comments may frustrate the reader, but its wealth and its interesting nature present a challenge to carry out the research that would be necessary to fully appreciate the nature of Mächler's contribution, in which case a major aim of Ilse Balg's publication would be attained.

Platz frei für das Neue Berlin

Quite different aims and principles are pursued by Harald Bodenschatz's broad-based history of urban renewal in Berlin. Its focus is the Berlin type of multi-story tenement buildings or *Mietskasernen* ('rental barracks'), as they were polemically termed because of the way in which 'armies of workers' and their families were crowded together under primitive conditions. The book examines the realities behind the broad range of myths which were spun around the tenements.

Its subtitle *Urban renewal in the world's biggest city of rental barracks* takes up the subtitle of Werner Hegemann's influential myth-making classic *Das Steinerne Berlin* ('Berlin of Stone') (1930). Hegemann's book is a landmark in the long campaign waged against the stock of rental housing built during the years of the German empire. This campaign had already begun while the production of that German type of multi-storey tenement buildings was still fully underway in the second half of the nineteenth century. In practical terms,

however, this campaign only came to full fruition during the prosperous years of the Federal Republic. What the bombardments of World War II had left undone was completed by what may have been the most massive programme of large-scale clearance Germany has seen. Based on a wealth of material (most of it published, much of it forgotten), Bodenschatz provides us with a detailed account of the fate of that 'city of tenements' (*Mietskasernen-Stadt*): the economic and political conditions of its 'production' (of those who produced it and those who lived in it); the criticism voiced against it and the motives and interests at the base of that criticism; and finally its destruction and the way in which its residents were dealt with.

Beginning with the date of the foundation of the German empire in 1871 and taking us right up to the present, Bodenschatz analyses the individual roles and interplay between the major agents involved in the planning and restructuring of that 'city of tenements'. Focussing on the structure and interaction of their economic interests, he analyses how they form overt or concealed forms of *interest blocks*, and how consecutive cycles in the formation, growth and decay of these blocks gave rise first to the development of the tenement city and then to different fashions of dealing with it by way of redevelopment and urban renewal.

After a first chapter devoted to urban renewal in the historical (pre-Empire) parts of the city, the major part of the study deals with the tenement city and its consecutive phases of renewal. Bodenschatz reminds us that the alternative of rehabilitating the rental stock and of improving the living conditions of its residents is not an invention of the last two or three decades. He draws the planning historian's attention to the long forgotten work of people such as Otto Schilling, who had worked out and published detailed proposals to this end as early as 1815/1821. But even then, the general public condemnation of the living conditions in the tenements had already focussed entirely on the physical qualities of the buildings. Moreover, the alliances of interests were already so strong that ideas and programmes of rehabilitation had no chance of realization.

Analysing the criticism levelled at the 'city of tenements', in terms of its aesthetic, social, political, hygienic and other planning aspects, Bodenschatz traces its historical permutations from 1871 to the present. It was as early as 1860 that the term 'rental barracks' ('*Mietskasernen*') was coined. Protesting against the 'tenements' and the living conditions in them, but also against the interest block of speculators and the city administration, nineteenth century housing reformers initiated a process of cultural rejection, condemnation and debasement of this form of housing; a process for which Bodenschatz coins the term '*cultural de-valuation*' (*kulturelle entwertung*).

In spite of magnificent plans for creating a modernized city centre following the example of London, Paris and Brussels, urban renewal remained limited in practice and was restricted to traffic improvement schemes. The housing stock itself was not found worthy of rehabilitation; for planners and politicians were dreaming of the bright future of a Berlin composed of a modernized tertiary city centre and high standard residential districts at the urban periphery. To them, the housing stock in between was little more than an embarrassing reminder of an obsolete past, and completely at the disposal of traffic planning.

In the years of the Weimar Republic, the plans for urban renewal by means of clearance were still not carried out on a large scale because of housing shortages and the economic slumps. But the housing stock of the Kaiser era now additionally became an object of

exorcism for the architects of the German 'modern movement', who sought to express the political rejection of the German Empire in architectural terms.

Here Bodenschatz identifies a traditional cultural dilemma of 'modern' urban planning: whenever planners and politicians have wanted to give architectural expression to a historical discontinuity, a new start, the typical means for doing this has always consisted in the construction of new buildings and new towns, and not in a modified way of dealing with the existing stock of buildings. (Historic monuments were a different matter, of course.) Thus, in the 1920s, it was again the inhabitants of the tenement housing stock who suffered – this time from the paternalistic efforts of Social Democrats and modern architects. Again, the existing housing stock was not found worthy of improvement.

The close connection between social politics and urban renewal, always present as one of the underlying motives of the latter, assumed its greatest significance under the National Socialists. As in most countries, the tenements had long been viewed as a danger to public order. Programmes of slum clearance were now developed for specific areas characterized by political resistance and by deviant voting patterns and became part of the political programme. They were also a basis for Speer's and Hitler's famous megalomaniac schemes for the transformation of Berlin. The war put an end to the realization of these plans. But the structures urban renewal was to follow after World War II had already been laid down.

To planners and politicians, the war-time destructions were 'a great disaster but a great opportunity'. After 1945, criticism and polemics against the tenement quarters were revived almost without modification. They were composed of the same arguments as in 'Victorian' times, even though the social and political conditions had changed considerably, and with them the way in which the dwellings were being used had altered and was changing drastically over the years. But the established patterns of criticism had been too deeply ingrained in people's minds. A whole framework of organizational structures for urban renewal, as well as planning models and concepts for their implementation, had been established during the preceding decades and were now only awaiting the advent of the economic miracle of the post-war period.

A new *block of interests* composed of non-profit making building associations, political parties, the Berlin Senate and investors profiting from the system of federal subsidies meant big business when they carried out the large-scale clearance programme which had been prepared for such a long time.

Bodenschatz describes the slow start of redevelopment during the 1950s, how it picked up speed at the Interbau building exhibition in 1957, and how it steam-rollered through the 1960s. His analysis shows that the 'point of crisis' of this 'social democratic type of urban development' arrived in the early 1970s, and that it came about as a consequence of the combined effects of economic problems, of opposition from residents and the public and of changed cultural attitudes towards the 'Victorian' housing stock.

But even today, destruction has not come to a complete end in all parts of Berlin. While in Kreuzberg, new forms of 'cautious redevelopment' are being practised, while other quarters of the city, notably the 'red Wedding', are still subject to large-scale destruction. Bodenschatz's account shows how difficult it was for public protest and residential opposition in Kreuzberg to force the existing 'block of interests' to admit those new forms of 'cautious and careful urban renewal'. The extent to which progress has been made against

the technocratic bulldozer mentality and the established approach of social authoritarianism would never have been reached without the publicity and support of the IBA, the International Building Exhibition. It will be difficult to maintain the *status quo*.

This is where Bodenschatz's study supplies important arguments for the ongoing discussion. It knocks away the basis of cultural legitimization for large-scale clearance which the established patterns of criticism against the tenements had so far seemingly provided. It demonstrates that this criticism has lost much of its validity. Bodenschatz points out which aspects of this criticism are still as valid today as ever, in that they are inseparably connected with the built form of this type of housing. But he also shows that they have to be clearly separated from those points of criticism which have lost their justification as a consequence of the cultural and social changes following World War I. Many of the qualities of Victorian housing for instance have taken on a different meaning in today's changed cultural context. Today, the Victorian housing stock is no longer overcrowded and insanitary, and the contrast between a heavily decorated facade and the living conditions of those living behind it is no longer interpreted as an outrageous lie. The narrow courtyards behind the housing blocks (*'Hinterhöfe'*) are no longer synonymous with tuberculosis but with the potential for a pleasant neighbourhood atmosphere, and the mixture of housing and workshops, and small-scale industries has again come to be appreciated.

Changes in the physical structure, the patterns of usage and the cultural interpretation and 'valuation' of the 'tenements' are important prerequisites for salvaging this part of the housing stock. In his defence of 'Victorian' housing, Bodenschatz demands that the practice of 'cautious urban renewal' be further developed in close association and co-operation with the residents. A changed outlook and cultural perception could help to save this part of the housing stock, even though this would not be sufficient. It would have to be interlinked with a strategy of breaking up the structures of the existing block of interests.

It is obvious that Bodenschatz's analyses are not limited to their historical value and that they are not restricted to this form of housing. Even though history does not repeat itself, Bodenschatz's book once more provides striking evidence of the recurrence of certain patterns of argument and action. At present, these are directed at the 'new tenements', the concrete high-rise, high-density buildings of the 1960s and 1970s. They are subject to very much the same patterns of cultural condemnation and 'de-valuation' as the 'Victorian' housing stock and they are threatened by the same bulldozer mentality, which again pays scant regard to the residents' interests. The way in which problems of this kind confront the biggest (and most monstrous) of Berlin's high-rise, high-density housing estates is analysed in the book's last substantial chapter devoted to the history of the *'Märkisches Viertel'*.

The resulting comparative view (old tenements *vs.* new) once more clarifies that the central problem is how to ensure that the best *common* use is made of what has been built (whatever its shortcomings may be) and that the residents are involved as much as possible in any decision-making processes relating to their homes. While there is no point in playing down the built-in defects and the monstrosity of the 'tenements', the nature, function and effect of criticism has always been problematic, as Bodenschatz's study shows. Throughout his book, Bodenschatz sets out to demonstrate where well-founded criticism turns into, results in or is used for the purposes of 'cultural de-valuation'.

What he pleads for is a kind of 'balanced judgement' (though this is not the term he uses) which replaces wholesale condemnation and the truly destructive criticism of the past by a discerning, cautious type of judgement. This is why he comes to classify the criticism voiced by the housing reformers – and notably by W. Hegemann – as libel and denunciation (*Diffamierung und Denunzierung*).

True to good political and academic tradition, the housing reformers were undeniably overstating their case. But I wonder whether the strong moralistic content of these terms (and their component of intentionality) could not have been used with more advantage to help distinguish between well-meaning but short-sighted criticism (even if it turned out to be destructive) and the treacherous campaigns of the Nazis.

It is true that Bodenschatz does not fail to clarify where progress has been made in legislation and other matters relating to the rights of residents. Nevertheless, the general impression which prevails towards the end of the book is that those responsible for the construction of old and new tenements, responsible for the failure of developing alternative strategies for rehabilitation (instead of destruction), and all the critics of the tenements who have thrown the baby out with the bath water over the last century (intentionally as well as not), stand united in the face of Bodenschatz's condemnation: (architects, politicians, speculators, housing reformers, social democratic paternalists, Nazis, pre- and post-war technocrats, SPD and CDU).

This may be particularly critical in the present climate of public discussion in Germany ('*Historiker-Streit*') where emphasizing the relativity of the Nazi activities effectively results in their vindication. To me, one of the most exciting elements in Bodenschatz's study is its analysis of the patterns of architectural criticism and the uses to which it has been put in history. Yet his increased awareness does not enable him to entirely escape the traps of traditional academic discourse. In order to make his point, he too tends to overstate his case. His approach avoids questions such as what made even the most well-meaning among the housing reformers fail; why paternalists and technocrats have not been able to step outside society's dominant modes of thinking? But these may be questions for further research and may be asking a bit much of one book.

None of this impairs the book's *central objective* of showing *where* the critics of the 'rental barracks' went wrong and of using this analysis in a *pragmatic* way as a basis for delineating alternative strategies and policies for urban renewal.

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