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The *Bauwerk* in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Dresden's Neumarkt/
Frauenkirche and the Ethics of Historical Reconstruction

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Elizabeth Rae Guthrie in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

The *Bauwerk* in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Dresden's Neumarkt/
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Dresden's historic reconstructions bring up questions that reach far beyond the city's new/old Neumarkt district. In this thesis, I would like to take a closer look at the current ideological discourse surrounding the reconstruction of destroyed historic buildings in Dresden and other cities in the former DDR. What seems at first to be a simple culture war between progressive and reactionary city planners is actually, I will argue, a unique historical moment that blurs the dogmatically held ideas of rationality and nostalgia, ornament and function, and high art and kitsch. From the uncanny shadow of a church recently raised from the dead, I will explore the aesthetic and ethical ramifications of the technologically reproduced building.

Keywords: Dresden, Frauenkirche, Historical Reconstruction, Neumarkt, East German Architecture, Modernism, Walter Benjamin, Aura, Kitsch

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The *Bauwerk* in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility:

Dresden`s Frauenkirche/Neumarkt and the Ethics

of Historical Reconstruction

Elizabeth Rae Guthrie
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I

*Und die Spieluhr spielt:
Dresden, in den Musennestern
wohnt die süße Krankheit Gestern*¹

-- Uwe Tellkamp: *Der Turm. Geschichte aus einem versunkenen Land.*

Recently, I emerged from Dresden`s newly rebuilt Frauenkirche where I met two well-dressed young women singing Reformation-era hymns. I was interested when they stopped their music and began a speech about the “historical lies” that surrounded us on the square. The missionary zeal of these young Modernists^a made an impression. I have remembered their sermon as I have read in feuillets, blog entries, and newspaper articles about the “Bausünden”² of Dresden`s Neumarkt, the “Schandfleck”³ where Berlin`s Palast der Republik once stood, and the “Auferstehung”⁴ of Halberstadt`s town hall. The discourse surrounding the reconstruction of historical buildings in former East German cities seems to have taken on a distinctly ecclesiastical tone. The arguments in the media I have been reading usually escalate between

^a Modernism is, of course, an immense movement that encompasses many contradictory ideas. When I use the term modernism, I am referring specifically to the ideologies and philosophies of early Modernists such as Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier. All of the listed architects argued against ornamentation and against references to the past. Their styles were boxy, using similar materials such as steel and glass. They believed buildings were meant to be functional and conceived mass-produced designs. For more on Modern architecture, see Manfredo Tafuri, *Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli 1976).

tourists, citizens and representatives of historical societies on one side and investors, city planners and professional architects on the other side. Interestingly enough, it is not only nostalgic citizens and historical societies who use religious imagery, but also those very architects and city planners who fashion themselves so self-consciously as Modernists, and thus as bulwarks of sobriety and enlightenment in an unenlightened, Disneyland world. Listening to the doctrines of Modernism and their arguments against reconstructions being preached to the tourists around me, I wondered how the ecclesiastical language of an *auto de fe* has slipped into the rhetoric of contemporary architecture and city planning.

Since the fall of the Berlin wall, the *tabula rasa* left in many of the ruined city centers of the former East Germany has brought forth a perfect storm of ideologies in urban renewal. It is not that the history of architecture has been free from ideological wrangling: from the moment that Kaiser Franz Joseph pulled closed his Hofburg curtains in disgust at the sight of Adolf Loos' provocative new building across Vienna's Michaelerplatz, modern urban architecture has always been a publicly polemic art.⁵ But the battle lines drawn between the ideologies have remained consistent. Ever since Loos and his contemporaries resoundingly rejected the social stratification embodied in the ornamentation of historicism, most serious, reputable architects have continued their project of rationalizing urban architecture.⁶ While individual buildings and small historical districts may have been restored, preserved and set aside from destruction, the builders of the city maintained a clear mandate: new buildings will serve to make the city into a functional machine.⁷ Where extra funds are available, new buildings can showcase aesthetic possibilities, but always in a vernacular appropriate to modern design. Even though Post-modern^b architects

^b My use of the term "Post-modern architecture" is based upon the ideologies of architects and critics such as Robert Venturi, Michael Graves, Charles Moore, and Frank Gehry. These scholars and architects re-introduced ornament into architecture simply for the sake of ornament—hoping

may have playfully and symbolically returned individual ornamental or technical elements from the past, such as scrollwork, arches, or columns, these individual exceptions have only served as “critical” quotes of the past, as carnivalesque digressions that do not seriously call for a return to any past architectural ideology.⁸

While standing in the Neumarkt in the shadow of the newly reconstructed Frauenkirche, however, I could clearly see that there is a sea of change in store for Post-modern architectural discourse. Although many ruined buildings have been carefully restored to their former state, the Frauenkirche project cannot by any stretch of the imagination be classified as a restoration, for it had to be rebuilt almost entirely from scratch. The church’s unique bell-shaped dome returned to its former place among Dresden’s characteristic skyline, as if the darkest hour in the city’s history had simply never happened. Whereas the historical architectural substance of Berlin’s Reichstag building had been carefully restored and critically integrated into a modern building of glass and steel, the Frauenkirche’s technicians reconstructed vast vaults of sandstone to match the pictures and plans of a building that had not existed for most of a human lifetime. An entire building has been reproduced by architectural technology, and the copy now casts its shadow across the columns, ornamented windows and baroque busts of an entire “historic” quarter of Dresden that did not exist five years ago.

Dresden’s historic reconstructions bring up questions that reach far beyond the city’s new/old Neumarkt district. In this thesis, I would like to take a closer look at the current ideological discourse surrounding the reconstruction of destroyed historic buildings in Dresden

to solve the problems of Modernism. Characteristic traits of this style of architecture include: pluralism, double coding, flying buttresses and high ceilings, irony and paradox, and contextualism. For more information on Post-modern architecture, see Charles A. Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions 1987).

and other cities in the former DDR. What seems at first to be a simple culture war between progressive and reactionary city planners is actually, I will argue, a unique historical moment that blurs the dogmatically held ideas of rationality and nostalgia, ornament and function, and high art and kitsch. From the uncanny shadow of a church recently raised from the dead, I will explore the aesthetic and ethical ramifications of the technologically reproduced building.

II

*Auferstanden aus Ruinen
und der Zukunft zugewandt,
lasst uns Dir zum Guten dienen,
Deutschland, einig Vaterland...*⁹

-Johannes Becher, *Nationalhymne der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*

The history of the Dresden Frauenkirche, or Church of Our Lady, has led an impressive show of technological advancements in architecture. It was first constructed between 1726 and 1743 by architect Georg Bähr. This cathedral, with its 96 meter-high bell-shaped dome distinctively crafted out of sandstone, was a part of Dresden's iconic baroque skyline for some 200 years. The construction withstood Prussian bombing, the Seven Year's War, World War I, and even the first two days of bombing in February of 1945 during the Second World War. It was not until February 15, 1945, when the firebombs surrounding the structure reached a heat of 1000 degrees Celsius, that the eight columns supporting the structure gave way, causing the vast dome to collapse upon itself.¹⁰ After the Church was reduced to rubble, two wall fragments and the surrounding pile of broken stones were designated as a memorial "against imperialist barbarism, for peace and the happiness of the people"¹¹ for some 45 years. It was unlike any war monument in Germany. Other monuments, such as the Gedächtniskirche in Berlin, were either restored or at the very least had the unsalvageable rubble removed before they were

memorialized. However, the memorial at the site of the Frauenkirche was unique in that it represented something more akin to a mass grave: its fallen Dome entombed the many victims who had sought shelter in the church during the bombing raid. This memorial was not constructed, erected, or even used as any kind of museum, but rather it was minimally secured and then left alone for nearly half of a century. By the time of the German reunification, tree saplings and grass had begun to grow on the mound, re-claiming the rubble into the empty, grassy landscape that had once been Dresden's bustling Neumarkt.

When the Wall dividing East and West Germany finally came down, and the reunification of Germany became a reality, serious efforts were made to reconstruct Dresden's characteristic structure in the former skyline. With the support of a vast community ranging from citizens and donors to architects and historians, 180 million Euros were raised in an unprecedented international fundraising effort.¹² IBM's computer-assisted three-dimensional imaging program or CATIA put together three-dimensional images of the some 8,500 stones saved from the original Frauenkirche. Architects used over 90,000 electronically generated images to literally piece together the old stones, blackened by smoke, with the new white stones.¹³ While the goal was to follow Bähr's plans exactly, some changes had to be made so as to be in compliance with modern-day building codes. With advances in architectural methods and technological implementations, architects and engineers were able to work together to prevent problems in the original design, such as cracking in the sandstone dome and were able to add other improvements.¹⁴ Sebastian Feydt described the improvement process stating that: "repeated surveys and checks were necessary. Scaffolding of a type no longer used on modern building sites had to be designed and built. Finally, a canopy was to span the entire building site so that this was largely independent of weather."¹⁵ In order to successfully re-build an old

structure, new technological inventions and innovations were necessary and this created a new type of architecture that is neither Modernist nor Post-modernist.

Technologically, this was an unparalleled undertaking. Because of the mechanical virtuosity of the reproduction, the project changed the whole way that reconstructions are considered. Because of the new form of architecture created due to its reconstruction, the Frauenkirche also instigated a change in the discourse surrounding reconstructions in general. It was as if the former Church had risen from the dead, so exact were its plans. Thus it broke metaphysical rules and in a way turned back time—as if the destruction had never happened. Professor David Lowenthal describes the rebuilding of the Frauenkirche as being “seen through the lens of nostalgia, representing a past that is both highly idealized and altered to meet the needs of the present.”¹⁶ *Zeitgemäß* or not, this structure could and does re-exist and even in the wrong time period. With this kind of miraculous reconstruction, it is no wonder that the discourse surrounding its existence and the trend for other reconstructions turned to mythic and ecclesiastical language. Through the rebuilding of the Frauenkirche, and the new technological advances, the whole ideology concerning a fraudulent or impossible replication has been changed. Kenneth Asch exclaims of the Frauenkirche’s extraordinary re-existence: “Here is tangible proof of a legend rescued at the eleventh hour from extinction.”¹⁷ The reconstruction of the Frauenkirche allows us to see the effects of implementing new technology to rediscover old buildings. With the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche has come a new type of architecture altogether and with it a new method of discourse which alludes to religious and mythic themes.

III

*Wer das Weinen verlernt hat,
der lernt es wieder beim Untergang Dresdens...*¹⁸

-Gerhart Hauptmann, *Die Untat von Dresden*

*Wer das Staunen verlernt hat,
der lernt es wieder beim Anblick Dresdens!!*¹⁹

-Frank Thielen, *Leben in der Frauenkirche*

Architects, city planners and architectural critics have long been able to dominate architectural discourse because of their privileged position in the discursive media. A layman might have responded to articles and reviews in newspapers, journals and books, or taken part in a radio discussion, but the official discourse has been dominated by those who control the economic and ideological decisions about a building's form and function. As might be expected for a reconstructed church that owed its existence to advanced digital imaging technology, the planning, fundraising and reception of the Frauenkirche took place in a media environment that was more transparent and interactive than at any other time in modern history. Each time one of the dark historic stones was placed amid the lighter new building blocks, thousands of people across the world could not only see the progress, but post their own comments and ideas on hundreds of Weblogs, sometimes referred to simply as blogs, that followed the Frauenkirche's restoration. To see what is being discussed, I have reviewed the newly-formed public forums that house these discourses. On many informal news sites online there is free access to post articles, links, and even personal opinions on the matters, making these different and specific news sites into a kind of Wikipedia article for each new building project. One can find arguments anywhere on the scale from scholars to neighbors both for and against the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche. While these extremely informal sites do not necessarily offer a scholarly outlook

on reconstructions, they show the discourse and opinions of the public, which both affect and are affected by the surrounding architecture.

For anybody not following the discourse surrounding the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche, the next sections outline the main arguments found in the blogs discussing the issues of reconstructions. Among the participants in the blogs that followed the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche, two camps evolved: a group of enthusiastic supporters of the reconstruction effort, and a group who decried the reconstruction as a violation of modern building ethics and aesthetics. The following blog posts provide an overview of the ideology of these groups. I have specifically used blog posts from sites such as “Frauenkirche Dresden” and “Dresdner Debatte,” as they are not only updated frequently with the progress of architecture projects in Dresden, but they also offer an equal representation of both sides and open forum where both camps can freely argue their points. One side of the argument, as mentioned above, fully supports reconstructions, claiming they are justified as they fulfill the public need for beauty. Their arguments tend to be geared toward aesthetics, claiming that a public right to beauty and identity makes reconstructions ethically appropriate. As a report on his visit to the Frauenkirche, one blogger from Ortenburg wrote, “Die Frauenkirche ist ein absolut schönes Bauwerk, das wir Dresdner stolz sein können!” [sic].²⁰ Many of those supporting the reconstruction offer similar sentiments concerning the restoration of beauty, and even make allowances for its magnetic pull for large crowds and long lines full of tourists. A blogger from Munich describes why this is through his the experience he had visiting the Frauenkirche:

Am Anfang waren ich und meine Frau ein wenig enttäuscht über die Scharen von Touristen die sich trotz mehrfacher Hinweise nicht davon abhalten ließen, ständig zu fotografieren. Auch die Stille im Raum des Gebets, leidet unter flüsternden, erstaunten

Touristen. Jedoch kann ich sie alle verstehen, denn diese Kirche ist überwältigend und mir lief mehr als einmal eine Gänsehaut den Rücken herunter. So viel Geschichte, Erlebtes, Glaube, Hoffnung, Gutes und Schönes wie dieses Bauwerk ausstrahlt ist einfach überwältigend. Auch die kurze Andacht beginnend mit einem Gedicht von Rilke, hat uns sehr gut gefallen und es war schön zu beobachten, wie all die erstaunten Gesichter innenhielten und den Worten des Pastors folgten. [sic]²¹

Many others share this opinion, as they believe that seeing the newly rebuilt Frauenkirche is an experience that should be shared by all. Some describe the Frauenkirche's beauty, grandeur and craftsmanship as reasons in favor of its "Auferstehung."²² A blogger from Australia who had the opportunity to visit described the Frauenkirche as "absolutely glorious, magnificent and [as having] unbelievable beauty and splendor. [She] sat in silence and wondered at the workmanship and [the] amazing Church of worship."²³ While complimenting the Frauenkirche's vast beauty and grandeur, this blogger gives no credit to any one person, but rather the general "workmanship" that represents a community effort rather than one man's genius.

Another argument used in favor of the rebuilding of the Frauenkirche is religion. It is important to remember that the Frauenkirche, like all buildings, has more than a merely aesthetic purpose; it also offers some sort of function, and in this case it is first and foremost a Church—a place of worship. Some argue that the Frauenkirche stands as an important monument solely due to its religious functions. One visitor writes: "Ich war die Woche in Dresden. Die Frauenkirche ist einmalig und ein Zeichen des Willens und der Versöhnung! Ich kann nur sagen: Wer das Staunen verlernt hat, der lernt es wieder beim Anblick Dresdens!!" [sic]²⁴ This contrasting allusion to Hauptmann's remarks made in 1950 after the destruction of the Frauenkirche, represent a strong feeling of appreciation, both for the re-building of this Church and its

amazing, albeit somewhat tragic history. This blogger's experience, like many, was highly spiritual, thus placing a heavenly aura on not only the ornament, but also the purpose of the Church.

IV

*If works of art were judged democratically—that is, according to how many people like them—kitsch would easily defeat all its competitors.*²⁵

-Thomas Kulka, *Kitsch and Art*

As an extreme example of bad American middle-class taste, it seems that reference to Disneyland serves as one of the most vindictive critiques that is used against a new building. In the Frauenkirche blogs that I have read, Disney's architecture is used not only an example of bright, colorful, touristic kitsch, but also as a prime example of a forgery, an unethical copy that has no claim on any authentic history. Most critics of reconstructions object because they feel that they represent the same problems presented in Disney architecture like those of kitsch and forgery. One blogger claims that Germans are especially sensitive to the kind of forgery perpetrated by Disney: "German people know the difference between what is really old, and what is re-made. And they don't like the re-made kind of thing, because if you know the real deal, that stuff looks like Disneyland. Fake."²⁶ Arguments against kitsch and Disneyland architecture infiltrate both the blogosphere as well as scholarly criticisms. The anti-kitsch approach suggests a privileged position and a hierarchy of opinion among Modern architects, since the public, as Kulka reveals, would undoubtedly be in favor of kitschy buildings. While kitsch alludes to forged beauty, is it a legitimate reason to avoid reconstructions?

For many of the Frauenkirche bloggers, the reconstruction of the church has returned the city to its lost glory, and the city has become the "Elbflorenz"²⁷ once again. After showing their

enthusiastic support for the Frauenkirche, many of these bloggers wonder why modern architects cannot produce something as beautiful. Their support of the reconstruction turns into a broader critique of Modernism. Those bloggers in favor of modern architecture, on the other hand, complain of the reconstructionists' naïve use of the term "beauty." From its inception, modern architecture has challenged the traditional bourgeois notion of beauty, and has exposed the problems inherent in architecture based upon middle-class taste. Hermann Broch, a great critic of kitsch, explains, "The work of art strives to undo death through an experience of timelessness, of eternity, which we call beauty, whereas kitsch is simply flight from death, a running away, the art of escape, as in escape literature."²⁸ He claims that kitsch is a lower form of beauty that does not inspire knowledge or enlightenment, but merely represents a raw and somewhat carnal beauty that offers a mere escape instead of inspiring progress. This same sentiment is present not only in the arguments of his contemporaries but also in the public opinions shared by those arguing against reconstructions.

The argument against kitsch seems to be the most popular reason used against reconstructions, as they are simply viewed as tourist magnets and even sometimes described as "Schandfleck[e]."²⁹ As a tourist-magnet, reconstructions have been described as comparable to Disneyland. One article describes Dresden's Neumarkt as a "Barock Disneyland."³⁰ Another blogger posted an article online that goes into great depth about the kitsch of the Dresden Neumarkt, or as he describes it, "Las Vegas an der Elbe."³¹ His reference to Las Vegas reflects the conviction that reconstructions are unoriginal and serve the same purpose as the tourist-attracting buildings on the Las Vegas Strip. Modern architects argue that "meaning [is] to be communicated, not through allusion to previously known forms, but through the inherent, physiognomic characteristics of form."³² Unlike Las Vegas, with incessant references to former

and even current famous structures, Modernists believe that architecture should be original and free of kitsch.³³ The false fronts, tinsel and lights found on the Las Vegas Strip represent a perfect example of opposition to Modernist beliefs as the architecture lies outside of both historical and geographical context. Like the casinos in Las Vegas, one blogger describes the Frauenkirche's appearance as "zu bunt und einfach nur kitschig... hätte man die ruine bestehen lassen, hätte das ganze heute mehr Charme." [sic]³⁴ This blogger alludes to the authentic state that the Church was in as it stood as a memorial and before it was replaced by fake materials, now referring to the past grandeur and forgetting the present. Agreeing with this sentiment, another wrote:

More recent 'reconstructions' seem to me to go far in the direction of Kitsch. E.g. the Frauenkirche with a lift halfway to the top and steel-and-glass construction in the dome and confectionary-style pastel paintings inside... more like Frauenkuchen, it is clearly oriented as a tourist money-maker... Go to the Kreuzkirche instead, that still has some real history to it. Or the cathedral, maybe there you could hear a real Baroque organ [sic].³⁵

This remark shows how the idea of a reconstruction alludes to a theme-park-like city, instead of the past, which the structure is supposed represent. Modernists argue that idealizing the past creates a fake representation of history. This blogger's comment also brings up the popular debate of "real history," or in other words, the common issue found with new structures not mirroring the architectural context in which they are built. Most critics would argue that due to the kitsch surrounding reconstructions, they do not represent the history to which they should concretely represent, but rather as Whitney Rugg explains, "[they are] seen as a type of creation that reaffirms rather than challenges the collective norm, a source of sheer entertainment in

opposition to the elevated perception generated by high art.”³⁶ Kitsch represents an iconic and touristic aura, which, ironically, makes the building common.

V

*The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological—and of course not only technological—reproduction.*³⁷

-Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*

If Disneyland is full of so-called “fake” architecture, what kind of architecture can be referred to as being “real?” In the blog discussions surrounding the Frauenkirche, the question of authenticity has been an issue since the start of the reconstruction trend. What is a copy? When is copying *Kunst/ Bauwerke* allowed? In his well-known essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,”³⁸ Walter Benjamin argues that the meaning of art changes with the character of its technical reproduction. He argues that in having subjects, such as *Kunstwerke*, available to the masses, the work is able to speak for itself. He claims that with its mass- and technological- reproduction, art loses its “aura.” Benjamin describes aura as “the desire of the present-day masses to “get closer” to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing’s uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction.”³⁹ “Aura” is Benjamin’s term for the religious significance that is projected upon art, and the cult-worth that this religious or ritual significance creates over time. He argues that it is important to destroy the aura so as to focus on the rationality and educational aspects of art. Although his contemporary, Theodor W. Adorno, believed that with the loss of aura comes the loss of a space for possible avant-garde manifestation and creativity,⁴⁰ Benjamin claims that the elimination of aura is a more complex historical development, an indefinite energy that also possesses the prospective

for “democratizing both access to cultural objects and a critical attitude toward them.”⁴¹ He argues that this is done through the technological reproducibility of art.

There is a question of authenticity and forgery that is solved with technology—especially in the form of film, for there is nothing authentic in print for it is made by machine with no track of the original. Benjamin claims that without authenticity and originality, that aura is lost, for the ritual of desiring to attain or see the unique aura-filled *Kunstwerk* is gone because everyone has a copy. Benjamin states:

For the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual. To an ever-increasing degree, the work reproduced becomes the reproduction of a work designed for reproducibility...to ask for the “authentic” print makes no sense. But as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized.

Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics.⁴²

Now, the sense of value, catharsis, awe or amazement that one feels when viewing a work of art is tied to the content rather than the context surrounding it. Without aura, a work is freed from the place and ritual and it is brought closer to people and is made less authoritarian in character. Is Benjamin’s theory relevant to architecture? In other words, can we produce copies of buildings through reconstructions? The Frauenkirche certainly seems to prove this theory possible, as it is an exact historical and technological reproduction, that also follows the “rules” of re-building in order to become authenticated.

VI

*“Alles Gescheidte ist schon gedacht worden,
man muß nur versuchen es noch einmal zu denken.”⁴³*

–Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*

The question of authenticity often presents itself in the discourse surrounding the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche. Many who argue against reconstructions claim that they lack the authenticity found in original structures. What is the difference between a good copy and a bad copy? Many modernists argue that reconstructions are fraudulent copies of earlier works—a sort of architectural plagiarism.⁴⁴ However, Walter Benjamin argues that making copies of art is a good thing, for it destroys the aura. The question is, can a *building* be copied? Benjamin claims that although “the authentic work retains its full authority in the face of a reproduction made by hand, which it generally brands a forgery, this is not the case with technological reproduction.”⁴⁵ Can it not be argued that the Frauenkirche is, as close as one can get to it, a technological reproduction of a building? Technology has finally advanced to the point that an exact replica can be constructed. Without technology, as Benjamin explains, copies could not be made—for they would have indeed been forgery. However, with a combined effort of science and community, the Frauenkirche was reborn. Credit is still given to the original maker, thus making it hard to claim that any one person has plagiarized the original. Because of the advancement of technology, architects now have the ability to reproduce a building through mechanics, which, according to Benjamin, eradicates the “brand of forgery.”⁴⁶

Modernists seem to have created a set of rules or guidelines that validate certain types of reconstructions and rationalize why most are not authentic. The reconstruction or restoration of the Neues Museum in Berlin was different from that of the Frauenkirche, in that it had at least

some semblance of a building to begin with. While some of the sections needed to be re-built, a great deal of the museum only needed some repair work and restoration.⁴⁷ The Neues Museum was reconstructed in a way that museumized the remains of the damaged museum. Chipperfield merely protected and built around sections of the original structure, thus making the building itself, part of the museum exhibit. Of the Neues Museum project, David Chipperfield Architects said: “Given this evocative yet inaccessible space, the restoration of the Neues Museum follows a principle of conservation rather than reconstruction.”⁴⁸ They argue that because this was more of a conservation rather than a reconstruction project, it is validated. They were not replacing a memorial or new building with a replica of what once stood there, but rather they repaired damages and added new materials only when necessary in order to keep the structure sound.

Why do Modernists support renovation and restoration projects such as Chipperfield’s Neues Museum on Berlin’s Museuminsel, and yet reject reconstruction projects such as the Frauenkirche? Why is conserving a building ethically appropriate while rebuilding is arguably a lie? In some cases, it may have to do with the nature of the reconstruction. The success seems to be determined on how much of the original building, if any of it at all, still exists. Benjamin argues that the presence of the original is needed for the concept of authenticity. While the Neues Museum project consisted of adding to and repairing an existing structure, the Frauenkirche project was forced to start from scratch yet still included old fragments into the new structure. According to Benjamin, by using actual pieces of the original structure, do not reconstructions such as the Frauenkirche portray this sense of “authenticity” by including original plans, materials and even by using the building for the same function as the first Frauenkirche? Gottfried Kiesow explains that, “according to preservation guidelines, the rebuilding of a

destroyed structure is only of historical value when the reconstruction uses more original materials than new ones.”⁴⁹ What does this “historical value” imply?

Some bloggers and scholars argue that “real history” lies in the physical building materials, while others argue that it is in the ritual or use of the building now—if the building carries the same historical significance it originally possessed, then it is authenticated. While reading discussions on the Internet about this issue, others have posed pressing questions as well. Responding to a comment about the legitimacy of the new Frauenkirche, a blogger from London asks:

Surely “history” includes the reason why a particular object is an object of the affection/veneration of the observer? Would this history not then be a preservation of that representation (rather than the object itself)? If so, surely whether the object itself is the original or a replica would not be important because the ideas being represented are being preserved? One only needs to observe behaviour around religious relics...to see that the veneration being displayed is that of the original idea [sic].⁵⁰

This blogger argues that the idea of “real history” is simply based on the general definition of history. If history is merely a preservation of original ideas and behaviors, then authenticity becomes less important and ritual becomes more so. Benjamin states, “It is highly significant that the artwork’s auratic mode of existence is never entirely severed from its ritual function. In other words: the unique value of the “authentic” work of art always has its basis in ritual.”⁵¹ He, too, argues that authenticity is based more on the ideology than on the physical nature of *Kunstwerk*; I believe that this same principle could be applied to a building. Others arguing in support of reconstructions claim that original materials and authenticity are not so important, but rather it is the meaning and symbolism behind the building that drives its purpose. While

discussing the idea of copies, one blogger wrote, “it’s difficult not to recall Sickert’s (Walter Sickert was a German-born English Impressionist painter ^{EG}) response to an art collector wishing to determine whether the Sickert painting he had bought was genuine or not. The response was, ‘No. But none the worse for that.’”⁵² In accordance with Benjamin, this blogger points out that as long as the *Kunstwerk* is an accurate replica, it should have the same value.

[Reconstructions] are not really historic...they lost their identificatorial value for the people when they were pulled down. So what they build now is nothing than a shell with no connection to History whatsoever, therefore lacking all value. [sic]⁵³

The opinion that reconstructions are not historical is actually quite popular in the discourse against rebuilding. Many claim that a false historical aura has been created with each new recreation. Without authenticity in material, origin, time and space, reconstructions do not, some argue, represent a “real history.”

VII

*Die übele Zwischenzeit möchte man gern vergessen oder ausrotten, um an das alte Berlin direkt anzuschliessen, was jetzt die junge Baumeistergeneration an wohlbeschaffenen Häuserblöcken und Einzelbauten errichtet. Aber das hieße eine Vergangenheit auslassen und ware echt berlinisch pietätlos.*⁵⁴

-Franz Hessel, *Das andere Berlin*

As was demonstrated by the missionary zeal of the young Modernists singing on the Neumarkt in front of the Frauenkirche, not only can a work of art itself become laden with an aura of religious meaning. The discourse that surrounds a work of art can also drift into the realm of the aura like Hessel’s use of “pietät” in the above quote, invoking religious terminology to discuss aesthetic phenomena. The language being used in the discourses surrounding the Frauenkirche’s reconstruction implies a new meta-discourse that infiltrates both sides of the

argument. Besides using the new Internet lingo such as lol, omg, and wtf⁵⁵, I have found that the language of discourse surrounding reconstruction projects has taken a rather ecclesiastical tone, especially among those who would agree with and perhaps are a part of the Modernist take against rebuilding. This newfound trend in using religious terms presents a method of discourse never really seen before with architecture. Terms such as “Bausünde,” “Auferstehung,” and “Schandfleck” are being used to describe reconstructions. This unusual method of debate is very uncharacteristic for the rational and sober group of Modernists who argue in favor of reason and intellect. Why have discourses surrounding reconstructions become riddled with liturgical language?

As might be expected, the pro-reconstruction group, unconcerned with rationalism in architecture, is quick to mythologize their ideology, speaking of “miracles” that have resulted in “resurrected” buildings. On the Frauenkirche Website, there is a Guestbook, where those who have seen the work are able to share their experiences. One traveler wrote, “ich war selbst einmal in der Frauenkirche. Ich bin nicht sehr religiös, aber dieses Bauwerk verkörpert etwas, dass nicht von dieser Welt ist” [sic].⁵⁶ Many on the Website shared similar experiences of awe and spiritual wonder at the reconstructed Church. Interestingly enough, it is not only the naïve pro-reconstruction group who slip into the realm of mythology, but also the very Modernists who are arguing for a rational and unemotional approach to the construction of a building. Like Benjamin argues about film, weblogs have become another unfiltered⁵⁷ venue in which to collect and observe language. While this, alone is interesting enough, we have discovered a new meta-discourse that *everyone*, both those pro and contra reconstructions, have incorporated into their arguments. While still arguing in favor of beauty or against kitsch, commentators on the Web have added a spiritual element to the idea of architectural reconstruction. While this could

arguably be expected when visiting a Church, even those who were displeased would seem to agree that “dieses Bauwerk...nicht von dieser Welt ist.” However, instead of describing the reconstructions in Dresden as “glorious” or “holy,” one blogger describes the new rebuilding of Dresden’s Neumarkt as “Spielplätze für Bausünden.”⁵⁸ The term “Bausünde” has become especially popular in describing the inauthentic forgeries, which seem to be popping up at an alarming rate in East Germany.

This uncharacteristic turn towards the religious and mythic argument, could arguably work against the Modernist camp. With their ideologies grounded in the rational, why have Modernists turned to a method of discourse filled with religious and fantastical allusions? In his famous analysis of the Tiller Girls in his essay “The Mass Ornament,” Kracauer explains that capitalist *ratio* had manifest itself in mass ornament of the uniformed dance routines performed by these girls. This supposedly rational form had become abstract, and thus began to adopt various mythic traits. Kracauer states:

Ratio flees from reason and takes refuge in the abstract...as such, it proves to be a relapse into mythology of an order so great that one can hardly imagine its being exceeded...*Ratio* is closed off from reason.⁵⁹

Just as with the idea of the Tiller Girls, Modernists have ignored the critical potential of reconstruction projects and turned to abstract arguments that have become ironic as they emotionally advocate for reason.

Ironically veering away from sobriety and reason, those who argue in favor of function and practicality are using a great deal of emotion and spirit in their arguments. One blogger goes even further than calling the Neumarkt a, “schlimme Bausünde” and even describes it as “baulich übel.”⁶⁰ What has spurred such a strong and arguably spiritual reaction from this group

of intellects? Returning to Kracauer's arguments, he claims that "viewed from the perspective of reason, the mass ornament reveals itself as a *mythological cult* that is masquerading in the garb of abstraction."⁶¹ Earlier in his essay, Kracauer explains that the mass ornament is the natural result of reason- it is the attempt to make available to the masses, every form of necessity and learning. However, those who advocate for reason should be wary, for just as the Modernist missionaries enlightening those who would listen about the "historical lies" held within the reconstruction of the Neumarkt, rationality can turn against ideology. Believing that they are actually supporting it, as evidenced by their return to myth, Modernists have abandoned rationality. The appreciation for reason can take on a holy veneration, thus, ironically, causing those rationalistic arguments to become just as impassioned and opinionated as personal beliefs. It is interesting to see the trend for personal conviction infiltrating every type of ideology. In using ecclesiastical language, do Modernists represent the aura which they are attempting to destroy?

VIII

*Despite opposing claims, retrospection and reverence of the past are inherently interwoven in their view of future architectural design.*⁶²

-Susanne Veas-Gulani, *From Frankfurt's Goethehaus to Dresden's Frauenkirche: Architecture, German Identity, and Historical Memory after 1945*

The two camps represented in the blogosphere surrounding the Frauenkirche have their roots in one of the foundational ideas of modern architecture: Modernism exists to purify architecture from the murkiness of history. Modernists argue that architecture, like most sciences, should constantly be advancing- taking into account historical or emotional references is simply the act of adding ornamentation to a building and is thus, as Loos would claim, a step

backwards. Modernists “warn against erecting what could at best be a copy of the original and call instead for ‘vorbildliche Bauten der Gegenwart,’ modern constructions free of any nostalgia for the past.”⁶³ While Modernists advocate for an eradication of ornament, Post-modernists have carefully used ornament for limited purposes: for irony, for beauty, or as a way to subtly invoke the history that Modernists had banned from architecture. Umberto Eco defines buildings as “signs that have both a denotative and a connotative level; while they are designed for specific functions, they also contain symbolic meaning.”⁶⁴ This “symbolic meaning” relates directly to the culture and traditions of the society surrounding reconstructed buildings. Thus, it is understandable that a culture would detest a plain and box-like existence and instead turn toward one with more personality and decoration. Where as modern architects sought to overcome the past through technology and a purging of historicist ornamentation, post-modern architects criticize the way that Modernism has repressed history. The current movement toward reconstructions reflects a desire to return to the past.

Architecture today has gone in a different direction than that of what Modernists would have hoped or predicted. The current style, Post-modernism, is seen as a reaction to Modernism.⁶⁵ It attempts to solve the problems of Modernism, like anonymity, pure functionality and lack of historical reference through a new type of pluralism. Post-modernists argue that it is important to communicate to the public through the use of ornamental ambiguity and also believe that sensitivity to context should be shown in current buildings. Unlike Modernists, their passionate arguments work in their favor as their ideologies mirror the hope for emotion and personality in art. Despite its historical inaccuracy, the public opinion is generally in favor of the Frauenkirche as it represents more than just the history in which it was originally built. In discussing the public’s relationship to the past, David Lowenthal states: “As many

reconstructions, reenactments, and even Disneyland reveal, as long as the image satisfies the onlookers' expectations, viewers perceive the building as true to the past and often are unaware that the object was altered."⁶⁶ It is not usually public knowledge what percentage of a reconstruction is part of the original, thus this has less import on its value than its aesthetic or cult-worth. Vees-Gulani explains this tendency by stating that, "Germans are continually drawn to processes of avoidance and suppression, redirecting the perception of German history away from Nazi Germany and its consequences to what is understood as a more glorious prewar past."⁶⁷ This sort of apolitical trend actually takes political action just as Benjamin explains, for with the destruction of aura, art is no longer based on ritual but rather it is founded upon politics.⁶⁸ Perhaps using buildings more as covered spaces, they can state politically what the public is feeling subconsciously. Anthony Vidler explains:

On the literal plane, the "empty spaces" appropriated or created by urbanism- the clearing of vacant or occupied territory- are paralleled on the phenomenal plane by the tabula rasa imagined by modernist utopias, to the point where both levels intersect in the commonplaces of modern urban development. The task of filling these voids...is given over to architecture, which is forced, in the absence of a lived past, to search for posthistorical grounds on which to base an "authentic" home for society.⁶⁹

It is important to take account of the public opinion as it houses the subconscious desires and uncanny perceptions of the citizens inhabiting the city. The question of authenticity is not so important as creating an environment that allows for a harmonious union between past, present and future.

IX

*Although the power of beauty requires no argument,
the aesthetics of ugliness needs justification.*

-Werner Sewing, *The Next Generation: New German Architects?*⁷⁰

Architects have been charged with the task of attempting to create an environment that can both fulfill the desires of the public and meet the requirements of their schooled opinion of art. However, it is not usually the pattern or desire for the architect to heed the public opinion, but rather they build what they are taught according to the aesthetics of architecture. While receiving arguments and popularity polls from the public architectural discussions on the one hand, architects must also serve the aesthetics of architecture and construct the “good” buildings.⁷¹ The Enlightenment spurred the idea that those artists, authors and architects produce works to lift the public out of their own self-incurred immaturity.⁷² This school of thought is still prevalent in even young German architects, as Werner Sewing explains that, “young German architects are always more strongly influenced by their educational stays at elite schools.”⁷³ This school of thought and influence has led to a tendency to ignore the aesthetic desires of the public, and to implement the aesthetics of architecture, which is predominantly modernist in style. Angelika Schnell confirms the impression that “especially with the younger generation everything is allowed except Postmodern architecture.”⁷⁴ Whatever architects have been taught has been the enlightened trend among building projects, despite what the public may think or desire.

However, with the public having greater access to publishing thoughts and opinions, these architects have been forced to amend their styles to adapt to the public’s wishes. After a specific public outcry in Dresden against the ugliness and brutality of the design that the

commission chose (the commission being merely seven men and women architects), this is how the commission responded: “Die Dresdner sollten den geschulten Augen der Fachleute vertrauen.”⁷⁵ Should the architect build what he believes to be “good” architecture, or should the opinions of the public be trusted? What seems to be constantly underestimated by modernist principles is the need for beauty and expression, which is extremely important in our surroundings. Referring to the ornamental and decorative elements in buildings, Venturi writes, “Architects can bemoan or try to ignore them or even try to abolish them, but they will not go away. Or they will not go away for a long time, because architects do not have the power to replace them (nor do they know what to replace them with).”⁷⁶ The human desire for beauty is natural and everlasting and thus it is arguably required in the surroundings of human life.

Previously, architects have concentrated simply on the movement of art and the advancement of technology to produce their new buildings.⁷⁷ However, the public, as evidenced in the blogosphere, has noticed the trend that is not in favor of their desires, and has begun to speak out against them. Avid blogger, newurbanism, has infiltrated many sites Online to try and get his message across on the importance and right the public has to influence architectural style. He argues:

Die Modernistenlobby versucht noch immer mit aller Gewalt, den Wiederaufbau Dresdens zu blockieren u.a. durch geschickt getarnte PR. Beliebter PR-Trick: “Ich bin ja für das historische, ABER” – und dann kommen zahllose Argumente warum Rekonstruktion verboten ist und diejenigen, die das dennoch wollen, alles “rückwärtsgewandte” Nostalgiker sind mit MickyMouse & Goofy unter einer Decke stecken. Liebe “Elite”: Eure Tricks werden langsam alt, lasst Euch doch mal was neues

einfallen. Ihr lockt mit Eurer Modernitäts- und MickyMouse-Argumentation keinen Hund mehr hinterm Ofen hervor.⁷⁸

With the popular desire for beauty, Modernists are crying out evermore against the type of beauty that is sought after. Claiming that re-creations possess a Disneyland-esque and kitschy nature, Modernists argue for simple and practical ornamentation. However, as evidenced by newurbanism`s claim, the populace now asks: is kitsch a reason *not* to build? The same Blogger argues:

Die selbsternannte “Elite” aus inkompetenter Kubus-Architektenschaft, gewissenlosen Großkonzernen und kulturzerstörenden Politikern hat den Kampf am Neumarkt bereits jetzt verloren. Es ist ein unglaubliches Glück und eine grenzlose Freude für alle Dresdner und auch alle Deutschen, dass sich hier die Menschen in Dresden durchgesetzt haben – und nicht die “Elite”.⁷⁹

Architects have typically adapted an “elitist” attitude that claims to know better, what is for the good of the public. Is it right that the public opinion be overruled by classroom claims?

While many would agree with this sentiment and these claims that architects have taken on an “elitist” attitude, some other point out that perhaps the opinions of the architects do mirror the opinions of the public. In response to outcries against architectural elitism, one blogger writes: “Natürlich sind die Architekten verantwortlich für ihre Bauten und ihren Geschmack. Aber eben dieser Geschmack begründet sich auch irgendwo. Es ist eben nicht so einfach und simpel wie Walt Disney die Welt zeichnet :P [sic].”⁸⁰ This blogger argues that perhaps the architectural trend is actually as influenced by the public desires, as much as it influences public style. Perhaps they are working in some strange sort of harmony to create buildings that fulfill

subconscious desires. While the public opinion is very important, should there not be some filtering to this process? Does the Internet perhaps leave too much unfiltered?

X

There is a painting by Klee called Angelus Novus. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is this storm.⁸¹

-Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

The Frauenkirche does not only cast a literal shadow across the Dresden cityscape, but a metaphorical one as well. What does this historically destroyed building—newly re-made by the art of technological reproduction—say about the way that we inhabit, experience and think about architecture? While it is not clear what kind of effect the new Frauenkirche may eventually have on architecture, this copy of a baroque church has, as Benjamin predicted, called in to question the notions of what can be considered as authentic. It is not the stylistic success of the church's mottle of dark and white stones that is ultimately at stake here, but the way that we perceive, inhabit and talk about historical architecture. At the end of the destruction of World War II, the public began to eagerly fight for their opinions of what type of country should emerge out of the rubble. While some still wished to follow the examples of Loos, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, many more wished to stunt the modern movement toward advancement. In the words of the architectural historian Hanno Rauterberg: "Project 'Future and Forgetting' had become

Project ‘Past and Remember.’”⁸² It seems that the style of architecture is forever in a battle against the past and the future. While intellectuals and certified architects desire for advancement and progression, there is something about the past with its nostalgia and aura that the public finds desirable. Could it be that perhaps even Modernists ignore the critical potential found in reconstructed copies of earlier *Bauwerke*? The ironic ecclesiastical allusion that Benjamin makes to an angelic figure that represents the struggle between progress and memory is mirrored in the modern-day discourses still surrounding architecture. It seems that copies have some sort of power to call up inadequacies of (modern) architecture as they undermine the sacred aura while simultaneously fulfilling the desire for beauty and personality.

The most interesting effect of the Frauenkirche may have nothing to do with its function as a church, a concert hall, a tourist site or a filled-in hole in Dresden’s skyline and collective psyche. As the creamy new sandstone eventually blackens and becomes indistinguishable from the old stones, the façade and the ornate interior of the church will continue to function as a projection space for important aesthetic and ethical questions: What role does a historic building play in building an urban or national identity? About the political potential for reconstructions, Vees-Gulani states:

The Frauenkirche runs the danger of becoming a site where memory of the past can occasionally be renegotiated in questionable terms. In the name of historical preservation, rebuilding then becomes a task of overcoming defeat and pain, a possibility of resurrecting national pride, and an outlet to thoughts and opinions that would be unacceptable if directly expressed. In the Dresden hype surrounding Germany’s own hardship, the true horrors and the extent of crimes under National Socialism are often minimized, while German suffering is emphasized.⁸³

For Germany, there are even more questions concerning the ethics of historical reconstructions, as their history is riddled with great revolutions and enlightenment eras as well as bloody wars and national destruction. The way that Germany represents itself through architecture is an extremely delicate and important matter. While reconstructions seem to undermine aura and yet offer beauty, there are still many questions that might be offered as an argument against rebuilding. For one, is the beauty represented merely a Disneyland-esque imitation that surrounds the world in kitsch? If so, is kitsch a reason *not* to rebuild? With the precarious methods and understood rules of authenticity outlining reconstructions and meriting only those with physical ties to the originals-what happens when technology brings us to the point that we *can* actually create a copy of a destroyed building, with or without the original pieces? Where previously the discourse could be separated in to camps of “Schön/Hässlich” and “Rational/Kitsch” there is a new potential, represented in the meta-discourse of ecclesiastical terms, for reconstructions to provide intellectual stumbling blocks for people on both sides of the argument. While the issues of beauty, aura, and authenticity still exist, perhaps a step back could reveal a new critical potential that reconstruction projects offer.

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- ⁷⁰ Werner Sewing, “The Next Generation: New German Architects?” *New German Architecture: Reflexive Modernism*, ed. Ulrich Schwarz (Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishing, 2002) 311.

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⁷² Immanuel Kant, “Was ist Aufklärung?” *Philosophie Arbeitsmaterialien*, vol. 6 (München: MVHS, 1999).

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⁷⁷ Hanno Rauterberg, “History-That Was Yesterday,” *New German Architecture: Reflexive Modernism*, ed. Ullrich Schwarz (Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishing, 2002) 314.

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