

## **Audrey Claire Lejeune – Architecture Department Study Trip – Berlin (December 2014)**

**Saturday, December 6th:** The flight from Stansted arrived in Berlin late at night. Despite not actively visiting the city quite yet, on my way to my host's house I walked through a bit of Berlin, West of the Spree. I noticed that that whole area up to the bridge is industrial, with large warehouses and company trucks, and very little and sporadic street lighting. Then as I approached the Spree it turned into large housing complexes. Only after crossing the Spree did ergonomic urban street lighting appear. This distinction was not so clear during the day when I returned.

**Sunday, December 7th:** At 8:45AM we (the students) met up with the tutors in front of the Reichstag. We went up to the dome (Norman Foster) and took time to sketch the structure. It is strangely separate from the Parliament building it sits on, yet it seems connected to the city through the 360° view it offers. We then visited the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (Peter Eisenman). Few in the group agreed on the appropriateness of having such an interactive memorial, as it makes vandalism and disrespect easy, as well how it sits on a large piece of property in the center of the city. We made our way next to Potsdamer Platz, with all the new buildings attempting to restore the old city center from before the wall (this complex includes the Sony Centre). This was quickly followed by a guided visit of the Philharmonie (Hans Sharoun). It was interesting to see how Sharoun's partner used his sketches to build the Chamber Music Hall extension after his death, and to note the differences between the two halls. Coming back that evening for a concert allowed me not only to experience the acoustics, which were excellent despite the unusual seating arrangement, but also to see the foyer in use during the entr'acte. That day we also visited the Neue Nationalgalerie (Mies van de Rohe), which was a great opportunity as it will soon close for several years for renovation work.

**Monday, December 8th:** At 10AM we met the tutors at the Jewish Museum (Daniel Libeskind). Here again the group disagreed on the correlation between the narrative told by the building form and the one told by the exhibition itself. Then we made our way to the Neues Museum, severely damaged during the war and renovated by David Chipperfield. The project's response is striking: he addresses the leftovers of the building by accentuating the ruins he had to work with, rather than overshadowing them with his implementations. At 3PM we had a guided visit of the Dutch Embassy building (OMA). I personally found it very contradictory, with very interesting ideas and spatial organisation, but some poor detailing and material choices, as well as some features that seemed excessive (for example a roof that slides open).

**Tuesday, December 9th:** We met up with the tutors at 8:15AM in front of the Berlin State Library (Hans Sharoun) for a guided tour before public opening hours. The similarities with the Philharmonie are interesting: the idea of a "democratic space" and the materiality are similar, and the acoustics are in both cases closely studied, despite being radically different in their result. It was also interesting to know that Sharoun had the insight -- or at least the hope -- that the Wall would fall eventually in his choice of a site for the library: totally on the edge of West Berlin and close to the Wall at the time, it is now in a central part of the city. We then visited the Museum of Musical Instruments, by Sharoun as well, where we could make the same comparisons as above. We walked through Tiergarten to see the Museum fur Naturkunde, which had an interesting approach to restoration: the bits of wall that had been destroyed have been replaced with copies in cast concrete, creating a façade with a ghost-like effect of what used to stand there. The group then separated, with the tutors and some people taking flights that evening. I made my way to David Chipperfield's offices, where they restored and extended what used to be a piano factory. I then walked around the area of Rosenthaler Platz, which is known to be the one of the most dynamic place to live in Berlin.

**Wednesday, December 10th:** I went to see the Charlottenburg Castle and the royal gardens. These have been modified and expanded through the years, both because of fashion and because of the destruction endured during WWI and WWII. I then walked around the Berlin Zoo area, which has luxury shopping malls lined up along a long boulevard on one side. On the other side, I accidentally came upon the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. Almost completely destroyed during the war, a new church was built where part of it used to stand. I came in just in time to hear the organ being played in the new bit. The remains of the original church have been turned into a remembrance room, with the history of the church and of the congregation explained, as well as two excellent scale models of the area in 1910 and in 1970, which showed the striking change that the war inflicted on the whole neighbourhood (almost none of the original buildings had remained standing in that area).