

David Frisby's "Spirit of Modernity, Spirit of the Metropolis – Martin Wagner's Modern Berlin"

Editors Note

David Frisby's "Spirit of Modernity, Spirit of the Metropolis – Martin Wagner's Modern Berlin" is one of the conference papers already uploaded to the Glasgow University website in 2011. Whilst the previous documents have been uploaded in their original form, the new versions have been edited in order to facilitate future research and references. The editing process has not been marked in the text at all. Other than this introductory information, I have tried to avoid any interference, here or in the text, that would distract the reader from Frisby's thought.

Frisby's "Spirit of Modernity, Spirit of the Metropolis – Martin Wagner's Modern Berlin" was presented to the colloquium "The Spirit of the City in Modernity" at the Whitney Humanities Center, in Yale University on the 26th of March 1999, a year before the presentation of "Old Vienna/New Vienna; Inside/Outside: Some Parameters in Resistance to Modernity" at the Vienna Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften (for the paper, the reader may also consult the university of Glasgow D. Frisby website). During the 1999 Spring Semester, and following a visiting fellowship at the IFK (1997-1998), and a 1998-2000 Getty Research Grant (received jointly with I. Boyd Whyte, Frisby worked as a Visiting Professor with the Yale Department of Sociology and as a Visiting Fellow with the Whitney Humanities Center; there, he taught two courses on "Simmel and Modernity" and "The City and Modernity" respectively. The lectures for the latter included topics such as: "Modernity in Theory," "The City in Theory," "City Topographies: Berlin/New York," "Circulation/Traffic," "Representations of the City," "Memory and the City," "Masses/Underworld."

Amongst other things, the paper verifies the increasing interest in architecture and urban planning that would inform a great part of Frisby's later works. For example, some of the ideas discussed here were further exposed in the co-edited *Metropolis Berlin: 1890-1940* that was completed by Iain Boyd-Whyte and was published in 2012 by the University of California Press. Other works related to Frisby's research during the late 1990s and early 2000s include:

(1999)

- "Culture, Memory and Metropolitan Modernity," in Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Verkehr & IFK (Eds.), *The Study of Contemporary Culture*. Vienna, Turia+Kant, pp.101-115.
- "Analysing Modernity." *Macjournal*, 4:9-17.
- Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project. A Pre-History of Modernity." *Macjournal*, 4:47-63.

(2000)

- Editor of *Georg Simmel in Wien. Texte und Kontexte aus dem Wien der Jahrhundertwende*. Vienna: Wiener Universitätsverlag.

(2001)

- "Georg Simmels Grossstadt: eine Interpretation," in L. Musner, G. Wunberg and C. Lutter (Eds.), *Cultural Turn. Zur Geschichte der Kulturwissenschaften*. Vienna, Turia+Kant, pp.65-86.
- "Para analizar la Modernidad." *Guaragua*, 5(12):91-104.
- "La Modernidad en la Metropolis: Entrevista con David Frisby." *Guaragua*, 5(12):105-112.
- *Cityscapes of Modernity: Critical Explorations*. Cambridge: Polity; Malden, Mass.,: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001.

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Spirit of Modernity, Spirit of the Metropolis – Martin Wagner’s Modern Berlin

I

When Max Weber published the first of his two articles on “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” early in 1905, he introduced the concept of spirit in parentheses, suggesting that the notion of spirit was a strange, unusual or uncomfortable one in relation to capitalism. In a number of respects, Weber’s articles on the spirit of capitalism can be viewed as a confrontation with Werner Sombart’s *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* of 1902, a substantial and substantive study of the origins of modern capitalism. There, and in his study of the German economy in the nineteenth century, published in 1903, Sombart’s discussion of the spirit of capitalism and the metropolis were not in parentheses. For his part, Weber drew upon Benjamin Franklin as a key historical source for delineating the spirit of capitalism and, amongst Weber’s contemporaries, Georg Simmel’s *Philosophy of Money* (1900). Thus, if there was an emergent discourse and controversy surrounding the spirit of capitalism in the early years of this century in Germany, then the same was equally true with respect to the spirit of the metropolis. These two interrelated sites of modernity - modern capitalism and the modern metropolis - were explored in greater or lesser detail by Weber, Sombart and Simmel in the early years of the present century. In turn, they may be viewed as part of a much wider discourse on the nature of the modern, capitalist metropolis and the search for its spirit that is to be found in the journals and newspaper literature of the period.

Given the dramatic expansion of metropolitan life in Germany since the mid-nineteenth century and its varied impact upon the consciousness and life-chances of its population, it is not surprising that there should have been a contested response to the modern metropolis, and even to its definition. If the definition of a metropolis as an urban conglomeration with a population in excess of 100,000 then by 1910 there were 47 metropolitan centres in Germany (compared with one – Berlin – at the start of the nineteenth

century). If a then current definition of a world city as possessing a population in excess of 1 million, then there was only one such city: Berlin. Its symbolic and hence mental elevation to this status occurred in 1896 on the occasion of the Berlin trade exhibition. The first German municipal exhibition was held in Dresden (the 5th largest city) in 1903, the exhibition and competition for the creation of a Greater Berlin in Berlin in 1910 and the municipal exhibition in Düsseldorf in 1911. Such major celebrations of metropolitan existence only partly sublated the powerful anti-urban impulses of many social strata in Germany. The division of the city (*Stadt*) and the country (*Land*) was merely part of a wider ideological confrontation between modernity and tradition, society and community, civilization and culture and, in the appropriate context, between America and Europe that was broadly articulated, often within emergent disciplines purporting to understand modern society, such as sociology.

What this all suggests is that a series of discourses developed at the turn of the century that focused upon the nature of the modern metropolis, the directions for city building (*Städtebau*), the relationship between the development of modern capitalism and the modern metropolis and the non-material (spiritual, mental, cultural) dimensions of the modern metropolis. To give some indication of the then current modes of conceptualising the metropolis and capitalism in this period, we should note that Sombart places emphasis upon the development of an 'asphalt culture' in the modern metropolis; Simmel announces the most significant feature of mental life (*Geistesleben*) to be a dramatic increase in nervous life; the debates on the directions for city planning in the 1890's associate the spatial forms of the modern metropolis as generating new pathologies (for Sitte agoraphobia, for others amnesia); the new discussion of the emergence of modern capitalism indicates the transformation of our mental and motivational orientation to economic (and urban) life into one dominated by a restricted form of (for Weber, 'formal') rationality. In other words, without elaborating upon these developments, there is evidence of an increasing focus upon the cultural, mental and spiritual dimensions of both the modern metropolis and modern capitalism alongside a continuing exploration of their materialist aspects. The

relationship between the economy, the city and their respective and interrelated 'cultures' is thus already under way.

II

This tendency to explore the spirit of the metropolis may also be seen in the critical discourse on the architecture and planning of the modern metropolis in Germany. An exemplary instance is provided by the writings of Karl Scheffler on the modern metropolis. His 1910 essay on 'The Metropolis' opens with the following statement:

The place where the struggle for a new architecture must be fought out is the metropolis, because there the intellectual (*geistige*) forces of the times converge together, because the metropolitan cities, as the centres of modern civilization, create the new presuppositions of a profane and ideal kind for architecture, because the idea of the metropolis slowly but surely takes over possession from the spirit of local community (*Gemeindegeist*) and the smaller towns too, and because for these reasons the whole country submits more and more to metropolitan sentiment [...]. What is absolutely decisive for the concept of the modern metropolis is not the number of its inhabitants but rather the spirit of the metropolis (*Grossstadtgeist*). It is this spirit that builds the new architectural structures (*Architekturkoerper*) [...]. For the modern metropolis is not an end [of a development] but rather a beginning. Hence architecture too does not stand under the banner of decadence but rather under the signs of new developments.

Scheffler's dichotomies between morphology and spirit, communal spirit and metropolitan spirit, the spirit (of the modern metropolis) and the body (of modern architecture) create the parameters within which a new metropolitan architecture can be conceived. In particular, the focus upon the idea of the modern metropolis enables Scheffler to explore the components of the *real* metropolis as well as the *idea* as *ideal*, i.e. the ideal modern metropolis.

What are the features of the modern metropolis? Alongside the metropolis as centre of trade, industry, seat of government and administration, etc., it is above all 'the centrepiece of world economic

interests', governed by 'internationally oriented, expansive world economically conceived interests in trade and manufacture'. The metropolis and its sentiments are increasingly the dominant ones in Germany and America reinforced by 'the natural increase in civilization (that does not always have to signify an increase in culture)', 'the general democratisation of the whole society', the mass migrations from the land to the city, the internationalisation of the economy, and the fact that the world economy requires a money economy, and this can only be organised in the metropolis'.

If the international spirit of the world economy is one of the key dimensions of the modern metropolis, the other is the family as 'the primal cell of the city', however much the modern metropolis creates out of its 'huge population' merely masses of individuals, and however much the new metropolitan population, with respect to its sentiment for the city, is almost indifferent'. The result is that the modern metropolis has again taken on the features of a fortuitous settlement (*Zufallssiedlung*). The unplanned expansion of the modern metropolis from its centre outwards has produced 'a hypertrophied degeneration of the old city economy', at the same time as the modern metropolis's 'spirit' is that of 'a crystallisation of the world economy'.

The absence of planning and conscious overall direction in the development of the modern metropolis results from the domination of 'impersonal capital', land speculation, and a calculated exploitation of urban capital that has calculated to the square meter the 'land value' (*Bodenwert*) but not the building value (*Gebäudewert*). This impersonal organisation of the modern metropolis has contributed to its 'internal and external formlessness' that contrast markedly with the realisation of the ideal metropolis. In the case of the latter,

The ideal metropolis... must fulfil two requirements. First, the metropolis must include the family economy as much as the city economy, it must therefore strengthen it anew and once more create the sense of family and metropolitan sentiment; and, second, it must perfectly correspond to modern needs and be a crystallisation point of interests directed towards the world economy.

Such requirements appear contradictory 'since the city as enclosed dwelling place of families requires a limited number of inhabitants and a surveyable size; and the city as workplace of the world economy 'requires contact with hundreds of thousands'. Scheffler's solution is for 'a monumental work city surrounded by a series of individualised suburban towns'.

Writing over a decade later after the First World War – in 1926 in an essay titled 'The Future of the Big Cities and the Big Cities of the Future' – Scheffler declares that this earlier image of the metropolis is no longer valid. Indeed, it was a utopian vision of the future metropolis. By implication, it was an image of the future that failed to recognise that:

The fate of the metropolis coincided totally with that of the economy, society and culture. The problem of the metropolis is the problem of modern life itself.

In turn, the identification of the future of the metropolis with that of life itself rapidly leads to utopian and illusory visions of the future. But what were the utopian visions of the metropolis in the pre-war period and what are they now? In the pre-war context, 'utopia was that metropolitan illusion for which the concept of development, above all technical development, had become an end in itself, and in which capitalism itself appeared to have become full of fantasy and poetry'. For the present period, after the war, revolution, strikes and yet greater housing scarcity combined with the transformation of cities into 'formless giant settlements',

the result is another kind of utopia which one may characterize as a utopia of pessimism and despair of the metropolis. To many, the metropolis seems merely hopeless, it appears like a synonym for the decline of the West, one makes comparisons with the phenomena of decline in ancient Rome and sees in the future only the coming collapse.

Thus, 'in the place of unlimited hope [there exists] an unlimited scepticism'.

For Scheffler, the present period (1926) is characterized by two tendencies. The first is a continuing flight from the land whose population 'has

a desire for the spirit (*Geist*) of the cities'. The second is the metropolitan dweller's unrest confronted with 'overfilled and overorganised' cities. The solution to this dilemma is for,

the metropolis to extend itself into the countryside. In other words, the country, the whole land will become city, will become metropolis, it forces the city to extend itself outwards, the broad landscape becomes filled with urban spirit (*Geist*).

Such a solution is obviously a long-term one (though as we shall see, one conceived for a more immediate future by Martin Wagner). As far as Scheffler is concerned, for the present, the flight *from* the cities will remain a counter tendency to the flight *to* the cities. The flight from the cities is a kind of 'internal colonisation' of the countryside, one in which 'the spirit of the city extends across the land'. But at present this colonisation exists in the form of housing estates for metropolitan dwellers and, as Scheffler points out, 'an estate (*Siedlung*) is not a village. It reckons from the outset with car, telephone and radio'. On a larger scale, it is to be found in general estate plans for the industrial, rural area between Bitterfeld, Halle and Merseburg.

Certainly, this extension of the city to the country will be aided by new technologies (Scheffler points to 'the social and economic mission of the radio') that, together with general 'industrialisation, mechanisation of life', will extend the metropolitan spirit across national boundaries too. The metropolitan centres will become similar in architectural style as a result of their emergence out of 'universally similar needs, universally similar materials and the same forms of construction'. In passing, it is worth noting that this constellation of needs, materials and construction was already announced in Otto Wagner's manifesto for a modern metropolitan architecture in 1896.

The extension of mechanisation and industrialisation will transform the building process itself:

Parts will be produced in factories and assembled together on the building site. Thus, the building craftsman will be transformed into an assembler. This mode of working determines that, to an extent still not

conceived of, use will be made of the auxiliary means of typification and serialisation... Houses will be built in masses, in blocks, in large uniform assemblages.

The future building process will commence from construction, from scaffolding, walls will no longer have their old function [and] ornament will be minimal.

Finally, the extension of the city without limits has elevated 'the street into an ideal', an ideal 'that has destroyed the ideal of the city. The street has transcended the city'. But this process of extension does not stop there. The pleasure in the street is also declining and the search for a new resting place is under way:

The old ideal of the city and the ideal of the street will be fused in metropolitan cities that are, as it were, city and street, at once extending broadly outwards and narrowly enclosed, at once cosmopolitan and communally intimate, at once metropolis and small town and, in a single phrase, city and country.

The spirit of the future city is thus both cosmopolitan and local. The spirit of the metropolis lives on once more in its dissolution into another entity.

III

This somewhat extended discussion of Scheffler's conception of the metropolis and its spirit may serve as a different context within which to locate the ostensibly most materialist of city planners, the city planner of Berlin in the crucial period 1926 to 1933 - Martin Wagner. Of course there is a socialist context that should not be minimised, especially with reference to Berlin's housing policy in the Weimar period. But the materialist context that has been extensively researched by Ludovica Scarpa and Manfredo Tafuri may not necessarily give us access to the changes in the conception of the city contained in Martin Wagner's work, even in this relatively circumscribed, but crucial, period. Even the frequent recourse to the fact that Wagner attended Simmel's lectures in Berlin and was influenced by Simmel's conception of the

metropolis need not clarify the non-materialist dimensions of Wagner's vision of the modern metropolis.

Wagner's concept of rationalisation which he applies to the economy, the building process, bureaucracy and the planning of the world metropolis is in many respects close to that of Taylor's managerialist conception – and Taylorism was already being advocated in the war period, if not earlier, in Germany – as well as that of Walther Rathenau and, above all, Max Weber's conception of rationalisation. In addition, the rationalisation advocated by Martin Wagner served to reinforce the perceived affinities between the world city of Berlin and American (i.e. U.S.) developments. Since Wagner made two visits to the United States in the 1920s, it is worthwhile briefly indicating the long-standing association of Berlin in particular with, positively or, most often, negatively Americanism (*Amerikanismus*), not least because this correlation represented a significant dimension of the spirit of the modern metropolis – one that served to delineate both a 'progressive' and a 'reactionary' modernism.

Max Weber, in the first of his essays on the spirit of capitalism, cites an anti-American German tract from the 1850's. The concept of 'Americanism' also occurs frequently in academic discourse by the end of the century. The notion that Berlin is an American city (and Chicago on the Spree rather than Athens on the Spree) is to be found before the First World War. Scheffler, comparing Berlin with Vienna in 1908, suggest that the fact that Berlin lacks a local culture, 'that it is for the time being merely the rendezvous site of many Germans, renders this city as *lacking in physiognomy, impoverished in tradition* and gives it its American traits', one of which, uniting its disparate population, is a '*boundless energy for work*'. Sombart, also comparing Berlin and Vienna in the same year, makes a much more negative association of Berlin and America. He asks, rhetorically, whether the Viennese desire to be "Berlin-American":

To have traffic? A "nightlife"? To be "efficient"?... To advance totally into modernity, in order to be absolutely enthusiastic about the fact that 6000 people can eat in a single restaurant, that every two minutes a city

railway train departs. For this one has to be devoid of all tradition, all culture, all quality, like the New Yorker.

This New York, to which Berlin is rapidly approximating, is culturally 'a desert, a cultural cemetery'. The association of New York (and, by implication, Berlin) with endless expansion, efficiency, accelerated circulation draws upon the opposition between civilization (New York, Berlin) and culture (Vienna). Ludwig Fulda in an essay on 'Berlin and German Mental Life (*Geistesleben*)' in 1913 commences with the statement that,

Berlin is an American city. One hears expressed time and again from local and foreign commentators this statement about the German metropolis... The predicate "American" is already justified with reference to its rapid expansion; but there are also inner qualities that apply. The stormy pressure forwards, the feverish industry, the unconstrained desire for doing things, the accelerating tempo of life, in short all those characteristics that give to this community at large the stamp of such an unbounded modernity.

The shadow side of this phenomenon, as far as Berlin is concerned, is 'the absence of an old culture, a monumental past, of noble heritage and established taste'. Nonetheless, 'the spirit of Berlin' is increasingly coming to dominate the 'daily physiognomy' of Germany. That spirit manifests itself in Berlin in a desire for newness as an end in itself ('newness in Berlin means unconditional praise'), 'the clear understanding of the essential, the rapid grasp of things, the practical talent for organisation, the stored-up energy... the intellectual realism [that] facilitates the realism of action'.

The spirit of 'Americanism' is thus perceived to be one of endless expansion, eternal newness, accelerating tempo of production and circulation, organisation, boundless energy and the like. So when Martin Wagner declares that Berlin is 'amongst all the European metropolises the one that stands closest to American cities', he is ostensibly expressing a judgement that is not new. But in this 1929 statement (after his second U.S. visit, the first being in 1924), part of the future of Berlin is to be viewed in the present day

American cities. The fascination with American economic and technological developments (complete with positive references by Wagner to Hoover, months before the 1929 economic crash) is certainly a general feature of the period of 'relative stabilisation' in Germany (1924 to 1929), but has particular resonance for Wagner since, for him, 'Germany city planning is at present experiencing a new Renaissance' propelled by 'technical and economic developments'. Throughout the decade, Wagner had been impressed by the perceived productivity gains resulting from thorough rationalisation of the labour process in production. In the sphere of city planning, and especially after his appointment as city planner of Berlin in 1926, Wagner saw the need to extend the principles of rationalisation to the circulation process of the metropolis and to its administration. As Max Weber had argued earlier, once the new rationality of the 'spirit' of capitalism had become established – the formal rationality of seeking the most efficient *means* to achieve a given end (whose rationality could not be assessed by this formal rationality) – the process of rationalisation would permeate all major institutions in modern life (the rational organisation of production, administration, state activity, state legitimation, and 'rational' justification for religion, etc). Weber is relatively silent on the rationalisation of the modern metropolis. Martin Wagner sought to achieve this (planned) rationalisation of the modern metropolis and, above all, Berlin.

The assumption that Taylorist principles for the rationalisation of production associated with specialisation and mechanisation of tasks, precise measurability and hence calculability of units of input and output of labour, could be applied not merely to capitalist enterprises but also to quasi-socialised production – as in Wagner's earlier building guilds employing unionized labour – was one which Wagner shared with other advocates of rationalisation and socialization of production. The subordination of labour to capital (including local state capital) could take the form not merely of what Marx had earlier defined as 'formal' subordination (in the labour contract itself) but also the 'real' subordination of labour involving increasing substantive control of the labour process by capital (whether state or private).

The presumed harmonisation of labour relations in quasi-socialized production often proved illusory.

But the rationalisation of building production which Wagner advocated, especially in relation to housing production, involved not merely an increase in the mechanisation of production (thereby reducing the *labour time* necessary to produce individual units and of course, the amount of labour employed) and accompanying deskilling of labour (associated also with increasing specialization and fragmentation of tasks) but also significant processes of *standardisation* of production. The latter involved the *pre-fabrication* (manufacture) of units of building production, whose most rationally organised form (in terms of mass production and reduced cost) required *serialization* and *replicability* of units. The transportation of ready manufactured (and interchangeable) units to the site of housing production created the possibility to utilise much less skilled labour than previously. The assembly (*montage*) of ready-made units had the advantage not merely of serialising the activity of production but also rendered that production (construction as assembling pre-built parts) precisely measurable in terms of units of labour and time employed for completion and thus production costs (and profits) more precisely calculable. If we return briefly to Scheffler's aims in 1910 for the modern metropolis – the provision for the family and a local city identity and provision for the crystallisation of the world economy – then the first of these aims was being fulfilled by Wagner in the creation of the new housing estates (*Siedlungen*) such as Lindenhof and Britz. Neither was so constrained by the notion of the 'existence minimum' of some of May's Frankfurt estate developments. The extended terraced house with garden would probably satisfy Scheffler's first aim, as long as the family members of working age were in employment. More problematical, however, would be the creation of a localised city identity on the outskirts of the metropolis where public housing estates were most often located, since the local state could acquire the building land more cheaply than in the central areas of the city. We must return to the issue of identity later.

The trend towards the creation of increasingly abstract (interchangeable) labour in housing production and other building production

favoured by Wagner did not exhaust the possibilities and perceived need for rationalisation. Max Weber had argued that the most efficient form of administration was the rationally organised bureaucracy. The organisation of city planning and the increasing number of local state government departments involved in planning and building production could also be subject to rationalisation. The 'rational' bureaucratic organisation was always conceived as hierarchical. This implied that the apex of any such organisation could give *direction* to its subordinate elements. The 'gaze of power' was always from above, a gaze unconstrained by subordinate units. But where elements of the local state government and bureaucracies are democratically elected, decision-making and direction from above is rendered [...] much more difficult and, formally, more inefficient. The greater the emphasis on the need for direction from above, the more Wagner's programme for city planning became socialism from above. And the increasing call for a leadership to give direction came increasingly to take on dimensions of Weber's own solution to rigidified bureaucratic organisational forms – the call for charismatic leadership to restore the *dynamism* of social, economic or political development and to break out of the 'iron cage'.

IV

The call for direction in city planning comes to the fore in the period from 1929 onwards when Wagner is increasingly involved in the (re)creation of Berlin as world city (though already announced in 1896 and periodically reannounced, as it were, say in 1910 and 1920 with the creation of *Gross Berlin*). If the creation of family dwellings in the public housing estate fulfilled, in part, the first of Scheffler's aims, then how was the crystallisation of the world economy to be realised in the world city? Does the modern metropolis as world city require a world spirit? The answer given by Wagner and Adolf Behne in the preface to the short-lived journal *Das neue Berlin* in 1929 is unequivocal. The quantitative economic expansion of the city since the immediate pre First World War period (indicated by population increase, import and export of goods to and from the city, consumption levels, savings in the Berlin Savings bank and increase in number of motor vehicles) indicate

that its population 'have *worked* and *saved*' (though a more than fourfold increase in savings from 1913 to 1928 is *not* an indicator of positive economic growth, as Keynes was later to point out):

A city that has demonstrated such an expansive development *must* build, form itself anew, create for itself a new spirit and a new body. The new spirit of Berlin is not the spirit of Potsdam, the spirit of court society... The new spirit is the spirit of the world metropolis (*Weltstadtgeist*), that brings to development overwhelming forces of labour and recreation, of civilization and culture to all the other cities of a country and will produce outstanding achievements. The spirit of the world city must necessarily possess a national character with pronounced international features. Yet what it must especially appropriate to itself is the self-consciousness of its potential significance and responsibility compared with other cities in other countries. The spirit of the new Berlin is a cosmopolitan spirit, that must grow away from the spirit of parochialism of earlier times. This cosmopolitan spirit will also have to create the body of its city (*Stadtkörper*) according to its content and form.

The tasks faced in creating the new form of Berlin as world city that manifests this cosmopolitan spirit must be confronted with a 'cosmopolitan sense of responsibility'. Although the 'formal expression' of this world city form has not yet been found, this is not due to the absence of personnel or means for achieving it. What is lacking is,

the leadership with clear aims, that can provide a comprehensive direction of all forces into a cosmopolitan tapestry. The director (*Regisseur*) of the world city of Berlin is lacking. The ordering commanding, dynastic will has died out. Today, the world city of Berlin is not governed by a *single* democracy but by a whole system of democracies that lack decisive and unified leadership.

A 'new Berlin' remains still to be created 'in a new spirit and in a new form'.

The new form of Berlin that is to embody the world city spirit first came into being with housing construction on a large scale, in the major estates such as

Britz and Zehlendorf, creating new urban forms. New forms of the metropolis will appear in the new formation of the old city (and the need for new traffic spaces) and the large scale dwellings in the newer areas of the city. Thus, the most transparent manifestations of the new forms embodying the world city spirit will be located in the centre of the city. They would include the reforming of 'world city squares' such as Alexanderplatz, Potsdamerplatz, Platz der Republik, the unification of transport connections, and the representation of the world city will have major new settlements (*Gross-Siedlungen*) and recreational areas (Wannsee swimming and recreation facilities).

Wagner himself was actively involved in most of these projects and most of them figured in the short-lived journal *Das neue Berlin: Grossstadtprobleme* which did not survive beyond the difficult year of 1929. Compared with the more successful *Das neue Frankfurt: Internationale Monatsschrift für die Probleme kulturelle Neugestaltung*, which was published from 1926 to 1933, the Wagner and Behne Berlin journal focused exclusively upon Berlin and its content suggested an urgent assertion of its world city status. The Frankfurt journal carried not merely articles on the new Frankfurt but also many more articles, as its subtitle suggested, on modern design in the new city, as well as contributions, amongst many others, by Behne and Wagner.

Amongst the problems covered in *Das neue Berlin* were those covering the planning and restructuring of Berlin for the expansion of *traffic*. The spirit of the world city and the cosmopolitan spirit are associated with accelerated circulation of goods and individuals. Traffic networks are circulation networks embodying, in part, that element of the spirit of the world city which is summed up in Franklin's dictum 'time is money', whose precise formation was reflected upon by Simmel in his lecture on the metropolis when he suggested – in his only reference to Berlin – that if all the clocks and watches stopped at the same time in Berlin, the whole circulation process would be rendered chaotic and grind to a halt.

The problem of traffic is a crucial element of what Scheffler earlier called 'the crystallisation of the world economy'. The variation in speeds of circulation (aircraft, rail, shipping, motor vehicles, horse-drawn and

pedestrian), the turnover time (amortisation) of built structures to accommodate these circulation networks and facilities for newer communication networks (telegraph, telephone, radio) all express the dynamic transformation of metropolitan (world city) existence. Although Wagner reflects, on occasion, upon air transport (the number of airports necessary in the world city), his major concern is with the structural transformation of built structures to facilitate the acceleration of traffic systems (such as giving a new form to the Alexanderplatz).

The major traffic intersections in 1929 requiring a new form include the Alexanderplatz and the Potsdamerplatz. The new structuring of such,

“squares” is determined primarily by the *new ordering* of *traffic* and the construction of *underground railways*.... A *world city square* is not a *small city square*.... The world city square is an almost permanently filled traffic sluice, whose “clearing” point is an artery network of major traffic thoroughfares [...]. World city squares *are organisms* with distinctive formal features.

Wagner claims that organically formed world city squares have not yet appeared in Europe. Their construction requires attention to a number of factors such as traffic capacity, differentiation of traffic flows (e.g. pedestrians, motor vehicles, streetcars), differentiation of traffic speeds and so on. Of particular note for the modern metropolis is the *limited life-span* of such new squares; that limit Wagner sets at 25 years (as turnover time or amortisation). This means that such spatial constellations for traffic flows are able to be totally reconstructed for new demands after 25 years. The crystallization of the world economy in such squares is therefore a transitory phenomenon. It follows from this limited life span that ‘the buildings surrounding the square do not possess any *permanent* economic or architectural value’. At the same time, such squares have to cover their costs. Hence, ‘to the *flowing* traffic on the square must be juxtaposed the “*stationary* traffic” that secures the consumer power of the human masses crossing the square (shops, bars, department stores, offices, etc)’. The flow of pedestrians as consumers must therefore also be secured. In turn, the architectural forms must create an

attractive spectacle in order to draw out this consumption's power. The 'clearest form' by day and the 'characteristic, artificial effect' by night must be ensured: 'A single flowing light by day and a light flowing *out* by night produce a totally new face for the square. *Colour, form, and light* (advertisement) are the three major building elements for the new world city squares. The total spatial constellation of such squares will manifest their dual functions, since 'a world city square is a *stopping point* and a *floodgate* in a single form: a stopping point for consumption power and floodgate for traffic flows'. In passing, it is worth noting here that if the Alexanderplatz and the Potsdamerplatz remain points of contention today, then so too does the Platz der Republik, which lacks the former's economic attractions. Wagner's solution is to extend the Reichstag building, thus forcing the structure of the square to be raised (and presumably *public* funding for its reconstellation). It is, however, the traffic intersection squares that aroused the greatest discussion. Marcel Breuer, justifying his plan for the Potsdamer Platz (in *Das neue Berlin*), maintained that 'the dramatic dimension of a metropolis is the traffic, and its bearer is – at the moment – the street. This drama reaches its high point in the *intersections of the main thoroughfares*; viewed in a new sense, the *squares of the city* are nothing other than these elevated points of the streets'. The walls of such newly constituted squares should represent their structure in the simplest form possible 'whose external features merely form a basic rhythm for the permanently changing, surprising and individually many sided forms of colour and light of the city. They are the naked body that the changing times clothe in contemporary and diverse elements'.

If the newly reconstructed world city squares are to manifest the dynamism and transitoriness of the spirit of the metropolis in modernity, then that dynamism of the human body also needs spaces for expression. Whereas under the local communal liberal politics of pre war Berlin in 1908 (in connection with the Gross-Berlin competition), '*intellectual Berlin*' (*geistige Berlin*) displayed very little understanding for *bodily Berlin* (*koerperliche Berlin*), the subsequent call for open recreational space in the metropolis produced 'a revolution of the body'. And whereas earlier, many had to remain satisfied with 'purely mental (*geistig*) drilling', today:

What the cosmopolitan dweller needs is the fortification of body and nerves to the greatest extent.... Mechanised metropolitan work will find its liberation in a large scale and thorough care of the body.

The construction of such metropolitan facilities (and Wagner completed with Richard Ermisch the beach bathing and sport facilities on the Wannsee in 1930) also serve to reduce the social and economic burdens on the public health system.

The expression of the dynamic crystallization of the world economy also requires adequate representation of the world city as marketplace. One of its modes of expression is the *exhibition centre*. As early as 1896 in the context of the Berlin Trade Exhibition, Simmel had pointed to the significance of such exhibitions as representations of the city itself and as creating a new transitory architecture (in keeping with modernity's transitory nature). Wagner and Hans Poelzig won the competition for an exhibition and trade centre complex adjacent to the Berlin radio tower (designed by Poelzig). But Wagner makes direct comparison with the 1896 exhibition and the changed economic circumstances that no longer permit exhibition construction on the basis of 'world exhibitions'. Therefore:

Compared with the exhibition area for the 1896 trade exhibition in the Treptower Park, that then extended 1,100,000 square metres and compared with the exhibition areas of other metropolises, the land available for the city of Berlin at the radio tower of 760,000 square meters is not large but nonetheless quite sufficient, because the holding of exhibitions has experienced a strong change from extensity to intensity and from general exhibitions to specialised and trade-specific exhibitions.

Yet the severity of the economic (and political) crisis ensured that the planned structures remained only partly completed for the 1931 building exhibition. In the same year, Wagner left the socialist party, the SPD, in part as a result of frustration in 'directing' the creation of a New Berlin, but largely as a result of

internal financial corruption in the party. On the Alexanderplatz, the purchase of the crucial 'Aschinger-building site' that had a tax value of 2,775,000 Marks was purchased for 13,500,000 Marks. As Wagner pointed out in his open letter of resignation from the party, the price of 6000 Marks per square meter and at the 'unbelievable 92 times [its] rentable value' spells 'the end of any city improvement'.

V

Given the intensity of the economic and material crisis in the German and Berlin economies, the spirit of the New Berlin was to take a different direction – at least on paper. In particular, Wagner completed a substantial manuscript in 1932 – part at least was to have been published in *Wasmuths Monatshefte*, edited by Werner Hegemann – on *The New Berlin*. In this closely argued work which dealt in detail with the acute crisis in the Berlin economy, Wagner's conception of a new Berlin came, in part, to resemble Scheffler's vision in 1926 (though there is no suggestion that Wagner was following him in this respect) of the new metropolis merging into the countryside. The dissolution of the metropolis – announced in a variety of forms in the Expressionist movement – reappeared in the guise of Wagner's proposal for the creation of new young urban areas, his urban settlements of 50,000 population.

It is clear from his other writings that these new towns – Wagner's 'fifties' – are not to be identified with the garden city movement. In 'the Problem of the Pure Garden City' (1926), Wagner insists that Howard would not recognise the 'sentimental degradation of the "Garden Cities" with their small houses and gardens found in Germany. Second, Wagner maintains that 'the garden city has nothing to do with the concept of the satellite town, a form that has been discovered in order to intervene in the insanity of metropolitan development. The satellite towns, in the final instance, seek nothing less than to introduce a different *distribution* of the increase in urban population'. In contrast, Wagner sees the major problem of large cities as economic. The vertical economic organisation of cities, with their massive concentration in urban spaces subsidising building types such as the rental barracks with

outlays for parks, hospitals, etc. and the excessive individual outlays for cleaning, leisure, travel costs, create false costs for arbitrarily created products. The horizontal economic organisation of urban settlements, including existing cities, could create a more viable economic urban form and genuine urban culture.

In order to understand Wagner's grounds for the creation of these new towns, it is necessary to follow his economic analysis of Berlin. Wagner presents a detailed account of Berlin's existing economic situation in the context of the regional Brandenburg economy, the German economy and the world economy. The purchasing power of all these economic regions has collapsed, and therefore crucially affected the Berlin economy. The reason for the dramatic decline in purchasing power lies in the fact that 'the economic leaders have not recognised the essence and significance of *machine work*'. Machines have not been running to full capacity and the utilization of the labour time set free from the planned use of machinery has not taken place in a free, unregulated economy.

A substantial part of Wagner's economic analysis rests upon the *reification* of machine technology. He regards 'the machine as economic shaper (*Gestalterin*) of the economy, as the shaper of both private and public spheres of work' (and hence applies to city planning too). For Wagner, the machine has its *own* laws, is its *own* shaper, and creates its distinctive happiness'. Unfortunately, it is currently controlled by dilettantes who lack the necessary knowledge to fully utilize its potential. Instead, much of the machinery is standing still. A new group that understands machinery must direct the economy:

Leader to the back! Leader to the front! Politicians and lawyer to the resting place, engineers to the front! This *must* happen and it *will* happen. And thus our *cities* will also awaken to a new life and be given a new form. *City planning* is *economic planning*, and economic planning is only possible if we work *with* the machine but not *against* the machine.

The engineer recognises that the machine has three permanent demands – ‘it wishes to run permanently, it wishes to run quickly, it wishes to run cheaply’. At present the economy has collapsed, capital is on strike and labour is unemployed (and ‘capital strikes because we mistreat its mother, the machine’). The engineer understands the machine and can ‘move beyond the limits of the “free” non-economy and advance rapidly into the land of the planned economy’. The analysis of the economy which Wagner provides is thus ‘from the standpoint of the *engineer*’.

Later in his economic analysis, Wagner makes use of Sombart’s conceptualisation of the basic elements of the concept of economy – spirit (*Geist*), form and technology. The contemporary economic *spirit* has abandoned the attempt to unify reason with life, the will with the deed. Instead - drawing upon another Sombart concept – ‘a *trader* spirit dominates the world’, taking up Adam Smith notion of the economic actor but without the presuppositions of the moral sentiments. The old *form* of economic life – the free play of market forces – has been rendered impossible and has led to cartellisation, etc. A new economic form is emerging – ‘the form of organised spatial economy with the highest possible economic impact for use’. *Technology* has been misused, since the ‘machine is not developed for the *individual* economy but rather for the collective economy’.

In this broader context, what is Wagner’s analysis and prognosis for Berlin? The concentration of economic life creates unnecessary costs, not least as far as transport is concerned. New forms cannot break out of the existing narrow built structures. Indeed, Wagner argues:

Berlin is still today a *pedestrian city*, but not a modern *machine* city. The whole city and street plan of Berlin, in principle and as a system, is nothing other than an enlargement of a middle ages – *small spaced* pedestrian city.

The new form of ‘city’ which Wagner proposes must depend to a much greater extent upon machine labour, and must take into account a new spatial economy. Therefore, ‘we must replace the old pedestrian cities with modern

ribbon cities (*Bandstädte*). These new cities with 50,000 population will be 'new cities [built] in accord with the idea of the perfect machine'.

There is thus a contradiction emerging here between Wagner's more consistent analogy of the metropolis as organism and as a result of his reification of technology, the analogy of the city as a machine. It is much easier to plan for machines than organisms. The moral rhetoric directed at 'the sin against the holy spirit of the machine' (in the context of electric machines and power stations running well below their capacity) and assertions, (with reference to the new form of life in the new cities) that 'the new form grows out of the organic!' are difficult to reconcile.

The new ribbon cities (Wagner also refers on occasion to garden cities) and machine cities will each be a 'country city in the city country'. Once created, 'the stone desert of the metropolis vanishes from the earth'. It is the metropolis that has '*destroyed* a circle of oscillation encompassing the whole community and has also left behind in history only *civilization* but no *culture*.' Instead, the new ribbon city will usher in 'the age of perfect humanity and the age of the perfect machine! [...] It will lead us back again to culture, to art and to the great beliefs. Decline of the West? No! Emergence of the age of perfect humanity!' Wagner's 'young city is no longer utopia and no longer Potemkin's village and representation'; the transition to the young city from 'dream to reality, contains within it no greater danger than the flight from the prison of poverty into the paralysed life'.

This horizontal dispersal of the city in the country requires, in the context of Berlin, 'the economic and political necessity of unifying Berlin and Brandenburg into a single economic sphere'. Other metropolitan centres also stand in a similar situation. On them, too,

hangs the sword of *death* and the cross of a new *belief*. And if one wishes to bring this dying and emergence for all metropolises into a more local and personal interpretation that signifies the direction then one can say:

Berlin is dead

Long live Brandenburg!

VI

The combination of the death of the metropolitan centres and the birth of the new ribbon cities (with a population of 50,000) with specialised machine economies as land cities has strong echoes of Expressionist visions of the city and the country. It is perhaps all the more surprising to find it expressed in the work of such a materialist oriented city planner as Martin Wagner, one whose message is also that there is no spirit without a body and that that body is planted on a ground, whose costs are always precisely calculated.

Throughout much of Wagner's writings the spirit of the metropolis is manifested in rationalisation (and circulation – in *Das neue Berlin*, the electrical analogy is oscillations). The rationalisation of production in a capitalist mode can only create civilization. Only the planned, socialist rationalisation can create a new culture for all. In this sense, as Scarpa and others have argued, Wagner's – unrealised, and unrealisable – aim was nothing less than the rationalisation of human happiness.