**Paul Stangl, Risen from Ruins: The Cultural Politics of Rebuilding East Berlin.  (Stanford Studies on Central and Eastern Europe.) Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. 2018. Pp. xii, 332. $65.00.**

The history of twentieth-century Berlin provides a source of endless fascination. This latest volume adds to the already significant body of literature on the politics of the city’s built environment, most specifically that of East Berlin between 1945 and the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The first line of East Germany’s national anthem provides an apt title and indicates the central theme of Paul Stangl’s investigation: ‘Risen from ruins, and facing the future…’. At the heart of the monograph are thus questions concerning the intersection between past, present and future architectural traditions, political regimes and associated symbolisms, as well as urgent housing needs.

Stangl frames his study by outlining two key approaches relating to collective memory. First, he argues that his work is distinct through the ‘spatialization of memory’, in which he claims to examine a ‘triad of representation, spatial/formal characteristics and place-based associations’ (4), each of which may adopt varying importance depending on the history, political status and use value of any given structure. Second, he introduces a number of ‘pathways of memory’, which he describes as ‘currents in a stream of cultural development’ (8), tracing their evolution and influence on urban politics over time. The nine pathways he outlines are preservationism, *Heimatschutz* (‘homeland-protection’), science, German exceptionalism, humanism, Marxism, Marxist-Leninism, modernism and socialist realism. The latter two prove to be the most influential, although the interweaving of different traditions over time highlights just how rich and complex the tapestry of post-war urban politics proved to be.

Following an introduction that includes a useful section on early post-war efforts to demolish ruined buildings and remove rubble from the city centre, the book begins with two thematic chapters. The first examines the efforts of German communists to reshape the symbolic urban landscape of East Berlin, despite the pressing demands for housing and infrastructure. Stangl focuses here on the renaming of streets, decisions surrounding the removal of Prussian and National Socialist monuments, and the development of Soviet memorials and German revolutionaries’ cemeteries, in particular the socialists’ memorial in Friedrichsfelde, which was heavily influenced by Wilhelm Pieck. The second chapter examines historical planning traditions in Berlin, before discussing in more detail modernist plans for the ‘New Berlin’ between 1945 and 1949. These never came to fruition, however, due to the rise of socialist realism after the founding of the GDR, which favoured more historic structures and viewed the city centre as a political space. Throughout the 1950s, however, pressure to rationalize and industrialize construction increased, once again causing a shift in paradigm.

A number of themes in the first two chapters resurface throughout the course of the book. In particular, the highly political nature of urban planning, construction and destruction serves as a leitmotif for the four remaining chapters, each of which focuses on the development of a high-profile site in East Berlin. Chapter 3 examines the development of the main boulevard of Unter den Linden, where strong Prussian architectural traditions conflicted with communist ideology, yet factors such as spatial capacity and utilitarian space were significant in driving decisions, alongside the influence of socialist realism. Chapter 4 focuses on the fate of the Royal Palace, which – following significant protest – was destroyed in order to make way for Marx-Engels Square. Stangl argues that Walter Ulbricht was the key player in this decision, led above all by the desire to create at the centre of East Berlin a parade ground for mass rallies and symbolic ceremonies. The following chapter examines Wilhelmstraße, which had become the centre of Nazi government activity, and thus provided a conundrum for the East German regime. Desperate for usable office space, yet uncomfortable about historical associations, the political elite decided to renovate some buildings but destroy others – most notably Hitler’s Chancellery. The final chapter is a lengthy examination of East Berlin’s showcase building project: Stalinallee. Here, the tension between creating a monumental national structure at great cost, and the need to provide cheaper, industrialized buildings to resolve the pressing housing crisis played out in eventual favour of the latter, with cranes and industrialized building panels becoming the new symbols of progress.

There is much to be said in favour of Stangl’s work: its detailed approach provides a useful reference work on this period, and it offers new insights into how and why high-level decisions were made at the time. Above all, it demonstrates the sheer complexity of the push and pull between ideological demands, architectural discourses, political realities and urban planning. Its detailed approach is, however, also one of its downfalls, and at times it is difficult to see the argument beyond the intricate details, names, facts and anecdotes. Indeed, given the wealth of information, the concluding sections of each chapter serve as somewhat repetitive summaries, and, together with the short concluding chapter, do little to expound a new approach to this period. Given Stangl’s emphasis on the ‘spatialization of memory’ in the introduction, for instance, it would have been nice to see more development on this front. Non-specialists may also struggle to digest the detail, for the numerous names and places are sometimes difficult to keep track of. An overarching map of East Berlin and a list of names may have helped here. The book would also have benefitted from better editing, as it unfortunately contains numerous typos, some of which extend to dates (Marx, for example, entered a humanist phase ‘in the 1940s’ [10] and there is reference to the ‘democratic revolution of 1948’ [60]). All in all, however, this monograph is doubtless valuable for its carefully constructed case studies and detailed approach to the period. Not only does it help us to understand the complex palimpsest of contemporary Berlin, but it critically also demonstrates that the built environment is – and always will be – intrinsically linked to our political understanding of the world around us.

*Anna Saunders, Professor of German Studies, Bangor University, UK*