

BLANK SPOTS ON THE INTERIOR MAP – BERLIN POTSDAMER PLATZ

Berlin, Sunday, 27th August 2006

Berlin's new centre Potsdamer Platz, which also was the pre-World War II lively, famous and noisy centre of Berlin, was a dead zone from 1961 to 1989, a chemically killed plantless gravel field, fenced by the two-layered wall area that divided East and West Berlin. After the Wall had come down, the place became a cultural and economic center and a tourist magnet, and it literally sticks out of the city – by pure concentration of highrise buildings. Potsdamer Platz has the highest floor area ratio of Berlin.

For four afternoons this week, our group of four, a photographer, a psychologist, a graphic designer and a watcher in occupational transition, Germans from East and West gathered in Potsdamer Platz so as to approach the place in a contemplative inquiry that included phenomenological description, colored soul mood images and pen sketches, a closer look into the history of the place and meditation. The study started off under the general judgement that the new design is not a very people-friendly solution. Motorized traffic takes up much of the space, and the whole quarter has a primarily commercial orientation. The much-evoked vibrancy of city life so gets slightly frantic.

We wanted to know what the place is about and what could be suggested to make it better. In the course of the inquiry, the three participants and I arrived at a much more profound level of knowledge about this place and its depths of meaning. Our judgement had to be abandoned, there will be no suggestions for improvement and the inquiry had an unexpected outcome for me. For the last day we had scheduled a final meeting to compare and conclude our impressions of our work and this place. In preparation of it I did a morning meditation and went through this week's stages one more time, and this is what happened:

People born in East Germany will remember the peculiar city map of East Berlin created at a time when google had not existed and satellite images were not available to everyone. The map was pretty exact as far as it concerned East Berlin and its East German environs. However, where there were supposed to be West Berlin's boroughs, streets and buildings, the map came up blank. West Berlin simply was white paper – an empty spot, a no-go area.

That morning the image of the map turned up internally and I saw that the blank spots had not disappeared in all those years. Now they did and life took its entrance. With my body left behind in my room I went back to the new old city center, sat down there under the light signal clock and felt the city all around me down to its remotest corners. Alive, vibrant and most of all *one*. Beyond a number of different layers, I experienced the forty years division of Potsdamer Platz as synonymous for the division of Berlin. The deeply felt split in the city's fabric cutting it in two halves went right through my whole being, a sensation felt in my body and soul, a heart-breaking misery that anyone living in a divided city would certainly be aware of in more than an intellectual way. Apparently it had still been there – an emotional trace in my cell tissues detectable seventeen years after the physical reunion, and I had not been conscious of it. This morning, the week's work resulted in my personal reunion and a vision of Berlin as a whole, a complete being consisting of all its single places and people. For the first time in my life I felt a part of the Berlin city organism rather than a resident of my mere immediate neighborhood (the latter being a feeling that Berlin's people are almost famous for). The disruption in my heart, body and soul, which resonated with the tear that had been going through the city, began to heal and I realized how it had been impacting on the course of my life in this city and the country where I had grown up. I also realized that it must have gone through each single one of us, be it East or West. My reunion is a reconciliation on several levels: with Potsdamer Platz, with Berlin, with all its people, as well as with some aspects of myself.

