

After “shodding the Austrian army” during World War I, the interwar years saw the company’s star rise ever higher, and by 1939, “the Bat’a Company employed over 84,000, ran 5,000 retail stores, and operated twenty-five factories in eleven countries across the globe” (7). In fact, it was now the largest shoemaker in the world. Its workforce—a lesson learned in Lynn—was intentionally young, allowing the company to shape them. Becoming a *Batovec* must have been a shock to the system, even as it meant a significant leg up for its mostly “rural, Catholic, and poor” young workers.

The company was very much of its time, holding fast to the belief “that an industrial utopia could be achieved through harmonizing man and machine, and through rationalizing society” (8). The consequent company culture came to be called *Batism*, and it meant not only that Zlín looked, felt, and sounded unlike any other city in Czechoslovakia (visitors would say they had been transported to America), but it focused on “vertical integration.” A worker ate Bat’a farm eggs in the Bat’a canteen, before returning to his Bat’a dormitory. If he were an exemplary *Batovec* (not only a hard worker, but married and producing more little *Batovci*), he might get a Bat’a house, and his wife would trade the factory floor for a life of gender-regimented bliss. Special boarding schools were set up to pluck talented youth. Unsurprisingly, Bat’a employees came to control both the local government and the police.

The dystopian aspects of the enterprise are in many ways the most fascinating. Doleshal does not gloss over these, yet he perhaps stays too loyal to the Habsburg theoretical frameworks that focus on nationalism and national identities. Because there is another story to tell here; the story of industrial surveillance and the desire of corporations to turn (wo)man into efficient machines. It is a story that stretches from the 1927 film, *Metropolis*, to Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. In today’s climate of accelerated corporate machinations, the history of Bat’a is relevant again in a way that moves beyond questions of nationalism to ask: how much is a worker willing to sacrifice in return for their livelihood?

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Three Cities After Hitler: Redemptive Reconstruction Across Cold War Borders. By

Andrew Demshuk. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021. xviii, 566 pp.

Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Photographs. Maps. \$65.00, hard bound.

doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.119

Histories of central Europe’s urban spaces since 1945 have focused overwhelmingly on memory, particularly Holocaust memory. At first glance, *Three Cities After Hitler* might seem to follow this pattern. But the fate of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries is not Andrew Demshuk’s main concern; in fact, the topic is shunted off to the book’s conclusion. To Demshuk, “redemptive reconstruction” denotes selective rebuilding in the wake of the Third Reich—but also later attempts to “redeem” the excesses of modernism. In effect, this is a comparative study of urban planning spanning seven decades, with special emphasis on citizens’ involvement in (or exclusion from) decisions about the fate of historic city centers.

Like Michael Meng in *Shattered Spaces* (2011), Demshuk offers a comparison across West Germany, East Germany, and Poland. The research design is extremely compelling, featuring three cities with a good deal in common: Frankfurt am Main,

Leipzig, and Breslau/Wrocław were similar in size before 1939, and all functioned as significant market or trade fair hubs. From comparable starting conditions before the collapse of the Third Reich, the three cities would come to be governed by contrasting political regimes—yet they went on to make remarkably similar decisions regarding reconstruction. Demshuk identifies four main phases (postwar dreams, sober early reconstructions, high modernism, post-modernism) and documents how priorities shifted in a parallel fashion in each city. What explains the common trend toward erasure and brutalism? Demshuk acknowledges that each city was operating within a larger international context, but even as expansive a text as this (illustrated marvelously with 150 photographs) can only do so much to explain the elusive shifts in architectural fashion. For Demshuk, the key variable is unchecked power: planners operated without accountability for several decades in attempting to realize functionalist visions of a thinned-out urban core unburdened by history.

What Demshuk can demonstrate most convincingly is that public figures fought hard to preserve what they could of each city's past—and that the heedless course of demolition (erasing significantly more than the bombs of World War II) awakened a significant backlash. In Frankfurt, this led by 1977 to a change in political power, and the CDU-led administrations instituted a program of historical restoration (centered symbolically in the rebuilt 1866 opera house) featuring postmodern efforts to synthesize a more livable, attractive, and entirely fabricated "New Old Quarter." In Leipzig, by contrast, Demshuk argues that the destruction of the University Church in 1968 significantly delegitimized political power in the city, creating a backdrop to the popular discontent that exploded there two decades later (a case he has explored previously in his *Demolition on Karl Marx Square: Cultural Barbarism and the People's State in 1968* [2017]). While postmodernism was officially reviled in the GDR, efforts to reconstruct Leipzig neighborhoods with interstitial and appropriately scaled *Plattenbau* commenced in the 1980s, and after the GDR's collapse the city wound up leveling some of the most offensive modernist towers—just as Frankfurt scuttled some of its own brutalist missteps.

Wrocław constitutes the most successful of the three postwar cases, and Demshuk's comparative angle gives him occasion to revisit the arguments in Gregor Thum's magisterial study *Die fremde Stadt: Breslau nach 1945* (2003; Engl. transl. 2011). Demshuk finds that any period style could be rescued, given the right historical-ideological justification: the Polish regime favored fragmentary remnants of the ancient Piast dynasty, but also permitted Renaissance-era gables to be recast. At any rate, the city lacked the resources to destroy as much as their German counterparts, leaving significant portions of the historical core in place. Even the ugly, barren reconstruction of the New Market featured buildings of moderate height. German observers—including expellees on return visits—admired the proportions of Wrocław and began soliciting Polish expertise in their own belated efforts to recreate the feel of city streets in the old German empire. (One wonders what happened to this admiration in the early post-communist years.)

All told, Demshuk's book offers a masterful overview of an entangled German-Polish history that was both transnational and sub-national, where local choices determined a great deal about everyday life. It is also impressively up-to-date, showing how the course of "redemptive reconstruction" continues to mark these cities. For all the conversation about Dresden's reconstituted Frauenkirche, it may be Leipzig's reborn University Church (now called the Paulinum) that best epitomizes the ongoing quest to synthesize traditions for a historically minded present.

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