



# The Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace

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Fig. pp. 8-9:  
Looking from the Brandenburg  
Gate towards Spreegraben and  
Königsbrücke, the reconstructed

Berlin Palace on Spree Island has  
restored the point de vue to the  
boulevard Unter den Linden.



The facade of the Palace facing the Lustgarten (Pleasure Garden) towards the north is characterized by two large portals, the one on the left

providing access to the Schlüter Courtyard (Portal 5), the one at the centre to the Passage (Portal 4). To the right, the projecting section, the

'Eosander shoulder', with its large corner cartouche, articulates the long section of the facade.











ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT, 14. SEPTEMBER 1769

250. GEBURTSTAG / 250TH ANNIVERSARY

HUMBOLDT FORUM



A Mobile for the  
Humboldt Forum  
in the Berlin Palace:  
The Programme  
*Hartmut Dorgerloh*



**'Only those who know the past have a future' – Wilhelm von Humboldt's fundamental insight is inscribed, figuratively speaking, on the foundation of the new Humboldt Forum.**

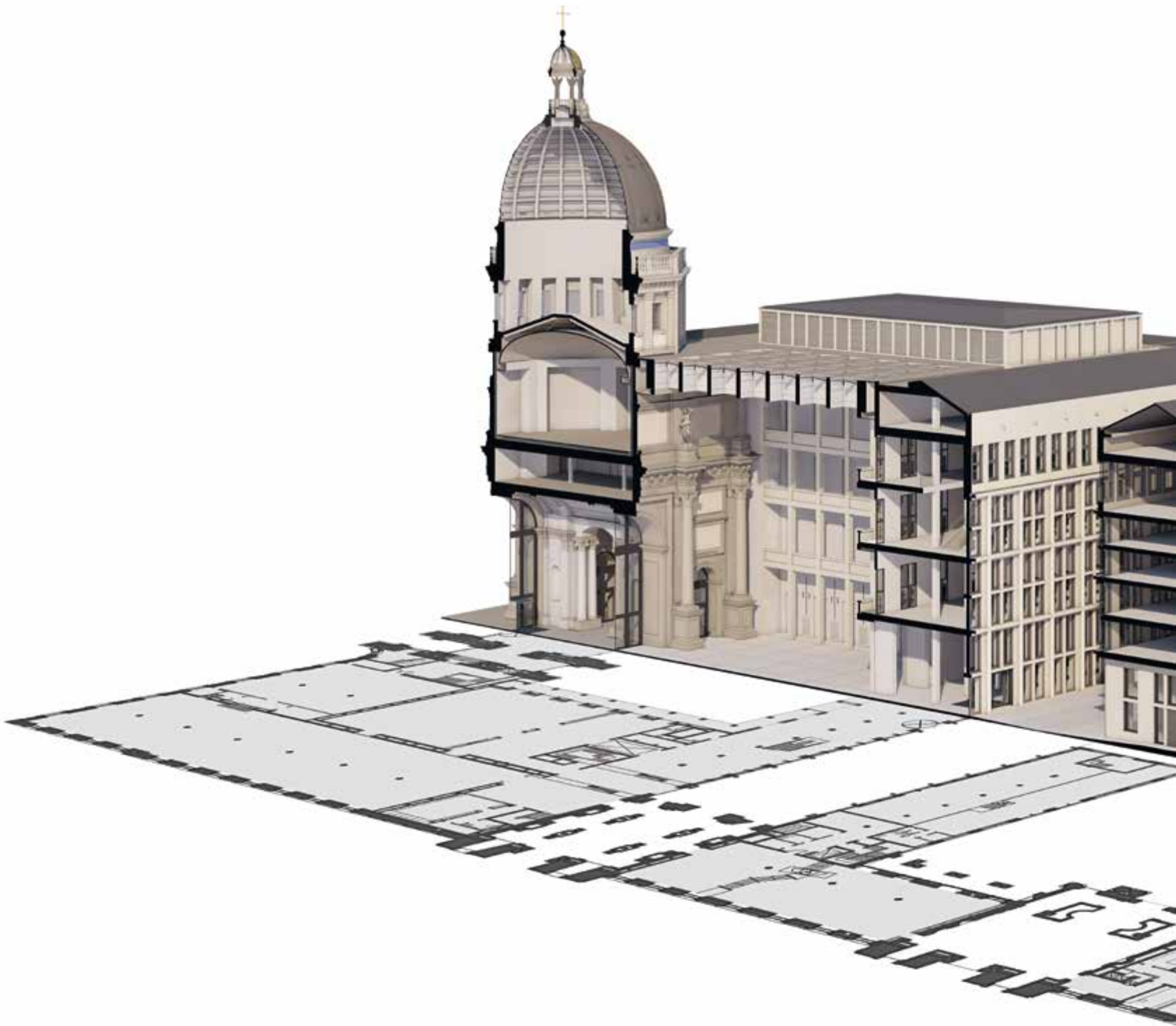
Transport and installation in the Humboldt Forum of the Luf boat from the Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) in Berlin-Dahlem, 2018

Not just because the historical stratification of this location on the Spree Island is strikingly perceptible in the reconstructed facade of the former residential palace of the Hohenzollerns. But also because a portion of the non-European objects are returning now to the place that formerly housed the electoral and royal cabinet of artworks and naturalia. These 'rarities' formed the nucleus of the collections of the Berlin museums, including the Völkerkundemuseum (Museum of Ethnology).

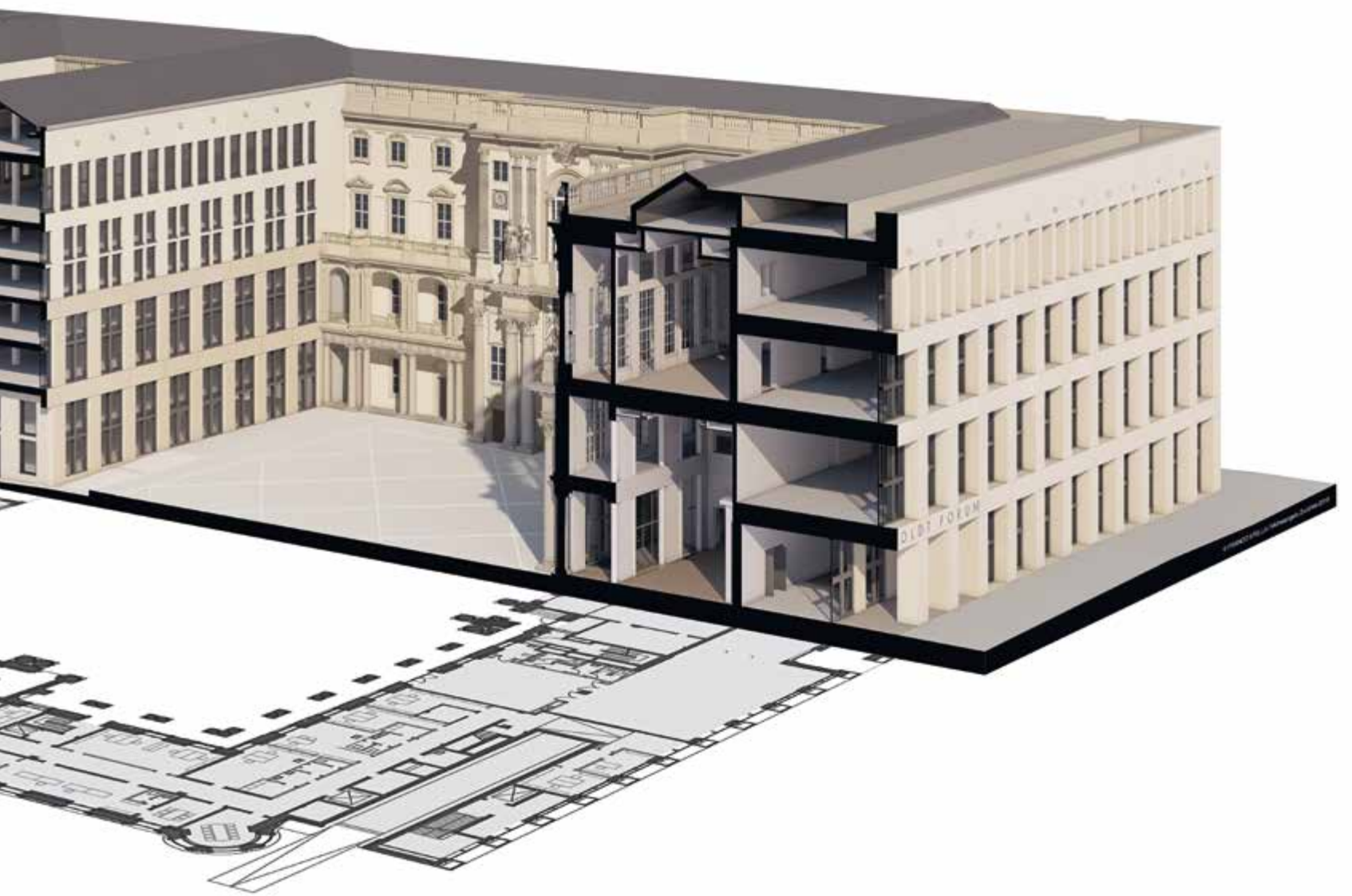
Inaugurated here in 1976, on the site of the historical Royal Palace that was demolished after World War II, was the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) - the political and cultural centre of the capital of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, more commonly known as East Germany). In a new way, the Humboldt Forum now embodies the idea of a palace of culture, complete with event venues, bars and restaurants.

These two divergent aspects suffice to make it clear why this historical stratification is such an important element in the programmatic self-conception of the Humboldt Forum: an intensive and unprejudiced attempt to come to terms with the past enables a versatile reimagining of future realities.

The Humboldt Forum reverses the idea of the palace as a royal seat, as a symbol of monarchical authority, of hierarchical distinction into its opposite - both socially as well as politically. Conceived and realized as a forum, it now becomes an open, inviting place of encounter, of cooperation based on equality, of shared experience, of global learning.



Perspective section of  
the entire building











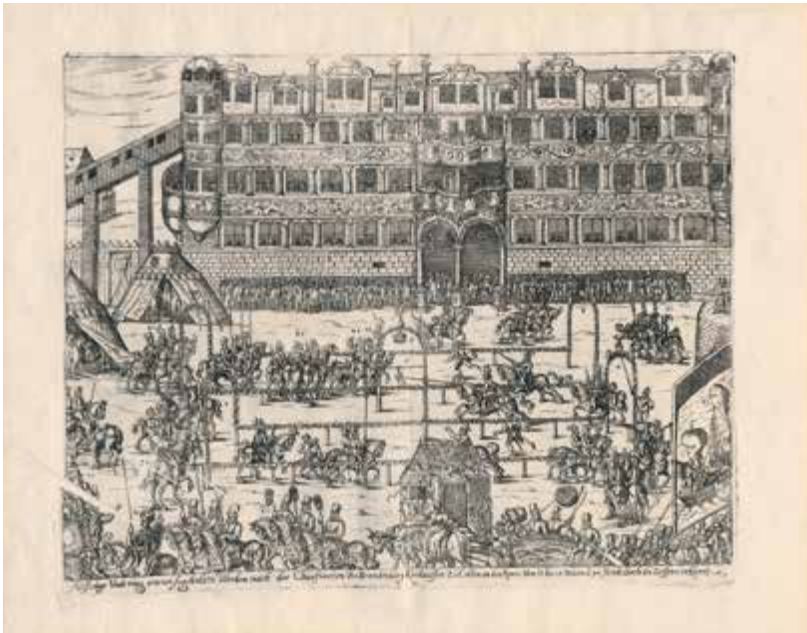






# On the Building History of the Berlin Palace

*Bernhard Wolter*



The tournament grounds at the Electoral Palace, engraving, 1592

Until its destruction at the end of World War II, the Berlin Palace evolved over a period of more than 500 years to become the urbanistic heart and architectural point of reference of the surrounding centre of Berlin. This was true of the view from the boulevard Unter den Linden as well as the view from the open staircase designed in 1825 by Karl Friedrich Schinkel for the Altes Museum (Old Museum) looking on the facade of the Palace facing the Lustgarten (Pleasure Garden).

The construction of the Palace was a continuous process of extensions, alterations and additions by the prince-electors of Brandenburg, the Prussian kings and the German emperors. In art-historical terms, the most important restructuring was carried out by the architect and sculptor Andreas Schlüter. He is the author of the Baroque transformation of the Palace in the early eighteenth century.

### The Era of the Prince-Electors

On 31 July 1443, Elector Friedrich II 'Irontooth' (1440-1470) laid the foundation stone for a new palace building on the Cölln side of the river Spree, whose shell structure was completed in 1448. For his residence, he chose the little double-town of Berlin-Cölln, then the most important town in the Margravate of Brandenburg, although it was a rather insignificant locale within the Holy Roman Empire. In the form of the 'Grünen Hut' (green hat), an element of the Cölln town wall was integrated into the complex which survived until it was destroyed in 1950. The Elector moved into the new Palace in spring of 1451.

The extensions ordered by Elector Joachim II (1535-1571), the modifications carried out by Elector Johann Georg (1571-1598) and the additions commissioned by Elector Joachim Friedrich (1598-1608) shaped the appearance of the Palace until Schlüter's remodelling. They already encompassed the outer palace courtyard, whose dimensions were later enlarged by Johann Friedrich Eosander beginning in 1707.

Initially, however, work was interrupted by the Thirty Years' War. The architects Johann Gregor Memhardt and Johann Arnold Nering initiated the first Baroque modifications during the era of the Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm (1640-1688). However, the Elector's priority was the newly created Lustgarten (Pleasure Garden), laid out in accordance with Dutch models.



View of the Berlin Palace from Lange Brücke (Long Bridge), painting, c. 1690





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Fig. pp. 146-147:

In November, just half a year after the laying of the foundation stone, the basement ceiling was concreted. Visible in the image is the Schlüter Courtyard, with its full basement level, which accommodates delivery and warehouse facilities, as well as, in the basement as a whole, the building services for the ground floor and the 1<sup>st</sup> upper level.

Fig. 148-149:

In late 2013, the construction site resembles a large puzzle – one that excites admiration for the planning and coordination brilliance of the architects and engineers. Visible in the background of this view of the western part of the building are the former Marstall (Stables) and the Staatsratsgebäude (State Council Building).

Fig. pp. 150-151:

June 2015: an impressive site: the shell construction with the topping-out wreath above the partially assembled steel structure of the cupola. On the ground floor level, work has already begun on the 60-cm-thick masonry wall, which rose freestanding independently of the reinforced concrete structure.

The interior of the Palace cupola was once occupied by Stüler's Palace Chapel. In the reconstruction, a prominent exhibition space, the 'Cave of the Sword Bearers', belonging to the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Museum of Asian Art), was installed there beneath the 14-meter-tall vaulted false ceiling.







An imposing object in the Humboldt Forum is the 'Mandu Yenu' throne from the kingdom of Bamun in Cameroon. Sultan Njoya of Bamun presented the throne to the German governor of the colony of Cameroon as a gift for the German Emperor Wilhelm II. The gesture raises many questions, and by the same token it is indicative of the relationship between local elites and the colonial power.

The Norwegian captain Adrian Jacobsen collected this transformation mask, created by a Kwakwaka' wakw artist from the Pacific Northwest coast of North America, and brought it to Berlin in 1883. It was worn during

potlatches, and symbolizes rivalry between chiefs. When closed, the mask displays anger towards the rival. When open, it expresses the generosity with which gifts were distributed to guests at the potlatch.

# ‘A New Sphere of Action for the Universal Gaze’

*A Conversation with  
Horst Bredekamp,  
Neil MacGregor and  
Hermann Parzinger*

Horst Bredekamp, Neil MacGregor,  
Hermann Parzinger (from the left)



*Herr Parzinger, reviewing the past decade, beginning with the conclusion of the design competition and ending with the completion of the Humboldt Forum – are you satisfied with what has been achieved?*

**Hermann Parzinger:** It was a process that had to overcome many obstacles and adapt again and again to altered framework conditions. When I became president of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation), we organized workshops with experts from around the world in order to reflect together about the ways in which non-European collections could be presented in the twenty-first century. The topic of colonialism was already current at the time; the topic of restitution had not yet become so central. An important phase of development was the Humboldt Lab Dahlem, the rehearsal stage, which Martin Heller organized. There we were able to try out many things that would later be integrated into the planning process. In the subsequent phase, we three founding directors attempted to lay out a number of major thematic trajectories for the project. Perhaps it would have been simpler to have simply designated one individual ten years ago to take responsibility for all aspects of the Humboldt Forum; but who, back then, would have been willing to take on such a task when so much still remained uncertain? Under the circumstances, we can be satisfied with the way things developed.

*Mr MacGregor, you headed the British Museum before becoming a founding director of the Humboldt Forum. Do you regard the two institutions as comparable?*

**Neil MacGregor:** With regard to the collections as well as to the larger ambitions of the project, it is certainly possible to compare the Humboldt Forum with the British Museum. Both strive to investigate and display cultural objects from around the world, and both strive to function as places of debate about society. On the other hand, the organizational preconditions are divergent. The British Museum is an institution with a very clear-cut governance structure and a clear-cut approach to arriving at decisions. In London, I dealt with structures that had

existed for hundreds of years, while in Berlin, by contrast, the founding directorate was obliged to devise these structures for the Humboldt Forum project from scratch.

*Herr Bredekamp, one of your central ideas for the Humboldt Forum – alongside the revitalization of the legacy of the Humboldt brothers – was to reclaim the idea of the *Kunstkammer* (Cabinet of Art and Curiosities) cultivated by the prince-electors of Brandenburg and the Prussian kings. What remains of these ideas in the Humboldt Forum in its final form?*

**Horst Bredekamp:** The idea goes back to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, whose 'Drôle de pensée' (Strange Thought) of 1675 is perhaps the boldest, most radical reflection on the museum to date: the idea of a thinking machine that would be organized around various collections. Later Leibniz revived his concept in relation to the *Kunstkammer* in the Berlin Palace when he founded the Academy. In one of its wings, the Academy was to house a 'theatre of nature and art'. There is also the fact that the Humboldt brothers took a strong interest in the *Kunstkammer* in the Berlin Palace – which, incidentally, had been Berlin's first publicly accessible museum beginning about 1800. Initially, Alexander von Humboldt wanted to use it to found a world museum that would have been associated with the Academy of Sciences. In 1809, however, Wilhelm von Humboldt succeeded in having the natural-scientific and medical collections of the *Kunstkammer* transferred as an inaugural gift to the newly founded university. In this sense, the Berlin University is a daughter of the Berlin Palace. My proposal to the commission on the historical centre of Berlin in 2001 was to relate this idea of a knowledge laboratory via the Humboldt brothers back to Leibniz. This concept was realized in the structure of the Humboldt Forum. It represents a major success that the Humboldt Forum stands under the motto 'museum as a process'. The most conspicuous expression of this is perhaps the Academy, to be housed in the first upper storey. Disappointing on the other hand is the fact that today there is no place for an object-based reconstruction of the *Kunstkammer*; however, the project has not been definitively abandoned either.

Timeline:

What Happened on and  
around the Building Site ...

*Bernhard Wolter*



Few people are aware of the enormous cost to the young German Democratic Republic (GDR, more commonly known as East Germany) entailed by the destruction of the Berlin Palace in autumn of 1950: three months of demolition work cost approximately 16 million GDR marks! Immediately before demolition, the precious Baroque sandstone sculptures of Schlüter and Böhme were provisionally documented by students from Humboldt-Universität.

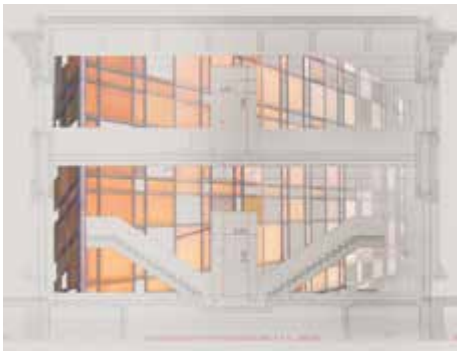


Before the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) opened in 1976, Schlossplatz (Palace Square) remained empty for twenty-five years – only the eastern side was outfitted with a large wooden grandstand. Hundreds of thousands streamed into the square for the annual First of May festivities. To accelerate the procession on the occasionally still cool spring days, Breite Strasse (Broad Street) was widened by demolishing the buildings on its western side.



The Palace of the Republic was the prestige building of the 'capital of the GDR' (East Germany), and it beat the International Congress Centre (ICC) in the western part of the city in a race for rapid construction, yet was soon doomed due to the use of sprayed asbestos. Together with the Staatsratsgebäude (State Council Building) and the Finance Ministry, it formed the new forum of the East German government. For months at a time during the 1990s, the open space in front of the 'Palace' became a much-favoured parking place for mobile homes.





Although the reconstructed baroque palace facades are adorned with manifold masterworks of fine art, and various modern works will be absorbed into the collections as well, the 'Kunst am Bau' (art on public buildings) programme represents yet another discursive level to be integrated into the building. In national competitions, contemporary art projects designed to serve as a stimulus to critical reflection were selected for five locations within the building. Among these is the *Statue of Limitations* by the artist and Ai Weiwei student Kang Sunkoo, two extensive graphic wall pieces in the staircases in Portals 1 (An Seebach

and Christiane Stegat) and 5 (Tim Trantenroth), a clock installation by Stefan Sous for the foyer of the Berlin Exhibition and the Academy in the first upper storey as well as *Die Architekten (The Architects)* by Christiane Dellbrügge and Ralf de Moll in the ground floor hall foyer.





At the Tage der offenen Baustelle (Days of the Open Construction Site), organized by the Foundation as the construction client on 25 and 26 August 2018 for the last time before the building's completion, visitors could take a first look at the reconstructed Schlüter Courtyard, although stucco and sandstone details were still missing in some places. On the initiative of Wilhelm von Boddien, director of the Förderverein (association of friends), the Berliner Philharmoniker under the direction of its new principal conductor Kirill Petrenko were persuaded to perform here under open skies for the first time after an interval of around 80 years – with music by Richard Strauss and Ludwig van Beethoven. Admission fees were linked to a donation, making it possible to gather 500 000 euros on a single afternoon. Even the rain that commenced promptly when the concert began failed to dampen the spirits of the 1500 music lovers.



The first meeting of the newly established Interessengemeinschaft Kultur & Bildung Spreeinsel (Spree Island interest group for culture and education) already took place in June of 2017 on the initiative of the Stiftung (Foundation) Humboldt Forum (SHF). Through this association, the participating institutions located on the Spree Island, which were, in addition to the SHF, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz (Berlin State Museums – Prussian Cultural Heritage), the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin (Hanns Eisler School of Music Berlin), the Berlin Cathedral, the European School of Management and Technology Berlin and the Stiftung Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin (Central

State Library of Berlin Foundation), hoped to receive a better hearing in particular from the Berlin Senate with regard to predictable and increasing problems involving tour bus traffic, but also unresolved urban issues such as lighting and signage. After a number of press conferences held in 2018 and 2019, the interest group succeeded in persuading the Berlin Senate to close Bodestrasse and the streets adjacent to the Lustgarten entirely to through traffic, so that in the future no tour buses will be able to park in the immediate vicinity of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites on Museum Island.