

A Thousand Years of Scars:
Tracing the Violent Histories of Mass Housing Landscapes in Berlin



This paper explores the overlooked deep history of Berlin's mass housing landscapes. Recent architectural historiography, focused on the *grands ensembles* of modernism, fails to account for the layered violence embedded in the marshy land beneath and around the neighborhoods. Two artificial mounds, Kienberg in Marzahn and Lübarser Höhe near Märkisches Viertel serve as entry points. Composed of rubble, war debris, consumer waste, and excavated soil, they obscure a thousand years of displacement, conquest, and resettlement. First, the anaerobic clay of Berlin's post-glacial plateaus preserved traces of early Slavic matriarchal societies displaced by medieval Germanic expansion and the imposition of patriarchal, feudal land regimes shaping the city's earliest peripheries. Soil removed during housing construction was relocated to the mounds, rendering these estates both enablers and erasers of Berlin's deep histories. Second, the paper examines Prussia's internal colonization strategy, which displaced Polish landowners and racialized the Garden City movement to justify German settlement in the "Wild East." This ideology persisted into the Third Reich, which intensified the violence. Both the land under Marzahn and Märkisches Viertel hosted camps for Romani people and forced Slavic laborers, their material remnants later buried in construction debris. Finally, the paper traces the eviction of migrant allotment communities, returned from former Prussian territories, that emerged in the agro-industrial fringe during the interwar and postwar periods. Their demolished homes were layered into

the mounds, which a former military camouflage expert who later trained as a landscape architect designed to hide the scars of war under elevated parks. The mounds materialize a history of German war crimes and dispossession, peaceful vantage points on a city on the verge of forgetting. By foregrounding land memory, the paper reframes Berlin's mass housing estates not just as products of modernism but as palimpsests of contested territory and erased lives.

Keywords: Berlin, mass housing, land history, landscape, violence, cartography, rubble mounds, landfills, post-war reconstruction, memory.

Short Bio: Robin V Hueppe is a researcher, designer, and writer whose work explores Berlin's mass housing landscapes. He is currently a Doctoral Fellow at the Institute of Landscape and Urban Studies (LUS) at ETH Zürich and previously served as an adjunct professor at the University of Houston. He holds degrees in architecture, urban design, and city planning from Rice University and TU Berlin, where he also contributed as a teaching and research assistant. Robin's academic path has been supported by fellowships from the Fulbright Program and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), as well as grants and residencies at institutions such as the Canadian Centre for Architecture. His work has appeared in peer-reviewed journals and architecture magazines, and his design experience spans architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design practices in Houston, Berlin, and Lisbon.